# Omri Kochavi

# Kishtatos | קישתתוס

for 18 voices (2022)

## Kishtatos | קישתתוס

Commissioned by Britten-Pears Arts for the 2022 Aldeburgh Festival

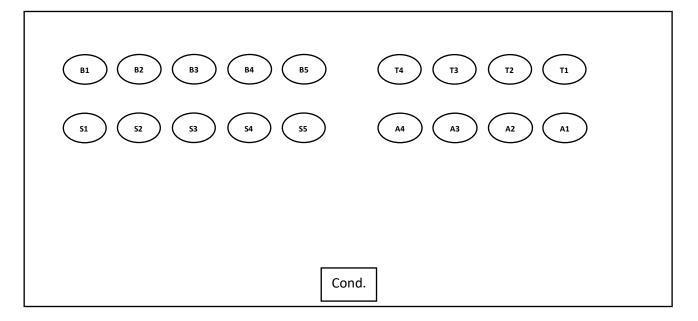
First performance: The BBC Singers, 14 June 2022, Snape Maltings Concert Hall

Duration: c. 13 minutes

## Ensemble

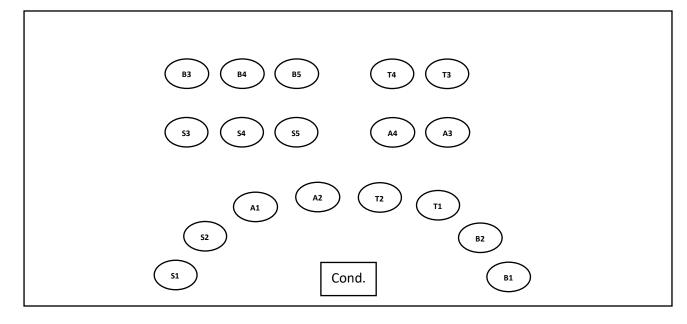
- 5 Sopranos
- 4 Altos
- 4 Tenors
- 5 Basses

## Stage placement: beginning of the piece



## Stage placement: Letter I – end of the piece

In Letter I, singers 1 and 2 from each section move to the front of the stage to form a solo octet (like a vocal consort). The choir is then placed as follows, until the end of the piece:



#### **Texts**

This piece uses several textual sources in different languages.

#### Uppercase letters are used for:

- English, such as TO WASH
- Generic vowel sounds, such as O or I

These should be pronounced normally.

## Lowercase letters are used for:

- Hebrew, such as leyabesh or shedonim
- Jewish-Babylonian Aramaic (JBA), such as asirin or shikufyata

Hebrew and JBA are the two languages that are used for the vast majority of the piece. Any text in JBA is to be pronounced as if it is spoken by a speaker of modern Hebrew.

Links to recordings of these texts are supplied below, and they are the best source for correct pronunciation. Yet, listed below is the basic pronunciation guide for the vowels and consonants that differ from English, or can be ambivalent:

```
a = father
e = let
i = green
o = door
u = boot
y = yes
ei = in between let and fate
yi = yiddish

r = rien (French), but a bit less throaty
tz = tsunami
ch = loch (Scottish)
```

The following pages detail the different textual sources, specifying usage in the piece, original text, transliteration, and recording. Note that:

- Translation of sources #1 and #2 is omitted, for different reasons. Supplied instead are these reasons, alongside an explanation of what the text is relaying.
- The different texts are all used in an interwoven and sometimes simultaneous way. They are also treated flexibly, often fragmented, manipulated, or transformed.

Two recordings of Amira Hess reading Text #2 are to be played alongside the music in two places in the score (Letters I and P). Find the links to these recordings here:

Part 1



Part 2

# Source #1 – fragments from Babylonian incantation bowls (Babylonian-Jewish Aramaic)

#### Context:

These text fragments are all taken from archaeological incantation bowls from ancient Babylon. As can be seen in the picture below, these bowls usually contained a drawing of a demon in the centre, surrounded by an inscription in spiral form. The bowl would then be buried under the house door, believed to protect its owners from evil demons. Many of the bowls from the region have been made by the Jewish population of the Babylon exile, hence many of the inscriptions are in Babylonian-Jewish Aramaic – a dialect of Aramaic common in the Jewish community.



Photo: courtesy of the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem, photo: James N. Ford

The texts used in this piece are different bits taken from an array of incantation bowls, all hosted by the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem. The fragments were chosen primarily by their sonic content rather than their meaning, to emphasise the unique sounds of this forgotten language. Thus, an English translation of the fragments would not be very sensible and is omitted.

The usage of the bowls was made possible thanks to the Bible Lands Museum Jerusalem for their permission and support to use the materials, and to Dr. Ohad Abudraham for his immaculate help with the pronunciation.

Detailed below are the different fragments used. Fragments 1-3 are used throughout the piece, while fragments 4-6 are used exclusively in letter J ("The Demons Madrigal").

## Fragment #1 original:

אָסִירִין, נְיִקִיטִין, צְמִידִין, כְּבִישִׁין

## Fragment #1 transliteration:

asirin, nikitin, tzemidin, kevishin

## Fragment #1 recording:

Link to recording



## Fragment #2 original:

שִׁיקוּפְיָתָא, אִיסְתְּרָתָא, זִיגּוּרְיָתָא, מַלַּלְתָא, זִידְּנְיָתָא

## Fragment #2 transliteration:

shikufyata, isterata, ziguryata, malalata, zidanyata

## Fragment #2 recording:

Link to recording



## Fragment #3 original:

וְמִן בָּתֵּיהוֹן, מְדוֹרָתְּהוֹן, לְמָזוֹנֵיהוֹן

## Fragment #3 transliteration:

vemin batehon, medoratehon, lemazonheon

## Fragment #3 recording:

Link to recording



Fragment #4 original:

