

Writing for CoMA ensembles - guidelines and requirements

What is flexible scoring?

CoMA ensembles vary in size and instrumentation, so we ask composers to write flexible scores which are designed to be performed by different numbers and combinations of instruments. You may specify your preferred instrumentation, but pieces must be playable using many different combinations of instruments.

Division of parts

Flexible scores usually consist of four parts, and often a number of different instruments will play from each part. The conductor and performers will choose which instruments play each part, depending on what instruments are available, adjusting the instrumentation to achieve the right balance.

You may also include parts for keyboard and percussion if you wish.

The following is a typical division of parts:

- Part 1 upper range:
- e.g., violin, flute, oboe, clarinet
- Part 2 upper middle range:
- e.g., violin, oboe, clarinet, viola, alto saxophone, trumpet
- Part 3 lower middle range:
- e.g., viola, tenor saxophone, french horn, tenor horn, bassoon, trombone, guitar
- Part 4 lower range:
- e.g., cello, double bass, bassoon, trombone, euphonium, tuba, bass guitar
- keyboard (piano or electronic keyboard) – normally one player only
- percussion – normally one player only

Percussion

The percussion instruments available vary between ensembles, so please suggest alternatives. For untuned percussion, specifying a generic timbre rather than a specific instrument is flexible and useful - e.g., drum, wood or metal.

List the instruments/timbres and the number of percussionists required on the score and the part.

Tuned percussion instruments (if available) may be assigned to one of the four basic ensemble parts.

Write the percussion part either in instrumental groupings (tuned and untuned), or on one continuous line, but do not use multiple separate parts.

Note that in CoMA ensembles, percussion is usually played by a non-specialist.

Examples

Scores and recordings of a number of existing CoMA works are available online at <http://www.coma.org/library> . If you would like to view more scores, either in person at the CoMA office or by post, contact Liz Herbert on library@coma.org.

Preparing for CoMA ensemble workshops - guidelines for composers

Score and part preparation

Please ensure that your score and part preparation covers the following points.

- The score should have a title, and if appropriate a short descriptive programme note.
- Please provide a short biographical note about the composer at the front of the score.
- Any special performance instructions that apply to the whole piece should appear at the front of the score, and may also appear in the parts if appropriate.
- For 'Open Score' pieces (flexible scoring), the score should show all parts 'in C', i.e., not transposed.
- Where the piece is for specific instrumentation, including transposing instruments, transposed parts are preferred.
- Use only one staff per part unless the part contains complicated divisi passages.
- Try to use clefs for each part which are appropriate to the tessitura of the music – e.g., alto clef may be used for part 3.
- Bar numbers must be shown in all pieces. In longer pieces, rehearsal letters should also be used.
- The initial tempo and all tempo changes must be clearly marked.
- Metronome marks should be used where possible.
- Order of staves:
 - If there are any solo instruments, their parts should appear at the top of the score.
 - Then place the ensemble parts in order of tessitura – Parts 1,2,3,4, etc.
 - The Keyboard part(s), if any, should be placed below the ensemble parts.
 - The Percussion part(s), if any, should be placed at the bottom of the score.
- The parts should be clearly labelled with the part number, transposition and clef – e.g., 'Part 1 in C Treble'; 'Part 2 in Bb Treble'; etc.
- Some parts may need extra clarification. For example, if you provide two versions of Part 3, one for clarinet and one for tenor sax, the transpositions are different by an octave. The clarinet part should be 'Part 3 in Bb Treble (Cl)''; the sax part should be 'Part 3 in Bb Treble (Sax)'.
- Please try to avoid difficult page turns in the parts wherever possible.
- Ensure score and parts are printed large enough to be easily legible, bearing in mind the distance between the player and the music stand. E.g., if using Sibelius, use staff size 7 for the parts and not less than 6.6 in the score.
- For percussion, list the instruments/timbres and the number of percussionists required on the score and at the beginning of the part.
- For percussion, lay out the part either in instrumental groupings (tuned and untuned), or on one continuous line, but do not use multiple separate parts. Show instrument changes clearly. Be consistent about the use of specific staff lines/space for specific sounds.
- Score and parts should be made available in PDF format.
- If you use Sibelius or other music notation software, it would be useful (but not essential) to have a copy of the source file available, so that CoMA can more easily generate any additional parts or transpositions that may be necessary. Allocation of instruments to parts

The following table gives a rough guide to how the most common instruments may be assigned to different parts in the ensemble. Parts for those instruments marked in bold and underlined are essential; other parts may be regarded as optional.

In most cases, one part can serve for several instruments. E.g., **Part 1 in C Treble Clef** could be given to Flute, Oboe and Violin. **Part 4 in C Bass Clef** could be given to cello, bassoon, trombone and double bass, but bear in mind that in this case the double bass will sound an octave lower than written. (In the range descriptions, C4 is 'middle C'; B3 is the B below middle C; C5 is one octave above middle C; etc.)

			(Typical ranges, as written for C instrs)			
			C4-C7	G3-A5	C3-E5	C2-G4
Instrument	Transposition (sounding)	Clef	PART 1	PART 2	PART 3	PART 4
Flute	None	Treble	in C			
Piccolo	8ve higher	Treble	in C			
Oboe	None	Treble	in C	in C		
Cor Anglais	perf 5 th lower	Treble		in F	in F	
Eb Clarinet	min 3 rd higher	Treble	in Eb			
Bb Clarinet	maj 2 nd lower	Treble	in Bb	in Bb	in Bb	
Bass Clarinet	maj 9 th lower	Treble			in Bb	in Bb
Bassoon	None	Bass / Tenor			in C	in C
Bb Soprano Sax	maj 2 nd lower	Treble	in Bb	in Bb		
Eb Alto Sax	maj 6 th lower	Treble		in Eb	in Eb	
Bb Tenor Sax	maj 9 th lower	Treble			in Bb	
Eb Baritone Sax	8ve+maj 6 th lower	Treble				in Eb
French Horn in F	perf 5 th lower	Treble			in F	
Eb Tenor Horn	maj 6 th lower	Treble			in Eb	
Bb Trumpet	maj 2 nd lower	Treble		in Bb	In Bb	
Tenor Trombone	None	Bass / Tenor			in C	in C
Bb Euphonium/Baritone	maj 9 th lower	Treble			in Bb	in Bb
Tuba /Bass Trombone	None	Bass				in C
Eb Bass	8ve+maj 6 th lower	Treble				in Eb
Bb Bass	Two 8ves+ maj 2 nd lower	Treble				in Bb
Violin	None	Treble	in C	in C		
Viola	None	Alto		in C	in C	
Cello	None	Bass / Tenor			in C	in C
Double Bass /Bass Guitar	8ve lower	Bass				in C
Guitar	8ve lower	Treble			in C	in C
Others	May vary	May vary	As reqd	As reqd	As reqd	As reqd

