

## CHAMBER MUSIC EXPLORATIONS FOR MEDITATION

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**SUMMARY.** Music evokes a wide range of feelings, from excitement to relaxation, enjoyment to sadness, fear to relief, and even mixtures of these. The following paper presents exploratory compositions and related research prepared for fulfilment to create chamber music for meditation. The paper is divided in three parts. The first part is focusing on background research about meditation. It includes an overview of meditation including a short history, its origins, the effects of music and its benefits in meditation. The second part briefly discusses the music elements and its influences. The third part of the paper describes and analyses the musical compositions. Each piece is deliberated in detail, to provide an understanding of the creative process and devices used in preparing, framing and composing the pieces. The pieces are written for string quartet and percussion instruments. The result of this work is the creation of new pieces that fulfill the purpose and a practical illustration of compositional processes.

**Keywords:** music, music explorations, effects of music, music for meditation, elements of music.

### Part III: The Compositions

#### Composition I: Inner Zone

My intention in composing *Inner Zone* was to create a piece for ‘focused attention’ meditation, helping the practitioner to achieve a state of deep inner tranquillity. In ‘focused attention’ meditation practices, the attention is directed to a single object during the meditation session. This object could be the breath, a mantra, a part of the body, an external object, or a sound.

An essential part of meditation practice can include the use of a mantra. I planned to incorporate a mantra into the composition. As we know, a mantra generally can be a word, a repeated phrase or sound used

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to help anchor the mind in the present moment and keep it from wandering off. The use of a repeated set of notes as a mantra in the music is intended to help the meditator concentrate during the meditation practice.

This piece was written for percussion instruments and string quartet (double bass, cello, viola and violin). The percussion includes marimba and singing bowl. The marimba part denotes the mantra. The Singing Bowl, also known as Tibetan Singing Bowl, produces harmonic overtones which creates an effect that is unique to the instrument that provides a soothing and positive effect. Singing bowls are a type of bell widely used as an aid in meditation practices.

To accomplish my goal, I attempted to integrate a drone effect into the piece using the string quartet. A drone sound is usually a homophonic or monophonic effect or accompaniment where a note or a chord is sounded continuously. Drone sounds tend to evoke calming and relaxation effects. My decision in choosing this string quartet combination was to create a more influential drone effect with the help of the double bass. The piece has a slow tempo, no sudden changes in tempo or volume, aiding in generating a soothing and calming ambiance.

Musicologist Rita Steblin notes that some theoretical works of the eighteenth and nineteenth century assigned certain affections or emotional characteristics to different tonalities. In selecting the tonality for the piece, I considered these characteristics and I opted for the G major tonality. According to Steblin, this tonality was thought to express calm, passion and every gentle and peaceful emotion of the heart.

## **Overview**

The structure of the piece is based on a AABA form with an introduction and coda. The structure of the piece is notated and divided into following parts:

### ***Structure of Inner Zone***

Parts	Measures
Intro	1-5
Part I	6-43
Part II	44-81
Part III	82-127
Part IV	128-163
Coda	164-174

My overview is organized according to this form, and describes how conclusions were made and organized during the composing process.

The beginning of the piece establishes the mantra's material and drone effect. The marimba presents the repeated note series that is founding the mantra of the piece. The cyclic sound of the mantra rises to a gentle rhythm, like a mesmerizing pulse that embraces awareness can guide the mind into a state of clarity, peace and deep meditation.

**E.g. 1**

***Inner Zone's mantra motif***



The drone effect is established in the introduction by the double bass, cello and viola. The singing bowl is present in the opening section as well, facilitating the crafting of the piece's character, suggesting a calming and comforting ambiance. The singing bowl pitches used in the composition are the tonic pitch (G) and the dominant pitch (D) of the G tonal center. The concept for the singing bowl is to function as a stimulating tool for the meditative process.

The first part of the piece is based on a ternary form, and is notated as follows:

***Inner Zone's first part sections***

Part I	Measures
Section A	6-17
Section B	18-25
Section C	26-43

The A section introduces the first melodic theme, which is restated in the second part of the section. The melody is based on five pitches that describe a descending shape, and is presented by the violin. The descending melody line intends to evoke a calming effect.

**E.g. 2**

***First melody theme***



The foundation sound of this section is based on the drone effect that provides the music with a feeling of weight and warmth. The drone effect is produced by the double bass joined by cello and viola in this section. The section has a static harmony; one chord throughout the entire section. This section's texture is a mixture of staggered sustained tones, slow falling melody figure and repeated note series (mantra).

