Sudden Swan

for solo voice and live electronics

Holland Hopson

2014

General Approach

Sudden Swan values discovery via listening and responding in the moment to the electronics. The singer is encouraged to approach the work in a spirit of finding his or her own way through the notated material and exploring the nuances that arise from the combination of the voice and the electronic processing.

Duration and Timing

Duration of the piece is free. A typical duration is 10-12 minutes.

Performance Instructions

The work may be performed by any solo voice in any range. Transpose the score to a comfortable tessitura.

Pitches within boxes may be sung in any order, repeated at will, or not sung at all. Choose any of the words below each pitch to sing for that pitch.

Listen for resonance between the voice and the processed audio. Adjust pitches in order to minimize beating. It may be helpful to rehearse the piece using a drone on the tonic (or the tonic and fifth). An acoustic or electronic organ, harmonium or sruti box are convenient sources for a drone.

Electronics

Download a copy of Max from cycling74.com to open the SuddenSwan.maxproj file. Performers do not need to purchase the Max application; the Max patch will open and run even after the trial period for the software has ended. The piece was developed using Max version 7.3.3 and may not work reliably with older versions.

Recommended microphone: Any quality head-mounted miniature condenser microphone (such as DPA 4060 or similar) is idea. Any quality dynamic microphone with a cardioid polar pattern is a good alternative. Examples include Shure SM7, SM58 or Sennheiser e835. To avoid feedback with the processed audio use a close-mike position (approx. 6" or 15cm from the bridge of the performer's nose).

Balance and overall level

Set the level of the electronics slightly louder than the level of the voice. The dry voice signal may need reinforcement depending on the size of the performance space.

The overall level of the piece does not need to be loud. It should fit comfortably alongside acoustic chamber music, and the audience should not feel assaulted by the volume of the electronic sounds.

In a good performance of this work

- rest durations are respected and a variety of durations for rests are employed
- a variety of dynamics
- not all words need to be sung
- not all pitches for each section need to be sung

Program Notes

The performer in *Sudden Swan* improvises a melody to a drone using a small set of just-tuned pitches. Each pitch is associated with one or more words which are strung together to create an ever-evolving poetry. The computer responds to variations in the vocal performance with subtle shifts of timbre, pulsating rhythms, and sometimes unpredictable flourishes.

