Fr.III.a-1

Pat Muchmore

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for solo piano

dedicated to Marty Goldray

2011 Nov. 26, Chicago, IL – 2012 June 24, Vienna, VA

Pat Muchmore

Fr.III.a–l

The following twelve pieces are fragments written in one sitting (possibly with more or less extensive editing at a later date) during vacations, or on interesting dates, or at interesting locations in my day-to-day life. Although some large-scale structural connections exist (discussed in the next paragraph), each piece generally creates its own soundworld. I hope that each one is evocative in its own way, despite their often truncated and idiosyncratic characters. Think of them as mysterious archaeological artifacts of one person's transitory existence—abstract journal entries without clear-cut meaning.

Unlike most other pieces in what I call my **Fr.#.x** series, *Fr.III.a–l* has a unifying structural design for each movement and there is a clear "narrative" that gives significance to their chronological ordering. In set-class theory, there are twelve distinct combinations of three different notes that are possible. That is to say, if you look at every possible combination of three different notes, and eliminate superficial differences such as register and order, only twelve unique intervallic collections exist. I explored each of these trichordal set classes in order from the most compact to the least compact, with each movement serving as a meditation on both the harmonic and melodic possibilities of each one in turn. I further unified the movements by beginning and ending each movement with some kind of presentation of a special six-note collection called the all-trichord hexachord (012478). This set is very cool, because if one picks out individual three-note chunks of it one will find at least one representative of each of the twelve aforementioned trichords. Thus, each movement begins with a six-note event, but eventually three of those notes disappear from the texture, leaving behind the three-note set that the movement will proceed to explore. Similarly, each movement ends with a simple presentation of its titular three-note set, which is then clouded by the reïntroduction of the three remaining notes of the all-trichord hexachord.

These pieces and this score have benefitted immeasurably due to the work, advice and eagle eyes of Martin Goldray. It was an enormous honor when he said he wanted to work on the pieces and perform them for our Sarah Lawrence students, and, in several rehearsals and e-mail conversations, he has made musical and notational suggestions that have been enthusiastically incorporated into this final draft. His musicality gave these pieces life, and I can't thank him enough.

What follows is a brief description of each movement, often just focusing on the context in which the fragment was written. Feel free to ignore these details and skip on to the real music unless you want to confront some of my personal minutiae.

Fr.III.a(012)

Jenny and I took a very brief trip to Chicago for Thanksgiving, because why not? For most of the trip we stayed in an apartment we found on AirBnB that came with a cat named Deuter. She was a total sweetheart. Anyway, I wrote this piece outside on the patio even though it was cold enough to numb my hands a bit, which, in retrospect, was kind of stupid. The (012) harmonies that pervade the movement quickly metastasize into chromatic scales and large clusters.

Fr.III.b(013)

When Jenny and I return to our ancestral homeland of Ponca City, OK, we try to always fly into Tulsa so we can hang out at my sister's place. I wrote this fragment on Christmas Eve morning, and it was a sad time because Shannon's beloved cat Pogo was very sick and in the hospital. For some reason, that inspired this deeply weird and angry piece. In my head the beginning sounds like some sort of demented 50s torch song, but I'm positive that no one else in the world would hear the connection…

Fr.III.c(014)

Sadly, Pogo took a serious turn for the worse in the days after Christmas, and I think a lot of that sadness came out in this fragment, which was completed only a few hours before he died. This movement—probably my favorite in the collection—is dedicated to his memory.

Fr.III.d(015)

My friend Kamala Sankaram wrote an opera called *Miranda*, and I've been a part of its performances for several years. Although I was initially only the cellist, as the piece evolved I was eventually playing the role of her father—singing countertenor parts, "acting" and doing basic choreography. Eventually, it was a full production with sets and New York Times reviews, and I wrote this fragment in our dressing room on the last night of the two-week run. Hopefully we'll revive the show sometime soon, because it was a blast. A nerve-wracking, body-punishing blast. [Full disclosure: there are some fairly complicated integrations of multi-planar presentations of the (015) trichord in this piece, which were only hazily sketched out in the dressing room. I built the specific pitch relationships much later. Mea maxima culpa.]

Fr.III.e(016)

In 2012, a few Sarah Lawrence music professors were on sabbatical, so I got to teach a couple of extra classes as well as—gasp!—have a few hours of downtime during the days. I wrote this fragment during one of those breaks, and it was a nice chance to properly abuse the piano in my main classroom. I pretended I was teaching a class to no one about the (016) trichord, and wrote a ton of notes and calculations on the board before diving into the actual composition. As a result, I think this is one of the more effectively-structured fragments in the set.

Fr.III.f(024)

Probably my all-time favorite place to eat lunch in my home neighborhood is a little panini shop called il Bambino, and they have a lovely garden out back where you can sit and eat and converse and chill and compose weird abstract piano pieces. This is definitely the dreamiest and most impressionistic of the fragments, something that always happens to me when I focus on whole-tone stuff.

Fr.III.g(025)

Although many aspects of the project were absolutely horrible for Jenny, her work on the new CUNY Law School in Long Island City nevertheless culminated in a cool design. Late one night she had to go over most of the classrooms with a fine-toothed comb to find all the dumb mistakes the contractors made, and I tagged along to provide moral support. I wrote this fragment while sitting in the moot courtroom; Jenny was quietly cursing to herself the whole time because contractors suck.

Fr.III.h(026)

At the very end of the 2012 school year, I gave a final exam to my Theory I class, and while the students sweated over it, I worked on this fragment. Weirdly, I am currently writing these words as the students of the following year's Theory I class take the same final. I think of this piece as what Beethoven might have written instead of the "Moonlight" Sonata if he lived in an alternate universe wherein tritones have replaced perfect fifths and fourths, and wherein he sucked at writing piano pieces.

Fr.III.i(027)

The beginning and ending of this fragment totally rips-off the *Touches bloquées* movement from Ligeti's first book of piano etudes, in that the pianist uses one hand to block some keys so that the other hand's scales have "holes" in them. This is the first fragment I wrote during a trip Jenny and I took with Shannon to Amsterdam. We had a crazy two-story apartment with a spiral staircase connecting the floors. The stairs also led up to a small roof garden, which was cool, but the coolest part of this was the bubble-shaped skylight/hatch that opened onto it. When it was raining, you could poke your head up into the bubble and look out at the city as if from a turret. Mm. 14–17 are possibly the most technically difficult in the entire piece—feel free to leave out the occasional quarter-note triplet or fudge the rhythm in order to get through it with the appropriate sense of continuity. Sorry about that!

Fr.III.j(036)

After Amsterdam, we hopped on a train to Copenhagen, and stayed in a little apartment in the Nørrebro neighborhood. In addition to seeing lots of cool Viking shit, and some motherfucking runes from olden times, we watched Buffy the Vampire Slayer Season 2 each night to get to sleep. These are random facts that have no bearing on anything. In looking back over these fragments, I'm noticing that a more mechanistic spirit started invading my style in the later pieces, combined with WAY more instances of 3 against 2 and 4 against 3 rhythms. I wonder why that happened?

Fr.III.k(037)

Copenhagen is far too close to Malmö in Sweden, with its glorious Calatrava building called the Turning Torso, for us *not* to jump on a train over the Öresund and add one more country to our trip. I wrote this movement on the various buses and trains we had to use to get there. (037) is the trichord set that includes major and minor triads, so, like any red-blooded American, I was compelled to explore the hexatonic system of neo-Riemannian transformations between major and minor. This movement is all about terrifying machines also. What did Northern Europe do to me?

Fr.III.l(048)

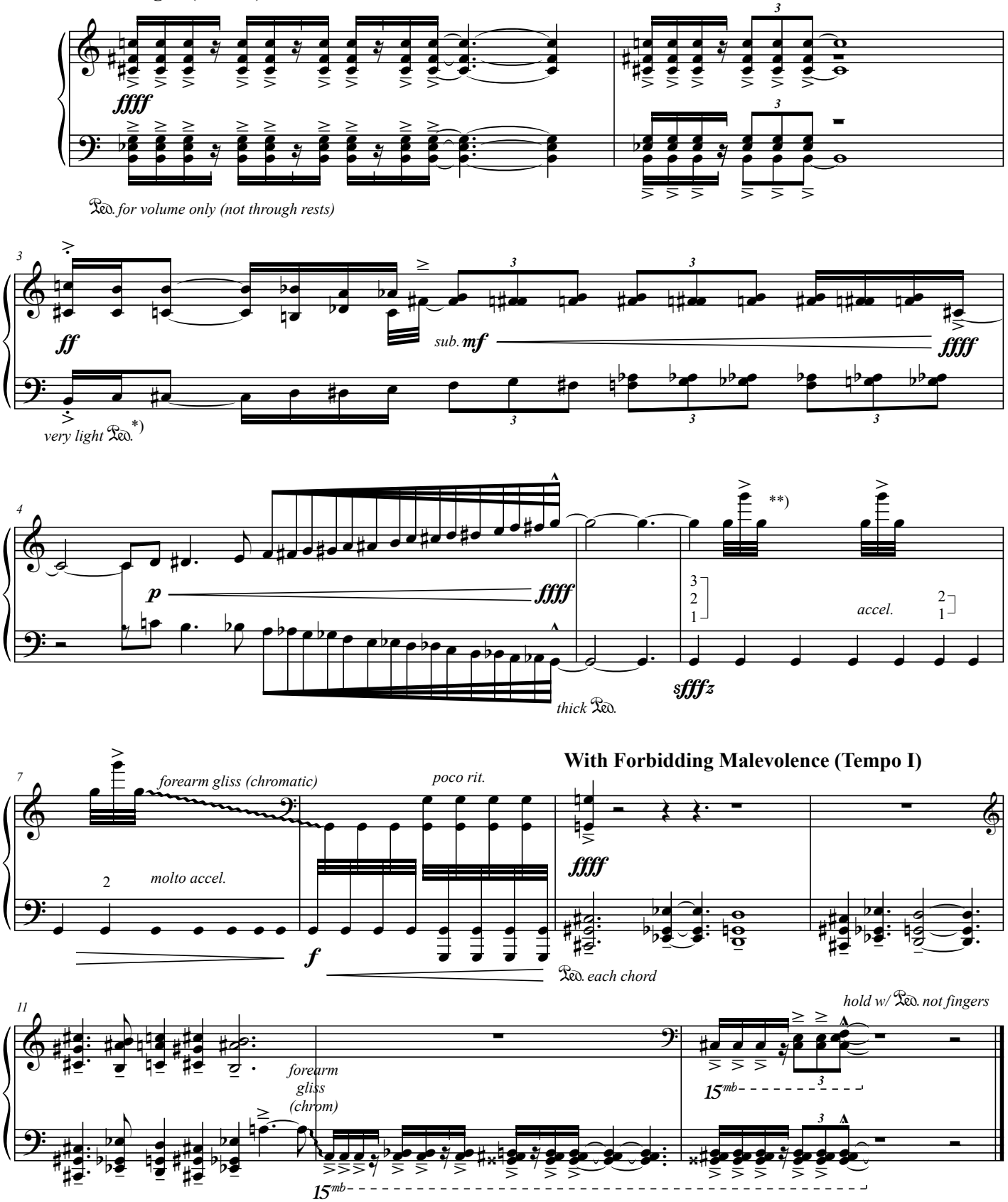
The last fragment is filled to the brim with augmented harmonies, and was composed the morning after the wedding of my good friend and fellow Anti-Social Music-er David Durst. I went down to the lobby of the Courtyard Marriott and wrote this one. I meant to capture a celebratory spirit, but I think the augmented chords shift the soundworld into something substantially more manic and creepy than that. I fought it at first, but quickly gave up and just let it happen. I was reminded of the great Alfred Schnittke quote, "I set down a beautiful chord on paper—and suddenly it rusts."

