

Or is it microbiology?

A piece for lower voice and percussion in two parts

Music and text by Pia Palme (2023)

Comments

General

Tempo

The indicated tempi are to be handled in a fluid and flexible way, with much freedom. In particular, the vocalist can take any freedom they want.

Dynamics are to be considered as relative; *mp* and *mf* indicate the middle dynamic levels of a given sound production.

Glissando

A glissando is indicated by a line between end notes; it is smooth. Stemlets indicate duration only, unless marked (with staccato).

All **grace notes** are to be placed before the beat.

Tremoli

One-note and two note tremoli are always unmeasured/irregular (default). Three different variations of (relative) tremolo speed are notated using three beams (strokes) for extremely fast tremolo, two for fast tremolo, one for slower tremolo.

Voice

The voice performs with a natural, lively sound but without artificially produced vibrato (default).

Use a **megaphone** for some passages of Part I as indicated in the score.

Two voice personalities

In general, the voice part alternates between two main performance modes, which auralize two voice personalities. A singing voice that projects outwards in a natural way, and a more noisy voice personality that gives voice to the thinking mind and internal and withdrawn inner states. The piece asks the vocalist to shift between two different bodily and mental expressions.

The **singing voice** (sung voice production by default) is notated on a five-line staff with ordinary note heads (from bar 1). Crossed noteheads (such as in bar 12) indicate a mixture of singing with noise content, or speaking performance with (approximate) pitch (as in bar 84).

The **noisy voice personality** (noisy voice production) is notated on a two line staff with slashed note heads (such as in bars 8–10). It features various spoken, murmured, or whispered sound productions and an array of distortions or non-verbal noises. The two lines frame the **relative pitch range** or **frequency range** of the vocal register for the respective performance mode, from as high as possible to as low as possible. For unvoiced productions such as whispering, the range denotes a relative timbral colouring (frequencies) of the audible airstream through formants, from very dark to very light.

All specifications of noisy productions, such as distorted, snarling or growling, vocal fry, etc. ask the singer to find a way of performance which results in the indicated aural and emotional timbre, while working best for their individual voice.

Considering unvoiced productions such as whispering or hissing, dynamics refer to the intensity and strength of the stream of breath. Note that ‘whisper’ is always a ‘stage whisper’.

Formants for voiced or unvoiced productions are written in *italics* in the **second lyrics line**, below the first text line. Special performance modes (including emotional colouring) can be detailed above the vocal staff.

Text recitation

Longer passages of text appear as boxed text. The manner of recitation is defined for every box.

Pronunciation of phonetic characters

Phonetic characters always appear in brackets []. The length of a sound is always determined by the note value.

Special signs for voice

- voiced, full sounding
- ◐ mixed with with air sound, half voiced
- air sound only, unvoiced

bloom vibrato is an elegant, decorative Baroque-style vibrato that gradually unfolds from a non-vibrato beginning, reaches a climax and fades out again.



∧ use a megaphone ▮ breathing out ∨ breathing in

The following characters are used to denote pronunciation:

a as in ‘father’
ɐ as in German ‘Vater’ or English ‘tongue’ – slightly relaxed, less open than ‘a’
ə as in ‘ago’
ɔ as in ‘cor’ or ‘oral’
œ as in French ‘peur’
y as in French ‘sud’ or German ‘füllen’

e as in dress
ɨ as in ‘sing’
o as in ‘obey’
ʃ as in ‘she’
u as in ‘do’

Percussion

Instruments

chs chimes, three different nut chimes
cro† crotales in g, g#, a, a# (lower octave *)
Tg Thai gongs in d, f, f#, g, a, hanging
t-t big tam-tam
wbl three large woodblocks, different tone colours, arranged horizontally close together to form a surface for ‘murmurations’
cb very big cowbell, horizontally mounted
bd bass drum, horizontal

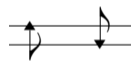
*) At least three of them should have preparations via tinfoil, small metal springs, and a metal chain, see example below.



