Dan Trueman

Songs That Are Hard To Sing

Commissioned by the
Barlow Endowment for Music Composition
at Brigham Young University

for Sō Percussion and the JACK Quartet

2017
Instrumentation and Notes

Strings

String quartet, in scordatura throughout:

I use Helmholtz-Ellis notation for micro-tuning. (see http://www.marcsabat.com/pdfs/legend.pdf for more information)

The C-strings are equal tempered, the G’s tuned to perfect 3/2 ratios, and the E tuned to a 5/2 just 10th over the C, or more practically to a 5/3 just 6th over the G-string.

I have erred on the side of being over-precise with the tuning, and naturally there is a range of tolerance. Sometimes a precise notation might in practice just be played as, say, a quarter-tone, but other times the precision is important. Most times, the micro-tuning is matched by something in bitKlavier, which is highly precise, so it seems better to err in that direction rather than approximate preemptively.

n+ — between normale and sul ponticello
s.p. — sul pont.
s.t. — sul tasto

— parenthetical note: one that barely speaks, but is still pitched (as opposed to a “ghost note”)

— a light brush stroke, from off the string, and to off the string (as opposed to an aggressive staccatissimo)

— tenuto, but without any aggression or edges; full length, usually with a lean, some dynamic emphasis
Instrumentation and Notes (cont.)

Percussion

Drum-kit
Crotale
Bows for Cymbals

Two 88-key MIDI keyboards with bitKlavier
(see bitKlavier.com for download and information)
and localized speakers, within the ensemble (a pair of Bose L1s is ideal)

Musical saws (alto and tenor)

Wood Blocks (2)
Double-second steel drums
Microtonal lead pan steel drum (~1/4-tone up from standard)
Concert Bass Drum
Many tuned pipes, cut to pitch, as follows:

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\[ \text{\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{pipes.png}} \]
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The ambitious might want a more complete microtuned set of pipes:

```
pitch | freq | MIDI # | notes
--- | --- | --- | ---
C3 | 130.813 | 48 |  
F3 | 174.418 | 52.9805 |  
G3 | 196.22 | 55.0195 |  
Ab3 | 209.3 | 56.1369 | Ab syntonic up  
Bb3 | 235.47 | 58.1764 | Bb syntonic up  
B3 | 245.28 | 58.8331 | B syntonic down  
C4 | 261.63 | 60 |  
C4+ | 269.809 | 60.5332 | 11th partial/G  
Db4 | 279.07 | 61.1173 | Db syntonic up  
D4 | 294.336 | 62.0395 |  
Eb4 | 313.95 | 63.1564 | Eb syntonic up  
E4 | 327.031 | 63.8631 | E syntonic down  
F4 | 348.835 | 64.9805 |  
F4+ | 359.744 | 65.5136 | F 11th partial/C  
F#4 | 367.89 | 65.9011 | F# syntonic up, or VERY close Gb septimal down syntonic up (7c off), so use for both  
G4 | 392.44 | 67.0195 |  
Ab4 | 418.6 | 68.1369 | Ab syntonic up  
Bb4 | 457.846 | 69.6883 | Bb septimal down  
Bb4 | 470.927 | 70.716 | Bb syntonic up  
C5 | 523.25 | 72 |  
Db5 | 558.134 | 73.1173 | Db syntonic up  
E5 | 654.062 | 75.8631 | E syntonic down
```
Program Notes

Some of my favorite songs and tunes are terribly hard to sing. They seem tuneful but defy my efforts to sing them, leaving me in a somewhat embarrassing and inarticulate heap of grunting and muttering, with an occasional sustained high note. I could make a list, but I trust (perhaps naively) that I am not alone in this experience and am hopeful that you all have songs that are similarly enticing and beguiling. Apart from the sense that these tunes are “melodic” in some way, even if they are hard to sing and their “melodies” perhaps even impossible to fully identify, these songs have other features that are enticing: their formal repetitions (one more chorus, please!), their singular moments (what a great bridge!), and their surface characteristics (sheesh, I love those ornaments and blue notes, wish I could do that!).

In the process of writing this piece for possibly the most incredible contemporary music band imaginable—So Percussion and the JACK Quartet… combined!—I found myself thinking about “songs” in all of their mysterious and wonderful facets. While I think most of these pieces will be hard or impossible to sing, my hope is that they feel like songs in various ways, like something we might be able to sing in a parallel universe, or, most ambitious, leave us wanting to sing them, even if we can’t. Perhaps Yeats was on to something when, in his penultimate poem Cuchulain Comforted, he tells us “Now we must sing and sing the best we can…. Or driven from home and left to die in fear.”

Now, about the band. So Percussion has broadened the notion of “percussion” so far that I tend to think of them as four amazing musicians who can do just about anything I ask them. Here, two of them play bitKlavier, a “prepared digital piano” inspired by Cage that I’ve been coding up for the last few years with fellow hacker/musician Mike Mulshine. One of the beauties of bitKlavier is that we can tune it up however we want, and have that tuning change as we play. Here, it’s mostly tuned to the overtones of C-Major, though we hear it drift from there at times (including the very opening of the first song, which gradually and strangely sinks flat). Similarly, I’ve asked JACK, which is the most tuning-sensitive ensemble I’ve ever encountered, to tune up their instruments to a big beautiful C-Major chord; you’d think that would be simple to deal with, but it turns out to be magnificently complicated, and even more-so when they play with the changeable bitKlavier—don’t try this at home! Or, maybe do!

