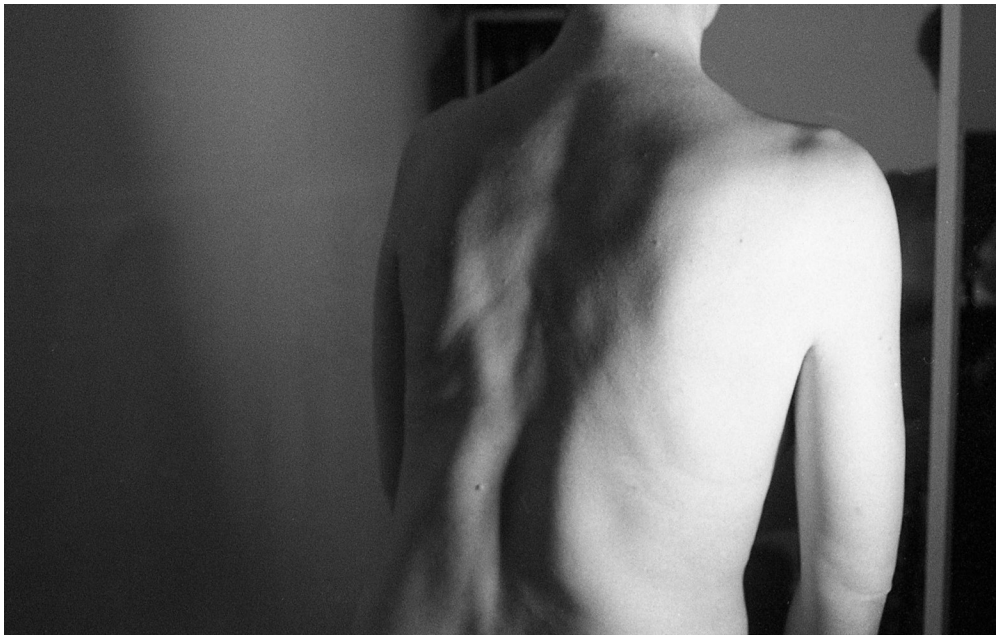

MY
HEART
DANAË
KILLIAN
PIANO
move



MY HEART

Danaë Killian | ***piano and spoken voice***

Danaë Killian
My Prussian Blue Heart for pianist, tarot cards and piano (2017, rev. 2024)
1 movement one *2'41*

Arnold Schoenberg
Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11 (1909)
2 No. 1 mäßige Viertel *3'45*
3 No. 2 mäßige Achtel *6'44*
4 No. 3 bewegte Achtel *2'24*

Howard Dillon
5 ***Möbius*** for solo piano (2012) *8'40*

Christine McCombe
6 ***Asphyxed*** (1991) *5'26*

Danaë Killian
My Prussian Blue Heart
for pianist, tarot cards and piano (2017, rev. 2024)
7 movement two *13'54*

Amelia Barden
8 ***The Seventh Centre*** (1992) *2'01*

Colin McKellar
9 ***Birth Music*** (2006) *9'12*

Gregers Brinch
Two Minds, Op. 73 (2004)
10 No. 1 Two Minds *4'06*
11 No. 2 Reflective Intersections *4'07*
12 No. 3 Homage *4'24*
13 No. 4 Drought *2'43*

Evan J Lawson
14 ***Sikinnis III*** (2015) *7'08*

Danaë Killian
My Prussian Blue Heart for pianist, tarot cards and piano (2017, rev. 2024)
15 movement three *0'39*

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move.com.au
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Danaë Killian
My Prussian Blue Heart
for pianist, tarot cards and piano (2017, rev. 2024)
My Prussian Blue Heart is my response, as a 21st C expressionist pianist living in Naarm–Melbourne, to *Mein Herz [My Heart]* (1911) by German Jewish expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schüler. Else's *Mein Herz* inspires *My Prussian Blue Heart* in undisclosably mysterious and largely symbolic ways. Structured in three movements with two interludes and a postlude, *My Prussian Blue Heart* works with an aleatoric concept of musical composition and pianistic performance, expanded to include creative writing, words spoken out loud, and acts of listening to the imaginative resonances between tarot cards. Improvisatory poetic threads existentially obfuscate the boundaries between Else and me, as both our hearts break. In the two interludes, music by my real-life composer friends, and by Arnold Schoenberg who once gave Else money in a time of need, wraps around our shattered hearts like a colourful unction-soaked bandage. ***Full written instructions for My Prussian Blue Heart's live performance are published in the digital album booklet.*** For the audio recording, movement two has been realised full-scale, whilst movements one and three have been condensed into spoken word miniatures. The interludes are completely filled by other composers' music (as per the written instructions), so have no track listing. *Danaë Killian*

Arnold Schoenberg
***Drei Klavierstücke*, Op. 11 (1909)**
Every composition on the *My Heart* album connects in some way with the groundwork laid by Austrian Jewish expressionist composer Arnold Schoenberg in his epoch-making *Drei Klavierstücke,* Op. 11. More than a hundred years since their creation, these three pieces continue to push musical-linguistic boundaries, doing so with extraordinary imagination and courage. In the early 20th C, Arnold's compositional activity was something of a wrestling-with-death-process as he grappled with the disintegration of familiar aesthetic forms and tropes. In the contemporary music that makes up the rest of *My Heart,* we can experience how Arnolds's death-wrestling was destined to become a birth-giving impulse. A basic assumption of new music, for example, is the preeminence of the intervallic motive—the shaping of musical in-between-ness—over functional tonality's gravitation toward a single centre. This valuing of the restless ambiguity of intervallic in-between-ness, accompanied by the individual search for novel ways of sculpting this musical antispace, was by the late 20th century something usual if not universal amongst composers of art music—it was by then an established fertile ground for creative exploration and freedom; but Arnold had to actively defend this ground, fighting bloodily for the emancipation of the dissonance in a hostile critical environment. No wonder Arnold sometimes sounds a bit cranky in his essays, which is a pity, since crankiness squanders energy and spoils happiness. *Danaë Killian*

Howard Dillon
***Möbius* for solo piano (2012)**
Möbius is a moto-perpetuo type of piece. As the title suggests, *Möbius* turns back on itself relentlessly, one could say obsessively, returning to the gestures and structures presented at the beginning yet never quite repeating itself exactly—until final disintegration. *Howard Dillon*
melbournecomposersleague.com/howard-dillon/

Christine McCombe
***Asphyxed* (1991)**
Asphyxed appears in *Australian Piano Miniatures*, Bk 2 (Melbourne: Red House Editions, 1992).
christinemccombe.com/

Amelia Barden
***The Seventh Centre* (1992)**
The Seventh Centre appears in *Australian Piano Miniatures*, Bk 2 (Melbourne: Red House Editions, 1992).
ameliabarden.com/

Colin McKellar
***Birth Music* (2006)**
Birth Music was written around the time of the Birth of my Daughter Nora. The presentation has since been slightly revised and rescored. The work uses Bell Ringing Charts superimposed over chord progressions from early Jazz Standards;

there is a story to my happening upon both sets of charts. The scale associated with the chord responds to the number order in the permutations, within the specific bell chart being referred to at the time. That material is then interpreted vertically and horizontally, into the structural architecture of the composition.

