

BOOK OF CHORDS

BOOK OF CHORDS
LISA STREICH

Kleinheinrich
MMXXIV

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	7
GLORIA	13
LES BAINS	27
LYS	49
REMEMORY	57
GEBET	75
APFELSINE	95
MOR	105
ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS	123
GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST	149
MEDUSE	165
DUNKELLILA	191
ZUCKER	217
PETROLIO	229
LA PLUIE AVANT QU'ELLE TOMBE	251

LISA STREICH (b. 1985) is a composer.
The book is a result of the artistic research
project PLAN TO UNPLAN precarious
spaces between homo sapiens and homo
ludens at the Norwegian Academy of Music.



Sally Mann
The Perfect Tomato, 1990
 Gelatin silver print
 8 x 10 inches
 © Sally Mann
 Courtesy Gagosian

This book presents a collection of chords that are special to me. I ‘found’ each chord through listening to recordings of amateur and professional singers and choirs on the internet. I look for harmonic moments that are familiar, but which have been given a special or unusual intonation, intentionally or not. I am attracted to the way that small differences of intonation interact with the overtone spectrum characteristics of the human voice. The chords in this book are moments from these performances that I have analysed and transcribed.

These chords have been central to my compositions of the past decade, especially in pieces for larger forces such as orchestras, choirs, and large ensembles. Some chords appear in several pieces, others only in a single piece. I continue to make more chords. In one sense this book serves as an articulation of “The Technique of My Musical Language”, to borrow the phrase from Messiaen. It shows my approach and helps decipher chords from my pieces. I hope it may also inspire other music makers in the way they think about harmony, composition and listening. This book is intended for musicians of all levels and to be read in the classroom or on the beach.

I see myself as a photographer, taking audible pictures, millisecond long moments that are special for me. I “photograph” them so I can experience common musical materials such as the minor-third interval in a new way. These well-worn musical elements have become overly familiar for me. I want to cast them in a new light to reaffirm them and discover anew their expressive possibilities. I find this through analysing the intonation of the recordings of voices. And that they are voices is important: the distinctive spectral qualities of the voice trigger for me a sense of the human, and of human imperfection. As I listen to these chords, I am aware that within the microtonal haze is a familiar musical element that has passed its expiration date, and that carries a sense of tragedy.

Photographer Sally Mann’s work “Perfect Tomato” presents a girl standing on an outdoor table with her arms stretched out. The table has various things on it including several tomatoes, and beside the table sits a father with a younger child on his lap. What I find special about the picture—and this relates closely to my work—is that the only object brought into sharp focus are

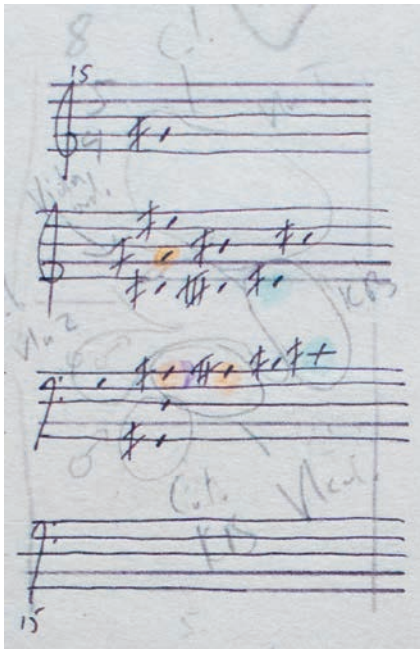
INTRODUCTION

the tomatoes; the father and younger child are indistinct, and the girl is blurred, which turns her into a hazy angelic figure. When looking at photos that are partly focussed and blurred, our attention is usually drawn towards the parts that are sharp. But in this case our focus is centred on the blurry standing child; the tomatoes, though sharp, are largely insignificant. The relationship between the tomatoes and angelic girl is like the relationship between the minor third and the overtones in one of my chords: in my music, the real focus is on the haze of spectral impurities.

I use the software Audio Sculpt to view, analyse and process the chords I find. I then use the software Open Music, a visual programming language based on Lisp, to transcribe this analysis into musical notation. This process of transcription involves making microtonal approximations to make it performer friendly. Both programmes were developed by Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM).

The dynamic level of each note is an essential feature of these chords. This is different to our usual sense of chords. When a classical music theory book introduces the student to a diminished chord, or a jazz theory book to a flat 9 chord, the notes are given without dynamics. Here, the relative weight of dynamic for each note is critically important to the quality of the chord. Dynamics are not notated here through using words such as forte and piano, but rather visualised in colour. The loudest notes are in purple, followed by red, black, and different shades of grey for the softest notes. Each chord typically features around 24 pitches. At first glance, it might look like a random assortment of quartertones. Once played, however, the relative dynamic weightings make apparent a distinct microtonal haze around a familiar harmonic sonority.

The chords in this book are divided into fourteen expressive categories. The names of these categories are diverse; my approach to classification was not systematic or procedural, but rather based on personal association and feeling. I have written short texts and poems to try and capture in words how I hear the quality of each category of chords. This is supplemented with photos of water I have taken that likewise attempt to signify characteristics of these chords; it may be idiosyncratic, but I see parallels between the different feelings I get from diving into water, with its range of temperatures and colours, and the



Lisa Streich
Compositional notes for *SEGEL*, 2017

INTRODUCTION

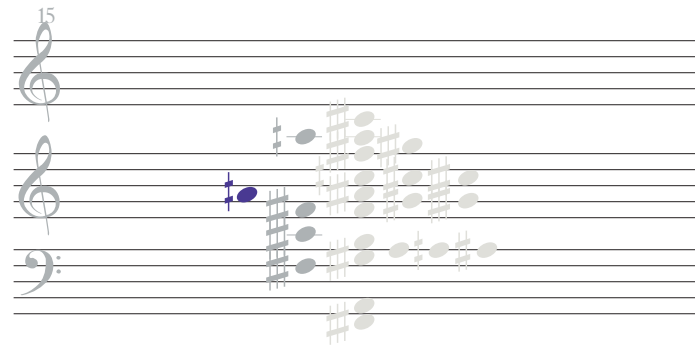
different feelings I get from these spectral chords. The photos are taken from above and underneath the water trying to visualize the expression and feeling of a certain chord group, imagining bathing in these chords, and feeling their qualities on the skin.

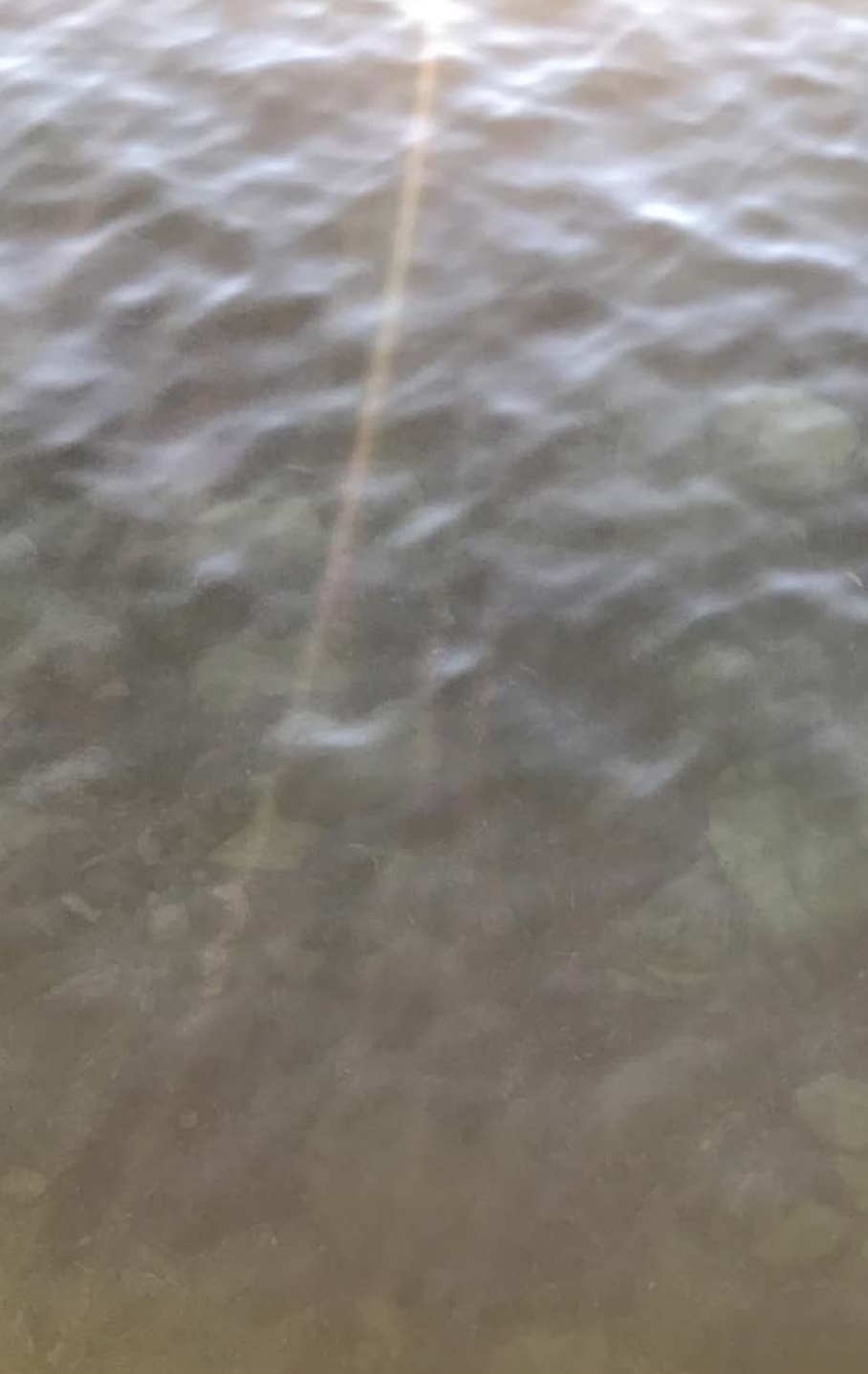
GLORIA

ÜBER DEM BODEN
DUNKELGOLD
MENSCH
STOISCHES GÖTTLICH

SAND
WARMER SAND.

GLORIA





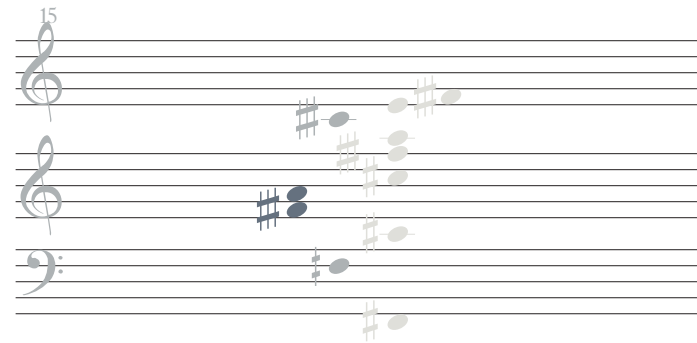
GLORIA

15

Musical notation for three staves (treble, middle, and bass clef) showing a sequence of notes and rests. The notation includes a blue note, a red note with a sharp sign, and several grey notes. The notes are arranged in a sequence that suggests a melodic line. The first staff (treble clef) has a blue note on the second line, a red note with a sharp sign on the second line, and several grey notes on the second, third, and fourth lines. The second staff (middle clef) has a blue note on the second line, a red note with a sharp sign on the second line, and several grey notes on the second, third, and fourth lines. The third staff (bass clef) has a blue note on the second line, a red note with a sharp sign on the second line, and several grey notes on the second, third, and fourth lines.

