

# sawmill sanctum

for bassoon trio



2023

*for my grandmother, and my uncle*

## **PROGRAM NOTE:**

Inspired by images of a deteriorating sawmill described in Craig Johnson's bluegrass song *Damned Old Piney Mountains*, ***sawmill sanctum*** uses the musical language of the Sacred Harp singing tradition to explore the sawmill's deteriorating interior, as well as the regional impact of the religious, industrial, and social institutions responsible for the sawmill's abandonment.

## **NOTES ON SACRED HARP:**

The Sacred Harp singing tradition is a uniquely American phenomenon that finds its roots in the New England Singing School, heralded by composer and shape-notation advocate William Billings. Several decades after the decline of the New England Singing School, shape-notation singing was revived in the American South after the publication of *The Southern Harmony* in 1835. *The Southern Harmony* was distributed across the American South, and later became popularized as *The Sacred Harp*. Many more editions of *The Sacred Harp* were published, several of which were regionalized (see *The Kentucky Harmony*, and *The Missouri Harmony*), which inadvertently led to the preservation of many American folk hymns and songs.

The Sacred Harp singing tradition is wildly unique, beyond its use of shape-notation. Singers are separated into four groups (SATB), each section gathering on each side of a large square. A leader stands in the middle, beating out the tempo and arpeggiating the approximate key of the tune. No piano or tuning fork is used in the process of tuning the initial key; it is all approximated in observance of the range and capability of the singers. This typically results in wildly microtonal performances, a concept that is reflected in ***sawmill sanctum***.

Sacred Harp singers are largely untrained, which, when guided by the ease of shape-notation and singing leadership, produce a timbre that is gravelly and dark, yet deeply passionate, resonant, and overwhelming. Those who are interested in experiencing this sound are encouraged to seek out recordings and videos from the following groups:

The Alabama Sacred Harp Singers  
Sacred Harp Singers of Cork  
Sacred Harp Singers of Chatahochee Singing Convention

**If you are planning a performance of *sawmill sanctum*, please send an email containing performance details (where/when) and a program to -insert email address here-**

## PERFORMANCE NOTES :

**sawmill sanctum** draws heavy inspiration from Sacred Harp, a 4-part chorale singing tradition from the American South. Sacred Harp singers are largely untrained, but the innovative shape-notation present in Sacred Harp songbooks allows the singers to approximate pitch. The resulting timbre is very unique, and at times very powerful and haunting; imagine a small crowd of people singing loudly in straight tone, with deep vocal gravel. This is the timbre that players of **sawmill sanctum** must aspire to in performance of this work.

This piece features an extensive amount of asynchronous performance. These instances are indicated by brief instructions in the score.

- Be aware of your fellow performers, but lean into the asynchronous aspects; lose yourself in the repetitions.
- Moments in which all performers become synchronous are indicated ahead of time, with instructions in the score to guide players into synchronous performance.
- Placement of musical material in the score is based on an approximation of where players will be at any given time. However, performance can vary from close to the approximation to very far off and still be perfectly valid.

Despite the asynchronous nature of this piece, it is encouraged that players maintain an internal pulse between 56 - 72 bpm (half note pulses) throughout the piece. This helps maintain consistency in note duration, while still giving players enough agency to play asynchronously.

This piece also features extensive use of quarter tone glissandi. The exactness of pitch does not matter that much in these instances; what does matter is that the distance the glissandi cover is less than a semitone.

Repeated figures have instructions that designate how often material is repeated. These must be followed as exactly as possible.

**iii. ... now sing the notes...** deviates from the style the rest of the movements inhabit. In **iii.**, players should sing and play indicated notes simultaneously.

