

Palm Quart  
(version for violin, viola, violoncello, and contrabass)

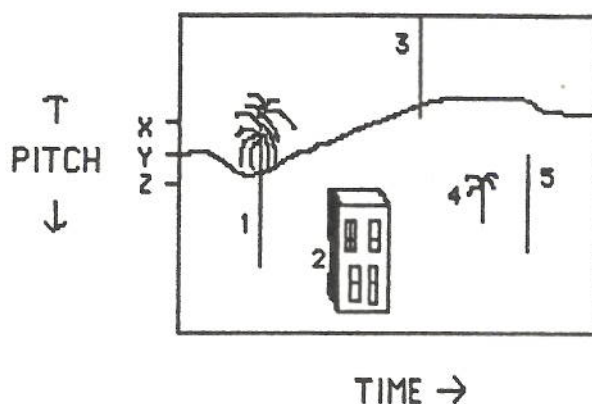
Duration: 9' 42"

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In this piece the "score" is a video tape of palm trees in Los Angeles. The four instruments derive their pitches, dynamics, rhythms, and playing techniques (i.e., *pizzicato/arco*) from the size and placement of these palm trees on the screen.

The piece consists of four movements. Before and after each of these movements is a different still shot of palm trees, lasting from 9 to 14 seconds, with a few seconds of black before and after the still. In the stills which separate the movements, the leafy tops of the palm trees are read from left to right by all four players together. The palm tree tops in the picture are treated as note heads, such that the higher up on the screen a tree top is, the higher the pitch that is played. The top of the screen, here, represents the top of each of the instruments' ranges, and the bottom of the screen, the bottom of their ranges. Palm tree heads which fall vertically between these two extremes should be translated proportionally into the ranges of the instruments. The middle of the palm tree heads should be used for pitch determination. The size of the palm tree heads determines dynamic level--the larger the tree, the louder the note. All of these notes should be bowed with the exception of two of the palm trees in the first still of the piece which are missing tops (they are just stems); these should be plucked (*pizz*) at pitches corresponding to the tops of their stems. Only the tops of palm trees should be treated as notes in these stills--cars, buildings, palm tree trunks, other kinds of trees, etc. should not be played.

Figure 1



Let's assume that figure 1 represents a still which lasts for ten seconds. This means that each player should try to take about ten seconds to scan visually across the screen from left to right, playing palm tree heads as she encounters them. The length of a note is the amount of time

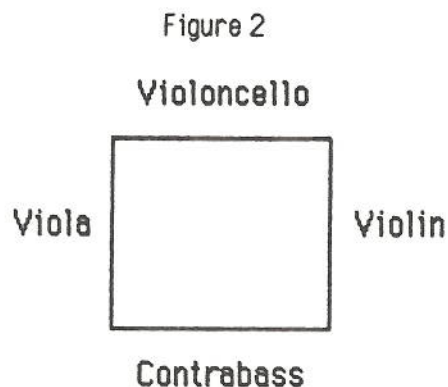
It takes to scan across a tree head. Thus, after about a second and 1/2 everyone should play the first tree (1) at a moderately loud dynamic, at the beginning of about the top third of her range (X), for about a second and a half. Ideally, there should also be a slight *crescendo* and *diminuendo* to the sound because the tree top is larger in the middle than on the sides (remember, we are scanning across the screen). At about seven seconds, the small (or distant) tree (4) should be played, rather quietly, in about the middle of everyone's range (Z). The tree which has no head (5) is like one of the two trees found in the first still of the piece, and indicates a plucked note to occur at about eight and 1/2 seconds, slightly higher in pitch than the small tree (Y). The building (2) and the tree whose top we cannot see (3) should be ignored.

The overall musical effect of the stills should be one of chords moving roughly in parallel. Particularly in the more complicated stills, it is unlikely that everyone will play the trees exactly together. This is alright. The players should not try to cue each other visually in order to play the trees at the same time, but should each try to time her scanning of the screen as carefully as possible; with practice the desired effect will be achieved. There is one still in which a timing cue is provided, still #3. In this still, a Bloodmobile truck drives by all of the palm trees. The back of the truck should be used as the scan line; i.e., everyone plays each tree as the back of the truck passes it.

