CHROMA FLOWS

(2024)

for improvising ensemble and dynamic score

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Program Note

Inspired by amorphous blob-like textures, I set out to design a system that generates colors and patterns at random. Much like a lava lamp, these colors undulate freely, and our improvising ensemble is left to make musical sense of them.

Visuals were made with the Unity 3D game engine. Many thanks to @straybasilisk2689 on YouTube for the coding tutorial from which this is based. Check out their work if you'd like to make a lava lamp of your own!

Duration: ca. 9 min.

Performance Notes

- It is recommended that the visuals (dynamic score) be projected behind the ensemble, for audience viewing.
    - However, additional screens are required so that the ensemble may read their score while facing forward.
    - Possible solutions include Zoom broadcasting the score to the personal devices of ensemble members or providing additional televisions or computer monitors for ensemble viewing.
    - For the premiere performance, the ensemble was equipped with two 15.6” flatscreen computer monitors that were placed on music stands.

Technical Notes

- Open the *Chroma Flows* application, then the *Chroma Flows* Max patch.
- The patch is originally programmed for performance using a "Korg NanoKontrol Slim-Line USB" controller and may be modified to accommodate various control surfaces.
- Be sure to turn on the DAC in Max before starting the performance.
- Ensure that the application is the only window visible to the audience and ensemble.

NanoKontrol Performance Instructions:

To Begin:

1) Double press REWIND to reveal visuals.
2) Press FASTFORWARD to begin electronic drone playback.

To Perform:

3) Press STOP to randomize visuals.
4) Press PLAY to randomize electronic drone pitch.
5) Use the four faders on the far righthand side to manipulate visuals in real-time.

To Conclude:

6) Press REWIND to blackout the screen.
7) Press FASTFORWARD to fade out the electronic drone.

PERFORMANCE GUIDE:
(for the ensemble)

- Randomly selected **drones** will guide your tonal center.
    - **C, D, F, G**

- Interpret the visuals, but **prioritize ensemble listening** to guide your playing.

- **Choose a blob layer** to follow as your "part:" Foreground, Middleground, or Background
    - Feel free to change layers as you wish throughout the performance.
        - Note: Consider solid black as a "backdrop," not a layer.
            - The blobs are at maximum tricolor (minimum one).

- As the color palette and/or drone pitch changes, **change your playing immediately**.
    - **OR** you're welcome to **finish your current musical thought** for however long it takes.

- **Changes in visuals and drones dictate pacing** of the performance.
    - **UNLESS** the ensemble invokes a **CADENCE** (see below).

- The Technologist will **trigger the ending** with a **sudden blackout.**
    - Upon blackout, **ensemble finishes their current musical thought** for however long it takes to reach a natural conclusion.

CADENCES:

- For players interpreting the foreground blobs, the **blob reaching the top** can be interpreted (but is not always interpreted) as playing the **drone pitch at a high(er) register**; same for the **blob reaching the bottom**, but play the **drone pitch at a low(er) register**.

- **Foreground players** can **LEAD** the ensemble in invoking a cadence by sustaining that pitch (as a drone, rhythmically, etc.)
    - Being **JOINED** in that unison by the remaining players indicates a **SUCCESSFUL** arrival at a cadence.

- Upon collective unison, when someone **breaks the cadence**, this forces the technologist to **change the visuals on the ENSEMBLE'S CUE**.
    - Why?
        - This reverses the power dynamic:
            - Players begin by following the technologist...
            - ...until the ensemble insists that the technologist follow them!