high voice

yasodhara, unheard

words by
rachel rose

music & movement by
jeffrey ryan

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Performance notes

Total performance time: ca. 5'30"

Vocal range: C4 to A5

Sung consonants: In many cases, consonants which can be sung and sustained (such as "m" and "n") are given their own syllables with their own rhythmic values. This occurs in the middle or at the end of certain words. For example, "from" may be written "fro-m", in which case the final "m" is sung as a separate syllable. Other examples include "born" (="bor-n"), "inside" (="i-n-side") and "mangoes" (="ma-ng-oes"). In each instance, the sung consonant creates an extra syllable which has one or more notes attached to it. This effect is integral to the style of text-setting used in this piece.

Nasal tone: At various points in the piece, for colour, a nasal quality is requested, similar to the traditional vocal style of Nepal and India.

Movement: The notated movements in this piece are all mimed. The character is beginning her day by doing her makeup while simultaneously tending to her infant son.

Frequently the tone of the words and the music is at odds with the external action; this is deliberate, and reflects how the character tries to mask her inner thoughts with the collected and controlled appearance she wants to project to the outside world. Though there are times when the mask briefly drops, it is important that the performer convey this inner vs. outer duality when required.

This piece may be performed standing, or, if preferred and practical, with a single chair facing the audience. If a chair is used, the character stands as indicated in m. 134.

If desired, the performer may use props, even actually applying her makeup in real time.

The notated movement is an important part of the theatre of the piece and may not be omitted. Occasionally, the movement is metrically notated, which should be strictly observed for the intended effect. Otherwise, while observing the notated movement and staying within the character of the piece, the individual performer is invited to make the movement organically her own.

Programme note

Unheard is a suite of four Song Theatre works for unaccompanied female voice with notated movement. They may be performed as a set, individually, or in any combination. Poet Rachel Rose has been writing an on-going series of poems in which she gives voice to female characters from literature and mythology who are largely unheard in traditional tellings, usually in favour of the male characters. We hear from these women after they have left their stories, expressing their experience in hindsight and illuminating for us a different perspective while connecting with women's experience in contemporary times.

Yasodhara, the wife of Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, was abandoned by her husband on the night of their son's birth. In ***Yasodhara, Unheard***, we hear from her some weeks after she awoke to find herself a single parent, her anger and pain still fresh, her devotion to her son intensified. As she tries to make sense of her fate and her feelings, she puts on the face—the mask—that she presents to the world, while at the same time going through a familiar routine that starts her day but now also provides a semblance of normalcy to which she clings in her new reality, one experienced by single mothers through the ages.

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Aubade: Buddha's Wife
by Rachel Rose

Others worship you, but I loved you, husband.
I still think we could have worked it out.
You named our newborn son Rahula, *Fetter*,
and fell in post-partum despair at his birth. Did your father
bind you to such grief when he kept old people a secret
all your boyhood, forced the broken-bodied outside city walls,
grandparents banished? Or was it your queen mother, who died
and left you? Life is a nut meat in our mouths, and life
is a bowl of cobwebs too. Once
Queen Maya sat under the ashoka trees
and held their red flowers to her face, heavy with joy,
tracing the *linea nigra*, as inside her you dreamed
of great loneliness, and beat your heels against it. Seven days
after your birth she died, her right side still clotted with blood.
You drank the milk of a woman your father paid,
who felt the death of her own child in every pull.
You grew fat from her sorrow; it formed your dimples.
I can't forgive you. For how many lifetimes will my heart
be shackled to yours?

We suffer, we die. Are you to be honoured
for discovering this, as if you'd found a new country?
You left us with a kiss while we were sleeping.
The rosy dawn was terrible to me. O my vagabond,
should I have followed your example, left our son to drift
unfettered, without even my milk to nourish him?
Did you feel lighter as you wandered,
eating fallen mangoes, sitting with stray dogs
who pushed their noses in your palm
for salt? Whole philosophies of attachment
unbind the breasts of ordinary mothers
who will never do what you've done.
Idiot. He never knew your hands.
Yes, we will die, yes, there is pain.
You could have stayed home, Siddhartha.
You could have raised our son.

