

BEATING.BLINKING for Bass Drums and Breaths (v.3)  
by Adam Overton  
First Performed June 11, 2004, Gallery 825 in Los Angeles, California  
(Rev. 9/04)

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INTRODUCTION

*Beating.Blinking for Bass Drums and Breaths* is a piece of "body music" in four movements for musicians, and may be interpreted in one of two very different ways. In one form of the piece, Performers can observe their own heartbeats and blinks; the second option is to perform the piece while instead observing the internal functions of volunteer audience members. The ensemble should agree upon which version to do and prepare accordingly. The score presented here is written for the more complicated case of using audience volunteers, though it shouldn't be too hard to interpret for the other more introspective variation. In any case, the performers will interpret this internal bodily activity with various rhythmic strategies, resulting in four sonic tableaux.

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SET-UP & INSTRUMENTATION

This piece requires 4, 6 or 8 percussionists who are numbered (1, 2, 3...). Player ONE will lead the group by signaling several important cues. All ensemble members will play the same part except in Movement *III* where it will be necessary for the players to split in half (Odd's and Even's). If possible, the ensemble should be evenly dispersed around the perimeter of the audience. If using Volunteers, Performers and Volunteers must be seated during the performance to prevent exhaustion, but must make sure that they can still be easily viewed by the audience.

Each percussionist will need:

- 1 willing Volunteer from the audience (optional depending on version of the piece)
- 1 Bass Drum -- Drumset bass drums with only one head attached work well because they can be placed on the floor, allowing Performers and Volunteers to comfortably sit in their chairs. If concert bass drums are used, and Volunteers are being used, you may need to use stools instead of chairs. The drums should be loosely tuned and allowed to resonate, though they should all have a unique tuning so as make them distinguishable from one another.
- 2 comfortable chairs or stools if using a Volunteer -- See the instruction above.
- 1 "HotRod" mallet (a bundled, balsa-wood mallet)
- 1 synchronizable timer

VOICED EXHALES should be interpreted as short, low, breathy and natural "uh" sounds. Breath sounds such as EXHALES and INHALES should be short, have a high velocity, and be audible to the listener.

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VOLUNTEER PREPARATION & GENERAL PERFORMANCE NOTES  
(Please read through this even if you are not using volunteers)

Do not force anyone to volunteer.

It is very important to only observe the breath and heartbeat, and to refrain from trying to consciously control them. If using a volunteer, express this to them while explaining what you are about to be doing. Also explain that in order for you, the Performer, to watch their blinks, they will need to look in your general direction with their eyes open, though they need not stare into your eyes if that makes them feel uncomfortable. You, however, should try to look your Volunteer straight in the eye during the entire performance.

Pre-determine what will be the most comfortable sitting position to use with your Volunteer so that you can get into place as soon as possible. In general it's best to be slightly bent over with your elbows resting on your knees or thighs, holding your Volunteer's wrist with one hand (or your neck if solo), and your bass drum mallet with the other. At the performance you will need to demonstrate to your volunteer what this best position should be and explain that they will grow tired if they sit any other way. This is super important because you do not want yourself or the Volunteer to be fidgeting later on because of a weary arm or a straining position.

You will need to quickly find your own or the Volunteer's pulse. Consider the act of finding of the pulse the entrance to the piece and remain silent during and after this act. When using a Volunteer, gently hold one of their wrists palm-side up with your thumb and 1st & 2nd fingertips. With the 1st & 2nd fingertips the pulse can be found on the up-turned wrist on the thumb-side, about half-an-inch below the base of the palm. Rehearse this on yourself and several others beforehand so that you are familiar with where to feel and can do so quickly in performance. Remember that it is not necessary to squeeze the wrist tightly, and may end up being uncomfortable to the Volunteer if you do so. When using your own pulse, you will need to check on the neck by placing your 1st & 2nd fingertips on either side of the throat about half-way down, very close to the edge of the esophagus.

When looking at your Volunteer, maintain a serious yet relaxed facial expression throughout the entire performance.

Keep your vocal and breathy sounds as UnFunny as possible to help prevent contagious fits of laughter. Also make sure that these sounds are loud enough to be heard over the bass drums -- it's much better to be too loud rather than too soft. And while doing your breathing sounds, try not to breathe on your Volunteer.