לָלִיתָא

## Fragment #4 transliteration:

lilyata

## Fragment #4 recording:

Link to recording



Fragment #5 original:

גַּבְרִיאֵל, נוּרִיאֵל, יה

## Fragment #5 transliteration:

gavri'el, nuri'el, ya

## Fragment #5 recording:

Link to recording



## Fragment #6 transliteration:

sheda deva

## Fragment #6 recording:

Link to recording



## Source #2 – newly commissioned text by Amira Hess (Hebrew)

#### Context:

Amira Hess (b. 1943) is an Iraq-born Israeli poet. Born in Baghdad, she emigrated to Israel at the age of 8, as part of the large Jewish-Iraqi emigration of 1951. Hess is a descendant of a long lineage of Jewish-Baghdadi poets and intellectuals, probably dating back to the very days in ancient Babylon when the above incantation bowls were made.

I asked Amira to write a text in response to the incantation bowls — loosely around the question "what would you write on a bowl that is meant to keep demons away?". While the text is generally in modern Hebrew, it also includes a large number of made-up words by the poet, weaving in the influence of the rich language of the bowls. Using this newly formed idiom, Hess constructed a fascinating image of her own idea of ghostbusting, which manages to be both highly personal and a striking reflection of her culture and environment.

Because of the frequent use of made-up words, as well as a high focus on the sonic aspects of the words on the poet's behalf, trying to translate the text to English did not seem like a logical choice in this case either.

Parts of the text is used throughout the piece in multiple contexts. The whole text is heard in a recorded reading of the poet, which is played back during the performance in two parts.

#### Original:

ַרָעָה לֹא תַּאֱפְפֵנוּ. הוּא מוּגָן מוּגָן. מוּגָן לוֹ. מָגֶרֵשׁ רַע וְרָעוֹת וְהִיטְלֵרוֹסִים. הָנֵּה זֵה בָּא ָנָטְרוּל אַיְכְמָנִיזוֹסִים*,* אִיִּבְנוֹס אָיוֹמוֹס סְמַרְטוּטוֹסִים עֲלוּבִים סְחוּטִים. יִמֶגַּר וְלֹא יִחְיֵה רֹעַ שֵׁדוֹנִי אֹפֶל. סַנָטוֹ סַנְטִי פָּלַסָטוֹ דַּנָטִי אַרטִי אַרטִי ּפָלֵנְטִי בְּרַכוֹתֵס עַל הַשָּׁאַנְטִי. קישָׁתָתוֹס אִימְפֶּרְיָאלִיזְמוֹס נִשְׁמָתִי לעַ שִּׂטְנָה בְּהֶמְתִי כַּדוּר עוֹפֶרֶת מוּמָס עַבוּר אֱזוֹר הַדֵּס בָּאֵזוֹר דְיוֹנִיסְס.

זָרִיתִי אֹמֶץ מֵמִיס.

## <u>Transliteration:</u>

Ra'a lo te'efefenu.

Hu mugan mugan. Mugan lo.

Megrash ra ve-ra'ot ve-hitlerosim.

Hine ze ba,
nitrul aichmanizosim,
Ivanos ayumos
smartutosim aluvim sechutim.

Yemugar ve-lo yichie ro'a shedoney ofel.

Santo santi
plasto danti
arti arti
plenty brachotes al ha shanti.

Kishtatos imperyalizmos nishmati
lo'a sitna behemti
kadur oferet mumas avur ezor hades

## Recording (this is not the recording to use in performance):

## Link to recording

be'ezor dionises.

Zariti ometz memis.



# Source #3 – archaeological excavation instructions (Hebrew and English)

## Context:

This text is only three words and is meant to describe the actions taken by archaeologists when discovering a new artefact in order to clean it and reveal any written or drawn content.

It is used in the first half of the piece by an expanding group of singers, as the background texture that is based on the bowl fragments is gradually made clearer.

It is sung in both Hebrew and English, as it should be clearly understandable to any audience.

## Original:

לִשְׁטֹף, לְהַבְּרִישׁ, לְיַבֵּשׁ

## **Transliteration:**

lishtof, lehavrish, leyabesh

## Recording:

Link to recording



## **Translation:**

TO WASH, TO BRUSH, TO DRY

## **Performance Notes**

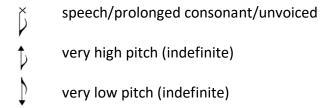
#### Accidentals

Microtonal accidentals are used in Letters H, M and N.They are always used to express the 7<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 13<sup>th</sup> partials of the harmonic series (approximated to the nearest quarter-tone or sixth-tone). The following symbols are used:

```
- a sixth-tone flat (= -33.3 cents), to express the 7<sup>th</sup> partial
- a quarter-tone flat/sharp (= +/-50 cents), to express the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> partial
```

All accidentals are valid throughout the bar.

## Special noteheads



## Special pronunciation instructions

```
gan(n) prolong the consonant sound, rather than the vowel (in case of a long note)

E A gradual transition from one vowel to another
```

## Staff types

The score uses 2 types of staves, as follows:

- Regular 5-line staff: used for all sung passages
- <u>1-line staff</u>: used for speech/unvoiced sounds/prolonged consonants (such as *sh* or *s*)

