

John Max McFarland

5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity

for percussion and mezzo-soprano



5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity by John Max McFarland
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TSPCE14-006

Program Notes

5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity was inspired by a gift I received a few years prior to the composition of these songs. The gift in question was a 365-day calendar in which each day was dedicated to a “stupid” quote. As each day passed that year, I collected the quotes that I enjoyed and kept them in a folder in my filing cabinet. One would assume that a “stupid” quote would most naturally reflect the intellect of the owner of the quote. However, during the collection process I noticed that many of these quotes were from famous diplomats, “intellectuals,” and other individuals known for “profound” thoughts and ideas. It was then that I realized that we all do and say stupid things in our lives.

We live in a day and age where sound bite media can take quotes and ideas out of context to make an individual look foolish, heroic, demonic, or whatever suits that organization’s agenda. Combined with the rise of “anti-intellectualism” (avoid formal education, lest ye be branded “elitist”) and the fact that the average person can name and describe five cast members from their favorite reality television show before they can name five American presidents and their contribution to society, perhaps we truly do live in the age of stupidity.

After sifting through the many quotes saved during that year, I picked my five favorites and set the texts to music. The music in these songs reflect the times in which we live: Overly dramatic, awkward, and sometimes just plain stupid. The mezzo-soprano acts as a pseudo-percussionist armed with various percussion accessories and other noise makers to further accentuate the stupidity.

5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity was the first prize winner of the 2012 IronWorks Percussion Duo Composition Contest.

– John Max McFarland

Acknowledgements

This labor of love would not be possible without the help of several people. Thanks to my wife, Sydney and my son, Camden for their constant inspiration; Many thanks to Tracy Grady for believing in this silly piece and giving an incredible singing performance on the audio recording included in the CD; Lastly, thanks to all of the “stupid people” (myself included) for the inspiration to write this song cycle.

Performance Notes

Performers are encouraged to “act the part” during the performance. Extra visual performance to enhance the text is not only encouraged but necessary to express the essence of this artistic concept.

The mezzo-soprano part utilizes a large array of various percussion accessories, noise makers, and toys (quite literally). The mezzo-soprano performing this part does not necessarily need to be a percussionist. However, a strong sense of rhythm is recommended to properly perform the parts written. A complete list of equipment needs are listed on the next page. It is highly recommended that several trap tables be placed around the performer to facilitate the quick changes indicated throughout the piece.

Both percussion parts utilize an array of keyboard percussion as well as their own stations of unpitched cymbals and membranophones. Complete instrumentation and a suggested setup are included on the next few pages. Great care is taken to clearly label all the instruments in the score. To avoid gratuitous labeling of instruments, phrases that require the use of the aforementioned “stations” are labeled as MULTI-PERC. Notation guides for each station are included on the Instrumentation page.

Both percussion parts share a sizzle cymbal in the suggested setup. If performers decide on an alternative setup, it is important that both percussionists have their own sizzle cymbal.

The percussion 2 part utilizes a special kind of cymbal combination in which a small splash cymbal is placed right side up on top of a medium china cymbal. This combination results in a trashy hi-hat sound. This is labeled as a trash-hat in the notation guide.

Various trap tables should be strategically placed throughout each percussion setup to facilitate implement changes.

As an effect for the end of the second song, the percussion 1 part utilizes a spare cymbal to drop on the ground. In the case that a performance takes place on a carpeted area, it is necessary to place a large wooden board on the floor near the spare cymbal. When instructed to drop the cymbal, it should be dropped on the wooden board to achieve the correct dynamic and timbre the effect requires.

A similar effect is required for the percussion 2 part, where the player is asked to drop 3 or 4 pair of drumsticks onto the floor. It is recommended that each pair vary in size and shape to achieve a cacophonous variety of timbres when executed. Again, if the performance takes place on a carpeted area, a similar setup as stated in the previous note should be used.

Vibraphone pedaling is sometimes indicated in the score. In places where pedaling is not indicated, the performer should use his or her own discretion based on phrase markings and other musical clues.

