

James Weeks

**ærc quartets**

(2016/8)

for any four bowed string instruments

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perusal score  
not for performance  
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# ærc quartets

for any four bowed string instruments

2016/2018

duration: 28'

## Introduction

*ærc* is the Old English word for *ark*, derived from the Latin *arca*, a chest. Here it denotes an enclosed space, perhaps of refuge or safety, certainly of intimacy.

*ærc quartets* is derived from my ensemble piece *ærc* (2016), for a large number of orchestral string instruments. In that work, the players are paired, as in the ark of Noah, entering the figurative space of the work two-by-two and creating a dense polyphonic texture (a giant viol consort) from breath-like bow-strokes, each pair in rhythmic unison, before exiting in sequence.

In *ærc quartets* only two pairs of instruments are present. The material of the pieces is almost identical to that of *ærc*, but I have subtracted one piece from the original eight.

## Notes for performance

Any combination of four bowed string instruments (including multiples of the same instrument) can be used.

The players in each pair should sit opposite each other with a single shared stand to one side (ideally not between the players and the audience). The two pairs should sit apart from each other.

There are seven pieces (I-VII), each of which lasts roughly 2'00-2'15 (a duration of 2'15 is given in the Structure below but this can be approximated). These pieces are ordered (differently for the two pairs) into seven sections (1-7), each of which contains one piece for each pair. Sections 5 and 6 are overlapped.

The timings for the work are given below. Stopwatches should be used.

## Rhythm

Each of pieces I-VII uses the same basic unit: a sound followed by a silence.

In pieces I-V, each sound is a single bowstroke (always  $\square$ ), played by either one or both players as directed, lasting 6-8 seconds, with a warm *piano* dynamic (slight hairpins are possible), *senza vibrato*. The sound should be gentle but never tentative or thin. *Poco sul tasto* is advisable.

In pieces VI-VII the sounds are double bowstrokes (always  $\square V$ ), each stroke little quicker than the single bowstrokes (5-6 secs each), giving a total sounding time of 10-12 secs.

In every piece, the silence that follows a sound should be roughly 4 secs.

Therefore, in pieces I-V there will be about 12-16 sounds, and in pieces VI-VII there will be about 9-12 sounds.

Each pair should try to get into its own regular rhythm of playing and resting within each piece – a musical breathing.

The stopwatch should be used only to begin and end pieces at the right time: durations of sounds and silences should be felt rather than counted against the clock, nor should the number of sounds be counted.

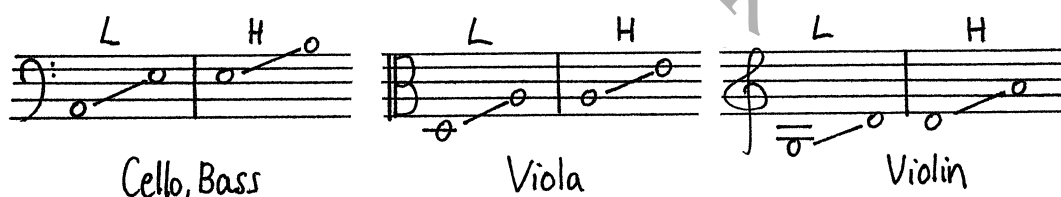
## Coordination within pairs

There are three types of co-ordination:

- alternating (player 1, player 2, 1, 2 etc.)
- alternating with additions: players observe the alternating pattern above but occasionally join in on the other player's note as well, before carrying on the alternating pattern
- playing together

## Pitch

Each player chooses his/her pitches freely from the following gamuts, as directed for each piece (see below).



Any pitch, microtonal or chromatic, within the gamut is allowed. Each piece should be played without moving left hand position.

When there is more than one pitch or sound in a piece (e.g. IV – 'Two notes, L-L or H-H'), each player chooses freely from the options each time s/he plays a note. This should not be fixed in advance nor discussed with the other player.

Pitches should be played with normal finger pressure (•) unless  $\diamond$  (harmonic pressure, whether or not on a harmonic node) is given as an alternative.



## Pieces

I

Two unpitched white noise (breath) sounds

Alternating

Single bows

II

One note, L or H

Alternating with one addition each

Single bows

III

One note, L or H, • or ◊ each time

Alternating with additions ad lib.

Single bows

IV

Two notes, L-L or H-H

Together

Single bows

V

Two notes, H-L, one of which may be • or ◊ each time (the other always •)

Together

Single bows

VI

One double-stopped chord, H&L

Together

Double bows

VII

Two double-stopped chords sharing one note in common, H&L

Together

Double bows