

GEORGE CRUMB

YESTERYEAR

**A Vocalise for Mezzo-Soprano,
Amplified Piano and Percussion (2 Players)**

Facsimile printing from the manuscript by the composer

duration: circa 10 minutes

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The sense of *YESTERYEAR* is implied by the quotation from Francois Villon's *Ballad of the Dead Ladies*: "Where are the snows of yesteryear?" The singer is vainly searching for her lost youth and beauty and laments their inevitable erosion by the relentless passage of time.

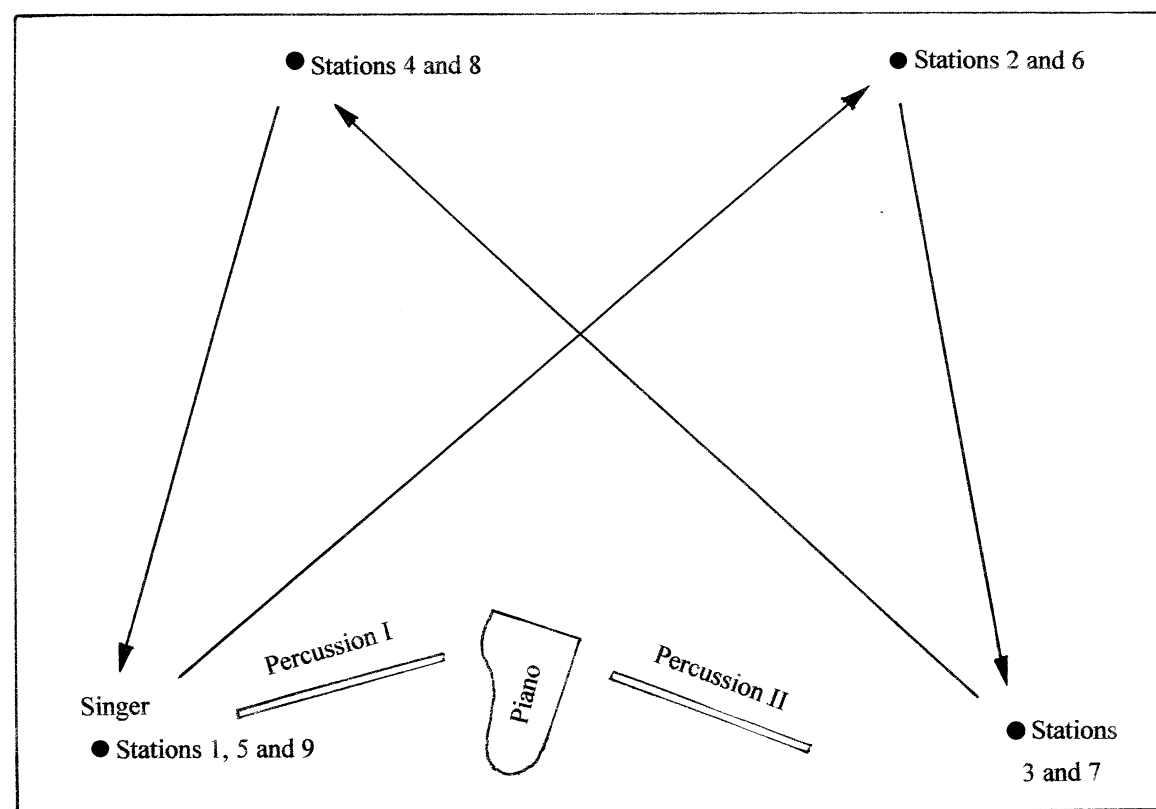
My original conception for this work included a "processional route" for the singer, which required a circumambulation of the concert hall with pauses at nine different "stations". Each "station" would represent a different aspect of the singer's anxiety ("musingly"—"mournfully"—"calling, invoking"—"nervous, apprehensive"—"dreamlike, eerie"—"alarm and growing anguish"—"climactic moment and gradual subsidence"—"musingly"—"with a sense of resignation and ultimate acceptance"). The processions should be solemn and graceful and at each "station" the singer should face the audience so that her singing, however soft and delicate, will project clearly throughout the hall.

