

NASCA LINES

The Nasca lines are giant ground drawings that cover 400 square miles of Southern Peru's coastal desert. The various "geoglyphs": Outlines of birds, animals, plants, spirals and geometric shapes, have given rise to much speculation as to their intention. Discounting certain theories of extra-terrestrial landing sites, the lines would certainly attract the idea of ritualistic activities.

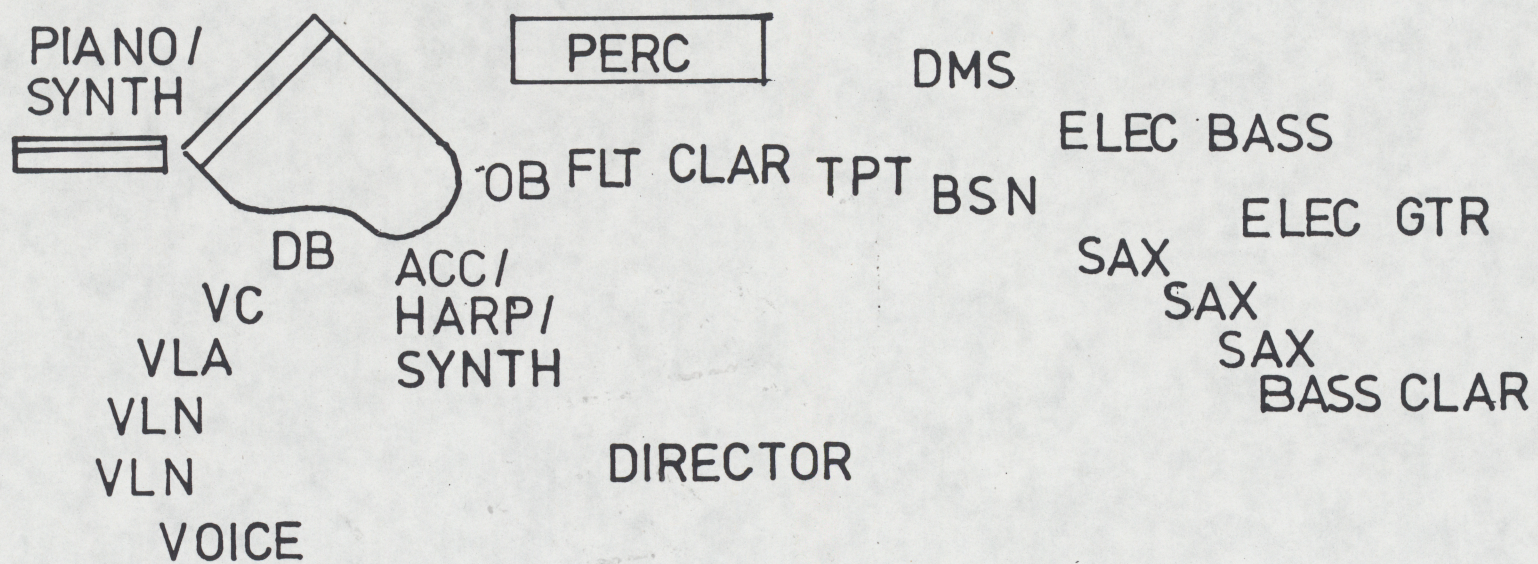
From a compositional point of view the complexity of these images suggested a graphical/musical realisation. So in sections 3 and 5 of the seven part work, there are special references with clear musical articulations related to these ancient manifestations.

Writing the piece for the outstanding players of the Upstream Ensemble and Halifax Symphony Orchestra members presented an ideal opportunity to not only create a dense compositional structure but also areas of freedom where the musicians can "speak" through the Nasca lines, respond freely to the graphic representations and so research and bring back to life again the powerful suggestions of these symbols which were created 2000 years ago.

Texts used are drawn from the Scottish artist Alan Davie whose own work relates closely to the mystical in ancient cultures and has been the catalyst for my interest in creating graphical scores.

