Whistle from Above

for Two Percussionists,
Robotic Instruments,
Staging, Lighting,
and Computer Sound

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Whistle from Above consists of a series of duos (Whistle Stops)
that occur spread over 6 small percussion setups.

Whistle Stop I - for 2 Log Drums
Whistle Stop II - for 2 Snare Drums
Whistle Stop III - for 6 Woodblocks
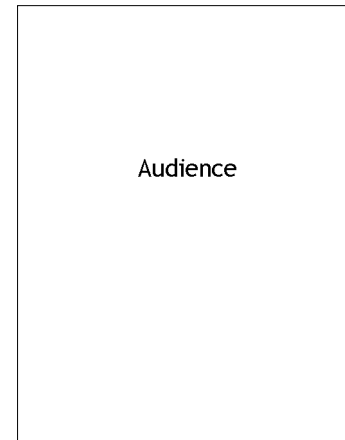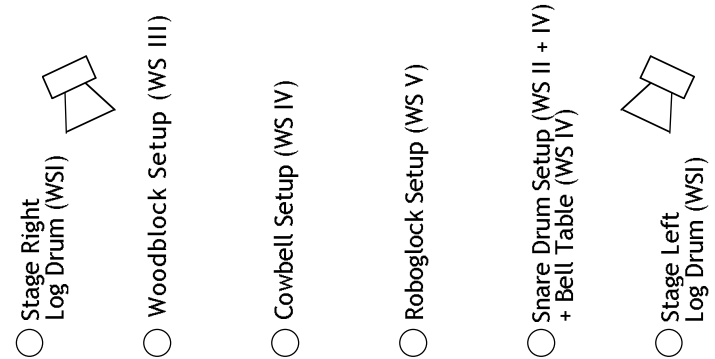Whistle Stop IV - for 2 Snare Drums and 4 Handheld Bells
Whistle Stop V - for Robotic Glockenspiel ("Roboglock")

Within each of these percussion setups there are:
- computer controlled lights (ultrabright LEDs) that light up the
performers and the instruments.
- robotic actuators
- a pedal switch to trigger cues

The Whistle Stops are surrounded by interludes of varying lengths
that make the movement between setups part of the theatrical
language of the piece.

Computer sound is used for the creation of the interludes, background
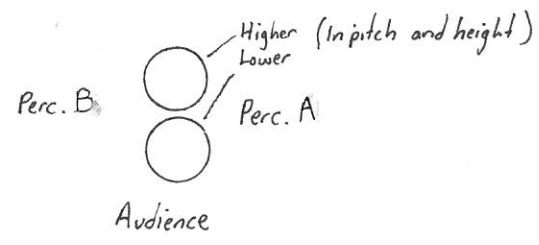for the Whistle Stops, and for characteristic spoken elements the "Voice
of God" (VOG).

Stage Right
Log Drum (WSI)

Woodblock Setup (WS III)

Cowbell Setup (WS IV)

Roboglock Setup (WS V)

Snare Drum Setup (WS II + IV)
+ Bell Table (WS IV)

Stage Left
Log Drum (WSI)

Audience

Whistle Stop I
from Whistle from Above

2 Percussionists
2 Log drums (or similar)

A

B

Both step back 3 steps

– pause ~4" –

VOG: "And now?"

Both step forward 3 steps

Both raise sticks.
Clear visual upbeat.

Both come down.

Only B strikes.

Both raise sticks.

Clear visual upbeat.

Both come down.

Only B strikes

A looks ahead.
Both raise sticks
(slow & deliberate)

Visual upbeat.
B comes down
all the way but
doesn't hit drum.

A comes down
½ way while
looking at B

Look at B

Look at audience
(You've been caught)

pp

(relax)

fake hit

Lights cross-fade to Snare Setup
↓
Both players step off stage

(relax)

VOG: "Again"
↓
Calvacade of steps
↓
Players arrive at Snares
↓
Remove cover in sync
with electronic "sheen"

Whistle Stop II
from Whistle from Above

2 Percussionists
2 Snare Drums
(snares off)

Higher (In pitch and height)
Lower

Perc. B   Perc. A

Audience

Heads down focused on playing

♩=30 or slower

A (stems up)
B (stems down)

Hi:

Lo:

ppp

* each subsequent roll should dovetail in and out.

pp

Start to take notice of each other (as an "opponent")

Heads down

pp   sub p   sub mp   sub mf   p   pp

etc. (~30 sec. more)

Abrupt cut off →

Lights: "Blinders" distract audience
Black out on snares

Sudden lights up on WoodBlocks

A + B: Once in black, move
immediately to Wood Blocks

A + B: In position .... Lift cover
from WoodBlocks

Staggered entrances with occasional
tiered dynamic crescendi.

