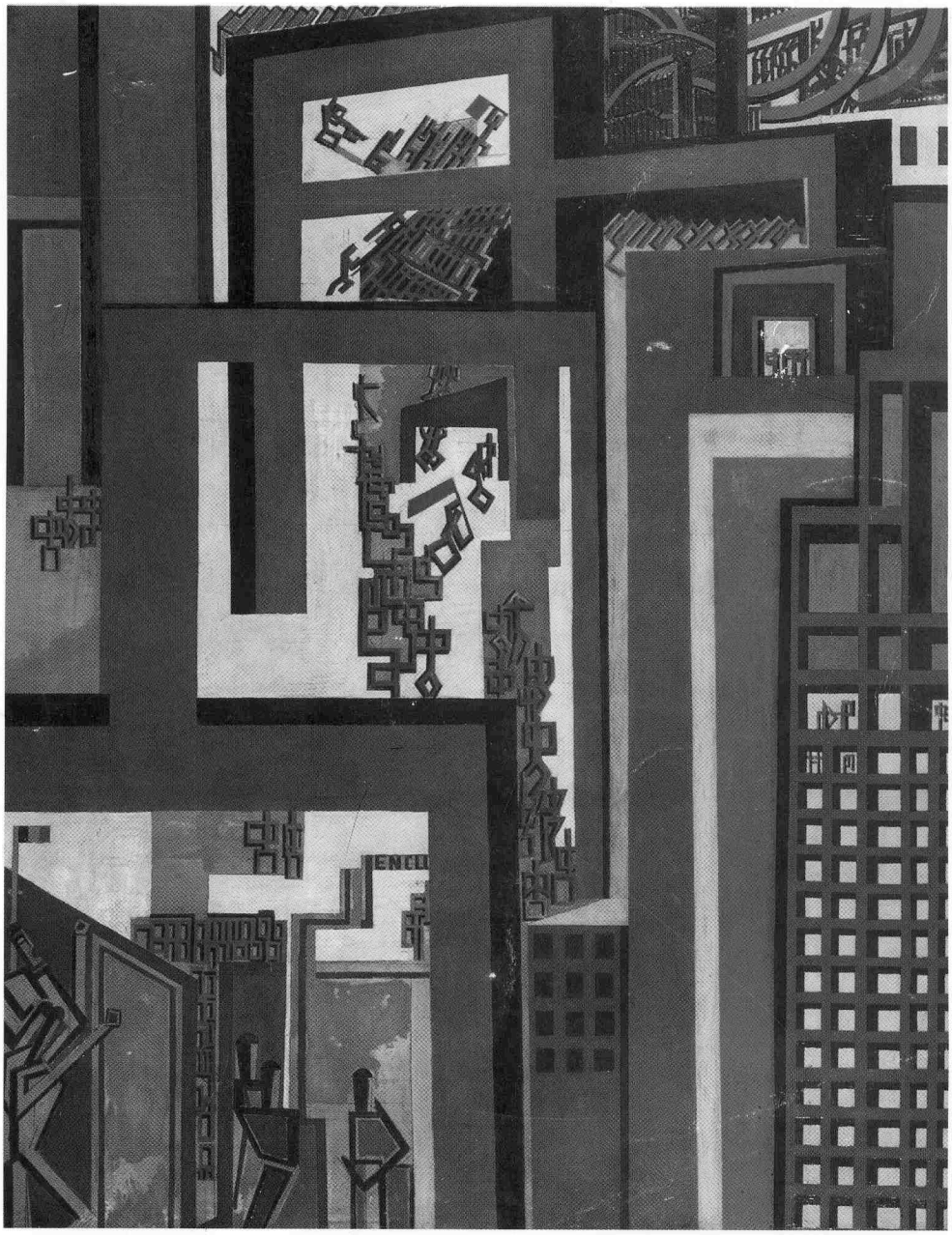
GEORGE ANTHEIL

The Piano Album

edited by Marthanne Verbit



GEORGE ANTHEIL

The Piano Album

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On June 19, 1926 at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées, young American composer George Antheil (1900-1959) astonished the Parisian public in a way not seen since the riot prompted by Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. Antheil's *Ballet mécanique*—scored for an unlikely ensemble of pianos, player piano, drums, xylophones, electric bells, siren and two propellers—captured the excitement, danger and spiritual exhaustion of life in the machine age. Antheil's debut piano recital at the same theatre in 1923 had already established him as a member of the Parisian moderns. His supporters in the audience included such luminaries as James Joyce, Erik Satie, Ezra Pound, Jean Cocteau and Darius Milhaud. Yet the uproar caused by this early notoriety and the subsequent disastrous New York premiere of *Ballet mécanique* eventually overshadowed the composer's entire career.

Although Antheil wrote four operas, ballets, chamber music, numerous symphonies, and over a dozen film scores, it is only now that these works are beginning to gain recognition. Due to difficulties in obtaining and deciphering the manuscripts, there have been only scattered performances of his chamber music and even fewer opportunities to hear his piano compositions. This is unfortunate, because one discovers Antheil immediately through his piano music. Unlike his contemporaries Virgil Thomson and Aaron Copland, Antheil was a full-fledged concert pianist. He composed for the piano throughout his life, often for his own performance, and his piano works far outnumber his compositions for other instruments.

The pieces collected in this volume are of intermediate difficulty, and they display the verve and wit that typify all of Antheil's piano music. They span the period from the 1920s, when he was in Paris and Berlin, to the 1940s in New York and Hollywood. With the exception of *Toccata No. 2* (first published by G. Schirmer in 1951), all the works in this collection are published here for the first time.

Death of the Machines, with its rhythmically charged construction, lasts only about a minute but conveys the style of the composer's earliest machine-inspired sonatas. The selections from *La Femme 100 Têtes* (45 preludes inspired by Max Ernst's collage-novel of the same name) are brief gesture pieces that juxtapose a variety of moods: slightly menacing and

and XL); or violently energetic (XLII, XLIV and XLV.) They capture the spirit of absurdity and naughtiness of the artist's work. The title is a pun on the French words *cent* and *sans*; it can be understood as "The Hundred-Headed Woman" or, as Ernst himself preferred, "The Headless Woman." These preludes represent a compendium of Antheil's compositional techniques up to 1933.

The more mellow style of Antheil's Hollywood years is sampled in the *Valentine Waltzes*, a set of eleven short pieces written in 1949 as a Valentine's Day gift for a friend. Antheil himself recorded the entire set in 1951. The harmonic and textual differences in his reading have been documented by ear and are shown in the footnotes. (A selection of contrasting waltzes would make an attractive program entry in the way one might choose a group of waltzes by Chopin.) *Toccata No. 2* is a display piece that exploits the full range of the keyboard. Brittle, rhythmically bouncy and dissonant, it is an effective contrast to the neo-romanticism of the *Valentine Waltzes*. Written in the same year (1948) as the virtuosic toccata movement of his *Piano Sonata No. 4*, it is a more accessible alternative to that style.

Antheil knew everyone in the artistic milieu of Paris, Berlin, New York and Hollywood. Some of the pieces collected here were written for those friends and acquaintances. For example, *Musical Picture of a Friend* is most likely an homage to the great Polish pianist Jan Smeterlin, who was a gifted interpreter of his countrymen Szymanowski and Chopin. Antheil's piece is reminiscent of Szymanowski's B-flat minor Etude, Op. 4 no. 3, which is in turn reminiscent of Chopin's C-sharp minor Etude, Op. 25 no. 7. *The Ben Hecht Valses* was written for the newspaperman-turned-moviemaker who hired Antheil to head the music division of his film company.

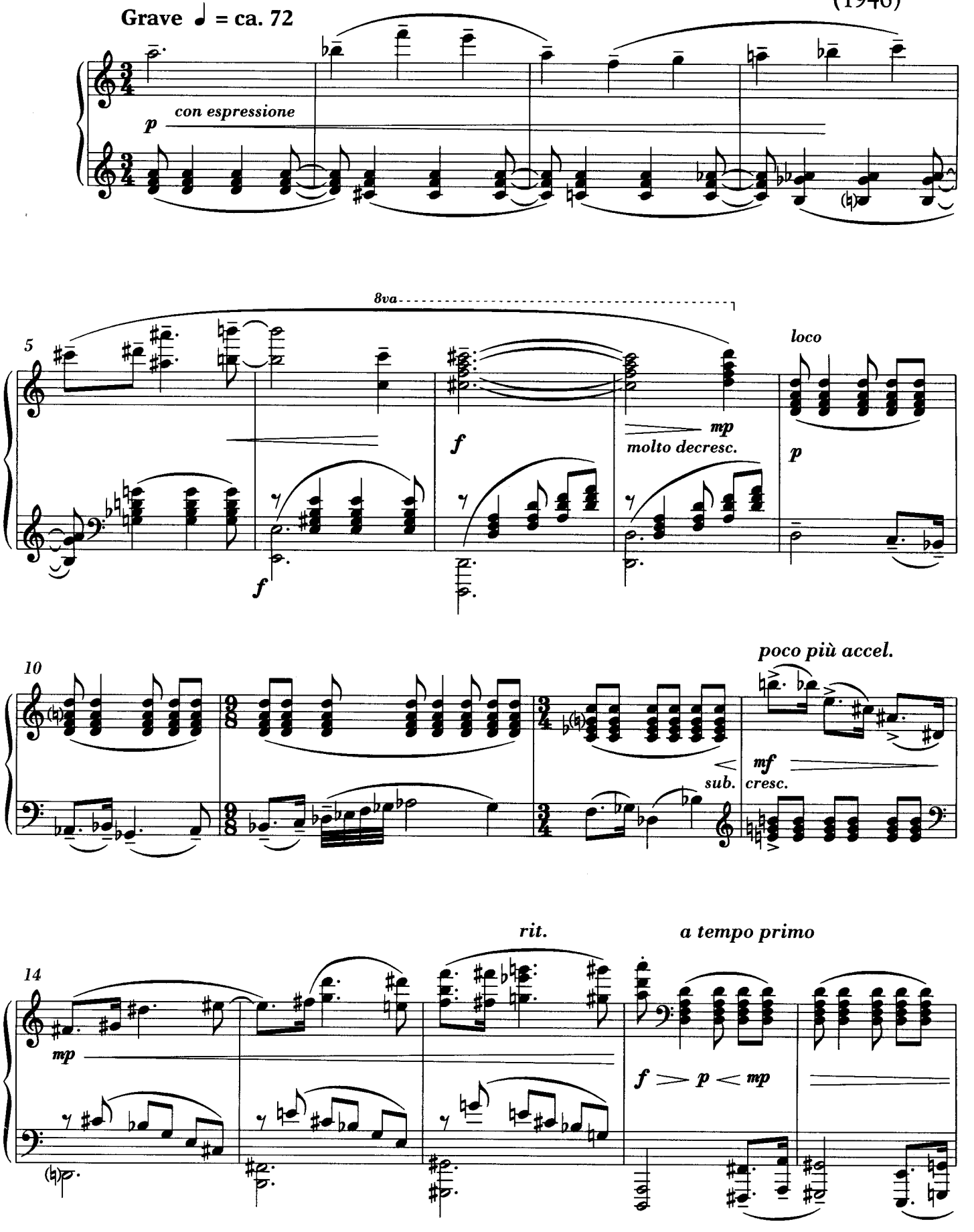
The audacity, humor and charm reflected in this collection of piano pieces gives some idea of the feisty personality and talent of this little-known composer. Even among all the musical frenzy of the twentieth century, this self-styled "bad boy of music" still seems a fresh wind.

—MARTHANNE VERBIT

Pianist Marthanne Verbit has premiered many works of George Antheil and other Americans. Her all-Antheil compact disc, *Bad Boy of Music* (Albany Records: Troy 146), includes the *Airplane*

MUSICAL PICTURE OF A FRIEND

George Antheil
(1946)



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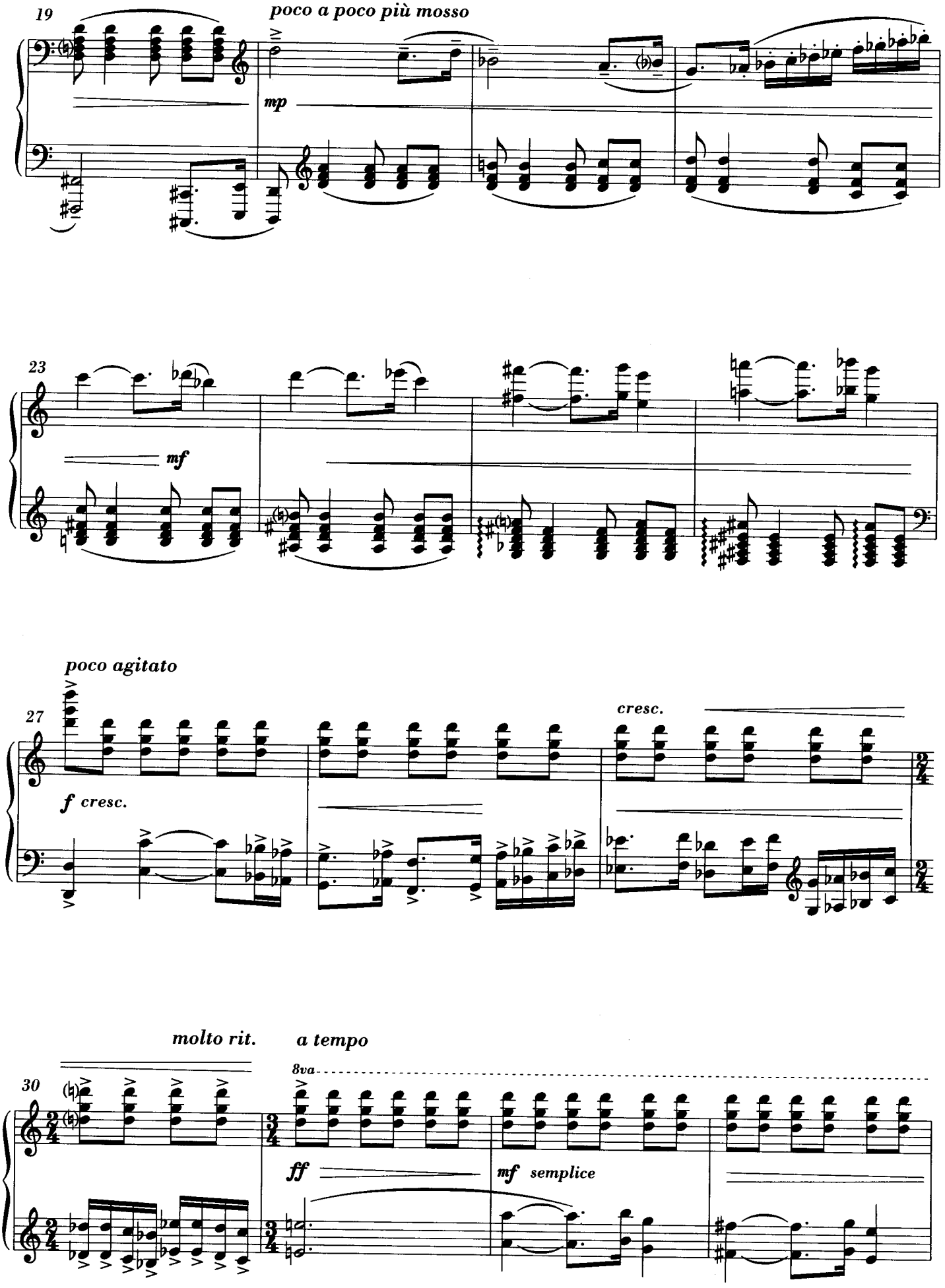
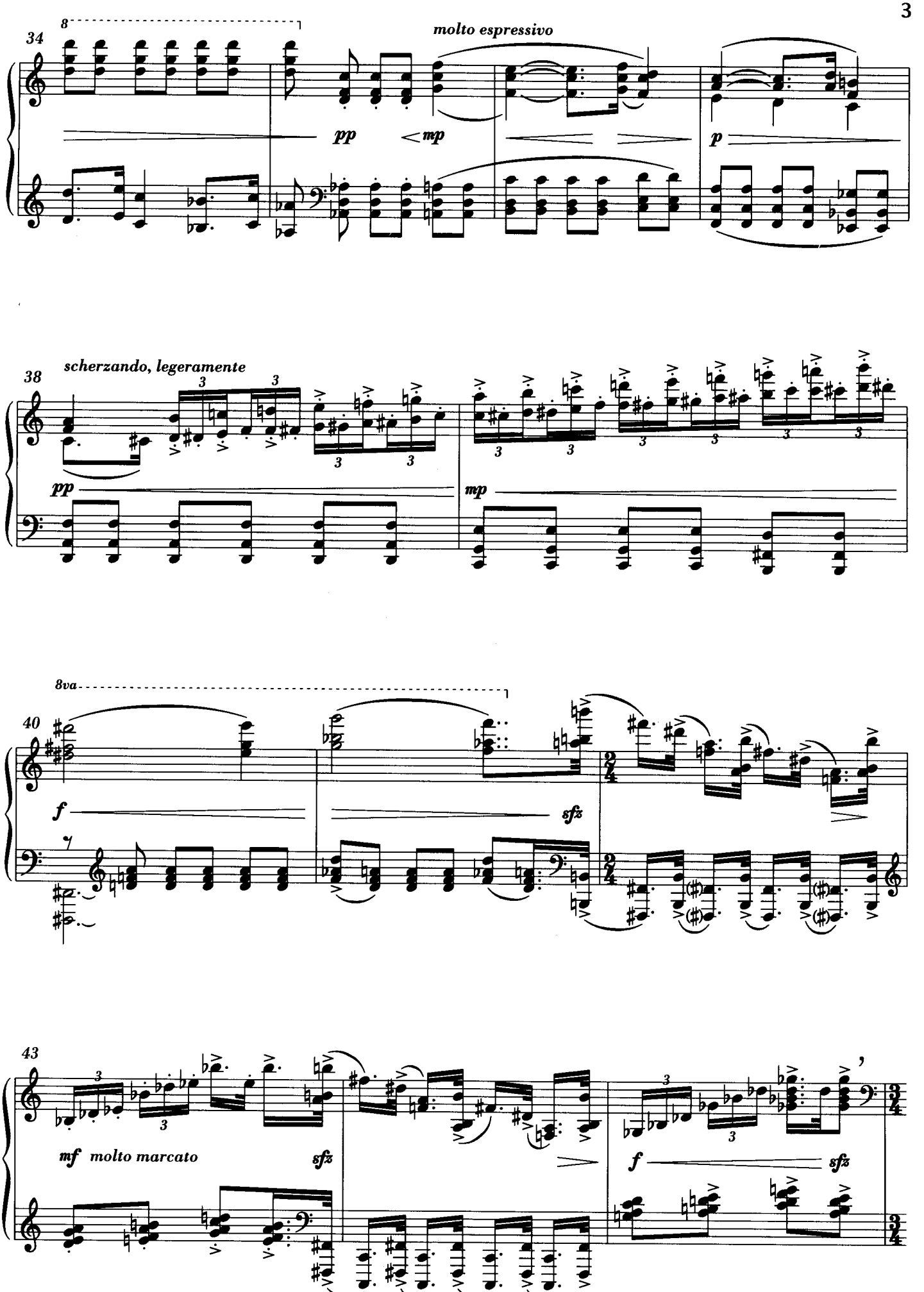
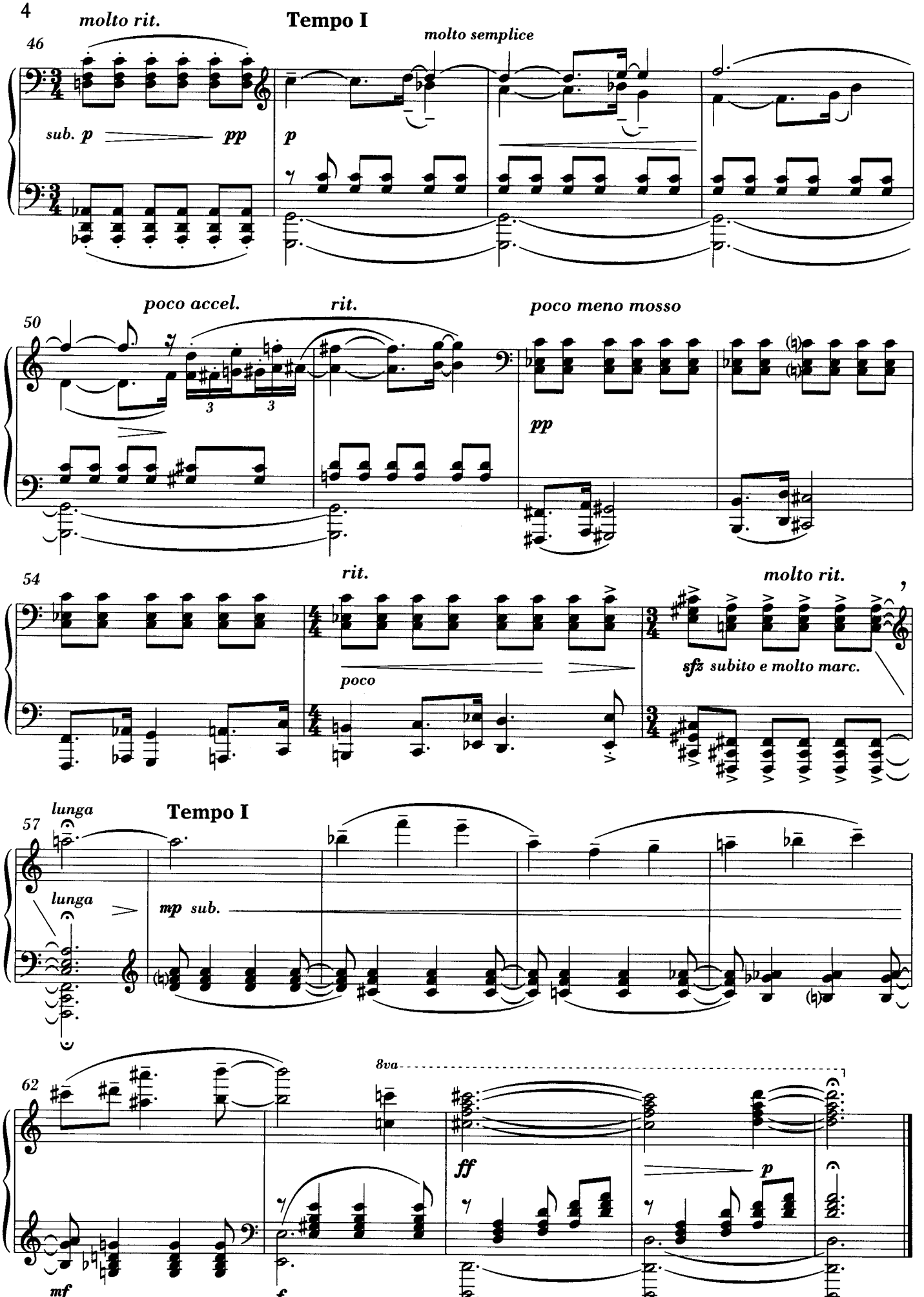

19
poco a poco più mosso
mp
23
mf
poco agitato
27
f cresc.
cresc.
molto rit.
a tempo
30
8va
ff
mf semplice


8
34
molto espressivo
pp
< mp
p
38
scherzando, legeramente
pp
mp
8va
40
f
sfz
43
mf molto marcato
sfz
f
sfz

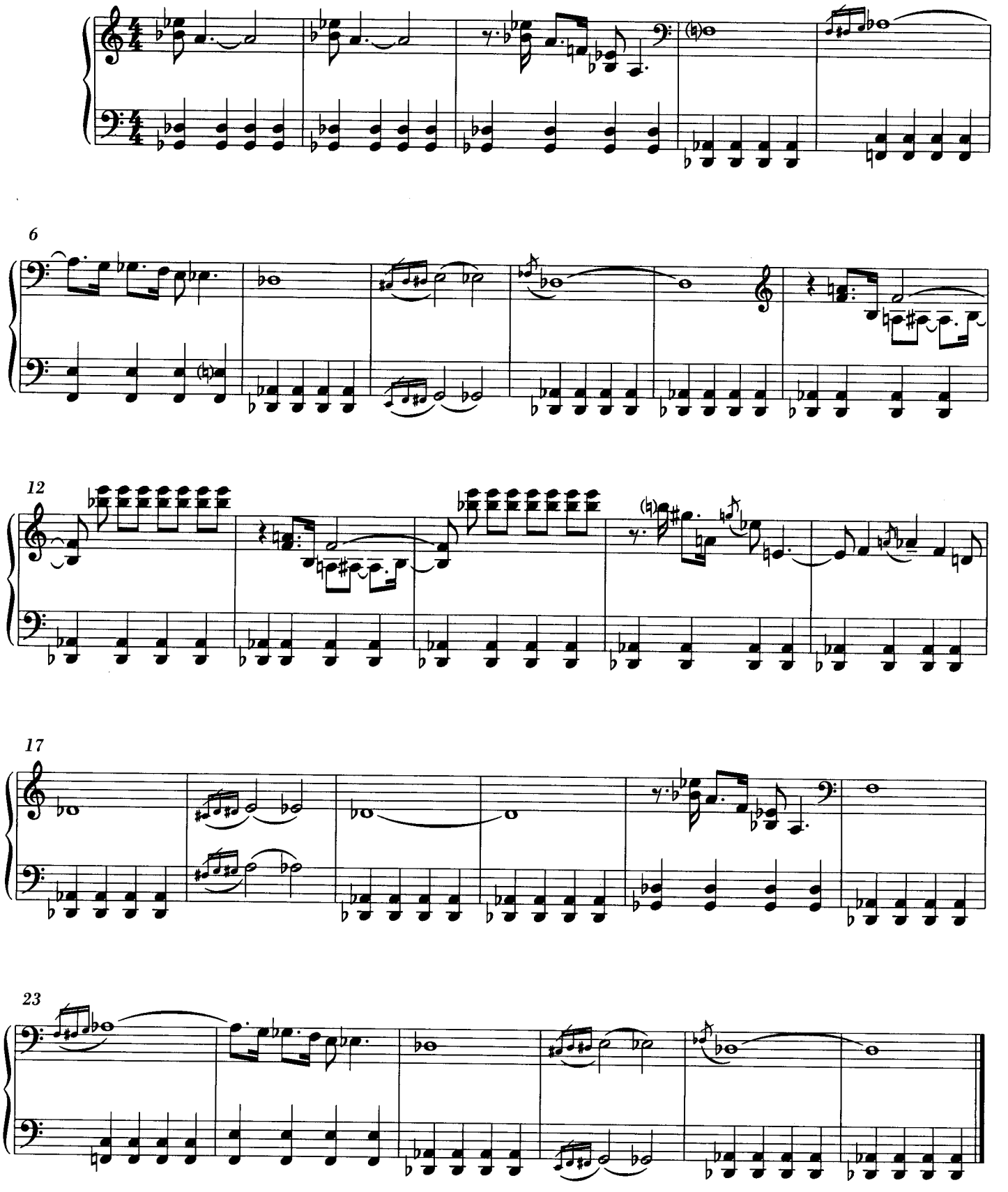

molto rit.
Tempo I
46
molto semplice
sub. p
pp
p
poco accel.
rit.
poco meno mosso
50
3
3
pp
54
rit.
molto rit.
poco
sfz subito e molto marc.
lunga
Tempo I
57
lunga
mp sub.
62
8va
mf
ff
p

für mein nur Einziger Böski

LITTLE SHIMMY

(1923)

♩ = 84*



* The manuscript does not have a tempo; this is the tempo I used on my recording. — Ed.