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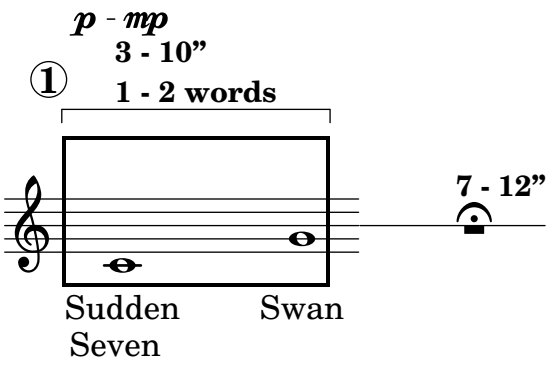
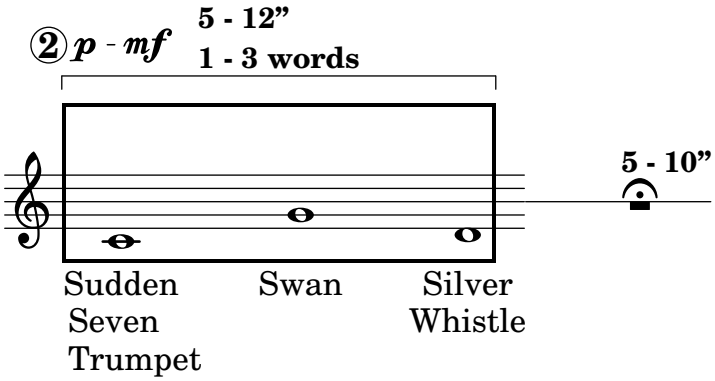
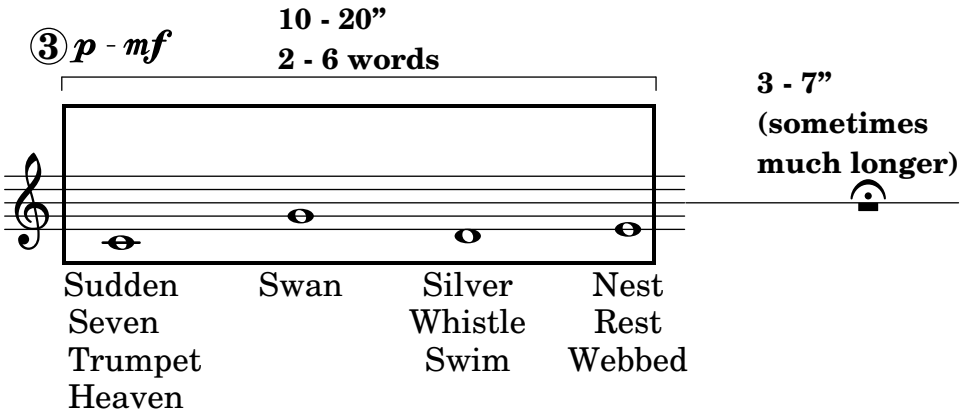
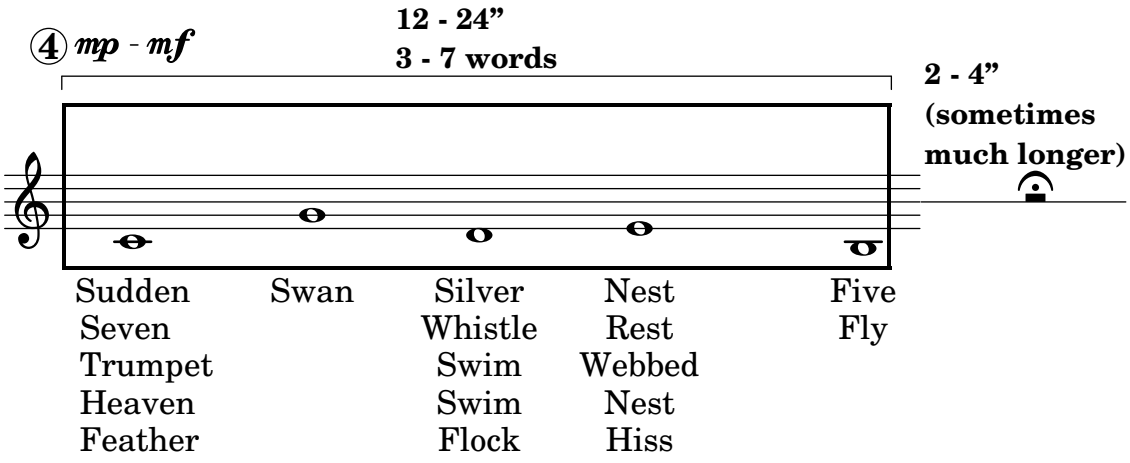




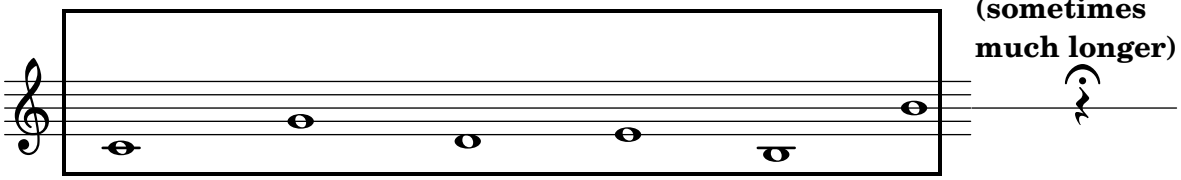




⑤ *mp - f*

15 - 30”
4 - 8 or more words

1 - 3”
(sometimes much longer)

