

BEN ARAUJO

My garden is full of shards
for soprano and electronics

texts by Edith Södergran, the composer, and Astrid Montén
(2025)

TEXT

Note: the text below is written exactly as it appears in the score
text in normal typeface: *Stjärnorna* [*The Stars*] by Edith Södergran (with repetitions)
text in italic typeface: written by the composer and Astrid Montén

Original text (in Swedish)

När... när natten... när natten kommer...

När natten kommer...

*Åh! Nu är det natt!
En väldigt mörk natt.
Det är mycket, mycket kallt.
Och här är jag, helt ensam i mörkret.*

Står jag på trappa och lyssnar...

*Det är så tyst här ute!
Endast vinden blåser...
Åh! Vad var det?
Var det en stjärna som... blinkar?!
En till!
Ännu fler!!*

Stjärnorna svärma, stjärnorna svärma i trädgården...

*De är så många!
Se hur de strålar!
De rör sig så snabbt i himlen!!*

När natten kommer,
Står jag på trappan och lyssnar,
Stjärnorna svärma, svärma, svärma...
[gasp]
Och jag står i mörkret...

*Mörkret kom tillbaka.
Även tystnad.
En dov tystnad.
[gasp]
Vad är det som kommer hit?*

English translation (by the composer)

When... when the night... when the night comes...

When the night comes...

*Oh! It's night now!
A very dark night.
It's very, very cold.
And here I am, completely alone in the darkness..*

I stand on the steps and listen...

*It's so quiet out here!
Only the wind is blowing...
Oh! What was that?
Was that a star... blinking?!
Another one!
Even more!!*

The stars are swarming, the stars are swarming in the garden...

*There's so many of them!
See how they're shining!
They're moving so quickly in the sky!!*

When the night comes,
I stand on the steps and listen,
The stars are swarming, swarming swarming...
[gasp]
And I stand in the darkness...

*The darkness came back.
Even silence.
A hushed silence.
[gasp]
What's that coming over here?*

Hör! Hör!!
En stjärna...
En stjärna föll... med en KLANG!!!!

*Åh herregud! Jag har aldrig sett någonting så starkt!
Men... det finns något annat i gräset...*

Gå icke ut i gräset med bara fötter.
Min trädgård,
Min trädgård är full
Av skärvor...
Av skärvor...

Listen! Listen!!
A star...
A star fell... with a CLANG!!!!

*Oh my god! I've never seen anything so powerful!
But... There's something else in the grass...*

Don't go out in the grass with bare feet.
My garden,
My garden is full
Of shards...
Of shards...

PERFORMANCE NOTES

Timing

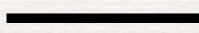
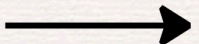
The timings in the piece do not need to be precisely followed to the second, but should serve as a reference to the singer as to when to sing/speak each phrase. Timings in parentheses are used to assist the singer as to which timing will appear on the next system/page.

Text

The piece makes use of two different texts, both of which are in Swedish. The first consists of the poem *Stjärnorna* by Edith Södergran, and the second consists of text written by the composer with contributions from Astrid Montén. These two texts are shown in the score in normal and italic typeface respectively to distinguish one other.

A translation in English appears in square brackets below the Swedish text in a smaller font size.

Soprano

 sustain gradual transition from one method of singing/speaking to another

Overall, the singer should perform the piece as if experiencing an extreme trance state, with a feeling of not being entirely conscious of their surroundings.

Sung passages should be sung in a natural, parlando-style rhythm..

Spoken passages are to be executed as freely as possible within a given time frame; the intonation is left to the discretion of the singer, depending on what is being spoken.

Notes on vocal techniques (indicated in the score in between parentheses):

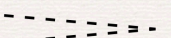
- (no vibrato): should sound very innocent, almost as if singing folk music
- (with vibrato): should have a dramatic, passionate, and operatic sound
- (norm): when speaking, do so with a completely natural and normal voice

 sing with a half-whispered sound (part whispering, part pitch); this also applies when speaking

- (whisper): should contain absolutely no pitch whatsoever

Electronics

The electronics part is notated as descriptions of the various sounds that occur throughout the piece, as well as the density or sparseness of these sounds. The beginning and end of each sound are indicated by bold, black lines.

 around a bold line, indicates a fade-in around a bold line, indicates a fade-out

From 2:00 to 2:30, material enclosed inside boxes can be freely improvised upon in different ways (for example, repeating a fragment of a phrase in different speeds, alternating one fragment with another, etc.) for as long as possible up until the next time code. This section should give the impression of someone experiencing an ecstatic state that gradually reaches an extreme climax.

