Peter McKenzie Armstrong

[CTT–95]

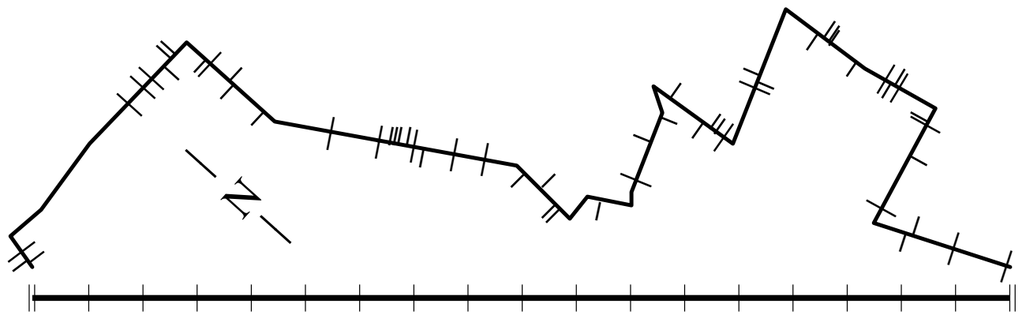
Bus Ride over a Bach Bass

for mixed digital quartet

2012

Edition Ottaviano Petrucci

NOTES



Circumstances obliged me recently to take a bus –– the CTTransit local from Hartford's Constitution Plaza, across the Connecticut River and south to Glastonbury. The ride would have gone unremarkably, had not something just before made me unusually vulnerable to distraction. A conversation, calling to mind the Air from Sebastian Bach's D–major Orchestral Suite, had sparked an irresistible urge to run this sublime music through my head. Soon more irresistible, however, was the lurching bus's cacophony of whines, rumbles and squeaks. My urge went down in defeat, and I vowed revenge: to concoct a musical busride powerless against JSB's Air. Back home, after a frenzy measuring Rand McNally and tinkering with Merriam Webster syllabications, a strategy emerged, which I summarize here to describe the outcome.

> Taking as point of departure the Air's 4–part layout: replace main melody (Violin I) with a rattletrap engine (steel drums); preserve fully the original bass line (Continuo); move inner–voice ranges (Violin II, Viola) to the outside instead (two xylophones, one too low to exist) for squeaks & rumbles respectively.
>
> Derive content entirely from the names of streets, taken in two groups: those driven on (18, coincidentally the number of bars in the Air), and those intersected (~70 total, on L or R only or on both). Map these names to the chromatic scale by spelling and to meter by their relative syllabic stresses. Set each Group–1 (drums) phrase as a single voice iterating perpetually once per beat, each time parrot–whipped by its inversion. Set each Group–2 (xylophone) phrase as a voice pair, sounding once only, painfully augmented.
>
> Apply global controls as follows. Move the engine's tessitura to parallel the bus's north–easterly height (see map). Vary tempo, slightly but often, with the relative stop–to–stop distances. Scale with complementary fractions to make the engine's "perpetual" beats seldom in fact quite equal. As its tessitura attempts dangerous heights, down–shift the stressed engine via transposing canon. And through all, ensure that the Air's bass line, while not unaffected by tempo instability, proceeds unperturbed to completion.

The score, while not humanly playable or performance–speed readable, has served to auto–sequence for MIDI and to discipline my efforts. Its dedicatee, please note, I made up, with an extra character honoring August Emil Daniel Ferdinand Wilhelmj, the nineteenth–century violinist who commandeered this Air to immortalize his G string.

Challenge to the Listener: Can you imagine, perhaps hum, the Air melody –– from memory, of course, and in sync with its sounding bass here –– without losing track?

