

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus

“Dear Charlie”

A Collection of Songs for Marimba and Voice

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of

Master of Music in Contemporary Performance

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July 2nd, 2018

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Abstract

At its core, Music can be described as a form of communication; of what we cannot achieve only through speech. By intertwining melody and the human voice, we are able to attain a level of personal expression that transcends gender, age, race, social class, and more. By contrast, music can also be meaningless; an exercise of learned muscle memory through repetition, void of emotion. The music in the marimba world has strayed dangerously close to the latter by creating a trend of music that is technically demanding, time consuming, and largely unpalatable for the audience, isolating the instrument to chamber halls and jury rooms. I have written a collection of six pieces for marimba and voice, drawing on techniques in the song writing tradition in an attempt to bring the marimba to a new genre. By using the marimba as a singer-songwriter tool, we can introduce the instrument to a mainstream market, helping create more performance and occupational opportunities, and shedding light on this wonderful instrument.

Acknowledgment

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my amazing professors and peers at the Berklee College of Music. Thank you for your unyielding support, ferocious devotion, and your inspired passion in what you do. They included but are not limited to Victor Mendoza, Casey Driessen, Perico Sambeat, Mariano Steimberg, Sergio Martinez, Liz Teutsch, Chris Wainwright, and Clara Barbera. Everyday you inspire me to continue what I am doing, despite the fact that no one knows what my instrument is. Your love for what you do is what will keep me pushing on for years to come. Also, I never would have accomplished this project without the help of my peers. To Jasmine Howard, Nan Macmillan, Eva Villalba, Grace Laboy, Erella Atlan, Ma Zhujun, and Davis West; this project wouldn't have been approachable without your beautiful voices and inspiring words. Thank you for everything you gave to this project and the countless hours you selflessly sacrificed to my vision.

1. Introduction

I've dawned the Texas sun, braced the Missouri snow, and taunted the Florida storms, all in the pursuit of music. I am a Texas-born artist who grew up in the heat of marching band, the composure of the chamber hall, and the admiration of the songsmith. With compositions focusing on the marimba, I write for the instrument in ways similar to classical solo music, while intertwining new instrumentations and uses for the keyboard. In an attempt to push the use of the instrument outside of the chamber music realm, I strive to write music that breaks with the self-defeating trend in marimba literature that focus' on technical demand and virtuosity.

This culminating experience is a book of sheet music and accompanying recordings of six original songs that focus on the marimba as a vocal accompaniment. Compositionally, the writing style is based on classical solo marimba literature while also drawing on song-writing elements. Each song is lyrically written as a letter addressed to a fictional personal named Charlie, creating an overarching theme. "Charlie" is not inherently important to the project, but rather provides an artistic focus that each song is narrated towards. Some songs are love letters, others, an airing of grievances, and some provide kind advice; but all are relatable to a large audience. In order to do this, I have taken my own writing style, which is rooted in classical marimba playing, and worked with several singers from varying backgrounds and incorporated lyrics in differing languages. The use of different languages was utilized to increase the target audience beyond just English speakers. I wanted the project to be as relatable to as wide an audience as possible. The subject matter is written to be universally applicable to anyone, and by using several languages it creates another level of engagement and deepens the meaning of the pieces. This was only possible

due to the diverse background of the singers I had at my disposal, who were crucial in the songwriting process. Along with the lyric writing process, I tried to approach my compositions in a similar manner to other songwriters. I began by building basic chord progressions and melodies at the piano and then took those ideas to the marimba, and through trial and error, developed the working song.

2. Purpose

There is a gap in the material for the marimba between beginner level pieces and extremely difficult pieces. Many composers write at the keyboard and apply skills and techniques that they have developed over time, into their music. More often than not, these composers are highly trained and accomplished marimbists and write very challenging music, which may sound amazing, but is too difficult for younger players. Many educators have begun commissioning new works that are written with their students in mind, such as Nancy Zeltsman, who has commissioned two books of music specifically with the purpose of filling this gap. I believe this is an important issue to be addressing but we need to take it a step further. It is not enough to only fill the space in concerns to difficulty; we need to fill the gap of genre as well.

