# Stitching: Orality, Literacy, and Music

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## **Abstract**

Early writings about the phonograph show a longing for the intimacy and presence associated with orality. But the longing for orality is not simply a historical phenomenon, recent writings about literature show an interest in immediate, communal outward-looking verbal art. In recent decades audio books have become big business, live storytelling events take place at venues around the country, and narrative radio is undergoing a renaissance. Twentieth and twenty-first century composers have engaged deeply with the creative possibility of speech, combining it with music to create innovative and compelling verbal art, that takes place in time and acoustic space, rather than on the silent printed page.

In this dissertation I explore the combination of music and words through composition. And I use Walter J. Ong's theories of orality and literacy to reflect on my work, and to analyze music by Frederic Rzewski, Shelley Hirsch, Meira Asher, and myself.

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## Introduction

To be heard, poetry needs to be sounded... Unsounded poetry remains inert marks on a page, waiting to be called into use by saying, or hearing, the words aloud.'

Relationships between language, literature, sound, and music have fascinated me for many years. Research in these areas has helped me to develop as a composer. This research has given me deeper insight into my creative work, pushed my work in new directions, and shed light on the music that influences my practice. My dissertation is both a creative exploration of the combination of words and music through composition, and a set of case studies of music in which words play a key role. In my first chapter I discuss music by Frederic Rzewski; in my second I examine the work of Shelley Hirsch; in my third chapter I consider pieces by Meira Asher; and in the fourth chapter I reflect on my own compositions. The works I discuss are quite contrasting in terms of the musical styles and compositional methodologies they reflect and their relationships to language. In each chapter I address some or all of the following questions: What is involved in composing, improvising, adapting, or finding words for combination with music? What is the relationship between the words and music? Do they operate on parallel or intersecting planes? What kind of story can words and music tell together? What can words and music do together besides tell a story? How does the use of audio technologies affect the combination of words and music in the work studied? The thread that binds these questions together is my application of Walter J. Ong's theory of orality and literacy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Charles Bernstein, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Kindle edition.

Early writings about the phonograph and talking book records show a longing for the immediacy and presence of orality. Edison, for example, hoped that his technology could overcome 'the "mediating" practice of reading'<sup>2</sup> by allowing listeners to have (almost) direct contact with the writer through recordings of his voice.<sup>3</sup> This longing for orality is not merely a historical phenomenon. Recent writings about literature show a similar interest in an immediate, communal, outward-looking verbal art. For example, in the 1998 collection *Close Listening* Charles Bernstein proposes that sounded poetry:

'... provides special possibilities for the listener, from direct response to the work, ranging from laughter to derision; to the pleasure of getting lost in language that surges forward, allowing the mind to wander in the presence of words. '4

Poetry is not the only area in which the longing for orality can be see though. In recent decades audiobooks have become big business and acquiring more and more credibility; as Matthew Rubery points out, even the president of the United States is now an audiobook narrator.<sup>5</sup>

Live storytelling has undergone a great revival and today storytelling events like story slams are taking place across the country and feature in radio shows like *The Moth Radio Hour*. For many years, the performance of autobiography has featured prominently in the work of feminist, queer (and other) theater practitioners and performance artists.

Narrative radio seems to be undergoing a renaissance thanks to the influence of productions like *This American Life* and the ease of distribution offered by podcasting. But we do not only crave orality in the artwork we consume; we even want our domestic

<sup>2</sup> Jason Camlot, 'Early Talking Books: Spoken Recordings and Recitation Anthologies, 1880-1920,' in *Book* 

*History*, 6 (2003), 147-173, 147. <sup>3</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Bernstein, Close Listening.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Matthew Rubery, 'Introduction,' in Matthew Rubery ed., *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies* (New York and London: Taylor and Francis, 2011), Kindle Edition.

appliances and portable devices to talk to us. Many of us can easily recognize and name the voices of artificial intelligences like Siri and Cortana. They are marketed to us as helpful friends who are always available.

While there has been a resurgence of interest in listening to words in literature since the development of the phonograph that interest was always present in the world of music. Words have probably been combined with music for as long as they both have existed. In the last century musicians have expanded into many new territories in their exploration of words and voices. In popular music, for example, rap artists developed a contemporary form of oral poetry, which combines rhythmic, stylized speech with sung melodies, beat boxing, sampled music, and original musical material for acoustic and electronic instruments. On the internet the Gregory Brothers and many Youtubers like them create extremely popular comic music by sampling and autotuning speech from news broadcasts, political speeches and viral videos. 6 In avant-garde music composers and performers like Luciano Berio, <sup>7</sup> Peter Maxwell Davies, <sup>8</sup> Cathy Berbarian <sup>9</sup> and Joan La Barbara<sup>10</sup> have explored a massive range of vocal sounds with and without the use of words. Creative uses of spoken words can be in the work of composers including Laurie Anderson, <sup>11</sup> Tom Johnson, <sup>12</sup> John Cage, <sup>13</sup> and Eve Belgarian. <sup>14</sup> My music and the music I

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Jenna Wortham, 'From Viral Video to Billboard 100,' in *New York Times*, 09/05/2010 http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/06/business/media/06tune.html?\_r=0

For example Luciano Berio, Sequenza III (Universal Edition, 1966).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> For example Peter Maxwell Davies, *Eight Songs For a Mad King* (Boosey and Hawkes, 1969)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> For example Cathy Berberian, *Stripsody* (Edition peters, 1966).

Cathy Berbarian, *MagnifiCathy – The Many Voices of Cathy Berberian* (Wergo, 1977). <sup>10</sup> For example Joan La Barbara, *Sound Paintings* (Lovely Music, 1990).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> For example Laurie Anderson, *Homeland* (Nonesuch, 2010).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> For example Tom Johnson, *Failing* (Two-Eighteen Press, 1975).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> For example John Cage, *Empty Words: Part III* (Cramps Records, 2010).

will discuss by Rzewski, Hirsch, and Asher fits into the context of recent musical explorations of music and words. Walter J. Ong's theories of orality and literacy allow me to gain insights into the influence of writing, speech, and technology on both the musical and verbal elements of this music.

#### Sound and Presence

Ong's theory of orality and literacy is helpful when analyzing twentieth and twenty-first century musical works featuring language due his interest in the power and potential of sound. Ong's work frames humanity's journey from the world of primary orality to literacy and eventually secondary orality as a change from a situation in which sound was key to thinking and knowing to one where the visual was paramount, and more recently to a situation where hearing and vision unite in a profound way as a result of changing technologies. The longing for orality found in early accounts of the phonograph is a testament to the power of sound and the spoken word as Ong depicts them. Perhaps because of our sophisticated and multi-layered relationship with sound, literacy and technology musicians are in a unique position to creatively express and investigate this longing for orality as well as delve into the potential of the mingling of orality, literacy and contemporary communication technologies.

Ong associates sound with the world of 'dynamism, action, and being in time'. Sound has a more profound relationship to time than other phenomena that humans can

<sup>14</sup> For example Eve Belgarian, 'Creating the World' or 'Landscaping for Privacy,' in *Eve Belgarian: Tell the World* (Anthology of Recorded Music, 2006).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 2012), Kindle edition.

sense because it is evanescent: 'Sound exists only when it is going out of existence.' He describes sound in general as 'indicative of here-and-now activity' and the spoken word as indicative of 'here-and-now personal presence.' He also points out that

The spoken word, however abstract its signification or however static the object it may represent, is of its very nature a sound, tied to the movement of life itself in the flow of time... the spoken word is an action, an ongoing part of ongoing existence. Oral utterance thus encourages a sense of continuity with life, a sense of participation, because it is itself participatory.

Ong also places a great deal of importance on the relationship between sound and the ability to perceive interiority, both in the sense of the physical interiority of objects and the psychological or spiritual sense of human consciousness. Our sense of hearing gives us a great deal of information about the materials that make up an object, as well as its interior structure or lack thereof. <sup>19</sup> For example, we can find studs in a wall simply by knocking on it and assessing the timbre, we do not need to break down the wall.

Related to the perception of interiority is Ong's conception of sound as an incorporating phenomenon: 'sound pours into the hearer.' In contrast sight isolates, as the viewer is separate from what is viewed. While vision is highly directional, sound is immersive: 'I gather sound simultaneously from every direction at once: I am at the center of my auditory word, which envelopes me, establishing me as a kind of cone of sensation and existence.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Ong, Interfaces of the Word.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 71.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 71.

Ong considers the ideas of interiority and harmony to be important characteristics of both sound and consciousness. Each person's consciousness is entirely interior. I am the only one who can access my consciousness from the inside. Ong explains

What is "I" to me is only "you" to you. And this "I" incorporates knowledge into itself... knowledge is ultimately not a fractioning but a unifying phenomenon, a striving for harmony. Without harmony, an interior condition the psyche is in bad health.<sup>21</sup>

Hearing a voice alerts us to the physical presence of other human beings, but also alerts us to the more profound internal presence of their consciousness.<sup>22</sup> We can only speak, sing, cry etc if we are alive. Ong proposes that "I" is not a label, but a voice, a cry calling for response from a "you" who can cry out his or her own "I". '23

In his essay 'Private Call—Public Speech,' Brandon LaBelle proposes that like speech music is also directed towards interaction: '...music is always already responding. What it responds to is both its social responsibility as a cultural practice with specific parameters, however flexible—and further, to the desire to engage with sound—to sonorously produce.'24

Ong also suggests that the voice engenders belief in the interiority of others: '...in believing in someone we enter into him. He is not merely an "object' of belief with whom our belief terminates. He is an interiority into whom our belief penetrates and with whom

<sup>22</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 71-72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 71-72.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ong quoted in Corey Anton, 'Presence and Interiority: Walter Ong's Contributions to a Diachronic Phenemonology of Voice' in Thomas J. Farrell and Paul A. Soukup eds., Of Ong and Media Ecology: Essays in Communication, Composition, and Literacy Studies (New York: Hampton Press Inc, 2012), 71-90, 78. <sup>24</sup> Brandon LaBelle, 'Private Call—Public Speech: The Site of Language, The Language of Site' in Brandon La Belle and Christof Migone eds., Writing Aloud: The Sonics of Language (Los Angeles: Errant Bodies Press, 2001), 60-71, 62-63.

it enables us to communicate.' Ong's conception of presence is based on relationships, it requires community and the act of communing:

To be present to himself, man must find the presence of another or others. Man's lifeworld... is a world not of presence but of presences. In presences we mature. Each individual I find himself by dealing with a thou, and another though and another. The presence of other persons fill a man's consciousness, as objects cannot. Situated among objects, a person may indeed find them interesting, but he responds only to other persons, other presences, who are not objects. In a whole universe filled with countless objects and occupied by one other man alone, it would be to the man alone that I could present myself, establish a relationship of presence. <sup>26</sup>

Lance Strate describes Ong's general mission as a 'philosophy of the human person', which includes consideration of 'communication, consciousness and culture.' Strate identifies an ethical bent to Ong's theories of media ecology:

To be an ethical person is to be present for others, and to allow others to be present for one-self. Presence require the individual to see out I-thou relationships, and seek to minimize I-it relationships. And I-thou relationships require the capacity for response from the participants... Response is what separates communication from information... making it possible for individuals to commune with one another, to form and maintain a community and a culture. <sup>27</sup>

Because I am discussing issues of orality and literacy, both I-thou and I-it relationships play a role in the music I discuss in this document, and it is important to keep in mind that although a system of ethics which prizes I-thou interactions is important in Ong's work, he does not reject I-it relationships. In *Interfaces of the Word* he explains:

Because of this contrast between sight and sound, knowledge of things (Buber's world of "it") is more immediately assimilable to knowledge by sight; knowledge of persons (Buber's world of "I-Thou") more immediately assimilable to knowledge by hearing. But in neither case is the assimilation entirely adequate. Knowledge of things and knowledge of persons are not entirely unlike or distinct from one another. We are always involved in both "thou" and "it" though at different times more in one than in the other. <sup>28</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ong quoted in Anton, 'Presence and Interiority,' 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ong quoted in Lance Strate 'Sounding Out Ong: Orality Across the Media Environments' *Of Ong and Media Ecology*, 91-117, 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ong, Interfaces of the Word.

Discussing music in terms of I-thou and I-it relationships is not a value judgment, but rather an attempt to understand how issues of communication, presence, and community operate in that music.

### **Primary Orality**

Primary orality is associated with cultures that neither use nor know of writing. It is radically different to our contemporary experience of speaking and listening due to the shifts in thought processes and practices of communication brought about by writing and other technologies. Some of the features of primary orality are familiar to us as they continue to play a role in spoken communication, but other features have become obsolete. Ong points to a connection between sustained thought and communication because an interlocutor can help to reproduce a line of thought, or to verify its reproduction.<sup>29</sup> In order to develop into complex ideas or to be repeated, thoughts must also be highly memorable, so mnemonic devices, such as patterns of rhythm and repetition, alliteration, and formulaic expressions, are common. These patterns also help listeners to comprehend and retain information.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, redundancy slows down the expression of ideas, providing time for the audience to comprehend, and to fill in gaps where they may have misheard something.<sup>31</sup>

Knowledge that is not repeated is quickly lost to a primary oral culture, so they tend to prize traditionalism or conservatism: 'oral societies must invest great energy in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34. <sup>30</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., 37.

saying over and over again what has been learned arduously over the ages.'32 Since communication is important, it makes sense that oral cultures prioritize community, so oral communication features a striving for intimacy between speaker and audience, and/or promoting the sense of an audience as a group of listeners. Related to this is a tendency to be 'empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced'. Ong explains that in oral cultures learning or knowing involves 'close, empathetic, communal identification with the known' and the conceptualization of knowledge in a close relationship to the 'human life world.' In contrast, writing 'separates the knower from the known and thus sets up conditions for 'objectivity', in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing.'33

## Literacy

The advent of writing (and eventually print) brought about a profound transformation of human consciousness by shifting words from the world of sound to the world of vision. While Ong associates sound with characteristics like unity and immersion, he associates vision with distance, dissection, clarity and distinctness. Through literacy these features became part of our ability to think, know, and communicate.

Ong characterizes oral speech as natural, coming from our 'unconscious depths', 34 while writing is a technology, which he characterizes as artificial because of its consciously devised, articulable rules.<sup>35</sup> This is not a condemnation. Ong believes in the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 41.<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 42, 43.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Ibid., 82.

paradox that 'artificiality is natural to human beings'. 36 He explains that writing is a technology we have internalized and:

Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, it is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials. Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness. Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed is in many ways essential for full human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. Thus writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does.<sup>37</sup>

Incidentally, Ong also discusses the playing of musical instruments and the making of electronic music as examples of internalized technology, which have the power to enhance human life.<sup>38</sup> It is important to also note that Ong proposes that new media, like writing, do not necessarily replace older ones, such as talk, but rather they reinforce and transform them. It is more than obvious to state that writing did not wipe out talk, we engage in it daily. Ong posits that writing in fact encouraged talk by giving the urban dwellers that developed it even more to talk about. And writing transformed speech by allowing speakers to employ the thought processes of writing while talking, and to help their speech by making notes for example.<sup>39</sup>

In the early days of literacy, orality played an important role in the creation of written texts and the retrieval of information from them. Ong describes early writing as a form of recorded utterance as authors often composed orally and dictated to a scribe, a practice which continued in Europe until medieval times. The widespread composition in writing of long, complex texts is a feature of high literacy. At this stage writing is

Ong, Orality and Literacy, 82.Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Ong, Interfaces of the Word.

ingrained in consciousness, allowing a shift away from orally sustained thought.<sup>40</sup> In marginally oral manuscript<sup>41</sup> culture the function of writing was '... to recycle knowledge back into the oral world.' Most reading was done aloud (often in a group setting), and reading was often done for the purpose of memorizing the text.<sup>42</sup>

Writing allows for the separation of words from the existential present, the inevitable intonation of speech, and the wider context of the settings in which they are spoken. While spoken words can 'never occur alone, in a context simply of words... words are alone in a text.'<sup>43</sup> This creates a context free language that cannot be directly contested or questioned (as a speaker might be) because the text and the author are separate.<sup>44</sup> A text can convey its message regardless of whether the author is dead or alive, while spoken words must come from living people.<sup>45</sup> Extratextual context is unavailable to both the writer and the reader, and so they must fictionalize one another.<sup>46</sup> Writing also allows for a higher degree of precision in composition than orality because it facilitates the immobilization of words in visual space making them subject to backward scanning in which we may erase and change words after putting them down on paper, whereas spoken words cannot be erased, merely supplemented by corrections.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 93-94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> i.e. handwritten not printed.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 118.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 101.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Ibid., 100-101

Ong discusses the fictionalization of authors and readers in detail in *Interfaces of the Word*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> Ibid., 98 and 103.

The development of printing transformed and reinforced both writing and speech. Writing introduced the previously spoken word to the visual realm, and printing firmly established its place there by developing and valorizing sophisticated techniques of visual presentation of words. In manuscript culture the book was a kind of recorded utterance, but as print culture developed the book became an object, a thing containing information. With print came the use of title pages, which label written objects, as well as the use of indices, which allow for the swift retrieval of information from a book.

Manuscripts were handmade and unique, they tended to be ornate and ornamented in appearance, while printed books were products of mechanization and industrialization. Copies of a given book were exact duplicates, the same information could easily be found in the same place in each copy. Clarity, neatness and regularly were intrinsic values in printed texts, <sup>49</sup> as was the sense of closure and completeness that the technology required. Ong describes print as '... comfortable only with finality'; printed texts are considered to be the definitive version of an author's words. The physical process of printing requires a final version, to which changes cannot be made. <sup>50</sup> Texts created for print are painstakingly revised by authors and worked on by a team of people. <sup>51</sup>And printed texts do not accommodate the erasures, insertions and marginal comments, which were commonly made to manuscripts and often. These were often integrated into later versions of the manuscript: 'They remained closer to the give-and-take of oral expression.' This influenced writing styles, leading to tightly plotted narrative forms like the modern novel,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> Ibid., 123-124.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Ibid., 130-132.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ibid., 120.

and to the creation of textbooks which prioritized flat statements of facts intended to be easy to memorize. 52

The development of modern science is one of the many revolutions that the precision and reproducibility of print made possible. Ong describes print allowing 'exact observation' and 'exact verbalization' to come together for the first time. Over time, technical printing and technical verbalization reinforced and developed one another, resulting in a new hypervisual world of knowledge. The development of 'exactly repeatable visual statement' alongside 'exact verbal description of physical reality' influenced literature as well as science. Ong points out that in the Romantic prose of authors like Gerard Manley Hopkins, we see meticulously detailed descriptions of landscape, which do not exist in the literature of earlier periods.<sup>53</sup> In the realm of musical composition and notation we can see a similar increase in precision and detail as manuscripts gave way to print and music print culture matured. The scores of composers like Brian Ferneyhough, for example, contain an almost overwhelming amount of information that may well have been inconceivable to earlier generations of musicians.

Printing made the exact position of words on the page extremely controllable, so spatial relationships became increasingly important in conveying scientific information (in printed books we see a proliferation of tables, lists etc). Spatial relationships also made an impact on the literary imagination, and eventually this led to extreme creative uses of space and typography like concrete poetry:

Ong, *Orality and Literacy*,130-132.
 Ibid., 125.

Concrete poetry (Solt 1970) climaxes in a certain way the interaction of sounded words and typographic space. It presents exquisitely complicated or exquisitely uncomplicated displays of letters and/or words some of which can be viewed but not read aloud at all, but none of which can be appropriated without some awareness of verbal sound. Even when concrete poetry cannot be read it all, it is still not merely a picture.<sup>54</sup>

Other features of literacy and consequences of literacy include:

- The quantification of knowledge through the use of mathematical analysis and the use of diagrams and charts.<sup>55</sup>
- The idea of correctness in language and the idea that the root of language is written rather than spoken.<sup>56</sup>
- Promoting the importance of personal privacy. The legibility of printed texts facilities the fast, silent reading that is the norm today. Printed books were also smaller and more portable, which facilitated solo reading. Reading in silence even influenced the architecture of our homes, as solo reading requires quiet space and isolation. <sup>57</sup>
- The sense of private ownership of words. Plagiarism, for example becomes problematic only with the advent of writing. 58
- Consciousness becomes thing-like: 'By removing words from the world of sound where they first had their origin in active human interchange and relegating them definitively to visual surface... print encouraged human beings to think of their own interior conscious and unconscious resources as more and more thing-like,

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 128.

Ong, Orality and Literacy, 127.Ibid., 127.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> Ibid., 129.

impersonal and religiously neutral. Print encouraged the mind to sense that its possessions were held in some sort of inert mental space.'59

• Intertextuality: the idea that texts are influenced by both lived experience and knowledge of other textual forms was taken for granted in manuscript culture because it was still tied to what Ong calls the 'commonplace tradition' of orality in which borrowing and adapting were common. With the advent of print culture came the idea of the closed work, an original, creative unit in its own right, which ideally is not influenced by other works. Twentieth century scholarship, such as that of Harold Bloom, disrupted this idea and created a certain amount of turmoil in the minds of authors 'that they may be producing nothing really new or fresh at all, that they may be totally under the 'influence' of others' texts. <sup>60</sup>

#### Secondary Orality

Though they have quite different features, orality and literacy cannot really be separated; with the exception of a few texting addicted teenagers, none of us have given up speaking and listening in favor of writing and reading. It makes sense to think of orality and literacy as a spectrum (as Ong does). This allows us to consider the balance between the features of spoken and written language in various verbal forms and practices. The idea of orality and literacy as a spectrum is particularly relevant to our current society, in which we experience what Ong calls secondary orality. Lance Strate thinks of secondary orality as 'electronically mediated orality, as various technologies are used to amplify, transmit, broadcast, and record speech...' These technologies are the result of innovation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Ibid., 131.

by literate people, and their 'contents' are full of literate residue<sup>61</sup> through the use of scripts and the thinking process of literacy. We also see text and speech combing through the use of subtitles, captions and the crawls on the bottom of the image in news broadcasts.<sup>62</sup> Like the primary orality of cultures without writing secondary orality forefronts a sense of intimacy and community, and a focus on the present, but its reliance on writing makes secondary orality far more deliberate and self conscious. Ong explains:

Secondary orality is both remarkably like and remarkably unlike primary orality. Like primary orality, secondary orality has generated a strong group sense, for listening to spoken words forms hearers into a group, a true audience, just as reading written or printed texts turns individuals in on themselves. But secondary orality generates a sense for groups immeasurably larger than those of primary oral culture - McLuhan's 'global village'. Moreover, before writing, oral folk were group-minded because no feasible alternative had presented itself. In our age of secondary orality, we are group-minded self-consciously and programmatically. The individual feels that he or she, as an individual, must be socially sensitive. Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward. In a like vein, where primary orality promotes spontaneity because the analytic reflectiveness implemented by writing is unavailable, secondary orality promotes spontaneity because through analytic reflection we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing. We plan our happenings carefully to be sure that they are thoroughly spontaneous. <sup>63</sup>

In the early days of radio, for example, broadcasters felt the need to overcome the idea of listeners as an undifferentiated mass audience, wishing to find ways to create a sense of personal connection in order to become an integral part of the home: 'Intimate

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> Lance Strate 'Sounding Out Ong', 106-107.

<sup>62</sup> Electronic technologies have also influenced our literacy. For example the texts we type and read on our computers have features in common with print, but they do not necessitate the closure and separateness of printed books. Online journalistic articles, for example, allow for reader's comments. Some online publications, like Slate, even present their texts in forms that allow for the mingling of readers comments and the journalist's article. Online writers can also quickly make additions or corrections to their texts, even after they are published. Tools like texting allow us to address others in written form almost as quickly as we might speak to them, and aps like Cyberdust or Confide give an evanescent quality to written communications.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 134.

sound spaces, domestic genres, cozy speech styles, and radio personalities all helped bridge the address gap in radio.'64

These approaches are still a part of today's broadcast media. In recent years the option to respond to media has grown significantly, radio and television shows invite us to submit questions, comments or votes by phone, email and via social media. And many Youtube stars leverage the fact that they are people 'just like us' who share their stories, tips, rants, and performances from their homes. And we can take comfort in their accessibility, if we comment on their videos or tweet at them they may well reply. Whether the medium is radio, television or the internet liveness has a special significance. John Durham Peters calls liveness in radio '... the effort to break the connection between death and distance.'65 And he considers liveness to be '...crucial to modern communications. Because life could be simulated by recording and transmitting media... In a "live" performance, the body is present in the flesh. "Live" means that contingency is still possible, that the energy is actual, and that a new and singular event can take place.' Television, for example, offers us live performances on shows like *The Voice*, live sports coverage, and live political debates. And we are encouraged to interact, to respond by live tweeting etc.

Just as readers and writers have to fictionalize one another under the conditions of literacy, fiction plays a role in secondary orality too. Irene Kacandes points out our striking propensity to forget or overlook the constructedness of the 'spontaneous'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> John Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 214-215.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Durham Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 218.

happenings presented to us: '...the technology that brings us the spoken word becomes invisible to us... we forget the 'secondary' in secondary orality, creating for ourselves a partial fiction that the happening is spontaneous or the interaction is the same as "face-to-face"...'<sup>66</sup> In his discussion of the importance of intimacy and a feeling of connection between media personae and audience John Durham Peters describes media culture as '...a lush jungle of fictional worlds where "everyone knows your name"...'<sup>67</sup> In our longing for orality and presence this is a fiction we buy into and see through. In her discussion of talk shows Kacandes explains:

In my own experience as a listener-viewer of talk shows I recognize that there are brief moments when I feel as if Dr. Laura is judging my behavior or Oprah is chiding me to pay attention because I really need to hear this part. More frequently, however, I am keenly aware that I am one of myriad other individuals listening and/or viewing, that most of what I hear and see is carefully calculated to make us each feel interpellated, and that the emotions of hosts, guests, and callers might just as well be fabricated as genuine. I attribute both my moments of identification and my moments of self-consciousness about those moments to my secondary oral conditioning.

The condition of secondary orality is rife with contradictions, complications and fictions, but the drive towards interpersonal connection persists. In some situations communication, community, and presence are achieved, sometimes only simulated, and sometimes we fail utterly in our pursuit of them. Lance Strate applies Ong's theories to more recent technologies and technological concerns in his essay 'Sounding Out Ong'. For example, he discusses the importance of sound in achieving immersion and verisimilitude within virtual reality environments. And he proposes that in secondary orality we are often dealing with virtual orality, which involves mediated, disembodied

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> Irene Kacandes, *Talk Fiction: Literature and the Talk Explosion*, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> Durham Peters, Speaking into the Air, 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Kacandes, *Talk Fiction*, 19.

reproductions and amplifications of actual human utterances. And these sounds can be transformed through editing and processing to create sounds that were never made in the real world, and perhaps could never be made in reality. <sup>69</sup> Strate also discusses the synthetic orality that is beginning to surround us through speech recognition and synthesized speech being used by a wide range of devices from smartphones to supermarket checkouts: 'We are in the process of constructing a kind of technological animism, a media environment of ubiquitous artificial speech. This type of synthetic orality may well be considered a pseudo-orality, but it may also turn out to be orality's ultimate extension.<sup>70</sup> In his discussion of telepresence (the combination of audiovisual technologies with almost instant transmission) Strate refers to an opening up of '...the possibility of establishing genuine I-thou relationships where proximity is not a requirement and distance is not an obstacle.' But these technologies also make us vulnerable to illusions of intimacy and interaction, he gives cites examples including sex lines, telephone psychics, artificial intelligences in chat rooms, and individuals who use false identities online. While Ong prizes connection between humans, he does not demonize distance. In Interfaces of the Word, for example, he points out that '... at the same time that they humanize by increasing knowledge, technological transformations of the word also alienate man from the real word, the living spoken word, and thus from himself.<sup>71</sup> But he cautions that:

Alienation, cleavage, is not all bad. To understand other things and themselves, to grow, human beings need not only proximity but also distance, even from themselves. Out of alienation, and only out of alienation, certain greater unities can come. Persons at ease with their origins and with their own unconscious welcome certain alienations, for they can put them to good use. The evolution of human consciousness would be impossible—

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>69</sup> Lance Strate 'Sounding Out Ong', 108-109.

Steven Jones provides a more detailed discussion of sound in virtual reality in his paper 'A Sense of Space: Virtual Realty, Authenticity, and the Aural,' in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10 (1993), 238-252.

<sup>70</sup> Strate 'Sounding Out Ong', 108-109.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*.

unthinkable—without the alienations introduced by writing, print, and the electronic transformations of the word.  $^{72}$ 

### **Secondary Orality and Avant Garde Music**

Musicians are an interesting case in relation to orality and literacy, as we experience it not only in relation to words, but also in relation to music. Consciously or unconsciously, we engage with issues of musical orality and literacy as we work with music on the page, the stage, and in recorded media. In our field, reading never really overshadowed listening, as it did in the case of poetry or prose, so perhaps we are particularly well-equipped to approach verbal art with open ears. Music has long been an important area in which words are sounded (we find it in opera, oratorio, art song, and melodrama, to name just a few forms). Experimental and avant garde musicians have engaged especially deeply with the creative possibilities of combining music and language, creating innovative and compelling verbal art, which takes place in time and acoustic space, rather than simply on the visual space of a page, and in the imagination of a reader. Their work features fascinating examples of secondary orality in action.

Harry Partch, for example, took a great interest in real speech, 'the intrinsic music of spoken words'. <sup>74</sup> In his discussion of Partch's music from the 1930s Bob Gilmore describes Partch's 'devotion to the expressive power of human speech: from the intimacy of the speaking voice, and the implied situation of person-to-person communication,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> Ong, *Interfaces of the Word*.

Many of the applications of orality and literacy to be found in scholarly literature on music are related to transmission methods within various musical traditions or at different points in history. An overview can be found in Francesca R. Sborgi Lawson, 'Rethinking the Orality-Literacy Paradigm in Musicology,' in *Oral Tradition*, 25/2 (2010), 429-446.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> Bob Gilmore, 'On Harry Partch's *Seventeen Lyrics by Li Po*' in *Perspectives of New Music*, v. 30, no 2, (Summer, 1992), 22-58, 33.

intimation, confession, that it connotes.'<sup>75</sup> This grew out of the dissatisfaction that Partch experienced in the 1920s with prevailing approaches to text setting, which relied on what he called 'refined, and particularly stylized English speech', which is 'totally impossible of communication'.<sup>76</sup>

Partch was influenced by the poet W.B. Yeats, who believed in setting text to music in ways that included both singing and speech, in which '... no word shall have an intonation or accentuation it could not have in passionate speech...'<sup>77</sup> He used speech transcriptions to develop his approach to text setting. In 1934 he visited Dublin, where Yeats and actors from the Abbey Theatre read for him. <sup>78</sup> Partch also studied the speech of ordinary life, preferring this to the '...strange language that was sung by people in opera and the concert stage.' In *The Wayward*, for example, he presented the speech of the hobos and government officials he encountered on his journey across America (*U.S. Highball*); as well as hobo inscriptions (*Barstow*); and newsboy calls (*San Francisco*). <sup>80</sup>

Like Partch, Robert Ashley was fascinated by real speech. According to Alvin Lucier '... to his ears, the dull roar of many people talking was symphonic.' Ashley was also critical of the text setting methods regularly employed by his contemporaries: 'note-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> Ibid., 33.

Quoted in Harry Partch, 'W. B. Yeats: 1941' in *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, Thomas Mc Geary ed., (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 165-168, 167

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>77</sup> Gilmore, 'On Harry Partch's Seventeen Lyrics by Li Po', 34.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Quoted in Harry Partch, 'W. B. Yeats: 1941', 165-168.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>79</sup> Harry Partch, 'The Use of English in Serious Music' in *Historic Speech Music Recordings: Ensclosure II*, (Innova, 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Samuel Andrew Grenade II provides an extremely interesting discussion of this work in his dissertation 'I was a bum once myself': Harry Partch, 'U.S. Highball" and the Dust Bowl in the American Imagination, (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> Alvin Lucier, 'At the Round Table' in Robert Ashley, *Outside of Time: Ideas About Music*, (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2009), 10-16, 12.

per-syllable style, which seems persistent in American opera, seems ugly to me because it is so far from the way English is spoken and it distorts the language. He created several large-scale works for his own opera company, which brought together performers from a variety of backgrounds, with different American accents, and speech characteristics. The style of vocal writing he developed was a kind of intonating, with attributes of both speaking and singing, which left a great deal of room for the unique characteristics of the voices of his performers.

Ashley's operas are largely character driven, with a sprawling novelistic form, made up of many short stories or episodes. The episodes are often inspired by anecdotes that people shared with Ashley, or that he overheard. Dust (1998) centers on several homeless characters who live in a park. It was inspired by the homeless occupants of a park near Ashley's home. The composer regularly watched them and listened in on their conversations, or rants, and this led him to write a series of autobiographical monologues for his characters. Now Eleanor's Idea (1993) is about a radio host who interviews members of the low rider community. For this piece, Ashley took a more direct approach to research by spending time with low riders. He explains: '[f]or the past forty years my idea of "character" in opera is that the character should be real. And there are no

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>82</sup> Robert Ashley, 'A New Kind of Opera: Contemporary Opera in the United States' in *Outside of Time* 130-137, 132.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Robert Ashley, 'Stories from Real Life: Music with Characters' in *Outside of Time*, 154-159, 154.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Robert Ashley, *Dust* (Lovely Music, 2000).

<sup>85</sup> Ashley, 'Stories from Real Life', 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> Robert Ashley, *Now Eleanor's Idea*, (Lovely Music, 2007).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ashley, 'Stories from Real Life', 156.

characters more real than people you have known and whose stories seem to deserve telling.'88

Technology has played an important role in shaping musical approaches to language. The phonograph made sound recordings available to ordinary people, but in the years after World War II the tape recorder made the practice of recording sound widely accessible. Jesper Olsson points out that the tape recorder was marketed for its ease of use and its accessibility to amateurs. <sup>89</sup> Tape recording quickly became part of professional activities like journalism, hobbyists even formed clubs to make and share recordings, and musicians like Edgard Varèse, John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer embraced the technology quite early.

Experimental music and poetry cross fertilized each other in the twentieth century with the works of poets like Jackson Mac Low finding their way to the concert stage, and the work of composers like Beth Anderson finding their way into literary magazines and anthologies. The sound poet Henri Chopin credited the tape recorder with making the sound poetry that he created and published in his magazine possible: '... the verbal upheaval that we are causing... goes far beyond orality as it was understood in the ancient civilization' because of use of 'electronic means'. <sup>90</sup> Sound had been objectified by phonography, but tape recording made it significantly easier to work with sound objects. While recording made it possible to capture and retrieve real sounds, such as the voices of

<sup>88</sup> Ashley, 'Stories from Real Life', 156.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Jesper Olsson 'The Audiographic Impulse: Doing Literature with the Tape Recorder' in *Audiobooks*, *Literature*, and *Sound Studies*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> Quoted in Olsson 'The Audiographic Impulse.'

authors, it also made it possible to go beyond being a trace of the real through editing and other creative manipulations.<sup>91</sup>

Olsson thinks of sound poets like Henri Chopin as drawing attention to both language and its margins using recording 'to disassemble and analyze vocal matter, disclosing to the listener some of its hidden layers and facets. '92 In pieces like *Come Out* and *It's Gonna Rain*, Steve Reich seems to see himself doing a similar investigation. While some commentators (e.g. Antonella Puca<sup>93</sup> or Amy Lynn Wlodarski<sup>94</sup>) regard Reich's use of phasing techniques as a distortion of his sources, the composer himself disagrees: 'If one could present speech without altering its pitch or timbre, one would keep the original emotional power that speech as while intensifying its melody *and* meaning through repetition and rhythm.' He discusses *It's Gonna Rain* in terms of intensifying the musical qualities of the preacher's speech, and creating an abundance of meaning by giving a listener time and psychological space to consider a sound and respond to it imaginatively:

... you seem to hear all kinds of words and sounds that you've heard before, and a lot of psychoacoustic fragments that you brain organizes in different ways, and this will vary from person to person. All music to some degree invites people to bring their own emotional life to it. My early pieces do that in an extreme form, but paradoxically they do so though a very rigid process, and it's precisely the impersonality of that process that invites this very engaged psychological reaction.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Olsson 'The Audiographic Impulse.'

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>93</sup> Antonella Puca, 'Steve Reich and Hebrew Cantillation' in *The Musical Quarterly* 81/4 (1997), 537-555.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> Amy Linn Wlodarski, 'The Testamonial Aesthetics of *Different Trains*' in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 63/1 (Spring 2010), 99-180.

<sup>95</sup> Steve Reich, 'Early Works' in Writings on Music, 1965-2000, Paul Hillier ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 19-34, 20.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Steve Reich, 'Early Works' 21.

Alvin Lucier used tape recording and tape delays to creatively examine and heal flawed speech. His 1969 piece *The Only Talking Machine of its kind in the World*, is for

...any stutterer, stammerer, lisper, person with faulty or halting speech, regional dialect or foreign accent or any other anxious speaker who believes in the healing power of sound.<sup>97</sup>

The performer is directed to speak to the audience (telling them stories, reading them poems, etc) to reveal the peculiarities of their speech and to use a tape-delay system to attempt even it out. 98 In his well-known piece from 1970 *I am sitting in a room* 99 he recorded himself speaking in his living room, and then played back and re-recorded the speech in the same many times. In the early cycles of the piece, it is difficult not to notice that Lucier barely contains his stammer. And his words describes the agenda of the piece, to use a musical process to heal the flaws in his speech: 'I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but, more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.' 100

The work of text-sound composer Charles Amirkhanian falls between the cracks of poetry and music as he deconstructs and reconstructs language in absurd, playful, sonically engaging ways. He studied piano and percussion from an early age and began composing for percussion ensembles as a teenager in the early 1960s. This experience informed his first piece involving speech, which he wrote in 1965. He began composing for percussion ensembles in the early 1960s and this work influenced his early attempts to create music with words:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>97</sup> Alvin Lucier, 'The Only Talking Machine of its Kind in the World', in Alvin Lucier *Reflections*, *Interviews*, *Scores*, *Writings* 1965-1994, 308.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Alvin Lucier, *I am Sitting in a Room* (Lovely Music, 1990).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>100</sup> Alvin Lucier, 'I Am Sitting In a Room', in Reflections: Interviews, Scores, Writings 1965-1994.

As a percussionist I was using many instruments, like the bass drum and cymbals, which we consider traditionally to be non-pitched. Well, we think of speech that way too... So, I just considered these speech sounds to be percussion points or sound objects which I could use for composing. Later, the literary aspect became a part of this too, but at this time in the mid-sixties, I hadn't thought of the possibility of this working having anything but musical implications. 101

His early speech pieces tended to be very simple consisting of patterns formed by phrase and sentence structures, with some use of sequences and simple cannons. Hearing Steve Reich's Come Out inspired him to make more use of repetitive phrases, his use of which often produce a trancelike effect as they twist, turn and evolve over the course of a piece. In 1969, Amirkhanian began working at KPFA Radio, which gave him access to professional recording equipment for the first time and had a significant impact on his aesthetic. 102 Technology allowed him to create effects that were difficult or impossible in live performance, such as the breathless effect of If in Is (1971). Its text is made up of just three words: 'Inni', 'bullpup', and 'banjo'. The composer recorded himself improvising with combinations of the three words, using one beat per word, and a one beat pause at the end of each line. The speech is performed quite quickly, and the recordings are edited and layered to create a dense texture, and the sense that the speaker never takes a breath. Amirkhanian describes these layers as 'dervishlike in their apparent exhaustion of the performer.'103

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Charles Amirkhanian, Sheila Davies, Susan Stone, 'Interview with Charles Amirkhanian,' in Melody Sumner, Kathleen Burch and Michael Sumner eds., The Guests Go In To Super, (Oakland and San Francisco: Burning Books, 1986), 253-254.

<sup>102</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg and Charles Amirkhanian, 'Charles Amirkhanian', in Nicholas Zurbrugg ed., Art, Performance Media: 31 Interviews, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 16-23, 18. <sup>103</sup> Zurbrugg and Amirkhanian, 'Charles Amirkhanian', 19.

Many of Amirkhanian's pieces can be performed live using multiple performers (due in part to the simple and effective notation system that he developed). <sup>104</sup> But Amirkhanian has a particular interest in the use of recording to juxtapose multiple instances of a single voice. *Churchcar*, for example, has the effect of a vocal percussion solo. The piece is extremely simple at first. Sections 1 and 2 could be performed by a single person, but are enhanced by the spatial quality of the split delivery. In sections 3 to 20 he builds up an increasingly complex rhythmic relationship between the two voices. The listener's experience of this complexity is aided by the rhythmic precision that recording offers, as well as the clarity that panning the voices to different channels provides. Amirkhanian does a wonderful job of playing with his listener's attention in this piece; the repetitive use of a small number of words like 'church' and 'car' quickly turns them into abstract sounds. The sudden introduction of new words like bang', 'auto', 'box', 'bump', 'cock', 'kumquat', 'loquat', 'rubber', 'baby', 'buggy', and 'bumper' return the listener to a linguistic mode of listening.

Computer technologies offer myriad ways for musicians to easily reproduce real speech, to transform live or recorded speech, and to create virtual speech. Charles Dodge, for example, used computers to take recorded speech apart and then put it back together to create 'super human' musical readings of texts. When he initially encountered synthesized voices in the early 1970s Dodge thought that they were unsuitable for music because they could not re-produce belcanto singing. But hearing text-sound compositions in Sweden influenced a change in his thinking, leading him to create speech music. Working at Bell Labs in 1972/3, he composed *Speech Songs* using text by the poet Mark Strand. The four

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> Charles Amirkhanian, 'Notes about the texts' in *The Guests Go In To Super*, 266-267, 267.

songs in this piece reflect rapid progress being made in speech synthesis at the time. For example, the voice sounds much more natural in the final movement 'The Days Are Ahead' than it does in 'A Man Sitting in the Cafeteria'. Overall, Dodge's use of artificial voices compliments the delightful absurdity of Strand's poetry.

In his 1975 piece 'In Celebration', Dodge also worked with a piece by Strand. In this case he used recordings of his own voice as a starting point, analyzing and resynthesizing them to create a voice with a five octave range. The methods he used in this piece also gave him a great deal of control over pitch, rhythm, and the layering of vocal sounds. The result is an uncanny vocal effect that uses human elements and goes beyond them, creating a reading of Strand's poem that is full of pathos.

Paul Lansky has made extensive use of similar techniques to Dodge (e.g. LPC), but sometimes with a radically different linguistic agenda. In his *Idle Chatter* pieces he uses synthesis to create combinations of nonsense syllables. And presents them in ways that create the impression of speech without the content. He describes his *Idle Chatter* pieces as 'cashing in on the presence of voices and the effort required to understand the words... using unusual means to short-circuit normal assumptions about speech.' In all three pieces there is a sense of 'almost-language,' and complex rhythmic and pitch contours. Like a lot of listeners I have found myself straining to understand, as if I might find real words if I listen hard enough, and sometimes imagine that I hear them. Lansky

Madelyn Byrne, Speech-Based Computer Music Compositions: Selected Works by Charles Dodge and Paul Lansky, (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1999), 11-14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Byrne, Speech-Based Computer Music Compositions, 25-28.

Paul Lansky, 'Some Thoughts on a Song or Two', http://www.music.princeton.edu/~paul/articles.html

interprets this kind of response as follows: '... I was very startled at first by the responses I got to it. Nobody seemed to hear the same things. Everyone seemed to choose a different route through the fun house. That sort of clued me in to the idea that in order to make stuff survive on tape, there has to be a different kind of relation between the material and the way in which people engage it.' <sup>108</sup>

As demonstrated in this brief glimpse into the field twentieth and twenty-first century musicians demonstrate the longing for orality that I mentioned in the opening of this chapter. These composers, and many others, use their interest in speech to investigate the communicative power and sonic potential of words, connecting with complex issues including the pleasure of presence and the insight that can come through the alienation associated with mediation and virtuality. These musical explorations or orality and literacy are the artistic context of my research. In the chapters that follow I provide four in depth case studies of music in relation to orality and literacy looking at the work of Frederick Rzwski, Shelley Hirsch, Meira Asher, and myself.

In Chapter 1 I discuss four pieces by Frederic Rzewski: *Coming Together, The Waves, Lost and Found*, and *De Profundis*. Each piece features a speaking performer but they demonstrate different explorations of the spectrum of orality and literacy. In *Coming Together* Rzewski's 'squaring' technique is prominent. His use of mathematically derived systems in his treatment of verbal and musical material shows the influence of literacy. He uses easily articulable rules to treat both music and words as abstract visual objects that

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Paul Lansky, and Jeffery Perry. 'The Inner Voices of Simple Things: A Conversation with Paul Lansky,' in *Perspectives of New Music* 34/2 (1996), 40-60, 42.

can easily be permuted. But the composer is also influenced in the attributes of orality. In *The Waves* he uses a musical game to give the performers opportunities to create a spontaneous reading of his musical text by exploring interpersonal connections. In both *Coming Together* and *The Waves* the roles of musician and speaker are somewhat separate. But in *Lost and Found* and *De Profundis* Rzewski brings the role of speaker and musician together. To varying degrees these pieces put speech in the context of musical virtuosity and make use of the creative presence of the performer.

In Chapter 2 I discuss music by composer/performer Shelley Hirsch. I focus on Hirsch's work featuring autobiographical stories. So I discuss the appeal of listening to stories, referencing scholarship on audiobooks. I also outline the ways in which Hirsch uses automatic speech and automatic writing to spontaneously create stories in improvised performances and for her composed works. I examine her pieces *O Little Town of East New York, The Vidzer Family,* and *Memory of Childhood Dancing* in detail. In doing this I discuss the idea of memory as a creative resource for Hirsch; the ways in which she addresses the complex relationship of fact, fiction, and individual perspective in autobiographical performance; and her use of intertextuality through sampling and quotation.

Chapter 3 is focused on music by Meira Asher, paying particular attention to her 2002 album *Infantry* and her 2004 album *Face\_WSLOT*. Asher's work is influenced by her anti-war views and in *Infantry* she undertook research into NGO reports to create a piece exploring the effects of armed conflict on children around the world. *Infantry* is quite a

literary piece as it is based on textual research. And the resulting performance texts are in the form of lists, tragic children's stories, and nursery rhymes. Face\_WSLOT is strongly influenced by orality and technology because it is based on recordings of three women from Sierra Leone, who describe their experiences as child combatants in that country's civil war. Here I use scholarship on autobiographical performance and verbatim theater to discuss Asher's creative relationship with her collaborators. I also discuss her use of audio technologies to record, edit and process sounds with regard to their influence on the stories she wishes to tell in her music.

In my fourth chapter I discuss my own compositional work in relation to the spectrum of orality and literacy. I discuss my pieces *Strained Conversations* and *linger...figure...flutter...* in which I was particularly interested in the abstracting potential of literacy and audio technologies. In my pieces *Cat House* and *Ciúnas agus Dúil* I am more interested in communication, connection and coherent narrative, features of orality. *Stitching* is my most ambitious project to date. This piece is a music and multimedia adaptation of Colin Bell's play *Lana's Nana*. In this piece I was interested in exploring the spectrum of orality and literacy in a conscious way. I use live and recorded speech, sung words, and projected text to tell the story of a young girl who attempts to save her grandmother's disappearing memories. I take a multimodal approach to language, attempt to take advantage of the many ways in which we can perceive words.

## Chapter 1. Squaring and Non Sequiturs: Music by Frederic Rzewski

The written word is highly significant in Frederic Rzewski's music. A large number of his pieces feature texts to be performed by speakers and singers. The composer usually works with texts written by others and has drawn from letters and historical documents in pieces including *Struggle* (1973) for voice and chamber orchestra, which uses a letter written by Frederick Douglas in 1849, <sup>109</sup> or *Jefferson* (1970), which features a text from the *Declaration of Independence*. He set contemporary literature to music in pieces like *Antigone-Legend* (1982) featuring his own translation of a text by Bertolt Brecht, and *Mayakovsky*, a 1984 work for speaker and string quartet based on the poem *Order No 2 To The Army of the Arts* by Vladimir Mayakovski. Rzewski engages with classic children's literature in *Snippets* (1994), which is for speaker and piano and features texts from Mother Goose rhymes.

This chapter discusses the interplay of orality and literacy in four of Rzewski's works featuring a speaking performer: *Coming Together*<sup>110</sup> (1971), *Lost and Found*<sup>111</sup> (1985), *The Waves*<sup>112</sup> (1988), and *De Profundis*<sup>113</sup> (1992). The influence of orality and literacy can be seen in Rzewski's approach to both music and words; for example, his

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> Frederic Rzewski, 'Struggle: for voice and chamber orchestra (1973),' in Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2007), 450-452.

<sup>110</sup> Frederic Rzewski, Coming Together/Attica,

http://imslp.org/wiki/Coming\_Together\_%28Rzewski,\_Frederic%29

Frederic Rzeweski, *Lost and Found*, <a href="http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/9/97/IMSLP115696-WIMA.7aed-LOST-AND-FOUND.pdf">http://petrucci.mus.auth.gr/imglnks/usimg/9/97/IMSLP115696-WIMA.7aed-LOST-AND-FOUND.pdf</a>

<sup>112</sup> Frederic Rzewski, *The Waves*, http://imslp.nl/imglnks/usimg/9/94/IMSLP115715-WIMA.81a9-THE-WAVES.pdf

<sup>113</sup> Frederic Rzewski, *De Profundis* (Frog Peak Music, 1992).

performance instructions to musicians often prioritize features of orality, like communication and connection between individuals, but he also uses mathematical patterns or systems to develop or organize musical or textual material, tapping into the objective, abstract qualities of literacy. I will discuss the ways in which words and music travel the spectrum of orality and literacy in parallel, as well as the ways in which they pull in opposite directions, causing interesting frictions and contradictions.

