Recyclers

for ensemble (open instrumentation)
with recorded sounds

Andrew May

2009

PART: BARITONE REGISTER

Recyclers is a work of music for live performance, based on sounds of a Northern Mockingbird recorded in 2008 by Nathan Pieplow in Big Bend National Park, Texas (used with kind permission of Nathan Pieplow and the Macaulay Library at Cornell University). The piece was written for the Nova Ensemble, directed by Elizabeth McNutt, in celebration of Earth Day 2009. It was premiered at the eARTh Festival at the University of North Texas. The six-speaker version was premiered at the Fort Worth Museum of Modern Art.

Mockingbirds are among the world's most inspired mimics; they learn to imitate other birds' songs (and other sounds) and incorporate them into their song. Humans, too, imitate and recycle the sounds we hear into our own songs and stories; technologies for recording and manipulating sound have made us even more avid recyclers. In this piece, both species' brands of mimicry are heard. Wild bird songs combine with the music of human performers to create a hybrid landscape.

Any combination of instruments and/or voices may perform, preferably 10-20 performers distributed fairly evenly between all registers from bass to sopranino. A recording of sounds derived from the original mockingbird recordings accompanies the ensemble throughout the performance.

The performance may happen anywhere - a concert hall is not necessarily the best environment. Outdoor spaces (especially those populated with mockingbirds) are encouraged.

Duration: 25 minutes

Materials

Parts – Each performer's part consists of 12 printed sheets, which are graphic transcriptions on music staves of 12 recordings generated from the mockingbird calls. The recordings also act as an element of the score: the performer rehearses with the recordings, learning to mimic the sounds in them. The printed transcriptions then provide references and reminders in performance.

Parts are assembled by instrumental/vocal range (1-12 bass, 13-24 baritone, 25-36 tenor, 37-48 alto, 49-60 soprano, 61-72 sopranino; but much of the material extends very high!).

Transposing instruments may use parts at sounding or written pitch, according to their preference, so long as they are within playable range. Any player may also choose to transpose any part up or down by a single octave.

Recorded sounds – The accompanimental recording may be presented through a single loudspeaker centrally located; through a stereo speaker setup with the two speakers placed at either side of the performance space; or through six individual speakers arranged far apart from one another, with a few performers clustered near to each speaker.

Preparing the Parts

The performer should first listen carefully to the 12 recordings, studying the corresponding pages of sheet music and practicing to imitate the various sounds as accurately as possible. Extended techniques may be incorporated. The performer should be as true to the recording as possible, paying particular attention to the shapes of the gestures. Working from the sheet music, the performer should practice linking and shaping the sounds on each page as a line. The parts are measured in 10-second units of time. Performers uncomfortable keeping time in this way may use a metronome set to mm. 48; two measures of 4 beats will equal 10 seconds. Height indicates pitch, roughly matching the given grand staff; darkness indicates dynamic (pale gray = *pp*, black = *ff*).

Performance Instructions

The piece begins when playback of the accompanimental recording is started. Performers may come in at any time, but should not play all the time. Sounds on the accompanimental recording will resemble the sounds from the performers' parts, but none will be identical. Performers should stop when the recording ends, but not abruptly: continue at least to the end of the page you are playing.

Performers should be arrayed through the performance space (and if desired, the audience space) in a variety of configurations: some seated alone, some in small groups. There should be several more seats and stands than there are performers.

As a performer, you may begin playing at any time after the recorded sounds begin. Choose any page from your part and play from it. Rely on the part as a reminder of what you heard and practiced. After playing a segment, you may either remain silent for a while; continue on to any other page; or "fly away" to another seat.

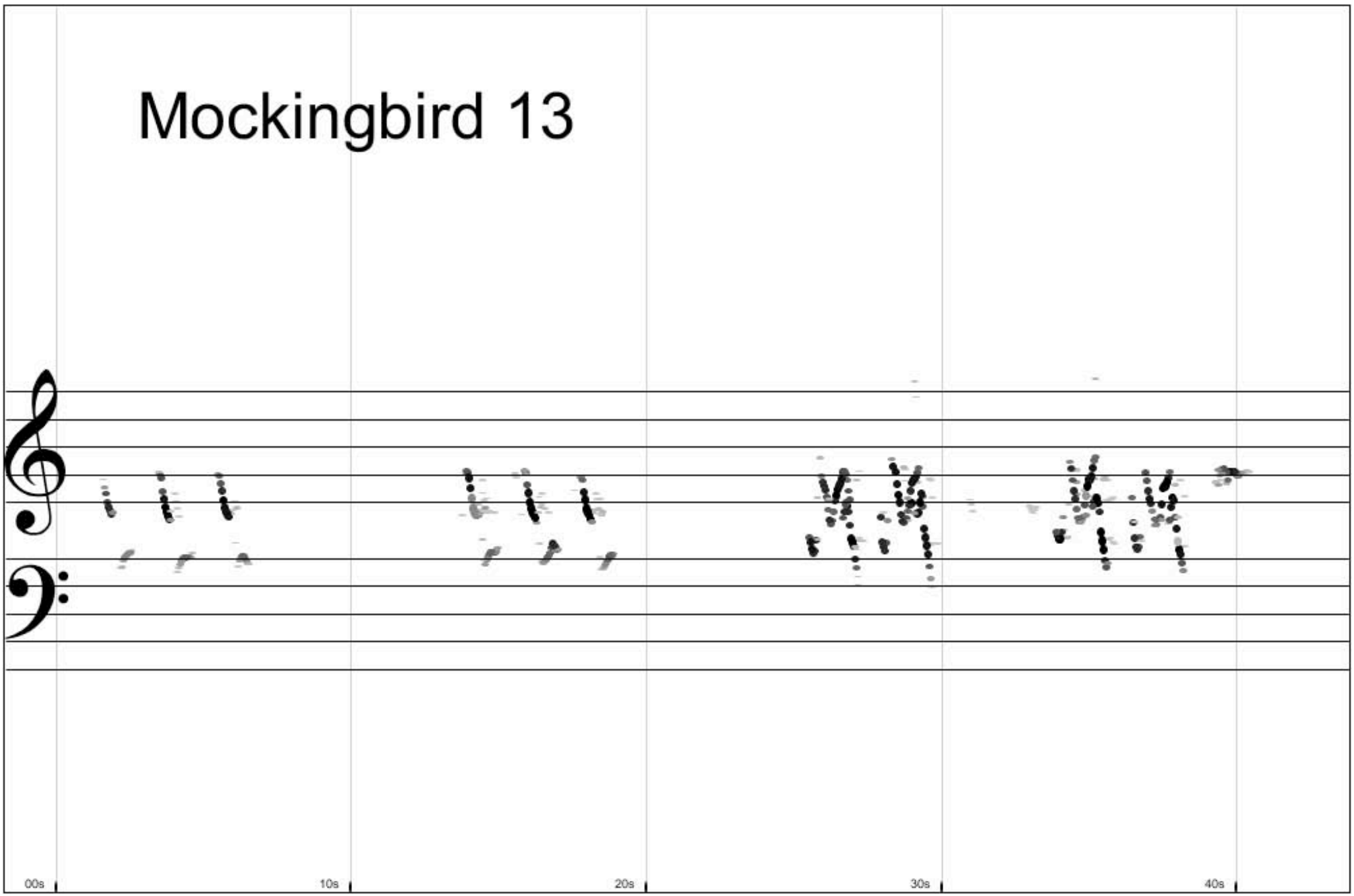
Listen constantly and let what you hear direct what you play. You have six options:

