

Joseph Klein

Three Poems from *Felt*  
(after Alice Fulton)

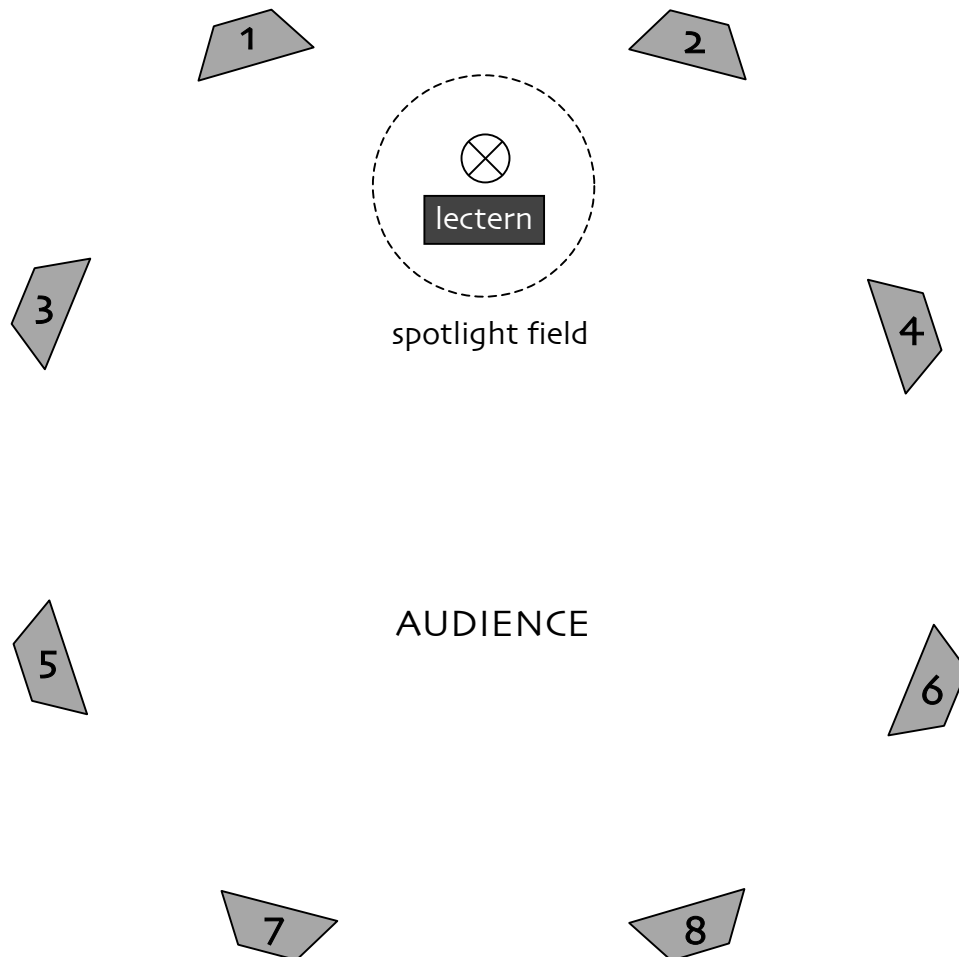
poetry reading with computer music

(2005)

Duration: c. 8'

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

**Three Poems from *Felt*** is a poetry reading with an 8-channel computer music environment. The computer music may be played as audio files directly from the computer or from a pre-recorded medium (e.g., ADAT). The performance set up is as follows:



The performer (female) is to stand at center stage behind a lectern. The lectern should be of fairly substantial size, allowing only the performer's head and upper torso to be seen by the audience. The performer's voice must be amplified but not processed, and the signal should be bused to channels 1 and 2; if necessary, the signal may be bused to channels 3 and 4 as well, though the primary placement should be in the speakers behind the performer. The microphone should be placed unobtrusively, and must not block the performer's face from the audience's view.

