

Tropical Fish Opera - General Instructions

Borrow as large a tropical fish tank as seems practical. A local tropical fish store frequently will provide the necessary items for a mention on the program. A two-foot long, one foot wide, 1-plus-foot high size is the minimum suggested (not too large yet easily visible).

In it place:

1 tropical fish heater

3 'Type A' fish, representing a pitch at "normal timbre"

2 'Type B' fish, representing a pitch at "rough" timbre

1 'Type C' fish, representing a pitch at "vibrato" timbre

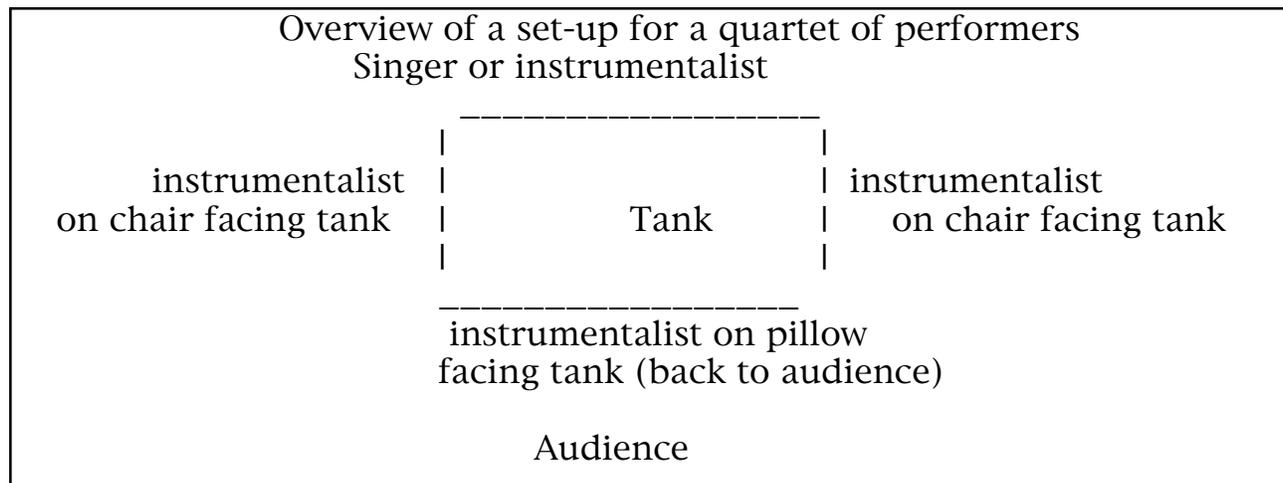
1 aquarium light

1 aereator (air pump) to keep the fish comfortable before and after concert, but remove during performance.

Get some food. Feed them 10 minutes before the performance. Not just before, because they'll all crowd to the top to eat.

Set the heater correctly. Cold fish become logy and sit on the bottom of the tank (see quote).

Set tank center stage with the aquarium light on top. Put it on a piano bench or even higher at 'music stand' level.



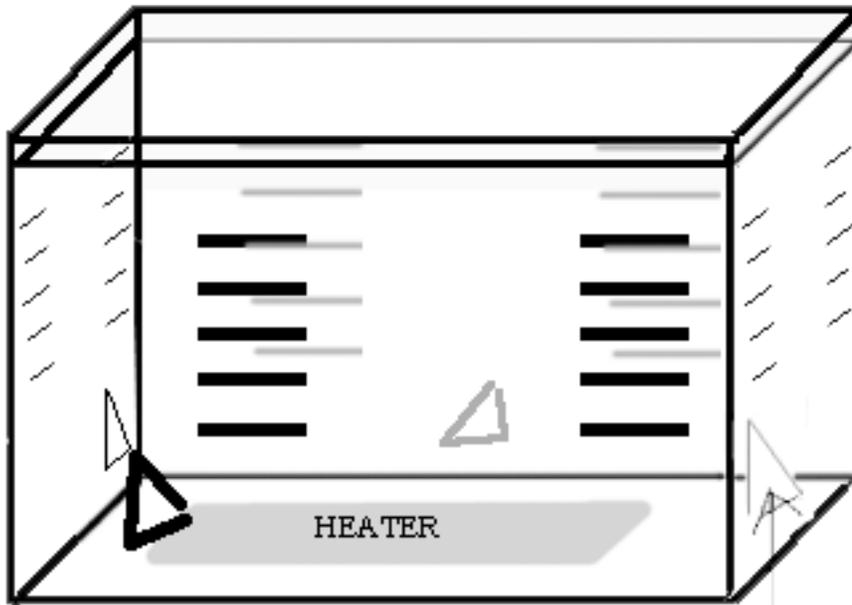
If you desire. more instrumentalist may be added.
However four seems to work well.

