

Songs from the Post-Truth Era

for soprano and bassoon

**Karim Al-Zand
(2018)**

Songs from the Post-Truth Era

Incorrect Speaking

Incorrectness in your speech
Carefully avoid, my Anna;
Study well the sense of each
Sentence, lest in any manner
It misrepresent the truth;
Veracity's the charm of youth.

You will not, I know, tell lies,
If you know what you are speaking.
Truth is shy, and from us flies;
Unless diligently seeking
Into every word we pry,
Falsehood will her place supply.

Falsehood is not shy, not she—
Ever ready to take place of
Truth, too oft we Falsehood see,
Or at least some latent trace of
Falsehood, in the incorrect
Words of those who Truth respect.

—*Charles Lamb*
from Poetry for Children (1809)

The Charm of Anna

Unless we are seeking to pry the truth
From my words of youth,
Carefully avoid the charm of Anna:
She is not shy, not shy in any manner.

If you study well your speech,
And diligently misrepresent into each
Sentence, lest it supply
The what, will, who and know,
Incorrectness will take Veracity's place—you see?
In her place, we sense, flies some latent trace of oft.

Speaking of Truth:
In truth, every word of those you respect is
Falsehood, Falsehood, Falsehood, Falsehood!
(Or is at least incorrect.)

The Supply of Flies

Take carefully each speech
Pry every sense from my sentence

Speaking, seeking
Of youth, of truth,
Or of lies
We will ready the supply of flies!

I, you, my, we
Study your veracity's
You see?
Incorrectness

if, of, oft
the will, the well, the words

We respect, incorrect
Truth, shy, truth
(Place into you-know-who)
Falsehood, shy, falsehood

it us, in lest, at least, in some
not word, what know, those are

Not to avoid charm
Truth is she any?
Unless in latent her manner too diligently is...

Of truth tell not ever
Anna

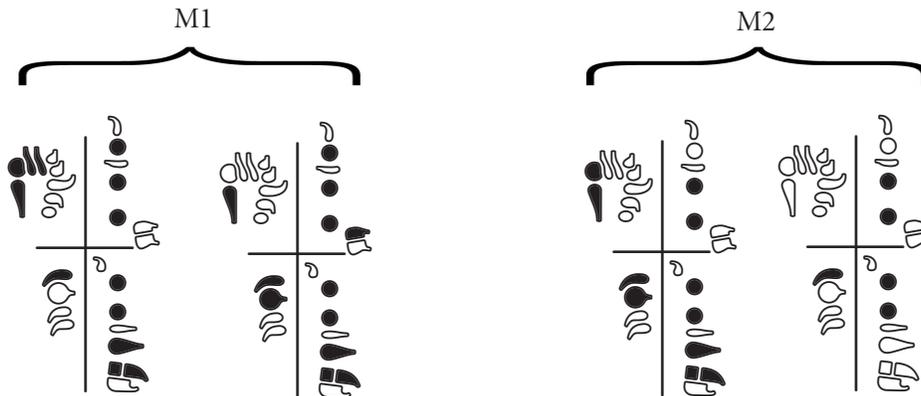
Program Note:

Facts are a feeble match for belief. Emotion trumps observation. Lie and truth are transposable, reason and fellow-feeling abandoned. Words careen through the air, cleaved from their meaning, simply sounds in the void. It is a Post-Truth Era.

This short song cycle is based on a poem about telling the truth: “Incorrect Speaking” by Charles Lamb, a didactic verse taken from his 1809 collection *Poems for Children*. Lamb’s poem is used as the first song’s text. I derive the text for the following two songs as “vocabularyclept” poems, a technique that preserves all the words from an original poem, but rearranges their order and syntax. The new poems, “The Charm of Anna” and “The Supply of Flies,” generate unexpected, humorous and contradictory meanings—and eventually produce no meaning at all.

