

Pacific Suite

A Work in Four Movements for Solo Piano

by

Holly Rose Kordahl

A Research Paper Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts

Approved April 2020 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Baruch Meir, Chair  
Gabriel Bolaños  
Andrew Campbell  
Robert Hamilton  
Russell Ryan

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2020

## ABSTRACT

*Pacific Suite* (2016) is a four-movement work for solo piano composed by the author of this paper, Holly Kordahl, that incorporates elements of several musical idioms, including Impressionism, tintinnabuli (as in the music of Arvo Pärt), post-modernism, minimalism and improvisation. This Doctorate of Musical Arts project consists of a descriptive paper, analysis, score and recording. The piece features varying levels of performer independence and improvisation along with notated music. Each movement is named after a different environment of the Pacific Ocean: *Great Barrier Reef*, *Mariana Trench*, *Sunlit Zone*, and *Bikini Atoll*.

*Pacific Suite* is engaging to mature pianists and accessible to students. The score of *Pacific Suite* is a blank canvas in some ways; almost all dynamics, tempi, pedaling, and fingerings are to be determined by the performer. The first movement, *Great Barrier Reef*, presents different musical vignettes. The second movement, *Mariana Trench*, requires the performer to improvise extensively while following provided instructions. The third movement, *Sunlit Zone*, asks the performer to improvise on a theme of Debussy. The final movement, *Bikini Atoll*, illustrates events of nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll in the 1940s.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my husband and children for their encouragement and inspiration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank my advisor, Baruch Meir, committee members Gabriel Bolaños, Andrew Campbell, Robert Hamilton, Russell Ryan, former committee member James DeMars, and Lim Tchoi for their assistance with this project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	v
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vi
INTRODUCTION.....	1
BACKGROUND.....	3
OVERALL STRUCTURE.....	4
Great Barrier Reef .....	4
Mariana Trench.....	7
Sunlit Zone.....	9
Bikini Atoll .....	11
QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION.....	15
General .....	15
Performer Autonomy.....	15
Improvisation .....	15
Notation .....	15
Tempo .....	18
Dynamics .....	19
Pianism .....	19
SUMMARY .....	20
REFERENCES .....	21
APPENDIX	
A ANALYSIS .....	22
B SCORE .....	29

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Great Barrier Reef Analysis .....	23
2. Mariana Trench Analysis .....	25
3. Sunlit Zone Analysis .....	26
4. Bikini Atoll Analysis .....	27

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , transition .....	5
2. Debussy, <i>Reflets dans l'eau</i> .....	5
3. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , Ravel reference.....	6
4. Ravel, <i>Ondine</i> .....	6
5. <i>Mariana Trench</i> , opening .....	8
6. Pärt, <i>Für Alina</i> .....	8
7. Ravel, <i>Miroirs, Une barque sur l'océan</i> .....	10
8. Debussy, <i>Suite Bergamasque, Prelude</i> .....	11
9. <i>Sunlit Zone</i> , Debussy reference .....	11
10. <i>Bikini Atoll</i> , Messiaen reference .....	12
11. Messiaen, <i>Catalogue d'oiseaux, Le Chocard des Alpes</i> .....	12
12. Messiaen, <i>Catalogue d'oiseaux, Le Merle Bleu</i> .....	12
13. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , thick black line .....	16
14. <i>Mariana Trench</i> , thin wavy line .....	16
15. <i>Mariana Trench</i> , thick wavy line .....	16
16. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , <i>sostenuto</i> .....	17
17. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , resting voice .....	17
18. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , stemless notes, no barlines .....	17
19. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , stem direction .....	18
20. <i>Great Barrier Reef</i> , barlines indicating phrases .....	18

## INTRODUCTION

*Pacific Suite* is a work in four movements for solo piano. Each movement is evocative of a different environment in the Pacific Ocean: *Great Barrier Reef*, *Mariana Trench*, *Sunlit Zone* and *Bikini Atoll*. As it is a piece about oceanic environments, the primary sound is similar to "water music" in Impressionist piano music, such as Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*, *Poisson d'or*, or Ravel's *Ondine*. The piece is somewhat unusual in that it requires the performer to improvise and to make artistic decisions. In *Pacific Suite*, the performer is encouraged to exercise a high level of autonomy and personal creativity.

Impressionism is present in the use of modes and pentatonicism, quartal and quintal harmonies, scintillating textures and sparkling timbres, as well as the extra-musical association of the title of each movement. The piece employs minimalism in the use of ostinati, long-held pedal points, and relatively few harmonic changes. The performer is required to improvise following written rules and ambiguous notation. In the second movement, the performer improvises in a style similar to Arvo Pärt's tintinnabuli style. The suite is better described in terms of repeated characteristic gestures and tone painting than harmonic progressions through key areas.

Historically, classically-trained keyboardists were expected to wield a certain level of skill in extemporaneous playing. Keyboard playing has a long tradition of improvisation, including improvising from figured bass, simple embellishments for ornamentation, florid elaboration of repeated passages and improvised concerto cadenzas. Performers were expected to be able to create an entire piece without prior preparation. Composer-pianists are known to have participated in improvisation competitions.<sup>1</sup> The ability to improvise has gone through periods of being more and less valued over time.

Typically, formally-trained young musicians are discouraged from experimentation in their studies. Some may be expected to recreate the teacher's performance, or to maintain strict fealty to the score. Therefore, many classically-trained pianists may be apprehensive about making perceived errors in interpretation and enduring criticism.

---

<sup>1</sup> (Brittanica 2012)



Performers who feel stymied at times when playing traditional pieces, who desire more artistic freedom and control, may welcome a piece that depends on the performer to exercise a high and unusual amount of creativity to succeed. *Pacific Suite* has places for the performer to improvise in different ways and in many cases there is no “correct” answer. A variety of opportunities provides many possibilities for pianists, whatever their comfort level with improvisation may be.

The composer’s intention is not for skillful, strict executions, but rather for *Pacific Suite* to be performed with a unique personal creativity. The challenge in the piece is more musical than technical. With the exception of a few markings, most musical decisions are left to the performer. The high degree of improvisation and performer autonomy ensures that many valid versions of the work are possible. The piece typically lasts approximately sixteen minutes when performed by the composer, but a high degree of variability between performances is expected due to the amount of improvisation and diversity in chosen tempi.

## BACKGROUND

I began the compositional process by considering different oceanic environments and how I wanted to express those environments in contrasting musical ways. The first movement, *The Great Barrier Reef*, would be very active, with an element of traveling through vignettes along with a grand hymn. The second movement, *Mariana Trench*, was originally conceived for prepared piano to showcase the strange creatures living in the midnight zone of the ocean, with an element meant to convey heavy pressure. Ultimately, I decided to depict a peaceful, still place, suitable for meditation, with an element of new birth and growth. The *Sunlit Zone* refers to the sun-illuminated upper level of ocean water where the majority of the sea animals live. I intended it to have splashing and sparkling gestures and to be the most similar to Impressionistic water music of all the movements. *Bikini Atoll*, the fourth movement, tells a story about nuclear testing and its destructive effects, and therefore has a violent and episodic character.