## Coming Together

Rzewski composed *Coming Together* in 1971 for speaker and any number of instrumentalists (he suggests 8-10). The text for this piece is based on 8 sentences, which make up the first 2 paragraphs of a letter dated May 16<sup>th</sup> 1970<sup>114</sup> written by Sam Melville while he was incarcerated in Attica prison. Melville was jailed after pleading guilty to participating in a series of bombings in New York, which were carried out to protest issues like the Vietnam War. Melville was later killed during the Attica prison riots. In the portion that Rzewski uses Melville describes his own physical and mental state after six months in the federal prison, his pastimes, and attempts to deal with the institution's conditions and rules. In the remainder of the letter Melville contrasts the character and chess prowess of state and federal prisoners; recounts being woken up by the sound of an explosion in a local parking garage; describes some of the other prisoners he has met, including others who had committed politically motivated crimes; and discusses his frustration with the legal system and the futility of his trial. In his other letters from Attica, Melville writes about topics including politics, the environment, prison conditions, standing up to prison

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Samuel Melville, *Letters From Attica* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1972), 110-112.

guards, and vegetarianism. Overall the letters are optimistic in tone despite the grim realities of prison life.<sup>1</sup>

Rzewski split the eight sentences into short fragments, which he associated with a single bar of music each time they were used. The divisions are as follows:

Sentence 1 I think the combination of age and a greater coming together is responsible for the speed of the passing time. Sentence 2 It's six months now and I can tell you truthfully few periods in my life have passed so quickly. Sentence 3 am excellent physical and emotional health. Sentence 4 There are doubtless subtle surprises ahead but I feel secure and ready. Sentence 5 As lovers will contrast their emotions in times of crisis, so am I dealing with my environment. Sentence 6 In the indifferent brutality, the incessant noise, the experimental chemistry of food, the ravings of lost hysterical men I can act with clarity and meaning.

Sentence 7 I am deliberate—

sometimes even calculating—

seldom

employing histrionics

except as a test

of the reactions

of others.

Sentence 8 I read much,

exercise,

talk to guards and inmates,

feeling for the inevitable direction

of my life.

Rzewski does not appear to have used a system to make the sentence divisions, but once he made the sentence fragments he left them intact, making no further divisions or transformations as the piece progresses. Throughout the piece Rzewski presents each fragment in the order that it appeared within the sentence, but he arranges the sentences into the following pattern: 1 12 123 1234 12345 123456 1234567 2345678 345678 45678 5678 678 78 8. This process of building up and breaking down patterns of material is typical of the kind of patterns often found Rzewski's early music. He refers to this approach as 'squaring'. <sup>115</sup>

Rzewski also used a process of addition and subtraction to develop his musical material. I have identified six motifs (labeled a-f):



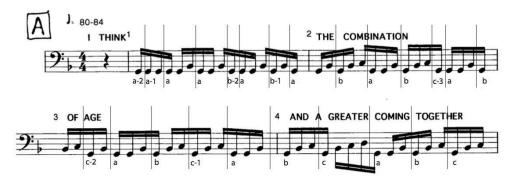
Motifs a-f could be seen as fragments of the complete phrase f, so the basic material is itself built up through an additive process. Each of *Coming Together*'s eight sections

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> Frederic Rzewski, 'Jefferson: for voice and piano (1970),' in Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2007) 444-447, 446.

(labeled A-H by the composer) features is own 'squaring' procedure, which creates a constant transformation of a small amount of material. <sup>116</sup> In section A, for example, Rzewski builds up material by adding one note at a time according to the following pattern:

```
a-2<sup>117</sup>
a-1
a
a, b-2
a, b-1
a, b
a, b, c-3
a, b, c-2,
a, b, c-1,
a, b, c,
...
a, b, c, d, e, f
```

In the score it looks like:



Once the process of building up is complete Rzewski breaks down the material by removing one note at a time:

<sup>116</sup> Please see Appendix 1 for a full analysis.

The description 'a-2' indicates that two notes are missing from the **end** of the motif.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> The description '-1a' indicates that one note is missing from the **beginning** of the motif.

In section B Rzewski begins with a statement of phrases a to f in order, then begins a new additive pattern beginning with phrase f and working back to a:

```
f
f, e-5,
f, e-4,
f, e-3,
f, e-2,
f, e-1,
f, e
f, e, d-4
f, e, d-3
f, e, d-2
f, e, d-1
f, e, d
```

As before he breaks the pattern down once he has finished building it up:

```
f, e, d, c, b, aP
-1f, e, d, c, b, aP
-2f, e, d, c, b, aP
-3f, e, d, c, b, aP
-4f, e, d, c, b, aP
-5f, e, d, c, b, aP
-6f, e, d, c, b, aP
e, d, c, b, aP
```

In section C he builds up and breaks down reversed versions of the a-f material. In sections D-H, Rzewski concentrates on f material, and his squaring techniques include adding and subtracting material from both the beginning and end of the motif, as well as from within it. For example in section H:

```
fR-6,
fR-5,
fR-4,
fR-3,
fR-2,
fR-1,
fR, -1fR-5,
fR, -1fR-4,
fR, -1fR-2,
fR, -1fR-1,
fR, -1fR, -2fR-4,
fR, -1fR, -2fR-4,
```

```
fR, -1fR, -2fR-2,
fR, -1fR, -2fR-1,
fR, -1fR, -2fR
```

After completing this pattern he breaks it down:

```
fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -1fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -2fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -3fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -4fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -5fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -6fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -3fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -4fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -6fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR, -2fR, -2
```

Features of literacy, especially those associated with print, play a significant role in Rzewski's treatment of both words and music in *Coming Together*. One way that we see this is in his use of consciously devised, articulable rules, like his use of 'squaring' processes (such as those described above) to develop his material. Both sentences and musical motifs are treated as visual objects that can be split into fragments, added to and subtracted from, or even turned backwards. Rzewski's basic musical material (phrase f) seems to have been created with this kind of systematic treatment in mind. It lends itself easily to the processes of transformation he employs. It is also replaceable; similar musical objects could easily be inserted into Rzewski's system.

The composer's source material for his text is somewhat different, though. It began as a personal letter, which, like the ancient handwritten manuscripts Ong referred to, is a kind of a recorded utterance. Letters do not have the spontaneity and presence of our speech, but they have more traces of orality than many other types of writing, as the writer

attempts to make a direct personal connection to the reader and uses informal language. Both the publication of the letter in a printed book and Rzewski's compositional treatment of it took Melville's letter deeper into the realm of literacy. In the book Melville's letters become printed objects that were organized chronologically, their dates became titles (identifying labels), and they are arranged into chapters based on where and when they were written. But the narrative element of the letters is, of course, still present in their printed versions. Rzewski's treatment of the quote from Melville's letter disassembles their narrative flow by spacing out the words temporally and reordering them according to an abstract process. In Rzewski's 'squaring' process, each sentence is treated as an object in its own right. And each sentence is divided into smaller fragments, which are presented (more or less) separately from one another. In the printed score the words are presented in block capitals, which has a neutralizing quality that gives each world equal weight.

Rzewski provided extensive instructions for the instrumentalists performing *Coming Together*, and this interplay of orality and literacy leads to some interesting contradictions. The performance rules themselves have the consciously devised, articulable nature associated with literacy, but their use is be associated with creating at least some space for the spontaneity and ephemerality associated with orality. The foundation of Rzewski's score is a bass line, which is to be performed (read) as written by at least one instrumentalist. The rest of the ensemble draws their material from the bass line according to rules that Rzewski created for each of the eight sections. Some sections have very stringent rules, e.g. section B:

Divide the ensemble into two groups, high and low. The higher instruments play only the notes with accents, the low instruments only the low G's, somewhat sustained.<sup>119</sup>

If he had wished, the composer could have created a fully notated part for this section, as there is no spontaneous decision-making from the performers. But in other sections Rzewski allows the players to read the music a little more creatively. They can choose which notes to play and how to play them. For example, in section A

... instruments begin to enter in a staggered fashion, very softly, with long sustained sounds pp. Each note should last at least a measure, and should be followed by a few measures of silence... the general effect should be that of individual isolated sounds of different instgruments [sic] fading in and out of each other.  $^{120}$ 

The success of this effect relies on individual musicians making decisions about which notes to choose and when to play them, and basing these decisions on listening what they hear others play. Rzewski's interest in making use of spontaneity demonstrates what Ong would call the 'I-thou' relationship between the players, and makes creative use of the features of orality. But Rzewski's performance rules have another effect too. They draw a listener's attention to the traces of literacy in the performance by giving each section a distinct sound, which is made even more audible by the lack of transitions. As the players switch from one to another, our ears are drawn to the sectional nature of the piece, and its orderly and consciously devised structure.

#### The Waves

Rzewski composed *The Waves* for speaker and at least three musicians. It features a text based on Shakespeare's *Sonnet 60* ('Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore'). The piece is divided into 14 sections (labeled A-N); each is assigned a line of the poem and lasts about 50 seconds. Sections A-N are heard twice. Their first use makes up

<sup>119</sup> Rzewski, Coming Together/Attica.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>120</sup> Ibid.

the main body of the piece, where the speaker performs a specified pattern of text delivery for each line of the poem. At the same time, the musicians use Rzewski's composed material as the basis for an improvisation game. The second time Sections A-N are used is a kind of coda in which the musicians play all of the composed material in order without repeats, while the speaker does the same with the text. *The Waves* features a more extreme treatment of the text than *Coming Together* in which all sense of narrative is lost. Rzewski's musical approach shows an evolution beyond the relatively straightforward implementation of 'squaring' techniques found in *Coming Together*.

Rzewski assigns one line of Sonnet 60 to each musical section, and divides every line into eight fragments. In each section of the first part, the eight sentence fragments are performed in the pattern 112 123 234 345 456 567 678 788. Rzewski instructs the speaker to perform the fragments at intervals of approximately two seconds. The composer introduces each word in the order it appears in the line of the sonnet, and within the fragments he never reverses or mixes up the order of words. But his progress through each line is not strictly linear; Rzewski sometimes steps back to an earlier part of the sentence once it has been introduced. For example, Section A, which uses the opening line of the poem 'Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,' has nine words in the line, and Rzewski arranges them text fragments as follows:

i. 1 (word number in line) like 234 ii. as the waves 1234 iii. like as the waves iv. the waves 34 v. as the waves 234 vi. make towards 5 6 vii. towards the pebbled shore 7 8 9 viii.

And based on his pattern of text delivery the performer would read:

like/ like/ as the waves/ like/ as the waves/ like as the waves/ as the waves/ like as the waves/ make/ make towards/ the waves make/ make towards/ towards/ towards/ the pebbled shore/ towards/ the pebbled shore

Rzewski's decision to return to words once they have been introduced creates some similarity between his approach to the text and the performance rules he creates for the musical material. He asks players to perform each section's eight bars in order (i.e. not to skip ahead), but they are free to return to any bar already played. Besides the 'stepping back' technique, the other notable feature of the text treatment is that he uses each word a multiple of three times. But there does not seem to be an additional system that influences which word is used or how often. Since words are reused only after they have been introduced, words that come early in the line tend to be used slightly more than those that come later.

Table 1. Distribution of words in each section.

Word number in line	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Section A - number of uses		9	12	12	3	6	3	3	3	-
Section B	6	6	6	6	9	3	3	3	-	-
Section C	6	6	3	6	12	6	6	3	-	-
Section D	6	9	3	6	6	3	3	-	-	-
Section E	6	12	9	9	9	9	6	-	-	-
Section F	9	9	9	3	3	3	-	-	_	-
Section G	6	6	6	6	6	6	-	-	-	-
Section H	6	6	6	6	3	3	3	3	3	-
Section I	6	6	6	3	3	6	6	6	-	-
Section J	9	9	9	9	3	3	3	_	_	-
Section K	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	-	-	-
Section L	3	12	6	6	3	3	3	3	3	
Section M	3	6	3	3	3	3	9	9	9	9
Section N	6	6	6	3	6	6	6	-	-	_

The musical material in *The Waves* comes from Rzewski's earlier piece *Imitation Love*. The music is divided into 14 eight-bar sections, each one associated with a line from Shakespeare's poem. Rzewski's use of pitches, rhythms, or phrases does not echo the simple mathematical pattern that he used to present each line of the text. Nor does it feature a preference for multiples of three. A minor similarity in his approach to music and text is the bias towards pitches and pitch combinations that originate early in the piece.

Table 2: Distribution of pitches in each section 121

	1 - D	2 – C	3 – Aþ	4 – Bþ	5 – Db	6 – F♯	7 – G	8 – B	9 – A	10 – E	11 – F	12 – Eb	13 − C#	14 − G#	15 − D#	16 − A♯
A	10	8	8	7	3		-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-		-
В	9	9	4	3	2	6	5	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-
С	4	5	3	3	2	4	2	1	-	_	1	-	-	-	-	_
D	7	6	2	1	1	-	-	1	3	2	1	-	-	-	-	_
E	6	6	1	1	2	4	4	3	1	4	1	1	-	1	1	-
F	5	5	3	3	2	3	2	-	-	1	2	1	-	-	-	_
G	1	-	_	-	1	-	3	2	3	5	1	1	1	-	-	_
Н	4	6	2	2	1	6	2	2	-	-	1	-	2	1	1	1
I	6	5	1	1	1	3	3	6	2	2	0	1	3	1	1	-
J	3	3	4	4	2	2	-	-	2	1	2	3	-	-	-	_
K	4	2	- 1	-	1	7	4	2	-	4	1	- 1	-	1	1	_
L	6	3	2	1	4	3	2	2	1	2	1	4	-	1	1	-
M	1	3	6	8	2	1	1	1	4	2	2	4	-	-	1	-
N	4	2	-	-	1	2	3	3	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	70	63	35	33	22	41	31	25	17	26	8	13	6	2	1	1

In *Coming Together*, Rzewski constantly transformed a small amount of pitch material throughout the piece. And the 'squaring' procedures that he used in each section were relatively easy to reverse engineer. But in *The Waves* he does not rely on such easily articulable rules; on the macro-scale his approach seems somewhat freer. *The Waves* 

<sup>121</sup> I numbered pitches in order of their appearance, and counted enharmonic equivalents separately if the composer notated them differently.

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features several short pitch units. Some originate early in the piece and are found in every, or nearly every section, while others are only found in one or two sections. For example, these two units first appear early in Section A, and they are used many times throughout the composition, often together:



Throughout the piece there are small scale patterns of pitch material that show the influence of the squaring procedures that Rzewski used more widely and strictly in other works. He sometimes reverses the order of notes within pitch units, and frequently combined units to create larger patterns. For example, Section A opens with an additive pattern of pitches:<sup>122</sup>

A i. 1 A ii. 2 1 A iii. 3 2 1 A iv. 3 4 2 1

Moving into fragment A v. Rzewski switches the position of the two halves of the A iv. phrase (3 4 2 1 becomes 2 1 3 4), and then creates another additive sequence.

A v. 2 1 3 4 2 1 3 4 5 A vi. 2 1 3 4 5 3 4 A vii. 2 1 3 4 5 3 4 2 1

This additive sequence develops between sections M and N:

N vii. 9 N viii. 9 10 M i. 9 10 1 M ii. 9 10 1 8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>122</sup> I numbered the notes in order of their appearance in the piece.

Then Rzewski breaks down the phrase he just built up by adding and removing pitches from it over the next three bars:

M iii. 10 1 8 7 M iv. 8 7 6 M v. 7 6

Rzewski also creates some phrases featuring symmetrical mirroring patterns, such as:

B ii. 2 1 6 7 8 7 6 7 8 7 6 1 2 or K iv. 1 6 7 8 7 6 1

A similarity between *Coming Together* and *The Waves* is Rzewski's use of a set of performance rules, which create a variety of interactions with his musical text. In *The Waves* he set out the following modes for interacting with his composed music:

Т	Text	' play the written music, or something close to it.'
V	Variation	' play or vary the music freely, without going far away from it.'
I	Improvise	' improvise freely, away from the text, including wholly unrelated material.'

But he was also interested in how the musicians interact with one another. He asked each player to select a partner for his improvisation game. They may choose either the speaker or another musician, and can switch partners at the beginning of each section. Rzewski allows the following modes of interacting with a partner:

=	Want	' you may play only when your partner plays.'
#	Don't want	' you may play only if your partner is not playing.'
$\infty$	Don't care	"play in your own time, regardless of what your partner is doing."

Some or all of these modes are available in each section:

Section	Indicated situation	Method of progress through written material.
A	$\infty$ T	'Each section has eight bars of music. Begin
В	∞ T, ≠ T	with bar 1. Move progressively to bars 2, 3, 4,
С	≠T	etc. After each bar there is a pause, which may be long or short as one chooses. Any bar may be
D	≠ T, =T	repeated any number of times. Any bar already
Е	=T, =V	played may be played again. End with bar 8.'
F	$\infty T$ , $\infty V$	
G	$=T, =V, \neq T, \neq V$	

Н	$\neq$ T, $\neq$ V	
I	$\infty$ T, $\infty$ V, $\infty$ I, =T, =V, =I	
J	$\neq$ T, $\neq$ V, $\neq$ I, $\infty$ T, $\infty$ V, $\infty$ I	
K	=T, =V, =I	
L	$=$ T, $=$ V, $=$ I, $\neq$ T, $\neq$ V, $\neq$ I, $\infty$ T, $\infty$ V, $\infty$ I	
M	$=V, \infty V, =T, \infty T$	
N	=T	" the musicians play the written music
		together with each other and with the speaker, in
		the same order as the speaker, i.e.
		112123234345456567678788.'

In the coda that follows Section N musicians are directed to play the melody all the way through without any repeats. The pair relationships no longer apply as the musicians are instructed to play in heterophonic unison.

The performance instructions for *Coming Together* prompted the musicians to undertake a kind of investigation of Rzewski's musical text by 'reading' it aloud, both literally and selectively. But Rzewski's instructions did not prompt an interaction between the musicians that would go beyond the co-ordination required to make entrances on time or create the overlapping effects that the composer was interested in. In *The Waves*, however, Rzewski's performance rules push the musicians to prioritize an 'I-thou' interaction with the other performers over 'I-it' interaction with the text. His performance rules are even inspired by romantic relationships between people. In the program note to *Imitation Love* he described the piece as follows: 'Unpredictable rhythmic relationships result, which are conditioned by the state of communication between the players, rather than by their aesthetic choices.' The ideals of this piece connect to Ong's notion of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>123</sup> Frederic Rzewski, 'The Mechanics of a Love Relationship: Imitation Love (1987),' in Frederic Rzewski, *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition and Interpretation* (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2007), 116-123, 116.

ethics in relation to media ecology, which prioritizes I-thou relationships because of the potential for communion and community. 124

Some of the composer's own writings try to tease out what can be achieved by writing and improvisation and how those two things relate to each other, delving into issues related to orality and literacy including spontaneity, freedom, and the ability of writing to represent thought. 125 Both Coming Together and The Waves are performative examples of the creative struggles, contradictions, and confusion that a composer can encounter under the conditions of secondary orality. In Coming Together and The Waves, the differing roles of the speakers and the musicians point to the composer's struggle between the values of written (literate) and improvised (oral) music. In the instructions given to the musicians there is an inclination to go against the grain of the features of literacy by using a text to promote interactions between people and putting presence to the fore by prioritizing features of orality like empathy and communication.

But the specter of text's objectifying and distancing qualities remains. Some aspects of Rzewski's approaches to his texts and his instructions to his speakers distance the verbal elements of these pieces from communication, emotion, and drama. In both compositions what the speaker says is quite abstract. Rzewski breaks down the narrative flow of Melville's letter by separating the sentences into fragments and spacing them out temporally. Shakespeare's poem is even more abstracted in *The Waves*. More significantly,

Strate, 'Sounding Out Ong,' 99.
 For example Frederic Rzewski, 'Nonsequiturs: A Lecture with Music' in Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition and Interpretation (Cologne: Musiktexte, 2007), 16-47; 'Little Bangs: Towards a Nihilist Theory of Improvisation', 48-67'; or 'Inner Voices: In Search of a More Spontaneous Form of Writing', 68-92.

in both pieces the speaker stands apart from the ensemble; there is little relationship between what they perform and what the musicians play. Though a musician might choose the speaker as their partner in *The Waves*, the speaker does not choose a partner, does not interact. So while the players are in an I-thou relationship with one another, the speaker remains in an I-it relationship with the text. The speaker could even be seen as an 'it' in relation to the musicians' 'I'. The friction between Rzewski's approach to the performance of words and music is typical of secondary orality in many ways, it demonstrates the desire for the spontaneity and connectedness of orality but does not always achieve it. Interestingly performances of of *Coming Together* often seem to resist the isolation of the speaking performer and the ambiguity of the text. Ensembles seem to choose speakers for their persona or their dramatic ability. And the performers that I have heard tend to create a sense of a single character or a consistent style of delivery ignoring the instruction that they should constantly vary their expression. For example, in his performance with the Crash Ensemble Gavin Friday create the sense of a man on the edge, leaning into the manic potential of a highly repetitious text. 126

## Lost and Found and De Profundis

Lost and Found, Rzewski's 1989 piece for speaking percussionist, uses text from a letter about military training by Lieutenant Marion Lee Kempner, a young officer from Texas who was killed in the Vietnam War. Like many of his letters home, this one has a

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<sup>126</sup> Documentation of Crash Ensemble's performances of *Coming Together* available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWGZD9wc86Y

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8MUo UPDsO

https://soundcloud.com/crashensemble/coming-together-excerpt

Other versions of *Coming Together* are found in the following recordings:

Alter Ego, Rzewski: Main Drag (Milano Dishi, 2002).

Eighth Blackbird, Rzewski: Fred-Music of Frederic Rzewski (Cedille, 2000).

Group 180, Group 180 (2014, Hungaraton).

witty, irreverent and energetic tone. His descriptions of his daily life are both very frank and full of amusing exaggerations. In this piece, Rzewski does not transform the text through a mathematical process of repetition. Instead, he divides it into short fragments, which alternate with physical gestures like slamming a table, scratching body parts, slapping body parts, making farting sounds, and jumping.

The composer does not notate a rhythm for the reading of the text or the performance of the physical gestures, but he does request that the words and the actions should be separated by a pause of 3-5 seconds. He also indicates a pause of 6-10 seconds between sentences and clauses. Text and actions are combined, as in the following example, from the opening of the piece:

(TEXT) (Action)

I HAVE JUST (Slam table)

GIVEN (Throw something down)

A CLASS (Scratch on table, as though writing)

ON AMBUSHES. (Silence; stare at audience)

(Pause)

I WAS CHOSEN (Beat on breast)

BECAUSE OF (Pound on table: left fist, then right fist)

MY CHARM, (Scratch crotch)
INTELLIGENCE, (Scratch head)

(Pause)

AND MESSIANIC (Lean back in chair, scratch armpits)

LIKE (Lean forward, pound head on table)

PERSONALITY, (Strike face with both hands)
AND BESIDES, (Play for a few seconds on right rib

cage)

(Pause)

I AM THE ONLY
GRADUATE
(Put left, then right foot on table)
(Embrace self, with slapping sound)
OF THE BASIC
(Blow into left elbow – farting sound)
SCHOOL
(Scratch on table, as though writing)

In The Waves, Coming Together and Lost and Found, there is a certain ambivalence to Rzewski's use of words and speaking performers. In The Waves and Coming Together, he breaks down the narrative element of the texts by using his squaring processes. And he obscures the narrative of Lost and Found, making it slightly difficult to follow, by spacing out the text. Though the use of speaking performers is often associated with an interest in drama or communication, Rzewski discourages expressiveness by requesting clarity, coldness and ambiguity in his instructions for Lost and Found, and in Coming Together, he requests ambiguity through discontinuity with the instruction to use "... a different expressive character with each repetition." These instructions, in combination with the comparative simplicity of the speaker's role in the music (especially in *The Waves* and *Coming Together*), and the general separateness of the speakers from the other performers, leads me to think of the speaker as a kind of stand in for the abstract potential of the printed page in these pieces. But an abstract, objectified view of the speaker suggested by the scores is always challenged in performance by the voice's tendency to proclaim human presence. In the case of Lost and Found, the abstractness of the verbal performance is also called into question by the composer's request that the performer appear on stage nude or almost naked. And the combination of the words s/he speaks with physical gestures, some of which are comic and childish, while others are violent and menacing; all of them draw attention to the performer's body. 127

Rzewski seems to fully embrace the notion of the speaking performer's presence in an intense way in *De Profundis*, a 30-minute piece that he wrote for the pianist Anthony de Mare in 1992. Rzewski describes the piece as follows: 'The music demands a combination

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> See for example Matthias Kaul's 1992 performance, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXNQ73jFmS0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXNQ73jFmS0</a>

of virtuoso technique and a total lack of inhibition on stage, thus virtually guaranteeing that no mediocre or conventional performer will dare go near it.' Most of the text is drawn from Oscar Wilde's epistle *De Profundis*, which reflects on his imprisonment in Reading Gaol, his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas and his spiritual development. Rzewski uses sections which explore prison as the punishment for an artistic life; the sorrowful nature of prison life; struggles with morality and norms; the nature of suffering; and love and loss. With these themes playing an important role in the text comes as no surprise that values of secondary orality, like communication and empathy, play a strong role in this piece.

De Profundis is one of Rzewski's most dramatic (as in theatrical) and communicative works. In Wilde's text, the author attempts to communicate his individual experience to the addressee of his letter, and to the public who read it after publication. The text is personal and subjective. Rzewski draws on this to create his piece. The composer's treatment of the text maintains the narrative flow of the sections he chooses, and his music seems to be built around what the text portrays, creating an emotional backdrop for the words, punctuating them, and drawing the listener's attention to aspects of emotional experience beyond what words can portray. The speaking pianist plays the part of Oscar Wilde, and to achieve the full effect of the piece, s/he must communicate the humor of Wilde's words and the wide emotional range of the sounds that Rzewski composed. The score includes emotional instructions like 'sing, half-sobbing' and 'unsentimental, with humor'. Instructions like 'hesitatingly, as if discovering these

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Frederic Rzewski, 'De Profundis,' in *Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation.* (516-520), 516.

thoughts' make clear that acting is required, not just reading aloud. Rzewski also puts the speaking pianist's presence at the center of the performance. In addition to playing the piano keyboard and knocking on and slapping parts of the instrument, the performer must also speak; sing nonsense syllables; make nonverbal sounds like humming, sorrowful breath sounds, groans, erotic sighs, and laughter; and slap and scratch parts of their body. In his deep reading of *De Profundis*, Milton R. Schlosser describes the forefronting of the pianist's body as subversive in the context of classical piano literature:

The many queer effects the pianist is obligated to realize—grunting, imitating animals, slapping the body—may be experienced as pleasure and sensuality, as an *excess* of physicality normally required of the classical pianist. <sup>129</sup>

As a performer of the piece himself, Schlosser describes his own struggle to both affirm and undermine the role of the 'concert pianist'.

As a creation of discursive networks rooted in nineteenth-century notions of "respectability," concert pianists are taught not to grunt, whistle, hit themselves, or speak while performing. Rzewski transgresses musical norms, thereby forcing the pianist and audience to recognize the silences and regulations which are imposed upon the classical pianist's body. Thus, the pianist may experience her/his own body in this piece in a way which serves to mark the body as a subversively-read text. <sup>130</sup>

By forefronting the physical presence of the pianist Rzewski is able to make the piece an imaginative and moving journey between highs and lows of emotion.

Lost and Found was composed for a percussionist Jan Williams, who wanted a piece that would require minimal equipment. And in his note to the score Rzewski references the influence of Cinko Globokan's *Laboratorium*, and the notion that 'play the human body, dead or alive dates from the beginning of music.' And in this piece Rzewski began to actively tap into the power of the speaking performer's presence. While his

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Milton R. Schlosser, 'Queer Effects, Wilde Behaviour: Frederic Rzewski's De Profundis' (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1995), 53-55.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Schlosser, 'Queer Effects, Wilde Behaviour,' 53-55.

instruction to the performer to perform with 'no particular expression' harks back to the impersonal role of the speaker in earlier pieces, the other requirements he makes of the performer suggest something more. The physical gestures he asks for veer between ridiculous, violent, and intimate, drawing attention to the performer's individual physicality and no doubt pushing their personal boundaries. Lost and Found also begins to break down the boundaries between speaker and musician in Rzewski's work by having the words and physical gestures performed by a single person. Early pieces like *Coming* Together strongly separate the roles of speaker and musician, requiring little or no musical expertise on the part of the speaker. But by the time he composed De Profundis, Rzewski brings speech and musical virtuosity together, the performer speaks, sings and performs other vocal sounds while playing the piano. He also creates an interactive relationship between speech and music, rather than placing them on separate tracks, as they were in Coming Together and The Waves. Interestingly this happens in the context of more strictly notated music, which offers fewer choices for how to read and respond to the music, and no other musicians to interact with. Spontaneity is not the only way in which presence can be explored, and this piece prioritizes communication and embodiment through a deep exploration of words and voice. As Brandon La Belle explains:

The relation of sense and nonsense, of the semantic and the sounded, is to be appreciated as the very fabric of voice, and it is the mouth's ability to flex and turn, resonate and stumble, appropriate and sample, which continually reminds us of the potentiality promulgated in being an oral body. <sup>131</sup>

Here Rzewski enlivens the written word through an embrace of the physicality and interior presence of the speaking performer, combined with the technical virtuosity of playing the piano.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014). Kindle edition.

### **Conclusion**

In the pieces discussed in this chapter Rzewski makes an interesting exploration of the spectrum of orality and literacy, which brings up some of the concerns and conflicts of secondary orality. In Coming Together and The Waves he uses the skills of literacy to create abstract processes for developing musical material. In both cases his systematically created scores are open to a wide variety of ensembles, in terms of both size and forces. And his bare bones musical texts allow ensemble to develop a specific group sound for their interpretation of the piece. In *The Waves* in particular Rzewski's musical text allows the ensemble to take advantage of the spontaneity of individual decision making and interpersonal interaction. This allows each rendition of the piece to have unique, unrepeatable qualities, which is very much in the spirit of orality. The comparatively fixed, isolated nature of the speaker's role creates an interesting friction as the composer makes less use of the speaker's presence and potential for virtuosity than the other performers. Perhaps the speaker's role is to act as a kind of anchor for the pieces, reading a text that remains the same in each performance giving the audience a predictable element in each interpretation of the piece. Whatever the reason Rzewski seems to embrace the potential of the speaking performer to a greater degree in Lost and Found and De Profundis. In these pieces he integrates the roles of speaker and musician. In Lost and Found the words and physical gestures are the only source of music, and they put the performers body at the center of the performance. In De Profundis Rzewski creates even more opportunities for dramatic expression and musical virtuosity. While the score offers fewer opportunities for spontaneity than *The Waves*, for example, it is not without choices and performers like

Anthony de Mare, <sup>132</sup> Lisa Moore, <sup>133</sup> Milton Schlosser, <sup>134</sup> Robert Slatterly, <sup>135</sup> and even the composer himself<sup>136</sup> have recorded very individual interpretations of the piece. De *Profundis* is a reading aloud that recreates the communal reading of early literacy, but adds drama and virtuosity through the addition of music through singing, playing on the body, and playing piano. Creating the kind of sophisticated communicative art that deploys the strengths of secondary orality.

Anthony De Mare, Speak (Innova, 2010).
 Lisa Moore, Which Side Are You On-Music of Frederic Rzewski (Cantaloupe Music, 2003).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>134</sup> Milton Schlosser, Frederic Rzewski's De Profundis and North American Ballads (Arktos Recordings,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Robert Slatterly, *Rzewski: Piano Music* (Naxos, 2014).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Frederic Rzewski, *Rzewski Plays Rzewski: Piano Works*, 1975 – 1999 (Nonesuch Records, 2005).

# Chapter 2. How do you remember? Shelley Hirsch's Storytelling

The art of storytelling has about it the halo and stigma of the ordinary. All of us who speak a language well enough to represent our experiences are entering into our storytelling birthright. The verbal, musical, and kinesthetic 'technologies of traditional storytelling are, to be sure, extensions of ourselves, in Marshall McLuhan's terms—but they are inward extensions, technologies in which the body and mind are the primary tools.

Joseph Sobol, *The Storyteller's Journey* 137

The work of composer and vocalist Shelley Hirsch displays a creative relationship with language that is complex and multifaceted. Her composed and improvised pieces combine the banal speech of everyday life; stylized literary forms, including haiku; philosophical musings; eloquent reflections on her past; as well as intertextual references to novels, popular songs, and her own work. In performing stories, Hirsch uses a vast array of accents and speaking styles that would impress the most accomplished actress. This virtuosity is matched by the skill and imagination she displays as a singer who can navigate from popular styles to extremes of extended technique. Her use of electronics places her speech and singing in a complex aural landscape full of unique sounds, as well as fascinating allusions and references.

Shelley Hirsch is especially well known for her virtuosic extended vocal techniques and her autobiographical pieces in which she brings music and storytelling together. Hirsch has been an avid performer since childhood, when she put on shows in the courtyard of her Brooklyn apartment building. Before dropping out at about 17, she

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Joseph Sobol, *The Storyteller's Journey: An American Revival* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 1.

studied music and dance at the High School of the Performing Arts in New York. As a young adult, she was involved in experimental theater, which included movement, singing, and acting. A key early experience of creating stories for performance came when she took part in a production of *The Serpent*, by Jean Claude van Itallie. Here the cast added extended vocal sounds and stories based on their dreams to the play.

Since the early 1990s, autobiographical stories have become a key element of Hirsch's creative practice. Initially she was doubtful that audiences would be interested in this material, 'Oh, who's gonna want to hear about me growing up in Brooklyn?' But she reports generally receiving a very warm reception to pieces about her personal history like *O Little Town of East New York*, which has encouraged her to make this work a major part of her practice. Shelley Hirsch's work brings together writing, oral composition and creative use of audio technologies. In considering her work in relations to orality and literacy, I will draw on scholarship related to audiobooks and autobiographical performance, and pay special attention to issues of memory and intertextuality.

## **Listening to Stories**

Scholarship on audio books is one of the most fruitful places to look for discussions of the pleasures of listening to literature. And the appeal of some of Hirsch's recorded works like *O Little Town of East New York* or *Where Were You Then* music is

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>138</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>139</sup> Shelley Hirsch, O Little Town of East New York (Tzadik, 1995).

For example: Matthew Rubery ed., *Audiobooks, Literature, and Sound Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Deborah Philips, 'Talking Books: The Encounter of Literature and Technology in the Audio Book' in *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*, 13/3 (2007), 293-306.

similar to that of audio books, due to features like nostalgia and a sense of direct address. Sarah Kozloff describes several aspects of the pleasure of audio books in her essay 'Audio Books in a Visual Culture', including the nostalgic idea that listening to stories read aloud takes us back to a slower, less stressful era in which people took time to savor the 'poetry of prose'. Audiobooks also suggest those pleasant moments of our childhood when some caring person took the time to read to us. Kosloff posits that audio books 'offer a special companionship, an easing of solitude or loneliness.' Rather than overhearing as we do through the fourth wall of film or television, we are directly addressed by the narrator (mediated through technology, of course). I would add that this sense of direct address becomes even more significant in the author-read autobiographies, which form a significant part of the audiobook market. The success of attempts to create a sense of communication and connection with the reader relates to the characteristics of voice and speech that Paul A. Soukup synopsizes in his writings about Ong's work:

Whether that voice occurs in the first-person speaking or whether it appears as an authorial voice, a claim occurs. The voice utters words, which both manifest the interior and connect us to one another. "Every human word implies not only the existence—at least in the imagination—of another to whom the word is uttered, but it also implies that the speaker has a kind of otherness within himself" ("Voice" 52). Because such words connect, they claim a relationship, the I-thou that Ong mentioned earlier. Ong ponders how this relationship can occur with literature and he traces human relationships from the face-to-face, through role-playing in drama, to the voice that a reader hears. All exist within "a context of belief"—a connecting of one with another…

Like the authors of memoirs who read their own texts in audiobooks, Hirsch is allowing her listeners into her private world to some degree; she is revealing something, sharing with her listeners. The idea of connection is important to Hirsch. She sees herself as addressing the listener when she tells her stories live or records them, and in some of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Sarah Kozloff, 'Audio Books in a Visual Culture', *Journal of American Culture*, 18/4 (1995), 83-95, 91-92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>142</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Soukup, 'Walter J. Ong, S.J.: A Retrospective' 23.

her improvisations, she even talks about them. Her voice makes a claim on her audience, asking us to listen while she memorializes, reflects on, and sometimes criticizes the mundane and magical aspects of life. And she invites us to remember for ourselves, to reminisce, to face, to grieve, or to re-imagine our own pasts. A significant difference between Hirsch's recorded pieces and audiobooks is that she creates her stories with the idea of listening as the primary mode of receiving them. Audiobooks, on the other hand, are usually seen as a substitute for reading and involve adapting a text for performance. Audiobooks also lack the rich sonic world of Hirsch's stories, in which words mingle with other sounds, adding extra layers to the telling.

## Speaking, Writing, and Creativity

Hirsch's creative process involves a fascinating interplay of orality and literacy.

Her performance with words began as part of her improvised performances rather than as a writing practice:

There were times when I was just focusing on extended techniques and working as an improviser and doing a lot of minimalist vocal pieces, which really used very little language. And more and more the language started coming out of me, through my improvising. And I found stories as I was using extended techniques and playing with how language just comes out of abstract sound. So I really play with that a lot in my work now.

Hirsch's descriptions of her use of language and stories in improvised performance frame it as a kind of 'automatic speech' that grows out of her experience of listening to and making musical sounds. <sup>145</sup> For example, archival video of a 2013 performance with Jim

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>144</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 12/24/2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Hirsch's automatic speech is slightly related to the involuntary speech that Robert Ashley explored, though he relates his creative use of involuntary speech as a harnessing of a mild form of tourettes in which he attempts to 'reconcile the performer—legal and highly paid—with the person you cross the street to avoid.'

Robert Ashley, Automatic Writing, (Lovely Music, 1996).

Meneses and Mike Pride in Philadelphia shows Hirsch spending about 3 minutes of the performance working with abstract vocal sounds, including long tones, glissandos on vowel sounds, and vocal fries. She then introduces nonsense syllables, alternating these with other sounds for a few minutes. About five minutes into the performance she begins to use words. At first she addresses the other players reacting to the music they play, and then she begins to talk about one of the objects that one of the percussionists brought to the stage. She wonders what it is, then realizes that it is a electronic neck massager. She then she imagines herself using it, a whimsical monologue which leads her back to abstract sounds. As is often the case in Hirsch's performances, there is a strong tongue in cheek element to her meta-musical performance. Humor acts as a through line in Hirsch's work, facilitating a journey between sense (words) and nonsense (abstract vocal sounds). 146

Hirsch's use of automatic speech is similar to the surrealist technique of automatic writing.<sup>147</sup> Surrealist automatism was used to explore non-conventional forms of thought and it is sometimes described similarly to forms of meditation, because both detachment and sustained concentration are required in order to practice it. Hirsch's description of her improvisation practice also has much in common with concepts related to meditation.

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See also Gavin Steingo 'Robert Ashely and the Tourettic Voice' in Alex Lubet ed., *Review of Disability Studies: An International Journal* 4.1 (2008).

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXaewmzYQgQ

Shelley Hirsch and Byzantine Art Punk Ensemble as part of the series Gershwin Live at Dixon Place. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lwi4FdhiFgA

Shelley Hirsch and Fred Frith, at Yoshi, in San Francisco on 09/06/2011.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=74XjiS386O8

Other examples of Shelley Hirsch's improvisation with words and stories include Shelley Hirsch and Zoy Winterstein at WERKSTATT 141, Nuremberg, 10/27/2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> The relationship of Hirsch's work to techniques/ideals of surrealism is discussed in more detail in Anne Le Barron, 'Reflections of Surrealism in Postmodern Musics,' in Judy Lochead and Jospeh Auner eds, *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought* (Routledge: New York and London, 2001), 27-73.

Rather than describing herself as mentally searching for ideas or memories, she reports that the focus of her attention is on her body (and this focus leads to a sense of spontaneous recollection and invention). She describes her work as '...very physical, it comes out of movement...' and explains that her practice is '...very much informed by how my body has contained and inhabited these experiences and these sounds.' In one of our interviews she recalled her composition *States* in which she referred to the body as 'the biggest recorder possible' and a 'storage house of memory', <sup>149</sup> she added that '...sometimes it's as though I'm squeezing that out to locate a character or a place.'

In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong explains that in oral cultures words 'have no visual presence;' they are not objects that can be looked up. Rather '[t]hey are sounds. You might 'call' them back – 'recall' them. But there is nowhere to 'look' for them. They have no focus and no trace (a visual metaphor, showing dependency on writing), not even a trajectory. They are occurrences, events.' For Hirsch, musical sounds have a 'recalling' effect. Her performance practice allows recollection to be a physical process in which one experience of sonic vibrations draws another from her body.

Hirsch reports that she finds it easy to recall things that people have said and their general way of speaking. Although this skill has likely been honed through many years of performance, she describes this ability as something that comes easily to her, rather than something she needed to consciously develop. Her ability to remember speech and individual speech characteristics also allows her to invent or reconstruct speeches in her

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>148</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>149</sup> Hirsch, States

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>150</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

more fictionalized accounts of real people. For example, in *States*, Hirsch performs in her mother's voice, musing on romance and memory in a way that Hirsch considers representative of her mother. Her practice of using other people's speech or speaking patterns is rooted in orality, relying on recollection rather than notation. This approach contrasts sharply with Harry Partch, who also made widespread use of other people's speech but relied more heavily on the tools of literacy. For example, he made transcriptions of people's speech in order to develop his intoning practicing of text-setting and performance.<sup>151</sup>

Both writing and 'writerly' practices play a significant role in Hirsch's composed pieces. *O Little Town of East New York*, for example, is an album-length investigation of the people and places of her childhood years in Brooklyn. It is bookended by a kind of author's prologue ('On the Far Reaches') and epilogue ('Outro'). These provide a commentary on the narrative, where Hirsch sets the scene and concludes her recollections by describing her return to a much-changed Hemlock Street after years of living elsewhere. The prologue contains the work's most direct intertexual reference. As Hirsch guides us towards her memories of her childhood home in Brooklyn, she notes 'Thomas Wolfe wrote a book called *You Can't Go Home Again*', and she adds 'but you can always remember'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Harry Partch, 'The Use of English in Serious Music,' in *Historic Speech Music Recording: Enclosure II*, (Innova, 2000).

Harry Partch, 'W.B. Yeats: 1941,' in *Bitter Music: Collected Journals, Essays, Introductions, and Librettos*, Thomas Mc Geary ed., (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 165-168.

Most of the work is made up of songs and flash non-fiction. <sup>152</sup> The plotting of the narrative is relatively simple; it proceeds linearly with the passage of Hirsch's childhood offering brief but focused glimpses of people, places, events, atmospheres and music that made a significant impression on her. The clear focus on specific events and characters used here is a significant point of difference from her improvised storytelling, in which she describes the characters she portrays mutating or evolving over time. In this way, she can be seen as linking composition with precision, while linking improvisation with free association and mutability.

Sound recording and editing allow Hirsch to bring written and improvised elements together in creating her compositions. Like several of her composed pieces, *O Little Town of East New York* began life in the recording studio rather than on the stage. In this case Hirsh came to the studio planning to make use of previously written texts and music, as well as intending to improvise with her collaborator David Weinstein. In some cases she created music to accompany written stories through improvisation. In other situations, she led improvisations with simple prompts, and stories and music emerged together from that process. Hirsch used some of her prepared texts as written, while she treated others more freely, adapting them in response to the music she created with Weinstein. The tools of the recording studio allowed her to make use both spontaneity and the precision of editing and reworking material. She created a large volume of material, which she edited and crafted to a carefully plotted album length piece. This combination of orality, writing, recording and editing is characteristic of secondary orality, relying on

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>152</sup> Flash fiction is a term used to refer to very short stories.

the organized compositional processes of literacy and the spontaneity and privileging of presence of orality.

When I asked Hirsch about her experience of performing in the studio, I expected that such a prolific live performer might describe the experience as alienating, so I was surprised by her answer. She reports enjoying the solitary aspect of recording, as it frees her from worries about how her performance is being received. She also describes her experience of recording in a way that is reminiscent of the introspective turn that Ong associates with writing: 'What I love about recording is that you can just be in this world in the headphones, you know, and when you hear it back it's outside of you and inside of you at the same time... it gives me a different way to listen.' She also pointed out that using a high quality microphone in the silence of the studio environment allows her to use a different palette of sounds than she can in live performances. She can dispense with her 'stage voice' when she needs to and instead make use of more intimate, more domestic vocalizations like murmuring or even whispering. In this way, recording has a function of distance and closeness. As listeners to a recording we are further from her living presence than we might be in a live show, but in some ways we are closer to her voice than attending a live performance might allow us to be, and her use of the microphone allows her to lean into that.

Recently, writing has taken on a greater significance for Hirsch, both on stage and off. Though she has always written to some degree, she reports that she is currently

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

writing a great deal, often while attending concerts. Like her spontaneous storytelling, her writing practice is very much in the realm of surrealist automatism, as she is interesting in letting go of control of her thoughts and allowing them to go in whatever direction they can. This journey is often one from fiction into fact:

Lately I've been at concerts writing while the music is there, while I'm listening to music and it puts me into a kind of state where I write very rhythmically and very surrealistically but then it lands into memory, it lands in stories that I have... it's launched into me on the cellular level. So suddenly I'll be talking about an invented character or somebody's shoulder and then out of the rhythm of that I land into a story, I find myself in a story as opposed to just recounting it. 154

Listening is not the only thing that influences her though; the physical process of writing is also significant.

It's very much also about my hand writing it because that physical act of writing has been very essential to the actual writing that I'm doing. That sounds a little obvious but really the physicality of writing dictates what I'm saying, what is coming out. 155

Hirsch has also begun to make use of the physical process of writing as part of her improvised performances. She is a highly experienced improviser with a lot of vocal techniques at her disposal, so some of her performances have a rapid-fire quality to them, in terms of the quantity of 'material' she performs and the pace of change. Choosing to write by hand while improvising has influenced the pace that she can perform material. She explains:

... the other thing that I've been doing recently is improvising and writing to change how I find a story or the language. I'll have my book with me on stage and some of the sections I write and speak simultaneously so that it's slowed down what I'm doing... I use my writing to find a new pace, a new rhythm.  $^{156}$ 

Hirsch's style of conversation about her work is highly performative, and as she explained this new practice to me, the pace and character of her speech changed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>154</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

from calm and natural to the fast paced, deliberate rhythm, and exaggerated intonation of her most recognizable 'stage speech', and then changed again to a slow, deliberate word by word delivery. In addition to its affect on rhythm, the change in performance pace from writing by hand has also led her to discover of new imagery and sounds: 'It gives me something new to bring to the music, which I might not have come to if I hadn't had that page and that pen and slowed myself down.' <sup>157</sup>

## **Memory**

When I told Mrs. Calabro that I was doing a piece about the neighborhood and started telling her some of the things that I remembered she said to me, "How do you remember all these things? How do you remember? ('Outro', *O Little Town of East New York*)<sup>158</sup>

Memory is a highly significant creative resource for Hirsch, so much of her work to date has an autobiographic basis. <sup>159</sup> This means that occasionally she has to navigate issues of her own privacy and the risk of offending those portrayed in her stories. But she takes this risk because, as she explains:

I hold very dear the actual names of people and places, so sometimes... a name resonates in a certain way, or the number of an apartment has a certain resonance for me, so I've used real names and addresses and places and experiences as much as I'm able to without disturbing anybody. <sup>160</sup>

O Little Town of East New York is replete with names and addresses. Throughout the piece, Hirsch usually introduces the people she portrays or refers to using their full name, and repeats their names often. O Little Town begins with a scene-setting description of

158 Shelley Hirsch, O Little Town of East New York

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>157</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

Tamar Barzel provides a fascinating discussion of memory and identity in Shelley Hirsch's work in her book *New York Noise: Radical Jewish Music and the Downtown Scene*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

where Brooklyn is located: 'East New York, Brooklyn. On the far reaches of New York City.' This introduction is followed by the piece '544 Hemlock Street', which begins with a repeated rhythmic recitation of the apartment building's address. This mantra-like repetition of the address conjures up a detailed description of the atmosphere of the building and the character of its community. Hirsch ends '544 Hemlock Street' by reciting a list of names of residents and a final statement of the address. In 'The Aida Song' Hirsch performs whimsical meditation on the name of a close childhood friend. She sings Aida's name in multiple ways, and even spells it out while pondering the changes made to it by officials at Ellis Island.

While memory is a very important creative resource for Hirsch, it is not something that she is always comfortable with or uses without question. In our first interview, she disclosed that she sometimes feels uncomfortable with her inclination to be inspired by her interactions with others, sometimes even while they are happening.

