JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

I've Never Talked to a Tree

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've Never Talked to a Tree is dedicated to the theater composer Mark Bennett. Its point of departure is a song by Lerner and Lowe that begins with the seemingly absurd line: "I talk to the trees." As with many postmodern pieces, this song sends mixed signals. It can be taken as a plea for preserving the environment, as a send-up of New Age sentimentality, or even as the sincere thought of a present-day Druid who actually considers discourses with trees a possibility.

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**
  I've Never Talked to a Tree uses only one patch:

  1: Synth flute with slight chiff.

- 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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I've Never Talked to a Tree

for Mark Bennett

Music and text
James Sellars

Jauntily (♩=102-108)

Voice

I've nev-er talked to a

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Jauntily (♩=102-108)

Keyboard

tree I doubt it would do an-y good since they're made of wood They would nev-er lis-ten But that's not the

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prob - lem The prob - lem is: What do you say More peo - ple would talk to a

11

tree if they knew what to say— My sug-ges-tion is that first you ask a ques-tion some-thing like—

14

What a-bout the wind Is the sun too hot Do you get bored_ stand-ing there Mak-ing small talk to a

18

p molto legato

tree is not so eas-y Trees have a dif-ferent view of the world They've been a-

p

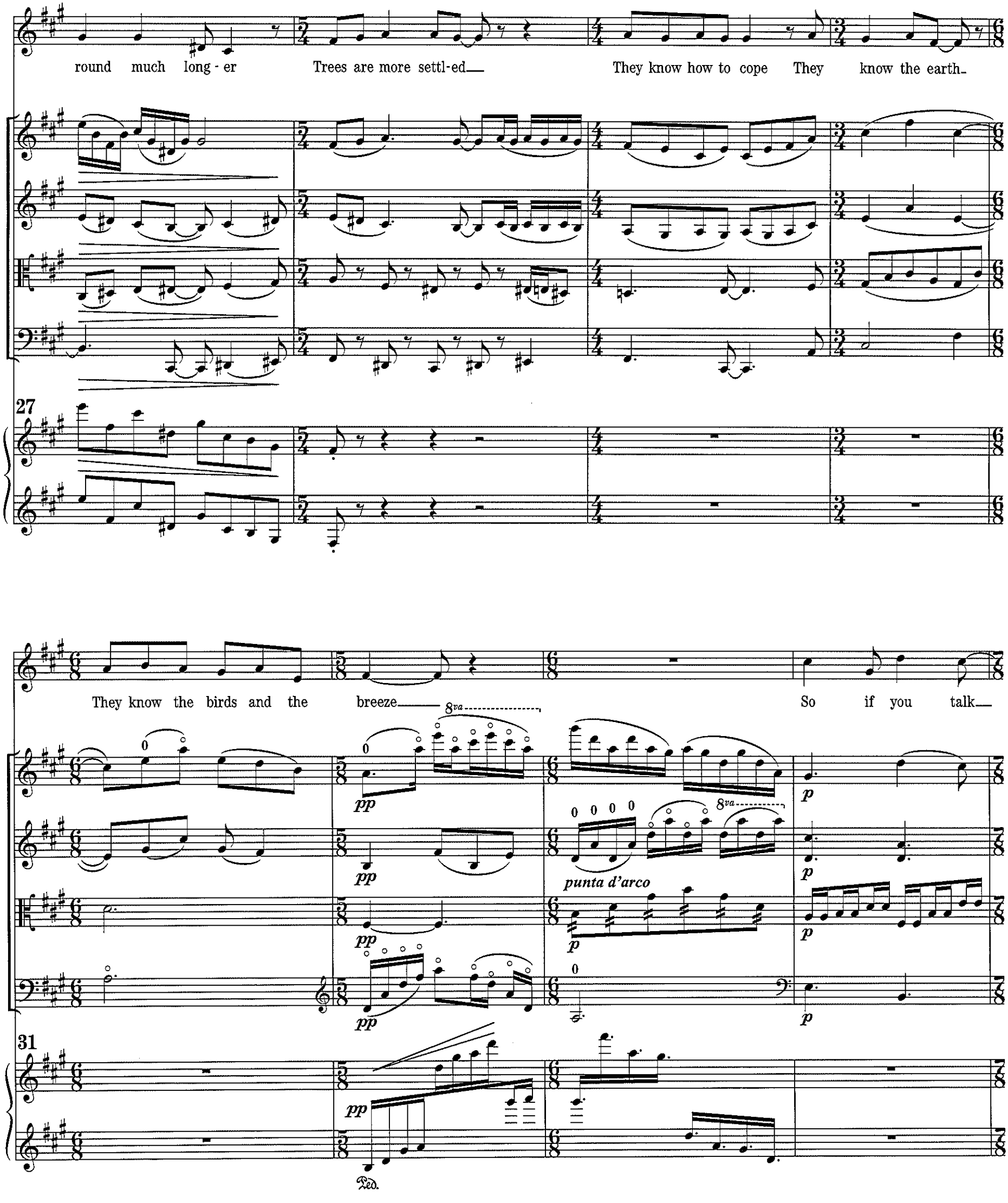
p

p

p

23

p


round much long - er
Trees are more settl-ed
They know how to cope They know the earth
27
They know the birds and the breeze
So if you talk
8va
pp
punta d'arco
p
31
Ped.

