

Four Songs for the Return of the Light

for a group of inter-generational singers

*But she ran off as hard as she could and soon
found herself safe in a thick wood.*
Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

no conductor

all singers stand in the performance area, well lit, close to each other, in a compact circle

no scores, no music stands

at the start of the first song the whole group gathers in the performance area, standing, in one tight group.

together, but individually, each singer sings long sustained sounds, as long as possible. long, deep, slow breaths between notes.

the sustained effort of complete exhalation may lead to a level of exhaustion, which should be noticeable, yet never faked or exaggerated.

First Song

approx. 20 mins.

together, but individually each singer sings sustained sounds in their middle register (speech voice quality), as long as possible, as quiet as possible.

no position changes in this song.

Second Song

approx. 20 mins.

sing sustained sounds, as long as possible, as low as possible, as quiet as possible.

individually, each singer should try to slowly move towards the centre of the circle, and without obstructing others.

Third Song

approx. 20 mins.

sing sustained sounds, as long as possible, as high as possible, as quiet as possible.

individually, each singer should try to slowly move towards the front, or circumference of the circle.

Fourth Song

approx. 20 mins.

sing sustained sounds, as long as possible, in the middle register (speech voice quality), as quiet as possible.

individually, each singer should try to slowly move towards either the front or the centre of the circle.

the song can end at any time after all singers have found their preferred position and no more movement is taking place.
ending takes time, though.

Singing

singing is done quietly, each song ranging from as quiet as possible to the level of a conversation in a public place.

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 a pitch they can hear, or deviate microtonally from it, 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.

full vestibular fold retraction, a small amount of thyroid 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 quiet, long and healthy sounds for the duration of the performance.

Phonetic Transformations

throughout each of the four songs, and in their own time, each singer very slowly makes the following phonetic transformations in their sung sounds:

/m/ -> /u/ -> /i/ -> /u/ -> /m/

this sequence of phonetic transformations takes place over each of the songs, not on each individual sung sound.

during each song, singers will find themselves at different points of this phonetic sequence.

there should be no attempt at synchronizing the singers.

Moving

during songs two to four, singers are asked to move towards the centre and towards the edge, or circumference, of the circle.

the whole group needs to cooperate in these changes of position.

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; in particular adults should make way for the children.

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.

as each singer shuffles their way across the circle, the whole group should be responsible for maintaining a tight circular form.

singers should look around to avoid deforming or breaking the circular shape. Each person holds the responsibility over the shape of the whole group.

it is inevitable that a singer trying to reach the centre will be at some point pushed back; equally that a singer trying to reach the circumference, will find themselves back in the centre of the circle.

they should accept and facilitate the group's and each individual's movements safely, politely, attentively and co-operatively, while pursuing their own desired position in the group.

after the suggested duration for each song has elapsed (approximately), 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 after all singers have returned to the phoneme /m/, when the whole group agrees it has ended, and within my suggested approximate durations for each song.

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 possible options 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.