

les étoiles sont belles

for 8-part choir

Nikolaos-Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis

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Seating arrangement

Duration: 5-6 minutes

Voices:

Soprano 1
Soprano 2
Alto 1
Alto 2
Tenor 1
Tenor 2
Bass 1
Bass 2

Performance Instructions

The audience must stand in the middle of the performers, blindfolded, preferably with a piece of cloth tied lightly around their eyes. Trusting that the members of the audience will keep their eyes closed during the performance is not enough – it is important that they feel exposed and in a vulnerable position, physically, in the space. The conductor is placed in the center together with the audience. As little noise as possible must be made by the conductor when cueing, conducting, or turning the pages so as not to distract the members of the audience. The singers must be standing in the arrangement shown above, approximately five steps away from the audience. The singers must not use stands – instead, their parts (which are one page long for this purpose) should be held in their hand, preferably printed on hard paper or cardboard so that there are no page-flickering sounds during the performance.

The large **crochet rests** with a number on top of them indicate a silence of approximately that duration (in seconds). A stopwatch must not be used, but rather the seconds should be counted by the conductor.

There are **no measure numbers** – instead, the numbers on the score and on the singers' parts indicate the fragments they are playing. (For example, p.4 of the conductor's score would contain four fragments.)

Dynamics (large font, on top of each pillar) apply to all the voices.

Where there are two-syllable words (*better*, *guilty*, etc), they are meant to be sung as spoken (in terms of rhythm), instead of holding each syllable for four beats.

At various points the singers are instructed in their parts to take one step towards the audience (+1); one step away from the audience (-1); two steps towards the audience (+2); and two steps away from the audience. These **movements** are represented in the score as thick black dots (●) on top of each singer's part. One dot indicates the player is one step closer to the audience, to a maximum of five steps. Steps should be relatively large (2-3 feet) and should be made as silently as possible. The singers must be **barefoot**.

For the first section (pp.1-3), the conductor performs a total of eight (8) **cues**. The first cue starts the piece; the second cue starts off S1, and the rest of the cues should be performed in relation to the S1 line.

In the **text**, where there is a bracket in the first letter of a word, these letters are to be omitted and the rest of the word is meant to be sung.

For the last page, the performers must sing the word “why” for as long as possible. Once they run out of breath they must repeat the word at their pitch, but they must remain the dynamic at which they stopped. The word must be spread out to take up the whole breath. (i.e. Instead of “whyyyyyyyyyyyyyy” it should sound like “wwuuuuuuuuuuuuuooooooooaaaaaaaeeeeeeyyyyyyy”, to encompass all harmonics created by the mouth.)

Programme Note

“Les étoiles sont belles” is a movement (musically and literally) for eight-part choir.

The text comes from an online data-collection engine, called “WeFeelFine” (<http://www.wefeelfine.org>), developed by Jonathan Harris and Sep Kamvar in 2005. On this website, there is an applet which automatically searches the Internet, harvesting human feelings from a large number of blogs. It scans blog posts for sentences containing the words “I feel” or “I am feeling”, it then extracts the sentence from its context and saves it in a database. Users of this applet can then browse through recent searches of “feelings” in various ways.

The text that is spoken all comes (unaltered) from the database. The text that is sung is written by me in response to (and inspired by) this project, using some of the statistics applets available on their website (e.g. seeing which “feelings” are most popular around the world at the moment etc.)

The reason why I found this text fascinating is because they are feelings which were written by a specific person, at a specific moment, in a specific place in the world, but at the same time they are feelings we have all felt at some point in our lives. With the anonymity of the internet, this text becomes text written by everyone in general, but no one in particular, It touches upon the personal and universal, the individual and the communal, “me” vs “them.” As Bill Watterson (author of Calvin and Hobbes) said:

“Oddly, the more personal something is, the more universal it is as well. When we dig deeper to truthful experiences, that's the work that really touches people and connects us all.”

The title of the piece is from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry *Le Petit Prince*. The exact quote is “*Les étoiles sont belles à cause d'une fleur que l'on ne voit pas.*” (trans. “The stars are beautiful because of a flower we don't see.”) I believe that emotions (pleasant or unpleasant) are the flowers of human lives – what we don't see, but what makes them beautiful.

Instructions for the singers

FIRST SECTION

The **little black boxes** on the left of the written phrases are the conductor's **cues**. The black boxes are cues to which you have to respond; the grey boxes are cues which you don't have to respond to. Dynamics are as normal, where: *mp* is normal voice tone, *mf* is slightly louder voice tone, *ppp* is whispering, and *fff* is shouting at top of your voice.

If there is space between two phrases on a single line, perform that silence, approximately as you would read it.

