

Being There

for 1-3 percussionists

Stephen F. Lilly

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Goals:

- 1) Imitation of sound audible in the performance space that has not been initiated by the performer (e.g. audience noise, environmental noise, or bleed from outside the space). The resulting imitation should seek to completely blend with and enhance the source sound.
- 2) Acoustic saturation of the space. The end result should be too loud (e.g. a field drum in a small hall) and/or too resonant for the space (e.g. finding and exploiting a resonant frequency in a small bathroom).
- 3) Acoustic isolation of sound. The end result should be audible to the performer and the fewest members of the audience possible (but at least one person other than the performer).

Instrumentation:

At least ten instruments, a combination of pitched and non-pitched, are chosen that provide a wide array of timbres and dynamic tessituras. Single instruments capable of producing a variety of timbres are encouraged. If the performer is familiar with the space, the instruments may be selected with the three goals in mind.

Rhythm:

- 1) Short impulse-like sounds. Single strokes, flams, rimshots, etc. are considered to be variations in articulation.
- 2) Sustained/tremolo sounds. Thumb rolls, press rolls, double-stroke rolls, etc. are considered to be variations in articulation.

Repetitive rhythms (including more complex rudiments and rhythmic cells) must be avoided at all times.

Set-up:

All instruments are placed in a central location. If the performance space is a traditional concert or recital hall, the central location is center stage.

Performance:

Phase 1: The performer begins in the central location by randomly testing the instruments with various articulations. The performer should be almost constantly switching instruments – variety and experimentation are primary. All the while, the performer must carefully listen to how each sound reacts with the space, bearing in mind the three goals.

Phase 2: After a general impression of the space's acoustics has been established both for the performer and the audience, the performer proceeds to phase 2. The least successful experiments (with regard to timbre and articulation) from phase 1

are abandoned, and the performer leaves any discarded instruments in the central location. Thus, with the more promising results from phase 1, the performer begins to explore the space. At first, forays outside of the central location are short, but they may become more substantial over time. The performer is encouraged to consider the entire performance space – any accessible area not separated from the central location by a closed door (e.g. in a typical concert venue this would include at least the stage, all aisles, and the audience seating area). During this phase, the performer should not focus on any one instrument for too long. Variety and experimentation are still foremost. Of course, if something promising occurs, the performer may return to that instrument more regularly or proceed directly to phase 3. If any instrument begins to suggest two different goals, the performer may choose to focus solely on that instrument for a reasonable length of time, exploring and establishing this duality. If any of the instrumental experimentations in phase 2 prove unfruitful, the instrument in question should be abandoned at the location where it was last played.

Phase 3: The performer continues exploring the instruments and performance space as in phase 2, but when a promising lead to one of the three goals presents itself, the performer follows it through to the end. To follow through, the performer first compares the lead with all other possible leads (timbre, rhythm, and articulation) to the same goal and then methodically eliminates all but the most promising – if this means that the initial promising lead gives way to something else, so be it. Once a goal has been reached and the performer has firmly established this goal for both him/herself and the audience, the final instrument should be abandoned in its last location. This instrument is considered to be retired and may no longer be used. The performer then resumes phase 2 experimentation until a promising lead for one of the remaining goals presents itself, at which point the elimination and retiring process is repeated for the new goal. Likewise, these steps are repeated for the third and final goal. With any instrument that suggested two different goals in phase 2, the performer must choose to pursue only one goal for that instrument in phase 3. This could be the goal for which the instrument is best suited or it could be that one of the other goals has more options and could more easily be represented by a different instrument. If at any time, the performer feels they have lost track, he/she may broaden his/her search to include the abandoned objects from phases 1 or 2.

Multiple Player Notes:

All performers should proceed independently of one another.

In phase 3, the performers may shape the goals with the other(s) in mind:

Goal #1: if a once audible sound is being masked by the other performer(s), the enhance aspect of the goal should take precedence over blend.

Goal #2: acoustic saturation could involve masking the actions of the other performer(s).

Goal #3: isolation could be achieved by allowing one's sound to be almost completely masked by the other performer(s), or isolation could involve isolating one's sound from the sound(s) of the other performer(s).

Once an instrument has been retired, it may not be used by any other performer (a subtle symbol may be agreed upon beforehand to indicate retirement).