

Enchanted Labyrinths
for sixteen virtuosi



Scenes Toward
P L U R A B E L L E
an opera in two or more acts

Augusta Read Thomas, Composer

Libretto (Toronto, 2022 -) by Thomas Peter O'Brien,
steeped in the “Anna Livia Plurabelle” portion of
Finnegans Wake by James Joyce – drawing
out, rendering upon, and revelling with
the 3,000+ references to opera
that he fused into his
flourishing
text

Recorded at The Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago
22 December 2025

“I started reading *Finnegans Wake* in Dublin, and I’ve been articulating the text for about 48 years. The book is the most inviting and entangling collection of words that we have. I am continuously finding new shards of linguistic musicality, new historic (and hysteric) reverberations, new ways to appreciate its chameleonic charms. As the first full opera based on this protean text, P L U R A B E L L E invites audiences into its endlessly fascinating rites, rituals, and riches.”

– Thomas Peter O’Brien

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“Composing for voice is a huge passion and as a result, one of the largest portions of my creative catalogue is music for voice(s). The human voice — possibly the most subtle, complex, and fragile yet forceful, flexible, seductive, and persuasive carriers of musical ideas and meanings — has always been an inspiration for and an influence upon my musical thinking. I scat, vocalize, and sing as I compose. When musicians ask me a question, I often scat or sing the answer.”

– Augusta Read Thomas

Begotten and commissioned by Thomas Peter O'Brien.

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Dedicated, with love, admiration, and gratitude, to the sixteen virtuosi and conductor Timothy Weiss, who were the first to embody and perform these scenes, and to Siobhan O'Connell, MERITO.

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Thanks to the multi-talented Phil Pierick, manager of the December 2025 recording session, to 2024 summer intern from Oberlin College Francesca Neibel-Spruill, for her exceptional and invaluable help, to Lucas Kim for his many administrative and musical wisdoms and supports, and to Anna Skorzewska, for her multitudinous inspirations.

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## **INSTRUMENTATION**

2 Soprano voices

1 Tenor voice

1 Baritone voice

Flute (optional to use Piccolo for all or some of Scene 7)

Oboe

Clarinet in Bb doubling Bass Clarinet in Bb

2 Percussion (see “Notes for the Percussionists” below)

Piano

Harp

2 Violins

1 Viola

1 Cello

1 Contrabass

## **PERFORMING ARTISTS**

Sasha Ishov, Flute

Andy Nogal, Oboe

Katherine Jimoh, Clarinet

John Corkill, Percussion

Greg Beyer, Percussion

Ben Melsky, Harp

Daniel Pesca, Piano

Hanna Hurwitz, Violin

Theo Ramsey, Violin

Doyle Armbrust, Viola

Nick Photinos, Cello

Emmett Jackson, Contrabass

Amanda DeBoer Bartlett, Soprano

Ariana Strahl, Soprano

Justin Berkowitz, Tenor

Nick Ward, Baritone

Timothy Weiss, Conductor

Christopher Willis, Audio Engineer

Mike Grittani, Videographer

## **SCORE IS IN C**

DURATION:

Scenes toward P L U R A B E L L E (40:04)

Scenes toward P L U R A B E L L E (Excerpts – 18:05)

Scenes

1 – 2:24

2 – 3:49

3 – 3:41

4 – 3:16

5 – 6:17

6 – 4:32

7 – 8:02

8 – 2:02

9 – 6:01

Movements / scenes can be performed as stand-alone works or in any combination of a subset of movements.

All subsets can be played in any order.

FULL SCORE PAGE#: 1, 9, 29, 52, 69, 99, 127, 161, 167

MEASURE#: 1, 42, 137, 234, 321, 464, 589, 733, 763

PIANO VOCAL SCORE PAGE#: 1, 8, 25, 41, 52, 71, 85, 102, 108

I: INTO THE LABYRINTH - in medias res  
00'00"

II: PLURABELLE KALEIDOSCOPE #1 - INDEED, FINNEGANS DO WAKE  
02'24"  
Attacca possible

III: PLURABELLE KALEIDOSCOPE #2 - LATIN ME THAT  
06'13"  
Attacca possible

IV: PLURABELLE KALEIDOSCOPE #3 - 100-LETTER THUNDERWORD  
09'54"

