My Aunt Gives Me a Clarinet Lesson

(1999)

(duration ca. 12 min.)

based on a poem by Gregory Djanikian

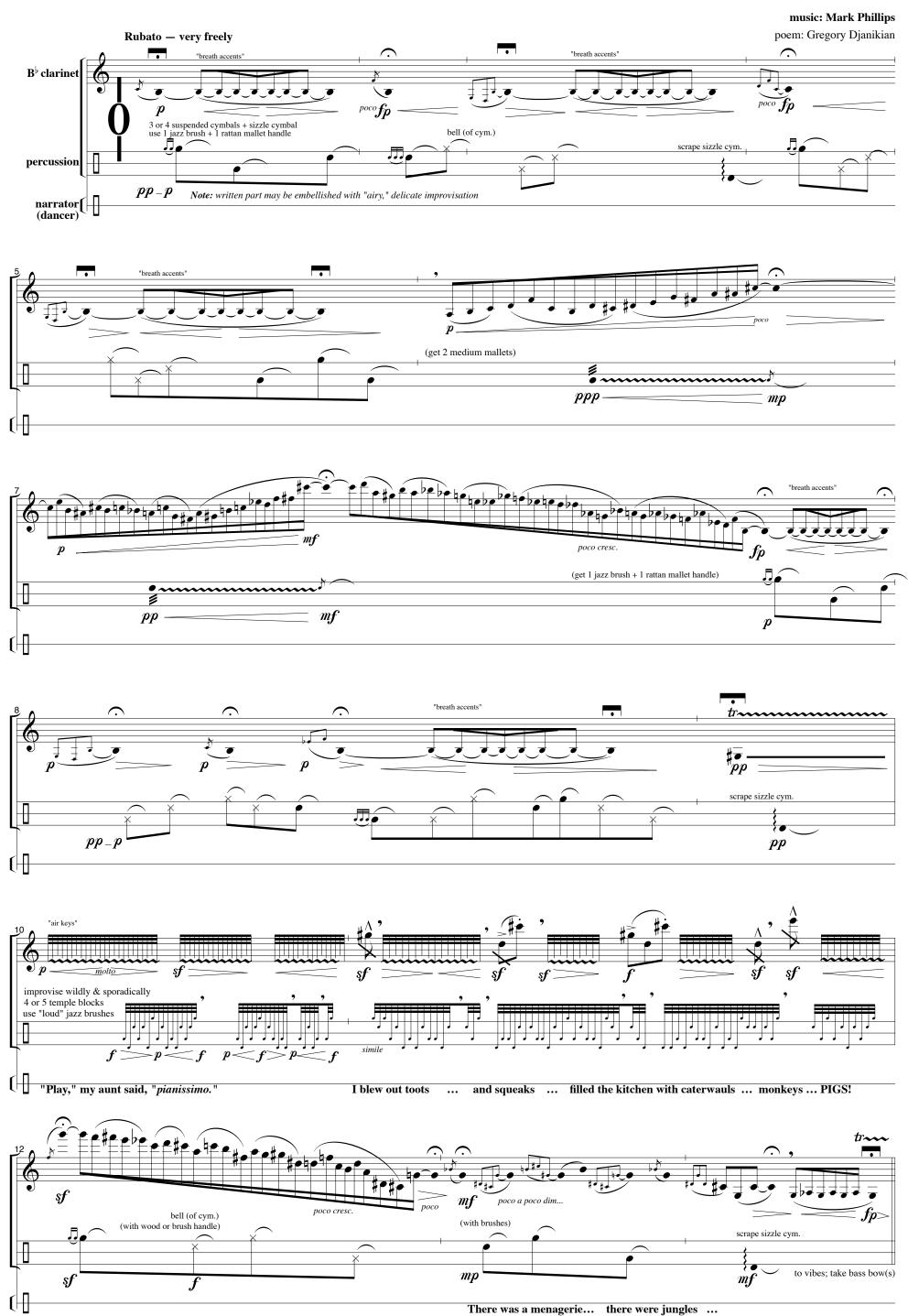
Mark W. Phillips

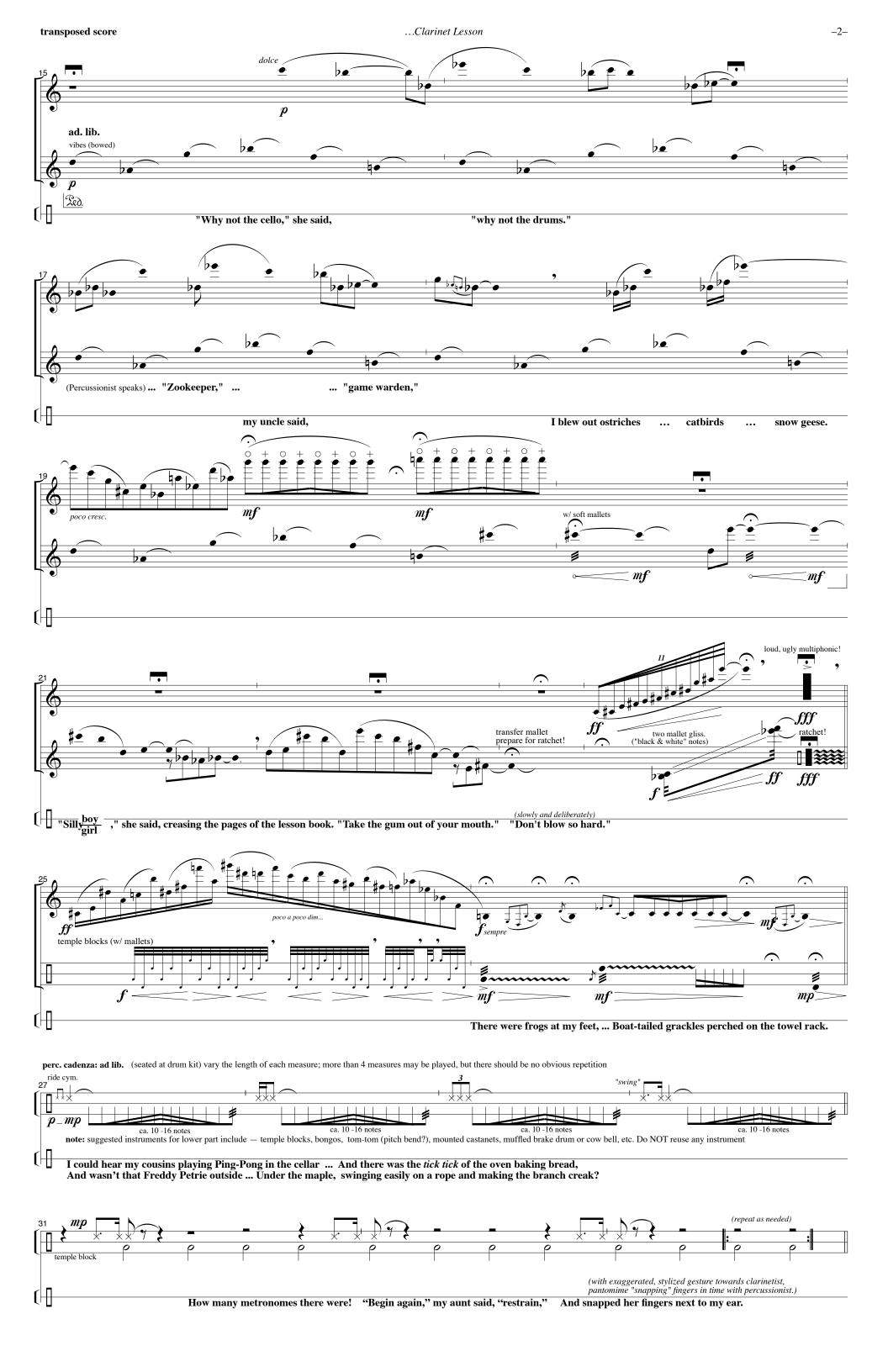