Fr.III.a-l

Fr.III.a(012) — 565 W Quincy St. CHICAGO, IL — 10:35 11/26/11

Pat Muchmore

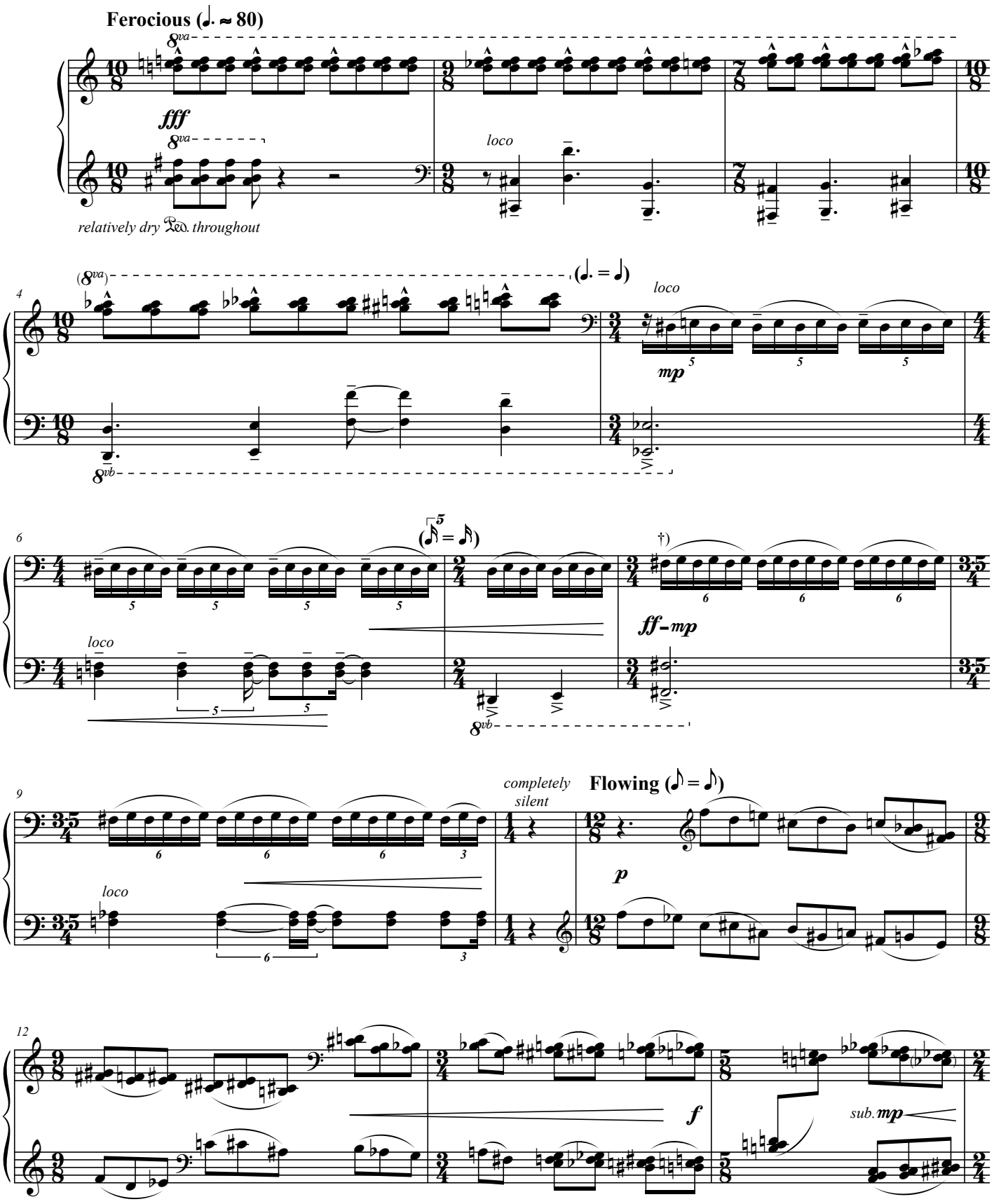
Enraged (♩≈100)



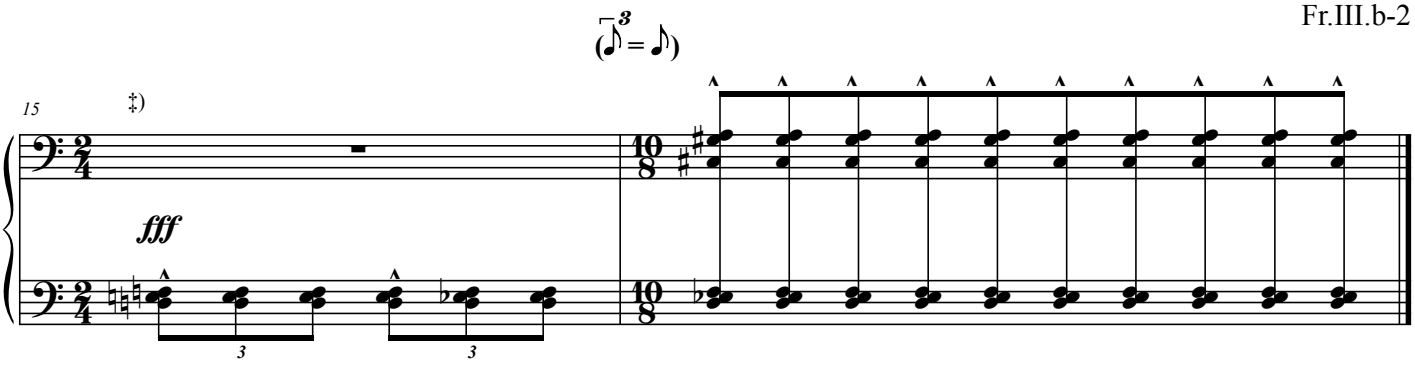
*) With light use of the damper pedal, the player can use sharp, percussive attacks while nevertheless maintaining a relatively connected melodic flow

**) These three outbursts aren't precisely placed, and should sound like random insertions (and should not decrescendo w/ the LH)

Fr.III.b(013) — Shannon's House Tulsa, OK — Dec. 24 2011 9:03



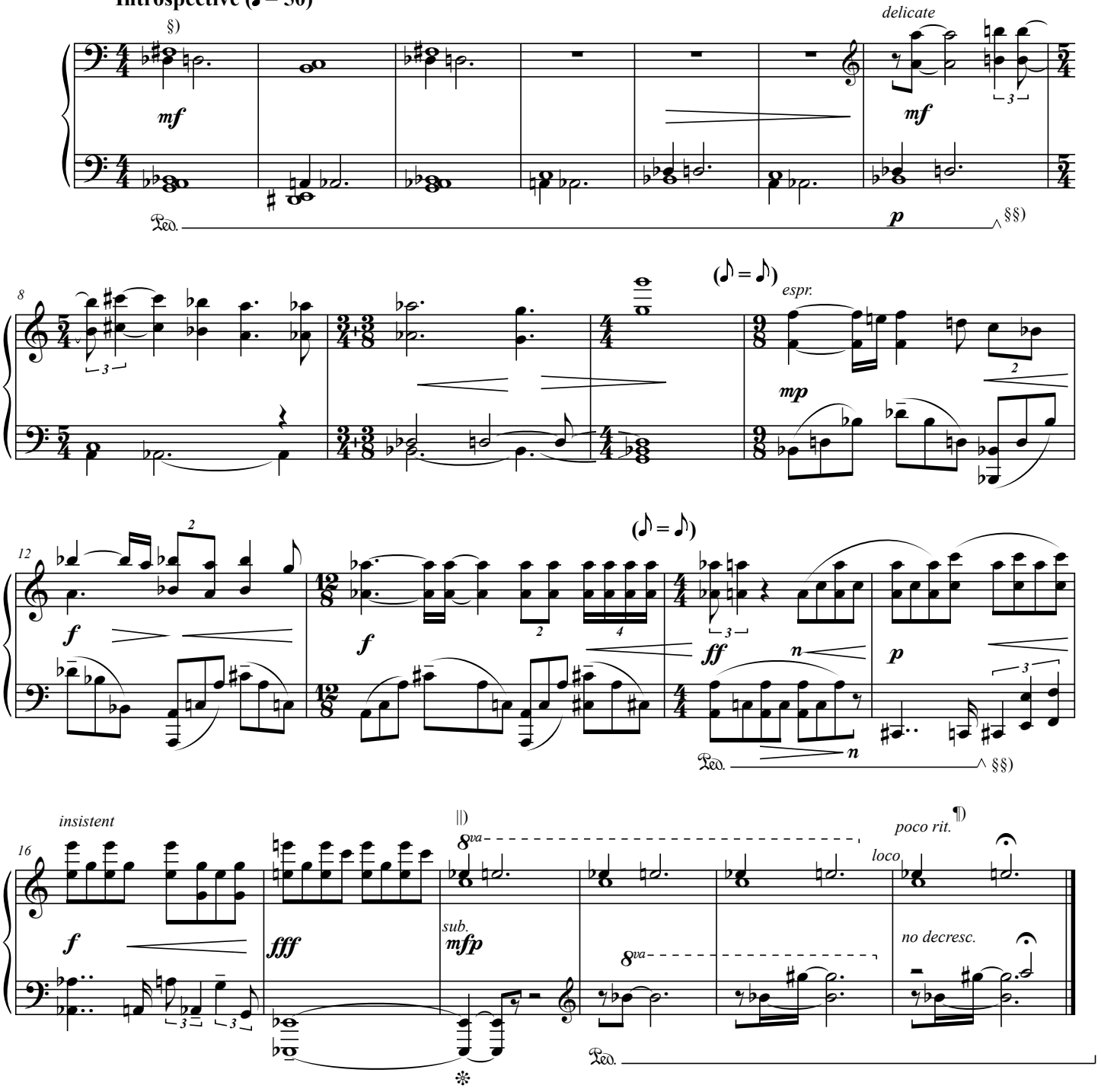
†) N.B. Unlike previous rhythmic shifts, here the beat stays the same, so the oscillating half-step is now faster



‡) N.B. Probably not a necessary warning, but I always screw this up in other pieces: Although the previous beat had three eighths in it, they weren't triplets. These groups of three eighths are actually happening in the same span as the two-eighth groups in the preceding measures. That is to say, eighths should suddenly sound a bit faster in this measure, and should stay that way through the end of the movement.

