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Three Nocturnes

for piano

Chris Cresswell

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Three Nocturnes (2011-2012)

for solo piano

World Premiere of Complete Set:
Sar-Shalom Strong at Hamilton College on November 10th, 2012
World Premiere of Nocturne no. 1:
July 14, 2011 by Rhimmon Simchy-Gross at St. Peter's Church in Cazenovia, NY

Nocturne no. 1 commissioned by the Society for New Music for their Rising Stars program.
Nocturnes no. 2 & 3 commissioned by Sar-Shalom Strong

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Completed in 2012 in Brooklyn, NY.

Program Notes:

Although written at three different and distinct times, the individual movements of Three Nocturnes are of a single musical and thematic impulse. The harmonic material of each movement is built around the pitch sets [014] and [016], which are featured in many of my recent works, with special emphasis placed on the intervals of a minor 2nds/major 7ths and the tritone. In addition, the opening of each movement begins registrally where the previous movement ended, creating a cohesive relationship between the three movements.

The first movement, Nocturne No. 1 "Lonely Tonight" introduces many of the elements that are used throughout the work. After the opening gesture, built around a tritone, a quiet melody unfolds in the right hand until it unleashes a sudden climax that fades away almost as quickly as it arrived. A new melody is introduced in parallel major 7ths in the right hand, and is quickly transformed into an ostinato pattern as the opening gesture returns, building to a longer, more sustained climax. The piece ends quietly, with the repeated opening gesture fading away.

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I began writing Nocturne No. 2 "With Sadness" in November 2011 and finished it in February 2012, during a time of personal and creative crisis. In many ways the musical material reflects the struggle to overcome a serious writer's block that was exacerbated by the dissolution of a close personal relationship. The opening pitches [Bb, A, C, Eb] (in the right hand) and [C, B, F, C] (in the left hand) become an idée fixe that the pianist struggles to develop. After several failed attempts to generate sustainable musical material, the pianist unleashes a frustrated, violent gesture culminating with the repetition of the idée fixe in the low range of the piano.

Moving to New York City from the small town of Cazenovia, NY (pop. 7,000) I'm often struck by how different my nights have become. Regardless of where you are in my hometown, you can look up and see a myriad of stars in the sky but in New York I'm surrounded by traffic, people, and most noticeably, the constant rumble of the subway. When I'm riding home over the Manhattan Bridge on the subway late at night, I have a reoccurring fantasy where my N train accelerates to the point that it lifts up from its tracks and takes off into the starry-night sky I remember from my childhood.Nocturne No. 3 "Different Nights" is my musical response to this fantasy. Borrowing material from the preceding two movements, the piece starts with the low rumble of the 'train' that gives way to the 'particularly sparkly' stars in the sky.

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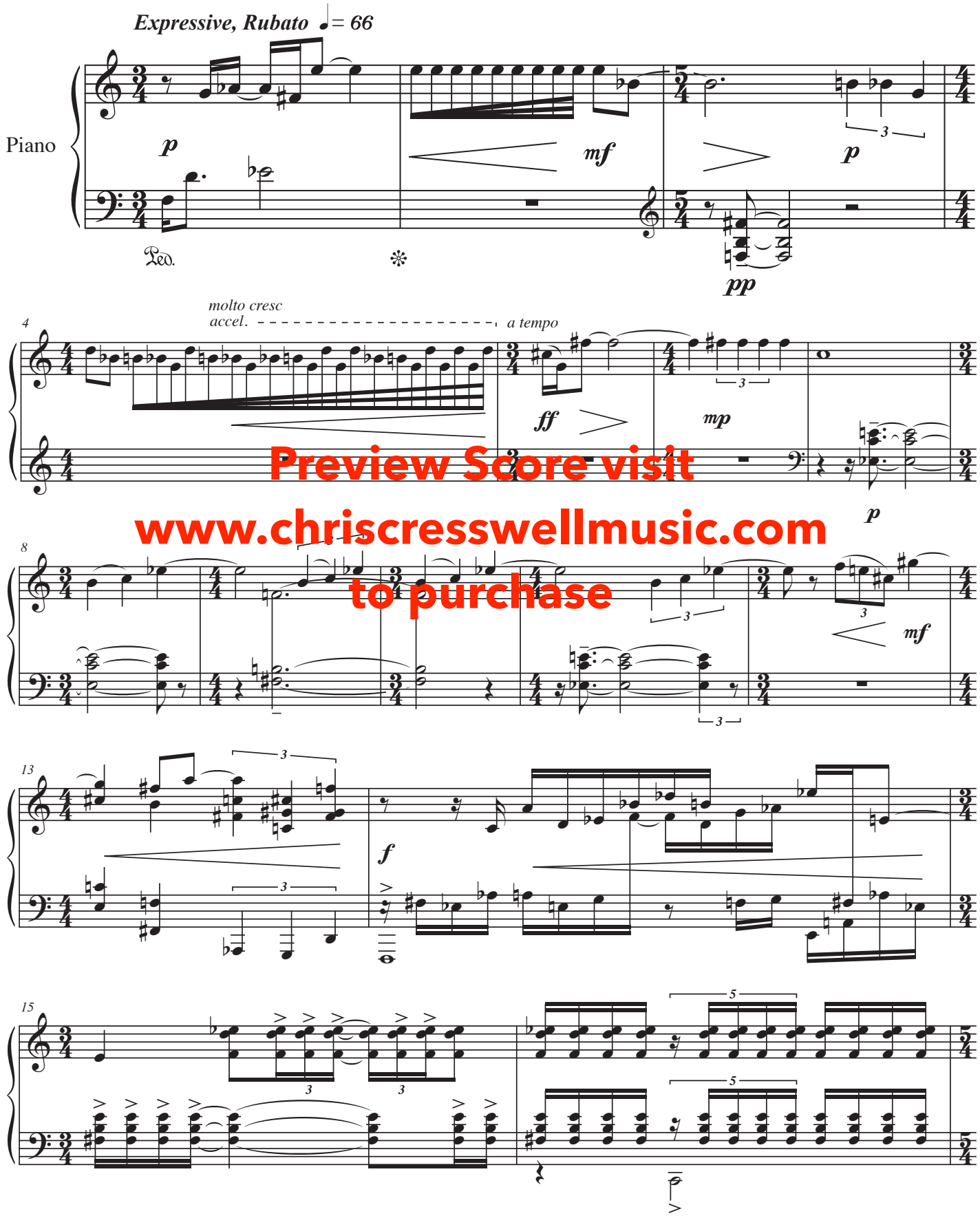
Nocturne No. I
"Lonely Tonight"



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Grave, Much Slower, Out of Time Tempo I, Fluid ♩= 66
15ma
32
mp
ppp
mp
8vb
mf
7:8
Ped.
35
7:8
7:8
7:8
8vb
Ped.
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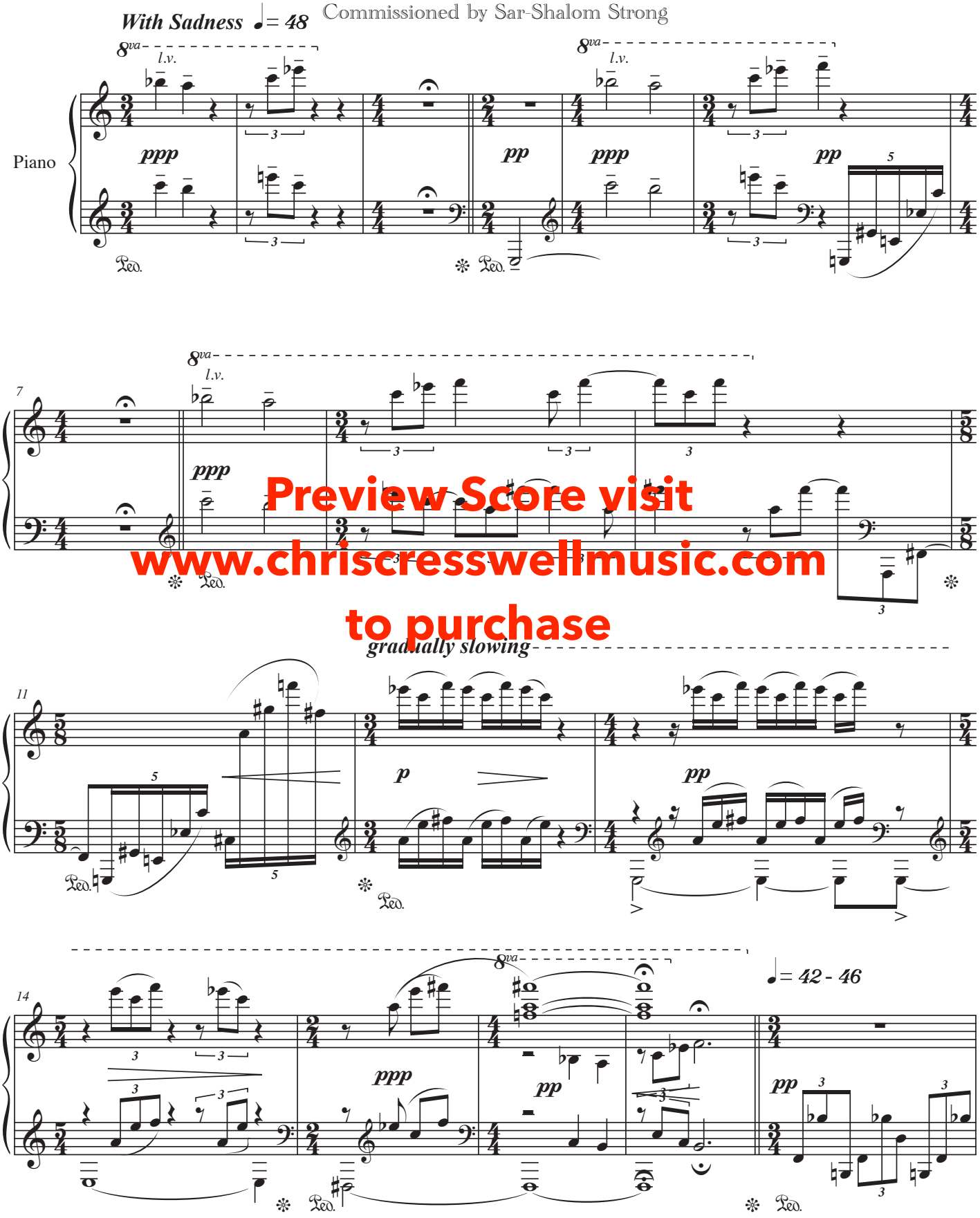
*Repeat with slight accel. and rit.
subtly moving in and out of time
38
f
f
46
slower, dramatic
rit.
p
mf
ff
Ped.

