

GCST: *Music for Flexible Minds*

Gloria Yehilevsky

‘GCST: Music for Flexible Minds’ is a dynamic score for improvisation, existing as a set of physical cards in my possession. Photographs of the cards are depicted below alongside performance notes, but it is important to note that these images are not the same as the physical score.

First performance:

Great Hall, Blackheath Halls, London, UK, 12 December 2024.

Performers: Gloria Yehilevsky–xyloynth, Caius Williams–double bass,
Cori Smith–viola

Video recording: <https://youtu.be/xVuxUWmINnM>

Duration: variable

card sorting and stringing typically takes 5-10 minutes
it is easiest to sort the cards before an intermission

Programme Notes:

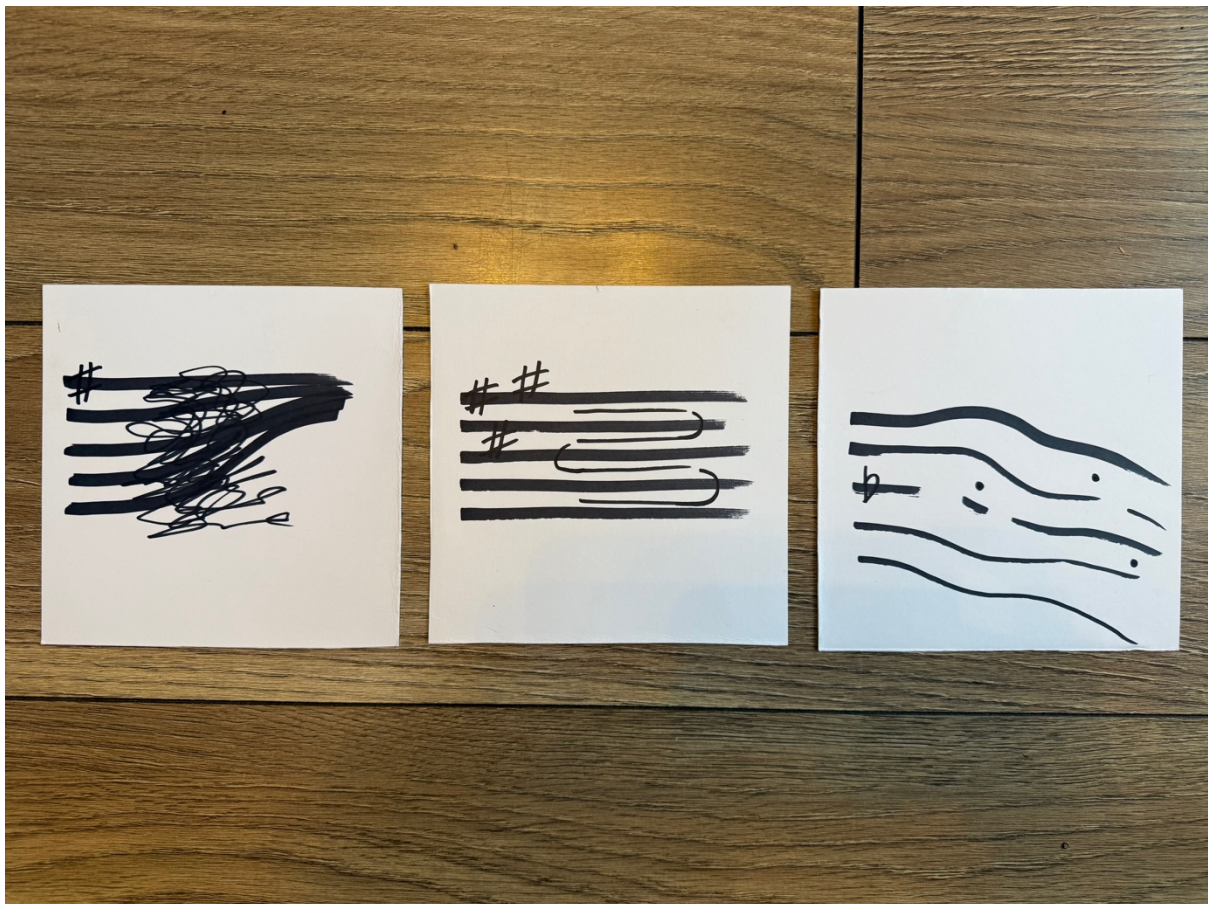
Context:

This piece is modelled after the cognitive neuropsychological task, the Wisconsin Card Sorting Task (WCST). In the WCST, there are four matching cards; in the GCST there are three. The matching cards always comprise the first card in a set/movement for performance, so there will be one 'movement' beginning with the 'dense & tenses' card, one beginning with the 'moderate & maintaining' card and one with the 'sparse and relaxing' card. These three are fixed and do not change. Below is a photo of the matching cards.

