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Piece for Cello and Saxophone
(December 1960)

La Monte Young

Program notes for Terry Jennings,

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The concert series I directed at Yoko Ono's studio on Chambers Street in 1960-61 was perhaps the first series to take place in a loft in New York City, thus representing one of the beginnings of alternative performance spaces. Because of the advantages of unlimited rehearsal and performance time, I was able to give each composer two entire evenings devoted to their own works. It is significant that I chose the work of Terry Jennings to open the series. Without doubt, I considered Terry the most talented musician I knew at that time. Terry, who was then only 20 years old, flew to New York to perform for the occasion.

Although on Terry Jennings' score itself, the title is listed as Piece for Cello and Saxophone, on the program for the December 1960 concert at Yoko Ono's loft, Terry listed this work as Piece for Bass and Saxophone and announced the legendary Scott LaFaro as bassist. Terry had written the work for LaFaro with whom he had worked and had planned for him to perform the premiere; however, LaFaro was unable to come to New York for the performance.

I have always liked Terry's Piece for Cello and Saxophone. It is one of the earliest examples of Terry's work with raga-like modes. Constellations of tones are presented over changing sustained drones with instructions regarding durations, sequence, and overall structure. In studying the piece, I discovered that the different modal constellations are intricately interrelated by using intersecting subsets of pitches at identical octave placements from the various constellations over different drone pitches, thereby allowing one to remember a set of melodic pitch relationships but hear them in a new tonal context.

At the time of the 1989 MELA Foundation presentation of the Terry Jennings Memorial Concert I had been working with cellist Charles Curtis and I was extremely interested in presenting the Piece for Cello and Saxophone because of Charles' rare understanding and mastery of performing sustained-tone music. I gave considerable thought to how to present the work, and decided that because of my long years of improvising with Terry, it should be my responsibility to perform the solo role in the Piece for Cello and Saxophone in its first concert performance. Although I had played saxophone from age 7 to 29 (1942-1964), and Terry had written saxophone music for me to play (Piece for Sopranino Saxophone and Strings, 1962) and for us to play together (Piece for Two Saxophones, 1960), I felt that the Piece for Cello and Saxophone could be presented by a variety of solo wind instruments with cello or double bass drones,

and that while it sounds very good with saxophone, it was probably written for that instrument as a showpiece for Terry. Therefore, for that 1989 Memorial Concert performance, I decided to perform the work with my chosen instrument, the voice, and Charles Curtis performed the very demanding sustained-tone drone part on cello. After this performance, I suggested to Charles that, because of his understanding of sustained-tone music, I would like to teach him the solo part of the Piece for Cello and Saxophone so that he could take the piece out into the world. For the Krems, Austria, European premiere performance (1992) of the Piece for Cello and Saxophone, Charles and I played the solo part together, with the cello shadowing the voice much in the way the sarangi accompanies the solo vocalist in Indian classical music. For that performance, Charles taught the sustained-tone drone part to Andreas Bleyer, Thomas Grossenbacher and Christof Groth, who performed with us, thus making this difficult part more playable and, at the same time, bringing chamber ensemble dimensionality to the work. Charles has since played the work as a soloist in the MELA Spring '98 Concert Series at the Dream House Light Environment in New York City on June 19, 1998, and presented the German premiere at the Kunst im Regenbogenstadl Dream House, Polling, Germany on May 9, 1999.

Although Terry once played me a tape of himself playing the piece on alto saxophone accompanied by cello, we did not have the tape in our archive. A tape recording from the Charlotte Moorman archive of the 1964 (2nd) Avant Garde Festival at Judson Hall with Charlotte Moorman on cello surfaced in the year 2000 and reminded me again of how Terry played this piece. The copy we were given states it was from a tape labeled "WBAI 12/9/64" and in comparing the recording with the score, it seems that Terry made a very shortened version of the piece with a number of the chordal changes omitted in order to fit this performance into a slot on a radio program. Terry's playing on the other hand, gives us a very good example of how he improvised on the chord changes that were included in this version.

