Tom Armitage

Dear Cyrnus,

2019

For Solo Piano

Dear Cyrnus,

by Tom Armitage

Duration c. 6-7'

Cyrnus was the erômenos of Theognis of Megara, an influential Greek lyric poet in the sixth century BC. We know very little of Cyrnus, sometimes referred to as Kyrnos or Kurnos, other than he was the son of Polypas. What we know comes from Theognis' writings of their pederastic relationship.

The elegies of Theognis present him as a complex character, an exponent of traditional Greek morality and a tormented man who found much joy and despair in his love for Cyrnus. He was described by Isocrates as among "the best advisers for human life" and his work, although sometimes considered self-contradictory, was the fruit of a lifetime of experience and wisdom. The Theognid collection is so vast that it is suspected that Theognis as an individual may not have existed at all, and in fact the collection was a collaborative composition by many writers over an extensive period of time. The attribution of their feelings towards Cyrnus could in fact be an expression of love towards any hypothetical young male.

This is what attracted me most to the elegiac verses of Theognis addressed to Cyrnus. The mystery of its authorship and the accessibility of self-identification that we may all experience as Theognis or Cyrnus. I remember as an eighteen-year-old thinking that I could not be attracted to anyone over the age of twenty-five, but now I am writing this as a twenty-six-year-old and I start to wonder if I am also now beyond that age of desire. Additional shame is burdened upon this thought because I know that I have many much older male friends that still refer to me as "young man", and sadly many of them are alone and quite lonely.

Not all of Theognis' writings to Cyrnus are amatory, but of those that are, his writings display his anxiety, his cynicism, his self-awareness of his mortality, his suspicions regarding Cyrnus' promiscuity - especially with men that Theognis considers to be less worthy, but most of all, his endless and unshakeable devotion to the young man. I have taken three elegies as inspiration for *Dear Cyrnus,:*

Boy, since the goddess Cypris gave you a lusty
Grace, and your beauty's every boy's concern,
Listen to these words and for my sake take them to heart
Knowing how hard it is for a man to bear desire.

- - -

My heart's in pain because of my love of you,
For I can't either hate or love,
Knowing it's hard when a man's your friend
To hate him, and hard to love him if he doesn't want.

- - -

Knowing in your heart that the flower of lovely youth
Is briefer than a footrace, loosen my chain.
For even you, mightiest of boys, may some day be compelled
And meet the hard work of the Love Goddess,
Even as I do now with you. Beware!
A boy's wickedness may one day conquer you.

(Translated by Peter Bing & Rip Cohen, Games of Venus, pp. 94-109. © 1991 by Routledge, Chapman and Hall, Inc.)

The verses express much admiration for Cyrnus' beauty, paired with Theognis' regret that age has withered his own attractive appearance. The demonstrable strength of his affection towards Cyrnus results in him stifling his desire to love him and his incapability to hate him for not returning his love. And in the final verse, whilst pleading with Cyrnus for pity and possibly gratification, he scorns him and reminds him that one day he will also grow old and will not be as attractive as other boys anymore. He chastises him for either being so beautiful or for using his beauty to inflict emotional torture.

The following music is at times fragmentary, as is the texts of which it was inspired. I present Cyrnus youthful beauty in the opening bars of this piece. A 6/8 metre providing a playful, boyish lilt; mid to high register chords hinting at his adolescence; a bright major tonality and arching melodies expressing the beauty of clear lines in Greek art; additional harmony notes to add colour and to suggest charming imperfections, such as a freckles or perhaps a beauty spot; and a series of unrelated block chords and cubic structures suggesting an angled bone structure, such as high cheekbones or a strong jawline.

