

# Solstice Ritual

Homage to Varese and Ravel  
(for fourteen virtuosi)

To be performed with dancers when feasible

AUGUSTA READ THOMAS  
2024



Commissioned by The Juilliard School for a world premiere performance by Jeffrey Milarsky conducting AXIOM  
in Alice Tully Hall, New York, NY on 25 November, 2024.

Dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Jeffrey Milarsky and The Juilliard School.

Immense thanks to 2024 summer intern from Oberlin College, Francesca Neibel-Spruill, for exceptional and invaluable help with proofreading, editing, formatting this front matter, helping me in my home office with countless other things which then afforded me more time to compose this work, and for her friendship.

## INSTRUMENTATION

(for fourteen virtuosi)

1 Flute  
1 Oboe  
1 Clarinet in Bb  
2 Violin  
1 Viola  
1 Cello  
1 Piano  
1 Celesta (5 1/2 octave – notated from C2 to F6 and sounding one octave higher)\*  
1 Harp  
4 Percussion\*\*

\*Not all celestas have the same range. This work is written for a 5 1/2 octave celesta notated from C2 to F6 and sounding one octave higher than written. If your celesta does not have certain notes, please tacet those notes. Do not move any notes into a lower or higher octave. Thank you.

\*\*Four percussionists playing a variety of percussion instruments.

Please see the following pages for detailed percussion instrumentation, suggested set-ups, and glossary

SCORE IS IN C  
DURATION: 18 minutes

For a *circa* 4 minute and 30 second shorter duration, you may play through measure 289 and then jump to measure 376 or 388 and play to the end of the composition

# PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**TEMPO:**

When feasible, it is important that the tempi be performed as notated in the score.

**RESONANCE:**

For the entire composition, even when vibraphones lift pedals, always let all other ringing instruments continue to ring naturally back to silence unless “secco” or a dampen sign is explicitly notated. Both vibraphones should have their motors on slow for the entire composition to enhance the duration of their resonances. All metals should be selected for maximum pretty and elegant resonance. For example, the anvils (or metal pipes or resonant metals), the brake drums, and cowbells, should be resounding, not clanky or dry.

**GRADUAL ACCELERANDO NOTATION:**

There are several places in the composition which involve gradual accelerandi. All accelerandi should be gradual (not notched) with energized musical flow. For instance, Measures 148-165 should be an enthralling and rip-roaring gradual accelerando made together by the four artists. Intended as helpful guideposts, new tempi are notated throughout the accelerando.

**DYNAMICS:**

There are only six dynamics used in this score (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) so that each “level” of volume has a clear meaning and sound. Very often dynamics are staggered and layered; thus, it is especially important that each musician plays their individual dynamics and is not swayed to change their dynamic if the other musician is playing a great deal quieter or louder. The words “*sempre*” and “*subito*” are often used to help clarify the layered, cross-fading dynamic textures. One of the central attributes of this composition is a kaleidoscopic use of hocketing, dovetailing, and crossfading dynamics, which occur on almost every page of the score.

**“PRIMARY LINE” AND “SOLO” INDICATIONS:**

The word “solo” is used to indicate to the player that their note or phrase is a solo and that no one else plays on that exact same beat of a bar. The indication “primary line” is used to indicate that, within a larger texture, players notes or phrases are part of the foreground energy of the phrase. This notation helps to clarify the hocketing between instruments.

**HOCKETING AND DOVETAILING:**

Many hockets take place between instruments, resulting in spatial-timbral-ping-pong, contrapuntal effects throughout the score.

**INSTRUMENTATION REMINDERS:**

In the score and parts, at each change of instrument, the name of the new instrument is listed. Please see below for the glossary of abbreviations of instrument names. In places where it is primarily one instrument and, for just a tiny interjection some other instrument is added, a plus sign (+) is given. For instance, Percussion #3, measure 242. In places where, for many bars, the composition goes back and forth between two instruments, such as Percussion #3 playing tom-toms and conga drums together, as a kind of “pair”, the indication is given once to avoid visual clutter.

**RUBATO:**

Where there are short soli, “*rubato*” is indicated and means that it is not necessary to mechanically play the exact rhythm (sextuplet, quintuplet, small triplet, etc.) but rather that you can consider those rhythms more gesturally. “*Rubato*” does not mean to drastically slow down the tempo.