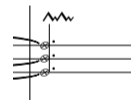
selection of beaters, wooden sticks, metal sticks
wooden stick with notches
bow for exciting the crotales
superball
small household broom to clean the drumhead with

selection of wooden objects and plant material (leaves, rosebuds, twigs, cones, etc.) [provided by the composer]

Special signs and actions



As in bar 7: scrape up and down, with one stick along the notched stick, to perform rattling noises
The two lines notate actions involving the drumhead of the bd in order to change the frequencies:
top line – notched stick held up
bottom line – notched stick touched to the drumhead



‘murmurations’ over large woodblocks: move one or more wooden objects across the horizontally arranged woodblocks, either by hand or with beaters, to produce murmuring noises of varying density

Text

Part I – A cold rock

Altri, altri, altri, altri,
Altri meco non voglio
I want no one else with me!
NO! ONE!
Ch'un freddo scoglio, ch'un freddo scoglio, scoglio
Tornante!
Veil your sweet lips! Don't look at me! Hide!

She sings
Lasciatemi qui sola, sola, sola*)
She sings
Leave me here alone to sing
She sings

Leave me alone
Leave me here to die, to die alone
Keep your distance at all costs
Lasciatemi morire, morire, morire, morire

DEATH is just a word, a word!

Part II – The shadows of my song

A word, a word, a word forming in darkness, darkness
A word between, between, between my lips
Lingering,
Clinging to my breath,
Dropping,
Faltering, falling,
Fall, fall, fall,
Falling into an abyss beyond time
That opens up under my flesh
Touches the other side of dark matter
Life reversed
An inner voice
Still singing on

Life, life reversed is gone,
Is gone, is gone, is gone,
Gone with the sound
Vanishing into spaces of memory
Spaces, spaces of memory
Vanishing, vanishing spectres of the past,
Spectres of the past

Shadows of my song
Reverberate
Hear, hear the shadows, shadows, shadows

Or is it microbiology
Winding
Firing cells
Twisted grey
Matter at play?
Or a virus dancing within my skull
Banging against

Of my song,
My song, my song, song, song.

Pia Palme 2020–2022

*With Italian text fragments by Francesca Caccini (1587–1641), from her aria 'Lasciatemi qui solo'
(in: 'Primo libro delle Musiche', op. 2825)*

) In the Italian language, the word 'solo' has been / is being used in the male form exclusively – even a female singer would use 'solo' and not 'sola' when singing about herself. The Italian dancer and artist Paola Bianchi, with whom I collaborated at the time when I wrote these texts, encouraged me to implement the unusual 'sola' into Caccini's fragments, instead.

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Part I — A cold rock

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4/4 ♩ = 60

voice
with a warm sound *mp* bloom vibrato non vib. *mf*
[o] [a] [a] *to* [e] [i]

chimes
crotales
Thai gongs
ppp *mp*
tam-tam
mp
wood blocks
murmurations over woodblocks with one object *p*
cowbell
bass drum

v
5 *mp* munter, light *pp* gradual change to *mp* vocal fry low frequencies with slow colour changes *mp* to single grains of sound
becoming enraged the sound can deteriorate
[a] [a] *to* [o] [o,æ,u]

wbl
p
two sticks, one with notches top line: stick held up
bd
bottom line: stick touched to drumhead
scrape up and down along notched stick *p* tap on stick 3 scrape 3 tap

v
10 *p* *mp* with disgust *mp* mix in noise *mp* calming, relaxed ord. *mf* more agitated
[ŋ] [ŋə] *to* [ə] [a] [a] [ha-ha-ha-ha] [a]

Tg
pp *mf*
t-t
pp
wbl
murmurations two objects *p* more agitated *mp* *mf*
bd
with beaters trem. *mp* dry *mp*

PMP

15 *p* warm sound [a] trem. [a] *mp* rit. trem. [a] ord. [a] *ppp* trem. [a]

two sticks *ppp* scratch trem. *mp*

ad lib. change the colour of the sound by shifting the angle between the notched stick and the drumhead

