Creating Words With Music

Allison McIntosh
Writing Music!

• Every composer has a different process
• Every medium is approached a little differently
• Sometimes ideas flow, sometimes they don’t
• Editing is key!
Classical Music, pre-1850s:

• All about form and convention
• Small and large forms
• Music theory “rules”
Rondo Form

A  B  A  C  A  D  A

Phrase Model for Harmony

Tonic (I chord)  –  Predominant (ii, IV)  –  Dominant (V)  –  Tonic (I)
stable  –  variation  –  tension  –  stable
Classical Music, 1850-today

• (Almost) anything goes!
• Form and harmony can be a starting place
• Rules or no rules at all
• Experimental, traditional, everything in between
Different Types of Aleatoric Music

• Chance Music – random processes create a fixed score
• Improvisation
• Mobile form
• Graphic notation
Mobile Form

• Composer provides different elements
• Performer chooses the order or timing
• Morton Feldman, *Intermission VI*
Intermission 6 (for 1 or 2 Pianos)  
Morton Feldman (1955)

Here is the score for Intermission 6. The composition begins with any sound and proceeds to any other. With a minimum of attack, hold each sound until barely audible. Grace notes are not played too quickly. All sounds are to be

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Mobile Form Writing Exercise

• Write “snippets,” spread out across your page
  – As many as you want
  – Each snippet as long or short as you want
  – Leave some space around them

• Find someone to trade with

• Create a “performance” of these snippets
  – Draw lines between or number the snippets to choose form
  – Repeat different ones, if you wish

• Share?

Brian Eno, *Music for Airports*, 1978
Graphic Scores

• Untraditional notation
• Precise and technical or very vague and artistic
• Performer interpretation

Using Graphic “Scores” as Drafting

• Sketching form of piece through lines/shape
• Represent different elements

Kaija Saariaho, *Verblendungen*, 1987
POLAR NIGHT
bass trombone + piano

interlude
harmonic
adventure!
solo/accomp
S-off
thematic

slowly losing light
very dark!
1 minute

Stillness
slow

light re-emerges

rising insanity!

regain energy
theme from beginning but
subdued, changed

calm OR triumph?
Sketching Exercise

• Make your own “graphic score” sketch for a piece of writing
• Think of 1-3 elements
  – Pacing, intensity, emotion, language, etc.
• Represent those elements through line or shape
• Sketch how they change throughout time
• Add in words and/or phrases that occur to you when sketching

Closing Questions, Comments?