

Kory Reeder

The End of the World, With the Gentlest Touch

For two percussionists

(2024)

Written especially for DesoDuo

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Things you'll need

Both players:

Bass drum (both players, same drum)

2 snare drums (1 each)

Someone:

Stone slab (concrete or textured, like a 12x12 step stone at a home-improvement store)

NOAA Weather Radio (live or pre-recorded, either the machine itself or online, just make sure it's very quiet)

A box of dry leaves – like, a lot of them

Brushes, soft mallets, small stones (at least 3-inches long or wide), a piece of a cardboard box (like a removed flap or a cut square or something)

Pebbles

Wood block or wood slat

Bell (the bigger the better)

Vibraphone (pedal always down)

Glockenspiel

Paper

Your voices

Things You'll Do

I will refer to you as “Player 1” and “Player 2,” but this isn’t a hierarchical thing.

Events happen in top-down order on the page; keep doing what you’re doing until the text tells you to change or the text changes you.

Read the text through, make changes gradually, and take your time.

This piece is at least 15 minutes long, but I don’t think it’s more than an hour or so.

It’s all rather quiet and stark.

First: silence (for some time)

Both of you

snare drums; both hands

With the gentlest touch, using only your fingertips, let the sound emerge like raindrops falling on a still pond. How shall we proceed?

[time]

Player 1

Freeing one of your hands.

Bass drum:

In the manner of a distant echo, tap quietly, as if the wind whispers through the trees
How might it feel?

[time]

Player 2

I wasn't sure if I heard the bass drum or the snare... maybe try both...

By barely brushing the surface, create a sound that shivers, like frost forming on leaves in the early dawn. How shall we proceed?

[time]

Player 1

Slightly, almost imperceptibly, let the rhythm drift, as if carried by the tide, flowing and receding. How it might feel.

[time]

Then, using only the edge of the cardboard, trace a path - like a shadow moving across the earth, softly, slowly, like tide. How shall we proceed?

[time]

Both of you

*mist settles in the morning
let the sound fall
light and transparent
how it might feel*

my neck tingles

[silence]

Start together

Player 1

Bass drum – thumb roll? Super ball? Normal roll?

With a subtle pressure, allow the resonance to build slowly, like a ripple expanding across water. How shall we proceed?

Player 2

Snare drum; hands on the skin – perhaps leaves too, but not too much.

Like the rustle of leaves in a gentle breeze, let each sound be brief and fleeting. How it might feel...

[then]

Using the edge of the stone, press softly and draw it along the stone slap, like water carving its path through rock – how it might feel – two feelings in two hands.

[time]

Player 1

With the wood in your hands, tap quietly, unevenly, tracing the outline of a forgotten memory. How shall we proceed? You know how to proceed.

[time]

Player 2

Rub the surfaces together slowly, letting them creak; old doors opening to places once known, now distant, now closer, now elsewhere. Now you know how it feels.

[time]

*as much as leaves brushing against one another in a gentle wind
let your touch be light
barely there*

[time]

*let the rhythm fade
almost dissolving
slipping away
echoes*

[time]

Player 1

[repeat]

Player 2

You could lightly hum, but not a melody—just a sound that’s barely there. The other might tap something nearby, but not too often, just when it seems right.

I’ve always imagined running a soft brush across metal might sound like air, but only if it’s done *really* slowly. Maybe one of you could try that while the other waits, not doing anything for a while.



Player 1

Perhaps you could join?

[time]

Player 2

In the manner of daydreaming, rub the slab; lost in thought, the sound drifting between presence and absence; Rub two smooth stones together, quietly, as if mimicking the slow erosion of time.

Player 1

Using only what is needed, allow the sound of wood to pulse like a heartbeat slowed.

Player 2

Gently brush fingertips across the surface of a drum, like a soft flutter.

Player 1

Lightly tap the side of a woodblock, as though hesitant to disturb.

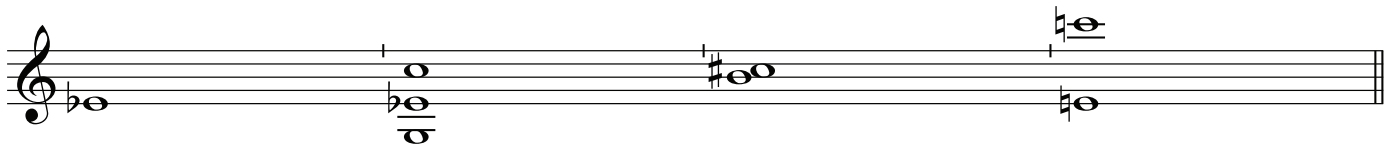
Player 2

Rub a drumskin with the side of your hand.

