

JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

I Have Nothing To Say

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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I Have Nothing to Say was composed in its original form for a series of European concerts I performed with bassist Robert Black and vocalist Finn Byrhard in the autumn of 1986. The present version for string quartet and keyboard was made in 1992. The complete song text stems from only 14 words — “I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry” — a line first written by John Cage, then permuted into a 14-line poem by the Scottish poet, Edwin Morgan. The highly formalized music affixes a specific pitch and duration to each syllable of the original line, which is sung as an introduction. The remaining 13 lines write themselves, as it were, following exactly the permutations in the poem. The accompaniment is through-composed.

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: Electric piano/harp pluck.
 - 2: Same as 1, but with softer top notes.
- 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:

HOG RIVER MUSIC
1800 Albany Avenue
Hartford, Connecticut 06105-1005

Tel.: (203) 523-1820 • Fax: (203) 232-5214

I Have Nothing To Say

Music by James Sellars
Poem by John Cage and Edwin Morgan

Slowly (♩=54)

Voice

I have no-thing to say and I am say-ing it and that is

Violin I
f molto legato

Violin II
f molto legato

Viola
f molto legato

Violoncello
f molto legato

Keyboard

1

Jauntily (♩=ca.84)

po-et-ry I have to say po-et-ry and is that no-thing and am I say-ing it

f *mp*

f *mp*

f *mp*

f *mp*

7

Jauntily (♩=ca.84)

mp

And I say that I am to have po-et-ry and say-ing it is no-thing I am po-et-ry

20

This system contains the first vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 6/8 time signature. The lyrics are: "And I say that I am to have po-et-ry and say-ing it is no-thing I am po-et-ry". The piano accompaniment consists of five staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first piano system is numbered 20.

and no-thing and say-ing it is to say that I have To have no-thing is po-et-ry and I am say-ing that

24

This system contains the second vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "and no-thing and say-ing it is to say that I have To have no-thing is po-et-ry and I am say-ing that". The piano accompaniment continues with two more systems, numbered 24.

and I say it Po-et-ry is say-ing I have no-thing and I am to say that and it Say-ing no-thing

28

I am po-et-ry and I have to say that and it is It is and I am and I have po-et-ry

34

say - ing say that to no - thing It is say - ing po - et - ry to no - thing and I say I have and am that

39

This system contains the first four staves of music. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics. The second and third staves are the piano accompaniment in the right hand, and the fourth staff is the piano accompaniment in the left hand. The music is in the key of D major and 3/4 time. The first measure is marked with a 7/8 time signature, and the second measure with a 6/8 time signature. The system ends with a 2/4 time signature.

Po - et - ry is say - ing I have it and I am no - thing and to say that And that no - thing is po - et - ry

43

This system contains the next four staves of music. The top staff is the vocal line with lyrics. The second and third staves are the piano accompaniment in the right hand, and the fourth staff is the piano accompaniment in the left hand. The music is in the key of D major and 3/4 time. The first measure is marked with a 7/8 time signature, and the second measure with a 6/8 time signature. The system ends with a 2/4 time signature.

I am say-ing and I have to say it Say-ing po-et-ry is no-thing and to that I say I am and have it

47

This system contains the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 41-47. The vocal line is in treble clef with lyrics underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of four staves: two for the right hand and two for the left hand. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. Measure numbers 47 and 52 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems.

mf

Solo

f

mf

52

This system contains the piano accompaniment for measures 48-52. It consists of four staves: two for the right hand and two for the left hand. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *Solo*, *f*, and *mf*. Measure numbers 52 and 57 are indicated at the beginning of their respective systems.