Nocturne No. II

"With Sadness"

Commissioned by Sar-Shalom Strong



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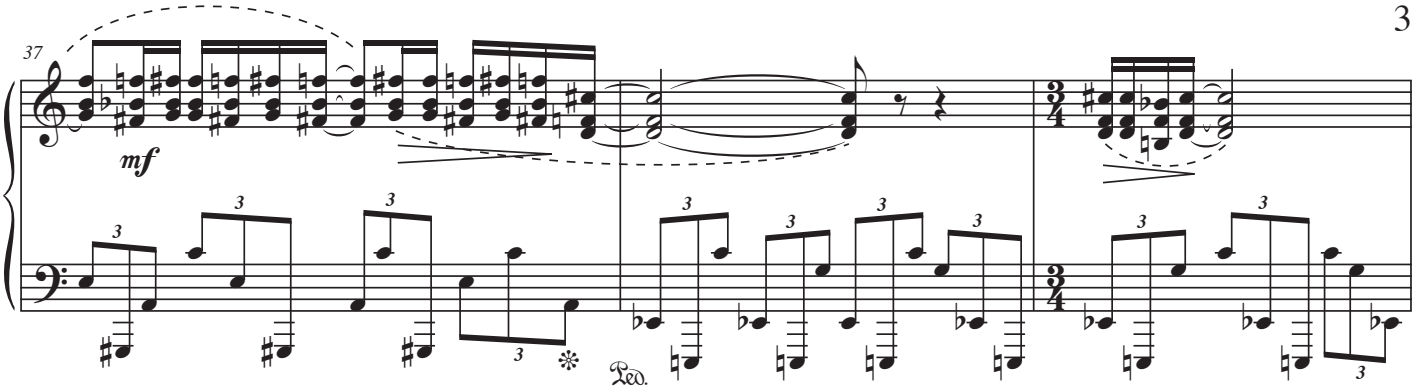

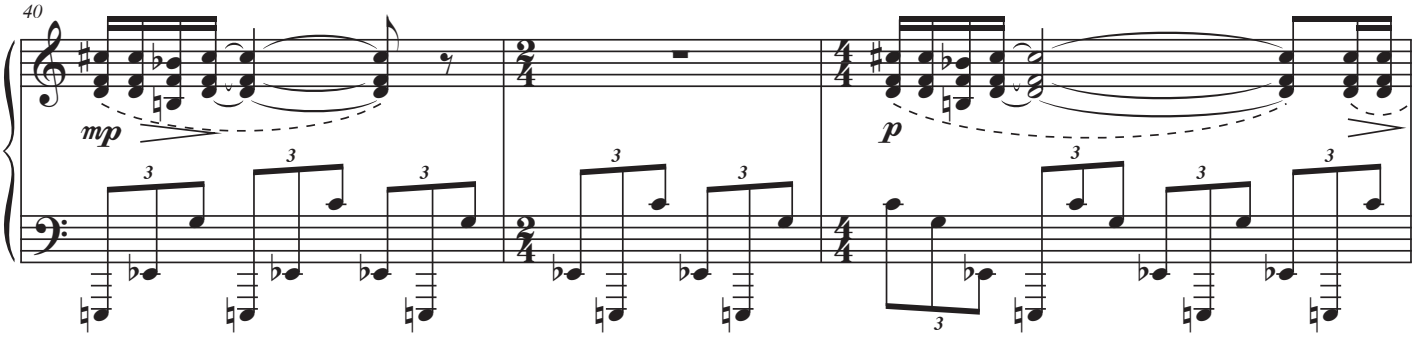

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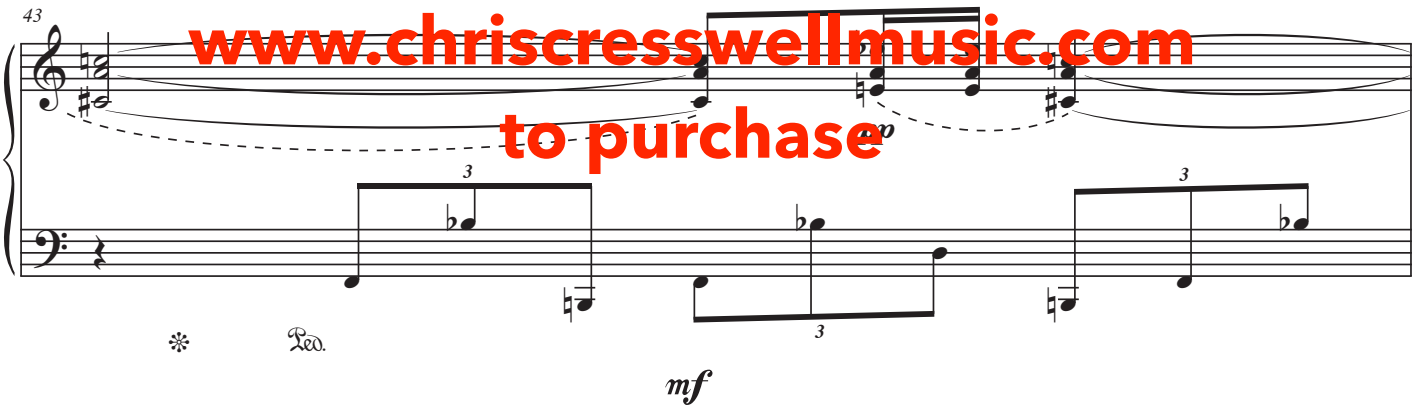

