UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

Helmut Lachenmann's *Serynade*: An Analysis and Realization of Instrumental Musique Concrète

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirement for the degree Doctor of Musical Arts

in

Contemporary Music Performance

by

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Professor Wilfrido Terrazas

2023

This dissertation of Shaoai Zhang is approved,
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VITA

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Musical Arts in Contemporary Music Performance

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Professor Aleck Karis, Chair

This dissertation focuses on issues of performance practice in Helmut Lachenmann's *Serynade* for solo piano (1997/1998, revised 2000), particularly the technical and musical challenges faced when realizing this work. With its idiosyncratic notation, Lachenmann's compositional language requires careful study prior to performance. As such, this paper discusses extended techniques and phrasing throughout *Serynade* and provides strategies for learning and performing this major work of the repertoire. In particular, this project provides insight into the production of shadow sounds, intricate use of the piano pedals, and playing

inside the piano. Likewise, the unique nature of *Serynade* necessitates an approach to phrasing and interpretation that is characteristically its own. In addition to performance analysis, this discussion of *Serynade* will include notes from my meeting with the composer as well as recent research on Lachenmann and *Serynade*. This dissertation provides practical solutions and a window into the performer's perspective when facing the many challenges encountered in Helmut Lachenmann's *Serynade*.

Introduction

I first encountered Helmut Lachenmann's music in 2015, when I heard *Got Lost* (2007/2008), a half-hour work for soprano voice and piano, performed live in Boston by Stephen Drury and Elizabeth Keusch. The following year I saw a live performance of his percussion concerto *Air* at the Darmstadt Summer courses, performed by percussion soloist Christian Dierstein and the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra. The composer's music left a big impression on me. However, I didn't begin learning *Serynade* (1997/1998, revised 2000), his thirty-minute-long solo piano work, until the Fall of 2017, my first year as a Doctoral student at University of California San Diego. After working on the piece for over a year, I performed it on my first DMA recital on November 8, 2018, along with Franz Schubert's Piano Sonata in B-flat Major, D. 960. Following the performance, I sent Lachenmann the live recording, and we met in December so that I could play the piece for him. In my dissertation, I will discuss performance considerations for *Serynade*, supplemented by observations from my own performance practice, notes from my meeting with the composer, and scholarly articles and interviews.

German composer Helmut Lachenmann was born in Stuttgart in 1935, where he began his musical studies in composition and piano at the local Musikhochschule. After completing his studies there, he became one of the first composition students of Luigi Nono in Venice, Italy.[1] Shortly thereafter, Lachenmann moved to Cologne to work with Karlheinz Stockhausen at the Kölmische Musikschule.[2] It was in the 1960s that Lachenmann emerged as one of the leading voices in European contemporary music, through performances of his compositions at the Biennale in Venice and at the Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik in Darmstadt,

[1] Paulo de Assis, "Inscriptions: An Interview with Helmut Lachenmann," in *Experimental Affinities in Music*, ed. Paulo de Assis (Leuven University Press, 2015), 94.
[2] Assis, "Inscriptions." 94.

Germany.[3] Some of his most famous compositions from this time include *Air* (1968/1969, revised 1994/2015) for solo percussion and orchestra, *temA* (1968) for flute, voice, and cello, and *Pression* for solo cello (1969-1970, revised 2010). A pianist in his youth, Lachenmann has written prolifically for the instrument from the early days of his career. His pianistic output ranges from smaller pieces such as *Wiegenmusik* (1963) and *Guerro* (1970/1988) to *Ausklang* (1984–1985), a concerto for piano and orchestra, and *Serynade*, his largest solo work. Although Lachenmann premiered many of these piano compositions and continues to perform them today, *Ausklang* and *Serynade* were written for and dedicated to the composer's wife, pianist Yukiko Sugawara.[4] In his *Serynade*, one can see Lachenmann's earlier ideas for the piano explored on a much grander scale, including aspects of piano resonance, pedaling, as well as scraping and producing harmonics on the strings. This physical approach to composition is a hallmark of Lachenmann's style and was dubbed by the composer as "instrumental musique concrète."[5]

[3] "Helmut Lachenmann: Biography," Breitkopf & Härtel, https://www.breitkopf.com/composer/561

[4] The misspelling of *Serynade* is a play on Yukiko Sugawara's name, with the "Y" of her name replacing the "E" in the traditional spelling of serenade. She premiered the work in 2000 at the Eclat Festival in Stuttgart.

[5] Helmut Lachenmann and David Ryan, "Composer in Interview: Helmut Lachenmann," *Tempo*, No. 210, (Oct. 1999): 21.

Chapter 1: *Serynade* by Helmut Lachenmann

Form and Notation Overview

Written over twenty years ago, *Serynade* remains one of Lachenmann's most ambitious and extended works for piano. The piece is structured in seven distinct and contrasting sections, labeled by the composer with rehearsal letters from A to G. Section A (mm. 1–82), a quasi-exposition, presents many of the compositional devices Lachenmann will explore in the piece, including silently depressed keys, frequent usage of the sostenuto pedal, chromatic clusters, rhythmic sustain pedal changes, and fast keywork stretching across the instrument's range. Section B (mm. 83–109) primarily focuses on the softer dynamics and the piano's lower register. Section C (mm. 110–144) features fast, fanfare-like passages with extreme dynamic contrast. Section D (mm. 145–246), the most extensive section of the entire piece, focuses on three elements – a reiterated chord, large violent clusters, and complex pedal work. Section E (mm. 247–273) centers around harmonics of the overtone series, produced by a combination of silently held and sounding notes. Section F (mm. 274–308) starts with the fast keywork reminiscent of section C but then introduces inside-the-piano techniques such as scratching the strings and harmonic overtones. The piece ends with a slow, chorale-like section G (mm. 309–372). *Serynade* is structured in a quasi-mirrored form, with sections B and C framing the central section, D, on one side, and sections E and F on the other side. Both sections B and E feature softer and more intimate dynamics, while sections C and F are more technically demanding and virtuosic. Figure 1 provides a visual guide to the scale and proportions of each section.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1–82	83–109	110–144	145–246	247–273	274–308	309–372

Figure 1. Table of sections in *Serynade*, with measure numbers, shown in proportion.

Before one can discuss the nuances related to performing all the extended technique of the piece, an overview of the score is needed to understand Lachenmann's notation. The score often utilizes two to four staves at the same time. When four staves are used, the top treble staff is sounding two octaves higher than notated (indicated by the number 15 above the treble clef). The treble and bass staves in the middle with no octave indications are sounding as notated. The bottom bass staff is sounding two octaves lower than notated (indicated by number 15 below the bass clef). Although the composer only occasionally utilizes all four staves, as seen in Figure 2, this number of staves is necessary to clarify the octave designations and for ease of reading in performance.

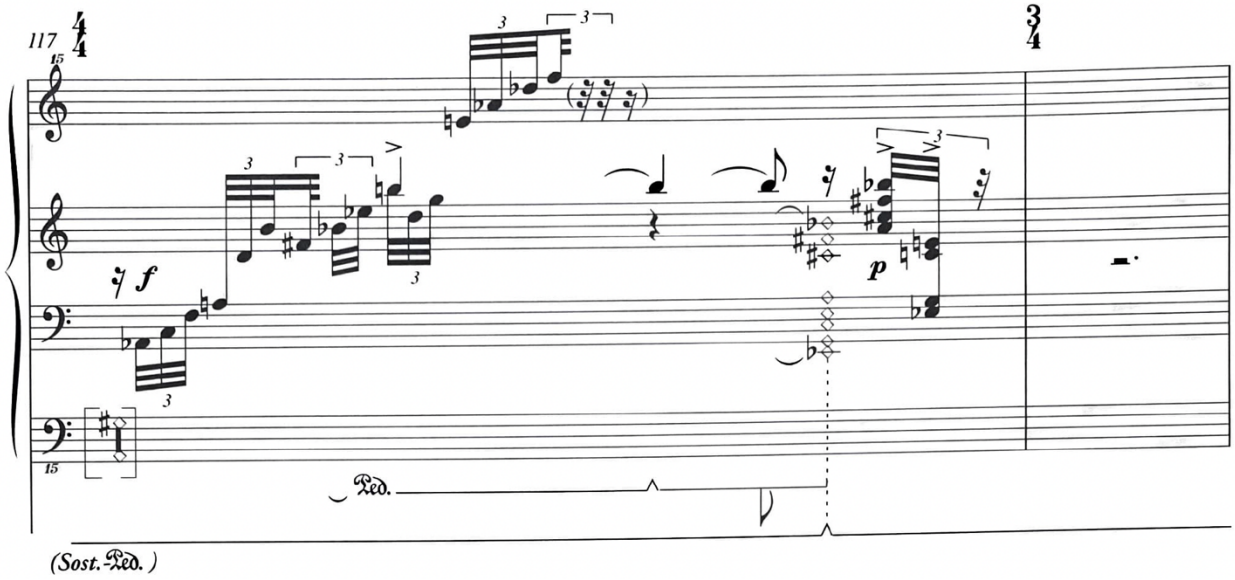

Figure 2. *Serynade*, mm. 117– 118

In addition to using four staves throughout the score, the composer also uses varying notation for the extended techniques. As seen in the previous figure, the composer not only uses traditional noteheads, but also diamond-shaped noteheads to indicate keys that the soloist will press down silently. Upon pressing down, the silent movement of the keys raises the hammers and dampers on the piano for these particular notes. Though the listener has not yet heard the

sound of these strings, they begin to vibrate when subsequent pitches are played due to the lack of dampening. The resulting sympathetic vibrations create a kinetic shadow sound, where one can hear a muted sonority murmuring underneath the pitches that are played in a traditional way.[6] Figure 3 provides a clearer example of how these shadow sounds are used throughout the piece.

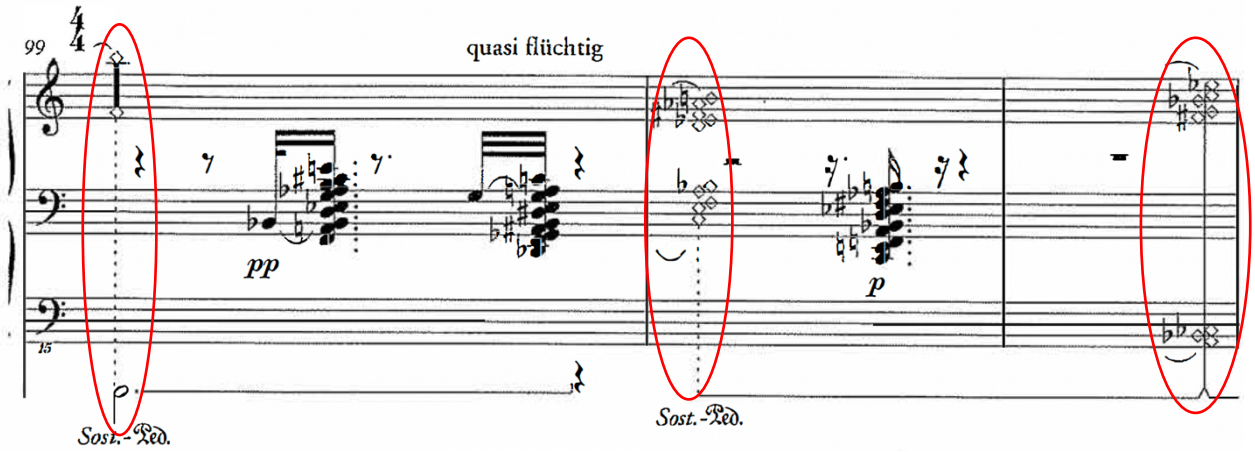

Figure 3. *Serynade*, mm. 99–101. The silently pressed notes, circled in red, create the sympathetic vibrations necessary for the shadow sounds. The vertical line between two noteheads indicates a chromatic cluster.

Lachenmann also achieves this shadow sound with the sostenuto pedal. The pianist silently presses down specific notes, then uses the middle pedal to hold them instead of holding them by hand. The order of pressing down keys first, then pressing the sostenuto pedal is important as the pedal will only hold the currently depressed keys. When the pianist uses the middle pedal, they can subsequently play new material with both hands while the pedal holds the original notes. Both methods of sustaining silent chords are used interchangeably by the composer, although the sostenuto pedal is preferred as it frees up both hands to play new sounding material. In the score, the silent notes held by the sostenuto pedal are indicated with a

[6] The sounds created by these sympathetic vibrations are referred to as shadow sounds throughout this dissertation.

dotted line going down to the sostenuto pedal indications below the staves. The caret in the line, as seen in m. 101 of Figure 3, denotes the change of sostenuto pedal to hold the newly depressed silent notes.

In addition to creating hidden harmonies, this technique of silently pressing down keys can be used to filter the sound of already resonating chords. This filtering effect is achieved through a combination of sounding notes, silently depressed keys, and the sustain pedal. The performer plays several chords held by the sustain pedal. While these chords continue to sound through the sustain pedal, the pianist silently retakes several of the notes in the chord, then releases the pedal (see Figure 4). By doing so, the sustained cluster is reduced to the sound of the currently pressed notes, creating the effect of filtering harmonies out of a dense texture. This filtering technique requires a coordination between the silent keys and the sustain pedal release. Note in Figure 4, how the sustain pedal indications are written very precisely to show when to reveal the hidden harmonies. The caret in the pedal part indicates the change of pedal, similar to its use in the sostenuto pedal part.

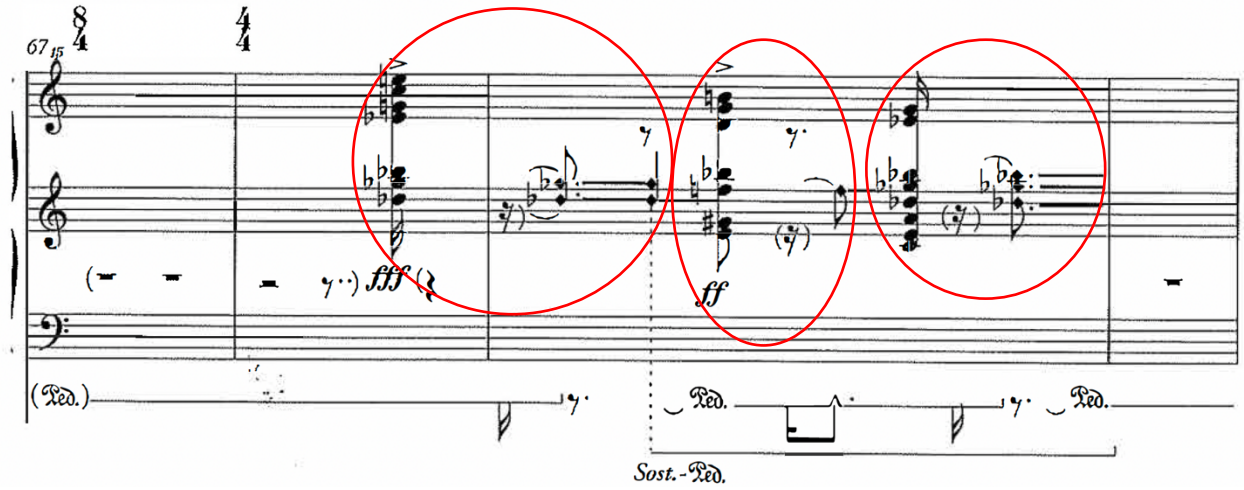

Figure 4. *Serynade*, mm. 67–70. The sounding chords and their subsequent filtered resonances are circled in red.

Lachenmann uses this technique of silently pressing down keys to create two individual effects – one of creating shadow harmonies from nothing, and another, taking resonance away from already sounding notes. Instead of pressing down keys silently first and then activating the reverberations with other sounding notes, the actions are reversed for the filtering technique. The sounds are already made by conventionally played notes, which are sustained with the pedal, and only then the silent notes are pressed down to reveal the hidden harmony underneath. To differentiate between the two effects, Lachenmann uses separate notations to distinguish them. The silently pressed notes that have no resonance of their own are indicated with hollow diamond-shaped noteheads to show that no sound has been made yet. In contrast, the filtered notes which are already sounding are shown as filled-in diamond-shaped noteheads.

The score to *Serynade* contains a plethora of information, from when to press the silent keys to exact moments the performer needs to change the pedals. As such, the score includes more information on *how* to produce the sound, rather than what is the intended sound. The performer is given instructions on when to press down the keys silently, but there are no indications of what the sonorities of the resulting shadow sounds are. This was an intentional omission on the composer's part, as he has no way of notating the resulting effect. One might consider labeling *Serynade* as an action score, due to the instruction-like approach in the notation, but Lachenmann himself rebuffs this idea:

> I normally never write what you'd call 'action scores'. I don't want to lose control of what should happen. . . . If in my cello piece *Pression* I decide that within 60 seconds the bow has to move gradually from the first to the fourth string behind the bridge with *fortissimo* pressure, I get a wealth of sounds that would be impossible to predict, and which could not be written down. This isn't chance, it's

> a clearly understandable result of what the player has to do at a certain moment in this piece.[7]

By only notating the performer's action instead of intended results, Lachenmann shows his understanding of the many variables in his music. In *Serynade*, the composer notates exact notes to be pressed down silently as well as sounding events, yet the resulting shadow harmonies will vary in each performance. This is due to the minute difference in the dynamics of the sounding notes, the mechanics of the piano, the acoustics of the performance space, and other conditions of the performance. The rigorously notated score of *Serynade* gives the performer the tools one might need to create the complex sonorities of the piece, but at the same time allows the performer to have the expressive freedom in the resulting performance.

