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Torrents and Streams

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torrents
and
streams

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oops

Torrents and Streams

for mixed ensemble and laptops hidden in the audience

James Alexandropoulos - McEwan

September 2017

Instrumentation:

Flute
Cello
Trombone (with cup mute)
Piano
Vibraphone (with motor)
2 Electric Guitars (each with capo and scordatura, and optional effects pedals)
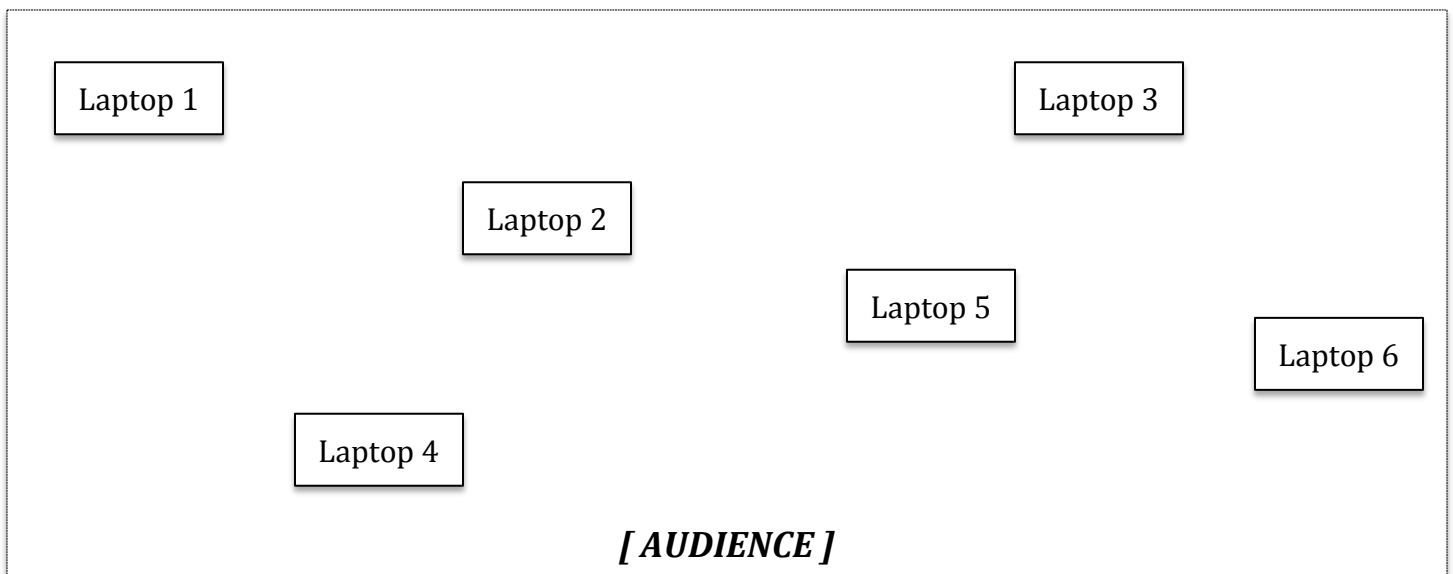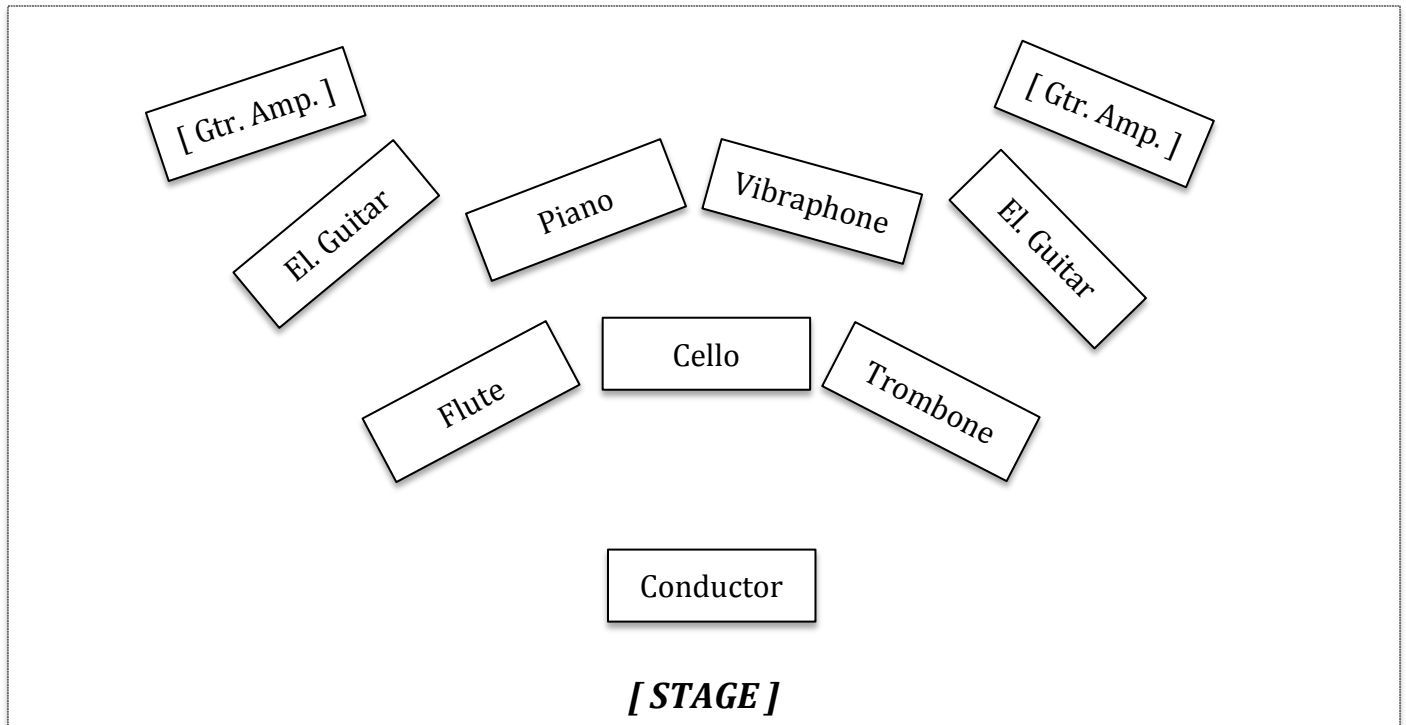
Laptop Ensemble (6 to 20 performers)

