

Twelve Moons

for percussion duo & electronics

Gavin Osborn

2009

(revised shorter version)

Programme Note

The title comes from a poem by T'ang Dynasty poet Li He, a sequence of twelve short poems, each being a seasonal description of a month. The music does not literally describe the poems; I was looking for a way of structuring the piece when I happened upon the Li He text: the sounds came first. I selected one line from each month which seemed to resonate best with certain sounds, and also reordered the poems January-December as opposed to the March-February of the original Chinese (purely because this suited the order of the sounds, rather than a desire to Occidentalise the calendar). The music itself is not presented in twelve miniatures or sections; some 'months' are discrete, others run together.

The lines are:

January
quivering in the cold light

February
a faint red glow

March
turned towards the first faint light

April
mist lingers

May
mist and cloud join heaven and earth

June
a fragrant rain

July
carved screens of jade

August
a flaming mirror

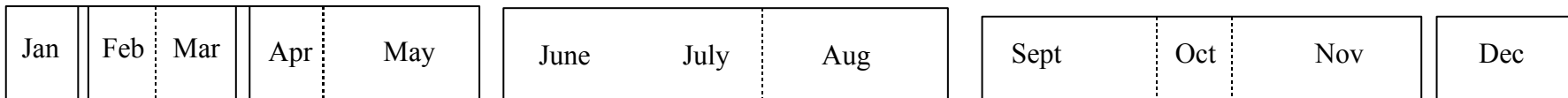
September
cold stars glitter

October
outside, the bright moon

November
the sky is water

December
the light and its shadows are motionless

basic structure:



Performance Notes

1) Instrumentation

Percussion 1: Marimba (conventional range)
2 Woodblocks (different pitches)
2 Double-Bass bows
2 Plastic snare-drum brushes
2 Marimba mallets, heads wrapped in plastic bags

Percussion 2: Crotales (1 octave set)
2 Cowbells (different pitches)
Triangle
Broom head (stiff bristles)
2 Small stones (e.g. large flat skimming stone, or at least one such)
1 Brick or Half-brick
Tam-tam
Large suspended cymbal
2 Double-Bass bows
2 Triangle beaters
2 plastic or wire snare-drum brushes

2)The score:

The design of the score is somewhat idiosyncratic, and is intended to reflect the idea that the sounds emerge from, and dissolve into the silent space surrounding them. As with Chinese landscape paintings, and Japanese Zen ink drawings, the notation exists in blank space which reflects both physical environment and atmosphere.

Some silences are timed, others left to the performers discretion – in these cases care for how the sounds emerge and return should guide duration. This is also the case where no metre, or proportional notation is suggested. Where tempi are not given, a general crotchet beat of MM c.52 (or slower) can be assumed.

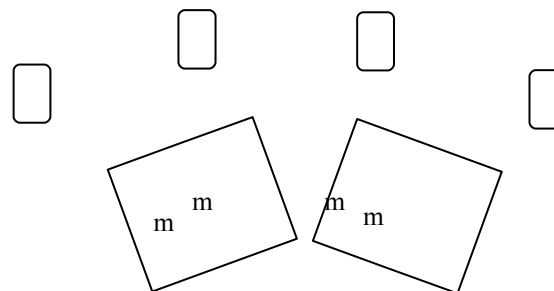
The tape part has three main strands of information: graphic representations of the sounds; verbal descriptions of these sounds, and numbered cues. THESE NUMBERED CUES INDICATE POINTS WHERE THE PLAYER SHOULD PRESS THE FOOTPEDAL TO TRIGGER SAMPLING OR SOUNDFILES.

3) Electronics

The electronics run via a Max/MSP patch. As stated above, sound processing and soundfiles are triggered by the performers via a footpedal. Essentially, once a basic level is set, it is possible to perform the piece without a computer operator; however, should an operator be available, they will be able to ride levels and correct mis-cued events using the patch.

Technical Requirements:

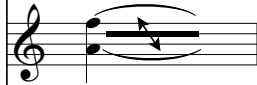
- Computer running Max/MSP 4.6 or later
- Audio interface (min. 4 channels in/out), e.g. Motu 828mkII
- 4 cardioid condenser mics
- 1 footpedal & interface if required
- 4 medium speakers (e.g. Genelec 1029, 8030, or 8040)



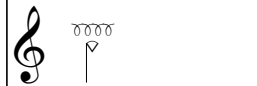
KEY



marimba mallets wrapped in plastic bags, rotated against each other (surf sound)
also used to conventionally strike marimba



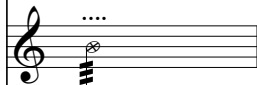
bowed marimba:
line & arrow indicates sound may fluctuate between pitches - do not attempt to correct for 'perfect' sound



