

æther

*for spatialized treble choir
(with optional piano, harp or glockenspiel)*

Jordan Nobles

Inspired by, and dedicated to, Kelly Nobles
North Vancouver, September 2011

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About the Piece

æther was completed in September 2011 in North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. The duration of the piece varies and can be as short or as long as desired.

Program Note

The æther (also spelled aether or ether) was once believed to be the material that fills the region of the universe above the terrestrial sphere, where the stars reside. Instead of the vacuum we know is there today previously it was imagined that a vaporous element surrounded the Earth, filled the heavens and was the very breath of the Gods.

Performance Notes

INSTRUCTIONS

In *æther*, the singers are given numerous phrases to sing. There is no synchronized score.

æther should begin and end with the humming of the G drone and last for whatever duration is desired

- what phrases to sing, and when to sing them, should be decided by each singer on their own in the spur of the moment. Singers proceed independently performing any phrase in any order.
- one does not need sing every single phrase. In fact one could decide just to hum the G drone for the whole piece if desired.
- any vowel sound can be sung, but no consonants
- all phrases should be sung with an obvious and exaggerated portamento between each note
- all phrases should be soft and quiet throughout the piece
- some phrases can be sung an octave higher if desired as long as they are still performed quietly
- players can pause between phrases to breathe and to listen or proceed directly to another phrase
- the tempo is variable but each phrase should only last as long as a single breath
- each performer plays in his/her own time but conscious of, and responsive to, the other players
- players should decide ahead of time how long to sing and how to end; whether stopping all together or dropping out one at a time

SPATIALIZATION

æther is written for the singers to be spatially spread about the performance space, preferably surrounding the audience. Balconies, lofts, etc. can also be utilized as well.

The exact layout will vary depending on the venue and is not important as long as they are evenly distributed throughout the space. Also, if possible, the sections (soprano, alto) should not stand together as would be the norm but instead should be separated so each soprano, etc. is in a different area of the space from the others.

While it is not vital for the piece to be performed this way, a spatial distribution of singers will greatly enhance the effect of the piece.

Note: It may be beneficial to rehearse the piece, at least at first, in the standard layout with all of the singers together. Then, once the piece is learned, it can be spread out and rehearsed in a spatial configuration.

æther

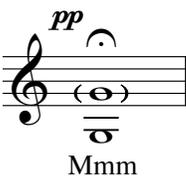
for spatialized treble choir

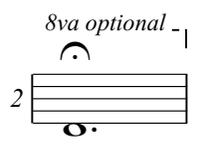
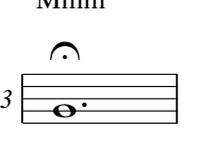
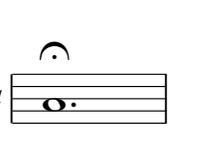
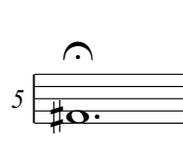
Freely ♩ = approx. 60-90

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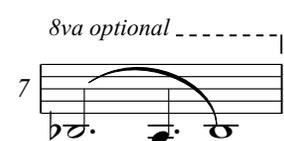
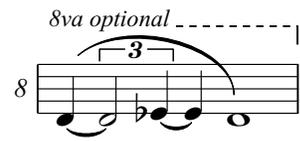
Jordan Nobles

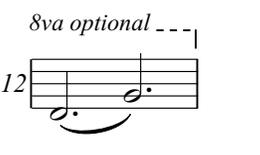
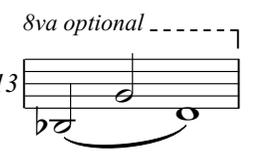
All phrases molto legato, with a portamento between each note

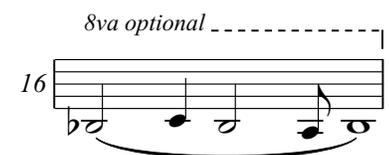
Begin with quiet drone  Anyone can hum the G drone at anytime during the piece as long as there are enough singers keeping it going throughout and they hum it pianissimo