Both percussionists should be equipped with a small towel or other similar muffling device for the various muffling indications in the score.

Mallet indications are occasionally used throughout the score. Mallet indications are ordered from left to right (1,2,3,4).

The tambourine utilized in the percussion 2 part should be a non-headed, rock style tambourine mounted on a suspended cymbal stand.

Players, Instrumentation, Notation Guides

5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity requires **3 performers** with the following instrumentation:

Mezzo-Soprano

- ratchet
- bike horn
- slide whistle
- party blower
- Electrolarynx® (optional)
- 10-hole harmonica in Bb major
- metal mixing bowl with several ounces of water



- acme siren
- flexatone
- vibraslap
- train whistle
- opera gong
- Tickle Me Elmo® (*NOT* optional)

Percussion 1

- xylophone
- vibraphone
- finger cymbal (suspended)
- small splash cymbal
- sizzle cymbal (shared with perc 2)
- hi-hat

- mark tree
- 5 temple blocks
- concert snare drum
- 4 concert toms
- loose cymbal for dropping

sizzle cymbal small splash cymbal hi-hat (closed) hi-hat (open) small concert tom medium concert tom medium snare drum large concert tom
large concert tom 5 temple blocks finger cymbal mark tree hi-hat (with foot)

Percussion 2

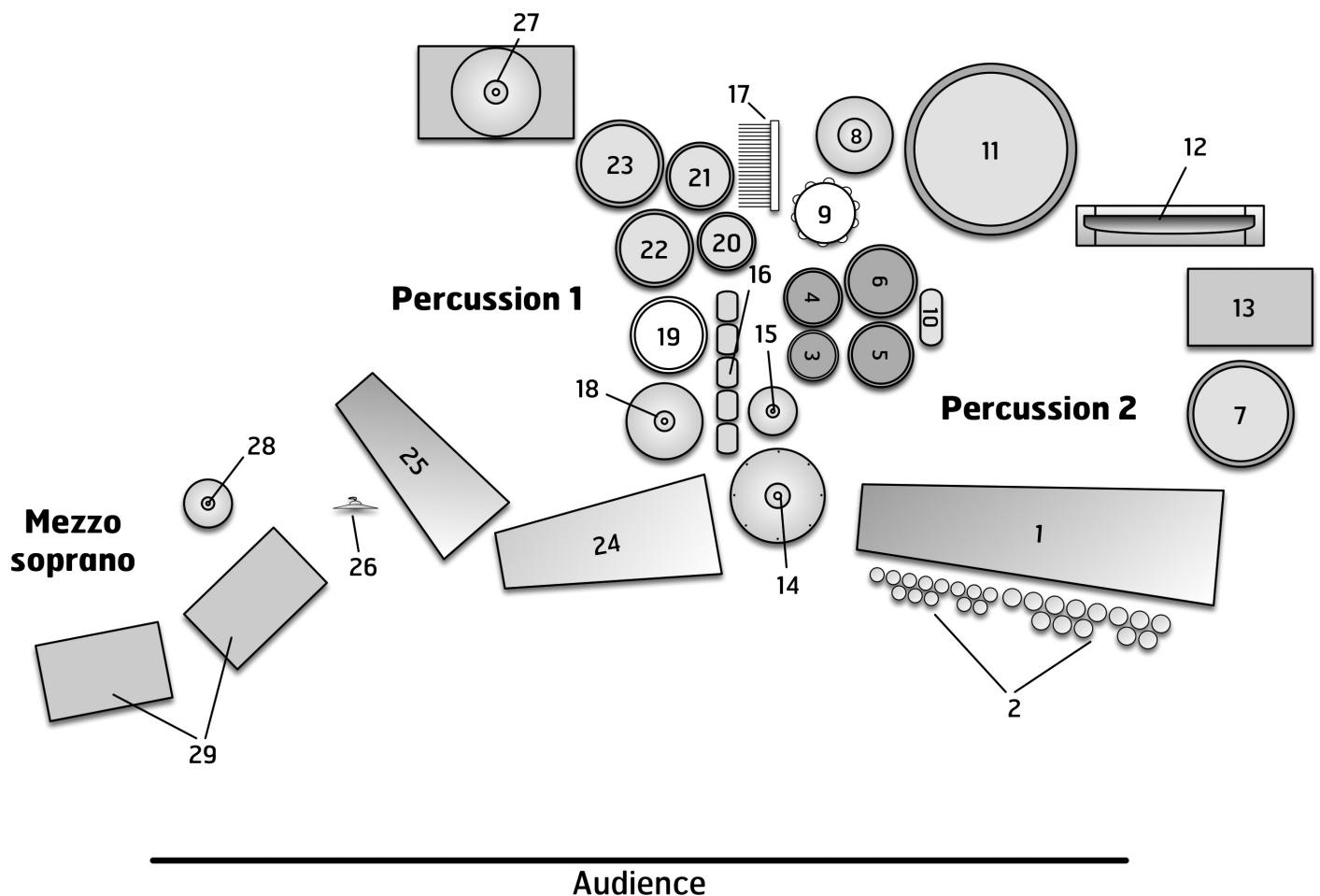
- marimba (5-octave)
- crotales (2-octaves)
- trash-hat
- sizzle cymbal (shared with perc 1)
- 1 set of bongos
- 1 set of congas

