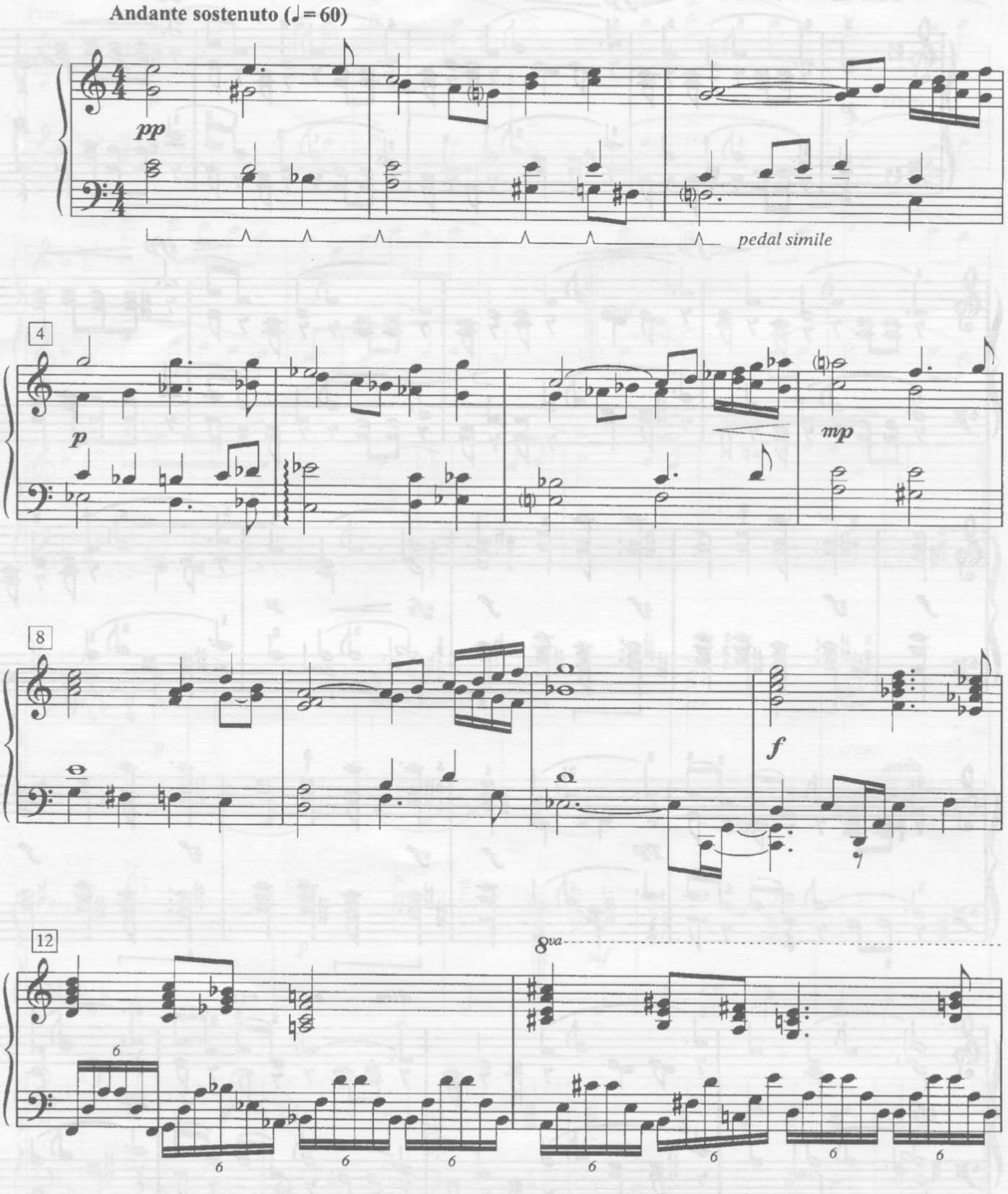
See John Salmon's master class on this piece in this issue.

