

# **BRETHREN**

for choreographed orchestra

by

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2016



## **BRETHREN (2016)**

Commissioned by the Lyons Celebration Award 2015-16.

Developed during a residency at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, Winter 2015.

**Premiere** The Brethren ensemble, York Spring Festival 2016, Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall, University of York, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

**Duration** c. 30 minutes

**Lighting** specific states are detailed in the score

**Staging** empty stage: as open and free a space as possible

**Costume** casual everyday clothing (without decorative text/logos, favour mellower colours) suitable for moving in, comfortable footwear

## Programme Note

*BRETHREN* is a devised work for choreographed orchestra, in three continuous parts, on themes of community and conflict. The work grew from the metaphor of an orchestra as a collective of instrumental families occupying the same space.

### Part I – VIOLINS

*A family. Similarity and difference. Close(d) spaces. Collecting.*

### Part II – VIOLENCE

*Instruments as objects. Divided space, disrupted space. Orchestrating.*

### Part III – SILENCE

*A defence mechanism. Shared space. What we carry with us.*

The title comes from words sung in the Finale of Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*: 'behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity'. Inspired by Bernstein's work, *BRETHREN* is a response to the current mass upheaval of people and the differing reactions to the crisis worldwide.

The titles of the three parts derive from *VIOLINS VIOLENCE SILENCE* (1981-2), a neon artwork by American artist Bruce Nauman. In the early 1980s, Nauman created a number of neon artworks in response to human rights abuses in Central and South America and South Africa. The indoor version features the three words arranged to form a triangle, superimposed with another triangle of the same words spelt backwards. The six words fade in and out independently, and slowly, in naive primary pinks, yellows, greens and reds. Curator Joseph D. Ketner II writes:

[t]he confluence of these words creates an ekphrastic sound poem in visual form that speaks of the extremes of music and silence, creativity and violence... The formal simplicity and linguistic eloquence of this neon veil Nauman's cry of disgust over the violence that humans inflict on one another.

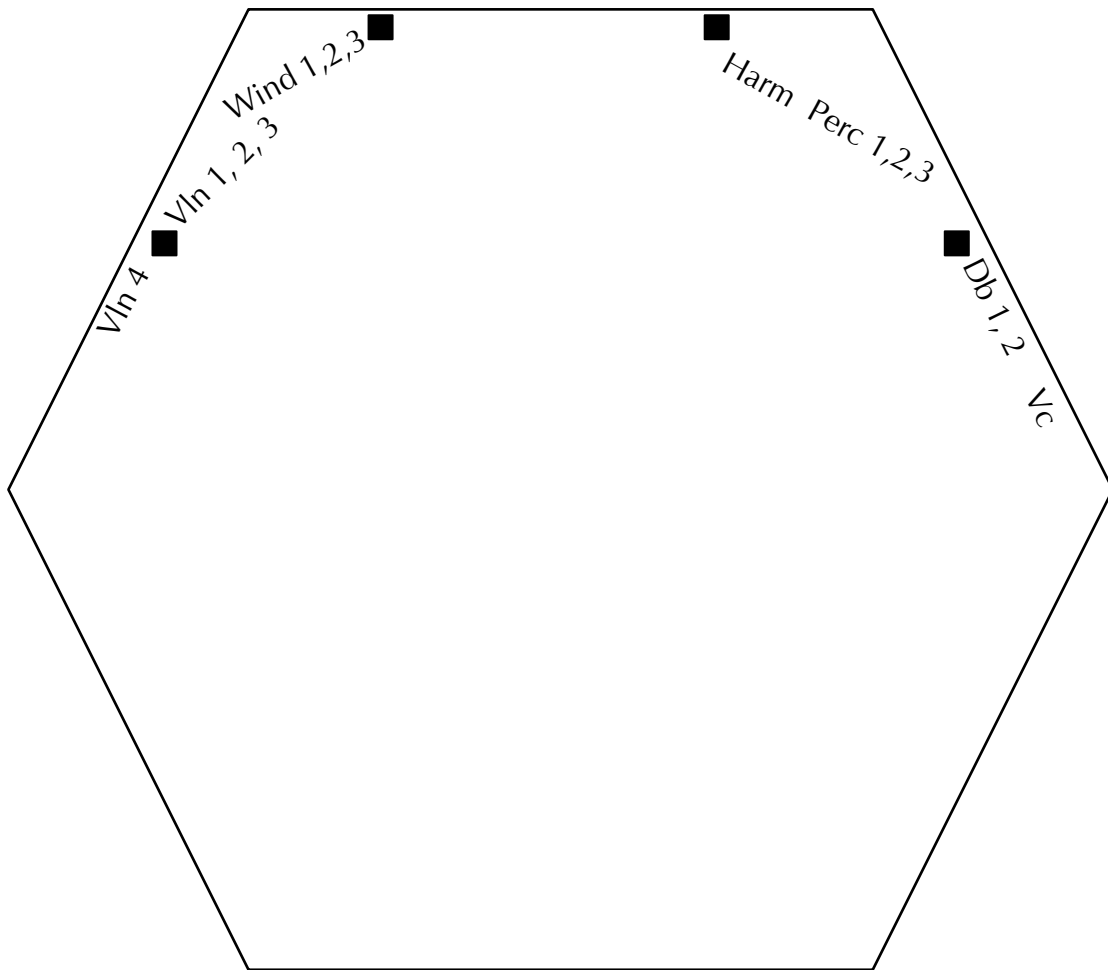
(Ketner II et al., *Elusive Signs: Bruce Nauman Works with Light*, 2006)

The three-word title informed the narrative structure of *BRETHREN*. Nauman invites the re-reading of these familiar words through setting up homophonic connections between them. The words break down into syllables as we wonder how we move so easily from the pleasant (if you like) sound of violins to the destruction of violence.

My approach to physical medium was similar and *BRETHREN* is as much about the orchestra – deconstructing it, questioning it, reinterpreting it. We call a group of instrumentalists an orchestra, but the word comes from the Ancient Greek *orkheisthai*, 'to dance', as well as referring to the site where the Greek choruses would perform – or nowadays the musicians.

*BRETHREN* was commissioned through the 2016 Lyons Celebration Award, which provided generous support for working on the piece at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity. In creating this piece, the last of my PhD, I am hugely indebted to the beacons of support and creativity that are the University of York Music Department, the Banff Centre, and especially the performers. My warmest thanks to them all.

## Stage Layout



### Preset Stage:

■ 4 lights

Musicians waiting around the edge of the stage in darkness. Stage otherwise empty.

### Staging Shorthand

- (U/D)SL = (up/down)stage left
- (U/D)SR = (up/down)stage right
- (U/D)SC = (up/down)stage centre
- Boxed letters refer to locations on stage

## **'VIOLINS' Movement Directions**

Movements in 'VIOLINS' are slow, deliberate, thoughtful, gentle, tender.

### **Cello movement**

Hold cello on shoulder resting on left of torso. Turn head to look at cello, slow sideways lunge with left leg, right arm holding bow extends out. Bring right foot in and right arm in to point bow down, head straightens. Turning movement: holding bow out symmetrical to the angle the cello rests at, spin slowly.

### **Double bass movement**

Slow sideways swing, steady movement forward. When coming to rest, hold the bass straight and away from your body. To turn: pick bass up, gentle swing in the opposite direction to gain momentum, swing round in the direction you want to turn, come to rest facing new direction. Footwork always matched.

### **Violin movement**

The scroll leads in a figure-of-8 movement, as if drawing a line through the air with the scroll or tracing a feather floating to the ground. Aim the movement forward, use slow footwork, focus on the scroll.

### **CROUCH position**

Crouched, knelt or sat on the floor (as is comfortable for a considerable period of time) in a close triangular cluster.

### **LINE**

Any frozen formation where the violins are close to each other, sharing the space, in a line extending in any 3-dimensional direction, occupying different levels. One player freezes in a playing position, then either or both other players, if nearby, move swiftly to form the LINE. Once a LINE of 2 or 3 players is formed, players break into faster free moving.

### **REACH gesture**

Play a long note on the A string, up bow, *senza vibrato*, slow bow, at the end of the note send bow and violin up into the air at the same speed, pause, then lower to previous position.

### **SHAPES**

Shapes are sculptures made with by holding your body in a frozen pose. Another player transforms your shape by placing another one next to yours – but not touching. To transform another's shape, look to find the gaps their body creates around them where you could fill space. You can add a similar or different shape, or develop their shape to suggest a pattern.

## **'VIOLENCE' Movement Directions**

Movements in 'VIOLENCE' gather energy and impetus with increasingly faster, more sudden and determinate gestures.

