UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA GRADUATE COLLEGE

VISIONS FROM REVELATION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of MASTER OF MUSIC

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Norman, Oklahoma
2020

VISIONS FROM REVELATION

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

Visions from Revelation is a sketch of Revelation 4 portrayed through piano and fixed media. The pianism makes tribute to several composers. Eleven Echoes of Autumn by George Crumb influenced the inside-of-the-piano operations. In the second piece, the extended techniques go nearly as far as the musique concrète instrumentale writing in Helmut Lachenmann's Guero. Naturally, the concept of prepared piano in movement one comes from John Cage, but the soundscape is in the vein of Crumb's Makrokosmos using a thimble to mute strings.

The pitch organization for the movements vary. In the first movement, the pitch content is a cross between intervallic harmonic techniques and pandiatonicism. The scale is similar to D Major, but the tendency toward tritones raises the 4th scale degree while lowering the 7th.

Furthermore, the scale occasionally lowers the 2nd and 6th scale degree for the sake of intervallic integrity as well as for bringing a strong pull down to the 1st and 5th scale degree. The second movement applies Messiaen's third mode of limited transposition, which is one of the most chromatic of his modes. Using this mode and carefully designing the melodic contour, the pitch material imitates the sound quality of the inside piano operations. The third movement is more intuitive with the horizontal pitch structure, but vertically there are general guidelines. The harmonic intervals consist of minor 2nds and perfect 5ths at the beginning. By measure 71, the minor 2nds invert to major 7ths, and by measure 122, the perfect 5ths invert to perfect 4ths.

Overall, this piece has a triumphal nature prompted by the programmatic material of the throne room from Revelation 4. Musically it displays virtuosic writing in the style of composers like Crumb and Lachenmann. The pitch material derives from several different 20th century techniques as well as some more intuitive approaches that evoke the triumphant feel

PROGRAM NOTES

Visions from Revelation is a musical sketch for piano and fixed media inspired by Revelation 4. The music puts the listener in the place of the apostle John and invites the audience to imagine what it might have been like to encounter the throne room. The Book of Revelation by G. K. Beale informed many of these interpretations.

The first movement is about beholding the throne. As the first gesture, the pianist taps the strings in the low register, placing a metal rod on the strings seconds later. The result is a low rumble imitating thunder with high, piercing overtones produced from the metal rod representing flashes of lightning. The main five-note motif represents an echo of thunder.

The second movement is about encountering the sea of glass. Beale notes, "The 'sea' is [typically]... associated with the idea of evil" in other places in the Bible. The irony is that the imagery in Revelation 4:6 is calming (glass implying motionlessness). If the sea represents the idea of evil, it is the last thing one should fear in God's presence. God is triumphant over evil.

The last movement portrays the four living creatures. I also drew inspiration from Isaiah 6:4. In this movement, I reference the famous hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." The reference is a symbol of the creatures. They call out, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Those are terrifying words to the sinner because holiness is everything a sinner is not. As the Isaiah passage describes, "the doorposts and the thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke."

There is also a great deal of programmatic meaning behind the concert setup of this piece.

One of the important messages of the book of Revelation is Christ's triumph over sin. The imagery of a solitary pianist on a grand piano is a symbol of the throne. Likewise, the pianism

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¹ Gregory Beale, *The Book of Revelation: The New International Greek Testament Commentary [NIGTC]* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) 327.

² Kenneth Baker, NIV Study Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2002), 1042, 1971.

³ Ibid., 1042-1043

requiring virtuosity of performers like Keith Kirkoff, Xenia Pestova Bennett, or David Burge is a symbol of triumph. Moreover, the loudspeakers that surround the concert hall is a symbol of the heavenly host that surrounds the throne depicted in Revelation 4.

Visions from Revelation is like a portrait of this chapter. The first movement is about thunder coming from the throne. The second is of a sea of glass. The third is about the four creatures. However, overall, the piece is about a sinner encountering a holy God.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

MATERIALS

Three cardioid condenser microphones with live reverb, a minimum of a stereo speaker setup (although, there may be speakers set up in pairs throughout the room as well), a mixer, a laptop or other device for playbacks, monitor for the pianist, an iPad or other type of tablet for the music as the piano desk will get in the way of the extended techniques, a timer set by the sound engineer, thin metal disc or rod, wax paper, yarn mallet, rubber mallet, and glass rod.

PREPARATION

The performer should use condenser microphones to help pick up the softer, more delicate sounds of the extended techniques. There should be two microphones placed inside the piano lid to get the inside piano sounds. The third microphone should be placed to the left of the pianist to pick up the key clicking sounds from the third movement. (See figure 1 below.)

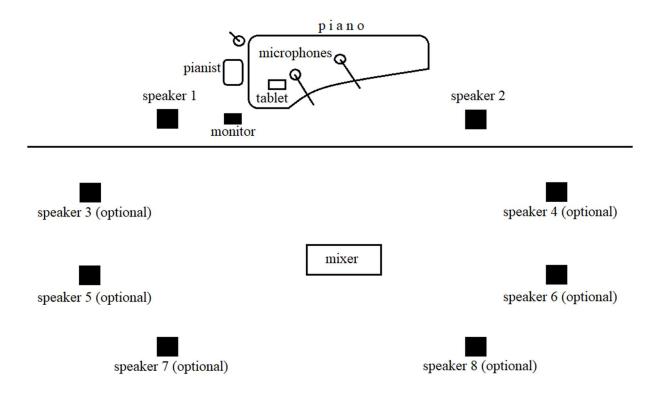
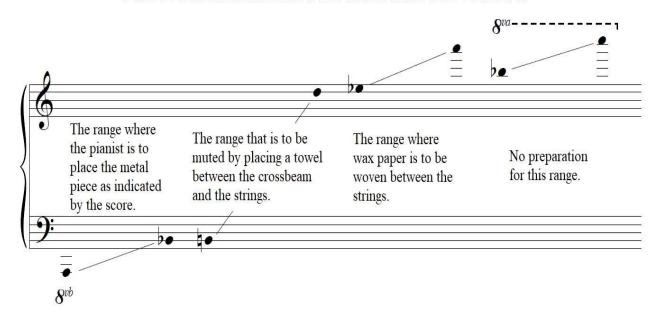
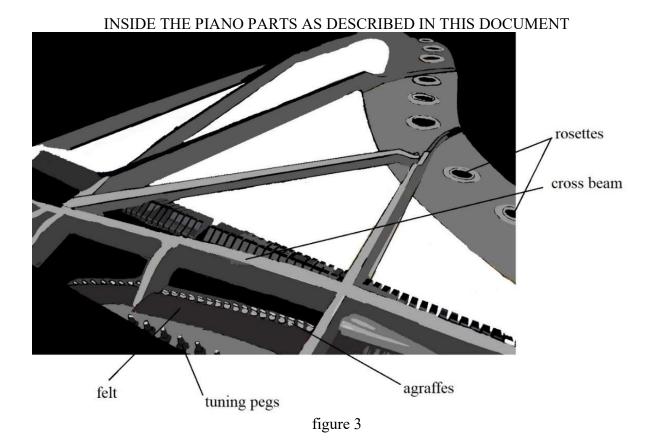


figure 1

There will be other preparations for the piano in the first movement. The materials needed for the preparations are as follows: a thin, metal disc or rod such as a metal spatula (the metal piece should be large enough so that there is no risk that it falls through the strings in the piano), a large towel, and wax paper. The pianist is to place the metal piece inside the piano a couple of seconds after the beginning of the piece and retrieve it in measure 53 as indicated in the score. The towel and wax paper should be set before the piece begins and quietly removed before the end of the piece during the rests starting at measure 71. The towel should be placed between the strings and the crossbeam (see figure 3) closest to the pianist so that the notes in that range sound muted. The wax paper should be woven between the strings so that it produces a buzzing sound. Figure 2 shows the registers in which the pianist should set up each item. The registers may vary slightly depending on the design of the cast iron frame of the piano.

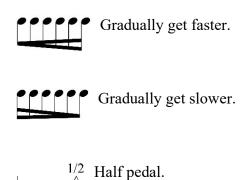
FIGURE 2
PIANO PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIRST MOVEMENT





NOTATION FOR THE PIANO

0:05, 0:15, etc. There is to be a timer set by the sound engineer to start at the beginning of each movement to help synchronize the piano with the electronics. These boxes are not to indicate exactly when to play. Rather, they indicate approximate timing, but they are always accurate within a second indicated by the box.



