

Lost Content

for SATB choir and piano

Martin Humphries

- 2016 -

Performance note:

The work concludes with a series of mobile phones playing back pre-recorded samples. Four to six people should be 'planted' around the audience with the files loaded onto their phones. On cue (rehearsal mark 'P') the 'plants' should hit play and leave the track to run. All tracks being with silence and slowly fade in and out. The samples are pre-recorded voices (ideally from the performing ensemble) singing singular pitches (Eb, Ab, Bb) with the start and end of each note removed. This creates an otherworldly, almost digital sound created entirely from the human voice.

The opening requires four vocal soloists (SATB) taken from the choir. These may be selected in advance or may be chosen spontaneously in each rehearsal/performance via a cue from the conductor.

Programme note:

Lost Content makes use of an A.E. Housman text taken from No. 40 of his famous cycle of poems, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896). Written before World War I, the words of Housman's poem are certainly prescient, and serve as both reflective and foreshadowing amidst such current international insecurity. The text also holds strong personal reverence, as its quotation in Dennis Potter's radio play *Blue Remembered Hills* (1979) made a lasting imprint on my perception of war during my childhood. The work began life as a very simple setting of the Housman text but quickly developed into a far more immersive and, hopefully, rewarding choral experience for both performer and audience.

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

Duration: variable (6-7 minutes)

Lost Content

for SATB choir and piano

A E Houseman

Martin Humphries

A

Piano:

Strike a key with an *sfz* accent, wait, then repeat varying pause on each repetition;
Centre around B \flat , F and C, but occasionally add other notes from the B \flat major scale;
Use any octaves within the singing range of the choir (SATB);
Sustain pedal always pressed;
Perform free of tempo and coincidence with other performers;
Continue repeating this event until directed to stop (rehearsal mark 'F').

A

10-15 seconds

B

Chorus:

Do the following when cued by conductor:

On the sounding of a piano note wait 1-3 seconds before singing the same note (at any comfortable octave);
Each note should be sustained for the length of one comfortable breath;
Each note can either be sung '*forte*, dim. *piano*' or '*piano*, cresc. *forte*';
Perform free of tempo and coincidence with other performers;
You do not need to sing a note for every piano note;
Repeat this event until instructed to stop by conductor;
When instructed to stop, complete the note you are currently singing;
Do not stop abruptly.

Conductor:

Cue singers to join or leave this event sporadically;
Any number of singers can be singing at any one time;
Strive for variety of texture and timbre.

B

20-30 seconds

C

Four soloists (SATB):

Sing the numbered fragments below in any order, repeating freely;
Sing at any comfortable octave;
Vary the text on each repetition (given text can be applied to any fragment);
Perform independently of one another but try to retain an independent crotchet=c.40 pulse;
Do not begin together or try to synchronise in any way;
Repeat until directed to stop (rehearsal mark 'F');
Character: lilting.

C

20-30 seconds

Text: from yon far / are those blue / high-ways where / come a-gain

1 *mp* vary length 1-3"

2 *mp* vary length 1-3"

3 *mp* vary length 1-3"

4 *mp* vary length 1-3"

D

Conductor:

Clear the texture by cueing singers to stop;
This does not include the four soloists who continue through this event;
Stagger exits to create a textural 'fade out';
If there are a large number of singers performing a 'conductor's sweep' may be employed.

D

20-30 seconds



E

Chorus (except four soloists):

Sing the following in tempo on conductor's cue:

E

Lilting (♩.=c.40)

S. *pp* 5-10" 5-10" 5-10" 10-15"
Lost Lost Land Lost Lost

A. *pp* 5-10" 5-10" 5-10" 10-15"
Lost Lost Land Lost Lost

T. *pp* 5-10" 5-10" 5-10" 10-15"
Lost Lost Land Lost Lost

B. *pp* 5-10" 5-10" 5-10" 10-15"
Lost Lost Land Lost Lost

Four soloists & piano:
 Stop, but not abruptly;
 finish your current phrase;
 stagger stopping to create a textural 'fade-out'.

Soloists:
 Rejoin choir.

