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 Runnemede 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*.

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)
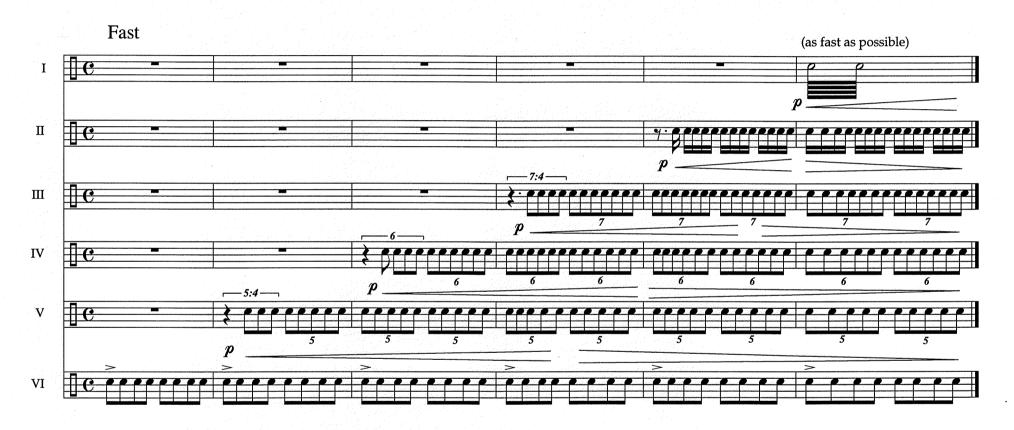- some homogenous, non-pitched sound (tapping on the instruments) (I, II, III, IV, V, VI)

- 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)
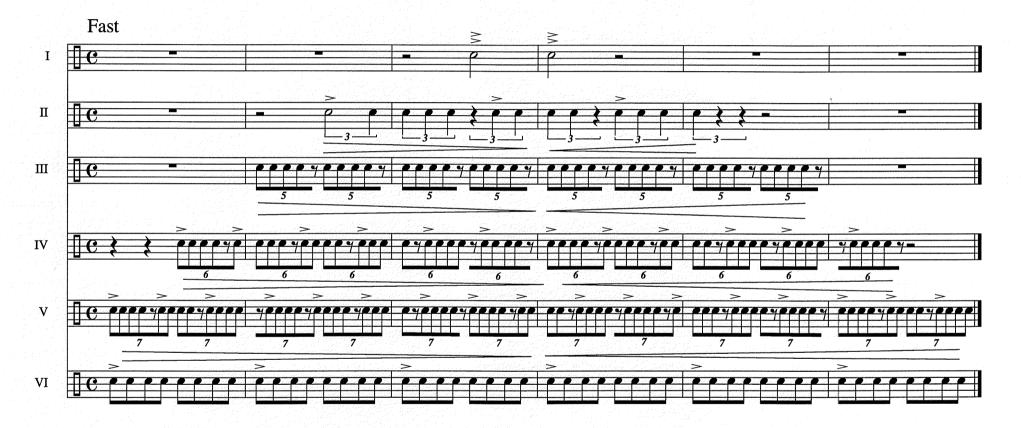

LP
Lebanon, NH/Sabbathday Lake, ME
November 3, 1998
(rev. 4/2/; 8/31/99; 3/1/00; 5/9/01)

