Full Score

Transmission Fog

For Soprano, Viola, and Recorded Obbligato Ensemble

by Aidan Gold

Duration: 6 - 8 minutes

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Instrumentation

Soprano (A3-A5, + opt. whistling E5-C6) Viola

Recorded Obbligato Ensemble:

Multitracked Trombone Piano (opt. multitracking)

The following strings should be accessible: the lowest $\sim\!8$ strings, E1, F1, A1, E2, A2, E3, A3, and the highest $\sim\!8$ strings

Multitracked Percussion:

Timpani (32", 29", and 26") + the following Crotales to be placed on Timpani: C4, E4, F#4, G4, and A4, all sounding 15ma
Vibraphone
Sizzle Cymbal
Suspended Cymbal
China Cymbal
Tam-tam
Bass Drum

Fixed Media and Live Processing

Performance Notes

From D until I, the Soprano and Violist should both be sending their audio through the Max Patch associated with this piece, which will process and send their sound out through Audiomovers. See the guide associated with the patch for detailed instructions on how to use it. The processed sound is then sent to the other musician. The Soprano and Violist should not be able to hear each other's dry sound, just their processed sound. In letters D and E, one of the musicians (the Soprano at D and the Viola at E) chooses one of their associated melodic fragments (found at the end of the score) randomly. It is then processed by one of eight different random sets of effects, and the result will be different every time. The other musician must then attempt to copy what they hear to the best of their ability. Their imperfect copy will then be processed in a similarly random manner and sent back to the first musician. The score notates passing the fragment 4 times each, but the performers may decide to elongate or shorten the section and pass the fragment back and forth more/fewer times if desired.

From letter G until I, the Soprano and Violist should freely play without regard to staying together with each other or the ensemble. They do not necessarily have to enter directly at G.

Program Note

Communication has always been, in some ways, a struggle. We construct imperfect representations of our lived experiences that we tell as stories to each other. We use language and art to attempt to express thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concepts that in many ways defy representation in those mediums. We use these words as our primary way of transmitting information between us. However, these words are only abstract signs for the concepts they represent. There is always distance between what we want to express and our means of expression – a fog that blurs and obscures the transmission of meaning.

Now, during the pandemic, most of our communication occurs through the medium of a screen. Everything we try to communicate must be recorded by a microphone, digitized, and then transmitted across a huge gulf of space to arrive at our receiver's location before it is played back. Much can be lost in this transmission as our audio is compressed into packets of data sent across a network. It is also very fragile, requiring a stable internet connection on both ends. The refrain of "Can you hear me?" is now heard endlessly in Zoom meetings around the world as this connection is broken and reestablished, as voices come in and out of existence. Sometimes we can hear them clearly, and sometimes we can barely discern and recognize their voices through the fog of transmission.

I wrote this piece as a response to the struggle of communication during the pandemic. I had already been experimenting with various methods of remote live performance using Audiomovers, to try to capture some of the feeling of making music in person together while distanced. I wanted to try to create a type of musical interaction that was unique to our situation, with performers in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, and Europe. The piece features two principal performers – a singer and a violist, who perform above a pre-recorded soundscape of instruments and electronics. These two performers perform the piece live, but in such a manner that they cannot hear each other directly. Instead, their sound is processed using a Max/MSP patch that does various spectral, timbral, and melodic transformations on their audio, which is then sent to the other performer. Thus, what the other performer hears is just the transmission fog – a distorted echo of the other part. In the central section of the piece, one of the two performers picks a melodic fragment randomly chosen from a set and performs it. The other performer then hears the processed version and attempts to imitate what they hear as closely as possible, given the limitations of their instrument (this is another imperfect transmission). That is then processed and sent back to the first performer. They continue having this dialogue for several minutes, trying to imitate each other and react in real time to each other based only on the foggy echo that they can hear. The vocalist's text is the phrase "Can you hear me?", but fragmented, split into individual vowel sounds, and reordered. It only becomes understandable at the very end of the piece, when the vocalist sings it as a distant, repeated chant as the music dissolves into the fog.

