

SINKING THE TITANIC for solo clarinet
A Piece of Music Theatre by Evelyn Ficarra

Duration: 10 mins

Programme Note:

This piece explores the story of the sinking of the Titanic, struck by an iceberg just before midnight on April 14, 1912, while on her maiden voyage to New York. She sank less than three hours later, with the loss of many lives.

The piece is in seven short scenes with an epilogue, and works as a sort of wordless opera. The clarinetist plays all the parts, moving to different areas of the stage to represent the different characters: Titanic itself, the other ships in the area (some sending unheeded warnings of ice, some passing the sinking ship obliviously by, some steaming too late to the rescue) and, of course, the iceberg (played by the bass clarinet.)

The musical material was developed from the rhythms of the Morse Code messages and distress signals sent on that night and from fragments of ragtime and hymn tunes which the band on the Titanic may have played as the ship went down.

Preview File Only

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE PERFORMER

This piece can be staged very simply, using music stands placed in different areas of the space to represent a change of character. What follows is a scene synopsis together with stage directions describing the movements of the clarinettist developed for the first performance. This should be read with reference to the accompanying diagram showing the positions of the music stands on the stage. These are of course merely suggestions: many alternative stagings are possible and the performer is free to develop his or her own.

Some of the music is played in transit and will need to be memorised.

Most scenes are based around certain phrases in Morse Code, whether merely descriptive (as in scene one) or as extracts from actual messages sent between ships. Many of these messages are 'spelled out' in the music; they are also written in the score at the end of each scene. They appear in the synopsis as 'text' and should help the performer to get the gist of a scene.

Scene One: Starry Night

Text: STARRY NIGHT, QUIET SEAS.

The Titanic, happy and calmly confident on its maiden voyage, is crossing the Atlantic bound for New York. The night is clear and starlit.

You enter, playing, from Stage Right, and cross to station A, which you reach roughly by bar 5. From the beginning of bar 8 you turn away and play the rest of the scene while moving to station B1. (NB in general the final repeated monotones at the ends of scenes may be used to cover the time it takes to get from one station to the next, and may be repeated as necessary depending on the size of the space.)

Scene Two: Warnings

Text: (1) 41.27 NORTH AND 50.08 WEST ON 14 APRIL.
PASSED 2 ICEBERGS. -KNUTH. (2) ICEBERGS AND FIELD ICE
- BALTIC. (3) ICE, ICE AND ICEBERGS - MESABA.

Three ships (the Amerika, the Baltic and the Mesaba) send messages to the Titanic warning her of icebergs which they have sighted.

You have reached station B1 and pause briefly to survey the scene. Catching sight of the iceberg (bass clarinet at station E) you look somewhat alarmed, raise the bell of your clarinet in the direction of station A and deliver the first warning message. Try to make it clear that you are warning station A about station E. You are alert and business like, not frantic: you are doing your duty. You are captain Knuth of the ship Amerika.

Using bar 23 you cross the space to station C. Here you become the Baltic and deliver the second warning. You are somewhat more relaxed and laid back about it all; you are perhaps in the middle of hosting an urbane dinner-dance.

Use bars 34 & 35 to get yourself across to station D. Stand with your back to the audience and deliver the third message directly to the Titanic, which is now in front of you. You are the Mesaba. You are more emotional; the message is now very urgent. Use bar 41 to travel towards station E, dropping your clarinet off on a waiting clarinet stand at station A on the way, singing repeats of the bar at the same pitch on the syllables 'di, da' until you reach the bass clarinet. ('Di' as in 'bit' for a short note and 'da' as in 'father' for a long one.)

Scene Three: The Iceberg

Text: The multiphonic gestures bars 1 - 4 spell out 'SEAS'.

The iceberg, mysterious and powerful, glides towards the Titanic.

You pick up the bass clarinet and play scene 3 while moving slowly towards station A. (Icebergs actually move terrifyingly quickly but you need somehow to convey the huge bulk of it, its immense power and menacing quality, and the fact that most of it is under water, invisible. Perhaps a very still, slow, gliding movement, your feet never leaving the floor.) Play the last note for as long as possible as you put the bass down into a waiting bass clarinet stand at station A, and retrieve your clarinet at the same time.

