

Joseph Klein

Conversations

(after Elias Canetti)

open-form work for 2 to 4 instruments
based on character studies after Elias Canetti

(2018)

duration: variable (c. 3-7')

Performance Notes

- *Conversations* (after Elias Canetti) is a semi-improvisational open-form work based upon materials derived from the composer's series of solo character studies after Elias Canetti, and may be performed by any combination of two to four instruments included in that collection.
- *Conversations* may be performed independently or in conjunction with the aforementioned solo works, as part of a larger composite work.
- Duration is not specified, though a given realization of the work is typically between 3 and 7 minutes – dependent in part on the number of performers involved and the context in which the work is presented (details below).
- There is no score per se, only this set of performance guidelines. Performers should reference their respective Canetti solo studies for musical materials, which are to be used as the basis of their improvisation.
- While each player is to draw upon material from the respective solo work *ad libitum*, this material should be continuously influenced in some way by the other players in the ensemble, while still maintaining the inherent qualities of the original character.
- The overall effect should be that of two, three, or four distinct characters interacting with one another, as at a social gathering. These metaphorical conversations may range from calm exchanges to heated arguments. Performers should be mindful of the behavioral traits of their respective characters, which should inform their interactions with the other player(s).
- In realizations with three or four instruments, performers should break out into various sub-groups, as well as combining for tutti improvisations. (Trios include three possible duo combinations plus tutti; quartets include six possible duo combinations, four possible trio combinations, plus tutti). Such combinations may be determined beforehand or may be allowed to spontaneously unfold during performance, though performers are encouraged to explore all possibilities regardless.
- *Conversations* is perhaps most effective when performed in conjunction with the respective solo works, functioning as prelude, postlude, and/or interlude(s) for the composite set. A realization of this type might last between 15 and 35 minutes, depending upon which solo pieces are performed and the number and duration of *Conversations* included in the given set.
- The following is a list of possible duo, trio, and quartet arrangements of *Conversations* when performed in conjunction with the respective solo works (C=*Conversations*; S1-S4=Solo works):
 - Duos: C-S1-S2-C; S1-C-S2; C-S1-C-S2-C
 - Trios: C-S1-S2-S3-C; S1-C-S2-C-S3; C-S1-C-S2-C-S3-C
 - Quartets: C-S1-S2-S3-S4-C; S1-C-S2-C-S3-C-S4; C-S1-C-S2-C-S3-C-S4-C
- When performed as a stand-alone work, it will not be necessary for the performers to work up the individual solo works, since the materials therein may be incorporated rather freely in *Conversations*. In this case, the work is perhaps best interpreted by instrumentalists who specialize in free improvisation.
- *Conversations* may be performed by any of the following instruments, which are included among the Character Studies after Elias Canetti: piccolo, bass flute, ocarina, basset horn, contrabassoon, alto saxophone, bass saxophone, trumpet, trombone, percussion, piano, organ, carillon, glass harmonica, harpsichord, cimbalom, guitar, violin, viola, violoncello, and contrabass.

Program Notes

Conversations (after Elias Canetti) is a semi-improvisational open-form work for two to four performers, based on the composer's collection of solo works after character studies in Elias Canetti's 1974 book *Der Ohrenzeuge (Earwitness)*. In *Conversations*, the performers improvise in various combinations, developing musical fragments from these solo studies, which are used as raw material for musical conversations – not unlike the interaction of distinct characters at a social gathering. Whereas the solo works in this collection explore the psychological qualities of the characters portrayed in Canetti's *Der Ohrenzeuge*, *Conversations* is more of a sociological study of these characters' interactions – very much in the spirit of another one of Canetti's writings, *Masse und Macht (Crowds and Power)*, an idiosyncratic yet penetrating study of group dynamics and power structures within various societal constructs.

Conversations was composed in March 2018 and first performed on 22 October 2018 at the James Madison University Contemporary Music Festival.

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