for Katherine Nunn…

The Clifftop Clan

five miniatures for young pianists

Martin Humphries

- 2016 -

Programme note:

The Clifftop Clan is a set of five miniatures for young pianists based on the book *Malu's Wolf* by Ruth Craig, each depicting a character from the story. The eponymous wolf Kono does not get his own movement, but instead, his theme is present throughout and interacts with the material of other characters. Each movement focuses on one soundworld of the piano and restricts difficulty so performers can focus on sound rather than technique. The characters portrayed are as follows:

I – Lone Wolf

Malu finds Lone Wolf dying in the underbrush and vows to look after her cub Kono.

II – Gunto

Gunto is the Clifftop Clan's newest hunter but he is arrogant and proud.

III – Malu the Girl

Malu dreams of being a hunter but as she is a girl she must endure the mundane tasks of clan-life.

IV – Sosho

Sosho is the leader of the Clifftop Clan and can communicate mystically with Gods and nature's spirits.

V – Malu the Hunter

Following her adventures, Malu fulfils her dream and is invited to become a hunter of the Clifftop Clan.

The Clifftop Clan was composed between August and December 2016 at the CoMA Summer School, Cardiff University School of Music practice room 1.09, and in my parents' loft. An early version of 'Lone Wolf' was performed by Michael Finnissy on 12/8/16.

This suite is inspired by and dedicated to Katherine Nunn.

Note to teachers:

Each movement of *The Clifftop Clan* is a character piece based on Ruth Craig's children's book *Malu's Wolf*. It is highly recommended that the young performers of this set of pieces read the book alongside their lessons to enhance the programmatic nature of the settings. The book is aimed at children ages eight and up, but has ample detail for readers (and players) some years older than this.

My musical settings are aimed at young pianists in the early stages of learning (i.e. Grade I-III). Particular care has been taken to ensure that the practical considerations of the work are suitable for children learning the piano. The work is written with smaller hands in mind and it tries not to deviate far from the requirements of the early grade ABRSM syllabus. As such, tonal centres are akin to those required in early grade scales, hand shapes remain largely static throughout each miniature, and concessions of difficulty are restricted to just one or two elements per movement.

Beyond early grade piano syllabuses, I have also looked to sources on teaching piano, Primary music education, and child psychology, as well as interviews and observations with working teachers. This research has informed my composing method and permeated the work in ways that hopefully makes the music more accessible and appropriate for young performers. Examples include the focus on timbre in 'Lone Wolf' (widely agreed to be the element of sound young ears are most susceptible to), speech rhythms in 'Gunto' to aid style and articulation, and invitations into the creative process in 'Malu the Girl' and 'Sosho'.

It has been noted by numerous practitioners and academics that children are not prejudice to contemporary music until a teacher has offered a negative attitude towards it – I frequently hear expressions such as 'no tune' or 'needlessly difficult'. My hope is that this suite of miniatures will serve as a useful introduction to a more diverse array of piano sounds and techniques than much of the early grade repertoire offers, created with a sensitivity to the needs of young pianists and their aspirations as performers.

Duration: c.11 minutes

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for Katherine Nunn

Lone Wolf

Martin Humphries

Malu stumbles upon LoneWolf dying in the underbrush. She makes a vow to look after her cub Kono.

Keep the right pedal down throughout and really listen to how one sound leads into the next. There's no need to rush through the piece. Just enjoy the sounds and place the next chord when it feels right. The rhythms are only guidelines but there should still be a sense that the music is moving forward. Feel free to leave even more space when there are pauses and commas in the score.

Slow lament (♩=c.60)

8va

p *poco* *pp*

Ped. *sempre*
(sound always bleeding)

4

8va

p *poco* *pp*

7 **A**

3

p *mf* *mp no dim.* *p*

3

11 **B** **Menacing**

pp

f

14

8va

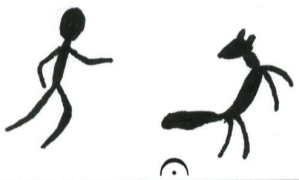
Db Eb F

17

3

ff sub.