**ARTICULATIONS:**

Nuanced articulations are notated to indicate phrasing, voicing, and character of lines.

**PERCUSSION ROLLS AND VERY FAST SUCCESSIONS OF NOTES THAT CAN BE PLAYED LIKE A ROLL:**

The composition is notated, from time to time, with a specific fast rhythm. These can be played as rolls when necessary. Examples of these include Percussion #1, measure 247; and Percussion #3, measure 236 and 237.

**OPTIONAL TACET:**

“O.T.” means "optional tacet" for the notes under the bracket. Each individual player may opt to take or not take the tacet and can do so for some or all of the notes.

**CLEAN CUT OFF NOTATION:**

Please do not "over think" or "over analyze" the notations where a note is held over for a 16th note. For example, measure 3, beat 3 for winds and strings. These are notated, from time to time, to try to ensure a very clean ensemble cut off. In all cases, they should sound natural and utterly musical.

**CAUTIONARY ACCIDENTALS:**

Cautionary accidentals are notated for both vertical and horizontal spelling reasons. For example, when there is both a C and a C# in a *vertical* chord, the C will be given a natural sign as a precautionary helpful reference even though, in a *horizontal* part, the C-natural-reminder might not seem as if it is needed.

**VIBRAPHONE PEDALING:**

The durations of the resonances of vibraphone notes are carefully sculpted for a specific harmonic rhythm. Thus, detailed pedaling indications are notated in the score and parts.

**VIBRAPHONE MOTOR:**

Both vibraphones should have their motors on the slowest possible setting for the entire composition to enhance the duration of their resonances.

**PIANO, CELESTA, AND HARP:**

Freely divide the notes and chords between the hands, especially when all the notes are on one staff. All harp harmonics are notated at *SOUNDING* pitch.

**8VA, 8VB, 15MA:**

Temporary transpositions are never corrected by “loco” to avoid visual clutter.

**C.M.:**

“C.M” means percussion the player might change the mallet so as to ensure a kaleidoscope of colors between, for instance, two attacks that are close together in time.

# INSTRUMENTATION:

## PERCUSSION 1

Vibraphone (motor as slow as possible for the entire composition) – 4 mallets needed.

1 Thai Gong (F#3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Almglocken (A#3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Tom-Toms (very low and low) – Rim shots are notated only on the very low drum. These tom-toms should be tuned lower than the 2 tom-toms of Percussion #3. \*\*\*

2 Wood Blocks (very high and medium high) – Please use beautiful-sounding resonant instruments. \*\*\*\*\*

2 Brake Drums (high and medium) – Both should have graceful, pretty, mellifluous resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

1 Ride Cymbal (very high) – Should have many high shimmering overtones in its resonances (i.e. not a low-pitched, dark cymbal).

1 Splash Cymbal – Should be vivid-sounding and able to make a sharp, spiky, and biting sound.

2 Anvils (or metal pipes or other resonant metals) (or metal pipes or other resonant metals) (very high and medium high) – Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

1 Zil Bell – Rich-sounding, not tinny or thin-sounding, and with beautiful resonance. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Triangles (very low and very high) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*

1 Egg shaker (small and egg-shaped) – Should be able to be held in one hand. Played either with open hand or with closed hand for a quasi-muted sound. Please use a very articulate instrument so that it is easy to hear “secco” rhythmic attacks “Tss, Tss, Tss”.

Alternatively, use sandpaper blocks. Or, you could have both instruments and alternate between egg shaker and sandpaper blocks for what you think is the best sound for a given measure.

1 Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) – Should sound different from the three tambourines played by the other three percussionists. Every attack is “L.V. Molto” for the entire composition unless otherwise notated. \*\*\*\*\*

## PERCUSSION 2

Crotales (2 complete octaves) – 4 brass mallets needed. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Thai Gong (Ab3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Almglocken (A3, C4) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Bongo Drums – Tuned very high and tight, à la Afro-Cuban music. Tuned higher than both the bongo drums of Percussion #4 and the conga drums of Percussion #3. \*\*\*

