MOMENTS OF SILENCE:
THE JAPANESE AESTHETIC CONCEPT OF "MA"
AND ITS APPLICATIONS FOR THE ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTOR

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century Western composers sought musical inspiration from non-Western cultures. The result was a pot-pourri of musical traditions. Now musicologists apply their analytical tools to the music of other cultures to better understand it in their own terms. Ethnomusicologists, for instance, record and notate music that for centuries was an aural tradition, and Schenkerian analysis is applied to an enormous range of music beyond the nineteenth-century forms for which it was first created.

The major components of Western music are melody, harmony and rhythm. Understanding non-traditional music is easier when it is described using these parameters. The quotation below is an example of how these elements are applied as Frederic Liebermann describes Japanese music:

> Some specific elements of Japanese music aesthetics are: long, held-out tones (shakuhachi, nokan); exaggerated portamenti and microtonal shadings (*gagaku*); natural sounds accepted as music; muscular rhythms with ma (tension); lack of functional harmony (all genres); occasional aleatoric elements in harmonic resultants of simultaneously sounding melodic lines (*noh, gagaku*); restraint and allusion (*noh*).[1]

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[1] Frederic Liebermann, *Contemporary Japanese Compositions: Its Relation to Concepts of Oriental Music* (Master's Thesis, University of Hawaii, 1965): 81

We can learn a great deal from other cultures by examining how they perceive their own music. The Japanese understand their music in physical and spiritual terms, or, as Noriko Ohtake describes it, logical and lyrical.[2] The question then arises: if we understand how other cultures perceive their music, can this help us to better understand our own music? Are there elements in Western music that we do not fully understand? Can we learn more about our music from the thought-processes of other cultures?

Japanese traditional culture may be considered the antithesis of Western culture. It has different religious beliefs, different work ethics, and its traditional art forms are far removed from ours. The twentieth century saw a breaking down of the barriers between these cultures, resulting in an understanding and appreciation of each other's perspectives. What was once an alien music is now something that we can comprehend.

There are possibly elements of Japanese music that can be applied in order to better understand Western music. Some Japanese composers have found international success by bringing together their traditional heritage with Western art-music; Toru Takemitsu is one such example. Here he describes the juxtaposition of sound and silence[3] in a way that is seldom considered in Western music:

> The sounds of a single stroke of biwa[4] or a single breath through the shakuhachi[5] can so transport our reason because they are of extreme complexity; they are already complete in themselves. Just one such sound can be complete in itself, for its

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[2] Noriko Ohtake, *Creative Sources for the Music of Toru Takemitsu* (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1993)

[3] Literal silence (the absence of sound) does not exist outside a vacuum, but in the context of this paper "silence" refers to moments where sound in not produced by the performers within a piece of music.

[4] The *biwa* is a pear-shaped plucked lute, usually with four or five strings.

> complexity lies in the formulation of *ma*, an unquantifiable metaphysical space (duration) of dynamically tensed absence of sound. For example, in the performance of Noh, the *ma* of sound and silence does not have an organic relation for the purpose of artistic expression. Rather, these two elements contrast sharply with one another in an immaterial balance. Japanese sensibility has produced the unique concept of ma in response to hearing these highly complex sounds, each one of which can be appreciated as individual and complete in itself. Hence the ma of silence or no-sound has in fact been perceived as a space made up of infinite audible but vibrant sounds, as the equal of individual complex audible sounds.[6]

The element of silence (and the tension between sound and silence) is present in Western music, but its nature, and its relationship to the sounds surrounding silence, is not something that is considered an important element in our tradition. The following pages examine how Japanese aesthetics, particularly in relation to the element of *ma*, can be applied to the orchestral repertoire.

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[5] The *shakuhachi* is an end-blown bamboo flute with five holes.
[6] Toru Takemitsu, "One Sound," *Contemporary Music Review* 8/2 (1994): 3-4

2. JAPANESE MUSIC AND ITS AESTHETICS

Japanese aesthetics provide a key to understanding artistic works and concepts from the East that are markedly different from those coming from Western traditions. Over the centuries a wide range of artistic elements were developed and refined. Japan's aesthetic conceptions, deriving from diverse cultural traditions, were formative in the production of uniquely Japanese art forms.

For many centuries Japanese music borrowed instruments, scales, and styles from neighboring Asian cultures such as China, Korea and India. Within the East Asian artistic tradition, China has been the acknowledged teacher and Japan the devoted student. Nevertheless, Japanese arts developed their own style. The large-scale, symmetrically balanced and rational approach of Chinese art forms became miniaturized, irregular and subtle in Japanese interpretation. Miniature rock gardens, bonsai, and flower arrangements were the favorite pursuits of refined aristocrats for a thousand years and they have remained a part of contemporary cultural life. The diagonal, reflecting a natural flow, became the favored structural design in all Japanese art forms. Suggestion, rather than direct statement, is used. Oblique poetic hints and allusive melodies and ideas have proved frustrating to the Westerner trying to penetrate the meanings of Japanese literature, music, painting, and language.

The Japanese started to define their aesthetic ideas by the tenth or eleventh century. Two terms, originating from Zen Buddhist practices, describe degrees of tranquility. One is the

stillness found in humble melancholy (wabi), and the other is the serenity accompanying the enjoyment of beauty (sabi). Zen philosophy also contributed the notion of combining ideas that are unexpected or shocking. In the visual arts this approach was expressed in combinations of unlikely materials such as lead inlaid in lacquer. Although the arts have been mainly secular since the Tokugawa period (1600-1867), traditional aesthetics and training methods that generally originate from religious sources continue to be integral in artistic productions.

Western art forms entered Japan in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) and were studied intently by Japanese artists who quickly imitated the European forms. A period of assimilation began as techniques and new forms were mastered and adapted. Artists divided into two streams: those continuing in traditional Japanese style and those who immersed themselves in the new Western culture. By the late 1920s a generation of Japanese artists had synthesized Western and Japanese artistic conceptions. Painters used the calligraphic, black lines of traditional Japanese brushwork while musicians used Asian tonal systems and instruments to create Western-style art forms. Artists who adopted Western forms were accused of imitating rather than creating. Ironically, Japanese cultural tradition has always incorporated copying a master's style until it has been perfected, which explains why so much so-called "imitative art" has been produced. As a result of the sharing and integration of many sources, Japan has produced its own unique art.

Scientific studies explain some of the basic differences between Japanese and Western aesthetics. In the 1960s and '70s discoveries were made in the field of cerebro-physiology regarding an unusual tendency of the Japanese brain towards sound. It is generally believed that speech is a function of the brain's left hemisphere and that song is primarily based in the

right hemisphere. We hear and appreciate music with the right hemisphere, while verbal calculations and thoughts originate in the left.

The studies that revealed these results were based on the brains of Westerners. Studies of Japanese brains, however, showed different results. Musicologist Gen'ichi Tsuge writes:

> The Japanese brain does not differentiate emotional and non-verbal sounds from logical and verbal sounds as clearly does the Western brain. Exclamations and the sounds of various creatures are received as "verbal" information as is the sound of traditional instruments. It may be concluded that the Japanese do not divide the world of sounds in terms of a dichotomy between logical and emotional and between verbal and non-verbal, but rather in terms of the sounds which emanate from nature and those which belong to the artificial world.
>
> This phenomenon is, in my opinion, well reflected in Japanese attitudes towards music. [...] There are no clear distinctions between "musical" sounds and "noise" in the Western sense. In Japanese music, nature and music are appreciated together. [...] Music is not considered so much a man-made arrangement of notes and rests or an architectural structure of sound as it is a part of or an extension of already existing nature. Japanese music is the artificial product of human hands and hearts, but there is a deep-seated attitude towards realization of a self-sufficient musical world in which sounds are created and experienced as organic and free from the instinct to build and form complicated structure. A single sound in itself can become a self-sufficient

> musical world. Therefore, the quality and nature of individual sounds is of great significance.[7]

These findings suggest that the aesthetic differences between Japanese and Western cultures exist not simply as a development of tradition, but because of basic physiological differences. Is it still reasonable to apply a principle of traditional Japanese music to traditional music of the Western world? The Japanese have certainly incorporated Western ideas into their artistic culture, so there is every reason to reciprocate this method in order to enrich our own culture.

Toru Takemitsu was the first Japanese composer to achieve international recognition. In an essay, titled "Rich Silence," he discusses his views on silence as it relates to the arts:

> The fear of silence is nothing new. Silence surrounds the dark world of death. Sometimes the silence of the vast universe hovers over us, enveloping us. There is the intense silence of birth, the quiet silence of one's return to earth. Hasn't art been the human creature's rebellion against silence? Poetry and music were born when man first uttered a sound, resisting the silence. [...]
>
> Confronting silence by uttering a sound is nothing but verifying one's own existence. It is only that singling out of one's self from the cavern of silence that can really be called "singing." That is the only "truth" that should concern artists, otherwise we will never really face the question of art's reality. [...] It is in silence that the artist singles out the truth to sing or sketch. And it is then that he realizes his truth exists prior to

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[7] G. Tsuge, "Symbolic Techniques in Japanese Koto-Kumiata," *Asian Music* Vol. XII-2, 1981: 110

> everything. This is the love of art, and at the same time is something that could be called "the world." These days too many arts have left the meaning of silence behind.[8]

The Japanese concept of the meaning of silence is an important part of the element of *ma*.

