

Empathies

for voice and percussion

Stephen F. Lilly

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Source Sounds: Restrictions

Voice

Use any part of the anatomy involved with vocal production.
(singing or speech)
No extra-vocal sounds from hands or other parts of the body.
(clapping, stomping, etc.)

Percussion

Use any instrument classified as percussion or found percussion.

<i>Keyboard percussion</i>	<i>Timpani</i>	<i>Paper</i>
<i>Siren</i>	<i>Lion's Roar</i>	<i>Cookware</i>
<i>Gong</i>	<i>Wind Machine</i>	<i>Stones</i>
<i>Thumb Piano</i>	<i>Orff Instruments</i>	<i>Twigs</i>
<i>Non-vocal Anatomy (beating chest or thigh, clapping, etc.)</i>		

Avoid:

<i>String Instruments</i>	<i>Keyboard Instruments</i>
<i>Brass Instruments</i>	<i>Woodwind Instruments</i>
<i>Bowed Saw</i>	<i>Autoharp</i>
<i>Dulcimer</i>	<i>Guitar</i>
<i>All Vocal Noises (speaking, clicking, smacking, etc.)</i>	

Use any non-vocal articulation.

(struck with hand or stick, bowed, plucked, rubbed, etc.)

Source Sounds: Performance

Sonic events

Individually defined by each performer.
Can be gestural or pointillistic.
Two categories: idiomatic or imitative.

Idiomatic events

Gestures and sounds that the performer believes to be unique to his/her instrument, i.e. difficult or impossible for the other performer to produce.

Employed when the score instructs the singer to be vocal or the percussionist to be percussive.

Imitative events

“Borrowed” gestures and sounds.

Employed when the score instructs the singer to be percussive or the percussionist to be vocal. In all cases direct mimicry should be avoided.

Three categories: abstract, mechanical, sonic, or mixed.

Abstract Imitation

Exploring the connotations of “vocal” and “percussive” and their synonyms.

Voice

What in your repertoire of sounds can be described as “percussive?”

What does it mean when a vocal sound or gesture is described as “drum-like?”

Examples: staccato phrasing, plosives, choppy rhythm of speech, etc.

Percussion

What in your repertoire of sounds can be described as “vocal?”

What does it mean when an instrumental sound or gesture is described as “song-like” or “lyrical?”

Examples: legato phrasing, continuous glissandi, speech rhythms, etc.

Mechanical Imitation

Exploring the mechanics of tone production.

Voice

How does a percussionist create sound?

Imitate these actions with your vocal instrument.

Examples:

With air flow representing a percussionist’s sticks, vocal fry can imitate a snare going from individual attacks to a roll.

With air flow representing a bow, unvoiced buzzing of the lips imitates how a percussionist bows a cymbal or vibraphone bar.

Percussion

How does a vocalist create sound?

Imitate these actions with percussion instruments.

Examples:

Pulling a piece of paper taut with both hands and then pushing both thumbs through the center of the paper imitates the build-up and release of air pressure in a plosive.

With the string representing air flow, a lion’s roar imitates air flow pushing through the vocal folds and causing vibration.

Sonic Imitation

Reduce sound to its acoustic elements and recreate them individually.

Voice

For instance, what are the spectra and envelope of a cymbal crash? A loud, transient-rich attack, followed by a sustain primarily characterized by a noise-based spectra with some prominent formants. Isolate each of these elements and recreate them vocally: starting with a loud rich sibilant sound with an instantaneous onset, alter the shape of the mouth and position of the tongue to bring out different frequency regions, all the while getting progressively softer.

Percussion

For instance, what are the spectra and envelope associated with human speech? Short, loud, noise-based consonants alternate with longer harmonic vowel sounds. Isolate these elements and recreate them on percussion by alternating between non-pitched and pitched percussion.

Mixed Imitation

A blend of all three imitation methods.

Organization: Interaction and Form

Both the singer and the percussionist read from the three page score.

Each page consists of one or more boxes.

Each box describes an interactive trajectory:

X-axis: time.

Y-axis: how vocal or percussive a performer should be.

The vocal extreme for the singer and the percussive extreme for the percussionist mean exclusively idiomatic sounds and gestures.

The percussive extreme for the singer and the vocal extreme for the percussionist mean exclusively imitative sounds and gestures.

The area in-between the extremes can be expressed in any manner the performer wishes (varying the ratio of vocal to percussive sounds, creating hybrid sounds that vary the degree of vocal vs. percussive, etc.).

Everything should be done relative to the other performer. For example, if both performers are moving similarly toward percussive (see Score Page 3, top right box), they must pace their trajectories to maintain an equivalent distance of percussive-ness throughout.

All performances begin on Score Page 1, which consists of a single box. Together, the singer and percussionist decide before the performance the sequence of boxes that will follow Score Page 1 according to four rules:

Score Page 1 can be followed by any box on Score Page 2.