The hall should be dark with only a single spotlight illuminating the performer and lectern. The spotlight requires a light blue gel and must be directed from above at a sharp angle (60 to 80 degrees) in order to create a tight focus on the performer, yet without creating dramatic shadows on her face. The performer should enter the stage once the hall is dark and the spotlight faded up. At the conclusion of the work, the performer should remain motionless at the lectern as the spotlight is slowly faded out (over approximately 5 seconds); the house lights may be raised once the applause begins.

The overall effect of the work should be that of a poetry reading rather than a musical performance. Thus, the music should be considered supportive to the text itself. It is important that the text be clearly understood throughout the entire work, without requiring any unnatural projection on the part of the performer. Any necessary adjustments may be made by the technician at the mixer, and should be subtle.

The performer will need a stopwatch (preferably with a large display) in order to coordinate the text with the music. The stopwatch should be started precisely as the title of each poem is read, which is the cue for the technician to start the music. It is absolutely critical that the stopwatch not make a sound—such as a beep or chirp—when activated! This feature must be disabled prior to the performance.

The score consists of the text (as originally printed in *Felt*) with timings indicated in red along the left side of the page. A natural reading of the text is more important than precise coordination with the music, and slight fluctuations in the relationship between the text and the music should be expected. However, the performer should practice the pacing of the text along with the music in order to maintain as close a relationship as possible. For this purpose, a 2-channel version of the computer music—with and without the text included—is available.

Arrows adjacent to the timings in the score indicate alignment of the music with the text: arrows pointing directly to a line of text indicate coordination with the beginning of the line; arrows between lines of text indicate coordination somewhere in the middle of the line. Timings in bold-face type indicate important coordination points.

In the first poem, "Prequel," the timings are marked in ten-second increments since the text is not presented in clearly defined stanzas. The effect should be that of a constant flow: adjusting to the timings is perhaps most difficult in this movement; the performer should frequently check the stopwatch and make use of sonic cues.

In the second poem, "By Her Own Hand," timings are indicated at the beginning of each stanza and at key points within the stanzas. Here adjustments may be made fairly easily between stanzas, if necessary.

The third and final poem, "Call the Mainland," includes several long pauses in the delivery of the text where the music continues; these pauses are demarcated in red print to the right of the text. Timings are indicated at key points in the poem, which do not necessarily coincide with the beginning of stanzas. As with the other movements, the reader should be thoroughly familiar with the sonic cues.



## PROGRAM NOTE

I have been an admirer of Alice Fulton's poetry for several years now, and have used her evocative turns of phrase as the titles of two of my previous works. I had wanted to compose an actual setting of her poems for quite some time, but never found the appropriate medium—the words themselves just seemed too perfect to tamper with musically. It finally occurred to me that what I was really interested in creating was an elaboration of a poetry reading—after all, poets often "perform" their own works just as musicians do, so why not take that as a point of departure to create a sonic environment around the spoken words? These three poems from Fulton's 2001 collection *Felt* lend themselves particularly well to such a setting.

**Three Poems from *Felt*** was first performed by Alice Fulton on April 4, 2005 at the University of North Texas.

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I. Prequel

II. By Her Own Hand

III. Call the Mainland



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(2005)

I.

0:00 ▶ P R E Q U E L

0:05 ▶ Before the blank—full of fresh  
grain scent and flecked  
like oatmeal woven flat—

0:10 ▶ canvas, before the blank canvas  
is stretched or strained  
tight as an egg, before then—

0:20 ▶ sketch. It doesn't catch  
commencement: it won't hook  
the scene like a rug,  
or strategize too far ahead.

0:30 ▶ It isn't chess. It doesn't expect  
the homestretch or the check.

Each line braves rejection

0:40 ▶ of the every, edits restless  
all into a space that's still  
the space of least commitment, distilling  
latitudes in draft.

0:50 ▶ It would domesticate the feral  
dusk and stockpile dawn.  
It would be commensurate, but settles  
for less, settles

1:00 ▶ prairies in its channels. Great plains  
roar and waterfall, yawn and frost

between the lines.

