

shbaq

for a singing string ensemble

Sara Cubarsi, 2025

shbaq

(leave / permit / let go / release / forgive)

for a singing string ensemble (4-4-2-2-1), ca. 1'30"

Dedicated and commissioned by The Van Swietens

shbaq is a miniature piece for string ensemble originally written to be performed right before Sonata IV from Haydn's The Seven Last Words of Christ. This Sonata represents the moment where Jesus speaks for the last time on the cross quoting Psalm 22: *My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?*

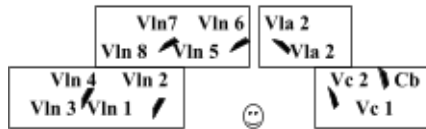
Inspired by questions on hermeneutics, literature, language and translation that surround this possible moment in history, I used the fixed drone idea - on F - to represent an elusive and changing Truth according to perspective, by constantly recontextualizing the F in the middle voices with a micro-controlled glissando on the other parts, having this drone be sometimes the fundamental, other times the 13th, 25th, or 14th partial, with many in-between moments that are also part of this constant change of spectral re-alignment.

As a counterbalance to the harmonic fundament of the miniature, a monodic line on the drone invokes the sound of Ancient modality with a quarter-tone ornament, with the voices chanting the famous words first in Hebrew and then in Aramaic, and a cello solo set free to resist against the drone.

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Performance notes

Positions:



As in the usual ensemble setting, pairs of musicians per section can share a music stand (black lines). The staves don't necessarily follow the positioning, for texture reasons.

Tuning:

- The score uses the Helmholtz Ellis Just Intonation Accidentals to indicate relationships between tones only by means of music notation: <https://masa.plainsound.org/pdfs/notation.pdf>
- The parts include cent deviations on the glissandi or pitch changes (how far is the change), and (in case it is useful) also cent deviations away from the equally tempered pitch in grey.
- The score also includes the ratio number (e.g. $11^{\circ} \times 4 = 44$ th partial) that the central F represents in each harmonic plateau, on Violin 5.

Glissandi:

- Slow down on the written notes (these are harmonic arrival points, where all voices align in the extended harmonic spectrum)
- The glissando voices should not be shy, coming securely from the “back” positions (Vln 3, Vln 7).

Violinists 2, 5, 6:

- The **singing violinists** use a tremolo voice without forcing it too much. The voice is notated with **triangle note-heads**.
- **Violin 2 and 6** use a wooden stick instead of a bow which is gritty (or a rough tree branch), creating a perforated tremolo sound: **p-bow**.
- **Violin 5** uses a normal bow, always sustaining the same F throughout the piece, while singing in the second half as well.
- Optionally (depending on concert situation): **Violins 2, 5, 6** stand up in the moment of singing.
- **Voice/Range:** if really needed, the voice part can be an octave lower.
- The **text** which is sung is:

Elí, Elí, láma azavtáni? (simple accent - Hebrew) / proper accent: 'élí, 'éli... ǝlā·māh 'ăḩaḩtānī?

Eloí, Eloí, lemána shebaqtá(ni)? (simple accent - Aramaic) / proper accent: 'al·lāh(y) 'al·lāh(y) lēmānā' shēḩaqtān(y)?

Cello 1

- When a **V** is notated, it indicates an uncontrolled vibrato which is wide and vibrating maybe twice per note-head, around the indicated pitch.

Mutes:

- Note: only *sordino* (the normal cheap small rubber mute) when indicated.

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Lento, poco ad libitum ♩=ca.30

sul III
con sord.

4

[illegible]

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4

6

ord.

sul I

-56.7

c -50.8

-45.3

4

poco s.p.

5

attaca: Sonata IV from Haydn's
"The Seven Last Words of Christ"

Vln. 1

mf

f

cresc.

fp

f

p

Vln. 4

ord.

+84.4

-53.2

+262.1

+48.3

-257.2

mf

cresc.

f

fp

f

Vln. 3

ord.

c -59.1

sempre legato

d +3

d +51.3

mf

f

fp

f

Vln. 2 + voice

3

3

3

f

e lo i

e lo i

le

ma

na

she!

she baq

ta

an

ni ni ni ni ...

pp

Vln. 5 + voice

7° x2

11° x4

11°

13°

13° x4

voice: sempre tremolo vibrato

3

3

3

f

e lo i

e lo i

le

ma

na

shhhhhhhhh

she baq

ta

an

ni ni ni ni ...

pp

shbaq

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Lento, poco ad libitum $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 30$

5

Violin 6 (+voice)

con sord. -111.8 fpp pp p mp ff poss

sul III $\text{e}_5 +41.5$ sul IV (ord.) $\text{d} -23.5$ $\text{c} -5.9$ $\text{c} -71.2 \rightarrow \text{s.p.++}$ Take p-bow senza sordino

Violin 7

con sord. -111.8 fpp fpp p (ord.) $\rightarrow \text{s.p.}$ -84.5 ord. -70.6 -111.8 -65.3 ff poss p (s.p.++) -201.5

sul IV fpp -38.9 -50.5 poco a poco cresc. poco a poco cresc. mp mf

Violin 8

con sord. -111.8 fpp p fpp p (ord.) $\rightarrow \text{s.p.}$ (voice) sh ff p p $\text{d}_5 +5.9$ sh ff p p $\text{c} -71.2$ s.p.++ (s.p.++) $\text{a} +27.3$ s.p.

sul III $\text{e} -19.6$ $\text{e}_5 -39$

4

Violin 6 (+voice)

p-bow voice: sempre tremolo vibrato (senza s.) e lo i e lo i le ma na she ff she baq ta an ni ni ni ni ... pp

Violin 7

ord. -80.6 $+63$ -58 $+48.3$ subito sp.+ mf cresc. f fp f p

Violin 8

sempre legato ord. $\text{a}_5 +46.7$ $\text{a} +9.7$ $\text{a}_5 +51.7$ mf cresc. f fp f

5

4

5

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Lento, poco ad libitum ♩=ca.30

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5!

Sul I
pizz
f

(ord.) → s.p.
arco
p → *f* → *pp*

** V = each not at least two uncontrolled wide vibrato motions

con sord. -70.7 -80
f *mp* poco a poco cresc.

(voice)
sh *ff* *p* → *mp*

con sord. *sfz p*

con sord. pizz *f*

Sul II
s.p. *es* +41.5
sfz mp

(s.p.) → ord.
mp → *mf*

→ s.p.++
ff poss

(s.p.++) -63
p

(*es* -11.7)
s.p.++
ff poss

(s.p.++) *d* +25.3
s.p.
p

arco

4

poco s.p.
f *mp* → *f* 3

e -72.8
sfz *mf* → *sfz* → *p* → *f*

ord. → s.p. → press
sfz *p* → *f*

gu. ord. ricorché
sfz

subito sp. +
p

ord. -80.5 +182.4 +293.3 +48 -176.6
mf cresc. *f* *fp* *f*

ord. *d* -55.2 *e* -72.8 *gs* +20.5 *g* -31.2
mf cresc. *f* *fp* *f*

sempre legato
ord. *g* +23.4 *g* -57.2 *es* +53.6
mf cresc. *f* *fp* *f*

Via1/Vc2 pure fifth
ord. *g* +23.4 -80.6 *c* -59.1 -289.2 *ab* +51.7
mf cresc. *f* *fp* *f*

Vc2/Db pure fifth
ord. *g* +23.4 -80.6 *c* -59.1 -289.2 *ab* +51.7
mf cresc. *f* *fp* *f*

subito sp. +
p

ord. -90.2
f

subito sp. +
p

ord. *pizz.* *ff*