

*The Difficulties* incorporates text by Brian Lampkin and music by Mark Engebretson. The piece calls for a speaker who reads the poem, an improvising musician and computer. The music can in theory be played on any instrument, although it is traditionally played by a baritone saxophonist (piano has also been used). During the course of a performance, the speaker reads the text, while the musician plays, responds, and interjects. The computer “listens” to what the musician is playing, and responds by playing back sound files when it hears certain notes. The improvisation is thus guided in that these selected pitches need to be played in order to keep the computer part active. Of course, the player can also turn off the computer part by not playing the target pitches. The performer can also turn on and off a drumbeat using similar aural cues.

Lampkin’s entertainingly dystopic poem is based in part on a conversation with Engebretson.