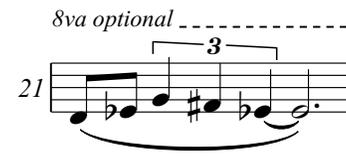
1  2  3  4  5 

Sing any vowel sound (no consonants)

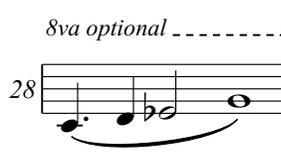
6  7  8  9 

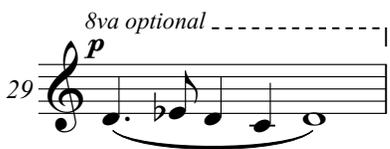
10  11  12  13  14 

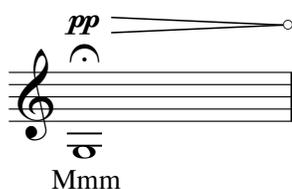
15  16  17 

18  19  20  21 

22  23  24 

25  26  27  28 

29  30  31 

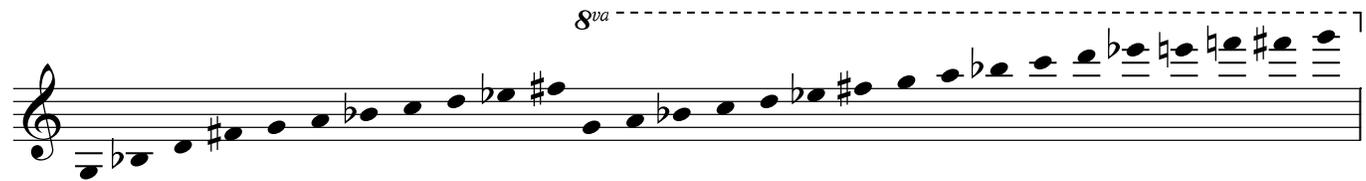
End with quiet drone  which slowly fades away...

OPTIONAL ACCOMPANIMENT

æther is composed to be performed a cappella or with optional accompanying piano, harp or glockenspiel. The attack/decay sound of those instruments is to represent the 'stars' in the æther.

- the following notes can be played in any order but conscious of, and responsive to, the singers
- play very sparsely, only 1 or 2 notes at a time, and avoid any recognizable pulse
- all notes should ring until they decay naturally
- all notes should be very soft and quiet throughout the piece
- the accompaniment should begin after, and end before, the singers

Pitches for the accompaniment:



NOTE: If no accompanying instrument is available but 'stars' are still desired; fingers cymbals and/or triangles can be substituted, performed by the singers, as long as there are at least 8 triangles and/or finger cymbals spread throughout the space.

ALTERNATIVE PERFORMANCE IDEAS

- A performance can start with the singers together on stage and as soon as the piece has begun they can slowly spread throughout the venue. Or alternatively they can come physically together by the end.
- or, singers can enter the stage one at a time and begin singing. Also they can end the piece this way in reverse with each player gracefully exiting the stage after finishing
- a performance can begin with the singers mixed throughout the audience and at an agreed upon cue they can begin humming. Once they are all humming and the audience is quiet they can begin singing various cells as they rise and spread throughout the space.
- alternative venues or 'guerilla' performances can be used to bring the concert experience to the people. Imagine a bus or subway car filled with bored commuters. The group of singers enter the vehicle in plain clothing and behave as normal passengers distributed randomly throughout the vehicle. After a moment, they begin humming the G together, but since their mouths are shut it will be difficult for other passengers to identify exactly what is happening, and who is humming. Once these passengers realize that others are humming, the singers begin to sing the piece from memory. After a few minutes the choir, without comment, disembarks and boards a different transit vehicle to perform the piece again.
- the piece could instead begin with the piano (or harp, etc...) noodling absentmindedly with the above pitches before a concert. The G drone could be present before the audience even enters and sits. Gradually, one by one the audience will figure out that the piece has already started and once they are quiet the singers could then enter, already singing.
- a large public facility (with good acoustics), such as an atrium can be taken over by the choir and the piece used as an installation of sorts with the choir singing while dispersed throughout.