 $\dots$  my friend... had been telling me the heaviest possible things about her life and there I was immediately thinking "Oh my god, I want to write this, I want to make this."... <sup>161</sup>

Though she asked her friend's permission to use the stories, and was given it enthusiastically, she still questions her almost instantaneous inclination to make art of life:

She was thrilled, actually, but I felt guilty because I didn't want to make it mine right away. It's almost like I was trying to, I wasn't trying, it just came so naturally [laughs]. I wanted to possess it, here's a jewel of something... something concerned me about my own self-centeredness, or something. Other people said "Nah, don't worry about it." But I just think about how I immediately want, I hear something that really touches me, the, the haste to want to be in, the haste to be inspired and want to create something with it feels a little questionable sometimes. <sup>162</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>161</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 12/08/2014.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

One of the ways that we can see Hirsch navigating the ethics involved in including other people's life stories in her creative work is the strong effort she makes to own her own perspective, rather than seeking to frame her recollections as objective.

Performing autobiography is no simple matter: the real life events depicted, confessed or told are filtered through memory, the conventions of language, the lens of a creative practice, the performance persona, and the techniques and technology employed. Fact and fiction inevitably intertwine. In an interview with *The Guardian*, essayist David Sedaris jokes about this issue saying that ... the people who say: That's not true' when someone tells a story at dinner are the people who didn't get any laughs when they told *their* story. In her book on autobiographical performance, Deirdre Heddon delves into some of the complications of this practice: one can never be totally sure that the material in a performance is autobiographical. She explains: I do not want to assume any easy or transparent relationship between a lived life and its portrayal. All autobiographical productions involve processes of selection, scripting, editing, revising, etc. Although the binary between fiction and real is 'notoriously unstable' in autobiographical works, Heddon believes that the spectator's sense of whether a work is autobiographical or not is significant:

That I believe something *has* happened (or *will* happen or *will happen again*) does place my experience of the theatrical event into a different emotional register. The 'real', even if

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> Sidonie Smith makes a fascinating discussion of this in her paper 'Constructing Truths in Lying Mouths: Truth Telling in Women's Autobiography,' in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 23/2 (Fall 1990), 145-163

As does Kristin M. Langllier in 'Personal narrative performance, performativity: Two or three things I know for sure,' in *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19/2 (1999), 125-144.

David Sedaris quoted in Hadley Freeman "A Life in Writing", *The Guardian*, 10/11/2010. http://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/oct/11/david-sedaris-interview-hadley-freeman

Deirdre Heddon, Autobiography and Performance (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 9.

intellectually understood as contingent, nevertheless retains its pull – and so it should, given its impacts are often painfully tangible.  $^{166}$ 

Sidonie Smith writes: 'Purporting to reflect upon or recreate the past through the processes of memory, autobiography is always, multiply, storytelling: memory leaves only a trace of earlier experience that we adjust into story...' Hirsch describes pieces like *O Little Town of East New York* as 'totally fact' explaining that they are 'of course surrealized somehow... and of course subjective; nonetheless they draw from very real experiences as I remember them.' 168

Like many of the performers of autobiography that Heddon discusses, Hirsch chooses to highlight and investigate the subjective nature of her memories and the inevitable interplay of fact and fiction in her work. Hirsch's autobiographical performances are anything but naturalistic; through the combination of singing, speech and other sounds she draws attention to their constructedness, and the interplay of sense, nonsense, fact and fiction. Like Sedaris, Hirsch's portrayal of her past self is often quite tongue in cheek. In *O Little Town*, she includes depictions of herself as a melodramatic child who cried with pleasure over a borrowed dress. In *Where Were You Then*, she features her comically paranoid thoughts about being a young Jewish hitchhiker who has been picked up by a pair of German men.

The sense of self also shifts constantly in her autobiographical pieces. At times she performs as her past self; at other time she talks about herself with the distance that comes

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>166</sup> Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, 10.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Smith 'Constructing Truths in Lying Mouths,' 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>168</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014.

from time. And sometimes she uses voices of other people, not only to recall them or evoke place and time, but in attempt to understand their perspective. <sup>169</sup> Though she regards her pieces as true, Hirsch does not see them as fixed or definitive. In some cases, she returns to pieces, recomposing them to include more recent experiences or different points of view. For example, she created *Memory of Childhood Dancing* in 1999 and she presented an extended version of it as *My Father Piece* the following year. Both pieces are concerned with her relationship with her father and revisit some of the themes and events of *O Little Town of East New York*. Hirsch's father has died since she composed *My Father Piece* and she is currently interested in revisiting it to include his final years:

It follows my relationship with my father from the early beginnings of listening to music in the enchanted living room until he left home and is then finally living on a boat. But now I really want to add the ending of how he finally became a very happy man and died with grace. So it's something that I need to add to that piece. <sup>170</sup>

In *My Father Piece* and *The Vidzer Family*<sup>171</sup> (1992/1993), Hirsch incorporates recordings of two people who feature prominently in previous pieces, her father and Aida Vidzer, allowing them to tell their version of events. Sometimes her interviewees agree with her; sometimes they add additional detail; and sometimes they disagree with her. Hirsch describes Aida Vidzer and her family in four sections of *O Little Town of East New York*. Aida is introduced as a new pupil in Hirsch's sixth grade class in 'Mrs McIntire/Bananas', which Hirsch performs in the voice of her haughty teacher. Hirsch is immediately drawn to Vidzer, finding her fascinatingly exotic because of her years living in what Hirsch imagined were the wilds of Brazil.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Interview with Shelley Hirsch 11/24/2014

<sup>170</sup> Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>171</sup> Shelley Hirsch, "The Vidzer Family" in *States* (Tellus, 1997).

In 'Aida Vidzer (I liked her)' Hirsch describes their friendship fondly, reminiscing about activities like teaching Vidzer American dances. Her spoken narration is heard against a background of quiet, sung recordings of the phrase 'I liked her, I liked her a lot.' Occasionally Hirsch pauses her narration to allow this wistful melodic layer to gain prominence. Next comes 'The Aida Song', which begins with a cheerful brass band style introduction on synthesized instruments. This is followed by a chorus, mostly consisting of Aida Vidzer's name, and Hirsch uses multiple recordings of her own voice to create a choral effect. Her singing is energetic and she uses a combination of pronunciation and processing to create a childlike vocal effect. This is followed by a verse, which creates the sense of a child's wild enthusiasm for a new friend:

Aida is the kind of girl who don't have any curls but she's got blue eyes and there's a surprise under there, some kind of thing is going on in her mind. I think I'll find out a whole lot of things from her and you know she's got a cousin named Joyce Witzer. W-I-T-Z-E-R hers was V-I-D-Z-E-R, they changed it at Ellis Island. Oh! Aida, Aida, Aida, Aida, Aida. Aida Vidzer loves Gary Spitzer!

Hirsch performs this without the exaggerated pronunciation, layering and processing of the chorus, but she uses these again to conclude the song. The final piece about the Vidzer's in *O Little Town* is 'Aida's House'. Here Hirsch describes Aida's cluttered apartment, her unusual parents, and her petty criminal brother Fivala. Hirsch speaks most of the description over a background melody and bass line on synthesized brass instruments. In general, her speech is fairly natural in character, but occasionally she uses a half sung, half spoken style to add emphasis to particular details or her emotional response to what she noticed in the Vidzers' home. Hirsch's songs about the Vidzers in *O Little Town* concentrate on her own perspective, portraying a sense of the exuberant, intense friendship between young girls and the curiosity many children feel when they encounter a family that is different from their own.

Some years later, Hirsch revisited the story of the Vidzer family in a radio piece created for New American Radio and Performing Arts. *The Vidzer Family*<sup>172</sup> reflects Hirsch's memories of the family with Aida Vidzer's insider's perspective. It includes some material from *O Little Town*, most notably by opening with 'The Aida Song', but it also features new music and words by Hirsch and recorded material from an interview with Aida Vidzer. The three movements following the introductory 'Aida Song' are each centered on a specific member of Aida's family: first her mother Bessie, then her brother Phillip (Fivala), and finally her father Jacob. Throughout the piece, Hirsch shifts between different modes of storytelling by using several writing and reading styles, varying her approach to music and sound design and working with the recorded interview in different ways.

Hirsch begins the movement 'Bessie' in the style of a radio documentary. She speaks in the style of a radio announcer as describes Aida's background. This opening section is similar to 'Aida Vidzer (I Liked Her)' and includes some quotes from its text, but it does not feature background musical sounds. In this section, Hirsch regularly inserts interview material, using Aida's words to add detail or correct misapprehensions e.g. 'Well, it wasn't far from the jungle, but it wasn't in the Amazon [laugh] like right there in the Amazon.' The second section (circa 01:11 to 02:40) concentrates on the Vidzer's apartment. Here Hirsch's writing style becomes more poetic and her performance style becomes dreamier. She only uses one interview segment in this section: Vidzer's amused but irked admission that she hated the apartment her family shared in Brooklyn. This quote comes quite early in the section and the remainder of it is focused on Hirsch's

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Shelley Hirsch, *States*, (Tellus, 1997).

detailed description of the apartment. In section 2 (circa 01:11 to 02:40), music plays a more significant role than in section 1. Hirsch overlays her narration on several background layers, including whispers, granularized speech, melodic vocalizations with a quasi religious feel, and repeating melodic statements of Bessie's name. The mysterious quality of these sounds evokes Bessie's interest in supernatural creatures, like angels.

In the third section (circa 02:40 to 04:30), Hirsch builds a more stable musical foundation by establishing a regular pulse (circa 60bpm) using a short, constantly repeating melodic sample in which she sings the word 'table'. She layers other samples on top of this, most notably another melodic sample featuring the phrase 'at the table'. This one appears less often, but still at regular intervals. Hirsch also uses quiet, pitch-shifted samples of whispered performances of the same words. She adds feedback delays to the whispered samples, giving them more of a textural quality than a rhythmic one. The repetitious use of the words 'at the table' dramatizes the monotony of Bessie's life in which she spent hours on end sitting alone at her kitchen table. In this section, Hirsch uses a small number of quotes from her interview with Aida, using them to confirm and elaborate on her observations of Bessie. For example, after Hirsch screeches 'The devil is in you!' in Bessie's voice; we hear Aida explaining that her mother was so worried about her being possessed she took her to see an exorcist.

The fourth section (circa 4:30 to 06:45) is the most dense and complex of the movement. Hirsch's spoken narrative takes on a stream of consciousness quality as she jumps between pondering Bessie's interests, her relationship with her husband, and

descriptions of the kitchen Bessie spent so much time in. From about 05:00, Hirsch combines this spoken narrative with a song that features a more succinct, orderly text with a list-like form, where she sums up Bessie's character and life story, e.g. 'Bessie doesn't do the things that other mothers do.' And 'Bessie doesn't talk the way that other mothers do.' Hirsch combines these narrative layers with a layer of granularized voices that create a sense of constant chatter; a slow, sung performance of Bessie's name; and an improvised vocalization soaked in reverb.

The fourth section features several quotes from Aida. They tend to be short and are not really introduced and contextualized as they were in the earlier documentary style sections. The quotes include descriptions of the furniture, comments on her mother's personality, and Aida's own reaction to attending a séance. Generally the sonic texture of this section is very complex, and the mix of sounds does not really direct the listener's attention to any layer in particular. But when she quotes Aida Vidzer, Hirsch always foregrounds this material, separating it quite strongly from the music. At the end of the fourth section (circa 05:58 to 06:45), Hirsch stops the spoken narration but continues the sung text. Each line of text is set to a version of a single phrase, and each time it is adapted to fit the differing lengths of text. By now, each line starts with the words 'And Bessie...' and they sum up Hirsch's depiction of Bessie ('And Bessie's always reading her book' or 'And Bessie's always alone at the table').

The final section of the 'Bessie" movement (06:46 to 08:00) is very different to those that came before. It features a song in which Hirsch overdubs multiple versions of

her voice singing in harmony with lyrics describing her fascination with Bessie: 'And I wonder what Bessie's thinking when she's not speaking/ And I wonder what she's dreaming when she's sleeping.' Here there is a sense of fascination, but also a softness and empathy for Bessie.

Hirsch works with the interview material somewhat differently in the next movement, 'Phillip', which concentrates on Aida's bother. Early on in this movement (circa 00:16), Hirsch includes one of her interview questions for the first time, providing one of the piece's rare insights into the interview process and an opportunity to hear Hirsch's voice in the context of conversation rather than performance. The answer that follows is the longest interview segment used so far. Here, Aida describes her mother's difficult second pregnancy and the favoritism she showed towards her brother Phillip (or Fivala, as Bessie called him). Hirsch creates background music by repeating short quotes from Aida's speech. At about 01:30, Hirsch begins to transform the interview segments through editing to a much greater degree than she has done previously. Here she samples the word 'no' and repeats it many times, using pitch shifting to create a three-note descending phrase. This transforms the word from part of the documentary narrative into a more musical element. Hirsch also sings along with the phrase, juxtaposing music constructed by editing and audio processing with a sung performance.

Creating musical content using samples of Aida Vidzer's speech plays an even bigger role in the final movement, 'Jacob'. The opening of the movement prominently features the short, repeated samples 'Jacob', 'Jacob, my father', which form the rhythmic

foundation for this section. This rhythmic usage of short speech fragments is reminiscent of Steve Reich's use of recorded speech in *Different Trains*. Later in the final movement (circa 02:17 to 03:00), Hirsch foregrounds Aida's admiration for her father's good qualities by repeatedly using four speech fragments: 'he did so many things', 'multitalented', 'extremely intelligent' and 'very capable man'. As a background to these, Hirsch performs abstract vocal sounds and repeats a short melodic phrase with the words 'he did'.

In this movement, Hirsch uses a great deal of interview material. The short, repeated samples contrast with long, minimally edited segments where Aida tells her father's life story. Hirsch also includes a section in which she performs her memories and impressions of Jacob (07:32 to 9:22). At first she presents two versions of the story at once, one spoken one sung, and they fall in and out of synch with one another. As this section progresses, Hirsch allows the spoken and sung layers to join together in telling the story, with the sung layer presenting information and the spoken layer mostly presenting an interpretation of it.

In *The Vidzer Family*, Hirsch's composition and editing styles highlight the curated, edited nature of the piece. Many of the cuts between her own narration and Aida's testimony are deliberately abrupt, drawing attention to the contrast in voice, style and context. Early in the piece Hirsch's perspective and her voice loom especially large in the

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<sup>173</sup> Steve Reich, *Different Trains* (New York: Hendon Music, 1988). Steve Reich, *Different Trains*; *Triple Quartet*; *the Four Sections* (Naïve, 2003).

narrative, but as the piece progresses the narrative moves farther and farther from Hirsch's experience, especially the final movement 'Jacob'. Towards the end of this movement we hear Aida describe what happened to the family in the years after the left New York. As Aida describes the time she spent in Israel and her parents' deaths, Hirsch adds little more than background music. Hirsch's voice (authorial and physical) becomes prominent again at the end of the piece as she restates 'The Aida Song' while Aida herself reminisces about their friendship, indicating that their time together was as special to her as it was to Hirsch.

In *O Little Town* Hirsch makes a creative exploration of her childhood memories, using stories and prompts to spark musical sounds and vice versa. In *The Vidzer Family* she demonstrates the self-consciousness associated with secondary orality in general and autobiographical performance in particular. She owns her perspective and allows it to be challenged, endorsed and extended by Aida Vidzer. She also combines spontaneity and composition by using unrehearsed interview material and specially devised music. Audio technologies allow her to bring these together in interesting ways, allowing music and interview to be separate strands at times, and to come together as she makes music from the interview material.

# Inter'textual' references

Hirsch makes widespread use of samples, quotes from, and references to popular music in her compositions. These intertextual references (for want of a better term) serve several purposes. Sometimes they simply set the scene in terms of time and place, or are

suggestive of a character. But they also allow Hirsch to take her listeners on a journey between melodrama and nostalgia, pathos, disillusionment and satire. In 'Tenderly', the second movement of her piece *States*, <sup>174</sup> Hirsch channels her mother, combining an anecdote about a man she dated with references to Billie Holliday's 1952 recording of *Tenderly* by Walter Gross and Jack Lawrence. Over a backdrop of instrumental samples from the Billie Holliday recording, Hirsch interweaves the song lyrics with her mother's story, deftly switching between singing in the style of Holliday and imitating her mother's voice. The combination of singing and speech creates a sense of her mother's romantic personality and the digressions of everyday storytelling, while the music evokes memories. At times the piece is quite funny, as Hirsch moves between the formal schmaltz of the song to her mother's descriptions of eating and falling in love (see Figure 1 for details).

Figure 1. Transcription of Hirsch's Text for 'Tenderly' in States

<u>Then you, you and I</u> we came stumbling, rumbling, tumbling right on by, like tumbling down a sand dune or something. <u>And lost</u> so completely out of our minds <u>in a sigh were we. The shore was kissed</u> mmm unbelievable delicious <u>by sea and mist</u>, you know I worked at the Misty Lingerie company as a switch board operator **and I met him over the telephone** his name was Dave. *I can't forget* and why should we? The body is the biggest recorder possible and the storage house for *all these lovely memories*. Ah yes *his arms* his <u>arms opened wide</u> because he was a very very big man. We had lobster, when he cracked the shell he did it with all of his strength but when he took the lobster meat out of the tail so tender! <u>He took my lips</u> along with the meat, you know <u>my love</u> also <u>so very tenderly</u>. [nonsense syllables] Delicious! And tender at the same time. What more can you ask for?<sup>175</sup>

No formatting = spoken in her mother's voice *Italics* = sung **Bold** = spoken with a musical rhythm

<u>Underlined</u> = quotation from *Tenderly* lyrics

<sup>174</sup> Shelley Hirsch, *States*, (Tellus, 1997).

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Live performance video of "Tenderly" by Shelley Hirsch at Kein Thema, at the WERKSTATT 141, Nuremberg, 10/27/2014 <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCmFsHfgvio">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCmFsHfgvio</a>

Transcribed from Shelley Hirsch, "Tenderly" in *States* (Tellus, 1997).

In *Memory of Childhood Dancing*<sup>176</sup> (1999), Hirsch makes many references to popular songs, which reflect her father's favorite songs during her childhood and her own musical taste as a teenager in the 1960s. They include Johnny Mathis's recordings of *All the Time, It's Not for Me to Say, Come to Me* and *Twelfth of Never*; Mario Lanza's performances of *Serenade* and *Deep in My Heart*; James Brown's *It's a Man's, Man's, Man's, World*; and Jefferson Airplane's *Somebody to Love*. Throughout the piece she uses samples from the recordings, sings quotes from the songs, and combines their lyrics with new melodies of her own.

Memory of Childhood Dancing opens in what Hirsch calls 'the enchanted living room,' as she recalls dancing with her father as a very little girl while listening to records in the living room of her family's apartment at 544 Hemlock Street. The scene is sweet and nostalgic: 'And I am practically swimming in the carpet of the livin' room, beige, beige carpet in the living' room cause I'm dancin' with my dad.' But the scene is also tinged with sadness; the very first sample Hirsch uses is from Judy Garland's recording of The Man that Got Away, hinting at the sorrow that will come. Hirsch opens the piece with a sample of Garland singing the words 'that great beginning.' Next, Hirsch sings them, imitating Garland's voice, and then she incorporates the lyric into her introduction. She associates the quoted lyrics with a new melody that she sings over a looped sample from the song's instrumental introduction. Hirsch refers to The Man that Got Away again later in the piece as she alternates between singing short quotes from it and describing her mother's lonely life after Hirsch's father left.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>176</sup> Shelley Hirsch, *Memory of Childhood Dancing*, recording from the composer's personal collection. Hirsch extended this work in 2000 and gave it the new title *My Father Piece*.

The opening of the piece is dominated by the use of looped samples from *Serenade* and *Deep in My Heart* from *The Student Prince*. Hirsch mostly uses samples from instrumental sections and in general they are melodramatically pretty. The occasional samples with lyrics that she includes hint at the sweetness of her memories: 'Deep in my heart, dear, I had a dream of you'. But Hirsch's nostalgia is not the only perspective we hear. She contrasts it with her father's extremely down to earth view: 'They were just normal rooms of an apartment house, I don't know how you can elaborate and say it was beautiful.'

The idea of differing perspectives on similar memories returns when Hirsch and her father describe the two family houses they moved to. Hirsch's sung recollections create a parallel narrative to her father's spoken ones. Her description of the house's 'long dark hallway' is quite poetic, while her father's is short and quite mundane: 'I don't think it would be different from any other house, you came in the hallway...' Though she continues to feature music associated with her father (a looped sample from the introduction to Johnny Mathis's *Come to Me*), the section about their new home depicts the start of a growing distance from her father. For example, her interaction with the samples of her father's speech becomes increasingly contrary. As he recalls dancing with the children in the living room, she halts her sung narrative to speak, creating a conversational effect: 'We didn't dance around the living room. There was no stereo in the living room.' These conversational disagreements appear several times and the section ends with Hirsch's firm and slightly irritated declaration: 'We would not dance around the

living room. Ok.' She then emphatically confirms her recollection by singing the word no eight times.

One of the most interesting aspects of Hirsch's storytelling is her ability to balance nostalgia and cynicism. This can be heard in her ironic use of samples. For example, she loops a very short sample from Vic Darione's recording of *On the Street Where You Live* to create a backdrop for her description of her new neighborhood. Though her family only moved one block away from their apartment on Hemlock Street, their new home felt like it was in a different world, as the streets were controlled by the anti-Semitic Crescent Gang. *On the Street Where You Live* is romantic to the point of being saccharine, but her use of a sample from it in combination with a loop of her own voice saying the words 'on the street' creates an eerie, ominous atmosphere. This underscores a story about gang members menacing local shop owners who were holocaust survivors.

Another ironic use of a sample is her association of Nelson Eddy's recording of *Stout Hearted Men* with a description of her father's failed attempt to convince men from the local synagogue to stand up for themselves against the Crescent Gang's intimidation. In this case she uses the sample to create a dramatic buildup that comes to nothing as the men refuse to fight. Her use of samples from *Stout Hearted Men* is generally associated with her father's toughness and insistence on defending his rights or having his way, which at times made him domineering. She also uses samples from *Stout Hearted Men* when depicting intense arguments with her father when she was a teenager. She uses it

again alongside the description of her father's failed attempts to fight corruption in California, which led to the collapse of his second business.

Hirsch's father seems to consider his sense of honor as a positive trait and essential to his sense of self, but she frames it as the cause of many of his problems. While *Stout Hearted Men* symbolizes her father's hubris, samples from James Brown's *It's a Man's*, *Man's, Man's World* depict her growing cynicism about her father. She first uses a sample from it as she describes her father renovating the basement of their new home, creating a space where she would listen to records and dance with her cousin. That basement came to replace the 'enchanted living room' of their old home as her imaginative center of the house. While the new living room had no stereo and 'no light,' she describes the basement as '... the room of hope.' While this first use of *It's a Man's, Man's, Man's World* is paired with a reference to her father's physical strength and skills, the next use is not so flattering. She uses another sample from the song while describing her father losing his business as he was swindled by his partner: 'My dad, very good with looks, but no so good with books or money.' And she continues to loop it while he describes beating and seriously injuring the man who swindled him instead of taking him to court.

Throughout *Memory of Childhood Dancing*, Hirsch layers musical references to create complex textures and narrative allusions. For example, she uses layers of samples and quotes to dramatize her period of teenage rebellion when she began to go downtown with friends against her parents' wishes. She uses samples from *Deep in My Heart* and *All of the Time* to suggest the lessening influence of her parents. At the same time references

to the music of her generation come thick and fast to suggest the growing influences of her friends and popular culture. Her many references and quotes to 1960s popular music include Otis Redding and Jefferson Airplane. Later Hirsch sings quotes from *The Man That Got Away* in between her spoken description of her mother's lonely single life and the romantic story of her parents falling in love. This is heard over a looped sample from Nat Cole's recording of *Nature Boy*, which she uses on several occasions to portray empathy for her father, or to highlight his lovable qualities. Here her use of it draws attention to her mother's and her own sense of loss caused by the marriage breakdown, her father's drinking, and his move across the country. Her one sung quote from the song uses the line 'He wondered very far...'

Hirsch briefly refers to *Nature Boy* again at the end of the piece. Here she talks about her current relationship with her father, in which they overcame many of their past difficulties. She harkens back to the opening of the piece by showing that music is a source of common ground for them. Hirsch loops a sample from *It's Not for Me to Say* in this section, and as the piece draws to a close, she sings a line from *Nature Boy* and then her father sings a line from *Until the Twelfth of Never*. Overall the piece shows Hirsch's remarkable ability to layer samples, sung quotes, new musical material, spoken narrative and interview material to create an extremely coherent and continuous whole. The rare moments when the combinations feel chaotic or ill-matched are used for dramatic effect, such as to evoke the complex sound world of an apartment building, or to portray her experience of the unfamiliar, drug fuelled world of downtown Manhattan in the 1960s.

Hirsch makes intertextual references to popular music through sampling and quotations from lyrics and melody. She makes use of the power of well-known music to evoke time, place, and emotion. In 'Tenderly' and *Memory of Childhood Dancing* she uses references to popular songs to refer to the memories she shared with her parents, and to depict the times of closeness and distance in their relationships. Ong thinks of intertextuality as a key element of literacy which becomes a conscious concern in the twentieth century, as authors came to accept that we are all under the influence of writing (or in this case music) that came before. In her use of sampling and quotation Hirsch embraces the idea of influence, again showing the self-consciousness that Ong associates with secondary orality. And she uses her musical references as building materials, putting them together to create new sounds, and combining them with her singing, personal narrative, and interview material.

#### Conclusion

Navigating the spectrum of orality and literacy is key to Hirsch's practice. She creates music spontaneously in her improvised performances and composes music using notation and audio technologies. She does the same with words. She embraces spontaneity in her creative relationship with language, avoiding self-censorship by using techniques like automatic speech and automatic writing. In her work in the studio she combines her interest in spontaneity with writerly practices like editing by carefully choosing material from the vast store that she creates and shaping it into coherent forms. Her many vocal resources allow her to use words in speech and song to portray characters, and experiment with different literary techniques including prose and poetry. Like the female performers

profiled in Deirdre Heddon's book she engages in the practice of autobiography with consciousness of the inevitable balance of fact and fiction in the stories we all tell about ourselves. She investigates the practice by trying out different forms for her autobiographical stories and including the voices of people who have featured in her works in subsequent pieces that revisit the same time period. As is often the case in secondary orality her work demonstrates a communicative impulse, she speaks to her fellow performers and to the audience when she performs on stage, and she imagines herself sharing details of her life with her listeners as she creates pieces in the studio, and hopes that they will touch people.

# Chapter 3. Uneasy Listening: Voices of Conflict in Meira Asher's Music

Meira Asher is a composer and performer from Israel whose work is often driven by political activism. Since the mid 1990s many of her pieces have investigated the impact of armed conflict on women and children. Projects in this vein include *Dissected* (1997), 177 Spears into Hooks (1999), 178 Infantry (2002), 179 Face\_WSLOT (2004-2006), One Blanket Lost (2010), and her currently ongoing project refuse\_military. 180 While Asher's work is consistently influenced by her activism, her projects feature quite varied relationships to orality and literacy, as well as differing musical styles.

Over the years Asher has shifted from creating non-fiction pieces in which she voices her opinions on real world issues like AIDS and sexual abuse, as well as her opposition to the conflict between Israel and Palestine and her hopes for peace to documentary style work where she collaborates with women directly affected by armed conflicts. On this journey she has also explored several different musical styles and approaches to combining words and music.

Her 1997 album *Dissected* is a collection of songs in which Asher brings together her studies of a wide variety of musical practices, including north Indian classical music and west African music. Intertextual references also feature prominently in *Dissected*;

<sup>178</sup> Meira Asher, *Spears into Hooks*, (Crammed, 1999).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Meira Asher, *Dissected*, (Crammed, 1997).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Meira Asher and Guy Harries, *Infantry*, (Subrosa, 2002).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> Meira Asher, *Face\_WSLOT* (BodyLab, 2004).

some of the songs included passages from and allusions to scriptures, juxtaposing the words of prayers and psalms with discussion of contemporary issues like AIDS. The sound world of Spears into Hooks is somewhat different to Dissected, as it features a rock aesthetic and electronic sounds, which create a much more aggressive, angry tone. Sung texts feature prominently in *Dissected*, with spoken words sometimes appearing as background or accompanying sounds, but spoken texts become more significant in Spears into Hooks. Singing plays an even smaller role in *Infantry*. That piece also begins Asher's move towards a documentary approach, as she created the pieces after doing research into the experiences of child soldiers around the world. But the idea of documentary becomes even more significant in Face\_WSLOT, in which Asher made use of interviews, rather than textual sources, and presents recorded speech rather than texts read aloud (or recalled from memory). She also used interview material in her recent piece One Blanket Lost, which sheds light on the issue of human trafficking. And she returns to the theme of armed conflict in her current project refuse\_military, in which she uses interviews and other materials to tell the stories of young women who refuse to join the Israeli military.

My discussion of Asher's work will concentrate on *Infantry* and *Face\_WSLOT*, two works that share a common theme, but demonstrate very different relationships to orality and literacy. In *Infantry* Asher (and her collaborator Guy Harries) undertook text based research to create their disturbing depiction of children in a violent world. This piece is strongly influenced by the features of literacy, Asher and Harries refer to various literary forms including nursery rhymes, and make extensive use of lists in their performance texts. Asher put features of orality, like communication and community, to

the fore in *Face\_WSLOT* by travelling to Sierra Leone to collaborate with a group of women who had been drawn into that country's civil war as children. Asher's piece is built around recordings of their testimony, so issues related to autobiographical performance and verbatim theater are helpful in understanding the piece. In both pieces words and music work together to create dramatic and moving portrayals of the horrors of war, which make for very challenging listening.

# **Infantry and the Creative Potential of Lists**

Infantry was composed and performed by Meira Asher and Guy Harries. Their live version featured a live camera network and film footage, in addition to electronic and vocal sounds. Subrosa released a recording in 2002. Asher and Harries describe the piece as '[a]n operation unit of sound & image exposing the harsh reality of a child in an adult's world... an intimate document exploring manipulation, militarist education and war. 181 Document is an important word in this description because literacy plays an important part in this piece. Most of *Infantry*'s texts are based on published accounts of child soldiers from Burma, Israel, Liberia, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Uganda, as well as NGO reports on the torture of children around the world. In addition to being based on textual sources, *Infantry* relies on heavily writing to achieve its effect. Asher and Harries created texts in a variety of forms: first person narratives e.g. 'Girl' (based on the testimony of Josephine Kamara from Liberia); a horrific instruction manual e.g. 'Torture—Bodyparts'; lists e.g. 'Tots'; prayers e.g. 'Combat'; bedtime stories e.g. 'The School' and 'The Car'; and nursery rhymes e.g. 'Bad Toys'. The content of the texts often takes their form in unexpected directions, like horrific children's stories and rhymes. Given the subject

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<sup>181</sup> www.meiraasher.net

matter, the texts are often disturbing and uncomfortable to listen to, and Asher and Harries re-enforce this psychological effect by combining their texts with sounds that are physically uncomfortable, such as extensive use of loud, low, noisy textures, and piercing, sustained sine tones.

List pieces feature prominently in *Infantry*, providing a sharp contrast to the singsongy children's stories, which are the other most common textual form on the album. When discussing the distancing, objective tendencies of chirographic and typographic culture, Ong states that 'An oral culture has no vehicle as neutral as the list.' 182 One of the effects of writing and print is to separate the knower from the known, as information can be stored in documents rather than in the mind. Words become things that can be arranged on the page according to abstract systems that have little or no relationship to the human life world:

A chirographic (writing) culture and even more a typographic (print) culture can distance and in a way denature even the human, itemizing such things as the names of leaders and political divisions in an abstract, neutral list entirely devoid of a human action context. 183

The abstracting, objectifying process of listing could be seen as problematic as it removes the accounts of conflict and torture from 'the human life world', making them into general concepts instead, thus making it difficult to identify and empathize with those who suffer. But the use of a repetitive form like a list could also be seen as an expedient way to dramatize the relentless, dehumanizing horror of war that many children around the world experience.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Ong, Orality and Literacy, 121.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>183</sup> Ibid., 121.

List forms are relatively common in experimental music. Some composers take advantage of the abstract potential of the list while others attempt to subvert it, or use its formulaic, repetitive qualities to create expectations and patterns to break. Textsound composers like Charles Amirkhanian are primarily interested in the sonic potential of words, and pieces like *Church Car*<sup>184</sup> or *Dutiful Ducks*<sup>185</sup> have few or no narrative elements. In contrast, pieces like David Lang's *Lost Objects*<sup>186</sup> use the list in a way that at first seems to be comically absurd or without narrative, but over time becomes a poignant exploration of both trivial and profound loss.

In the case of *Infantry*, several factors are in play. On a very basic level, the use of lists makes reference to the sources for *Infantry*'s texts—reports and statistics on child soldiers and torture of children. The reports of NGOs are usually not intended to be personal narratives eliciting, empathy or identification; rather, they are sources of data used to drive decision-making or influence government policy. Asher and Harries' use of lists could also be interpreted as a way of showing scale, dispelling the impression that they are describing isolated tragedies rather than widespread abuse of children taking place around the world over extended periods of time. In our conversation, Asher acknowledged these interpretations and proposed another: the idea that a list form can facilitate musical performance through its rhythmic potential, and promote ease of comprehension and retention through repetition and redundancy, as is the case in chants.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>184</sup> Charles Amirkhanian, 'Church Car,' in Melody Sumner, Kathleen Burch, and Michael Sumner eds. *The Guests Go in to Supper* (Burning Books: Oakland and San Francisco, 1986), 271-271.

Amirkhanian, 'Dutiful Ducks' in *The Guests Go in to Supper*, 271-271.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Michael Gordon, David Lang, and Julia Wolfe, Lost Objects, (Red Poppy, 2001).

Due to the subject matter of her piece she relates this idea to brain washing. But she also relates the listing or chanting technique to her previous musical experience:

I think that also comes from the music I studied, the traditional music I studied although I'm doing a lot of noise these days and free music those techniques are very rooted in me and they definitely influence my choice of how to present a text... I studied dhrupad. Dhrupad is a classical North Indian style of singing, it's ancient ... it's very grave, it's very low... So that also has a lot of chanting element to it. They use syllables, meaningless syllables that are coming from the Sanskrit language, it means words are being spliced to syllables and they use these syllables to improvise and that is also something very repetitious, so I think it's, it's my immediate kind of eh, tool. <sup>187</sup>

'Torture Bodyparts' is the first list piece on the album, and certainly shows the influence of Asher's interest in chanting. After an opening, which seems to be based on time-stretched drum sounds (00:00-00:40), Asher/Harries establish a bass drone modulated with a regular clicking pulse at about 120bpm. The time-stretched percussion sounds continue intermittently as Asher speaks. The text she reads is divided into 10 sections, each one beginning and ending with the name of a single body part. Between these bookends Asher performs descriptions of various tortures. The descriptions vary in length, but all of them are bare bones, with no personal pronouns and very few adjectives. She performs each section similarly in a low, quiet, and unexpressive tone of voice. She begins each one by stating the name of the body part and then rests for the next two beats. In general, Asher performs one word per beat, but occasionally fits two short words into a single beat or divides long words over two beats to preserve the rhythmic flow. The breaks between the ten sections are irregular—longer early in the piece and growing shorter as it progresses, creating a sense of increasing intensity.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

'Childsoldier List' also relies on a chant-like technique, but it is applied slightly differently. Like 'Torture Bodyparts,' this piece features a bass drone, but this one relies on a much faster clicking modulation, which produces more of a timbral effect than a rhythmic one. Asher performs a text that is divided into three main sections: the first, titled 'Abduction,' (circa 00:25-01:50) is not quite in the form of a list, but is a very pared-down description of a child who attempts to flee from rebels, but is captured and beaten by them. The fragmented nature of this text suggests the patchy but vivid memories of a traumatic event. Asher performs the description in a similar tone of voice to the one she used in 'Torture Bodyparts' and separates the elements of the description into list items through her phrasing. She does not use the kind of strict rhythm found in the earlier piece; her performance is more rhythmic than natural speech. In the second section, 'March', (circa 01:51 to 02:49) Asher performs a text that features the words 'march, loot, kill' in 6 of its 8 lines, suggesting the horrific routine of the child soldier's life. Sometimes the words are found at the beginning of a line, e.g. 'March loot kill long distances cross river swim'. Sometimes they are placed in the middle of a line, e.g. 'Must walk march loot kill always day and night'. And in some cases at the end of a line: 'Dysentery eat leaves of tree aimless march loot kill'. She breaks the pattern in the second last line: 'Escape no rest no sit no march loot' and abandons it in the final line: 'Kids all over lay down like in sleep but are dead'.

Throughout the piece bursts of noise are used intermittently, and they become much more frequent and prominent in the third section, 'Combat' (circa 02:50 to 03:46). The clicking effect in the bass also slows here, and it begins to exert a rhythmic influence

rather than a timbral one. In response, Asher picks up speed in her performance of the text and makes a close connection with the bass rhythm. In this section she repeatedly uses the words 'Holy Spirit' to begin phrases that command the child soldiers to do something, e.g. 'Holy Spirit say go to fight have gun have no gun.' She also repeats the refrain 'God you come and help us God prepare to take us' several times. This last text and Asher's performance of it suggest both children's games like Simon Says and religious practices like reciting a litany, with both list-like forms being put to grotesque purposes.

'Torture A-B-C' features *Infantry's* most formulaic text, embodying Ong's definition of the list as an abstract, organizing technique. In this case, Asher loudly declaims three alphabetized lists of torture techniques and the effects of torture. As was the case in 'Torture Bodyparts' and the final section of 'Childsoldier List,' the piece features a low bass drone with a pulsing modulation that establishes a consistent tempo. And Asher works with this in her performance of the text. Some words are repeated between sections: 'abduction' is heard in sections 1 and 3, 'rupture organs' is used in section 2 and 3, and ' trauma' is spoken in every section. The sections are irregular lengths, as sometimes letters are represented with a single word, e.g. 'blindfold' for the letter b, while other times they are represented by a combination of words, e.g. 'broken bones' or 'electric shocks'. While the text is in three parts, the music is performed as a single unit with a more or less uniform character. The combination of the piece's rhythmic drive and Asher's energetic performance gives the piece a character that suggests the chanting of protestors at a rally.

*Infantry* ends with another list piece, 'Tots.' In this case, each line begins with the word 'tots'. The piece is from the perspective of an adult commander of child soldiers. The first few lines describe the benefits of using a child combatant, e.g. 'Tots make good spies for the size'. Next there is a description of some of the challenges of using child soldiers, such as 'Tots cry at the front line'. And finally Asher describes some of the common fates that befall the children, e.g. 'Tots are shot when they can't follow'. Asher performs two statements of the text. The first (00:35 to 02:10) features only one vocal layer and Asher performs it very slowly, in a quiet, low, breathy voice with little expression. When she repeats the text (03:32 to 04:36) Asher uses multiple versions of her voice, sometimes accentuating words or phrases, e.g. 'crying time', and sometimes simply creating a more dense vocal texture with layers of similar performances. Occasionally she presents contrasting performances of the same text e.g. whispered, spoken without expression, spoken with a mocking tone, spoken at different pitches. Vocal layering is used quite rarely in *Infantry*, and here it creates a very dramatic effect for the grim conclusion of the piece.

The use of list forms in *Infantry* is one of the key ways in which the piece exemplifies tendencies of secondary orality, a state that brings together features of orality and literacy in combination with contemporary technologies. *Infantry* was largely based on textual research, but Asher and Harries intended to present it orally. They wrote their texts with performance in mind, often making musical features like rhythm a priority. Many of their texts are carefully crafted to be minimal, impersonal and sometimes quite abstract. But they use forms that feature repetition in the organization of lines and

sections, creating redundancies that promote understanding and retention by the audience. And they perform these texts alongside semi-improvised musical sounds, which add another layer orality to the presentation of the text. Asher and Harries also contrast their lists with other kinds of texts, like children's stories and traditional rhymes, which evoke (and then disrupt) the tender memories of caring adults reading to children.

# **Face\_WSLOT** and Verbatim Theater

In her project Face\_WSLOT (Woman See Lot of Things) Asher wanted to approach the issue of child combatants directly by working with people who had personally experienced it. She collaborated with a group of women living in Sierra Leone who performed their autobiographies through interviews, reenactments, dance, and singing. Through its reliance on spoken testimony and individual biographical information, this project shows a strong connection to features of orality like communication, community, and closeness to the human life world.

Asher's role in the project was to create a framework for these performances to take place within, record them, and use them as source materials for artwork. Her role in this project relates fairly closely to creative practices found in verbatim theater. In this field, many practitioners work with interview subjects and use transcriptions of their speech as the basis for a dramatic text. Like verbatim theater practitioners, Asher has to navigate complex issues such as how to ethically represent the experience of others. In the opening of her essay 'The Language of *WSLOT*' she asks the questions:

How do you convey a different reality? How do you re-create a world in a way that brings the spectator closer to another individual's life? How do you tell the story without forcing your own perception on it?' 188

Unlike many verbatim theater practitioners, Asher is not transcribing recordings in order to make performance texts. She uses her recordings in performance.

In her discussion of verbatim theater, Deirdre Heddon points out that terms like 'verbatim', 'documentary' and 'autobiography' propose 'a relationship to veracity of the supposed facts.' But she cautions readers that 'we should remember that the process of interviewing is not at all accidental.' Asher, for example deliberately sought out women with particular kinds of war experiences for her project. Heddon also points out that in addition to finding and choosing interviewees, 'verbatim practitioners construct the questions that are then posed, arguably thereby prompting certain answers.' Additionally, more material is collected through interviews than can be included in a single performance, so the theater practitioner's role in selecting what testimony is represented is worthy of attention. 190

When Asher finished working with the women in Sierra Leone she had about 50 hours of recorded material, <sup>191</sup> so much that she decided to create multiple pieces: a multimedia installation, a musical performance and recording, and a documentary film. <sup>192</sup> This allowed her to share as much material as possible with a broad audience. In her published comments on the piece, Asher acknowledges both the filtering aspect of the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Meira, Asher, *Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things: Female ex-child combatants in Sierra Leone*, (The Hague and Milan: Bodylab/Auditorium, 2004), 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Heddon, Autobiography and Performance, 130.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>192</sup> Meira Asher, Woman See Lot of Things, (BodyLab, 2006).

artist's role in a project like hers and the artist's ability to organize and interpret the interview material:

In a project such as this the issue of language, in its broadest sense, needs to be taken into account. The artist's work focuses on the act of recording and transcribing, the act of translation between languages and between different media, the act of retelling and rewriting. The artist needs to read between the lines and behind the words. Words acquire various meanings; stories go through a series of transformations. One is confronted with the ambiguity of the term 'truth'. <sup>193</sup>

One of the criticisms of verbatim theater that Heddon discusses is the absence of contextual information about the process of interviewing and the uses of the interview material. She explains that this omission can mask the voice and power of the theater practitioner in the performed text. She points out that:

Feminists have long insisted, particular within the realm of ethnographic and oral history, that interviews and what they reveal must be treated with caution; "interviews must be carefully contextualized, with attention to who is speaking, what their personal and social agenda is, and what kind of event they are describing" (Sangster, 1998, p.88). Where they are speaking, when and to whom is also surely significant, as is the act of listening. These are the "conditions of speaking" (Alcoff and Gray, 1993). <sup>194</sup>

Asher goes to great pains to provide her audience with contextual information, and in doing so, raises an issue that Heddon does not address: the idea of the artist as a bridge between the interview subject and the audience. For example, Asher believes that having spent a lot of time in Africa learning music and dance in the years before this project helped her to fit in well enough in Sierra Leone to make friends who helped her find women to participate. <sup>195</sup> And as part of her preparation for the project, Asher learned the basics of local languages and dialects, including Kiro, Temne and Liberian English. Asher also tried to verse herself in local culture in an attempt to 'truly understand all that the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>193</sup> Asher, Face WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things, 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> Heddon, Autobiography and Performance, 131.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>195</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

women were revealing. A lot of messages were to be found hiding in between the lines.'

196 To help the audience understand the social and linguistic context of the project Asher bundled the audio CD with a book that includes transcriptions and translations of the speech heard in the recording, as well as historical, social, and personal information for context. Asher includes a biography for each woman, and explains that it was created by asking them to tell their life stories multiple times and through fact checking of the historical information. She also includes statements by the women, which give a sense of their personal priorities and worldviews.

Even without this contextual information about the sound work on the CD, it would be difficult to mistake Asher's work as a 'transparent lens' showing the women's lives. Her musical composition includes some long speeches with little editing or added sounds, but it would be difficult to mistake these for 'stories that are simply being told and simply being "caught" as they are juxtaposed with pieces that feature highly mediated recordings in elaborately constructed forms. Many of the pieces on the CD feature small fragments of speech recordings, which are often repeated, permuted, and altered using audio effects to create varied degrees of linguistic abstraction and musical effect.

# Autobiographical Performance, Testimony, and Trauma

Through her connections in Sierra Leone, Asher met and interviewed over 40 women between the ages of 13 and 28 and then chose three women to participate in her project. She looked for women who represented a range of social backgrounds, different

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> Asher, Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things, 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>197</sup> Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 132.

war experiences, and different post-war living situations. Asher also sought participants '... with a strong and clear expressive ability' and took the 'richness of their vocal qualities' into consideration. <sup>198</sup> As the women were being asked to share personal and traumatic information, which is also associated with social stigma, they were assured anonymity. <sup>199</sup> The three participants she chose were given the pseudonyms Anita Jackson, Chris Conteh and Mahade Pako. And as part of establishing a situation of trust and equality, the three women were invited to participate as collaborating artists and were paid for their work. <sup>200</sup>

Believing that '[t]here is more than one way to communicate, more than one way to tell a story,' Asher documented '[s]ounds, words and actions' from the beginning of the project. Aiming to give the women 'every opportunity and means to share their past and present realities,' Asher and Flashkes worked with them in an indoor studio setting and outdoors in their everyday environments, recording them doing a range of activities, including speaking about their experiences, reenacting past events, showing important locations on maps, singing, and dancing. <sup>201</sup> Asher acknowledges the filtering process of recollection, reenactment, editing, translating, and composition:

No translation is neutral or objective. Every translation carries an element of interpretation, however minimal. A different language, a different medium—all of these alter the story to some extent. Each translation leaves a mark on the result.  $^{202}$ 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>198</sup> Asher, Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things,13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>199</sup> Asher reports that anonymity became less and less important to the women as the project progressed and they gained confidence. For example they allowed their faces to be shown in Asher's film, and allowed her to film their friends and family in their homes and local communities. Some of the women also attended openings of the *Face\_WSLOT* exhibition in other countries, and all of them attended the opening of the exhibition when it came to Sierra Leone.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Asher, Face WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things), 14-15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>201</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Ibid., 16.

But she hopes that the project will facilitate a situation of 'personal communication' for the audience, which will expose them 'to different layers of the women's realities'. <sup>203</sup>

As personal history has such significance in *Face\_WSLOT*, I will provide a short biography for each of Asher's collaborators and outline the uses of their testimony in the Face\_WSLOT musical work. Anita Jackson is a Liberian-born woman whose father and sister were murdered by the INPFL<sup>204</sup> and her mother was pressed into serving that group as a cook. Jackson suffered gang rape at the hands of police officers allied to the NPFL<sup>205</sup> and became pregnant. She then gave birth to a son who died of illness while they were living at a refugee camp in Kenema (Sierra Leone). In 1992, she joined the Sierra Leone Army and after initial training at Camp Tiger, she fought in the Joru battle. In 1993 she received training in nursing and worked at an army barracks in Freetown. In 1997 a coup took place and Jackson worked at a military hospital controlled by Johnny Paul Koroma's junta. Later that year she escaped from Freetown and spent time running a clinic for women and children in Koidu. After a few months she escaped to Liberia and spent time in a refugee camp called Camp Sinje. In 1999, she became involved with forces of the Economic Community of West Africa, which fought against the junta in Sierra Leone. This meant that she was back on the side of the ousted Sierra Leone government. She returned to Freetown in 2000. During the years of the conflict she adopted six children, and at the time of her collaboration with Asher she was living with them at a military barracks while working as a nurse.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Asher, Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things, 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>204</sup> Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

On the *Face\_WSLOT* CD we hear Jackson talking about the battle in Joru, which stood out in her mind more than any other battle ('01\_MostFight'); she discusses her motivation to join the army and fight in '02\_Arm' and her relationship with her parents in '03\_Papa'. Jackson discusses everyday sexism and the unreliable electricity supply in '04\_Suzanna', and demands more rights and political power for women in '05\_Why!' Her voice also features along side those of the other interviewees discussing the rape of women and girls in '06\_GoodToGo'. And in the final piece '17\_Touch' Jackson talks about the shock, terror and sorrow of seeing her comrades dead.

