

Prefatory Note

“*Time* is the actual dimension in which music exists when performed and is by nature an infinitely divisible continuum. No metric system or notation based on metrics is able to indicate all of the possible points in the continuum, yet sound may begin or end anywhere along this dimension.”¹

Similarly, all of the other characteristics of a sound — frequency, intensity, timbre, modes of attack-continuation-decay — are infinitely divisible continua and unmeasurable. The imposition of approximate scalar-systems is obviously possible and efficacious, but to deal directly with the experience of a continuum on its own unknown terms seems to imply that the unmeasuring eye and ear are their own terms and experiential justification and compatible with unmeasured experience. An ambiguous but implicitly inclusive graphic “notation,” and alert, sympathetic performers, are conceivable catalysts for activating this “process” within continua.

...to produce graphic situations, the implications of which would involve the performer’s response as a factor leading to multiple “characteristic” realizations of the piece as an audible event;...to extend and intensify the ambiguity inherent in any graphic representation and possible composer, performer, and audience response to it; a work, and any one performance of it, as “process” rather than as static and conclusive.

Two basic approaches:

a “mobile score subject to physical manipulation of its components, resulting in an unknown number of different, integral, and “valid” realizations.

a *conceptually* “mobile” approach to basically fixed graphic elements; subject to an infinite number of performance realizations through the involvement of the performer’s immediate responses to the intentionally ambiguous graphic stimuli relative to the conditions of performance involvement.

October 1952

for piano

Clefs are in the usual treble-bass relationship. Pitch, intensity, and duration are graphically precise and conventionally represented. The total time-duration of the piece and the implied metrical-time relationships between events are to be determined by the performer. The absence of rests produces an intentional ambiguity and is intended to eliminate the possibility of a metrically rational performance. The performer may move through the space at a constant or variable rate of speed relative to “real” time or to intuitive time.

November 1952 (“Synergy”)

for piano(s) and/or other instruments or sound-producing media

¹ From a program note to “Music for Cello and Piano,” 1955

(See also facsimile reproduction of preliminary sketches.)

“The frequency range will be relative to that of each instrument performing the work. To be performed in any direction from any point in the defined space for any length of time. Tempo: as fast as possible to as slow as possible...inclusive. Attacks may be interpreted as completely separated by infinite space, collectively in blocks of any shape, or defined exactly within that space. Line and spaces may be thought of as tracks moving in either direction (horizontally at different and variable speeds) and clef signs may be considered as floating (vertically over the defined space)...this indicates the theoretical possibility of all the attacks occurring at the same instant (and on the same frequency, for any amount of time) or any other expression of simultaneity. The defined space may be thought of as real or illusory, as a whole or I parts. Either space (vertical or horizontal) may expand, contract, or remain as it seems to be here. Vertical space will vary according to the performer’s view of the floating clefs.” (Nov. 1952)

December 1952

For one or more instruments and/or sound-producing media

The following note and sketch appear on a notebook page dated Oct. & Nov. ’52, but they are the basis of the composition “December 1952” as well as being particularly relevant to “Four Systems.”

“...to have elements exist in space...space as an infinitude of directions from an infinitude of points in space...to work (compositionally and in performance) to right, left, back, forward, up, down, and all points between...the score [being] a picture of this space at one instant, which must always be considered as unreal and/or transitory...a performer must set this all in motion (time), which is to say, realize that it is in motion and step into it...either sit and let it move or move through it at all speeds.”

“[co-efficient of] intensity and duration [is] space forward and back.”

The composition may be performed in any direction from any point in the defined space for any length of time and may be performed from any of the four rotational positions in any sequence. In a performance utilizing only three dimensions as active (vertical, horizontal, and time), the thickness of the event indicate the relative intensity and/or (where applicable instrumentally clusters. Where all four dimensions are active the relative thickness and length of events are functions of their conceptual position on a plane perpendicular to the vertical and horizontal plane of the score. In the latter case all of the characteristics of sound and their relationships to each other are subject to continual transformation and modification. It is primarily intended that performance be made directly from this graphic “implication” (one for each performer) and that no further preliminary defining of the events, other than an agreement as to total performance time, take place. Further defining of the event is not prohibited however, provided that the imposed determinate-system is implicit in the score and in these notes.

MM – 87

MM – 135 March 1953

for piano or to be performed simultaneously by two pianos.

See note to “October 1952.”

“October 1952” utilized a discontinuous, spatial-coordinate compositional technique and in that sense is a structure. “MM – 87” and “MM – 135” were composed very rapidly and spontaneously and are in that sense performances rather than compositions.

Music for “Trio for Five Dancers” June 1953

For piano and/or other instruments

A transcription of graphics which relate to physical position and movement in space into a “literal” and indigenous sound-event in comparable time. (See comments on the score.)

1953

for piano

This page is actually a study for “25 Pages” (1953) and is best described by the performance note to that work:

“The ‘25 Pages’ may be played in any sequence; each page may be performed either side up; events within each two-line system may be read as either treble or bass clef; the total time duration of the piece is between...(for this ‘Folio’ page: 20 seconds and 2 minutes), based on 5 seconds and 15 seconds per two-line system as probably but not compulsory time-extremities. A time-structure in terms of seconds per two-line system may be pre-set by the performer, obtained from the composer, or be arrived at spontaneously during the performance. The indicated note-durations are precise relative to each other and to the eventual time-value assigned to each line-system.

“It will be seen that the basic ‘mobile’ elements of the work — page sequence and inversion, clef disposition, and time — admit of a considerable number of different presentations of this material All of these possibilities are valid within the total concept of the work provided that once a selection from the range of possibilities has been made it be executed with devotion and accuracy with regard to the time-durations, attacks, and intensities. The variable factors are to be dealt with to any degree of simplicity or complexity interesting to the performer. The piece may be played by any number of pianos up to 25.” (The last sentence is not applicable to Folio page “1953.”) (June 1953)

Four Systems January 1954

For piano(s) and/or other instruments or sound-producing media

See comments on the score itself² and the comments and notes to “December 1952.”

E.B.

² “outer limits” may refer to the range extremities of any instrument, group of instruments, or other sound-producing media; “keyboard” appears by virtue of the dedication.