3

Roll starting from top to bottom played on the keys.

When a tie doesn't connect to another note head, the pianist is to let the pitches vibrate freely until the sound dies away.

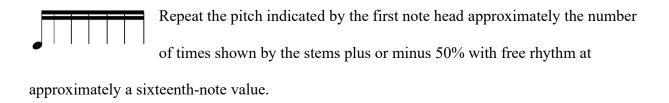
This indicates a cluster to be played on the strings inside the piano with the palm of the pianist's hand in the approximate range covered by the note head.

The x note head is used when there are unpitched or off the keys playing techniques. The technique to be used is always specified in the score. For example, in the first movement, the x note head indicates that the metal disc/rod is to be placed and left on the strings for the duration of the indicated value of the x note heads (removed in measure 53). In the second movement, an x note head without a glissando mark next to it indicates that the pianist is to carefully tap a tuning peg to create a percussive sound. In the third movement, the x note head indicates to the pianist that s/he is to play the indicated notes on the strings inside the piano with mallets.

The performer is to press the fleshy part of the index finger on the string indicated by the score and run it up and down the string vertically to produce varying levels of muted sounds on that strings.

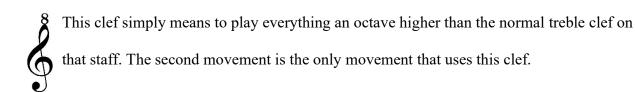
This is a similar technique to the previous. The only difference is that the performer is to lightly press the string to

produce various harmonics rather than to simply produce a muted sound. The note head shown will not be the actual pitch; rather, the note head indicates the string being used to produce the harmonics.



Repeat everything within the box as needed until the given time runs up.

This clef is used anytime the pianist or electronics have unpitched materials. The relative contour is shown rather than the exact pitches. For example, if the score indicates that the pianist is to hit the wood part of the piano but one note head is higher than the next, the pianist should tap a place on the piano that produces a relatively higher unpitched sound compared to the next tap.



() This sign indicates a harmonic. The bottom note head indicates the string on which the pianist is to lightly touch to produce the partial. The top note head in parenthesis is the pitch that should result.

This sign appears horizontally a few times in the first movement. It always appears after a glissando played on the strings. The sign simply means to let the strings vibrate freely after the glissando.

Each movement has a different type of glissando. In the first movement, the glissando is always to be played inside the piano on the strings which the pianist is to strum with the fleshy part of the finger in the direction indicated by the line and in the approximate range indicated by the line.

In the second movement, the speed of the glissando is moderate, slow, or fast. Aside from the speed, there are three different types of glissandos in the second movement. The first type is the oblique squiggly line. It means that the pianist is to carefully scrape the glass rod on the strings between the tuning pegs and the agraffes (see figure 3).

Both the second and third type use straight line. What distinguishes them is the clef being used. The second type of glissando uses the neutral clef (). It means to carefully scrape the glass rod on the strings near the felt. However, when there is the same oblique line in the bass clef, the sign means to carefully run the glass rod vertically up and down the string notated by the note head in the score.

The third movement has two types of glissando. Both are notated with the oblique, straight line; however, they have different types of note heads. The first type of glissando has a triangular note head. This indicates that the pianist is to use a stick to run across the keys without depressing the keys. The result will be a percussive clicking sound. The second type of glissando used in this movement has an "x" note head. Here the pianist is to strum the strings with a yarn mallet.

This indicates a glass rod dead stroke on the strings of the piano.

This sign indicates that the pianist is to mute the string with the glass rod while striking the X key that corresponds with the string indicated.

ms. 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18. There is a technique that in the second movement in these measures where the pianist is to slowly and carefully slide the glass rod back and forth vertically on the strings indicated for the duration of the note value.

Move the glass rod in circular motions on the strings in the approximate range given by the note head.

A triangle note head without a glissando mark in the third movement indicates that the pianist is to hit the center crossbeam of the cast iron frame (see figure 3) with the yarn mallet.

NOTATION FOR THE ELECTRONICS

-xxxxxx Scratchy musical texture.

Smooth musical texture.



Glissando musical texture.

()()()

Propeller like texture.



Blurry musical texture using the musical content shown.

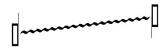


An approximate number of repetitions at approximately a sixteenth-note value.

The pitch generally changes on a microtonal level, too.

* * *

A pulsating sound between the given pitches.



Indicates a glissando in the approximate relative pitch register and

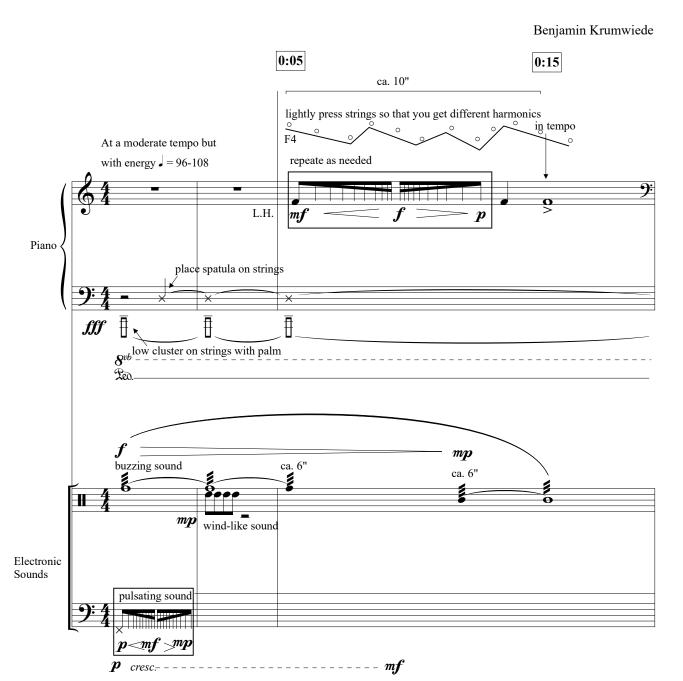
direction indicated.

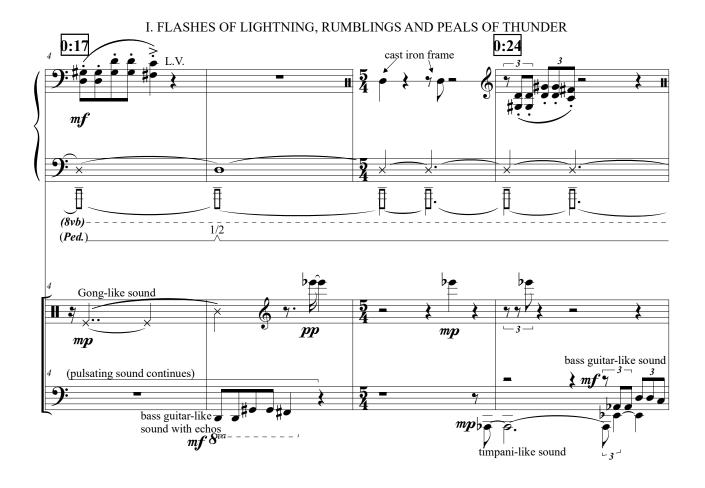


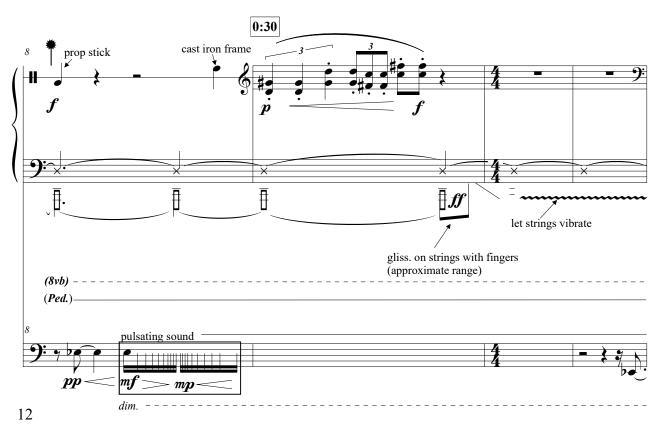
Indicates a glissando going up to an indefinite pitch.

