Social sounds from whales at night
commissioned by the Canada Council
for Helen Pridmore

Humback Whale song recorded by Patrick Miller.
Thanks also to Thomas Götz, Luke Rendell and Henrik Brumm for grey seal, sperm whale and musician wren sounds respectively.

Emily Doolittle, 2007

In this section (until 2'49''), rhythmic coordination between tape part and voice is only approximate. Note values are also approximate. There should be a sense of proportion, but not of "beat". Noteheads indicate the general ballpark of the pitch to be sung: glissandi, wavers and minor alterations of pitch (within, say, a 1/4 tone) may be added freely. Do not try to sing all the sections as a continuous musical thought. Rather, all the "ah's" form one musical line, the "eh's" another (melodically the most important), and the "huh's" a third. "Ah's" are always diffuse, "eh's" always bright, and "huh's" always pushing. Begin as if far away, gradually coming closer until 2'49".

(* This and the other "huh" motives could be sung down an octave. (Either sing all up or all down.)

set down ocean drum

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52"
(background ocean sounds continue to crescendo)

(each iteration of the "ah" figure can have a slightly different glissando and dynamic contour)

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2'26" 2'32"

entrance of water sounds

2'38" 2'42"

seal noise

2'43" 2'46"

higher seal noise

2'49"

third splash/seal noise

water/seal sounds fade out as eerie pitched sound takes over

Final "huh" should coincide with third splash.
(Vary the number of preceding "huh's" as necessary.)

Bamboo Chimes
rustle chimes

Improvise using individual notes, leaps, and slower glissandi, as well as rests. Use mostly the notes in the box, but add others as desired.

Begin by favouring individual notes and leaps, and gradually switch to favouring glissandi.
Favour this type of figure, but still include other notes and figures. Actually these notes (end of B should overlap with whale entrance).

Mirror whale song as closely as possible (including "out of tune" notes). Of course it won't be possible to mimic it perfectly: relish the little clashes between your version and the whale's! From here until the cadenza, the alignment between the voice and the tape/timings should be as precise as possible.

Sing  Whistle
4'16" a little faster (around $\frac{1}{4} = 120$)

4'26" beginning of audible low rising sounds

(approx. 41 -- not all exactly B)

4'37" 4'39" 4'42" back to original tempo (around $\frac{1}{4} = 84$)

4'49" 4'51" sort of trailing off

(Slightly higher than the whale entrance at 4'51".)

5'02" 5'04" 5'07" 5'14"
start with a normal, pitched sound, gradually transform into a rough, glottal stop (centred around D, but not always sounding like a D), then fade away back through a pitch into nothing
becoming rough becoming rough  descending becoming rough

improvise freely. use material drawn from other sections of the piece, as well as anything else you might like to add. you may play the percussion instruments (and even add percussion instruments that are not used elsewhere in this piece).

continue to improvise, gradually adding more rising figures which mimic those in the tape part (or which introduce new sounds).

add to the overlapping layers of rising figures, becoming increasingly lively and intense. get swept away by the tape part.
Like the tape, repeat the part leading up to the climax, slowing and fading.

Fade to a hiss, "h", or "s" sound.

Bamboo Chimes

Ocean Drum

end of tape part