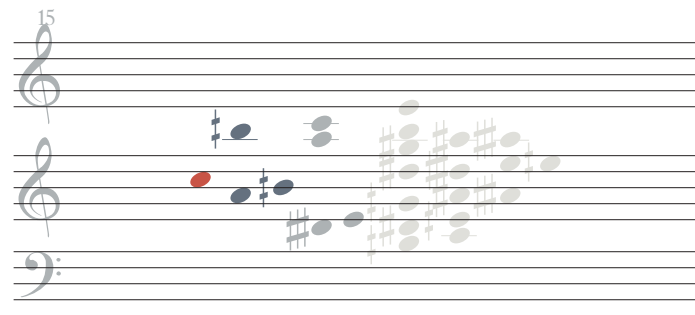


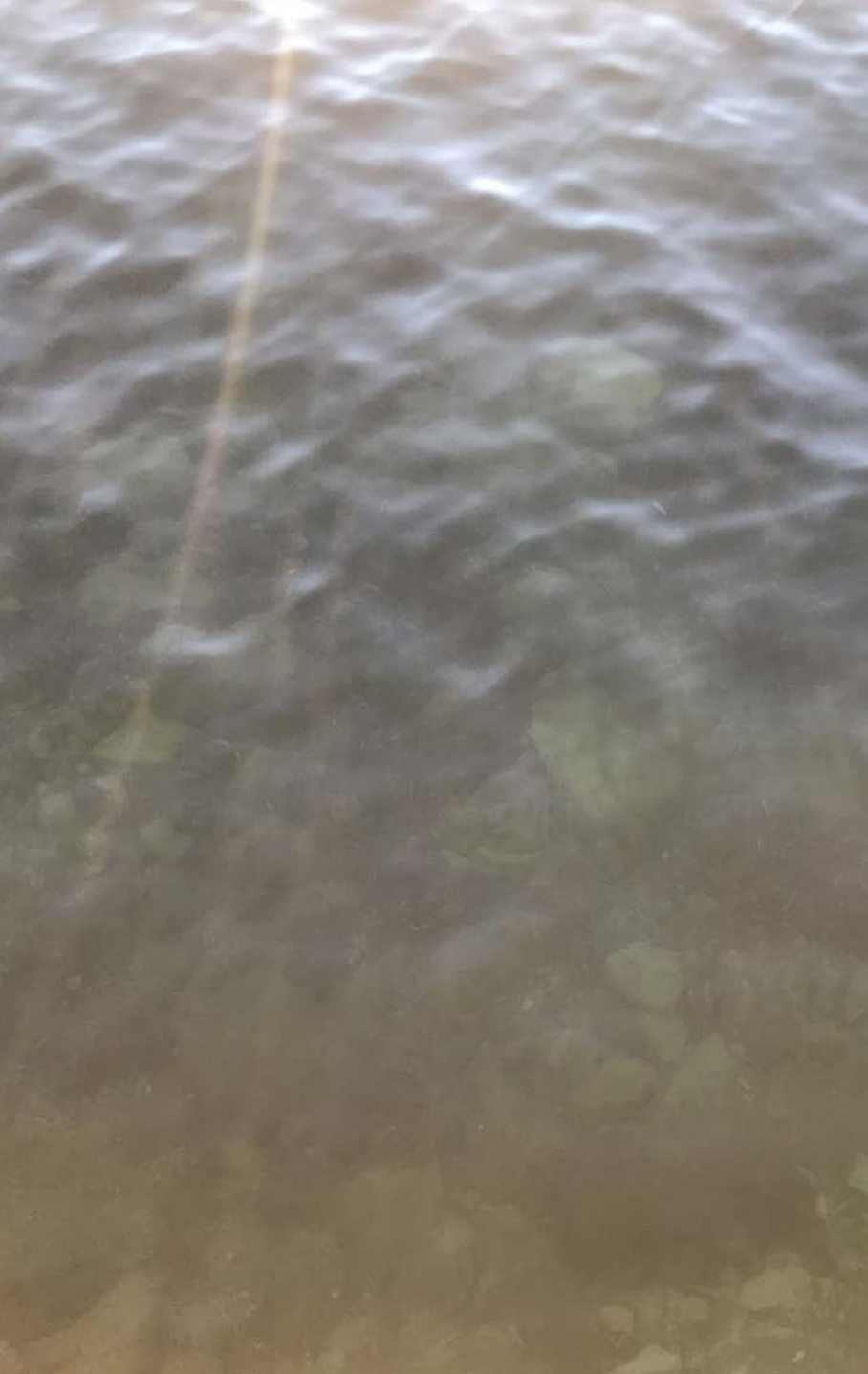
GLORIA





GLORIA

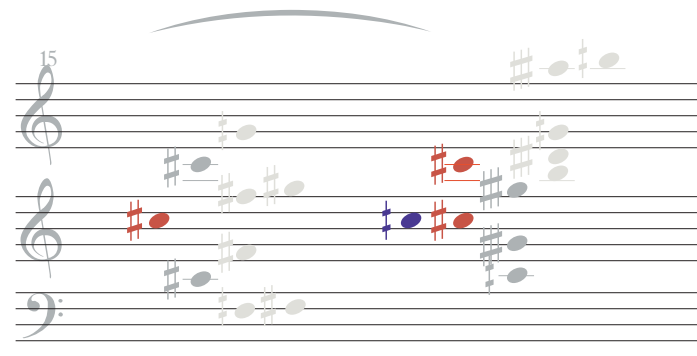




GLORIA

15

GLORIA



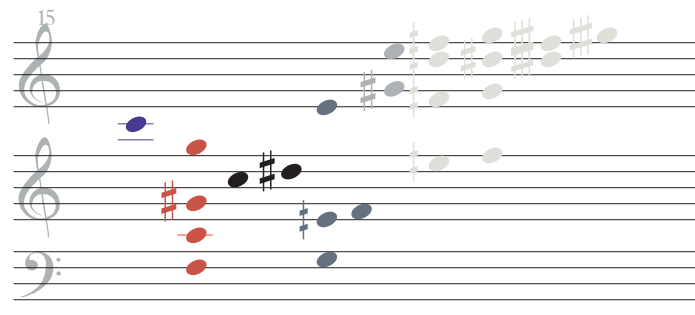
LES BAINS

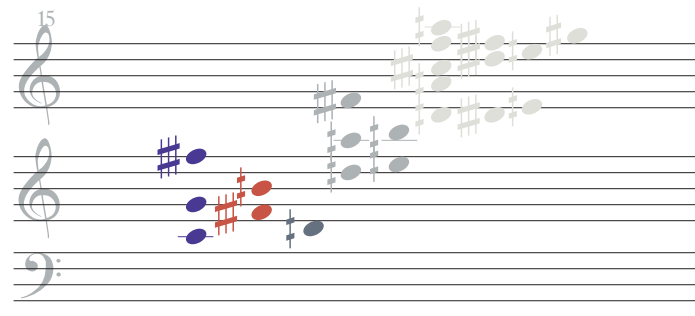
DOFT
VÄRME
LÄTTHET
TYNGD

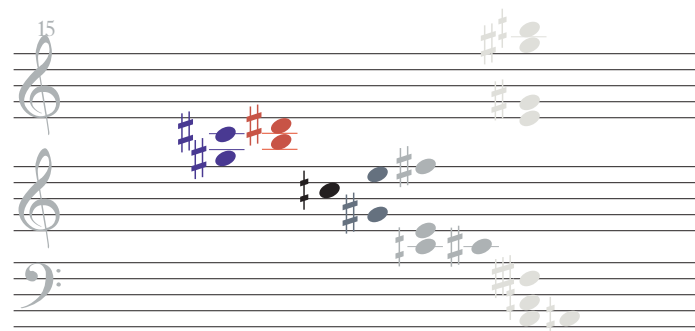
OMSLUTEN
OMFAMNAD
VATTEN MOT HUD

NAKENSOLBAD EFTER LÅNG VINTER.

LES BAINS

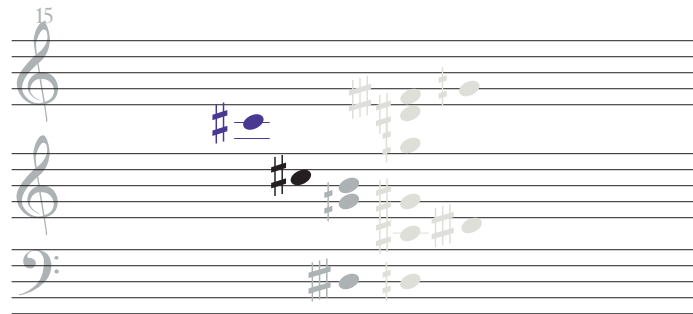






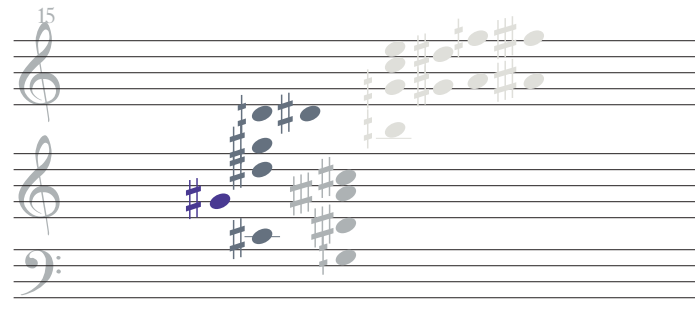


LES BAINS



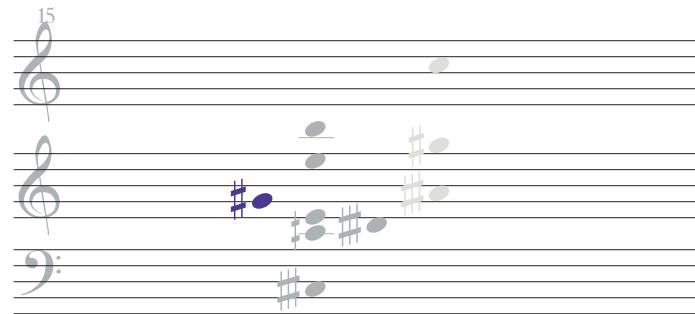


LES BAINS



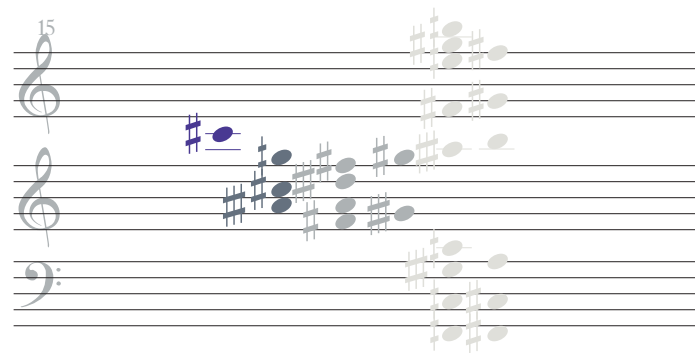


LES BAINS



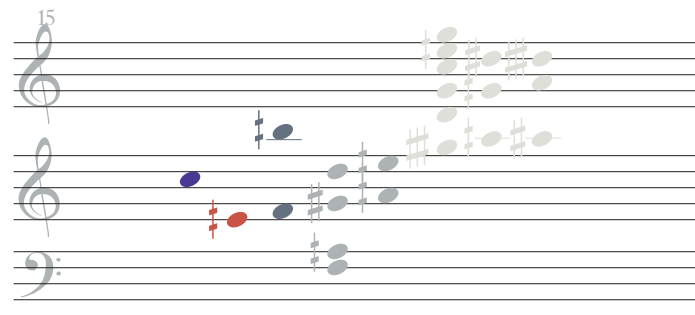


LES BAINS



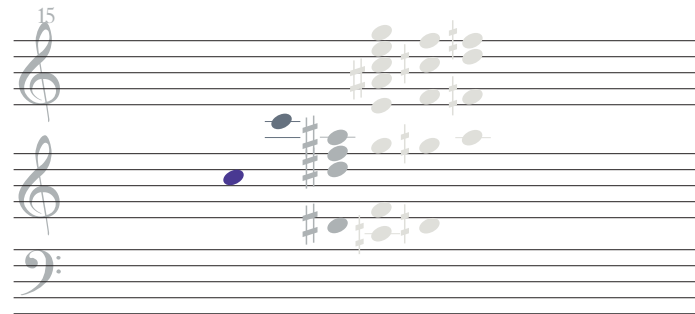


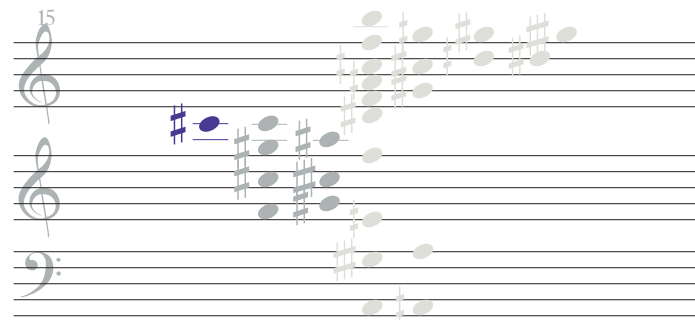
LES BAINS





LES BAINS





LYS

UNENDLICH

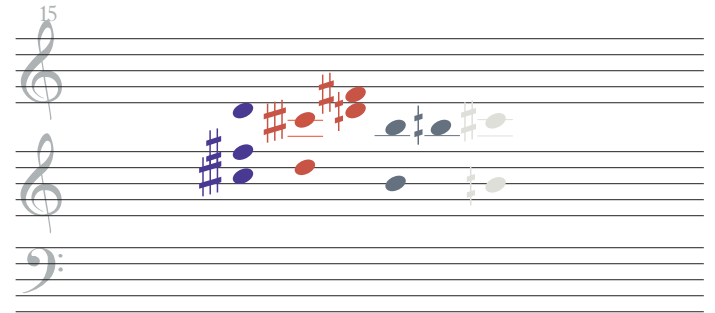
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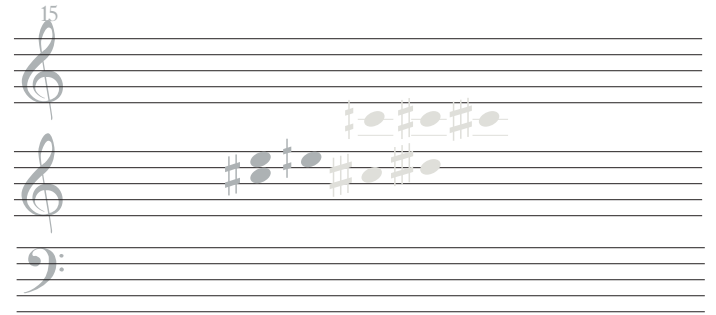
GEBORGEN

