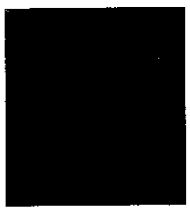


ALVIN LUCIER

EVER PRESENT

for
flute, saxophone and piano
with
slow sweep pure wave oscillators

MATERIAL PRESS
Frankfurt am Main

ALVIN LUCIER
EVER PRESENT

Program Note

In March 2002 my friend Susan Foster and I visited Robert Irwin's garden at the Getty Center in Los Angeles. Irwin had designed a graceful space with oval walkways as a contrast to the more rectangular architecture of the Center. It was beautiful to watch the people walking through the garden. They seemed to be in a special frame of mind, feeling the spaces, rather than simply paying attention to the plantings.

I decided to use part of the outline of Irwin's visual design as the formal structure for a new work for flute, saxophone and piano. I simply drew the top and bottom walkways on music paper. The upper arc starts at Middle C and rises two octaves, descending back to the starting point while the lower arc slowly descends, then falls more rapidly to its nadir, rising again to its starting point in a similar manner, To offset the symmetry of Irwin's design, I increased the speeds of both sweeps starting at the midpoint. Susan and I had sat off to one side of the garden for most of the afternoon, so our perspective was skewed; the farthest part of the design looked shorter than the nearer. The resulting shapes provided a two-part cantus firmus against which I set the instrumental parts.

As the waves sweep up and down, the players sustain long tones across them creating beating patterns at speeds determined by the closeness of the tunings. The farther apart, the faster the beating patterns. At unison no beating occurs. Because the waves are in constant motion, the speed of the beating is continually changing. The players' tones are notated simultaneous with and halfway between the chromatic semitones of the sweeps. The players may, however, anticipate or delay their tones, thereby changing the resultant patterns.

Ever Present was commissioned by the Drescher-Okabe-Armbruster Trio for a performance on June 21, 2002, at the Musikhochschule, Freiburg, Germany. The work is dedicated to Susan Foster.

EVER PRESENT

for
flute, (alto) saxophone and piano
with
slow sweep pure wave oscillators

Performance Notes

Description

During the course of the performance two pure wave oscillators sweep up and down from a central tone. As they do so, three players sustain tones against the sweeping waves, creating audible beats at speeds determined by the closeness of the tunings. The farther apart, the faster the beating. At unison, no beating occurs.

Because the pure waves are in constant motion, the beating continually changes speed. If a player's tone begins before a pure wave reaches unison with it the beating will start fast and slow down, If a tone starts at unison, it will start at zero, then speeds up as the wave moves away from it. If a tone crosses a unison it will slow down, stop, then speed up again.

Notation

The oscillator sweeps are indicated by diagonal lines interrupted by black noteheads. The players' tones are indicated by whole notes positioned directly under and half way between the noteheads. The Alto Saxophone part is in E-flat, sounding a Major 6th lower than written.

Players

The wind players sustain long tones of varying lengths; the pianist holds the sustaining pedal down throughout. Using the whole notes as guideposts the players should feel free to anticipate or delay their tones thereby changing the shapes of the beating patterns. They should not coordinate with each other but decide for themselves when and for how long their tones should be played.

Oscillators

The oscillator sweeps are recorded on compact disk.

Oscillator 1, Left Channel, ascends from Middle C (261.6 cps) to C (1046.5) at 21 seconds per semitone; descending back to Middle C at 17".

Oscillator 2, Right Channel, descends from Middle C to A-flat (207.6) at 63". continuing down to B (123.7) at 28"; ascending back to G-sharp at 24"; continuing up to Middle C at 48".

Set-Up

The compact disk player is routed through amplifiers to a pair of loudspeakers positioned on either side of the players. A sound engineer positions the speakers and sets dynamic levels to ensure optimal beating among the players' tones and those of the sweeping oscillators. Once a dynamic is established, it is not changed during the performance

Ever Present was commissioned by the Drescher-Okabe-Armbruster Trio for a performance at the Musikhochschule, Freiburg, June 21st, 2002. The title was taken from two inscriptions at the entrance of Robert Irwin's garden at the Getty Center, Los Angeles: EVER PRESENT, NEVER TWICE THE SAME and EVER CHANGING, NEVER LESS THAN WHOLE.

