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Title

To Muddy Death

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2020

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to muddy death (2017)

for soprano, mezzo-soprano, baritone,
trumpet in c, trombone, and bass
clarinet in b \flat

About This Music

to muddy death is a musical representation of Ophelia's gradually deteriorating mental state over the course of Acts III, IV, and V of *Hamlet*, with particular focus on her "mad-songs," which populate Act IV.v of the play. These songs poignantly illustrate - in their sudden and shocking oscillation between expressions of unrequited, romantic love for Hamlet and heartbroken, filial affection for her dead father Polonius - her increasing insanity. While the original melodies used by Shakespeare are, for the most part, not known, I was intrigued by the dramatic effect of Ophelia's songs, and decided to attempt my own musical treatment of her character. Rather than a setting of the songs in order with a vocalist playing the "role" of Ophelia however, *to muddy death* is a representation of Ophelia's own mind, utilizing three voices - soprano, mezzo-soprano, and baritone - along with three instruments - trumpet, trombone, and bass clarinet - to paint a musical picture of the emotions and impulses that motivate her songs and subsequent insanity.

The piece begins ominously, and the first words sung are Ophelia's expression of dismay that Hamlet has spurned her love in Act III. As one voice struggles to sing an essential word - "overthrown" - the others shush it, a pattern that is repeated three times with increasing intensity, punctuated by chaotic and rapidly syncopated instrumental passages. As sanity is called into question, the "sh!" sounds fade away and the bass clarinet embarks upon a jagged ostinato in 7/8 time based on the opening motif, which is soon picked up and commented upon by the other instrumentalists. As they play, the voices comment on and exchange lines of Ophelia's songs, as if each emotion she feels expresses itself in a new line - a new voice. The tension progressively builds to a dissonant climax, where the ostinato finally ceases and the voices descend, echoing Ophelia's suicide by drowning (something also implied through the lowercase, or "submerged" letters of the title). The piece concludes with the entry of a "fourth voice," the baritone singing the "grave-digger's song" from Act V in falsetto. This breaks the "fourth wall" of the piece and invites the audience to consider questions of love, loss, and madness provoked by the music we have just heard.

- Thomas Nielsen, New York, NY, December, 2017

Text

The text employed combines IPA syllables with selections from Acts III, IV and V of *Hamlet*, specifically parts of Ophelia's "mad-songs," as well as the grave-digger's song. The excerpts selected for setting are quoted in full below, for the convenience of the performers. I have provided line numbers in case the performers are interested in considering the lyrics in the context of the text surrounding them, something I encourage. I have made slight alterations to the original text to increase the smoothness of the setting. Line numbers are quoted from *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*, Orgel and Braunmuller, eds.

O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!

(Ophelia, III.ii.150)

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance.

Pray, you, love, remember. And there is pansies, that's for thoughts. [...] There's fennel for you, and columbines. There's rue for you, and here's some for me. We may call it herb of grace o'Sundays. You must wear your rue with a difference. There's a daisy. I would give you some violates, but they withered all when my father died.

(Ophelia, IV.v.170-180)

White his shroud as the mountain snow [...]

Larded all with sweet flowers;

Which bewept to the ground did not go

With truelove showers.

(Ophelia, IV.v.36-40)

They bore him barefaced on the bier

And in his grave rained many a tear -

Fare you well, my dove!

(Ophelia, IV.v.161-163)

In youth when I did love, did love,

Methought it was very sweet [...]

But age with his stealing steps

Hath clawed me in his clutch

And hath shipped me intil the land

As if I had never been such.

(Clown, V.i.56-57, 66-70)

Instrumentation

Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Baritone (with falsetto ability), Trumpet in C, Trombone, Bass
Clarinet in B \flat

Performance Notes

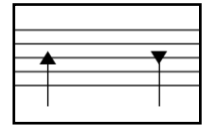
1. General

- This piece employs occasional quarter-tones, which are notated as follows:
- Accidentals last for the duration of the measure.
- The first iteration of every extended technique is accompanied by a textual reminder in the score.

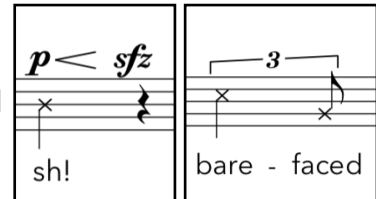


2. Voices

- An important texture in this piece is audibly inhaling and exhaling. This is denoted with arrow-shaped note heads; upward-facing arrows mean inhale; downward facing means exhale. For the fullest sound, purse the lips so that the air hisses through them.



- X-shaped note heads denote spoken passages. Most pervasive is the sound "sh!," but the mezzo-soprano has a more extended passage starting in measure 79.