Duration:
7 mins

about the piece:

The words stream and torrent refer both to the flow of water, as well as the flow of media content and information through the internet. Both of these ideas influence this composition, in which different layers of sound follow their own paths fairly independently of each other. The different strands of sound coexist in a harmonious yet conflicting manner, flowing together peacefully, but also overflowing and seeping out to the audience.

Proposed Seating Plan

[STAGE]

[Gtr. Amp.]

El. Guitar

Piano

Vibraphone

[Gtr. Amp.]

El. Guitar

Flute

Cello

Trombone

Conductor

[AUDIENCE]

Laptop 1

Laptop 3

Laptop 2

Laptop 5

Laptop 6

Laptop 4

Don't adhere exactly to the positioning of the laptops depicted here; it is only an indication of a possible spread of the Laptop Performers amongst the audience (if using only six laptops).

Piano and vibraphone need to be able to see each other, but also need to see the conductor.

General Instructions:

The ensemble is divided into four groups; each one performs one of the four separate *Streams* that make up the piece:

- Stream of Laptops
- Stream for Trio (with Conductor)
            (consisting of Flute, Cello, and Trombone)
- Stream of Piano and Vibraphone
- Stream of Electric Guitars

The streams function somewhat independently of each other each of them moving between the foreground and the background.

Starting the Piece: the conductor starts the piece. He/she faces the audience in a manner inviting silence. He/she then gives a subtle gesture to indicate to the laptop performers to produce their laptops and play their respective videos. After about 15 - 20 seconds of the laptops playing, the conductor turns to face the onstage performers and begins conducting *Stream for Trio (with Conductor)*. The downbeat for the first bar of this stream is also the cue for the Piano, Vibraphone and the Electric Guitars to begin their respective streams.

