

Joan La Barbara

So, I was yesterday at LUCIER, and he told me that you were concerned with one of his pieces.

hm hm

Um which one?

It was STILL & MOVING LINES OF SILENCE IN FAMILIES OF HYPERBOLAS

He didn't give you the spellings? Well, I can give you that later. Um it has to do with the acoustical phenomenon of beating. You know, when you have two pitches that are very close together, they beat against one another. And he can probably explain to you much better the technical reasons for this happening. But the idea with the piece was um that he would give me pure oscillator-produced pitches from one or up to four speakers. And I would by singing very closely in tune with those oscillators ah try to find my acoustical center of the space that we were performing in. And then from there he would give me additional pitches, and I would improvise (finger tapping) beating against those pitches and creating additional tones that result from two pitches being played.

Ya, so in Middletown you had another concert?

Yeah, I gave a solo concert.

It was called VOICE, THE ORIGINAL INSTRUMENT. How did you get this title? Could you just talk a little about your voice technique?

Yeah, it um, it comes I suppose from having studied as a classical singer and from being regarded by musicians as not being a musician. You know, it's probably something you're quite accustomed to. You know musicians refer to each other as musicians, and singers are referred to as singers. And I believe that the voice is an instrument, and that actually many if not all instruments were created in imitation of the voice.

Before we had language we had the opportunity to have hand signals, I suppose, sign language and picture signs and some sort of vocalizing in order to communicate with each other. So what I'm trying to do with a number of the pieces that I do is to get back to that original use of the voice, that that use of the voice without words to express feelings, emotions, to work to get very interior things out. You know, there are some things that you can't express in words, or you have the feeling that you can't express them in words. And I'm trying to I suppose develop a new kind of language with this. And so I've tried to devise different situations that I can place myself in to not bypass the brain, but to not use intellect to make a sound. But rather to use another sense.

One of the things I do is an experiment. I tape my eyes shut for an hour before the performance. And I have a series of six or seven glass dishes that I put on a table. And whoever it is that's assisting me in the performance puts different items in each dish. And my only stipulations are that they shouldn't be bugs, it shouldn't be anything that crawls, and it shouldn't be anything that injures me. I'm not into pain. ha.

And what I do then is I try to come out into the situation. And I spend that hour in isolation, because I think your attitude when you're by yourself is very different . . . I mean your

attitude when you're by yourself is very different than your attitude when you're in front of an audience. And I try to heighten my emotional state that way, by not really preparing myself for an audience, by preparing myself for a very solitary experience. And using this visual block as a sensory deprivation I come out and I touch the items in the dish. And I'll try to just give an immediate vocal response to that. And the idea is to surprise myself as well as the audience with the sounds. Because I'm looking for new ways to find new sounds.

Ya.

And another of the things that I have done is worked with poets, where they will read their works and I will try to create a fabric of sound behind them that is my reaction to their words.

Prime reaction to all these....

Yes, to their words, to what their images are creating. And one of the things that I've found when I was doing that.... A poet named ARMAND SCHWERNER was reading some Tibetan scriptures. And as he read, one of the vocal reactions that were made was an octave split. That I learned later, but I haven't heard it yet. But I learned it's done by the Tibetan monks.

Ya, that belongs now to your multiphonic singing.

Yes, right.

You should explain the technique too a little bit, how to produce that.

Well what I do, basically.... The reason that I brought this up at this point was that it was a sound that came out, and I try to learn things from my voice. You know, instead of trying to direct the voice I try to let the voice direct me. And one of the places it led me to was this multiphonic singing. And once I have that sound either on tape or just to remember, then I can work out how to produce it.

Now, the multiphonic octave singing. There are two ranges that I work in. The one that I can best control is the lower range. And I'll work in like a middle range of my voice and make one tone and sort of pull back on it a little bit. It's it's using the split. You know, sometimes if you yell, your voice will crack. Right?

Ya.

