Signature Moments

From Sounding the Deep

For Piano

Nigel Morgan

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About the Music

Signature Moments for solo piano are miniatures that describe key moments in the large-scale work *Sounding the Deep* for bass voice and orchestra. This work follows the adventures of zoologist and explorer William Beebe as he makes his first pioneering descents into the deep sea in his Bathysphere.

These miniatures join two existing collections: *Fifteen Images (Le Jardin Pluvieux)* and *The White Light of Wonder*. The latter is a *Kinderszenen* for the 21st century based on extracts from the autobiography of G.K. Chesterton. *Fifteen Images* is wholly different in being a reflection on a garden in a Quaker meeting house in Cumbria. Both pieces bring to themselves other satellite works – just as these piano pieces from *Sounding the Deep* will do.

These 20 'signature moments' are like musical web pages, designed to be 'browsed', played around with, even improvised upon. You won't need a virtuoso technique to sound them out, and most work well as piano duets – No.6 *A Question of Descent* is particularly suitable and will lead to some intimate hand crossing like my infamous and widely performed *Seven Nuptial Blessings* for Piano Duet!

Each group of 'signature moments' is prefaced by an extract from the libretto, written after Beebe's book *Half Mile Down*, by Nigel Morgan and Phil Legard.

For more information on these pieces and *Sounding the Deep*, please visit www.soundingthedeep.co.uk

Signature Moments – A Guide to their Realisation

This collection of moments has been assembled to encourage musicians to get their hands on the core musical material of *Sounding the Deep*, an ambitious twenty-minute work for bass voice and orchestra. These moments follow and refer to a text fashioned into a libretto from *Half Mile Down*, a book about the exploration of the ocean depths by zoologist and explorer William Beebe. This text contains a wealth of descriptions, events and images that dictate a musical structure in five movements. Within each movement there are between three and six distinct musical 'signatures' that provide a kind of musical map through which a musician can plot the musical argument of *Sounding the Deep*.

As a way towards setting the text for solo voice – devised in the form of an imagined public lecture by William Beebe – twenty signature moments have been composed as keyboard miniatures, each occupying no more than a single page in landscape format. These miniatures last between 45 and 120 seconds. They were composed to be released in PDF score and MP3 audio formats one by one on the composer's blog on the *Sounding the Deep* website during August 2011. Their initial purpose was to introduce the music of this new work to the community of the orchestra who will give *Sounding the Deep* its premiere in March 2012. Reference recordings and simulations are all very well, but there is nothing quite like engaging directly with the notes and sounds of a new work. This is, after all, what audiences did prior to the advent of recording when publishers, as a matter of course, released piano duo or indeed chamber music versions of new orchestral scores.

Signature Moments was not composed as a concert piece, though there is no reason why the music couldn't be presented as such, though not, it is hoped, in a slavish rendition of the score. The composer is keen for each moment to be considered as a starting point for personal experiment, just as a jazz musician might do from a lead sheet and chord progression. Neither does the notation of each moment dictate precise dynamics or phrasing. Indeed, within each moment the organisation and division of musical structure – indicated by bar lines – is 'open'. This means the player is encouraged to improvise different juxtapositions of bars, add repeats, insert pauses and reflective silences, play passages in different octaves and transpositions, and add all manner of expressive device (dynamics, articulation, change of tempo). Any kind of keyboard maybe used (though the composer particularly favours the electric piano in its Fender Rhodes guise). Some moments can be most effectively played as piano duets or with the addition of other instruments.

The complete score can be downloaded as a PDF and easily played directly from a laptop computer or mobile tablet device (i-Pad or equivalent). An on-line version that includes on-screen play-back control of the music as an MP3 file is in preparation.

The annotation of a 'signature moment' on the facing page provides a visual guide to possible questions musicians may have in tackling these pieces for the first time.

Time Signatures
Note values and groupings within bars show the metrical organisation of the music. For example, bars 3-5: 4/4, 5/8, 5/8.

Expressive Markings
If placed above the grand stave these support an overall expressive approach. When placed below each single stave such markings refer to that stave alone. When placed between treble and bass staves the marking refers to both.

The Title
The moment titles refer directly to passages in the libretto. This text has been broken up into five sections, appearing as a preface to each of the groups of moments.

Rests
Rests may be lengthened or shortened *ad lib*. They may also be inserted at any point to add drama or emphasis. The comma sign ❜ may be used as an alternative.

Dynamics
Traditional dynamic markings and abbreviations such as ***f, p***, etc. are not shown. <, >, *lontano*, *eco*, and *intimo* suggest dynamic effects. This means the player is free to create his/her own dynamic scheme.

Accidentals
These are reinforced within a bar when repeating chords or beamed groupings are present.

Repeat Signs
These serve to indicate any number of repeats. Further repeated sections may be inserted. Players might consider making their own variations on the texture of each repeat via transposition and dynamic alteration.

The Barline
Used to suggest musical phrasing and to contain note groups in a way that makes the need for intricate time signatures unnecessary.

I – The Wonderer

I

I saw an expression on the face of a man,
sculptured in bronze,
With two flints he has struck a spark.
He struggles to wonder.
He knows he is wondering
This is something wholly new.

So the First Wonderer begins to creep,
and to know that he's creeping,
farther and farther,
from the home cave,
across the flat earth,
over the next horizon,
coming to consciousness,
beginning to know that he knew.

II

Circling the planet
from west to east,
I only gained a day.

Daring the jungles
I found their perils
Fire-side imaginings.

But adventuring under sea:
This is an unearthly experience.

When I put on the helmet,
Descend to the white coral sand,
To temperate tapestries and portieres of seaweed.

It seems as if I am returning — not venturing.

But adventuring under sea:
Such an unearthly experience.

Are we content to look beneath the surface?

Shall we descend?