If you lose the pulse while performing, you **SHOULD NOT CONTINUE PLAYING**. You should stop, re-locate the pulse, and then resume your part where you left off.

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A VERY IMPORTANT FINAL NOTE

This piece should be fun to perform, so do not get discouraged if you are having trouble counting, executing rhythms, or keeping track of the pulse. Just as with any other piece, a few short rehearsals and a little practice on your own will soon make things much, much easier to execute.

Additionally, realize that this piece features not only the biological processes of the heart and eyes, but also the ebb and flow of your brain and attention. Your ability to focus and keep track of pulses and blinks while counting and performing numerous rhythms is a unique and interesting bodily function, and an integral part of the performance. Consider any such mental lapses as "fluctuations" that add your own personal signature, and hence additional depth, to the work. So please relax and have fun with it, and mess up (or succeed!) in your own special way.

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## Intro.

0:00 - 0:30

On Cue from Player ONE, Turn Timer ON  
SILENCE -- Begin Observing Volunteer's (or Own) PULSE & BLINKS

[ 1 Quarter Note = 1 HeartBeat ]

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## I.

0:30 - 3:00

Medium Loud (*mf*) -- With HOTROD

Play every 23rd HEART BEAT on the HEAD of the Bass Drum  
AND

For every BLINK, hit the RIM of the Bass Drum AND Alternate the following:

- .Inhale Loudly thru the Nose
  - .Exhale Loudly thru the Mouth
- 

## II.

3:15 - 5:00

Softly (*p*) -- With FingerTips [ No HOTROD ]

With your FingerTips lightly play 16TH NOTES in sync with HEART BEAT.  
(or, if 16ths seem too fast to do consistently, use 8TH NOTE TRIPLETS)

Cycle thru the following accent pattern, only shifting forward whenever there is a BLINK:

accent every

2nd HeartBeat ... (repeat while waiting for blink)

3rd HeartBeat ... (repeat while waiting for blink)

4th HeartBeat ... (repeat while waiting for blink)

3rd HeartBeat ... (repeat while waiting for blink)

2nd HeartBeat ... etc

### III.

5:15 - 8:00

Medium Soft (*mp*) -- With Hand and FingerTips [ No HOTROD ]

:: Players 1,3,5,7 ::

With FingerTips

Play QUARTER NOTES with the HEART BEAT on the Bass Drum Head Near The Rim  
AND

With each BLINK make a short VOICED EXHALE

:: Players 2,4,6,8 ::

For each BLINK, With HAND on the Bass Drum Head Near The Rim, Alternate:

.Muffled Bass Hit (hit with flat hand, and hold on head)

.Resonant Bass Hit (hit with fingertips; pull away from the head)

AND

Make short INHALES and EXHALES with each HEART BEAT.

Do Inhales until lungs are full, and Exhales until lungs are empty before alternating...

i.e. [Empty] In, In, ... In, [Full] Out, Out, ... Out [Empty] ...

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### IV.

8:15 - 12:00

Medium Loud / Loud (*mf / f*) -- Use HOTROD

No HEART BEAT in this movement, so release Volunteer's wrist, but maintain Eye Contact

One Common Pulse for All Players - Everyone plays the SAME RHYTHM TOGETHER

Players either ALL enter on cue from Player ONE,

OR they each come in 3 seconds apart (Player ONE, then TWO, etc...)

With each BLINK, Play an ACCENT on the Next Nearest Bass Drum Beat

Accents should be LOUD (*f*) / All unaccented hits should be Medium Loud (*mf*)

Starting Speed should be Around Quarter Note = 90 BPM

The group does a Stepwise ACCELERANDO. Player ONE may cue each increase if desired.

// 8:15-9:00 - QUARTER NOTES // 9:00-10:00 - QUARTER-NOTE TRIPLETS //

// 10:00-11:00 EIGHTH NOTES // 11:00-12:00 EIGHTH NOTE TRIPLETS //

Watch for Cutoff Cue from Player ONE to end the piece (sugg: 3-and-Uh, 4-and-uh, STOP)

On Cue

End Together, MUFFLE HEAD with Stick on Last Note