Well, it's learning how to make that sound on cue instead of just by happening. Sometimes ah I can also do it in an upper range, but I can't control the additional note. I can split the tone, but I can't always say it's going to be an octave above or a fifth above or whatever. But with the lower ones I can.

And one of the other pieces that I do on this solo concert is called VOICE PIECE: ONE-NOTE INTERNAL RESONANCE INVESTIGATION. And I'll choose one pitch that's comfortable, that I can move most easily. And by thinking different resonance areas within my head and neck and chest, I can make the tones sound very different. And eventually I get to this split procedure. And I start with the octave, and the longer I use that it becomes an octave and a fifth. It breaks up into a three note chord instead of just a two note.

And how do you produce it? You said you learned it from the Tibetan monks?

Well I didn't learn it from the Tibetan monks, no. I wish I had, because it probably would have been a lot easier. Most of the things that I've learned have been through explorations and improvisation.

So, to understand you right, you just develop your own vocabulary, first in primary reactions to events. From there you get empiric insights. And then you train yourself.

I train myself to produce those sounds. So that I can THEN use them in pieces. I mean, there are two kinds of pieces. There are the pieces that you do spontaneously, in front of an audience.

And are these techniques of production concerned with emotional states?

uuuuuuuuuuha (deep sighing) I would say that sometimes the improvisations have to do with emotional states. um, once I have the vocabulary, I don't need to recreate the emotional state in order to recreate the sound.

Ya, right, I understand. But do you recognize your reaction to sound if you listen to yourself again on tape or what? I think the context of voice production and emotion is very interesting.

Yeah, sometimes, if I'm listening, for instance these video tapes that I was editing last night, I put myself in a situation and one of them.... It was up in Vermont, and I was working with the natural setting.... And it happened that there were hunters shooting in the background. And my reaction, I didn't think about it ahead of time, was just when I heard the gun shots, I reacted as if I were an animal. And this was danger. And now, when I look at those tapes again, I can appreciate the sounds, but I also relive the emotion.

So it's more an emotional state than a kind of meditative state?

It depends on what the piece is. Now that one was not meditative. The ONE-NOTE INTERNAL RESONANCE INVESTIGATION is. I remain very still when I'm singing, because it takes all my mental activity to direct the sound where I want it to go.

Are there other experiences that you've had?

Well, I'm also working with a dancer. And I'm trying to move more and to let the movement inspire a sound. And to work sort of circular fashion in um that I'll use the energy that I get from producing sound to inspire me to a movement. And also, you know that physical reaction and letting some physical motion direct the sound.

Ya, SO to really integrate the whole person into the piece.

Yeah, to use as many different parts of me that I possibly can. Actually from where did your interest in this kind of technique grow? Did you study nonwestern

cultures of singing?

No, my training was basic western classical opera, hahaah And I just decided that I was going through the motions. I wasn't getting anything out of singing it. You know, because all of the questions were already answered. And I wanted to find something where I could answer some questions, you know? Where I could be put into a situation. Like LUCIER did. He explained the phenomenon that he was interested in and placed me in this situation. But then he let me go, you know, with that. And that's very exciting to me. I like to be able to develop a piece with a composer and myself.

Actually how do you initiate a multiphonic?

I can do it for you right now.

(Joan demonstrates a multiphonic sound: 23 seconds.)

Um, now what I was doing there was going back and forth. I would sing the original pitch and go below it. And also, it's a physical sensation. It's not something that you can actually describe how to do, although I met a singer, a wonderful commercial singer in New York a few days ago, and ah was talking to her about this. And I sang it for her. And she could do it. She just listened. But she was so in tune with her own physical voice, you know, that she could hear it and she could do it. Now whether she could do it again, I don't know. Sometimes you can do it like that right away, and then you have to go through a mental process to try to figure out how.

Does it have limits of dynamic and limits of range?

It does have limits of dynamics because when you're producing it, you're not pushing out so much. Most of pitched singing, single-pitched singing, you're directing all of your sound and air flow out. And with this you're not directing out so much as in. You create the initial sound which is going out. And then you sort of back up on it a little bit. I can actually feel it sort of dropping. And it has to be amplified.