All boxes on Score Page 2 can be followed by any box on Score Page 3.

All boxes on Score Page 3 can be followed by any box on Score Page 1, 2, or 3.

No box can be visited more than twice.

Who will take the solid versus dashed line in each box should also be decided before the performance.

It is not necessary that all boxes be used, nor is there a minimum number of boxes that must be used.

If a box is visited more than once, the roles are reversed (e.g. if singer was the dashed line the first time, he/she should be the solid line the second time).

Independently, each performer should decide what type of imitation method they will employ for each box (it is possible that a box may call for only idiomatic sounds and gestures). The relative distribution of these imitation methods should be even, i.e. as close to an equal number of abstract vs. mechanical vs. sonic vs. mixed as possible.

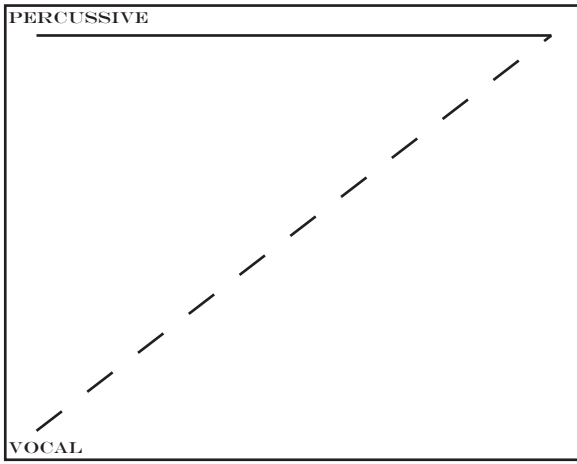
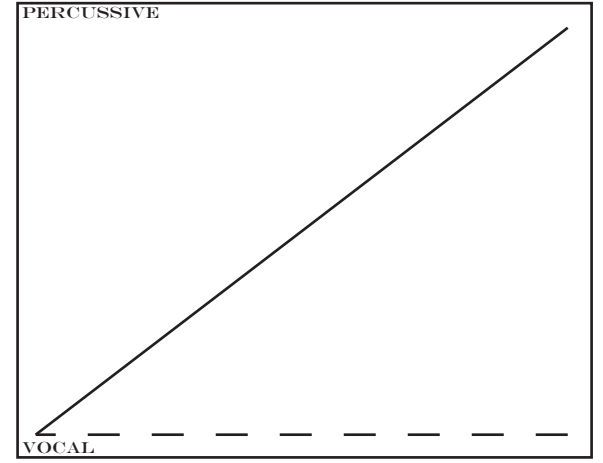
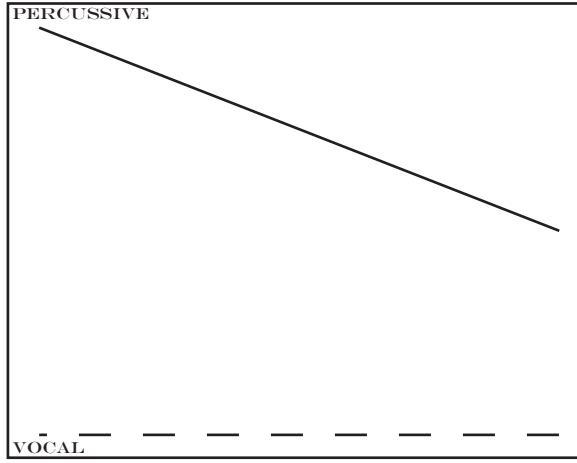
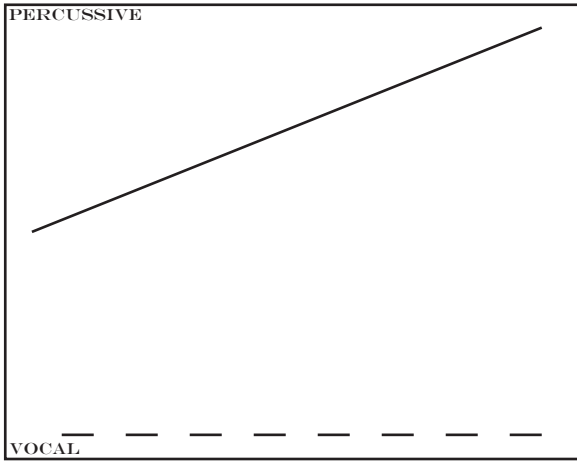
The timing of each box should not be arbitrarily predetermined but worked out naturally in rehearsal or improvised in performance. With very few exceptions, boxes should not be shorter than 15 seconds or longer than a minute.

Once a performer feels that a box has been completed, he/she should immediately move on to the next box in the path without cuing the other performer.

