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# Anxiety and *The Real Thing*

## Queer Ekphrasis, Acoustic Palimpsest, and Autistic Listening

### *Heavenly Music* and the anxiety of influence

The 1943 Oscar-winning short film *Heavenly Music* opens with the character of Ted Barry entering the gates of heaven.[1] On earth, Barry is a band director and a successful composer of popular songs and commercial jingles. Upon announcing his profession to heaven's admissions officer, Barry is directed to the Hall of Music, where his talent and credentials are to be judged by the likes of Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Wagner, Paganini, Brahms, and other deceased canonical composers. To join the esteemed group in the Hall, Barry must pass an audition. He plays his most popular song for the judges, expecting to be praised, but instead Tchaikovsky points out that the tune is suspiciously similar to his melody from *The Nutcracker*, and therefore not original. Tchaikovsky's allegation starts a chain of attributions as Barry defensively claims that Tchaikovsky did the same thing and borrowed a tune from Wagner, who in turn borrowed a tune from Brahms, leading each composer to emphatically protest what seems like a most serious allegation for a Western music composer—unoriginality. The composers change their attitude after realizing that they all have committed the same "crime" and borrowed melodies from one another. Still, to be convinced that Barry belongs in the Hall of Music, they ask him to compose a new and *original* piece on the spot. His success (afforded by help from an uncredited angel) leads to his admittance to the Hall in a happy resolution to the short film's plot.

In this article I am interested in the conflict that drives *Heavenly Music's* plot. The composers' protests in the film highlight a sensitive area that literary critic Harold Bloom famously termed the "anxiety of influence" underlining poetic expression.[2] Aesthetic concepts such as Bloom's "anxiety" and Walter Benjamin's "aura" express attempts to theorize the aesthetic and social motivations behind long-held reservations against copying or appropriating material from another author.[3] For at least the last two centuries, such appropriation has been frowned upon in the public sphere, where the demand for originality has been more recently enforced by copyright laws that affect authors' and artists' reputations and earnings.

The situation is different in works that highlight (rather than obscure) their reliance on other artworks. Musical pastiche, transcriptions, and cover songs are examples of such creative output that reworks another source, which is often provided in the work's title or a text that accompanies the score. These works tend to quote more than just a tune, making the original easier to identify. They are often considered less "serious" and therefore less worthy of scholarly attention, unlike some of their sources.[4] The experience of listening to such works can be marked by discomfort and anxiety arising from ambiguous expectations—should listeners be familiar with a work's source(s), or would such familiarity lead to reductive listening that filters out the work's original aspects? On the other hand, would listeners unfamiliar with the source be able to appreciate these works?

*Heavenly Music* and Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence* explore authorial anxiety of unoriginality. In the following, I concentrate on a musical work that weaves a network of references with diverse sources. My focus will shift from the authors to the audience, to explore discomfort and anxiety in listening to, and understanding, this composition that wears its unoriginality on its proverbial sleeve.

### Richard Beaudoin's *The Real Thing* [5]

I will discuss a work for string quartet by contemporary composer Richard Beaudoin. Since 2009, Beaudoin has used existing musical recordings almost exclusively as pre-compositional material. Beaudoin does not hide the sources behind his music; on the contrary, his scores explicitly specify the works' sources and influences, and he explained his work process in several articles and interviews.[6] I will focus on *Étude d'un Prelude VI: The Real Thing* (2009), a composition for string quartet that uses a recording as its source material and transforms that recording in a manner inspired by a painting. Already Beaudoin's title proclaims its connection to an eponymous painting from 2000 by Glenn Brown. Brown's work itself uses Frank Auerbach's 1973 *Head of J.Y.M.* as its source material. Beaudoin's composition, meanwhile, is based on Martha Argerich's October 1975 recording of Chopin's Prelude in E minor op. 28, no. 4. As we shall see, there are many parallelisms in the ways in which the two works rework their respective source material.

Through these multiple layers of reference— responding to two musical sources (Chopin's score and Argerich's recording) and using techniques influenced by a painting which itself takes another painting as its source—Beaudoin's quartet provides a multi-faceted arena to think about discomfort and anxiety in listening to music that references another source. For example, how does the experience of listening to Beaudoin's quartet as a transformation of Argerich's recording of Chopin's Prelude, or as a transformation of Brown's painting, differ from listening to the quartet without those references? Does hearing the Prelude in Beaudoin's quartet mark a failure as a listener to hear the quartet "on its own terms," whatever those terms may be? Or, on the contrary, would not noticing the Prelude's presence in the quartet mean a shallower listening experience? After a brief discussion of Glenn Brown's painting and Richard Beaudoin's quartet, I consider these questions using three conceptual frameworks from queer theory, ethnomusicology, and disability studies.

## The Inspiration: Glenn Brown's *The Real Thing*

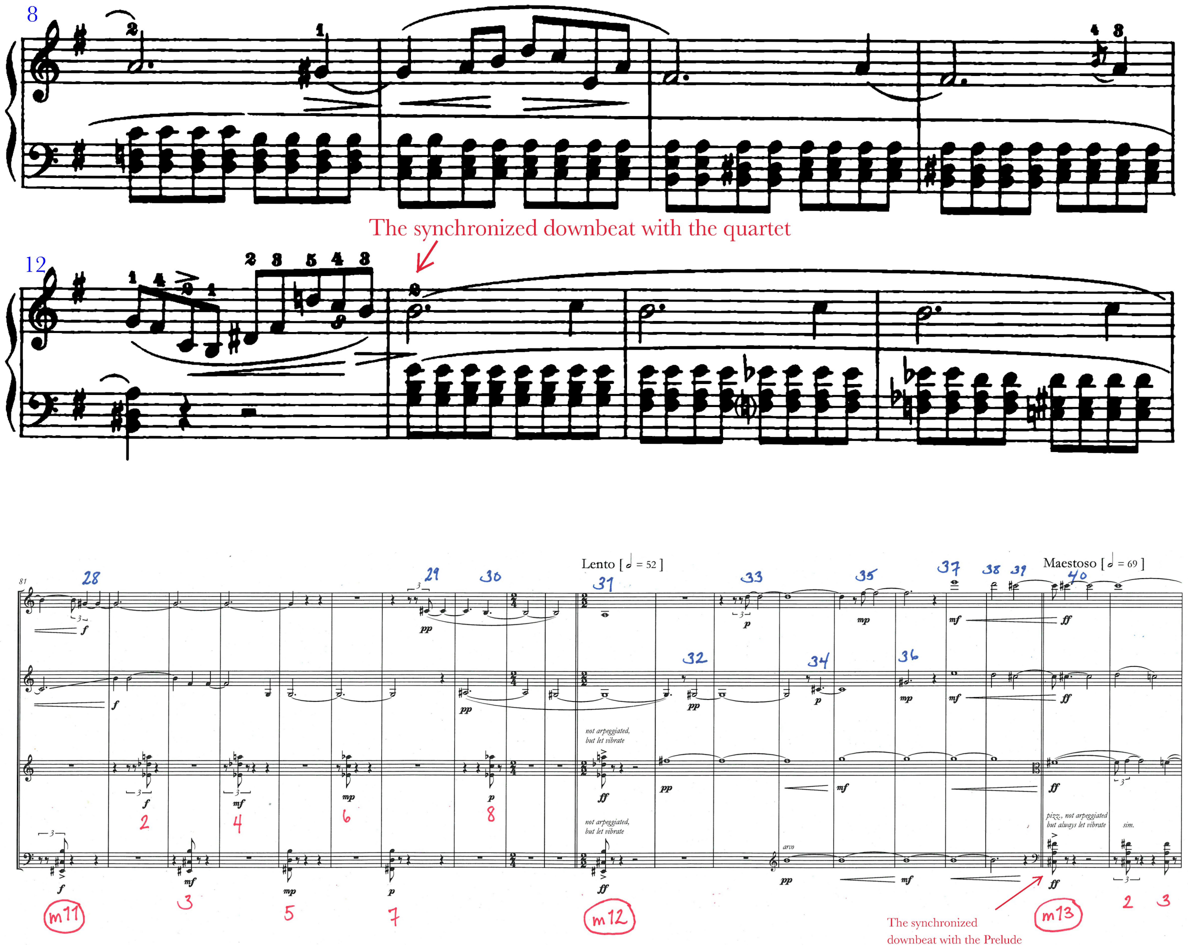
When composing *The Real Thing*, Beaudoin was inspired by the way in which Glenn Brown's painting *The Real Thing* (reproduced here in the appendix) transforms one of Frank Auerbach's portraits of Juliet Yardley Mills, titled *Head of J.Y.M.* (1973).[7] Brown often paints transcriptions of other paintings.[8] His art has been described as appropriation, a description to which the painter does not object.[9] Like Beaudoin, Brown's "pre-compositional" work involves technology —he first creates a digital version of the original painting and alters it on a computer, then projects this altered image on a canvas, and finally paints the altered image by hand. Comparing Auerbach's *Head of J.Y.M.* to its transformation in *The Real Thing* reveals some interesting differences: First, the angle of the original painting is rotated in Brown's painting. While Auerbach's character is positioned so that her body occupies the right-hand side of the canvas with her head and torso angled to the left, Brown's version presents the character in an identical posture but rotated to the right around the middle of the canvas, so that her head is directed upwards. Her body is positioned in Brown's version closer to the center of the canvas, which means that more of the left side of her body (our right) is showing. Second, all parts of Brown's painting that do not show the character's skin—her hair and clothing, as well as the background—are blurred. Her face and neck, however, are incredibly sharp. Third is Brown's work with the paint, which significantly repeats the same brushstrokes from Auerbach's painting but as if in much higher resolution. It seems as if Brown peeled the outer layer of Auerbach's paint to show the layers of color and brush motion underneath the character's skin. Lastly, an interesting difference between the two paintings that cannot be perceived when viewing their digital images is their physical depth. Auerbach's painting comprises thick layers of paint, while Brown's is much flatter and slim when looking from the side. Depth in Auerbach's painting is "real" in terms of its physicality, while depth in Brown's *The Real Thing* is an illusion.