Program note

My interest in Swedish culture, especially the Swedish language, goes back to well before writing this piece. It mainly stems from the fact that I got the chance to meet many people from Sweden while studying at the Royal College of Music in London, which gradually led to a desire to teach myself the Swedish language. I quickly realized that I was able to pick up the language fairly quickly, being able to understand significantly large amounts of it, and this motivated me to go further and further. Fast forward to October 2024, and I got the opportunity to write a piece for a soprano student from Sweden named Astrid Montén. I'd already had sketches of ideas for setting Swedish text to music from several months before, none of which satisfied me, but once I got the opportunity to work with Astrid, I began to have a more concrete idea of what I wanted to do.

The piece is mainly centered around a Swedish poem from 1915 by Finnish poet Edith Södergran (1892-1923) called *Stjärnorna* (The Stars), a poem that immediately caught my attention due to its surrealistic imagery, which gave me the impression that the narrator was experiencing some sort of vision. However, given the poem's short length, and the fact that the final piece would have to last around 4 and a half minutes long, I later asked myself: what possible way is there to extend the poem for a piece of this length? A big eureka moment came soon after: I realized that I became quite proficient in Swedish by that point, so I challenged myself to write my own text in Swedish to keep the piece all in one language. This text acts as a commentary of sorts to the Södergran text, and helps to give the impression of the singer experiencing a vision or going into an extreme state of trance. The piece later revealed itself to be more than just a setting of *Stjärnorna*, but something like a theater piece that had its own inherent drama to it, with the electronics helping to add to the imagery of the text.

Duration: 4:30

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0:00 0:04 0:07 0:10 0:15 0:25

Soprano

Electronics

0:25 0:26 0:31 0:36 0:40 0:43

Sop.

Elec.

0:43 0:50 0:52 0:59 1:04

Sop.

Elec.

1:04 1:10 1:11 1:13 1:16 1:20 1:22 1:26 1:30

Sop.

Elec.

1:30 1:32 1:37 1:45 1:48 (1:53)

Sop. sing (with vibrato) *f* Stjär - nor - na svär - ma, [The stars are swarming,] stjär - nor - na svär - ma i träd - går - den... *ff* De är så många! [There's so many of them!] Se hur de strålar! [Look at how they're shining!]

Elec.

1:53 2:00 2:03 2:13 (2:21)

Sop. *f* sing (with vibrato) De rör sig så snabbt i himlen!! [They're moving so quickly in the sky!!] När nat-ten kom - mer, [When the night comes,] står jag påtrap-pan och lyss - nar, [I stand on the steps and listen,]

Elec. gust of wind: sustaining star sounds + flanger:

2:21 2:27 2:29 2:30 2:35 2:45 2:47 2:50 2:52 (2:55)

Sop. 35 *ff* stjär-nor-na svär- ma, [the stars are swarming,] *fff* svär- ma, swarming, svär - ma... (gasp) (no vibrato) *mf* Och jag står i mör- kret. [and I stand in the darkness.] (half-whisper) *pp* Mörkret kom tillbaka. [The darkness came back.] *p* Även tystnad. [Even silence.]

Elec. gust of wind: gust of wind: gust of wind: gust of wind: gust of wind:

2:55 2:57 3:00 3:02 3:05 3:07 3:10 3:12 3:15 3:17 (3:20)

Sop. (half-whisper) En dov tystnad. [A hushed silence.] (gasp) Vad är det som kommer hit? [What's that coming over here?] *mf* Hör! [Listen!] *f* Hör!! [Listen!!] En stjär- na... [A star...]

Elec. low rumbling: low rumbling + distortion: high drone + distortion (high C#):

3:20 3:22 3:25 3:30 3:32 3:35 (3:45)

Sop. *fff, as if screaming*
 En stjär - na föll... med en KLANG!!!! (scream) Åh herregud! Jag har aldrig sett någonting så kraftfullt!!
 [A star fell... with a CLANG!!!!] [Oh my god!] [I've never seen anything so powerful!]

Elec. high drone + ring modulation (high C#): explosion and fallout:

3:45 3:47 3:55 3:57 (4:05)

Sop. *mf* *p*
 Men... det finns något annat i gräset... Gå ic - ke ut i grä - set med ba - ra föt - ter,
 [But... there's something else in the grass...] [Don't go out in the grass with bare feet,]

Elec. glass chimes: glass chimes: glass chimes:

4:05 4:07 4:10 4:15 4:17 4:22 4:30

Sop. (half-whisper) *pp* speak (half-whisper) *ppp, with a sense of fear* (whisper)
 min träd - gård, min träd - gård är full av skärvor... av skärvor...
 [my garden,] [my garden is full] [of shards...] [of shards...]

Elec. glass chimes: glass chimes: