The Seventh Voyage

J. Simon van der Walt

for piano and laptop

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Composer's note

The title of this piece is taken from Stanisław Lem's 1971 science fiction comedy classic 'The Star Diaries'. In 'The Seventh Voyage' the hero of the stories, hapless cosmonaut Ijon Tichy, finds his rocket trapped in a loop of time. His attempts to repair the ship's rudder are continually frustrated by the appearance of younger and older copies of himself:

> "Just a minute," I replied, remaining on the floor. "Today is Tuesday. Now if you are the Wednesday me, and if by that time on Wednesday the rudder still hasn't been fixed, then it follows that something will prevent us from fixing it, since otherwise you, on Wednesday, would not now, on Tuesday, be asking me to help you fix it. Wouldn't it be best, then, for us not to risk going outside?"
>
> "Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Look, I'm the Wednesday me and you're the Tuesday me, and as for the rocket, well, my guess is that its existence is patched, which means that in places it's Tuesday, in places Wednesday, and here and there perhaps there's even a bit of Thursday. Time has simply become shuffled up in passing through these vortices, but why should that concern us, when together we are two and therefore have a chance to fix the rudder?!"
>
> from Stanisław Lem 'The Star Diaries' – Chapter 1 'The Seventh Voyage'

The Seventh Voyage for piano and laptop was developed in collaboration with and is dedicated to pianist Silviya Mihaylova.

Performer's note by Silviya Mihaylova

The Seventh Voyage by J. Simon van der Walt is a theatrical piece for pianist, two grand pianos and a laptop. Every element of the story on which the piece is based can be found on the stage: There is *The Tuesday Me* (the pianist performing on grand piano 1), *The Wednesday Me* (the pianist performing on grand piano 2) and *The Space Rocket* (the laptop). The hero, Ijon Tichy, found himself in a broken space rocket, which is trapped in a time loop. He tries to fix it, without success. Representing this, the music on the first grand piano is always connected to the laptop, repeating the same musical idea, with almost minimalistic sound, fighting with the sounds of the laptop, trying constantly to 'fix it'. The sound coming from the second grand piano is completely different – acoustic, pure, lyrical and always in contrast with piano one, but still holding the same musical ideas.

And if this doesn't sound special enough the sounds of the laptop are live generated, which means that the laptop 'improvises', performing along the pianist, making each and every performance unique.

Performance directions

Section Z

Pd patch is ready in 'Nofx' state. Come onstage and hit spacebar to trigger:

Section A

Patch goes into 'Crazy' state. Play A3 on piano 1: Anticrescendo with each phrase repeated three times. Patch will start to go 'crazy' after about 5 seconds of piano, and continues like this throughout this section.

At the end of A3, walk to piano 2. On the way, hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section B

Patch goes into 'Nofx' state. On piano 2, play Chords, arpeggiated either upwards or downwards ad lib.

At the end of this section, walk to piano 1. On the way hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section C

Patch goes into 'Echoes' state. On piano 1, play Chords straight, not arpeggiated, leaving space for each echo effect to come to an end.

After playing through the Chords, go straight on into A2, still on piano 1: Anticrescendo with each phrase repeated twice. The patch is still in the 'Echoes' state: somewhat unpredictable here how the patch will respond.

Somewhere towards the end of A2, walk to piano 2. On the way, hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section D

Patch goes into 'Nofx' state. On piano 2, carry on playing the rest of A2 from where you left off.

At the end of A2, walk to piano 1. On the way hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section E

Patch remains in 'Nofx' state, but is recording. On piano 1, play Makams.

At the end of Makams, walk to piano 2. On the way, hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section F

Patch goes into the 'Slicer' state, and plays a 'gesture' based on the Makams just recorded. Allow this to play for a minute or so, before joining in with an improvisation on piano 2.

At some point the 'Slicer' will suddenly switch to high, rapid material. At this point, walk back to piano 1. On the way, hit the spacebar to trigger:

Section G

Patch remains in 'Slicer' state for a period, then goes into 'Nofx' state till the end of the piece. On piano 1, play A1: Anticrescendo with each phrase repeated just once. The first part of this will have 'Slicer' material over it, at some point however, the patch will fall silent, allowing A1 to finish purely acoustically.

Walk to laptop and close lid: finis.

