# SPIEL (2018)

*a concerto for percussion with symphonic wind orchestra and recorded electronics*

Dave Maric · c. 16 minutes

1. Diatribe
2. Echo Chamber
3. Crestfallen
4. Contravention

## Programme note

In German, *Spiel* simply means play, or a game. In English the word has picked up a less innocent meaning: a glib, well-rehearsed patter, reeled off to persuade or provoke. Both senses felt apt for a piece about how we behave on social media – a place where opinion is performed, amplified and fought over with something like the logic of the playground, and where a few careless lines can set off a chain of events nobody quite intended.

The four movements follow one hypothetical post through its life online.

**Diatribe** opens with the soloist entirely alone on snare drum, set against the recorded electronics. It is a short, fiery outburst delivered through every sound the drum can make – rim shots, cross-sticks, strikes on the shell, sticks clicked together – with the snares switched off and on like a voice shifting register. The orchestra stays silent: nobody has replied yet.

In **Echo Chamber** they do. Trumpets and trombones begin passing a fragment back and forth, and the idea is taken up, repeated and reinforced across the band until it seems to be coming from everywhere at once. The soloist moves to a rack of gongs, seed pods and temple blocks, then to marimba, as the electronics return and the music gathers into a long crescendo of agreement. But consensus online is brittle, and what was cheered can just as quickly be torn apart.

**Crestfallen** is the aftermath, its title gently mocking the bruised egos of those who have been undermined online. The tempo eases, woodwinds and muted brass take over, and the soloist turns to vibraphone, crotales and glass chimes, playing with a sense of freedom. The electronics drift in without a click track, no longer dictating the pulse, and bring with them the sound of birdsong – a wry nod to the platform where so much of this begins. What remains is a fragile moment of self-reflection, if perhaps not quite as profound as it believes itself to be.

It doesn't last. **Contravention**, marked "with attitude", brings the full battery back: Taiwanese devil chasers, drums and cymbals, the ensemble's bongos and toms joining the fight, until the snare drum of the opening returns for one last stab of vengeance.

Throughout, the recorded electronics stand in for the medium itself – digital, relentless, indifferent – while the soloist is pushed to their limits, navigating the emotional extremes of a mini psycho-drama in which it is never quite clear who is playing and who is being played.

*SPIEL was commissioned for Cameron Leach by Capital University, Columbus, Ohio, for its "100 Years of Music" celebrations, and was premiered there on 29 March 2019.*

## Short version (c. 100 words)

*Spiel* – German for play, English for a glib, rehearsed patter – is a percussion concerto about social media behaviour. Its four movements follow a single online post: a solo snare-drum **Diatribe** with electronics; an **Echo Chamber** in which the wind orchestra seizes the idea and amplifies it until it is everywhere; a self-pitying **Crestfallen**, all vibraphone, chimes and tweeting birdsong, once the consensus collapses; and a **Contravention** that returns "with attitude" for one last stab of vengeance. The recorded electronics stand in for the digital medium itself, while the soloist navigates the emotional extremes of a mini psycho-drama.