1. **consider**: simply listen
2. **compete**: play a part that will establish your sound as distinct and dominant
3. **chorus**: join in with performers close to you (or on recording) and blend in with them
4. **converse**: play sounds that respond to other performers (or to the recording)
5. **court**: try to attract another player to join in with you (even to "fly" closer to you) with the sounds you play
6. **copy**: *be moderate in your use of this option!* learn and imitate sounds from another player – playing by ear, not from your part

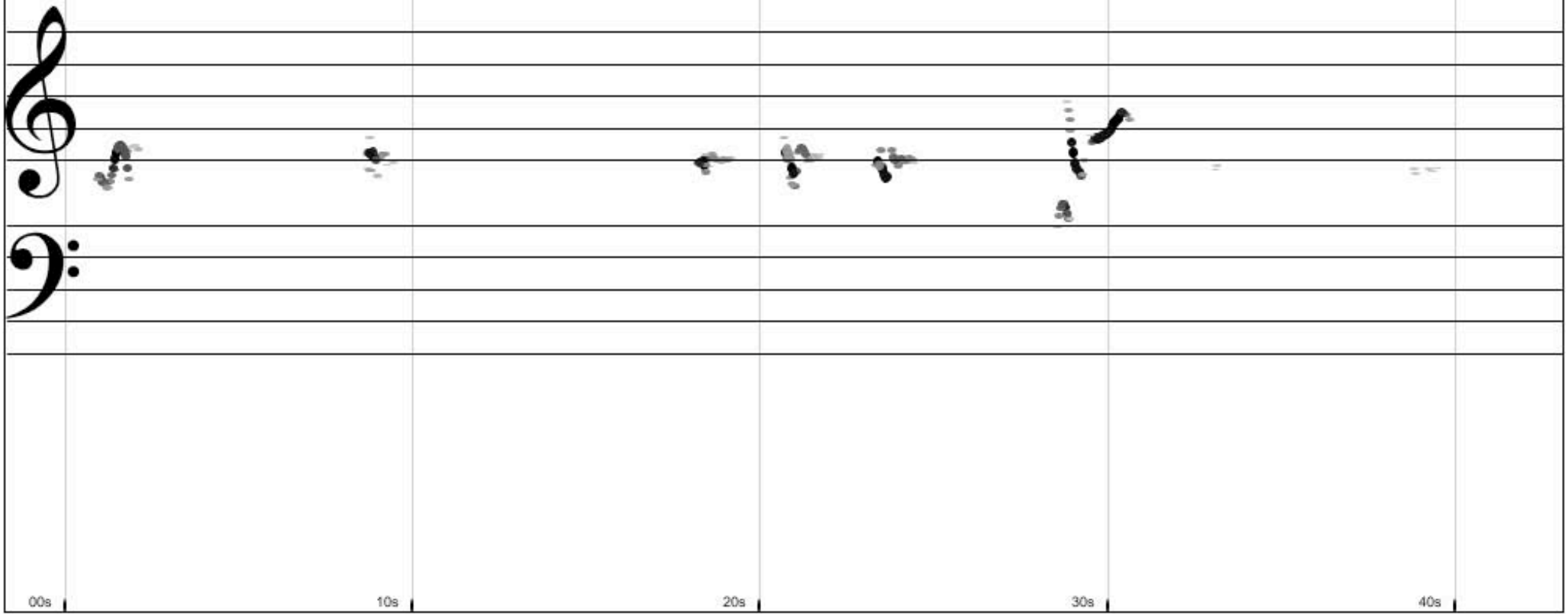
Remember that you should not play all the time; to "consider" is an excellent option. You may play each page of your part as many or as few times as you wish, or even not at all. You do not have to play the entirety of a page; while each page is intended as a single complete statement, gestures within each page may be separated.

