

**Charlie Sdraulig**

**fade**

*for amplified vocalists, sound engineer, and dynamic noise floor*

**2018**

For Ekmeles

***Note***

A small meditation on mourning and distance.

To A. Kozlowski.



## General Directions

This piece was originally written for a vocal sextet (soprano, mezzo, countertenor, tenor, baritone, and bass). However, **it may be performed by any combination of voice types—4 to 8 singers total**. Contact me ([c-sdraulig@hotmail.com](mailto:c-sdraulig@hotmail.com)) for advice on the small adaptations required for the different arrangements.

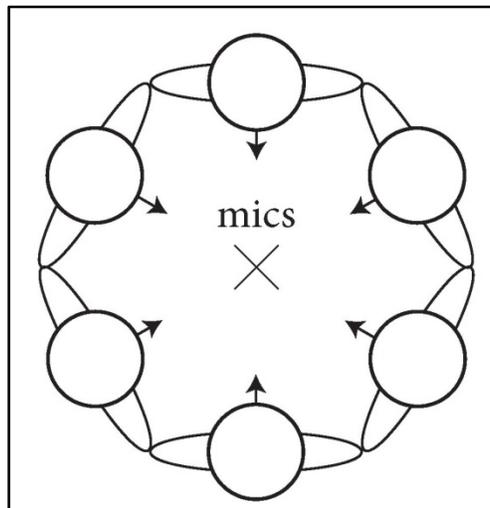
**This piece must be memorized; it takes place in near darkness.**

### *Tech requirements/staging*

First pair of microphones = two AKG C414s or AT4050s or similar i.e. large diaphragm condensers; figure of 8 polar patterns; blumlein pair; use windscreens if necessary:



Vocalists, huddle around the blumlein pair, as close as possible to one another (elbows touching) as well as the microphones:



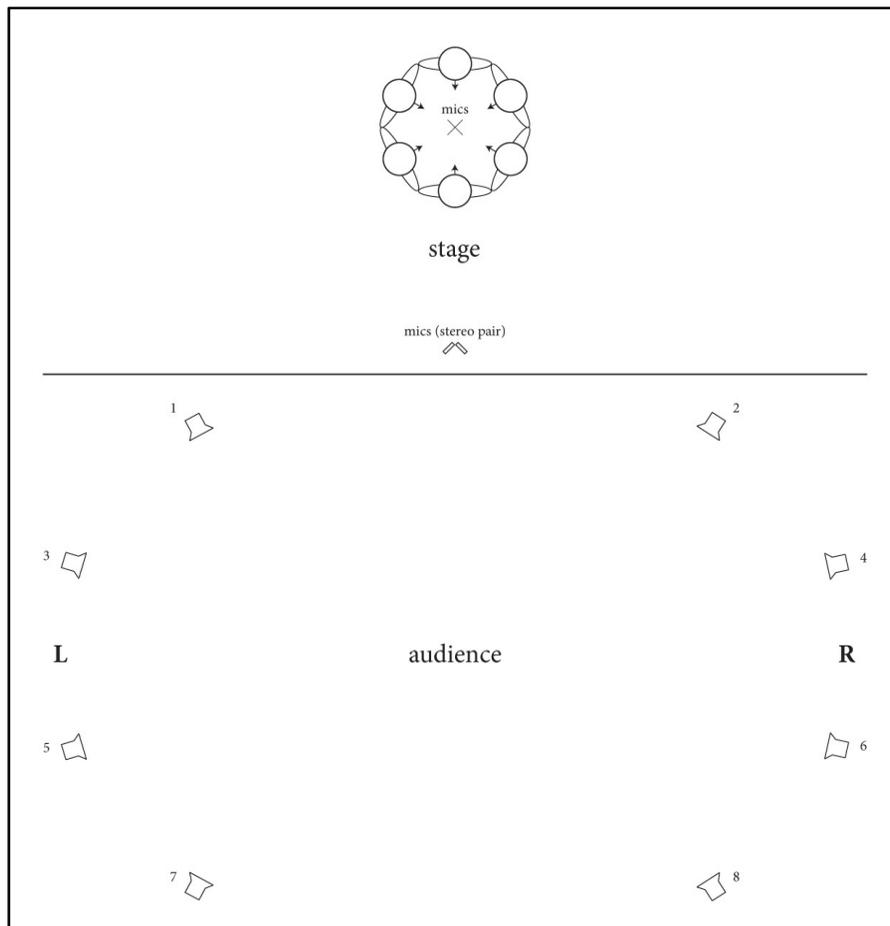
Vocalists, always keep both hands fairly close to your face:



Second pair of microphones = two Neumann KM 184/185s or similar i.e. small diaphragm condensers; (hyper)cardioids; stereo pair (XY, AB etc.); see diagram below for placement

Lighting: a single, very dim, diffuse light directed at the stage right or left sides of the huddle—the vocalists must be able to perceive when the light fades out at the end of the piece.

Signal chain: two figure of 8 condenser microphones (= 'L' & 'R') and two (hyper)cardioid microphones (= 'L' & 'R') -> XLRs -> audio interface (supplying phantom power) + laptop (max patch) -> mixing board -> out to at least 4 speakers (preferably 8), surrounding the audience to amplify the vocalists. See the top down view below:



## ***Live amplification/electronics***

One additional performer will execute the electronics (riding levels, subtly introducing dynamically filtered pink noise from time to time) and lighting. More details in the max patch (contact: [c-sdraulig@hotmail.com](mailto:c-sdraulig@hotmail.com)).

Once the huddled vocalists are in place, gradually fade out the house lights. Only the huddle light should remain on.

At first, aim for a high level of amplification to all speakers, while still requiring the audience to strain to hear the softest sounds. You may employ some light compression and EQing to boost the signal, as well as minimize noise and avoid feedback.

Over the course of several minutes, the goal is to give the impression of a gradual, undulating fade out—it shouldn't be a strictly linear progression. You may subtly bring up the gain and introduce pink noise from time to time to signpost and draw the audience's attention to the progress of the fade, as well as to highlight the beginning and ends of sections (see **sounds** and **structure**).

Over time, increasingly mix in the stereo pair while fading out the blumlein pair to increase the audience's perceived distance from the vocalists' sounds.

Finally, the amplification should completely fade out a minute or so into stage D (see **sounds** and **structure**)—only the unamplified sound of the huddled vocalists should remain.

After another minute or so, fade out the huddle's light. Wait for an additional 30 seconds and then bring the house lights up to end the piece.



# Sounds

## *All sounds are barely audible*

Every sound you make must be at the **threshold of audibility** for the other members of the ensemble. Make no effort to project beyond the huddle (to the audience, for example).

Involuntary variation in sound at this threshold is expected and *embraced*.

## *All sounds fall*

In terms of timbre, **all of the sounds in this piece should start relatively bright and then gradually darken**. These are relative terms that will differ from performer to performer. Any emergent frequency or pitch content should likewise descend.

**When you cannot fall/darken your sound any further, start from another subtly different high/bright state and fall/darken again** etc. (It might be helpful to thinking of falling as timbral or pitched glissandi downwards.)

For stages B., C., and D., **always fall from a high/bright state to a low/dark extreme within one breath out**; preference **subtle, slow, continuous changes in sound**. (Refer to the line drawings as points of departure and hints.)

Inhale as quietly as possible, unless otherwise indicated.

## *Global filters for all stages*

- Your mouth shape will act as a global filter for *all* sounds listed below i.e. in general wider = brighter sounds; narrower = darker sounds
- Mouth shapes should range from as wide as possible to closed:



- You may cover your mouth with your hands, to further dampen and darken your sounds (especially at the ends of falls)

## Stages

### Download [this audio file \(51mb\)](#) of recorded examples

(Please avoid streaming the audio; the mp3 conversion creates lots of artefacts)

### ***Wear headphones, and listen at a high volume—refer to the descriptions below***

Within each stage below, the sounds described are generally presented in the order relatively bright to relatively dark. **With each fall, explore subtly different paths through each stage's materials.** You don't need to exhaust all possibilities within a single fall.