4 Wood Blocks (low, medium low, medium, and high) – Please use beautiful-sounding resonant instruments. \*\*\*\*\*

2 Cowbells (high and medium) – Please use resonant, pretty, mellifluous-sounding instruments (i.e. not low-pitched, dark, harsh-sounding instruments). For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Anvils (or metal pipes or other resonant metals) (high and medium) – Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

2 Opera Gongs (up) – One gong should be pitched higher than the other. Both should have excellent long glissandi-effects when struck. They should be vivid and almost raucous. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*\*\*

1 Caxixi (mounted, but also able to be picked up) – May be substituted with maraca.

1 Vibraslap that rings for at least 4 seconds (high, mounted but also able to be picked up) – Tuned noticeably higher than the vibraslap of Percussion #4. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let vibraslap naturally fade back to silence.

2 Triangles (low and high) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*

1 pair of 2 Finger Cymbals (high, mounted to be stuck easily) – Please use resonant, pretty, mellifluous-sounding instruments. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) – Should sound different from the three tambourines played by the other three percussionists. Every attack is “L.V. Molto” for the entire composition unless otherwise notated. \*\*\*\*\*

1 Ribbon Crasher

## PERCUSSION 3

Glockenspiel – 4 mallets needed. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Thai Gong (G3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Almglocken (B3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Tom-Toms (medium and medium high) – Rim shots are notated only on the medium high drum. These tom-toms should be tuned higher than the 2 tom-toms of Percussion #1 and lower than your conga drums. \*\*\*

2 Conga Drums – Lower in pitch than the bongo drums of Percussion #2 and #4. \*\*\*

2 Wood Blocks (high and medium low) – Please use beautiful-sounding resonant instruments. \*\*\*\*\*

2 Brake Drums (high and medium) – Both should have graceful, pretty, mellifluous resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

2 Ride Cymbals (high and medium high) – Both should have many high shimmering overtones in their resonances (i.e. not low-pitched, dark cymbals).

2 Anvils (or metal pipes or other resonant metals) (high and medium) – Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

Bell Tree – Circa 3 feet tall or larger with a very long sustaining resonance – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let bell tree naturally fade back to silence.

2 Triangles (medium low and medium high) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence unless otherwise notated. \*

1 Finger Cymbal (medium high) – Rich-sounding, not tinny or thin-sounding and with beautiful resonance. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) – Should sound different from the three tambourines played by the other three percussionists. Every attack is “L.V. Molto” for the entire composition unless otherwise notated. \*\*\*\*\*

1 Elephant Bell (high) (mounted) – Bell should have many high overtones in its resonances (i.e. bright and radiant).

## PERCUSSION 4

Vibraphone (motor slow for the entire composition) – 4 mallets needed.

1 Thai Gong (F3) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Almglocken (E4) (mounted) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Bongo Drums (medium high and medium) – Tuned lower than the bongo drums of Percussion #2 and higher than the conga drums of Percussion #3. \*\*\*

1 Large Tam-Tam – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Wood Block (high) – Please use beautiful-sounding resonant instruments. \*\*\*\*\*

1 Cowbell (medium high) – Please use a resonant, pretty, mellifluous-sounding instrument (i.e. not a low-pitched, dark, harsh-sounding instrument). For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

2 Anvils (or metal pipes or other resonant metals) (high and medium high) – Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*

2 Opera Gongs (down) – One gong should be pitched higher than the other. Both should have excellent long glissandi-effects when struck. They should be vivid and almost raucous. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*\*\*\*

1 Maraca (mounted, but also able to be picked up)

1 Egg shaker (small and egg-shaped) – Should be able to be held in one hand. Played either with open hand or with closed hand for a quasi-muted sound. Please use a very articulate instrument so that it is easy to hear “secco” rhythmic attacks “Tss, Tss, Tss”.

Alternatively, use sandpaper blocks. Or, you could have both instruments and alternate between egg shaker and sandpaper blocks for what you think is the best sound for a given measure.

1 Vibraslap that rings for at least 4 seconds (medium high, mounted but also able to be picked up) – Tuned noticeably lower than the vibraslap of Percussion #2. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let vibraslap naturally fade back to silence.

2 Triangles (low and medium high) – For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence. \*

1 pair of 2 Finger Cymbals (mounted to be stuck easily) – Please use very high, resonant, pretty, mellifluous-sounding instruments. For the whole composition, all notes are resonant; let all notes naturally fade back to silence.