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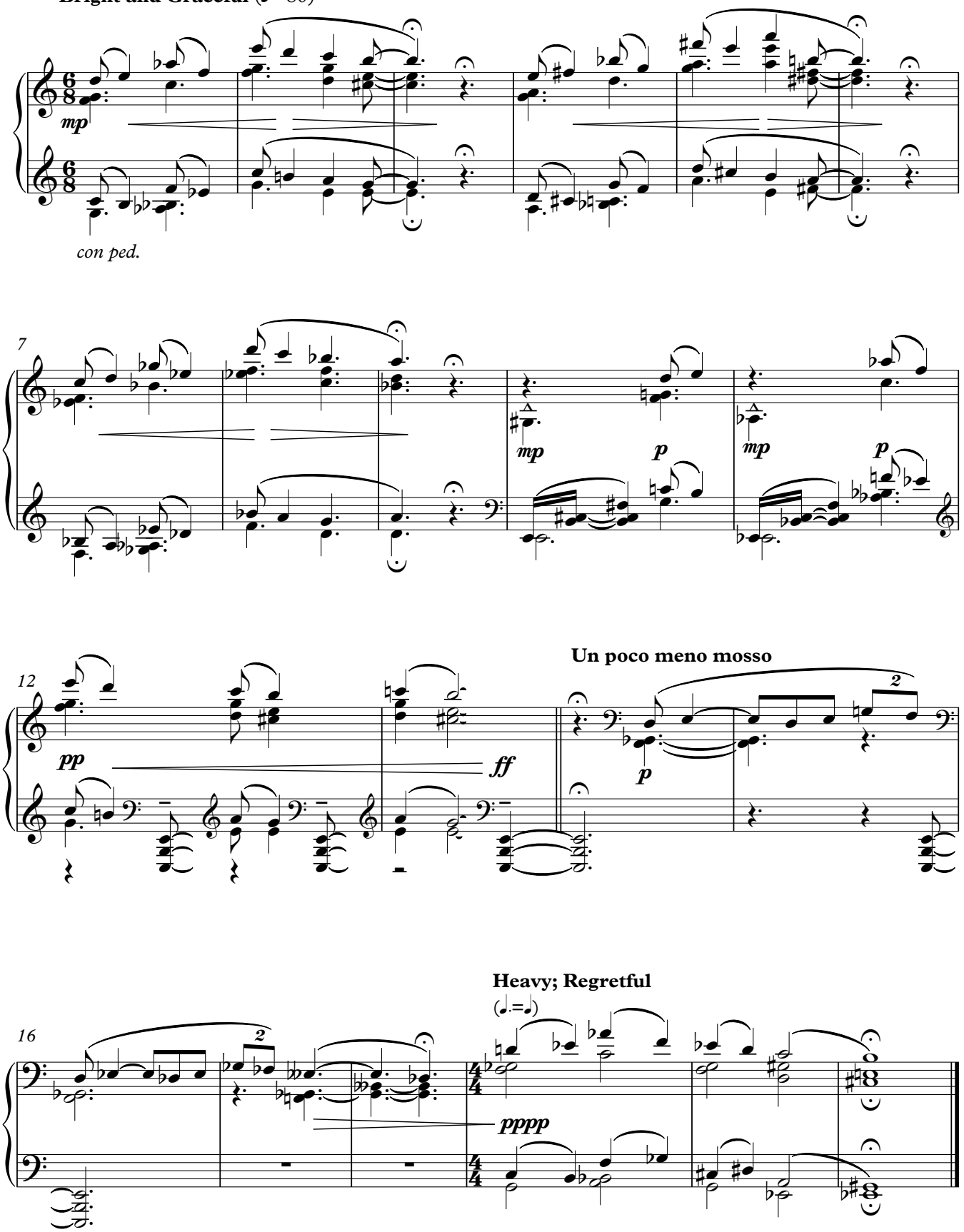
Dear Cyrnus,

I.