### **CRUNCH form**

All very close together, a tight-knit cluster of bodies. Get as close to each other and each others instruments as you dare to form a single organism. Backlighting should reveal a silhouette of the ensemble. When creating the ensuing throbbing and shaking movement, the image to have in mind is of one mass tearing itself apart.

### **ORCHESTRA FORM**

All players position form a traditional Classical orchestral/sinfonietta arrangement. The exact layout can depend on the instruments in the group. Positions should be regimented: evenly distributed, with space in between. All players stand tall and for a moment seem ceremonial and grand.

### **TOOL**

Find a way to carry your instrument as if it is any kind of functional object.

### **WEAPON pose/pair**

Find a way of pointing your instrument towards another player in a confrontational, aggressive, threatening way. Switching to a WEAPON pose should be swift, spontaneous to convey sudden intensity. Hold the pose still, before returning to your previous movement in your own time.

For WEAPON pairs, the player who is aimed at retaliates by aiming a WEAPON pose back. Both players maintain a WEAPON pair until a member of either instrumental family releases them by walking through the space between them. As the section progresses, WEAPON pairs may be doubled by more than two players.

## **'SILENCE' Movement Directions**

All movements in 'SILENCE' should be completely spontaneous, but carefully considered. After ZIGZAG, consider the effect of the violent sounds you made. Your response is the movement sequence, performed very gradually.

### **PRECIOUS object**

The shift to holding your instrument as a precious object should be very slow. The PRECIOUS pose may be a continually evolving pose as you consider what the instrument now means for you, represents, or is making you feel.

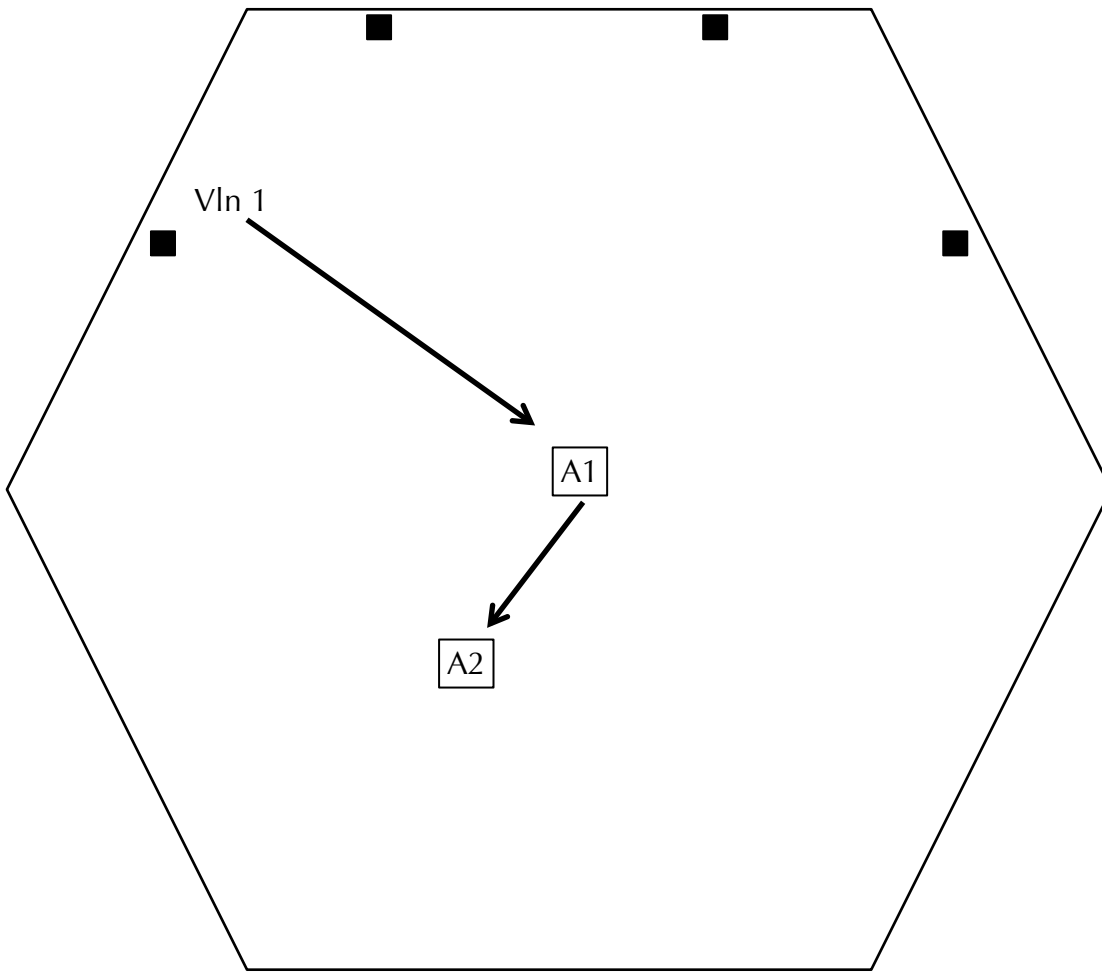
### **SHAPES**

See 'VIOLINS' Movement Directions.

### **OFFER / RELINQUISH**

Leave your instrument on the stage floor by another player / on the stage floor wherever you are. Once the instrument is out of your hands, you must leave it be and exit the stage.

## Part I – VIOLINS



**BLACKOUT.**

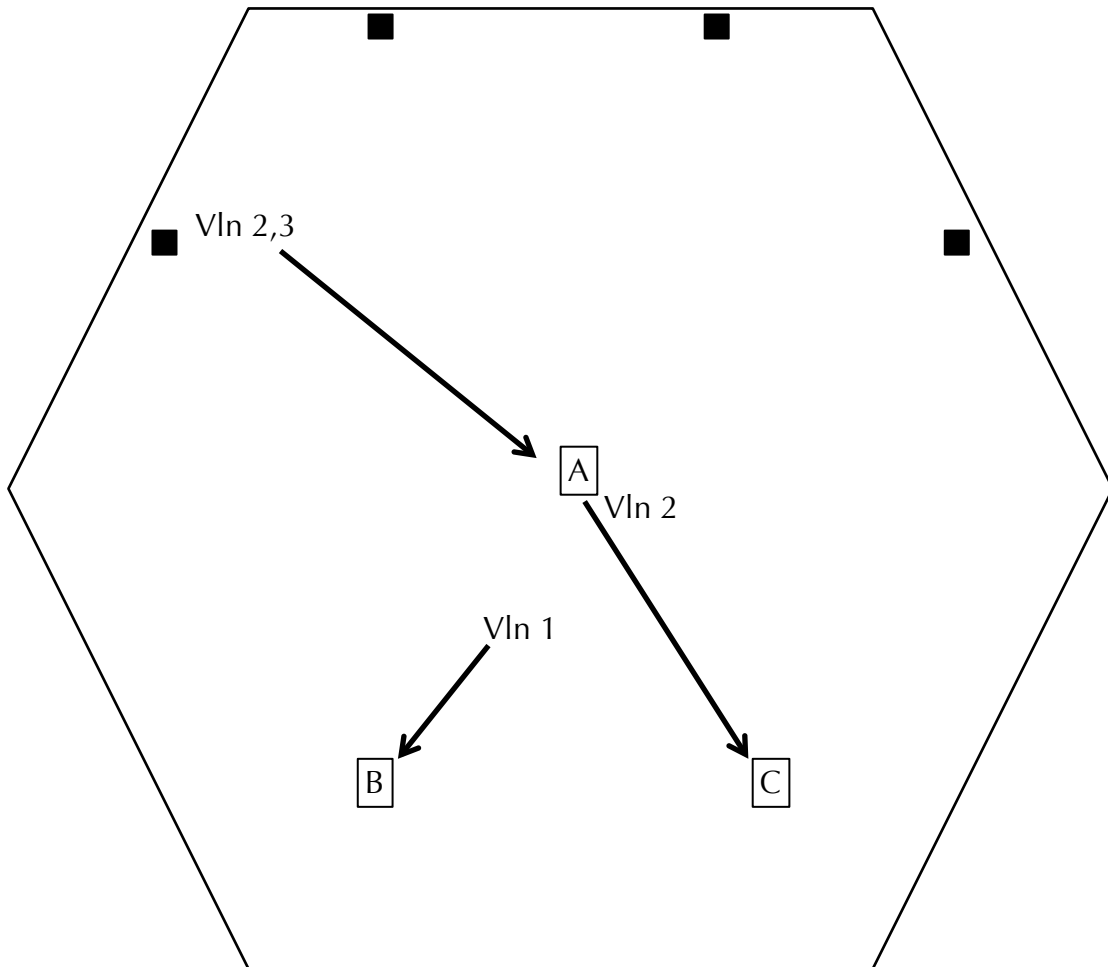
### **Violin 1:**

- Move to **A1**: slow figure-of-8, descending to and turning anticlockwise into **A1**.
- At **A1**: **REACH gesture** facing backwards.
- Move to **A2** with a little more speed variance, descending as before.
- At **A2**: **REACH gesture** facing forwards.

