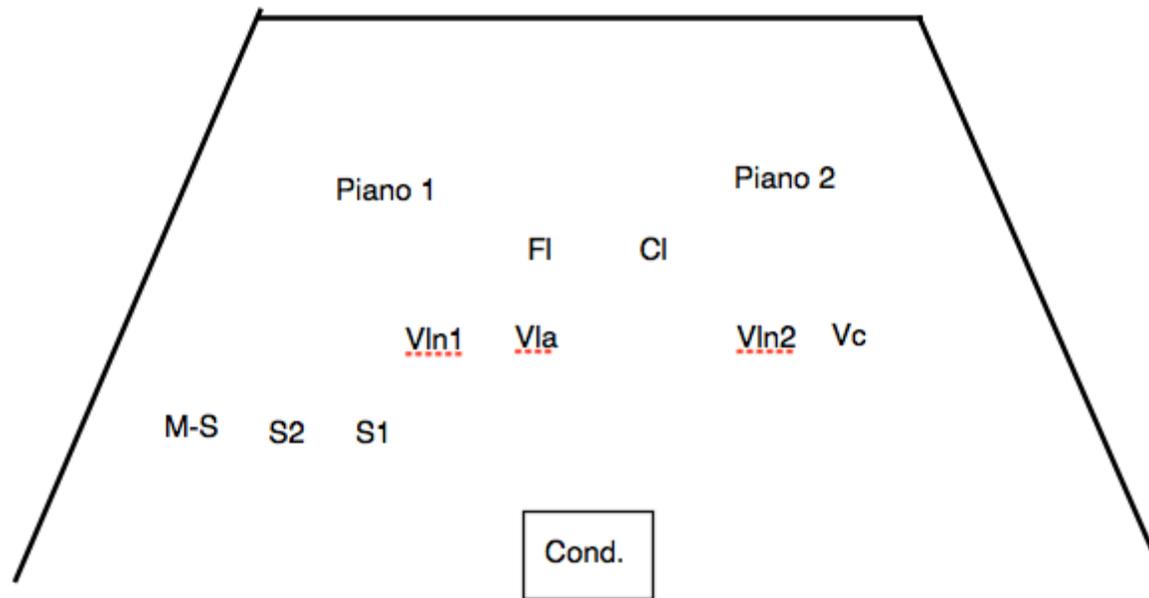


Suggested Stage Setup



Notes: The Pianos should both be at half stick, with both keyboards facing stage right. Strings and winds should be sitting. The conductor should not be standing on a podium.

The Lights in the house should be as low as possible. Lights on the stage should be low and the musicians should be using stand lamps. The conductor and singers should lightly illuminated, but only such that the conductor can be seen clearly by the other performers. If possible, the singers should perform their parts from memory.

Lighting Instructions: The stage should be lightly illuminated by colored lights, some of which should be yellowish green and the other half to a smokey, ghostly blue.

Notes on the Movements

Mvt. 1

At the beginning of Mvt. 1, all musicians onstage except Soprano 2 and Mezzo-Soprano.

This movement should be performed without a conductor until **Rehearsal D**.

Mvt. 2

At this point Sop. 2 and Mezz. should begin to make their way to the front doors of the hall. When onstage performers reach **Rehearsal C**, Sop. 2 and Mezz. should enter the hall and watch from the sides (out of view of the audience).

After the first bar of the 2nd movement Soprano 1 should slowly and quietly exit stage right.

Mvt. 3

Before the beginning of Mvt. 3, Sop. 1 should slowly and quietly walk to offstage right and perform from just inside the doors to the stage. Sop. 2 and Mezz. should move forward so that they are inside the hall, but still behind the audience.

Spoken text:

This movement indicates where text is to be spoken by Sop. 2 and Mezz. If the direction reads **Spoken** the performer should speak the text slowly and dramatically, observing the dynamics printed above the staff. Creativity and embellishment of the way the text is spoken is encouraged. The placement of the words is not meant to be precise, but the speaking should begin approximately where the first letter of the first word lands in the bar.

When the direction reads **Echo** the performer repeats the same phrase as the performer whose line was **Spoken**, at a lower dynamic and with a sense of shadowy and reflective awe. If deemed dramatically appropriate, an **Echo** may decrescendo to a stage whisper. Again freedom and creativity are encouraged.

A **Simultaneous Echo** should be dramatically performed like an **Echo**, but should be spoken in unison with the **Spoken** line. The pacing of these sections should be worked out between the two performers ahead of time.