Tom Armitage
February 2019

Bright and Graceful (♪=80)



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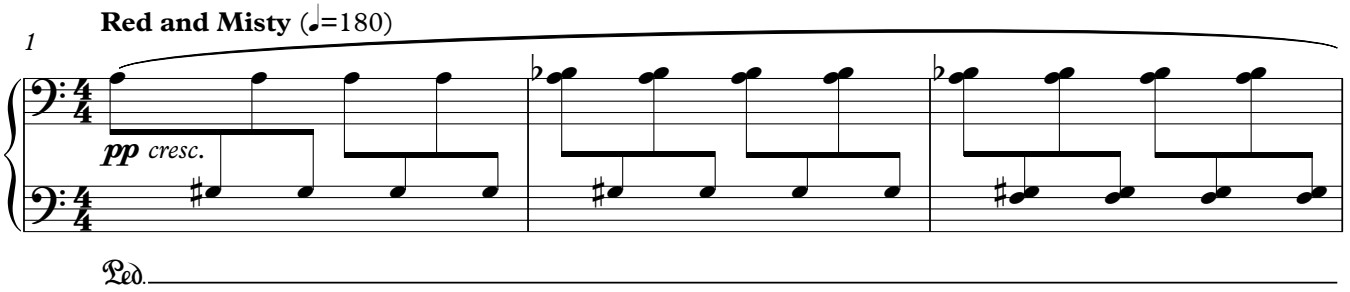
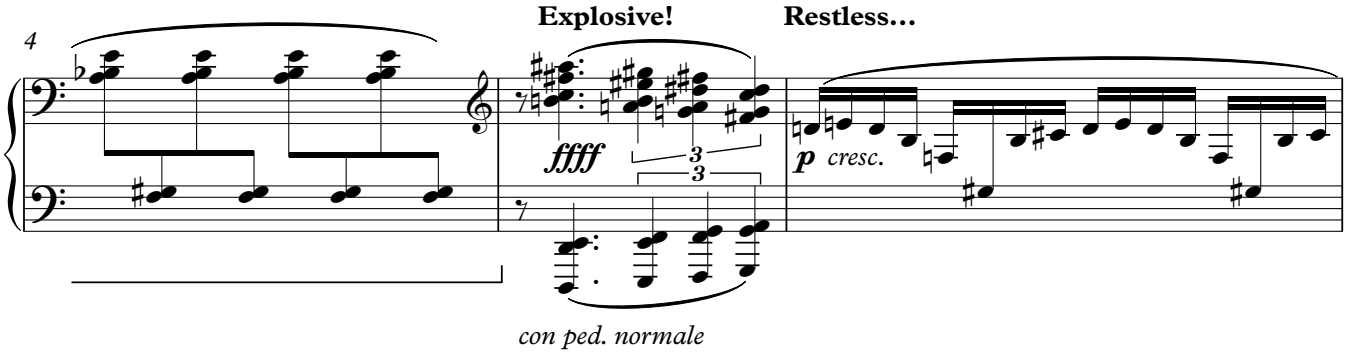
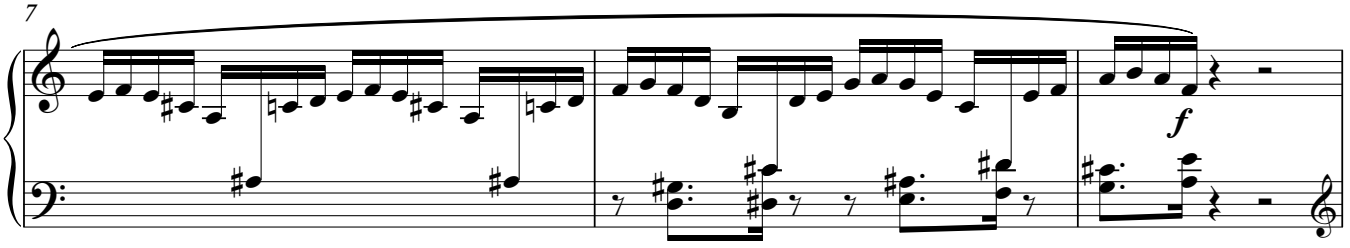
