

AFTER YEATS

for performer and composer

concept by

William Brooks

After Yeats is not a score for performance but rather a method for determining a score; it extends W. B. Yeats's practice of poetic declamation to languages other than English. *After Yeats* describes a collaboration between a performer, who declaims a Yeats poem in translation, self-accompanied by a plucked string instrument, and a composer, who works at a remove to observe and amplify the implications of the declamation.

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Frog Peak Music
Box 1052, Lebanon NH 03766
www.frogpeak.org

After Yeats

1. Background:
 - a. Read W. B. Yeats, "Speaking to the Psaltery" (included).
 - b. Read the "afterword" to *Everlasting Voices* (also included).
 - c. Listen to Yeats reading "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" (available at openculture.com).
 - d. Read (or at least browse) Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrel* (Oxford University Press, 2008).
2. Thus informed by your reading,
 - a. Choose a poem by Yeats that has been well translated into your native language. If no translations exist, commission some.
 - b. Choose a plucked string instrument with which to accompany yourself. It could (but need not) be indigenous to the culture in which your native language is spoken. An existing instrument can be modified, or a new instrument designed and constructed.
3. Practice and evolve a reading, based on the texts (Yeats, Schuchard, Brooks) and Yeats's recording. Do not notate the reading; practice the text repeatedly until your performance has fully stabilised and can be replicated with an exceptional degree of accuracy. In the final stages test yourself by making several recordings over several weeks and comparing them.
4. When ready, send several recordings of the text and a generous quantity of samples made from your instrument to a composer. The composer can be yourself, but it is probably more interesting if this is not the case. The composer need not be a native speaker of your language.
5. The composer makes a score, also guided by the background reading. The score is monophonic and for your instrument; discrete pitches from your reading are selected to be reinforced and sustained by the instrument. The composer can adjust pacing and silences and can create purely instrumental interludes, but alteration of the pitches implied by the reading is not permitted.
6. The composer may, as an option, create an electroacoustic continuity to be played together with your performance, using only the samples and the recordings you have supplied.
7. Learn the score as you would any other, but bear in mind your prior experience with the poem.
8. If performed, the title is the name of the poem (in your native language). The programme should list
 - from a concept by William Brooks
 - with a text by W. B. Yeats
 - informed by writings by Yeats and Ronald Schuchard
 - composed by <name of composer>
 - from materials supplied by <your name>

W. B. Yeats

"Speaking to the Psaltery"

from

Ideas of Good and Evil

2nd edition

London: A. H. Bullen

1903

[first published 1902]

Ideas of
Good and
Evil.

SPEAKING TO THE PSALTERY

I

I HAVE always known that there was something I disliked about singing, and I naturally dislike print and paper, but now at last I understand why, for I have found something better. I have just heard a poem spoken with so delicate a sense of its rhythm, with so perfect a respect for its meaning, that if I were a wise man and could persuade a few people to learn the art I would never open a book of verses again. A friend, who was here a few minutes ago, has sat with a beautiful stringed instrument upon her knee, her fingers passing over the strings, and has spoken to me some verses from Shelley's *Skylark* and Sir Ector's lamentation over the dead Launcelot out of the *Morte d'Arthur* and some of my own poems. Wherever the rhythm was most delicate, wherever the emotion was most ecstatic, her art was the most beautiful, and yet, although she sometimes spoke to a little

tune, it was never singing, as we sing to-day, never anything but speech. A singing note, a word chanted as they chant in churches, would have spoiled everything; nor was it reciting, for she spoke to a notation as definite as that of song, using the instrument, which murmured sweetly and faintly, under the spoken sounds, to give her the changing notes. Another speaker could have repeated all her effects, except those which came from her own beautiful voice that would have given her fame if the only art that gives the speaking voice its perfect opportunity were as well known among us as it was known in the ancient world.