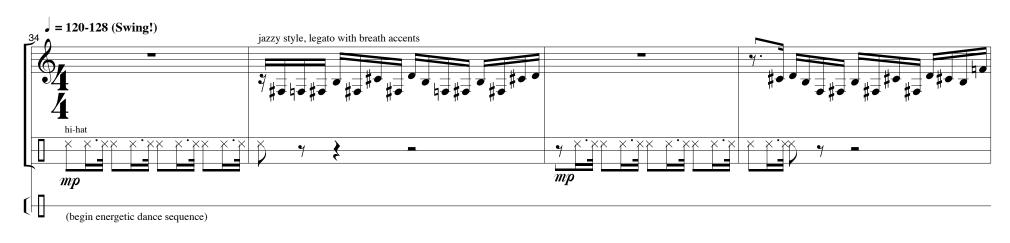
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composed for Rebecca Rischin, Guy Remonko, and Lisa Ford Moulton

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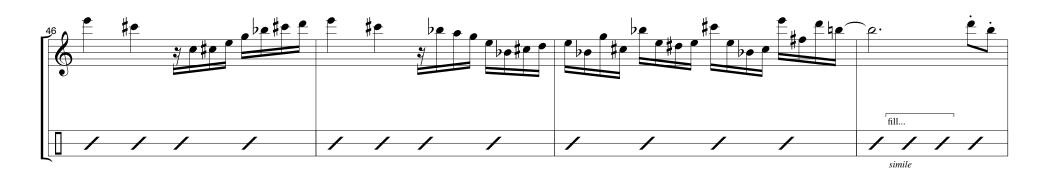




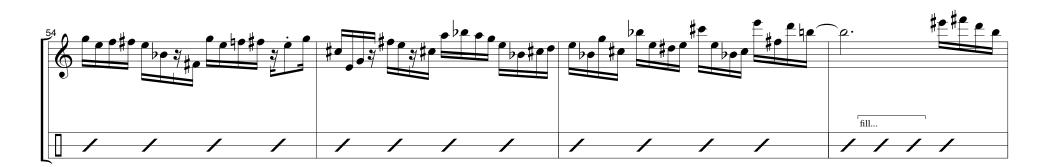


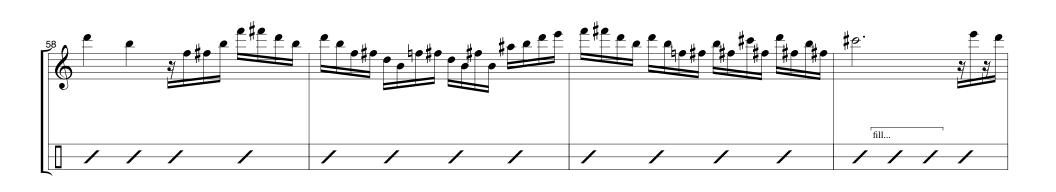


("jungle drums" — lots of toms!)