20 accel. trem. [a] calm 3 5 *mp* *ppp* *mp* *pp* *p* *ppp* trem. oscillating fields [a] [a] [a] [i]

smooth transitions *ppp* *p*

itches can suggestions, use the space between a/g

24 *mp* ord. 3 5 *mf* [i] [e]

murmurations two objects *ppp* sudden shifts, changes of timbres *mp*

29 *mp* *ff* fade in strong even fast vib. non vib. [a] [a] [a] to [y]

murmurations very agitated *mp* sim. *mf* *mf*

two sticks 5 *p* produce soft even drone-like sounds, gradually modify the tone colour superball

34 *p* *mp* *p* 7 8 *p* *mp* *p* 3 4 *p* *mp* *p* 4 4

detached sounds, densify and spread out again sim. with pitch bend sim. al - - - tri, al - - - tri, al - - - tri,

pp *pp* sweep with hand over drumhead *mp*

dynamic range, with accents as indicated *ppp* - *p*

4/4 *p* ————— *mp* ————— *p* ————— *ff*

40 *sim.* deteriorate ord. *speaking coldly, scornfully* *mf* with a lot of power

v al - - - tri, al - tri me-co non vo - glio I want no one else with me! NO! ONE!

chs nut chimes *pp* very few occurrences calm & gentle

Tg

t-t

wbl murmurations use beaters wild & fast *p* *p* *p* *f* *f*

bd as before rhythmic sweeps with hands stop drone *mp* with beaters trem. *mp* *sim.*

45 *p* ————— *mp* ————— *p* *ppp* ————— *p* ————— *ppp* *mp*

with tenderness trillo accel. trem.

v Ch'un fred-do sco - glio, ch'un fred-do sco - glio, sco - - glio,

chs gradually densify less densify perform layers of rustling noises with slight variations soothing

sim. with 2nd chime 3rd chime

50 ord. distort ord. *p* inhale *f* low growl *mf* half-voiced whisper in a slower, natural rhythm urgently, like casting a spell *pp*

v [hə] [hə] Tornante! // Veil your sweet lips! // Don't look at me! // Hide! [hɔ]

chs

bd superball gentle background drones modify sonic textures slowly *ppp*

55 ord. *mp* *mf* *ppp* mid-frequency noise low coloured whisper high coloured

v [l] [la] [a] [a] → [u] [hœ] [œ] [œ] [i]

bd insert modifications of sounds/accents becoming more and more audible sweep with hand over drumhead *mp*

overall crescendo

61 *> ppp* *mf > ppp* *ppp* *mp* *mf* *mp*

sharp articulations fast tongue trill, ululation *desperately*

v she ss-ings [l] [lələlə] [l] La - - scia - te-mi qui so - la, so -

bd tap drumhead sweep tap sweep tap stop accents continue drones

66 *mf* growl distorted *mf ppp* medium coloured whisper *mf ppp* *mp* fast tongue tremolo ord.

v *mf* *mf ppp* *mf ppp* *mp*

sh - e s - ings [l] [lilili] [i]

bd drop rosebuds and leaves on the drumhead at irregular intervals with theatrical gestures, leaving space for each movement

fadeout superball drone

71 *mf* sharp, commanding *p* warm *mf ppp* low frequency noises *mf ppp* *mf* semplice

v *mf* *p* *mf ppp* *mf ppp* *mf*

Leave me here a-lone to sing sh - e s - ings leave me a -

bd gradually densify movements take more/other plant material, using both hands

now the drumhead is covered with plant material

take materials, very slowly and delicately explore textures of crushing while gently touching the material to the drumhead to amplify the noises

dynamics follow the materiality

76 *ppp* with pitch, nasal sound ugly *mf* ord. legato urgently *f* *mp* *p* *ppp*

v *ppp* *mf* *f* *mp* *p* *ppp*

lone [ŋœ] leave me here to die to die a -

bd with one hand, very gently sweep material making slow, big movements across the drumhead, very little pressure

second hand sweeps sim. moving in different spaces and independently

interrupt the big sweeps with sudden scratching movements, rhythms can be suggestions precise & sharp