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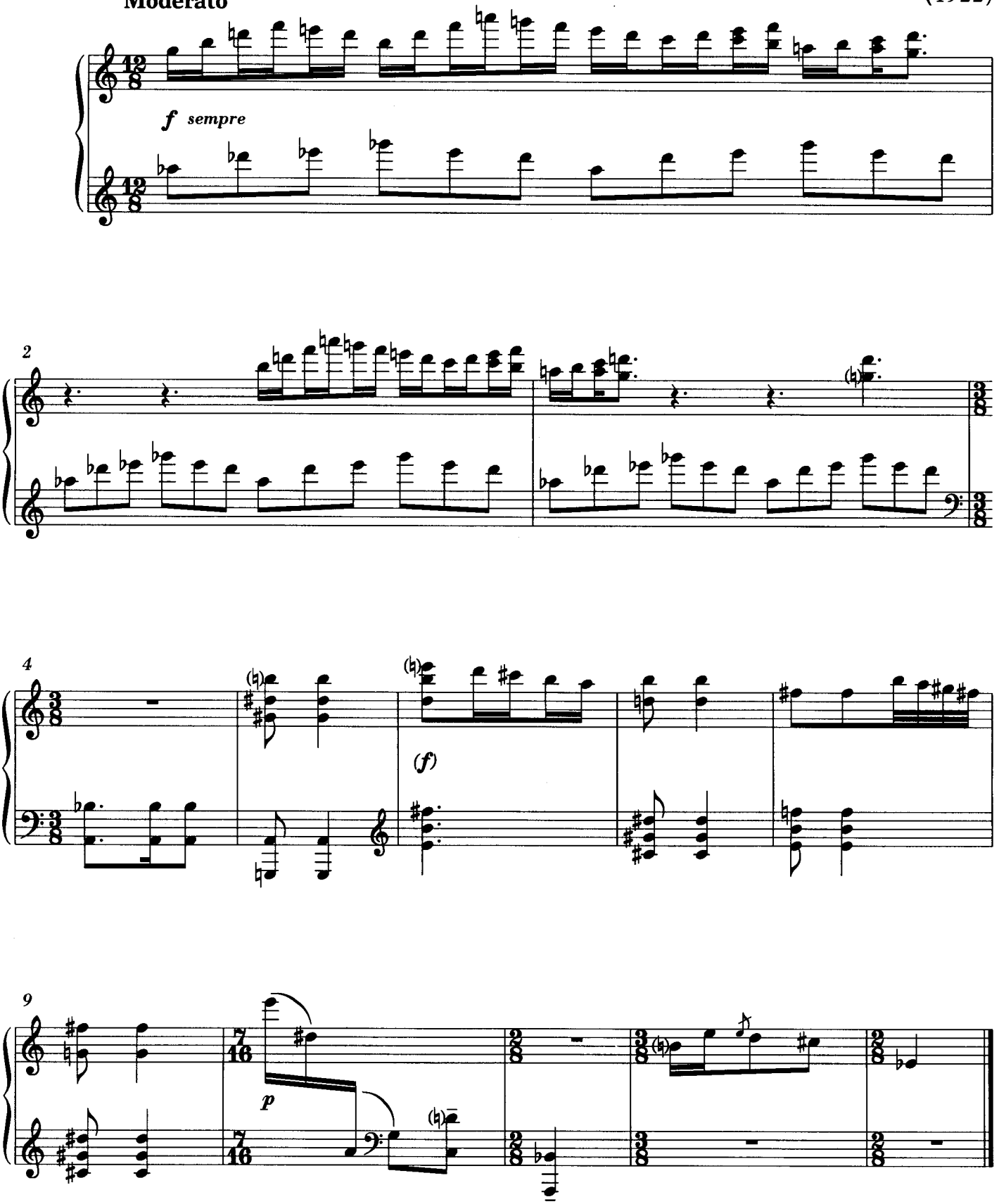
SONATINA

(Death of the Machines)

I

Moderato (1922)



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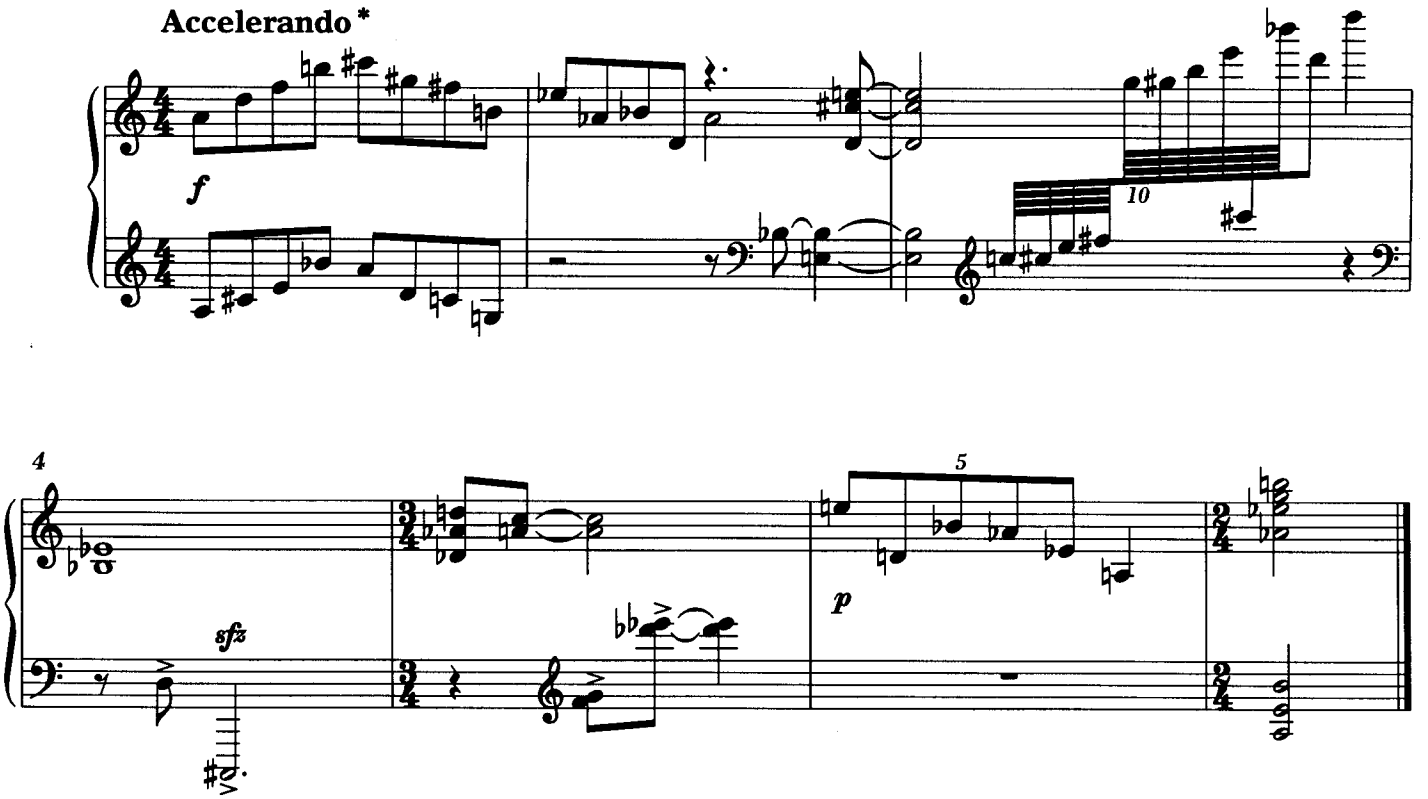
II



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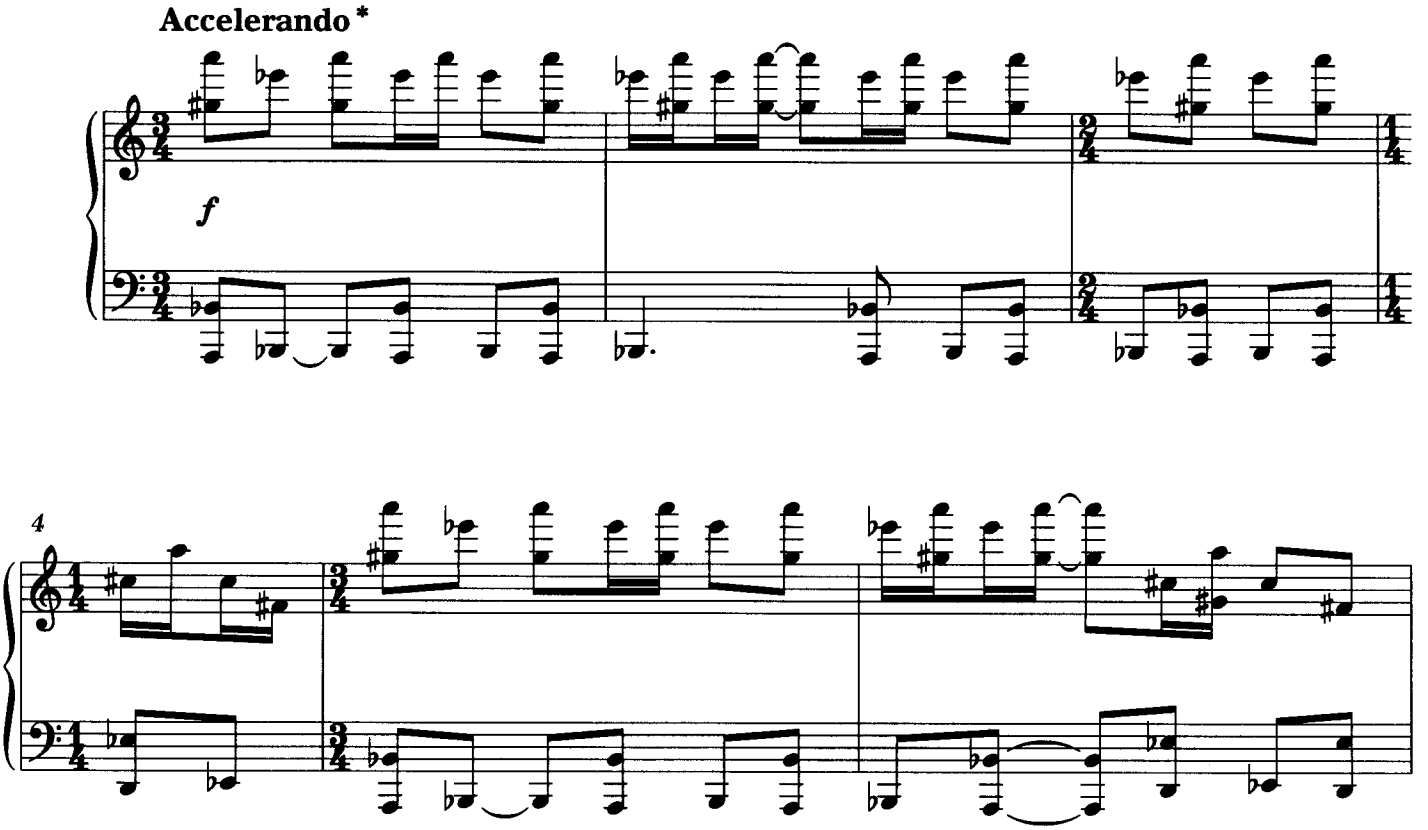
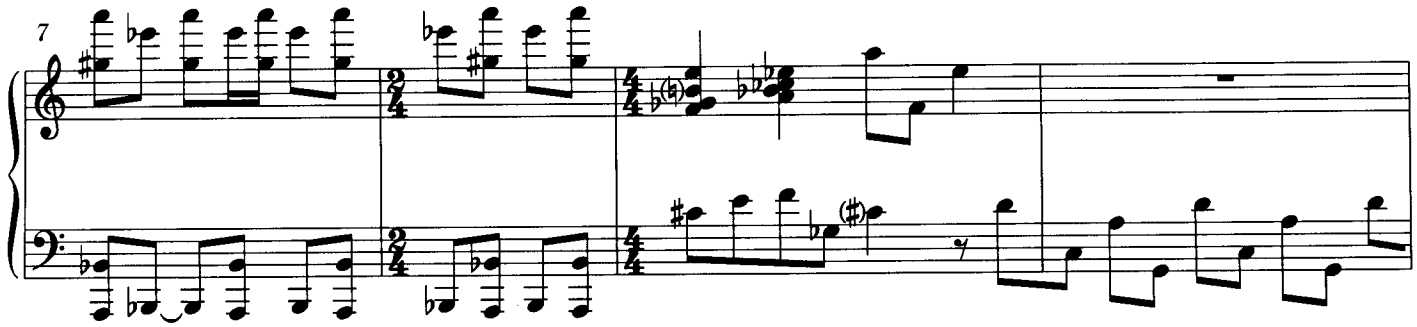
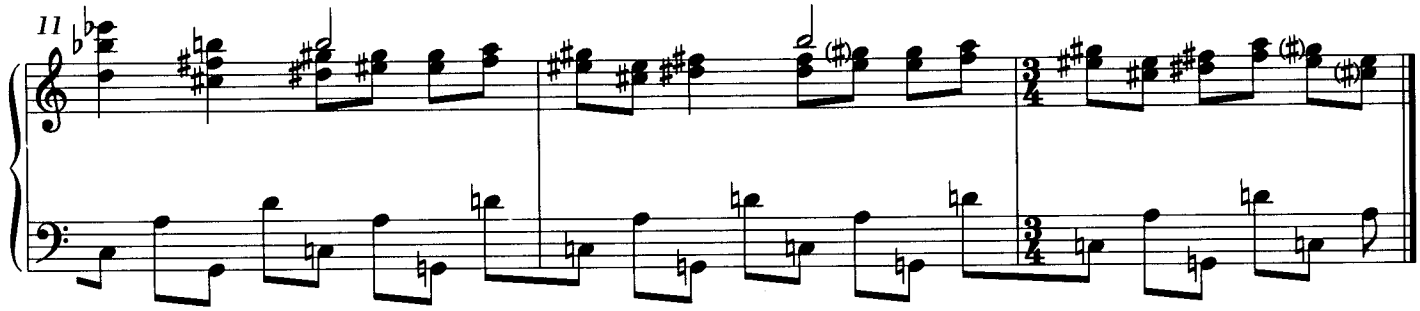


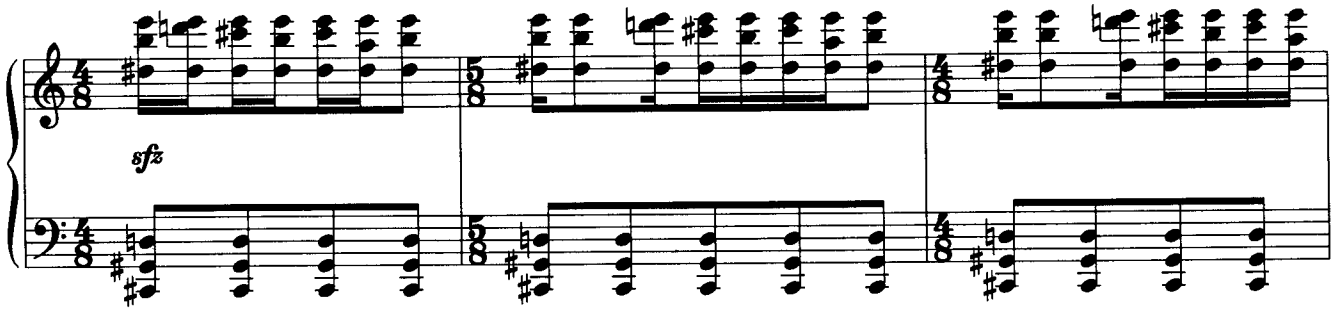
* These *accelerandi* should be paced so that the beginning of each movement

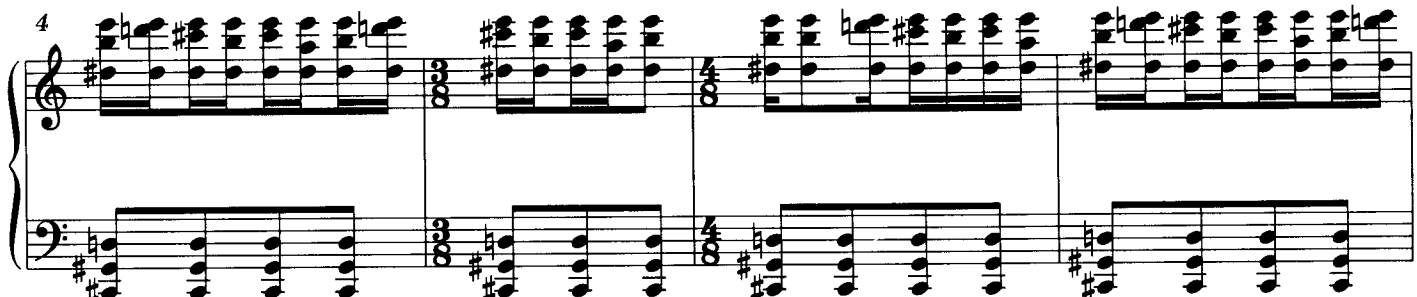


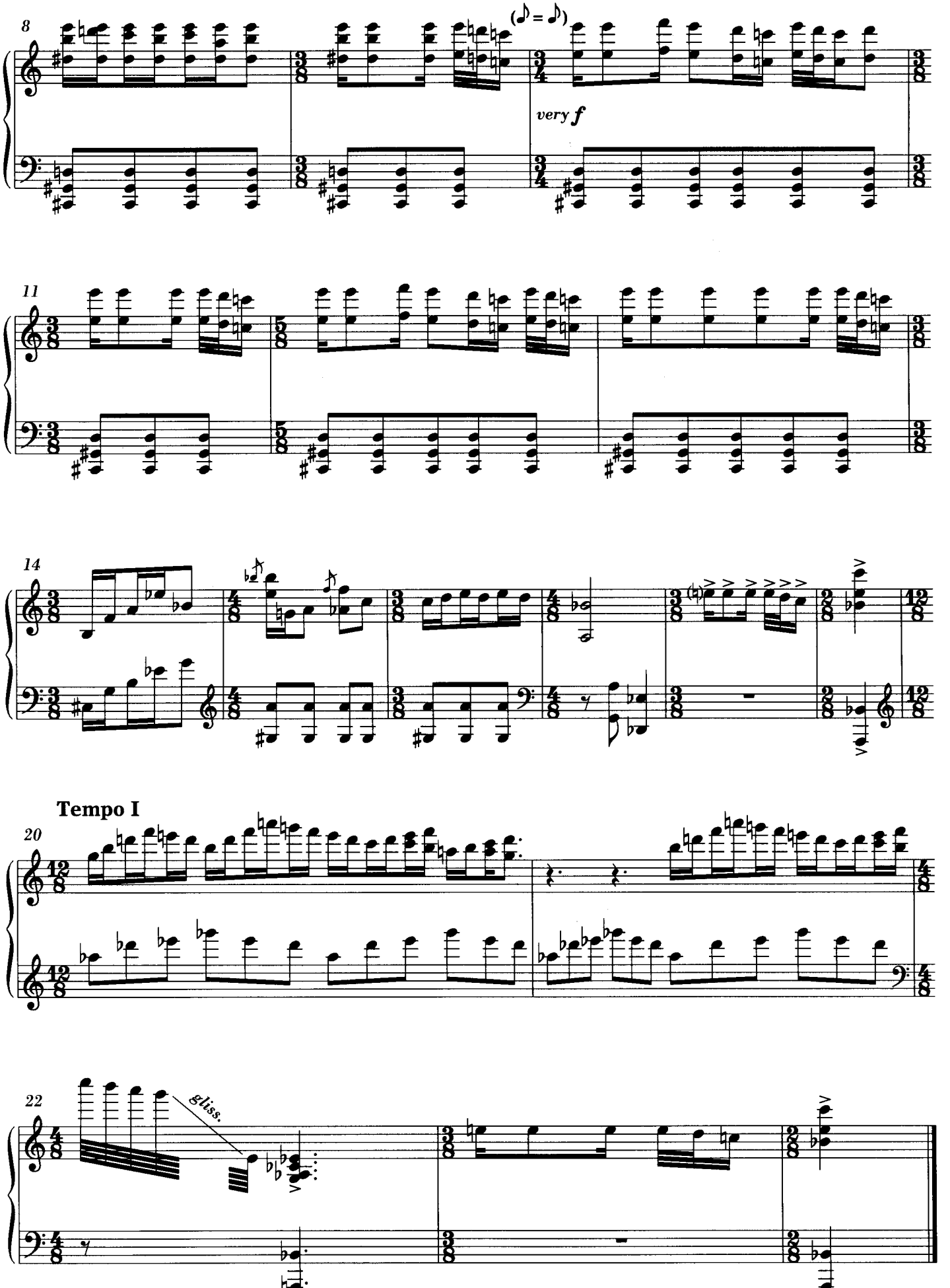


IV

Accelerando

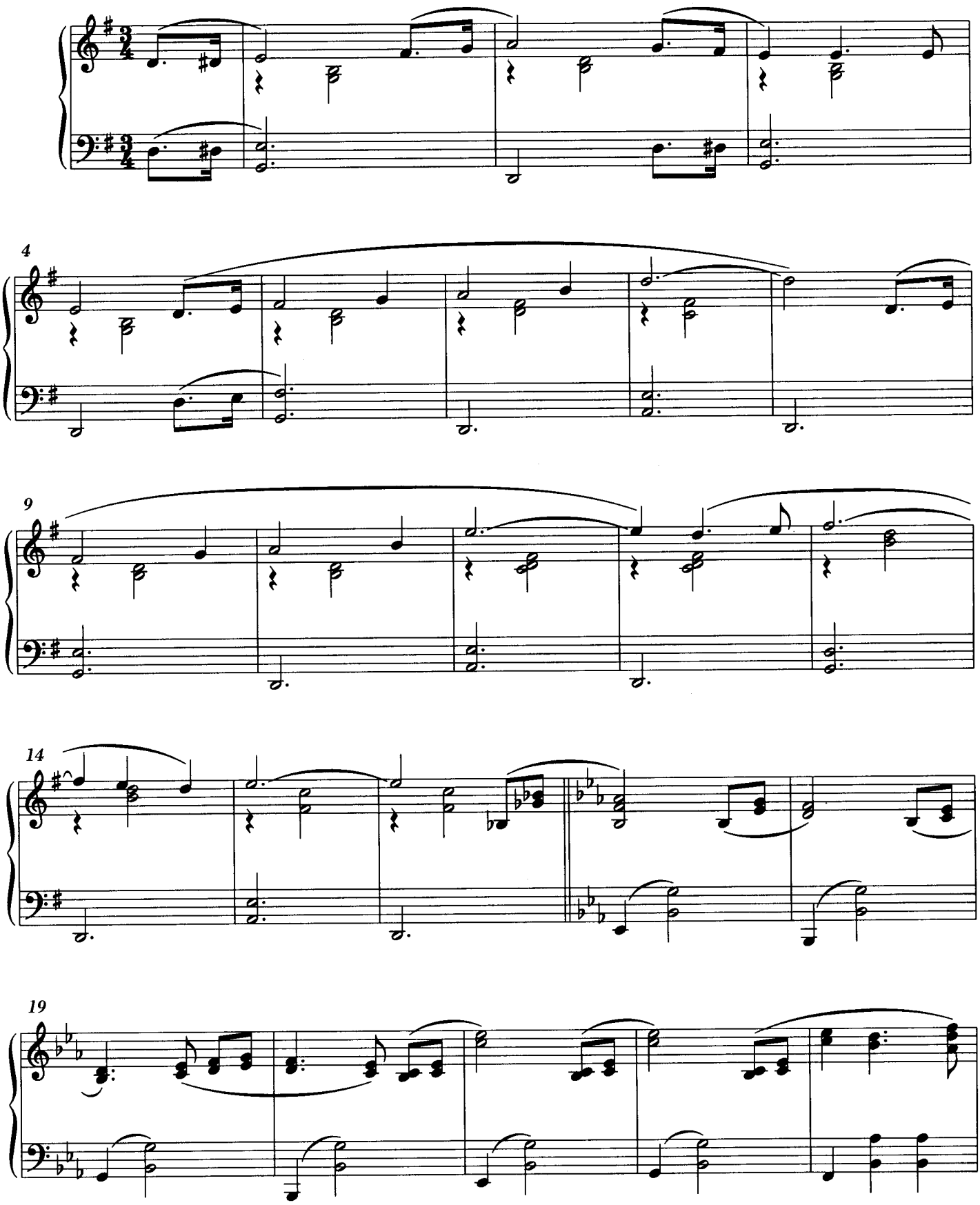





8
(♪ = ♪)
very f
11
14
Tempo I
20
22
gliss.

THE BEN HECHT VALSES

(1943)