1 Ribbon Crasher

1 Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) – Should sound different from the three tambourines played by the other three percussionists. Every attack is “L.V. Molto” for the entire composition unless otherwise notated. \*\*\*\*\*

\*The score calls for 8 triangles of differing pitches in the percussion parts. Care should be given to ensure that each of the triangles has a different pitch and timbre from one another, so that each of them has a unique contribution to the overall sonic palette and so they blend elegantly with the crotales, vibraphone, finger cymbals, Anvils (or metal pipes or other resonant metals), brake drums, and other bell-like sounds. In order to bring forth from the triangles a kaleidoscopic range of colors, please vary the beaters used to play the triangles (heavy, medium, and light triangle beaters, rattan, etc.) The idea is to build an amalgam sound palette: 8 triangles of various pitches, in addition to the finger cymbals, crotales, and vibraphone.

\*\*The score calls for 8 Anvils (or metal pipes, small mounted hand bells, or other resonant metals) and 4 brake drums. Care should be given to ensure that each of these instruments has a slightly different pitch and color from one another, so that each of them has a unique contribution to the overall sonic palette and so they blend elegantly with the other bell-like sounds. If necessary, in order to ensure the most resonant possible instruments, feel free to use or to build your own metal pipes or bars. It is the composer’s hope that the length of the ring/resonance and the amount of “ping” one can get from the anvils, brake drums, and metal pipes is radiant, akin to, for instance, a crotale. All metals should be selected for maximum pretty resonance. For example, the anvils (or metal pipes or resonant metals) and the brake drums and cowbells, should be resounding and not clanky or dry.

\*\*\*The score calls for 10 membranophones in total, composed of 4 tom-toms, 2 congas, and 4 bongos. Care should be given to ensure that each of these drums are tuned differently from each other. In addition, the 4 tom-toms should be the lowest in pitch, with the 2 congas higher than those, and the 4 bongos the highest of all. Altogether, the 10 membranophones in this order should form a large gradation in pitch without any pitch repetitions.

\*\*\*\*The score calls for 4 opera gongs, two of which have pitches bending up, and two of which have pitches bending down. Care should be given to ensure that each of them has a different pitch and color from one another, with a distinct “high” and “low” gong of each variety.

\*\*\*\*\*The score calls for 9 wood blocks. Care should be given to ensure that each of them has a slightly different pitch and color from one another.

\*\*\*\*\*The score calls for 4 tambourines. Care should be given to ensure that each of them has a slightly different pitch and color from one another.

Unless otherwise specified above or on the score, use the most common beater or mallet.

C.M. means change mallet so as to ensure a kaleidoscope of colors between, for instance two attacks that are close together in time.

PERCUSSION 1

t.t.  
v. low  
r.s.

t.t.  
v. low.

t.t.  
low

2.w.blk.

brk.dr. #1

brk.dr. #2

r.cym.

spl.cym.

anv. #1

anv. #2

z.b.

f.cym

tri. #1

tri. #2

e.s.

tamb.

PERCUSSION 2

bg.dr.

4.w.blk.

cow.b. #1

cow.b. #2

anv. #1

anv. #2

op.g. (up) #1

op.g. (up) #2

cax. #1

cax. #2

vslp.

f.cym. #1

f.cym. #2

tri. #1

tri. #2

rib.c.

tamb.

PERCUSSION 3

t.t.  
med.  
low

t.t.  
med.

t.t.  
med.  
r.s.

cg.dr.

2.w.blk.

brk.dr. #1

brk.dr. #2

r.cym. #1

r.cym. #2

anv. #1

anv. #2

e.b.

b.tree

f.cym.

tri. #1

tri. #2

tamb.