## Beaudoin's compositional strategy

Beaudoin treats Argerich's attacks in the recording analogously to the way in which Brown treats Auerbach's brushstrokes: Just as Brown's The Real Thing includes every brushstroke in Auerbach's painting, each sound captured on Argerich's recording is represented in Beaudoin's piece. Precise capturing of the temporal and pitch qualities in the recording is afforded by LARA (Lucerne Audio Recording Analyzer), the microtiming analysis software developed by Olivier Senn and his team in the Institute for Music Performance Studies at the Lucerne School of Music. This technology provides micro-measurements of rhythm, pitch, and dynamics in a musical recording.[10] Argerich's October 1975 recording of Chopin's E minor

Prelude is the first object analyzed by the LARA team, and Beaudoin used their analysis to compose a series of twelve works entitled *Études d'un prelude* in 2009–10. The sixth work in the series, *The Real Thing*, features a drastically slowed-down version of Argerich's recording and is set for a string quartet. Beaudoin's pre-compositional work included transcribing the spectrographic data provided by LARA into traditional Western notation.To transcribe the temporal data, which is precise to the degree of milliseconds, Beaudoin altered the time ratio and effectively notated slowed-down versions of the original recording.[11] Measure numbers in the quartet do not agree with Chopin's measure numbers in the Prelude not only because of the rhythmic augmentation, but also because of the altered meter, which in Beaudoin's quartet shifts for the most part between 3/4 and 2/2. The axis of symmetry—the moment in which the quartet aligns with the Prelude, analogous to the axis of rotational symmetry between Brown's and Auerbach's paintings—is the downbeat of m. 13 in the Prelude (which begins the second part of the Prelude's binary form) and m. 99 of the quartet, shown in examples 1a and 1b respectively.[12] Therefore, the quartet features two conflicting sets of downbeats: the first comes from Chopin's score, and the second consists of the new downbeats created by the quartet's notated barlines. Complete annotated scores of Chopin's Prelude and *The Real Thing* are available in the Appendix.

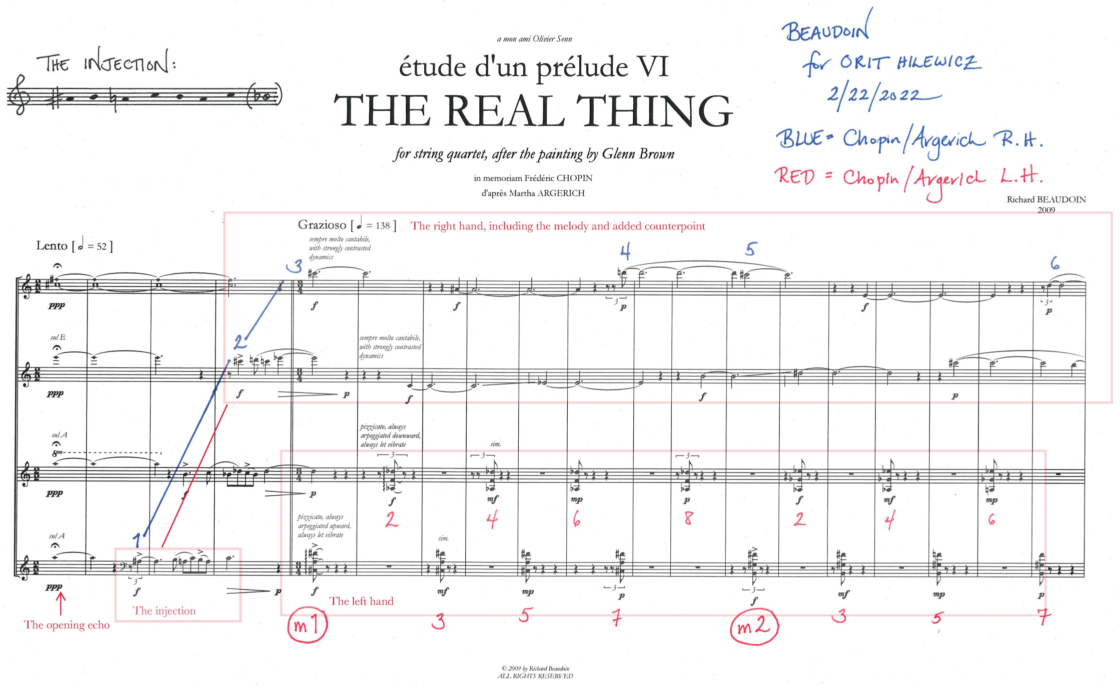
Apart from the precise microtimings, all other aspects of Argerich's recording are distorted in Beaudoin's quartet. The Prelude's pitches are skewed; none of the notes keeps its original pitch height. The


8
12
The synchronized downbeat with the quartet
81
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
Lento [ 𝅗𝅥 = 52 ]
Maestoso [ 𝅗𝅥 = 69 ]
not arpeggiated, but let vibrate
pizz., not arpeggiated but always let vibrate
sim.
arco
2
4
6
8
m11
3
5
7
m12
m13
2
3
The synchronized downbeat with the Prelude

Example 1: The quartet's axis of temporal symmetry with the Prelude; a. Chopin's Prelude in E minor op. 28 no. 4, m. 13, b. Beaudoin's *The Real Thing*, m. 99. Annotations by the composer.

Prelude’s melody, transposed up to F# minor and in shifting octaves, is divided in the quartet between the first and second violins.[13] The Prelude’s accompaniment—the left-hand part—is divided in the quartet between the viola and cello. While the cello also plays the chords transposed up to the key of F# minor, in agreement with the melody, the viola plays an inversion of the cello’s pitch classes, so that the first chord, for example, is Db major instead of E minor. In addition, Beaudoin adds an “injection” to the parts, analogous to the colors and textures added “under the skin” of the character—an ornamented, arabesque-like motive, which is played by the three lower instruments at the opening of the quartet and repeats many times, at different pitch levels, throughout the piece, “smudging” the Prelude’s textures.

“Realism” in Beaudoin’s *The Real Thing* is afforded by LARA’s precise digital transcription. While all sounds captured in Argerich’s recording are represented in some way in Beaudoin’s quartet, not all of them are heard when listening to the original recording. For example, at the beginning of the recording, LARA captures the echo of the chord that closes the preceding prelude, played in Argerich’s preceding track. This echo is represented, played in harmonics, as the quartet’s opening sonority. Paradoxically, the same qualities that endow *The Real Thing* with its sense of realism—the microscopic precision afforded by LARA and transferred into Beaudoin’s transcribed notation and the subconsciously-heard events in the recording that become consciously heard moments in the quartet, like the opening echo that does not belong to the Prelude—also distance the quartet from Argerich’s recording and Chopin’s piece. Example 2 shows the first page of the quartet’s score with annotations for the echo that opens the recording and the insertion. For listeners familiar with the recording or Prelude, listening to *The Real Thing* can be an unsettling experience analogous to an augmenting mirror in the circus or shrinking in *Alice in Wonderland*, in which Chopin’s Prelude and Argerich’s performance sometimes flicker into existence, slowed down and distorted, through a dissonant harmonic soundscape.


THE INJECTION:
a mon ami Olivier Senn
étude d'un prélude VI
THE REAL THING
for string quartet, after the painting by Glenn Brown
in memoriam Frédéric CHOPIN
d'après Martha ARGERICH
BEAUDOIN
for ORIT HILEWICZ
2/22/2022
BLUE = Chopin/Argerich R.H.
RED = Chopin/Argerich L.H.
Richard BEAUDOIN
2009
Lento [𝅗𝅥 = 52]
Grazioso [♩ = 138]
The right hand, including the melody and added counterpoint
sempre molto cantabile, with strongly contrasted dynamics
sul E
sul A
8va
pizzicato, always arpeggiated downward, always let vibrate
pizzicato, always arpeggiated upward, always let vibrate
sim.
ppp
f
p
mf
mp
1
2
3
4
5
6
2
4
6
8
2
4
6
m1
3
5
7
m2
3
5
7
The opening echo
The injection
The left hand
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Example 2: The recording’s opening echo and initial insertion in the quartet’s opening

In the following, I suggest three metaphors to understand discomfort and anxiety that listening to *The Real Thing* may provoke. The first situates the quartet in the framework of queer ekphrasis, allowing to examine mimesis in the piece in terms of genre and art form and the questions of identity that it raises. The second metaphor is the notion of an acoustic palimpsest, which allows to contemplate issues in listening to *The Real Thing* as an expression of the Argerich/Chopin/Brown, as well as the issues that arise in listening to the quartet without this context. The third explores *The Real Thing* in the context of autistic hearing. I argue that the piece encourages a particular type of autistic listening that expands Joseph Straus's definition while expressing a revealing way to hear Argerich's performance of Chopin's Prelude.