What is felt in my arms:
Vibration of belonging:
My newborn:
Lifted away with some secret of inner necessity:
What is felt in vibration
Belonging with me in universal peace and calmness.
14.8.24. *Colin McKellar*

melbournecomposersleague.com/colin-mckellar-2

Gregers Brinch
***Two Minds,* Op. 73 (2004)**
Encouraged by fellow composers Dimitri Schmirnow and Elena Firsova, I approached the composing of these four pieces with a degree of freedom that I had not attempted before. The meeting with these two wonderful composers was very inspirational indeed—I had always had the attitude that I would not compose in an atonal idiom unless I felt the need for it. In this case the pieces are not necessarily atonal, but I feel as if I encompass a free atonality in the music. These pieces seek to combine a feeling of lyricism with a soundscape-like quality, in addition to the contrasts of character that are inherent in the juxtaposed themes and voices, which are to be understood as human/divine characteristics. Two Minds, Op. 73, is published by MusicaNeo, Kreuzlingen.
Gregers Brinch
gbrinch.com/

Evan J Lawson
***Sikinnis III* (2015)**
Sikinnis III follows from two previous works: *Sikinnis I* for solo flute (2010) and *Sikinnis II* for flute, viola and harp (2013). A sikinnis is a vigorous dance performed during a satyr play in ancient Greek theatre. These dances are strongly associated with the half-faun character of satyrs and explore hyper-masculine/male fantasy. In my own works titled *Sikinnis*, I explore the idea of dance, joy and sexuality generally. In each *Sikkinis* I contrast two musical ideas, with different aural outcomes, and (to me) different emotional experiences. In this third *Sikinnis* I'm most interested in the muddy, almost overly resonant textures, as at the beginning of the piece. To me there is a fascinating melancholy in the sustained sounds available with use of the piano's pedal. Generally these moments arise from the lower register of the piano to then focus on more hyperactive rhythms. This is contrasted with higher register material which is less rhythmically rapid and more focused on melody, line and a sense of sparkly-ness. There is a third element in block chords, which help form a basis for the ongoing resonance of the piece. *Sikinnis III* is published by BabelScores, Paris.
Evan J Lawson
evanjlawson.com/

Recording by Vaughan McAlley and Martin Wright at Move Records studio 2012, 2021, and 2025
Editing by Vaughan McAlley
Mastering by Martin Wright
Yamaha C7 piano tuned and maintained by Benjamin Briggs
Design by Martin Wright
Front cover image: *Danaë Killian*, 2017, Jeremy Scerri
Back cover image: *Expired Relationship*, 2018, Mignon Killian

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AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL FUND.ORG.AU

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Dr Danaë Killian is an expressionist pianist known for her intense originality and interpretive power. A passionate champion of modern art music, Danaë Killian has given premiere performances throughout Australia, Europe, China, New Zealand, and the USA. In Naarm-Melbourne, Danaë is a Forest Collective core artist, freelance recitalist, and an AMEB examiner. Danaë has been a University of Melbourne Honorary Fellow and has received prestigious awards including the Australian Alumni (W G Walker) Fulbright Scholarship, the Helen Macpherson Smith Scholarship, an Australian Postgraduate Award, and an Endeavour Postdoctoral Research Fellowship. Among her many recordings is the critically lauded *Arnold Schoenberg: Complete Works for Piano Solo* (Move Records, 2014).

forestcollective.com.au/danae-killian



Danaë Killian
***My Prussian Blue Heart* for pianist, tarot cards and piano (2017, rev. 2024)**
My Prussian Blue Heart is a musical composition in three movements notated mostly in the form of lucid instructions concealed within a fanciful text. The full written instructions for *My Prussian Blue Heart's* live performance are published in this digital album booklet. On the audio recording, movement two is realised full-scale, whilst movements one and three are condensed into spoken word miniatures.

Arnold Schoenberg
***Drei Klavierstücke, Op. 11* (1909)**
Every composition on the *My Heart* album connects in some way with the groundwork laid by expressionist composer Arnold Schoenberg in his epoch-making *Drei Klavierstücke,* Op. 11. More than a hundred years since their creation, these three pieces continue to push musical-linguistic boundaries, doing so with extraordinary imagination and courage. In the early 20th C, Arnold's compositional activity was something of a wrestling-with-death-process as he grappled with the disintegration of familiar aesthetic forms and tropes. In the contemporary music that makes up the rest of *My Heart,* we can experience how Arnolds's death-wrestling was destined to become a birth-giving impulse. A basic assumption of new music, for example, is the preeminence of the intervallic motive—the shaping of musical in-between-ness—over functional tonality's gravitation toward a single centre. This valuing of the restless ambiguity of intervallic in-between-ness, accompanied by the individual search for novel ways of sculpting this musical antispace, was by the late 20th century something usual if not universal amongst composers of art music—it was by then an established fertile ground for creative exploration and freedom; but Arnold had to actively defend this ground, fighting bloodily for the emancipation of the dissonance in a hostile critical environment. No wonder Arnold sometimes sounds a bit cranky in his essays, which is a pity, since crankiness squanders energy and spoils happiness. *Danaë Killian*

Howard Dillon
***Möbius* for solo piano (2012)**
"Your compositional voice is the realization of those little moments of dissatisfaction you have with the music of your heroes." Chris Thile, interviewed by Rick Beato, 23/10/2025
Möbius is a moto-perpetuo type of piece. As the title suggests, *Möbius* turns back on itself relentlessly, one could say obsessively, returning to the gestures and structures presented at the beginning yet never quite repeating itself exactly—until final disintegration. *Howard Dillon*

Australian composer Howard Dillon's interests extend to electro-acoustic music and sound installations alongside more traditional instrumental works, including music for community and educational projects. Between 1997 and 2006, Howard organized the Elbow Room Concert Series highlighting the work of local composers in non-traditional venues on behalf of the Melbourne Composers' League. Howard's music has been programmed by Astra, the Melbourne Composers' League, Monash University, Forest Collective, and the Asian Music Festival in Bangkok and Tokyo. His sound installations have been exhibited at the Linden Gallery and the National Gallery of Victoria. Howard Dillon holds a master's degree in composition from La Trobe University.
https://www.melbournecomposersleague.com/howard-dillon/

Christine McCombe
***Asphyxed* (1991)**
Christine McCombe is a composer, digital artist, writer, and lecturer, who lives and works in Naarm-Melbourne, Australia. Christine holds a PhD in Composition from the University of Edinburgh and is the recipient of the Dorian Le Galienne Award, The Lyrebird Music Society A.N.A. Prize, the Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Fellowship, a Centre Acanthes bursary, a Bundanon Artists Trust Residency, and the Pythia Prize. Christine's work is regularly performed internationally and throughout Australia. The CD *Christine McCombe: three kinds of silence* was released on Tall Poppies in 2018. Of her work, Christine says: "I think music should aspire to create a space for contemplation. Every piece of music I write or work that I create strives for this in different ways but a common thread is the strangeness and beauty of human experience." *Asphyxed* appears in *Australian Piano Miniatures*, Bk 2 (Melbourne: Red House Editions, 1992).
https://christinemccombe.com/