ZWISCHEN ZWEI STÜHLEN

SCHENKEN

KÖRPER





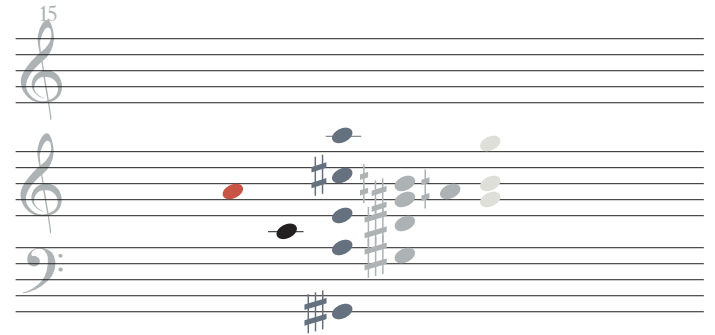
Unspeakable thoughts.
Unspoken.

By being there
he felt he knew
or at least almost knew.

It was a simple notion
of something ineffable
in the lives of the women
of 124.

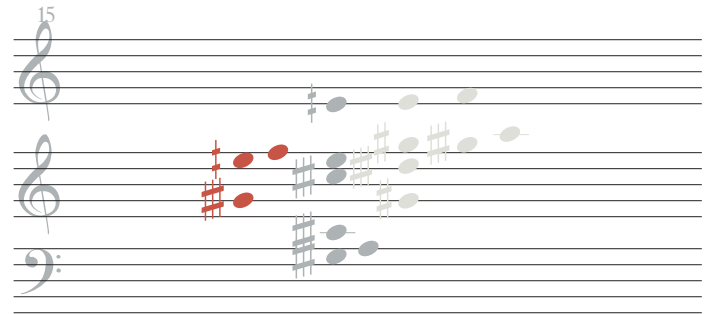
It came to him.
An immediate insight.
Another way of knowing.

Almost.

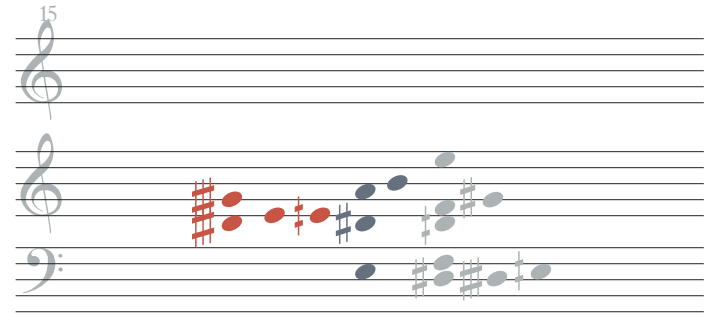




REMEMORY

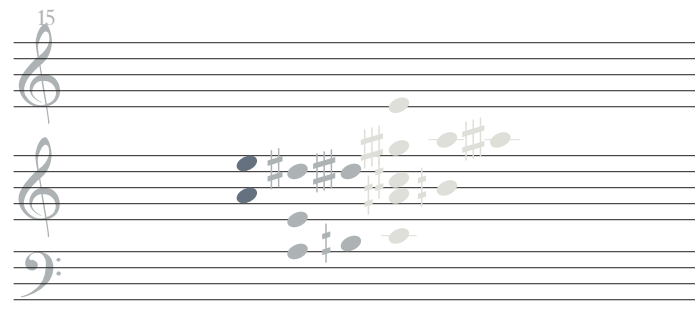


REMEMORY



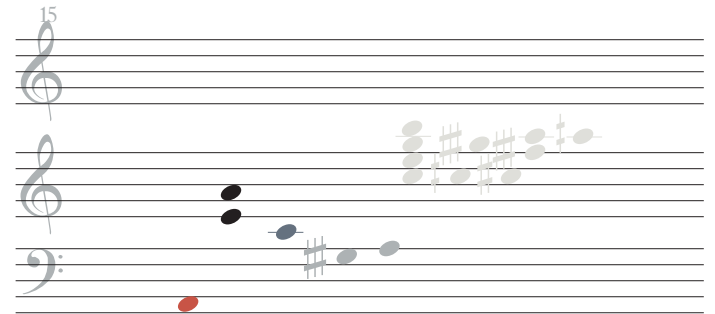


REMEMORY



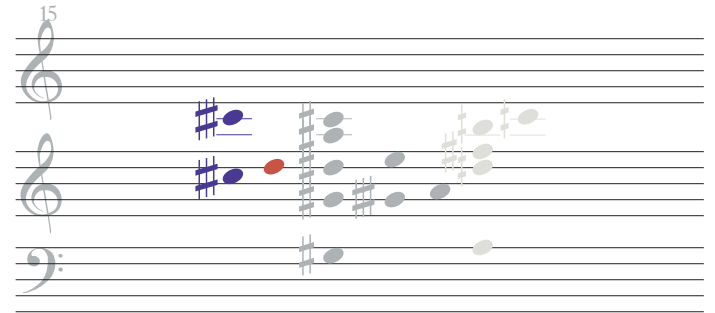


REMEMORY



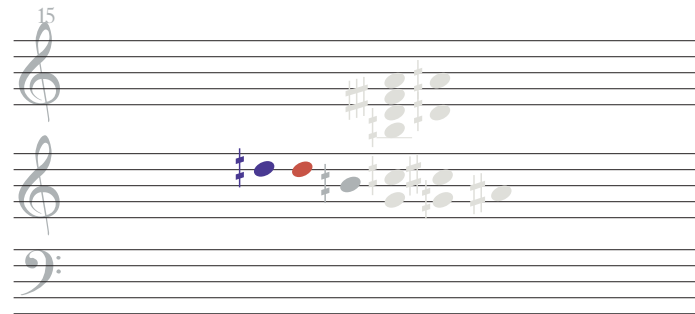


REMEMORY

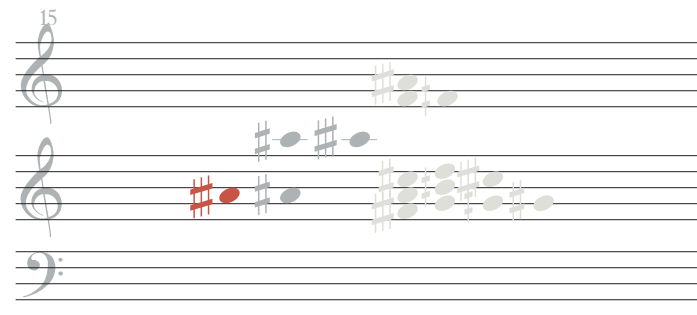




REMEMORY



REMEMORY



GEBET

DA
INNEN
OFFEN

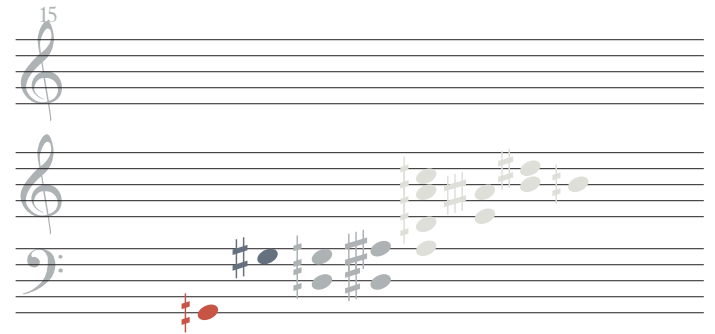
HANDFLÄCHEN
LIPPEN
DENKEN

FLÜSTERN
EWIG
STILL.