VISIONS FROM REVELATION

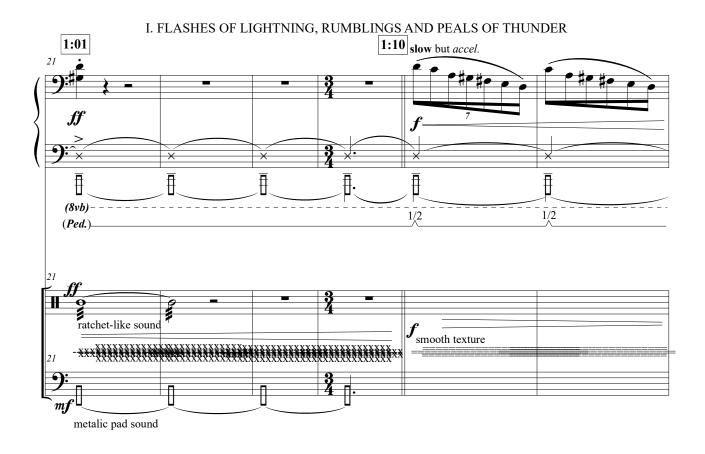
I. FLASHES OF LIGHTNING, RUMBLINGS AND PEALS OF THUNDER











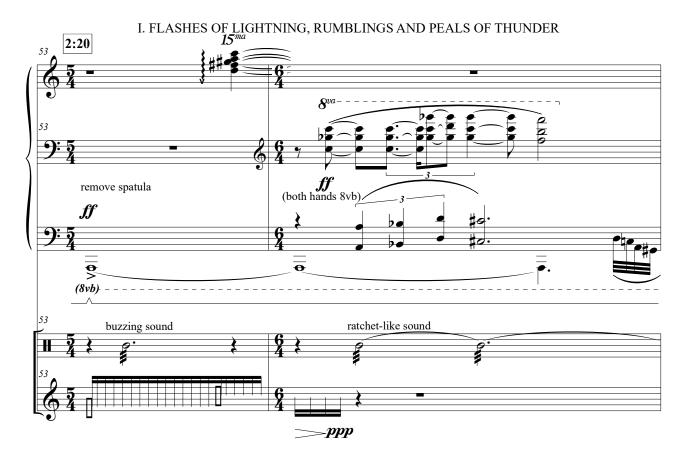


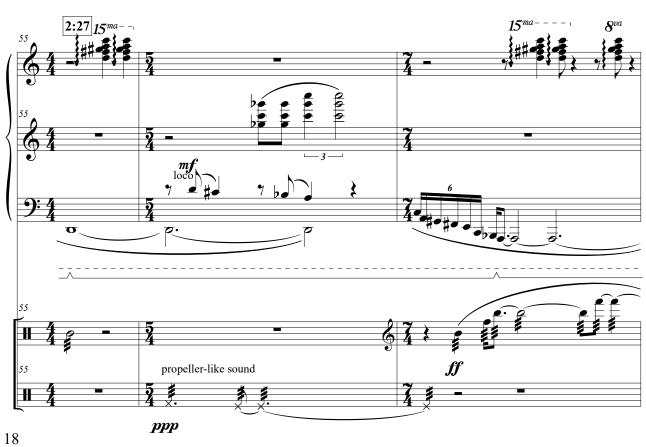




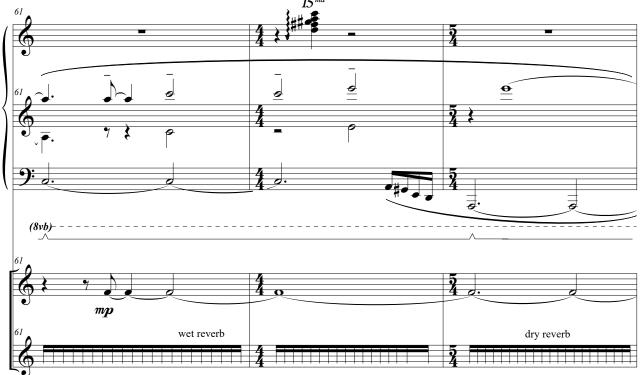
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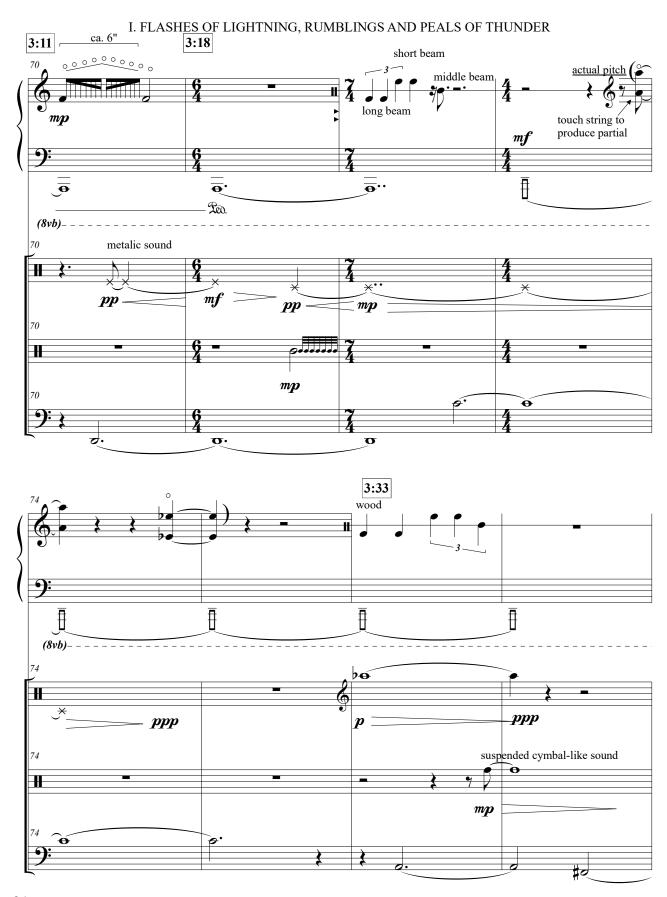






