#### SHORT OPERA FOR FIVE VOICES

Vincent Sauer

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

#### MASTER OF MUSIC

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Committee:

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Mikel Kuehn

#### ABSTRACT

#### Christopher Dietz, Advisor

Short Opera for Five Voices is a ten-minute music theatre piece for five unaccompanied voices of any gender or voice type. The performers do not sing, but rather phonate in such a way as to give the impression of conversational speech. The score is notated with specific rhythms and pitch contours that emulate the prosodic elements of speech: stress, intonation, cadence, etc. To place greater emphasis on the prosody, the performers' text is limited to a small collection of syllables based on spoken American English. The syllables are distinct enough to differentiate the voices and add variety to the texture yet similar enough to give the text cohesion. While their words will be unintelligible to the audience, the characters' emotions and motivations will come across through the prosody and acting.

The plot is an informal gathering of five friends in which the increased tension between two of them results in a verbal altercation. In addition to the theatrical convention to showcase the most dramatic aspects of the human experience, this piece dwells on the pedestrian and mundane qualities of social interaction in an attempt to show audiences the quiet poignancy in everyday life.

The notation for this piece was informed by Aperghis's *Recitations*, Berio's *Sequenza III*, and Ligeti's *Aventures* while the textual and conceptual elements were inspired by Glass's *Einstein on the Beach*, Monk's *Atlas*, Reich's *The Cave*, and Sciarrino's *Lohengrin*. BGSU music students Hillary LaBonte, Nicholas Fox, Mavis MacNeil, Vincent Sauer, and Crystal Lau will perform the piece on Saturday, March 18, 2017.

# Short Opera for Five Voices

**Vincent Sauer** 

#### Characters

Dadaʊ:	Reserved, emotionally guarded, loyal, a devoted friend, opinionated. Lower voice.
Bobə:	Outgoing, optimistic, a peacemaker, compassionate, sincere. Higher voice.
Nenə:	Apathetic, pessimistic, judgmental, spiteful, superficial. Lower speaking voice, more monotone, speaks quickly.
Mɛmə:	Laidback, relaxed, friendly, funny. Lower, softer speaking voice, speaks slowly. Don't make a lot of eye contact.
Tatu:	Outgoing, funny, selfish, chatty, popular. Higher, louder, ringing voice that projects well.

#### Setting

A casual, comfortable environment in the present time and season.

# Synopsis

Premise: Five friends are meeting in a casual, informal setting. Dadao, Bobə, and Tatu are close friends, but Dadao and Tatu have fallen out recently over a personal dispute. Nenə, an acquaintance of all three, is coming with their friend, Mɛmə. While Nenə is aware of the confrontation between Dadao and Tatu, Mɛmə is still unfamiliar with this group and is ignorant to any discord.

Part 1: Dadao has arrived early to the gathering and is waiting for Bobə to arrive.

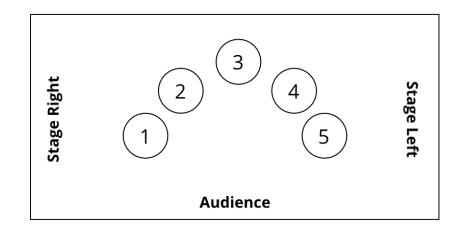
Part 2: Dadao and Bobə greet each other enthusiastically. Dadao tells a funny story which entertains Bobə. Bobə precedes to tell Dadao about a conflict they had which upsets Dadao and causes Dadao to show how defensive they are of Bobə. Bobə changes the topic to something more pleasant but Dadao is still upset and preoccupied. Bobə then tells Dadao about a recent run-in they had with a mutual friend. Dadao feigns interest but is still preoccupied. Dadao then asks about Tatu, an uncomfortable subject. Bobə apprehensively tells Dadao that Bobə and Tatu have seen each other recently and that Tatu seems to be fine. Bobə tries to console Dadao, but Dadao dismisses it, insisting they are fine with the situation and concealing their hurt. Bobə, unconvinced, is about to reveal that Tatu will be joining them today when Nenə walks in. Part 3: Nenə apathetically greets Dadao and Bobə before complaining pessimistically about a series of trivial misfortunes in their life. Nenə dismisses Bobə's attempts to help and becomes defensive when Dadao belittles their complaints. In retaliation, Bobə brings up Tatu, realizing that it is a sore subject for Dadao. Bobə reluctantly discusses Tatu in front of Dadao, believing that Nenə's motivation was not malicious, but then tries to change the topic. Bobə retells Nenə the same funny story Dadao told in Part 2. Immediately after, Nenə announces that Tatu is coming today. Dadao is taken off guard and feels a little betrayed by Nenə for not telling them. Nenə feigns sympathy for Dadao and acts innocent in front of Bobə. Mɛmə enters and is greeted by Nenə.

Part 4: Mɛmə greets all and then starts telling slow, long-winded stories to Nenə. Dadao is closed off and upset while Bobə listens attentively. Nenə responds with the same apathetic complaints from Part 3. Bobə is sympathetic again to Nenə but Mɛmə is less affected and tries to make light of it. Nenə does not react defensively but continues to persist with their apathetic complaints throughout the scene while Mɛmə maintains their calm, easygoing attitude. The two continue to converse throughout the scene though they're not really listening to each other or commenting on what the other has said. Meanwhile, Bobə checks if Dadao is okay. Bobə apologizes for not telling Dadao that Tatu is coming, and Dadao is honest with Bobə about their feelings. Dadao is more calm now but decides to leave. As Dadao is about to get up, Tatu enters.

Part 5: Tatu enthusiastically greets everyone except Dadao. Tatu tries to engage with Bobə who is hesitant to do so in front of Dadao. When Memə tells a private joke to Nena, Tatu picks up on it immediately and makes Mema laugh. Nena interrupts to ask Tatu about a provocative topic. Tatu jumps on the opportunity to hold court and entertains everyone but Dadao. Near the end of Tatu's story, Dadao mutters a snide comment, but Tatu catches it. Dadao initially denies saying anything, but eventually vocalizes their criticism and irritation with Tatu. The two begin arguing, making rude comments about each other and rehashing old disputes. Nena watches in silence, disinterested, while Mɛma, a newcomer to this group, looks on in confusion and quiet amusement. After several attempts, Boba is able to silence the two and chastises their behavior. Boba attempts to resolve the situation between the two by acknowledging their respective faults, but Tatu interrupts in an emotional outburst, revealing their concealed hurt. Tatu calls out Dadao for being so distant and unwilling to resolve the situation. Dadao feels remorse but is unsure what to say. After pleading with Dadoo to open up, Tato gives up and leaves with the same easygoing facade as they entered with. Nena and Mema leave together in response to the awkward confrontation. Boba, disappointed with Dadao's closed-off stubbornness, begins to leave. Dadao is about to communicate with Boba, but decides otherwise. Boba leaves Dadao alone on stage.

#### Setup

5 chairs placed center stage in a semicircle facing the audience with each chair facing inwards. Performers are seated in the order of their entrances with Dadao labeled as 1 and Tatu labeled as 5. Performers should enter and exit stage left at least 7 steps from the chairs. This setup may be mirrored with Dadao seated stage left and performers entering and exiting stage right



#### Duration

Approximately 10 minutes

### Notation

Each notehead represents a spoken syllable with an approximate pitch. The singleline staff represents the character's mid-range fundamental speaking frequency with notes pitched higher or lower based on their distance and direction from the line. Performers should try to maintain a consistent central frequency for the central line throughout the piece, however an accurate contour is generally more important. Speak in a natural, casual speaking voice and slide as necessary to accomplish a more natural sound.

Rhythms and markings above the staff are spatially notated with each dashed barline indicating one second. Performers should loosely line up their gestures vertically. The space between two thick, solid lines is a flexible length of time indicated above in seconds.

Performers may use a stopwatch or click track in practicing their individual parts, but rehearsals and performances should not be so strictly paced. The live performance may loosely deviate from the second-markings to accommodate the acting and interaction between performers. The piece is to be performed from memory without score.

Horizontal brackets are used to indicate related gestures. These gestures may imply the same word or phrase or a character intentionally mimicking rhythm or intonation for emphasis. Each bracket is numbered with a description at the bottom of the page.

Horizontal beams (long slurs) group notes to performed in one breath with no break in sound. Phrase markings group several gestures into a phrase that follows one train of thought. Such gestures may be a single sentence or a single paragraph. If a character pauses or is interrupted in the middle of a phrase, they continue on with similar intonation.

A double beam (as in sixteenth notes) merely indicates notes that are faster than single-beamed notes. Again, all notes should be paced according to their spacing within each dashed barline.

# Text above the staff

Bolded text is spatially notated and indicates physical gestures (**smile, laugh, etc.**) and stage directions (**enter, exit, etc.**).

Italicized text relates to vocal delivery (*quickly, slowly, quietly, etc.*) The marking *loose* gives the performer more flexibility in spacing the indicated gesture and allows the performer to momentarily deviate from the second markings. Italicized text applies to the entire beamed group or the entire phrase if a phrase marking is present

Regular text specifies character motivations and gestural descriptions.

# Text below the staff

Text below the staff gives an English translation of what the character is saying in quotation marks or a rough idea of the character's intent in parentheses and quotation marks. Text in brackets is IPA to be spoken by the performer.

The spoken text consists of a small collection of syllables notated in IPA used in the place of spoken American English. This draws attention away from the text and toward the more musical aspects of speech like pitch contour, rhythm, stress, and dynamic.

Each character uses unique syllables to communicate, which differentiates their voice. Use the syllables below according to their articulation unless a different syllable is indicated.

Articulations and Noteheads							
	Accent	Tenuto	Unmarked	Slurred/Tied	'X' Notehead		
	<b>&gt;</b>	ſ	ſ		ř		
Dadaʊ	[da]!	[da]	[də]	[daʊ]			
Bobə	[bo]!	[bo]	[bə]	[bou]			
Nenə	[ne]!	[ne]	[nə]	[nei]	unspoken		
Mɛmə	[mɛ]!	[mɛ]	[mə]	[mɛə]			
Tatu	[ta]!	[ta]	[tə]	[taʊ]			

Notes marked with an articulation are stressed (when two notes are slurred/tied, the first is stressed). Unmarked notes are unstressed. These stress rules still apply even if a different syllable is specified. If a note has a slur/tie and an accent, use the syllable specified for slurred/tied notes. An 'x' note head indicates an unspoken sound described above the staff in bold.