From hunger, from blank

1:10

▶ and black, it models erotic

stopped tornadoes, the high relief

1:20

▶ of trees. In advance or retreat, in terraced  
dynamics—its bets are hedged—with no dead-  
bolt perspective. Its point of view? One

with the twister in vista glide,

1:30

▶ and the cricket in the ditch,

with riverrain and turbine's trace.

Inside the flux of

flesh and trunk and cloudy come,

1:40

▶ within the latent

marrow of the egg, the amber

traveling waves is where

its vantage lies.

1:50

▶ Entering the tornado's core,  
entering the cricket waltzed by storm—

to confiscate the shifting give

and represent the with-

out which.

[2:20—End]

## II.

**0:00** ▶ BY HER OWN HAND

**0:10** ▶ If you believe you would have caressed every lash  
and freckle that I was  
but for decorum, I appreciate the thought.  
Have you ever been embarrassed

**0:20** ▶ by a frugal kiss? It is embarrassing to live.

**0:27** ▶ My love for my husband was all balled up  
with mothering. I had compassion for any flesh  
trying that hard to be iron. Imagine  
living with his bluster and hiss

**0:40** ▶ for forty years. Have you ever been embarrassed  
by a frugal kiss? I died of it. Just say I sublimed.

**0:50** ▶ Snowflakes do this all the time. Say I was tired  
of eating beige, for heaven's sake. Of  
molestations imposed by my own body.  
Let's see. I wasn't stoical enough for me.

**1:10** ▶ You might say I've eased into the trees  
and the autistic fields: eyes like forget-me-  
nots. "Desire." All that business you admire.

**1:20** ▶ The human yen for angels is depraved.  
It decorates death with heaven, longing  
for the note I never left.

- 1:34** ▶ My last sound was like the small release  
of strings and frets you sense  
when a guitarist changes chords.  
Enough to let you know the music's made by hand.
- 1:49** ▶ I am not without regrets,  
picayune as they may seem or plain  
grotesque. I do regret the writhing.
- 2:00** ▶ I wanted to be self-reliant.  
I wanted to reach up and shut  
my own eyes just before I died.

**[2:25—End]**

III.

0:00 ▶ CALL THE MAINLAND

[Pause for next music cue]

0:35 ▶ Nature hates a choir. Have you noticed  
the lack of chorus in the country every dawn?  
The birds spent the night looking down on earth  
as that opaque, unstarred space.  
The vivacious soundscape they create at day

0:50 ▶ must be their amazement  
that the planet's still in place.

[Pause for next music cue]

1:04 ▶ No wait. Time out and whoa. There I go—  
coating the birds' tones with emotion,  
hearing them as my own. I know, I know.

[Pause for next music cue]

1:20 ▶ Yet I can't say birds aren't feeling  
in their hollow bones some resonance of glad  
that night has passed.

I can't claim their hearts don't shake  
when the will to live another day  
in the cascade of all that is  
is strong. Emotion

1:35 ▶ makes its presence felt in flesh.  
Maybe you've noticed—the body speeds  
its reflexes and is moved. It moves. It makes

the heart, lungs, and gut  
remember their lives

1:50 ▶ like sleepers between bouts of sleep.

While more serene delights  
are intellect selective, without cardiac effect:

2:00 ▶ the mind sparks

at a Borges story or elegant proof in math,  
a bliss that doesn't shift  
across the blood-

2:10 ▶ brain barrier. Such heady pleasures  
are never for the birds.

To be key

rather than bit player, of independent means—

2:20 ▶ to sound your own agenda in polyphonic overlay  
as day takes shape == as day takes shape

the birds begin their final take.

2:30 ▶ They'll never know themselves as symbols  
of the sublime. Transcendent  
messy shrines, whose music won't stoop  
to unison or climax—

[Pause for next music cue]

2:51 ▶ tell them I said hi.

[3:00—End]