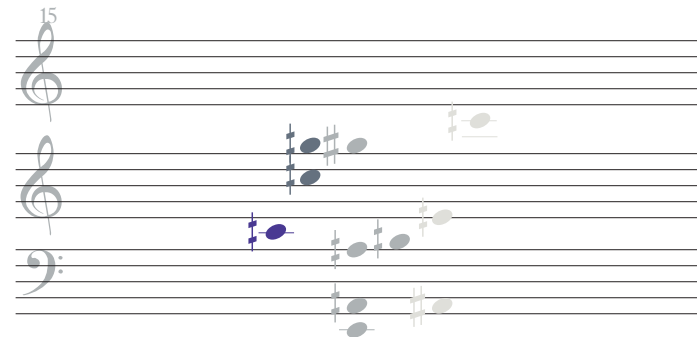


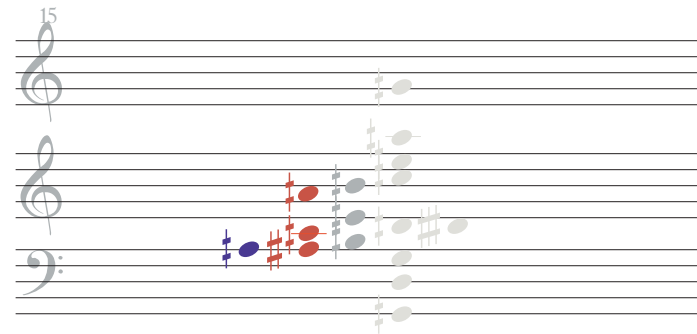
GEBET

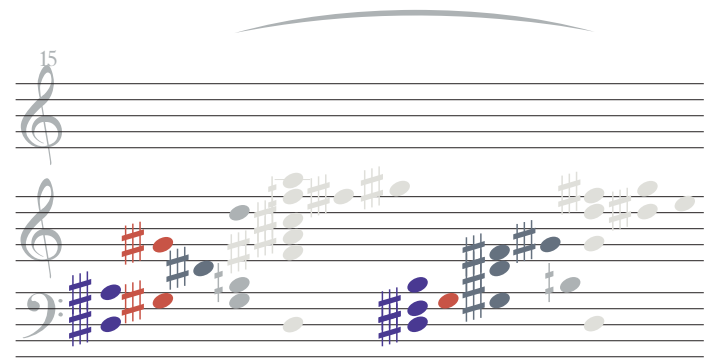


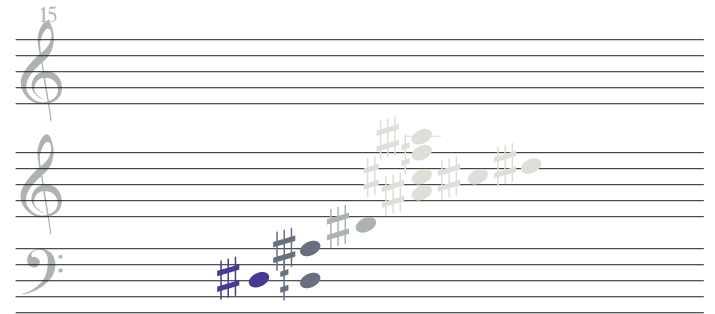


GEBET

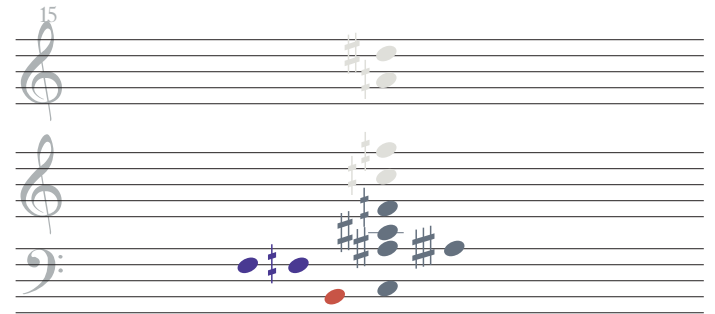


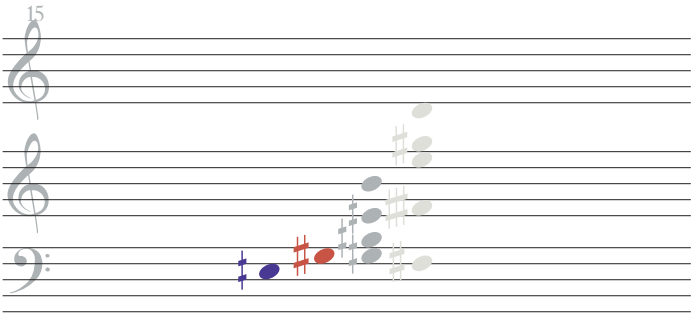




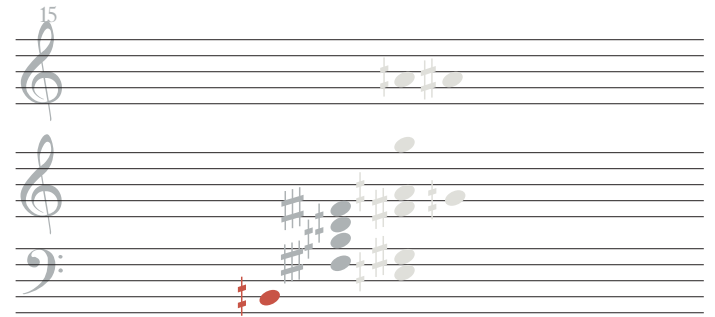


GEBET





GEBET

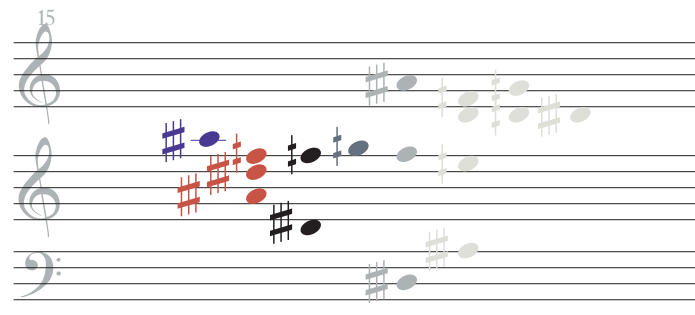


APFELSINE

SÜSS
SAUER ?
BITTER

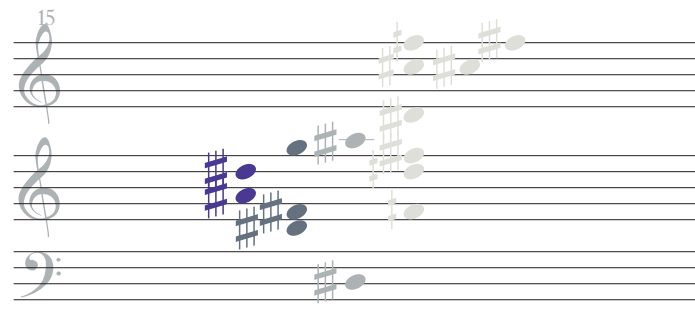
MANCHMAL ROSA DAZWISCHEN

INNEN UND AUSSEN
FORDERNDES KIND
DICKE HAUT
DÜNNE HAUT



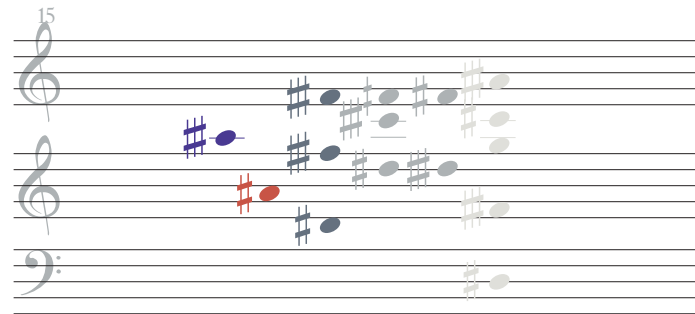


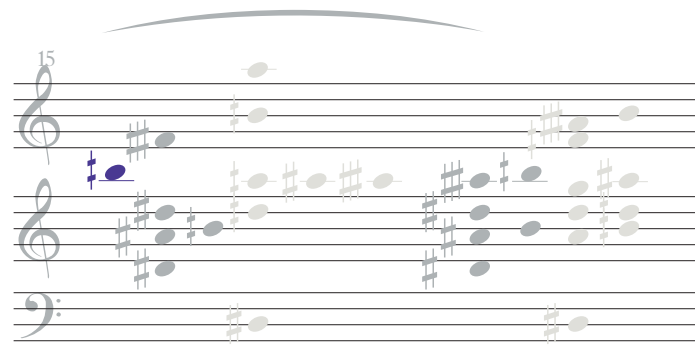
APFELSINE





APFELSINE





MOR

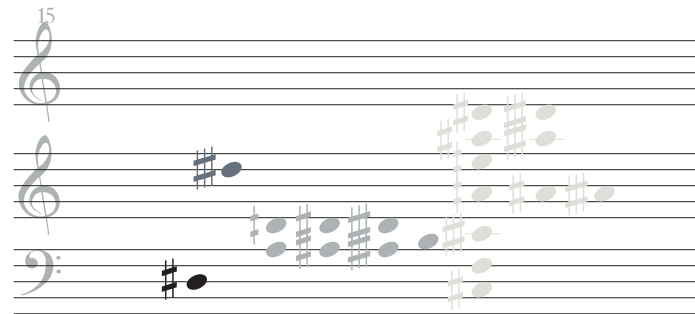
STARK
BRUTEN
STRÄNG
MJUK

OÄNDLIG
EVIG

MIN
DIN.

