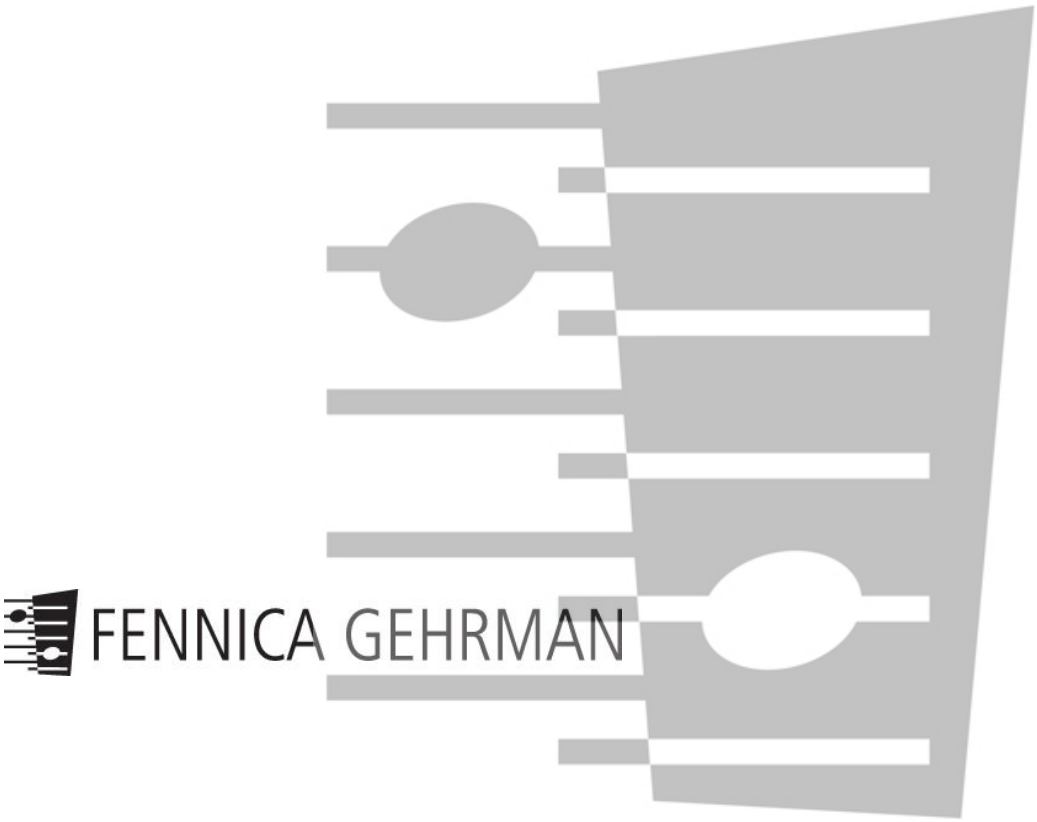
Matthew Whittall

# The return of light

(2015)

*for voices and orchestra*



FENNICA GEHRMAN

Instrumentation

2 Flutes (both doubling Piccolo)
2 Oboes
2 Bb Clarinets
2 Bassoons (2nd with A extension tube)
2 F Horns
2 C Trumpets

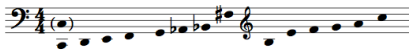
Percussion (1 player – see detail)
Piano (played inside – see detail)

SATB Choir

Strings (min. 8-7-5-4-3)
(a small number of Cello and Contrabass players require Superball friction mallets)

Percussion instruments and equipment:

Wind gong (played with triangle beater and wire brushes)
Suspended cymbal (played with bow)
Bass drum (played with Superball mallet)
1 Low timpano (played with Superball mallet)
Crotale (lowest F, played with bow)
Japanese bowl gongs (4-6, preferably of non-specific pitch)
Vibraphone
Thai gongs



Percussion and Piano directions:

The percussion and piano parts from the beginning through figure F, inclusively, are notated as a kind of improvisation. The notation is left purposely open in order to encourage sound exploration. The cues need not be followed strictly past a certain point. Rather, the opening through figure B are meant to give an idea of the type of gestures desired, and the rough timing between those gestures. The two players are required to listen closely to each other, and to the ensemble, and create a texture of well spaced out noises, with sparseness and calm being the overriding mood, as if observing a quiet landscape.