Amelia Barden
***The Seventh Centre* (1992)**
Naarm-Melbourne-based screen composer Amelia Barden creates subtle and dynamic original music, which permeates the depths of storytelling. Amelia won an AGSC Award in the category Best Music for an Animation for her work on the short film "Ashputtle or the Mother's Ghost." She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the theVictorian College of the Arts and a Grad. Dip. in Music Technology from La Trobe University. *The Seventh Centre* appears in *Australian Piano Miniatures*, Bk 2 (Melbourne: Red House Editions, 1992). http://www.ameliabarden.com/

Colin McKellar
***Birth Music* (2006)**
Birth Music was written around the time of the Birth of my Daughter Nora. The presentation has since been slightly revised and rescored. The work uses Bell Ringing Charts superimposed over chord progressions from early Jazz Standards; there is a story to my happening upon both sets of charts. The scale associated with the chord responds to the number order in the permutations, within the specific bell chart being referred to at the time. That material is then interpreted vertically and horizontally, into the structural architecture of the composition.

We prayed that the souls in the cemetery,
With the stillness of mild winter sunshine
Rested peacefully;
But that their spirits burnt brightly in the heavens
To kick up Hell on Earth for the unbelievers.
What is felt in my arms:
Vibration of belonging:
My newborn:
Lifted away with some secret of inner necessity:
What is felt in vibration
Belonging with me in universal peace and calmness.
14.8.24. *Colin McKellar*

Colin McKellar has a strong background in the practice of poetry/painting and music. A turning point in musical influence came in his late teens, in the form of Experimental Free Jazz. Playing and teaching piano and trumpet has acted as a point of leverage into ensemble writing. Growing up in a rural community, and later attending a very free thinking art school in a rural environment, has shaped an open horizon of artistic interest, without a predominance of technical and formalistic presumptions. To operate within a peer environment has been crucial, firstly at art school, and now as a member of the Melbourne Composer's League. Through The Melbourne Composer's League he has enjoyed having a variety of pieces performed by some outstanding players. This has been an important learning experience, and led to wider awareness of developmental advancement in the art of, and enthusiasm for contemporary composition.
https://www.melbournecomposersleague.com/colin-mckellar-2

Gregers Brinch
***Two Minds,* Op. 73 (2004)**
Encouraged by fellow composers Dimitri Schmirnow and Elena Firsova, I approached the composing of these four pieces with a degree of freedom that I had not attempted before. The meeting with these two wonderful composers was very inspirational indeed—I had always had the attitude that I would not compose in an atonal idiom unless I felt the need for it. In this case the pieces are not necessarily atonal, but I feel as if I encompass a free atonality in the music. These pieces seek to combine a feeling of lyricism with a soundscape-like quality, in addition to the contrasts of character that are inherent in the juxtaposed themes and voices, which are to be understood as human/divine characteristics. *Two Minds,* Op. 73, is published by MusicaNeo, Kreuzlingen. *Gregers Brinch*

Gregers Brinch is a native of Denmark, but being, as he says, a cosmopolitan, Gregers has also resided in Germany and the UK, where he was educated at Michael Hall Steiner School. Gregers decided as a young person to pursue musical composition after seeing the movie *Amadeus*, which awoke his particular interest in the experience of inspiration. Music and inspiration have thus been focus of enquiry and striving throughout Gregers's career, which has seen him working with many top musicians, as well as teaching countless individuals from all around the world. Gregers's tireless endeavour to bring high quality music to any setting or person continues to open new avenues, including the launch of several albums of his music on the Claudio Contemporary label. His

most recent work includes the opera *The Bridge* based on Goethe's Fairy Tale. With composer Nicholas Korth, Gregers is developing a new instrument—the harmonic sail—which is specially constructed to add both the harmonic and subharmonic series to concert performances of their music.
https://gbrinch.com/

Evan J Lawson
***Sikinnis III* (2015)**
Sikinnis III follows from two previous works: *Sikinnis I* for solo flute (2010) and *Sikinnis II* for flute, viola and harp (2013). A sikinnis is a vigorous dance performed during a satyr play in ancient Greek theatre. These dances are strongly associated with the half-faun character of satyrs and explore hyper-masculine/male fantasy. In my own works titled *Sikinnis,* I explore the idea of dance, joy and sexuality generally. In each *Sikkinis* I contrast two musical ideas, with different aural outcomes, and (to me) different emotional experiences. In this third *Sikinnis* I'm most interested in the muddy, almost overly resonant textures, as at the beginning of the piece. To me there is a fascinating melancholy in the sustained sounds available with use of the piano's pedal. Generally these moments arise from the lower register of the piano to then focus on more hyperactive rhythms. This is contrasted with higher register material which is less rhythmically rapid and more focused on melody, line and a sense of sparkly-ness. There is a third element in block chords, which help form a basis for the ongoing resonance of the piece. *Sikinnis III* is published by BabelScores, Paris. *Evan J Lawson*

Evan J Lawson is one of Australia's leading queer artists, working at the forefront of contemporary culture as a composer, writer, curator, singer and conductor. Evan is a founding member and artistic director of interdisciplinary company Forest Collective. He is the creator of several critically acclaimed, unorthodox music-theatre presentations: the operas *Calypso* (2013), *Orpheus* (2019), and *The Sea* (2023), and the immersive dance-opera-piano concerto *Labyrinth* (2024). Evan's music has been performed at the Melbourne International Arts Festival, Metropolis New Music Festival, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Bendigo International festival of Exploratory Music, Dublin Theatre Festival, Midsumma Festival, and the Universities of Meboune, Texas and Paris. As a conductor, Evan has collaborated with companies including the Melbourne and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras, Moravska Filarmonie, and Tonkünstler Orchester, and has served as assistant conductor to Brett Dean, Christopher Hogwood, and Warwick Stengards.
https://www.evanjlawson.com/

My Prussian Blue Heart

for pianist, tarot cards, and piano

a musical composition in three movements, notated mostly in the form of lucid instructions concealed within a fanciful text

by Danaë Killian

Composed and first performed in 2017, revised 2024

to dearest Suzanne who told me words belong to everyone even me

Composer's Note

My Prussian Blue Heart is my response, as a 21st-C expressionist pianist living in Naarm–Melbourne, to *Mein Herz* [*My Heart*] (1911) by German-Jewish expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schüler. Else's *Mein Herz* inspires *My Prussian Blue Heart* in undisclosably mysterious and largely symbolic ways.[1] Structured in three movements with interludes and postlude, *My Prussian Blue Heart* works with an aleatoric concept of musical composition and pianistic performance, expanded to include creative writing, words spoken out loud, and acts of listening to the imaginative resonances between tarot cards.

Some of *My Prussian Blue Heart's* text is drawn from my imaginal exposure sessions in a clinical trial conducted by Phoenix Australia—Centre for Post-Traumatic Mental Health, The University of Melbourne. Some words are quotations, in the original German or translated into English, from Else Lasker-Schüler's work (with citations in the footnotes). Most of the words in the creatively written instructions are mine, and most of the words are *not* meant to be said out loud in performance. It is up to the pianist performing the work to decide (within the bounds of my instructions) which words, if any, will make up their spoken word script.

