SONGS OF THE NIGHT SKY:
THREE POEMS OF QUENTIN SMITH

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ABSTRACT

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_Songs of the Night Sky: Three Poems of Quentin Smith_ is a setting for soprano and small chamber ensemble consisting of clarinet, cello, and piano. The poet’s philosophy concerns cosmology, time, and the meaning of the universe’s existence. His basic view toward these subjects is best described as scientific, naturalistic, and Humanistic. His poetry reflects this viewpoint by capturing the wonder and awe experienced when encountering the magnitude and vastness of the universe via the night sky.

_Songs of the Night Sky: Three Poems of Quentin Smith_ complements Smith’s poetry by musically portraying its emotional and intellectual states as well as painting the text to further illuminate its meaning. The three poems form a distinct narrative and dramatic progression. The overall form of the piece is analogous to this dramatic shape.

The piece draws on well-known twentieth century vocal/small ensemble literature. The instrumentation loosely models that of Arnold Schönberg’s _Pierrot lunaire, Op. 21_. Pierre Boulez’s _Le marteau sans maître_ impacts this work through its abstraction of the text and relation of instrumental accompaniment to the text. George Crumb’s _Ancient Voices of Children_ and _Lux Aeterna_ are manifest through the use of extended techniques and complex, evocative timbres. The influence of Luciano Berio is evident in the treatment of text as seen in _Thema: Omaggio a Joyce, Visage, and Circles_. The final poem presents the emotions the author experienced when listening to Bruckner’s _Symphony no. 4_. The third movement’s finale quotes extensively from this piece.

_Songs of the Night Sky: Three Poems of Quentin Smith_ is intended as a musical component of and counterpart to the Humanistic philosophy and world view embodied in Smith’s philosophy and poetry. It is also intended as a contribution to and extension of the twentieth century vocal/small chamber ensemble tradition.
To Sarah, my love and inspiration
I. OUTSIDE

Blood-flecks in the sky
Red lights on towers
Flash death-warning
Swords of stars
Crash silver blades
On black rocks.

Hard birds arc
Like bombs
Through the night

The wind drives
Against a tree
Like a truck
Without an anchor
A pole
Splashes in the dirt

The sky turns to a wave-crest
Flowing from distant orange suns
And the night breaks

Without a scream
Through the sinews
Of the Earth.

Written 1973, 1974, 2002

II. NIGHT

The night like an infinite wing
Keeps spreading towards the earth

In flowing mirrors that melt and dissolve
The air vanishes below the stars

Beyond the moon’s scarred ice-stone
A frozen-orange hall is fading

Onto a field space is pouring
An ocean of eternal silence

Into a ghost mountain’s distant glow
A purple shadow gently crashes

On a hill a tombstone breaks
In the light of silver suns

Moonlight splashes on a statuehead
And trickles numbly on its eye-dead face

Near a vine that grows blue around an elm
Starlight rains softly on a marble pond

On an island of a darkened meadow
A rose echoes the deep universe

Written 1974

III. WALKING HOME FROM A MOVIE

The longing glow of the moon
Slid in and out of the scattering clouds,
Illuminating them with a silver-blue radiance…
O everything is infinite! Glorious night!
Stars speckled and so near in your distance
…I have risen beyond myself, beyond the world…
There is no more time, there is only beauty;
Everything is the deepest
And the most fullest eternity of love…
There is no world, I am the infinite…

Written 1971

All text used with permission of the author
Guide to notation

The following applies throughout the ensemble:

All performers read from score.

Accidentals apply throughout a measure; accidentals apply only to the notes they immediately precede where measures are absent; accidentals apply throughout boxed repeated figures.

No Meter

Duration is indicated through brackets:

Arrows are used to indicate cues between parts:

Dashed barlines indicate points of simultaneity:

Small notes are used to indicate release, used to cue another player:

A group of beamed notes with a slash indicates that the figure should be played as fast as possible:

A line between notes indicates sustain (same as a tie):

The termination of a line indicates a release:

Any boxed figure should be repeated until the end of the bold line:
Symbols used in the voice part:

“X” noteheads indicate an unvoiced whisper or a sustained fricative (may be voiced or unvoiced depending on the text)

Notes marked with a “+” indicate a sustained consonant (nasal or semi-vowel)

Indicates the following pitch should be sung a quarter tone lower than the already flatted pitch

The vocalist is also asked to play bamboo wind chimes, finger cymbals, and a large Chinese wind gong (Feng Luo) (strike with large, soft tam-tam mallet)
Symbols used in the clarinet part:

Notes marked as such: \( \ddagger \) should consist entirely of breath noise, while the marking \( \ddagger \) indicates a mixture of tone and breath noise.

Multiphonics are designated as follows: \( \ddagger \) and will always include a suggested fingering (see *The Clarinet of the Twenty-First Century* by E. Michael Richards for information on multiphonics).

A register key trill with upper multiphonic is shown: \( \ddagger \) (see *The Clarinet of the Twenty-First Century* by E. Michael Richards).

An “X” above a note indicates a slap-tongue.