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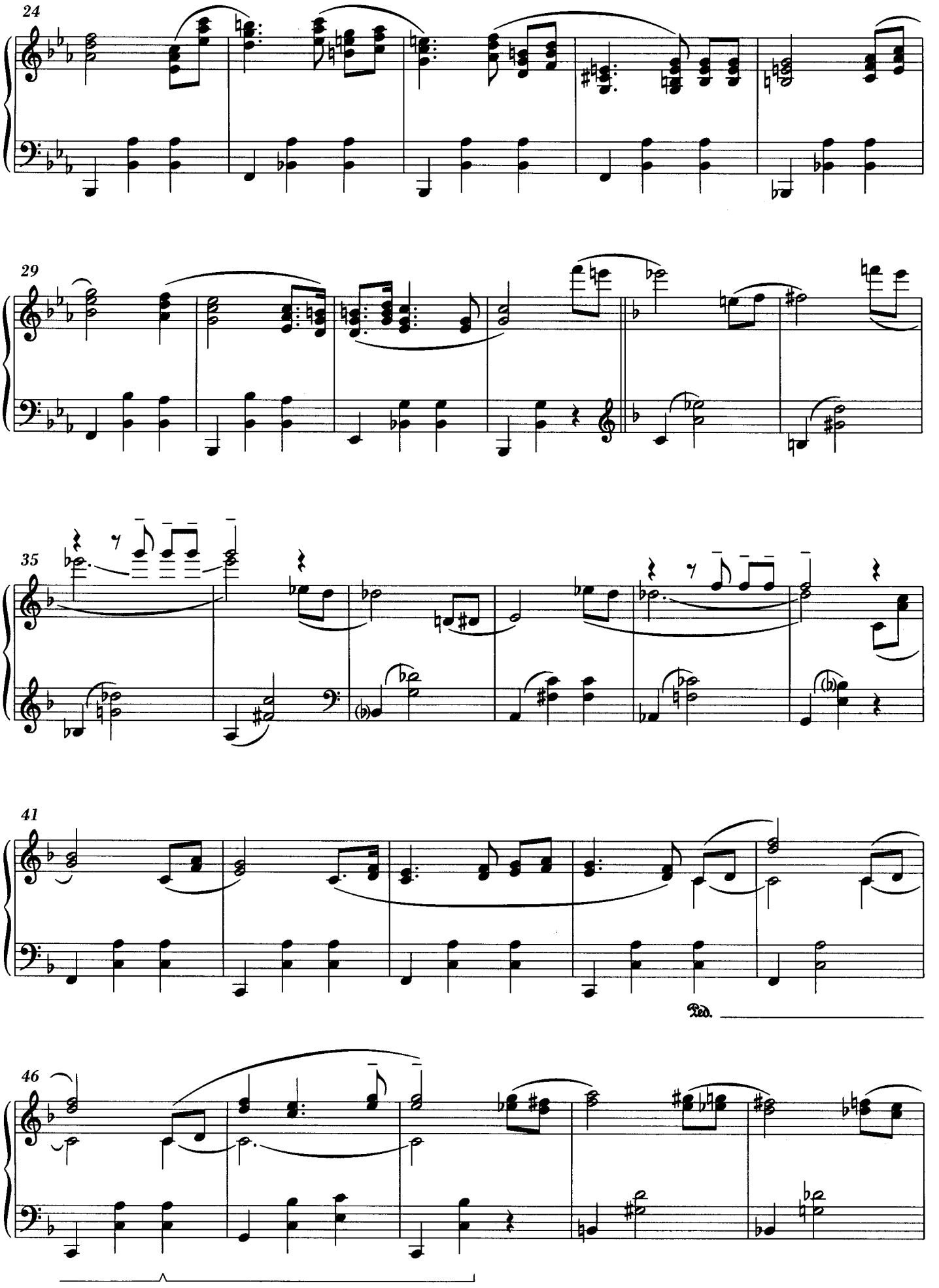
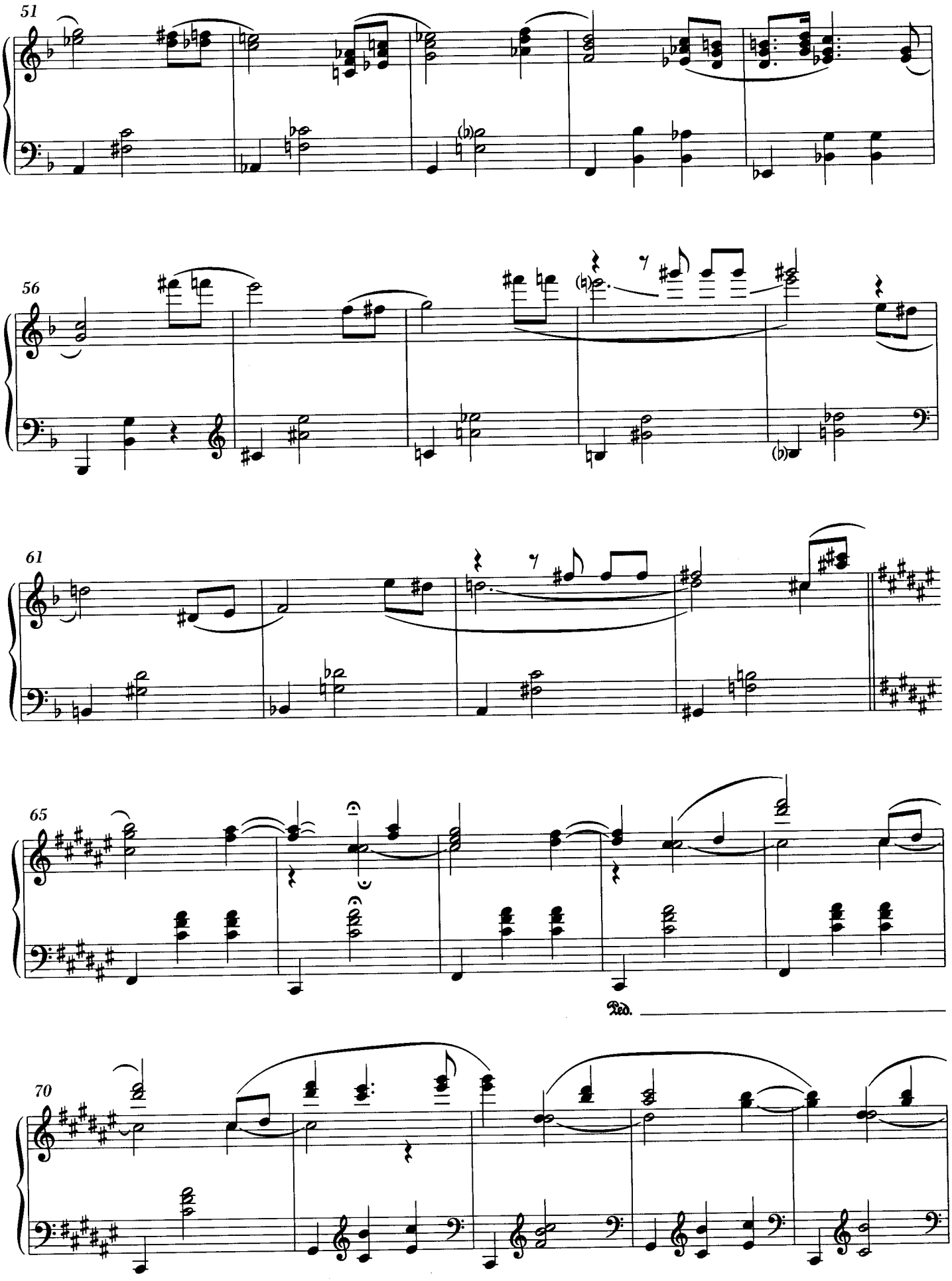
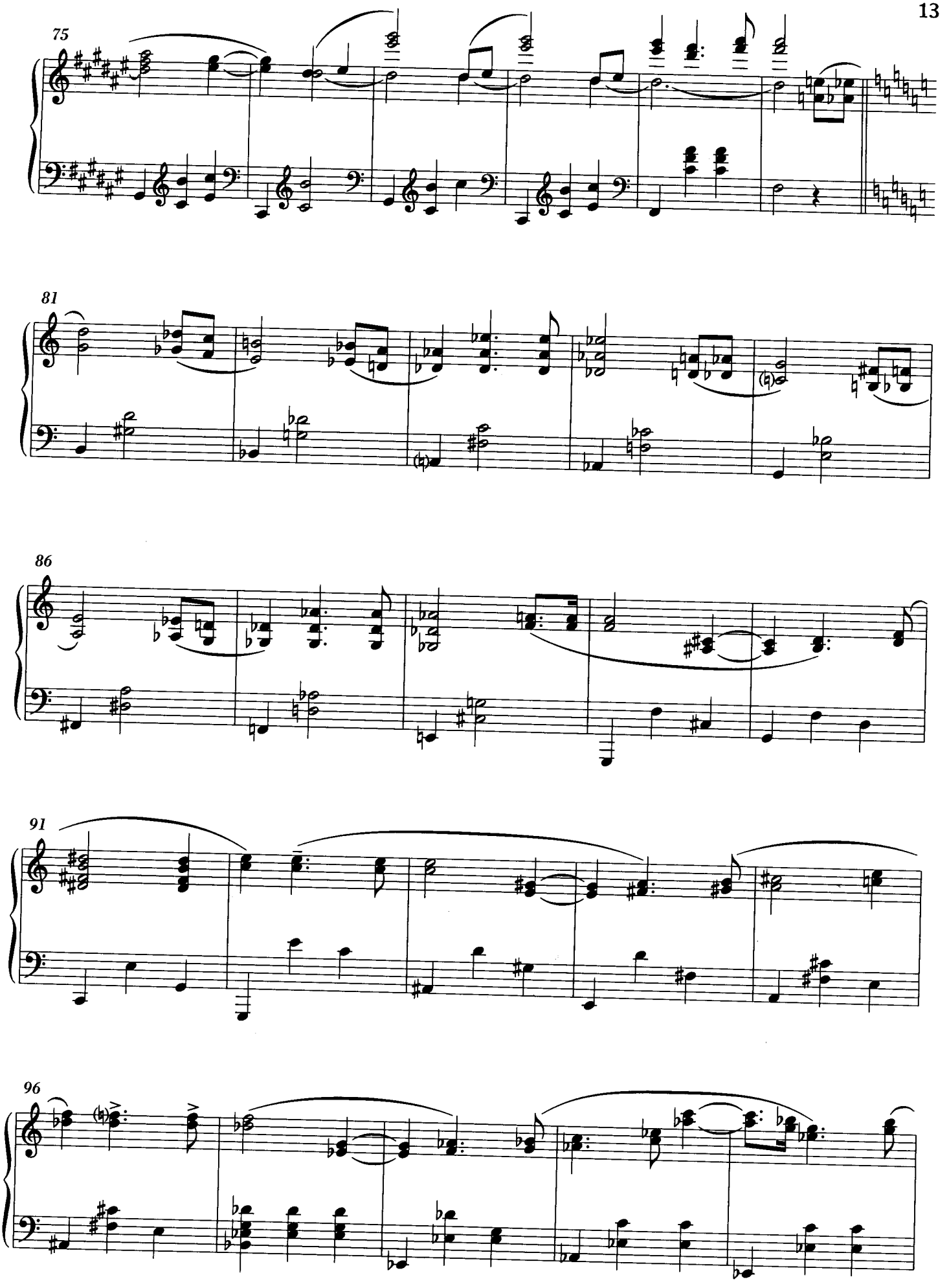
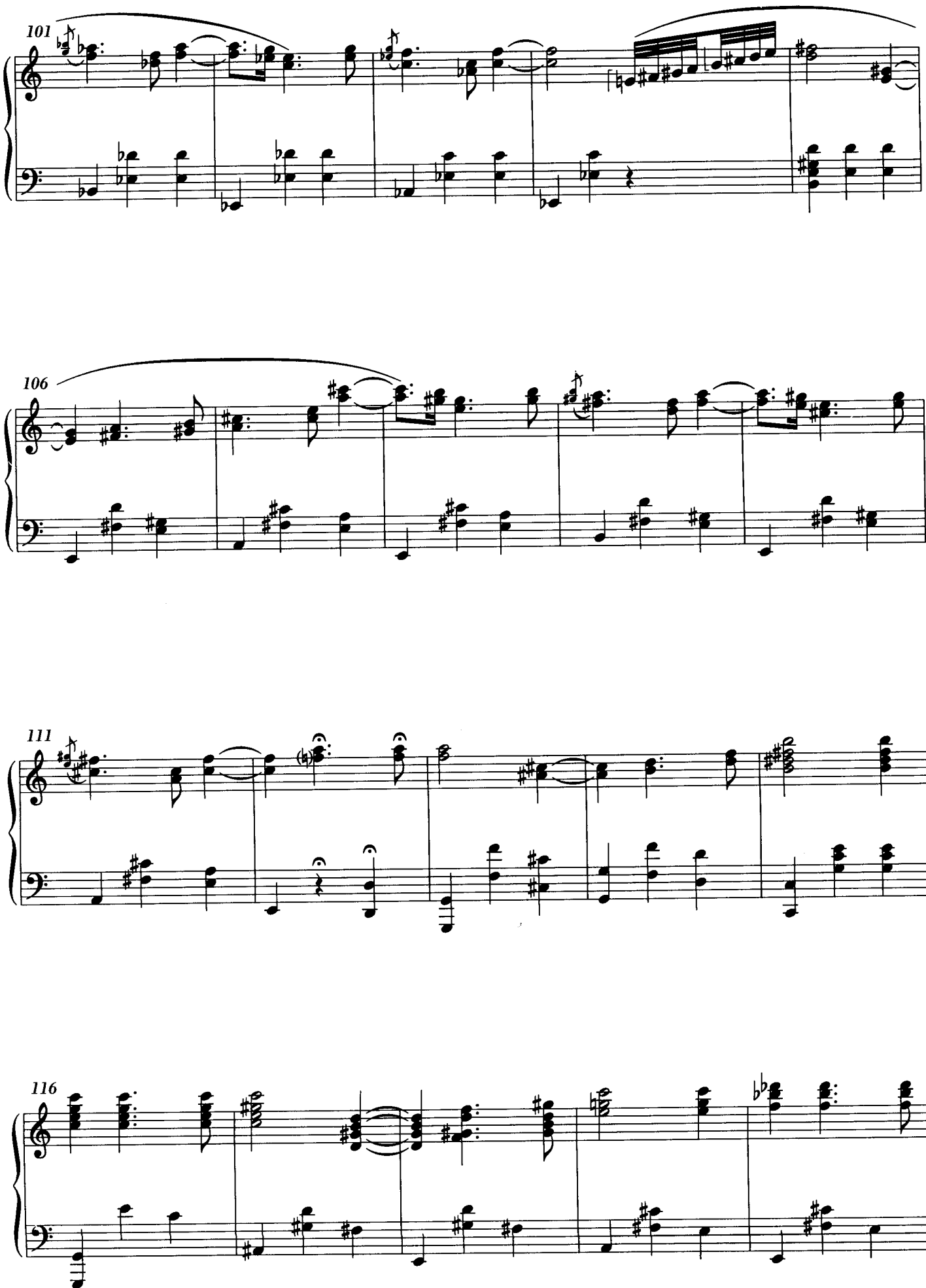
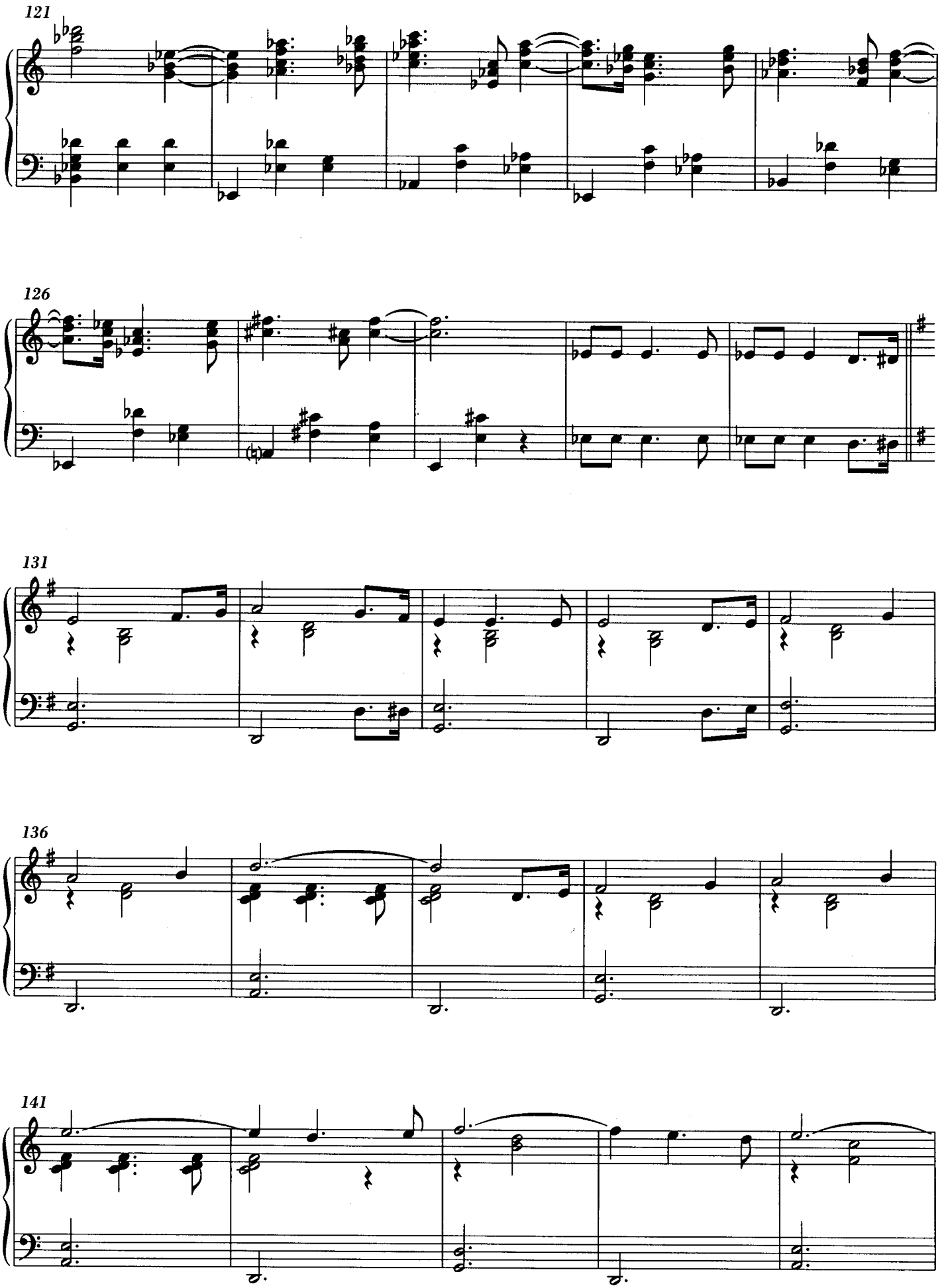

24
29
35
41
Ped.
46


51
56
61
65
Ped.
70


75
81
86
91
96


101
106
111
116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131
136
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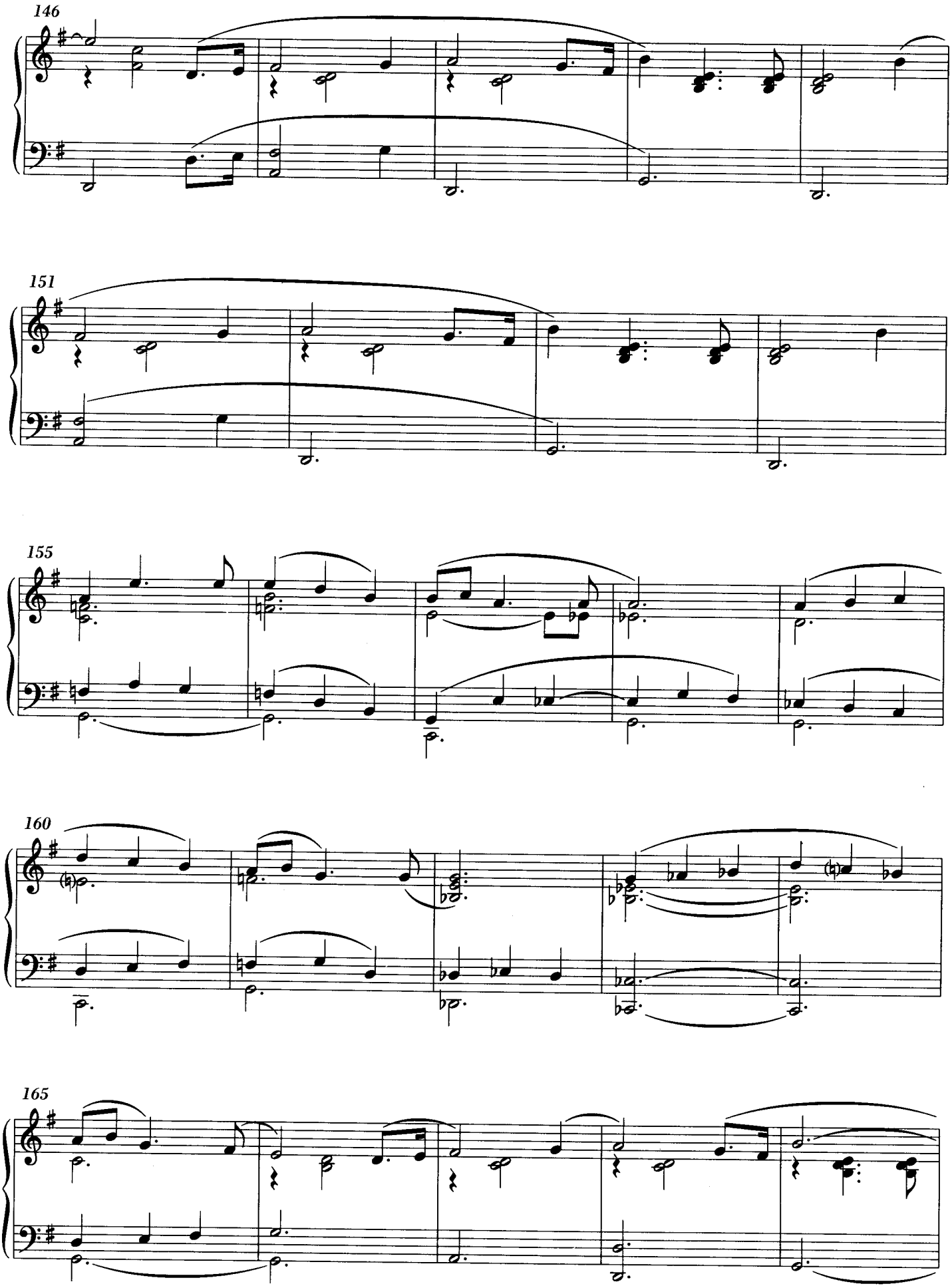
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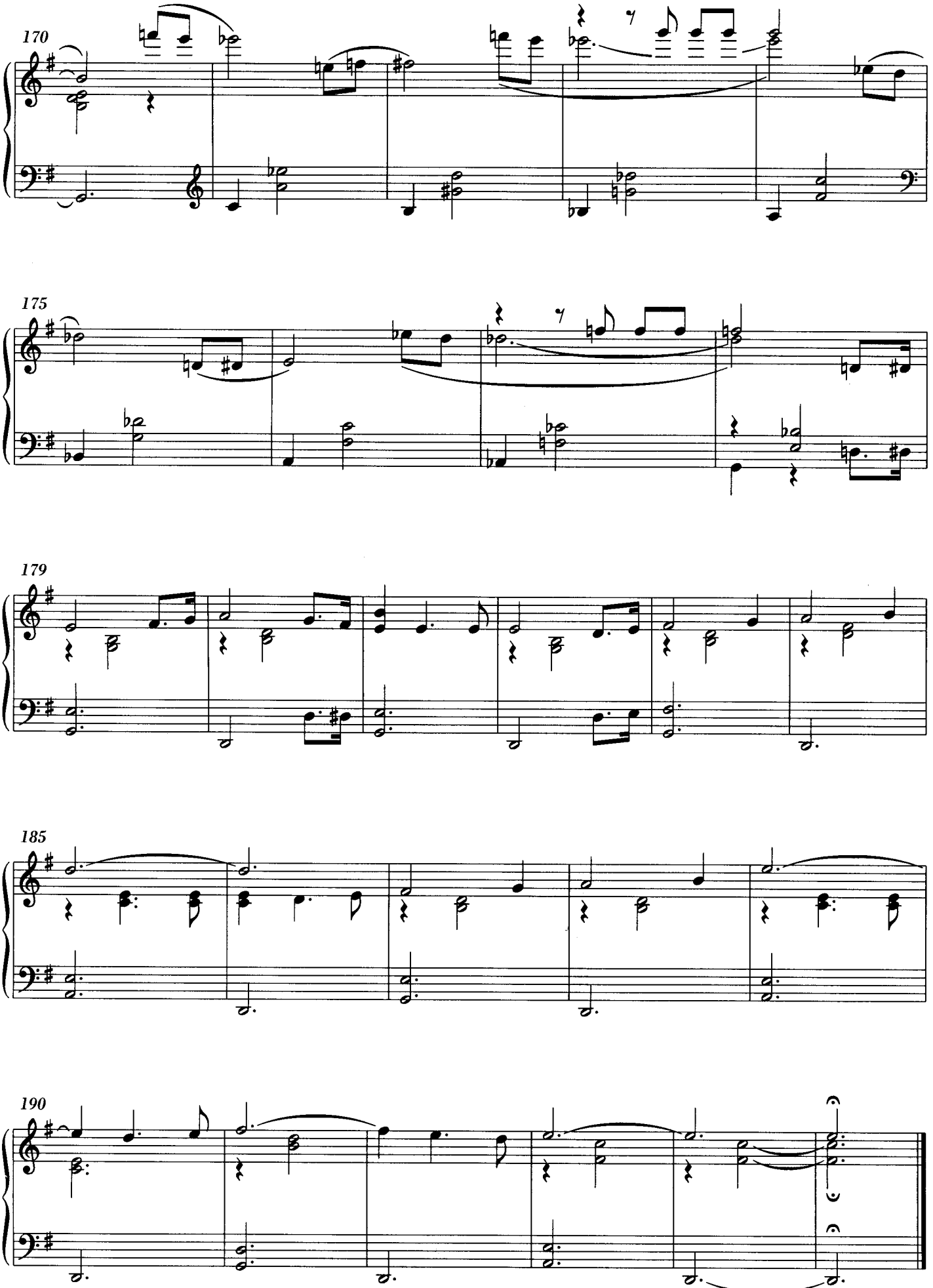
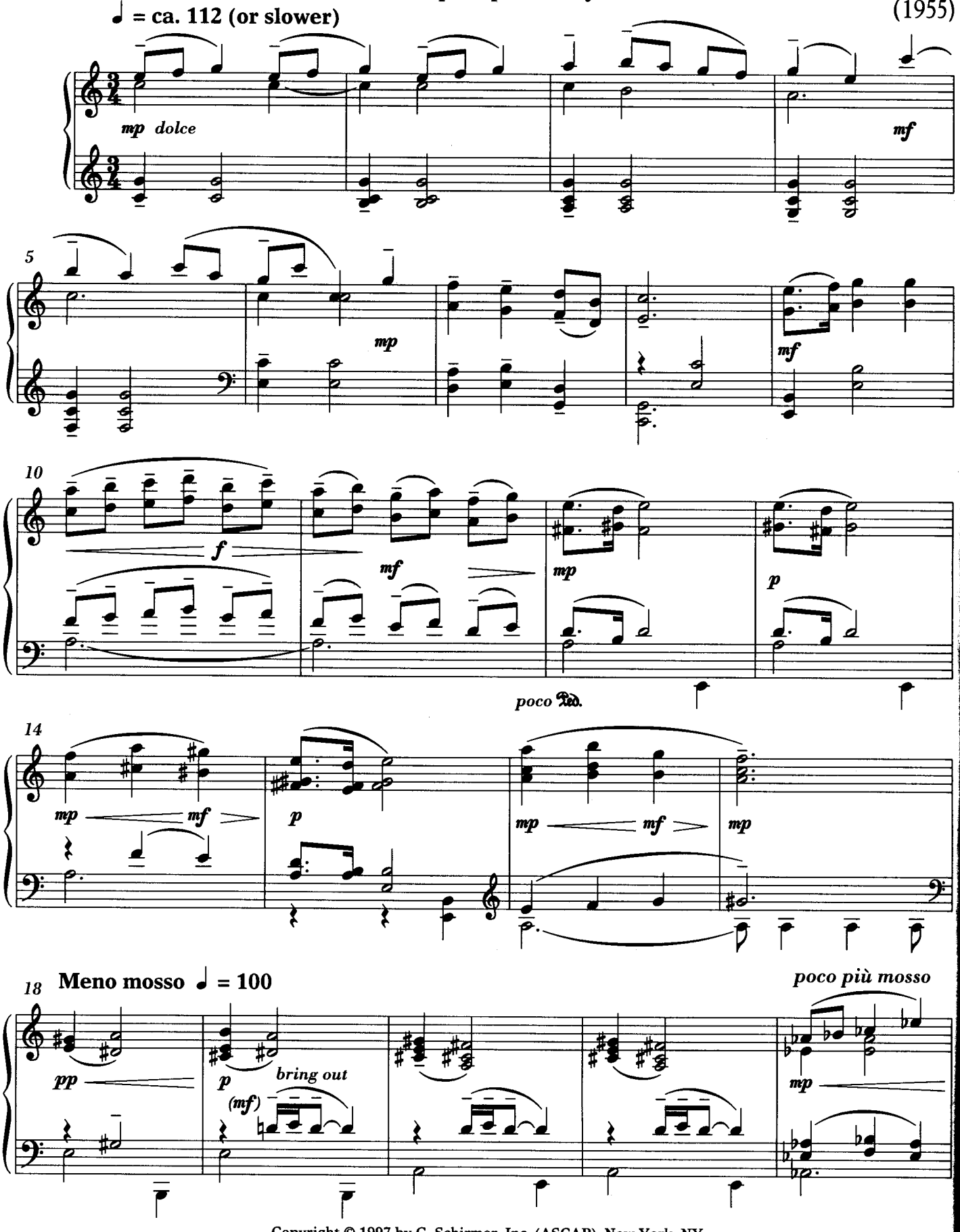
151
155
160
165


170
175
179
185
190

BERCEUSE FOR THOMAS MONTGOMERY NEWMAN

(in antique Spanish style)

(1955)



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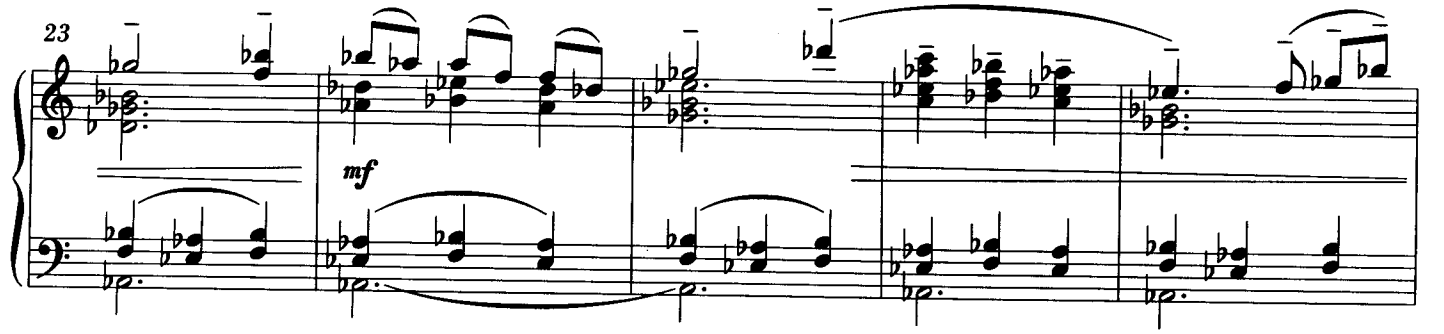
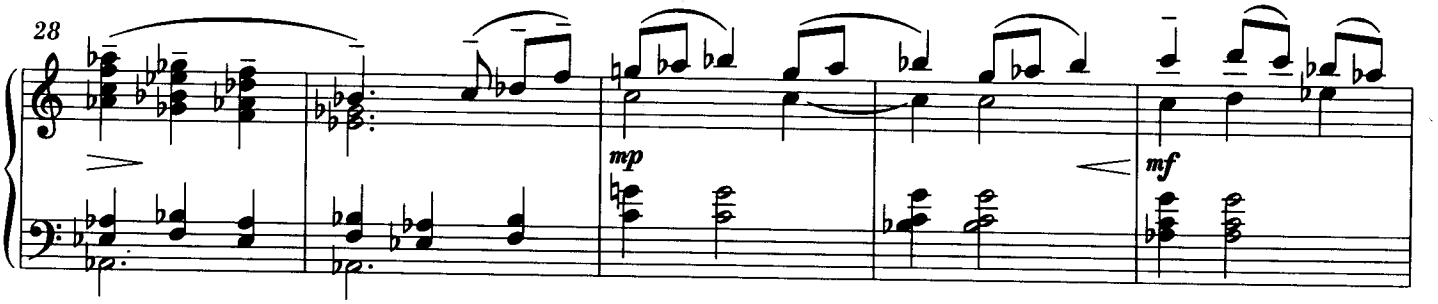
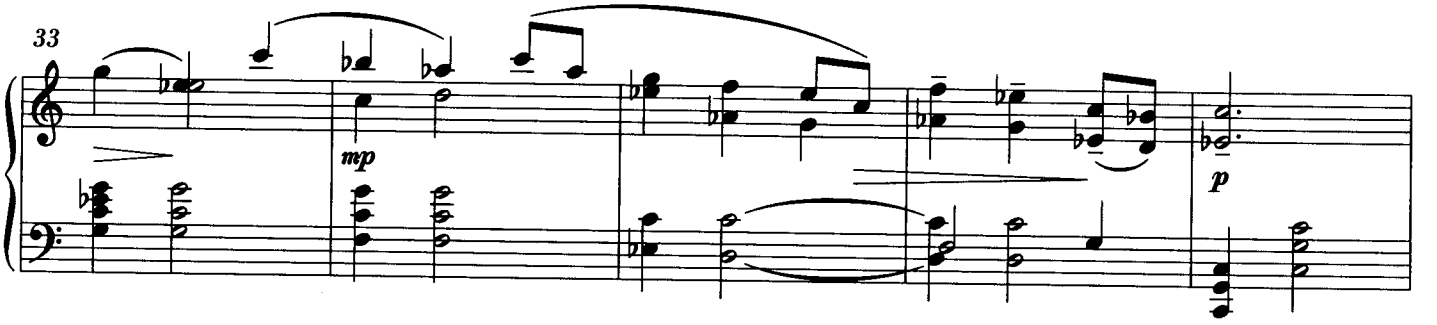
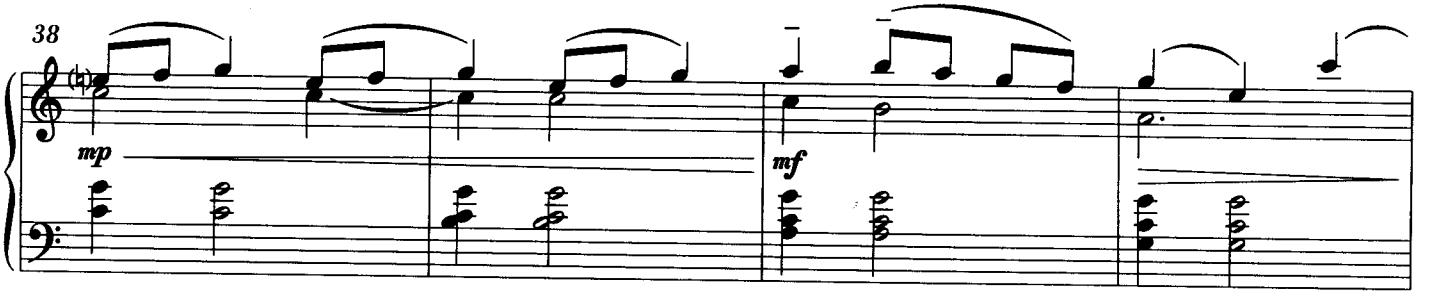
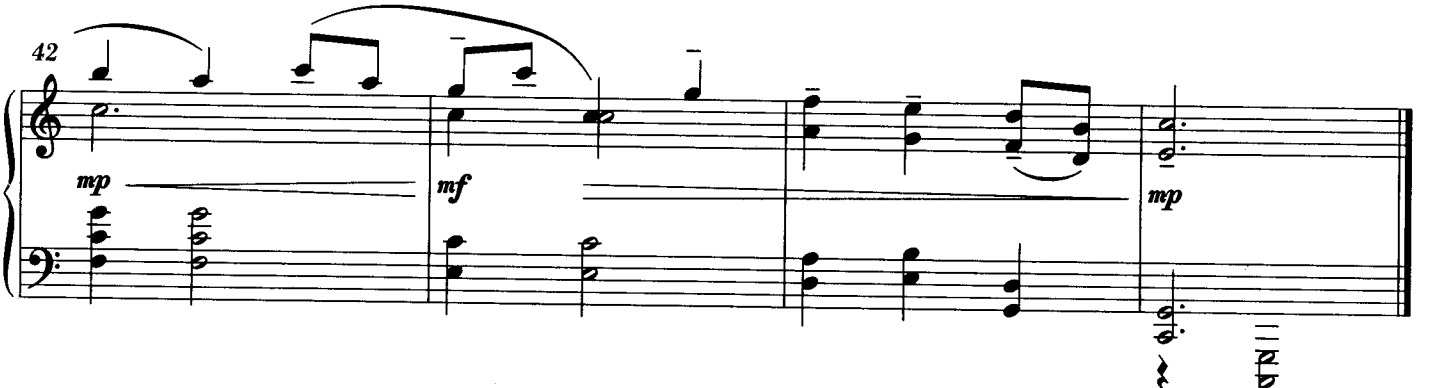


A tempo I



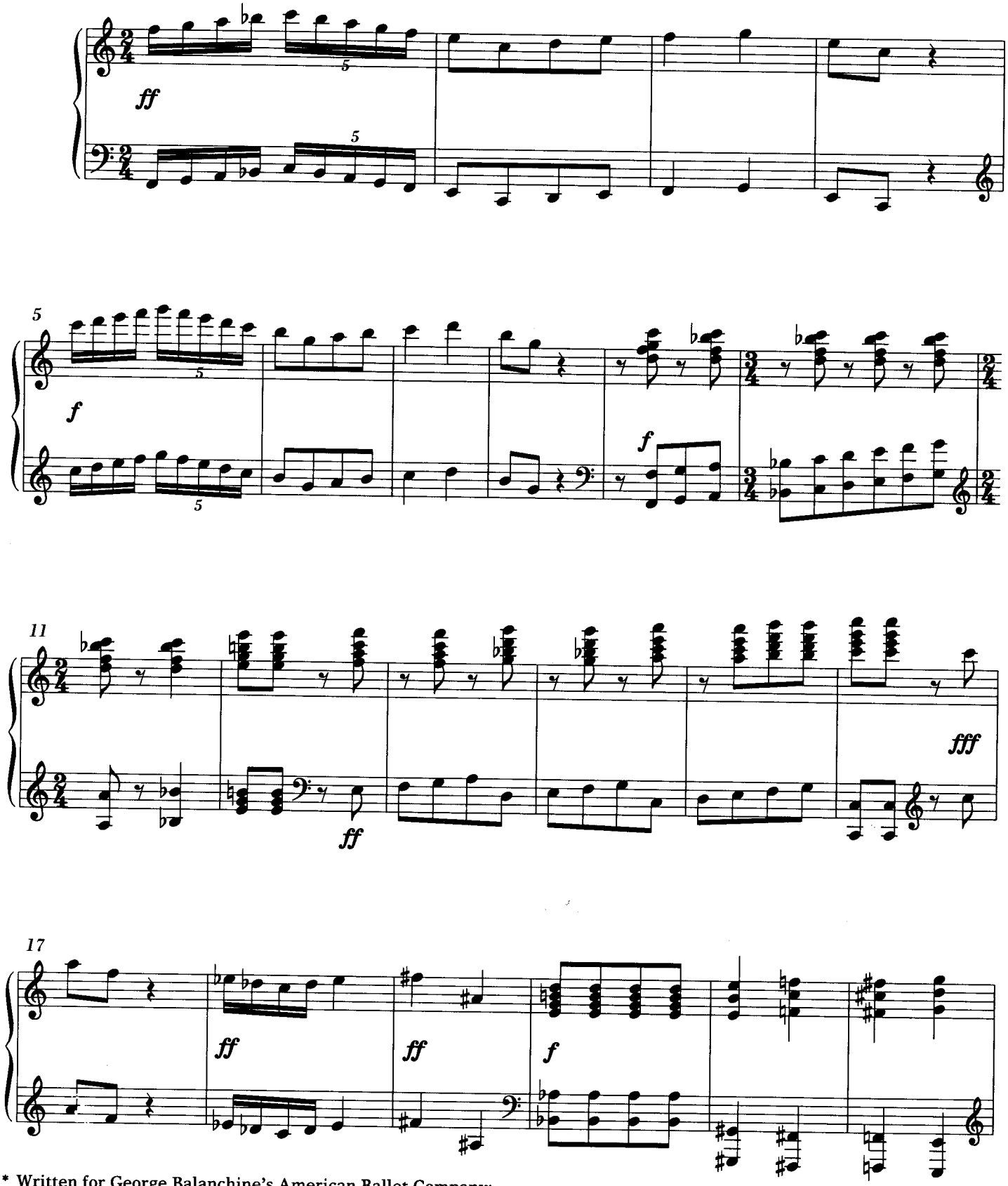






CAN-CAN
from *Dreams**

Vivace molto (1934–35)



* Written for George Balanchine's American Ballet Company; first performed March 5, 1935 in New York.