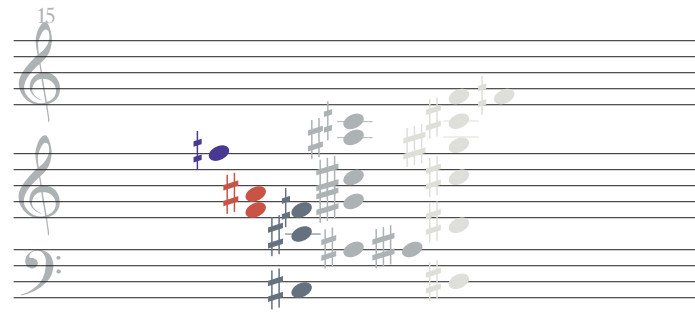


MOR



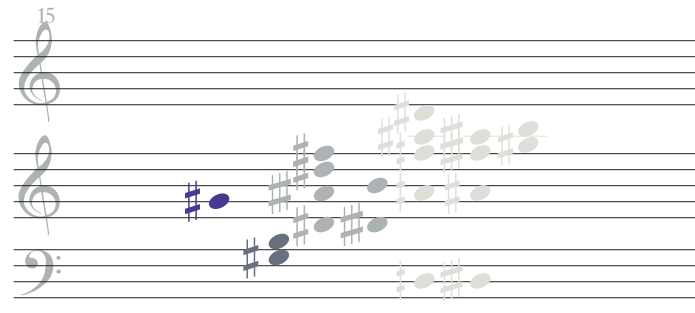


MOR



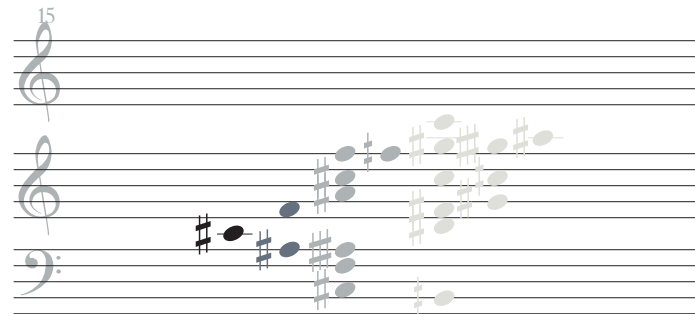


MOR



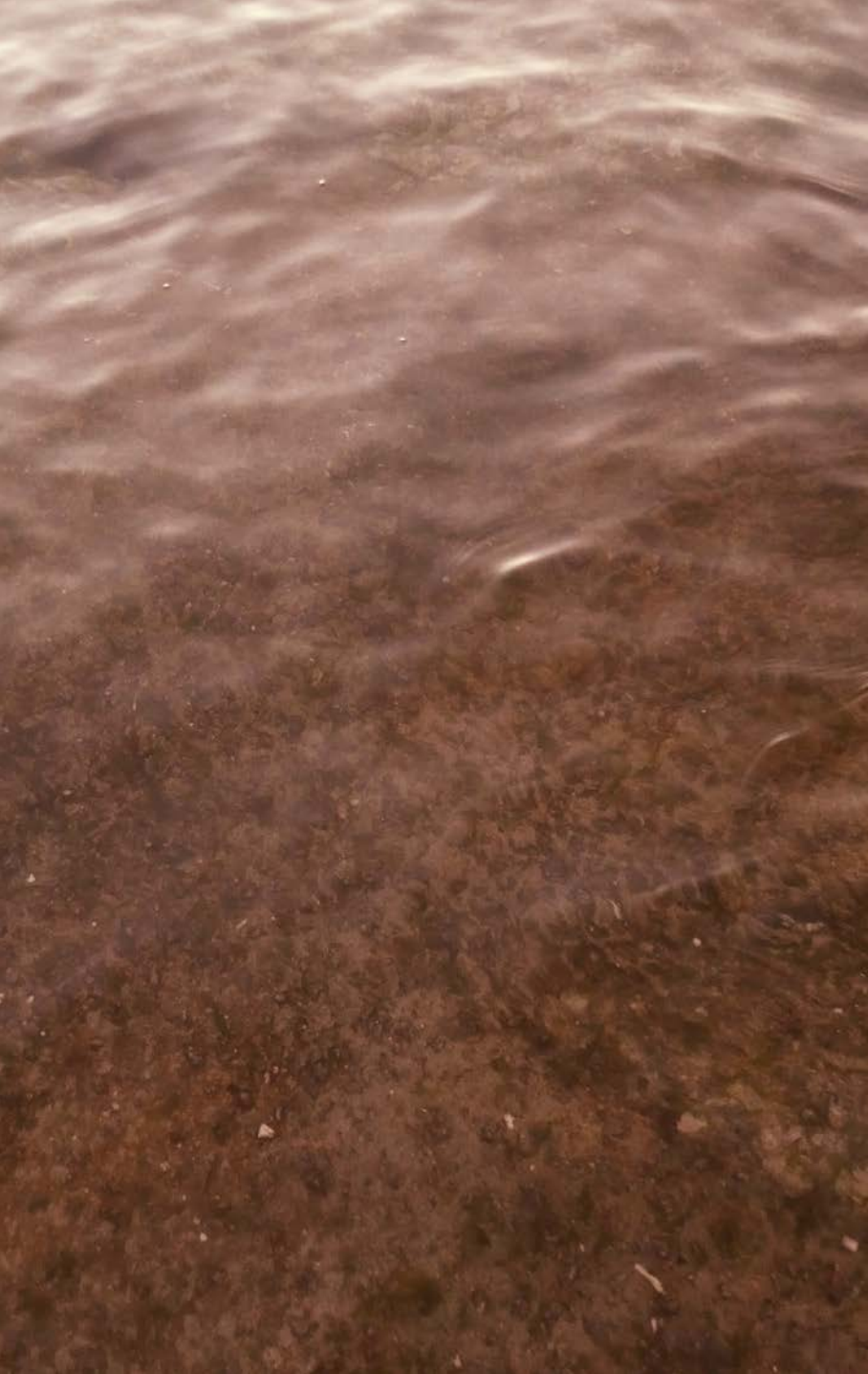


MOR

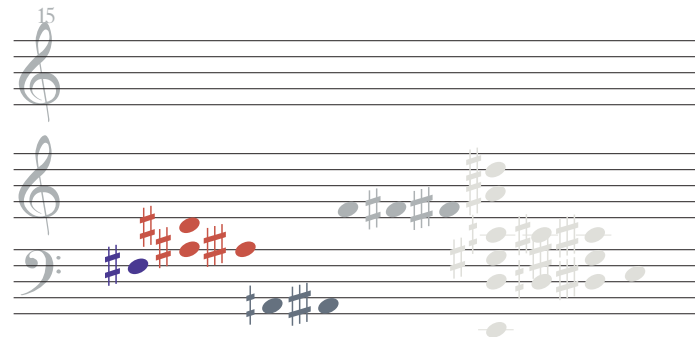




15



MOR

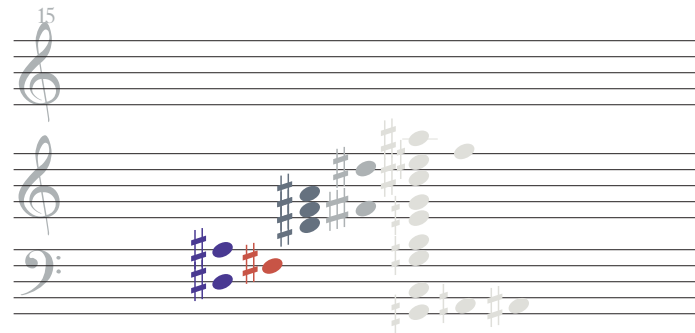




15



MOR



ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS

LAUDES
MESSE DE MINUIT

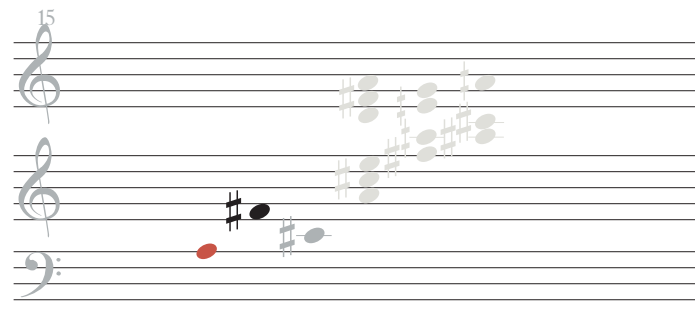
OUVRE MES LÈVRES
CŒUR OUVERT

MYRRHE MYSTÈRE
INFUSION D'YLANG

(Rue de) PAIX.

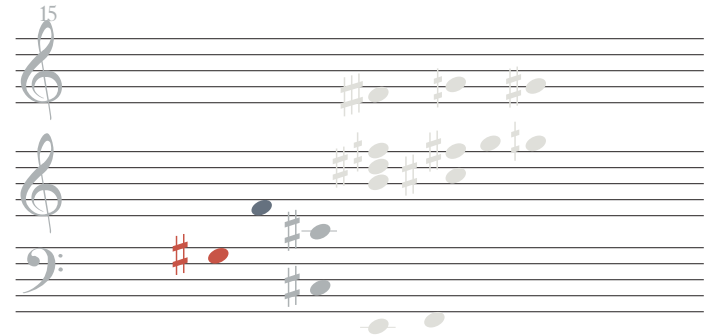


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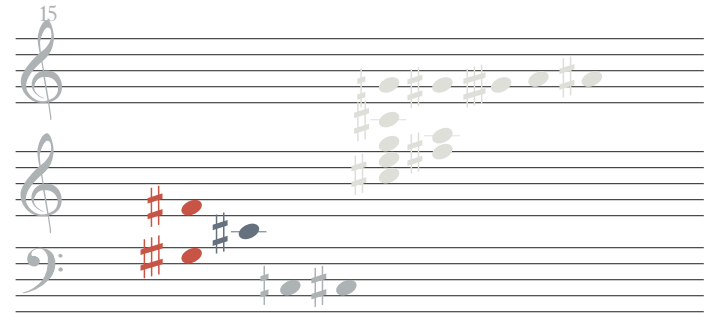


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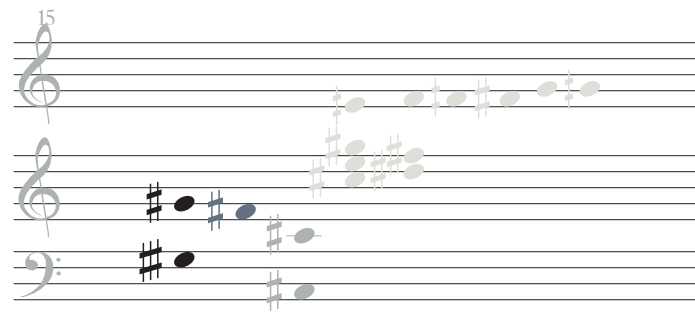


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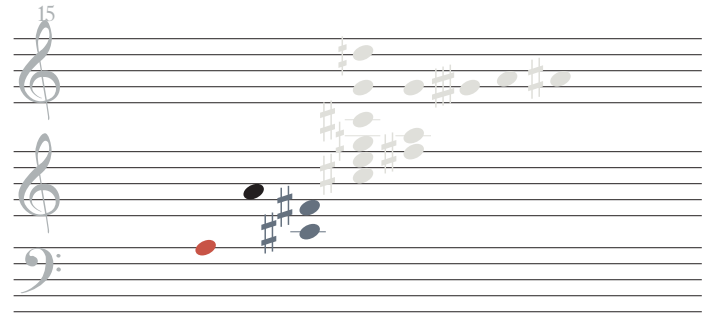


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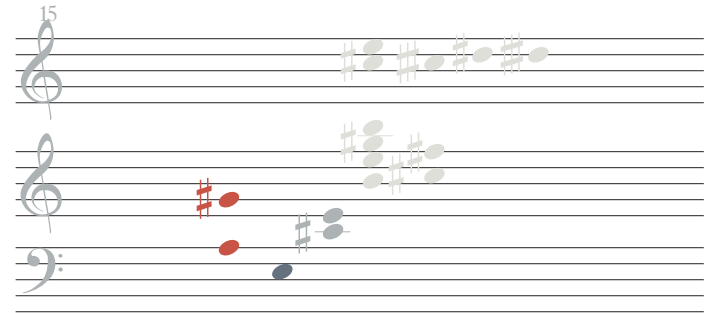




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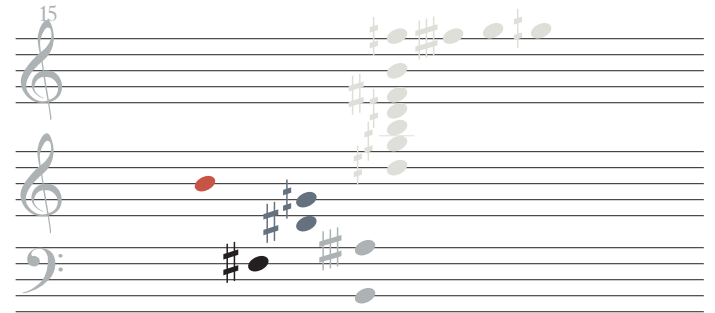


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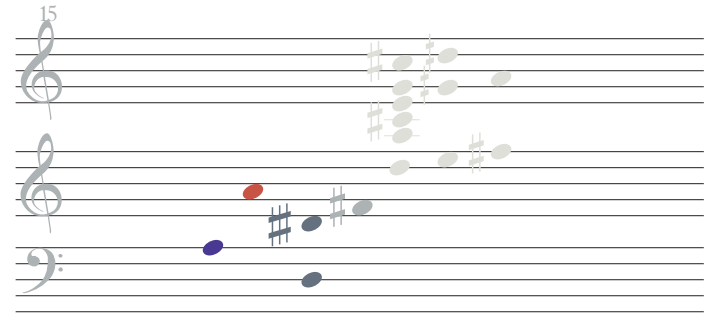


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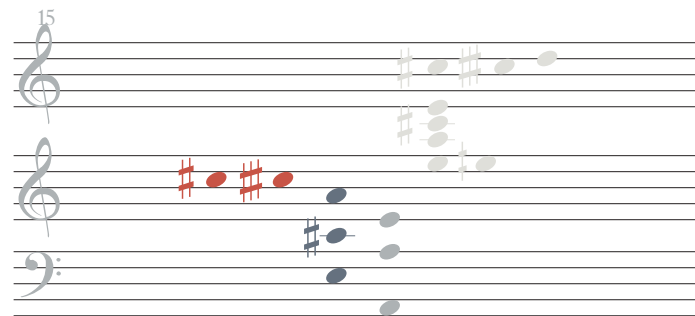


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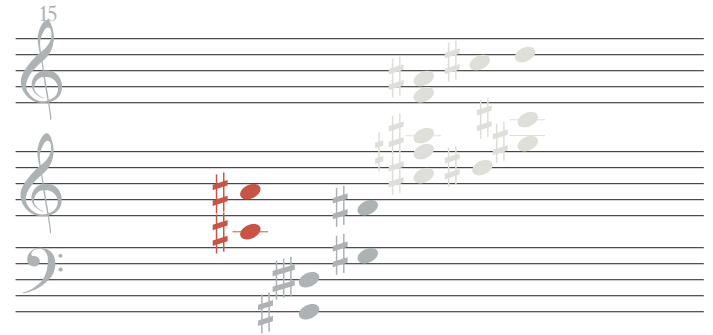


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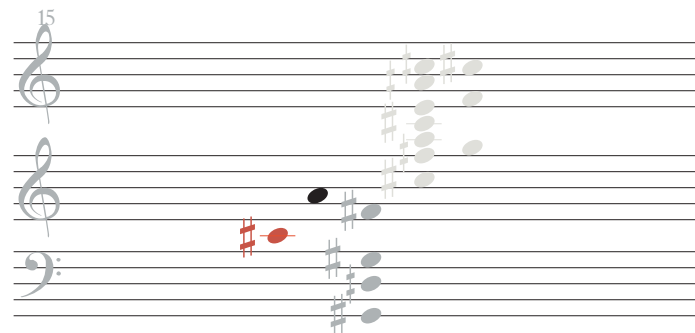


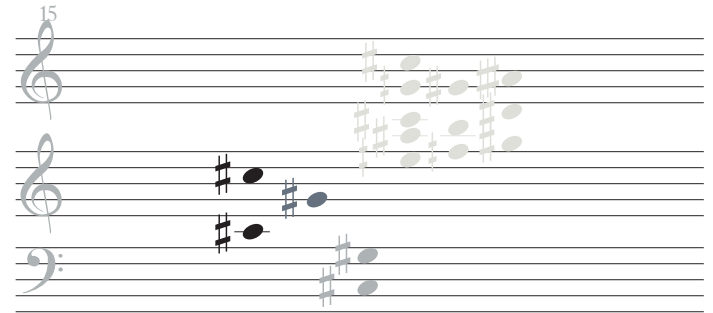
ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS





ON EARTH WE'RE BRIEFLY GORGEOUS



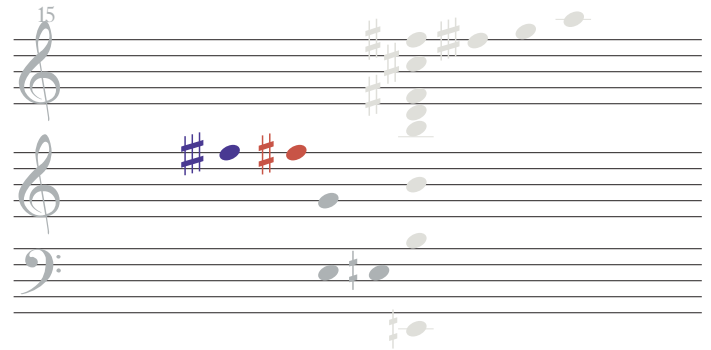


GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST

WUNDER UND WUNDEN.