Serynade contains many aesthetics and characteristics of instrumental musique concrète, which manifest themselves through extended piano techniques. These techniques, which I will discuss in detail in the following chapters, pose unique challenges to the performer unfamiliar with Lachenmann's compositional language. I categorized the extended techniques used in this piece into three groups– silently depressed chords, pedal releases, and more conventional extended techniques such as scraping and muting the strings. In each subsequent chapter, I will provide practice guides and suggestions for how to approach these aspects for future performers of this piece. Chapter Two is dedicated to the discussion of silently depressed keys, and the many techniques connected to this phenomenon. In Chapter Three, I will focus on Lachenmann's unusual use of the sustain pedal, and the more common extended piano techniques encountered in the piece. In Chapter Four, I will discuss more interpretive aspects of the piece such as

[7] Abigail Heathcote, "Sound Structures, Transformations, and Broken Magic: An Interview with Helmut Lachenmann," in *Contemporary Music: Theoretical and Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Max Paddison and Irene Deliège (Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 339.

phrasing and rubato. This dissertation will provide a performer's perspective and analysis of *Serynade*, which will be helpful to those looking to perform this important musical work.

Chapter 2: Silently Depressed Keys

Approaching the silently depressed keys

One of the central compositional ideas and extended techniques in the *Serynade* is the usage of silently depressed keys to generate hidden harmonic content. Although each of the work's seven sections features different musical materials, they are simultaneously connected through the continuous use of silently depressed chords. The persistent presence of these silently depressed chords is crucial to this work. The entirety of the piece is centered around piano resonance, whether it is produced through silent notes and their sympathetic vibrations or by manipulating the use of the piano pedals. As such, this section of my dissertation will discuss the many nuances of these hidden harmonies, including timing, depth to press the keys, the usage of the sostenuto pedal, and different types of note releases. I will also include references to Lachenmann's earlier piano pieces for better understanding of his compositional ideas and musical notation.

The extensive use of silently depressed notes presents many challenges for the performer, starting with approaching and pressing the keys without accidentally making the strings vibrate. This issue arises within the first measure of the piece. In this first measure of Figure 5, the pianist must quickly shift between silent and sounding chords. With a tempo of 63 to the quarter note, there is very little time for the performer to press the first cluster silently, hold it with the sostenuto pedal, and move to the next sounding chord, all within the first beat of the measure (see Figure 5). Though the cluster is placed on the downbeat, silent chords can generally be prepared beforehand. In his notes to the score, Lachenmann writes, "keys that are to be depressed silently are generally notated where the respective harmonics reverberation is produced," meaning the diamond-shaped noteheads are placed within the measure where they will begin to

produce kinetic sounds, and not necessarily where they need to be pressed down.[8] The composer further states that "these actions must always be prepared, i.e. the notes must be depressed before," which he indicates with the small slurs preceding the diamond-shaped noteheads (as seen in m. 5 of Figure 5).[9]

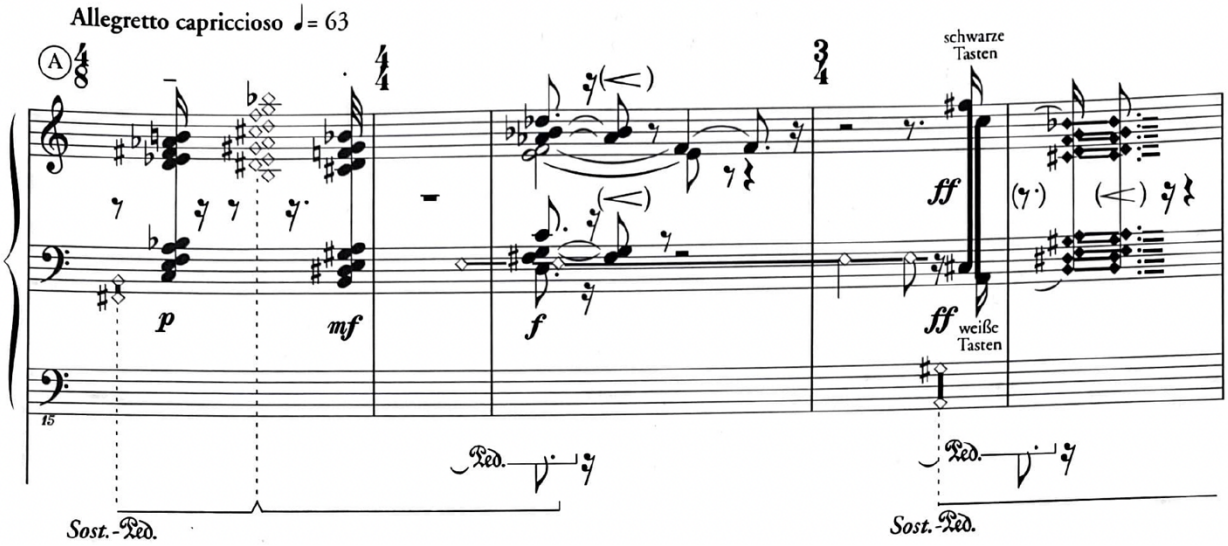

Figure 5. *Serynade*, mm. 1–4

During my meeting with Lachenmann, he stated the same sentiment, going as far as suggesting preparing the following chords and not relax my hands on the keyboard even if there are full measures of rests.[10] The first silent cluster in m. 1 can be pressed down at any time before the downbeat of the measure. Likewise, the silent E3 in m. 2 can be pressed down at any point during that measure instead of its indicated placement in the score. British pianist and music scholar Ian Pace notes in his article about *Serynade* how Lachenmann suggested holding this silent E3 with the sostenuto pedal to avoid "an unwarranted level of theatrical tension caused by

[8] Helmut Lachenmann, *Serynade* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 2002).
[9] Lachenmann, *Serynade*.
[10] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.

too rapid a transference between playing sounding and silent notes."[11] By doing so, the performer will have more time to prepare for the next sounding chord at the downbeat of m. 4. Ian Pace echoes the same idea and promotes using this "pragmatic approach" throughout the entire piece.

Likewise, the silent clusters in mm. 96–97 (see Figure 6) can also be prepared beforehand. Although a cluster is placed at the end of m. 96, it can be prepared right after the sounding *ppp* chord. Particular attention should be paid to releasing the sostenuto pedal in this and similar instances. In the score, the sostenuto pedal is notated below the staves. At the beginning of m. 96, the pedal is holding the previous silent chord (the diamond noteheads in square brackets), which is released simultaneously with the sounding triple *piano* chord. The following silent cluster at the end of m. 96 should only be pressed after the release of the pedal to ensure that no sympathetic vibrations carry over from the previous chord. In the subsequent measure, the sostenuto pedal is released on beat three.

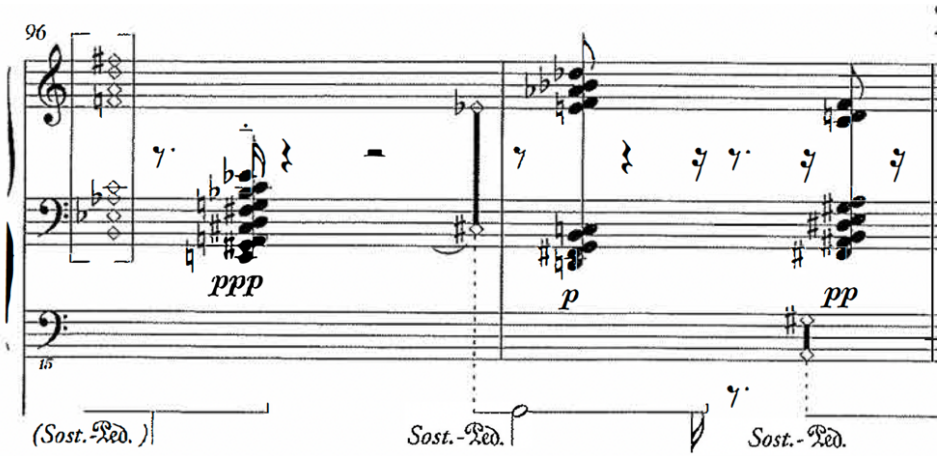

Figure 6. *Serynade*, mm. 96–97

[11] Ian Pace, "Lachenmann's *Serynade* – Issues for Performer and Listener," *Contemporary Music Review* 24 (1) (2005): 104.

The left hand should be placed over the indicated notes ahead of time to prepare the next silent chord and pressed down silently after the release of the sostenuto pedal. The pianist needs to take the rests in the sostenuto pedal part literally, to ensure there are no overlapping resonances. Instances like these require the performer to be mindful not only of the silent notes but also of the nuances related to the sostenuto pedal.

A similar approach to preparing notes ahead of their indicated place in the score is necessary for sonorities altered by the filtering effect, where specific notes emerge from already-sounding harmonies. In mm. 33–34 in Figure 7, one sees a clear example of the filtering effect used in this piece.

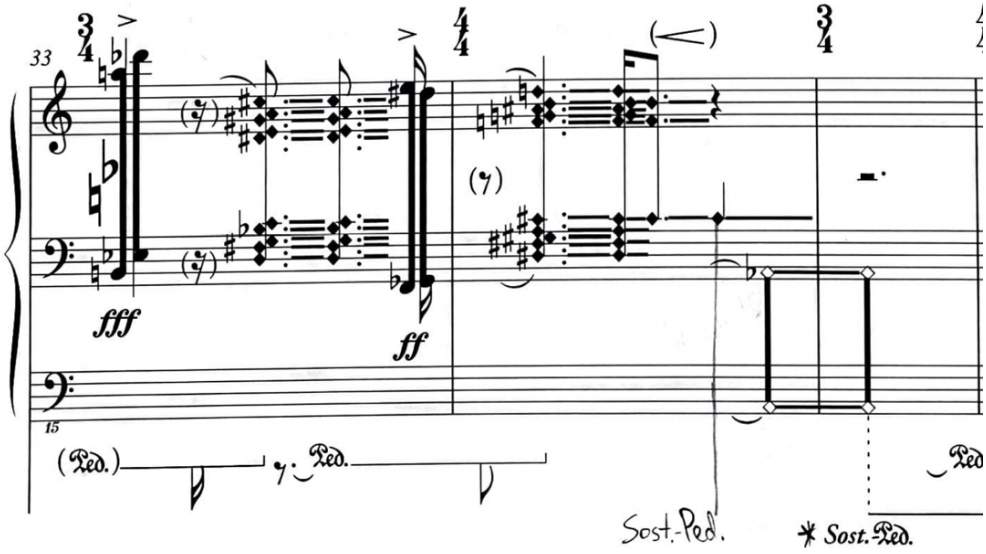

Figure 7. *Serynade*, mm. 33–35

The clusters produce pools of resonance from which the silently held notes emerge. The oversized accidentals placed in front of the cluster indicate whether it is a white-keys or black-keys cluster. In these two measures, the left-hand presses down on the white keys while the right-hand presses the black keys. In my performances of this work, I prepare and press down the silent chord earlier than indicated to prevent accidentally hitting the strings of the already-sounding notes. This will not cause a change of rhythm, as the sustain pedal should be released at

the indicated point in the score. I have also found it helpful to hold the C-sharp 4 on the last beat of m. 34 with the sostenuto pedal to ensure I can use both hands to press down the subsequent silent cluster.[12]

Not only must the performer consider the timing of the silent chords, but also the exact depth needed to press the keys so that the dampers lift without making any sound. This aspect will vary with each instrument, but I have found on most pianos the keys only need to be pressed just past the halfway point for the dampers to lift. This allows the performer to touch the keys lightly instead of pressing all the way down and risk accidentally hitting the string. This issue of how deep to press the keys is further complicated by the extensive use of the sostenuto pedal in *Serynade*. Most often, the silent notes are held by the sostenuto pedal to allow the performer to use both hands to play other sounding notes. Even if the keys only need to move minimally to lift the dampers, the mechanism of the sostenuto pedal is such that it may not catch all the notes. This is due to the idiosyncrasies of each instrument and the mechanism of the sostenuto pedal, which may not always be in the best shape due to its relatively infrequent use (as compared to the *una corda* or sustain pedal). As such, the performer needs to spend some time learning the nuances of the instrument that will be utilized in the performance of this work. Sensitivity to the instrument's particular characteristics will make the soloist more effective when shifting from sounding to silent notes.

To support my interpretation, I also visited earlier works by Lachenmann. His usage of silently depressed keys to create shadow sounds and the filtering effect can be seen in his previous piano works, such as *Wiegenmusik* (1963) and *Ein Kinderspiel* (1980). In *Wiegenmusik*, the idea of filtering pitch content is utilized throughout: the sustain pedal, indicated by dotted

[12] This might be unnecessary if one prefers to press the cluster with the left forearm instead.

square brackets, is used in entire passages, and Lachenmann indicates the notes he wants the soloist to press down silently to reveal after its release (see Figure 8).

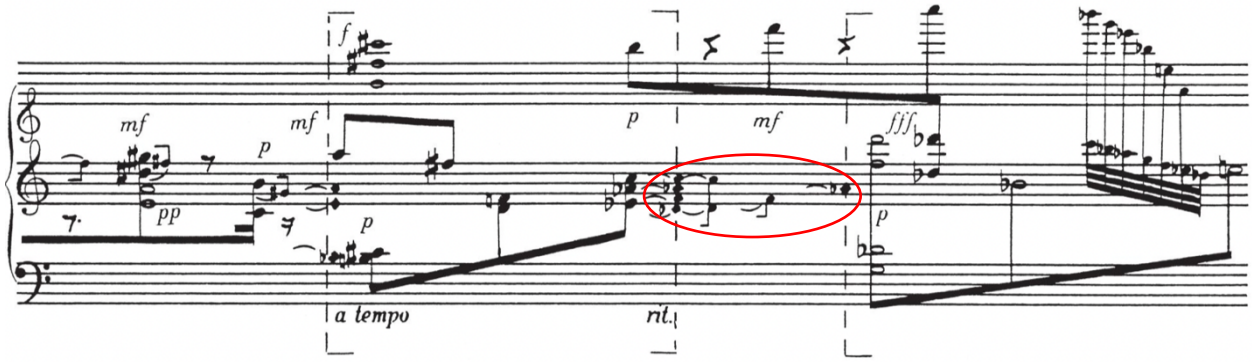

Figure 8. *Wiegenmusik*, system 2. Dotted square brackets indicate the sustain pedal usage. Circled are the held notes emerging from the sustain pedal resonance.

Ein Kinderspiel (1980), a cycle of seven short children's pieces, has more direct connections to *Serynade* both in compositional ideas and notation. The shadow sounds and filtering are used in all seven movements. Lachenmann specifies in his notes to the score that a cluster on the lowest notes of the piano is "pressed down and held "mutely" (thus soundlessly) with the flat of the hand" (see Figure 9).[13] It is clear Lachenmann was interested in the idea of activating the piano's inner workings through the use of silently pressing the keys, and its use became increasingly virtuosic in *Serynade*.

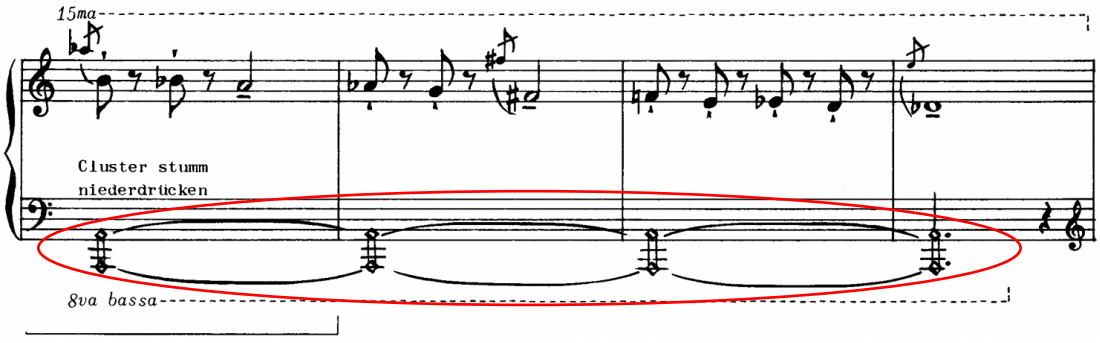

Figure 9. *Ein Kiderspiel*, movement 1: Hänschen klein, mm. 5–8. Circled in red is the silently depressed cluster on the lowest notes of the piano.

[13] Helmut Lachenmann, *Ein Kinderspiel* (Breitkopf & Härtel, 1982).