After deciding the environments each movement would depict, I then made a rough map of each movement using a symbolic shorthand showing how active or still the music would be, employing gestures, registration and other large scale details to plan the “big picture” of the movements. I made a list of different musical gestures that I wanted to include. I’ve always enjoyed birdsong, high and low bell sounds, chant, explosive bass notes, counterpoint, rapid arpeggiations, and ostinati, so I knew I wanted to include those elements. Several sessions of improvisation to discover themes, harmonies, and ostinati followed.

After the building blocks of the piece were in place, I made a sketch of each movement with themes, ostinati, pedal points, harmonies, and transitions, in order, according to my original map. All of the movements were worked on simultaneously, with a conscious effort to create unifying factors that spanned all movements.

## OVERALL STRUCTURE

I originally conceived of this work as a dance suite. A Baroque dance suite can be thought of as a collection of international dances showcasing the flavors of different locales, dances that contrast and intrigue the listener yet follow a certain structural schema.<sup>2</sup> The movements of *Pacific Suite* each bring to the imagination a different environment in the Pacific Ocean, and though those environments do not have characteristic dances, each movement has its own personality and a recognizable form. *Great Barrier Reef* is a five-part rondo, *Mariana Trench* is a binary form with coda, *Sunlit Zone* is also a binary form with coda, and *Bikini Atoll* has a palindrome form (Intro, ABCBA, Coda). There are many thematic similarities between the first and fourth movement to bring unity to the suite. Additionally, there is a prominent leap-step gesture that permeates all the movements. Certain pedal points, harmonies and ostinati reappear in different contexts as well.

### *Great Barrier Reef*

The inspiration for the first movement is the world's largest coral reef, the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia.<sup>3</sup> The reef is home to thousands of species of coral, sea animals and birds.<sup>4</sup> The form is a five-part rondo. The recurring A theme is intended to function like the "Promenade" in Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*; it transitions the listener from one vignette to the next. The first three notes of the A theme recur many times throughout the movement and make up the leap-step gesture that is a fundamental building block of the work. The rapid ostinato gives it forward propulsion. One might visualize the tune, full of little grace notes and changes of direction, as a small fish flitting about from one miniature drama to another.

The A theme appears in different registers and different modes. Although the right-hand accompaniment and the notes of the melody rarely change, the bass pedal tone alters the mode between appearances. The first time the A theme occurs it is in F# Dorian. It appears in a somewhat deconstructed form, with birdsong-like grace notes interrupting the tune.

---

<sup>2</sup> (Gordon 1996)

<sup>3</sup> (Reef Facts 2018)

<sup>4</sup> (Reef Facts 2018)

Accompaniment in the high register gives it a sparkling character. The second time the A theme appears it is in the middle register with a B pedal, changing the mode to B Mixolydian. The third and final time the A theme appears in this movement it has moved down to the low register and appears with the F# pedal again, this time with an arrival in F# Ionian or F# major.

There are two contrasting, vignette-like sections in the movement: one a sort of comical scene reminiscent of reef life rolling about with the movement of the water and the second a hymn-like contemplation on how extraordinary the reef is and the abundance of life in it with a dash of melancholy because of the uncertainty of its future.

After a transition from the A theme at Rehearsal A, the B theme appears in B Lydian. The character is charming, flexible and lilting. The theme is irregular and the performer should consider the indicated phrasing, pushing the tempo towards the middle of the phrase to give it a rolling sound. The chords in the alto voice and the grace notes in the accompaniment should be treated delicately. Between iterations of the theme appear wave-like arpeggiations, as in Fig. 1, similar to ones that appear in Debussy's *Reflets dans L'eau*, as in Fig. 2.



Fig. 1 *Great Barrier Reef* transition



Fig. 2 Debussy, *Reflets dans l'eau*, m. 24<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> (Debussy, Images: Reflets dans l'eau 1905)

The performer is advised to follow staff direction to play the gestures hand-over-hand, but must be careful to make sure it sounds like one complete gesture. The leap-step gesture from the A theme and the upcoming chorale also appear transposed, in retrograde and in retrograde-inversion. The final gesture in this theme area, pictured in Fig. 3, is a reference to Ravel's *Ondine*, shown in Fig. 4.



Fig. 3 *Great Barrier Reef*, Ravel reference

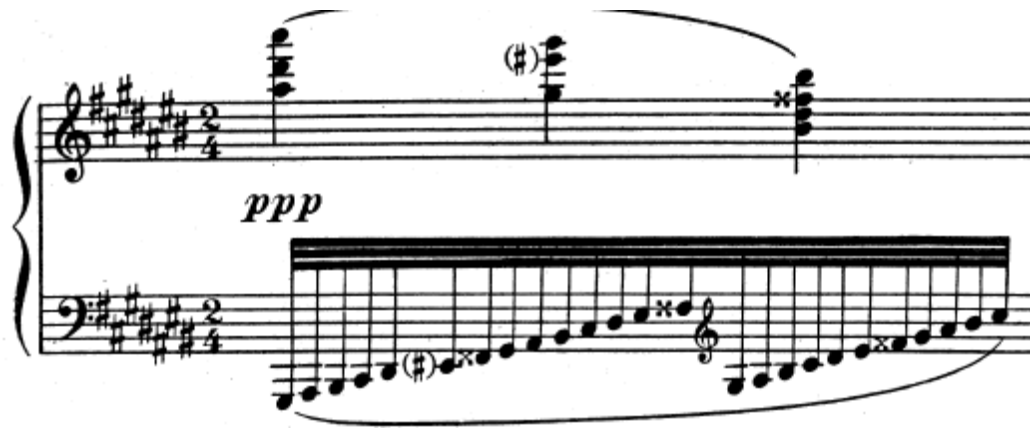


Fig. 4 Ravel, *Ondine*, m. 23<sup>6</sup>

The A theme then appears in B Mixolydian at Rehearsal B. As part of a registral downward evolution, it is in the middle register. The character is more transitional and the tune is, once again, interrupted by a combination of “bird chirps” and bass motion. The performer should

<sup>6</sup> (Ravel, *Gaspard de la nuit*: *Ondine* 1909)

follow the pedal markings in the transition to the chorale. This transition uses augmentation to slow the tempo.

Though the quarter notes of the chorale-like C section move more quickly than the rest of the movement, the overall motion feels slower because the smallest note value is now a quarter note. The leap-step opening motive of the chorale appears as commentary in the first vignette and resembles the opening gesture of the A theme. Phrasing of weak and strong beats is indicated by barlines. The leap-step commentary appears here too, as well as a small amount of counterpoint. Two fermatas appear; how to proportion them is up to the performer and dependent on the way sound resonates in the performance space.

The movement is concluded with a third iteration of the A theme, this time in a low register and in a joyous F# Ionian or F# major. Birdsong-like commentary also appears in this section using the leap-step motive. The performer must catch the boxed notes at rehearsal D in the *sostenuto* pedal, then in the final bar lift the damper pedal to reveal the *sostenuto* notes. The grace note tied to an octave leap should be explosive. I recommend that the performer use finger 1 on the lower note because the action of flipping the hand to put the thumb on the key combined with the anatomy of the thumb makes an impressive accent.