## Miscellaneous

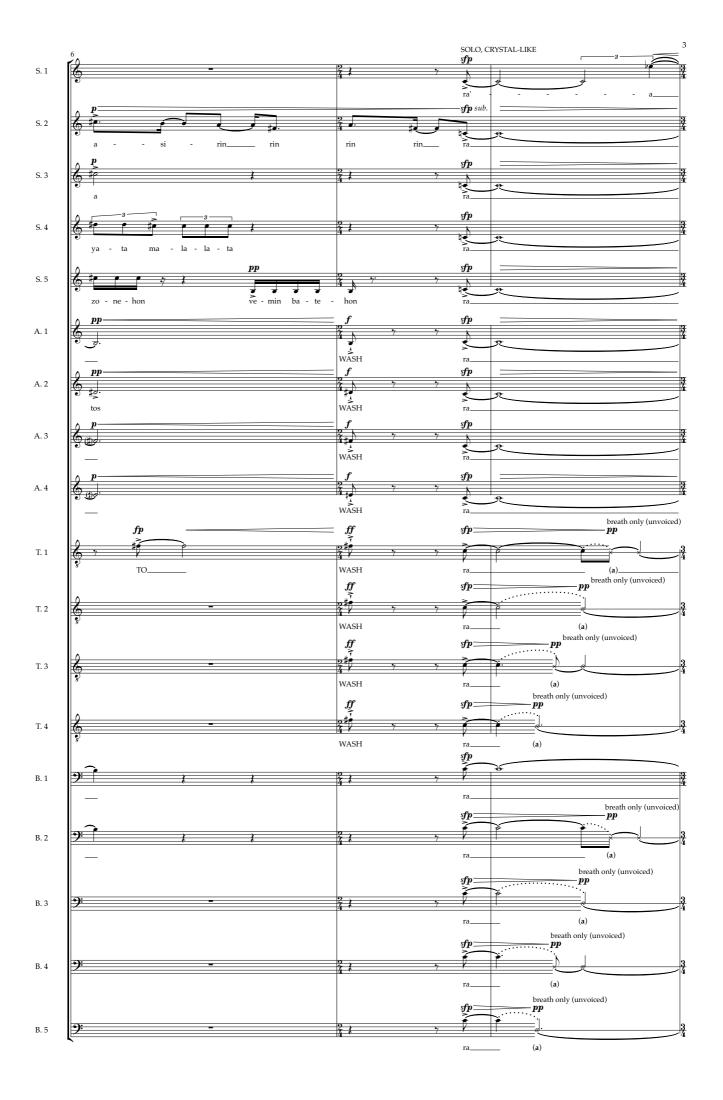
All glissandi start from the beginning of note value they are attached to.

## Kishtatos | קישתתוס

for the memory of my grandparents: Aziza the Babylonian and Moshe the Archaeologist





