

**JAMES SELLARS**

*Miscellaneous Songs*

**Sound in my Head**

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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Musicians, especially composers, commonly have sounds running through their minds. Most often this is desirable: music teachers, pointing to a musical passage, often ask their students, "Can you hear it in your head?" But occasionally, as when one is trying to get some much needed sleep, mental stereo can be quite annoying. *Sound in my Head* considers this musical condition, and is dedicated to my composer friend Charlie Harmon.

## 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: Pitched brake drum with tambourine attack.
  - 2: Short, percussive tap with a high jangle.
  - 3: Unpitched clanging sound; loud.
  - 4: Electronic *BOING*, as from a spring, but on a steady pitch.
  - 5: Bird chirp; short, pretty.
  - 6: Harpsichord with wood block attack
  - 7: Electric piano with toy piano halo.
- 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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# Sound in my Head

for Charlie Harmon

Text and music  
James Sellars

Allegretto (♩=ca.92)

Voice

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Keyboard

I have this sound in my head

*mf* *mp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

Allegretto (♩=ca.92)

And I can't get it out

Like an ec-ho (ec-ho ec-ho)

*f* *f* (l.h. pizz.)

8va

1 *f* *f* (l.h. pizz.)

8va

that nev - er stops                      Some - times it's high                      Some - times it's low

(off the string) *simile* *8va*

*pizz.*                      *arco*

9

*f*                      *f* *8va*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 1 through 8. The vocal line starts with the lyrics 'that nev - er stops' in 6/8 time, followed by 'Some - times it's high' in 3/4 time, and 'Some - times it's low' in 2/4 time. The guitar part features a melodic line in the first two staves and a bass line in the third staff. The first two staves of the guitar part include the instruction '(off the string) simile' and a dynamic marking of *pp*. The bass line includes 'pizz.' and 'arco' markings. The piano accompaniment (measures 9-8) is mostly silent, with some chords marked *f* and *8va* in the right hand.

Some - times it's loud                      Some - times it's soft                      But it's

*sord.* *pp*                      *sord.* *pp*

*ff*                      *p*                      *mp*

13

*ff*                      *p* *8va*

Detailed description: This system contains measures 9 through 13. The vocal line continues with 'Some - times it's loud' in 2/4 time, 'Some - times it's soft' in 3/4 time, and 'But it's' in 2/4 time. The guitar part features a melodic line in the first two staves and a bass line in the third staff. The first two staves of the guitar part include the instruction '*sord.* *pp*' and a dynamic marking of *ff*. The bass line includes '*ff*' and '*p*' markings. The piano accompaniment (measures 13-13) is mostly silent, with some chords marked *ff* and *p* in the right hand, and *8va* markings.

al - ways with me Like a son - ic com - pan - ion

*mp* *mf* *senza* *mp*

17 *f* *8va*

What is the sound in my head?

*pp* *ff* *pizz.* *(pizz.)* *arco* *pp* *ff*

20

What hap-pens to it when I'm dead? Will it find an - oth - er head And just keep on

*arco*  
*ff*

*p*

24

Detailed description: This system contains the first five staves of a musical score. The top staff is a vocal line in 6/8 time, with lyrics: "What hap-pens to it when I'm dead? Will it find an - oth - er head And just keep on". The second and third staves are for the violin and viola, respectively, both in 6/8 time. The violin part is marked *arco* and *ff*. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) in 6/8 time, with a *p* dynamic marking. The system concludes with a measure rest for 24 measures.

Just keep on Just keep on

*p*

28 *8va*  
*mf*

Detailed description: This system contains the next five staves of the musical score. The top staff is a vocal line in 4/4 time, with lyrics: "Just keep on Just keep on". The second, third, and fourth staves are for the violin, viola, and cello/double bass, respectively, all in 4/4 time. The violin part is marked *p*. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef) in 4/4 time, with a *mf* dynamic marking. The system concludes with a measure rest for 28 measures, with an *8va* marking above the treble clef staff.

\*)

Keep on — - ing a - way night — and day Day and week — Week — and month

31

8va

Month and year — So I lis - ten to my son - ic

*pizz.* *ppp* *articulato* *mp*

*pizz.* *ppp*

*pizz.* *ppp*

*pizz.* *ppp*

34

\*)imitate sound of Synthesizer (i.e., bonk-ing)

♩=122 (prev. cello beat)

friend                      How        strange                      are sounds                      in        one's head

(pizz.) 3                      3                      3                      3                      3                      3                      3

*mp*                      *mp*                      *f*

*arco*                      *f*                      *pizz.*                      *f*

38                      ♩=122 (prev. cello beat)

Here are        some oth - er        sounds                      And here are        some more

*pizz.*                      *f*

43                      8va                      8va

3                      *f*                      4



Yet still more They're— love-ly of course And so are these

The first system of the score features a vocal line in 3/4 time with lyrics: "Yet still more They're— love-ly of course And so are these". The piano accompaniment consists of five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef, and two bass clefs. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature.

47 *8va*

Measure 47 of the piano solo section. The right hand has a melodic line starting on a whole note, marked *8va* (octave up). The left hand has a simple accompaniment. A box containing the number "5" is placed in the left hand part.

*rall.*----- *Slower*

And when we hear them They be - come sounds in

The second system of the score features a vocal line in 3/8 time with lyrics: "And when we hear them They be - come sounds in". The piano accompaniment consists of five staves: two treble clefs, one alto clef, and two bass clefs. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature. Performance markings include *arco*, *p*, and *(pizz.)*.

52 *rall.*----- *Slower*

Measure 52 of the piano solo section. The right hand has a melodic line starting on a whole note. The left hand has a simple accompaniment. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/8 time signature.

*rall.*----- *Still slower*

our heads Lis-ten now Can you hear this sound in my head?

*pp possibile*

*pp possibile*

*pp possibile*

*arco*

*pp possibile*

8va-----

59

*rall.*----- *Still slower*

6

*pp*

8va-----

I hear the sounds in your head They sound like this

(8va)-----

8va-----

65 (8va)-----

8va-----

*mf*

Do you hear them? I hear them too I won-der Are they the same

69

8va-----, 8va-----,

*molto rit.* ----- **Tempo primo** (♩=ca.92)

for me as for you? Since I hear these

mf mf mf mf

73

*molto rit.* ----- **Tempo primo** (♩=ca.92)

sounds in your head

And you hear these sounds in your head

*pizz.* *mp* *arco* *mp* *arco* *mp*

*f* *f* *mf*

78

*8va* *mf*

7

Pri - vate sounds in our heads

*8va* *p* *3* *8va* *p*

*p* *p* *p*

82

*8va* *p*

Like an ec - ho ec - ho ec - ho ec - ho ec - ho

(8va) sord. 8va p p p p

85

ec - ho

(8va) ppp pp ppp pp ppp 8va pppp

89

6