

shambles

for any solo musician or group

by

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shambles (2013)

Premiere *shamble 1 for cello* (James Whittle) and *shamble 2 for flute*
(Rowena Jacobs), 9th November 2013, Leeds

Duration variable

shambles explores the physical absurdity of musical performance. The score details a process for creating a piece by choreographing musical gestures.

A performer may work solo, or with assistance from a director or dramaturg. Although the score refers to one's 'instrument,' the piece is suitable for singers too. Performers may collaborate and combine individual *shambles* into one piece.

As the title suggests, each performance may be dramatic, satirical, surreal, or all these and more.

How to devise a *shamble*

1. Discover your movements

What gestures do you make when you play your instrument?

e.g. movements, habits, techniques, sound-accompanying movements. Think about what is unique and characteristic about your instrument. Think large-scale and small-scale parts of the body; think about the gestures of other performers of the same instrument, or about performer stereotypes and portrayals.

Identify as many gestures as you can. Write down each one.

2. Experiment with movement

What happens if you abstract, exaggerate or elaborate the movements?

Explore each gesture as a separate motif in movement improvisation:

- Start with performing the gesture alone a few times. Then begin to vary the gesture: speed it up, slow it down, augment or reduce the size of the movement. Push and stretch the gesture until it becomes something else.
- Start to consider the gesture as no longer a gesture associated with performing music, but as something else entirely. Reflect on what it looks like or reminds you of, outside of music.
- Notice the effects the varying gestures have on other body parts and movements. Do these other parts and movements hinder or act differently now? Can you link one gesture to another?
- Improvise using all your available gestures. Notice how it feels to move from one gesture to another. Play with tempo.

Now think about the sounds that result from each gesture (if any).

- Explore what sounds accompany your gestures. Does the sound change when you vary the gesture? Is the sound interesting to you?
- Explore what sounds *could* accompany your gesture, by thinking again about extra-musical associations.
- Are there other sounds you could make? Could you use your voice?
- Improvise more, using all your available gestures and sounds.

3. Refine your movements and set yourself a structure

Once you have a bank of gestures, you can do what you want with them to make a piece. Here are some suggestions to consider:

- making movement phrases combining different gestures (what connects them? What is the tone of each?)
- making distinct sections
- improvising with your bank of gestures
- using external sources (e.g. any text mentioning your instrument, instructional texts, practice notes, etc.)
- how do you use the space on stage?
- what should the lighting state be?
- where are the audience positioned?

Once you have a structure, consider the intention behind each moment: is each gesture distinct enough? Does it look like you want it to look like? What could be improved? Filming and watching your rehearsal can help here.

5. Perform your *shamble*

You have made a *shambles*! Enjoy sharing it with an audience.

Please give your *shamble* a serial number and let me know about your piece.

Take the next available number from an up-to-date list of all *shambles*:

<http://www.james-whittle.co.uk/shambles>.

Credit your solo performances as:

'shamble [no.] for [instrument], by [your name], from a concept by James Whittle.'

Credit a group performance as:

'shambles, from a concept by James Whittle.'