— Andrew May 2009

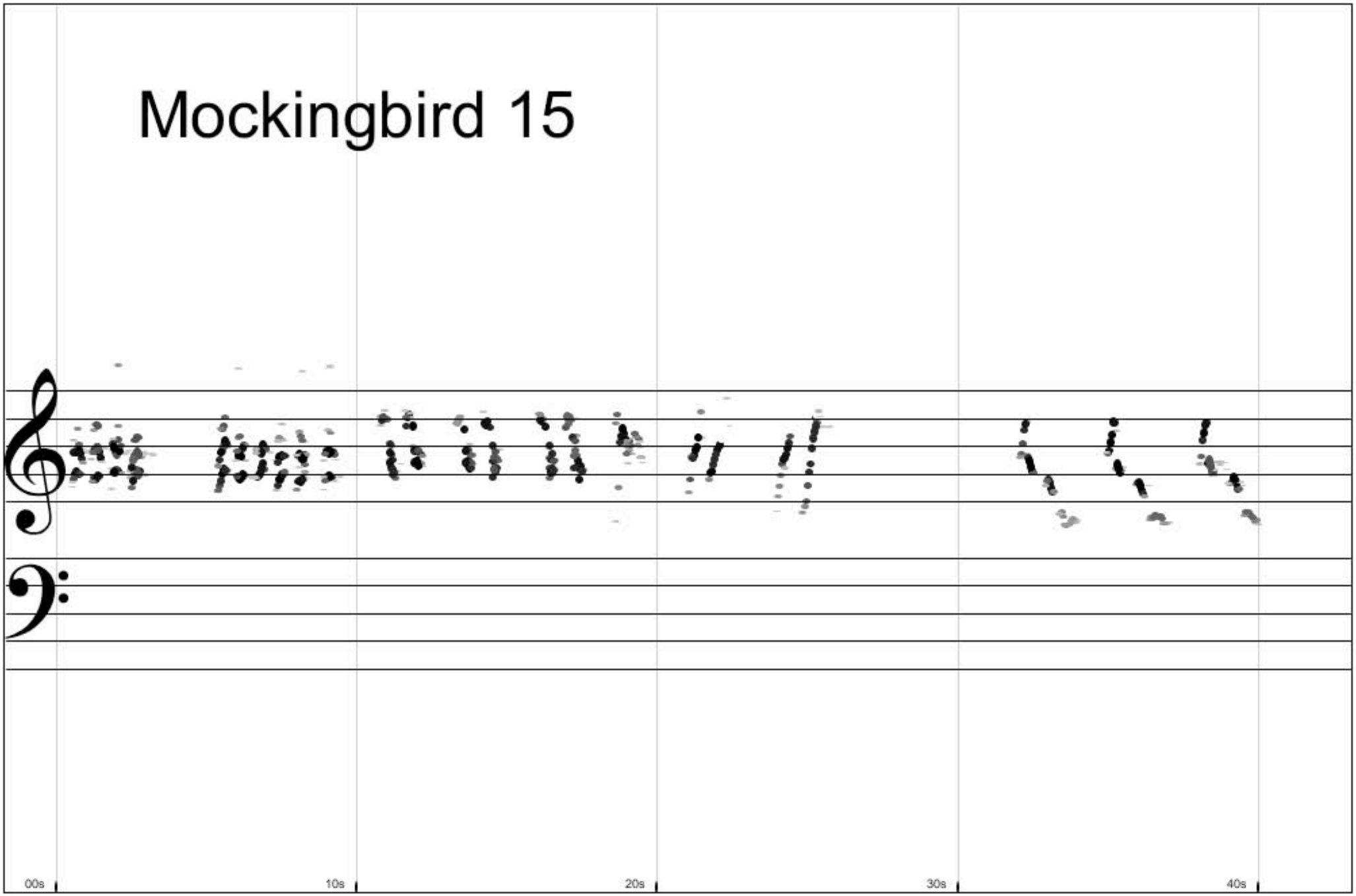
Mockingbird 13



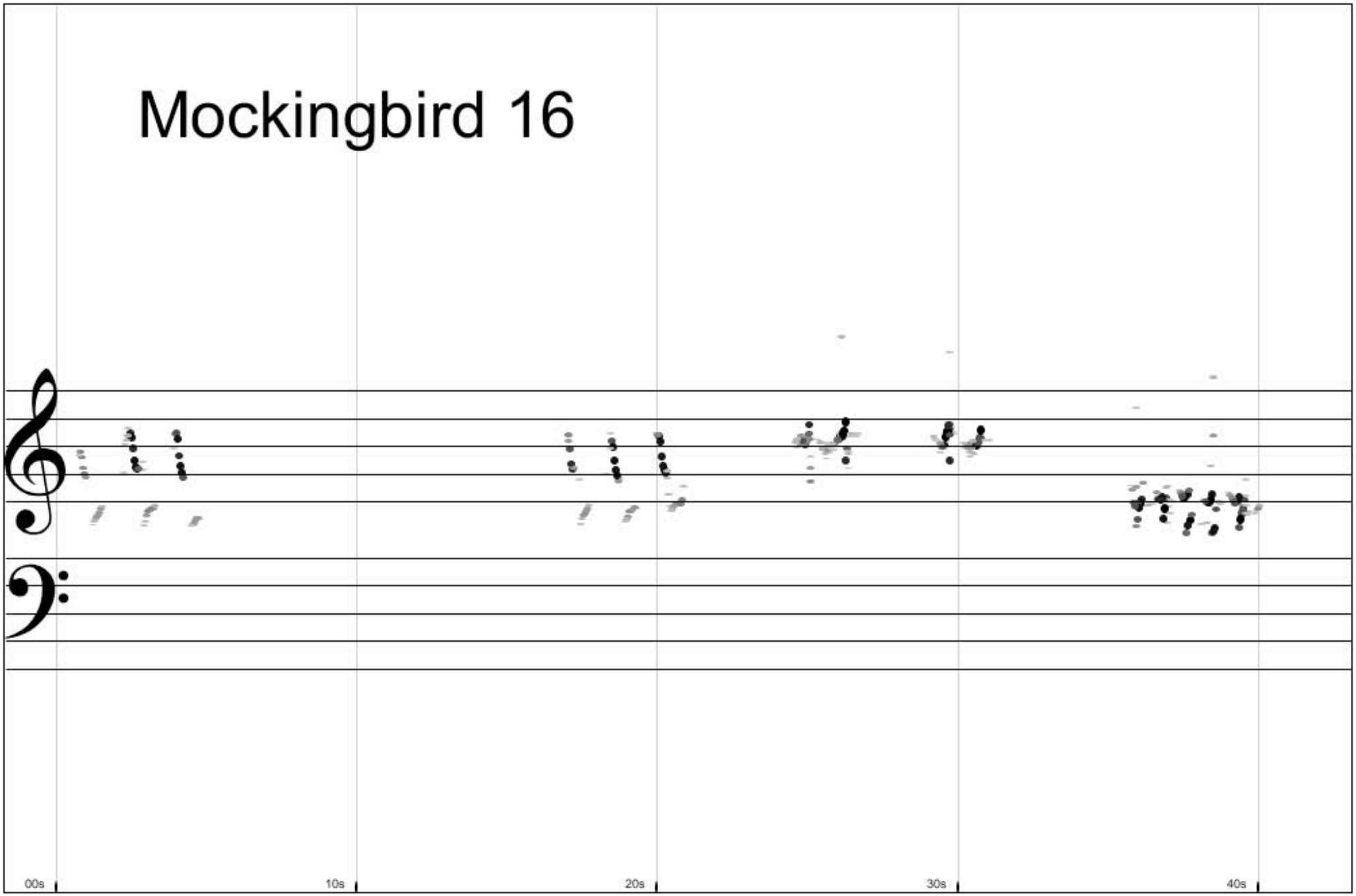
Mockingbird 14



