

ANDREW LOVETT

THREE POEMS BY MIROSLAV HOLUB

*for mezzo-soprano and piano*

2008

Three Poems by Miroslav Holub

*for mezzo-soprano and piano*

(2008)

Duration: approx 12 minutes

(I) Brief Reflection on Accuracy

(II) The Clock

(III) Parallels Syndrome

*Brief Reflection On Accuracy* was first published in MIROSLAV HOLUB: Poems Before and After: Collected English translations, translated by Ewald Osers (1990) and used with permission from the publisher, Bloodaxe Books.

*The Clock* and *Parallels Syndrome* were published in MIROSLAV HOLUB Vanishing Lung Syndrome, translated by David Young, published by Faber and Faber, 1990. The translations are used with permission from David Young.

In Memory of Peter Lipton, 9 October 1954 - 25 November 2007

## Programme note:

This cycle of three songs based on poems by Miroslav Holub was composed as a tribute to Peter Lipton.

Peter Lipton was the Hans Rausing Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science at Cambridge University. He was much admired for his remarkable ability to communicate complex scientific and philosophical ideas. In particular, he relished stories and humour as ways of exploring problems.

These three poems by Holub evoke aspects of Peter's style. They describe classic scientific problems: accuracy, measurement, time, the convergence of parallel lines. I don't know whether Peter would have agreed with the interpretations suggested by Holub, but I think he would have savoured their precision, lucidity, humour and humanity.

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***The Clock*** and ***Parallels Syndrome*** were translated by David Young and are used with his permission.

## Performance instructions:

The first song is mostly recitative, except for the two short arias for the soldier and the clock-maker. The recit passages should be light, half-sung - almost sprechgesang - and rhythmically free.

In the last song, breaths should be taken where needed, preserving the feel of the long lines.

Across metrical changes, quaver always equals quaver.

### I) Brief Reflection On Accuracy

Fish  
always accurately know where to move and when,  
and likewise  
birds have an accurate built-in time sense  
and orientation.

Humanity, however,  
lacking such instincts resorts to scientific  
research. Its nature is illustrated by the following  
occurrence.

A certain soldier  
had to fire a cannon at six o'clock sharp every evening.  
Being a soldier he did so. When his accuracy was  
investigated he explained:

I go by  
the absolutely accurate chronometer in the window  
of the clockmaker down in the city. Every day at seventeen  
forty-five I set my watch by it and  
climb the hill where my cannon stands ready.  
At seventeen fifty-nine precisely I step up to the cannon  
and at eighteen hours sharp I fire.

And it was clear  
that this method of firing was absolutely accurate.  
All that was left was to check that chronometer. So  
the clockmaker down in the city was questioned about  
his instrument's accuracy.

Oh, said the clockmaker  
this is one of the most accurate instruments ever. Just imagine,  
for many years now a cannon has been fired at six o'clock sharp.  
And every day I look at this chronometer  
and always it shows exactly six.

So much for accuracy.  
And fish move in the water, and from the skies  
comes a rushing of wings while

Chronometers tick and cannon boom.

### II) The Clock

In the tenth century  
a monk named Gilbert  
put together the first  
mechanical clock:  
the human spirit's yearning  
towards the Eternal Infinite  
needed to be marked off  
by a regular sound.  
It needed a balance wheel,  
an acrobat hanging on a bar  
coming loose.

The regular sound begot bells  
the synchronised bells  
begot towns,  
the towns begot cities, the cities begot more hours,  
the hours begot  
minutes,  
the minutes begot  
seconds,  
a second became a moment.

And there is no nature in a moment,  
No town, No bells no tick.  
No monk. No ash.

The acrobat in the cupola  
reaches for a bar  
which isn't there.

### III) Parallels Syndrome

Two parallels  
always meet  
when we draw them ourselves.

The question is,  
ahead  
or behind us.

Whether the train in the distance  
is coming  
or going.