PERCUSSION 4

bg.dr.

w.blk.

cow.b.

anv. #1

anv. #2

op.g. (down) #1

op.g. (down) #2

mar.

vslp.

e.s.

cax.

f.cym. #1

f.cym. #2

tri. #1

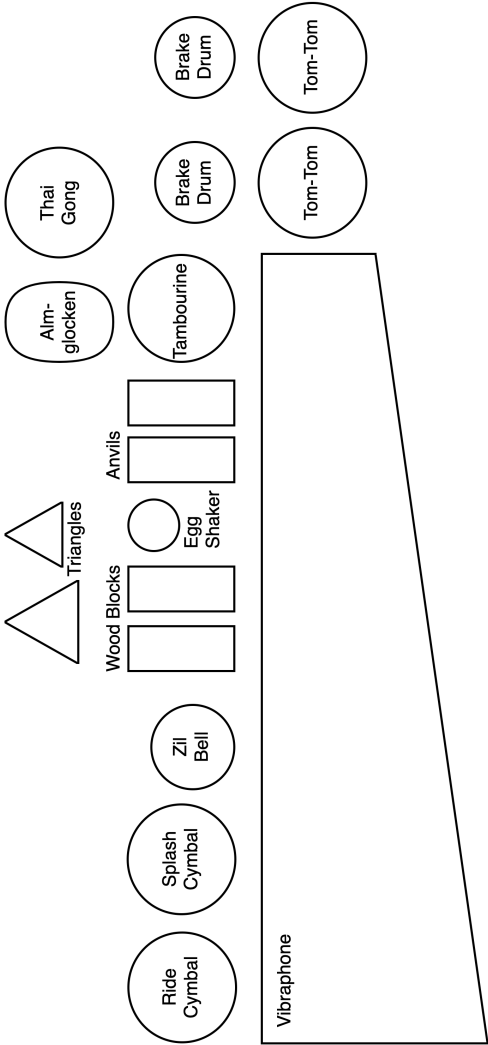
tri. #2

sl.bls.

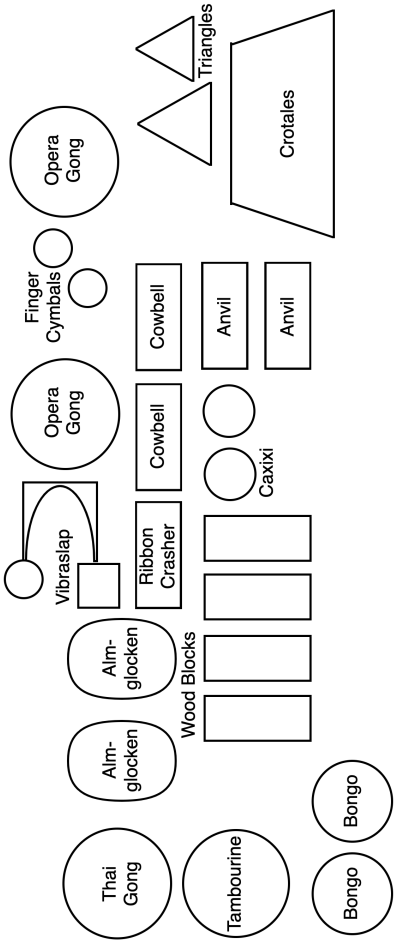
rib.c.

tamb.