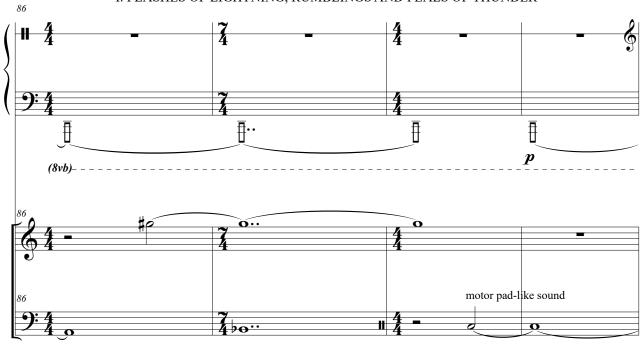


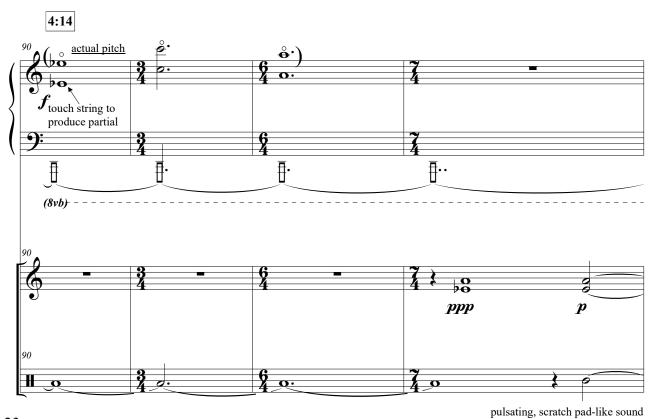


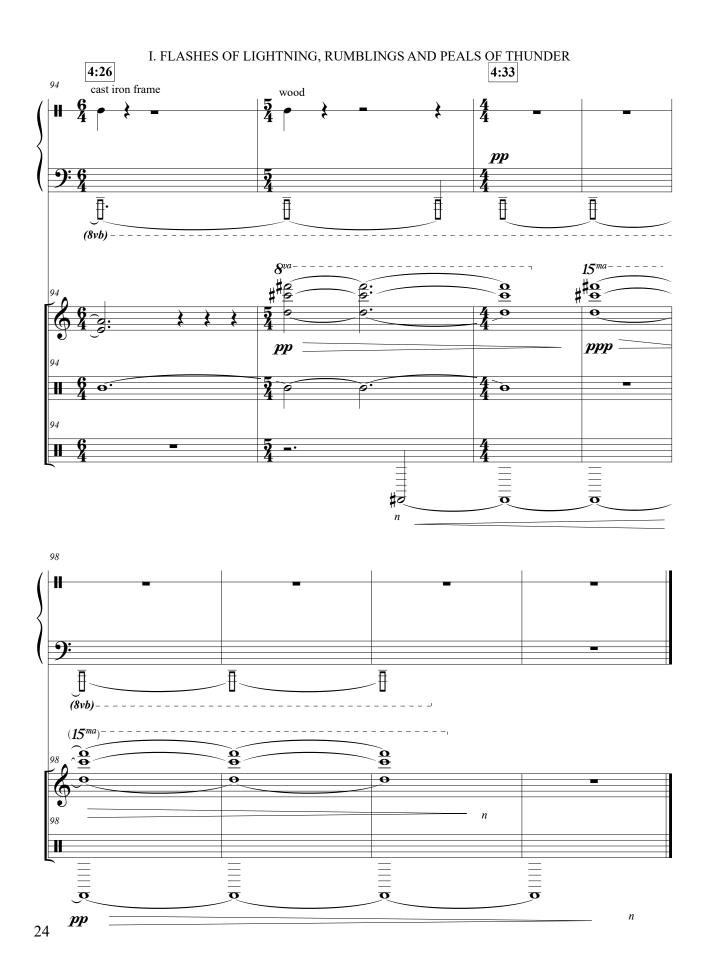




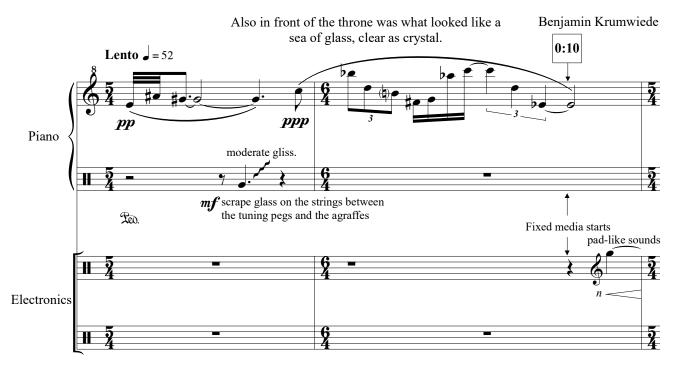
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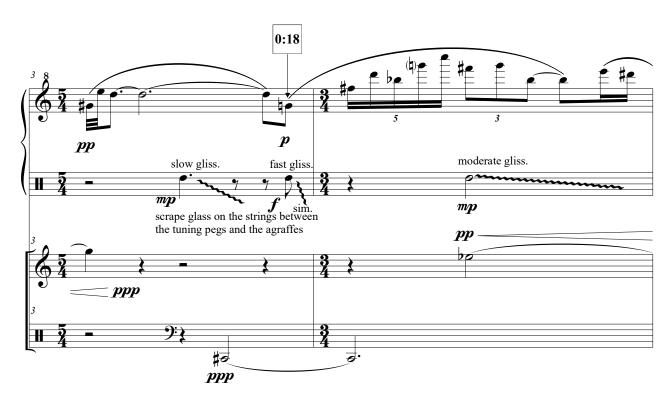




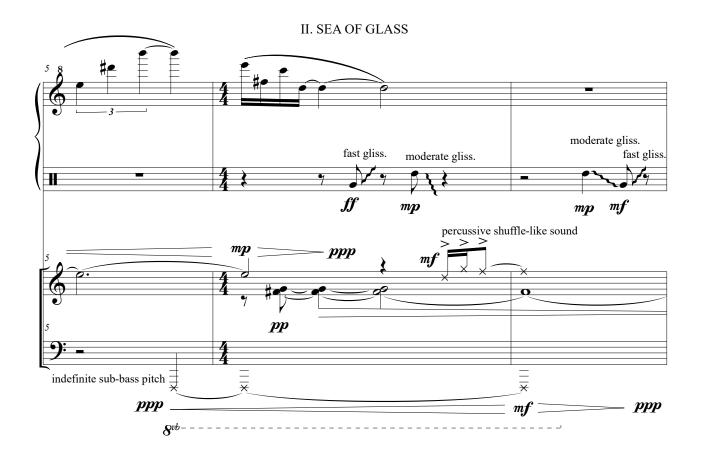


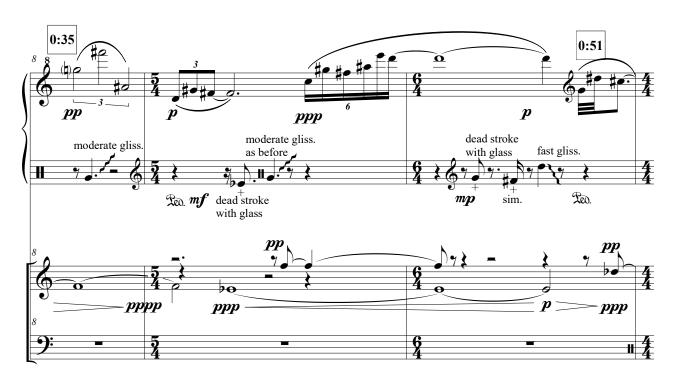
II. SEA OF GLASS

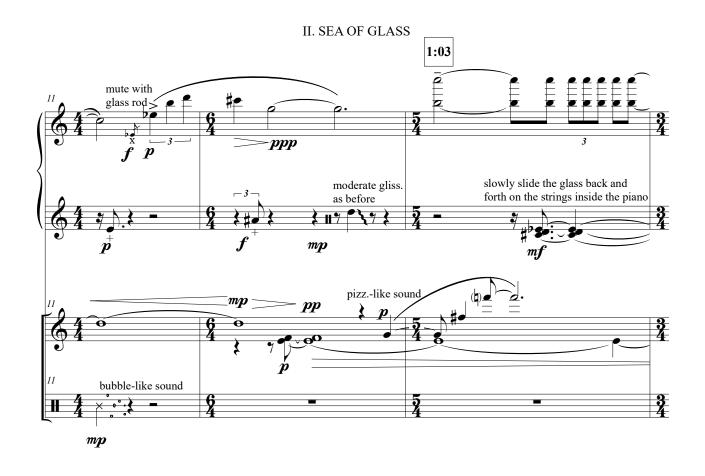


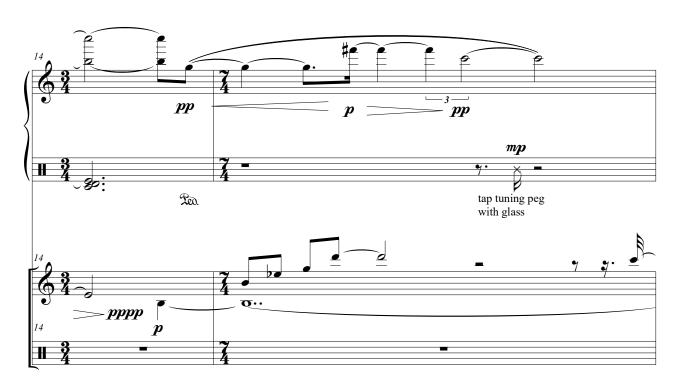


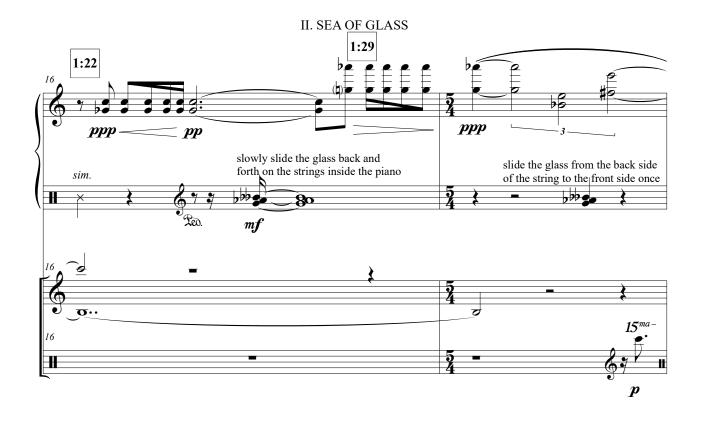
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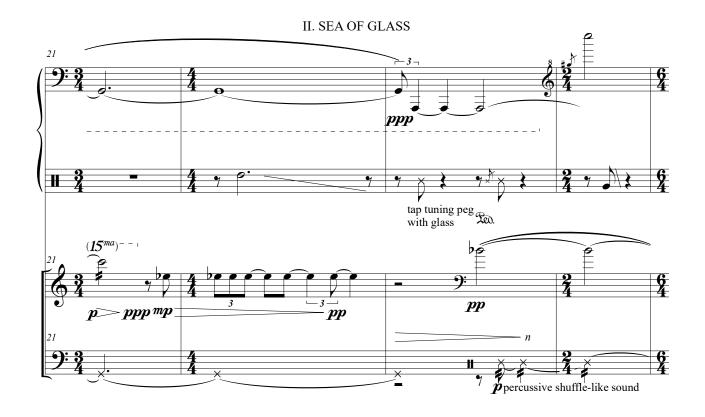


