

Breathing Instructions

Premise

Three years ago, I started using breathing as time regulator. In my first compositional attempts, breathing was conceived either as a tool to determine the duration of the notes or as a segment of time in which players have to play one or sets of sounds. What interested me in this compositional strategy was the fact that players are brought to play according to a subjective regulator, namely their breath, so that the emerging combinations of sounds between musicians are not under composer's control, but rather they change according to the differences in players' breathings. As composer and pianist, I was mainly fascinated by using breathing patterns with instruments that do not necessarily need breathing to produce sounds; my first pieces shared in fact similarities with works such as *Streichquartett* (1973) by Heinz Holliger and *Found Harmonies* by Malcolm Goldstein (2011), in which string players have to match up-bow and down-bow to their breathing phases, the 2nd and 3rd piece of *Four Meditations for Orchestra* (1996) by Oliveros, in which the duration of notes of unspecified instruments correspond to the length of players' breathing, and *Mind is Moving (I)* by Michael Pisaro (1995), where silences last different amounts of guitarist's breaths. This initial stage of my work was crucial for the compositional practice I am currently undertaking. My recent compositional works are grounded on the employment of explicit instructions that bring players to play and interact in unfamiliar ways, according to constraints on their breathing.

Performance Notes

Breathing Instructions is a series of 25 text scores that aim to push players to behave, interact between each other and engage with their breathing in unpredictable, unfamiliar, and occasionally exaggerated ways. The pieces are open to professional and non-professional musicians, some of them involve the use of musical instruments (when specified), while others require just the use of player's breath. The instructions are flexible, adaptable to a vast range of musical situations and the number of players is open, preferably from 7 to 20 performers.

Constraints imposed by the instructions foster the emergence of circumstances of various kinds, some of them stimulate the intersubjective dimension, engagement between performers, with the audience or with the performance space, others tend to underscore the theatrical aspects of breathing, the possibility of failure, or decision-making processes. It is important to consider that breathing is always used as regulator, namely a tool that coordinates actions, relationships, contingencies and may overturn the situations that usually emerge within a conventional musical context, therefore, the whole temporal dimension of the performance depends on the way players breathe.

In the last page of the document, there is a list of categories that identify a set of key aspects tied to breathing, composition and performance. Categories are in bold, while the pieces are in italics. The way I grouped the pieces within these aforementioned categories may be useful for performers, in order to adopt the most appropriate approach for each piece. All the pieces, except for two, fall into more than one category. However, categories remain open and work just as indicative means, they can easily be mixed, or contradicted by the further experience of the players.

Breathing Instructions

1- Blow I

Breathe. Exhale longer than the other players.

2- Blow II

Breathe. Exhale shorter than the other players.

3- A Bit Longer than Before

Breathe continuously. Every time you breathe, exhale for a bit longer than before. Stop when you cannot handle it anymore.

4- Nose

Take a wind instrument and play C major scale through the nose.

5- Without I

Take a wind instrument and play a C as many times as possible within the same breath.

6- Without II

Take a wind instrument.

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Play a C two times without taking a breath.

III- Play a C three times without taking a breath.

IV- Play a C four times without taking a breath.

V- Play a C five times without taking a breath.

VI- Play a C six times without taking a breath.

VII- Play a C seven times without taking a breath.

etc.

7- Unison Maybe

Perform 5 short breaths in 10 seconds. If you and another player exhale exactly at the same time, start again from the 1st breath. Reactions should be immediate, even if the other does not start from the 1st breath. It does not matter if the other does not start again from the 1st breath.

8- Inhalation I

Take a wind instrument. Play one note but instead of exhaling/blowing, inhale through the mouth.

9- **Inhalation II**

Take a wind instrument. Choose a note and repeat it continuously. Alternate blowing and inhaling through the mouth.

10- **Inhalation III**

Synchronise your breathing with the other players. Inhale louder than the other players, exhale softer than the other players.

11- **Inhalation IV**

Take a wind instrument and play it. When you take a breath, inhale through the nose. Exhale as long as possible. Your inhalation should be longer than your blowing.

12- **From the Soundscape I**

Take a wind instrument. Choose a sequence of 4 notes and play it regularly and slowly. Every time you hear an external sound from the soundscape, start the sequence from the beginning. You can take a breath before starting again, however, remember that the first player to complete the sequence wins.

13- **From the Soundscape II**

Take a wind instrument. Choose a sequence of 4 notes and play it regularly and slowly. Every time you hear an external sound from the soundscape, stop immediately and hold your breath as long as you can. Start again from the point where you stopped only when you hear another sound.

14- **Each Sound**

Take a wind instrument. Choose a sequence of 4 notes and play it regularly and slowly. Hold your breath as long as you can between each note.

15- **You or the Others**

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Breathe normally.