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enter with "baby" against shoulder. Stand (or sit) at "mirror", centre stage, facing audience. Reposition baby to be cradled by one arm, freeing the other hand to apply makeup. Stare at "reflection" with a sense of being emotionally drained. After a moment, look at baby for a beat, then turn back to mirror. Expression turns to resolve and determination, fuelled by hurt and anger, and masking a pain which occasionally breaks through the surface.

♩= 72 (♪= 144) *prepare to apply tika (bindi)*

nasal

mf *with a hint of sarcasm*

O - thers_ wor-ship you.

dip middle finger into paste *slowly raise hand to forehead* *press finger to third eye, making a small circular motion, then lower hand*

3

O - thers_ wor-ship you. O - thers_ wor-ship you. But

ord. ***f***

♩= 48 *sub.* *impassioned, emotional* *pulling away from reflection* *back to mirror*

poco rit.

6

I_ loved_ you, hus - band.

p

change of expression, back to resolve in the face of adversity; wipe finger clean, then pick up foundation sponge *dip sponge into foundation* *apply foundation to face, avoiding tika area (to m. 20)*

10

♩. = 48 (♪= 144)

mp

I_ still_ think_ we could have worked_ it out.

14

I_ still_ think_ we could have worked_ it out. You_ na-m'd our

check foundation in mirror; when satisfied, put down sponge

18

mf ♩. = ♩ ♩= 48 ***p***

new - bor-n son Ra-hu-la, Fet-ter, and fell_ i-n

distracted by baby, look at him and smile, perhaps rub his nose *poco rit.* *turn back to mirror, still smiling—seeing reflection, smile fades*

23

3 3

mp ***p***

post - par-tum de-spair_ at_ his birth.

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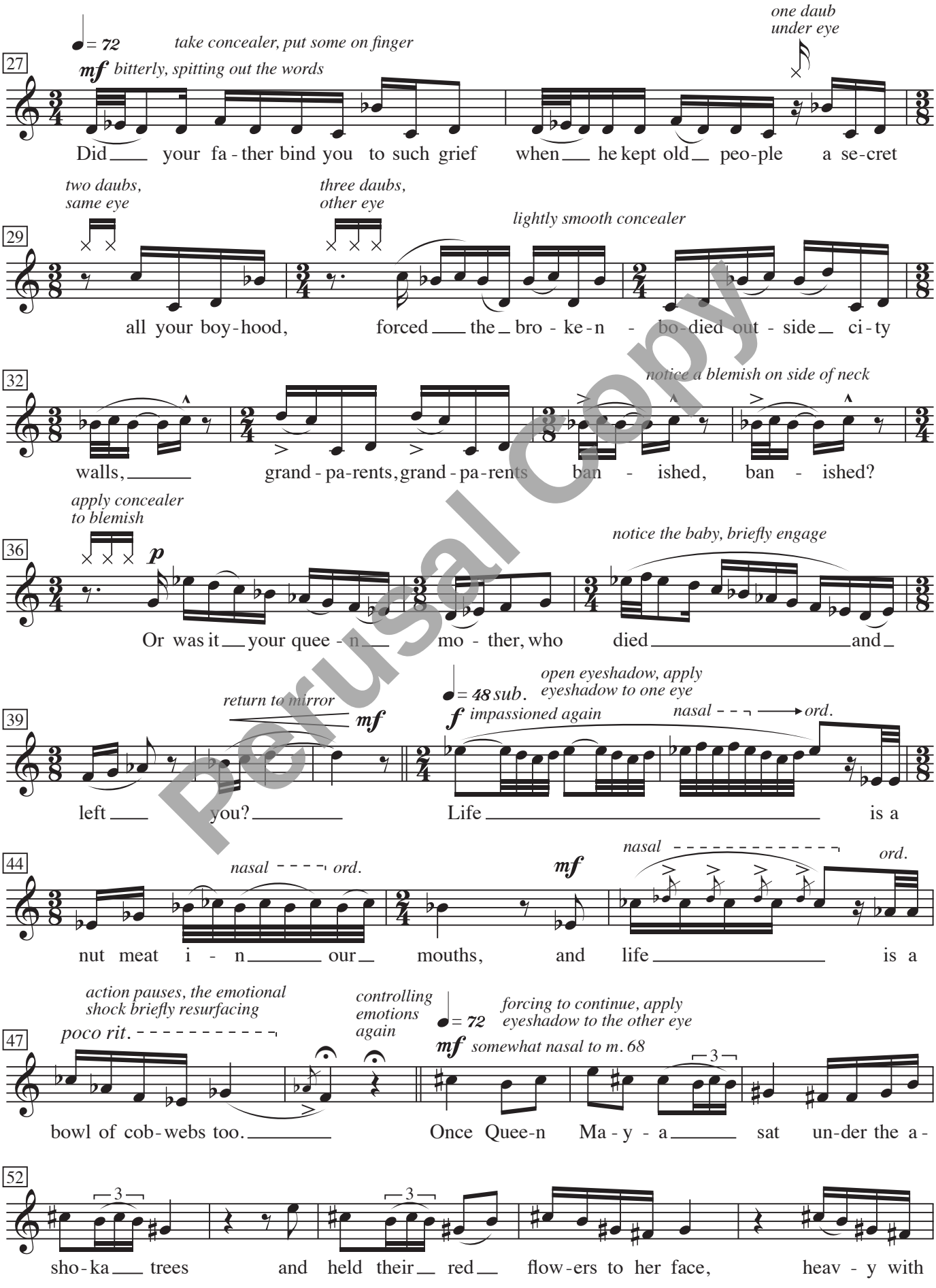

