

**Peter McKenzie Armstrong**

**JE: A Mural**

for piano solo

Opus 29

*Edition Ottaviano Petrucci*

# NOTES

This work is inspired by John Elliot's mural, "Yesteryear on the Hudson". Painted outdoors at Burd Street, Nyack, NY in 1984, it won the only ever Friends of the Nyacks arts competition. A photo is online at the Hudson River Valley Heritage site, <<https://hrvh.org/cdm/ref/collection/nyacklib/id/218>>, and documentation on Elliot's work overall can be accessed at <<http://www.johnelliot.com/index.htm>>. My comments on the music follow, grouped by movement number.

## COMPOSITION

1. With middle-D symbolically as the shoreline, nearly broken chords in the treble ring over a compatible linear flow in the bass. Harmonies, essentially two, alternate downbeat tonic and upbeat dominant. There are three 12-bar subsections, each with its treble second half inverted, yielding modal alternation per phrase. Chord pair members are chosen for increasing cragginess in their melodic succession. Bass figuration per bar meanwhile changes almost perpetually.
2. "Flaps" (single-staff passages) represent the boat's flags: Elliot's "JE" pennant at the bow, its characters mapped to the pentatonic scale; and Old Glory at the stern, its vintage-1848 star field mapped to the chromatic. The patterns separately rotate and expand, then merge for a mutual buffeting.  
  
"Chugs" conjures the engine sounds of two riverboats in passing each other. Their shared two-bar motif repeats perpetually but with unequal interim pauses, yielding phase shift such that the motifs re-juxtapose always differently: the first series nudges them into sync; the second takes them out again.
3. Each bar consists of one downward-rolled chord, notated to indicate hand distribution. Each chord contains two intervals, alternating until just short of pitch-class redundancy. No two interval pairings are the same. The V-shaped bottom-pitch succession is meant to suggest the mural's pattern of sunbeams striking the river surface.

4. Not least among Elliot's achievements was his place as a mandolin virtuoso and as concertmaster of the Bloomfield Mandolin Orchestra, then conducted by Gabriel Navola. He videotaped this melody in a hospital bed shortly before his death. I have attempted to emulate the performance, adding counterpoint to imagine his carrying – as surviving grandson of Tsar Nicholas II – bits of Mussorgsky in the back of his mind.

## PERFORMANCE

1. Stresses, stretches and leaps in the treble chords are likely to impede needed smooth flow. I recommend, upon striking the onbeat interval, releasing its outer key and pivoting on the inner towards the melodic offbeat. Bass dynamics should make its figuration "well up" from the low D in minor mode, then instead "suspend" from the high A in major.
2. "Flaps" are to be divided between the hands at performer's discretion. "Chugs" in their per-beat phase shifting pose hefty challenge for the player's immediate short-term memory, in that each beatwise juxtaposition of hands belies both the prior one (at that beat two bars before) and the next (two bars later). I can play this only from score, fixed on keeping the 5/4-consistent part firm and fitting in the other per force.
3. The pitches of each bar are to be rolled evenly downward as a single chord, with the 2/4 bar-lengths essentially equal. Dynamics need to ensure that the sounding unit note group is a pair – not a threesome, as some hand distributions inadvertently suggest.
4. This tremolo, nearly unbroken, must suggest the strumming of a mandolin. Its triplets (tempo compels these, though quadruplets would be ideal) can do this via their pairing, if the initial note of each first is slightly stronger than that of the second. Tremolo fingering, then, is to be 3-2-1-3-2-1 throughout with 3's volumes adjusted accordingly. Meanwhile, the sustain pedal is to flutter by the 8th.

– PMA

to Faith and Hope Elliott in memory of their father

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## Mountain Meets River

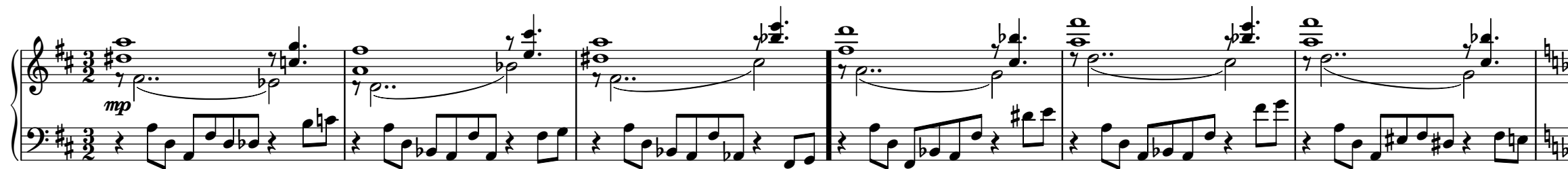
Andante cantando ( $\text{♩} = 80$ )

1

Musical score for Mountain Meets River, measures 1-6. The score is in 2/2 time, key of B-flat major. The tempo is Andante cantando with a quarter note equal to 80 beats per minute. The first measure is marked with a forte (mf) dynamic. The right hand features a series of half notes with a fermata over the first measure. The left hand has a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A bracket under the first three measures is labeled "tenuto e pedale simile al fine".

