

# *Plastic Fish*

for soprano, piano, and plastic waste  
by Clint McCallum

**Notes About the Piece:** *Plastic fish* was written at the request of the soprano/piano duo Astralis (Stephanie Aston and Katalin Lukacs) for an ongoing programmatic project called “Rising Waters.” While composing the piece I was going on daily walks to the banks of the Patapsco River in downtown Baltimore. There I sat and watched a diversity of plastic waste float on the surface of the water, articulating the various shapes and rhythms of the waves as they oscillated in and out of the harbor. I started trying to imagine Ravel’s *Une barque sur l’océan* in a world where the oceans are filled with plastic. And so the soprano and pianist to “play” plastic trash in addition to their instruments. The lyrics are a translation of the coordinates of the “Great Pacific Garbage Patch” (a Texas-sized island of trash floating in the Pacific Ocean) using the *Navajo Code Talkers Dictionary*, which was the lexicon that the US military used to transmit sonar communication during World War II. While it clearly contains extra-musical political and historical dimensions, the piece is also a “wave-dance” that presents oscillatory patterns as proportionally related, resonating and/or interfering with one another—like the ocean. The ocean sings to us a timeless indifference. We will drown ourselves in plastic long before we drown the ocean.

**Playing the plactic:**

**Piano:**

When the score says "styrofoam inside of piano" find a solid piece of packing styrofoam about the size of your fist (like the styrofoam the electronics come packaged in), with the sustain pedal down "bow" a group of high strings inside of the piano (between F5 and F6 maybe, just find a place where you have enough room and can produce a loud, painfully shrill, squeaking sound), bow along the length of the string (parallel).

**Soprano:**

- Section A: find a plastic bag and a plastic bottle that sound good. Cut the top off of the bottle so that you can easily sing into it. In this section, you are mostly crumpling and rubbing the two together, making oscillating patterns that are supposed to sound like little waves that you find in a bay (ie not waves you surf on, but the little ones that slap against the shore in areas where there isn't such a broad ebb and flow). I hope this makes sense. When you sing into the bottle exentuate the distance/echo quality, when you sing into the bag sound submerged.
- Section B: find two plastic bags that produce a different sound than the one in section one. These bags should be stiffer, potato chip bags are good. The technique here is both like playing maracas and waving a handkerchief. So the sixteenth notes are indicating alternating up/down motions. The way I'm envisioning it is you have one bag in each hand and they oscillate up/down opposite of one another. Make the motion wave-like, like they're floating in the air.
- Section E: The sound of plastic getting crushed loudly. Maybe liter sized soda bottles that you crush into one another, maybe a trash can filled with plastic that you crush with a 2x4.

# Plastic Fish for Astralis

A.1

♩ = 46

Soprano

Plastic

Piano

*p* sonar-like

*f* into bag

6:4 whisper

6:4

Beh Eh Hoe Zin Nah As Dzoh Bee Nah Kah Nee Lin Nee

crinkle bag against bottle

mimicing water calmly lapping at shore, dynamics ad lib...

like the surface of water

15:16

5:4

5

12:16

13:16

15:16

5:4

12:8

15:16

9:8

9:8

*p*

let ring...

S

Pls

Pno.

*p* into bottle, like a distant echo

*f* bag

*p* bottle

bottle

ord.

Tlow Chin Tсах Dzeh Ah Ah Woh Tseh Gah Gah Ah Jah Ah Jah Nahl Kid

3:2

3:2

5:4

3:2

5:4

12:8

12:8

3:2

3:2

5:4

3:2

15:16

3:2

A.2

S

Pls

Pno.

bottle

bag

Gloh lh Ah Jah Klesh Ah Ah Woh Tlo Chin Ah Jah Tсах

12:8

5:4

3:2

12:8

12:8

9:8

5:4

6:4

5:4

12:8

12:8

12:8

5:4

6:4

15:16

*ppp*

A.3

S 2  
18  
bottle  
bag  
bottle ord. bottle ord.  
bag  
bottle

Pls 18  
Dzeh Chu Oh Lin Chu Oh Ah Woh Tsah Ah As Zih Choh ooo Lin Ah Keh Dee Glin Ah Jah Nahl Kid Claw Ghee Ah Woh Law Chee Ah Woh Tseh Gah Gah Ah

Pno. 18  
styrofoam inside piano  
p  
p  
f  
ff  
fff  
p  
ppp  
p

S 27  
27  
bag  
bag  
bottle ord.  
bag  
bottle  
bag

Pls 27  
Jah Ah Gah Glin Ah Chee Mah Eh Ah Chee Nahl Kid Moh Ah See Ah Woh Gah Woh La Chee Claw Tsah Tlow Chin Tseh Gah Ah Keh Dee Glee Nee Teh Low Gah Woh Ah Woh Ah Woh Toe Do Bee Nah Kah

Pno. 27  
12:8  
15:8  
3:2  
3:2  
3:2  
8va  
12:8  
9:8  
12:8  
15:8  
p  
ppp  
p

A.4

S 34  
34  
bottle  
bag  
btl ord.  
bottle ord.  
btl ord.