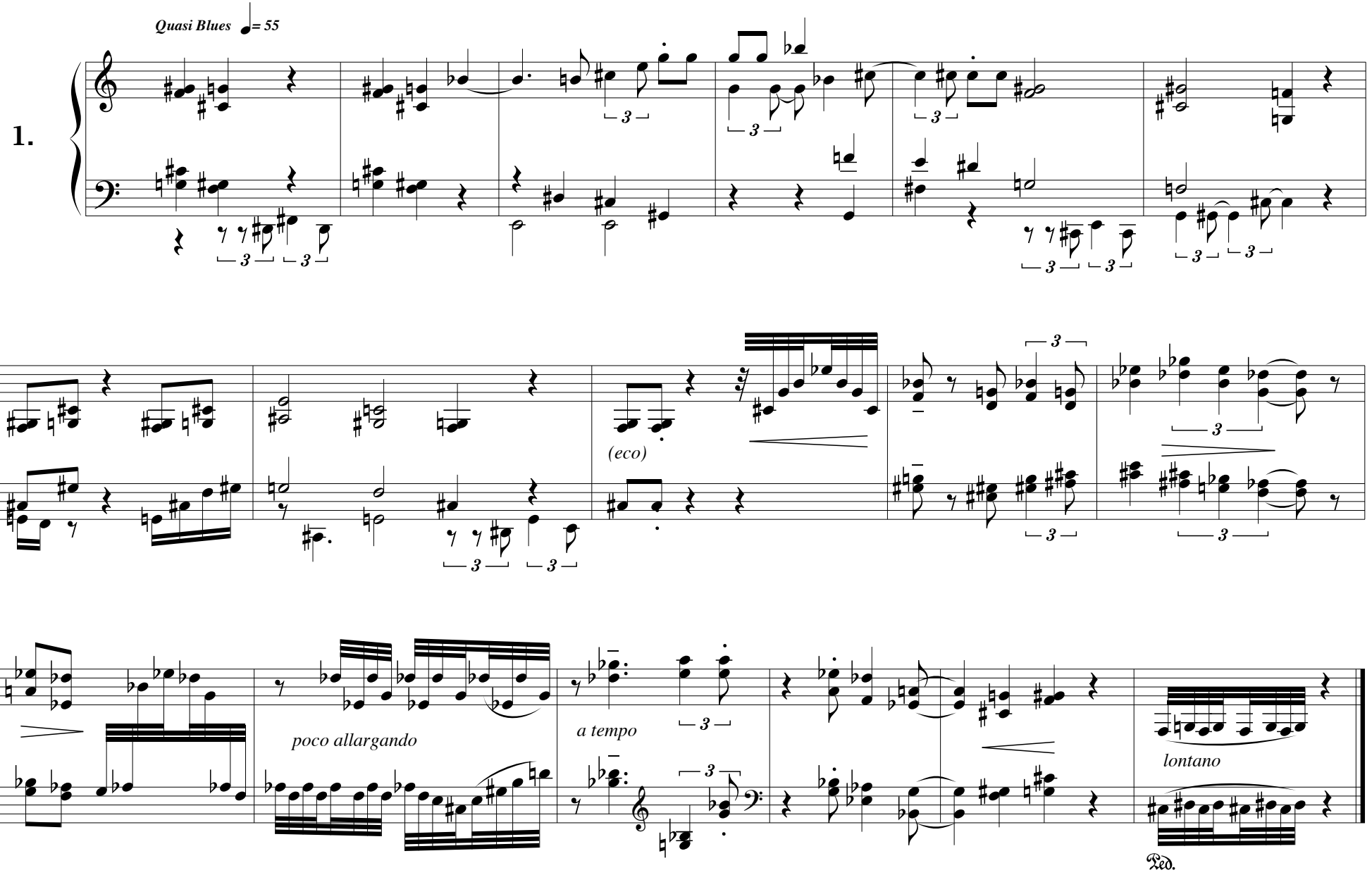
Sixty, eighty . . .

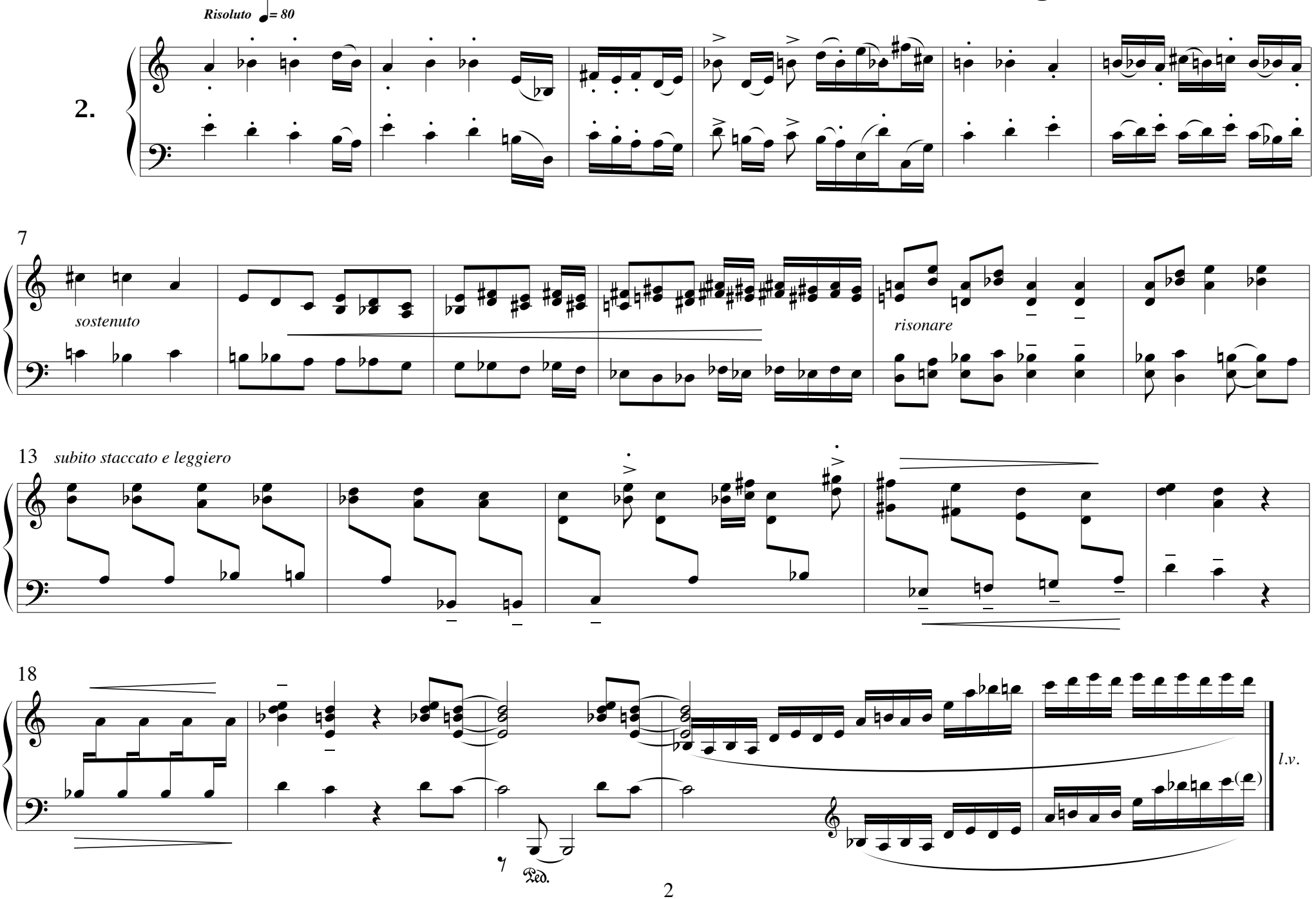
One hundred . . .