The Marimba is still widely unknown outside of the percussion world. The literature is very complex and mostly consumed only by other percussionists, creating a very small market and not living up to the true potential of the instrument. My goal is to push the marimba into a new genre that will shed light on this beautiful instrument, but in order to do that we need to begin writing for the instrument in a way that is more palatable to non-percussionists and average listeners. I aim to do this by incorporating lyrics and songwriting elements into my writing, so a more general audience can be reached. The themes of songwriting have been used for generations and allow for a more welcoming environment. People love listening to the poetry of a

singer songwriter because there is an instant understanding and gratification that can only be achieved through words, and if we don't start writing with a larger audience in mind then the instrument will remain bound to the chamber hall and forever, and thought of as "the big xylophone". At the same time, we need to be careful that we do not pander to another audience purely for the sake of growing the marimba world. Growth purely for the sake of growth is not beneficial without substance, but if the marimba does not break the shackles that we have put on it, then it will forever remain a novelty of music universities and practice rooms.

People love singer songwriter music because it attaches itself to our hearts and our soul. It has the ability to create change and connect people across geographical, political, and generational divides. It can help us learn and grow in ways that can only be done through music and shape us into whom we are. Nobel Laureate, Bob Dylan, states this well when he describes the first time he heard "I Am the Walrus". "I remember first hearing, in November 1967, aged nearly 12, the Beatles' "I Am The Walrus"; how John Lennon's lyrics, splicing *Alice in Wonderland* with a sexy surrealism, seemed to lead me, Pied Piper like, out of childhood."¹ Music has the ability to help us grow and move through life with a guiding hand, making the songwriter genre a powerful tool.

3. Execution of the Project

The concepts of love, anger, or regret are relatable to anyone, and permeate singer songwriter music. With this project I wanted to be able to express these simple and fundamental themes using the marimba as the primary writing and

¹ Motion, Andrew, et al. "Beyond Bob Dylan: Authors, Poets and Musicians Pick Their Favourite Songwriter." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 5 Nov. 2016, www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/05/bob-dylan-nobel-favourite-songwriter.

accompaniment tool, as well as incorporating other languages. By using broad topics as well as different dialects, I am widening the target audience in an attempt to shed light on a relatively new and unknown instrument.

3.1 The Compositions

In order to successfully complete this project, I began by composing six pieces in varying styles, working very closely with my librettists to make sure the key of the pieces and lyrical content was appropriate. I then rehearsed them with each singer individually and recorded them all in the AKSS studio. The most important part was the compositions themselves since my main goal is to have a clean and professional book of sheet music in the end, and to achieve that, the compositions needed to be as well-written and notated as possible. I want my final product to be ready to take to different publishing companies, where it could be printed in mass and prepared for distribution. The audio recordings and accompanying video is also important for the advertisement of the book. The main way marimba music is consumed is through YouTube, making the video integral for the advertisement of the pieces. The modern marimba has only been around for approximately twenty-five years, so it has spent much of its growth amongst the rise of social media. Being able to have content to put on social media, including audio recordings and video recordings, is a big factor in the advertisement of the book.

3.2 The Recordings

After the pieces were written the next step was to record audio, and capture as high quality and accurate of a sound as possible. Through much trial and error, I found a microphone set up that got the optimum sound out of the marimba, but the mic'ing techniques varied from track to track, making each song slightly different

from the next. In the end the best microphone technique was two Neumann KM184 small diaphragm condenser microphones directly above the marimba. Even the use of room microphones proved useless because the instrument didn't have the space necessary to fully stretch its legs, so reverb and other effects were added later to compensate for the space.

The original plan for the video was to overdub footage to the recordings, but this proved to be too challenging. No click track was used during the recording of the songs because the tempo needed to be able to breath. So during the overdubbing process we ended up with extreme phasing issues. Instead, stills of the sheet music were used in lieu of performance footage, so there would still be a visual element to accompany the audio when uploaded to YouTube. This is very commonly done in the classical genre so the listener can follow along in the music and can often be more useful than performance footage, so despite the set back, I was able to find a viable solution.