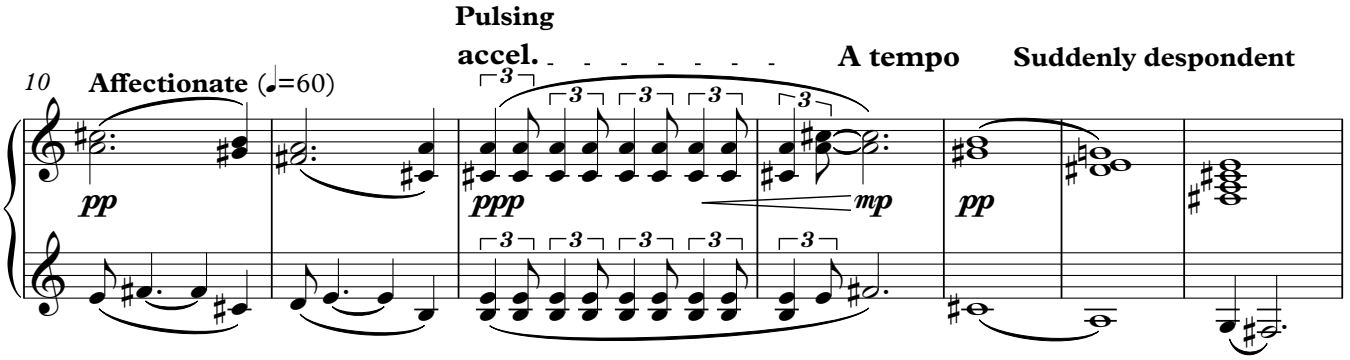
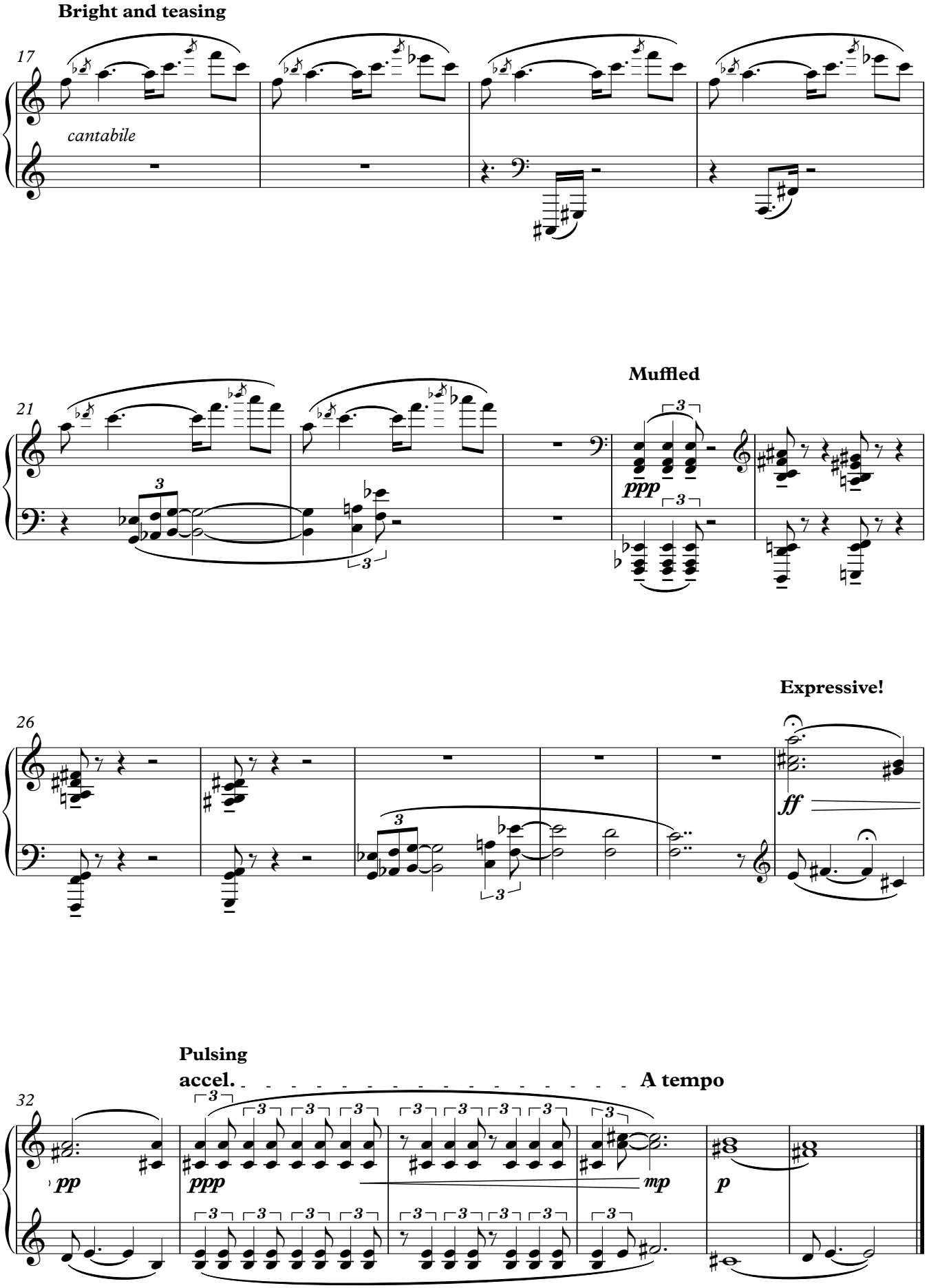
II.


