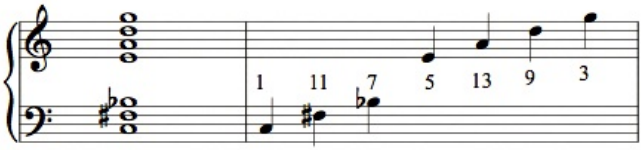
Mystic Chords

For soundfile (virtual piano)

By Kyle Gann
2012

Mystic Chords (2012)

Mystic Chords is based on a sonority that Scriabin dubbed the "mystic chord," stacked in fourths and approximating the 1st, 11th, 7th, 5th, 13th, and 9th harmonics of a harmonic series, in that order:



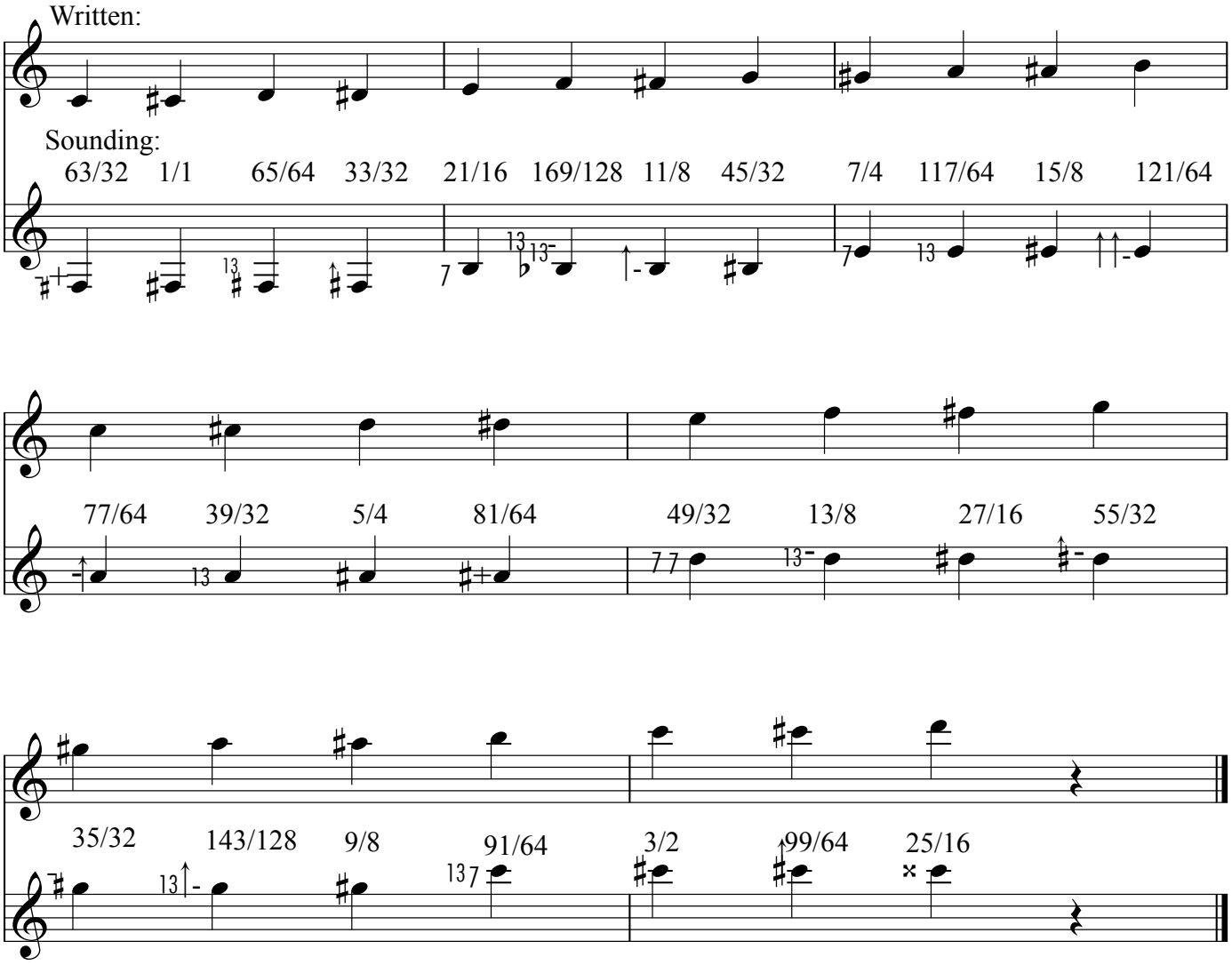
Mystic Chords builds up a chordal melody by alternating among seven such chords, each built on the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th, or 13th harmonics (purely tuned in just intonation) of a very low F#. The harmonics of F# (transposed by octave into the same two-and-a-half-octave range) are distributed among the seven chords as follows:

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
3	25	3	91	99	99	91
9	35	9	35	9	143	143
13	55	27	49	27	55	13
5	5	39	77	81	77	39
7	15	15	7	117	121	117
11	45	21	21	45	11	169
1	65	33	63	63	33	65

The effect of each chord varies in perceived dissonance depending on whether the root, 13th, 9th, and so on is in the bass; thus while the "pitch sets" of all the chords are identical, the level of tension is affected by registral placement, illustrating what an inadequate concept "pitch set" is for composing. In addition, the duration of each chord is indicated by a tempo marking, so that the rhythms, entirely unmetrical and presumably impossible to precisely reproduce by humans, are determined by changing speeds rather than any underlying pulse.

Duration: 6'20"

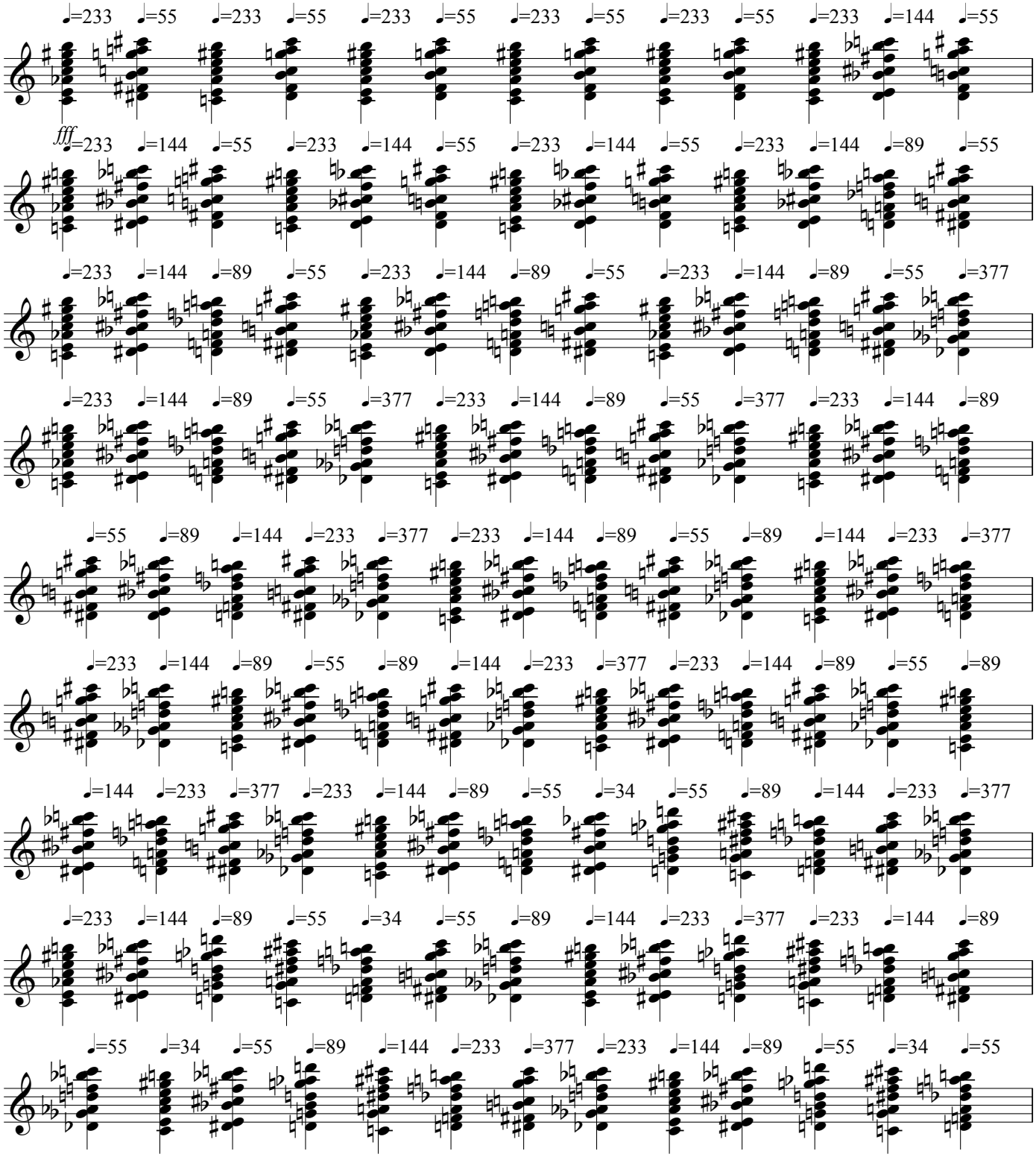
Mystic Chords
Pitch Key

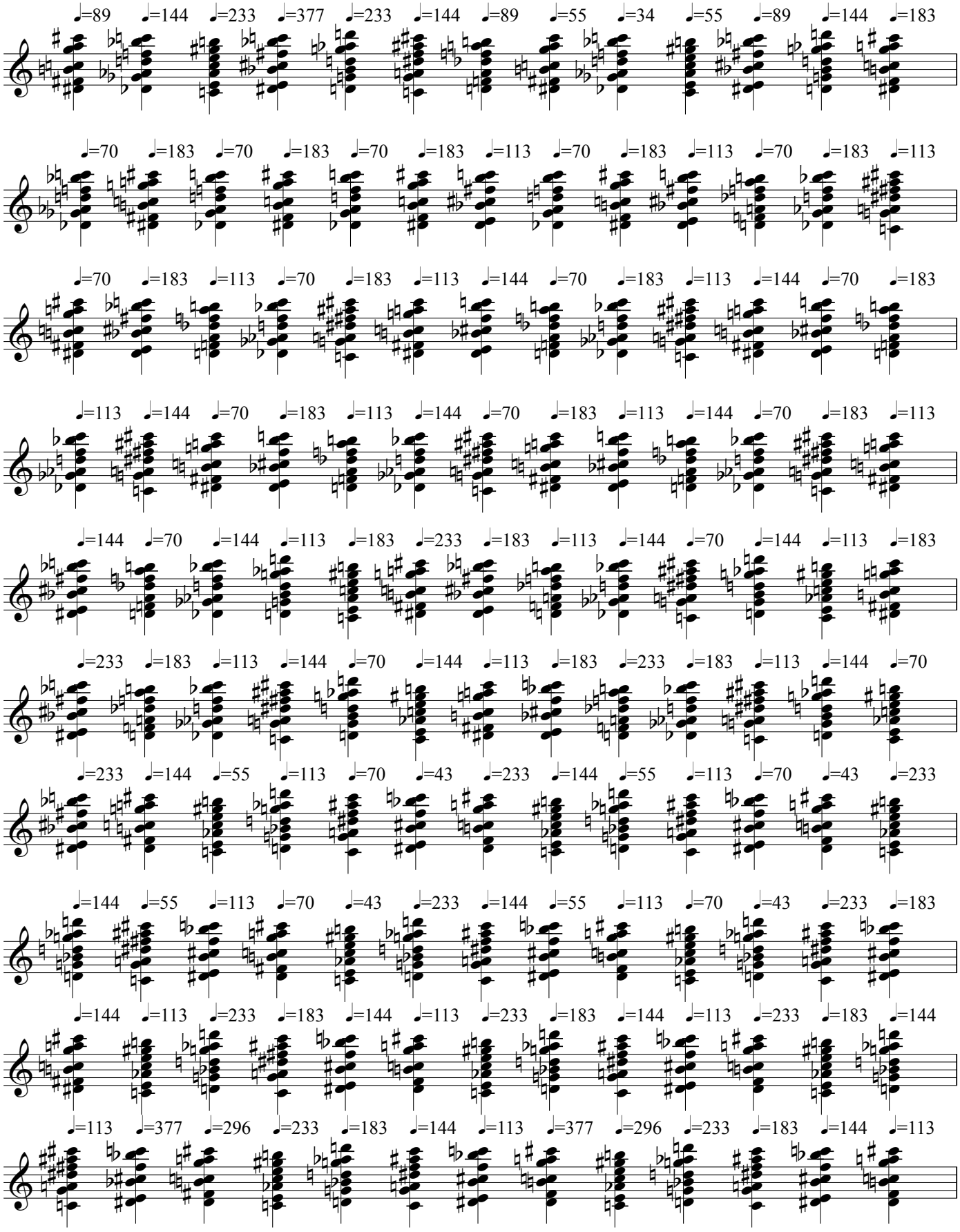


To Maarten Beirens

Mystic Chords
(Rhythm Study)

