

Timetrial

for large ensemble of pitched instruments

Stephen F. Lilly

(2013)

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The duration of the piece, decided beforehand, can be anywhere from 6 to 60 seconds. Each performer independently makes the following selections before the performance:

1. Their entrance—any time between 2 seconds and 1 second prior to the end. If the total duration of the piece is 6 seconds, a performer may choose any time from 2 seconds up to 5 seconds (e.g. 2 seconds or 3.5 seconds).
2. Their duration—a performer can be as brief as possible (silencing their instrument immediately after it begins to produce sound) or a performer can play a sustained event/glissando. The latter will start at the performer's chosen time and end with the piece. For example, a flautist's contribution could be a single staccato note played at 3.5 seconds or if the total duration of the piece is 6 seconds and the flautist chooses a long sustained note with an entrance at 2 seconds, they must be able to play for a total of 4 seconds, whereas if they had chosen an entrance of 3.5 seconds, they would only have to play for 2.5 seconds before reaching the end of the piece. Care should be taken that the note does not waver (obviously, if the performer has chosen to gliss, the pitch will change, but it should change continuously). String players should choose pitches that can be played in a single bow stroke, and if they choose to gliss, the glissando should not extend beyond a single string nor should the rate of change speed up or slow down. Wind players should choose a pitch that can be played in a single breath. Also, performers should only make idiomatic decisions, e.g. a traditionally performed piano cannot gliss nor can it sustain a single event with no change in dynamic level.
3. Their pitch—any sound the performer can gliss from or sustain for the duration of the piece without wavering or breaking.
4. Their dynamic level—it must be sustainable for the duration of the piece.
5. Whether or not they will glissando, and if the performer chooses to gliss, whether to gliss up or down. The glissando must be one continuous gesture, so performers should select their start time, dynamic level, speed, and direction so that they can play the gesture in the given duration without changing speed, string, valve, etc.

The conductor will make only two gestures, one to signal the beginning of the piece and one to signal the end. No one should play within two seconds of the conductor's opening gesture, but everyone should end with the conductor. No one, however, should intentionally begin playing within one seconds of the conductor's final gesture.