Fr.III.c(014) — Dad's House 2 Hillcrest Ponca City, OK — 12/28/11 9:51

in memory of Pogo



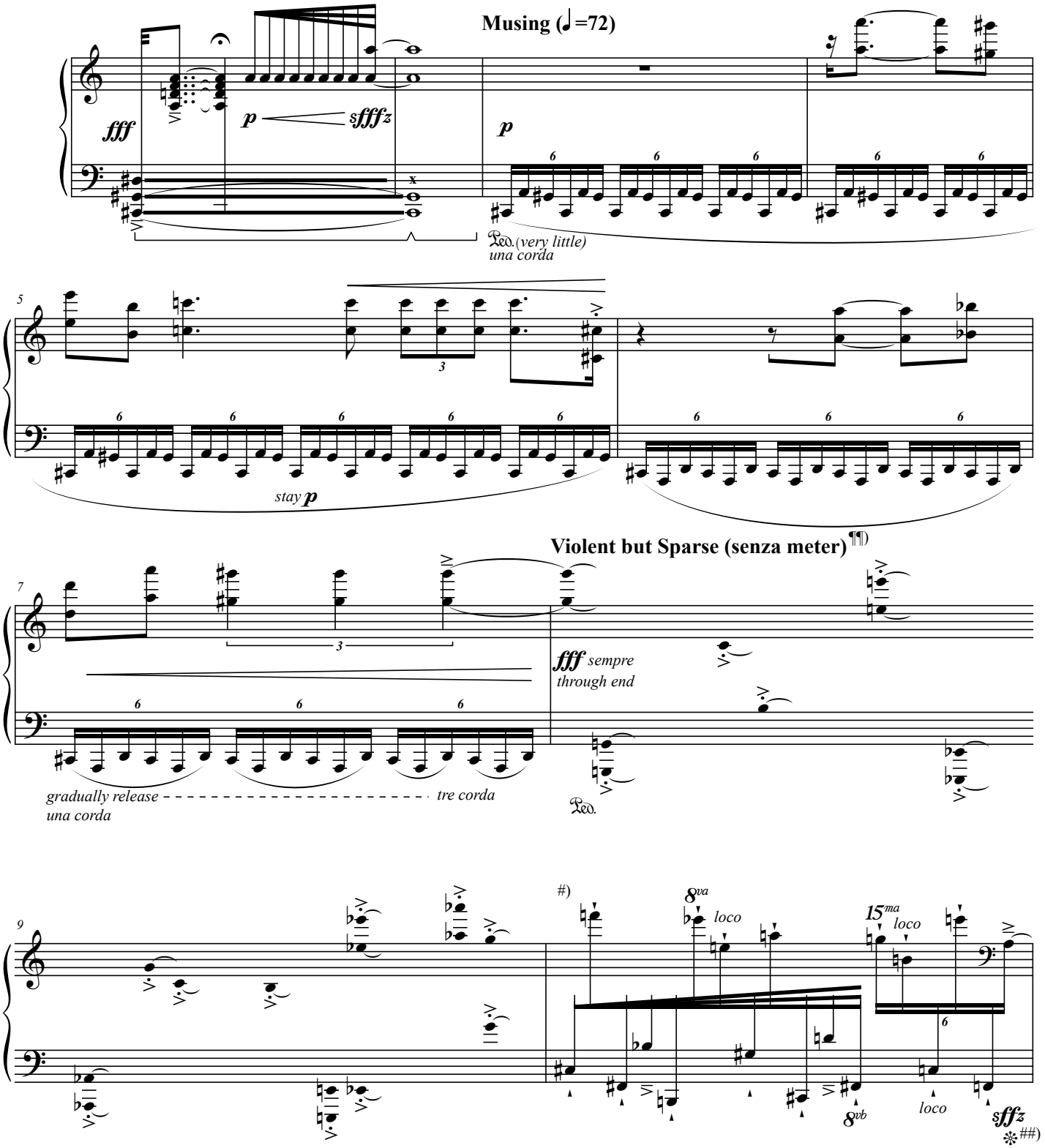
§) These opening bars should be completely murky, no individual line should stand out from the thick dissonance. In particular, make sure that the notes in mm. 4–6 are, if anything, *less* audible in mm. 1–3 before they've been exposed by the other note's disappearance.

§§) From here to the next marking, pedal as necessary for a relatively hazy, Debussian soundworld

||) With the exception of the low E♭'s in the LH, hold all notes down with the fingers in both hands from here to the end.

¶) This slowing down should be *almost* imperceptible.

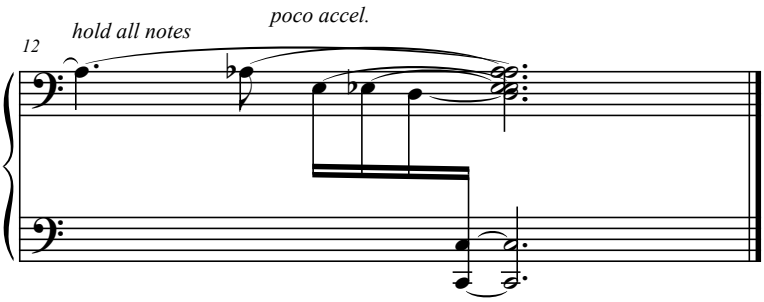
Fr.III.d(015) — *Miranda* Dressing Room, HERE Arts Center New York, NY — last night 18:17 Jan 21 2012



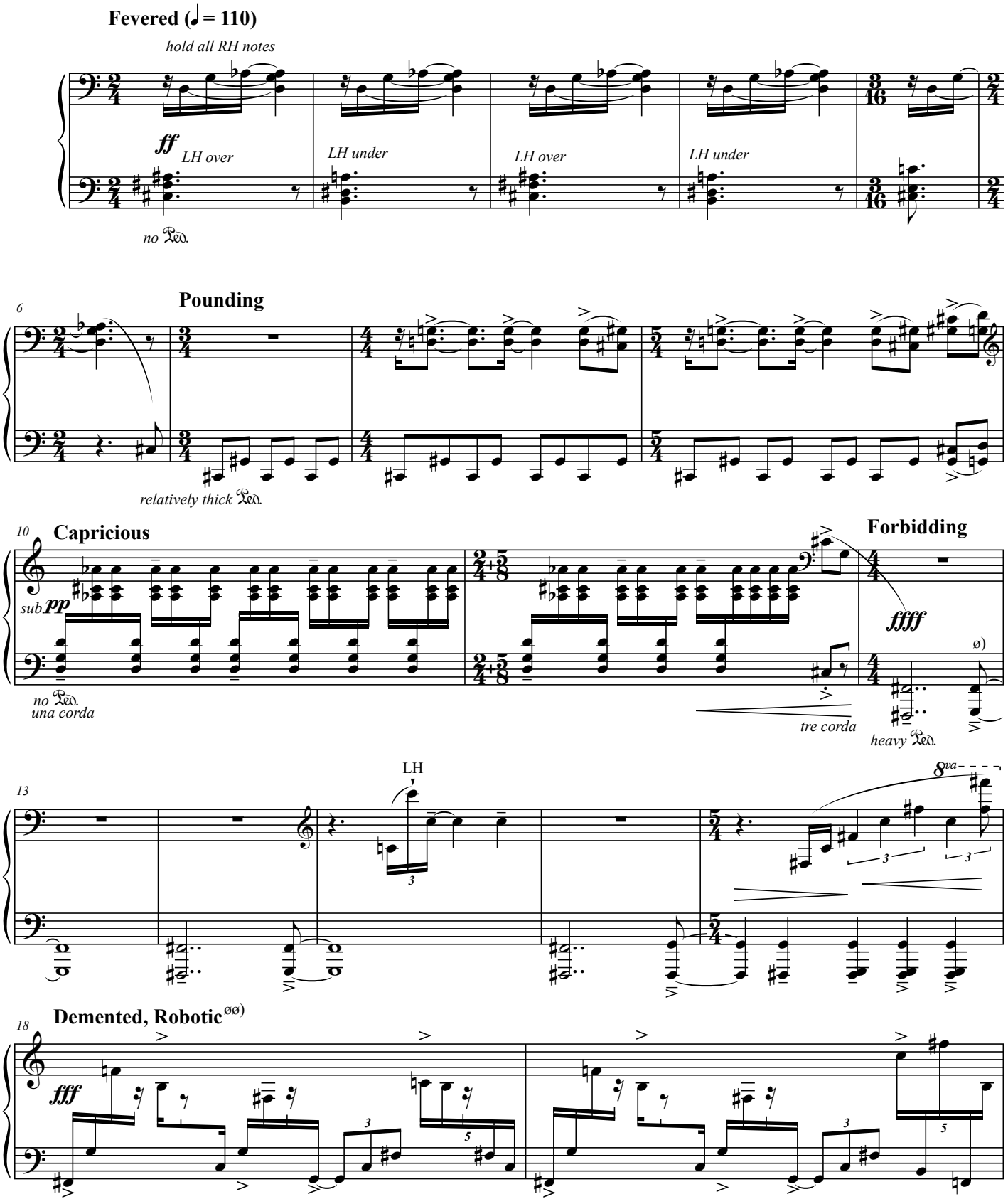
¶¶) Use short, sharp attacks throughout, but keep the pedal always depressed so that they all ring and form an effervescent harmony. The notes are written with vaguely proportional distances indicating relative duration, but your own musicality is the final determinant of note spacing.

#) N.B. Three of these notes have a different, heavier articulation. If possible they should be brought out of the texture a bit, ideally through a moderate lengthening of the attack.