- A passage for the tenor, commencing in measure 102, is written utilizing falsetto. If falsetto is not possible, this segment can be transcribed to a singable octave.
- All lyrics are written using either English, which should be pronounced in an American accent, or the IPA system.
- An arrow in between two IPA syllables means that the vocalist should gradually move from one syllable to the next.

3. Trumpet in C

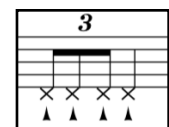
- Some passages call for a "distorted" sound. I leave this open to the performer, but the sound should not be overbearing in the context of the music around it. It is denoted by the symbol at right.



- Occasionally, the player must exhale through the trumpet, a texture which is denoted by a downward-facing arrowhead.



- Pitched tongue rams are denoted by x-shaped note heads with a tick, as follows.



- Flutter tongue is notated with tremolo slashes and "flz."
- "Norm." signifies that you should return to normal playing.
- This piece calls for two kinds of mutes: harmon and plunger. Text in the score explains when to use them. The following notation signifies closed ("o") and open ("+") positions of the harmon mute's stem and the plunger's position.



When using the plunger mute, *the pitch should be allowed to alter with the opening of the mute.*

4. Trombone

- The above notes for the trumpet player on "distortion," pitched tongue rams, and flutter tongue apply to the trombone part.
- The trombonist occasionally is asked to inhale and exhale through the instrument, motions denoted by upward and downward-facing arrowheads, respectively, as in the diagram to the right.

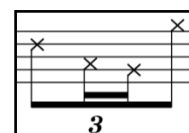


- This piece employs a harmon mute, with text in the score on when to use it.

5. Bass Clarinet in B \flat

- The score in C is written at sounding pitch; the part is written utilizing French notation.
- The above notes for the trumpet player on "distortion" and flutter tongue apply for the bass clarinet part.

- Key-clicks are denoted with x-shaped note heads. The clicks should be allowed to release before the next note, and should be as loud as possible.



- Measure 94 calls for a spectral multiphonic glissando around the given contour, which can be freely improvised as long as the given partials are hit.



- Pitched slap tongue is denoted using regular note heads with a tick, as in the diagram to the right.



- Sung multiphonics appear in segments of the piece, and are notated using a diamond-shaped note head, which is the note that should be sung.



SCORE IN C

to muddy death for loadbang and singers from Ekmeles

william shakespeare (1564-1616)

thomas erik nielsen (b. 1995)

slow ♩ = 68

Soprano

Mezzo-soprano

Baritone

slow ♩ = 68

Trumpet in C

Trombone

(notated at sounding pitch)

Bass Clarinet in B \flat

7

S. *p* < *sfz* sh!

M-S. *mf* o → a

Bar. *p* < *sfz* sh!

(distort)

C Tpt. *gliss.* *p* *mp* 3 chaotic

Tbn. *gliss.* *gliss.* *p* *mp* 3 chaotic

B. Cl. norm. 3 3 *p* chaotic

12

S. *f* (breathing in and out) **A**

M-S. *mf* o → a

Bar. *f* (breathing in and out) 3

C Tpt. 3 5 *f* *p* *p* *flz.* 3 3 *mf*

Tbn. 3 3 *f* *p* *p* *gliss.* *p*

B. Cl. 3 5 3 *f* *mp*

16

S. *p* *sfz* sh!

M-S. *p* *sfz* sh!

Bar. *mp* oh what a no - ble *mp* mi - nd

C Tpt. norm. *p* *mf* 3

Tbn. (distort) *mf* (key clicks - let release before next note)

B. Cl. *p* as loud as possible *mf* 3 3 3

18

S. *p* *sfz* *f* sh! *f* (breathing in and out) *mf*

M-S. *p* *sfz* sh! *f* (breathing in and out) *mf* o

Bar. *mf* o → a

C Tpt. *f* *p* chaotic

Tbn. *f* *p* chaotic gliss.

B. Cl. *f* *mf* chaotic (sung multiphonics)

B

21

mf

S. *o* *a* *o* *a*

M-S. *a* *o* *a* *o* *a*

Bar. *o* *a* *o* *a*

C Tpt. Plunger Mute - Allow Pitch to Alter *mf* flz. norm. Remove Mute

Tbn. *f* *p*

B. Cl. *mp* *f*

25

C

S. *mf* *f* *p* *sfz*
oh what a no-ble mind is here ov-er - thrown!

M-S. *mf* *f* *p* *sfz*
o *a* *e* sh!

Bar. *mf* *f* *p* *sfz*
o *a* *o* *a* sh!