Kyle Gann
2012

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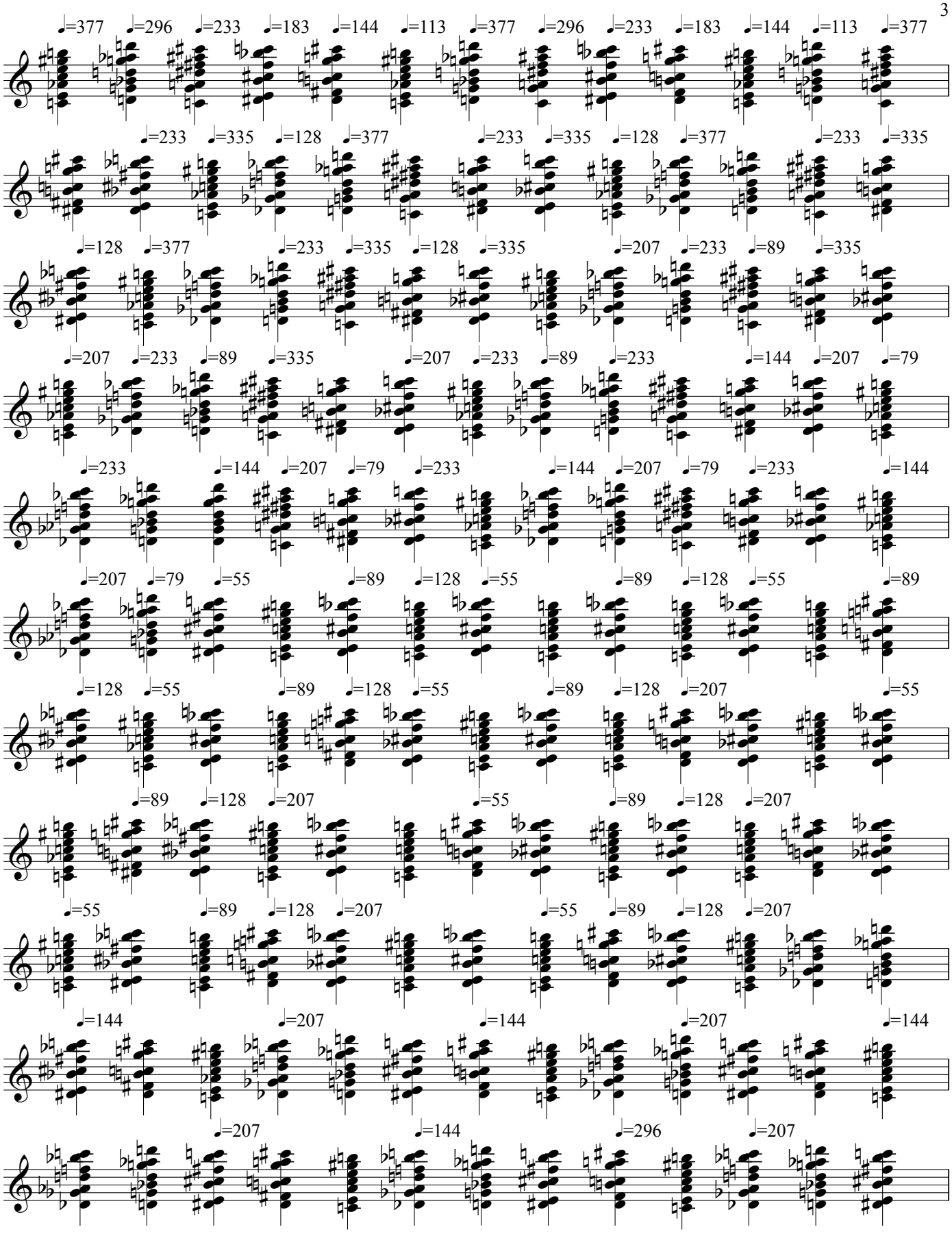