The slurred/tied syllable should be performed with a smooth transition between the vowel sounds (like a diphthong).

Occasionally characters will need to say specific syllables; these are notated below the notehead in brackets and override the typical rules. These may include specific punctuation, a character's name, etc.

Pronunciations for all of the IPA used in this piece are listed below.

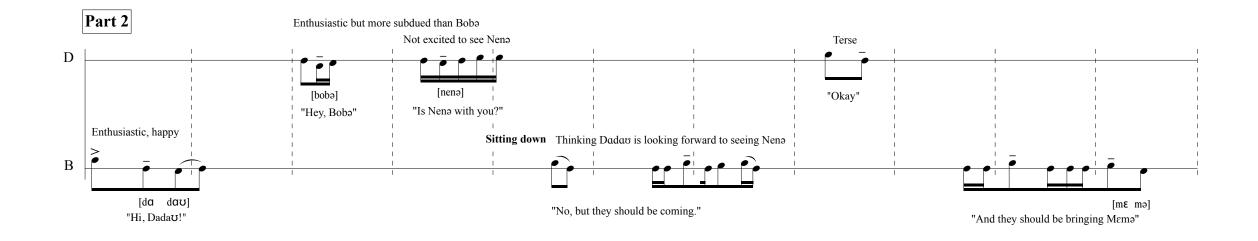
IPA P	IPA Pronunciations				
[a]	f <u>a</u> ther				
[ɑʊ]	c <u>ow</u>				
[o]	<u>go</u>				
[u]	t <u>oo</u>				
[ə]	pard <u>o</u> n (unaccented)				
[e]	s <u>ay</u>				
[٤]	b <u>e</u> t				
[i]	t <u>ea</u>				
[aɪ]	my				
[^]	b <u>u</u> t				
[d]	<u>d</u> og				
[b]	<u>b</u> at				
[n]	<u>n</u> ose				
[m]	<u>m</u> ap				
[t]	<u>t</u> alk				

# Short Opera for Five Voices

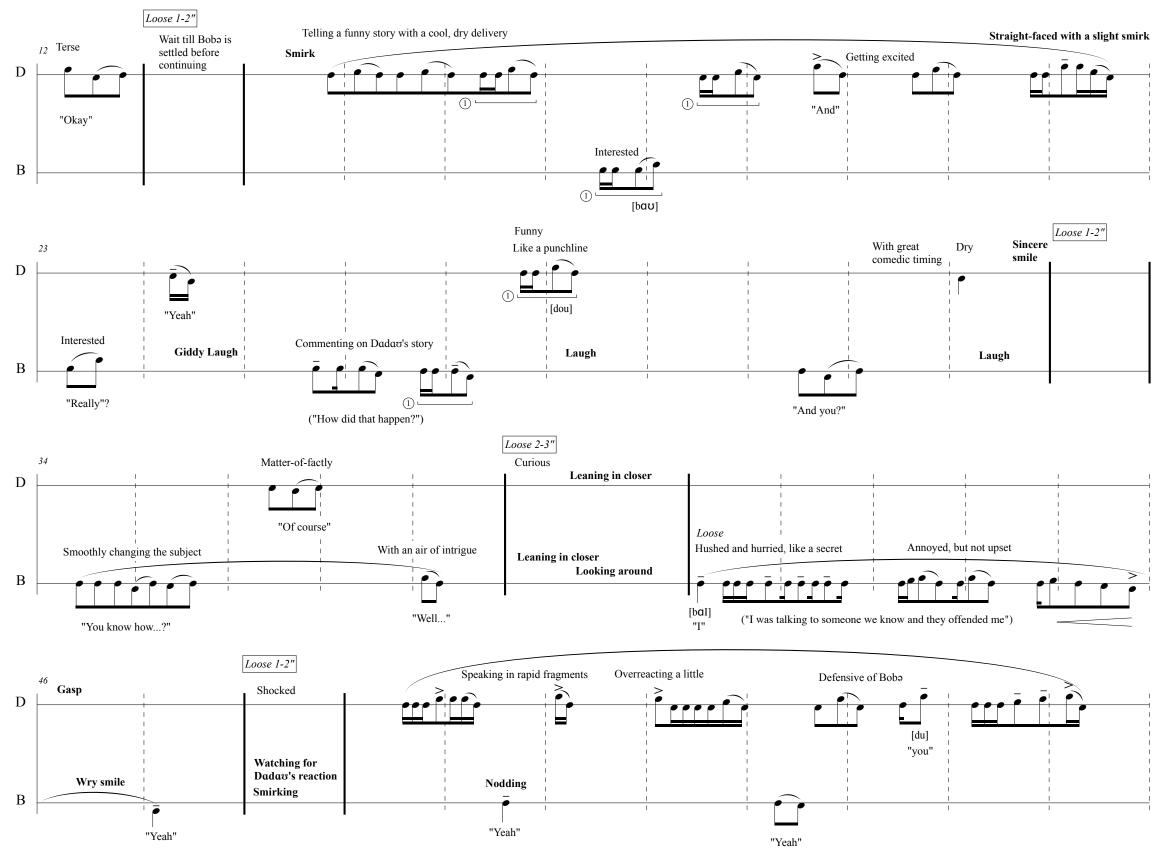
Vincent Sauer



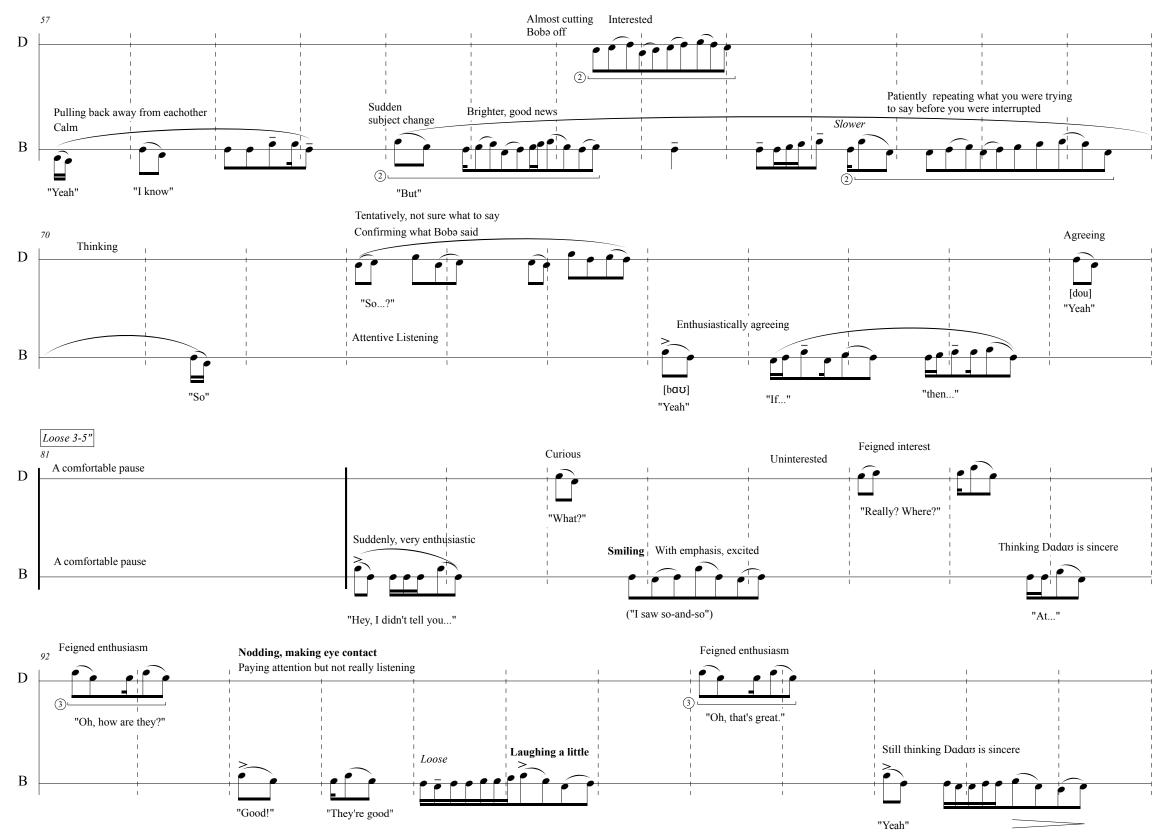
\*If possible, Dadao should enter as the audience is walking in, around 5-10 minutes before Bobo's entrance. Ignore the audience. If anyone tries to interact with you, act as if they are a stranger and politely acknowledge them. Improvise speech using [də], [da], and [dao] syllables if necessary.



