A Quartet of Daydreams

For string quartet

Ian Percy

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Approximate Duration: 13-14 minutes

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2005/09
(Revised 2017)

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This single movement for string quartet was composed with primary pitch material flavoured by natural resonance theories and elements of the harmonic and sub-harmonic series during 2005/06. The piece was revised in 2009 and again during 2017 in preparation for performance of an abridged version. Initial work evolved from the planning for two entirely different pieces:

Melancholy Daydreams for solo piano (2004): A set of 4 movements subtitled: What, Where, When and Why. These generic questions (or daydreams) offer a variety of connotations. They can be perceived as interrogations or exclamations, passive or aggressive. This ambiguous extra-musical influence captured the imagination, inspiring conception of a meta-formula from which multiple pieces evolved.

Natural Resonance for string quartet (2004): A single movement dealing with the acoustic phenomenon of resonating natural resonance. Natural Resonance seems to describe the timbral characteristics of a string quartet quite accurately. It implies an organic phenomenon: acoustic vibration. It is as old as nature and is often discussed in relation to space and time, even the origins of the universe itself. It suggests the harmonic series, ancient organic resource and natural patterns. In literal terms, natural resonance refers to the additional sympathetic tones produced when sustained resonances vibrate against each other. These heterodyning frequencies can be produced above the pitches as combination tones (sum of the two frequencies), or as difference tones (the difference between the two).

Having allowed the idiomatic properties of the instrument to shape heterodyning frequencies and multiphonics within previous works, this quartet adopts a more considered and reproducible approach to the phenomenon of natural resonance as a compositional resource. The pitch of D is treated as the primary thought and all material is generated from and around it. The meta-formula for this quartet can be sub-divided into four forms:

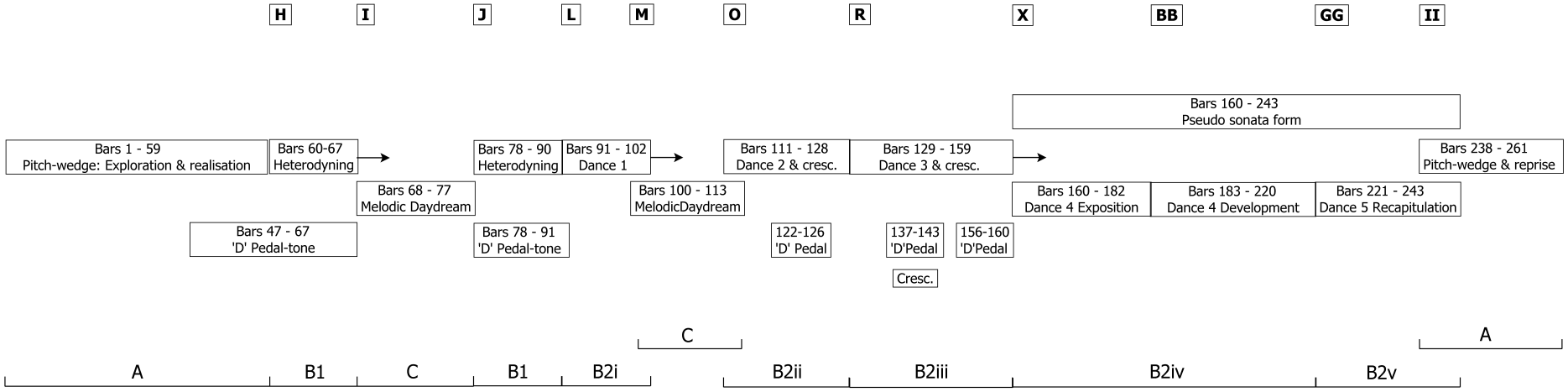
1. Chromatic pitch wedge around D
2. Modal cells
3. Whole-tone scales and chords
4. Heterodyning frequencies relative to pitch of D

Although a seemingly complex movement, it can be divided into a handful of compositional units:

1. Pitch wedge
2. Ostinato/pedal tone
3. Motivic gestures and resonance theories
4. Dance adaptations (mini sonata form)
5. Melodic daydreams (transitional passages/lyrical interludes)