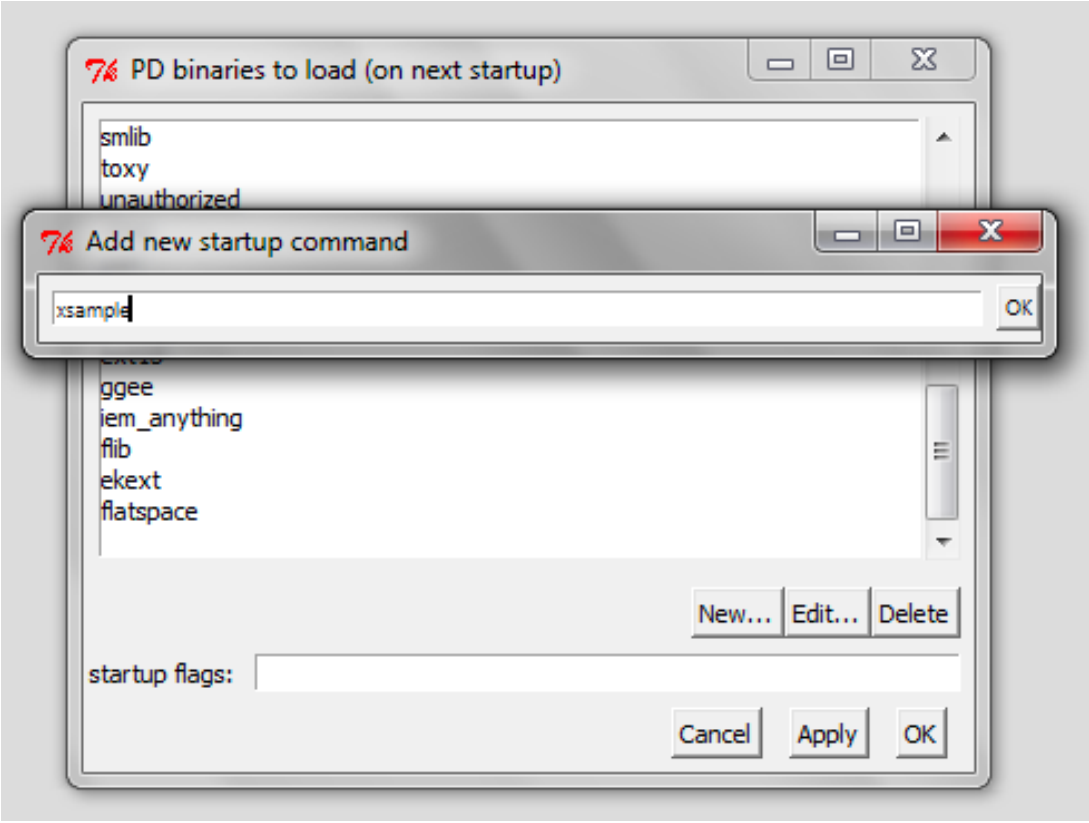
Technical notes

The Seventh Voyage incorporates a PureData (Pd) patch, which is used to modify the sound of one of the pianos. The following equipment will be required:

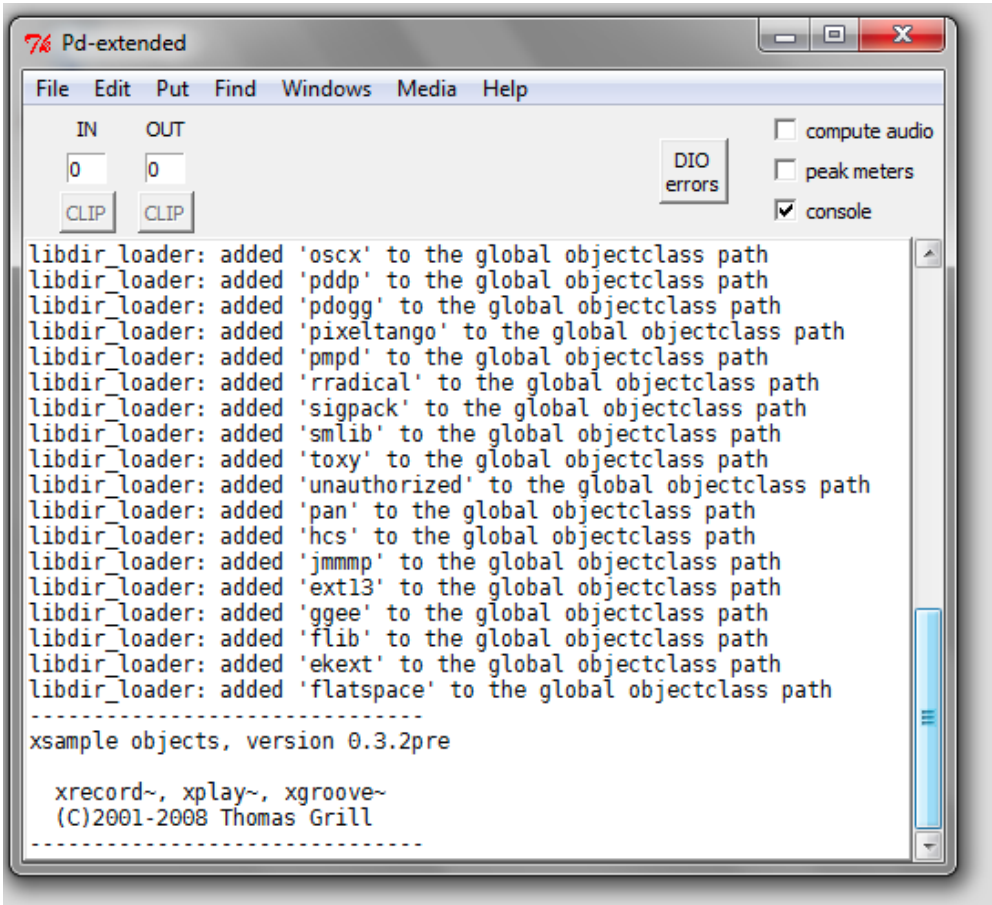
- Two mics and stands
- A low-latency audio interface with at least two mic inputs
- A computer running Pd
- An amplification system

The Pd patch was authored in Pd 0.42.5-extended on a MacBook Pro under Snow Leopard. It has also been tested under Windows 7. However, there is a dependency on Thomas Grill's xsample library, which is not part of Pd-extended. For running on the Mac, a hacked version of Pd is available from the composer, which includes the necessary xsample binaries. For running under Windows, follow these instructions:

- Download and install Pd-extended http://puredata.info
- Be sure to get the right version: Pd-0.42.5-extended-windowsxp-i386.exe
- Download the xsample library http://grrrr.org/ext/beta/windows/pd/xsample.dll
- Move the file xsample.dll into the folder C:Program Files\pd\extra
- Launch Pd extended
- Go to File… Startup…
- Hit the New… button and type in the the startup command 'xsample' (without quotes)



- Hit OK and Apply
- Restart Pd, and verify that the xsample libraries are loading:



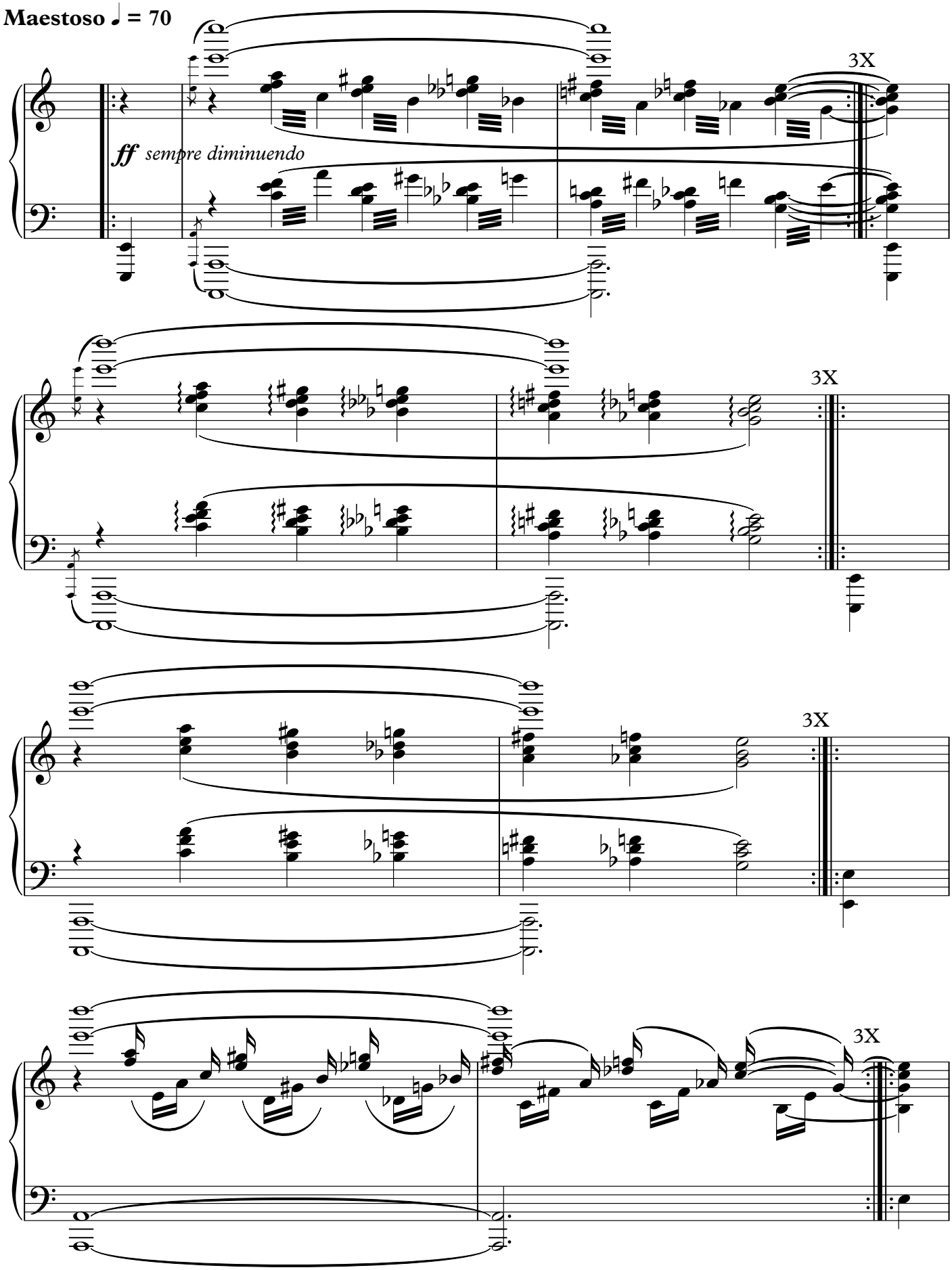
- Use the ‘Media’ menu to configure Pd to talk to the audio interface using a low latency driver, eg ASIO - for more instructions, try http://en.flossmanuals.net/pure-data/ch010_configuring/