Chris Conteh was the youngest participant in the project. She was born in Kambia, Sierra Leone in 1986. She became involved in the conflict after being abducted from her school in Rokupr by RUF<sup>206</sup> rebels. She was raped by two of them and then made a 'wife' of a rebel commander. In 1999 and 2000, she took part in attacks on villages and participated in 'Operation Stamping Stomachs,' in which rebel 'wives' were forced to capture pregnant women, guess the sex of their baby, and then cut the fetus from her body and announce its sex before leaving them both for dead. Conteh's commander 'husband' was killed in an ECOMOG attack in 2000. Around this time, Conteh discovered she was pregnant, and after giving birth in the bush she escaped from the rebels and travelled to Kambia, hoping to find her family. She discovered that her parents were dead but her sister was still alive. Conteh did not disclose her history as a rebel for fear that her sister would not accept her. Her sister took her in, and when her baby reached six months, Conteh joined her sister on the street as a prostitute. Eventually her sister kicked her out and Conteh ended up as a slave, working extremely long hours for very small amounts of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Revolutionary United Front.

food. In 2001 she attended a training program on gara, a tie-dye and batik technique. She struggled to make money from the skill because she could not afford supplies, and ended up reuniting with her sister and doing domestic work for her in exchange for housing. But this arrangement feel apart and Conteh made an arrangement to pay a pair of widows for housing and child care while she attended school. She made money for her school fees through a combination of odd jobs, prostitution, and support from boyfriends.

Conteh's voice is heard for the first time in '06\_GoodToGo'. In '07\_Even,' she sings a song about unconditional loyalty to one's rebel commander and in '08\_Stampin'Stomach' she describes the brutal attacks on pregnant women that she was involved in. Conteh sings again in '09\_Forget'. And she discusses the ways in which she can pay for her education in '10\_Options': marriage, prostitution, and financial support from boyfriends. In the final piece, '17\_Touch,' her voice is heard only briefly referring to the persistent memories of the war.

Mahade Pako was born in Liberia in 1977. Her mother abandoned her when she was 3 months old and she spent much of her childhood with her grandmother. In 1992 she saw her father killed by INPFL rebels and a few days later she was captured by ULIMO<sup>207</sup> rebels and was trained to fight. She became a commander, led other young rebels, and spent much of the next two years fighting. In 1995 she went to Monrovia, where she gave birth to a child and reunited with her mother, who was afraid of her, but still took her in. After a few months, Pako returned to the jungle. In 1996 she went back to Monrovia and took a hairdressing course run by a missionary group. But when war came again between

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy.

the NPFL and the ULIMO, she fought. Later that year there was a ceasefire and Pako ended up homeless in Monrovia and began working as a prostitute to provide for herself. In 2000 she moved to Freetown to be with her boyfriend and avoid hostilities against ULIMO soldiers.

At the time of Asher's project, Pako described herself as a hustler, involved in prostitution and theft. Over the years Pako had 3 children, but was unable to care for them and ended up giving them to others to raise. In '11\_Peacekeepin' she describes the necessity of prostitution and robbery for survival and her low opinion of men. She sings about becoming pregnant and describes the situation of girls becoming pregnant by the rebels who captured them in '12\_Beleh'. Pako portrays rebel commanders, like herself, calling young soldiers to formation in '13\_BushFAQ'. In this piece she also describes what was necessary to stay safe on dangerous missions, the difficulty of finding food in the bush, and the brutal attacks she ordered her subordinates to carry out. In '15\_Caterpillar' she describes life with her grandmother before the war and in '16\_Confusion' she discusses the stigma against women like her and the difficulties she faces with finding housing and dealing with the police.

Asher describes Jackson, Conteh, and Pako as collaborators (rather than interview subjects) who participated in the project by performing their personal stories in front of the camera and the microphone.<sup>208</sup> In her book on autobiographical performance, Deirdre Heddon puts that practice in dialogue with the performance of history. In doing so, she summarizes the work of several commentators who have highlighted the importance of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>208</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

testimony and bearing witness in turn of the (21<sup>st</sup>) century culture, including Miller and Tougaw, who link our 'time of testimony' with our 'age of trauma', the many wars and genocides of the twentieth century. <sup>209</sup>

Asher's discussion of her project's agenda focuses on giving voice to three individuals who bare witness to the extreme violence and trauma of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. According to Asher the women were "... stigmatized women who nobody wanted to listen to or sometimes even get close to...' and she commends them because '... they spoke very clearly about their experience and very openly...' Asher attributes part of this openness to the women's personalities but also to the social climate of post-war Sierra Leone, in which a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established and people were encouraged to talk about their war-time experiences and attempt to leave them behind. In her discussion of TRC's in relation to performance testimony, Heddon quotes Christopher Colvin, who describes them as 'historiography-astherapy'. She also states that: 'The predominant narrative around TRCs displays a definite, progressive trajectory, whereby the process of recounting or narrativising one's experience leads 'us' from a painful past to an enlightened, peaceful and shared future.' 212

Heddon explains that testimony and trauma are often seen as two sides of one coin and describes several works in which the performance of testimony is intended to have some capacity to heal trauma through reconciliation, mourning, and catharsis, e.g. Linda

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Heddon, Autobiography and Performance, 53-54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

<sup>211</sup> Thid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, 57-58.

Montano's *Mitchell's Death*. She also points out that in psychoanalysis, narrativisation is a therapeutic approach to a traumatic event, which allows a person to externalize the traumatic event by reconstructing it and transmitting it in a safe, structured setting. Asher's work with the women is similar to the psychoanalytic approach, with the use of repetition, reenactment and construction of a linear narrative. But in her published statements she does not describe any intentions that the process could offer healing for the women. And in our interview she acknowledged the possibility of the process having a healing element, but explains that it the project was more than a healing process:

About healing, of course this is absolutely, it is a healing process, but I don't think we talked about or mentioned even, it's obvious. I'm not a therapist, so because this is not my official skill I cannot pretend to be trying to heal anybody. And actually sometimes it felt like healing, sometimes it felt like sickening... specifically with... the young woman that was participating, she was describing such horrific acts she performed that she went through a lot of waves through the project, like she left and came back and it was very, very tough to complete the project with her. And I insisted, and it ended up in a very, very positive way, but it could also have ended up in just losing the way.<sup>213</sup>

The idea of healing trauma through testimony has its critics. Some see the idea of TRCs, for example, as putting the idea of suffering in the past and ignoring suffering that may still exist as a result of past events. In her analysis of this position, Heddon points to groups like the South African Khulumani Victim Support Group, which uses narrative to 'forge connections and solidarity between people who suffered and *continue to suffer*.' The group uses stories to create community, make continued suffering visible and demand social change.

Asher's project does not focus its attention solely on the women's experience during the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia. She also asks them about their present

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

lives and their hopes for their country's future. In the *Face\_WSLOT* book, we learn that Anita Jackson lives with the six children she adopted during the conflict; Chris Conteh pays for her housing, childcare and schooling through prostitution, when necessary; and Mahade Pako makes her living through prostitution and stealing. <sup>214</sup> All three women have experienced the loss of close family members, rape and other violence. And each of them is interested in improving the social position of women in Sierra Leone. In the musical piece the women talk about issues like sexism (04\_Suzanna), women's rights and potential political contributions (05\_Why!), the necessity of sex work and crime ('10\_Options' and '11\_PeaceKeepin'), and harassment and discrimination against former rebels ('16\_Confusion'). The book contains statements in which each woman discusses an issue of particular concern to her. Anita Jackson discusses women's health in general and the dangers of female genital mutilation; Chris Conteh decries inequality; and Mahade Pako recommends education as a means of avoiding violence, prostitution and sexually transmitted disease. <sup>215</sup>

Asher's project also allowed the women to do more than express their opinions; it also allowed them to participate in a practical effort to address some of their concerns.

Asher explains that with *Face\_WSLOT* she began a new way of working, which combined 'documentary via the arts' with a support initiative:

The idea is that when you are working on an art project with some subject group at the same time you have to generate some form of support, actual support, material support for the subject group of the project. Because I don't think, my personal experience is it's not enough to just generate art and cause change only with the art work. I think there needs to be some work on the ground. <sup>216</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>214</sup> Meira Asher, 'Life Trajectories,' in *Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things*, 30-61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Meira Asher, Anita Jackson, Chris Conteh, Mahade Pako, 'Woman See,' in *Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things*, 122-139.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

Asher and her collaborators decided to use the income from the project to support third level education for women in Sierra Leone:

And in this case it was very special because we are talking about female ex-child combatants, which were very much stigmatized, stigmatized women who nobody wanted to listen to, or sometimes even get close to actually came out and they spoke very clearly about their experience and very openly, to my surprise. And at the same time they are the ones who generated cash for other women, and some of the ones who stigmatized them, to go to university. <sup>217</sup>

Deirdre Heddon also points out that performances can take testimony beyond the individual therapeutic context of psychoanalysis into a public sphere:

... performances explicitly call forth a witness. Thinking of Roland Barthes' writing on listening, we might consider that performance, particularly performances of testimony, interpolate us as 'listeners', using 'phatic expression' that compels an intersubjective relationship (1986, p. 251). Such intersubjectivity necessarily extends the performance beyond the performer.

The first instance of this intersubjective relationship in *Face\_WSLOT* took place in the studio between Asher, her camera operator Flashkes, and the three performers. She describes the process of working on the project as follows:

... I think we all went through something together... I think the more important point about it is about bringing people together... What we have is the ability to do with our artistic abilities is to perform the stories, I think, in a very deep, deep level. And eh, it's about getting close to each other. It's about just being extremely human, to just sit there and listen, and document it, and listen more, and shut up and listen. And by and by you just become one, you know, there is some kind of a merge that takes place between the performers and the artists. And the performers become artists and we kind of become...

In her published comments on Face\_WSLOT Asher states a wish to create the kind of intersubjective relationship between audience and performers that Heddon describes. In an essay titled 'The Language of WSLOT' she includes some of the questions she had to tackle to create the project including: 'How do you convey a different reality? How do you

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Heddon, Autobiography and Performance, 59.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

re-create a world in a way that brings the spectator closer to another individuals life?' She also invites the reader/listener to '... approach the interpretation of the following texts, sounds and images with a curious and open mind, as well as sharpened senses. Try looking for the overlooked; watch out for ambiguity in terms. With these tools, a spectator can create his/her own reading of the project – a personal communication with the subject at hand.'221

Asher believes that music can play a role in facilitating the connection between the listener and the testimony: 'It helps you to listen to the things that are unsaid... music definitely helps the listener to cope with very difficult issues... there's less walls there the connection is much more immediate.' But Asher does not allow this connection and witness bearing to be easy on the audience. Her aesthetic is rooted in noise and influenced by styles like doom metal. And in *Face\_WSLOT*, her music is loud, dense, and often extremely menacing in character, and her repetition of speech fragments can feel torturous at times. In Asher's words: '... how can you identify with a non-easy journey when it sounds like an easy journey?' She also states: '... I don't believe it [music] needs to be sweet and commercial in order to say things. I think it needs to be as sincere and authentic as possible. That's what, at least, that's what I choose to generate.' The piece '08\_Op.Stampin'Stomach' is a good example of this.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Meira Asher and Guy Harries, 'The Language of WSLOT,' in Meira Asher, *Face\_WSLOT Woman See Lot of Things: Female ex-child combatants in Sierra Leone*, (The Hague and Milan: Bodylab/Auditorium, 2004), 13-17, 13.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Asher and Harries, 'The Language of WSLOT,' 16.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Interview with Meira Asher 02/04/2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>223</sup> Ibid.

'08\_Op.Stampin'Stomach' features the voice of Chris Conteh speaking in English and Kiro as she describes an 'operation' that she participated in, which involved brutally attacking pregnant women and then leaving them for dead. As is the case in *Infantry*, Asher tends to combine difficult subject matter with physically uncomfortable sounds in *Face\_WSLOT*. '08\_Op.Stampin'Stomach', for example, opens with a low pulsing drone (circa 65hz initially) combined with a piercing, very high overtone (circa 12,300hz). The pitch, loudness and long duration of these sounds create an atmosphere of constant tension and discomfort.

The first section of '08\_Op.Stampin'Stomach' (00:00 to 01:00) features short sentence fragments used in a list-like manner. At first the words are mostly unintelligible, as they are heavily processed to create a harsh, metallic sound that evokes the idea of orders coming in over primitive radio equipment. As section 1 progresses, Conteh's speech becomes more and more intelligible, and words like 'operation', 'stamping', and 'pregnancies' stand out establishing the theme of the piece and the mission of the child soldiers.

As section 2 begins (circa 01:00), more high shrill drones are introduced and the crackling, metallic processed speech returns. At first no words are discernible; the sound is mainly recognizable as speech due to its rhythmic contour. At about 01:19, Asher begins to use intelligible speech samples again. As before, Conteh's speech is presented in short fragments which represent the protests the child soldiers may have made against these orders, thoughts passing through Conteh's mind, and the threats made by those in charge

to force the children to do their bidding. Once Asher introduces the various speech fragments, she repeats these short samples, arranging them rhythmically to create a rapid-fire delivery of speech, the effect of multiple voices, and a strong sense of urgency and pressure. By layering speech samples and adding harsh noise sounds that evoke the sense of a combat environment, Asher builds up a very dense texture by the end of section 2.

Section 3 begins abruptly—at about 01:57 most of the sounds drop away, suddenly leaving a low pulsing drone at about 60hz (with an undertone of about 30hz). Throughout section 3, this drone is the most prominent sound and the speech sounds take on more of a background role. As in sections 1 and 2, Asher arranges and layers short sentence fragments. She also pairs relatively unprocessed versions of Conteh's voice with more heavily processed versions by using envelope following of the voice to control a noise sound. Eventually she fades out the unprocessed speech (circa 02:57), but continues to use it to trigger the noise sound, thereby maintaining the rhythmic contour of Conteh's speech after her voice is no longer heard. The final third of section 3 feels like a period of rest. The texture is less dense, the sounds are not as loud, and the bombardment of speech samples has temporarily ceased.

Section 4 begins at 03:38 with the introduction of buzzing sounds that are controlled by Conteh's speech. After about 10 seconds Asher re-introduces Conteh's voice; this it is prominent in the mix. In this section, Asher repeats just 3 sentence fragments ('operations', 'we are doing' and 'we are doing our works') several times, creating a sense of rhythmic groove. She also occasionally extracts word fragments from

the phrases, something she does quite rarely. As the section progresses, Asher uses more and more noise sounds, which creates the effect of bombardment. And at about 05:15, she introduces what sounds like knives being sharpened alongside the words 'we are doing our works,' suggesting the weapons the children used to carry out their gruesome orders.

Asher ends this section by repeating the scraping metal sounds and replaces the speaking voice with the abstraction version she used previously. By this point her listeners are likely so familiar with the rhythmic contour of the three sentence fragments that they may not even need to hear the actual words to think of them.

The metallic scraping sounds continue into section 4 (from about 05:40), but the pulsing bass drone ceases. Conteh's voice can be heard at the beginning of this section, but until about 06:30 it is so heavily processed that it is unintelligible. Early in the section, Asher fades in an environmental recording that suggests village life: the sound of farm animals and children shouting are easy to make out. As she finishes the piece, Asher fades out the scraping sounds and introduces an unprocessed recording of Conteh's voice. She speaks in Kiro, describing exactly what she and her group did to the women they attacked. This is by far the longest speech in the piece, and Asher makes no audible edits. Through the use of abstracted speech, speech fragments and a sound world full of noise and menace, Asher creates the effect of a traumatic flashback in the first few sections of the piece. By presenting Conteh's narration with little or no editing, processing or musical sounds at the end she creates the effect of a therapeutic reconstruction that Heddon describes. Combining Conteh's speech with the sounds of a village suggests both the

intrusion of war into ordinary life and the fact that the child soldiers must carry these horrific memories with them after the conflict is over.

The idea of speaking out and baring witness is a recurring theme in Asher's work. In her recent piece, *refuse: military.1* (2014), she features the words of Noam Gur, a young Israeli woman who has chosen to refuse to serve in the Israeli army. Gur began the process by applying to be seen by a Conscience Board, which deals with refusals of military service by radical pacifists, but that application was refused. At the time that Asher's composition was made, Gur had gone through three trials and been jailed twice for a total of 30 days in military prison. If her case follows the typical process, she will continue to attend hearings and be jailed until either she attempts to persuade a military psychologist that she is mentally incapable of service or the military decides to release her on the grounds that she is unsuitable for service. In an interview with Annie Robbins for *Mondoweiss*, Gur states that she does not intend to apply to be declared mentally incapable of service. Gur believes that the repeated process of jailing people or expecting them to resort to feigning mental illness is intended in part to silence those who resist military service:

The Israeli army is doing everything it can in order to silence any kind of criticism. Sending refusniks to mental officers, for example. People feel like they can just go to a mental officer without jail and it will have the same effect and final result – getting a release of the army. I will not be silenced, I will let people know that I oppose this terrible crimes and make my refuse public, instead of just getting out of the army in the easiest way possible.  $^{224}$ 

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Annie Robbins, 'I refuse to join an army that has, since it was established, been engaged in dominating another nation: Interview with Israeli refuser Noam Gur' http://mondoweiss.net/2012/03/i-refuse-to-join-an-army-that-has-since-it-was-established-been-engaged-in-dominating-another-nation-interview-with-israeli-refuser-noam-gur#sthash.k8QNHGDU.dpuf

As an activist, Gur wishes to make a public refusal of military service and to refuse the pressure to do so silently. Featuring Gur's words in her *refuse\_military* project is a way for Asher to continue her own activism and amplify the voices of other protestors.

Pressure to be silent is a theme that runs through several of Asher's projects. In One Blanket Lost, Nigerian woman Erica reports that the families of prostitutes like her do not want to know how they are making their living in Europe: 'They never want to know how she is living.' There is pressure on the women to stay silent about where the money they send home comes from and to continue making money to send home: '...I don't think this is love.' In the track 'Forget' on Face\_WSLOT, Chris Conteh sings a song in Temne, which calls on people to forget the events of the (recent) past: 'there's nothing to do now.' As the verse repeats, different figures call on the women to forget: 'Johnny Paul', 'Kabbah, Major, Sargent, Mother, Father' indicating that the pressure comes from governmental, military, and domestic sources. As Conteh sings, Asher selects tiny samples of her and repeats them for several seconds at a time. These frozen moments from the song form a kind of accompaniment to it and a comment on it by constantly looking backward at what she has sung already, a granular cloud that seems to do anything but forget. By taking part in Asher's project, Erica, Chris Conteh, and the other women from Face\_WSLOT are refusing to be silent by speaking publicly about things that some people do not wish to acknowledge. But it is unclear from the pieces whether Erica is attempting to force her family to hear the truth about her life, or whether the women in Face\_WSLOT talk about their violent past with members of their community.

#### Conclusion

Both *Infantry* and *Face\_WSLOT* can be seen as examples of secondary orality, but the two pieces have different relationships to orality, literacy, and technology. As described earlier, *Infantry* has a close relationship to texts and literary forms in its creation. It becomes part of the oral world through Asher and Harries' performances of texts in combination with musical sounds (many of which are at least partly improvised). *Face\_WSLOT* has a more immediate connection to spoken language and lived experience through Conteh, Jackson, and Pako's testimony. And although the piece does not make it easy, empathy and intersubjective connection are important elements of it.

Audio technologies, including recording, editing, and processing, play an important role in the presentation and interpretation of spoken language in Asher's work. A curious paradox of audio technologies is that they allow composers to both lean into the features of orality and to pull away from them. Through techniques like close micing, recording can facilitate a sense of direct address and closeness between the speaker and the listener. Artists like Shelley Hirsch and Laurie Anderson make extensive use of this as they attempt to draw in their listeners to share a personal story or perhaps a fireside tale. But recording also allows for the deconstruction and decontextualisation of spoken language. Through sampling, words or strings of words can become objects, which can be repeated, arranged and rearranged temporally, and sonically manipulated without regard for their meaning, or who spoke them.

Audio editing and composition is in part a visual process, like the arrangement of text on a page, in which fragments of spoken language can be arranged according to visually derived patterns. Uses of sampling and processing can have the effect of dehumanizing the speaker (beyond the dehumanization that already takes place through recording), objectifying them through the abstraction of both the meaning of the words they spoke and the speaker's voice. Examples of this can be heard in works like Steve Reich's *It's Gonna Rain*, <sup>225</sup> Pamela Z's *Declaratives in the First Person*, <sup>226</sup> and Alvin Lucier's *I Am Sitting In a Room*.

Asher makes use of the depersonalizing qualities of audio editing in 'Girl,' the opening piece on the album *Infantry*. Josephine Kamara, a Liberian woman that Asher contacted as part of her research, wrote the text for this piece. Asher performs the text, which describes a rape, in a flat, unemotional tone of voice creating a tragic sense of detachment similar to that of the female speaker in Robert Ashley's *Purposeful Lady Slow Afternoon*. Asher uses simple editing to create gaps in her speech, systematically removing all of the personal pronouns for both the girl and the attacker. This simple device suggests the dehumanizing element of this specific attack, but also of the almost systematic sexual violence of many conflicts. It also creates a distance between Asher's reading and the real person whose experience the text describes. By removing words like 'I' from her performance, Asher can share Kamara's experience without attempting to portray her.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Steve Reich, *Early Works*, (Elektra/Nonesuch, 1987).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>226</sup> Pamela Z, *A Delay is Better*, (Starkland, 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Alvin Lucier, *I Am Sitting in a Room*, (Lovely Music, 1990).

Using techniques like sampling and processing does not always have an abstracting effect, though. The repeated use of short speech samples can have the effect of intensifying their meaning, tapping into the ideas of copiousness associated with orality. In a work like *Face\_WSLOT*, where the English dialects and Creole's spoken may be unfamiliar to many listeners, repetition can have the beneficial effect of making utterances easier to understand. Repetition also makes challenging material more difficult to miss, forget, or ignore. In pieces like '08\_Op.Stampin'Stomachs,' Asher uses repetition of words and phrases to make the horror of a situation unavoidable and overwhelming. Repetition makes the violence Conteh was forced to carry out and the threats she lived under inescapable, just as they were for her in reality.

Throughout *Face\_WSLOT* Asher's uses of techniques like sampling and processing take speech into and out of abstraction. She explains:

 $\dots$  when you do stuff like this you have to find the right measurement of compromise between the text [language] and the sound. And there must be a tension between them, they don't hold to each other. So it's like making a radio documentary where you have the music in the background the voice is very clear, so it's a radio documentary. But this is not what I do... I actually intend to create tension between the raw sound and the vocal sound.  $^{228}$ 

In pieces like *Face\_WSLOT*, Asher must balance her impulse to document reality for the purposes of social justice and make art. This desire results in a constantly shifting focus between sense and nonsense (or, perhaps more accurately, intelligible and unintelligible), which pushes the audience to constantly pay attention actively in order understand as much as possible. While Asher provides enough 'information' to create a narrative for the audience to follow her piece neither facilitates nor rewards passive listening.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Interview with Meira *Asher* 02/04/2015.

Meira Asher's work draws attention to violence and injustice in ways that are indicative of secondary orality. We see the self-consciousness of secondary orality in her awareness of the mediating effects of writing and recording. She attempts to address this by providing contextual information for her pieces in ways that make her role as an author and editor visible. In *Infantry* she also makes use of the abstract impersonal aspects of literacy and audio technology, using them to portray the dehumanizing nature of war. But work like *Face\_WSLOT* also attempts to put a human face on the effects of armed conflict by featuring personal stories, showing the wish to communicate and connect that is so common is secondary orality. Asher's use of physically uncomfortable sounds in combination with emotionally difficult testimony and performance texts creates a visceral politically engaged music.

# Chapter 4. Stitching: My Work with Words and Music

Many of my memories of my childhood are of people telling stories and singing songs. My grandfather was known in our town as a great tenor and he reveled in this reputation. He sang at every possible opportunity: at parties, at mass, at his workbench in his shoemaker's shop, and even in front of the fire on weekday mornings as he entertained me and his other grandchildren. My mother loved to sing too. I remember her singing in the kitchen while she cooked meals or did the ironing and singing along with cassette recordings on long drives on Sunday afternoons.

Under this influence, I sang constantly. From a very early age I also loved stories and books, so much so that it took hours to settle me down to sleep at night. My parents indulged me with nightly reading and stories about 'long ago' (their own childhoods) long after I had learned to read myself. Throughout my childhood I loved audiobooks; sometimes reading along with them, sometimes just listening. And a particularly special memory is of my father making tapes of my favorite stories for me to listen to at night while he was away in London for work. Whether they were told to me live or on tape, listening to stories was deeply important to me, and I found it magical. These days not much has changed: I still love to listen to stories as well as read them. I attend author readings as often as I can. I devour narrative radio and regularly listen to audiobooks.

As composer and scholar, I have spent a great deal of time attempting to bring together my interest in music and verbal arts. Discovering experimental music at

university felt like a homecoming, as I found music where speech, singing and abstract sounds came together in fascinating combinations. In the music of artists like Robert Ashley and Laurie Anderson, I felt I had found the something that was missing for me from the musicals, popular music and opera that I had grown up with.

More recently, learning about Walter J. Ong's theories of orality and literacy also brought a feeling of recognition, in the sense that they described what fascinated me so greatly about composers such as Shelley Hirsch, Frederic Rzewski, or Meira Asher. It also gave me a frame of reference for the exploration that was going on in my own creative work. And once I learned about Ong's theories, what had begun as an unconscious exploration became a conscious one. This chapter describes my attempts to navigate the spectrum of orality and literacy and the connections between words and music.

#### Strained Conversations

Strained Conversations (2010), for 4 speaking vocalists, violin, viola, cello, bass drum, was inspired by sound poetry, such as the work of Charles Amirkhanian, and modernist theater, including the work of Samuel Beckett. In this piece I treat words as musical sounds, using whispered and spoken words to create sonic textures and rhythmic events. I also combine the words with instrumental sounds and physical gestures. I created the texts for *Strained Conversations* in the form of a list of words that I found sonically interesting and emotionally evocative. The parts for the four vocalists are based on a single text in which I arranged the words based on their timbral, rhythmic qualities, and dramatic effect. I then divided the text among the four voices, occasionally emphasizing

words by having more than one person perform them, and I sometimes juxtapose whispered and spoken performances of the same word.

While creating this text, I was also interested in suggesting the sense of a story or drama without ever writing one. I wanted the audience to feel that they heard snippets of interesting conversations, or were flipping through the pages of a book, and hoped that their imaginations would fill in the gaps. I used instrumental music, sounds of everyday objects, and physical gestures to heighten the sense of almost theater, almost story. The objects and gestures I indicate include several references to texts and reading. For example, I ask the vocalists to tear or scrunch paper several times, and between bars 33 and 40 the vocalists whisper lists of words while holding open books and turning their pages.

In creating Strained Conversations, I tapped into some of the aspects of literacy that Ong describes, such as its capacity for abstractness. But I was also interested in aspects of orality, such as the view of words as temporal events and the significance of the performers' presence. There is some tension between my attempt to create a sense of almost communication and almost drama by using a list of words. Ong thinks of lists as a uniquely literary device; to him they are 'abstract' and 'neutral', 'devoid of a human action context'. He also claims that '[a]n oral culture has no vehicle so neutral as a list.'229 But the lists that Ong is referring to here are lists of nouns, the names of objects, or people's names in documents like catalogues or histories. Many of the words I chose were verbs, such as 'suffer', 'dedicate', 'crave', 'savour'. Looking back at the piece with

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 121.

knowledge of theories of orality and literacy, I now see that in choosing a lot of verbs I was attempting to relate my list to 'human activity'. And in keeping with the ambiguity of the piece, the form of the verbs I use is ambiguous. When I write 'suffer,' is it a command from one performer to another? Is it an incomplete infinitive suggesting that an undefined person suffers? Is there a missing I, as in 'I suffer', or 'I crave'? I cannot and would not answer this question because the ambiguity creates space for the performers and the audience to interpret the piece as either communicative or alienating.

## linger...figure...flutter...

I return to the idea of incomplete or out of reach narratives in linger...figure...flutter... (2011), a piece for voice, cello, electronics and video that I composed with my collaborator Margaret Schedel. linger...figure...flutter grew out of discussions of imagined and impossible experiences and sensations. We began working on this piece by sharing stories of dreams and real life events in which our imagined experiences felt as or more powerful than real experiences. I then wrote four stories, which were highly fictionalized versions of the stories we shared. I wrote with oral performance in mind, often choosing words for their sonic properties, but I did not try to simulate spontaneous speech. I embraced the idea of reading a 'literary' sounding text to the audience.

After I wrote the stories we each recorded a version of them. These recordings became elements of a multilayered electronic part, which also includes abstract sounds created using everyday objects. In keeping with our interest in sensation, we were

particularly interested in sounds based on friction. So we recorded sounds, including rolling decorative glass balls along a wood floor, brushing hair, and rubbing kitchen utensils against an animal skin topped side table.

In performance, Schedel constantly varies the mix of the layered recordings by using a k-bow to control a max patch, allowing her physical gestures to give a sense of life and contour to the pre-recorded sounds. We chose this method of performing with the recordings to create an experience in which the audience would hear enticing glimpses of stories, which we hoped would spark something in their imaginations, as the complete story is always just out of reach. Our use of technology in this case resembles the abstracting potential of writing and print, which make it easy to disassemble and reassemble texts. Schedel can use her bow to 'drop in' on a story, to reveal a few words and conceal others. But, of course, in our performance the words are still temporal events, rather than visual objects, and the recorded stories progress whether Schedel reveals them or not.

My role in the performance involves less spontaneity. In the opening and closing portions of the piece, I read two halves of a single story, the only one that the audience hears in its entirety. The story is from the point of view of a character who becomes so fascinated with an old women she sees in the street that she eventually follows her home and stands in the street outside, imagining the inside of the house. In the middle section I join in the more abstract element of the performance by improvising with a text derived from the recorded stories in speech and song. To create my text, I chose individual words

and phrases from the stories and arranged them to create evocative, but still abstract, combinations that would hint at a narrative. The text is as follows:

years lived long rain silk sacred light lacy veins shiver slowly ache strange bog skin narrow low rain forgotten

powder light faded needles below bare wind fragments blistering blazing blackened winters gash shoot murky lightening shoots

strange air
no night
dark bubbling ash
demure steps flutter
stealthy care
swish creek crack
wobble squeak turn
blistering

The pre-recorded tracks and performance text allow me and Schedel to work with preparedness and spontaneity in our performances. Spontaneity plays a greater role in Schedel's performance, as her cello sounds and control of the electronics is very free. I am less comfortable with improvisation, and using a text in the middle section feels like a helpful anchor for me. It gives me a starting point to use when responding to Schedel's sounds. It roots me in the stories and in language, which I find inspiring.

linger...figure...flutter can easily be seen as an example of secondary orality as we use writing, recording, and an 'open' form for performance. Ong notes that the spontaneity of secondary orality is dependant on the self-conscious structuring and preparedness of

literacy, and in that way pre-recorded sounds and text provide the foundation for the piece. They provide recognizable elements across performances. But the open aspects of the piece make each performance to unique. They allow us to make use of our interactions with one another on stage as well as with the audience. And they make it possible to change our approach to the piece over time, occasionally creating other versions when we are not able to perform it together.

#### Cat House

In my solo piece *Cat House* (2010), I took a more direct approach to presenting narrative by performing three very short stories live and in full. *Cat House* grew out of a performance I created for a workshop I took with writer and performer Heather Woodbury. At the workshop, she shared a variety of prompts for improvising and writing stories, including choosing fictional situations and imagining how I, or people I know, would behave in them. I ended up creating three stories that are linked by references to blood and cats.

The first story is about a woman who unexpectedly becomes pregnant and loses her baby. After that she realizes that she has grown out of her romantic relationship, now finding it shallow and unfulfilling, so she leaves her partner very suddenly and without a word. I imagine this story as part of a conversation the woman might have if she ran into the man after many years; she is now willing to communicate, but she is not sorry. The second story was inspired by staying in an apartment full of cats while taking Woodbury's workshop. I was having writer's block at the time and the only story I could come up with

was a fictional account of a confirmed cat-hater surrounded by cats. Although it has an unexpected twist at the end this story is quite informal and natural. It is intended to mimic the way friends share stories of funny and absurd experiences over coffee. The third story is a heavily fictionalized version of a story a friend told me about being frightened by strange noises outside his house. Then after investigating, he found a dying animal on the road. It made me think of traditional Irish stories of the Bean Sí and the opening of *Wuthering Heights*, when the ghost of Catherine appears at the window of Heathcliff's house. I think of this story as a reluctant telling by the narrator, perhaps to a close friend, or even a therapist.

In creating this piece, I was more focused on features of orality than I was in *Strained Conversations* or *linger...figure...flutter...* For example, I created the first draft of the stories by recording myself telling them, and then edited them to various degrees. And while I wanted to use the 'unnatural' quality of listing in *Strained Conversations* and *linger...figure...flutter*, I wanted to use a more 'natural', conversational approach in my text for *Cat House*. The drama of the piece is achieved by combining the monologues with music, and in some performances I also included physical gestures like wrapping a ragdoll in red ribbon. I was not interested in performing the texts in a stylized way, so in performance I read or perform the stories from memory at my own pace and play the accompanying sounds by advancing a Max patch in response to cues from the script.

The sounds I work with are relatively simple, but they heighten the emotions and surrealism of the stories. In the first story, I combine three sounds: a recording of a small

child sleeping; a rhythmic sound, suggesting a heartbeat, which becomes increasingly distorted; and a randomized sequence of bell-like sounds that suggest the seeping or dripping away of life that the woman describes. These sounds are gradually corrupted by increasing use of constantly varying delays. In the second story, I use granularized speech to suggest the character's unease about the constant presence of the cats and her sense that they are watching and judging her. And in the third story, I use a very low bass drone to establish a sense of foreboding, as well as very high beating sing tones, which suggest the uncanny but touching moment of connection between the character and the dying cat.

Like many other examples of secondary orality the ideas of communication and interpersonal are important in *Cat House*. Each story is a representation of a conversation; although the interlocutor is absent from the performance, the idea of one is not. In some ways the audience stands in for the interlocutor for each story. When I perform the piece I hope to make a connection with the audience. And after performances people often ask if the stories are about my life and want to share strange stories of their own with me. Although it is fiction the piece feels quite personal and I have never given it another performer and I doubt that I ever would.

## Ciúnas agus Dúil

In *Ciúnas agus Dúil* (*Silence and Longing*) (2011) I continued the idea of telling a story directly, but decided to look towards fairytales and folklore rather than real life for inspiration. This led me to return to the interest in working with fictional rather than dramatic texts that I explored in *linger...figure...flutter...* For *Ciúnas agus Dúil*, I wrote a

story about a magical sea creature called Tonnagh, a name I invented based on the Irish word for wave. She spends years alone in a freezing underwater cave before being awoken by the sounds of a great storm. For the first time in many years, Tonnagh is curious about the world outside. She swims to the surface of the sea and revels in the violent waters of the storm. She follows the storm for many miles and eventually comes upon a currach with a fisherman inside it. Tonnagh decides to rescue him by carrying his boat to shore on her back. After the storm ends, she stays near the land where the man lives and watches over him when he takes to the water. As the fishing season comes to an end, Tonnagh realizes that the man will soon leave the sea for the winter and she will be bereft. She wishes to follow him so fervently that she is transformed into a human woman. The story ends with Tonnagh sitting in the fisherman's boat.

Several sources influenced my writing, including David Thomson's moving collection of folklore about Selkies *The People of the Sea*,<sup>230</sup> as well as legends like Clann Lir, the story of *Ceann Sibéal*, Tim Severin's *The Brendan Voyage*,<sup>231</sup> and spending time with currach maker Monty O'Leary. In writing my text, I wanted to twist and turn through these sources, to create new variations on their themes and add elements of my own.

I took a slightly different view of combining words and music in this piece. I wrote the text with music in mind, intending to use it to enrich the images and emotions of the story, to refer backwards and forwards in time, and sometimes to go against the grain of the narrative. I ended up creating the instrumental music in a similar way to a traditional

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> David Thompson, *The People of the Sea: A Journey in Search of the Seal Legend*, (Berkeley:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>231</sup> Tim Severin, *The Brendan Voyage*, (New York: Modern Library, 2000)

film score by creating musical themes associated with specific characters or ideas. The musical material was to be played at the same time as the narrator would read the story. This differs from *Strained Conversations*, where the words had a dramatic and rhythmic function; or *linger...figure...flutter...* in which the words were often embedded in a sound scape; or *Cat House*, where the spoken words are constantly in the foreground and the music is consistently minimal. The combination of speech and instrumental music that I used in *Ciúnas agust Dúil* can be difficult to balance live, so I was aware that some audience members might occasionally miss words or phrases. I hoped that the combined effect of music and words, especially in portraying mood, would help them to stay oriented in the narrative, as it so often does in opera, for example.

In addition to live speech and live instrumental music, I also used some prerecorded sounds. Some of these are simply theatrical sound effects, made using a
combination of my own field recordings and clips from sound file libraries, to create the
sounds of a storm at sea, and rowing a currach. Another pre-recorded sound was a song
representing Tonnagh's memory of her mother's 'dark water' songs, which she used to
lead the family through deep oceans or sea caves. In this case, I created a text of nonsense
syllables intended to depict the language of the sea creatures. I chose sounds that are
commonly heard in the Irish language, partly in reference to the cultural origins of
Tonnagh's story, but also for aesthetic reasons. I wanted the song to have a gentle quality
and I felt that these syllables facilitated this easily.

When I recorded Rachel Greenway performing the song, I directed her to give it a folky, lullaby quality. After that, I processed the recordings with constantly changing reverb settings to dramatize the sense of navigating through space using sound. I also used recordings to represent Tonnagh's perspective. Most of the story is told live by an external narrator, but towards the end of the piece I wanted to feature Tonnagh's own view in order to convey the intensity of her love for the fisherman and the violence of her transformation. I wanted her voice to be something more than a normal human voice, but it was also important to me to maintain the intelligibility of the words and avoiding processing the voice to the point that it became robotic. As Tonnagh's words represent her thoughts rather than her speech I decided to give them a dreamy quality by using multiple recordings of the same text, including both spoken and whispered versions of it.

I present Tonnagh's words three times, first to express her adoration for the fisherman: 'I would empty the ocean to please you.' Here the use of effects is quite simple: mostly delays, a vocal transform unit to change the formants, and EQ. I present Tonnagh's words for the second time during her transformation and use effects like distortion to evoke the violent effect of the transformation on her body, as the 'change tears through [her] like a hurricane'. I use Tonnagh's words for the third time after her transformation when she finally has a chance to see the fisherman up close. At first I process the layers with reverb and chorus to give them a pretty and full bodied quality, but as Tonnagh realizes that she is now as soft and frail as he is, I strip way the effects and the extra layers of speech to create a thin, weak sound as Tonnagh describes herself as being 'as soft and frail as a mullosc without its shell.'

When I decided to create Ciúnas agus Dúil I saw the project as a way to engage with traditional Irish storytelling. As a child I had been extremely interested in Irish folk tales, but I experienced them through published collections and audiobooks. Seanchaí are more or less extinct and few Irish families tell those stories at home anymore, so I am unlikely to ever experience them in the traditional way. But the idea of traditional storytelling has always attracted me. Stories about selkies and the fairy people of the sea were always of particular interest to me. Thompson's writing about selkie stories suggests that every village in Ireland and Scotland probably had its own version of these tales. So in Ciúanas agus Dúil I decided to create my own version. And I chose to augment the telling of it with the tools available to me as a composer. Combining the live narration with live instrumental music allows me to tap into music's power to enhance a story by evoking emotion and establishing atmosphere. Using live speech allows the narrator and the audience to connect. And adding recorded and processed speech and singing allows me to use the unreality of electronically mediated sounds to evoke the magical aspects of the characters, and the complex voices of the mind.

## Stitching

Stitching is my most ambitious project to date. And in this piece I combine storytelling, drama, and music. Stitching is a musical and multimedia adaptation of Colin Stanley Bell's play Lana's Nana. I approached Bell to suggest collaboration after meeting him at a workshop performance of his play Pigeons. One of the things that attracted me to his work was his style of dialogue, which balances a natural feel with a sense of poetry and humor. He tends to use short sentences and lays out his dramatic texts more like lines

of poetry than paragraphs of dialogue, so I felt that much of his language lent itself to music quite readily. Following some initial discussion, we decided that collaborating on an adaptation of *Lana's Nana* would allow us to make the most of our shared interests like maritime folklore and stories that mingle magic and everyday life. *Lana's Nana* caught my imagination because it is emotionally rich and relatable, but it is also full of magic, whimsy, and humor.

Colin Bell describes *Lana's Nana* as '... a story about how we're all shaped by stories, the true ones and the false.' The play was partly inspired by Bell's experiences of working with older people at a day center in Dunbar, as part of a commission by East Lothian Council to write for their youth theatre company. Bell visited the day center for several weeks and the men and women who attended the center shared their personal stories and recollections of the local area with him. Ideas of family secrets and lost histories stood out to him and became an important part of the story he created.

Memory plays an important role in *Lana's Nana*. Bell decided to create a physical embodiment of memory in the form of knitted garments stored on the planet Saturn. He drew from two sources for this idea. The first was Kabbalah astrology, in which Saturn is a repository of human memories. The second was the legend that traditional cable knitters in Ireland and Britain used unique stitch patterns to identify fishermen from different families. The idea of stitches being used to store information appealed to him. It also resonated with me because I have been interested in handcrafts like knitting and crochet for many years.

Lana's Nana tells the story of a teenager called Lana who lives with her Nana in a small seaside town in Scotland. Nana has always been an outsider as her mother, a local woman, married a German prisoner of war who was held in a camp near the town. This made the family the object of gossip and suspicion. Nana's isolation worsened after her daughter's suicide. She raised her Lana, alone, and encouraged the girl to keep to herself as much as possible. Both Lana and Nana are extremely imaginative people, and Nana invented stories of magic and mermaids to shield Lana from the truth of her mother's death. But now Nana is getting old, and her memory is failing, so Lana cares for her. Hoping to avoid being separated they have kept Nana's illness secret, but people are starting to notice.

Early in the play, Nana disappears from the house during the night and is returned by the local postman, Tom. He turns out to be part of a special team, which takes care of the memories of the townspeople. Tom and his partner Sybil have lived in the town since it was first built and they know everyone's life story. In her desperation, Lana decides to trust them and asks for their help in recovering Nana's memories. After some debate with Sybil, Tom takes Lana to the planet Saturn, where the memories are stored in the form of knitting. They find Nana's file, which is full of holes (representing her lost memories). Lana attempts to repair it, but fails. However, in doing so, she learns about her grandmother's past and her mother's death. Tom brings her home and Lana decides to accept help from Tom, Sybil, and the friends that her grandmother pushed away over the years.

# Adaptation

Lana's Nana was devised as a fully staged theatrical production with a large cast. Our adaptation, Stitching, was intended to be something very different. We planned to tell the story using music, multimedia and a small group of performers. So we needed to adapt the story and its form to suit this performance context. In our planning phase we discussed several dramatic musical pieces, including Robert Ashley's Dust and David Lang's Little Match Girl Passion, to find a common aesthetic for texts to be set to music, or spoken with music. I also annotated the original text, suggesting which sections might be best suited to songs, monologues, projected text, projected images, or recorded speech. And I suggested what kinds of textual changes would need to be made to accommodate musical setting or musical accompaniment, explaining that singing slows the pace of words and requires a higher degree of redundancy to promote comprehension and retention by the audience. In response, Bell decided to simplify the story. For example, he reduced the number of characters and removed the back-story about Nana's parents.

As the collaboration progressed, I ended up taking a more active role in creating the text for *Stitching* than I originally expected, taking a hand in editing Bell's writing, adding text of my own, and assembling the final performance text. To create the final text, I mostly worked from Bell's second draft of *Stitching*, but I also included elements from his first draft and from the script of *Lana's Nana*. In many cases my changes were intended to create song lyrics that fit my aesthetic. I wanted a simple text, especially for songs. I wanted to include enough redundancy to help the audience to follow the story when it was told in song. And I wanted to use repeated patterns in the song texts to

facilitate the use of repetition in the musical material, for the sake of formal coherence and dramatic effect.

The song 'A Flicker on her Face' depicts Tom finding Dorothy wandering in the street. It is a touching moment, which highlights her plight and his kindness. In the opening, I chose to alternate Tom's description with short dance-like phrases (played by vibraphone and piano) to suggest the dance that Nana believes she is travelling to. In Bell's text I was struck by the lines: 'A flicker on her face/ Nipped by the cold/ Something's not right'. I decided to use this text as the template for a kind of chorus. Its melody is heard three times at the end of the piece, first with Bell's lines, and then new text which follows Bell's pattern of syllables, as well as the structure and narrative trajectory of his words. Musically I wanted this part of the song to contrast with the recitative style of the opening, as it is more lyrical in style. Dramatically, I wanted to linger on the description of Nana condition, the sense that she lost and confused at this moment, and the general the feeling that she is fading away as her memory worsens.

Table 1. Comparison of Bell's text and the performance text for 'A Flicker on her Face'

Stitching, 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft	'A Flicker on her Face', Stitching, performance text.
Tom: I found nana at the bus stop Waiting for the number 27 "I'm going to the dancin" She said "Do you like my new frock? I made it myself" She said Stood at the stop in her nightdress	Tom: I found nana at the bus stop Waiting for the number 27 'I'm going dancing,' She said. Stood at the stop in her nightdress. Blue with the early morning frost. 'I'm going dancing,' She said. [On screen: "Do you like my new frock? I made it myself."]
Says I Mrs. O'Malley Have you the right change for the bus? For if you've no, it's hometime for us	'Mrs O'Malley,' Says I. 'Have you the right change for the bus? For if you've none, it's hometime for us.'
I can drive you in the van. In a snap She says 'I need to go home'	A flicker on her face. Nipped by the cold. Something's not right. 'I need to go home,' She said.
A flicker on her face Nipped by the cold Something's not right  I'll take you home	A glimmer leaves her eye. Her smile grows old. She's not herself. 'I'll take you home.'
"I know who you are Would you take me home please?"	I said. [On screen. Tom: 'It's me, Tom.']  There's worry on her face. Pale with the cold. She knows 'I know who you are.' She said.
Arm in arm We go back to her house The first time I've found her But she'll get out again no doubt	'Take me home, please?'  [On screen: Arm in arm, We go back to her house. The first time I've found her But she'll get out again, no doubt.]

In the case of 'There Are Rules,' my agenda was different. The characters of Tom and Sybil transformed somewhat between *Lana's Nana* and Bell's drafts for *Stitching*. I felt that the character of Sybil had become a little cold and difficult to empathize with in

her resistance to Tom's plan to help Lana and Nana. So I wanted to include a song from her perspective, in which she describes her role in caring for the town's memories. Bell and I thought of Sybil as being responsible for big picture issues, and she spends much of her time watching the town from a distance. Tom, on the other hand, collects the memories and has closer contact with the townspeople. Bell made Tom a postman because it would allow him to visit every house without ever attracting attention. In *Lana's Nana* Tom explains to Lana:

Being a postman people don't tend to notice you. You ask anyone the name of their postman, and every generation since postmen began, they'll tell you Tom. Too busy looking to see what's for them. To see it's still me. I'm still here.

In Sybil's song, I wanted to represent the difficulties of leadership. She must always balance her empathy for individual townspeople with the need to ensure that all of their memories are taken care of. To create a song from Sybil's perspective, I converted a dialogue to a monologue. And I added text to depict Sybil's fondness for the people she watches over and hint that she is open to being convinced to allow Tom to help Lana and Nana, for example:

He wanted to help.
He thinks I don't care,
But I watch them every day.
I sort and save their loves and losses.
Yes, there are rules.
But perhaps just once...
Perhaps...

Table 2. Comparison of Bell's text and the performance text for 'There Are Rules'

Stitching, 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft	'There are Rules', Stitching, performance text.
Tom: I wanted to help	
	Sybil:
Sybil: I said	I told him
No Tom we can't	No, Tom, don't get involved.
Don't get involved	'The town's growing fast,
Our role is clear	We need to keep up,
Leave what works well alone	To think of everyone.
	Walk away and do your job.'
<b>Fom:</b> But who would she tell?	
It could be done	He wanted to help.
We could help	He thinks I don't care.
Even just a little	But there are rules.
	Our role is clear.
Sybil: What if we did?	
What if she said?	Each impression, reminiscence, memory,
We'd be inundated?	recollection
With every request	Must be collected, logged, mailed and stored.
Every question	We help to hold this town together.
Where are my car keys?	Ensure things run smoothly.
What happened when	Now and then we hurry things along,
can't remember where I	With a placed piece of news
And so on ad nauseum Tom	[On Screen. Tom: Some might say gossip.]
Then every other town	To catalyze.
Every other place	To stir.
We cannot risk it.	To pry apart.
	To bring together.
Fom: But we could help	But only as directed.
Get her to see	Date only as uncertain
Help her to repair her nana's memory	What if we helped?
After all they've been through	What if she what told?
	We'd be inundated!
Sybil: All they've been through?	With requests,
eve had over 7 centuries of you	Complaints,
1 ve had over / centuries of you	And their questions, questions, questions.
<b>Tom:</b> It's one time in all these years	Spoken:
	'Where are my car keys?'
Sybil: Leave them alone	'Do we need milk?'
Close your ears	'What happened when'
Walk away and do your job	'I can't remember where I'
	'Do you know who'
Tom: Nobody need know	And so on, and so on.
TOM: NOUGH HEED KHOW	[On screen. Sybil: First our town,
Sybil: We need more pigeons	
Focus on that	Then every other town, Where would it end?]
	where would it end?]
Fown's growing fast	'It's just one time ' he said
Need more kit than we've got	'It's just one time,' he said.
Form OV	'After all they've been through.
Tom: OK	None need know,' he said.
OK	'Think of the good we could do.'
Leave it wi' me, but	
Think of the good we could	He wanted to help.