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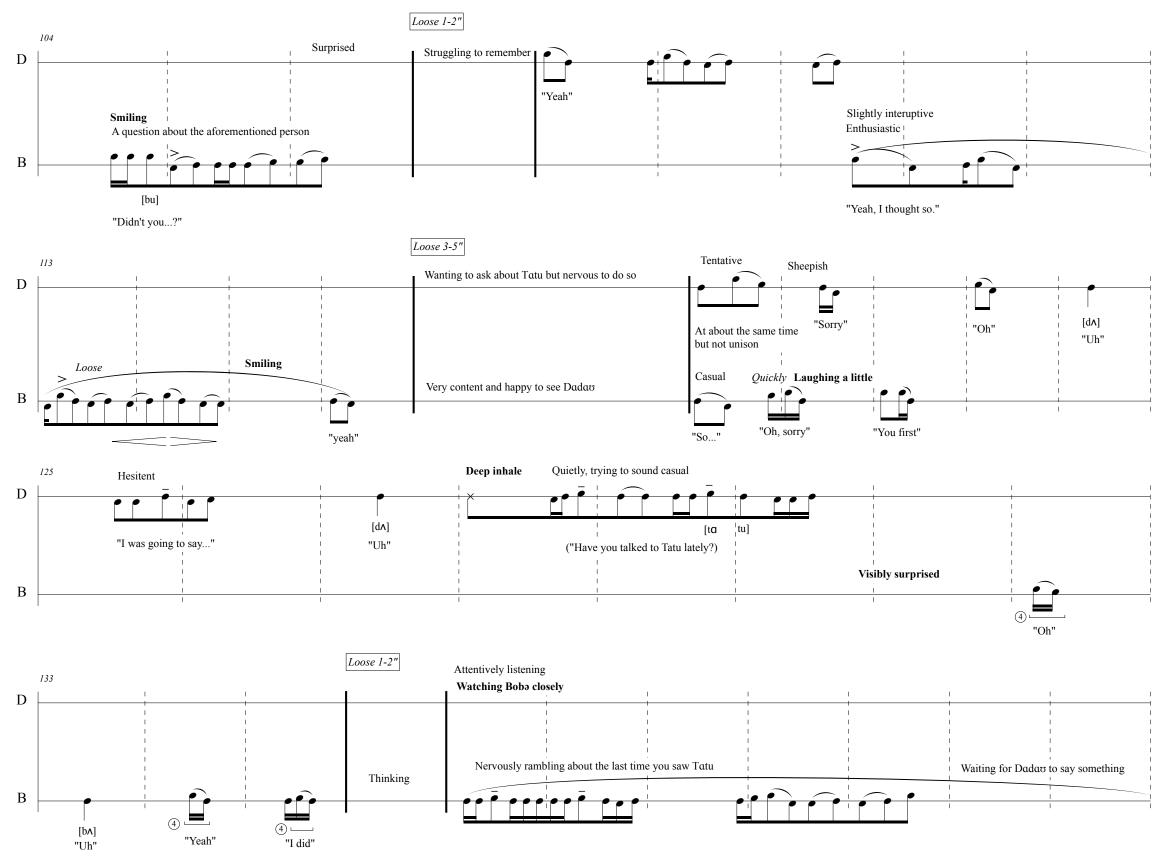


① Same words spoken with the same rhythm

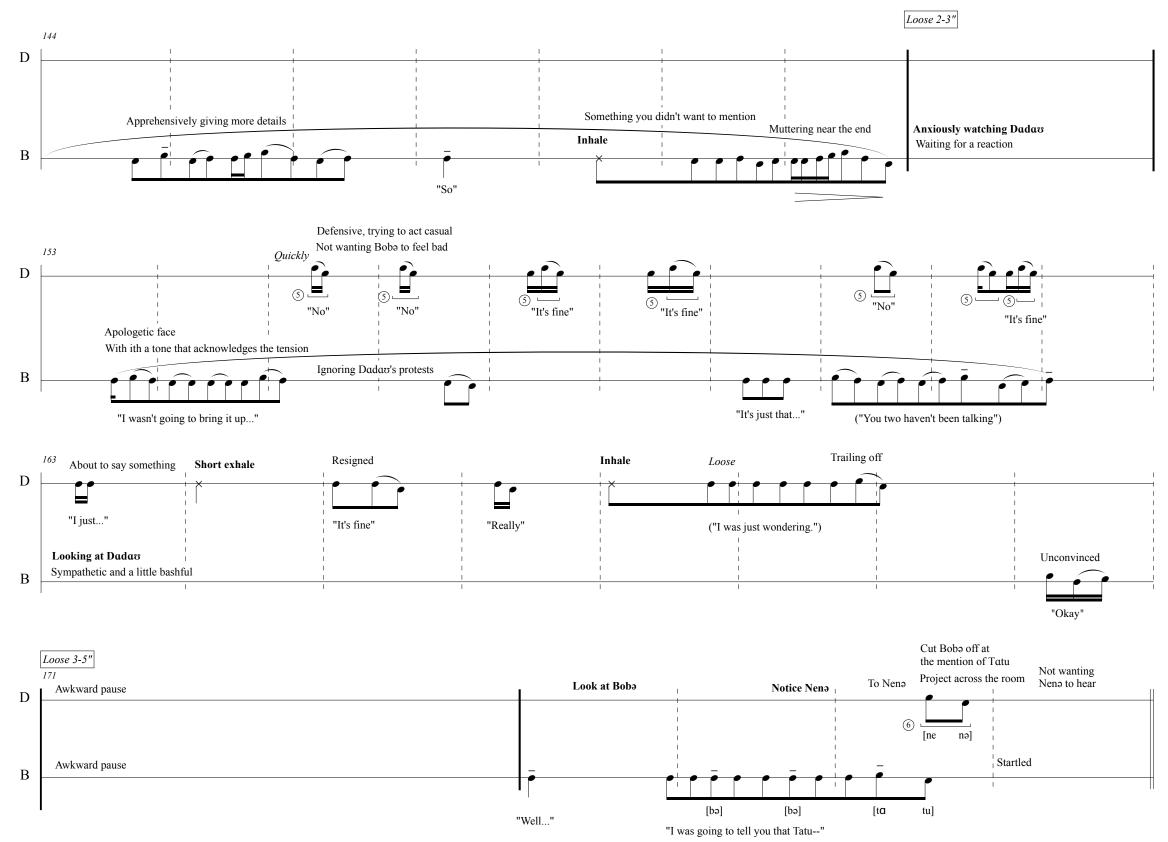


<sup>(2)</sup> The same phrase spoken with similar rhythm but different pacing

③ Spoken with the same intonation, rhythm, and attitude.

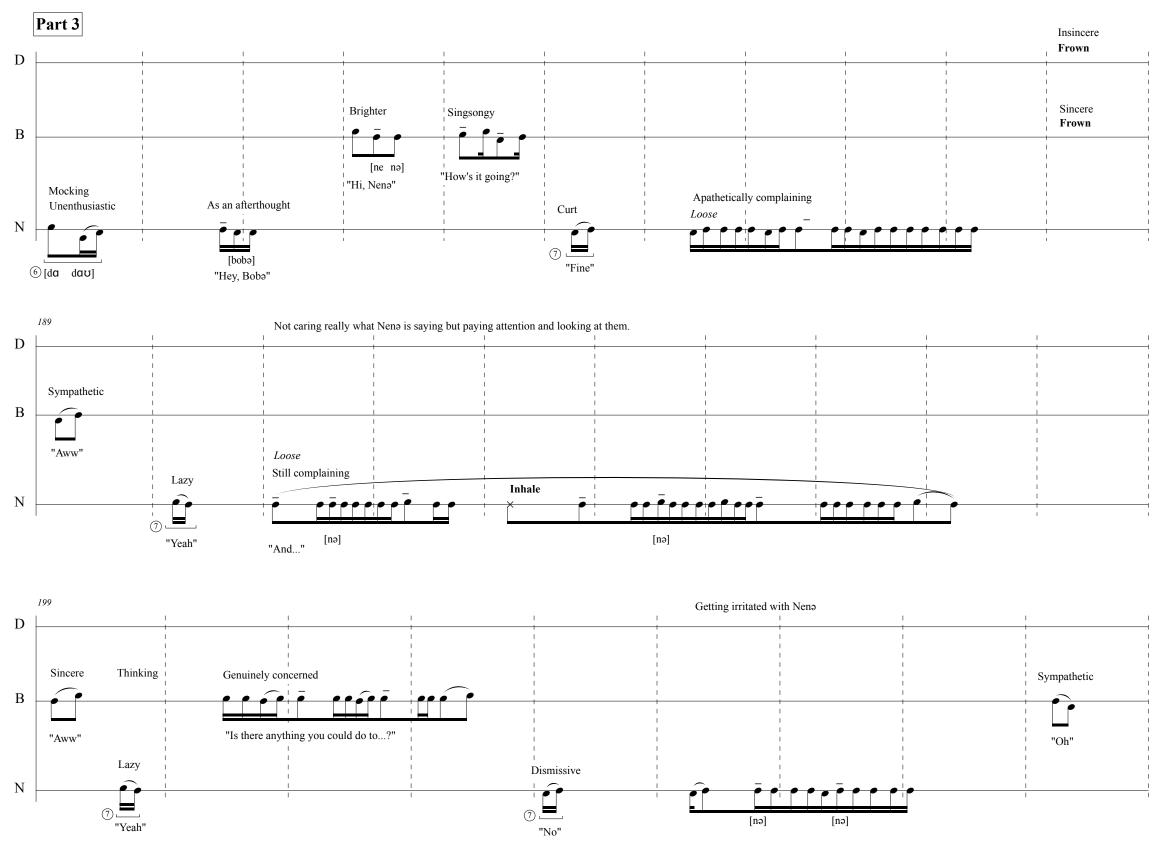


④ Spoken with the same intonation, rhythm and attitude.



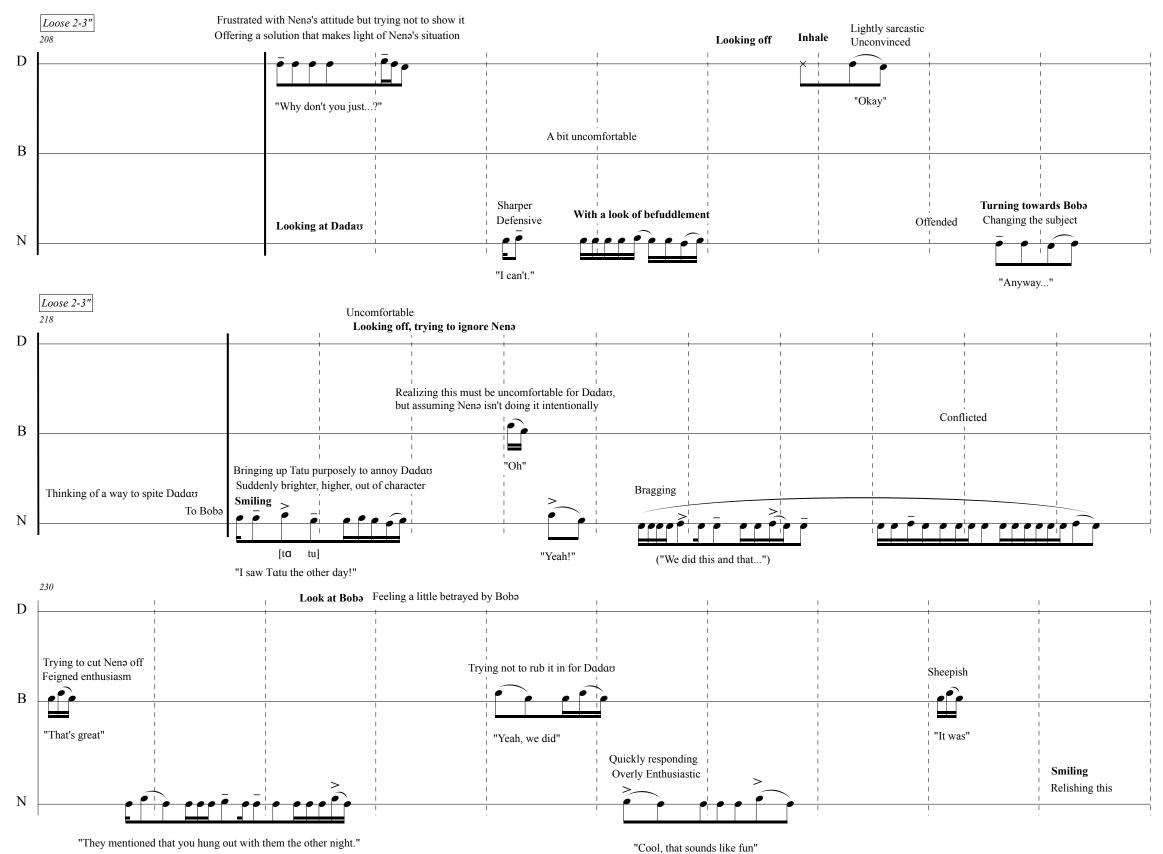
⑤ Spoken with the same intonation and attitude and with similar pacing.