The first performance of *My Prussian Blue Heart* took place on Michaelmas Night, 29 September 2017, at St Stephen's Richmond as part of Melbourne Fringe. The occasion was my solo piano recital *My Heart*, which featured music by Arnold Schoenberg, premieres of virtuosic works by contemporary composers Howard Dillon, Colin McKellar, Gregers Brinch and Evan J Lawson, and concentrated miniatures by Christine McCombe and Amelia Barden.[2]

This revised version of *My Prussian Blue Heart* was first performed in October 2024 as part of Forest Collective's *It's a Matter of Time* series at the Eleventh Hour Theatre.

My Prussian Blue Heart is included on my solo piano album *My Heart,* a Move Records CD launched at the Melbourne Recital Centre on 22 January 2026 as part of Midsumma Festival.

Danaë Killian

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[1] Else Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz: Ein Liebesroman mit Bildern und wirklich lebenden Menschen* [1912], www.projekt-gutenberg.org/lasker/meinherz/. Else Lasker-Schüler, *My Heart: A Novel of Love, with Pictures and Real, Living People*, trans. Sheldon Gilman and Robert Levine (Amsterdam: November Editions, 2016).

[2] Arnold Schönberg, *Drei Klavierstücke,* Op. 11 (Vienna: Universal, 1910 rev. 1924); Howard Dillon, *Möbius* (unpublished, 2012); Colin McKellar, *Birth Music* (unpublished, 2006); Gregers Brinch, *Two Minds: Four Pieces for Solo Piano, Op. 73* (Kreuzlingen: MusicaNeo, 2004); Evan J Lawson, *Sikinnis III* (Paris: BabelScores, 2015); Christine McCombe, *"Asphyxed,"* in *Australian Piano Miniatures, Book 2* (Burnley: Red House, 1992), 7; Amelia Barden, *"The Seventh Centre,"* in *Australian Piano Miniatures, Book 2* (Burnley: Red House, 1992), 15.

Instrumentation

PIANIST

The pianist might be the reincarnation of German Expressionist poet Else Lasker-Schüler. The pianist's gender is hermetic—she has the queerly secret gender of a medieval unicorn. Though going proudly by the pronouns she/her/herselves, she might be a boy. A real pianist should be chosen to literally personify—to sound through—this pianist who is an instrument and who might be the reincarnation of a poet. In her tactile interactions with the tarot cards, as with the piano, the pianist works at the intersection of fate and chance. She looks everywhere for her Prussian blue heart, which might be her lost wedding ring.

TAROT CARDS

The tarot cards make a material, mystical, magical metaphor for the keys of the piano. In movements one and three, the tarot cards expand figuratively in parallel motion with the untouched keys of the piano. From the tarot's double arcana of 78 cards, the pianist draws out unique-to-this-moment signifying structures of psychically harmonic resonance. The tarot cards live in a small mauve bucket. Ideally the cards bear the Kabbala-infused images conceived for them by Fellow of the Rosy Cross Arthur Edward Waite in 1909, but any other pack might be used if it has an existing close relationship with the real pianist who has been chosen to sound through the instrument that is an imaginary pianist (and reincarnated poet). After each performance or sequence of performances, the tarot cards should be given away to a friend or to a lost person.

PIANO

The piano is blue, blauereiterlichesblau. Ever since the world went rotten the rats have been dancing in the piano's broken-down clitter-clatter-clacker-click keyboard action. [3]
A real grand piano, of magnificent quality, of any hue, should be chosen to personify this broken-down blauereiterlichesblue piano (which is upright and stands alone in the dark by the dank cellar door).[4] The real grand piano has the unfulfilled form of a heart, with wings. Inside are 88 gold nerves.

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[3] This sentence is a rough translation of some words, and an allusion to other words, in Else Lasker-Schüler's 1943 poem "Mein Blaues Klavier": 'Seitdem die Welt verrohte. // … Nun tanzen die Ratten in Geklirr. // Zerbrochen ist die Klaviatür . . . . .' Else Lasker-Schüler, *Die Gedichte:* 1902–1943, ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 337.

[4] 'Stands in the dark by the dank cellar door' is likewise a rough, modified translation of words in "Mein Blaues Klavier": 'Es steht in Dunkel der Kellartür.' Ibid.

My Prussian Blue Heart

Movement One

No one can see her. The pianist is crouching down and curling herself up between the spare chairs at the back of the temple. She is praying a bit, sometimes dreaming of her mother in heaven, who might help her when she crawls out of the dark. Voices of friends and strangers fall in fragments and flakes of snow into her hiding place: a stream of sanguine voices has been flowing through the open oak doors and along the aisles, flowingly, fragmentarily, brightly oblivious to what nature of listening—to what precise, still silence—the pianist will soon (ferociously) exact from her audience. The pianist is wearing her gold wedding dress whose silk is perished (but only a *little* perished—there is still hope). The little, loosening, cherished gold silk threads shine promisingly in the dusk above the pianist's squashed knees. Her ankle has gone to sleep and is tingling like a burnt star.

The tarot cards are lying face-down drowned in their bucket of emptiness. They see nothing. They say something. Hush!

Out there in the wind, in front of the altar, my heart is open like a piano. Who am I?

A lamp blazes in the rough wind. It is shielded by violets and cannot be blown out. Mossy fabric falls all the way from the table onto the floor. All the notes for the pianist are held in the slipping green. The notes are bound in gold stars and gift paper.

And a sword plunges into my heart.

Now the pianist comes tripping in, hieratic and skipping, holding her small mauve bucket in which the tarot cards lie dying like Gahmuret with his diamond helmet alchemically pierced and flushed with blood in Arabia.[5] With her bucket of cards swooshing against her hip, the pianist crosses the hard stone altar and talks out loud:

"Nights I wander the world's city streets, looking for you and talking to you, my heart."

The bright sanguine people smile like friends. Even the strangers do. It would be a lot better if no one smiled. But the pianist's voice has touched these people's surfaces faintly, so that smiles issue forth, welcomingly, encouragingly. The smiling is all a bit silly—inessential. But at least the people have stopped their flowing and falling in fragments and flakes. Instead they are heavily seated. They scratch at their paper programs for help waking up.

The pianist halts lightly, her centre of gravity the star just over her head. Gravely and fervently, "Please—show me my heart," she implores.

Now she is sitting at a low table stage right. The table is really two piano stools wound all the way down. They are covered over with a carmine velvet cloth found auspiciously in an op shop on the pianist's birthday. I can't remember whether she'd prefer to sit in a carved, curved wooden chair in front of her birthday ocean of velvet rubies, or rather to listen to the waves washing in whilst she knelt on the shore. I just can't remember… But probably there is a chair on the disappearing floor; a chair in which the pianist sits, like a pianist. This chair is oriented to the low table (which is really a pair of piano stools hiding under the Red Sea) *exactly* as the other piano stool over there—out there, in the middle of everything—is oriented to the piano.