Selectively do-	He thinks I don't care,
-	But I watch them every day.
	I sort and save their loves and losses.
	Yes, there are rules.
	But perhaps just once
	Perhaps

# **Storytelling Techniques**

Stitching is far from being a naturalistic drama. While it is theatrical, it is not intended to be 'fully staged' with extensive sets and singing actors playing each part. Bell and I thought of *Stitching* as dramatic musical storytelling, and our approach took inspiration from work including David Lang's recent choral pieces for small vocal ensemble, Steve Reich's operas and Katie Mitchell's plays. In pieces like *The Little Match* Girl Passion<sup>232</sup> and Love Fail, <sup>233</sup> Lang uses his vocal ensemble as both characters and narrators, shifting between mimesis and diegesis in a live performance that is dramatic, but not theater. Reich's operas are more theatrical, but a great deal of what makes them theater rather than a dramatic piece for musical ensemble is the use of media, video and recorded sound. Due to the documentary element of his operas, he tends not to portray characters but rather references real people who are not present live (their contributions are prerecorded). However, his musicians' live performance supplements the lack of presence associated with the use of recordings. Katie Mitchell is a director who leads acting ensembles in devising multi-media adaptations of novels, such as the 2006 production Waves, <sup>234</sup> based on Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*. <sup>235</sup> Mitchell uses her ensemble of actors to create sound effects live, to operate cameras for live video, to narrate, and to

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> David Lang and Theater of Voices, *The Little Match Girl Passion*, (Harmonia Mundi, 2009)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> David Lang and Anonymous Four, *Love Fail*, (Cantaloupe Music, 2014)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>234</sup> Katie Mitchell, *Waves* at National Theater, London, 2006.

http://59productions.co.uk/project/waves

235 Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*, (New York, Harvest Books, 1978).

portray characters. Her use of electronic media is very transparent. The audience can watch the actors creating sound effects, putting on partial costumes, and assembling and filming tableaus, which look very realistic when filmed. The result is a fascinating mixture of mundane and magical. For Mitchell, character is elastic, so more than one actor may play a single person. They switch, as dictated by the technical and dramatic conditions of the performance. This strongly informed the way I approached characters in *Stitching*, sometimes showing them in photographs on screen, playing recordings of their speech, reporting their speech in the narration and projected text, and having the chorus portray them in song. The chorus is quite a fluid entity in *Stitching*; their voices are used to portray Lana and Nana, as well as Tom and Sybil. But the chorus also narrates on occasion and performs sound effects like the flapping of pigeon wings or bird calls.

### **Text on Screen**

When devising *Stitching*, I was interested in working with layers of language. Having previously undertaken research on the operas of Gerald Barry, I had become interested in the creative opposition to pressure on composers to set text in ways that make it entirely intelligible at all times. In many opera productions, surtitles are used even when the work performed is in the native language of a majority of the audience, in order to overcome the supposed problem of following every word of the sung text. I often find this use problematic, as it can overemphasize the text and distract from the combined effect of language, music and staging. The surtitles, as their name suggests, are above the stage, outside the performance space, detached from the world of the performance. In *Stitching*, I wanted to try working with projected text in a more integrated and creative way, using it to

support, elaborate, and even contradict the words that are sung or spoken. I also wanted to use projected text independently, asking the audience to combine reading and listening to music intentionally rather than as a solution to a problem.

In some situations, I use text on screen to simply 'double' the sung text, taking some pressure off the singers to enunciate at the cost of musical concerns and ensuring that the audience is getting enough 'information' to follow the narrative. This is the case in Sybil's song 'There are Rules,' in which most of the words on screen are drawn directly from her text to emphasize key moments. In 'Say You Make a Memory,' I use text on screen to augment Tom's description of hierarchy among those who collect and store memories. But I also use text on screen to poke fun at his pomposity. For example I list the absurd titles he gives himself: 'Assistant to the Chief-Operating-Officer/ Foreman of the foremost importance/ Supervisor of the capture, protection and delivery of human experience to the storage facilities.' And then strike through his overblown description and replacing it with the word 'Postman'. I also use text on screen to include the voice of a character in a narrated section. For example, in 'Lana's Routine,' the narrator describes Lana's mornings, and the text on screen shows Lana's perspective on it, which provides emotional insight and comic relief.

In 'Lana Marveled,' no words are spoken or sung; the description of the pigeons dropping off memories on the surface of Saturn is presented only as text on screen. Here I was interested in tapping into the privacy and imaginative potential of reading silently.

Many of us have had the experience of escaping into the world of a book as we read, of

inhabiting a special, private, imaginative space. Many of us have also experienced the disappointment of seeing a screen adaptation of a beloved book that fails to live up to the images we had created in our imaginations. Lana arriving at Saturn with Tom is one of the most magical moments of the piece, and I wanted to give the audience space to visualize it for themselves. We are well accustomed to musical sound tracks in films and television, as well as in narrative radio on shows like This American Life or Radiolab. And the ability of music to influence our emotional response to a story, or otherwise color our experience is widely documented. Many people also choose to listen to music while reading, so I chose to pair the words on screen with music intended to create an atmosphere of mystery and wonder. Coordinating the combination of text with music also allows me to influence the audience's reading speed; silent reading is very fast, especially when compared to reading aloud. Slowing the presentation of the text to the pace of the music was part of my effort to allow imaginative space for the audience. They can take time to imagine the world that Lana is visiting, to switch their attention between sound and visuals, or to catch up if their mind wandered.

#### **Live Speech and Recorded Speech**

In devising the adaptation of *Lana's Nana*, Colin Bell and I thought of *Stitching* as a kind of theatrical storytelling rather than a play in the strict sense. We chose to use a narrator who directly addresses the audience, connecting with them and directing them through the story.<sup>236</sup> In some ways we were interested in recreating the childhood experience of being told a story, something that many people experience very rarely as

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>236</sup> At times I allow the characters Tom and Sybil to also take on a narrating role. In 'We Are This Town' and 'One of Those Girls' they also address the audience, describing their position in the town, and Lana and Nana's circumstances.

adults. Using a speaking narrator allowed us to advance the story quickly when necessary; introduce and interact with recorded speech; easily create transitions between songs or sections; and to combine the performance of storytelling with music. Inspired by the exposed tech of theatrical performances like Katie Mitchell's *Waves*, I decided to have the narrator run the multimedia cues from the stage in the workshop performance of *Stitching* at GWU. My thinking was that if the narrator's role is to organize the telling of the story, then they should be the 'source' of the visual and recorded elements of the narrative too. The narrator's presence would be a bridge of sorts between the live and recorded elements. When combining the narrator's speech with music I wanted to maintain maximum intelligibility of the words, so I generally alternate speech and music, such as in 'Lana's Routine' or 'A Little Tin'. In 'Unraveling Memories,' the narrator speaks while music is playing, but I kept the music very simple, by using gentle rolled marimba chords.

Recorded speech features prominently in *Stitching*. For the workshop performance, I worked with Colin Bell and a group of Edinburgh based actors to record lines. One of the reasons for using recorded speech is the element of both presence and distance that comes with recording. Memory plays an important role in the story. For example, the narrator's opening lines are:

In a small village overlooking the Irish sea there lived a couple called Sybil and Tom. They've been there a very long time, ever since the earth was broken to lay foundations for the village. They keep watch over the town, they are its living memory.

The narrator is recalling the story for the audience. She has several resources to share these past events with the audience, such as recordings, photographs, projected text. But as the events are in the past, there will always be some degree of distance. Using recorded speech suggests the presence of the individual characters; the actor's voices suggest bodies

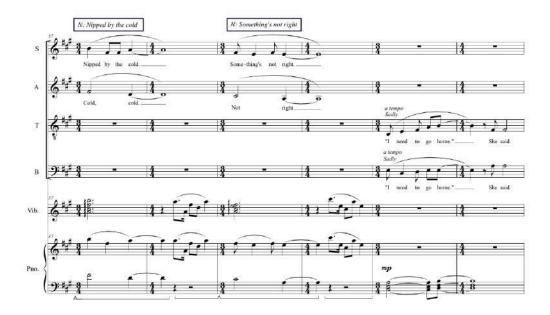
and personalities. Combining the recorded voices with images might give an even greater sense of presence, but not a complete one.

#### The Chorus

When selecting the ensemble for *Stitching*, I decided to use a four-person chorus, as this would give me enough voices to depict individual characters, but also to divide the ensemble for dramatic effects and allow me to expand and contract the harmony as needed. For example, 'A Flicker on her Face' opens with both male voices singing in unison, performing Tom's lines. In bars 10/11 and 20/21, the female voices perform Nana's reported speech 'I'm going dancing.' Here I was interested in contrasting Tom's realistic description of the situation with Nana's fantasy of being young again and on her way to a dance hall. In bars 35-40, 45-50, and 55-60, I used the female voices to depict Tom's thoughts as he notices the changes that are happening to Nana, and in between, the male voices perform Tom and Nana's reported speech. Splitting the ensemble this way allows me to create a clear distinction between Tom's conversational description (which could be addressed to the audience or to Sybil, depending on staging choices) and the world of imagination and thought.

Figure 1. Tom's thoughts performed by female singers, Tom's speech performed by male singers





In 'Wild Stormy Night,' I also used the chorus both to represent characters and for other narrative functions. Here we see Lana attempting to keep Nana attached to the present through routine; they tell the story that Nana created about Lana's mother's death

each day. This piece is the only time that Lana is heard through song in the entire piece and one of the few times that Nana is heard in song. I chose to represent Lana and Nana with alto and soprano voices, respectively, treating them as soloists. But rather than make the piece a duet, I use the male voices as a chorus to create various dramatic effects. The piece opens with Lana starting the story and encouraging her grandmother to remember and join in the telling. In bar 14, I introduce the male voices as a backup for the alto, using the extra voices to depict the strength of Lana's insistence. In other situations, I use the male voices to echo Lana's intensions, such as in bars 34/35. And later in the piece, I use them to voice Lana's unspoken doubts about Nana's story, e.g. 126/127 or 141/142. But the most notable role of the male voices in 'Wild Story Night' is to add weight and drama to the ensemble when describing the terrifying night of the storm. In bars 66-70 they join the soprano and alto to perform a phrase whose musical material recurs several times, with variations in the text.



173 3 57 3 1 73

Perc.

Figure 2. Female and male voices combine to depict the storm in 'Wild Stormy Night'



### Memory

As mentioned earlier, memory is a constant theme in *Stitching*. In 'Lana's Routine' and 'Lana's Routine 2,' we see the pressure that Nana's fading memory put on Lana and the constant shadow that this problem casts over their lives. In 'Wild Stormy Night,' we see the darkness of Nana's memories of her daughter's death, but also her attempt to shield Lana from the tragedy by filtering her memories through fiction. 'There Are Rules' and

'Say You Make a Memory' feature Tom and Sybil describing their role in archiving the memories of the townspeople.

The sequence in which Lana attempts to reconstruct her Nana's missing memories is a key moment in the story. I decided that the most appropriate way to portray it would be to make use of previously heard music to create a literal experience of musical memories for the audience. Some of the references will be very clear to the audience, as I chose material that was repeated in its original presentation and present them with few changes. For example, in the opening of 'Memory Sequence,' I feature material from the opening of 'Wild Stormy Night' with new lyrics to suggest Lana's current mission. I make several references to 'Wild Stormy Night' in this section, as this song describes a significant memory for both Lana and Nana. Telling the story is a memory that binds them to each other; it is a kind of talisman for Lana in her attempts to save Nana's memories. I also wanted to reflect the truth inside the fiction by pairing quotations from the song with revelations of the truth about Lana's mother's death.

Other musical references include transformations of the material. The more musically astute members of the audience may recognize the majority of the quotations and recall their original narrative context. But even those who cannot identify the references will likely have a sense that the musical material is familiar. In measure 27-30 of 'Memory Sequence,' the cello part refers back to melodic material from 'A Flicker on her Face'. Apart from the initial transposition the melody begins the same way in both versions, but it progresses differently due to changes in the direction of the melody and the

interval of transposition, which create a more cheerful tone. This reference is combined with other quotes from 'A Flicker on her Face' to suggest Nana's happy memories from her youth, including meeting her husband at a dance.

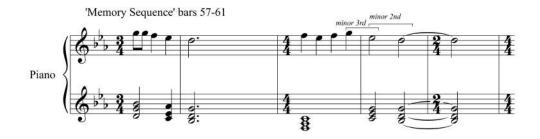
Figure 3. Material from 'A Flicker on her Face' re-presented in 'Memory Sequence'

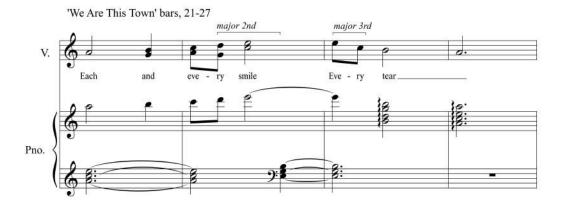


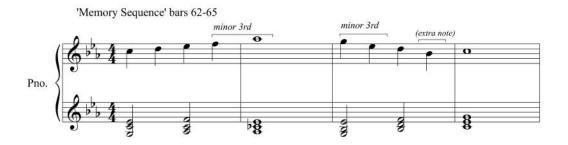
When depicting Lana's mother's depression, I chose to refer to a moment in 'We Are This Town' in which Tom and Sybil describe witnessing the happy and sad moment of the town: 'We've known every pain/ Every laugh'. The reference is made by the piano with no voices or words used. I transposed the melody to fit with the surrounding musical material. I put a greater emphasis on minor chords in the harmony and changed some of the interval sizes in the melody to create a sadder atmosphere. And I made some changes to the rhythm to emphasize slowness and sadness.

Figure 4. Material from 'We Are This Town' re-presented in 'Memory Sequence'



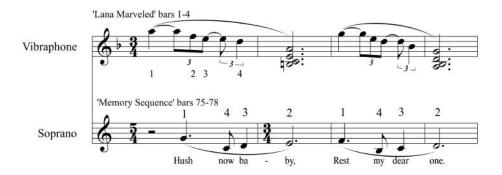






Nana's lullaby, in bars 74-77 and 84-87, is loosely based on the opening of 'Lana Marveled'. I created the melody for the lullaby by reordering the pitches from the vibraphone phrase, which opens 'Lana Marveled'. Like the opening of 'Lana Marveled,' Nana's lullaby consists of two phrases. I kept the descending sequence element of the opening phrases of 'Lana Marveled', but only used the notes of the first phrase.

Figure 5. Material from 'Lana Marveled' re-presented in 'Memory Sequence'



The melody of Nana's lullaby is heard twice, and after each statement, I use two bars of the piano material that follows the vibraphone phrases that open 'Lana Marveled'. Bars 5 and 6 are quoted after the first part of the lullaby, and bars 7 and 8 are quoted after the second statement of the lullaby. In this sequence, I wanted to hint at the bittersweet quality of the loving care that Nana provided for Lana in place of her own daughter, Hannah.

Stitching is my largest scale piece to date, and in this work I had the opportunity to work with live and recorded speech, sung words, and texts on screen. This allowed me to take a multimodal approach to language, which relies on the audience's ability to perceive

language in more than one way. This piece was also an interesting opportunity to collaborate with a writer, and take part in adapting a dramatic text for combination with music and multimedia. The process of adaptation helped me to clarify some of my aesthetics related to the combination of words and music, such as my preference for monologue rather than dialogue.

#### **Conclusion**

Like the other work profiled in this study my work reflects the influence of orality and literacy. I am fascinated by the sound of words when they are spoken or sung. And I have experimented with a variety of writing styles and musical combinations in the last few years. Like many artists working in the context of secondary orality my work often shows a desire for communication and interpersonal connection, but it also reflects on and makes use of the mediating, abstracting potential of writing and composing music using audio technologies.

# **Conclusion**

The music discussed in this dissertation exists in the context of secondary orality. It is related to cultural practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including storytelling and poetry, through the influence of orality, literacy, and technology. Many of the works described show traits like a desire to communicate; prioritizing interpersonal connection; making use of the organized thinking processes of literacy; and exploring the mediating effect of technology.

Frederic Rzewski demonstrates the possibilities of artistic expression when combing words with music. The compositional process of *Coming Together* shows a great deal of influence of writing and print. Rzewski started with fragments: melodic fragments and sentence fragments, and then used similar rule based systems to develop this material into a multi-section piece for speaker and instrumental ensemble. This kind of approach depends on the ability to think of music and words as visual objects rather than events in time. As this work was created in the context of secondary orality, we also see an interest in community and spontaneity in his performance instructions for the instrumentalists. These instructions give them some freedom to create a unique reading of the piece each time it is performed. But, of course, the spontaneity is carefully planned; it references notated music and written instructions. The speaking performer is in a more confined position with few choices about how to read the text.

In *The Waves*, Rzewski uses another 'squaring' procedure to work with the text fragments. But he seems to have taken a freer approach to composing the music, although

patterns reminiscent of the 'squaring' process appear at points in the score. His performance instructions to the musicians give them an even greater range of choices about how to read the text than *Coming Together*. And this time, one-on-one interactions are also very important. But just as was the case in *Coming Together*, the speaking performer has few choices about what or when to perform. Although both pieces can result in extremely engaging performances, the composer does not really take advantage of the presence of the speaking performer or their potential to perform challenging material.

However, in solo pieces like *Lost and Found* and *De Profundis*, Rzewski combines the role of speaker and musician. In both cases, he created pieces for specific musicians and seems to have been influenced by the musical ability of these individuals in his approach to the text. Both pieces are quite challenging dramatically and musically. It also probably takes a lot of nerve to perform music almost naked or to include erotic breathing in a performance. Both pieces put the performer's presence to the fore and they give the speaking performer the kind of choices that allow them to create highly individual interpretations of the pieces.

Shelley Hirsch's work includes writing, but it favors the orality end of Ong's spectrum. Her narrative works are highly communicative; her performance style creates the sense of a direct address to the listener. And through her depiction of her childhood in Brooklyn, for example, it is certainly close to the human life world. Pieces like *O Little Town of East New York* are both relatable and exaggerated, which makes them highly entertaining. In her studio work, she combines written materials with improvisation. And

she uses the tools available in the studio to record, transform, combine and structure her materials. As is often the case in secondary orality, the spontaneity of orality and the carefully devised, structured nature of literacy intertwine.

In *O Little Town of East New York*, Hirsch performs her recollections of the people and places that loomed large in her childhood. At times she seems to meditate on names and addresses, repeating them to conjure up the people associated with them. She often seems to draw their voices from the depths of her memory and performs their stories in the style in which they spoke. Hirsch is well aware of the balance of fact and fiction that is inevitable in autobiographical work. She investigates this very creatively by revisiting some of the stories of *O Little Town* in *The Vidzer Family*. Here Hirsch brings together aspects of documentary and the kind of creative non-fiction found in *O Little Town*. She intertwines recorded material from an interview with her childhood friend Aida Vidzer with her own author's commentary, creative writing about her recollections, songs based on the narrative, and other musical sounds. In *Memory of Childhood Dancing*, Hirsch augments her storytelling with interview material from her father and creative use of pop music samples. In her use of sampling, Hirsch embraces intertextuality, using musical references to underscore the themes of her story.

Meira Asher explores the intersection of sound and text throughout her work. In their 2002 piece *Infantry*, Meira Asher and her collaborator Guy Harris use the knowledge gleaned from reading textual sources to dramatize the effect of war on children through musical performance. List forms are prominent in this piece. The use of lists references the

textual sources used to develop *Infantry*: NGO reports. They provide a sense of distance and scale, in the sense that the horrific situations Asher and Harris describe are widespread and systematic rather than individual tragedies. Ong associates lists with the abstract, objectifying properties of literacy. But in performance ,lists have other potential. Asher associates her use of lists with chanting, a musical technique that she has spent a great deal of time on in her career. Her list forms often use patterns and repeated material, which taps into the features of orality, such as the use of mnemonic devices and copiousness or redundancy. As political music, it makes sense that Asher would want to promote understanding and retention by her audience. Forgettable political music would not make much impact on listeners.

In her 2004-06 project *Face\_WSLOT*, Asher chose to use people as her sources rather than texts. This allowed her to associate the themes explored in *Infantry* with individuals. She hopes that her audience will be able to experience a personal connection with the women featured in her project. The contextual information that Asher supplies with the *Face\_WSLOT* CD shows her awareness of the power of the artist to shape personal narratives by directing the interview process and editing the recorded materials. But it also shows her belief that the artist can be not only a filter, but also a bridge between the interview subjects and the audience. In *Face\_WSLOT*, Asher uses music to facilitate the connection between the listener and the recorded testimony. She believes that music helps to draw attention to what is unsaid and facilitates close connection to what is heard. But Asher does not make it easy for her audience to bare witness to the women's testimony; her music is loud, dense, and aggressive in character. It also constantly shifts

between 'sense' and 'nonsense,' forcing the audience to listen very activity if they wish to follow the narrative.

Like Rzewski, Hirsch, and Asher, I have also worked with abstraction and narrative in my music. At times I also embrace communication and sometimes attempt to question it, put it just our of reach, or avoid it altogether. In *Strained Conversations*, I reference the abstraction and ambiguity of sound poetry and modernist theater. I treat words as rhythmic events, combining them with a simple bass drum rhythm and string sounds. I created the text by listing words that I found sonically engaging and evocative. By writing an abstract but somehow emotionally charged text, I wanted to reference half heard conversations and the words and phrases that draw the eye when flipping through the pages of a book. I hoped that the sense of almost story would spark imaginative experiences for the audience. Some may find the piece communicative; others will find it alienating. Both are valid reactions to it.

I took a similar approach when collaborating with Margaret Schedel on linger...figure...flutter... In the live electronic part that Schedel controls with her k-bow, we layered stories and abstract sounds, allowing her to dip into each of the layers while playing cello. This approach offers brief glimpses of the various narratives, but the full story remains of out reach. I reference this idea by creating a textual starting point for my improvised section. The words I use are drawn from the stories, but are combined into an abstract sequence of words.

In *Cat House* and *Ciúnas agus Dúil*, I present stories more directly. *Cat House* features three dramatic texts in the form of monologues spoken to an imagined interlocutor. In this piece, simple music provides a backdrop for the monologues, creating a suitable atmosphere for the performance. *Ciúnas agus Dúil* is a short story told with music. In this case the music is more complex, with material being repeated and transformed to underscore the themes of the narrative. In this piece I also use recorded and processed speech to depict magical characters and the complex world of the mind. In this way, I explore the capacity of audio technology to present words in ways that go beyond reproducing real voices.

In *Stitching* I collaborated with Colin Bell to adapt his play *Lana's Nana*. The text that we created was designed to facilitate a musical setting that included live and recorded speech, instrumental music, singing, and projected text. I saw the piece as a kind of dramatic musical storytelling that makes use of the various ways in which we can perceive words. When creating song texts, I prioritized features of orality like redundancy and repetition. This allowed me to create music that included repeating melodic material to give it a sense of coherence and memorability. It also helped to ensure that the audience would not get lost when the narrative progressed through song. The narrator's text tended to be short and to the point, as this character was often used to make quick narrative progress. Generally, recorded speech is used to reference the idea of memories being conjured up. While the remembered conversations are lifelike, giving a sense of the character's personalities through their voices and speech, it is still at a distance.

Walter J. Ong's theories of orality and literacy offer insights into the use of words in many cultural practices. In this case they have helped me to gain insight into music that interests me by artists who have combined music and words in fascinating ways. But Ong's theories also helped me to understand my own compositional work better. When I worked on *Stitching* I engaged with his theories consciously. And it proved to be a fruitful process in which I was able to begin exploring a multi-modal approach to language in a more profound way. Awareness of Ong's theory suggests many other possible ways of engaging with words in my music. And I hope that these theories will prove to be a source of inspiration for many years to come.

# Appendix 1. Description of Frederick Rzewski's Squaring process in *Coming Together*.

This description is based on the following motifs:



#### Notation method:

- a-1 = omission from end of motif
- -1a =omission of beginning of motif
- a(-1)= omission inside the phrase with right to left movement
- (-1)a =omission inside the phrase with left to right movement

 $\mathbf{P} = \mathbf{permuted}$ 

 $\mathbf{R}$  = reversed

#### Section A.

- a-2
- a-1
- a
- a, b-2
- a, b-1
- a, b
- a, b, c-3
- a, b, c-2
- a, b, c-1,
- a, b, c, d-4
- a, b, c, d-3
- a, b, c, d-2
- a, b, c, d-1
- a, b, c, d
- a, b, c, d, e-5
- a, b, c, d, e-4
- a, b, c, d, e-3
- a, b, c, d, e-2
- a, b, c, d, e-1
- a, b, c, d, e
- a, b, c, d, e, f-6
- a, b, c, d, e, f-5
- a, b, c, d, e, f-4
- a, b, c, d, e, f-3
- a, b, c, d, e, f-2

```
a, b, c, d, e, f-1
a, b, c, d, e, f
-1a, b, c, d, e, f
-2a, b, c, d, e, f
b, c, d, e, f
-1b, c, d, e, f
-2b, c, d, e, f
c, d, e, f
-1c, d, e, f
-2c, d, e, f
-3c, d, e, f
d, e, f
-1d, e, f
-2d, e, f
-3d, e, f
-4d, e, f
e, f
-1e, f
-2e, f
-3e, f
-4e, f
-5e, f
f,
-1f
-2f
-3f
-4f
-5f
Section B.
a, b, c, d, e, f
f
f, e-5,
f, e-4,
f, e-3,
f, e-2,
```

f, e-1, f, e f, e, d-4 f, e, d-3 f, e, d-2 f, e, d-1 f, e, d f, e, d, c-3 f, e, d, c-2 f, e, d, c-2 f, e, d, c-1

```
f, e, d, c
f, e, d, c, b-2
f, e, d, c, b-1
f, e, d, c, b
f, e, d, c, b, a-2
f, e, d, c, b, a-1
f, e, d, c, b, aP
-1f, e, d, c, b, aP
-2f, e, d, c, b, aP
-3f, e, d, c, b, aP
-4f, e, d, c, b, aP
-5f, e, d, c, b, aP
-6f, e, d, c, b, aP
e, d, c, b, aP
-1e, d, c, b, aP
-2e, d, c, b, aP
-3e, d, c, b, aP
-4e, d, c, b, aP
-5e, d, c, b, aP
d, c, b, aP
-1d, c, b, aP
-2d, c, b, aP
-3d, c, b, aP
-4d, c, b, aP
c, b, aP
-1c, b, aP
-2c, b, aP
-3c, b, aP
b, aP
-1b, aP
-2b, aP
aP
-1aP
-2aP
```

## Section C.

a aP aP, bR-2 aP, bR-1 aP, bR aP, bR, cR-3 aP, bR, cR-2 aP, bR, cR-1 aP, bR, cR

- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**-4
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**-3
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**-2
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**-1
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**-5
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**-4
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**-3
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**-2
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**-1
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-6
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-5
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-4
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-3
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-2
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**-1
- a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -1a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -2a**P**, b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -1b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -2b**R**, c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -1c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -2c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -3c**R**, d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- $d\mathbf{R}$ ,  $e\mathbf{R}$ ,  $f\mathbf{R}$
- -1d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -2d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -3d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- -4d**R**, e**R**, f**R**
- e**R**, f**R**
- -1e**R**, f**R**
- -2e**R**, f**R**
- -2e**R**, f**R**
- -4e**R**, f**R**
- -5e**R**, f**R**
- f**R**
- -1f**R**
- -2f**R**
- -3f**R**
- -4f**R**
- -5f**R**
- -6f**R**

#### Section D.

- f**R**-6
- f**R**-5
- f**R**-4
- f**R**-3
- f**R**-2
- f**R**-1
- fR,
- f**R**, f**R**-6
- f**R**, f**R**-5
- f**R**, f**R**-4
- f**R**, f**R**-3
- f**R**, f**R**-2
- f**R**, f**R**-1
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-6
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-5
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-4
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-3
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-6
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-5
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-4
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-6
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-5
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-6
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- fR, fR-1, fR-2, fR-3, fR-4, fR-5
- (-1)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-2)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-3)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-4)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-5)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-6)f**R**, f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-1)f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-2)fR-1, fR-2, fR-3, fR-4, fR-5
- (-3)f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-4)f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-5)f**R**-1, f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-1)f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-2)f**R**-2, f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-3)fR-2, fR-3, fR-4, fR-5

```
(-4)fR-2, fR-3, fR-4, fR-5
```

- f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-1)fR-3, fR-4, fR-5
- (-2)f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-3)f**R**-3, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-1)f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- (-2)fR-4, fR-5
- f**R**-5
- f**R**-5
- (-1)f**R**-5
- (-1)f**R**-5

#### Section E.

- -6f, -6f, -5f
- -5f, -6f
- -5f, -4f(-1)
- -5f, -4f
- -5f, -4f, -6f
- -5f, -4f, -3f(-2)
- -5f, -4f, -3f(-1)
- -5f, -4f, -3f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -6f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f(-3)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f(-2)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f(-1)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -6f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f(-4)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f(-3)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f(-2)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f(-1)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, -6f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f(-5)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f(-4)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f(-3)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f(-2)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f(-1)
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -5f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -6f, -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -4f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -5f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f

```
-6f, -3f, -2f, -1f, f
```

- -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -3f, -2f, -1f, f
- -4f, -2f, -1f, f
- -5f, -2f, -1f, f
- -6f, -2f, -1f, f
- -2f, -1f, f
- -2f, -1f, f
- -3f, -1f, f
- -4f, -1f, f
- -5f, -1f, f
- -6f, -1f, f
- -1f, f
- -2f, f
- -3f, f -4f, f
- -5f, f -6f, f
- f
- f
- -1f
- -2f
- -3f
- -4f
- -5f
- -6f

### Section F.

- a, b, c, d, e, f,
- f, -2b
- f, -1b
- f, -1c
- f, -1d,
- f, -1e
- f, -f1
- f, -1f, -2b
- f, -1f, -2c
- f, -1f, -2d
- f, -1f, -2e
- f, -1f, -2f
- f, -1f, -2f, -3c
- f, -1f, -2f, -3d
- f, -1f, -2f, -3e
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4d
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4e

- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5e
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f
- f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -1f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -2f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -3f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -4f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -6f, -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -1f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -2f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -3f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -4f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -6f, -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -2f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -3f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -4f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -6f, -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -3f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -4f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -6f, -4f, -5f, -6f
- -4f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -5f, -6f
- -6f, -5f, -6f
- -5f, -6f
- -6f, -6f
- -6f

#### Section G.

- f**R**-6, f**R**-6, f**R**-6,
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-6,
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-5,
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-6
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-5
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-4
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-6
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-5
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-4
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-3

- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-6
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-5
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-4
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-3
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-2
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-6
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-5
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-4,
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-3
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-2
- f**R**-6, f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**-1
- fR-6, fR-5, fR-4, fR-3, fR-2, fR-1, fR
- f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -1f**R**-5, f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -1f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -2f**R**-4, f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -1f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -2f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -3f**R**-3, f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -1f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -2f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -3f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- -4f**R**-2, f**R**-1, f**R**
- f**R**-1, f**R**
- -1f**R**-1, f**R**
- -2f**R**-1, f**R**
- -3f**R**-1, f**R**
- -4f**R**-1, f**R**
- -5f**R**-1, f**R**
- f**R**
- -1f**R**
- -2f**R**
- -3f**R**
- -4f**R**
- -5f**R**
- -6f**R**
- Section H.
- f**R**-6
- f**R**-5
- f**R**-4
- f**R**-3

- f**R**-2
- f**R**-1
- f**R**
- f**R**, -1f**R**-5
- f**R**, -1f**R**-4
- f**R**, -1f**R**-3
- f**R**, -1f**R**-2
- f**R**, -1f**R**-1
- f**R**, -1f**R**
- f**R**, -1 f**R**, -2 f**R**-4
- fR, -1 fR, -2 fR-3
- f**R**, -1f**R**, -2f**R**-2
- fR, -1 fR, -2 fR-1
- fR, -1fR, -2fR
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR-3
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR-2
- f**R**, -1f**R**, -2f**R**, -3f**R**-1
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR-2
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR-1
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR-1
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR
- fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -1fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -2fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -3fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -4fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -5fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -6fR, -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -1fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- $-2f\mathbf{R}$ ,  $-2f\mathbf{R}$ ,  $-3f\mathbf{R}$ ,  $-4f\mathbf{R}$ ,  $-5f\mathbf{R}$ ,  $-6f\mathbf{R}$
- -3f**R**, -2f**R**, -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -4fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -5fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -6fR, -2fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -2f**R**, -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -3fR, -3fR, -4fR, -5fR, -6fR
- -4f**R**, -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -5f**R**, -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -6f**R**, -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -3f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -4f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -5f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -6f**R**, -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**
- -4f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R**

-5f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R** 

-6f**R**, -5f**R**, -6f**R** 

-5f**R**, -6f**R** 

-6f**R**, -6f**R** 

6f**R** 

# Appendix 2. Stories from linger...figure...flutter...<sup>237</sup>

#### Bag woman (Part 1, used in the opening of the piece)

Years ago, when I lived in the city, I took an evening class on the other side of the river, in the newer part of town. I liked walking home after, thinking about what we'd learned, looking at the buildings and the people I passed. On one of the old rambling streets near the river I often saw a strange old woman, walking alone, pulling a wheeled shopping bag behind her. The bag was so old its floral pattern had faded to a ghostly lace, and the wheels wobbled, squeaked and rattled as they turned. She made her way down the street slowly, stopping often to scrutinize the contents of rubbish bins, look inside plant pots on windowsills, or peer into the gutters beside the road. It was as if she was searching for something, but had long ago forgotten what. The more I saw her the more interested in her I became, and would walk slowly behind her, so I could watch her for longer. Looking at her made my heart ache, and I often wondered if I should do something for her, but I had no idea what she might need from me. She didn't look unfed, and though her clothes were ancient they were clean and warm. It surprised me that she wasn't frightened to be out alone at night, but I don't think she cared what time it was. And she never seemed to notice me, or the groups of young people standing outside the old pubs talking and smoking. We were like ghosts to her.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> A recording is not available for this piece so these texts and the tape parts are supplied. A one-minute fixed media version created for 60x60 is also included.

#### Bag woman (Part 2, used in the closing section of the piece)

One rainy night I didn't just slow down and watch her for a few minutes, I followed her, taking tiny steps to match her slow pace, and keeping a good distance between us. Eventually she reached the end of the road and crossed the river, then she walked up the hill towards the oldest part of town. I doubt I was very stealthy, but the old woman never even turned her head, maybe she still didn't notice me, or maybe she just didn't care. As she walked through the narrow streets lined by small windowed houses with low doors she didn't stop so often. She weaved through the twisting lanes and finally stopped at a small dark house, took a key from her pocket, and opened the chipped front door. The woman switched on the hall light as she entered, and I saw beige paper peeling from the walls. She closed the door and I just stayed in the street watching the house. Through the thin curtains I saw a light come on upstairs. I pictured magnolia paint bubbling off the walls, dark wood furniture, the smell of ash and mildew and, cool cotton sheets, silk soft and translucent with age. I imagined a sacred heart picture on the wall, and rosary beads passing through her fingers. I don't know how long I stood in the rain watching and thinking, but when the light went out I got a strange, lonely feeling that made it hard to go.

#### **Bird** (Used in electronic parts)

The Autumn air is cool and crisp, it's early, and the trails are almost empty of people.

Wind swishes through the trees, bows crack and creek, and an assortment of birds coo and chirp gently, as if still a little sleepy. My feet fall softly on years upon years of faded leaves and rusted needles, crunching through the crepe top layer to the spongy humus

below. As I walk I scan the ground for bulging roots I might trip over, and in the sepia mosaic of elm, ash, oak, and beech traces I spot the tiniest bird, a demure little fledgling, who seems to hop from place to place more than fly, landing on the leaves with a quick, crisp flutter. I open my mouth wide and imagine his little feet landing pit pat on my tongue, and closing my mouth to envelop the shy, almost weightless creature, feeling beak against teeth, and tail feathers brushing my pallet. All the time he moves in tiny twists and turns, and his feathers feel like powder on a breeze, dusting all the surfaces of my mouth. I savour the feeling of his nervous heart pattering against my cheek, and I seem to know the bird completely, to feel all the life inside this blithe, tender bundle. The blood in his lacy veins slows its tenuous flow to meet the quickening of my pulse. Just the thought of his heart meeting mine makes me shiver, and the goose bumps on my arms feel like the first buds of powder-light feathers of my own.

#### **Redwood (Used in electronic parts)**

Through the murky air the lightning shoots towards me like an arrow, slicing though me like a hot knife, like a shark's tooth, like a spade through bog. It forms a great gash that splits a hundred years of winters, and summers, springs and falls. But though I am divided my brawny, calloused trunk endures unperturbed, growing as slowly and surely as it always has. Days weeks and months go by, and with the sweating summer heat comes a blistering and burgeoning of sap, blazing red like fresh blood against my blackened flesh.

#### **Baby** (Used in electronic parts)

I'm in an apartment, very modern and pristine white. Somehow I know it's mine, but I don't recognise anything. Did I choose this marble and chrome? I stand alone behind a tasteful kitchen island, and stare at a group of friendly but unfamiliar faces. I ache with a dull, bloody pain. It's as if my organs have become too heavy, they seem to strain against my skin, as if they might burst through my pelvis at any moment. Some how I also feel hollowed out, as if something essential has been taken from me, but what? I don't remember being ill or injured, but something is missing. The people talk and laugh, but I don't hear a word they say as I walk across the room and through the front door, which leads directly to a wood full of mammoth old trees. Dry leaves crunch under my bare feet, leaving dusty fragments between my toes. Despite the dragging pain that burns in my belly I walk through the woods for hours, until I reach a huge old redwood tree, bent and burst by wind and lightening so it cradles an amber form. I know this scene is nothing more than damaged wood and sap, but at the sight of it my lungs empty, my breasts ache, and I know what was lost.

# **Appendix 3. Score:** *Strained Conversations*

## Strained Conversations

for 4 speaking vocalists, violin, viola, cello, bass drum

by Sarah O'Halloran

2010

#### Notation and abbreviations

Spoken

Whispered

A gesture or action without an accompanying or word

@ SP Look at string players

@ P

Look at percussionist

SA

Look straight ahead

@ V(1) Look at the indicated vocalist

Turn page

TP

them to be performed at a fairly natural speed with minimal exaggeration. the paper I regard it as preparation so it should be done discretely. Most of the gestures required are 'everyday' actions, I would like the gesture, for example to tear the paper you would first have to pick up the paper, if there is no specific instruction about picking up With regard the physical gestures the notation indicates when they should begin. In some cases performers will need to prepare for

#### Performance instructions

asked to speak or whisper the words in a fairly neutral tone, avoid acting. I intend for the drama of this piece to come from the associations that it sparks in the minds of the audience members. Performers are

#### Props

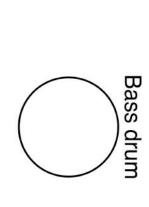
Voice 4	Voice 3	Voice 2	Voice I
3 pieces of paper (something light eg news paper or tissue wrapping paper, any colour), 1 book that can lie flat when	5 wooden chopsticks or pencils, I candle, matches, I book that can lie flat when open	small jug of water (300-400 ml), glass vase (1 or 2l volume) its mouth should be large enough to easily drop the pebbles into, 4 pebbles (ideally flat and 3-5cm diameter), 1 candle, matches, 1 book that can lie flat when open	5 pieces of A4 or letter size paper (performers may choose a variety of colour and types, and pages may be printed or blank). I can lie matches, I book that can lie flat when onen

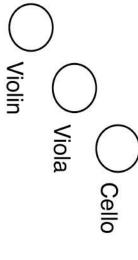
Cello		Viola		Violin
I apple, 1-4 coins, I piece of fabric	Optional: Wet wipes to clean hands after biting the apple	I apple, 1-4 coins, I piece of fabric	Optional: Wet wipes to clean hands after biting the apple	I apple, 1-4 coins, I piece of fabric

Optional: Wet wipes to clean hands after biting the apple

open

#### Preferred stage positions





for their props. Each one should Each string player will need an extra music stand or a table beside them to drop the coins onto. place a piece of fabric on the floor

#### Vocalists





small table for their props. Each vocalist will need a





#### Violin - text for bars 5-17

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Pithy Vigil Spurning Bloom **Sharply Malinger** Glib Scandal Florid Impasse Greedy Exile **Burnished Crime** Silent Momentum Wilful Blush Wise Illusion Vulgar Shore Wan Gathering Glorious Reproach Fleeting Claw Ashen Fetish Fanatic Dissolve Prodigal Fallow Languid Blight Loose Innocence Inert Pith Lucidly Infect Tawdry Scar Myopic Nuance Sickened Root Zealous Wilderness Compliant Pariah Sullied Tedium Credulous Alacrity Broken Atonement Recovered Eloquence Coveted Escape Plastic Insult Shabby Fulfilment **Exploited Damage** Uncanny Prestige Bleak Friction Dour Folly Profane Clarity Composed Impulse Inflexible Ethic Verdant Doctrine Jocular Vestige Insipid Larceny Erudite Effrontery

Candid Deluge

#### Viola - text for bars 7-17

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Obscure Shine  Nominal Proclivity  Weary Offering  Slow Despair  Mournful Sleen  Mournful Sleen  Deformed Missive
ng e

Dim Chaos

#### Cello - text for bars 8-17

Caustic Honour

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Opaque Parasite **Burnished Flood** Austere Dithering Blithe Diatribe Luminous Fervour Grievous Apathy Pious Artifice Vague Offering Convoluted Effigy Engaged Static Irksome Perish Austere Flame Urgent Slack Wary Drone Savage Graft Parched Rebuke Replete Fake Relentless Dagger Gnarled Tirade Extravagant Force Laconic Euphemism Impoverished Guile

Eclectic Dogma Ringing Hurt Numb Expert Drunk Bleating Revolving Schism Effusive Variance Rapid Vice Grim Hesitation **Profane Clarity** Officious Paradox Embroidered Spike Whimsical Catalogue Prudent Grief Awakening Absolution Fluent Peal Wary Discord Dire Quirk Indolent Dissonance Cloying Ingrate Latent Trace

## Voice 1 - text for bars 33-40

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Pristine Gripe
Erratic Compensation
Fetid Glower
Impious Collusion
Hapless Ardour
Droll Efficacy
Kinetic Juncture
Enlightened Toll
Prudent Grave
Surplus Grief
Rapid Falter
Immoral Jangle
Pierced Memory
False Elegy
Incessant Strength
Irked Prudence
Rancid Lethargy

## Voice 2 - text for bars 34-40

Lauded Exile

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Cheapened Catalyst
Fierce Grovelling
Lavish Scold
Greedy Torpor
Nascent Wail
Arbitrary Gestation
Contrite Defect
Itinerant Jargon
Frugal Hyperbole
Indolent Dissonance
Verbose Strife
Gleaned Deadlock
Crystallised Shower
Banished Chime
Rotten Crest
Arduous Bluff

## Voice 3 - text for bars 34-40

Testy Paragon

before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

Stiffening Allegory
Lewd Redress
Curious tone
Dazed call
Rampant border
Ingenious shade
Dainty edition
Supplanted voice
Versatile fury
Dark Ration
Fictional abstinence
Early cave
Grey audacity
Earthy danger
Damp absolution
Abandoned face

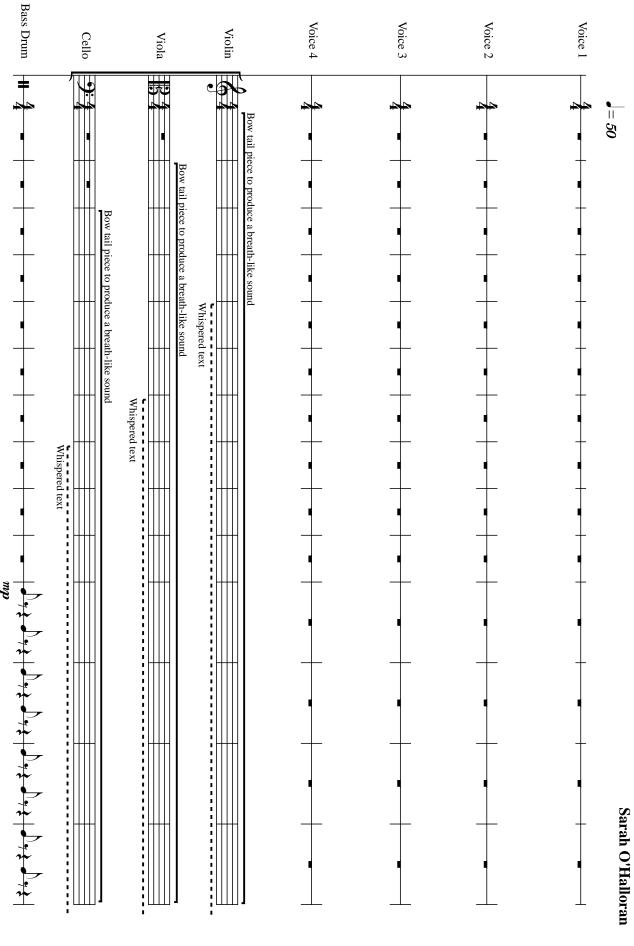
## Voice 4 - text for bars 34-40

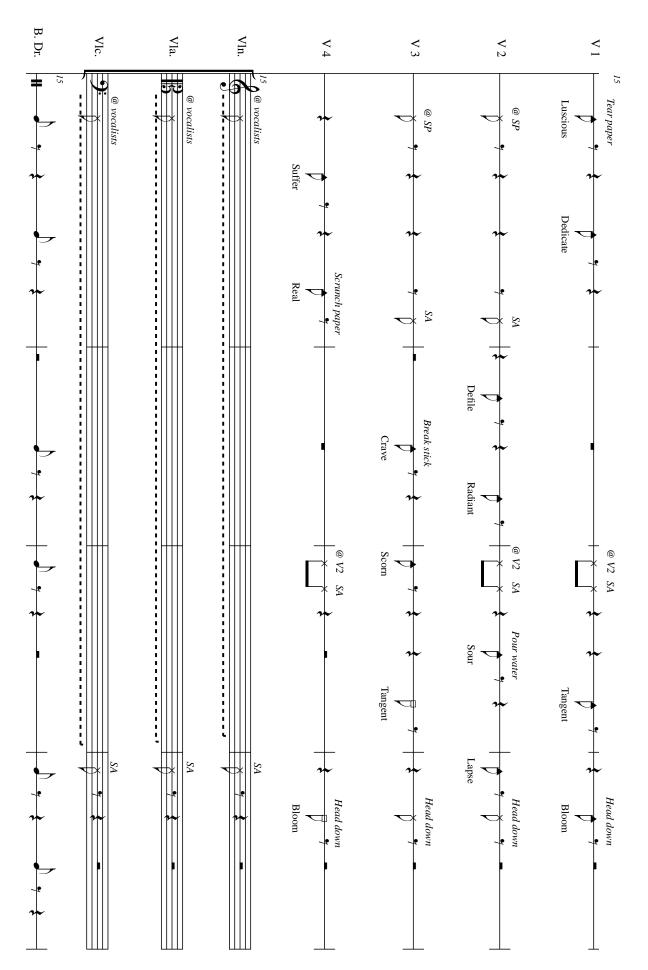
Abashed garden

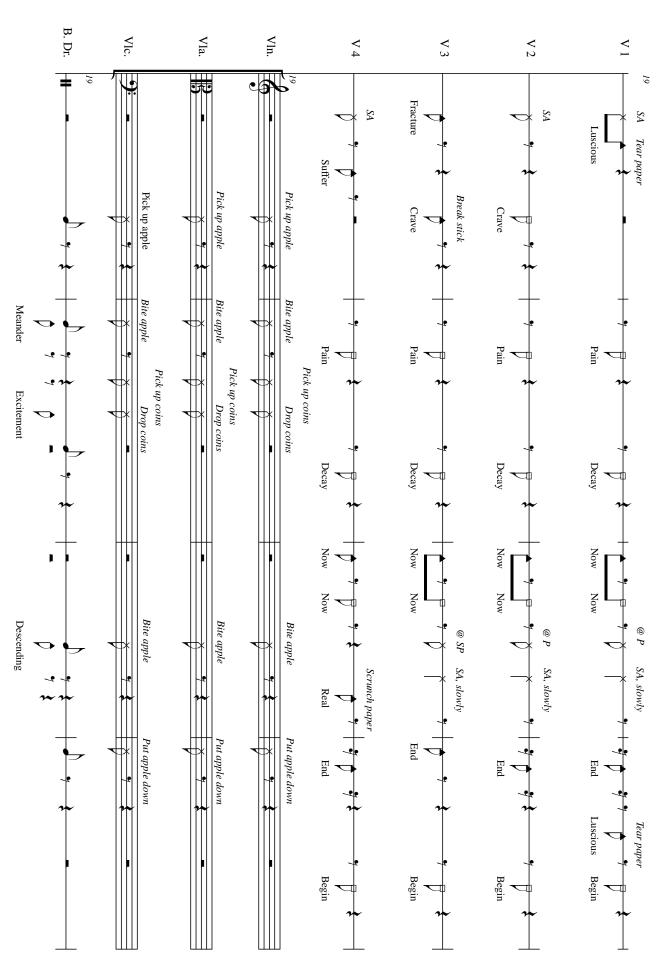
before the end of the section repeat from the beginning. Whisper the following pairs of words at your own pace. It is not essential to get all the way through the list. If you complete the list