#### *Mariana Trench*

The Mariana Trench is the lowest point on Earth, a massive subduction zone in the Pacific Ocean where one tectonic plate slides underneath another, churning material out from the Earth's core and assisting in the creation of new continents.<sup>7</sup> The tone of the movement is evocative of the dark, peaceful abyss of the deep ocean.

Through the movement, the performer improvises based on provided instructions in B pentatonic. A performer who is not comfortable with improvisation can succeed in this movement because the rules are very simple, yet produce a musically satisfying result. The guidelines for this movement were inspired by the philosophy of Estonian composer, Arvo Pärt. Naming his style *tintinnabuli* after the ringing of bells, Pärt's music uses primarily notes from the major triad

---

<sup>7</sup> (Chadwick and Fryer n.d.)

with judicious use of dissonance. Combined with the use of silence and slow tempi, the ascetic openness hypnotizes the listener and creates a sense of mystery and spirituality.<sup>8</sup>

As in Arvo Pärt's *Für Alina*, shown in Fig. 5, the right-hand plays a simple melody using given pitches while the left-hand chimes chord tones underneath, shown in Fig. 6. These instructions describe using leap-step and step-leap gestures that are common throughout the suite and are designed to create unity through the movements.

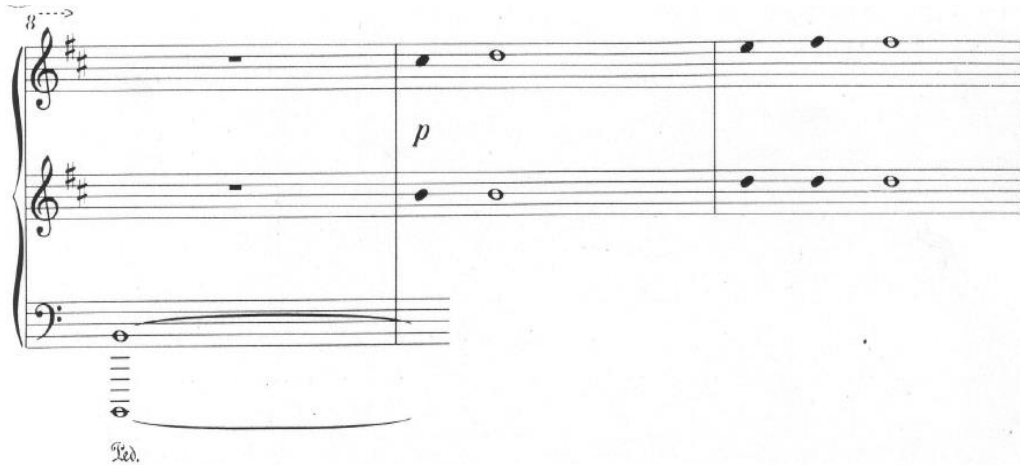


Fig. 5 Pärt, *Für Alina*, mm. 1-3<sup>9</sup>

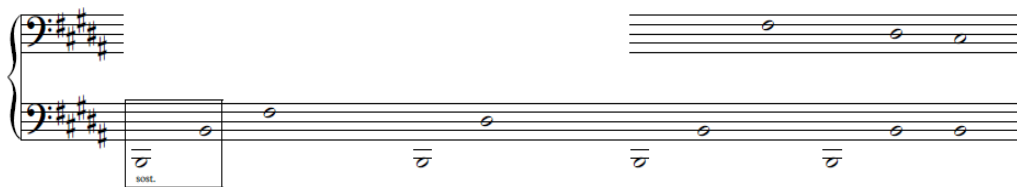


Fig. 6 *Mariana Trench*, opening

The movement, like *Für Alina*, begins with a solemn, bell-like gesture. Then the performer improvises using the suggested motives in a gently rising melodic line that lasts about one minute. The bell-like gesture recurs at Rehearsal A. This gesture resets the action, analogous to

<sup>8</sup> (Kuiper 2019)

<sup>9</sup> (Pärt 1990)

the function of the large gong in gamelan.<sup>10</sup> Another improvisatory section follows, this time with a broader range, increased tension and the option of decorating the line with “unapproved” tones. The performer could experiment with returning to the opening gesture multiple times, evolving the phrases and lengthening the piece.

The performer is responsible for guiding the transition at Rehearsal B, moving from the slower, relaxed motion of the previous section to the faster, more complex motion and lower range of the next section. Exactly how to accomplish this is up to the performer.

At Rehearsal C, the ascending scalar phrases are evocative of the rising plumes of undersea volcanoes. The left-hand ostinato provided is faster and has more disjunct motion than the beginning of the piece, providing contrast and heightened drama. The performer should follow the contour of the left hand but change pitches for interest. The coda should gradually return to the material and sound from the beginning. After the climax of the movement, the performer finishes the movement by gradually reducing the activity and returning to the energy and sound of the opening motive.

### *Sunlit Zone*

The third movement is inspired by the sparkle, waves and *joie de vivre* of the sunlit zone, the uppermost, brightest slice of ocean where the majority of ocean creatures live. Ninety percent of ocean life resides in the topmost six hundred feet of water.<sup>11</sup>

This movement is the most like stereotypical water music, especially by the Impressionist composers, with rippling broken chord motion, modal harmonies, and expectation of experimentation with tone color. In the second section, the right hand provides commentary to the Debussy quote. It should start out simply but gain in exuberance as the section progresses. The A theme of the movement is divided into an antecedent and consequent phrase, which is repeated in different transpositions.

The accompaniment is improvised by the performer using given pitches. The performer should split the accompaniment between the hands as needed, rapidly arpeggiating the material

---

<sup>10</sup> (Gamelan Music 2020)

<sup>11</sup> (Temperate Oceans: Light Zones 2002)



up and down the keys, and adding secondary motivic commentary as desired to increase complexity and interest. In general, the activity progresses in a downward trajectory. To maintain the registral evolution of the piece, the performer should arpeggiate higher, but not lower until indicated or in transition to a lower range.

The opening accompaniment should be of a relaxed pace and sets the initial tempo for the movement. At different times the accompaniment is marked *a tempo*, *2x tempo* and *4x tempo*. The theme remains the same tempo throughout the A section. The sound is evocative of *Une barque sur l'océan*, as in Fig. 7, or of the fluctuating arpeggiations of Debussy's *Reflets dans l'eau*.



Fig. 7 Ravel, *Miroirs*, *Une Barque sur l'Océan*, m. 1<sup>12</sup>

At Rehearsal D, it bursts into a familiar near-quotation from Debussy Prelude from *Suite Bergamasque* (Debussy shown in Fig. 8, Kordahl in Fig. 9). The RH improvises commentary and decoration. It could be interesting if a performer improvised more extensively on the Debussy, despite the length of the wavy line indicating that it should be a short riff. The performer is allowed many liberties. The section transitions into a coda peppered with black key glissandi, including a hand over hand ascending glissando at the very end. The ending could work equally well with different dynamic schemes and it may be of value for the performer to experiment.