1
Red and Misty (♩=180)
pp cresc.
Ped.


4
Explosive!
Restless…
ffff
p cresc.
con ped. normale

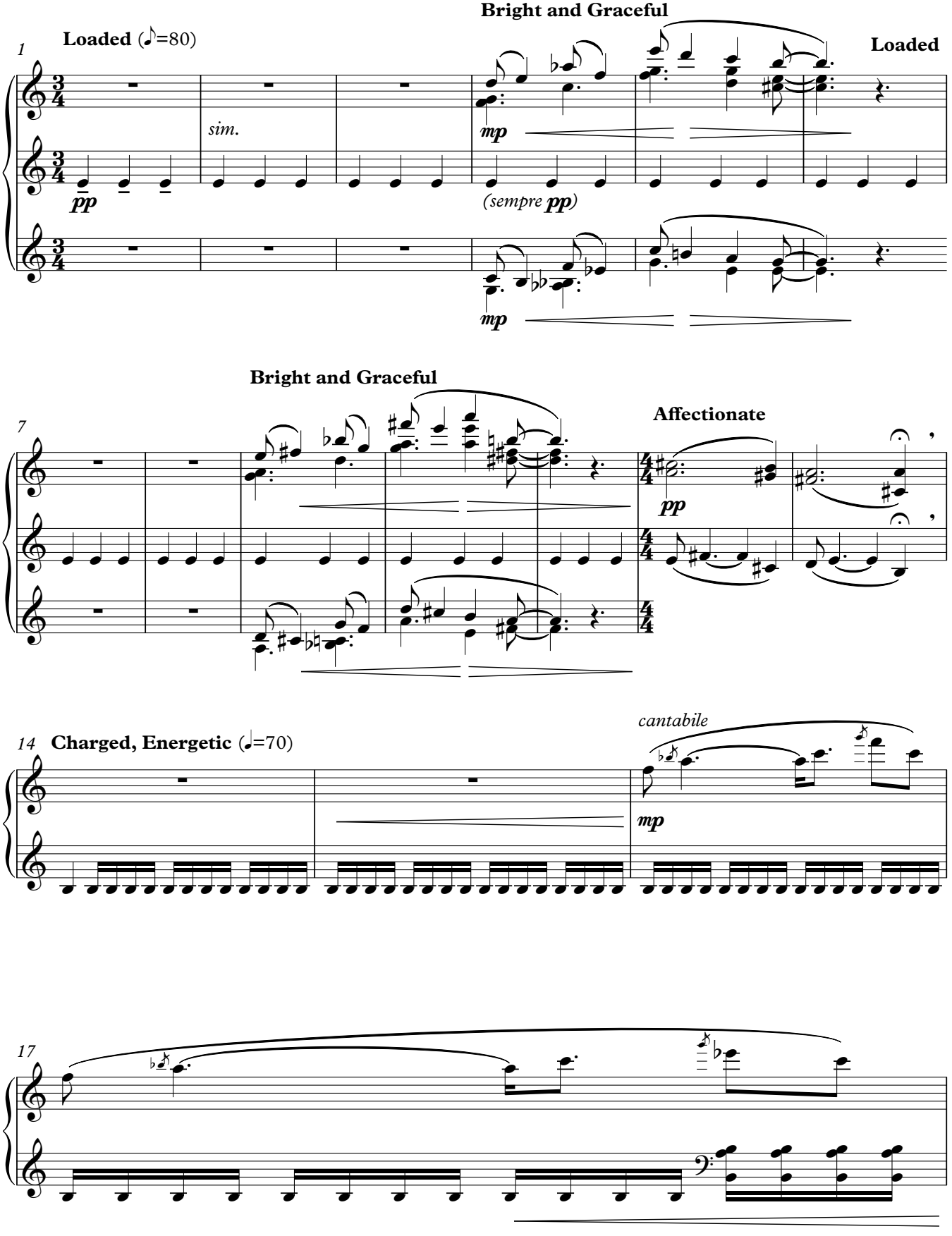

7
f

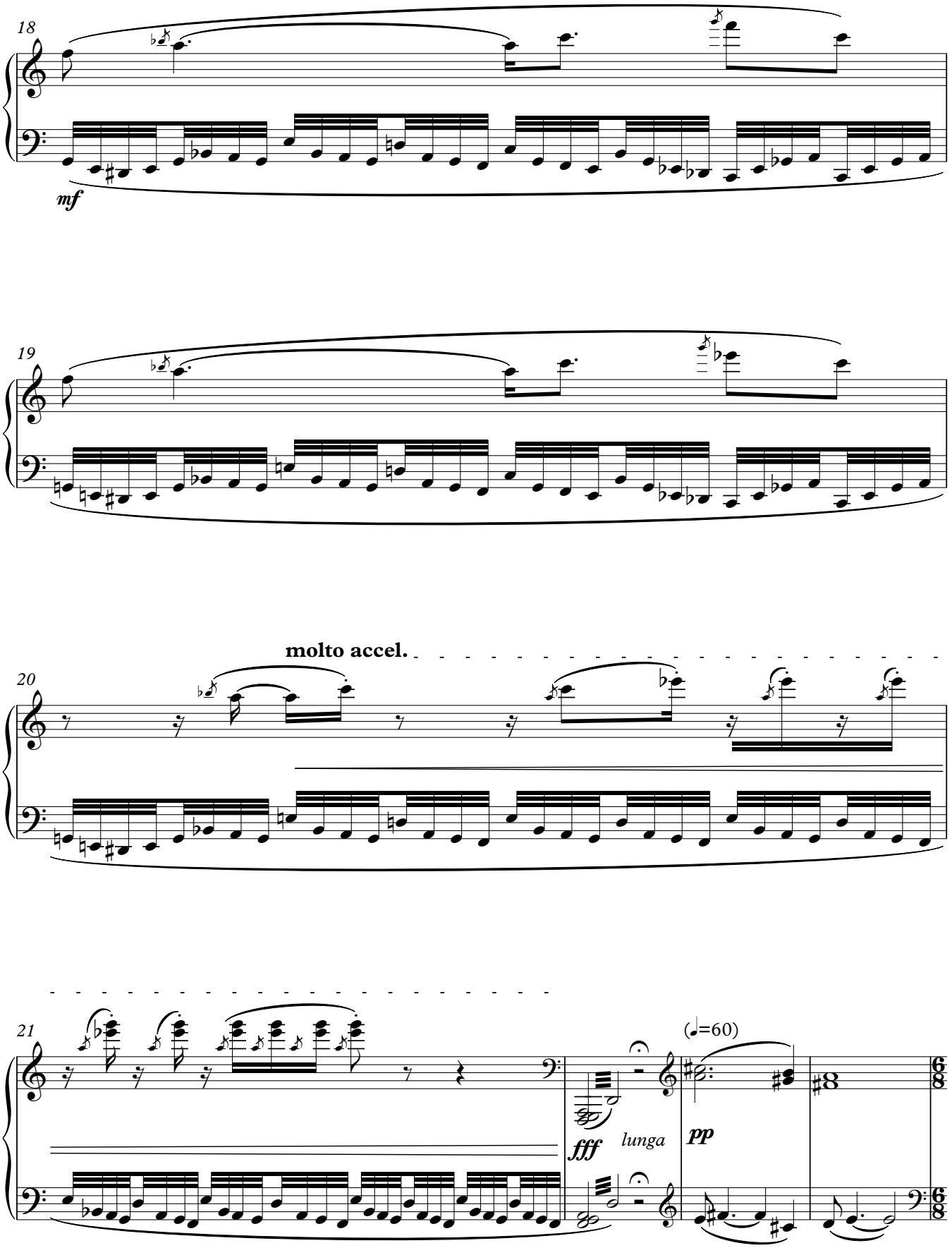

10
Affectionate (♩=60)
pp
Pulsing
accel.
ppp
mp
A tempo
pp
Suddenly despondent


Bright and teasing
17
cantabile
Muffled