– PMA

to Nikola Gharzumj

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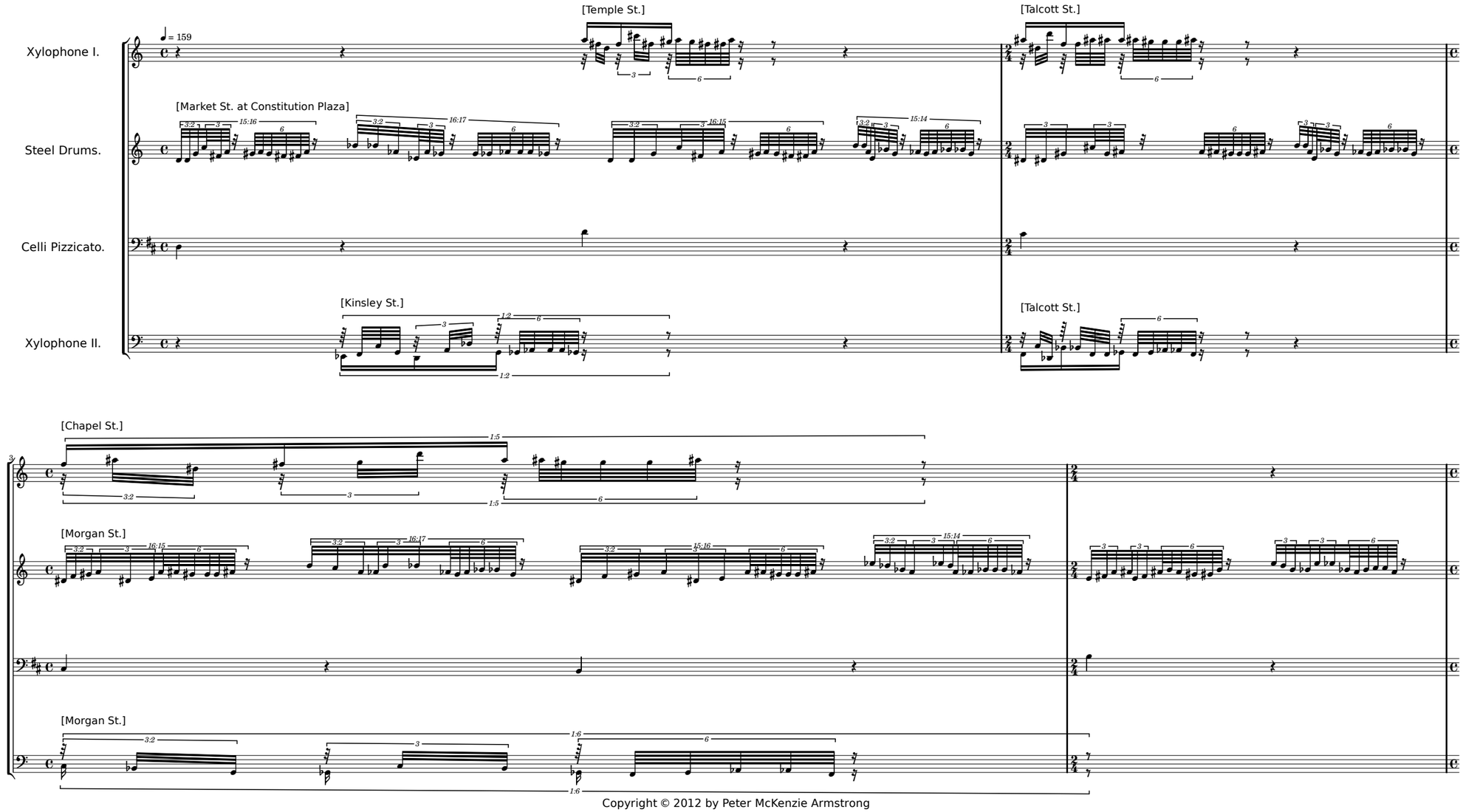

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[Bulkeley Bridge]

[Blacksmith Ln.]

[Connecticut Blvd.]

[East River Dr.]

11

12

[Thomas St.]

[Ash St.]

[Governor St.]

13

[Governor St.]

[Prospect St.]

14

[South Prospect St.]

♩ = 121

[Harrison Place]

[Lynn St.]

15

♩ = 130

[Ward St.]

♩ = 131

[Main St.]

17

[Main St.]

[Main St.]

♩ = 132

[Central Av.]

[Chapel St.]

[Garvan St.]

18

[Saunders St.]

♩ = 149

[Carroll Rd.]

[Blinn St.]

20

[State Highway 517]

[Pitkin St.]

21

[Silver Ln.]

[East River Dr. Ext.]

23

25

♩ = 134

[Brown St.]

[Judson Av.]

[Lilac St.]

[Willys St.]

[Sisson St.]

♩ = 136

[Risley St.]

[Willow St.]