UNDERSTANDING MA

The aesthetic category of *ma* may have originated in the Zen concept of juxtaposing or balancing two disparate ideas or events. In the case of *ma*, the two events are sound and silence. Composer Mamiya Michio explains that *ma* is a qualitative, rather than quantitative, way of perceiving time. Michio reveals that this concept is not unique to Japanese music; it is also found in African and Scandinavian cultures. In Japanese music, however, this concept has taken on greater meaning and importance:

> ...in Japanese classical traditions [...] this particular trait has been developed to a remarkable degree. It is not found in the musics of European cultures. This contrast is perhaps due to the grounding of the Japanese people's sense of musical time in the rhythms of their language.[9]

Silence is, of course, an element that is present in Western music, but its recognition as an important structural element is something that has been the domain of traditional Japanese music. By defining the character of silence, as both a moment in itself and as a component contrasting with sound, the Japanese have found a way to bring greater emphasis to this

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[8] T. Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence* (1995): 17
[9] M. Michio, "Sensing time," *Contemporary Music Review* 1987, Vol. 1: 48-49

musical ingredient. Takemitsu's description of *ma* (as an "unquantifiable metaphysical space of dynamically tensed absence of sound") provides a definition that is comprehensible to the Westerner: a "dynamically tensed absence of sound" is something present in much music, regardless of its origins.

The study of silence in Western music is not a new concept, but its roots have come from Japan. John Cage, who was one of the most influential American composers of the twentieth century, began a study of Eastern philosophies in the 1940s (including Zen[10]) and incorporated the principles into his music. Silence was one of these principles, and its importance was exemplified in *4'33"* (tacet for any instrument or instruments). In this piece the audience focus is on silence because the instrumentalists produce no musical sounds.

Silence is an important consideration for the performer of any piece of music. The Japanese aesthetic category of *ma* provides a means to examine, define and perhaps even better understand silence in terms relevant to the traditional Western repertory.

[10] John Cage said: "What I do, I do not wish to blame on Zen, though without my engagement with Zen [...] I doubt whether I would have done what I have done." *Silence*: xi

3. MOMENTS OF SILENCE IN THE ORCHESTRAL REPERTOIRE

CATEGORIES OF ORCHESTRAL SILENCE

In an orchestral context, moments of silence can take many forms. Sometimes the composer prescribes them in the score (composer-driven silences), whereas other times they are simply implied or are found in performance tradition (conductor-driven silences). The moments of silence found in orchestral music are summarized into five major categories in Table 1 (below). The table shows how each moment of silence is represented in the score and the way in which its duration is determined. The rows list the five categories of silence and are subdivided where necessary. The columns are divided into two parts: composer-driven silences and conductor-driven silences.

TABLE 1: Categories of Silence

	Composer-driven		Conductor-driven	
	indicated in score	duration	interpreted from score	duration
1) Grand Pause				
with fermata	x			x
without fermata	x	x		
2) Internal Rests	x	x		
3) Post-Fermata Silence				
with rest sign	x	x		
without rest sign			x	x
4) Comma				
with sign	x			x
without sign			x	x
(Phrasing Comma)				
5) Break Between Movements	x			x

Each of the categories of silence will now be examined in detail.

Grand Pause

The Grand Pause is often abbreviated in scores as G.P. (for whole-measure rests) and sometimes is written as rests for all instruments (where G.P. is implied). It may or may not include a fermata sign. The Grand Pause often occurs at or near the end of a major musical section within a piece or movement. This type of pause is distinguishable from an Internal Rest because it is longer in duration and because of its function in the music.

The Grand Pause without a fermata is measured and does not result in a tempo change. The composer, therefore, defines its duration. Example 1, from the first movement of Mahler's First Symphony, and Example 2, from Rossini's *William Tell* Overture, are excerpts showing the composers' use of "G.P." In both instances the Grand Pause is located near the end of the musical section. A different sort of Grand Pause is depicted in Example 3 (from the fourth movement of Beethoven's Second Symphony). Although Beethoven does not use the "G.P." sign above the full measure of rest, the effect is the same. The duration of the moment of silence is exactly one measure, as indicated in the score. This Grand Pause is also located near the end of the movement.

The next two musical examples depict Grand Pauses denoted with fermata signs above rests. Because of the fermata, the conductor determines the duration of this type of Grand Pause. Example 4 is from the second movement of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony and Example 5 is the opening measures of the overture to Mozart's *Il Flauto Magico*.

Internal Rests

Internal Rests occur simultaneously in each instrumental part within a phrase of music. They may be very short in duration and occur as part of the music's melodic structure, usually in a homophonic texture. The listener is often not focused upon this type of silence. It is a brief absence of sound rather than a significant period of silence. Internal Rests are shown in musical examples 6, 7 and 8, by Berlioz, Glazounow and Stravinsky respectively. The texture of each excerpt is homophonic and the rests allow brief silences between statements of the music. The composer determines the durations of these rests because they are measured and there is no change in the established tempo.

Post-Fermata Silence

It is often necessary for a long or short silence to follow a fermata. Sometimes the composer prescribes the silence by notating a rest, whereas at other times it is implied or becomes part of tradition in performance. The composer only defines the duration of Post-Fermata Silence when a rest follows the fermata. Example 9 depicts the opening measures of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The composer has included eighth-note rests after each of the fermatas, indicating the duration of the silence following each fermata. Through performance tradition, however, some conductors add additional duration to these rests. Recent discoveries regarding performance practice have led to more literal interpretations, but there are still "old school" conductors who adhere to the earlier practices.[11]

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[11] In *The Conductor and His Baton*, published in 1950, Nicolai Malko details how a conductor should insert a break following the second fermata (page 224).

Example 10 is from Copland's *Appalachian Spring* Suite. Here is an instance where the composer has not prescribed silence in the music following the fermata and, because of the short length of the previous phrase, a literal breath is not required. Nevertheless, some conductors choose to add silence following this fermata. This decision is based on the conductor's interpretation of the phrase as well as practical considerations for the instruments. For example, the added time after the fermata may assist in preparing the accented E of the subsequent phrase. In this instance the conductor determines the duration of any Post-Fermata Silence. Another case can be found in Example 13, from J.S. Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D minor, arranged for orchestra by Stokowski. Here a conductor may insert a moment of silence following the fermata in order to make a clean start to the second phrase of the piece at measure 3.

In an excerpt from the first movement of Schumann's Fourth Symphony (Example 11) the fermatas after rehearsal figure C are not followed by rests in the score, yet moments of silence are invariably inserted by the conductor. In this case the music itself implies that a break would be appropriate. The rising sixteenth notes are the beginning of an important musical phrase that dominates the subsequent section. The fermatas provide a point of contemplation before the music begins in earnest, but there is a definite need to feel as though each phrase has its own beginning after each fermata. Inserting Post-Fermata Silence enhances this effect.

Similarly, Post-Fermata Silences are often added to the opening measure of Webern's *Oberon* Overture (Example 12). The conductor may elect to add silences only after the second measure, or may add silences following each of the fermatas. Again, the decision is based on the conductor's interpretation of the phrasing of the music.

Comma

The Comma provides a means of inserting brief silence into the fabric of the music. This may be prescribed by the composer, indicated with a sign, or added appropriately at the discretion of the conductor. The Comma without a sign, or a "Phrasing Comma," often occurs at the end of a phrase and is caused by a physical or musical need for "breath." In this instance the conductor defines the duration of the silence. The Phrasing Comma will be discussed in further detail below in the section sub-titled "Moments of Silence in the Classical Symphony."

The Comma with a sign is indicated in the score. It is unmeasured and the conductor determines its duration. Various comma signs have been in use in orchestral music since the early 1800s, although they are most commonly found in the twentieth century. Some of the signs employed include the following:

Type 1:	**Type 2:**	**Type 3:**
,	//	V

Comma Type 1

An example of Comma Type 1 is shown in Example 14, from Barber's Adagio for Strings. String players do not use breath to produce sound on their instruments, but the composer has inserted a breath mark to indicate a break between phrases. The conductor determines the duration of the breath. Following the second beat of the eighth measure another "breath" would be appropriate, although in this instance the composer does not include it. This is a case where a conductor may add a Comma because a breath is implied by the music. The composer

sets a precedent for subsequent phrases by indicating, in the first instance, that he wants a non-mechanical rendering of the rhythm and tempo.