- Because **sawmill sanctum** draws an extensive amount of inspiration from the musical structure and style of the Sacred Harp singing tradition, sung pitches are notated in Sacred Harp shape notation. The difference in notehead shapes does not matter, but the pitches do.
- Pitches can be sung in any octave. Sing with whatever range is most comfortable to you (it is important to note that while changing octaves does affect tone and color, the variety in sound from one player to the next is encouraged to ensure that every performance is special to those playing it, a philosophy very much in line with Sacred Harp singing sessions).
- Sung pitches do not have to be immediately exact. Do your best to be as precise with sung pitches as possible, but if you miss the exact pitch requested and have to adjust, you will still create a really interesting (and, in moderation, encouraged) texture that is perfectly valid for performance of this work.

**v. return again** also deviates slightly from the predominant texture in this piece. In **v.**, bassoon 2 is responsible for individually starting a series of 4 cascading phrases:

- Once bassoon 2 plays their first note, bassoon 1 comes in a moment later with their first note.
- Once bassoon 1 plays their first note, bassoon 3 comes in a moment later with their first note.
- After each player plays through the whole duration of their 4 whole-note phrase, they pause until bassoon 2 plays the first note of their next phrase.
- Once bassoon 3 finishes their 4 whole note phrase (fading away), bassoon 2 pauses for the instructed duration before beginning their next phrase.

Any questions or comments regarding the performance of **sawmill sanctum** can be sent to:

-insert email address here-

I am more than happy to help explain or clarify any unclear details.

# sawmill sanctum

## for bassoon trio

### i. banisters

*cold, quiet; as if a cold breeze pushing through the wooden walls of a large, deteriorating atrium (♩ = c. 56-72)*

The score is written for six bassoon parts, grouped into three systems. Each part is in the bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The first system includes Bassoon 1, Bassoon 2, and Bassoon 3. Bassoon 2 and Bassoon 3 have dynamics of *pp* and *(pp)* respectively. Performance instructions include 'asynchronously repeat 3 times' for Bassoon 2 and 'asynchronously repeat 4 times' for Bassoon 3. The second system includes Bsn. 1, Bsn. 2, and Bsn. 3. Bsn. 1 and Bsn. 2 have dynamics of *pp* and *(pp)* respectively. Performance instructions include 'asynchronously repeat 4 times' for Bsn. 1 and 'asynchronously repeat 5 times' for Bsn. 2. The third system includes Bsn. 1, Bsn. 2, and Bsn. 3. Bsn. 3 has a dynamic of *(pp)* and a performance instruction of 'asynchronously repeat 3 times'. The score uses various musical notations including slurs, repeat signs, and dynamic markings.

asynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 5 times

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 5 times

Bsn. 3

*pp*

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Bsn. 3

asynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*

ansynchronously repeat 5 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

pause for 8-10 seconds

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*p*

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)*

**ii. whistles through walls**  
*uneasy, slowing coalescing*

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

*(p)*

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 5 times

*(pp)*

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

*(p)*

Bsn. 3

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ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 1

*pp* *p*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 2

*(p)*

Bsn. 3

pause for 8-10 seconds

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

Bsn. 1

pause for 6-8 seconds

*(p)*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 2

*(p)* *(p)*

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)* *p*

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

*(p)*

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 2

*(p)*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 3

*(p)*

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asynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Bsn. 3

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Bsn. 3

Bsn. 1

Bsn. 2

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

*(mf)* *f*

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

Bsn. 2

*f*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 3

*f*

Bsn. 1

pause for 4-6 seconds

ansynchronously repeat until bsn. 1 hits high B $\flat$

Bsn. 2

*sfpp* *(pp)*

ansynchronously repeat until bsn. 1 hits high B $\flat$

Bsn. 3

*sfpp* *(pp)*

(♩ = c. 56-72)

synchronized with other players

Bsn. 1

*(pp)* *sfpp* *ff*

synchronized with other players

Bsn. 2

*(pp)* *ff*

synchronized with other players

Bsn. 3

*(pp)* *ff*

iii. ... now sing the notes...

loud and brazen, yet ghostly; shake the dust from off the floor

sing and play into instrument; sung notes are notated in Sacred Harp shape notation