## *The Real Thing* as queer ekphrasis

In the context of gender performance, imitation and repetition are central themes in Queer Studies, which promotes a view of identity that is performative, complex, and changing, as opposed to rigid and stable models of gender expression.[14] This complexity and fluidity is also conveyed in recent publications that apply queer perspectives to a broad range of topics such as opera, karaoke, music-video production, and even art description and critique.[15] In this last category, literary scholar Brian Glavey's recent monograph offers a queer perspective on ekphrasis, a term referring to poems or prose that take visual artworks as their subject matter. In the following, I consider Glavey's theory in the context of *musical* ekphrasis—compositions written after other works of visual art—a category that arguably includes Beaudoin's quartet.[16] *The Real Thing* provides an unconventional example of musical ekphrasis in treating another musical work and, in a sense, a painting, as its subject. I suggest that considering *The Real Thing* as queer musical ekphrasis opens avenues for understanding its relationships to the Argerich/Chopin and to Brown's painting.[17]

In *Wallflower Avant-Garde: Modernism, Sexuality, and Queer Ekphrasis*, Glavey defines a special category of modernist ekphrastic works.[18] The paradigm of ekphrasis as expressed in seminal texts by W.J.T. Mitchell and James Heffernan considers ekphrastic writing as a masculine act of speaking for mute and feminized images.[19] In queer ekphrasis, Glavey shifts this power balance and redefines the relationship as "imitation and identification that embraces its own belated- and relatedness and maintains an openness to failure."[20] By imitating images' structure instead of pursuing mimesis, queer ekphrastic texts both observe and express the images that they describe.[21] Therefore, queer ekphrasis indicates a mode of caring and submitting to visual artworks through imitation and repetition comparable to queer gender performance: "Gay men and lesbians have long been subject to a homophobic association with imitation, treated as failed copies of the ideals of masculinity and femininity. Queer ekphrastic texts identify with this association as a means to transform it."[22] The driving force of queer ekphrasis is the "gratification of speaking in another's voice, of quoting liberally, of adapting and adopting the language of your object of study."[23] It is characterized by "near-visceral identifications" with its subject matter, identifications that include not only verbal assignment of intention and meaning, but also form, as ekphrastic texts imitate the form of their subjects.[24] According to Glavey, "modes of thought tied up with an attention to form are queer in the sense that they care about things too much or in all the wrong ways."[25]

Such expression of caring seems fitting also for Beaudoin's *The Real Thing*. In its technical accuracy, the quartet is a perfect imitation of Argerich's recording (of Chopin's Prelude) that exaggerates the recording's temporal shape, reproducing a magnified version that exactly duplicates Argerich's rhythms. The slow tempo effectively emphasizes the rubato, the way in which the accompaniment neither creates a pulse nor agrees with the melody. At the same time, the quartet does not replicate any other aspect of the recording; repeating Argerich's rubatos in a radically slow tempo (that allows to represent these rhythms precisely using traditional notation) exemplifies an excessive mode of caring for, and identifying with, a musical work.

For the most part, the quartet establishes similitude with Chopin's Prelude rather than mimesis. The sparse moments in which the Prelude shines through emphasize the quartet's distance from it; moments in which *The Real Thing* copies the Prelude bring out its "failure" as a copy, its changing and fluid identity as a memory of another work.[26] In concentrating on the rubato, a feature that makes Argerich's recording unique and yet is difficult to perceive precisely, and in meticulously pursuing to reproduce this feature exactly while altering all others, I argue that *The Real Thing* queers Argerich's recording and the Prelude, showing that it cares about its sources "too much" and in "all the wrong ways." Indeed, the qualities that Beaudoin tracks in his source—a performance rather than the score, in the first place, variation in timings as its main aspect, and an inclusive approach towards background "noises," which are typically ignored—zooms in on musical aspects commonly considered secondary at best.

Queer imitation does not aim to become the ideal being imitated, but is rather about creating a new form of expression that comments on, and interacts with existing conventions in a way that "makes apparent—indeed, amplifies—the clichéd, normative fantasies that underlie the repetition of these conventions."[27] The quartet's resistance to expressive conventions, through radical rhythmic augmentation of Argerich's rubato, metrical changes, and dramatic shifts between extreme dynamics, exaggerate and emphasize tendencies from the recording and their underlying stylistic conventions. Understanding *The Real Thing* as an exaggeration that highlights musical conventions highlights the role of technology in repeating Argerich's Chopin in *The Real Thing*. More than Chopin's score, *The Real Thing* is about capturing the liveness of Argerich's recording using LARA.[28] Understanding the quartet in terms of queer imitation highlights the way technology, the idea of which could be considered antithetical to the aesthetics and performance traditions associated with Chopin's score, allows the quartet to exaggerate performance conventions such as Argerich's rubato.

A different perspective on the quartet is provided by considering it as queer (musical) ekphrasis of Brown's painting. The quartet transforms to music Brown's strategy, including the use of technology and the expressive meaning that it lends the works' titles. As such, the quartet imitates the painting's structure without pursuing mimesis—Brown's rotated character around an axis becomes Beaudoin's augmented and shifted downbeats, and the additional colors that Brown inserts into the character's outlines become a musical injection that permeates the Prelude's lines.

## *The Real Thing* as acoustic palimpsest

A palimpsest is a text that has been inscribed on a medium that used to host another text, which has since been erased. Remnants of the older text can still be seen, perhaps with some effort, behind the newly inscribed text.[29] The notion of palimpsest has become a metaphor for memory and human experience in general, and it has been used also in music and sound studies.[30] Focusing on a listener's perspective, J. Martin Daughtry coins the term "acoustic palimpsest" as a metaphor to a multi-layered acoustic experience and its embedded acts of "erasure, effacement, occupation, displacement, collaboration, and reinscription."[31] For example, Daughtry applies the metaphor to listening acts aimed towards a heard layer of sound while filtering out others, acts such as listening through headphones in a noisy environment or more consequentially, as Daughtry found in his research on military forces deployed in Iraq, listening for the sound of shootings in a busy urban environment.[32] However, considering that—unlike media for inscribing text—one's sound environment is rarely "uninscribed," but is almost always a soundscape that in itself could be heard as multilayered, one could define an acoustic palimpsest as a mode of listening or a mode of experiencing one's environment. In brief, layered listening creates acoustic palimpsests. Listening to an acoustic palimpsest often involves the imagination that completes and interprets sound events. It demands effort "to hear things unheard, and barely heard. To imagine the unheard as the barely heard and strain to listen past the sonic foreground down to the ghostly echo."[33] Therefore, listening to a Palimpsest can be an experience of anxiety (to successfully hear, especially in the case of the soldiers that Daughtry discusses) and discomfort, as one is trying to filter out foreground sound in order to perceive the background.

Given its title *Étude d'un prelude VI*, listeners to *The Real Thing* are arguably encouraged to understand the work as an acoustic palimpsest on several levels, depending on a listener's background.[34] On the level of intertextual relations, *The Real Thing* contains the figurative inscription of Argerich's 1975 recording, which was itself an inscription of Chopin's score. Listeners familiar with the recording might listen for its remnants in the quartet. In addition, depending on listeners' familiarity with performances of the Prelude, Argerich's recording could itself be heard as a palimpsest containing these other performances with their various expressive choices. Lastly, listeners who play the piano may be listening to Argerich's performance layered over their own audiated version of the Prelude.

*The Real Thing* is also an intermedial palimpsest as a translation of Chopin's piano piece into a string quartet, which obscures the original piano work and, in a sense, "buries" it under a new work. Listeners familiar with the piano Prelude may excavate their impressions of the piano work while listening to the quartet. For example, they may notice the Prelude's downbeats under the new downbeats of the quartet. On an auditory level, *The Real Thing* foregrounds sounds that in Argerich's recording are considered noise, such as the chord that ends the preceding track, whose echo opens the recording. As a result, sound considered noise in the recording, which I would normally filter out, becomes part of my experience and encourages me to search the original echo in the recording.

The metaphor of acoustic palimpsest allows to focus on the sense of anxiety that listening to Beaudoin's quartet can raise. On some level, listening to the Argerich—and the Chopin—in the quartet means missing the ways in which the quartet is original and unique by reducing it to a version of the recording. It is also a frustrating experience because the quartet will never be the piano prelude, and it raises anxiety that Beaudoin's composition might be missed in the process of listening for the Argerich/Chopin.[35] The quartet becomes an obstacle for listeners to overcome on the way for a successful listening to the Prelude. As I try to listen for the Argerich/Chopin, I become anxious about whether I am listening to it in a "wrong" way and missing out, whether there is another listening experience that I should be having. If not the Prelude, what am I supposed to listen for?

