



Music for 18 Musicians (excerpt) by Steve Reich

NOTES FROM THE ARRANGER

By Iain Farrington

Available parts:

Flutes	Euphoniums	Violins
Oboes	Tenor Horns	Violas
Clarinets	Trombone	Cellos
Alto Saxophones	Tuba	Double Basses
Bassoons	Bass in Eb	Piano
Trumpets	Timpani	
Horns	Percussion	

For Grade 4/5 only

Universal notes for all instrumental arrangements:

All parts have been designed to enable mixed-ability groups to perform together. A certain amount of simplification has been required to adapt the pieces for mixed-ability. A successful rendering of each piece would require the essential melodic material and bass line which are often in the Grades 4/5 parts, especially in the piano.

There are scores for each difficulty level plus three other scores for each piece:

1. Grouped according to ability
2. Grouped according to instrument type
3. 'Short score' in C, grouped according to ability

There are three ability levels – beginner, intermediate (Grades 1-3) and Grades 4-5.

- Flute parts can be played by the violins
- Oboe parts can be played by the flutes and violins
- Trumpet parts (in Bb) can be played by the clarinets
- Violin parts can be played by the flutes (except when in the lowest register)
- The 'percussion' part is a beginner part and can be played on any drum. It adds a simple rhythm layer to each piece. Timpani and full percussion parts are for intermediate or Grades 4/5

Notes from an Expert

By Micaela Haslam

Tips to get playing

- For ease of reading and counting, this arrangement is in the time signature of 3/4. The original time signature is 3/2 (6 crotchet beats in each bar).
- Conductor - rather than beat 3 crotchets per bar, I would recommend giving an audible beat (e.g. with a wood block or a hand-held drum), giving a slight accent every other bar (every six beats). This will help get the right “feel” of the piece, and encourage the players to listen and feel the pulse, rather than just watch a conductor.
- The vibraphone part should always be played strongly, so that everyone in the ensemble can hear it.
- Whenever the vibraphone plays in Music for 18 Musicians, it is a warning cue for something to change:
- Look at the top flute part at figure A (a short one-bar pattern).
When the vibraphone plays at figure B, that short figure gets longer (from bar 21, now a three-bar pattern with a bar’s rest).
At letter C, the vibraphone cues another lengthening of that pattern (now 7 bars long with a bar’s rest – see oboe part etc from bar 33).
The cue at letter D heralds the arrival of the lovely bass notes from bar 57.
The vibraphone cues from G onwards play this whole process in reverse (the bass line goes back up, then the melodic patterns get shorter).
- To practise, play the repeats as written in the arrangement. When the ensemble is more familiar with the piece, the sections immediately preceding each vibraphone cue can be repeated a few more times, the whole ensemble moving on only when the vibraphone player chooses to play.
- People doubling the vibraphone cues (e.g. piano/glock) need to stay in touch – perhaps one of those players could raise a hand or a beater at the beginning of the bar before each vibraphone cue to show when to play the cue - another good way to ensure that all the players stay in touch with each other.
- Finally, don’t forget to add some maracas (or a shaker) – playing constant quavers as evenly as possible throughout.

Some more fun facts about the piece

- It is called Music for 18 Musicians because 18 is the smallest number of musicians you need in order to play the piece, several musicians having to swap and play 2 or more instruments.
- It is often played with 19 musicians – for that reason (it’s easier!)
- The piece is based on 11 “pulsed” chords, each presented twice at the beginning of the piece. These are then developed into 11 sections (actually, there are 12 because Reich wrote sections 3a and 3b).
- The piece should never be conducted – it progresses by aural and visual cues – often from the vibraphone and the 1st clarinet, but not always.
- At one point in the piece, you need to have 3 people all playing the same marimba – one person on the wrong side of the instrument.

- Throughout the piece, at least one pair of pianos, marimbas and/or xylophones take turns to play “pulsed” chords – one person playing on the beat, and their opposite number playing off the beat (very difficult to do!)
- The whole piece takes 55-60 minutes to perform.
- In 2014, Synergy Vocals performed the piece with London Sinfonietta on the West Holts stage at Glastonbury; the previous year with Ensemble Modern and Steve Reich at a rock festival in Gdansk, just after Kings of Leon and Jonny Greenwood. Steve Reich always wanted to be in a rock band!
- When Steve Reich is in the ensemble, he always plays Piano 4.

Most importantly – have fun!

Background

Micaela was a member of the BBC Singers for 22 years. She first worked with Steve Reich in 1996. In 1997, he invited Micaela and her vocal ensemble, Synergy Vocals, to work on the new score of Music for 18 Musicians with Ensemble Modern in Frankfurt. This was the first time that a full score and individual parts had been published, 21 years after the work’s premiere. Steve Reich says that she knows Music for 18 Musicians better than he does!