An **Immediate Echo** should be dramatically performed like an **Echo**, but should begin directly after the first vowel or consonant of the **Spoken** text is performed. The words of the texts should overlap but never should start at the same time with the **Immediate Echo** always lagging just slightly behind the **Spoken** text.

Mvt. 4

Allow time between movements 3 and 4, no less than 15 seconds and no more than one minute. All singers should take their places onstage at this time.

Mvt. 5

Allow the tempo to be very flexible throughout Rehearsal A and B. Ritardandos and accelerandos are written in to give a template, but interpretation is encouraged based on the conductor's taste. In general however, any acceleration or deceleration (whether performed as written or otherwise) should be more subtle than exaggerated.

World Premiere Program Notes:

Hey! When the impulse of my lifespan is worn out,
As dear ones cannot help beyond this world
And I must wander alone in the between,
May Buddhas mild and fierce exert the force of their compassion
And clear the dense fog of darkness of misknowledge!

Now that I wander alone, apart from my loved ones,
And all my visions are but empty images,
May the Buddhas exert the force of their compassion
And stop the fear and hate-drawn terrors of the between!

When the five lights of brilliant wisdom dawn,
Fearlessly, bravely, may I know them as myself!
When the forms of the Lords mild and fierce arise,
Bold and fearless, may I recognize the between!

- The Tibetan Book of the Dead

Translation: Robert A.F. Thurman¹

¹ Karma-glin-pa, Sambhava Padma, and Robert A. F. Thurman. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, as Popularly Known in the West: Known in Tibet as The Great Book of Natural Liberation through Understanding in the between*. New York: Bantam, 1994. Print.

Earthless is a quasi-programmatic piece that is loosely based on the narrative of the Tibetan book of the Dead, using a compilation of texts by English and American poets compiled to help communicate the feelings and experiences of the character who is traversing the space between death and rebirth. The Tibetan Book of the Dead (Bardo Thodol) is a Tibetan Buddhist text that is to be read to a person after they have died. The text instructs the deceased on how to navigate the “between,” the world that exists between death and rebirth. Our actions in this between world will determine if we are returned to another life of suffering or if we are liberated and achieve Nirvana. The arc of “Earthless” is based around the impressions that I had when I read the narrative and each movement loosely represents a different phase of the between experience. The protagonist is represented musically by Soprano 1 (performed by Bethany Battafarano) and her surroundings are created by the five surrounding instrument pairs (Pianos, Flute/Clarinet, Violin/Viola, Violin/Cello, Soprano 2/Mezzo), which correspond to the five Buddha Deities.

Movement Descriptions

Movement 1: Arrival

The protagonist has just died and arrived in the between. She looks around and reacts to her surroundings.

Movement 2: The Visitation of the Mild Deities

The deceased person is visited by the Buddha deities and their consorts whose visages are accompanied by harsh, piercing lights that appear terrifying to the between person. Each of the harsh lights is accompanied by a soft, calming light that appears warm and appealing to the protagonist. At this point, the Bardo Thodol instructs that the deceased

must move towards the harsh light, realizing the truth that the Buddha's present will liberate her from the cycle of death and rebirth.

Movement 3: The Visitation of the Fierce Deities

In one of the most graphic sections of the Bardo Thodol, the deceased is subject to a frightening procession of gods, outfitted with many heads, many arms and armed to the teeth and brandishing skulls filled with blood. The protagonist is understandably frightened as the world seems to be crashing around her and trying with all its might to destroy her.

Movement 4: Distraction and Torture From Mental Images

The deceased has now achieved a magical body with which she can choose to go anywhere at anytime, however the key to recognizing and becoming liberated from the between experience is know that being "here" is the enlightened state. At this point the protagonist is also beset by a host of distracting and grotesque mental illusions, including, but not limited to, pain at the estrangement of her previous lives (and her previous acquaintances), her own decapitation and the consumption of her brain by demons. The way to liberation at this point is through meditation, the idea of which is represented musically by a fugue.

Movement 5: Calling from the Worlds of Rebirth

At this point almost all hope is lost for liberation. The lights of the six worlds of rebirth call to her and she is drawn towards them, sometimes in a calm trance, at other times in a furious storm of energy and attraction. Her last hope is to bar the door to the womb by realizing the truth of simply being "here," and coming to the realization that the suffering that she experiences is that of the between realm and knowing that in this world, liberation is achievable with a simple thought...