V: PLURABELLE ENCHANTING  
13'10"

VI: PLURABELLE KALEIDOSCOPE #4: - STRATEGIC TILTS  
19'27"  
Attacca when feasible

VII: PLURABELLE KALEIDOSCOPE #5: - SHEM & SHAUN : NORMA & AIDA  
23'59"

VIII: ROOTS IN EARTH  
32'01"

IX: RIVERS OF DREAMS  
34'03"

## **PERFORMANCE NOTES**

### **STAGE LAYOUT:**

The following four players, who very often play together, should, when feasible, play from relatively near the back of the stage, arranged in a semi-circle in this order:

Harp, Piano, Percussion 1, Percussion 2

These artists form a “sonic team” and create a “canopy of sound” that encircles the orchestra.

### **RUBATO:**

Where there are short soli, “rubato” is indicated and means that it is not necessary to mechanically play the exact rhythm (sextuplet, quintuplet, small triplet, etc.) but rather that you can consider those rhythms more gesturally. “Rubato” does not necessarily mean to drastically slow down the tempo. Places where rubato does indeed mean to slow the tempo are clearly marked in the score, for instance at moments where text needs to align in such a way that word entrances are staggered.

### **DYNAMICS:**

There are only seven dynamics used in this score (niente, pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) so that each “level” of volume has a clear meaning and sound. Very often dynamics are staggered and layered; thus, it is especially important that each musician plays their individual dynamics and is not swayed to change their dynamic if another musician is playing a great deal quieter or louder. The words “sempre” and “subito” are often used to help clarify the layered, cross-fading dynamic textures. One of the central attributes of this composition is a kaleidoscopic use of hocketing, dovetailing, and crossfading dynamics.

### **W/SDN:**

Means with slight dynamic nuances.

### **TREMOLO:**

For the entire composition, increase roll and tremolo speeds with crescendi, and decrease roll and tremolo speeds with diminuendi.

### **RESONANCE:**

For the entire composition, even when vibraphone lifts pedal, always let all other ringing instruments continue to ring naturally back to silence unless “secco” or a dampen

sign is explicitly notated. All metals should be selected for maximum pretty and elegant resonance.

#### HOCKETING AND DOVETAILING:

Many hockets take place between instruments, resulting in spatial-timbral-ping-pong, contrapuntal effects throughout the score.

#### “SOLO,” “SOLOISTIC,” AND “PRIMARY LINE” INDICATIONS:

The word “solo” is used to indicate to the player that their note or phrase is a solo and that no one else plays on that exact same beat of a bar. The word “soloistic” indicates that even though others are playing, your note is soloistic in nature. The term “primary line” is used to indicate that, within a larger texture, a group of players’ notes or phrases are part of the foreground energy of the phrase. These notations are intended to help to clarify the layering and the hocketing between instruments.

#### OPTIONAL BELL UP:

The wind players may freely opt to play with bell up at any time throughout the composition. Some measures are specifically indicated for playing with bell-up.

#### OPTIONAL TACET:

“O.T.” means “optional tacet” for the notes under the bracket. Each individual player may opt to take or not take a tacet and can do so for some or all of the notes.

#### 8VA, 8VB, 15MA:

Temporary transpositions are never corrected by “loco” to avoid visual clutter.

#### CLEAN CUT OFF NOTATION:

Please do not “over think” or “over analyze” the notations where a note is held over for 16th note (for example, measure 7, beat 1 for flute, oboe, and all strings except contrabass). These are notated, from time to time, to try to ensure a very clean ensemble cut off. In all cases, they should sound natural and utterly musical.

#### WINDS: BREATHING:

For the entire composition, sneak breaths as needed.

#### CLARINET:

In Scene I, the sounding pitches written for Bass Clarinet may be played on Bb Clarinet instead of Bass Clarinet.

#### VIBRAPHONE PEDALING:

The durations of the resonances of vibraphone notes are carefully sculpted for a specific harmonic rhythm. Thus, detailed pedaling indications are notated in the score and parts.

#### VIBRAPHONE MOTOR:

Vibraphone motor is used. The on and off motor indications and motor speeds are notated.