C

C Tpt. *mp* *mf* *f*
chaotic

Tbn. *f* *chaotic*

B. Cl. *f* *chaotic*

(distort)

S.

M-S.

Bar.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

B. Cl.

32

S.

M-S.

Bar.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

B. Cl.

36 **D** ♩=156

S. *p* *sfz*
sh! _____

M-S. *p* *sfz*
sh! _____
there's rose-mar-y_

Bar. *p* *sfz*
sh! _____

C Tpt. **D** ♩=156
Plunger Mute

Tbn. **D** ♩=156
Harmon Mute

B. Cl. *mf* *mp*
(4 ♩ = 3 ♩)
jagged etc.

40

S. *p*
that's for re - mem - brance_____

M-S. *p* *sfz*
sh! _____

Bar. *p* *sfz*
sh! _____
pray!_____ love, re-mem-ber him_____

C Tpt. *mp*

Tbn. *mp* *mf* *mp*
(4 ♩ = 3 ♩)

B. Cl. *mf* *mp*

43

S. *p* < *sfz* sh! *mf* and there is pan sies_____

M-S. *mf* that's for re-mem - brance_____ that's for re - mem brance_

Bar. _____ *mf* re - mem - ber him_____ and that's for

C Tpt. _____ *mf* _____ +

Tbn. *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* 3 4 3 4

B. Cl. *mf* flz. norm. flz. norm. 4

46

S. _____ *p* < *sfz* sh! _____

M-S. _____ *p* < *sfz* sh! _____

Bar. _____ *p* < *sfz* thoughts... sh! _____

C Tpt. _____ Remove Mute _____ *f* 3 3

Tbn. _____ *f* 4 4

B. Cl. _____ *f* 3 3 3 3

49

S. *mf* and col-um - bines_____

M-S. *mf* there's fen-nel for you_____ *mf*

Bar. there's

C Tpt. *mf* (4 ♩ = 3 ♩) Remove Mute (breathe in and out, through the instrument, following the arrows)

Tbn. *mf* *f*

B. Cl. *mf*

53

S. *f* here's some for me_____

M-S. *f* and here's some for me_____

Bar. *f* rue for you_____ some for me_____ me!_____

C Tpt.

Tbn.

B. Cl.

56

S. *p* < *sfz*
we may call it _____ sh!

M-S. *p* < *sfz*
me! _____ herb of grace o' Sun days _____ sh!

Bar. herb - grace o'

C Tpt. **Harmon Mute**

Tbn.

B. Cl. *f*

F ♩ = 78

59

S. *f*
O, _____ you _____ must wear your rue with a _____ difference _____

M-S. *mf*
rue with a

Bar. *mf*
you must wear _____ your rue _____

F ♩ = 78

C Tpt. *mf*

Tbn. *mf* *f* *mf*
gliss.

B. Cl. *mf*

62

S. *mf*
o ————— a

M-S. *mf*
differ - ence
o

Bar. *mf*
o ————— a

C Tpt. *mf*
3 3 gliss.

Tbn. *mf*
3 3 3 gliss.

B. Cl. *mf*
3

64

S. *f*
you must wear your rue

M-S. *f*
you must wear your rue with a differ - ence

Bar. *f*
O, you must wear your rue with a difference

C Tpt. *mf* *f*
3 3 3 3 3 3

Tbn. *mf* *f*
3 3 3 3 3 3 gliss.

B. Cl. *f*
3 flz. norm. flz. norm.

67

S. *mf* *sfz* *p* *sfz*

M-S. *mf* *sh!* *p* *sfz*

Bar. *mf* *sh!* *p* *sfz*

Detailed description: This block contains the first system of music, measures 67-70. It features vocal lines (Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Baritone) and instrumental lines (C Trumpet, Trombone, Bass Clarinet). The vocal parts have lyrics and dynamic markings like *mf*, *sfz*, and *p*. The instrumental parts include triplets, glissandos, and dynamic markings like *mf* and *f*. A key signature change to G major and a time signature change to 2/8 are indicated at measure 70.

C Tpt. *mf* *gliss.* *mf*

Tbn. *f* *gliss.*

B. Cl. *mf* *f*

G ♩=156

Detailed description: This block contains the second system of music, measures 70-73. It features instrumental parts for C Trumpet, Trombone, and Bass Clarinet. The C Trumpet part has a dynamic marking of *mf* and a glissando. The Trombone part has a dynamic marking of *f* and a glissando. The Bass Clarinet part has dynamic markings of *mf* and *f*. A key signature change to G major and a time signature change to 2/8 are indicated at measure 70.

