

Letters to a screen

*for a vocalist, a clarinettist,
and an electronic track*

Sunbin Kim
(2020)

Program notes

Sunbin Kim's composition deals with communication, distancing and alienation. It is loosely programmatic and drawn from two times and places (West Germany in late 1977, the United States in mid-2020), but does not contain a plot or setting in the traditional way. Although it is inspired by political themes, composing this is in no way a form of activism.

In this time, communication has become ever more distant, both physically and mentally. This is especially true for the younger generation, who are dependent on precarious temporary work and deprived of time and money to form social bonds.

Human beings are social creatures, and even in an atomised existence, they need social bonds just as they need food and water. A starving person will even eat rotten food to survive. So, many young working people seek second- or third-hand sources of sociality, using readily available virtual media – but none of these can truly fulfill our need. Social cognition is blunted as communication becomes pushed off to more far-off media.

To represent this growing alienation between people, Kim's piece explores three "levels of communication as translated to music: real performance (live musicians), semblance of a performance (recordings, of both composed and quoted music), and artificial imitation of music without performance (VST / MIDI sequencing). Likewise, there are three levels of musical content, each one more "alienated" in tone and personal involvement than the last. To the second layer belong direct quotations and passages written in other composers' styles. The last level consists of music generated almost entirely by neural network. The first few bars of Strauss' *Metamorphosen* serve as a seed for the algorithm in various style presets. This layer requires the least creative work, and my only input is to arrange the results into something plausible-sounding.

For much of the piece, reality is stifled and artificiality dominates. The audience feels a weird dissonance of hearing the song of a vocalist, but the actual vocalist is not singing, but just seems to be *sitting there* scrolling on a phone. The theatrics of the piece depicts the desire, and indeed *need*, to perform after all—they are onstage and the show must go on! So the real music—the real message—again and again creeps toward the surface, but struggles to break out under the second- and third-hand layers.

Instrumentation

Voice (soprano/mezzo)

Clarinet in B \flat

Electronic track (see Stage set-up)

Scordatura: The **Clarinet** is tuned down approximately 30 cents from concert pitch. An electronic tuner or an app can be used to calibrate the pitch.

Special notation

♯	Quarter-tone sharp.	♭	Quarter-tone flat.
###	Three quarter-tones sharp.	♭♭	Three quarter-tones flat.

Vocals: ⊗ × *Sprechstimme* (for syllables)
indefinite pitch (for singly articulated consonants)

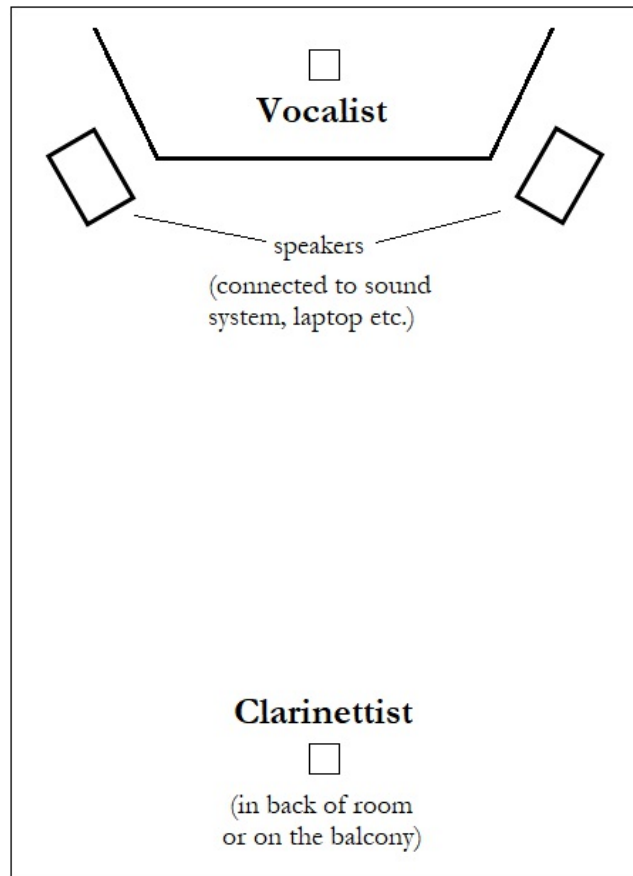
In tape track transcription: For non-tempered passages: The above microtonal accidentals are used, plus up ↑ and down ↓ arrows attached to the accidentals to indicate finer tuning distinctions (approx. 1/12 tone). For example:

♯↑	Slightly sharper than normal.
♭↓	Approximately a sixth tone flatter.
###↓	Somewhat less than three-quarter tones sharp.