Alvin Lucier

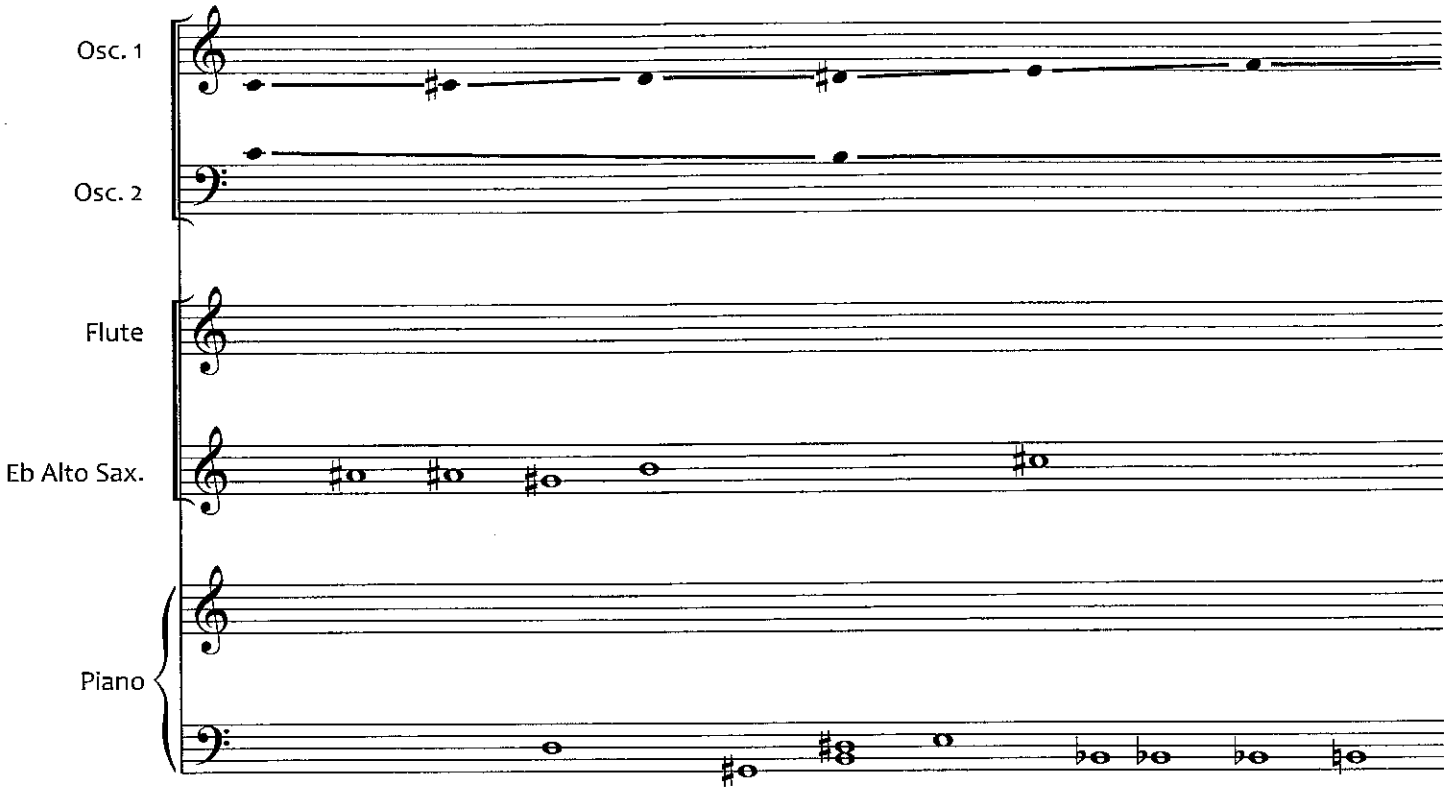
May 25,2002
Middletown, CT

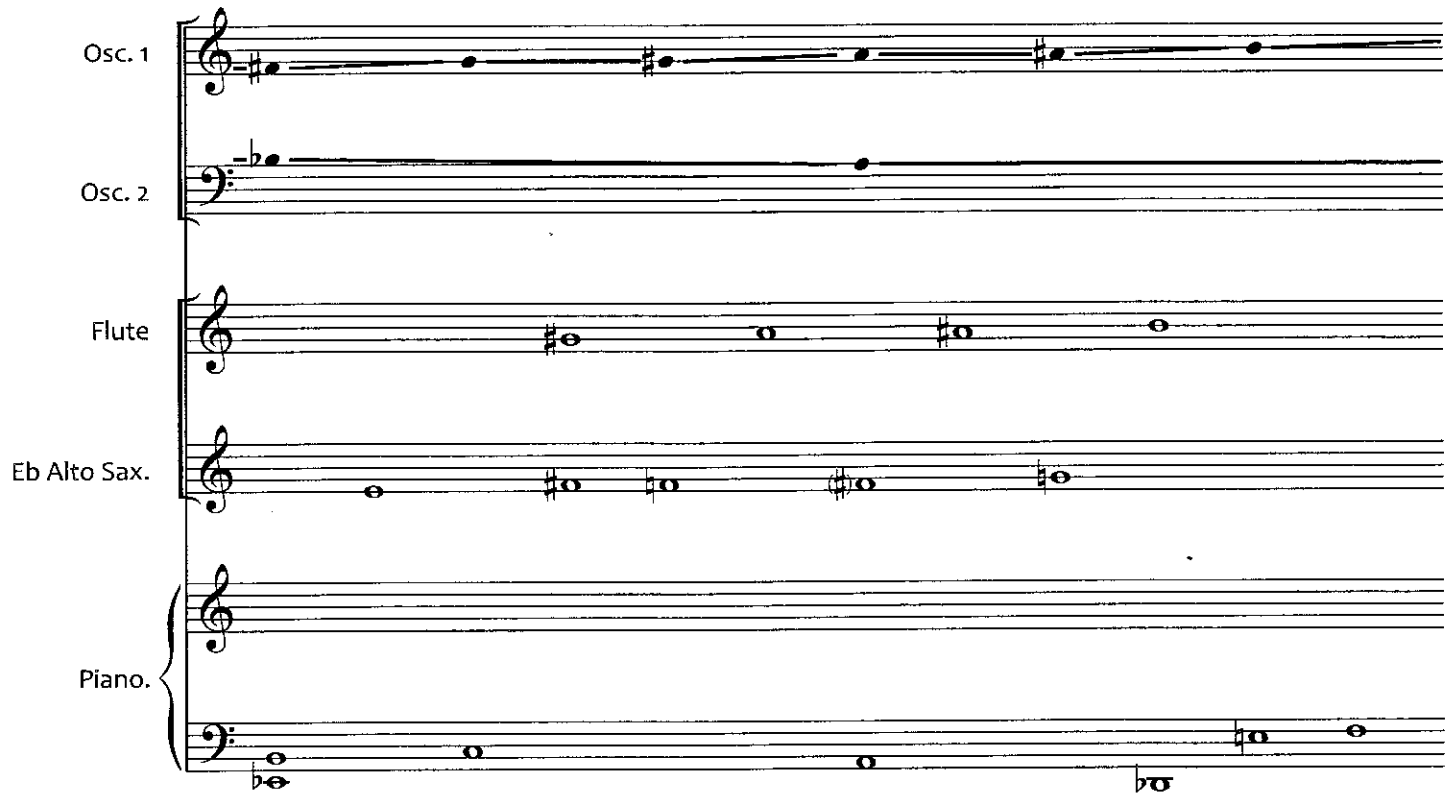