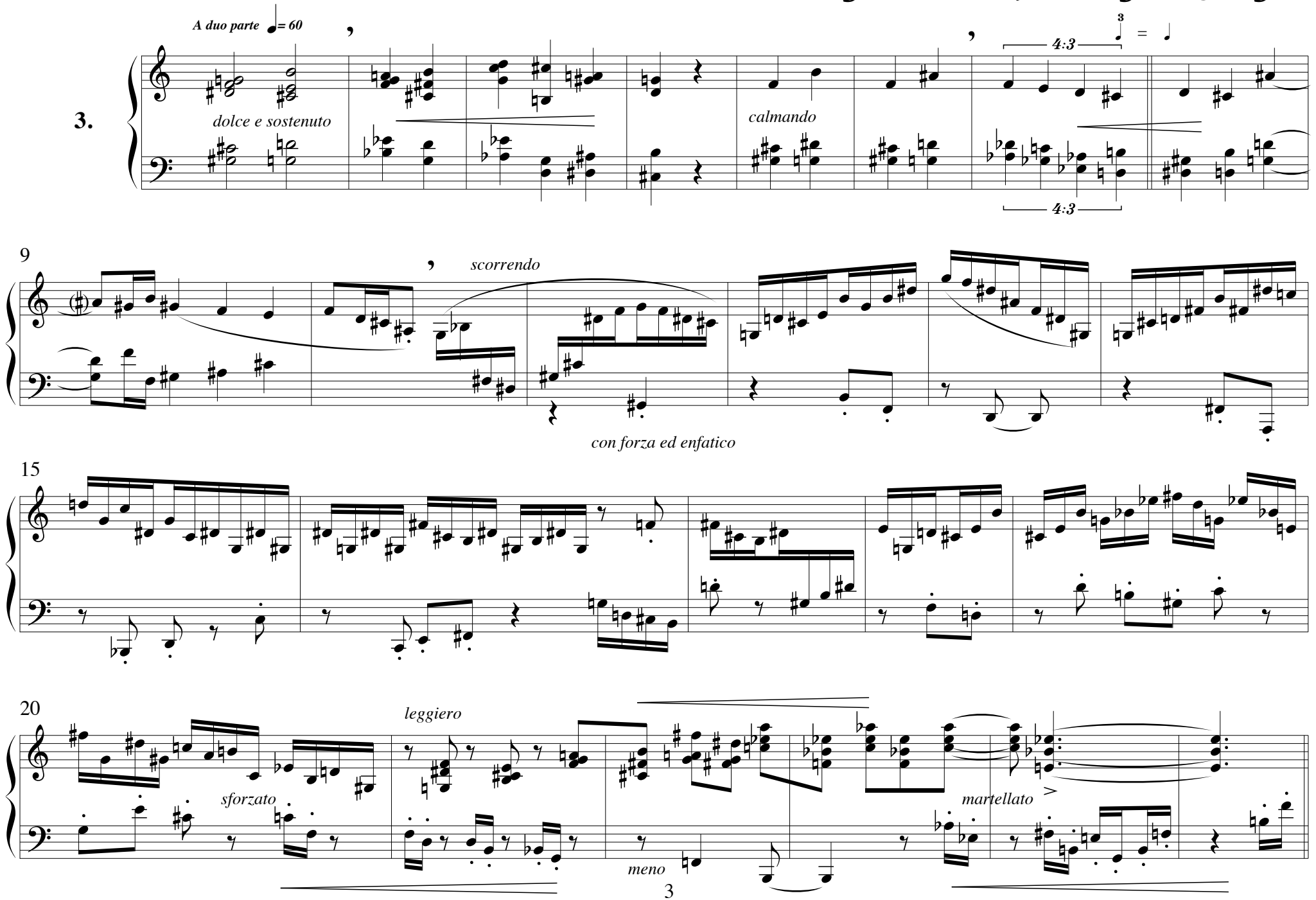
Three hundred feet . . .

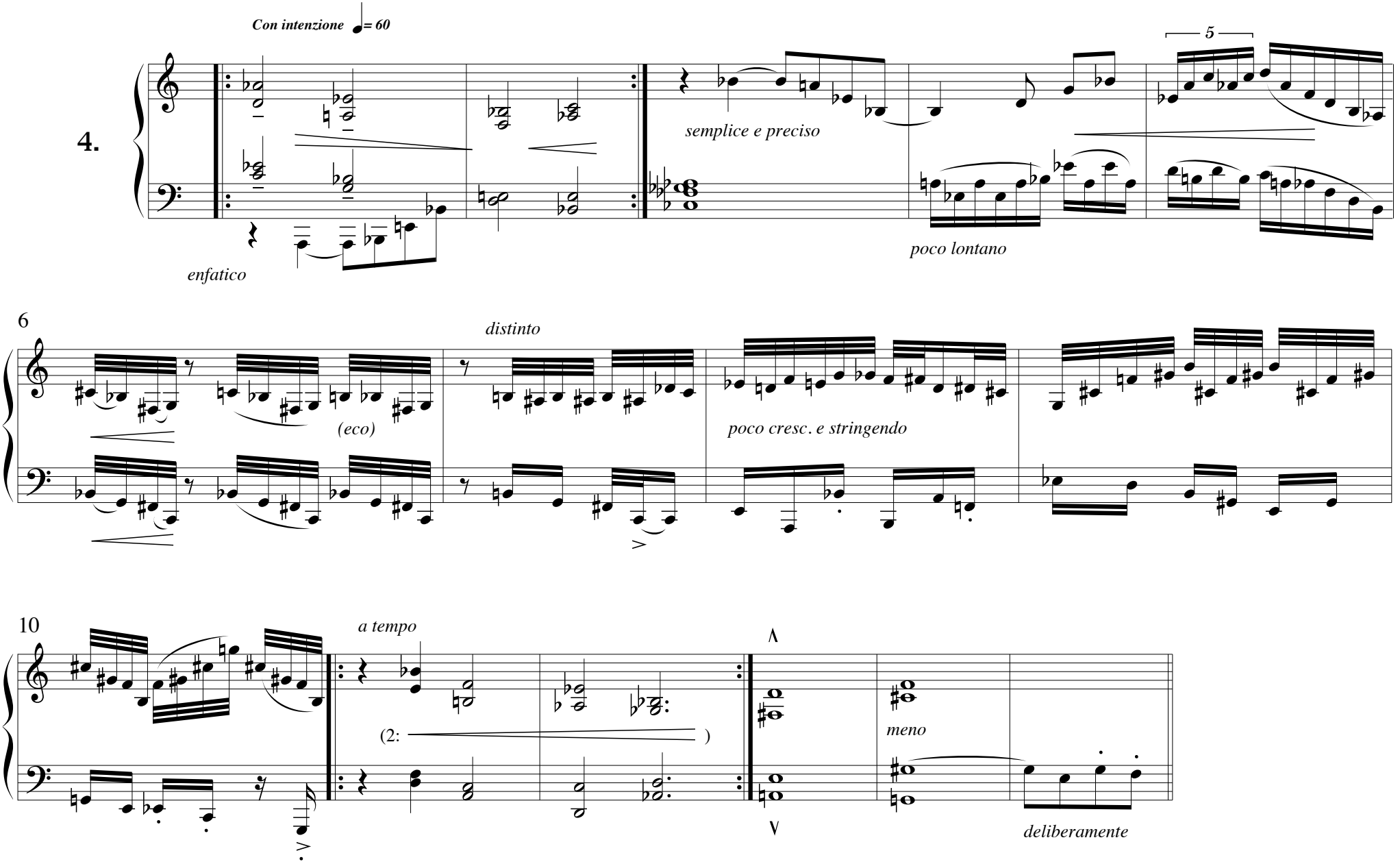
A half mile down?