- concert bass drum (large)
- woodblock
- tambourine (mounted, non-headed)
- large concert tom (tuned very low)
- tam-tam (large)
- 3 to 4 pairs of drumsticks on a stand

sizzle cymbal trash-hat tambourine woodblock hi bongo low bongo hi conga low conga large bass drum large tam-tam

Suggested Setup

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Marimba | 11. Bass Drum | 21. Medium concert tom |
| 2. Crotales | 12. Large tam-tam | 22. Medium large concert tom |
| 3. High bongo | 13. Drumsticks on a stand | 23. Large concert tom |
| 4. Low bongo | 14. Sizzle cymbal | 24. Vibraphone |
| 5. High conga | 15. Splash cymbal | 25. Xylophone |
| 6. Low conga | 16. 5 temple blocks | 26. Finger cymbal |
| 7. Large concert tom | 17. Mark tree | 27. Loose cymbal |
| 8. Trash hat | 18. Hi-hat | 28. Opera gong |
| 9. Tambourine | 19. Snare drum | 29. Trap tables |
| 10. Woodblock | 20. High Concert tom | |



5 Songs in the Age of Stupidity

I. The Revolving Door

John Max McFarland

"We have slammed shut the revolving door that we found open."

~ Bertie Ahern, Former Irish Prime Minister

Vivace, espressivo et ondulato

Mezzo-soprano

Percussion 1

SNARE DRUM

Marimba
medium yarn mallets

Percussion 2

freely

PP *crescendo poco a poco*

**due to lack of time signature, all accidentals are noted consecutively throughout the phrase*

pp *crescendo poco a poc*

Più agitato

RATCHET

p *cresc.*

M

P1

P2

**Sample
Image**

A Maestoso molto accel. A Tempo

M
P1
P2

MULTI-PERC

l.v.
chk
(l.v.)
to crotales w/cello bow

MULTI-PERC

fff
pp
fff
fff



B Largo (\downarrow = ca. 52)

M

We have Slammed! shut!

p ff whispered,
approximate pitch

mf ffz motor off

CROTALES
cello bow
mallets

MULTI-PERC

ffz fff p

Sample Image

C Presto ($\text{♩} = 168$)
Swung 8th notes

M **TOM 3** *mp*

P1 **VIBRAPHONE** *mp* *cresc. poco* *ped.*

P2 **MARIMBA** *medium hard mallets* *pp* *p* *mp* *sf*

FINGER SNAPS *natural finger snapping volume*

swanky, jazz-like *mf* *J*

M **LARGE TOM** *p* *mp* *f*

P1 **(mallet muffle)** *mp* *mf* *ped.*

P2 **HI-HAT** *mf* *sf* *l.v.*

Sample Image

molto rit.

p

M: Treble clef, 4/4 time, dynamic *p*. Measures 1-4 show sustained notes. Measure 5 shows a descending eighth-note scale.