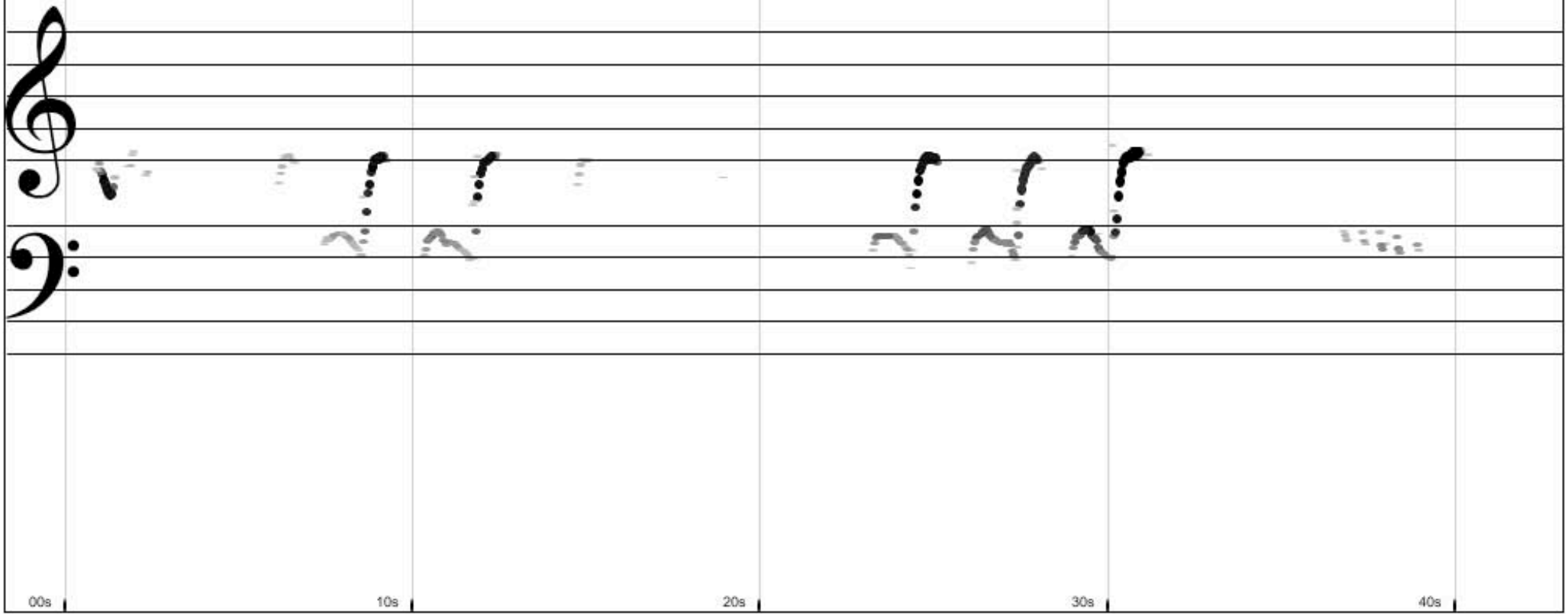
Mockingbird 15



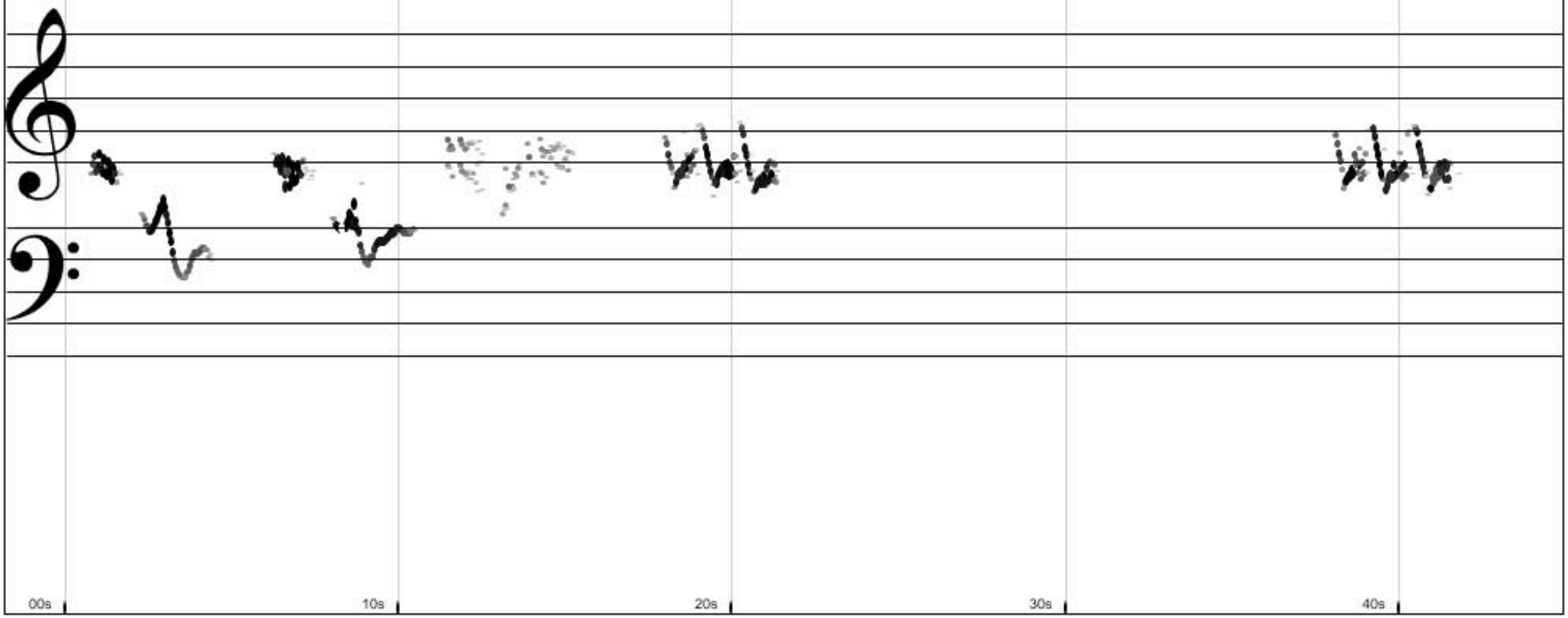
Mockingbird 16



