

JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

Is This a Love Song

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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Is This a Love Song — if there's a jot of doubt, it probably isn't. The real question here is whether sincere love can be declared in music at all, what with thousands of pop-rock songs intoning "Yea, yea, baby, baby!" from millions of loudspeakers. Music itself may still be able to declare love, but language, the linguists tell us, is a self-referential, closed, and well-worn system. Perhaps the answer is songs about love songs.

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**
Is This a Love Song uses only one patch:

1: Synth chiff ensemble/pan flute

- 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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Is This a Love Song

Music and text
James Sellars

Gliding, flowing
(♩=ca.96)

Score for the first system, measures 1-5. The score includes parts for Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Keyboard. The tempo is marked "Gliding, flowing (♩=ca.96)". The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 6/8. The voice part begins with the lyrics "Is this a love song I'm sing-ing". The instrumental parts are marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

Score for the second system, measures 6-9. The score includes parts for Voice, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Keyboard. The tempo remains "Gliding, flowing (♩=ca.96)". The key signature has two flats, and the time signature is 6/8. The voice part continues with the lyrics "does it have a mean-ing or is it just the sounds of a song". The instrumental parts are marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic.

10

Is there a pat-tern or rhy-thm In these words of ex-pres-sion Is there a sense that one might un-der-stand

This block contains the musical score for measures 10 through 13. It features a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment consisting of four staves (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Is there a pat-tern or rhy-thm In these words of ex-pres-sion Is there a sense that one might un-der-stand".

14

Are these thoughts of mine free flow-ing or emp-ty form and pat-tern Are these feel-ings art-i-fi-cial

This block contains the musical score for measures 14 through 17. It features a vocal line on a single staff and a piano accompaniment consisting of four staves (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are: "Are these thoughts of mine free flow-ing or emp-ty form and pat-tern Are these feel-ings art-i-fi-cial". The piano part includes a *mf* dynamic marking.

17

or im-age and il-lu-sion

Is this a love song I'm sing-ing does it have a mean-ing

p

pp

p

pp

p

pp

17

21

or is it just the sound of a song

Is there a pat-tern or rhy-thm In these words of ex-pres-sion

p

p

p

p

p

21

25 *mf* *p*

Is there a sense that one might un-der-stand— When I'm sing-ing what I'm say-ing

mf *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf* *pp*

28 *mf*

When I'm say-ing what I'm sing-ing— Is this a love song I'm sing-ing

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

31

Does it have a meaning or is it just the sound of a song—

31

36

A poem of in-for-ma-tion With-out in-ter-pre-ta-tion Dif-ferent words for eve-ry per-son

36

legato

40

no onelisting mis-un-der - stand-ing Lines with dif-ferentmean-ings

flautando
p sul tasto
flautando
p sul tasto
flautando
p sul tasto
flautando
p sul tasto

40

44

songs of dif-ferent sounds Not com-mun-i-cat-ing nev-er com-pre-hend-ing

44

49 *pp*

Is this a love song I'm sing-ing does it have a mean-ing or is it just the sound of a song—

ord.
pp
ord.
pp
ord.
pp
ord.
pp

54

p

pp *p*

60

This score block covers measures 60 to 62. It features a vocal line at the top and a piano accompaniment below. The vocal line begins with a rest in measure 60, then enters in measure 61 with the lyrics "This song that I'm per - form - ing" and continues in measure 62 with "These sounds that I'm pro - duc - ing". The piano accompaniment consists of five staves: two treble clefs and three bass clefs. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). A guitar chord diagram for a C major chord (000000) is shown above the first piano staff in measure 61. The time signature changes from 9/8 to 12/8 between measures 60 and 61.

000000

pp *mf* *mf* *mf*

60

This block shows the piano accompaniment for measures 60 to 62. It consists of two staves: a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays a melodic line starting in measure 60, while the left hand provides harmonic support with sustained notes and chords. Dynamics include *pp* and *mf*. The time signature changes from 9/8 to 12/8 between measures 60 and 61.

pp *mf*

63

This score block covers measures 63 to 65. The vocal line starts in measure 63 with the lyrics "These thoughts that I am dream - ing" and continues in measure 64 with "Can you un - der - stand" and in measure 65 with "What style and in - flec -". The piano accompaniment consists of five staves: two treble clefs and three bass clefs. Dynamics include *pp* and *mf*. The time signature changes from 12/8 to 6/8 between measures 63 and 64, and then to 4/4 between measures 64 and 65.

pp *mf*

63

This block shows the piano accompaniment for measures 63 to 65. It consists of two staves: a treble clef and a bass clef. The right hand plays a melodic line starting in measure 63, while the left hand provides harmonic support with sustained notes and chords. Dynamics include *pp* and *mf*. The time signature changes from 12/8 to 6/8 between measures 63 and 64, and then to 4/4 between measures 64 and 65.

pp *mf*

66
 tion Will get a-cross my mean-ing And if you re-pond Might I un-der-stand? Is this a love song I'm sing-ing

pizz.
pizz.

66

70 *mf* Does it have a meaning or is it just the sound of the song— *mf* Is there a pat-tern or rhy-thm in

mf *p* *f* *mf*
mf arco *p* *f non vib.* *mf vib. norm.*
mf *p arco* *f* *mf*
p *p espr.* *mf*

70

75

these words of ex - pres - sion Is there a sense that one might un - der - stand

75

mp

78

p

When I'm sing - ing what I'm say - ing When I'm say - ing what I'm sing - ing

p

78

p legato

80

Is this a love song I'm sing - ing Does it have a mean - ing

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

80

p *f*

83

Or is it just the sound of a song— Ex - plain - ing those feel - ings

mp *mp* *mp* *mp* *mp*

83

mp

87

De-scrib-ing my in - ten-tions The sense of my e - mo-tions Find-ing rea-sons de-fi-ni-tions

87

91

Is there a pat-tern or rhy-thm In these words of ex - pres-sion Is there a sense that one might un-der-stand

91

95 *pp*

Is this a lovesong I'm sing-ing Does it have a mean-ing Or is it just the sound of a song

pp

pp

pp

95 *p legato*

100 *poco rit.*

100 *poco rit.*

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