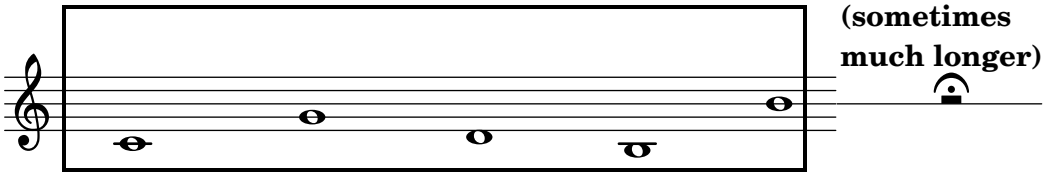


Sudden	Swan	Silver	Nest	Five	Fly
Seven		Swim	Wing	Far	Sky
Heaven		Flock	Neck		
Feather		Tribe			
Water					

⑥ *mp - mf*

12 - 24”
3 - 7 words

2 - 4”
(sometimes much longer)

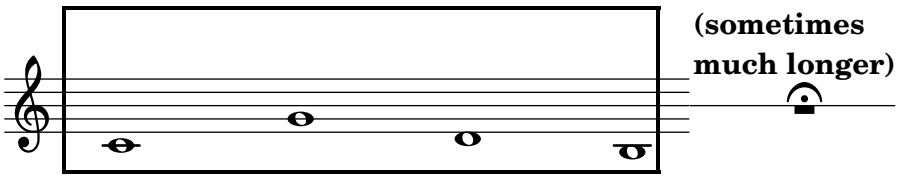


Sudden	Swan	Silver	Five	Sky
Seven		Ring	Far	Fire
Feather		Pair		
Water		Swim		
		Black		

⑦ *p - mf*

10 - 20”
2 - 6 words

3 - 7”
(sometimes much longer)

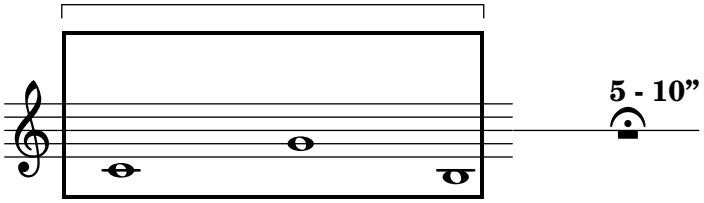


Sudden	Swan	Silver	Float
Seven		Swim	Five
Water		Flock	Far
		Pair	

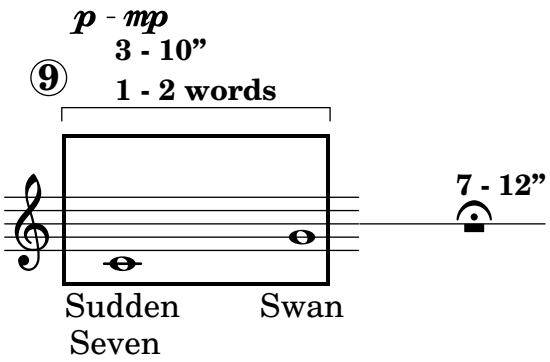
⑧ *p - mf*

5 - 12”
1 - 3 words

5 - 10”



Sudden	Swan	Star
Seven		Far
Never		Five



Rhythms are speech rhythms and not strictly metrical. Whole notes represent any duration.

Dynamics may be freely choosen within the ranges given. Much of the time the voice should sound only slightly louder than the electronics. Sometimes allow the voice to be swallowed by the electronics; sometimes allow the voice to dominate the electronics.

Repeat each section as many times as desired before moving on to the next section. Take time to listen for subtle changes in the electronic texture. The piece is over when all sections have been sung and the performer chooses to stop. The electronics will gradually fade when the performer stops singing.

Connecting words (such as 'on', 'in', 'above', 'below', 'through', etc.) may be freely interpolated and sung using any available pitch. Phrases may make linguistic sense (i.e. 'Swan in nest over water') or poetic sense (i.e. 'Flock far five feather sky') or no sense at all.

Melismas may be improvised using the supplied pitches for all words except 'swan' provided the melisma either begins or ends on the word's associated pitch. Experiment with portamento connecting nearby pitches.