# Three Poems by Miroslav Holub

Andrew Lovett

## I: Brief Reflection on Accuracy

brisk - declamatory, but light (♩ = c. 104)

Mezzo-Soprano

Piano

*mp*

Fish al - ways

*mp* *p*

3

a - ccu - rate - ly know where to move and when - , and like - wise

*pp*

5

birds - - - - - have an a - ccu - rate built - in - time - - - - sense

8

and o - ri - en - ta - tion. Hu - ma - ni - ty how - e - ver,

13

la - cking such in - stincts re - sorts - - - to sci - en - ti - fic re - search. Its

*sfz*

*sfz*

17

na - ture is i - llus - tra - ted by the fo - llo - wing o - ccu - rance.

*mp*

*sfz*

*pp*

more urgent...

21

A cer-tain sol - dier had to fire a ca - nnon at six o' - clock

26

sharp ev' - ry ev' - ning. Being a sol - dier he did - so. When his



strong, forthright

31

a - ccu - ra - cy - was in - ves - ti - ga - ted he ex - plained: I - - - - - go -

*p* *f*

*sffz* *mf*

38

- - - - - by - - - - - the ab - so - lute - ly a - ccu - rate - - - chro - no - me - ter - in the

*sffz* *mf*

44 *gradual accel.*

win-dow - of the clock-maker down in the ci - ty. E - - - -

3

3

7

*sfz* *f* *mf*

50

- - v'ry day - - - - - at se-venteen - - - forty five - - - - I set-

>

58

- - my watch - by it and - - - - ... climb - - - the hill - - - - -

65

- where my ca-nnon - - - stands rea - - - - - dy.

*sfz* *p*

5

steadier...

71 *p*

At sev'n-teen fif-ty nine pre-cise - ly I step up to the ca-nnon. and at eigh-teen hours sharp

*p* *p*

light, declamatory (like the beginning)

74 *pp*

I fire - . And it was

*pp* *mp*

*8vb-1* *sfpp* *p*

*8vb-*

79

clear that this method of firing was absolutely accurate. All that was left -

*p*

82

- - was to check that chrono - no - me - ter. So the clock - ma - ker down in the ci - ty was

*p*

light, but a little fussy... (c. ♩ = 120)

86

que-stioned a - bout his in - stru - ment's a - ccu - ra - cy. Oh - - -

*p*

*pp*

91

- - - - - said the clock - ma - ker, this is one of the

*p*

97

most a - ccu-rate in - stru-ments e-ver. Just i - ma-gine - , for -

*pp*

101

- ma - ny years now - - - a cannon - - - has been fired - at six o'clock sharp - . And

106

ev - ry day I look at this chro - no - me - ter and al - - - -

*pp*

*mp* *pp* *pp*

light, declamatory (like the beginning)

109

- - - - ways it shows e - xact - ly six. So much for a - ccu - ra - cy. And fish -

*mp*

*sfz*



114

move in the wa - ter.

117

And from the sky - - - - - comes a ru - shing of wings -

121

- - while \_\_\_\_\_ chro - no - me - ters \_\_\_\_\_ tick and

*pp*

128

ca - nnons boom.

*ppp* (whispered)

*sfzpp*

8vb

[ allow sound to sustain as long as possible ]

## II : The Clock

 $c \text{ } \text{♩} = 104$ 

ff

Leo.

3

Detailed description: This system contains the first three measures of the piece. The music is in 3/4 time with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and accents. A dynamic marking of *ff* (fortissimo) is present. The signature 'Leo.' is written below the first measure. A triplet of eighth notes is marked with a '3' in the third measure.

*rit.* -----

4

3

3

pp

3

Detailed description: This system contains measures 4 through 6. A dashed line above the staff indicates a *rit.* (ritardando) section. Measure 4 begins with a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo). The right hand has a melodic line with a triplet of eighth notes in measure 5. The left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment, also featuring a triplet of eighth notes in measure 5. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 5/4 at the end of measure 6.

7

p

3

Detailed description: This system contains measures 7 through 9. The music returns to a 3/4 time signature. The right hand has a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment, featuring a triplet of eighth notes in measure 9.

confiding (c. ♩ = 96)

10

*p*

In the tenth cen - tu-ry - - -

8<sup>vb</sup>-----

16

*pp*

*ppp*

- - - a monk named Gil - bert in - ven - ted the first - - - - me - cha - ni - cal clock.

