

In C (1964)

Performing instructions

All performers play from the same page of 53 melodic patterns played in sequence. A group of about 35 creates a rich, full overlay, but interesting performances have been created with many more or many less.

Patterns are to be played consecutively with each performer having the freedom to determine how many times they repeat each pattern before moving to the next. There is no fixed rule as to the number of repetitions a pattern may have, however, since performances normally average between 45 minutes and an hour and a half, it can be assumed that one would repeat each pattern from somewhere between 45 seconds and a minute and a half or longer.

It is very important that performers listen very carefully to one another and this means to occasionally drop out and listen. As an ensemble, it is desirable to vary dynamics as well as create group crescendos and diminuendos.

Each pattern can be played in unison or canonically in any alignment with itself or its neighboring patterns. One of the joys of playing **In C** is the interaction of the players in polyrhythmic combinations that spontaneously arise among patterns. Some quite fantastic shapes will arise and disintegrate as the ensemble progresses through the piece.

It is important not to hurry from pattern to pattern but to stay on a pattern long enough to interlock with other patterns. As the performance progresses, performers should stay within 2 or 3 patterns of each other. It is important not to race too far ahead or lag too far behind the main patterns sounding.

The ensemble can be aided by the means of an eighth note pulse played on the high C's of a piano or mallet instrument. It is also allowed to use instead of or with the pulse, improvised percussion to keep the rhythm of the ensemble precise. Care must be taken however that the percussion does not overwhelm the ensemble.

Players must take care to play each pattern precisely. The first rehearsal should have everyone playing a repetition of each pattern in unison before going on to rehearse sections of the piece.

The tempo is left to the discretion of the performers. Extremely fast is discouraged. When a performer is not playing, they should be conscious of the larger periodic composite accents that are sounding. When players re-enter they must be aware of what affect the entrance will have on the overall flow.

The ensemble should aim to merge into a unison at least once, but preferably often during the course of a performance. If all patterns seem to be played too much in unison, a player should try to offset their pattern by an eighth note or other value so as to create a feeling of shifting alignments. It is okay to transpose patterns. Take care when transposing down, especially with patterns in running sixteenth notes. This can create a very muddy sound. Also all instruments should aim to blend and no one instrument should stick out except momentarily. Rhythmic augmentation of patterns can be effective.

Players may omit patterns that are too difficult or unsuitable for their instruments.

Amplification of instruments is allowed to help achieve a balanced dynamic. Electronic instruments are also welcome.

In C usually ends this way: When each performer arrives at figure #53, they stay on it until the entire ensemble has arrived there. The group then makes a large crescendo and diminuendo a few times and then each player drops out when they wish.

- Terry Riley