Multiphonics produced through singing and playing are shown as follows: the small noteheads are transposed and are to be sung in the octave most comfortable for the performer.

Glissandi are indicated as follows: Glissandi covering wide ranges should use both changes in embouchure and fingering, at the performer’s discretion.
Symbols used in the cello part:

Small pitch bends on open strings are obtained by applying pressure to the strings behind the bridge, thereby raising their pitch slightly

An “X” notehead indicates to bow the bridge

Variation in vibrato speed is shown graphically, as such:

Glissandi are indicated as follows: Every attempt should be made to perform each glissandi entirely on a single string; exceptions to this are left to the performer’s discretion

Artificial or stopped harmonics are indicated

A triangular notehead indicates the highest possible stopped pitch on a given string

A diamond notehead above a triangular notehead indicates the highest possible stopped harmonic on a given string

A triangular notehead marked with a circle indicates the highest possible natural (or touch) harmonic possible on a given string

A “+” above a note indicates a left hand pizzicato
The marking \( \diamond \) indicates the strings should be muted using any free left hand fingers in order to produce bow noise, with no actual tone.

The marking \( \bullet \) above a note indicates it should be muted as above, but lightly, as to create a combination of bow noise and tone.

The following: \( \frac{\text{Note}}{\text{Interval}} \) indicates free glissandi through the natural harmonics available on the given string.

Ricochet bowing is indicated as such: \( \frac{\text{Note}}{\text{Interval}} \) When followed by sustain, the final bounce should begin the sustain.

The cellist is also asked to use a plectrum. A standard guitar plectrum is appropriate.
Symbols used in the piano part:

Muted strings are indicated with a “+”

Harmonics are shown as follows:

A diamond notehead indicates the key(s) should be depressed silently

Tone clusters are indicated as follows and should include all chromatic pitches between the two given pitches

Indications to play on the keyboard or on the inside of the piano are made as such:

The pianist is also asked to scrape a wire brush (the type typically used by jazz drummers) both lengthwise and across (as if strumming) the strings (see page 22-24 of the score)
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Songs of the Night Sky:
Three Poems of Quentin Smith

I. Outside

Piano

Clarinet

Cello

Voice

bow as necessary

\[ q = 72 \]

Dark, mysterious

Lee Scott Price (2005)
ooed fleck s in the sky

randomly trill keys

blow air through horn

growl

red lights on towers

flash

mf

mp

pp

mf

pp

mf
J = 96 Harsh, obsessively

"Hard birds are like bombs"

Play given note in erratic rhythm
s Against a tree
Like a truck.
Shar throughout; do not rearticulate each repetition.
singing from distant orange suns

sing:

ah

mf

mf

mf
Through the sinews of the Earth.

Bamboo Wind Chimes

PPP
II. Night

\( \text{\( p \)} \quad \text{\( mp \)} \)

The night like an

Depress keys silently;
secure with sostenuto pedal
Inside

Sweep across strings
with fingernail
Increasingly agitated

* Syncronicity between parts is approximated in this section.
\( \text{\( q \equiv 66 \)} \text{ Warm, fragile, ethereal} \)

\( \text{ Beyond the moon's s-carved } \)

\( \text{ Ricochet (begin sustain on last bounce; bow as necessary) } \)

\( \text{ Ritard... } \)

\( \text{ diminuendo... } \)
pno.

Cl.

Vc.

Vox

°

w

4"
On to a field space is pouring An ocean of eternal silence

Depress keys silently; secure with sostenuto pedal

Pno.

Vc.

Cl.
Staar Scrape bass strings secured with sos. ped., lengthwise with wire brush.

away from endpin

(pno.

away from endpin

(breathe as necessary

slightly mute strings while bowing to create noisy tone

(p

(breathe as necessary

mute strings while bowing to create noise

Slur throughout; do not rearticulate each repetition.

dr.
On a hill a tombstone breaks
In the light of silver suns.
Ecstatic, warm

Moonlight splashes on a statuehead And trickles numb

freely gliss through natural harmonics

(sos)
- ly on its eye—dead face
Near a vine that grows blue,
a-round an elm
Star—light rains soft—
ly on a marble pond
On an island of a
darkened meadow
A rose echoes the deep

Finger Cymbals
III. Walking Home from a Movie

Tempos and Dynamics:
- \( \text{C} = 72 \)
- Precise, mechanical, imminent

Notation:
- Piano
- Violin
- Clarinet

Symbols:
- \( \text{mp} \)
- \( \text{sfz} \)
- \( \text{pp} \)
Urgent yet calm, controlled

The long-ing glow of the moon
S-1-ld in and out of the scattering clouds,

Illuminating them with a silver-blue radiance...

Trill with register key
Ecstatic, powerful, absolute

Everything is infinite!

Glorious
night!

Stars speckled and so near in your distance

...I have risen beyond myself, beyond the
There is no more time, there is...
only beauty; every thing is the deep-est and the most full-est eternity of
love...

ah____ ah____ ah____ ah____ ah____ ah____