***The first part of section A***

**E.g. 3**

The musical score for the first part of section A is presented in six staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 6/8. The score begins at measure 6. The instruments and their parts are:

- S.B. (Sub Bass):** Plays a single note (F#) in the first measure, followed by rests, and then a descending melodic line in the final three measures.
- Mar. (Maracas):** Plays a continuous, rhythmic pattern of eighth notes throughout the section.
- Vln. 1 (Violin 1):** Plays a series of sustained notes that gradually descend in pitch across the measures.
- Vla. (Viola):** Plays a series of sustained notes that gradually descend in pitch across the measures.
- Vc. (Violoncello):** Plays a series of sustained notes that gradually descend in pitch across the measures.
- Db. (Double Bass):** Plays a series of sustained notes that gradually descend in pitch across the measures.

The dynamic marking *p* (piano) is indicated at the beginning of each staff. The overall texture is characterized by a static harmony and a drone effect created by the sustained tones of the lower instruments.

The following B section, presents the second melodic theme, which is based on the same idea descending melody shape within a larger range. The drone effect is suspended in the first part and returns back in the last three measures of the section. The harmonic material changes in this section, with more movement in the inner parts. The harmonic rhythm of this section is mostly one chord per measure.

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**Section B**

**E.g. 4**

Musical score for Section B, Example 4, measures 18-22. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features five staves: S.B. (Soprano), Mar. (Maracas), Vln. 1 (Violin I), Vla. (Viola), and Vc./Db. (Violoncello/Double Bass). The S.B. part has a melodic line starting at measure 18. The Mar. part has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Vln. 1 part has a melodic line with a *p* dynamic. The Vla. part has a melodic line with a *p* dynamic. The Vc. and Db. parts have a bass line with a *p* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

In the following section, C, the third melodic theme is presented by the viola. The melody describes an arch shape and has a range of an octave, tending to create a hovering effect.

**The first part of section C**

**E.g. 5**

Musical score for The first part of section C, Example 5, measures 26-30. The score is in G major and 4/4 time. It features five staves: S.B. (Soprano), Mar. (Maracas), Vla. (Viola), Vc. (Violoncello), and Db. (Double Bass). The S.B. part has a melodic line starting at measure 26. The Mar. part has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. The Vla. part has a melodic line with a *p* dynamic. The Vc. and Db. parts have a bass line with a *p* dynamic. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings.

The harmonic material in the first part of the section shifts to the relative minor tonality, E minor, whereas in the second half, the harmonic material shifts back to the G major tonality while the melodic theme is repeated. In the second half of the section, motion is created with the counter melody part. Meanwhile, the mantra has been adjusted to follow the harmonic motion, while following the same rhythmic pattern as in the previous sections.

The texture is homophonic in the first part, and becomes polyphonic in the second half of the section. The drone effect returns back in the last four measure of the section, performed by the double bass, and transitions into the next part of the composition.

The second part of the work provides a reiteration of the previous part within the same structure, but with different texture and arrangement. The string section of this part is crafted for three voices. The second part sections are noted as follows:

***Inner Zone's second part sections***

Part II	Measures
Section A <sub>1</sub>	44-55
Section B <sub>1</sub>	56-63
Section C <sub>1</sub>	64-81

In the A<sub>1</sub> section, the cello takes over the melody part generating a gentle and softer tone. As the violin part is placed above the melody, with its light sound, creates an airy and brighter effect. The static drone effect has been diminished, as the harmonic material is crafted to add more motion to the section. The mantra pattern returns back to its initial form, providing the material to focus on during meditation.

***The first part of section A<sub>1</sub>***

**E.g. 6**

The B<sub>1</sub> section recaptures the melody theme from the B section, presented by the viola. Besides the varied texture, more interest and motion is created in the cello part, with the falling counter melody line.

**Section B1 string parts**

**E.g. 7**

The following C<sub>1</sub> section restates the material for the C section, while the violin presents the melody, and cello and double bass provides the accompaniment parts.

The third part of the piece is constructed to emphasize the drone effect. This part is crafted to stimulate a calming and relaxing feel, and to create a soothing atmosphere, while the dynamics of the part decreases. The sections of Part III are:

***Inner Zone's third part sections***

Part III	Measures
Section D	82-113
Section E	114-127

The major idea for the D section was to highlight and develop the drone effect. The drone starts in the double bass part and provides the foundation for the section. To establish an intense and rich drone sound, the cello and later the viola join in, in the first half of the section, with a slow moving descending line. In the second half of the section, the violin takes the viola's place, and the section moves to a lower pitch, inspiring a deeper state of meditation.

