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Jing Jing Luo

Ashima

a monodrama in 6 parts

for countertenor and 4 musicians


instrumentation


Countertenor
Piccolo/Flute/Bass Flute
Bass Clarinet in Bb
Percussion
Violin
Conductor

dedicated to my father Luo Zong Xian


Performance Notes


Countertenor


 = highest squeaky pitch


 = inhale, exhale; desperate and exaggerated

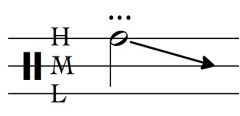
Winds

 = air tone, no pitch

 = tongue ram, pizzicato slap

 = sing and play, mimic speech

 = between jet whistle and overblow

 = teeth on reed technique where H, M, L stands for High, Medium, Low with regard to the technique; pinch the air flow with the teeth and embouchure to activate the highest registers of the clarinet; always a delicate sound that flutters in and out of focus

Percussion

5 cymbals

3 woodblocks (small, medium, large)

3 tomtoms (small, medium, large)

Bb crotale



medium-sized piece of wood



heavy, resonant metal object


bike bell

4 high bells on foam

Violin


 = vertical bowing; alternate between sul ponticello and sul tasto parallel with the strings as if rubbing; no pitch, mute strings with palm of left hand and play on strings according to relative position of arrows


 = circular bowing; quickly alternate between sul ponticello and sul tasto in a circular motion


 = overpressure

ord = ordinary bow position

mSP = molto sul ponticello

Program Note

Ashima is a Chinese folktale. It was the cause of my father's death in 1968. Inspired by this, I have felt a need to recreate the story of Ashima in an operatic form.

Ashima was a dead soul in the narrative poem. Ashima's voice is still echoing inside the rock forest in Yunnan province today. To me my father's soul has never died. Ashima's arias from his opera are still sung and heard by the common people and performed by famous Chinese professional singers today. My father remains a musical icon in China.

Ashima, was the last opera my father, Zong Xian Luo composed before his death. The Chinese Cultural Ministry had assigned him to write an opera for an internationally marketed film in 1964. Ironically, after its premiere in 1965, Madam Mao and other government officials pointed out "Ashima" as a major threat to the Communist Party at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution. This led to my father's imprisonment and to the end of his life at the age of 40. Eventually, in 1984, many years after my father's death, his "Ashima" won the Jury Prize at the International Film Music Festival in Spain.

My mother was a well-known Western trained opera singer prior to the Cultural Revolution. As a result of the Revolution, she was forced to leave her opera profession to work in a Chinese electronic wire factory where she remained until retirement in 1982. Around the same time, I was sent to a labor camp in the Gobi desert. I escaped from the labor camp almost two years later and managed to find a position in a southern Army hospital. I worked as a nurse's aid at the hospital until I entered the music conservatory in Shanghai.

My version of "Ashima" is a psychological and emotional response to my childhood traumas. It is especially a reflection on my father's final composition, which ultimately led to his own death, an unspeakable and incomprehensible tragedy under the aegis of the government.

The monodrama "Ashima" has no traditional libretto. No plot. No words are used, only the broken gibberish of syllables twisted between Chinese, English, German, French. Non-narrative experience may cause a psychologically intense response in the audience through the visual and aural senses. The original Sani minority's tune in Ashima's fairytale is literally demolished. Instead of using the traditional operatic bel canto singing including the recitative speech style, my emotional response as conveyed in musical writing beckons the listener to comprehend a strange, distorted, beautiful, and discordant mixture of sounds which evokes my own anger, anxiety, catastrophic memories, regression and emotional issues that still resonates in every level of myself as a person today.

"Ashima" is my first operatic composition. As well, it is the first music project in a dramaturgical form dealing with the Chinese Cultural Revolution — a topic still avoided today in China.