3.3 The Distribution

The final step is the release and distribution of the book and recordings. I printed and bound two books for my final presentation because I didn't want to invest too much money before getting final comments and revisions from my panel. The printing process was relatively cheap and painless, making me more inclined to print and publish the pieces myself. The benefits include the control of the distribution and quality of the product, being able to establish my own branding techniques, and receiving one hundred percent of the profits. The challenge is in the advertising of the pieces and mass production of the books. I do not have a name as a marimba player that is substantial enough to get my product to people outside of my community, so it will be challenging to convince people to buy my book. In the end, I don't need to

make a lot of money off this book if it is able to help build my name and reputation in the percussion world, and help me gain further employment.

4. The Book “Dear Charlie”

The book is comprised of six songs in Portuguese, Spanish, Mandarin, French, and English. The singers are all fluent in their respective language ensuring articulation and execution is as accurate as possible during the recording process. It is important for other players to have as accurate of a reference as possible, which is why I wanted to have fluent singers. Each piece was written on the piano developing the chord progression and melody and was then taken to the marimba where I applied common marimba techniques to the progression to support the melody. Some of the pieces have elements that are technically more challenging, but overall, the pieces are approachable by intermediate players.

4.1 “Vou Com Você”

Written from the perspective of a girl from Brazil, this song is a love letter. A girl expresses her longing for a boy named Charlie saying, “Vou Com Você”, I will go with. Even though they have only just met, she expresses her desire to go with him, no matter where the destination. This piece was originally written around a very simple chord progression of only four chords, I IV VIIb V. With this song, I wanted the sound to be very simple to reflect much of the songwriter music repertoire. I then began to elaborate with subtle chromaticism to make for a more interesting chord progression, always being careful to not distract from the lyrics. After that I began applying typical permutations common to marimba playing. In measure 33 I applied a

simple permutation that efficiently moves up and down through arpeggios, common to marimba solo literature and easily adaptable by players.



Fig. 1 screen shot from “Vou Com Você”, measure 33 to 36

4.2 “Gratitude”

This song is written from the personal perspective of Charlie, and since a woman performs it, it poses the question, Is Charlie a girl? This song expresses Charlie's gratitude for life, despite the challenges and troubles it presents.

This piece is a typical choral form found in many solo pieces. The form starts with an extended roll section with the marimba harmonizing and accompanying the voice in the top mallet. The second half opens into a marimba feature following a similar chord progression, allowing the marimba a chance to show more technical moments. Playing chorals is a very common step in a marimba player's advancement. The literature is deceptively challenging for accuracy as well as phrasing. In order to imitate sustain, we must strike the bars repetitively in order to create the illusion of a long tone. While rolling on the bars we then create the challenge of accuracy because the strokes are in quick succession, making the shifting between chords more difficult.

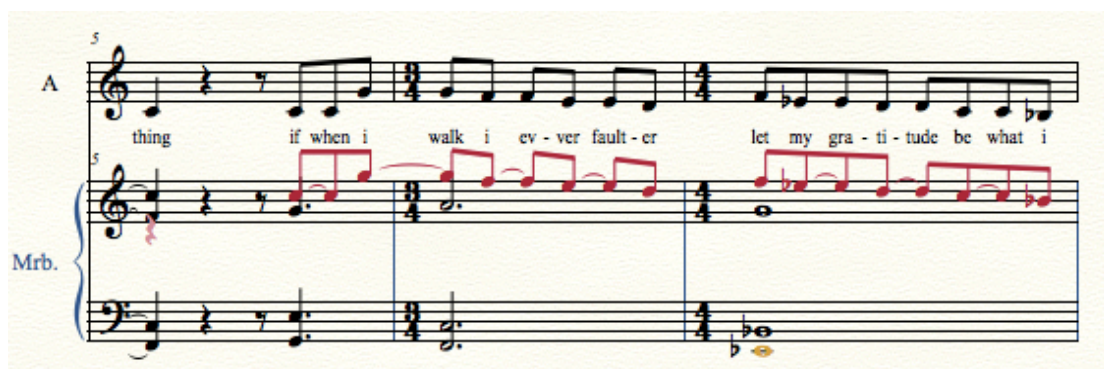


Fig. 2, screen shot from “Gratitude”, measure 5 to 8

4.3 “Adiós Carlos”

Compositionally more clear-cut, “Adios Carlos” is written in an Impressionistic style. This song is about a Spanish woman who has finally had enough with Charlie, or in this case, Carlos. It draws heavily on the piece “Apparition” by Debussy,² utilizing a similar cascading effect to blur the tonalities together. It’s performed on the marimba the exact same way as the piano, allowing it to be performed on either instrument effectively.



Fig. 3, screen shot from “Adiós Carlos”, measure 4 to 7

It is notated as triplets but is intended to meld rhythmically to give a smooth consistent sound. I also encourage the player to taken freedoms with the vocal accompaniment section. The chords are notated as simple quarter notes but if the

² gsarci2011. “Claude Debussy - ‘Apparition’ for Voice and Piano (Audio + Sheet Music).” *YouTube*, YouTube, 22 May 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9aNqNO5uZE

performer prefers, they can implement other rhythms or ‘comping’ styles, so long as it doesn’t deter from the melody. The focus in all these songs should be the lyrics so as long as the playing doesn’t distract from the words, I encourage the player to take personal liberties with this section.

Fig. 4, screen shot from “Adiós Carlos”, measure 34 to 37

4.4 “Yáo Lán Qū”

“Yáo Lán Qū”, which translates to Lullaby in Mandarin, is from the perspective of a mother singing to her child. This song is meant to be a sweet bedtime or nursery song that would be sung to a small child. This piece can also be performed as a solo. From a performance perspective, this tune is one of the most challenging. It was originally written as a practice in counterpoint with contrary lines moving simultaneously in the top and bottom voices. The melody is doubled in the top mallet through the whole piece, making any pitch discrepancies between the marimba and voice very obvious. Because of the extreme tonality of the piece any wrong notes in the marimba part become very apparent making this a deceptively difficult piece. Often percussion students will have to play simple piano pieces, such as the Bach inventions, in order to practice intervallic control. This song is intended to reflect that same approach and

challenge factor.



Fig. 5, screen shot from “Yáo Lán Qū”, measure 3 to 5

4.5 “Deux Trois Souvenirs”

The fifth piece of this collection is a French waltz, and my personal favorite. The accompaniment is very simple but fits nicely for the style, transporting the listener and player to a Parisian cafe.

One of my favorite parts of this project was realizing the weight that a name can carry in different peoples cultures. It can have extreme contexts that are unnoticed unless you are from a specific country, and for that reason the name Charline was used in replace of Charlie. The librettist feared that the name Charlie would only be taken as a reference to the Charlie Hebdo attacks. Even though the attack is not as often thought of in connection with the name Charlie elsewhere in the world, these atrocities are still very fresh in the memories of the French people. That being said, this piece is written to sound like a Parisian waltz, written in three but felt in one. This is typical of French accordion songs that are written to accompany singers.³

³ LifescapesMusic. “A Stroll in Paris - Two French Waltzes.” *YouTube*, YouTube, 11 Aug. 2010, www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAEjitXo-eM.



Fig. 6, screen shot from “Deux Trois Souvenirs”, measure 91 to 97

This piece does have a few moments of more technically challenging passages. As seen above in measure 96, the player must play a quick sixteenth note phrase in transitioning between verse and chorus. If this passage is too challenging for younger players, I would encourage them to play something similar using the same tonal structure that isn’t as technically intricate. Again, I want these pieces to be approachable by students. So if one passage is too difficult, I would prefer it be left out or changed, rather than the player choosing not to play the song.

4.6 “Run Home Charlie”

The last song of the collection, and the reason for the name and theme of the project, “Run Home Charlie” is about a boy being told to go home because his mother has just passed away. It is the only trio in the collection and should be treated as a lead sheet. I strongly encourage the players to improvise around the notated parts.

This book of songs is intended to allow players leeway with the execution of their parts and encourages the performer to make their own interpretation of the way they want to play the piece. I want people to feel comfortable getting off the page and playing what feels natural to them. The piece blurs the lines of playing exactly what is notated and only having chords to play around. If the piece is performed only as

written, the desired sound and effect will be achieved, but it leaves plenty of room for improvisation and personal taste.

Score

Run Home Charlie

140 BPM

Nathan Smith
Librettist - Nathan Smith and Nan Macmillan

Alto

cantabile

Violin

p

Marimba

Dm7 F7sus

A

Vln.

Mrb.

Dm7 F7sus

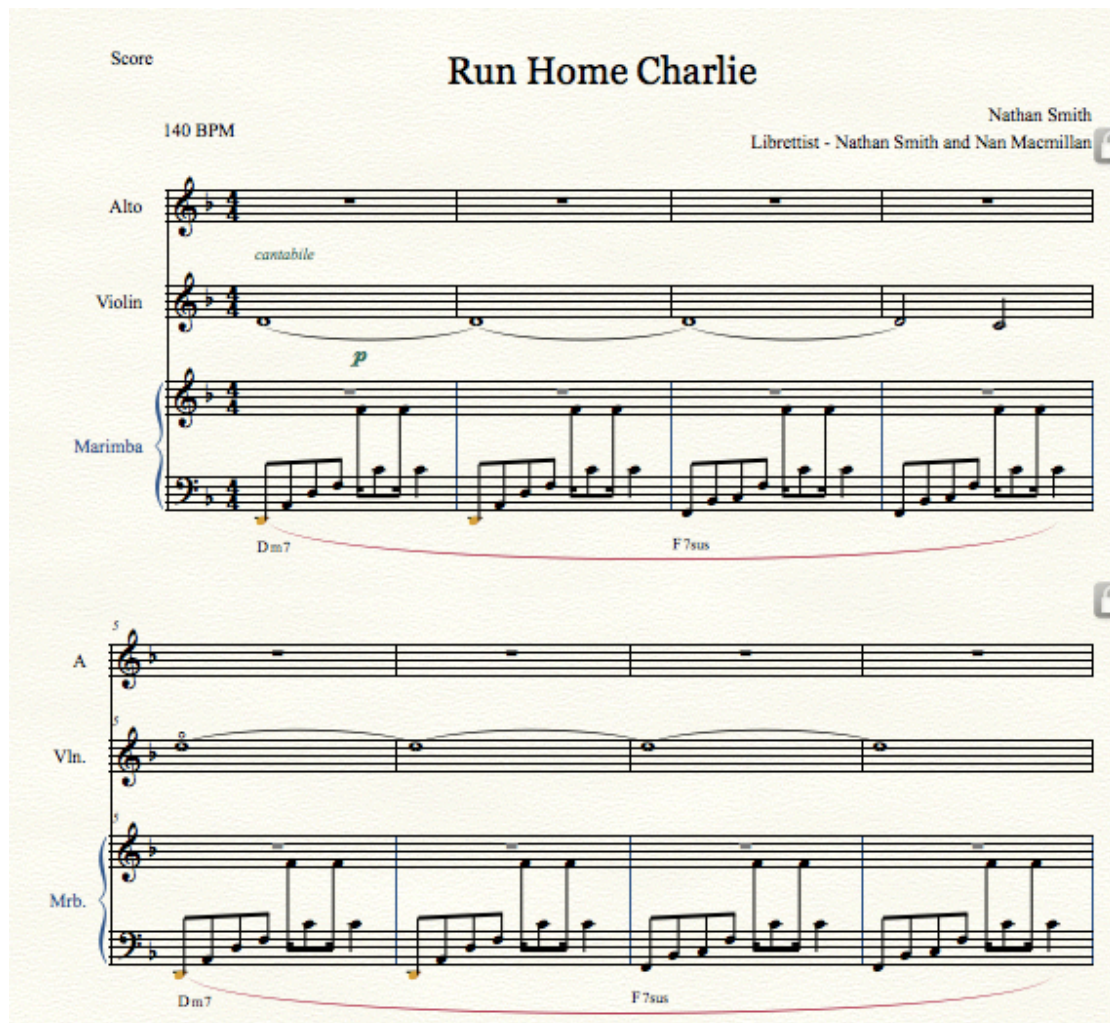


Fig. 7, screen shot from “Run Home Charlie”, measure 1 to 9

5. Personal Motivations

I have always loved the honesty and integrity of the singer songwriter tradition and the sonic and compositional possibilities of the marimba. While living in Austin I wanted to approach this project, but I never had the resources to successfully achieve it. Berklee provided me with the personnel and materials I needed to accomplish my final goal of composing and recording these six pieces. I am very proud of this end product and I have already received requests for copies. This is an untapped area within the marimba world that needs to be developed, but I knew if I tried to release

something that wasn't well written and professionally produced, that no one would take it seriously. I can confidently say, that all six pieces are well written, recorded, and thought out.



Fig. 8, photo of the first print of the front and back of “Dear Charlie”

6. Future Impact and Conclusion

My goal with this project it to have a body of work reflected in compositions for the marimba that is different than what is being written right now. I want to build my name as a player and a composer through these pieces and be known for doing something that is different and important. This would allow me a better chance to gain employment in higher education. The jobs at the highest levels within universities are greatly sought after for their consistent pay, enrollment of qualified students, and the exposure it comes with. The majority of university professors will have better endorsements, receive more requests to perform at conferences or serve as guest lecturers, and will be able to charge more for private lessons. On top of that, most

universities have much larger budgets for instruments, giving access to the newest and best equipment. Because of all these benefits, these jobs are highly desirable and very difficult to get. Within my peer group, people are trying to attain these jobs by gaining degrees from the most prestigious institutions but still fall short. It is my hope that by writing for the marimba in a new and innovative way, I can create a following and be more competitive in the job market.

Due to the access of highly qualified singers and recording facilities, as well as the compositional guidance of my professors, this project has been a great success. Having already received requests for copies from a single post on Facebook, I fully expect to sell many books and begin to build my name and my brand. If this book is successful enough I will publish a second collection of songs. I have already begun a second project using the same approach, and I can't wait to keep writing. I will continue to compose for the instrument, always with the intent of broadening the 'marimba lovers' community, and sharing this wonderful instrument with the world.

6. Audio References

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- Mo Li Hua (Jasmine Flower)
- Purple Bamboo Melody
- Astrud Gilberto, João Gilberto and Stan Getz - The Girl from Ipanema
- Brazilian Dinner: Samba & Bossa Nova | Brazilian Music
- Seu Jorge - The Life Aquatic Sessions
- Nella and Javier Limon - The White Sessions
- Tonina Saputo and Javier Limon - Refugio Del Sonido
- Iron and Wine - Boy With a Coin
- Oro Santo Javier Limon and Buika en Buenafuente

- Susana Baca - Maria Lando
- Peru Landon - Leo Blanco
- Susana Baca - Negra Presuntuosa
- A Stroll in Paris - Two French Waltzes
- Debussy – Apparition

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8. Appendix - Lyrics

8.1 "Vou Com Você" Jasmine Howard

Amanhece e espero por você perto do mar

E sinto a dor

E a saudade me fez querer

mais te procurar

Meu amor Mais um dia

Só pra sonhar

Se você vem Charles

Vou com você, oh Charles

Desenhei uns traços seus lá na areia

Pensando em amor

E meu coração vai onde as ondas o levar

Pra onde for

Mais um dia Pra te encontrar

Se você vem Charles

Vou com você, oh Charles

Mais um dia

So pra sonhar

Se você Se você

Se você vem Charles

Vou com você, oh Charles

8.2 “Gratitude” Nan Macmillan

If I should ever wish to wander

If there is hope in anything

If when I walk I ever falter

Let my Gratitude be what I sing

If there should never come tomorrow

If I should stumble when I wake

If there be any grief or sorrow

Let my gratitude be what I sing

Oh

If I am worthy of forgiveness

If there's a hope that waits for me

8.3 “Adios Carlos” Eva Villalba

Recuerdo todo el tiempo que dedicabas,

A revivir una historia de amor pasada.