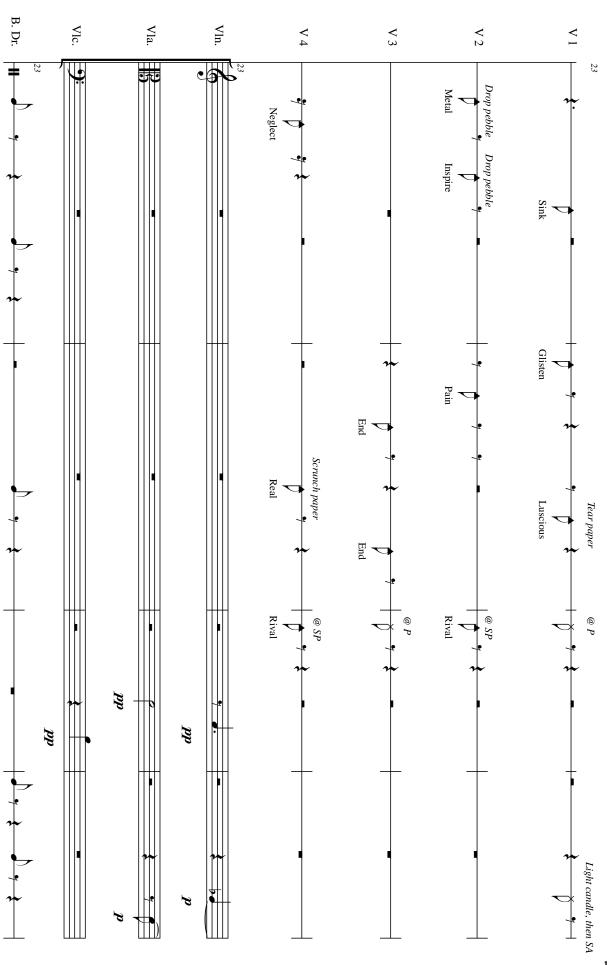
Faultless rage
Natural obedience
Earned schedule
Harmless dawdler
Fading gaff
Laborious quiet
Abated harvest
Oblique pulse
Habitual gale
Nameless crack
Jaded data
Remote minority
Timeless hallucination
Listless keepsake
Naïve gain
Cage remembrance

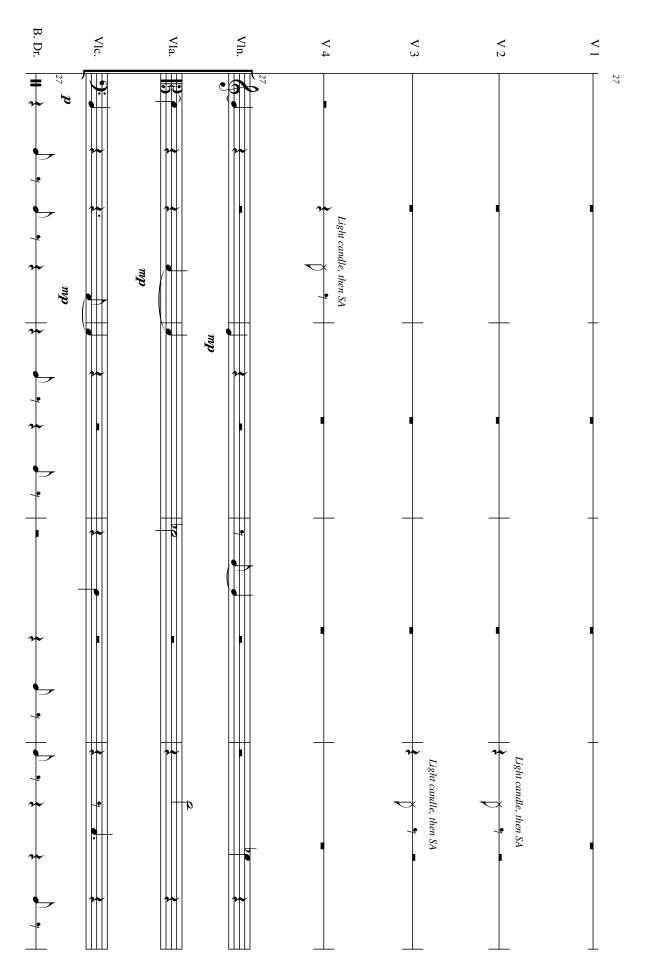
# **Strained Conversations**

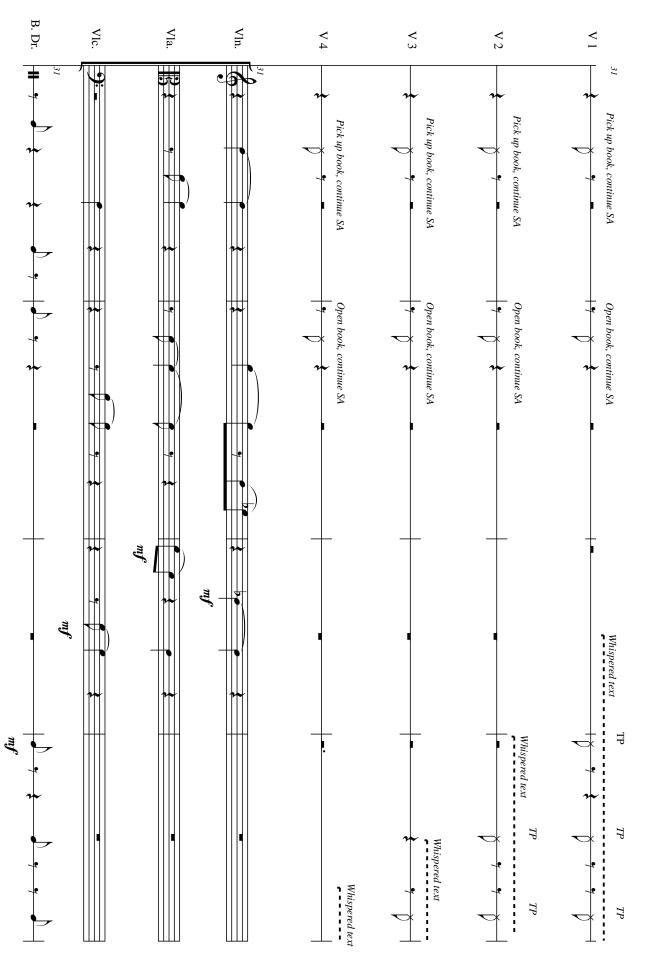


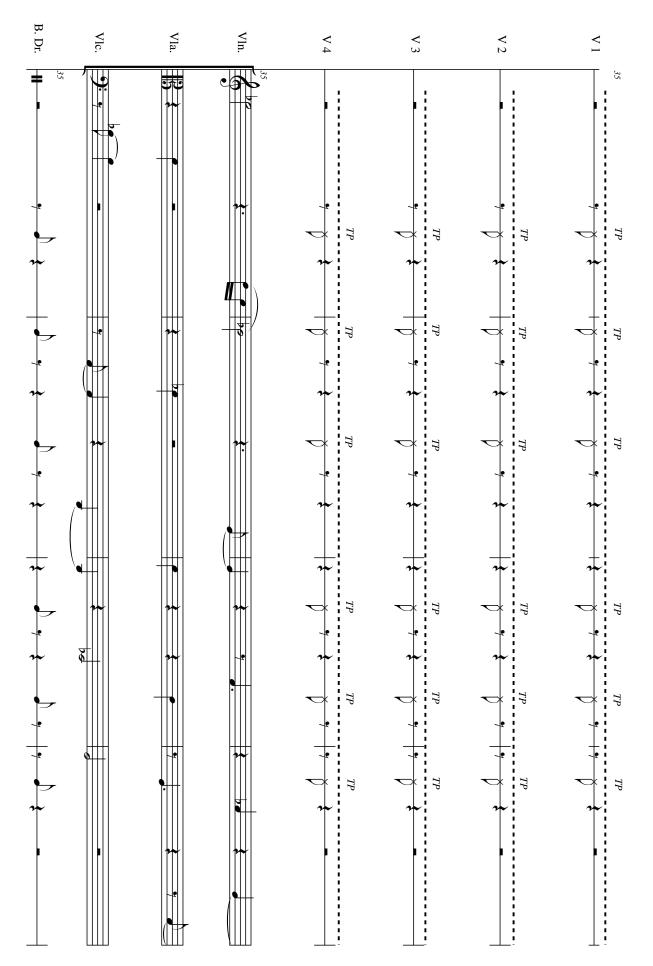


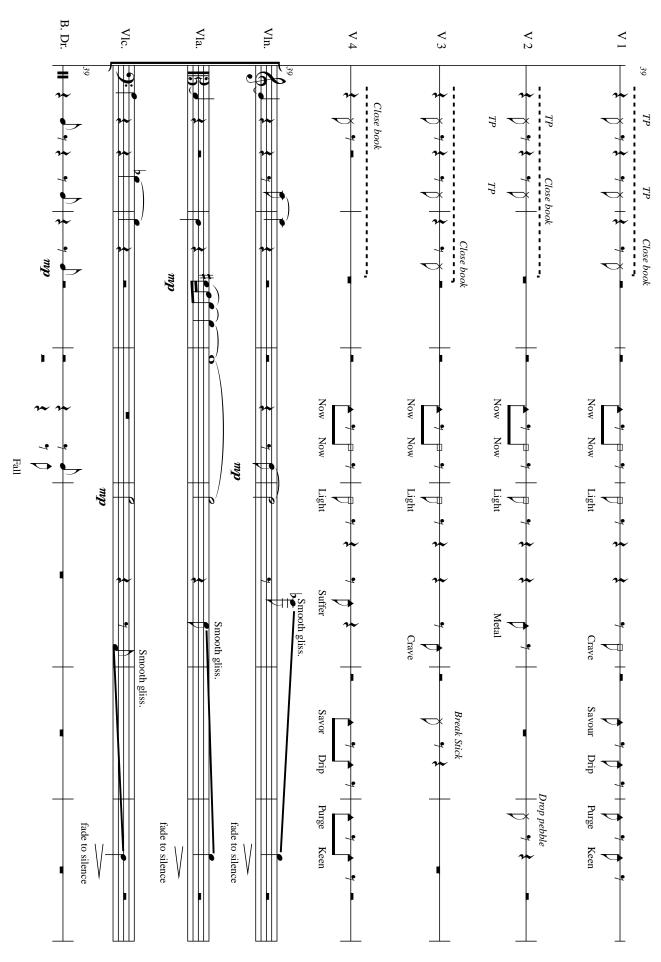


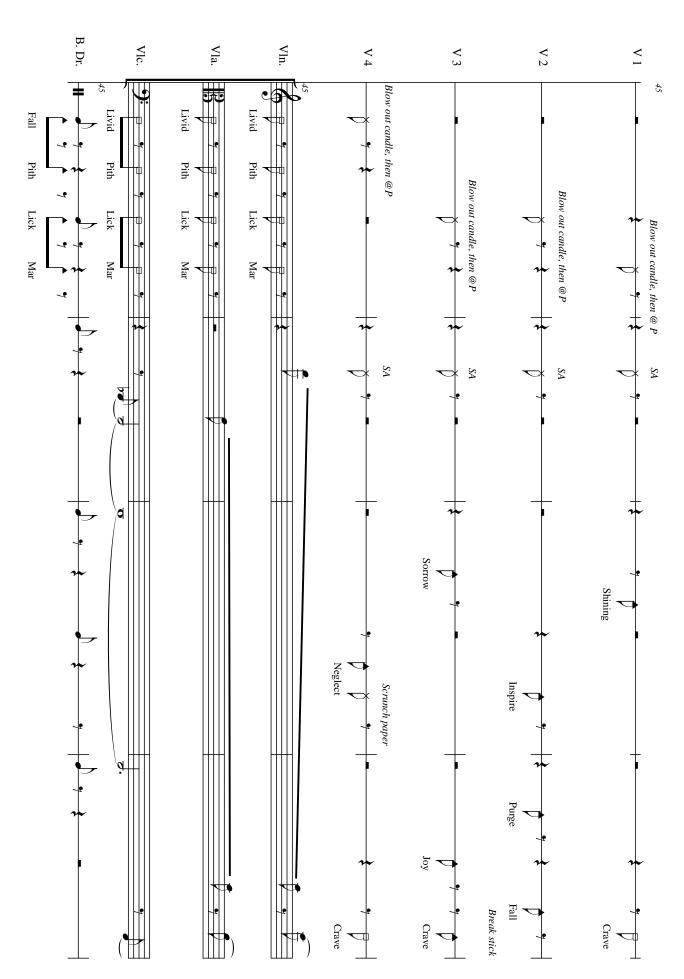


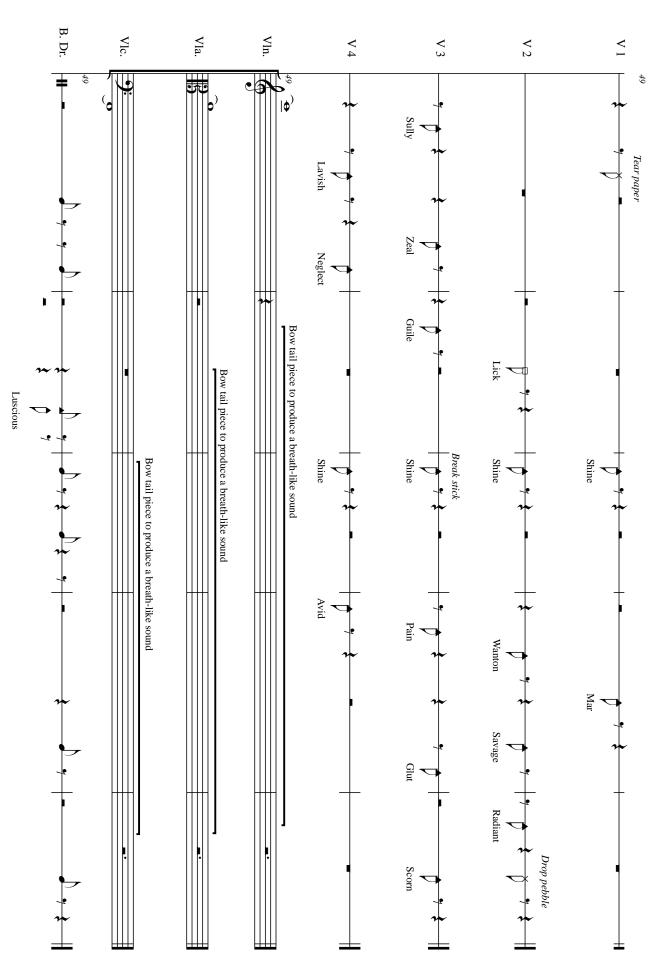












#### Appendix 4. Score: Ciúnas agus Diúl

# Jiúnas agus

(Silence and Longing)

Sarah O'Halloran 2011

Flute, Clarinet (B,), Percussion, Piano, Violin, Cello, Narrator

#### Program note

emotions of the story, to refer backwards and forwards in time, and sometimes to go against the grain of the narrative. variations on their themes, and add elements of my own. I also wrote with sound in mind, intending to use it to enrich the images and the Atlantic seascapes of Co. Kerry. In writing my text I was keen to twist and turn through these sources, trying to create new lead us to make, as well themes of transformation, self-reliance, and growth. Many sources influenced my writing, they include The Ciúnas agus Dúil is the first installment of a story about two characters, Tonnagh, who begins life as a mysterious sea creature, and Little Mermaid, David Thomson's moving collection of folklore about Selkies The People of the Sea, as well as legends like Clann Dathí, a currach builder and fisherman. The overall story explores loneliness and melancholy, and the strange choices these feelings Lir, the story of *Ceann Sibéal*, Tim Severin's *The Brendan Voyage*, my time with currach makers Monty and Micheal O'Leary, and

#### **Notation**

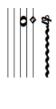


**Trill on a natural harmonic**Eg. Cello bar 55

Alternate between the unstopped string and the indicated natural harmonic

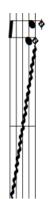
## Trill on an artificial harmonic

Eg violin bar 57

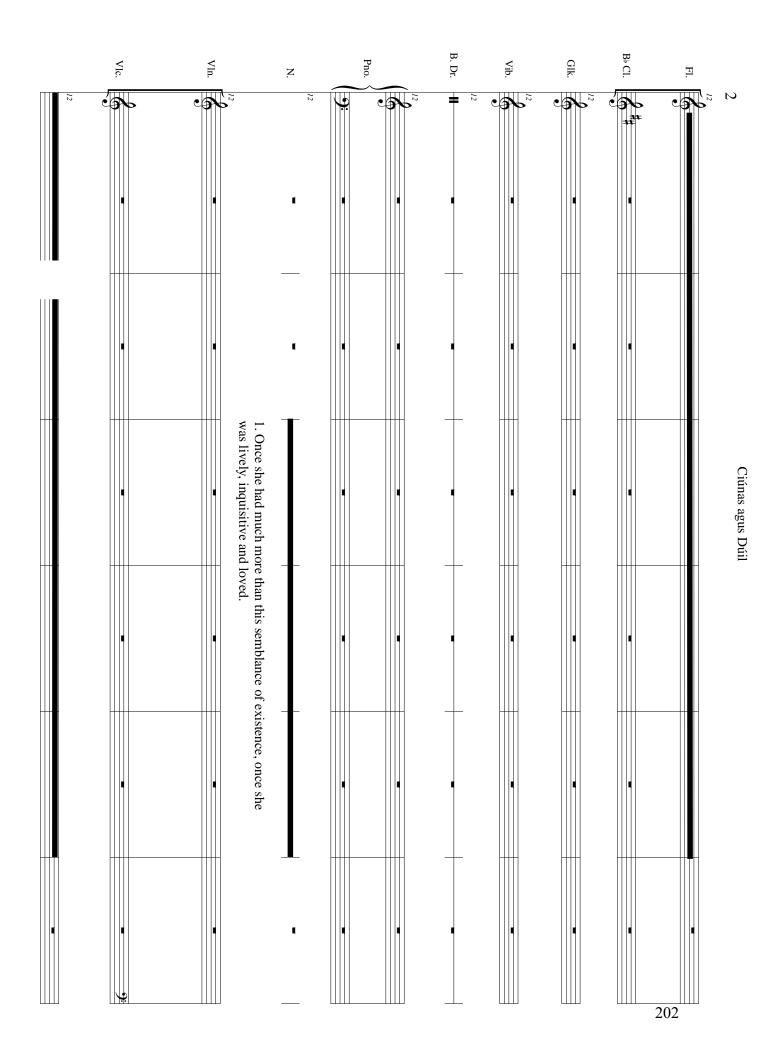


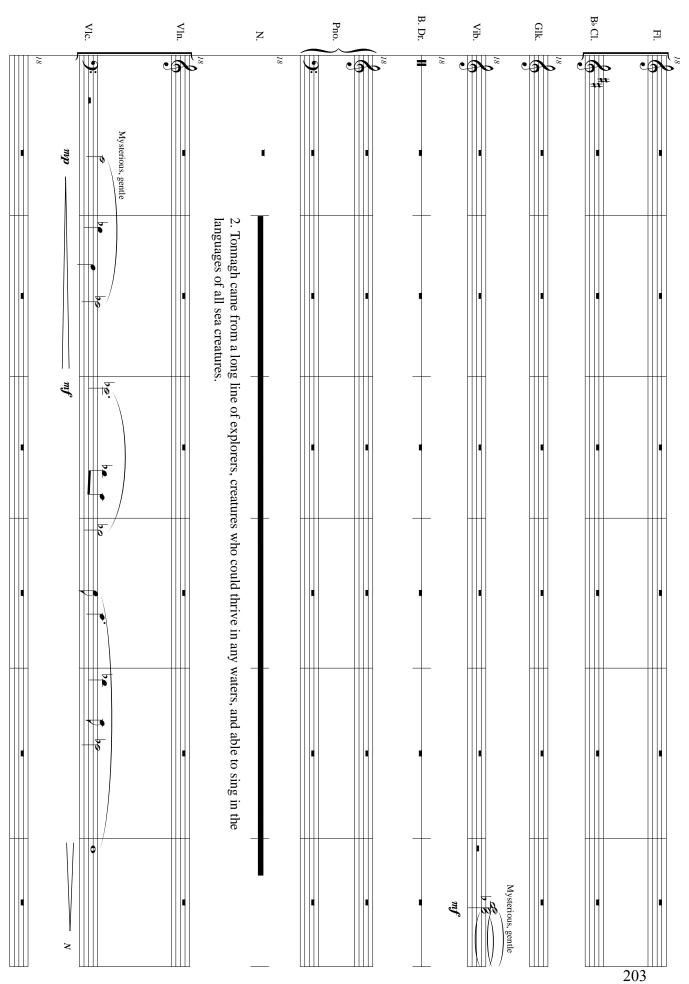
Alternate between the stopped string and the harmonic



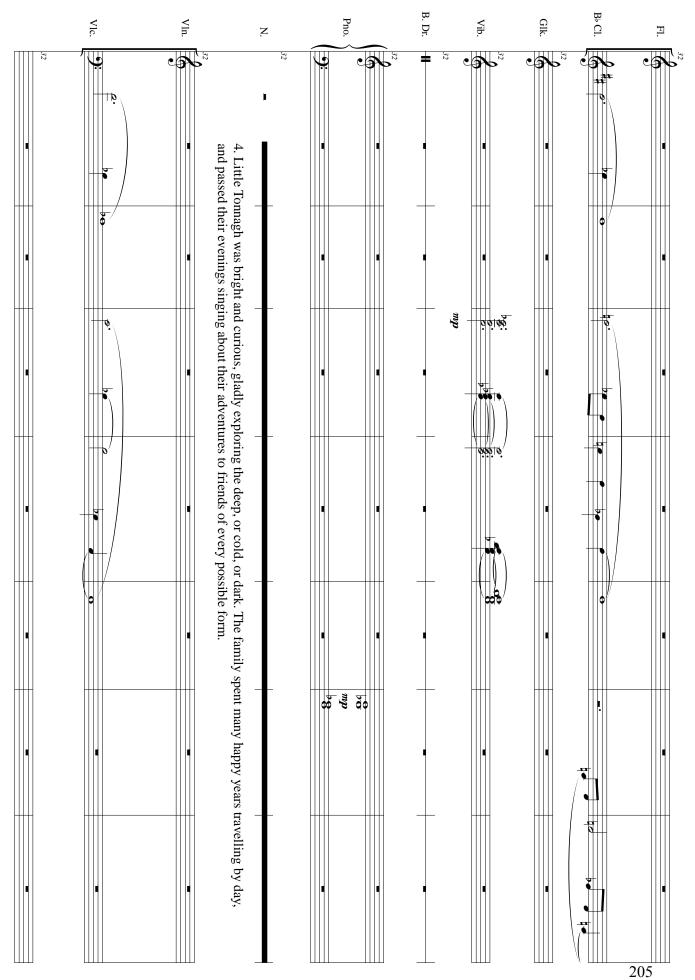


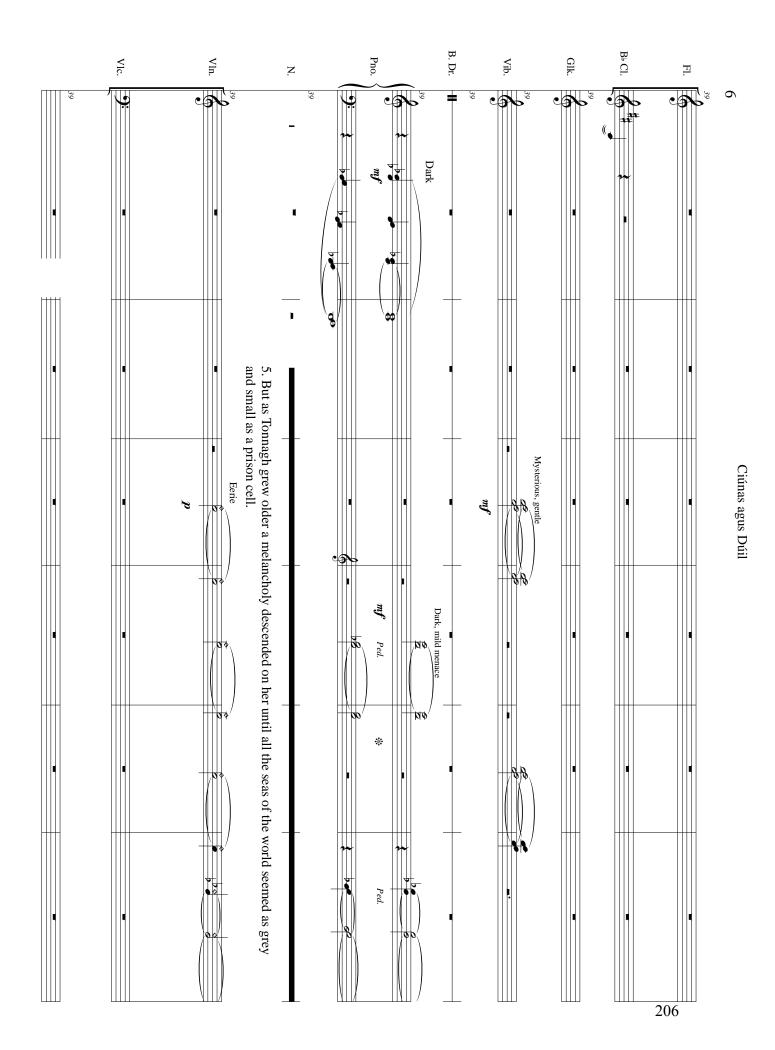
harmonics at the 4th and at the 3rd Glissando to the top of the fingerboard while constantly shifting between artifical

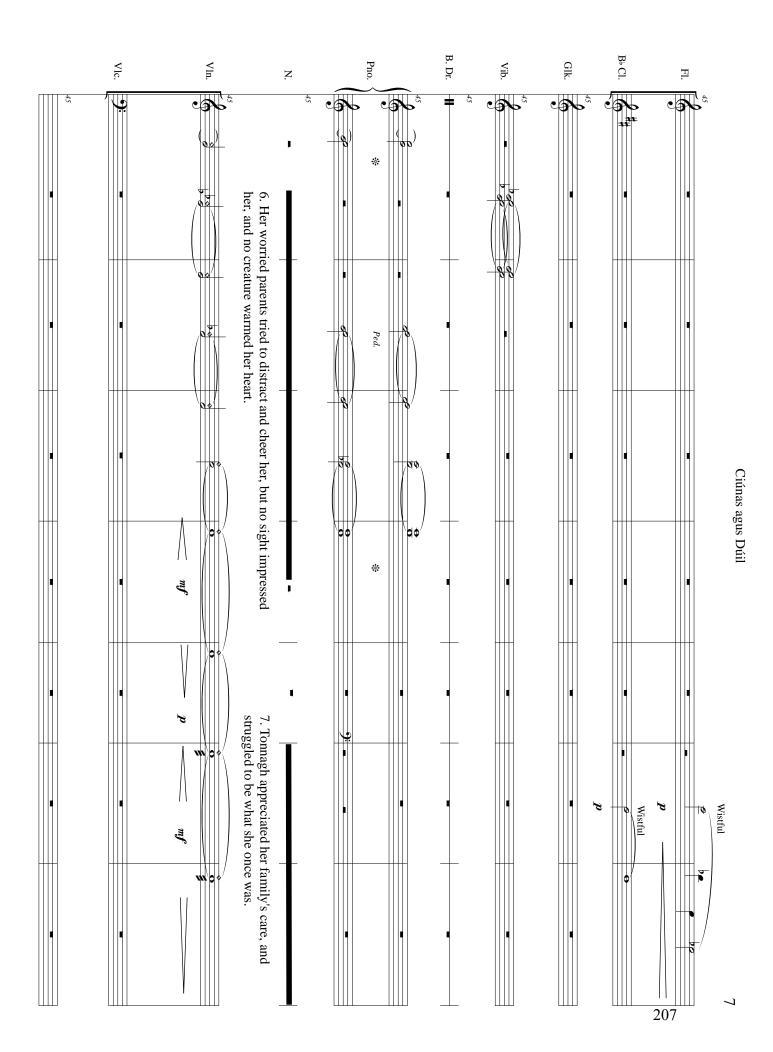


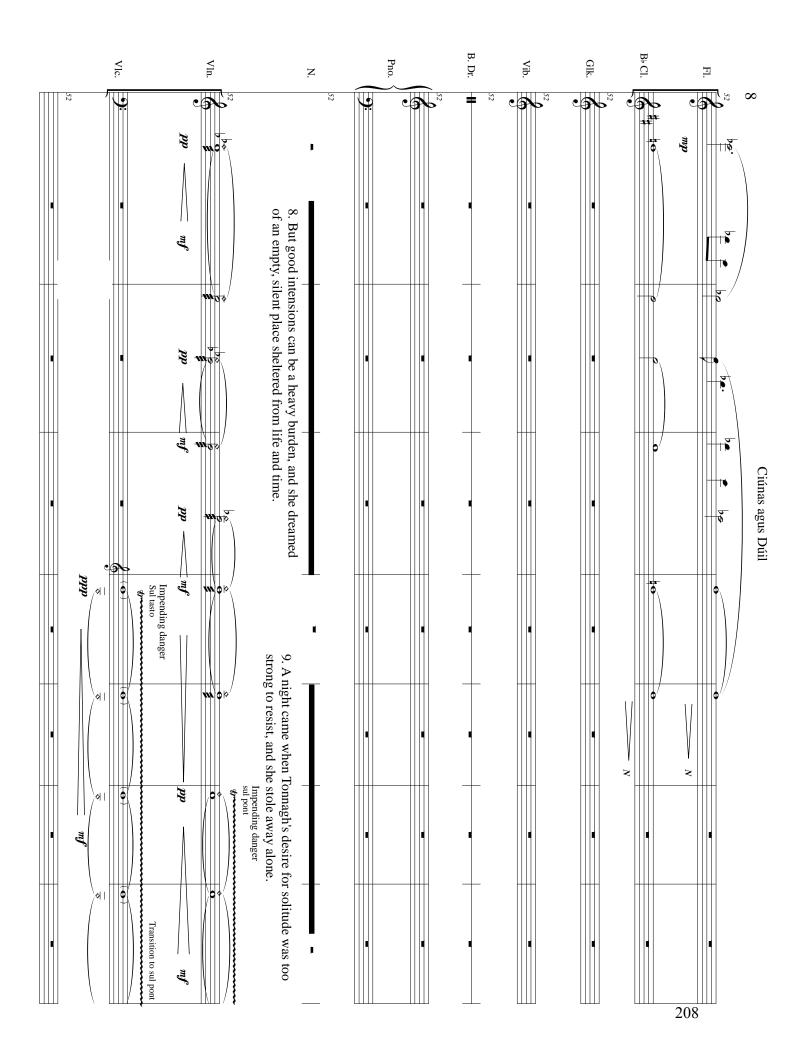


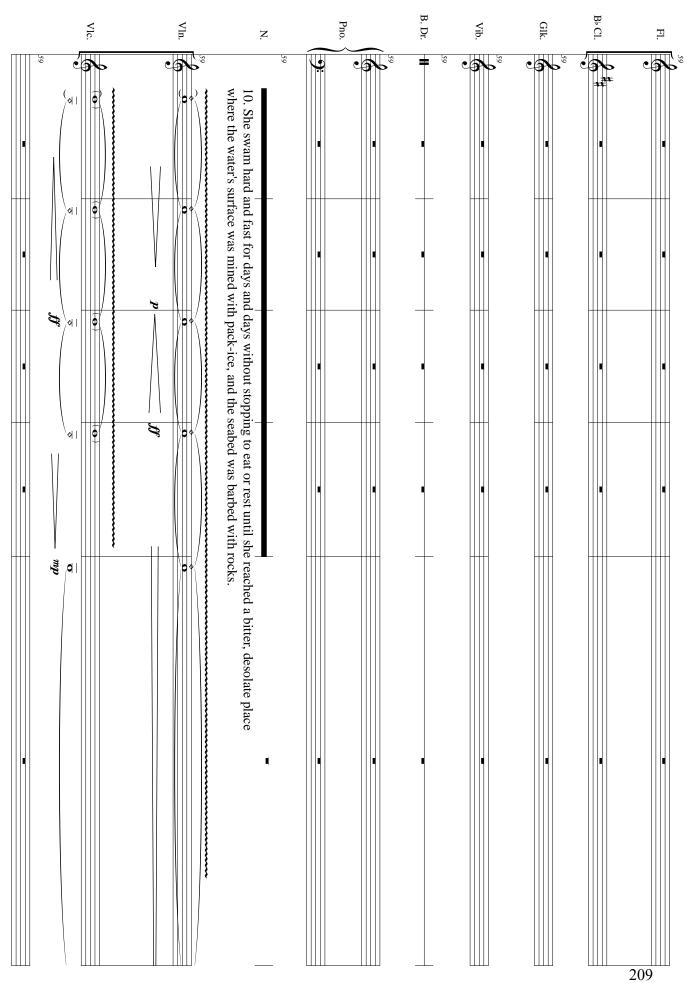
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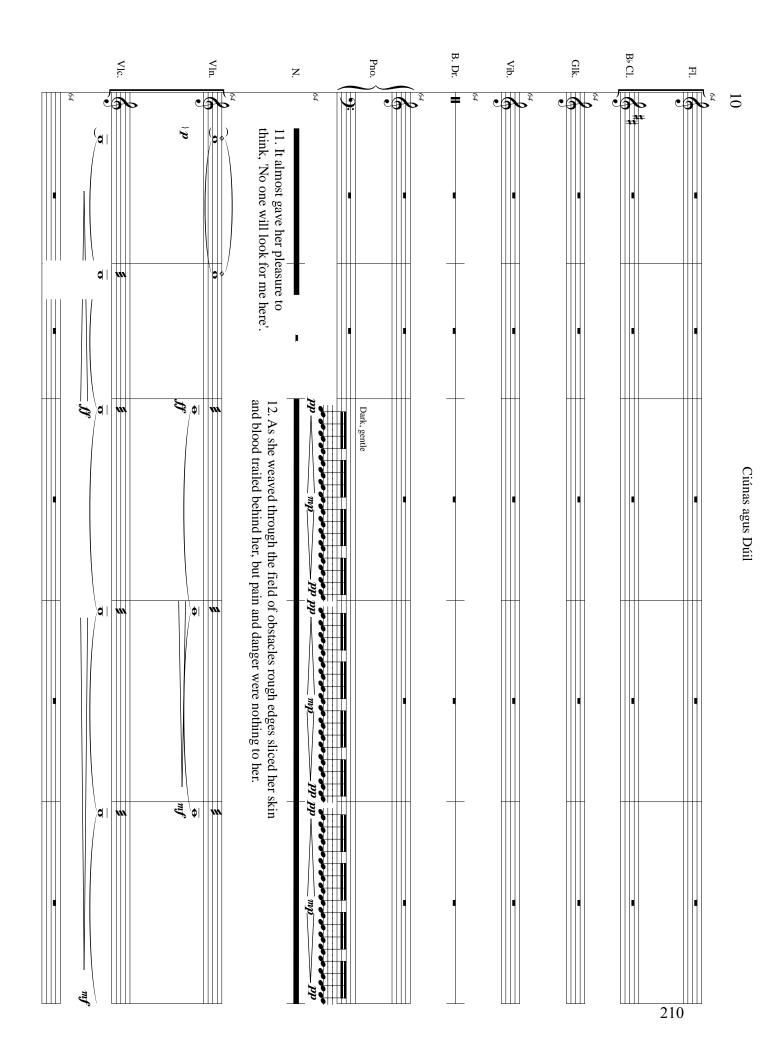




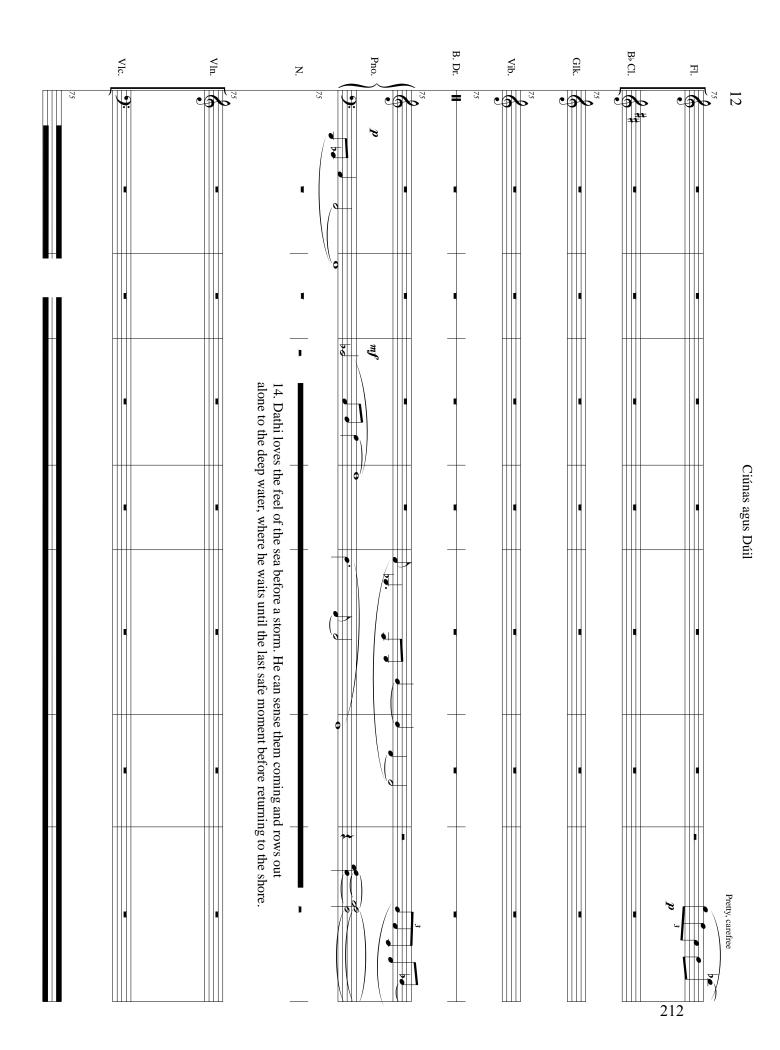


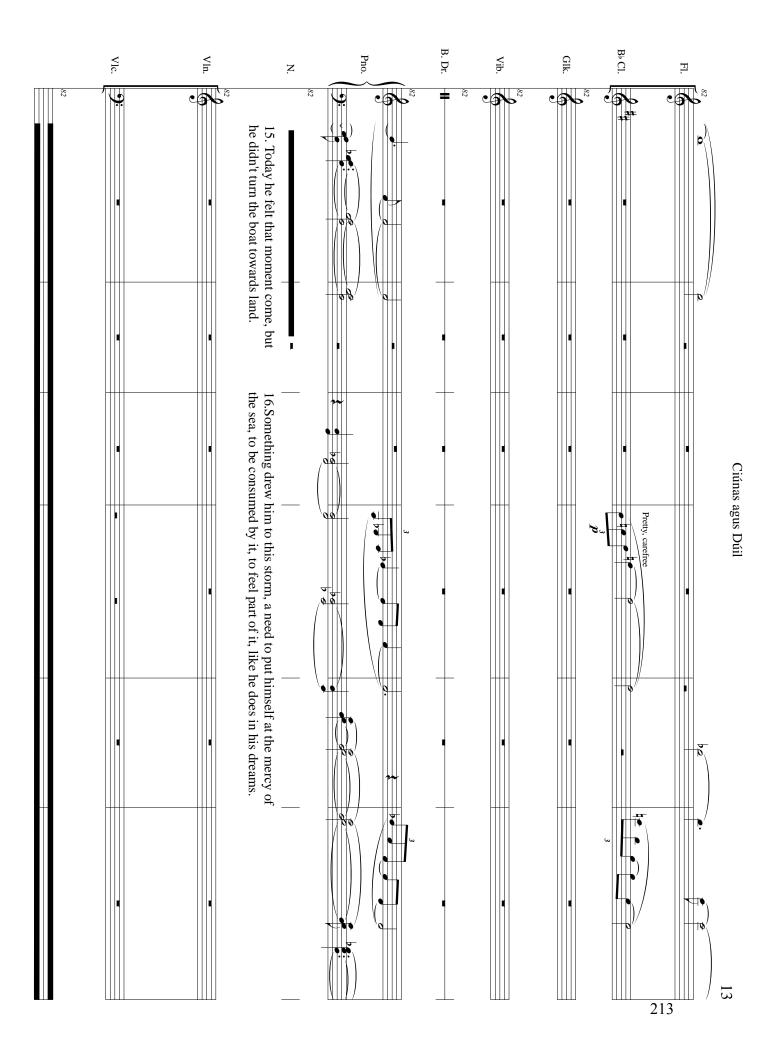


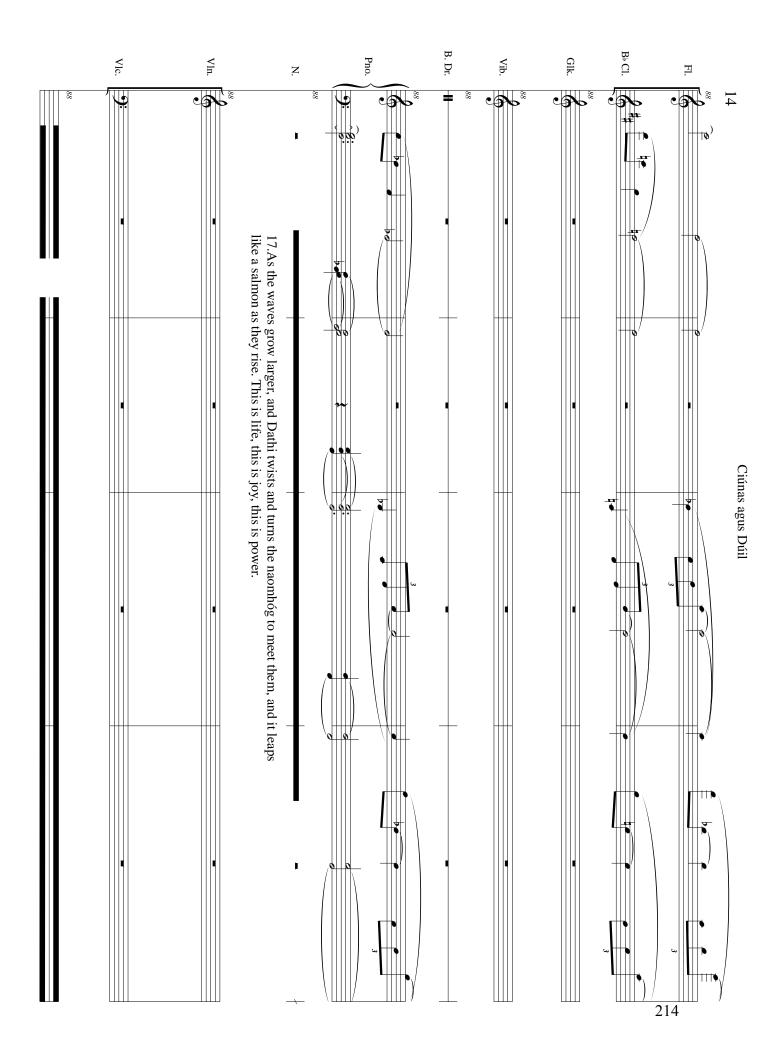


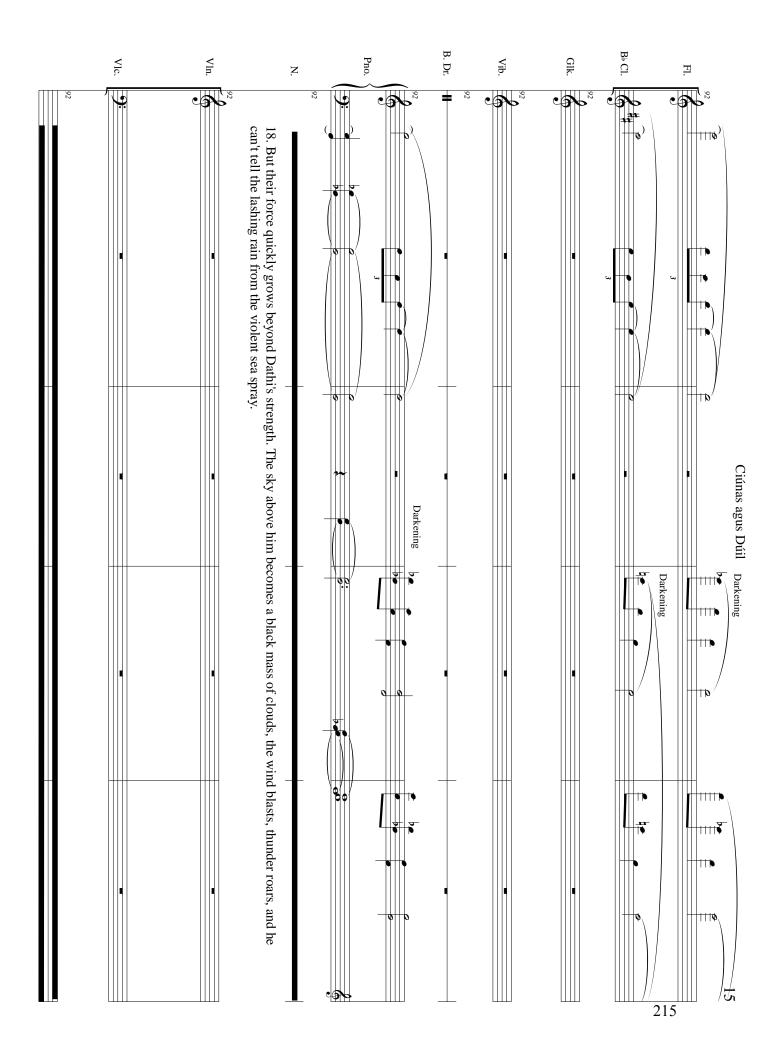


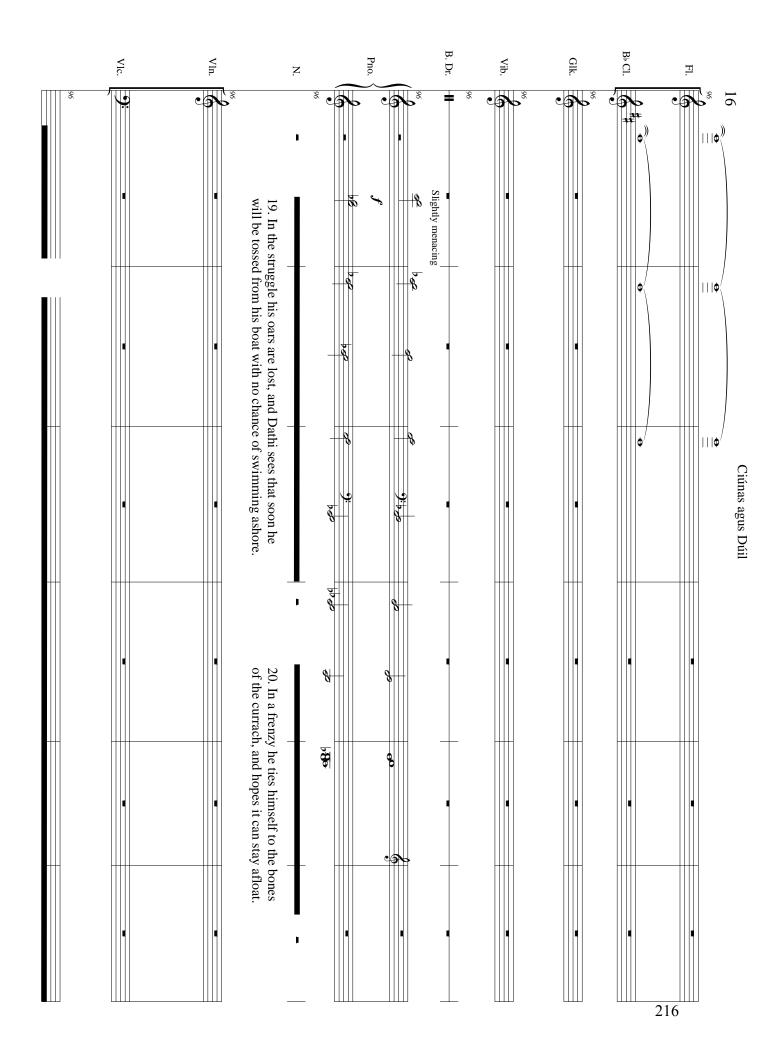
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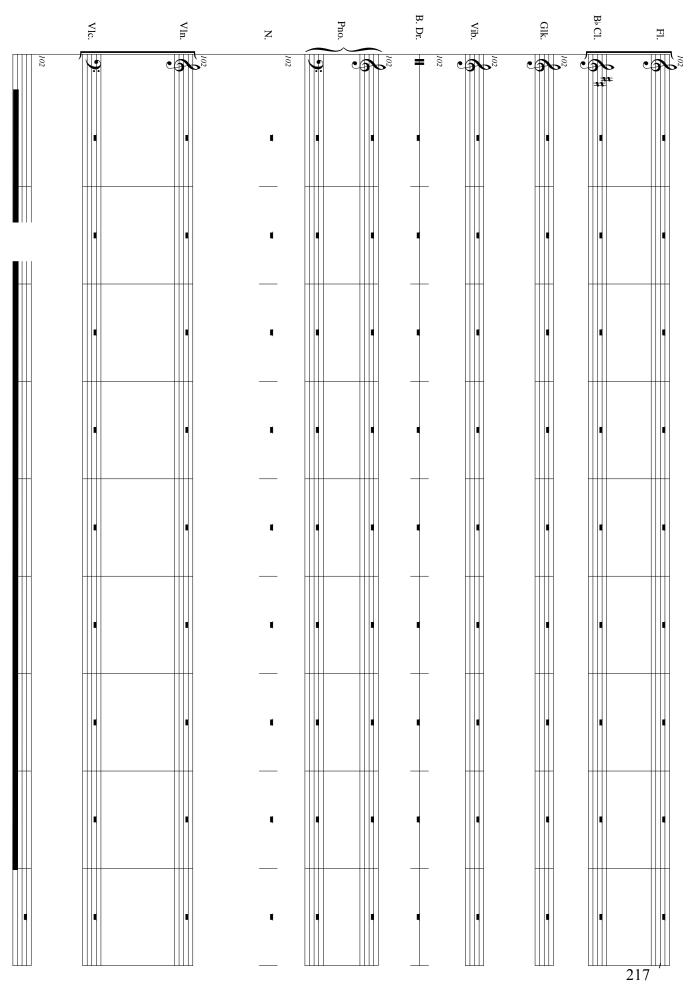