The mantra of this section is diminished to stimulate less motion, and to help to create an effortless static effect. The singing bowl, with its periodic sound and its pulsating tone, is intended to enhance the awareness of the mind.

**The middle part of the section D**

**E.g. 8**

92

S.B. *pp*

Mar.

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Db. *pp*

The E section is constructed to serve as a transition section into the next part of the piece. The string parts of the section have a homorhythmic (chordal) texture. The harmonic material changes in this section and is based on a slow ascending bass motion that stimulates an elevating effect. The harmonic rhythm of the section is one chord per two measures. The percussion material remains the same, as in section D, to generate continuity to this part.

**The first part of section E**

**E.g. 9**

114

S.B. *pp*

Mar.

Vin. I *pp*

Vla. *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Db. *pp*



The last part of the piece, recapitulates the first part's material following the same layout, and the sections are noted as follows:

***Inner Zone's fourth part sections***

Part IV	Measures
Section A <sub>2</sub>	128-139
Section B <sub>2</sub>	140-147
Section C <sub>2</sub>	148-163

The melody is presented in the lower register by the viola in the A<sub>2</sub> section, with an elegant, light and soft texture. Meanwhile the mantra pattern is restated to recreate the first part of the piece; the drone effect is being restated as well.

As the fourth part continues, the B section material is repeated in the B<sub>2</sub> section, while the melody is performed in the lower register by the violin. The accompaniment in the following C<sub>2</sub> section, is extended to a three-part accompaniment for the C section's material. The coda section recapitulates the first melody theme sustained by the drone effect, and ends with a plagal cadence into the D major tonality.

The repeated series of notes that provides the mantra to the music helps to anchor and to keep the mind focused. In addition, it serves as an entity that can help to bring back the mind into the present state. The goal of this piece is to create interest and help to clear away mental clutter through the use of diverse musical soundscapes. Floating effortlessly above the powerful sound created by the drone effect can lead to enter into a deeper state of meditation.

**Composition II: Spectrum**

In creating *Spectrum*, my goal was to create a piece for open monitoring meditation. In the open monitoring meditation, the meditator cultivates an objectless awareness, monitoring the content of ongoing experience, without judgment or attachment. All perceptions, internal (thoughts, feelings, memories) or external (sounds, images, smells), are acknowledged and seen for what they are. One of the ideas to accomplish this goal was to depict different soundscapes that mesmerize awareness and soothe the mind.

The second intent for this composition was the texture and instrumentation. I wanted to combine and blend the traditional string quartet with pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments to obtain diverse textures. In addition, I intended to incorporate a mantra in the piece a repeated series of notes that provides a mantra effect.

My selections for percussion instruments were Cajon, Crotales, Marimba and Hang. The *cajon* is a box-shaped non-pitched percussion instrument, played by slapping the front or rear faces with the hands or fingers. *Crotales* are pitched percussion instruments consisting of small tuned cymbals. The *hang* is a musical instrument in the idiophone class. An idiophone instrument creates sound primarily by the instrument as a whole vibrating, without the use of strings or membranes. The Hang is a newer instrument, developed in the beginning of twenty-first century in Switzerland. The Hang is made from two deep drawn steel hemisphere hardened together. Hands and fingers play it. There are different generations of Hangs with different tunings and pitches. The Hang that I selected for the piece produces the following pitches: D3, A3, Bb3, C4, E4, F4 and A4. Based on the pitch collections of the Hang, I opted for the D minor tonality. Musicologist Rita Steblin notes that the D minor tonality can be described as the tonality that suggests rumination, melancholy and pious.

### **Overview**

*Spectrum* is composed for a small chamber ensemble comprised of two violins, viola, cello, cajon, crotales, marimba, and Hang.

The piece is divided into sections of sixteen measures long with an introduction and a coda. The piece is organized according to this form, as that is how decisions were made and organized during the creative process.

### **Structure of Spectrum**

Sections	Measures
Introduction	1-8
Section A	9-24
Section A <sub>1</sub>	25-40
Section B	41-56
Section C	57-72
Section D	73-88
Section A <sub>2</sub>	89-104
Section A <sub>3</sub>	105-120
Coda	121-128

The mantra is based on an eighth-note rhythmic figure performed by the Hang. This mantra pattern provides the foundation and background material for the piece.