Scene Four: Collision

Text: ICE!

The lookout on the Titanic sights the iceberg and rings the alarm bell, but too late; the ship is side-swiped and the iceberg slices easily through the hull as it passes. The impact is not great however; few on board notice it. But there is a strange hissing and whining sound as sea water reaches the boilers.

You play this scene from station A, completely serene and happy for the first 2 & 1/2 bars, until the alarm bell is rung in bar 3. You are taken completely by surprise when you are hit, and this scene depicts the shock and pain of the collision. Between bars 10 and 11 (before you put the mouthpiece back on) you realise you need help, and you raise the clarinet to your eye like an eyeglass to scout for passing ships. You see one, and hurriedly put the clarinet back together so that you can play scene 5.

Scene Five: Distress

Text: CQD CQD - 41.46 AND 50.14 STRUCK AN ICEBERG.
CQD CQD...SOS SOS STRUCK AN ICEBERG AND ARE SINKING
BY THE HEAD.

The Titanic sends out many distress signals to ships within a wide radius, using both the old distress signal (CQD) and a new one (SOS.) The captain and the radio operator realise the severity of the danger but as yet not many passengers are alarmed.

You play the whole scene from station A, sending your distress signal to the other ships (stations B, C and D) in turn. This is controlled panic, with emphasis on the control. At the end of this scene you improvise some Morse monotone to get yourself across to station B2.

Scene Six: Distant Ships

Text: (From the Carpathia) HEADING FOR YOU.

The Carpathia receives a distress call and sends the message that she is coming to help; unfortunately she is far away and the Titanic will sink very quickly. Another ship is sighted from the decks of the Titanic, sending off rockets, which in those days could be either distress or celebration, but whether in ignorance or callousness she does not stop to help. On the closest ship, the Californian, the radio operator goes to bed at 11:30 PM and therefore misses the Titanic distress call. Controversy still rages as to whether the Californian could have been on time to save the sinking ship.

You arrive at station B2, a long way away, and send your message across the distance to station A. Then you move away from station B2 and become instantly a wild, drunken, partying ship, possibly the Samson (a Nordic fishing vessel that has strayed into waters where it shouldn't be fishing) sending off rockets and whirling around. You catch sight of the Titanic in bar 9, and wonder what's going on, then shrug your shoulders in bar 10 and stagger off again, past station A, towards upstage. You stop very near station A but with your back to it, and become the Californian. You are asleep. You snore quietly in between notes.

Scene Seven: Sinking

Text: SOS SOS QD - SINKING FAST - PASSENGERS BEING PUT INTO BOATS - SOS SOS. (plus rockets, ragtime, and hymns.)

The Titanic is sinking swiftly. Distress rockets are fired. The radio operator works until the last possible minute, sending and receiving messages. Passengers are put into life boats; there are too few life boats. The band plays to the end; ragtime, then hymn tunes. Many hundred passengers are huddled on deck when the ship finally upends itself and sinks, bow first, beneath the waves. This makes an extraordinary sound as the black funnels fill with water. When the ship is gone, the screams of the dying still fill the air. They mostly have life jackets; they do not drown. They freeze to death. The Titanic plunges on down through the dark water. She hits the seabed and breaks in half.

From your 'sleeping' position at the end of scene 6 you turn and step swiftly into position at station A. In this scene you must sink; possibly the final pages of the scene are on a low music stand which you must stoop to see, ending up finally on your knees crouched on the floor. For the dramatic, forte multiphonics at the beginning of the third page, swing your bell up as high as possible and bring it down very slowly to the end of the second line (the black funnel disappears beneath the waves.) For the final two lines (the cries of the dying) you should be as prone

as possible and very still. At the end of this, twist apart the main joint of the clarinet and lay both halves of the instrument on the floor, separated by a small space. As you rise up, collect the bass clarinet from its stand.

Epilogue: The iceberg drifts away.

The iceberg, serene and powerful, moves on, oblivious of its triumph.

You move slowly off stage left, playing the final page, repeating phrases as necessary until the lights dim or you reach the wings.

SINKING THE TITANIC for solo clarinet was commissioned by Ian Mitchell, and was premiered by him in Coventry, December, 1991.