Dynamics between the four *Streams*: the *Streams* should generally sound at a similar volume for the members of the audience. The only exception is the laptop ensemble, which can be quieter than the onstage musicians, yet still definitely audible (or at least loud enough so they colour the overall sound, giving it an electronic edge).

A list of dynamic contours is given for the guitars, piano and vibraphone. These contours are also indicated in the full score for *Stream for Trio* as rehearsal markings, labeled *a1-a5*, *b1-b5*, and *c1-c2*. The conductor cues the start of each of these dynamic contours by indicating the respective cue with the respective number of fingers on one hand. So for example, the first time the conductor holds up one finger it indicates cue *a1*, for cue a2 he/she holds up two fingers etc… The second time the conductor holds up one finger it indicates cue *b1* and so on… The guitars, piano and vibraphone need to create these dynamic arcs as a whole, although within these arcs they can still move between the foreground and background within this quartet.

Tempi between the four *Streams*: each *Stream's* tempo should also be independent of one another's for most of the piece, although occasional – possibly unintentional – alignments of tempi of the separate groups are possible for brief moments. The tempo for *Stream for Trio* is fixed and should be adhered to exactly, whereas *Stream of Electric Guitars* and *Stream of Piano and Vibraphone* are given tempo boundaries to move within.

Ending the Piece: Conductor Cues *c1* and *c2* indicate a gradual fade to silence from all onstage performers. The *Stream of Laptops* should be left to continue until all their videos come to an end on their own. The conductor should wait for all laptops to end before indicating to the audience that the piece has ended.

Instructions for the
Stream of Laptops**:**

This *Stream* is to be performed by a *Laptop Ensemble* consisting of 6 – 20 performers, hidden and dispersed amongst the concert audience. Other portable devices such as smartphones and tablets could be used if laptops are unavailable, but devices with larger screens are more desirable.

Ten videos are provided for this *Stream*. The videos include sound, which echoes the material performed by the onstage performers, and abstract moving images and colours. Each video last about 6 mins and 45 secs. Provide each of the performers in the *Laptop Ensemble* with a different video, which they should load onto their laptop, ready for the performance. For a performance with more than ten laptops, make sure only up to two versions of each video exist in the group.

The members of the *Laptop Ensemble* should be spread across the audience, so that the sound moves across the room in a three-dimensional way and the videos create a spread of visuals across the room. Aim for an equal spread across the audience, but also somewhat haphazard-seeming seating. The performers should dress so as to blend in with the audience and they should be sat in their place from the beginning of the concert. The performers' laptops should be already turned on at the time the *Laptop Ensemble* take their seats, with their individual videos loaded and ready to be started.

The audio is to be played through the internal speakers of the laptops. The volume of the laptops should be set at a similar volume with each other, while being loud enough to compete with the dynamic of the onstage musicians (but make sure none of the laptops are set so loud that the sound distorts). Ideally, the laptops should be heard at the same volume or just a bit quieter that the ensemble for the seated audience members. The videos should be played in full screen, and the screens should be set as bright as possible.

When the conductor faces the audience at the start of the piece, the *Laptop Performers* should produce their laptops, and place them on their laps. When the conductor cues them to start of the piece, the individual members of the *Laptop Ensemble* should play their respective video. The performers shouldn't all start their videos at the same moment, but should start in a staggered fashion, within a 5 – 20 second period.

Once the videos have finished, the performers should put their laptops back into their bags, and remain seated for the remainder of the concert.

Other than these instructions, no score is given for this stream.

For performances in larger halls more laptops could be used to "double" some of the ten parts.

Instructions for the

Stream for Trio with Conductor

(consisting of Flute, Cello, and Trombone)

The notated dynamics indicate dynamics to be heard, not dynamics to be played. When all three instruments have the same dynamic they should sound at the same volume with each other.

The tempo of ♩= 72, as notated for this section, should be kept as precisely as possible so that this stream lasts start to finish 6mins 20secs.