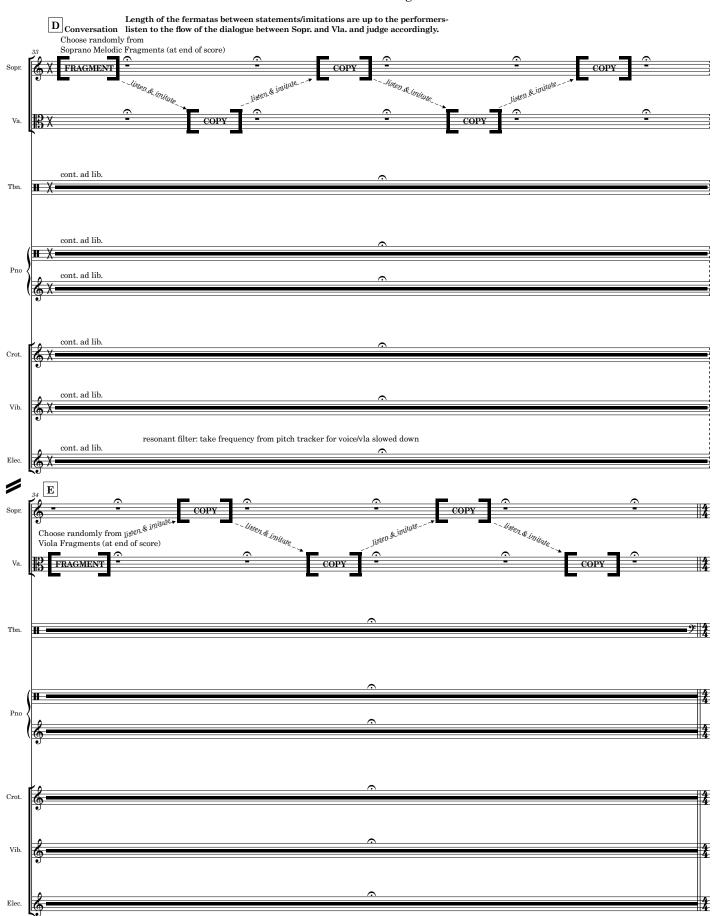
Transmission Fog

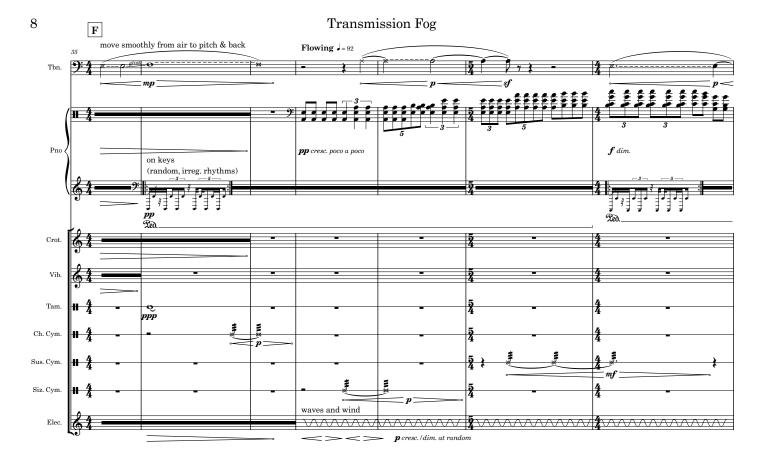


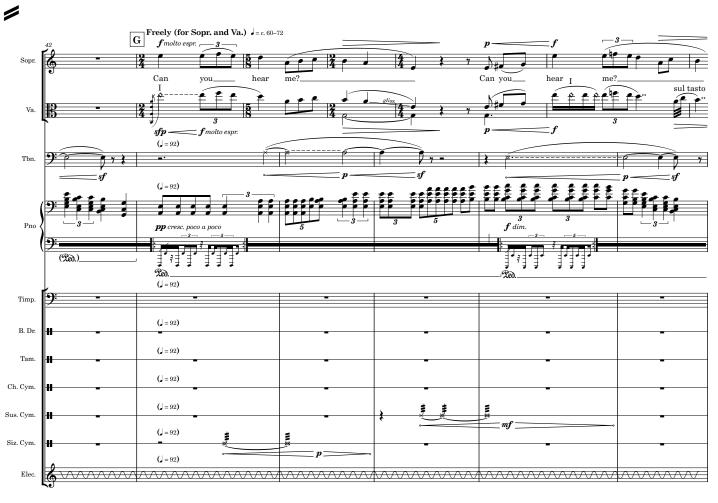
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