II- Try to match your breathing to another player's breathing without making it clear to him/her. If s/he figures it out, change player. Feel free to move throughout the performance space.

16- **What is '?**

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

Breathe audibly and

I- Hold the breath as long as you can

II- Hold the breath as long as you hear a sound

III- Hold the breath as long as you hear someone breathing

Feel free to move throughout the performance space.

17- **Domino**

Performer 'x' starts inhaling or exhaling. He can choose if s/he wants to inhale or exhale.

Performer 'y' next to him/her should do the opposite of what performer 'x' just did.

Performer 'z', next to performer 'y', should do the opposite of what performer 'y' just did, etc.

18- **Ratio**

Breathe audibly, following this ratio (count approximately in seconds): Inhaling (4) - Pause (4)
- Blow/exhale (6) - Pause (2)

19- **Cough or Sneeze**

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Breathe audibly. If a person from the audience sneezes, hold your breath until someone coughs, then start breathing again. If no one coughs and you cannot hold your breath anymore, leave the stage and breathe in another room.

II- If a person from the audience coughs, hold your breath until someone sneezes, then start breathing again. If no one sneezes and you cannot hold your breath anymore, leave the stage and breathe in another room.

20- **Couples**

Each performer invites a person from the audience to sit close to him/her. The performer should breathe audibly according to the audience's breathing: when the person inhales, the performer inhales. When the person starts exhaling again, the performer starts exhaling.

21- **Breathe or Breathe**

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Breathe audibly.

II- Breathe only if you hear someone else who is breathing. When you breathe once, you have to find another person who is breathing in order to breathe again.

22- **The Stage I**

Two sides of the stage: 'x' and 'y'.

Place yourself on side 'x' of the stage. Inhale while moving to side 'y' of the stage. Once on side 'y' exhale and then hold your breath. Inhale while moving to side 'x', etc. (Match always the duration of inhalation to the rate of walking)

23- **The Stage II**

Two sides of the stage: 'x' and 'y'.

Place yourself on side 'x' of the stage and take a long breath. Hold your breath while moving to side 'y' of the stage. Once, on side 'y' exhale and then hold your breath. Hold your breath while moving to side 'x'. Once on side 'x' take a long breath, etc. (Rate of walking should be determined by your need of air)

24- **The Stage III**

Four sides of the stage: 'x', 'y', 'z', 'q'

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Perform '22-The stage I' from side 'x' to side 'y'

II- Perform '22-The stage I' from side 'z' to side 'q'

25- **The Stage IV**

Four sides of the stage: 'x', 'y', 'z', 'q'

Four corners of the room: 'a', 'b', 'c', 'd'

Possible choices:

(to be made before starting. Once chosen, do not change)

I- Perform '23-The stage II' from side 'x' to side 'y'

II- Perform '23-The stage II' from side 'z' to side 'q'

III- Perform '23-The stage II' from corner 'a' to corner 'b'

IV- Perform '23-The stage II' from corner 'c' to corner 'd'

Categories

1- TIMING (instructions may indicate for how long the piece should last, the extent of the repetition of the occurrence of an event, and/or the physical aspects that can determine the duration of the musical event)

Blow I; Blow II; A Bit Longer than Before; Without I; Without II; Unison Maybe; Inhalation II; Inhalation III; Inhalation IV; From the Soundscape I; From the Soundscape II; Each Sound; You or the Others; What is '?; Domino; Ratio; Cough or Sneeze; Couples; Breathe or Breathe; The Stage I; The Stage II; The Stage III; The Stage IV

2- COMPETITION (players are brought almost to compete with each other. Physical effort and stamina involved in players' actions are due to the way the other participants breathe)

Blow I; Blow II; Inhalation III

3- RECIPROCAL LISTENING (players are pushed to interact with each other)

Blow I; Blow II; Unison Maybe; Inhalation III, Domino

4- ONE-DIRECTIONAL LISTENING (relationship that takes place between two participants, but just one person is involved in the act of listening)

You or the Others; Couples; Breathe or Breathe

5- INTERACTION WITH THE ENVIRONMENT / AUDIENCE (relationships that take place between participants and the environment or the audience)

From the Soundscape I; From the Soundscape II; What is '?; Cough or Sneeze; Couples

6- CHOICES TO BE MADE BEFORE THE BEGINNING (participants have a set of options and they have to decide before the beginning which one they should perform. Decisions can be made freely according to the will to fulfil the required task or the physical limits of the player)

Without II; You or the Others; What is '?.; Breathe or Breathe; The Stage III; The Stage IV

7- PERFORMANCE SPACE (the performance space affects some aspects of the piece)

Cough or Sneeze; The Stage I; The Stage II; The Stage III; The Stage IV

8- FAILURE (fulfillment of the constraints is objectively not possible. The task cannot be completely achieved, if not in the attempt to perform it)

Blow I; Blow II; Inhalation I; Nose