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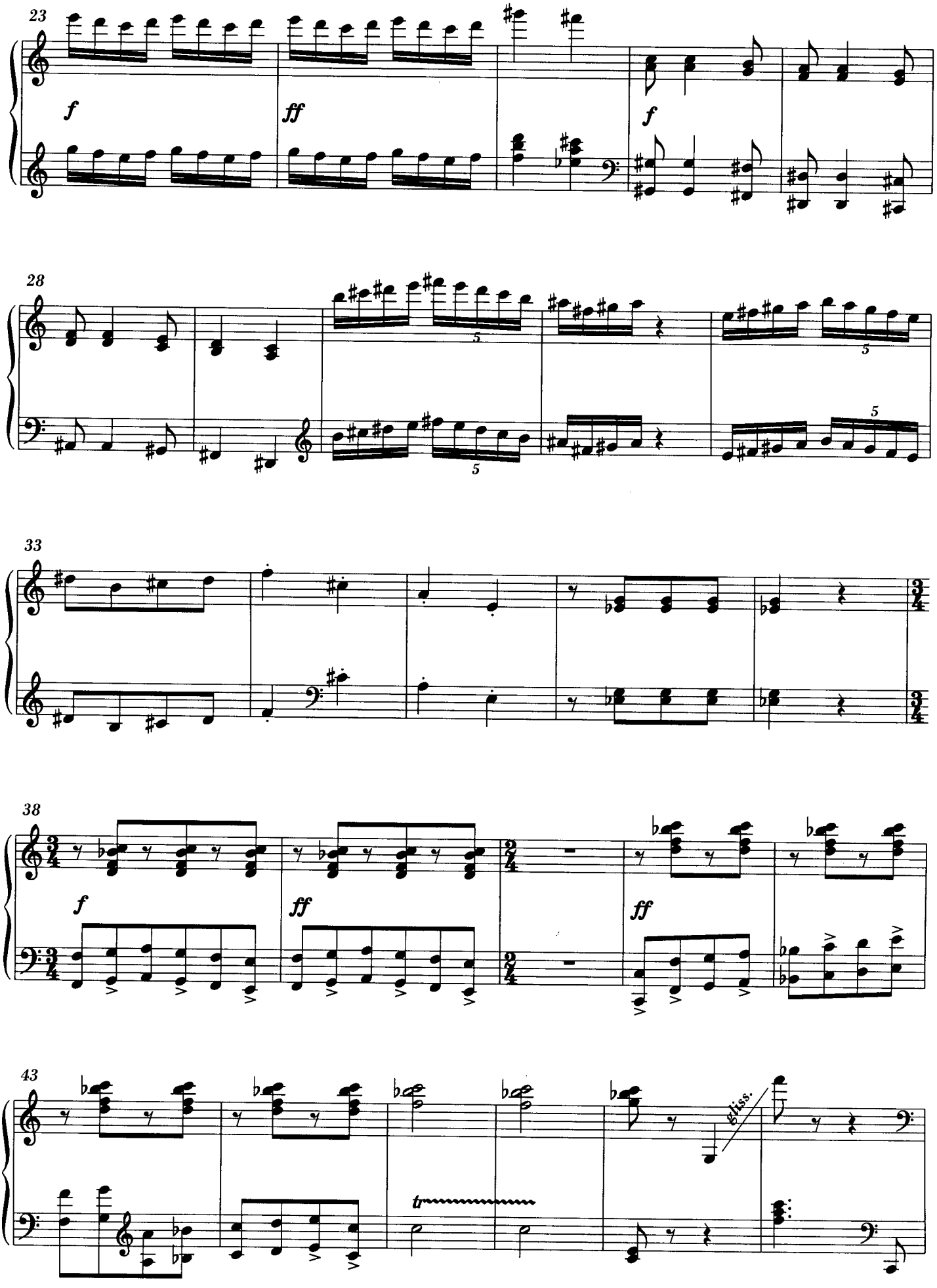
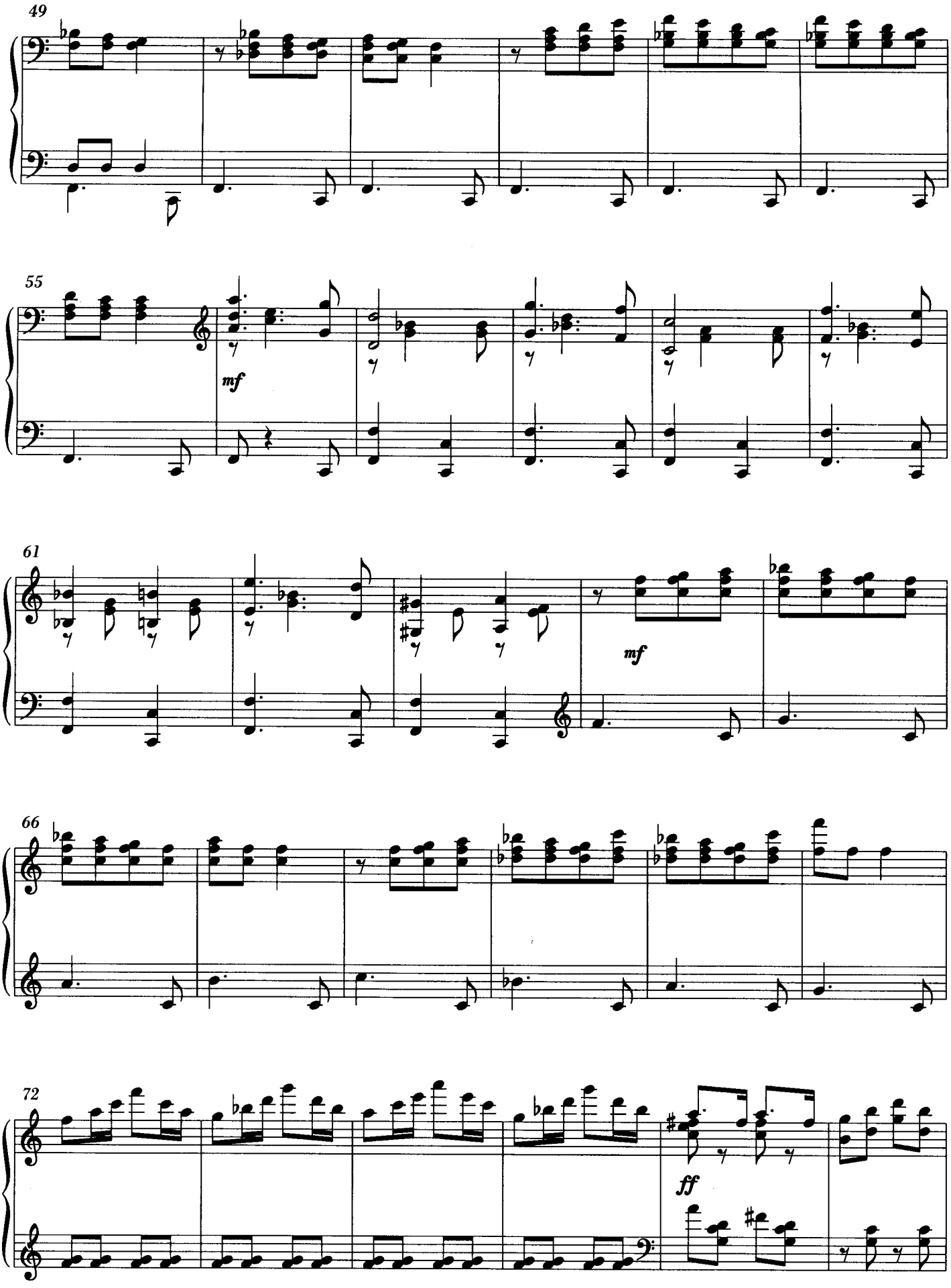
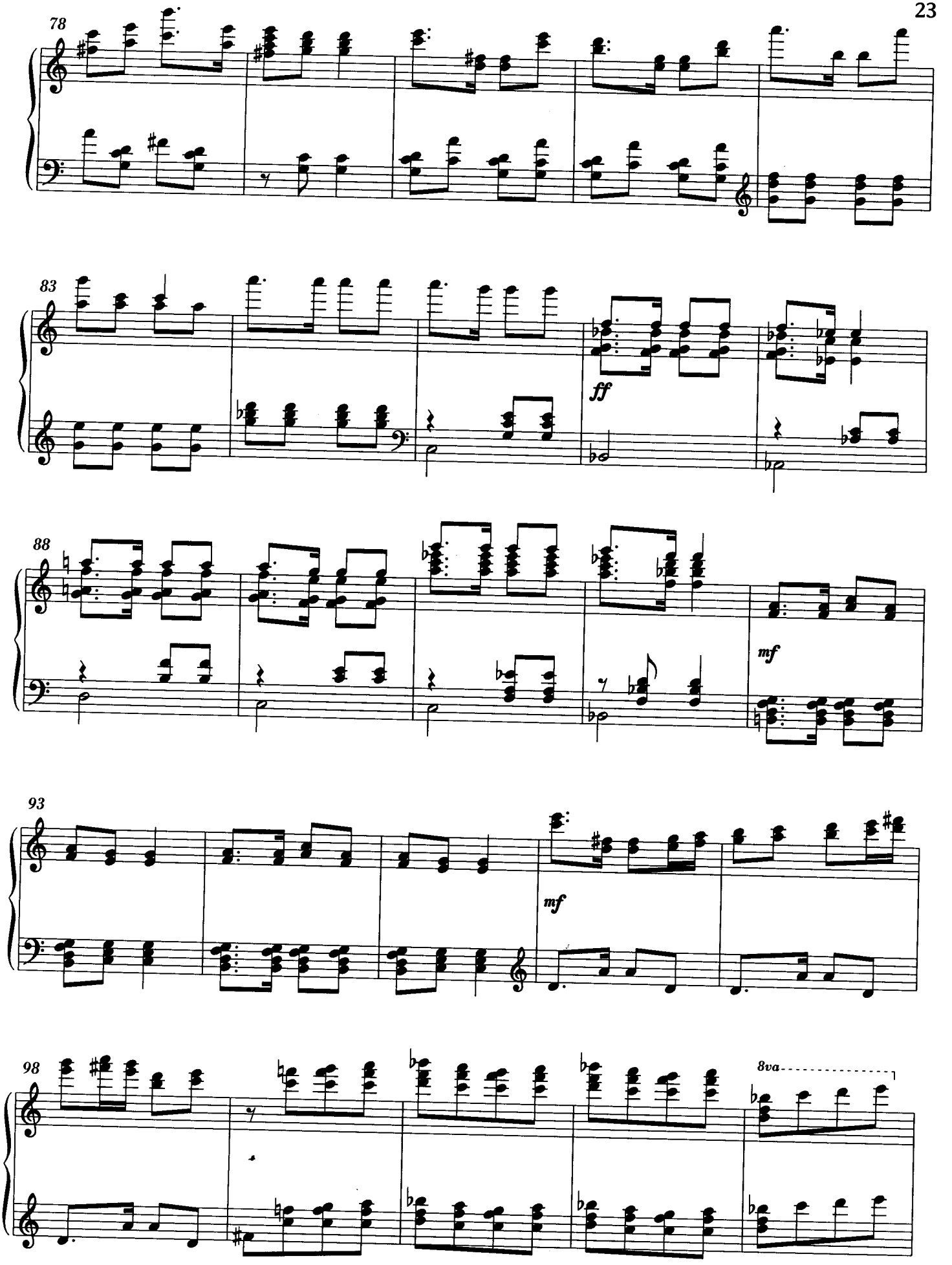
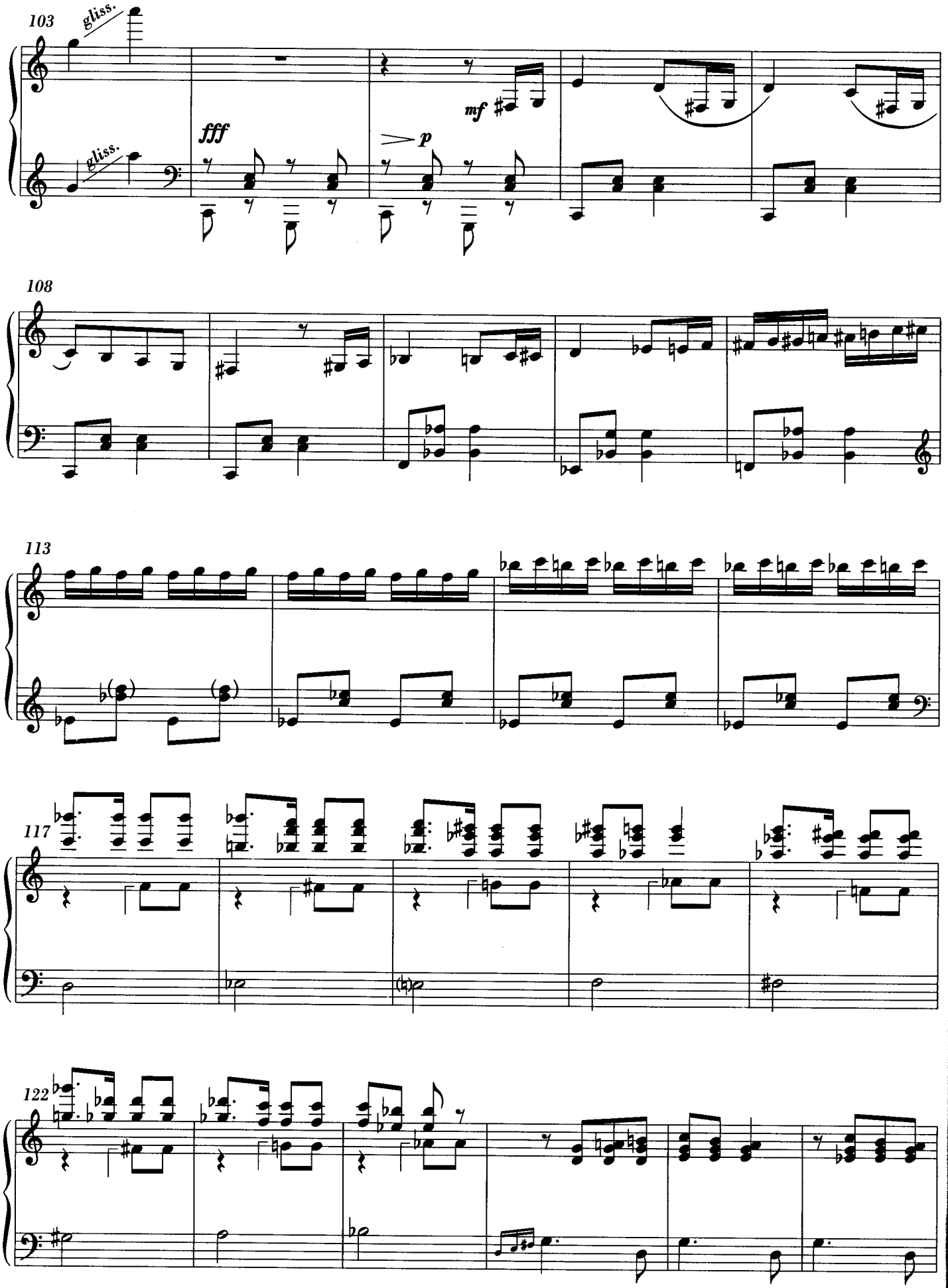
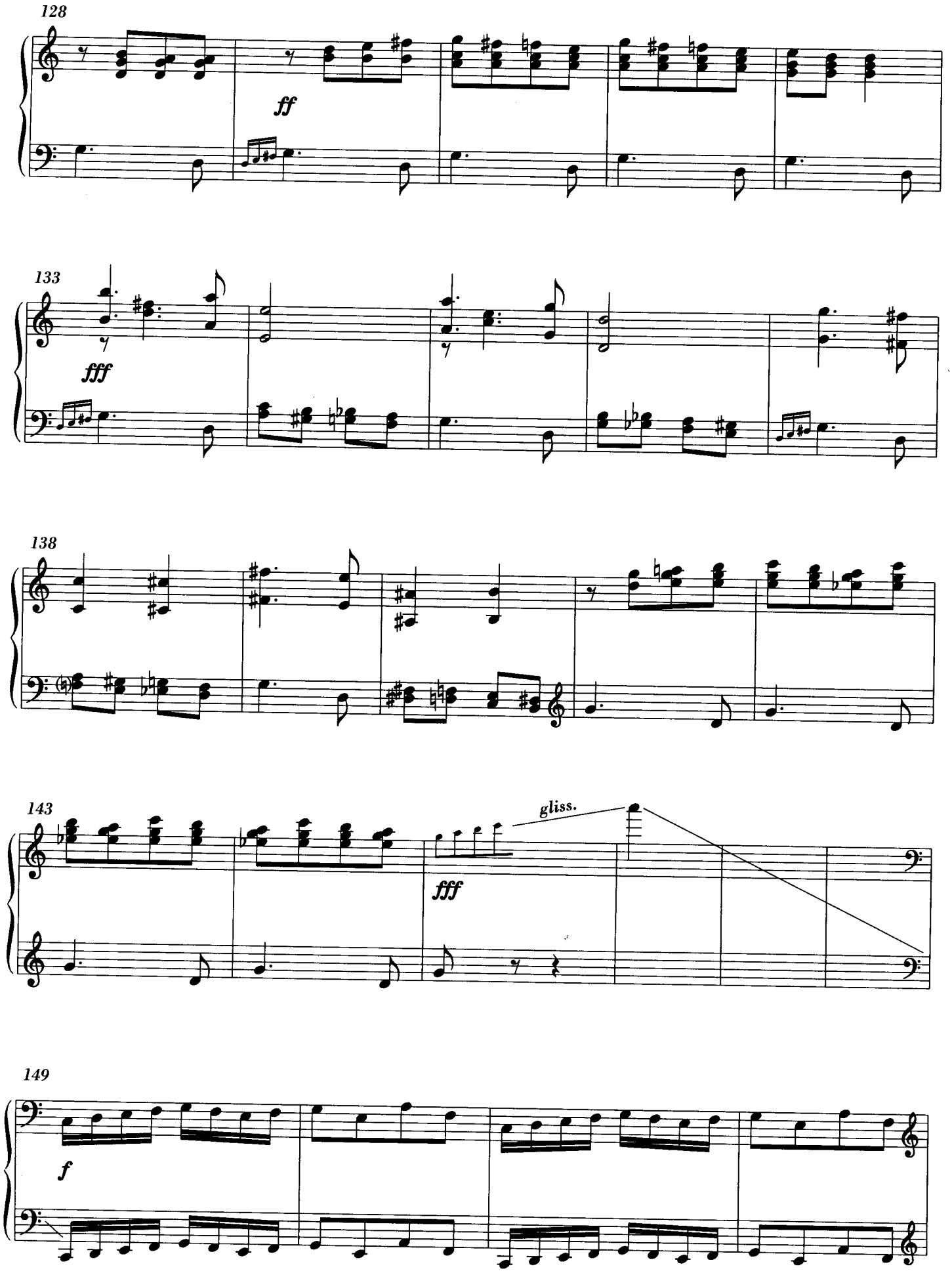
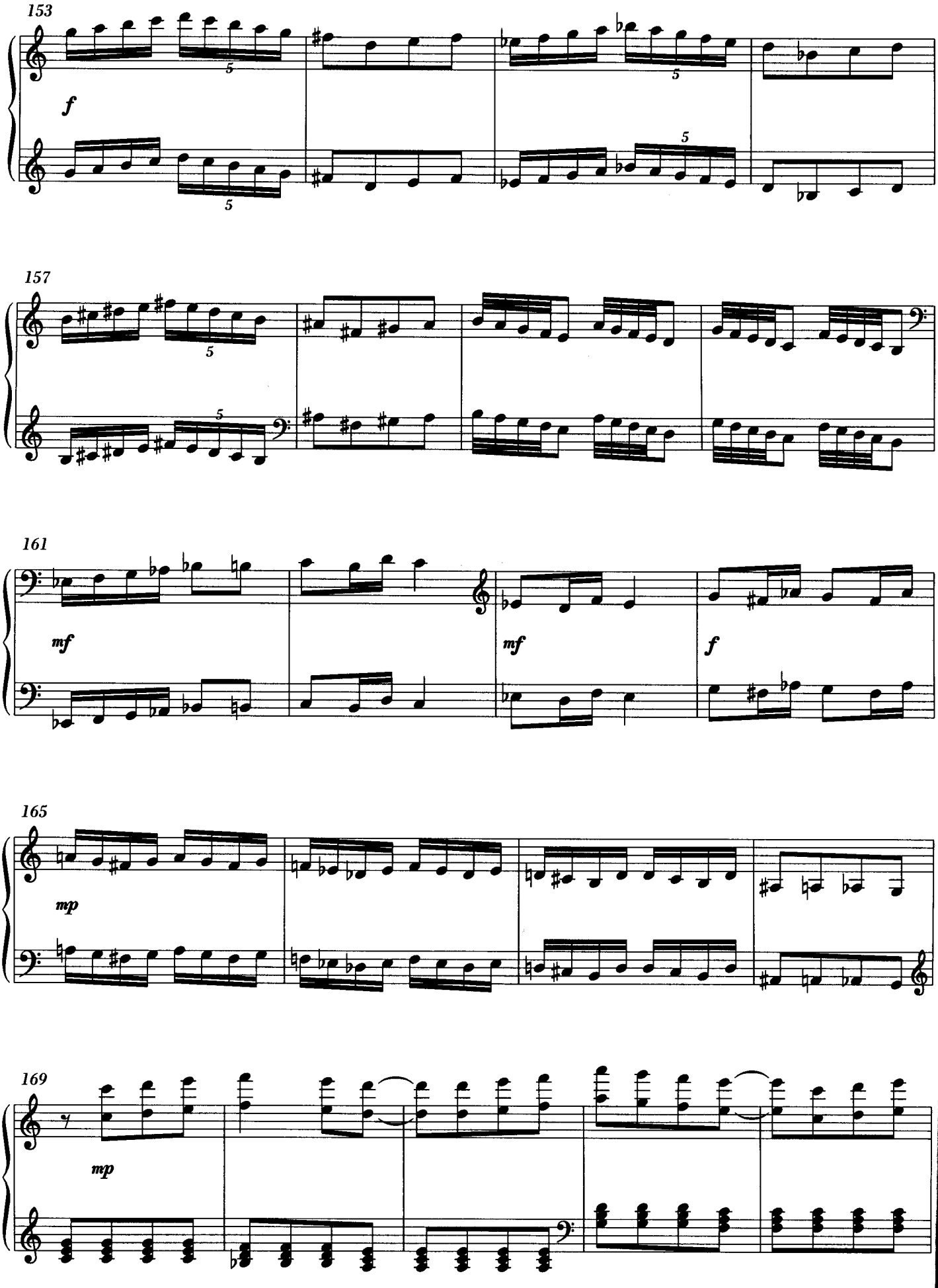

