

# Richard Felciano

# Background Music

E. C. SCHIRMER MUSIC COMPANY BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02111

Richard Felciano

# Background Music

A THEATRE PIECE FOR HARP AND ELECTRONICS

## NOTATION

Harmonics sound one octave higher than written.

SB = sound board

LV = let vibrate



= with the wooden handle of the tuning key



= with the metal shank of the tuning key



= insert the handle of the tuning key near the pegs between two strings; pluck both strings toward each other near the SB and simultaneously slide the key down. The pitch will rise.



= insert the handle of the tuning key about 2 inches from the SB between two strings; pluck both strings toward each other and simultaneously slide the key down to the SB. The pitch will descend a half-step and crescendo slightly. End with a knock on the SB.



= slap with the flat of the hand



= damp completely



= damp only one note



= thunder. Pull the very lowest group of strings brusquely so that they jangle noisily together.



= with the finger nail



= finger trill; even, without accents



= played seven times

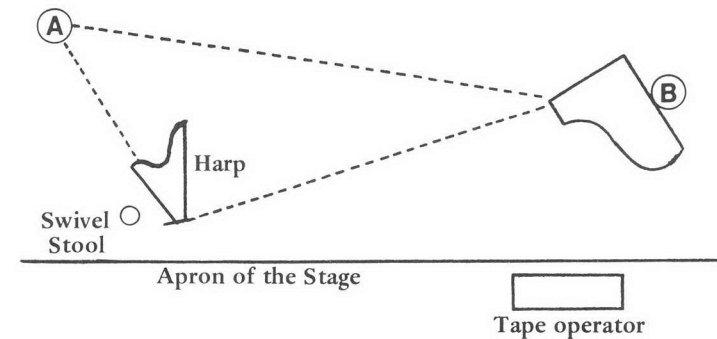


= whistling sounds; rub both hands, extended flat, slowly up and down along the low, wound strings

## RESOURCES

- 1 female harpist
- 1 tape operator, who must also give cues to the harpist, unseen by the audience, if possible
- 1 harp (tuned to the tape's F natural in the passage on page 8, with the five most resonant partials of the contrabass D string marked in colored chalk)
- 1 grand piano, the larger the better, with top removed and with the damper pedal tied down so that the strings may vibrate freely throughout the piece.
- 1 swivel-type piano stool. No other bench or chair is needed.
- 1 stereo amplifier
- 2 large speakers
  - Speaker (A) sits on the floor, and ideally is about four feet high
  - Speaker (B) is situated near or even in the piano so that it can cause maximum sympathetic vibrations from the strings. If it is located inside the piano, it will necessarily be smaller than Speaker (A). Care should be taken to see that it possesses the widest possible frequency response, given its size, and that its volume matches that of Speaker (A), so that in the panning section at letter [E], the illusion is given that a single sound is moving back and forth between the speakers.
- 1 tuner or radio, preferably FM. It must be monophonic, equipped with an output plug feeding only into Speaker (A). If a stereo tuner must be used, feed both channels into Speaker (A).
- 1 small battery-operated transistor radio (unseen until letter [K])
- 1 stereo quarter-track tape playback deck
  - Channel (A) → Speaker (A)
  - Channel (B) → Speaker (B)
  - (Tuner, all channels → Speaker (A))
- 1 black cloth large enough to cover Speaker (A) (off-stage at the beginning)
- 1 metal nail file
- 1 wooden tuning key
- 2 scores
- 1 music stand (decorative if possible)
- 1 stereo quarter-track tape, for sale by the publisher

Duration: about 15 minutes

ARRANGEMENT  
ON THE  
STAGE

(Note that the harp is not in the normal playing position but at a right angle to the sight line. The harpist should sit with full profile to the audience.)

DETAILS  
OF THE  
SCENARIO

From the theatrical point of view, the piece should be placed first on a program or after an intermission. The best arrangement would be between two intermissions; in this way the audience will enter the hall to background music from Speaker (A) and leave the hall to background music from the transistor radio, unaware of any precise point at which the piece might have begun or ended.

