

Many Worlds Game – Spoon

for toy piano, toy xylophone, toy percussion, and optional tape

Composed for The 4th UnCaged Toy Piano Composition Competition

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Performance Notes

The instruments required are a concert toy piano (range at least two octaves, chromatic) and a toy xylophone (range at least an octave, more highly desirable, black notes optional). The score comprises several sections, here called “levels”, as in a videogame. Everything is read from left to right, except for the final level (see below). The symbols (see explanation of symbols below) represent little chunks of music – segments – to be improvised by the performer. For example, a symbol may represent a short melody of three or four notes, or two high notes taken at random, or any noise produced by hitting the instrument slightly, and so on. Squared symbols are to be performed on the toy piano, circled symbols are for the toy xylophone, asterisks represent two kinds of toy percussion instruments – those with an upwards pointing arrow are metallic and harsh (e.g. cymbals), those with a downwards pointing arrow are dull (e.g. a bass drum).

Two symbols following each other horizontally are read thus: perform one, then perform the other. If two or more such symbols are connected by a line, the segment’s duration must be increased. Two or more symbols arranged vertically represent segments that are to be performed simultaneously. If two or more vertical symbols from the same column are connected by a vertical line, they have to be synchronized somehow (e.g. begin at the same time, or a single sound from one must coincide with a sound from the other, and so on). If there is no vertical line, the performer is free to synchronize whatever they want, or synchronize nothing. (Essentially, this piece likes being like drops of mercury, no rhythms or synchronized movement most of the time.) For more details, refer to the explanation of symbols below.

Generally speaking, the duration of each segment is free. Obviously, all segments of a given column should have roughly the same duration. However, sometimes this is either not applicable (for instance, it may be difficult to arrange the same length for a single noise and a melody, although one is welcome to try), and sometimes this is not possible due to too many sounds happening at the same time. In the latter case, one must strive for perfection anyway, but it is permissible to pause certain segments, or admit some segments after others are over, and so on. Adopt the same tempo for all levels.

The performer *should not practice the piece too much* and *should not make notated interpretations of the piece*. It is sufficient to know which symbols represent what, and practice a few passages from each level. Any and all mistakes you make – getting lost, forgetting a sound, moving out of sync, etc. – are part of the nature of the piece. Thus there are several performance options, depending on the nature of the concert. Each has to do with difficult parts where many segments are combined simultaneously. One is bound to make mistakes at least in such passages, and here are the options for dealing with these, and any other mistakes:

- a. pause, then restart the current level. Repeat every time a mistake occurs.
- b. pause, then start the next level. Repeat every time a mistake occurs.
- c. continue playing as if nothing happened.

Naturally, any one performance (of one level or of the entire piece) must adhere to just one of these options.

Optional Tapes

A performance of a level may be accompanied by a recording of natural sounds:

- Level 1: soft rain, distant thunder.
- Level 2: air currents in tunnels, underground, in caves, etc.
- Level 3: gusts of wind.
- Level 4: quiet water movement – drops falling into a pool, a gentle stream, etc.
- Level 5: the quiet hum of electronic equipment.
- Level 6: insects at night.
- Level 7: waves crashing into a shore.

Before the performance, try to balance out the levels of the instruments and the recording so that they contribute to each other, rather than cancel the other one out. Amplification may be used. Suitable free recordings may be found at freesound.org and similar resources, or produced by the performer and/or their associates.

Level 7

The last level of the game is special: it is not read from left to right, but consists of six sections which the performer must arrange into two non-repeating sequences (e.g. ABCDEF and AFDCEB), and then perform one after another, making pauses after some of the sections. If a recording of ocean waves is used, the performer must synchronize these sections with the waves in the following manner:

- a. pick a looping portion of the sound of waves, e.g. from the loudest point of one wave to the loudest point of the next one, or from a midway point of one to the midway point of the next, etc.
- b. play a section, trying to fit it into the loop you have chosen.
- c. after you stop (either because the loop is over, or because the section is), silently wait for the current wave (or the one coming up) to ebb completely.
- d. repeat a–c selecting a different portion of the sound of waves.

Melodies 1 – 7, 9

These are eight melodies to be performed at certain points during the performance, as indicated in the score. Soprano clef is presumed, but feel free to change that to bass clef, or to read some of the notes as if they were preceded by one. Any transpositions are allowed as long as the entire melody is transposed. Average tempo is quarter note = 60 (Adagio). Notes in brackets are optional.

The melodies may be performed as a separate sequence of tiny pieces for toy piano – in any order, and with any two or more present. The title of the sequence, if one is performed in public, is simply “Many Worlds”.

Melody 1

Melody 1: A single staff of music featuring a complex rhythmic pattern. It includes a quintuplet (5) and several triplet (3) markings. The melody is characterized by rapid sixteenth-note passages and rests.

Melody 2

Melody 2: A single staff of music with a more melodic and flowing character. It features a triplet (3) and a quintuplet (5) marking. The notes are often beamed together, and there are some slurs.

Melody 3

Melody 3: A single staff of music with a rhythmic, repetitive feel. It contains several triplet (3) markings and rests, suggesting a syncopated or off-beat rhythm.

Melody 4

Melody 4: A single staff of music with a highly rhythmic and technically demanding character. It features multiple triplet (3) and quintuplet (5) markings, as well as glissando (gliss.) markings. The notes are often beamed in groups.

Melody 5

Melody 5: A single staff of music with a complex, multi-measure rest at the beginning. It features several triplet (3) markings and a mix of rhythmic values.

Melody 7

Melody 9

Melody 7 and Melody 9: A single staff of music containing two distinct melodic lines. Melody 7 is the first line, and Melody 9 is the second line. Both feature simple rhythmic patterns with triplet (3) markings.