Phaser

My aim in constructing this piece was to combine the principles of open-repetition

music, in which the freedom to choose the speed at which the score is moved

through is given to performers, resulting in it unfolding in a different way each time it

is played, with that of process-based music, which allows for more elaborate and

complex musical events to be planned for at the compositional stage. This, I

anticipated, would result in a piece which is engaging for performers due to the input

and decision making it requires without requiring me to surrender the possibility of

implementing advanced rhythmic concepts. It was vital that the piece contain a

number of tempo modulations, and from referring to pieces such as Helmut

Lachenmann's *Salut für Caudwell* (1977) and Elliot Carter's *String Quartet No. 1*

(1951), I became aware that achieving such a feat with more than one performer

requires strictly notated passages. In tandem with this, I wished to allow for the

rhythmic complexity that occurs in a pieces such as Terry Riley's *In C*, Simeon ten

Holt's *Canto Ostinato* Steve Gisby's *Coming Home* (2010). The compositional

process that is the basis of Gisby's piece is basic, involving the presentation of every

possible permutation of a group of four unpitched semiquavers, but the piece

generates interest as a result of the choices made by performers as they move

through its 31 cells at different speeds. I set myself a similar goal: to create

complexity from simplicity. I decided to refer to the process-based music of Steve

Reich, which contains several examples of this aim being met, and found *Clapping*

Music (1972) to be most applicable to my needs due to its absence of emphasis on

pitch. The potential for rhythmic variation that the phasing process allows is vast, but

I felt that offsetting one voice against a static pattern, as in *Clapping Music*, would

not generate enough musical interest for the larger-scale piece that I had in mind, and instead decided on allowing three separate processes to occur simultaneously. All three parts of my score begin with the same four-beat pattern:
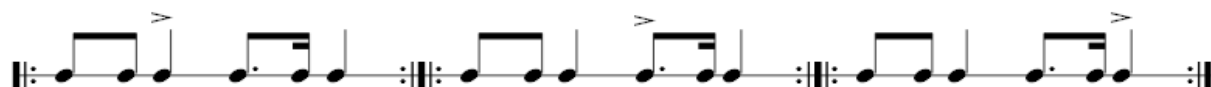

In the upper voice, each individual note is in turn phased through the semiquavers that surround it:

In the middle voice, the whole pattern is phased by one semiquaver:

The lower voice provides metric grounding for the ensemble, and as such is only subject to a looser process of accent variation:

Each of these processes is followed through to completion, although with a number of diversions and interruptions. I decided that all areas not crucial to the instances of tempo modulation would be subject to open repetition, and it was subsequently necessary to explore ways of moving between these and my synchronised sections. I found my solution in the works composed by Philip Glass for his own ensemble in the 1970s, which contain a similar use of partly open repetition. In *Music with*

Changing Parts (1970) and *Music in Twelve Parts* (1974) in particular, the 'figures' which make up each of the pieces are repeated an indefinite number of times until a pre-determined member of the ensemble gives a signal, at which point the figure is to be played twice more before the players move on together.[1] I have followed each of my open repetition sections – which are boxed so as to separate them from the rest of the score – with a 'pivot' bar, which serves as the point of reconfiguration for the group. These bars are to be repeated until all members of the ensemble have reached it. Once this has happened, the 'leader', whom I have pre designated as the upper voice, gives a clear nod to indicate that three more repetitions are to be given before moving on in synchronicity.

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[1] Michael Riesman, 'Foreword', in Tristian Evans, *Shared Meanings in the Film Music of Philip Glass: Music, Multimedia and Postminimalism* (New York: Routledge, 2015), p. xi.

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