

John MacCallum

blankness

For Viola, Vibraphone, and Electronics

Instrumentation

Viola with mute

Vibraphone with working motor

4 medium mallets

2 bows

1 hardwood plank (should have a similar sound to a woodblock or a temple block, but thinner and less hollow)

Technical requirements

1 MacBook Pro running Max/MSP 5.0.4 or better

4 or more speakers. Two of these speakers should be placed near the performers.

Two possible speaker configurations can be seen at right.

1 audio interface such as a MOTU 828 with 5 or more output channels

1 MIDI control surface such as a Behringer BCF2000

Notes:

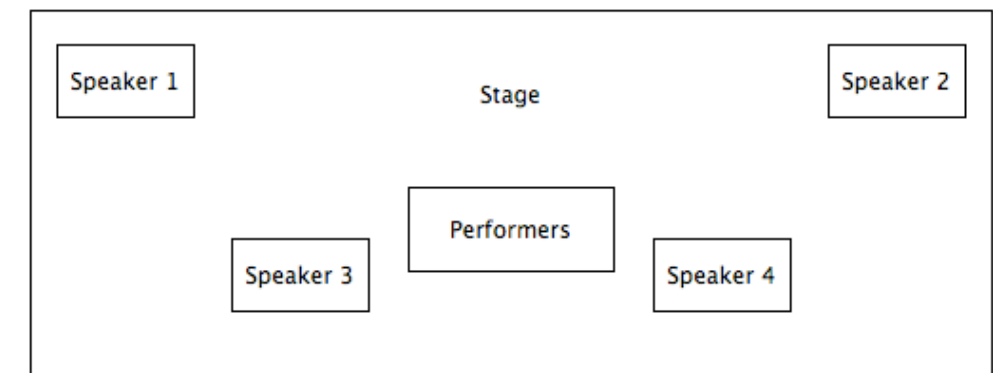
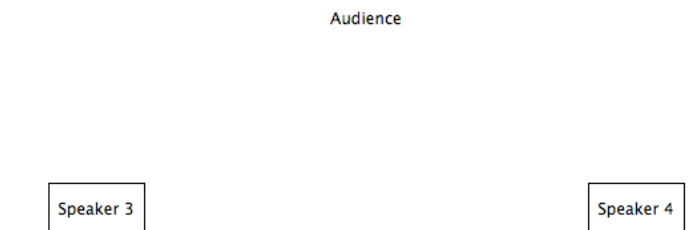
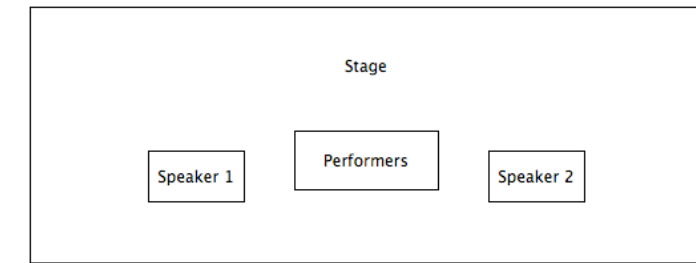
The instruments should be unamplified and the electronics should be mixed so that they blend with the unamplified instruments. If possible, the speakers should be placed near the performers to blend the electronics with the instrumental sounds. Generally speaking, this piece should be quiet very quiet—the dynamics are relative and passages marked *f* should still be fairly quiet.

Program Note

Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that are interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerge and dominate the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies. Finally, when that frugal musicality becomes exhausted in its turn, or simply does not succeed in becoming established on account of the pressure of silence, the melancholy person appears to stop cognizing as well as uttering, sinking into the blankness of asymbolia or the excess of unorderable cognitive chaos.

Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*.

blankness (ii) was written for and premiered at the 2008 MANCA festival in Nice, France as part of a collaboration between UC Berkeley, CNMAT, the Conservatoire à Rayonnement Régional de Nice, and CIRM.



Audience

blankness (II)

very freely
with practice
mute

ca. 30" ca. 5-10" ca. 30" ca. 30" ca. 10" ca. 30"

IV III (ord.) sul pont. ord.

Viola

pppp *<poco>* *<poco>* *<poco>*

arco med. vib. l.v. slow vib. l.v. l.v. fast vib. l.v.

Vibraphone

f *f* *f* *f*

Ped. Ped. *sempre*

Computer

mf

Trigger

1 Pulsating chord with vibraphone-like timbre
2 Chord fades out
3 Sim.
4
5
6
7
8

ca. 30" ca. 30" ca. 30"

5

Vla. *<poco >* *mf sub.* $\text{♩} = 55$ (♩ remains constant throughout)

vib. off l.v. take 4 med. mallets fast vib. l.v. take bow with right hand and keep two mallets in left hand vib. off arco

Vib. *f* *mf* *p*

(Ped.)