Piano:

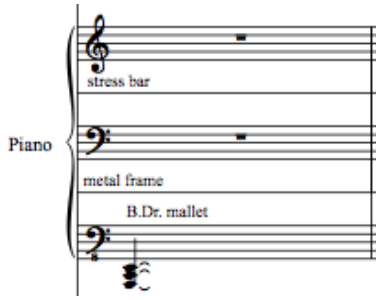
Preparation: Remove lid, depress damper pedal with weight for the duration of the piece.

Special equipment:

1 Bass drum mallet
1 medium marimba mallet
1 Superball mallet
10-12cm length of bicycle inner tube
1 plastic stick (such a chopstick or mallet handle)

-The piano part is played entirely within the body of the instrument. The keyboard is not used at all in this piece. As such, the piano part may easily be performed by a non-specialist (i.e. a second percussion player).

-There are five main areas of activity in the piano part, as shown below:




Staves:

Top staff: Single steel strings in the middle register
Middle staff: Double wound brass strings in the middle-low register
Bottom staff: Single wound brass strings in the lowest register

Lines:

Upper line: Stress bar(s) above the string bed
Lower line: Metal frame over the soundboard

-All performance directions (tools, technique, pressure, etc.) are indicated verbally in the score and part.

-The interior of the piano must be clean and completely dust-free in order to facilitate friction with Superball mallet and bicycle inner tube. The Superball mallet itself should also be clean and dry.

-The area used at figure O is the densest area of tunings pegs in the mid register. The plastic stick is dragged gently (almost without force or pressure) through the tuning pegs to give a sound like ice cracking or water droplets falling. As this sound is rather quiet, this gesture may be unobtrusively amplified.

Choir:

Special equipment for figure O:

-Several sheets of aluminum foil, in three rough sizes: 10 cm, 20 cm and 30 cm.
-Fu-rin (Japanese metal wind bells, set of 3, or other small metal bells close in pitch)

Fu-rin:

-The aluminum foil sheets should held at diagonal corners and twisted very gently. Use as many of these sheets as necessary to create an audible texture without obscuring other noise elements.

Special techniques:

-The opening of the piece is a noise continuum shared by all singers. It is divided into four parts, but in a strictly SATB division. Singers may move freely among the noise effects at will, and as general balances require. (The same applies to the transition from singing to noise at figure O.)

There are four main techniques in the beginning:

-Half-whistle: A near-pitchless, wavering whistle, like a gentle wind
-Tongue clicks: Single or double, very sparse
-Lip pops: A rather forceful expulsion of air from just behind the lips, the pitch of which is determined by the open space in the mouth (less space= higher pitch)
-Tongue-attack whistling: A whistled glissando gesture with a strong tongue attack between the lips. This is meant to echo the same pizzicato effect in the upper strings, and should sound as similar as possible (see note below).

-Overtone singing at figure O may be performed by any singers capable, not only Tenors.

Strings:

Special equipment:

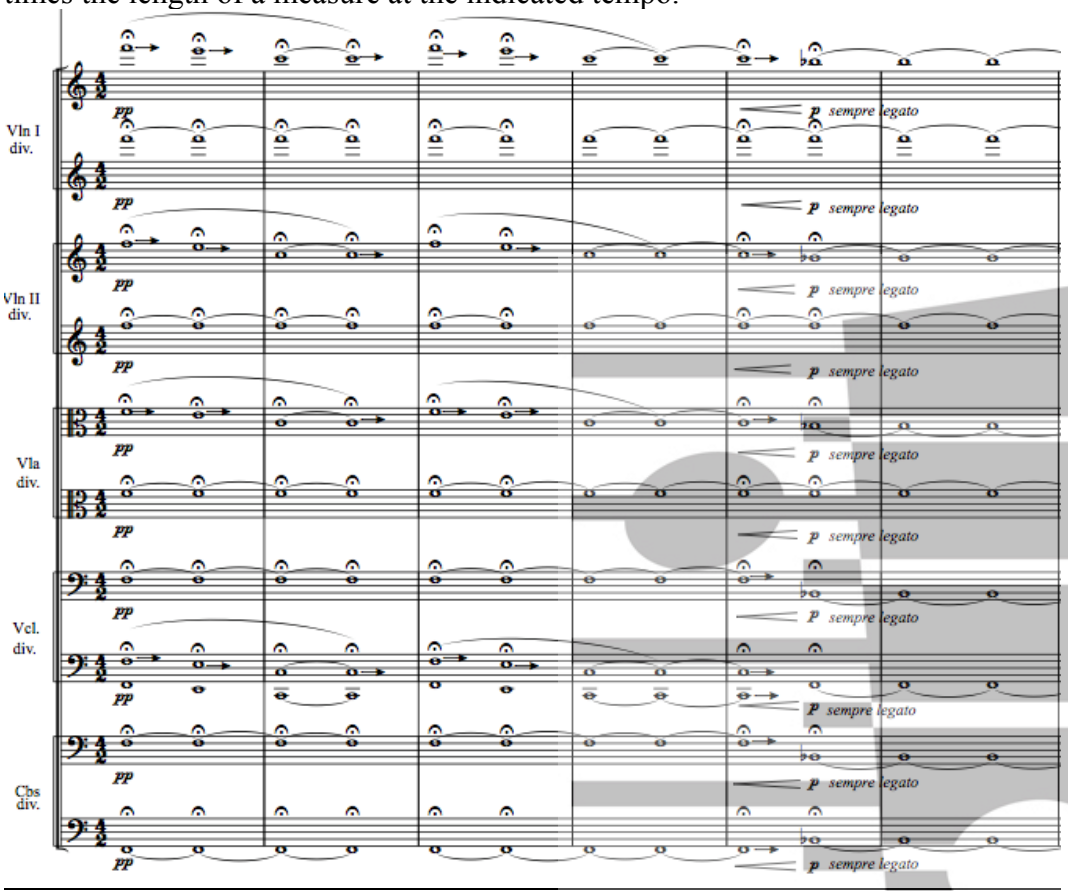
Violins/Violas: 7-8 3-cm metal/glass guitar bottleneck slider tubes

These are used at the opening through figure E by two or three solo players in the Vln 1, Vln 2 and Viola sections. The slide pizz. gesture shown in the score is obtained by touching the slide tube to the A string on the indicated pitches without depressing it. All other strings should be muted with the fingers to avoid sympathetic resonance. This is best done by holding the instrument in the lap like a small cello. The general sound is meant to mimic ice "singing", i.e. the pitched cracking of ice sheets in sunlight. (Audio examples of this phenomenon can be easily found online).

Cellos/Contrabasses: 3-5 Superball mallets, for gently rubbing the back of the instrument body.

Special notation for String body and Choir:

The following arrow notation is used for all strings and voices. Players/singers are to move one by one from the back/outer edges of each section from one note/harmony to the next, thus blending the two together and creating a canonic "melting" effect. The conductor may give one or two cues in these measures, as fits the context. This transition, while important, should be not be overly emphasized, lasting roughly 1.5-2 times the length of a measure at the indicated tempo.



Program note:

"To the polar navigator the return of the sun is an event of indescribable joy and magnificence. In those dreadful wastes he feels the force of the superstitions of past ages, and becomes almost a worshipper of the eternal luminary. As of old the worshippers of Belus watched its approach on the luxuriant shores of the Euphrates, we, too, standing on mountains of ice or perched on the masts of the ship, waited to hail the advent of the source of light. At last it came! A wave of light rolled through the vast expanse of heaven, and then uprose the sun-god, surrounded with purple clouds, and poured his beams over the world of ice. No one spoke for a time. Who indeed could have found words to embody the feelings of relief which beamed on the faces of all, and which found a kind of expression in the scarcely audible exclamation of one of the simplest and least cultured of the crew, "Benedetto giorno!" The sun had risen with but half his disk, as if reluctant to shine on a world unworthy of his beams. A rosy hue suffused the whole scene, and the cold Memnon pillars of ice gave forth mysterious whispers in the flood of heat and light. Now indeed with the sun had a new year begun – what was it to bring forth for us and our prospects? But alas his stay was short – he remained above the horizon for a few minutes only; again his light was quenched, and a hazy violet colour lay over distant objects, and the twinkling stars shone in the heavens."