Mockingbird 17



Mockingbird 18



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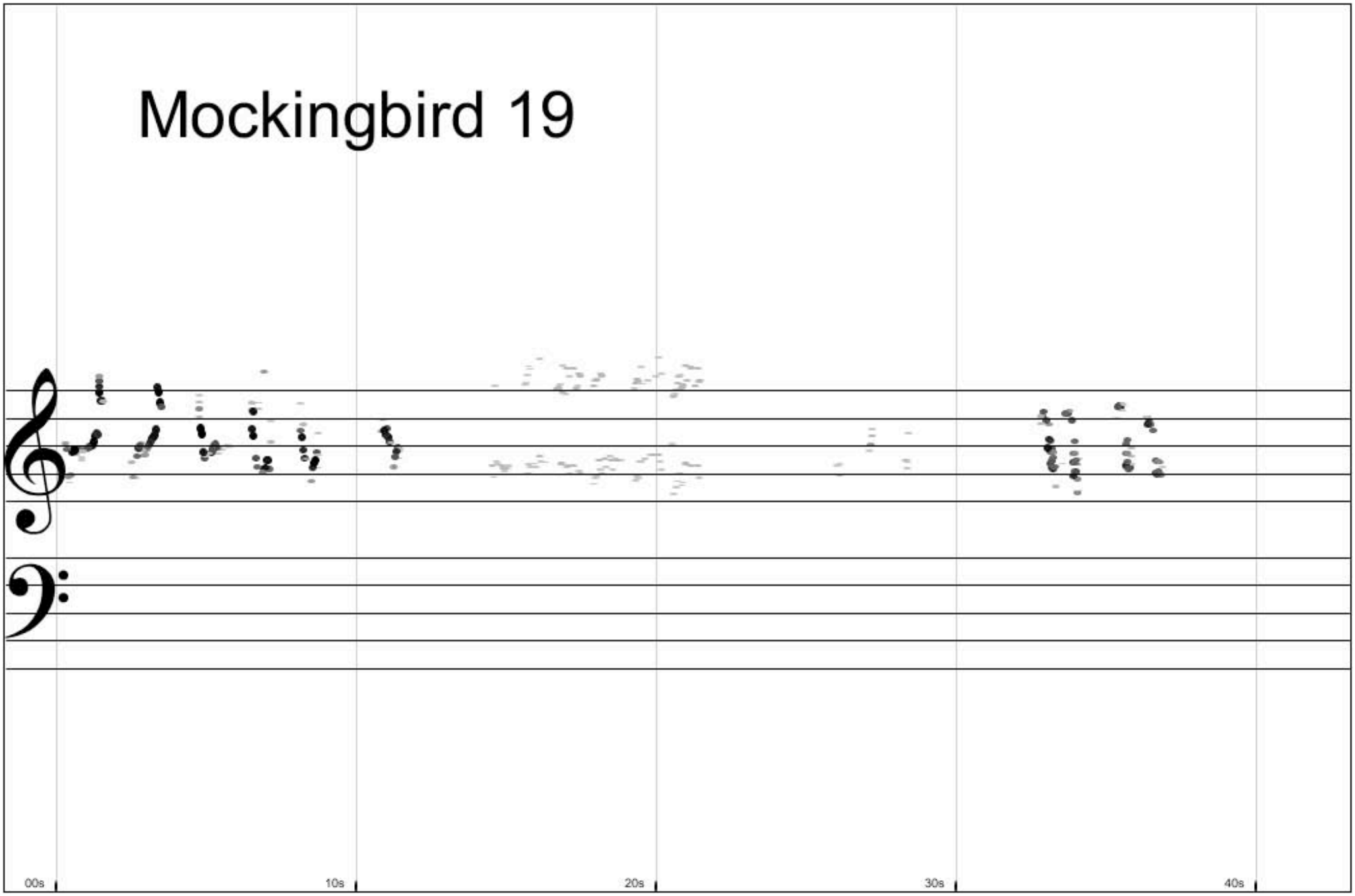