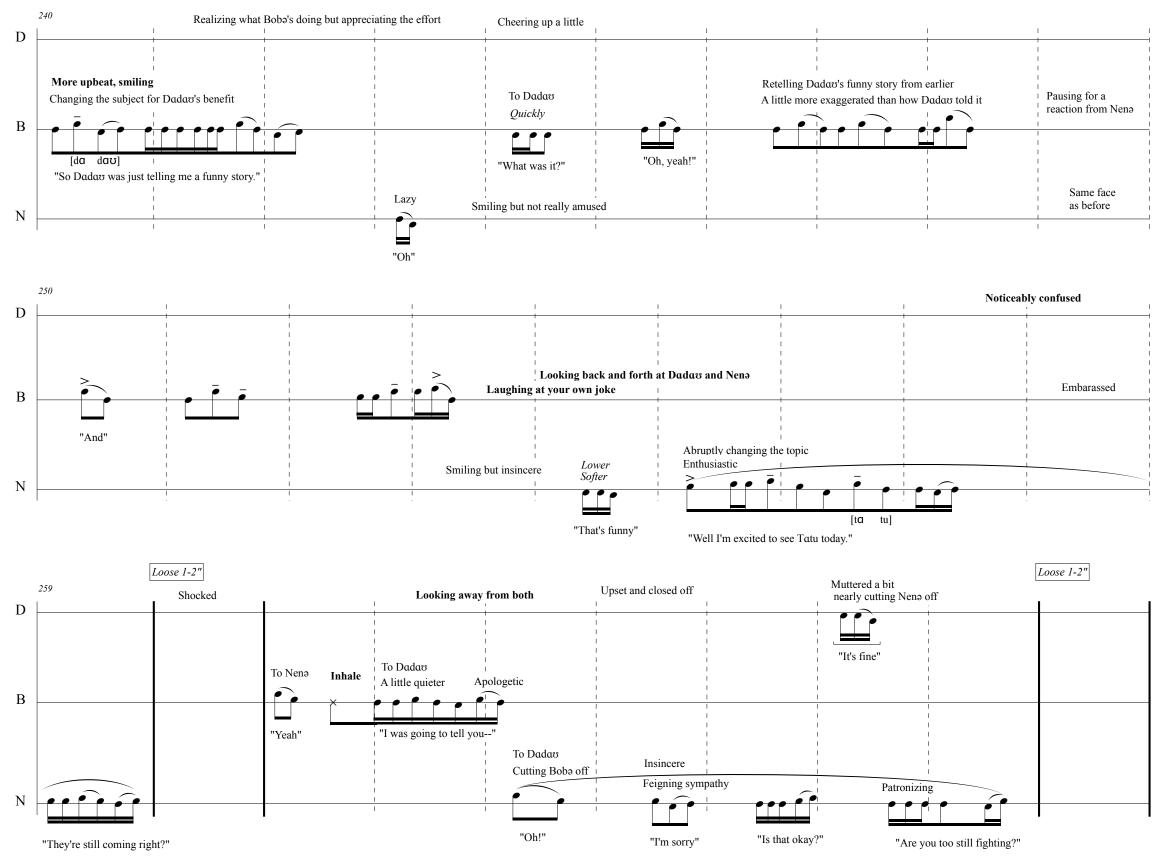
6 Spoken with the same intonation and rhythm.

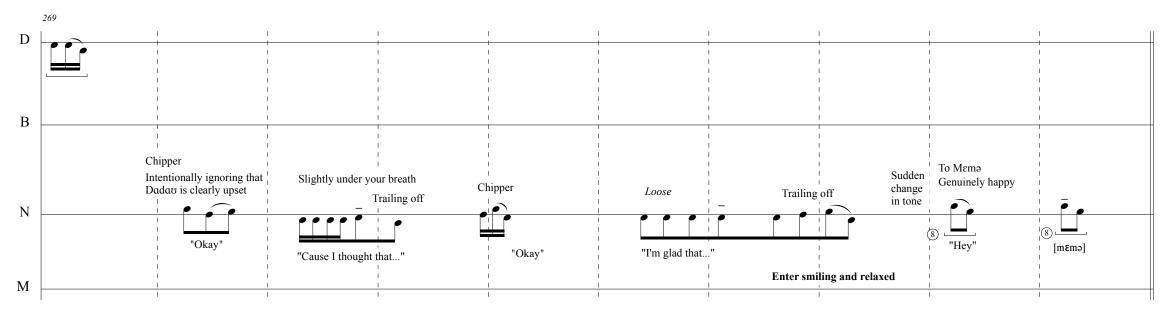


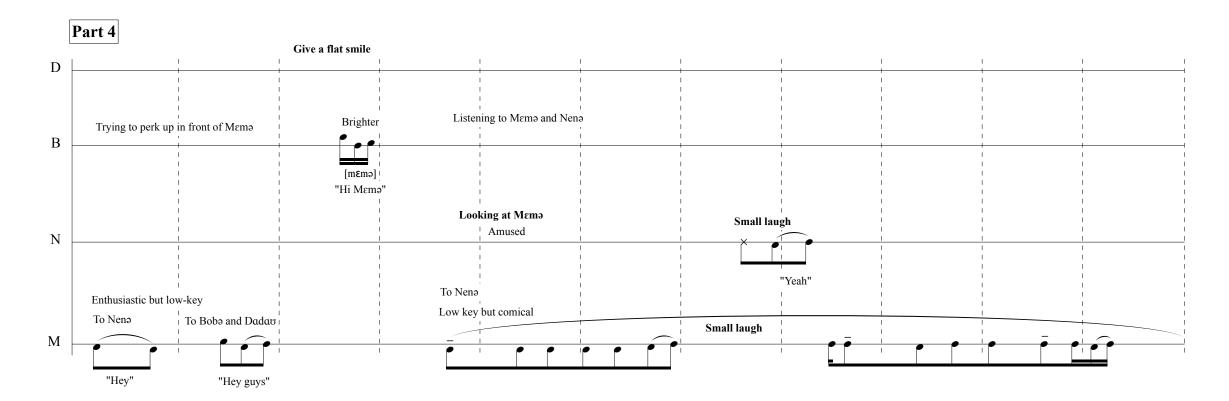
<sup>(6)</sup> Spoken with the same intonation and rhythm

