

Janet Oates

2020

Dream-Catcher

A text-instruction piece for Zoom or live performance

For between 4 and 10 vocal performers

Written for and performed (over Zoom) by the CoMA Singers in 2020

flexible duration: perhaps about 3 to 6 minutes

Dream-catcher

PREPARATION

Prepare between 20 and 40 seconds' worth of talk about a dream you have had (at some point in your life). It could be a very humdrum one, or a recurrent fragment, or a fantastical epic. You could tell it simply, or relate some of it in great detail, or choose rather to explain or analyse it, or to summarise it in relation to other dreams or what was going on in your life...

As part of your talk, prepare four gestures:

- A physical action, such as covering your face with your hands, or standing up suddenly
- A noise made with your body, or an un-voiced vocal noise: for example, a clap, stamp, hiss or tongue-click
- A bell-like sound from an object or instrument – perhaps a toy bell, or a triangle, or tapping a mug with a spoon
- A brief, sung melodic, expressive fragment – hummed or wordless, though you may use varied vowels and consonants (e.g. du du-ah). This could be your own invention or a 'found' melody/fragment.

These four gestures should be used once each (in any order) as an integral part of your talk, to act as emotional/dramatic illustration or punctuation.

PERFORMANCE

1. One speaker begins (either nominated in advance or bravely leaping in!)
 2. Others begin when they see/hear a gesture corresponding to their first one, for example if their first gesture is a bell noise, they should start speaking as soon as they hear a bell-noise from a speaker who has already started.
 3. As you are talking about your dream, be aware of the other speakers. You may choose to stop and listen to them at any time, re-starting when you like.
 4. When you have finished your prepared talk, concentrate on everyone else. Pick up on any of the gestures people make, and either imitate them respectfully, or answer with one of your own (prepared) gestures that seems to be a natural response. You may also pick up on and repeat any words or phrases you hear (mistakes in hearing and remembering are inevitable and not 'wrong'). Continue to listen. You may begin to pick up on gestures and words that are themselves copies rather than part of an original telling...
 5. Continue until only gestures are circling round (no words). Copy each other's rather than responding with your own (though the others may now be recycling yours!).
 6. The piece ends when all the dreams have been caught: when the gestural vocabulary is becoming more and more limited. Stop as individuals when you think the time is right.
 7. Or, the group may decide in advance to end the piece by – eventually – all reducing the vocabulary to one (or two) gestures only, by judicious copying. Again, stop as individuals when you think the time is right.
- Variation 1: perhaps it could be the gestures that are dropped (from no.5 onwards), with just words being caught and repeated
 - Variation 2: if there are performers present but not participating in this particular work, perhaps they could be invited to be 'catchers', picking up on and repeating gestures and words; similarly, plants in the audience, or even the audience themselves, could participate like this.