

Joseph Klein

Canetti-menagerie

(after Elias Canetti)

open-form work for mixed ensemble (2 to 8 instruments)
based on character studies after Elias Canetti

(2015)

duration: variable (c.3-15')

About the Work

Canetti-menagerie is part of an ongoing project inspired by characters in *Der Ohrenzeuge: Fünfzig Charaktere* (*Earwitness: Fifty Characters*), written in 1974 by the Bulgarian-born British-Austrian novelist Elias Canetti (1905-1994). This project centers around a series of solo instrumental works that are based on these characters, which form the basis of *Canetti-menagerie*—an open-form, semi-improvisational chamber work that is derived from musical materials in these solo works.

Canetti-menagerie may be performed by two to eight performers. Depending on the number of available performers and the amount of time available on a given program, the work may be presented in any of the following ways:

- (a) As a free-standing work for three to eight performers. In this format, the realization may include brief solo cadenzas for each of the instruments, which are excerpted directly from the respective solo works. The interjection of these “monologues” provides context for the improvised material, and allows for a more concise and organic realization of the work.
- (b) As opening, closing, and/or interstitial dialogues in performances with any two Canetti solo works.
- (c) As part of a set of three to eight Canetti solo works. In this iteration, *Canetti-menagerie* may be presented as opening, closing, and/or interstitial material between the individual solo works.
- (d) As an expanded version of (c) that also includes any of the following extensions: readings from the Canetti texts (either by the instrumentalists or by a separate narrator), image projections, lighting, and theatrical staging. Depending on the number of performers and scope of the production, *Canetti-menagerie* could be presented as an evening-long program in itself.

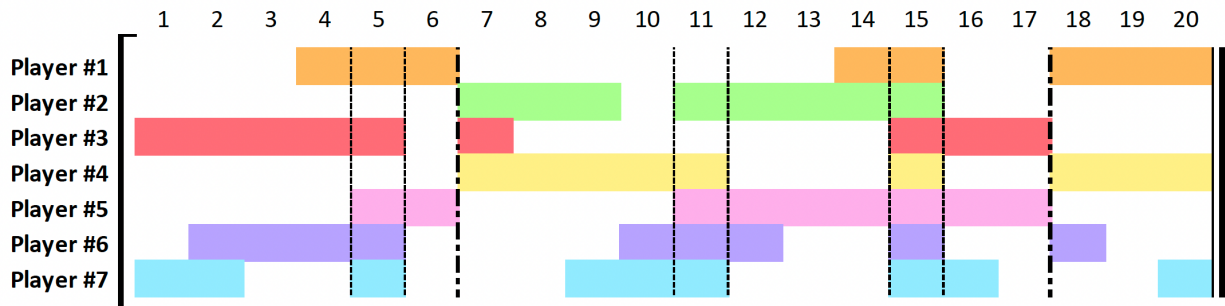
The title *Canetti-menagerie* may refer to any of the above permutations of the work.

Performance Guidelines

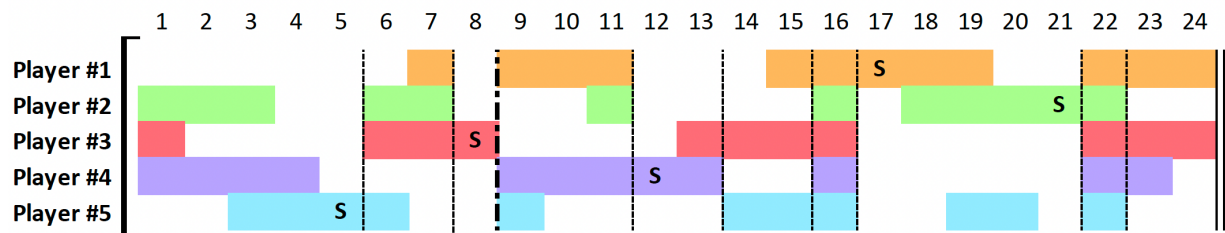
- Duration is not specified, though depending on the number of performers involved and the context in which the work is presented (see options above), a given realization may range between 3 and 15 minutes.
- There is no score per se, only this set of performance guidelines. Performers should reference their respective Canetti solo studies for musical materials, which are to be used as the basis of their improvisations.
- 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 performer(s) in the ensemble, while still maintaining the inherent qualities of the original characters.
- The overarching metaphor for the work is that of a social gathering of diverse individuals with distinct character traits interacting with one another. When performed as a duo, this interaction takes the form of a dialogue (or set of dialogues) between two characters; with three or more performers, the work is structured as a series of metaphorical “conversations,” comprised of continuously changing instrumental subgroupings. These 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 performers.

