

Contraflow Symphony

for **2 to 32 large vehicles** equipped with backup warning beepers, horns, and optional air horns
such as sanitation trucks, delivery trucks, construction vehicles, etc.
and **2 to 32 small vehicles** equipped with forward warning beepers
such as airport carts.

Dennis Báthory-Kitsz

This piece may be performed at four levels.

Level Four: All vehicles, events and equipment

Level Three: A smaller number of vehicles, with all events and equipment

Level Two: Any number of vehicles greater than four, with most events and limited equipment

Level One: Four vehicles with limited equipment

The Location

A resonant stone village (preferred), town or small city with a cobbled town square (preferred), large central park, parking lot, or concrete parking garage. If the latter admits large vehicles, then it is ideal.

The Equipment

The vehicles and their beepers, horns and drivers, plus:

Walkie-talkies or mobile phones in walkie-talkie mode*

Powerful vehicle sound systems with recorded boom track (provided)**

GPS units, maps or good directional sense (rehearsed)***

On the town square, park, parking lot or garage:

Outside Ring with a sound system with multiple channels***

Second Ring with enough room for the vehicles to travel in a spiral

Third Ring with glass bottle sculptures (see design)***

Fourth Ring with large plates of glass (from windows, display cabinets, etc.)**

Fifth Ring with piles of random resonant metal**

Central Ring with plastic orange traffic barrels***

*equal to twice the number of vehicles

**equal to the number of large vehicles

***equal to the number of both large and small vehicles

Optional video equipment and camera operators to record the event from the perspective of each vehicle.

The Setup

1. The first walkie-talkie is used to establish communication between one small vehicle and one large vehicle for signals and directions.
2. The second walkie-talkie is used to transmit the local sound from the vehicles to the central sound system. Ideally, the second walkie-talkie is mounted near enough to the vehicle's beeper and its exhaust to transmit both sounds.
3. The vehicles are set up on the outskirts of town and given a spiral route (either clockwise or counterclockwise, but all vehicles traveling in the same direction) that will take them inward to the central square, arriving at about the same time.
4. One small vehicle is to meet up with one large vehicle and guide it as travel gets congested, and to make decisions if one set of vehicles overtakes another. This pairing is set in advance.
5. All traffic signals and laws are to be respected.

Total time is approximately one hour. Longer performances are encouraged.

The Performance

Prelude

1. At an arranged time, all vehicles turn on their walkie-talkies.
2. The large vehicles immediately turn on their sound systems and begin the boom track.
3. One minute later, all vehicles turn on their engines and warning beepers.
4. One minute later, the small vehicles begin to move and travel to find the large vehicle. The search and meeting should take no longer than five minutes.

First Movement

5. When the large vehicle is met by the small one, the pair begins to travel—the small one forward and the large one backward with both warning beepers sounding—toward the town square. They are always together.
6. The sound from all beepers and exhausts is received, mixed and broadcast into the town square. It is recommended that real-time effects or transformations be made with a resident a laptop orchestra. The sound level throughout should be matched to the actual level of the vehicles.

Second Movement

7. As the vehicles pairs arrive at the edge of the town square, they file onto the Second Ring and continue to move.
8. As each vehicle pair arrives, it slides into position behind the nearest pair and continues to move.
9. When all vehicles are circling, a designated leader begins the spiral inward.
10. When the first vehicle reaches the inside edge of the Second Ring, it pulls into position on the radius, aimed at the Third Ring, and stops. The lead vehicle remains the small one, and the large vehicle follows it (still in reverse).
All sounds and transmissions continue.
11. The second pair of vehicles passes the first and follows into the circle.
12. Eventually (and as quickly as possible) all vehicles are lined up, motors and beepers and boom tracks running.

Third Movement

13. At an arranged signal, all vehicles race their engines for a 30 seconds, then slow them down for 30 more seconds.
14. When all engines are at idle, the small vehicles commence the inward motion simultaneously, perform a U-turn just before the metal piles in the Fifth Ring, slide past the large vehicles, and perform another U-turn.
15. When the small vehicles are facing the large ones, the large ones begin to move very slowly backward, the driver reaching out and pushing over the glass bottle sculptures in the Third Ring so they fall onto the glass plates in the Fourth Ring, timing the fall to occur when the large vehicle hits the pile of metal in the Fifth Ring. Drivers immediately scream loudly and blow their horns (air horns if available).
16. As soon as the glass is breaking and the metal screeching, the engines are revved and the large vehicles hit the plastic barrels in the Central Ring as fast as possible, and then shift into neutral.

Coda

17. Engine idling, boom track and beeping continue for at least a full minute.
18. Engines are switched off. Beeping and boom tracks continue for another full minute.
19. Boom tracks are switched off. Beeping continues for another full minute.
20. Everything is switched off and silence ensues (after, if used, the laptop orchestra completes its transformations).