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**Lighting:** From blackout, fade up SC: warm, soft.



**Violin 1:**

- Continue to **B**. Remain on this spot. Perform **REACH gesture** twice more when Violin 2 and Violin 3 each play.

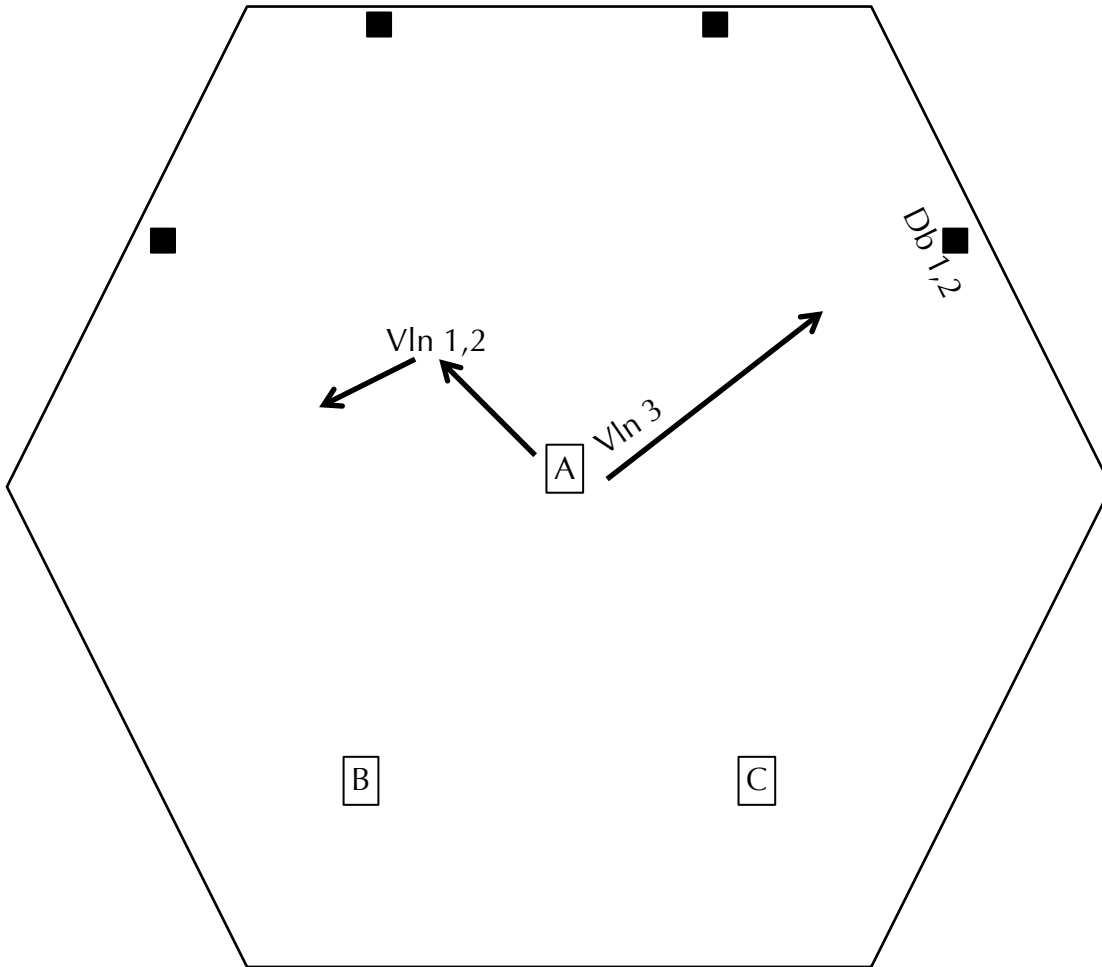
**Violin 2:**

- After Violin 1's second note, move to **A**. At **A**: **REACH gesture** facing backwards.
- Continue moving DSL, descending to **C**.
- At **C**: perform **REACH gesture** when Violin 3 plays.

**Violin 3:**

- After Violin 2's first note, move to **A**: slow figure-of-8 movement, descending to and turning anticlockwise into **A**.
- At **A**: **REACH gesture** facing forwards.

**All:** On Violin 3's REACH gesture, Violins 1,2,3 *cresc.* towards the end of the note, hold REACH pause for longer, then lower bow and instrument to a normal playing position more slowly than before.

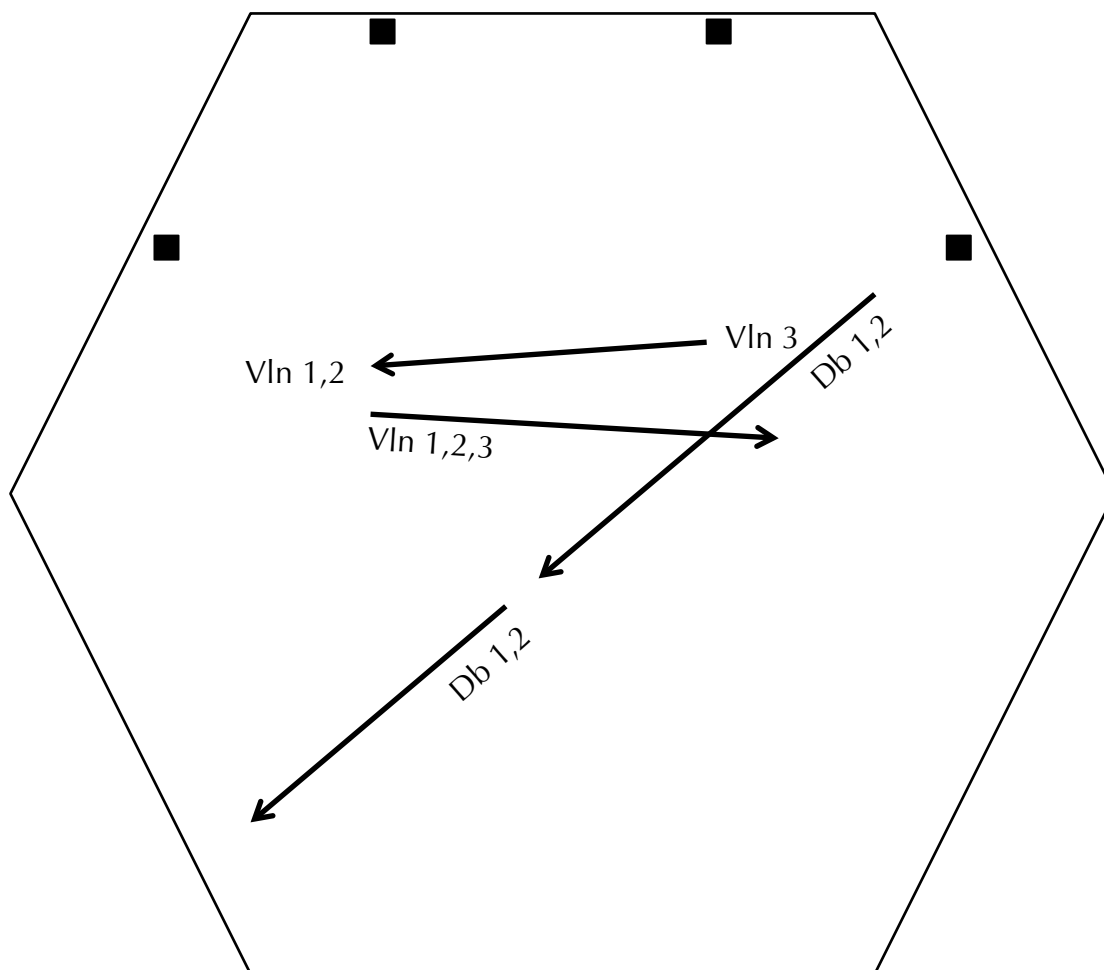


**All:** movement (as before) around the lit space.

- Form 4 **LINES** on points: **A, C, B, A**.
- The first two **LINES** are silent. From the third, play: the first frozen player begins a sustained note, down bow, *senza vibrato*. The other players play when forming the **LINE**. End together and break away.
- The last **LINE** is a set position on **A**.
- Break out in separate directions, play long notes *legato* in your own time.