⑦ Spoken with the same intonation, rhythm, and attitude with similar contour

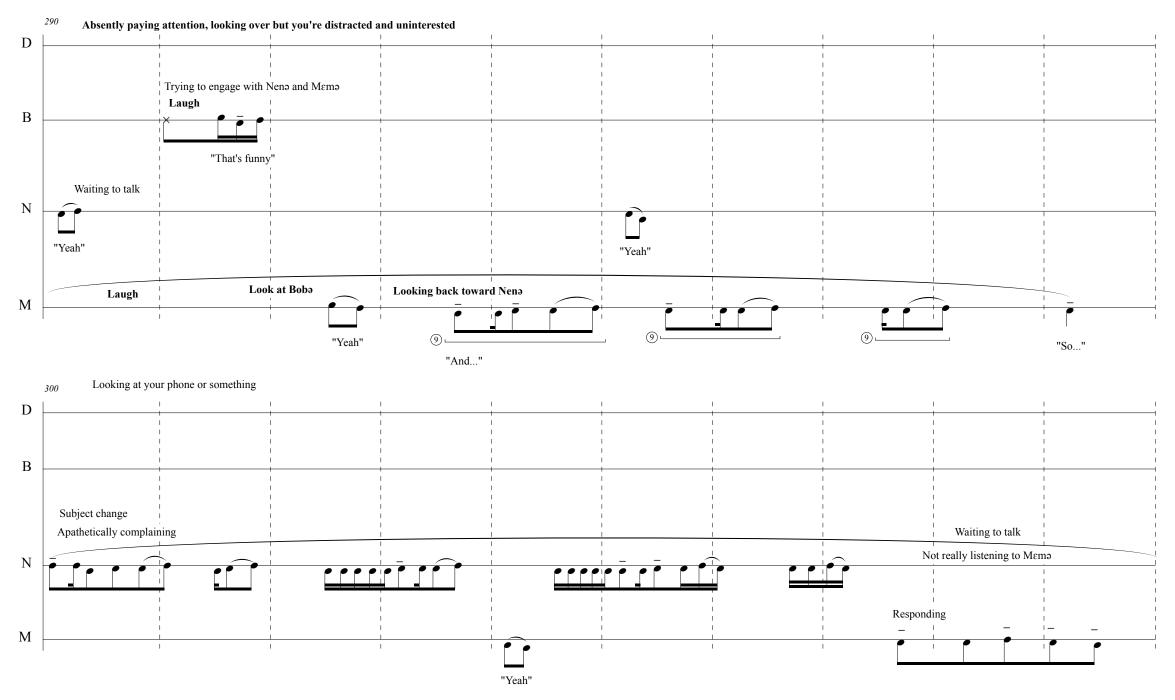


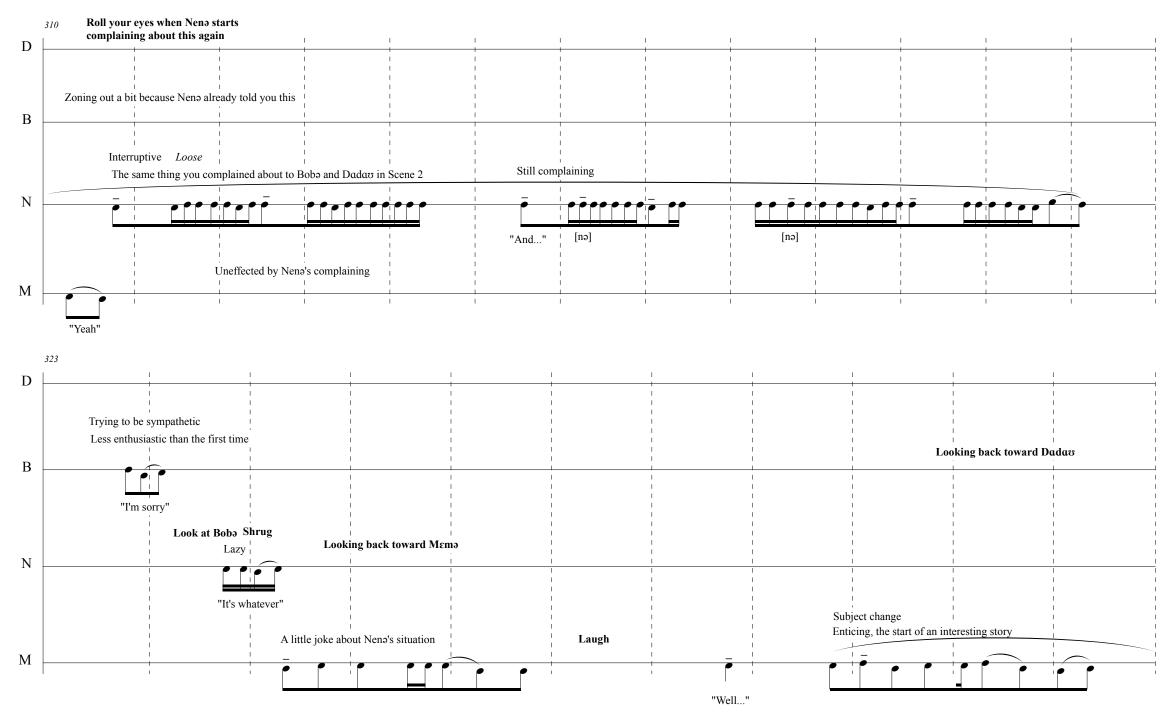


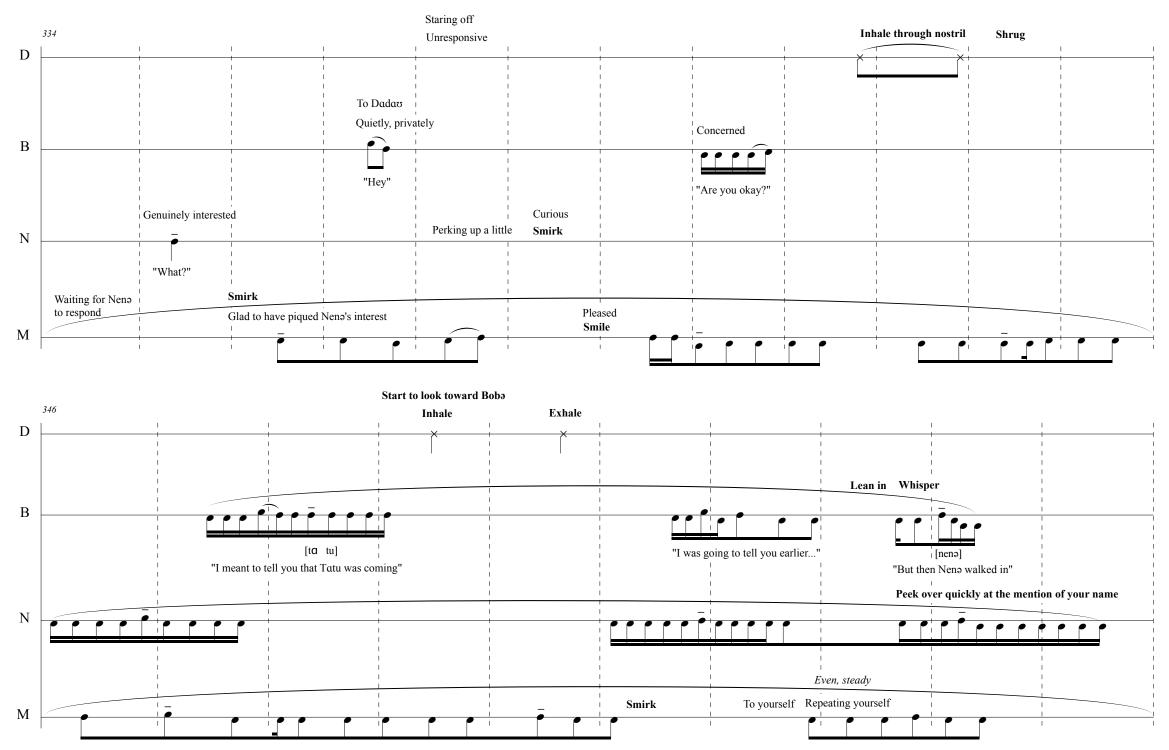


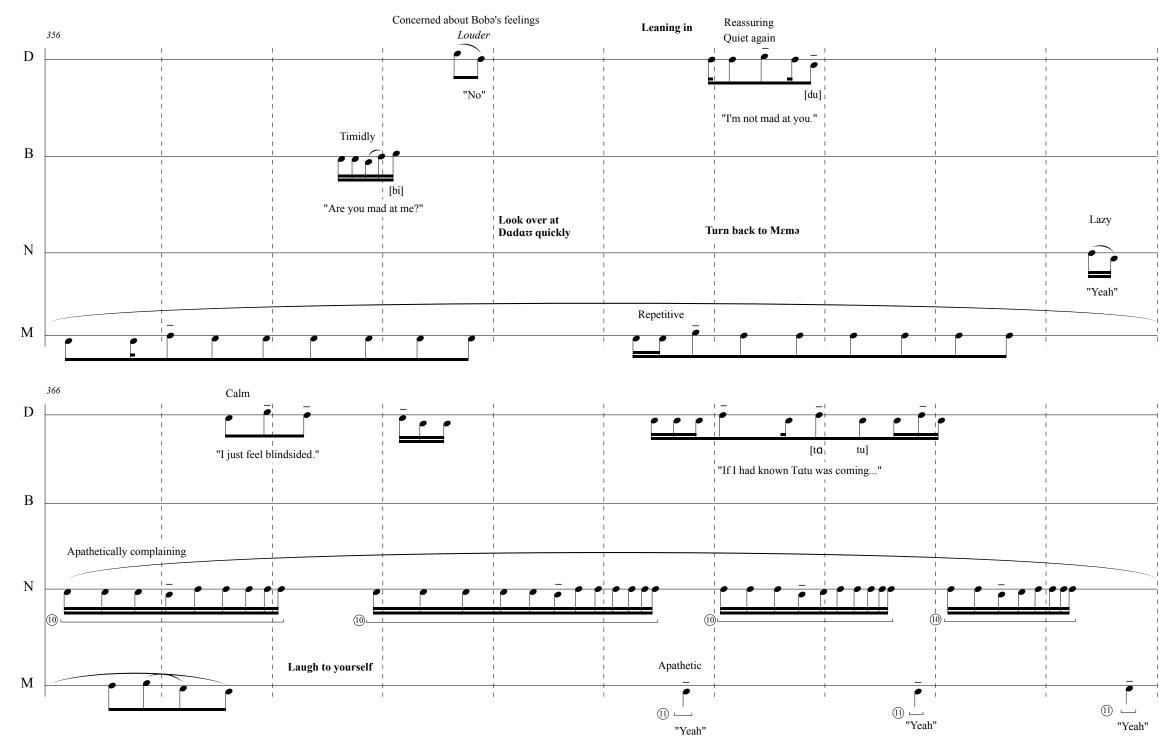


(8) Spoken with the same intonation, rhythm, and attitude.



