

Robert Guthrie

strrr 4

(2024)

tempo: ♩ = ca 84

for String Quartet

duration: ca. 10-15 minutes

strrr 4

strrr 4 is an openly notated piece for String Quartet, utilising an open form and demanding a creative and collaborative approach towards its performance from the quartet as a unit.

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Due to the open, mobile form of *strrr 4*, which consists of 16 fragments, there can be an almost limitless number of unique versions of the piece.

Requiring a performer to take the role of leader, each performance should be played with spontaneous decision making throughout. Therefore, as may be popular practice regarding other works utilising similar open forms, no 'order' or 'pathway' should be decided prior to the performance.

The piece begins with fragment 1, which is begun on the cue of the leader. Towards the end of fragment 1, the leader will decide on the fragment to follow, and indicate this using a numerical indicator (digital or physical, displayed on a music stand or similar so the rest of the quartet can see clearly.)

The decision may be musical, emotional, aesthetic, otherwise intentional, or, it may just as legitimately be random.

However the decision is made, it should not be pre-meditated, ensuring that the form and movement of the piece are impulsive and instinctual.

See below for guidance on moving between fragments, this will, when needed, be guided by the leader.

Fragments may be repeated, though no more than three times consecutively.

The piece ends when the leader feels that the performance has come to a suitable and poignant ending point (recommended ca. 10-15).

See below guidelines for transitioning between fragments.

- If a fragment ends with a barline (CLOSED ending), a pause is taken (as marked) before moving to the next section.
- If a fragment ends with an 'open' bar (OPEN ending) - the relevant players should sustain the note until the start of the next fragment, to create a smooth transition.

- If a fragment begins with a barline (CLOSED beginning) and marked cue point, the players enter as per the leader's cue.
- If a fragment begins with an 'open' bar (OPEN beginning), transition into this based on the ending of the previous fragment.

There are four possible types of transition between fragments:

-OPEN-OPEN transition

In these cases the players should transition smoothly between open bars. These could overlap or transition smoothly from one into the next.

-OPEN-CLOSED transition

In these cases the final note of the open bar should be held until the conductor's cue to begin the following fragment.

If the player doesn't have to play at the start of the new fragment, they can hold the note to overlap fragments.

-CLOSED-OPEN transition

In these cases the fragment will end with a pause. The next fragment begins at the will of the players who are to start the new fragment. They can decide how long to pause as they are in control of starting the next fragment.

When they do start the new fragment, the player is free to interpret the music temporally at their will. The leader only intervenes when they reach a cue marking, when all players must join together.

CLOSED-CLOSED transition

In these cases the previous fragment ends with a pause. The leader then signals the cue to begin the following fragment at their will.

TEMPO, METRE and RHYTHM

In areas of the piece where barlines are unclear or there are no metric or rhythmic guidelines, players are at liberty to play in free time, moving intuitively with respect to the specific performance. If two or more players are in free time simultaneously, they do not have to follow one another. However, they must wait at cue points, which will only be moved through when the final player reaches it.

However, where there are defined and clearly determined barlines, tempo and metre, these should be adhered to strictly.

When transitioning from free time to temporally-defined sections, the downward arrow indicates the leader's cue for players to join together.

Any clear metronome mark should be abided to. Where tempo markings and instructions are ambiguous, it is at the leader's discretion to lead the pace.

At times the metre appears as $\frac{2}{2}$, which should be followed when clear. At other times there is little indication as to the metre. This allows space for the leader and performers to interpret the music's temporality at will.

Where bar lines are clear, they must be adhered to by all performers. At times, standard note values appear not to fit into a defined bar. It is the performer's responsibility in these cases to forget standardised note values, and to interpret the rhythm intuitively, using the barlines as guidelines to strictly fit between.

NOTATION

The notation throughout varies widely. At times, 'traditional' notation is clear, at others we see markings and symbols which may resemble some recognisable musical elements, or none at all. This indeterminate nature of the notation may guide the aesthetic or musical qualities of the passages, but actual musical realisation is often left open to the performer's interpretation.

Parameters such as pitch, dynamics, articulation and, on a broader scale, texture, might be implied through the shapes, position and density of the markings, though if there is any doubt, then the decision is the performer's to make intuitively and emotionally.

At times, a marking might appear in no-man's-land between two staves, it may not be clear who should play it. It may (or may not) be picked up by one player or the other. The essence of this relates to the way in which the whole score should be treated, as a unified whole, rather than a sum of four separate parts.

This score creates opportunity for spontaneous decision making in form, structure and various musical parameters. Thus, any question regarding 'how' these indeterminate elements should be played, should be approached freely and musically, escaping any notion of what might constitute an accurate or valid realisation.

