



Omphalos

For (Prepared) Piano and Percussion

Nigel Morgan

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ISMN 979-0-57043-112-0 (Full Score)
ISMN 979-0-57043-113-7 (Piano Part)

Omphalos

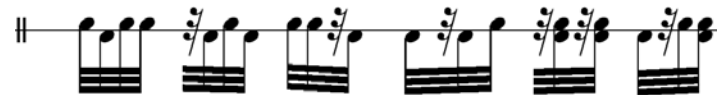
For (Prepared) Piano and Percussion

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Omphalos is the first part of a four movement work written in 1997 for Joanna MacGregor and Ensemble Bash. The music is an uncompromising toccata for five percussionists, the pianist playing the piano predominantly as a percussion instrument. The work is entirely computer-generated using the following source material: a sequence of ‘found’ chordal clusters, a collection of rhythmic gestures associated with particular instruments or pairs of instruments, a pattern from Nicholas Slonimsky’s *Thesaurus of Scales and Melodic Patterns* arranged for the fingers as though for an African mbira.



Six clusters



Six rhythmic gestures



Slonimsky pattern No.6 as spread out across two hands

The music is in three sections:

Section 1 focuses on a play of clusters and rhythmic gestures. These two elements are passed through a neural net programmed to vary their content and structural combinations and associations. The result appears like a complex improvisation in which the percussionists gradually establish formal responses to patterns the pianist creates.

Section 2 rearranges the relationship between pianist and percussionists. The pianist plays a continuous evolving music devised from just six pitches of Slonimsky's tritone pattern 6, calling for a complex interplay of fingers as though playing the mbira. Above this *perpetuum mobile* the percussionists in pairs mirror each hand of the piano for a couple of bars only to break away into variations and then return into the piano's groove before starting the whole process of variation and 'escape' once more.

Section 3 revisits the opening music, only this time the chordal clusters are inverted, stretched, arpeggiated. The percussion gestures are extended by accessing a library of 8-bit binary rhythmic patterns again processed using a neural net.

The title *Omphalos* comes from the Greek for navel. It was the title of a celebrated mid 19C book by Philip Henry Gosse who was the David Attenborough of his day, described by Stephen Jay Gould as 'Britain's finest popular narrator of nature's fascination'. The reason for choosing this title is its historical notoriety as an argument by Gosse that 'creation has only the appearance of pre-existence'. In other words, in providing us with the fossil record God lied. Transfer this notion if you will to the creation of music by algorithmic means . . . and perform the work with intent, fervour, deliberation, and utter obedience to its own logic . . . but knowing that its creation is prochronic rather than diachronic. Adam's navel was prochronic, the 930 years of his earthly life diachronic.

Performance instructions

The music should be played without a pre-ordered dynamic scheme. In section 1 and 3 the pianist should initiate dynamic contrasts, although such contrast may be immediately revoked by the percussionists. In section 2 the pianist provides a continuum, which may include improvised and unprepared accents; the percussionists should follow the dynamic scheme come what may .

The musical structure is emphasised by its division into bars. The performers should play to the denominator value of the time-signature for each bar. Note in the example below that the only emphasis is to occur on the first beat of the division, which is indicated here by accents:



The image shows a musical score snippet for a piano part. It consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The tempo is marked as ♩ = 70-80 and the instruction is 'with intent'. The score is divided into bars with various time signatures: 1/4, 4/8, 3/32, 1/8, 1/4, 5/8, 1/4, 3/32, 4/16, and 1/4. Accents are placed on the first beat of each bar. The music features clusters and rhythmic gestures.

In bars where an instrumental part is silent the rests indicated don't always reflect the denominator value, thus a 4/8 bar may show two 1/4 rests rather than 4 1/8 rests.

In the percussion parts rolls and ornaments may be added ad lib, particularly on tied notes.

The piano may be 'prepared' in any way appropriate to the performers' concept of the piece. Such preparation should not be too 'intense' in the middle and higher registers but should tend towards an imitation of the buzzing of the mbira in the lower regions of the piano's compass. There are 3 pitches in bar 234 that should not be 'prepared' in any way. The sustaining pedal should not be used.

Omphalos

♩ = 70-80 *with intent*

The score is divided into two systems. The first system (measures 1-10) features a piano accompaniment with a complex, shifting rhythmic structure. The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *f** and *sim. sempre*. The percussion section includes Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block, with various rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings like *f* and *(muted)*. The second system (measures 11-20) continues the piano accompaniment and percussion, with a section labeled 'A' in measure 12. The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *f*. The percussion section continues with similar rhythmic patterns and dynamic markings.

Measures 1-10:

- Piano:** Treble and Bass clefs. Dynamics: *f**, *sim. sempre*.
- Bongos:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.
- Congas:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *(muted)*, *f**, *f*.
- Timbales:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.
- W. Block:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.