from Chromatic Fantasy Sonata

CHORALE

DAVE BRUBECK



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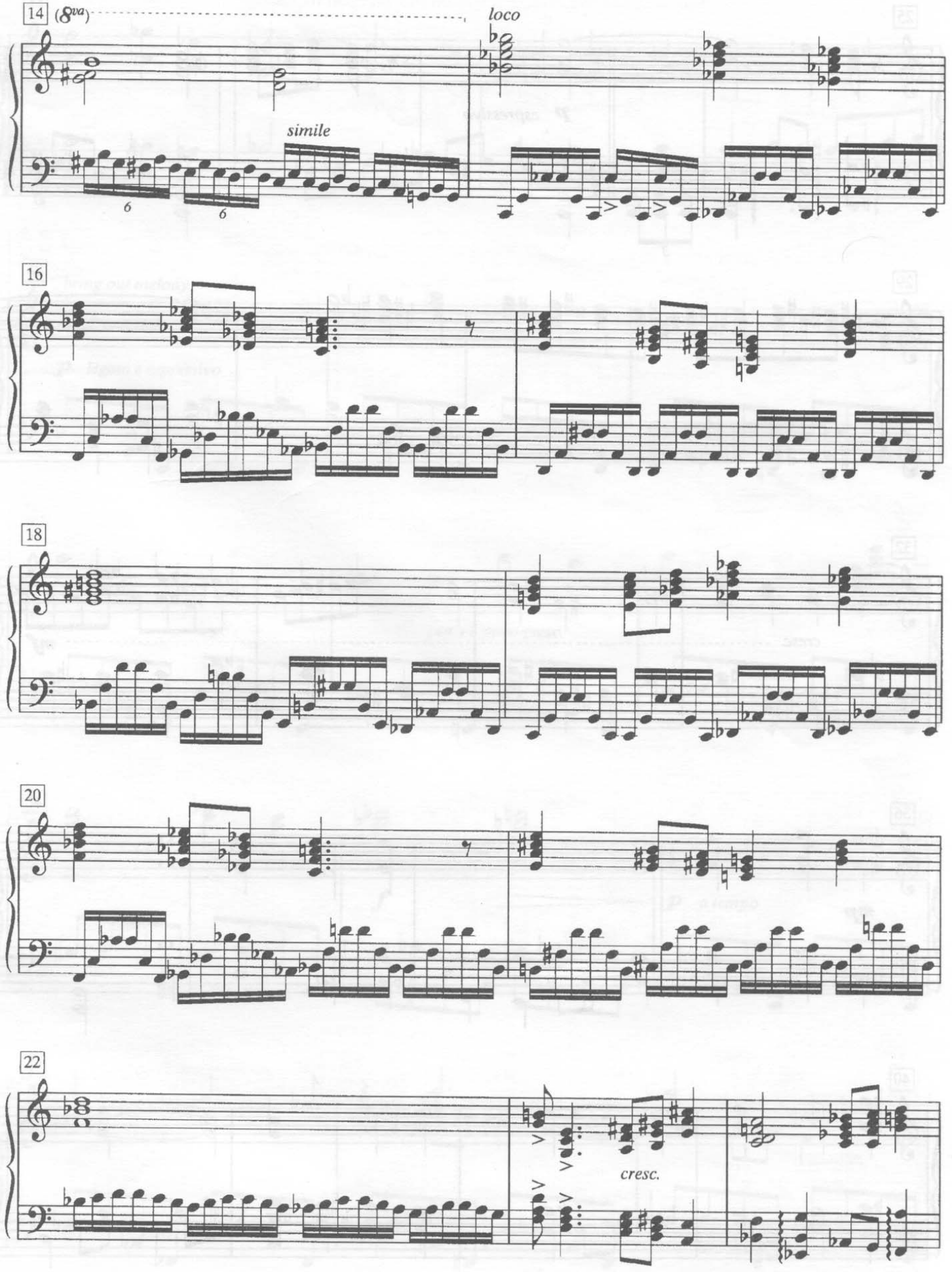
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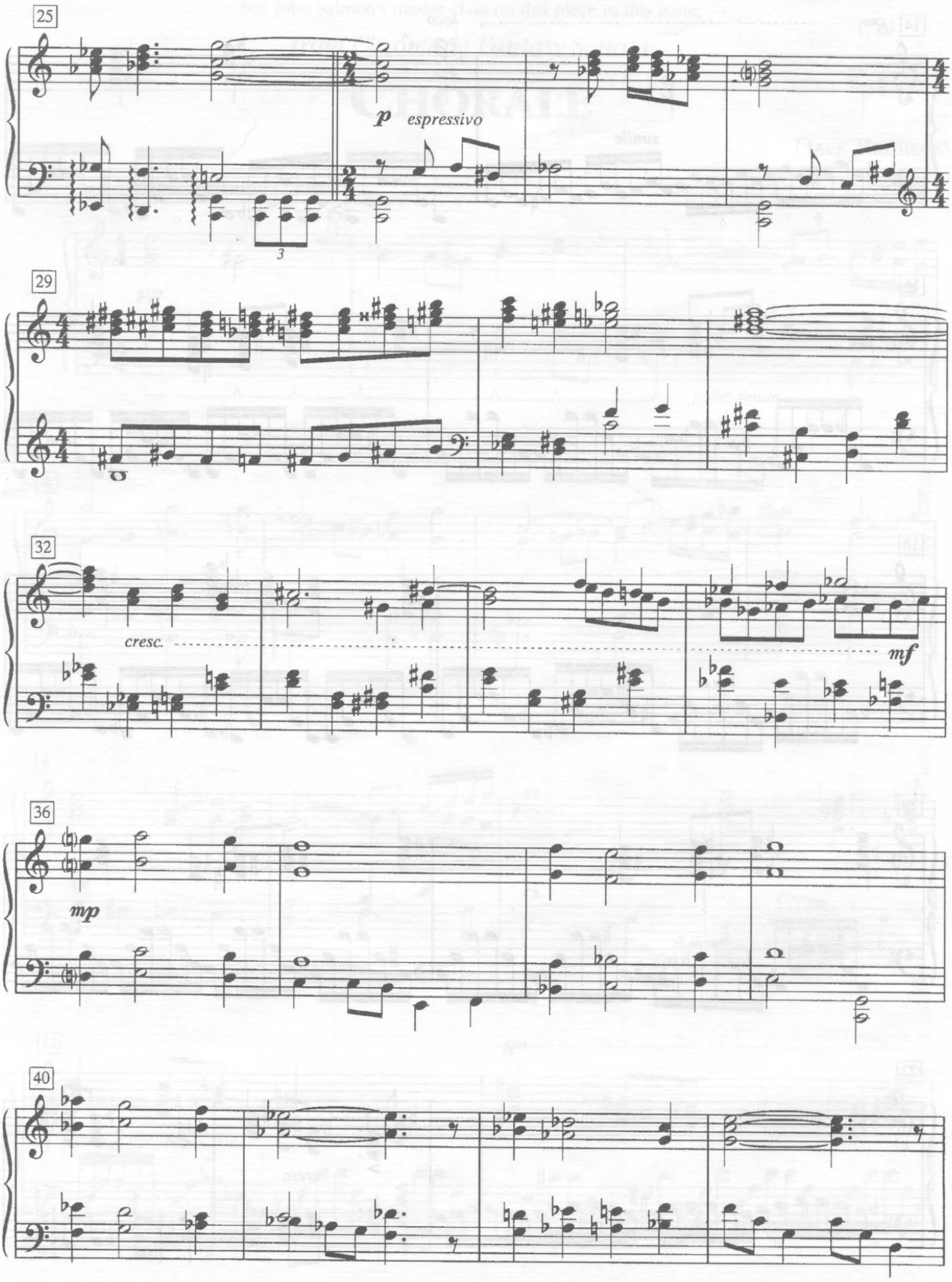