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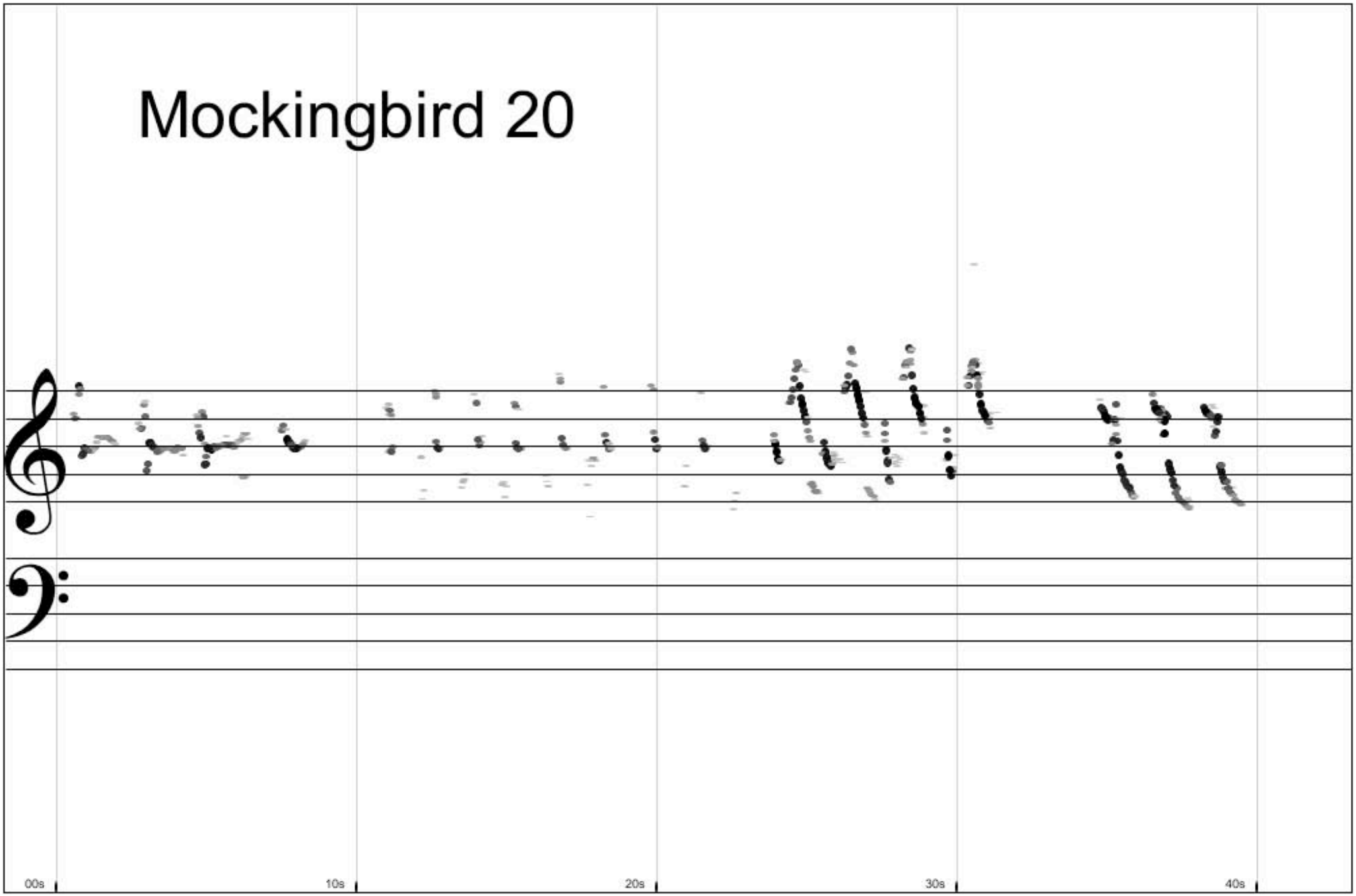

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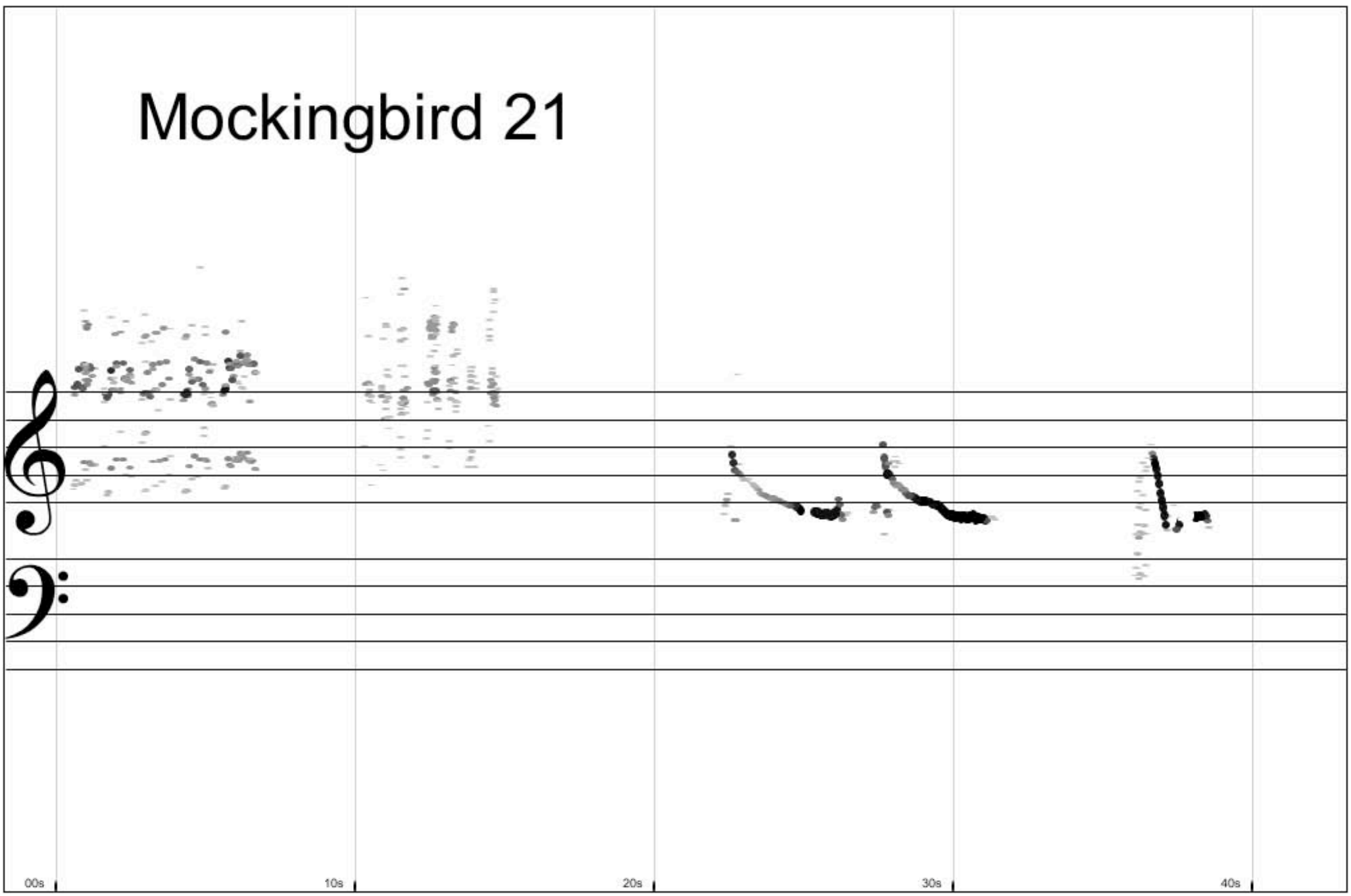

