

UCLA
Contemporary Music Score Collection

Title

Black

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7t9232t0>

Author

M. Pearson, Tina

Publication Date

2020

BLACK

for mixed ensemble

Tina M Pearson

©2014 revised 2019

BLACK

For the Experimental Music Unit and Norm Adams and in gratitude to Pauline Oliveros

©Tina Pearson Dec 2014, revised Dec 2019

Black is a set of two text scores that invite performers to focus on dark listening – a kind of deep listening that is possible at the darkest time of year (Winter Solstice), or in other dark times.

The *Black* scores can be a study for sonic imagining in deep dark spaces and places, such as ocean depths, the bottom of an ice-covered glacial lake, deep space beyond gravity, the deep thick air in a rainforest, or the deep dark recesses of the mind, of memory, of imagination.

Black can reference “dark times”, in both personal lives, and in social and political spheres. It is said that the darkness or bleakness of grief, or depression, or other challenging experiences, need to be fully embraced and experienced so that a kind of rebalancing, or renewal or “getting out the other side”, transformed, can occur. It could be that the lack of courage to face this kind of darkness has something to do with dark political or social times repeating themselves. *Black* is offered as a kind of music-making that might lead a way in to the richness of dark space.

Black can also reference a contemplation of the evolving mysteries of dark matter and dark energy, which, according to physicists, cannot be directly observed even though they form 95.1 per cent of all matter in the universe, and are known only by their effect on the 4.9 percent of matter that is ordinary – the stars and us.

Black might have something in common with the Ouija Board game, which invites a bypass of conscious individual intention toward an emergence of sub-conscious group mind as a way to answer the posed questions of its players from the beyond.

In performance, *Black* is a bow of respect to deeply listening adventurous musicians, who, over time, develop together a kind of perception and response system that is organic, cellular, mysterious and has a mind of its own. These musicians, masters of their instruments and the nuances of performance, dwell within a listening place with an unmistakably deep gravitational pull, but one that is also elusive, not directly attained, or easy to explain.

INSTRUMENTATION

The *Black* scores ask for an ensemble of three or more instruments capable of sustaining controlled tones: winds, reeds, brass, strings. The ensemble could also include carefully considered percussion and extended piano including strings (inside piano) or extended accordion (including bellows, body of instrument). Instruments should have a range of nuanced sounding possibility that is within the mastery of the musician. Instruments and objects with limited texture, colour, range and control are not the best choice. If amplified instruments are used (electric guitar, bass, other) each such instrument's sound should be amplified through its own individual speaker placed near the musician. The sound should be carefully balanced with non-amplified instruments. No amplification should come through house / system speakers.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The score moves through a set of instructions for the musicians to consider silently, with awareness of the whole of the group. Each of the two *Black* scores invite a specific discipline of listening and imagining. The resulting soundmaking yields distinct textures that in turn provide their own material for interacting sonically and within the space of listening.

The performance requires skill in listening and responding without a reliance on musical gesture or expression, and rather focuses on the inner process of acute listening, sonic imagination and trust in in-the-moment sonic decision making.

Each performer should approach their whole instrument, with its parts, as a landscape for possible soundworlds and as an extension of their mind. That is, using a “peripheral” sensibility, the performers should use a range of sounding methods that consider and amplify the interface between their bodies and the parts of their instruments, that equally embrace sounds that the instrument's design intended, and those that stretch beyond the ones intended by the instrument's conception.

The musicians might consider the location of their performance, especially tuning to bodies of water, and what lies beneath their surfaces; and the breath, voices, movements and residues of beings that dwelled on the land back through pre-industrial generations.

TO BEGIN AND END

Each score has an instruction for how to begin.

To end

Option 1: The sound field ends of its own accord in any manner.

Option 2: The performers determine a duration, and end on cue or agreement, either as a group, or one at a time.

BLACK ONE

*A sound field
appears regular, constant and static;
but in reality
is imperceptibly shifting and evolving
of its own accord.*

Begin with silent listening

To inward spaces
(breath, bone, organ, blood; sensation, emotion, imagination, dream)
To the air and particles nearby,
(sensation on skin, outside nostrils, outside ears, above, below around)
Outward to the biosphere
(recalled or imagined beyond the room, the building the location)
Downward to the depths of the earth and ocean floor,
Further outward to the atmosphere, the solar system and beyond.

Performance

Each performer invites into their imagination a simple cellular sonic fragment of any kind, such as a texture, a contour, a rhythmic cell, a sonic gesture, a single sound, a phrase or other. The fragment can include silences but should include audible sound.

Each performer begins independently, playing to carefully reveal and slowly extend and explore the fragment sonically from the inside, repeating it without pause and allowing it to reveal itself, as if discovering a new stone, or gem, or word, turning it over, feeling it, sensing it, appreciating each part of it beyond its surface. By listening and staying focused on detail, and being open to change, each player will allow their fragment to evolve and transform of its own accord.

Through continuous sounding, the players follow subtle dynamic, pitch, intensity, duration, texture, complexity and density changes without editing, leading, or following, or trying to control the sound or progression. Follow the path of new, unexpected facets of the fragment.

The overall sound field will shift as the performers listen to their own evolving repetitions, while simultaneously being aware of the texture of the whole, but without attempting to intentionally tune or align or merge with any other player's evolving sound.

Each player should equally create the overall soundfield and its elements: No player should be generally prominent, obscured, lead or fall into conventional roles. Players should resist the lure of "thinking ahead" or soloing or shaping the sound in any way.

BLACK 2

Begin with imagining

Individually, each performer imagines (or remembers) they are floating within a still, vast dark elemental place such as;

*Deep beneath the surface of an Ocean,
or within an ice-covered lake far from shore;
or deep in space, far from Earth's gravity.*

In silence, each performer takes time to fully imagine, sense, integrate and develop the details, evolutions, characteristics, movements, transitions of their imagined or remembered environment.

Still in silence, within their imaginations or memories, each performer waits for a change element (an event, addition, movement, something newly noticed, something quickly passing) in their imagined or remembered environment, whether seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted or sensed, however elusive or small, or sudden or large.

Performance

Each performer translates, as carefully and accurately as possible, their change element into a single sonic gesture, following it to completion. The gesture can be extended in time to enable the performer to fully discover and realize accurately the imagined change element. The gesture should not be repeated - once it is realized, the performer returns to again silently float within their imagined environment. Each performer acts independently.

The performers wait within their imagined environments for another change element. If no further change elements arise, the performers continue to fully observe their imagined or remembered environments in silence.

Each performer plays one imagined change element at a time. If the element becomes continuous and/or numerous and constant in their imagined environment, it is now part of the imagined environment, so should not continue to be played.

If the imagination becomes unfocused, distant or unclear, stop and begin again.