Waves brushing a shore, softly, cautiously, as if unsure of their place.

Lightly drag a soft brush across metal.

The slow, reluctant arrival of a breeze at dusk.



Player 1

Tap the rim of a bell with a fingertip, letting the faintest sound escape, like the distant call of a bird no longer there.

Again, and again...

[time]

Both of you

You might take turns tapping a wooden block with your fingertips, but quietly, as if not wanting to disturb anyone.

[time]

Someone

Try placing some leaves on a surface and barely shift them—enough to feel their texture, but don't force it.

Maybe lightly touch the skin of a drum with your palm, then lift it—don't worry about making it loud, just feel the skin.

[time]

One of you could crumple some thin paper slowly, not much, while the other lets a finger trace the edge of a bell.

One of you might lightly scrape wood with your fingernail, just a small motion, while the other taps the same piece softly.



With the faintest pressure, let the leaves stir beneath your hands, their dry sound like whispers of forgotten places. How shall we proceed?

[time]

*the leaves murmured their ancient language,
but the meaning slipped between the branches,
tangled in the fading light*

[time]

[silence]

I think if one of you lightly taps the side of a woodblock, almost absentmindedly, it could sound like distant knocking. The other might just listen for a while, not feeling the need to join in right away.

[then]

You might both take a moment to just sit with your instruments, doing nothing at all. It feels like part of the process to not act sometimes; don't you think?

[silence]

I like when one of you makes the smallest sound possible, maybe just barely touching a cymbal with your fingertips. The other could press something soft against a drumhead, not to play, just to feel the surface.

[silence]

[repeat]

One of you could open a window, just a little, to let in some sound from outside. You might both listen for a while before deciding what to do next.

[silence]

[repeat]

*shadows flickered against the stone, a pulse of light, a memory—there, but not for long,
and the air knew it first*

[time – silence]

*somewhere, far beyond the hills, a sound was heard once, or maybe twice, and never
quite left the air, though none could recall its shape*

[time – silence]

*in the distance, the horizon wavered, uncertain whether to rise or fall, as if the day itself
had lost the will to complete its sentence*

Who?

Let the mallet barely touch the surface of a cymbal, creating a faint shimmer, like light passing through mist.

Someone

Gently crumple paper, as if capturing the delicate rustling of grass in a hidden meadow.

Someone else

Use a bundle of leaves to sweep across a drumhead, softly, as though listening to autumn settle into the ground.

[time]

Leaves to sweeping across a drumhead.

Softly.

Listening.

Across the [ground].

[time]

[time]

[time]

Perhaps one of you might drag a nail over the edge of a bell, while the other presses lightly on a drumskin, as if testing how much pressure it takes to not make a sound.



You could each pick up a leaf and move it over your instruments, but without trying to make sound—just see what happens when you let it fall or shift.

I've always thought dragging a fingernail along metal could sound like distant thunder, but only if you do it slowly. Maybe you take turns with this, or maybe you both do it at the same time, but not quite in sync.

You— someone —might hold a small stone, letting it gently slide along metal—don't rush it, just let the sound happen.

Someone else: Let small pebbles roll between your palms, like the murmur of a distant stream, almost too quiet to hear.

[time]

[time]

[time]

[silence]

I think if one of you brushes a leaf across a drumhead, it might sound like the way trees shift when no one is paying attention. The other could wait, and then do something small, like dragging a mallet across wood, but not too much.

I said this already.

I'm losing my place

I'm starring in the distance

1000 yards

[time]

[time]

[time]

[time]

[again]

[silence]

I like when you both start something at the same time, but don't agree on when to stop.

Quickly now!

