Strange Energy

Duration: 12 minutes

Instrumentation

FLUTE/PICCOLO
BASS CLARINET
VIOLIN
CELLO
PIANO
PERCUSSION (SEE BELOW)

Optional Conductor

Optional Tape Part (SEE BELOW)
Optional Visuals (SEE BELOW)

All performers play from the score

Each performer plays a number of additional instruments, as detailed below:

Flute/Piccolo:
Two house keys, each on a string, played like finger cymbals
3 glass bottles (such as wine bottles), sounding the pitches E, G, and A (in any high octave), struck with a metal object or blown.
The bottles can be “tuned” by filling them with varying amounts of water

Bass Clarinet
3 glass bottles (same as flute)
two small metal objects, sounding any pitch in a high register, struck with another metal object

Violin
Two house keys (same as flute)
One glass bottle, sounding the pitch A in any high octave, blown

Cello
3 glass bottles (same as flute)
two medium-sized metal objects, sounding any pitch in a middle register, struck with another metal object

Piano
3 glass bottles (same as flute)
Pencil (used to strike the strings- use the eraser)
small chain or heavy set of keys, used to struck and swipe the strings

Percussion Instruments:
a low and deep sound, like a bass drum
“poured sand”: slowly pour sand from a large coffee can onto a sheet of aluminum foil stretched tautly over a casserole dish
“paper-on-paper”: rub two sheets of heavy paper against each other
“metal mixing bowl”: create a variety of sounds by swirling and scraping the inside of a metal mixing bowl with a fork
“coffee cans”: connect several coffee cans to a piece of string in such a way that, when the string is shaken, the cans bang into each other. Note: it must be able to be played with one hand.
one glass bottle, sounding the pitch E in any high octave, blown
one large metal object, sounding any pitch in the lower register, struck with another metal object

In addition, Each performer is asked to vocalize in various ways (such as whispering and whistling).
**Preferred Setup**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(stage)</th>
<th>Piano</th>
<th>Screen</th>
<th>Percussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(audience)</td>
<td>Projector</td>
<td>(audience)</td>
<td>Fl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B.C.</td>
<td>speaker</td>
<td>Vn.</td>
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</table>

This setup creates a sensation of the physical movement of sound around the audience. Though not crucial to the effectiveness of the piece, the composer nonetheless would prefer that it be used. If the concert space does not allow for this exact placement of the instruments, the ensemble may either:

1. adapt the setup to maintain the relative location of each performer (such as placing the clarinet in the back left corner of the hall, rather than directly behind the left-most section of seats;
2. experiment with other setups in which the ensemble surrounds the audience, or
3. use a standard on-stage setup.

**Optional Tape Part**

The tape part consists of four iterations of a prayer spoken by a little girl. If CD playback is not available, the prayer may be spoken by a live performer, preferably a small child. Another, less-referred options include one of the performers (or a different performer each iteration), or even the audience. This last option would require a short rehearsal before the piece is performed.

**The Composer Heavily Prefers the Use of the CD Recording.**

**Optional Visuals**

Four photographic slides may be projected during the piece at moments indicated in the score. (The slides should change at the exact moment in the score). The slides should remain on the screen until the next slide is called for, except at the end of the piece (as indicated in the score).

**The Composer Heavily Prefers the Use of the Visuals.**

**For Perusal Purposes this Score Includes a CD Featuring the Tape Part. In Concert, a PowerPoint Presentation can be Used for Both Audio Playback and Visual Projection. Contact the Composer for These Materials.**
**PROGRAM NOTE:**

The concept of the simultaneous immanence and transcendence of God has posed a tantalizing theological and philosophical problem for many of the West’s greatest minds. How can the God who created black holes also hold every blade of grass in his infinite love? How can that same God listen to every prayer from every human soul? And how can that eternally blameless and ineffable Energy deign to manifest Himself in human form – and in a human who experienced torture and death at the hands of beings created by his Father?

*Strange Energy* is a meditation upon these questions. The act of meditating is in part an act of recontextualization: of taking an idea, image, word – or even one’s whole life – and trying to understand it by fundamentally questioning the way we have understood it in the past. We can perhaps approach the questions above by learning to fathom how different God’s perspective on the universe is from ours, and how differences which seem so great to us – a black hole, a blade of grass – may not be for our Creator.