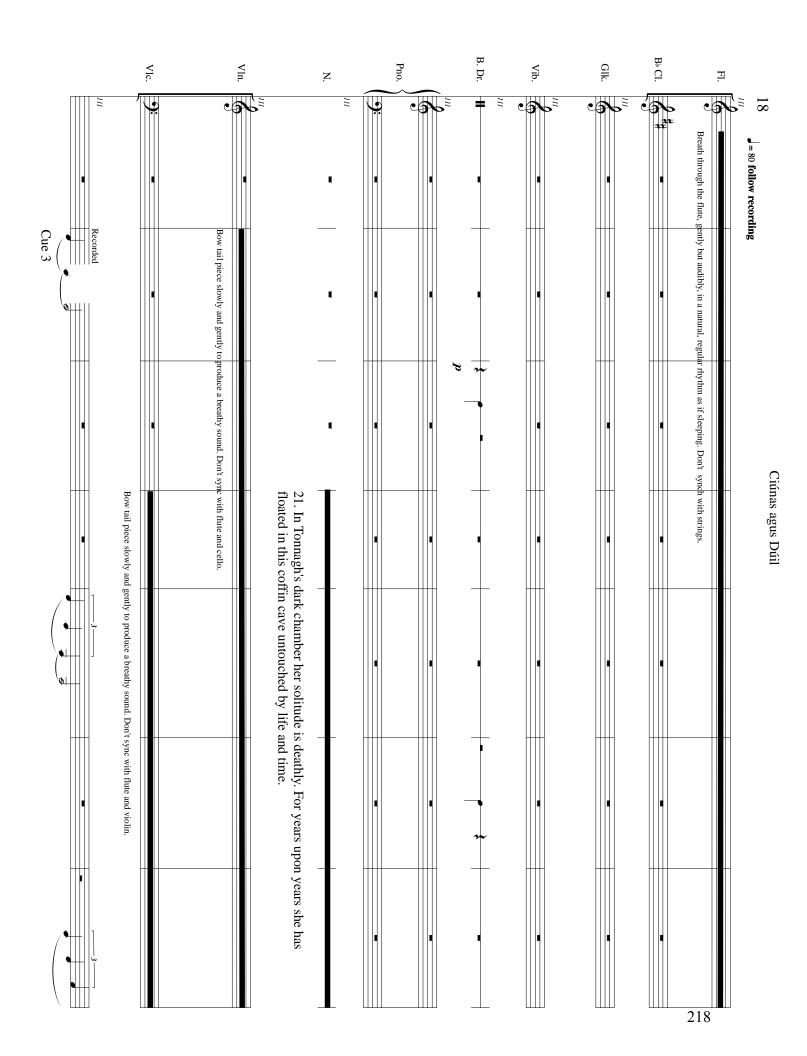


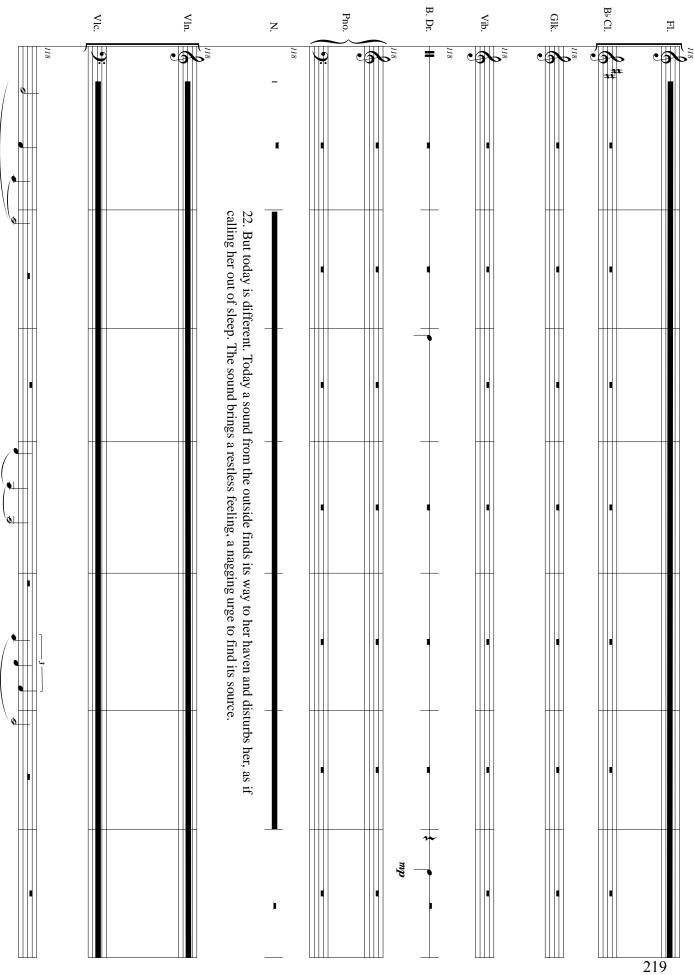


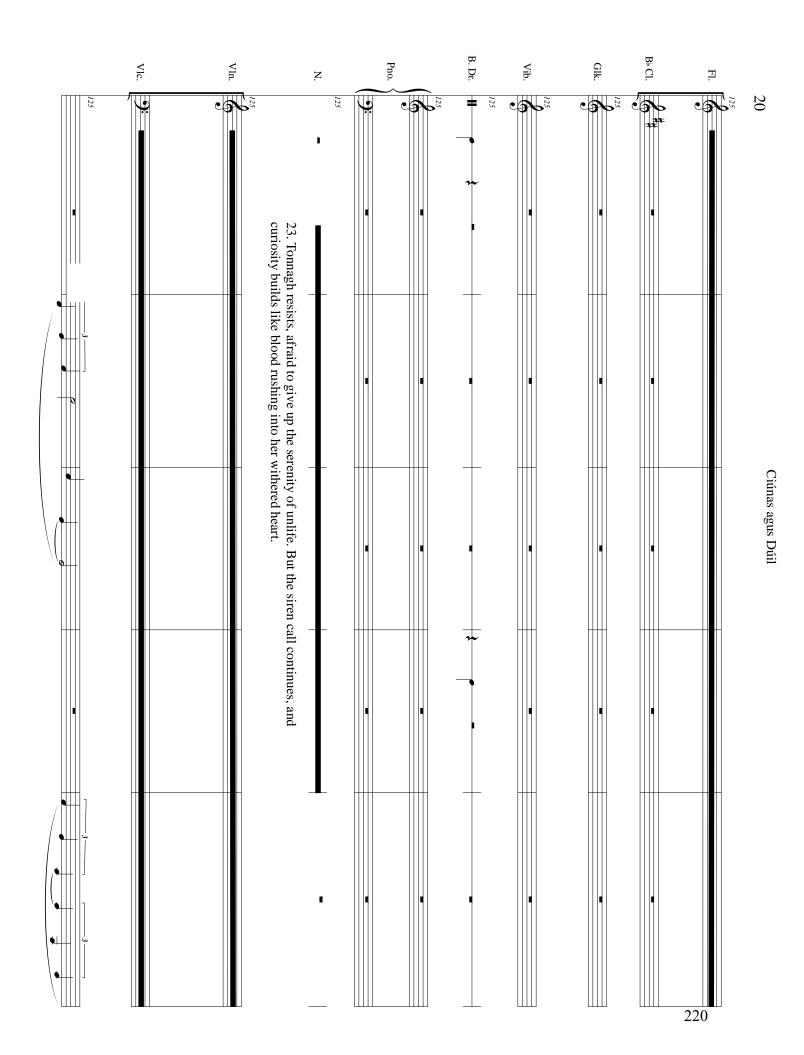


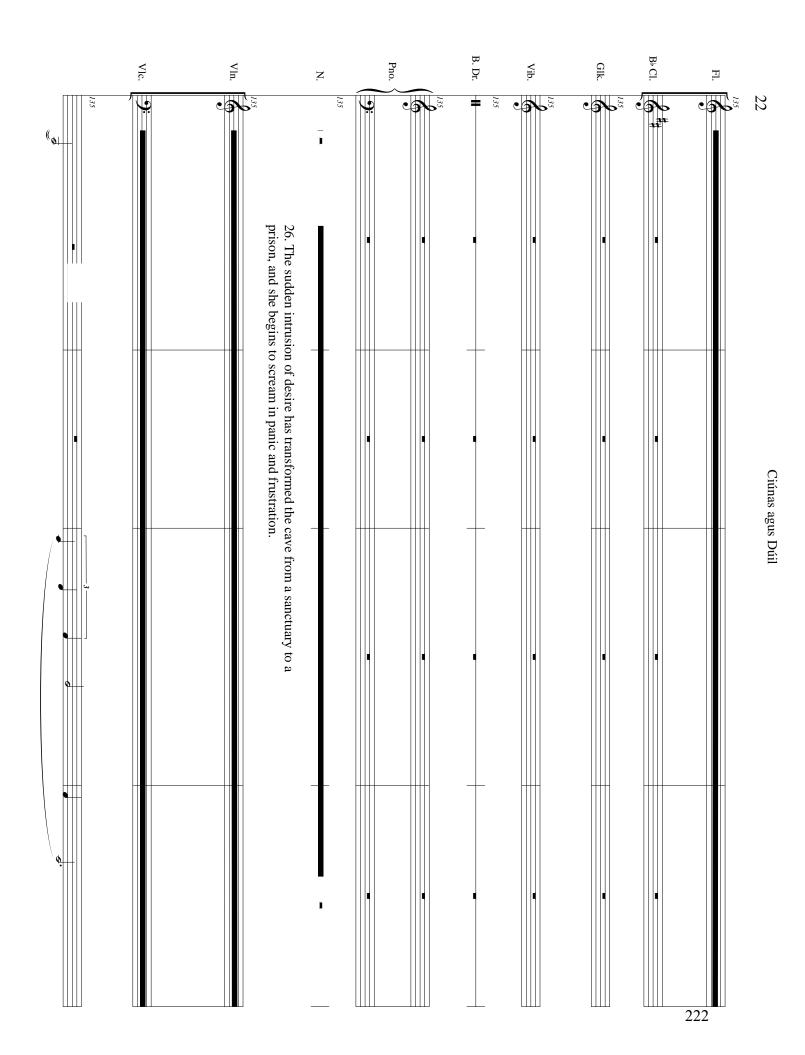


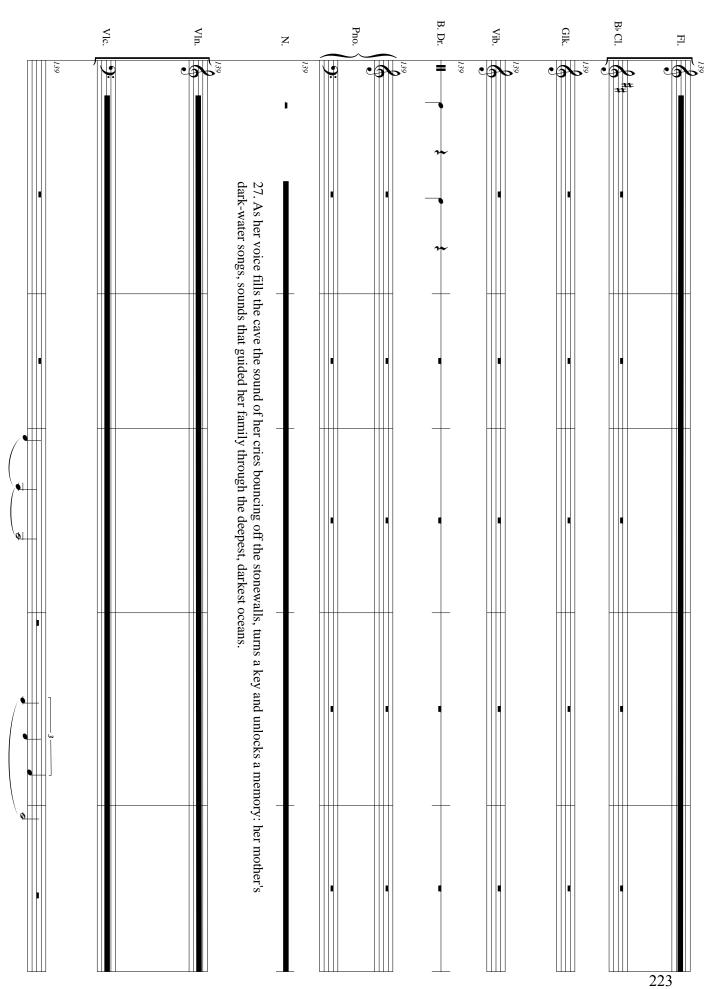


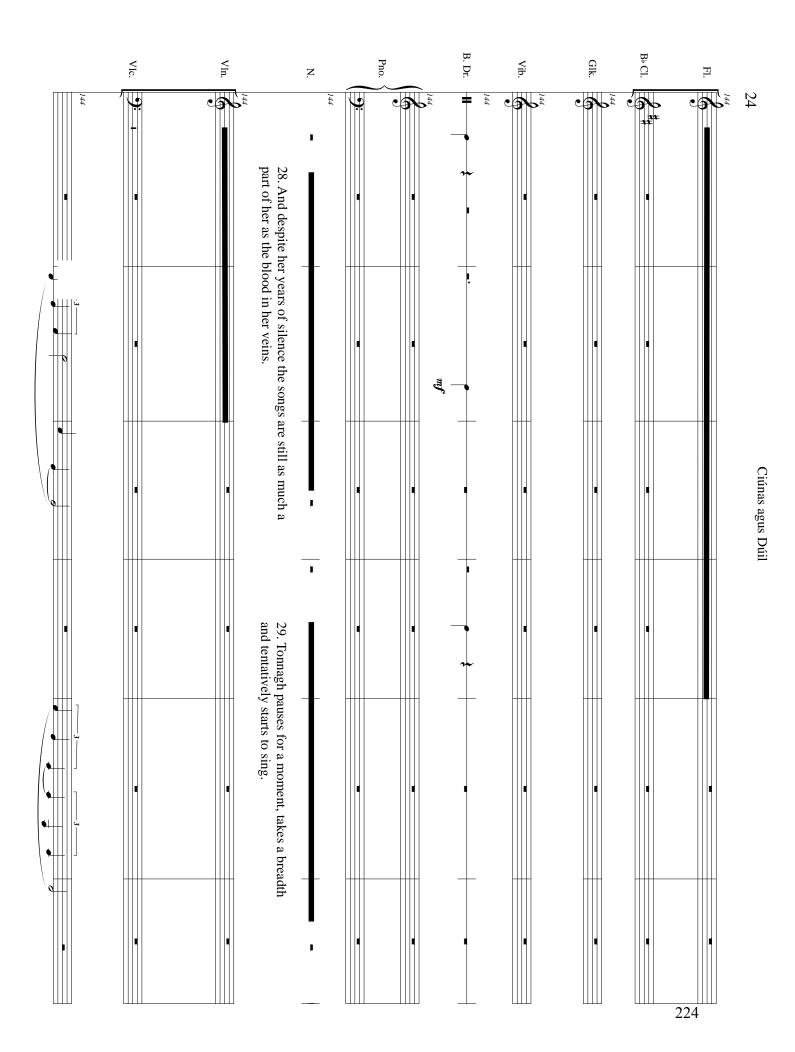


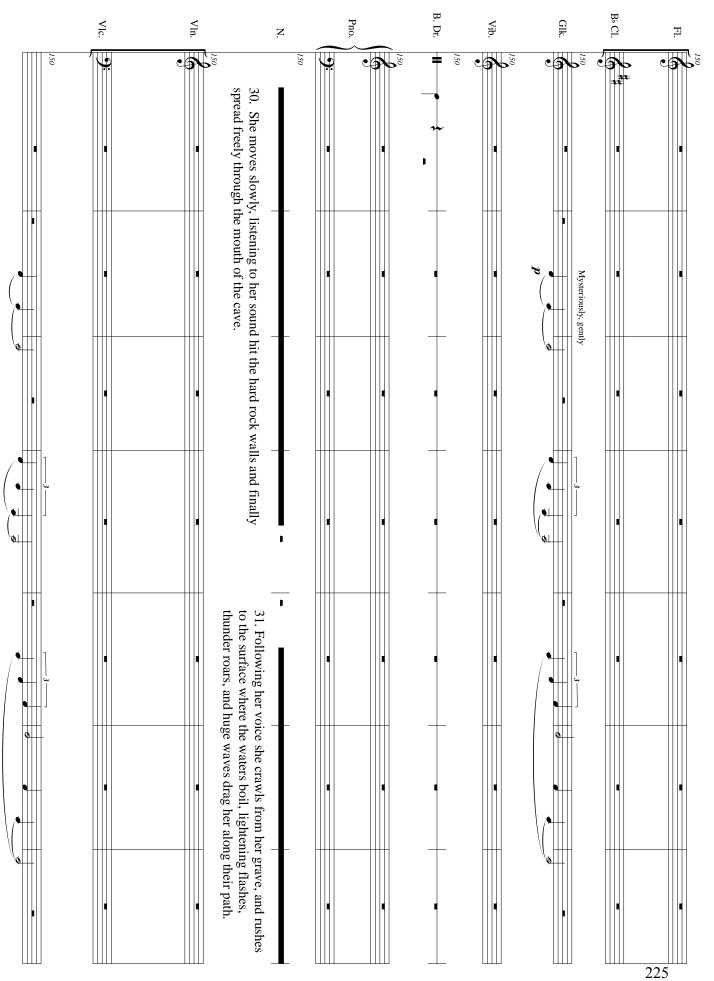


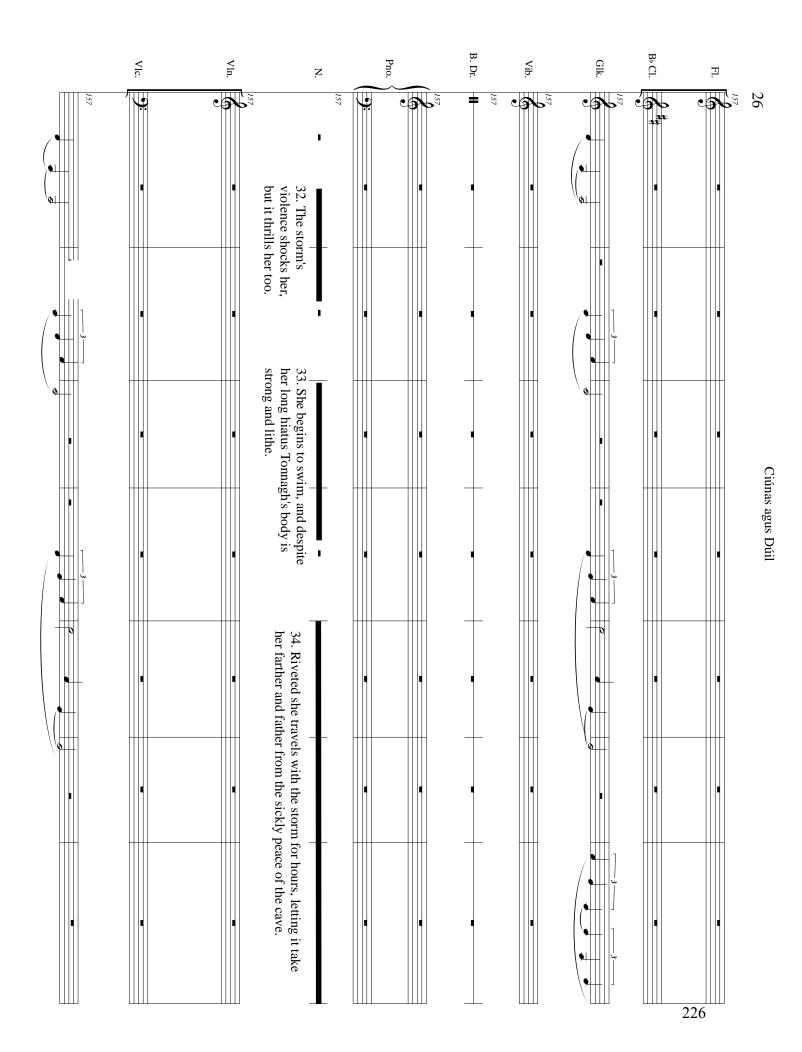


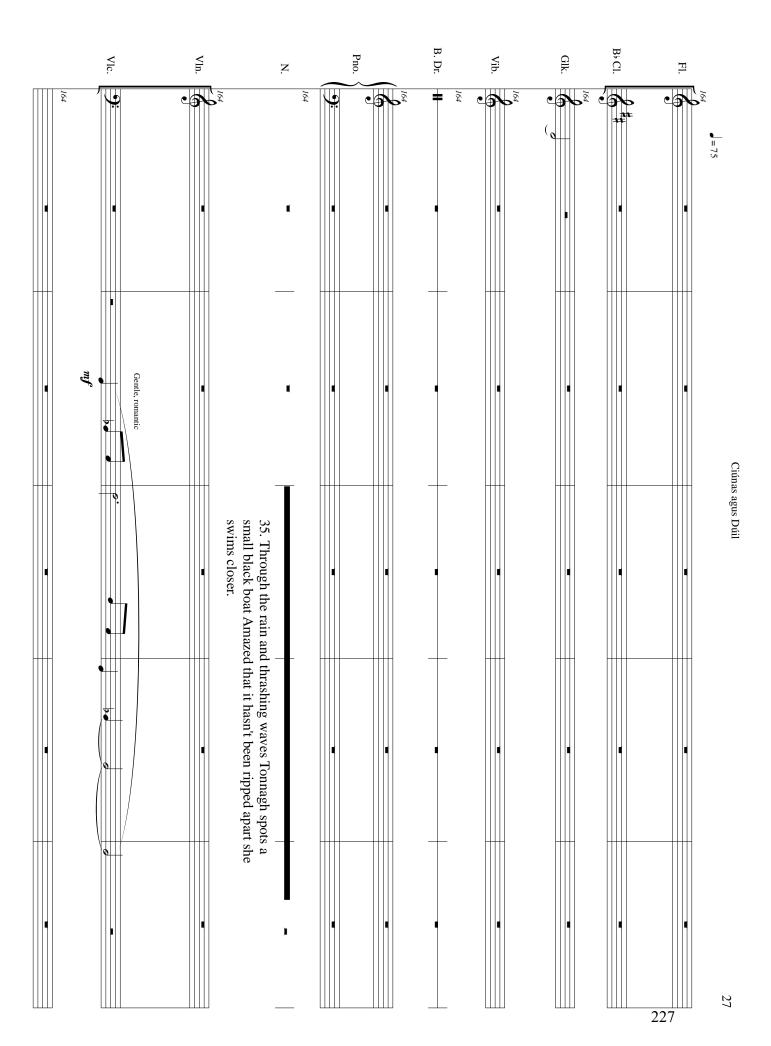


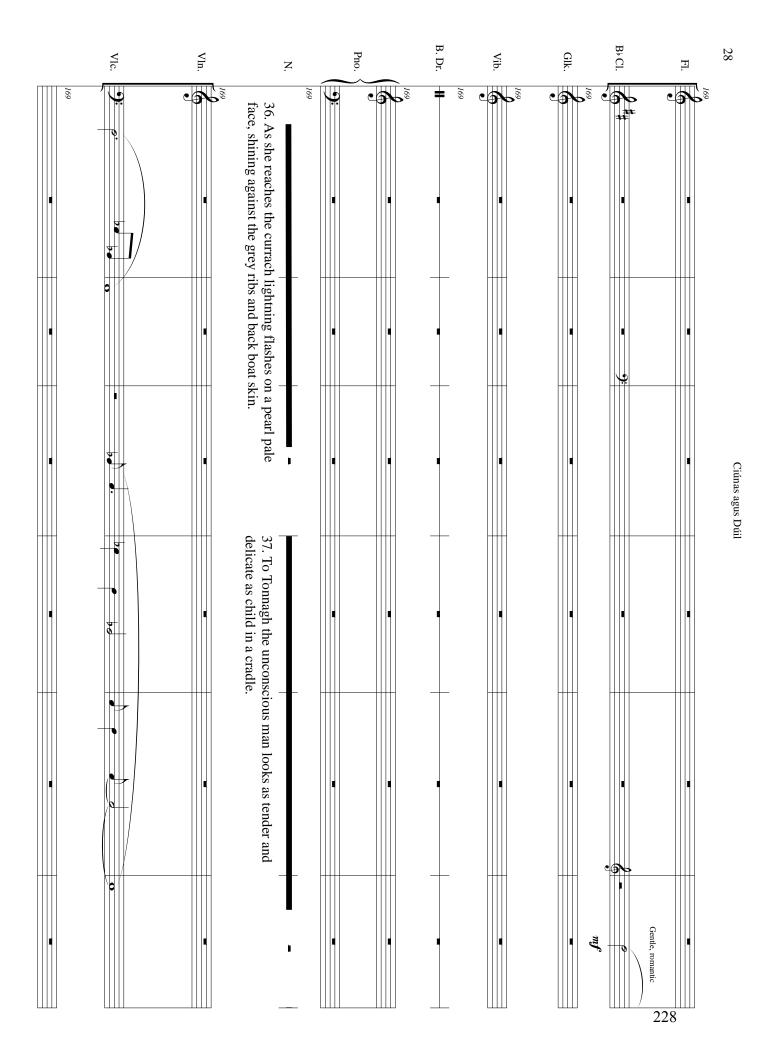




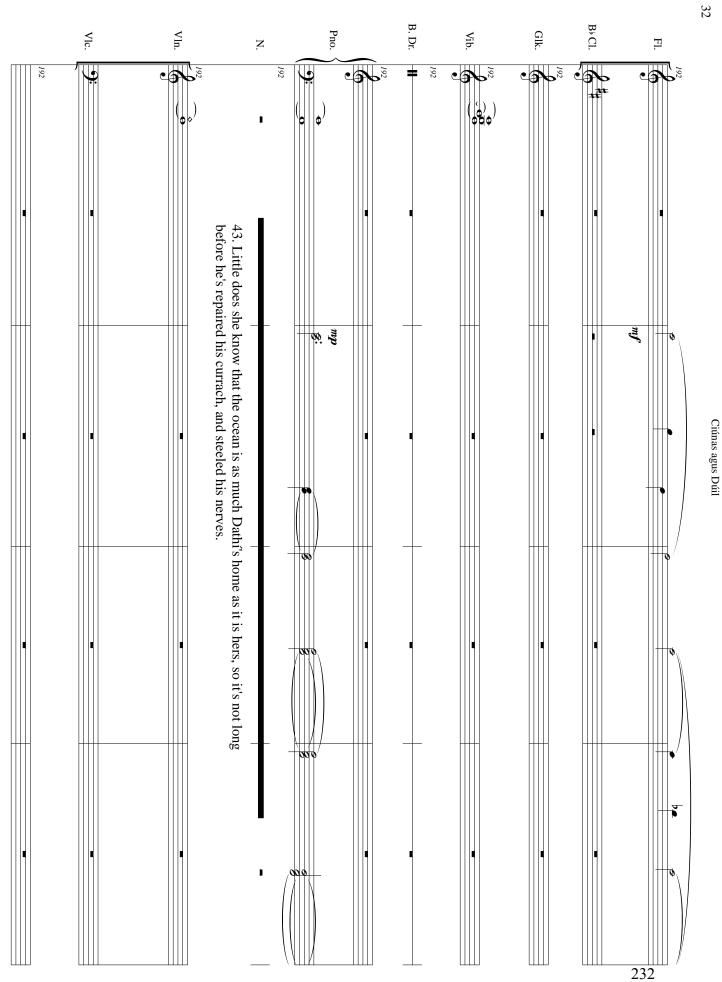


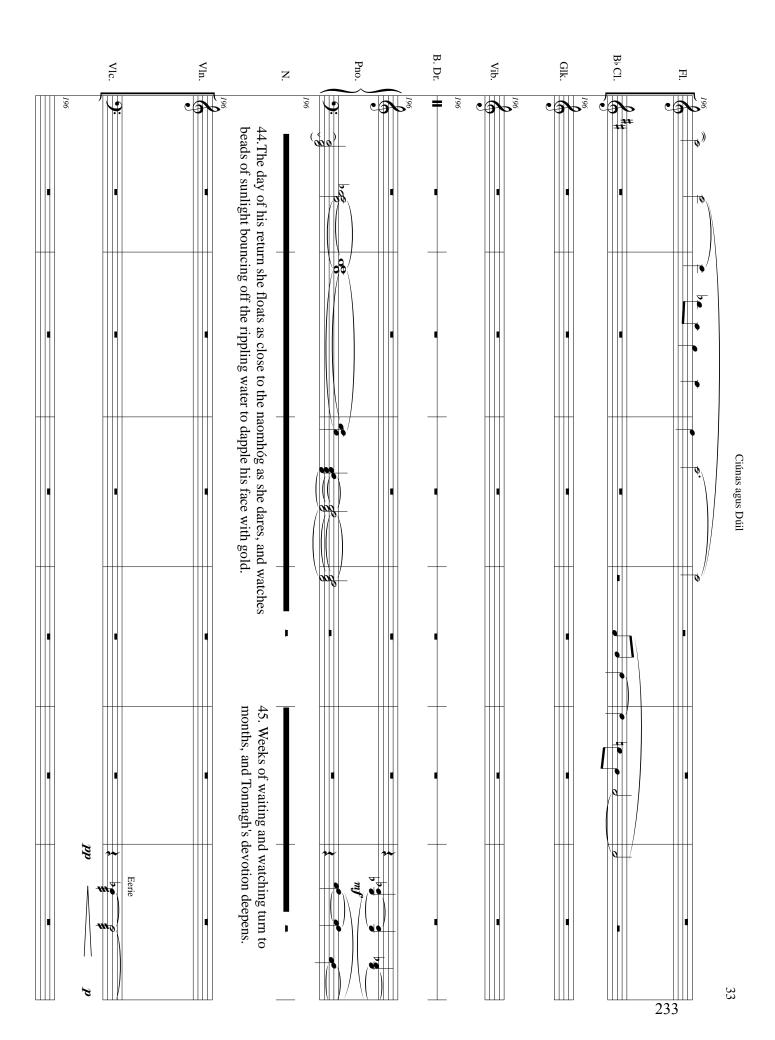


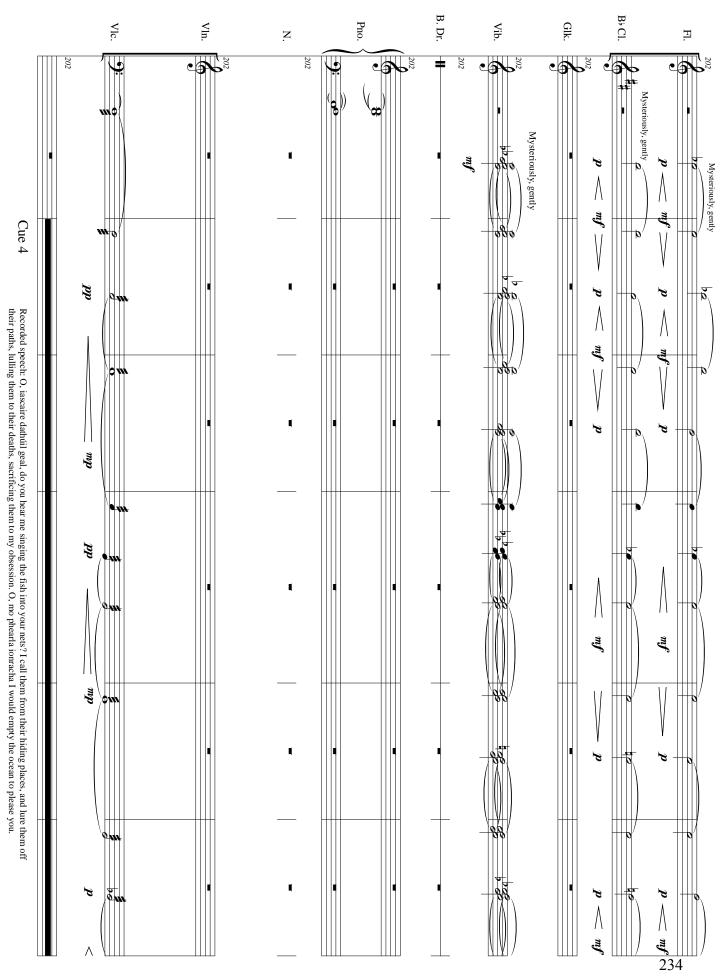


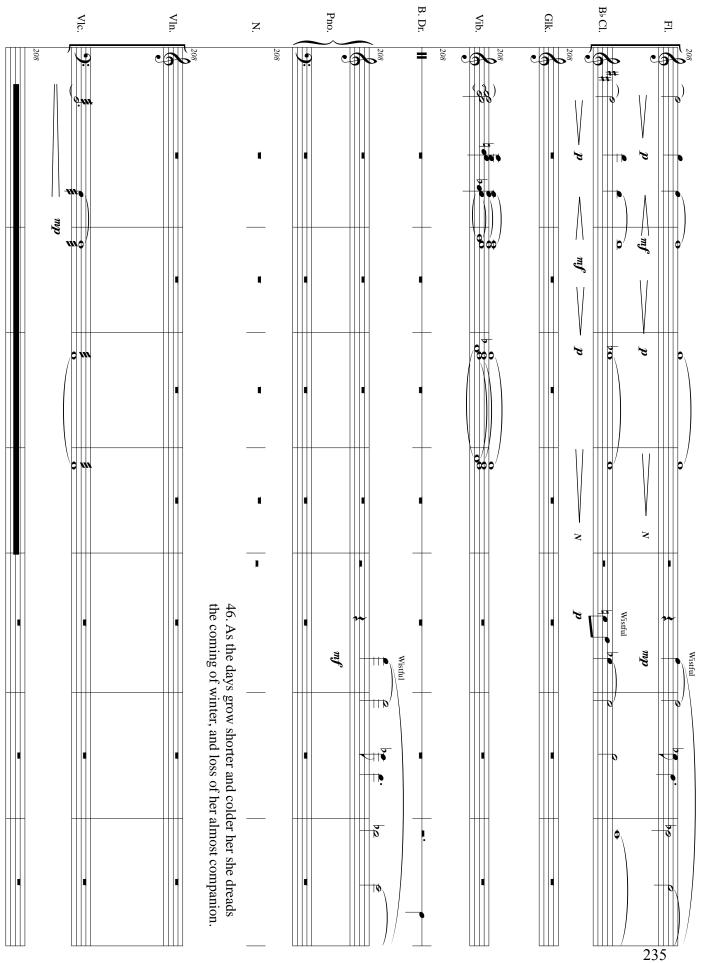


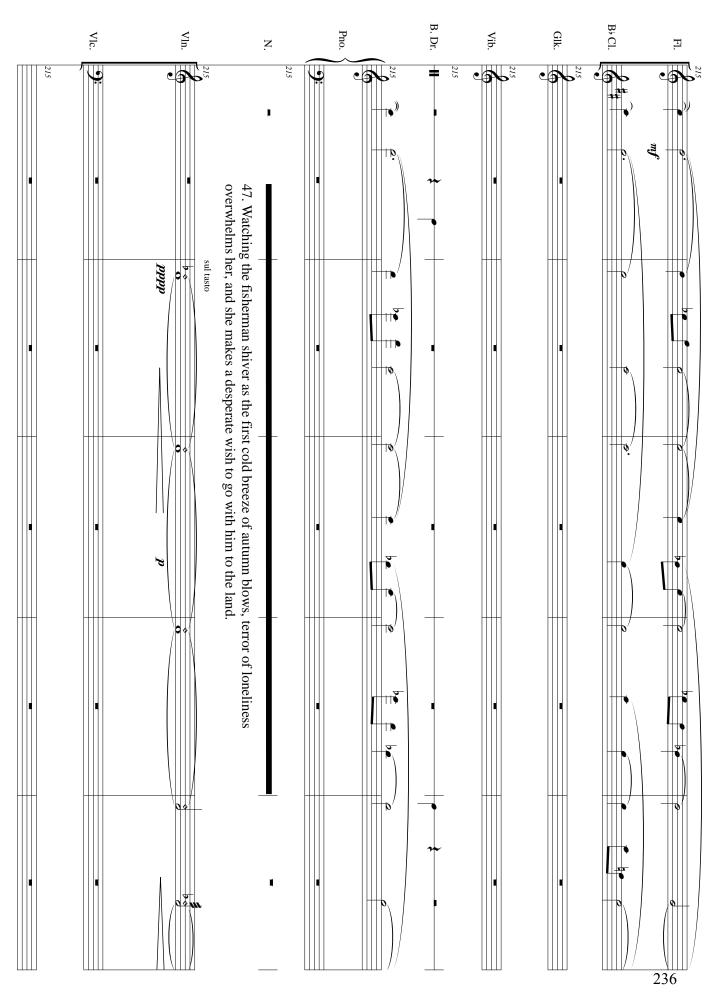
Ciúnas agus Dúil

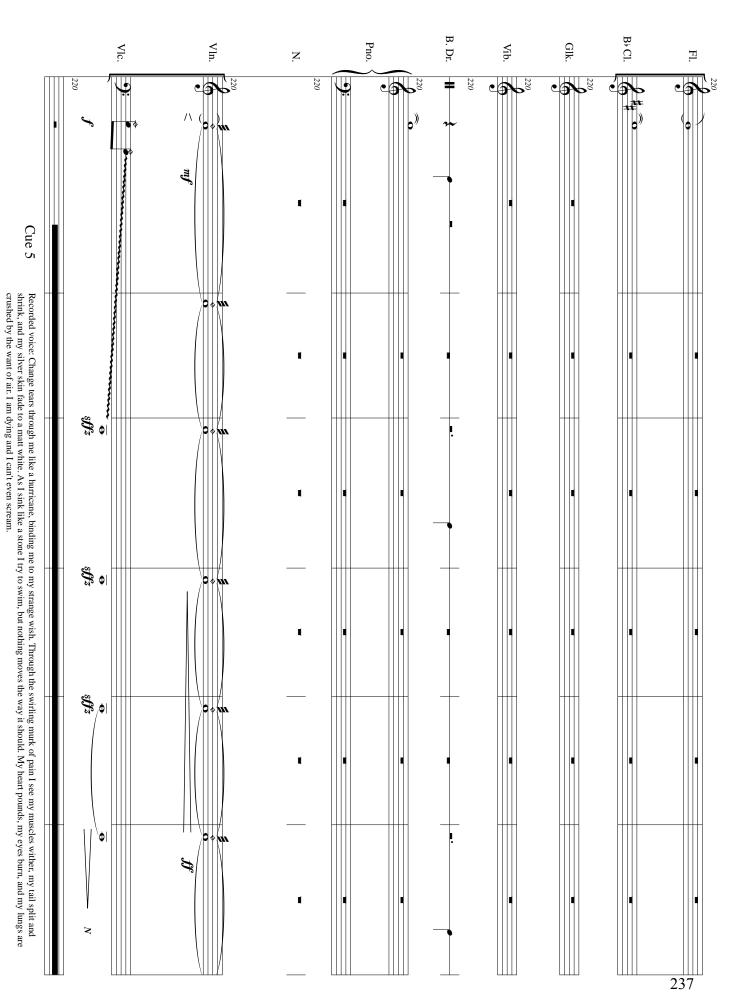


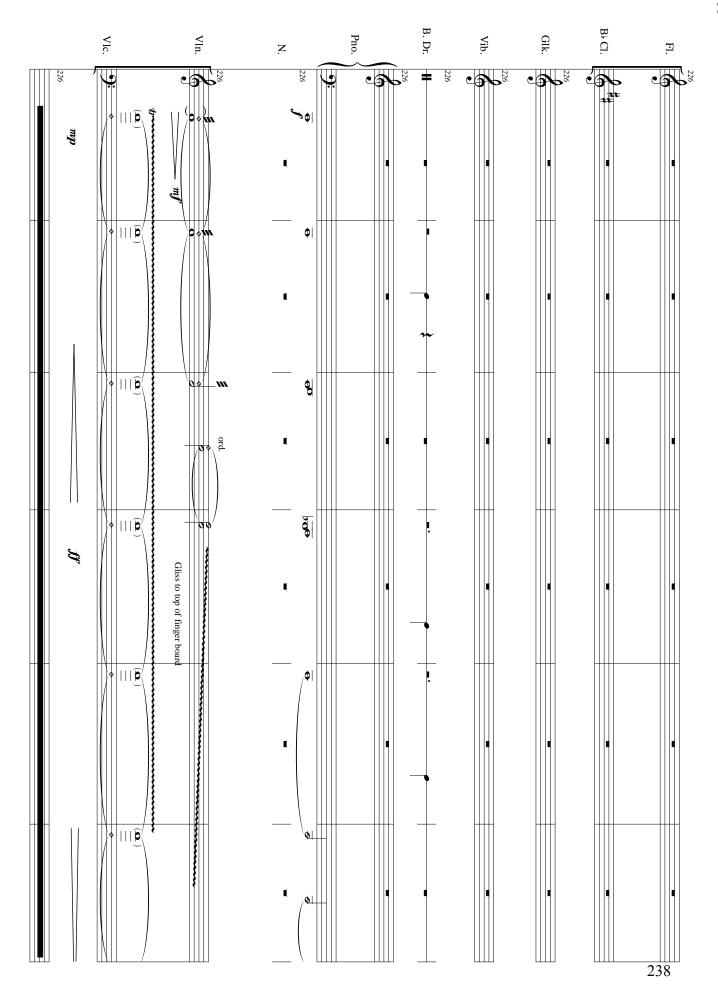


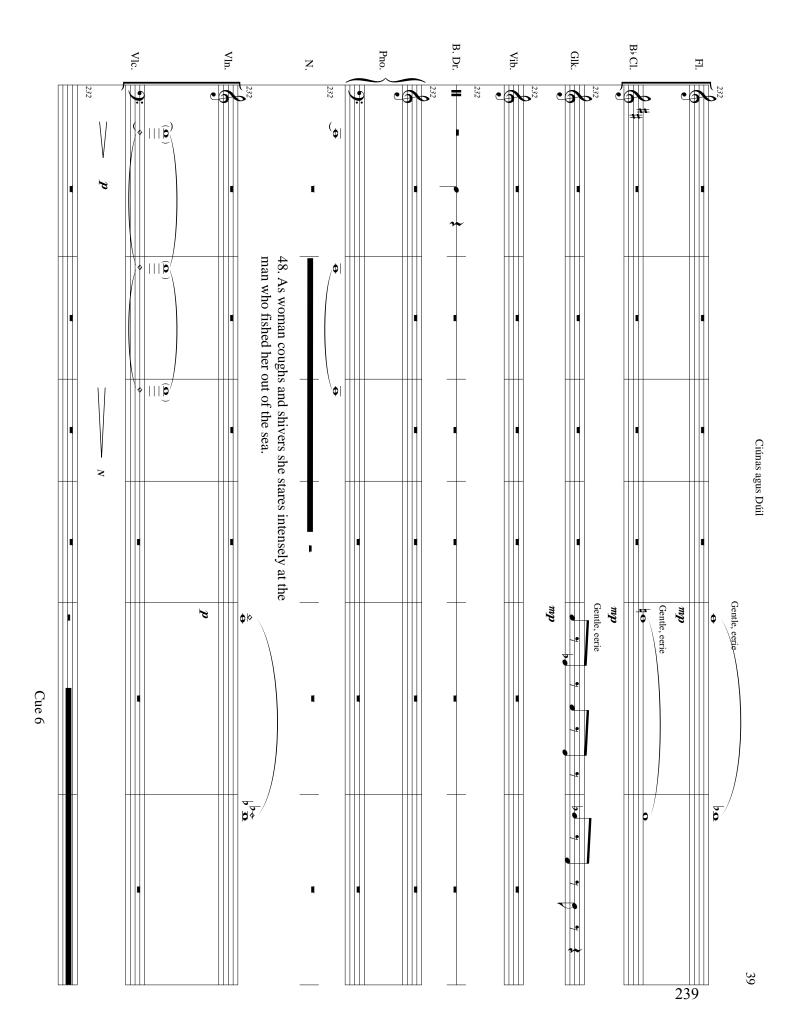


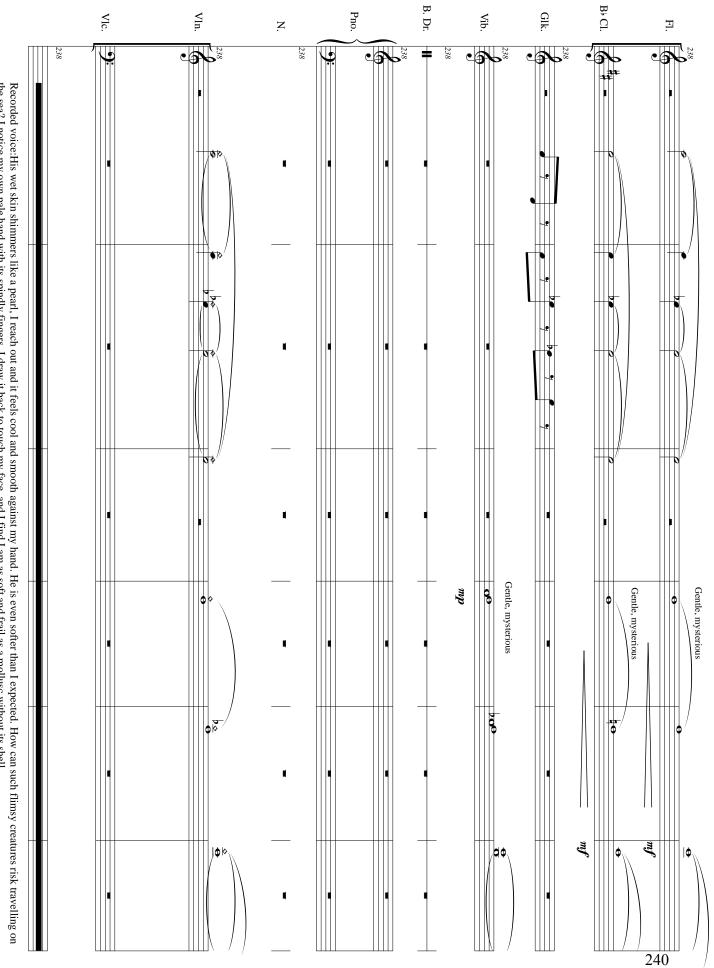




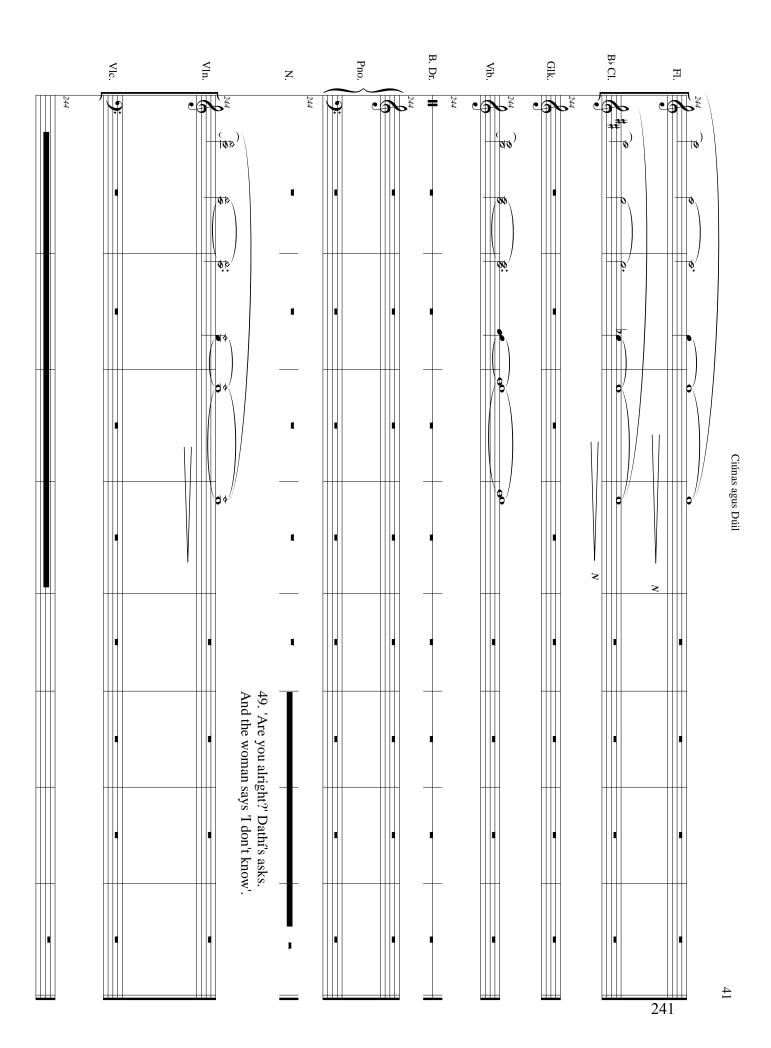








Recorded voice:His wet skin shimmers like a pearl, I reach out and it feels cool and smooth against my hand. He is even softer than I expected. How can such flimsy creatures risk travelling on the sea? I notice my own pale hand with its spindly fingers. I draw it back to touch my face, and I find I am as soft and frail as a mollusc without its shell.