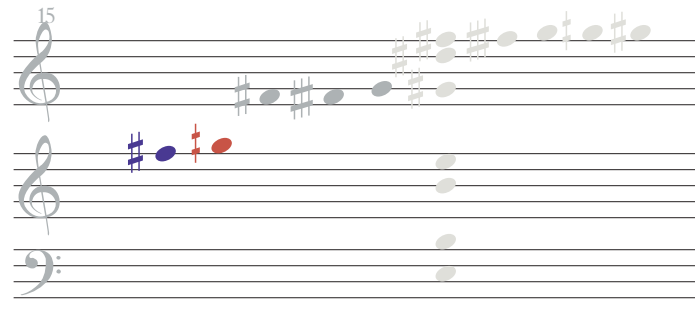


GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST



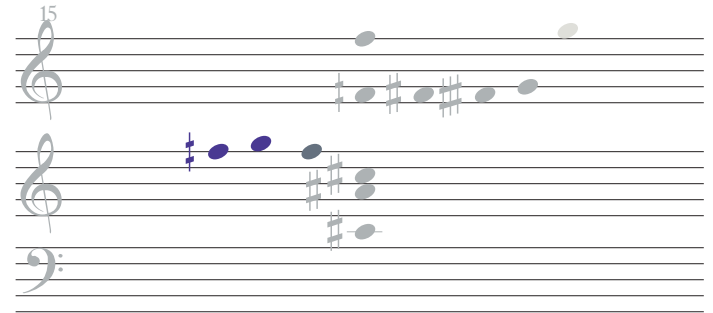


GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST



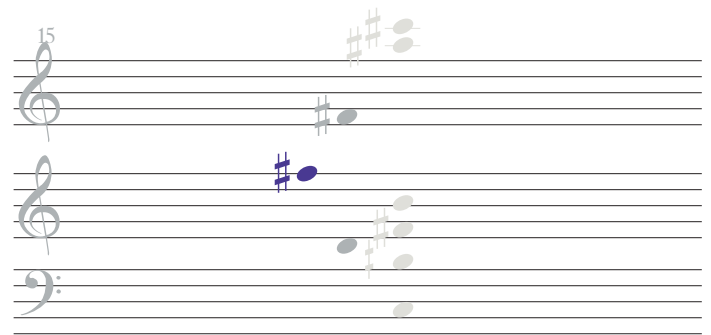


GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST



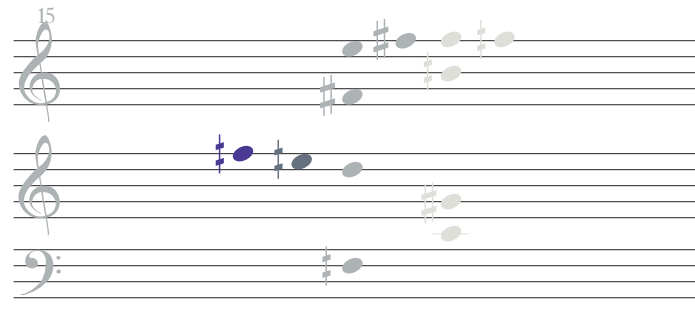


GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST



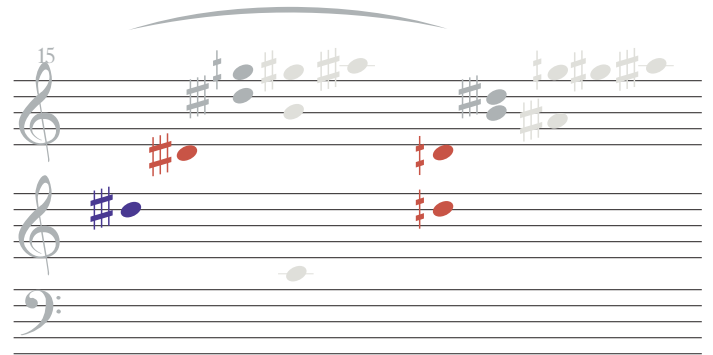


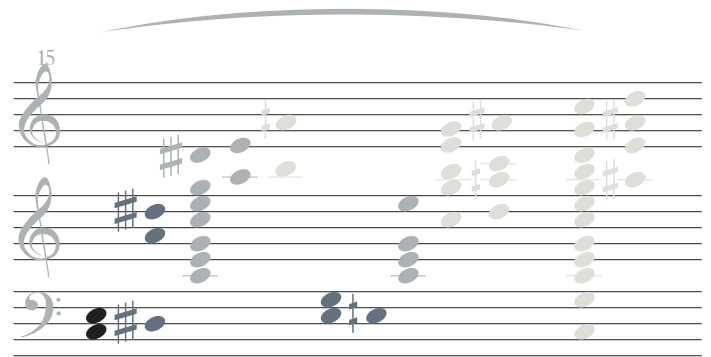
GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST





GOD WAS NOT A FEMINIST





Himmel unter Wasser
Göttlich unter dem Horizont
untötbar, sterblich.

Millionen von Jahren
sanft, so sanft
und klar
und glatt
und anschmiegsam
und anpassbar.

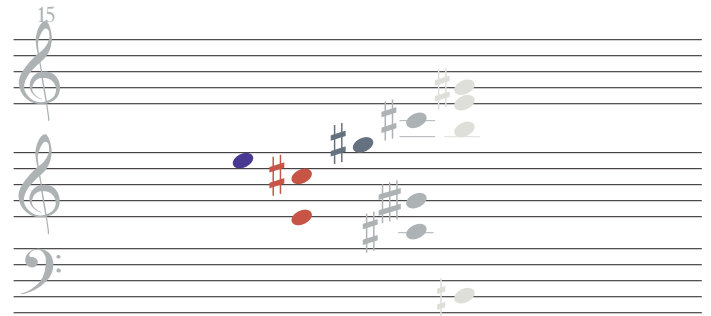
Frei schwimmendes Herz
freigeschwommener Muskel
Freischwimmer

—

Mit Erinnerung,
mit Gedächtnis.