Another example of Comma Type 1, this time employed by Vaughan Williams in the first movement of *A London Symphony*, is shown in Example 15. The first comma enables a breath to be taken at the end of the phrase without having to shorten the dotted whole note of measure 7. The second comma, in measure 13, has a slightly different function. It is located at the completion of a crescendo and is followed by a sudden *ppp*. This comma enables the conductor to "place" the *ppp* chord delicately and to create a nuance different from the previous measure. The extra time allowed by the comma gives the musicians ample opportunity to execute the *ppp* chord at a comfortable pace—this is not music that should seem at all rushed.

Comma Type 2

The second type of Comma, the caesura sign (or "train tracks"), can be found as early as Beethoven's time. An example of his usage of the caesura can be found in Example 16, from the fourth movement of his First Symphony. The composer adds a rest after the fermata sign and also a caesura sign to allow the conductor plenty of time to prepare the new tempo of the rapid sixteenth notes.

Comma Type 3

The third type of Comma is depicted in an excerpt from Schoenberg's *Kammersymphonie* No. 1 (Example 17). These Commas are usually interpreted as very short silences in the music and in this particular instance some conductors ignore the commas altogether. The conductor determines the duration of the moment of silence.

Breaks Between Movements

It has become a tradition that silence (rather than applause) be observed between movements within one piece of music. Sometimes silences may also be observed between pieces if they have been grouped together to form a set. Where silences occur between movements the composer has consciously divided the piece in order that Breaks should occur. However, the composer seldom decides the exact duration of the silence between movements. The conductor, according to various factors, determines the duration.

There are certain practical considerations that influence the duration of the Break Between Movements. In particular, the musicians may need to make preparations for the subsequent movement. For example, the timpanist may need time to re-tune, or the clarinetists may need to change from *Bb* to *A* clarinets. The strings or brass may need time to add mutes to their instruments, or the harpist might have a need to change to a new pedal setting. These are non-musical considerations but they are important for the conductor in calculating the duration of silence between movements.

The conductor must also consider the duration of the movements. If a movement is particularly lengthy or rigorous, such as the movements in the monumental symphonies by Shostakovitch or Mahler, a long break may be necessary in order for the musicians (and the audience) to "recover" before beginning the next movement. A shorter break may be sufficient between movements in a classical symphony.

The duration of Breaks Between Movements is an issue pertinent in recordings. Some audio engineers have a set duration of silence that they insert between each track on a recording.

This may not be desirable in the case of a symphony that requires breaks of differing durations between movements. The conductor of such a recording may wish to take into consideration whether the composer intended a long or short break between each movement and this should be reflected on the recording.

MOMENTS OF SILENCE IN THE CLASSICAL SYMPHONY

The seventeen brief musical examples presented so far suggest that moments of silence have always been an important element in the orchestral repertoire. These seventeen isolated cases were selected from works that collectively span more than two hundred years. Analyzing a complete symphony will provide a more comprehensive picture of the occurrence of silence. Since the symphonies of the classical period (by composers such as Mozart and Haydn) provide the basis from which many modern orchestral works are derived, the study of a classical symphony will provide further insights into the role of silence in the orchestra's repertory.

Haydn's Symphony No. 104, "London"

The "London" was Haydn's last symphony (composed in 1795). It is a work that is highly influenced by Mozart and is a prime example of the classical symphony. It consists of four movements:

Adagio—Allegro

Andante

Menuet: Allegro—Trio—Menuet

Finale: Spiritoso

All of the major categories of silence can be found in this work. The first movement opens with a slow introduction with fermatas in the first two measures (Example 18). Post-Fermata Silences are commonly added after each of these and their durations are determined by the conductor.

Internal Rests can be found in measures 6 and 13—brief moments of silence created within a homophonic texture. The introductory section concludes with a Grand Pause, denoted by a quarter-note rest with a fermata. The fact that this is a quarter-note rest, instead of a whole measure, would suggest that Haydn did not want this to be a very long silence.

Later in the first movement are further examples of Grand Pauses, as shown in examples 19, 20 and 21. Examples 19 and 21 include measured pauses, whereas the Grand Pause in Example 20 includes a fermata. The duration of the Grand Pause with a fermata is determined by the conductor.

The second movement includes examples of Internal Rests (Example 22), Post-Fermata Silences (Example 23 and 26) and the Grand Pause (Example 24 and 25). The Grand Pause of Example 24 is measured, but sometimes a conductor may add duration because of the sudden change of nuance caused by a change in dynamics from *ff* to *p* and a textural change from tutti orchestra to a smaller group of instruments. In Example 25 Haydn again adopts a method of adding a

fermata to a short rest (this time an eighth note rest) to denote a short Grand Pause. It too serves the function of creating space between different moods.

In this slow movement there are many opportunities for the conductor to add Phrasing Commas. The long, lyrical lines call for moments of relaxation between the phrases and the slow tempo allows the conductor some flexibility with rubato and agogic. Haydn does not use comma signs, but there are certain ways in which the music implies that commas may be inserted. A conductor may choose to add a Phrasing Comma at the end of Example 22, for instance, to enable a gentle beginning to the next phrase. A Phrasing Comma may also be added at the end of the first section of the third movement immediately before commencing the Trio. With the Trio Haydn presents a new musical thought and the Comma gives "pause" to this event.

The third movement also includes the Grand Pause (Example 27) and Post-Fermata Silence (Example 28). The Trio ends with a fermata chord that must be followed by silence because it is preceded by a long phrase and is followed by sudden changes of tempo, dynamics and orchestral texture. This is yet another example of how the Post-Fermata Silence is implied though not actually notated by the composer.

The final movement of the symphony includes Internal Rests (Example 29) and more examples of the Grand Pause (Examples 29 and 30). As in earlier movements, the Grand Pause provides space for the transition from one nuance to another.

The fifth category of silence, Breaks Between Movements, presents itself between each of the movements in the symphony.

To classify a musical element as important it should be present in all or most music. The five different categories of silence each occur in Haydn's Symphony No. 104. Because this work is a sample of the orchestral repertoire that has influenced some two hundred years of the genre, one may assume that its basic musical elements are the building blocks of its successors. As such, the silences that occur in music should be acknowledged as important elements in the orchestral repertoire. Consequently, silence is an element that conductors should consider carefully. The function of each of the moments of silence must be determined in order to fully understand the written and unwritten instructions of the composer. The function of each type of silence is something that can be defined by *ma*.

4. *MA* AND THE CATEGORIES OF SILENCE

Takemitsu's definition of *ma* as an "unquantifiable metaphysical space (duration) of dynamically tensed absence of sound" is more applicable to some types of silence than others. The least of these is the Internal Rests because they usually exist as part of the melodic structure of the music. In order for a moment of silence to be "dynamically tense" there must be a moment of expectancy, or, if you will, a "pregnant pause." These moments can certainly be found within the Grand Pause, Post-Fermata Silence, the Comma, and to a lesser degree in Breaks Between Movements.

The elements of silence have been identified and discussed at length. The other part of the equation of ma is sound. Melody, harmony and rhythm are integral in producing a sense of expectancy. The sound events that occur prior to (and to some extent, after) a moment of silence define the character of the silence. A comma at the end of a phrase, for instance, may be anticipated, and there is little in the way of tension in the moment. Alternatively, a Grand Pause that occurs suddenly in the midst of a fortissimo tutti recapitulation of the main subject will create a great deal of expectancy and tension.

The higher the degree of tension in the moment of silence, the more closely it relates to ma. Table 2 (below) shows the range of degrees of tension found in each of the categories of silence. Horizontal lines show the degrees of tension each category of silence may carry, ranging from no tension to a substantial amount of tension.

TABLE 2: Degrees of Tension in the Categories of Silence

CATEGORIES OF SILENCE	RANGE OF DEGREES OF TENSION NONE → SOME → SUBSTANTIAL
GRAND PAUSE:	
INTERNAL REST:	
COMMA:	
POST-FERMATA SILENCE:	
BREAK BETWEEN MOVEMENTS:	

Table 2 shows that the Grand Pause, the Comma and the Post-Fermata Silence are the categories of silence that exist in the highest degrees of tension. These categories will now be examined in practical terms for the orchestral conductor.

5. CONDUCTING SILENCE

Conductors are taught techniques to manage the physical aspects of moments of silence. However, the less tangible elements, such as degrees of tension, are less well defined. In his book, *Techniques for the Beginning Conductor*, Allan Ross writes:

> The conductor must be able to read [a] score and possess the physical, mental, aural and psychological equipment to turn it into sound. The conductor should not impose a personal will onto the music; he should not, under the guise of "interpretation," so alter the composer's intent that it becomes his own production using only the basic ideas of the original composition. Only through a careful study of the composer's life and time, the form and shape of the piece and its background, and most of all, the score itself can the conductor come to know how the composition should sound.[12]

Ross's definition is comprehensive, but not conclusive. He has omitted an important part of conducting that extends beyond the logical: artistic expression. This quality enables a conductor to be lyrical and expressive, and to determine, through instinct as well as logic, the information implied, rather than stated, in a score. The Conductor-driven categories of silence (the Grand Pause with fermata, the Post-Fermata Silence without a rest, Commas and Breaks Between Movements) have durations that must be determined by the conductor. These

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[12] A. A. Ross, *Techniques for Beginning Conductors*: Preface

durations would be difficult to determine purely with logic alone; a certain amount of instinctive response from the conductor is also required.