Movements:

- dense & tenses
- moderate & maintaining
- sparse & relaxing

Matching cards:



Performance Notes:

Instrumentation: Flexible. Recommended maximum of 8-10 players per movement.

Score set-up:

The order of the cards is determined by audience participation in sorting the cards. Volunteers are asked to create new piles below the matching cards. There are 27 cards in the deck (in addition to the 3 matching cards, resulting in 30 total). They are told that there is a rule according to which they need to match the cards, but they don't know what the rule is. They determine the rule based on feedback from the 'experimenter / composer,' and are told whether they are correct/incorrect for each card that they sort. Their goal is to get as many correct as possible, however the rule may change during the task, and when they notice that the rule has changed, they need to figure out what the new rule is and exploit that. This continues until all the cards have been sorted.

The rules are always in the same order: (1st) match to key signature, (2nd) match to staff shape, (3rd) match to density script, repeat if necessary. When there are 6 correct cards in a row, the rule changes.

The three resultant piles, with the corresponding matching card to start, now comprise the three 'movements' to be played by the improvising ensemble.

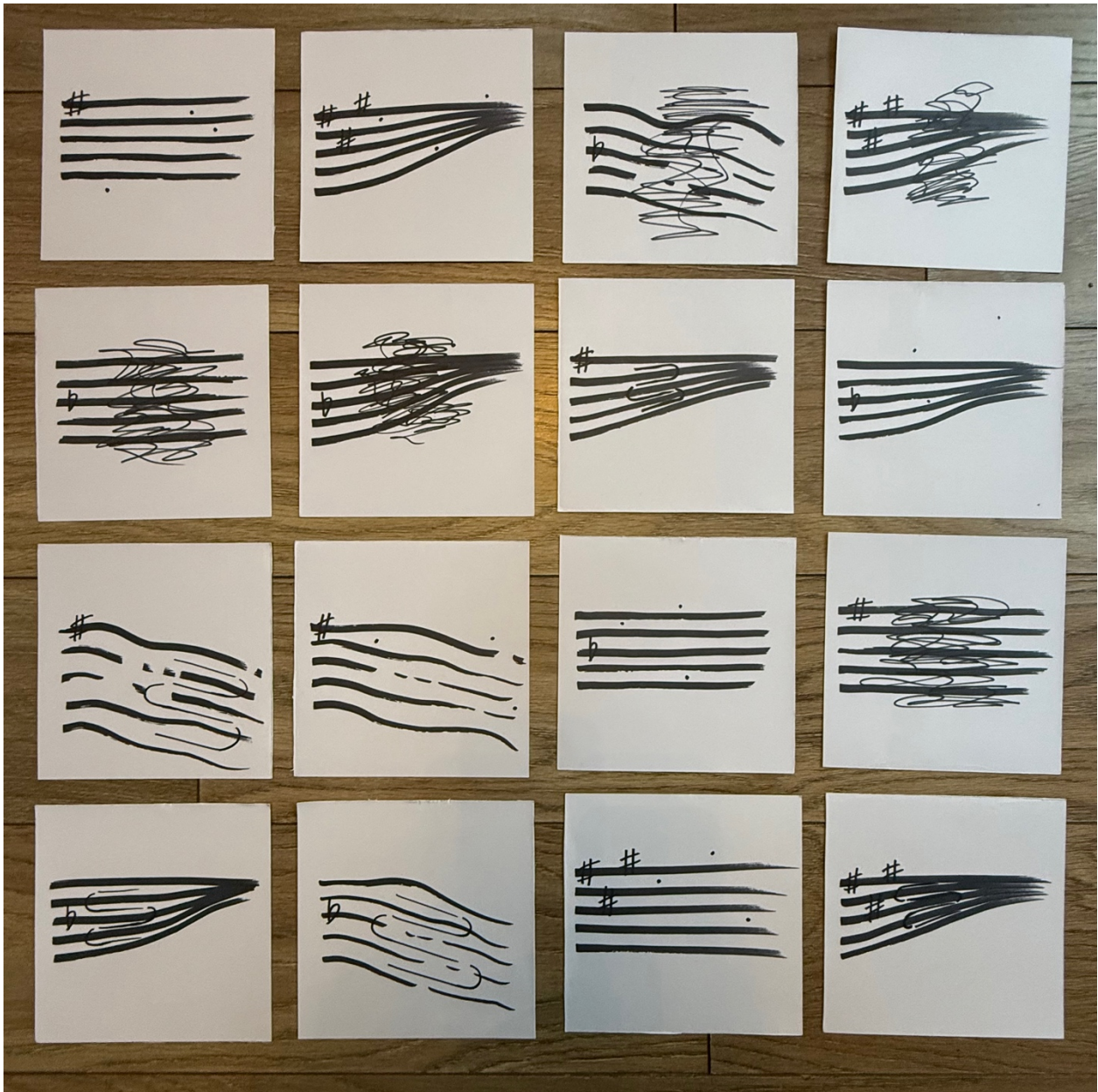
Physical set-up:

Once the order of cards is determined, they should be strung up on yarn/string with clothes pins. One string should be used for each movement, totalling three. These will most often contain unequal numbers of cards; this is not an issue. The lines should be hung up in plain visibility for the performers, however the room allows (e.g. from mic stands, ceiling hooks, vents, other).

Please see images below for examples:



Below is an image of a selection of the sorting cards. It was not necessary to photograph all of them because they all contain variants of the same set of symbols/information.



Score interpretation:

Staves:

The staves that squeeze together towards the right indicate increasing tension.

The staves that are as normal indicate maintaining tension.

The staves that ripple and expand to the right indicate decreasing tension or relaxing.



^ increasing tension



^ maintaining tension



^ relaxing/decreasing
Tension

Scripts:

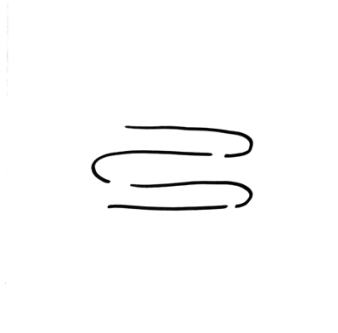
The scripts with a dense, irregular, erratic shape indicate dense playing.

The scripts with winding lines between the staff lines indicate medium/moderate density playing.

The scripts with a few dots indicate sparse playing.



^ dense playing



^ medium/moderate
Density



^ sparse playing

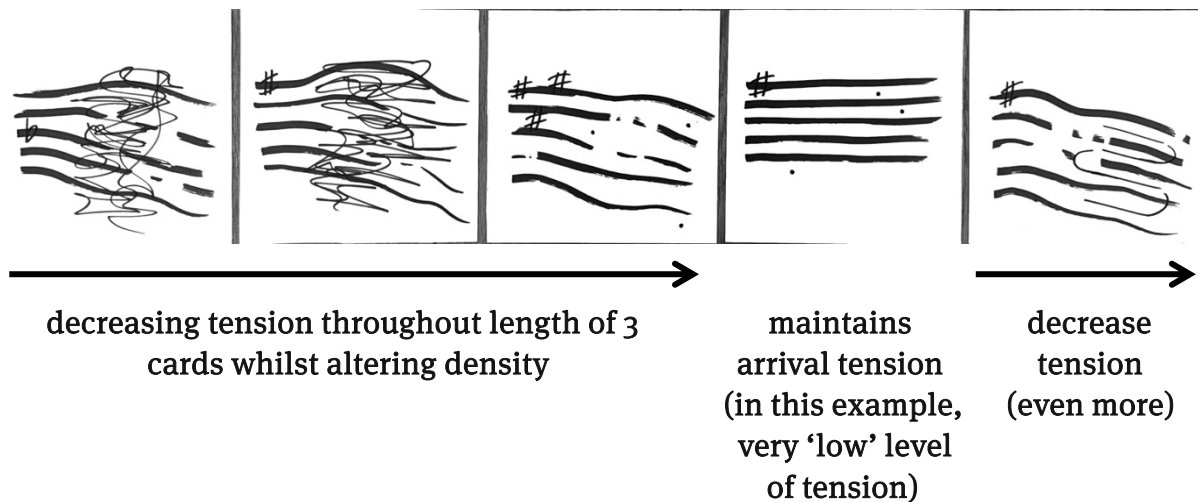
Key signatures:

As normal.

Chromaticism can be used in service of altering levels of tension. A-harmonic playing is welcome; the key signature is lowest in the hierarchy of invitations but is not to be entirely ignored.

Strings of same-tension cards:

When several cards in a row have the same tension, tension should be altered cumulatively. For example:



Performance length and card progression

There is no set performance length and cards are to be moved through from left to right at any pace. If played as an ensemble, members should listen to one another whilst progressing through the cards. The piece ends in any way that is appropriate to the final card and mutually agreed upon.