-Julius von Payer, *New Lands Within the Arctic Circle*, Chapter IX, "The Return of Light" (publ. 1876)

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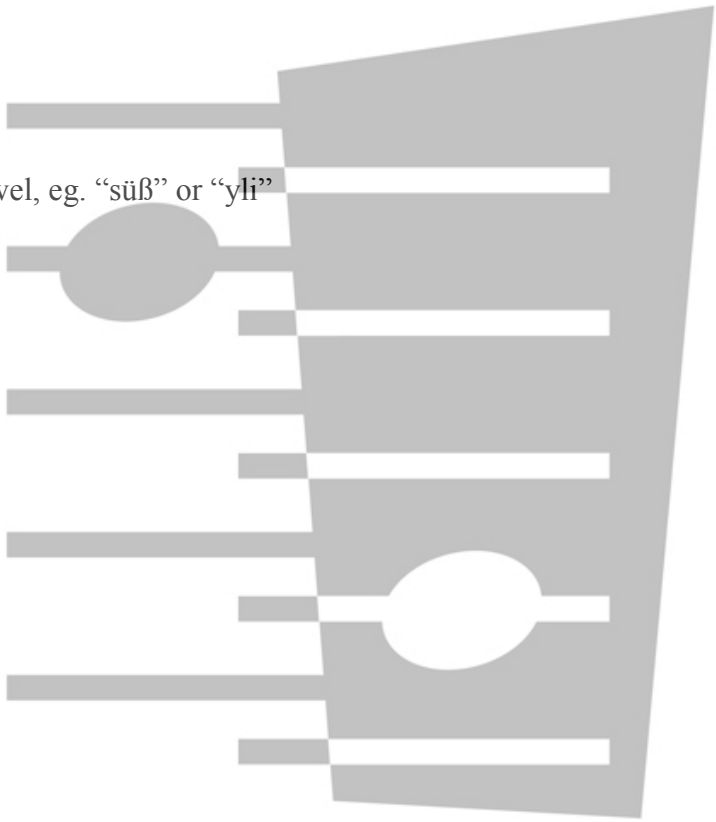
Pronunciation guide for IPA symbols (approx.):

[ɑ] is in the "a" in "far" (UK English)
[ɐ] as in the "u" in "sun"
[ə] as in the "u" in "hurt" (UK English)
[ɔ] as in the "aw" in "paw" (UK English)
[u] as in the "oo" in "boot" (US English)
[y] as in the German "ü" or Finnish "y" vowel, eg. "süß" or "yli"



Score in is C

*dedicated to the Helsinki Chamber Choir and Nils Schweckendiek*

# THE RETURN OF LIGHT

**Cold and still; meditative**

MATTHEW WHITTALL (2015)

1 7-10" | 2 12-15" | 3 5-7" | 4 10" | 5 10" | 6 10"

2 Flutes
jet whistle position, air only — one breath — segue to — whistle tone — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
[fssss] — (not together) — pp slowly change fingerings, do not use octave key — (not together)

2 Oboes
remove reed, blow air through instrument — one breath — segue to — 7-10" — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
mp — (not together)

2 Clarinets (B♭)
blow air through instrument — one breath — segue to — 7-10" — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
mp — (not together)

2 Bassoons
remove reed, blow air through instrument — one breath — segue to — 7-10" — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
mp — (not together)

2 Horns
reverse mouthpiece, blow air through instrument — segue to — 7-10" — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
one breath — mp — (not together)

2 Trumpets (C)
reverse mouthpiece, blow air through instrument — segue to — 7-10" — (sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)
one breath — mp — (not together)

Percussion
Cymb. — mf (bowed, one stroke only)
sfz scrape w/tri. beater
Wind gong
Timp. & B.Dr. — 7-10" — p–mf
w/superball mallet, subharmonics, long slow gestures ad lib.