**Violin 3:** move to the USL edge of the light.

**Violin 1,2:** move to form a **SHAPE** on USR. Once there play long notes.



**Double basses:**

- Move into SC, following Violin 3.
- Rest in SC then pick up and carry on.

**Violin 3:**

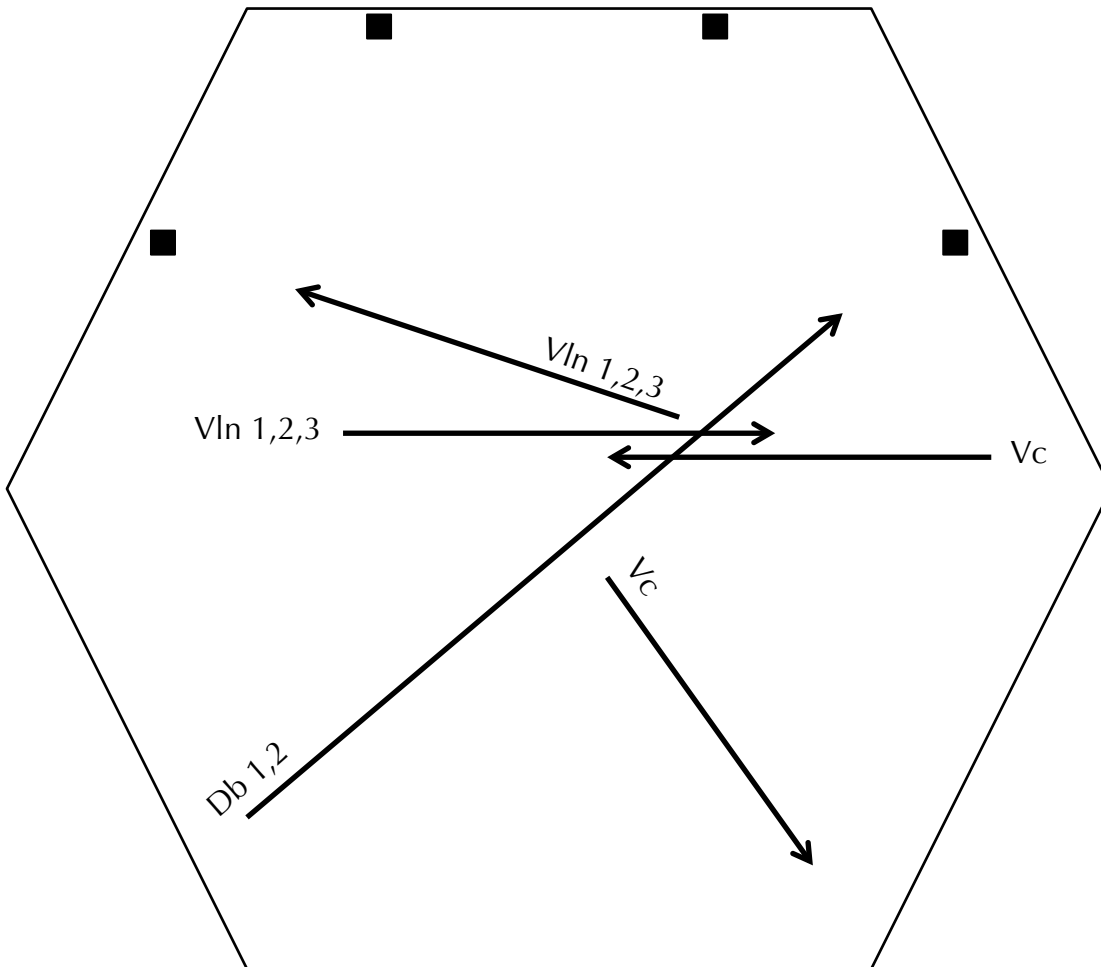
- Step backwards as the Double basses follow you into the light. Turn and move to join Violins 1 and 2.

**Violin 1,2,3:**

- Once together, move swiftly to USL.

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**Lighting:** Fade up DSL if needed.



### Violin 1,2,3:

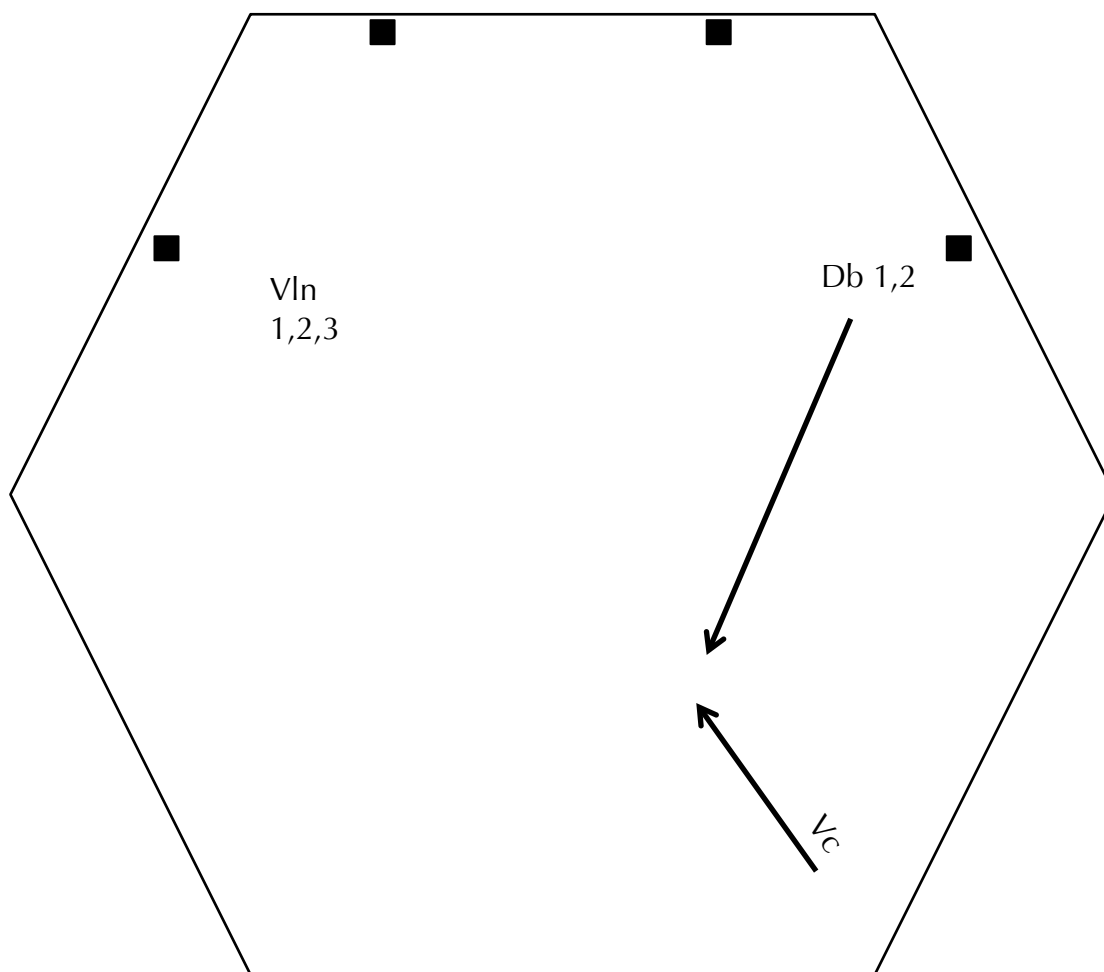
- Play a down bow note to bring in Cello, then rush USR to **CROUCH** positions. Fade out playing. Watch the Double basses.
- When the Double basses begin moving back, watch them and play long notes *legato*: one high, one low, repeat. Start *p*, play in your own time.

### Cello:

- Move into SC, pause, turn 135 degrees. Move to DSR.

### Double basses:

- Rest again at the DSR edge. Turn to face the opposite direction.
- Move back in the opposite direction to before.

