

# Groundhog Night

(Hear What the Earth Says)

John Howell Morrison



2020

Commissioned by Kin of the Moon,  
and offered in hopes of helping  
awaken the cooperative spirit needed  
to overcome the fate that we have created  
through our treatment  
of the earth.

## About the piece

The piece is designed to receive audience input to alter the repetition of something they've already heard, hence the title, *Groundhog Night*. The subtitle comes from the text eventually revealed by the singer. There are three large sections, each to be repeated, and which lay out a long-range shape that the audience helps to realize. The process might be called collaborative composition, as it is a collaboration between composer, ensemble, and audience. And since the piece is not a single performance but the composite of all realizations, I call the process meta-composition.

Audience members self-select for participation, and all others gauge the energy of the music they hear, the results of which poll are displayed right away. While this is going on, co-composers offer changes for the repetition to come. Players and co-composers briefly discuss changes offered and how to realize them. Players mark up parts to reflect changes to a basically repetitive structure so that they are able to play the entire sequence with little pause between sections. Players who can sustain notes are encouraged to do so on the complete run, minimizing breaks in continuity.

The audience (or at least the co-composers) will be informed of the overall shape, helping those who participate in this way to make suggestions that head in the direction of the next pre-set. The first repetition, section 1.2, gains pre-determined changes described by players, changes designed to suggest ways audience members can offer input. The second and third repetitions, sections 1.3 and 1.4, get input from co-composers to alter the repetitions. A new preset, which inherits material from the previous sections, comes next, and will be followed by two repetitions which gain input from the audience. Finally, a third preset comes and is followed by its one repetition. After the whole piece has been assembled step-by-step in this way, the whole thing is played continuously, with as little break between sections as can be managed. A second run of the piece could take place after co-composers, or even other audience members, have offered refinements to the whole.

## Symbols, notation

o

Above or below a note head, this symbol means to damp the note while articulating it, or to sound a similarly short, stopped note.



x as note head means key click.



x over a normal note head indicates a transitional state between key clicks and normal notes.

*f*\*

A dynamic with an asterisk means that the dynamic is relative to the technique's ability to sound.

s.p.

sul ponticello

☒

"Thwump" sound, like a tongue ram on flute, stopping air flow suddenly on brass, closed slap tongue on reed instruments, etc.

⊖

Violently airy sound, similar to jet whistle on flute, blowing air through brass instrument without mouthpiece, etc.



Gradual change of some aspect of performance.



Steady state of parameter that had undergone gradual change; also a note-extender to show relative duration.

## Performance notes

The first thing to note is that this score shows four parts, but only three performers are necessary: the singer is the only part required, but it is most desirable that there be one melody instrument, one harmony instrument, and singer. Adapted parts for any combination of three are available on request.

The harmony instrument part is provided on one staff here, with mostly repeated notes and chord symbols. For instruments unable to play all the notes of the specified chords, choose notes which convey the dissonance level implied by the given chords. The register one plays in is up to performer choice and the direction of co-composers.

Each page of the score is to be about 30 seconds; the score is notated in a proportional manner. Organized in three large sections, the first page of each will be repeated, with changes suggested by co-composers. Co-composers may suggest anything except new material, and should be encouraged to suggest gradual change of normal, energy-producing parameters such as dynamics, register, frequency of repetition, and so forth.

Co-composers will be made aware of the long-range shape laid out in the three sections, and will be encouraged to offer changes in intervening sections to move the music toward the next section.

Parts for each player are part-scores, with one's part larger than the remainder of the ensemble. Additional staves, one per repetition of section, are provided on parts. As co-composers suggest changes, the ensemble will quickly determine how to implement them, make any helpful notational marks on their part-score, and then play through the next page of the section. During this time, the remainder of the audience will be involved in rating the energy of the music just heard, the results of which will be immediately displayed for all to see.

There are a few rules to govern performance:

1. Changes accrued in a repetition should remain in effect unless specifically cancelled in the score or by audience input. (This means that changes from a previous section carry into the next.)
2. Materials presented in sections 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, and 3.1 are intended to be the sole source of figures. They may be recombined, altered within, etc., but no really new figures should be inserted.
3. Players may introduce any manner of unusual performance techniques to realize their part as suggested by co-composers, whether specifically or in a more general manner.
4. Unless specifically altered, gradual changes that occur one time through should be duplicated on repeat. Performers might ponder the impact of this fact when rehearsing.
5. Some changes that might be offered will require quick action on a complex topic, specifically those having to do with pitch (consonant, dissonant, etc.), so the table shown below is provided on each part to suggest how to make such choices quick and effective.

Some suggested pathways to making quick responses to suggestions of change in dissonance/consonance level:

### more dissonant

sections 1.3-1.4: one player move all single pitches up or down, strings can play double-stops of constant dissonance, etc.  
harmony instrument can play dissonant chords of intervals, etc.