## Autistic listening to *The Real Thing*

*The Real Thing* imitates Argerich's recording of Chopin's Prelude, but at the same time it deconstructs the Prelude's tonal and structural hierarchies and therefore invites listening that is non-hierarchical in the sense that it concentrates on the moment rather than large-scale structures. In recent years, theorists have been exploring the ways in which people with disabilities experience music. For example, Joseph Straus noticed that theories of music analysis and cognition tend to take into account normative and prodigious modes of listening while ignoring others. Normative modes of listening reflect the experience of an able-bodied, Western, neurotypical listener, who is listening to (usually common-practice tonal) music divorced from any explicit historical, cultural, or associative context. This mode of listening is prevalent especially in studies on music cognition.[36] Prodigious listening refers to a listener marked by musical talent and education, who can listen to music in an unusually perceptive manner. Such listeners are often the implied listeners in music-analytical theories.[37] In his study of music and disability, Straus defines modes of "disablist hearing," or ways of listening that acknowledge and refer to different kinds of disabilities. His definition of autistic hearing is especially relevant to this study. According to Straus,

> an autistic listener is someone who attends to the discrete musical event in all of its concrete detail (local coherence); who prefers the part to the whole; who is adept at creating associative networks (often involving private or idiosyncratic meanings); […] who may have absolute pitch and a prodigious rote memory [… and who responds] to music with their own vocalizations.[38]

To formulate the concept of autistic hearing, Straus draws from Headlam (2006) as well as other authors on autism and music, following characterizations of autism as cognitive difference rather than a clinical view of autism as deficiency. The first part of his definition builds on the attention to detail that distinguishes people on the autistic spectrum, in contrast to abstract and hierarchical thinking that characterizes neurotypicals. The second part refers to associative, private, and idiosyncratic modes of communication and approach to language that characterize autistic people. The last part, of absolute pitch and vocalizations, originates in the preference for repetition common to autistic people, and the “capacity for recalling extended musical passages in full detail,” or mimesis, which is especially prevalent among this population.[39] According to Straus and Headlam, much post-tonal music (in contrast to “common practice” tonal works) is especially accommodating to autistic listening because of the lack of hierarchical structures and susceptibility to listening strategies that concentrate on disparate events, fragmentation, and association.

I propose to expand Straus’s last characteristic of autistic hearing—responding to music with one’s own vocalizations—to recognizing and imitating musical patterns whether vocally or with the body or an instrument. Recent studies on autistic women and girls—a population that has been traditionally underdiagnosed and whose symptoms have been underacknowledged in the medical community—show that many are particularly skilled in imitating social behaviors, including both verbal expressions and bodily gestures, in order to “participate in social interactive situations and to be accepted by their peers.”[40] At the same time, social imitation is complicated by difficulties, common among autistic individuals, in changing one’s communication style to match the social context or the needs of the listener.[41] Identifying musical or social patterns and vocalizing or imitating them is a characteristic feature of autistic experiences.

The framework of autistic hearing is a useful metaphor for grappling with the discomfort that might arise when listening to Beaudoin’s *The Real Thing* as a transformation of Chopin’s Prelude to a different tonal, instrumental, and rhythmic context that concentrates on precise temporal imitation of Argerich’s rubato. I propose that *The Real Thing* can be interpreted as a form of autistic listening to Chopin/Argerich in two main respects. First, Beaudoin’s quartet “flattens” Chopin’s hierarchical pitch and phrase structures, transforming the Prelude into a collection of discrete and fragmented events. This flattening is the result of the different transpositional/inversional values of the instruments in the quartet. For example, the cello and viola mostly share the left-hand part of Chopin’s Prelude, yet in the cello part it is transposed by a whole tone, while the viola plays the inversion. Together with the quartet’s extreme slowing down of the tempo, this flattening of structures represents a mode of listening to the Prelude that concentrates on local events rather than large-scale hierarchies. Second, Beaudoin’s quartet “enacts” Chopin’s Prelude, and at moments sounds like it. However, it does so by replicating temporal patterns from the recording, albeit exaggerated and in the “inappropriate” instrumental, temporal, and tonal contexts, featuring a string quartet instead of a piano, downbeats in the “wrong” moments, and variously diverging from the Prelude’s key of E minor. In these two ways, the quartet both represents, and is susceptible to, listening that focuses on details instead of hierarchy and attends and responds to imitation. In other words, *The Real Thing* both embodies and rewards autistic listening with an idiosyncratic exploration of Argerich’s recording.

## Reconsidering musical ekphrasis

The discussion above presented three ways to hear Beaudoin’s *The Real Thing*. First, as queer ekphrasis of Chopin/Argerich and Brown’s painting that comments on, and interacts with, existing musical conventions of tempo and rubato, providing an exaggerated version that imitates in “all the wrong ways.” Second, as an acoustic palimpsest whose layers consist of temporally, tonally, and timbrally manipulated Chopin/Argerich as well as inserted material, raising the anxiety of reduced listening that focuses on one layer and ignores the others or, alternatively, distracted listening that misses the information embodied in the referential layers. Third, as an experience in an augmented and deconstructed yet incredibly precise imitation of Argerich’s recording that rewards an autistic listening strategy.

The questions explored here can be generalized to reflect on listening to other ekphrastic musical compositions, which take artworks (usually of other art forms) as their subject matter by mimesis or imitation of their structural features. While ekphrastic compositions as a whole cannot be considered by any means unoriginal, they form a special category of works in which musical aspects such as structure, dramatic shape, timbre, etc. are designed to express something about another artwork, and therefore they may feature mimesis, or imitate structural or other features of another art as musical features. In the latter case, we can frame musical ekphrasis as queer when non-mimetic musical works draw structural features from other works, which they imitate “in all the wrong ways.”[42] Understanding such works as expressions of care for other artworks allows to focus on the ways in which they comment on existing conventions and the sense of discomfort that these commentaries can raise. These works offer different listening experiences that depend on a listener’s familiarity with their sources, and the notion of acoustic palimpsest is useful for considering the anxieties embodied in each mode of listening. Lastly, as commentaries on peculiar aspects of other artworks, some ekphrastic musical works invite autistic listening, which revels in local details rather than large-scale hierarchies and patterns of imitation, and creates networks of associations, often with idiosyncratic meanings.[43]

## Endnotes

1. I was introduced to *Heavenly Music* in an April 2022 talk by J. Daniel Jenkins at the Eastman School of Music’s symposium in honor of Dave Headlam. Jenkins presented this film as an example of communicating music theoretical information through feature films, or “public music theory.” For the purposes of this article, I would like to focus on the issue of copying and originality that drives the film’s plot.
2. Bloom 1973.
3. Benjamin 1968.
4. There are some notable exceptions, such as Schoenberg’s orchestration of Brahms’s Piano Quartet in G minor, op. 25, or the scholarly attention given to cover songs in recent years. The third movement of Luciano Berio’s *Sinfonia* (1968) is a notable exception arguably for combining numerous unidentified musical quotations in addition to those identified by the composer, embodying a virtuosic weaving together of quotations and references. Indeed, most published analyses are devoted to identifying and interpreting quotations in the movement.
5. A studio recording of *The Real Thing* was recorded by the Kreutzer Quartet and appears on *Microtimings* (New Focus Recordings, 2012) alongside four other works in the *Étude d’un prelude* series and other works based on microtimings of Maurizio Pollini (playing Webern) and Alfred Cortot (playing Debussy). New Focus Recordings made the audio of *The Real Thing* available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foPpOmK5dvI and a video of a 2010 live performance by Kreutzer Quartet at the South London Gallery is available at https://youtu.be/dwxmDT6_IH0.
6. For representative examples, see Beaudoin and Trottier 2013, Beaudoin and Kania 2012, and Heyde and Beaudoin 2013.
7. Brown’s *The Real Thing* can be viewed in Brown and Klein 2021 and here in the appendix. Brown has also made the image available at https://glenn-brown.co.uk/artworks/88/. Brown painted a series of portraits modeled after Auerbach’s 1973 version of *Head of J.Y.M.,* which can be seen (alongside two of Brown’s transcriptions) in Gayford 2011 (https://www.bonhams.com/magazine/6067/).
8. A detailed account of Brown’s methods is available in Stubbs 2008.
9. Brown and Klein 2021. Brown admits that at the time he created *The Real Thing* he did not allow himself to have enough of an individual voice, and in recent years his paintings are characterized by more originality and therefore, ironically, reveal more of “the real” him.
10. Beaudoin and Trottier 2013, 174–75. Detailed description of the analysis materials produced by the LARA team is available in Senn et. al. 2009.
11. Ibid., 180; see also Bard-Schwarz 2014. The Kreuzer Quartet recording is 4:56 minutes long, while Argerich’s recording is 1:51 minutes long.
12. In Example 1b, the red measure numbers indicate bars in the Prelude. The rest of the red numbers indicate eighth notes in each bar of the Prelude, and the blue numbers show the Prelude’s melody notes.
13. The last E4 in the Prelude’s final bar is preserved in the quartet in terms of pitch class, but transposed up three octaves. There are a few moments in which the second violin plays some of the melody notes while keeping the same transposition level.
14. Maus 2022, 1 and 17, Tongson 2022, 212.
15. The recent *Oxford Handbook for Music and Queerness* (2022), for example, includes an array of perspectives.
16. For further reading on musical ekphrasis, see Goehr 2010, Bruhn 2000, and Hilewicz 2018.
17. As ekphrasis of Argerich’s recording of Chopin’s Prelude, *The Real Thing* does not feature the transformation in art form that characterizes most ekphrastic works. Instead, the quartet transforms the recording’s medium (from recorded sound to musical notation) and ensemble-type.
18. The term has also been used for musical works that take visual or literary works as their subject matter. See, for example, Bruhn 2000, Goehr 2010, and Hilewicz 2018.
19. Heffernan 1993, 7, and Mitchell 1994, 162–63.
20. Glavey 2015, 4.
21. Imitation in this context should be taken broadly, as a form of (non-hierarchical) similitude rather than (hierarchical) mimesis. Ibid., 30–31.
22. Ibid., 7.
23. Ibid., 13.
24. Ibid., 2.
25. Ibid., 3.
26. I am referring to moments such as 1:51–2:02 in the recording, in which the eighth-note melody from m. 9 of the Prelude is reproduced transposed in pitch a whole step up.
27. Tongson 2022, 211.
28. For more on the concept of “liveness” in *The Real Thing*, see Sanden 2019.
29. Ibid., 4–5.
30. Before Daughtry, Nina Eidsheim deployed palimpsest as a metaphor both for the way in which singing inscribes modes of identity and vocal practices into the musculature of the body, and for listening to a voice in relation to all the voices previously heard (Eidsheim 2008, 209–10).
31. Daughtry 2013, 9.
32. Ibid., 10.
33. Ibid., 9.
34. Ibid., 25–26.
35. Daughtry discusses a similar, yet very different, mode of layered listening in a war situation, in which soldiers must keep their ears tuned for the possibility of gunfire or other signs of threat (Daughtry 2013, 9–10).
36. Straus 2011, 153.
37. Ibid., 152.
38. Ibid., 165.
39. Ibid., 164–65.
40. Tubío-Fungueiriño et al. 2020, 2191.
41. Baird and Norbury 2015, 746.
42. Glavey 2015, 3. For analyses of such works, see also Guerrero 2010 and, focusing on contextual representation, Hilewicz 2018.
43. I am grateful to Richard Beaudoin, Steffi Probst, Michéle Duguay, Eduardo Herrera, and Toru Momii for their helpful feedback and suggestions.