Bsn. 1

*ff* become asynchronous from other players

Bsn. 2

*ff* become asynchronous from other players

Bsn. 3

*ff* become asynchronous from other players

asynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

pause for 6-8 seconds

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

pause for 3-5 seconds

*pp*

asynchronously repeat 6 times

Bsn. 3

pause for 3-5 seconds

*(pp)*

iv. splinters

quiet again; fractured, with creases and seams

asynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 2 times

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)*

asynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*

Bsn. 1

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 3

Bsn. 1

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 1

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

*(pp)*

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

*(pp)*

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ansynchronously repeat 2 times

ansynchronously repeat 4 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

Bsn. 3

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

*(pp)*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

ansynchronously repeat 3 times

still asynchronous

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

pause for 3-5 seconds

*(pp)*; extremely still, as if unmoving

ansynchronously repeat 2 times

still asynchronous

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*

pause for 3-5 seconds

*(pp)*; extremely still, as if unmoving

still asynchronous

Bsn. 1

pause for 2-4 seconds

*(pp)*; extremely still, as if unmoving

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*  
asynchronously repeat 10 times

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*  
asynchronously repeat 10 times

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*  
asynchronously repeat 10 times

Bsn. 1

*(pp)*  
asynchronously repeat 10 times

Bsn. 2

*(pp)*  
to nothing

Bsn. 3

*(pp)*  
to nothing

once bsn. 1 fades away,  
pause for 2-4 seconds before  
moving on to v. return again

v. return again

*muted, yet warm; the remains of a phantom congregation*  
staggered entrances indicated by arrows

Bsn. 1  
*(pp)*; in cascading motion - follow bsn. 2

Bsn. 2  
*(pp)*; in cascading motion - signal bsn. 1 entrance

Bsn. 3  
*(pp)*; in cascading motion - follow bsn. 1

to nothing

1-2 sec. pause

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of a musical score for three bassoons. Each part (Bsn. 1, 2, and 3) is written on a five-line staff. Bsn. 1 is in the soprano clef, while Bsn. 2 and 3 are in the bass clef. The music consists of a series of notes connected by curved lines, with small triangles indicating staggered entrances. Annotations include dynamic markings *(pp)* and performance instructions like "in cascading motion" and "follow bsn. 2". A box labeled "1-2 sec. pause" is positioned at the end of the system, with an arrow pointing to the end of the music.

Bsn. 1  
*(pp)*

Bsn. 2  
*(pp)*

Bsn. 3  
*(pp)*

to nothing

2-3 sec. pause

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of the musical score. It follows the same notation and staggered entrance structure as the first system. The dynamic marking *(pp)* is placed at the beginning of each staff. A box labeled "2-3 sec. pause" is positioned at the end of the system, with an arrow pointing to the end of the music.

Bsn. 1  
*(pp)*

Bsn. 2  
*(pp)*

Bsn. 3  
*(pp)*

to nothing

3-4 sec. pause

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of the musical score. It continues the staggered entrance pattern. The dynamic marking *(pp)* is placed at the beginning of each staff. A box labeled "3-4 sec. pause" is positioned at the end of the system, with an arrow pointing to the end of the music.

Bsn. 1

*pp*

to nothing

Bsn. 2

*pp*

to nothing

5-6 sec. pause

Bsn. 3

*pp*

to nothing

all together now...

Bsn. 1

*pp*

Bsn. 2

*pp*

Bsn. 3

*pp*

asynchronously repeat 10 times  
gradually shift sung vowels: aah-eee-ooo-aah-etc.

Bsn. 1

*f*

to nothing

asynchronously repeat 10 times  
gradually shift sung vowels: aah-eee-ooo-aah-etc.

Bsn. 2

*f*

to nothing

asynchronously repeat 10 times  
gradually shift sung vowels: aah-eee-ooo-aah-etc.

Bsn. 3

*f*

to nothing