What I've just heard now is a kind of a balancing act.

Yes, ya. And the longer you do it, the better you're able to balance it and control it. At first it sort of does what it wants to....

Besides multiphonics are you doing overtone singing?

Now that's a different procedure. Producing the overtones is more a matter of um mouth position. Different vowels and placement in a particular area create different overtones.

(Joan vocalizes C sharp and its series of overtones: ca. 20 seconds.)

FANTASTIC! Could you repeat it again?

Oooh sure, hah.

VOICE PIECE: ONE-NOTE INTERNAL RESONANCE INVESTIGATION

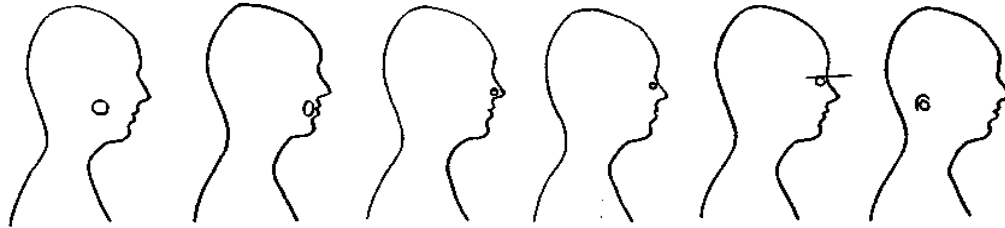
Part I Resonance Area Identification and Placement of Sound

The following are descriptions of resonance areas, placed in a specific order for performance, with drawings indicating exact placement of sound. The vocalist should think of the sound as a solid object — a ball — and imagine that ball in each indicated area before activating the sound producing mechanism. I recommend closing the eyes during performance and when initially locating specific resonance areas since one is able to focus sound more accurately when not visually distracted and fine tuning of pitch and placement is more precise. Vocalist should choose a comfortable pitch which can be placed in the maximum number of resonance areas. Always think the sound in a specific place before starting each sound. Each area should be identified individually for the length of a short breath. Silent spaces in between sounds allow time for the vocalist to concentrate mentally on the next area while replenishing air supply. The vocalist should not use vibrato at any time. The sound is to be clear, clean and specific.

The piece begins when the vocalist announces:

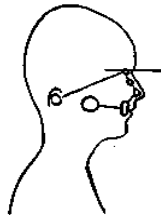
"THIS IS A ONE-NOTE INTERNAL RESONANCE INVESTIGATION."

lips closed:



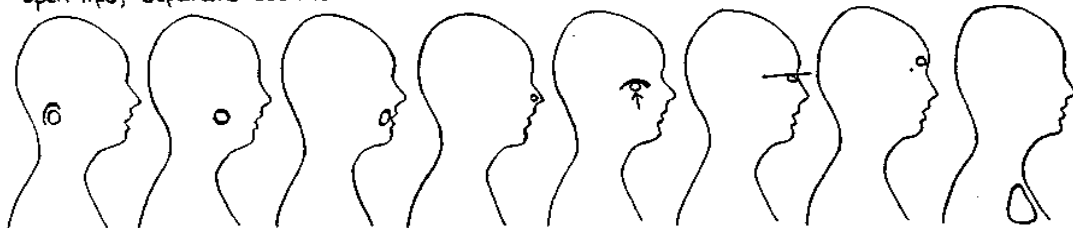
center of mouth ... front of mouth ... lower front nose ... center of nose ... bridge of nose ... upper throat (yawn)

Keeping the same order repeat these six sounds in a series, i.e. pace the air supply in one long breath so that time can be spent in each of these six resonance areas. The series should be treated as a phrase. Lips remain closed.