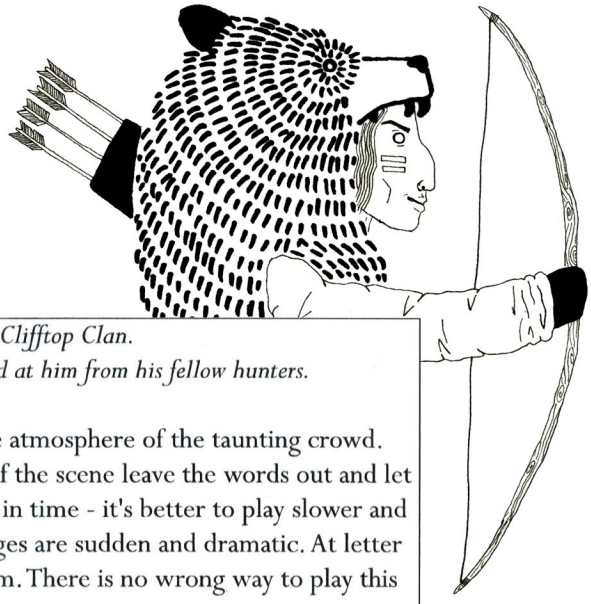
3



20 **C** **Hopeful and just a little quicker (♩=c.80)**

pp

Gunto



Gunto, a young hunter, is being initiated into the Clifftop Clan.
He is proud and arrogant and does not appreciate the taunting aimed at him from his fellow hunters.

When learning this piece chant along with the words to help create the atmosphere of the taunting crowd. When you are happy you can play the rhythms and capture the mood of the scene leave the words out and let the piano do the talking. Keep everything short and punchy and always in time - it's better to play slower and stay steady then to slow down or stumble. Make sure all dynamic changes are sudden and dramatic. At letter C use the space between chords to help you decide where to place them. There is no wrong way to play this section so experiment with lots of different timings.

Steady (♩=c.100)