Stream for
TRIO (with Conductor)

James Alexandropoulos - McEwan

Instructions for the
Stream of Piano and Vibraphone

The Piano and Vibraphone are given note cells to arpeggiate through together. Play the given notes in various different iterations before moving to the next cell. Do not follow the given order of notes but change them around, creating endless melodic variations. Pedal ad libitum, to create a harmonic blur at different moments in the performance, and sometimes hold the pedal across several cells.

Always alternate between the left hand and right hand notes provided. (The right hand for both instruments plays the same three notes throughout the piece, so it is only notated in the first bar).

For example, the first cell could be interpreted by the piano as follows:

Similarly, the second cell could be performed as below:

The same principals apply for the vibraphone. (The vibraphone can mix up the hands if it helps perform the piece, as long as the player makes sure to alternate between the notes from each stave).

Durations of the cells: the piano and vibraphone should move through the different cells together. The first cell should be held for about 45 secs. From there on each cell should be played for about 5 to 15 seconds, but every now and then a cell should be held for longer, for up to 50 seconds. If the performers arrive at the last cell, they should keep playing it until the end of the piece.

The players cue each other to move together to the consecutive cell. Either of the two players can cue the other with a nod of the head when they see fit. When a player gives the cue the other must follow it. Don't arrange who cues which cell when before hand. Both players need to give these cues at different times as the piece progresses.

Dynamics: the dynamics should constantly but gradually fluctuate for each of the two instruments while still following the dynamic arcs provided, as cued by the conductor.

Starting and ending the piece: start the stream when the conductor gives the first downbeat for the *Steam for Trio*, by following the first dynamic arc (*a1*), which directs a gradual fade from silence. Cues *c1* and *c2* indicate a final gradual fade to silence from all onstage performers. The piece ends when all the laptops in the audience have stopped sounding.

Tempi: the average tempo should be about ♪= 72 bpm. Fluctuate around this tempo, doing slower or faster accelerandi and deccelerandi across the duration of the piece. The proposed outer limits that can be used for the tempo variations are as low as ♪= 50 bpm and as high as ♪= 168 bpm.

  Occasionally jump momentarily to a new tempo for just a few notes, before returning back to the previous tempo, as if a machine is malfunctioning. You can jump up to double tempo, or down to half tempo, or play triplets to create a sense of faster or slower tempi.

  The vibraphone and piano should move in and out of each other's tempos. At times they can be close to each other's tempo, and at times they should be at totally different tempi with each other. Don't follow any of the other tempi that are around you. If you end up in the same tempo as someone else slowly move away from that tempo.

Vibraphone: use soft mallets and start with the motor turned on at a slow or medium speed. Change the speed of the motor across the duration of the performance, or possibly even switch it off at times, as feels appropriate. You can keep a new motor setting for just a few seconds, or for as long as a minute.

