

**tetherball**

**book 1**

**Larry Polansky**

**for percussion ensemble  
or any six musicians  
(beginning to advanced)**

# tetherball

Larry Polansky

*tetherball* is a set of pieces for six musicians, each playing a different percussion instrument (or anything that makes sound). The pieces are of varying difficulty, ranging from a level appropriate to 7-9th graders learning music to very hard. The first two pieces were originally written for the 7-9th grade class at Runnemedede School in Lebanon, New Hampshire. The order of the pieces, except for I and II, is not necessarily the order of difficulty.

The simplest realization is for six players, one percussion instrument each. If non-percussion (pitched) instruments are used, players may start with one pitch each. As the players become more comfortable with the pieces, they may experiment with multiple pitches and sounds for single lines. However, each line should always have a single, uniquely identifiable timbre.

It is possible to play *Tetherball* with more than six players, by rotating into silence for some number of lines, depending on how many extra players are used. For example, with seven performers, one performer sits out for each rotation.

A conductor, or one of the performers, may *call the rotation*. Each performer plays a specific part on hisr instrument until a rotation is called. After each call, at the following start of the six measure pattern, players switch to the next line down (wrapping around to the top from the bottom line), but do not switch instruments. The result is that the composite rhythm remains the same, but the orchestration changes six times. Any number of repeats of an individual line may be taken, and the ensemble may rotate just once or several times through all the parts before stopping. An even simpler way of performing the piece is for players to agree beforehand on the number of repeats for each rotation. Alternatively, players may rotate freely through the six parts, at their own pace, with the unavoidable effect that at times certain lines will be doubled, certain lines left unplayed.

The entire set (or any subset) may be played as one piece, from beginning to end, in any order, with or without pauses, with the number of repeats for each "orchestration" fixed or not. The ensemble can move from one

piece to the next when the original pulse player (part VI) is back on the pulse. If the set is done together, the instrumentation may differ between pieces.

Alternatively, part VI (the pulse) may be omitted at any time, or not used at all in the performance. It may be variably included in a given set of rotations as well.

The different "tetherballs" may be used together in many ways. Two (or more) ensembles may play their different versions of the piece (or parts of it) simultaneously, alternating, spatially separated, etc. Groups may invent their own ways of starting, ending, and recombining the different pieces. Different lines, or sets of lines from one pieces may be combined with lines from another to create new pieces. Performers might write their own pieces using *tetherball* as a model.

If pieces are performed individually (rather than as a set), players might start with a gradual accumulation of parts, in the following way:

- 1) Performer VI: Begin Part VI.
- 2) Performer I: Play the first measure of Part I (or wait six measures —one cycle — first) then wait 5 measures, then play the first two measures, wait four measures, and so on, until the part is complete.
- 3) Performer II: Do the same thing as Performer I, but six measures behind, starting on Part II
- 4) Performers III-V: Do the same thing as Performer II (but on Parts III-V), each performer starting one 6-measure cycle later than the previous.
- 4) Continue in this way until all five performers (I-V) are playing all parts, all measures.

— or in some other system designed by the ensemble.

Even though most of the tempi are "Fast," there are some realizations (especially for non-percussion instruments) which may merit slower or more moderate tempi.

*tetherball XI* ("Parsons Canon") is also, coincidentally, *Four Voice Canon #11*.

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premiere" (I, II, IX) was given by the Moorhead State University New Music Ensemble (2/27/99), directed by Ross Feller, with performers Al Albers, Chris Bolstad, Karl Koopman, Steve Setzepfrandt, Matthew Shmigelsky, and Ross Feller.

## Some "orchestrational ideas" for Tetherball, non-percussion versions

For ensembles of pitched instruments, the performers may "orchestrate" the different pieces in different ways. The general idea is to try and devise a coherent sonic idea, suggested in some way by the piece, associating sounds with "lines" (I-VI) and "instruments" (each performer has one) through the rotations.

The following are some suggestions which might be used as a model for ensembles to devise their own schema. These were made for the performance of several of the pieces in April, 2000, by the New York based Downtown Ensemble, directed by Daniel Goode, and including Peter Zummo, Joseph Kubera, Jim Pugliese, and Margaret Lancaster.