##) No more pedal from this A through the end, but hold all notes with the fingers

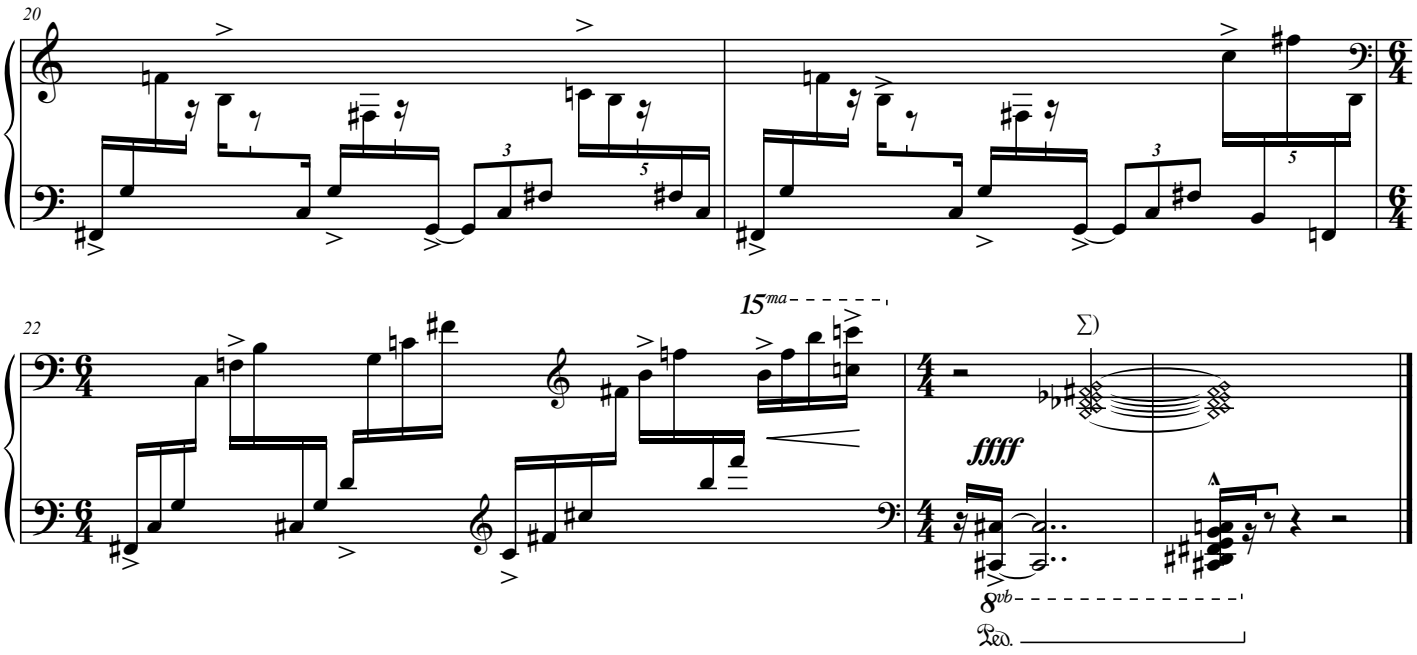

12
hold all notes
poco accel.

Fr.III.e(016) — Sarah Lawrence College Rm. MF21 — Wed. Mar. 7 2012 17:05



ø) N.B. The bottom note is changing even though the top note repeats. A few bars later this is reversed.

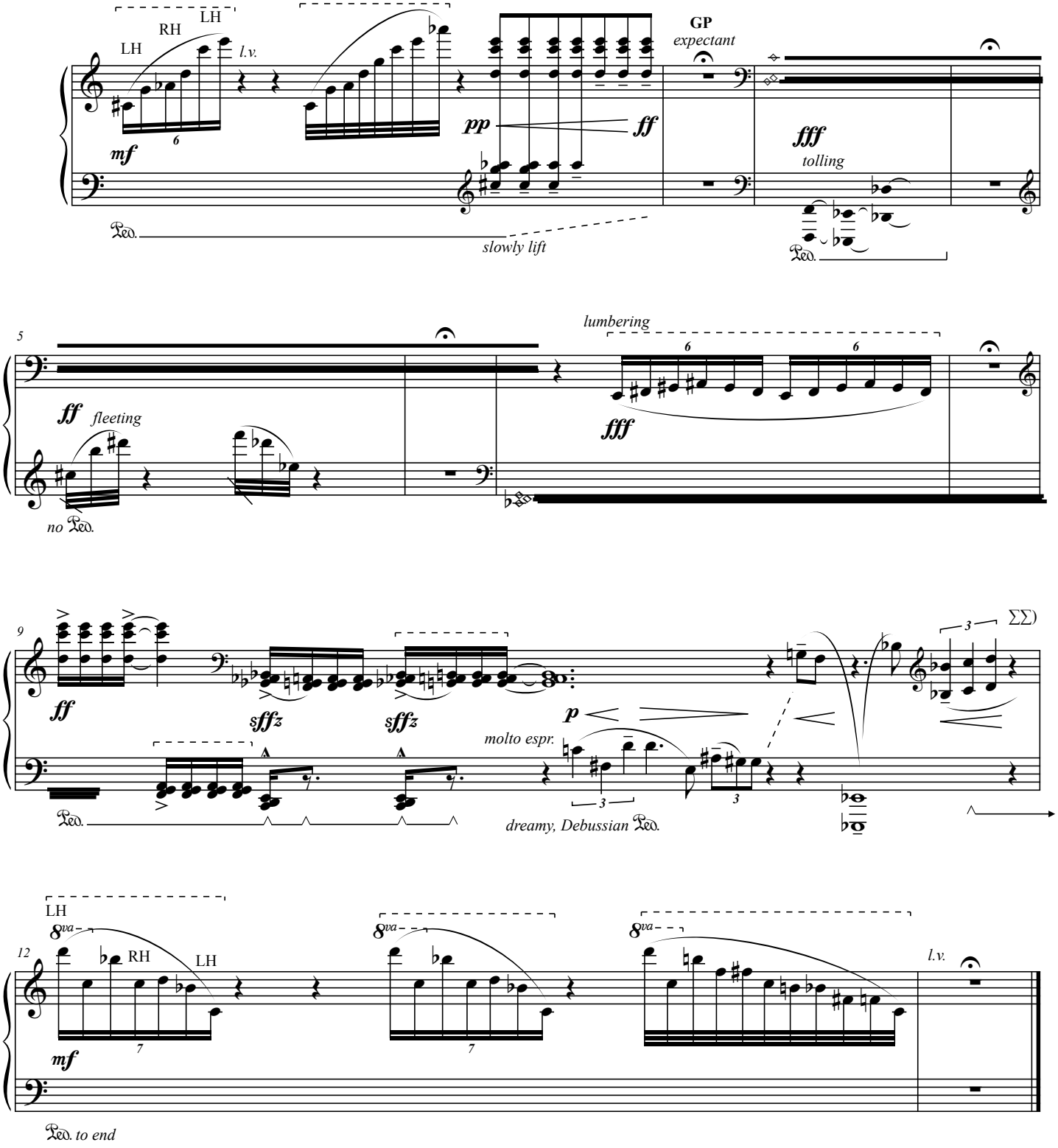
øø) Keep the beat as strictly in time as possible, so that the minute speed change of the quintuplets is maximally disorienting



∑) Throughout this score, diamond noteheads indicate keys that are depressed silently to create sympathetic resonances

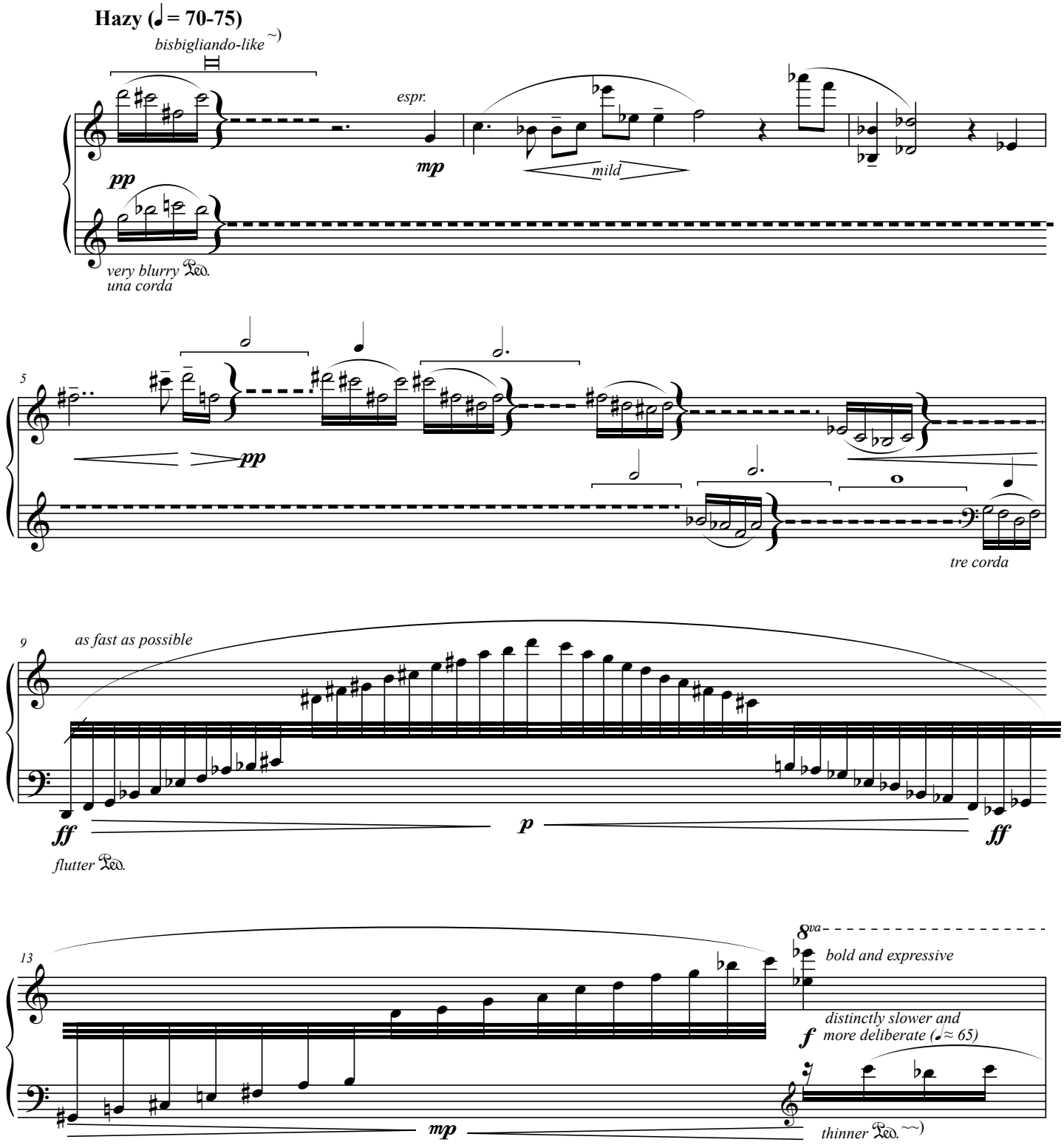
Fr.III.f(024) — garden at il Bambino restaurant, Astoria, NY — Mon. 3/19/12 16:02

Dreamlike (♩ = 60, but bracketed passages = 75)