P1: Bass clef, 4/4 time. Measures 1-4 show sustained notes. Measure 5 shows a descending eighth-note scale.

P2: Bass clef, 4/4 time. Measures 1-4 show eighth-note patterns. Measure 5 shows a descending eighth-note scale.

Measure 5 dynamics: *sf*, *molto*, *fff*.



D Freely

approximate pitch, half spoken (screamed) *sff* *sff*

mp dolce that we found OP - EN!

mp splash cymbal with (and, of course)

repeat with this pitch set in

//

//

The vocal part consists of a single melodic line with various dynamics and performance instructions. The lyrics are: "that we found OP - EN!". The score includes instructions for approximate pitch, half spoken (screamed), *sff*, *sff*, *mp dolce*, and a splash cymbal with (and, of course). The vocal line is supported by a background of sustained notes and eighth-note patterns from the other parts.

Sample Image

Stringendo, furioso!

M

P1

XYLOPHONE
very hard plastic mallets

BASS DRUM & TAM-TAM

P2

MARIMBA

hit random notes in a similar ascending fashion

hit random notes in a similar descending fashion

FINGER CYMBAL
w/xylo mallet

pp

mf

sff

(diatonic)

as far up as you can reach
maintain interval of a major 2nd

mf

sff

slur

(diatonic)

**Sample
Image**

II. 58 States

"I've been in 57 states, I think. One left to go."

~ President Barack Obama

A brisk march tempo

Mezzo-soprano

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

MULTI-PERC
drumsticks w/moleskin

*place towel or similar muffling on bass drum prior to performing this movement

A

BIKE HORN

SLIDE WHISTLE

VIBRAPHONE
very hard mallets

MULTI-PERC
subito f

mp — mf



Sample
Image

M

P1

P2

to hard plastic mallets

MARIMBA

with hard marimba mallets

f

**B**

co rit.

M

P1

XYLOPHONE

f

FINGER CYMBAL

p

P2

mp

mp ————— *mp* ————— *mp* —————

Sample Image

A tempo

M

P1

P2

p

mp

f

l.v.

mf

mp

p

mf

MULTI-PERC

f

più f



C

declamatory f

M

I've been in fif-ty sev - en states!

I think?

Hard yarn mallets

**optional high-step mark time*

(left foot) (right foot)

MULTI-PERC

subito f

VIBRAPHONE

mf — *f*

mf — *ff*

subito f

mf — *ff*

**optional high-step mark time*

(left foot) (right foot)

MULTI-PERC

subito f

mf — *ff*

Sample Image

M [Treble clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 1] I think.

P1 [Bass clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 2] - [Measure 3] **TEMPLE BLOCKS** [Measure 4] *mf* [Measure 5] *mp* [Measure 6] *f*

P2 [Bass clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 2] - [Measure 3] **TEMPLE BLOCKS** [Measure 4] *mp* [Measure 5] *f*

==

M [Treble clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 1] *f* [Measure 2] - [Measure 3] *7* [Measure 4] - [Measure 5] *3* [Measure 6] *mf* [Measure 7] *p* [Measure 8] go crazy w/slides whistle
one left to go

P1 [Bass clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 1] - [Measure 2] *9* [Measure 3] *8* [Measure 4] *7* [Measure 5] - [Measure 6] *3* [Measure 7] *8* [Measure 8] *7* [Measure 9] *3* [Measure 10] *f*

P2 [Bass clef] [Key signature: B-flat major] [Time signature: Common time] [Measure 1] - [Measure 2] *9* [Measure 3] *8* [Measure 4] - [Measure 5] *8* [Measure 6] - [Measure 7] *3* [Measure 8] *pp* [Measure 9] *ff*

PARTY BLOWER
wait until after cymbal stops rolling

**Knock 3 to 4 pairs of drumsticks off a music stand onto the floor*

Sample Image

III. Save the Screens

"I have a huge problem. A friend has placed a screen saver on my computer,
but every time I move the mouse, it disappears."