mp

Fool-ish Gun-to,

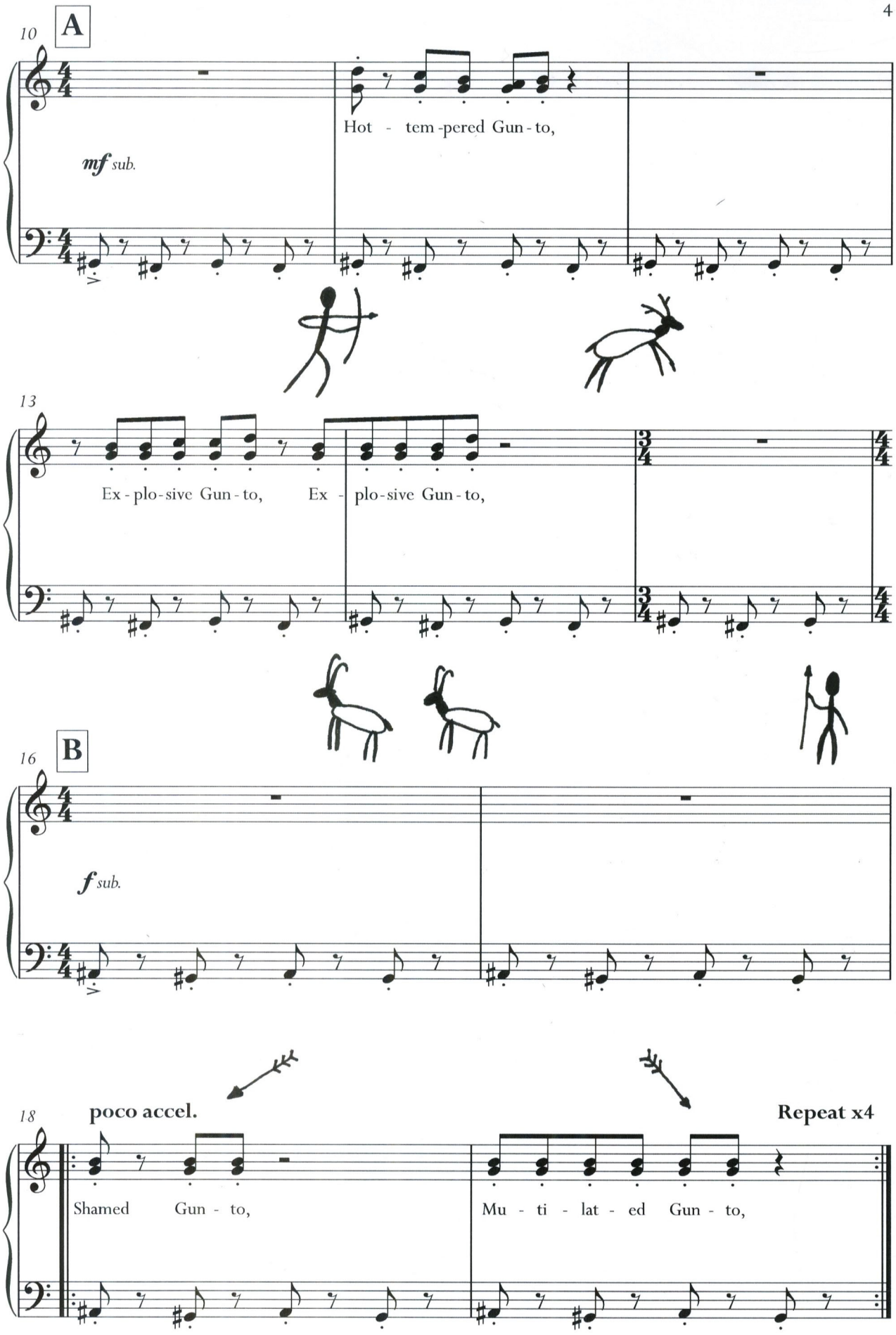
4

Hast-y Gun-to,

7

Boast-ing Gun-to,

Snort-ing, snarl-ing, sneer-ing, Gun-to,


10
A
mf sub.
Hot - tem-pered Gun-to,
13
Ex-plo-sive Gun-to, Ex - plo-sive Gun-to,
16
B
f sub.
18
poco accel.
Repeat x4
Shamed Gun - to,
Mu - ti - lat - ed Gun - to,

C **Arrogant (free time, no pulse)**

20

ff *sub.* *sim.*

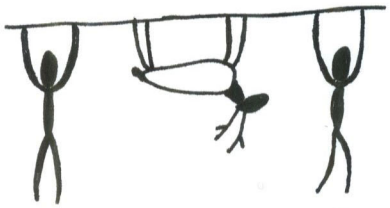
(accidentals apply throughout bar)

21

D **Steady (♩=c.100)**

22

p *sub.*



25

Slam palm of hand onto the keyboard
(as many low notes as possible)

