

KALBA

For viola, electronics and video

Dedicated to my beloved Mother who is the source of everything

The title is the Lithuanian word that stands for language. Quite naturally I turned to my mother tongue, which also happens to be one of the oldest among living languages on our planet. Throughout the duration of the piece, an imaginary evolution and learning of language is revealed in electronics - from various vegetative sounds such as glottal cracks and imitative animalistic sounds to words and sentences and eventually to a song. The video of the piece also simulates a metaphorical journey of the birth of language from primal drawings to organized syntactic formations.

The linguist Roman Jakobson writes that the babbling of infants consists of phonemes, "which are never found within a single language or even a group of languages - consonants of any place of articulation, palatalized and rounded consonants, sibilants, affricates, clicks, complex vowels, diphthongs, etc.". It is known that during their age of "tongue delirium", infants are capable of uttering all conceivable sounds before they learn to use stable phonemes. This amazing array of sounds was produced by the Japanese vocal artist Ami Yamasaki who I met and recorded during our collaborative creative residency at the Pocantico Center, NY. The choral voices heard in Parts II and IV are excerpts from my piece "Chant des Voyelles" (2018) (Incantation of Vowels) performed by VOLTI, San Francisco.

KALBA is a very personal piece if not to say an autobiographical one not only because of my native language. In a way it is a sonic portrait of a few generations of my family. The electronics contain recordings of my mother's voice, my little niece and nephew and also my own. In the last section I sing a lullaby that my Mom used to sing to me when I was a baby. It was an invented melody with only one stanza of lyrics she composed using my name as a character in the song. In my memory it sounded differently from day to day. Sometimes my mother sang it in a bright major key, other days - in a minor key. Yet most often she was meandering melodically as though there was no key or point of reference at all! For this piece I used fragments in a minor key. Maybe because I would have chosen this slightly darker harmonic mode myself if I was to sing it to a baby... or maybe it is simply related to the notion of not continuing my family bloodline and the ensuing sadness...

KALBA has 4 parts that are performed without a break.

Part I. Birth. Vegetative sounds [in the womb...]

Part II. Syllables. Babbling [in the world...]

Part III. Words. Sentences.

Part IV. Lullaby [in the dreams...]

Duration - 19'

Premiere by Karen Bentley Pollick on May 28th, 2020 at CCRMA, Stanford University.