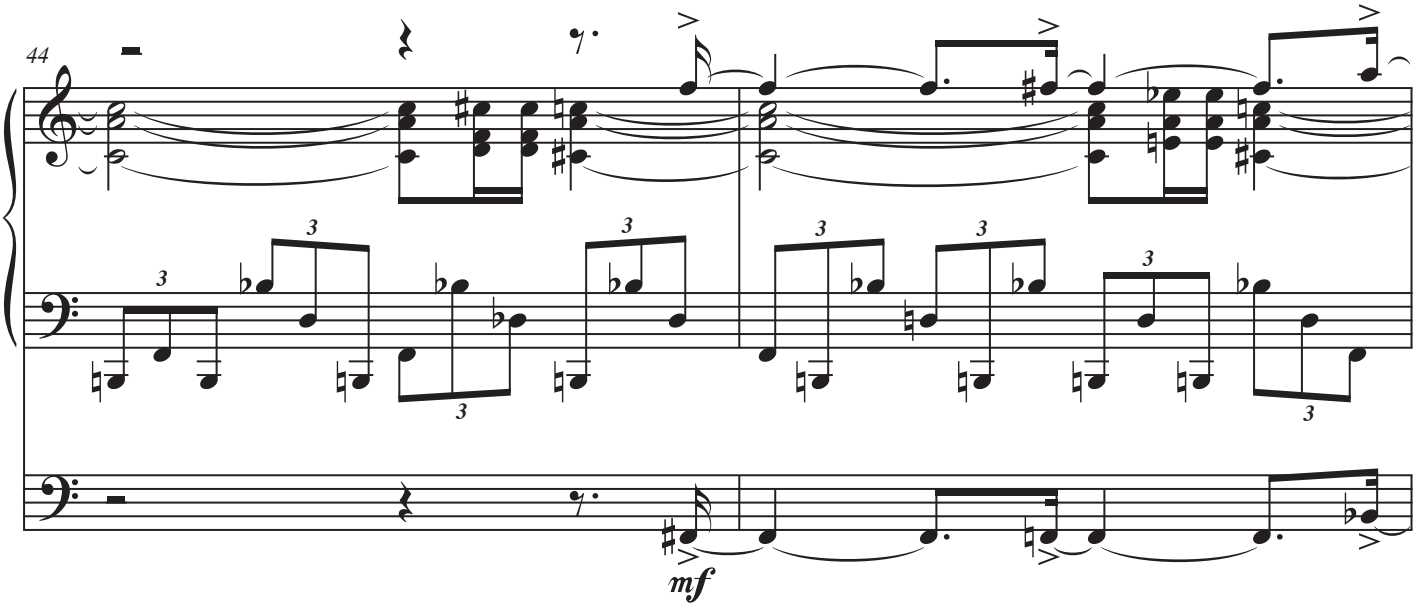

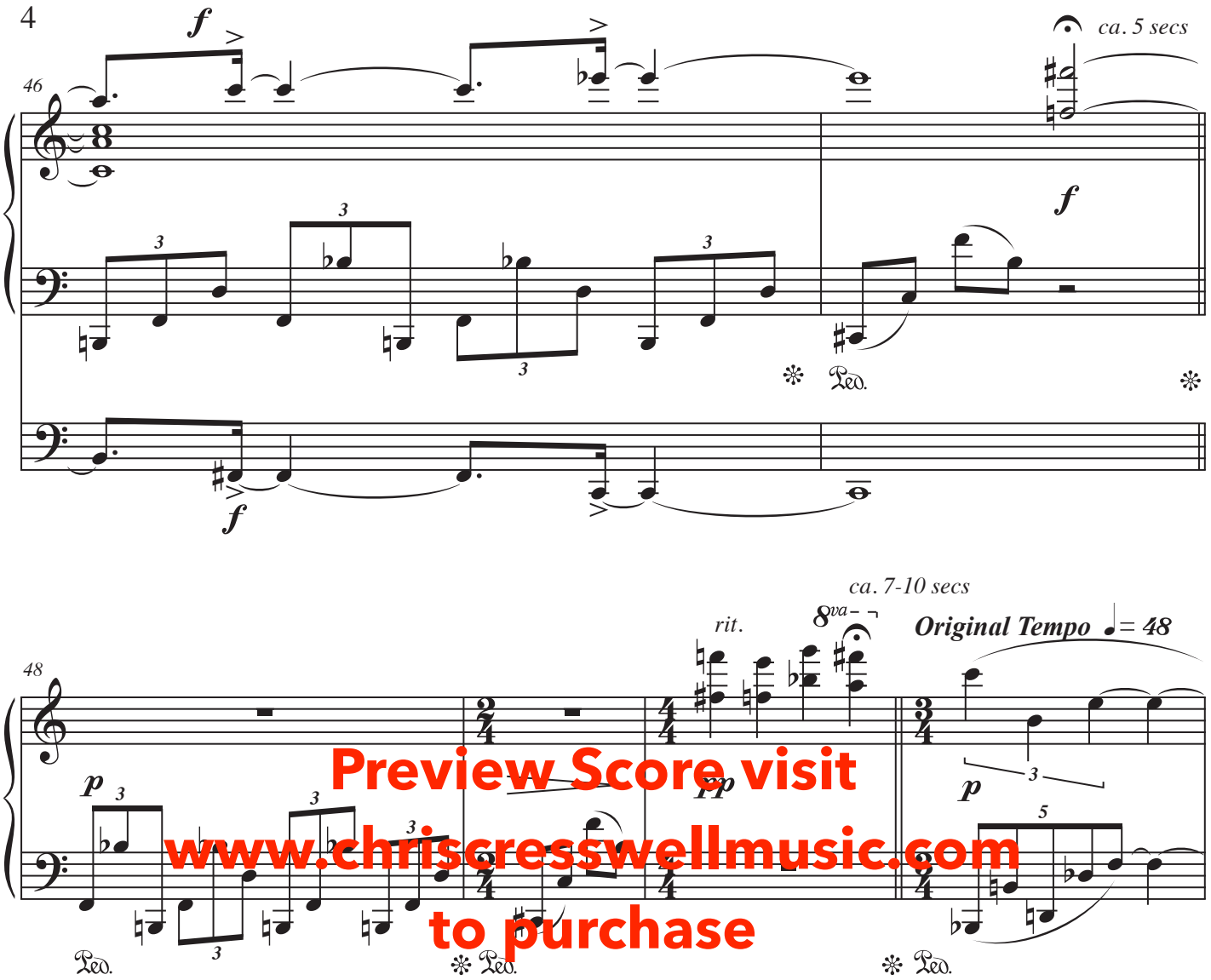

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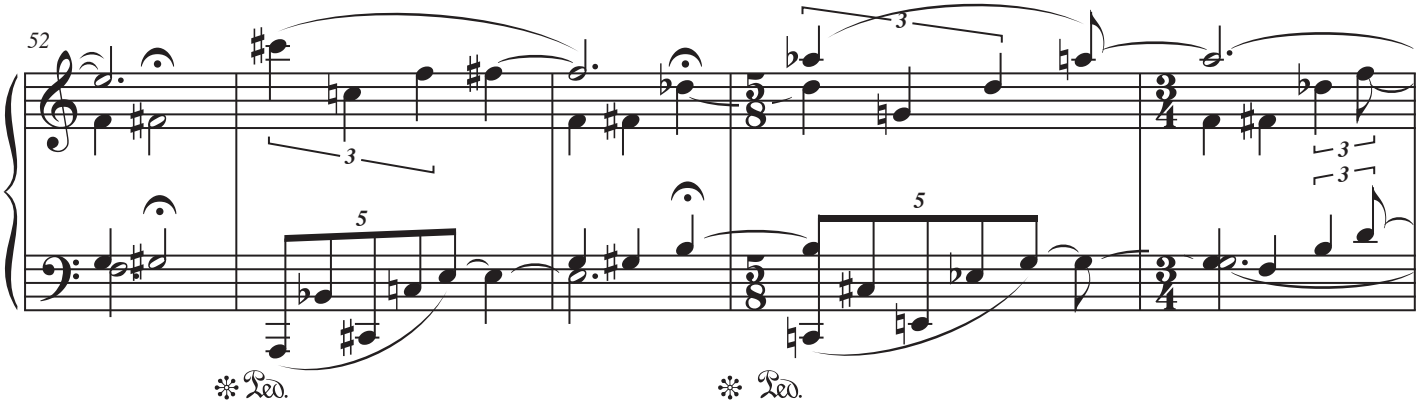

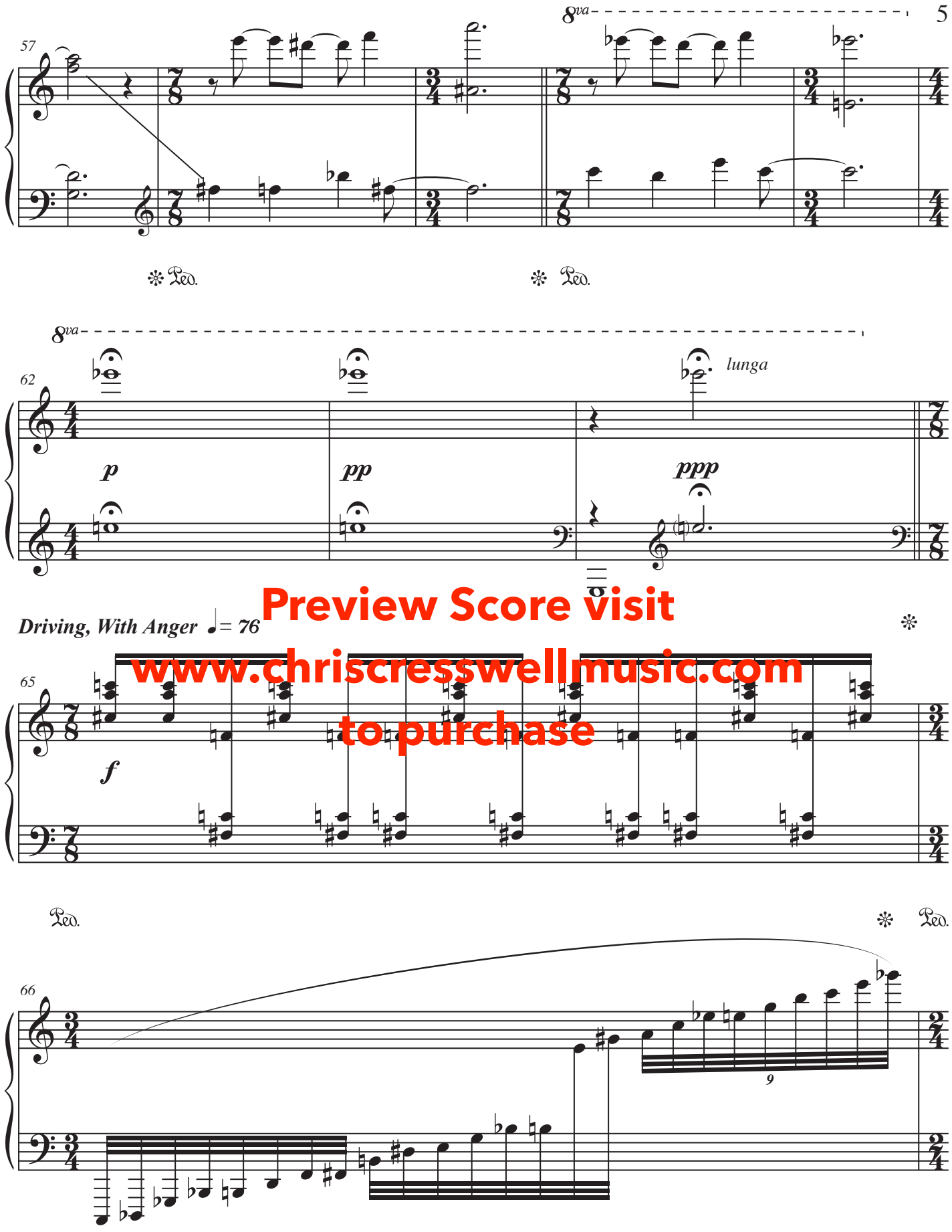

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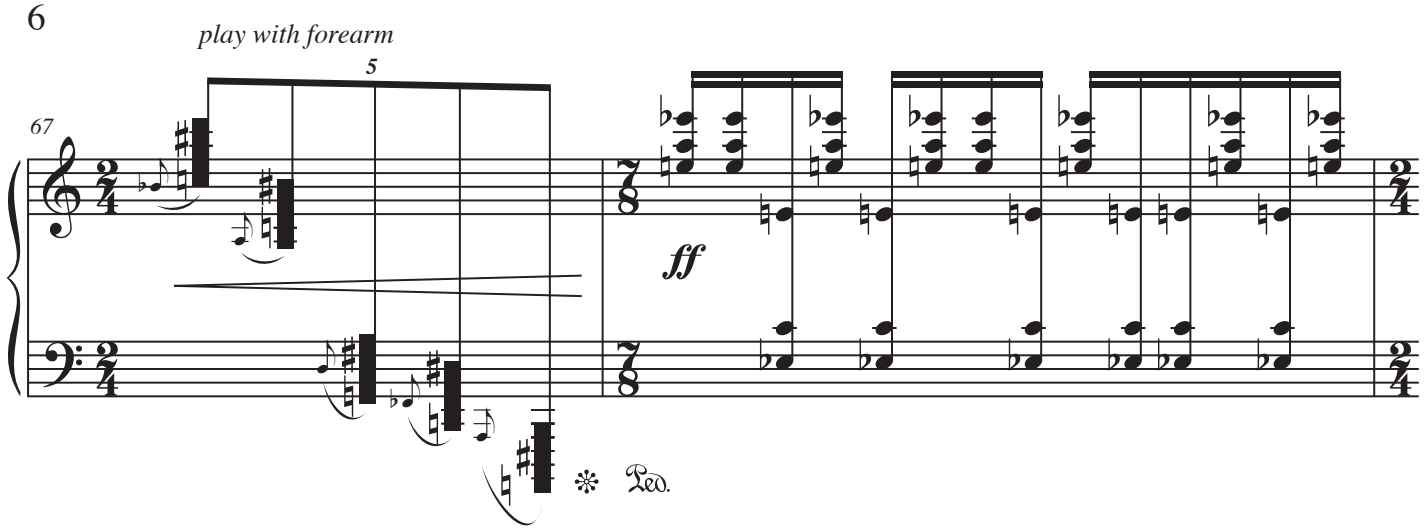

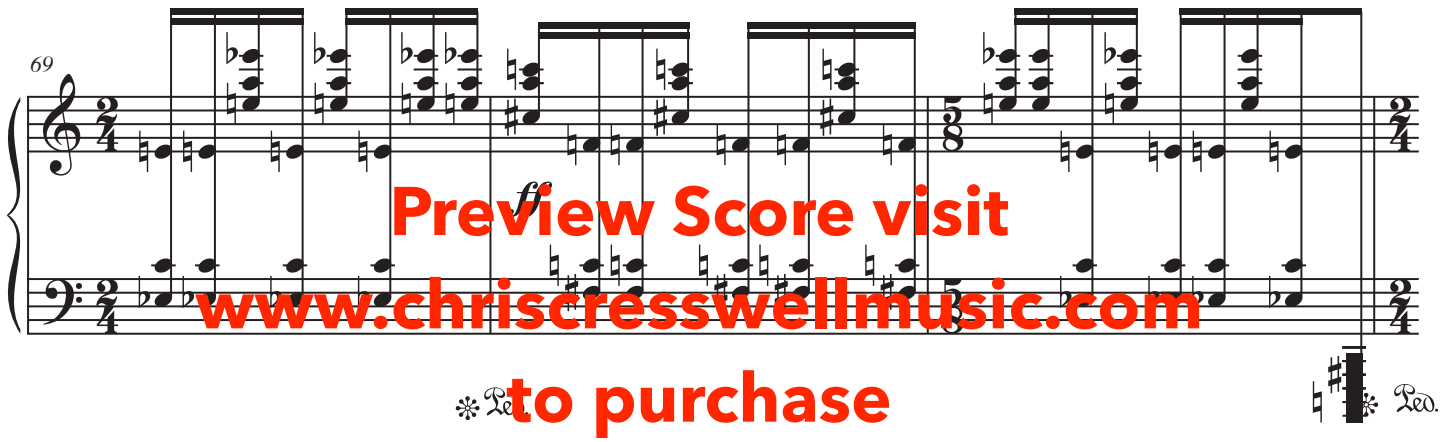

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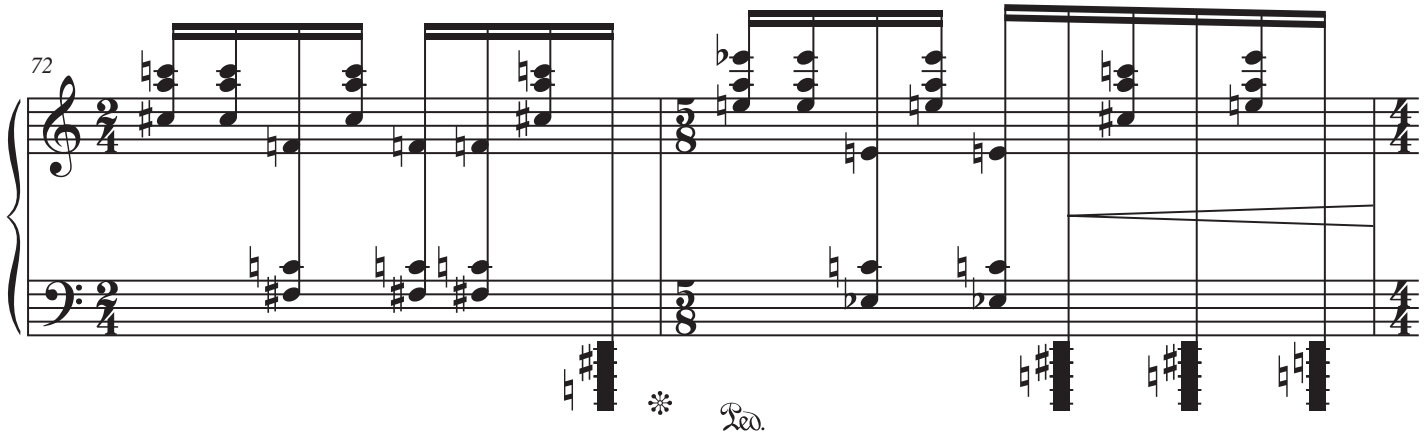