Glossary of Musical Terms

SOS



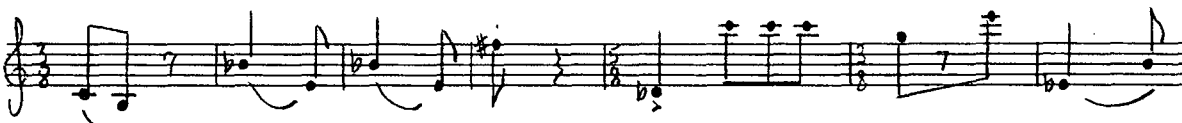
QQD



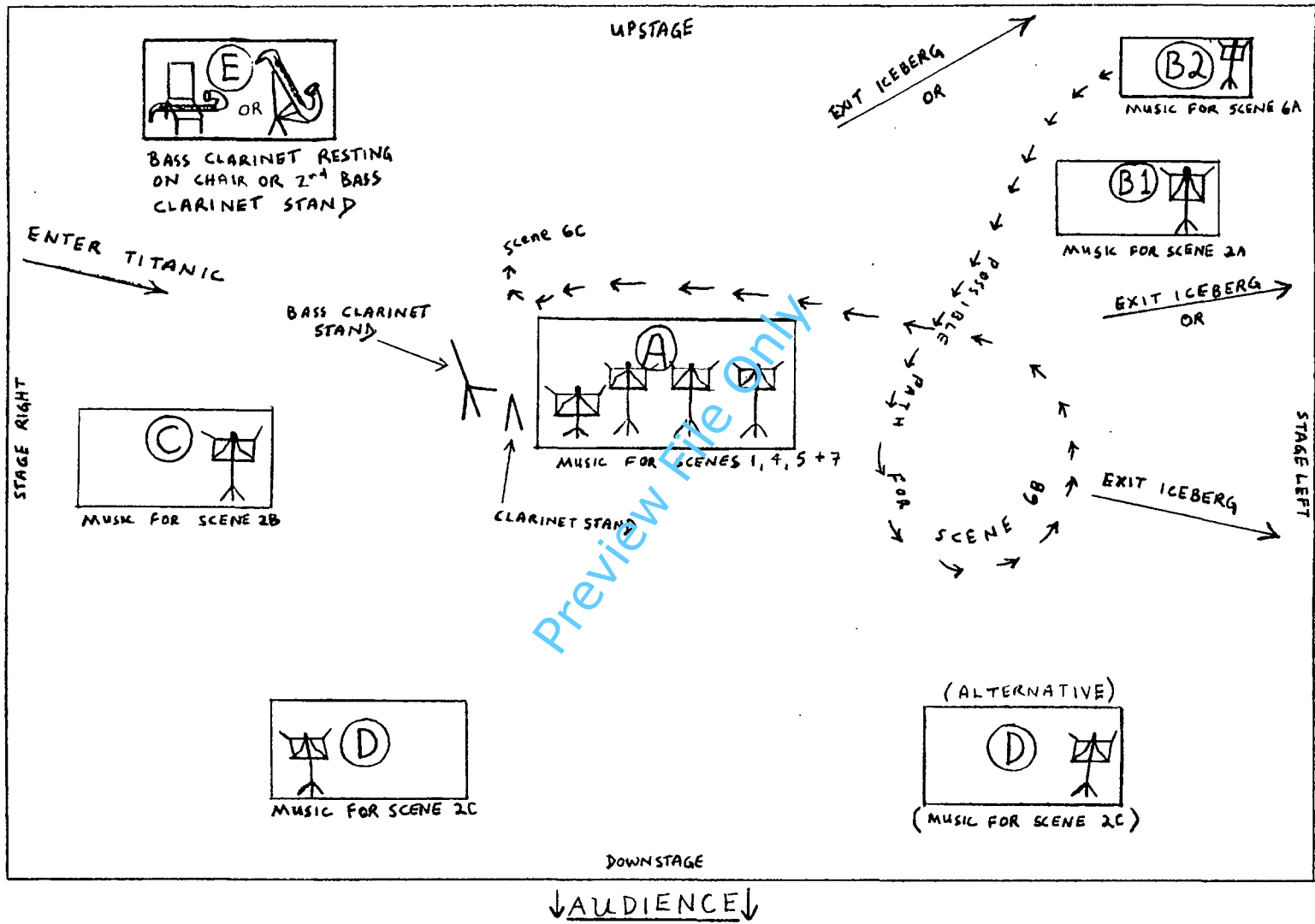
SINKING



ICEBERG



STAGING



SCENE 1 - STARRY NIGHT

TITANIC

(♩=80)