Score

EVER PRESENT

for Susan Leigh Foster

ALVIN LUCIER





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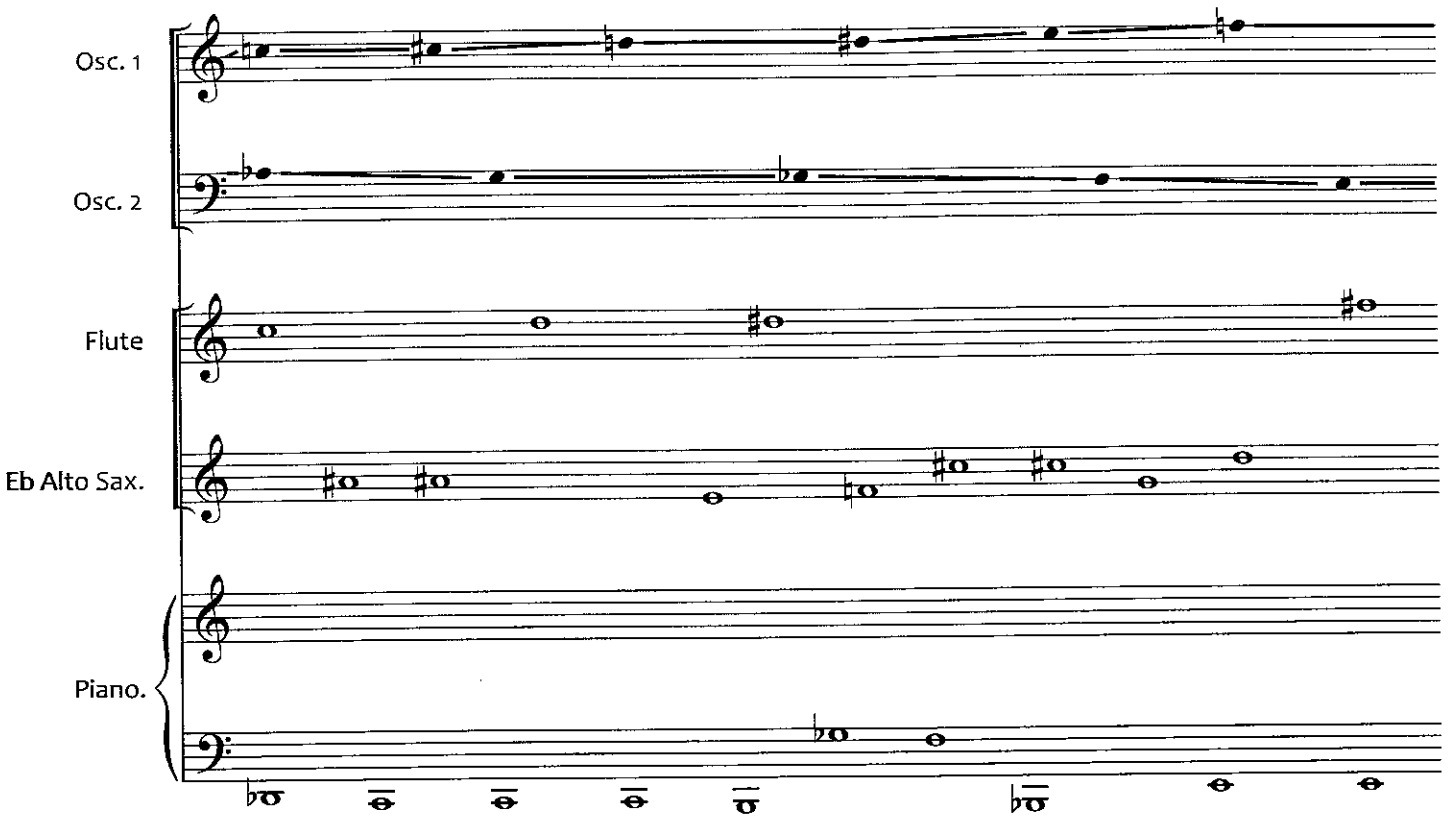
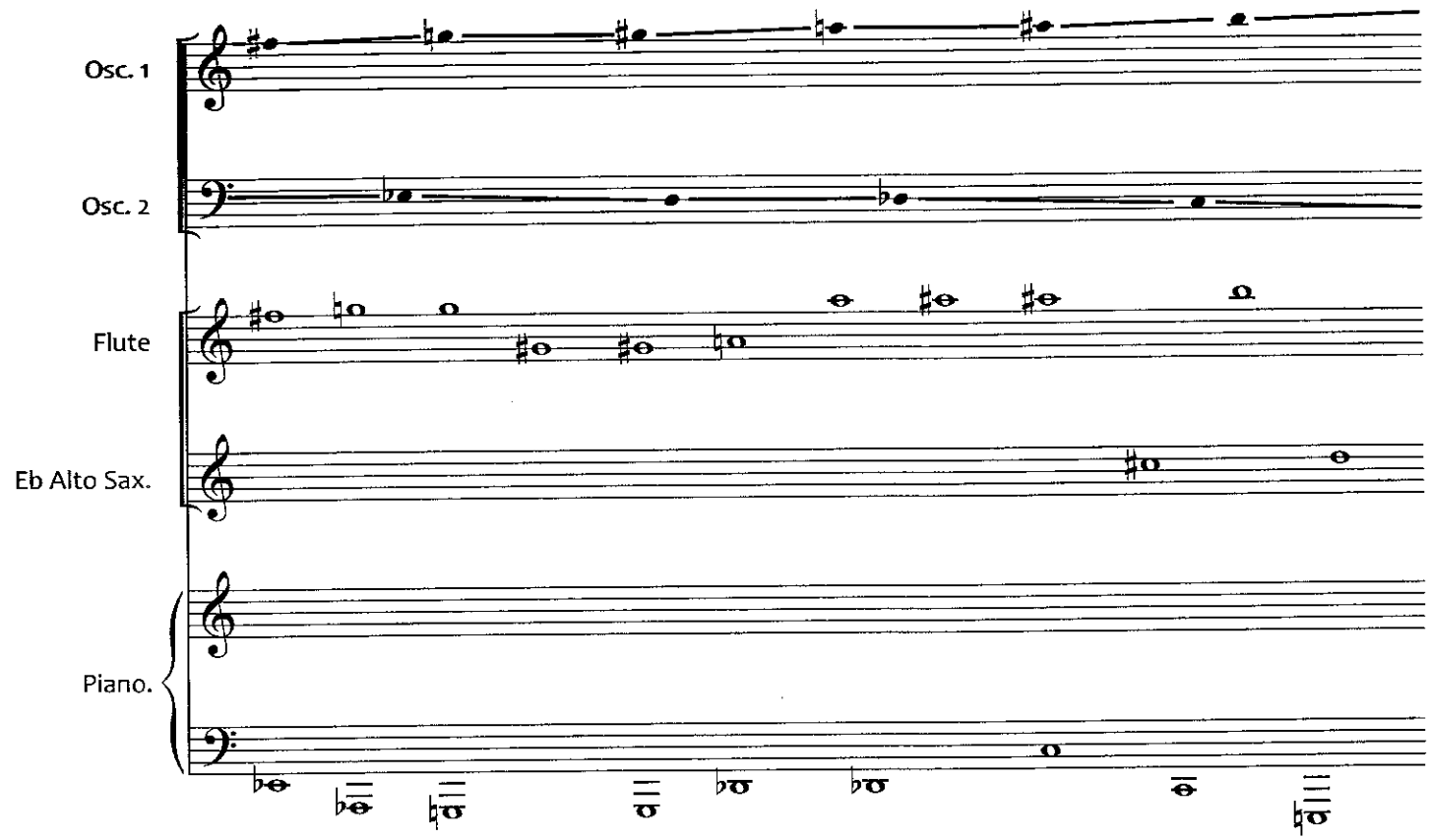