Here are the actual lengths of the five stills:

Still #1: 9 seconds  
 Still #2: 9 seconds  
 Still #3: 11 seconds  
 Still #4: 7 seconds  
 Still #5: 14 seconds

During the movements (the main body of the piece), the video score is interpreted in a different way. Each player concerns herself only with one side (edge) of the frame. The violinist has the right side of the frame, the violist has the left side of the frame, the 'cellist has the top of the frame, and the bassist has the bottom:



A player only plays the trees that hit her side of the frame-- i.e., while a tree is touching her side, she plays. For the viola and violin, pitch continues to be represented vertically: the

higher up the side of the frame a tree hits, the higher the pitch played. For the 'cello and bass, however, pitch is now represented horizontally: the farther to the right a tree hits, the higher the pitch played. Each player plays only on one string per movement as follows:

| <u>1st mvt.</u>     | <u>2nd mvt.</u>     | <u>3rd mvt.</u>     | <u>4th mvt.</u>     |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Vln-- <i>su</i> / D | Vln-- <i>su</i> / A | Vln-- <i>su</i> / G | Vln-- <i>su</i> / E |
| Vla-- <i>su</i> / G | Vla-- <i>su</i> / A | Vla-- <i>su</i> / C | Vla-- <i>su</i> / D |
| Vc-- <i>su</i> / D  | Vc-- <i>su</i> / A  | Vc-- <i>su</i> / C  | Vc-- <i>su</i> / G  |
| Cb-- <i>su</i> / G  | Cb-- <i>su</i> / D  | Cb-- <i>su</i> / A  | Cb-- <i>su</i> / E  |

A proportional correspondance should be made between the length of a player's current string and the side of the frame she is following, so that if, for example, in movement 2, a single palm tree head is intersecting the left side of the screen 1/3 of the way down from the top, the violist should be playing 2/3 of the way up her A string. As with the stills, the size of a tree indicates dynamic level, and the middle of the segment of intersection between the tree and a player's side of the frame is where the pitch should be read. Thus if a tree were shown so large as to fill up the entire screen, all four players would play in the exact center of their strings as forcefully as possible.

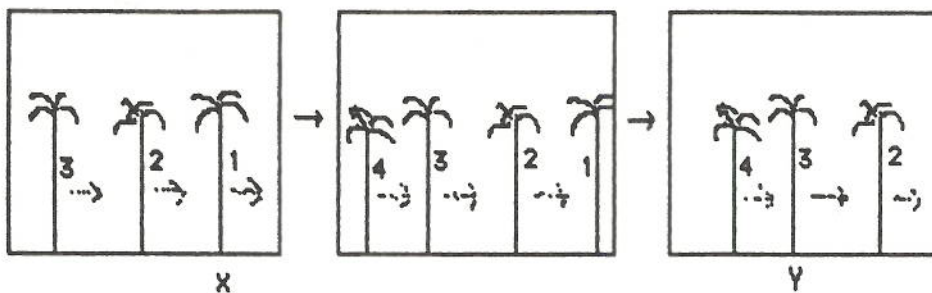
Interpretation is complicated by the fact that frequently the camera is tracking or panning so that trees slide along the edges of the frame, and frequently more than one tree intersects a side of the frame at once. Also there is the twist that palm tree heads are to be read as bowed notes (*arco*), while trunks are to be read as plucked notes (*pizzicato*). The following rules should enable a clear interpretation of all situations which arise:

1) If more than one tree is touching a player's side, the player should choose only one of the trees to play, and stick with it until it leaves the edge of the frame; the player should then choose another tree to stick with until it leaves the edge of the frame, and so on.

2) Palm tree heads always take precedence over trunks--i.e., when a trunk and a tree top are both touching a player's side of the frame, the player should always bow the tree top rather than plucking the trunk. (This takes precedence over the rule of sticking with one tree until it leaves the edge.)

3) If a tree head slides along a player's side of the frame, she should bow continuously while sliding smoothly through the pitch range indicated. If a single trunk is sliding along a player's side of the frame, she should pluck one time at the start of a *glissando* through the range indicated (it is alright if the sound fades out before the *glissando* is completed). If more than one trunk is touching the side (and no heads), the player should pick only one trunk at a time to follow until it leaves the side, but should for each trunk it follows pluck as many times as there are trunks touching the side. In figure 3, for example, where the trees are moving by from left to right at regular intervals, the bassist choosing tree # 1 would pluck 3 times while sliding from pitch X up to and off the high end of the string. She might then choose tree # 3 and pluck three times while sliding from point Y (about the middle of the string) up to and off the high end of the string.

Figure 3



In performance, the video should be projected so that it can be seen by the audience. The four players should be situated between the screen and the audience, facing the screen as the audience does.