Pls 34  
Ah Woh Tseh Gah Tloe Chin Tsah Teh Saw Duh Zeh Chuh Ooo Oh Teh Leh Oh Chee In Gah Ah Woh Tsah Ah Zih Ah Woh Glow Oh Iht Low

Pno. 34  
15:16  
12:8  
15:16  
12:8  
15:16  
styrofoam inside piano  
p  
p  
ppp

42 *bottle* *bag* *bottle* ♩=104

S  
Chin Nah Kid Tsah Teh Low Chin Gah Ah Woh Tseh Gah

Pls

Pno.

**B.1** ♩=92

S  
Toe Doo Oh Bee Nah Kah Toe Doo Oh Bee Nah Kah Oh Bee Nah Kah Toe Doo Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee

Pls  
*plastic bag wave*

Pno.  
*a bouncy staccato*

**B.2**

S  
Nee Lih Nee Toe Doo Oh Bee Nah Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee Nee Lih Nee

Pls

Pno.

89

S. *mf* < *f* *mf* *f* *mf* < *f* *mf* < *f* *mf* < *f*

Oh Bee Nah Kah Toe Doo Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee Toe Doo Oh Bee Nah Oh Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee

Pls. *ppp* *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp*

Pno. *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *p*

103

S. *mf* < *f* *mf* *ff*

Nee Lih Nee Toe Doo Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee Keh Yah Dah Nah Leh!!

Pls. *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp* *mf* *ppp*

Pno. *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *ppp* *f* *stay forte!!*

B.3

123

S. *ff* *f*

Toe Doo Bee Nah Kah Nee Lih Nee To Ahl Tesh Hoe Gahn Keh Yah Dah Nah

Pls. *mf*

Pno. *mf* *steady, sharp*

C.1

C.2

136

S

Leh Toe Ahl Tesh Hoe Gahn Oh - Ah

Pno.

145

S

Oh - Ah Oh Oh - Ah Oh - Ah - Oh Oh -

Pno.

152

S

Ah Oh - Ah Oh - Ah Oh - Ah

Pno.

C.3

160

S

Oh - Ah Ah - - - - Oh

Pno.

6  
167

S

*light and soft, but also pure and projected*

Oh - - - Ah Oh -

Pno.

173

S

Ah Oh - - - Ah - - - Oh Ah - Oh - Ah -

Pno.

179

S

Oh Ah - - - Oh

*light* *heavy*

Pno.

C.4

184

S

Ah - - - Oh Ah - - -

Pno.



C.5

*p*

*f*

*p*

7

S 188  
Oh Ah Kah Ah

Pno.

S 192  
Kah Ah Kah

Pno.

S 196  
Ah Kah

Pno.

S 203  
Ah

Pno.

**D.1** ♩=104

*ff*

slowly fading out over several repetitions

styrofoam inside piano

*ppp*

*ff*

*ff*

8  
213  
S  
emphasize "k" sound throughout...

Kah  
8va-----

Ah  
8va-----

Pno.

ppp  
ff

222  
S

Kha Ah Kha

Pno.

ppp  
ff

D.2

232  
S

Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah

Pno.

241  
S

Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah

Pno.

D.3

249 S Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah Ah Kah

249 Pno.

255 S Ah Kah

255 Pno.

266 S [E.1] ♩=46

266 Pno. *ppp*

275 S *p* Oh Ah crush plastic, loudly! *fff*

275 Pls

275 Pno. *p* *fff*

10  
278

S

Pls

Pno.

E.2 *shrieking!!!*

Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe

286

S

Pls

Pno.

*ppp*  $\leq$  *p*

Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh Hoe Gahn Toe Al Tesh

Oh Oh

*ppp* *p*

3:2 9:8 9:8 13:8

293

S

Pls

Pno.

*fff*

Ah

E.3

Toe Al Tesh Hoe GahnToe

*fff*



