

Brief

I will compose a minimalist piece (Area of Study 2) for two violins which will be performed at a school concert. This will be played during the interval and should demonstrate the abilities of the violin in a short amount of time through minimalist music.

Compositional Process

To start off with, I decided on the tempo of the piece. I chose to use Allegro at crotchet = 120bpm as the piece would feature short and simple loops and I felt that a reasonably fast tempo would be suitable, as the rhythm and the notes played were not too complicated.

For the first section, only three notes are used in both violin parts for the first 8 bars: G and F in the first violin; and D in the second violin. The first violin played crotchets and the second violin played a semibreve tied over four bars. I decided to use a minimal range of notes for this section to keep everything simple to start of with. I decided to make the first violin play pizzicato as this thin texture contrasts with some of the later sections which are played arco. The next 4 bars consist of the first violin playing two sets of quaver loops: G, A, D and C; and F, G, A and B. I decided to use them with every second bar having the order of the loops reversed, (i.e.: GADC, FGAB, FGAB, GADC) as it would be more interesting than having the loops played continuously one after the other (i.e. GADC, FGAB, GADC, FGAB) whilst still being minimalist. The second violin played crotchet notes to each “group” of quavers played by the first violin: two D’s for the GADC loop and two C’s for the FGAB loop.

The next 8 bars involve both violins using metamorphosis. I decided to do this as this is a common technique in minimalism for subtly changing the loops. I changed each note by moving it down to the next white note, as this is would make a subtle, yet noticeable change. I also decided to change one set of quavers in the first violin before changing the next set, as this is common in minimalist music; however, every second bar is in retrograde in this piece as described above. This gives: FADC, FGAB, FGAB, FGDC etc. in the first violin. The crotchets in the second violin part change in relation to the first violin, though the notes change every two bars: [CD CC] [CC CD] [CC CC] [CC CC] etc. I decided to do this so that each note would have decreased in pitch to the next white note at the end of the 8 bars whilst one note in a loop in the first violin part was changed in every bar.

Both violins in the next section play arco, contrasting with the pizzicato opening. Originally, this section was played pizzicato as well, however, I changed this so that there is an even balance of arco and pizzicato. The second violin plays a 5 note loop (D, G, F, E and C) compared with 4 note loops in the first violin. I decided to do this as this would incorporate layering. Both violin parts go through metamorphosis again; the notes are lowered to the next white note. I did this so that the loops in the first violin were two notes lower than to start off with, so I could use metamorphosis to change them back. After the loop in the second violin part had completely transposed down, I used phase shifting with at least a quaver rest between the loops. I decided to

do this as this is another common feature of minimalism and I was interested to see what effect it would have on a 5 quaver loop against a 4 quaver loop. For this section, I decided to change both violins' style back to pizzicato so that this section would lead into the next section, where both violin parts go through metamorphosis again; this time two white notes up, so that both parts would be back where they started in terms of the pitch of the loops.

The next section is similar to bars 9-12 except that both violin parts are playing arco and that the second violin is playing minims rather than crotchets. I decided to do this as playing minims would give a smoother texture than crotchets would when playing arco. The five quaver loop appears in the second violin again but requires five bars for it to "return", whereas the first violin part only plays the two loops in four bar phrases. Because of this, I decided to introduce a new idea in the fifth bar where the first violin repeats a note in semiquavers pizzicato. I did this so that the idea did not appear so suddenly: the first violin introduced the idea before the second violin joined in. In the next bar, both violin parts are playing pizzicato, with the second violin part playing a ninth below the first violin part. This fashion continues, except the second violin plays quavers and utilises phase shifting.

In bars 60-61, I decided to return to the original loops because at the end of bar 60, the first violin plays an F and at the start of bar 61, the second violin plays an E. In the loops, the first note in the first loop is G for the first violin and D for the second violin. As these notes are next to each other pitch-wise, I thought this would be a good place to reintroduce the original loops. In bars 69-70, I decided to have patterns of repeating notes played around the note C in both violin parts: F, E, D, B, G, F, G, C. The piece ends on a perfect cadence, closing it.

I decided to call the piece "Ping" due to the pizzicato sections which are abundant throughout the piece. Although the arco sections contradict the title, the piece starts pizzicato and can lead the listener to believe that the entire piece will be pizzicato.

I feel that the piece met the brief as the two violins demonstrated pizzicato and arco throughout the piece, and that the violins showed the range that the violins can play: the lower range in the second violin and the higher range in the first violin. However, the piece may not be suitable to be played during the interval of a concert as the repeated semiquavers build up tension, when music played during the interval should be relaxing.

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