Accidentals are also attached to clefs to transpose them by a microtone. This is used for 12-EDO (equal temperament) samples that are transposed by a non-tempered interval. The “sixth tone flat” sign shown above is also used for the tuned-down clarinet's clef.

19-tone temperament samples are notated with traditional accidentals, but with different values: because of the greater number of tones, sharps and flats are no longer enharmonic. 19-EDO is indicated by writing “19-EDO” on top of a clef. For finer microtonal “transpositions”, up ↑ and down ↓ arrows are simply attached to the clef.

Stage plan and performance set-up



The **electronic track** is a continuous fixed media tape track. It needs two speakers in stereophonic set-up, and a sound-system capable of playing FLAC (or mp3, but the lossless format is preferred).

The two performers require a **click track** and **headphones** for each. The click track is set at $\text{♩} = 60$ and 4/4 meter, and lasts for four minutes from the beginning.

Letters to a screen

for a vocalist, a clarinetist, and an electronic track
(2020)

Sunbin Kim

click tracks and tape are turned on at the same time

♩ = 60 (speed of click track)

0:10

Voice

0:00

Glassy ring modulation

Tape Track

Convolutions between Pergolesi and Strauss recordings

soprano vocal (from Pergolesi recording)

(dul - cem na - tum...)

Clarinet

♩ = 60 (speed of click track)



V.

0:20

Track

(...so - la - tum)

Cl.

0:20

V. *f* *p* *p quasi sotto voce* 3

[do] [mi - zit s]

pp *n*

mp *ff* *mf* *n < mp*

(dum e - mi...) (de - so...)

p *mf* *n < mp*

Cl. *p* *ppp* *mf* *f* 5 3



A

0:40

V. 10 *mp* *f*

[gu] [ra] [do]

mf

f *mp*

(vi - dit) (de -)

tr *p* *f* *mp*

Cl. *p* *f* *mf* *ff* *mp* 3 3

0:50

V. 13

mp *f* *p*

[i] [n] [vi] [d]

Track

so... (vi dit)

p *ppp* *f*

L R

Cl. *pp* *mf* *mp*

1:00

B 16

1:10

V.

p

(su um dul...)

ff *p*

Track

p *mf* *ff* *n*

Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*
(low bitrate mp3)

[piano]

pan -64

L R

Strauss, *Metamorphosen*
(low-bitrate mp3)

pan 63

Cl. *mp* *f*

19 *pp* *sotto voce* 1:20 *mp*

V. [mi - zi] [t]

Track

Cl. *pp* *mp* *ppp* *p* *n*

22 *pp* *sotto voce* 1:30 C

V. [mi - z] pan 0

Glassy ring modulation

Track

Cl. *p* C

25 1:40

V. Flute convolution pan -7 *ppp* *p* *mf*

Track

Cl.

Fragment from Salute to Fisher recording at different speeds

plate reverb wet

pan -14

28 1:50

V.

Track

bell
plate reverb dry, increases (up to wet)

violin *gliss.*
p *ppp* *p*

cello *tr*

Salute to Fisher
rec fragments

Cl.

D 2:00

31 *p* *mf* *p* 2:10

V.

letter excerpts from Stammheim
vocoder (sample and hold), diffuseur palme wet
pan -64
pan 63
[...da musst du anfangen.]

what we were missing from the last 100 years...
plate reverb wet
piano
n *p* *n*

[das anerkennen
[...scheiße gebaut.]

Track

distorted metallic percussion
guitar convolutions
pan -32
mp *mf* *p*

Cl.

34 **p** **f** 2:20 **fp** **pp**

V. *ver la - - (a) - s - sen*
 und das dann... [muss man das noch weiter auswalzen?] [dass die

reverb dry bell [kann ich mit den händen greifen.] [ich seh am punkt aber auch.]

violin

cello

Track

clean guitar briefly appears

f mp f mp n p mf pp

Cl. *p f p mp*

37 2:30 **E** **p**

V. *isolation das politische kernproblem der... [überall.]*
 [ob er sie sich korrigiert.] [ändert.] [immer.] [oder:]

ppp

string senza vibr. (slowed down) piano slowed down

Salute to Fisher rec fragments

Track

duduk/sax/string

MIDI sequence imitation in style of Rzewski

moog

19EDO

MIDI sequence algorithm output in "U2" preset

Cl. *pp*

E

V. *mp* 2:40 *pp*

40 5 3

ih - - - re

[auf allen ebenen.]

