

Graphic Piece for Solo Bass

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Graphic Piece for Solo Bass

1. The performer navigates through the circles, or modules, within the score, following the connecting paths and performing the notations within each circle.
2. The piece begins with the large circle in the lower left-hand corner; it ends when the performer has played the phrase within the large circle in the upper left-hand corner.
3. The performer must play each circle at least once.
4. Once a cluster of small circles has been entered, the performer may move between them in any direction and in any order allowed by the connecting paths. A performer may return to a small circle as often as they like.
5. The written phrases within the large circles can be played only once. These phrases act as barriers between the three clusters of small circles. Once the performer leaves a cluster of small circles by playing the phrase within a large circle, the player may not return to the previous cluster.
6. When a performer arrives on a circle containing a red dot, they have the option of playing any one of the melodies within the rectangular boxes in addition to the notations within the circle. The performer may return to the circles with red dots as often as they like and may play material from different rectangles upon each visit.
7. Modules containing graphics notations are to be freely interpreted by the performer.
8. Diamond-shaped note heads signify a natural harmonic played in the location of the written note. As such, pitch or octave may not be approximate.

Graphic Piece
for
Solo Bass

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Adagio
f

Presto *pizz.*

MAESTOSO
3 4 | 2 6 |
3 | 1 5 | 2 |

PIZZ

Adagio

Andante *mf*

Moderato *mf*

Andante *mp*

Performance Notes

To aid those who may be unfamiliar with performing graphically notated works, I discuss my own approach to interpreting the modules of this piece. Certainly, not every module requires supplementary explanation. Those containing traditionally notated figures can simply be played as written. But for many of the modules, a word or two regarding interpretation and performance may be beneficial. Nonetheless, these comments are intended only as starting points for those wishing to perform this piece. I encourage each performer to develop a personalised approach to interpreting the graphic modules.

1. Elements of notation: Many of modules contain only elements of traditional notation: a time signature, an abbreviation for *pizzicato*, a repeat sign, and feathered beams. In such modules, these notational components can be taken literally. For example, the performer can play in five-quarter time, use *pizzicato* techniques, repeat a phrase or idea, etc. As for the feather-beamed *accelerando*, the quarter note with the downward stem indicates a sustained tone throughout the *accelerando*, which I typically accomplish by using an open string or natural harmonic. The peculiar appearance of this *accelerando* is intentional, and the performer must be creative with how this affects performance. For example, are there, in fact, multiple tempos? Should articulations be exaggerated? Should one attempt

virtuosic speeds? Do the small note heads imply a *delicato* passage?

Consider these questions and attempt to devise your own strategies when playing this module.

2. Pitch: When interpreting the modules containing graphic notations or components of traditional notation, the performer must consider how their own pitch choices relate to the traditionally notated phrases. The phrases themselves are derived from two separate tone rows: Bb, D, Gb, Ab, C, E, Eb, G, B, A, F, Db; and G, Ab, A, E, Eb, C, Bb, B, D, F. To prepare for my own performance, I begin by practicing each row forward and in retrograde, eventually working to transpose and invert each row according to 20th-century compositional practice. My goal is to gain fluency in this process so that, when interpreting the smaller circles, my improvised lines keep with the character of the pre-composed material. Though this preparatory method is not required, the performer should carefully consider their tonal strategies and take care so that the traditionally notated material transitions seamlessly with the other modules.

3. Colour: With the exception of the red dots, the sparse use of colour is limited to soft, light hues. Consider what interpretation and performance strategies are appropriate for these colour tones. Does a light blue or purple indicate a loud, aggressive performance with biting timbres? Does light

yellow suggest a heavy, sombre *maestoso*? In both instances, I would think not. Plan, practice and perform accordingly.

4. Graphics: In this section, I discuss my mapping strategies for some of the graphic notations. I have given many of these graphics multiple interpretations and often play them several different ways within a single performance.

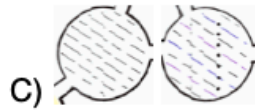


A) I often use this graphic to indicate moments of silence. In other instances, this graphic indicates vastness or emptiness – the sound of being outdoors and hearing only wind or of being in an environment so bereft of sound that one hears one's heartbeat. These ideas can be translated musically by lightly drawing the bow in *sul tasto* position whilst muting the string with the left hand (wind); rubbing the fingertips at varying rates across the wood (wind); or drawing the bow in a circular motion on the E string whilst muting with the left hand (heartbeat).



B) This graphic has multiple interpretations. I often use it to indicate the number of notes to perform within a rhythmically stable unit (each square = one unit). Other times, the numbers indicate the number of beats to sustain a single note, with each square indicating a note change (e.g.. for first row: Bb for 3 beats, D for 4 beats, etc.). The two rows can also be combined. For example, I might play three pitches (as indicated by first square of the top

row) with three different techniques or dynamics (as indicated by the square beneath it).



C) For the left graphic, I improvise in short melodic bursts, often with a *spiccato* bow stroke. For the right graphic, I retain the same strategy, yet map the colours to indicate changes in bow pressure and position (black = *ord*; blue = a light bow stroke that fails to produce a fundamental tone; purple = a heavy bow in *sul tasto* position). The vertical lines represent intermittent downward *glissandi* performed with a *ricochét* bow stroke played *col legno*. Regardless of the strategy one employs, the interpretation for the graphic on the right should reflect an elaboration of how one interprets the graphic on the left.

As for the remaining modules, I am happy to say that the performer is now left to their own creative devices. If having difficulty mapping an interpretive strategy to a module, start simple. It is better to have a strong command over simple ideas than to struggle with a concept or technique beyond one's current capabilities! As with any piece of music, mastery comes with time and experience.