

nudge gently, but wake her now

For composer's voice, vocalist,
flute, piano, and electronics.

Composed for P. Lucy
McVeigh, Yong Su Clark, and
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notes

This is a piece about "trans voice", or the desire by some trans-women or trans-femme people to adjust the pitch of their voice, through extensive training, away from a more "masculine" pitch and towards a more "feminine" pitch¹. Unfortunately, being on hormone replacement therapy does not help trans-women or trans-femme people change their vocal pitch, as estrogen does not shorten the vocal cords. Once infected with testosterone during puberty, the cords remain stretched for the rest of one's life. Broadly stated, voices coded as "male" vary from around 85 to 180 Hz, while those coded as "female" vary from around 165 to 255 Hz. This corresponds, roughly, to the pitches F2 to Fsharp3 (for male) and E3 to B3 (for female). Of course pitch is only one aspect of how we code a particular voice as male or female, and trans-women also have to change the resonance of their voice, intonation, inflection, and so on, in order to allow their voice to "pass" as female (if so desired).

Trans-men or trans-masculine people who choose to do hormone-replacement therapy do not have to do as extensive of training of the voice, as taking testosterone *will* lengthen the vocal cords, leading to a concomitant deepening of vocal pitch.

Many trans-women practice by using the "Harvard Psychoacoustic Sentences", as described in the 1969 publication entitled "IEEE Recommended Practice

1 I'm going to just use the phrase "trans-women" from this point forward, but that should also be taken, in the context of this piece, to refer to trans-femme people as well.

for Speech Quality Measurements".² These sentences are designed to be "phonetically balanced"; that is, they contain a similar distribution of phonemes as found in standard English. The sentences were used for testing of new types of communication equipment and techniques, like telephone lines, digital voice transmission, voice over the internet, and satellite communication. There are 72 sets of 10 sentences each. Some phone companies have a "secret" phone number (like 858 651 5050) that you can call to hear pre-recorded versions of these sentences. Such numbers can be called to do real-time checks on voice quality in the field.

Many of the sentences are certainly of their time, and encode within their phonemes patriarchal and misogynist attunements, especially in the ones having to do with women or girls.

All of the textual material for this piece comes from these particular sentences, with a few *necessary modifications* that suggest alternatives unimaginable to the original authors.

There should be a general feeling of *straining* throughout this piece. Of course, I don't want this straining to cause any physical damage, so please take care of yourselves! But the process of vocal training is itself exhausting and very time consuming, and going through process of trying to raise one's vocal pitch is not an easy endeavor. And the process of building our own universe is itself a tiring endeavor, but the result will ultimately be worth the effort.

Each part should seamlessly move into the next.

2 IEEE. "IEEE Recommended Practice for Speech Quality Measurements." IEEE No 297-1969, 1969, 1–24. doi:10.1109/IEEESTD.1969.7405210.

part one

0'00" ~~~~~ 1'30"

Composer's voice, on microcassette tape, at "male" pitch, getting more and more frustrated with the sonority of her voice as she reads the sentences below. All other players TACET.

The birch canoe slid on the smooth planks.
Glue the sheet to the dark blue background.
It's easy to tell the depth of a well.
These days a chicken leg is a rare dish.
Rice is often served in round bowls.
The juice of lemons makes fine punch.
The box was thrown beside the parked truck.
The hogs were fed chopped corn and garbage.
Four hours of steady work faced us.
Large size in stockings is hard to sell.

The boy was there when the sun rose.
A rod is used to catch pink salmon.
The source of the huge river is the clear spring.
Kick the ball straight and follow through.
Help the woman get back to her feet.
A pot of tea helps to pass the evening.
Smoky fires lack flame and heat.
The soft cushion broke the man's fall.
The salt breeze came across from the sea.
The girl at the booth sold fifty bonds.

part two

1'30" ~~~~~ 3'00"

piano

trills at extreme registers (left hand rill far bass end, right hand trill far treble end), slightly dissonant, rather quiet, slow crescendo, reaching *mp*



flute

pizzicato tongue, alternating between low and high registers, try to generally match the piano pitch qualities, take it slowly at first, but gently speed up the alternations, stay around *mp*



vocalist

read deliberately the sentences on the previous page at the **lowest comfortable pitch**



electronics

tacet

part three

all players take cues from vocalist
as to when the piece ends

3'00" ~~~~~ indeterminate

piano

slow, wandering movement from extreme registers (left hand far left, right hand far right), tending towards the middle, match dynamics of vocalist, pedal down throughout, forming a *wall of sound*



