

Problem Child  
for double bass and facial expression

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## Instrumentation

Double Bass

Facial Expression

### *Face Shape (Sutton Sign Writing)*

The entire catalog of discrete SSW symbols can be found online at <http://signbank.org>. Below I have listed each symbol used in the piece:



Mouth closed, eyes half open



Half open frown (slack-jawed), eyes half open



Closed smile, eyes half open



Closed smile, eyes half open, head tilted toward wall



Open smile, eyes half open



Open smile, eyes half open, head tilted toward wall



Open smile, eyes half open, nostrils flared (or, nose wrinkled)



Open smile, eyes wide open



Open smile, eyes wide open, sucking in air




Mouth wide open, eyes wide open, head tilted toward wall

*Mouth Shape (International Phonetic Alphabet)*

ʊ	As in "put" or "hood"
ɑ	As in "father"
bæ	As in "bat"
œ	As in French "honneur"
ə	As in "bird"
ɹ	As in "red"
i	As in "eat"
eɪ	As in "gay"
oʊ	As in "old"

*Articulation*

- Expression held or continued
- Gradual, continuous change (*glissando*) from one expression to the next
-  Oscillation between mouth or face shapes
- \* Cover entire face with any object

## **Instructions**

I have used a script system called Sutton SignWriting (SSW) in order to denote facial expressions. Below the SSW symbols I have used the International Phonetic Alphabet to indicate what shape the expressionist's mouth should make when indicated as open. If a change in mouth shape is indicated without a change in face shape, then the face shape is to be held through the indicated mouth shape change (denoted by a dashed line).

The facial expressionist and double bassist are both to face the audience, with the expressionist positioned directly in front of the bassist such that the bassist's figure is blocked from view as fully as possible by the expressionist when seen from straight ahead. The bassist should position herself as closely as possible behind the expressionist. By this setup the performers will be unable to watch each other during performance.

Timing is left unspecified. The temporal value of the notes and rests need not be consistent or proportional to one another; they are simply visual suggestions for pacing and phrasing. For example, sixteenth notes are used to indicate a very short rhythmic value in contrast to the longer value of the basic, pulse-setting stemless note, which in turn contrasts the dramatically longer, pulseless value of the double whole notes.

Because they are unable to cue each other face-to-face, and because of the unspecified temporal value and placement of each event, the performers must determine together the phrasing of each event, and synchronization must therefore be internalized. However, a cue system that accommodates a more spontaneous interpretation of the vague rhythmic values and unwieldy staging would be welcome.

One of my compositional aims was that the facial expression observed by the audience might change their perception of the sound of the double bass occurring at that moment. Through a sort of suspension of disbelief, the audience might choose to "hear" the sound of the bass as issuing from the expressionist's mouth, and thus "hear" the formant of the vowel suggested by the expressionist's mouth shape. Likewise, they may also "hear" sounds that the bassist is not making when the expressionist holds an expression for longer than the bassist holds a note.

I.