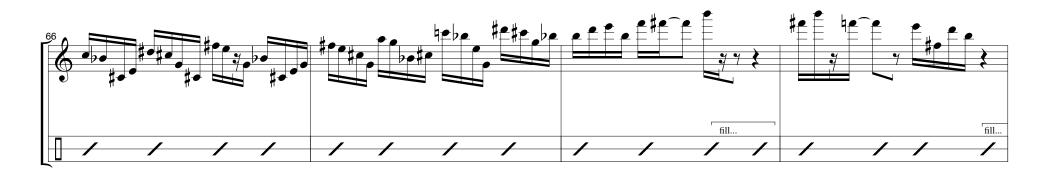








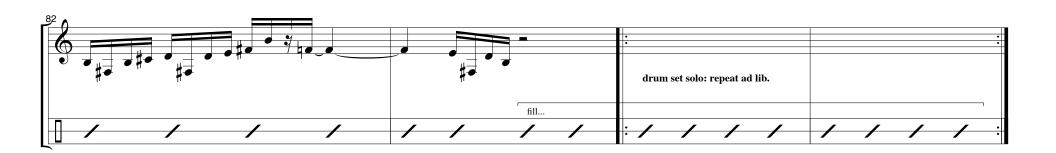


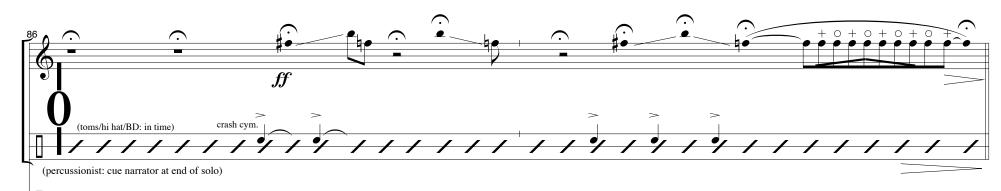








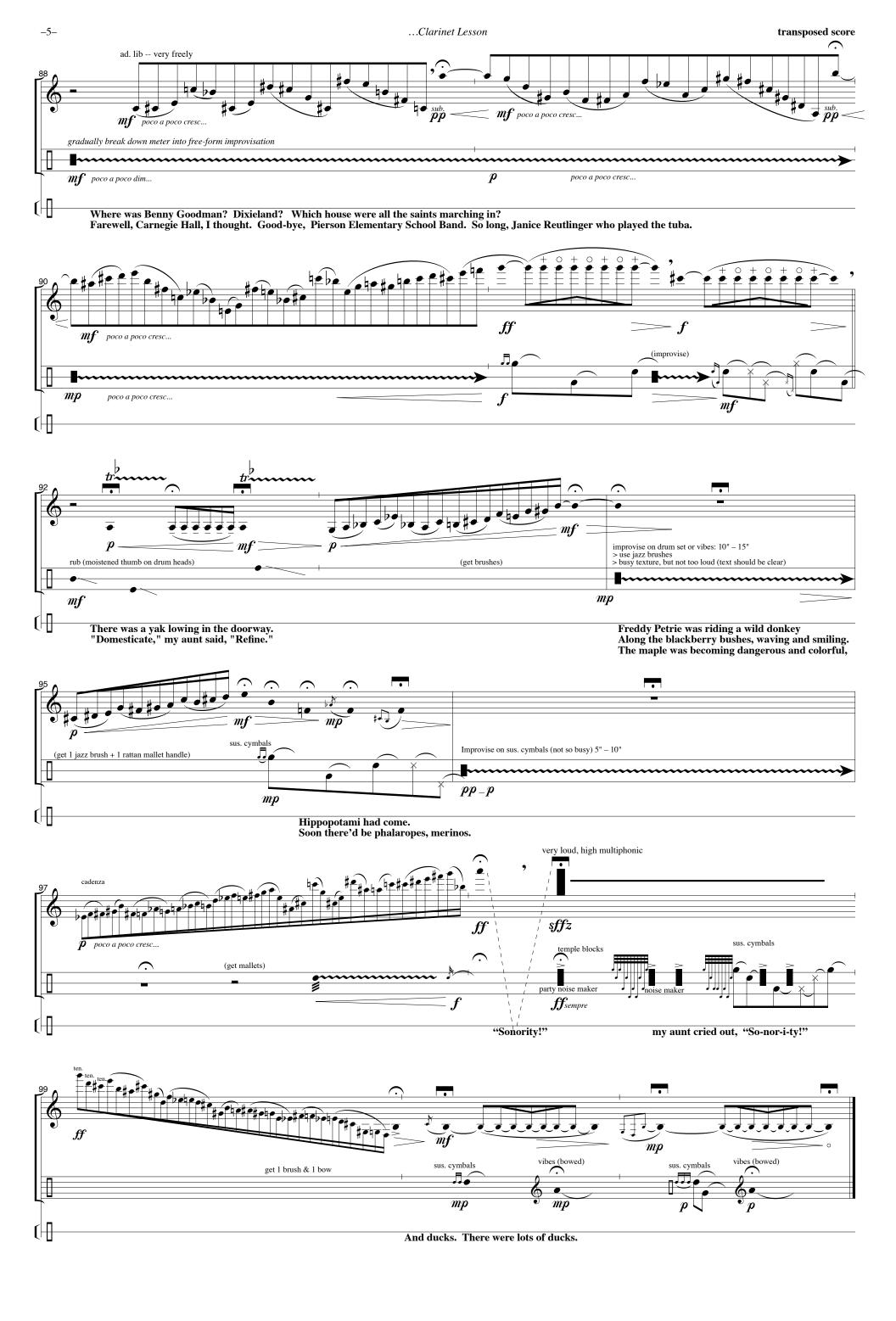




(begin "winding down" energetic dance sequence)

Two mules, I counted.

