

Four Songs for a Time of Blindness

for a group of inter-generational singers

*N'el mezzo del camin de la mia vita mi ritrovai in
una selva oscura ed la via dirita era smaritta*
Dante, La Divina Comedia, Inferno

no conductor

no scores, no music stands

all singers stand in the performance area, well lit, close to each other, in a compact circle, in full sight of the audience.

individually, sing long sustained pitches, as long as possible, as loud as possible, as high as possible, without vibrato.

long, deep, slow breaths between notes.

sustained effort, and inevitable subsequent exhaustion should be noticeable, yet never faked or exaggerated.

trans-gender and non-binary singers can personally elect which group (male or female) to join, based of their vocal register and gender.

First Song

adult women only (high voices)

approx. 20 mins.

Second Song

adult men only (low voices)

approx. 20 mins.

Third Song

children only

approx. 8 mins.

Fourth Song

all adults and children

approx. 20 mins.

Singing

singing is done always as loud as possible, each sung sound as long as possible, one full breath for each sound.

full effort. rests between notes, as comfortable.

at each new sung sound, each singer should either sing the same pitch or deviate micro-tonally from their previous sound, but avoiding glissandos.

each sung pitch remains the same for the duration of its life: no vibrato or glissando; no crescendo or diminuendo.

singers should refrain from unhealthy vocal practices but still sing as loud as possible.

full vestibular fold retraction, full thyroid or cricoid cartilage tilt, anchored abdominal and intercostal muscles, efficient head and neck anchoring, and leaving long pauses between two notes in order to relax the vocal instrument should allow the singers to sing loud, long and healthy sounds for the duration of the performance.

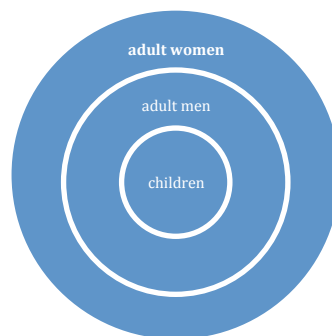
Positions on Stage for each Song

at the start of the first song (for adult women only) the whole group gathers in the performance area.

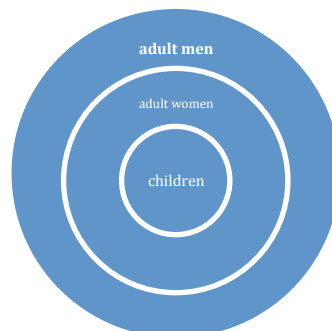
the children huddle in the middle, standing, in one tight group.

the adult men will surround the children, making a closed circle around them.

finally, the group of adult women will surround the circle of adult men with their own closed circle:



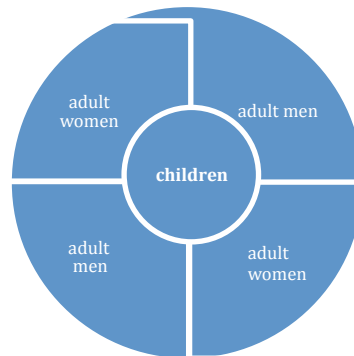
by the start of the second song (for adult men only) adult men and women will have swapped positions: the adult women now surround the huddle of children in the centre, and the adult men stand on the outside of the group, surrounding the women:



by the start of the third song (children only), the children should remain in the centre.

the adult men and women should move into groups with other men and other women until there are two clear groups of women and two clear group of men now surrounding the children.

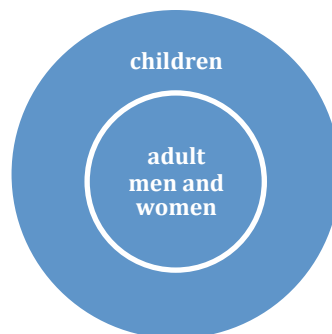
each adult man should try to surround himself with other men; each adult woman should try to surround herself with other women:



by the start of the fourth song (all adults and children) the adult men and women should be gathered in the centre, the group of children surrounding them in a closed circle.

adult men and women should to surround themselves with an equal number of other men and women.

there are no major changes of position during this song, though singers can still adjust their position within the group:



Moving

during songs one to three, each singer tries to move towards their position in the following song.

the whole group needs to cooperate in reaching the new formation.

singers move during rests, when they are not singing.

each singer moves individually and at their own pace.

movements are slow and considerate, so not to disturb the other singers.

each singer may have to make several moves before they find their new preferred position within the moving group.

singers need not push each other out of the way.

equally, singers should facilitate each other's movements.

a singer moves to a nearby empty space, sing sounds for a few minutes before moving again to another empty space.

once a new formation has been reached (and within the durations suggested), a new song can start and the current one can finish.

from this point on, the group should focus on improvising a transition between the two songs.

Transitions Between Songs

the decision to finish a song and start the next one is to be done by the group without previous discussion.

each song ends when the whole group agrees it has ended, within my suggested durations.

the transition between two songs (no conductor) can be done in one of two ways:

- a) a pause between the songs;
- b) crossfade between two songs.

the group should not agree in advance which of the two will be used, but should be prepared to take an active part in either.

one singer's decision to start a new song is in not necessarily a cue to end the previous song.

the decision to start a new song has to be taken four times in each performance (one for each song), and each time it should be improvised by the group.

looking at each other (making eye contact) facilitates starting a new song.