Releasing the silently depressed keys

Alongside issues related to approaching the silently depressed chords, one must also consider the different types of releases used in *Serynade*. There are three types of ending articulation seen in Lachenmann's score – a crescendo release, a soft release, and rhythmical releases of notes from a chord. It is important to note that these different types of articulation only apply when the performer is holding the silent chords by hand. Although the sostenuto pedal is used throughout the piece, most of the chords held by the pedal are retaken by hand for their respective releases. As seen in m. 49 of Figure 10, the silent chord is pressed down and held with the sostenuto pedal. After playing the sounding chord, the pianist depresses the earlier silent notes again and releases the sostenuto pedal. To indicate the exact duration of the hand-held notes, thick horizontal lines are drawn to the exact point of their releases.[14] Now that the silent notes are held by hand, the pianist can easily control and execute different release articulations. Due to the nature of the sostenuto pedal, it can be hard to control the release of the silent notes, which the composer rectifies by having the performer retake them by hand. Lachenmann even goes so far as to provide a footnote in the score to indicate further his preference for retaking chords from the sostenuto pedal by hand:

> This and several following clusters that cause reverberation must be taken over by the hand from the sostenuto pedal, because the intended – reverberation-ending – cancellation of these clusters can only be done noiselessly by hand.[15]

Lachenmann's choice of the word "*geräuschlos*" (noiselessly in English) is a bit misleading due to his use of a crescendo in parenthesis marking for the note releases in Figure 10. The marking, related more to articulation than dynamics, indicates a quick release of the keys to produce the

[14] Due to the silently depressed keys being clusters, the horizontal lines are connected vertically at the end, forming a bracket.
[15] Lachenmann, *Serynade*, 5, translated by the author.

sound effect of the dampers rapidly muting the strings. Lachenmann describes this marking as a "psychological crescendo effect," which is produced "by the sharply contoured release of the keys in question, almost as if 'ripping out' the held sound just when it is acoustically unfolding."[16] In my practice, I have found it helpful to think of these crescendo releases as quasi-staccato markings, not in terms of shortening the duration of the notes, but as the physical motion my hand and fingers make when playing a staccato note in more-traditional repertoire. During my time working with him, Lachenmann reiterated the exact sentiment of these crescendo markings impacting the releases of the silent notes rather than producing an actual increase in dynamics.[17] Ian Pace also notes in his article how more abrupt releases will cause the note ending to have "a more accentuated quality."[18]

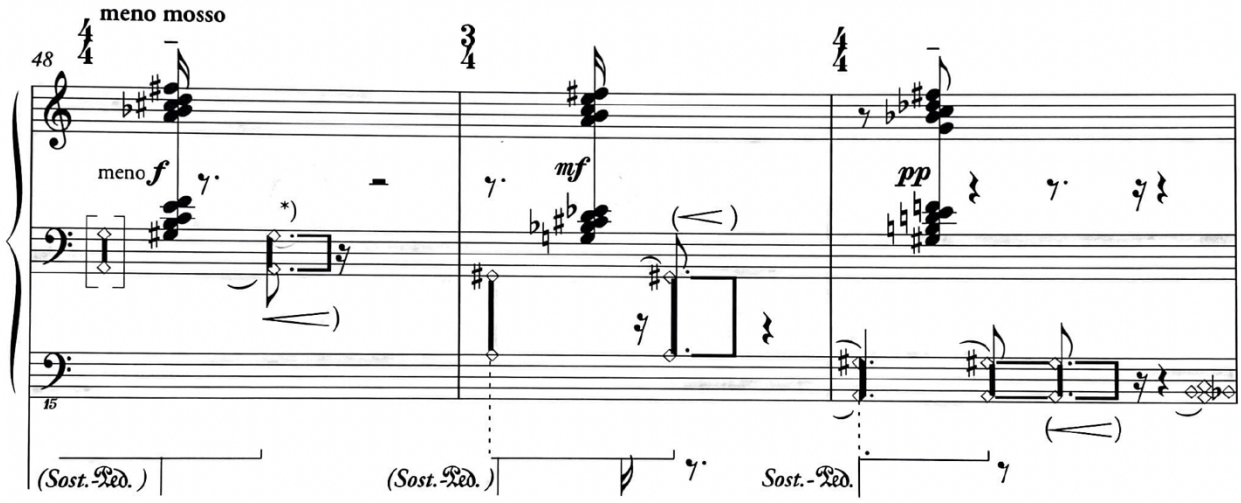

Figure 10. *Serynade*, mm. 48–50

This "crescendo" articulation is in contrast to the more gradual and smooth releases of the keys, which Lachenmann utilizes later in the work. Starting in m. 98, Lachenmann references the

[16] Lachenmann, *Serynade*.
[17] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.
[18] Pace, "Lachenmann's *Serynade*," 109.

same footnote seen previously, indicating the performer to retake the silent chord by hand. In this instance, the releases do not have a crescendo in parentheses, suggesting the ending of these notes are meant to be less articulate (see Figure 11). Ian Pace notes how this effect of "each note sinking away into the resonance" can be achieved by a gradual upward wrist motion, which I did not find necessary in my performance of the piece. [19]

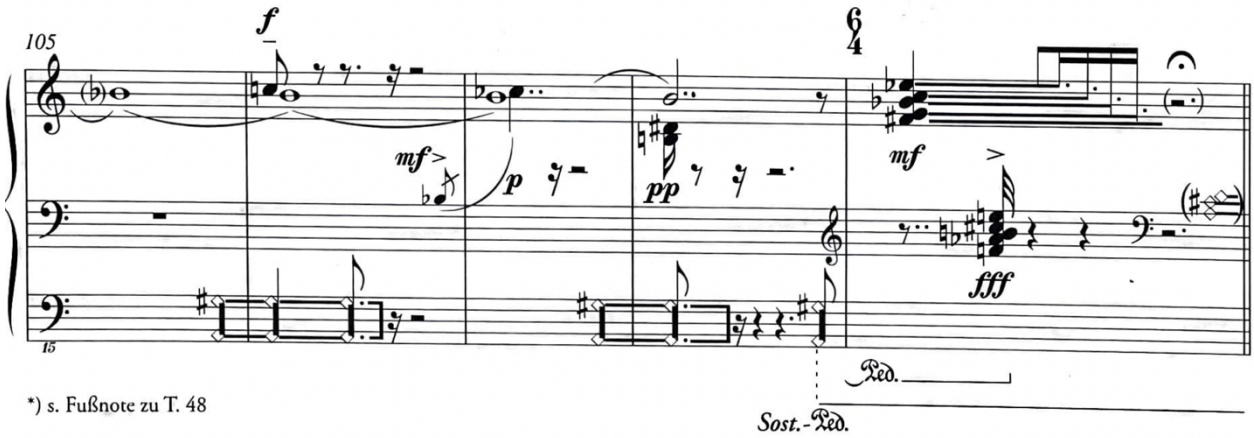

Figure 11. *Serynade*, mm. 105–109

The use of crescendo releases is particularly highlighted in section D. From mm. 145–182, Lachenmann uses the same sounding chord but varies the subsequent silently depressed chords. The change in these silent chords allows different strings to catch the resonance of the audible repeated chord, producing the effect of varying shadow resonances, as seen in Figure 12. This section of the piece is particularly striking because of the seeming simplicity of the sounding material: the same chord is repeated over a dozen times, and yet there is complexity in the resulting resonances produced by the silently depressed notes. British pianist Nicolas Hodges, a close collaborator of Lachenmann's, describes this section as "multi-faceted"– the same chord is played but different resonances are heard, as if the resonances are different sides

[19] Pace, "Lachenmann's *Serynade*," 109.

of the same sound object.[20] What Lachenmann creates in this section is a prism-like effect, where the reiterated chord is a prism, and the ever-changing silent chords are the light which reveals different colors of the primary object. By limiting the sounding pitch content, Lachenmann directs the performer's and the audience's attention to the main compositional idea of *Serynade* – the hidden harmonic resonances of the piano strings subtly revealed through this prismatic compositional effect. On this repetitious implementation of harmonic shading, Lachenmann noted in an interview:

> [If] I want to draw attention to a special sonic aspect, it can be a good idea to make a rhythmic and/or a pitch pattern so simple that we immediately understand this is just a sort of empty pretext leading us to another, somehow hidden level of perception.[21]

In *Serynade*, this pretext can be found in the reiterated chords, placed with measures of rests between them, thereby giving the listener more time to process these subtle shadings. At the same time, the dynamics are varied between each sounding chord, providing different colors and timbres each time. The resulting resonances often have subtle differences between them, which Nicolas Hodges echoes:

> [*Serynade*] *relies* on subtlety, both subtlety of composition but also of performance. There's a very obvious example: the section which is all on one chord for a couple of pages, the subtlety of that compositionally and in performance is its essence: there's no way that that can exist without being subtle.[22]

In my work with Lachenmann on this particular section, the composer also pointed out how performances should not be theatrical in terms of physical gestures.[23] Although a measure of rest

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[20] Tom Service, "Expressivity and Critique in Lachenmann's *Serynade*: Nicolas Hodges in Conversation with Tom Service" by Tom Service. *Contemporary Music Review*, 24 (1) (2005): 83.
[21] Heathcote, "Sound Structures," 336.
[22] Service, "Expressivity and Critique," 78.
[23] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.

or more often separates each chord repetition, the performer should prepare the following passage and resist the temptation to build visual drama by placing the hands in a resting position.

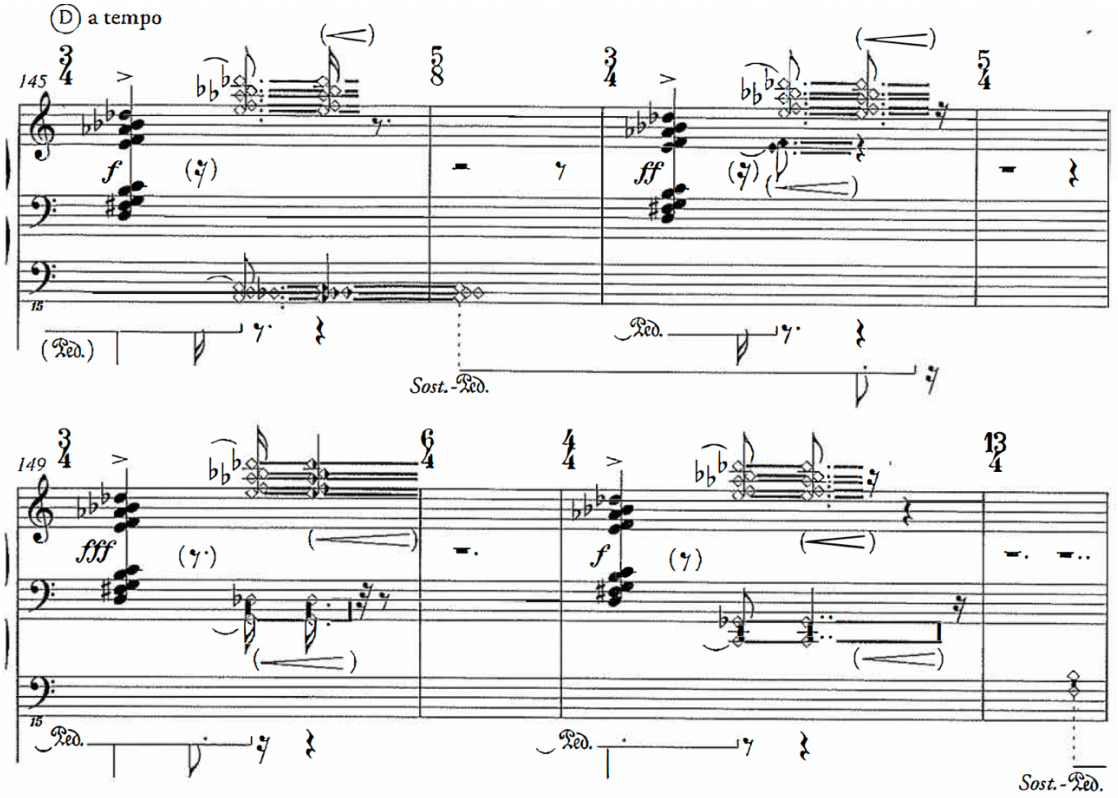

Figure 12. *Serynade*, section D, mm. 145–152

Beyond the types of note releases seen thus far, there is also the rhythmical release of individual notes from a held chord. After playing a sounding chord, the pressed keys are released one or two at a time, producing the effect of a gradually decaying sonority. An example of this can be seen in m. 15 of Figure 13, where the chord at the beginning of the bar features notes dropping out one by one. It is helpful to think not only about which notes need to be released but also about which fingers need to lift to avoid any accidental releases. In Figure 13, I have provided an example of my approach with written-in fingerings used for performances. For the last chord in the measure, which combines the rhythmic release and the previously described filtering effect, I play the sounding chord, then hold the notes indicated in m. 16 while releasing

the remaining fingers. I have found this method to be more practical than playing the sounding chord, releasing all the notes, then silently retaking the indicated notes again. The filtered notes in m. 16 are part of the previous sounding chord, so I hold those notes down while releasing all the others. The fingers which are held over to the next measure are indicated with long lines stretching after them, similar to Lachenmann's notation for holding notes by hand.

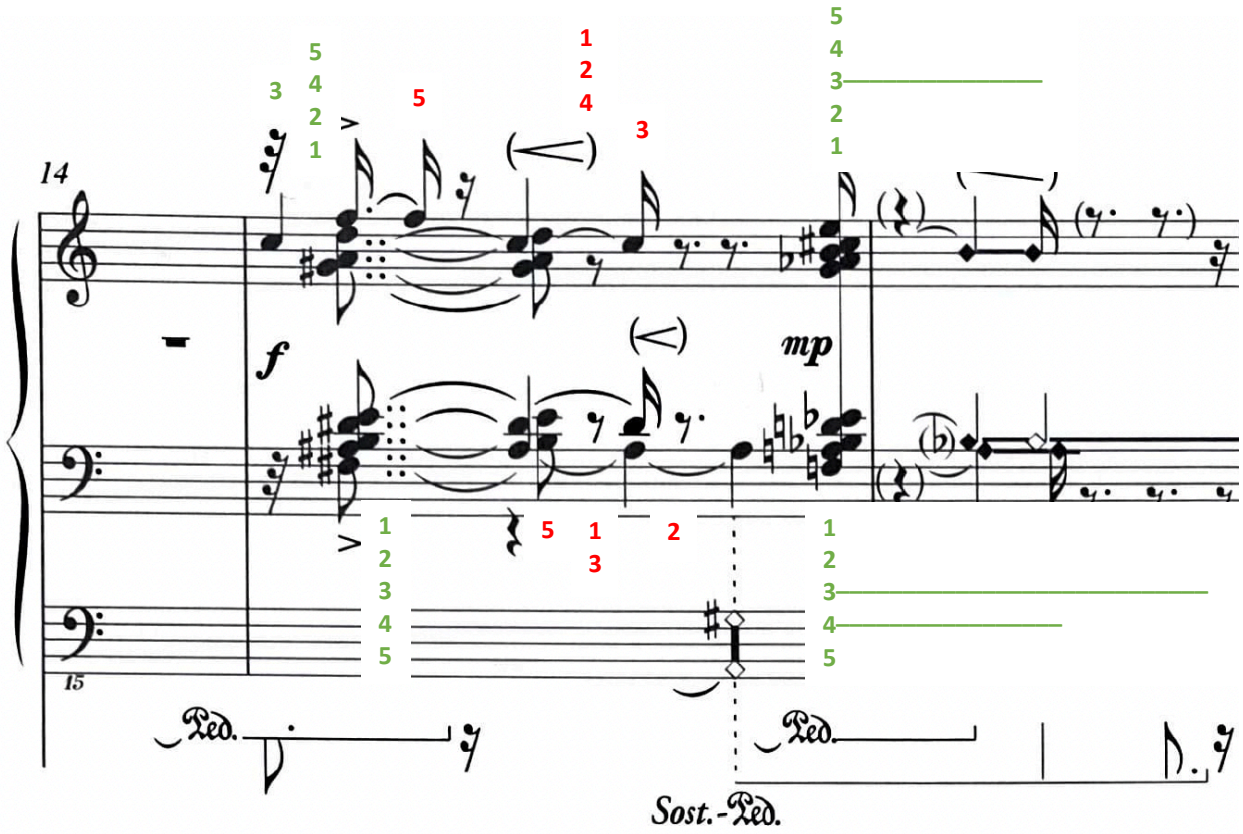

Figure 13. *Serynade*, mm. 14–16. The fingerings are given bottom to top. Green denotes which fingers are going down, red denotes which fingers need to be lifted.

This type of note release is further utilized in section E of *Serynade*. In addition to holding multiple notes and releasing them in the indicated rhythm, the composer also asks for individual notes to be added. This complex web of pressing and releasing notes relies on the performer holding all keys by hand, with little use of the sostenuto pedal. Holding all the notes by hand allows the pianist to easily release individual notes, without worrying about the noise

from the sostenuto pedal. As such, the pianist must carefully arrange fingerings for the held notes and predetermine the distribution of the sounding notes between both hands (see Figure 14). Further complicating the notated complexities is the use of four staves, as seen in Figure 14. Although four staves are used periodically throughout the piece for ease of reading, section E uses the top two staves for clarification only. The silent notes are all held by hand, and Lachenmann uses horizontal lines to indicate their duration, which make the score quite difficult to read. As such, the composer uses the top staff to clarify which notes are currently being held.[24] The staff below it, containing stemless noteheads, is used to indicate the harmonics produced by the silent notes. In my practice and performance, I find the top two staves useful as reference points only.

