WARDEN *For three or more players and one production engineer*

This work is built by layering and assembling recordings. The performers have agency over the materials; the audio engineer acts as a caretaker to shepherd the sounds together. Each performing group will make a different version of the work. It is an assembly of improvisations co-created with a group of players. Warden was written during the COVID-19 quarantine, designed for broadcast production, such as possible in under physical distancing.

This piece builds outward from sounds that are carefully designed, prepared, and worked out privately, in isolation, with time to oneself. It is a piece made for a time of quarantine.

By passing each stage of the process through an intermediary caretaker, players are able to improvise and perform while responding to recorded audio/video from others with reasonably high fidelity.

This piece is quasi-telematic in the sense that it uses technology to facilitate musical responsiveness across time and place. But it is not telematic in the sense that there is no synchronous playing or collaboration. But the piece's conceit is that, when done right, listeners would presume it is performed synchronously. The final artifact is a video production that would appear as a synchronous performance, whose kernel of inspiration are sounds too fragile and difficult to realize reliably "live".

Warden is created through a process of assembly. Players begin by recording sounds and improvisations. An audio engineer uses these to create "prompts" that are returned to the players for a to overlay a new round of improvisation. This cycle can repeat as many times as necessary.

FINISHED PRODUCT

Warden should have a duration of at least 2' per player (i.e. a quartet >8 minutes total duration). The finished product should be a video production that has the appearance of being a live performance. All recording should be both audio and video recording, with a similar camera angle and attire.

PROCESS – PART I

The process of this piece always begins by each of the players recording a sound and subsequent improvisations. The sound should either be sustained for at least 15-25", or be an attack with a resonance that lasts at least 15".

Find a vivid sound. A sound that you can usually only coax into existence on the third or fourth try, not the first try. A sound that, absent context, most listeners would not necessarily know what instrument is bringing it to life. A sound that is complex and immediately invites engagement. And one that emanates from a dexterity you feel is unique to you and your instrument. The sound may have perforations, flickering, fluctuations, etc. Ideally it should have an unusual and unique disposition.

Record it. Take several tries until you feel you have an artifact that captures the sound in a vibrant way. Then, capture it twice more at that quality. You should make **three recordings** total of the **initial sound**.

Then, make **two improvisations**, of one-to-two minutes each, based on your sound.
1) An improvisation rooted in your sound, relatively often including it; and
2) A more active, dynamic, kinesthetic improvisation—still connected to the harmony or timbre of the prior sound, but now more active and exploring farther afield.

Trust your intuition. Think on them and practice ad lib, but please do not do more than three takes.

PROCESS – PART II

At this point, each player should have sent five samples to the engineer: 3 recordings of a sound (ca. 20" each); and 2 improvisations, one more active and one more sustained (60-180" each).

The engineer acts as caretaker, assembling these recordings into the building blocks of the piece. Artistic discretion is left to caretaker(s) and/or performers. Each group can decide to what extent decision-making is collective (with everyone in the ensemble), or unilateral (by the caretaker).

The caretaker could choose to lay out the piece's architecture at this time, situating each sound within the form of the entire work. Or, they could choose to start with building blocks whose relationship to one another in the form is not yet apparent and will reveal itself with time.

PROCESS – PART III

At this point, the caretaker bounces various sections and sends them back each member as "prompts". The players should respond as though improvising—or composing another voice—to add to the excerpt. For example, the caretaker might create situations like:

- A sound, on its own, sustained for some time.
- A combination of sustained sounds and free improvisation
- Excerpts that include prolonged silences
- A composite of multiple sustained sounds, in an ambient cluster
- One or more improvisations, composited

Since the final product is designed to appear as a synchronous performance, players should not overdub onto a prompt that already contains their playing. (i.e. a string quartet version should never have two cellos playing at once).

PROCESS – PART IV
Players record responses to the prompts they have received, adding a new layer. They may receive one prompt, or a handful each round. They may freely improvise, or map out ideas in notation.

Players record alongside the soundfile they are responding to, monitoring it over headphones. Players then bounce their new recording and send it back to the caretaker. The caretaker may—or may not—give any instructions to accompany the prompt; the more complex the situation, the more likely the caretaker may need to give more specific guidance.

Part III and Part IV repeat ad lib, with new layers added each time. Completion is by consensus.

A/V TECH / NOTES FOR THE CARETAKER
To ensure a timely and effective assembly, the following tactics are recommended:
- Produce all the audio first; begin synchronization with video only once the audio is finished
- However, as you begin processing audio files, maintain a text document with notes about which excerpts correspond to what video files, and their approximate timing
- Maintain at least two separate DAW sessions:
    - A tracking session, which acts as a consolidated home for all the complete take submissions from the players. This session can be used for basic EQ and normalization before the desired excerpts are bounced into the main assembly session.
    - An assembly session where the prompts and the work itself are assembled. (Depending on the duration/complexity, a third session for just the final mix/master may be advisable).

To ensure precise synchronization and enough time for players to record, the caretaker should include:
- At least 10" seconds of lead-in time at the beginning of prompts
- A "three two one click" at the beginning of the 10" roll-in, with players clapping on the click

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Sincethe ultimate goal is a video production that appears to be a continuous, players should plan their production schedule carefully. Considerations include maintaining similar:

- Camera angle
- Time of day (i.e. sunshine vs. night)
- Attire
- Hairstyle/facial hair

The production engineer will likely need 3-5 days to turn around each prompt. Often a production of *Warden* will require 3-4 rounds. Therefore, a typical schedule might be weekly recording sessions for a period of 3-4 weeks. Take care that in the first session, the above features are feasible to replicate on a weekly basis for the coming month—particularly malleable features like haircuts or time-of-day.

The caretaker could also be a performer in the group.

Each group should discuss how to credit the performers, caretaker, and composer. Authorship functions differently in this work than in most musical works. One recommended possibility is: "*Warden* by Zach Sheets, featuring players [name], [name], and [name], produced by [name]"

I am glad to serve as caretaker. Please contact me at zachsheets91@gmail.com.

The premiere performance of Warden was on March 5, 2021, presented by the [Switch~ Ensemble], featuring Madison Greenstone, TJ Borden, Megan Arns, and Zach Sheets.