Y no pudiste avanzar, y ni olvidar,

Los momentos que ya nunca volverán

Y ahí comprendí que era lo mejor

Despedirme y decir, Adiós a Carlos

Llega la hora de recorrer mi camino

Y guardaré los recuerdos que viví contigo.

Pero no puedes mirar más hacia atrás

Necesitas dejar lo nuestro pasar

Para poder vivir tu vida mejor

Lo correcto, es decir: Adiós a Carlos

8.4 “Yáo Lán Qū” Ma Zhujun

Bao bao guai guai Kuai tang xia
Ma ma hong ni lai shui jiao
Jin tian xin qing hao bu hao
Wan de hao bu hao
Bao bao guai guai Kuai tang xia
Zao shui zao shen ti hao
Jiu zhe yang dai she ma ma de ai
Jiu jian jian jian jian jing ru men xiang
Bao bao guai guai Kuai tang xia
Ma ma hong ni lai shui jiao
Jiu zhe yang dai she ma ma de ai
Gen sui zhe jie pai jing rum eng xiang
Ba ba ma ma shen pang
Jian kang kuai le de zhang da
Zui wen nuan de di fang
Bao bao guai guai kuai shui xia
Zao shui zao qi shen ti hao
Jiu zhe yang dai zhe ma ma de ai
Ta jiang hui
Shou hu zhe
Shou hu zhe ni dao lao

8.5 “Deux trois souvenirs” Erella Atlan

Seule dans la brume
Je pense et je fume
Dans la nuée se dessine ton nom

Autour de moi les souvenirs s'agitent
Prise dans la danse, je chuchote et récite

Deux trois souvenirs, l'ombre de ton sourire
Un léger tournis, suffit
Deux trois souvenirs, le son de ton rire
Résonne dans ma tête, Charline

Je ne veux pas je me débats
J'essaie de l'oublier
Mais la tendre fumée m'ennivre
Ankylose mes pensées

Deux trois souvenirs, l'ombre de ton sourire
Un léger tournis, suffit
Deux trois souvenirs, le son de ton rire
Il n'en faut pas plus, Charline

Seule dans la brume
Je pense et je fume
Dans la nuée se dessine ton nom
Autour de moi les souvenirs s'agitent
Prise dans la danse, je chuchote et récite

Deux trois souvenirs, l'ombre de ton sourire
Un léger tournis, suffit
Deux trois souvenirs, le son de ton rire
Résonne dans ma tête, Charline

Je ne veux pas je me débats
J'essaie de l'oublier
Mais la tendre fumée m'ennivre
Ankylose mes pensées

Deux trois souvenirs, l'ombre de ton sourire
Il n'en faut pas plus Charline
Deux trois souvenirs, le son de ton rire
Il n'en faut pas plus Charline
Deux trois souvenirs, le son de ton rire
Il n'en faut pas plus Charline

8.6 "Run Home Charlie" Nan Macmillan and Nathan Smith

Midnight Blooming
Night time looming
Cant find peace at home
So you say here
Living in fear
Run home Charlie
Your mothers gone and no ones home now
Run hoe Charlie
Your all alone its time to go now
Garden growing
Sunrise showing
Only one was home
Rest your eyes now
Lay your head down
Run home Charlie
Your mothers gone and no ones home now

Run Home Charlie

You're all alone its time to go now

Run home Charlie

Your mothers gone and no ones home now

Run Home Charlie

You're all alone its time to go now