

PREFACE

Al-kitab al-khamr is the book of forbidden drink. “Khamr” is the word in the Qūr’an that prohibits the faithful from intoxicants: from wine and from stimulants and from bringers-of-visions. What things must those be that between poison and pleasure tack course in the body? What colors and shapes the forbidden inscribes as its left-behind marks on dreams and insoluble mind.

Instrumentation:

- Bass flute (doubling flute)
- English horn (doubling oboe)
- Bass clarinet (doubling B♭ clarinet)
- Baritone saxophone (doubling soprano saxophone)
- Guitar
- Piano
- Percussion
- Violin
- Viola
- Cello
- Contrabass

Prioritization of tempo. The piece comprises two series of different tempi. Tempo series one sets the quarter note equal to 126, 63 or 31.5 (written as 32). Tempo series two sets the quarter note equal to 84 or 42. The tempi of the first series stand 3:2 in relation to the tempi of the second series. Even though the choice of tempi are to some extent a matter of the preferences of the ensemble and the acoustics of the hall, the subito changes of tempo in the piece should be felt and conducted as exact metric modulations. In addition, the tempi of the very fast parts of the piece should be played as closely as possible to the tempi written in the score: it is preferable to play the dense figures in very fast parts of the piece as something of a blur rather than slowing the tempi to attack the notes carefully.

The winds are transposed. The bass flute sounds an octave lower than written. The English horn sounds a perfect fifth lower than written. The B♭ clarinet sounds a major second lower than written and the bass clarinet sounds a major ninth lower than written. The baritone saxophone sounds a major thirteenth lower than written and the soprano saxophone sounds a minor third higher than written.

Winds. Trills without secondary noteheads are color trills.

Flute. The two bass flute multiphonics in the piece are numbers 17 and 22 in Carin Levine’s book *Die Technik der Flötensspiel* and the boxed numbers in the score are reminders of this. Any fingerings approximating the off-octave sound of the multiphonics may be used.

Saxophone. The multiphonic dyad in the piece is number 77 in Marcus Weiss’s book *Die Technik der Saxophons*; the boxed number in the score is a reminder of this.

Guitar. The guitar is tuned as usual. Cross noteheads indicate half harmonics. Individuated clicks indicated in the score should be executed by running a pick or fingernail laterally up the outer wire weave of the E string creating a continuous but sparse and irregular sound.

Piano. The piano should be prepared with a piece of cardboard woven between the strings of twelve notes in the octave from F♯6 to F♯7. The effect is coarsely to mute these pitches; no special indication is given in the score when these pitches are encountered. ‘Tamburo’ hits characterize the first section of the piece. Execute these with heel of the palm struck against the lowest strings inside the piano with the sustain pedal lifted; the sound augments the color of the tam-tam and is the only type of inside-the-piano technique requested in the score.

Percussion. The percussion part is notated primarily on a single-line staff. Where cells of the five-line staff occur they represent a synchrononous attack on A♭5 in the marimba together with a single woodblock; these two instruments are always struck together in the piece and should be placed near each other so that each can be hit with a hard mallet at the same time. The tam-tam should be as large as possible and the tam-tam dynamics written into the score may be freely ignored: the goal is as resonant a sound that fills as much of the hall as possible without spilling over from the fundamental of the instrument into the less desirable upper frequencies. Rolls on the bass drum are all to be as close to attackless as possible: the rate of the roll doesn’t matter but the background depth provided by the instrument is important.

Strings. The violin, viola and cello are tuned as usual. String IV of the contrabass is tuned down to G♯0 (a major sixth lower than the usual tuning of E♯1); the string may be lose in scordatura but this is ok. The contrabass plays a special role in the piece and should be allowed to sound front-and-center above the other strings in many sections of the piece, as indicated by the dynamics. The string writing that features glissandi lentissimi in natural harmonics is designed to encourage the production of multiphonics and other unstable harmonics, especially in the contrabass and cello: allow the multiphonics and transient harmonics to sound as much as possible and do not adjust them back to known pure harmonics unnecessarily.

Al-kitab al-khamr was written between January and April 2015 for Ensemble Dal Niente. The piece was premiered on the 16th of May 2015 on the campus of Harvard University by Ensemble Dal Niente.