

## **Breathing, Beating, Blinking for Large Ensemble**

by Adam Overton

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for Conductor and 1 or more of each of the following instruments: Piccolo/Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Trumpet, Percussion (Bass Drum, Snare Drum, Suspended Cymbal), Piano, Violin, Viola, 'Cello, and Double Bass

**Breathing, Beating, Blinking for Large Ensemble** is a series of sonic tableaux that depict the internal activity of the performers' bodies. The piece utilizes the performers' breaths, blinks and heartbeats to determine tempo, rhythmic placement, and duration of each of the movements. The conductor serves to start and stop movements while simultaneously serving as an additional percussionist. It is important to point out that besides depicting the pulse, breath and blinks, the piece also utilizes and represents the limits of the performers' minds and attention. Some of the instructions are purposefully hard to execute, for instance where counting or checking the pulse is involved, and there may be a tendency to occasionally lose track of these. While performers should try to execute the piece as correctly as possible, they should also not be disturbed by these occasional lapses since the timing of each can be considered a unique, biological process.

### **Rules:**

The conductor will indicate the beginning and ending of each movement. When beginning movements, the performers should execute their instructions as soon as possible after the cue, though it is quite likely not everyone will enter in unison due to differences in pulses, blinks, etc. When ending movements, everyone must stop sharply and immediately when given the cutoff by the conductor.

Movements may require the performers to observe their own or others' Breaths, Blinks, or Pulse. It is very important that the performers should try only to *observe these processes without affecting them*. Do not try to speed up, slow down, halt or begin, or otherwise consciously control any of these bodily processes.

On each player's part, a label in brackets at the top (e.g. [Breaths, Blinks] or [Pulse]) will indicate which processes will need to be followed during that particular movement.

It should be assumed that the *Quarter Note is equal to the Pulse* ( $q = \text{Pulse}$ ) whenever one is instructed to play something in rhythm with the HeartBeat.

If you lose track of your pulse, do not fake your part. Stop what you are doing and relocate the pulse before starting again. If you are counting something and lose track of what count you were on, start again wherever you believe you left off.

A *Complete Breath* should be considered the combination of an inhale followed by an exhale.

A "monkey-mind action" is an instruction to be executed whenever one has realized their mind has wandered or that they have lost track of some attention-based process.

Performers will sometimes be asked to choose a "Number (or Tone, or String, or Tetrad) of Significance" within a certain range. A "Number (or Tone, or String, or Tetrad) of Significance" is one that seems to stick out in your mind or seems more important than the rest - a kind of superstition. Performers should choose a "Number (or Tone, or String, or Tetrad) of Significance" without trying to consciously affect the music, and without telling anyone else what they've chosen.

Performers should try to balance their sound within the ensemble so that no sound is any louder or softer than another, unless otherwise specified.

### **Checking the Pulse:**

Find the easiest way to check your pulse. The two main ways include touching the neck near the esophagus with your first and middle fingers, or touching either of your wrists about an inch away from the base of your palm with the same two fingers. Here are my suggestions for each instrument:

*Woodwinds and Brass* are perhaps best off using the pulse from the wrist, where it is generally easier to maintain contact with the pulse while playing. Players may also check on the neck if they find it convenient, though when

blowing through their instrument the neck tends to tense and often obscures the pulse.

*Piccolo/Flute* - Hold your instrument with your left hand as normal, meanwhile checking the pulse on your left wrist with your right hand.

*Oboe, Clarinet, Trumpet* - Hold your instrument with your right hand as usual, meanwhile using your left hand to check the pulse of your right wrist.

*Percussion, Piano* - Always check your pulse on the neck rather than the wrist.

*Violin, Viola* - Hold your instrument normally with the left hand while finding the pulse on your neck with your right hand. During this piece you will not have to bow and check your pulse at the same time.

*Cello and Double Bass* - If asked to bow, use the right hand to bow normally, and your left hand to check your pulse on the neck. Vice versa if instructed to pluck the strings with your left hand.

Note that checking the pulse is not required for every instrument during every movement.