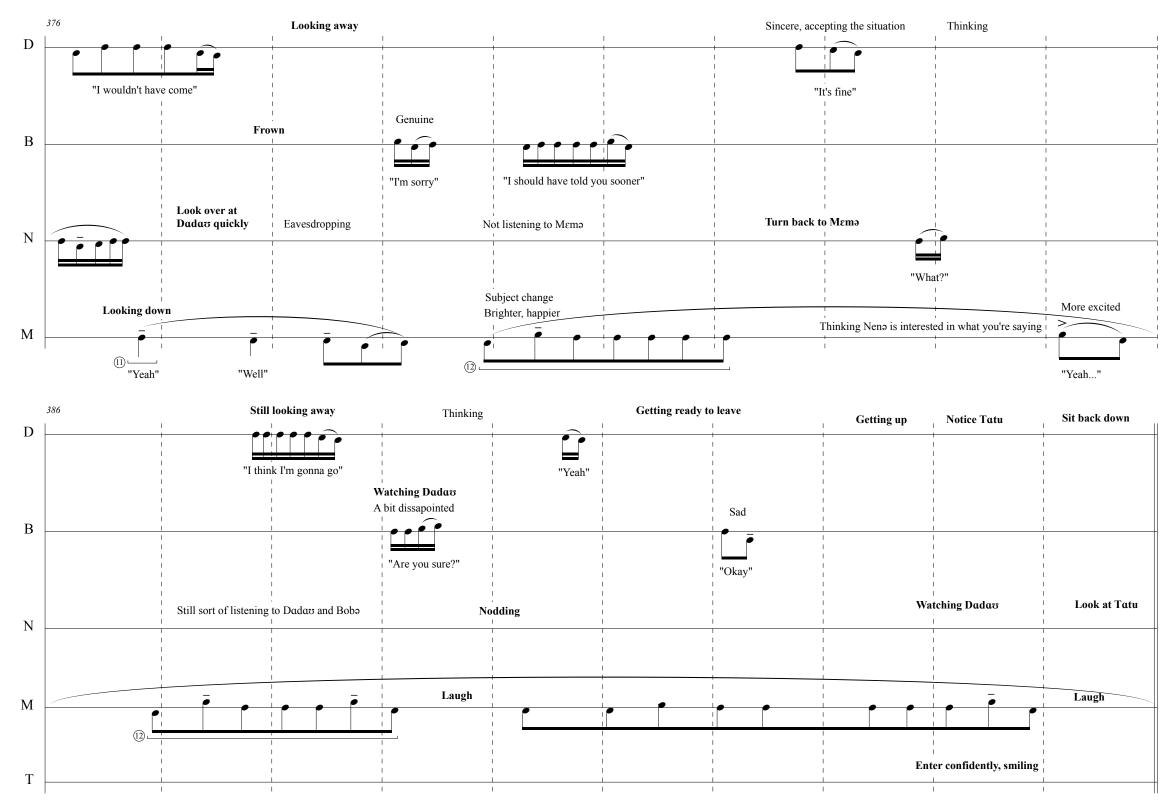




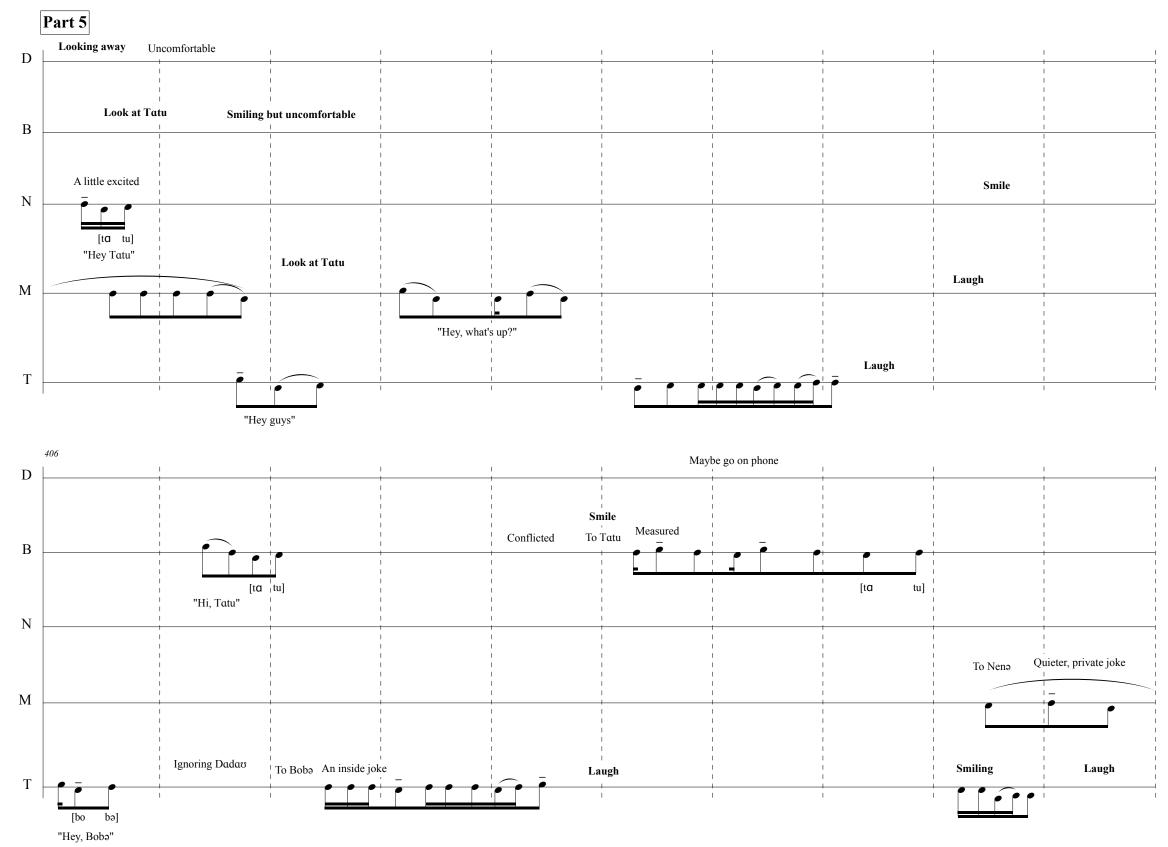


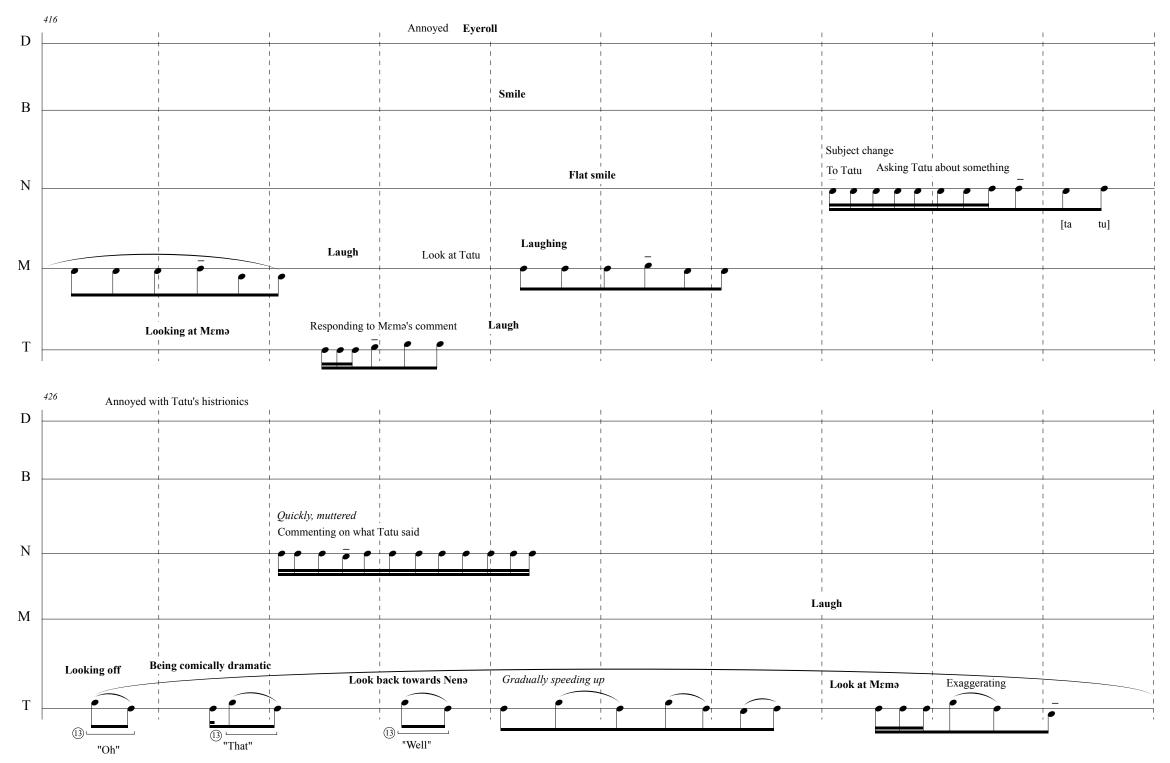
(1) Spoken with the same intonation and attitude, with similar rhythms, and gradually speaking more quickly.

(1) The same words spoken with the same intonation, and attitude.