---

<sup>12</sup> (Ravel, *Miroirs*: *Une barque sur l'océan* 1906)



Fig. 8 Debussy *Suite Bergamasque, Prelude*, mm. 1-2<sup>13</sup>

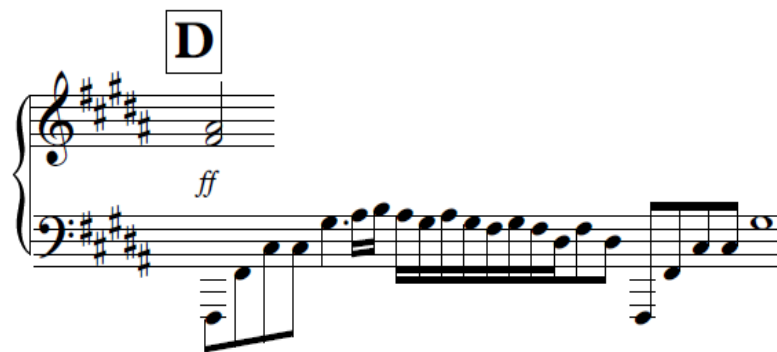


Fig. 9 *Sunlit Zone*, Debussy reference

#### *Bikini Atoll*

The fourth movement portrays the Baker nuclear weapons test at Bikini Atoll in 1946. The Baker test was an underwater atomic blast with several distinct stages.<sup>14</sup> This movement is the most explicitly referential and depicts different phases of the explosion. It also features many callbacks to earlier movements, particularly the first movement.

The movement begins with the tolling of bells in A Aeolian. The performer must finger pedal the pitches to ensure all of the boxed notes remain sustained through the gesture and are captured in the *sostenuto*. These bells continue until Rehearsal B, moving in a descending line

<sup>13</sup> (Debussy, *Suite Bergamasque: Prelude* 1905)

<sup>14</sup> (Gladstone and Dolan 1977)

that repeats akin to a passacaglia. Birdsong appears in the right hand, starting simply then erupting into a fast and complex gesture indicated by two wavy lines and the instruction, “scattered black and white keys,” ending in rapid repeated notes (Fig. 10). This should be similar to gestures in Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux* (Fig. 11 and Fig. 12).



Fig. 10 *Bikini Atoll*, Messiaen reference

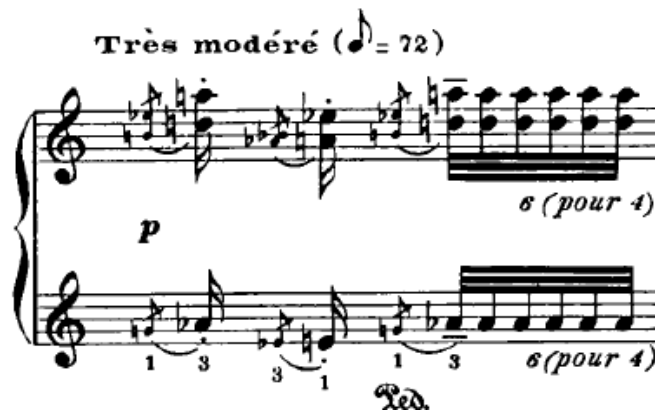


Fig. 11 Messiaen, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, *Le Chocard des Alpes*, m. 56<sup>15</sup>

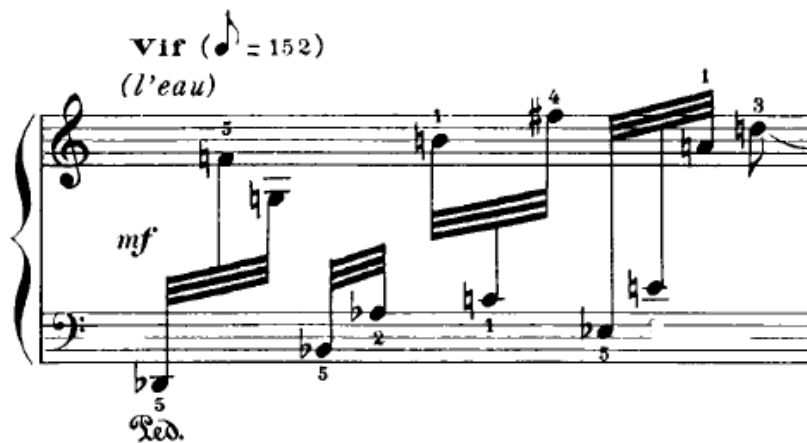


Fig. 12 Messiaen, *Catalogue d'oiseaux*. *Le Merle Bleu*, m. 11<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> (Messiaen 1964)

<sup>16</sup> (Messiaen 1964)

The bell accompaniment continues in the next section. A chant starts at Rehearsal A. Not representative of any specific type of chant, the chant is in two voices and features several instances of parallel fourth and fifths, and additionally intervals that would not be found in authentic chant, e.g. the minor seventh. Pauses in the phrasing are indicated by commas.

The first *sub. ffff* section at Rehearsal B represents the initial explosion, with a booming B pedal and cluster-like repeated chords. The following boiling accompaniment depicts the tension of the event and the hidden machinations occurring underwater. The figure is alternated between the hands and notes may be omitted from the right hand as needed. The accompaniment is in B minor with a flatted fifth while the tune that enters at Rehearsal C, an abbreviated return to the A theme from the first movement, is in unaltered B minor.

At Rehearsal D, the second *sub. ffff* section represents the reveal of the spray column after the evaporation of the initial condensation cloud.<sup>17</sup> In this second instance, the pedal that underpins the repeated clusters is F. The faster accompaniment reflects the increased activity and danger of the “base surge” that followed. The accompaniment is in E minor while the melody is in E Phrygian. This theme is the first vignette theme from the first movement recast into a different character. The rapid accompaniment should be played hand-over-hand with notes omitted or rhythm slightly altered as needed.

Following a return to the B pedal (captured in the *sostenuto*) and a long glissando, the truncated A theme from the first movement reappears in augmentation. This section, at Rehearsal F, features several glissandi. The ending of this section and transitioning to the next is a large tremolo on several Bs that spans the keyboard. The performer should quickly drift over the keyboard to play whichever B they can in the moment.

Over the tremolo, the chant appears transposed up a whole step and slightly altered. There are no breaths indicated in this returned section; it should continue with more forward motion. The final activity of the work recalls the coda from the first movement, transposed from F#

---

<sup>17</sup> (Schurcliff 1947)

major to B minor. Events occur in the same order as coda of the first movement: appearance of the fast first movement A theme accompaniment, parts of the A theme interrupted by other themes (in this case, a gesture that may have occurred in the second movement), a rising gesture and finally a reveal of the notes suspended by the *sostenuto* pedal.