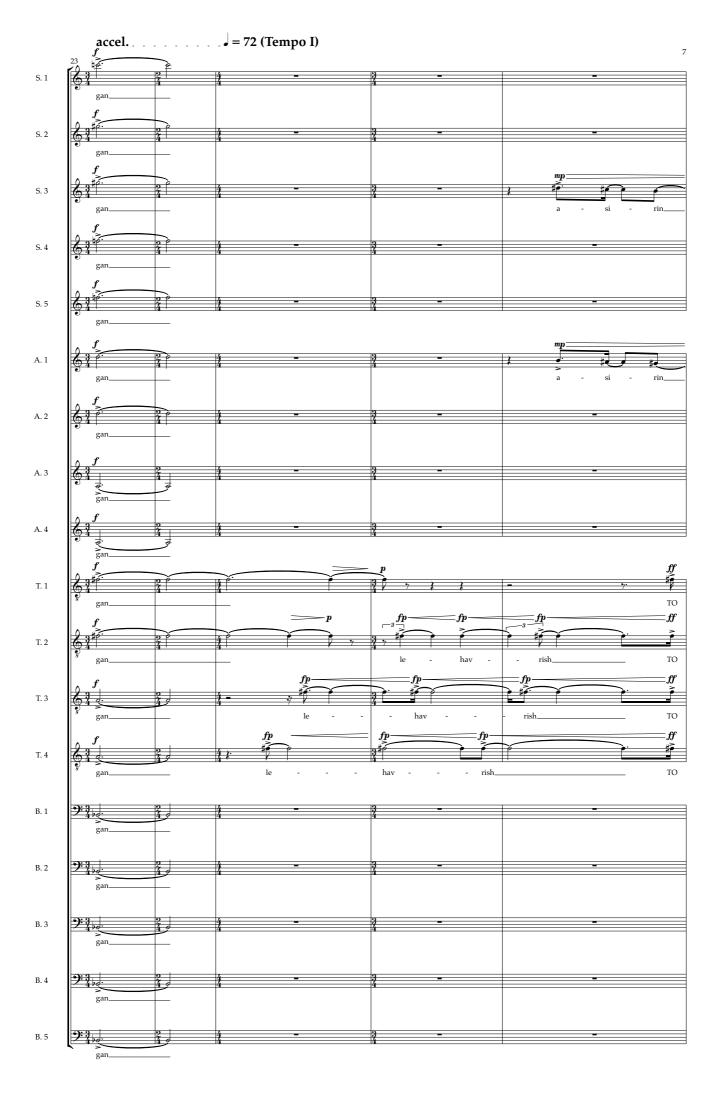




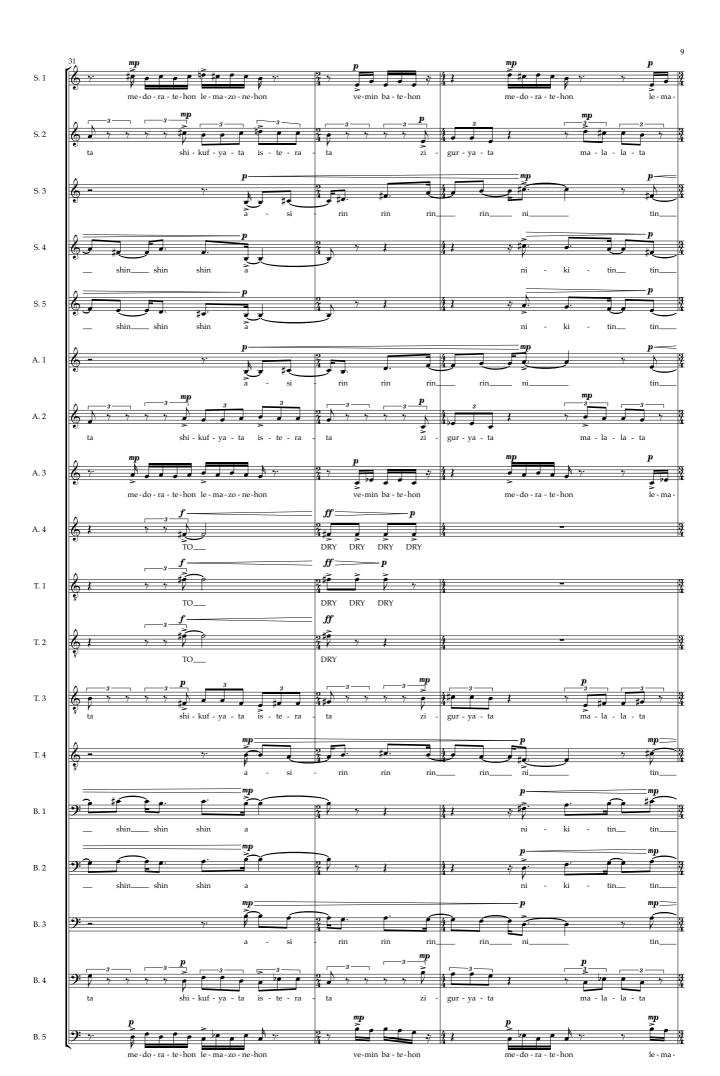


rit.  $\square$  warm  $\downarrow = 60$ 

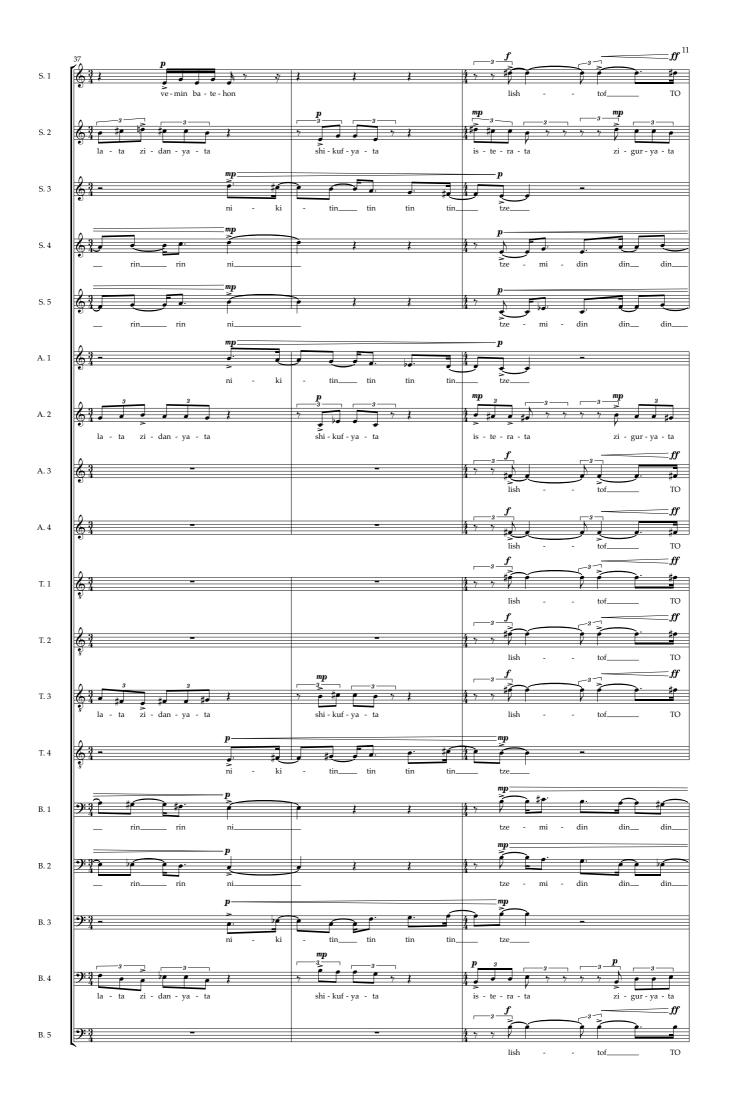


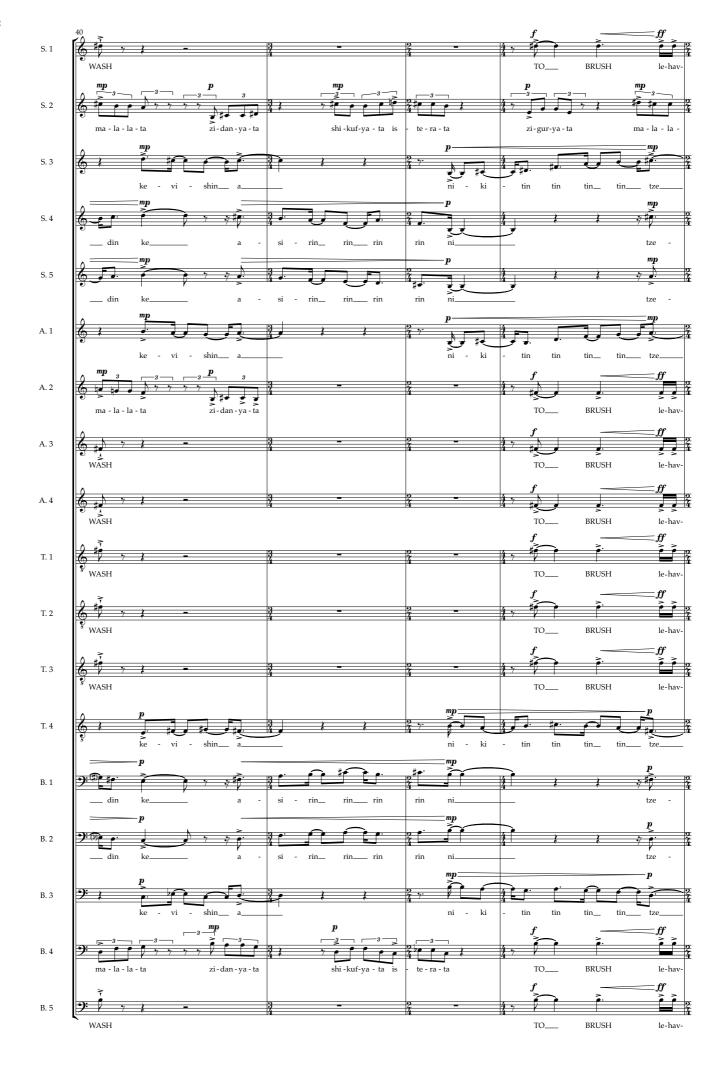








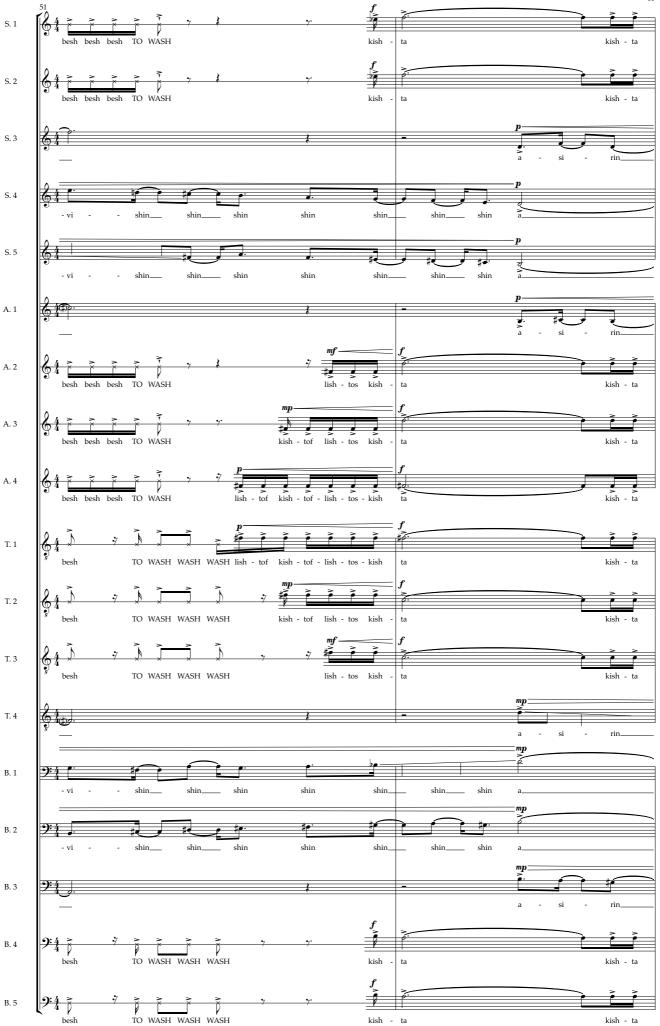


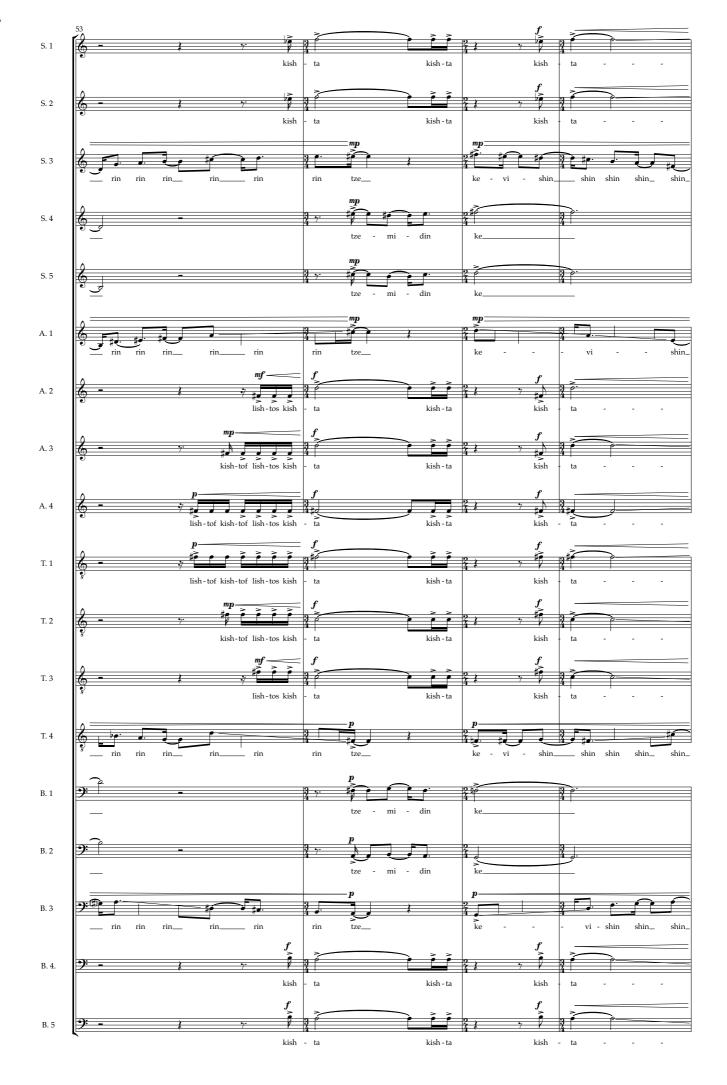




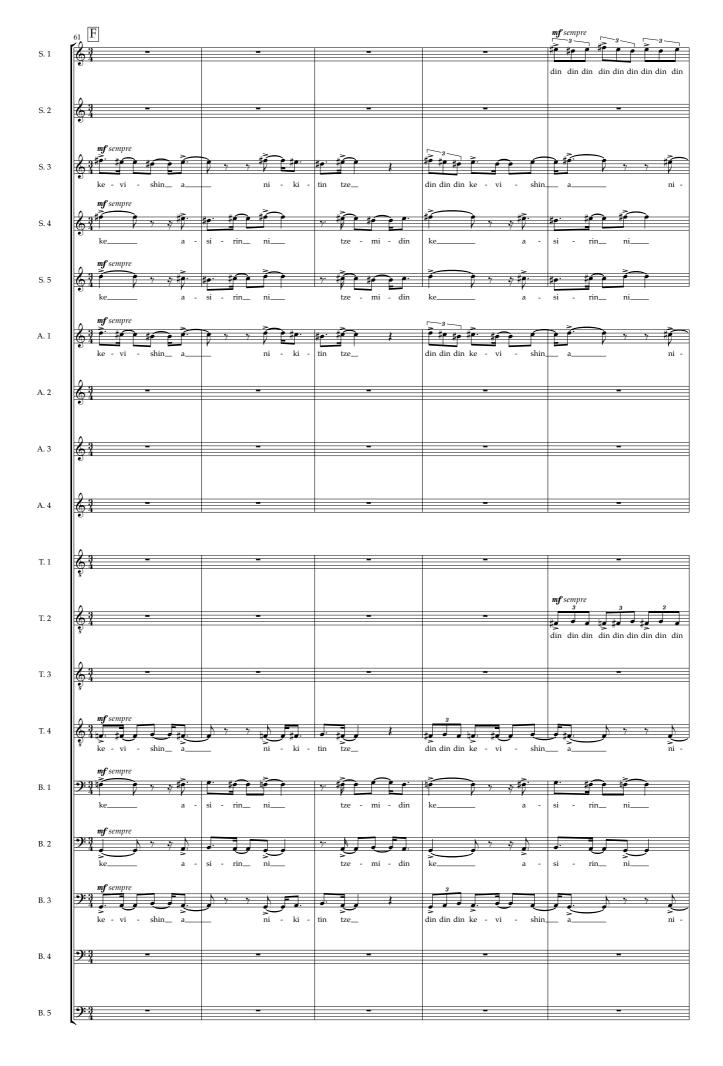




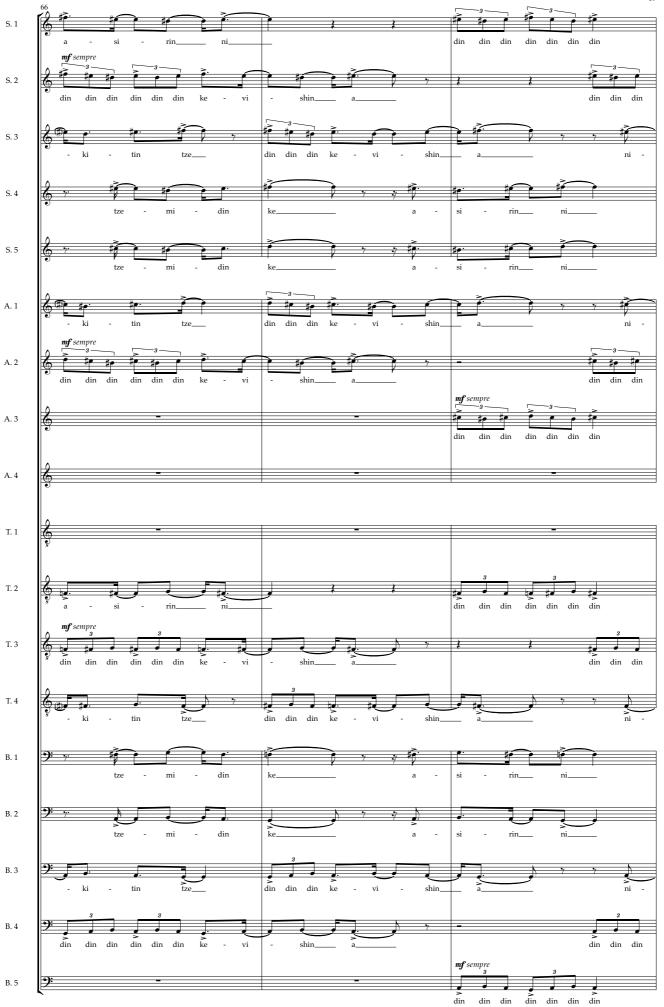