83 *mp* spoken, pitched utterance unpitched coarse utterance noisy & urgent *mf* voiced hiss *p* *mp* vocal fry, sinister

v *mp* *mf* *p* *mp*

lone Keep your dis - tance at all costs, keep your dis-tance at all costs [s] [y] [œ] [y,æ,u]

bd overall cresc. but never loud

trem. with hand holding material, stay in place, perform tiny movements

88 *mp*

v *mp*

[o] [ho] [o] [ho] [o] [ho]

bd slowly turn the megaphone in various directions (horizontally) while performing

sim. slightly, slowly vary the colour and density of the sonic grains,

trem. sim.

one hand in position at the top of the drumhead

other hand in position at the bottom

move to centre

both hands meet at centre

trem. hands move in opposite directions to right/left rim

right rim

left rim

PMP

93 *mp* ord. *desperately* *mf*

La - scia - - - - te - mi - mo - ri - - - -

right rim → left rim → right rim → left rim → both hands meet at top → both hands stop at top and freeze in position

109 *mp* cool & calm *ppp*

re mo - ri - re mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re,

bloom vib. non vib. dying away

move hands to right rim left rim both hands do big gently sweeping movements to the centre gathering plant material with both hands, toss a handful of material up into the air, in a wide gesture sim., extend the passage by adding a few wide circular motions on the drum surface randomly repeat movements sweeping material together, using hands and arms, playing with the sound and tossing material up ad lib.

senza misura

After the silence, speak the boxed text with verve towards the audience, with eyes wide open, as if you just found the solution to all problems!

114 *sim.* *mp* continue text, fadeout voice and continue mouthing silence 9" *mp*

mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re, mo-ri-re,...

DEATH is just a word, a word!

continue sim. Begin to slowly and gently sweep off all material from the drumhead, with hands and a broom.

Part II – The shadows of my song

4/4 ♩ = 72 more lively *p* tender *mp* *mf* *ppp*

A word, a word, a word, a word, form - ing [i]

crot Tg t-t cb bd continue sweeping until the drumhead is clean

6

mp low frequency groan
ugly

p tender

mf fast even vib. ord.

v [i] *to* [y] [α,ə,u] in dark - - - ness

Tg

t-t

ppp

ppp

10

mf spoken *p* hiss

mp slowly vary colouring by changing formants, breathe as necessary

p tender *mp* *p* *ppp*

v dark-ness -[ssss] [e] [sss] *to* [y] *to* [i] a word be-tween, be-tween, be-tween, -

Tg

t-t

p

ppp

14

p non-legato *mf* *ppp* trem. with sudden shifts in speed

v be - tween, be - tween, be - tween, be - tween,

Tg

t-t

bd with beaters *ppp* *p* *ppp*

19

p *ppp* *mf* *ord.* *mp* even vib. shivering 3 hissed, vary colouring

v be - tween be - tween my lip - s - [sss] [y,e,i]

Tg

t-t

p

ppp

25

mp speaking, pitched, follow a natural rhythm

f sung *p* *mp* sighing sim.

v lingering, clinging to my breath, dropping, faltering fall - - - ing, fall fall

Tg

use metal or plastic rods and wooden sticks with the side of a rod, scratch trem. low frequencies slow gradual colour change to higher frequencies to lower frequencies accents at irr. intervals > > PMP

ppp

29 *ppp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p* *ppp* speaking, pitched sung

fall fall fall - ing fall - - ing, fall - - ing in-to an a - byss bey-ond time

Tg *p* rit. trem. tip of rod to very slow even circling movements

t-t *ppp* *sempre*

cb beat with wooden stick *mp*

Boxed text spoken in a low register, powerfully and slowly like casting a spell. Crumple dried flowers and leaves between you fingers and toss them around, take time and pause ad lib. Coordinate with percussion.