#### A. Stops, clicks, and saliva

- voiceless (i.e. no vibration of the vocal cords) stops
  - [k] (e.g. 'c' in 'cap'): voiceless velar stop
  - [t] (e.g. 't' in 'tot'): voiceless alveolar stop
- consider tongue clicks (i.e. touching your palate with different parts of your tongue) distinct from the above
- saliva sounds (tongue movement, small swallows and gulps)
- overall, to produce darker sounds, change your tongue's point contact with your palette: within a given fall, start closer to your throat and finish on or near your teeth.
- N.B. a fall will consist of a succession of several progressively darker discrete sounds.

#### B. Voiceless breath

- generally blow small volumes of air out of your mouth at a slow speed
- continuous transitions between these voiceless vowel colorations of breath (subtle hints, not well enunciated, a little like sighs)
  - [i] (e.g. 'ee' in 'beet'): high front vowel
  - [ɪ] (e.g. 'i' in 'bit'): high front vowel (articulated slightly lower and slightly further back than is the preceding vowel)
  - [e] (e.g. 'ai' in 'bait'): mid front vowel
  - [ɛ] (e.g. 'e' in 'bet'): mid front vowel (articulated slightly lower and slightly further back than is the preceding vowel)
  - [æ] (e.g. 'a' in 'bat'): low front vowel
  - [a] (e.g. 'a' in 'father'): low central vowel
  - [o] (e.g. 'oa' in 'boat'): mid back vowel
  - [ɔ] (e.g. 'au' in 'caught'): mid back vowel (articulated slighter lower and slightly further forward than is the preceding vowel)
  - [u] (e.g. 'oo' in 'food'): high back vowel
  - [ʊ] (e.g. 'u' in 'put'): high back vowel (articulated slighter lower and slightly further forward than is the preceding vowel)
- continuous transitions between voiceless approximants
  - [ɹ] (e.g. 'r' in whispered 'red'): voiceless postalveolar approximant
  - [l] (e.g. 'l' in whispered 'let'): voiceless alveolar lateral approximant

C. *Whistles: fricatives, fingernails, and wheezes*

- continuous transitions between these voiceless fricatives; overall, to produce darker/lower sounds, gradually move your tongue back towards your throat
  - [f] (e.g. 'f' in 'fine'): voiceless labiodental fricative
  - [θ] (e.g. 'th' in 'thistle'): voiceless interdental fricative.
  - [s] (e.g. 's' in 'sue'): voiceless alveolar fricative
  - [ʃ] (e.g. 'sh' in 'shore'): voiceless alveopalatal fricative.
- consider tongue movement away from the teeth and/or palate to explore different degrees of focused or diffuse breathy whistles
- blow air on (multiple) fingernails (multiple whistles); employ a focused, but slow moving air stream; manipulate your lips with your fingers, interfering with airflow),
  - E.g. bring a fingernail to within a few millimetres of your lips. With tight pursed lips, blow directly on to the tip of your fingernail; allow the tip of your nail to split the air and create a whistle sound (i.e. bifurcate the air stream). Make subtly adjustments to the air direction or the x-y-z position of your fingernail relative to the air stream etc. Overall, to produce darker/lower sounds, move your fingernail(s) further away from your face (z position) and allow your air stream to become less focused
- constricted throat sounds, by putting your tongue as far back as it will go to produce wheeze-like whistles (Akin to Scottish English [x] as in loch: voiceless velar fricative); brighten/darken with your mouth shape only<sup>1</sup>
- you may combine all of the above whistle-types within a given fall

D. *combining previous stages + voiced glissandi*

- Sing/hum falling glissandi; these should always be *extremely* soft, occurring within a comfortable and flexible range; only ever barely engage your vocal cords, hovering at the threshold between the minimum possible vibration and none at all; therefore, your sung/hummed falling glissandi will be *broken and inconsistent*
- Upon these glissandi, superimpose different types of whistles, varying degrees of breathiness and vowel or consonant colorations; at the beginnings and ends of breaths you may also add stops, clicks and saliva sounds.

