

HBTYDYCFTZ'CYLLAMAWLWT

for flexible ensemble

Colin G. Johnson

Programme Note

A number of years ago I was rather shocked to discover that most countries don't have their own song to sing at birthdays, but instead sing "Happy Birthday to You" in English. Since childhood, I have always preferred this version of the song, anyway:

*Happy Birthday to you
Do you come from the zoo?
'cause you look like a monkey,
and walk like one too.*

There are many variants on this. For a 21st birthday celebration, it is an apposite version, having 21 words in it.

HBTYDYCFTZ'CYLLAMAWLWT takes the words from that song and re-orders them into 21 individual, stand-alone musical gestures, each consisting of a single chord and one of the words of the song (for the two-syllable words, the chord is repeated). These are played as a loud, ignorant anti-accompaniment to a solo singer, who sings the original song in a quiet, introverted version. There is also a wild wood-block solo starting about half way through the piece, for some reason.

Length

Around one minute.

Biography

Colin Johnson is interested in a wide variety of compositional and musical activities, ranging from writing pieces of music-theatre and frameworks for improvisation through to straightforward music for acoustic instruments. The current piece is one of a number of pieces that have explored placing blocks of contrasting material in the same musical space, without any attempt to make a "musical argument" to join them. When not doing music he is active in research and teaching in computing and mathematics.

Practicalities

The piece is for a flexible ensemble of six or more players/singers.

There is a solo voice part who stands/sits somewhat apart from the ensemble, perhaps in a corner, singing the “happy birthday” song in a quiet, introverted way, perhaps with a small amount of distortion (hand partially over mouth, for example), perhaps accompanying themselves on an instrument. This part starts shortly after the first chord and repeats the song until the chords have finished; the singer should finish the current round of the song and not stop in mid-song.

There is a percussion part which needs two temple blocks, wood blocks or similar and a pedal bass drum; this can be spread between two players if needed.

The remainder of the ensemble are broken down into four groups. These groups can consist of any mixture of instrumental players, singers and speaking voices (instrumentalist can also sing/speak whilst playing if that is practical). There should be enough performers so that each part can both sound the pitches and the text; so, for example, there could be four or more singers; four instrumentalists and four speaking voices; two singers, two speaking voices and two instrumentalists; or any such combination.

The ensemble should be pragmatic in terms of matters such as octave transpositions in chords.

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Contact Details

Colin Johnson, 4 Kirby’s Heights, Station Road West, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 8FB
Email: colingj@gmail.com Web: <http://www.colinjohnson.me.uk/>

Voice

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Perc.

Kbd.

you

come

you

come

you

come

you

come



Voice

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Perc.

Kbd.

a

'cause

a

'cause

a

'cause

a

'cause

18

Voice

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Perc.

Kbd.

birth - day like too



20

Voice

Part 1

Part 2

Part 3

Part 4

Perc.

Kbd.

one to and.

one to and.

one to and.

one to and.

one to and.