**Cello:**

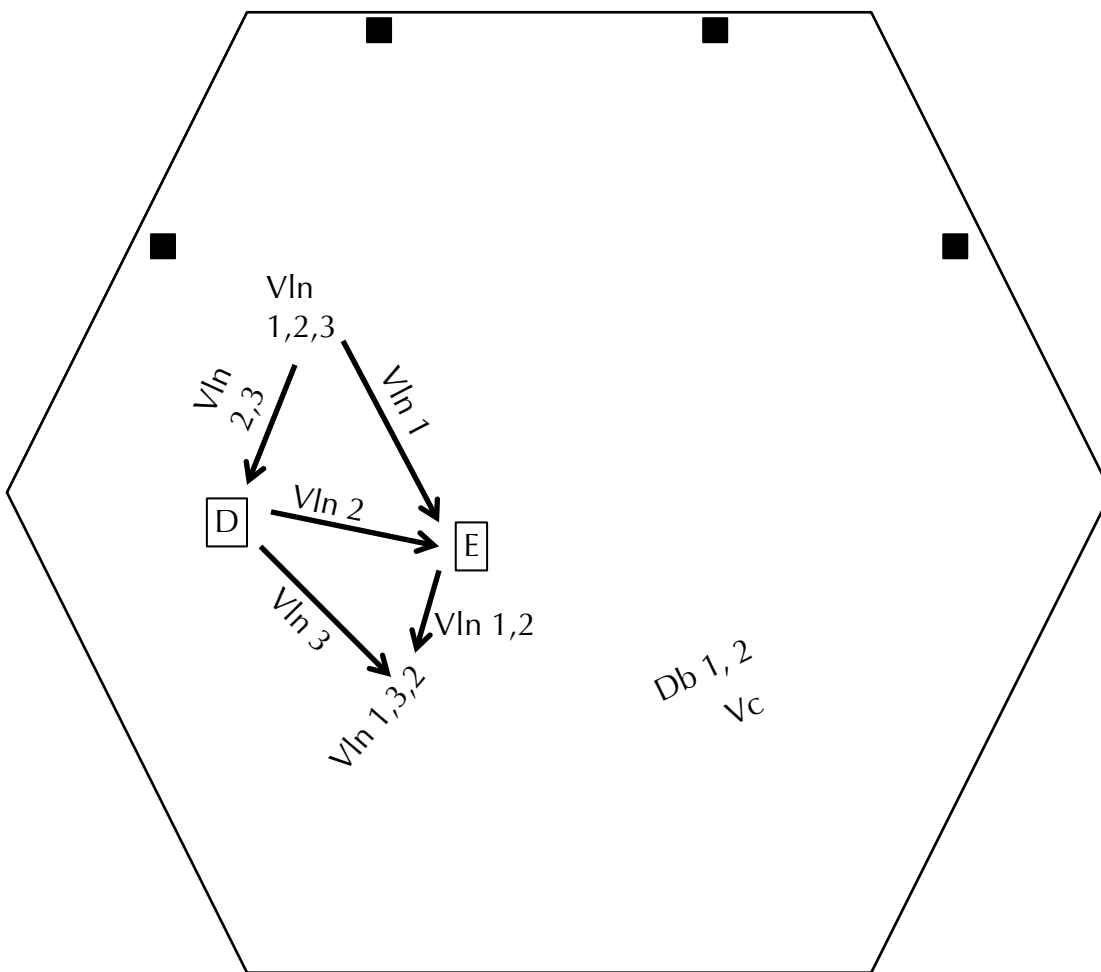
- Turn 180 degrees, move back towards SC. Turn anticlockwise close to the Double basses to face the same direction as them.
- In position, on Violin low string cue, turn head to look at bow, slowly raise bow ready to play an up bow.

**Double basses:**

- Move DS to meet Cello.
- On Violin low string cue and Cello head turn cue, raise bows ready to play an up bow.

**Violin 1,2,3:**

- Still in CROUCH positions, still playing: all notes get lower as basses and Cello move closer. When basses and Cello are in position, hold G strings (then viola move to C string) and fade out when they start playing.



### Cello:

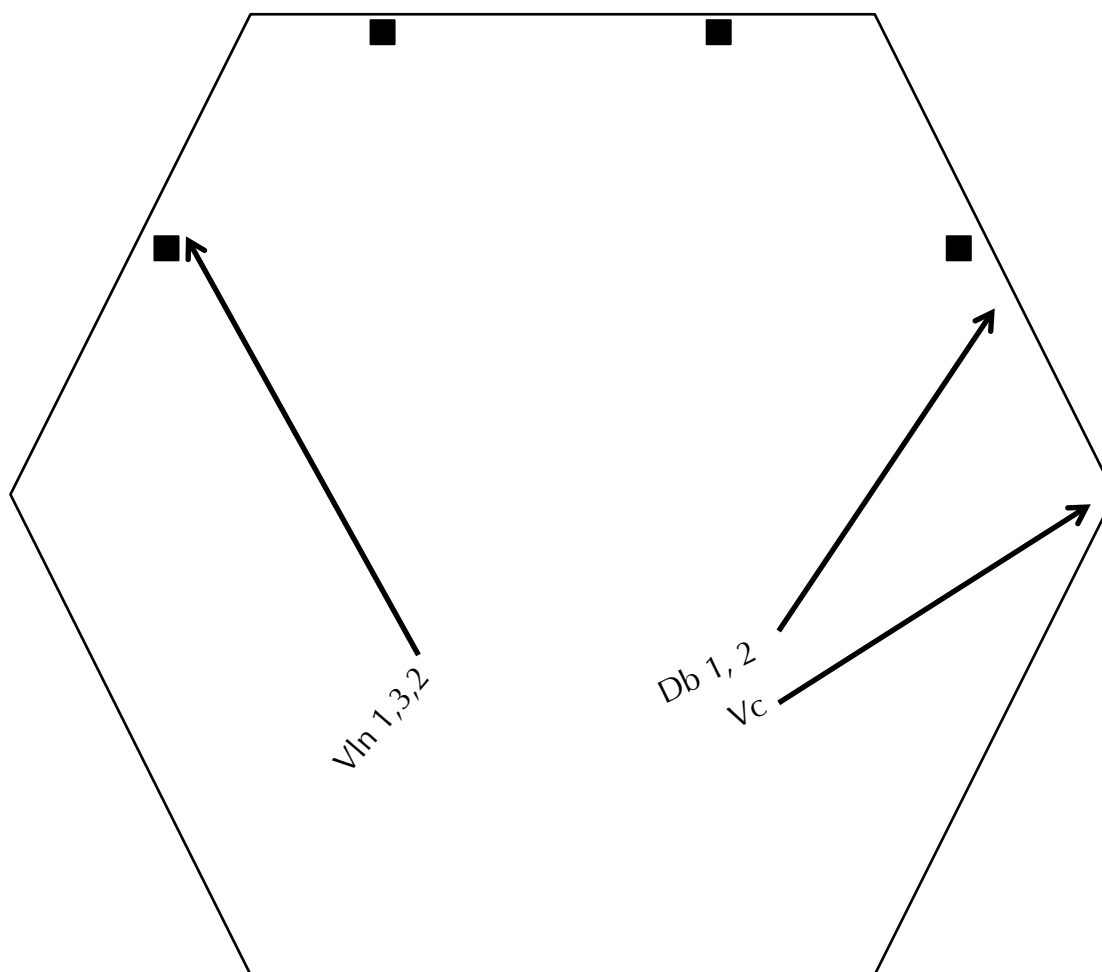
- Play G string, up bow, slow bow, retake bow with an arm spin round at the same slow speed, play again. Repeat. Start ***p***, ***cresc.*** slightly (ad lib.).

### Double basses:

- Start playing a D and a harmonic, sustaining, ***p***. After every Cello note, one player changes note. Dynamics can swell as the chords sound.

### Violin 1,2,3:

- After the Cello's third note, move forward one by one to form **SHAPES** in pairs on **D** and **E**. The order of movement is: Violin 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2.
- The final position is a diagonal line: all face the Basses straight on, at a right angle to audience.
- In the third position, play four long *legato* notes (down bow, up, down, up) ascending from the lowest string. Send the fourth note out with a slight *crescendo*. Retake bow with slow spin, play another up bow on a higher note. Repeat, always ascending in pitch (don't leap far each time, keep listening) and sending the notes out. Work towards playing in time.
- After at least one note together, leave in the order Violin 2,3,1. Walk slowly to USR into the dark, always playing.



### Violin 1,2,3:

- After at least one note together, leave in the order Violin 2,3,1. (Wait until one is out of sight before leaving.) Walk slowly to USR into the dark, always playing.
- Playing should move out of sync. After Cello stops playing, each note gets gradually louder, to *f* then stop (in your own time). The last one playing does three notes solo then stops.

### Cello:

- When Violin 2 leaves, move off stage left. Continue to play the G string, move in between each note. Continue playing off stage until lighting cue.
- Once the stage is empty, each note gets gradually louder, to *f* then stop.