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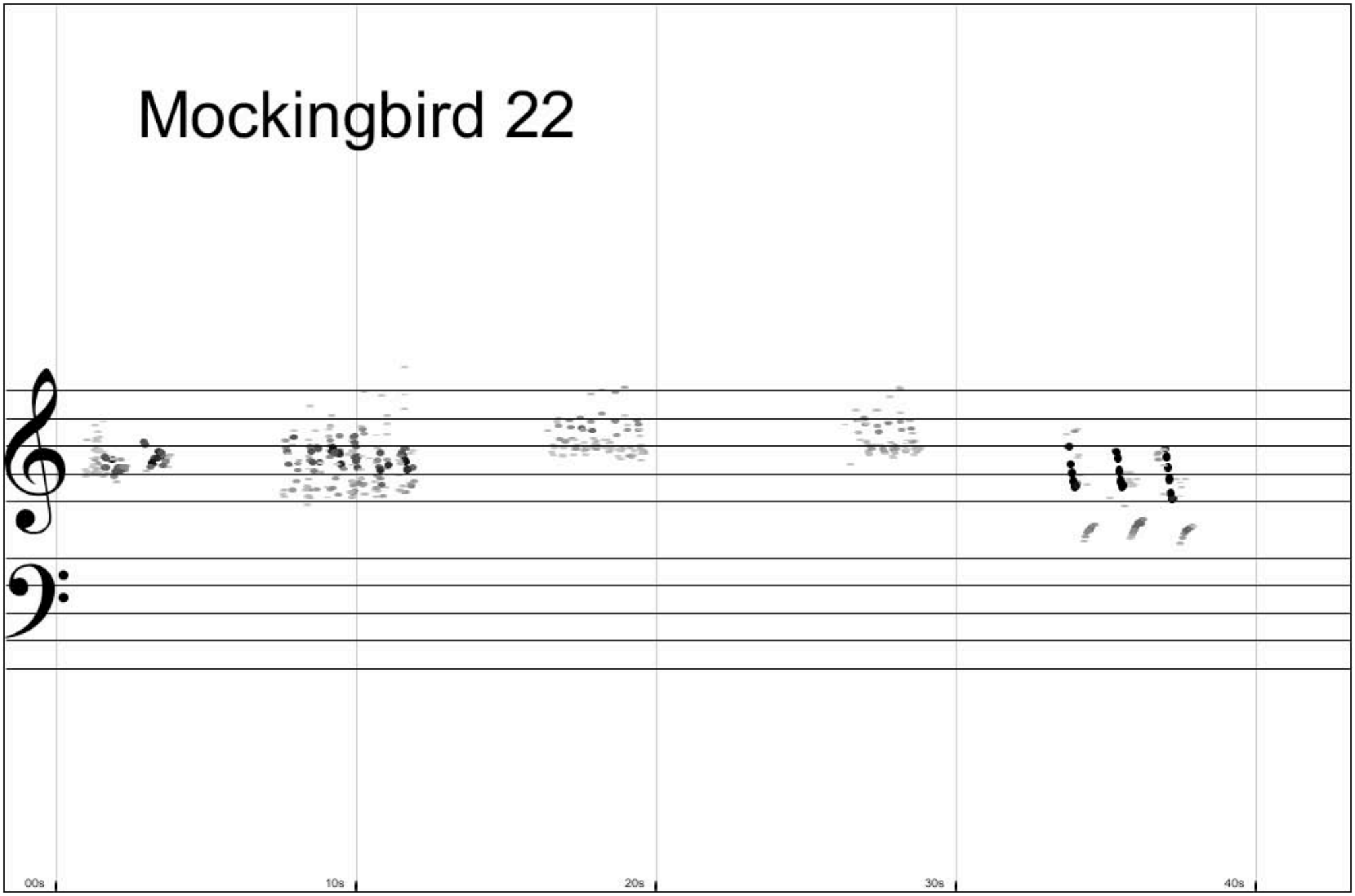

