triPoe:try

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Mixed choir. Texts by Poe, Cummings and Mallarmé.
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Bruno Ruviaro

triPoe:try

for mixed choir

(2003)

texts by
Edgar Allan Poe
Stéphane Mallarmé
e. e. cummings
GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

* The narrator should preferably be an actor. If the person is to be chosen from among the choir members, the selection should be determined by who is best able to act and narrate passages; also, if possible, choose a bass voice.
* Some singers may hold tuning forks to help in finding the notes in the middle of spoken passages.
* The conductor (or a director, if available) should decide about the details of the theatrical aspects of the piece. The general scene directions below may be adapted or changed according to each ensemble and each performance.
* When needed, a short guide to pronunciation of phonemes is provided at the top of score. This is not strictly the IPA (International Phonetic Association) standards, but rather is an adapted version of it, to meet the necessities of this piece and to make reading more straightforward.
* Short, normal and long fermatas, respectively:

PAGE 1 – Nobody on stage, blackout. The narrator walks in toward the center, holding a lantern, coming from stage left (left from his point of view, right from the audience’s). He starts speaking while still walking. The choir enters the stage irregularly from both sides, each individual — if possible — with a small flashlight pointed at his/her own eyes. According to the score, singers are already whispering upon walking onto the stage.

PAGE 2 – Eventually all singers reach their standard choral position. The narrator leaves the center of the stage during the second block of text on page 2. He goes to a chair, which should be positioned somewhat diagonally stage right (not facing the audience directly), and a little apart from the choir. The narrator sits. He continues to read the tale with a hardly audible voice, as if reading or thinking to himself. He should always be doing this during the piece, except for his “solo” moments indicated in the score. From page 2 to page 8 theater lights fade in gradually on the choir.

PAGES 9 to 13 – The female’s French text: as a soloist, she may take a step forward from the choir. During her scene, she may walk from one side to another, either in front of or among the other singers, as the laughs increase in volume and density.

PAGE 14 – The narrator’s solo. He leaves his seat and walks again to center-front of the stage. During his block of text on page 15, he returns to his seat, finishing the solo when already sat down again.

PAGE 20 – The choir should study this scene carefully, trying to find its own effective way of building the “silent crescendo”. The climax of this part is the sudden return of voices uttering in “unison”.

PAGE 21 – The narrator speaks facing the audience but without leaving the chair.

PAGE 25-26 – Theater lights should fade out a little during this scene. The narrator abandons his chair (optionally carrying the lantern) and walks slowly to the other side of the stage, planning to finish the block of text upon arriving there. The shriek “Villains” should start from that side and continue while the narrator moves abruptly towards the choir. At this time, the choir runs away from the stage, leaving the narrator alone (still shrieking). The stage is almost dark at this moment, fading to blackout. The narrator’s lantern can be either with him or left near the chair. If with him, he may extinguish the fire after his last words. The complete blackout should come right after these two words. End of the piece.
true! [short pause] - nervous, very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad? The disease had sharpened my senses - not destroyed - not dulled them. Above all was the sense of hearing acute. I heard all things in the heaven and in the earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad?
It is impossible to say how first the idea entered my brain; but once conceived, it haunted me day and night. Object there was none. Passion there was none. I loved the old man. He had never wronged me. He had never given me insult. [...] go on reading the tale...
[2 basses solo. The others keep whispering all the time.]

[speaking]

How HEALTHILY!

[How healthily!]

True!
[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

[Mute mouth with one hand]

And so, by degrees...

...VERY, very gradually

True!

fp

[attacca]
I moved it slowly
- nervous, nervous, cautiously
- dreadfully nervous
- not destroyed, not dulled them
- how wisely, with what caution
- how healthily, with what foresight
- how calmly, with what dissimulation
- very gradually, very very slowly
- the disease had sharpened my senses
With what caution!

Yes, foresight

With what foresight!

Oh! ... so gently
I turned the latch of his door and opened it. (...) I think it was his eye!

I made up my mind to take the life of the old man, and thus rid myself of the eye forever!

It took me an hour...

I moved it slowly, very very slowly...
Only breathing sounds. General Rule: higher note BREATH IN, lower note BREATH OUT

\[ \text{\textit{Tel qu'en Lui même enfin l'éternité le change...}} \]

[FEMALE VOICE SOLO. BEGIN READING MEZZO FORTE WITH NORMAL INTONATION.]

[Narrator continues normally reading the tale, always ppp]

[AHONAGE TO STÉPHANE MALLARMÉ]

[All basses: occasional, spaced stifled laughs and chucklings. Up to three "solo" individuals may make sound at the same time. Alternate turns irregularly among all basses]
...Le Poète suscite avec un glaive nu...  [She realizes that there are laughs around]
[Laughs become more and more clear and unrestrained. Any number of singers can laugh at the same time. Singers may start using sounds as /bf/, /pf/, /mf/ or similar]

[More emphasis, a little bit faster]

...Le Poète suscite avec un glaive nu ... Son siècle épouvanté...

[Disturbed by the laughs]
Nervous, more and more intense...

Son siècle épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu...