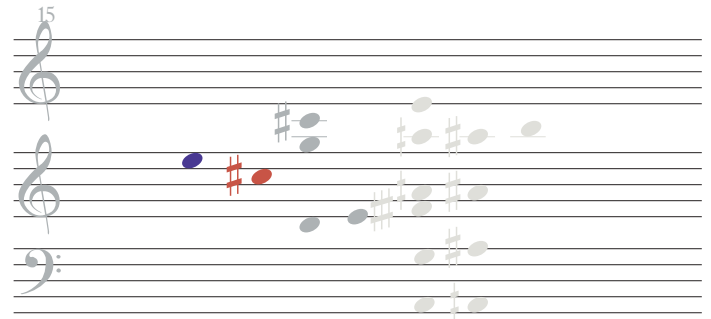


MEDUSE



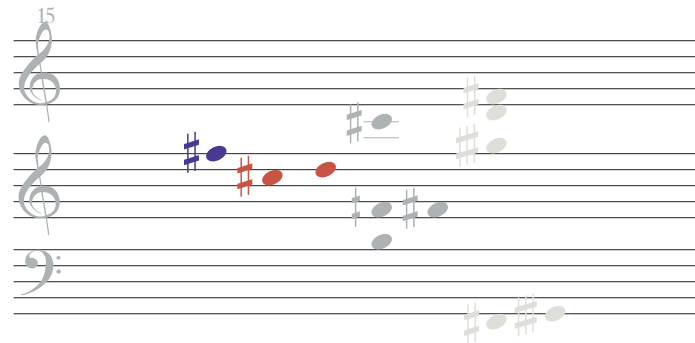


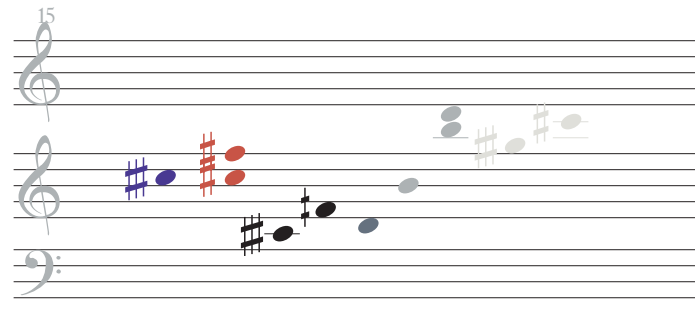
MEDUSE

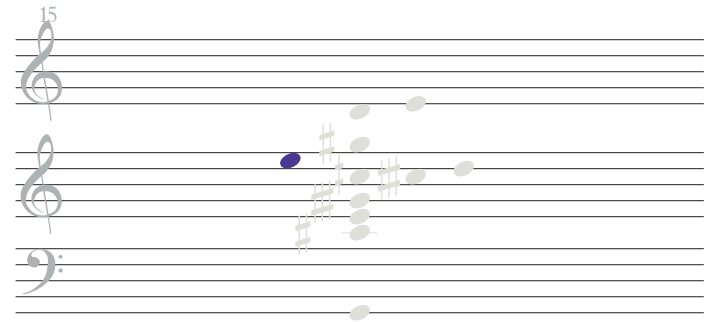


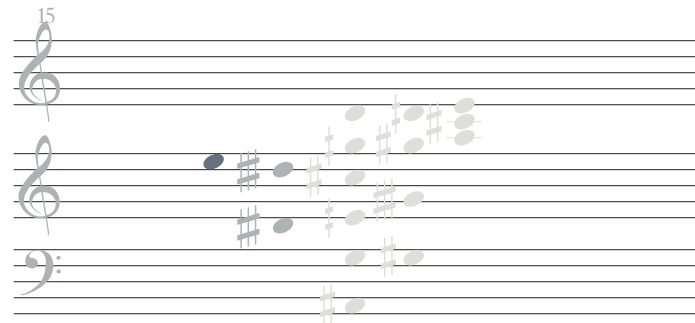


MEDUSE



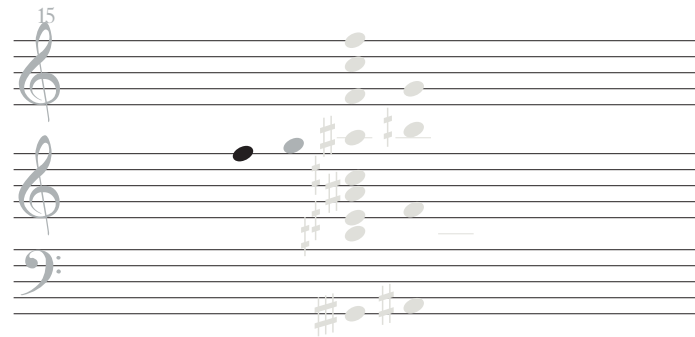






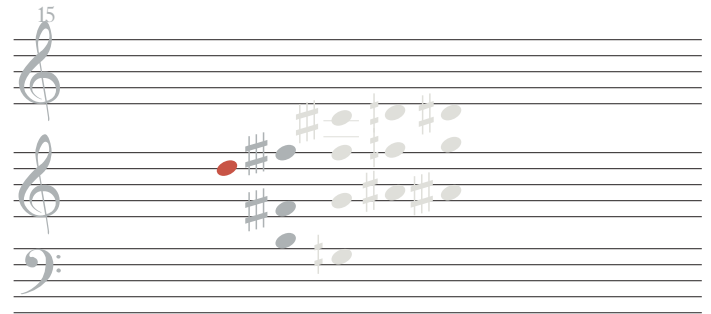


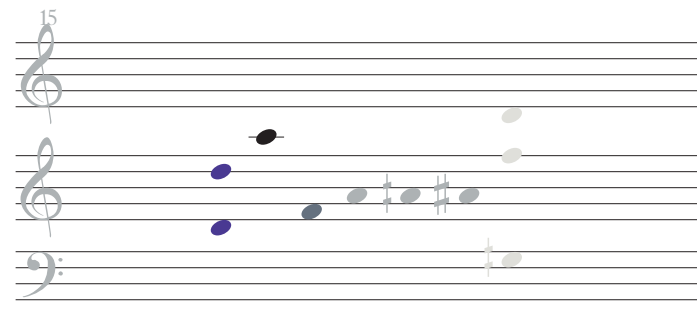
MEDUSE



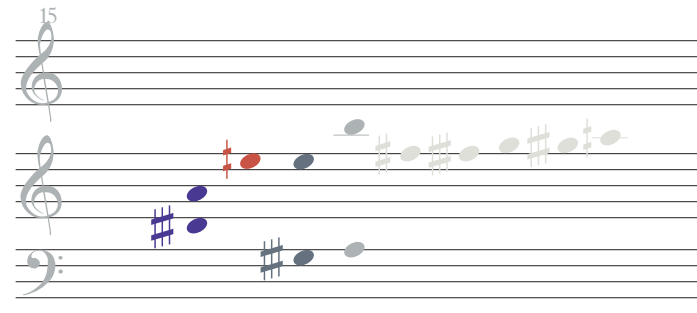


MEDUSE



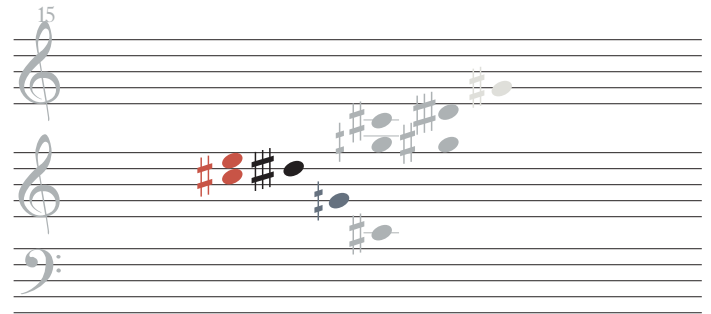


MEDUSE



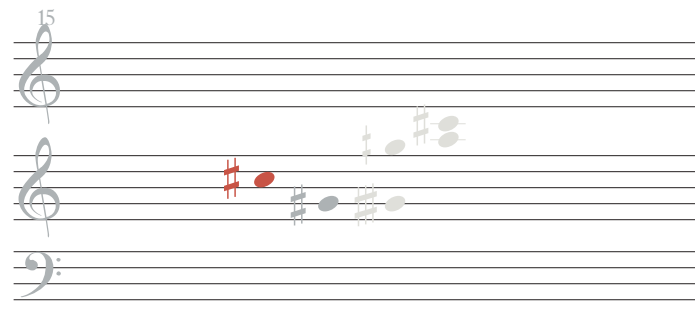


MEDUSE





MEDUSE



DUNKELLILA

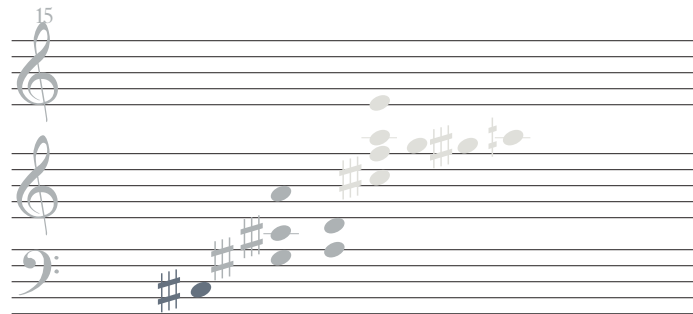
NACHT MIT LICHTSTREIFEN.

DUNKELSCHWARZ, DUNKELLILA, DUNKELBLAU.

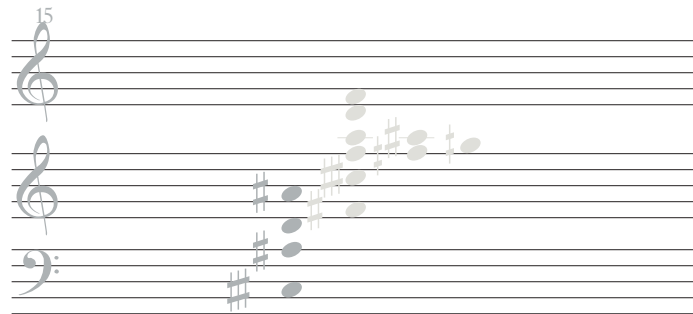
GELBER STAUB
ORANGENER STAUB
GOLDENER STAUB.

DUNKLER REGENBOGEN OHNE GRÜN.

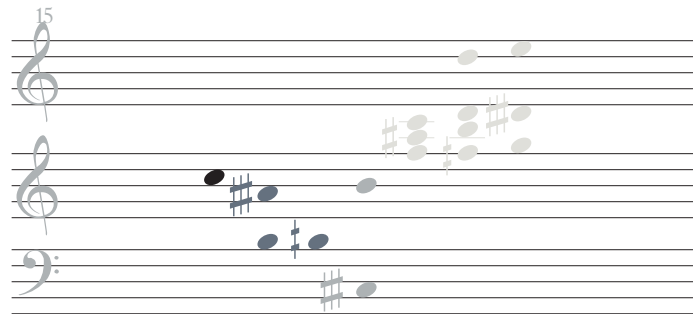
DUNKELLILA



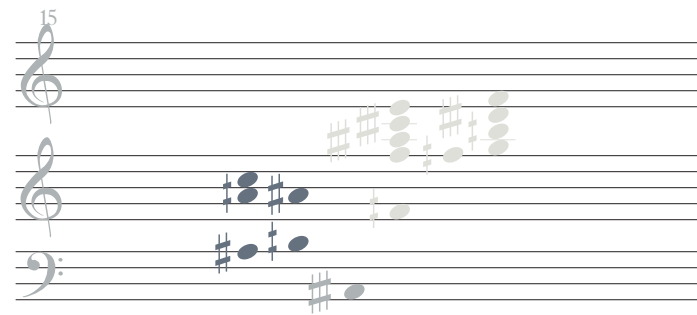
DUNKELLILA



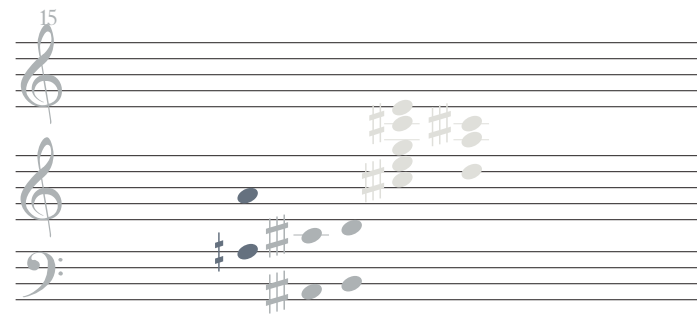
DUNKELLILA



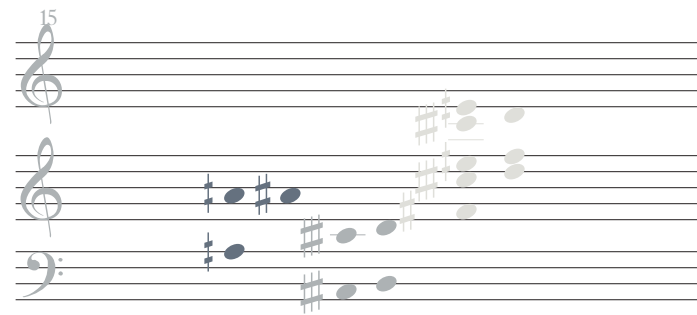
DUNKELLILA



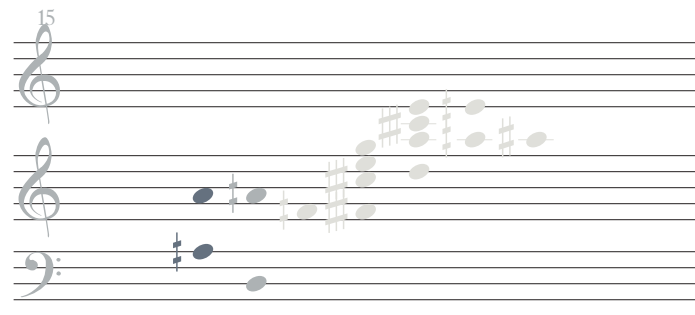
DUNKELLILA



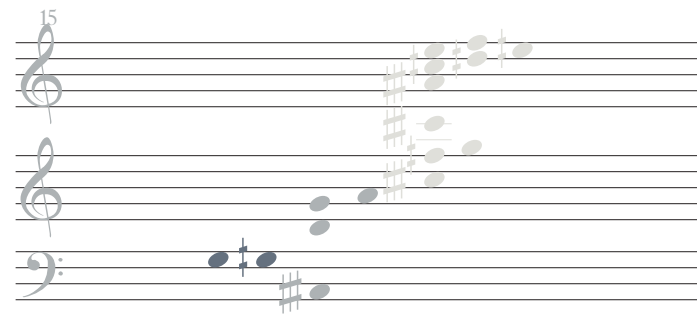
DUNKELLILA



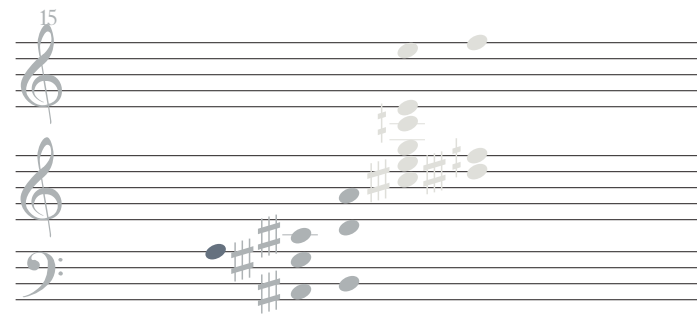
DUNKELLILA



DUNKELLILA



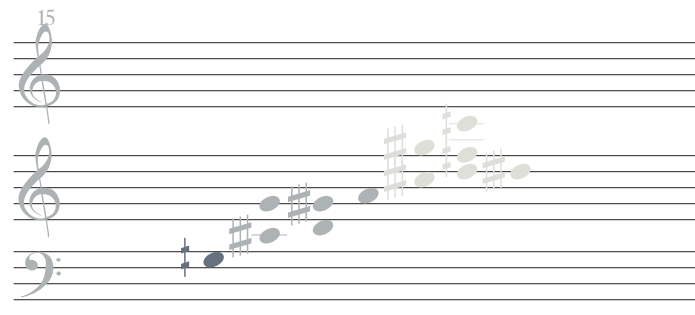
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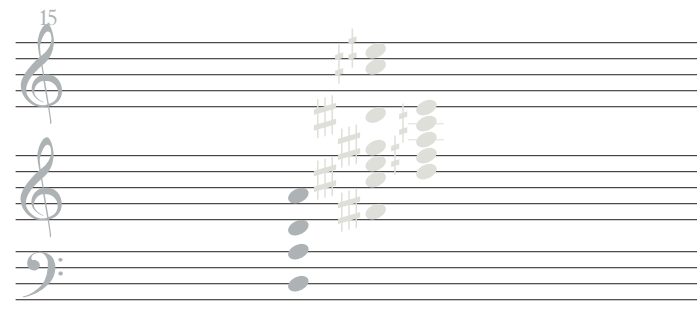
DUNKELLILA



DUNKELLILA



DUNKELLILA



ZUCKER

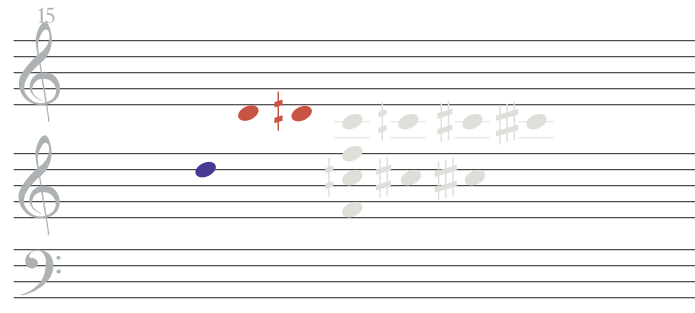
EMPTY EVERYDAY
HEAVENLY HAPPINESS

LIEBLING.

(HABIBI.)

