"...or a cherish'd bard..." (1999)

was written for the American pianist Deborah Richards in honor of her 50th birthday in August 1999. It represents the transition of one piano score – based on the whole-tone scale containing the pitches DEB (D, E and B-flat in German) and on rhythms derived from the hexadecimal number DEB – to another score similarly based on the whole-tone scale containing the pitches AH (A and B-natural in German) and on rhythms from the hexadecimal number A0 (the "H" is rhythmically silent and replaced by 0). The transition is in the hocket tradition: one always hears DEB *or* AH, never both together, though DEB predominates at the beginning and AH at the end. The title is an anagram of the pianist's name.

The dedication goes as follows:

Full fifty years – the most whereof well-spent
In service of the Muse – wherefore I pray
That Lady Fortune add three-score and ten.
Yet I, a clown cerebral, so some say,*
Unfit in words, resort to Music's way
To help submit my prayer in this regard.
Meseems a minstrel, or a cherish'd bard
Would better wield in verse his worthy pen.

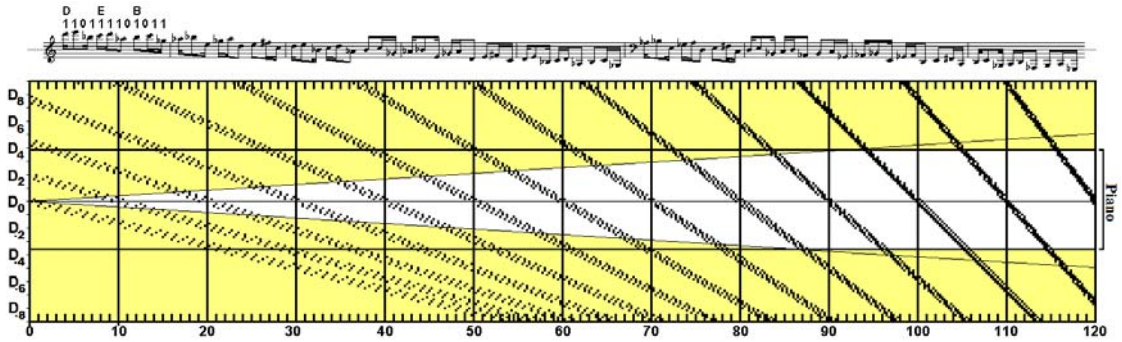
* an anagram of "Clarence Barlow"

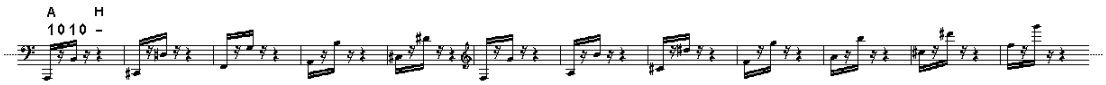
The complete procedure:

1. Make an infinitely long descending chain of notes based on whole-tone transpositions of the melodic motif D E B-flat ("D E B" in German – see the center of the notated example below) in a cyclic rhythm derived from the hexadecimal numbers D E and B converted to binary (1101 1110 1011 in regular pulses: '1's are attacked, '0's are silent) as in the diagram below. This is the "DEB" chain.

