# Hymn to a Blue Hour

(2010)

John Mackey

Commissioned by Mesa State College
Calvin Hofer, Director of Wind Studies

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## Instrumentation

Piccolo
2 Flutes
2 Oboes (Oboe 1 is also fully cued in an optional soprano sax part)
2 Bassoons
Contrabassoon (optional but preferred) *

3 Clarinets in Bb
2 Bass Clarinets in Bb
Contrabass Clarinet in Bb (preferred, but Eb contra-alto part also supplied) *

2 Alto Saxes
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax

3 Trumpets in Bb
4 French Horns
3 Tenor Trombones
Bass Trombone
Euphonium
Tuba

Double Bass *

Bass Drum

* If contrabassoon, contrabass clarinet, and double bass are not available, an optional "bass organ" part is supplied and may be played on the lowest octave of a synthesizer using a subtle organ or string-like patch to provide the absolute bottom-most octave that will otherwise be missing. Do not use this "bass organ" part if the other contra-range instruments are available, as purely acoustic instruments are preferred.

## Performance notes

The tempo should be extremely fluid throughout. Ritardandos at the ends of phrases should slow to a tempo below the "arrival" tempo of the next bar. (An example of this is explicitly notated in measure 42 into 43.) Although tempos are indicated with great precision, these are only guidelines of the *minimum* amount of rubato requested.

The ends of sustained notes should taper as if sung by a large choir.

Although the climax is notated fortissimo, the result needs to be "strong and powerful" rather than"blasted," played with a full, non-harsh tone. (Think of the dynamic markings as indicating strength and energy more than volume.)

In rehearsal letter "K," be careful not to allow the first trumpet to ever become shrill. If this danger exists, please have the player play the lower notes instead. The uppermost D in measure 80 should only be played if it is consistently secure and beautiful in tone.

Many bars are notated with half- or dotted-half-notes as the pulse. The goal, by the time of performance, is for the work to be as fluid as possible, but the conductor should not hesitate to show quarter-notes where necessary, provided that these subdivisions are extremely fluid and legato. (In other words, if a measure is in 9/4 marked "in 3," it must eventually sound and *feel* like three large, fluid pulses, but in order to show the large degree of rubato that the work demands -- such as the implied ritardando at the end of measure 80 and again at the end of measure 81 -- it will likely be necessary to show every quarter-note. It is essential that these subdivisions be legato, and not in any way "metronomic.")

Finally, the piece should be played one-player-per-part wherever possible in the most transparent sections, especially measures 1 through 11, 43 through 46, and 106 through 123.

*"Hymn to a Blue Hour" was commissioned by Mesa State College, and premiered by their wind ensemble, with Calvin Hofer conducting, on December 3, 2010.*

## Program Note

The blue hour is an oft-poeticized moment of the day - a lingering twilight that halos the sky after sundown but before complete darkness sets in. It is a time of day known for its romantic, spiritual, and ethereal connotations, and this magical moment has frequently inspired artists to attempt to capture its remarkable essence. This is the same essence that inhabits the sonic world of John Mackey's *Hymn to a Blue Hour*.

Programmatic content aside, the title itself contains two strongly suggestive implications - first, the notion of hymnody, which implies a transcendent and perhaps even sacred tone; and second, the color blue, which has an inexorable tie to American music. Certainly *Hymn to a Blue Hour* is not directly influenced by the blues, per se, but there is frequently throughout the piece a sense of nostalgic remorse and longing - an overwhelming sadness that is the same as the typically morose jazz form. Blue also has a strong affiliation with nobility, authority, and calmness. All of these notions are woven into the fabric of the piece - perhaps a result of Mackey using what was, for him, an unconventional compositional method:

> *"I almost never write music 'at the piano' because I don't have any piano technique. I can find chords, but I play piano like a bad typist types: badly. If I write the music using an instrument where I can barely get by, the result will be very different than if I sit at the computer and just throw a zillion notes at my sample library, all of which will be executed perfectly and at any dynamic level I ask. We spent the summer at an apartment in New York that had a nice upright piano. I don't have a piano at home in Austin - only a digital keyboard - and it was very different to sit and write at a real piano with real pedals and a real action, and to do so in the middle of one of the most exciting and energetic (and loud) cities in America. The result - partially thanks to my lack of piano technique, and partially, I suspect, from a subconscious need to balance the noise and relentless energy of the city surrounding me at the time - is much simpler and lyrical music than I typically write."*

Though not composed as a companion work to his earlier *Aurora Awakes, Hymn to a Blue Hour* strikes at many of the same chords, only in a sort of programmatic inversion. While *Aurora Awakes* deals with the emergence of light from darkness, *Hymn to a Blue Hour* is thematically linked to the moments just after sundown - perhaps even representing the same moment a half a world away. The opening slow section of *Aurora Awakes* does share some similar harmonic content, and the yearning within the melodic brushstrokes seem to be cast in the same light.

The piece is composed largely from three recurring motives - first, a cascade of falling thirds; second, a stepwise descent that provides a musical sigh; and third, the descent's reverse: an ascent that imbues hopeful optimism. From the basic framework of these motives stated at the outset of the work, a beautiful duet emerges between horn and euphonium - creating a texture spun together into a pillowy blanket of sound, reminiscent of similar constructions elicited by great American melodists of the 20th century, such as Samuel Barber. This melody superimposes a sensation of joy over the otherwise "blue" emotive context - a melodic line that over a long period of time spins the work to a point of catharsis. In this climactic moment, the colors are at their brightest, enveloping their surroundings with an angelic glow. Alas, as is the case with the magical blue hour, the moment cannot last for long, and just as steadily as they arrived, the colors dissipate into the encroaching darkness, eventually succumbing at the work's conclusion with a sense of peaceful repose.

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Piccolo
Flute 1
Flute 2
Oboe 1
Oboe 2
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2
Contrabassoon *
B♭ Clarinet 1
B♭ Clarinet 2
B♭ Clarinet 3
2 Bass Clarinets
B♭ Contrabass Clarinet *
Alto Sax 1
Alto Sax 2
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax
Trumpet 1
Trumpet 2
Trumpet 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Tbn. 3, Bass Tbn.
Euphonium
Tuba
Double Bass *
Bass Drum

* See perform
contra-bass

# Hymn to a Blue Hour

*for Stephen Boelter*

John Mackey

♩=60 circa, but extremely freely

Piccolo
Flute 1 — solo *molto espress.* *p*
Flute 2
Oboe 1
Oboe 2
Bassoon 1 — solo
Bassoon 2 — *pp*
Contrabassoon *
B♭ Clarinet 1 — solo
B♭ Clarinet 2 — *pp* solo
B♭ Clarinet 3 — *pp*
2 Bass Clarinets — solo *pp*
B♭ Contrabass Clarinet *
Alto Sax 1 — solo
Alto Sax 2 — *pp* solo *pp*
Tenor Sax
Baritone Sax

♩=60 circa, but extremely freely

Trumpet 1
Trumpet 2
Trumpet 3
Horn 1 — solo
Horn 2 — *pp* solo
Horn 3-4 — *pp*
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Tbn. 3, Bass Tbn.
Euphonium
Tuba
Double Bass *
Bass Drum

* See performance notes about optional contra-bass instrument subsitutions.

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9

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

tutti
div.
espress.
solo
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2
arco
pizz.

17 A ♩.=30 (in 2)

Contrabasso
singing

17 A 𝅗𝅥.=30 (♩=90)
(in 2)

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

A 𝅗𝅥.=30 (♩=90)
(in 2)

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

mp
pp
p
Contrabassoon
Bassoon 2
Bassoon 1
singing simply
arco
a 2

24

B

poco rit.

a tempo

C

33

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

solo
espress.
tutti
solo
tutti
( Bassoon 2 )
( Bassoon 1 )
Bassoon 1
a 2
Double Bass

33

D

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Bassoon 2
Bassoon 1
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

41 rit. (♩=72) E 𝅗𝅥=42 (♩=84) rit.