ob er sie ausbeutet.]

p

ppp

L

R

mf *mf* *p*

Track

L

R

n *p*

Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*
 (low bitrate mp3)
 + Strauss convolutions

p

L

R

(plate reverb slowly increases)

19EDO

mp

L

R

Cl.

p *mf*

V. ⁴³ **f** 2:50 *pochiss.* **p** **ppp**
 plä - (ä) tze brau-chen wir den...

Track
 (vi - dit su - um dul - cem - na...) (mo)

19EDO *plate reverb wet* *piano* **pp** **mf** **pp**
 moog

Cl. ⁴³ **ff** **mp** **pp**

V. ⁴⁶ 3:00 3:10
Vocalist pauses for 4 minutes (until auidial cue at H, at 7'05").
Sits scrolling on a phone, tablet or similar, as if distracted or sunken into online, and not even aware that they should be performing.

Track
chamber reverb wet **p** **mp** (reverb decreases)
 "Rzewski" sequence
 ri - en - tem de - so - la - tum mo - ri

19EDO **mf** **p**

Cl. ⁴⁶ **p** **mf** **pp** **mp** **ppp**

3:20

chamber reverb wet
piano+strings

reverb dry

pp

mp

mp

Track

L

R

en - tem de - so - la - tum) (dum e - mi...)

tr tr

crossfade into convolution, becomes muddy

p

pp

Cl.

49

mp

f

3

5

ppp

Track

L

R

3:30

"clean" Pergolesi rec.

mp

mf

f

p

Cl.

52

p

poebiss.

5

7

Strauss, Metamorphosen
(low-bitrate mp3 + convolutions)

distorted formants

"clean"

[espr.]

Track

(pan 63)

3:40

Strauss convolutions

f

p

n

Cl.

55

pp

5

3:50

G distorted

[p espr.]

(pan 63)

gibr. esagg

Strauss convolutions

Convolutions between algorithm output arrangements ("U2" and "Strauss" presets)

lowpassed, "underwater" arp

pp cresc. piano, bass

Cl. 58

p

fff

Clarinetist suddenly puts down their instrument. Pauses for appr. 3 minutes until auidial cue at H. Like the vocalist, becomes distracted in some way (scrolling on phone etc.)

click track is now off

4:00

4:10

Track

19EDO synth arp

pp piano

mp

19EDO bass

drums

strings

mf

mf

p

mf

peel guitar+crystal lead

4:20

Track

19EDO

19EDO

19EDO

L

R

p

mf

p

mf

mf

mf

f

p

pp

mf

ff



4:30

Track

19EDO

19EDO

19EDO

L

R

Convolution between algorithm arrangements ("kpop" and "Strauss")

f

mf

f

p

f

f

p

convolution begins to split into two tracks

mp

4:40

chamber reverb wet
soprano (from rec, slowed down)

Fragment from
Rilke Songs
recording

(sie - - he, wie klein dort, sie - he... die letz...)

flute

pan -53

MIDI sequence, algorithm output in "kpop" preset
clean
violin

19EDO

19EDO

19EDO

drums

pan -64

vibes+piano

mp

mp

bass

f

f

MIDI sequence, algorithm output in "Strauss" preset
clean

19EDO

19EDO

solo strings

pp

pan 63



4:50

rev. 50%

Rilke Songs
rec fragment

(wor - - te.) (und hö - -)

flute

L

R

plate reverb wet

electronic piano

MIDI sequence
imitation in style
of Wyschnegradsky

19EDO

19EDO

L

R

Track

19EDO

19EDO

19EDO

(pan -64)

19EDO

19EDO

mf

p

(pan 63)

5:00

rev. wet

her...)

Musical notation for the first system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *fp*.

- L
- R

5:10

rev. dry

Musical notation for the second system, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *fp*.

- L
- R

vocoded clarinet / voice

fp

MIDI sequence:
imitation in
style of Nono

Musical notation for the vocoder track, featuring a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *fp*.

- L
- R

Track

Musical notation for the Track section, featuring piano accompaniment. The system includes two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *fp*.

- L
- R

Musical notation for the cello section, featuring a cello line and piano accompaniment. The cello line is in bass clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *mp*.

- L
- R

Musical notation for the piano section, featuring piano accompaniment. The system includes two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The piano accompaniment is in bass clef. The system includes a time signature change to 3/4 and a dynamic marking of *mp*.