Osc. 1
Osc. 2
Flute
Eb Alto Sax.
Piano.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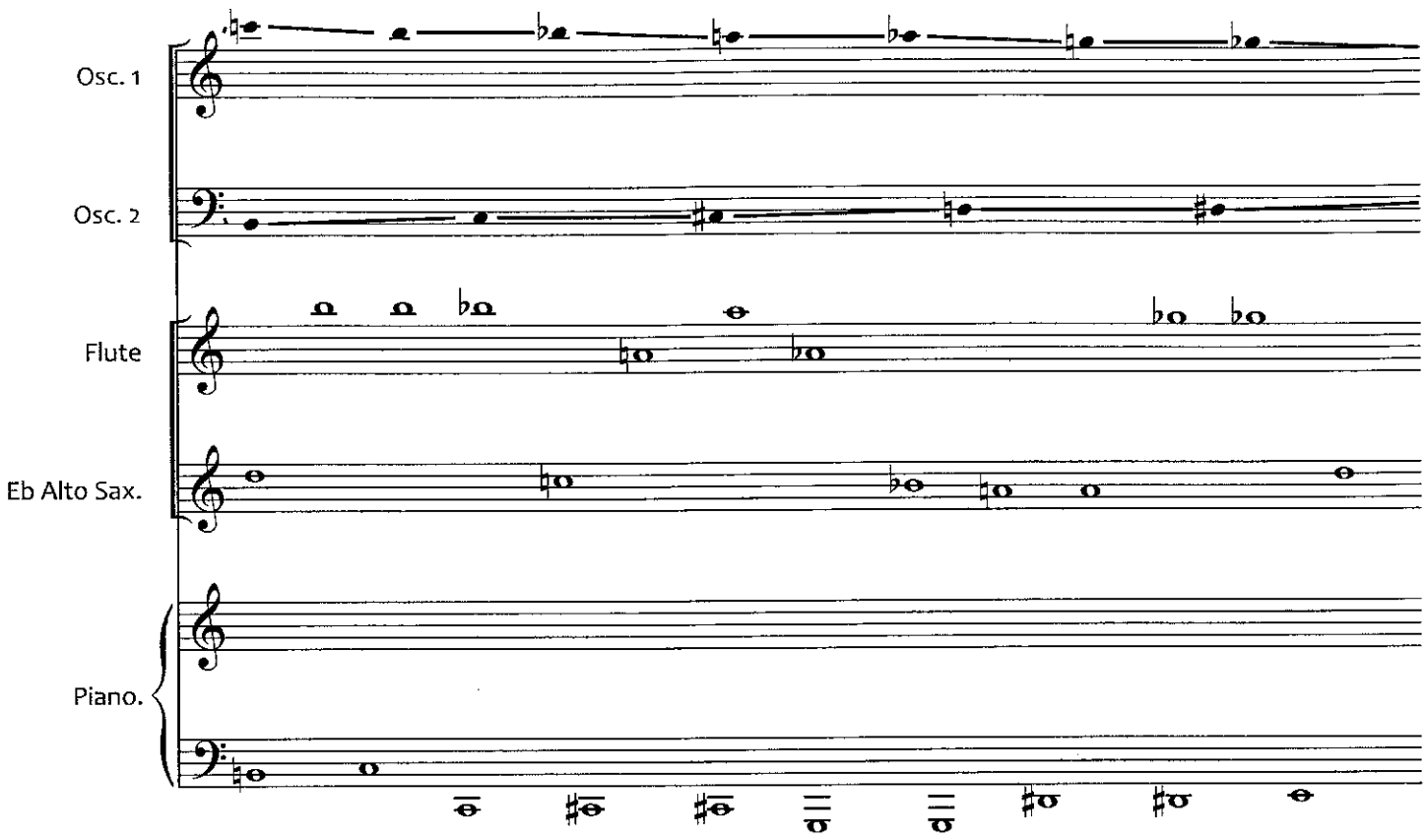