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II

Since I was a boy I have always longed to hear poems spoken to a harp, as I imagined Homer to have spoken his, for it is not natural to enjoy an art only when one is by oneself. Whenever one finds a fine verse one wants to read it to somebody,

and it would be much less trouble and much pleasanter if we could all listen, friend by friend, lover by beloved. Images used to rise up before me, as I am sure they have arisen before nearly everybody else who cares for poetry, of wild-eyed men speaking harmoniously to murmuring wires while audiences in many-coloured robes listened, hushed and excited. Whenever I spoke of my desire to anybody they said I should write for music, but when I heard anything sung I did not hear the words, or if I did their natural pronunciation was altered and their natural music was altered, or it was drowned in another music which I did not understand. What was the good of writing a love-song if the singer pronounced love, 'lo-o-o-o-o-ve,' or even if he said 'love,' but did not give it its exact place and weight in the rhythm? Like every other poet, I spoke verses in a kind of chant when I was making them, and sometimes, when I was alone on a country road, I would speak them in a loud chanting

voice, and feel that if I dared I would speak them in that way to other people. One day I was walking through a Dublin street with the Visionary I have written about in *The Celtic Twilight*, and he began speaking his verses out aloud with the confidence of those who have the inner light. He did not mind that people stopped and looked after him even on the far side of the road, but went on through poem after poem. Like myself, he knew nothing of music, but was certain that he had written them to a manner of music, and he had once asked somebody who played on a wind instrument of some kind, and then a violinist, to write out the music and play it. The violinist had played it, or something like it, but had not written it down; but the man with the wind instrument said it could not be played because it contained quarter-tones and would be out of tune. We were not at all convinced by this, and one day, when we were staying with a Galway friend who is a learned

musician, I asked him to listen to our verses, and to the way we spoke them. The Visionary found to his surprise that he did not make every poem to a different tune, and to the surprise of the musician that he did make them all to two quite definite tunes, which are, it seems, like very simple Arabic music. It was, perhaps, to some such music, I thought, that Blake sang his *Songs of Innocence* in Mrs. Williams' drawing-room, and perhaps he, too, spoke rather than sang. I, on the other hand, did not often compose to a tune, though I sometimes did, yet always to notes that could be written down and played on my friend's organ, or turned into something like a Gregorian hymn if one sang them in the ordinary way. I varied more than the Visionary, who never forgot his two tunes, one for long and one for short lines, and could not always speak a poem in the same way, but always felt that certain ways were right, and that I would know one of them

if I remembered the way I first spoke the poem. When I got to London I gave the notation, as it had been played on the organ, to the friend who has just gone out, and she spoke it to me, giving my words a new quality by the beauty of her voice.

III

Then we began to wander through the wood of error; we tried speaking through music in the ordinary way under I know not whose evil influence, until we got to hate the two competing tunes and rhythms that were so often at discord with one another, the tune and rhythm of the verse and the tune and rhythm of the music. Then we tried, persuaded by somebody who thought quarter-tones and less intervals the especial mark of speech as distinct from singing, to write out what we did in wavy lines. On finding something like these lines in Tibetan music, we became so confident that we covered a large piece of pasteboard, which now blows up my fire in

the morning, with a notation in wavy lines as a demonstration for a lecture; but at last Mr. Dolmetsch put us back to our first thought. He made us a beautiful instrument half psaltery half lyre which contains, I understand, all the chromatic intervals within the range of the speaking voice; and he taught us to regulate our speech by the ordinary musical notes.

Some of the notations he taught us—those in which there is no lilt, no recurring pattern of sounds—are like this notation for a song out of the first Act of *The Countess Cathleen*.

It is written in the old C clef, which is, I am told, the most reasonable way to write it, for it would be below the stave on the treble clef or above it on the bass clef. The central line of the stave corresponds to the middle C of the piano; the first note of the poem is therefore D. The marks of long and short over the syllables are not marks of scansion, but show the syllables one makes the voice hurry or linger over.