Elements of silence are important in the conception of orchestral music and it is often the conductor's responsibility to determine the balance between sound and silence. The duration of a moment of silence may be found through a sense of "quality" rather than "quantity" using concepts that are both lyrical and logical. These parameters describe the essence of *ma* and are attributes that conductors must develop in order to understand and successfully execute moments of silence. The principles of *ma* may be applied to better understand the functions of each of the categories of silence.

Some conducting pedagogues deal with some of the categories of silence. Post-Fermata Silence, in particular, is given considerable attention. Ross devotes a chapter to the fermata, including a discussion of what he describes as "The Fermata Followed by Silence." He says:

> Although there may not be a printed rest after a *fermata*, it is rare to find a case where there is actually no silence at all. Usually there is at least a breath or slight break in the sound line. [...] If there is to be a long break (but no printed rest) after the *fermata*—for dramatic reasons, or as indicated by a double bar, change of tempo, or //--give the release appropriate to the preceding music, stop all motion, then after the break you desire, give the preparation appropriate to the following music. [...] For a *fermata* printed on one beat of silence, give that beat as the release, hold it, and repeat it for the preparation.[13]

[13] A. A. Ross, *Techniques for Beginning Conductors*: 312-315

Ross explains reasons why there should be breaks after fermatas but does not explain how to determine the duration of the silences. He suggests that the moment of silence should be the duration you "desire" with no indication of the basis of that desire. In his latter example he dictates that the duration of the silence should be exactly twice the duration of the rest given. What is his basis for this? It is a simplistic approach that may work in some circumstances but not in others.

Another author, Hugo Marple, has a different approach to this problem:

> The conductor must decide how much silence the fermata indicates. A fermata over an eighth note in one selection or over a half rest in another selection may not indicate anything other than the composer desiring to treat his measure, melody, and rest in a metrical manner. The conductor must understand the music, trying to make the melody and harmony carry as much meaning as possible for the listener, and must incorporate the fermata into this meaningfulness.[14]

The "meaningfulness" to which Marple refers is akin to the aesthetic concept of *ma*. The elements of sound and silence must be balanced, as in *ma*, to create a meaningful musical experience. The relationship between sound and silence is something that the conductor must consider in determining the duration of Conductor-driven moments of silence.

In an earlier chapter pertaining to rests Marple is less clear about this issue. He makes the following observations:

> When most of a measure contains rests in all staves, the conductor should decide in his own mind if the tempo is to be continued or if it is to be changed. [...] From time to time a conductor may find rests that are longer than one complete measure. These may be indicated by rests, by a fermata over a rest, or by a break (caesura) in the music. [...] Although a conductor has the prerogative of making the rests shorter or longer than indicated on the printed page, it is advisable aesthetically for him to observe the rests as indicated in the music.[15]

The conductor is not given a precise method to determine the duration of the moments of silence, apart from the practicalities of making it easier to conduct. Maple's final suggestion is very confusing. Is he inferring that the conductor should disregard the caesura or fermata? At the very least, it is clear that this is a complex issue for the conductor.

In a more recent publication the author's instructions are again close to the concepts of *ma*:

> How long should a fermata be? It varies depending on the musical context. We have heard it said that a quarter note fermata should be held twice its normal value. This is a gross generalization [...] With both the fermata and the caesura, the conductor must try to determine the composer's intentions for this structural device. Is it being used to close a major section of the composition, to emphasize a particular chord or word, or

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[14] H. D. Marple, *The Beginning Conductor*: 119
[15] H. D. Marple, *The Beginning Conductor*: 104

merely to provide a momentary pause in the musical motion? Careful score study will help provide the answers.[16]

Nicolai Malko, in his 1950 publication *The Conductor and His Baton*, also devotes a substantial section to fermatas and caesuras. He makes some generalizations about whether or not a fermata should be followed by silence then proceeds to describe the exceptions. These exceptions are based on physical issues as well as musical ones including dynamics, phrasing and context. He explains how to execute cut-offs and entrances, but does not explain how to determine the duration of a conductor-driven moment of silence.

The Grand Pause is not mentioned at all by most of these authors, particularly if its duration is measured (without a fermata). Physically a conductor is not overly concerned with this category of silence. However, the degree of tension created by a Grand Pause can be significant, and is therefore of interest to the conductor. The musical events that precede and follow a Grand Pause, along with the silence of the pause itself, comprise an important moment in the structure of the music. The *ma* of such a moment defines how it should be perceived by the conductor and conveyed to the audience. This is essentially a psychological approach but it may find manifestation in its physical rendering.

For the most part, pedagogical conducting books are concerned primarily with the physical execution of conducting moments of silence. A successful realization of a moment of silence requires the conductor to be aware the dual qualities found in *ma*: the logical and the lyrical or the physical and the psychological. Instructional books deal adequately with the physical part of the equation, but are less useful when determining the psychological components.

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[16] D. L. Kohnut, J. W. Grant, *Learning to Conduct and Rehearse*: 53-54

6. CONCLUSION

Ma is useful for conductors as a philosophical and pedagogical tool. It explains the necessary balance between sound and silence and helps us to determine the degrees of tension inherent in music. The relationship between sound and silence is often in the minds of conductors, but it is difficult to define or fully comprehend in the context of traditional Western thinking. The Japanese aesthetic concept of *ma* defines moments of silence in a unique way and strengthens our understanding of music. Through this understanding we can become better conductors.

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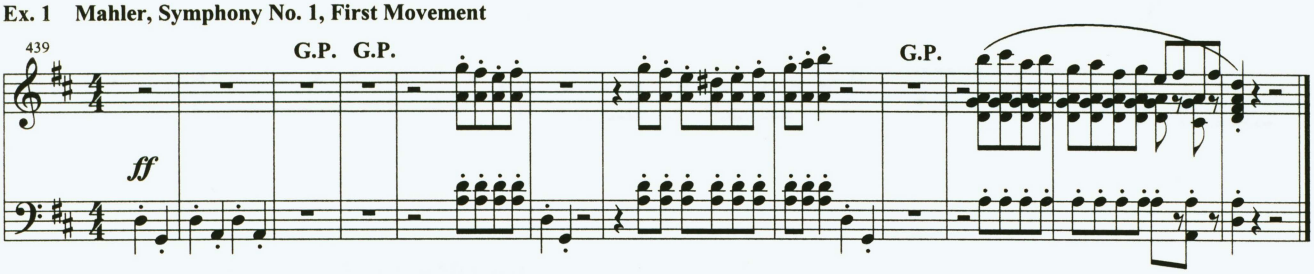
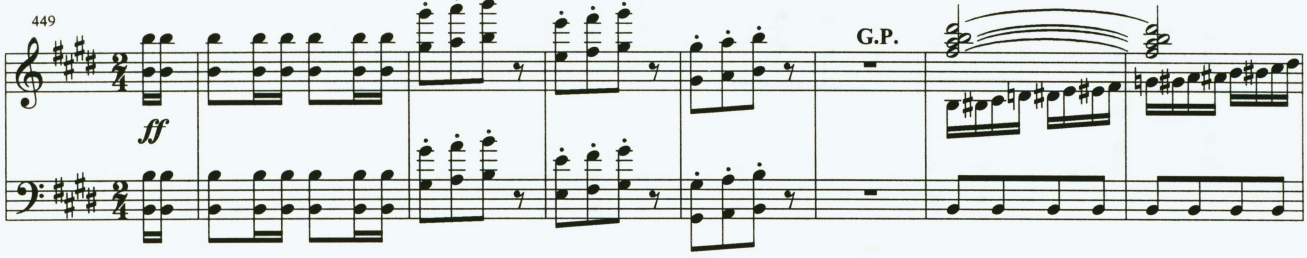
http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?cstdy:7:./temp/~frd_s8hE::

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

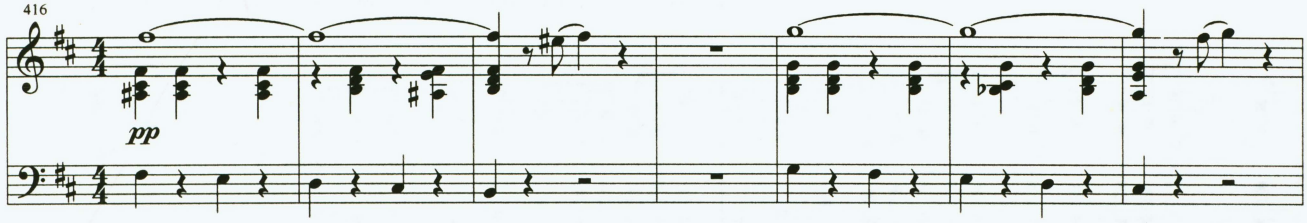
Ex. 1 Mahler, Symphony No. 1, First Movement