The girl-boy pianist with the bucket, having implored the revelation of her heart, puts her bucket down on the table. The bucket handle turns to face the heavily seated people, and at last they stop smiling. The tarot cards float toward the surface of emptiness and the girl-boy receives them two-dimensionally into her hands and almost into her hidden heart. Her hands are two flat pentagrams; her heart is sculpted fluidly and three-dimensionally in the proportions of the golden ratio. Her heart is made of cyanide and rust. Her fingers flicker radiantly with the metamorphosed life

[5] Gahrumet is the father of the protagonist in Wolfram von Eschenbach's 13th century grail saga *Parzival*.

of a butterfly. The butterfly has long since escaped her grasp, but its life still moves in her fingertips, as if it saw and heard something wondrous in their touch. Tracing the life of a butterfly all the way from her fingertips, through her nerves and through her blue veins, all the way into her heart, the pianist holds the tarot cards close against her chest, face-down deep-down into her chest, and listens. Hush! She listens to the trace of the life of a butterfly for a very long time.

Gracefully quaint, the pianist is also remarkably clumsy. Her movements are attuned to some other universe of spatial relations than the strange one we inhabit. She has no gift for mechanics. Nor is she adept at card shuffling, not in the slightest. It wouldn't surprise me if she dropped her bundle of cards now, quite accidentally, and in one fell moment lost everything: the whole plot and all her worldly fortune. But she listens, slowly, for a very long time, and the grace of her listening saves her from such a fate.

Instead of shuffling, the pentagrammic pianistic butterfly hands linger over each card individually, and over the infinitesimal dark spaces between each card, rhythmically over one card after another, delicately and meditatively, as the pianist slowly, wakefully, blindly changes their order. (The cards become the waves of Virginia Woolf.) [6]

She (the pianist not Virginia Woolf)— She probes. She yearns and renounces all yearning. The refined, pure power of a perfectly articulated wish combines, in her rhythmical lingering and listening, with an unbounded openness to any unintended clumsy result. Inside the innermost alchemy of her listening, within which crucible her Prussian blue yearning renounces all yearning, this pianist-boy-girl-soul's desire combines with the power of its own spiritual negation, burns the food on the stove, and makes an offering out of the ruins.

That is the essence of it—this is my confession: the clumsiness that burns the food on the stove is what makes religion and ultimately all philosophy, as well as drama, chemistry, and fortune-telling, possible. So says my wildly hypothesizing heart.

Above all, though, she (the boy-girl who is not Virginia) listens not just as an incompetent scullery maid but as though she were a pianist playing a piano—until slowly her ten fingers begin drawing out cards while her voice opens out into words. From right to left, one at a time, the pianist lays out the drawn-out cards with their faces cast down in a form she calls the Pythagorean Pyramid. She lays them out on the low red table in ascending, right-to-left-moving rows of four, three, and two, followed by one card laid out alone. The words she speaks, one independent clause per card, are incantatory yet plain—conventionally magical (for they are not yet inspired):

"Show me my heart in the element of fire; show me my heart in the element of air; show me my heart in the element of water; show me my heart in the element of earth."

In her voice she has outlined a square. On the table there are four cards walking across the Red Sea.

"Show me my heart erupting in a stink of sulphur; show me my heart quivering and shining in a globe of quicksilver; show me my heart entombed in a cube of salt."

In her voice she has outlined a triangle. On the table there are three cards skipping through a meadow of red plush.

"Show me my heart singing in the ethereal blue-violet of the midnight sun; show me my heart flooding the ark of the noontide moon."

She has outlined an opposition. On the table there is grief. The two cards are an open wound. Her voice has grown strange with pain. (Truth be told, though, her voice was already growing strange and off-course whilst she laid out the *second* row of cards; what she *actually* said then, as she laid out the second row of tarot cards, has been faithfully transcribed and attached to this movement in an Appendix.)

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[6] The allusion made here to Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) is a non-specific literary-ontological and cultural-mythological one. The specific reference, though, is to Woolf's novel *The Waves* and to such sequences of words in that text as the following: 'Gradually as the sky whitened the grey cloth became barred with thick strokes moving, one after another, beneath the surface, following each other, pursuing each other, perpetually' (London: Hogarth, 1931), 5.

In between laying out each row of a particular number of tarot cards, in between speaking each stanza made of a particular number of independent clauses, the pianist has been bringing all remaining cards close-without-touching to her heart in order to turn their order over. She has been folding them into each other, folding them over amongst and between themselves, probingly, for the precise number of blindly turning folds that agrees with the number of cards to be laid out in the next row.

Now only one card remains waiting to be drawn; or rather, each of 69 cards remains waiting and hoping to be the last one drawn. I am not sure which one of these two statements is factually correct. But it is true that only one card is still to be drawn—so all the cards clamour and grasp at the boy-girl's heart, all in a rush, all wildness and chaos. But hush! The pianist holds the remaining tarot cards fast against her grieving heart under still, crossed hands, until the noise subsides. Together the cards and the pianist listen to the slow breathing of a faraway, musically turning, eccentrically orbiting planet. All heads are bowed. All eyes are closed.

"Show me my heart," commands the pianist, in the lopsided tempo of the faraway planet. Slowly she stirs the tarot cards once, while singing:

"Eh—yi-e—ä–…"

Precariously now the butterfly fingers find the last card to be drawn, the wrist unfurls a wing, and the pianist's right arm opens its inner surface, extending itself obliquely towards the people (heavily seated, smiling, in a church) to show them the face-down precious treasure now straddling her stretched-apart finger-bones. It is like the birth of a singleton child (in a hospital, surrounded by essential people, a clear-faced clock looking on).

Never mind the many pints of blood falling out. The pianist blazes into rapturous conviction:

"Ich habe dich gewählt

Unter allen Sternen!"[7]

She places her newborn card reverently into the Red Sea, onto the tip of the underwater pyramid she has built there using magic. Meanwhile, unminded, the unchosen cards fall like stars into a starless heaven, back into their bucket of emptiness. (That is what it means to be discarded in life. So says my wildly ravaged heart.)

The pianist stands up to explain herself properly to all the people witnessing this strange Pythian ritual instead of the piano recital they have paid to hear. "I wanted, you see," she says wistfully, reproachingly, disappointedly, confidingly, "to open a fortune-telling salon called 'Schweigt mir von Rom.' But since none of you has ever asked me what I might mean by this mysterious instruction not to talk about Rome—no, you have passed over it in silence—how could *strangers* be taken in? I would do better peddling genie lamps door-to-door. [8]

"Schweigt mir von Rom! Listen (boys!)—listen (Herwarth!)—listen!

"Listen together with my rudi-steiner-rosicrucian-moroccan prince in the Romanischen Café that even now, more than a century on, storms into my remembering heart with wild blue herzeloydisch heart-slicing sleet—

"Listen (there in the storm; together with him the prince) to the music that thrums along my blue-veined wrists and up my stretched-apart finger-bones which are fluttering full of bumpily metamorphosed caterpillar-life.

"Listen to me play Schoenberg."

With that, the boy-girl-unicorn pianist (who might be the reincarnation of a poet but is not Virginia Woolf) seats herself at the blue piano whose heart has blown open under the raging wind. And as she begins to play the *Drei Klavierstücke,* Opus 11, by Arnold

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[7] Else Lasker-Schüler, "Heimlich zur Nacht" [1917], *Die Gedichte:* 1902–1943, ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 246.

