

JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

Function

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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Function is a setting of self-comments we use to get through our high-tech lives: “Function, Now begin, In time, Hold, Turn,” etc., etc. — the machine runs us, as we run the machine. This feedback loop is reflected in the music: motives and harmonies circle back onto themselves; the word “Function” is obsessively set to the same C and A over an unchanging, unyielding chord.

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**
Function uses only one patch:

1: Electric piano

- 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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Function

Music and text
James Sellars

Mechanically (♩=ca.108)

Voice

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Keyboard

Mechanically (♩=ca.108)

4

Func - tion Now — be - gin Func - tion In time — Hold — Se -

8va

arco

arco

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

s fz

s fz

7

cure Out now Func - tion Turn out Fast Wait

The vocal line starts in 3/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains the lyrics: "cure Out now Func - tion Turn out Fast Wait". The melody is simple, using quarter and eighth notes. The time signature changes to 2/4 at the start of measure 8 and back to 3/4 at the end of measure 10.

arco

Three staves of string accompaniment. The top staff is in treble clef, the middle in alto clef, and the bottom in bass clef. All are in 3/4 time. The music is marked *arco*. It features a mix of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The time signature changes to 2/4 at the start of measure 8 and back to 3/4 at the end of measure 10.

7

mf

Piano accompaniment for measures 7-10. The right hand is in treble clef and the left hand is in bass clef. The music is marked *mf*. It consists of chords and moving lines in 3/4 time. The time signature changes to 2/4 at the start of measure 8 and back to 3/4 at the end of measure 10.

10

Func - tion Pro - ceed Now Func - tion Now — stead - y On course Pro - ceed

The vocal line continues in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains the lyrics: "Func - tion Pro - ceed Now Func - tion Now — stead - y On course Pro - ceed". The melody is simple, using quarter and eighth notes.

p

Three staves of string accompaniment in 4/4 time. The music is marked *p*. It features a mix of quarter, eighth, and sixteenth notes, with some rests. The time signature is 4/4 throughout.

10

p

Piano accompaniment for measures 10-13. The right hand is in treble clef and the left hand is in bass clef. The music is marked *p*. It consists of chords and moving lines in 4/4 time.

13

p non cresc.

Hold on Take hold Off Back up Be - gin a - gain

pp non cresc.

pp non cresc.

pp non cresc.

16

(pp) *cresc.*

Func-tion Re-gu-late In time Func-tion Change— time— Now per-i-od-ic Func-tion Be -

sul pont *p* *sul pont* *sul pont* *sul tasto* *sfz* *p non vib.* *sul tasto*

p *sfz* *p non vib.* *sul tasto*

p *sfz* *p non vib.* *sul tasto*

p *sfz* *p non vib.* *sul tasto*

16 *pp* *p* *8va* *sfz*

28 *p sempre*

Tune in Hold fast Move up Switch on

sord. *arco*
p

arco
p non cresc.

sord. *arco*
p non cresc.

28

31

Re - gu - late Time in Func - tion

poco *p* *pp* *p possibile*

p possibile
a punta d'arco

p *ppp*

p possibile

31

ppp