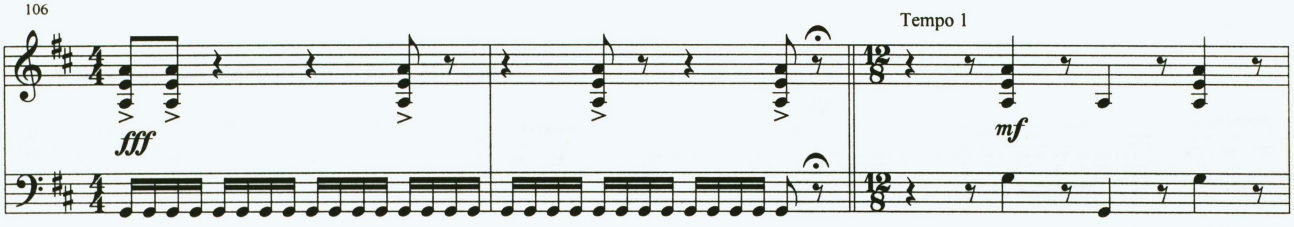
Ex. 2 Rossini, *William Tell* Overture



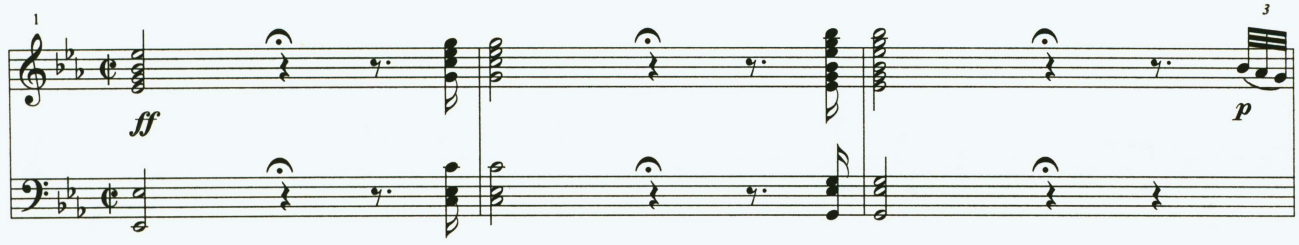
Ex. 3 Beethoven, Symphony No. 2, Fourth Movement



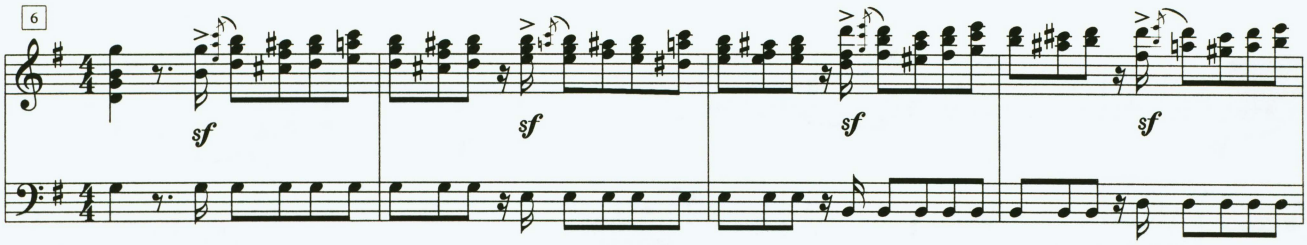
Ex. 4 Tchaikovsky, Symphony No. 5, Second Movement



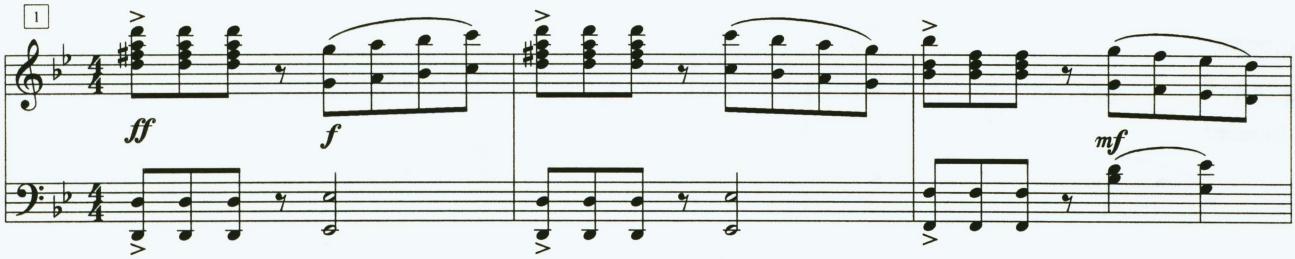
Ex. 5 Mozart, *Il Flauto Magico* Overture



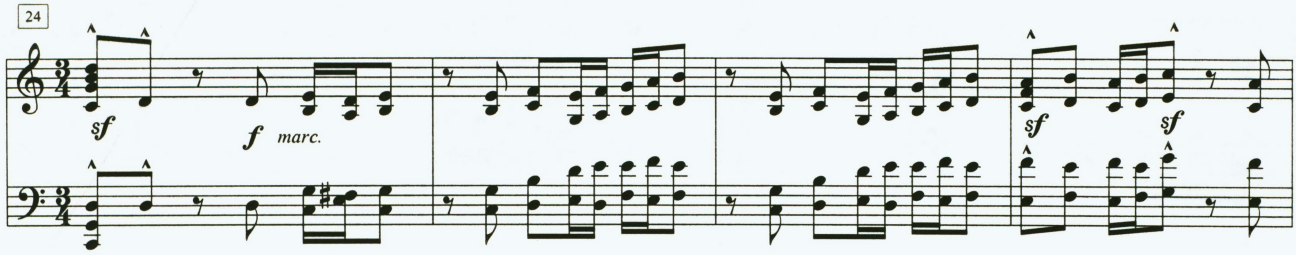
Ex. 6 Berlioz, *Benvenuto Cellini* Overture



Ex. 7 Glazounow, Symphony No. 5, Fourth Movement



Ex.8 Stravinsky, *Danses Concertantes*, Second Movement: "Pas d'Action"



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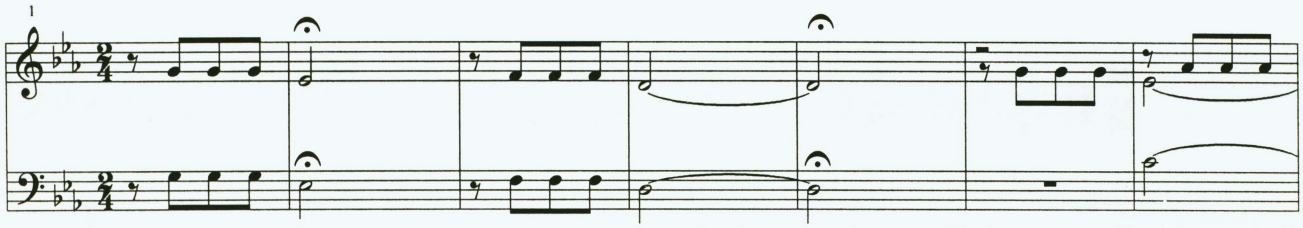
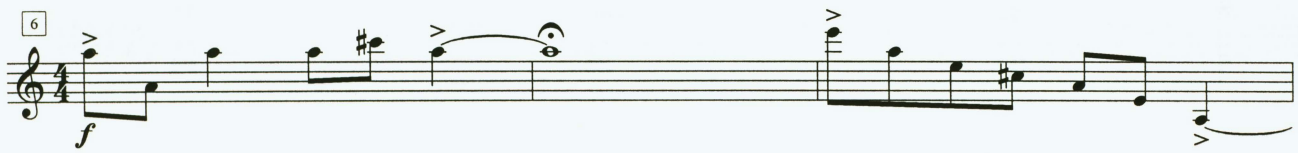
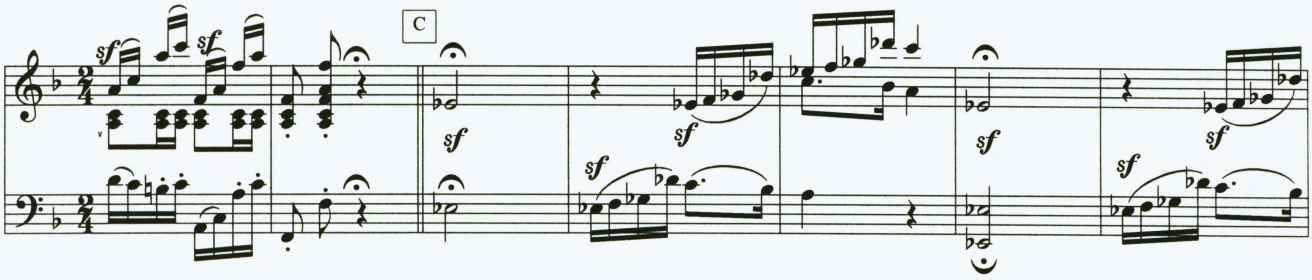