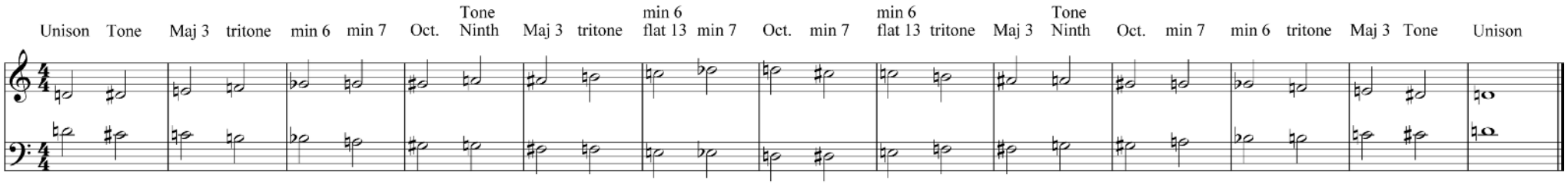
As a guiding extra-musical influence, the composer considered the definition of a daydream as ‘a fantasy indulged in while one is awake’ and through analogy and metaphor, allowed this to influence the atmosphere, character, interaction, pacing, texture and rhythm of the writing as one aimed to compose an acoustic interpretation of the natural thought process: a collection of daydreams.

Quartet of Daydreams Form

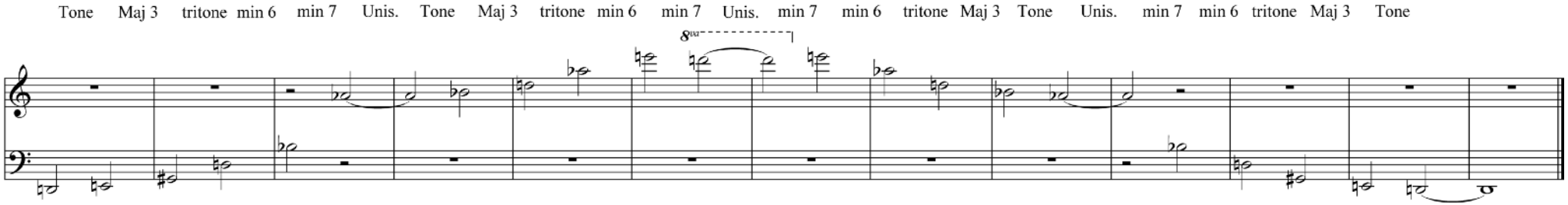


Daydream Meta-Formula 'D' Material

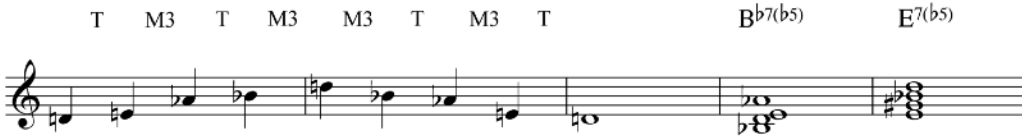
Paired-intervals of 'D' semi-tone contrary motion:



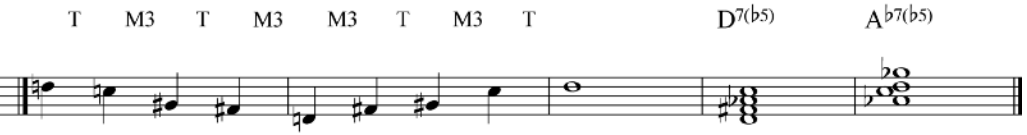
Consecutive-pitches derived from intervals generated within the mirror-wedge/contrary motion:



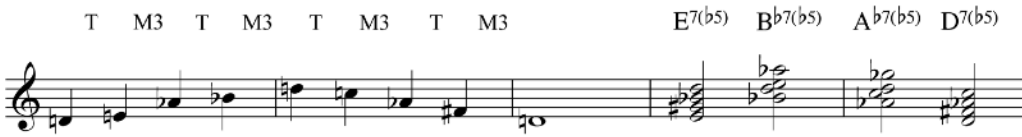
'D' Cell:



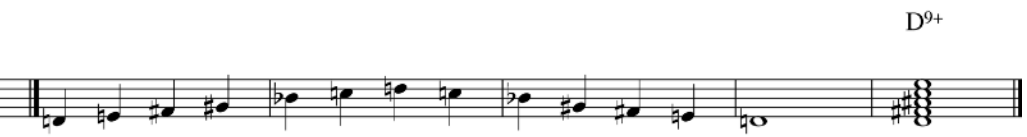
'D' Cell Mirror-inversion:



'D' Cell Rotate:

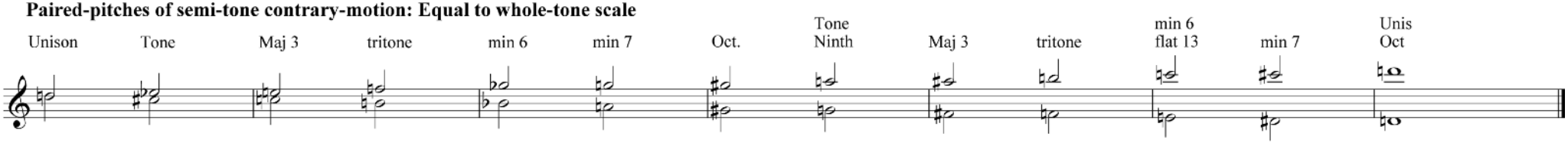


Combined cells produce a whole-tone scale:

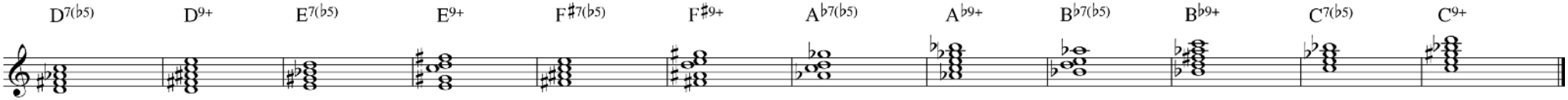


Daydream Meta-Formula 'D' Material: Whole-Tone and Natural-Resonance

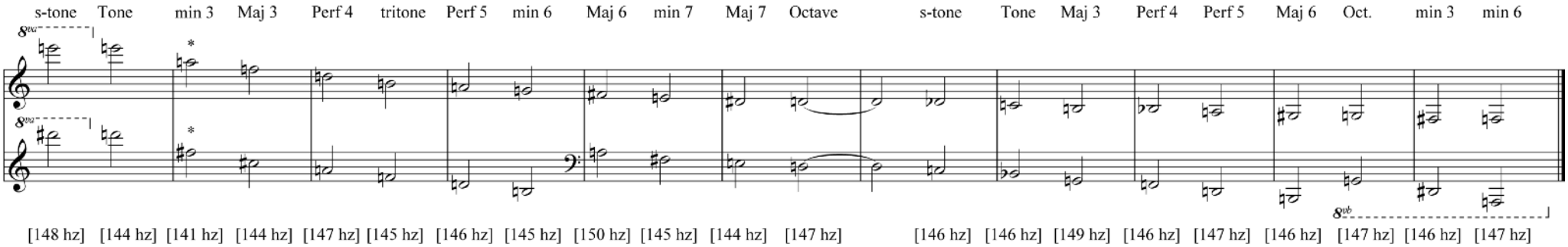
Paired-pitches of semi-tone contrary-motion: Equal to whole-tone scale



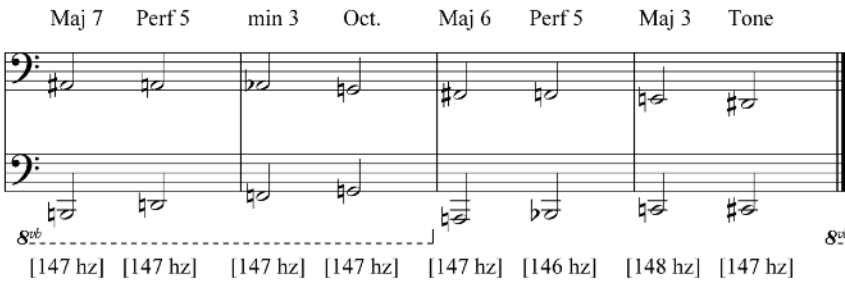
D whole-tone chords:



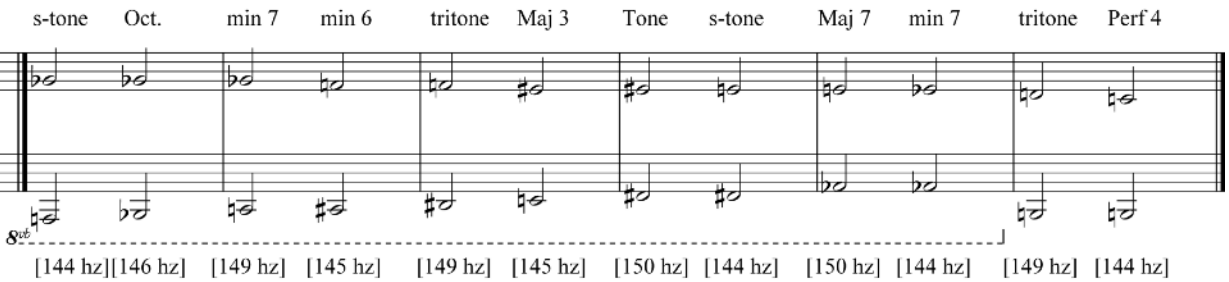
Pitches producing a 'D3' differential-tone: [middle C = C4] 'D3' resonates at 146.8 Hz



Pitches producing the most accurate 'D3' combination-tones:

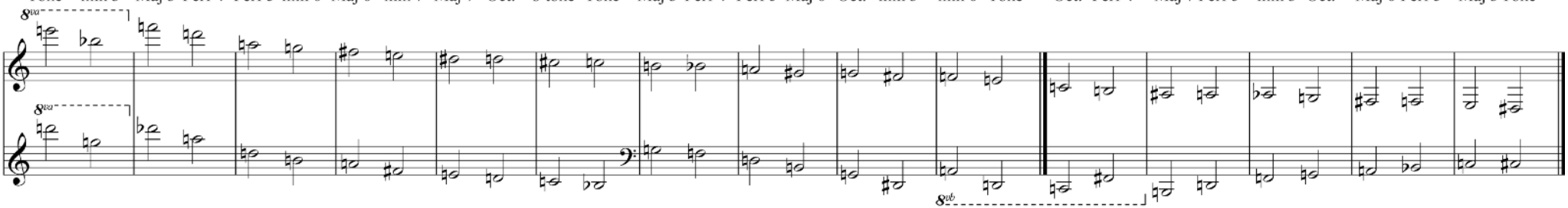


Other acceptable 'D3' combination-tones:



Pitches producing a 'D4' differential-tone: 'D4' resonates at 293.6 Hz

Tone min 3 Maj 3 Perf 4 Perf 5 min 6 Maj 6 min 7 Maj 7 Oct. s-tone Tone Maj 3 Perf 4 Perf 5 Maj 6 Oct. min 3 min 6 Tone



[288] [297] [289] [295] [293] [290] [300] [289] [292] [294] [292] [290] [298] [291] [293] [292] [294] [296] [294] [293]

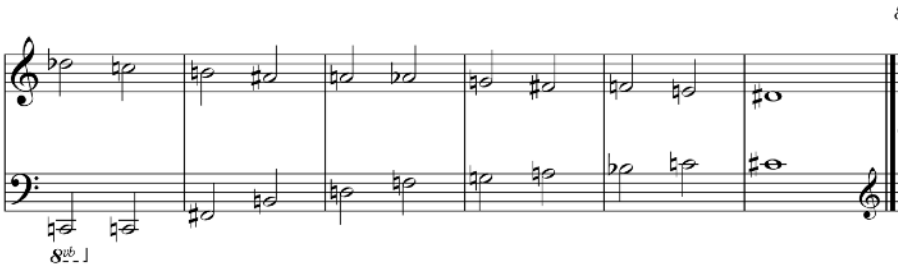
Pitches producing a 'D4' combination-tone:

Oct. Perf 4 Maj 7 Perf 5 min 3 Oct. Maj 6 Perf 5 Maj 3 Tone

[294] [293] [295] [293] [295] [294] [295] [291] [296] [294]

Pitches producing a 'D5' combination-tone: 'D5' resonates at 587.3 Hz

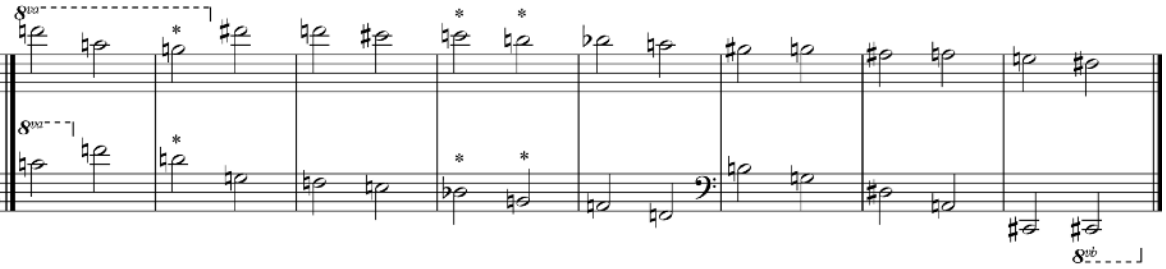
s-tone Oct. Perf 4 Maj 7 Perf 5 min 3 Oct. Maj 6 Perf 5 Maj 3 Tone



[587] [589] [586] [590] [587] [590] [588] [590] [582] [591] [588]

Pitches producing a 'D5' differential-tone:

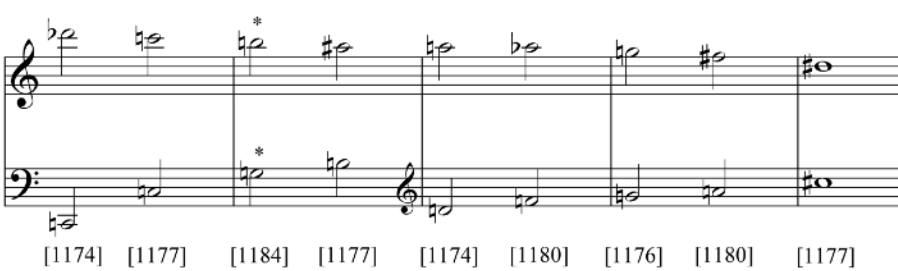
Perf 4 Perf 5 min 6 Maj 7 Oct. s-tone Tone Maj 3 Perf 4 Perf 5 Maj 6 Oct. min 3 min 6 min 3 Tone



[589] [585] [580] [585] [587] [585] [580] [595] [583] [586] [584] [588] [585] [588] [590] [589]

Pitches producing a 'D6' combination-tone: 'D6' resonates at 1174.7 Hz

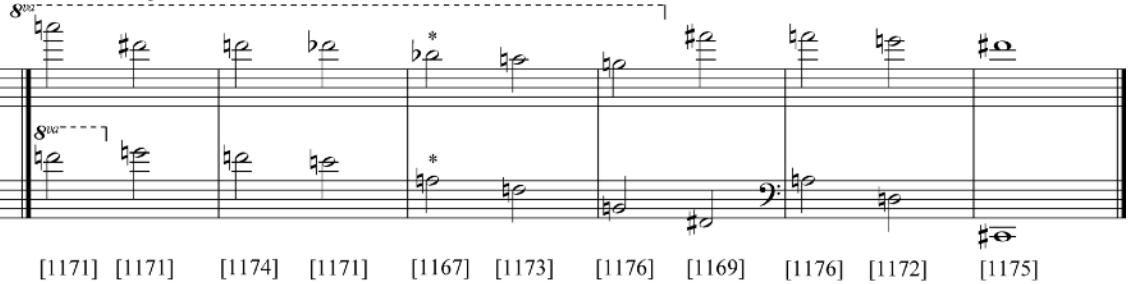
s-tone Oct. Maj 3 Maj 7 Perf 5 min 3 Oct Maj 6 Tone



[1174] [1177] [1184] [1177] [1174] [1180] [1176] [1180] [1177]

Pitches producing a 'D6' differential-tone:

Perf 5 Maj 7 Oct. s-tone Perf 4 Perf 5 Oct. min 3 min 6 Tone Tone



[1171] [1171] [1174] [1171] [1167] [1173] [1176] [1169] [1176] [1172] [1175]

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