## QUALITATIVE DISCUSSION

### General

This work is written for an artist with an innate understanding of Impressionistic music. It also has pedagogical value for students who are interested in Impressionistic music and in improvisation. It has a high expectation of individual expression and personalization. It is not an exercise in close study of the score. The performer has a rare opportunity to make almost all of the musical decisions and even to create much of their own music. A “where written, as written” attitude should be taken: the performer is free to invent dynamics, fingerings, pedaling, etc. but should not change what does appear on the score. The performer should not add or alter melodies, harmonies or accompaniments.

### Performer Autonomy

Autonomy is a key characteristic of this suite. Each movement requires the performer to make choices and to show their maturity and artistry. The degree of autonomy varies from movement to movement, with the most expected in the second movement. The expectation of the performer might be something as simple as the length of a note or as involved as improvisation following given rules. In the first and fourth movement, the performer has many ostinati to perform and has the power to decide how many repetitions to do, which determines the length of certain melodic resting points and therefore the length of the section.

### Improvisation

A successful improviser is mindful of the form they are creating, keeping in mind the desired pace from one structural element to the next. Much of this skill is in the strategic creation of tension and release. Melodically, it is important to remember what one has done so that it can be repeated. A majority of the second movement and much of the accompaniment of the third movement are improvised by the performer based on given instructions.

### Notation

The score uses a few unusual symbols to accommodate levels of improvisation and other techniques. Staves with a thick black lines (Fig. 13) indicate the performer should repeat the preceding ostinato gestures precisely.



Fig. 13 *Great Barrier Reef*, thick black line

The thin wavy line (Fig. 14) indicates that the performer should use the general contour or idea of the previous gesture but evolve the gesture with new notes and other changes.

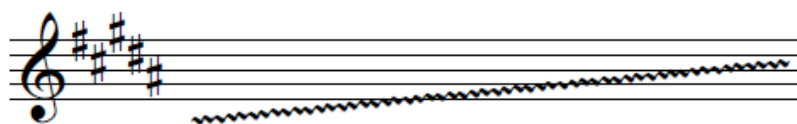


Fig. 14 *Mariana Trench*, thin wavy line

The thick wavy line (Fig. 15) means the performer freely creates music using whatever instructions given.

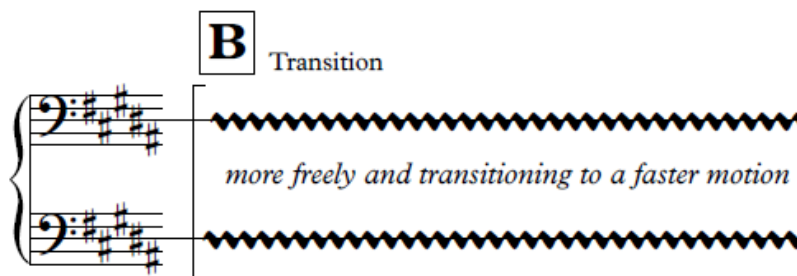


Fig. 15 *Mariana Trench*, thick wavy line

The suite uses the *sostenuto* pedal: notes to be captured in the *sostenuto* are enclosed in a box (Fig. 16A); the symbol to lift the *sostenuto* is the familiar pedal-lift asterisk (see Fig. 16B).



A. *joyfully*  
  
 B. 

Fig. 16 *Great Barrier Reef*, sostenuto

When a voice rests, generally that staff disappears until the voice returns, as in Fig. 17.



Fig. 17 *Great Barrier Reef*, resting voice

Sections with no stems and no barlines, as in Fig. 18, are meant to be played freely.

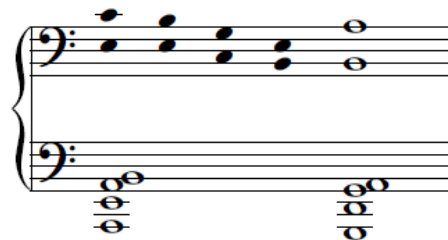


Fig. 18 *Bikini Atoll*, stemless notes, no barlines

Stem direction, in certain phrases, suggests which hand should play, as in Fig. 19. Experienced pianists should readily recognize when this is the intention.





Fig. 19 *Great Barrier Reef*, stem direction

Barlines, where present, may indicate phrasing, as in Fig. 20.



Fig. 20 *Great Barrier Reef*, barlines indicating phrasing

Most time signatures, rests and tuplet markings have been omitted for visual clarity.

### Tempo

The performer is expected to decide the tempo of each movement. There may be some guidance within the movement with regard to whether a section should be faster or slower but the performer sets the character and overall tempo. No specific tempi are indicated, although some instructions for relative speed appear. The performer can decide what they consider an effective tempo for their interpretation in each section. It is not necessary or appropriate for the tempo to remain constant in each movement. Rubato should be used where desired. Several sections are notated without stems or barlines that should sound very free and without meter.

## Dynamics

For the most part, there is very little prescription for dynamics indicated on the score. However, their absence does not mean that the performer should play without dynamics. A seasoned musician should have their own well-developed musical tastes and inclinations, and should be able to shape a piece through dynamics of their own choosing. I trust that the performer is an accomplished musician, capable of playing musically without needing overt guidance. The performer should make decisions based on the larger evolution of the piece while keeping in mind the minute details of musicianship. A diverse variety of musical decisions can be equally effective. I recognize and accept that another person may interpret sections completely differently from the way I originally conceived of them.

Likewise, damper pedal determinations are mostly left to the performer. Overall, the sound should be sustained with a plush but not unclear pedal. The *una corda* pedal is indicated in only one place but may be used anywhere the performer desires.

## Pianism

The piece has several piano techniques that appear multiple times throughout the movements: rapid ostinato, hand-over-hand arpeggios, hand-crossing, three-hand technique,<sup>18</sup> extended intervals and chords, glissandi, and rapidly improvised music.

The *sostenuto* pedal is used in two ways in this piece. A simple use is as a way to sustain a bass pedal pitch longer while being able to lighten the damper pedal. This technique is indicated in several places but could be used more frequently if the performer feels it would be effective.

Notes are sustained in the *sostenuto* to create extra resonance in the second and fourth movement. In the fourth movement, the opening notes must be finger-pedaled in order to sustain the sound without using the damper pedal, then, while holding all of the notes, depress the

---

<sup>18</sup> This technique, originated by Thalberg, features arpeggiated activity in both hands with a melody, usually played by the thumbs, creating an aural illusion of the performer having three hands.

*sostenuto*. The additional tones held over from the *sostenuto* add richness that is reminiscent of the pleasant cacophony of the sounds of multiple bells overlapping.

A more novel use of the *sostenuto* pedal occurs at the end of the first and fourth movements. A chord is captured in the *sostenuto*, and the music continues for the duration of the coda. Then, after the last activity of the coda, the damper pedal is released to reveal the tones held in the *sostenuto*.

### Summary

The expression of personal creativity of the performer is a defining feature of *Pacific Suite*. I believe that having more freedom in the musical decisions gives the performer a greater personal connection to the music. The performer is able to make their own decisions in many regards.

*Pacific Suite* is a vehicle for pianists to expand their creative expression and also their ability to improvise. Performers have an opportunity to exercise their improvisation skills, no matter their level of experience. They are encouraged to take risks, lean into mistakes, and express themselves confidently.