[8] Modified translation of the following passage from Else Lasker-Schüler's *Mein Herz,* op. cit:
Liebe Jungens, warum fragt Ihr mich nie an, was ich mit dem geheimnisvollen: Schweigt mir von Rom gemeint hab? Ich wollte mir nämlich einen Wahrsagesalon eröffnen, »Schweigt mir von Rom« – aber da Ihr beide stillschweigend darüber hinweggegangen seid, wie sollen da die Fremden hereinfallen. Ich gehe nun lieber hausieren.

Schoenberg,[9] a rapt and solemn silence like the silence of Prussian blue—ferociously exacted—falls upon her audience.

APPENDIX [10]

This is what she *actually* said as she laid out her wheely whorl of cards. First her voice disappeared under a shivery blanket:

"H s-hhh-f— sh-hhh-f—"

Then it reappeared in a crystal:

"I

"I

"I can't say the word I—

"Ich. Ich. Ich.

"It.

"It is the end of Tuesday."

Tuesday is made of iron. On Saturday (after nightfall) she said:

"Can't sleep.

"Animals in my bed.

"…

"…

"My heart is pressed raging into a vice as I lie in the bed of bereavement and take into my consciousness severely and with certainty that he-whose-name-I-cannot-speak is about to sail to Arabia, there to consecrate double his life with the Swedish pain-footed conch-snail poetess Archangel Nell,[11] who once-upon-a-time in QuFu served me with herbal medicines and occult waters and called me her Queen and willed me murdered dead.[12] Our bed is still rich and sulphurous with my husband's dreamlife; and this density of animal, masculine dreamstuff burns my mattress and all my peace away. I wish it were that instead of febrile animals I found beauty and comfort in golden traces of good dreams left for me faithfully under my pillow, but it is not so; my husband's limbs are on fire in the sheets he slept in and left, and my blue necklace broke today, and my red glasses too. All the tokens are dead."

Then she erased those too-many words stung with details-focussed jealousy and uttered in 19th-century Lucy Snowe[13] rhythms. The words once erased had never been spoken. It was the end of Tuesday. She drew something in the sand and tried again:

"I wasn't there…

"I had to freeze forever…

"And he would never wake up.

"…

"…

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[9] Arnold Schönberg, *Drei Klavierstücke,* Opus 11 (Vienna: Universal, 1909 rev. 1924). The work, first performed by Etta Werndorff in Vienna in 1910, received its Berlin premiere in February 1912, in that 1911–1912 season in which Lasker-Schüler's *Briefe aus Norwegen,* later published as *Mein Herz,* appeared in the Berlin literary magazine *Der Sturm*. The *Briefe* [Letters] were addressed to Lasker-Schüler's husband Herwarth Walden (1878–1941), founder of *Der Sturm*. They would divorce on 1 November 1912. See: Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Works*, trans. Humphrey Searle (Richmond, UK: Oneworld Classics—Overture, 2011), 127, 161; Jakob Hessing, "My Heart: An Introduction," in Else Lasker-Schüler, My Heart, trans. Gilman and Levine, op. cit., p. xiii; and Betty Falkenberg, *Else Lasker-Schüler: A Life* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 52, 76–77.

[10] The Appendix draws partially upon my words recorded in imaginal exposure sessions during a clinical trial (the IMPACT trial) conducted by Phoenix Australia—Centre for Post-Traumatic Mental Health, The University of Melbourne, in 2020.

[11] Nell Walden (née Nelly Roslund 1887–1975) was Herwarth Walden's wife from 1912 to 1924. Their romantic relationship began while Else Lasker-Schüler was writing *Mein Herz*, and Herwarth married Nell immediately after his divorce from Else. See Betty Falkenberg, *Else Lasker-Schüler: A Life* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 75–77.

[12] Once upon a time in real life, a man fell in love with a woman he thought was the reincarnation of Nelly Sachs. The woman lived in Shandong.

[13] Lucy Snowe is the protagonist of Charlotte Brontë's 1853 novel *Villette*.

"Eventually it sort of ended… because he with…draw…s… and all the poisonous grey… the poison was put on my stomach…

"That's the worst thing—it's there forever—it's poison… and that's where my will died, that's where I'm lame—it's *me*—this big cold grey…

"thing…

"that was supposed to protect me.

"…

"Forced to swallow other people's will for me…

"I wasn't hungry, and I didn't want to eat. I am telling the truth.

"…

"…

"Pain through my left buttock searing down my leg dissolving in pins and needles sticking into my ankle, blurring my toes: sciatica and peripheral neuropathy make a crushed-star after-lunch dizzying distraction to the dark grey stingray feeling welling in my filled-up abdomen."

And this is what she desperately never said at all:

"My hips are edgy and frail—there's a dead space framed between them—an inverted dirty triangle without adornment, asking questions it's not allowed to ask. My genitals feel thin and liable; apologetically, enragingly meek; almost … rebellious and backtalking.

"Then a smash-bang of violence aimed in a boiling jet of water straight at her (it, me). A red lambswool jumper screaming 'Liar!' The angry inverted triangular forehead of an enragedly righteous man, whose black smooth hair is roped tight into a ponytail like a Manchurian Queue or like the ebony swathes of an innocent, unadorned, Venus-in-Virgo Schneewittchen. Him. And the teapot smashing and banging and breaking over and over again in my mind, in the kitchen, onto my thighs.

"He doesn't apologize.

"…

"…

"… ."

Interlude

The pianist embarks at last upon the piano recital her audience has paid for. Following the Schoenberg, her program embraces the music of her own midnight city, played in her own time, with heart. While she is playing this music, whose composers are really living people that aren't herself, *My Prussian Blue Heart* exists in a suspended state.

If she likes, the pianist might at odd times pierce the dense texture of Schoenberg's *Drei Klavierstücke* with words taken from Lasker-Schüler's *Mein Herz* and whispered in English. I like the following words especially much:

> Dear Herwarth! My heart is very sick … Herwarth, yesterday evening my heart was granite red, I could hear, taste the colour in my mouth. My heart was the sunset, and sank. … I died of sunset. … Dear Herwarth, I am very sad, I hear weeping all day long in the city. — But [when] I turned around, it was me. I weep, Herwarth, because someone is angry at me. … [M]y soul has melted, emerald and ruby and sapphire pour down it, as well as moonstone, like multicolored springs. … I no longer have a secret; my heart cannot keep one, my heart lies open to the world. Oceans come and pour the secrets of the heart onto the land, it awakens at daybreak and dies at sunset. But my heart is still made of silk, I can close it like a case.[14]

Or these stanzas and sentences, read in reverse sequence:

> What should I do,
> If you are not there.
>
> From my lids
> Black snow drops;
>
> When I am dead,
> Play with my soul.
>
> …

---

[14] Else Lasker-Schüler, *My Heart*, trans. Sheldon Gilman and Robert Levine, op. cit., 57–58.