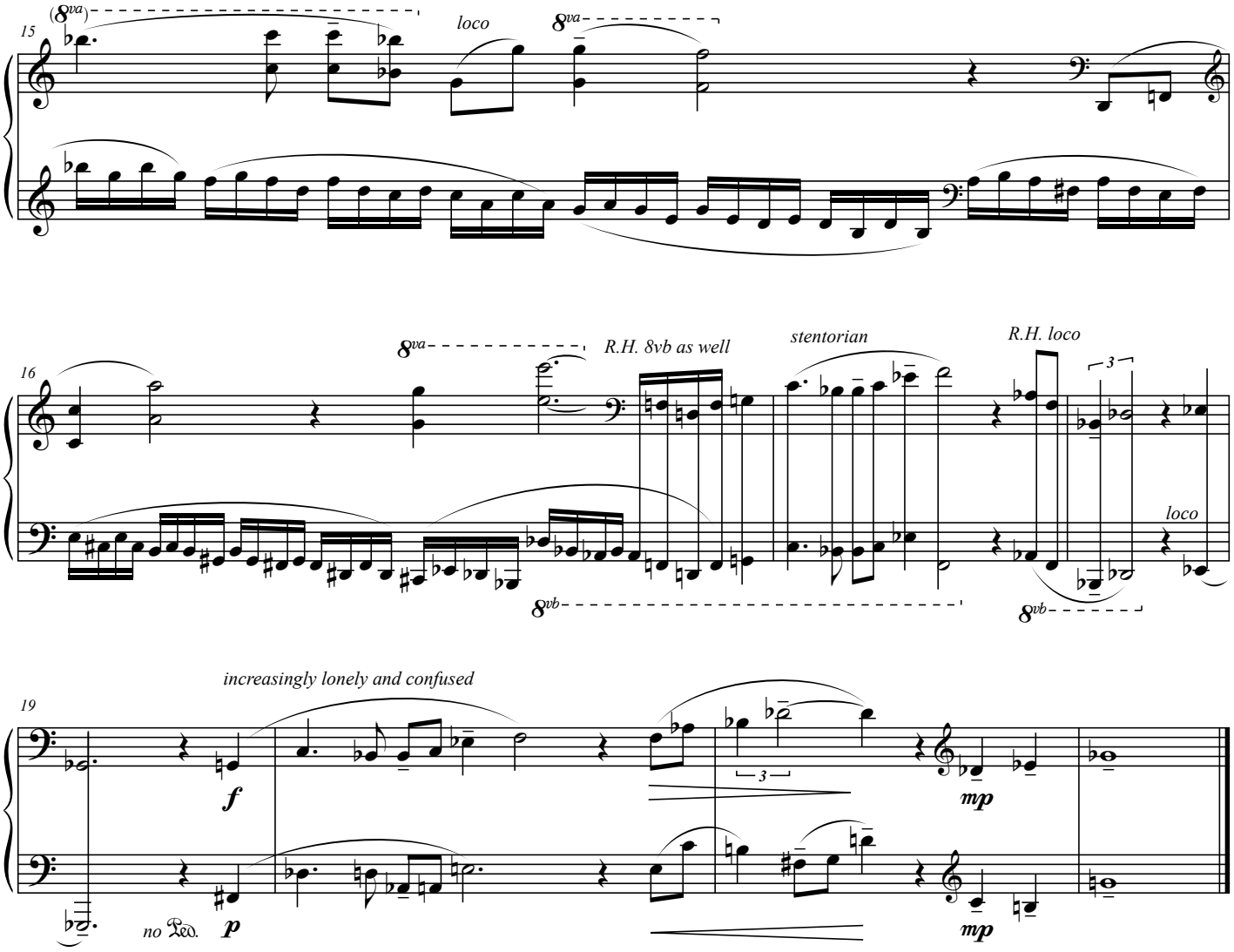
ΣΣ) This melody line should sound continuous between the two hands, and the ending should build to a resolution that never comes.

Fr.III.g(025) — CUNY Law (partially designed by Jenny) Rm. 101 — 4/21/2012 0:40

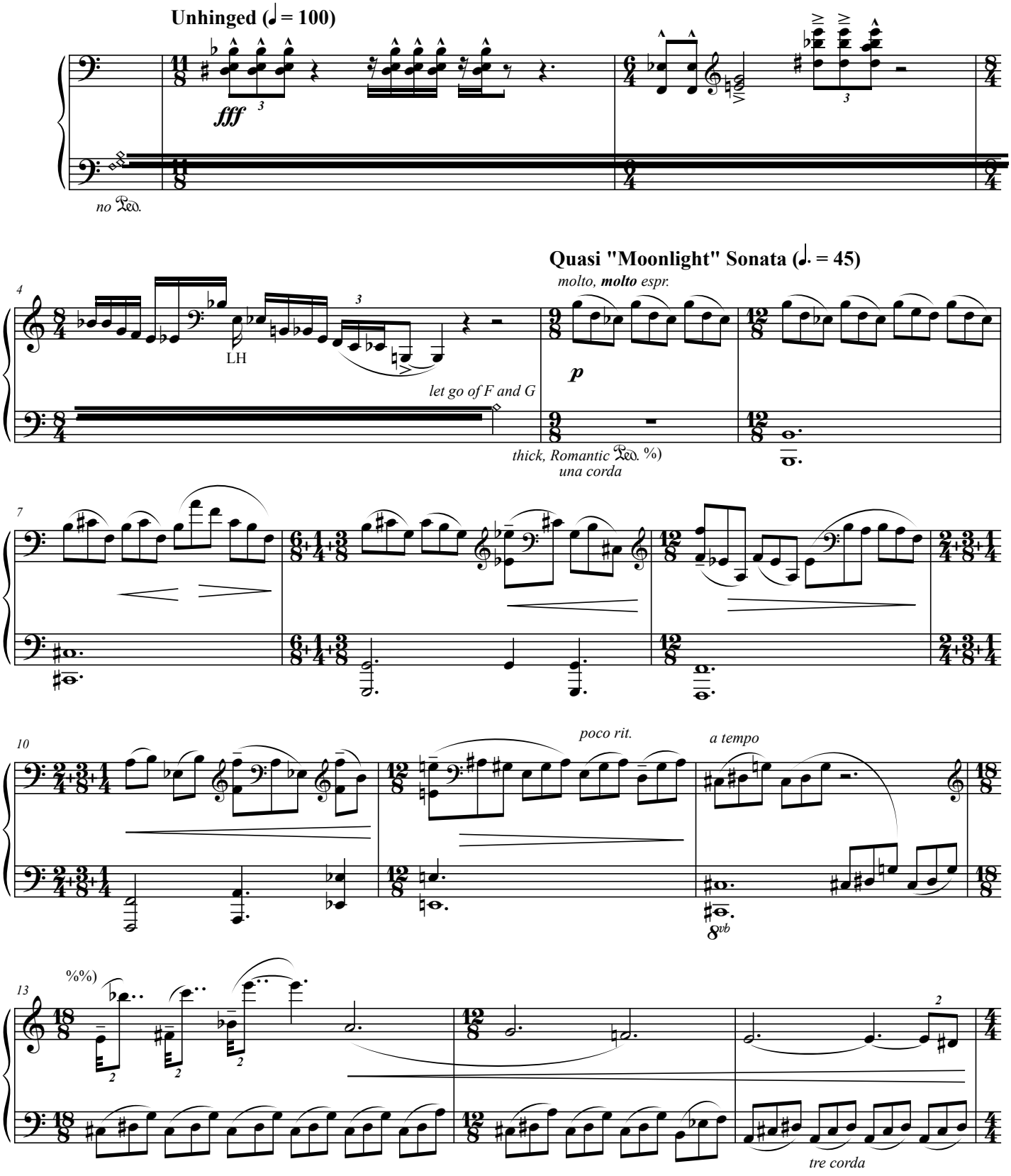


~) *Bisbigliando* is a harp term for a light fluttering between notes. The notes needn't be in order, and should sound like a fast and delicate tremolo with no notes sounding simultaneously (that is to say, each hand plays single notes, there should be any number of simultaneous notes between the two hands when both are performing the effect). These passages will always be notated with open noteheads and 16th-note beaming, and the general length of any collection of notes will be indicated by note-lengths above the figures.

~~) The LH needs to be relatively distinct and insistent, but it's more important to have a flowing and continous RH melody line in spite of that line's disjunct nature. This will necessitate a bit more pedal than would otherwise be desirable for the LH part. Perhaps use flutter or half pedaling?

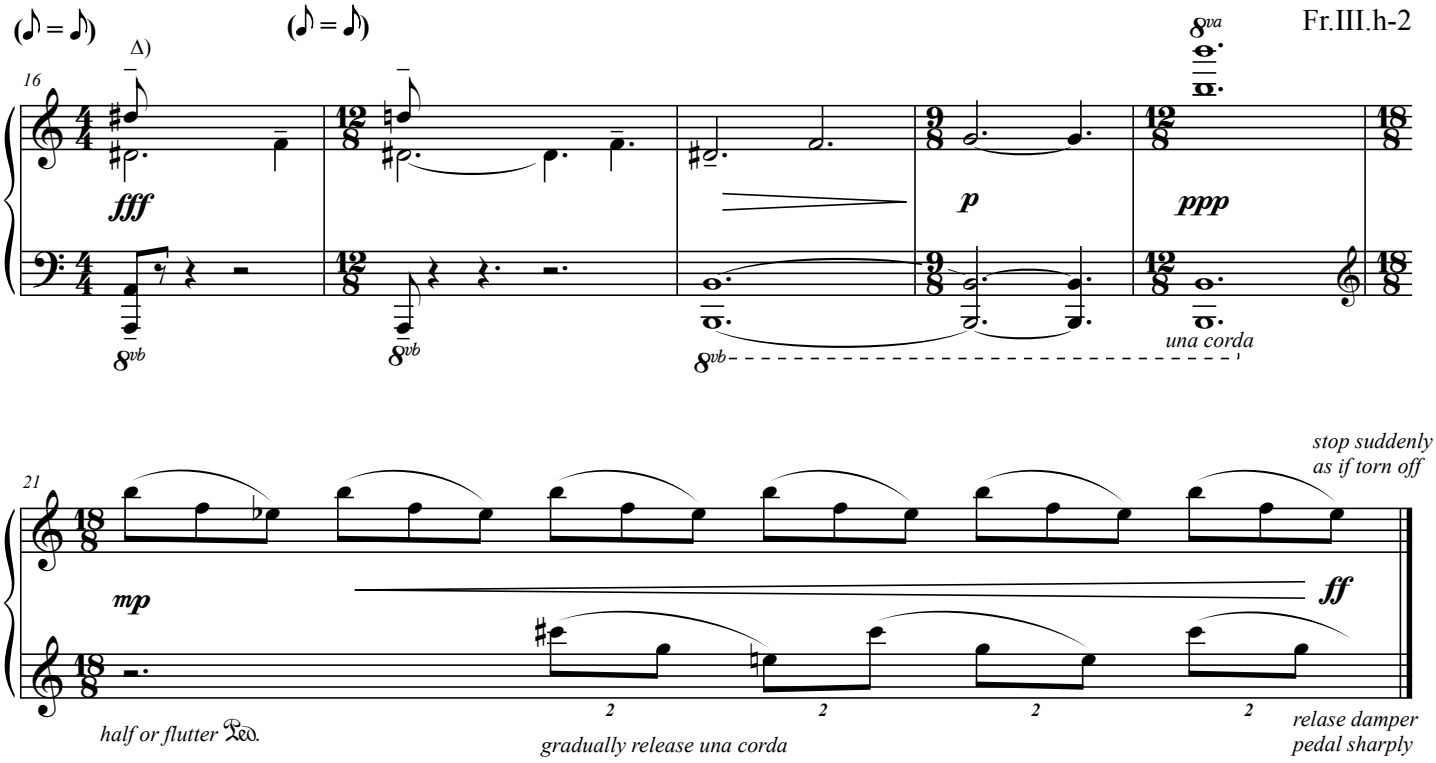

15
(8va)
loco
8va
16
8va
R.H. 8vb as well
stentorian
R.H. loco
3
loco
8vb
8vb
19
increasingly lonely and confused
f
3
mp
no Ped.
p
mp