Measures 11-20:

- Piano:** Treble and Bass clefs. Dynamics: *f*. Section 'A' in measure 12.
- Bongos:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.
- Congas:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.
- Timbales:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.
- W. Block:** Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.

* dynamics should be initiated by the pianist, but may be revoked by the percussionists.

22

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

3/4 4/8 1/4 1/8 4/16 2/8 1/4 1/8 4/16 1/4 1/8

32

B

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

1/8 1/4 3/8 4/16 1/8 1/4 3/8 4/16 3/32 4/16 1/4 1/8

43 C

Piano accompaniment (Pno.) consists of two staves. The right hand plays chords and melodic fragments, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment. The percussion section includes Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block, each with specific rhythmic patterns.

Measures 43-56, section C. Time signatures: 1/8, 4/16, 1/4, 3/8, 1/4, 4/16, 1/8, 1/4, 1/8, 1/4, 1/8, 1/4, 4/16.

57 D

Piano accompaniment (Pno.) continues with two staves. The percussion section includes Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block.

Measures 57-60, section D. Time signatures: 4/16, 5/8, 3/32, 1/8, 1/4, 1/8, 4/16, 1/4, 2/8, 1/4.

68

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

4/8 3/32 2/8 1/4 2/8 4/16 1/4 3/32 1/4 1/8 3/32 1/4 4/16

81

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

E

4/16 4/8 1/4 1/8 4/16 4/8 1/4 4/16 1/8 1/4 3/8

91

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

3/8 4/16 1/4 2/8 1/4 3/8 1/4 3/4 1/4 1/8

101

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

F (add accents ad lib)

mp (sempre)

mp

mp

mp

mp

1/8 1/4 3/32 3/8 1/4 3/32 1/8 1/4 6/16 *mp* (sempre)

Piano score for measures 113-117. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics include *poco a poco cresc...*, *f*, and *mp*.

Piano score for measures 113-117. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics include *poco a poco cresc...*, *f*, and *mp*.

Piano score for measures 122-126. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics include *poco a poco cresc...*, *f*, *mp*, and *mf*.

Piano score for measures 122-126. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics include *poco a poco cresc...*, *f*, *mp*, and *mf*.

Piano score for measures 132-141. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics range from *mf* to *ff*. A *poco a poco cresc...* instruction is present across the percussion parts.

Piano score for measures 142-145. The score includes parts for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. Dynamics range from *mp* to *f*. A *come prima* instruction is present in the Congas part. Time signatures $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{1}{4}$, and $\frac{1}{8}$ are indicated at the bottom right.

151

Piano score for measures 151-162. The score includes staves for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. The Pno. staff features a complex melodic line with various intervals and accidentals. The percussion staves show rhythmic patterns with specific notes and rests. Time signatures are indicated below the Pno. staff: 1/8, 1/4, 4/8, 1/4, 1/8, 3/32, 3/8, 3/32, 3/8.

163

Piano score for measures 163-172. The score includes staves for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. A box labeled 'J' is placed above measure 163. The Pno. staff continues with a complex melodic line. The percussion staves show rhythmic patterns. Time signatures are indicated below the Pno. staff: 2/8, 3/32, 1/4, 5/8, 1/4, 1/8, 1/4, 5/8, 1/4, 6/8.

K

173

Piano score for measures 173-180. The score includes staves for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. The Pno. part features complex chordal textures and melodic lines, with a *(m.s.)* marking in measure 179. The percussion parts are highly rhythmic, with various patterns and rests. Time signatures are indicated above the Pno. staff: 6/8, 1/4, 4/8, 1/4, 7/8, 1/4, 1/8, and 3/32.

L

181

Piano score for measures 181-188. The score includes staves for Pno., Bongos, Congas, Timbales, and W. Block. The Pno. part continues with complex textures. The percussion parts show intricate rhythmic patterns. Time signatures are indicated above the Pno. staff: 3/32, 1/4, 3/8, 5/8, 1/4, 5/8, 3/32, 1/4, and 2/8.

190

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

2/8 3/32 2/8 1/4 1/8 1/4 5/8 1/4 4/8

199

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

M

1/4 4/8 1/4 5/8 1/4 2/8 1/4

207

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

1/4 4/8 3/8 1/4 3/32 3/8 1/4 2/8 3/32 5/8

217

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

N

5/8 1/4 4/8 1/4 5/8 1/4 3/8 1/4

225

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

subito risonare

1/4 3/8 3/32 2/8 1/4 3/32 3/8 1/4 3/8 1/4

* make sure these pitches are not prepared.

235

Pno.

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

W. Block

(like an afterthought)

1/4 4/8 3/32 1/8