

# *Duo*

**for bass recorder  
(one instrument, two players),  
two actors and electronics**

**Luke Stoneham**

## Duo

A. One bass recorder (with a bass recorder stand), two players.\* A *duet* for two players, therefore, but a *solo* for the one instrument.

B. A looped recorded dialogue\*\* (on CD). This is to be cued (imperceptibly) beneath Player 1's first note, and faded to silence once Player 2 has exited. The speakers relaying this material are to be situated outside of the performance space (the doors of which should be closed), and the volume level to be checked so as to be inaudible to the audience when the recorder is sounding, and only just perceptible when it is not.

Player 1 enters, plays page 1 and then exits, leaving the recorder on its stand. Player 2 then enters and plays page 2. The transfer from Player 1 to Player 2 should be as smooth as possible—i.e. the last pause on page 1 should be no longer than any of the others. (This bar and the first bar of page 2 can in fact overlap.)

No music stand: the music is to be memorized.

The recorder: like (pitched) breathing—no more.

In ... out ... in ... out ... in ... out ... in ... out ...

A meditation.

The recorded script: like a Bruce Nauman neon piece.

On. Off. On. Off. Yes. No. Yes. No.

Automation.

\*These needn't be professional recorder players—or indeed professional musicians, but they should be professional *performers*.

\*\*See script. This is to be prepared by actors in advance and played 'to the hilt': screaming, raging, howling—no holds barred. War happening elsewhere.

# Duo

1

Twenty-seven times

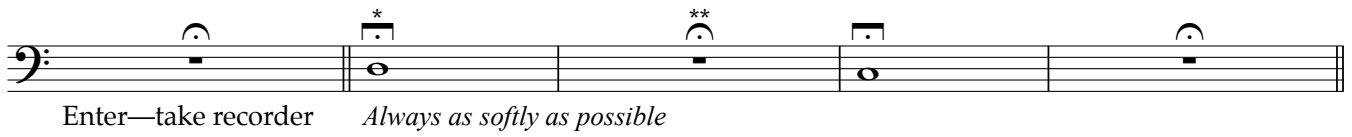
*Always as softly as possible*

Exit (leaving the recorder on its stand)  
(Straight on)

\*As long as possible every time—a full exhalation

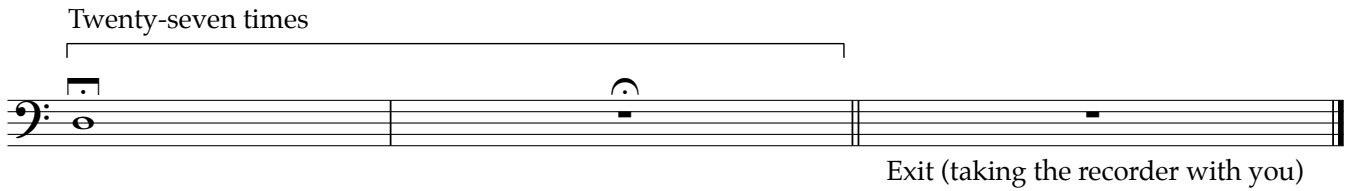
\*\*Not so long—just enough to comfortably refresh the lungs

2



Enter—take recorder *Always as softly as possible*

Twenty-seven times



Exit (taking the recorder with you)

\*As long as possible every time—a full exhalation

\*\*Not so long—just enough to comfortably refresh the lungs

## Duo

SHE: **NO!**  
HE: **YES!**  
SHE [great sadness and loss]: You have **no** right . . . you have **no** right at all. . . .  
HE: **Yes**, you did.  
SHE [crying]: I FORGET! Sometimes . . . sometimes when it's night, when it's late, and . . . and everybody else is . . . talking . . . I forget and I . . . want to mention him . . . but I . . . HOLD ON . . . I hold on . . . but I've wanted to . . . so often . . . oh, you've *pushed* it . . . there was **no** need . . . there was **no** need for *this*. I mentioned him . . . all right . . . but you didn't have to push it over the EDGE. You didn't have to . . . kill him.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE [still looking away]: **No** . . . nothing.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: **Yes**.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: **Yes**.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: **Yes**.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: **Yes**.  
[a long silence between them]  
Did you . . . did you . . . have to?  
HE [pause]: **Yes**.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE [pause]: **Yes**.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **Yes**.  
SHE: **Yes**.  
HE: **No**.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **Yes**.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **No**.  
SHE: **Yes. No**.  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: **Yes. No**.

SHE [impatiently]: **Yes**. They're married. To each other. Cluck! And she comes in, and she looks around, and she puts her groceries down, and she says, 'What a dump!'

HE: (indiscernible)

SHE: **Yes** . . . guests . . . people. . . . We've got guests coming over.

HE: (indiscernible)

SHE: **Yes** . . . and good-looking. . . .

HE: **Yes**, I guess so. . . . But why in God's name are they coming over here now?

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **Yes**. But I'm sure your father didn't mean we were supposed to stay up all night with these people. I mean, we could have them over some Sunday or something. . . .

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **Yes**, you do . . . you really do . . . you're always *springing* things on me.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE [patiently]: It was very funny; **yes**.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **Yes**, love.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE [with a great effort he controls himself . . . then, as if she had said nothing more than 'Dear' . . . ]: **Yes?** Can I get you something?

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE [considers, then moves off ]: **No** . . . there are limits. I mean, man can put up with only so much without he descends a rung or two on the old evolutionary ladder . . . sinks, and it's a funny ladder . . . you can't reverse yourself . . . start back up once you're descending.

[SHE blows him an arrogant kiss]

Now . . . I'll hold your hand when it's dark and you're afraid of the bogey man, and I'll tote your gin bottles out after midnight, so **no** one'll see . . . but I will not light your cigarette. And that, as they say, is that.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE [resignedly]: **Yes**.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **Yes** I did.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **Yes** I did.

SHE: (indiscernible)

HE: **No** . . . he's a biologist.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: In my mind, you are buried in cement, right up to your neck. [SHE giggles]  
**No** . . . right up to your nose . . . that's much quieter.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **No, no** . . . I want to know . . . you brought it out into the open. When is he coming home?  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **Yes** . . . since you had the bad taste to bring the matter up in the first place . . . when is the little bugger coming home?

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SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **No**, I did not clean up the mess I made. I've been trying for years to clean up the mess I made.  
SHE: **Yes** you do.  
HE: Uh . . . **no**, love . . . we've got guests.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **No**, what we did, actually, was . . . we sort of danced around.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE [calm . . . serious]: **No** . . . **no**. It's just I've got to figure out some new way to fight you. Guerilla tactics, maybe . . . internal subversion . . . I don't know. Something.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE [considers it]: **Noooooo** . . . not with him around . . . that's for sure. And not with twinkle-toes here, either.  
SHE: (*indiscernible*)  
HE: **NO! NO! NO! NO!**  
SHE: Georgie said . . . but daddy . . . I mean . . . ha, ha, ha, ha . . . but *Sir*, it isn't a novel at all . . . [other voice] Not a novel? [mimicking HIS voice] **No**, sir . . . it isn't a novel at all. . . .  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE: The hell I won't. Keep away from me, you bastard!  
[backs off a little . . . uses HIS voice again]  
**No**, Sir, this isn't a novel at all . . . this is the truth . . . this really happened . . . TO ME!  
HE: (*indiscernible*)  
SHE [sincerely]: **No**.  
HE: **No**.

[*He starts quietly but as he goes on his tone becomes harsher, his voice louder*]  
Well, it's an allegory, really — probably — but it can be read as straight, cosy prose . . . and it's all about a nice young couple who come out of the middle-west. It's a bucolic, you see. AND, this nice young couple comes out of the middle-west, and he's blond and about thirty, and he's a scientist, a teacher, a scientist . . . and his mouse is a wifey little type who gargles brandy all the time . . . and . . .

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: It's perfectly all right for you. . . . I mean, you can make your own rules . . . you can go around like a hopped-up Arab, slashing away at everything in sight, scarring up half the world if you want to. But somebody else try it . . . **no** sir!

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE [*as if she were some sort of bug*]: **No** . . . **no** . . . you're . . . sick.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: **Yes** . . . you have.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: Once a month! I've gotten used to it . . . once a month and we get misunderstood, the good-hearted girl underneath the barnacles, the little Miss that the touch of kindness'd bring to bloom again. And I've believed it more times than I want to remember, because I don't want to think I'm that much of a sucker. I don't believe you . . . I just don't believe you. There is **no** moment . . . there is **no** moment any more when we could . . . come together.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE [*without moving*]: Oh, **yes** . . . I'll get some.