### Double basses:

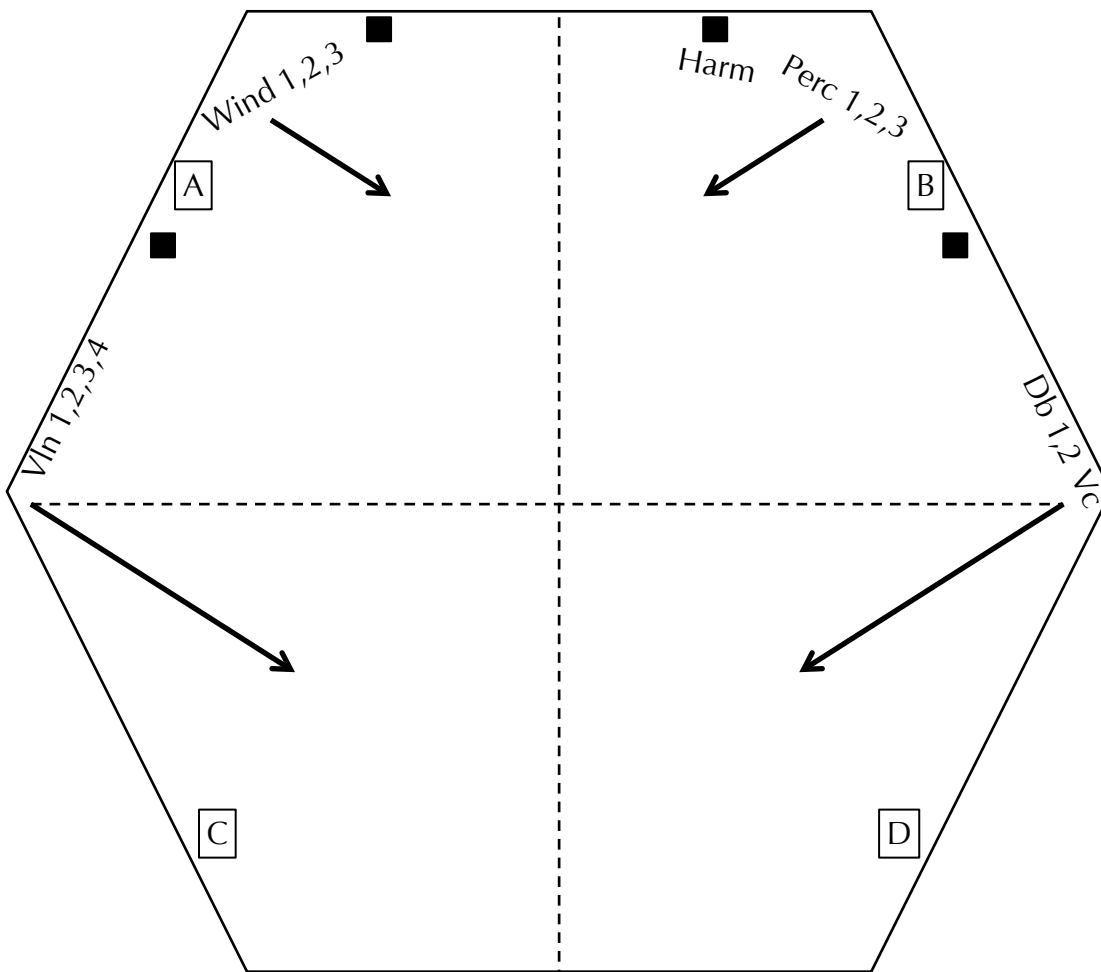
- Fade out, move off USL when Cello starts. Do not restart playing.

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**Lighting:** fade slightly as players leave.

Sudden state change after the last Violin's final three notes to dark red wash.

## Part II – VIOLENCE



**Order of entries:** Violin, Wind, Perc, Basses, Violin, Harmonium, Wind etc.

**Violin 4 enters immediately after lighting cue.**

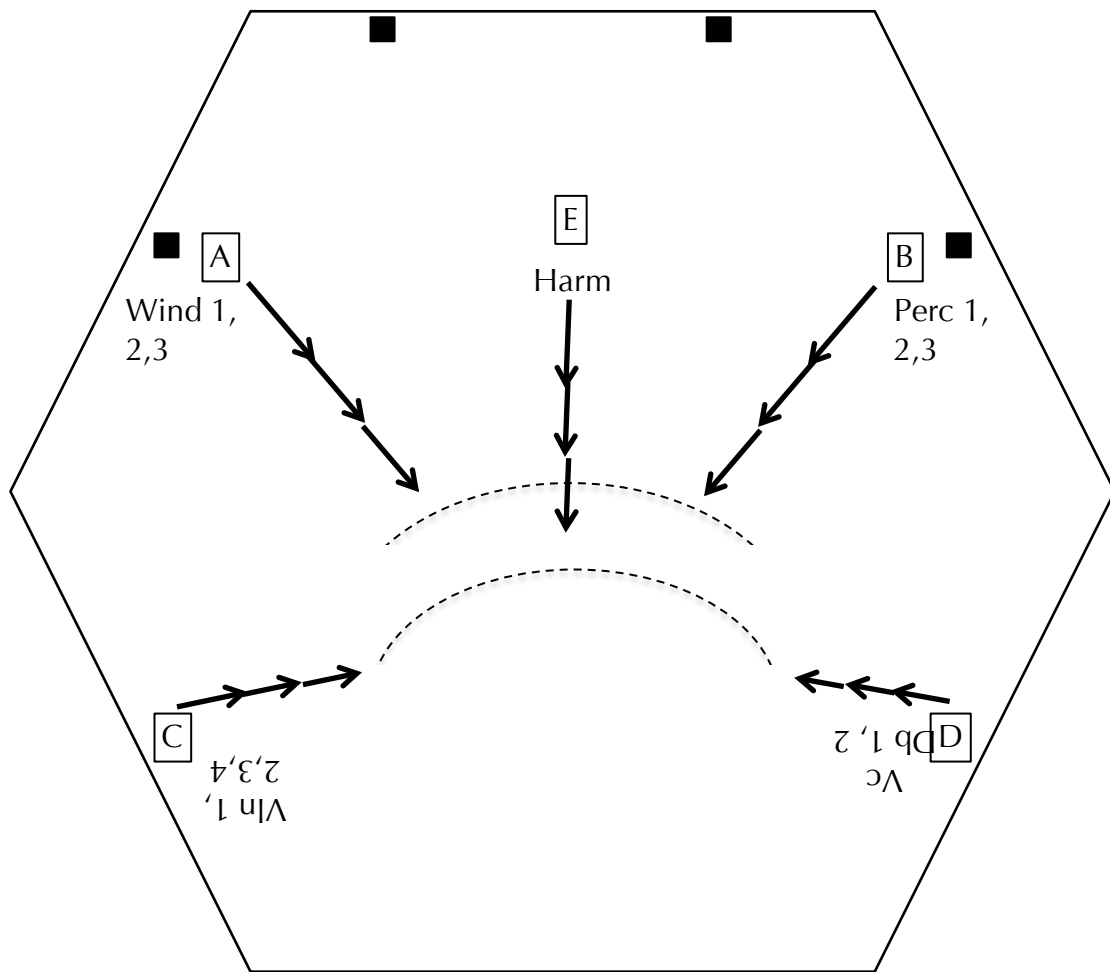
### **Movement (ALL):**

- Walk carrying instrument as a **TOOL**. Remain in your quarter (dashed lines).
- On your first entry, walk straight then pause for 5 seconds.
- Pause often for c. 5 seconds.
- Subsequent players only enter when a player from their family collects them. Follow onto the stage, pause, walk in different directions.
- Initially occupy only a small space in the far **HOME** corners (**A, B, C, D**).
- Move to/away from **HOME**. As more players enter, move closer to SC. Look for opportunities to **FLOCK** together when close to **HOME**.
- **WEAPON poses** aiming at a player in a different quarter.
- **WEAPON pairs**, released by an instrumental family member.
- **WEAPON pairs**, released by a family member. Family members **FLOCK** as a pair.

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**Lighting:** Bring up a bright white quarter spot DSR to cue Violin 4, then 3 more spots as the other 3 players enter first. Fill out the rest of the stage with white light if necessary.