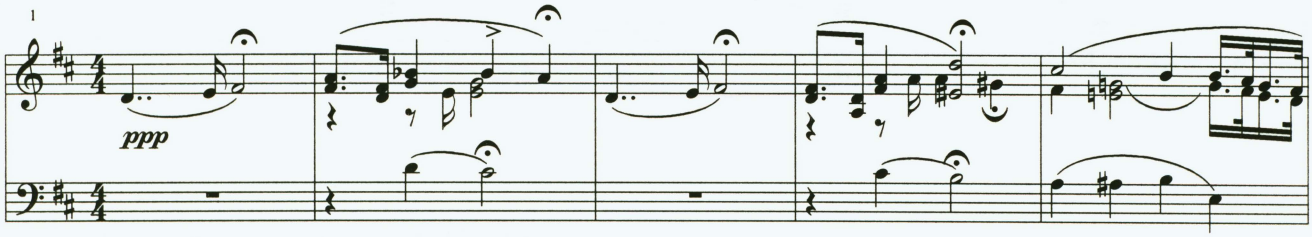
Ex. 10 Copland, *Appalachian Spring* Suite



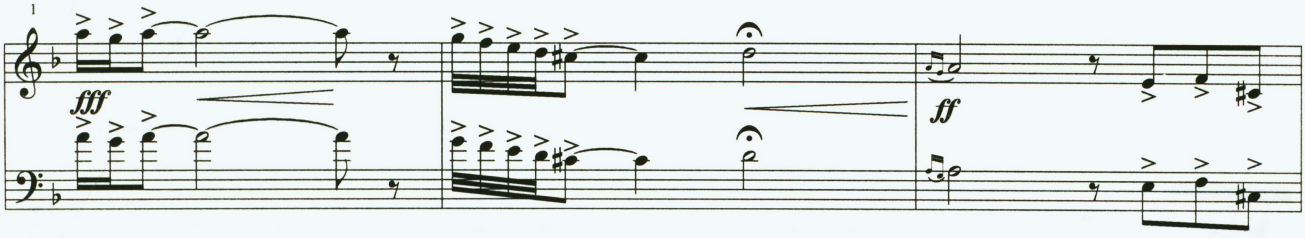
Ex. 11 Schumann, Symphony No. 4, First Movement



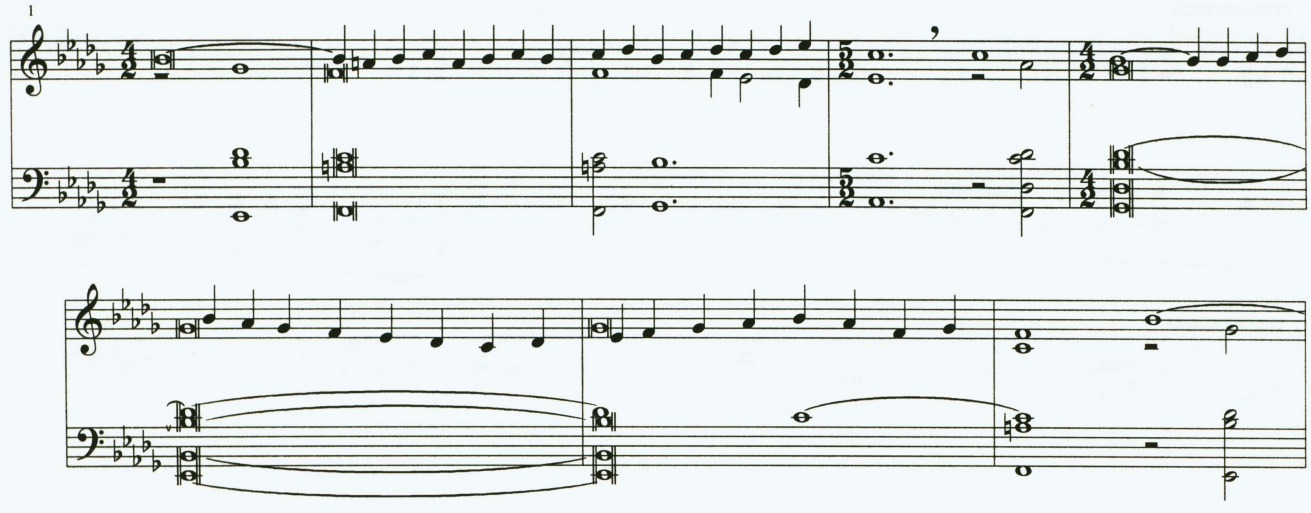
Ex. 12 Weber, *Oberon* Overture



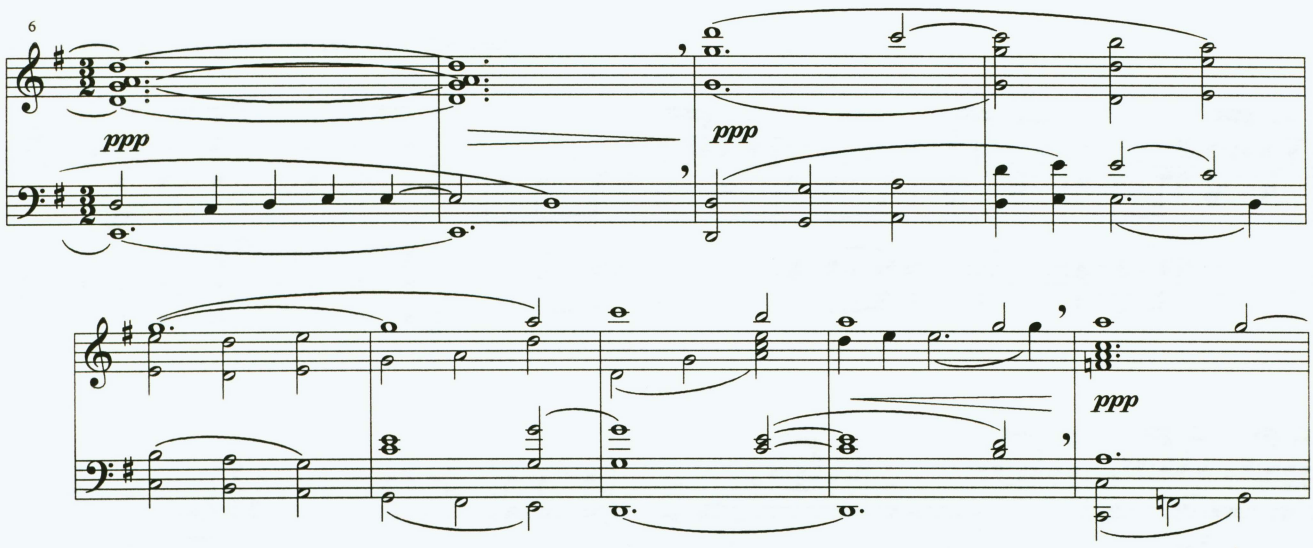
Ex. 13 J.S. Bach (arr. Stokowski), Toccata and Fugue in D minor



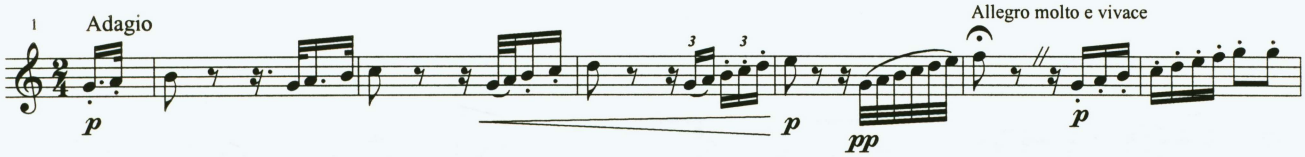
Ex. 14 Barber, Adagio for Strings



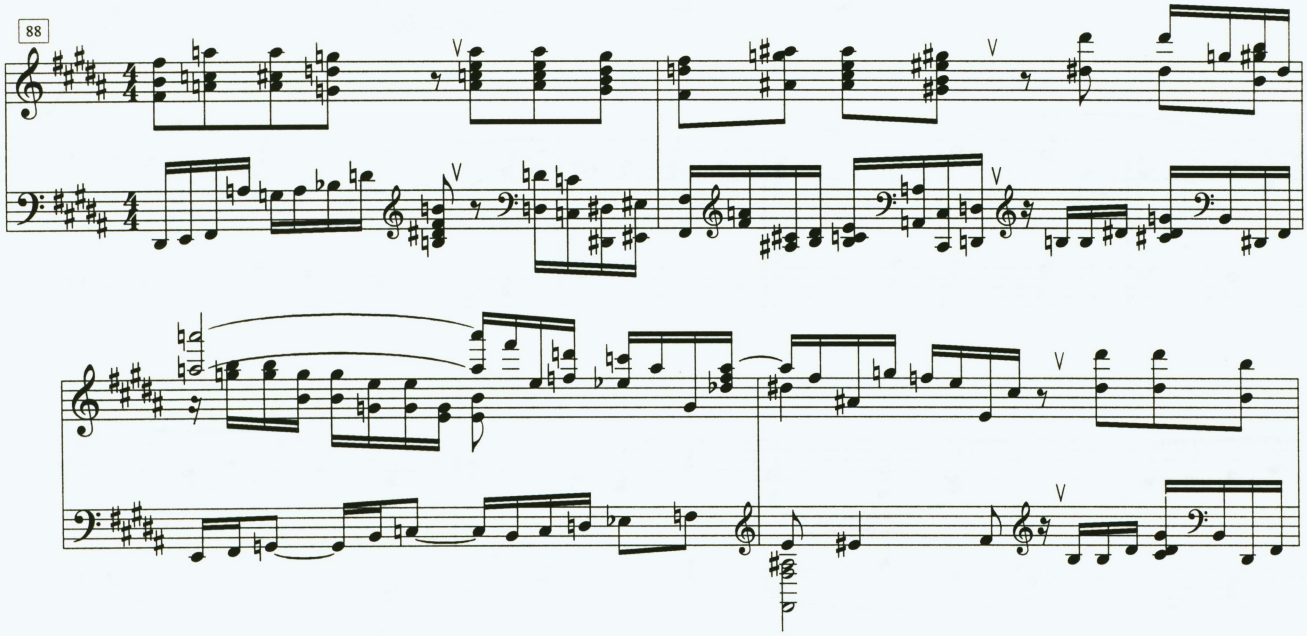
Ex. 15 Vaughan Williams, *A London Symphony*, First Movement