**Spectrum's mantra pattern**

**E.g. 10**



The introduction is constructed as an eight-measure section shaped by the percussion instruments. The cajon sets up and provides the pulse of the piece. The crotales help to highlight the pulse of the section designed with a descending melody line. The marimba part is created by a simple rhythmic motif that is repeated through the introduction.

**Introduction**

**E.g. 11**



The first section of the piece, section A, is based on two melodic theme, each eight measure long. The first melodic theme is presented by the cello.

**The first melodic theme**

**E.g. 12**



The shape of the melody is based on a falling line in the first part of the theme and a rising line in the second part. As the section continues, the second melodic theme is introduced by the first violin. This melody line is developed from the first melody theme following the same idea in the beginning, the falling melody. The second part of the melody theme unfolds a different path.

**Second melodic theme**

**E.g. 13**

The harmonic motion of the piece is grounded on an eight measure long progression. All sections of the piece are founded on the same repeated harmonic progression with adjustments where needed. The music repeatedly cycles through the progressions that gently builds and releases, conveying a sense of diverse occasions, and even includes a feeling of euphoria from time to time.

**Harmonic motion**

**E.g. 14**

The texture of the A section is homophonic, one melody line accompanied by the percussion instruments. The rhythmic flow of the sections is created by the blend of the percussion instruments and the slow moving melody rhythm. The blend of the melody rhythmic flow and the mantra's eight notes figure pattern creates motion for the piece. The harmonic rhythm of the A section is based on one chord per measure.

**Section A**

**E.g. 15**

In the second section of the piece, section A<sub>1</sub>, is a reiteration of the A section material with variations. The melodic themes are presented in the same order as in the previous section, but both are performed by the cello.

The melodies are joined by counter melody lines. The first counter melody is presented by the viola, and the second one is presented by the second violin. The counter melodies use material derived from the first melody theme.

**Section A<sub>1</sub>**

**E.g. 16**

The musical score for Section A<sub>1</sub>, Example 16, consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Cajon, starting at measure 33 with a steady eighth-note pattern. The second staff is for the Crotales, showing a sparse rhythmic pattern with rests. The third staff is for the Hang, featuring a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The fourth staff is for Violin 2, with a slow-moving line of long notes and rests, marked with a piano (p) dynamic. The bottom staff is for the Cello, also with a slow-moving line of long notes and rests, marked with a piano (p) dynamic.

In section B, new material is introduced with new texture. All the instruments perform together for the first time in this section. In the first half of the section, the marimba presents a rhythmic pattern generated from materials introduced in the introduction. This pattern adds a new colour to the section's texture. The melodic material presented by the violin is crafted from the first main melodic theme. In addition, the cello pizzicato part adds yet another colour to the texture. This palette of sounds creates a new and distinct soundscape intended to release the mind from analytical thinking, and the slow moving harmony creates a calming effect.

**The first part of section B**

**E.g. 17**

Musical score for 'The first part of section B' (E.g. 17). The score is in common time (C) and features the following instruments and parts:

- Caj.** (Cajón): Treble clef, starting at measure 41. The melody consists of eighth notes.
- Crot.** (Crochets): Treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Mar.** (Maracas): Treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a *mp* dynamic.
- Hang.** (Hang drum): Treble clef, playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.
- Vln. 1** (Violin 1): Treble clef, playing a melodic line with a *p* dynamic.
- Vln. 2** (Violin 2): Treble clef, playing a melodic line with a *p* dynamic.
- Vla.** (Viola): Bass clef, playing a melodic line with a *p* dynamic.
- Vc.** (Violoncello): Bass clef, playing a melodic line with a *p* dynamic and *pizz.* (pizzicato) markings.

In the second part of the B section, the second melodic theme is restated within a new texture. The melody is presented by the first violin, in a higher register, depicting a new image about this melody theme with different background materials, crafting a diverse soundscape.

The first part of the following C section, presents a two-measure long new melodic motif. Interest in this part is created by the moving melodic motif between the string parts. Texture created by the background material and the falling melodic motif creates content with ongoing temptation, and seeks to captivate awareness.

**The first part of section C**

**E.g. 18**

The second part of section C restates the first melodic theme, presented by the viola and accompanied by cello, second violin and percussions. The melodic theme has been slightly altered and placed in a delicate soundscape to create a soothing influence.

**The second part of section C**

**E.g. 19**

The D section of the piece creates another complete soundscape, by bringing back all members of the ensemble. The homorhythmic texture in the first part of the section, crafted by the string quartet combined with the percussions, creates a resting, calming feel.