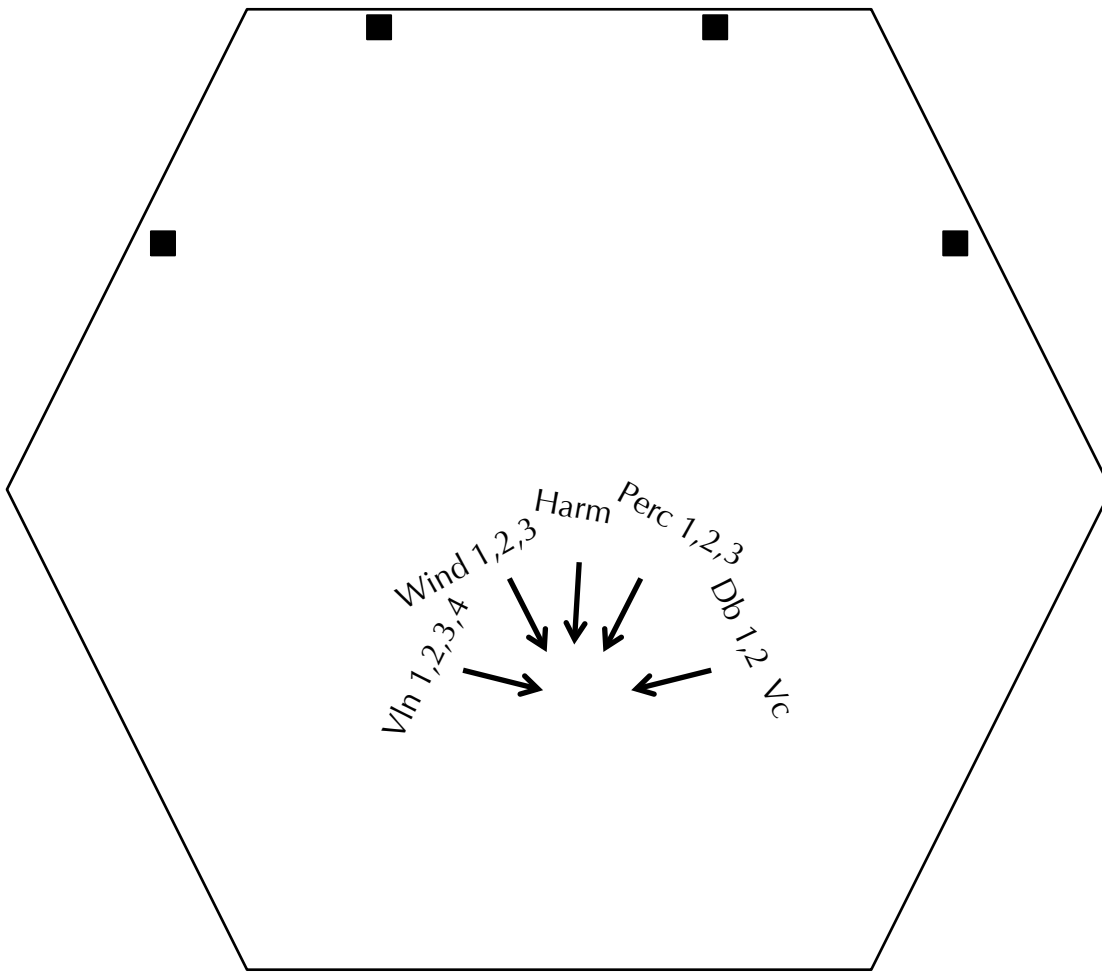


**Movement (ALL):**

- Collect all family members and **FLOCK** in a diamond shape.
- **FLOCK** to **HOME** corners (A, B, C, D, E).
- Turn and present, looking at other families.
- Begin playing: *sff dim.*, pitched/unpitched, getting noisier and louder the closer you are to the centre and the other families.
- Families each shift forward in three stages (not in a preset order: respond to each other) towards **ORCHESTRA** form.
- The third stage is the **ORCHESTRA** form (dashed lines are approximate). With the move to **ORCHESTRA** form comes a sudden change in sound. Families play material that they would in a traditional orchestral piece: Classically-inflected figures, motifs, bass lines, pedal notes, scalic patterns, etc. All performed with an assumed grandeur.

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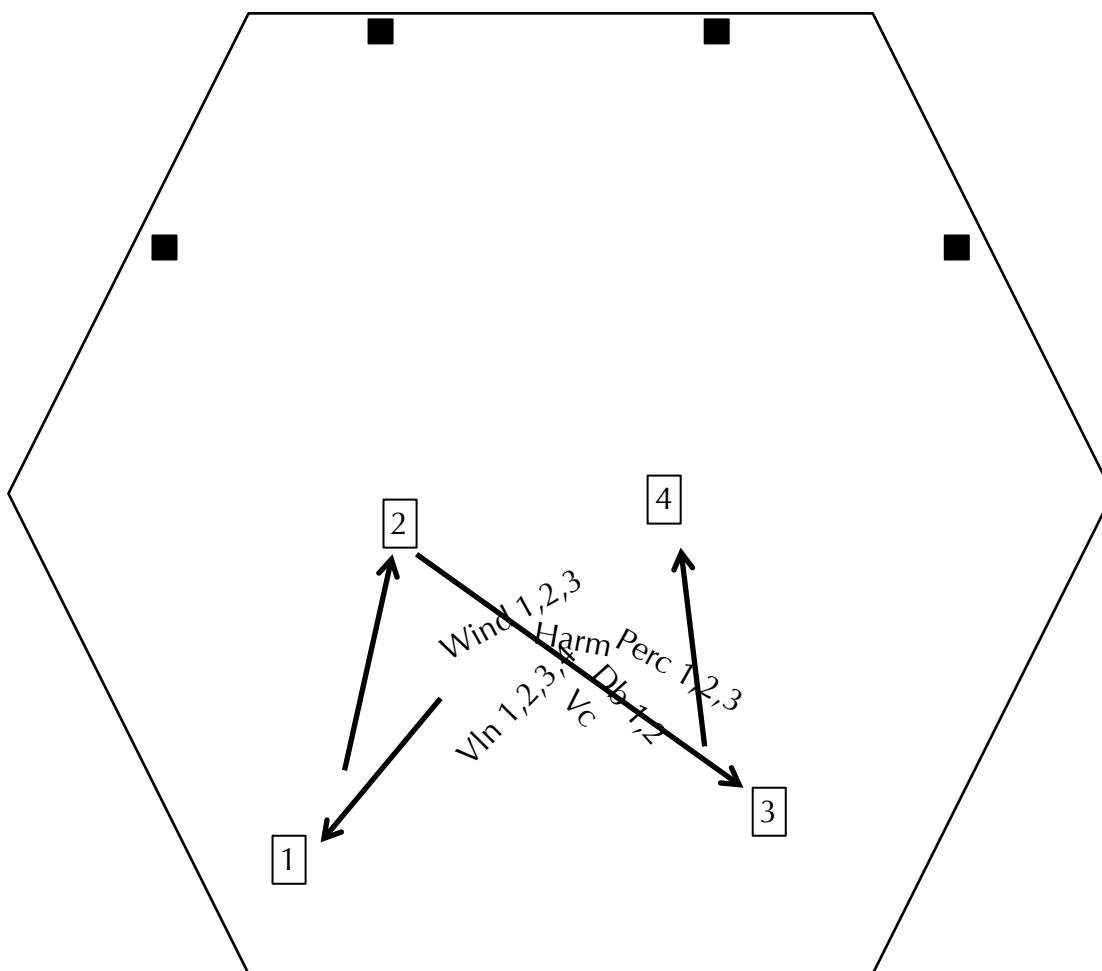
**Lighting:** Increase red light slightly, fade up the 4 LED spots.

**Movement (ALL):**

- Into **CRUNCH** form.
- Pause playing for c. 5 seconds then all unleash cacophonous, chaotic noise.

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**Lighting:** Fade out all lights except the LED spots, which should backlight the ensemble to form a silhouette.