Gently tap
Softly brush
Quietly scrape
Lightly rub
Slowly drag
Faintly click
Barely touch
Subtly shift
Carefully roll
Hesitantly press
Gently rub
Softly tap
Slowly brush
Lightly scrape
Quietly roll
Barely press
Faintly drag
Carefully drop
Delicately strike
Subtly shift
Softly cleave
Gently smite
Quietly rend
Lightly graze
Subtly quiver
Meekly scour
Faintly murmur
Slowly chafe
Delicately hover
Humbly stir
Timidly bewail
Subtly pare
Silently beckon
Softly riddle
Gently unmoor
Quietly sever
Humbly wrest

[then]

Pulse: for a very long time

After some time, it's still happening, but I think if you both pick up a small object—like a pebble or a stick—and just hold it, it could feel like waiting for something to happen. There's no need to force it. You'll know when it's time.

[time]

[fade]

[silence]

Beneath the silence, there was a hum, faint and indistinct, as if the earth itself whispered a secret to the stones, who could not answer back.

You could turn on the NOAA Weather Radio, quietly, so it's more of a hum than anything else, while the other taps something nearby, but only when they feel like it. I love that radio, it reminds me of afternoons spent inside during storms.

Is that pianist still there? Were they ever? I guess that makes a difference.

Faintly lapse
Darkly wend
Slowly unknot
Softly sunder
Gently travail
Humbly anoint
Silently abide
Meekly glean
Quietly reckon
Faintly supplicate
Subtly cleave
Darkly tarry
Lightly forsake

[time]

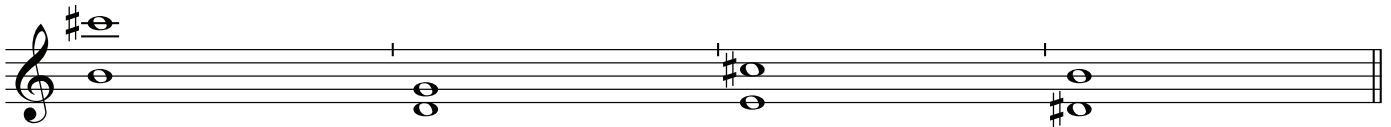
Maybe try sliding two stones together, slowly, barely touching—just enough to catch the sound.

You could hold a brush and let it sweep across the surface, quietly, as if testing how little pressure you need.

You could both pick up small pebbles and let them fall onto a drum, one after the other, without rushing.

Perhaps, one of you could lightly brush your fingers across a surface, while the other taps the underside, barely there.

With



Then

Maybe shift your hands along a drumhead, no striking, just feeling the texture beneath your palms, while the other plays with silence.

A path wound its way through the tall grass, but the ground was silent

footsteps had long ceased to matter

What are we doing?

You could both take turns rubbing a stick across wood, no pattern—let it sound only when it needs to, or maybe not at all.

Maybe both of you could lightly hum—not a song, just something barely heard, while letting a stick rest against a surface, waiting for what happens next.

*Under the weight of the sky, the earth bent, not breaking but sinking
time had left its handprint and moved on.*

Try tapping a stone softly against metal, but not rhythmically, and the other might catch those moments with a brush.

They can feel it.

[time]

I could have sworn....

Is that pianist there? Do you see this?



[time]

Hmmm...

I like when one person does almost nothing. Maybe one of you could hold a mallet against a cymbal, just resting there, while the other slowly rubs their hands along the edge of a drum.

[time]

Then: pulses. Dearly faint.

I see them.

[time]

I like the idea of barely brushing the surface of a drum, just enough to hear the skin move. Maybe you could both try that, one of you waiting a little longer than the other.

[time]

[time]

[time]

*across the water's skin, the ripple remembered itself
folding endlessly
searching for a shore it never knew*

[time]

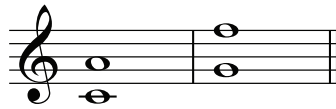
[silence]

You might refer to something you can't quite name, something that feels distant but is always listening. I think one of you should tap lightly on metal, while the other drags a finger along a drum, as if in response to something just out of reach.

[silence]

[silence]

[time]



*the wind, brittle and stuttering
caught in the trees
whispered confessions
half-heard and already forgotten by dusk*

[silence]

[time]

Then

Let a single grain of sand fall on a taut surface, as though listening for the whisper of time slipping away unnoticed.

Think about letting sand fall, not much, just a little at a time, while the other listens closely, waiting for something to respond to.

I always like when things end in a way that doesn't feel planned. Maybe one of you turns off the NOAA Weather Radio, slowly, while the other brushes against their instrument one last time, just enough to hear it.

[time]

[silence]