The piece is a collaboration between performer and composer. The composer must trust the performer to make good choices, and the performer must trust the composer that the blueprint of the score is enough to make satisfactory music. Pianists can enjoy playing the piece and being flexible, and feel confident that the composer condones their performance, no matter their decisions. In my own experience, the suite is a different experience every time I play it and my interpretation has changed as my life has changed. As time goes on, I continue to enjoy playing the piece and it challenges me in different ways.

*Pacific Suite* is a celebration of Impressionist piano music and contains numerous references to well-known pieces from the genre. It uses pentatonic and modal tonal languages as well as water-like gestures. Inspired by an awe for the Pacific Ocean and its ecology, the titles are descriptive and the music stirs the imagination.

## REFERENCES

- Brittanica, The Editors of Encyclopedia. "Improvisation." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. March 2, 2012. (accessed February 17, 2020).
- Chadwick, Bill, and Patty Fryer. "The Geology of the Mariana Convergent Plate Region." *Ocean Exploration and Research*. n.d.  
[www.oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/oceanos/explorations/ex1605/background/geology/welcome.html](http://www.oceanexplorer.noaa.gov/oceanos/explorations/ex1605/background/geology/welcome.html) (accessed February 22, 2020).
- Debussy, Claude. "Images: Reflets dans l'eau." Paris: A. Durand & Fils, 1905.  
—. "Suite Bergamasque: Prelude." Paris: Fromont, 1905.
- "Gamelan Music." *Schubert Club*. 2020. <https://schubert.org/museum/gamelan-music/> (accessed April 11, 2020).
- Gladstone, Samuel, and Philip Dolan. "Description of Underwater Bursts." In *The Effects of Nuclear Weapons*, by Samuel Gladstone, & Philip Dolan, 48-58. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977.
- Gordon, Stewart. *History of Keyboard Literature: Music for the Piano and its Forerunners*. Belmont, CA: Schirmer, 1996.
- Kuiper, Kathleen. "Arvo Part." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. September 7, 2019.  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Arvo-Part> (accessed April 20, 2020).
- Messiaen, Olivier. "Catalogue d'oiseaux." Paris: Alphonse Leduc Editions Musicales, 1964.
- Moore, Robin. "The Decline of Improvisation in Western Art Music: An Interpretation of Change." *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 23, no. 1 (1992): 61-84.
- Part, Arvo. "Fur Alina." Vienna: Universal Edition, 1990.
- Ravel, Maurice. "Gaspard de la nuit: Ondine." Paris: A. Durand & Fils, 1909.  
—. "Miroirs: Une barque sur l'ocean." Paris: E. Demets, reprint by Dover Publications, 1906.
- "Reef Facts." *Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority*. 2018. [www.gbrmpa.gov.au/the-reef/reef-facts](http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/the-reef/reef-facts) (accessed February 21, 2020).
- Schurcliff, William A. *Bombs at Bikini: The Official Report of Operation Crossroads*. New York: William H. Wise, 1947.
- "Temperate Oceans: Light Zones." *Missouri Botanical Garden*. 2002.  
[www.mbgnet.net/salt/oceans/zone.htm](http://www.mbgnet.net/salt/oceans/zone.htm) (accessed February 22, 2020).

APPENDIX A  
ANALYSIS

Table 1 Great Barrier Reef Analysis

Form: ABACA rondo						
Section	Rehearsal	Mode	Character	Description/features	Leap-Step gesture (up a fourth, up a second)	
A Theme		F# Dorian	Fractured, swirling, setting the scene, sparkling	Ostinato in thirty-second notes in a high register, primary melody in the LH featuring grace notes and the leap-step gesture, character gestures (bird chirping) and pedal points on F# interrupting the melody	Present in the primary melody and ostinato	
Transition to B theme		Modulating	Mysterious, descending	Ostinato descending into different sonorities into the treble register, modulating to B Lydian with small motives in the LH	Intervals condensed into a rising third and rising second in the left hand	
B theme	A	B Lydian	"Charmingly"	Ostinato in sixteenth notes in the LH middle register featuring grace notes, primary melody in the RH featuring repeated notes and stepwise motion, harmony notes in the RH under the melody, motivic interruptions	Present in the interrupting commentary	
Transition to B theme		Modulating	Undulating	Hand-over-hand arpeggio, dotted rhythm flourish, modulating to D# Aeolian	Not present	
B theme		D# Aeolian	"Somewhat faster and more agitated"	Ostinato in sixteenth notes in minor-sounding harmony, primary melody from B theme slightly altered from earlier appearance, motivic interruptions	Present in retrograde first, then retrograde inversion	
Transition to B theme		Modulating	Undulating, wave-like	Hand-over-hand arpeggios in sixteenth notes, melody in long notes	Present in the long melodic notes	
B theme		B Lydian	Charmingly	Recalling original B theme with added short	Present in the	

A theme	B	B Mixolydian	Mysterious, more grounded	transition using an ascending pentatonic scale and leap-step motive in augmentation	interrupting motivic commentary, in retrograde and augmentation in the short transition
Transition to C theme		Modulating	Stop and go, becoming more peaceful	Recalling the original A theme but in B Mixolydian (established with a B pedal point), which has a more major sound. Lower in range, it sounds more grounded. Ostinato pauses and becomes slower through augmentation. Harmonies change in the LH to move from B Lydian to F# Ionian or major. There is a color change marked through use of the <i>una corda</i> pedal.	Present in the primary melody Present in the ostinato, many ascending fourths in the RH ostinato and seconds, sevenths and ninths in the LH
C Theme	C	F# Ionian	Peacefully celebratory, majestic	Hands together in chorale-like homophony with melody and bass in octaves with tone clusters in the RH.	Present in the primary melody at the beginning of the first and second phrase, the end of the first and last phrases and the commentary
A theme and coda		F# Ionian	"Joyfully"	Similar to the A theme in the beginning: "fractured" primary melody, ostinato, pedal points, interrupting commentary, unison flourish and bird calls to end. Special effect using the <i>sostenuto</i> pedal	Present in primary melody, ostinato, and commentary

Table 2 Mariana Trench Analysis

Form: Binary with coda						
Section	Rehearsal	Mode	Character	Description/features	Leap-Step gesture (up a fourth, up a second)	
A theme	Beginning	B pentatonic	Peaceful	Improvised slow moving homorhythm similar to tintinnabulation, duet texture, strategic "wrong notes." Repeated and lengthened the second time.	Deconstructed to pairs of large and small intervals	
Transition	B	B pentatonic	Accelerating	Improvised transition from a peaceful character to an active one	Same as previous section	
B theme	C	B Mixolydian with lowered 7 scale degree, then B Ionian	Turbulent	Improvised accompaniment featuring disjunct motion underpinning two scales, one with lowered scale degrees and one without	LH proceeds by leaps, RH proceeds by steps	
Coda	D	B pentatonic	Becoming more relaxed	Improvised transition returning to material from the A theme and descending in register to make a palindrome with the opening	Transitioning from LH accompanimental leaps, RH steps back to the duet texture from the opening	