> It was night when your letter arrived; I had just hanged myself; only in the morning I could not find the tree again. … I am still very shaken by the hanging and by everything associated with it. [15]

Try not to say too many of such words. Outside their context, outside their German language, they lose sonorous vigour. But if they can be cut up and collaged, the way Schoenberg's Op. 11 No. 3 is thematically cut up and collaged, they might bleed back into life.

Movement Two

Spielzeug: a rose quartz crystal with a soft round form; a clear quartz crystal with sharp edges; an e-bow; an antique sterling silver bonbon fork; a Moroccan leather-bound 1922 edition of Schönberg's Harmonielehre, ready to drop leadenly onto the piano strings; coloured chalk and stickers for orientation on the strings.

The pianist plucks three high tones out of the blue, then shimmers along the central nerve strands of her open heart piano, saying: "Stars put themselves to bed for the night in your blue soul." [16]

Then she starts playing a gentle Moldavian lullaby that rests on chicken legs. (The lullaby is scribbled down somewhere amongst these sheets of paper. It's full of quarter tone approximations.) After three bars, she interrupts herself to sing and laugh in a melody of half-flats and double-dots. Suddenly, she finds herself in the Appendix to Movement One, reading out what the pianist *actually* said as she laid out her wheely whorl of cards. She accompanies her words with scratches, tremoli, and e-bowed crystals of tone, until she reaches the animals in her bed. Then she returns to the Moldavian lullaby, beginning again, playing those opening three bars another two times. Her left hand doubles its tones into dark chocolate octaves.

Leaving the sustaining pedal down, turning her face obliquely from the audience to hide the breathlessness of her shame, the pianist speaks rapidly into the protective wing of the raised piano lid:

"My heart is pressed in a vice [etc. etc. … there are probably too many words here] … All the tokens are dead."

Wildly her voice searches inside the piano for her heart until she realises what she has to do: erase the words and draw something new called APHIEMI into the sand. Her fantasy of vengeance flops into soft lead.

"And he would never wake up," she says, in a dream. The lullaby rolls on another three bars, pianissimo yet shapely. Dissociated.

The pianist seems to be remembering something rotting that happened a long time ago to a child. The words still emanate from the Appendix to Movement One. Eventually it sort of ended, said the child. Eventually she worked out that the child was telling the truth and that the child's name was I.

Under the pianist's caterpillar hands, the lullaby sounds its bars three to six again, mezzo piano and shapely. Divorced.

Now her voice turns silly and lost in wide careening pitches talking about bodily aches. We have come to a bizarre place in this story of heartbreak. A bird sits on the pianist's belly, singing of crushed stars.

The lullaby sounds its bars four to seven in a flammable crescendo that crowns in virtuoso octaves, ninths, nothings…

She sings her lapsing outrage. Then it is gone. He doesn't apologize.

Butterflies flit across the final bars of her lullaby. Then she crosses her hands across her chest and closes her eyes.

"Gar keine Sonne ist mehr," recites the pianist from Else Lasker-Schüler's *Mein Herz*.

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[15] Ibid., 68–69.

[16] This sentence is a variation upon Lasker-Schüler's 'Auf deiner blauen Seele / Setzen sich die Sterne zur Nacht' [On your blue soul the stars settle themselves for the night]. Else Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz*, op. cit.

"Aber dein Angesicht scheint.

"Lauter Gold ist dein Lachen,

"Mein Herz tanzt in den Himmel.

"Wenn eine Wolke kommt—

"Sterbe ich." [17]

Interlude

The pianist continues her piano recital of music whose composers are really living people who aren't herself. This time, one of the composers is Scandinavian. Shocked, *My Prussian Blue Heart* exists in a state of upendedness.

Movement Three

Finally the pianist disembarks the piano and walks to the bowed front of the instrument, where a cellist who used to be her husband used to sit. Instead of a man with a cello, there is an open, ten-paned scarlet-and-white parasol, who sits on the floor and smiles like a flower opening its petals to Venus. Under the umbrella is a withered original copy of *Die Fackel* or *Der Sturm* or Schoenberg's *Harmonielehre,* and a little red riding hood bucket.

"My heart dances in heaven. When a cloud comes—I die." [18]

Hush!

"Nights I wander the world's city streets—through Berlin, Naarm, Qingdao, Baghdad—past all the Luna Parks and zoos and China Towns in the world—looking for you and talking to you, my heart.

"Walking one night in Dhaka, my eyes blazing through clouds as I sang to you whom I had chosen from amongst all stars,[19] I walked into a big, maleficent spider's sticky web. My wedding ring—my gold ring with your name on it—was flung off in the shock of it.

" 'My heart!' I cried out. Where was my heart?

"In the dark streets of Rome, near the train station, I scavenged until I found something."

The pianist kneels like a rag doll collapsing whilst trying to stay upright.

"Shining in the gutter at 3 a.m. in New York—there it was: my heart."

The pianist picks up the little red riding hood bucket.

"I put my scratched and shining heart into this small bucket."

The pianist tries her best to stand up gracefully.

"There I carry it safely now as I wander the streets of Zürich, Jerusalem, Stockholm, Hong Kong, Moscow, Leipzig—past all the cafes and jails and temples in the world."

The pianist walks back to the piano stool, like a real pianist ready to face applause. Then she returns the bucket tenderly to the floor, putting it to bed like a baby.

"My friends in this city Naarm [20] (my friends in the heavenly North, too)—they send me such beautiful pieces to play with! Twinkle-twinkle little star, and the cow jumped over the moon. With a thud, she landed on Jupiter, to the chime of a thousand bells. 'Es spielen Sternenhändlein vier— die Mondfrau sang im Boote.' [21] Tonight this Michaelmas Night my heart has jubilated overflown!"

The pianist crosses hands over heart and sticks a needle in her eye, as she walks to the Red Sea, then kneels to turn the long-ago-spread facedown tarot cards face-up, all except the crowning card. She gazes into the nine card faces intently, wondering whose side they are on, for a long while. She listens without hands, passively as the High Priestess herself, before gathering up the cards and pouring them into her bucket. She stands, holding the crowning card.

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[17] Ibid.
[18] Else Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz*, ibid.
[19] 'Chosen from among all stars' comes from Else Lasker-Schüler's "Heimlich zur Nacht" [1917], *Die Gedichte: 1902–1943*, ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 246.
[20] or another city, as determined by what has happened during the interludes
[21] Else Lasker-Schüler, "Mein Blaues Klavier," *Die Gedichte: 1902–1943*, ed. Friedhelm Kemp (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 337.

“You, my crowning star, your name is—”

The pianist turns the card face up and speaks its name to complete the sentence. She turns its face to the audience.

“My heart is—”

The pianist completes the sentence with the name of the card. To break evil spells she embellishes and distorts the name of the card to whatever extent she chooses. She has freed us!

“Tomorrow, under the early morning star named after me, I will speak to my city and open my soul to her people like a grove of palm trees, which they may enter.” [22]

The pianist drops the crowning card headfirst into the gaping bucket.

“The sky is my mirror.” [23]

The pianist clutches the wooden bucket handle and lifts up all the stars.