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## Appendix

The appendix contains a reproduction of Glenn Brown's painting *The Real Thing* and the complete annotated scores of Beaudoin's *The Real Thing* and Chopin's *Prelude.*

## Abstract

In this study, I examine the discomfort and anxiety that might arise in listening to a musical work that references another source. Richard Beaudoin’s *Étude d’un Prelude VI: The Real Thing* (2009) carries multiple layers of musical and visual-artistic references and therefore provides a rich case-study for intertextual exploration. I offer three conceptual lenses—queer ekphrasis, acoustic palimpsest, and autistic listening—as analytical tools to productively engage with Beaudoin’s composition as well as other referential musical works.

## Author

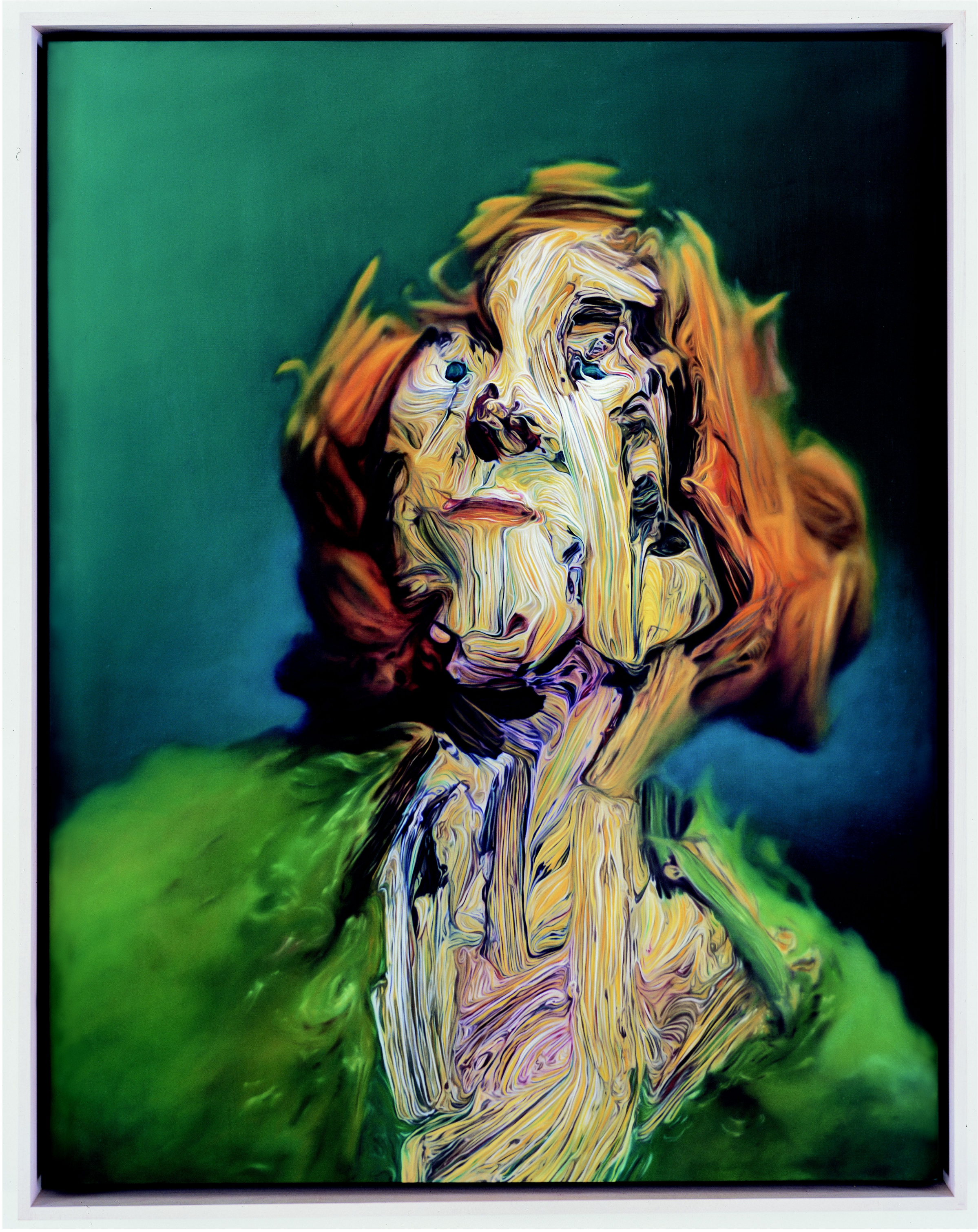
Orit Hilewicz is assistant professor of music theory at Jacobs School of Music in Indiana University. Her research examines approaches to analyzing the relationships between musical, visual, and literary arts in Western music of the last century. Her articles, which can be found in *Music Theory Online* and *Perspectives of New Music* among other journals, propose strategies for listening, observing, and analyzing intermodal musical forms. Orit is also interested in music and sound in films and multimedia works and analytical approaches to musical temporality. She has served as co-editor of *Theory and Practice* and assistant editor of *Perspectives of New Music*, and is currently on the editorial board of the *Music Theory Spectrum*.