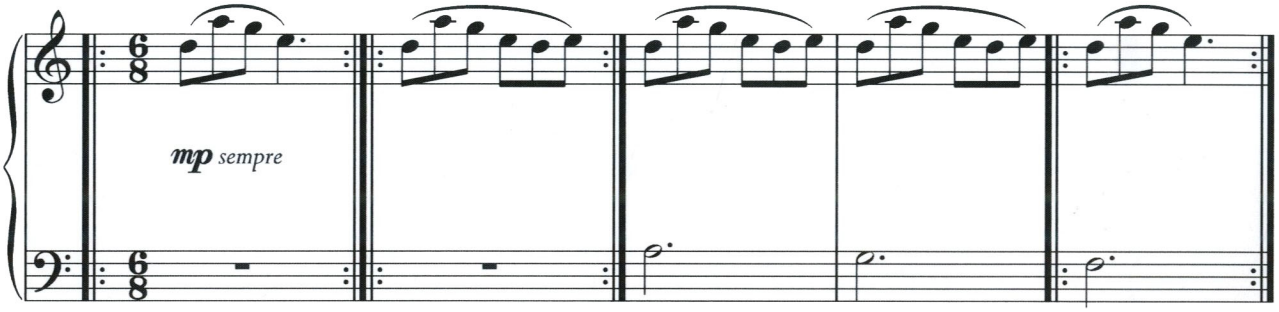
fff

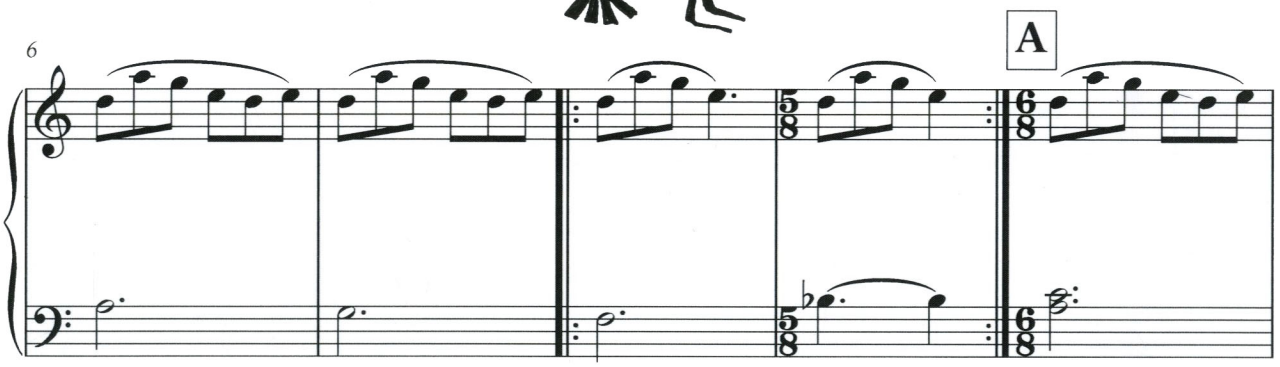
Malu the Girl

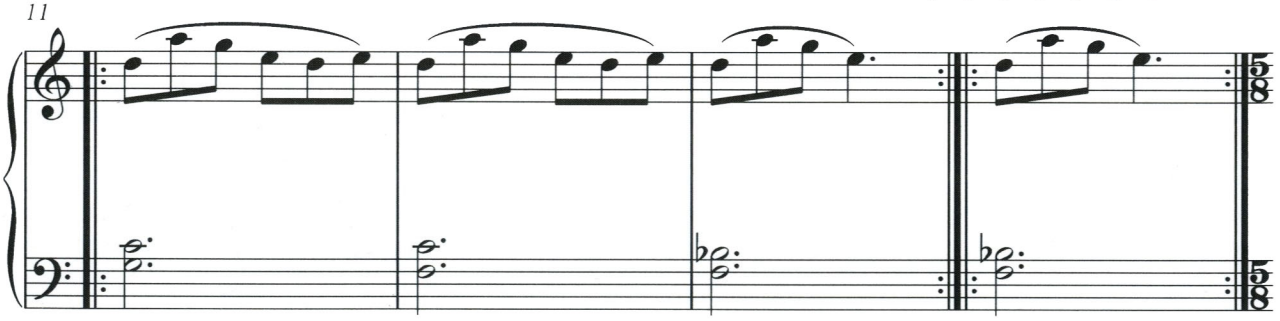
Malu dreams of being a hunter but this is forbidden. She finds her daily life repetetive and never-changing.

The real challenge of this movement is to keep one dynamic and tempo throughout, despite the changing styles. Each bracketed section must be repeated at least once, but can be repeated up to four times. Experiment with different numbers of repeats to represent the dullness of Malu's routine. You can even try deciding on the spot whilst performing once you are comfortable with the piece.

Flowing but constant (♪=c.120)







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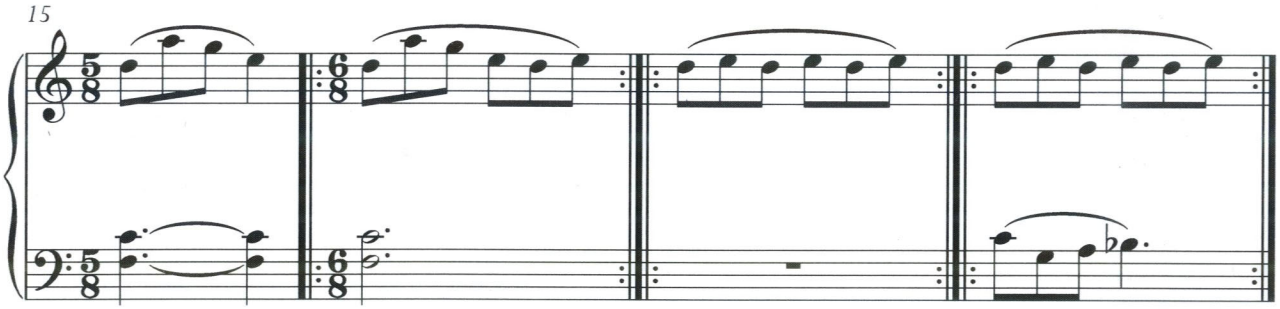
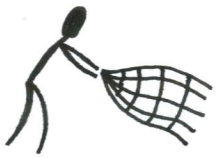
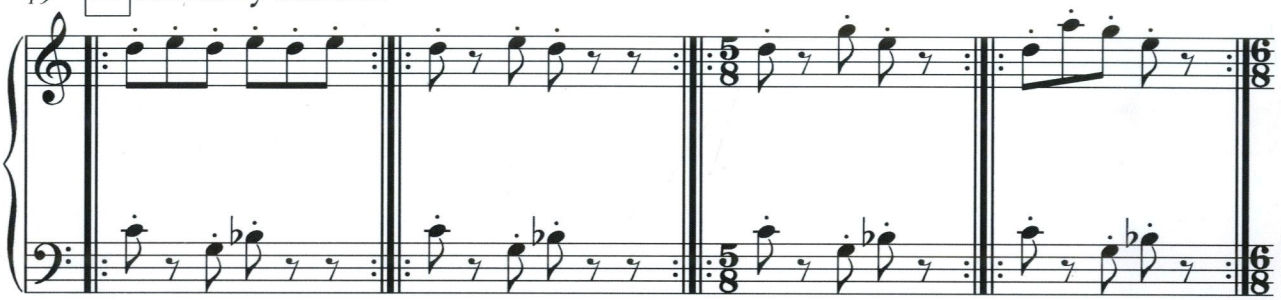