Ashima

I. "shocking"

5'45"

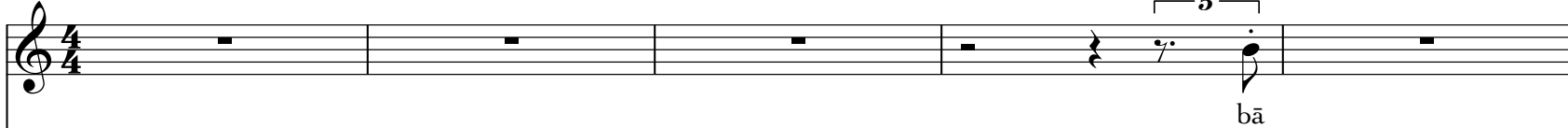
Tape 



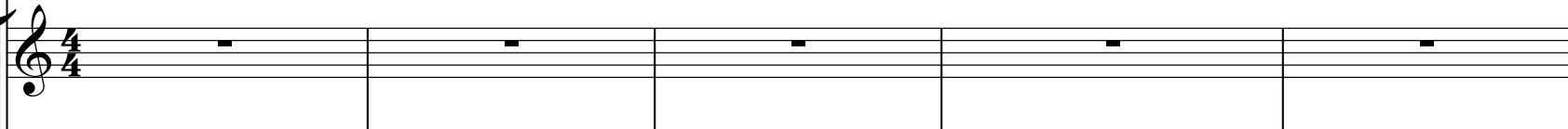
II. "baba"

2 ♩ = 48

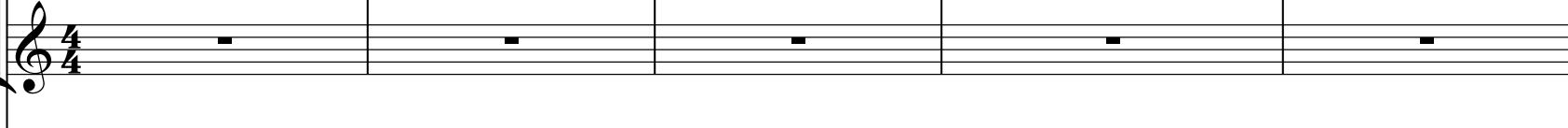
Countertenor



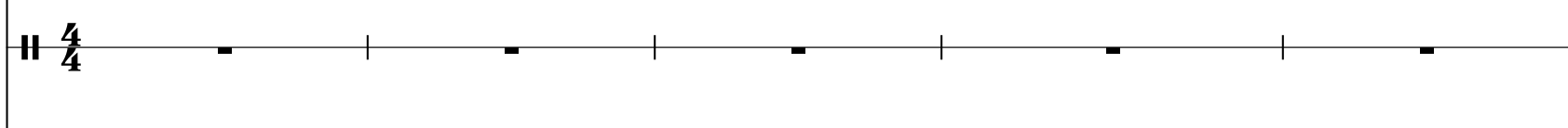
Fl.



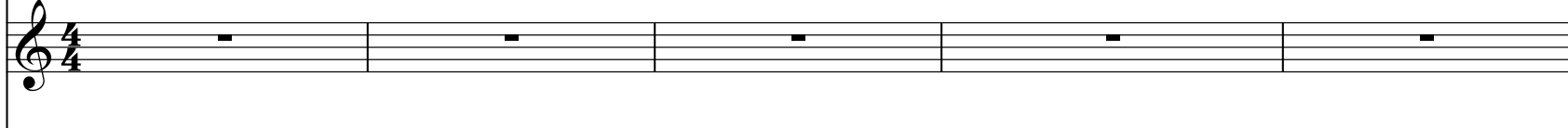
B. Cl.