But since many halls for various reasons (size, acoustics, etc.) would not be suitable for this sort of symbolic theater, I later envisioned using the stage itself for the nine "stations" (see diagrams for these two different possibilities). And of course a third option would be to present the work in a more conventional manner, without processions, allowing the music itself to delineate the sequence of emotional transformations. I must leave the choice in the hands of the performers!

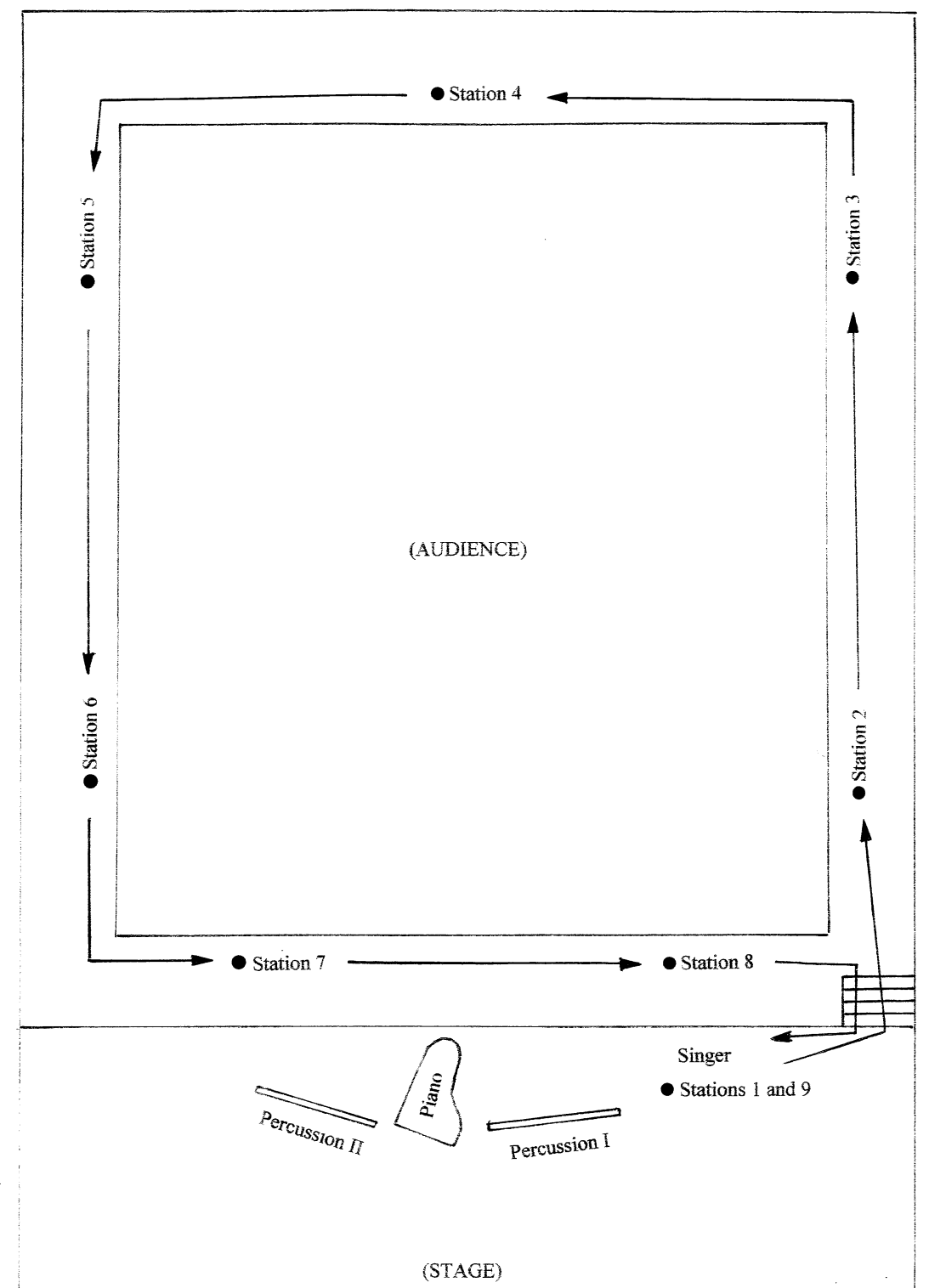
For a special theatrical effect, I would suggest that the audience section of the hall should be completely dark and the stage bathed in a deep red light. Immediately before the music begins the singer could light a candle (positioned on a small table). During the last few moments of the work the stage lighting should be gradually fading away and after the music ends the singer extinguishes the candle, leaving the hall in total darkness.