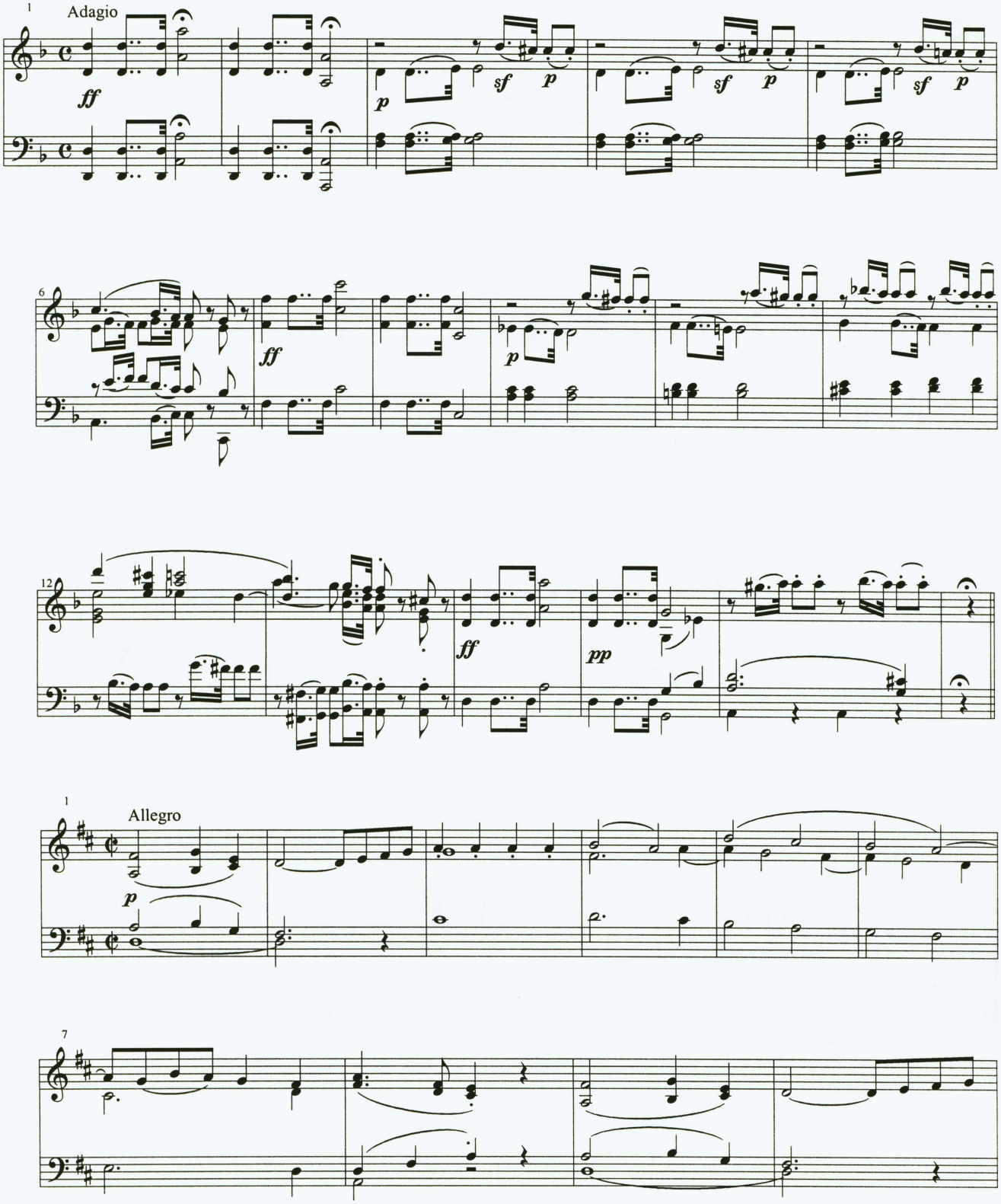
Ex. 16 Beethoven, Symphony No. 1, Fourth Movement



Ex. 17 Schoenberg, *Kammersymphonie* No. 1



Ex. 18 Haydn, Symphony No. 104, First Movement



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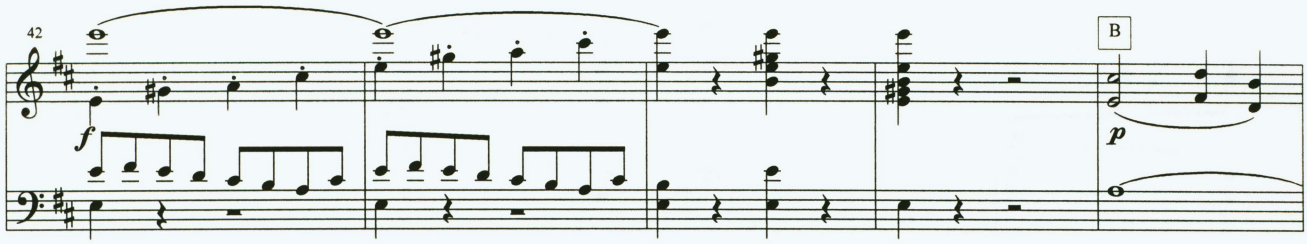

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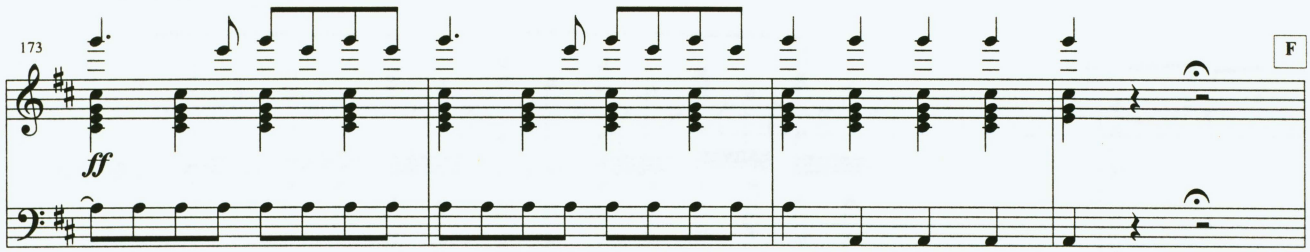

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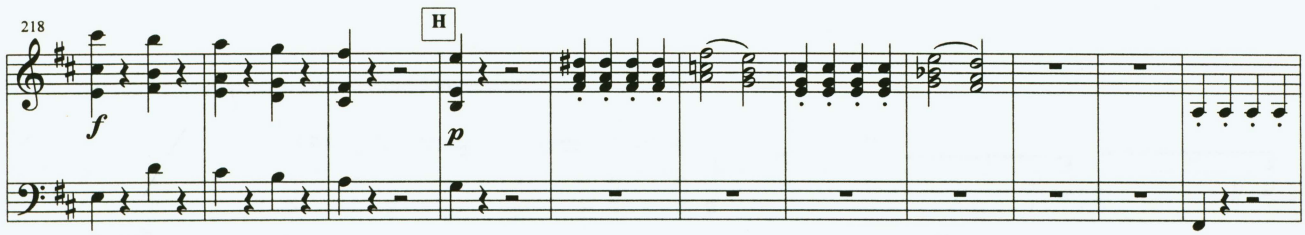