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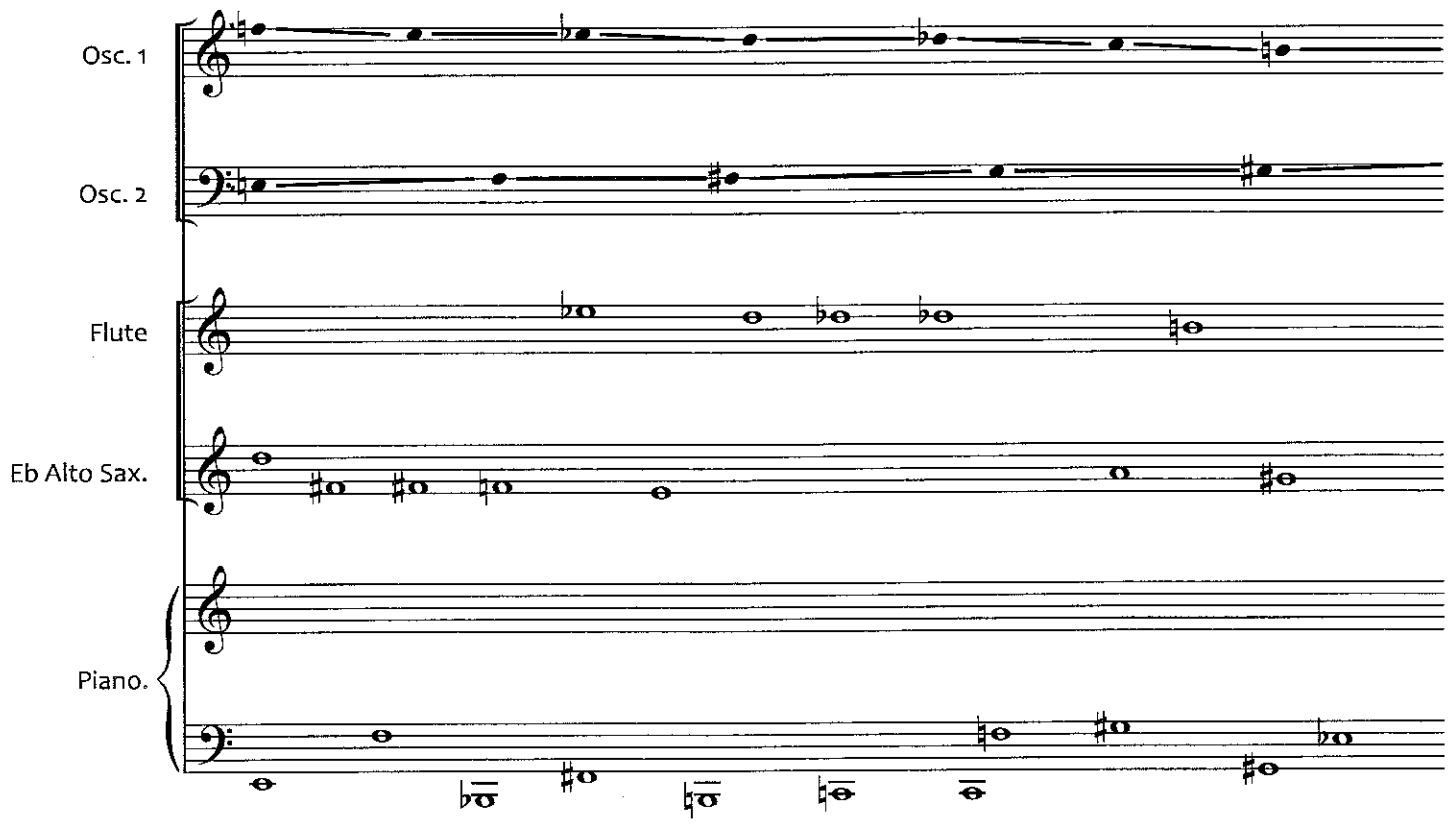