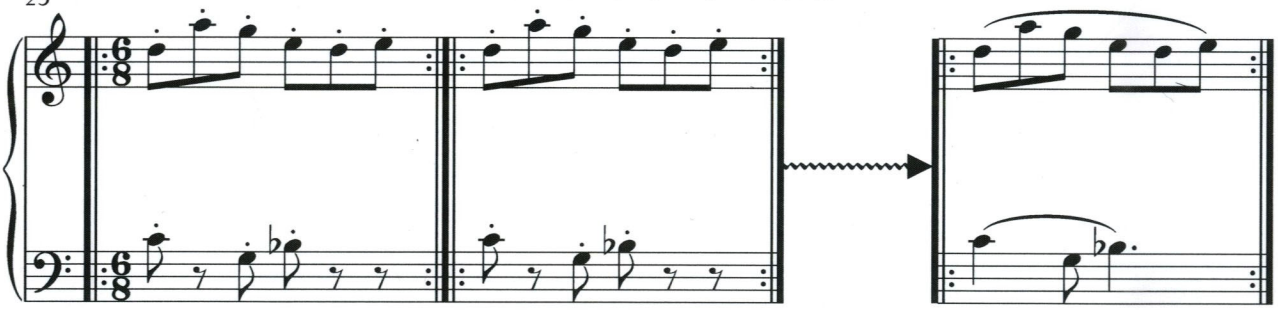


19 **B** **Suddenly staccato**



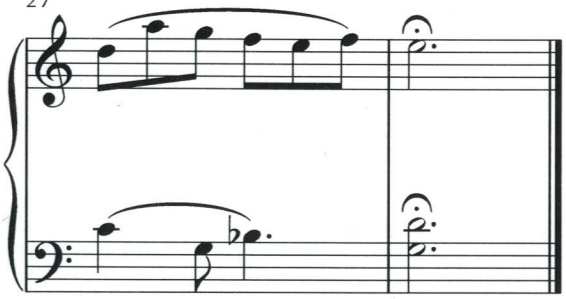
Repeat, getting slower and slower, and smoother and smoother

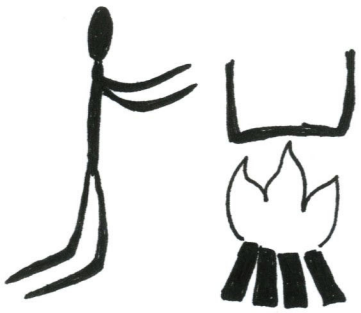
23



Grinding to a halt

27





Sosho

Sosho is the wise and mystical leader of the Clifftop Clan. He can communicate with the spirits of nature.

You may start at any rehearsal mark (A,B,C, or D) and continue around the loop until all four have been played. In between these you should insert an interjection from page 10 - there are five to choose from but you will only need to use your three favourites. After playing the final chordal section do not play the interjection, instead end with the final chord of that line. Take note that the right hand uses a different clef so this music should be played an octave higher than it looks. All the chordal music uses only black notes and all the interjections use only white notes so don't panic about the key signature!

A **Mystical and free (𝅗𝅥=c.60)**

mp

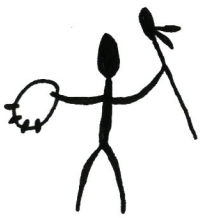
INTERJECTION!

2

B

mp

INTERJECTION!



3

C

mp

INTERJECTION!

4

D

mp

INTERJECTION!

1

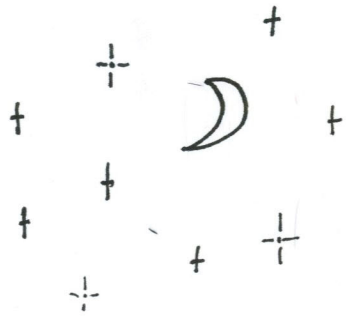
ff

Ped.

2

ff

Ped.