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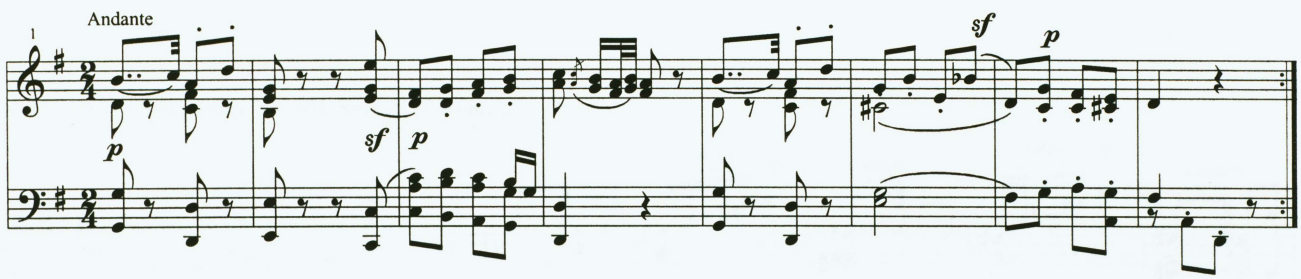

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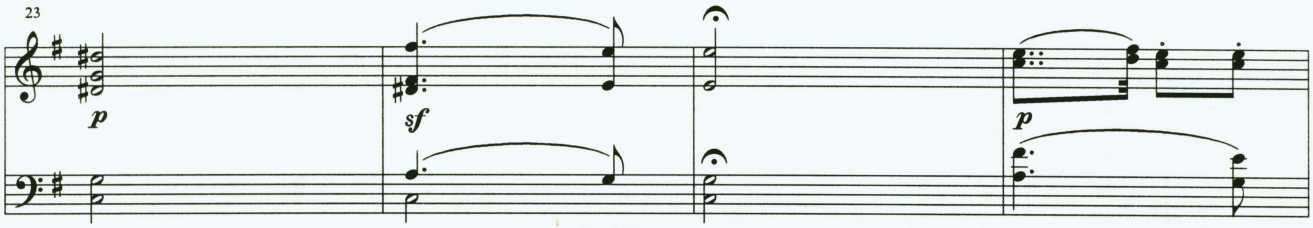

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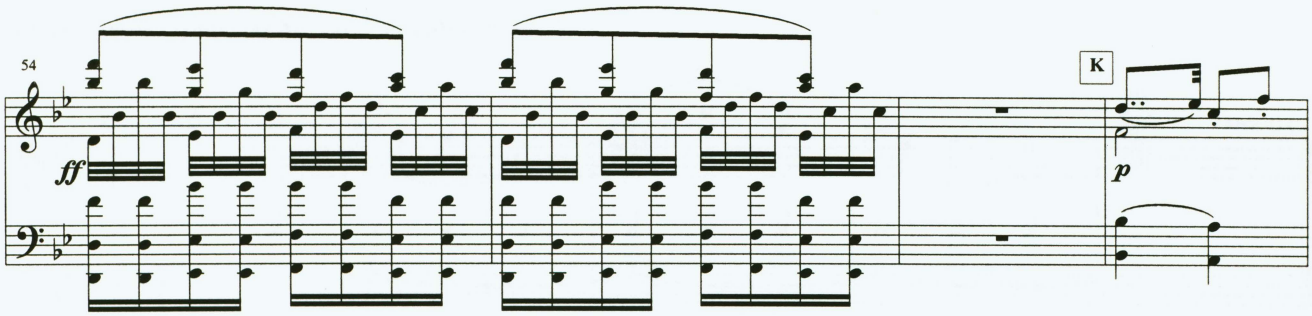

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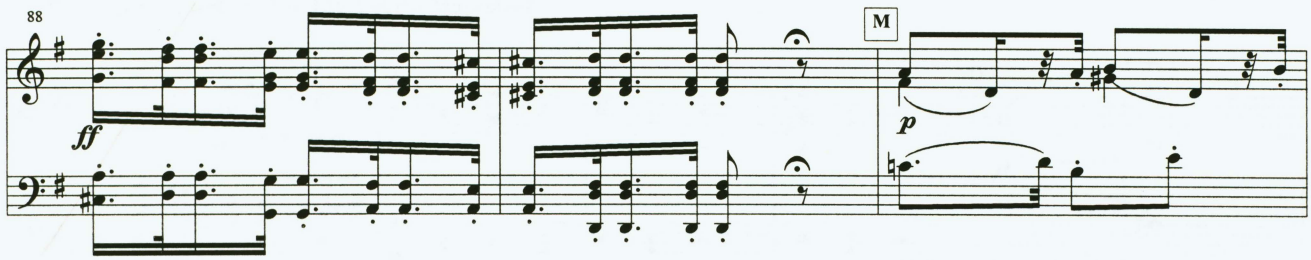

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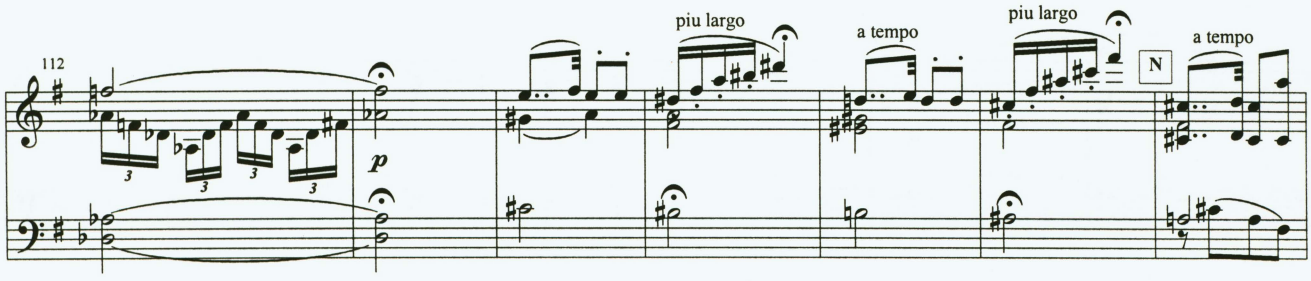

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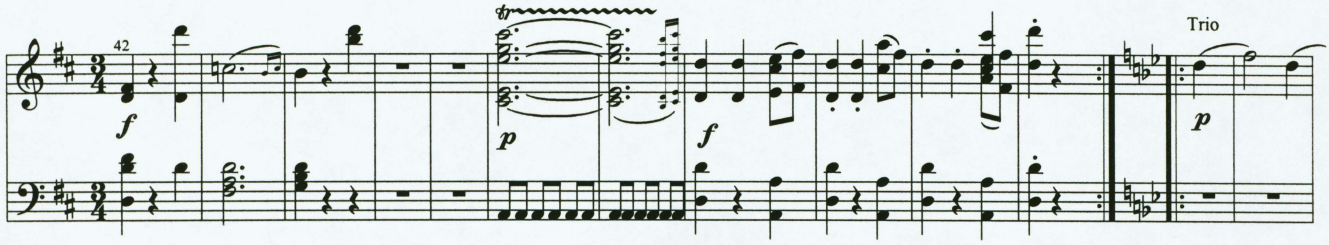

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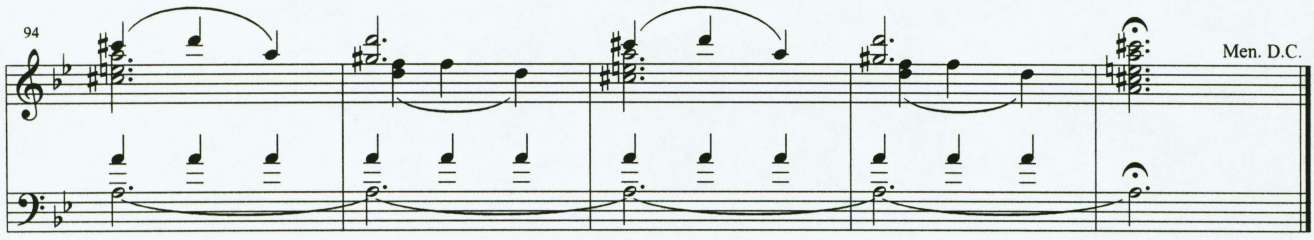

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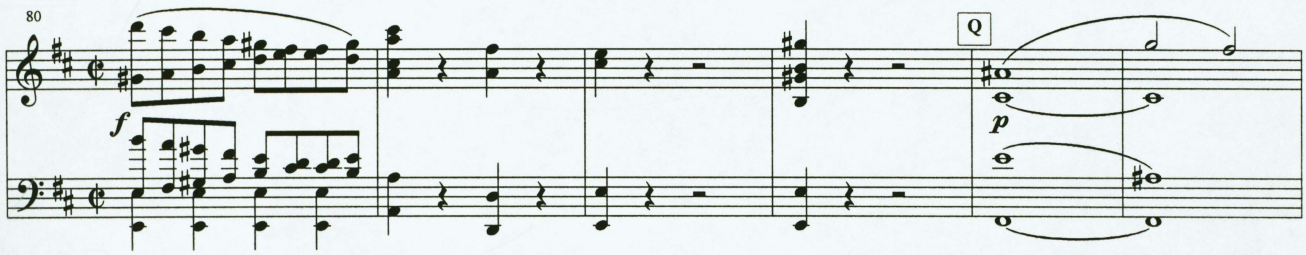

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