Dynamic Arcs

for *Stream of Piano and Vibraphone* and *Stream of Electric Guitars*
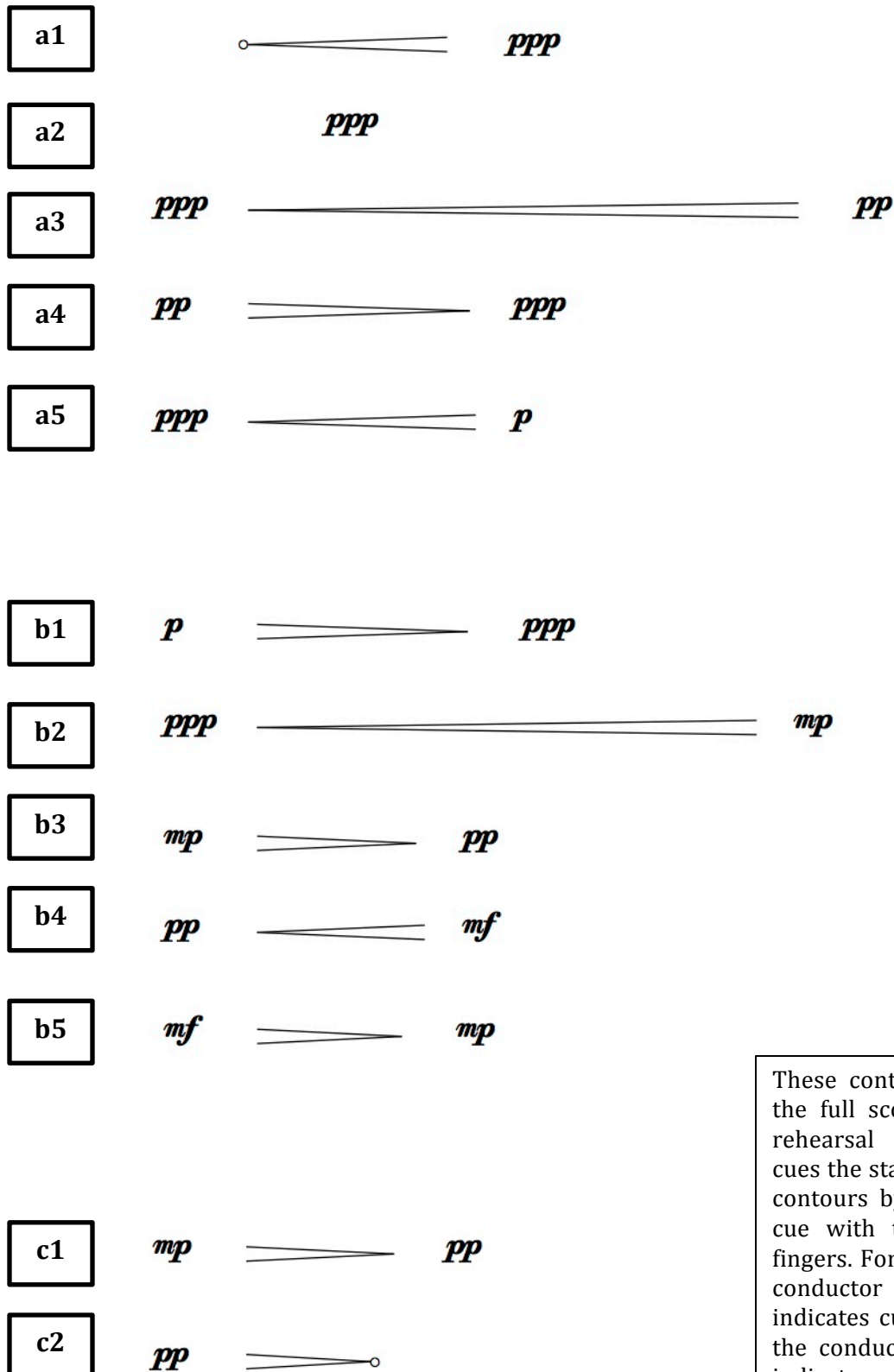
These contours are also indicated in the full score for *Stream for Trio* as rehearsal markings. The conductor cues the start of each of these dynamic contours by indicating the respective cue with the respective number of fingers. For example, the first time the conductor holds up one finger, it indicates cue *a1*, and the second time the conductor holds up one finger it indicates cue *b1* etc…

Stream of
PIANO and VIBRAPHONE

James Alexandropoulos - McEwan

Vibraphone

Piano

(L.H. holds the same chord throughout)

(L.H. holds the same chord throughout)

Vib.

Pno.

Vib.

Pno.

Instructions for the
Stream of Electric Guitars

The guitars are given a notational system that generates hand positions and chords to be used for the piece. Move through the chords generated this way by arpeggiating through all six strings in a variety of ways and note orderings. Let notes ring throughout. The arpeggios should be slow and expressive. Hold each chord for the duration that seems appropriate or until you feel that you have explored that chord fully for the time being, then move to another chord generated from the score. Don't synchronise the moves to a different chord with the other guitarist.

How to generate chord positions from the score: each guitar has a separate tuning, which also requires a capo, as indicated in each part. Each of the staves gives different note options in a specific area of the neck. Choose a note for each string from the options on a single stave to create each chord. For each note notated in the score the string it is to be found on is marked below the stave, and the fret it can be found on is marked above the stave. The notes in the score should only be played in the given positions. Dashes are used to separate different note options on a single string.

