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

I have this sound in my head

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Allegretto (♩=ca.92)

Keyboard

And I can't get it out

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

(l.h. pizz.)

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that nev - er stops

(off the string)

simile

Some - times it's high

Some - times it's low

pizz.

arco

9

Some - times it's loud

Some - times it's soft

But it's

sord.

sord.

13

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

senza

mf

senza

mp

mp

17

8va

f

8va

What is the sound in my head?

pizz.

pp

(pizz.)

ff

pizz.

pp

pizz.

pp

arco

ff

ff

20

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

arco

ff

ff

p

p

24

Just keep on

Just keep on

p

28

8va

8va

8va

2

mf

*)

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.) mp

(pizz.) mp

arco f

f

f

pizz. f

38

♩=122 (prev. cello beat)

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

pizz. f

43

8va 3 f

8va 4

Yet still more

They're love - ly of course

And so are these

47

8va

5

rall. Slower

And when we hear them

They be - come sounds in

arco

arco

arco

(pizz.)

52

rall. Slower

rall. **Still slower**

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

8va

pp possibile

arco

59

rall. **Still slower**

8va

6

pp

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

(8va)

69

8va 8va

molto rit. Tempo primo (♩=ca.92)

for me as for you? Since I hear these

8va

mf mf mf mf

73

molto rit. Tempo primo (♩=ca.92)

sounds in your head

And you hear these sounds in your head

mp

pizz.

arco

mp

pizz.

arco

mp

f

f

mf

78

7

8va

mf

Pri - vate sounds in our heads

8va

p

3

8va

p

p

p

82

8va

p

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

(8va)

8va

sord.

p

85

ec - ho

(8va)

ppp

pp

ppp

89

8va

6

pppp