Fr.III.h(026) — SLC MF1 during Theory I Final — Tue. 5/8/2012 16:54



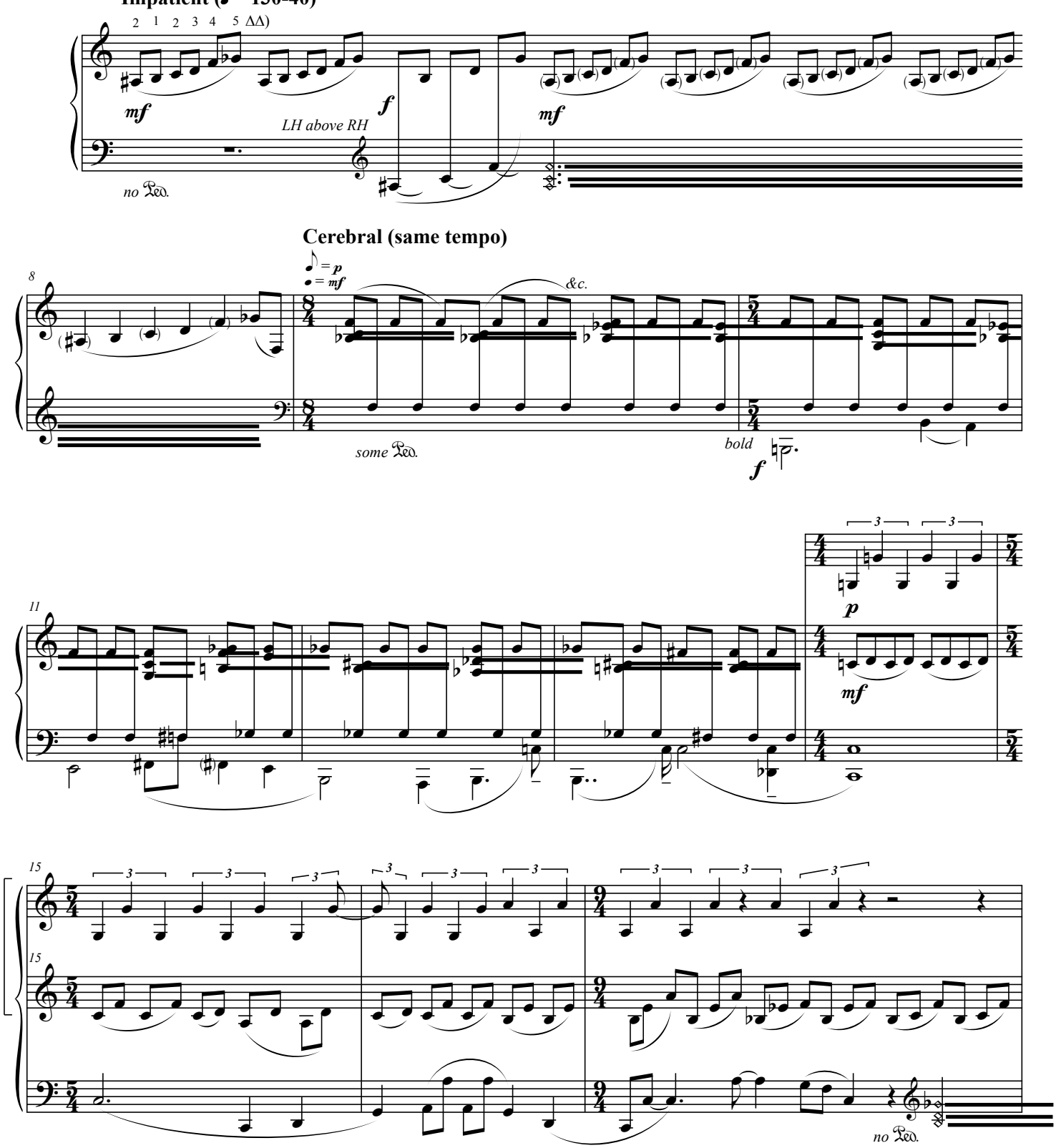
%) Catch the ringing sympathetic vibrations with the initial pedal. Also, I think I want a thicker pedaling here than would be appropriate for Beethoven. Use the kind of pedaling that an overly enthusiastic high school player might use for the "Moonlight".

%%) The emphasis is entirely on the bottom note in these figures, the top note is "ghosted" as much as possible and should be no more than an afterthought

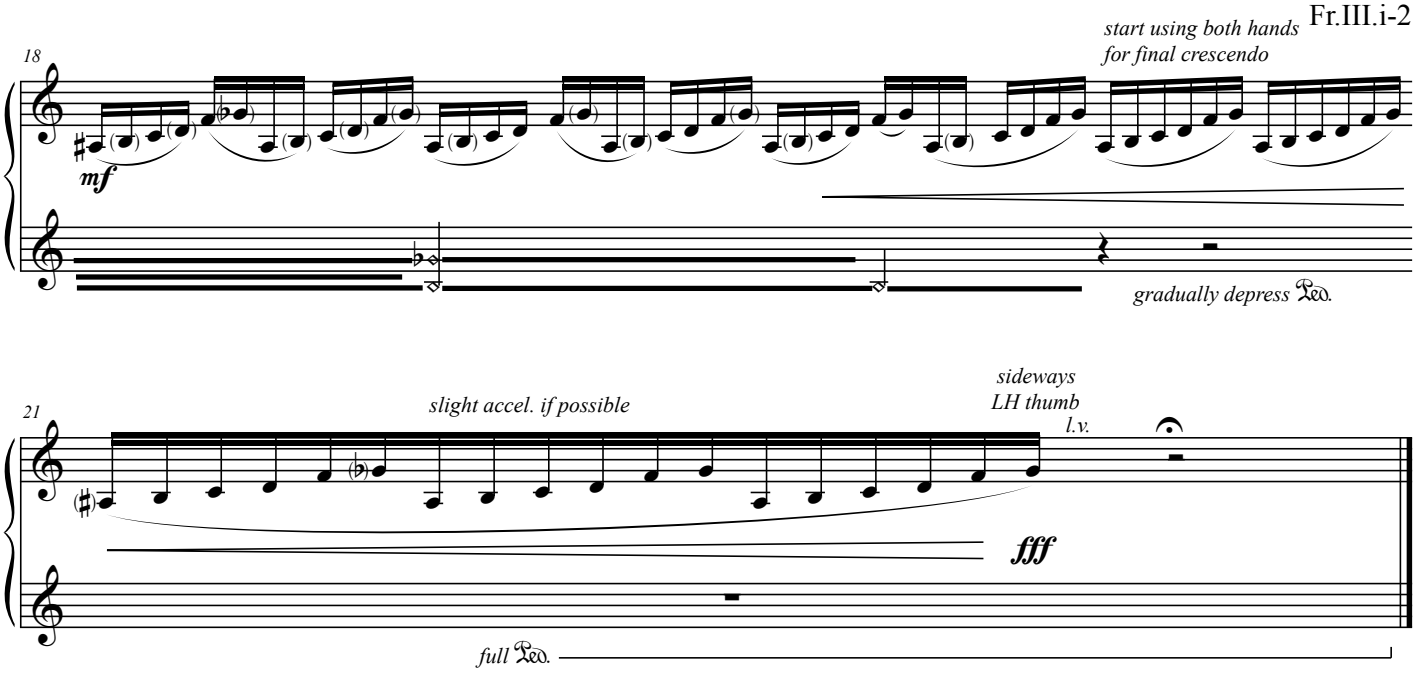


Δ) The eighth-notes on the downbeats of these two measures should be greatly emphasized, but with *weight*, not as a sharp accent. Make sure they aren't caught in the damper pedal, but maybe hold them with the fingers just *barely* more than an eighth-note?

Fr.III.i(027) — Jan Pieter Heijestraat, Amsterdam, Nederland — vrijdag 8 juni 2012, 11.33 uur