Notes in boxes are the *primary* notes that form the two *primary chords* for each stave. These notes should be used most frequently. In each set of *primary notes* there always exists the option of a C♮ or C♯ on the same string. They are presented in a box together, separated by a dash. These two notes are both to be used equally and frequently, as moving between them will create a sense of modulation between two keys. Throughout the performance rock back and forth between these two notes to create the feeling of two contrasting tonalities. Become aware of the effect of these notes and use them with sensitivity in the ensemble's sound. All notes in parenthesis are variants that should be introduced gradually, and used less frequently.

Below are some examples of chords that Electric Guitar 1 can generate from the material provided in the top stave:

Start the piece by generating chords from your respective top stave. Once finished with this stave for the time being follow the arrows to another stave and then repeat the same process with the new stave (the arrows direct you so that you always alternate between the top stave and one of the other staves). It is best when arriving in a new stave to start with just the boxed notes before moving to the notes in parenthesis.

Dynamics: the dynamics should constantly but gradually fluctuate for each of the two instruments while still following the dynamic arcs provided, as cued by the conductor.

Starting and ending the piece: start the stream when the conductor gives the first downbeat for the *Steam for Trio*, by following the first dynamic arc (*a1*), which directs a gradual fade from silence. Cues *c1* and *c2* indicate a final gradual fade to silence from all onstage performers. The piece ends when all the laptops in the audience have stopped sounding.

Tempi: assuming each note in an arpeggio is an eighth note (♪), the average tempo should be about ♪= 66. Fluctuate around this tempo, always becoming slower or faster. The proposed outer limits that can be used for the tempo variations are as low as ♪= 52 bpm and as high as ♪= 132 bpm.

Occasionally jump momentarily to a new tempo for just a few notes, before returning back to the previous tempo, as if a machine is malfunctioning. You can jump up to double tempo, or down to half tempo, or play triplets to create a sense of faster or slower tempi.

The two guitars should move in and out of each other's tempos. At times they can be close to each other's tempo, and at times they should be at totally different tempi with each other. Don't follow any of the other tempi that are around you. If you end up in the same tempo as someone else slowly move away from that tempo.