Face

Double Bass

u u u a u

*p*

Face

Double Bass

u a u a u a u

*p*

Face

Double Bass

\* y y y u œ œ œ œ œ œ œ œ œ œ


*p*

Face

Double Bass

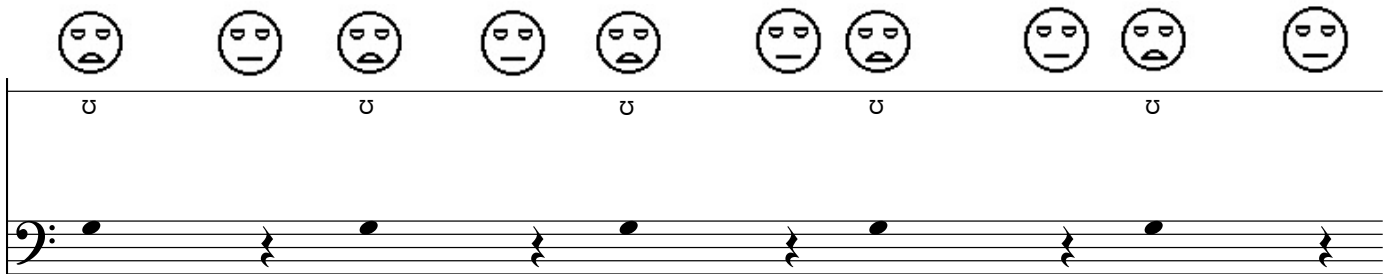
u pull cheek y y y a

*pp f*

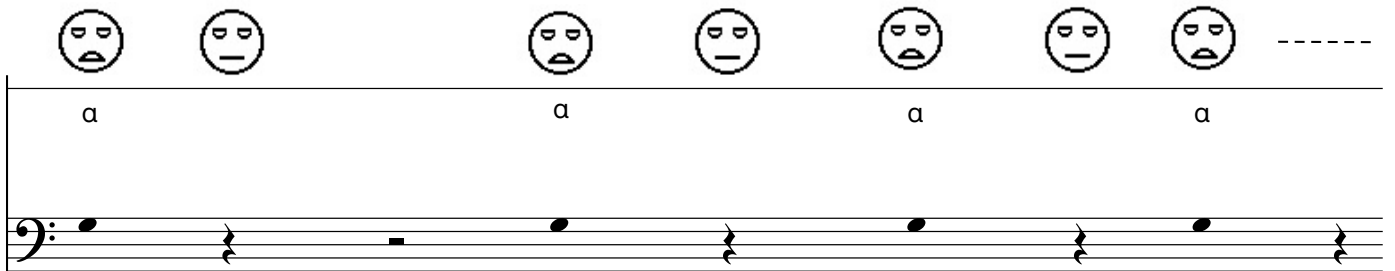
  
bow scrape

## II.

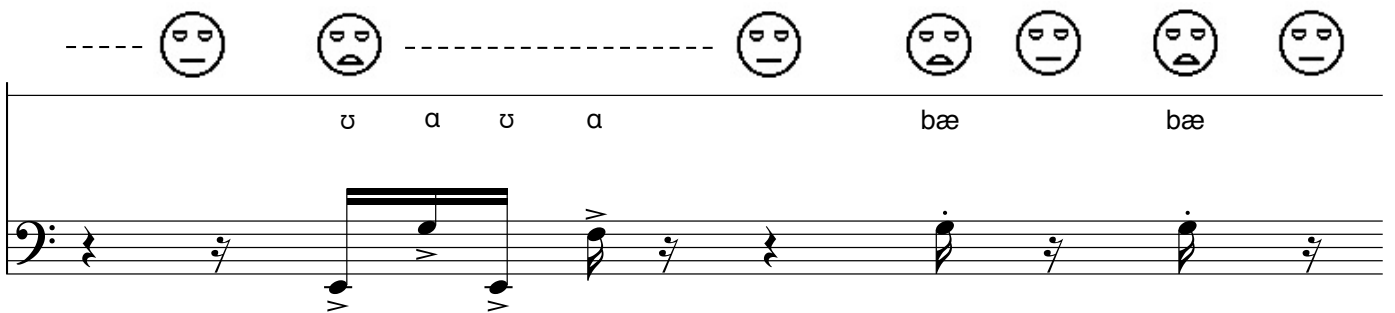
ū ū ū ū ū ū ū ū ū



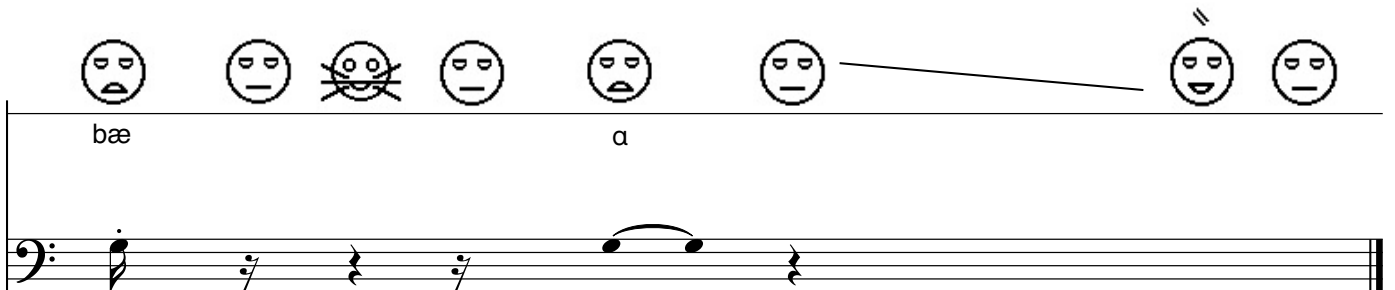
ā ā ā ā ā ā



ū ā ū ā bæ bæ

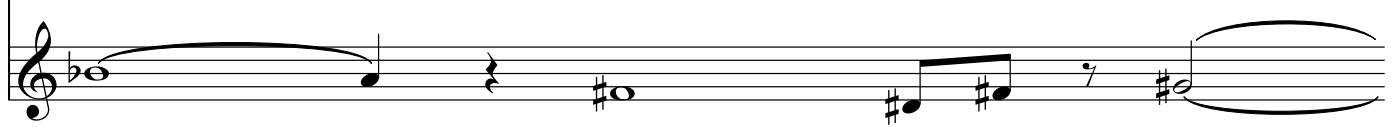


bæ ā

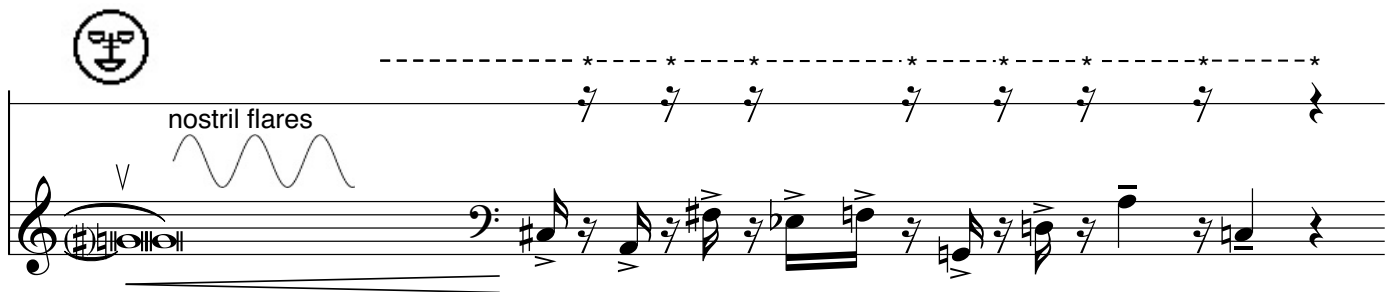


### III.

ei ei ei a ei ei




nostril flares



o o o

*p*



ei i ou ou i ei a