70

S. *mp* I would give you some vio - lets__

M-S. *mp* There's a dai-sy__

Bar. *mp* some

Detailed description: This block contains the third system of music, measures 70-73. It features vocal lines for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, and Baritone. The lyrics are: "I would give you some vio - lets__", "There's a dai-sy__", and "some". The vocal parts have dynamic markings like *mp* and include triplets.

C Tpt. Remove Mute

Tbn. Harmon Mute *f* *mp*

B. Cl. *mf* etc.

Detailed description: This block contains the fourth system of music, measures 70-73. It features instrumental parts for C Trumpet, Trombone, and Bass Clarinet. The C Trumpet part has a dynamic marking of *f* and a "Remove Mute" instruction. The Trombone part has a dynamic marking of *mp* and a "Harmon Mute" instruction. The Bass Clarinet part has a dynamic marking of *mf* and includes triplets and quartets. The word "etc." is written at the end of the Bass Clarinet line.

73

S. *f*
vio-lets vio- lets but they with-ered all when my

M-S. *f*
vio- lets with-ered all when my

Bar. *f*
vio-lets some vio lets

C Tpt. *mf*

Tbn. *mf* *mp* *mf*

B. Cl. *mp* *f*

76

S. *mp*
fath-er died I → a

M-S. *mp*
fath-er died I → a

Bar. *mf* *mf*
fa - ther I → a white his

C Tpt. *mf*

Tbn. *mf* Remove Mute

B. Cl. *mf*

18 79 H

S. *f* lard - ed with sweet

M-S. *f* crazed they bore him bare - faced on the bier

Bar. *f* shroud as mount-ain snow

H

C Tpt. *mf*

Tbn. *mf*

B. Cl. *mf*

81

S. *gliss.* flow- ers → a with true love

M-S. *gliss.* I → a Hey non non - ny non-ny hey non - ny

Bar. *gliss.* Which be - wept to the grave did not go

C Tpt. *gliss.*

Tbn. *gliss.*

B. Cl. *gliss.*

S. *gliss.*
show ers → a I → a I → a

M-S. *ff* *f* more crazed
and in his grave rain'd ma-ny a tear I → a

Bar. *gliss.*
→ a I → a I → a I → a

C Tpt. *gliss.*

Tbn. *f* *gliss.*

B. Cl. *f* *flz.* *norm.* *flz.* *norm.*

86 **molto rit.**

S. *gliss.*
I → a fare you

M-S. *gliss.*
I → a fare you

Bar. *gliss.*
a I → a I

C Tpt. *mf* *etc.*

Tbn. *mf* *flz.* *norm.* *f*

B. Cl. *mf* *etc.* *ff*

20

88 ff $\text{♩} = 68$

S. *well!* my dove! my _____

M-S. *well!* my dove! my _____

Bar. *ff*

91 ff $\text{♩} = 68$

C Tpt. *ff*

Tbn. *norm.*

B. Cl. *flz.* *norm.* *flz.* *norm.* *fff*

92 *fff* *mf* *mf*

S. dove _____ a _____

M-S. dove _____ a _____ *gliss.* *mf*

Bar. a _____ a _____ *gliss.* *mf*

93 *mf* *mf* *f*

C Tpt.

Tbn. *mf*

B. Cl. *flz.* *norm.* *spectral gliss.* *f*

96

S. *pp*

M-S. *pp*

Bar. *pp*

C Tpt. *f* *mp* *mf*

Tbn. *mp*

B. Cl. *mf* *mp placid*

100

S.

M-S.

Bar. *mp* *falsetto; placid*
In youth when I did—

C Tpt. *mp*

Tbn. *pp* *gliss.*

B. Cl.

K

104

S. *mp*
did love

M-S. *mp*
did love

Bar. *mp*
love me- thought it was ve - ry sweet

C Tpt. *mp*
3 4 3

Tbn. *mp*
3

B. Cl. *mp*
3

107

S. **L**
but

M-S. *mp*
but age

Bar. *mp*
but age, with his_

C Tpt. *mf* *p* **L**
pp

Tbn. *mf* *pp* *gliss.*

B. Cl. *f* *p*
3 5 3

110

S. age

M-S.

Bar. *f* gliss.

— steal-ing steps hath claw'd me in his clutch

C Tpt.

Tbn. *mp* *mf* gliss.

B. Cl. *mf* flz. as loud as possible

113

S. *p* e

M-S. *p* e

Bar. *mf* *p* And shipped me in-til the land As if I'd ne - ver been such.

C Tpt. *mp* *pp* *M*

Tbn. *mp* *pp*

B. Cl. norm. *p* *M*

119

S. *a*

M-S. *a*

Bar. my dove... *o* *a*

C Tpt. *p* *pp* *p* *pp*

Tbn.