As the audience drifts in, the tuner is playing superficial, light, sentimental music of a semi-popular nature through Speaker (A) at only a moderately high volume level. A radio station and a volume level should be chosen which will best give the effect of background or "semi-classical" music. (Avoid "classical" music or music with a strong beat.) The house lights remain up until the end of the work, where they go out on cue; they should not be dimmed to signal the entrance of the harpist.

The harpist enters as if into her own living room, tunes a bit, sets the pedals, and begins the standard commercial glissandi. Or, if she chooses, she may even roll the harp in and place it herself. The music from the FM tuner continues through Speaker (A) until two seconds after the opening harp glissandi. The first tape entrance occurs with the top note of the third arpeggio.

(A)

- Ⓑ The force of the explosion on the tape seems abruptly to set the harpist spinning rapidly once around on the stool. As she returns to the usual playing position she takes the harp and begins a silent ritual, moving abruptly and mechanically “by the numbers”, each number being equal to half a second.
- 1 arms outstretched
  - 2 arms at harp
  - 3 arms outstretched
  - 4 )
  - 5 } arms at harp
  - 6 )
  - 7 arms outstretched
  - 8 left arm at harp, right arm outstretched
  - 9 both hands at harp and begin playing the passage following frenetically, mechanically, like a robot
- Ⓒ The whole section is meant to convey 1) the discovery that the F natural on the tape can be maneuvered from speaker to speaker by moving the harp from its upright to its normal playing position or vice versa, 2) the satisfaction of manipulating the sound, once the preliminary astonishment is gone, 3) the assertion on the part of the F natural of its own independence by its steadfast refusal to move from one of the speakers in spite of increasingly violent movements on the part of the harpist to shake it loose. The first appearance of the F natural must seem to happen accidentally as the harp, by a gesture common to all harpists, is slowly moved back into playing position. The cessation of sound and the arrival of the harp at the shoulder must occur simultaneously. The harpist should freeze for a moment, look toward Speaker Ⓑ in a puzzled manner and then replace the harp pensively in an upright position. Her hands remain on the instrument. Again she leans the harp back, as if to reassure herself that she was not dreaming, and again the F natural appears and moves from one speaker to the other in perfect synchronization with the harp. (It is essential that the harp seem to control the position of the tape sound as it moves from one speaker to the other. It must not seem that the harpist is waiting for the tape sound to reappear and move before she makes an attempt to move with it. A good deal of practice in moving the harp to the tape sound will be necessary to achieve a convincing performance.) The third recurrence of the sound on the tape requires a slightly faster leaning of the harp than its setting up again. Now the harpist removes her hands from the instrument, brings them back to the front of her body, and moves them slowly forward, fingers apart, ominously, as if stalking prey (the harp, in this case). She finishes by grasping the sound board firmly and holding on, only to have the tape suddenly jump

at her with a loud, short note from which she recoils by pulling her hands abruptly away from the instrument as though they had been burned. Clearly the thing is alive! With considerable self-confidence she now takes hold of the harp as the F natural reappears, and moves it to and fro repeatedly, synchronizing her movements exactly with the tape, so that she appears to be in complete control of the movement of the sound from speaker to speaker. When the note becomes stationary, she continues to move the harp to and fro, first at the same speed, then more violently, as she begins a series of fruitless attempts to shake the note loose from the speaker where it is stuck. Increasingly angrily she plays the flourishes—but to no avail. She turns away from the harp with the note still sounding, and, turning on the stool toward the audience, she meditates on the problem (possibly assuming the position of The Thinker of Rodin). Attempts to dislodge the note have failed. She decides to make the best of a bad situation and incorporate it as an interior pedal point in a passage of traditional music (Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony). Even this is to no avail; the note drones mercilessly on out of Speaker Ⓐ. Exasperated, she stomps off the stage and returns with a black cloth which she throws over Speaker Ⓐ, completely covering it, only to have the sound move immediately to Speaker Ⓑ (it escaped!) and terminate in a whimsical hissing flourish inside the piano as the harpist returns to the harp. When the first tape hiss occurs, the harpist immediately stops in her tracks, looks at the piano and angrily hisses back at it. She returns to the harp, sets the pedals and begins to play frantically.