The Wonderer

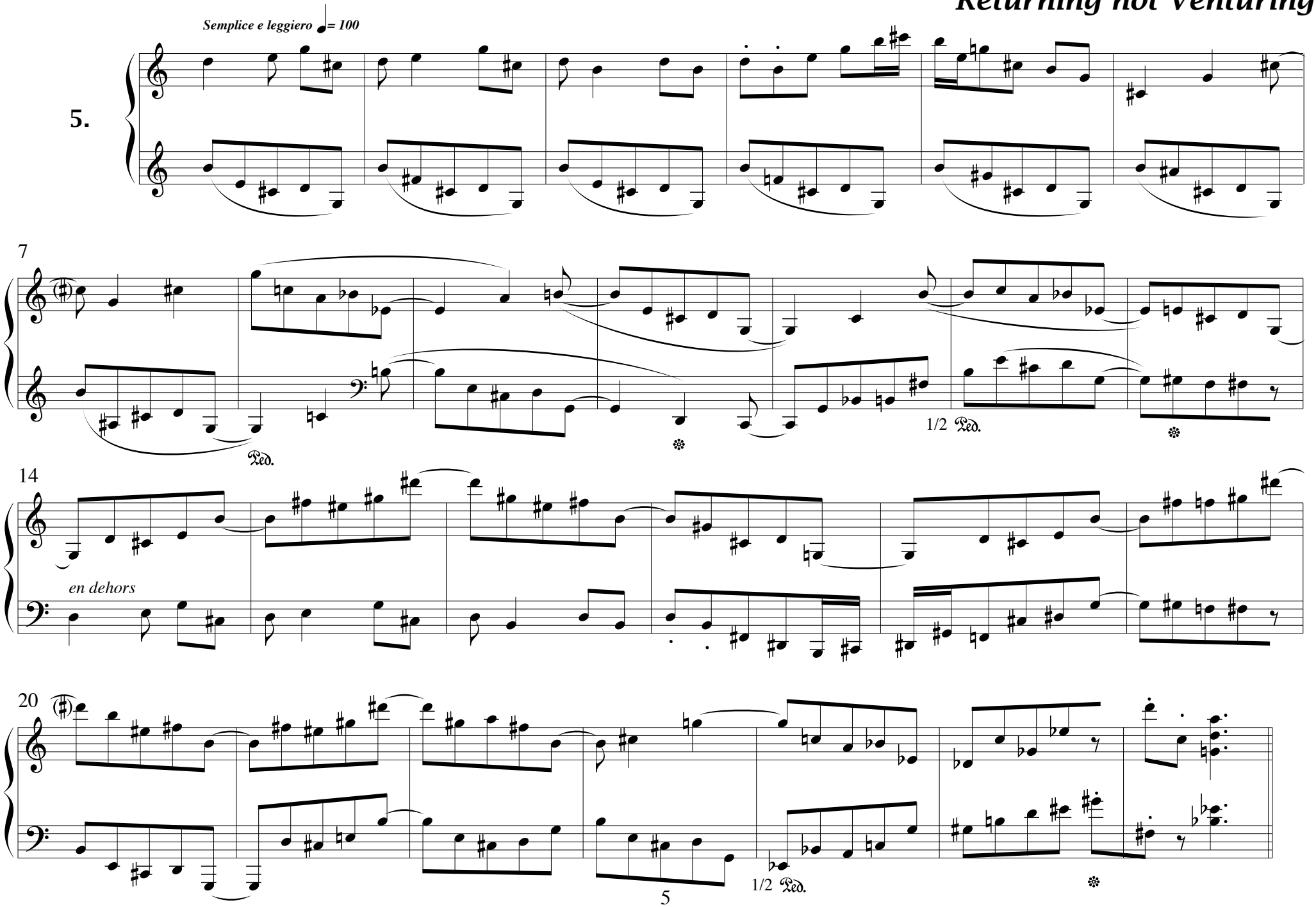


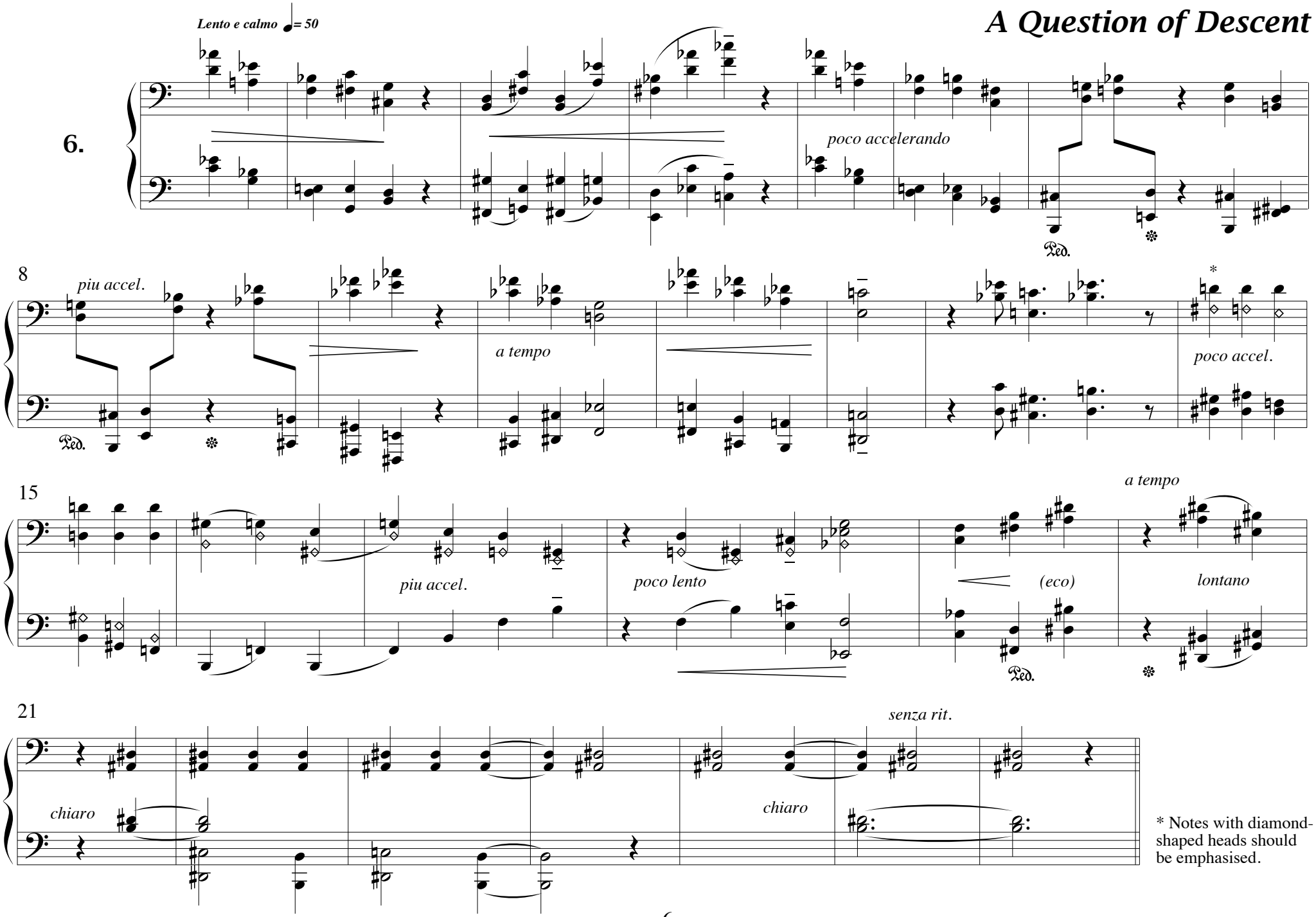

Risoluto ♩= 80
2.
7
sostenuto
risonare
13
subito staccato e leggiero
18
l.v.
Ped.


A duo parte
= 60
3.
dolce e sostenuto
calmando
4:3
4:3
9
scorrendo
con forza ed enfatico
15
20
leggiero
sforzato
meno
martellato


Con intenzione ♩= 60
4.
enfatico
semplice e preciso
poco lontano
5
6
(eco)
distinto
poco cresc. e stringendo
10
a tempo
(2:)
meno
deliberamente

Returning not Venturing





* Notes with diamond-shaped heads should be emphasised.

II – The Kingdom of the Helmet

I

Just below the surface,
I found a new world.

Just a bathing suit,
rubber-soled shoes
a glass-fronted helmet,
a hand pump and hose:

There's no practice required
for this new phase of life.
And down you go
into two, four, six, eight fathoms,
swallowing as you descend:
to offset the pressure.

Submerged,
I can leap twelve feet;
(I can) lift a companion with the crook of my finger;
Falling from a coral cliff, (I can,)
I drift, downwards, in slow-motion.

If you wish to paint, weight your easel with lead,
And brush away the inchlings from time to time.
If you incline to sport, shoot the fish you wish
with barbed arrows of brass.
In the grotto of a reef, plant a sunken garden,
With waving purple plumes.

Welcome!
Welcome to the Kingdom!
Welcome to the Kingdom of the Helmet:

Such indescribable riches . . .

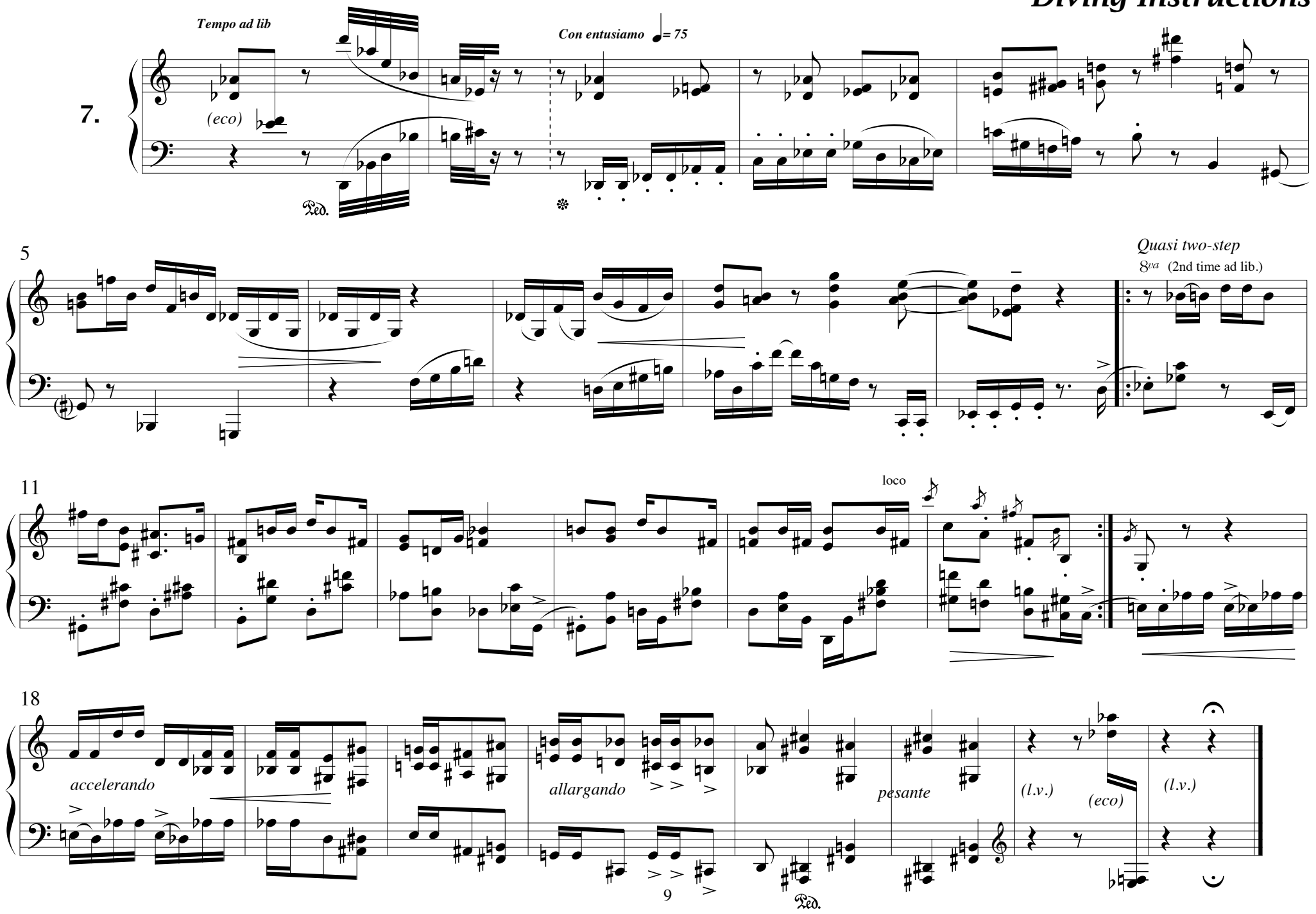
II

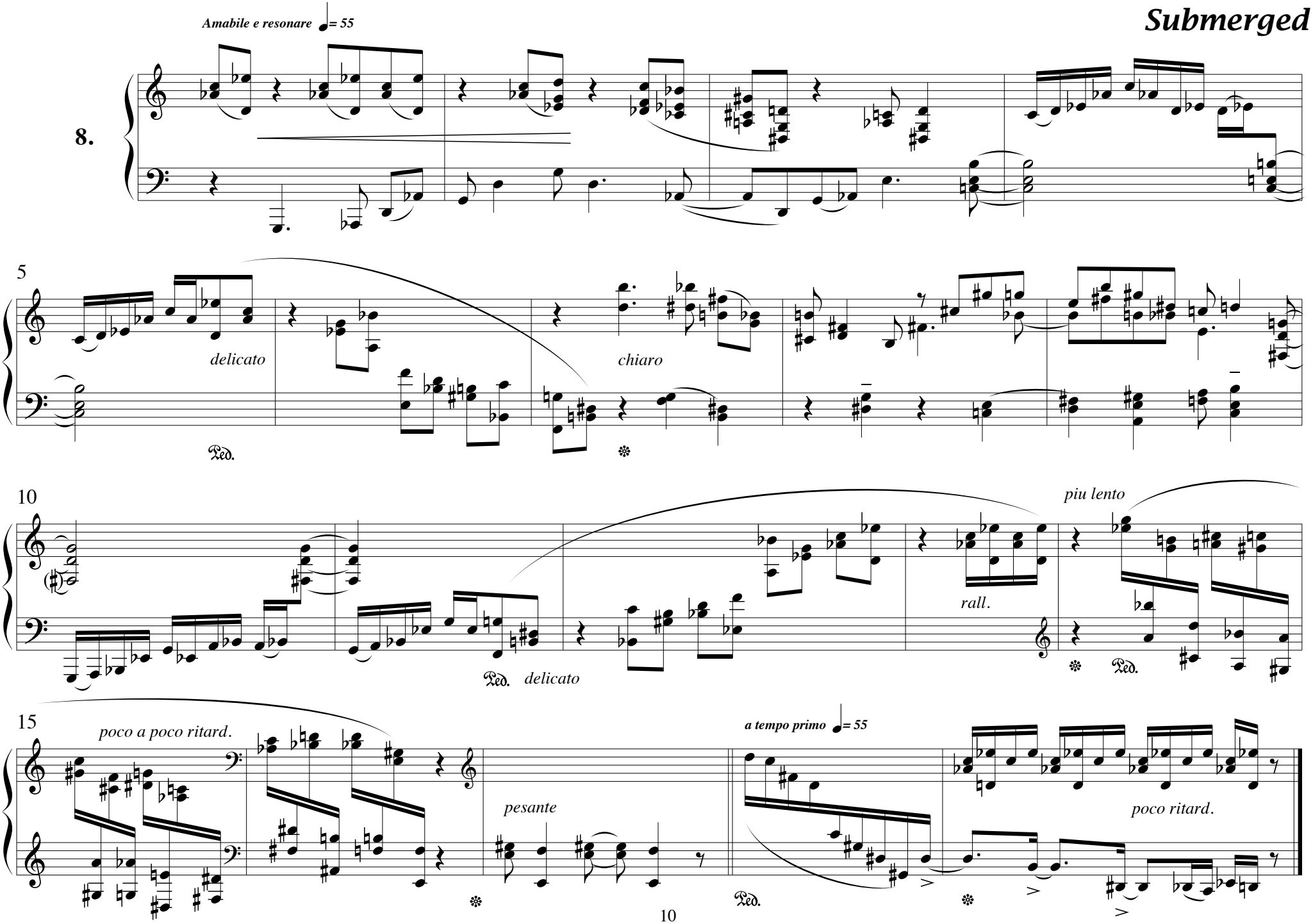
Off Hawaii, a forest
of animal plants:
thousands of architects
happy at home
in horny branches
and marble monoliths.

