

Cort Lippe

Program Notes

Music for 12 Brass Instruments (*4 trumpets, 4 horns, and 4 trombones*) (1979,84) has survived two revisions, with the final revision taking place before its premiere in 1993 at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois, conducted by Drew Krause. With most pieces, I usually choose a rather constrained set of musical ideas and problems to explore; but occasionally, as with many composers, I write a piece which attempts to synthesize many of the ideas that I have explored over the course of a number of works. The first version of this piece was an ambitious attempt to develop a large number of musical ideas, including acoustic spatialization, the use of secondary sound sources, non-conducted soloist playing, and group improvisation, all within the framework of a notated/conducted score. In 1984, feeling that I had not developed this rather large palette of ideas satisfactorily in the first version, I reworked the piece extensively, and the final version—consisting of minor revisions—was made in 1993.

There are two possible performance set-ups for this piece: The more practical, conventional proscenium set-up does not allow for full exploitation of the spatial aspects of the piece. In an ideal performance the players surround the audience, and an attempt is made to avoid the concept of an ideal listener located precisely in the middle of the performers. (The major influence on this aspect of the piece came from an evening spent in a boat on a small lake listening to frogs around the shoreline...)

Conventional playing, secondary and percussive sounds, and vocal sounds are employed in a hierarchical manner. This hierarchy does not give precedence to "normal" playing techniques, but uses them as a point of reference in order to give perspective to the large palette of sounds produced. The non-conducted solos and the improvisation section were influenced by my work with improvisation ensembles. Ensemble musicians' ability to "listen" to other players seems to be inversely proportional to the amount of written musical information they are required to interpret. In other words, the more difficult the part, the less a performer can concentrate on what other players are doing. In this piece, the performers must listen to each other—before the improvisation section starts—to discover the material on which the improvisation will be based. My hope is that this piece is an exploratory adventure for both performers and listeners.

Duration: 12 minutes.