

James Weeks

Meadow (iii)

for a for a large number of performers, vocalising or/and playing*, with audio recording devices and cameras

2026

* *Note:* the materials of *Meadow (iii)* are most effective for voices and string instruments; players of all instruments may prefer to vocalise some or all of the elements.

Meadow (iii) is designed to be possible to produce and perform within a single session of group activity, taking place initially outdoors and then indoors (the performance space). The outdoors space should be a flowering field or meadow (not a garden). A fine day in Spring or Summer is ideal, if possible. If preferred, performers can complete the outdoor section of the instructions individually, in advance of the group performance activity.

Outdoors

In the flowering field or meadow selected, each participant records a soundscape on their recording devices (phones, portable sound recorder, etc.).

Record an unbroken track of around 10 minutes' duration, by placing the recording device on the ground, in among the plants, and leaving it to record.

While recording, close your eyes and immerse yourself in the soundscape, attending to each sound individually before listening to their interaction (see *Polyphonic Listening* for a structured approach).

Next, take note of the sounds of any birds or insects (such as bees) you have heard among the plants. Ignore birdsong or calls which emanate from surrounding trees or from further afield, focusing on the ground-level ecosystem. Listen microscopically and note down all details of their sounds.

Finally, take pictures of the flowering wild plants there (wildflowers, 'weeds', grasses, reeds etc.). Some non-flowering plants could be included. Take photos both of individual plants and of clusters of the same or different plants, always so that you can make out the shape and structure of individual plants. Take plenty of pictures, trying to capture as many different species as possible.

Now, return to the performance space and create the meadow.

Indoors

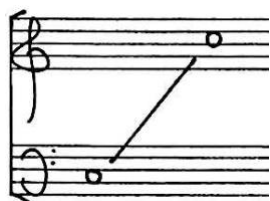
The meadow is made up of three sound elements: **plant-drawing**, **birds and insects**, and the **recording**.

1) Plant-drawing

The aim is to 'draw' the different plants in sound, from your photos. Do this in two ways:

- **Stems and foliage:** using glissando as your 'drawing line', sketch the shape of the plant. Vertical stems should be realised as upward glissandi (so the drawing 'grows' from the ground upwards), and branching stems as upward or downward glissandi according to their shape in space. Draw 'around' the shapes of leaves (upwards then downwards, or vice versa). Choose a timbre and articulation that seems appropriate to the plant in question (e.g. a furry stem might have a soft tremolo or fluttertongue texture; something more spiky might have a slightly harsher timbre). All sounds should be very soft and light, almost transparent: a faintly sketched pencil outline. Work quickly and don't linger over details.

All sketching should take place within the following range:



- **Flowers:** when you reach a flowerhead on your 'drawing', play a flower. This should be a single, relatively short note, the length corresponding to the size of the flower but not exceeding 2-3 secs for the largest flowers. Do this for all the flowers on your plant, when you reach them. If a plant has many flowerheads in a cluster (e.g. cow parsley), play them all – the smaller the flower, the shorter the pitch.

Choose one particular pitch within the following range for each type of flower and stick to this as best you can through the performance. (It need not accord with other performers' choices for the same flower.)



Each flower note can be performed 'straight', or coloured with a timbre or articulation appropriate to it. In comparison to the stems and foliage, the flowers should be a little louder, and should be performed delicately, with care.

2) Birds and Insects

During the performance, periodically break off from drawing plants and flowers and imitate as closely as possible the sounds of the birds and insects heard. These might include bees and wasps, cicadas, beetles, dragonflies, or the sound of birds among the foliage.

3) Recording

From time to time, cease performing either plant-drawing or birds and insects, and play your recording at a medium-low level, keeping still and silent and listening to everything around you.

Structure and approach to performance

The meadow should last approximately 10-20 minutes, but can be longer if desired, with a sufficient number of participants. Agree on a duration together.

Before the performance, each participant should independently decide when they are to perform plant-drawing, when birds and insects, and when to play their recording. In general, plant-drawing should predominate. The three elements can be returned to multiple times, and no single section should last more than 3 minutes. Take a moment's breather between each section.

In each plant-drawing section you can use as many photos as you like to draw from, and reuse the best ones *ad lib*. It would be best to make a selection in advance of the performance.

Timings should be observed using stopwatches.

The overall texture and performance approach should be busy, variegated and intricate, and always very soft. You are in among the plants and insects, at ground-level. The music is the abundant life of the meadow, each tiny plant and animal contributing to an infinitely complex, extremely delicate sonic whole.

Performers should spread out around the performance space. If an audience is present, let them wander quietly among you.

Variations

Meadow (iii) can be performed without the Birds and Insects material if desired (or, for instance, if no birds or insects are heard).

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