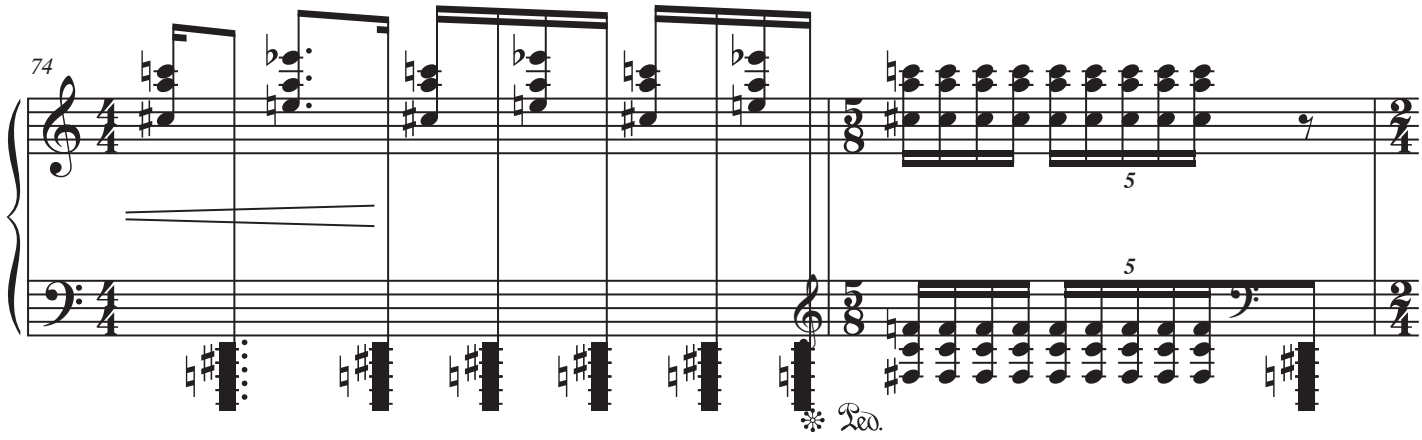

let sound bleed over

driving, no decrescendo, no rit. no accel.

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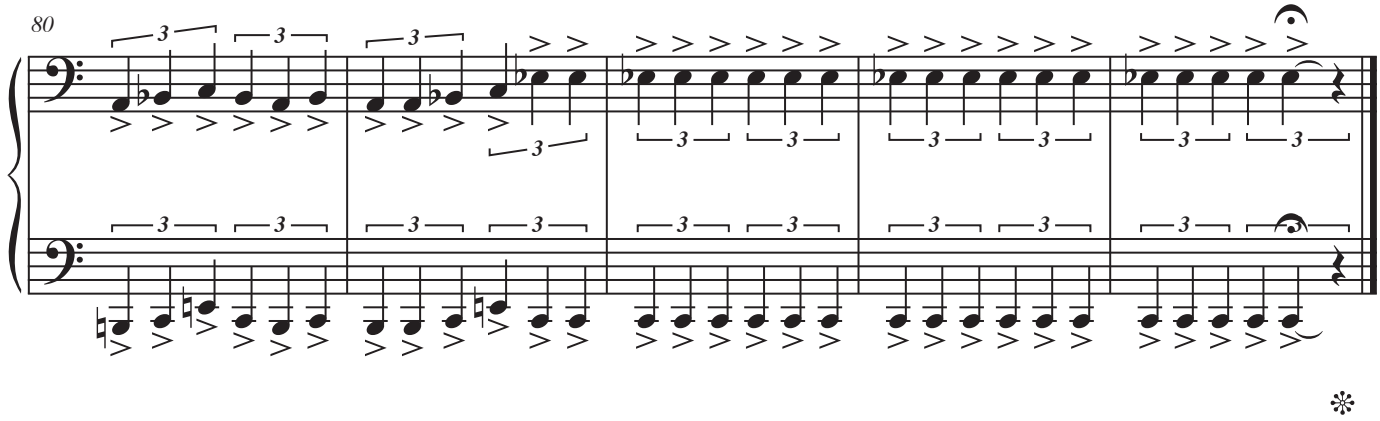
let sound naturally decay



Nocturne No. III
"Different Nights"

Written as a gift for Sar-Shalom Strong

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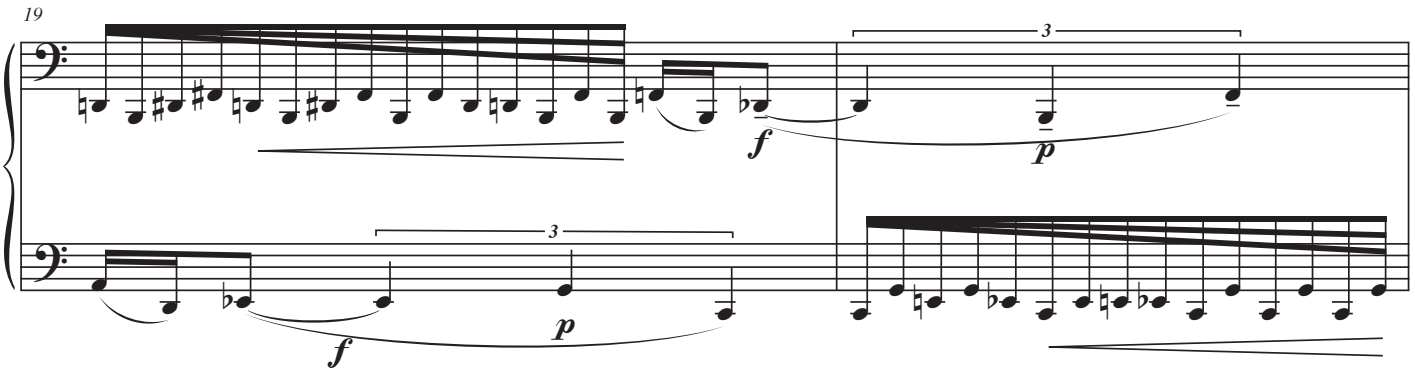

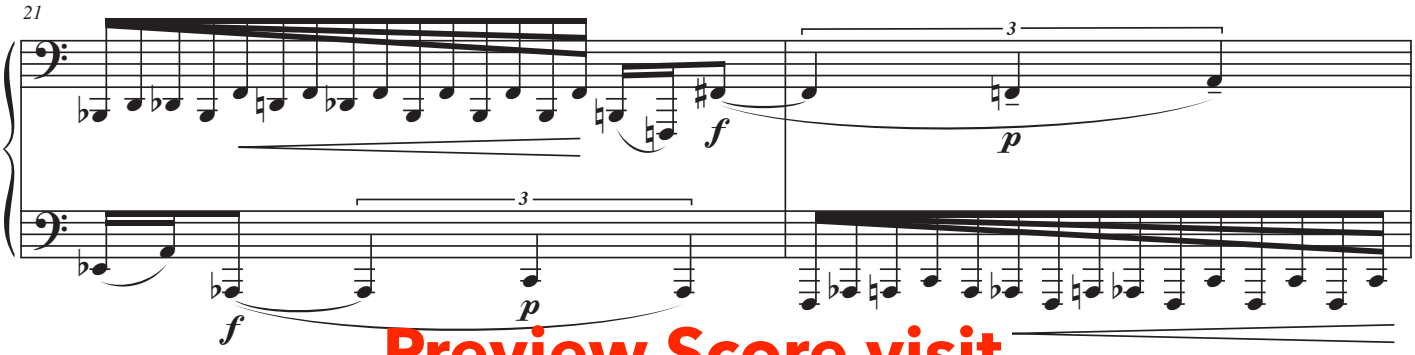

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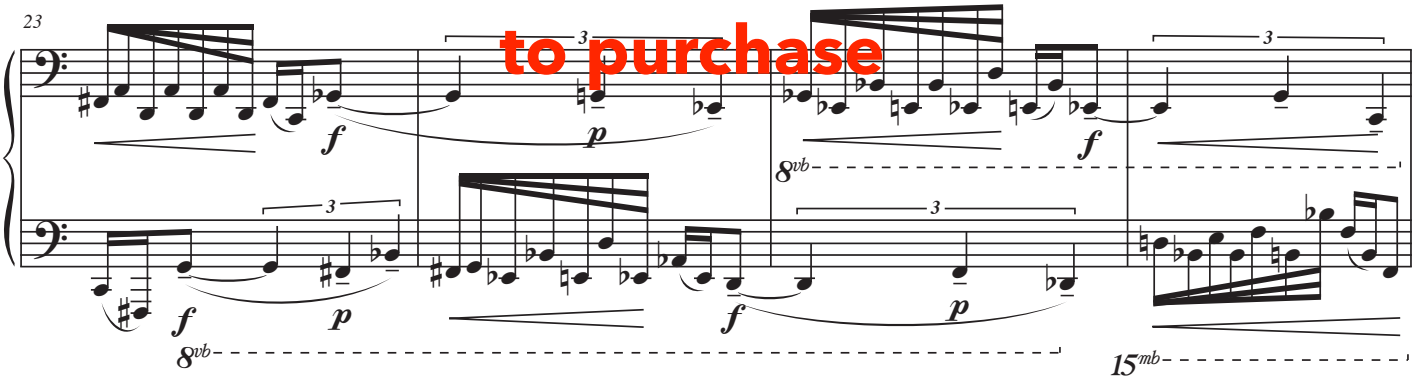