The muttering is to be done through half-closed lips, unintelligible, so as to sound like a badly tuned radio. The following harp passage must seem to be a continuation in music of the word patterns of the muttering. The spoken words interspersed are to sound hypnotic, trance-like, as though a part of a flowing stream of consciousness.

Speaker Ⓐ, still covered, suddenly becomes the repository of a rather pompous voice extolling the virtues of the harp, and, more specifically, of lady harpists. In response, the harpist sets her instrument upright and leans her head against it as if in despair. Both hands remain on the instrument. Slowly the fingers of her right hand begin to tap impatiently. She walks slowly over to Speaker Ⓐ, encircles it, growing more and more angry. As the speech ends, she grasps the black cloth, pauses a moment, and, at the words “before Saul”, snatches it off and drops it angrily to the floor. Disgusted and resolute she returns to the harp.

- Ⓕ The sounds, which must follow as if in imitation of the tape sounds, are the 5 most resonant upper partials of the bottom string. The nodes must be marked ahead of time with colored chalk. The string is struck with the wooden handle of the tuning key, and then one finger is gently touched to the node. If more convenient, the passage may be played standing.
- Ⓖ After beginning the wind sounds on the low strings, the harpist hisses like a sorceress casting a spell, stopping again 25 seconds after the crescendo begins on Speaker Ⓐ. She pauses about 10 seconds before the cue notes are heard on the tape. Then she begins the dominant seventh passage.
- Ⓗ As the sustained sound in Speaker Ⓑ breaks up, the harpist should play seven more notes and move immediately to the shouts, regardless of where she is in the previous passage. The house lights begin to fade on a 6-count. If a fade is not possible, a bump-out should occur at the same place. In the darkness, the harpist turns on the cheap transistor radio, holds it up to her ear to adjust it to a low volume level, and sets it down in an unobtrusive place, nevertheless in the sight line of most of the audience. She leaves the stage unseen in the darkness.
- Ⓘ After the tape sound ends with the muffled sound of an amplifier being turned off, the transistor radio is heard faintly in the darkness for about 10 seconds. The house lights then come up on a slow count of 12 or more, while the radio continues to play. If the lights are not on a rheostat, sections of lights should be turned on at irregularly spaced but generally progressively shorter intervals, so that the work returns slowly to the "real" world from which it grew: full lighting and background radio sounds.

Channel Ⓑ has been recorded slightly louder than Channel Ⓐ in the event that it may be speaking through a smaller speaker (preferably inside the piano) with a correspondingly smaller dynamic range. Adjustments may have to be made to balance the levels of sound for the panning section beginning on page 8, according to the characteristics of the equipment in use. The levels must be set so as to produce the illusion of a smooth, continuous movement of sound from one speaker to the other.

Some adjustment in volume may also be necessary in the following passages. The numbers correspond to those in the tape areas of the score:

The sound of a knock on a sound-board of a harp is recorded on the tape. It gives impetus to the harpist's swivelling around on her stool. Therefore it must seem very sudden and loud. If the volume level must be raised, it should be dropped back to its normal setting very slowly during the repetitions of sound-board knocks that follow.

If the F natural in the panning passage is too loud for the harp, the volume should be lowered beginning on the top of page 8 and raised again at the beginning of the third system on the same page.

The speech which emerges from Speaker Ⓐ must be very loud. If the volume must be increased, restore it to the normal setting immediately after the speech is concluded.

For most of the final passage it may be necessary to lower the volume on Speaker Ⓐ slightly (5-10 db), especially if Speaker Ⓑ is smaller, for the sounds on Ⓑ are more important than those on Ⓐ until approximately 5 seconds before Ⓑ stops. Thereafter, to the end, raise the volume of Ⓐ slowly. Once the desired fortissimo is reached, leave the volume unchanged until the tape runs out. The relationship between the dynamic levels of the harp and the tape should be such as to create the effect of the harp and harpist being more and more overwhelmed by the tape sounds. The shouts should give the illusion of her being lost in a maelstrom.

# INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TAPE OPERATOR

①

②

③

④



# Background Music

A THEATER PIECE FOR HARP, SYMPATHETIC PIANO, STEREOPHONIC TAPE, FM TUNER AND TRANSISTOR RADIO

Richard Felciano

2" Turn off tuner abruptly

TAPE ON

①

HARP

standard commercial gliss.

ff

LV

3"

mf

rall. e dim. molto

immed.

fff

LV take key

hand flat: slap

Hiss

NO!

shout SB

place key

♩ = 60

♩ = 60

SB SB SB

(handle of key placed between F# & G)

1

TAPE ON

①

SB

fff

TAPE OFF

enter as part of tape rall.

♩ = 60

mp

ff sub.

SB knuckles both hands

SB finger trill (even, without accent)

ff

SB trill middle to top:

continue until interrupted by tape (about 2" tr.)

Spin once around rapidly on stool as though tape sound sets you abruptly in motion.

SEGUE:

Ritual:

LH RH

arms outstretched 1

arms at harp 2

3

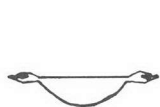
4

5

6

hold position

Move abruptly, mechanically, and "by the numbers" (each number = ½ second).



7



8

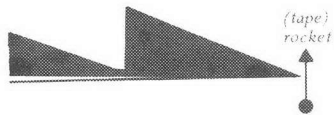


9

begin playing passage with this gesture

$\text{♩} = 72$  fast, frenetic, brittle, mechanically, like a robot, no accent

**ff**



2"

**mf**



stop at second rocket sound on tape; repeat last two notes several times if necessary

\*key between F and E above middle C

1"

**f**

**mf** (less)

**f**

**p**

follow tape

TOP

RANGE

glissando lightly, continuously, one finger of one hand only.

**f** (other hand)

BOTTOM

■ = random **f** pitch **SB**, muffle immediately. avoid coincidence with tape punctuations.

(B)

harp harmonics (distorted)

(A)

as continuation of preceding:

as beginning, but **pp**

2"

**Ab**

(B)

(A)

natural sound

8va

**mf**

**p**

**mf**

**p**

slow, relaxed  $\text{♩} = 50$

simulate end of preceding gliss

avoid coincidence with tape as much as possible.

**pp**

**mp**

**pp**

**mp**

pedal slide

rall.

**p**

**ff** nasal

set harp upright

\*A nasal **Bb** suddenly protrudes from the tape part. Jump back at it instantly with your own **Bb**.



②

time with harp

12-15"

6-7"

7"

3"

1 1/2"

level *mf-f*  
do not  
cover harp

UPRIGHT

PLAYING POSITION

UPRIGHT

PLAYING POSITION

UP

BACK

UP

(faster)

(slower)

Slowly lean harp back with movement of *F* from (B) to (A) (as though position of harp controls position of sound).

Freeze, look toward speaker (A) in puzzled manner, then pensively replace harp in upright position. Keep your hands on the instrument.

Try it again—to be sure you were not dreaming.

Again replace harp in upright position keeping hands on instrument.

Now take your hands off instrument and move hands slowly, ominously to grasp it again, as though stalking prey. Fingers apart.

At 7" grasp soundboard firmly. When tape sound occurs, pull both hands back abruptly, as though burned.

Now grasp harp confidently and move it to and fro as though in complete control of the movement of sound. (Synchronize!)

① ①

③

④

increasingly angry

Flourishes to shake *F* loose

higher, fierce

higher

same level

lower

1" pause

3

3

3

8"

Not knowing what to do with the stuck *F*, you finally determine to incorporate it as a pedal in a passage of traditional music. (Set *Bb* major here, not before.)

*J* = 80 ca. *espressivo*

12"

Seeing that this is to no avail, get up and leave platform, come back with black cloth and throw it over (A) so speaker is covered completely at 12".

Harp keeps moving, *F* gets stuck in speaker (A)

[Beethoven: Symphony No. 9]

*E* *b*

⑤

⑥

explosion

WN (hiss)

fff

Tape dialogue, the piano ringing softly in sympathy with (B)

WN

3"

11" (count)

*J* = 72

Stop, look at (B) and hiss reply.

fff

s-s-s-s-s-s

Return to harp and play, frenetically

metallic

normale

metallic

Avoid coincidence with tape as much as possible.

