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**Olympic Frieze**  
(2014)

for any number of pitched instruments (at least 12)

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# Olympic Frieze

for any number of pitched instruments (at least 12)

**Duration: free**

## Introduction

*Olympic Frieze* is conceived like an Ancient Greek frieze around the entablature of a temple: players should be placed along the walls of the performance space at regular intervals, like figures in a bas-relief. Like visitors to a temple or museum, the audience should be free to wander through the space and out again as desired, and there should be no audible starting or stopping point – ideally the music should be playing before the first audience member enters and continue after the last audience member leaves. Thus the piece functions as part of the decoration of the room, and might be considered a descendant of Satie's *musique d'ameublement*; the difference being that *Olympic Frieze* is not intended as background music but to draw the listener's attention. It is also fundamentally audio-visual in nature.

The piece explores the fundamental pleasure and beauty of physical exercise that underlie both ancient and modern manifestations of the Olympic games (as well as the Spartan *gymnopaedia* evoked in Satie's piano pieces). The music consists of three elements: Exercises, Actions and Disciplines. There are 84 short, repeated Exercise motifs analogous to simple movements of the body, or stretching exercises, in performing which the players adopt stylised (musical) poses akin to those of Greek art. In between Exercises the players perform a number of silent physical Actions devised by themselves. Once stretched and loose each player is ready to attempt his or her own personal Discipline, chosen from a list of 9 possibilities (running, jumping, javelin and trampoline).

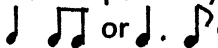

## Instrumentation

The piece is conceived predominantly for strings; bowing indications are provided and should be adhered to strictly. Other pitched instruments may participate as long as they are able to perform in the requisite style (see below). They may need to avoid certain Exercises and Disciplines that cannot be performed with sufficient ease, or with the required glissando.

### **Performance Instructions**

The performance should begin before the audience enters and end after it has exited. A performance begins when the first player starts playing; other players may enter at any point after this.

Each player performs independently at all times; however, **the *tactus* must be held in common by all** (players must always play rhythmically together). The only exceptions to this are the Disciplines, which are performed at the tempo indicated.

A drum part may be improvised to provide the *tactus*, using repeated units of either  or  or variants of the same. The drum part could be shared between two players in different parts of the room, alternating with different patterns every 30 seconds or so.

Each player moves through the 84 Exercise motifs independently, moving around the six types in order (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6), having pre-selected a few suitable ones from each type (there is no requirement to cover all of them). For example, a player begins with type 1, from which she selects two motifs, then moves onto type 2 and selects one motif, etc. In between Exercise motifs the players should perform an Action, either alternately or near-alternately with the Exercises (see example). When she finishes type 6 the player performs her chosen Discipline, takes a rest, then begins again with type 1.

An example sequence might go:

Exercise Type 1, first selected motif  
Action  
Exercise Type 1, second selected motif  
Exercise Type 2, only selected motif  
Action  
Exercise Type 3, first selected motif  
Action  
(etc....)  
Exercise Type 6, last selected motif  
Discipline  
(then return to the start)

Overall, there will be a fluctuation in the amount of playing (Exercises) and silent Actions happening at any moment. To an extent it might be desirable for the players to be aware of this and to be able to decide on the spur of the moment whether an Action or an Exercise is most appropriate.

Between each activity (Exercise, Action or Discipline) players should take care of their movements. They should be still for at least 5 seconds after finishing one activity before starting the next. It is crucial that everything that occurs in the piece both visually and aurally is very clear, precise and poised: a sort of ballet.

### Exercises

Exercises should be selected and decided in advance.

Each Exercise should be repeated on a loop for **between 20 and 60 seconds**. Rests of any length may be taken after finishing an Exercise before starting another one. Players should listen to those around them and create an interplay between their motif and those of their neighbours.

Exercises may be played at the upper or lower octave as indicated. They must be played at the written pitch.

Accidentals apply throughout an exercise.

The style of the Exercises should be athletic and graceful, *mp-mf*.

### Actions

Each player should find a number of physical actions that are repeatable over units of 2, 3 or 4 beats. These may include:

- stretching the arm(s) – outwards or upwards or across the body
- stretching the leg(s)
- bending the knees
- turning the head
- etc.

These Actions should be very neat and precise and highly stylised: an exact analogy to the musical ‘actions’ of the Exercises, now made real. Instruments may be held during the Actions.

Actions should be performed silently.

### Disciplines

Each player picks only one Discipline – it is expected that each player will perform his/her Discipline only once or twice in total during a 10-20-minute performance.

The Disciplines should be louder, stronger and more rhythmically defined than the Exercises and stand out of the surrounding texture.

Disciplines may be played on any pitches, preferably as contrasted with the prevailing modes of the Exercises as possible. They should be muddy and complex in timbre – ‘noisy’ as opposed to the elegantly musical sounds of the Exercises: they need to sound as unharmonic as possible. Very punchy *pizzicato* would work on strings, or possibly tapping the wood of the instrument. Other instruments should find their own analogous noises.

When performing a Discipline, the player should come forward, away from the wall (ideally having memorised the Discipline so avoiding the need for a music stand), and move back again once the Discipline is completed.

**NB** Depending on the setting and circumstances of the performance it might be decided that only a few players – for example, those who have strong instruments that can cut through the overall texture – should perform Disciplines. The Disciplines should be intermittent events that disrupt the surface of the music, strongly rhythmic and clearly defined.

*Olympic Frieze* was first performed by participants at the CoMA Summer School, High Melton, Doncaster, on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2014.

♩=112 mp-mf rhythmic and graceful

①

Exercise 1: A 6-measure piece in 8/8 time. It features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various fretting techniques marked as x6, x8, x4, and x6. The piece ends with a double bar line.

②

Exercise 2: A 12-measure piece in 8/8 time. It includes a variety of rhythmic patterns and fretting techniques such as x6, x4, x8, and x6. The exercise concludes with a double bar line.

③

Exercise 3: A 12-measure piece in 8/8 time. It features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various fretting techniques marked as x6, x8, and x6. The piece ends with a double bar line.

④

Exercise 4: A 12-measure piece in 8/8 time. It includes a variety of rhythmic patterns and fretting techniques such as x8, x6, x6, x8, x6, and x4. The exercise concludes with a double bar line.

⑤

Exercise 5: A 12-measure piece in 8/8 time. It features a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various fretting techniques marked as x6, x6, and x6. The piece ends with a double bar line.

⑥

Exercise 6: A 12-measure piece in 8/8 time. It includes a variety of rhythmic patterns and fretting techniques such as x6, x6, x6, x6, x6, and x6. The exercise concludes with a double bar line.

Exercises

100m  $\lambda = 60^{\pm}$  f, pizzicato\*

triple jump

110m hurdles

javelin

400m hurdles

200m

high jump

long jump

trampoline

\*see introductory notes