

# **Character Study No. 1**

for small ensemble of composers and/or improvisers

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## Personae:

All performers must have experience as composers or improvisers. The ensemble must consist of at least three performers and cannot be ad hoc unless all the performers have a history of collaboration (e.g. a close knit community of improvisers, who regularly perform together in various guises).

## Instrumentation:

Ideally, this piece would be programmed in the middle of or at the end of a concert featuring the ensemble. In this case, the performers are free to use any instruments that are present, either for prior or subsequent works. Alternatively, this piece could follow another work executed by the same ensemble on a program featuring many performers. In this case, the ensemble should use the exact same instrumentation as their previous piece. Regardless, the stage should not be reset beforehand. If the piece is to be the sole contribution from the ensemble, each performer should use an instrument with which they are most comfortable. This instrument can be set before the piece or carried onstage during the initial bows. In any of the above situations, the performers are free to incorporate instruments from offstage when they walk onstage for the initial bows, as part of their imitations/interpretations, or during the Absence Stage (see below).

## Performance:

Each performer imitates the compositional and/or improvisatory style of the other performers. Performers should not use this piece as an excuse to lampoon or caricature each other. Instead, imitations should attempt to respectfully capture the essence of their subject – quasi-portraits if you will. Furthermore, the use of quotation should be used sparingly; performers should always strive to present a more abstract representation of their colleagues.

Before the performance, every performer should create one “score” for each of his/her colleagues (e.g. for a quartet, each performer would be responsible for three scores). The scores should not be labeled with any indication of the person they are imitating. The content of each score can be, but is not limited to, one of the following:

- A score in the style of a composer-member of the ensemble
- Notes/sketches in the style of a composer-member of the ensemble
- Improvisation guidelines/notes (such as those used by some performers to organize their improvisations)
- Stylistic notes addressing concerns such as:
  - What is the typical balance of pitch vs. noise?
  - How are extended techniques and technology employed?
  - How is the environment engaged?
  - What role do stage presence and theatrics play?
  - How limited is the performance with regard to instrument and space?
  - How is the concept of ensemble treated?

This piece consists of three Stages. *The Stages may be performed in any order*; each performer should independently determine this either beforehand or during the performance. Each performer enters and exits each Stage independently. The only moments that should be coordinated are the very beginning and ending. The beginning should occur after the initial bows and can be as simple as a cue given by one of the performers. The ending should be arrived at naturally. This moment is determined by whoever remains (i.e. whoever is not in the Absence Stage), and following this, final bows should be taken by all performers.

**Stages:**

*Absence*

The performer removes him/herself from the performance in any way and for any length of time he/she deems sufficient.

*First-order Imitation*

The performer selects one of the scores he/she has prepared and improvises, as his/herself, independently. Once the performer feels that his/her imitation has been established, he/she should begin observing the person he/she is imitating and begin incorporating aspects of that person's performance into their own imitation. As aforementioned, this can include mimicry and quotation, but the imitator should strive to capture more abstract qualities of their subject's performance: gesture, conception, motivation, etc. Even if the subject has temporarily removed his/herself from the performance, how he/she removed his/herself should be considered and incorporated into the imitation. At first, this incorporation should be in keeping with the performer's interpretation of their score, but as this Stage progresses, the elements incorporated from the subject's performance can become more dominant and alien to the initial imitation. Once, in the mind of the performer, this has been accomplished, the Stage ends.

### *Second-order Imitation*

The performer selects a score that has been created by someone else in the ensemble (it does not matter who the score is imitating, nor does this information need to be available to the performer). The performer then interprets the score as they think one of their colleagues would. This new subject of imitation should be different from the one used in the First-Order Imitation. The duration of this Stage is up to the performer.

### **Other Considerations:**

If the following occur by coincidence, they should *not* be avoided:

- All performers begin or end with the same Stage.
- The Absence Stage for all performers coincides.
- All performers end with the Absence Stage.
- All but one performer end the piece with the Absence Stage.
- All performers, save the subject, imitate the same person at the same time.
- One performer is forced to perform his/her final Stage disproportionately longer than the rest of the ensemble because he/she moved quickly through the first two Stages.
- A single score gets reused for multiple Stages by multiple performers.

Two or more performers may interpret the same score simultaneously. This can be decided by the individual performers in performance but should not be preplanned. In any case, their imitations should not be coordinated.

As part of the Second-Order Imitation, a performer may interpret a score that is an imitation of him/herself (knowingly or unknowingly).

As part of an imitation, one or more scores may be destroyed. If this occurs, these scores are removed from the performance. Care should be taken so that not all the scores of a single performer are destroyed, thereby making First-Order Imitation impossible.

**Example (Trio):**

First Stage:

A in Absence Stage

B uses B's A-like score to imitate A

C uses C's A-like score to imitate A

In this Stage, B and C begin their imitations independently. If A has not returned to the performance by the time B and C have established their imitations, they must imitate the manner in which A removed him/herself. When A returns, B and/or C (whoever is still working on their First-Order Imitation) begin(s) incorporating A's imitation of B into their own performance. Each performer will finish this Stage independently and immediately move on to the next Stage.

Second Stage:

A uses any one of B's score to imitate B

B in Absence Stage

C uses any one of A's scores to imitate B

Third Stage:

A uses A's C-like score to imitate C

B uses any one of A's score to imitate C

C in Absence Stage

In this Stage, A and B begin to near the end of their imitations (A incorporating more and more of C's absence into his/her imitation). Listening to each other, A and B should arrive at a natural ending without any obvious concluding gestures or demonstrative cues. C then re-enters, and all take their bows.