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p espressivo
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cresc.
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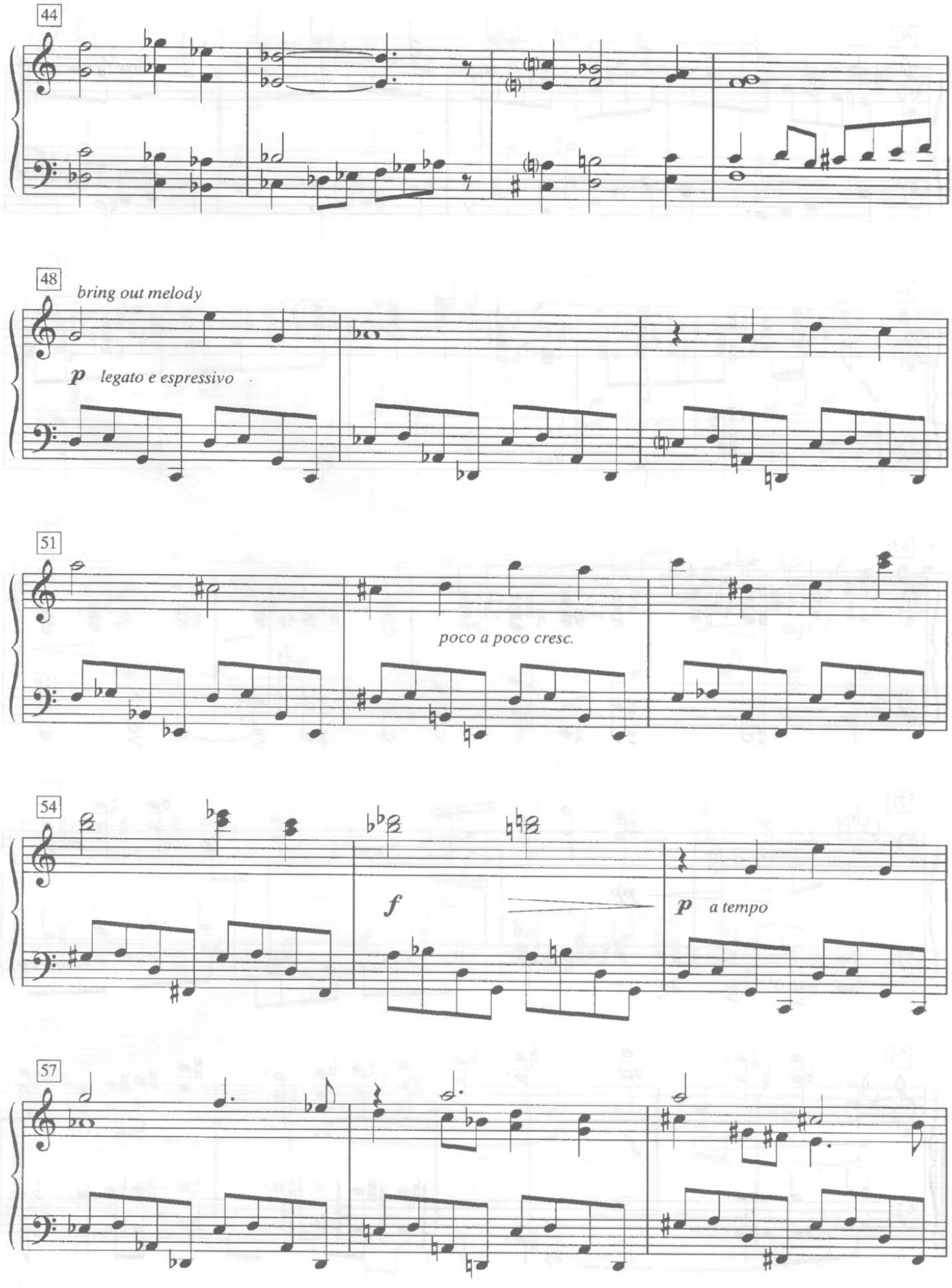
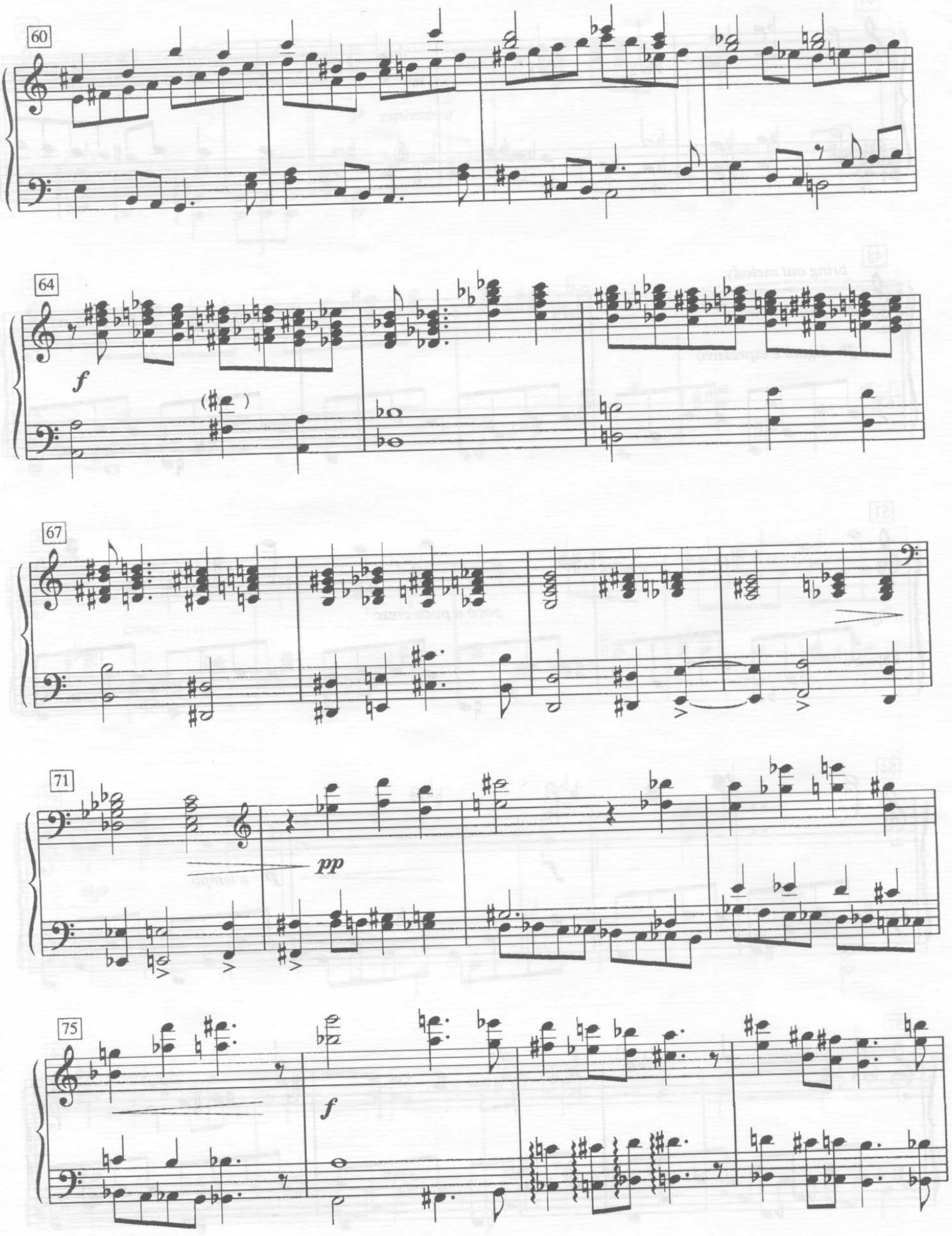

44
48
bring out melody
p legato e espressivo
51
poco a poco cresc.
54
f
p a tempo
57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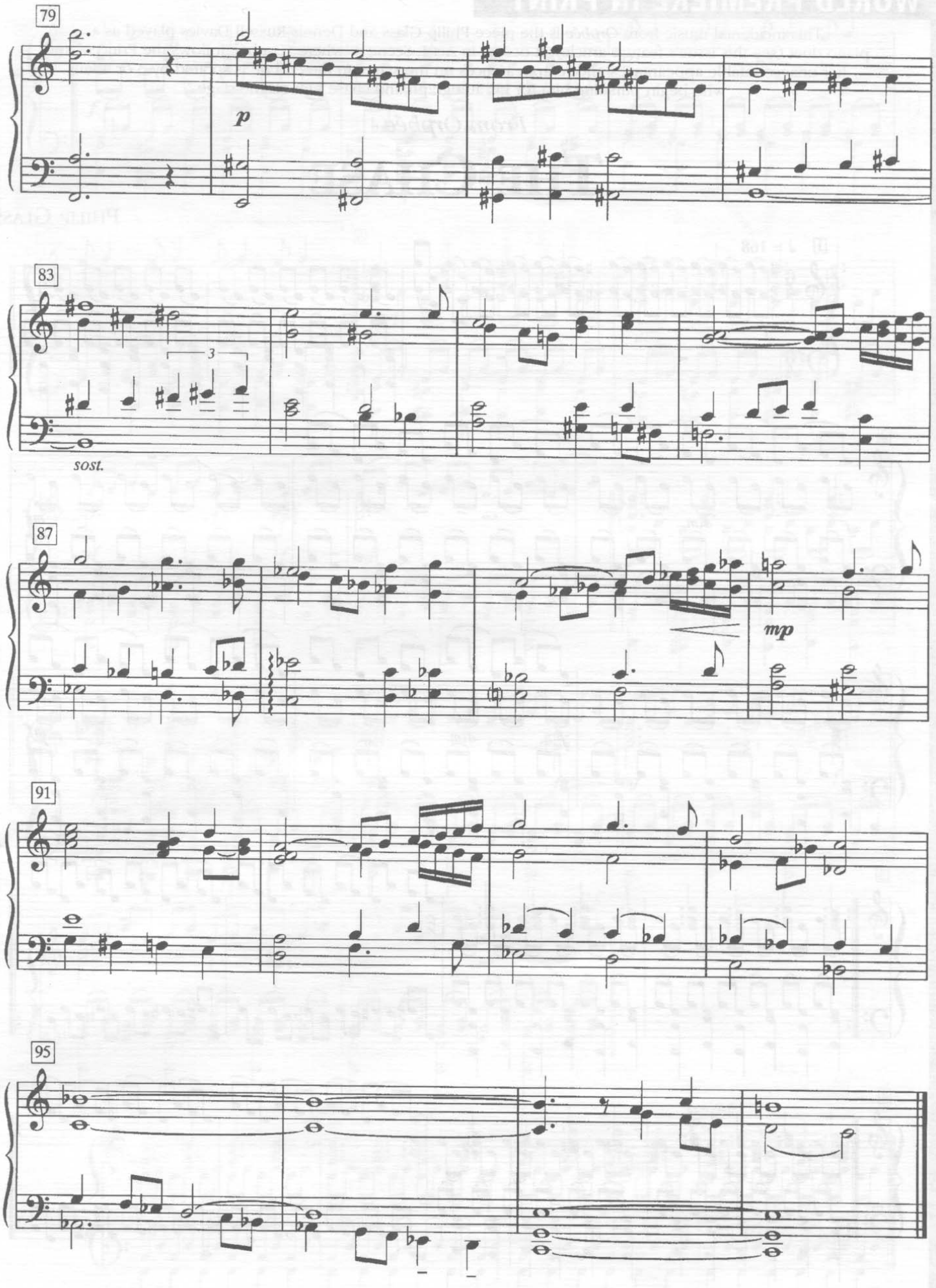
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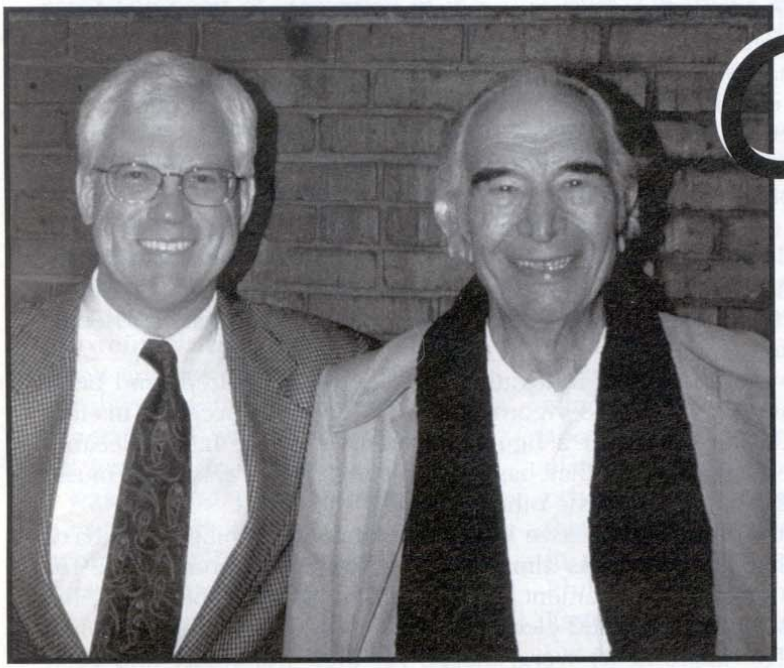
DAVE BRUBECK'S CHORALE



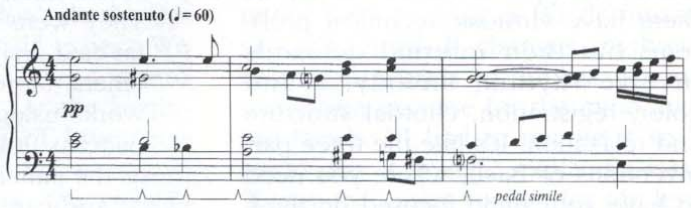
John Salmon with Dave Brubeck backstage in Chattanooga, TN (2000)

Photo by Rev. Bill Carter

By John Salmon

While Dave Brubeck may be best known as a jazz pianist, he is an equally prolific composer of works suitable for the concert stage, all written out and performable by classically trained musicians. Indeed, he has always described himself as "a composer who plays the piano," rather than the opposite, and it is probably no exaggeration to assert that his compositional study with Darius Milhaud during 1946-47 was the pivotal experience that—even more than his many triumphs and successes as a jazz musician—has shaped his career. Milhaud encouraged Dave to become a professional musician, something that, astonishingly, Dave had doubted until Milhaud's encouragement; to *dare*; and to compose using the jazz idiom, as Milhaud himself had done in 1923 with his groundbreaking *La création du monde*.

The present *Chorale* (you'll find it in this issue beginning on page 24) is the second movement of Brubeck's large-scale piano solo, *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata*. At 32 minutes, it is the longest of his piano pieces and the one with the most explicit references to J.S. Bach. To fully appreciate Brubeck's ingenuity and the piece's compositional sophistication, it helps to know the other movements. Three themes appear throughout the work's four movements, unifying the cycle motivically: (1) a descending chromatic line, seen in the *Chorale* in bars 1-5 of the bass voice; (2) a twelve-tone theme, heard in the top line of bars 11-14; and (3) another twelve-tone theme, this one expanding out symetrically, embodied in the tenor line of bars 26 through the first beat of bar 31. (These three themes come together in the *Fugue*, the third movement of *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata*, creating, in essence, a fugue with three subjects.)



Despite these dodecaphonic aspects, the work comes across as freely tonal with C major as the clearly perceived tonic. Two melodies unique to the movement—one fairly diatonic (the soprano line of bars 1-10), the other more chromatic (48-55)—are firmly rooted in C.

