

JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

Dolce Far Niente

for Voice, String Quartet, and Keyboard

HOG RIVER MUSIC
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT

PROGRAM NOTES

The ten *Miscellaneous Songs* are for unspecified voice (optionally amplified), keyboard (preferably electronic) and string quartet. They are decidedly postmodern in style, tending to deal with the present in terms of the past and the past in terms of the present. The musical idiom ranges from a crunchy chromaticism to a lilting diatonic sweetness. Despite a degree of unity in this stylistic disunity, the songs do not constitute a cycle or even a set: one to all ten may be sung in any order as the singer(s) choose.

The texts to the *Miscellaneous Songs* deal with various contemporary ideas, from our increasingly administrated robotic lives in *Function* and the constant interruptions brought on by technology in *Discontinuous*, to a pleasant dream of escape in *Dolce Far Niente*.

Sound in My Head and *I've Decided* are, in their self-absorption, songs to oneself. *Is This a Love Song*, if not exactly self-absorption, is a self-dialog, less about the impossibility of love than about the impossibility of yet another love song. *To Write a Song* carries our millennial skepticism a step further and questions the writing of any song — except, of course, one on the subject of writing a song. *I've Never Talked to a Tree* is a doubly-coded song, sincere and satirical at the same time.

I Have Nothing to Say, a modular song, is based on John Cage's famous statement, permuted into a poem by the Scottish poet Edwin Morgan. *JNNY* is a setting of a pop tune and lyric by composer Todd Merrell (with a word and note changed here and there).

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Dolce Far Niente is the wonderful Italian phrase for “the sweetness of doing nothing,” the blessing of leisure. This song is dedicated to my friend Leslie Tomkins, a free-lance violist who lives and works in New York when she is not playing concerts around the globe. Such a hectic life, I thought, deserves some sweet time off. *Dolce Far Niente* addresses that need: it is about the sweetest and most leisurely-paced music I have written.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

- Voice part may be amplified
- Keyboard part may be performed on an acoustic piano, electric piano, or synthesizer. The various synthesizer patches are described below.
- Patches (and patch changes) are indicated in the Keyboard part by a number in a box **1**
 - 1: Gentle harp/flute with long release ring (5-6 sec.)
 - 2: Same as 1, but fairly dry release.
 - 3: Sustained chiff organ sound; warm, and without a lot of overtones.
 - 4: Synth guitar with bright piano; slightly detuned, though clear in pitch.
- A reference cassette (or DAT) of synthesizer sounds (as part of a sequencer “performance”) is available from the publisher. This recording may be used by the singer in preparing for performance.
- Parts are available from the publisher:

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Dolce Far Niente

for Leslie Tomkins

Music and text
James Sellars

Leisurely
(♩=ca.52)

Score for the first system, measures 1-4. The score includes parts for Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Keyboard. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked "Leisurely" with a quarter note equal to approximately 52 beats per minute. The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) for the strings and *p* (piano) for the cello and keyboard. The word *sord.* (sordina) is indicated for the strings. The keyboard part has a circled "1" in the first measure. The time signature changes to 3/4 in measure 3 and back to 4/4 in measure 4.

Score for the second system, measures 5-8. The score includes parts for Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Keyboard. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked *mp comodo* (moderato piano, comodo). The lyrics are: "June. twen-ty-first sum-mer sol-stice this year." The dynamics are marked *pp* (pianissimo) for the strings and *p* (piano) for the cello and keyboard. The word *semplice* (semplice) is indicated for the strings. The time signature changes to 3/4 in measure 6 and back to 4/4 in measure 8.

10

Hot still af-ter-noon.

mp *pp* *p* *p*

mf *p*

10

14

No-thing do-ing no-thing Dol-ce far nien-te

p *pp* *pp* *pp*

senza vib. *senza vib.* *senza vib.* *senza vib.*

vib. norm. *vib. norm.*

14

18

In the yard watch-ing Bird song- sun-flo-wers- long hours-

mf *mp* *p* *pp* *pp* *pp*

vib. norm. *vib. norm.* *senza vib.* *senza vib.* *senza vib.* *senza vib.*

23

No-thing do-ing no-thing Dol-ce far nien-te Mor-ning

p *vib. norm.* *vib. norm.* *p* *vib. norm.* *p* *mp* *mp* *mp*

28

rain no wind far-a-way heard

mp *pp*

28 *mp* *p*

33

mu-si-cal birds Si-lent blos-soms hot sun

mp

33 *mp*

38

vi-o-let in-di-go blue green yel-low or-ange red

pp *f*

pp *f*

pp *f*

pp *f*

38 *pp legato* *f* *p*

42

Bees with their pol-len

p *p* *p* *p*

42

48

long hours No-thing do-ing no-thing

pp *ppp* *ppp* *ppp*

48

pp *ppp*

Red. Red. Red. Red.

3

53

Dol-ce far nien-te A breeze now

non harm. (vib.)

p *p* *ppp*

53

p molto legato

3

58

the trees sing-ing tall grass-es sway

Detailed description: This system contains measures 58 through 61. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "the trees sing-ing tall grass-es sway". The piano accompaniment consists of four staves: the first two are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The piano part features triplet patterns in the first two measures of each system and various melodic lines in the subsequent measures.

58

Detailed description: This system shows the piano accompaniment for measures 58-61. It is written for grand piano with a treble and bass clef. The music is in 4/4 time and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and more complex melodic lines in the treble.

62

Do-ing no-thing sweet no-thing Far - a-way mus - ic

Detailed description: This system contains measures 62 through 65. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are "Do-ing no-thing sweet no-thing Far - a-way mus - ic". The piano accompaniment consists of four staves: the first two are in treble clef, and the last two are in bass clef. The piano part features eighth-note accompaniment and melodic lines in the treble.

62

Detailed description: This system shows the piano accompaniment for measures 62-65. It is written for grand piano with a treble and bass clef. The music is in 3/4 time and features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the bass and more complex melodic lines in the treble.

66

in time time for the pre-sent

sul tasto *ord.* *ppp sul tasto* *ppp* *p* *p* *p*

66 *ppp* *ppp legato* 4 *p*

71

No-thing close by Far a-way

p *p* *p dolce* *p dolce* *p*

71 2 *p*

78 *ritardando*

Far a-way Dol-ce far nien - te—

p

p

p

p

78 *ritardando*

p legato

niente

pp

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