I

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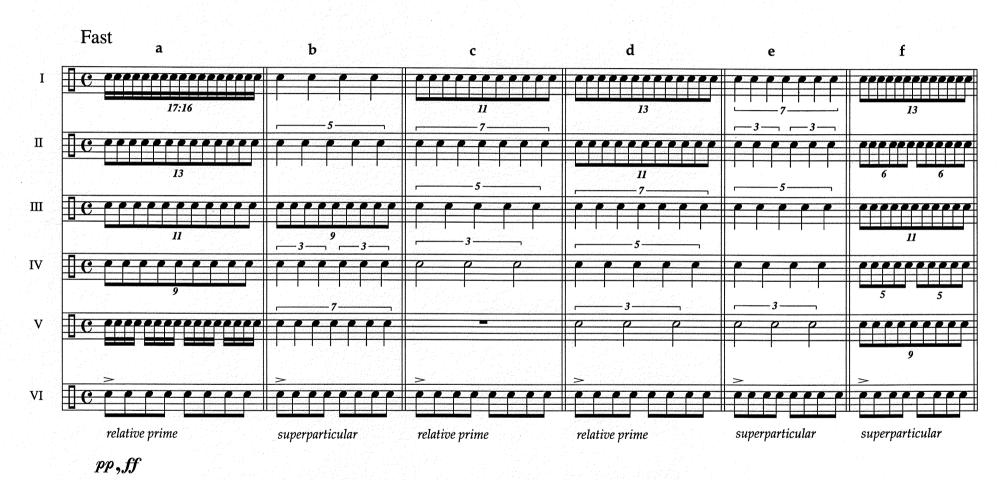for the Runnemede School
7-9th graders
Oct., 1998

II

III

IV

V

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

Fast

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

VIII

hocket, nothing in common

Fast

quiet or loud

rev. 4/25/01

IX

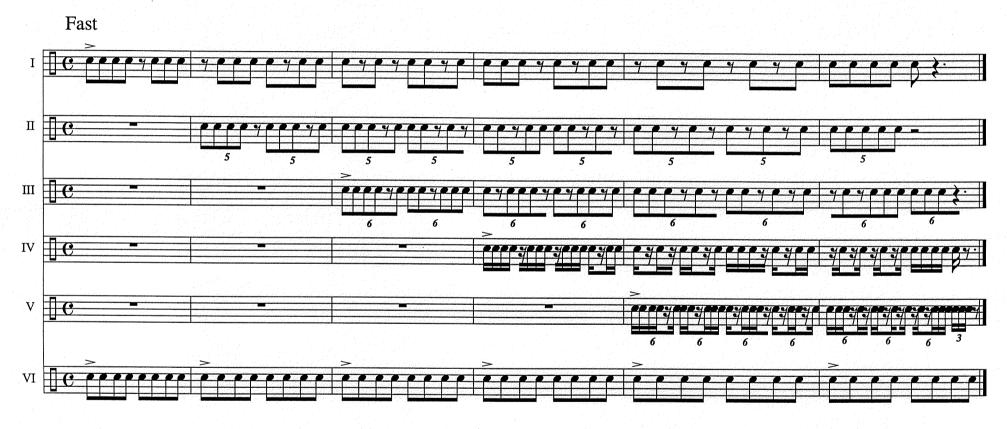## haiku

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

X

rotations

XI

Four Voice Canon #11: Parsons Canon

XII
coordination

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

Feb.-March, 1999

XIII
wear a helmet!

Each different note a different part.

Feb. - March, 1999

XIV
roll call

Fast

I

II

II

V

V

/I

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 meausres (Except for Part VI, which should always do the pulse).

XIVa
name hocket

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.

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XV

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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.
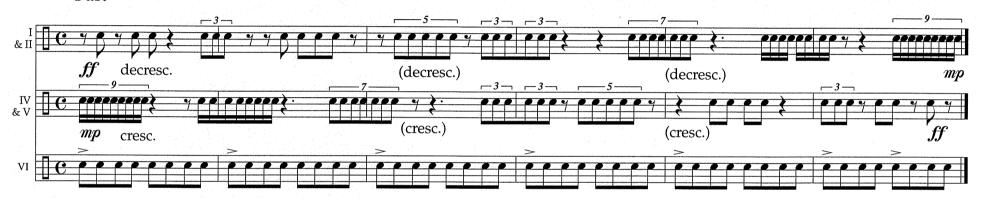g. Change the pulse (a different rhythm, a different idea).

LP
Mexico/Lebanon, 5/1/01

XVIIa
just play the notes

Fast

III tacet, or play either part.

LP, Mexico/Lebanon
5/9/01

XVIIb

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