23
f
ff
f
28
5
5
5
33
38
f
ff
ff
43
tr
8va

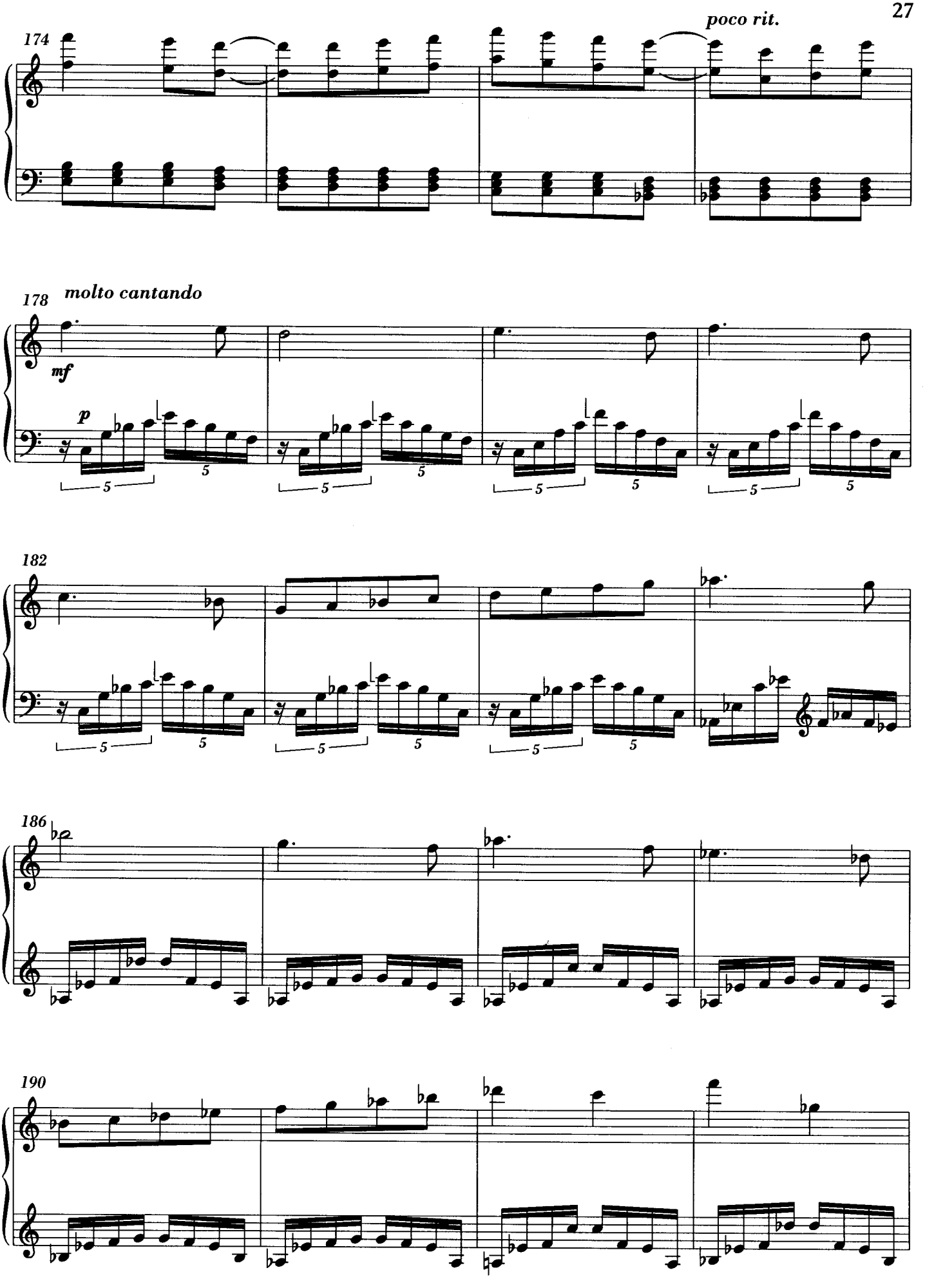

49
55
mf
61
mf
66
72
ff

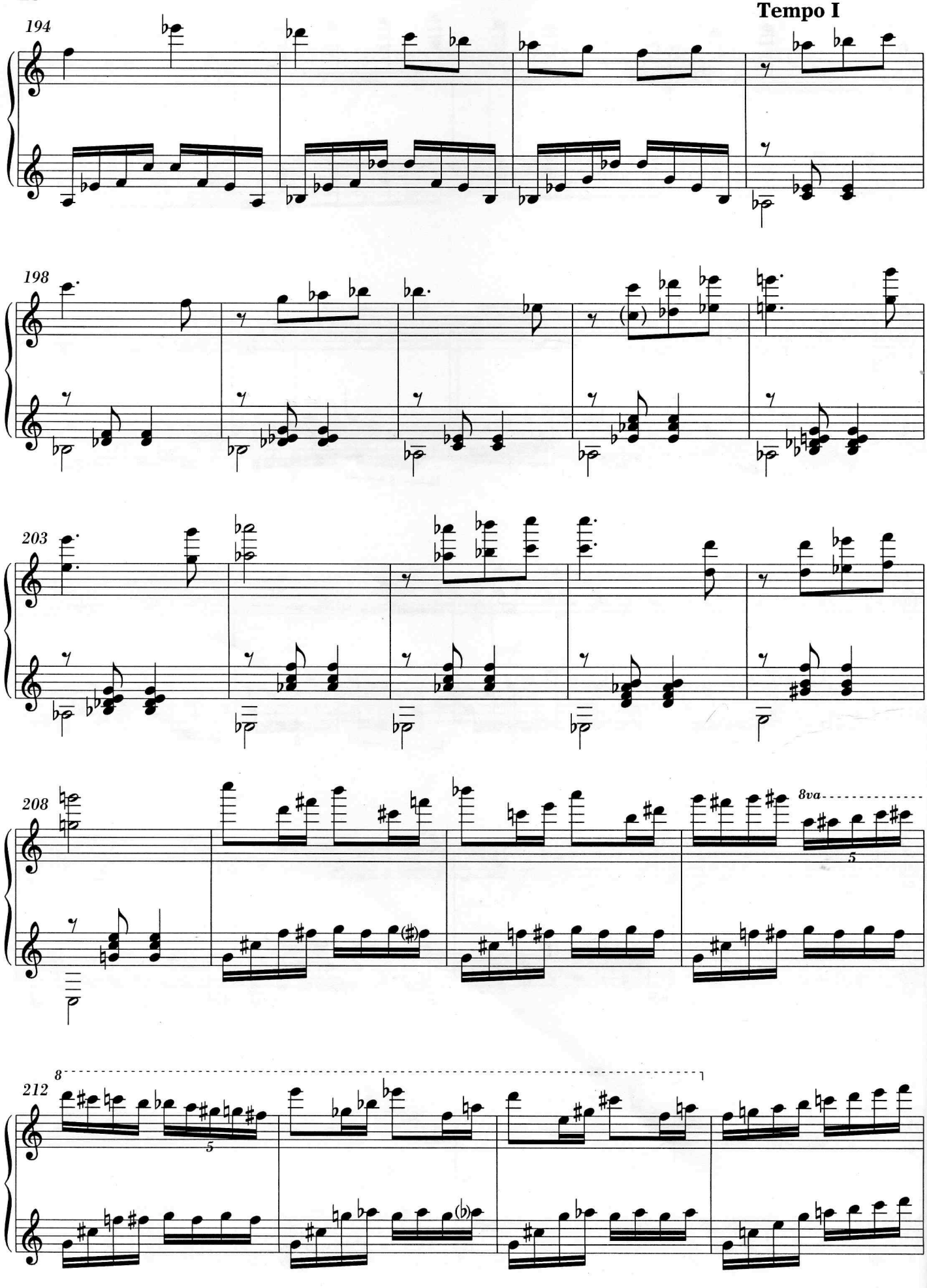

78
83
ff
88
mf
93
mf
98
8va

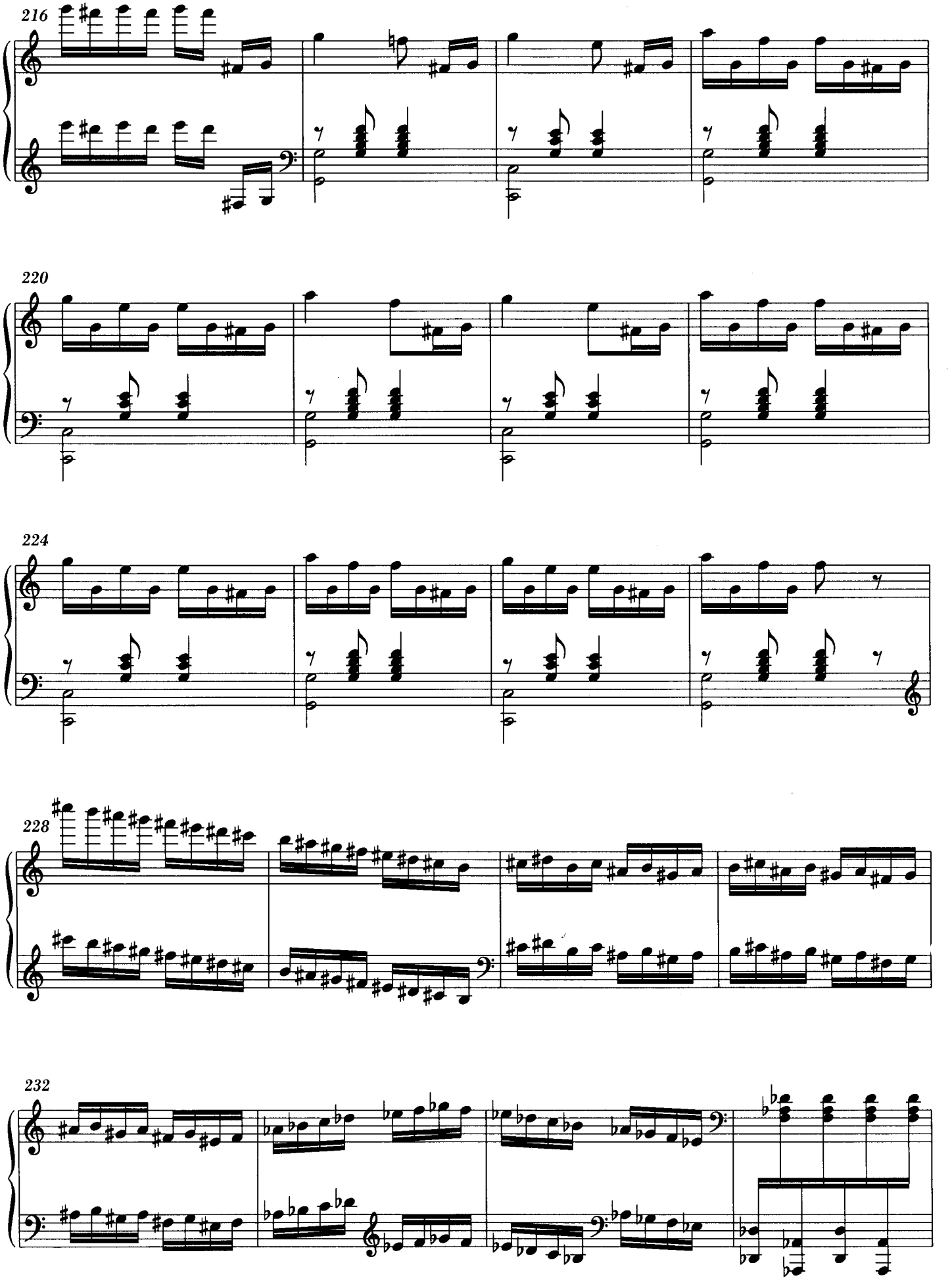

103
gliss.
gliss.
fff
mf
p
108
113
117
122


128
ff
133
fff
138
143
gliss.
fff
149
f


153
f
157
161
mf
mf
f
165
mp
169
mp


poco rit.
174
178
molto cantando
mf
p
182
186
190


Tempo I
194
198
203
208
8va
212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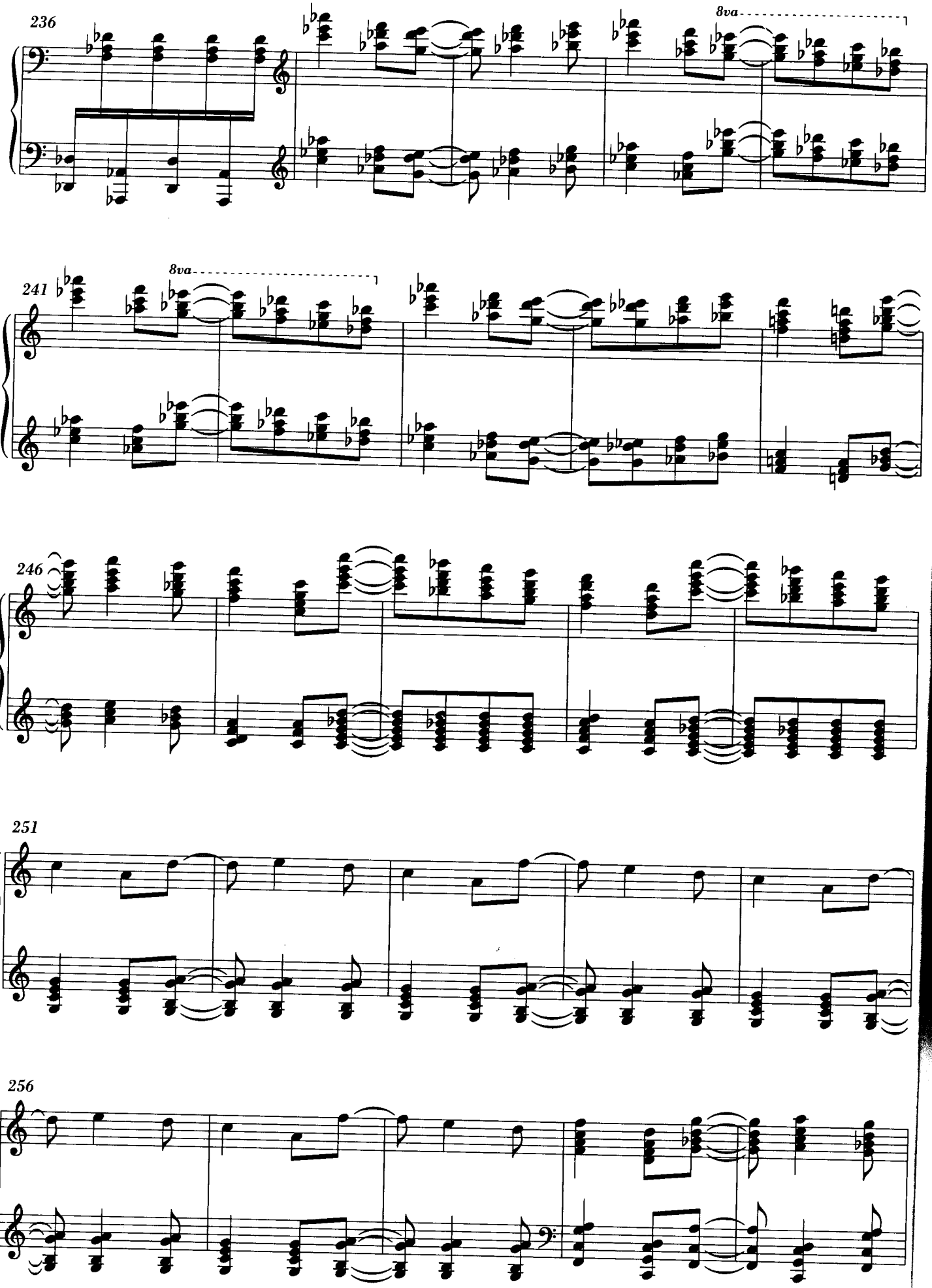
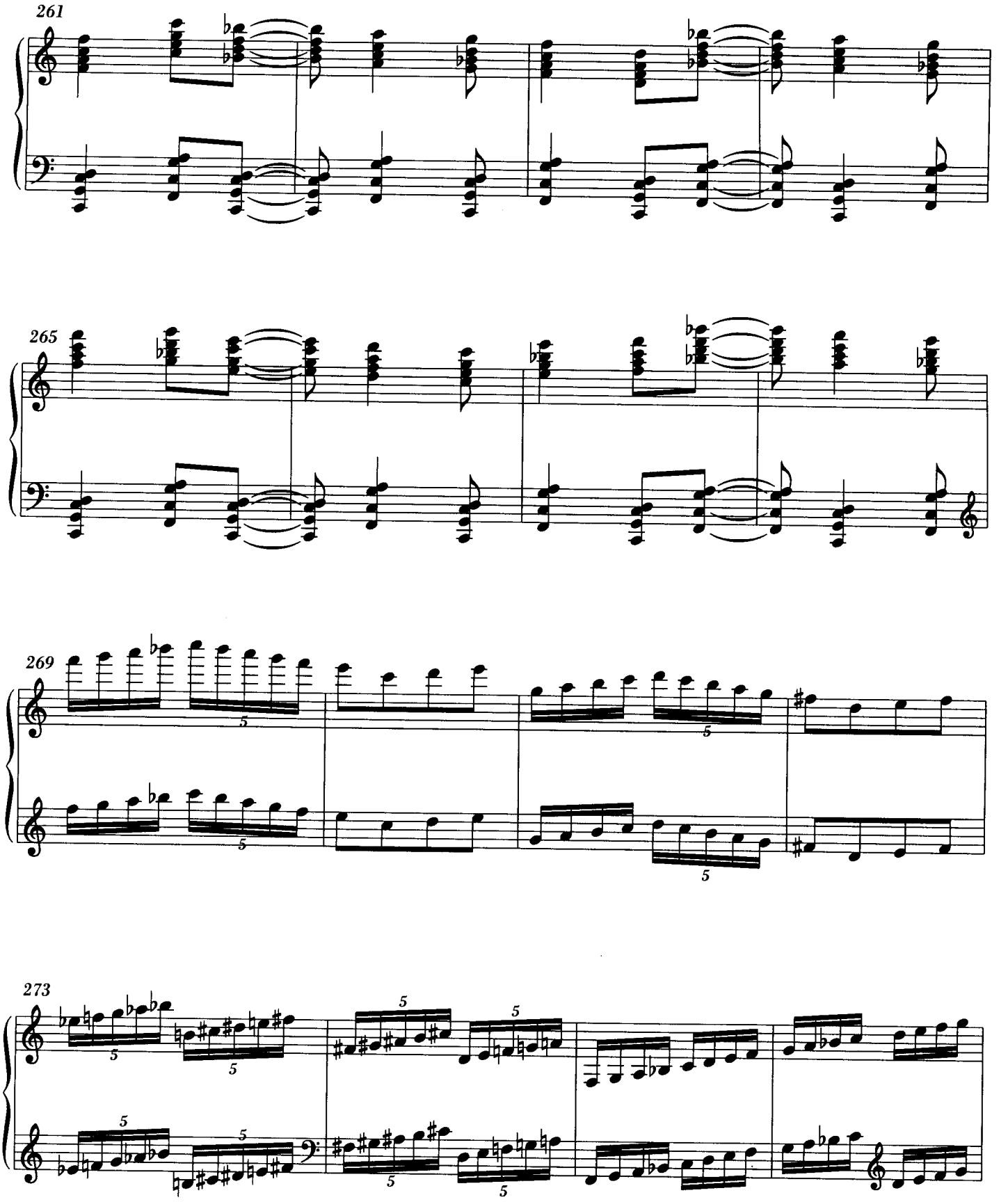
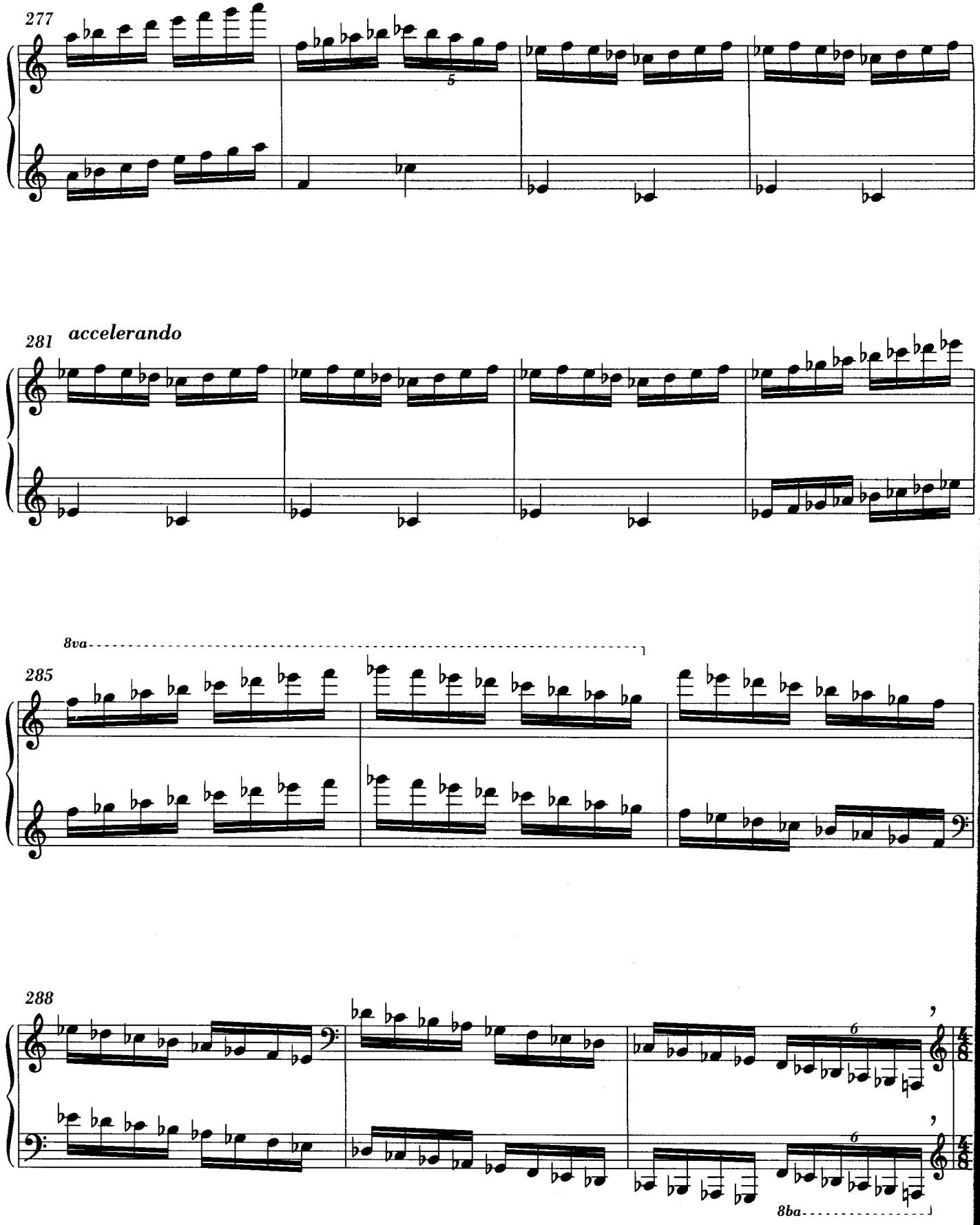
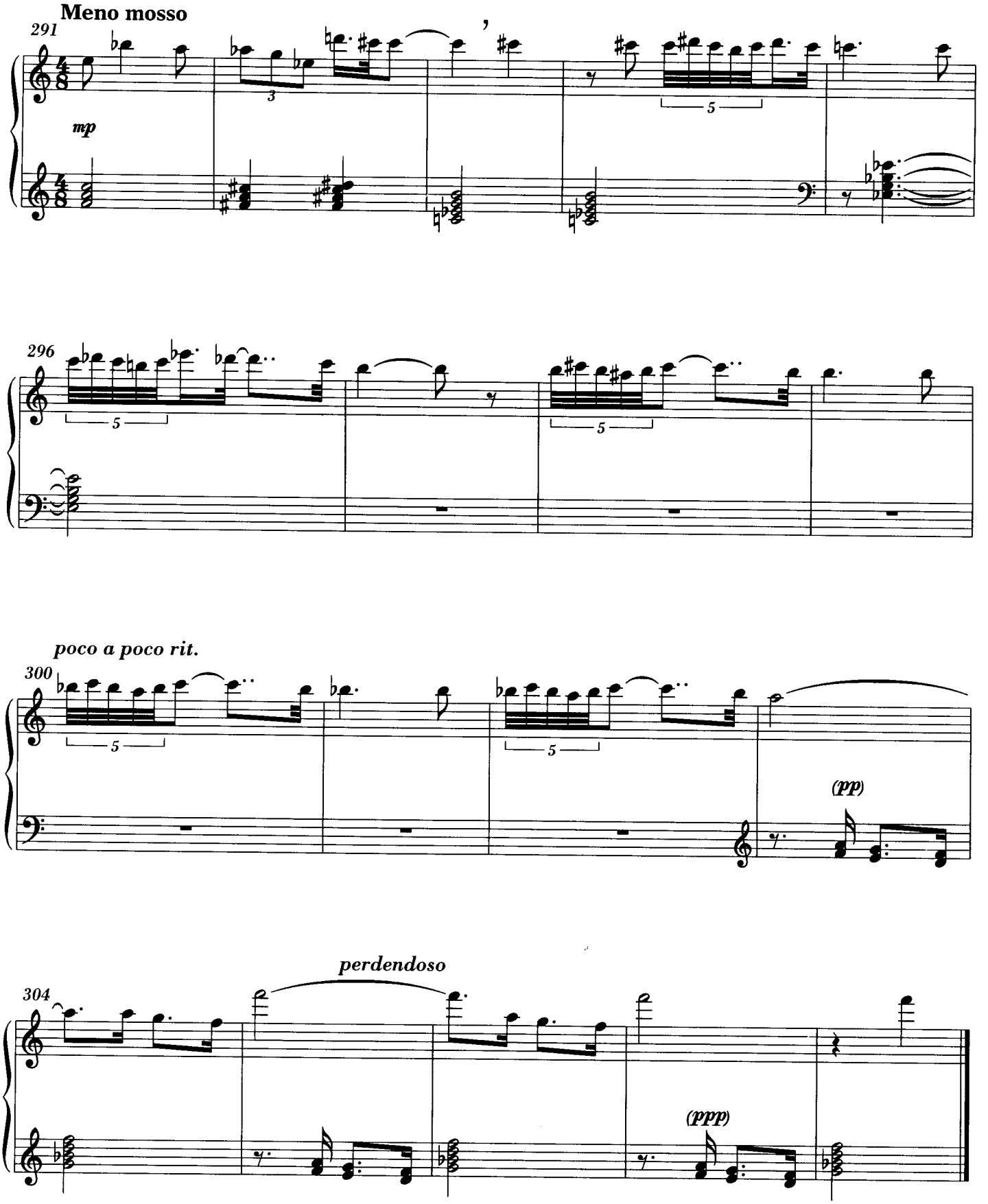

236
8va
241
8va
246
251
256


261
265
269
273


277
5
281
accelerando
8va
285
288
6
6
8ba

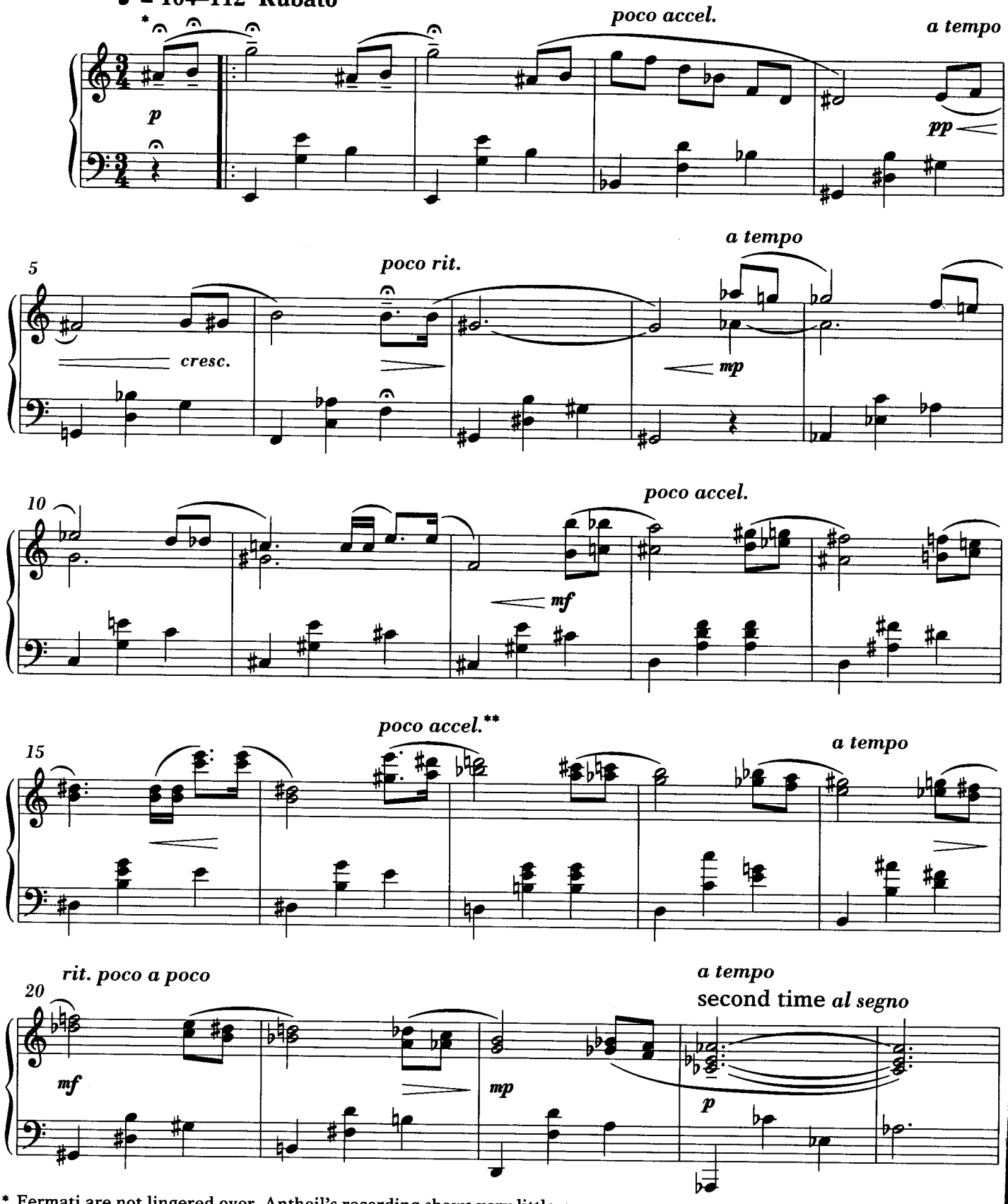

Meno mosso
291
mp
3
5
296
5
5
poco a poco rit.
300
5
5
(pp)
perdendoso
304
(ppp)

VALENTINE WALTZES

I

(1949)

♩ = 104–112 **Rubato**



* Fermati are not lingered over. Antheil's recording shows very little pause.

** Antheil's indications in mm. 16–23 (*poco accel.*, *rit.*, *a tempo*) are meant to suggest *rubato*. His own recorded performance is very free.

