

Peter McKenzie Armstrong

JE: A Mural

for piano solo

2019

Edition Ottaviano Petrucci

NOTES

This work is inspired by John Elliot's mural, "Yesteryear on the Hudson". Painted outdoors at Burd Street, Nyack, NY in 1984, it won the only ever Friends of the Nyacks arts competition. A photo is online at the Hudson River Valley Heritage site, <<https://hrvh.org/cdm/ref/collection/nyacklib/id/218>>, and documentation on Elliot's work overall can be accessed at <<http://www.johnelliott.com/index.htm>>. My comments on the music follow, grouped by movement number.

COMPOSITION

1. With middle-D symbolically as the shoreline, nearly broken chords in the treble ring over a compatible linear flow in the bass. Harmonies, essentially two, alternate downbeat tonic and upbeat dominant. There are three 12-bar subsections, each with its treble second half inverted, yielding modal alternation per phrase. Chord pair members are chosen for increasing cragginess in their melodic succession. Bass figuration per bar meanwhile changes almost perpetually.
2. "Flaps" (single-staff passages) represent the boat's flags: Elliot's "JE" pennant at the bow, its characters mapped to the pentatonic scale; and Old Glory at the stern, its vintage-1848 star field mapped to the chromatic. The patterns separately rotate and expand, then merge for a mutual buffeting.

"Chugs" conjures the engine sounds of two riverboats in passing each other. Their shared two-bar motif repeats perpetually but with unequal interim pauses, yielding phase shift such that the motifs re-juxtapose always differently: the first series nudges them into sync; the second takes them out again.
3. Each bar consists of one downward-rolled chord, notated to indicate hand distribution. Each chord contains two intervals, alternating until just short of pitch-class redundancy. No two interval pairings are the same. The V-shaped bottom-pitch succession is meant to suggest the mural's pattern of sunbeams striking the river surface.

4. Not least among Elliot's achievements was his place as a mandolin virtuoso and as concertmaster of the Bloomfield Mandolin Orchestra, then conducted by Gabriel Navola. He videotaped this melody in a hospital bed shortly before his death. I have attempted to emulate the performance, adding counterpoint to imagine his carrying – as surviving grandson of Tsar Nicholas II – bits of Mussorgsky in the back of his mind.

PERFORMANCE

1. Stresses, stretches and leaps in the treble chords are likely to impede needed smooth flow. I recommend, upon striking the onbeat interval, releasing its outer key and pivoting on the inner towards the melodic offbeat. Bass dynamics should make its figuration "well up" from the low D in minor mode, then instead "suspend" from the high A in major.
2. "Flaps" are to be divided between the hands at performer's discretion. "Chugs" in their per-beat phase shifting pose hefty challenge for the player's immediate short-term memory, in that each beatwise juxtaposition of hands belies both the prior one (at that beat two bars before) and the next (two bars later). I can play this only from score, fixed on keeping the 5/4-consistent part firm and fitting in the other per force.
3. The pitches of each bar are to be rolled evenly downward as a single chord, with the 2/4 bar-lengths essentially equal. Dynamics need to ensure that the sounding unit note group is a pair – not a threesome, as some hand distributions inadvertently suggest.
4. This tremolo, nearly unbroken, must suggest the strumming of a mandolin. Its triplets (tempo compels these, though quadruplets would be ideal) can do this via their pairing, if the initial note of each first is slightly stronger than that of the second. Tremolo fingering, then, is to be 3–2–1–3–2–1 throughout with 3's volumes adjusted accordingly. Meanwhile, the sustain pedal is to flutter by the 8th.

– PMA

to Faith and Hope Elliott in memory of their father

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Mountain Meets River

Andante cantando (♩ = 80)

1

musical score for measures 1-6 of "Mountain Meets River". The piece is in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is Andante cantando (♩ = 80). The first measure is marked with a forte (mf) dynamic. The score features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The melody consists of half notes and quarter notes, often beamed together. The bass line is a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A fermata is placed over the final measure of the first system. The instruction "tenuto e pedale simile al fine" is written below the bass line of the final measure.

musical score for measures 7-12 of "Mountain Meets River". The piece continues in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is Andante cantando (♩ = 80). The seventh measure is marked with a mezzo-forte (mp) dynamic. The melody in the right hand continues with half notes and quarter notes, often beamed together. The bass line in the left hand continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A fermata is placed over the final measure of the second system.

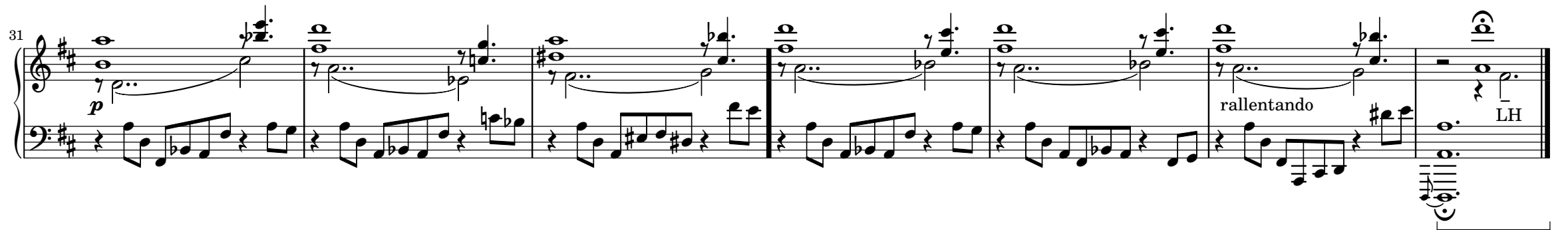
musical score for measures 13-18 of "Mountain Meets River". The piece continues in 3/4 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is Andante cantando (♩ = 80). The thirteenth measure is marked with a forte (mf) dynamic. The melody in the right hand continues with half notes and quarter notes, often beamed together. The bass line in the left hand continues with a steady eighth-note accompaniment. A fermata is placed over the final measure of the third system.