Musical score for Mountain Meets River, measures 7-12. The score continues in 2/2 time, key of B-flat major. The dynamic is mezzo-forte (mp). The right hand continues with half notes and a fermata. The left hand maintains the eighth-note accompaniment.

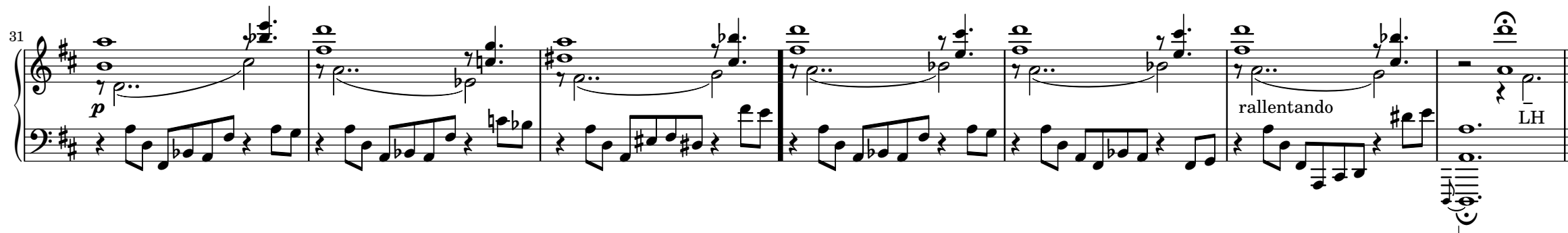
Musical score for Mountain Meets River, measures 13-18. The score continues in 2/2 time, key of B-flat major. The dynamic is mezzo-forte (mf). The right hand continues with half notes and a fermata. The left hand maintains the eighth-note accompaniment.



Musical score system 1, measures 1-6. The piece is in 2/4 time with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The right hand features a melodic line with slurs and accents, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. The dynamic marking *mp* is present at the beginning.



Musical score system 2, measures 7-12. The right hand continues with slurred notes, and the left hand maintains its accompaniment. The dynamic marking *f* is present at the beginning of this system.



Musical score system 3, measures 13-18. The right hand features slurred notes, and the left hand continues its accompaniment. The dynamic marking *p* is present at the beginning. The word *rallentando* is written above the right hand in the final measure. The system concludes with a double bar line and the marking *LH* below the right hand.

# Steamboat (Chugs & Flaps)

Buffetto gioioso (♩ = 132)

2

Allegro persistente (♩ = 160)

21 **Buffetto rudo** (♩ = 132)

28 **Di nuovo persistente** (♩ = 160)

32

36

40 **Buffetto contesto** (♩ = 116)

# Sunbursts

Largo capricciosamente (♩ = 60)

3

Musical score for measures 3-10. The piece is in 2/4 time. The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs, while the left hand provides a rhythmic accompaniment. Dynamics include *pp*, *sfz*, and *p*. A bracketed instruction "pedale simile al fine..." is placed below the first five measures. A rehearsal mark "8" is located above the first measure.

11

Musical score for measures 11-19. The right hand continues with complex textures, including triplets and slurs. Dynamics range from *sfz* to *f*. A rehearsal mark "8" is located above the first measure.

20

Musical score for measures 20-27. The right hand features a melodic line with grace notes and slurs. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, *sfz*, and *pp*. A rehearsal mark "8" is located above the first measure.

# Man In Skiff

## 4 Quodlibet: An old-world melody, set c/o Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*

Quasi-mandolina (♩ = 108)

*mf* sempre ... terzina 16 ... tremolo ...

pedale svolazzare a 8 ...

5

*mp* "The Old Castle"

17

"Gnome"

*mp*

29

"Catacombs"

*pp* mezzo tempo poco cresc. dimin. *sfz*

fine svolazzare