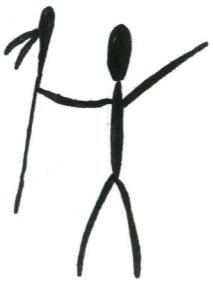


3

Strike the left side of the piano on wood to aggrevate low strings

ff

Ped.



4

Use palm of right hand to crush as many notes around the chord as possible

ff

Ped. *off*

5

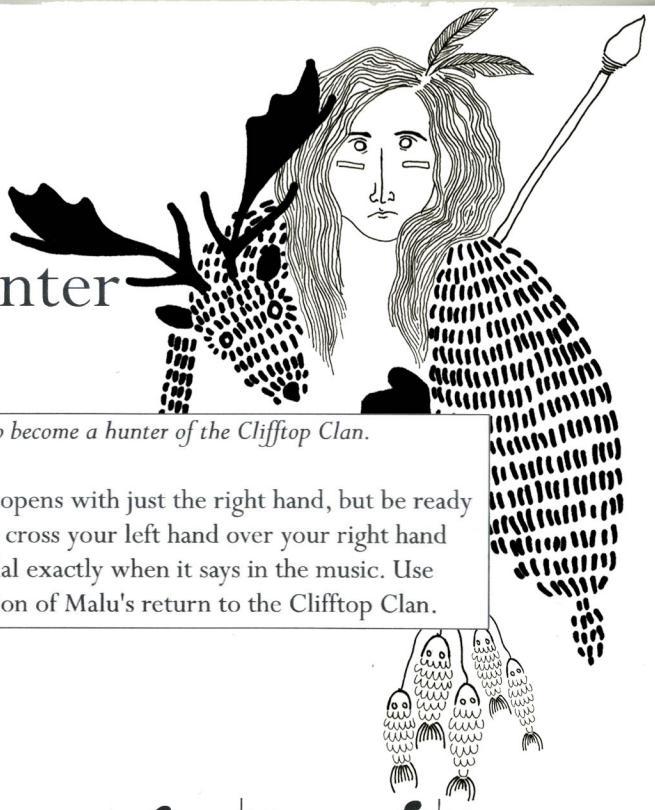
gliss.

ff

8vb

Ped.