Table 3 Sunlit Zone Analysis

Form: Binary with coda						
Section	Rehearsal	Mode	Character	Description/features	Leap-Step gesture (up a fourth, up a second)	
A	Beginning	Bb Ionian	Sparkling, undulating, rapid, effervescent	Improved arpeggiated accompaniment using hand over hand technique. Two primary melodic phrases that are similar and end feeling unresolved. Additional secondary commentary can be added	Primary melody is made up of fourths and seconds, mostly descending	
B	D	F# pentatonic	Declaratory, joyful	Texture drops to a single line, then RH fills in motion	Not present	
Coda	F	F# pentatonic	Bustling, celebratory	Ascending fifths taken from the Debussy quote with black key glissando flourishes	The first part has only leaps written. At rehearsal G, the starting notes of each glissando make a descending step and leap (second and third)	

Table 4 Bikini Atoll Analysis

Form: Intro ABCBA Coda palindrome						
Section	Rehearsal	Mode	Character	Description/features	Leap-Step gesture (up a fourth, up a second)	
Intro	Beginning	F# Dorian	Somber, mysterious	Bell-like gestures in stacked fifths with added resonance from the sostenuto pedal underpinning birdsong	Several leaps of a fourth in the written birdsong. The performer may incorporate more in improvised birdsong	
A	A	A Aeolian	Chant-like	LH bell tones move stepwise in a descending scale, RH plays a duet texture similar to chant with primarily fourths and fifths	Not present	
B	B	B Aeolian with added b5 scale degree	Turbulent, disordered	Section begins with cataclysmic event: a loud, percussive note followed by repeated dense tone clusters. An ostinato using alternating hands supports the primary melody, the A theme from the first movement (referred to as the B theme in this movement).	Opening gesture in the B theme (A theme from first movement)	
C	D	E Aeolian	Boiling	Ostinato uses quintuplet sixty-fourth notes in a scalar pattern. Primary melody is the B theme from the first movement	Not present	
B	F	B Aeolian	Powerful, sweeping	Motion dramatically reduced with octave glissandi leading to the B theme in octaves and chords	Present in the opening gesture of the theme	
A	G	B Aeolian	Frenetic, pensive	Chant-like A theme returns, transposed to B Aeolian and supported by a complicated tremolo	Not present	

Coda	H	B Aeolian	Poignant	Very similar to the coda from the first movement but sorrowful instead of joyful due to the minor key	Present in the gestures from the B theme of this movement and the octave leap followed by a step interjected commentary
------	---	-----------	----------	---	---

APPENDIX B  
SCORE

Full Score

Holly Kordahl

# Pacific Suite

2016

© 2020 Holly Kordahl


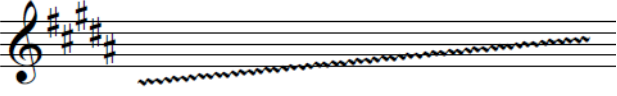
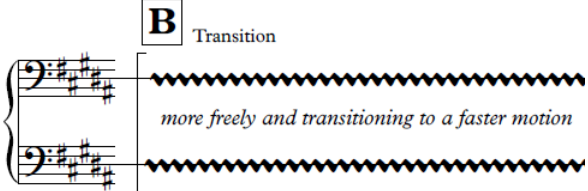

## PERFORMANCE NOTES





Pacific Suite is a work in four movements for solo piano. Each movement evokes a different environment in the Pacific Ocean. The work is a collaboration between the performer and the composer, with the performer being given many freedoms. The performer is expected to make many artistic decisions and improvise to different degrees in each movement.

Details such as tempi, articulations, dynamics and pedaling have been intentionally omitted in order to give the performer more control over the finished product. Other elements have been left undefined (e.g. length of ostinati, length of rests, rhythms in some sections), not out of negligence of the composer, but out of deference to the performer. The composer and performer create the work together, and every performance is different.

Most time signatures, rests and tuplet markings have been omitted for visual clarity. Some sections with stemless notes and no barlines should be played freely. The performer is expected to navigate technical challenges with their own solutions.

### Notation

 <p style="text-align: center;"><i>p</i></p>	<p>Repeat the ostinato precisely for duration of black line</p>
	<p>Continue in a similar manner</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>B</b> Transition</p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>more freely and transitioning to a faster motion</i></p>	<p>Improvise following the given instructions</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>joyfully</i></p>  <p style="text-align: center;"><i>f</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">sost.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">*</p>	<p>Hold boxed notes in sostenuto pedal, lift pedal at asterisk</p>

	<p>Voices rest as long as the performer feels is appropriate; the staff disappears and reappears with the voice</p>
	<p>Stemless notes should be played freely, with filled noteheads having a shorter duration than unfilled noteheads</p>
	<p>Stem direction, in certain phrases, suggests which hand should play</p>
	<p>Barlines, where present, may indicate phrasing with the assumption that the downbeat will be slightly accentuated</p>

The expression of personal creativity by the performer is a defining feature of *Pacific Suite*. I believe that having more freedom in the musical decisions gives the performer a greater personal connection to the music. The performer is able to make their own decisions in many regards.

Pianists can enjoy playing the piece and being flexible, while feeling confident that the composer approves of their performance, no matter their decisions.

### *Great Barrier Reef*

The performer has many opportunities to decide the length of ostinati and the length of rests in this movement. In areas where the staff disappears, the performer chooses how long to continue the ostinato and when to have the resting voice join again. There are a few tempo, character, dynamic and pedal indications; otherwise, the performer is responsible to create those elements of musicianship.



Dynamics, tempi and other expressions  
to be determined by the performer

# Great Barrier Reef

*With wit and wonder*

The musical score is written for piano in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. It consists of six systems of music. The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic marking and features a rapid sixteenth-note arpeggiated pattern in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand. The second system includes a *stacc.* marking and a crescendo hairpin. The third system continues the arpeggiated pattern in the right hand. The fourth system contains a section labeled 'A' with a key signature change to D major (two sharps) and a more active bass line. The fifth system features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The sixth system concludes with a *stacc.* marking and a final melodic phrase in the right hand.

First system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The music consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef.

Second system of musical notation, continuing the piece. It features a single treble clef staff with a melodic line.

Third system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The bass clef part includes an 8va (octave) marking above the staff.

Fourth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The bass clef part includes an 8va (octave) marking above the staff.

Fifth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef.

Sixth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The bass clef part includes an 8va (octave) marking above the staff.

Seventh system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef.

Eighth system of musical notation, featuring a grand staff with treble and bass clefs. The music consists of a melodic line in the treble clef and a rhythmic accompaniment in the bass clef.

The image displays a musical score for piano, consisting of seven systems of staves. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a continuous melodic line in the right hand and a rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand. The second system continues this pattern, with an *8va* marking above the right hand. The third system features a *8va* marking above the right hand and a *8va* marking below the left hand. The fourth system has *8va* markings above both hands. The fifth system shows a *8va* marking above the right hand. The sixth system includes a *dim.* marking and an *8va* marking above the right hand. The seventh system has an *8va* marking above the right hand. A section marker **B** is placed above the first staff of the seventh system.