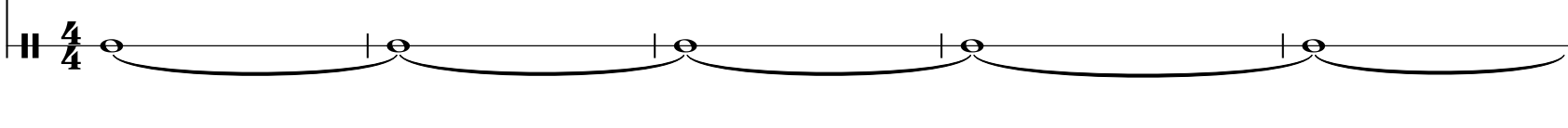
Perc.



Vln.

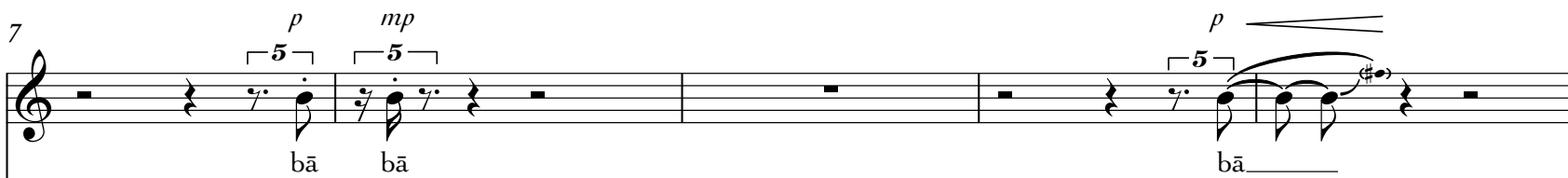


Tape





Countertenor



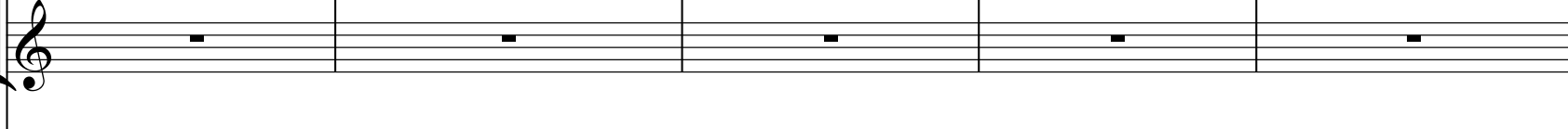
accented air blow
extreme vib. gliss.
no pitch

Fl.

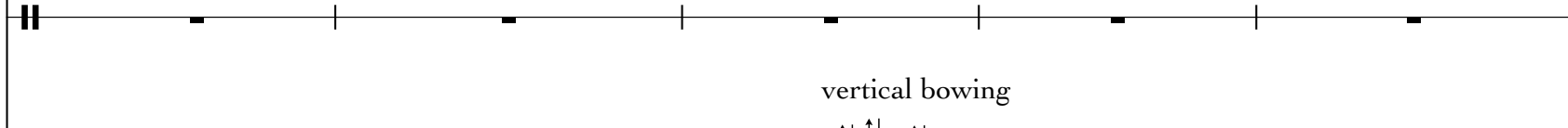


sfz

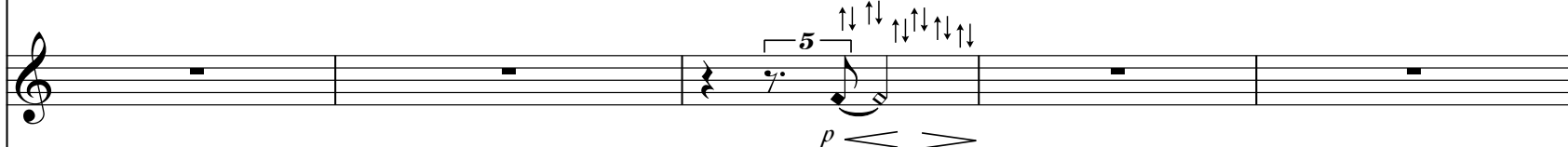
B. Cl.



Perc.