One needs, of course, a far less complicated notation than a singer, and one is even permitted slight modifications of the fixed note when dramatic expression demands it and the instrument is not sounding. The notation which regulates the general form of the sound leaves it free to add a complexity of dramatic expression from its own incommunicable genius which compensates the lover of speech for the lack of complex musical expression. Ordinary speech is formless, and its variety is like the variety which separates bad prose from the regulated speech of Milton, or anything that is formless and void from anything that has form and beauty. The orator, the speaker who has some little of the great tradition of his craft, differs from the debater very largely because he understands how to assume that subtle monotony of voice which runs through the nerves like fire.

Even when one is speaking to a single note sounded faintly on the Psaltery,

if one is sufficiently practised to speak on it without thinking about it one can get an endless variety of expression. All art is, indeed, a monotony in external things for the sake of an interior variety, a sacrifice of gross effects to subtle effects, an asceticism of the imagination. But this new art, new in modern life I mean, will have to train its hearers as well as its speakers, for it takes time to surrender gladly the gross efforts one is accustomed to, and one may well find mere monotony at first where one soon learns to find a variety as incalculable as in the outline of faces or in the expression of eyes. Modern acting and recitation have taught us to fix our attention on the gross effects till we have come to think gesture and the intonation that copies the accidental surface of life more important than the rhythm; and yet we understand theoretically that it is precisely this rhythm that separates good writing from bad, that is the glimmer, the fragrance, the

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spirit of all intense literature. I do not say that we should speak our plays to musical notes, for dramatic verse will need its own method, and I have hitherto experimented with short lyric poems alone; but I am certain that, if people would listen for a while to lyrical verse spoken to notes, they would soon find it impossible to listen without indignation to verse as it is spoken in our leading theatres. They would get a subtlety of hearing that would demand new effects from actors and even from public speakers, and they might, it may be, begin even to notice one another's voices till poetry and rhythm had come nearer to common life.

I cannot tell what changes this new art is to go through, or to what greatness or littleness of fortune; but I can imagine little stories in prose with their dialogues in metre going pleasantly to the strings. I am not certain that I shall not see some Order naming itself from the Golden

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Violet of the Troubadours or the like, and having among its members none but well-taught and well-mannered speakers who will keep the new art from disrepute. They will know how to keep from singing notes and from prosaic lifeless intonations, and they will always understand, however far they push their experiments, that poetry and not music is their object; and they will have by heart, like the Irish *File*, so many poems and notations that they will never have to bend their heads over the book to the ruin of dramatic expression and of that wild air the bard had always about him in my boyish imagination. They will go here and there speaking their verses and their little stories wherever they can find a score or two of poetical-minded people in a big room, or a couple of poetical-minded friends sitting by the hearth, and poets will write them poems and little stories to the confounding of print and paper. I, at any rate, from this out mean to write all

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my longer poems for the stage, and all my shorter ones for the Psaltery, if only some strong angel keep me to my good resolutions.

1902.

“Afterword” to *Everlasting Voices*

William Brooks

The following text appears at the end of Everlasting Voices, a composition for actor, bass clarinetist, and fixed media that is, like After Yeats, based on Yeats’s practice for declaiming his poetry. I have not edited it for this new context, and not all of it may be of immediate relevance, but it can serve as a general guide and introduction. In a practical sense, Everlasting Voices is a kind of extended realization of After Yeats, though it preceded the latter by several years.

The following summarizes *some* of the research and thinking that went into the creation of *Everlasting Voices*. It is meant to suggest ways for performers to approach the work and, perhaps, Yeats’s ideas. It is not a substitute for, nor even a guide to, the extensive literature on Yeats and chanting; it’s merely an introduction, made with this particular composition in mind. A more scholarly version will be published in the *Sourcebook for Artistic Research*, to be published by Leuven University Press in 2014. Here I give merely an indicative sketch, based heavily on Schuchard’s (2008) exceptionally fine study.

Yeats recalled chanting poetry even as a youth: “Like every other poet I spoke verses in a kind of chant when I was making them; and sometimes, when I was alone on a country road, I would speak them in a loud chanting voice, and feel that if I dared I would speak them in that way to other people” (Yeats 1902 [1903], 18–19). As he grew older he did dare to chant more openly, at first only in the safe confines of the Rhymers’ Club, a loose association of poets and literati (Schuchard 2008, 15–16). The turn towards truly public utterances—performances, even—came in the late 1880s, when Yeats was in his early twenties. And it was profoundly and eternally associated with his encounters with two extraordinary women.