Heads come up slowly into a staring match.

Electronics: raise in
activity until a
climax →

Electronics: Continue and
add prerecorded alternating
rolls (semi-realistic)

Electronics: drop out .... Add sheen
suddenly (leaving a
little background)

VOG: "Out of the dark"

VOG: "

Whistle Stop III
from Whistle from Above

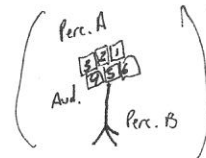2 Percussionists
6 Wood Blocks, Temple Blocks or Similar
*Instruments should resonate enough
 so that, at high speeds, the patterns
 start to blur.
*Tuning should be microtonal

Perc. A   Perc. B

Audience
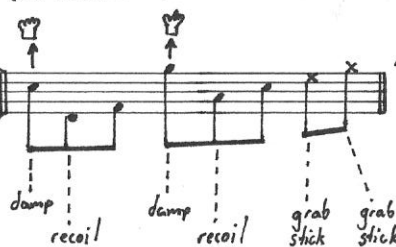
♩.=90 or AFAP

Perc. B
(Stems Up)

Perc. A
(Stems down)

pp ——— mf

Perc. B: 1ST x   tacet (after 1ST note)

           2ND x   deaden

           3RD x   damp all
                   ½ way after
                   (like gamelan)

(Hit Perc. B's hand)

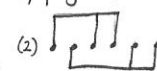damp   recoil   damp   recoil   grab stick   grab stick

deaden all
(with the attack)

VOG: "Wait" or "30 seconds"
(players freeze for
an extended duration)

~30"-45" ...→ (lights up on Snare Setup)

w/ finger tips

VOG: "Now"

lights out on players
slow calvacade
Perfs. arrive at snares

Whistle Stop IV

from Whistle from Above

for 2 snare drums (snares on)
and 4 handheld bells

Whistle Stop IV is a composition to be "set" on the two percussionists in the manner that dance choreography is "set" on the bodies of the dancers. As such, what follows is a structural outline for reference and to aid the memory of the performers.

(Performers arrive at snare drum setup after finishing Whistle Stop III)

- Resume the staring match and alternation of rolls from Whistle Stop II

- After ~30 seconds, player A refuses to yield (i.e. won't stop his roll)

- In response, Player B takes first hand bell and places it as a damper on the snare drum in use by Player A.

- Players pass this bell back and forth as a damper 2-3 times more.

- On next attempt to dampen, Player X "bats" it away - striking the bell. Other player moves the bell away (as if the stick hit his finger) and replaces it behind the snare setup.

- Both lean slightly to look where the bell came from.

- Remove cover on hidden bell table (cue computer "sheen").

- Stare at each other. Then "agree" to begin a "two man roll" (a roll performed by the downstage hands of both players).

- Both lean way over and come back with one bell each.

- Continue two man roll on higher drum. B places bell on it, A shifts roll to lower drum, B has to follow then removes bell from high drum.

- Repeat 2x with roles interchanged and in varying combinations of drums.

- B ends participation in the two man roll - "trapping" A to maintain the entire roll. With free hands, B picks up a bell for each hand.

- B attempts to dampen A's rolls. Sometimes A simply shifts to the other drum. Other times A bats B's bells away as before.

- On one attempt by B to dampen A's roll, A strikes B's wrist forcing B to leave a bell on that drum. During this time, A performs either a one-handed roll or a steady stream of fast notes. A picks up bell and returns to two-hand roll. B replenishes his lost bell from the bell table.

- Repeat 1x more. Ending with 1 bell and 1 stick in all four hands.

- 4 Hand Stick/Bell Kung-Fu:
    Start by playing a two-man roll
    Maintain a two-man roll as much as possible throughout
    Alternating drums to "trip up" the other player
    With free hand attack (strike at other player) and
        defend (block stick with bell)
    Create more complex patterns
    Eventually all four hands are involved (forgetting the roll)
    While I use the analogy of "Kung-Fu" no over-acting or
        aggressive behavior is warranted. Simply try to
        strike the bells in the other's hands.