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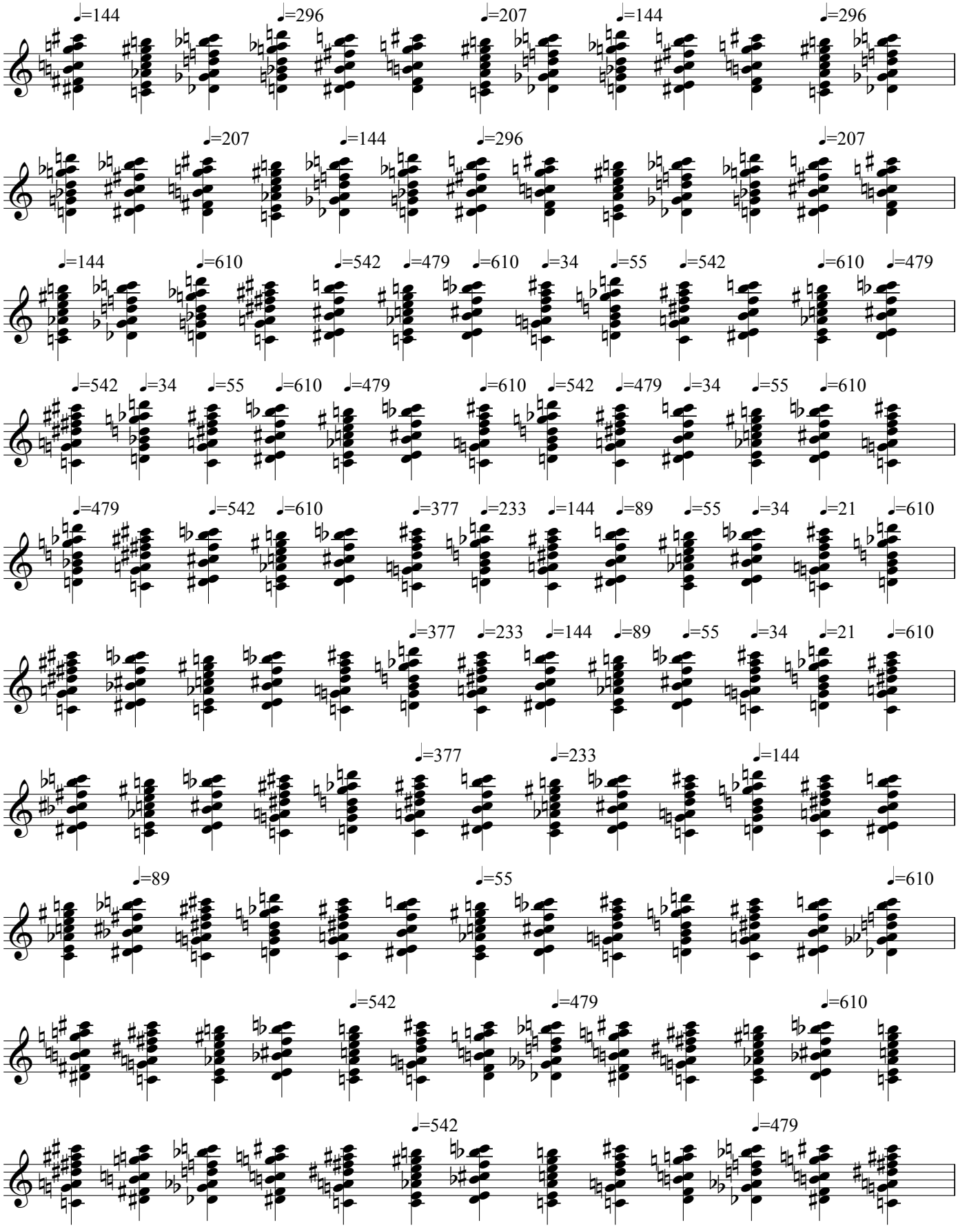
