

Incantation

for vocalist with bowls and natural objects

Stephen F. Lilly

(2022)

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Program Notes:

Incantation is inspired by Rivka Galchen's *Everyone Knows Your Mother Is a Witch*. Humans have long recognized the power of both words and the natural world. *Incantation* invites the performer to marry the two in a ritualistic ceremony, not unlike the rite of communion in a Catholic mass. The performer, however, is deliberately cast as a witch rather than a priest, in honor of the (mostly) women who were (and in some places still are) demonized for looking to the natural world and its spirituality for healing and guidance.

Incantation can be staged as a stand-alone performance, or it can be coordinated with other works from Kristian Twombly's *North Shore* project.

Items Needed:

- 3-5 Large Mixing Bowls (crystal, glass, metal, stone or ceramic, but no plastic)
- 13 Collections of Small or Pourable Natural Objects (e.g., water, sand, dried leaves, eggshells)
- 13 Containers for Objects—these should be smaller than the mixing bowls and can be any sort of receptacle (e.g., box, vase, cup). Again, no plastic.

Sequence:

- **Centering:** the piece begins with a sustained 's'.

⊙
S

- **Incantation:** a short phrase is intoned or chanted, and corresponding natural objects are added to one of the bowls. Incantation is repeated many times with a new phrase and different bowl each time.

girl
O ring
S hell
the
lavish

lump
O ring
S hear
lump
alter

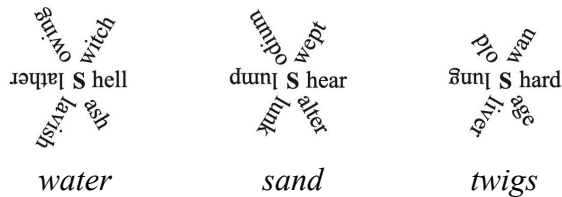
P/O
wan
S hard
liver
age

- **Focusing:** after many iterations of incantation, “hallow” is whispered. Simultaneously, one of the bowls is poured into another and, once emptied, set aside and retired from the piece. After focusing, incantation resumes. This incantation-focusing alternation repeats until focusing happens when only two bowls remain. At that point, after focusing, the piece ends.

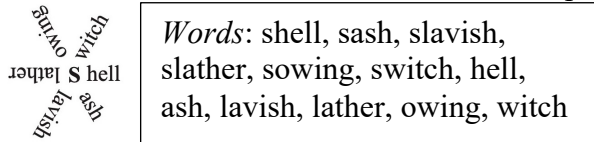


Explanation and Rules:

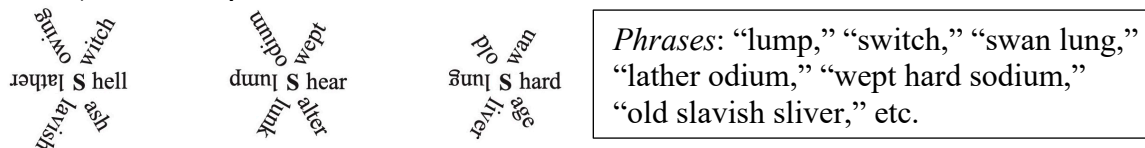
- Perform the opening ‘s’ in a single long breath.
- Assign each of the natural object collections to a poem asterisk. For example:



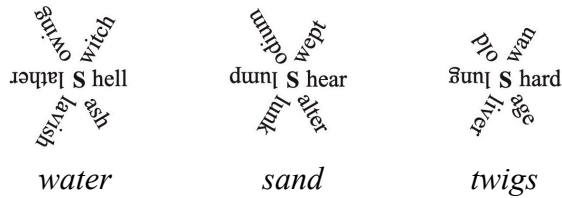
- Each poem asterisk consists of 12 words. For example:



- Once used, no word may be repeated for the duration of the performance.
- All the words need not be used.
- Intone or chant one- to three–word phrases constructed from the poem asterisks (the words don’t have to come from the same poem asterisk). For example:



- Two- and three-word phrases should consist exclusively of non-rhyming words. For example, “old shell,” and “shear hell ash” are acceptable whereas “hard shard” and “slather sliver” are unacceptable due to the full and half rhyme, respectively.
- Incant each phrase only once.
- For every word in the phrase, add some, but not all, of the corresponding natural object to one of the mixing bowls. For example:



“hell” = pour water in crystal bowl.
 “wan lump” = snap twigs into small bits and drop into metal bowl; then, pour sand in the bowl.
 “salter sowing sage” = pour water and sand into the bowl and then snap twigs into bits and drop in bowl.

- One can choose to incant the phrase simultaneously with the adding of natural objects, one can add the natural objects and then incant the phrase, or one can incant the phrase and then add the natural objects.
- Natural objects do not have to be added in the same order as the words are said.
- For each phrase, add natural objects to only one bowl.
- If you run out of a natural object, the corresponding poem asterisk can no longer be used.
- In-between phrases, swirl the bowls to mix natural objects and generate sound or pause silently. One can also choose to move without pause or swirling into the next incantation or a focusing.
- Focusing eliminates the bowl being poured.
- If the performance starts with three bowls, there will be only two left after the first focusing, and the piece will end after the second focusing.
- *Incantation* can be performed without amplification, or the vocalist and bowls can be subtly miked to accommodate larger or noisier venues.
- The performer can be anywhere on the gender spectrum.
- The performer should wear whatever they normally would for any performance and not dress in a way that is thematically related to the piece or that would otherwise distract from the performance.

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