Thus, the guiding metaphor structuring *Strange Energy* is that of the recontextualization of the ordinary, but to do so in order to show the universal connectedness of all of us. The concert experience in the Western tradition serves in many ways to divide, not unite, and thus *Strange Energy* represents an attempt to undermine that sad reality. Thus, I have asked that the performers surround the audience, placing them literally in the center of the music-making experience. In addition, the performers not only play their instruments – skills which separate them from the listeners - but also whisper, whistle, and blow on glass bottles – activities that all of us can do. The close-up photographs of the flowers confront us with the intricate beauty that surrounds all of us daily, but which most of us take for granted – and which none of us (artists or not) can fully recreate.

*Strange Energy* is a quiet piece meant to allow for reflection and contemplation. The musical form of is heavily ritualized in that the same sequence of events happens four times, and though the pitches and timbres change, the duration of each stays the same. This results in a large-scale predictability that underscores the eternal nature of the piece’s main question.

The photographs were taken by my late wife, Laura Kjeldgaard Case. The voice reciting the prayer is that of my daughter, Alexandra Case, recorded when she was 4 years old.

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**O power of the divine fire, O strange energy…**

**YOU WHO DWELL, CHRIST MY GOD, IN LIGHT WHOLLY UNAPPROACHABLE,**

**HOW IN YOUR ESSENCE TOTALLY DIVINE DO YOU MINGLE YOURSELF WITH GRASS?**

-**ST. SYMEON “THE NEW THEOLOGIAN” (10TH CENTURY)**
O power of the divine fire, O strange energy.../You who dwell, Christ my God, in light wholly unapproachable:/ How in your essence totally divine do you mingle yourself with grass?
Voice parts fade out on this note, regardless of location in the pattern. Percussion continues.
behind the bridge - an extremely high note of indiscriminate pitch

play swells of varying durations, ad lib.

on strings with house key

Shushush...
*Whispered as fast as possible; think of wind through a field of grass.
Two House Keys

Take House Keys

Fl.

Vn.

Voice

Voice

Voice

Voice

Perc.

Piano

B.C.

Vc.

shickashicka... becoming... shushushush...

low and deep sound

modo ord.

moderato

shushush... shickashicka... becoming... shushush...

shushush... as before

shushuss...

pizz. - with fingernail

pizzico
O power of the divine fire, O strange energy…/ You who dwell, Christ my God, in light wholly unapproachable,/ How in your essence totally divine do you mingle yourself with grass?

Two House Keys

(shickshicka... becoming... shushush...)

(pizz. - with fingernail)
Voice parts fade out on this note, regardless of location in the pattern. Percussion continues.
glass bottles

Fl.

B.C.

Take house keys and
glass bottle

Vn.

glass bottles

Vc.

Perc.

Pno.
**Create a variety of sounds by swirling at various speeds, and scraping at different locations inside the bowl.**
TAPE: O power of the divine fire, O strange energy,.../You who dwell, Christ my God, a light wholly unapproachable,/How in your essence totally divine do you mingle yourself with grass?

Glass bottle

Fl.

Glass bottle

B.C.

Glass bottle

Vn.

Vc.

Perc.

Piano
Bottle-blowing fades out on this note, regardless of location in the pattern. Percussion continues.
To Picc.

Fl.

B.C.

Vn.

Vc.

Perc.

Piano

Coffee cans on string (shaken)

ad lib.

p

Without vibration, sul ponte

Piano, legato

Depress silently

FF senza pedale

p

p

mp

n

n

n

n

n

n
Metal chain on strings*

*Using a section of a metal chain (or a heavy set of car keys), strike and swipe the lowest 12 strings of the piano, ad libitum. Make awful noises!
Gradually widen the interval of the gliss until it becomes a
tremolo between B and D, while increasing the speed of the tremolo.

Two pitches, ad lib.

Gradually widen the interval of the gliss until it becomes a
tremolo between B and D, while increasing the speed of the tremolo.

(breathe ad lib.)

Throw chain onto strings and remove it immediately.
O power of the divine fire, O strange energy…/ You who dwell, Christ my God, in light wholly unapproachable,/ How in your essence totally divine do you mingle yourself with grass?
*After plucking the strings forcefully, very slowly lift your finger off the keys, creating a buzzing sound as the dampers come into contact with the strings. Prolong the buzzing sound as long as possible.