

Wonderful Scatter (2005)  
Marc Sabat



(performance setup, Frauenmuseum und Feuerwehrhaus Hittisau)

“Wonderful Scatter” is an approximately 2 hour performance for tubist with computer and loudspeaker. The 6 valves of the tuba are equipped with sensors, connected to a computer program that automatically switches between 40 loops, each about a minute long. Changes of fingering by the tubist specify lengths of tubing, which are associated with different loops. In this way, each loop gathers together pitches played as overtones of a particular tube-length. These loops are played back over a subwoofer loudspeaker which filters the sound, eliminating frequencies above 352 Hz, producing a soft, round sound resembling sinewaves.

The musician follows a slow microtonal ascent, playing all available pitches in the first four octaves of the tuba’s range. The length of notes measured in bpm is proportional to their respective tube lengths. The separation of notes in time is proportional to their melodic distance so that each semitone includes one minute of non-playing ‘silence’. After completing each of the second, third and fourth octaves, the player repeats the lowest pedal tones that open the piece, creating a seven-part overall form in which the traditional role of tuba as bass-line is alternated with a counterpoint of increasingly virtuosic and dense higher-register solos.

As the performance progresses, the slowly rising movement from tone to tone interspersed with silences is transformed into flowing melodic and harmonic relationships resembling continually modulating alphorns. The title is a literal English translation of the Latin Requiem Mass text “Tuba mirum, spargens sonum” (“War-trumpet wonderful, scatter sound”).