48 F 𝅗𝅥=56

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

stagger breathe

Bassoon 1

Bassoon 2

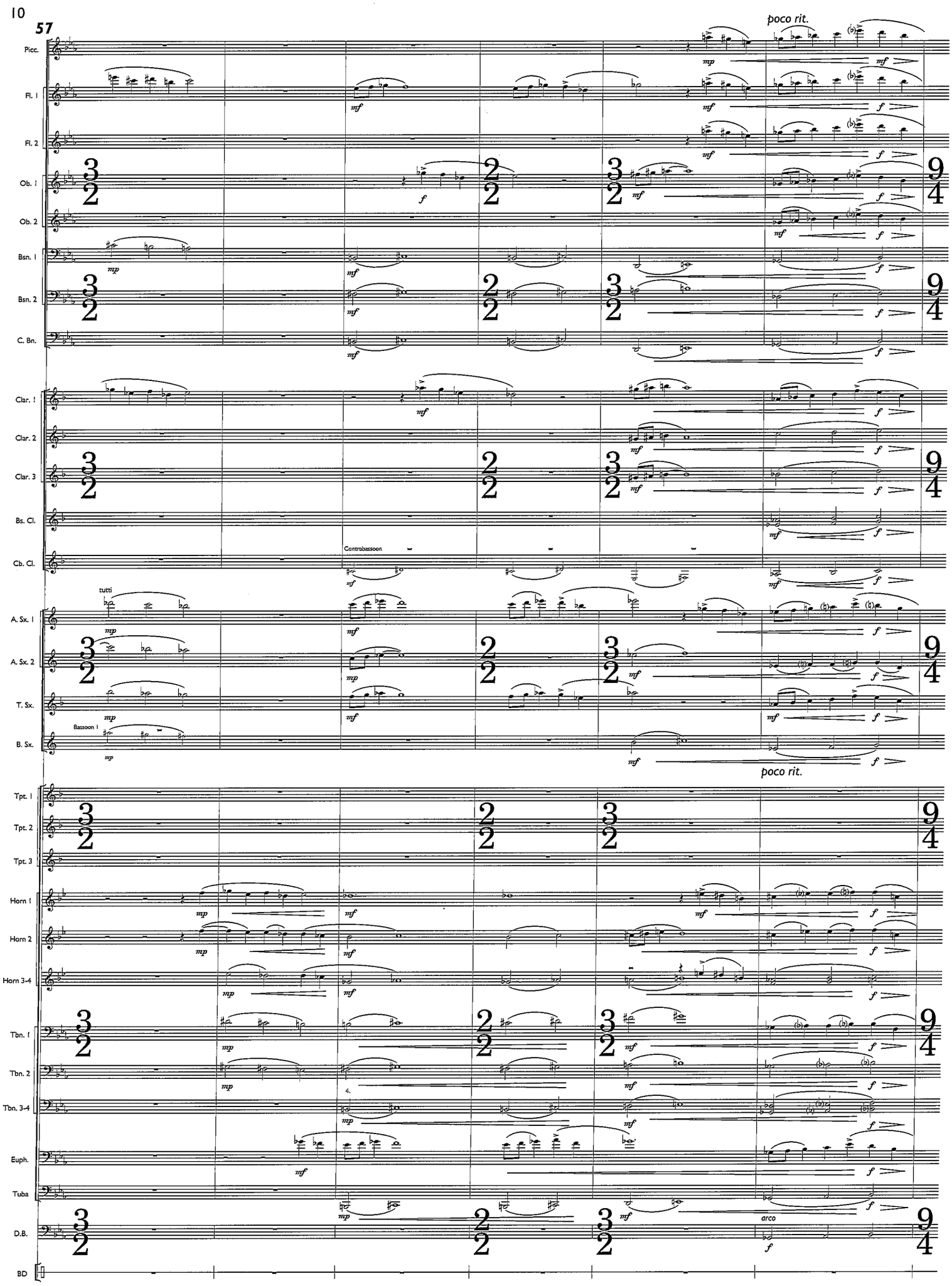
3/2

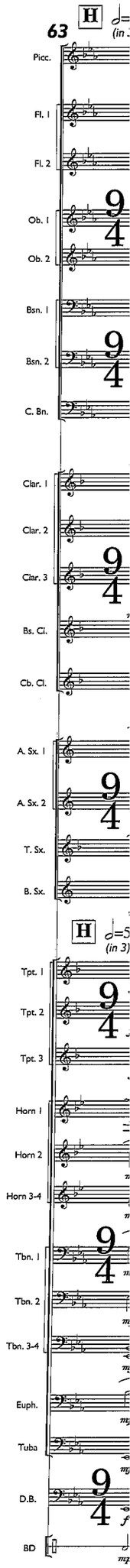
**48** F 𝅗𝅥=56 (♩=112) *with a little more motion* G

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

*espress.*
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2
solo
*pizz.*
a 2

F 𝅗𝅥=56 (♩=112) *with a little more motion* G


57
poco rit.
Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
Contrabassoon
tutti
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
Bassoon 1
B. Sx.
poco rit.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
arco
BD


63
H
Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
H
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

63

H ♩=56 (♩=112, ♩.=38)

(in 3) (in 2)

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

H ♩=56 (♩=112, ♩.=38)

(in 3) (in 2)

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

69

I

poco rit.

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

I

poco rit.

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

pizz.
arco

a 2

75

J

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
J
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

75 J a tempo

rit.

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

J a tempo

rit.

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

con sord. - straight

senza sord.

a 2

79

K *a tempo, but even more freely, stretching the end of phrases*

(in 3) (in 2)

L

85 *rit*

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

K *a tempo, but even more freely, stretching the end of phrases*

(in 3) (in 2)

L

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

*epic, grand, Mahlerian*

a 2 *epic, grand, Mahlerian*

* Under no circumstances should Trumpet 1 be allowed to become shrill here. If this danger exists, please ask that the lower optional notes be played instead. The highest D should only be played if absolutely secure, consistent, and beautiful in tone.

85

rit. (♩=84) 𝅗𝅥=50 (♩=100) rit. (𝅗𝅥=42, ♩=84) M 𝅗𝅥=48 (♩=96)

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

molto n.

92

molto rit. (♩=64) N 𝅗𝅥=40 (♩=80) stretch dramatically (𝅗𝅥=30) 𝅗𝅥=36 (♩=72) O (2+3)

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Bassoon I
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

solo molto espress.

