

Helpful Instructions for Circus Performers

Katharine Norman

[Note to performer :

These programme note is an essential part of the piece. It is most important that the text is printed, in full, in any programme booklet. Alternatively it could be read out before the performance begins, preferably by someone other than the performer (but this is not ideal).]

Programme note

(roll up, roll up)

JUGGLE

Practise the illusion of having three objects in the air.

THE LADY CUT IN HALF

Wiggle your toes and wave your arms, despite the situation. Expect knives.

TIGHTROPE

Maintain the appearance of poise and balance whilst teetering on the brink.

SPINNING PLATES ACT (and the lure of the Big Top)

Don't stop for an instant. Keep going round and round. Smile. If everything falls about you, cover your ears.

(Featuring a palimpsest for Mr. Ives)

This piece was written for Simon Limbrick, and first performed at The Warehouse, London in November 2000. It is dedicated to Simon, with thanks for his helpful instruction and advice during its composition, and to the 2000-1 RAE (an acronym with percussive resonance for British academics)

Performance notes

Instrument list

Bass drum
Side drum, with snares
Rototoms (5)
Bongos
Templeblocks (5)
Marimba
Xylophone
Crotales (c, fsharp, a, b, high c) (*or Glock*)
Suspended cymbal
Sizzle cymbal
Large suspended metal sheet
Two fairly large gongs, or tam tams (and additional metal sheets, optional)
Cabasa
Jingles (held in hand)
Wooden wind chimes
Two large 'stage' knives, daggers or swords.
One large spinning top*

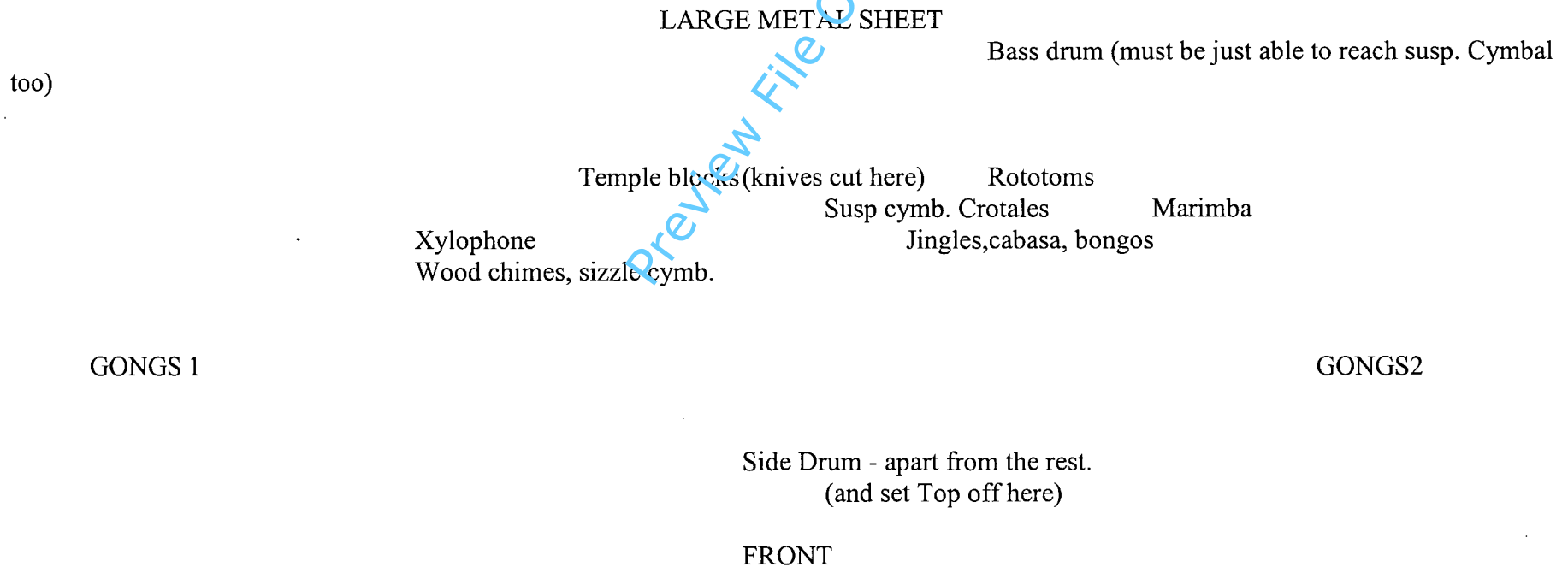
* if possible a very large metal spinning top, the old-fashioned humming kind that you 'pump' to wind up. In the UK you can get these from Hamley's Toy Shop (London) - at time of writing you can order one online at <http://www.hamleys.co.uk/catalog/detail189.htm>