From the mid-50s through the early 60s, Terry, Dennis Johnson and I wrote compositions that consisted only of chord changes and we all played solos over them. It began with my version of the blues, which eventually came to be called Young's Blues in B-Flat. In the summer of 1961, I recorded this work as a duet; I played piano and Terry played saxophone. At the same session, we recorded Terry's composition, Tune in E (c. 1961). On this tape, I am improvising my own chordal piano style and Terry is improvising melodic lines.

Dennis Johnson's 109 Bar Tune (c. 1960-61) was a set of chord changes in which even the voicings were completely notated, as compared to Young's Blues in B-Flat and Terry's Tune in E, in which the chord changes, if written out, would have been with chord symbols only. Sometimes I was the pianist, sometimes Terry and sometimes Dennis, and each of us played the rhythmic element of the changes in our own distinctive style. Improvised solos were played over these changes, frequently by Terry. A very special relationship existed among the three of us through performances of our compositions of this genre. All three of these compositions, had no melodic line; they consisted entirely of chord changes. Terry's Piece for Cello and Saxophone added more detail to this genre in that not only were the chord changes completely voiced, there were melodic lines, elaborate instructions regarding durations of pitches, and repetitions of pitches, sequences and constellations. Woven into these elaborate instructions was a great deal of creative flexibility for the performer.

Terry always approved and encouraged my realizations of his music and I am sure he would have liked the version of Piece for Cello and Saxophone that I have performed and taught to Charles. Nonetheless, I have given this version much thought over the years and while Terry, without doubt, composed the chords, the melodic phrases and the modalities they suggest, after reminiscing on his performance on the WBAI recording, I really feel that I have made the realization into something that is much more my own music than Terry's. This is not to take away from Terry's musical genius and the greatness of his composition Piece for Cello and Saxophone. It is simply that I have added so much to it that it is unlikely that Terry would have ever realized the work in this way himself. Whereas from c. 1959 to 1961, Terry did compose in the style of the long sustained tones I originated in for Brass (1957) and Trio for Strings (1958), he eventually abandoned this approach and went more in the direction of neo-Romanticism. Although Terry liked to listen to harmonics, he did not compose anything in just intonation. I have painstakingly analyzed the modal implications of Piece for Cello and Saxophone and made my realization in what I consider to be the underlying just intonation structure. Terry's saxophone improvisations were much more South Indian in nature, whereas my improvisations reflect the deep North Indian style of alap inspired by my studies with my guru, North Indian vocal master Pandit Pran Nath. Ultimately, I took the freedom that Terry had offered in Piece for Cello and Saxophone and pulled the work into the direction of my own musical inclinations. However, there are many works of indeterminate nature that give a great deal of artistic freedom to the performer. I am happy that Terry composed the work in such a beautiful way that it inspired me to make this

realization in my own terms, and I feel no need to take credit as a co-composer. After all, what would the compositions of John Cage and Stockhausen have been without the new life's blood infused into them by the inspired realizations of David Tudor?

Terry and I shared many musical experiences together and in the early stages of my career, his work was an inspiration to me just as mine was to him. Even though I have added a dimension (we could even call it my arrangement) to Terry's Piece for Cello and Saxophone, I am sure Terry is enjoying it just as much as am I.

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Charles Curtis

Program notes for Terry Jennings,

Piece for Cello and Saxophone (December 1960)

Terry Jennings' Piece for Cello and Saxophone exists in score as slightly more than one page of standard music notation, and an additional page and a half of performance instructions written in cursive. The notated cello part alternates between sustained double stops and sustained single tones, in a fixed order; and the saxophone part shows groups of individual pitches above the cello tones, with only cursory indications of duration, rhythm and note order. The score looks to me as if it had been notated quickly (especially the last third of the piece); it may constitute more a sketch, or a reminder to Jennings of the pitches he planned on using in his own performances, which would have relied heavily on improvisation. The score is therefore by no means an exact image of how a performance should sound, but something like a set of materials to be drawn from in performance.