The first was the aspiring actress Florence Farr, recently separated from her husband and already a member of some of the mystical societies that Yeats would come to embrace. A paradigmatic “new woman,” she would go on to an extraordinary life: actor, magician, writer, educator; extravagantly casual in dress and manner, the mistress of George Bernard Shaw, an early champion of Ibsen (Johnson 1975). But in 1890 that life was just beginning, in part through her association with the Bedford Park enclave of radical artists and writers. There, in June, she appeared in a play by John Todhunter, who was also interested in the declamation of verse, and the beauty of her voice and reading captivated Yeats entirely. In reviewing the performance, Yeats wrote that she “won universal praise with her striking beauty and subtle gesture and fine delivery of the verse. . . . I do not know that I have any word too strong to express my admiration for its grace and power. . . . I have never heard verse better spoken” (Yeats 1989, 39). And later he would recall that “she had three great gifts, a tranquil beauty like that of Demeter’s image near the British Museum reading room door, and an incomparable sense of rhythm and a beautiful voice, the seeming natural expression of the image” (Yeats 1922, 11). Yeats and Farr would go on to a twenty-year collaboration to explore, develop and promote the art of chanting poetry.

Yeats had met Farr well before her appearance at Bedford Park, and indications are that he was quite infatuated with her (Schuchard 2008, 18; Johnson 1975, 42). But she was utterly eclipsed by the second woman to appear: Maud Gonne, who arrived on his father’s doorstep on 30 January 1889. Of her Yeats was famously to write: “I was twenty-three years old when the troubling of my life began. I had heard from time to time . . . of a beautiful girl who had left the society of the Viceregal Court for Dublin nationalism. . . . Presently she drove up to our house in Bedford Park . . . I had never thought to see in a living woman such

great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past” (Yeats 1972, 40). Yeats’s love for Maud is one of the great literary love stories: over the next two decades, he would propose—and be rejected—numerous times; and for, and to, Maud he would write some of his most famous poems and plays. But that too was in the future. Yeats, at the age of twenty-five, had found two companions that would sustain and frustrate him for twenty years; and during those same twenty years, he would develop the practice of “chanting” in their company and with others. The nucleus of an artistic community had been formed.

The community’s conceptual framework arose from Yeats’s other abiding interests. The first and most enduring was the pursuit of a mythical antiquity—that of Ireland, above all, but also of Europe, ancient Greece, even Egypt. It is not coincidence that Yeats found in Maud “some legendary past”; for ten years he had been collecting and publishing Irish tales and verses and speculating about the place of the poet-bard in ancient Irish culture (Yeats 1888). And even earlier, as a youth, he recalled that “images used to rise up before me . . . of wild-eyed men speaking harmoniously to murmuring wires while audiences in many-coloured robes listened, hushed and excited” (Yeats 1902 [1903], 18). For Farr, too, “the music of speech” was “the practice of the bardic art” (Farr 1909, [i]); a magical antiquity was to be remade through the practice of chanting: “The mystery of sound is made manifest in words and in music. In music we know and feel it; but we are forgetting that it lives also in words, in poetry, and in noble prose; we are overwhelmed by the chatter of those who profane it, and the din of the traffic of the restless disturbs the peace of those who are listening for the old magic, and watching till the new creation is heralded by the sound of the new world” (ibid, 21).

A related interest also provided the first laboratory in which to test the project. Farr, Gonne and (for a time) Yeats were members of a mystical society known as the Order of the Golden Dawn. In the rituals practiced there, according to Mary Greer (1995), “the vowels are used in a sympathetic way to sympathetically vibrate the ether on the astral plane” (128). And Greer goes on to note that “Florence’s voice—especially low, resonant, trained—was perfect.” However, only Farr remained committed to the Order; Yeats and Gonne eventually turned away from its fabricated mysteries to a spiritual union that was more unsystematic and personal. At the same time, both turned their attention to a more politically constructed antiquity: the hidden culture of Ireland as a source for an emerging nationalism.

