

# Social sounds from whales at night

commissioned by the Canada Council  
for Helen Pridmore

Humpback 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

0" 15" background ocean sounds gradually becoming audible

Tape

Percussion

Bamboo Chimes

Ocean Drum

let fade after initial strike

*f* *p* *mp* *mf*

(♩ = aprox. 84)

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".

2 30" (35") (44")

*diffuse*  
*pp*

*focused, bright*  
*p*

*pushing*  
*p*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_ huh \_\_\_\_\_

set down ocean drum

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

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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)

*diffuse* *focused, bright* *pushing* *etc.*

*p* *mp* *< mp*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_ huh \_\_\_\_\_

1'14"

*mp* *mp* *mf* *< mf*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_ huh \_\_\_\_\_

1'36"

(sound is becoming more "processed")

*mp* *mf* *f* *> p* *< mf*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_ huh \_\_\_\_\_

2'02"

first appearance of whistle/calliope sound

2'15"

whistle/calliope  
computery upwards run

continued increase of computery sounds

*mf* *mf* *f* *> mf* *< mf*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_ huh \_\_\_\_\_

2'26" 2'32" 2'38" 2'42"

entrance of water sounds

seal noise

*mf* *mf* *f* *mf*

ha - uh huh huh huh *etc.* huh huh huh

2'43" 2'46" 2'49"

higher seal noise

third splash/seal noise

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

*mf* *mf* *ff*

ha - uh huh huh huh *etc.* huh huh huh

**Bamboo Chimes**  
rustle chimes

*mp* *ff*

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

Strike chimes, then let fade for next 10-15 seconds.  
(Rustle if natural fade is not long enough.)

3'00"

**Whistle**

shortly after 3'00"

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.

*mp>mf*

3'15"

3'23"

Favour this type of figure, but still include other notes and figures.

Actually these notes (end of B should overlap with whale entrance).

Musical notation for the first system, showing a treble clef staff with a boxed-in figure and dynamic markings *mp* and *p*.

3'27"

3'34"

3'37"

Musical notation for the second system, including dynamic markings *p*, *espressivo*, and *mp*.

3'46"

3'54"

Musical notation for the third system, featuring triplets and dynamic markings *mp* and *mf*.

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.

4'01"

4'03"

4'06"

Musical notation for the fourth system, including "Sing" and "Whistle" boxes and dynamic markings *mf* and *mp*.

4'16" a little faster (around ♩ = 120)

*mf* *f* *a little rough* *mf* **Sing** *f* *et*

huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh etc.

4'26" beginning of audible low rising sounds (approx. 41 -- not all exactly B)

*mf* *mf* *becoming increasingly rough, pushing*

huh huh huh huh huh huh huh etc. huh huh

back to original tempo (around ♩ = 84)

4'37" 4'39" 4'42" 4'49" 4'51"

*ff* *f* *mf* *trumpet* *let pitch waver as desired* *sort of trailing off (more like a waver than precise triplets)*

huh ah ah

4'55" 5'02" 5'04" 5'07" 5'14"

*f* *mf* *trumpet* *trumpet-like* *f* *mf* *f*

ah hah ah

5'18" descending

5'26"

5'33"

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 → roughest *ff* ← fading away gone nothing

ah

5'33"-6'27"

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).

6'27"-6'30" reentrance of tape (low rising whale sound)

6'38"-6'51" rising shimmery/computery sounds

6'52"-6'55" rising whale sound

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

10 6'56" overlapping rises to "climax"

7'29"

Add to the overlapping layers of rising figures, becoming increasingly lively and intense. Get swept away by the tape part.

*ff*

11 7'30" 7'31.5" 7'34" 7'39" end of tape part

*mf* *mp* *p*

nothing  
Fade to a hiss, "h", or "s" sound.

Like the tape, repeat the part leading up to the climax, slowing and fading.

→

11 *mf* *mf*

ah \_\_\_\_\_ eh \_\_\_\_\_

Bamboo Chimes

*p*

11

Ocean Drum

*p* *mp* *mf* nothing