

MUSIC by a smith

A short symphony (four movements) for voice, space, woodblock, and overhead projector

A note on the text

The spaces between lines should be observed as pauses. The space might give an indication of how long the pause lasts.

Overture

T: Good Evening.

R: Welcome to Nordic Music Days,

A: and tonight's concert, here at Alexander Teater in Helsinki in Finland.

E: We are Ning and we are an ensemble from Oslo in Norway.

R: The stage has been prepared, the acoustics have been discussed. The instruments are tuned.

E: Drinks have been finished. You entered and you took your seat.

T: Discussions filled the room. *Excuse me* was said. *Are these seats alright? Are you comfortable?*

A: Smiles and hellos were exchanged. The day has been reflected upon: what happened, what it meant, how it went.

A: Compliments were made:

R: *Thanks so much for coming tonight.*

E: *How are you enjoying the festival?*

T: *You look beautiful.*

A: *It's been such a long time. It's very good to see you.*

R: The performers entered. Places were taken. Stands were adjusted.

T: The scores were opened and a quiet descended.

Someone concealed a cough.

A: A programme page was turned, consulted and set down.

E: There is a short silence.

First movement

The overhead projector is switched on, a slide is placed on it that reads FIRST MOVEMENT

E: The first movement begins.

T: We hear a quiet breath moving through a flute, followed by a gentle and mild tone from a cello.

R: There is the harmonic 'ping' of a guitar.

A: Unexpectedly, a soft beater strikes a small gong.

E: Far away we hear a military snare drum.

R: There is a fanfare from a trumpet, a deep swell of strings that rises, falls and slowly fades to almost nothingness.

A: A football bounces.

T: There is the constant hum of traffic.

E: There is the sound of pages turning.

R: Suddenly, the clarinets play a fast triplet.

E: A lone piccolo pipes a high pitched melody.

A: The tune is taken up by a harp.

T: We hear a deep tuba, like an elephant.

T: There is birdsong.

R: A bell is struck three times.

A: A cymbal crashes.

T: A bicycle wheel in need of oil rhythmically squeaks.

There is a glissando on the vibraphone, which is joined by another

A: and another

R: and another

T: and another

E: until the sound of around 700 vibraphones all playing the same glissando fills the room.

And then very suddenly they stop and the first movement ends.

There is a short pause.

Second movement

The slide on the overhead projector is changed to read SECOND MOVEMENT

R: The second movement is extreme in its difference to the first, employing only a single instrument: the woodblock.

The range of the instrument is explored to maximum effect. The intention being perhaps to hear things never heard on the woodblock before, and things that may never be heard again.

During the movement instrument and player explore and convey a wide range of ideas, emotions and situations. The listener is taken on an aural, visceral and potentially spiritual journey: at times pleasing and comforting to hear, at others extremely upsetting and disturbing.

The movement takes somewhere between 16 and 17 hours to perform, depending on the tempo chosen, and the number of breaks decided by the ensemble or orchestra presenting the work, it is without any doubt the longest solo for woodblock ever composed.

Various commentators and critics have reflected that the movement is 'indescribable', 'terrible' and 'potentially mind-blowing, unfortunately we may never know.'

We are of course unable to present the entire movement here for you tonight, but offer what we consider to be some of the highlights.

E: These are:

T: The representation of the beauty of morning sunlight on the mountain top.

Woodblock

The quarrel of young lovers.

Woodblock

The terrifying depiction of the hundred year's war.

Woodblock

The howls of the coyote as they race over the plains.

Woodblock

A winter scene.

E: In the short pause before the beginning of the third movement we hear the sound of instruments being retuned.

Third movement

The following slides appear on the overhead projector

THIRD MOVEMENT
A DISSONANT TRUMPET
FIREWORKS IN THE STREETS
FOOTSTEPS IN THE FRESHLY FALLING
SNOW
A BOW JUMPING
A CHEAP ELECTRIC KEYBOARD
A DEEP WALRUS LIKE BASSOON
A SPIRITED WALTZ ON A SQUEEZEBOX
A THUMPING BASSLINE
THE NOISE OF THE RAINFOREST
NOSE FLUTES
A SCALE ON A STEINWAY
A GAMELAN ORCHESTRA
THE SHAKING OF MARACAS
A SAW WOBBLING
A ZITHER
A 37 MINUTE DRUMROLL
EUPHORIC BRASS
A LONG AND HIGH PITCHED SCREAM

CONCRETE SOUNDS
A ROMANTIC SONG
1000 INSTRUMENTS PLAYING A UNIFIED
CHORD
SLEDGEHAMMER BEATS
A WALL OF WHITE NOISE
THUNDER AND LIGHTNING
AN ATOMIC EXPLOSION
A SILENCE¹

¹ The length of this is at the discretion of the performance, but I don't think that it should be shorter than a minute.

Fourth movement

A slide reading FOURTH MOVEMENT is placed on the overhead projector

T: The fourth movement begins with a breeze through the leaves.

A: Waves breaking on a pebbled beach

R: There is a pizzicato from the strings.

A: A cutlery drawer opens.

E: A coffee grinder grinds.

T: A pan is set down on the stove.

R: A glass is set down on a table.

T: A kettle boils.

A: A gun fires.

E: There is a long and melancholic solo from a French horn.

A: We hear a plane as it crosses slowly overhead.

R: A fast train as it speeds past.

T: The sound of a man falling over.

T: We hear church bells.
A: Drumming on an oil barrel
E: A speaker vibrating
R: A window breaking.

A: A pounding piano.
R: The BOING of a timpani.
T: The song of the whale.
E: The click click of dolphins.

R: A knife pierces plastic.
T: There is the jangle of loose change.
E: There is a series of descending sevenths on the chimes.

A: We hear a bluegrass banjo.
R: A ukulele.
T: A jews harp.

E: A microphone being dragged across the floor.

T: The sound of a stick breaking.
The chink of champagne glasses.

A: A door slamming. A key turning in a lock.

E: Fingers snap. Tongues clack. Hands clap.

R: The New York symphony orchestra play a dans macabre.

E: There is a Janis Joplin song.

T: We hear an angry riff on an acoustic guitar.

A: Drumming on an oil barrel.

T: A gaelic song played softly.

All: One hundred digeridoos.

R: Somewhere in the distance a swiss yodelling trio yodel.

E: Then there is only stillness.

Finale

The overhead projector is switched off

T: This part of the performance is over.

Smiles and hellos can be exchanged.

Conversations can fill the room.

What it meant.

How it went.

Thanks very much for listening.