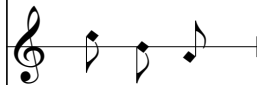
rub two stones together



woodblocks - higher & lower pitch
usually either bowed or played tremolo with brushes



agitate bristles of broom head (hand or any suitable object)



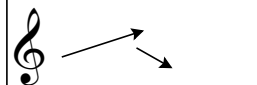
cowbells: upper & middle pitch achieved by bowed off-centre or centre of smaller bell
lower pitch achieved by bowing larger bell



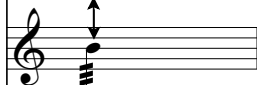
triangle - conventional beater (beater also used to play crotales)



glissandi on marimba using brushes as indicated



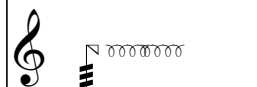
glissandi on crotales using brushes
intensity and speed (as well as direction) indicated by length of arrow



static tremolo on marimba with brushes - vertical tremolo (one note)



static tremolo on marimba with brushes - horizontal tremolo (more than one note)



jangle a bunch of keys



rotational scraping of brick

Twelve Moons

for percussion and digital sound

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Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Tape

c.5"

beaters w plastic bags

c.5"

crotales

1 Granular cloud

January:
quivering in the cold light

marimba

P1

P2

Tape

3
mp

5

6

3

3 Texture & bass

Detailed description: The score is divided into three sections. The first section features Percussion 1 and Percussion 2 with rhythmic notation and dynamic markings. Percussion 1 has a '3' and 'mp' marking. Percussion 2 has a '3' marking. The second section features Percussion 1 and Percussion 2 with rhythmic notation and dynamic markings. Percussion 1 has a '5' marking. Percussion 2 has a '3' marking. The third section features Percussion 1 and Percussion 2 with rhythmic notation and dynamic markings. Percussion 1 has a '6' marking. Percussion 2 has a '3' marking. The Tape part has a '3 Texture & bass' marking. The score includes various rhythmic notations, including triplets, quintuplets, and sextuplets, and dynamic markings like 'mp'. There are also descriptive text boxes and musical symbols like 'c.5"', 'beaters w plastic bags', and 'crotales'.

P1 bowed wd blks

P2 broom head

Tape

4 Textured cloud

5 Wind, bass, clouds

stones c.5"

P1 bowed marimba

P2 bowed cowbells

Tape

c.6"

February: a faint red glow

P1

p *mp* *p* *p*

P2

Tape ||

bowed crotale *p*

P1

p *pp*

triangle

Tape ||

*March:
turned towards the first faint light*

(trigger file, switch beaters and continue)

6 Mix of pitches and mist grows towards next section

*
woodblocks & brushes

P1

mf

P2

mf

bowed cowbells **

Tape || (sounds continue) (sounds die out)***

*April:
mist lingers*

7 Wedge crescendo
attacca!
into next

* n.b. in this passage and that which follows, exact synchronicity is not necessary

** lightly bow body of cowbells - no tone, just noise

*** players can repeat section ad lib. if necessary to allow sounds to fade

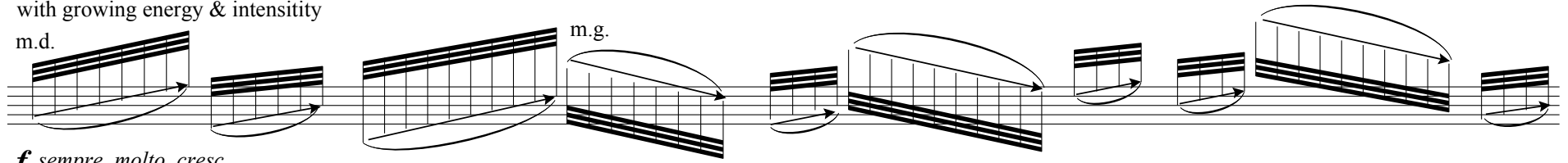
marimba with brushes

with growing energy & intensity

m.d.

m.g.

P1



P2

crotales with brushes

mf sempre molto cresc.

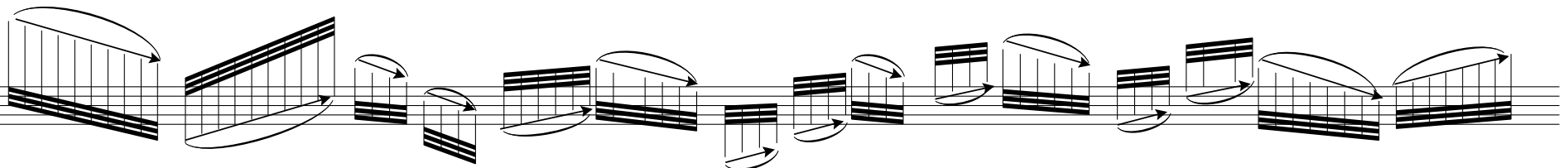
Tape



8 subtle live processing

May:
mist and cloud join heaven and earth

P1



P2

Tape



(sound continues)

↕ with growing intensity

P1

mf sempre molto cresc.

