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# **BONN FEIER by Pauline Oliveros**

an environmental theater piece for specialized and non-  
specialized performers

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A M E R I C A N M U S I C

2617 Gwynndale Ave.

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# BONN FEIER by Pauline Oliveros

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MUSIC

BONN FEIER is intended for performance in a city, college, or university environment. All normal city or campus activity, as well as specially arranged activity, is a part of BONN FEIER. Anyone who enters the city or campus during the designated but unannounced time of the performance is a knowing or unknowing participant in BONN FEIER. Special rituals, activities, and sights, described below, are to be blended smoothly with normal city or campus activity all during the normal working day and evening. The intention of BONN FEIER is to gradually and subtly, subvert perception so that normal activity seems as strange or displaced as any of the special activities. Thus the whole city or campus becomes a theater, and all of its inhabitants, players.

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BONN FEIER is a community effort. Its success depends on the full commitment, attentiveness, and understanding of the knowing performers. Each performer must be willing to undertake his or her part with the understanding that devoted and undivided attention to the chosen tasks, no matter how long they are, is necessary.

BONN FEIER is intended to be continuous over a long period of time. A minimum performance time is fifteen hours of a normal working day. An optimum performance time might be a week, or a month, or as much as a year. The time references in the description below refer to the minimum performance time. However, events could be spaced by long time intervals. New events could be introduced hourly, daily, or weekly. Other events could be repeated daily until they seem part of the normal environment.

Participants must agree to perform during all or any specific part, or parts, of the designated time length. BONN FEIER should grow gradually through the day (week, month, year) from events which are hardly distinguishable from normal activities of the city or campus, but have been displaced or modified in some way, to very unusual events which culminate in a ritualistic ceremony which is described below.

The most crucial instruction for any knowing participant in BONN FEIER is to always remain focused on the particular activity he or she has chosen, and to blend in with the environment, no matter what happens or what social demands arise. Normal city or campus activity must continue undisturbed. Example: A secretary performs her usual duties, but she establishes her office outside near a busy walkway. She must be able to perform her normal duties even though her office is peculiarly out of place. She must be able to continue without giving away the secret of BONN FEIER; even though questions might arise from the curious.

Preparations: Make a sound map of the city or campus. Indicate all continuous sounds such as motors, generators, ventilators, etc., areas of intermittent or random sounds, and the likely or probable sounds to be found there, such as those that come from buildings, offices, practice rooms, cafeterias, traffic, and the like. Decide what are characteristic sound marks of the city or campus and what are the most unusual sounds to be found. Notate pitch or register and durations of these sound marks when possible. Note the positions of these sound marks, with their respective pitches, registers, and durations, on the map and indicate possible routes to follow which would bring a person into ear contact and close proximity to the sources.

Each sound mark on the map must have a costumed guardian posted nearby. The guardians should be of a fantastic or mythological nature such as Neptune, Quetzalcoatl, Spiderwoman, the Tin Woodsman of Oz, or any other such figures. The task of the guardians is to listen continually to the selected sound mark, to point very slowly and simply to the source when people happen to pass by, to observe reactions, and to remain silent, always supporting the costume.

Each sound mark on the map must be reinforced by one or more musicians from time to time. The musicians must attempt to blend so subtly with the sound source in pitch, dynamic, and rhythm, that a listener would have difficulty determining which is the environment and which is the musicians.

Musicians will also use the sound map as a guide to sources, pitches, and routes to the sources throughout the city or campus.

Activities and Possible Performers: City officials, staff members, workers of all kinds, instructors, physical plant workers, and others carrying out normal duties, with the following modifications: wearing a costume, tuxedo, formal, uniform, mask, unusual hat, or any kind of garment which is unusual for the person; doing unusual duties in unusual places; instructing a class in an entirely different discipline; driving a utility cart in a gorilla costume; bringing an unusual object to work; changing clothes every hour. Any of the above to be carried out with no explanation.