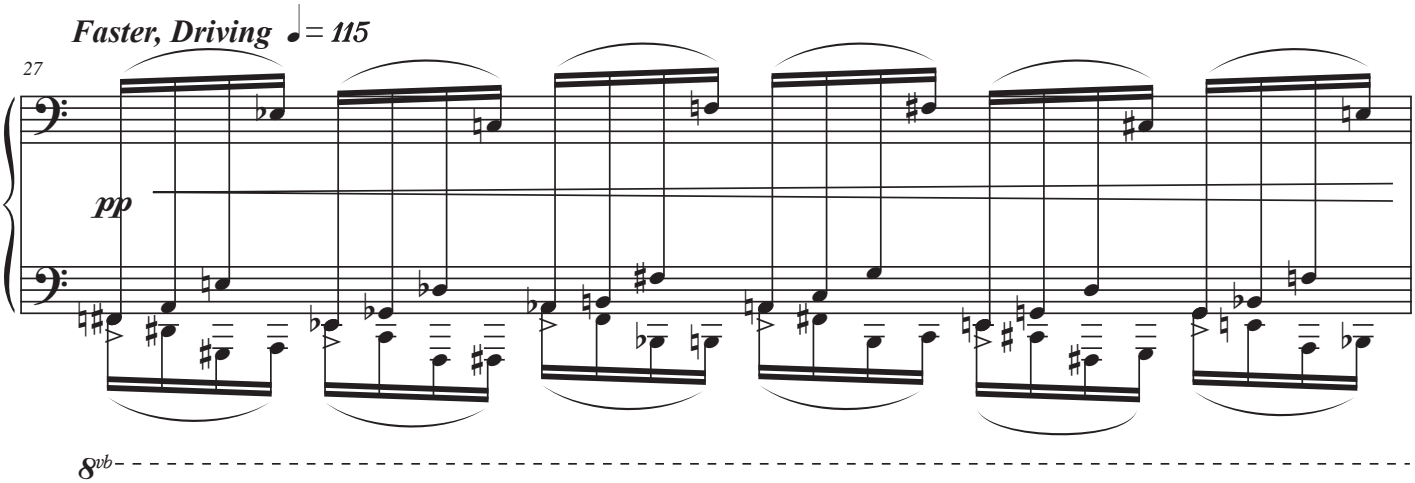

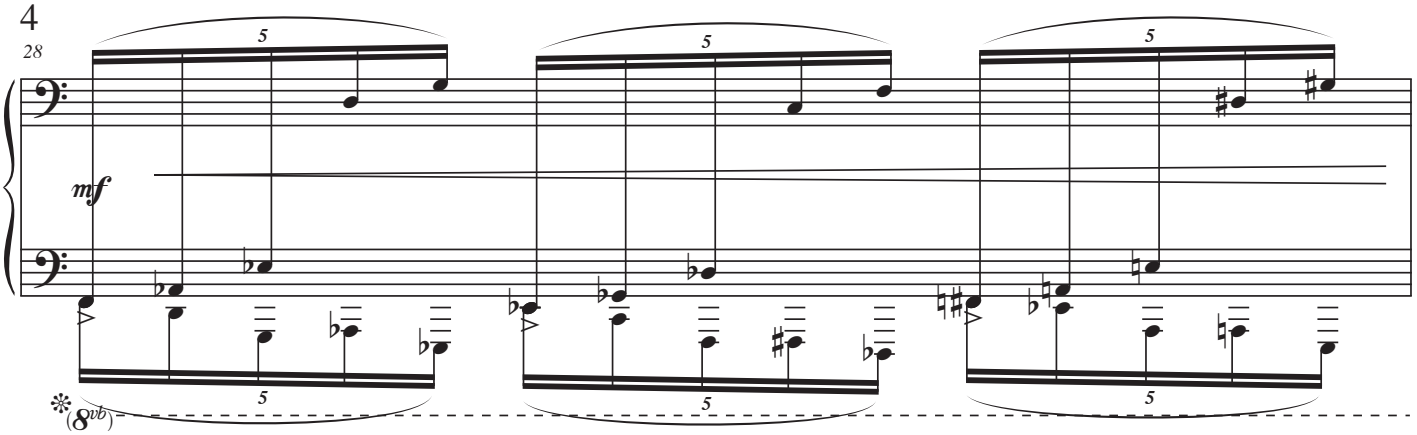

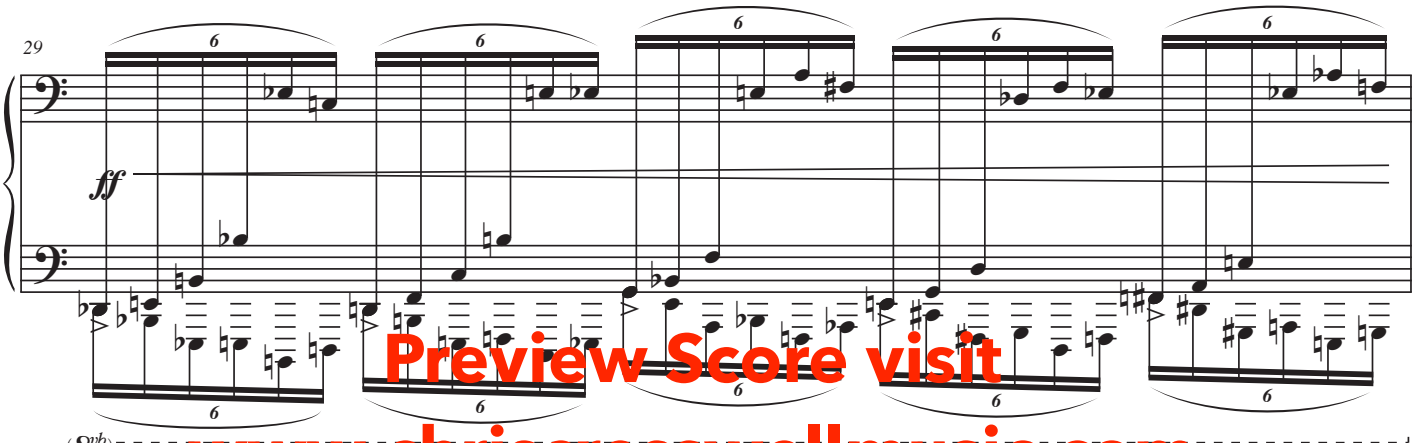

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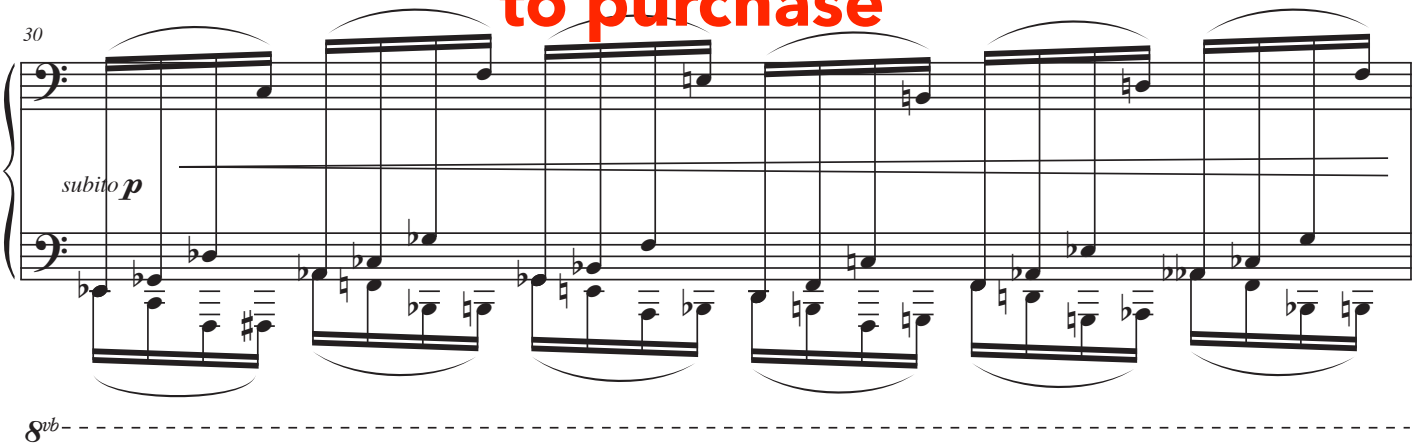