Comp.

Tgr. 9 10 Sustained tone begins to pulsate 11 Electronics fade out.

precise and mechanical

9 $\frac{2}{4}$ poco sul tasto $\frac{11}{16}$ $\frac{13}{16}$ $\frac{11}{16}$ $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{2}{4}$ $\frac{11}{16}$ $\frac{13}{16}$ $\frac{6}{16}$ $\frac{7}{8}$ $\frac{9}{16}$ $\frac{3}{4}$

Vla. *pp*

Vib. (arco) *pp* (Ped.) fast vib. slow vib.

Comp.

Tgr. [12] Vibraphone-like timbre

21 $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{11}{16}$ $\frac{13}{16}$ $\frac{6}{16}$ $\frac{9}{16}$

Vla.

Vib. vib. off *ppp* (vibraphone top voice) replace bow with mallet (dead stroke) *p*

Comp. *pp*

Tgr. [13] Sustained tone begins to pulsate

30 **11/16** **3/4** **15/16** **1/8** ord. **12/8** **3/4** **3/8**

Vla. *mf sub.*⁵ *quasi 1/4-tone vibrato* *pp*

Vib. (Ped.) *mf sub.*⁶ fast vib. take two bows arco fast vib. l.v. take 4 mallets *f* vib. off * *pp*

Comp. *molto* *pp*

Tgr. [14] Large complex shimmering chord [15] Electronics fade out [16] Vibraphone-like timbre whose pitch begins to oscillate through bar 50

39 **3/8** **13/32** (7+6) **4/4** **7/8** **3/16** **1/8**

Vla. *mf sub.*⁶ *quasi 1/4-tone vibrato*

Vib. (6+7)

Comp.

Tgr.

46 $\frac{5}{4}$ $\frac{11}{16}$ (5+6) $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{9}{8}$ $\frac{1}{8}$

Vla. *pp*

Vib. *pp*

Comp. *pp*

Tgr.

50 $\frac{1}{8}$ $\frac{7}{16}$ $\frac{11}{32}$ (4+7) $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{1}{8}$ $\frac{9}{16}$ $\frac{1}{8}$

Vla. *pp*

Vib. *pp*

Comp. (rhythm is approximate)

Tgr. 17 18 Rhythmic pulsation and sustained tones alternate

58 $\frac{5}{4} + \frac{1}{16}$ $\frac{13}{16}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{1}{8}$ $\frac{4}{4}$

Vla. *mf sub.*⁵

Vib. *mf sub.*⁶ *Ped.* take two bows *arco* *f*

Comp. *molto*

Tgr. [19] Large complex shimmering chord

65 $\frac{5}{4}$ *détaché* $\frac{1}{8}$ ca. 10" ca. 5" Remove practice mute ca. 5"

Vla. *pp* *mp sub.* *pp* *mf sub.*⁵

Vib. take mallets *f* *f* *f* *pp* fast vib. \oplus *mp sub.* *pp* *mf sub.* *Ped.*

Comp.

Tgr. [20] Electronics fade out [21] Large complex shimmering chord (ca. 5") [22] The shimmering chord fades out leaving behind a pulsating texture

73 **very freely** ca. 10-20" ca. 10" ca. 10-20" ca. 10"

Vla. ord.-----> sul pont. ord. (ord.)-----> sul pont.

Vib. vib. off ♪ ≈ 90 arco fast vib. ♪ ≈ 120

Comp.

Tgr. [23] From here until the end of the piece, each number thins out the pulsating texture slightly until it disappears.

77 ca. 10-20" ca. 10" ca. 10-20" ca. 10"

Vla. ord. sul tasto

Vib. arco vib. off (vib. off)-----> fast vib. vib. off ♪ ≈ 78

Comp.

Tgr. [24]

81

Vla. *sul pont.* *mp* *ca. 10-20"* *ca. 10"* *III ord. o* *p* *ca. 10-20"*

Vib. *arco med. vib.* *mp* *Ped.* *vib. off* *♩ ≈ 108* *mp* *p*

Comp.

Tgr. 25

84

Vla. *Wait for computer to fade out completely.* *ca. 10"* **1/4** *ca. 3-5"* *bow on the bridge to produce pitchless noise* *ppp*

Vib. *Wait for computer to fade out completely.* *wooden plank* *♩ ≈ 90* *ppp*

Comp.

Tgr. 26