Layout

This piece should not be performed 'in the round'. The spatial layout is important since the performer's attempts to go from one instrument to another are very much part of the show (in particular in 'The Lady Cut in Half' and 'Spinning Plates Act').

The three 'gong'/sheet groups in the last movement should be as far apart as feasible. The performer has to run between them in the last movement, and they should be 'too far apart'.

IMPORTANT: the knives, and the spinning top, should be hidden from view until used. For instance, place them in a bag/under cloth on the floor between the rototoms and templeblocks.



Helpful Instructions for playing the last movement!

This movement is a palimpsest on "The Circus Band", a song by Charles Ives. All the material is taken from his song. Some of the lyrics of the song are provided in the score. You may perform them vocally if you wish. If you do, either speak while you play the material, or instead. Don't stop moving around however.

It is important that this movement in particular is performed with deadpan humour, straight-faced until the last ROUND in which you may smile manically (or not, if you can't face it!)

The movement alternates between ROUNDS (explained below) and marimba solos.

ROUNDS instruments

Instruments for the ROUNDS: one large (as big as possible) metal sheet stationed at back centre. Two 'gongs' stationed at left and right. The 'gongs' may be tam tams, large gongs, or a combination of these - more than one for each 'station' if you like. The three 'stations' should be as far apart as feasible, so that you have to run between each to keep things going. It should appear slightly ridiculous.

Sticks - use marimba sticks for most things. Suspend a bass drum beater from the bass drum and use this for the bass drum passages only. NB - when you have to play cymbal and drum it is intended that you 'stretch' since the suspended cymbal and drum will not be placed together.

How to interpret the score:

The **ROUNDS** consist of fragments surrounding the central 'gong/sheet' material.

- You should always start the section with gongs/sheet material (there's a 'START' instruction)
- You should end the section with the relevant END material (you may play this material before this point as well)
- You should play the other fragments interspersed with gong/sheet material.

- You can play more than one fragment before returning to the gongs but you must be able to hear the gongs/sheet at all times.
- If the gong/sheet sound is dying out, you must return and play some more before getting back to the fragments.
- Do not make the ROUND sections too long, err on the side of brevity - they get shorter as they go on. By the final ROUND you should be rushing between instruments as quickly as possible, and creating a hell of a noise.
- In the first section the fragments will predominate. In the final section the gongs will be extremely loud, the fragments virtually submerged.)

The **Marimba** material between these sections is a cadenza, based on the Ives. You should play this material in a virtuososo manner, generally fast - but with some leeway.

You should use quite hard sticks and aim for a brittle tone.

Spinning Top

In the final ROUND you should set a large spinning top going at about 10-15 seconds or so before you intend to stop playing. You should aim to leave the stage abruptly after the bass drum phrase, with the top still spinning and lots of noise in the air. If the top crashes while you're still playing, start it up again.

The idea is that the audience is left watching everything die down, with no performer on stage.

NB: if possible set the top going on top of the side drum so that it will make more noise and fall off as it stops (after you leave). If this is not possible make sure the top is set up somewhere very visible at the front of the stage - run forward to set it going and then go back to what you were hitting....

