

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 will help to realize. The process might be called collaborative composition, as it is a collaboration between composer, ensemble, and audience.


Audience members will self-select for participation, and all others will gauge the energy of the music they hear, the results of which poll will be displayed right away. While this is going on, pairs or threes of audience co-composers will offer changes for the repetition to come. Players and co-composers will briefly discuss changes offered and how to realize them. Players will mark up parts to reflect changes to a basically repetitive structure.

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, will gain changes offered by players, each of which is designed to suggest ways audience members can offer input. The second and third repetitions, sections 1.3 and 1.4, will get input from audience members to alter the repetition. A new preset, which inherits material from the previous sections, will occur next, and will be followed by two repetitions which will gain input from the audience. Finally, a third preset comes and is followed by its one repetition. After we have gone through the whole piece step-by-step in this way, we'll go back and play the whole thing continuously. A second run of the piece could take place after co-composers have offered refinements to the whole.

Symbols, notation

∅ above or below a note head, this symbol means to damp the note while articulating it.

 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

TR
 tongue ram (flute)

JW jet whistle (flute)

 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

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 the audience members (co-composers). The audience may suggest anything, but will be encouraged to suggest gradual change of normal, energy-producing parameters.

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 us toward the new section.

As co-composers suggest changes, the ensemble will quickly determine how to implement them, make any helpful notational marks on their 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.

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.
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 will be provided on each part 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: viola move all single pitches up, and move double-stop glisses to position of constant dissonance against cello (i.e., bottom note)
cello can keep it position then (or it could change, leaving viola as notated)
harp change flats to naturals, play chords with m2, M7, 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!

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1: isolation

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1.1 5" 10" 15" 20" 25" 30"

Soprano
*f** (no vocalization) (2x) (some air/voice) (2-3x) (with voice)
 d d d d d d d d t b r n o

Alto Flute
 TR (key clicks) density of repetition:* very sparse gradually add a little air to create pitch - - - - -
ff *mf** *mp**

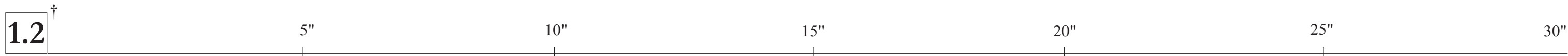
Viola
 pizz. density of repetition: moderate - - - - - very sparse - - - - - less sparse gradually increase duration of note - - - (pizz.)
fff *pp* *mp*

Cello
 pizz.* density of repetition:* moderate - - - - - very sparse - - - - - less sparse gradually increase duration of note - - - arco
fff *pp* *mp* *mf* *pp*

Harp
 (damp gradually later and later, increasing duration of note - - - - -) (steady duration)
mp *mf** *p* *p* *mf* *p*

mp < *ff*

* 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.



S. *f** (no vocalization) (†) (??x) (some air/voice) (with voice)
 d d d d d d d d t b r n o

A. Fl. TR (b) *ff* (key clicks become normal note) *mf** *f* density of repetition: Staccatissimo - - - - - gradually to - - - - - tenuto (Slowly rise through whole tone scale.)

Va. pizz. *fff* *mp* density of repetition: arco gradually increase duration of note - - - *mf*

Vc. pizz. *fff* *mp* density of repetition: arco gradually increase duration of notes - - - *mf* *mf* *pp*

Hp. density of repetition: sparse (damp gradually later and later, increasing duration of second note - - - - -) less sparse *mp* *f* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

† 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"

alto flute: "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."

viola: "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."

Vc.: "Since I can play more than one note at a time, I'll add a note to my repetitions. And since my colleagues are going up in pitch, I'll go down!"

harp: "I'm going to do something that will make my part more like the soprano: I will add a rise and fall to my ritythm, 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 audience.
 (Players confer as to
 implementation, mark
 up part on blank staves
 provided, then play.)

2: come together

2.1

5"

10"

15"

20"

25"

30"

The musical score is arranged in five systems. The first system is for the Soprano (S.), with lyrics: "d d d on't (o - - - - n - - - - t) b b b urn (ur - - - - n) oi (o - - - - i - - - -)". The second system is for the Alto Flute (A. Fl.), marked with *TR* and *ff*. The third system is for the Violin (Va.) and Viola (Vc.), both marked with *pizz.* and *ff*. The fourth system is for the Harp (Hp.), marked with *f* and *p*. The score includes various dynamics such as *f*, *mf*, *f**, *ff*, *mp*, and *simile*, along with performance instructions like *air: f sempre*, *ord.*, *s.p.*, and *simile*. A red mark is visible above the 15" time marker.

2.2 & 2.3

repeat 2.1 with changes suggested by audience.
 (Players confer as to implementation, mark up part on blank staves provided, then play.)

3: work together

3.1

5"

10"

15"

20"

25"

30"

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

S. Don't burn oil (o - i - l)

A. Fl. JW TR JW JW

Va. *ff* ord. - - - s.p. - - - ord. *f* *ff* *pp* * *ff* *pp*

Vc. *ff* ord. - - - s.p. - - - ord. *f* *ff* *pp* * *ff* *pp*

Hp. *ff* *f* *f possible*

* The outcome should be a series of short notes, gradually softening, with little gliss in the notes; Glissando occurs between articulations, and notes are not intended to match normal note. 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.

harp 3.2 More consonant: omit third in given chord
More dissonant: play all notes in existing tuning

3.2

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