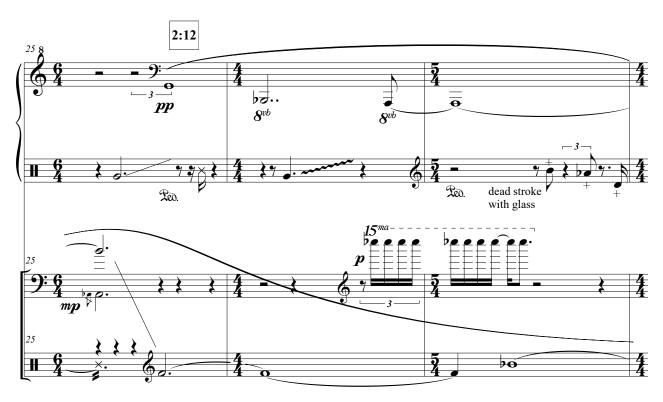


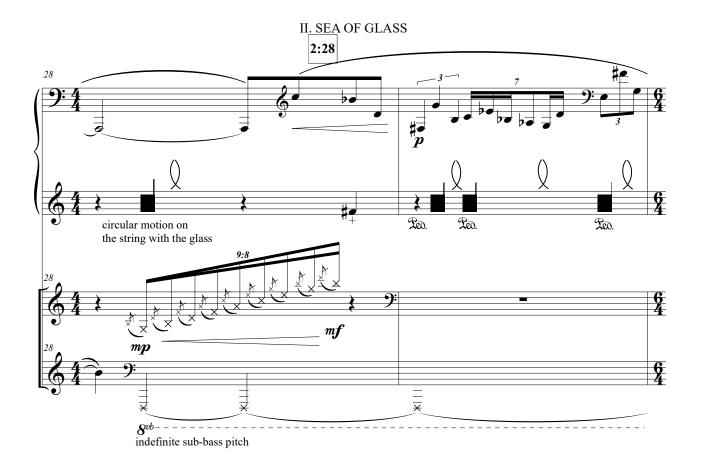


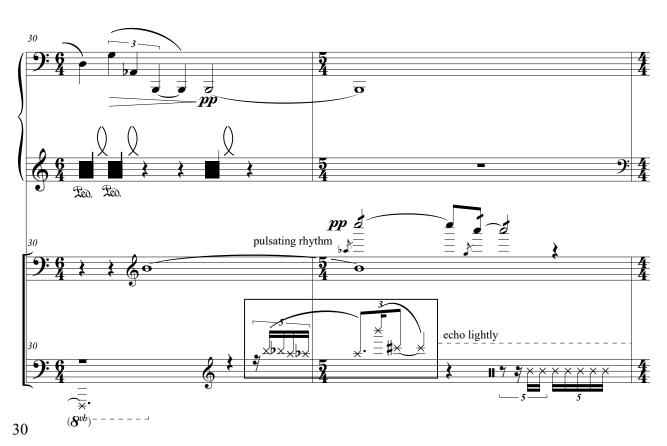




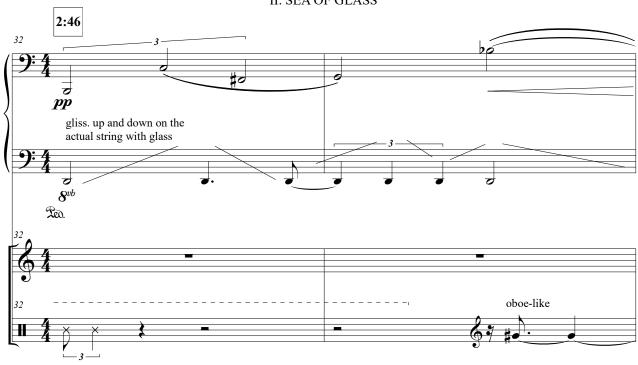


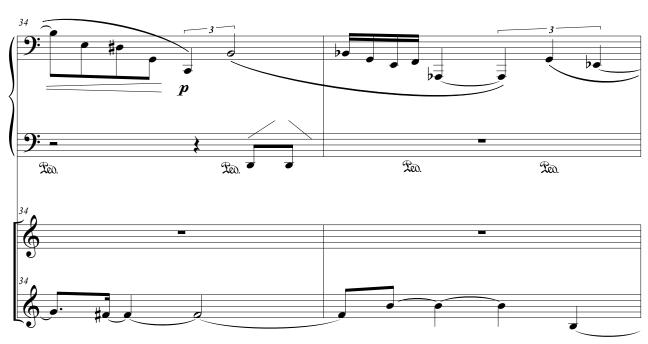


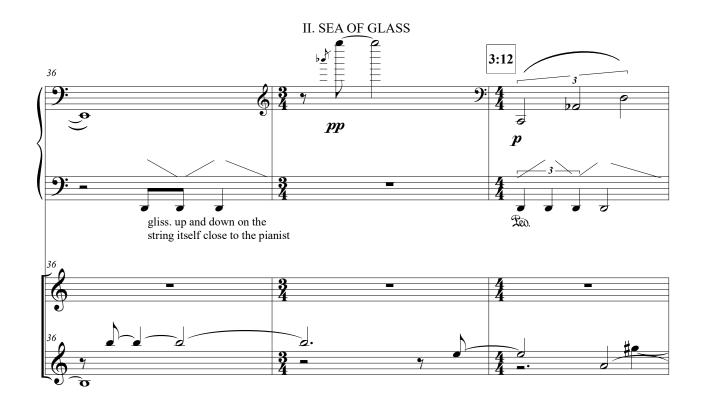


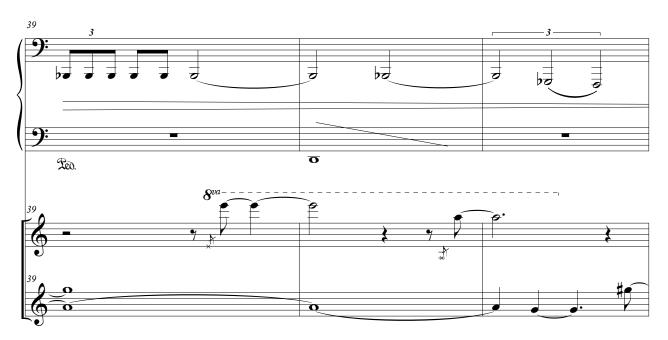


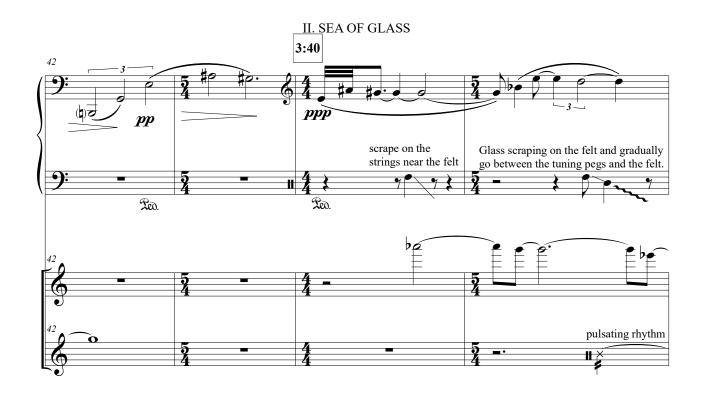
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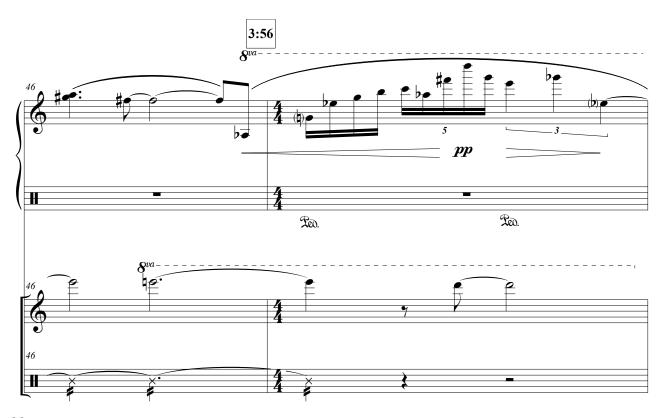