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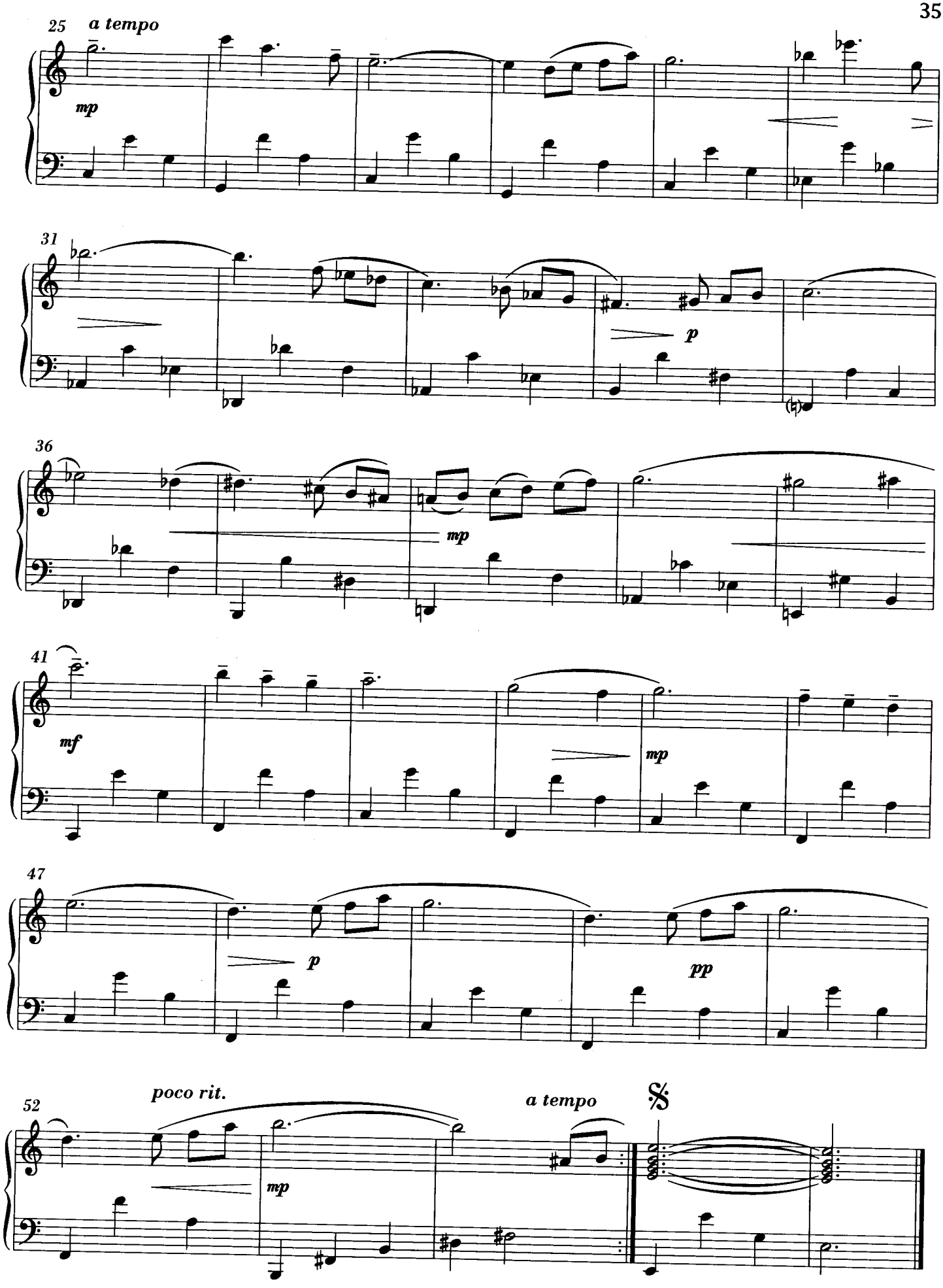
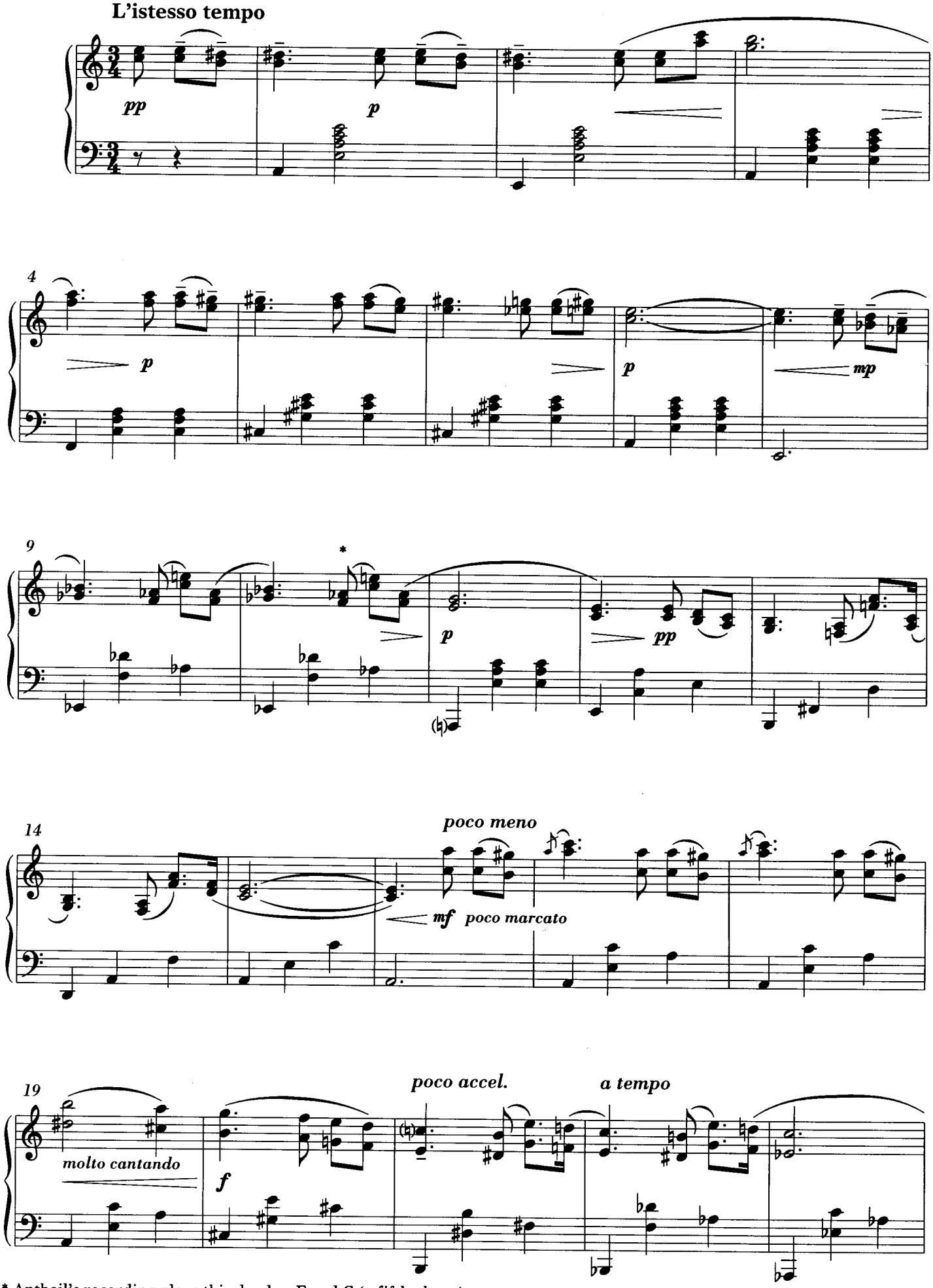
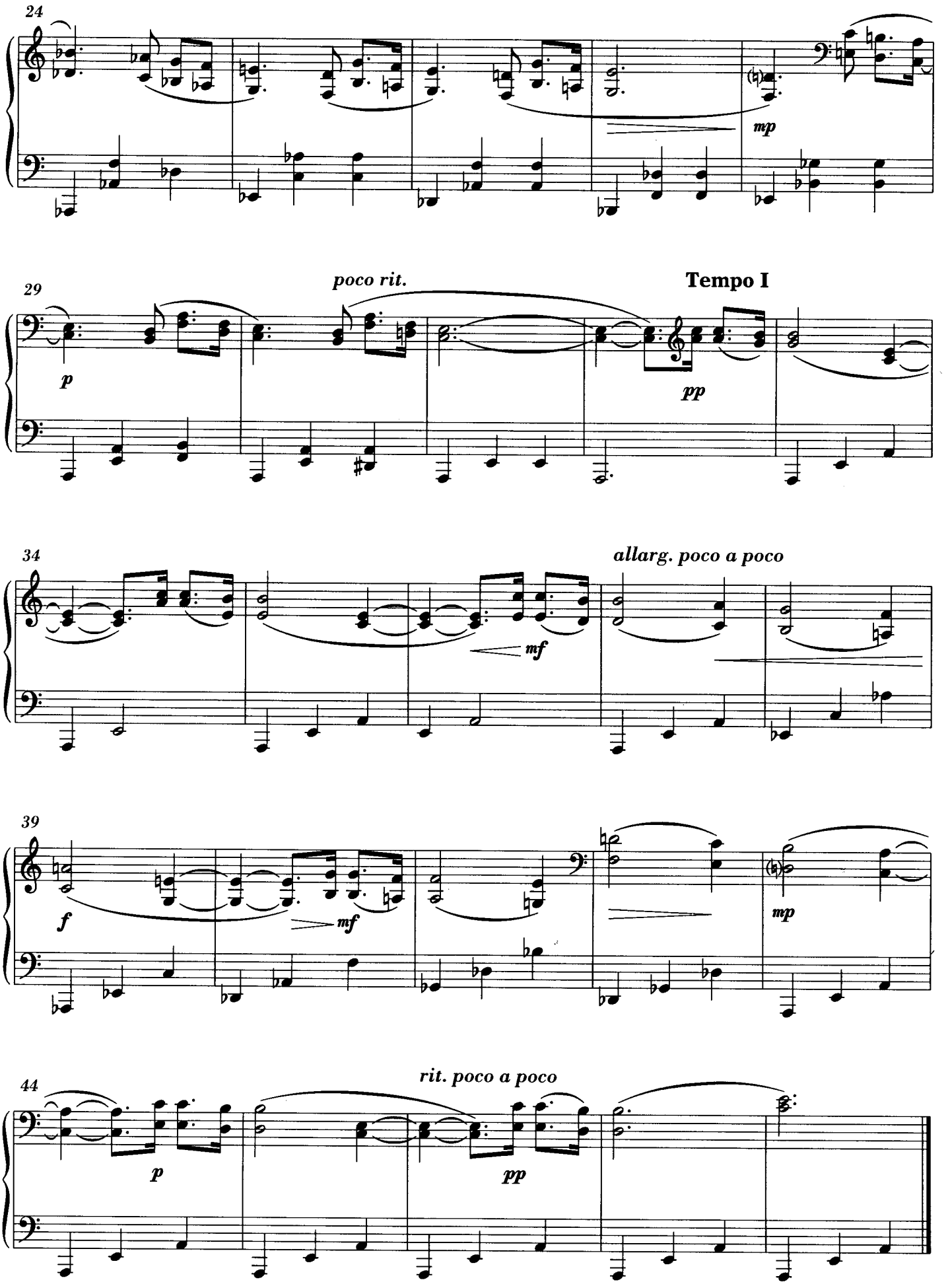

25
a tempo
mp
31
p
36
mp
41
mf
mp
47
p
pp
52
poco rit.
mp
a tempo

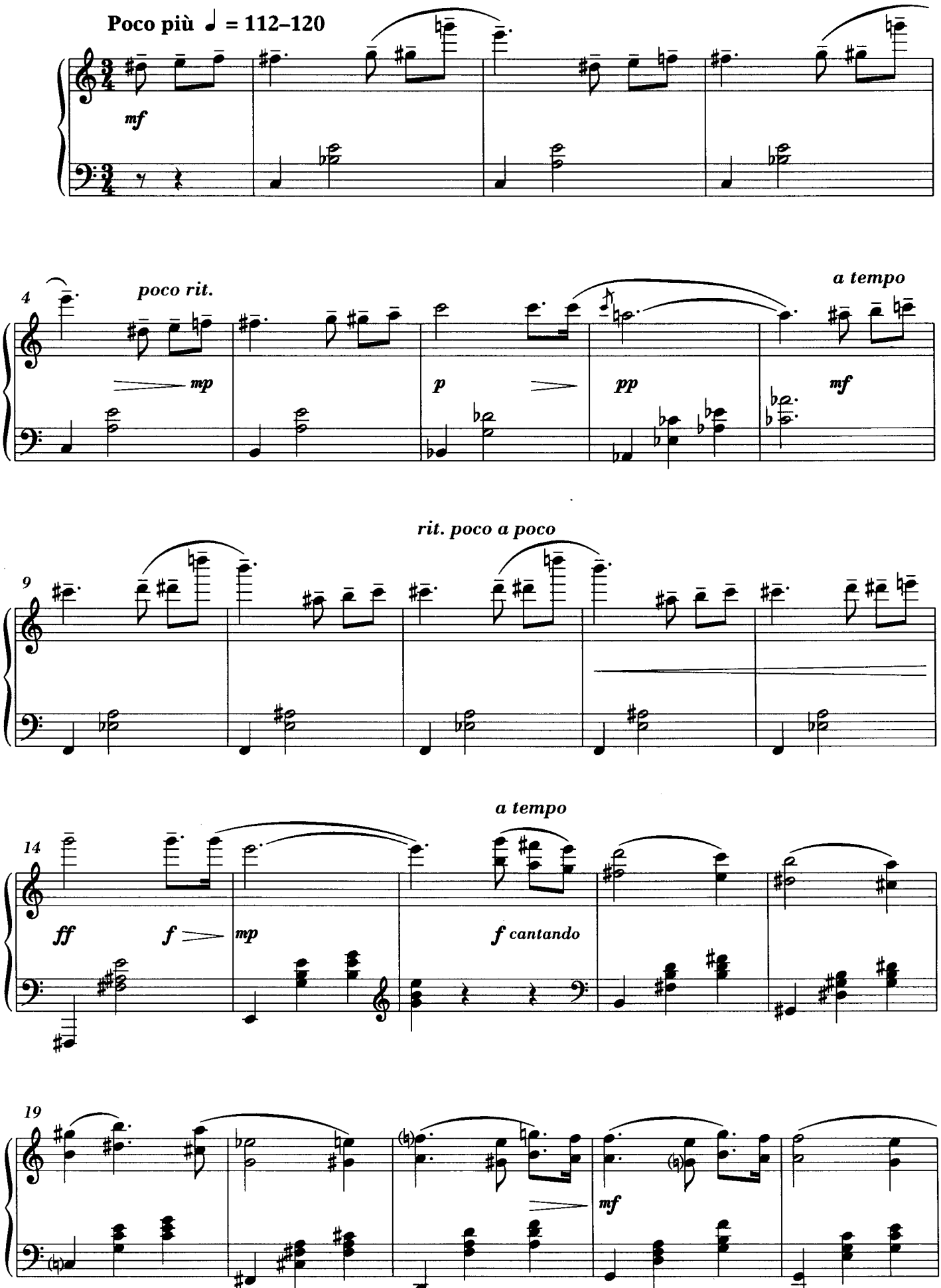
II

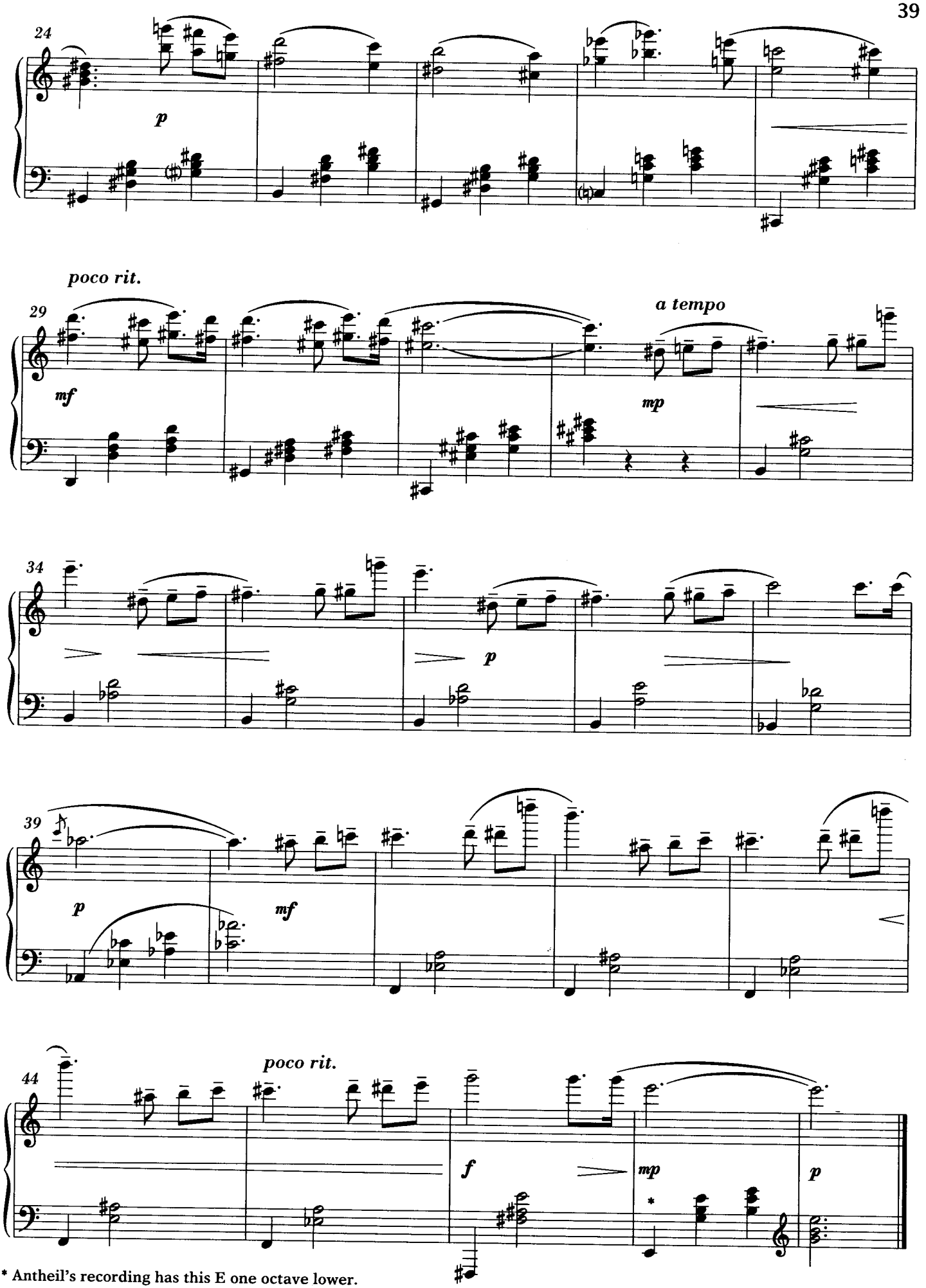


* Antheil's recording plays this dyad as E and C (a fifth above)


24
mp
29
poco rit.
Tempo I
p
pp
34
allarg. poco a poco
mf
39
f
mf
mp
44
rit. poco a poco
p
pp

III

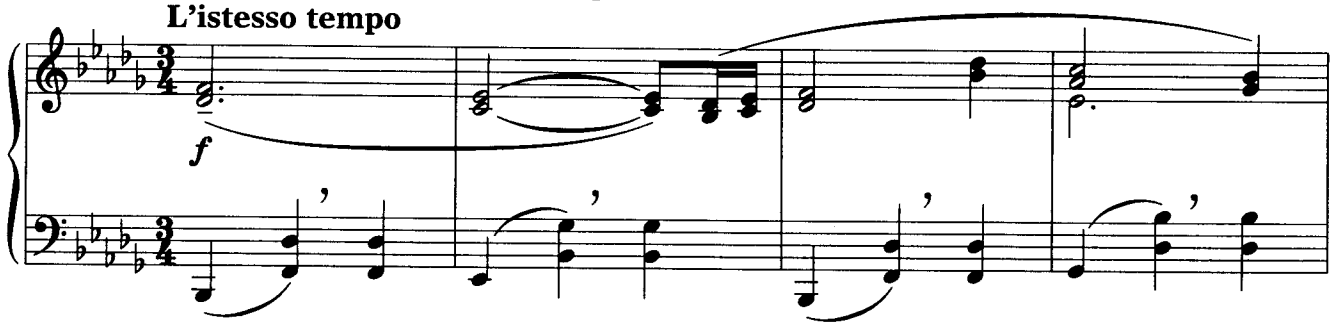

Poco più ♩ = 112–120
mf
4
poco rit.
mp
p
pp
a tempo
mf
9
rit. poco a poco
14
ff
f
mp
a tempo
f cantando
19
mf

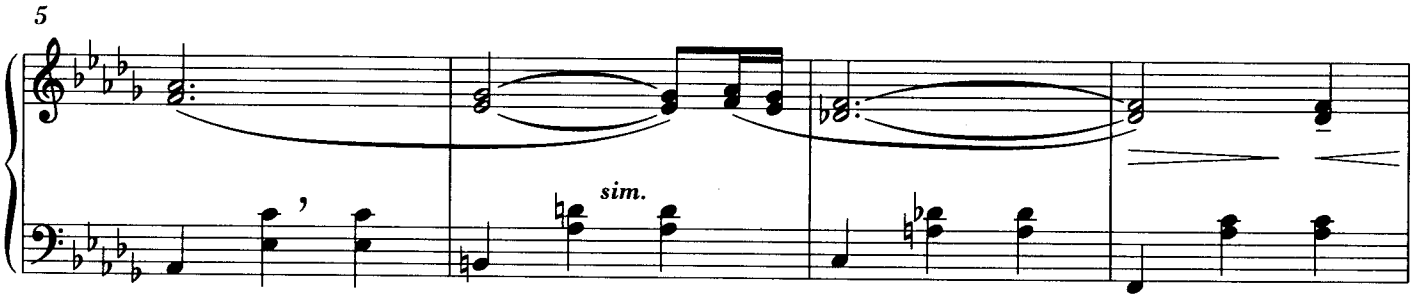


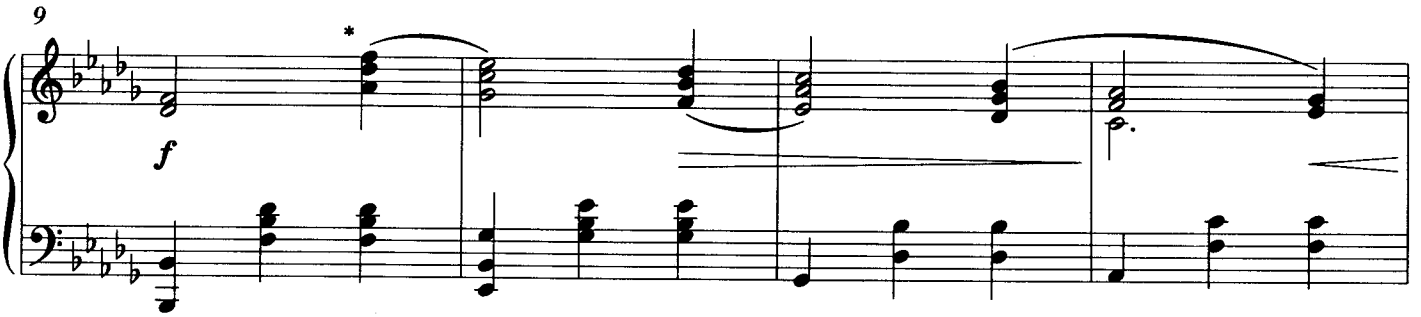
* Antheil's recording has this E one octave lower.

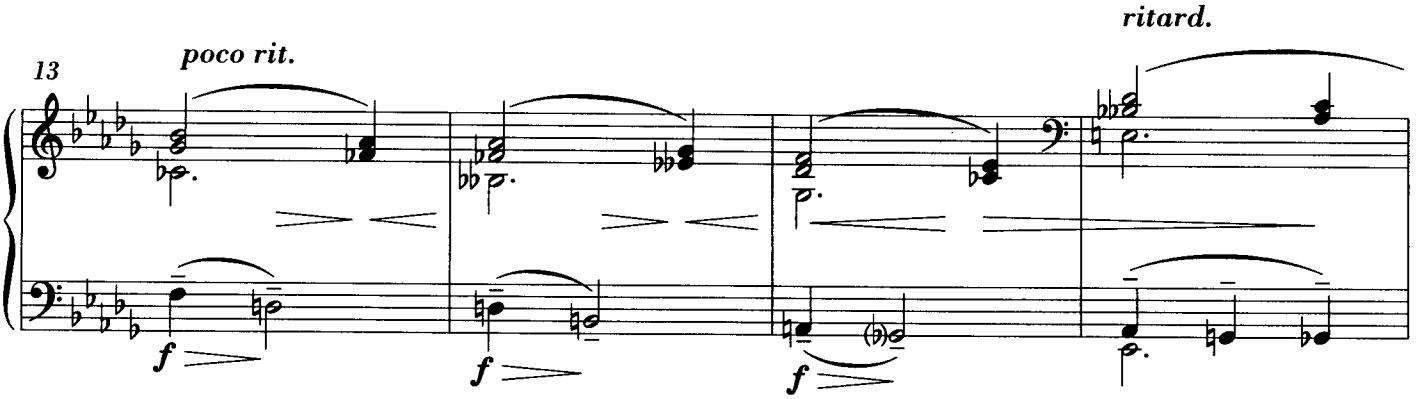
IV

Poco viennoise, mit Schwung
L'istesso tempo

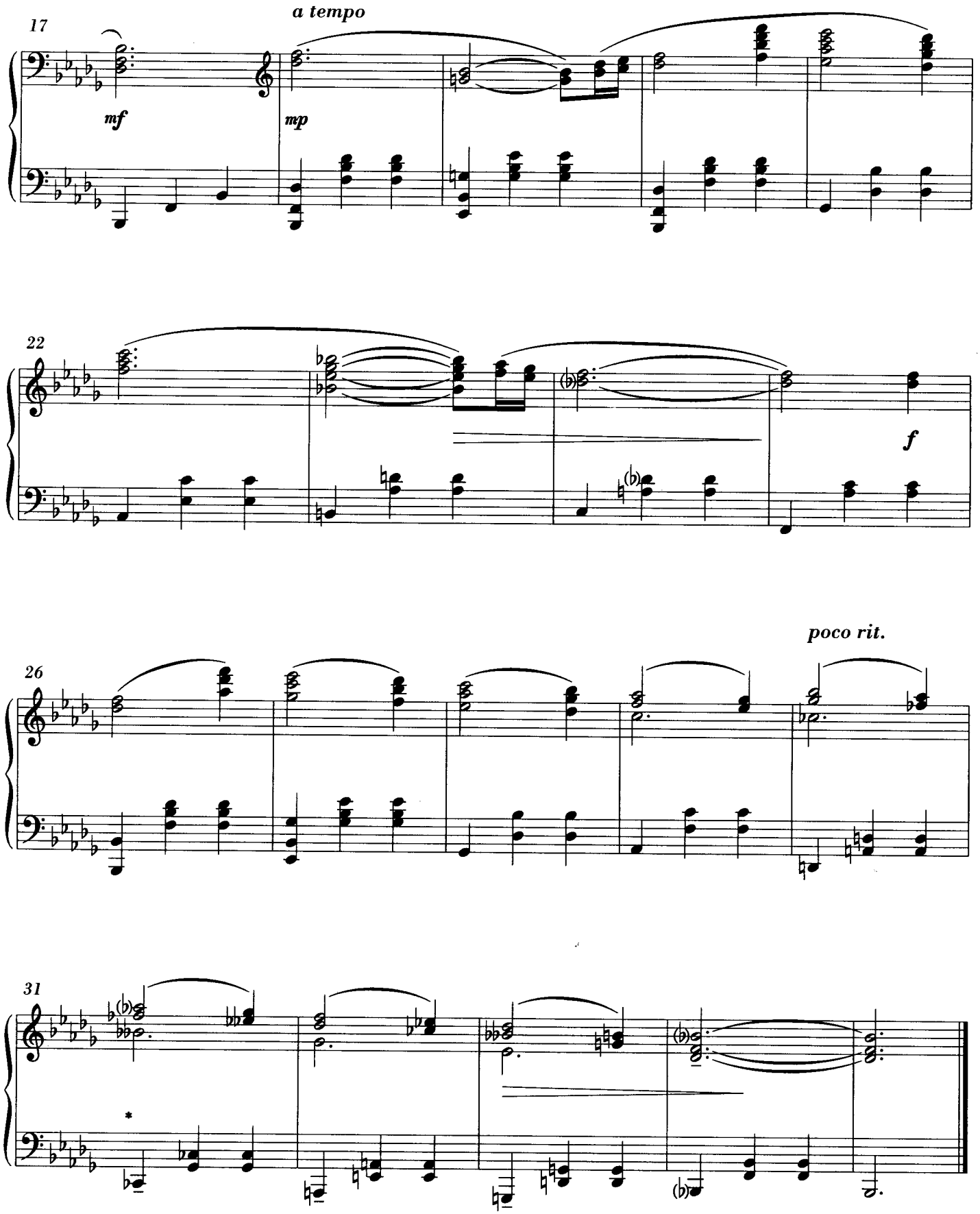






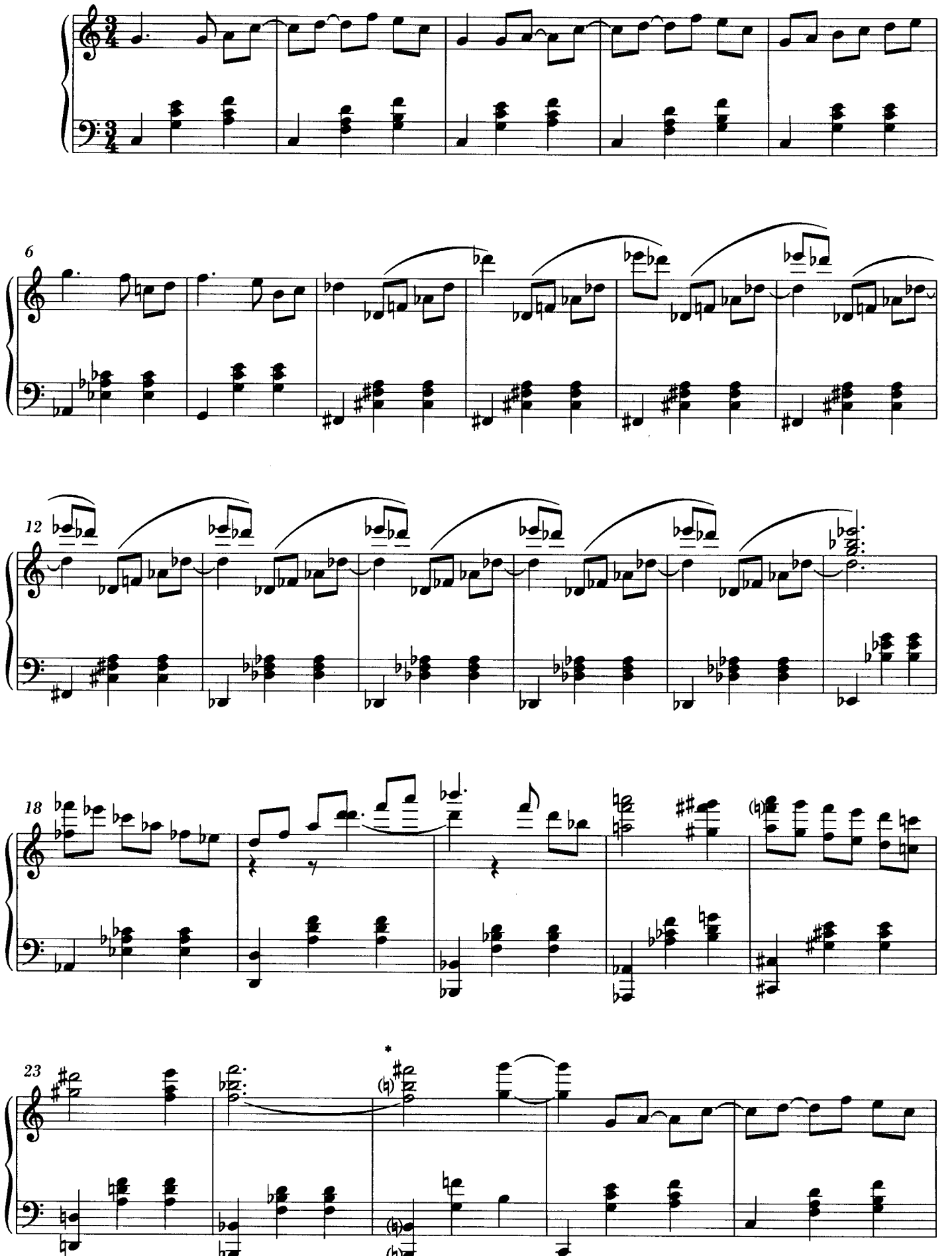


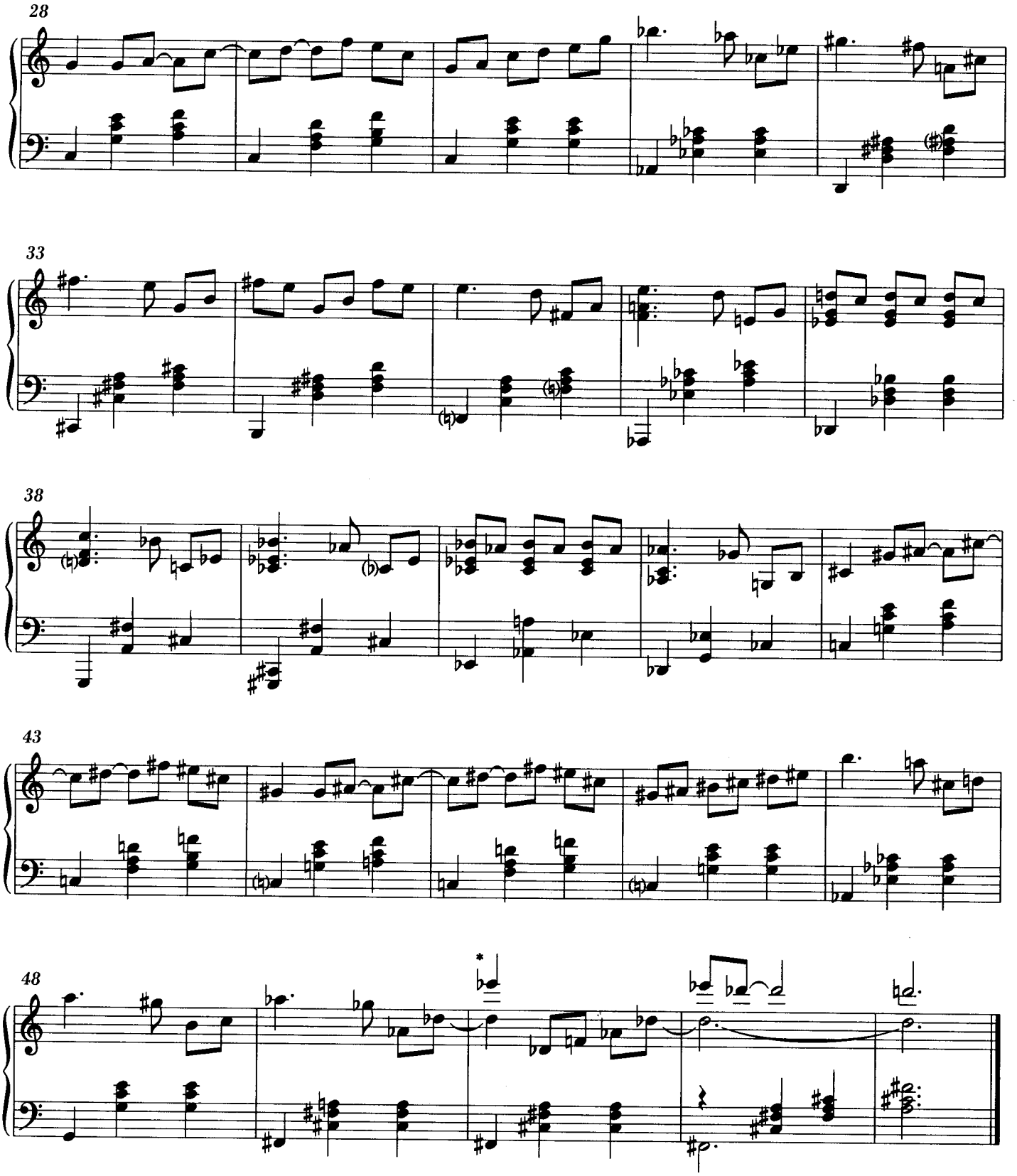
* Antheil's recording rolls this chord.