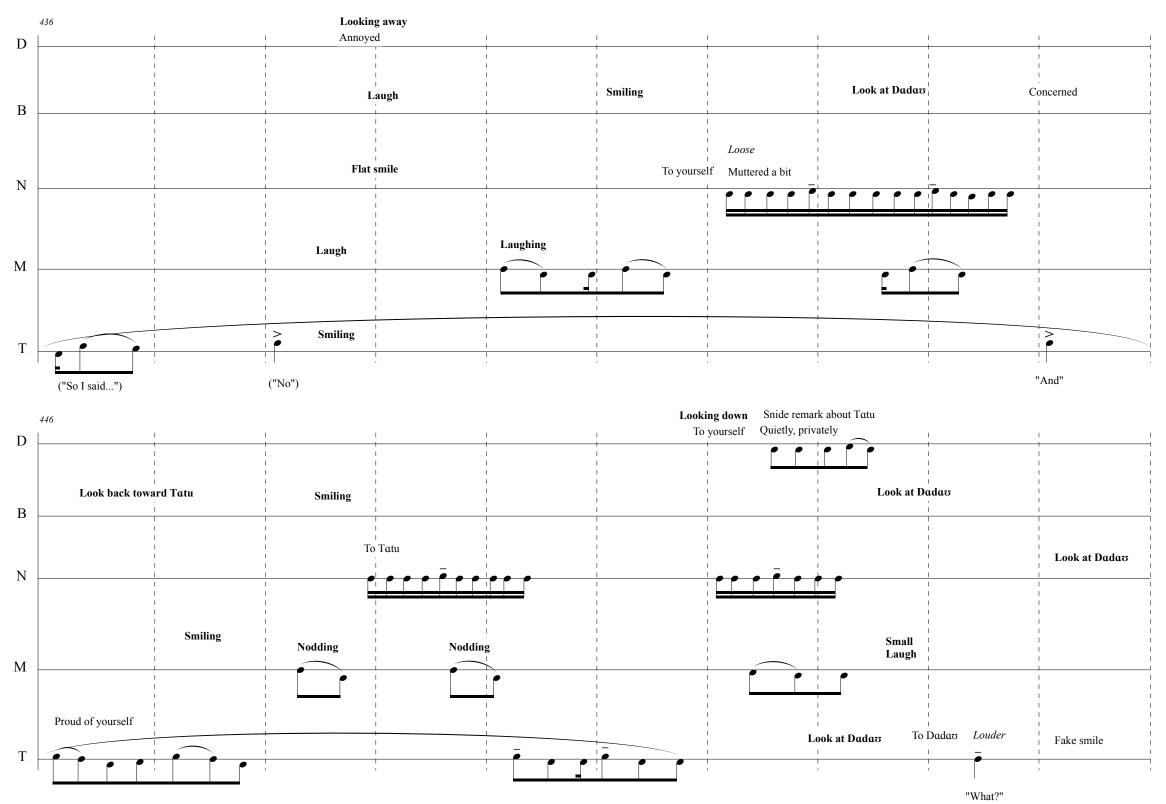


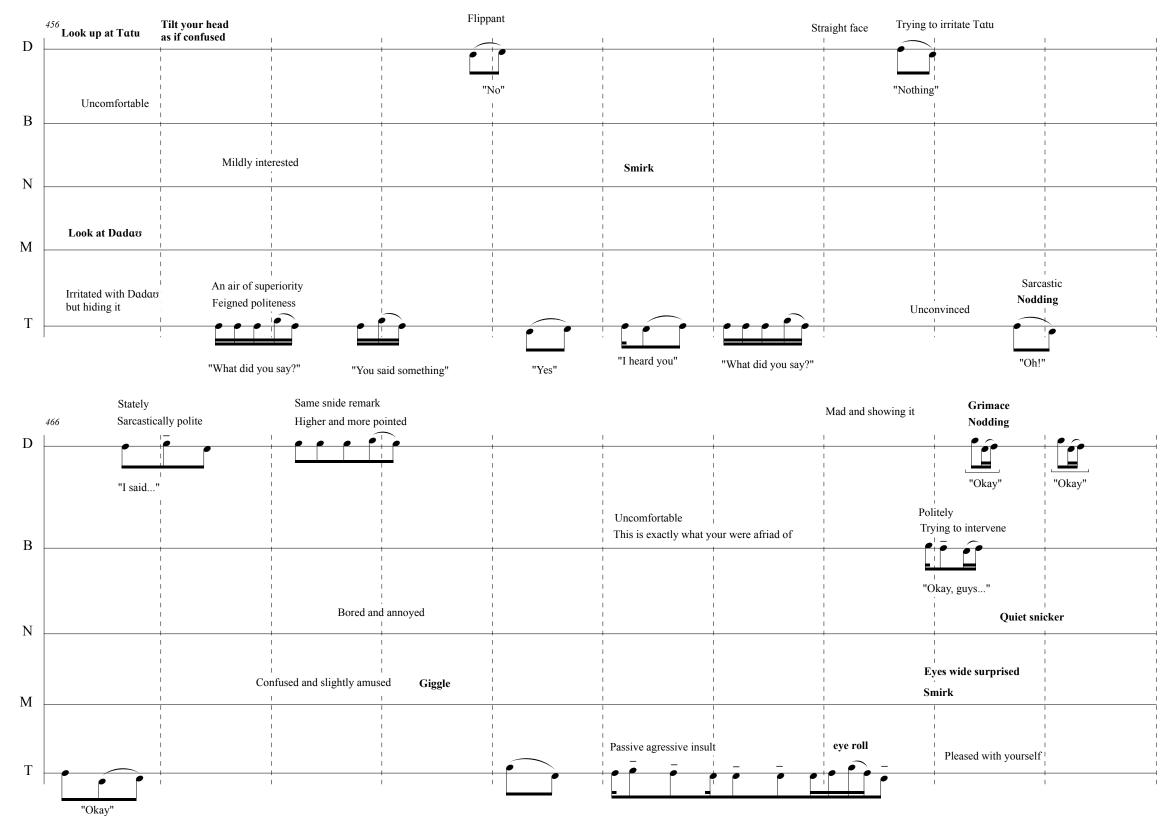
(1) The same words spoken with the same intonation and attitude.(2) Similar words spoken with similar intonation.

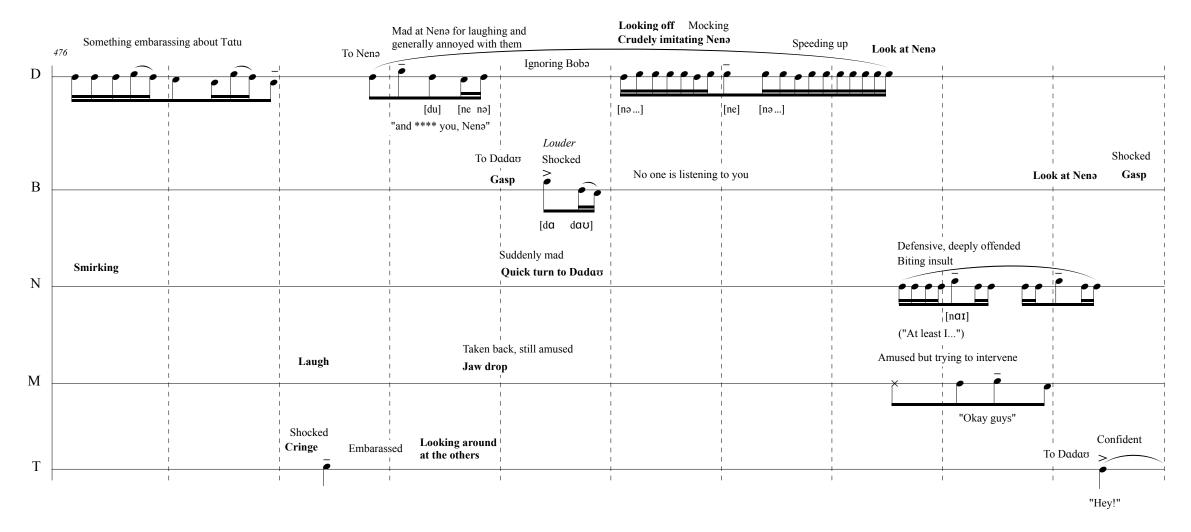


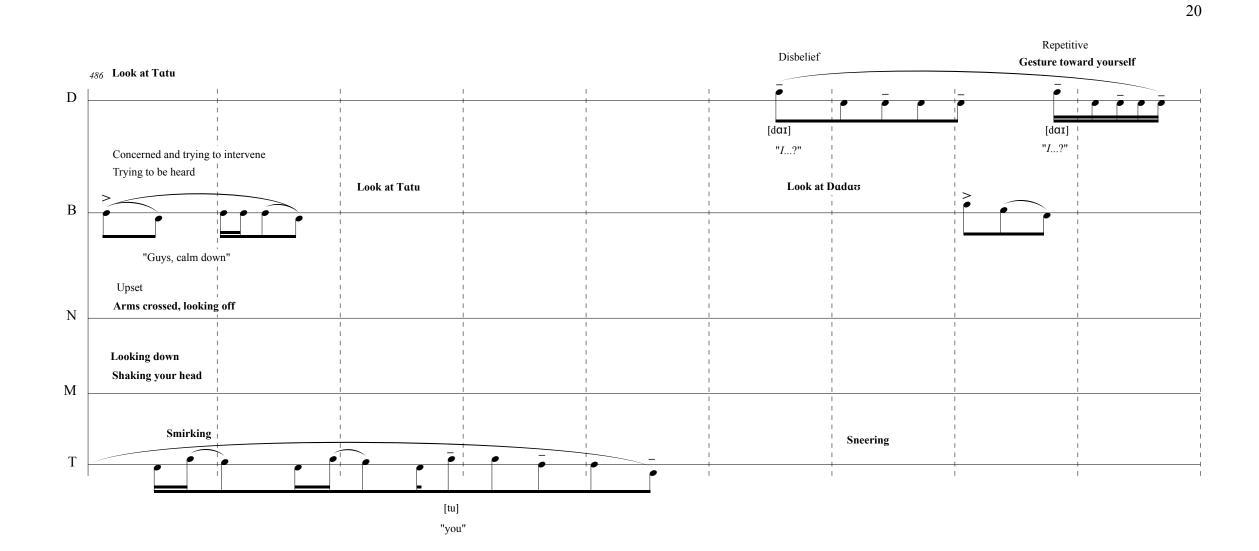


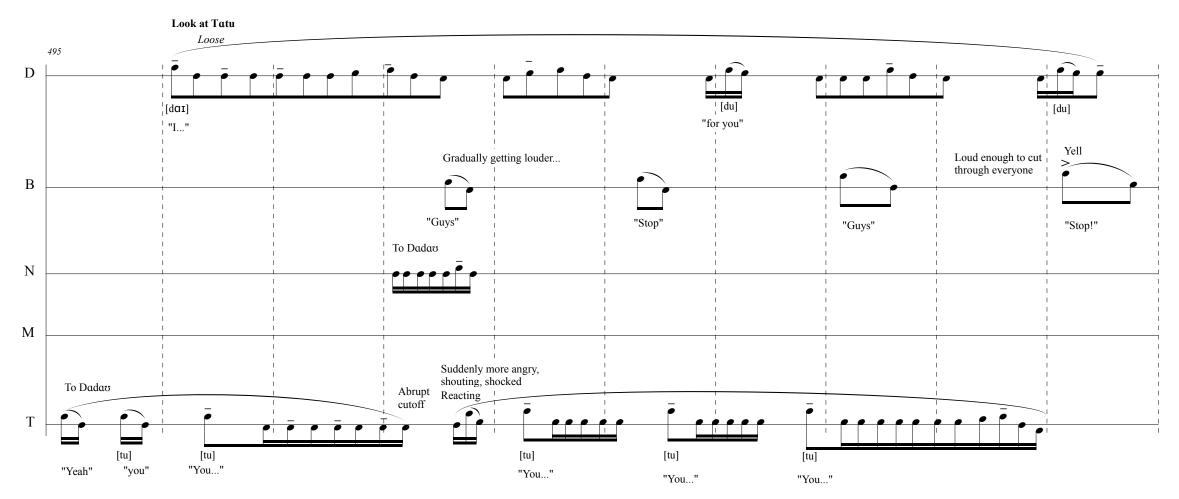
<sup>(13)</sup> Spoken with similar intonation and rhythm

