

Chant des Voyelles (2018)

Incantation of Vowels

Commissioned by Volti, Robert Geary, Artistic Director

Composer's note

Continuously living in two languages - my native Lithuanian and English, I had an unresolved ambiguity about the choice of language for the text. I realized that whichever I was going to use - it would be a translation of some sort, either for me or for the listeners and singers. I was aiming for something more direct, a communication that goes beyond words and supersedes them. That's how I came to vowels thinking how they are almost the very first sounds we make when we attempt to speak as babies.

In the autumn of 2017, I was at a creative residency at the Pocantico Center, which is located at the Rockefeller estate Kykuit near New York City. There among a rich collection of outdoor sculptures, I encountered a work by the cubist sculptor Jacques Lipchitz called "Chant des Voyelles". It was titled after an Egyptian prayer composed only of vowels that was designed to subdue the forces of nature. Further research showed that many ancient traditions (Egyptians, Greeks and Tibetans) ascribed sacred, mystical and healing powers and significance to vowels. The details might vary in different traditions, yet it is clear that something miraculous happens through the very act of prolonged repetition of certain vowels - whether in the form of a mantra or prayer or as a self-healing ritual. Also each vowel in elongation stimulates an appearance of particular overtones of the natural harmonic series. I wanted to experiment with subtly shifting, sometimes barely audible clouds of overtones resulting from the sustaining of certain vowels in multiple voices. I worked with vowels dedicating an entire section to one single vowel and then also mixing them up in various densities. I have yet to find out together with the singers and listeners what effects these vowels might have.

Duration 16'

Premiere performances by Volti on May 4th, 2018 at Noe Valley Ministry in San Francisco, CA and May 6th, 2018 at BAMPFA (in Berkeley, CA)