I have to say po-et-ry and is that no-thing

60

2

and am I say-ing it I am and I have po-et-ry to say and is that no-thing say-ing it I am no-thing

sord.

pp

66

and I have po-et-ry to say and that is say-ing it I that am say-ing po-et-ry have no-thing and it is

pp

71

I and to say And I say that I am to have po-et-ry and say-ing it is no-thing I am po-et-ry

75

and no-thing and say-ing it is to say that I have To have no-thing is po-et-ry and I am say-ing that

pp

80

and I say it Po-et-ry is say-ing I have no-thing and I am to say that and it Say-ing no-thing I am po-et-ry

84

no - thing and to say that And that no - thing is po - et - ry I am say - ing and I have to say it

101

This system contains the first vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 7/8 time signature. The lyrics are: "no - thing and to say that And that no - thing is po - et - ry I am say - ing and I have to say it". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp and a 7/8 time signature. The system number 101 is indicated at the beginning of the piano part.

Say - ing po - et - ry is no - thing and to that I say I am and have it

senza
mf

105

This system contains the second vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Say - ing po - et - ry is no - thing and to that I say I am and have it". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a key signature of one sharp and a 3/4 time signature. The system number 105 is indicated at the beginning of the piano part. The word "senza" is written above the vocal line, and "mf" (mezzo-forte) is written below the piano part.

Musical score for measures 108-111. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system contains five staves: a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and three individual staves. The second system contains four staves: a grand staff and two individual staves. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Performance instructions such as *pizz.* (pizzicato) and *arco* (arco) are present. A circled number '1' is located in the first staff of the second system, indicating a first ending.

Musical score for measures 112-115. The score is in 3/4 time and features a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The first system contains five staves: a grand staff and three individual staves. The second system contains four staves: a grand staff and two individual staves. The notation includes various rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. Performance instructions such as *arco* and *pizz.* are present. A circled number '1' is located in the first staff of the second system, indicating a first ending.

I have to say po-et-ry and is that no-thing and am I say-ing it

117

mp

arco pizz. arco

mp

mp

mp

I am and I have po-et-ry to say and is that no-thing say-ing it I am no-thing and I have po-et-ry

121

f mp

f mp

f mp

f mp

mp

to say and that is say-ing it I that am say-ing po-et-ry have no-thing and it is I and to say

126

This block contains the musical score for measures 122 through 125. It features a vocal line with lyrics and four piano accompaniment staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

And I say that I am to have po-et-ry and say-ing it is no-thing I am po-et-ry

130

This block contains the musical score for measures 126 through 129. It features a vocal line with lyrics and four piano accompaniment staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

and no-thing and say-ing it is to say that I have To have no-thing is po-et-ry and I am say-ing that

134

and I say it Po-et-ry is say-ing I have no-thing and I am to say that and it Say-ing no-thing

138

I am po-et-ry and I have to say that and it is It is and I am and I have po-et-ry

144

p *f*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 144 through 148. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a 3/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "I am po-et-ry and I have to say that and it is It is and I am and I have po-et-ry". The piano accompaniment consists of four staves: two treble clefs and two bass clefs. The first piano staff has a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and the second piano staff has a dynamic marking of *f* (forte). The piano part features arpeggiated chords and melodic lines.

say-ing say that to no-thing It is say-ing po-et-ry to no-thing and I say I have and am that

149

Detailed description: This system contains measures 149 through 153. The vocal line continues with the lyrics: "say-ing say that to no-thing It is say-ing po-et-ry to no-thing and I say I have and am that". The piano accompaniment continues with similar arpeggiated textures. The key signature and time signature remain consistent with the previous system.

Po-et-ry is say-ing I have it and I am no-thing and to say that And that no-thing is po-et-ry

153

This system contains measures 153 through 156. It features a vocal line with lyrics and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 2/4. The piano part includes a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, with some rests in the left hand during measures 154 and 155.

I am say-ing and I have to say it Say-ing po-et-ry is no-thing and to that I say I am and have it

157

This system contains measures 157 through 160. It continues the vocal line with lyrics and piano accompaniment. The key signature and time signature remain the same as in the first system. The piano part continues with melodic lines in both hands, including some rests in the left hand during measures 158 and 159.