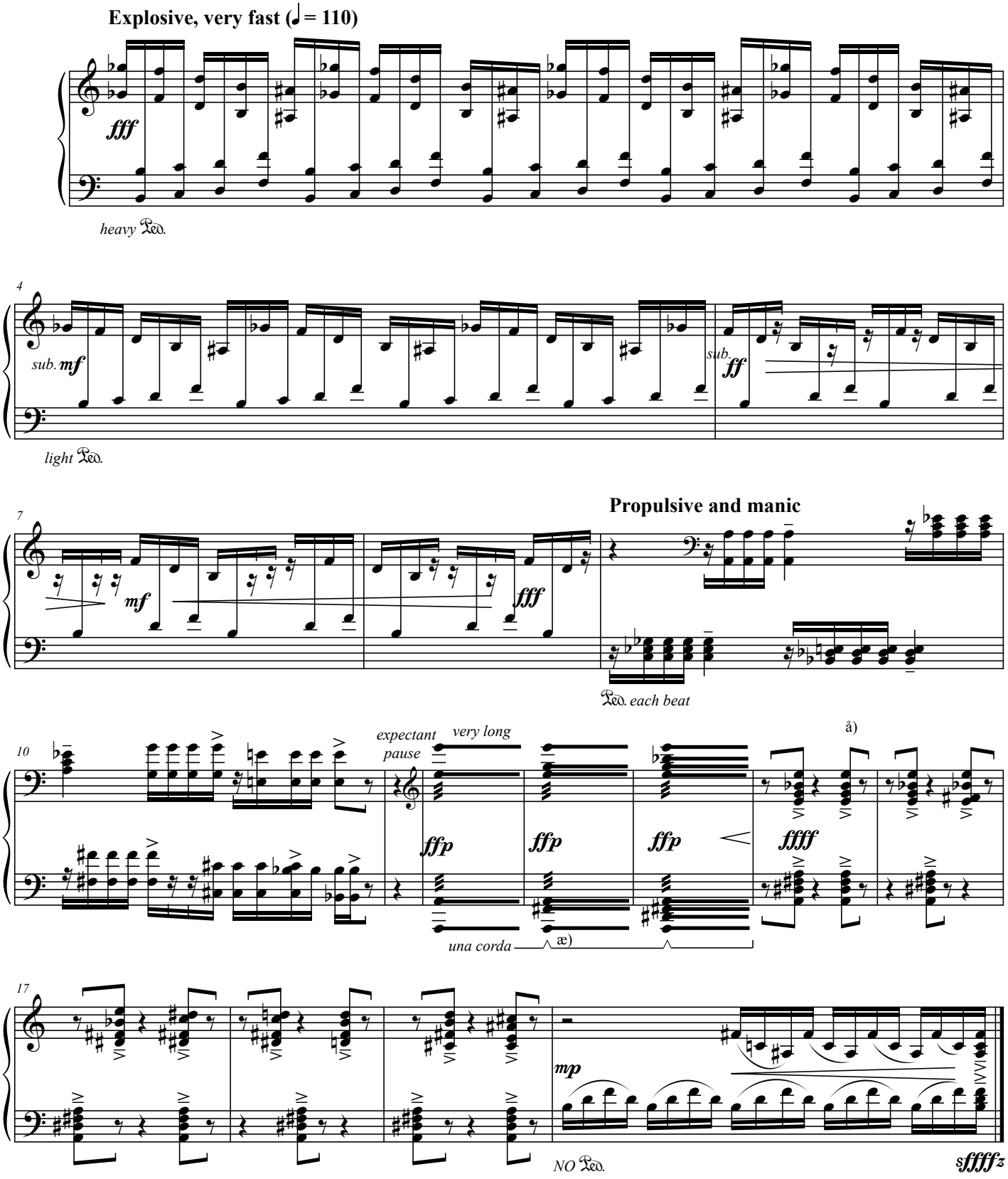


ΔΔ) At least this is the fingering I use. It will behoove the player to come up with something relatively comfortable, since this passage is twice as fast at the end. The idea in both this figure and the closing figure is that the RH plays all of the notes even though the LH is sometimes preventing them from being played. The concept is ~~stolen from~~ an homage to Ligeti's *Touches bloquées* étude.


18
start using both hands
for final crescendo
mf
gradually depress Ped.

21
slight accel. if possible
sideways
LH thumb
l.v.
fff
full Ped.

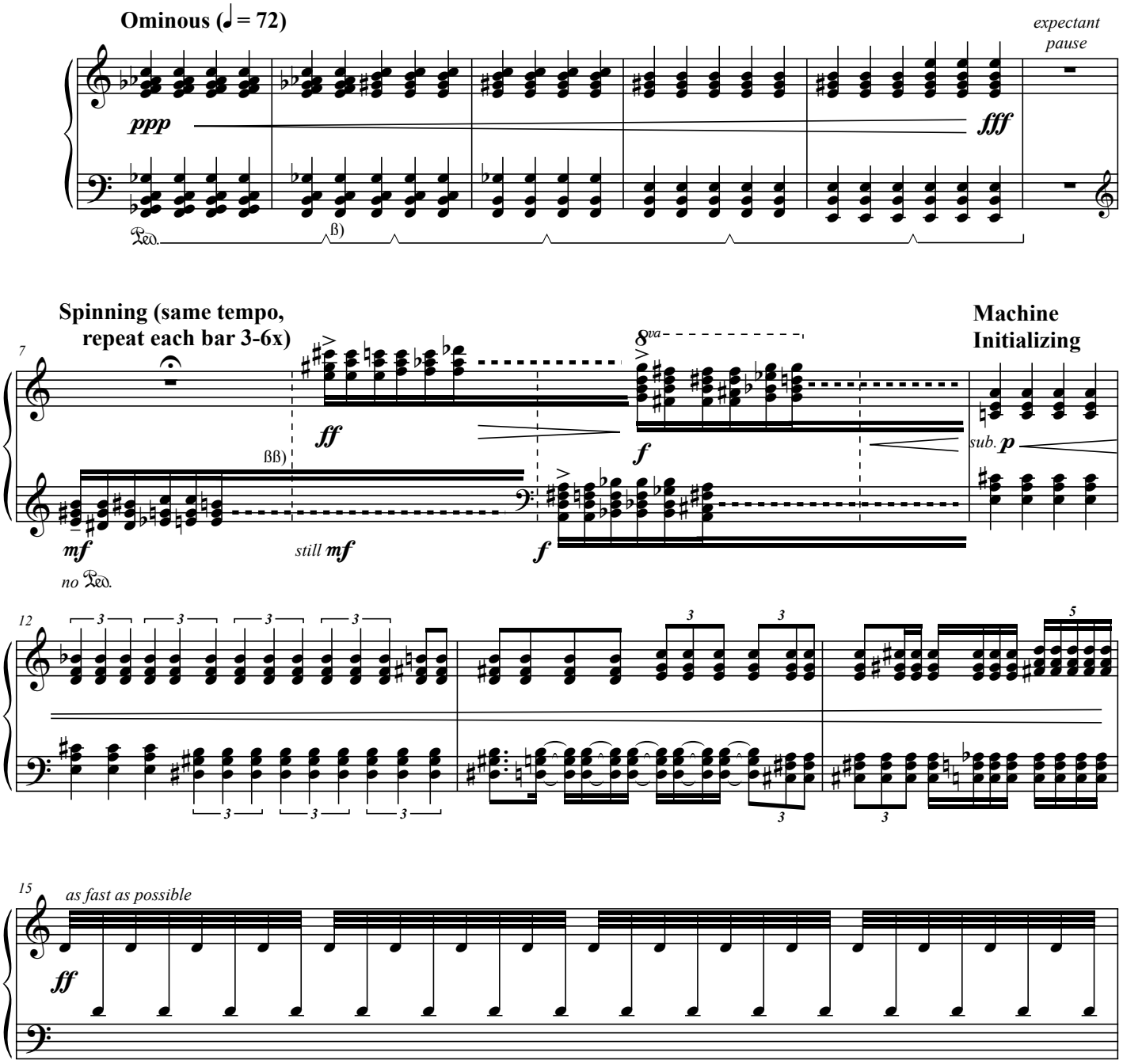
Fr.III.j(036) — København, Danmark on Gormsgade near Ægirsgade — fredag d. 15. juni 09.16



æ) Release the una corda pedal for the attack of each of these tremolo chords (also, perhaps use the damper pedal for the initial attack)

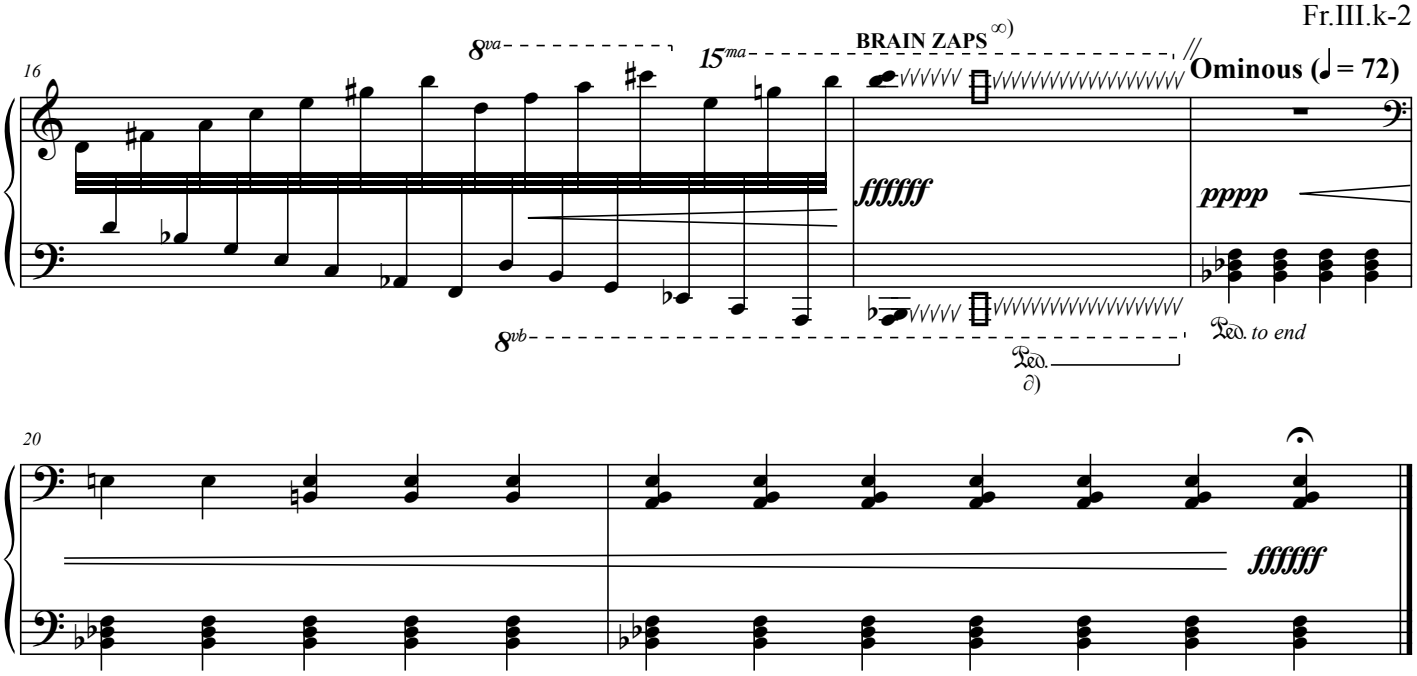
å) This should be like two machines stamping metal, the LH pattern is one eighth-note longer than the RH. Use the damper pedal on each chord to create extra percussiveness (it could be cool if both the depression and release of the pedal are occasionally audible)

Fr.III.k(037) — Øresundtåg to/from Malmö, Sverige — tisdag den 19 juni vecka 25 2012 20:12



ß) This is a very subtle thing, but it's a nice effect if these pedal clearings happen where notated instead of on the chord changes so that the emergence of a clearer harmony is even more gradual. Note that the later pedal lifts are even further removed from the chord change