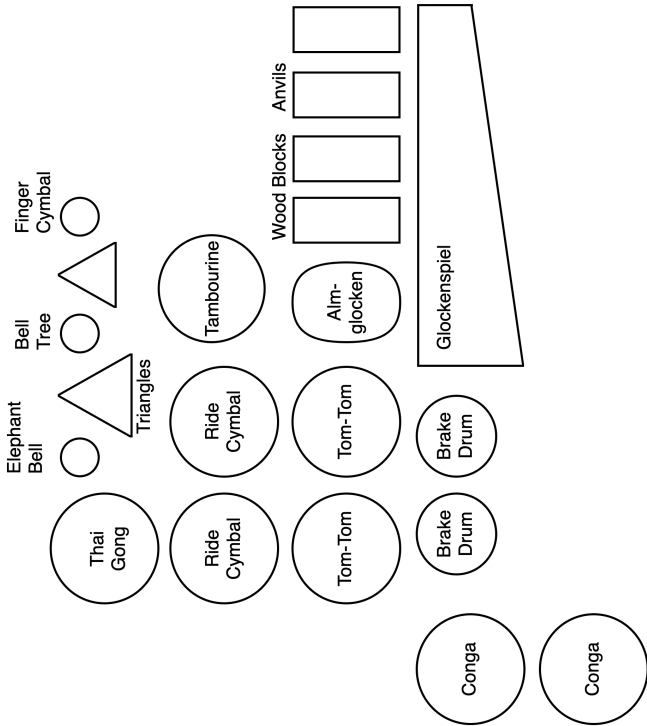
PERCUSSION 1



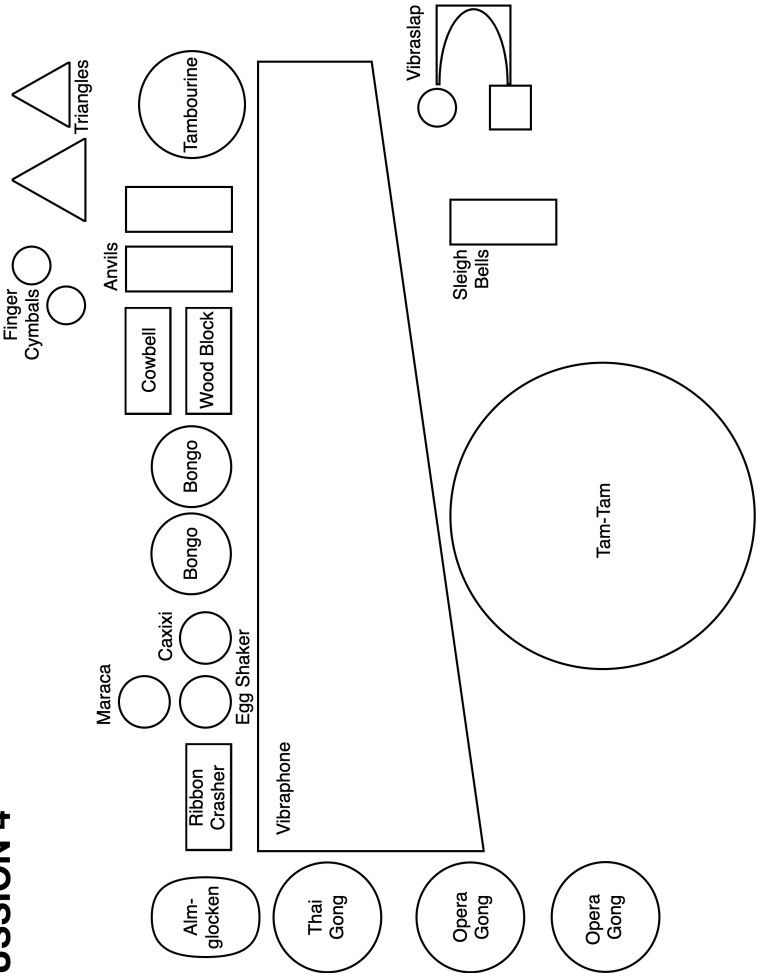
PERCUSSION 2



PERCUSSION 3



PERCUSSION 4



Gongs and Almglocken should be mounted for maximum resonance

PERCUSSION I

musical staff with notes and labels t.g. alm.

PERCUSSION II

musical staff with notes and labels t.g. alm. alm.

PERCUSSION III

musical staff with notes and labels t.g. alm.

PERCUSSION IV

musical staff with notes and labels t.g. alm.

GLOSSARY:

INSTRUMENTS

- Vibraphone
- Almglocken
- Opera Gong (up)
- Opera Gong (down)
- Brake Drum
- Bongo Drums
- Conga Drums
- Tom-Toms
- Tom-Toms, some with Rim Shot
- Anvil
- Zil Bell
- Elephant Bell
- Bell Tree
- Wood Blocks
- Cowbell
- Finger Cymbal
- Ride Cymbal
- Splash Cymbal
- Triangles
- Maracas
- Caxixi
- Egg Shaker
- Ribbon Crasher
- Tambourine
- Vibraslap

INSTRUCTIONS

- Optional Tacet
- Change Mallet

ABBREVIATIONS

- vib.
- alm.
- op.g.(up)
- op.g.(down)
- brk.dr.
- bg.dr.
- cg.dr.
- t.t.
- t.t. some w/r.s.
- anv.
- z.b.
- e.b.
- b.tree
- w.b.
- cow.b.
- f.cym.
- r.cym.
- spl.cym.
- tri.
- mar.
- cax.
- e.s.
- rib.c.
- tamb.
- vslp.

- O.T.
- C.M.