In La Monte Young's recasting of Piece for Cello and Saxophone, the most prominent change is the placing of the piece in a just intonation tuning. Jennings conceived the piece in equal temperament, and apparently never showed any real interest in just intonation as a performance system. However, it's notable that the cello chords are held in continuous sustained tones, that Jennings specifies that the tones be held without vibrato, and that the melodic saxophone figurations repeat in very specific, elliptical constellations. These are features that suggest the kind of listening in to pitch relationships that characterizes music in just intonation. It is impossible for me to imagine this music being played or heard without focusing on the complex acoustical experience of sustained intervals; thus the move to put these intervals into rational relationships seems near at hand.

At the same time the music reads, up to a point, as tonal, resolving and diverging and resolving again, moving gradually between E and A as harmonic centers, with various transit points in between as modulating pivots. I hear the chord progressions as choralelike, but set forth in very slow motion. One is confronted then with a bifurcated listening situation, in which one can dwell on the concrete, physical, purely acoustical richness of the just intonation structures as they sustain and slowly alter; or one can switch over to a listening mode which addresses the chordal progressions, the quasifunctional relationships of the melody notes to the chords suspensions, major/minor shifts and so on and the accumulated associations with earlier music thus evoked. Some of the beauty

of the piece may be in the equivocal status of the listening experience. Now that the piece exists in La Monte Young's tuning, the style of performance has shifted to the painstaking act of placing pitch in just relationships, observing and reacting to acoustical cues, dwelling in the constant care and attentiveness of tuning and adjusting. As a result, the melodic unfolding slows down naturally and it is fair to guess that this would have been fine with Jennings as the performer constantly seeks to identify the combination tones, partials and slight beatings which act as orientation points. In just intonation, a note is not a simple mark or a neutral point in a scale, but an entryway into a severely defined virtual space. The location of the entryway can never be assumed, but must be sought again and again, with each motion from point to point, even with each return to a previous point. This constantly seeking and never knowing lends the piece a special expressivity quite different from the assured, florid pattern-improvisation that Jennings himself, as a virtuoso improviser on saxophone, would have employed.

The distinctive sonority of the piece is announced immediately, in the low E A perfect fourth, pushing against the Gsharp in the saxophone part. This chord recurs throughout the piece, the Gsharp forming a fifthpartial relationship with the low E and a rougher 16:15 semitone with the A. As counterpart to the lushness of this tertiary harmony, Jennings introduces at various points a Gnatural, here tuned septimally against the A; and the vying between Gsharp and Gnatural becomes a theme sounded in numerous more and less similar situations. An analogous ambiguity plays out in the alternation between Csharp and Cnatural, again the one as a five-limit, the other a seven-limit interval. One unquestionably hears the major/minor modal shifts, but in the more pointed and timbrally laden form that just intonation gives us. Late in the piece the opening fourth moves up an octave, and the melody moves correspondingly into the descant range; and this section, impossible to miss even on a first listening, seems to carry the most detailed and particular melodic choices from Jennings. Following an unexpected low D, the piece ends with the same E A fourth as was heard at the beginning, but worked in a simpler and more austere set of melodic tones. At three points in the middle of the piece the saxophone part slows to only a single sustained tone against a changing cello tone, in each case resulting in a different perfect fourth or fifth, held without melodic elaboration; first, an F Bflat fourth, then a G D fifth, and then surprisingly the Gsharp from the opening chord redefined as an Eflat Aflat fourth. At these moments one hears the proximity of La Monte Young's Trio for Strings, composed just two years earlier, as a central influence on Jennings' composition. These simple held intervals seem to suggest a ground that

leans forward into figure, taking the place of the melodic activity that is the main texture of the piece.

Jennings' handwritten performance notes provide extensive directions for the articulation of the melodic patterns, but his directions are ambiguous at best. One of his directions states: "Since Directions 3 + 4 seem confusing why don't you listen to the tape recording of the piece and may be change the directions accordingly." Yet there is no known recording of the complete piece. In essence the directions attempt to explain which melodic groups should be repeated, in what sequences, and when to shift forward and no longer repeat earlier patterns. The piece evolves through alternately lingering upon a present pattern, with reference to earlier patterns or tones allowed under certain conditions, then introducing a new, unfamiliar tone as a signal to move on to the next set of patterns, over which one then lingers; and so on. Oddly, certain melodic tones which according to the rules should not be repeated then reappear immediately as new tones; the distinction between a "repeated tone" and a "new tone" is thus hopelessly blurred. Over time, one has the sensation of a filling in, the gradual completion of a very large chord or pitch set already hinted at in the beginning.