With this shift came a second laboratory in which to explore chanting: the theatre. Yeats played a key role in the founding of Dublin’s Abbey Theatre, and from the start he hoped that it would serve to restore the proper practice of declamation to the stage (Schuchard 2008, 193–94; Yeats 1907 [1916], 522–33). Almost from the day he met Maud, Yeats conceived a play based on an Irish legend, *The Countess Cathleen*. Yeats intended that Maud would play Cathleen—the personification of Ireland, much like the female “Liberty” in France—but she turned him down. To act in plays, she wrote him, “was all very well when I was a child, but now that I have undertaken a great mission I have to act accordingly” (Gonne 1992, 74). And indeed, thereafter—with one important exception—Maud Gonne would turn her oratorical skills solely to proselytising on behalf of a future Irish state. But in Yeats’s mind she was always “his” Cathleen; and he wrote himself into the play, as well: the young, beautiful Cathleen has a bardic suitor, Aleel, whose memorable lyrics (among them “Impetuous Heart”) were to be chanted in the style that Yeats and Farr had developed.

When *The Countess Cathleen* was first produced at the Abbey Theatre on 8 May 1899, after a decade of delays and uncounted revisions, it was a kind of valedictory to Maud; its conclusion, in which Cathleen-cum-Maud saves the Irish people by selling her soul to the devil, is Yeats’s gloss on the lifework of Maud herself. “I told her,” he recalled, “I had come to understand the tale of a woman selling her soul to buy food for a starving people as a symbol of all souls who lose their peace, or their fineness, or any beauty of the spirit in

political service, but chiefly of her soul that had seemed so incapable of rest” (Yeats 1972, 47). In a strange twist of casting, the part of Aleel (representing Yeats) was taken by Florence Farr, in a trouser role; thus Farr came to enact Yeats himself, chanting his poetry as the ostensible suitor of Maud-Cathleen.

Yeats followed *The Countess Cathleen* three years later with *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, a shorter, more flagrantly political work. Undaunted, he again asked Maud to play Cathleen, and this time, through a combination of nationalism, friendship, and confusion, she agreed, playing the title role, Yeats wrote, “magnificently and with weird power” (Schuchard 2008, 89). Thereafter Yeats’s theatrical interests took a somewhat different direction; but Florence Farr remained devoted to theatrical chanting, taking the practice forward with mixed results in plays ranging from new works to translations of classical Greek drama (Johnson 1975, 111–22).

However, Yeats and Farr together embarked on a major effort to advance the cause of chanting, using a third, less demanding laboratory: the lecture hall. They began in 1902 with semi-public renditions for a largely invited audience and eventually moved on to substantial tours throughout the British Isles. Extensively reviewed, these events were buttressed by a number of essays and communications by Yeats himself, providing a theoretical and practical account of his practices. Farr, too, wrote to papers and journals expounding her method, eventually compiling her own notices and the critical responses in a slim volume, *The Music of Speech* (1909). Yeats’s key essay, “Speaking to the Psalter,” first appeared in 1901 and was shortly afterward incorporated in a revised form in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903). These writings and others constitute the most important contemporaneous descriptions of the theory and aesthetic of chanting.

Farr’s engagement with chanting faded after her American tour of 1908 and the publication of *The Music of Speech*. Although she continued to perform occasionally, she grew more interested in writing, and her interest in mystical practices never waned. In 1912 she left England for Ceylon to teach at a women’s school; she never returned, dying of cancer there in 1917. After the Great War, Yeats, too, moved on to other matters: to Irish politics, to balladry, to a new, astringent style of poetry. But near the end of his life, in the 1930s, the bardic impulse reawoke. The advent of broadcasting seemed to offer the opportunity to chant directly to the people; and with broadcasting came a younger generation interested in taking up and reapplying the principles that he and Farr had developed. An actor, Victor Clinton-Baddeley, proved willing and able to be trained by Yeats personally; and from America came the young Harry Partch, who had independently developed theories of declamation that greatly resembled Yeats’s. These and others contributed in differing ways to a new team, a community working in the last of Yeats’s laboratories: the broadcast studio. From these we have the only audio traces that remain: a handful of poems read by Yeats and several dozen recordings made by his latter-day acolytes. These are the closest we can get to the experience of Yeats’s method as actually practiced at the time.