“My heart is dancing in the heavens.” [24]
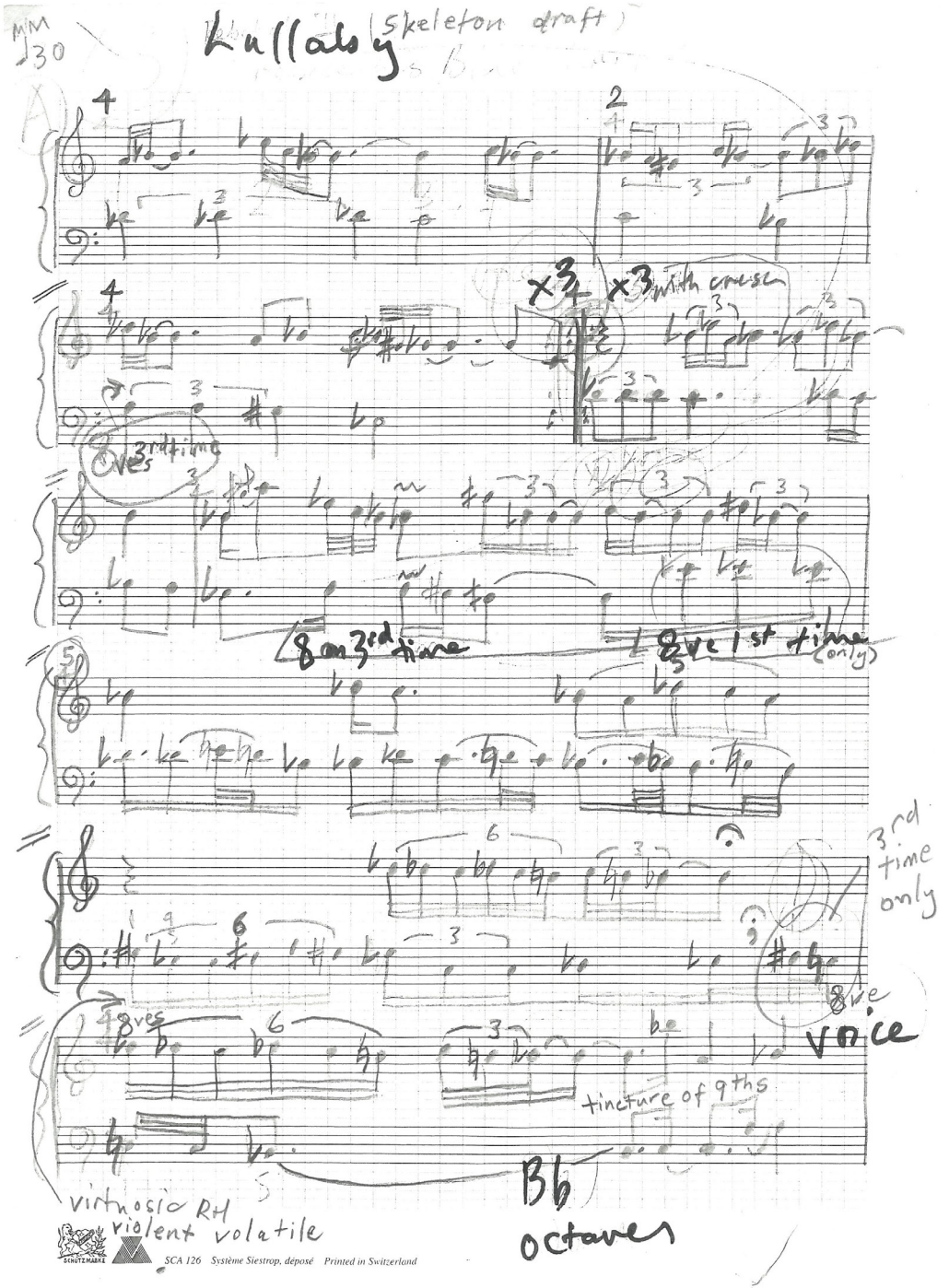
She leaves.

Postlude

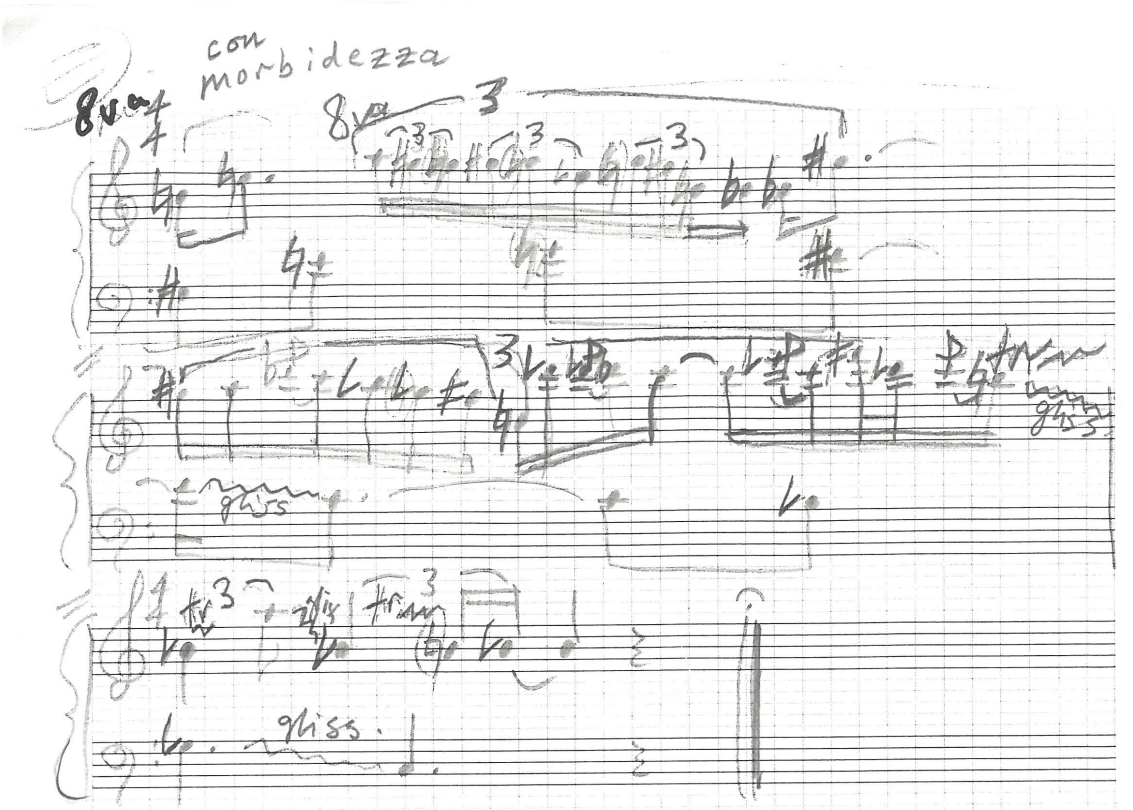
Don’t forget to give away the tarot cards to a friend or to a lost person!

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[22] Else Lasker-Schüler, *Mein Herz*, op. cit.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

Lullaby on Chicken Legs
(draft scribble as a base for improvisation)





♭ = half-flat ♯ = half-sharp (impossible to realise literally on the piano)

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