♩ = 120 (clockwork)

20

the hu - man spi - rit's - year - - - ing to - wards the e - ter - - - nal in - fi - nite - - - needed to be

24

marked - - - - off by a re - gu - lar sound - - - . It needed a ba - lance wheel -

steadier...

*pp*

\* High G if it can be floated - otherwise, the lower octave

♩ = 120 (clockwork) *very gradual accel...*

28

an a-cro - bat han - ging on a bar co-ming loose - - -

*p*

32

The re-gu-lar sound - - - be-got bells - - -

*sfz*

37

the syn - chro - nized bells - - - be - got towns - - -

*sfz* *f*

40

the towns - - - - - be - got ci - ties - - -

*f* *sfz*

Leo

42

the ci - ties be - got more hours - - - - the hours be - got mi - nutes , the mi - nutes be -

45

got se - conds the se - conds \_\_\_\_\_ be - got a mo - ment.

exultant - but gradually calming...

*sfz* *fff*



48

Musical score for measures 48-50. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs and accents. Bass clef has a supporting line with triplets and slurs.

51

Musical score for measures 51-55. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs and triplets. Bass clef has a supporting line with triplets and slurs.

56

wistful (c. ♩ = 84)

*p*

And - - - -

*pp*

*Leg.*

Musical score for measures 56-60. Treble clef has a melodic line with slurs and triplets. Bass clef has a supporting line with slurs and triplets. Includes dynamic markings *p*, *pp* and tempo marking *And*.

65

there is no - - - na-ture - in a mo-ment. - - - No - - - town - - - . No bells -

*mp*

71

(c. ♩ = 96)

- - - no tick - . No monk - . No - ash - - - . The

*ppp*

79

a - cro - bat in the cu - po - la - - - - - rea - ches - - - - - for a bar which is - n't there - - - - -

*pp*

♩ = 120 (clockwork) *accel.* -----

83

-----

88

Musical score for measures 88-93. The score is written for piano in two staves. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4, then 2/4, then 3/8, and finally back to 4/4. The music features a complex rhythmic pattern with many eighth and sixteenth notes, and rests. A dashed line is positioned above the staff.

94

*extreme rit.* -----

Musical score for measures 94-96. The score is written for piano in two staves. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The time signature is 4/4. The music consists of long, sustained notes in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes in the left hand. A dashed line is positioned above the staff.

[ allow sound to sustain as long as possible ]

*Ad.* -----

### III : Parallels Syndrome

calm, smooth, very gentle -  $c = 56$

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat. It begins with a whole rest for four measures, followed by a half note G4 and a whole note G4, both marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics "Two" are written below the notes. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat. It features a continuous eighth-note pattern starting from the second measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom staff is a bass line in bass clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat, starting with a whole rest for four measures and then playing a half note G2 and a whole note G2, both marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The word "And." is written below the first measure of the bass line.

The second system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat. It begins with a whole rest for one measure, followed by a half note G4, a quarter note A4, a half note B4, and a whole note C5, all marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics "pa - ra - llels - - - - - al - ways - - - - - meet - - - - -" are written below the notes. The middle staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat, featuring a continuous eighth-note pattern starting from the second measure, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bottom staff is a bass line in bass clef, 3/4 time, with a key signature of one flat, starting with a whole rest for one measure and then playing a half note G2, a quarter note A2, a half note B2, and a whole note C3, all marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic.

13

when we draw - - - - - them - - - - - our - selves - - - - -

*f*

*very gentle accel...*

*pushing on a little...*

18

The question - - - - - is -

*mf*

25

a - head - - - or be - hind - - - us - - - - -

*gradual accel.*

31

Whe - ther - the train - - - - -

*Red.*

37 *gentle rit.*

in the dis-tance - - - - - ...

43 *p* *pp*

is co - - - - - ming - - - - - or go - - - - -





61

$\text{♩} = 120 - \text{extreme rit.}$

*ppp*

*sfz*

*p*

very gentle, c.  $\text{♩} = 48 - \text{rit to end...}$

67

*pp*

74

*ppp*

*pppp*

*much slower*  
*rit.*