Shouting...épouvanté de n'avoir pas connu...
[S1, S2, A1, A2, T1, T2: each individual may repeat *ad libitum* the last breathing rhythm. Then gradually abandon it introducing new sounds into the global mass, among the following options: coughing, puffing, choking and laughing. Each of these may have at least two different levels like "soft" or "strong". Density of events should increase globally]

[B1, B2: increasing density of events. Chuckles and giggles with varying dynamics, moving towards exaggerated laugh]

*Que la mort ... triomphait dans cette voix étrange!* [May be repeated once or twice]
Upon the eighth night I was more than usually cautious in opening the door. A watch's minute hand moves more quickly than did mine. Never before that night I had felt the extent of my own powers - of my sagacity. I could scarcely contain my feelings of triumph. To think that there I was, opening the door, little by little, and he not even to dream of my secret deeds or thoughts. I fairly ->

[Soprano Solo: puffing, short of breath]

[Filtering: global diminuendo and decreasing density of sound events. Only two soloists remain prominent, gaining relief over the others: one tenor laughing and one soprano short of breath]

[Narrator solo: start a little before the end of global filtering. This text should sound as foreground, while the laughing and puffing solos should be background]

Tenor Solo: strong, hysteric laugh; alternate with some silence

All others: silence

[Soprano Solo: puffing, short of breath]
-> chuckled at the idea; and perhaps he heard me; for he moved on the bed suddenly, as if startled. Now you may think that I drew back - but no. His room was as black as pitch with the thick darkness (for the shutters were close fastened, through fear of robbers), and so I knew that he could not see the opening of the door, and I kept pushing on it steadily, steadily.
Narrator resumes reading the tale, now even more *ppp* - sometimes only moving his lips without voice sounds.
If kept quite still and said nothing
S1

S2

A1

A2

T1

T2

B1

B2

N
[whispering]

S1: dull

S2: still cotton /u/ quick

A1: still cotton /u/ heart

A2: dull /u/ sound

T1: still still dull

T2: quick low

B1: low low

B2: still low low
When I had waited a long time, very patiently, without hearing him lie down, I resolved to open a little - a very, very little crevice in the lantern. So I opened it - you cannot imagine how stealthily, stealthily - until, at length, a single dim ray, like the thread of the spider, shot from out the crevice and full upon the vulture eye. It was open - wide, wide open - and I grew furious as I gazed upon it.

But even yet I refrained and kept still. I scarcely breathed. I held the lantern motionless. I tried how steadily I could maintain the ray upon the eye. Meantime the hellish tattoo of the heart increased. It grew quicker and quicker, and louder and louder every instant. The old man's terror must have been extreme! It grew louder, I say, louder every moment! - do you mark me well? Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder! Louder! (...)

[All, "unison": speaking very loudly (with sound!), but not shouting]

I HAVE TOLD YOU THAT I AM NERVOUS: SO I AM.

fff
(d)I

[Narrator: calmly]

[short pause] He was stone dead. His eye would trouble me no more. [short pause]
If still you think me mad, you will think so no longer when I describe the wise precautions
I took for the concealment of the body. The night waned, and I worked hastily, but in silence.
No human eye - not even *his* - could have detected any thing wrong. There was nothing to wash
out - no stain of any kind - no blood-spot whatever. [short pause] For what had I now to fear?
I smiled - for what had I now to fear?
[Homage to Luciano Berio]

[T1 solo: only consonants, speaking slowly]

F(o)R (wha)T
H(a)D [I] N[ow]
T[o] F(ea)R?

mf

[T2 solo answer: only vowels]

[f]O[r] WHA[t]
[t]O [f]EA[r]?

mf

[T1&T2 solo: "stretch" sounds in time, even the consonants, to obtain a continuous effect of "building up" the sentence. Speak slowly. Keep individual sounds as pronounced in those words.]

F...R ..T H...D .. N.. T.. F......R?

f

..O.. WHA.. ..A.. I ..OW ..O ..EA..?

f

No

B1

B2

N
[Homage to e.e. cummings]

[All A1: the voiced sounds N = /n/ and Y = /y/ should NOT be tuned in unison with the bass B]

A1 mf NNNNNNNNNNNSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSYYYYYYYYYYYYSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS


[All A2: speak slowly and omit sounds in brackets]

[T1&T2 solo: repeat one more time the previous "broken phrase"]
[A1, A2, T1, T2, B1: each individual should speak the same text as the narrator with irregular delayed starts. Many speaking "modes" can be mixed. Once a singer chooses one, s/he should stay on it until the end.
- normal speech;
- whispering;
- omitting vowels;
- omitting consonants;
- motion of lips only;
- interrupting text with cough, laugh, choke etc.
- "monotone" speech, like some kind of prayer;

The "normal" mode should be slightly prevalent in the overall result. The narrator is supposed to start alone as a soloist; little by little the increasing crowd of sounds from the other singers should compete with the narrator's solo. Global crescendo of everything until the end.]

No doubt I now grew very pale; but I talked more fluently, and with a heightened voice. Yet the sound increased - and what could I do? It was a low, dull, quick sound - much such a sound as a watch makes when enveloped in cotton. (...
(...) I gasped for breath - and yet the officers heard it not. I talked more quickly - more vehemently; but the noise steadily increased. I aroused and argued about trifles, in a high key and with violent gesticulations, but the noise steadily increased. Why would they not be gone? I paced the floor to and fro with heavy strides, as if excited to fury by the observation of the men - but the noise steadily increased. Oh God! What could I do? I foamed - I raved - I swore! I swung the chair upon which I had been sitting, and grated it upon the boards, but the noise arose over all and continually increased. It grew louder - louder - louder! And still the men chatted pleasantly, and smiled. Was it possible they heard not? Almighty God! - no, no! They heard! - they suspected! - they knew! - they were making a mockery of my horror! - this I thought, and this I think. But anything was better than this agony! Any thing was more tolerable than this derision! I could bear those hypocritical smiles no longer! I felt that I must scream or die! - and now - again!- hark! louder! louder! louder! louder! louder! louder! -
[All S, A, T, B: upon the narrator’s shriek “Villains!”, all singers run away from stage quickly and irregularly, leaving him alone]

[Shrieking, sustaining first "notes" for a while. Walk towards the center of stage. Bend to the floor, kneel.]

[Suddenly calm, with a soft voice, just a little puffing. Leave the sentence without conclusion. Blackout.]

"Villains!"