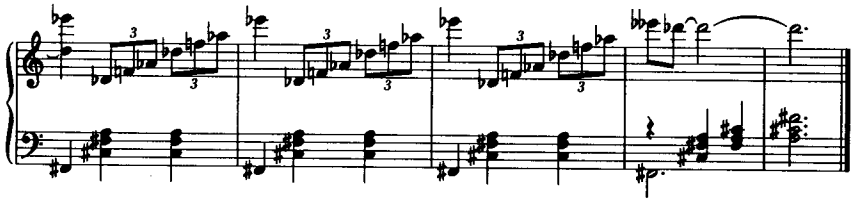
* Antheil's recording stresses this and the following *tenuto* marks.

V

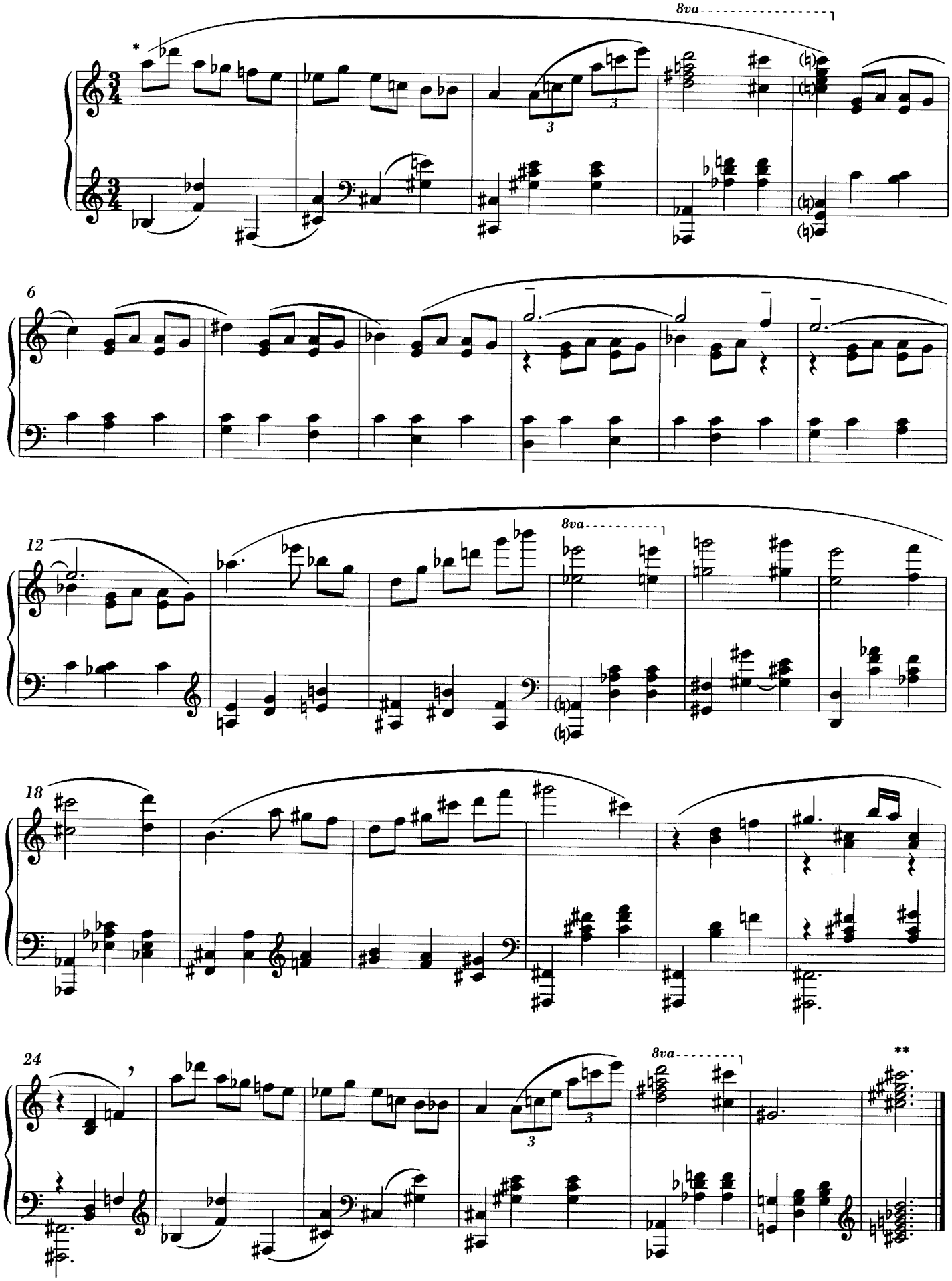




* This is the ending as it appears in Antheil's manuscript, as opposed to the following, which is the editor's transcription of Antheil's own recorded performance:

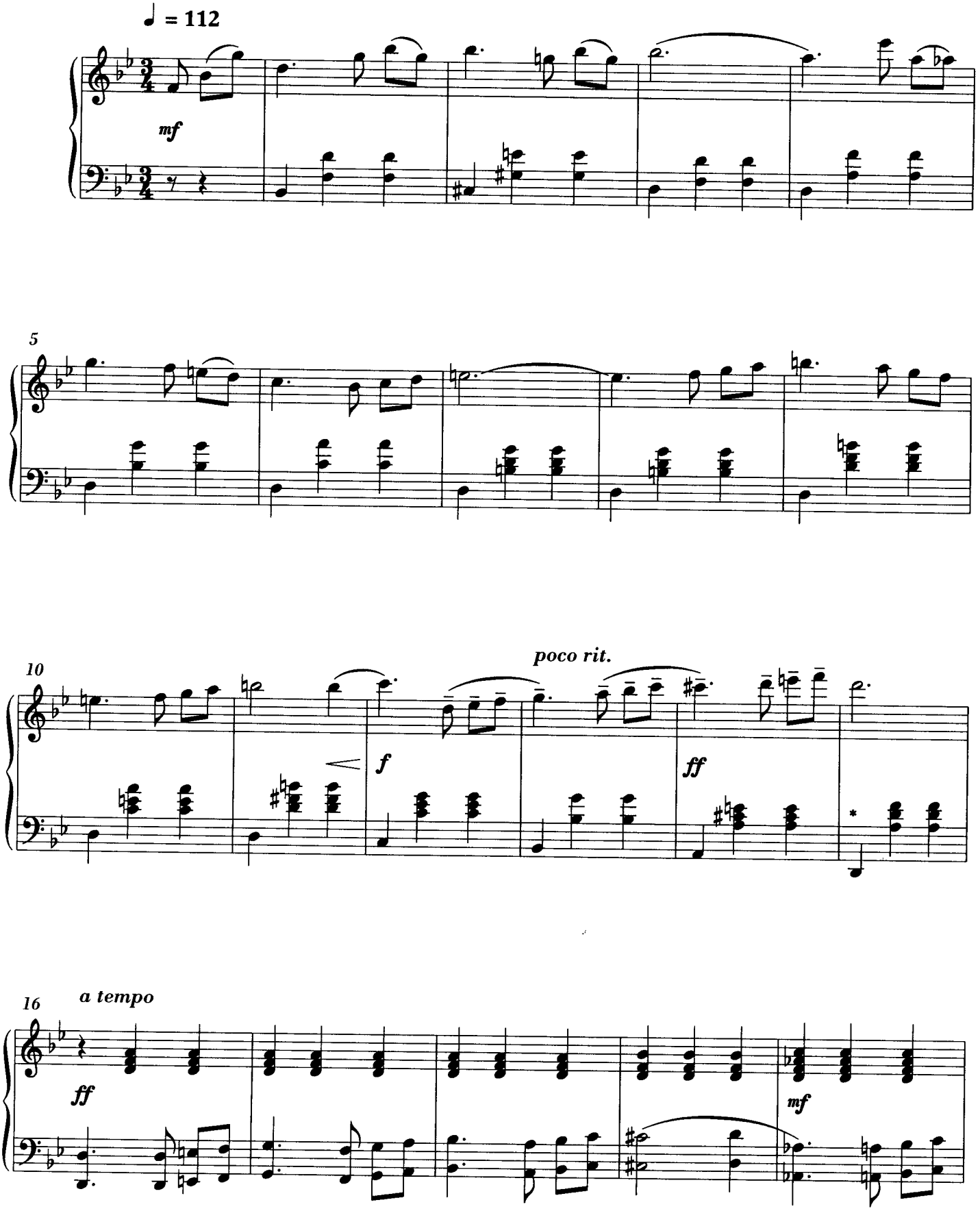


VI

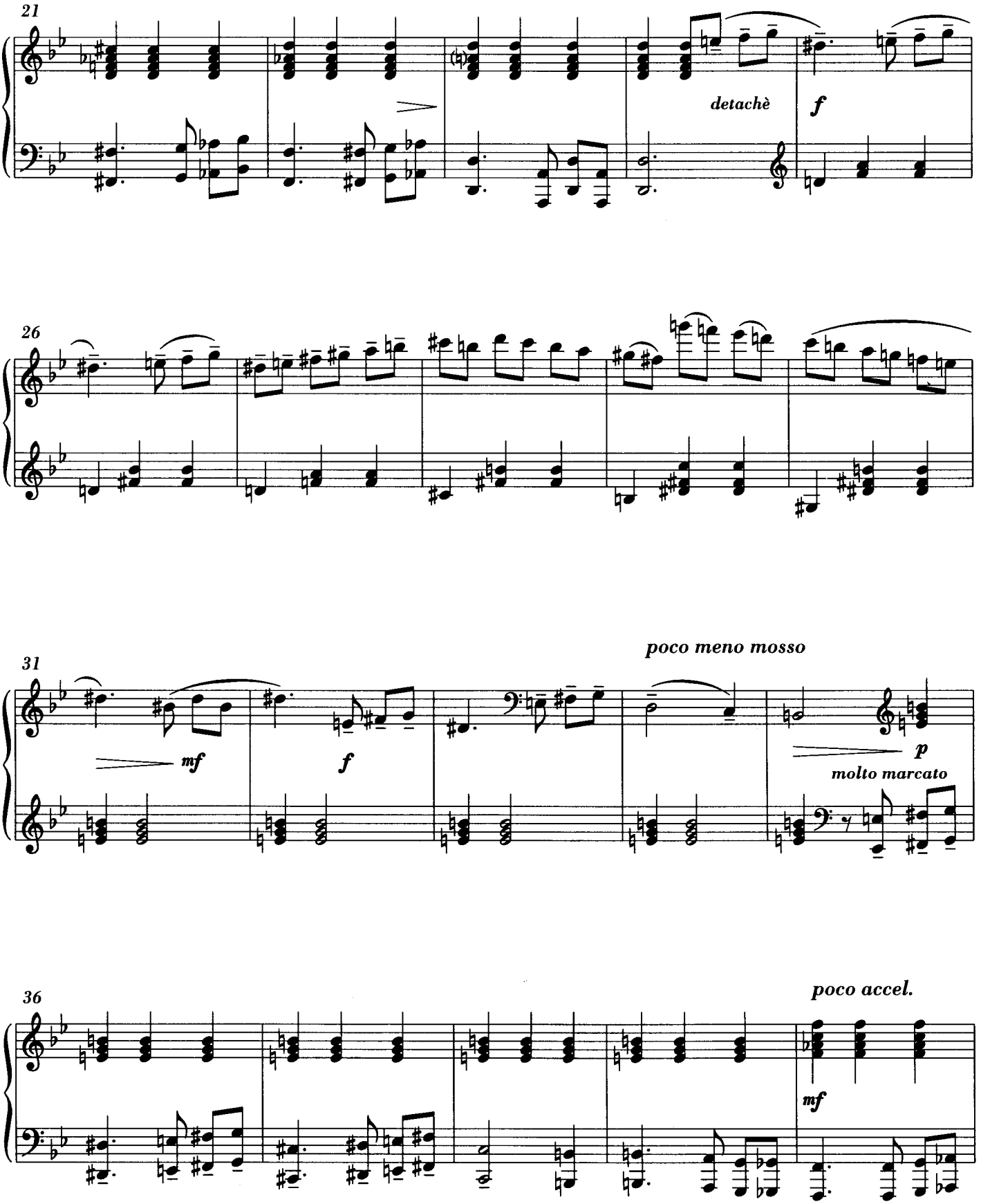


* There are many places in Antheil's music where phrase marking would be helpful; this piece is a good example. The phrasing here has been added by the editor to indicate melodic shape rather than touch.

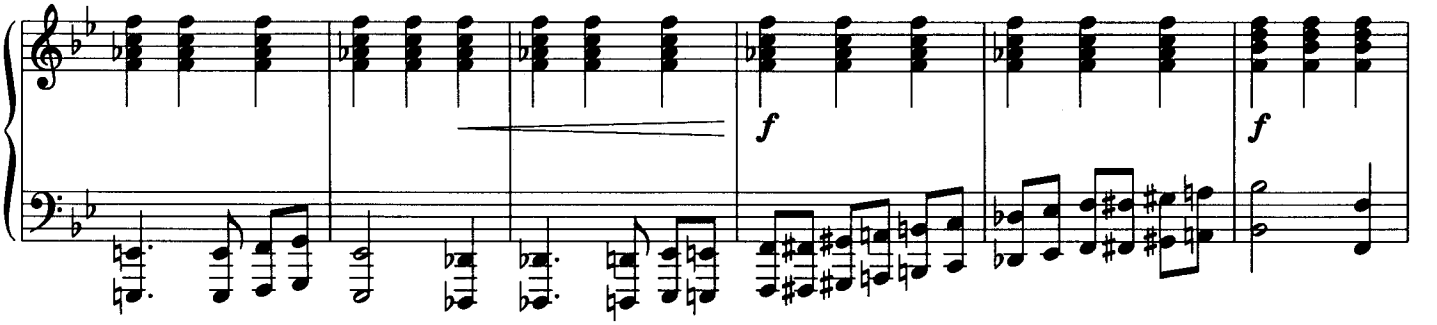
VII



* Antheil's recording has this D one octave lower.

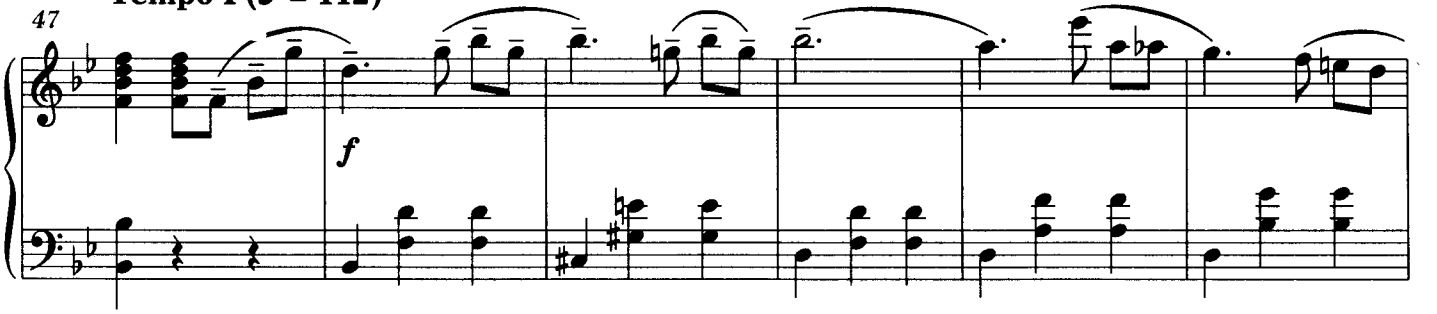

21
detachè
f
26
31
poco meno mosso
mf
f
p
molto marcato
36
poco accel.
mf

41 **Più mosso**

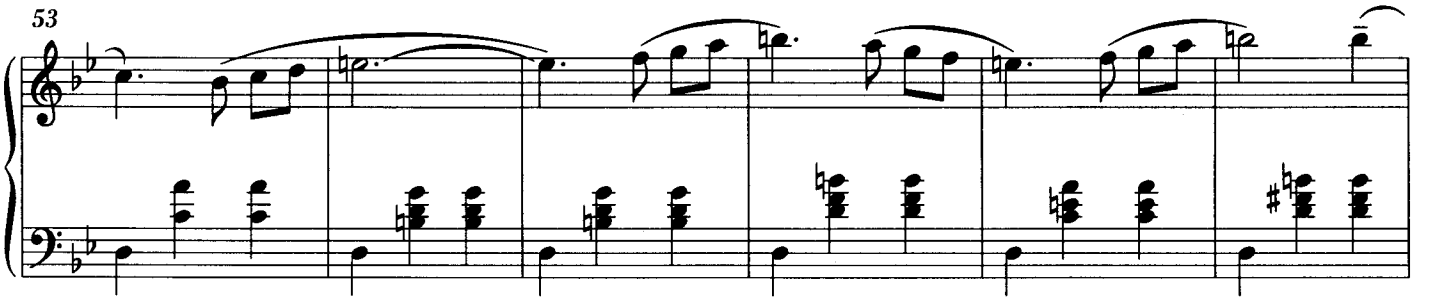


Tempo I (♩ = 112)

47

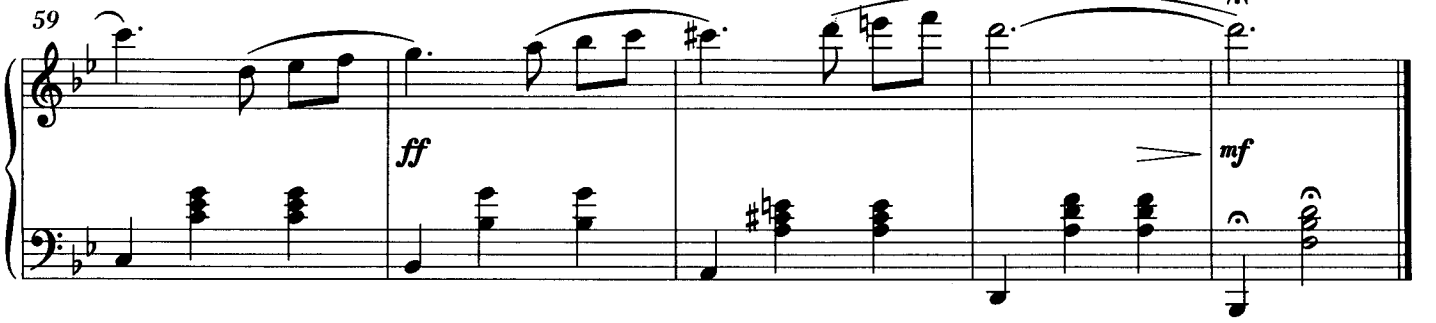


53

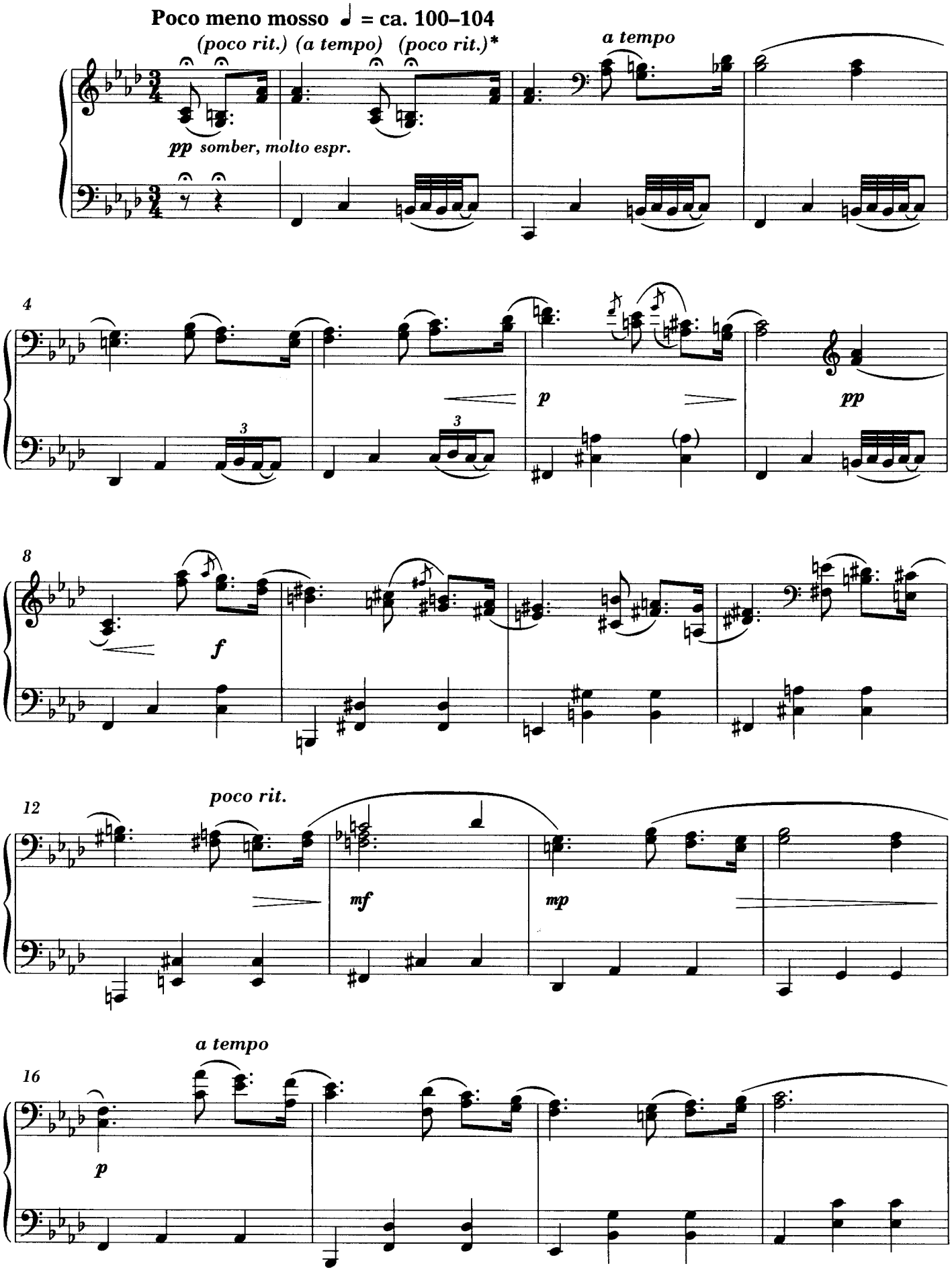


poco rit.

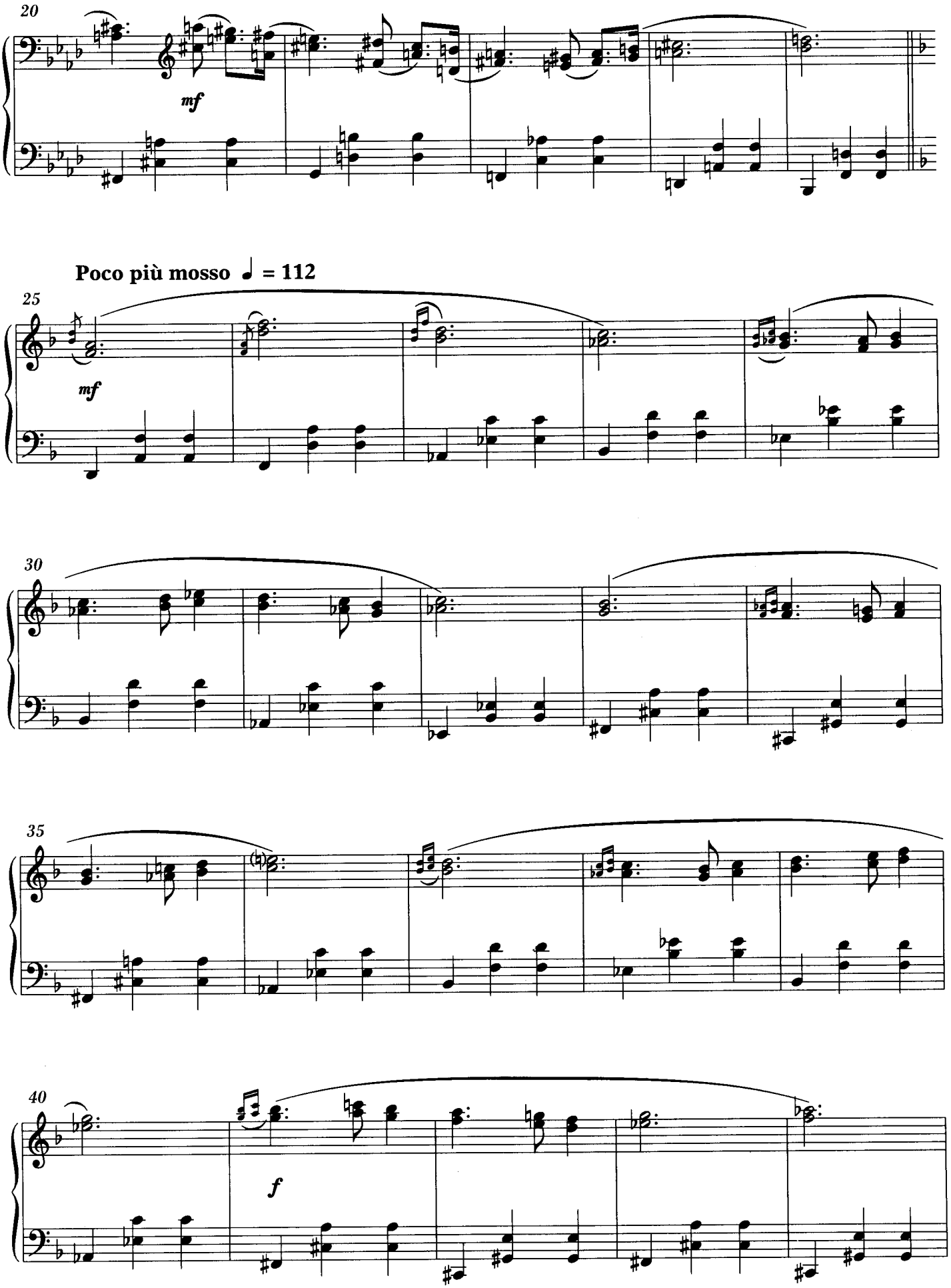
59

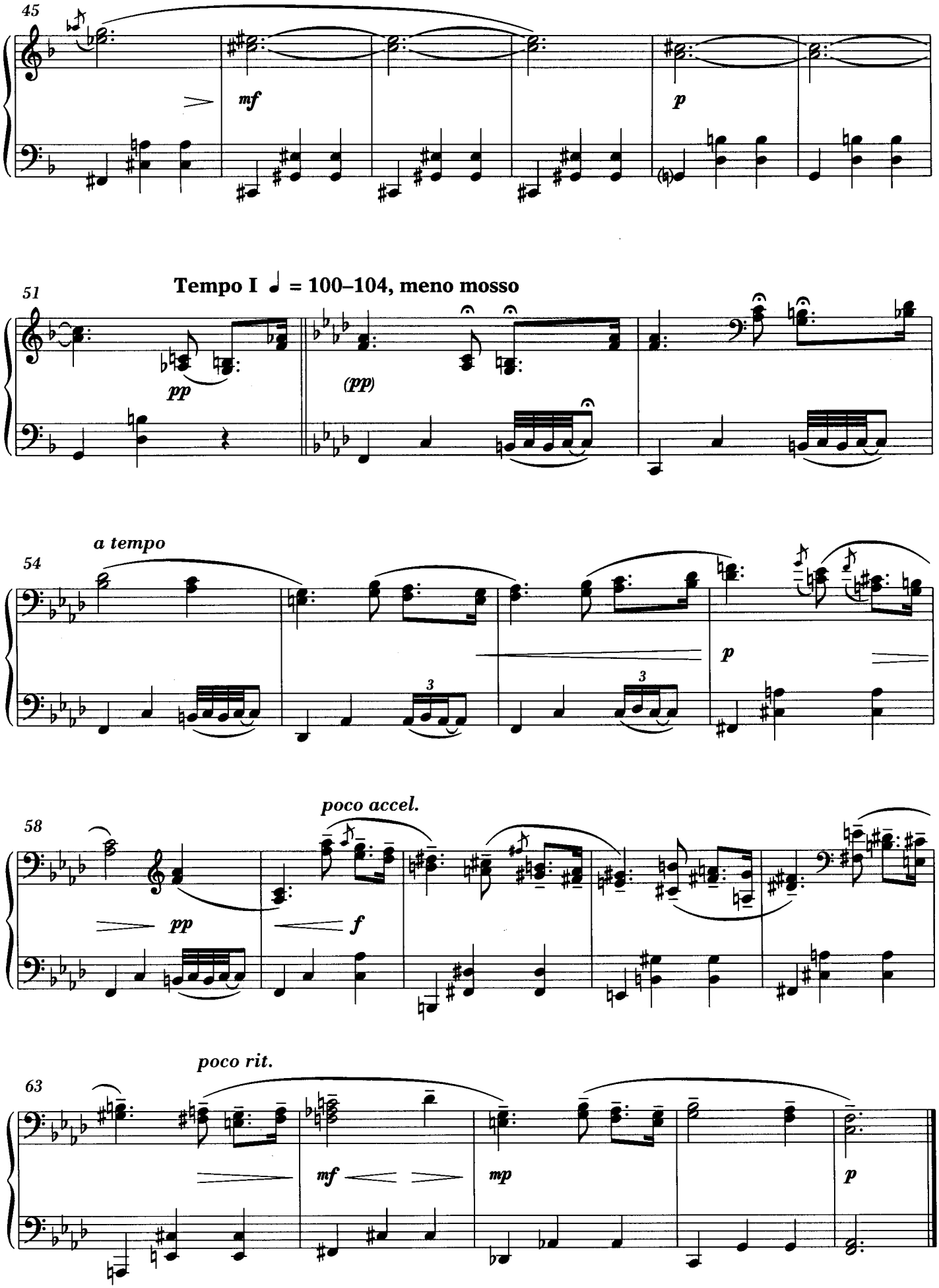


VIII

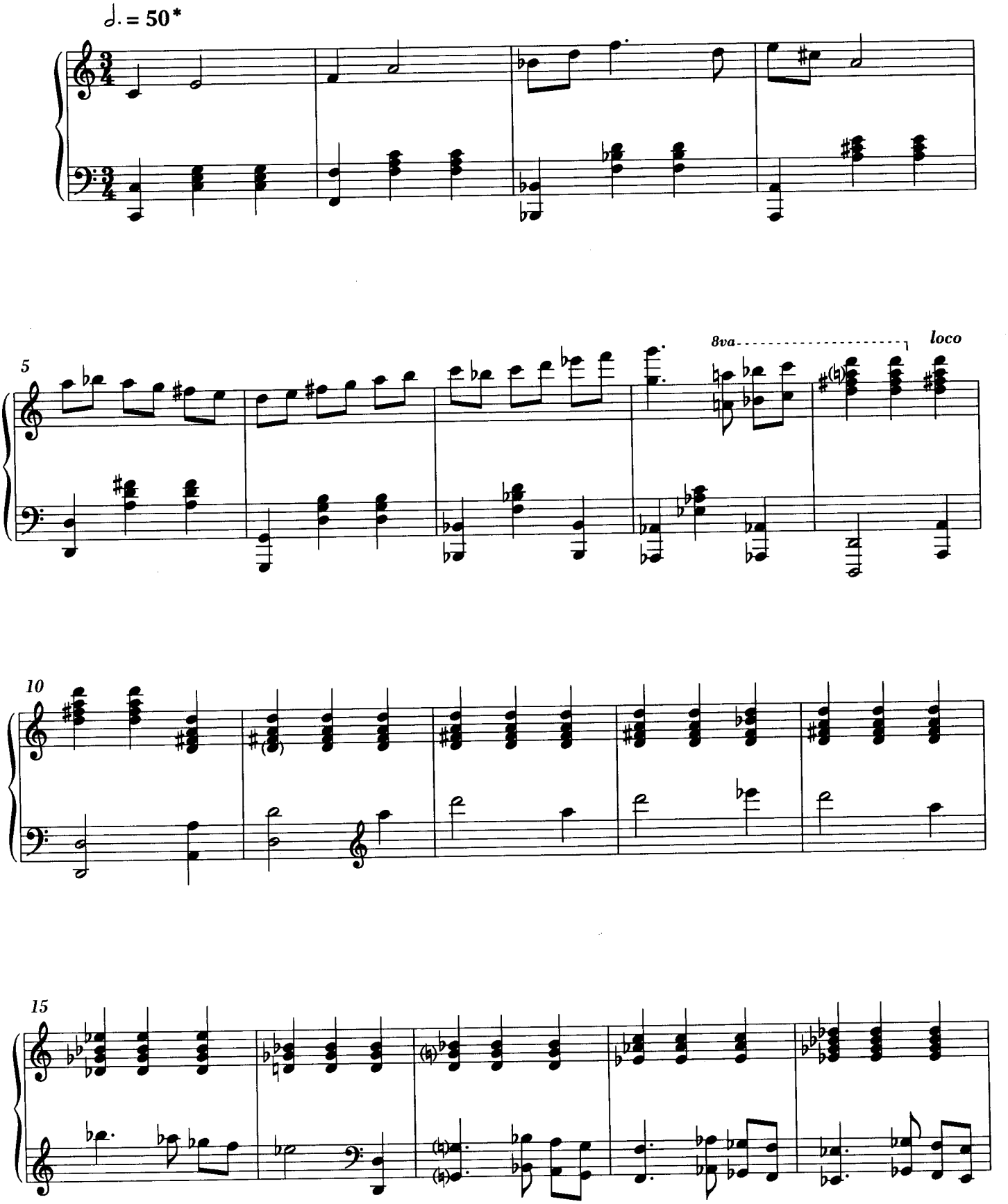


* These markings are in Antheil's manuscript. Here, as elsewhere, they are meant to signify