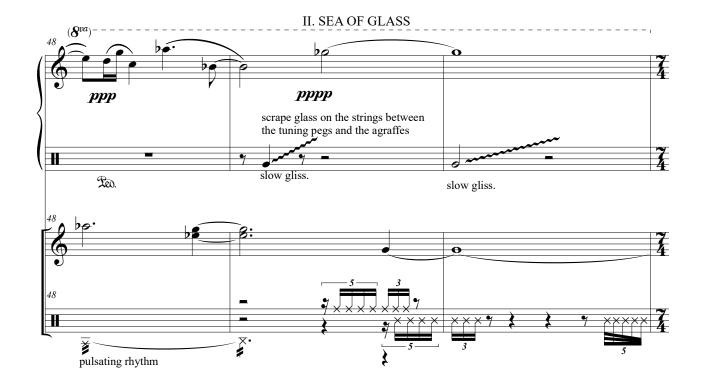


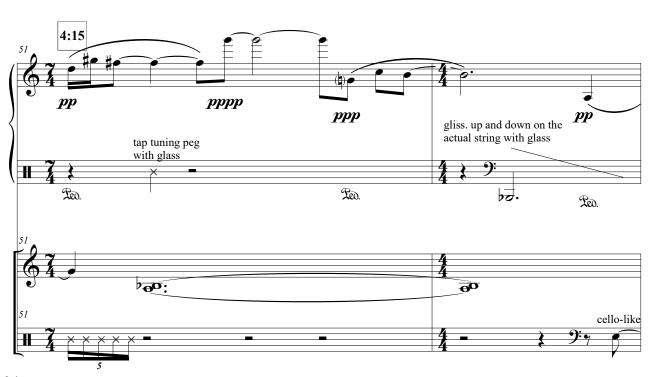


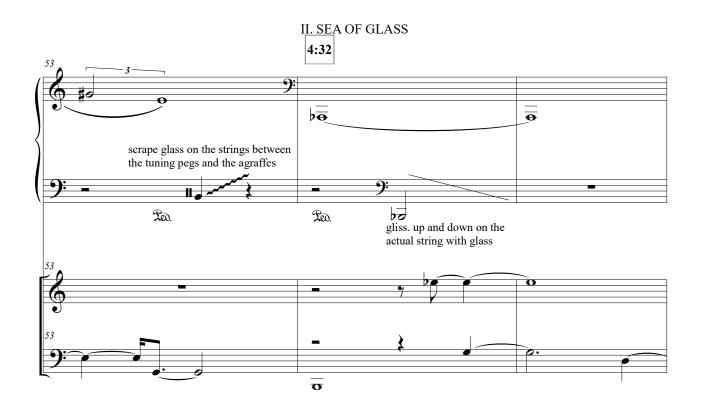




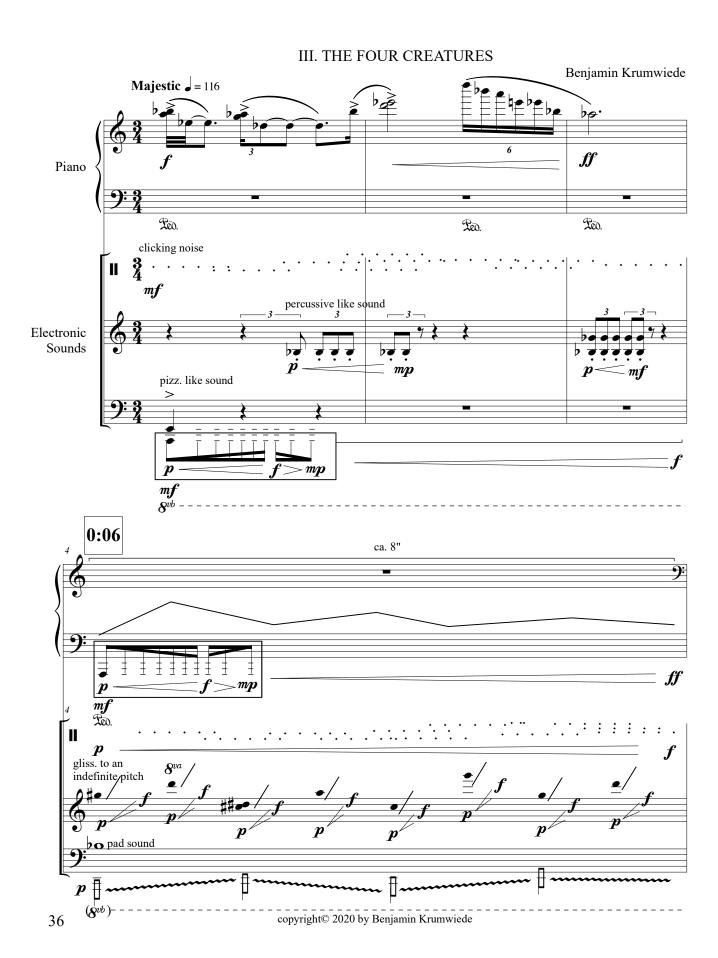




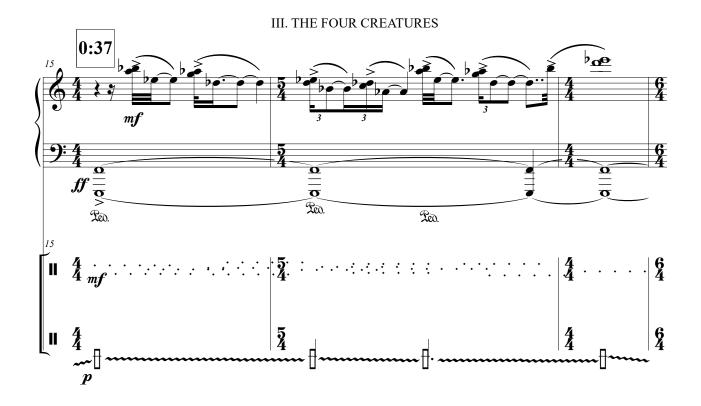


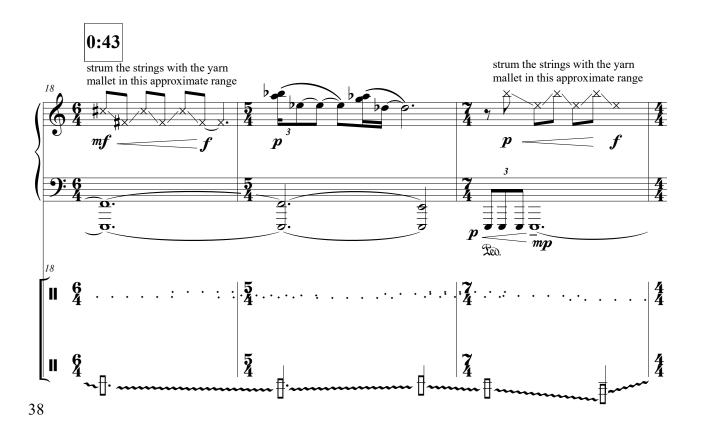


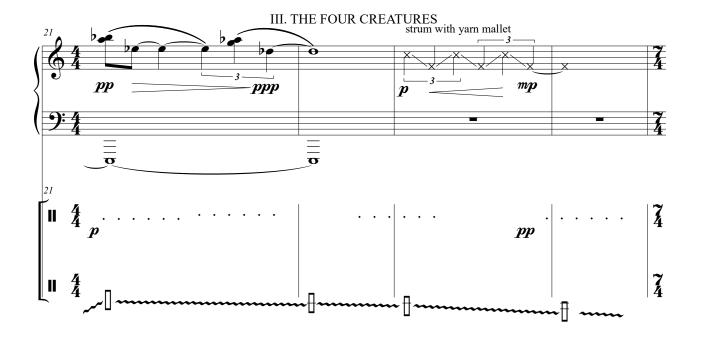