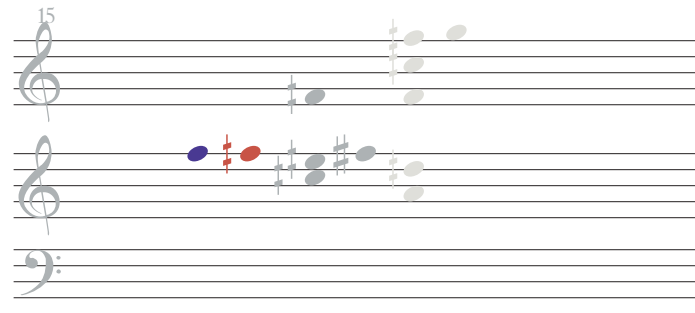


ZUCKER

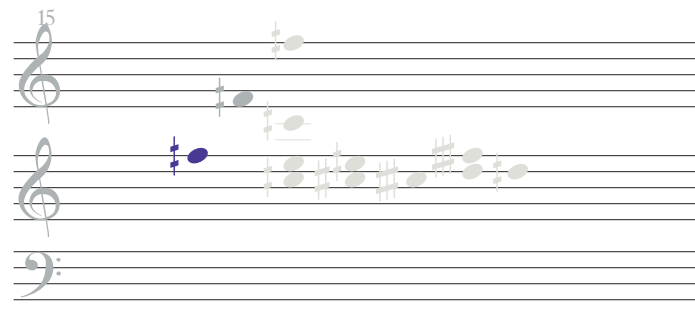




ZUCKER

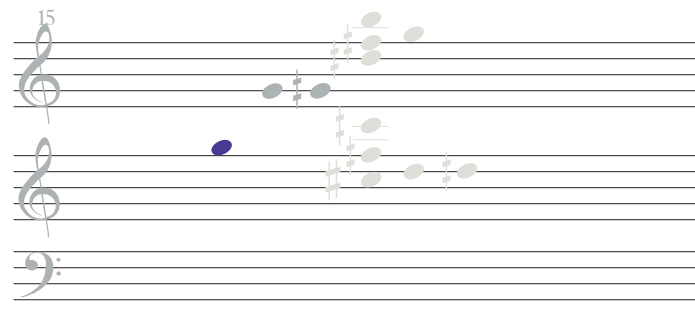








ZUCKER



Gemälde an der Tanke

Öl auf der Pfütze
Benzin auf Asphalt

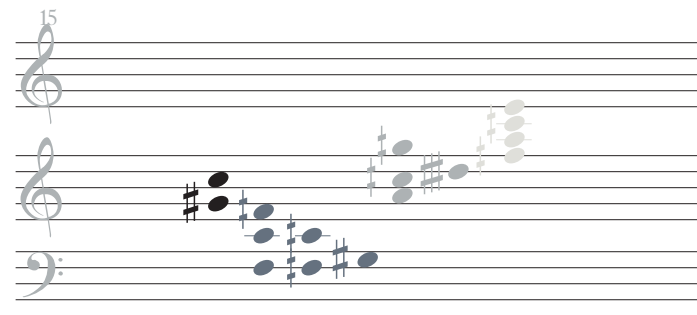
Alle farben auf Dunkel
Schlieren von Regenbogen

hauchdünn

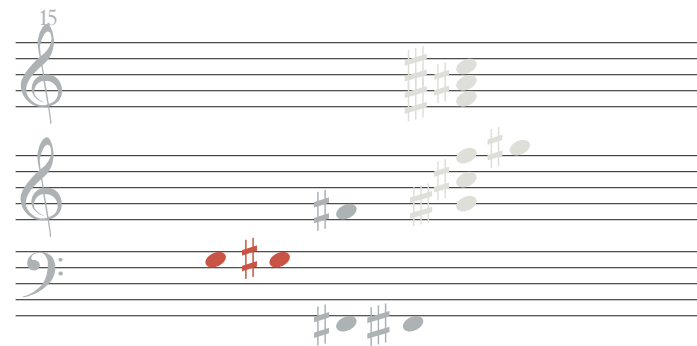
Fundament mit Zittern

dünnere als Haut
dicker als Atem.

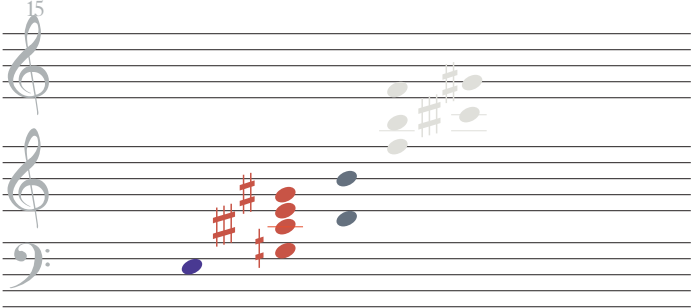
PETROLIO



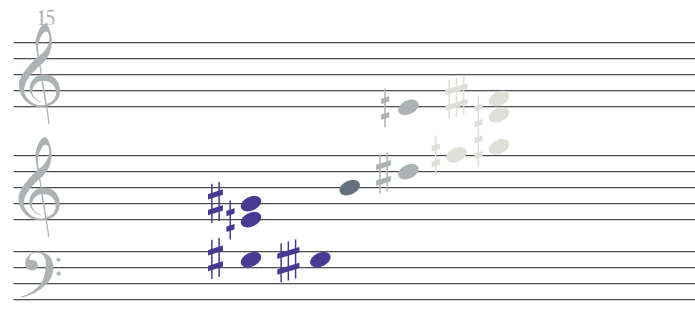
PETROLIO



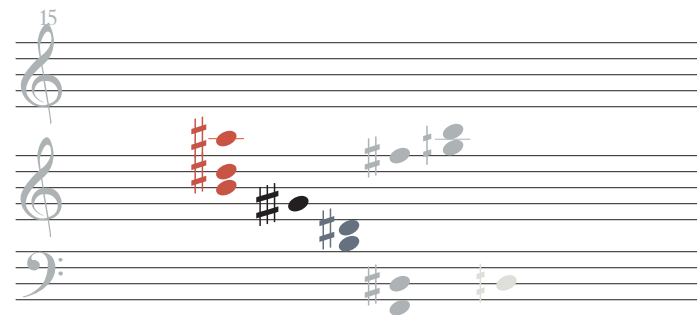
PETROLIO



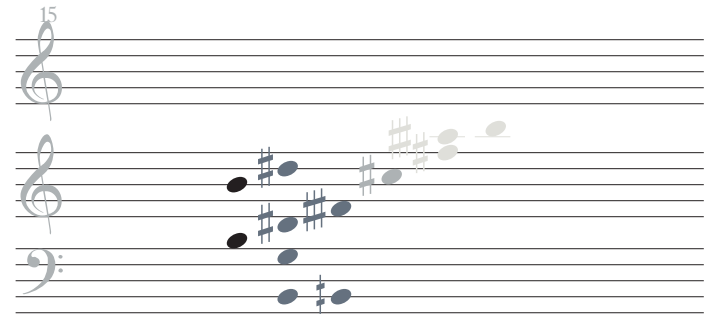
PETROLIO

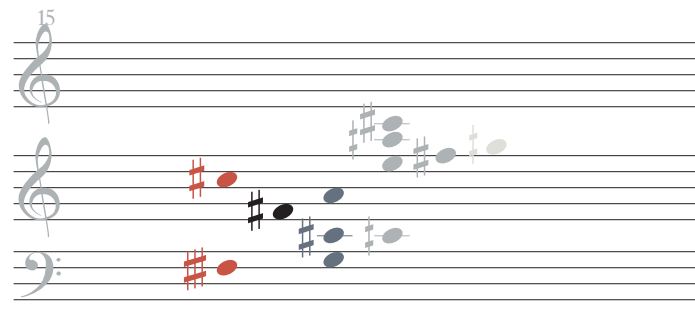


PETROLIO

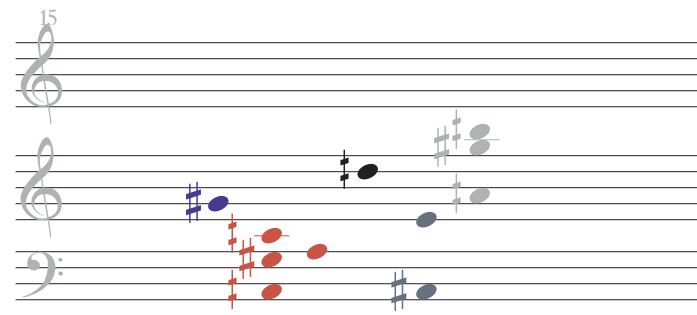


PETROLIO

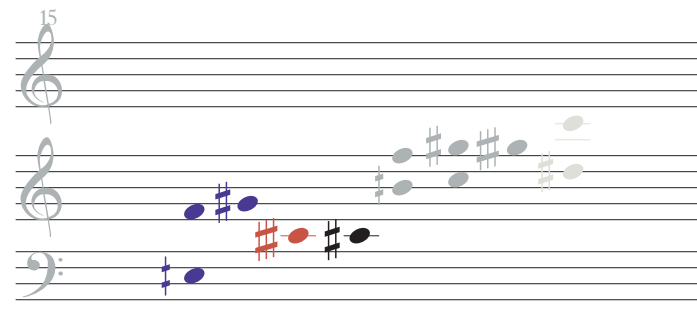


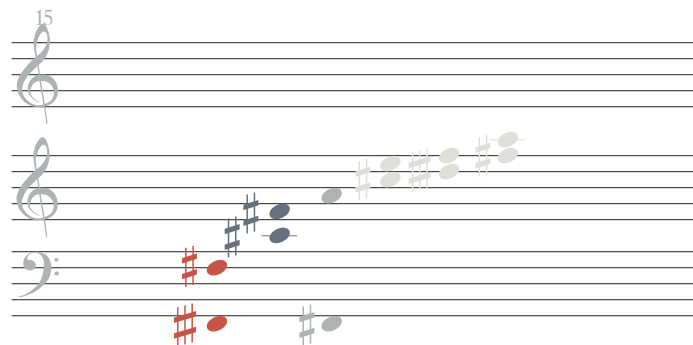


PETROLIO



PETROLIO

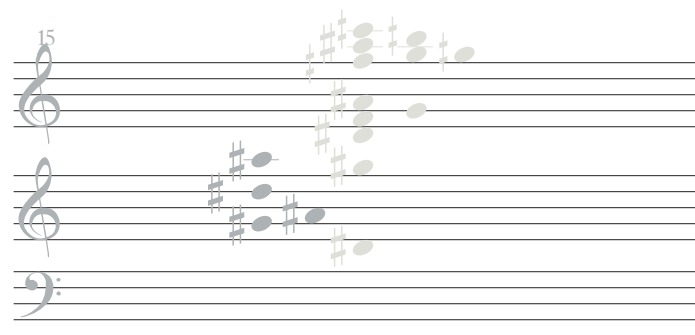




INNOCENT
SANS CONTINUUM, PETRICHOR DANS LE CIEL
INNOCENT
SANS CONTINUUM, PETRICHOR DANS LE CIEL
INNOCENT
SANS CONTINUUM, PETRICHOR DANS LE CIEL
INNOCENT
SANS CONTINUUM, PETRICHOR DANS LE CIEL
INNOCENT









LA PLUIE AVANT QU'ELLE TOMBE



GLORIA (P. 13)

ABOVE THE GROUND
DARK GOLDEN
HUMAN
STOICALLY DIVINE

SAND
WARM SAND.

THE BATHS (P. 27)

SCENT
WARMTH
LIGHTNESS
WEIGHT

ENVELOPED
EMBRACED
WATER AGAINST SKIN

NUDE SUNBATHING
AFTER LONG WINTER.

LIGHT (P. 49)

INFINITELY
THERE
SHELTERED

BETWEEN TWO STOOLS
GIVING
BODIES

PRAYER (P.75)

THERE
WITHIN
OPEN

PALMS
LIPS
THINK

WHISPERING
INFINITELY
SILENTLY.

ORANGE (P. 95)

SWEET
SOUR ?
BITTER

SOMETIMES PINK IN BETWEEN

INSIDE AND OUTSIDE
DEMANDING CHILD
THICK SKIN
THIN SKIN.

MOTHER (P. 105)

STRONG
BROKEN
STERN
SOFT

INFINITE
ETERNAL

MINE
YOURS.

ON EARTH WE ARE
BRIEFLY GORGEOUS (P. 123)

LAUDES
MESSE DE MINUIT

OPEN MY LIPS
WITH OPEN HEART

MYRRHE MYSTÈRE
INFUSION D'YLANG

(Rue de) PAIX.

GOD WAS NOT
A FEMINIST (P.149)

WONDERS AND WOUNDS.

MEDUSE (P. 165)

Sky underwater
Divine beneath the horizon
unkillable, mortal.

Millions of years
gentle, so gentle
and clear
and smooth
and supple
and adaptable.

Freely swimming heart
freely swim muscle
free swimmer

With memory
with remembrance.

DARK LILAC (P. 191)

NIGHT WITH STRIPES
OF LIGHT.

DARK BLACK, DARK LILAC,
DARK BLUE.

YELLOW DUST
ORANGE DUST
GOLDEN DUST.

DARK RAINBOW
WITHOUT GREEN.

SUGAR (P. 217)

EMPTY EVERYDAY
HEAVENLY HAPPINESS

LIEBLING.

(HABIBI.)

PETROLIO (P. 229)

A painting at the gas station

oil on puddle
gasoline on asphalt

all colors on dark
streaks of rainbow

paper-thin
foundation with trembling

thinner than skin
thicker than breath.

THE RAIN BEFORE
IT FALLS (P. 251)

INNOCENT
WITHOUT CONTINUUM
PETRICHOR IN THE SKY
INNOCENT
WITHOUT CONTINUUM
PETRICHOR IN THE SKY
INNOCENT
WITHOUT CONTINUUM
PETRICHOR IN THE SKY
INNOCENT
WITHOUT CONTINUUM
PETRICHOR IN THE SKY
INNOCENT

Gratitude goes to my mentors
Ellen Ugelvik, Eivind Buene and
Helmut Lachenmann and my colleague
Matthew Shlomowitz.

Lisa Streich
Photographs, Chords, Texts

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