

## **Rotating**

Olaf Pyras

Naturally, repetitive percussion playing is always based on an ideal movement. It can be represented in the space-time relationship mostly as circulating and rotating. The aesthetic application of this principle is presented by the following text and the video on the basis of the composition *Timber*, by the US-American composer Michael Gordon.

The version dealt with is the one that was developed at the *Berlin Klangspuren 2021* in a combination of movement (directed by Dorothea Weise) and percussion (directed by Olaf Pyras) and was performed on November 23 in Berlin, *Dock 11*.

**TIMBER** for six percussionists with amplified Simantras<sup>1</sup>

*I decided early on that Timber would be for non-tuned percussion and that each percussionist would play one instrument only. I thought of composing this music as being like taking a trip out into the desert. I was counting on the stark palette and the challenge of survival to clear my brain and bring on visions.*

*I imagined that the six instruments would go from high (Player 1) to low (6 Player), and that, through a shifting of dynamics from one instrument to the next, the group could make seamless and unified descending or ascending patterns. [Michael Gordon]*

It should be emphasized that Gordon's reductionist approach was initially concerned with structure. The instrumentation emerged as a process, in collaboration with the Dutch percussionist Fedor Teunisse. He had simantras from Xenakis' work *Persephassa* at his disposal.

Michael Gordon: *With inspiration from this discovery, I returned to New York to finish the music.*

## **Playing Positions:**

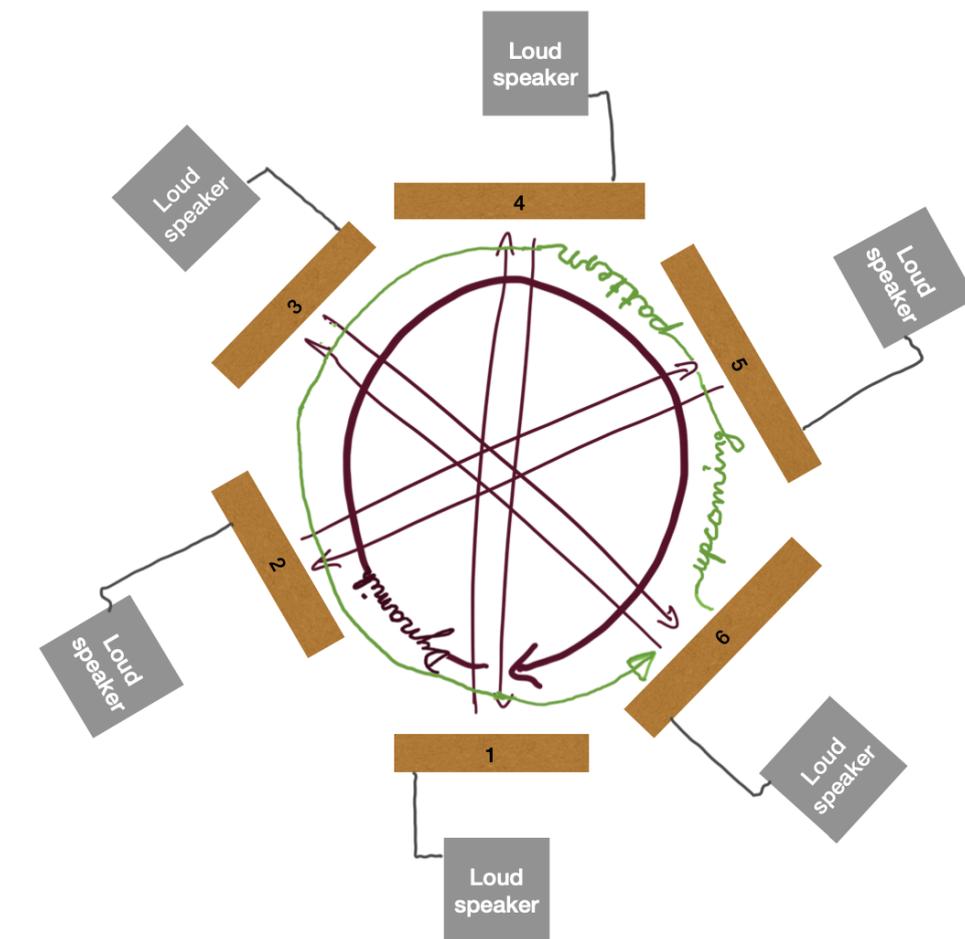
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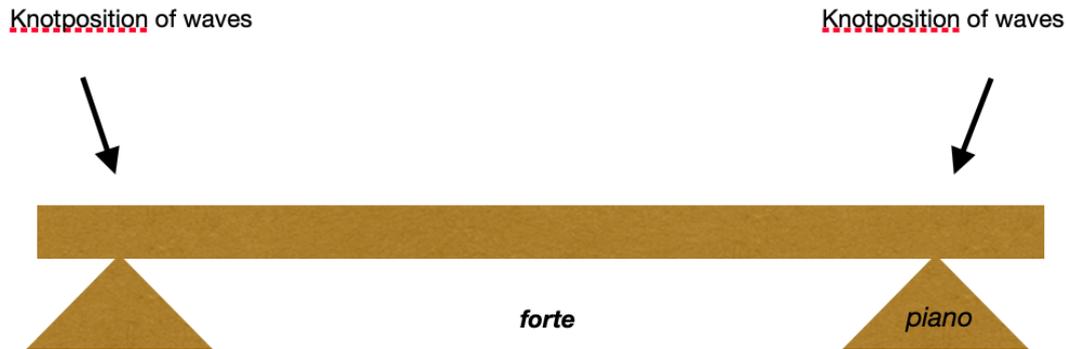
<sup>1</sup> *Simantra* refers to an overtone-rich tonewood used in worship in the Eastern European Orthodox Church. Iannis Xenakis uses it in the composition *Persephassa*

