

John Oliver

Prismophony

guitar quartet

**commissioned by the Vancouver Guitar Quartet
with financial assistance from the British Columbia Arts Council**

johnolivermusic.com

The Music

"Sounding the prism" would be a literal translation of the title. The parts are equal in difficulty for the most part as canon technique is frequently used. Thus a balanced group sound is essential; yet the individual voice of each player should come through. Tempi should be followed very closely: tempi indicated are the *minimum* speed.

The square bracket under certain groups of notes indicate that the notes should be held for that duration. I use this notation – which is similar to the pedal notation for piano – to indicate sustained chords. I find this easier to read than tied notes.

In general, my approach to sound, dynamics, and articulation is understated. My indications are always the *minimum* requirements. Dynamic indications in the score range from *ppp* (barely audible) to *fff* (as

loud as possible). When you see an accent, this is not a polite accentuation, but rather a clear and decisive marking out of the note.

Where I have indicated fingerings, strings, *sul tasto*, *sul pont* (*s.p.*) etc., these must be followed, since they define the colour of the sound. On the other hand, there are passages where no indication of colour or dynamics exist. Such passages should not be played flat, without contour, style or colour: experimentation will personalize any one quartet's interpretation. For example, in **Blue**, there are no dynamic or *tasto*/*ponticello* indications at all from bar 24 to 59, and, with the entire piece called **Purple** – a strict canon – there are only general dynamic contour indications. A great quartet will give inner life to these phrases, deciding how to vary the colour (*tasto*/*ponticello*) and dynamics of each phrase. Thus the homophony of **Blue** will come off as though all four musicians were playing as one, and the polyphony of **Purple** will be clarified by highly contoured individual voices that will emerge despite the dense canonic texture.

The Composer

John Oliver came to international attention during 1988/89 when he won six prizes for five compositions ranging from chamber to orchestral to electroacoustic music. Among these the "City of Varese Prize" at the 1988 Luigi Russolo Competition (Italy), and the Canada Council's Grand Prize at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's 8th National Competition for Young Composers for his live electroacoustic work "El Reposo del Fuego."

Oliver has been commissioned by the Canadian Opera Company, Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Vancouver Opera, the CBC Radio Orchestra, Vancouver New Music, La Société de musique contemporaine du Québec, Ensemble Pierrot, and the St. Lawrence Quartet, among others and his music has been presented at several international festivals, among them the ISCM World Music Days and the Juilliard School of Music Pacific Rim Festival.

John Oliver writes music for acoustic and electronic instruments. Oliver's recent music combines familiar musical materials and techniques with new inventions, with a view to creating a perceptually-based and visceral experience. Oliver holds a doctorate in composition from McGill University.

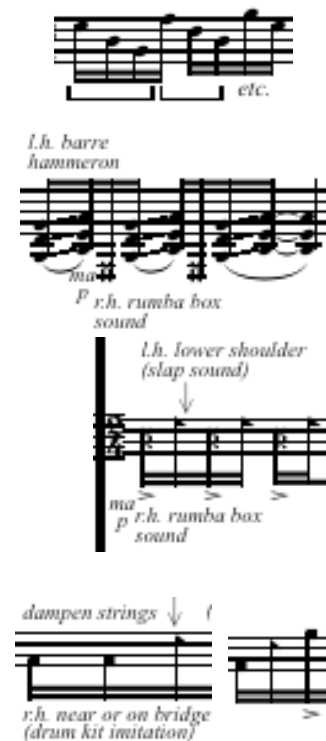
Notation

Sustained notes

written notes are hammered on by left hand; right hand taps with thumb above 6th string & "ma" fingers below 1st string, either side of sound hole.

Percussion-only notated on 4-line staff: rumba on central 2 lines; l.h. slap with flesh of hand on lower shoulder.

(Lower right)
Drum imitations on bridge: Thumb imitates bass drum above 6th string; "a" below 1st string.



PRISMOPHONY

1. Blue

John Oliver
(1999/2007)

♩ = 124

sul tasto *gradually move toward normal playing position*

Guitar 1 *ppp*

sul tasto *ppp* *gradually move toward normal playing position*

Guitar 2 *sul tasto* *ppp* *gradually move toward normal playing position*

Guitar 3 *sul tasto* *ppp* *gradually move toward normal playing position*

Guitar 4 *ppp*

normal playing position *Swing, lively with exaggerated accents*

④ *f*

normal playing position *f*

normal playing position *f*

f

⑦

10

13

16

A

$\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 124$

20

normal
ff
normal
ff
gradually move toward ----- *normal*
ff
ff

23

normal
ff
ff

26

normal
ff
ff

29

32

35

B

38

Musical score for measures 38-41. The score is written for four staves in G major. Measures 38-41 show a complex rhythmic pattern with many sixteenth notes and accents. Measure 40 features a *ff* dynamic marking, and measure 41 features a *f* dynamic marking.

42

Musical score for measures 42-45. The score continues with four staves in G major, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations.

46

Musical score for measures 46-49. The score continues with four staves in G major, featuring a mix of eighth and sixteenth notes with various articulations.