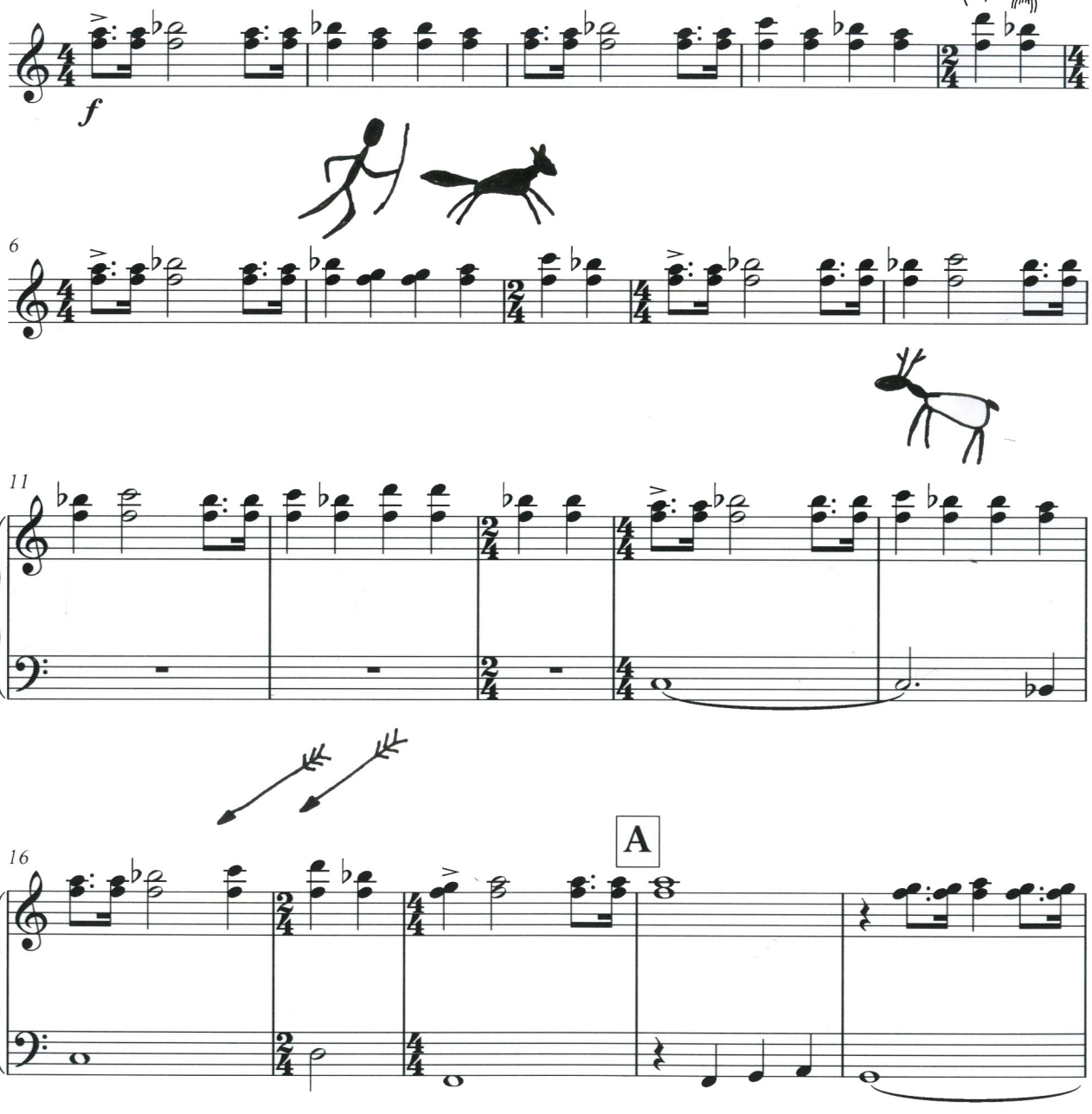
Malu the Hunter



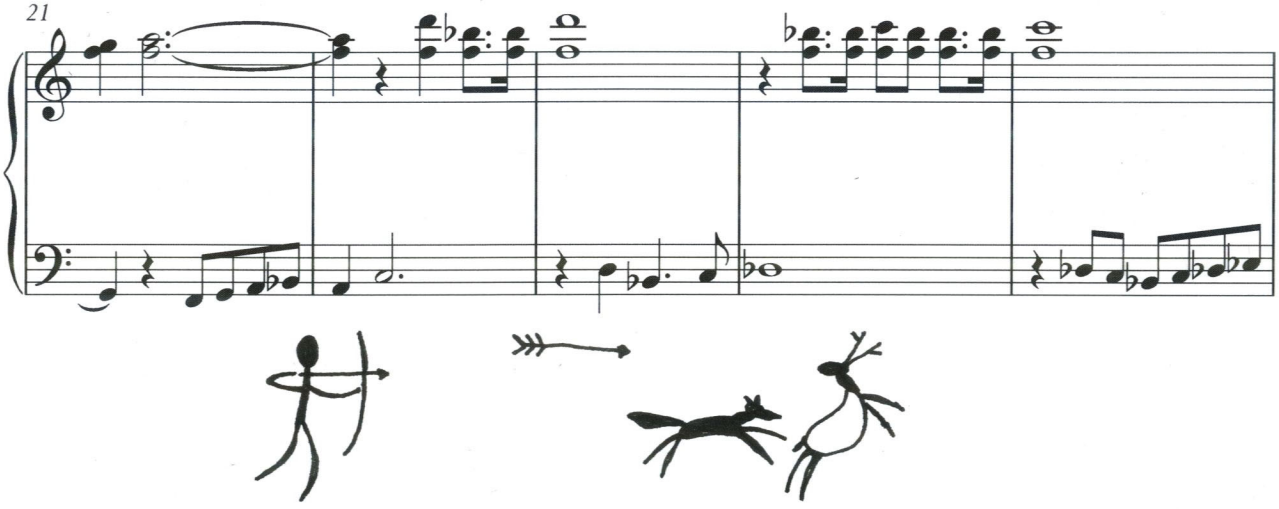
Following her adventures, Malu fulfils her dream and is invited to become a hunter of the Clifftop Clan.

This piece is a celebration and should be played like a fanfare! It opens with just the right hand, but be ready for the left hand to join in at bar 14. At letter B you will need to cross your left hand over your right hand and press down the sustain pedal. Make sure you release the pedal exactly when it says in the music. Use these effects to create a piano sound which conveys the celebration of Malu's return to the Clifftop Clan.