- Use the ‘Test Audio and MIDI’ item under ‘Media’ to confirm that sound is coming from the mics and going to the speakers
- Now launch the patch ‘voyage.pd’ and verify that it is working correctly

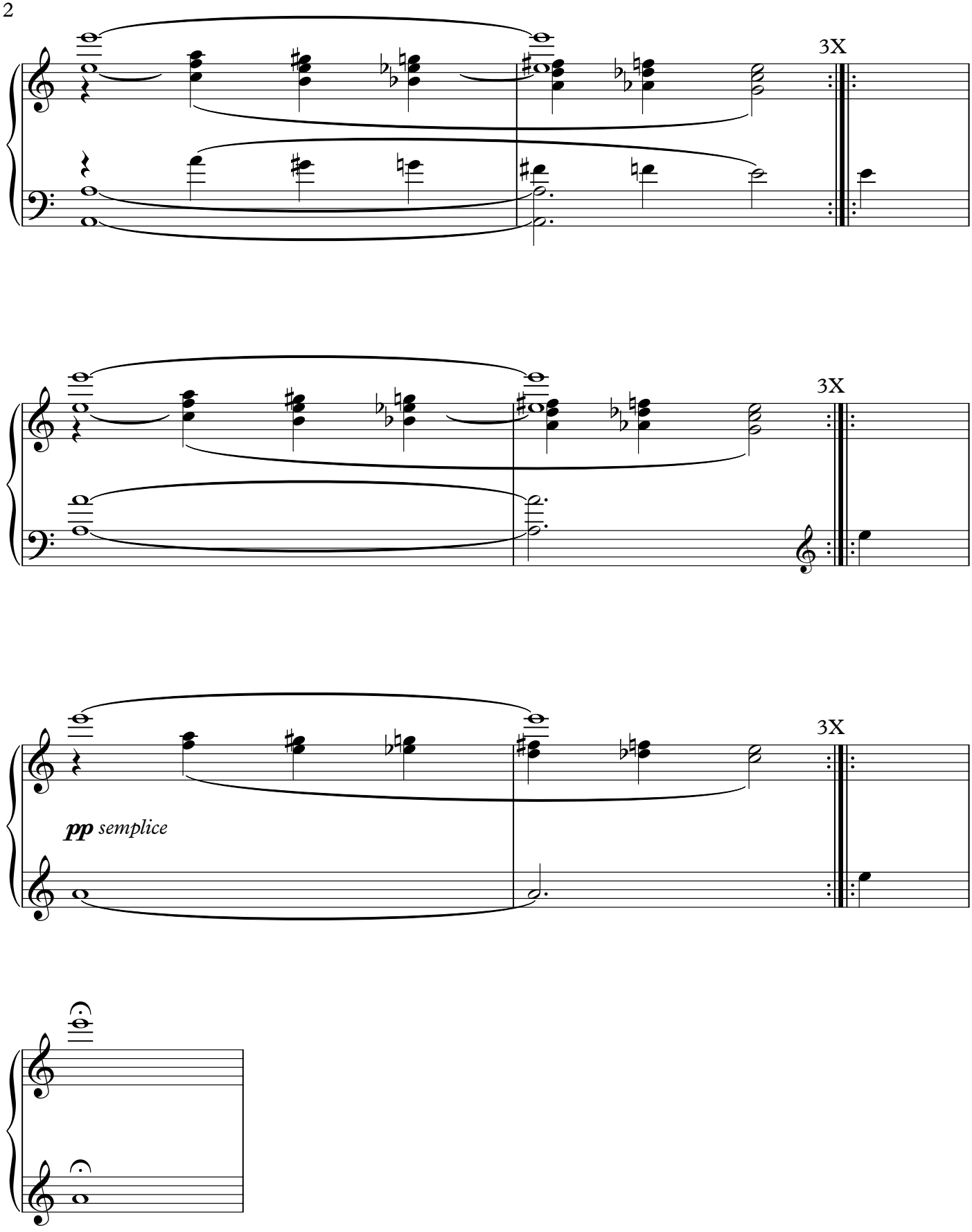
The levels on the mics should be set as follows:

- Set the patch to ‘Section C - Echoes’
- Make sure that playing a quiet chord triggers a series of echoes (but that spurious echoes are not being triggered by background noise)
- Set the patch to ‘Section E - Nofx’
- Make sure that the ‘recording_slice’ indicator is lighting up while the ‘makams’ section is being played by the pianist

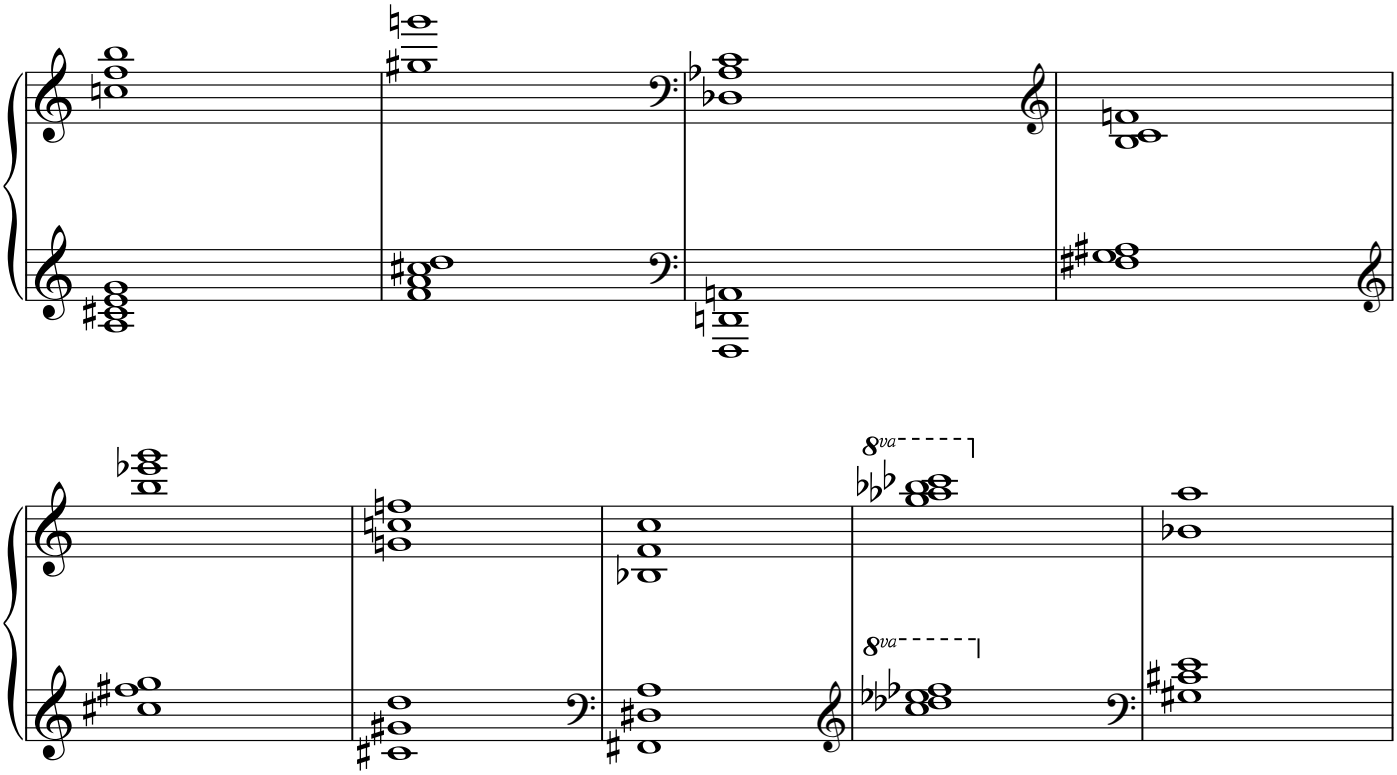
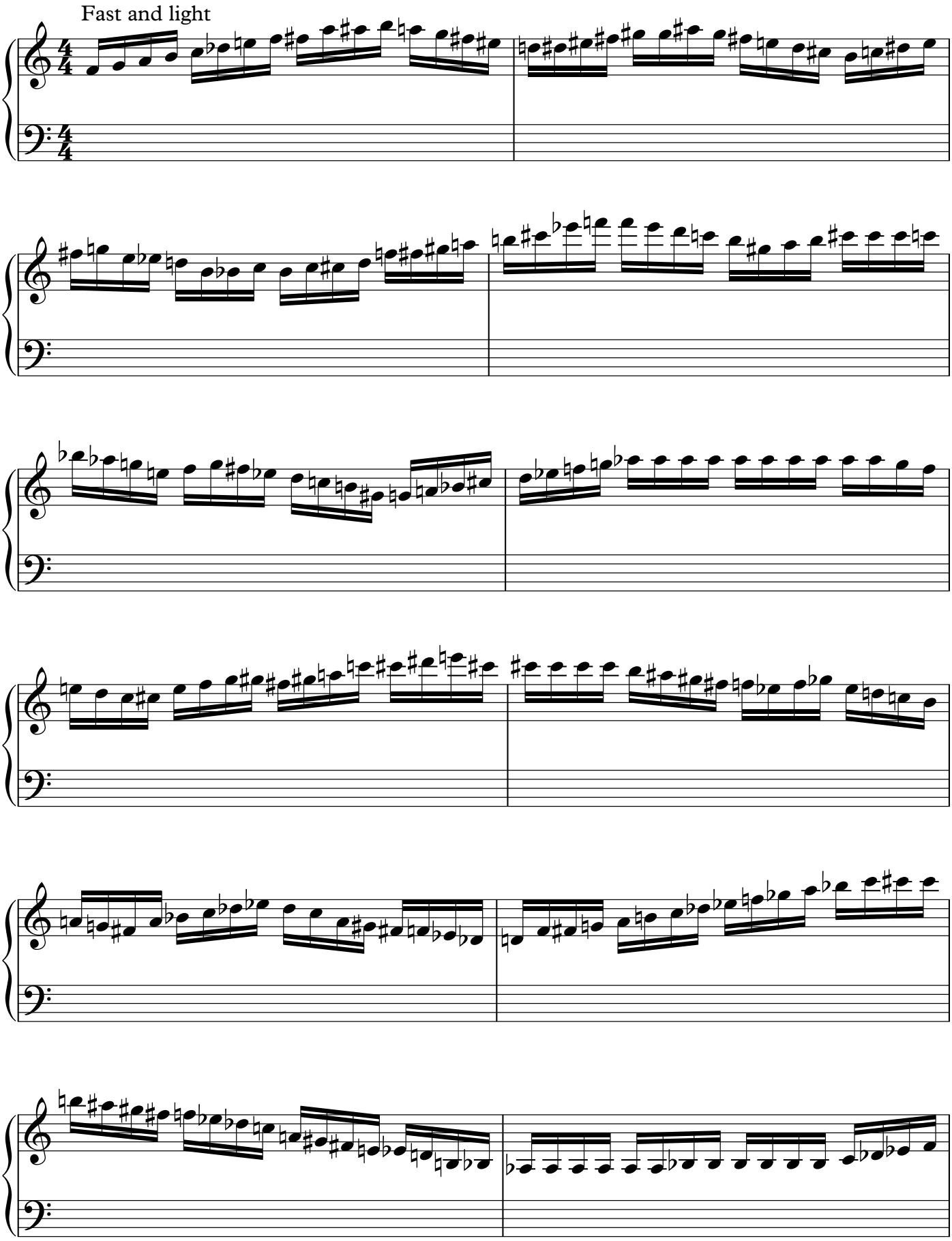
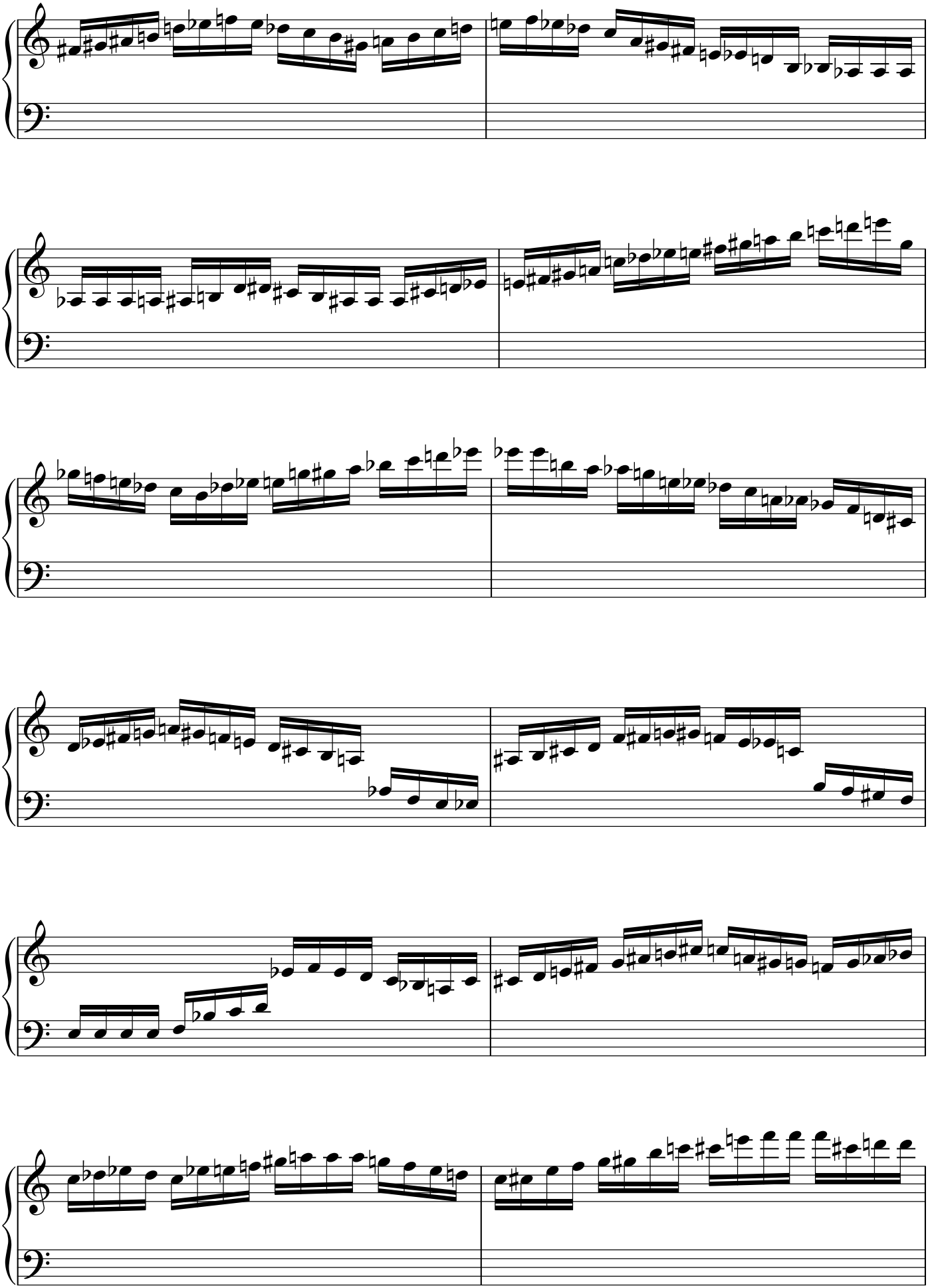
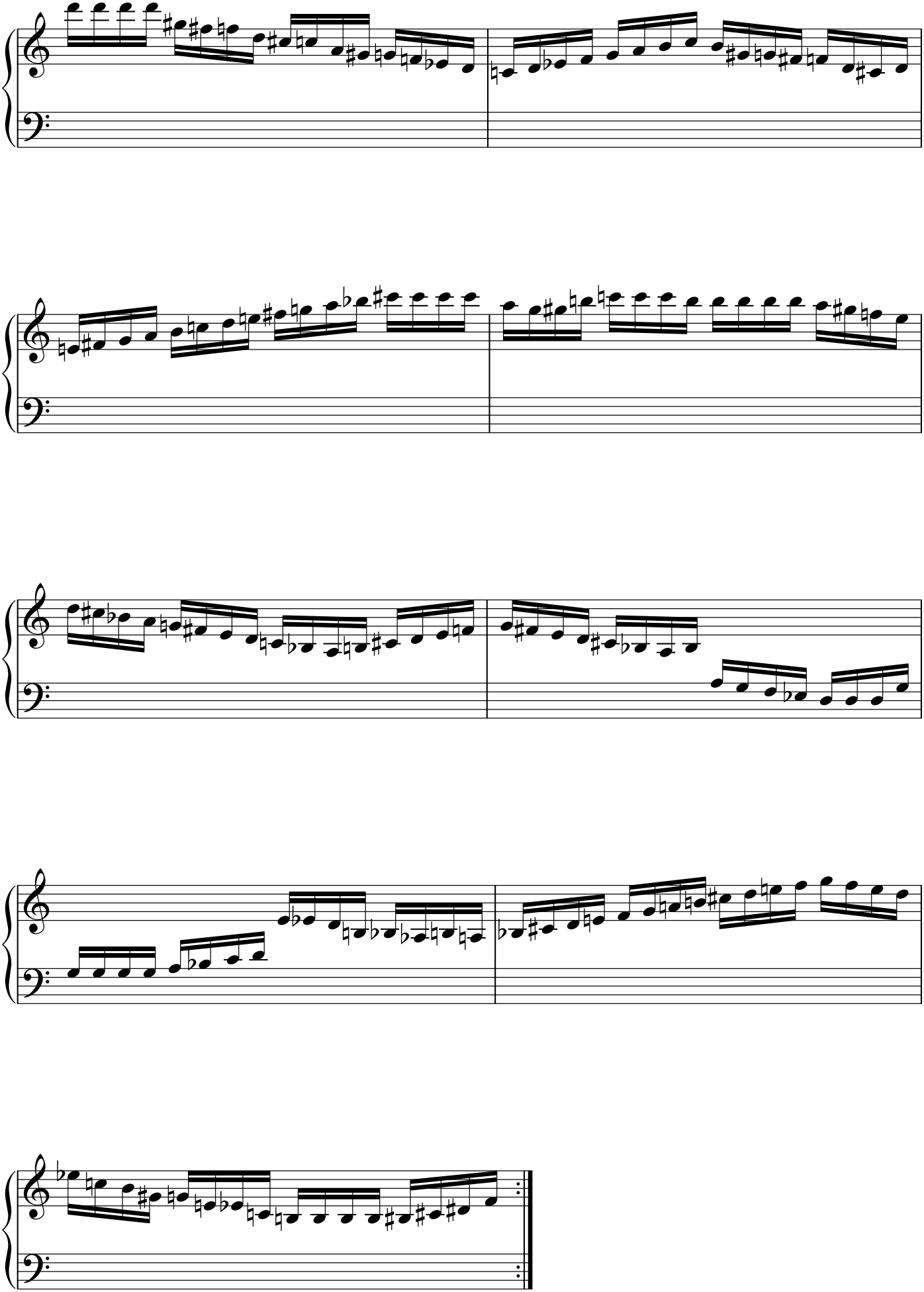
(The patch itself has a coarse input setting which can be accessed using the [and] keys: however, the levels should preferably be set using the gain controls on the audio interface.)

Anticrescendo in Am




3X
3X
3X
pp semplice

chords



Makams draft 01