—Dan Trueman, 2017
Sad Song

Sad songs
Sad songs are hard to sing
I sigh, wish I could cry, a lament is too much for me

Sad songs
I'm afraid to show shame
Ashamed to know, it's so so so…

Let's resolve
resolve to see what we will want
to unsee, to remember the names we can't forget

Cuchulain tells us that,
like muttering shrouds,
we must sing and sing and sing the best we can

Ochon
Ochon agus ochon oh…
Songs That Are Hard To Sing

Sinking Song

Dan Trueman

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accel. . . . . . . . . . \( \frac{\mathcal{J}}{\mathcal{J}} = 78 \)

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2

\( \text{bowed cymbal} \)
\[ Vln. 1 \]
\[ Vln. 2 \]
\[ Vla. \]
\[ Vc. \]
\[ bK 1 \]
\[ bK 2 \]
\[ P. 1 \]
\[ P. 2 \]

slash note just slightly before others, to reset tuning
continue slight pitch bending into second of slurred notes

gentle fall off with dim...

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2
again, elaborate; this is just a basic template, rough sound world (HH play)

bass drum, soft mallet
again, continue slight pitch bending into second of slurred notes
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2

concert bass drum
super quiet, with fingers
approx. 6 min.
Songs That Are Hard To Sing

Sister Song

after the Norwegian tune Systerslått

Dan Trueman

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C-just; match bitKlavier

J: beat types in symbols, plus outline of what synchronic preparations in bitKlavier would be; shape as you see fit

comp as you see fit
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

p

B♭ root

bK 2

p arpeggiate lightly, bottom up

P. 1

P
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
bK 1
pp

again, arpeggiate lightly, bottom up

bK 2

P. 1
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.  

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2

fp

moltó vibrato

diminish vibrato with decrescendo

Sisterslaat-bK2-6
approx. 7 min.
*Songs That Are Hard To Sing*

**Summoning Song**

```
\begin{music}
\textbf{A} \quad \text{\textcopyright Many Arrows Music, 2017}

\textbf{Violin I}
\
\textbf{Violin II}
\
\textbf{Viola}
\
\textbf{Cello}
\
\textbf{Saw}
\
\textbf{bitKlavier}
\
\textbf{Crotales}
\
\textbf{Percussion I}
\
\textbf{Drum Set}
\
\textbf{Tuned Pipes}
\
\textbf{Percussion II}
\
\textbf{Steel Drums}
```

scordatura
just tuned in C

By Dan Trueman

\[ \text{At} \quad \text{BPM} \]

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Meno mosso

finger so all notes can
ring as long as possible

A tempo
Steel Pans: accidentals continue through bars
D A tempo

Summoning Song 1
Songs That Are Hard To Sing

Seizing Song

Dan Trueman

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rall.

Meno mosso

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2

espress.
rall.  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  A tempo

respelling septimal B-flats to avoid clutter....
Meno mosso rall.

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2
will clash with bK G

Ab-partial
legato, flautando
Meno mosso

\( \text{rall.} \)

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

BD finger tremolo

\( \text{pp} \)
$\text{Vln. 1} \quad \text{Vln. 2} \quad \text{Vla.} \quad \text{Vc.} \quad \text{bK 1} \quad \text{bK 2}$

$rall. \quad \frac{j=81}{183} \quad \text{mp} \quad \text{p} \quad \text{p}$

$\text{bK 1} \quad \text{bK 2}$

$\text{mp} \quad \text{p}$
A tempo

\( \frac{1}{2} = 70 \)
\( \frac{2}{3} = 140 \)

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK 1

bK 2

P. 1

P. 2

improvise with this pattern, varying as you like brushes, etc...
Songs That Are Hard To Sing

Sad Song

Dan Trueman

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but within *pp* and with some width to the accent
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Saw
bK
bK
P. 1
P. 2

high G mutes
synchronous pulse
and itself is muted
and does not sound
Long GP!
delicate, legato, connected
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Saw

bK

bK

P. 1

P. 2

sfz (but within pp)

glide easily from note to note
Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

bK

bK

P. 1

P. 2

75

battuto

pp
late port to each note, with saw
Più mosso

connected, powerful, but suppressed

stronger than before, but still pure

connected, powerful, but suppressed

connected, powerful, but suppressed

two mallets, one hand

mp
high G mutes
synchronic pulse
and itself is muted
and does not sound
EVERYONE GATHER NEAR JOSH, SLOWLY

ALL SO GENTLY PLAY THESE PITCHES IN SOME WAY

Freely, non-metric

Sad songs sad songs are hard to sing I sigh wish I could cry

IDEALLY THIS IS ALL MEMORIZED

Follow voice, sustain chords as smoothly as possible, disguise bow and pitch changes
V1

120

a l-a-m-e n-t is too much for me sad songs I'm a-fraid to show shame

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

P. Pitches

125

a shamed to know it's so so so... let's re-solve re-solve to

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Vc.

P. Pitches
see what we will want to un-see to re-mem-ber thenames we can't for-get

(yes, I mean A here)

Cu-chu-lain tells us that like mu-tter-ing shrouds we must sing and sing and sing the
V2
V1
best we can
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Vc.
P. Pitches

140
144
V2
V1
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Vc.
P. Pitches
V2

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

Vln. 1

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

Vln. 2

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

Vla.

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

Vc.

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

P. Pitches

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

\( \text{o-chon o-chon a-gus o-chon oh}_1 \)

approx. 11 min.