SB

Heav-y

3 Slap

3 Shout

drag the triplet

s-s-s-s-s-s

Hiss fff

WN

At a pause in the tape sounds about 1" after vocal hiss starts (about 23" after (B) WN starts or into tape dialogue)

LV, change pedals for new setting; any buzz which occurs is desired.

segue: *mf* only

Mutter the following, unintelligibly; use half-closed lips; as a badly tuned radio.

"Nearly anything baby can do, Axion can undo. Babies are experts at dirt and stains. Give them a clean outfit and in no time it's covered with chocolate...spinach..."

continuous muttering

(about 40" into tape dialogue)

① ①

② continued  
(about 40" into tape dialogue)

① (scrapping sound)

as though a continuation of speech

ff norm. ff norm. norm. mp

segue

norm. pedal slide 5 9 9 3

Bb Gb Ab G# Gb Eb G# F#

poco rall. ♩ = 50  
Slower dolce

②

①

spoken: "Reset"  
(mutter)  
intimately; matter of factly

(spoken) "Pedals"  
mp

ff 1"-2"

Db Fb

normale G#

LV segue

♩ = 72

② continued

① continued

fast; leave irregular pauses between notes; play against tape.

ff normale

8va

pedal slide

repeat if necessary; stop during last upward sweep of (A) and follow immediately with

fff

single rapid gliss. entire range down to F#

fff muffle immed. in steps, treble to bass, as fast as possible; do not muffle 1<sup>st</sup> octave

6"

LV

F# E# fff

TAPP OFF  
CUE QUICKLY!

(B) *tacet*  
**FAST CUE**  
**TAPE ON** immediately after low E# of harp.

(A) Voice, pompously  
 "Of all the instruments..." etc.

(3)

(E)

(A) is acting up again. Set harp upright, lean your head forward against it in despair; both hands remain on the harp; fingers of right hand begin to tap impatiently; get up, walk slowly over to (A), encircling it, the while doing a slow burn; toward end of speech, grasp black drape which still covers speaker, pause momentarily, then with a sudden jerk, on the words "before Saul", pull the drape off and drop it to the floor, angrily. Return to harp resolutely and somewhat in disgust.

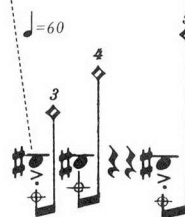
(F)

slower than tape.

(the same low E#)



After striking, touch one finger to node to produce five most resonant partials. It may be necessary to locate partials in advance and mark them with colored chalk. Play standing, if desired



(sit)

1"



(G)

up and down slowly at random ("wind")

slow cresc.  
*ppp* (background music)

after 4-6"  
 hiss (as a sorceress)  
 varied, softly, sporadically  
 cast a spell

(B) *tacet*



immediately

any order; irregular pauses between notes  
 moderato

continue until 9"  
 after antiphonal F7  
 returns on tape

ca. 10"  
*tacet*

both hands on left side of harp  
 J=60  
 nail file on low wound string - slowly

234 234 234  
 SB SB SB

*tacet*

tape - spoken voice

"kind, lovable, considerate..."

*tacet*  
 F7 returns again

J=60  
 norm., pesante

5"

*tacet*

Muffle chord during rests but let F#<sub>4</sub>, always replayed, ring through.



② tacet

① continued

tape E $\flat$  emphasis

tape runs out  
about here

TAPE OFF

TAPE ON

Waltz  
1st phrase

Waltz  
2nd phrase

ff LV fast slow mf f SB SB SB norm. SB

emphasize top note  
rall. & dim.

$\text{♩} = 60$   
a tempo with top note 'A'

in tape tempo  $\frac{3}{4}$

take key

E $\flat$  D $\flat$  F $\sharp$  G $\sharp$  G $\flat$  G $\sharp$

①

④

Waltz  
3rd phrase

TAPE OFF

rall. accel.

1" after

$\text{♩} = 60$

ff

rapid gliss. back of nail

ped. slide sim.