— to a tree You must watch— what you say They— know— us— well— the

35

trees and their— friends— They know us— ver - y well— Part of the earth— Part of the

39

air Part of the sky

pp

When you go in-to the wood First ask

43

p

a ques-tion Then lis - ten for an ans-wer You'll hear some-thing fam-il-iar

48

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

Since they've been a-round and know what to say They know us well They know what we're do-ing

52

They knowwherewe're go - ing They've been a-round a long time

0

0

57

62

p

p

p

p

p legato

67

71

p

mp

My sug-ges-tion is that first you ask a ques - tion Some-thing like— What a-bout the wind

mp

pp

pp

mp

p

pp

75

mp

pp

Is the sun too hot Do you get bored_ stand - ing there Mak-ing small-talk to a tree is not so

pp mf p

mf p

mp p

mp mf

79

p mp

eas - y Trees have a dif-ferent view of the world They've been a - round much long - er

84

p

They know how to cope They know the earth_ They know the birds and the

88

p

breeze So if you talk_____ to a tree

8va

pp

pp

punta d'arco

pp

pp

p

p

p

p

92

pp

Ped.

you must watch what you say They know us well the trees and their friends They

96

know us very well Part of theearth Part of the air Part of the sky

101

When you go in - to the woods First ask a ques-tion Then lis - ten

pp

105

Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped.

for an ans - wer You'll hear some - thing fam - il - iar Since they've been a - round and

110

Ped. Ped.

— know— what to say They know us well They know what we're do - ing

113

They know where we're go - ing— They've— been a - round— a long— time

0

p sempre

0

p sempre

arco

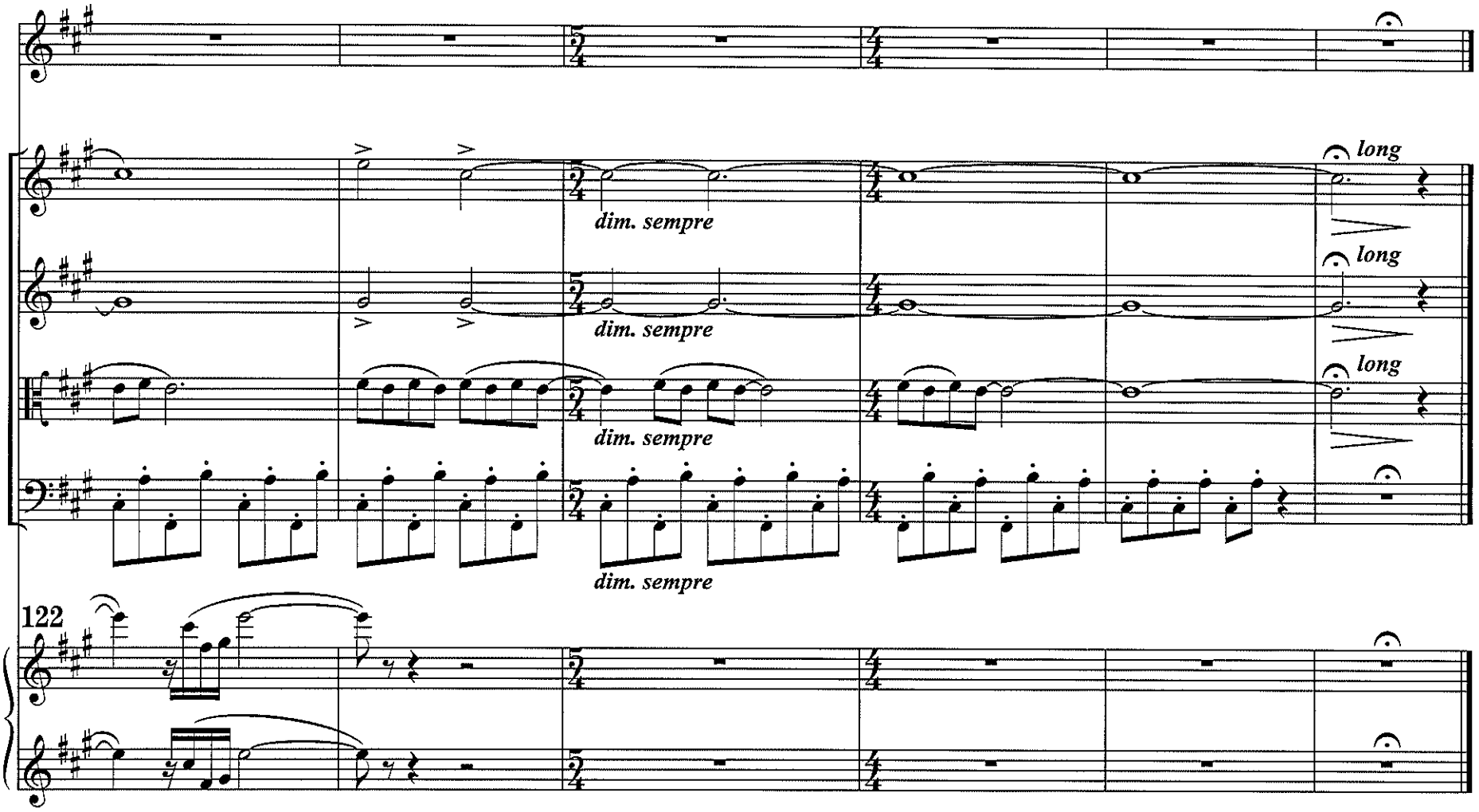
pizz.

p sempre

117

mp

p



Hartford, Connecticut
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