- L
- R

5:20

chamber rev. wet
soprano (from rec)

Rilke Songs
rec fragment

(aus - - - - -)

- L - - - - -

- R - - - - -

chimes, gongs (l.v.)

- L - - - - -

- R - - - - -

Track

ff *dim.*

- L - - - - -

- R - - - - -

clean

19EDO

19EDO

19EDO

- L - - - - -

- R - - - - -

mp *f*

19EDO

19EDO

- L - - - - -

- R - - - - -

5:30

→ reverb dry

ge - setzt auf den Ber - gen des Her - zens...

flute

crot.

guitar harm.

cello

acoustic guitar

gong



5:40

lowpass, muffled

Algorithm output convolutions (between "U2" and "kpop" presets)

mp

mf

p

mf

tracks enter into convolution with each other

Track

chamber reverb wet
indistinct vocals

5:50

This system contains a vocal line at the top and piano accompaniment below. The piano part is divided into two tracks, both labeled '19EDO'. The upper piano track starts with a *mp* dynamic. The lower piano track includes a bass line with a *mp* dynamic. The system is marked with a time signature of 5:50.



6:00

This system continues the piano accompaniment from the first system. It includes a section of algorithm output at the bottom, labeled 'Fragments of 3 algorithm output arrangements at different speeds ("u2", "kpop", "strauss")'. This section features three staves with dynamics of *p*, *f*, and *f*. The system is marked with a time signature of 6:00 and includes a 6:10 time marker.

6:20

This musical score is presented in three systems, each with a piano and guitar part. The piano parts are written in 19EDO (19 Equal Divisions of the Octave) and use a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The guitar part is written in standard notation with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, stems, beams, and slurs. The piano parts feature complex textures with triplets and sixteenth-note patterns. The guitar part includes a melodic line with slurs and a rhythmic accompaniment with 'x' marks indicating muted notes. Track labels 'L' and 'R' are placed below the piano staves in each system. A time signature of 4/4 is indicated at the beginning of the guitar part in the second system. A box containing the time '6:20' is located at the top of the page.

Strauss, *Metamorphosen*
(low-bitrate mp3)

6:30

First system of musical notation. It includes a piano part with three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs) and a string part with a single bass clef staff. The piano part features a melodic line in the upper treble staff and accompaniment in the middle and bass staves. The string part consists of a single bass clef staff. A dynamic marking 'n' is present in the piano part. A 'pan 63' label is located below the string staff.

Second system of musical notation, primarily piano accompaniment. It features two staves (treble and bass clefs). The piano part includes various chords and melodic fragments. There are also two empty staves labeled 'L' and 'R' below the piano part.

Third system of musical notation, featuring 19EDO tuning. It includes a piano part with three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs) and two empty staves labeled 'L' and 'R'. The piano part contains complex harmonic structures and melodic lines. The label '19EDO' is repeated on each staff.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring 19EDO tuning. It includes a piano part with three staves (treble, middle, and bass clefs) and two empty staves labeled 'L' and 'R'. The piano part continues with complex harmonic and melodic material. The label '19EDO' is repeated on each staff.

First system of musical notation, including piano (p) dynamics markings.

Second system of musical notation.

Track

"Wyschnegradsky" sequence

Inset musical notation for the "Wyschnegradsky" sequence, featuring a triplet figure.

Third system of musical notation, labeled 19EDO.

Inset musical notation for the third system, labeled 19EDO.

Fourth system of musical notation, labeled 19EDO.

6:40

Track

6:50

recording slowly becomes clearer

The image displays a musical score for piano and 19EDO tracks. The piano part is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *mf*. It features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs. The 19EDO tracks are also in grand staff and include specific performance instructions like *mf* and *3 1*. The score is organized into three systems, each with a 'Track' label on the left and 'L' and 'R' indicators for the left and right channels. A vertical dashed line is present in each system, likely indicating a recording cue or a specific time point. The piano part includes a section with a *ff* marking and a *3* triplet. The 19EDO tracks include a section with a *mf* marking and a *3 1* triplet. The piano part includes a section with a *ff* marking and a *3* triplet. The 19EDO tracks include a section with a *mf* marking and a *3 1* triplet.

H

V.

At the appearance of this melody (at 6'56"), the Vocalist puts away their phone/ tablet/etc. and headphones...

7:00

This system contains the vocal line and the first two staves of the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase marked *ff*. The piano accompaniment includes a right-hand part with triplets and a left-hand part with a steady eighth-note accompaniment, also marked *ff*. A rehearsal mark '63' is located at the start of the piano part.