However, these late recordings differ in many respects from Yeats’s accounts from thirty years before. As described at the turn of the century, his work appears to have followed a method that emerged from a solitary, “compositional” use of chanting that continued throughout his life. Kathleen Tynan recalled staying at Yeats’s home when “Willie” was barely twenty: “I used to be awakened . . . by a steady, monotonous sound rising and falling. It was Willie chanting to himself . . .” (Tynan 1913, 191). Fifty years later Yeats was still chanting; his son recalled that in his last months “he would come out on the lawn and sit in a chair with a rug over him . . . He’d make a low tuneless hum and his hand would start beating time . . .” (Schuchard 2008, 400).

This chanting was research only in the most personal sense; it served Yeats simply to conceive and test poetic possibilities, as a composer might try out alternatives at a keyboard.

Its traces were left only in the poem itself, where declamatory inflections and rhythms were vaguely expressed in punctuation and line-breaks, though no more so than in any other verse form. But in the 1890s chanting was transformed from a compositional tool to a social project. The proximate cause seems to have been a visit with George Russell (“A. E.”), who also chanted his poems. The experience persuaded Yeats of the power of notation: “[Russell] was certain that he had written [his verses] to a manner of music, and he had once asked somebody . . . to write out the music and play it. . . . I . . . did not often compose to a tune, yet always to notes that could be written down and played on [Russell’s] organ. . . . When I got to London I gave the notation . . . to [Florence Farr], and she spoke it to me, giving my words a new quality by the beauty of her voice” (Yeats 1902 [1903], 19–21).

Then, as Yeats relates it, he and Farr “began to wander through the wood of error . . . we tried, persuaded by somebody who thought quarter-tones and less intervals the especial mark of speech as distinct from singing, to write out what we did in wavy lines. On finding something like these lines in Tibetan music, we became so confident that we covered a large piece of pasteboard, which now blows up my fire in the morning, with a notation in wavy lines as a demonstration for a lecture” (ibid., 21–22). It is important to note that the *practice* remained paramount: “we tried . . . to write out what we *did*,” Yeats explained (my italics). It was not a question of developing a theory to which declamation would be fit; rather, a declamation that was empirically determined, as before, was to be communicated to others by means of a new notation. The wavy lines resulted, and with this new documentation it became possible to test outcomes, one against the other. Yeats’s project thus moved on from the composition of poetry to the reproduceability of poetic delivery.

Rescue from “the wood of error” came with the addition of another member to the research team: the early-music enthusiast and instrument-builder Arnold Dolmetsch. Dolmetsch contributed not only a more rational, conventional system of notation but also an instrument—a psaltery, designed in collaboration with Yeats and meant to evoke something of antiquity in its simplicity and appearance. The psaltery was, first of all, a tool to ensure accurate reproduction of a chant: by playing key notes at irregular intervals the speaker could remain on pitch. But, secondly, it permitted a new, compositional inflection to be added to the previously unadorned voice. And this in turn invited a new kind of experiment: which words, which syllables, are best reinforced by a sounded note on the psaltery? Successive versions of “Impetuous Heart” (Aleel’s lyric from *The Countess Cathleen*) attest to the many empirical tests which informed the decisions—and also to Dolmetsch’s inclination to press for ever more conventional notation (Schuchard 2008, 52, 53; Yeats 1902 [1903], 23; Yeats 1924, 17). Florence Farr, not surprisingly, created her own method of writing, merely inscribing the letter names for pitches directly above the poetic text (Farr 1909, 23–27).