The Score

As the fish move on or around pitch-defined areas, play them as notes, the duration defined by how long a fish stays put. The same fish obviously may be being played by all four performers. A fish very close to your side of the tank should be played fortissimo, in the center mezzo-forte, etc.

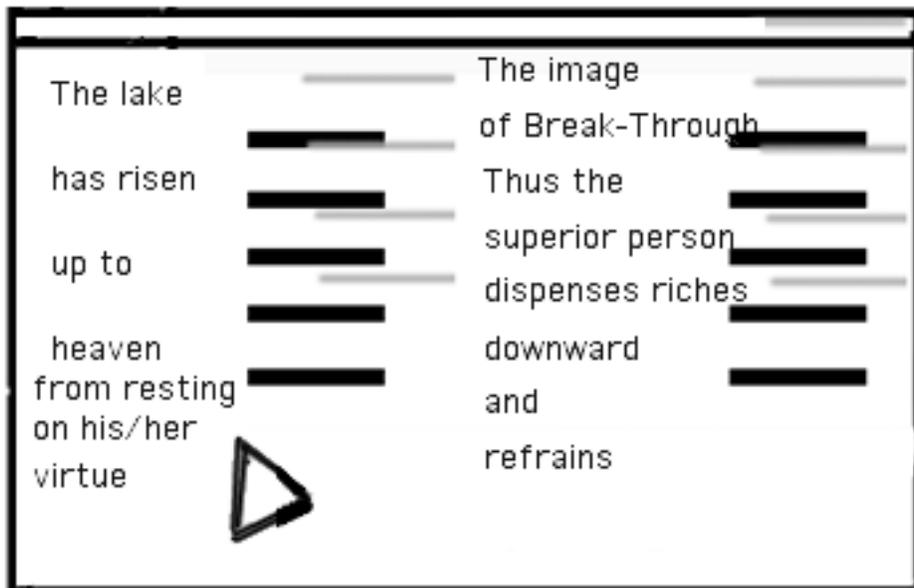
There are two basic performance possibilities. One is free form — i.e. do not commit the instrumentalists to a specific scale and and/orset of pitches. This works well with musicians who are good at improvising but willing to respect the parameters of the piece.

Diagram of 'free form' score



The staff lines, etc. may be drawn with a 'washable' black pen on the sides of the tank, or else drawn with a permanent marker on acetate which is attached with magic mending tape to the sides.

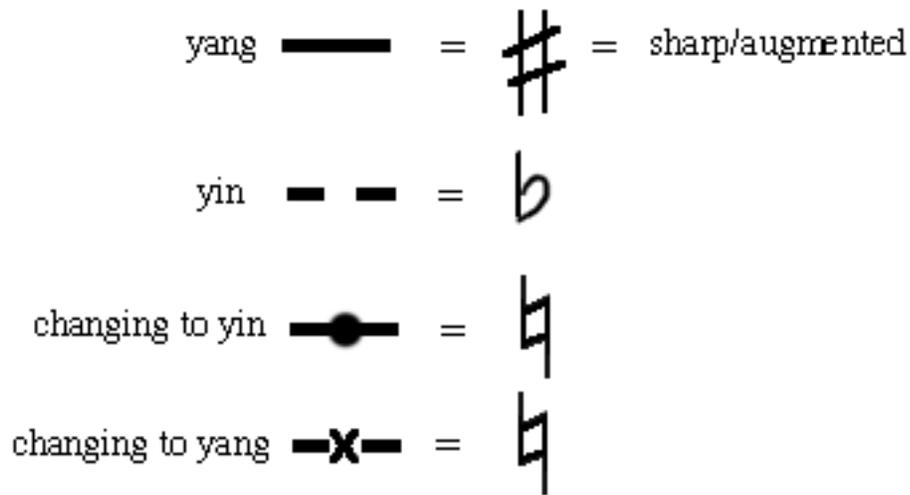
Words for a singer should be derived by casting the I Ching (see next page) and then using The Image of the given hexagram as the text. The words should be dispersed in two areas on his/her aquarium panel and written large enough so that the word may break down into a particular syllable if a fish stalls behind it. The singer should note that the placement of the word on the panel does not imply a particular pitch. Pitch for the word sung should be derived from a fish activating a pitch area. Here is a sample panel for a possible singer using the hexagram 'Kuai':