21
ppp
Expressive!
26
ff
Pulsing
accel.
A tempo
32
pp
ppp
mp
p

Blank page to facilitate page turn

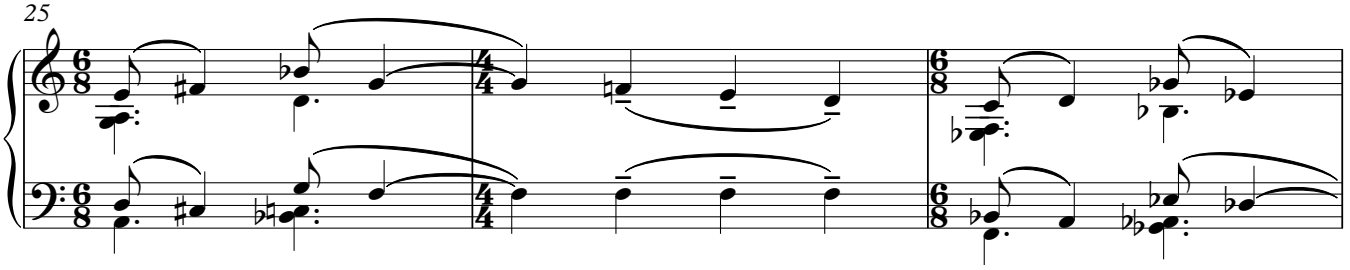
III.


Loaded (♪=80)
1
sim.
pp
mp
Bright and Graceful
(sempre pp)
Loaded
mp
Bright and Graceful
7
Affectionate
pp
14
Charged, Energetic (♩=70)
cantabile
mp
17


