

*They Wash Their Ambassadors
in Citrus and Fennel*

for Mezzo Soprano and Tape

*by
Jon Christopher Nelson*

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based on a poem by Robert Gregory

They Wash Their Ambassadors in Citrus and Fennel (1994) is based on a poem by Robert Gregory and is dedicated to Joan La Barbara, who commissioned the work. The composition's incorporation of a variety of extended vocal techniques is inspired by La Barbara's use of the voice. Its formal structure is greatly influenced by both the larger design and internal form of Gregory's poem. This poem is of special interest to me because of its many internal cross-references. These recurring referential structures are similar to musical ideas that I have explored in recent works. The computer-generated tape was created in Sweden's national Electronic Music Studios (EMS) where I was in residence as a Guggenheim Fellow in the fall of 1994. Much of the material on the tape is derived from Joan La Barbara's voice. I am indebted to her for providing me with rich source material. I thank Robert Gregory for allowing me to set his poem. I am also grateful to the Guggenheim Foundation and EMS for providing me with the necessary resources to realize this composition.

Performance Notes:

♩ = sung tones


♩* = breathy tone—almost whispered

(♩) = duration only—not actual pitch

♩ = sung pitches with ad libitum rhythm

▲ = highest possible note

▼ = lowest possible note

 = intonation contour

parenthetical pitch above a notated pitch = overtone (improvised, no specified overtones in this work)

parenthetical pitch below a notated pitch = multiphonic (generally 8^{vb}, but can be whatever multiphonic is comfortable)

(text) = improvisational instructions enclosed within large parenthesis

"text" = conventionally spoken text is enclosed by quotation marks

!!text!! = shouted words are enclosed by double exclamation points

{text} = conventionally whispered text is enclosed by brackets

t/e/xt = sounds or groups of sounds pronounced in context are separated by slashes

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Mezzo Soprano

Tape

mf They wash ... *mf* ... Their Ambassadors ... *pp* Ambassadors

fff *mp* *fff*

gradually, more pure tones emerge

0:45 approx. start time

:54"

$\bullet = 56$

breathily to sung to overtones
×-----> (improvised overtones) breath as needed, continue holding to the next measure

ppp You who re - ject the shad - ow

Fennel

ppp

1:30" approx.
start time

♩ = 72

mp some-times it's on - ly noise in here *mf* on - ly noise *p* it's *mp* it's in -

granulation and phasing multiphonics begin on the tape

(improvisation on a single drone pitch using multiphonics, overtones, inhaled notes, etc.)

2:00" ♩ = 60

f noise on - ly *ff* n-noise *pp* *fff* !!it!! *mp* ord. can al - ter the

note cut-off is followed by an echo

ppp *mf*

meno mosso

depth *mf* of the shin - ing *pp* they say *mp* of the lu - mi - nous mem - brane

mp *mf* *pp* *p*

portato *p* in which the mind is wrapped 2:45"

mf she told me - go close 2:54" 2:58" *ff*

mf to the on - ly hot 3:03"

f la currandera go close ssssssss... hot tttttt

$\bullet = 56$

pp shad - ow *mp* that's how to cure a long - ing from a long *mf* time back *mp* as long as

f ssssssstttt *mp* long - ing long perc. hit with echo 3:23" long

hu - man time can be, *p* which suf - fers no di - min ish ing 3:45"

fp nor doubts *mf* which form to take *f* and takes *mf* form as duss - sst

percussive events begin here

3:56" 3:27 4:09"

form take takes doubts form form as take *mp* dust *ff* take *mf* form ta/ /kess - ss *p* form

to gather on the skin . . .
(comb filtering begins) there

4:14" hold as long as possible or until 4:51"

multiphonics (follow tape gliss.) low D emerges in the tape ♩ = 56

mp dust *mf* like a tree that bears large *f* si - lent flow - ers

where . . . (comb filtered)
dust (granulated) *p* *mp* large si - lent flow - ers

whispered (somewhat forced) 5:20" 5:33" 5:51" (improvise on {motion})
sing inhaling and exhaling
experiment with vowels

{when I was small I would get myself outside somehow} {it's difficult to be inside sometimes} {I would walk a long time just to be silent and to be in motion}

{outside} {inside} {outside sometimes inside somehow} {silent} {motion}

(granulated . . .)

♩ = 90 6:21" shout ord.

ff !!here!! *f* where in - side and out - side are near - ly the same

The first system of the score consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a tempo of 90 and a 6:21" time signature. It features a 'shout' dynamic and an 'ord.' (order) marking. The piano accompaniment includes complex rhythmic patterns with 3:2 and 2+2+3 groupings. Dynamic markings include *ff* and *f*.

ff you can walk on - ly at night

multiphonics

The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics 'you can walk on - ly at night' and a 'multiphonics' marking. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with 3:2 and 5:4 groupings. Dynamic markings include *ff*.

ord.

f oth - er - wise you'll burn your - self,

ff *mf* burn burn *f* *mf*

The third system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics 'oth - er - wise you'll burn your - self,'. The piano accompaniment features complex rhythmic patterns with 3:2 groupings. Dynamic markings include *ff*, *mf*, *f*, and *mf*.

you'll let death *mf* in - to your skin *p* and at night there are

mf death *mp* *p*

voic - es to help you the peo - ple who

mp *mf* *mf*

follow tape gliss. hold pitch (about 8") slowly dissolving into glotal clicks 7:20"

you the tape dissolves into granular sounds random percussive events continue to 8:17"

si - t out/ /side on bal - co - nie - s on chair - ssss - saved from the

(improvise with short, percussive sounds extrapolated randomly from the text to 8:27" no complete word should be spoken)

8:17" 8:27" $\bullet = 96$

trrr - a - shhhh

w/i/l l t/a/lk a/b/ou/t y/ou i/n a l/an/g/u/a/ge y/ou d/o/n't un/d/er/s/t/an/d y/e/t

mp tell - ing

ppp un/d/er/st/a/nd y/e tttt t t t t

sto - ries a - bout your *mf* fa - mous jour - neys and your *f* se -

pp *mp* *p* *mf* se - se - se - se -

9:00" monotone descending gliss. (ad libitum rhythm) ----- spoken -----

cret *mf* sor - rows; *p* and everywhere cats keep an eye on reality so that it will continue; and in "the torn interiors of uninhabitable

cret sor - rows; a sound mass emerges, descends, and centers on low Bb by 9:25"

p

----- whispered 9:30" $\bullet = 56$ 9:46" follow the tape rhythm

structures they gather" {to look at each other} *ppp* how can this feel - ing be bro - ken? *mf* may - be no one

mf *p*

ppp (improvised overtones) continue holding until 10:12" 10:12" $\bullet = 60$

real - ly knows the bro - ken heart, *mp* *mf* the burn-

9:57" (extreme filtering) they say it's a road or just what it is, that's all or say. broken (phase vocoder) *mp*

real - ly knows

poco rit. 10:35" *mp* ing child the life that slow - ly tight - ens gradually choke off sound 10:51" $\bullet = 60$ 3:2 *p* there - fore

burning (phase vocoder) *p* *ppp* *p*

mf *mf* life (granulated) granulation ends-----|

11:06"

what's loose as a shadow in high wind *mp* what's

shad - ow

tape sound swirls and transforms

fff

poco rit.

5:4

11:14"

beau - ti - ful with *mf* three se - cret flaws *ppp* let *pp*

hold until next measure

$\bullet = 60$

p *mp* *ppp* *f*

three se - cret flaws

(improvised overtones)

11:57"

cun - ning drop a - way *ppp* - come curve a - gainst me

ppp *pp* *p* *pp*