Piano
stress bar
metal frame
B.Dr. mallet
(held down throughout)
vib. mallet (med.) — p — mf — mf — p
rubber tube, med. press.

Choir (Noise)
whisper (one breath length) — segue to — low half-whistle, like wind
Ice! [sss] — p–mf
whisper (one breath length) — segue to — tongue clicks
Ice! [sss]
whisper (one breath length) — segue to — lip pops
Ice! [sss]
whisper (one breath length)
Ice! [sss] — pp–mp — whistled, with tongue attack — very sporadic* — A 2x — B 1x — mf — ff

Violin I
(mute other strings w/fingers) — (alt. bowing on bridge or C-bout)
sul A pizz. — very sporadic* — pp–mp (bottleneck slide) — A 2x — B 1x — mf — ff

Violin II
p–mf
(mute other strings w/fingers) — (alt. bowing on bridge or C-bout)
sul A pizz. — very sporadic* — pp–mp (bottleneck slide) — A 2x — B 1x — mf — ff

Viola
p–mf
(mute other strings w/fingers) — (alt. bowing on bridge or C-bout)
sul A pizz. — pp–mp (bottleneck slide) — A 2x — B 1x — mf — ff

Violoncello
p–mf
mute strings with hand, no resonance — 1. solo — 7-10" — poco f
3-6" — 7-10" — superball mallet on back of instrument, rub gently — p–mp

Contrabass
3-6" — 7-10" — superball mallet on back of instrument, rub gently — p–mp

*Upper strings and voices create a sparse series of events with this sound. Every 8-15 seconds, concertmaster initiates a short period of denser, louder activity using either figure A or figure B. All players and voices respond as quickly as possible in canon, creating an echo effect. All players/voices then return to continuum.

A

1 10" 2 12-15" 3 5-7" 4 10" 5 10" 6 20"

7

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

rubber tube, med. press.

mf pp mf p mp mp mf mp mf mf etc.

superball mallet

Choir (Noise)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

B

1 10" 2 10" 3 12-15" 4 5-7" 5 10" 6 12-15"

13

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

Choir (Noise)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

(whistle tone, starting from C4 fingering, slowly down chromatically)

*mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

rubber tube, extreme press.

rubber tube, med. press.

VWWWWWWW

4-6 highest whistlers, very slow, smooth gliss.

*p* *f*

C

♩ = 60

19

(sporadic, pitchless, gentle air swells, like wind)

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

cont. ad lib.

low half-whistle, like wind

Choir (Noise)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

arco
no vib.

Vcl.

arco
no vib.

Cbs

*Microintervals (i.e. pitches other than those with conventional ♮, ♯ or ♭ signs) are not meant to be learned as written, but are relative indications of pitch wavering.
Cellists keep fingers as close together as possible; the change from one indicated fingering to the next will produce the desired approximate pitch difference.

29

D

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

Choir
(Noise)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

unis.

3 2 1 2 3 2 3 2 2 1

gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss. gl. gliss. gl.

Cbs

arco
no vib.

pp f

gliss. gliss. gliss.

E

1 10"

2 12-15"

39

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

Choir (Noise)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

"color trill" free, variable durations from 1-4" approx.

continue indep.

Wind gong (wire brushes, slow circles)

Crot. (bowed)

Like soft breathing. Choir as unit, led by one singer.

segue to S

segue to A

segue to T

segue to B

[sss]

[haaa]

All strings transition to held F 1 by 1, very slowly, back of section to front

raw tone (extra pressure)

F

**Gentle; a soft light filling the sky** ♩ = *44 -48*

49

Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tr.
Perc.
Pno
S
A
T
B
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vcl.
Cbs

pp_mp
replace reed
1. 2.
replace mouthpiece
Vib.
Thai G.
2 sole
(altre)
tutte uniti
div.
sempre legato

60

G

1. 2.

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

a 2

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

metal straight mute on

Perc.

Thai G.

Pno

S

A

T

B

1.

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

unis.

69

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

2. add A extension

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Thai G.

Vib.

Pno

3 sole

S

tutte uniti

A

T

B

(m)

Vln I

div. a 3

div. a 2

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

78

H

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Vib.

