

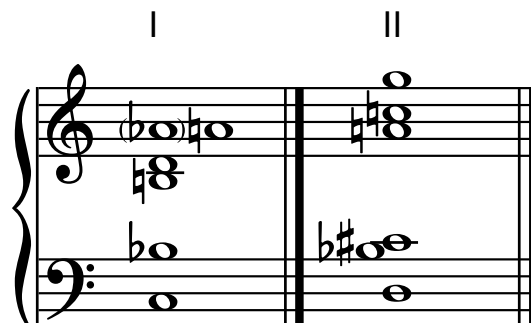
flotsam / jetsam

Alex Rennie (2026)

Programme note

The initial inspiration for this piece was from Alex Ross's article 'The Composers of Quiet' on the Wandelweiser Group, in which he describes tonal materials in John Cage's music as 'meaningless flotsam and jetsam' (by contrast, Wandelweiser composers such as Jürg Frey and Eva-Maria Houben are said to display unstable 'ghost tonality'). In this work, I interrogate intentionality in the metaphor of 'flotsam and jetsam' – literally cargo or debris that has floated up from a shipwreck and intentionally jettisoned goods from a vessel to prevent wreckage, respectively. Both categories are consequences of tempestuous conditions on the ocean and are, as such, unintended but are human, unnatural objects which have intrinsic design and intentionality; they are out of place and isolated.

The piece is divided into two discrete sections, which can be thought of as 'flotsam' and 'jetsam', in that order. I explore different formal techniques to create expressive quasi-organic results. Both are constructed formally using a different hexachord (see below), although in the first movement, the sixth pitch is withheld for most of the piece. In 'flotsam', the compound sonority slowly unfurls, with the temporality shifting as though affected by gentle waves in the aftermath of a storm – as if different objects periodically bob above the water. The hexachord is transposed and octave-displaced, and I use a variety of contrasting textures, although the constant gentle oscillation never entirely disappears. The second movement is more violent, with a propulsive rhythm, taking some slight inspiration from Beat Furrer's *spur*. Its hexachord does not assume octave equivalency: instead, I am concerned with rigorous intervallic rotation (where stacked intervals are shifted around). As a technique, it maintains intervallic coherency whilst allowing for expressive contrasts in harmonic material. The pitch material is defined by the absence of two pitches, D# and F#, as I found every rotation and transposition of the six intervals without them. The piece is centred around the pitch D, which is held in one part at a time, each rupturing into a new rotation representing a new set of objects floating up – more vigorous each time. Eventually, the piece dissolves into a quiet resonance, where the pitch material, played in natural harmonics (differing from equal temperament – especially in the case of the seventh and eleventh partials), is *naturalised*, symbolising the absorption of the jetsam into the ocean mass. In previous works, such as *oceanograph* (2024), which I wrote for standard issue in Huddersfield, I have also explored formal processes, including intervallic rotation to represent the chaos and boundlessness of the ocean – with an interest in cases where nature overpowers humanity.



Performance directions

This piece should be played with minimal vibrato throughout, unless otherwise specified. With metallic practice mutes, dynamics are as they would be played rather than as sounding. Accidentals apply to the entire bar. In the first section, the time signature and rhythm need not be read exactly, instead the focus should be creating the effect of warped temporality – ‘snatched’ (such as $3/4 + 1/8$) or ‘expanded’ ($4/4 + 1/8$) time – hence why I used aggregate time signature notation.



play sustained note, initially touching harmonic for written duration (letting it ‘ring’)



bow scratched on string



immediately gliss upwards for note duration (if from open string, finger immediately)

m.s.p.

molto sul ponticello – as close to the bridge as possible

$\frac{1}{2}$ l.+c.

play with bow tilted: half wood and half hairs of bow



brief caesura – like a short breath



overpressure – width indicates amount

vib. irreg 

irregular and chaotic fast vibrato

flotsam / jetsam

for Quatuor Bozzini

Alex Rennie

Lontano ♩ = 48

Violin 1 con sord. metallo s.t. *sfz pp* *mf* *ppp*

Violin 2 con sord. metallo s.t. *sfz pp* *mf* *ppp*

Viola con sord. metallo s.t. *sfz pp* *mf* *ppp*

Violoncello con sord. metallo m.s.p. s.t. *sfz p* *ppp*

sfz

4

7

senza sord.,

sfz $\triangleleft$ *mf* $\triangleleft$ *ppp*

sfz pp $\triangleleft$ *mf* $\triangleleft$ *ppp*

sfz *p* $\triangleleft$ *ppp*

m.s.p.

s.t.

senza sord.,

senza sord.,

senza sord.,

senza sord.,



10

ord.
molto leggiero

ppp poss.

ord.
molto leggiero

ppp poss.

ord.
molto leggiero

ppp poss.

ord.
molto leggiero

ppp poss.

ppp poss.

More energy ♩ = 54

16

mp

s.p.

pp

s.p.

ord.

pp

pizz.

sf

IV II III

p aim for some sustained resonance



19

pp

ord.

mp

s.p.

pp

pizz.

ord.

sf

IV II III

p aim for some sustained resonance

arco

s.p.

pp

22

mp

s.p.

pp

s.p.

pp

ord.

mp

arco s.p.

pp

pizz. ord.

p

sf

25

ff sonore

sfz

fpp

rfz

ff

sfz

from the frog

ff sonore

sfz

fpp

rfz

ff

sfz

arco from the frog

ff sonore

sfz

fpp

rfz

ff

sfz

s.p. harm.

ord.

IV

28

con sord. metallo

fpp *rfz* *ff* *sffz*

pp *mp* *pp*
accel. and decel. tremelo
touch harmonics half way through

from the frog
ord.

con sord. metallo

fpp *rfz* *ff* *sffz*

con sord. metallo

fpp *rfz* *ff* *sffz*

s.p. harm.
ord.

IV

fpp *rfz* *ff* *sffz*

s.t.

pp *mp* *pp*

s.t.

pp *mp* *pp*

s.t.

pp *mp* *pp*



32

s.t. → s.p.

pp *mp* *pp*

pp *mp* *pp*

pp *mp* *pp*

pp *mp* *pp*

con sord. metallo

pp *mp* *pp*

m.s.p.

IV

mp *pp* *n*