

Melt 2

for flute, violin, violoncello, and ice cubes

Stephen F. Lilly

(2016)

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Program Notes

Humans have spent centuries trying to control water—fixing the paths of some rivers while creating new channels for others, harnessing the power of its currents, and even using it to farm arid land. In this piece that relationship is reversed. Three melting ice cubes control the pacing of the instrumentalists, whose dynamic levels and expressive abilities are constrained so as to balance with the delicate sound of dripping. To further foreground the role of water, the piece begins and ends with the water dripping on an empty stage.

Instructions

From each performer's music stand, an ice cube should be suspended over a water glass filled a quarter to half full—see figure a. This can be done by freezing a bolt or screw



Figure a

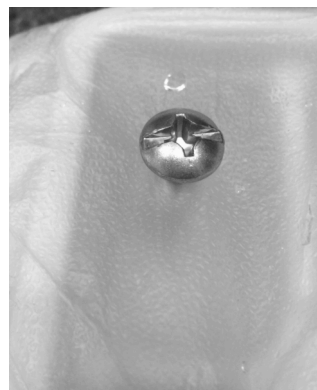


Figure b

into an ice cube using a standard ice tray and plastic wrap—see figure b.

To attach each ice cube to its stand, use twine or string—this works best with music stands equipped with wire clips (figure c).



Figure c

For each performer— independent of the others—the window for an individual event is delineated by drops falling from their ice cube into the water glass below.

When a drop falls, the performer should not always play immediately. The sound event must occur before the next drop, but where the sound happens in-between those drops should vary from event to event.

In tests, it took anywhere from twenty to fifty minutes for one of these hanging ice cubes to melt under normal conditions. The performance can take place anywhere within that time frame. The stage should be set with the hanging ice cubes before the players take the stage. Once the ice cubes begin dripping, the performers should enter and begin playing independently of one another—there should be no more than one minute between the initial event of first performer and that of the third performer. Each player should perform for at least three minutes but no more than ten minutes. The piece ends after the final performer exits. A few seconds should then be given for the ice cubes to drip in silence before the performers return to the stage for bows.

The overall dynamic level is very low such that the plunking of drops into the water glasses is not masked. Ideally, no amplification would be employed, but for large and/or noisy venues accommodations should be made—amplifying both the performers as well as the water glasses.

Flute

Select a fundamental from which you can produce the most whistle tones—also known as whisper tones—and use only this fingering for the entire piece. For each event, select one or two whistle tones. When a single whistle tone is chosen, play a single sustained pitch of any duration—provided the event does not extend beyond the next drop. For two whistle tones, either make a single legato sound from one to the other or alternate between the two as legato and as fast as possible. Sonic instability is desirable—from the occasionally breaking up of the tone quality to the accidental sounding of other whistle tones. Do not try to suppress the breathy presence of the fundamental. The duration of each sound event should vary but must always be performed in a single breath.

Violin

Start anywhere on the E string. Using only a touch-fourth artificial harmonic—producing a pitch two octaves above the fingered note—glissando up or down any interval less than a minor third—the use of microtones is encouraged. The speed of the glissando may vary from event to event, but within each event, the speed of the glissando should be even. In general, the duration of each event should be short and no more than one bow length. Care should be taken to finish each glissando before the next drop occurs. The destination pitch of one glissando will act as the starting pitch of the next. When selecting destination pitches, avoid all pitches previously used as endpoints—octaves are not to be considered equivalent. The performer can choose the direction of the glissando from event to event.

Violoncello

Start anywhere on the A string. Using only a touch-fourth artificial harmonic—producing a pitch two octaves above the fingered note—glissando up or down any interval less than a minor third—the use of microtones is encouraged. The speed of the glissando may vary from event to event, but within each event, the speed of the glissando should be even. In

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