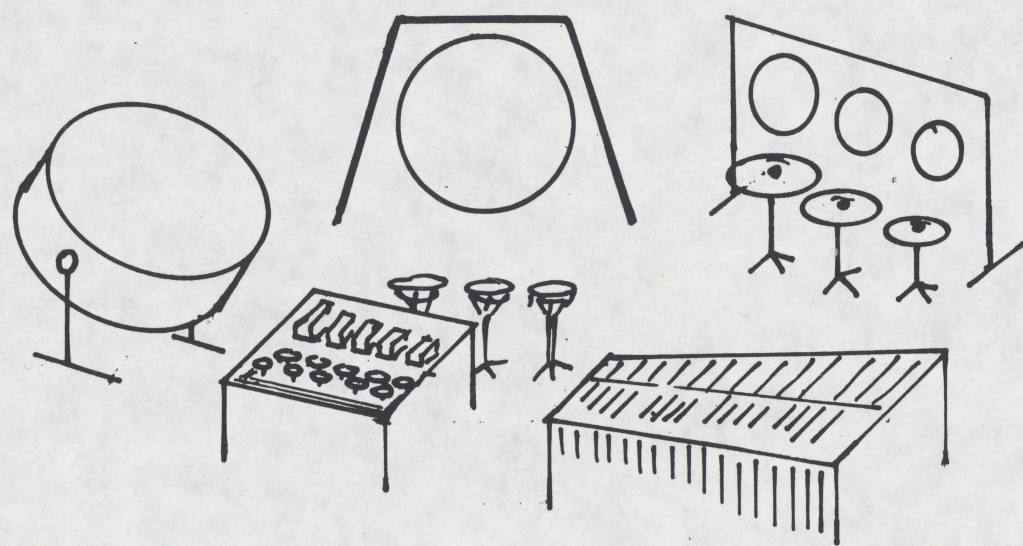
Barry Guy, 2001

ORCHESTRA LAYOUT



PERCUSSION

- 5 WOOD BLOCKS (low to high)
- 3 ROTO TOMS or FLOOR TOM TOMS (large, medium, small)
- 3 GONGS (large, medium, small)
- 3 CYMBALS (large, medium, small on stands)
- 1 TAM TAM
- 1 BASS DRUM
- 1 SET OF CHROMATIC OR MIXED CROTALES (on stand)
- 1 MARIMBA



PERFORMANCE NOTES

Part I, Page 1

1.1

Three systems to be read in a conventional way (ie left to right).

1.2

The principal musical gestures are fairly obvious from the score but the choosing of the various cards needs explanation. On the left hand side there are 16 cards denoting specific articulations. From this pool the players designated in the sections marked SNAPSHOTS, GROUPS and STREAM, select 7, 5 and 9 cards respectively to use as the basis for improvising.

SNAPSHOTS

1.3

Seven cards are to be chosen by each ensemble member (Perc/Drums/Synth tacet) with the intention of performing precise finely articulated sound worlds of varying durations (never too long) regardless of what the other members are playing. I envisage a fast colourful complex scenario similar to a video being fast forwarded.

GROUPS

1.4

Five cards are to be chosen by each ensemble member as marked. The ensemble is broken down into three groups that function as a start-stop machine of information. One member of each group indicates the start and stop of the music. GROUPS rationalises the more open SNAPSHOT music by corralling the actions into three layers.

STREAM

1.5

Nine cards are to be chosen by each ensemble member as marked. In STREAM the musical gestures are even more defined by the fact that the conductor indicates each change of articulation by left and right gestures. Two synthesisers and percussion make comments on this activity - preferably musical in nature!

VETO A, B and C

1.6

These Veto options may turn up anywhere in this section (via flash card). They refer to specific articulations that may be used to interrupt the normal flow of the music. It is assumed that the ensemble understands that on cessation of the VETO they return to the material that was interrupted and continue.

The rest of Part I is self explanatory.

Part II, Pages 1 - 16

2.1

A feature for the string quartet and textless voice with ensemble colouring at various points. The progress of the music should be decided by the 1st violin in collaboration with the conductor: So the main gestures and some subsidiary left hand gestures will be the responsibility of the conductor whilst details and articulation within the broader canvass will be directed by the 1st violin.

2.2

The string quartet material moves from the gestural through to defined material. The gestural music is placed on a two line staff that serves as an indicator for the spontaneous selection of pitches. In the case of sustained events (as against the more agile groups), I have suggested intervals to be considered for double stops (minor 2nd / major 7th / minor 9th / diminished 5th), which (a) defines the dissonant nature of the music and (b) allows an improvisational, spontaneous quality to prevail. The + and - signs merely indicate that these intervals may be imprecise in their execution.

2.3

On page 4, after the initial fortissimo harmonics there is a complex set of articulations that need explanation. With the hair of the bow each player is to describe a circular motion upon the designated strings whilst the left hand dim5 (+ or -) follows the contours suggested either as harmonics or stopped pitches. The tricky part is to also interrupt the circular motion with short bursts of quick oscillations between strings. This will tend to crush the pitches.

2.4

Activity accretions in the in the box on page 9 and subsequent similar figures are to be interpreted thus: From the enlarged set of pitches (suggested as on page 9, defined as on page 13) sub-sets can be extracted as shown by the ligatures. The idea is to build up complex rapid fragments out of the basic set of pitches.

Part III, Page 1

CANON

3.1

The ensemble is broken down into four groups - string quintet, wind quintet, saxophone quartet (in which the bass clarinet is included) and percussion, synth, guitar trio. Each group has a colour with an appropriate page for their group. The musical options are extracted from an image of an ariel representation of one main area of the Nasca Lines, and this image is broken down into 'strata' or staves which each musician traverses at a particular speed: either 17", 13", 11" or 7" according to the number applied to the instrument in the left hand box.

INSERT: * ADDITIONAL NOTES.

To initiate a canonic sequence, the director will show the appropriate flash card to the group in question. At that point the clock starts ticking, and each person in that group begins the series of 'passes' through each line of the image. (see the notes on the right hand bottom corner of page for mode of execution). Some passes are silent, but the chronological time must be respected. This gives way to a piano solo which overlaps briefly with a saxophone duo.