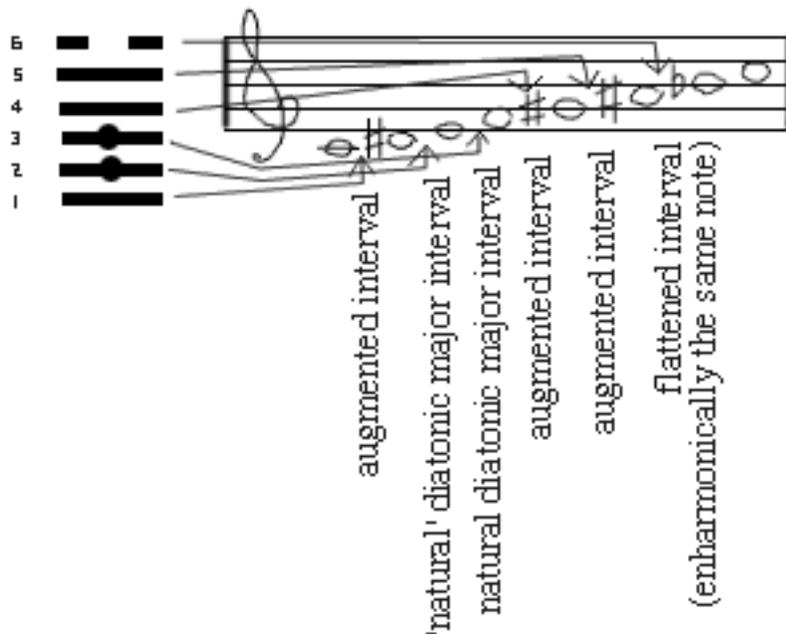
Deriving Text and Mode from the I Ching

The other performance possibility is to derive a mode by casting the I Ching. The I Ching, as you no doubt know, is a method of divination by throwing coins or dividing yarrow stalks. I will assume you have some familiarity with the procedure for creating a hexagram — or else consult one of many English editions of the I Ching. I am partial to the more classical Wilhelm translation (Bollingen).

Throwing the three coins: heads = 3, tails = 2
 3 heads = 9 = yang moving to yin; 3 tails = 6 = yin moving to yang
 two heads 1 tails = 7 = yang; two tails one heads = 8 = yin
 Look up hexagram on diagram in back of book.
 Starting with the major diatonic scale on C, apply the following values to the intervals depending on the derived hexagram.



example: The hexagram Kuai - Breakthrough, Number 43
 (built from the bottom up - i.e. 1st throw the bottom line)



Here is a suggested “long side panel” for a female vocalist using a “Kuai” mode-specific version of the piece. Note that this mode does not have a dominant-to-tonic relationship. In order for our western ears not to seek out any 5 to 1 in the mode and assign tonic to the ‘1,’ I suggest a tonic drone be used.

Note that in the example above, there is a ‘type 2’ fish activating a low f# and another the word “Break.” I would imagine the pitch fish is in the middle of the tank, thus requiring a mezzo-forte, raspy intoning of the word ‘break’.

General Advice

As a fish moves towards you, crescendo; away from you diminuendo
Be creative! And even within Mode 43, feel free to cut loose!

Depending on the instrument, the Special Effects triangle can signify everything from a squawky reed (clarinet, oboe, bassoon) to a ‘col legno’ on a violin.

Other variations to consider. It might be fun to place a video camera so that the tank can be projected on a large screen.

Ramon Sender
rabar@mindspring.com
weekdays: 415 282-2317
evenings: 415 821-2090

HERB CAEN



The Rambling Wreck

CAENFETTI: More mourning around "Evening," KPIX's expensive experiment in nightly local production. Not only is the show No. 3 in its time slot, Susan (Sex Symbol) Berman quit Thurs. as writer-editor, following in the fast-disappearing footsteps of Co-Host Eric Smith and Producer Bob Zagone. Susan's parting shaft: "They oughta change the name of this turkey to 'Twilight' and shoot it live at the SPCA" . . . Sudden thought: Only in the magic world of the telly can you shoot something live that's dead . . . The hot rumor floating up and down Montgomery St. — that BankAmericard and Master Charge will merge — is, smiles a spokesperson, "premature by, oh, a few years at least." It's nice to be first with the news but I may be overachieving here . . . The investigation into the bizarre reign of John Carrodus as gen. mgr. of the Mark Hopkins has one widely-known San Franciscan chewing his and others' fingernails. The 11 auditors assigned to sort out the mess discovered Mr. Carrodus (or rather, the hotel's owner) treated this feller to a round-the-world trip, plus jaunts to Hawaii, with wife thrown in. Only it wasn't his wife.

★ ★ ★

CULTURE CORNER: I suppose you missed the S.F. Chamber Music Society's recital of avant garde music at Fireman's Fund Aud. the other night. So did I, dunderhead that I am, but Doug Payne covered for us. Among the "selections" was a piece in which the musicians gathered around a 10-gallon aquarium with five lines painted on it to represent the musical staff. Inside the tank swam three goldfish, whose movements represented "notes" to be played by the gallant musicians . . . Unfortunately, the fish assigned to Nathan Rubin, concertmaster of the Oakland symphony, and Clarinetist Larry London settled to the bottom and refused to move. Rubin dutifully played one unvarying low note but London, eventually bored, began improvising a merry tune. At which Rubin swung around and barked: "What's the matter, London, can't you read fish?" ★ ★ ★

Somewhere in the mid-nineteen-seventies...