Degu Sounds

for solo piano

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Completion date: March/August 2015. This edition: April 6th,2018.

Note on the edition:

This is the third edition of the work. The music has been reformatted to A3 paper size, and small changes have been made to indications of dynamics. Very high and very low passages alike were re-notated to facilitate reading. The preface that accompanied the first edition of the work has been rewritten, and performance notes have been added.

This edition supersedes all previous editions.

Performance notes:

No. 2: *piano* to *mezzo piano* throughout the entire piece, possibly with a few accented notes. The tempo indicated is approximate.

No. 6: *mezzo forte* to *forte* throughout the entire piece. Phrasing is up to you. The tempo indicated is approximate, and you may use any amount of rubato. For unplayable aggregates, see instructions for no. 10 below.

No. 4: the impression should be of a gentle piece with a few quirks, not something harsh. Most of the music should be played *mezzo piano* or *mezzo forte* with a few accents, and a natural increase in volume where large chords are employed. Glissandi are played on white notes only.

No. 10: glissandi may be white notes only, or chromatic. Aggregates too wide for one hand may either be distributed between the hands or fragmented in any fashion (e.g. turned into a quick arpeggiated chord, or a grace note followed by the remainder of the aggregate, etc.). Dynamics are just one option, and using a wider range will benefit the music.

No. 15: dynamic indications in the bottom staff are approximations. Play with subtle gradations of piano and forte, creating a dynamics melody, if you will. The top staff pitches must all be the same, and *pianissimo*. The text below them is a name which is not meant to be read aloud, or understood as a title of the piece.

The pieces are presented in the order they were composed. They may be played separately from each other, or in any sequence.

Degu Sounds: A Note

(Note: this preface, in a shorter, simplified form, appeared in the first edition of the work. Here it is reproduced in full for the first time. – J.)

So much program music relies on ineffective ideas. Cinematic clichés: evil characters and their deeds accompanied by the low register of a piano, or a low filtered bass sound, its filter slowly opening up. An ascending melody for strings – for majestic, grand occurrences in the story. A sweet melody, perhaps played on a violin or a saxophone, to symbolize characters in love. A quick passage on a flute to imitate birds – or the simplistic bird song imitations in European art music.

Even if the music they're in may be good, these ideas are ineffective to me. Film music which relies on clichés doesn't really exist as music, but as a tool to manipulate the audience, and the clichés themselves have nothing to do with the feelings they supposedly portray. And the very basic transcriptions of animal sounds have more to do with music tradition than with the animals and their motivation. I don't like this kind of simplification. A few composers – notably Messiaen – have attempted to take much more complex and creative paths, but such attempts are far and few in between.

This work presents one idea of what effective program music can be. The music is based on vocalizations of the common degu (*Octodon degus*). These Chilean rodents are known, among other things, for their extensive vocabulary of vocalizations: they employ about twenty different types of sounds. Each piece is based on one of those types, but the actual vocalizations are never rendered in a straightforward way. The actual sounds are isolated and magnified, or radically slowed down and transposed, or used as blueprints for different ideas. An extraneous musical vocabulary is used when necessary: transpositions to convey the idea of an individual degu, large chords to convey the idea of sleep, and so on. Thus a single short whirr from a degu may be interpreted here as 60 seconds full of different sounds, but the same 60 seconds can then be interpreted as an encounter between several animals, simply because of the nature of the original sound.

The result is simultaneously based heavily on degu vocalizations and mostly unrecognizable as such even by those who are intimately familiar with the animals' behavior. Most importantly, I hope the work attains the quality the original vocalizations have: while types of sounds may be identified as conveying e.g. fear, or a desire for grooming, the details may forever stay beyond our reach. A single soft warbling sound from a degu, identified securely as a welcome intended at a conspecific, invariably contains dozens of individual notes, and we have no way of knowing how much information a single one of those notes carries. In these circumstances, a single trill in the music may be understood as conveying many things – or nothing at all without its context.

Degu Sounds – No. 6

Often Stimulates Reciprocal Chittering From Conspecific and
Further Nose-nose Contact or Allogrooming

Jashiin
2015

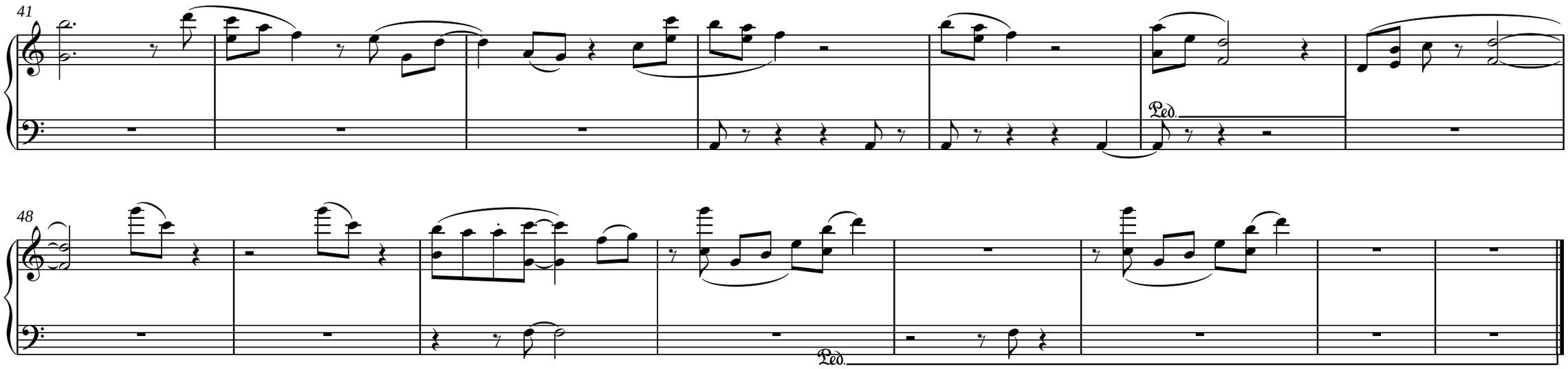
♩=40?

Piano

12

24

34


41
Ped.
48
Ped.

Degu Sounds – No. 2

...Lunging, Scrabbling with Forepaws and Boxing. Causes Conspecific
to Move Away from Subject.

Jashiin
2015

♩=40?

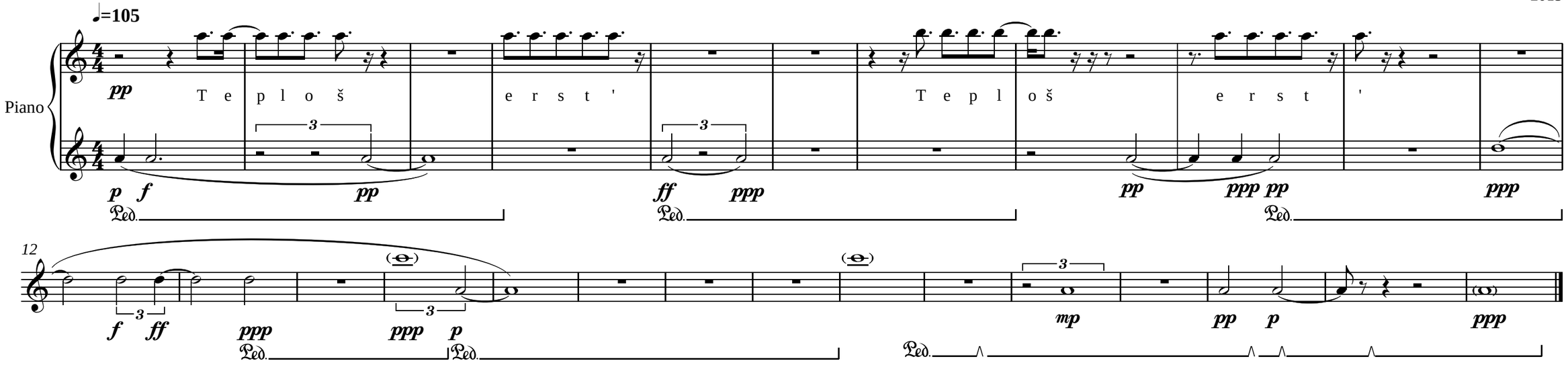
Piano

10

Degu Sounds – No. 15

Use Decreases Until Pups Are Roughly Two Weeks Old

Jashiin
2015



Degu Sounds – No. 10

Warning of Immediate Agonistic Action Intended to Repel Conspecific

Jashiin
2015

Piano

♩=120

mp

p

14

28

35

Degu Sounds – No. 4

Can Trigger Chittering, Tail Beating and Sometimes Warbling
in Conspecifics Within Auditory Range.

Jashiin
2015

Piano

♩=44

12

26

♩=64

37

gliss.

♩=54

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

47

♩=64

Ped.

Ped.

55

♩=54

♩=44

Ped.

65

♩=64

♩=44

Ped.