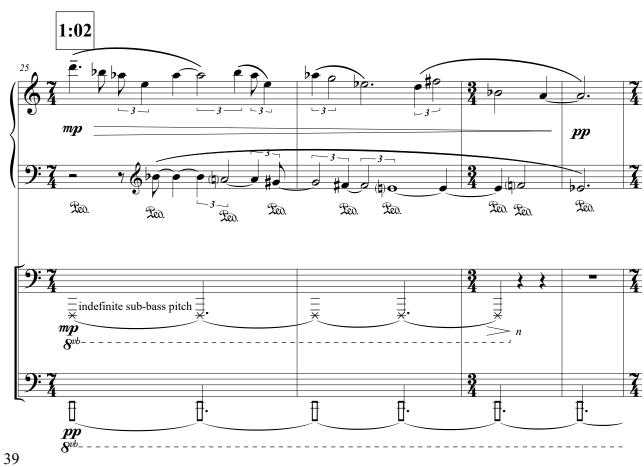




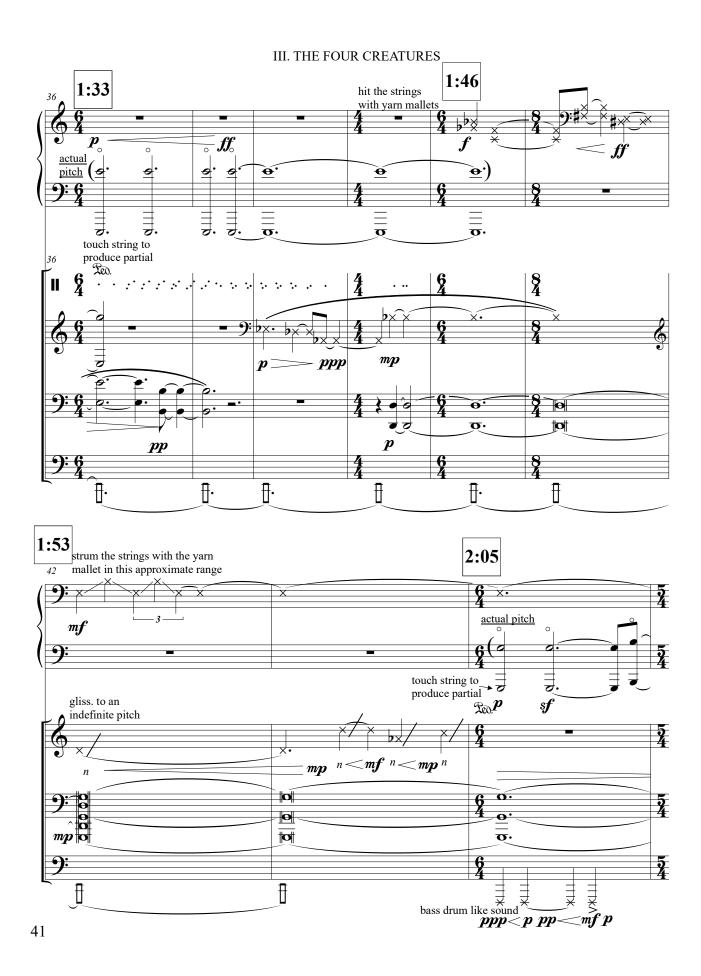




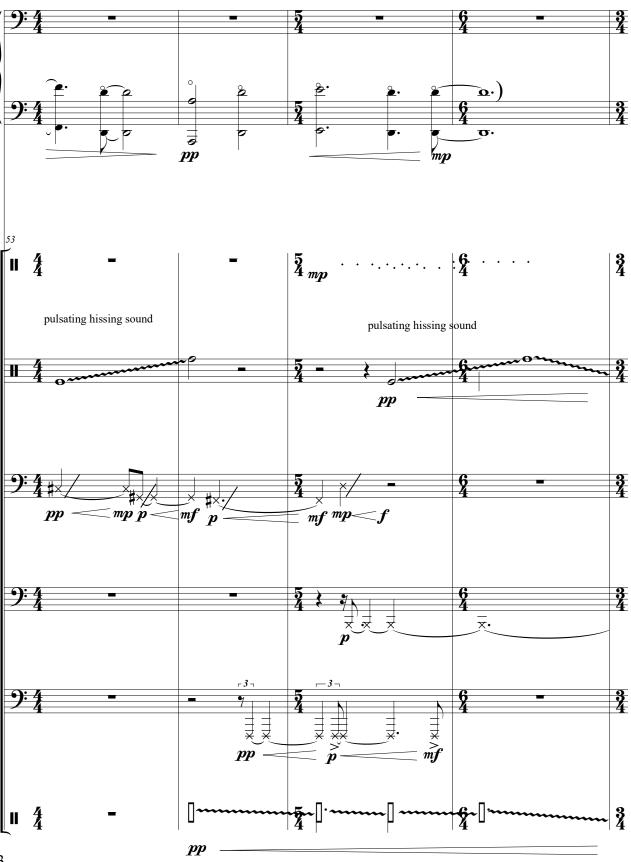


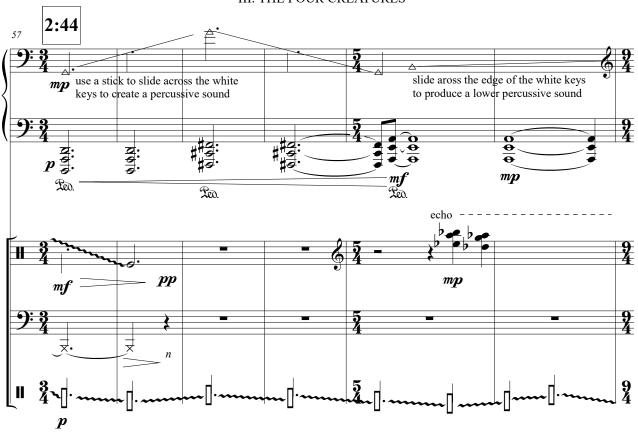


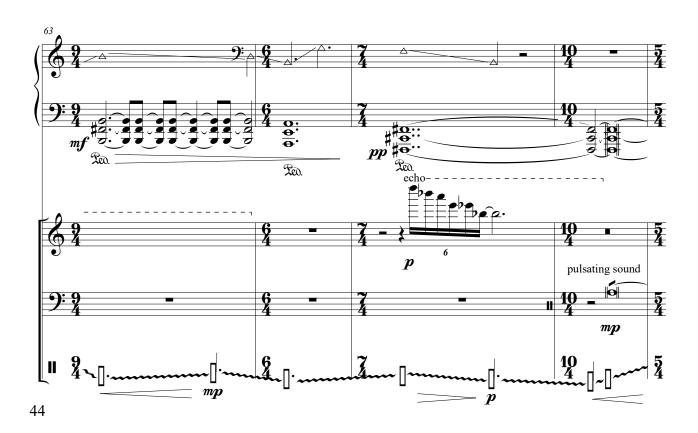








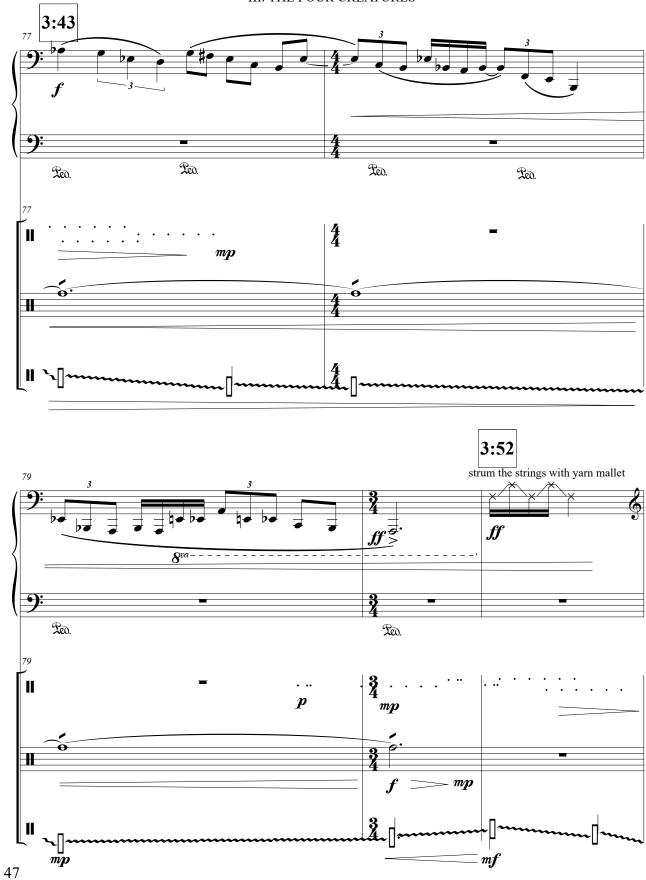