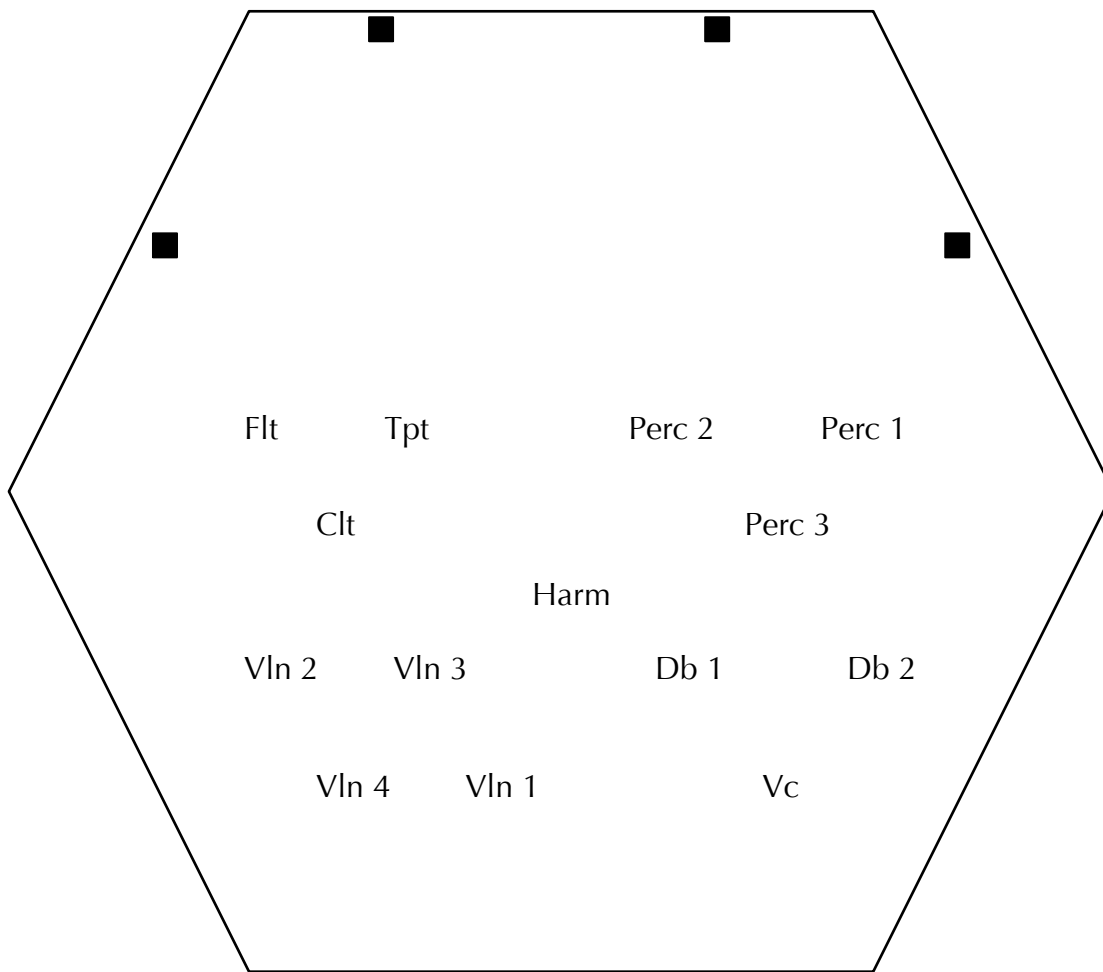


**Movement (ALL):**

- **CRUNCH** form throbs and shakes for a while, becomes unsteady, then stretches out in 4 directions: **1, 2, 3, 4** into **ZIGZAG**. (The fourth stretch causes the **CRUNCH** mass of performers to scatter into **ZIGZAG**).
- Stretches are led by: Violin 4, Trumpet, Double bass 1, Percussion 1.
- Playing throughout: create a chaotic, frenetic, throbbing, pulsating, thrashing cacophony, like an orchestra wrestling with itself.

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**Lighting:** On the fourth stretch into ZIGZAG, fade out the LED spots, fade up bright white lights to the highest intensity yet of the piece.



### Movement (ALL):

- Spread into **ZIGZAG** shape.
- Play **WAVES** back and forth:
  - SR to SL, SL to SR (any note);
  - SR to SL, SL to SR (follow flute/bass notes).
- Playing order (SR to SL):
  - Flute, Violin 2, Clarinet, Violin 4, Trumpet, Violin 1, Violin 3, Harmonium, Percussion 2, Cello, Percussion 3, Double bass 1, Percussion 1, Double bass 2.
- Repeat **WAVES**. One player sustains their notes in between each chord:
  - Clarinet, Violin 4, Percussion 1 (joined by 2 and 3), Trumpet
- After the 8 **WAVES**, stand for c. 20 seconds, reflecting on what has happened.

### WAVE sequence:

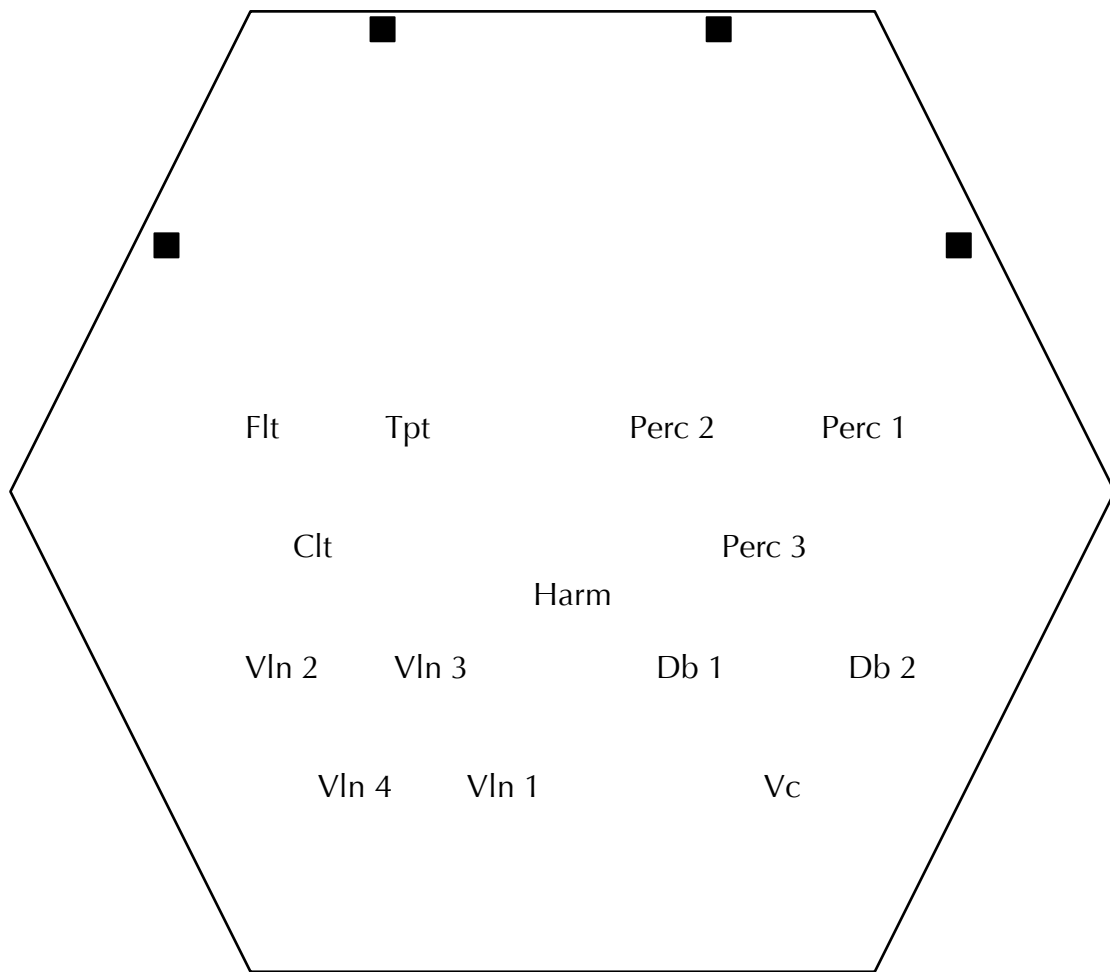
WAVE 1 SR to SL, SL to SR

WAVE 2 SR to SL, SL to SR (+ 1 sustained sound)

WAVE 1 SR to SL (+ 1 sustained sound), SL to SR (+ 1 sustained sound + family join),

WAVE 2 SR to SL (+ 1 sustained sound), SL to SR

## Part III – SILENCE



### **Movement (ALL): players follow this sequence very gradually in their own time**

- Stand still.
- Form a **SHAPE** with another player. At some point after, the player who is joined leaves the SHAPE. Everyone can do this once or a couple of times.
- Change the SHAPE by holding your instrument as a **PRECIOUS** object.
- If in a shape: **OFFER** your instrument to your partner.  
If stood alone: **RELINQUISH** your instrument.
- Stand straight and think on your instrument.
- Leave the stage.

One player remains onstage: they stay in the PRECIOUS pose, looking out at what is left on stage.

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**Lighting:** A very gradual dim to a low lighting state: dim a little every time a performer leaves the stage. When one final performer is left on stage, they look at their instrument then clutch it close to their chest: fade to black a few seconds after.