***N.B. Please ensure that you are confident exploring, and thoroughly familiar with, the intricacies and subtle variations possible within these sounds before trying out the following structure together***

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<sup>1</sup> All this and the above information on phonology sourced from <http://facweb.furman.edu/~wrogers/phonemes/phono/index.htm> accessed 3/18/18



# Structure

After the house lights go out, wait for 30 seconds or so and then start stage A—individual entries do not need to be precisely coordinated.

## **A. Stops, clicks, and saliva (sounds at regular intervals and hockets)**

1. Start with a single bright stop, click, or saliva sound.
2. Then make each subsequent discrete sound (e.g. each individual click) progressively darker at a regular interval (n.b. breaths in and out as quiet as possible, without pause):
  - *Soprano*: breaths in vary *ad lib.*, breaths out ca. 10-15"; sound at end of every breath out
  - *Mezzo*: equal breath lengths in and out, ca. 7-10" each; sound at end of every *second* breath out
  - *Countertenor*: equal breath lengths in and out, ca. 7-10" each; sound at end of every breath out
  - *Tenor*: breaths in vary *ad lib.*, breaths out ca. 15-20" each; sound at end of every breath out
  - *Baritone*: equal breath lengths in and out, ca. 7-10" each; sound at end of every *second* breath out
  - *Bass*: breaths in vary *ad lib.*, breaths out ca. 10-15" each; sound at end of every breath out
3. If one of your sounds and another person's sounds occur at the same time (or close), quickly hocket together through the remainder of your own respective falls (i.e. take turns to make your stops, clicks etc. in rapid succession; breathing *ad lib.*)
4. When you can't darken your own sound any further, individually start a new fall i.e. return to instruction 1.
5. When you have participated in *two* hockets move to stage **B**.
6. Once the majority of the other vocalists have already moved on to stage **B**, any vocalists remaining in stage **A** should immediately join them in the next stage.

## **B. Voiceless breath (synchronizing, attuning and lengthening breaths)**

1. Carry over your breath lengths from the previous stage (n.b. voiceless breath falls/sighs occur on *all* breaths out)
2. Once everyone is in stage B, gradually synchronize your breath lengths with a neighbouring vocalist (i.e. in pairs: e.g. Soprano + Mezzo; Countertenor + Tenor; Baritone + Bass)
3. When your pair is synchronized, gradually synchronize with the other pairs until everyone is breathing in and out together
4. Then, while maintaining synchronization, over the next two to three falls substantially lengthen each breath out and take increasingly longer pauses between each fall (i.e. pause at the end of breaths in)
5. Your final collective breath out should be as long as possible and the majority of the vocalists should need to employ audibly shuddered or quick breaths in afterwards. Then, all immediately move to stage **C**.

**C. Whistles: fricatives, fingernails, and wheezes (taking turns, one at a time, accommodating)**

1. All try to execute a whistle fall at the same time (your breath out length = same as in Stage **A**)
2. All quickly cede and stop except one who completes the fall (tension, negotiation and accommodation is expected)—the vocalist who completes the fall remains silent thereafter until Stage **D**
3. Pause ca. 10”
4. The remaining vocalists all try to execute a whistle fall at the same time
5. Repeat steps 2 to 4, subtracting vocalists until only one remains
6. After the final vocalist completes their whistle fall, they should move to stage **D** on their next breath out— all the other vocalists immediately follow

**D. combining previous stages + voiced glissandi (free falling, introspectively)**

1. Do not coordinate your falls with the other vocalists, introspectively focus on your own actions
2. Vary the length of your breaths out (falls) *ad lib.* between ca. 7” to as long as possible—after these as long as possible breaths out, audibly shudder or quickly breath in, and then allow yourself a few breaths in and out of inaudible recovery before commencing another fall.
3. Stop vocalizing when the huddle light goes out. Then wait silently in darkness for 30 seconds. End of the piece = house lights up.