18
mf
19
molto accel.
20
21
fff
lunga
(♩=60)
pp

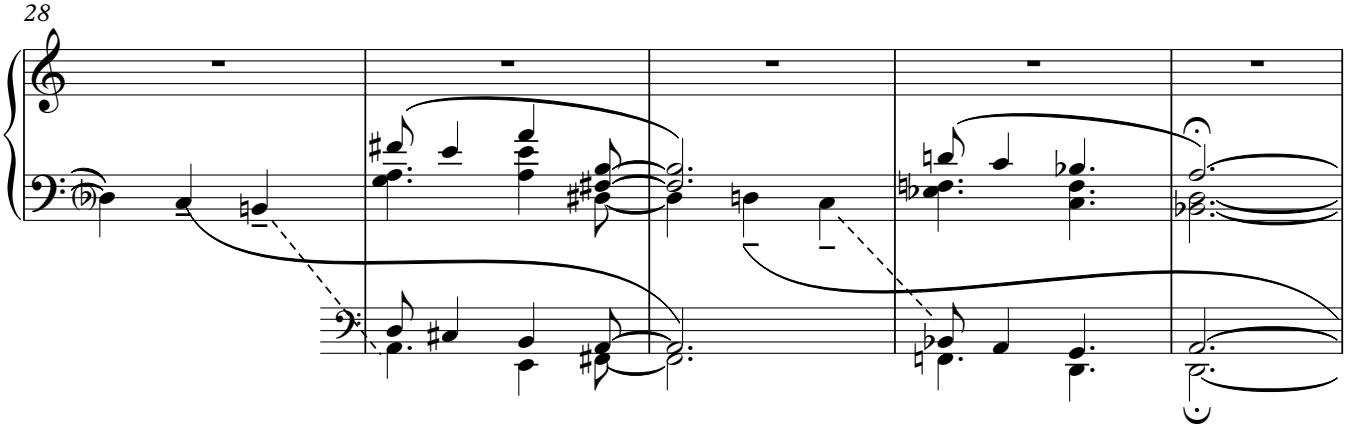
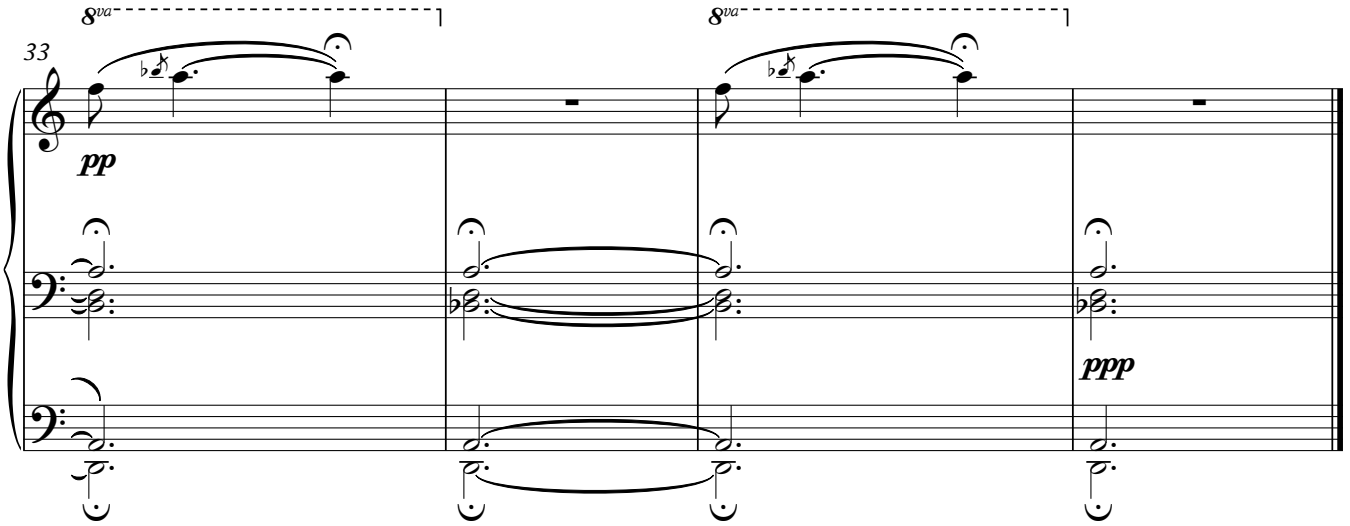
Sinking with Desperation (♪=80)

25



keep tempo and dynamic constant througout

28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