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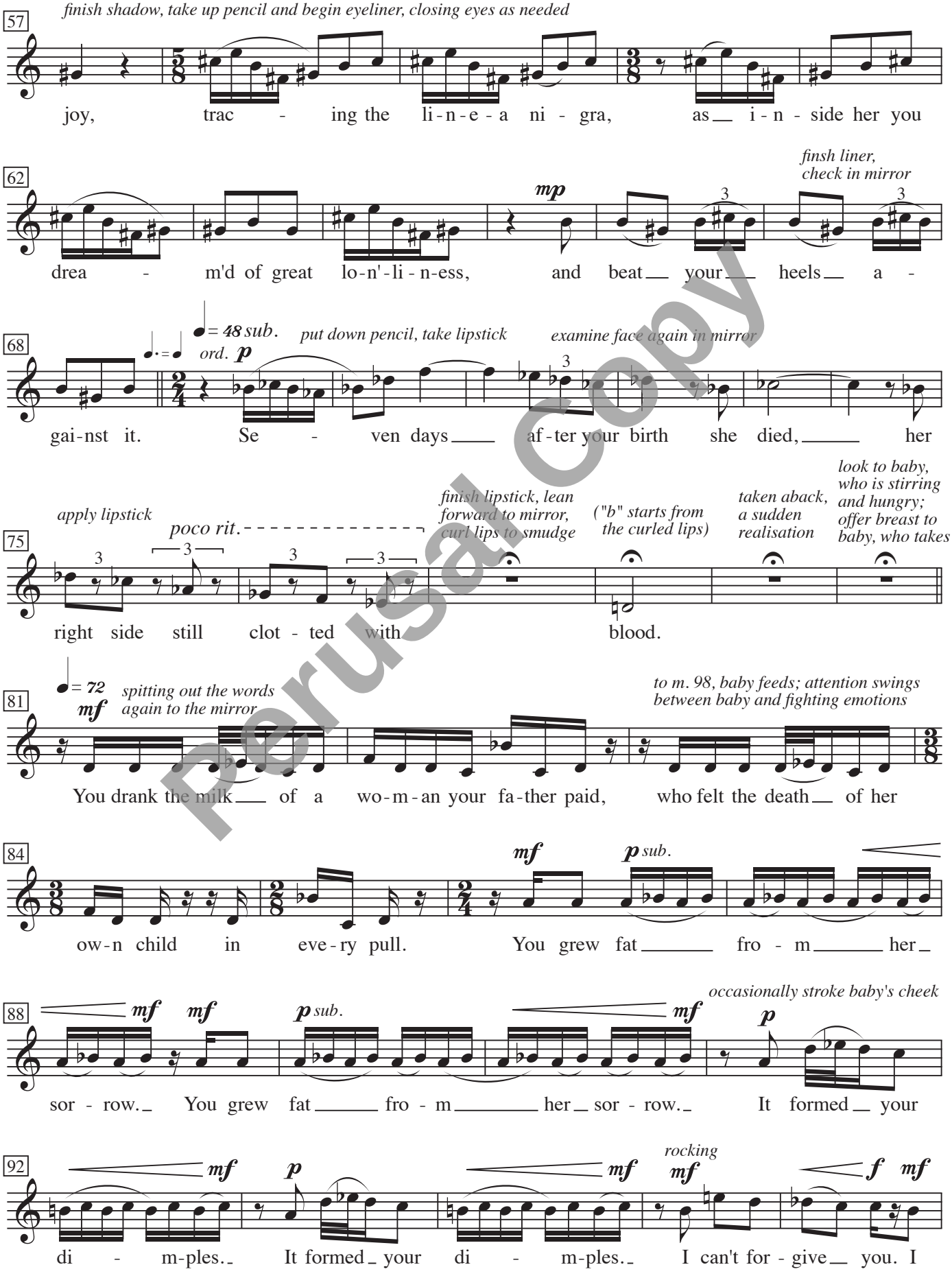