The six instruments are usually positioned in the form of a hexagon. They are amplified individually. The overtone spectrum of the woods stimulates different partials, depending on the position of the striking. This is noted by dynamics (see illustration).

The special acoustic shape of the work arises from the mixing balances of the dynamic progressions and of the repetitive patterns.

See also the video TIMBERTalk with Olaf Pyras.





*Timber* consists of a total of eight form parts. Within these basic rhythmic structures are worked through: Unisono, polyrhythm, polymeter with increasing complexity to 6/4 meter.

The overall varying character reveals a reference to the technique of *isorhythmics*. Passages are repeated together between 3 and 22 times – the number of times is to be determined beforehand – and interpreted dynamically.

The progressions develop different directions of movement (see below), which have an effect on the acoustic shape in space.

1. **INTRO**, m. 1–31, Unisono 16th notes, dynamics run clockwise
2. **Part A**, m. 32 –133, 16th notes, dynamics develop in the opposite direction to the respective opposite playing position  
From m. 87 polyrhythm sets in: 7/2 , 5/2, 8/3, 3/1, 2/1
3. **Part B**, m. 134–157, polyrhythm is complete, dynamics run clockwise, from m. 156 double stroke roll
4. **Part C**, m. 158 –210, double stroke roll, polyrhythmic texture to m. 203, dynamics run clockwise, increased use of piano
5. **Part D**, m. 211–238, single strokes, ritardando to half tempo, just the right hands are playing
6. **Part E**, m. 239–496, triolas of player 3 become the new 1/4 tempo, two-voice part with the neighbour, dynamics counter rotating in hands, unisono, polymeter begins counter clockwise 5/2, 5/4, 7/4
7. **Part F**, m. 467–706, continues with polyrhythm
8. **Part G**, m. 707– 862 turns back to unisono, 1/4 pulsation, dynamics run counter clockwise

The concept of rotation can be experienced visually and acoustically.

During the playing time of about 70 minutes, the audience should also be able to move through space.

Video: TIMBERTalk with Olaf Pyras

Link: <https://michaelgordonmusic.com/music/timber/>