Katharine Norman, June 2001.

If you need to contact the composer contact the British Music Information Centre at www.bmic.co.uk

Helpful Instructions for Circus Performers

Katharine Norman

(roll up, roll up)

Walk on stage, do not acknowledge audience. Play a long snare drum roll, as indicated (start during applause if it happens).
At end of roll snap snares off, loudly. Chuck the sticks on the ground and move to position for JUGGLE. Start playing JUGGLE immediately.

with snares
15-20 seconds. The duration should be too long for comfort.

Snare drum (medium)

ppp *cresc poco a poco.....* *fff*

JUGGLE:

practise the illusion of having three objects in the air.

as fast as possible
whilst still mechanical and precise

♩ = 120 or faster

(sweep across chimes with stick)

wooden wind chimes both chimes and cymbal: throughout
play with xylophone sticks, 'con brio' - do not stop the sounds.

sizzle cymbal

♩ = 120 or faster

use hard sticks, and play with two sticks throughout (preferably)

Xylophone

6

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

f *mf* *mp*

10

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

f *dim.....* *p*

15

faster 'swirl' up and down chimes

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

f

f

ff

20

fast 'swirl' with stick

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

f

ff

f

26

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

f

mf

f

33

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

p

p

40

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

f

sub f

45

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

sfz

mp

ff

f

51

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

sfz

p

f

6/16, 5/16, 12/16, 8/16, 8/16

58

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

sfz

p

f

12/16, 8/16, 5/16, 12/16, 11/16, 9/16

64

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

mf

p

9/16, 12/16, 9/16, 8/16, 9/16, 5/16, 12/16

70

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

mp

p

ff

mechanical s- do not rit or dim.

74

chimes

cymb.

Xyl.

no rit.

move to next piece in perfunctory manner, with as small a pause between movements as possible.

Preview File Only

THE LADY CUT IN HALF:

Wiggle your toes and wave your arms, despite the situation. Expect knives.

timbale sticks or other heavy, hard sticks

RotoToms(5)

$\text{♩} = 100$

(long)

pp *ff*

Musical notation for RotoToms(5) starting at measure 1. It features a 3/4 time signature, a half note followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes with various groupings (5, 6, 6, 6, 6, 3, 3, 3). Dynamics range from *pp* to *ff*.

roto

7

mf *mp*

Musical notation for roto starting at measure 7. It features a 2/4 time signature, a quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes with various groupings (5, 3, 3, 3, 3, 3, 6, 3, 6). Dynamics range from *mf* to *mp*.

roto

13

f *ff*

Musical notation for roto starting at measure 13. It features a 2/4 time signature, a quarter note followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a series of eighth notes with various groupings (3, 3, 3, 5, 5, 3, 5, 5, 5). Dynamics range from *f* to *ff*.

19 TEMPLE BLOCKS - timbale or similar hard sticks

T. Bl.

f *sfz* *sfz*

26

T. Bl.

f *sfz*

30

T. Bl.

sub f

Preview File Only

AD LIB - duration c. 30 seconds

LARGE METAL SHEET, with knives*

35

pp

accel.....poco.....a.....poco

*place knives down,
pick up sticks*

l.v.

attaca!

fff
*(as far
as poss.)*

*** INSTRUCTIONS:**
 Pick up two large knives or swords, one in each hand. (The knives should have been concealed until this point !)
 Use the blades and the tips to describe shapes on the metal sheet. Move slowly, also make large cutting motions in the air in the space between rototoms and templeblocks.
 This should start quietly and 'mysterioso' - NOT comical at all, but building to a loud and resonant wash of sound.

Notation: the staff represents the two extremities (top/bottom) of a large suspended metal sheet. Start with two slow downward gestures, as indicated, and end the passage with a long downward 'scrape'. Improvise ad lib.
 The passage should have a definite sense of building up, and increasing menace: it should last at least 30secs. and should be left to resonate through the subsequent material.