- VOG: "Less". A and B return to two-hand roll with 2 hand Kung-Fu.

- A is"winning". Then Cowbell Setup starts to glow. A is transfixed and becomes distracted from the battle. B looks quickly to see what A is staring at but must maintain roll (as A has stopped playing by now).

- A goes over to Cowbell Setup. Uncovers instrument (cue computer "sheen"). Slowly lifts up setup and carries it over to Snare Setup.

- While maintaining two-man roll, slowly introduce Whistle Stop III material on the Cowbells. Occasional hand bell Kung-Fu. Eventually the full Whistle Stop III material is played incorporating the two upstage hand bells as instruments 2 and 6 in the cowbell patterns.

- Crescendo and accelerando until blackout and cutoff.

Whistle Stop V

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from Whistle from Above

for "Roboglock" (a robotic glockenspiel instrument) and computer sound.

Whistle Stop V is a composition to be "set" on the solo percussionist in the manner that dance choreography is "set" on the bodies of the dancers. As such, what follows is a structural outline that defines a series of modes of interaction with the computer controlled Roboglock and the transitions between modalities.

(Transition from Whistle Stop IV: after cutoff two soft murmurs from all of the robotic instruments except for the Roboglock. Soundfile builds up intense build-up to the moment when the Roboglock Setup is illuminated from within. As soundfile diminishes, Players A and B crowd around, curious around a warm fire. Roboglock plays one note. Player B uncovers Roboglock and damps note. Roboglock plays one more note. Player A dampens - simultaneously the other robotic instruments begin to play. A and B must travel to each instrument and play a gesture (like those in Whistle Stop I) to silence the robots. The silencing is actually achieved by stepping on a pedal at the appropriate setup. During this quiet mayhem the Roboglock plays more and more frequently - requiring more of Player A's attention. The other instruments diminish in frequency. This brings us to the beginning of Whistle Stop V.)

- Dampen each rods shortly after they are struck.

- As individual rods are struck too fast, player removes the rod to silence it.

- Eventually no rods left on instrument (just clicking actuators).

- Return rods one at a time creating rhythmic/melodic patterns

- As number of rods "in play" increase, re-introduce damping to vary the patterns.

- Computer reverse attack sound begins to precede some strikes.

- Computer sound "tail" on some pitchs - do not dampen these rods.

- Begin to dampen the end of the computer sound tails. This may be long after the rod itself has stopped sounding.

- These tails become more prominent and outlandish.

- Throughout, a very fast pattern of notes in the top register needs continual damping attention.

- 2 murmur swells from the other robotic instruments.

- Computer tails start linking Roboglock strikes with other instruments (except Stage Left Log Drum).

e.g.   W.B.

Roboglock

Computer Sound "Tail"
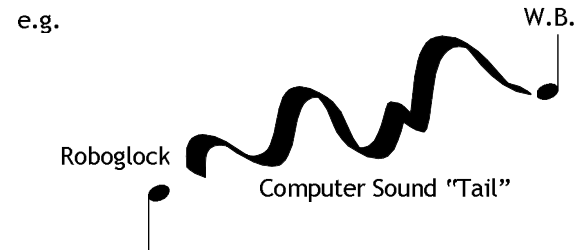
- Other instruments, after being called into action, coalesce into a heartbeat rhythm (with some extraneous notes)

- Player B appears at Stage Left Log Drum (lights up on him) playing in strident opposition:

5

etc.

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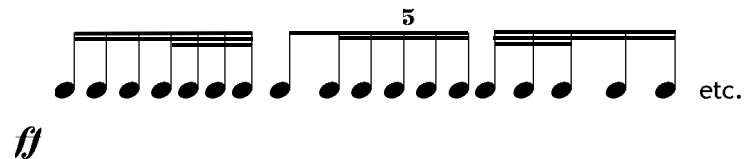
- Fade out Roboglock.

- Player B continues.

- VOG: "Thirty Seconds". Player B freezes. Soundfile continues.

- VOG: "Then Fade...". Lights fade slowly on Player B (in silence).

- All Out.