## Appendix 5. Score: Stitching



play by Colin Stanley Bell music and additional text by Sarah O'Halloran



<b>T</b> 7			
1/	Λı	co	c.
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Soprano'

Alto'

Tenor"

Bass'

**Instruments:** 

Cello'

Piano'

Percussion:'vibraphone,'marimba,'woodblocks,'bass'drum,'cymbal' Additional:'Pigeon'calls,'rubber'gloves'(flap'to'create'sound'of'pigeon'wings)'

## Fonts used:

Voices on tape

Spoken Live

Text on screen

– use different fonts to indicate which character the words are associated with. Unless otherwise indicated text on screen should be in the narrator's font.

Images

- images are indicated at some points in the score, other images should be used as available. Video, photographs and drawings may be used.

(the voices of nosey neighbours)

'that one, she's odd as get out'

'Wouldn't look at you'

'Thinks she's too good'

'No wonder her daughter went the way she did'

'that Lana's a strange one'

'Don't speak to anyone'

'Sure you know what the family was like'

'Not from round here'

'Nobody knows who the father was'

'Coulda been any numbera fellas'

'Outsiders'

'They don't belong here'

(Nana)
It's just you and me, Lana.
Just you and me against the world.
But that's ok, we're all we need.

In a small village over looking the Irish sea there lived a couple called Sybil and Tom.

They've been there a very long time, ever since the earth was broken to lay foundations for the village.

They keep watch over the town, they are its living memory.

In the village Sybil is known as the 'pigeon lady'. Tom is 'Postie Tom'. The townsfolk don't pay them much attention. In fact, most people forget that they're even there, their own busy, busy lives taking over; making memories to be picked up, packaged, and protected by Tom and Sybil.

(Very short pause before 'We Are This Town')

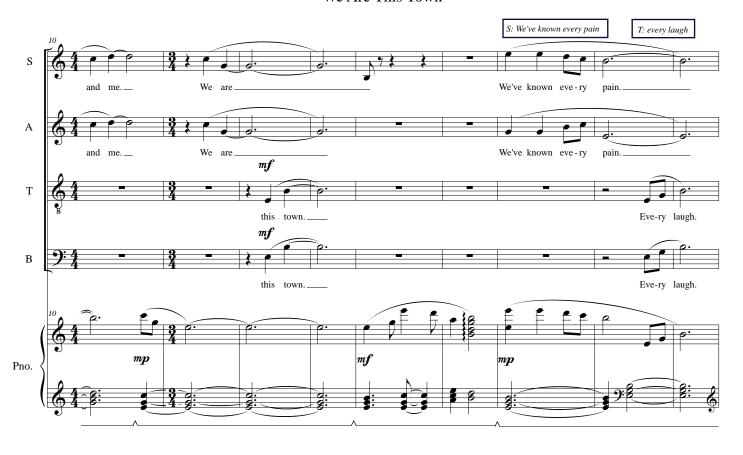
## We Are This Town

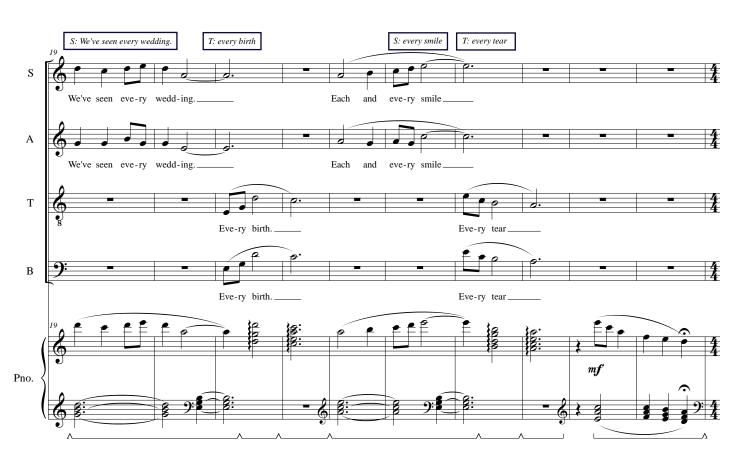
Characters: Tom and Sybil

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran

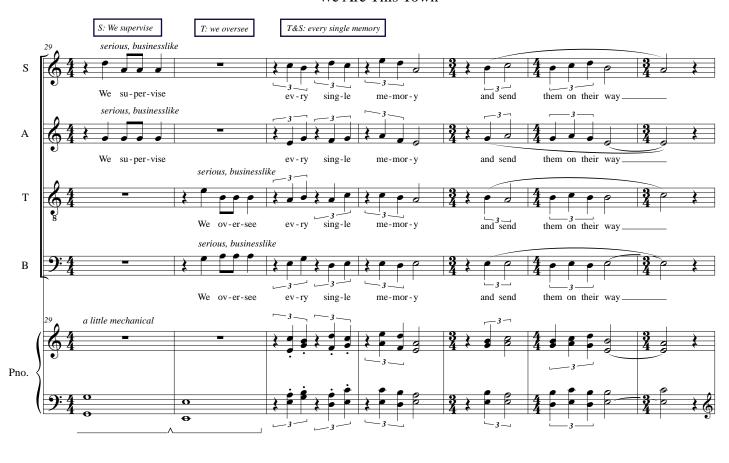


## We Are This Town



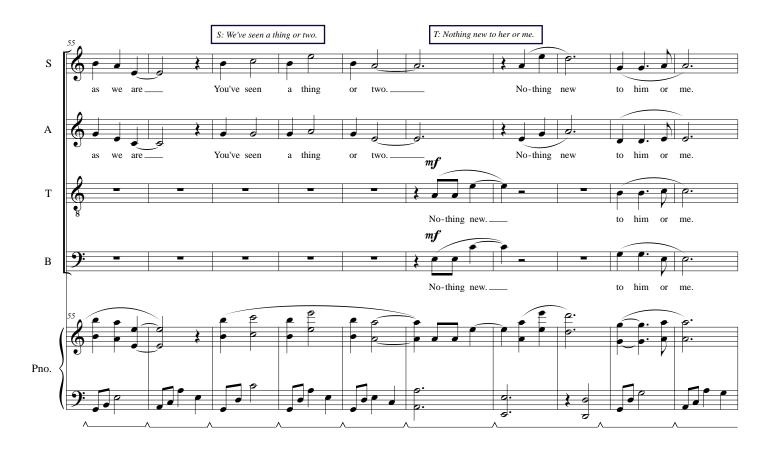


#### We Are This Town



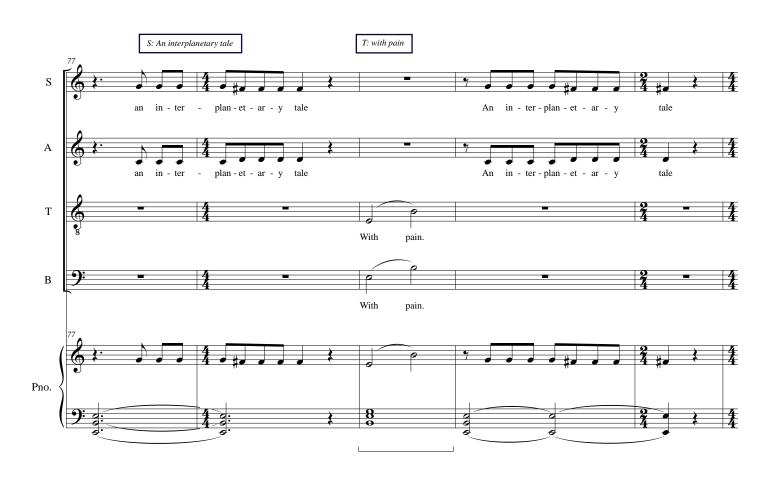




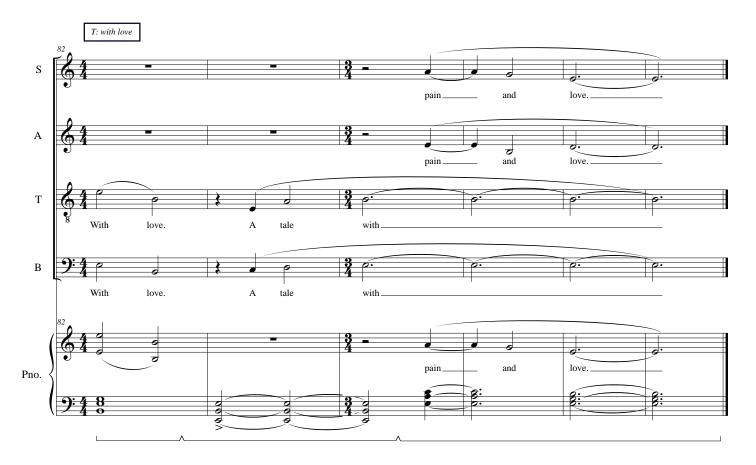


#### We Are This Town





#### We Are This Town



Also in the town lives a girl called Lana.
Her mother, Hannah, left when she was very young.
So Lana lives with her Nana.
Their house overlooks the sea,
a wee end terrace,
the only one without a satellite dish.

Could use a licka paint.

Lana's family never really fit in.

Nosey neighbours love to gossip about them.

But Lana and Nana do their best,

Keep themselves to themselves.

Tom and Sybil: But no slipping through our net.

Now Lana's Nana is getting older. And Lana cares for her Nana.

(Very short pause before 'One of Those Girls')

## One of Those Girls

Characters: Tom and Sybil

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran



- + place a hand on the string inside the piano while playing the note
- harmonic, gently place a fingertip on the string





a tempo

mf

mp



# Lana's Routine

Character: Narrator

Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran

Instruments, wait for speaker, no need to rush in after a line.





Narrator: It's November,

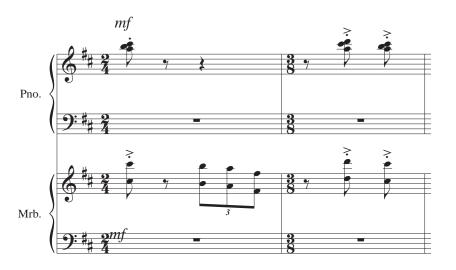
A mucky old morning, 5:28am,



Lana's alarm's about to sound.

She has a lot to do before school.

L: Nana likes her hair wet first, before her face.



The day starts with Nana's bath.

#### Lana's Routine

L: They come out so that's a bit easier.



Then Nana's teeth need to be brushed.

Next dry Nana's hair,

Nr: That's what her Nana always told her. N: Wet hair equals a stiff neck.



so she doesn't get a stiff neck.

And every morning they tell the story

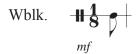
Nr: Lana fills in the gaps, helps Nana to remember.



of Lana's mother.

It's what they do. It's their story.

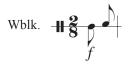


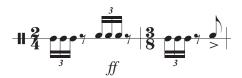


But this morning feels different.

Mornings are usually quiet,

### Lana's Routine





But not this quiet.

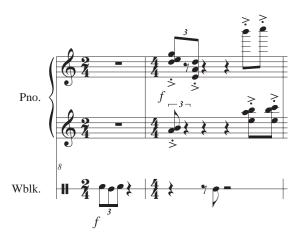


Nana's not where she should be.

Nana's nowhere to be found.



L: Where can she be? What if she's fallen? What if somebody sees her?



Panic sets in.

L: What if they didn't believe me? What if they told?

Lana doesn't want to explain anything to anyone.

(Following straight on from 'Lana's Routine')

Lana and Nana have promised to stay together. They don't want to live anywhere else. They don't want to be separated. And they need to stay put So that when Lana's mother comes home She will find them.

It is best if things just stay the way they are.
But this morning could change all that.
If Nana is out there wandering around
the police might find her,
social services,
the nosey neighbours that Nana hates.
Lana has to find her Nana before anyone else does.
But she is too late.

(Short pause before 'A Flicker on her Face')

## A Flicker on her Face

Characters: Tom and Nana

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran

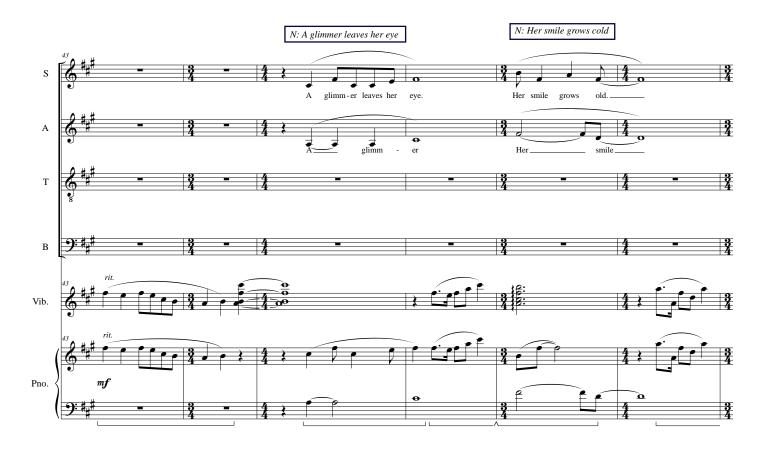


















(Very short pause after 'A Flicker on her Face')

Lana's grabbing boots, scarves and coats Keys! Keys! Keys! Where are her keys!

Keys! Keys! Keys!

Then the door bell rings.
Lana takes the stairs three at a time
Down to the hall.

Through frosted glass
She sees two shapes at the door,
One her Nana,
The other?

TOM: One parcel return to sender.

'I'm sorry love' Her Nana says.

Lana could feel the twitch of every curtain, her head was filled with what they'd all be saying.

Before she knew it she'd pulled Nana in and slammed the door.

Locking it.

'Thank-you' Lana called through the letterbox.

'She won't do it again'

Sybil: I told him not to get involved But would he listen? Not to me!

Lana ran her Nana a bath Like Nana used to do when Lana was wee, When her nose was nipped by the cold, And her wee toes were frozen.

When Nana was warmed by the bath, And bundled up in blankets in the front room Lana said:

Lana: Nana.

You mustn't go out like that.

Nana: OK Lana: Nana

> If anyone finds out... It's just you and me Nana.

Isn't it?

Nana: You and me Hanna.

Lana: I'm Lana, Nana.

Hanna is my mum.

Nana: I know that.

I know that.

Lana: Tell me the story Nana

Nana: Story?

Lana: It was a wild stormy night It starts like that

It was a wild stormy night

Nana: When?

Lana: On that night.

(Very short pause before 'Wild Stormy Night')

# Wild Stormy Night

#### Characters: Lana and Nana

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran

Images: Lana getting Nana settled, and telling the story.

















Images: The storm, evil agnes and the mermaid.

















































(Very short pause after 'Wild Stormy Night')

Lana: And when evil Agnes' reign ends

She'll come back to us Won't she Nana?

pause
Nana: We'll be OK
Won't we?

(Very short pause before 'Lana's Routine 2')

## Lana's Routine 2

Character: Narrator

Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Collin Stanley Bell wih Sarah O'Halloran

It was almost time for school,

Nr: Clean clothes washed and pressed by Lana.

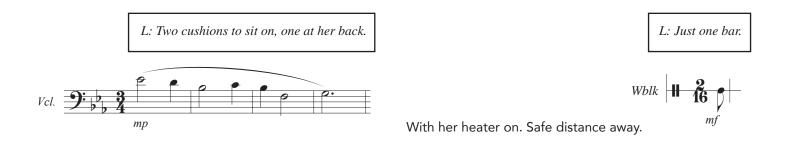


So Lana got her Nana dressed,



Made Nana's breakfast,

Then got Nana comfy in her chair,





The TV on.

She'd be back at break, then at lunch 302

## Lana's Routine 2

L: 4 minutes and 37 seconds door to door if you walk fast enough.



Lana'd live with the hunch That things aren't right, That things are changing, And not for the good, As far as she was concerned.

Meanwhile Sybil and Tom argued.

## There Are Rules

Characters: Sybil (and Tom)

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Hallroan









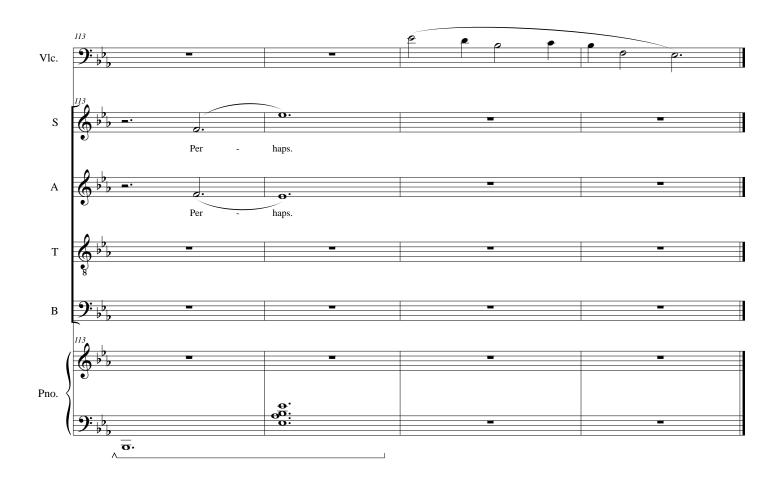












(Short pause after 'There are Rules')

When Lana got home at lunchtime Tom was there.

Tom: I made your favourite

Tomato soup wi' cheesy puffs floating in.

Your Nana told me. She let me in.

We've been chatting haven't we Mrs O'Malley?

The colour drained from Lana's face.

Lana: We're OK.

She sleepwalks, don't you Nana?

She won't do it again, sure you won't Nana?

Please leave us be, we don't need help, sure we don't Nana?

But her excuses didn't get Tom out the door.

He said calmly:

Tom: There's a way I can help.

Not just making soup, But help make things better, Give your Nana another chance.

Lana didn't follow.

Lana: 'How'd you mean, help?'

Tom: Your Nana's losing memory

the 'long goodbye's' what they call it.

I can help you this once,

I think, To stop it.

Lana: 'You think you can help us?

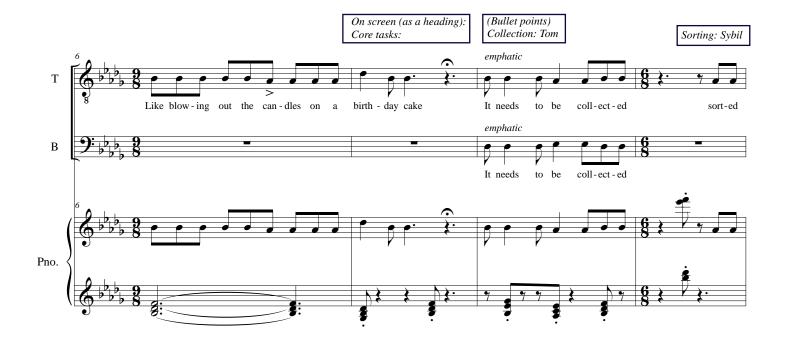
(Very short pause before 'Say You Make a Memory')

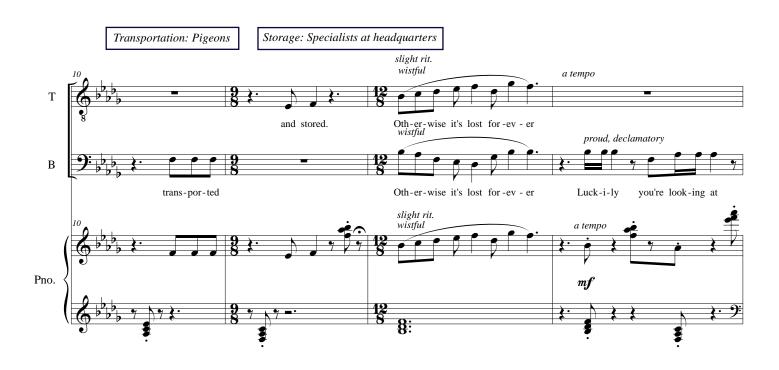
## Say You Make a Memory

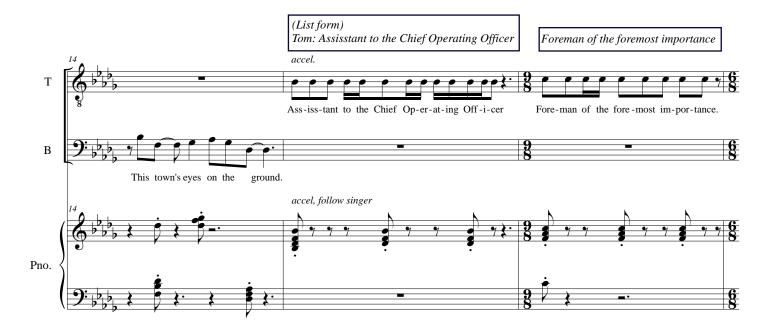
Character: Tom

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran



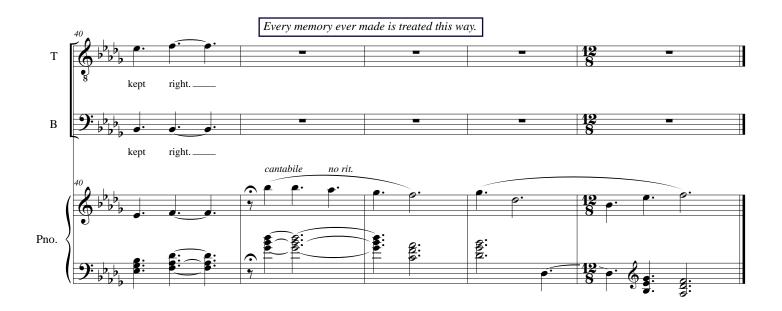












(Very short pause after 'Say You Make a Memory')

Lana: So you could take me to where they're stored?

We could get Nana's back?

Tom: In theory I could take you there

Lana: We could go there and see what's wrong?

Tom: But you can never, ever tell anyone.

Lana: Cross my heart, I'll do anything.

Who'll look after Nana?

Tom: Don't you worry, Sybil'll do it.

Tom: She has a good heart, I knew she'd come around.

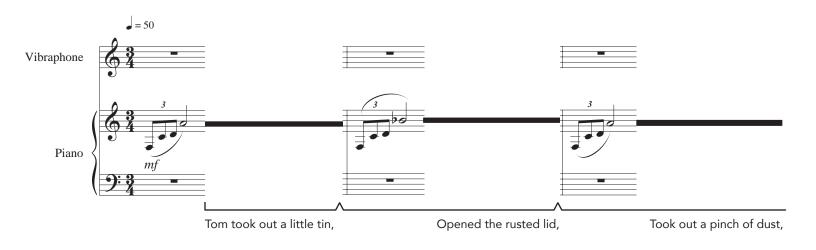
(Short pause before 'A Little Tin')

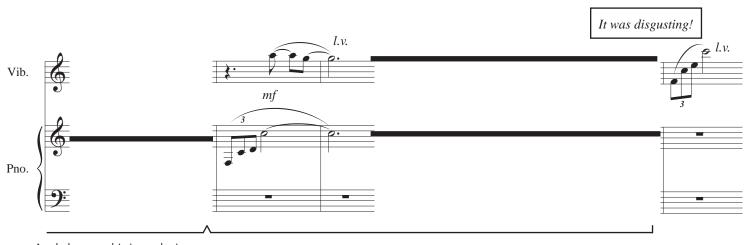
## A Little Tin

#### Character: Narrator

Serves as introduction to Song 7. Rings on Saturn

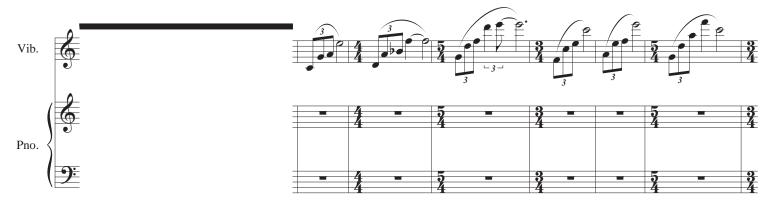
Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Collin Stanley Bell





And dropped it into their tea.

The dust was pigeon wing, Ground up and dried.



# Rings on Saturn

Character: Tom

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran





Rings on Saturn

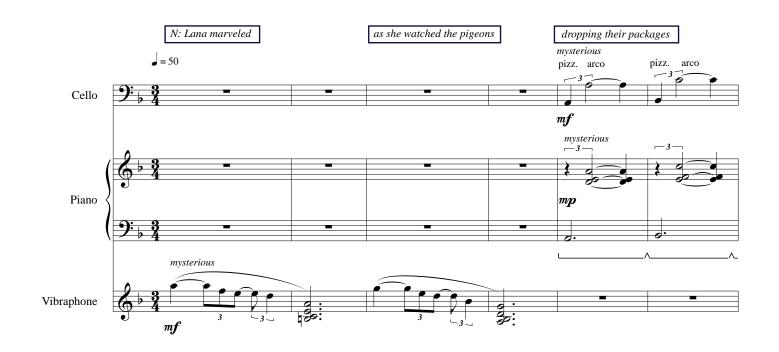


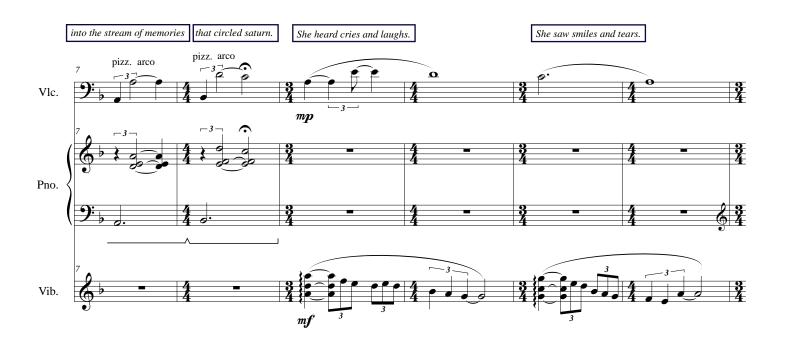




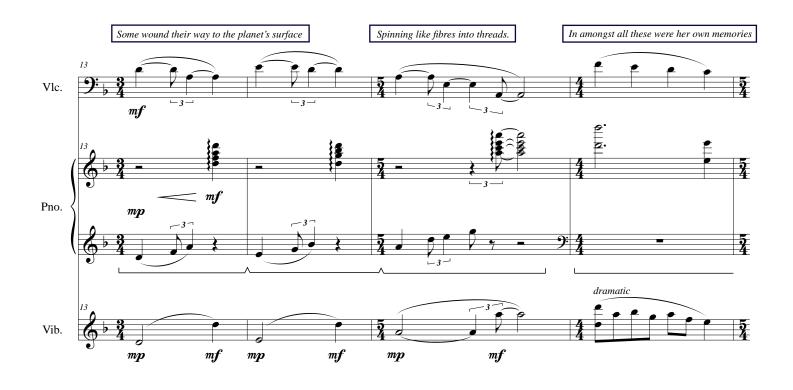
### Lana Marveled

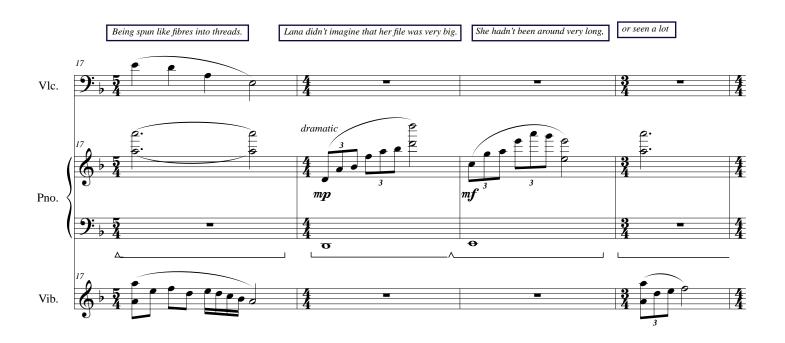
Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Colin Stanley Bell





#### Lana Marveled





#### Lana Marveled



Then she thought about her mother. Her mother must have a file here too.

#### (Short pause after 'Lana Marvelled')

Before Lana knew it
She found herself in an office
From outside she could hear the click and scratch of needles,
Knitting up the threads of memories,
Binding them together.
A woman sat at a tidy desk,
Fiona Office Manager.

Tom: Fiona! Fiona!

How nice to put a face to a name

Fiona: no response

Tom: Tom, I'm Tom

Fiona: Tom, it's you?

How can it be?

Tom: You'll know about structural changes

Secondments and that.

Well,

That's me in another... department.

Fiona: I never heard

Tom: Inspections and Evaluations Section 24c

Accompanied today by My colleague Lana

FIONA: This is very irregular

I wasn't fore warned I mean, informed

Tom: Spot inspections

New policy

Won't take us long Please bear with me

Fiona: I'll have to check,

Not meaning offence. I run a tight ship,

You see.

Tom: Ah but we're pressed for time

All we need is one file To see how things work

Spot check

Fiona: That's not possible

Not with this sort of notice

Tom: We'd value your input for the report

We're compiling

Co-operation means promotion A break from all this filing?

Fiona: Name?

Lana: Mrs Dorothy O'Malley

Fiona: Birth

Lana: Christmas Eve

24th December 1944.

Fiona: And this is random?

Tom: Completely.

Fiona: I'll see what I can do.

In the blink of an eye
Fiona produced
The file of Agnes Dorothy O'Malley
Her dad called her Dottie.
Lana's Nana.

Fiona: The file you requested

Needles still present Not deceased, but With budget restrictions

Upkeep and repair has been affected We are Prioritising the backlog of

All those new files As you can see

Tom: Thank-you, Fiona.

Your co-operation is noted,

That will be all.

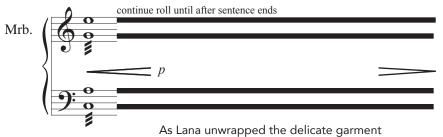
(Short pause before 'Unravelling Memories')

# **Unraveling Memories**

Characters: Narrator, Lana, Tom

Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Collin Stanley Bell

gentle, mysterious

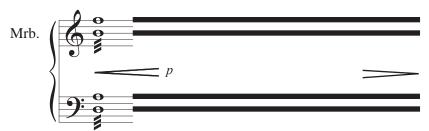


Mrb.

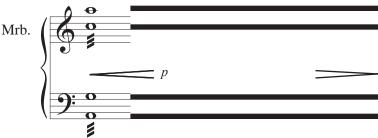


that bound together all the memories her Nana had ever made.

She noticed that every so often there were little gaps,

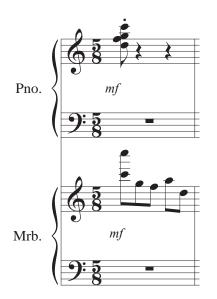


Holes where the yarn had worn away,



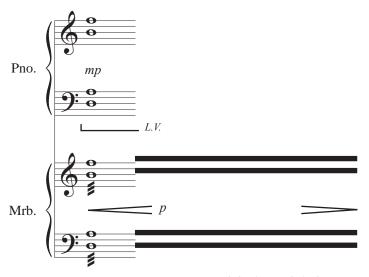
And little tendrils had separated.

### **Unraveling Memories**



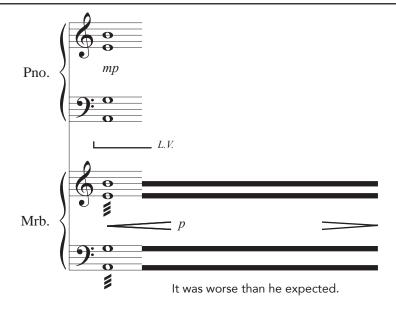


Tom explained, 'that's where memories have been lost'.

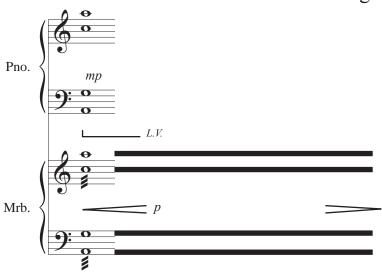


'Can it be fixed?', Lana asked.

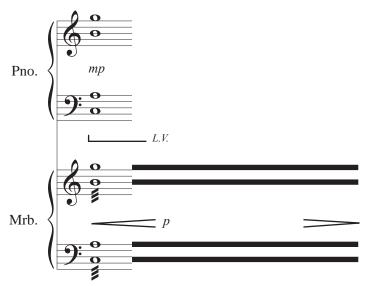
Tom examined the knitted cloth.



### **Unravelling Memories**



They couldn't possibly repair it all of it,



They didn't have much time.

TOM There is only so much we can do, Lana.

We have to get you back, Lana.

LANA Tell me what I can do.

If I even fix one or two Then that gives us more time.

Tell me what to do.

TOM Where you find fibres unravelling

Take them between your fingers and

Ever so gently

unravel a little further The ends will spark

the memory releases

Doing it this way means You'll see things that your Nana

Didn't want you to see,

Just so you know.

This was a bad idea.

I never think things through.

### **Unravelling Memories**

Lana was determined to help Nana,

So she had one more favour to ask of Tom.



He had to let her do it alone.

If her Nana's secrets were there

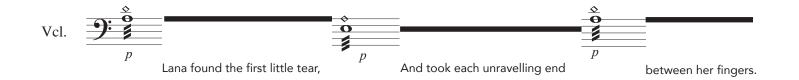


Lana should be the one to keep them.



Tom complied,

Leaving Lana to unravel Nana's memories.





Pigeon call.

Her Nana's world awakened before her.

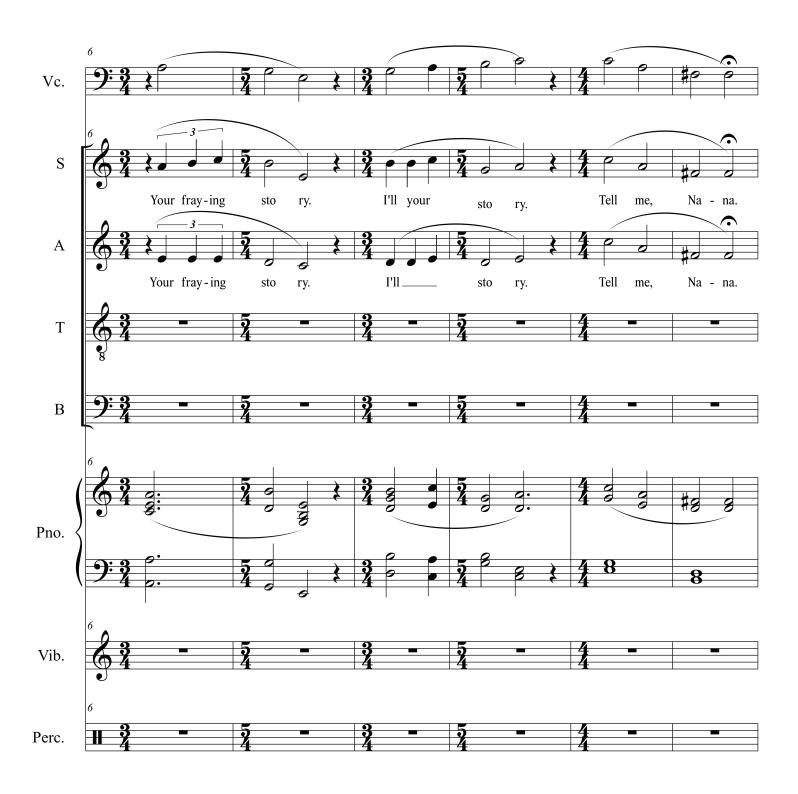
Fluttering wings.

There was no going back. She'd see all she could And her her Nana to be better.

# Memory Sequence

Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Colin Bell with Sarah O'Halloran





Images: Unravelling + Lana and Nana happy.



The Locarno Ballroom, 1965. Nana is 16. She meets her future husband.

Images: Nana's memories of her youth.



Spoken by two singers:

Nana: Do you like my new frock?

Man: Yes, it's very nice.

Nana: I made it myself. There's a pocket for my comb and my cloakroom ticket.

Man Would you like to dance?





On the news.

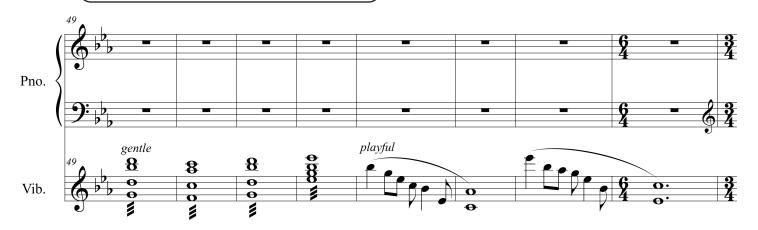
Narrator (in the style of a news reader):

... and the search for missing local woman, Hannah O'Malley has been called off following her disappearance on Tuesday evening.





Images: Hannah growing up, happy memories



Images: Hannah as a young woman. She looks happy. Perhaps images with Lana's father or during her pregnancy.

Images: Introduce images of Hannah's depression



#### Memory Sequence



Nana in a doctor's surgery.

#### On tape:

Nana: Ever since the wee one arrived she won't leave the house.

I've tried to encourage her. Doctor: And the father? Nana: He's not around.

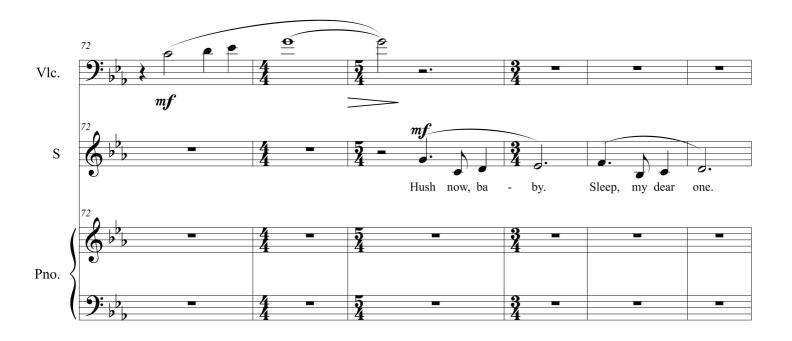
Overheard at the supermarket.

#### On tape (nosey neighbor:

- 1: She's always had plenty to say for herself.
- 2: No anymore.
- 1: Daughter in that state!
- 2: It's that child I feel for.

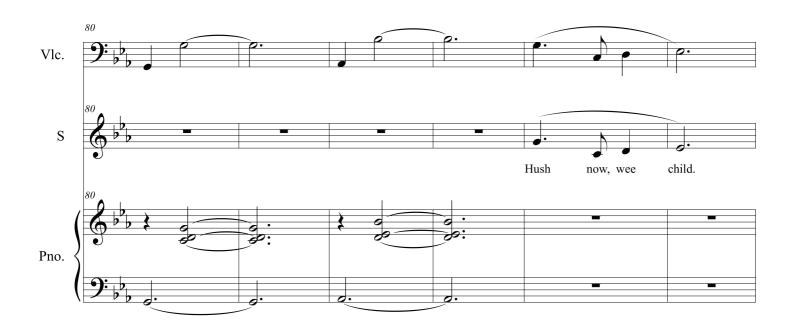


Images: Lana as a baby and little girl.



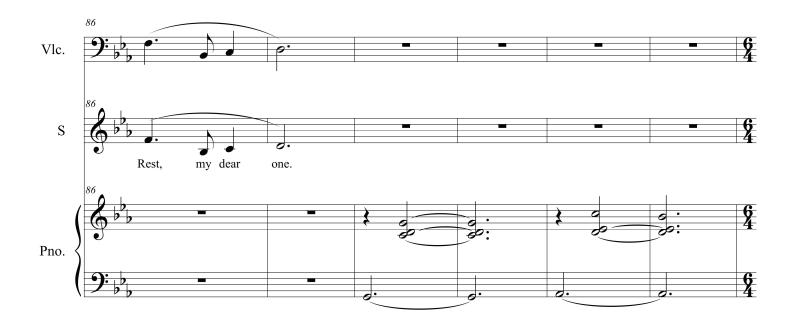
#### On tape:

Nana: You're just like your mum when she was wee.



#### Memory Sequence

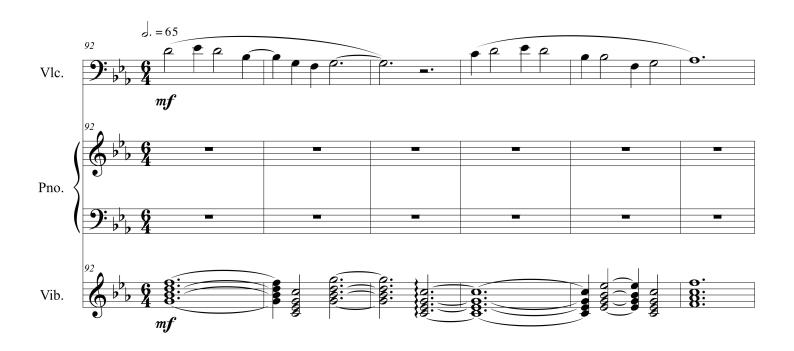
Images of Lana as a child and Hannah looking sad.



On tape:

Lana: My mum is a mermaid, isn't she, Nana?

Nana: [processed snippets from her 'Wild Stormy Night' story'



#### Memory Sequence

A policeman at Nana's door.

#### On tape:

Policeman: Is there anyone you'd like us to call to come wit with you for a bit?
Nana: No. No. Nobody. I don't want you calling anybody. There's nobody to call.



#### On tape:

Nana: It's just you and me, Lana. Just you and me against the world. But that's ok, we're all we need.



On the news.

Narrator (in the style of a newsreader): Witnesses last saw Hanna O'Malley heading towards the beach during the worst storm to hit this coast since records began. Police do not suspect foul play.

Images: Hannah on the beach looking extremely depressed.

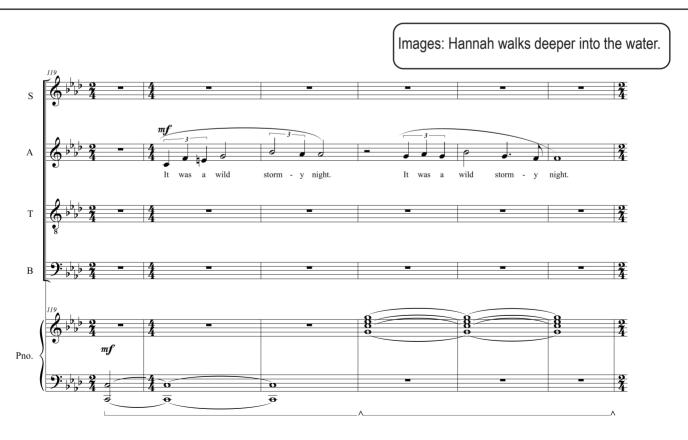
With every twist of the yarn a new memory was released, and Lana's need to learn more grew.

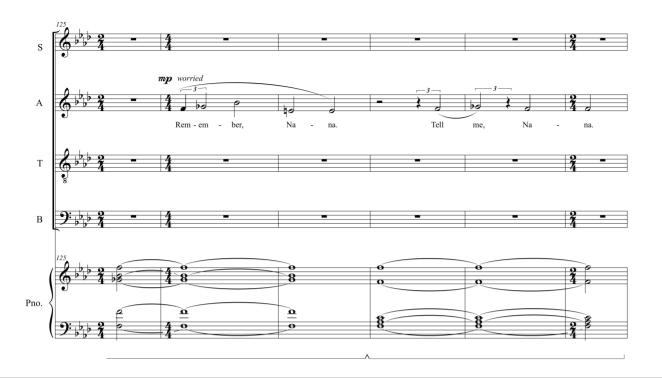




Images: Hannah enters the water

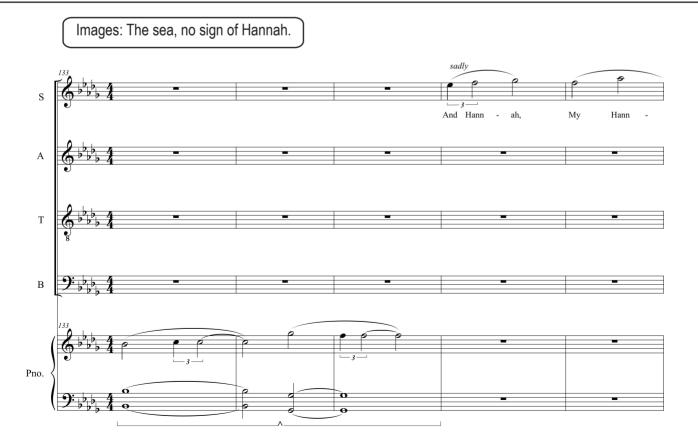
Now that she understood what had happened She needed another glimpse of her mother, Or just to hear her voice.



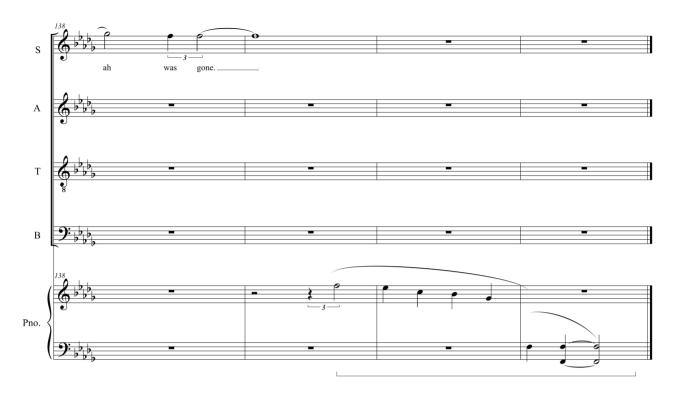


Images: Hannah dives into the sea and disappears.

She continued to twist and pull until it had all unravelled in her hands.



#### Memory Sequence



Images: Lana waking up, she is covered in yarn.

Lana cried out: 'Mum!'

And with her cry she jolted awake in her own bed, surrounded by the wool that her mother had used in her first attempt at knitting.

She had unravelled the jumper she slept in.

The sweater her mother had made.

## Lana Glanced at the Clock

Character: Narrator

Music by Sarah O'Halloran Text by Colin Stanley Bell with Sarah O'Halloran

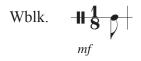
Lana glanced at the clock. Two minutes before her alarm would go off, Two minutes before another day would begin.





It's November,

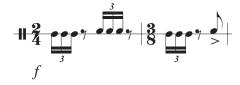
A mucky old morning, 5:28am,



Wblk. #8

But this morning feels different.

Mornings are usually quiet,



But not this quiet.

'Nana!', she thought.



Jumping out of bed to see if Nana was alright.

But she wasn't there.

#### Lana Glanced at the Clock

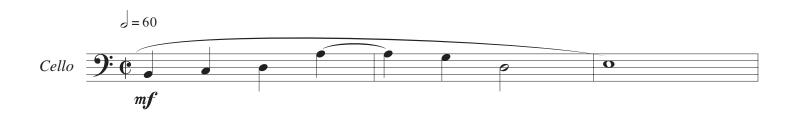


She was nowhere to be found.

But then Lana remembered, Nana was at the bus stop Waiting for the number 27 to take her to the dancing. Tom would find here and bring her home.



Things would be different this time. When Tom arrived at the door with Nana Lana would be waiting, Lana would be grateful, Lana would ask for help. She'd had enough secrets.



The pigeon lady and the postie knew everything already. Almost nothing needed to be said.



#### Lana Glanced at the Clock

Time passed.

More memories were made.

The rings still spin around Saturn.

Tom and Sybil continue their work.

They even recruited some new pigeons.

And they take time to sit with Nana when Lana was at school.



They talk with Nana about her past, Make her feel like herself again.



They helped Nana remember things like her childhood, So that Lana could have what was left of hers.

# Reprise: We Are This Town

Characters: Tom and Sybil

Music by: Sarah O'Halloran Text by: Colin Stanley Bell









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