B. Cl.

123

S. **N**

M-S. **N**

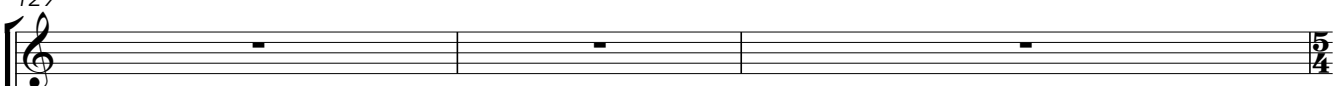
Bar. **N**

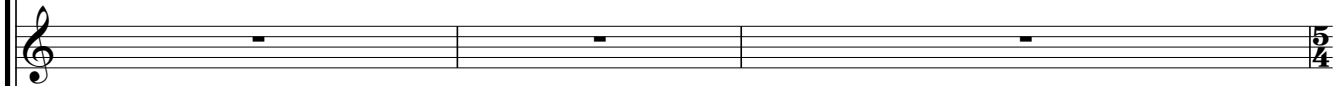
C Tpt. *p* **N** Harmon Mute

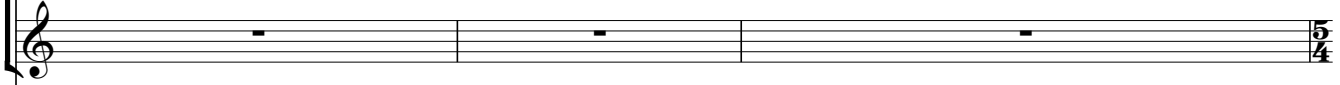
Tbn. **N** Harmon Mute *pp*

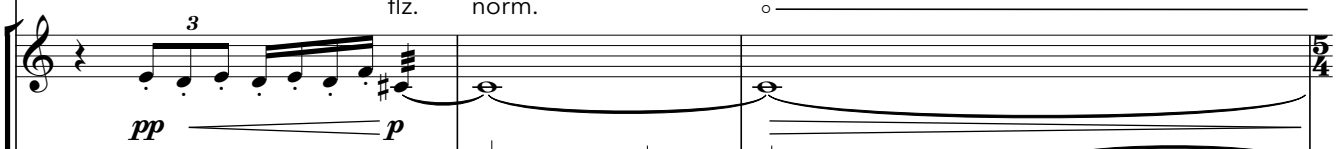
B. Cl. *mp* *mp* *p*

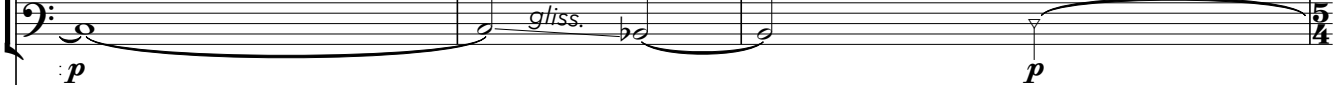
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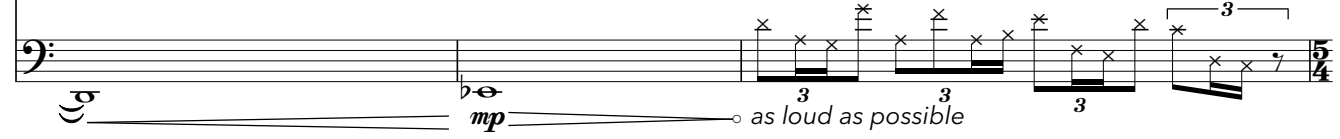
S. 

M-S. 


Bar. 


C Tpt.  *pp* *p* flz. norm.


Tbn.  *p* *gliss.*

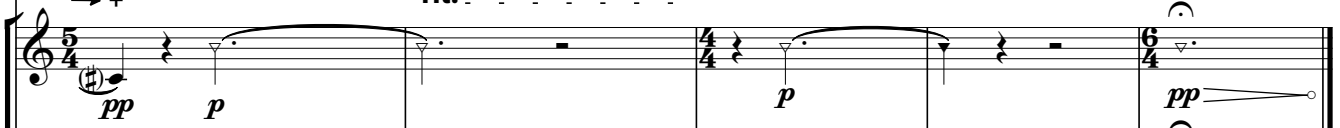
B. Cl.  *mp* *as loud as possible*


132


S. 

M-S. 

Bar. 

C Tpt.  *pp* *p* *rit.*

Tbn.  *pp*

B. Cl.  *p* *p* *mp* *mf*