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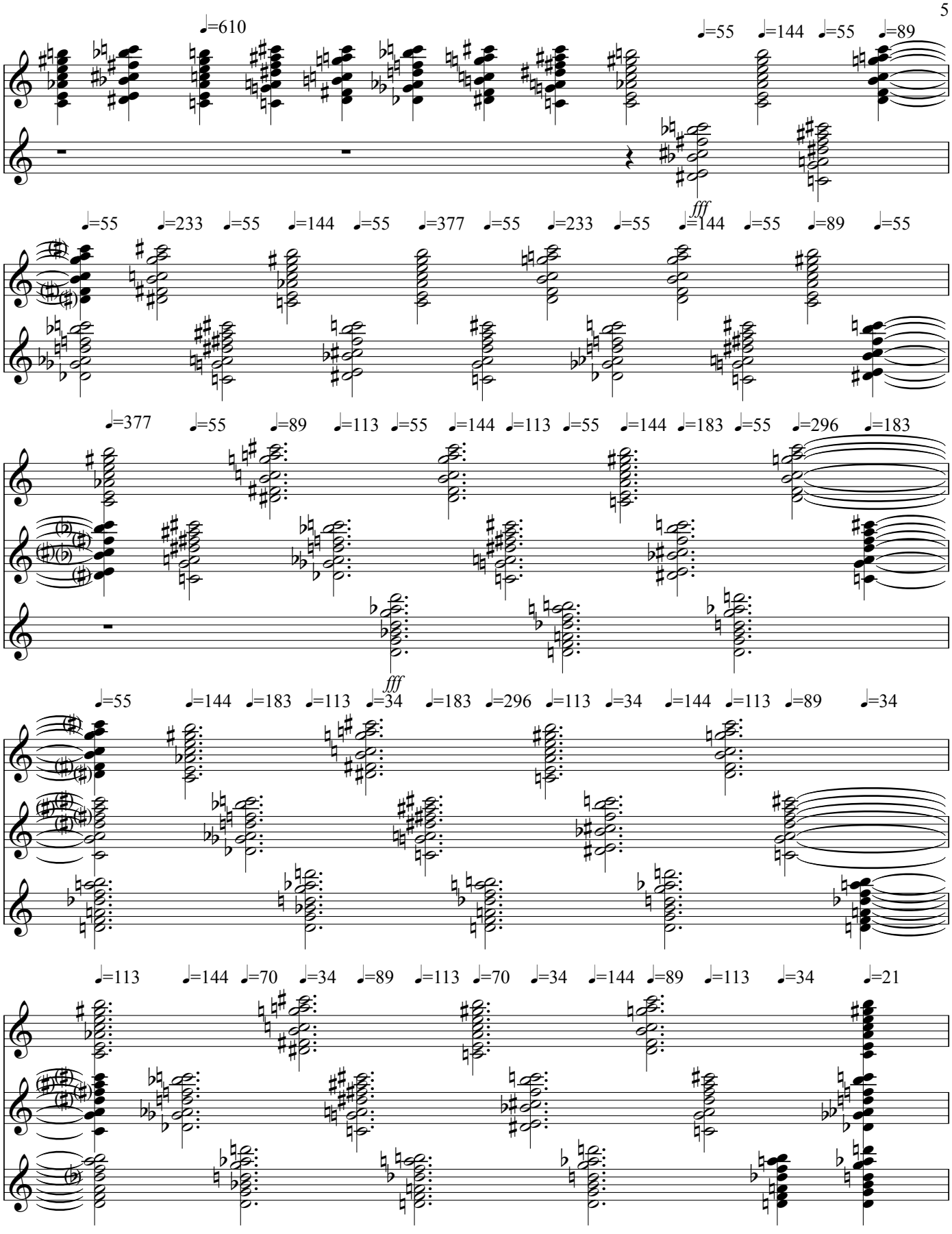
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