### more tonal

sections 1.3-1.4: G major/minor  
sections 2.1-2.3: D major/minor  
sections 3.1-3.2: C major/minor

### more consonant

if paired with request to be more tonal, emphasize scale degrees 1, 3, 5

## Rehearsal notes

It is by rehearsing anticipated changes that the ensemble will be prepared to react quickly to what the audience suggests. Therefore, a few suggestions for things to anticipate seem in order, and the ensemble is encouraged to brainstorm more possibilities to gain fluency and ease in adapting.

### Things to anticipate, rehearse:

General energy terms like faster, slower, more intense, more playful, lighter, heavier, rougher, smoother, nastier, higher, lower, darker, longer, shorter. Brainstorm more!

Score in concert pitch

# Groundhog Night

(Hear What the Earth Says)

† Only three players are required, either a string or a wind with harmony instrument and voice.

## 1: isolation

John Howell Morrison

**1.1** 5" 10" 15"

**Voice** *f*\* (no vocalization) (2x) (some air/voice) (2-3x)

**Wind instrument †** (key clicks) density of repetition:\* very sparse

**String instrument †** pizz. density of repetition:\* moderate very sparse less sparse

**Harmony instrument** density of repetition:\* sparse gradually increase duration of note (before muting in most cases) less sparse gradually increase duration of note (before muting)

\* The rest in the repeat box is to indicate varied spacing between repetitions of note(s), while the "density of repetition" note directs them to come closer or further apart. (Dynamics with asterisk indicate volume in relation to ability to sound.)

15" 20" 25" 30"

**V.** (with voice) r n o

**W.** gradually add a little air to create pitch

**S.** add pitch bend, gradually increase duration of note (pizz.)

**H.** (steady duration) *p* *mp* *p* *mp*

1.2 †

5" 10" 15"

V. *f*\* (no vocalization) (some air/voice) (?? x)

W. *ff* (key clicks . . . . . become . . . . . normal note) *f* *f* *sempre* Staccatissimo - - - - - gradually lengthen - - - - -

S. pizz. *mp* density of repetition: moderate - - - - - very sparse - - - - - less sparse move to arco

H. *fff* density of repetition: sparse - - - - - gradually increase duration of second note - - - - - less sparse

15" 20" 25" 30"

V. (with voice) r n o

W. (gradually lengthen) - - - - - to - - - - - tenuto

S. add pitch bend, gradually increase duration of note - - - (l.v.)

H. (sustain second note) *f* *f* *f* *mp* *f*

† In break between 1.1 & 1.2 players announce changes they'll make in the manner of content in boxes to the right:

voice: "I'll repeat each event a little more, and go higher with my last event"

wind: "I'll keep making the keyclicks have more and more pitch, and rise gradually over time. I'll gradually change the way I articulate the notes as well."

string: "I'll move to arco by the end of this time through, and go a little higher with my repeated notes. I'll even add a little pitch bend to add a plaintive energy."

harmony instrument: "I'm going to do something that will make my part more like the soprano: I will add a rise and fall to my rhythm, like the soprano does with her voice. Since my notes got gradually louder and longer last time, and ended with a pair of repeated notes, I'll keep the repeated notes and gradually get louder still."

1.3 & 1.4:  
Repeat 1.2 with changes suggested by co-composer.  
(Players confer as to implementation, mark up part on blank staves provided, then play.)

# 2: come together

2.1

5"

10"

15"

V. *f\** *f\** *f\** *f* *mf* *f\** *f\**

d d d on't b

W. *ff* *f* *f* *n* *f\**

air: *f* keys: *f sempre*

S. *ff* *mp* *f* *mp*

pizz. ord. s.p. ord.

H. Dm, DM *p* *f* *f* *f\** simile

15"

20"

25"

30"

V. *f\** *f\** *mf* *f\** *mf* *f*

b b urn oi

W. *f* *n* *f\**

air: *f* keys: *f sempre*

S. *mp* *f* *mp*

ord. s.p. ord.

H. *f* *mp*

2.2 & 2.3

repeat 2.1 with changes suggested by co-composer.

(Players confer as to implementation, mark up part on blank staves provided, then play.)

# 3: work together

3.1

5"

10"

15"

*pleading, almost screaming (pitch bend, gliss, etc. as you desire)*

V. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ burn \_\_\_\_\_

W. ⊗ ⊗ ⊗

S. *f* ord. - - - s.p. - - - ord. *f possible* ord. - - - s.p. \*

H. *ff* Eb, E *mp* F, G *ff* *p* \*

\* The outcome should be a series of short notes, gradually softening, with no attempt to coordinate the articulations between string and accordion. For strings, little gliss in the notes; Glissando occurs between articulations, and notes are not intended to match normal pitches. Allow the final note to be muted slightly by a finger at the nut, and allow the bow to come to rest on the string.

15"

20"

25"

30"

*pleading, almost screaming (pitch bend, gliss, etc. as you desire)*

V. oil

W. ⊗

S. *f possible* s.p.

H. *pp* G, Am *pp*

*f possible* *n*

3.2

repeat 3.1 with changes suggested by co-composer.  
(Players confer as to implementation, mark up part on blank staves provided, then play.)

After first time through gathering input from co-composers,  
play the entire piece with as little break between sections as possible.  
Those who can sustain notes might hold their final note across section breaks.