33 *fff* *mp*

that opens up under my flesh // touches the other side of dark matter // life reversed // an inner voice // still singing on

Tg with wooden stick sim. movement in opp. direction *p* metal, with diff. colour slow circular movements with tempo variations *mp* metal scratch trem. metal scratches, colour change tap circle *mp* scratch tap circle scratch

t-t circle

39 *mp* *mf* *ppp* **accelerando** ♩ = 86 *mf* with a certain kind of heaviness

sung with a warm sound life, life, life re - versed is gone,

coordinate with voice, take more time only if necessary

Tg circle scratch circle intensify circling erratic circling motions getting edgy

ppp *mp* *ppp* *mf*

44 *mp* *p* *ppp* *mf* low groan

is gone, is gone, is gone, gone

Tg smooth transition to trem. *ppp*

t-t *ppp*

cb big cowbell, damped, various beaters *ppp* *mp* *mp*

bd *ppp*

*) quick irr. noises in many diferent timbres, short / scratched / open / damped / beating at various places, at irr. intervals, rare or condensed occurrences

keep the tempo brisk and continue without break

as high as possible, the sound can deteriorate

ff *p* *ppp* *mp* *mp* sung floating

49 sung
with the sound, van-ish-ing in-to spa - ces of mem - o - ry, spa - ces,

crotales with preparations

sim., include short trem. (scratching or beating)

f *pp* *ppp* *p* *pppp*

**) alternatively use the lower version

mf *ff* *mp* extremely high noise *mf* ord. sung**) *p*

54 spa - ces, spa - ces of mem-o - ry [y] van - ish - ing, van - ish-ing.

crotales

pppp *pppp* *p* *p*

cb *mp* *mf* *ff* *ff*

ppp *mp* *ppp* *mp* *ppp*

59 spec - tres of the past, spec - tres of the past, spec - tres

crotales

pppp *pppp* *pppp* *p* *pppp*

cb *ppp* *p* *p*

mp *ppp* *p* *ppp*

64 of the past, past, pas - - - - - [te]

bloom vib. non vib.

percussive sound bend pitch down as far as comfortable *f*

arco manipulate sound by hand with tinfoil *ppp* *pppp* *sim.* *mp*

ritardando ♩ = 66

p a low, airy groan
past

mf percussive airsounds with much energy
[tɛ] [tɛ] [tɛ] [tɛ]

mf sung, warm
shad-ows of my song re-ver-ber-ate, hear,

p ————— *mp*

pppp ord.
ppp ord.
pppp always

mf detached
hear the shad - ows,

p *pp* trem.
shad - - - ows,

ppp trem. rit. trem.
shad - - - ows,

With diff. beaters and hands, using various techniques including scraping, tapping, damping, perform a rainbow of various timbres, pitches, frequencies as suggested with different noteheads.

mp *pp* *mp*

mp hiss inhale through teeth with a groan *ff* *mp* accentuated spoken, casually & quickly
shad - ows - [sss] [hsss] [sss] Or is it microbiology // winding // firing cells // twisted grey matter at play?

pp *mp* *p* *mp*

as before, mix in short tremoli, rhythms & colours are suggestions

p murmuring
Or a virus dancing within my skull // banging against

mp sung, gently
of my song

mf bloom vib.

wait until voice is finished with their text

erratic actions as before

pppp *pppp* *mp* *mf*

87 *mp* non vib. *p* distort sound *mp* *ppp* trem. rit. and gliss. *mf* ord. begin trill with *f* slow & accel.

[ŋ] my song

sim. mixing timbres & techniques

p *mp* *mp* *mf*

mp *mp*

dry sound

92 ord. *mp* *p* *mf*

disgusted nasal noise, mid-frequency, open and close mouth for colouring low growl

[ŋ] [ŋə] [œ]

p *mp* *ppp* *ppp*

96 *mp* sung, warm sound accelerate and blend into trill *p* *fff*

voice takes time to unfold an ugly, penetrating nasal sound rip off sound at end with percussion

7 *tr* ord. raw & dirty voice nasal

song, song, song,

mp extremely short sound *mf* extremely short *fff*

sim. *fff*

extremely short sound *ff* *fff*