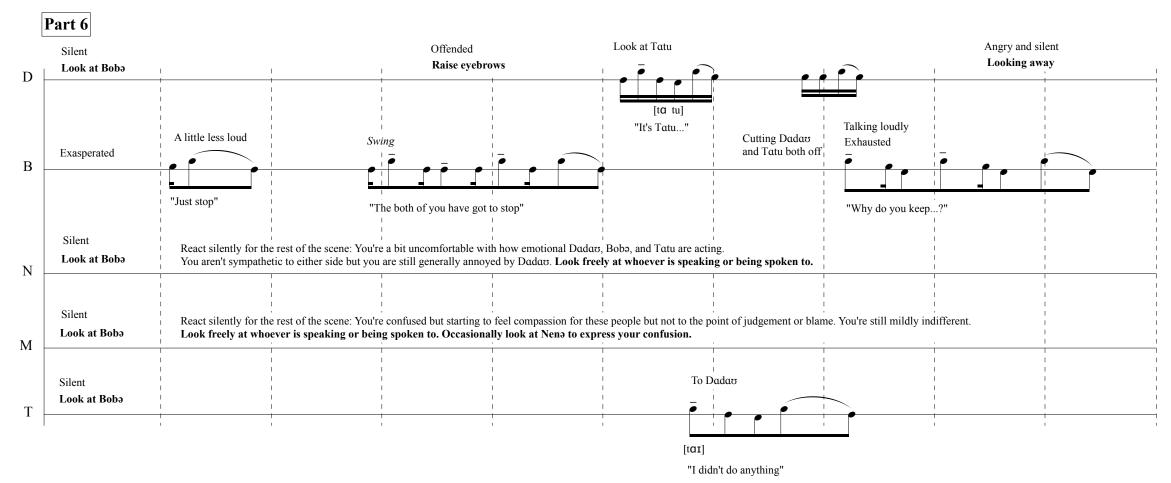


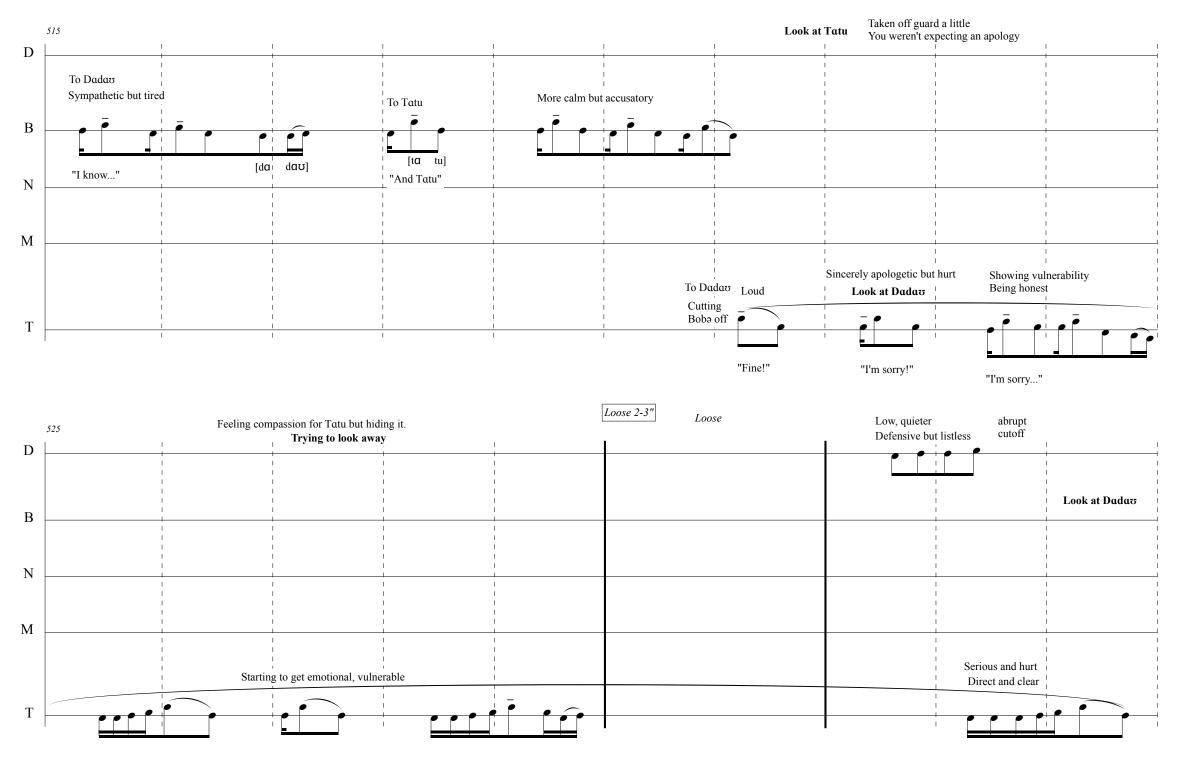






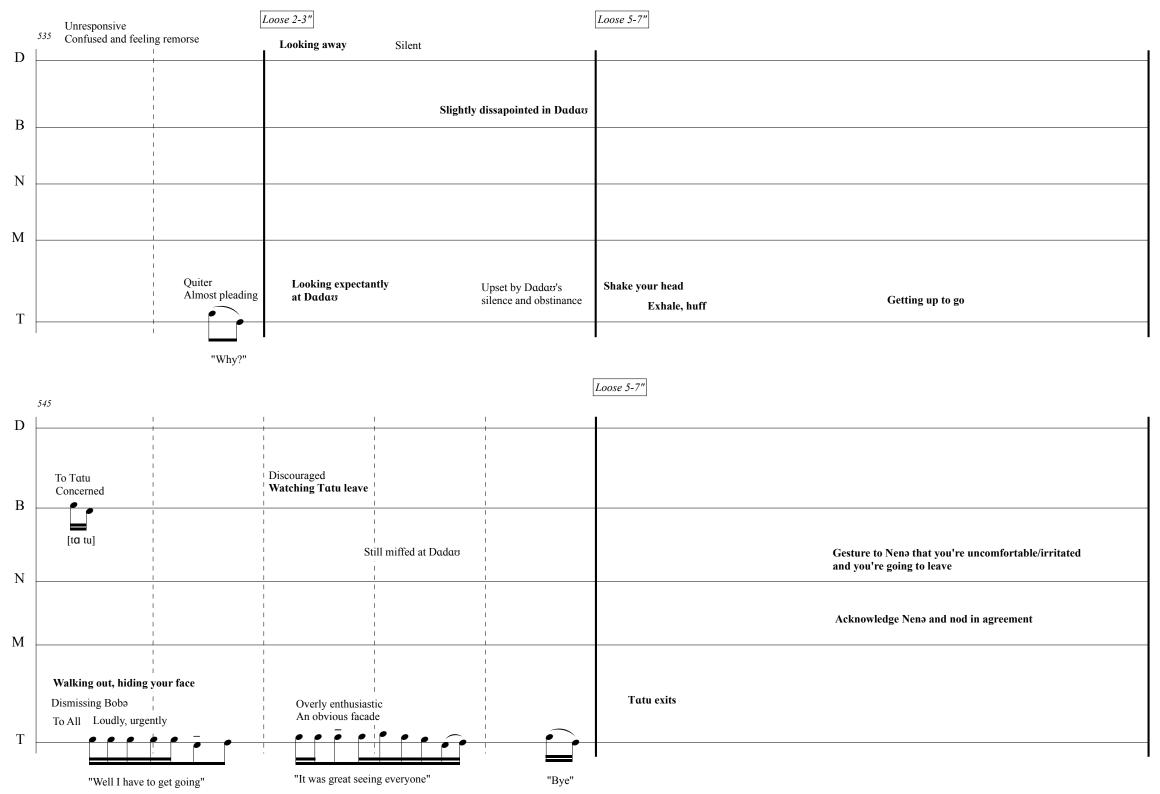


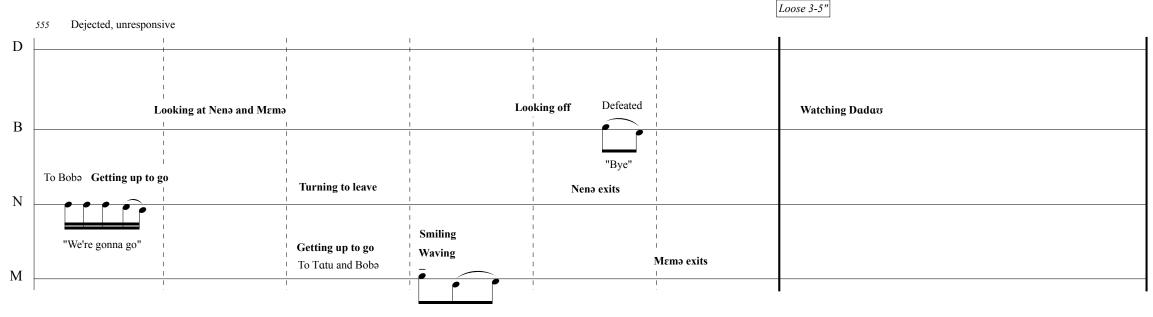




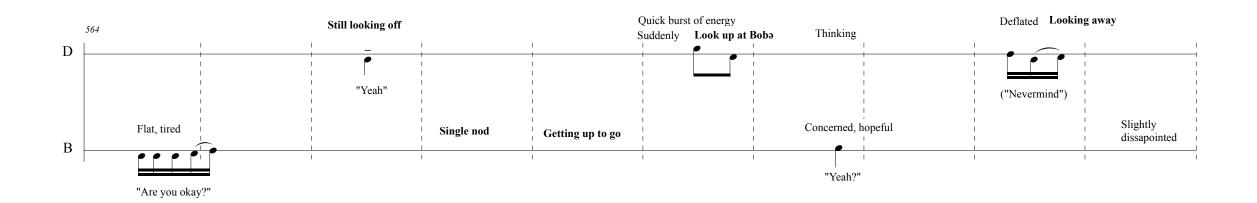
("But you shut me out. You didn't talk to me.")

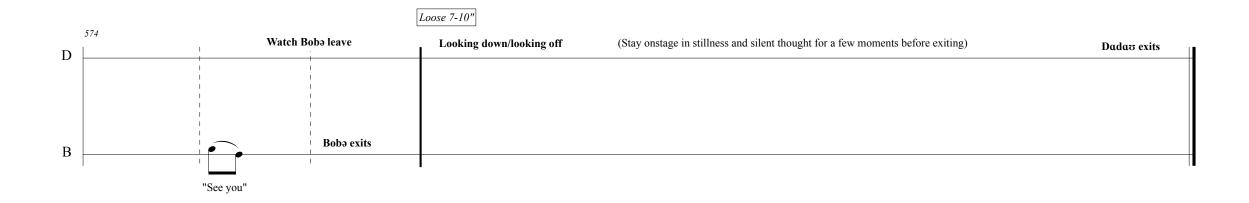
"Why did you shut me out?"





"Bye guys"





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