2. Repeat the chains in time, so that they cross the pitch Middle D once every second.

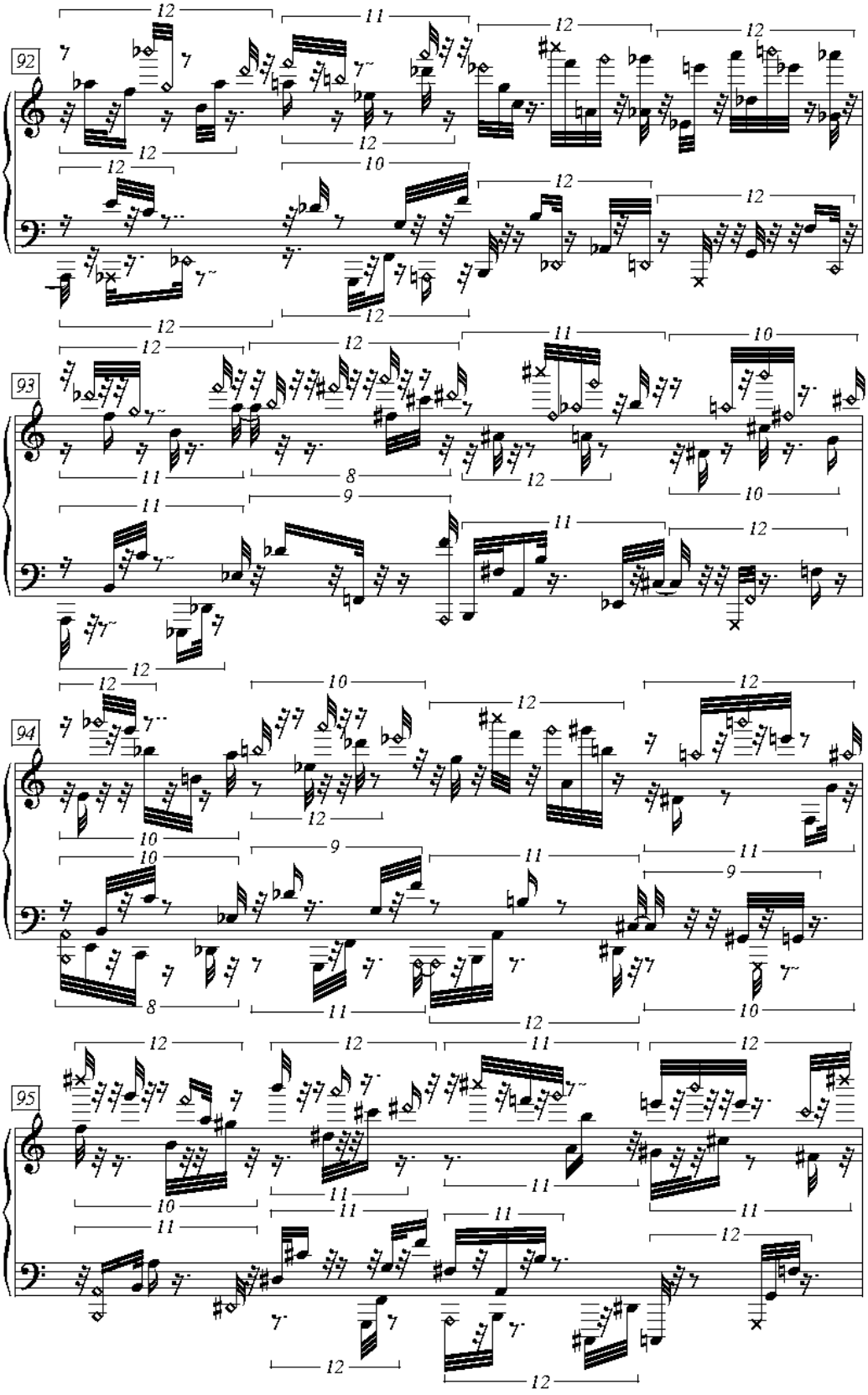
3. Gradually raise the chains' gradient by a fixed factor every repetition. This is the "DEB" score.



4. Make an infinitely long rising "AH" chain based on whole-tone transpositions of the major ninth motif A B ("A H" in German) based on the rhythm derived from the hexadecimal number A0 converted to binary (1010 0000) – see the notated example:

5. Make an "AH" score as in points 2 and 3 above but using the "AH" chain.

6. Align both scores simultaneously and interpolate for every note of each the probability of it being attacked, depending on its source – in the "DEB" score the probability gradually falls from 100% to zero over the duration of the piece, rising concurrently in the "AH" score from zero to 100%.

7. As the final step, insert a pitch range filter on the resulting score, rising linearly from Middle D at the beginning to ±60 half-steps centered at Middle D at the end, keeping only the enclosed notes.

An excerpt of the score is shown below. The diamond- and cross-headed notes sound an octave higher in the treble and lower in the bass, the cross-headed ones being unavailable on a regular piano.

92
93
94
95