

songs of sorrow

SATB a cappella

Sheena Phillips

This wordless diatonic lament is dedicated to the people of Aleppo, a once great city that has been tragically destroyed by the war in Syria. The piece is modelled partly – and very loosely – on traditional Syrian singing (which often uses the rather doleful sequence *la so fa mi* – though with a rather sharp *fa*). Because of the tonal centre on E, there is a Phrygian flavour to the music.

The piece includes aleatoric elements that are repeated by the singers independently, evoking a multiplicity of voices, and a vocal tremolo in echo of traditional Syrian ornamentation.

songs of sorrow was composed in 2016 for the Portugese choir Voz Nua, dir. Aoife Hiney.

duration c. 3:50

perusal score – not for rehearsal or performance

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Notes

X denotes no time signature (note that sometimes one or two parts continue with a time signature, while the other parts sing freely).

Straight lines between notes indicate a glissando (for example at bar 16 – 17).

The straight line just before the second note on page 1 indicates a short glide into the note (not a long scoop).

Box and line notation: repeat the material in the box for the duration of the line.

Independence: the instruction ‘independently’ means that each singer sings in their own time. You do not need to sing in exactly the same tempo as those around you. You might hold the notes for different amounts of time and take more – or less – time between phrases. Finally, you do not need to start together either – although you could.

Rest in brackets: a rest of indeterminate length (could be several seconds, or just long enough for a breath – the singer chooses).

Pronunciation

a, e, i ~ as in IPA

o ~ as in English ‘hot’ (IPA: ɔ)

So at letter A there is essentially a series of soft “oy”s (to rhyme with “boy”)

j ~ y as in ‘yarn’ (IPA: j)

Tremolo

To get a sound somewhat like traditional Syrian ululation, think of the tremolos as a sort of pitched vocal fry. If you can’t get that to work, then just pulse on the note or repeat the ‘o’ sound as fast as you can.

Traditional Syrian singing

There are several sound clips at the following web site that will give you a flavour of traditional Syrian song:

<https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/youssef-tage-six-traditional-syrian-songs-1940/>

for Aleppo
songs of sorrow

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Moderato (individual pulse c. ♩ = 100)

~ 20 seconds

independently

mf *f* *p* *anguished*

Soprano
i a i, (—)

Alto
i a i, (—)

Tenor
i a i, (—)

Bass
i a i, (—)

Piano
mf *f* *p*

all parts independently

(for rehearsal only)

S: finish your current phrase

♩ = 100

7 *f* together (conducted) *intensely*

i o lo ro, i o lo ro a i,

ATB: finish your current phrase

ATB: finish your current phrase

ATB: finish your current phrase

♩ = 100

7 *f*

Pno.

tremolo: see notes

13 *p* < *f* > *p* *mf* *f*

o, _____ i o lo ro, _____ i _____ o

independently *p* < *f* > *p* repeat once, then wait
o i o,

independently *p* < *f* > *p* repeat once, then wait
o i o,

independently *p* < *f* > *p* repeat once, then wait
o i o,

13 *p* < *f* > *p* *mf* *f*

lo ro a i, _____ o a i, _____ o a i, _____

o a i, _____ o a i, _____

o a i, _____ o a i, _____

o a i, _____ o a i, _____

19 _____ o a i, _____ o a i, _____

19 _____ o a i, _____ o a i, _____

Pno.

Pno.

A Faster ♩ = c.120

pp on the edge of sobbing

optional: some S sing a tremolo on F or G every now and then, over one bar

o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i,

mf cantando

je ni me o,

pp on the edge of sobbing

o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i,

mf cantando

je ni me o,

26 Faster ♩ = c.120

Pno.

pp

Piano accompaniment for measures 26-31, featuring a tremolo accompaniment in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

mf

poco accel., pressing forward

32

o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, o i, mi o le,

mf

f

mf

f

je ni me o mi o le o,

32 poco accel., pressing forward

Pno.

pp

Piano accompaniment for measures 32-37, continuing the tremolo accompaniment and bass line, with dynamics increasing from *pp* to *f*.

mf

f

B a tempo ♩ = c.120
outpouring

f

mi o le o, o, je ni mi o le o,

f

mi o le o, mi o, mi o le o le o,

f

mi o le o, mi o le o, me o mi o le o,

f

mi o le o, mi o le o, je ni mi le

39

Pno.

45 *p* *mf*

mi o le o, o,

mf *p* *mf*

mi o le o, mi o, je ni me o mi o le o,

p *mf* *mf* *mf* *p*

le o, le o, le o, mi o

p *mf* *p*

o, je ni mi le o,

45 *p* *mf*

Pno.

51 **reining it in**

p *mf* *p*

je ni me, mi o le o,

mf *p*

le o, le o, je ni mi le o,

p

mi o je ni mi le o,

Pno.

51

p

C heartbroken but quiet

~ 10 seconds

~ 10 seconds

independently

p

je ni me o,

independently

p

je ni me o,

independently

p

je ni me o,

independently

p

je ni me o,

all parts independently

p

57

p

Pno.

♩ = 100

S and T together (conducted)

p *espressivo*

mf *mf* *p*

64

je ni me o, je ne mi le o, je ni mi le o,

finish current phrase

S and T together (conducted)

p *espressivo*

mf *mf* *p*

8

je ni me o, je ni mi le o, je ni mi le o,

finish current phrase

Pno.

64

♩ = 100

p

desperate outburst

70

f

ff

o, mi o, je ni mi le o!

X

p

f

ff

o mi o, je ni mi le o!

X

p

f

ff

o mi o, je ni mi le o!

X

p

f

ff

o mi o, je ni mi le o!

70

p

mf

ff

Pno.

D the grief never ends

independently (also vary note lengths and selection of syllables freely)

pp *mp*

mi o le o...

pp *mp*

mi o le o...

pp *mp*

mi o le o...

mp together (conducted) *mf*

o, je ni me le o, je ni mi

pp *mp*

mf

Pno.

83 *pp*

pp

pp

le o, je ni mi le o...

83 *pp*

p

Pno.