Members of the surrounding community or suburbs could be invited to perform some unusual activity which would appear very unusual in the city or campus. For example: a farmer milking a cow in the parking lot; a seamstress working in the cafeteria sewing a gigantic dress or trousers; a water witch divining the presence of water on a city street; a trout fisherman in the fountain or swimming pool; a rowing team on a boat in the grass or in a hall; a car salesman selling toy cars; a barber giving a haircut in a telephone booth. All unannounced, unexplained and in unusual places.

Groups or individuals could be asked to perform in whatever way is most appropriate to the group or individuals; however, the performance must occur unannounced, unexplained, and in an unusual place. For instance: a barber shop quartet singing in a men's room; an American Indian ceremony around the flagpole; a Punch and Judy show in a stairwell; a speaker on some current subject in the physical plant warehouse or closet; a juggler on the steps of the administration building; a tap dancer in a sand-lot; any kind of performer or performing group out of context. "

Mummers, Jesters, or Actors: One or more people, each with a specific character different from the others, spend parts of the day engaging citizens or students, faculty and staff in ridiculous conversations. They have free reign/run of the whole city or campus. Their purpose is to create scenes by appearing unexpectedly, anywhere at all with license. If known persons take these roles, they must be well disguised. The successful performer will be so convincing that he or she could have wandered in off the street. For example: a mad Russian who speaks only Russian. He is very courteous and engaging. He is constantly searching for something but knows no English; a mad fortune teller wanders around predicting fantastic occasions such as free taxes, public privacy, honest politics and etc., reads palms, has a portable crystal ball made of rubber and any other acccutrements of the trade; an old hag goes around collecting paper and putting it in her bag. She gives ecology speeches and advice to the love lorn; a sleepwalking sailor keeps looking for his anchor, mutters sea talk and reminisces on resemblances to ports he has visited; any other fantastic characterizations.

All foreign citizens or students, faculty, and staff should be encouraged to speak only their native languages during specific times.

Rituals: Talking Drums - 4 or more African 2-tone log drums are required. Drummers' positions are to be out-of-doors at the points of the compass, distant from each other and preferably out of sight. The drummers devise a language, trying to imitate words and phrases of the city's language as near as possible with the two tones available. Their messages must range from intermittant, scattered words and phrases, to continuously repeated words and phrases. They must listen carefully and try to respond accurately to each other, commenting on the events of the day.

Pickets: march with blank picket signs. All marching must be inch by inch forward, backward, to either side, or obliquely in silence. A carpenter could build a picket fence around the marchers.

Fantastic Sights: carved, larger than life, wooden or paper-mache figures and totemistic objects, small to large, and very colorful, carried slowly around sound map routes in a ritualistic fashion, or placed in unusual spots.

Final Circle or Ritualistic Ceremony: at a chosen time, as a peak to activities, all ritual performers gather together in a circle around a bonfire or a reasonable substitute for a bonfire. The talking drummers and natural sound makers begin signaling, intermittantly at first. The moving performers move slowly around the circle, maintaining their individual characteristic movements. Any others present are to chant the word "feier" continuously and simultaneously. The tempo of all sound and movement must gradually and imperceptibly increase until all activity is extremely fast. The acceleration must take at least an hour or more to occur. The activity then continues until each person can no longer participate.

BONN FEIER must remain unannounced, except for the final ritual. A successful performance is one that grows gradually, is subtle, and leaves people very uncertain as to which activities in the city or campus are normal and which are unusual.

Leucadia, California

November 1971

BONN FEIER was originally entitled LINK, and was commissioned by Larry Livingston for Palomar College, San Marcos, California. In 1976, LINK, under the new title BONN FEIER, was entered in a competition sponsored by the city of Bonn, Germany. The theme of the competition was urban music to be performed in outdoor spaces within the context of the 1977 Beethoven Festival, Since LINK culminates with a bonfire ceremony, the new title BONN FEIER, which sounds similar to 'bonfire', and means Bonn celebration (or good celebration), seemed appropriate.

First prize was awarded to the composer by Dr. Bruese for the city of Bonn on May 14, 1977 for BONN FEIER.