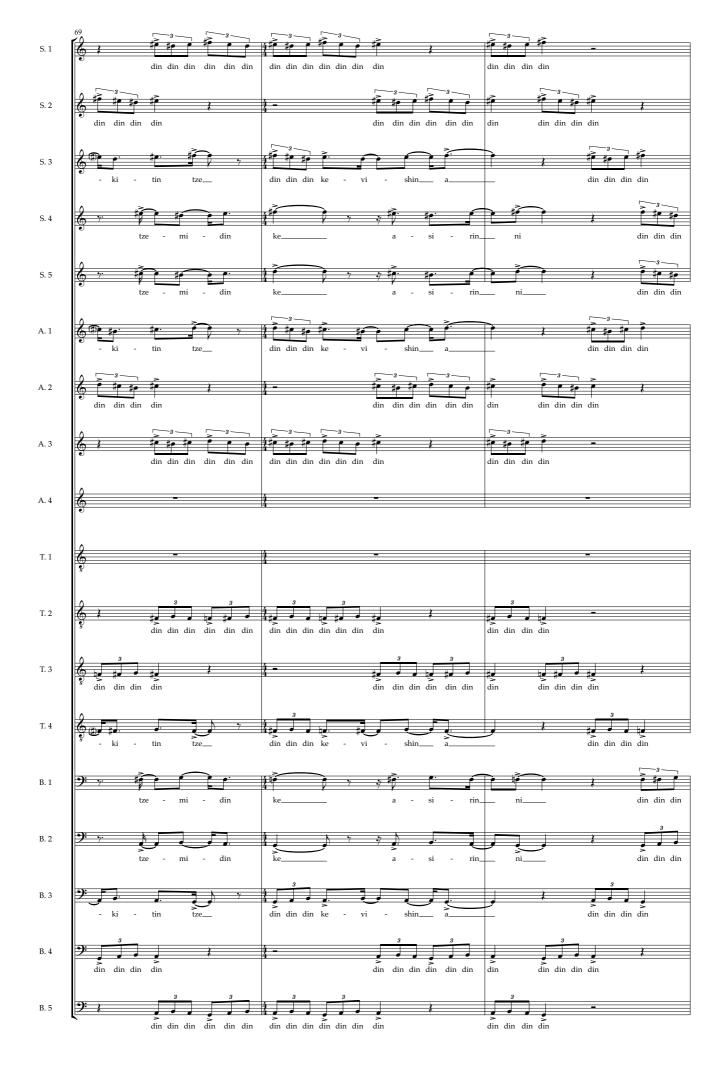


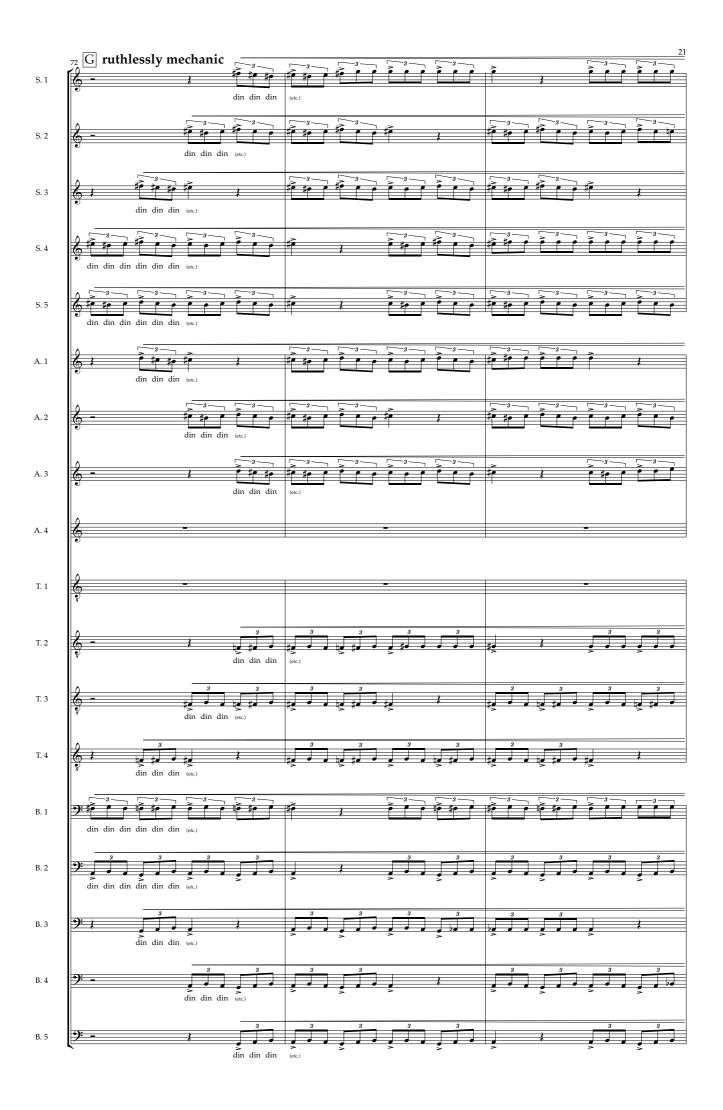


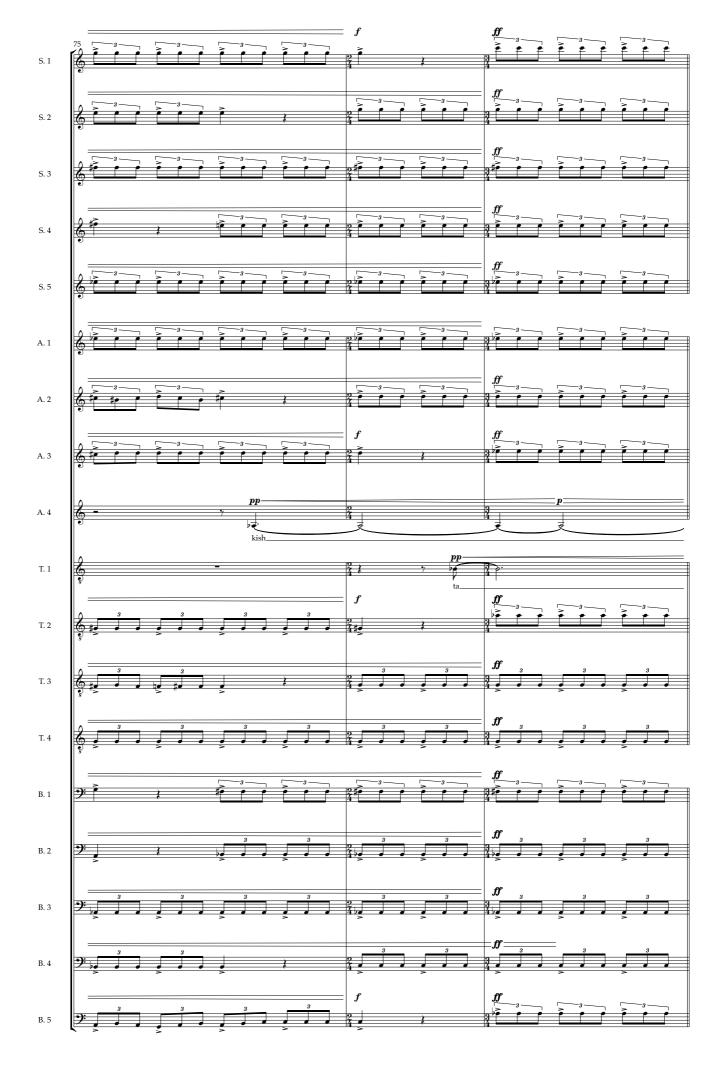
















## PLAY PART #1 OF SPOKEN RECORDING OF AMIRA (c. 30') - TURN LIGHTS OFF I 25 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET S. 1 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET S. 2 S. 5 