These ideas may be expanded upon, modified, or tailored for the specific ensemble. Numbers in parentheses are particular *Tetherball* pieces for which the idea seemed appropriate, but these are only suggestions, and should not be taken as rules.

- one note for an entire piece (any note, in several octaves perhaps) (I, II, III, VI, VI, X, XI, XII, XIII)
- one note, constant, for each line (that is, whoever plays that line, plays that note) (I, II, III, VI, VI, X, XIII)
- one note per instrument, which moves when the instrument moves (I, II, III, IV, VI, VI, X, XIII)
- 2 notes for an entire piece (either assigned to the line, or the instruments), a 5th, tritone, or, in fact, anything (I, II, X)
- only non-pitched noises on the instruments (one per instrument, which moves with the line) (I, II, III, IV, VI, VIII, X, XI)
- odd lines, play noises, even lines, play pitch (or every other instrument plays a noise, or a pitch) (I, II, X)
- one six part chord, with each note assigned to a line. One suggestion would be a dom9th, #11 (e.g. C-E-G-Bb-D-F#), but any six part chord is fine. The notes of the chord might be associated with the line, or the instruments (that is, they might move through the lines, or through the timbres, staying fixed to a line) (I, II, III, VI, X, XI, XII, XIII)
- harmonic series spread from low to high or high to low (per instrument or per line) (I, II, III, IV, VI, VIII, X, XI)
- some homogenous, non-pitched sound (tapping on the instruments) (I, II, III, IV, V, VI)

- close semitone, or even better, smaller than semitone, clusters (that is, a very small range of notes for the instruments), which might move with the instruments, or with the lines. Instruments that are able can play clusters themselves (III)
- extreme high and/or low notes (either associated with instruments or lines) (IX, X, XI, XII, XIII)
- extreme loud and/or soft notes (either associated with instruments or lines) (IX, X, XI, XII, XIII)
- combination of the above, or one or the other (IX, X)
- pick pitches from a simple, small, limited pitch scale or gamut (a pentatonic, a collection of a few notes, in any tuning system) — notes chosen freely from that scale while the piece is played (IX, X)
- loud chords, clusters, or multiphonic sounds (IX, X)
- ascending or descending pitch pattern from line VI through line I (staying fixed with the lines) (IX, X)
- some large six part chord, fixed with the lines (I, II, IV, VI, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII)
- each line one note, all six notes as close to (far apart from) each other as possible (I, II, IX, X, XI, XII)
- some simple melody, or melodic fragment associated with each part, but the same melody, or general melody (XI)
- some simple improvisational gamut (pentatonic scale, four note mode, etc.) to be used for any note (X, XI)

LP

Lebanon, NH/Sabbathday Lake, ME

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# I

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. Each staff begins with a common time signature (C) and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The music is written in a rhythmic style with various note values and rests. Staff I features a sequence of quarter notes with accents, followed by a dotted quarter note. Staff II contains eighth notes and quarter notes, some with accents. Staff III has a pattern of quarter notes and eighth notes, with accents on the first and third notes of each measure. Staff IV shows a mix of quarter and eighth notes, with some measures containing rests. Staff V is primarily composed of quarter notes and dotted quarter notes. Staff VI features a continuous eighth-note pattern throughout the piece. The score concludes with a double bar line on each staff.

Larry Polansky  
for the Runnemede School  
7-9th graders  
Oct., 1998

# II

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, all in common time (C). The tempo is marked "Fast".

- Staff I:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.
- Staff II:** Features a simpler rhythmic pattern of quarter notes and quarter rests, also with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.
- Staff III:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.
- Staff IV:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.
- Staff V:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.
- Staff VI:** Features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and quarter notes with accents (>) above them. The notes are primarily G4, A4, and B4.

There are several horizontal lines drawn across the staves, likely indicating phrasing or breath marks. The score concludes with a double bar line.