The sense then would be that all elements remain, that as the piece moves forward, none of the preceding music actually falls away, nothing is discarded, nothing is forgotten; the structure builds, notes and intervals accrue, and a single large harmonic shape emerges and lingers. Terry Jennings remains a shadowy figure, a fleeting presence in music history, of whom few material traces have survived; yet he was revered by those who knew him and heard him. His works too, especially the beautiful solo piano pieces such as *Winter Trees* and *Winter Sun*, and the *Piano Piece* published in La Monte Young's *An Anthology*, are bare, fragile, fleeting moments in early Minimalism. *Piece for Cello and Saxophone*, by contrast, seems a more formally ambitious work. Even if they're confusing, the lengthy directions may point to Jennings' concern for a more legible music, a music of greater foreground detail and harmonic complexity. The surprising chord sequences may foreshadow Jennings' later interest in the high Romantic chromaticism of composers like Bruckner, Reger and Pfitzner. In its present form, the piece is monumental, without, paradoxically, missing any of Jennings' characteristic fragility and weightlessness. His music is poignant in ways that seem impossible to separate from its continued disappearing and reappearing. The music seems to regret its own passing, but to linger on this regret with infinite tenderness, even if inevitably to let it go and allow the music to return to silence.

Terry Jennings (1940-1981) was a key figure in the first generation of Minimalist composers and artists. His performances in the early 60s at venues such as The Living Theatre, the ONCE Festival, and Yoko Ono's Chambers Street loft left unforgettable impressions on his listeners, and his collaborations on saxophone with La Monte Young, John Cale, Charlotte Moorman and others are the stuff of legend. Once described by Cale as "the slowest man in the world," Jennings' brief career flickered at the margins of the avant-garde music world, never quite coming into focus; despite his immense talent and the admiration of the musicians who came into contact with him, his legacy remains largely undocumented; performances of his music are extremely rare.

Cellist **Charles Curtis** has created a new body of work for solo cello through his collaborations with composers La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, Alvin Lucier, Éliane Radigue, Christian Wolff, Alison Knowles and Tashi Wada, and filmmakers Raha Raissnia and Jeff Perkins. Rarely-heard works of Terry Jennings, Morton Feldman and Richard Maxfield have also been signposts in Curtis's performing life. Trained at Juilliard with Leonard Rose and Harvey Shapiro, Curtis received the Piatigorsky Prize of the New York Cello Society. Since 2000 Curtis has been Professor of Music at the University of California, San Diego. He is a former member of King Missile.

In recent seasons Curtis has presented solo works of Alvin Lucier at the Auditorium du Louvre and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and premiered new works of Éliane Radigue at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris; premiered Tashi Wada's *Landslide* for solo cello and modified tape deck at Issue Project Room; and given performances at the Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, the Angelica Festival in Bologna, the Ostrava New Music Days, and in Brussels, Metz, Paris, Mexico City, Miami Beach, Athens and Los Angeles. Last summer Curtis led four performances of the music of La Monte Young in honor of Young's 80th birthday at the Dia Art Foundation's Dia:Chelsea space, including the premiere of the original three-hour-long version of *Trio for Strings* from 1958. In December 2015 he gave the New York premiere of Alvin Lucier's *Orpheus Variations* for cello and seven winds with Petr Kotik and the SEM Ensemble at Paula Cooper Gallery in New York. In Spring 2016 Curtis performed Éliane Radigue's *Naldjorlak* at The Kitchen in New York, and presented a series of four concerts with Alvin Lucier in various venues in Marfa, Texas. Jennings' *Piece for Cello and Saxophone* has been heard this Spring at the Courtisane Film Festival in Ghent, the Ateliers Robespierre in Paris and the Regensbogenstadl in Polling, Bavaria in addition to tonight's performance.

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Upcoming Events

Senyawa

Bridget Donahue Gallery
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