On the black lava shores
of Islas Galápagos
the venomous octopus
slides from its cave,
changes its colour
from yellow to blue

Such increase of life,
such brilliancy of colour,
And the joy of it all:

Everything that moves has no fear of us.
We're not afraid,
We are made to feel at home —
returning natives, not intruding strangers.
Natives not strangers,
And oh, the joy of it all.


7.
Tempo ad lib
(eco)
Ped.
Con entusiamo ♩= 75
5
Quasi two-step
8va (2nd time ad lib.)
11
loco
18
accelerando
allargando
pesante
(l.v.)
(eco)
(l.v.)
Ped.


Amabile e resonare ♩= 55
8.
5
delicato
chiaro
Ped.
10
piu lento
rall.
Ped. delicato
15
poco a poco ritard.
pesante
a tempo primo ♩= 55
poco ritard.
Ped.

9.

Quasi Danza ♩= 60

risonare

7

poco a poco accelerando

rall.

a tempo primo piu mosso

(sim)

12

18

pui lento

allargando al fine

10.

ad lib.

comodo ♩= 60

6

affabile

12

inquieto

17

liberamento

calando

11.

tempo ad lib.

(lontano)

intimo

3

rall.

Misterioso ♩= 60

6

11

pesante

18

(eco)

12.

Animato ♩= 105

7

13

20

calando a niente

III – The Birth of the Bathysphere

I

Sixty feet below,
the clear waters of Haiti,
balanced on a precipice,
I looked down, into a world
as unknown as Venus or Mars.

Unwise to descend,
for double this depth is a no-man's zone.

II

Then I remembered an evening with Teddy (Roosevelt that is).
We'd discussed some ways of diving deep.
On a smudged piece of paper
I drew a cylinder; he drew a sphere.

There is nothing like a ball
for even distribution of pressure . . .

This sphere idea
took form and grew.

In nature I found other divers:
the whirligig beetle, with its bubble of air;
the rat-tailed maggot and its telescopic tail;
the silken bells of the water spiders,
beside which man is a poor imitation . . .

Then I found (and introducing to you) Mister Otis Barton:

He shared my dream
to design a sphere:
large enough, strong enough
To descend to the depths,
make a safe return
in the cabin of a Bathysphere.

III

Three windows of quartz,
A fourteen-inch 'door',
ten bolts set against the terrifying pressure, it was
cast in steel to weigh five-thousand pounds,
lowered by a cable three-thousand feet long,
cables for light, cables for air,
cables for a telephone too.

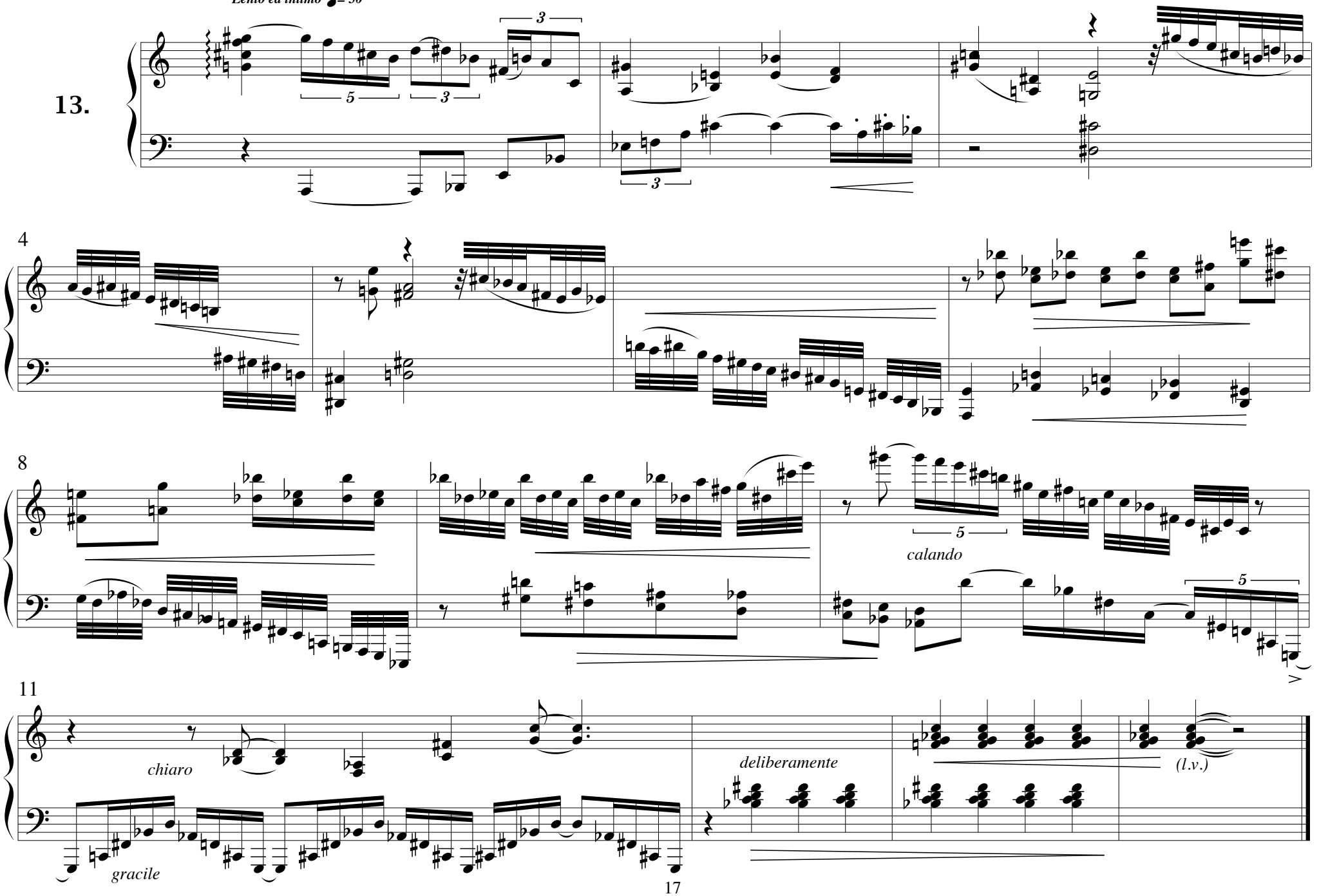
So we shared our dreams
and designed a sphere:
large enough, strong enough
to keep men alive,
to descend to the depths,
make a safe return
in the cabin of a Bathysphere.

A tug and a barge with twenty six crew,
A prayer for fine weather,
And the hope of seeing down below a new world.

So we shared our dreams
and designed a sphere:
large enough, strong enough
to keep men alive,
to descend to the depths,
make a safe return
in the round steel Bathysphere.

13.

Lento ed intimo ♩= 50



14.