Perc.

Pno

S

A

T

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

Picc.

to Picc.

1.

pp

p

mp

87

Fl.
to Fl.
to Fl.
Flute
Flute
2. remove A extension

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.
metal st. mute

Tr.

Thai G.
Vib.
Thai G.

Perc.

Pno

S
div.
S
A
T
B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

98

I

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

S

A

T

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

mf n

to Picc.

p mp n

pp mp

p

n p

ppp mp

p

metal st. mute

Thai G.

mp

pp p mp n

ɐ → ɑ → m

u → ɑ → m

pp p

109

J

Fl.

Picc.

pp

Picc.

pp

Ob.

pp

Cl.

pp

Bsn.

pp

Hn.

mp

p

Tr.

p

Perc.

Vib.

pp

Thai G.

mp

Pno

2 sole

1.

n

mf

S.

a

n

mf

S

pp

mp

a

(altre)

n

mp

a

A

pp

mp

a

mp

p

u

mp

a

T

pp

mp

a

p

c

mp

a

B

pp

mp

a

p

c

p

c

mp

a

Vln I

n

p

n

mp

p

n

p

Vln II

n

mp

p

n

p

Vla

n

p

n

p

Vcl.

Cbs

119

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

a 2

1.

Tr.

metal st. mute

mute out

Perc.

Vib.

Thai G.

Vib.

Pno

S

(altre)

2 sole

tutte

A

T

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

non div.

non div.

non div.

div.

K

12-15"

20-30+"

L

130

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

S

S

A

A

T

T

B

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

gentle swells, random, varying lengths, overlapping freely

gentle swells, random, varying lengths, overlapping freely

gentle swells, random, varying lengths, overlapping freely

random durations and pitch order

Be-ne-det-to gior-no!

(start 1 by 1)

Be-ne-det-to gior-no!

Solo

Be-ne-det-to gior - no!

fading away...

(others continue)

Solo

Be-ne-det-to gior - no!

fading away...

Be-ne-det - to gior - no!

fading away...

(start 1 by 1)

Be-ne-det-to gior-no!

fading away...

Solo

Be-ne-det - to gior - no!

fading away...

(u) → i → u

fading away...

Solo

Be-ne-det-to gior - no!

fading away...

Be-ne-det-to gior - no!

fading away...

open

137

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Vib.

Thai G.

Pno

S

A

T

B

2 soli

(altre)

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

147

M

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

a 2

Tr.

Perc.

Thai G.

Pno

S

A

T

B

tutte

Vln I

div. a 3

div. a 2

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

155

N

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Thai G.

Vib.

Pno

S

A

T

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

to Picc.

to Picc.

1.

163

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

Tr.

Perc.

Pno

S

A

T

B

Vln I

Vln II

Vla

Vcl.

Cbs

Picc.

Picc.

Vib.

1.

p

pp

n

O **Transfigured; returning to night**

**20-30"** **30-60"** ∞

173

Fl. whistle tone 1. 2. (independently) slowly change fingerings, do not use octave key *pp* *n*

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn. reverse mouthpiece, blow air through instrument *p* *mp* *mf* (independently) *becoming more gentle, sporadic, fading away*

Tr. *p* *mp* *mf* (independently) *becoming more gentle, sporadic, fading away*

Perc. Jap. bowl gongs *pp–mp* Thai G. *p*

Pno gently drag plastic stick through densest section of tuning pins *pp–mp* (becoming sporadic) *n*

S high half-whistle *n*

S segue to Fu-rin & Foil sheets *pp–p* (bells becoming sporadic) *n*

A segue to tongue clicks (becoming sporadic) *n*

T segue to overtone singing, indep. *n*

B segue to lip pops (becoming sporadic) *n*

Vln I ord. s.p. ord. (independently) *pp–p* *n*

Vln II ord. s.p. ord. (independently) *pp–p* *n*

Vla (circular bowing) slow fast slow (independently) *n*

Vcl. (circular bowing) slow fast slow (independently) *n*

Cbs ord. s.p. ord. (independently) *n*

s.p. *pp*