Sylvia Lim

sounds which grow richer as they decay

for two tenor trombones and prepared harp

(2017)

Score

PERFORMANCE NOTES

As objects age and interact with their environment over time, their surface transforms and acquires a rich patina. The sounds in this piece similarly form new surfaces – beating as the trombones come into contact with one another, and rattles and buzzes as the harp's vibrating string meets the pedal mechanism or paper clip. In this way the sounds can be said to be living – interacting, changing, growing richer – even though they are decaying.

This work was influenced by Linda Sandino's article, 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: Transient Materiality in Contemporary Cultural Artefacts', *Journal of Design History* 17 (2004), 283-293. Accessed online: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3527118

Written for and first performed by Samuel Barber, Peter Thornton and Helena Ricci
on 4th July 2017 as part of Curious 2017 in the Barbican Exhibition Halls.

This work requires a contact microphone, and a small monitor or PA speaker. The harp is amplified with a contact microphone to balance with the trombones. Attach the contact microphone to the lower half of the soundboard with blu tack.

The instruments are spaced as follows to produce maximum beating between the trombones:

If possible, please perform without music stands. The parts can be placed on the floor.

Duration: c. 7-8'

Score accurate as of 1st January 2019

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part for trombones

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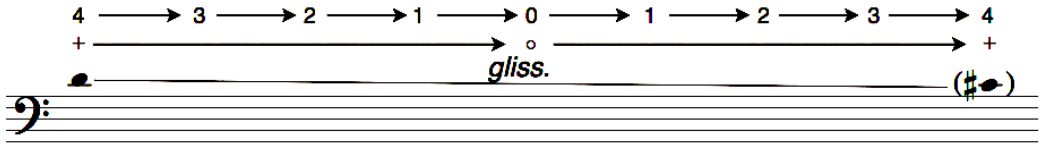
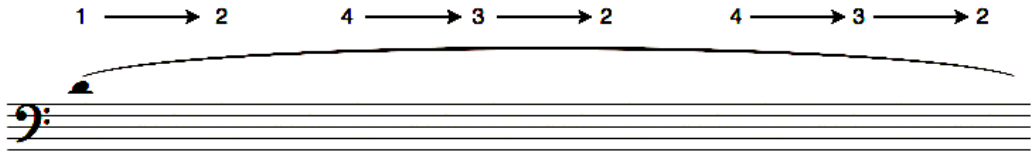
Trombone 1



Length = c. 14 sec*
Play in one breath

Trombone 2



Length = c. 17 sec*
Play in one breath

Gradually cover or uncover the harmon mute (stem in) by varying how many fingers are covering the stem. The numbers above the staff indicate how many fingers are covering the stem at that point in time. Place or lift each finger gradually when there is an arrow, and suddenly when there is no arrow. The result is a slowly but noticeably shifting timbre, like the wah-wah effect in very slow motion.

* If necessary, these lengths may be shortened to be played in one breath. Keep reiterations the same length. Make sure there is still a clear difference between the following combinations.

Trombone combinations:

Embrace the beating between parts. Play loudly enough that the beating is clearly audible, but quietly enough that the tone is warm, gentle and reflective. Listen carefully to the subtle (yet significant) differences between the combinations.

(1)
1
c. 7 sec after
c. 4 sec after
2

(2)
1
2
Start and stop together (adapt length of material accordingly)

(3)
c. 6 sec after
1
2
c. 4 sec after

Structure

Always alternate between material and silence throughout. “(1)”, “(2)” and “(3)” refer to the type of trombone combination. Always hold the tension in silences.

Trombone 1 starts two sec. after harp:

(1) Silence (c.12-25 sec.)
(1) Silence (c.12-25 sec.)
(1) Silence (c.12-25 sec.)
(2) sim. (until the third last silence)
(2)
(2)
(3)
(3)
(1) Shorter silence (c.11-15 sec.)
(3) sim. (c.11-15 sec.)
(3) Even shorter silence (c. 7 sec.)

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part for prepared harp

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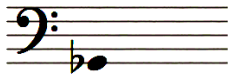
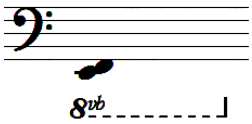
The harp is amplified with a contact microphone to balance with the trombones (see performance notes). The harpist will also require a stopwatch.

Harp preparations

1) Wrap blu tack securely around the string c. 58 cm[1] from the second rod from the top of the harp on the following string:

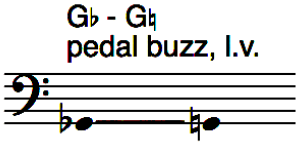


2) Attach a large paper clip at the base of the strings E and F, so that the E string is trapped between the two ends of the paper clip. This should produce a subtle, electronic-like rattling sound that resonates long after the E pitch has decayed.



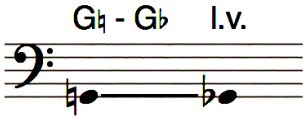
Harp materials

(1a)



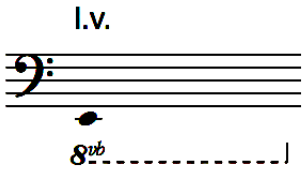
Let the buzz ring.

(1b)



Length = c. 3-4 sec.
Aim for no pedal buzz if possible, although if it does naturally buzz that is welcome.

(2)



To be played *simultaneously* with the other materials. The rattle is the main element here, rather than the pitch.

1 This may change from harp to harp. Aim for a gong-like sound. The pedal buzz should also sound resonant.

Play loudly enough that the rattles and buzzes are clearly audible, but quietly enough that the tone is warm, gentle and reflective.

Structure

0' 00"	Begin the piece with (1a). Listen to the sound naturally die away before playing (1a) again. Repeat freely. Play (1b) very occasionally after every few iterations of (1a). Continue this free alternation between (1a) and (1b) until c. 4' 45".
c. 2' 17"	Play (2) once while playing (1a) or (1b), only while trombones are silent (adjust time accordingly).
c. 4' 18"	Play (2) once while playing (1a) or (1b), only while trombones are silent (adjust time accordingly).
c. 4' 45"	Stop *midway* through the trombone figure, while they are still playing (adjust time accordingly). Hold the tension in the silence, while the trombones continue playing.