## Titel

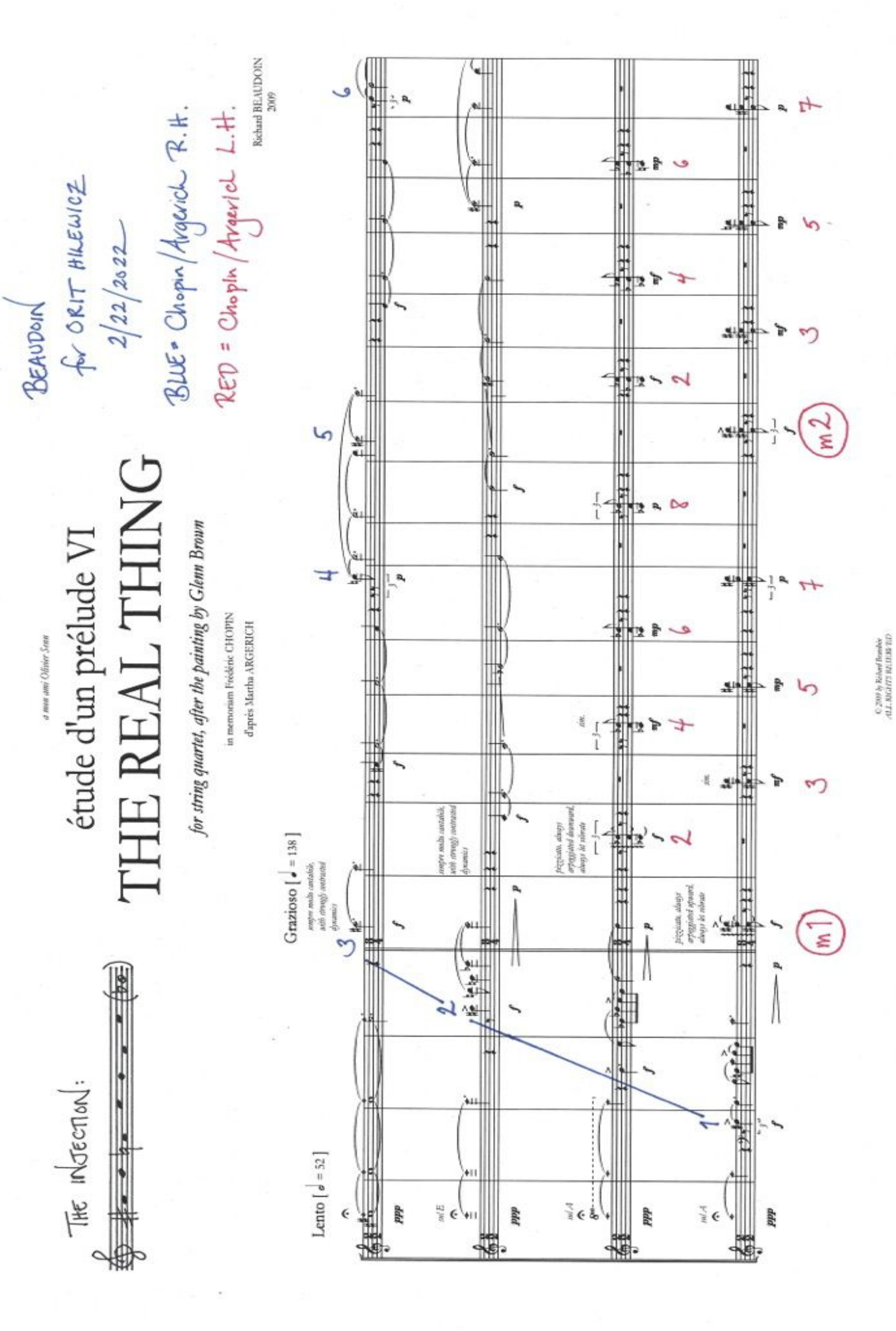
Orit Hilewicz, *Anxiety and The Real Thing. Queer Ekphrasis, Acoustic Palimpsest, and Autistic Listening,* in: kunsttexte.de, Nr. 4, 2022 (18 Seiten), www.kunsttexte.de.

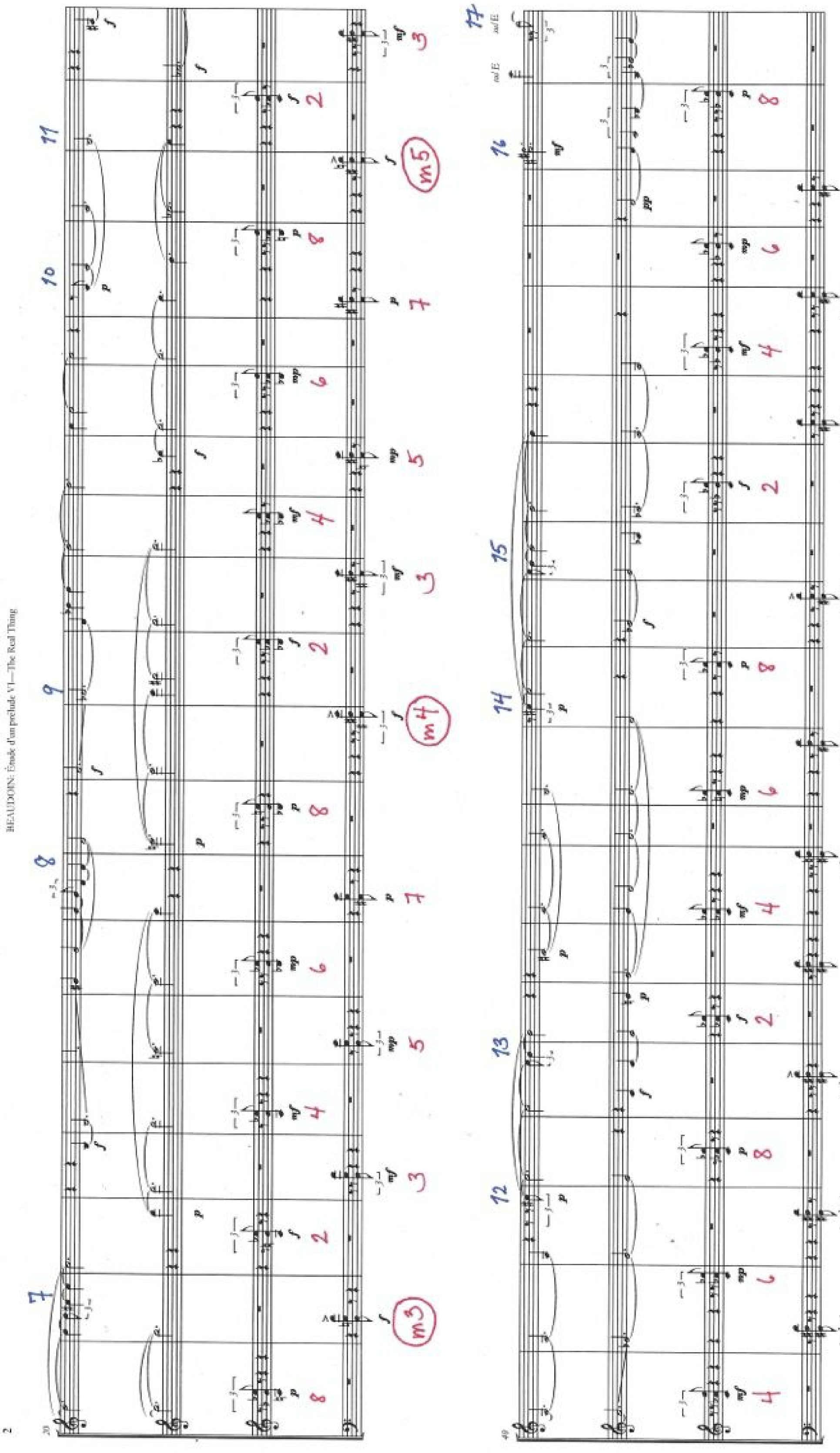
DOI: https://doi.org/10.48633/ksttx.2022.4.91645