Performance Note:

The multiphonics in measure 148 and elsewhere are of two varieties, labeled M1 and M2. M1 roughly corresponds to an A dominant seventh sonority; M2 roughly corresponds to a D major sonority. These can be fingered a number of ways; two possibilities for each are given below, drawn from Jamie Leigh Sampson’s *Contemporary Techniques for the Bassoon* (2014).



Regarding the notation and performance of the text: when a multi-syllabic word is performed or emphasized in a way that differs from its conventional syllable parsing, this is indicated by a short horizontal arrow. For instance, “speak - - ing” is sometimes notated “spea → king” to emphasize a consonant articulation in the second syllable. The same is true for the performance of some single syllable words, when they stretch over more than one note or rhythmic articulation, e.g., “spee → ch.”

Duration:

approx: 6'

for PushBack Collective: Ally Smither and Ben Roidl-Ward

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Song 1: Incorrectly Speaking

Slowly; very flexibly, with much rubato ♩ = 88 (♩ = 176)

stretto - - - - -

Soprano

Bassoon

freely expressive; floating above the meter

pp — *mp* *molto legato*

① Use an alternate fingering (or added fingers) to lower pitch slightly, very briefly, and back; an ornamental gesture: legato, quick, but expressive.

6 a tempo *mf* *stern*

In - - - cor - rect - ness in your speech Care-ful-ly a - void, my

mf — *mp* *mf*

11 *very articulate* *gently scolding* Suddenly very swiftly ♩ = 104

An - na; Stud - y well the sense of each Sen - tence.

poco f — *mf* *mp* — *f*

animato

14 *f* *ritenuto* *poco rit.* *mp*

lest in an - y man - ner It mis - rep - re - sent the truth; Ver -

f *decres.* *matter-of-fact*

17 **Swiftly again** | **a tempo**

- a - ci - ty's the charm of youth. You will not, I know, tell —

mp *f* *(p parenthetically)* *mf*

21

lies, If you know what you are speak - ing. Truth is

mp *poco f* — *mp*

25 **Swiftly again** | **a tempo**

shy and from us flies; Un - less di - li - gent - ly seek - ing

mf earnest *f* *mf*

28 **ritenuto** | **poco rit.** ----- | **a tempo**

In - to ev' - ry word we pry, False - hood will her place sup - ply. False - hood

mp *pp* *mf*

decesc.

32

is not shy, not she — Ev - er read - y — to

mf

36 *poco f* warmly

take place of Truth, too oft we False-hood see, Or at

poco f — *mf*

40 *mp* perturbed

least some la-tent trace of False-hood. in the

Song 2: The Charm of Anna
Very quickly; volatile and
a little manic ♩ = 168

44 Swiftly again *f* interrupting *sub. p*

in - correct Words of those who Truth re - spect. Un-less

mp *f* *f*

48 *mf*

Un - less we are seek - ing to pry the truth, to pry the truth, to

mf

② Use the same lowered-pitch-fingering to present two alternating timbres in these and other similar repeated-note passages

57 *sub. f* *p* sing-song

pry the truth From my words of youth, Care - ful - ly a - void the charms of

sub. f *p*

64

p

An-na: she is not shy, not shy, not shy, in an - y man - ner.

p *f*

71

mp cresc. *becoming a little unbinged*

If you stud - y well, you stud - y well, you stud - y well, you stud - y

mp cresc.

78

(very short) *f* *a tempo* *p*

well, you stud - y well your — speech, And dil - i - gent - ly mis - rep - re -

(very short) *f* *p*

86

sub.f *mf*

- sent in - to each Sen - tence, (as before) lest it sup - ply, lest

sub.f *mf*

93

ff *pp*

it sup - ply, lest it sup - ply, lest it sup - ply The what, will, who and know, In - cor -

ff *pp*

101

- rect - ness will take ve - rac - i - ty's place, ve - rac - i - ty's place— you see?

109

mp cresc.