In its full form, then, the method evolved by Yeats’s associates proceeded in four stages. First, Yeats, Farr, or another practitioner would declaim the text, going over and over it in an intuitive, exploratory way until the reading stabilized into something that could be replicated consistently. Then Farr or Dolmetsch would notate the pitches and inflections, with rhythm sketched only vaguely. An instrument was built—or retuned—to suit the voice in question; Dolmetsch was not at all amiss to tuning the psaltery in quarter-tones if required. Then decisions were taken—compositional decisions, really—about the pitches that should be emphasized by means of the psaltery, and a new score was produced. Finally this notation would be given to others for performance, in part as a test of the accuracy of the “score,” in part to test the reading in public performance.

But the question follows: what does one *do* with such experiments, once the project in question is completed? In particular, what can one do with a practice that is so deeply grounded in the persons, the voices, the very bodies of a generation that is long since passed? In the present instance the question arose because I was asked to make a new piece. The

present account of that work follows a logic of its own that bears only a slight resemblance to the actual chronology of composition. But conceptually it is true to the work, and in retrospect it seems to me to offer a useful instance of the consequences that arise from revisiting an experimental practice that is a century old.

There are at least three possible approaches to the recreation of Yeats's practices. One can use the existing recordings by Yeats and his later colleagues; one can work from the musical notations made by Farr and Dolmetsch; or one can apply Yeats's method to altogether new readings. In composing *Everlasting Voices*, I concentrated on the last of these, but it is useful to look briefly at the first two approaches first.

But even before that, there is the matter of the psaltery. With the commission came two wonderful performers, a clarinetist and an actor. The bass clarinet that I eventually chose to use is a beautiful instrument, but it is far removed from the "murmuring wires" of Yeats's childhood vision. Some of the psalteries built by Dolmetsch survive, but they're in museums. I wasn't about to commission a new one, and I'm not an instrument-builder myself. It seemed necessary to settle on an alternative, and my choice was the autoharp—an American instrument that, perhaps coincidentally, came into prominence at about the same time as Yeats's and Farr's lecture-performances.

The autoharp closely resembles the psaltery, and the playing techniques are similar. Yeats's description of Farr's playing in 1901 implies that the psaltery was held horizontally on the lap, with the performer seated: "a friend," he wrote, "sat with a beautiful stringed instrument upon her knee, and spoke some verses" (Yeats 1902 [1903], 16). In America, the popularity of the autoharp surged in the 1920s and 1930s in the wake of seminal recordings by the Carter Family and others, and Sara Carter generally held the instrument in her lap or placed it on a table. But in a 1907 photograph of Florence Farr she holds the psaltery vertically, as one would a lyre; that she performed in this manner is confirmed in contemporaneous reports of her late tours (Schuchard 2008, 227 and plate 11). Maybelle Carter, Sara's cousin, developed an exactly equivalent technique for the autoharp, and it is this that has been followed by present-day performers like John B. Sebastian.

From a practical point of view the autoharp has certain advantages over a psaltery. It's easier to play; on a psaltery the strings are played singly and are undifferentiated. Dolmetsch remarked on this in a late critique of Farr: "Florence Farr had the poetic feeling," he wrote. "All went well when I played for her—but she could not follow her own voice with her instrument, especially when performing in public" (Schuchard 2008, 353–54). In addition, the autoharp could be retuned to obtain unconventional chords. *Everlasting Voices* uses a tuning that permits both quarter-tone inflections and chords of stacked fourths (rather than the triads for which the autoharp is designed).

With the "psaltery" reinvented, it was tempting to turn to Yeats's own recordings and to those by Clinton-Baddeley and other associates (Yeats 1932 [1955]; Clinton-Baddeley 1958 [1973]). I approached Yeats's recording of "The Lake Isle of Innisfree" as if I were Arnold Dolmetsch: that is, I notated the tones of his reading on a conventional staff. (For the sake of authenticity I first tried a "wavy-line" notation, but—like Yeats—I found this too imprecise to be useful.) Then I extracted what seemed to be the central, reference pitches; as I had guessed from studying Yeats's method, this was as much a compositional process as an analytical one. Lastly, I synthesised a psaltery part from sound samples recorded from the autoharp, one string at a time. When this was superimposed this on Yeats's recording, I had, hypothetically, a recording of a performance that might have been heard in 1901.

This was an interesting activity, and I believe the results are convincing; but it was not a composition. The process was more akin to the restoration of a missing part in a Renaissance motet: there were decisions to be made and variants to be tested, but both the compositional technique and the standards to be applied were known in advance. The next

alternative was to turn to the notated poems. There are many more of these (though the repertoire is still quite limited), and often the notation is precise enough to attempt to recreate a performance from it. I chose “Impetuous Heart,” which has a particularly rich notational history. I had my psaltery, and it only remained to learn the score and develop a performance technique. I practiced, recorded myself, practiced some more, and eventually achieved a level of mediocrity that seemed adequate for my purposes. This too was interesting and—with more practice or a more talented performer—probably aesthetically convincing; but it too led nowhere compositionally. I was, after all, merely executing a score, not producing a new one; and though I certainly learned quite a bit—for example, about how hard it is *not* to “sing”—I didn’t advance Yeats’s ideas significantly.

So in the end I adopted the third, most open option: to pursue the method but to deliberately disregard the traces, the scores, the specific artifacts of Yeats’s original project. Yeats’s method, as I have said, was grounded in *practice*, in the experiential, empirical discovery of a reading, with all else following from that: instrument, tuning, notation, reproduction. I had my artist, my Florence Farr, in the person of Nuala Hayes; I simply asked her to listen to Yeats, read what he had to say, and then to arrive at her own rendition of the poetry. She sent me a recording, and from that I derived an autoharp tuning that suited her voice, together with a notation. I was again acting as Dolmetsch, but this time in response to a living person, who had her own embodied understand of the text; suddenly the project seemed *alive*.

In the meantime I had been working on a script for the piece as a whole, and I felt strongly that I wanted to include Yeats as a presence: the history of chanting seemed deeply entwined with the story of Maud Gonne, and that was in part the story I wanted to tell. I determined that I would include excerpts from Yeats’s *Memoirs* and Gonne’s letters; Nuala would read the latter, but for the former I needed a second, male voice. This I found in the talented and responsive Irish actor and playwright, Dennis Dennehy. I sent him a collection of texts with the request that he, too, listen to Yeats; then I went to Ireland and recorded his beautiful readings. These became the threads winding through the channels of fixed media, and these too I supplied with “psaltery” accompaniments, using the samples I had recorded.

My objective now was to work in the spirit of Yeats, with due regard for his method and thought, but *not* necessarily to “recreate” events that might have occurred a century ago. *Everlasting Voices* could thus become a “new” composition, written from a perspective that resembled Yeats’s but differed in crucial respects. I grew preoccupied with the full spectrum of monody, from quotidian speech to abstract music. The extremes I assigned to Maud Gonne, who seemed such a polarised being: Gonne’s letters should receive a wholly prosaic reading, while Yeats’s recollections of Gonne are accompanied by arching, romantic melodies on the bass clarinet. In between there is live, chanted poetry (the actor as Florence Farr), traditional Irish melody (the clarinetist playing “Yellow Haired Donough,” a tune explicitly cited in *The Countess Cathleen*), heightened speech (“Yeats”—Dennis Dennehy—reading from Yeats’s *Memoirs*), and theatrical oratory (excerpts from the two “Countess” plays). The psaltery, too, is expanded: from quarter-tones to microtonal and “bent” pitches, impossible on an acoustic instrument but easily accomplished electronically; from single tones to chords and counterpoints; from plucked strings to clarinet samples and electronically derived drones.

But these, now, are historical details; what you hold now is merely a record of *my* work. *Everlasting Voices* calls for everlasting re-creation, in a sense; the score is not the experience. Because the score was made for specific circumstances, specific people, it now functions exactly as did Yeats’s and Farr’s texts for me: it is a spur to creative work that, I hope, suggests paths for the creators—the performers—you!—to explore. I would like to think that will be a happy experience for all concerned.

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