This system shows the continuation of the piano accompaniment. The right hand has a melodic line with some rests, while the left hand continues with a rhythmic accompaniment.

Track

This system features a piano accompaniment in 19EDO. The right hand has a melodic line with triplets, and the left hand has a more active line with triplets. Dynamics range from *p* to *pp*.

This system shows a complex piano accompaniment with multiple staves. It includes a right-hand melodic line, a left-hand bass line, and a lower register line with a rhythmic pattern. All parts are in 19EDO.

This system continues the piano accompaniment with a right-hand melodic line, a left-hand bass line, and a lower register line. The right hand features a triplet. All parts are in 19EDO.

Cl.

H

The Clarinettist, upon noticing the vocalist finally get ready to perform, puts away their headphones and other things and picks up their instrument...

A single musical staff for the Clarinet part, currently empty.

V. *...slowly stands up and hesitantly walks a few steps forward...*

7:10

The first system of the score features a piano accompaniment and a violin part. The piano part consists of five staves: two grand staves (treble and bass clef) and three lower staves (L and R channels). The violin part is on a single staff. The music is in a minor key and includes dynamic markings such as *ff* and *p*. A time signature of 7:10 is indicated above the piano part.

Track

The second system continues the piano and violin parts. It features two grand staves for the piano and two L/R channel staves. The piano part includes dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The violin part continues with its melodic line.

The third system shows the piano and violin parts. It consists of two grand staves for the piano and two L/R channel staves. The piano part includes dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The violin part continues with its melodic line.

The fourth system continues the piano and violin parts. It features two grand staves for the piano and two L/R channel staves. The piano part includes dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The violin part continues with its melodic line.

Cl.

...and stands up.

...and begins to sing

little or no vibr.

V. *n*

[m] *gradually open mouth* → ([o])

Track

19EDO

Cl. *L* *R*

Call-and-response passage. At the beginning, **Vocalist** and **clarinettist** both listen and give cues to each other to time each entrance. The clarinet's first entrances begin as soon as the other performer finishes their note. After this, each entrance begins to overlap more and more with the other performer's note, and the parts become more independent. Lengths of the passages are variable, but each one is a little shorter than the last.

Duration of this whole passage (from the clarinettist's first entrance until the reintroduction of the tape) is a little more than 30 seconds. It may go on for a few seconds after the tape sound starts.

V. *fff* *pp* *ff* *p*

s.v. *vibr.*

[o?] [a] [a?] [ε]

Cl. *ppp* *fff* *pp* *ff*

subtone → *ord.*

V. *ff* *mp* *f* *mf*

[y] [r] [a]

Cl. *p* *f* *p* *mf*

At this point, the two performers begin to lose their coordination with each other and perform independently, although the total duration of this measure is roughly the same. If needed, this section may be repeated to fill the time until the tape comes in.

Musical score for Voice (V.) and Clarinet (Cl.). The Voice part is on a treble clef staff with notes and lyrics: [a], [ha], [a], [eo], [o]. Dynamics include *mf* and *ff*. The Clarinet part is on a treble clef staff with notes and slurs. A dynamic of *ff* is indicated. A performance instruction reads: "shrill multiphonic by forcing pressure on reed".



*Electronic track is reintroduced. **Vocalist** and **Clarinetist** begin free improvisation passage. All parts are independent of each other and the tape.*

1 min. 30 s.

J *Improvisation style: Melodic, moderate-paced. Vocalise mixed with fragments from the classical vocal repertoire.*

V.

A horizontal wavy line representing a period of free improvisation for the Vocalist.

Three layers of randomised granulation taken from the three "algorithm output" MIDI sequences. Granules decrease in length from 7 seconds to 5 milliseconds. Granule entrances overlap with each other.

Notation for granulation, showing horizontal lines of varying lengths and positions, representing the electronic track's granules. Dynamics range from *f* to *fff*.

Track

Piano score for the Track, consisting of three systems of staves. Each system has a treble and bass clef staff. The notation includes chords, arpeggios, and rhythmic patterns. Dynamics include *f* and *fff*. The score is marked with "19EDO".

J *Improvisation style: Wild, free-jazz like. Quick, slighty runs and figures. Occasional multiphonics, fluttertongue, other extended techniques.*

Cl.

A horizontal wavy line representing a period of free improvisation for the Clarinetist.

Both players stop suddenly at the same time as the electronic track!