- These instrumental interactions should generally proceed freely and continuously from one to another, so that there is a constant flow in the “conversation”; however, it is also possible to allow for more jarring shifts on occasion: as with actual social interactions, performers may subtly join a conversation, or abruptly interrupt or attempt to derail an ongoing conversation.
- In realizations involving only **two instruments**, the conversations consist strictly of duos, which serve as an elaboration of the solo works.
- In realizations involving **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 a tutti; quartets include six possible duo combinations, four possible trio combinations, plus a tutti. These combinations may be determined beforehand or may be allowed to spontaneously unfold during performance, though performers are encouraged to explore all possible combinations regardless.
- Realizations involving **five to eight instruments** are much more elaborate and clearly defined in the way they are structured:
 - Subgroupings are parsed into duos, trios, and quintets of varying combinations. Trios may be formed by adding a player to a pre-existing duo, while quintets are typically formed by combining duo and trio groupings; conversely, trios may be extracted from pre-existing quintets, and duos from pre-existing quintets or trios. Occasionally, a duo or trio may be sharply juxtaposed with a complementary trio or duo, resulting in more abrupt contrasts. However, these types of sharp contrasts between subgroups should be used sparingly.
 - As a general guideline, duo and trio groupings should be more frequently selected than quintet groupings; this allows for an optimum degree of interaction between the parts without an excessive amount of textural saturation. Extended solo playing is to be avoided, unless played as a freestanding work with solo cadenzas/monologues; otherwise, players should be interacting with one or more additional players throughout a given realization.
 - Each of the duo, trio, and quintet groupings should last between 10 and 30 seconds, which is generally determined spontaneously by the players during the performance. The durations of these sections should be continuously varied, so as to avoid regular or predictable changes between the ensemble groupings. In order to maximize the variety of possibilities, it is important to avoid repeating specific combinations of instruments (particularly duos and trios) during any given realization of the work.
 - Players may begin with any duo or trio combination and proceed from one grouping to another *ad libitum*.
 - In performances with more than five players, there should be one (and only one) point in a given realization where the entire ensemble is playing. This must occur sometime after the mid-point of the realization.
- When performing *Canetti-menagerie* as a freestanding work, the group improvisations and solo cadenzas/monologues should blend seamlessly—often dovetailing with one another—in order to maintain the overall flow. Soloists should visually cue the other performers at the beginning and end of their respective monologues in order to achieve these smooth transitions. Monologues should be distributed somewhat evenly throughout a given realization, and should always be separated by at least one (sub)group improvisation.
- While there is no score for this work, it is strongly recommended that the various combinations and orderings are worked out ahead of time (especially in realizations for five to eight instruments), and that the performers create a general outline or “roadmap” for each given realization. This will

provide additional structure to the improvisations and allow the performers to shape the overall flow of the music accordingly. Below is an example of such an outline, for seven performers (broken vertical lines indicate coordinated entrances for more than one performer; bold broken lines represent sudden shifts between mutually exclusive subgroups):



Below is a sample outline of a freestanding realization for five performers that includes solo cadenzas/monologues (indicated with an “S”):



- Ensembles that include more experienced improvisers and/or have become familiar with this work may prefer to determine an ordering spontaneously during performance.

Program Note

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

Canetti-menagerie was composed in March 2015 and first performed on 19 September 2016 at the University of North Texas.