flute

slow, random movements, across registers and flutes, dissonant tones, breathiness, matching dynamics of vocalist, forming with the pianist a *wall of sound*



vocalist

read performance notes on the next page



electronics

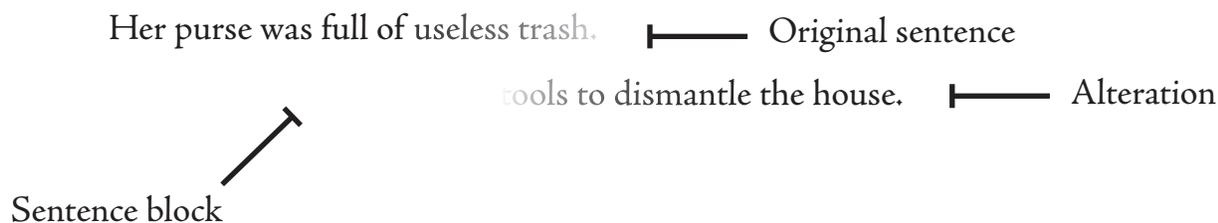
spaced loops of pre-recorded sentences of vocalist, gradually becoming more dense and detuned as the vocalist finishes the piece

The sentences on the following pages are organized in “sentence blocks”. The first line of the block is the original Harvard Sentence. Below this first block are different alterations of the sentence written by the composer to correct misogyny and suggest alternative futures not available to the original authors of the Harvard Sentences.

Center pitch for the recitative should **begin from the lowest comfortable singing pitch**, and **gradually move to the highest comfortable singing pitch** by end of the sentences. **Dynamics should slowly increase** as well.

Blending of sentences from original to alteration is indicated by a gradient from black to light grey and from light grey to black. Occasionally individual words or phrases in the middle of a Harvard Sentence are to be replaced by the words in the second line of the Sentence Block; this is indicated by a strikethrough. As well, some Harvard Sentences are extended through additional phrases at the end of the original.

The vocalist should begin to sing the sentences on the top left of the next page, reading the original sentences from right to left, top to bottom. After singing a few of the sentences in their original



form, the vocalist should return to the beginning of the sentences, and then begin to sing the sentences by *blending*, through whatever means possible, the original with the alteration. At a certain point up to the vocalist, the sentences can be sung by moving directly from the original to the alteration, without any form of blending.

Singing should occur in a **Sprechgesang style**. Whenever the vocalist is moving from an original to an alteration, the vocalist should change pitch.

Schools for ladies teach charm and grace.

Help the woman get back to her feet.

building the universe.

The girl at the booth sold fifty bonds.

shares in the new cooperative.

The tiny girl took off her hat.

confident woman

Her purse was full of useless trash.

tools to dismantle the house.

The young girl gave no clear response.

a beautiful rendition.

She sewed the torn coat quite neatly.

invisibility cloak

She has a smart way of wearing clothes.

tools for rebuilding.

The hostess taught the new maid to serve.

sabotage.

The glow deepened in the eyes of the sweet girl.
The aggrieved girl as she gazed into
the flames.

The new girl was fired today at noon.
The girl took over from the warring men.

The gold ring fits only a pierced ear.
The girl melts down well for new accouterments.

She called his name many times.
The girl once, and left.

Women form less than half the group.
The girl formed the group, now they make up the majority.

Dull stories make her laugh.
The girl features form RBF.

She danced like a swan, tall and graceful.
The girl flapping her wings to warn the haters away.

She was waiting at my front lawn.
The girl

She blushed when he gave her a white orchid.
The girl sie

Mesh wire keeps chicks inside.
the bad ones out.

Grace makes up for lack of beauty.
, said the ignorant men wearing
sneakers as they stumbled into
each other on the sidewalk.

A sash of gold silk will trim her dress.
, as she pirouettes around the
flames consuming her enemies.

The nag pulled the frail cart along.
, and hidden inside were hand-
made batteries necessary for the
future.

A gold ring will please most any girl.
needing raw metals for smelting.

He knew the skill of the great young actress.
power and intelligence

The stitch will serve but needs to be shortened.
reinforcing for the future.

The lobes of her ears were pierced to hold rings.

instruments of orientation.

She flaps her cape as she parades the street.

in front of her friends and lovers.

She was kind to sick old people.

, for their knowledge was
necessary for the future.

She saw a cat in the neighbor's house.

, and they winked at each other,
sharing a moment of inter-
species connection.