# III

Fast

(as fast as possible)

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, all in common time (C).  
- **Staff I:** Contains whole rests for the first four measures, followed by two half notes in the fifth measure.  
- **Staff II:** Contains whole rests for the first four measures, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet in the fifth measure, and then a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the sixth and seventh measures.  
- **Staff III:** Contains whole rests for the first four measures, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet in the fifth measure, and then a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the sixth and seventh measures. A bracket labeled "7:4" spans the triplet and the first two notes of the sixth measure.  
- **Staff IV:** Contains whole rests for the first four measures, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet in the fifth measure, and then a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the sixth and seventh measures. A bracket labeled "6" spans the triplet and the first two notes of the sixth measure.  
- **Staff V:** Contains whole rests for the first four measures, followed by a sixteenth-note triplet in the fifth measure, and then a continuous sixteenth-note pattern in the sixth and seventh measures. A bracket labeled "5:4" spans the triplet and the first two notes of the sixth measure.  
- **Staff VI:** Contains a continuous sixteenth-note pattern throughout all seven measures. Accents (>) are placed above the first note of each measure.

Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) at the beginning of the rhythmic sections in staves II, III, IV, and V. A crescendo hairpin is shown under the sixteenth-note patterns in staves II, III, IV, and V.

# IV

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, all in common time (C).  
Staff I: Features a series of rests followed by two measures with a half note and a quarter note, each marked with a double accent (>>).  
Staff II: Features a series of rests followed by six measures of eighth-note triplets, each marked with an accent (>).  
Staff III: Features a series of rests followed by six measures of eighth-note quintuplets, each marked with an accent (>).  
Staff IV: Features a series of rests followed by six measures of eighth-note sextuplets, each marked with an accent (>).  
Staff V: Features a series of eighth-note septuplets, each marked with an accent (>).  
Staff VI: Features a continuous eighth-note pattern throughout the piece, marked with an accent (>).

# V

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, in common time (C). The tempo is marked "Fast".

- Staff I:** Features a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some rests. It includes two long horizontal lines with a circled cross (∅) at each end, spanning across the staff.
- Staff II:** Contains a series of eighth notes with accents (>) and slurs. Many notes are grouped with a bracket and the number 7, indicating a seven-finger fingering.
- Staff III:** Shows a sequence of eighth notes with accents (>) and slurs, continuing the rhythmic complexity.
- Staff IV:** Features eighth notes with accents (>) and slurs. Several groups of notes are marked with a bracket and the number 5, indicating a five-finger fingering.
- Staff V:** Contains eighth notes with accents (>) and slurs. Many notes are grouped with a bracket and the number 3, indicating a three-finger fingering. A single note is marked with a bracket and the number 5.
- Staff VI:** Shows a sequence of eighth notes with accents (>) and slurs, providing a steady rhythmic foundation.

# VI

(a, b, c, d, e, f)

gruppetti

Fast

a

b

c

d

e

f

relative prime      superparticular      relative prime      relative prime      superparticular      superparticular

*pp, ff*

Six different pieces (a-f), each measure repeated six times, played either very loud or very soft.  
 Or: VI may be treated as one piece, and read right to left. Or: recombine in any way.  
 Or: mix dynamics (very loud and very soft) in any version.

# VII

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, all in common time (C). Each staff begins with a C-clef and a common time signature. The music is written in a single melodic line across the staves. Staff I features a sequence of eighth notes with accents, starting with a quarter rest. Staff II uses a 7-finger fingering for groups of seven eighth notes. Staff III uses a 5:3 fingering for groups of five eighth notes. Staff IV uses a 5-finger fingering for groups of five eighth notes. Staff V uses a 3-finger fingering for groups of three eighth notes. Staff VI consists of a continuous eighth-note pattern. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

# VIII

## hocket, nothing in common

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. Each staff begins with a common time signature (C).  
- Staff I: Features a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes with rests. It includes four triplet markings (indicated by a '3' and a bracket) under the eighth notes in measures 4, 5, 6, and 7.  
- Staff II: Features a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes with rests.  
- Staff III: Features a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes with rests. It includes six triplet markings (indicated by a '3' and a bracket) under the eighth notes in measures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.  
- Staff IV: Features a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes with rests. It includes five quintuplet markings (indicated by a '5' and a bracket) under the eighth notes in measures 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.  
- Staff V: Features a sequence of eighth notes and quarter notes with rests.  
- Staff VI: Features a sequence of eighth notes with accents (>) above each note in every measure.

