

INSOMNIA
for oboe*, percussion and digital sound

Insomnia. The inability to sleep, despite attempts at rest. Like an insomniac this piece is agitated and unable to settle. The instrumentalists inhabit a dark, oppressive world which is constantly active, fragmentary and bordering on nightmare. The work was partly inspired by my own experience of insomnia, which usually strikes when I am composing, and by Sylvia Plath's poem, 'Insomniac'.

The piece was commissioned by *New Noise* (Joby Burgess and Janey Miller) and first performed by them at Blackheath Concert Halls, London on June 12th 2001.

Katharine Norman

** The written part here is designed for oboe and should not be performed on another instrument. However, an alternative woodwind or brass instrument could replace oboe, but please contact the composer to discuss an arrangement.*

IMPORTANT - please read these performance instructions carefully before embarking!

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

This piece was written for oboe and percussion (for New Noise – Joby Burgess and Janey Miller). The digital sound or 'tape part' (CD or Dat) could be performed alone (as a somewhat different piece). The oboe part could be performed by another suitable instrument – however, please contact the composer to discuss, rather than use the part here, which is written with oboe in mind.

The tape part is indicated in the score as a guide to what you are hearing, with timings to aid the ensemble.

Where you are required to co-ordinate with the tape there is an arrow to show the relevant point on the tape. You do NOT need to co-ordinate precisely, just play after you hear that event. It may be helpful to use a stopwatch.

The tape part is a 'world' for you to live in, rather than an extension of your parts. Quite a bit of the time you may be almost inaudible when the tape is loud - this is fine! In fact the tape part should be very loud throughout.

If you get behind, you could leave out material – but preferably not.

If you get ahead, repeat material ad lib – please do this rather than leave a long gap of inactivity.

Do not attempt to co-ordinate with the other player, you are two isolated individuals and will frequently be playing very different material. Don't consciously choose the same tempo as the other person.

Tempi are relative – the way the score is laid out in time will dictate the sort of speed required.

Instrumental notation:

Durations are relative, even rhythmic patterns are provided as a guide only, you may change them if you keep to the fragmentary, rather frenetic spirit of the piece.

Where a note is of an indeterminate length there is no beam, just a notehead. Hold these notes until the next note, a comma (indicating a stop) or (in the case of the oboe only!) until you run out of breath.

Symbols:



Oboe only. Detune up and then back, using the embouchure/lip. The effect should be quite a pronounced distortion of the pitch, up to a semitone higher and back, quite slow.

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These commas are important and indicate breaks (they replace rests). They indicate to stop playing until the next event.

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(over a note) Percussion – ‘stop’ the instrument. For wind chimes, grab, for cow bell stop with the stick on the bell etc. Sometimes the music is so fast that you will not stop the sound in reality – but you should attempt to.

RC

Rim click. (sharper and less drum sound than rim shot)

RS

Rim shot

Staging/technical matters.

The two performers should be positioned either side of the stage, separated. Oboe on the left, percussion on the right. They should be far apart, and appear isolated.

They should, ideally, be in semi-darkness with lights on their stands or spotlights on each performer. The piece should be 'dark' and the performers may wish to start in blackout, gradually raising spotlights on them, if this is possible. Please don't raise the lights gradually during the dawn chorus at the end. The stage should remain dark, even fading blackout once the performers have stopped playing (and the tape continues)

The performers should be amplified. The amplification should be panned to duplicate the actual position of the performers. They may also need stage monitors in order to hear the tape part. Amplification should only be omitted if equipment is unavailable and the venue is very small.

Multi-speaker diffusion is ideal, so that the sound surrounds the audience (with the amplified instruments only coming out of the front speakers). If only two speakers are used, make sure there is no feedback with the instrumental amplification.

Please note – many of the sounds on tape are high-pitched and timbrally complex; they require good quality speakers to work, and a standard PA will not be able to reproduce the tape part accurately. Use good speakers if you can, please!

Katharine Norman can be contacted via the British Music Information Centre: www.bmic.co.uk