

James Weeks

**ærc**

(2016)

for any number of orchestral string instruments (at least 12)

University of York Music Press

ISMN M 57036 746 7

perusal score  
not for performance  
[www.uymp.co.uk](http://www.uymp.co.uk)

# ærc

for any number of orchestral string instruments (at least 12)

Duration: 26'-30'

## Introduction

*ærc* is the Old English word for *ark*, derived from the Latin *arca*, a chest. Here it denotes an enclosed space, perhaps of refuge or safety, certainly of intimacy. As in the ark of Noah, the players are paired, entering the figurative space of the work two-by-two and creating a dense polyphonic texture (a giant viol consort) from breath-like bow-strokes, each pair in rhythmic unison, before exiting in sequence.

## Instrumentation and set-up

The piece is conceived for a group of orchestral stringed instruments (violin, viola, cello, double bass): ideally a good balance between higher and lower instruments. There should not be fewer than 12 players, and there must be an even number overall.

Each player pairs with another, preferably of a different instrument. The space should be set up with a number of (seated) positions for the instrument pairs, far enough apart that each pair can hear itself and act as a unit, but not so far apart as to lose the sense of being enclosed altogether in a single space.

The pairs should begin at intervals of about 1 minute – enough time for each pair to establish itself – and at the end each pair stops as soon as its music is complete.

The performance should be timed with stopwatches, which are started independently by each pair when it begins to play.

Each pair functions as an independent unit throughout, following its own stopwatch: there is no temporal or other coordination between pairs during the performance.

## Performance Materials

The performance materials, identical for each pair, consist of 8 pieces which can be played in any order. The order should be decided independently by each pair before the start.

Each piece plays for around 2'00-2'15, with a pause of about 15-30'' between each, in such a way that the time between the first note of one piece to the first note of the next piece is 2'30 (e.g. the second piece starts at 2'30, the third at 5'00, etc.). All 8 pieces therefore take 20 minutes to perform in sequence.

## Rhythm

Each piece uses the same basic unit: a sound followed by a silence.

In pieces I-VI, each sound is a single bowstroke (always  $\Pi$ ), played by either one or both players as directed, lasting 6-8 seconds, with a warm *piano* dynamic (slight hairpins are possible), *senza vibrato*. The sound should be gentle but never tentative or thin. *Poco sul tasto* is advisable.

In pieces VII-VIII the sounds are double bowstrokes (always  $\Pi V$ ), each stroke little quicker than the single bowstrokes (5-6 secs each), giving a total sounding time of 10-12 secs.

In every piece, the silence that follows a sound should be roughly 4 secs.

Therefore, in pieces I-VI there will be about 12-16 sounds, and in pieces VII-VIII there will be about 9-12 sounds.

Each pair should try to get into its own regular rhythm of playing and resting within each piece – a musical breathing.

Durations of sounds and silences should be felt rather than counted against the clock, and pairs should not count the number of sounds made, rather, simply finish each piece when it feels right to do so before the starting-point of the next piece.

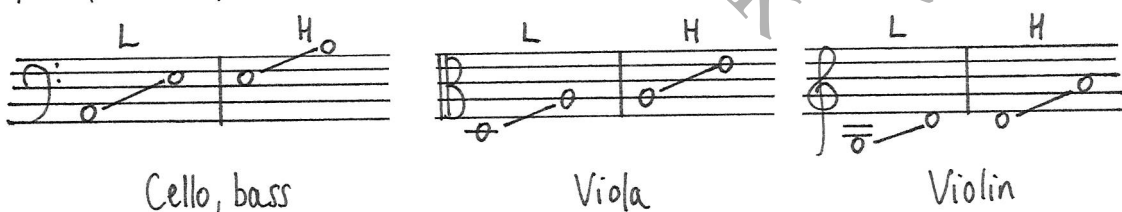
## Coordination

There are three types of co-ordination between players in a pair:

- alternating (player 1, player 2, 1, 2 etc.)
- alternating with additions: players observe the alternating pattern above but occasionally join in on the other player's note as well, before carrying on the alternating pattern
- playing together

## Pitch

Each player chooses his/her pitches freely from the following gamuts, as directed for each piece (see below).



Any pitch, microtonal or chromatic, within the gamut is allowed. Each piece should be played without moving left hand position.

When there is more than one pitch or sound in a piece (e.g. IV – 'Two notes, L-L or H-H'), each player chooses freely from the options each time s/he plays a note. This should not be fixed in advance nor discussed with the other player in the pair.

Pitches should be played with normal finger pressure (•) unless  $\diamond$  (harmonic pressure, whether or not on a harmonic node) is given as an alternative.

*ærc* was first performed by participants at the CoMA Summer School, High Melton, Doncaster, on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2016.

© University of York Music Press 2016

perusal score  
not for performance  
[www.uymp.co.uk](http://www.uymp.co.uk)

perusal score  
not for performance  
[www.uymp.co.uk](http://www.uymp.co.uk)

**ærc: score**

*Each pair chooses in advance an ordering of the following eight pieces.*

I

Two unpitched white noise (breath) sounds

Alternating

Single bows

II

One note, L or H

Alternating with one addition each

Single bows

III

One note, L or H, • or ◊ each time

Alternating with additions ad lib.

Single bows

IV

Two notes, L-L or H-H

Together

Single bows

V

Two notes, H-L, one of which may be • or ◊ each time (the other always •)

Together

Single bows

VI

Three notes, H-H-L or L-L-H

Together

Single bows

VII

One double-stopped chord, H&L

Together

Double bows

VIII

Two double-stopped chords sharing one note in common, H&L

Together

Double bows