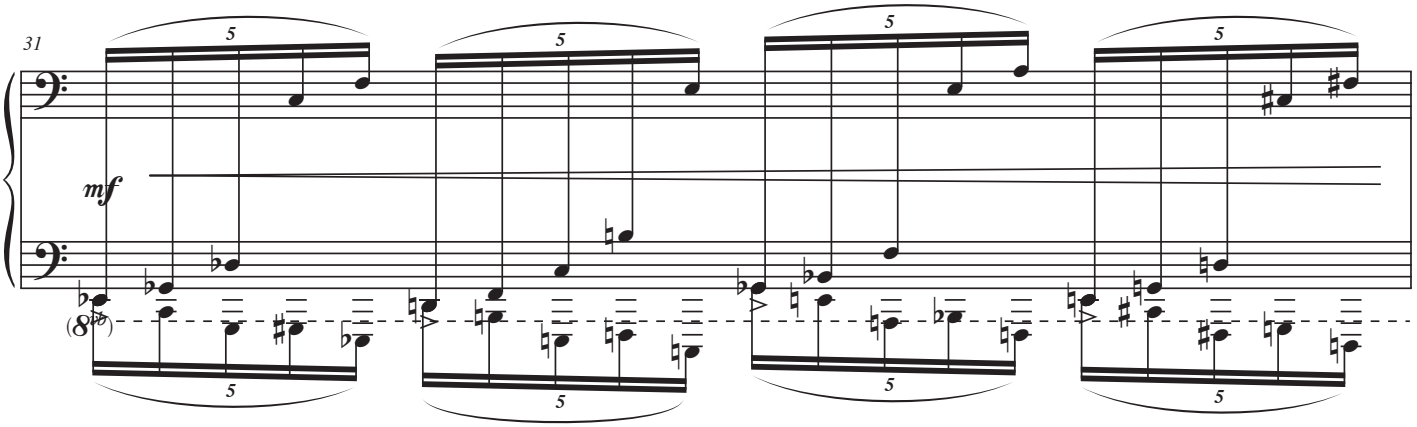

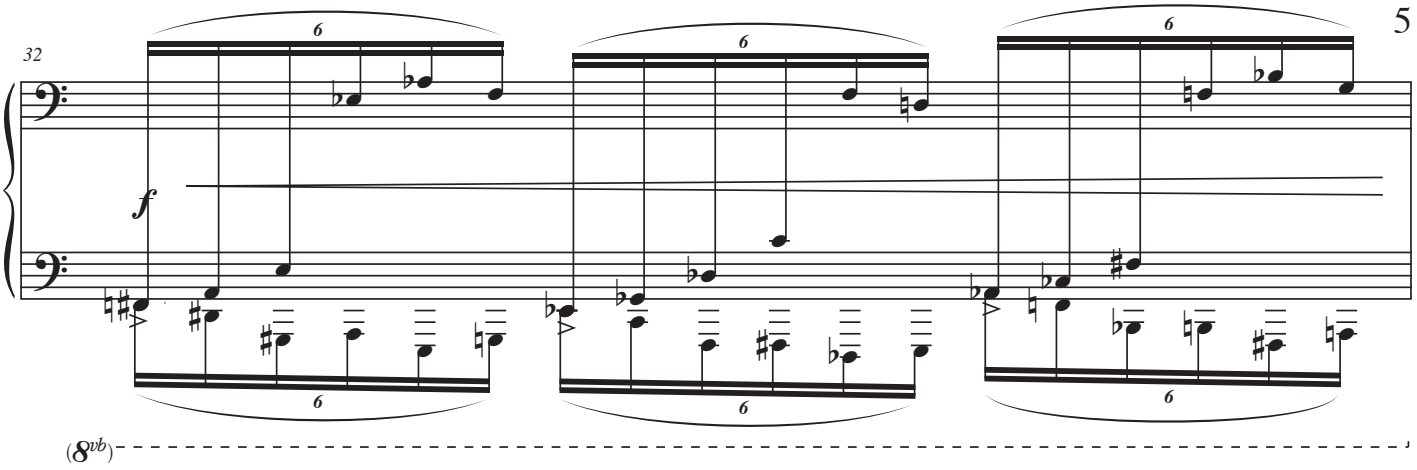

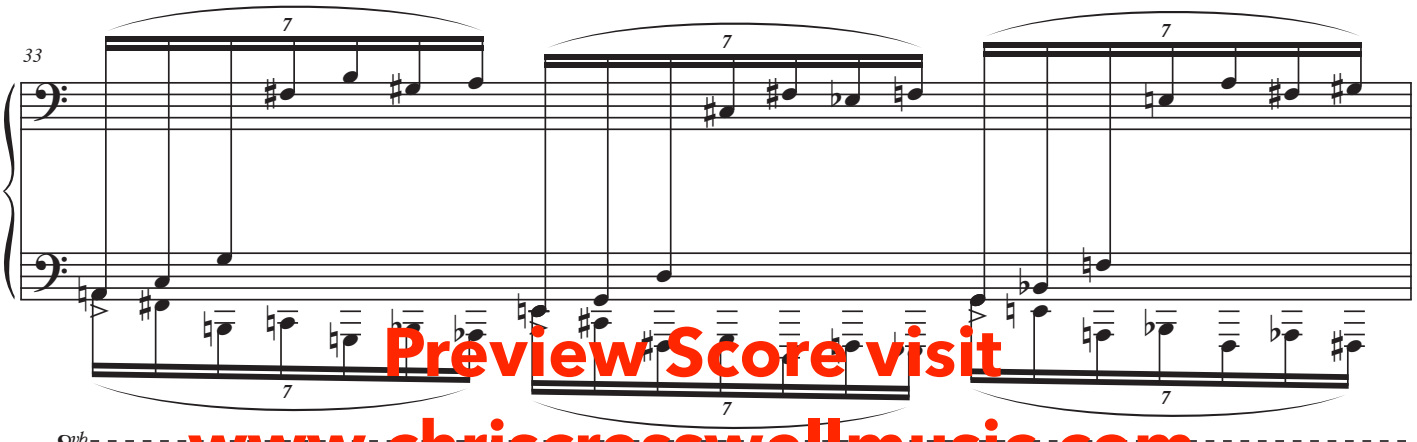

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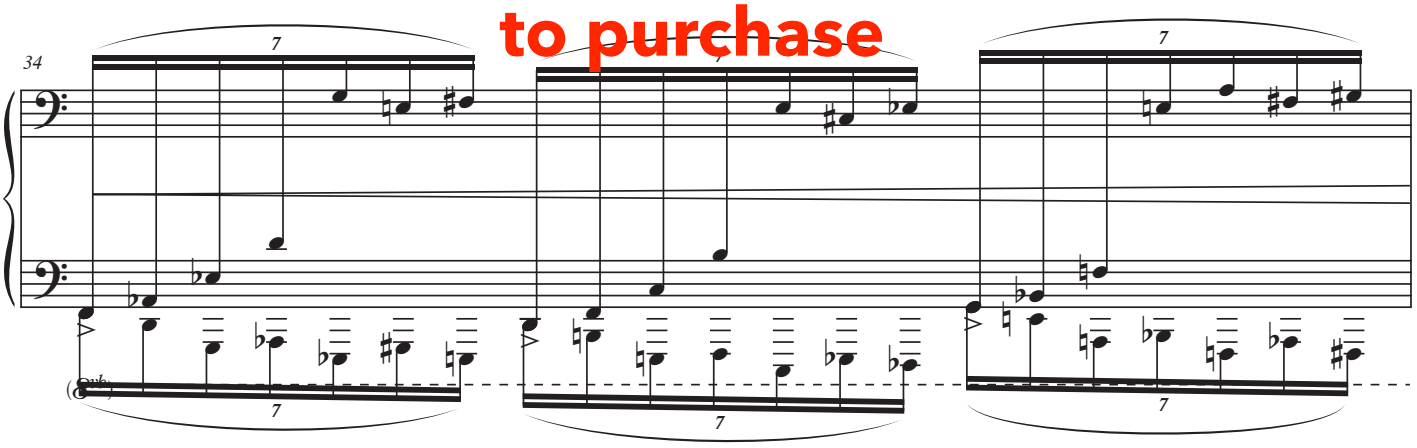
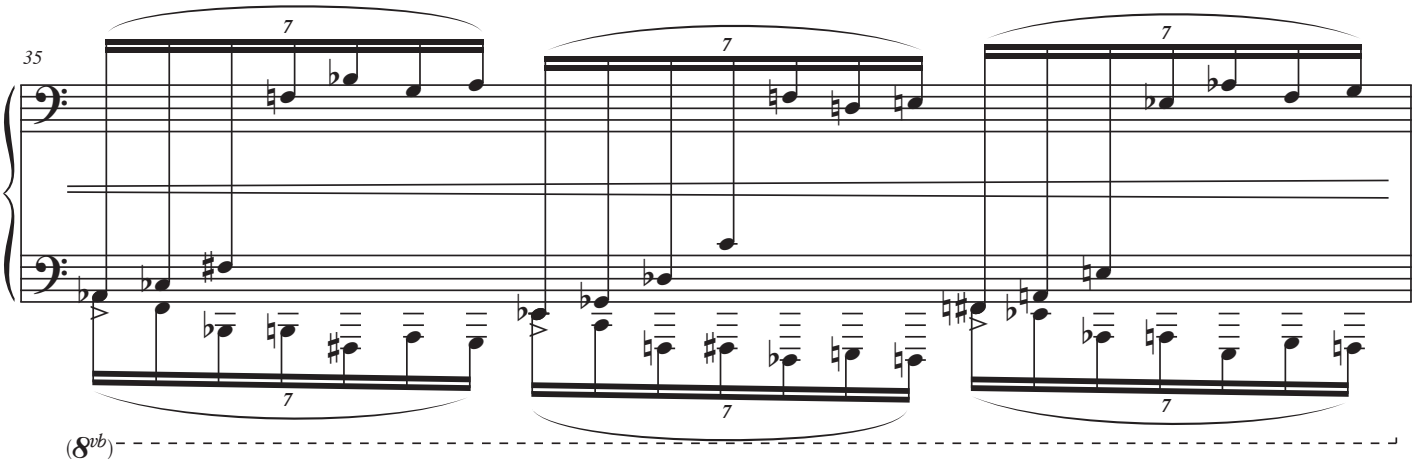
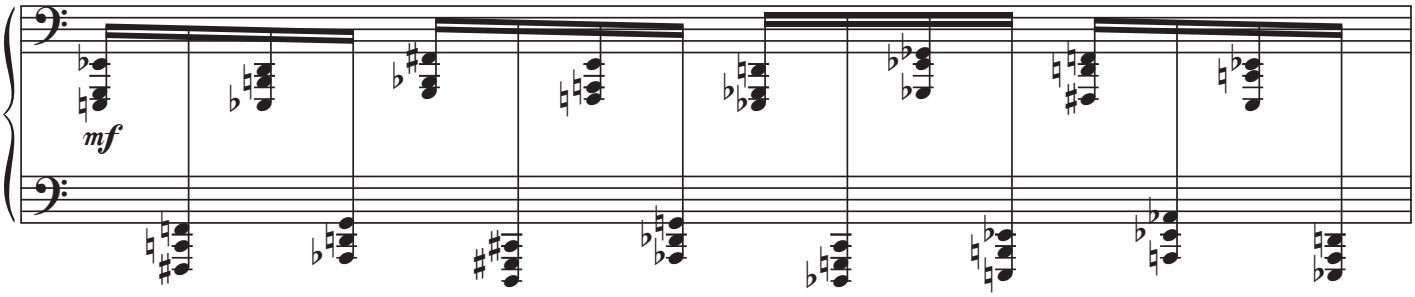




As If Coming Unhinged

sempre accel, sempre crescendo

36



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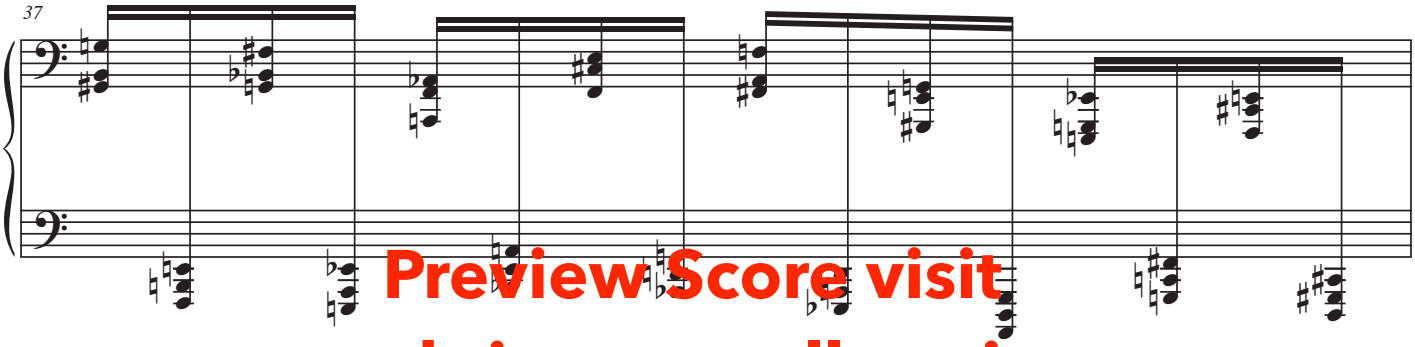

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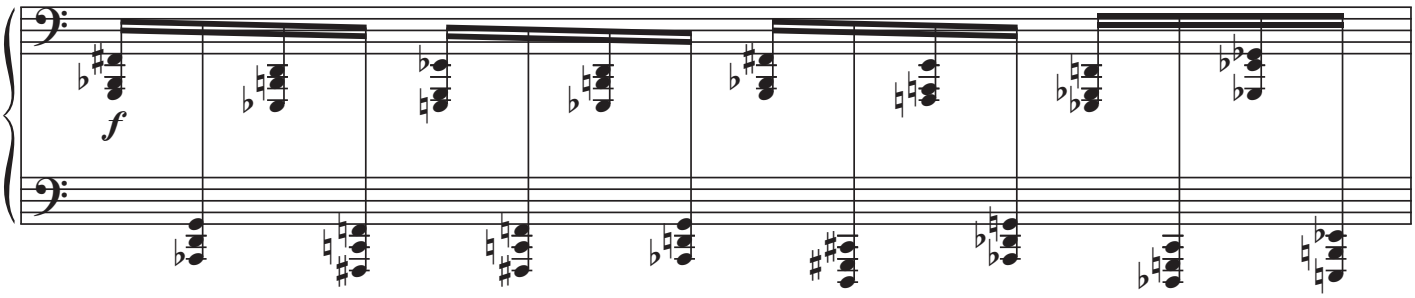

