

Swallowtail

for three or more electric guitars with electric bass and drums
by Holland Hopson

General Information

Swallowtail is inspired by Rhys Chatham's *Guitar Trio* (1977). It was written as a companion piece to Chatham's work, with the idea that an ensemble could perform both pieces on the same program.

Preferred Equipment and Setup

- Those with sensitive ears or tinnitus are encouraged to use earplugs.
- You will need a slide. Choose whichever one works best for you.
- Swallowtail is in standard tuning.
- You will need a digital tuner that you can refer to during the performance, in case you go out of tune over the course of the piece. Please borrow one, if you don't own one already.
- This work is performed using a pick. Choose whichever gauge pick works best for you, paying particular attention to your ability to play tremolos.
- Use the pickup setting closest to the bridge of your guitar.
- Chatham recommends 100 watt amps for his piece. Volume is less important for Swallowtail, so smaller amps may be fine. All guitarists should play at approximately the same volume. Guitar tones should be clean--no distortion.
- The bass player should use an amp that will match the combined volume of the guitars.
- Drums are played with brushes in the first half and sticks in the second half.

Performance Instructions

Swallowtail is about the sounds in the spaces between the frets and various ways to activate them. The overall form is

Intro

Part 1

- slow glissando on the first string from open string to the 12th fret
- with faster glissandi gradually becoming more frequent
- rhythms gradually becoming faster

Part 2

- tremolo on first string at the 12th fret
- ending with dive bombs

Drum Break

Part 3

- repeat Part 1 gradually adding lower strings and open strings

Part 4

- 12th fret tremolo

Detailed Instructions

• Intro

- Guitar 1 and drums begin together. Guitar 1 plays whole notes, half notes and quarter notes on the 1st string (open e - top space on treble clef). Every 4 bars Guitar 1 cues another guitar to join, also playing whole notes, half notes and quarter notes on the 1st string.
- Drums are played with brushes. Tempo is 76-80 bpm. 4 beats to the bar. Mostly cymbal textures and rolls and light drum hits building in intensity until the drum break.
- Bass is silent during intro.

- **Part 1:** Slow gliss up the neck with increasingly frequent fast slides to high e

- Drums cue part 1 with a floor tom and bass drum riff (i.e. and-uh ONE or similar) that gets repeated every 16 bars.
- Bass enters on bass drum cue. Play half notes on high e. Every 16 bars lower the first half note of each bar by 1 half step. (i.e. bars 1-16: half note high e, half note high e; bars 17-32: half note high d#, half note high e; bars 33-48: half note high d, half note high e; etc.) Gradually play faster rhythms.
- Guitars:
 - a. Open e string to 2nd fret
 - Guitars play whole notes, half notes and quarter notes on the 1st string using your slide to slowly raise the pitch one fret every 16 bars. At any time of your choosing during the 16 bars, play a 1-bar long glissando using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After the glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch. The drummer will play a bass drum riff to mark each 16-bar group, so you can play the slide any time after hearing the bass drum riff.
 - b. 2nd fret to 4th fret (first dot)
 - Guitars continue as in part a playing only half notes and quarter notes (no whole notes). At any time of your choosing during each 16 bar phrase, play 2 1-bar long glissandi using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch.
 - c. 4th fret to 6th fret (second dot)
 - Guitars continue as in part a playing half notes, quarter notes and eighth notes. At any time of your choosing during each 16 bar phrase, play 3 1-bar long or 2-beat long glissandi using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch.
 - d. 6th fret to 8th fret (third dot)
 - Guitars continue as in part a playing quarter notes and eighth notes (no half notes). At any time of your choosing during each 16 bar phrase, play 4 2-beat long glissandi using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch.
 - e. 8th fret to 10th fret (fourth dot)
 - Guitars continue as in part a playing eighth notes and sixteenth notes. At any time of your choosing during each 16 bar phrase, play 5 or 6 2-beat long or 1-beat long glissandi using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch.
 - f. 10th fret to 12th fret (double dots)
 - Guitars continue as in part a playing sixteenth notes and thirty-second note tremolos. At any time of your choosing during each 16 bar phrase, play 6-8 1-beat long glissandi using the slide from your current position to the 12th fret. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch.

Writing this all out makes it seem more complicated than it needs to be. Here's a summary: During Part 1 play a slow glissando on the first string from open string to the 12th fret, moving 1 fret every 16 bars. Begin with slow rhythms and gradually move to faster rhythms. Every so often add a faster glissando from your current position to the 12th fret. Gradually makes these glissandi more frequent and faster. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch. Listen to each other and have fun. The overall effect should be a slowly rising mass of sound which becomes more and more intense, punctuated with swooping glissandi to the 12th fret.

•Part 2: Tremolo at the 12th Fret

- Guitars play a fast tremolo on the 1st string at the 12th fret. When cued by Guitar 1, play a gradual downward glissando on the first string while slowing the tremolo. That is, gradually descend the length of the string while plucking slower and slower notes. These rhythms do not need to be in time. End with a deliberate, slow strum of all open strings from highest string to lowest. Proceed at your own pace; guitars will not end all together.

- Bass ends on middle e with last guitar.
- Drums switch to sticks and become more active, leading into drum break.
- Part 2 may last 32 bars or longer.

• **Drum Break**

- Drums plays break of any length.

• **Part 3:** Repeat Part 1 also playing open strings and gradually adding lower strings

- Drums cue part 3
- Bass enters on bass drum cue. Play half notes alternating high e with low e. Every 16 bars lower the first half note of each bar by 1 half step. (i.e. bars 1-16: half note high e, half note low e; bars 17-32: half note d#, half note low e; bars 33-48: half note d, half note low e; etc.) Gradually play faster rhythms.
- Guitars:
 - Open e string to 2nd fret
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also play open 1st string at any time.
 - 2nd fret to 4th fret (first dot)
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also add 2nd string (b) fretted with slide.
 - 4th fret to 6th fret (second dot)
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also add 3rd and 2nd strings (g + b) fretted with slide.
 - 6th fret to 8th fret (third dot)
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also add 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings (d + g + b) fretted with slide.
 - 8th fret to 10th fret (fourth dot)
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also add 5th, 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings (a + d + g + b) fretted with slide.
 - 10th fret to 12th fret (double dots)
 - Same as Part 1. Guitars may also add 6th, 5th, 4th, 3rd and 2nd strings (e + a + d + g + b) fretted with slide.
- Lower strings are always played in conjunction with 1st string, never alone.
- Drums are more active from here to the end. More fills, more aggressive rhythms, fewer textural gestures.

Again, writing this all out makes it seem more complicated than it needs to be. Here's a summary: During Part 3 play a slow glissando on the first string from open string to the 12th fret, moving 1 fret every 16 bars. Begin with slow rhythms and gradually move to faster rhythms. Every so often add a faster glissando from your current position to the 12th fret. Gradually makes these glissandi more frequent and faster. After each glissando return to your previous position and continue to slowly raise the pitch. Gradually add lower strings fretted with the slide. Listen to each other and have fun. The overall effect should be a slowly rising mass of sound which becomes more and more intense as lower pitches are added, punctuated with swooping glissandi and sudden bursts of open strings.

• **Part 4:** 12th fret freakout

- Guitars play a fast tremolo on all strings at the 12th fret.
- Guitar 1 cues cut off for bass and drums.
- Guitars continue to play glorious 12th fret tremolo. Guitar 1 cues cut off for guitars.
- Part 4 may last 32 bars or longer.