Fanfare celebration (♩=c.120)



21



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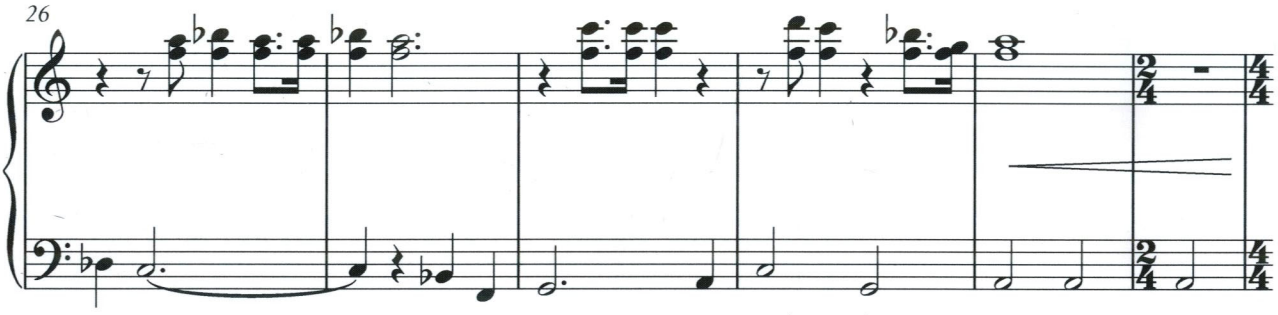
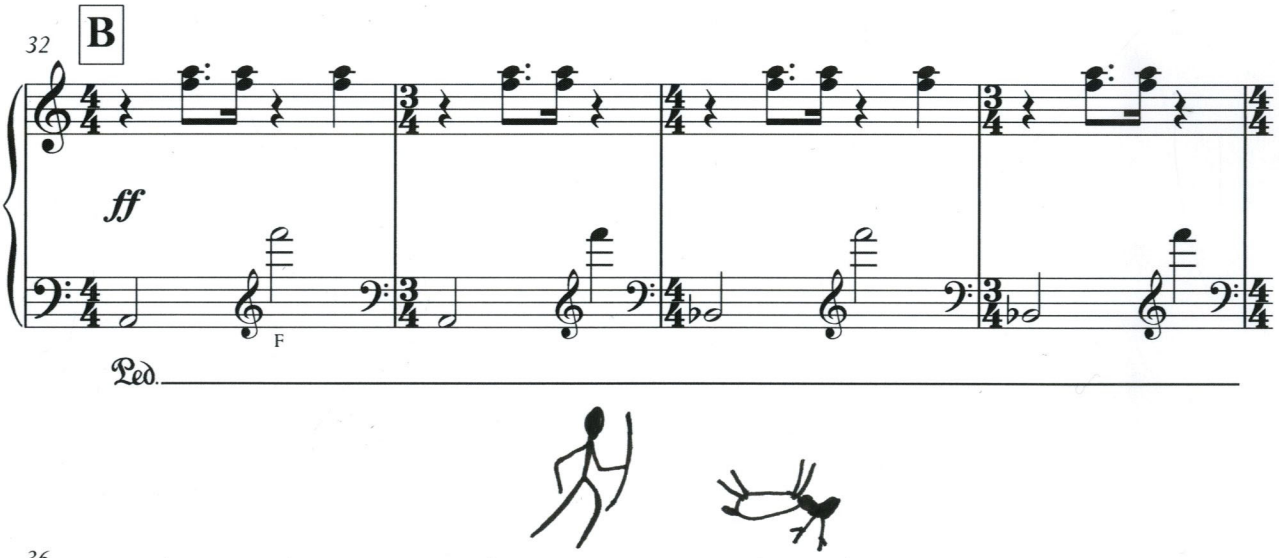


32 **B**

ff

F

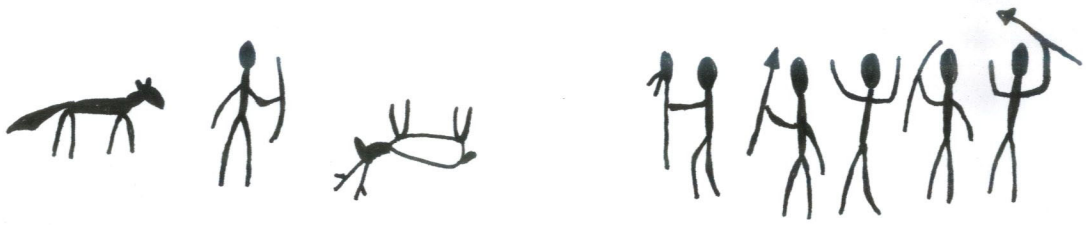
Ped.



36

G G

off



C

40

f sub.

rall.

45

Finale (♩=c.80)

48

ff

Ped. *off*

Ho-la!