Allegro animato ♩= 120

risonare

intimo

4

risonare

intimo

marcato

7

giocoso

sfz

12

(eco)

sf

(eco)

sf

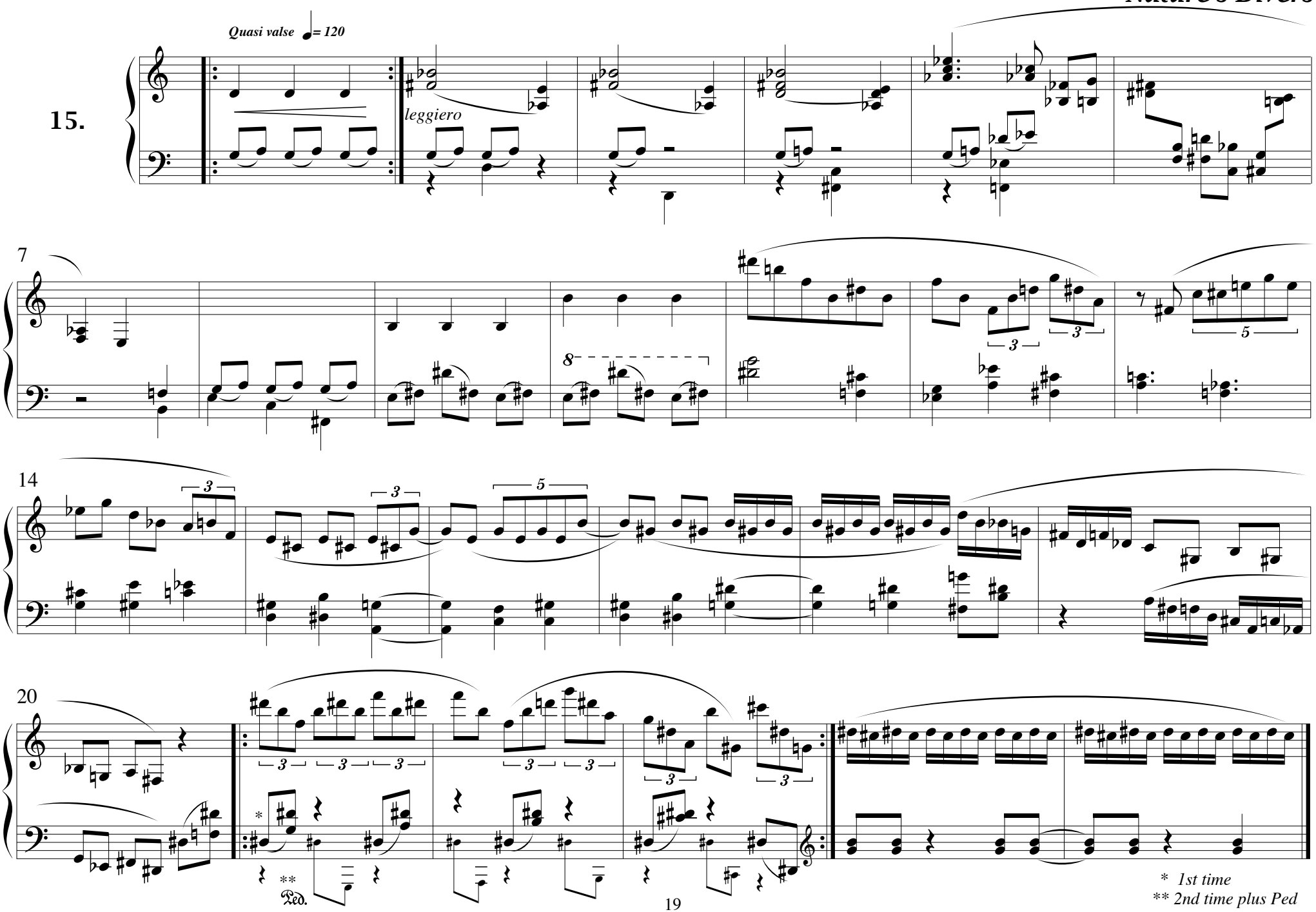
1.

2.

(eco)

attacca

15.



* 1st time
** 2nd time plus Ped

16.

Alla marcia ♩= 110

distinto

pesante

a tempo

con spirito

5

9

13

poco allargando

poco rall.

1. *a tempo*

2. *a tempo*

lontano

(l.v.)

IV – Descent into Perpetual Night

We have just splashed below the surface.

60 feet — We are at our deepest helmet dive.

285 feet — The Lusitania rests at this level.

306 feet — The greatest depth reached by Navy divers.

383 feet — We are passing the submarine record.

400 feet — The *Egypt* was found at this level by divers in rigid shells.

525 feet — The deepest point which a live human has ever reached.

600 feet — Only dead men have sunk so deep.

670 feet — *A door closes on the upper world.*
There is no green in our new cosmos:
Only a dark, yet luminous blue.
I take up my position at the window.

725 feet — A pair of dark-banded *Seriola* hang around for a minute or mc

1000 feet — *The light becomes ever more dim.*
Here we hang adapting to the blue-black gloom.
I sense the passing of numberless beings:
Round-mouth fishes: the Cyclothones.

1426 feet — We are still alive and one-quarter mile down.
Deep-sea eels appear:
slender, silvery creatures, long jaws and sharp teeth.
Undoubtedly Serrivomer.

1500 feet — *A large fish has swung into the beam:*
I saw it was something unknown.
It was a color worthy of these depths,
From deep in the abyss it swam with ghostly sails.
I have called the fish the Pallid Sailfin.

1650 feet — As black as Hades.
Lanternfish pass my window,
their pale green lights exceedingly bright.

1700 feet — *All outside is black, black, black:*
For two billion years no day or night,
No summer or winter, no passing of time until we came.

1900 feet — *It is not only blacker*
—but a tangible, and complete dark.

1825 feet — Coiled *pteropods* by the dozen,
hatchet-fish illuminated by each other.
And now a school of large squids:
Their great eyes stare in at me, circled with coloured lights.

1950 feet — *Our first bad pitching.*
The worst fright of the dive.
Have we had broken loose?
Are we turning over?

2100 feet — The walls are running with condensation.
The Bathysphere is rolling badly,
Chemicals are spilling off the racks,
And then… the most exciting experience of the dive!
Two fish went very slowly by.
The shape of large barracudas, six feet in length.
Large eyes and undershot jaws, armed with illumined fangs.

2300 feet — *Sternoptyx,* the skeleton-fish;
and a fish as flat as a moon-fish.