SECOND SECTION

- +1 means "take one step towards the audience"
- 1 means "take one step away from the audience"
- +2 means "take two steps towards the audience"
- 2 means "take two steps away from the audience"

The steps must be taken **prior** to the fragment to which they apply.

The steps should be relatively large (2-3 ft). On setting up for the performance, you should position yourself approximately five (5) such steps away from the nearest member of the audience.

The numbers on the left indicate **fragment number**. (e.g. on each line of your part, there are 7 fragments)

In the **text**, where there is a bracket in the first letter of a word, these letters are to be omitted and the rest of the word is meant to be sung.

For the last page, the performers must sing the word “why” for as long as possible. Once they run out of breath they must repeat the word at their pitch, but they must remain the dynamic at which they stopped. The word must be spread out to take up the whole breath. (i.e. Instead of “whyyyyyyyyyyy” it should sound like “wwuuuuuuuuuuuuuuooooooooaaaaaaeeeeeeeeyyyyyyy”, to encompass all harmonics created by the mouth.)

the conductor cues the singers
(based on the S1's part) who in
turn start reading their part
until they finish, or until their
next cue

les étoiles sont belles

a movement for 8-part choir

Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis

Soprano 1 *fff* shout, at top of voice!
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!
I'm a girl, I feel privileged that I have the chances and choices that I've had throughout my life ..

Soprano 2 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!
I know I am lucky but I feel it is very wrong that the value of .. (p)

Alto 1 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Alto 2 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Tenor 1 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Tenor 2 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Bass 1 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Bass 2 *fff*
I DON'T EXPRESS MY FEELINGS VERY WELL!

Three dynamic markers (downward arrows) are positioned at the top of the score, corresponding to the first, second, and third measures of the first staff.

S 1
 .. as I am aware that my life could have been very different had I been born in a different society. I get that great nostalgic feeling you ..

S 2
 .. a woman's life and the way she is permitted to live her life is dependent on where she is born. I feel less beige already. I wanted that ..

A 1
 I feel he is back in his own negative space because it feels comforting. I feel like screaming.

A 2
 I feel a flutter of excitement and also a feeling of dread.

T 1
 I feel like coming back to a world of strangers. I feel like screaming.

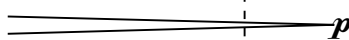
T 2
 I feel insecure and not sure of things anymore.

B 1
 I feel lonely. I feel stressed. I just can't explain this feeling..

B 2
 I feel like coming back to a world of strangers

Dynamic Markings:

- S 1:** *p* (first measure), *mp* (fourth measure)
- S 2:** *p* (first measure), *f* (second measure), *mf* (third measure), *mp* (fourth measure)
- A 1:** *pp* (first measure), *mp* (second measure), *p* (third measure), *ff* (fourth measure, labeled *whispered*)
- A 2:** *mf* (third measure), *p* (fourth measure)
- T 1:** *mp* (first measure), *fff* (fourth measure)
- T 2:** *mp* (second measure), *pp* (third measure)
- B 1:** *f* (second measure, labeled *whispered*), *mf* (fourth measure), *ppp* (fifth measure, labeled *fade to whispering*)
- B 2:** *p* (third measure), *ff* (fourth measure), *p* (fifth measure)

S 1	<p><i>f</i>  <i>p</i></p> <p>.. get in your stomach when you start a brand new relationship.</p>
S 2	<p>.. feeling that I know I had made someone feel good.</p>
A 1	<p><i>mf</i> <i>whispered</i></p> <p>I feel peace.</p>
A 2	<p><i>whispered</i></p>
T 1	<p><i>f</i></p> <p>I feel good that she feels good.</p>
T 2	
B 1	<p><i>ppp</i></p> <p>.. that remains.</p>
B 2	

5"



*the fermatas must be neither too short
nor too long and they shouldn't have
the same duration every time*

1* **Unrushed** *pp* *(♩=72-80)*

S 1 we

S 2 [w]e

A 1 [w]e

A 2 [w]e

T 1 [w]e

T 2 [w]e

B 1

B 2

2"

pp

feel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

5"

p

fine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

2"

mf

fine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

[f]ine

1"

* These are not measure numbers, but fragment numbers (i.e. on this page there are four fragments)
They correspond to the numbers on the parts of the singers.

The image displays a musical score for the song "The Sound of Silence" by Simon & Garfunkel. The score is written for a vocal ensemble and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are arranged in four staves: Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), Alto 1 (A1), and Alto 2 (A2). The piano parts are arranged in four staves: Tenor 1 (T1), Tenor 2 (T2), Bass 1 (B1), and Bass 2 (B2). The score is divided into four measures, each with a dynamic marking: *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *ppp*. The lyrics are "we are fine, we are fine, we are fine, we are fine." The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The piano parts are written in a style that suggests a soft, intimate sound.