In her place, we sense, her place, we sense, her place, we

f *mp cresc.*

115

(very short) *f* *a tempo* *p*

sense, her place, we sense, her place, we sense in her place flies some

f

122

sub.f (off) no pitch

la - tent trace, some la - tent trace, la - tent trace of o -> fff -> t.

p *sub.f*

129 Suddenly calm; as before ($\text{♩} = 88$)

p

Speak - ing ____ of Truth: in truth, ev' - ry word of those you re - spect ____

p molto legato

Very quickly again ($\text{♩} = 168$)

134

sub. ff raving

is False - hood, False - hood,

mp *p* *sub. ff*

139

False - hood, False - hood, False - hood, False - hood! (Or is at

in time *p*

Song 3: The Supply of Flies

(attacca) Quickly; a deranged mambo $\text{♩} = 144+$ ($\text{♩} = 288+$)

forceful and rhythmic; a percussion instrument

145

least in - cor - rect.) Take care - ful-ly ea - ch ch ch ch

pp *f*

③ Multiphonic (M1) —see preface for possible fingerings.

150

ch ch ch ch ch spee - ch ch ch ch

p *f*

like an echo

154

ch ch ch ch ch Pry ev' - ry sss - - -

p *mf* *fpp* *f*

159

→ sense from my sen - ten - ce (sss) - - - Spea - king, spea - king see -

mf *fpp* *f* *mf* *pinging f*

164 *mf* a bell-like clave sustain on the "ng"

2+2+3

king, see king, see king, king, king, king, king, king, king, king, king,

f *cresc.*

169 *sub. p*

king, king, spea → king, king, see → king. Of you → th, th th th

f

sub. p *sub. f*

173

th th th th th of tru → th, th th th

p *f*

177

th th th th th Or of lie → s (zzz)

p *mf* *fpp*

mf

181 *f* *mf* *fpp* *f* *mf* half-pitched, buzzing

We will read - y the sup - ply zzz Of flie → s (zzz)

④ transition immediately from the initial pitch to a sibilant sound.

186 (ad lib.) etc.

2+2+3 *mf* *cresc.*

I, you, my, we stud - y your ve -

f

191 *fp* *ff* *sub. p*

- rac - i - ty's You see? you see?

195 *f* *mp but rhythmic*

you see? In - cor - rect - ne - ss if, of, of -> t,

⑤ A forceful, pitched glottal stop, like a resonant drum.

200 4X (accompanying)

if, of, of -> t, if, of, of -> t, the will, the well, the wor - ds (dz)

solo [ad lib.] ⑥
rhythmic, disjunct, angular—but still hitting the changes!

ben f

A⁷ *D⁶*

M2

© Bassoon solo: take a few choruses (or play as written). Make use of multiphonics M1 and M2. The voice is an accompanying part here.

204 *ff* *p* *ff*

We re - spe -> ect, ect ect ect ect ect ect in - cor - re ->

209 *p mp sub. ff mp sub. ff*

ect ect ect ect ect ect ect ect Truth, shy, truth, shy,

214 *sub. pp mp sub. ff mp sub. ff mf cresc.*

(place in - to, you - know - who) False - hood, shy, false - hood, shy, it, it,

219 *accel. ad libitum: descending into mad*

it us, in lest, at least, in some, not word, what know, those are lest least some in us

224 *gibberish then winding down fitfully... Slowly, ad lib.; forlorn [ca. ♩ = 54]*

[at, what, know, not, word, are, in, it, those, etc...] Not to a - void charm. Truth, is she an-y? — Un-less

① Voice repeats the given words (singly, and in pairs) at random in increasingly dense and chaotic staccato rhythms, then gradually thinning out spasmodically. Choose pitches from the A-B-C-D-E-F hexachord. Bassoon plays similarly, though asynchronously, using the E \flat -E \sharp -D \flat -D \sharp collection. Notes can be played singly (staccato) or in minor seventh pairs (slurred).

230 *As before (♩ = 88)*

in la - tent, un - less her man-ner too dil - i - gent - ly is.

235 *Very slowly; resigned ♩ = 54 rit.*

Of truth, tell not ev - er An - na.