Handwritten musical notation for the first staff. It begins with a treble clef and a series of notes, some with slurs. Dynamic markings include *p* (piano) and *mp* (mezzo-piano). The notation is written on a single staff with a grand staff line below it.

Handwritten musical notation for the second staff. It continues with notes and slurs. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *mf* (mezzo-forte), *dim* (diminuendo), and *pp* (pianissimo). A triplet of notes is marked with a '3' above it. The notation is on a single staff with a grand staff line below it.

Handwritten musical notation for the third staff. It features a triplet of notes marked with a '3' above them. The notation is on a single staff with a grand staff line below it.

Preview File Only

(STARRY NIGHT, QUIET SEAS)

AMERIKA

SCENE 2 - WARNINGS

Presto (♩ = 144) Scene 2A Allegro (♩. = 132) Presto (sim.) Allegro (sim) Presto Allegro

Presto Allegro Presto Andante (♩. = 112)

crusc. ad accel. Presto (♩. = 92) (slower)

QUICKLY (♩. = 144)

[41.27 NORTH AND 50.08 WEST ON 14 APRIL. PASSED 2 ICEBERGS - KNUTH]

(♩ = 112)

Scene 2B - BALTIC

Tempo di Waltz (♩ = 132)

(♩ = 116)

Handwritten musical notation for the first system. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as 112 beats per minute. The music consists of a series of notes with accents and slurs. Dynamics include forte (f), piano (p), mezzo-forte (mf), fortissimo (fp), and mezzo-piano (mp). There are also some rests and a wavy line indicating a tremolo or similar effect.

Handwritten musical notation for the second system. It starts with a treble clef and a tempo of 132 beats per minute. The music features various time signatures (3/8, 2/4, 3/4, 3/4, 2/4, 7/4) and dynamics (mf, mp, mf). A section is marked as a waltz with a tempo of 132. The system concludes with the instruction "rall e dim".

Handwritten musical notation for the third system, showing a few notes with a piano-piano (pp) dynamic marking.

[ICEBERGS AND FIELD ICE - BALTIC]

Preview File Only

Scene 2C - Mesaba

Urgently:
Prestissimo (♩ = 160)

Adantically
mp
mf
f
Cresc.

di di di da da di di di da di da da di di di di da
mf
repeat as necessary, played or sung

[ICE, ICE, ICEBERGS - MESABA]

Preview File Only

SCENE 3 - THE ICEBERG

BASS CLARINET

(♩ = 56)

Musical staff with notes and envelopes. Dynamics: pp, #0, p, mf, fp. Envelopes: diamonds (start from nothing, swell, disappear), triangles (hard attack, fade).

Musical staff with notes and envelopes. Dynamics: mp, #0, ff, pp. A large envelope shape is drawn over the notes, with a +2/1 ratio indicated.

Preview File Only

3 MULTIPHONIC ZONES:
 1 HIGH
 2 MID
 3 LOW

SHAPE = ENVELOPE E.G. = start from nothing, swell, disappear
 = Hard attack, fade

= FUNDAMENTAL. If placed in brackets () fundamental should be almost inaudible.

Freely (ca $\text{♩} = 76$) (B♭ Clarinet)

SCENE 4 - COLLISION

QUICKER ($\text{♩} = \text{ca } 104$)

mp

sub. *f* (ftg)

(x) (o)

fp

fp cresc.

f

(M↑) (B)

(M)

BREATHE IN AND OUT THROUGH BODY OF CLARINET.