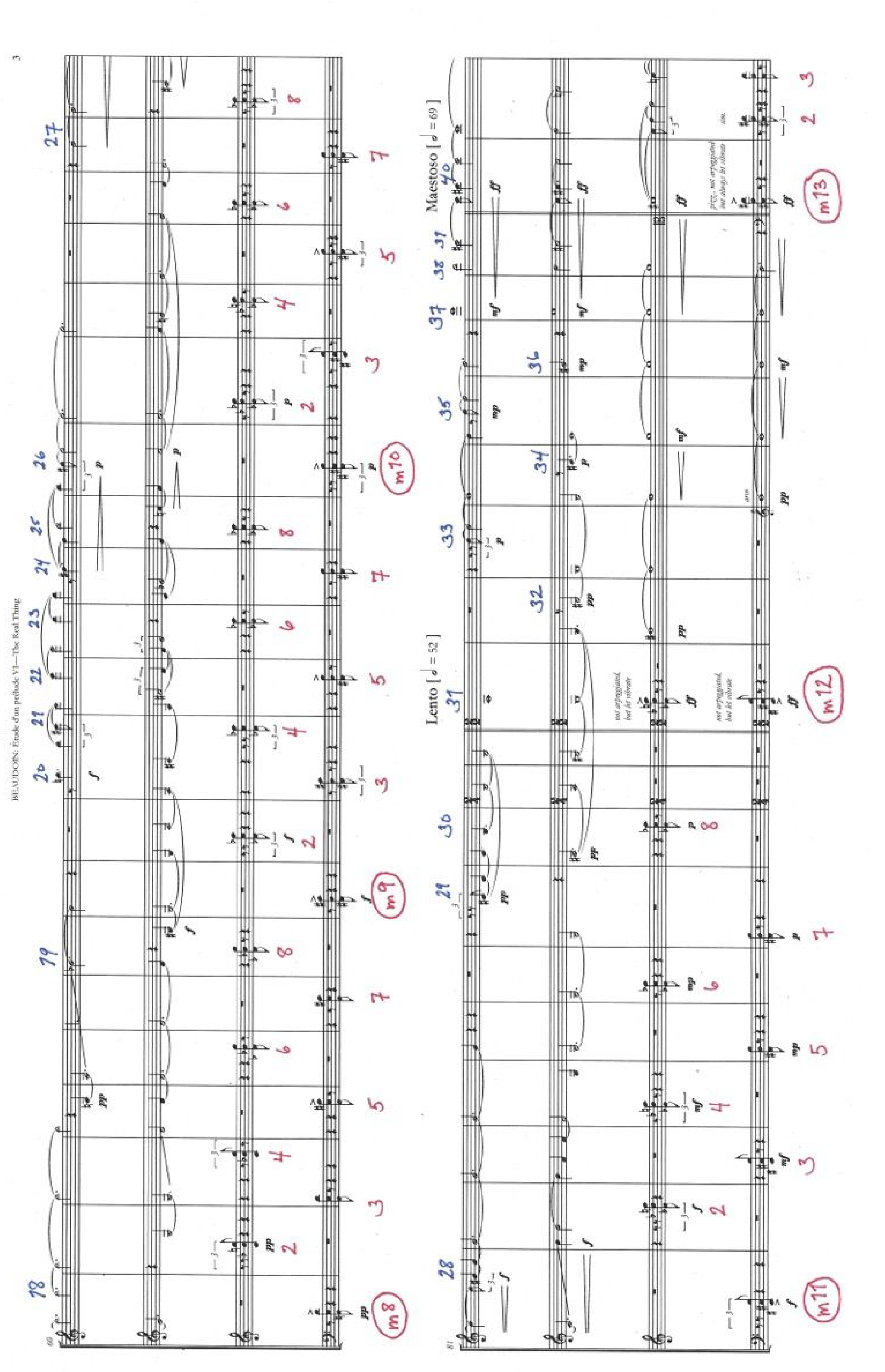
## Appendix

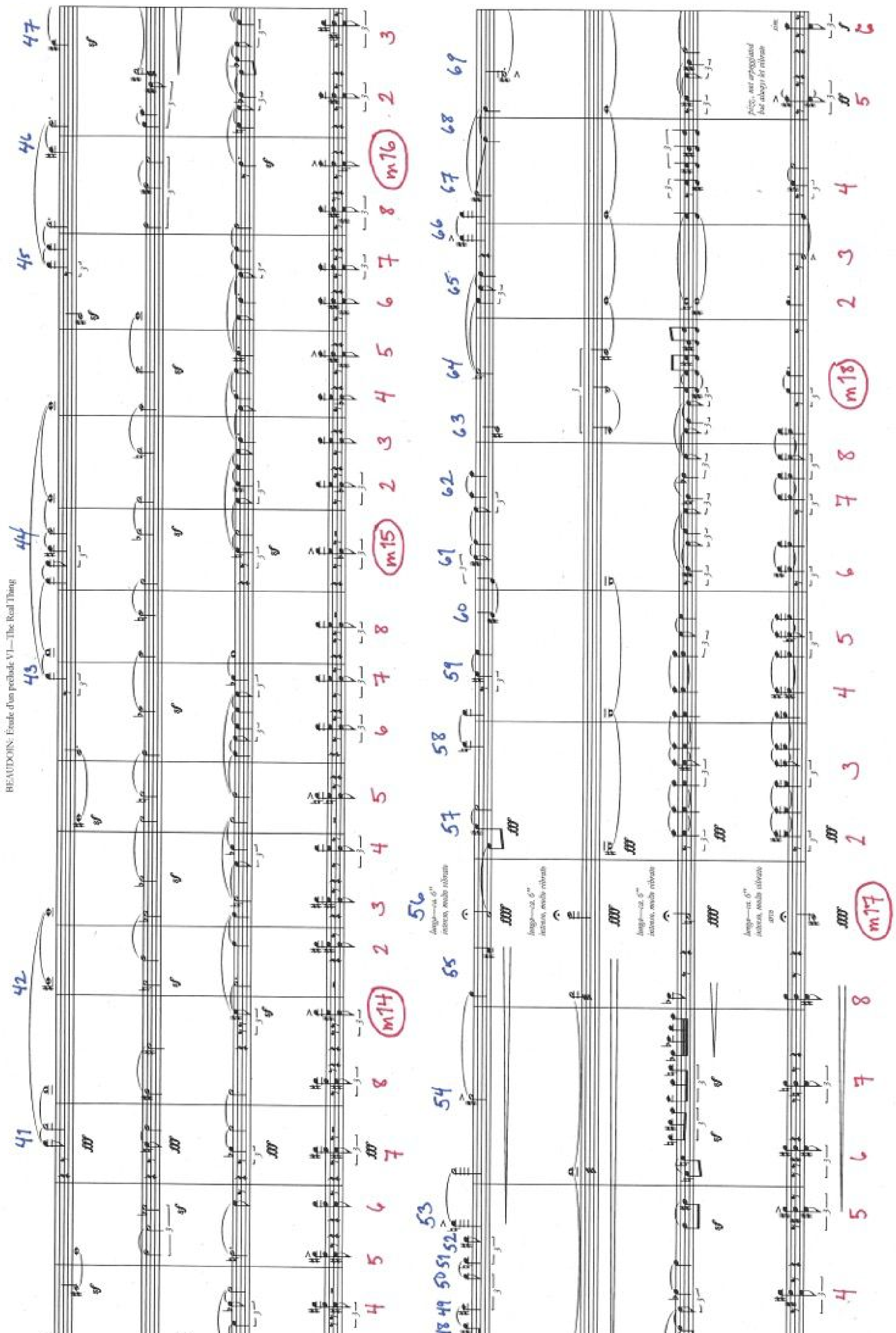


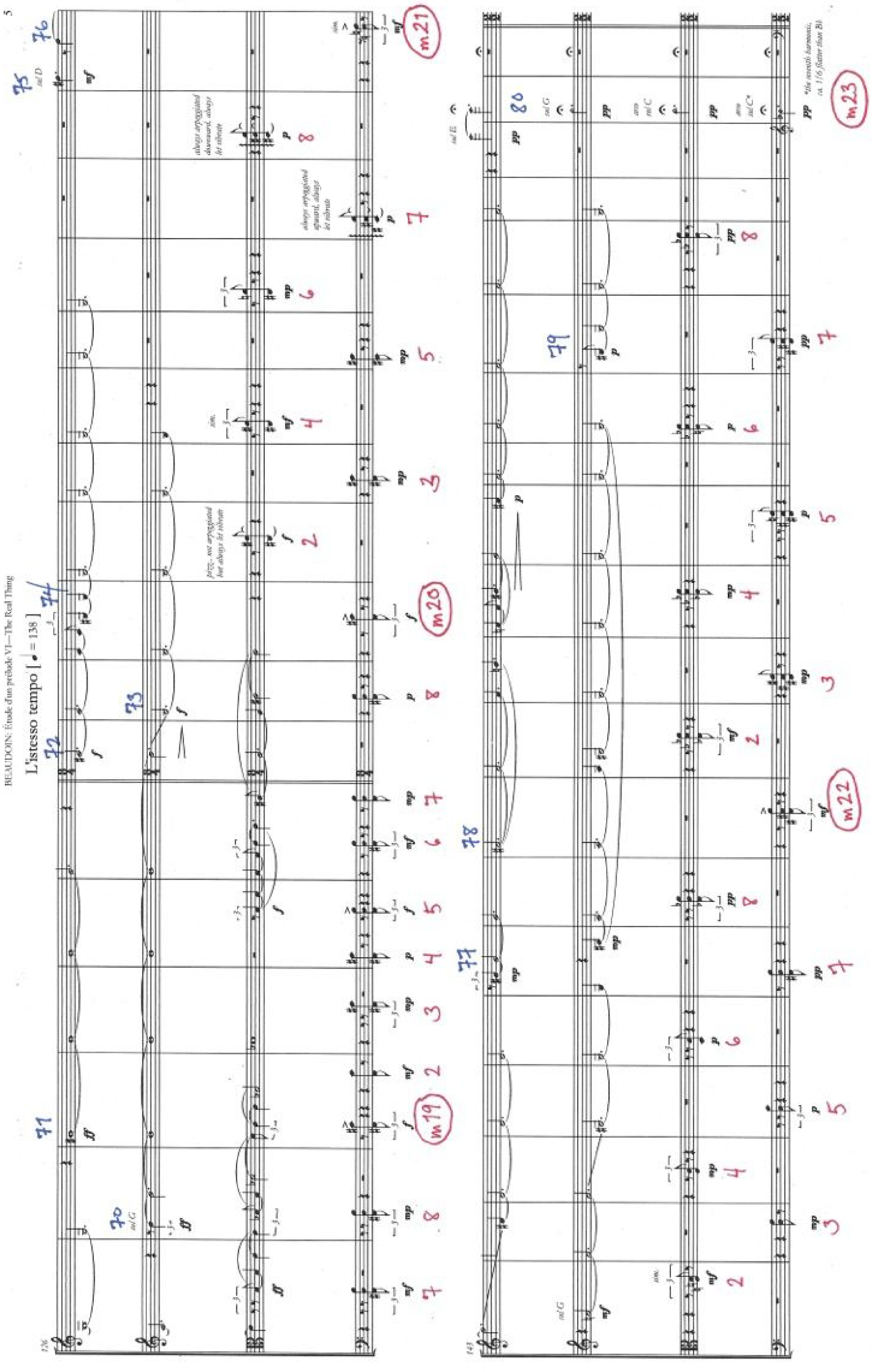
Glenn Brown, *The Real Thing* (2000). Oil on panel.
82x66.5 cm. Photo courtesy of the artist.