Despite these dodecaphonic aspects, the work comes across as freely tonal with C major as the clearly perceived tonic. Two melodies unique to the movement—one fairly diatonic (the soprano line of bars 1-10), the other more chromatic (48-55)—are firmly rooted in C.

There are traditional instances of *functionality*, as in the dominant-tonic relationship in bar 6 (C7 to F minor) or the half cadence of bar 55. There are also plenty of standard jazz chords, like the juicy D major nine chord on the downbeat of bar 17.

There are also examples of Milhaudian (and Brubeckian!) bitonality—as in bar 18 where the right hand plays an E7 chord while the left hand arpeggiates triads on B-flat, G, E, and D-flat.

But all this analysis may obscure the movement's central appeal—its heartfelt lyricism (as in bars 1-10), reminding me of the ingenuous songfulness of Edward MacDowell—and romantic textures straight out of Chopin or Rachmaninoff (as in bars 11-22). Hence a refined sense of *cantabile* and *legato* is indispensable to a good performance. Those unfamiliar with this *classical*

side of Brubeck may be surprised to learn that no swinging or particular affinity with jazz styles is needed here. It is worth recalling that Dave's mother, Elizabeth Ivey Brubeck, was a classically-trained pianist who had studied with both Myra Hess and Tobias Matthay. As a boy, Dave heard his mother give numerous piano lessons on the music of Bach, Chopin, and MacDowell—sounds that predated Dave's later acquaintance with the jazz idioms of Duke Ellington, Fats Waller, and Teddy Wilson.

Above all, *Chorale* stirs deep emotions. I always get a lump in my throat at the music of bars 48-55. The gradually rising melody and the plangent double appoggiatura at 55 seem to express an intense but slightly repressed longing. The pianistic trick here is to maintain a very soft, very legato left hand, even sustaining the chord tones (if a tenth can be reached), while the right hand floats on top; yes, *bring out the melody* of the right hand, as Brubeck advises, but be gentle and placid about it in bars 48-51, allowing the crescendo only from 52 to 55.

Another magical moment occurs at 72, when the symmetrically expanding twelve-tone theme occurs in sixths in the right hand while the left hand descends chromatically. It begins *pianissimo* on a diminished seventh chord, in mystery and doubt (isn't that what a diminished seventh chord connotes, from Bach through Weber?), accumulating tension through increasing dissonance and a rising melodic line. An internal cataclysm has occurred. A spiritual challenge has emerged which culminates in measure 76, three-quarters of the way through the piece, in the proclamation of another of the twelve-tone themes (the one from 11-14). The four voices sing in unified rhythm. For those who know Dave's many choral works, most with an explicitly religious text, it is hard not to imagine some climactic biblical verse sung here, Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass, all voices full throttle.

Catharsis (or, at least, diversion) arrives in bar 80 with a heavenly patch of E major, but it isn't *home* yet. An amazing deceptive cadence at bars 83-84—a B7 chord resolving to C major—brings us to the denouement we craved: tonic C major. By applying the sostenuto pedal after the downbeat of bar 83, and avoiding the damper pedal (but use your left foot for the soft pedal!), we can clearly hear all four voices of the B7 chord at the end of the measure. The resolution to C major is as dramatic as it is comforting.

It would be appropriate to excerpt this *Chorale* from *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata* for performance on recitals. What about preceding it with J.S. Bach's short, happy Prelude in C Major (BWV 924)? Only an advanced pianist should tackle the entire, four-movement *Chromatic Fantasy Sonata,* which quotes and could effectively be preceded by Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy and Fugue* in D Minor (BWV 903). The *Chorale*, on the other hand, is accessible to an intermediate student. ■

Pianist John Salmon, a longtime performer and colleague of Dave Brubeck, is the co-editor of Seriously Brubeck, *a recent collection published by Warner Bros. Publications. He is on the faculty of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and is active as both a classical and jazz recitalist. His CD,* John Salmon Plays Brubeck Piano Compositions *(Phoenix PHCD 130), called "brilliant" by the magazine* Piano & Keyboard, *includes some of the works printed in this collection.*