

Quarantine Bagatelle for Remote Choir #1

by Sam C Henderson

POV: You can't remember why, but after drunkenly leaving that graduation party you find yourself on campus in an abandoned recital hall, moonlight illuminating the organ and some acoustic panels, and amongst your swirling and disjointed thoughts you gather notes of a distant, playful energy...but it's mostly hauntingly dark and depressing.

Performance Notes:

Ensemble Specifications and Logistics:

- I. Although it is much preferred that the ensemble be larger, Quarantine Bagatelle requires at least 16 performers, or two of each voice part.
- II. Quarantine Bagatelle is designed to be performed in a variety of ways. Due to its asynchronous and aleatoric nature, as long as a timer (counting up) is displayed for all performers to see, hardly any ensemble coordination is needed. This allows not only for performances on a stage but all around the hall and even in separate locations with the use of an online video chat service.

General Instructions:

- I. There are no metric parameters for this piece. Measure duration is determined by the timestamps over each barline – for instance, the measure in between timestamp 0:00 to 0:05 is 5 seconds, between 2:15 to 2:30 is 15 seconds, etc.
- II. Arrows extending from measures with repeat signs indicate that the measure will be repeated in a free,

asynchronous, non-metric fashion until the timestamp where the arrow ends at the corresponding barline. Ex: the Bass 1 measure at timestamp 1:00 will repeat until timestamp 1:30, where the arrow ends. (Bracketed measures are an exception: see VIII.)

- III. Note duration is to be performed semi-randomly, taking measures to ensure that consecutive repetitions noticeably vary from one another, based on given parameters. Note duration is determined by notehead, rhythm parameters, tempo parameters, and (somewhat) IPA syllables:
 - a. Noteheads: Closed noteheads are to adhere to the tempo parameters under which they are assigned. Open noteheads, including circled x noteheads, will typically be sustained until the next instance of one's voice part's musical material. However, in rare cases such as Alto 2 timestamp 1:00, open noteheads will adhere to tempo parameters, lasting approximately twice as long as closed, unbeamed noteheads.

- b. Rhythm parameters: Typically, closed noteheads are to be considered “quarter” notes for the purposes of tempo parameters. However, in cases such as Bass 2 timestamp 2:00, bracketed beam patterns may be located directly under the noteheads of a measure. This signifies that for a given tempo parameter, closed noteheads may be deemed anywhere from “quarter” notes to “thirty-second” notes. Remember to perform successive notes semi-randomly – for instance, avoid singing three or more “sixteenth” notes in a row.
- c. Tempo parameters: In cases such as Tenor 1 timestamp 1:05, bracketed tempo markings are situated above a given measure. These signify that per repetition of a measure, any “quarter” note (closed, unbeamed notehead) should fall somewhere within that tempo range. *Within* a repetition of a measure, the tempo should stay consistent. However, *across* repetitions of a measure, an effort should be made to ensure that consecutive repetitions noticeably vary from one another.
- d. For IPA syllables, see IV.–VII.

IV. Letters enclosed by brackets are to be pronounced according to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA):

- a. [a] = “a” in “ah”
- b. [f] = “f” in “first”
- c. [g] = “g” in “goodbye”
- d. [h] = “h” in “hello”
- e. [k] = “k” in “trek”
- f. [m] = “m” in “hum”
- g. [n] = “n” in “need”
- h. [o] = “o” in “bravo”
- i. [u] = “u” in “flu”
- j. [x] = “ch” in “Bach”
- k. [ŋ] = “ng” in “bring”
- l. [ʒ] = “z” in “azure”

V. In instances where a bracketed letter is attached to another bracketed with a backslash “/” (Alto 2 timestamp 0:00), sound the first letter then the second letter then the first, etc., gradually morphing the pronunciation of one letter into that of the next when transitioning between letters, for the given duration. Each instance of transition should last .5–2 seconds, and no two consecutive transitions should last the same amount of time.

VI. In instances where a bracketed letter is nested within another bracketed letter (Soprano 1 timestamp

3:15), combine the pronunciation of both letters with the nested letter serving a secondary role and sound for the given duration. For instance, [m([n])] should be pronounced as a hum with the “n” sound articulated with the tongue only and as dictated by the given rhythm. [u([x])] should sound primarily like [u] with [x] introduced to provide a different texture.

- VII. In instances where two letters are within the same bracket pair (Bass 2 timestamp 2:00), the second letter is to sound immediately after the first. This may result in a near simultaneity but not always.
- VIII. With bracketed measures, such as Alto 1 and 2 timestamp 1:00, all members of the relevant voice parts (in this case, the Altos), will coordinate singing the optional bracketed material throughout the duration of the material (this material stops at 3:15, as indicated in the score). This can mean one Alto 1 member sings the bracketed material the whole time while every other alto member does not, or after every 10 seconds, the bracketed material is passed to a different alto, or somewhere in between.
- IX. In any case of ambiguity, dynamics are to be performed in relation to the duration of the piece and not in relation to its assigned measure.

Some Quick Program Notes

Quarantine Bagatelle for Remote Choir #1 is the first composed piece of a planned set. The work utilizes limited aleatory and extended experimental choral techniques involving unique use of the International Phonetic Alphabet to generate novel and complex ambient textures. Due to its totally asynchronous format, this piece can be performed remotely over platforms such as Zoom simply with the use of a screen-shared stopwatch – perhaps a necessary option for a worldwide choral community still in crisis.