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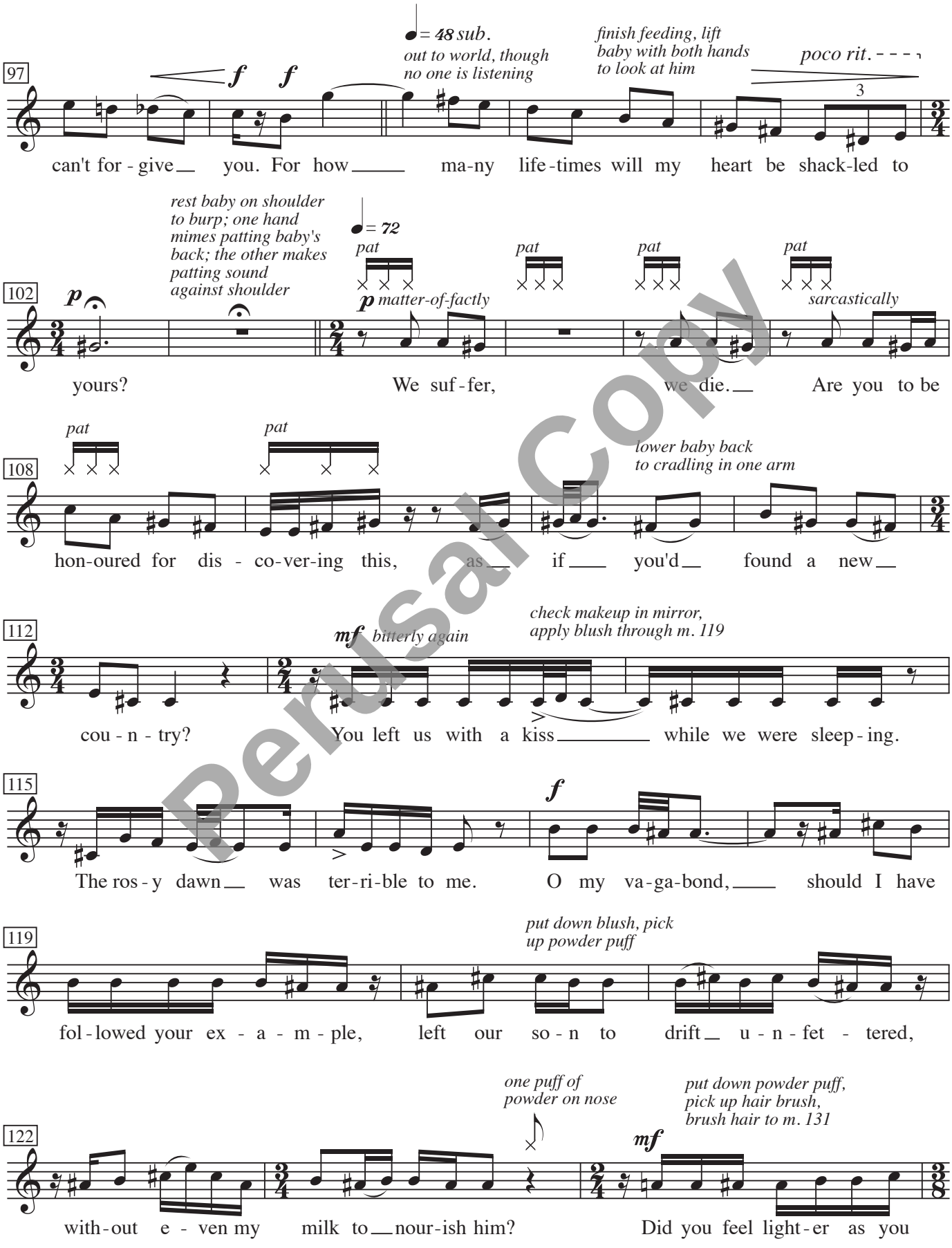