#### PIANO AND HARP:

Freely divide the notes and chords between the hands, especially when all the notes are on one stave.

#### HARP HARMONICS:

Harp harmonics sound one octave higher than written. All harp notes should be “L.V. Molto” unless otherwise specified.

#### CHROMATIC SPELLING:

In making decisions about chromatic spelling of notes, priority was given to the horizontal lines (parts) over the vertical chords (score) so that the individual parts (some of which are transposing instruments) have logical intervallic chromatic spelling.

#### TRILLS:

“WT” next to a trill means to trill a whole step.

“1/2” next to a trill means to trill a half step.

# PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTATION

## PERCUSSION I

Vibraphone — 4 mallets.

Glockenspiel — 4 mallets.

2 Bongo Drums — Tuned high and tight. Higher in pitch than the conga drums of Percussion #2.

2 Wood Blocks (low and high) — Resonant.

Suspended Cymbal (very high) — High shimmering overtones in its resonances.

Splash Cymbal — Vivid-sounding, able to make a sharp, spiky, biting sound.

2 Metal Pipes (or anvils or other resonant metals) (medium and high) — Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

1 Opera Gong (down) — Long glissandi-effect when struck. Should be vivid and almost raucous. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

Zil Bell — Rich, beautiful resonance. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

2 Triangles (very large and small) — Chameleonic timbres. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

Egg shaker (small and egg-shaped) — Held in one hand. Played either with open hand or with closed hand for a quasi-muted sound. Alternatively, sandpaper blocks.

Ratchet (large) — Swung in air. Raucous, theatrical, loud ratchet is ideal.

Vibraslap (high, mounted but also able to be picked up) — Should ring for at least 5 seconds. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence, unless otherwise notated.

2 Flexatones (low and high) — Should sound different from the flexatone played by Percussion #2.

Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) — Should sound different from the tambourine played by Percussion #2. Every attack is “L.V. Molto,” unless otherwise notated.

Slide Whistle — Should sound different from the slide whistle played by Percussion #2.

Wildcard — Scenes IV and VII call for “wildcard” percussion interjections. These should be performed with various instruments selected for their quirky, humorous character and dramatic contribution to the tableaux – example: rubber chicken, whistle.

Kazoo (optional).

## PERCUSSION 2

Marimba (5 octave).

Crotales (2 complete octaves) — 4 brass mallets. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

2 Conga Drums — Lower in pitch than the bongo drums of Percussion #1.

5 Temple Blocks — Beautiful, resonant instruments.

Suspended Cymbal — High shimmering overtones in its resonance.

2 Metal Pipes (or anvils or other resonant metals) (low and medium) — Both should have many high overtones and long resonances. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

Opera Gong (up) — Long glissandi-effect when struck. Vivid and almost raucous. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

Elephant Bell (high) (mounted) — High overtones in its resonances – bright and radiant.

1 pair of 2 Finger Cymbals (high, mounted to be struck easily) — Resonant, pretty, mellifluous-sounding instruments. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence.

2 Triangles (low and medium) — Various kinds of beaters so the triangle notes have chameleonic timbres. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence, unless otherwise notated.

Mark Tree — All notes resonant – let mark tree naturally fade back to silence. Sweep a finger or a stick across bottom of hanging bars to make them ring.

2 Maracas

Vibraslap (high, mounted but also able to be picked up) — Should ring for at least 5 seconds. All notes are resonant, naturally fading back to silence, unless otherwise notated.

Flexatone — Should sound different from the flexatones played by Percussion #1.

Tambourine (mounted, but also able to be picked up) — Should sound different from the tambourine played by Percussion #1. Every attack is “L.V. Molto,” unless otherwise notated.

Slide Whistle — Should sound different from the slide whistle played by Percussion #1.

Wildcard — Scenes IV and VII call for “wildcard” percussion interjections. These should be performed with various instruments selected for their quirky, humorous character and dramatic contribution to the tableaux – example: rubber chicken, whistle.

Kazoo (optional).

The score calls for 4 triangles of differing pitches. Each triangle has a different pitch and timbre, so that each has a unique contribution to the overall sonic palette and so they blend elegantly with the crotales, vibraphone, finger cymbals, metal pipes, and other bell-like sounds. Various beaters.