First system of the musical score. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The left hand (bass clef) provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4.



Second system of the musical score, starting at measure 25. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking. The left hand (bass clef) provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4.



Third system of the musical score, starting at measure 31. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking. The left hand (bass clef) provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#), and the time signature is 3/4. The system concludes with a *rallentando* instruction and a final measure marked "LH".

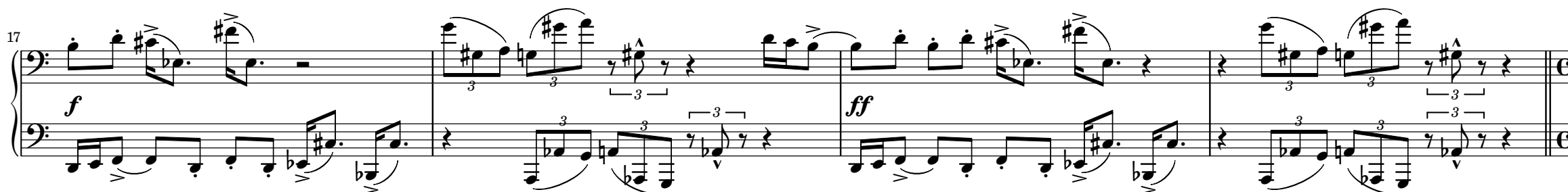
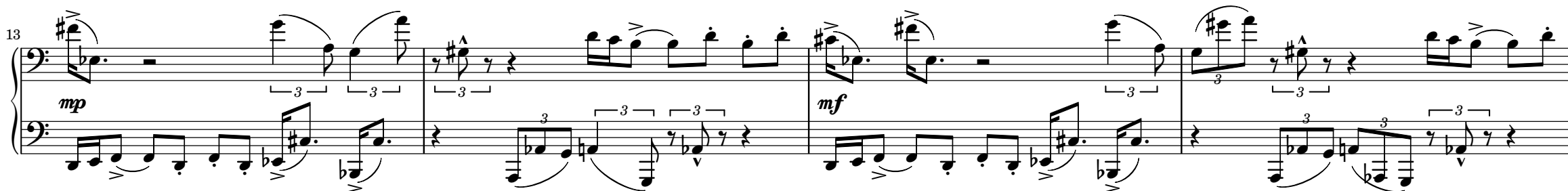
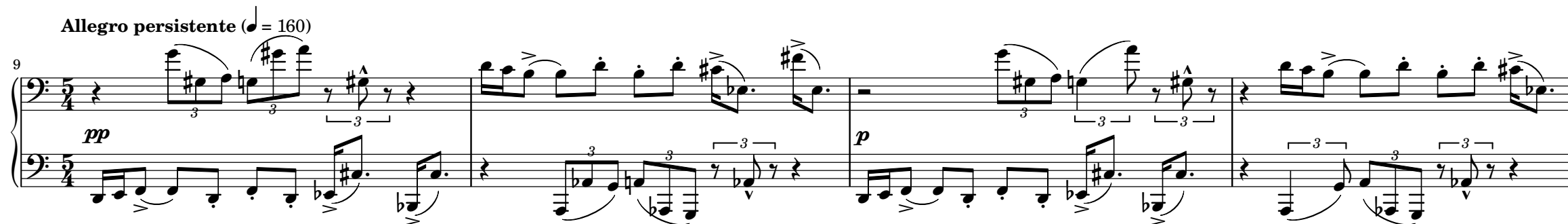
Steamboat (Chugs & Flaps)

Buffetto gioioso (♩ = 132)

2



Allegro persistente (♩ = 160)



Buffetto rudo (♩ = 132)

21

Di nuovo persistente (♩ = 160)

28

Buffetto contesto (♩ = 116)

40

ff

f

mf

mp

p

pp

pp

cresc.

... al ...

ff

sfz

The musical score is divided into two main sections. The first section, 'Buffetto rudo', begins at measure 21 and features a complex, syncopated melody in the right hand with a tempo of 132 beats per minute. The second section, 'Di nuovo persistente', starts at measure 28 and is primarily a piano accompaniment in the left hand with a tempo of 160 beats per minute. This section includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *f*, *mf*, and *mp*, and features triplet patterns. The final section, 'Buffetto contesto', begins at measure 40 and returns to a complex, syncopated melody in the right hand with a tempo of 116 beats per minute. It includes dynamic markings like *pp*, *pp*, and *sfz*, and features a crescendo leading to a final fortissimo section.

Sunbursts

Largo capricciosamente (♩ = 60)

3

8

pp

sfz

p

pedale simile al fine...

11

8

sfz

mp

mf

f

mf

sfz

20

8

mp

p

sfz

pp

sfz

Man In Skiff

4 Quodlibet: An old-world melody, set c/o Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Quasi-mandolina (♩ = 108)

mf sempre ... terzina 16 ... tremolo ...

pedale svolazzare a 8 ...

5

mp "The Old Castle"

17

mp "Gnome"

mp

29

"Catacombs"

pp mezzo tempo poco cresc. dimin. *sfz*

fine svolazzare