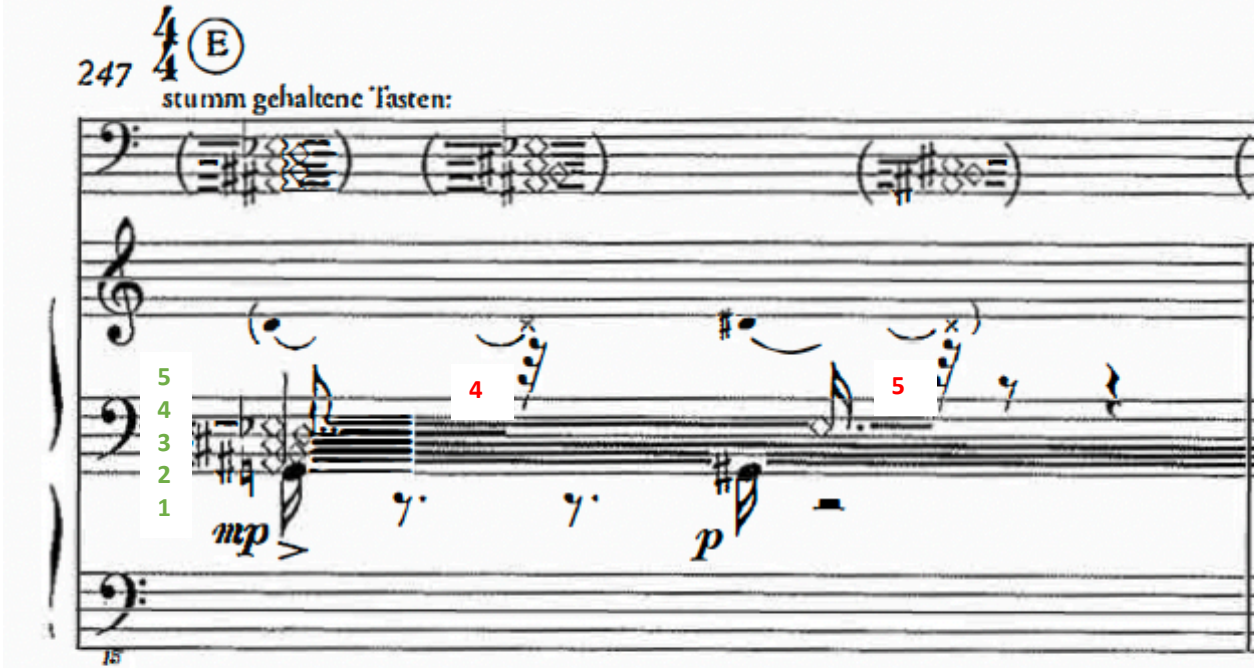

Figure 14. *Serynade*, section E, m. 247. The right-hand fingerings are indicated by numbers and color coded: green is which fingers are depressing silent notes; red is which finger is released. The left hand plays the regular noteheads.

[24] Written above the top staff, *Stumm gehaltene Tasten* is translated to "muted keys".

At the beginning of the passage in m. 247, the right hand should hold the silent notes on the second from the bottom staff. In Figure 14, I have marked the fingerings in the right hand for releases of individual notes in red, and the left hand plays the conventionally notated notes. Due to the maneuvering of the hand and the complicated pattern of holding and releasing notes, it is advisable to press the keys all the way down instead of only halfway down. By pressing the keys all the way down, the performer avoids the risk of accidentally sounding the silent notes when navigating the complex fingering in this section. Alongside fingerings for holding, releasing, and adding new keys, the performer must also switch fingerings while holding the keys silently. For example in Figure 15, to prepare for the sounding chords in m. 254, the silent D3 of m. 252 must be changed from the fourth finger to the thumb. This substitution ensures that one can comfortably reach the sounding chords in m. 254 with just the right hand. In my practice, this method of focusing on fingerings is especially helpful when negotiating between which notes are held, released, or pressed down.

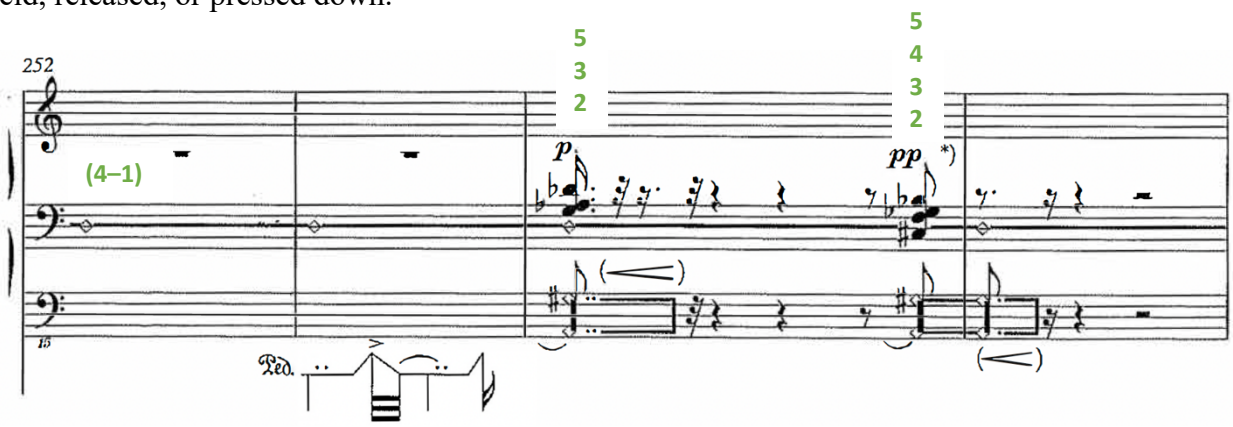

Figure 15. *Serynade*, mm. 252–255. Substitute fingerings are given in parenthesis.

Lachenmann's prismatic approach and rhythmic note releases can be seen in his earlier piano works *Ein Kinderspiel* and *Wiegenmusik*. In the fifth movement of *Ein Kinderspiel,* titled "Filter-Schaukel/Filter Swing," the musical material consists of the same repeated chord, much like section D of *Serynade*. In this short movement, the chromatic cluster chord is first treated

with the filtering technique, utilizing the sustain pedal and releasing specific notes from the chord. In the movement's second half, the repeated chord is now featured with shadow sounds as the pianist silently presses down different keys (Figure 16). There are many similarities between this movement of *Ein Kinderspiel* and *Serynade*, but one can see how this prism-like approach changed over time. In "Filter Swing," the chord is repeated constantly, without any break for the performer and audience to fully hear the changes in resonance. The dynamic stays the same throughout the movement, making the repeated chord sound incessant.

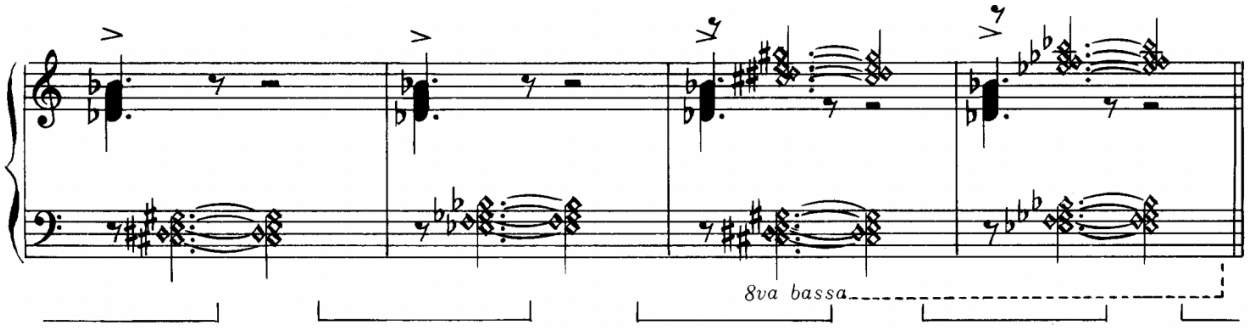

Figure 16. *Ein Kinderspiel*, movement 5: Filter-Schaukel/Filter Swing, mm. 28–31

The rhythmic releases of held notes can be traced back to an even earlier *Wiegenmusik*. In this piece, alongside his use of sustain pedal to create the filtering effect, the composer combines it with the note releases. After emerging from the sustain pedal resonance with a filtered chord, some notes are then individually released (Figure 17). Upon examining his earlier piano works, it is clear Lachenmann was interested in these techniques and ideas long before he started writing *Serynade*. However, these techniques are expanded and applied much more broadly in the later piece, making *Serynade* more complex and virtuosic in its usage of extended piano techniques. By looking at Lachenmann's earlier works, I was able to better inform my performance practice of *Serynade*.

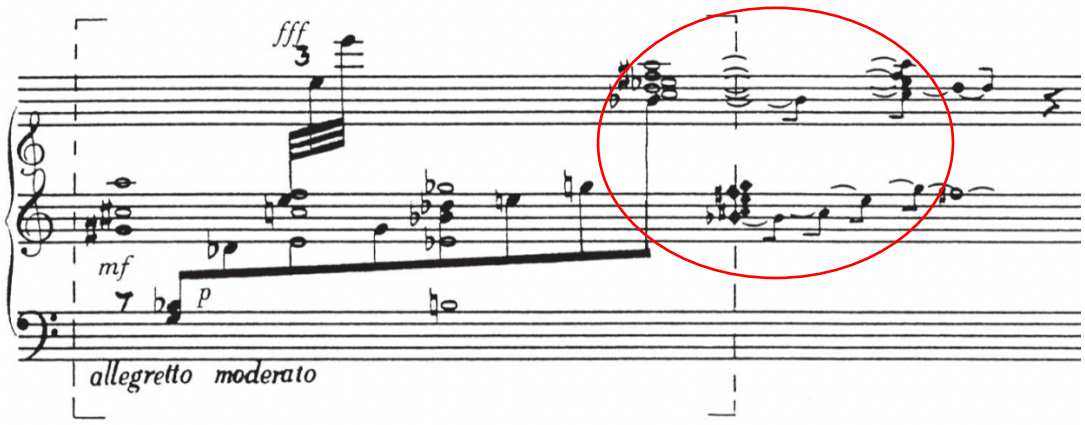

Figure 17. *Wiegenmusik*, opening. Brackets indicate sustain pedal usages. Circled are the filtered notes and their rhythmic release.

Conclusion

The various extended techniques used in *Serynade* require the performer to rethink their approach to the piano. Even the most familiar action of pressing down piano keys is broken down into many different components – silently pressing down keys or playing the keyboard conventionally. The release of the keys is similarly disassembled into different aspects, such as accented release, soft release, or releasing one key at a time. This idea of disassembling a fundamental instrumental concept and using this as the seedling of a larger work is among the recurring themes in Lachnemann's oeuvre. On this aesthetic approach, the composer furthered:

> In order to develop this aspect, a process of 'deconstruction' of the sound-technique must be invented, which leads of its own accord to unexpected possibilities. And what is decisive is not the joy of discovery, as though one were a musical botanist, coming across unconventional sounds – rather it is the fresh orientation of our ears which thus becomes possible.[25]

Lachenmann examines the fundamentals of the instrument's sound, which he then takes apart and uses the elements to build his musical compositions. He does not invent new sounds, but he effectively takes the familiar sonorities and fragmentizes them beyond recognition. As seen

[25] Lachenmann and Ryan, "Composer in Interview," 21.

in *Serynade*, the extended techniques used by the composer are all part of the conventional way of playing piano. Sympathetic vibrations on the piano have been featured in other repertoires, yet Lachenmann takes this natural phenomenon of the instrument and makes it the central idea of the piece. This "deconstruction of sound-technique" is one of the ways Lachenmann's achieves his instrumental musique concrète style, and it proves to be challenging for the performer unfamiliar with Lachenmann's compositional language. Though *Serynade* poses unusual and highly virtuosic demands on the performer, I hope the detailed suggestions provided here for approaching the silently depressed chords will be helpful to the future performer.

Chapter 3: Sustain Pedal & Other Extended Techniques

Expanding the role of the sustain pedal

In *Serynade*, Lachenmann reimagines the role of the piano pedals in a way that requires careful consideration. While conventional piano repertoire often leaves pedaling at the performer's discretion, *Serynade* provides explicit instructions and detailed markings. The extensive use of both sostenuto and sustain pedals is highly demanding for the performer. Lachenmann highlights the role of the pedals and pulls attention toward this often understated aspect of the piano. While the sostenuto pedal has been covered in the previous chapter, this section will discuss the role of the sustain pedal in *Serynade*. In more traditional piano repertoire, the sustain pedal is one of the main components of piano playing, yet it has been rarely featured as it is in Lachenmann's work. This chapter will discuss the nuances and technical approach regarding Lachenmann's writing for the sustain pedal, particularly issues of rhythm and its role as a solo voice within *Serynade*.

Before looking at the more complex usages of sustain pedal in the piece, a brief clarification of the sustain pedal's function is needed to understand Lachenmann's usage of the pedal in this piece. When the pianist presses down the right pedal, the dampers in the piano case are lifted up, allowing all the strings to vibrate freely. When one plays a note with the right pedal down, the note is sustained due to a lack of dampening, and the sound decays naturally. The sustain pedal also changes a note's timbre, making it sound louder and richer. In *Serynade*, Lachenmann uses the right pedal in its traditional role as a tool for sustaining tones and expands its role to a rhythmic device as well.

Figure 18 shows an example of the pedal in a more conventional role of sustaining the piano resonance in *Serynade*. The sustain pedal is often used in conjunction with the silent notes,

expanding on the filter-like effect discussed previously. In m. 55 of Figure 18, the sustain pedal, circled in red, is pressed down at the beginning of the measure, catching the sound of the first chord. The subsequent silent cluster is coordinated with the pedal change; both are circled in blue. The result of this combination allows the silently pressed notes to continue vibrating while the previously sounding strings have been muted. This effect repeats in the second half of m. 55 – following the sound of the triple *forte* chords, another silent cluster is pressed down, which reduces the original sound once more. This technique shares many elements with the filtering technique but expands on the previous idea to include notes outside the sounding chord. When Lachenmann uses the filter-like effect, the pianist silently retakes some of the already-sounding notes, which reduces the resonance from a full chord to only the selected held notes. In m. 55, the silent notes are not part of the previously sounding chord. When the pianist lifts the pedal, one hears only shadow sounds. Instead of hearing the sonority of the sounding chord reduced by a note or two, in Figure 18, the reduced resonance consists of complex harmonic overtones activated by sympathetic vibrations.

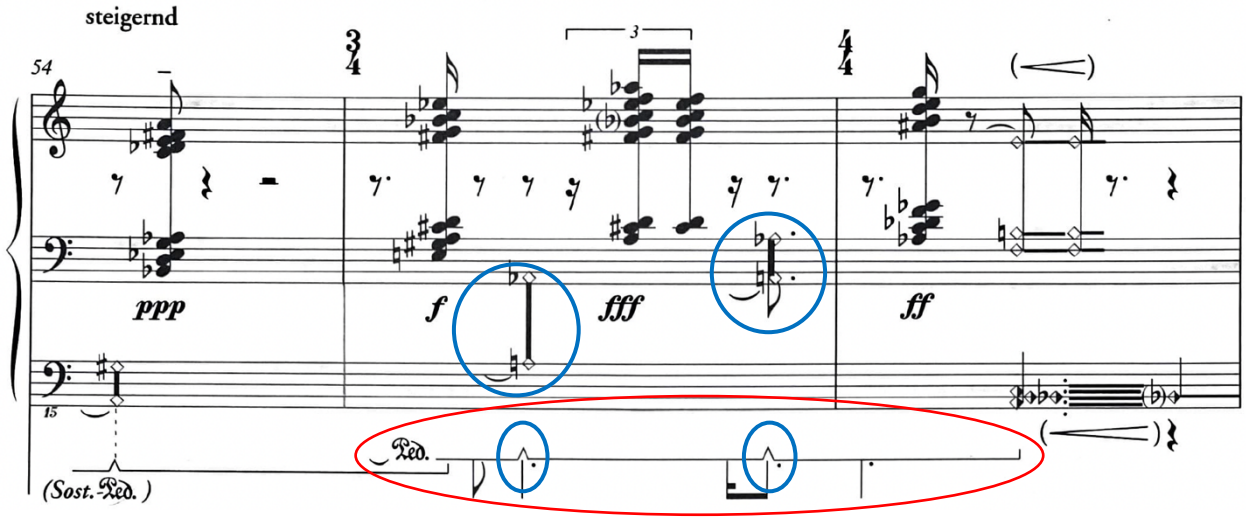

Figure 18. *Serynade*, mm. 54–56. The sustain pedal part is circled in red; the coordinated silent keys and sustain pedal changes are circled in blue.

Lachenmann manipulates the sustain pedal even further by introducing rhythms into the sustain pedal part. In Figure 19, the composer indicates precise rhythms for the pedal in mm. 6–8. The intended effect here in m. 8 is similar in concept to fluttering the pedal in the conventional piano repertoire in that the foot lifts the pedal halfway and presses it down immediately before the dampers entirely mute the strings. Yet, unlike traditional fluttering, which is typically at the performer's discretion, Lachenmann indicates specific rhythms. The exact timing of the pedal is notated using traditional rhythms in Figure 19. However, rather than using noteheads, and perhaps for ease of reading, the composer utilizes a single, continuous line. In addition to providing this rhythmic clarity, Lachenmann's notation indicates the physical motion of the pedal as well. Throughout the score, diagonal lines going up signal the lifting of the pedal, while diagonal lines going down signal the depressing of the pedal, as seen in m. 8 of Figure 19.

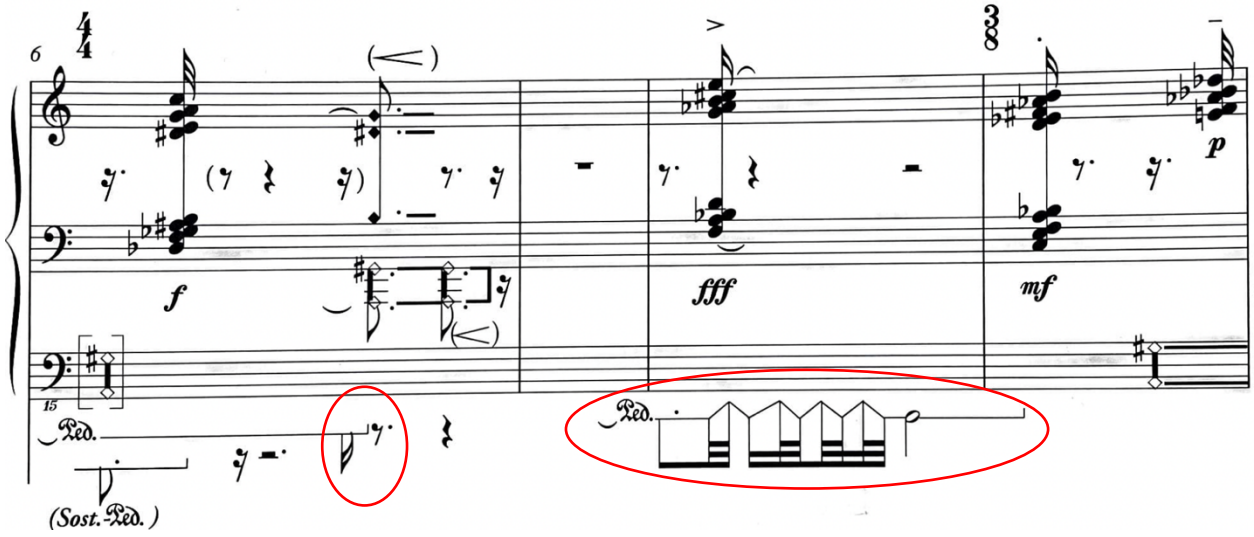

Figure 19. *Serynade*, mm. 6–9. The sustain pedal rhythms are circled in red.

To realize these intricate rhythms in performance, I primarily focus on the indicated releases of the pedal. In m. 8 of Figure 20, the pedal's rhythm is indicated in thirty-second note durations. Although Lachenmann's notation provides great specificity, I find it necessary to clarify this rhythmic activity by focusing on the release of the pedal. For example, the first

release in m. 8, indicated by the upward motion of the line, occurs on the last thirty-second note before beat two, then each subsequent release is on the second, third, and fourth sixteenth notes of that beat. To achieve this gesture in live performance, I think of the first release as a quasi-pick-up to beat two, working in tandem with the sounding chord immediately preceding this fluttering pedal motion. By implementing the quasi-flutter pedal right after the sounding chord, I can capture the rhythmic and musical effect of combining the chord and the fluttering into one gesture. The precise timing of these actions is crucial– the sustain pedal is pressed down at the beginning of the measure, then the triple *forte* chord is played, followed by a quick up and down of the pedal. By executing the passage in this way, one can ensure the pedal has caught the resonance of the chord, which is then slowly dissipated through each subsequent flutter. In Figure 14, I provide my reduction of the pedal rhythm, offering visual clarity as to the upward releases indicated in Lachenmann's original notation.

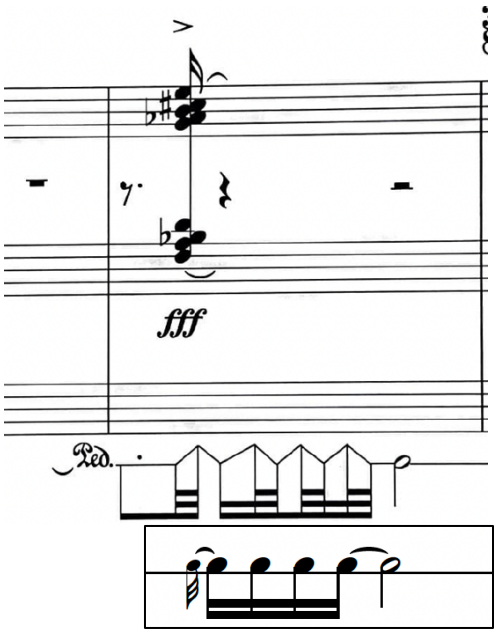

Figure 20. *Serynade*, m. 8, author's reduction of Lachenmann's notated pedal rhythm.

Solely focusing on the sustain pedal's release, rather than a constant up and down motion, proves meaningful for the accented releases later in the piece. At m. 189 of section D (Figure 21), Lachenmann begins to indicate accents atop the pedal's rhythmic releases. In his notes to the score, the composer provides the following commentary on this effect:

> In Section D, starting from m. 189, clearly recognizable at m. 206 at the latest, the action of conventional depressing the pedal transforms itself into an audible percussive effect – see the marcato signs above the stems –, later even with a clearly perceptible reverberation.[26]

The accents seen in Figure 21 are achieved by the foot releasing the pedal rapidly, causing the dampers to hit the strings with force. The pianist must then immediately depress the pedal again, raising the dampers and allowing the strings to vibrate from the force of the release.[27] The accents appear in the middle of the central section D. Alongside introducing these accents, the texture is further saturated by low register clusters, which grow more prominent with each iteration.

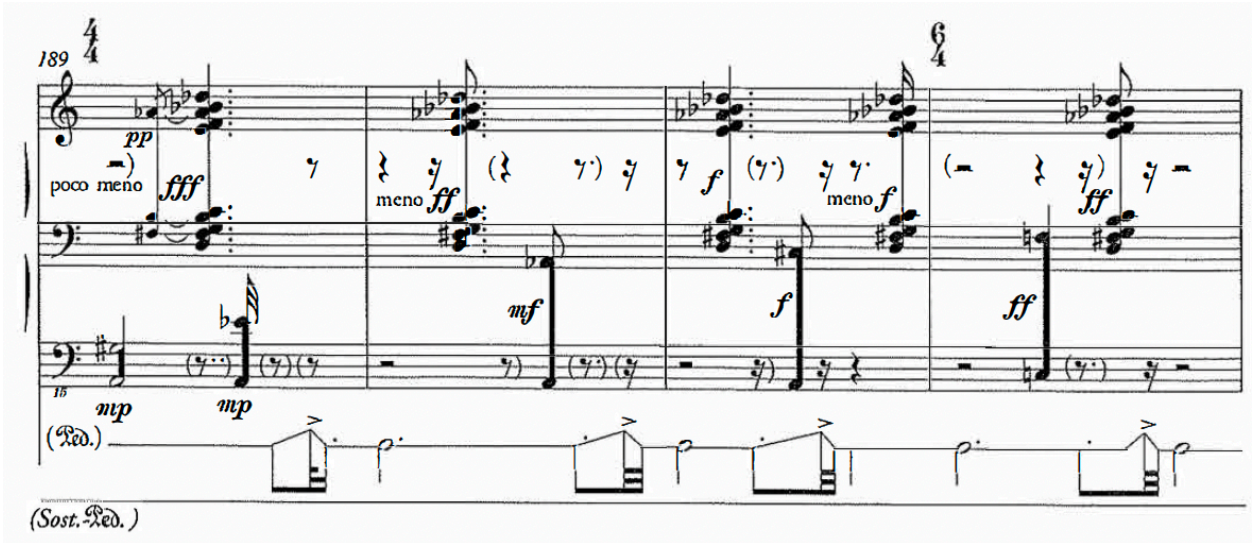

Figure 21. *Serynade*, mm. 189–192

[26] Lachenmann, *Serynade*.
[27] The accents should come from the sound of dampers and not the performer's shoe hitting the pedal. Due to the idiosyncrasies of the instrument, the top of the pedal itself may hit the wooden frame, producing an extra sound on top of the dampers hitting the strings.

While the accented pedal releases are only utilized once per measure, as the section goes on, Lachenmann combines the rhythmic and accented releases together (Figure 22). In these instances, I similarly clarify the composer's notation by only focusing on the releases, but this time letting the pedal go all the way up so that the sound of the dampers is clearly audible. In m. 209 of Figure 22, the first accented release is on the downbeat, but for the following two accents, I think of each as quick pick-ups to the first eighth note and the second quarter note, respectively. The last accent is on the second eighth note of beat two. One should be careful to distinguish between the accented releases on the first two beats of the measure and the futter-like releases towards the end of the measure. In Figure 22, I similarly provid my rhythmic reduction of the pedal part.

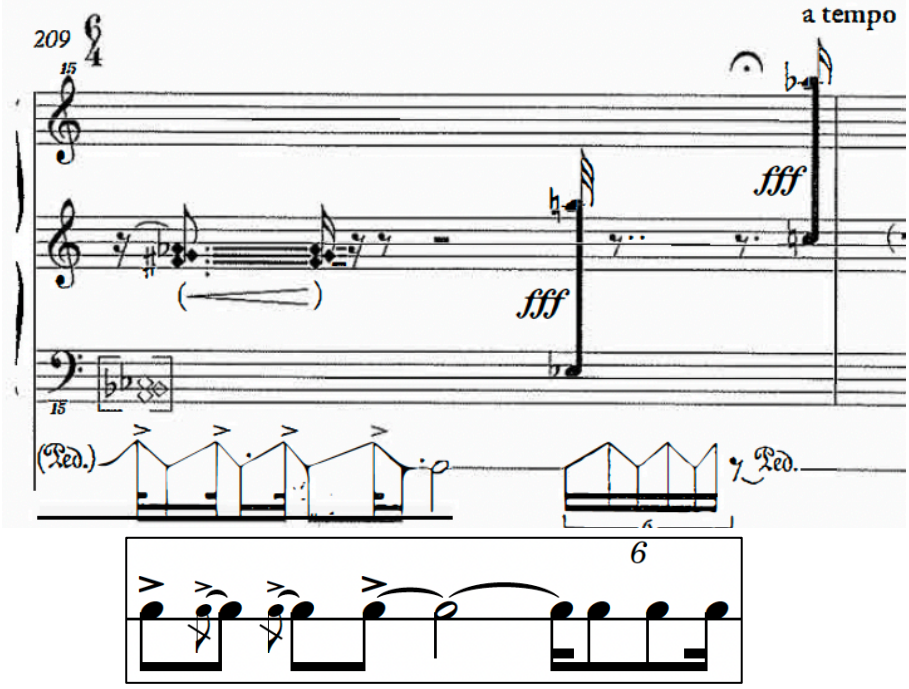

Figure 22. *Serynade*, m. 209, author's reduction of Lachenmann's notated pedal rhythm.

Lachenmann further highlights the accented pedal releases towards the end of section D. Starting in m. 228 (see Figure 23), the composer strips away traditional keyboard sonorities. The pianist only produces the sound of the dampers hitting the strings to close this climatic moment

in the piece. While it might seem unusual due to its exclusion of sounds traditionally associated with the piano, it is precisely this subversion of climactic expectation that makes this moment a peak in S*erynade*'s form. Lachenmann's score centers around two interconnected ideas – the technical and acoustic essence of piano sound and its compositional deconstruction. Techniques such as silently held notes and rhythmic fluttering isolate and highlight aspects of the instrumental sound, but it is this moment of pure pedal sounds that makes us rethink our concept of the piano. This recontextualization of instrumental sound is also one of the main ideas of instrumental musique concrète. Lachenmann elaborates on this idea of rethinking instruments in his compositional process:

> For me, composing is always deconstructing in a new way, at the same time constructing new contexts for the elements which have been thus released; stipulating, and newly adumbrating in my own fashion, the sound material which I harvest from this stipulation.[28]

Serynade builds around the idea of piano resonance. Lachenmann focuses on different aspects of piano resonance by deconstructing how the performer approaches the instrument. By varying the extended techniques, the composer focuses on each element and provides a meaningful context for its full exploration. The shadow sounds and their resulting sonorities have a distinctive sound, which sets them apart from the sounds produced by the filtering technique. The rich reverberations of the pedal action focus yet on a different aspect of the piano resonance, featuring the complex harmonic overtones of the entire instrument. The prismatic quality of section D can be applied to the entire piece – through the usage of different extended techniques, the possibilities of piano resonance are shown through varying angles.

[28] Lachenmann and Ryan, "Composer in Interview," 21.

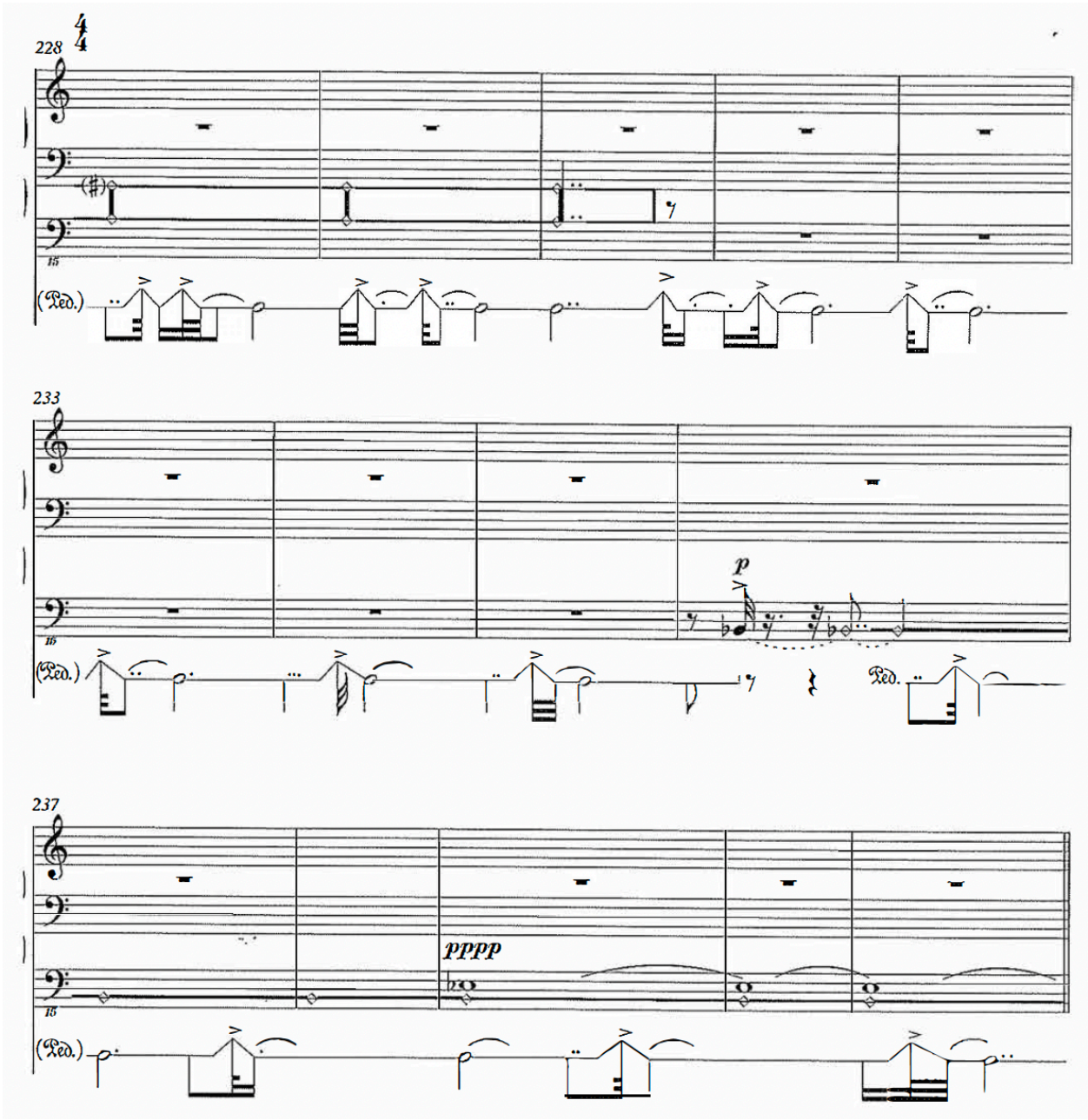

Figure 23. *Serynade*, mm. 228–241

To better inform my performance decisions, I again turned to Lachenmann's earlier works, which shows the composer's long interested in the more intricate usage of the sustain pedal. The second movement of *Ein Kinderspiel*, "Wolken im eisigen Mondlicht / Clouds in Icy Moonlight", features precise pedal indications reminiscent of their usage in *Serynade*. The sustain pedal similarly has its own place in the score with written-out rhythms (see Figure 24).

The use of the pedal is closely linked to the keyboard sounds and "must be precisely coordinated with the rhythm of the right hand."[29] Comparing the usage of sustain pedal in both works, it is evident how Lachenmann further developed this idea into a more intricate process in the later *Serynade*.

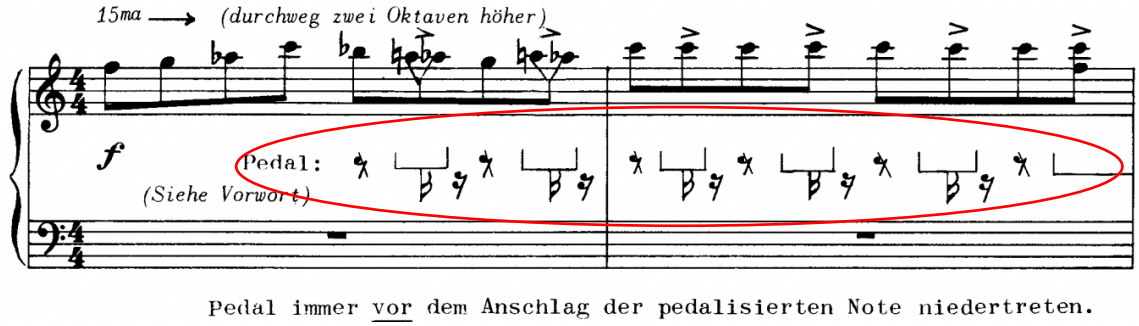

Figure 24. *Ein Kinderspiel*, movement 2: Wolken im eisigen Mondlicht / Clouds in Icy Moonlight. The pedal indications are in the middle of the grand staff, circled in red.[30]

Lachenmann's other early piano piece, *Guerro* (1970/1988), features the idea of highlighting a seemingly extraneous piano sound. Just as section D in *Serynade* features the sound of the pedal dampers, a supporting feature of most piano works, a different sound takes center stage in *Guerro*. In this short work for piano, the composer focuses on the sound created when the fingernails hit the top of the keys. Throughout the composition, different areas of the piano are treated like the work's namesake ridged wooden percussion instrument by having the pianists' fingernails glide over the top and on the side of the piano keys, as well as on top of the tuning pegs (Figure 25). As seen in these examples of Lachenmann's earlier piano works, the composer has always been interested in expanding the instrumental palette to include all aspects of piano sonorities.

[29] Lachenmann, *Ein Kinderspiel*.
[30] Translation of the composer's note under the grand staff (by author): The pedal is always depressed *before* the playing the pedaled notes.

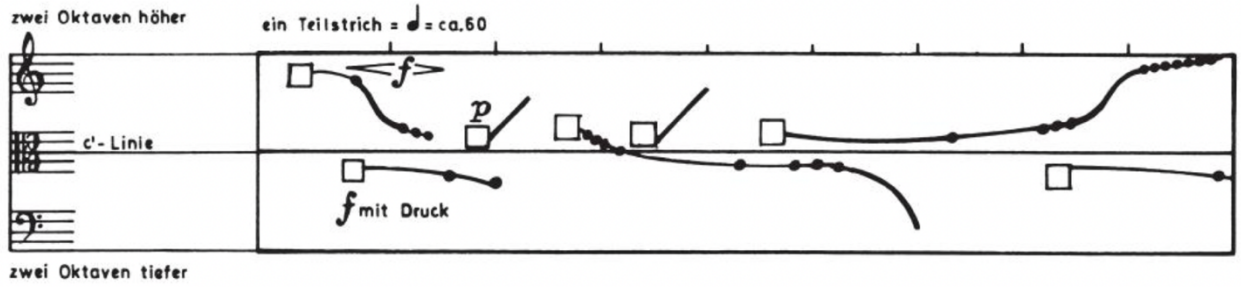

Figure 25. *Guerro*, opening. The curved lines indicate one gliding gesture. The clefs on the left denote the register of the keys to glide over.

Other extended techniques: scratching and harmonics

Other extended techniques used in *Serynade* include scratching and producing harmonics on the strings. These two techniques appear briefly towards the end of the piece, in sections F and G. The scratching sounds are notated on their own dedicated staff indicated by the word *Saiten* (strings), and the exact pitches are indicated with square serrated noteheads (see Figure 26). The composer gives detailed instructions on producing such sound: the pianist's left hand must reach into the piano and hover over the general area of the indicated pitch. Lachenmann further elaborates that the middle finger should be placed with the fingernail loosely touching the surface of the indicated string and then flicked away from the hand to produce the "brightly resonating, complex mixture of overtones."[31] The produced sonorities are then muted by the pad of the same finger, which is indicated in the score by coda-like signs.

[31] Lachenmann, *Serynade*.

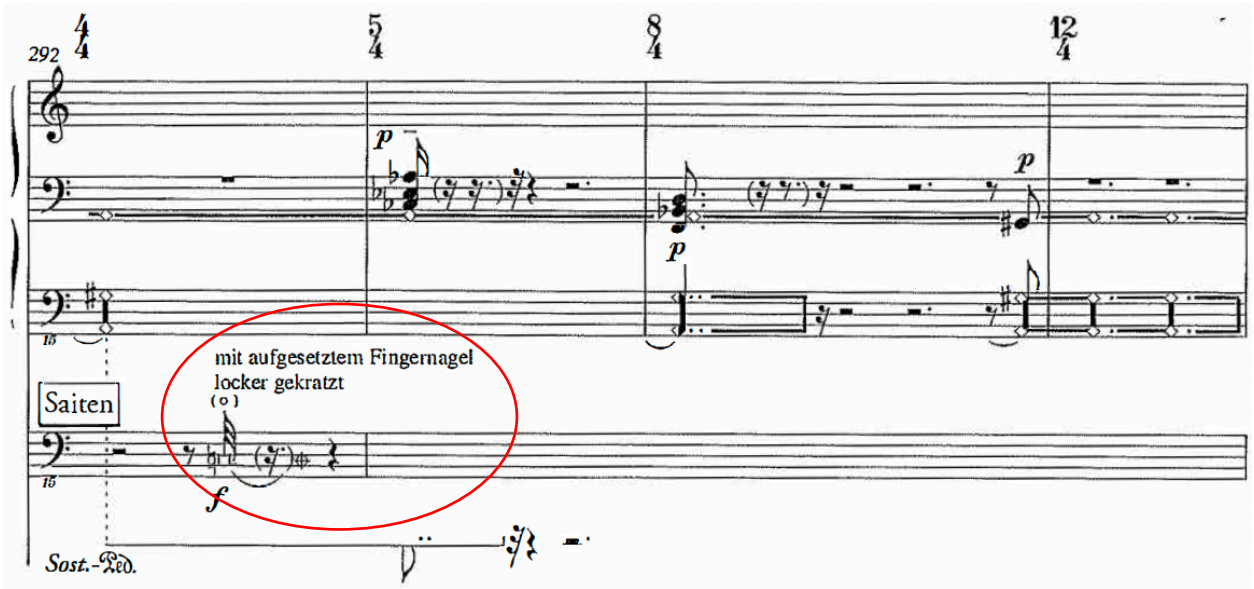

Figure 26. *Serynade*, mm. 292–295[32]

For the scratching technique, I found it helpful to have my forearm balanced on the piano frame. With the forearm positioned on the bar of the frame just above the dampers, it makes it more comfortable to execute the scratching technique. This position also helps to alleviate any tension one might develop in the hand if it hovers over the strings without a point of balance. Due to the composer indicating different dynamics for these scratching sounds, the pianist needs to be mindful of their range of motion. For a softer dynamic, a softer flicking motion is sufficient, while for the louder ones, such as *forte* and *fortissimo*, more force and pressure should be applied.

The performer will also find harmonics produced by the finger lightly touching the string in the same sections of F and G. Touching the strings to produce indicated harmonic overtones is one of the more common extended techniques used in this piece. Instead of indicating the precise overtone, Lachenmann specifies the exact position the pianist's finger should touch the string. In

[32] The translation of the note in German is (translated by author): loosely scratched with an applied fingernail.

his notes to the score, he indicates that the left hand should be touching the indicated pitches "in the proximity of the damper in a harmonic-like manner."[33] The pad of the finger lightly touches the strings in the area beyond the damper. At the same time, the other hand plays the note on the keyboard to produce a range of "overtone mixtures," which the composer indicates on the higher staves in parenthesis (see Figure 27). Unlike the scratching technique, the harmonics are not notated on their dedicated staff. Regular noteheads are used, with small circles above the notehead to indicate the harmonics.[34] Both scratching and harmonics are used in the same passages and are often within close range of each other. As the composer mentioned in his notes, it is advisable to always keep the left hand inside the piano for those passages and in the same position for both techniques.

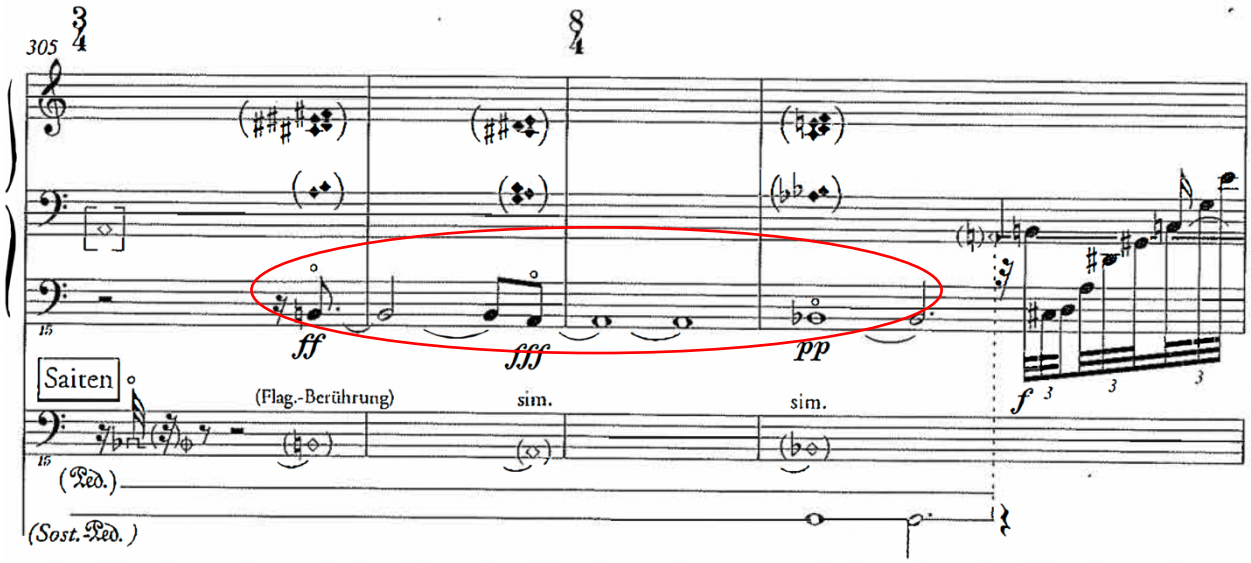

Figure 27. *Serynade*, m. 305–308. The desired harmonic overtones produced from touching the string are indicated on the top staff.

[33] Lachenmann, *Serynade*.
[34] Lachenmann does put the notes for the harmonics in the *Saiten* (string) part, but the notes are given in parenthesis.

Conclusion

Lachenmann's approach to deconstructing instrumental sound requires the performer to rethink their approach to the instrument. The addition of extended techniques disrupts the familiar actions of playing the piano. The rhythmic treatment of the sustain pedal is rare and highly unusual, which makes the execution of this technique all the more challenging. By clarifying the rhythms and connecting this extended technique to the more conventional uses of the pedal, I have shown that a more practical approach is possible. Understanding the context and the idea behind each of the extended techniques helps the performer to bring cohesiveness to the work. Through isolating the pedal sound, the composer focuses on an aspect of the piano sound which is not often featured as a solo voice. In *Serynade*, the composer asks the performer and the listener to question the essence of piano sound. Instead of trying to invent new piano sonorities, the piece answers with old and familiar sounds, which are deconstructed, reconstructed, and recontextualized in a new light. The composer himself noted how "the idea was not to find always 'another' sound, but to bring a sound into a context that was totally new."[35] By focusing on the essential aspects of the piano and rejecting the established conventions, Lachenmann is able to present the piano in a new and fresh light.

[35] Assis, "Inscriptions," 95.

Chapter 4: Phrasing & Interpretation

As discussed in previous chapters, one part of the virtuosity in *Serynade* lies within its use of extended techniques. It is technically demanding for the performer to quickly shift between sounding and silent modes of playing while executing detailed pedal instructions. To accurately realize these aspects, one must practice the gestures and the coordination to have fluidity in performance. However, this technical virtuosity is only part of the equation. Indeed, the performer faces a different virtuosity upon overcoming these technical considerations. To truly represent this work in performance, it is essential to balance the directions given in the score and account for its structure, phrasing, and even musical references. While it may seem *Serynade* does not contain melodic elements or conventional phrasing, understanding their role in this piece is critical to a convincing performance. In this chapter, I will discuss strategies for highlighting the melodic elements, phrasing, and hidden musical allusions throughout *Serynade*.

During my meeting with Lachenmann, the composer stressed the importance of thinking melodically in this piece.[36] The chords and clusters should be voiced carefully by emphasizing the top note, a standard practice for voicing chords in piano repertoire from the Classical and Romantic periods. In our meeting, Lachenmann referred to the practice of breaking the chords ever so slightly by playing the top notes ahead of the rest of the notes to accentuate them further.[37] However, the voicing of the chords should still be balanced – while bringing out the top notes of a chord, the remaining harmony must be heard. Without the full sonority of the rest

[36] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.
[37] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.

of the chord, the silently depressed strings cannot pick up as many sympathetic vibrations, thus diminishing the shadow sounds heard throughout the piece.

The emphasis on the top notes is easily achievable in chords because the pianist plays them with their fingers, but it becomes an issue when playing clusters. In our conversations, Lachenmann pointed out the melodic quality of the top notes of the clusters, starting in m. 197 of section D (Figure 28). Due to the clusters stretching over multiple octaves, the performer must use both forearms to press the key range notated. The technical realization of these two clusters is not difficult, as the performer could simply slide their arms from the first cluster on the black keys to the adjacent second cluster on the white keys. However, to bring out the top notes of these clusters, A-flat and G respectively, requires the performer to pay special attention to the forearm position on the keyboard.

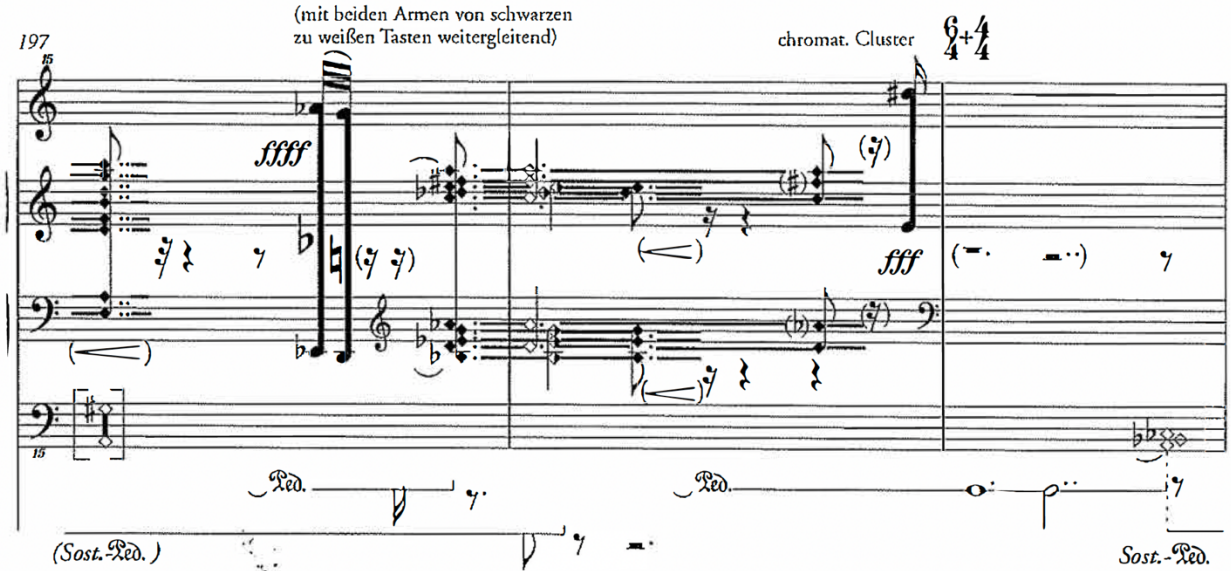

Figure 28. *Serynade*, mm. 197–199

In my performances, I aim for the top notes with my right elbow. By doing so, I can apply more pressure as compared to the lower pitches, and thereby make these top notes stand out. In addition, it is helpful to put some space between these two clusters. Although a note in the score

indicates the performer to "slide from the black to white keys with both arms," the composer suggested separating the clusters.[38] Instead of playing these two clusters in one sweeping gesture, I lift the arms between each cluster to provide clarity. The following cluster, seen at the end of m. 198 in Figure 28, covers a much smaller area of notes and can be played using both forearms or palms with outstretched fingers. Using both palms, the pianist can maneuver their hands so that the top note is covered by a finger, providing ideal flexibility in voicing.

In addition to balanced voicing, Lachenmann introduces melodic elements into the piece through short ornament-like notes before chords. At the beginning of section B, one note of a chord seemingly arrives ahead of the remaining notes (see Figure 29). In this section, Lachenmann indicates that for "the following chords, the preceding single notes are passing, played discreetly, and articulated."[39] However, during our meeting, the composer suggested to instead play these single notes as part of a melodic line.[40]

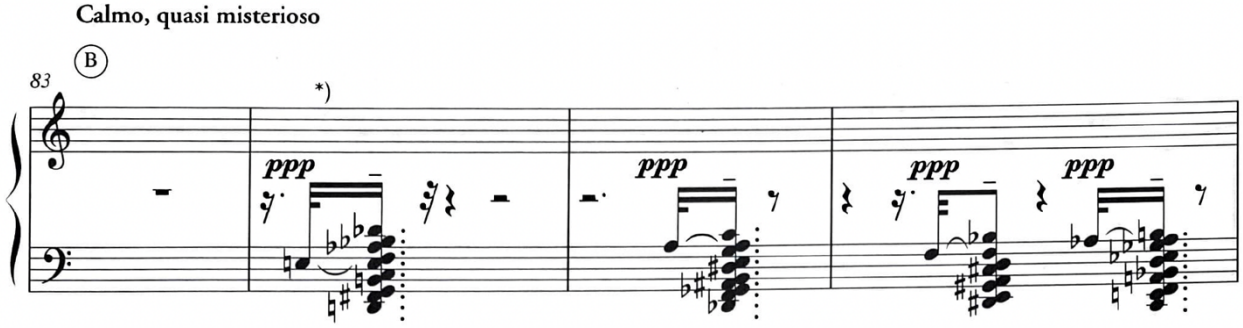

Figure 29. *Serynade*, mm. 83–86

Though these single notes are notated as thirty-second notes in duration, the composer suggested to playing such precise rhythms a bit slower than indicated by the score, and to separate them from the rest of the chord. This melodic idea returns at m. 167, as seen in Figure 30, yet

[38] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.
[39] Lachenmann, *Serynade*, 9, translation by author.
[40] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.

Lachenmann changes the compositional material slightly. Here, single notes are written out as grace notes to the main chord, rather than thirty-second notes. Perhaps due to the dynamic contrast between the grace notes and the chords in Figure 30, he similarly suggested to play these single notes slower and more emphasized.

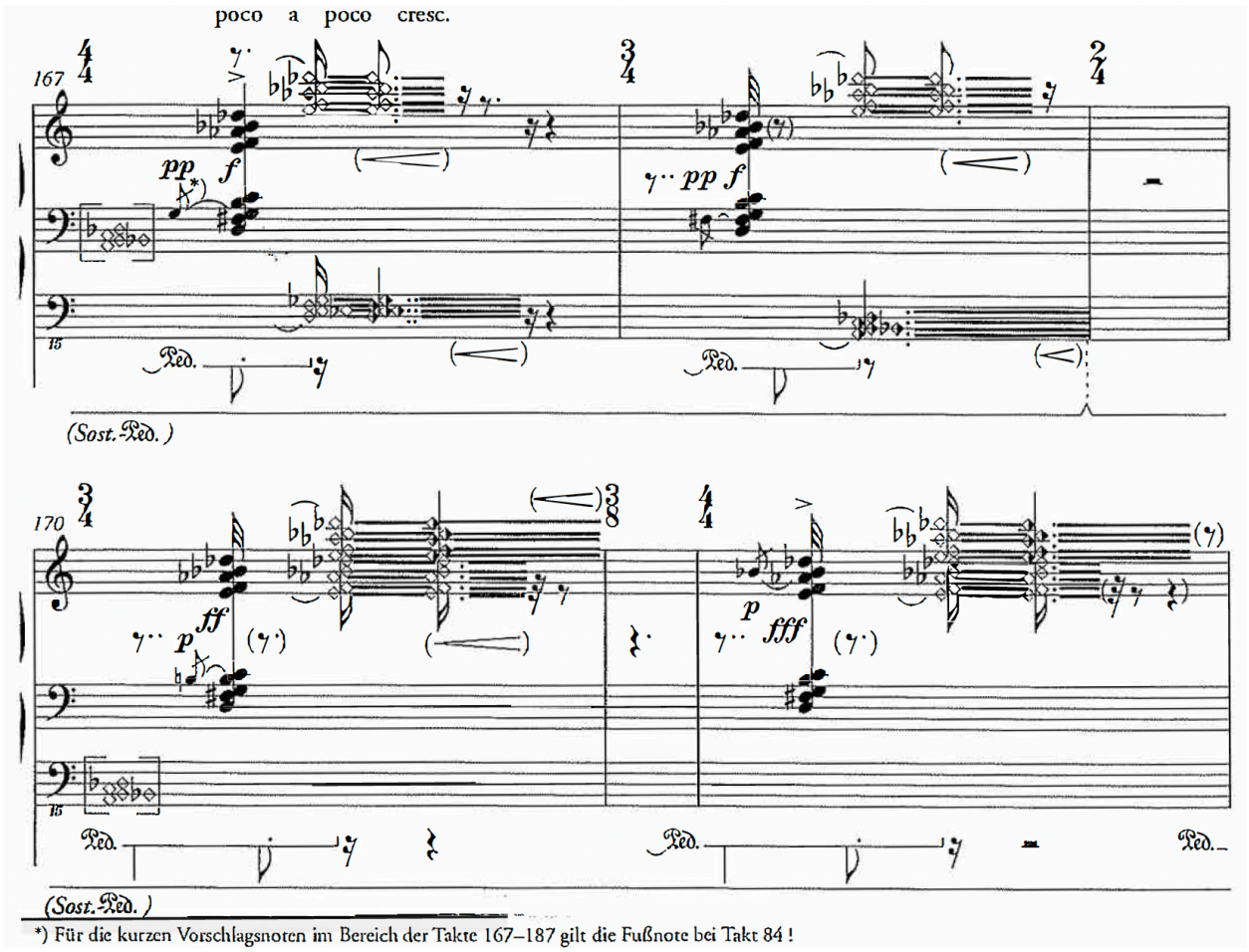

Figure 30. *Serynade*, mm. 167–172

In addition to bringing out melodic content, it is critical to consider phrasing and shorter gestures in *Serynade*. One particularly determining factor in my own phrasing of this work is the placement of rests and silence. Due to the extensive usage of silently depressed keys and shadow sounds, this piece rarely has moments of typical musical silence. As such, I use these silences to guide my phrasing in my performance practice. Within the opening measures of the piece, I

consider mm. 1–7 as one phrase (Figure 31), as m. 7 is the first moment not containing residual resonances and sounding events. The dynamic shape of this phrase also grows organically from the *piano* in the first measure to the *forte* chord in m. 6, which fades away through the filtering effect.

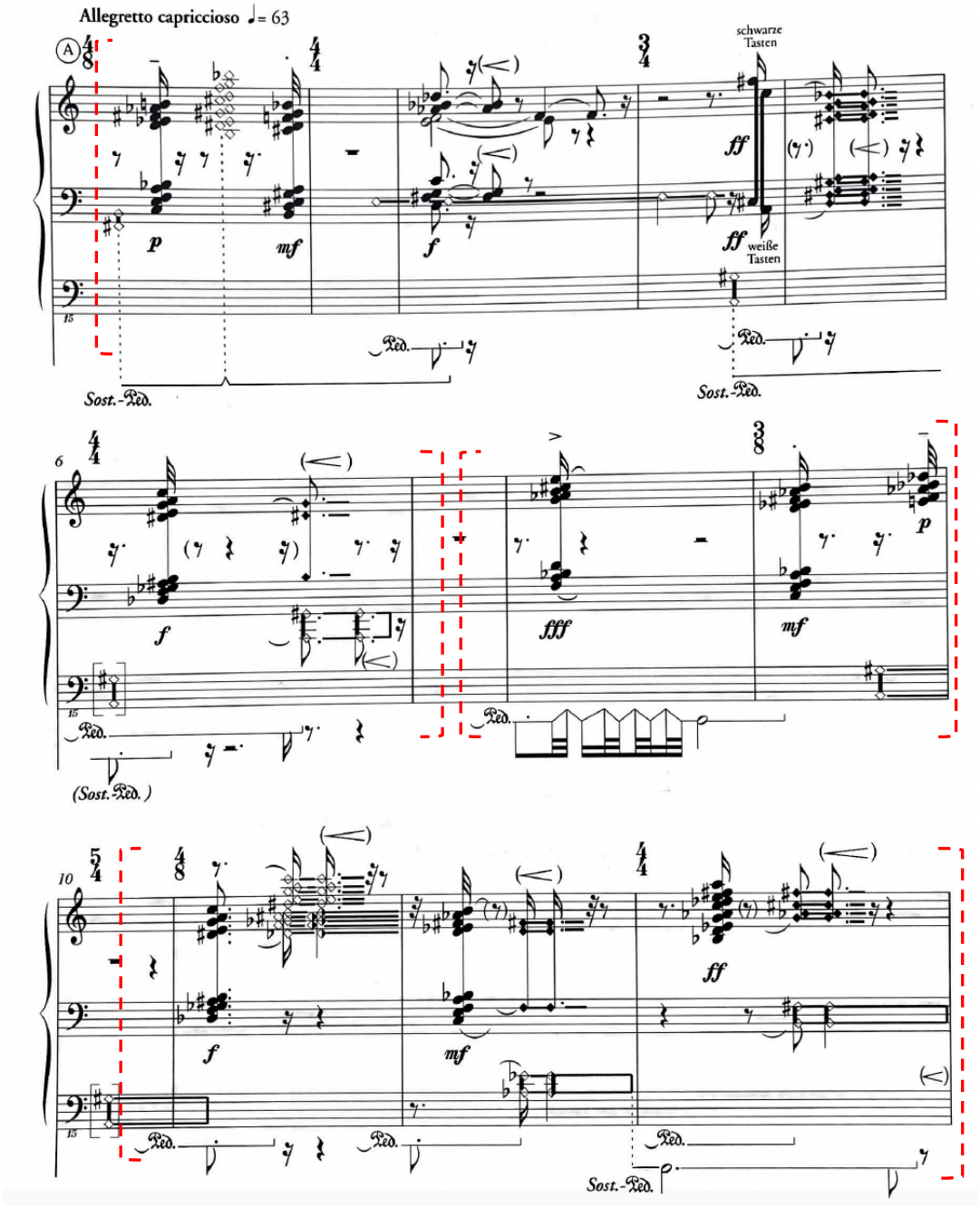

Figure 31. *Serynade*, mm. 1–13. Dotted brackets are used to indicate phrasing and gestures.

For the following measures, I take the notion of phrasing and break it down further, categorizing these as two groups of gestures. This is due to the lack of silence in these measures, as well as a clear grouping of mm. 8–9 as one unit, and mm.11–13 as another unit. Mm. 11, 12, and 13 share a similar structure between them – the loud sounding chord in the first beat of the measure, followed by the fading resonance in the rest of the measure.

Another way to determine phrasing in *Serynade* is by listening to the hidden harmonic content generated by shadow sounds. Most of the time, these shadow sounds do not form traditional harmonies, but in mm. 219–225, one can hear seventh chords and inversions filter through the resonating clusters (Figure 32). The filtered notes in the left hand obscure the tonal nature of these seventh chords at first, but with the left hand releasing its notes much earlier, these right-hand harmonies are still clear and audible. By isolating these shadow harmonies in the right hand, it becomes clear that the five chords in mm. 219–225 are part of a sequence, with the bass of the chords moving down by step (see Figure 33 for the right-hand chords isolated by themselves). The first chord in Figure 33 is a seventh chord with the note E as its root, and the second is an inverted seventh chord, using the same bass note of E. The subsequent chords similarly share bass notes – the seventh chord in m. 222 utilizes D as its root, followed by an inversion with the same bass note. The third part of this sequence is incomplete, as there is a seventh chord in m. 225 with a C-sharp root, but no inversion follows. An awareness of these shadow harmonies and their relationship to one another influences my phrasing decisions throughout this passage, as I perform the shadow sounds and their subsequent inversions as one phrase. The first phrase begins in the second half of m. 218 and ends in m. 221. The second phrase in this passage includes another pair of shadow harmonies and goes from mm. 222–224.

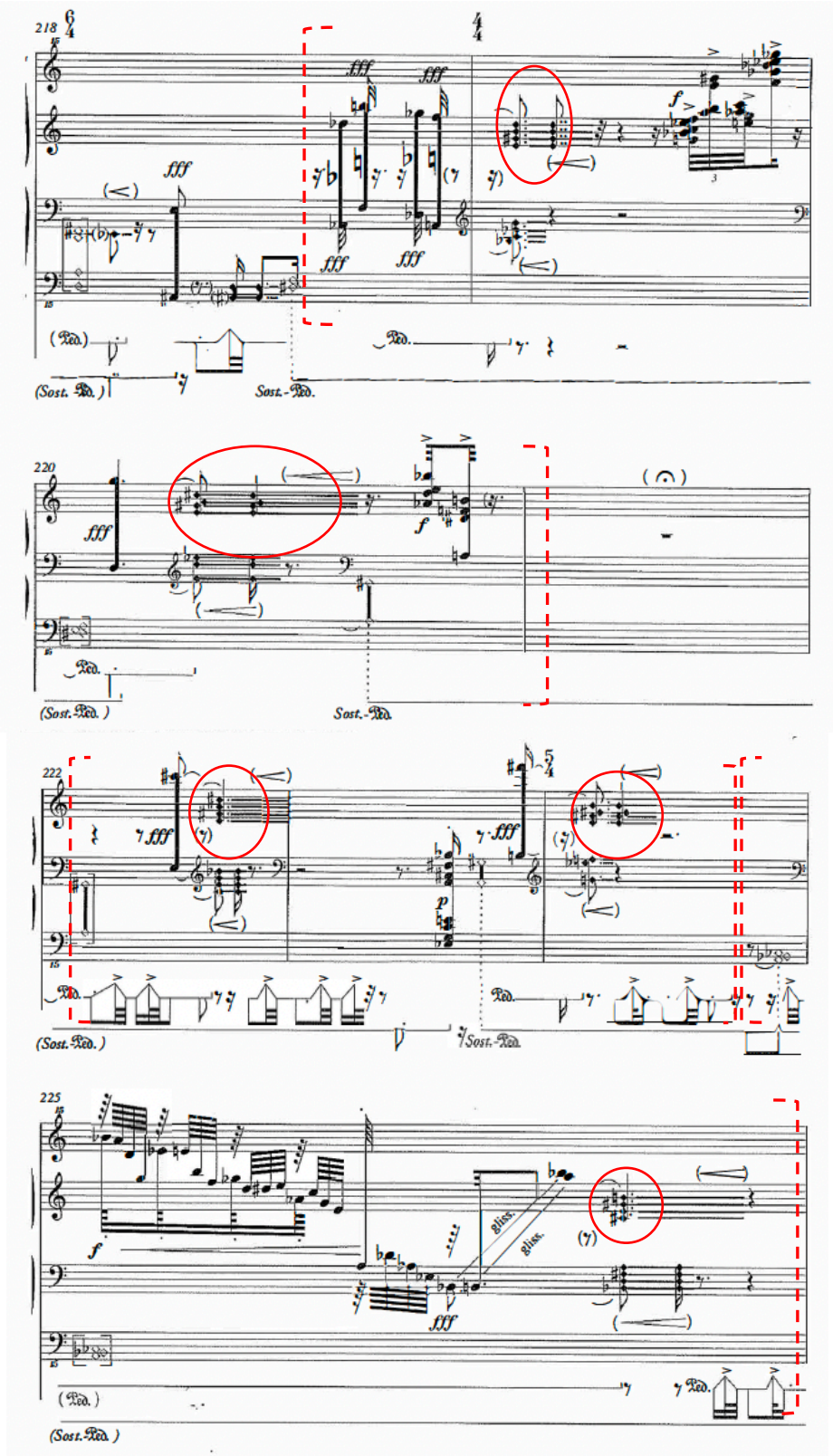

Figure 32. *Serynade*, mm. 218–225. The shadow harmonies are circled in red. Dotted brackets indicate phrasing.

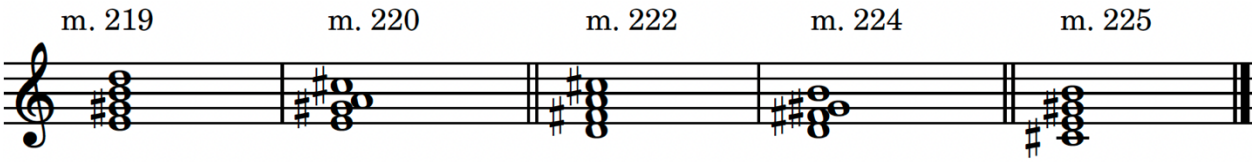

Figure 33. *Serynade*, mm. 219–225. Reduction with only the right-hand shadow harmonies

With this sudden introduction of conventional harmony, the composer informed me that it was Johannes Brahms' *In Stiller Nacht* which inspired these shadow harmonies. Though *Serynade* does not directly quote Brahms, these chords are very much influenced by *In Stiller Nacht*. Indeed, both pieces use seventh chords inversions in a downward half-step motion between multiple harmonies. In Brahms, the second phrase of his work begins with a B-flat major triad, which moves to a diminished seventh chord inversion on the same bass note (circled in Figure 34). The soprano voice moves from an F to an E, forming a downward half-step motion, echoed by Lachenmann in his *Serynade*, as seen in Figure 33.

