

Another poem which was performed ('read' is certainly an inappropriate word in Sound Poetry) used three groups of people in the audience. In this poem, not this time by Cobbing, each group chanted a different word. The words used were 'pulse', 'impulse' and 'pulsate', and each group chanted at a different rate. 'Pulse' became a low, steady throb, separated into two heavy syllables: PUL ssss, PUL ssss, Pul ssss; 'Impulse' was rapid and insistent, a much more urgent sound with a very heavy first syllable and a lighter second: IMPulse IMPulse IMPulse IMPulse; while 'Pulsate' was loud and aggressive: pul SATE, pul SATE, pul SATE, pul SATE. At the crescendo all groups chanted 'ululate', drawing out the syllables as much as possible to suggest a released tension, and then subsided, and went back to their original words. The length of the performance is decided by the mood of the performers, who should be able to achieve a balance between confidence in their own chant and response to the other sounds around them.

If you're inhibited, do it in the dark, but a quite small and shy audience at the Poetry Society warmed up remarkably fast.

Anyone can make Sound Poems of their own, and there is great scope for experiment: articulate and semi-articulate sounds can be combined, between sounds can be varied, so that silences become part of the performance and increase the impact of sound. Generally, it is better to have only two or three words - at most a phrase - in a sound poem, since the purpose is not to express meaning, but to 'touch' or modify words in such a way that they become dynamic and penetrate the consciousness directly, without passing through the mental filters which deaden their impact under normal circumstances. We are so familiar with words that we must peel them, like an orange, to get their flavour. This is what Sound Poetry tries to do.

ESCHATON

The god stood.

*We were secure in the belief
That we would
Be held. Substantiated
By his power.*

The priest prayed.

*We were inspired beyond the world
Where we stayed
Enclosed. Drawn by his vision.*

The clown wept.

*We were released from the curse
That we were left
Unknown. Suffered
By his love.*

And then GOD

*Silenced the priest.
Dried the clown's eye.
Crumbled the god.*

Stephen Bartlett