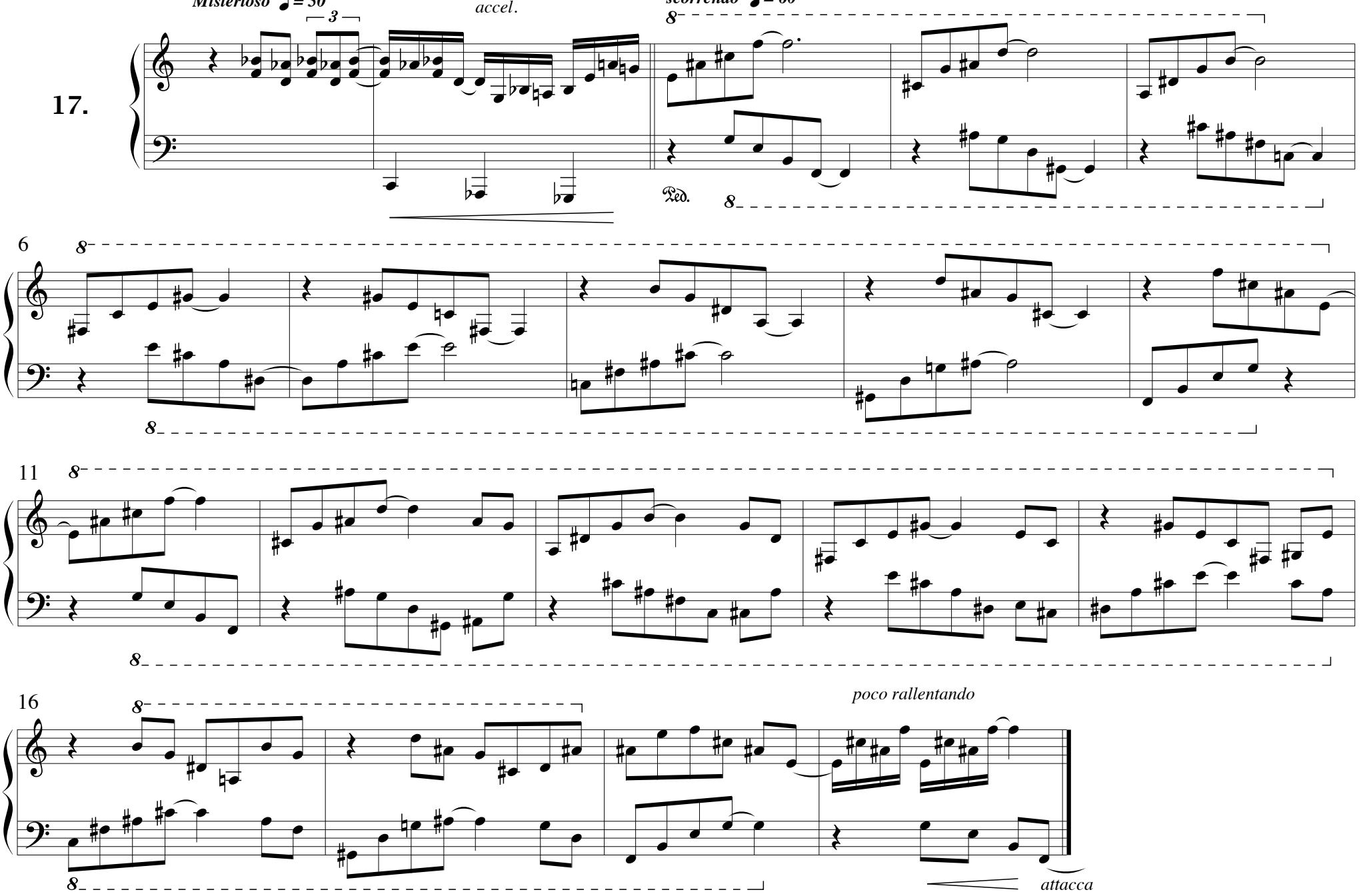
2500 feet — *A complete, shadow-contour:*
Twenty feet in length at least, and as deep in proportion.
I could not see an eye or fin.

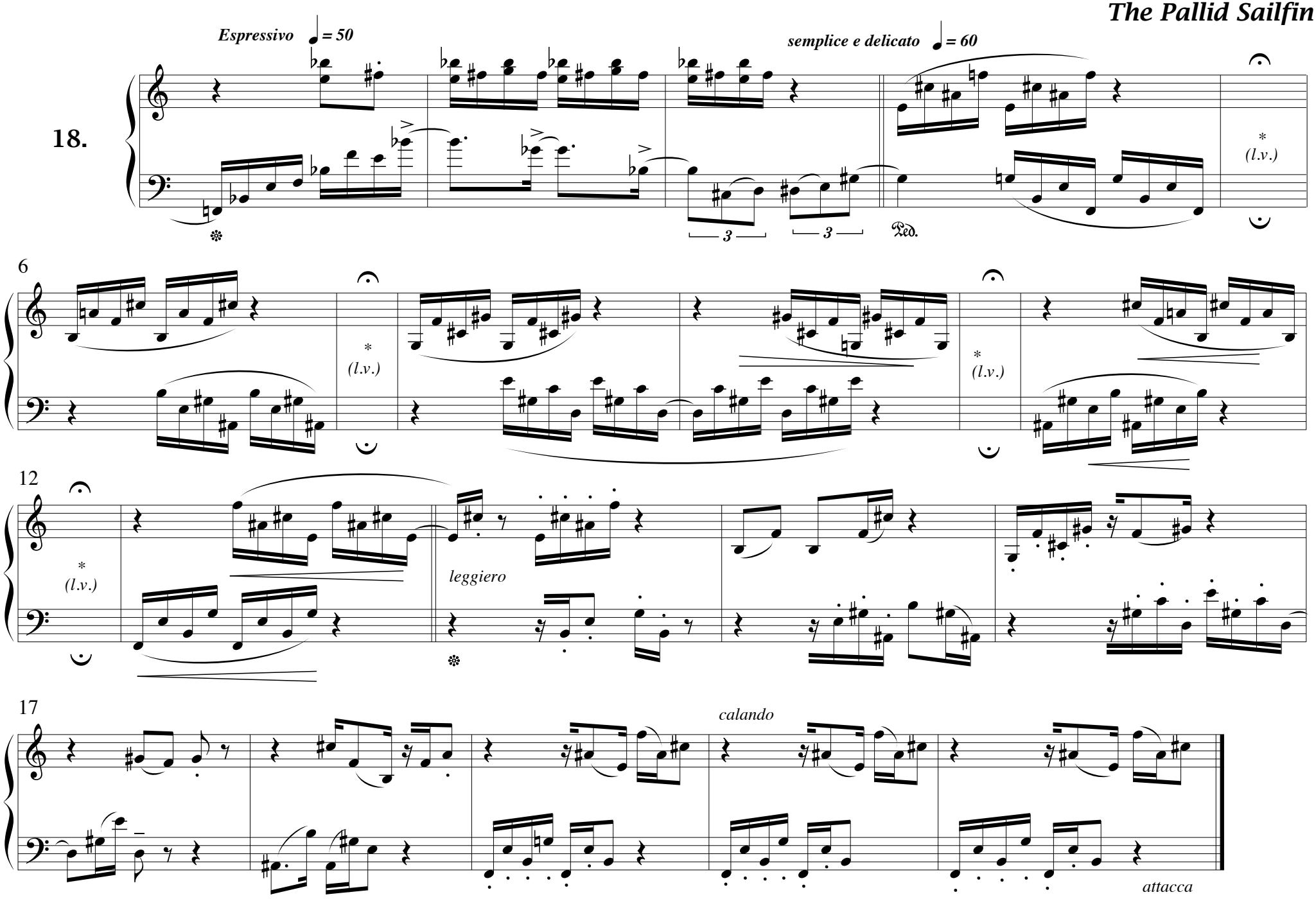
3000 feet — Now we come to rest
The cable on the winch is near its end.

Italics – sung / plain text – spoken.

17.

Misterioso ♩ = 50 *accel.* *scorrendo* ♩ = 60




18.
Espressivo ♩ = 50
semplice e delicato ♩ = 60
3
3
Ped.
*
(l.v.)
6
12
leggiero
17
calando
attacca

* *pausa ad lib.*

19.

Inciso ♩ = 60

subito

(eco)

5

lontano subito

9

marcato

lontano subito

con forza

lento e calmo ♩ = 50

13

coperto

operto

V – Half Mile Down

I

In the blackness of ocean's depths
I have never felt so completely isolated.

All future nights in the upper world
will be forever twilight.

I shall never again
use the word ‘black’
with any conviction.

II

So many more mysteries below:
It leaves the mind in a maze of wonder.
And as for comparisons:
The eternal one is naked space itself.
Beyond atmosphere,
and between the stars,
where sunlight has no grip,
the shining heavenly world
is surely akin to a life in the open ocean,
a half mile down.

20.

Lento e calmo ♩= 50

8

14

crescendo poco a poco

19

6

For Matthew.
August 2011