The score calls for 4 metal pipes (or anvils or other resonant metals). Each has a slightly different pitch and color from one another, so that each of them has a unique contribution to the overall sonic palette and so they blend elegantly with the other bell-like sounds. The length of the ring/resonance and the amount of “ping” one can get is radiant, akin to, for instance, a crotale.

The score calls for 4 membranophones in total, composed of 2 congas and 2 bongos. Each of these drums are tuned differently from each other. The 2 congas are the lowest in pitch, with the 2 bongos higher. The 4 membranophones in this order should form a gradation in pitch with no repetitions.

The score calls for 2 opera gongs, one of which has a pitch bending up, and one of which has a pitch bending down. Both of these pitch-bends are pronounced and markedly distinct.

For the 2 wood blocks and 5 temple blocks – each has a slightly different pitch and color. Unless otherwise specified, the most common beater or mallet. A change in mallet ensures a kaleidoscope of colors between, for instance, two attacks that are close together in time.

## **NOTES FOR VOCALISTS**

### **SKETCH OF KALEIDOSCOPE OF VOCAL SOUNDS:**

Available from the composer.

### **DYNAMIC NUANCES:**

From time to time, a dynamic should be accentuated by subtle dynamic nuances at your discretion. These are marked “w/ slight dynamic nuances” to begin with, and later abbreviated to “w/sdn”.

### **COLLA VOCE:**

Colla Voce is marked often and means that the conductor and ensemble should follow the solo voice and should allow the vocal soloist time to perform with rubato.

### **SPRECHSTIMME:**

The notation “Sprechstimme” indicates to perform the text akin to reading a story with great musical inflection in the voice and body. For these nine opera/music-theater scenes, Sprechstimme should mostly be performed without vibrato. Sprechstimme means a cross between speaking, singing, and acting, where the tone quality of speech is heightened and lowered in pitch along melodic contours indicated in the musical notation including the descriptions of the text to be vocalized. In certain places the actions that are to be physically portrayed will influence and shape the vocal colors. Descriptions are also offered. For example, some of the notated descriptions in this opera include: “whimsical and naughty,” “with hints of outrage,” “ludicrously juvenile,” “yelping,” “spellbound stage whisper,” “like a kid complaining on a car trip,” “muffled speaking due to a mouth full of candy,” “bargaining harder,” and “excited and fluttering with energy.”

### **UNIQUE SONIC PALETTE AND NOTATION:**

Exact pitches, rhythms and dynamics are purposely not notated so that the artists can be flexibly dramatic and the stage director can call for physical movements that do not require the artists to exactly count and subdivide rhythms for entrances. The idea is to allow for a kaleidoscopic array of vocal colors that are, generally speaking, not hard to learn and yet compile and multiply into an exquisite sound tableau.

### VOCAL INTERJECTIONS:

Vocal interjections, quips, laughter, and vocal antics should be kaleidoscopically colorful and ever-varied.

### VIBRATO:

Composer requests that only natural vibrato, produced by an open throat and relaxed voice free of unnecessary tension, is used. The vibrato should have a very clean and clear pitch center. Wide vibrato and/or false vibrato created by incorrect mimicking of the natural vibrato is never wanted. The loud dynamics should never sound like bellowing or yelling and should always have a singing, elegant, musical quality. Generally speaking, the quiet music should, when feasible, be sung without vibrato or with very little vibrato.

### BREATHING:

For the entire composition, sneak breaths as needed.

### DETAILED VOCAL DELIVERY INSTRUCTIONS:

All free-floating texts under a specific pitch should be freely sung on that pitch. All free-floating texts without a specific pitch should be freely spoken, whispered, and Sprechstimme.

Try to stagger entrances and exits with other singers during these passages.

“Dampen” symbols ( ) are used in some free-floating texts to indicate when a phrase should end where it is necessary (i.e. in the absence of notated rhythms).

In free-floating passages without specific rhythms, the text is laid out to illustrate the general intended pacing.

Due to limited space on the page, several phrases are broken across two lines. These should always be read as a single continuous phrase.

For all glissandi, freely pick the pitch range.