102

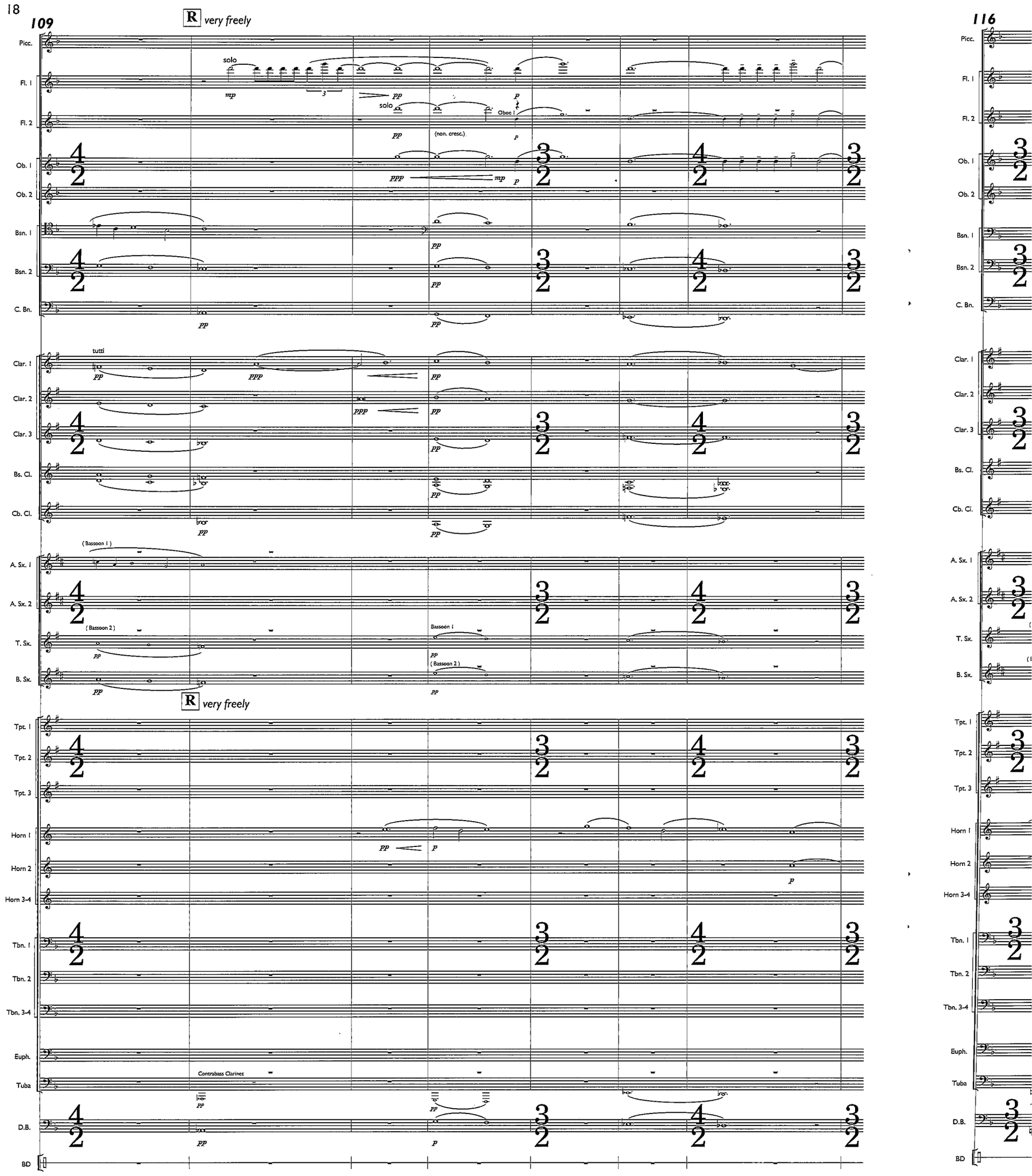
Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

102

P ♩.=30 (♩=90) (in 2) poco rit. (3+2+2) Q with a little more motion

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

solo
espress.
Horn 1
Bassoon 1
Bassoon 2
pizz.
arco


109
R very freely
Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD
solo
mp
pp
(non. cresc.)
Oboe 1
ppp
tutti
(Bassoon 1)
(Bassoon 2)
Bassoon 1
Contrabass Clarinet
116

116 slowing

S

T

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1
Clar. 2
Clar. 3
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.
Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3-4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3-4
Euph.
Tuba
D.B.
BD

(Oboe 1)
singing above the rest
(Bassoon 1)
(Bassoon 2)
solo

**124** ♩=48 (♩=96) *rit.* (♩=42, ♩=84)

Picc.
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn. 1
Bsn. 2
C. Bn.
Clar. 1 — tutti
Clar. 2 — tutti
Clar. 3 — Piccolo / Oboe I
Bs. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx.
B. Sx.

♩=48 (♩=96) *rit.* (♩=42, ♩=84)

Tpt. 1
Tpt. 2
Tpt. 3
Horn 1
Horn 2
Horn 3–4
Tbn. 1
Tbn. 2
Tbn. 3–4
Euph. — tutti
Tuba
D.B.
BD

August 4, 2010
New York, NY