~ Actual customer service call

Slow, eerie, ghastly even

*spoken like you're telling a
scary ghost story to children*

Mezzo Soprano

VIBRAPHONE
motor on, medium fan
medium-soft mallets

MARIMBA
medium soft yarn mallets

BASS DRUM
*Place towel or similar
muffling on bass drum
prior to performing this
movement

*replace mallets 2 and 3
with hard plastic mallets

Percussion 1

Percussion 2

Mezzo Soprano part: "I have a huuuuuge problem"

Vibraphone part: *p*, *più f poco agitato*

Marimba part: *mp*, *n*

Bass Drum part: dynamic markings *p*, *mf*

A **Più mosso et agitato**

M

Tales

SIZZLE CYMBAL

Mezzo Soprano part: vocal line with lyrics "A friend has".

Melodic Line (M) part: dynamic *mp*, rhythmic patterns with grace notes.

Tales part: dynamic *mp*.

**Sample
Image**

III. Save the Screens – McFarland

M *mf*
placed

P1 *mf*

P2 *mf* *meno f*

Vibrphone Cue *f*

M *ff*
screen sav - er

P1 *ff* *p* *mf*

P2 *ff* *p* *mf*

TAM-TAM with plastic inner mallets

BASS DRUM *ff* *p* *mf*

Wait for la otale note to decay cor tately

Sample Image

B Freely, recitativo

M 9 *mp*
 on my com - pu - ter

C Largo (\downarrow = ca. 56)

VIBRAPHONE
with cello bow

MARIMBA
soft mallets

p *poco cresc.*

D Più mosso

M 12 *n*

SIZZLE CYMBAL
soft vibraphone mallets
l.v.

mp *mp*

Sample Image

* Special effects may be added to the original score for added effect, and electric guitars and keyboards may be added to artificially create a rock feel.

15 *mp dolcissimo*

M: - but eve - ry time I

P1: **VIBRAPHONE** 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3
mp *p*

P2: 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5 5
p



17 *mf*

M: move the mouse

P1: 3 *mp*

P2: 5 *mf* 3 *ff*
p It dis - ap - pears

Sample Image

M 20 ♩ = ♩ **molto rall.**

P1 (delay type effect) *mf* morendo

P2 * **CROTALES**
w/shish kabob skewers *p possible*

* Play vigorously up the scale in random order until you reach the B² above the staff

Sample Image

IV. The 90's

"All marriages will be happy [in the 1990's], for the law will put to death any man or woman who assumes conjugal position without the proper physical, mental, and financial qualifications."

~ Author John Habberton, 1893

$\text{♩} = 96$, simply and expressively

Mezzo-soprano

HARMONICA

**Place small towel or other small muffling item over the largest tom prior to performing this movement*

Percussion 1

VIBRAPHONE
medium soft mallets

MARIMBA
very soft mallets

**Leave towel from previous movement on bass drum*

Percussion 2

M

Pl

P2

Sample
Image

A A Tempo

M 8 *mp* — *mf*

All mar - ria - ges will

SIZZLE CYMBAL *l.v.*

P1 { *mp* — *p* = *pp*

SNARE DRUM *snares off*

p < *mp*

P2 { *mf* — *p*

A musical score for voice and piano. The vocal line starts with a sustained note followed by eighth-note chords. The piano part consists of eighth-note chords. The vocal line continues with eighth-note chords, followed by a melodic line with grace notes and a sustained note. The piano part ends with a final eighth-note chord.

turn on snares

Sample Image

B Meccanico (♩ = 132)

M 16 nine-ties

MULTI-PERC
with drumsticks

P1 *for ease of notation the temple block part is separated on the lower staff and should be performed with the left hand

MULTI-PERC
Hard felt swizzle stick (swizzle end)

P2

≡

METAL MIXING BOWL FILLED WITH SEVERAL OUNCES OF WATER
struck with drumstick
(swirl water to alter pitch)

M 20

P1 f 3 mp f

P2 f

Sample Image

C Boldly

poco rit. Poco meno mosso

mf

For the law will put to death An - y

P1

SNARE DRUM

buzz press *rim*

p possible *pp* *p*

P2

mf *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp*



D

J = 104

man or w - man

MULTI-PERC
with brushes

brush stir

mp *mf* *mp*

poco rubato *non rubato* *(one-handed)*

f *10:6* *fp*

pesante *mp*

Sample Image

E Bawdy shuffle

M

32

ff

Who 3 as-sumes

P1

mf

(continue stir w/left hand)

P2

*mp*³

play hi-hat with shaft of brush

mf

swanky!