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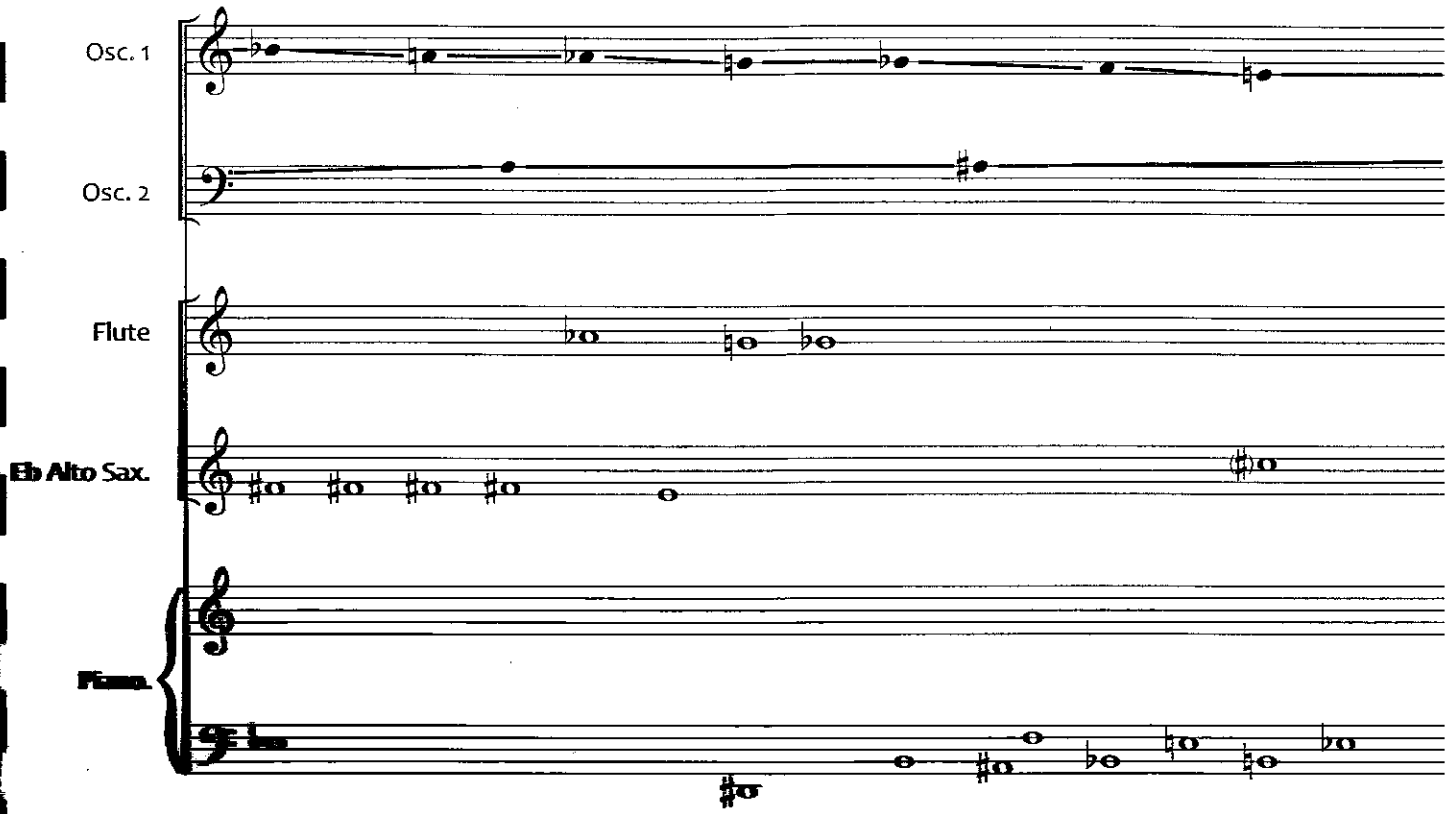
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