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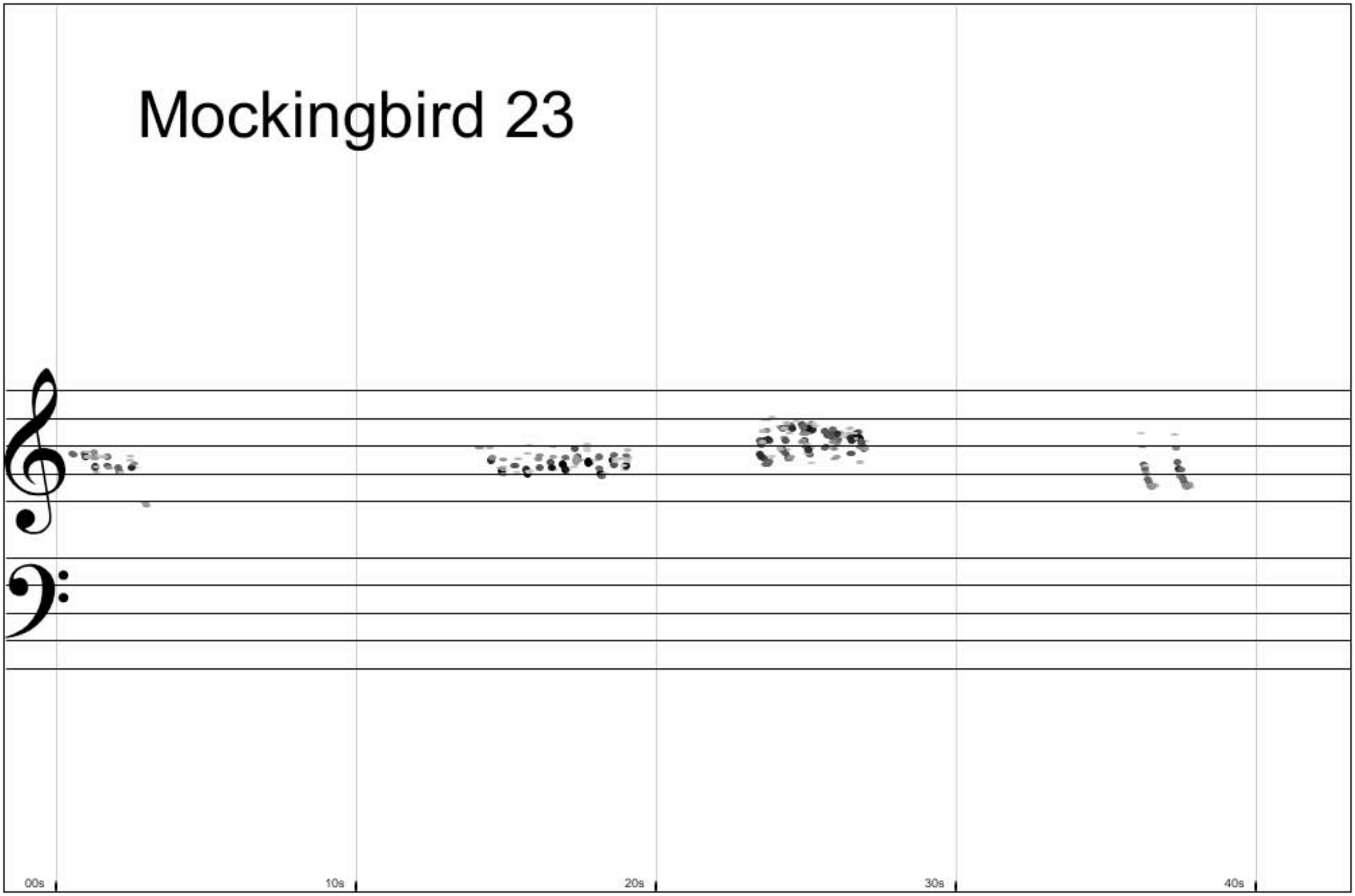
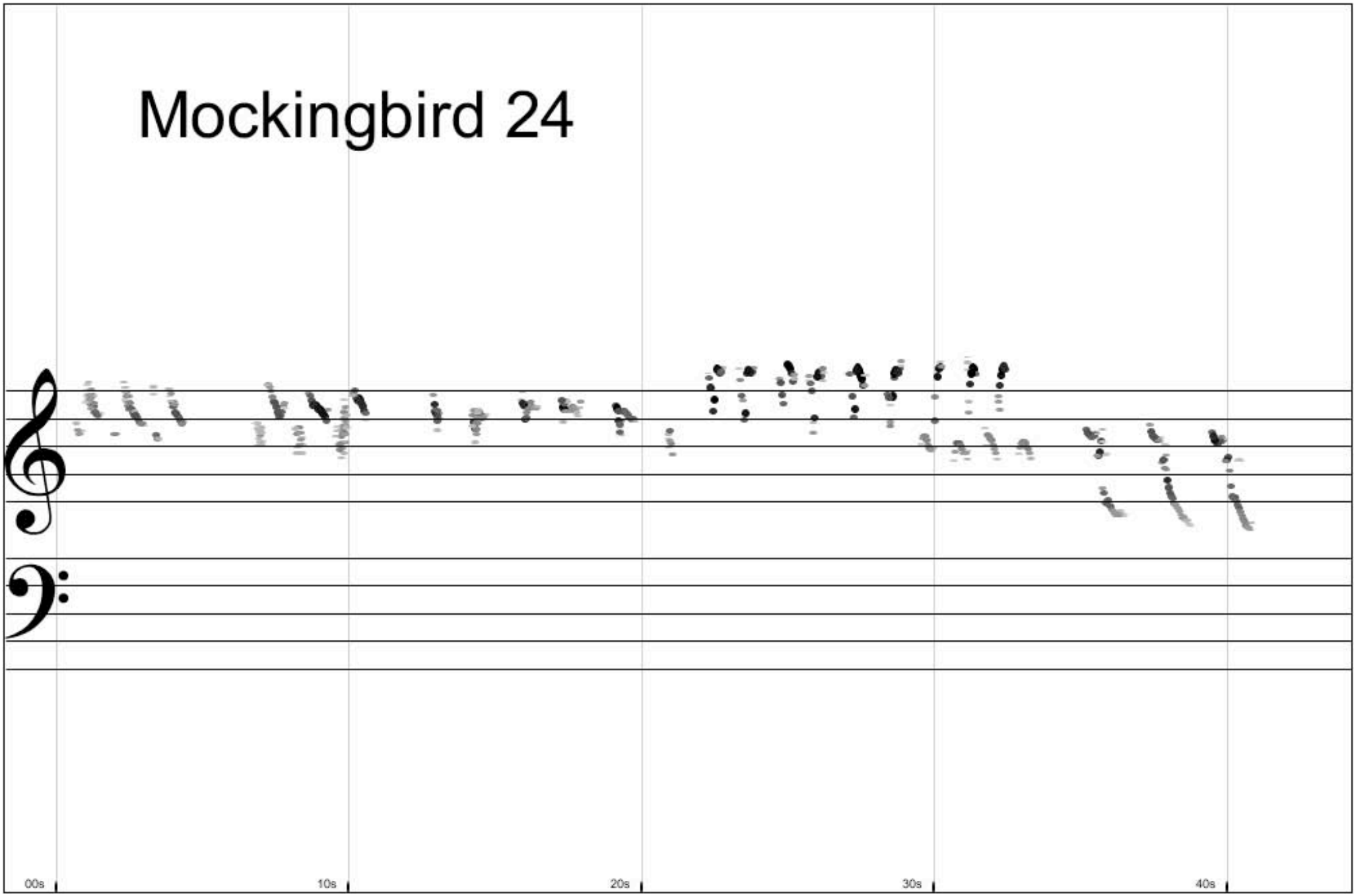
Mockingbird 24