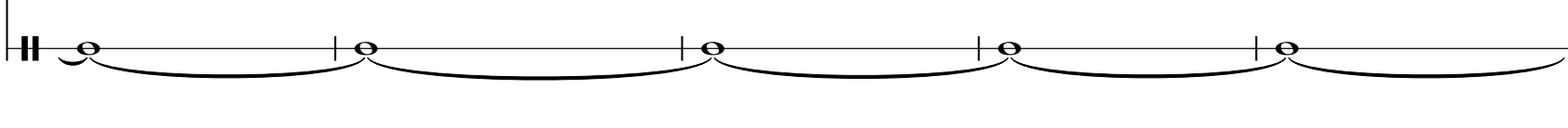
Vln.



vertical bowing


p < >

Tape



12 *pp*

Countertenor *bā*

Fl. *sfz* *sotto voce* *pp* *mp* *sfz* [o-e-o-e-o-e]

B. Cl. *pp* *mp*

Perc. wirebrush on cymb. *mp*

Vln. *f* *p* *mf*

Tape

17

Countertenor *bā* *bā* *bā* *bá bá bá bá bá bá bá bá*

Fl. tongue click (with only mouth) *f* *p* [ts]

B. Cl. tongue click (with only mouth) *f* *p* [ts]

Perc. 3 woodblocks *p* *p* [ts]

Vln. tongue click *f* *p* [ts]

Tape

atempo

22

Countertenor

bá bá bá bá bá bá bá bá bá bá bá

Fl.

f tongue click

B. Cl.

f tongue click

Perc.

f tongue click

Vln.

Tape



27

Countertenor

bā bābā

Fl.

gradually faster tremolo

sfz

pp *mp* *sfz*

B. Cl.

teeth on reed delicate sound

pp *mf*

tr. *pp* *p*

Perc.

Vln.

f

Tape

32

whisper in any fast syllables

Suddenly! speak

4

Countertenor

f *pp* *mf*

bā!

Je ne comprends pas Je ne comprends

Fl.

[o-e-o-e-o-e-o]

sfz

p

B. Cl.

sotto voce

teeth on reed

pp *p* *mf*

Perc.

Vln.

col legno circular bowing

pp *p* *f* *mp* *mf* *p*

Tape

36

(speak) ————— whisper

Countertenor

Je ne com-prends pas Je ne com - prends pas Je Je ne com - prends pas Je ne

Fl.

mp *sub. f* *p*

B. Cl.

squeaky multiphonic

Perc.

wirebrush on 3 cymbals

pp *p*

Vln.

pp

Tape

38

Countertenor *pp* (whisper) → speak
 com - prends pas non! Je com - prends pas non! Je Je Je com - prends pas Je com -

Fl. *p* whisper →
 Je ne com - prends pas Je ne

B. Cl. *fp* whisper → *mf* → *mf* 5
 Je com - prends pas *sfz*

Perc. *pp* → *p* → *pp*

Vln. *p* whisper →
 com - prends pas Je ne

Tape



40

Countertenor *fp* → *p* → *f*
 prends pas Je com - prends pas Je... [ts] Je ne com - prends pas com prends pas!

Fl. *f* speak
 com - prends pas Je ne Je ne com prends pas com - prends pas!

B. Cl. *p* → *f*

Perc. 3 tomtoms
pp > *p* < *fp*

Vln. *fp* → *f* speak
 com - prends pas Je ne Je ne [ts] Je ne com - prends pas com prends pas!