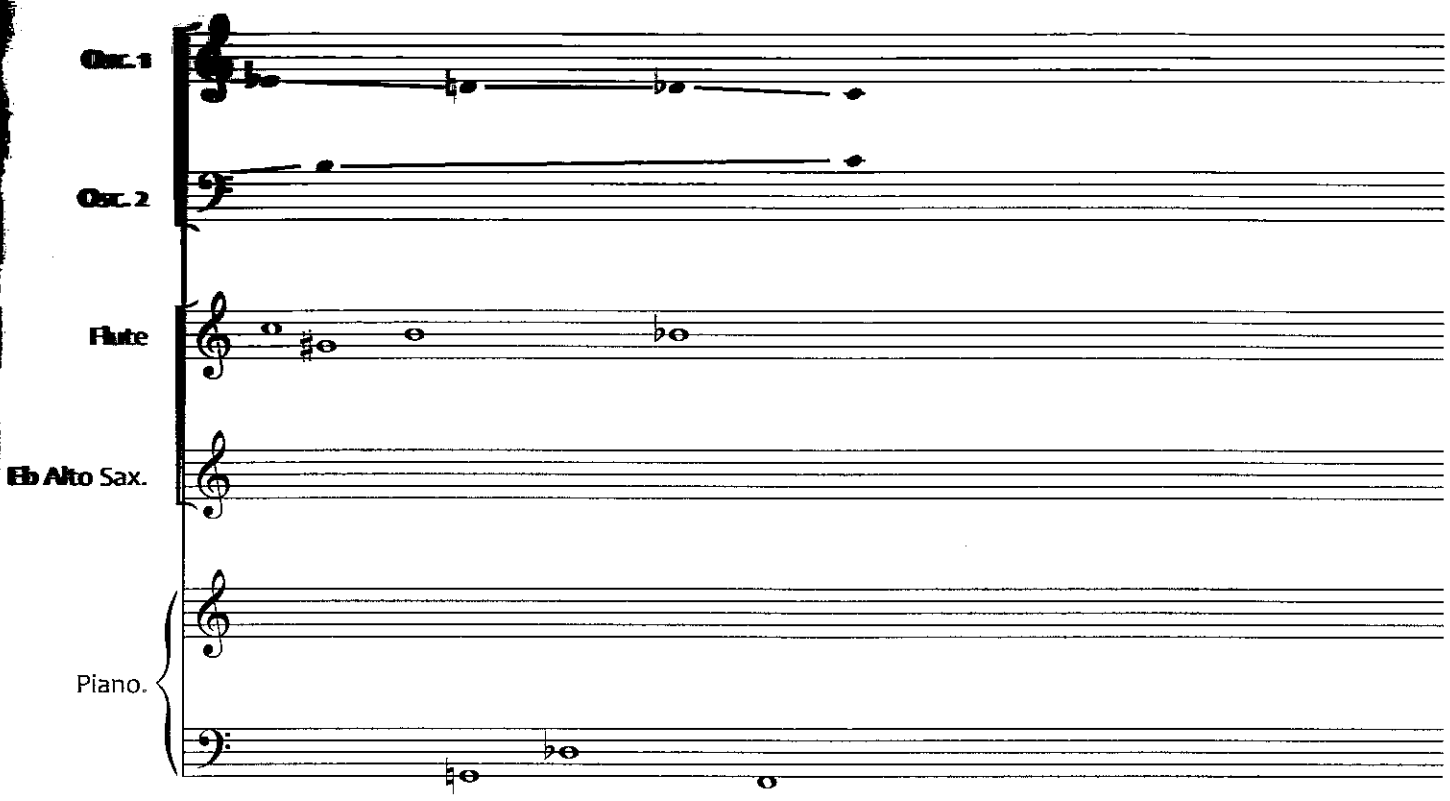
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