P2

f

5

brushed cowbells

continue in similar rhythmic vein

Tape

||

(sounds continue)

9 live processing parameter change

10 stop processing!

play gently, and a-rhythmically, as if improvising a melody
soft mallets

P1

triangle

P2 *mp*

crotales
(triangle beater) *p* play gently, and a-rhythmically, as if improvising a melody

Tape ||

*June:
a fragrant rain*

11 subtle live processing

P1

P2

Tape || (sounds continue)

12 parameter change

P1

P2

Tape || (sounds continue)

13 fade
processing

^

(switch beaters and continue)

bowed marimba

P1

P2

Tape ||

*July:
carved screens of jade*

^ ^ ^ ^ *

*pause duration as necessary to beater change

♩ = 80

hard mallets (snare sticks?)

P1

ff cresc. to fff

P2

continuing like this

tam-tam & cymbal played with triangle beaters - vary style (circular, swipe, etc)

Tape

14 live processing

*August:
a flaming mirror*

P1

P2

continuing like this

Tape

P1

Tape ||

P1

continue in this style

Tape ||

15 STOP processing!
DAMP TAM/CYMBAL!!

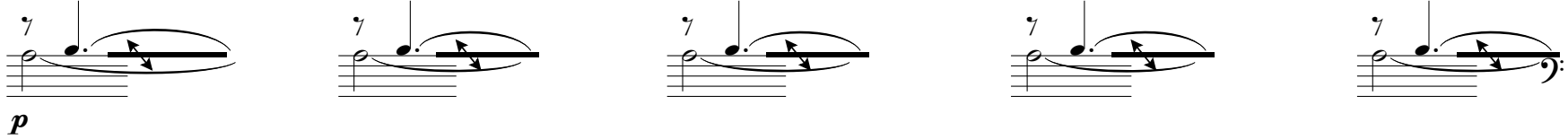
P1


P2

Tape **||**

c.6"-8"
⊙

bowed marimba


P1 

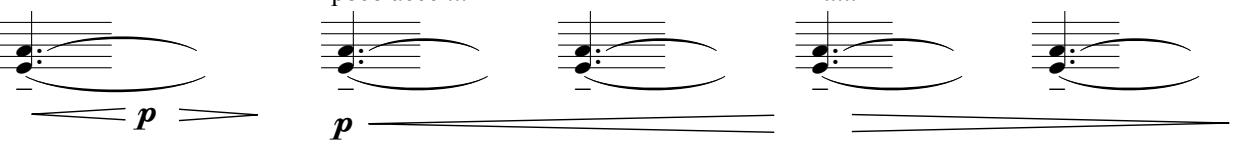
P2 bunch of keys 

Tape ||

*September:
cold stars glitter*

16 live keys processing

P1 

P2 bowed crotales 

Tape ||

*October:
outside, the bright moon*

17 trigger tape

P1



P2

Tape



*November:
the sky is water*

TAPE SOLO
- RAIN -
(player 2 moves to marimba)

bowed marimba
(both players) ♩ = c.40

P1

P2

Tape

*December:
the light and its shadows are motionless*

18 live processing

19 change parameter

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of a musical score for bowed marimba. It features two staves, P1 and P2, and a 'Tape' section. The P1 staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The P2 staff has a bass clef. The 'Tape' section is marked with a double bar line. The score consists of six measures. The first measure has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second measure has a dynamic marking of *sim.*. The 'Tape' section shows two measures with a hatched pattern. A box labeled '18 live processing' points to the start of the hatched section. A box labeled '19 change parameter' points to the end of the hatched section. A text box contains the text: *December:
the light and its shadows are motionless*.

P1

P2

Tape

20 change parameter

21 change parameter

23 kill processing, trigger file

c.15-20"

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of the musical score. It features two staves, P1 and P2, and a 'Tape' section. The P1 staff has a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The P2 staff has a bass clef. The 'Tape' section is marked with a double bar line. The score consists of five measures. The first measure has a dynamic marking of *mp*. The second measure has a dynamic marking of *sim.*. The 'Tape' section shows two measures with a hatched pattern. A box labeled '20 change parameter' points to the start of the hatched section. A box labeled '21 change parameter' points to the end of the hatched section. A box labeled '23 kill processing, trigger file' points to the start of the hatched section. A vertical dimension line on the right is labeled 'c.15-20"'. A text box contains the text: *December:
the light and its shadows are motionless*.