

NOTHING CAN GO WRONG

a piece for a musician, a sound diffuser and too much apparatus

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written for the duo *La Zététique*

... creating circumstances ...

Program note: You hear a joke; you are eight years old and it remains in your memory: "I am the newest super-duper Type 35749 computer with new possibilities never dreamt of. For example you now hear me speaking to you. ... [extend the joke as long as you like] ... Nothing can go wrong ... go wrong ... go wrong ..." And as you grow older you notice you are becoming more and more involved with all sorts of apparatus ...

A word to the (un)wise: The following "score" can be adapted according to circumstances. The language of the text may be changed, the performers' names, the goings wrong altered due to present apparatus, and so on. MUS = the musician, SD = the sound diffuser who should be visible to the public if possible. As music is a time-based art, the length of any performance is one of its most crucial characteristics. The moral to this story is: shorter, not longer. Furthermore, despite what you may think, this is a piece of music. Maximalizing the music and the musicality in your versions of this piece of music is one of its greatest challenges.

SD: *via microphone in the mixing desk* OK Jos, are you ready?

MUS: *while still connecting his apparatus on stage; plays a passage on his flute "expecting" some live-electronics effect to take place, but it just sounds normal. Interrupting his playing.. I'm not so sure about this. The effect is on his voice. Shaken up - he continues playing without changing anything & the effect just "happens by itself" due to the pedal under the mixing desk's being slowly switched on.*

SD: *seems to be stuck with the same wrong effect on his voice. That sounds better!*

MUS: *getting his score in place. But that's not the right sound for that bit of music. He has forgotten that the effect is still on in his microphone as well.*

SD: I'll try to sort this out. Let's see - if I change this plug ... Jos, try that out again, please.

MUS: *plays - no change.*

SD: ... and what about this? *fussing in one way or another, but now the microphone of SD is feeding back* Wait Jos, we can't continue like this. Let me have a look here. *As they both look into this, MUS is in fact changing the feedback on SD's microphone, making it more "aesthetic". SD keeps talking about nothing in particular and concludes: Hey, this sounds pretty good. I couldn't have gotten this sound in the studio if I tried! The effect disappears "mysteriously". I think we'd better get this piece started now, Jos - if you don't mind.*

MUS: Let's test a couple of things here. *Plays a multiphonic while circular breathing and turns on and off various pedals creating the most amazing extended flute known to ... the public.* Wow, if I keep playing like that, I won't need those pie-in-the-sky composers like you anymore. Are you ready at last?

SD: I think so. *Unfortunately the feedback has "mysteriously" reappeared.*

MUS: *by now totally uninterested in what SD has to say. Here goes. He now has stepped away from his pedals, etc. and begins to play "the piece". Somehow the flanger comes and enters into his sound. MUS makes an awful face but is determined to go on. At one point the music becomes a bit pointillistic and the time has come for several delays (without the original sound) to be added, all of which come out of the wrong loudspeaker. He stops suddenly. Where's that sound coming from? His voice is very far away from where he's standing.*

SD: Pretty odd, isn't it? *His voice is suddenly on stage. Straightens that out. I think we had better try out the tape and flute combination, don't you?*

MUS: *still with that maladjusted microphone - loudspeaker combination. I guess so. Starts playing. Tape is switched on which comes out of a tiny loudspeaker next to MUS, but his sound is coming from behind the audience. By the way, the sound on the tape is wrong.*

SD: Jos, I thought by using the tape that nothing could go wrong. *The last two words are picked up in a mini-sampler and repeated indefinitely ... beginning after a pause of a couple of very silent seconds ... on a seemingly remote loudspeaker. In the meantime, SD has changed the tape and suggests: Shall we try that tape and flute combination again?*

MUS: *looks for cue from the table, starts with great expression and the tape simply begins too late.*

SD: You know, I hate these DAT recordings. Perfect quality, but you still have to wait for them to start. Machines cueing people – it sounds like the end of the world.

MUS: *has ignored all of this as he has simply been cued by the tape by now and is playing something ... well ... fantastic at long last. At the end of this ... You know that wasn't too bad, but it surely sounds better on my MIDI synthesizer at home.*

SD: Yeah, you're most likely right, but what can you do with live performance these days? *Apparently his voice has been put through a harmonizer and he sounds like any number on today's top ten. He continues, rhythmically: I wonder what those listeners must be thinking of this awkward mess of our getting things set-up?*

MUS: *playing the next segment without any problem ... until ... all the effects fall out suddenly and he is simply playing a boring passage quietly on an acoustic instrument.*

SD: You know, I remember a tale about a group of people in West Africa that sings a tune every time a plane passes by. In its text it is said that they will be the only people in the world who will still know how to sing when there is no electricity anymore. *Believe it or not, his voice is followed by a pitch-tracker hooked up to a synthesizer module with one of the most awful timbres it offers.*

MUS: *In the meantime he's getting pretty sick and tired of not playing on stage, so he starts anew and will get through this part of the piece coûte que coûte. He and SD make sure that a number of effects are used effectively for once.*

SD: OK Jos, are we finally ready? *It's octave divider time and SD makes a nasty basso profundo. SD becomes a bit upset. Will we ever get this sorted out? Apparently not, due to a pitch shifter's continued gradual disturbance of his voice. He continues to speak his heart out when his voice is taken over by and treated with the stereo chorus effect. By this time his voice has become more rhythmic.*

MUS: *plays along beginning a few seconds later and is also being put through the stereo chorus effect.*

SD: *is now describing how he's changing filter settings, trying to get MUS to use a sampler pedal, requesting that the distortion isn't to be heard, etc. etc. with more or less success and complaining in general about everything going wrong whilst MUS continues to play the accompaniment to this rap number which is ... of course ... THE END.*