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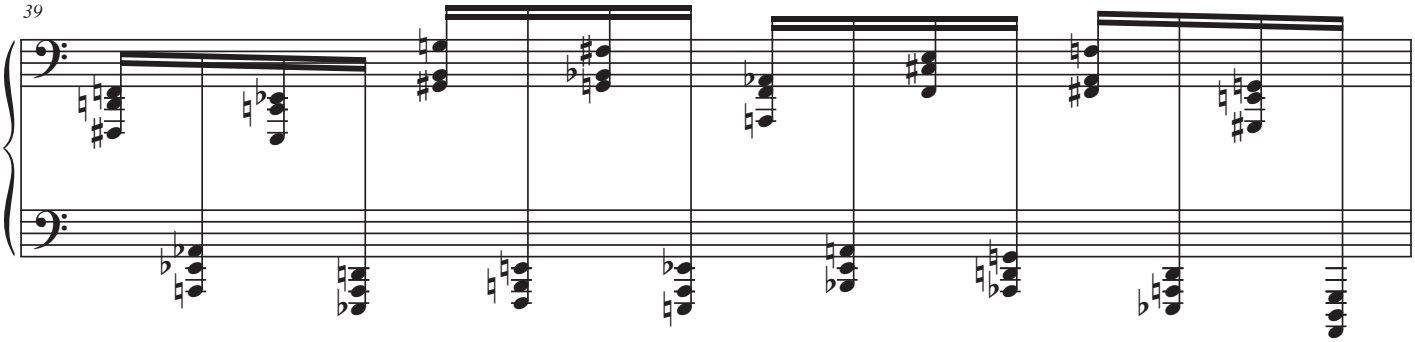

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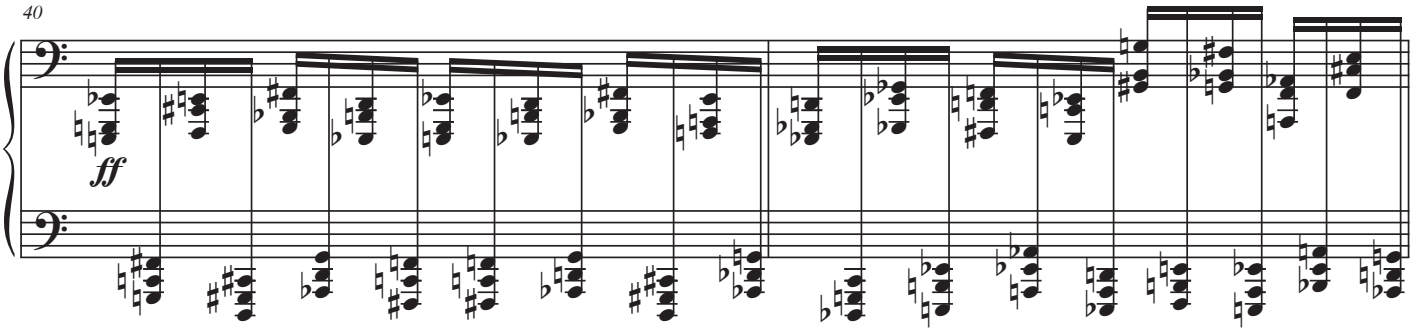
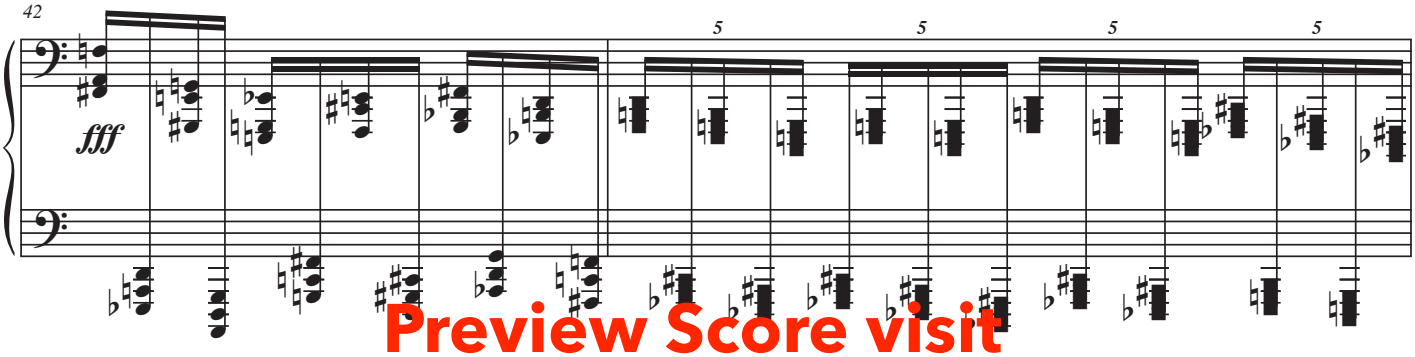


play with fists, alternating white and black notes

42



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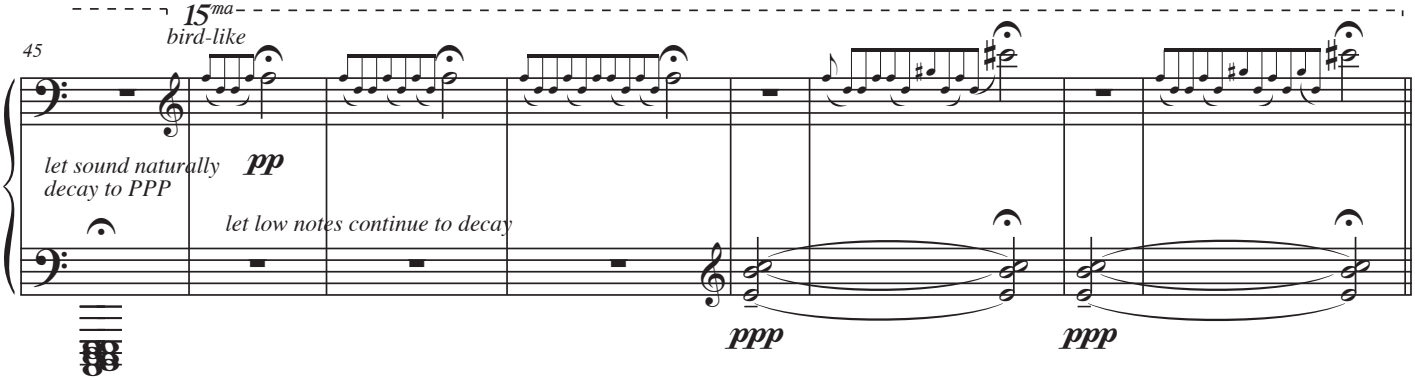
44

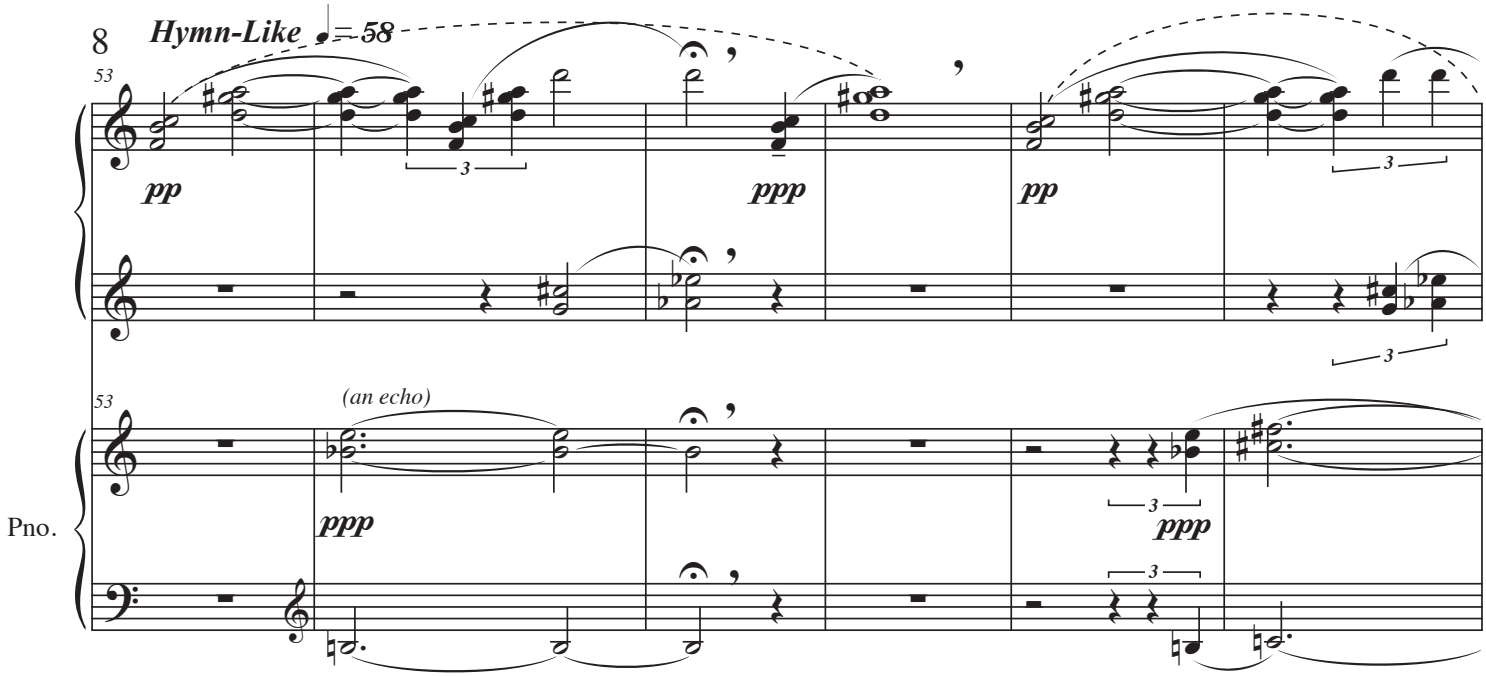
Very Free, As If Improvised

45

15ma
bird-like



as low as possible



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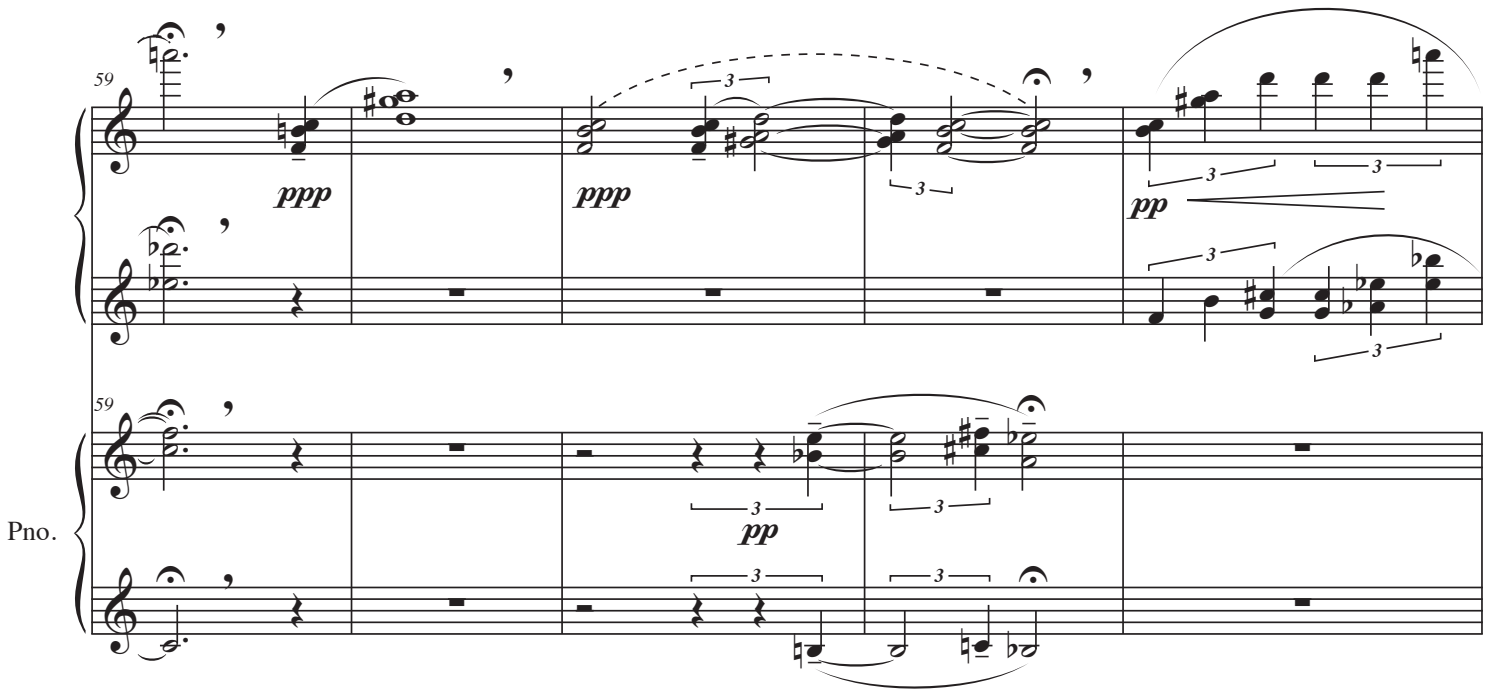