10 **F** **G** *p* < *mp* *p sub.* < *mp* *p sub.* ————— *mp*

S. In- to my heart an air that kills From yon far count-ry blows_____

A. *pp* < *mf pp sub.* < *mf pp sub.* < *mp* < *pp* < *mp*
 Lost land lost land lost_____ land_____ blows_____

T. *pp* < *mf pp sub.* < *mf pp sub.* < *mp* < *pp* < *mp*
 Lost land lost land lost_____ land air that blows_____

B. *pp* < *mf pp sub.* < *mf pp sub.* < *mp* < *pp no cresc.*
 Lost land lost land lost_____ land_____

Pno. **F** **G** *p* *mf* *8va* *15ma*
Ped. sempre

20 **H** *p* *p* *mf* *mf*

S. _____ lost lost land lost land

A. _____ lost lost land lost land

T. *mf*
 What are those, — What are those, — What are those, — What are those, What are those, — What are

B. *mf*
 What are those, — What are those, — What are those, — What are those, What are those, — What are

Pno. **H** *8va*

26

S. *lost land lost land lost land lost land lost land*

A. *lost land lost land lost land lost land lost land*

T. *— those, — What are those, — What are those, What are those, — What are those, What are those, What are*

B. *— those, — What are those, — What are those, What are those, — What are those, What are those, What are*

Pno.

32

S. *blue hills, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber, re-mem ber,*

A. *blue hills, What are those*

T. *sub. those, — blue hills, What are those*

B. *sub. those, — blue hills, What are those*

Pno. *mp unmeasured tremolo*

ff intense

ff intense

ff intense

mp

pp

8^{va}

Ped. sempre

** lift pedal*

38

S. re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re - mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re - mem - ber, re - mem - ber, re-mem - ber,

A. what spires, what farms what spires, what farms What are those

T. what spires, what farms what spires, what farms What are those

B. what spires, what farms what spires, what farms What are those

Pno.

(8)-----

44

rall. **K** A tempo (lilting)

S. re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber, re-mem - ber_____ blue hills blue_____ blue_

A. What are those What are those blue hills re-mem - bered hills, re-mem - bered hills,

T. What are those What are those blue_ hills_____

B. What are those What are those blue hills_____

Pno.

rall. **K** A tempo (lilting)

(8)-----

51

S. *blue* *blue* *blue*

A. re - mem - bered hills, re - mem - bered hills, re - mem - bered hills,

T. *pp* what farms are those? what farms are

B. *pp* spires

Pno. *p* *8va*

54

S. *blue* *blue*

A. re - mem - bered hills, re - mem - bered hills,

T. those? what farms are those? What farms are those? what are those lost lands?

B. spires spires spires spires spires lost lands?

Pno. *8va*

58 **L** *p* < *mp* *p sub.* < *mp* *p sub.* < *mp* **M**

S. That is the land of lost con- tent, I see it shin- ing plain, _____

A. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*
lost land lost land, land, The land of lost con-

T. *mp* *pp* *mp* *p*
lost land lost shin - ing plain, _____ The land of lost con-

B. *mp* *pp* *mp* *mf* > *p*
lost land lost The happ yhigh -ways where I went _____

Pno. **L** **M**

66 **N** *pp* *f* *mp* *pp* *poco*

S. And I can, And I can, And I can, And I can - not _____ come a - gain. _____

A. *f* *pp* *p* *pp* *poco*
tent not a - gain. _____

T. *f* *pp* *p* *pp* *poco*
tent not a - gain. _____

B. *f* *mp* *pp* *poco*
not come a - gain. _____

Pno. *pp* *mf* *p* *poco rall.*

8va *8vb*

Piano:
Begin next event on this pause.

O**Piano:**

Play as at start of piece until cued to stop (rehearsal mark 'Q') with the following changes:
 Play consistently at a *piano* dynamic instead of with an *sfz* as at the start;
 Centre around C, F and G, but occasionally add other notes from the C major scale;

10-20 seconds

O**P****Chorus:**

Independently select any fragment from this piece (from one note to two bars in length);
 Repeat the fragment freely, varying rests between repetitions
 Do not synchronise with other singers;
 Maintain a static *pianissimo* dynamic throughout;
 Stop when directed by conductor at rehearsal mark 'Q'.

P**Mobile Phones:**

'Planted' participants should press play on their phones at the start of rehearsal mark 'P'.

10-20 seconds

Before the performance prepare 4-6 mobile phones with pre-recorded audio;
 Brief the owners of these phones to press play at rehearsal mark 'P';
 The tracks will fade in over the final gesture and remain playing for a subsequent c.60 seconds;
 The piece concludes when the last phone has gone silent.

The samples played by the phones are pre-recorded voices, ideally from the performing ensemble. The voices are singing singular pitches (Eb, Ab, Bb) at any comfortable octave but with the start and end of the note removed. This creates an otherworldly, almost digital sound created entirely from the human voice.

Q**Conductor:**

Cue individuals to drop out of the texture;
 This may be done individually, through a conducting sweep, or as a combination of both;
 The order of this gesture is at the conductor's discretion.

Q

Until phones are silent
 (40-60 seconds)

Tutti:

Maintain silence and stillness until final mobile phone has gone silent.

- End -