Tape

42

Countertenor *pp* [ah] *f* Suddenly! *f* bà bà

Fl. *sfz*

B. Cl. *p* *pp*

Perc. bowed crotale *pp* *p*

Vln. *sfz* *fp* *ff*

Tape

msp high fast gliss. split the bow hair picking up any high partials

46

Countertenor *sfz* Suddenly! air blow low register *sfp* [o - e - o -

Fl. *sfz* *mp*

B. Cl. *mp*

Perc. *f* *p*

Vln. *sfz* *fp*

Tape

Pounding on floor with a piece of wood in fast speed close to the given rhythms, spontaneously

msp split the bow hair picking up any high partials

56

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

bā bā bā

bā bā

bā bā!

sfz *p* *fp* *f* *mp* *f*

p *f* *fp* *f*

norm *8va* *msp* *8va*

sfz *fp* *f* *sfz*

59

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

bā bā

bā bā bā

bā

ba ba ba ba ba

p *mp* *mf* *pp* *p* *f*

p *sfz* *sfz* *p* *mp* *f* *p* *sfz*

p *f* *p* *f* *p*

mp *f* *p* *mf*

3 Tomtoms

sfz *sfp* *p* *f* *sfz*

62 *mp* *f sub. p*

Countertenor

bă ————— bà

Fl.

(tr.)

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

freely (♩ ≈ 40-50)
col legno msp

p

Tape

tacet

tacet



III. "humiliation"

♩ = 58 speak

65 *mf* *f*

Countertenor

Ich Ich Ich ver-stehe nicht!

Fl.

bass flute

p *sfz* *fp*

B. Cl.

sfz *sfz* *f* *sfz*

Tape

69 freely *mp* *p* *mf*

Countertenor: Warum? Je_ ne comprends pas!

Fl.: *pp* *sfz* *ffz* *p* whistle tone

B. Cl.: *p* *tr* *Freely, expressively* *p* *f* *p*

Tape: [Tape notation]

73 *mp* *pp* *high squeak*

Countertenor: hm [any syllables] ouiiiiii

Fl.: *w.t.* *sfz* *fp* *p* *double tongue* *5* *5*

B. Cl.: *ffz* *p* *3* *3* *pp* *ff* *pp* *highest squeaky multiphonic irregular tremolo* *slow gliss.*

Tape: [Tape notation]

77 *pp* *mp* *mf* *mf*

Countertenor: ouiiiiii Wö Wö Wö Wö Wö Wö Wö

Fl.: *d.t.* *tr. b* *8va* *p* *pp* *f* *sing and play*

B. Cl.: *p* *p* *3* *pp* *f* *sing and play*

Tape: [Tape notation]

82 *f* *poco accel.* *atempo* ♩ = 58

Countertenor

tzu!

Fl.

p *poco accel.* *f* *pp* *sfz* *fp* *closed embouchure throat flzg*

B. Cl.

p *poco accel.* *f* *pp* *sfz*

Tape



85 *Spontaneously*

Countertenor

Fl.

mf *ff* *p* *mf* *p* *f* *p* *f*

B. Cl.

p *sfz* *p* *ff* *mf* *p* *f*

Tape



♩ = 54

dramatically

A wavy and shaky voice in any syllables

p *mf* *p*

Countertenor

Why? *f* *mf*

Fl.

f *sub. p* *mf* *pp* *f* *mp*

B. Cl.

f *p* *mf* *p* *flzg.*

Tape

92

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

94

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

high squeak
p f

[any syllables] ouiuiiiiii
fast

double tongue

double tongue

(tr) dark!

split tone multiphonic

squeaky multiphonic irregular tremolo

slow gliss.

double tongue

97

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

speak
mf

non ca-pis - co non ca-pis - co

d.t. with heavy airy breath

d.t. with heavy airy breath

key clicks

lip gliss.

lip gliss.

110

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

p \rightarrow *f* *mp* \rightarrow *f*

[ss] do Wo [oo] [ts] [tu] [shee]

cluster of high partials over fundamental

flzg \rightarrow norm

airy

lip gliss.