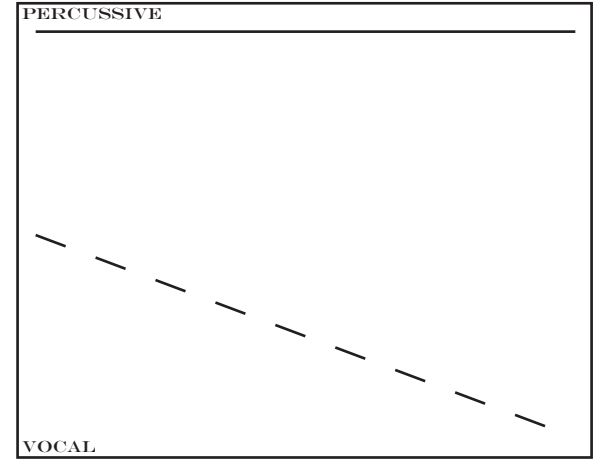
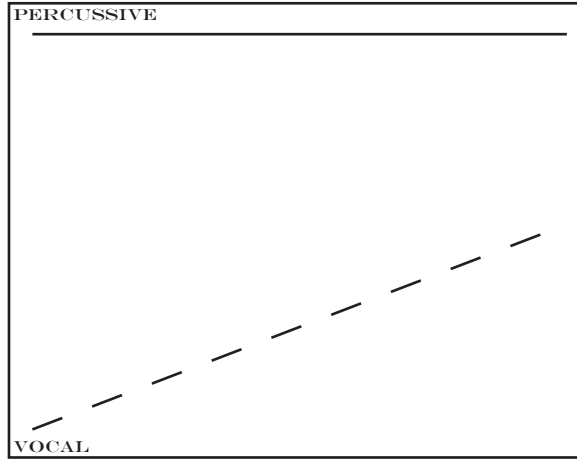
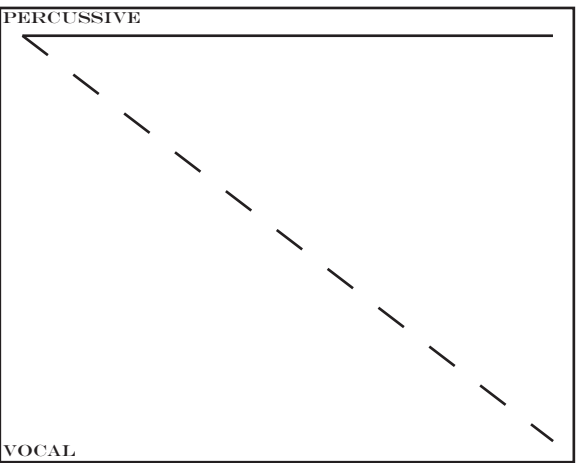
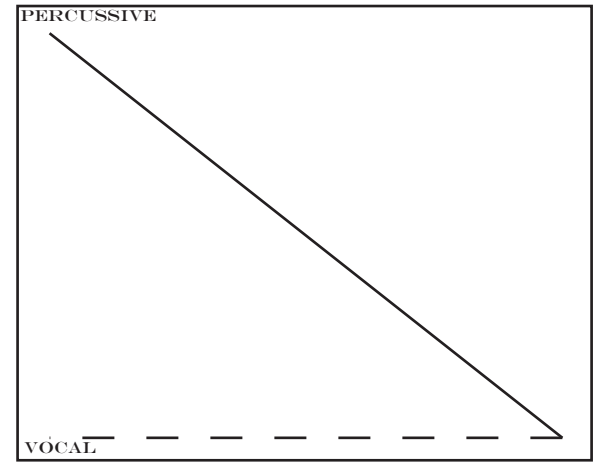
When the second performer senses that the first has moved on, the second performer can choose to remain in their current box for up to 10 seconds, creating a transitory region before both performers are once again in the same box.