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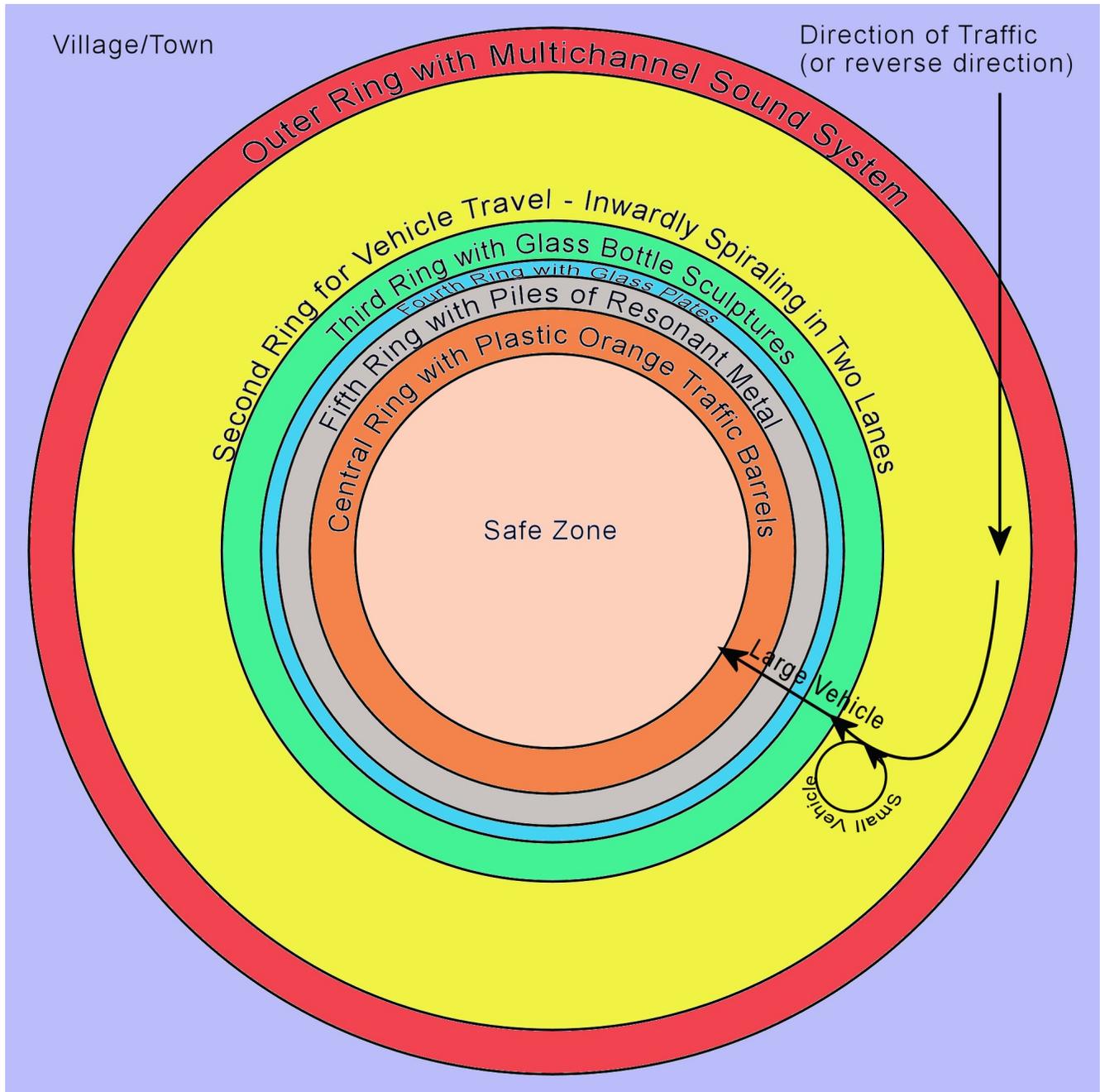
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Gouldsville, Vermont

Location Layout

Approximate setup of sound equipment, vehicles, bottle sculptures, glass, and barrels, together with the safe zone. An area approximately 400 feet on each side will be satisfactory, though a reduced area can be used with smaller vehicles.

The setup should encourage an increasing tumult as vehicles begin their journey and finally arrive in the central area. The crescendo of sound is not a smooth rise, but rather quickly growing from silence to a roar of exhausts and beeps, concluding with 64 sound sources (live and broadcast) in a chaos of rhythms and thunders.



Bottle Sculptures and Glass Plates

Constructing the bottle tree wind chime in the Third Ring is straightforward. A tree-shaped frame is built with several bottles hanging at different heights but close enough to strike each other; the top of the tree shape is a cross similar to that used for marionettes. The bottom of the tree pivots on a frame sturdy enough to hold the entire assembly, and a backrest keeps the pivoting tree from blowing over in the wind. The pivot is chosen so that when the bottle tree is pulled over, the bottoms of the bottles strike the central part of the glass plate in the Fourth Ring.

Because of the number of large vehicles that will be running on fossil fuels, this performance piece is ecologically marginal. The cost of the final portion can be ameliorated by using scrap materials that can be retrieved from and returned to the recycling stream.

The bottle tree wind chime is built entirely recycled materials, from the bottles themselves to the scrap wood for the tree, the pivot, and the base. The frame for the plate glass can be any supporting wood, and the plate glass itself can be scrap window glass frequently discarded at the roadside.

The resonant metal in the Fifth Ring can also be obtained from and returned to the recycling stream. 'Resonant metal' might include appliance sides, brake drums and discs, rebar, automobile fenders, etc.

Finally, the plastic orange barrels in the Central Ring are used in road construction and are intended to be struck by vehicles and re-used.

