ROUND

Thomas Nicholson (2018)

"Tuning is a function of time." — *La Monte Young*

The piece is for an odd number of musicians standing or sitting in a round. If the group is large, it might encircle the audience. Tones travel around the group in alternating two- and three-note constellations — intervals and triads. All tones are related to each other by tunable intervals (*i.e.* just intonation).

One musician begins by playing or singing a tone. Then, moving *clockwise* around the circle, the next musician adds any other tone, tuned in some way to the first. Finally, a third tone is added by the next musician, which is directly tuned to *either* of the two sounding tones though *simpler* in harmonic complexity[1] than the first interval.

Once the triad has sounded long enough to be perceived/appreciated, the first tone drops out, allowing the interval between the second and third tones of the preceding triad to be heard clearly. Listen.

The next musician in the round creates a new triad by adding any other tone, which is directly tuned to *either* of the two sounding tones though, this time, with a *more complex* harmonic relationship than the first interval.

Again, the first tone drops out and we hear the interval between the second and third tones of the preceding triad.

The piece continues in this way, always alternating between adding intervals that are either *less* or *more* complex than the preceding interval. On every pass around the circle, each musician will have the opposite "role" (more *or* less complex) than they had on the previous pass.

Tones should be relatively pure and have no vibrato. In general, dynamics are healthy — at least *mezzoforte* — and well balanced between the voices in each constellation. The ideal intensity of each voice/instrument may not be the same between triads and intervals. The onset and decay of a tone should not be abrupt though should also not have an excessive amount of *crescendo* or *decrescendo*; deliberate, decisive phrasing.

Try to find a *slow* but *constant* rhythm between alternations of interval and triad. Allow for at least *four* passes around the group, however, the piece must not last longer than 30 minutes. The piece ends when three consecutive musicians play the same tone (unison).

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[1] While perception of the relative complexity of different intervals is ultimately subjective, it can generally be correlated to the relative size of the ratios' integers as well as the prime limits involved. As such, 9:8 might be considered more complex than 3:2; likewise 13:8 might be considered more complex than 15:8, since prime 13 is larger than prime 5.