**The first part of section D**

**E.g. 20**

Musical score for the first part of section D, measures 73-77. The score includes parts for Cajon, Crotales, Marimba, Hang, Violin 1, Violin 2, Viola, and Cello. The Crotales part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Marimba part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Hang part plays a complex arpeggiated pattern. The strings (Vln. 1, Vln. 2, Vla., Vc.) play sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *pp*.

The periodic bright sound, created by the crotales in this section, can help to absorb the meditator's attention to clear away mental clutters. Another sound also, can be noted, is the pattern presented by marimba. The periodic marimba pattern helps to focus mindfulness in the present moment, to move past mental noise. The texture thickens in the second part of D section.

**The second part of section D**

**E.g. 21**

Musical score for the second part of section D, measures 81-85. The score includes parts for Crotales, Marimba, Hang, and Viola. The Crotales part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Marimba part has a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The Hang part plays a complex arpeggiated pattern. The Viola part plays sustained notes with a dynamic marking of *pp*.

Interest is created by the arpeggiated rhythmic pattern presented by the Hang. The diverse combination of the instruments and the foreground material are intended to create a soothing musical experience that promotes insight.



The following section  $A_2$  is a reappearance of the A section material, with both main melodic themes restated. The second melody theme is presented by the second violin, and is destined with the bass part. It recreates the same musical experience as in the beginning of the piece.

The last section of the piece,  $A_3$ , echoes the second main melody theme twice in the higher register. The percussions restate material from the D section, which helps to emphasize the unity of the piece. The last two sections of the piece suggest an atmosphere to explore the relationship to the music, as a path of self-discovery. The piece ends with a coda, using a descending melody line with a homorhythmic texture in the string section along with percussions.

In the process of composing the soundscapes of the piece, the goal was to captivate objectless awareness and to calm the mind without ever becoming a distraction, with no unexpected change generated in volume or tempo.

## Conclusions

Composing the pieces for this project was a great experience for me. I was able to incorporate my musical knowledge, and take risks both in my writing and in my personal interpretation of the selected ideas.

One of the deliberations I made was exploring a wide range of sonic possibilities, and deciding which options were desirable for this project.

Having the opportunity to use the works in my meditation practices, I found that the use of repeated note series incorporated in music as mantra, helps to keep the mind focused and also to bring it back into the present moment when it wanders. I concluded that melodies with less motion tend to evoke a more calming or relaxing effect than melodies with more motion. Also, I found that the use of longer note values and slow moving harmonies helps to create a balanced and soothing atmosphere. The most successful work that help me to achieve a meditative state is *Eternal Flow*. The use of the drone effect and the repeated note series helps to create a calming atmosphere for meditation.

This thesis has offered numerous methods in creating compositional material based on interpreting stylistic qualities from a certain framework. My research into this unique history and inner working of chamber music and meditation music has allowed me to further appreciate these musical genres. The vast amount of research involved in the project has brought to my attention many different texts and guidebooks that I wish to further explore.

The development and challenges of this project required me to deal with diverse issues during the creative process resulting in moments of revelation and discovery, and provided me with inspiration for future projects.

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## Appendix A: Types of Meditation

A brief description about the meditation types mentioned in the paper.

**Chakra Meditation** - the practitioner focuses on one of the seven chakras of the body (centers of energy), typically doing some visualizations and chanting a specific mantra for each chakra.

**Guided Meditation** - is a process by which one or more participants meditate with the help of a meditation teacher, or by listening to a guided meditation recording, helping to guide the meditator's attention to achieve a meditative state.

**Mindfulness Meditation** - is the practice of intentionally focusing on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and non-judgmentally paying attention to the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that arise.

**Sound Meditation** - the type of meditation that is focusing on sound. Firstly, starts with meditation on external sounds, such as music, whereby the practitioner focuses all his attention on just hearing, to calm the mind. The final goal is to hear the internal sounds of the body and mind.

**Taoist Meditation** - the main characteristic of this type of meditation is the generation, transformation, and circulation of inner energy. The purpose is to calm the body and mind, unify body and spirit, find inner peace.

**Transcendental Meditation** - a technique for detaching oneself from anxiety and promoting harmony and self-realization by meditation, it involves the use of a mantra.

**Vipassana Meditation** - in general emphasize starting with mindfulness of breath in the first stages, to stabilize the mind, then the practice moves on to developing clear insight on the bodily sensations and mental occurrences, noticing them moment by moment and not clinging to any.

**Zen Meditation** - is a Japanese school of meditation emphasizing the value of meditation and intuition, revolves around observation of your thoughts and how mind and body operate.