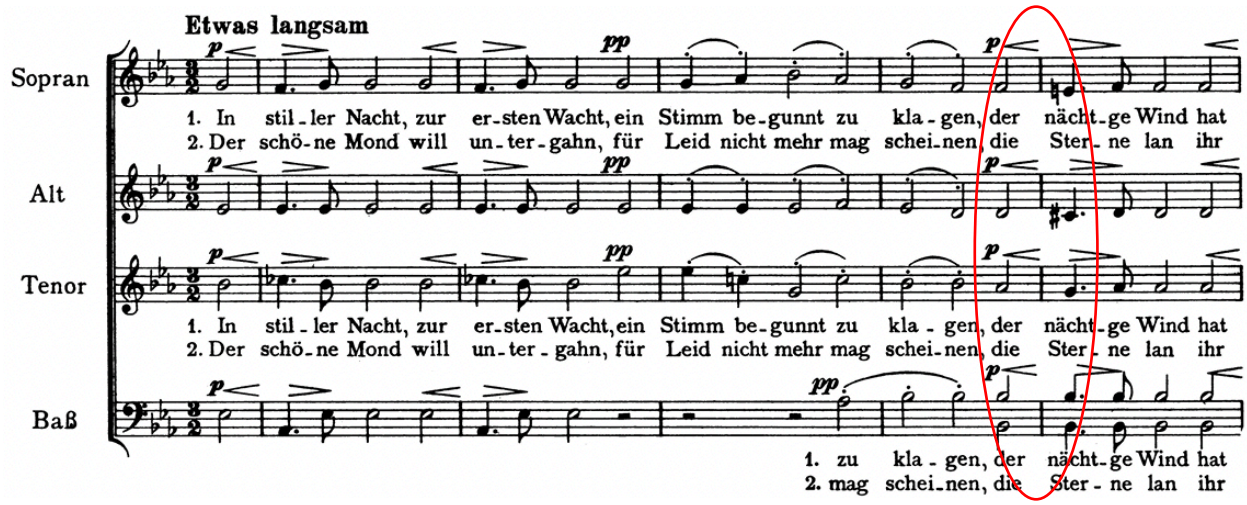

Figure 34. Brahms, *In Stiller Nacht*, mm. 1–6

Alongside melodic voicing and phrasing, other interpretational issues include usage of the *una corda* pedal. Although the sostenuto pedal and sustain pedal are incorporated extensively, there are moments in *Serynade* that may necessitate using the *una corda* pedal. The composer does not indicate the usage of the left pedal in the score, but during our meeting, he

noted that it is left to the performer's discretion.[41] One such place its use may be practical is at the beginning of section B, mm. 83–90 (Figure 35). The *una corda* pedal is needed to achieve the dynamic marking of triple *piano* throughout this passage. Although softer dynamics are used throughout the entire section, the simultaneous use of the sostenuto and sustain pedal in mm. 91–92, makes the incorporation of the *una corda* impractical beyond m. 90.

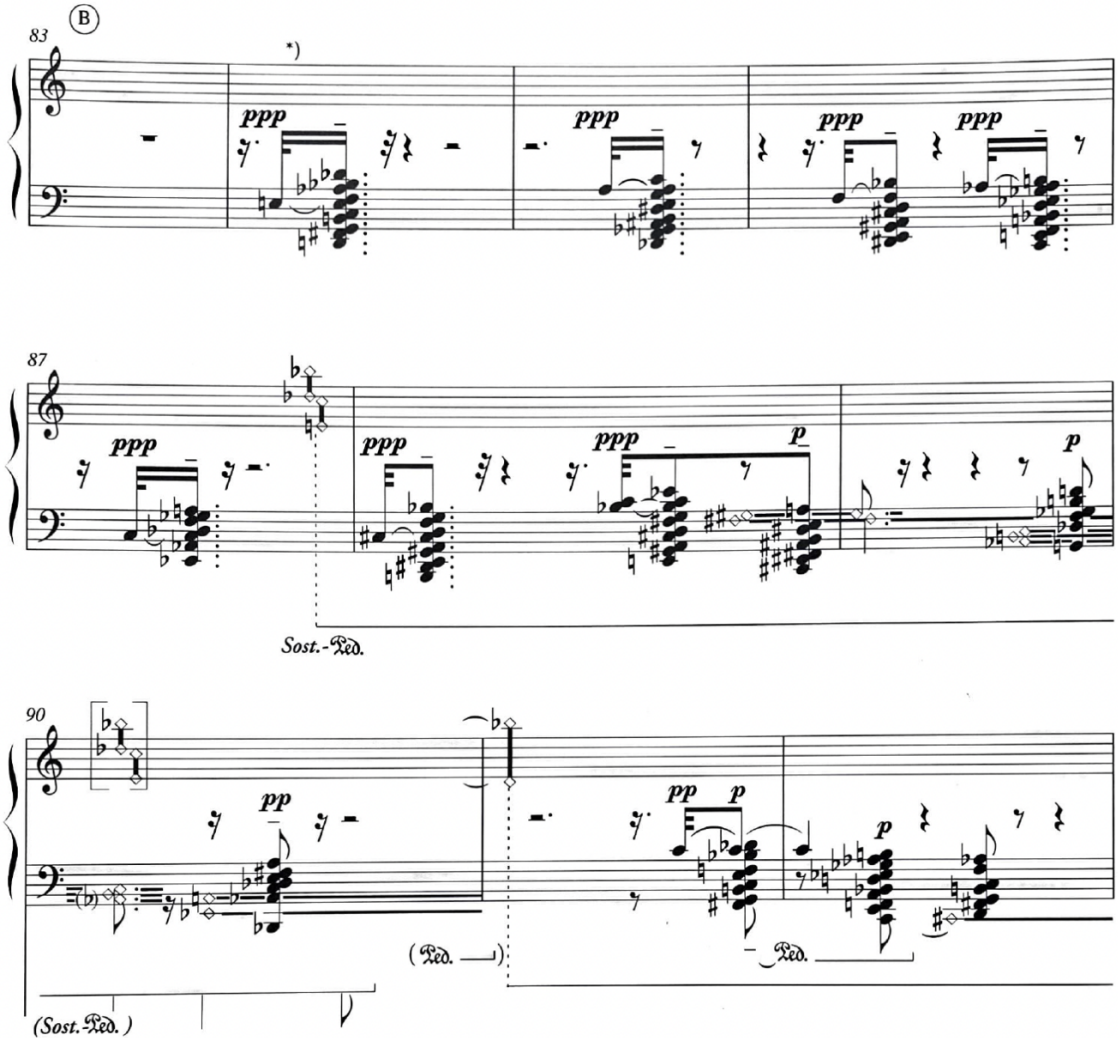

Figure 35. *Serynade*, mm. 83–92

[41] Helmut Lachenmann, in discussion with the author, December 2018.

Some other interpretative aspects the performer must consider are tempo and the usage of rubato. In my conversations with Lachenmann, the composer pointed out how certain sections of the piece should be rigorously in time, such as section D (mm. 145–246). Due to the repetitive nature of this section, the pianist should adhere to a very strict tempo and rhythm. The drama of section D builds from the relentless repetition of the same chord, and having any tempo fluctuations would take away the tension in this central section of the piece. The composer does not specify the usage of rubato in the score, and as such, when and how to use rubato is left to the performer's discretion. Ian Pace notes that considering "some degree of *rubato*" within the fast-note passages "is by no means at odds with the spirit of the music."[42] However, these fast passages scattered throughout provide a sense of meter and pulse.[43] In such passages, the rhythm frequently changes between duple and triple division of the beat, and incorporating rubato here would likely distort the rhythm. In my conversations with Lachenmann, the composer pointed out how he wanted more distinction between the duplets and triplets in the passage shown in Figure 36 and other similar places throughout the piece. Most of the sounding events in *Serynade* are separated by rests, making it hard for the listener to get a rhythmic feel for the piece. In the fast keywork passages, such as the one shown in Figure 36, there is a clear sense of pulse and rhythmic drive. Based on Lachenmann's insistence on rhythmical clarity in section D, it follows that a stable pulse throughout these fast passages is ideal.

[42] Pace, "Lachenmann's *Serynade*," 105.
[43] See Figure 36 for an example of the fast passagework in section C.

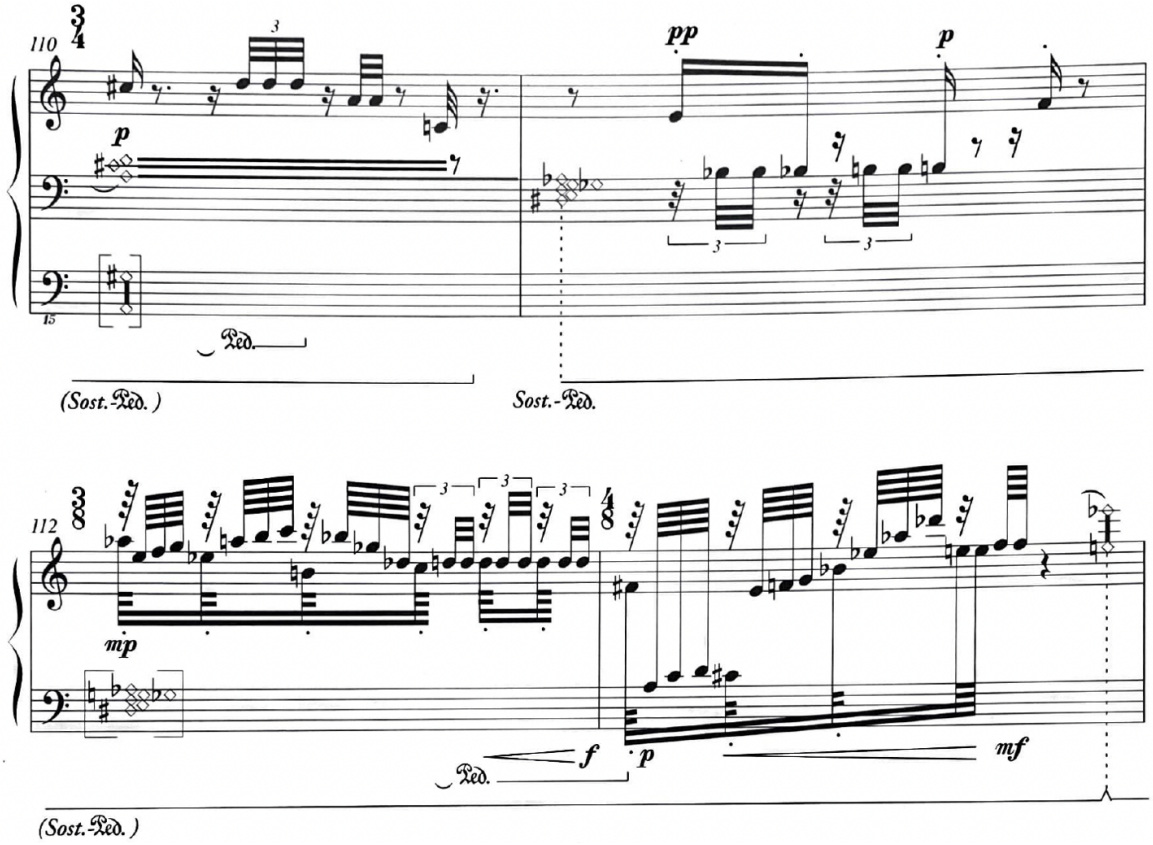

Figure 36. *Serynade*, mm. 110–113

The interpretative decisions in *Serynade* must be made after the performer familiarizes themselves with the piece's language and its extended techniques. Although the composer has rigorously notated the details for articulation, dynamics, tempo, and other aspects relating to the interpretation, there is still much for the performer to highlight through their unique understanding of the piece. Faithfulness to the score should not come at the sacrifice of clear melodic direction as Lachenmann himself indicated; instead, one should seek to highlight the melodic and expressive qualities of *Serynade*. In my own performances, Lachenmann was very specific about certain aspects of the piece, such as melodic voicing in chords and clusters as well as strict adherence to the tempo, but he was also very open towards any decisions I have made as the performer of the piece. While the technical challenges of *Serynade* might present themselves

as the more pressing matter, to truthfully present this work in performance, one must also consider the interpretative aspects.

Conclusion

Throughout Lachenmann's sixty-year career, *Serynade* remains a cornerstone of his oeuvre. The scope and breadth *of Serynade*'s musical language, brimming with extended techniques, can be intimidating to approach, but careful study reveals the clarity and structure within each passage. Indeed, the techniques used by Lachenmann are not new – Schumann famously used the shadow sounds produced by silently pressed keys in his *Carnaval*, while the filtering technique is strikingly similar to that used by Charles Ives in the second movement of his Piano Sonata No. 2, *Concord*. However, the extent and exacting precision with which Lachenmann demands such techniques in *Serynade* redefine their compositional possibilities. He furthers on this notion:

> Trying to redefine again and again the idea of music, searching for new contexts for the sounds I am living with, trying to resolve the resulting problems and thus discovering my creative possibilities: the resulting music has its sound and its form, and the two are inseparable.[44]

As we have seen in *Serynade*, the composer presents the idea of shadow sounds in multiple frameworks. This technique is particularly highlighted in section D, where the silently depressed keys serve as a prism that reveals the different colors of the reiterated chord. The introduction of the rhythm into the sustain pedal part is also presented in multiple situations – as a more conventional pedal fluttering and as a percussive effect later in the piece. Each of these techniques challenges the performer's and audience's perception of the piano sounds, thus opening our ears to hear familiar sounds in a new environment.

In addition to performance techniques, physical gestures in *Serynade* are an issue a performer must consider when realizing this piece. In an interview, when asked about the visual

[44] Heathcote, "Sound Structures," 346.

aspects of his works, Lachenmann discussed the Japanese temple gongs known as Dôbachi, noting that the rims of these instruments must be warmed up in a circular motion before they can produce their "wonderfully rich tone."[45] The Dôbachi bowls do not make sound right away when one rubs their rims, just as the silently depressed keys in *Serynade*. Lachenmann calls for these silently notes, which may not immediately produce shadow sounds, yet they require an initial physical motion. As such, the physical gestures in *Serynade*, which may seem theatrical at first glance, are necessary components shaped by the "musically determined context."[46] Likewise, in my discussions with the composer, he reiterated this sentiment of *Serynade* not being an overtly theatrical piece. The extended techniques, such as silently depressed notes or accented pedal actions, are means to produce the desired sonorities and are an "integral part of [the] work's fabric, rather than as special effects."[47]

I am drawn to this piece because it makes me rethink my relationship with my instrument. The act of playing piano, something that I have been doing for over twenty years, is redefined in many ways in this piece. In *Serynade*, the silent moments are as important as the sounding events, and the performer must focus equally on the silent and sounding notes. The many nuances in approaching the silently depressed keys and the usage of the sostenuto pedal made me carefully consider the choreography of this piece. The releases of notes, especially the silent ones, also demand a nuanced approach. Lastly, the extensive use of shadow sounds throughout the work made me rethink my listening. *Serynade* calls for profound and attentive listening from both the performer and the listener. Lachenmann characterizes listening as

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[45] Lachenmann and Ryan, "Composer in Interview," 24.
[46] Lachenmann and Ryan, "Composer in Interview," 24.
[47] Ross Feller, "Resistant Strains of Postmodernism: The Music of Helmut Lachenmann and Brian Ferneyhough" in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, ed. Judy Lochhead, Joseph Auner (Routledge, 2002), 252.

"constantly provoking our ears in new ways, to prevent what they hear becoming homogenized, and which broaden our ability to take in new experiences."[48] It is through listening and comprehensive understanding of the score that the pianist can hope to bring out the nuances of Lachenmann's score into the performance.

My work on *Serynade* has made me seek other compositions exploring similar ideas. In my joint chamber music recital with pianist Dimitris Paganos-Koukakis, we programmed Henri Dutilleux's *Figures de Résonances* (1976). The work consists of four short movements and, as the title suggests, explores different aspects of the two pianos as resonant bodies. Just as Lachenmann uses the pedals and silently depressed keys to create shadow harmonies, Dutilleux's work creates this effect through the use of two pianos. While one performer plays sounding chords and clusters, the other pianist keeps the sustain pedal pressed, allowing the open strings of the second instrument to vibrate sympathetically. Beyond chamber repertoire, my second solo DMA recital featured *crimson* by Rebecca Saunders. Both pieces by Saunders and Lachenmann share similar elements, such as silently depressed keys, percussive pedal effects, and other extended techniques. However, Saunders uses these elements in a dramatically different way from Lachenmann. In *crimson*, the shadow sounds take on a secondary role, with Saunders' work focusing primarily on rich sonorities of chromatic clusters. Likewise, the pedal releases are transformed into a percussive effect – while in *Serynade*, this effect is achieved by the sound of the dampers hitting the strings, here Saunders instructs the pianist to jerk the foot sideways, producing a loud sound with the shoe and pedal hitting the wooden frame. My previous work on *Serynade* helped me understand Saunder's notation and the sound world she wanted to create in her piece.

[48] Lachenmann and Ryan, "Composer in Interview," 20.

Serynade by Helmut Lachenmann is a milestone in the contemporary piano repertoire. With its technical and musical demands, this dissertation provides a window into the performance considerations necessary for realizing this major work. By breaking down Lachenmann's techniques, this dissertation offers insight into interpreting the score and how to realize the complex notation. Indeed, with these detailed and specific suggestions on how to approach Lachenmann's composition, it is my hope that future performers will find information that provides the impetus for their own unique interpretations of *Serynade*.

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