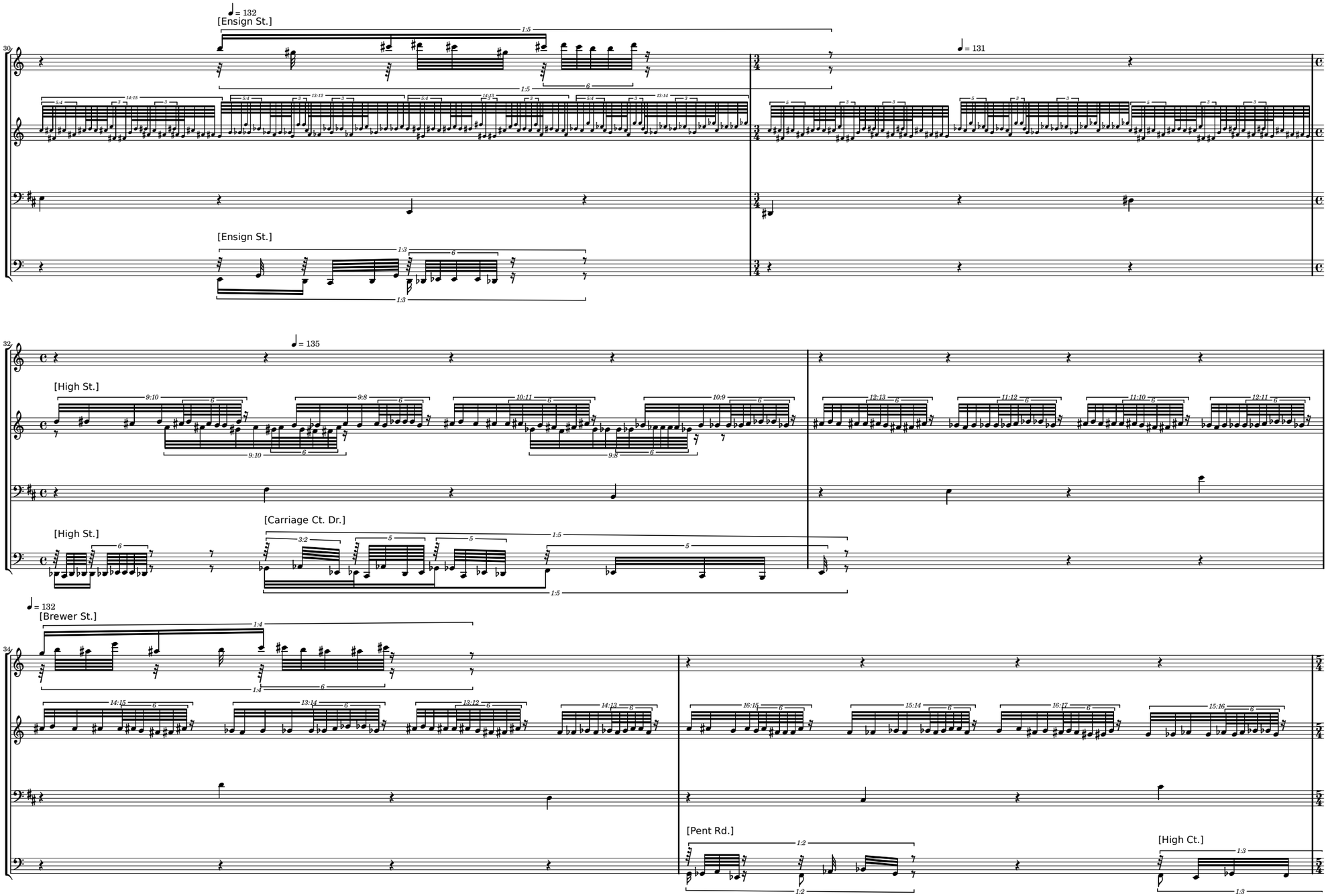
[Willow St.]

[Crosby St.]

♩ = 135

[Colt St.]

[Crosby St.]


♩= 132
[Ensign St.]
♩= 131
[Ensign St.]
♩= 135
[High St.]
[High St.]
[Carriage Ct. Dr.]
♩= 132
[Brewer St.]
[Pent Rd.]
[High Ct.]

36

♩ = 136

[Carter St.]

[Carter St.]

[Main St.]

[Main St.]

♩ = 134

[Main St.]

[Wadsworth St.]

38

♩ = 131

[Sutton Av.]

[Sutton Av.]

41

[Cambridge Dr.]

♩ = 134

[Millbrook Dr.]

[Cambridge Dr.]

[Oxford Dr.]

[Millbrook Dr.]

[Nassau Ln.]

[Millbrook Dr.]

♩ = 133
[Evans Av.]

[Evans Av.]

♩ = 132
[Handel Rd.]

[Handel Rd.]

♩ = 134
[Woodycrest St.]

[Evans Av.]

[Handel Rd.]

♩ = 132

[Evans Av.]

[Handel Ct.]

♩ = 142
[Canterbury St.]

[Norwich Ln.]

[Suffolk Dr.]

51

[Maple St.]

[Maple St.]

[Maple St.]

53

= 148
[Clayton Rd.]

[Holly St.]

[Spaulding Cr.]

[Spaulding Cr.]

55

57

[Forbes St.]

[Forbes St.]

[Forbes St.]

59

♩ = 131

[Landers Rd.]

[May Rd.]

♩ = 132

[O'Connell Dr.]

[Heritage Ln.]

61

♩ = 133

[Woodmont Dr.]

[Long Hill Dr.]

[Prospect St.]

[Linwood Dr.]

[Montclair St.]

[Madison Rd.]

63

[Wyllys St.]

64

♩ = 137

[Lancaster St.]

[Shelley Ln.]

[Harris St.]

65

[Griswold St.]

[House St.]

♩ = 135

[Griswold St.]

[Griswold St.]

[Salem Ct.]

[Harris St.]

67

♩ = 137
[Bantle Rd.]

69

♩ = 130
[Wrights Ln.]

[Brewster St.]

71

♩ = 134
[Main St.]

[Main St.]

[Main St.]

♩ = 139
[Spring St.]

[Pratt St.]

73

75

= 120

[New London Tpk.]

[Welles St.]

[Naubuc Av.]

[Welles St.]