

NOTES FOR PERFORMANCE OF *RHYTHM PRELUDES*

Lent 2006: Write on our hearts

As the “heart” emerged to our writing team as a central image, we discussed numerous ways to portray it, some concrete and some more abstract. Eventually we decided to suggest that each worship service begin with a drum prelude based on a beating heart.

A subtle, though ever present heartbeat remains the foundation for all the suggested weekly pieces; it symbolizes God’s presence and movement within creation. Each week’s prelude feature a variety of other sounds related to the scripture passages for that week. Below is a list of “players” and “instruments” needed. In some cases, parts could be combined for fewer players; congregations should feel free to adapt according to their resources. Tempos have been chosen carefully and rhythms need to be crisp and accurate. Although some rhythms can be taught by rote, congregations would do well to find performers who are musically proficient.

Lent 1:

- 1: Heartbeat (heartbeats can be imitated by thumping on a microphone or beating one’s chest)
- 2: Hammer
- 3: Saw
- 4: Rainstick* and Cymbals**
- 5: 2 pitchers, partially filled with water
- 6: 2 pitchers, partially filled with water

*Rainsticks are available through Ten Thousand Villages; otherwise, one can create an inexpensive rainstick by poking numerous stick pins through a cardboard dowel (like those found in wrapping paper), securing both ends of the dowel and pouring it $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ full of rice.

**If cymbals aren’t available, any hanging sheet metal will do.

Composer’s comments: Prelude 1 opens with the heartbeat and “construction” sounds, as Noah and family work to build the ark. As the rain approaches, the pace of construction comes more feverish. A rainstick announces the coming flood. As we move from Old to New Testament, the floodwaters become those of baptism, symbolized by water poured from a pitcher. Following Jesus’ baptism, he is driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Each temptation is announced with a loud cymbal crash. After the third temptation, the sounds all converge for a final cacophony before the heartbeat continues alone.

Lent 2:

- 1: Heartbeat
- 2: Voice, Piano or other keyboard*
- 3: Cymbals (see Lent 1), Voice, Hands, Feet
- 4: Voice, Hands, Feet
- 5: Voice, Hands, Feet

*Several instruments will work. If using **piano**, the lid needs to be open and the strings fairly accessible; the damper pedal needs to be functional. If using **organ**, use a soft pedal stop (32’ or longer) for the initial rumbling and a thin reed on the manuals. Various synthesized sounds on **electronic keyboards** can work well.

Composer's comments: Prelude 2 begins with a picture of “barrenness,” created by using the inside of a piano. The performer should depress the damper pedal, create a low rumbling by *strumming* the bass strings and *plucking* (fingernails will create the best metallic sound) a few random strings in the middle register. The pedal should stay down to sustain the laughter a few measures later (laugh loud and hard right into the echo chamber). [Because the mechanics of creating these sounds can be distracting, it may be helpful to have worshippers close their eyes during this prelude.] Here, the cymbal indicates God's voice as He promises a child. The final part of the prelude is a series of hand claps and foot stomps to indicate the “multitude of nations” coming forth. Notice how the single clap on the first beat of m. 8 becomes two on the next and four on the next—exponential growth as the generations multiply. (Downstems indicate foot stomps while upstems indicate hand claps. Claps should be with slightly cupped hands to produce the biggest, fullest sound possible.) Rhythms intensify and all voices reiterate God's promise to end: “You will be blessed!”

Lent 3:

- 1: Heartbeat
- 2: Female voice
- 3: Male voice

Composer's comments: The third Prelude combines verses from Psalm 119 with the lectionary Psalm for Lent 3. Notice the tempo is slightly faster than the previous two weeks—this is to assist the readers. While readers should follow the given rhythm as closely as possible, text should *not* be accented according to rhythmic principles. Rather, it should flow as naturally as possible so as to relax the listener. This will require practice.

Lent 4:

- 1: Knives, Forks, small table, Voice
- 2: Voice, Coins and Offering plates (or any container)
- 3: Voice, Coins and Offering plates
- 4: Coins and Offering plates
- 5: Heartbeat
- 6: String or electric bass, optional

Composer's comments: Prelude 4 combines visual and aural elements. In lieu of sounds associated with the “darkness” and “light” mentioned in the Gospel passage, begin with lights out in the sanctuary. The sounds of grumbling (knives/forks) and consequences (hissing serpents) should all be heard in the dark. It might actually be effective to have a group of children portray the “Children of Israel” by clanging the knives and forks—the more voices, the better. As the serpents fade out and the “coins” fade in, lights should come up as gradually as possible, either by turning on individual banks or by using a dimmer; if sanctuary doesn't have the capacity to change lighting gradually, all lights should be turned on in conjunction with m. 12. Where one is indicated to start dropping coins, all parts can gradually double this to portray “immeasurable riches.” A quarter note indicates a few coins should be heard separately; a half note, several more; a whole note should make quite a racket. [The bass line provided has a slight jazz flavor, meant to aid in the sinister-ness of the snakes; this line can be omitted entirely from the prelude with no great consequence to overall effect.]

Lent 5:

- 1: Pencil, Paper, Sandpaper, Nail, Ceramic object, Metal, Engraving Pen, Heartbeat
- 2: Paper (2 sheets) to rip, Ceramic object to break, Heartbeat
- 3: 2 pitchers, partially filled with water, Heartbeat
- 4: Heartbeat

Composer's comments: Prelude 5 repeats several times the same scenario, meant to portray God's relentless pursuance of covenant with His people: First, we hear the sound of *covenant making*. Each time, it becomes a little more uncomfortable to listen to as the performer uses 1) pencil and paper, 2) pencil and sandpaper, 3) a nail or screw on ceramic, and 4) and engraving pen on metal. Writing should always be done as rhythmically as possible; that is, harder strokes should be made on main beats and punctuated occasionally by the dotting of an "i" or the crossing of a "t." [The writing on paper will need to be on a hard surface (not on a tablet) and will probably need to be miked.] Ripping paper and smashing the ceramic indicate the next sound, that of *covenant breaking*. Each time God decides to try again, we hear the sound of *cleansing*, portrayed by pouring water. At the end of the prelude, multiple heartbeats suggest changed hearts in response to God's promise that "all people" will one day know Him.

Lent 6:

- 1: Stone, Chisel and Hammer
- 2: Voice
- 3: Voice
- 4: Hoofbeats
- 5: Heartbeat

Composer's comments: Prelude 6 features almost exclusively sounds from the traditional Palm Sunday text. The exception is the chisel and stone heard in the opening measures above the heartbeat, designed to remind worshippers of the stone rejected by the builders (Ps. 118). The clip-clop of the donkey's hooves can be created by wood blocks, other percussion instruments, or anyone fluent in the art of tongue-clicking! Both the hoofbeats and the chant should begin at a whisper, as if in the distance, and crescendo until m. 14. Similarly, the hoofbeats and heartbeat should diminuendo until they fade out entirely. Though not quite scripturally accurate, a moving picture is painted as the hoofbeats accompany the heartbeat to the end of the piece. We can almost see the lonely figure on a donkey as the pair makes its way toward Good Friday and Golgotha.