

Notes on Performance

This is a 'modular' score that faithfully maintains all the flexibilities of performance that are idiomatic to the piece. Since *Music for 18 Musicians* is basically chamber music, it does not require a conductor, nor is it idiomatic to have a conductor in performance. However, a conductor may be very helpful during the first three or four rehearsals to coach the ensemble and to make all the musicians aware of how the first clarinet, vibraphone and other individuals in the ensemble eventually take over all the conductorial duties.

First Clarinet: At the beginning of the piece, during the opening pulse section, the bass clarinets take a deep breath and enter at bar 5 making a crescendo and then diminuendo of their pulsing repeating notes for the length of a full comfortable breath. They pause at bar 8, then take another full breath and do the same thing beginning at bar 9. After another pause at bar 12 the first (bass) clarinet gently lifts his instrument up so that all members of the ensemble can see it just as he enters with new notes for a new pulsing chord at bar 13. This is what is meant by the word "cue" in the box above the clarinet part at that bar, at bar 21, 29, 98 and throughout the piece. Consequently, all musicians in the ensemble must be able to see clarinet one in order to follow these visual cues. The accompanying ensemble placement diagram can be helpful in making this possible.

Vibraphone: The other instrument that, along with the first clarinet, primarily replaces the conductor, is the vibraphone. To see how this works, look at bar 99. After 7-11 repeats, as indicated in the score and parts, the vibraphone plays the three bars from 100-102, and the entire ensemble then moves on to bar 103. Each time the vibraphone plays it is always an audible cue for the entire ensemble to move on. The vibraphone therefore decides, within the limits specified in the score and parts, exactly how many repeats there will be of a given group of bars ('module'). The vibraphone cues are written in all the individual parts as well.

Other members of the ensemble: There is also sometimes cueing between other members of the ensemble for entrances. For instance, at bar 97 (Section I), marimba 3 and piano 3 enter with a repeating melodic pattern. They look at each other prior to entering so as to come in together. This situation recurs at bar 176 between piano 3 and xylophone 1, at bar 181 between piano 4 (player two) and xylophone 2, at bar 264 between piano 3 and xylophone 3 and so on throughout the piece. The solution is always for the players to look at each other and for one to nod to the other to indicate their entrance together.

This score is flexible in some respects, but it is also extremely accurate even when it appears loose. A good example of this is on the very first page. The two bass clarinets, the cello and piano 4 all play the same notes, but their entrances and their crescendos and diminuendos are staggered. The bass clarinets begin their crescendo, are followed by the cello and are then followed by piano 4. As the clarinets begin their diminuendo, the cello is still making a crescendo, followed a bit later by piano 4, so that the effect is that the timbre of the bass notes gradually changes from bass clarinets to cello and then to cello with low piano. These staggered crescendos/diminuendos appear throughout the score, particularly between the two bass clarinets and the cello. It is a mistake if the cello and bass clarinets make their crescendos at the same time. Similarly with the women's voices, the strings and, later on, the B \flat clarinets: their order of crescendo and diminuendo is staggered to create a gradual change of timbre. The musicians need only listen to each other, keep an eye out for the first clarinet and follow the other cues in their parts.

'Floating' bars: From time to time throughout the score you will note 'floating' bars with white space before and after them. Look, for instance, at bar 129A. The marimbas and pianos are repeating their one-bar phrase over and over, while the voices and strings are repeating their four-bar phrase over and over at the same time. The floating bars for the clarinets indicate that they are free to enter where they like within that area. They play repeating pulses of the notes written for the length of a full breath, pause, enter again with the next pulsing notes and so on until they finish their fourth and last set of notes at 130B. The floating bars indicate this freedom of entrance as well as freedom of duration to be determined by one long comfortable breath. While the clarinets are doing this there is simply a heavy black line in the marimbas and pianos to indicate their continued repetition of their one-bar pattern. Later on, at bar 177, there is a

floating bar entrance for both the clarinets and the strings, following the entrance of xylophone 1 and piano 3 at 176. This indicates that the clarinets enter first and then the strings, as indicated by the longer white space before the string entrance. Then both the strings and clarinets freely follow along with xylophone 1 and piano 3 as they 'build up' a pattern together through bar 180. Still later in the piece at bar 226A you will find the voices entering freely with pulses and then closely followed by the clarinets, also pulsing.

Syllables for the singers: The singers in this piece do not sing words. Rather they are singing vocalise syllables, which are chosen so as to imitate, as exactly as possible, the sounds of some of the instruments. Syllables or vowels by themselves appear in the score and vocal parts. Generally, voices 1 and 2 are imitating the sound of the marimbas and this may require the use of a 'u' as in 'you' vowel with a 'b' or 'd' in front of it. Voices 3 and 4 are generally imitating the strings, which may require an 'ee' as in 'see' vowel with no consonant before or after. In addition to the syllables in the score and parts, the singers may additionally try to get the precisely right vowel or syllable by simply listening carefully to the instrument they are imitating and singing the syllable or vowel that most closely approximates it.

Numbers of musicians: One might think that *Music for 18 Musicians* would require 18 musicians and, of course, that is how my own ensemble played the piece. However, we did this only with the vibraphone player playing the piano 4 (player two) part and with piano 2 playing maracas in one section and so on. These doublings were done so that we could tour with the smallest number of players for economic reasons. Other ensembles playing this piece have used as many as 21 or 22 musicians in order to avoid this kind of doubling. It is entirely up to each ensemble as to how many players they need and/or want to play the piece though generally, the maximum is 22 and the minimum 18.

Amplification: All voices and instruments, with the possible exception of the xylophones, are amplified. The singers should use their microphones to enhance their crescendos and diminuendos. Slowly moving slightly closer and farther away from the microphone will help enormously in this regard. The sound technician should arrange the microphones to be very close to the strings. The bass clarinet microphones should be just above and pointed down into the upturned bell of the bass clarinet so as to get the 'rasp' of instrument during pulsing sections. The B \flat clarinets may have a separate microphone placed conventionally near the barrel of the instrument. In a hall of 1,000 seats or more it may be worthwhile to amplify the xylophones. If the maracas are the Latin Percussion model asked for below or something similar, they may not need amplification. If they are smaller and lighter in sound, then a microphone may be necessary for balance.

Maracas: It is strongly suggested that Latin Percussion brand maracas be used since they contain heavy shot in a plastic or leather shell with great carrying power. If they are not available try for something similar with carrying power. Try and avoid 'Mexican style' wooden maracas or small plastic 'eggs'.