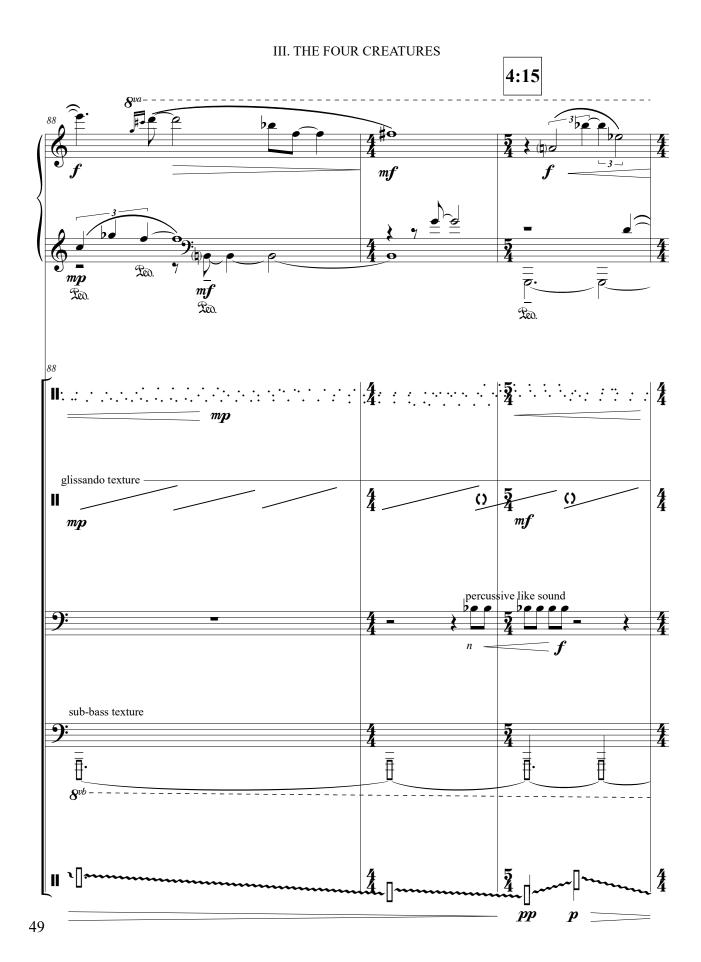




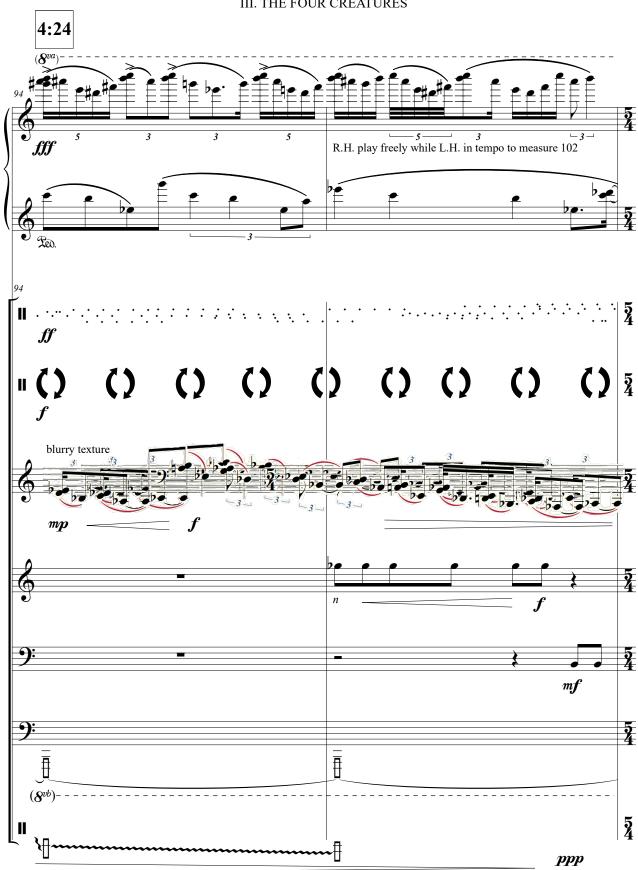




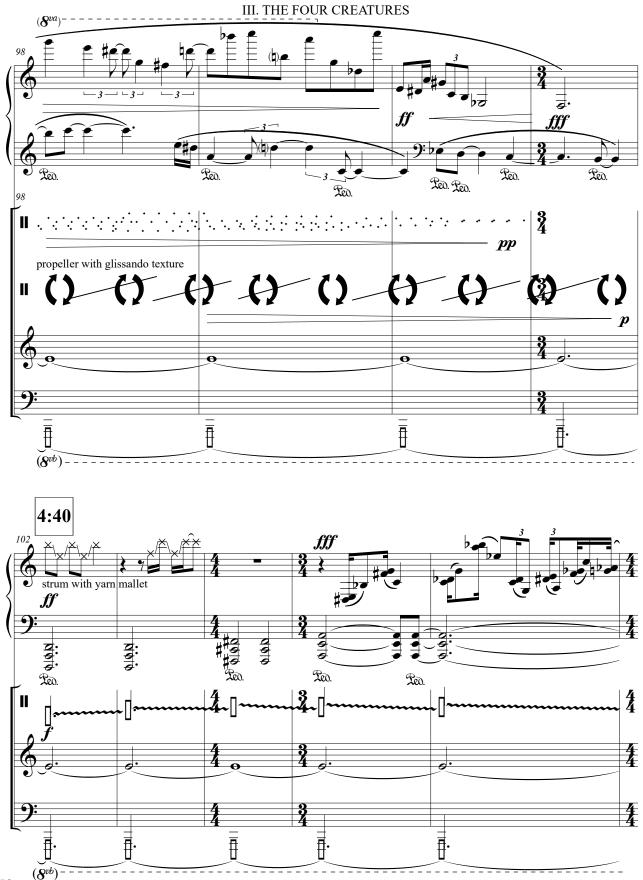








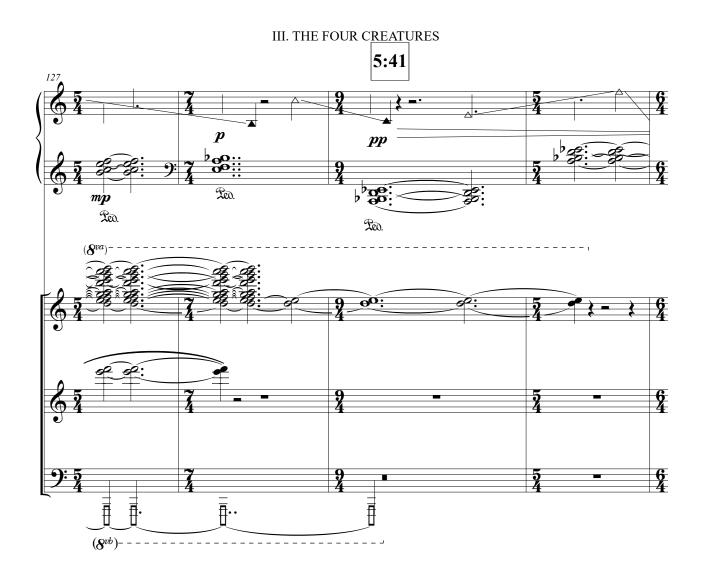


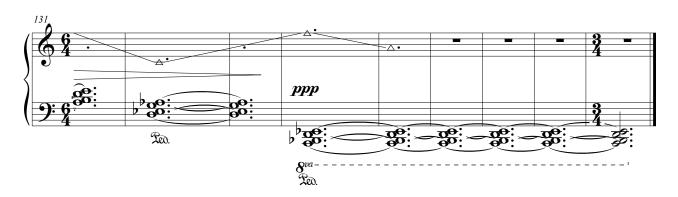












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