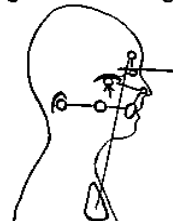
Series: center of mouth
front of mouth just behind lips
lower front nose
center of nose
bridge of nose
upper throat (yawn)

open lips, separate sounds:

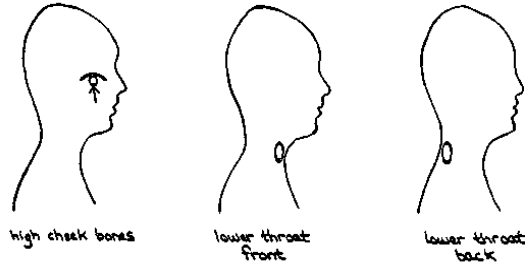


upper throat ... center of mouth ... front of mouth ... lower front nose ... high cheek bones ... bridge of nose ... third eye ... chest bones

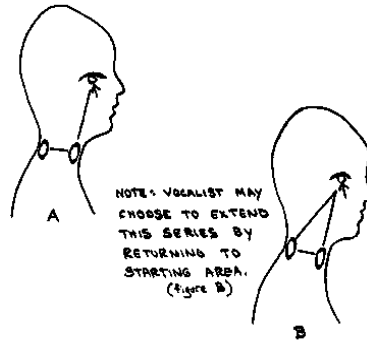
Keeping same order, repeat these sounds in series:



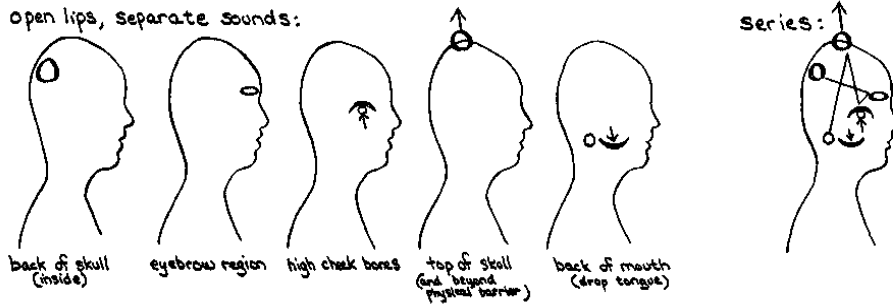
open lips, separate sounds:



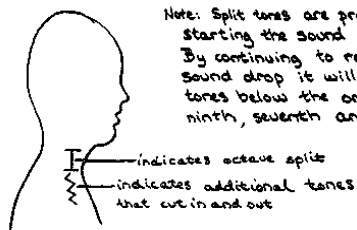
repeat these in series (figure A):



open lips, separate sounds:



split tone / octave:



Note: Split tones are produced by focusing attention on front throat, starting the sound there and then thinking it smaller. By continuing to relax the throat and letting the sound drop it will produce additional "undertones" — tones below the original sung tone; octave, octave + fifth, ninth, seventh and others.

Part II Series Lists

The vocalist may choose from the following Series or resonance area runs, repeating sections that respond well to a particular environment. Vocalist may create new Series and include them in this section. Series may be done in any order.

Series 1

center mouth
front of mouth
lower front nose
high cheeks bones
bridge of nose
third eye
back of mouth
back of neck
split



Series 2

center mouth
front of mouth
lower front nose



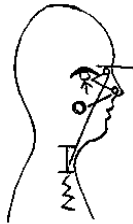
Series 2a

center mouth
front of mouth
lower front nose
front of mouth
center mouth



Series 3

center mouth
front nose
high cheeks
bridge of nose
split



Series 4

back of mouth
lower front nose
octave split
(keeping nose resonance feeling)



Overtone Series

To produce overtones the sound should be focused in a narrow vertical band in the center of the face (the area from the lips to the third eye). Both the shape of the mouth and the specific resonance area affect and reinforce the overtone. One depends heavily on the ears for fine tuning. The sound moves in clearly sensible steps. The overtones can float or glide from one to the next or can be moved in stepwise fashion. The drawings below indicate the area for sound placement in order to produce most clearly audible overtones or upper partials.