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The diagram below shows the singer's onstage "processional route" and her nine "stations":



The diagram below shows the singer's "processional route" around the hall and her nine "stations":



Percussion instruments required:

- Percussion 1:** Medium Tamtam (= "Water-Gong"), Almglocke (low F#) (= "Water-Bell"), Medium Cymbal, Medium Sizzle Cymbal, Crotales (2-octave set), Claves, Glass Wind Chimes, Large Bass Drum, 5 Japanese Temple Bells. (Also needed: a tub of water!).
- Percussion 2:** Large Tamtam, Large Cymbal, Medium Cymbal, Large Sizzle Cymbal, Metal Wind Chimes, Indian Ankle Bells, Medium Chinese Temple Gong, Very Large Chinese Temple Gong, Flexitone, Indian Ankle Bells, 2 Chinese Woodblocks, 2 Maracas, Conga Drum, Log Drum, Timpano.

Yesteryear

A Vocalise for Mezzo-Soprano,
Amplified Piano and Percussion (2 Players)

Mais où sont les neiges d'antan?
(But where are the snows of yesteryear?)
François Villon: *Ballad of the Dead Ladies*

George Crumb

[Commissioned by the
Jebediah Foundation]

[VOX HUMANA I]

Station 1

quasi improvvisando, sotto voce sempre [♩ = ca. 56, where applicable]

(hum) (lunga) (lunga) (sing) (accel. - - -) (hum) (sing) (accel. - - -) (hum) (rit. - - -) (sing) (rit. - - -)

oh ee-oo-ee-ah-ee-oh-ee, ah ee-oo-ee,

Water-Gong (1.) *tr* *pp* *(gliss. sempre)*

Lg. Tamtam (2.) *mp* (i.v.)

strike soundboard (i.v.)

gliss. over strings (wire brush) (i.v.)

Ped. I sempre (hold down throughout!)

Med. Sizzle Cym. (1.) pp (i.v.)

Lg. Sizzle Cym. (2.) pp (i.v.)

Station 2

10

(hum) (mournfully) (lunga) (sing) (poco) (accel. - - -)

ee-oh-ee-ah-ee-oh-ee-oo-ah-ee, oo-ee - wah-wah(etc.)

Water-Bell (1.) *tr* *pp* *(gliss. sempre)*

Med. Chinese Temple Gong (2.) *mp* (i.v.)

strike soundboard (i.v.)

gliss. over str. (wire brush) (i.v.)

(ped. I sempre)

“wind-singing” poco accel. - - - rit. - - -

stage whisper

Mais où sont les neiges d’an-tan?

Med. Susp. Cym. (1.) pp pull thread (i.v.)

Metal Wind Chimes (2.) pp

Spring (wire coil) Drum (i.v.)

strike coil with butt of hand (a single stroke)

Ampl. Piano

*) A numeral over a square fermata indicates a duration or pause of approximately that number of seconds.

**) Bend the pitch of a medium-size tamtam by lowering it into, and raising it out of, a tub of water (while making a rapid tremolo near its rim with a single yarn stick).

**) Strike the soundboard (through a circular opening in the metal frame) with a soft yarn stick. "Wind-singing" is like an unvoiced whistling. The intonation should be accurate throughout and the entire passage must project clearly.

**) Bend the pitch of an Almglocke by lowering it into, and raising it out of, a tub of water (while making a rapid tremolo with two yarn sticks held in one hand).

**) A piece of well-rosined thread should be attached to the upright support just below the cymbal. The thread is held above the cymbal (with some tension) so that it rests firmly against the edge of the cymbal. When the thumb and forefinger move along the thread (while pinching it), an eerie high-pitched (quasi harmonic) sound is produced.