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET A. 1 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET A. 2 A. 3 A. 4 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET T. 1 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET T. 2 T. 3 T. 4 le - ga-resh\_\_\_ (sh) GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET B. 1 GO TO FRONT OF STAGE AS SOLO OCTET B. 2 В. 3 le - ga - resh resh . esh resh resh resh smar-tu-to-sim smar-tu**mf p** sub. **₹ ?** mf ₹ **p** sub. **mf p** sub B. 4 resh resh resh le - ga - resh resh

**p** sub.

resh

resh resh

mf p sub

le - ga - resh resh

resh(sh)

mf ₹

resh

esh le - ga - resh resh

resh(sh).

resh esh esh

B. 1

B. 2

## RECORDING ENDS - TURN LIGHTS ON (...al ha shanti) 27 S. 3 TU TU TU RU RU S. 4 S. 5 TU TU TU RU RU TU TU TU RU RU **CHOIR** T. 3 kish kish - ta\_ $f_{\stackrel{>}{ imes}}$ В. 3 to - sim resh B. 4 le resh resh S. 1 S. 2 A. 1 A. 2 SOLO OCTET T. 1 fel(I) o - fel(1)\_\_\_ T. 2 B. 1 she - do - ney - do-ney o-fel B. 2



























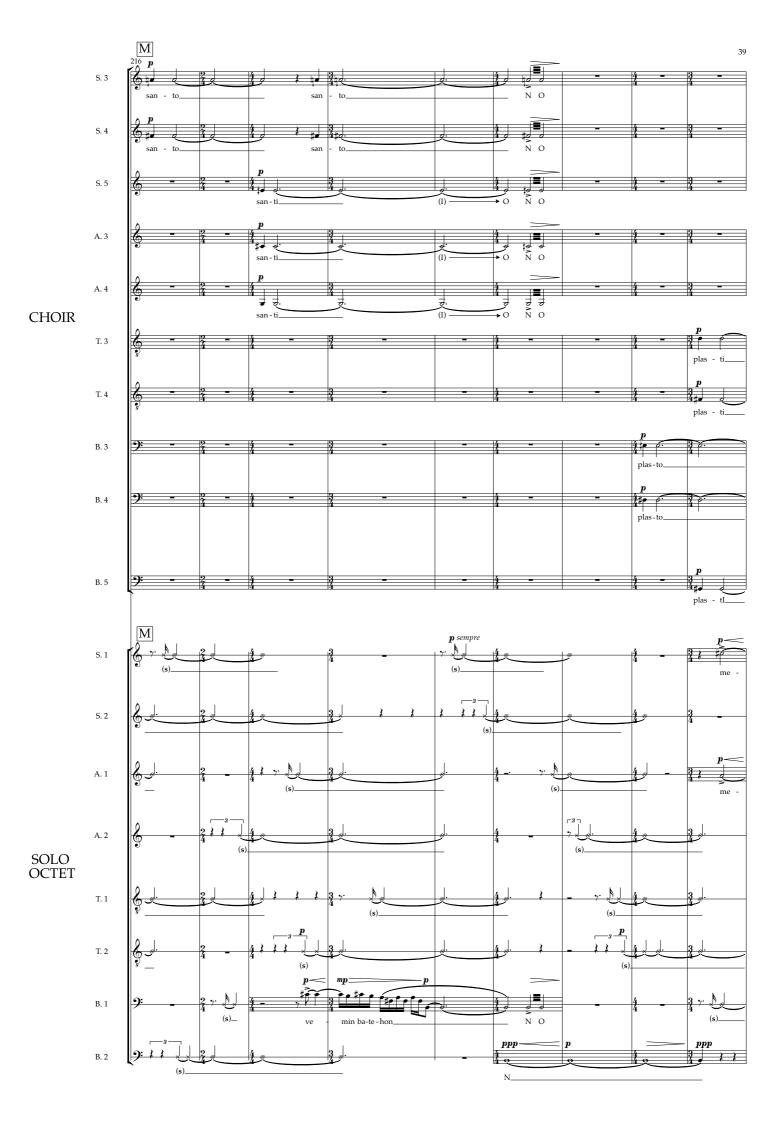






















## PLAY PART #2 OF SPOKEN RECORDING OF AMIRA (c. 20') - TURN LIGHTS OFF