2 SB LV norm. G $\sharp$  F $\sharp$

F $\sharp$  B $\flat$  G $\flat$  C $\flat$  E $\flat$  F $\flat$  D $\flat$

①

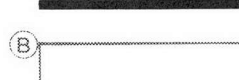
(B) 

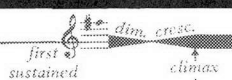
(A) 

*p* 8 *mp* 7 *segue*

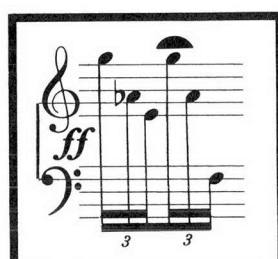
*♩* = 120 mechanically

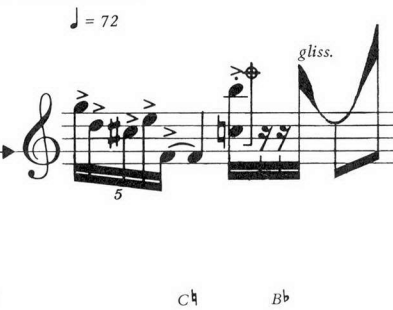


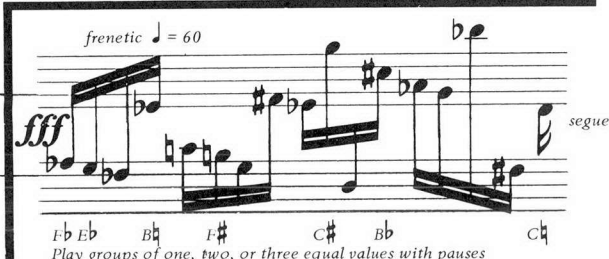
(B) 

(A) *slow white noise cresc.*  *dim. cresc.* *etc.* *climax* *first sustained F#*

*♩* = 72


 *ff* *repeat as long as necessary; play 2 repetitions after climax of 1st F# crescendo on (B) then segue*



 *gliss.* *SB slap* *always fff* *LV* *F#*

 *frenetic* *♩* = 60 *segue* *ff* *Play groups of one, two, or three equal values with pauses of one value between; e.g. the beginning might be:*


*go on after beginning of white noise "pitch" descent*

*(white noise, continued)*

(B) 

(A)  *continued*  *Start a 6-count fade of house lights. If a fade is unavailable, use a bump-out at the same place.*

*final tape sound is white noise on (A) which stops with a muffled amplifier click*

(H) When sustained sound breaks up on (B) play 7 more notes , then move immediately to shouts, regardless of where you are in the present passage.

 *8va*

*A# G# B# F# E# D# D# Eb Db D# Ab G# F# B# E#*

\*If a fade is unavailable, use a bump-out at the same place


(J)


#### IN DARKNESS (UNSEEN):

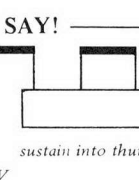
Get up, turn on small, cheap transistor radio (heretofore unseen), and set volume level low (hold it to your ear, as tape is FFF now). Set radio down in an unobtrusive place which is nevertheless in the line of sight of most of the audience (e.g. on the floor leaning against left proscenium arch). EXIT.

After tape sound stops, transistor radio is heard faintly in darkness for about 10 seconds. House lights then come up slowly in a count of 12 or more.

*♩* = 56

*fff*  *shout* *LV*

*SEE-LAH!*  *simile* *LV*

*SAY!*  *sustain into thunder!* *LV*

**RICHARD FELCIANO** was born in California in 1930. He holds degrees from Mills College, the Paris Conservatory, and the University of Iowa (Ph.D. 1959). His principal teachers of composition were Darius Milhaud, with whom he worked at Mills and in Paris, and Luigi Dallapiccola, with whom he studied privately during a year in Florence. He has held grants from the French and Italian governments, the Woolley and Copley foundations, a Fulbright grant, two Ford Foundation fellowships, and a Guggenheim fellowship. Since 1967 he has been a resident composer to the National Center for Experiments in Television in San Francisco. His sensitive gift for working with highly refined sonorities, the originality of his compositions, and his uncommon ability to combine electronic sounds with those of live instruments have made him one of the most highly respected American composers of his generation. Mr. Felciano is currently Professor of Music at the University of California at Berkeley and co-director of the university's electronic music studio.