USING MOUTH PIECE ONLY, PLAY HIGHEST POSSIBLE NOTE (with help of finger struck inside mouthpiece)

HOLD FOR AS LONG AS POSSIBLE

(M↓)

XXXXXXXXXX

GLOSSARY: (M↑) = TAKE OFF MOUTHPIECE (M) PLAY WITH MOUTHPIECE ONLY (M↓) PUT MOUTHPIECE BACK ON

(x) (o)

FINGERING G, BREATHE IN NOISILY THROUGH CLARINET

(o) (x) FINGERING G, OUT BREATH + FLUTTER TONGUE (NO PITCH)

(B) USING BODY OF CLARINET WITHOUT MOUTHPIECE

(B) (B)

XXXXXXXXXX NOISY IN BREATH FROM PLAYER NOT NECESSARILY THROUGH CLARINET

(B) (B) OUT BREATH THROUGH BODY OF CLARINET IN BREATH THROUGH BODY OF CLARINET.

(♩. 132) Quick but controlled

SCENE 5 - DISTRESS

Presto (♩ = 144)

Allegro (♩ = 132)

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as Presto (♩ = 144). The music consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with accents. Dynamic markings include *mf* at the beginning, *p* in the middle, and *mf* and *p* towards the end. A tempo change to Allegro (♩ = 132) is indicated at the end of the staff.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked as Presto. The music features a series of sixteenth-note runs. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, and *mp*. The tempo changes to Allegro and then back to Presto.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mp*, and *mf*.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *p*, *mf*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*, *mf*, and *f*.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *p*, and *mf*. The piece concludes with a double bar line and the text "page seven".

Preview File Only

(♩ = 48) SUDDENLY SLOW

(♩ = 132) QUICK

♩ = 60

mp

p

CQD CQD — 41.46 AND 50.14 STRUCK AN ICEBERG CQD → SOS STRUCK AN ICEBERG AND — ARE — SINKING
BY THE HEAD —

SCENE 6 - DISTANT SHIPS

Scene 6A

CARPATHIA

[CARPATHIA: HEADING FOR YOU]

scene 6B

SAMSON

scene 6C

CALFORNIAN

(SNORING)

SCENE 7: SINKING

(♩ = 144) PRESTO

(♩ = 60) SLOW

(♩ = 132) QUICK

(♩ = 112) RAG

(♩ = 144)

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The tempo is marked 'PRESTO' with a metronome marking of 144. The music consists of a series of rhythmic patterns, including eighth and sixteenth notes, with dynamic markings of *f*, *mp*, *f*, *mf*, and *f*. There are also some slurs and accents.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The tempo is marked '(♩ = 60)'. The music features a mix of note values and rests, with dynamic markings of *mp*, *mf*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *mp*, and *f*. There are some crossed-out notes and slurs.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The tempo is marked '(♩ = 60)'. The music includes a section marked 'molto accel...' with a metronome marking of 144. Dynamic markings include *mf*, *mp*, and *f*. There are slurs and accents throughout.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The tempo is marked 'SUDDENLY SLOW' with a metronome marking of 48. The music features a series of notes with dynamic markings of *f* and *mp*. There are slurs and some crossed-out notes at the end.

Handwritten musical notation on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp. The tempo is marked '(♩ = 132)'. The music consists of rhythmic patterns with dynamic markings of *mf*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, *mf*, *f*, and *mf*. There are slurs and accents. The staff ends with a double bar line and the text 'page cen'.

(♩ = 76) HYMN (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76) (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76) (♩ = 132)

(♩ = 60) (♩ = 76) (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76) *gva* (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76)

gva (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76) *gva* (♩ = 132) (♩ = 76) *gva* (♩ = 132)

gva (♩ = 132 +) FAST AS POSSIBLE *gva* *gva* *gva* *gva* dim ... f

mf ... mp ... *pp* (♩ = 60) *p*

[SOS SOS GOD - SINKING FAST - PASSENGERS BEING PUT INTO BOATS *pp* SOS] (Plus rockets, ragtime, and hymns)

(♩ = 80) Approximate durations: 0

1.

(♩ = 58)

1. Δ This note to be sung as well as played, drifting in and out of pitch (~~~~~)

MULTIPHONIC ZONES

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EPILOGUE - THE ICEBERG DRIFTS AWAY

(♩ = 56)

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