"Bagatelle" may seem like an unfitting word given the haunting, chilling, and disorienting atmosphere of the work. However, during a devastating year of extended physical isolation, widespread crippling anxiety, boldfaced and unconscionable social injustice, and subsequent personal bouts of extreme depression and lack of motivation, "bagatelle" to me simply meant "it doesn't matter how good or important I think the piece is, just write something."

This was the result.

Duration: 4'30"

Quarantine Bagatelle for Remote Choir #1

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Free Meter; Hauntingly

0:00 0:05 0:10 0:15 0:20 0:25 0:30 0:35

The musical score consists of eight staves, each representing a different voice part. Each staff begins with a treble or bass clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notes are marked with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and a phonetic syllable [h]/[u]. Above each note is a simple line drawing of a face with eyes and a smile. Vertical lines indicate time intervals at 0:00, 0:05, 0:10, 0:15, 0:20, 0:25, 0:30, and 0:35. The notes for each part are as follows:

- Soprano 1:** Note at 0:25.
- Soprano 2:** Note at 0:15.
- Alto 1:** Note at 0:00.
- Alto 2:** Note at 0:00.
- Tenor 1:** Note at 0:10.
- Tenor 2:** Note at 0:20.
- Bass 1:** Note at 0:30.
- Bass 2:** Note at 0:35.

1:00

1:05

1:15

1:30

1:45

1:50

S 1

S 2

A 1

A 2

T 1

T 2

B 1

B 2

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[♩ = 80-200]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[o]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

[h]/[a]

niente

mp

niente

mp

niente

mp

niente

mp

The score is presented on a grand staff with eight vocal parts: Soprano 1 (S 1), Soprano 2 (S 2), Alto 1 (A 1), Alto 2 (A 2), Tenor 1 (T 1), Tenor 2 (T 2), Bass 1 (B 1), and Bass 2 (B 2). The vocal lines for S 1, S 2, A 1, and A 2 are primarily silent, with phonetic syllables [h]/[o] and [h]/[a] appearing at specific time points. The Tenor and Bass parts feature musical notation with lyrics. The Tenor parts (T 1 and T 2) have a tempo marking of [♩ = 80-200] and dynamic markings of *mp*. The Bass parts (B 1 and B 2) also have dynamic markings of *mp*. The score is divided into measures by vertical lines, with time stamps at the top: 1:00, 1:05, 1:15, 1:30, 1:45, and 1:50. A large watermark 'PESANTO.COM' is visible across the page.

Quarantine Bagatelle for Remote Choir #1

2:00

2:15

2:30

2:40

2:50

The score is divided into measures by vertical lines corresponding to the time markers. The vocal parts are as follows:

- S1 and S2:** Sing "niente" until 2:15. At 2:30, they sing a melodic phrase in *mp* dynamics. The lyrics are [u]/[ʒ].
- A1 and A2:** Sing "niente" until 2:15. At 2:30, they sing a melodic phrase in *mp* dynamics. The lyrics are [u]/[ʒ].
- T1 and T2:** Sing "niente" until 2:15. At 2:40, they sing a melodic phrase in *mp* dynamics. The lyrics are [u]/[ʒ].
- B1 and B2:** Sing "niente" until 2:15. At 2:30, they sing a melodic phrase in *mp* dynamics. The lyrics are [h]/[u].

At 2:40, the vocal parts transition to a new melodic phrase. The lyrics for T1, T2, B1, and B2 are [u]/[ʒ].

At 2:50, the vocal parts transition to a final melodic phrase. The lyrics for T1, T2, B1, and B2 are [h]/[u].

The percussion parts (B1 and B2) feature a rhythmic pattern of sixteenth notes with accents (>) and a dynamic marking of *mp*. The lyrics for B1 and B2 are [gɲ] and [kɲ] respectively.

Tempo markings: $\text{♩} = 80-200$ for the vocal parts and $\text{♩} = 60-90$ for the percussion parts.

3:00

3:15*

3:45

L'istesso tempo

S 1
S 2
A 1
A 2
T 1
T 2
B 1
B 2

[u(x)]
[a]/[ɜ]
[u(x)]
[a]/[ɜ]
[u(x)]
[a]/[ɜ]
[a]
[a]

[h]/[a]
[h]/[u]
[h]/[a]
[h]/[u]
[h]/[a]
[h]/[u]
[a]

[♩ = 80-200]

*Bracketed measure material ends.

Quarantine Bagatelle for Remote Choir #1

4:00
[• = 60-90]
p

4:20 4:30

The musical score is divided into two sections. The first section, starting at 4:00, features a piano (*p*) dynamic and a tempo of 60-90. It includes vocal parts S1, S2, A1, and A2, each with a melodic line and a dynamic hairpin. Below them are tenors T1 and T2, and basses B1 and B2, each with a sustained note and a dynamic hairpin. The lyrics for all parts are [m([n])] for the sopranos and alts, and [u([h])] for the tenors and basses. The second section, starting at 4:20, features a fortissimo (*f*) dynamic and the instruction *niente*. The vocal parts S1, S2, A1, and A2 have a melodic line with a dynamic hairpin. The tenors T1 and T2, and basses B1 and B2 have a sustained note with a dynamic hairpin. The lyrics for all parts are [f].