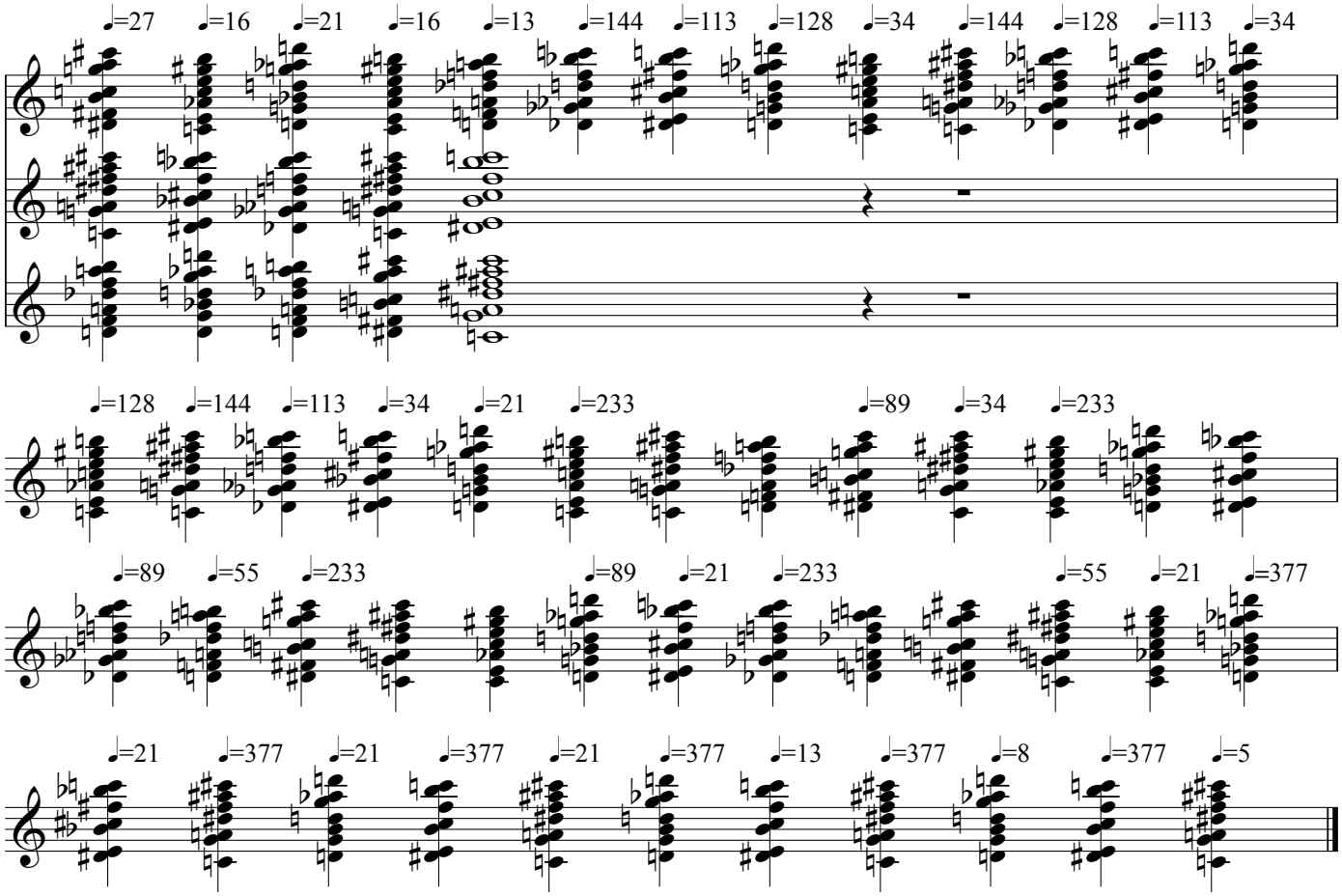

March 2-April 3, 2012
Germantown, NY
Lightly revised Feb. 3-5, 2014