ACME SIREN

M

con - ju - gul pos - it - ions

P1

p 3

P2

4 1 3 2

6 6 6 6

Sample Image

38

M [Treble Clef] -

P1 [Bass Clef] *mf*

P2 [Bass Clef] *p* *molto* *mf* *f*



40

M [Treble Clef] - with - out the prop - per

fast back and forth motion

3 3 p

p

Sample Image

Spoken using pitch indications as a guide for vocal inflection

M 42

FLEXATONE

*hold nose and speak in a nasal voice
(approx rhythm)*

and fi - **3** - nancial qual - if - ic - at - ions

Phy - si - cal Men - tal **mp** molto

strike a body-builder pose Manly yell!

MULTI-PERC play all membranophones of this setup as fast as possible while laughing hysterically chk

YAA! **fff**

MULTI-PERC play all membranophones of this setup as fast as possible while laughing hysterically

sff YAA! **fff**

Sample Image

V. United E-Mail Parcel Service (UEPS)

"I was going to send an e-mail to someone and wanted to know- will it get delivered today even though it's Presidents Day?"

~ Customer service call to a computer helpline

$\text{♩} = 124$

ACME SIREN

RATCHET

Mezzo-soprano

Percussion 1

MULTI-PERC
with hard plastic xylophone mallets

XYLOPHONE

Percussion 2

MULTI-PERC
4 medium hard yarn marimba mallets

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for Mezzo-soprano, featuring a single note at the beginning followed by rests. The middle staff is for Percussion 1, and the bottom staff is for Percussion 2. Both percussion staves show continuous rhythmic patterns. Dynamic markings include *f*, *mf*, *ff*, *sf*, and *mp*. The Percussion 1 staff uses hard plastic xylophone mallets, while the Percussion 2 staff uses 4 medium hard yarn marimba mallets. The score is set against a background map of North America.

M 5

f

I was

f *p*

mp

The continuation of the score starts with a vocal line (Mezzo-soprano) with a rest at measure 5. The vocal line then begins with a melodic line, ending with a forte dynamic (*f*) followed by a piano dynamic (*p*). Below the vocal line is a rhythmic pattern for a multi-percussion instrument, with dynamics from forte to piano. The score is set against a background map of North America.

Sample
Image

A

M 8 go-ing to send an e - mail_ **VIBRASLAP** *awkward silence* **ffff** to some-one and want-ed to know

quick switch to 2 medium vibe mallets **MULTI-PERC**

P1 **p** **f** **ff** **mp**

P2 **p** **f** **mp**

A tempo

molto rit. **B Recitativo** *mf dolcissimo*

M 13 Will it be

P1 **6** **ff** **VIBRAPHONE** ha-esque, if you will () you

P2 **SIZZLE CYMBAL** **pp**

Sample Image

M 17 *mp* *p possible*
day _____
Ev - en though it's

P1 *pp* *pp*

TAM-TAM
soft mallet

CROTALES
medium plastic mallets

remove muffling
from bass drum

P2 *PPP*

=

C = 126 Stringendo →
sub **f** (declamatory!)

M 20 Pres-i-dent's day

FINGER CYMBALS
*played like a cymbal monkey
rotating clockwise rapidly*

XYLOPHONE
ard plastic mallets

ff

Sample
Image

D Get cues from mezzo-soprano

M 24

ACME SIREN

SLIDE WHISTLE

TRAIN WHISTLE

fff semper

P1

BASS DRUM

fff semper

P2

Sample Image



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