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Cornish String Music
(2015)

for any number of orchestral string instruments (at least 16)

University of York Music Press

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Duration: 15'

<u>**Introduction**</u>
Cornish String Music is a sound ritual for a large number of stringed instruments. The ensemble sets up a loud, high-energy block of sound, outwardly static but internally dynamic, from which are hewn rhythmic profiles using the outlines of four Cornish folksongs. The instruments use only open strings until the final section; the sound quality should be primal, rough and resonant, the intensity similar to that of Noise music. The piece should be performed either in a resonant space or with amplification such that the effect is engulfing and immersive.

<u>**Instrumentation and set-up**</u>
The piece is conceived for a mass of orchestral stringed instruments (violin, viola, cello, double bass): ideally a good balance between higher and lower instruments.

The musicians should sit close together in whatever arrangement best gives the immersive effect demanded: preferably in a number of tight, concentric full circles with all musicians facing each other and the audience surrounding; alternatively, in a number of deep, concentric semicircles in front of the audience. This will be dependent on the resonant qualities of the space and the amplification used.

Instrumental seating should be mixed up as much as possible: players should not sit next to a player of the same instrument.

The piece should be played from memory, without sheet music or stands. The performance should be coordinated with stopwatches.

<u>**Tuning**</u>
The whole piece apart from the Coda is performed on open strings.

Before the performance, each string player individually should retune his/her instrument as follows:

Each string should be detuned individually up or down to a maximum of a semitone, such that no pair of adjacent strings sounds a well-tuned fifth. A complexly sonorous sound is desired for each pair of strings.

<u>Materials</u>
There are three materials: Open Bowing, Songs and Glissandi.

<u>Open Bowing</u>
Double-stopped whole bows on open strings, always *ff* to *fff.* Bows should be quite slow, aiming to get maximum resonance from the strings, but do not need to be precisely the same length. Bowing position *normale.*

Each change of bow should be accented (>), without losing the continuity of the sound.

Bow the same two strings without changing. Take rests (5-20s) when needed, after which change strings (still double-stopped).

As the piece progresses (see Structure sheet), these default instructions are added to as follows:

- **ADD *sul pont.*:** move away from *normale* ad lib. and explore *sul pont.* timbres, including *molto sul pont.* Move between *sul pont.* and *normale* ad lib.
- **ADD noise**: combining *sul pont.*, increased bow pressure and slower bow speed, introduce noise distortions into the sound ad lib.
- **ADD pressure waves**: within a single bow, increase and decrease the bow pressure regularly, giving changes of intensity and slight pitch fluctuations. This should be used quite sparingly. E.g.

- **ADD string changes:** move between strings at bow changes (without rests), either every one, two or three bow changes ad lib. The aim should be to get all four strings resonating as much as possible.

With all these additions, players need not use them exclusively, but should work them into the texture, moving among them and the 'default' mode so that the overall sound mass evolves gradually and complexly, in a non-uniform way.

At all times players should listen to the sound around them and contribute to it meaningfully.

<u>Songs</u>
The Open Bowing which dominates the piece is broken into four times by Songs. These are the rhythms only (without melody) of four Cornish folksongs, which have been provided with the score.

These should follow on without a break from Open Bowing and be played very rhythmically, with great energy. After finishing a Song the player should rest for a few seconds before continuing with the Open Bowing.

Each Song should be played on a single open string. The choice of which Song to play and which string to use should be chosen in the moment, according to what will best stand out of the texture at the time (and not duplicate pitches already in use by other players close by).

Players should strive to make the Songs an intensification of the music, a breaking-out or flaring of energy that is then reabsorbed into the sound-mass.

Glissandi
These are used only in the Coda.

Always on double-stops, execute a slow glissando upwards or downwards, on both strings or one string (i.e. leaving the other string open), for 5-15 secs ad lib. At the end of each glissando, rest for a second or two (not more) then begin another.

In double stops, the fingers need not maintain the same distance apart through the glissandi.

Bowing: each glissando should be bowed at any speed from bowstroke=MM60 to MM180. Maintain a regular speed within each glissando, but vary the speed from one glissando to the next.

End with a downward glissando.

Timing
Each player should be within sight of a stopwatch. The piece begins exactly together and should end precisely together at 15'00. All players should have begun the glissando Coda by 13'30.

Within this, each player moves through the sections of the piece at his/her own speed. It is therefore not necessary for everyone to move to or from Songs, or to the Coda, at the same time. The texture should be complex and not homogenous, though always presenting a consistently very high intensity of sound.

Cornish String Music was first performed by participants at the CoMA Summer School, High Melton, Doncaster, on 7th August 2015.

Cornish String Music

Structure

Open Bowing
  ADD sul pont.

Song 1

Open Bowing
  ADD sul pont.
  ADD noise

Song 2

Open Bowing
  ADD sul pont.
  ADD noise
  ADD pressure waves

Song 3

Open Bowing
  ADD sul pont.
  ADD noise
  ADD pressure waves
  ADD string changes

Song 4

Glissandi
  begin by 13'30 at the latest
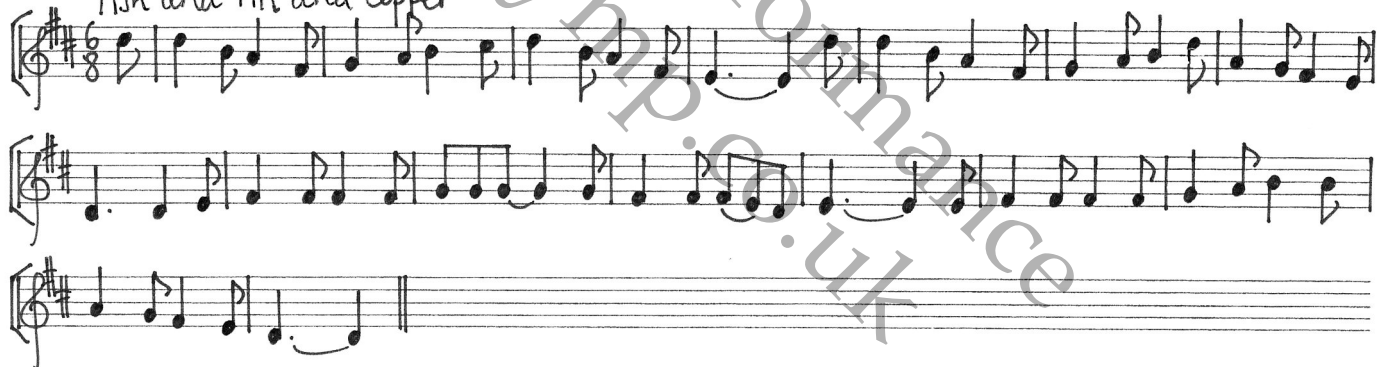 end on a downward glissando at 15'00

Helston Furry

Trelawny

Fish and Tin and Copper

Padstow May Song

- Each tune to be played through (rhythm only) 3-5 times in each 'Song' section. (ie. each 'Song' contains 3-5 verses of the chosen tune).

- Slurs may be ignored.