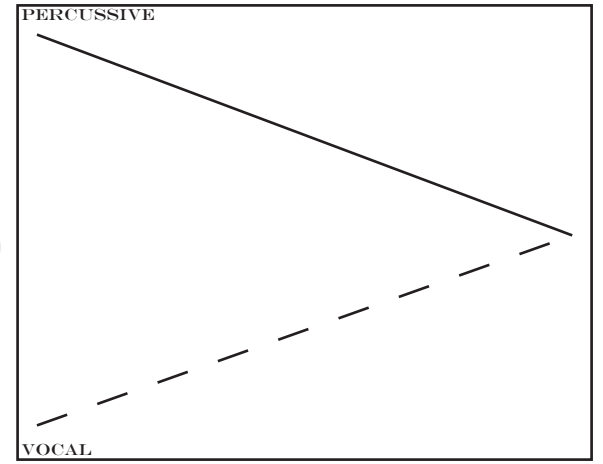
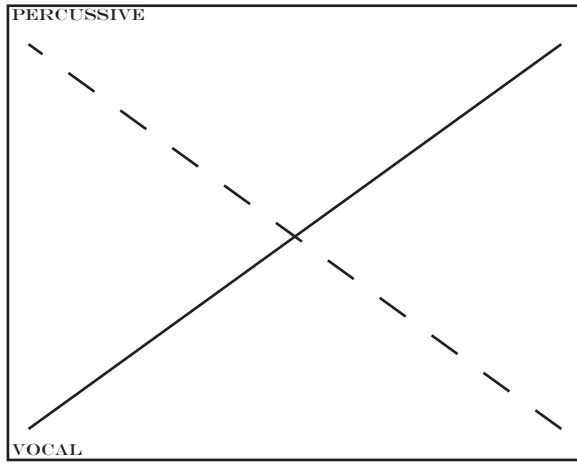
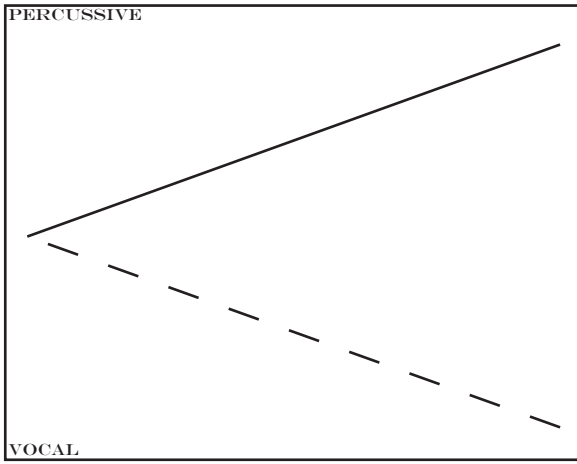
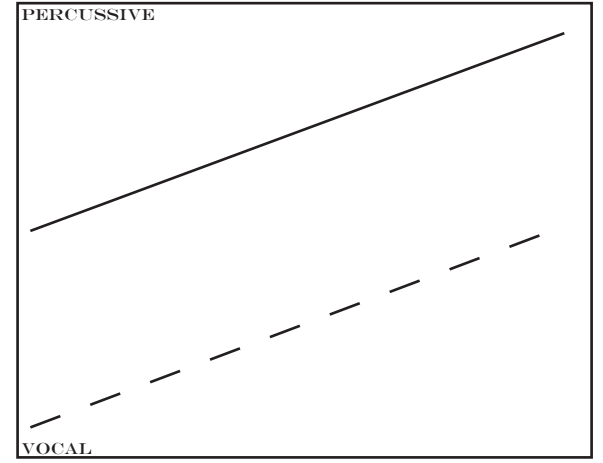
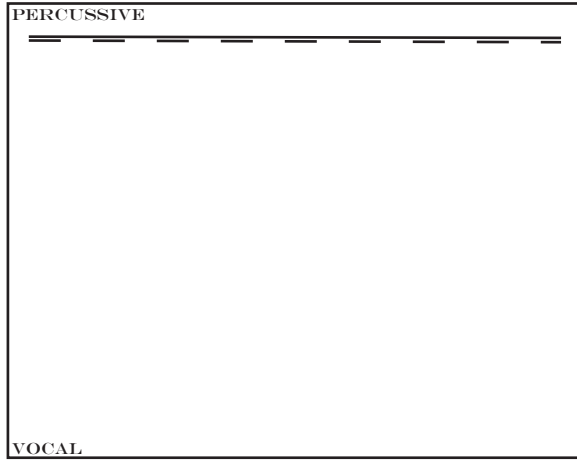
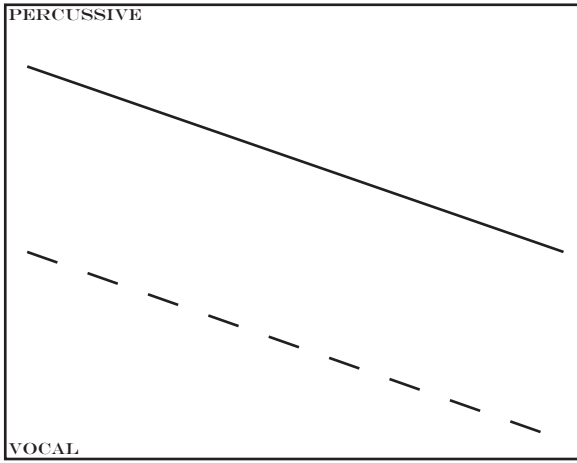
The total duration of the piece can be predetermined, but ideally, this would also be worked out in rehearsal such that the end sounds natural and unforced.

SCORE
PAGE 1



SCORE PAGE 2





SCORE

PAGE 3