quiet or loud

# IX haiku

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, arranged vertically. Each staff begins with a common time signature (C).  
- Staff I: Features a sequence of notes including a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '5' below it, followed by rests and eighth notes.  
- Staff II: Contains rests, eighth notes, and a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '5' below it.  
- Staff III: Shows eighth notes, rests, and a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below it.  
- Staff IV: Includes rests, eighth notes, and a triplet of eighth notes marked with a '3' below it.  
- Staff V: Displays eighth notes, rests, and two triplet markings, each with a '3' below it.  
- Staff VI: Consists of a continuous eighth-note pattern with an accent (>) above each note.

(This piece might be played very quietly, or very loudly.)

# X rotations

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI, arranged vertically. Each staff begins with a common time signature (C) and a treble clef. The music is written in a single melodic line per staff. Staves I through V feature a complex rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes, with numerous triplet markings indicated by a '3' and a horizontal line below the notes. Staff VI is distinguished by a continuous, rapid sixteenth-note pattern throughout its duration. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign at the end of each staff.



# XI

## Four Voice Canon #11: Parsons Canon

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C).  
- Staff I: Starts with a dynamic accent (>) and contains a continuous eighth-note pattern.  
- Staff II: Starts with a whole rest, then enters with a dynamic accent (>) and contains eighth notes with fingerings of 5 and 5.  
- Staff III: Starts with a whole rest, then enters with a dynamic accent (>) and contains eighth notes with fingerings of 6 and 6.  
- Staff IV: Starts with a whole rest, then enters with a dynamic accent (>) and contains eighth notes with fingerings of 6 and 6.  
- Staff V: Starts with a whole rest, then enters with a dynamic accent (>) and contains eighth notes with fingerings of 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, 6, and 3.  
- Staff VI: Starts with a dynamic accent (>) and contains a continuous eighth-note pattern.

# XII coordination

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. Each staff begins with a common time signature 'C'. The music is written in a single melodic line per staff. The notation includes various rhythmic values such as eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped with slurs and marked with a '5' underneath, indicating a quintuplet. Accents (>) are placed above many notes. The score is divided into six measures. A diagonal slash is drawn through the final measure of each staff, indicating a rotation point. The notes after the slash in the final measure are accented.

Only play notes after slash (starting with accented note) in final measure immediately before a rotation.  
Other times rest.

**XIII**  
**wear a helmet!**

Fast

The musical score consists of two staves, labeled 'I' and 'VI'. Both staves are in the key of C major and 4/4 time. The 'I' staff features a melodic line with eighth-note patterns and accents, with fret numbers 6 and 7 indicated below the notes. The 'VI' staff features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes, also with accents. The piece concludes with a double bar line.

Each different note a different part.

Feb. - March, 1999

# XIV roll call

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I, II, II, V, V, and VI from top to bottom. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The music is written in a rhythmic style with eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in beams. Above many notes are 'x' symbols, indicating where a call should be made. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines, with some measures containing rests or specific rhythmic patterns. The overall tempo is marked as 'Fast'.

For the "x" noteheads:

- 1) Say your own name, or
- 2) say somebody else's name (same all the way through), or
- 3) say one name for each line (name associated with the line), or
- 4) any of the above, but some word of your choice instead of names.
- 5) *Alternate*: Don't play at all, just say your name, someone else's, or a word — rotating or not — anywhere in the six measures (Except for Part VI, which should always do the pulse).

Larry Polansky  
Mexico/Lebanon, 5/1/01

# XIVa name hoquet

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. Staves I through V are in common time (C) and feature a sequence of notes and rests, with some notes beamed together. Staff VI is also in common time and features a continuous eighth-note pattern with accents (>) above every eighth note. The score is divided into five measures by vertical bar lines.

As in XIV (names, words): all the options.  
Try to use just one beat for each name/word.