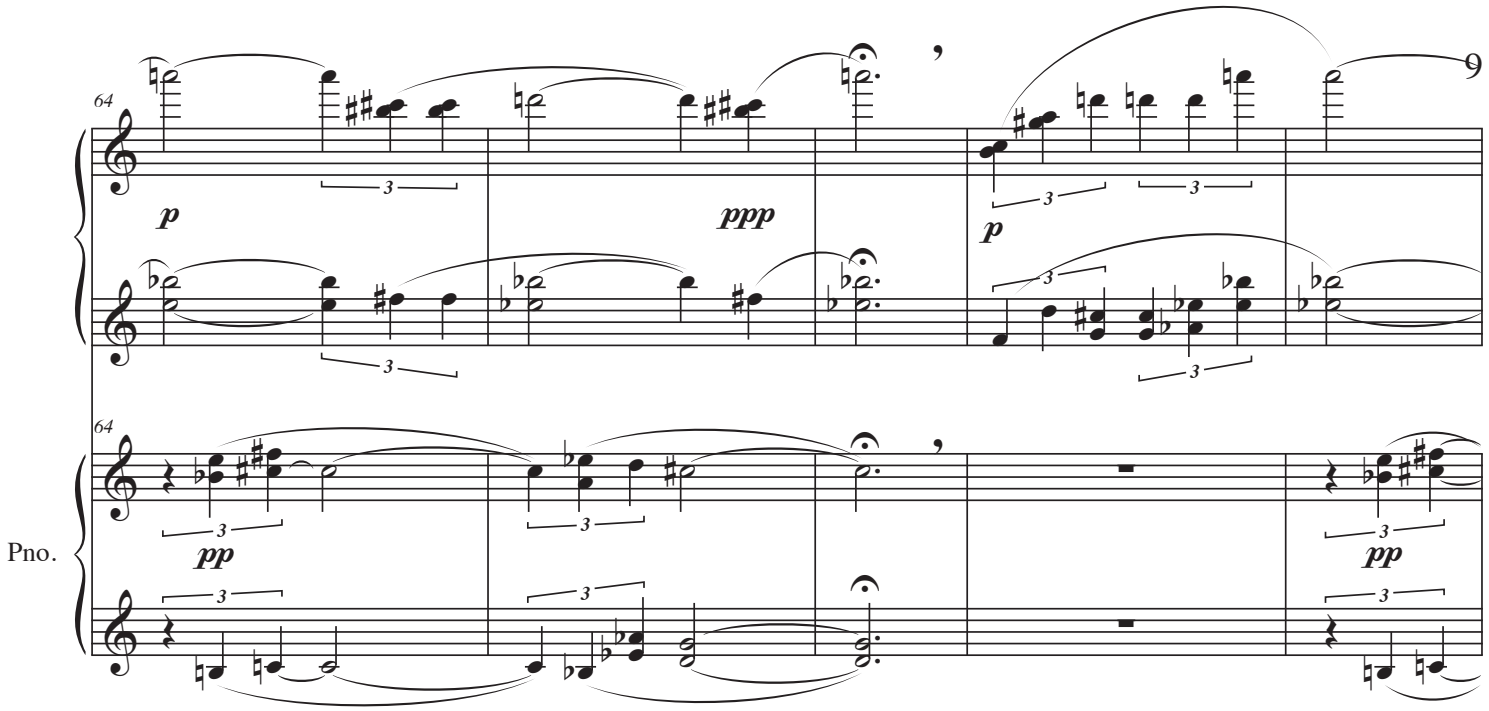

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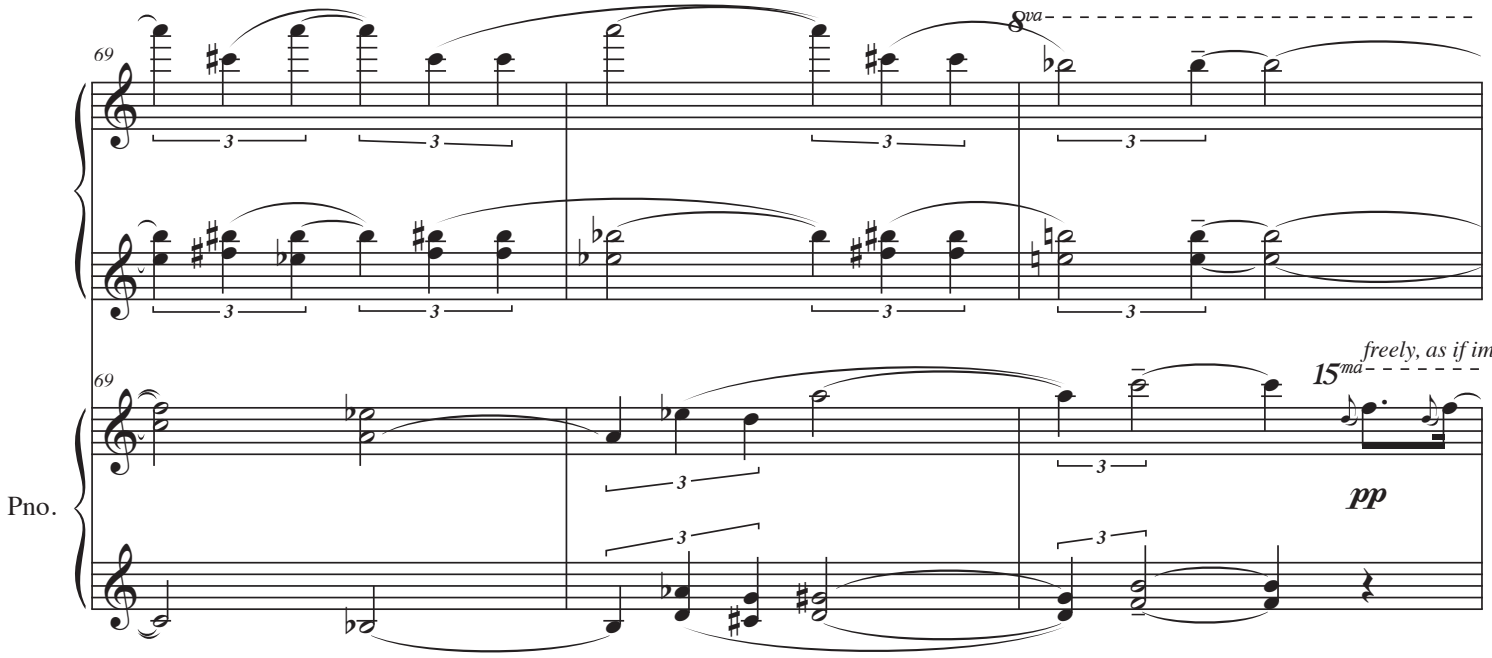

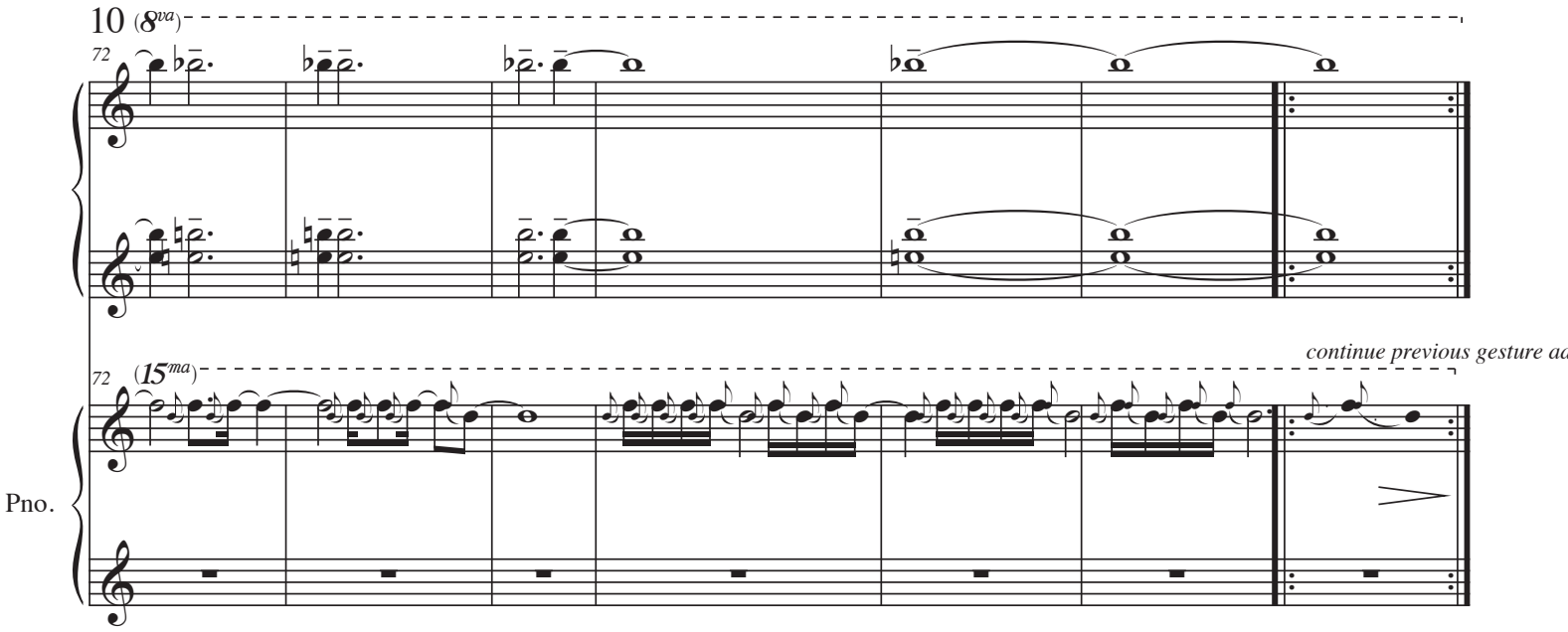

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