63

*Ped.* *sub. p*  
*una corda*

*cresc.* **C** *grandly*  
*somewhat faster*  
—  $\wedge$  *continue normally* *release u.c.*

**D** *joyfully*  
*f* *cresc. to end*  
*sost.*

8<sup>va</sup>

Ped.

8<sup>va</sup>

\*

lift sostenuto pedal

### *Mariana Trench*

The performer is expected to improvise this movement in a style similar to the tintinnabuli style of Arvo Pärt with a duet of two voices, the lower of which tracks the higher closely, or rings a pedal tone. The voices mainly play in homorhythm. The possible pitches for either hand are B, C#, D#, F# and G#. The melodic intervals should be combinations of small, then large intervals (or vice versa), with small groupings of notes ending in a long note. Following the given guidelines, a performer might improvise something similar to the example below:



The pitches should generally ascend during each phrase group that has a thin, wavy line. The thick wavy line at Rehearsal B indicates that the performer should improvise more freely, creating a transition between the two contrasting sections of the movement. At Rehearsal C, the performer should improvise an accompaniment that continues in the same disjunct, active style. At Rehearsal D, the performer improvises a coda that gradually returns from the active style to the meditative material from the beginning.

# Mariana Trench

*In meditation*

The first system of music is in bass clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It features a piano accompaniment in the left hand with a series of half notes on a single line, and a vocal line in the right hand consisting of a few notes on a higher staff. A box labeled "sost." is placed under the first few notes of the piano accompaniment.

(somewhat brief)

The second system shows a more developed piano accompaniment with a wavy, tremolo-like texture in the left hand and a vocal line in the right hand.

**A**

The third system returns to a simpler piano accompaniment with half notes in the left hand and a vocal line in the right hand.

(more developed than the first)

The fourth system features a more complex piano accompaniment with a wavy texture in the left hand and a vocal line in the right hand.

The fifth system shows a piano accompaniment with a wavy texture in the left hand and a vocal line in the right hand.

**B**

The sixth system consists of two staves of piano accompaniment with a wavy, tremolo-like texture. The text "more freely and transitioning to a faster motion" is written between the staves.

**C**

8<sup>va</sup>...1

**D**

*reduce motion, return to activity similar to the opening gesture, move to lower registers*



### *Sunlit Zone*

In the A section, the performer is required to improvise a rapid, arpeggiated accompaniment using given the pitches. The melody provided has stemless noteheads, with black noteheads shorter in duration than white noteheads. Optionally, the performer may choose to add extra motivic commentary. This non-notated section gives the performer flexibility to adjust their playing to suit their musical and physical needs necessary to accommodate these activities.

At Rehearsal D, the left-hand improvises material in the spirit of the quote from Debussy's *Suite Bergamasque*, indicated by the thin wavy line. The right-hand improvises supportive material freely. The glissandi at Rehearsals F and G should be black key glissandi.

# Sunlit Zone

*Sparkling*

*pp*

Improvise an arpeggiated accompaniment  
Arpeggiate higher but not lower than the written pitches

*2x tempo*

**A**

*a tempo*

*2x tempo*

4x tempo

**B**  
mf  
sub. piano  
2x tempo

f  
presto

**C**  
prestissimo

set up arrival

**D**

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The staff contains a continuous tremolo pattern across the entire range of the instrument. At the end of the staff, there is a single note on the G line of the treble clef.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The upper part of the staff has a tremolo pattern. The lower part of the staff features a melodic line in the bass clef, consisting of several eighth notes and quarter notes.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. The staff contains a continuous tremolo pattern. The instruction "gain exhuberance" is written below the staff.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. It begins with a section labeled "F" (black key glissandi) and "stretto". The staff contains several "gliss." markings with diagonal lines. The lower part of the staff has a melodic line in the bass clef, also marked "stretto". The section ends with an "8va" marking and a final note.

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of three sharps. It begins with an "8va" marking and a "G" section. The staff contains several "gliss." markings with diagonal lines. The lower part of the staff has a melodic line in the bass clef.

A musical staff with a bass clef and a key signature of three sharps. It begins with an "8va" marking and contains several "gliss." markings with diagonal lines. The staff ends with a final note.

### *Bikini Atoll*

The boxed notes at the beginning will most likely need to be either simultaneously depressed (or finger-pedaled), or one may depress them silently before beginning the work to include them in the *sostenuto* pedal. The following birdsong can either be played as written, or improvised, depending on the skills or experiences of the performer. Notes may be omitted from the ostinati in this movement as needed. The tremolo before Rehearsal G should be played at the discretion of the performer, and continued as much as possible into the next section.

# Bikini Atoll

8<sup>va</sup>  
*freely*

sost.

8) mix of black and white keys

**A**

**B**

*sub. ffff*

*subito p*

The musical score is written for piano and voice. It begins with a vocal line in treble clef marked '8<sup>va</sup>' and 'freely'. Below it is a piano accompaniment in bass clef with a 'sost.' marking. The piano part features a series of chords and a melodic line in the right hand. A section marked '8)' is labeled 'mix of black and white keys'. Section 'A' is a piano solo in bass clef. Section 'B' is a piano solo in treble clef, starting with a 'sub. ffff' dynamic and featuring triplets and a four-measure rest. The score concludes with a piano solo in bass clef marked 'subito p'.

**C**

omit RH accompaniment notes as needed

**D**

*sub. fff*

3 3 4

\* 8<sup>va</sup>

**E**

8

Detailed description: This page contains five systems of musical notation. The first system, labeled 'C', shows a piano accompaniment in the left hand and a melodic line in the right hand. The second system continues the piano accompaniment with a complex rhythmic pattern. The third system shows the piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand. The fourth system features a large melodic line in the right hand with a long sustain. The fifth system, labeled 'D', shows a piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand, including triplets and a fourth note. The sixth system, labeled 'E', shows a piano accompaniment with a melodic line in the right hand. The page includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

The musical score consists of several systems of piano notation. The first system features a long glissando in the bass register, with a circled 'G' and the text 'or lowest key' below it. The second system includes a treble clef staff with a circled 'F' and a chord diagram below it. The third system has a treble clef staff with a circled 'G' and the instruction 'trem. as possible'. The fourth system is a standard piano accompaniment. The fifth system features a circled 'H' above a treble clef staff. The sixth system is a piano accompaniment with a fermata over a measure.



Musical notation for the first system, featuring a grand staff with a treble clef and a bass clef. The bass line contains a sequence of eighth notes, followed by a few chords. A 'Ped.' marking is present at the end of the system.

Musical notation for the second system, showing a dense texture of sixteenth notes in both the treble and bass staves.

Musical notation for the third system, continuing the sixteenth-note texture from the previous system.

Musical notation for the fourth system, with '8va' and '15ma' markings above the staff indicating octave transpositions.

Musical notation for the fifth system, starting with '(15)' above the staff and ending with an asterisk.