9 *ppp*

S 1 [w]e

S 2 we

A 1 [w]e

A 2 [w]e

T 1 [w]e

T 2 [w]e

B 1

B 2

2" *mp*

[f]eel

feel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

[f]eel

5" *f*

better

[b]etter

[b]etter

[b]etter

[b]etter

[b]etter

[b]etter

1" *ppp*

bad

[b]ad

[b]ad

[b]ad

[b]ad

[b]ad

[b]ad

4"

The musical score is arranged in four measures, each with a dynamic marking at the top: *ppp*, *mp*, *f*, and *ppp*. The vocal parts are labeled on the left: S 1, S 2, A 1, A 2, T 1, T 2, B 1, and B 2. The lyrics are: 'we', 'feel', 'better', 'bad'. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, slurs, and articulation marks. There are also large black marks between the measures, possibly indicating breath or phrasing. The first measure has a '9' at the top left, and the subsequent measures have '2"', '5"', '1"', and '4"' respectively.

pp *pp* *sfpppp* *mp*

13

S 1 [g]ood [r]ight guilty [s]ick

S 2 good [r]ight guilty [s]ick

A 1 [g]ood [r]ight guilty sick

A 2 [g]ood right guilty [s]ick

T 1 [g]ood [r]ight guilty [s]ick

T 2 [g]ood [r]ight guilty [s]ick

B 1 [r]ight guilty

B 2 guilty

2" 3" 1" 2"

17 *ppp* *mf* *p* *mf*

S 1 [s]ick we [f]eel [f]ine

S 2 [s]ick [w]e [f]eel [f]ine

A 1 sick [w]e feel [f]ine

A 2 [s]ick [w]e [f]eel fine

T 1 [s]ick [w]e [f]eel [f]ine

T 2 [s]ick [w]e [f]eel [f]ine

B 1 [f]eel [f]ine

B 2 [w]e [f]ine

1" 1" 4" 3"

ff *sfpp* *pp* *pp*

21

S 1 we are [s]ame [f]ine

S 2 we are same [f]ine

A 1 we are [s]ame fine

A 2 we are [s]ame [f]ine

T 1 we are [s]ame [f]ine

T 2 we are [s]ame [f]ine

B 1 we are [s]ame [f]ine

B 2 we are [s]ame [f]ine

2" 2" 1" 5"

The musical score is written for a choir with eight parts: Soprano 1 (S 1), Soprano 2 (S 2), Alto 1 (A 1), Alto 2 (A 2), Tenor 1 (T 1), Tenor 2 (T 2), Bass 1 (B 1), and Bass 2 (B 2). The score is divided into four systems, each with a dynamic marking and a time signature. The lyrics are 'we are [s]ame [f]ine'. The first system is marked *ff* and 21. The second system is marked *sfpp* and 2''. The third system is marked *pp* and 1''. The fourth system is marked *pp* and 5''. The lyrics are 'we are [s]ame [f]ine'.

25

p

S 1 [s]ame

S 2 [s]ame

A 1 same

A 2 [s]ame

T 1 [s]ame

T 2 [s]ame

B 1 [s]ame

B 2 [s]ame

3''

mf

S 1 [w]e

S 2 we

A 1 [w]e

A 2 [w]e

T 1 [w]e

T 2 [w]e

B 1 [w]e

B 2 [w]e

2''

f

S 1 [f]eel

S 2 [f]eel

A 1 feel

A 2 [f]eel

T 1 [f]eel

T 2 [f]eel

B 1 [f]eel

B 2 [f]eel

1''

ff

S 1 sorry

S 2 sorry

A 1 sorry

A 2 sorry

T 1 sorry

T 2 sorry

B 1 sorry

B 2 sorry

5''

* note: the accel. is meant to be executed so that each fragment is faster than the previous one, but there is no acceleration within the fragments.

sfpp

30-45"

29

S 1

S 2

A 1

A 2

T 1

T 2

B 1

B 2

the singers should start the word "why" when they begin to sing, and should have reached the end of the word "why" by the time they run out of breath. i.e. instead of going "whyyyyyyyyyyyyyy" they should go "wuuuuoooooooooaaaaaeiiiiiiii".

throughout this last section, singers may (or may not) choose to whisper any one short phrase (fewer than 10 words) from the selection of phrases from the beginning of the piece.

*expression ad lib, breathe as necessary; on repeating the word "why" (each singer at their pitch), repeat at **pp** and do not perform the dynamic envelope*

tutti

move towards the audience quickly / stand for 10" / move around the audience slowly for 6" / move away from the audience / walk out of the room slowly