Larry Polansky  
Mexico/Lebanon, 5/1/01

# XIVb

## DIY

### Variations on XIV (names, words, rotation):

- Keep part VI, but it might be vocal;
- Use your own names, names of other musicians, any names, or words (as in XIV, XIVa);
- Don't play at all, but say/sing a name/word **once** per line, in some specific place, rotating in the various ways suggest by XIV, keeping the word/name with a line, or specific place/rhythm with each part;
- or: say/sing the word/names **more than once**, in any of the ways above;
- or: make a simple ostinato for each word/name/part, rotating words/names through the different ostinati, or rotating the ostinati through the different word/names (perhaps use rhythm of the word/names themselves as the basic ostinati); for example, the ostinati or the words could be associated with the line, or the player;
- or: something like the above, always with the idea of rotation of something through something (something changes, something stays the same);
- some combination, variation of the above.

LP  
Mexico/Lebanon, 5/1/01

# XV

Fast

The musical score consists of six staves, labeled I through VI. All staves are in common time (C).  
- **Staff I:** Features a steady eighth-note pattern throughout. The final measure contains six sixteenth-note groups, each with an accent (>) and a slur.  
- **Staff II:** Starts with a whole rest. From the second measure, it features eighth-note patterns with fingerings: 3-3-3-3, 5-5-5-5, and 6-6-6-6.  
- **Staff III:** Starts with a whole rest. From the second measure, it features eighth-note patterns with fingerings: 3-3-3-3, 5-5-5-5, and 6-6-6-6.  
- **Staff IV:** Starts with a whole rest. From the second measure, it features eighth-note patterns with fingerings: 5-5-5-5 and 6-6-6-6.  
- **Staff V:** Starts with a whole rest. From the second measure, it features eighth-note patterns with fingerings: 5-5-5-5 and 6-6-6-6.  
- **Staff VI:** Features a steady eighth-note pattern throughout, with an accent (>) over each eighth note.

Larry Polansky  
Mexico/Lebanon, 5/1/01

# XVI

## Word Problems

In general, keep Part 6 as the pulse.

- a. Part 1 plays one event, Part 2, two events, Part 3, three events, etc. Any variation of that idea.
- b. Pick another player for each rotation, and play as *close* (or as *far*) as possible before, after, or at the same time as that player. Alternatively, each player picks some other player for the *entire* piece. Perhaps establish some system for which player will play in response to another player, perhaps changing over the different rotations.
- c. For a given part, play

*ff, f, mf, mp, p.*

Keep these dynamics per player or per part. Use this in conjunction with other pieces from the set, or improvise.

- d. For any of the above, or for any of the existing tetherballs, some players rotate in one "direction," some in another.
- e. One (or more) part(s) is the conductor. Rotate through. The conductor(s) may alter or shape, in performance, any of the existing tetherballs, or one of your own.
- f. Write 5 rhythmic patterns of your own, make your own tetherballs.
- g. Change the pulse (a different rhythm, a different idea).



# XVIIa

just play the notes

Fast

The musical score consists of three staves, each with a common time signature (C).  
Staff I & II: Features a complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including triplets (3), quintuplets (5), and septuplets (7).  
Staff IV & V: Features a similar complex rhythmic pattern with eighth and sixteenth notes, including triplets (3) and quintuplets (5).  
Staff VI: Features a simpler rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

III tacet, or play either part.

LP, Mexico/Lebanon  
5/9/01

# XVIIb

Fast

The musical score for XVIIb consists of three staves, each in common time (C).  
Staff I & II: Features a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns and fingerings (3, 5, 3, 3, 7, 9). Dynamics include *ff* decresc., (decresc.), (decresc.), and *mp*.  
Staff IV & V: Features a melodic line with various rhythmic patterns and fingerings (9, 7, 3, 3, 5, 3). Dynamics include *mp* cresc., (cresc.), (cresc.), and *ff*.  
Staff VI: Features a rhythmic line with accents (>) above each note.

III tacet, or choose a line

LP, Mexico/Lebanon  
5/1/01

XVIIc: As XVIIa or b, but for every rotation, pick one of the two parts.

XVIIId: Write two parts of your own, and play them as in a, b, c.