Three cows.



My Aunt Gives Me A Clarinet Lesson*

by Gregory Djanikian

"Play," my aunt said, "pianissimo."
I blew out toots and squeaks, filled the kitchen With caterwauls, monkeys, pigs,
There was a menagerie, there were jungles.
"Why not the cello," she said, "why not drums."
"Zookeeper," my uncle said, "game warden."

I blew out ostriches, catbirds, snow geese. "Silly boy," she said, creasing
The pages of the lesson book,
"Take the gum out of your mouth,
Don't blow so hard."

There were frogs at my feet, Boat-tailed grackles perched on the towel rack.

I could hear my cousins playing Ping-Pong in the cellar, And there was the *tick tick* of the oven baking bread, And wasn't that Freddy Petrie outside Under the maple, swinging easily on a rope And making the branch creak?

How many metronomes there were! "Begin again," my aunt said, "restrain," And snapped her fingers next to my ear. Two mules, I counted. Three cows.

Where was Benny Goodman? Dixieland? Which house were all the saints marching in? Farewell, Carnegie Hall, I thought. Good-bye, Pierson Elementary School Band. So long, Janice Reutlinger who played the tuba.

There was a yak lowing in the doorway. "Domesticate," my aunt said, "refine." Freddy Petrie was riding a wild donkey Along the blackberry bushes, waving and smiling. The maple was becoming dangerous and colorful, Hippopotami had come. Soon there'd be phalaropes, merinos.

"Sonority!" my aunt cried out, "Sonority!" And ducks. There were lots of ducks.

Gregory Djanikian teaches creative writing at the University of Pennsylvania.

* from Falling Deeply into America use by permission of Carnegie-Mellon University Press © 1989 by Gregory Djanikian

Percussion Instrument List: jazz brushes, drum sticks, various mallets, and 1 (or two) bass bow(s) required jazz drum set having 3 or 4 suspended cymbals of various timbres and a sizzle cymbal plus the normal complement of drums and hi-hat; vibraphone; 4-5 temple blocks; ratchet; [optional instrument choices for ad lib. cadenza (see mm. 27-30) include bongos, castanets, brake drum, or cowbell]; and "party noisemaker"

(Note: The "party noisemaker" (see m. 98) should allow "hands-free" noisemaking. Suggestions include party horn, whistle, etc.

Notes on Notation:

Though courtesy accidentals are used extensively throughout the work, if there is a question, it should be assumed that accidentals apply throughout the measure, but not across octaves.



means w/o meter or tempo

means a longer than normal *fermata*



means accelerando



Performance options:

This work can be performed with a dancer serving in the role of narrator, as in the premiere performance. It could also be performed with those two roles being handled by different performers (e.g. a narrator *and* a dancer). In situations where dance is impossible or impractical, the work may also be performed using just a narrator. Performers are encouraged to add elements of a theatricality (i.e. lighting, staging, props, and costumes) to the extent they are feasible in the performance venue.

Program Note: One summer, years ago, I was browsing through an issue of *American Scholar* left lying around by my editor wife. (By a long shot, this was not my usual summer reading material, so it must have been a *really* slow summer.) A cover story about the "Ph.D. Squid" problem in American academia (!?!?) grabbed my attention and pulled me into the volume, where I stumbled across this wonderful poem by Gregory Djanikian. Ever since that first encounter there has been a copy of the poem tacked on my bulletin board and I shared it with anyone who would take the time to read it. Years later when I was asked to write a piece of chamber music for clarinet, the idea to incorporate this poem became irresistible. Happily, Gregory Djanikian and Carnegie-Mellon University Press, graciously granted permission to use his poem. -M.P.