Adding Expression and Timbral Variety: vibrato of fluctuating intensity and speed should be used to add expression. This could also be produced with a whammy bar if available. Similarly a volume pedal can be used to add more expression and help create the dynamic curves required for the piece.
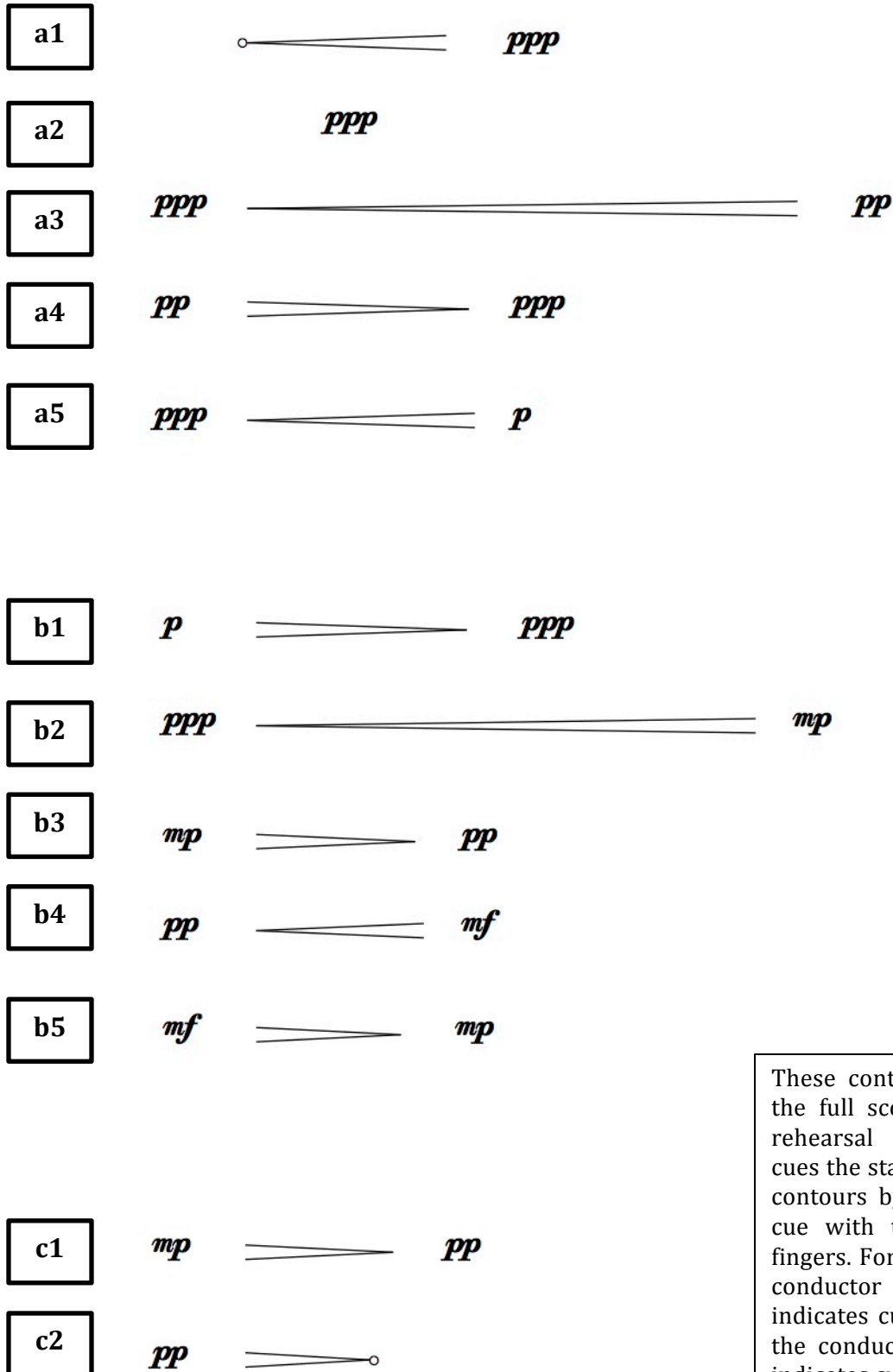
Other pedals that create modulating effects, such as chorus or phaser (but preferably not flanger), or effects such as vibrato or tremolo set to subtle settings can also be used to add colour (Wah Wah could also be used, if controlled very slowly so as to do gradual filter sweeps, or even distortion or overdrive if set in a way that only changes the colour of the guitar without adding much distortion). Generally any effects that can alter the guitar's timber should be used, as long as the guitar still blends with the surrounding instruments. The electric guitars should produce a sound that sits somewhere between the electronic sounds of the laptops and the acoustic sound of the other instruments. You can switch pedals on and off during the performance, as long as the click of the pedal being switched on or off isn't heard in the ensemble setting.

Other ways of changing timber, including changing picking position or picking technique, alternating between fingers and pick, or changing the guitar pickups or other controls on the guitar should be used to subtly change timbre over the course of the piece. The guitarists are encouraged to bring the nuanced, varied and personal timbral possibilities the electric guitar to the fore, but it is requested that the guitarists at all times do so with sensitivity.

The guitarists should change their timbres independently of each other, and these changes can happen as frequently as every few seconds at times, or a guitarist could instead keep to one timbre for as long as 1 – 2 minutes.

Dynamic Arcs

for *Stream of Piano and Vibraphone* and *Stream of Electric Guitars*

a1   ○———————— *ppp*

a2   *ppp*

a3   *ppp* ——————————————————— *pp*

a4   *pp* ———————— *ppp*

a5   *ppp* ———————— *p*

b1   *p* ———————— *ppp*

b2   *ppp* ——————————————————— *mp*

b3   *mp* ———————— *pp*

b4   *pp* ———————— *mf*

b5   *mf* ———————— *mp*

c1   *mp* ———————— *pp*

c2   *pp* ————————○

These contours are also indicated in the full score for *Stream for Trio* as rehearsal markings. The conductor cues the start of each of these dynamic contours by indicating the respective cue with the respective number of fingers. For example, the first time the conductor holds up one finger, it indicates cue *a1*, and the second time the conductor holds up one finger it indicates cue *b1* etc...

Stream of
ELECTRIC GUITARS

James Alexandropoulos - McEwan