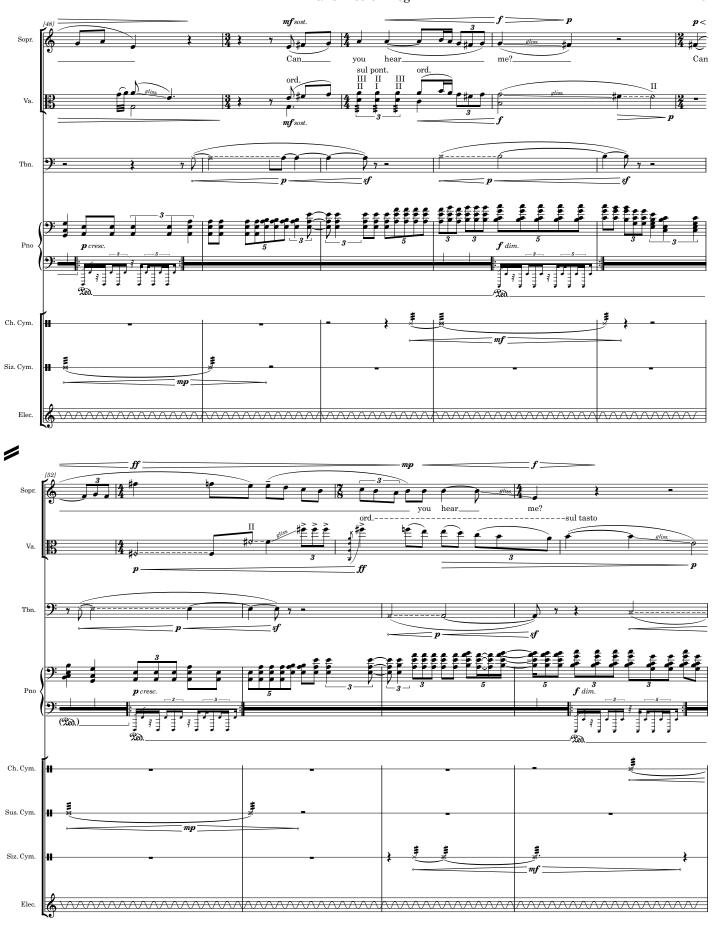








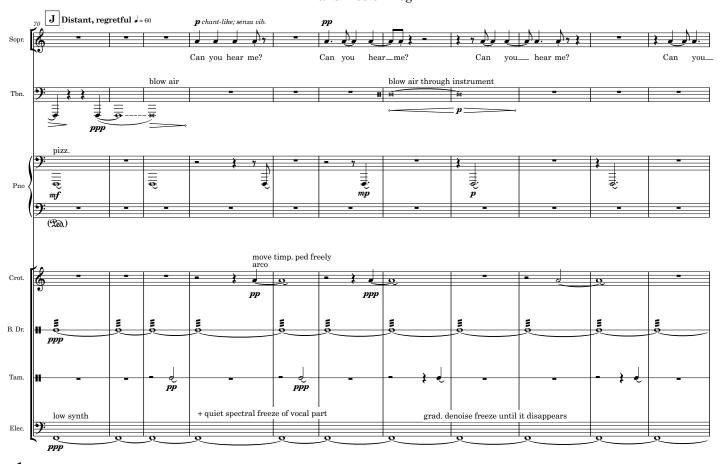


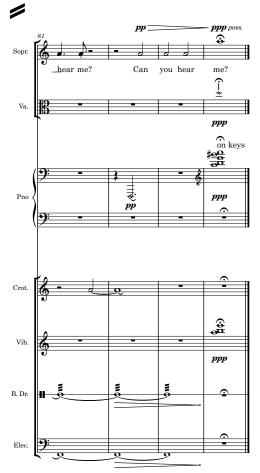


distant thunder

pp

f dim.





Soprano Melodic Fragments



Viola Melodic Fragments