SHE [*violent*]: **NO?**

HE [*he too*]: **NO!** [*quietly again*] You'll try anything.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE [*never looking up*]: **No, no**, now . . . you go right ahead . . . you entertain your guests.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: **Yes** you are.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: **No** . . . what are you doing?

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE: **Yes**, good . . . good for you.

SHE: (*indiscernible*)

HE [*swings around to face her . . . says, with great loathing*]: **No** . . . show him . . . he hasn't seen it. *Maybe* he hasn't seen it. . . .



SHE: *(indiscernible)*  
 HE: **No, no**; that would be too much; he's your houseboy, baby, not mine.  
 SHE: There is **no** moon; the moon went down.  
 HE *[too cheerful]*: **No; no**.  
 SHE: **Yes** . . . you did. You would.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE *[with finality]*: There is **no** moon; the moon went down.  
 HE: **No**; but we must carry on as though we did.  
 SHE: *(indiscernible)*  
 HE *[throws one at her]*: SNAP! **No**, actually, it doesn't. Either way . . . I've had it.  
 SHE *[pathetic]*: **No**. But I don't like it.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE: **No**.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE *[pleading]*: **No** more games.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE *[almost in tears]*: **No; no**.  
 HE *[soothing]*: **Yes**, baby.  
 SHE: **No**; please?  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE: **No**.  
 HE: **No** climb stairs with Georgie?  
 SHE *[a sleepy child]*: **No** more games . . . please. It's games I don't want. **No** more games.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE: **No**.  
 HE: *(indiscernible)*  
 SHE *[tenderly; moves to touch him]*: Please, **no** more games; I . . .  
 HE *[too kindly]*: **Yes?**  
 SHE *[pathetically]*: **Yes**.  
 HE: Oh; **no**. You laboured . . . how you laboured.  
 SHE: *(indiscernible)*  
 HE: Ah . . . **yes**. Better.  
 SHE *[with great sadness]*: Our child. And we raised him . . . *[laughs, briefly, bitterly]* **yes**, we did; we raised him . . .  
 HE: With teddy bears and an antique bassinet from Austria . . . and **no** nurse.  
 SHE: **No**. A carrot. And his eyes were green . . . green with . . . if you peered so deep into them . . . so deep . . . bronze . . . bronze parentheses around the

irises . . . such green eyes!

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: [*laughing, to herself*]: . . . and how he broke his arm . . . how funny it was . . . oh, **no**, it hurt him! . . . but, oh, it was funny . . . in a field, his very first cow, the first he'd ever seen . . . and he went into the field, to the cow, where the cow was grazing, head down, busy . . . and he moo'd at it! [*laughs, ibid.*] He moo'd at it . . . and the beast, oh, surprised, swung its head up and moo'd at him, all three years of him, and he ran, startled, and he stumbled . . . fell . . . and broke his poor arm. [*laughs ibid.*] Poor lamb.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: How did you . . . what? . . . **No! No** . . . he grew . . . our son grew . . . up; he is grown up; he is away at school, college. He is fine, everything is fine.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: **No**. That's all.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: **No!**

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: **No!**

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE [*without energy*]: **No** more.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: YOU HAVE **NO** LETTERS!

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: **No** more.

HE: **YES!**

SHE: *(indiscernible)*

HE: **Yes**, that's right . . . crazy Billy . . . and he had a telegram, and it was for us, and I have to tell you about it.

SHE: *(indiscernible)*

HE: **No**.

SHE [*quivering with rage and loss*]: **NO! NO!** YOU CANNOT DO THAT! YOU CAN'T DECIDE THAT FOR YOURSELF! I WILL NOT LET YOU DO THAT!

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE [*a howl which weakens into a moan*]: **NOOOOOOoooooo**.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE [*pathetic*]: **No; no**, he is *not* dead; he is *not dead*.

HE: *(indiscernible)*

SHE: **NO!**

HE: Oh **yes**, and you bore him, and it was a good delivery. . . .