p \rightarrow *mf* *fp* \rightarrow *mf* \rightarrow *f*

mp \rightarrow *sfz* \rightarrow *f* \rightarrow *f* \rightarrow *sfz*

14

113

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

sfz \rightarrow *ff* *sfz* \rightarrow *ff* *sfz*

sfz \rightarrow *ff* *sfz*

Man's voice

116

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape

ff

Io - he - he - van - ti Io - he - he - van - ti

sfz \rightarrow *ff* *sfz* \rightarrow *sfz*

ff *sfz* \rightarrow *ff* *sfz* \rightarrow *sfz* \rightarrow *sfz*

5/4

Woman's voice

tongue roll

fp

ff

f

Countertenor

118

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape



121

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Tape



IV. "splitting sand at the shadow"

$\text{♩} = 63$

loudly!

f

126 - 137

12

138

mp

5

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

140 *p* \longleftarrow *f* *mf* *mp* \leftarrow 16

Countertenor *Née* *Pour quoi?* *quoi?*

Fl. *sfz* \leftarrow *sfz* *mf* \leftarrow *f* *sfz* *ff* *fp*

B. Cl. *p* \longleftarrow *mf* \longleftarrow *pp* *whisper* *p* *f* \leftarrow *pour-quoi* *quoi?*

Perc. *whisper* *mp* \longleftarrow *shout* *f* *pour -* *quoi?*

Vln. *sfz* *f* \longleftarrow *f* *mf* *pour* *quoi?* *f*

Tape

from a low to high voice

closed mouthpiece

t. tr.

whisper

shout

overpressure

slow gliss.

144 *mf* \longleftarrow *mp* \longleftarrow *ff* *ff* *mp* *mp*

Countertenor *I - ch* *Ich verstehe nicht!* *nicht_ nicht_* *nicht_* *nicht_*

Fl. *sfz* *p*

B. Cl. *f* *tr.* *pp*

Perc. *break drum with hands* *p*

Vln. *p* \leftarrow *f* \leftarrow *p* \leftarrow *f* *overpressure* *slow gliss.*

Tape

Countertenor *mf* 147 *mp*
 Née uh

Fl. *sfz* *p* *mf*

B. Cl. *p* *mf*
 t. tr.

Perc. *fp*

Vln. *f poss.* 5
 whisper pizz.
 thumb only

Tape



Countertenor 149 *mf* *f*
 uh uh uh uh uh uh

Fl. *sfz* *pp* *sfz*

B. Cl. *p* *f*

Perc. *pp* *f*

Vln. arco overpressure
mf *f* *p* *mf*

Tape

151 *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

Countertenor: Pour quoi? uh uh uh uh uh uh We shall

Fl.:

B. Cl.:

Perc.:

Vln.:

Tape:

whisper pizz. arco overpressure

t. tr.

different spots on timp. with soft mallet

IV

154

Countertenor: uh uh uh uh Shnee Oui?

Fl.:

B. Cl.:

Perc.:

Vln.:

Tape:

Suddenly! *ff* *p*

tongue ram

depress keys

dry!

harmonic gliss.

msp

156

Countertenor *p* *mf* *p*
 woo uh uh

Fl. *p* *f* *ffz*

B. Cl. *fp* *p* *p*
 t. tr.

Perc. *pp* *mp* *p*
 extremely dry and quiet

Vln. *mf mp* *f p* *mf* *f*

Tape

159

Countertenor *p* *mf* *f* *p*
 Hmm uh eh uh Ah - mm

Fl. *p* *mf* *ffz* *pp* *pp*
 sing+play ord. 3

B. Cl. *mf*

Perc. *pp* *mf*
 place cymbal upturned on timpani drumhead

Vln. *p* *mf* *mf* *p*

Tape

162

Countertenor *f* *mf*
uh eh

Fl. *pp*

B. Cl. *pp*

Perc. wirebrush on 5 cymbals *mp* *mp* *mp*
bow cymbal on timpani *mp*

Vln. *mf* *p* (norm) *mp* *p* *mf*

Tape



165

Countertenor *mp*
Hmm

Fl. *pp*

B. Cl.

Perc. *mf* *f* *mf*

Vln. *msp* *sudden!* *sfz*

Tape

169

Countertenor *pp* *p* *f* *mf*
 Hmm Ahm shnee uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh

Fl. *pp* *pp*

B. Cl. *pp*

Perc. *mp* *mf* *p* *mp* *mp*

Vln. *sfp* *sfp* *pp* *f* *mp* *p*
 norm → overpressure

Tape

173

Countertenor *p* *f*
 uh Hmm eh eh eh eh

Fl. *f*

B. Cl. *p*

Perc. *mf* *mf*

Vln. *f* *f*

Tape

176

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape



control voice, utterly quiet
slowly and gradually increasing
in volume along with screaming
voice in electronics

180

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

ppp Woo *f* Ke *mf* nai *p* heh

shaky, unstable

shaky, unstable

bow cymbal on timpani

shaky, unstable, uncertain

184

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

heh hoo Yue hmm

p *p*

t. tr. *8va*

pp *mf* *p* *mf*

mp *mf* *3*

188

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

uh mm eh eh eh eh

f

t. tr. *8va*

pp *mf* *p*

mf *3*

very fast and sharp flutter of natural harmonics

overpressure

sfp *f* *p*

191

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

Musical score for measures 191-192. The Countertenor part is silent. The Flute part has a melodic line with a *pp* dynamic and a quintuplet of eighth notes. The Bass Clarinet part features a tremolo (t. tr.) and a melodic line starting with a *p* dynamic. The Percussion part includes a *mf* dynamic and a section marked "soft mallets" with a *pp* dynamic. The Violin part has a *pp* dynamic. The Tape part is silent.



193

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

Musical score for measures 193-194. The Countertenor part is silent. The Flute part has a melodic line with quintuplets and triplets. The Bass Clarinet part features a tremolo (t. tr.) and a melodic line. The Percussion part includes a *p* dynamic and a triplet. The Violin part has a *p* dynamic. The Tape part is silent.

Countertenor

Countertenor staff with rests in all three measures.

Fl.

Flute staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. **15** measure marker.

B. Cl.

Bass Clarinet staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. **15** measure marker.

Perc.

Percussion staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. **15** measure marker.

Vln.

Violin staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. **15** measure marker.

Tape

Tape staff with rests in all three measures.



Countertenor

Countertenor staff with rests in all three measures.

Fl.

Flute staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. Fingerings: 5, 3, 5, 3, 5, 6. **15** measure marker.

B. Cl.

Bass Clarinet staff with notes and trills. *pp* dynamic marking. **15** measure marker.

Perc.

Percussion staff with notes and trills. *p* and *mp* dynamic markings. **15** measure marker.

Vln.

Violin staff with notes and trills. *fp* and *sfz* dynamic markings. **15** measure marker.

Tape

Tape staff with rests in all three measures.

split bridge bowing
 let bow hair hit sub and sul pont. area randomly
 to produce a flickering white noise effect

msp

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

8va

Countertenor

Musical staff for Countertenor, measures 217-218. Includes a triplet of notes in measure 218 and the vocalization "Ah" in measure 219.

air tone with some pitch

t. tr.

t. tr.

Fl.

Musical staff for Flute, measures 217-218. Includes trills and slurs. Dynamics: *pp*. Measure numbers 6 and 3 are indicated below the staff.

pp

air tone with some pitch

t. tr.

t. tr.

t. tr.

B. Cl.

Musical staff for Bass Clarinet, measures 217-218. Includes trills and slurs. Dynamics: *p*, *pp*. Measure numbers 6 and 3 are indicated below the staff.

p

pp

Perc.

Musical staff for Percussion, measures 217-218. Includes a single note in measure 219. Dynamics: *mf*.

mf

Vln.

Musical staff for Violin, measures 217-218. Includes slurs and dynamics: *mp*, *p*, *m sp*.

mp

p

m sp

Tape

Musical staff for Tape, measures 217-218. Includes a long slur across both measures.



p

Countertenor

Musical staff for Countertenor, measures 219-220. Includes a triplet of notes in measure 219 and a slur in measure 220. Dynamics: *p*.

t. tr.

t. tr.