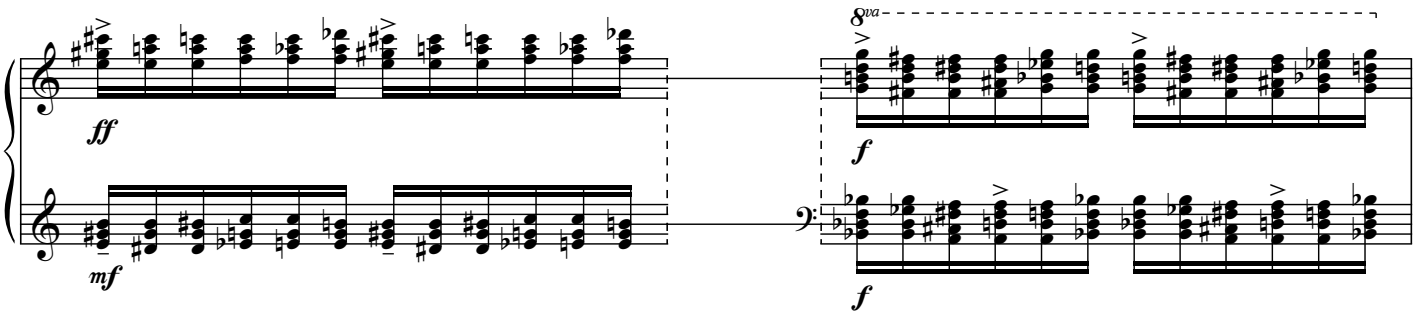
ßß) These cycles of chords just keep up on repeating, and all 16th-notes should be the same tempo, even though the precise number of repetitions is variable. They effect should be similar but ultimately unrelated mechanical processes coexisting, like looking at the inner workings of a vast, clockwork machine. I've notated the passage in this fashion because I think it gets across the feel of the passage well, and because I wanted to leave open the possibility of the the two cycles overlapping differently in each performance. In rehearsals for the premiere, Marty Goldray pointed out that the passage is much easier if you can see a precise alignment between the two hands, so at the bottom of the next page I've notated one possible alignment between the two hands that can be used for practice.



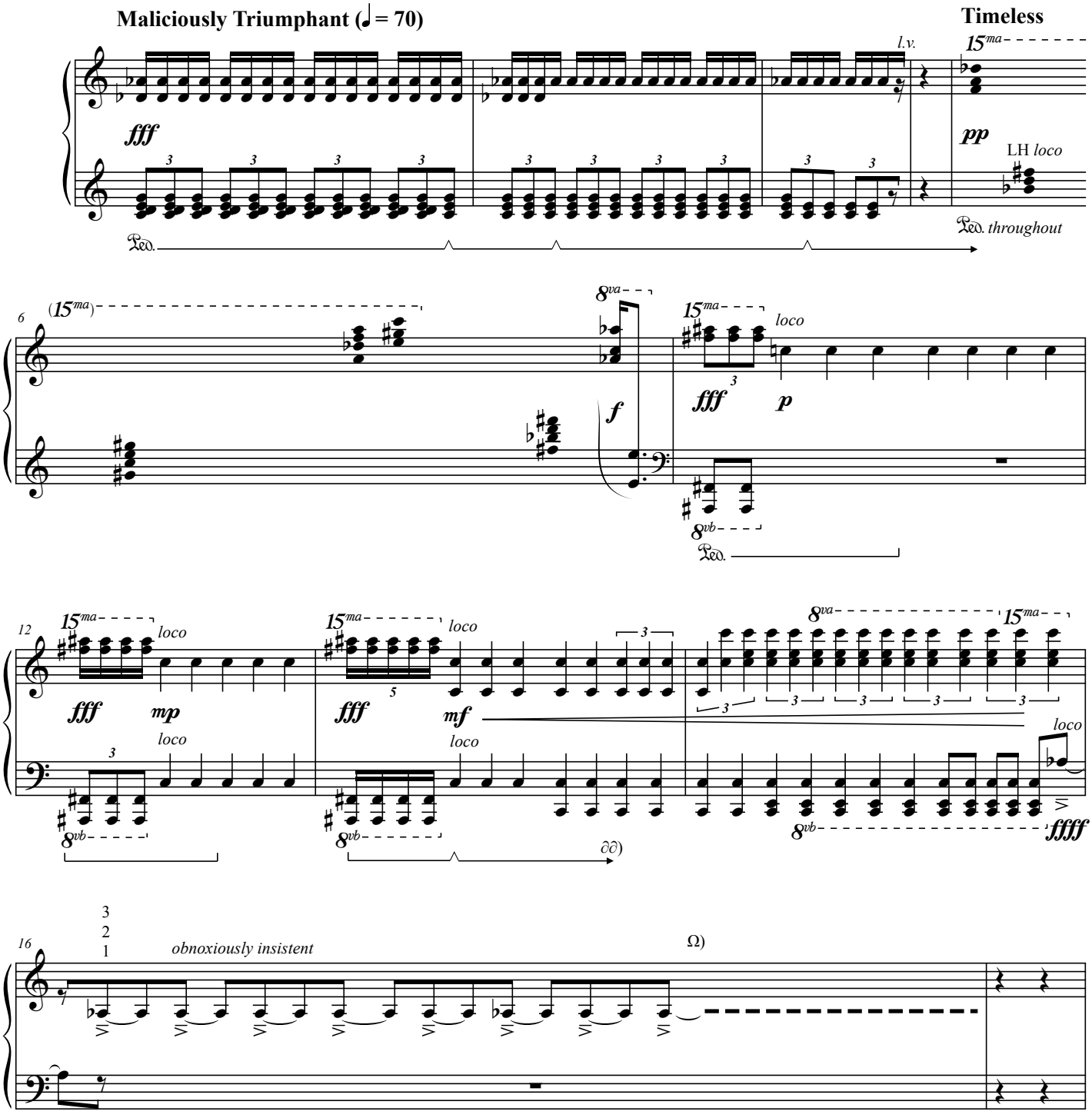
∞) Play in a viciously stuttering manner - like the sparking and spitting of a downed power line. E.g.- 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯 𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯𝅘𝅥𝅯
Each hand should be completely independent in both tempo and rhythm, and the passage should last approximately 15".

∂) Add the damper pedal roughly halfway through this brain zap measure, but lift completely for the caesura.

For Practicing mm. 7-10



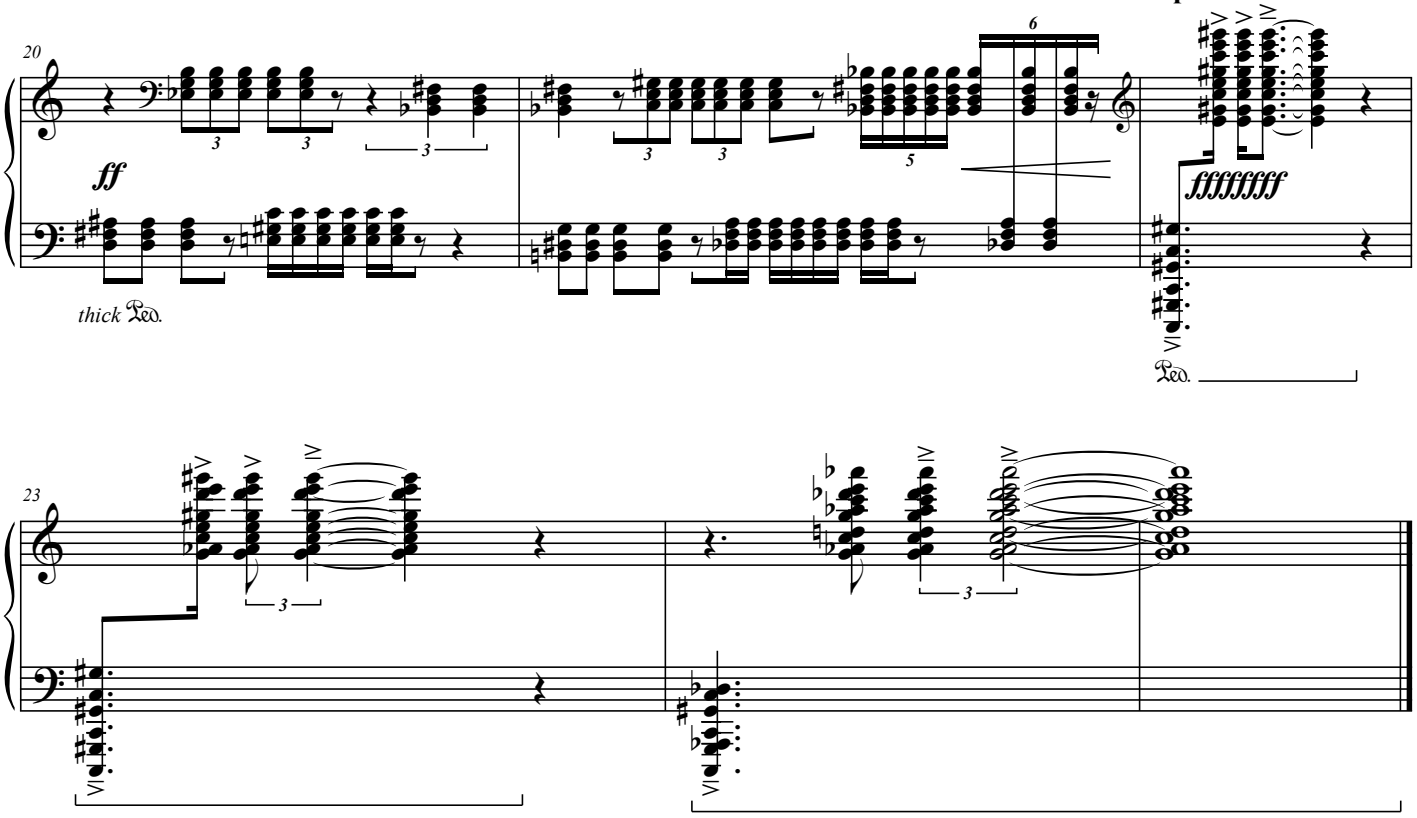
Fr.III.l(048) — Vienna, VA near Washington D.C. the day after David Durst's wedding 9:44 @ Courtyard Marriott hotel — Sunday June 24 2012



∂∂) Hold damper pedal for the rest of this page, allowing all the sound to gradually decay during the repeated A♭.

Ω) Repeat this loud A♭ ad naseum, continuing a little after it starts to be uncomfortably long (but if you still aren't uncomfortable after about 30", rest assured that the audience is). Certainly it should at least repeat past the point that all of the ambient sound caught in the damper pedal has decayed naturally. (Depending on the piano and performance situation, waiting for all the sound to decay might be too long. You could choose to do a mild pedal clearing immediately after the last big chord to reduce the time it takes for the sound to decay completely.)

Apotheosis



ΩΩ) Think Liszt at his most grandiose, except the chords keep rusting for some reason. N.B. the rest at the end of each measure is total, with no damper pedal holding through it.