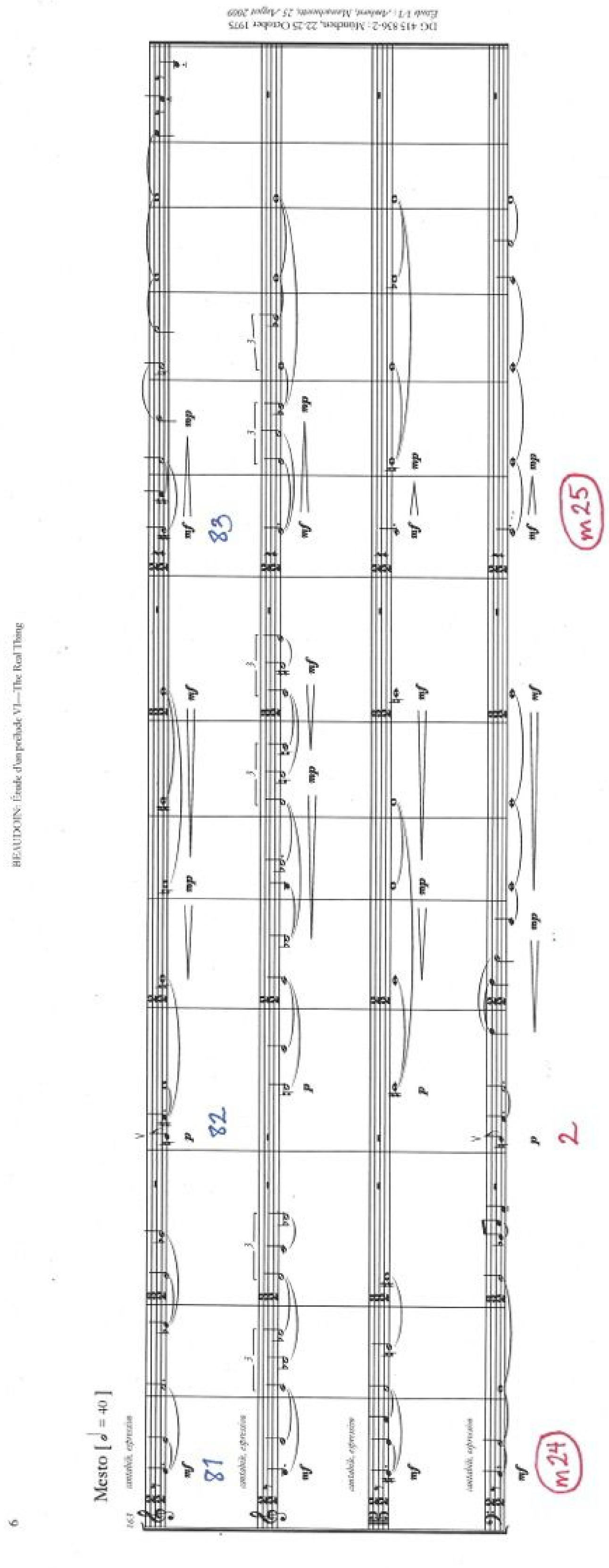

THE INJECTION:
BEAUDOIN
for ORIT HILEWICZ
2/22/2022
BLUE = Chopin/Argerich R.H.
RED = Chopin/Argerich L.H.
a mon ami Olivier Sann
étude d'un prélude VI
THE REAL THING
for string quartet, after the painting by Glenn Brown
in memoriam Frédéric CHOPIN
d'après Martha ARGERICH
Richard BEAUDOIN
2009
Lento [♩ = 52]
Grazioso [♩ = 138]
sempre molto cantabile, with strongly contrasted dynamics
pizzicato, always arpeggiated downward, always let vibrate
pizzicato, always arpeggiated upward, always let vibrate
sim.
ppp
f
p
mf
mp
1
2
3
4
5
6
m1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
m2
2
3
4
5
6
7


BEAUDOIN: Étude d'un prélude VI—The Real Thing
m3
m4
m5
m6
m7
mol E


BEAUDOIN: Étude d'un prélude VI—The Real Thing
Lento [𝅗𝅥 = 52]
Maestoso [𝅗𝅥 = 69]
non arpeggiated, but let vibrate
pizz., not arpeggiated but always let vibrate
m8
m9
m10
m11
m12
m13

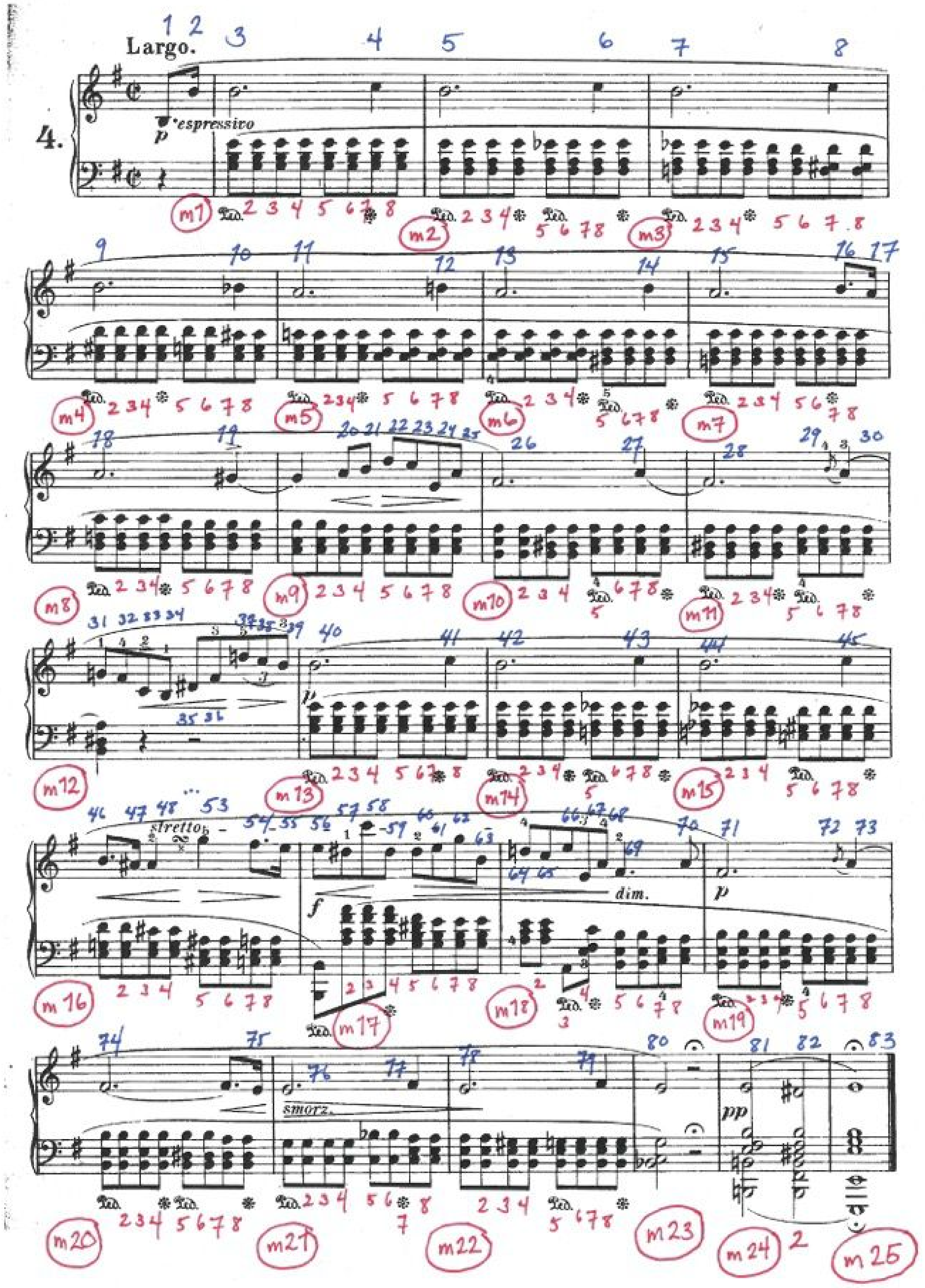

BEAUDOIN: Etude d'un prelude VI—The Real Thing
longa—ca. 6"
intenso, molto vibrato
arco
pizz., not arpeggiated but always let vibrate
sim.
48 49 50 51 52
m14
m15
m16
m17
m18


5
BEAUDOIN: Étude d'un prelude VI—The Real Thing
L'istesso tempo [♩ = 138]
136
143
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
m19
m20
m21
m22
m23
pizz., not arpeggiated but always let vibrate
always arpeggiated downward, always let vibrate
always arpeggiated upward, always let vibrate
sim.
nat G
nat D
nat E
nat C
*the seventh harmonic, ca. 1/6 flatter than B♭
ff
f
mf
mp
p
pp
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8


6
BEAUDOIN: Étude d'un prélude VI—The Real Thing
Mesto [ 𝅗𝅥 = 40 ]
cantabile, espressivo
mf
p
mp
81
82
83
m24
m25
2
DG 415 836-2 : München, 22-25 October 1975
Étude VI : Amherst, Massachusetts, 25 August 2009

CHOPIN op 28/4
ARGERICH DG 415 836-2
October 1975

BEAUDOIN
for ORIT HILEWICZ
2/22/2022


Largo.
4.
p espressivo
m1
m2
m3
m4
m5
m6
m7
m8
m9
m10
m11
m12
p
m13
m14
m15
stretto
f
dim.
m16
m17
m18
m19
p
smorz.
pp
m20
m21
m22
m23
m24
m25