Fl.

Musical staff for Flute, measures 219-220. Includes trills and slurs. Measure number 5 is indicated below the staff.

5

B. Cl.

Musical staff for Bass Clarinet, measures 219-220. Includes trills and slurs. Measure number 5 is indicated below the staff.

5

5

Perc.

Musical staff for Percussion, measures 219-220. Includes a single note in measure 219 and a slur in measure 220.

flutter of harmonics

Vln.

Musical staff for Violin, measures 219-220. Includes a "flutter of harmonics" in measure 219. Dynamics: *mf*.

mf

Tape

Musical staff for Tape, measures 219-220. Includes a long slur across both measures.

Countertenor

Ah *p*

Fl.

pp

B. Cl.

p

Perc.

pp 5

Vln.

p

Tape



Countertenor

mm

Fl.

pp change to bass flute

B. Cl.

pp

Perc.

pp 5

Vln.

pp

Tape

227 *pp* *p* 28

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

231 *pp* *pp* *pp*

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

Countertenor

Countertenor staff with rests in measures 235-238.

Fl.

Flute staff with notes in measures 235-238, including a *pp* dynamic marking.

B. Cl.

Bass Clarinet staff with notes in measures 235-238, including a *pp* dynamic marking.

Perc.

Percussion staff with a triplet of notes in measure 235.

Vln.

Violin staff with notes in measures 235-238, including a *pp* dynamic marking and an *8va* marking.

Tape

Tape staff with notes in measures 235-238.



Countertenor

Countertenor staff with rests in measures 239-241.

Fl.

Flute staff with notes in measures 239-241, including a *pp* dynamic marking.

B. Cl.

Bass Clarinet staff with notes in measures 239-241, including a *pp* dynamic marking.

Perc.

Percussion staff with rests in measures 239-241.

Vln.

Violin staff with notes in measures 239-241, including a *pp* dynamic marking and an *8va* marking.

Tape

Tape staff with notes in measures 239-241.

21

21

21

21

V. "Sani"

262

Countertenor Mouth harp improvise with a fast and steady rhythm → ca. 1' ca. 30"

Fl. Mouth harp improvise with a fast and steady rhythm → change to piccolo

B. Cl. Mouth harp improvise with a fast and steady rhythm → change to b. cl.

Perc. Mouth harp improvise with a fast and steady rhythm → 5 drums *sub.f* change to violin

Vln. Mouth harp improvise with a fast and steady rhythm →

264

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

f = 112
A Collage
Improvise from the given material

tongue rolls!

lu lu lu lu lu lu

split tone growl!

growl!

4 bells on foam

bike bell

sfz f

Sudden Stop determined by the conductor

ca. 1'

VI. "a dream in water"

♩ = 48

266 tear newspaper *f*

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape



270

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

275

Countertenor

Fl. change to C flute

B. Cl. highest squeaking with random fingering

Perc. bow cymbal on timpani

Vln. freely bow on body and neck

Tape



279

Countertenor

Fl.

B. Cl. pp

Perc. bow on medium cymbal

Vln. softly

Tape

283

Countertenor *mp* *p* *pp*
hm hm hm

Fl. *tr* *pp* *f* *f*

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln. *b* *bow on bridge* *f* *pp*

Tape



287

Countertenor hm du! du!

B. Fl.

B. Cl. *tr* *pp*

Perc. *mf* *mf*
bow two cymbals

Vln. *b*

Tape

292

Countertenor

B. Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

pp

mf

p

pp



297

Countertenor

B. Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape

p

sigh!

mm—

humming the melody
almost not audible

301 *pp* *mm* *mm* *pp* *hm* 3

Countertenor

B. Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape



305 *pp* *mm* *sigh*

Countertenor

B. Fl.

B. Cl.

Perc.

Vln.

Tape