3.2

The showing of the TUTTI flash card interrupts all of the proceedings and indicates that all players involved in this section should begin at the beginning of the graphic image and continue until further notice.

Part III, Page 2 (voice tacet)

SINGLE

3.3

Again, the ensemble is broken down into four groups. Instead of working as a group, individual musicians will be offered a duration via the flash card which starts a sequence of passes of the 'strata' which follows in rotation (see notes on coloured page). The starting point (A,B,C or D) is up to the individual but must also follow in rotation.

The graphic is terminated by a piano solo which overlaps with another saxophone duo.

3.4

The TUTTI flash card again interrupts all of the music and obliges the players to refer to the beginning of the graphic selecting A,B, C or D and 7", 11", 13" or 17" as the starting point.

* Part III, Page 3 All performers. (voice tacet)

OPEN INTERPRETATION

The same principle of rotation defined in the previous two sections applies here also.

The graphic is now completely exposed for interpretation in any configuration with pitch and activity being left to the discretion of the performer.

The rotation principle is simple.

Start with the page upright, upside down or sideways (the black dot orientates the player-top, right or left and bottom) and proceed to "read" the graphic left to right with the chosen duration. Thereafter continue rotating the part and duration (ie. 7", 17", 13", 11" or 13", 11", 7", 17" etc.)

The director will terminate this section in favour of the voice cadenza (Part III, Page 3A)

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Part III, Page 3A

VOICE CADENZA

3.6

This page is segmented, with demarcation lines radiating from the Nasca Lines graphic. The segments can be selected in any order and the graphic used as a medium for improvisational music.

3.7

Five of the segments contain pitched material which may be played in any order and may also be implemented at any time (or not at all) during the selection of text fragments.

3.8

The vocalist may invite any of the named instruments to negotiate the pitch row with the only proviso that the chosen instrument(s) and the voice begin on the circled pitch. Thereafter the pitch order is free unless by prior arrangement there is an agreement on a sequence. The vocalist may terminate the accompanying instruments at any time.

3.9

The instrumentalists may also deviate from the row to pick up on improvisational possibilities from the graphic.

3.10

In general, I imagine that the pitch rows be confined to each segment, but I can foresee that an accumulation of instruments, note rows and text may offer an interesting extension of the strategy.

PART IV

4.1

Part 4 is a focus for the wind ensemble: flute, oboe, clarinet, trumpet and bassoon with significant inputs from piano and percussion. The music is self explanatory and exists as a piece of chamber music coloured by improvised blocks of activity from the piano and percussion.

4.2

The final sequence of four information triangles acts as pitch centres (white letter on black) with related note rows, and in two cases secondary pitches (in the opposite corner of the triangle) that should feature a little more than the five pitches (any octave) marked within the triangles boundary. the conductor will direct which set to play via visual numerical cues (1 - 4) It might also be the case that two triangles (or more) will be played simultaneously.

4.3

The small triangles in various parts indicate the termination of previous material in favour of the new incoming "information triangle" directed by the conductor.

4.4

At an appropriate point the conductor will encourage a tutti move to a low tessatura. This should be slow and without nuance.

PART V

5.1

A return to the discrete groups that featured in part 3. Flash cards will indicate which group plays (coloured cards) and the type of articulation. Images from various creatures that litter the Peruvian Pampas are allied with certain improvisational suggestions which are self explanatory. Only FOLLOW needs more information. Simply explained, FOLLOW means mimic (and follow) the improvisations of colleagues, so for instance if the sax quartet were to be interpreting a dense/active area, then perhaps the voice might be shown the appropriate cards to enter the argument and to follow the general contour of the music.

5.2

TUTTI (all parameters) invites any indicated group(s) to move through all of the possibilities available.

5.3.

TUTTI ENSEMBLE brings together all of the groups and should respond to whatever parameter(s) is/are shown via the flash card.

5.4

There is also the possibility of a solo (or solos) being injected into the music, or perhaps the ensemble may quieten to leave a solo instrument. This is open to any eventuality.

PART VI

6.1

This section features the saxophones, electric guitar, bass and drums. No special indications need explanation.

PART VII

7.1

This final section represents a recapitulation of part 2,4 and 6 with the various autonomous groupings recapturing their own written musics. The string group has three fragments to refer to, directed by a member of that group. The three sections may appear in any order.

The wind group also has three fragments, but they are played consecutively.

The saxophone group has four fragments which will be directed by the conductor. It is assumed that in the case of the wind and saxophone group they will repeat the sequence until further instruction as indeed the string group who will continue to perform fragments in any order until new information is imparted (ie. the move into SNAPSHOTS).

7.2

SNAPSHOTS

The return of SNAPSHOTS and the choice of five cards out of the sixteen offered. The mode of performance is the same as in Part I.

7.3

VETO A,B and C will most certainly be used in SNAPSHOTS (the director will show an appropriate flash card) but maybe also in the first section of Part VII. If this happens, the string and wind group have to independently start again at 1, 2 or 3 (in the case of the strings) and the first fragment in the case of the wind. The conductor will direct the saxophones.