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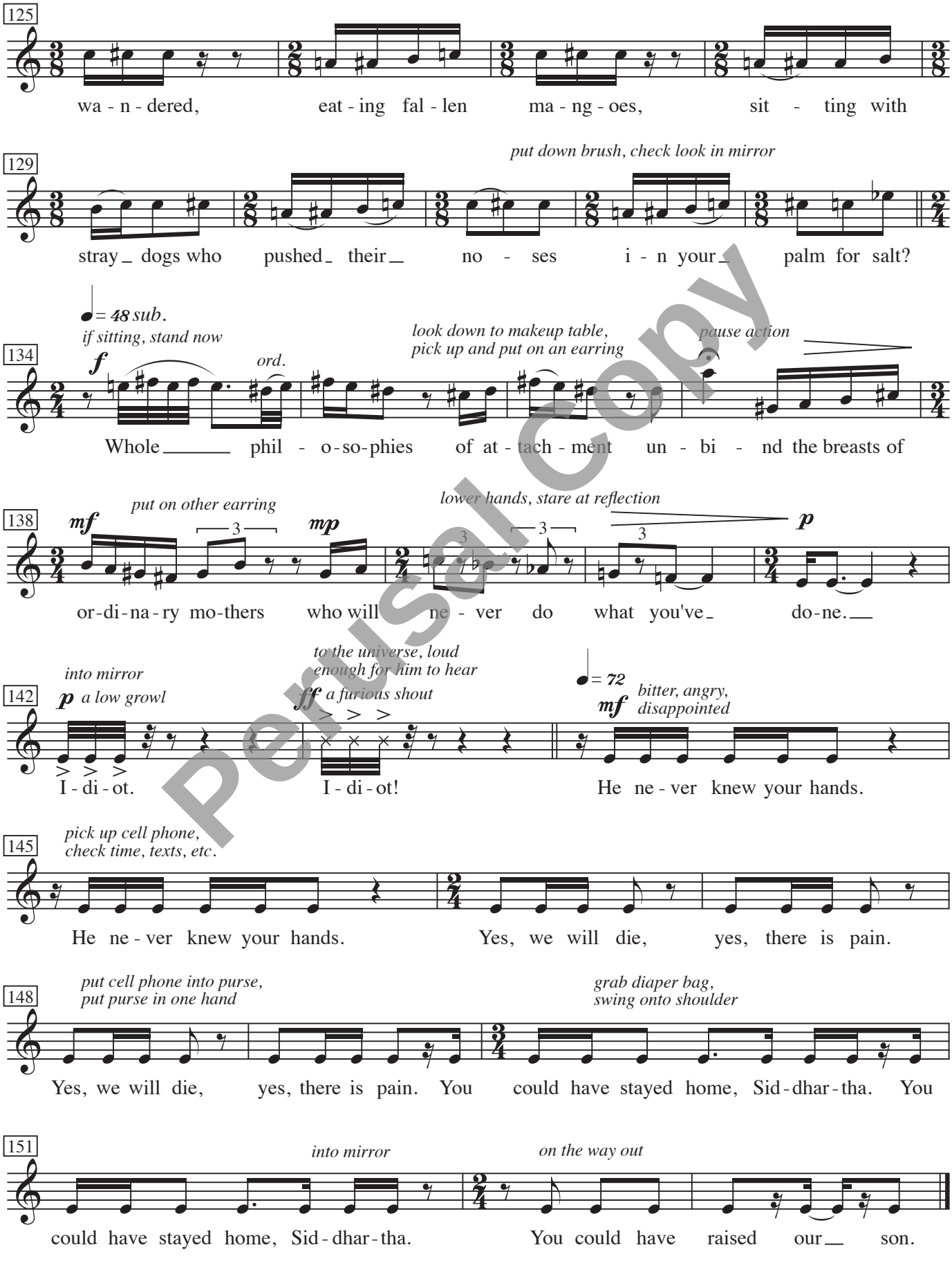

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