# PROGRAM BOOK LISTING:

Dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Jeffrey Milarsky and The Juilliard School.

Solstice Ritual – Homage to Varese and Ravel (for fourteen virtuosos) (2024)	Augusta Read Thomas (b. 1964)
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## PROGRAM NOTE

Over the past forty-five years, I have composed many works whose titles point to natural and celestial radiances: galaxy, star, sun, earth, moon, sky, light, dawn, illumination, equinox, summer, etc. One central metaphor of my life’s creative work is that of light refracting. Of interest to me, for my work, is to build, sculpt, and compose clean, clear, transparent, translucent, luminous, radiant, shining, resounding, and resonant musical materials.

*Solstice Ritual for 14 virtuosos* shares many of these preoccupations. The two solstices happen in June (the 20th or 21st) and December (the 21st or 22nd). These are the days when the sun’s path in the sky is the farthest north or south from the Equator. A hemisphere’s winter solstice is the shortest day of each year, and its summer solstice the longest of each year. In the Northern Hemisphere the June solstice marks the start of summer: this is when the North Pole is tilted closest to the sun, and the sun’s rays are directly overhead at the Tropic of Cancer. The December solstice marks the start of winter: at this point the South Pole is tilted closest to the sun, and the sun’s rays are directly overhead at the Tropic of Capricorn. In the Southern Hemisphere, the seasons are reversed.

Cultures throughout the epochs, and in all corners of planet Earth, have performed a multitude of rituals to celebrate and mark the solstices. As I composed *Solstice Ritual*, in my mind’s ear and eye were sonic and visual images of fourteen musicians, a conductor, and dancers, performing outdoors (if feasible) during the precise moment of a solstice. For this reason, when it is also feasible, *Solstice Ritual* is to be performed with dancers. Although the score took most of its inspiration from the vivid illuminations and dazzling rays of the summer solstice, at times *Solstice Ritual* explores contrasting materials whose shadowy character may also suggest the relative absence of light that marks the winter solstice.

A related sonic and balletic image I had when composing this composition was that of a kaleidoscopically radiant light refracting with vibrant and multi-shaped energies in a constant state of transformation. The music’s energy-flows vary and braid together musical materials that are blazing, radiant, kinetic, ritualistic, resonant, lyrical, rhythmic, reflective, fiery, avid, dynamic, effervescent, and, at times, harmonically jazz-like. The resulting labyrinth of musical interrelationships showcases the world-class musicians of AXIOM and superstar conductor Jeffrey Milarsky. Importantly, *Solstice Ritual* was not conceived of as an ensemble piece. Rather, it is a score for fourteen highly virtuosic soloists.

*Solstice Ritual* also pays homage to the composers Edgard Varèse and Maurice Ravel, and it celebrates their imagination, joy, love, vitality, soul, energy, great chords and rich chord progressions, resonant orchestrations, tight big-band-like splash-chords, and the sheer beating-heart inner life of their music. I love all of their compositions and to give just two examples among many, Varèse’s percussion writing and Ravel’s gorgeous orchestrations have been longstanding sources of inspiration.

The eighteen-minute composition is in three parts played without a pause. The first part, “Reaching Skyward,” unfolds bell-like fanfares—with outgrowths and transformations and lasts five minutes and thirty seconds. The second part, “Solstice Rites,” consists of a series of shorter sections entitled “Drumming Ritual 1,” “Bells Recap,” “Cosmic Clock 1,” “Drumming Ritual 2,” and “Cosmic Clock 2.” These sections last six minutes and thirty seconds. The third and concluding part, “Bell Prayers,” lasts seven minutes.

Although my music is meticulously notated in every detail, I like it to sound like it was spontaneously invented—always in the act of becoming. The creative journey—not a predictable or fixed point of arrival—is, for me, essential. I dance while I compose, hoping that my music will feel organic and self-propelled. I work hard to ensure that my music too dances; I often create in my mind and ear imaginary flexible dances and ballets, poems, visual art doodles, lighting, or animations, and I love virtuosic performances that percolate and spiral with natural musicality. I draw maps of form and never follow them! Rather, I follow the music where it needs to go and then redraw the maps of form over and over and over.

*Solstice Ritual* is dedicated with admiration and gratitude to Jeffrey Milarsky and The Juilliard School.