

JAMES SELLARS

Miscellaneous Songs

To Write A 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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To Write a Song is a possible discussion, albeit abstract and poetic, a song writer might have with his or her muse. Where, when one writes a song, does the song really come from? Some formal aspects are carefully planned but don't work out, while, on the other hand, some unplanned, fortuitous event may work perfectly. The music is wistful, even desultory, as is the ideal state of mind when composing. Longing to write a song will always produce a song.

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**
To Write a Song uses only one patch:

1: Harp/plucked vibraphone

- 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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To Write A Song

Music and text
James Sellars

Molto moderato (♩=ca.60)

Voice

Why when I try to

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Keyboard

5

count or phrase a line I lose a name or a term Two num-bers then or three a-gain

Four times the three or more... Re - turn to one a-gain Just to find a way to

mf *p subito*

mf *p subito*

mf *p subito*

mf *p subito*

p

make a rhyme- Just to make sure that once in a ran-dom chain of signs a se-quence oc-curs

mp

mp

mp

mp

mp

16

A mu-sic-al line in time _____ Lis-ten

poco mp dolce

p

pizz. vib.

arco

p

16

p legato

20

Hear— that sing-ing— What is the tune Can you re-mem-ber? To note a re-fer-ence

p

20

34 *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*
 When I count the phra-ses — Re-mem-ber the lines Re-hearse my thoughts and say them out loud

p *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp*

34 *p*

38 *mf* *mf* *mf* *mf*
 Through the win-dow — In the mir-ror The signs re-ap-pear

mf *p* *niente* *mf* *p* *niente* *mf* *p* *niente* *p* *niente*

38 *mp* *p* *ppp*