

Phon & Phon 2

Scott Mc Laughlin

June 2012

Duration 5 mins +

four or more vocalists

Phon

for four or more vocalists

Preparation:

- the ensemble should agree a duration for the performance, at least five minutes.
- each singer, choose a word of more than three syllables, this is your material for the piece, keep it to yourself. Examine the word, isolate and explore its individual phonemes, find connections and distances between them.

Performance:

- in your own time, sing one of the phonemes from your material at a pitch of your choosing: sing softly and simply, direct and without self-consciousness.
- listen to the other voices, if you hear the same or a similar phoneme then sing yours again, at the same pitch as before, keep repeating at a mostly regular pulse until you have reached a comfortable pattern with the other singer, then stop, pause, and choose a new phoneme and a new pitch, carry on.
 - if the other singer does not respond (does not repeat their sound), then you may repeat yours for a short while before moving on.

General:

- dynamic should be quiet, the ensemble sound should blend.
- singing should not be expressive, theatrical, or gestural: in the words of Cage, "let the sounds be themselves" not what you add to them.
- be sensitive to the sound of your material, pronounce each phoneme the way that you say it when you say the whole word, be sensitive to your way of pronouncing it.
- pitches should not always be equal-tempered.
- the ensemble may stand in a semi-circle to allow eye-contact, or stand back-to-back (or in darkness) and work only by ear.
- durations should suit the phoneme. For example:
 - short sounds that cannot be pitched, such as plosives ('p', 'k') etc. should be soft but percussive, repeated relatively quickly but not rushed or hectic.
 - phonemes that can be pitched ("mmm", "ah" etc.) should be sung for at least long enough for the pitch to be clear, never too short or rushed, and can be up to a full breath in length.
 - unvoiced fricatives and sibilants ("f" or "s") should be sustained as continuously as possible, very quietly.

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Performance:

- in your own time, sing one of the phonemes from your material at a pitch of your choosing: sing softly and simply, direct and without self-consciousness, repeat it a few times to see if anyone connects with it.
- listen to the other singers, when you hear the phoneme from either side of the phoneme you sang from your own word. Then repeat your phoneme and form a pattern with the other singer, maintaining your pitch but altering tempo so that their phoneme.
 - so if your word was "lemon" and you sang "le" then you want to find someone singing "mmm", or if you sang "mmm" then you want to hear "le", or "(m)o" / "ah".
- if you establish a pattern with another singer then keep repeating for a while, then stop, pause, and choose a new phoneme and a new pitch, carry on.
- if you cannot make a pattern with another singer or the other singer does not respond (does not repeat their sound), then you may repeat yours for a short while before moving on.

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