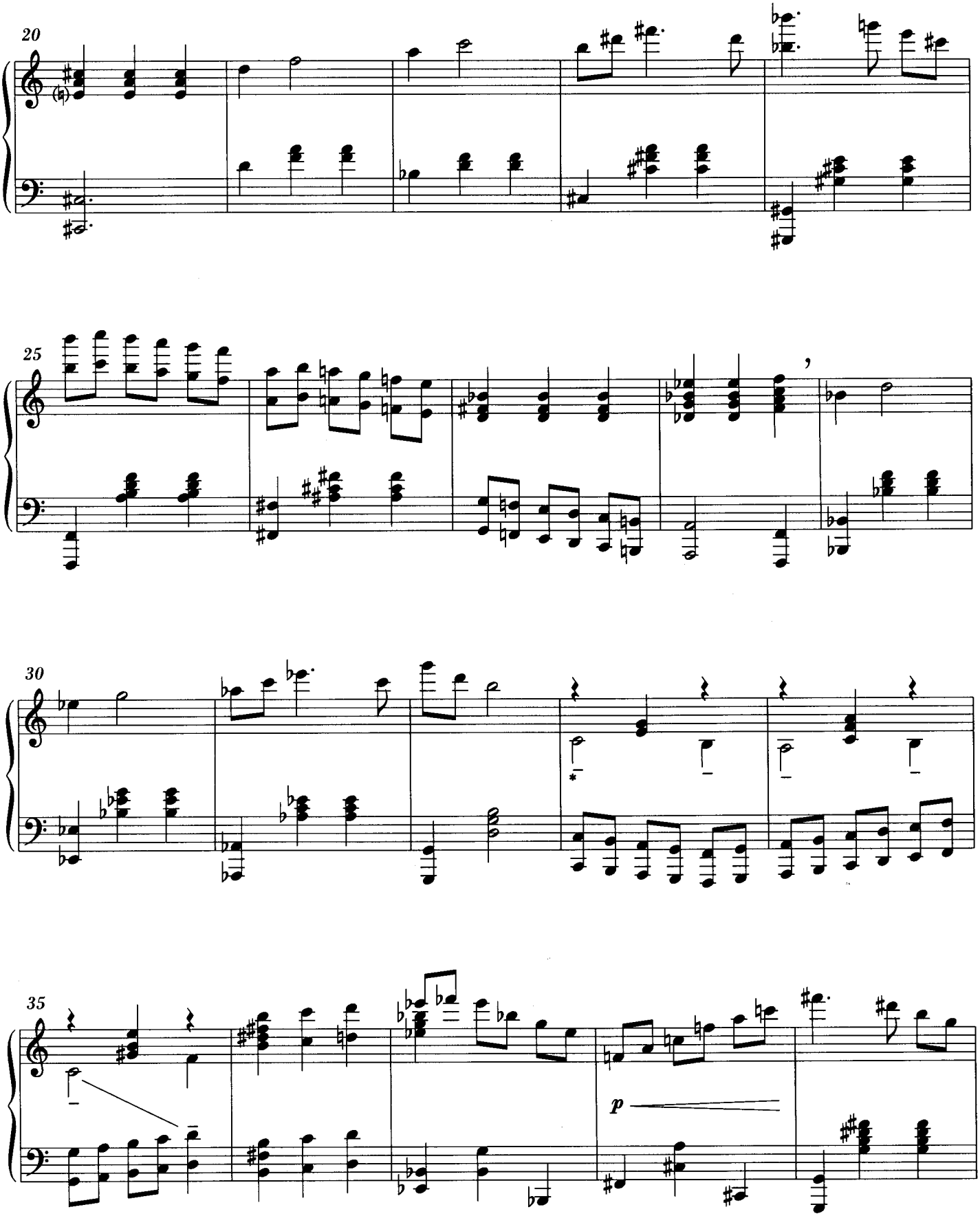

20
mf
Poco più mosso ♩ = 112
25
mf
30
35
40
f


45
mf
p
51
Tempo I ♩ = 100–104, meno mosso
pp
(pp)
54
a tempo
p
58
poco accel.
pp
f
63
poco rit.
mf
mp
p

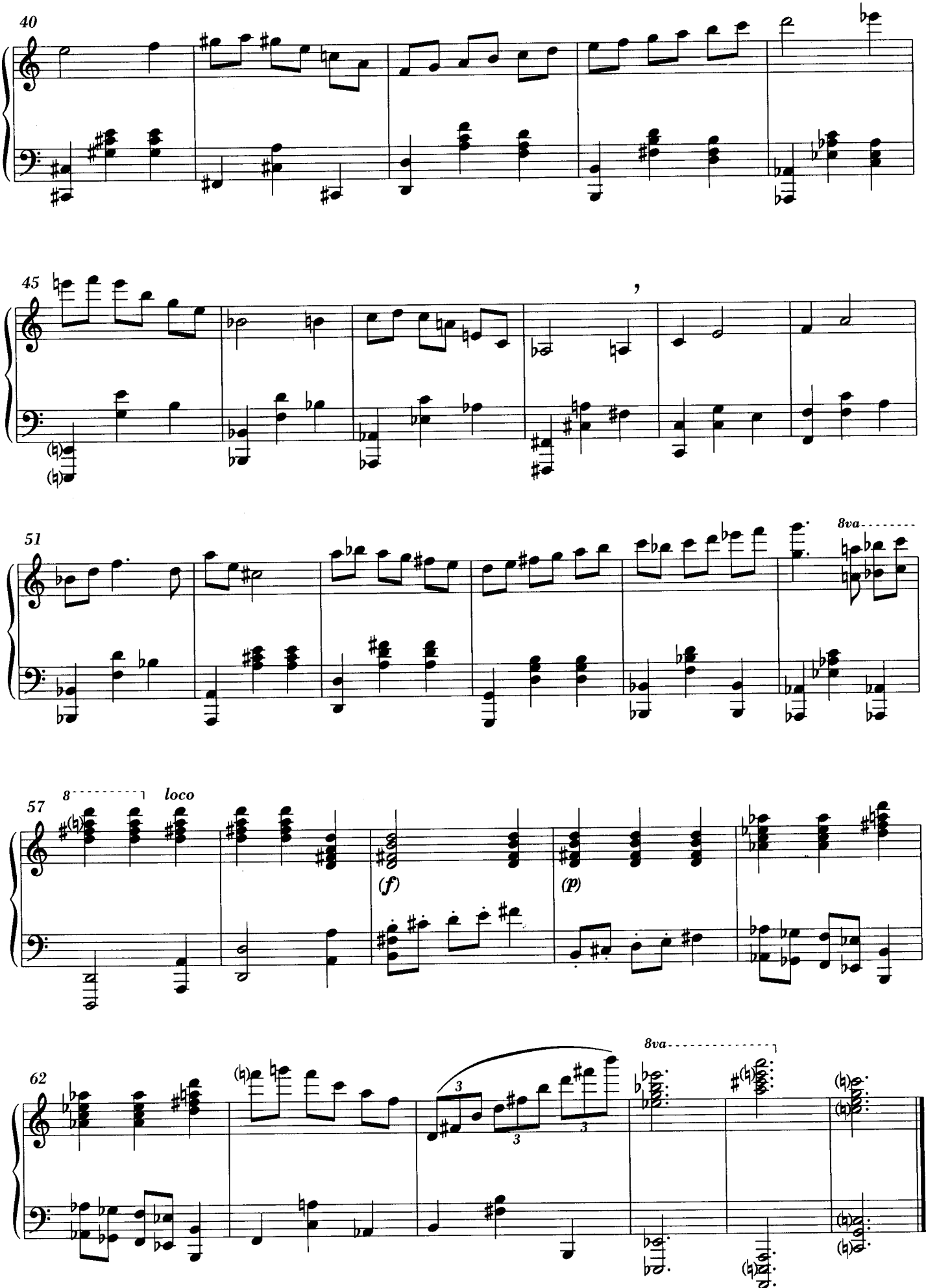
IX



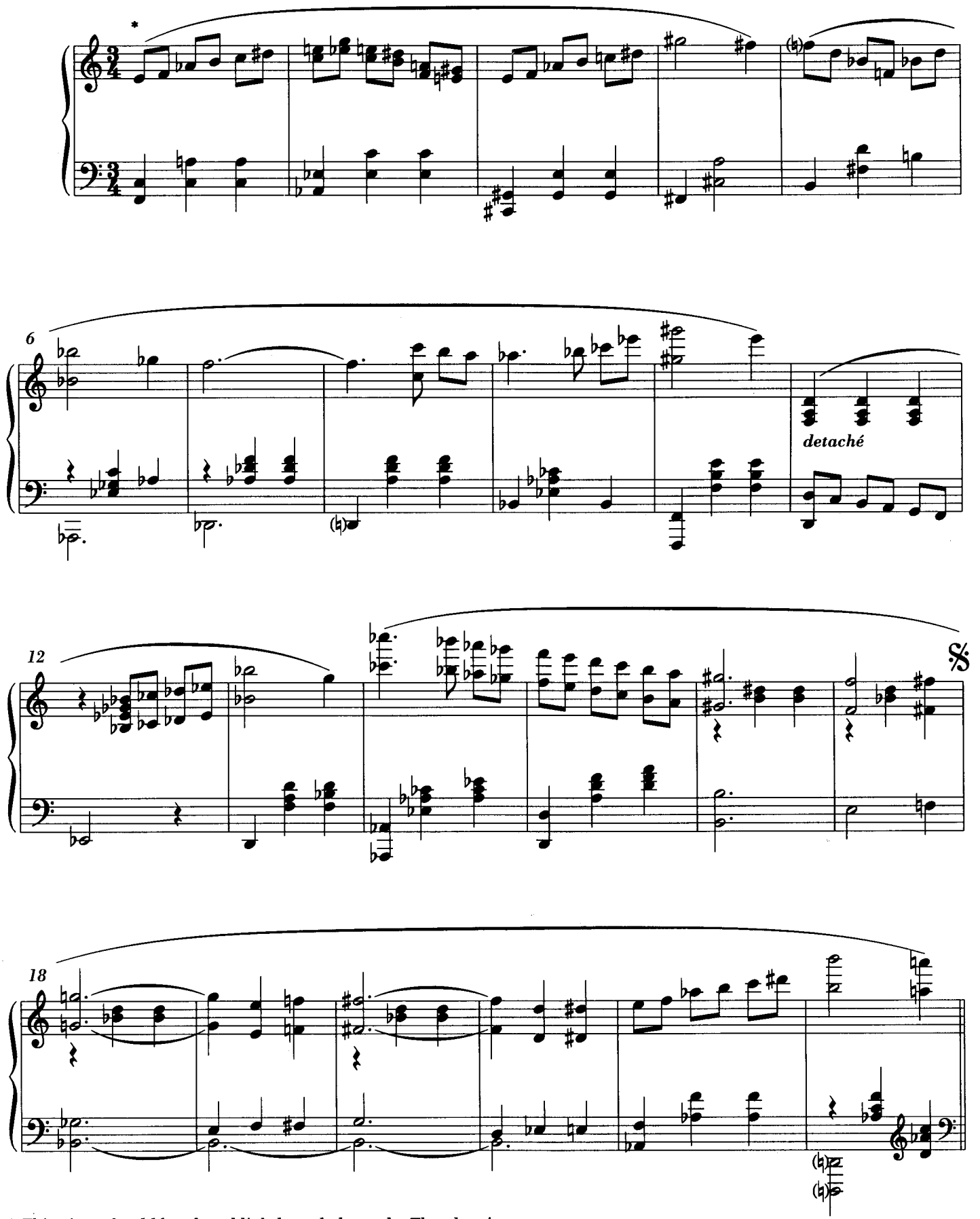
* Editor's suggested tempo.



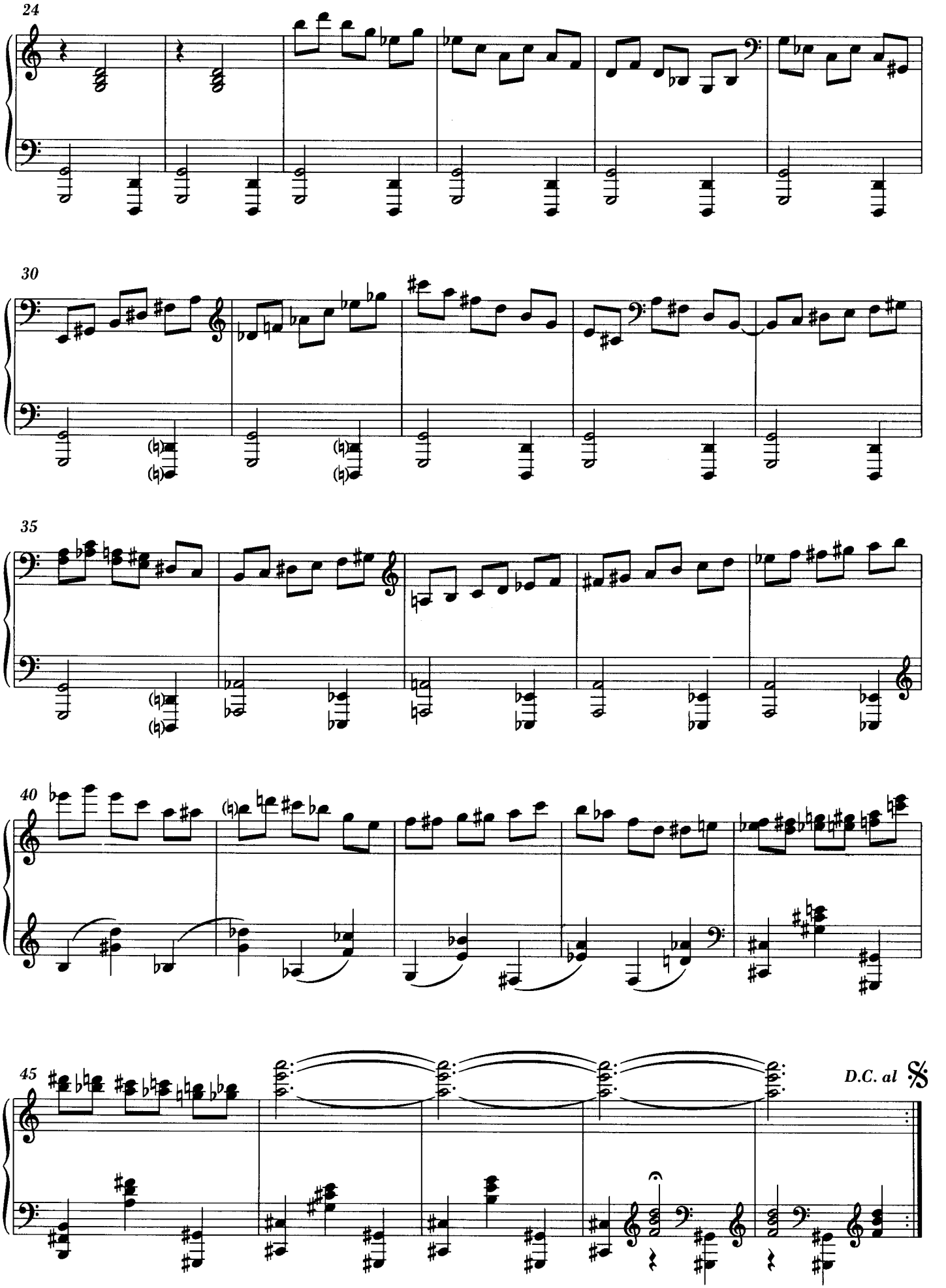
* *Tenuto* marks have been added to show voice leading, and are not in the manuscript.

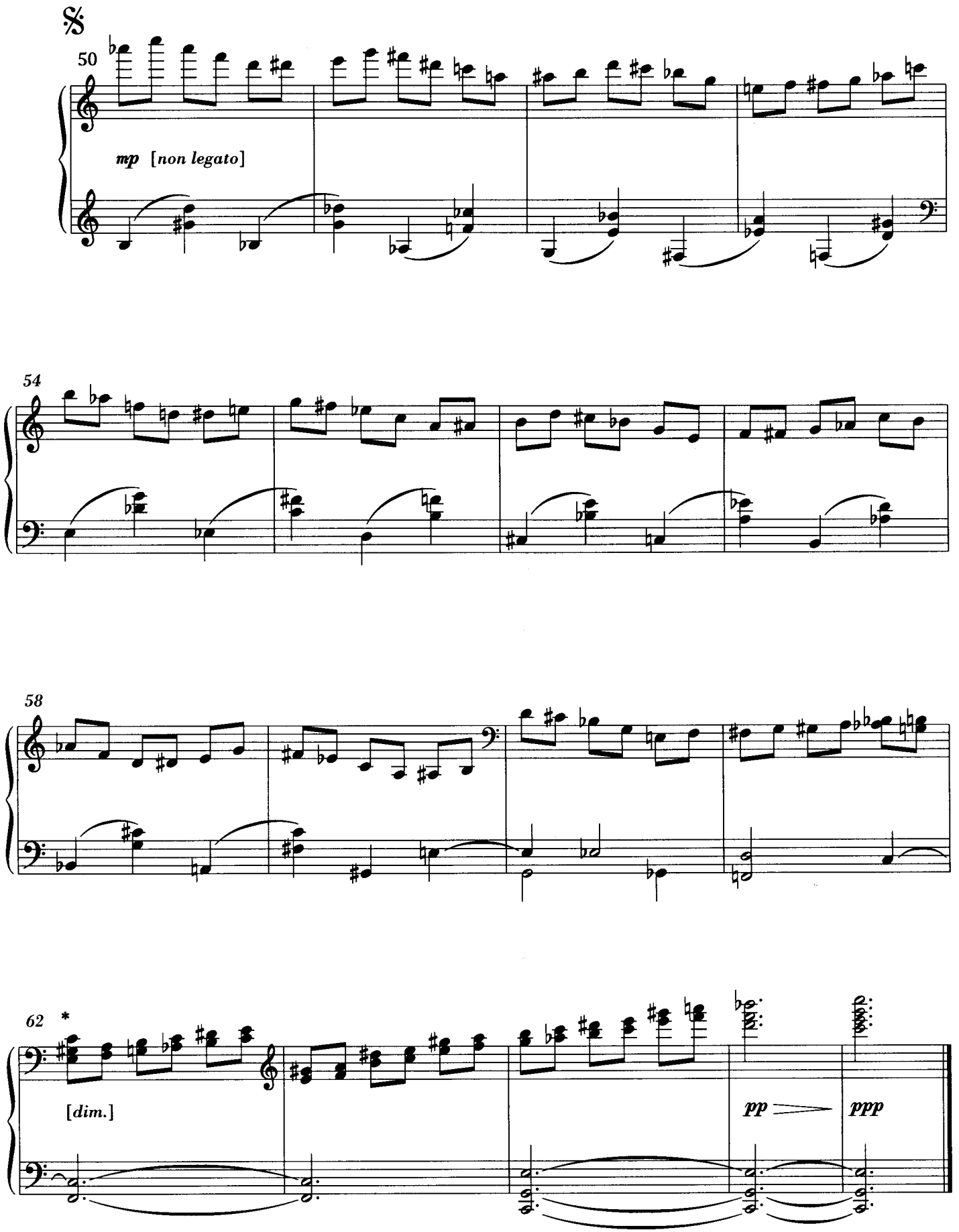

40
45
51
8va
57
8
loco
(f)
(p)
62
8va

X



* This piece should be played lightly and elegantly. The phrasing has been added by the editor.

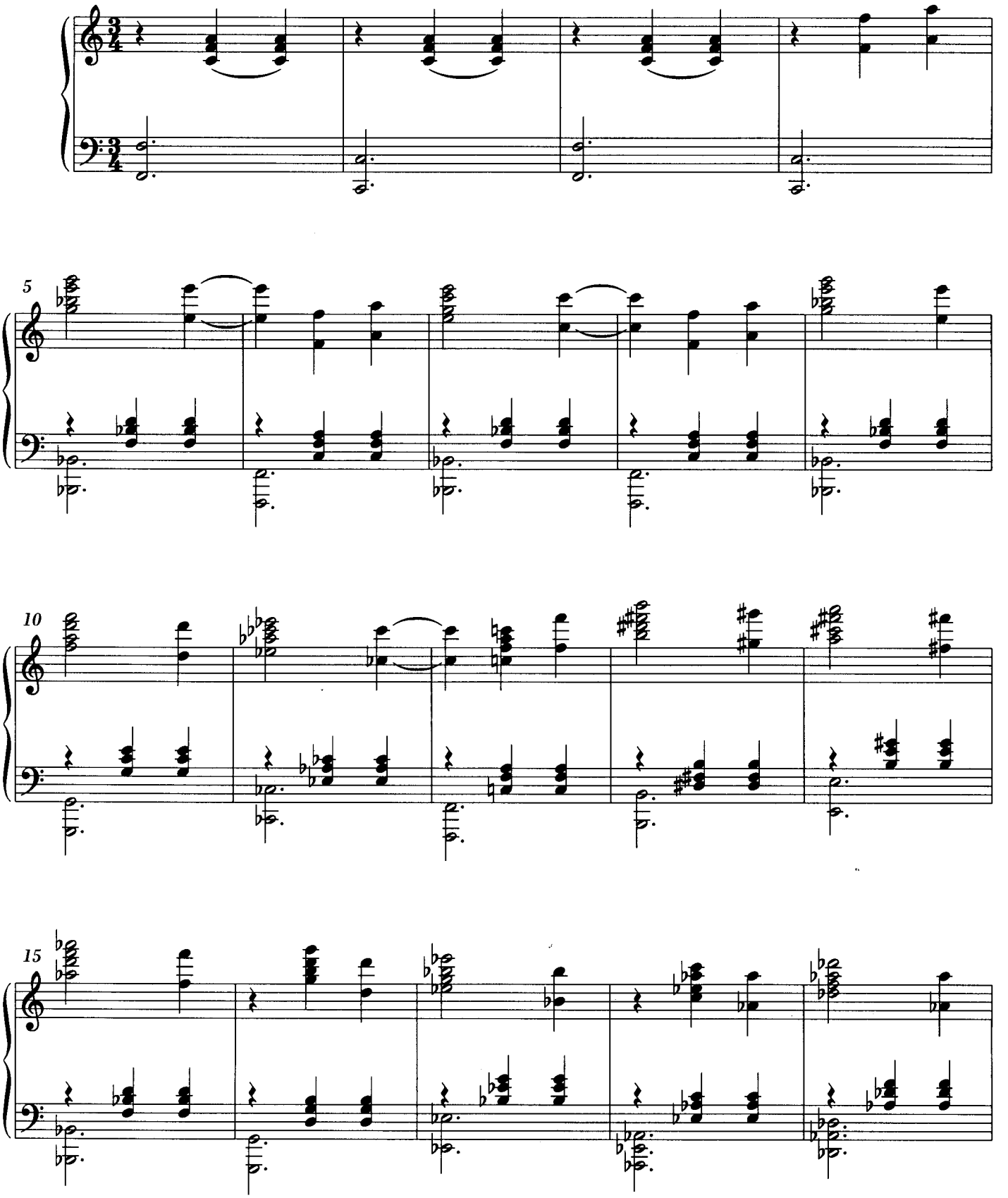

24
30
35
40
45
D.C. al 𝄋



* Antheil's recorded performance is *ritardando* from here to the end.
The editor prefers maintaining a quick tempo to the end.

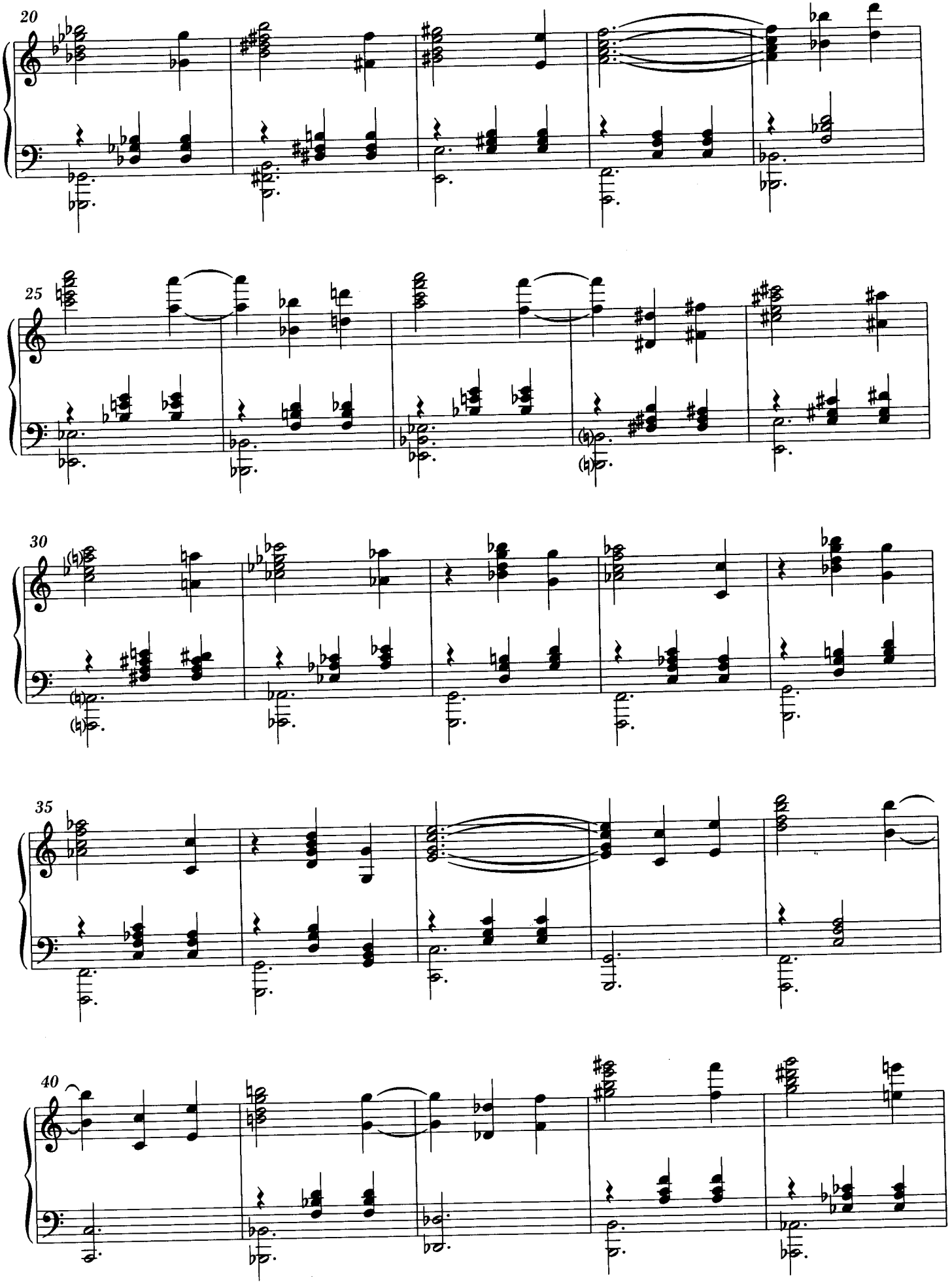
XI*

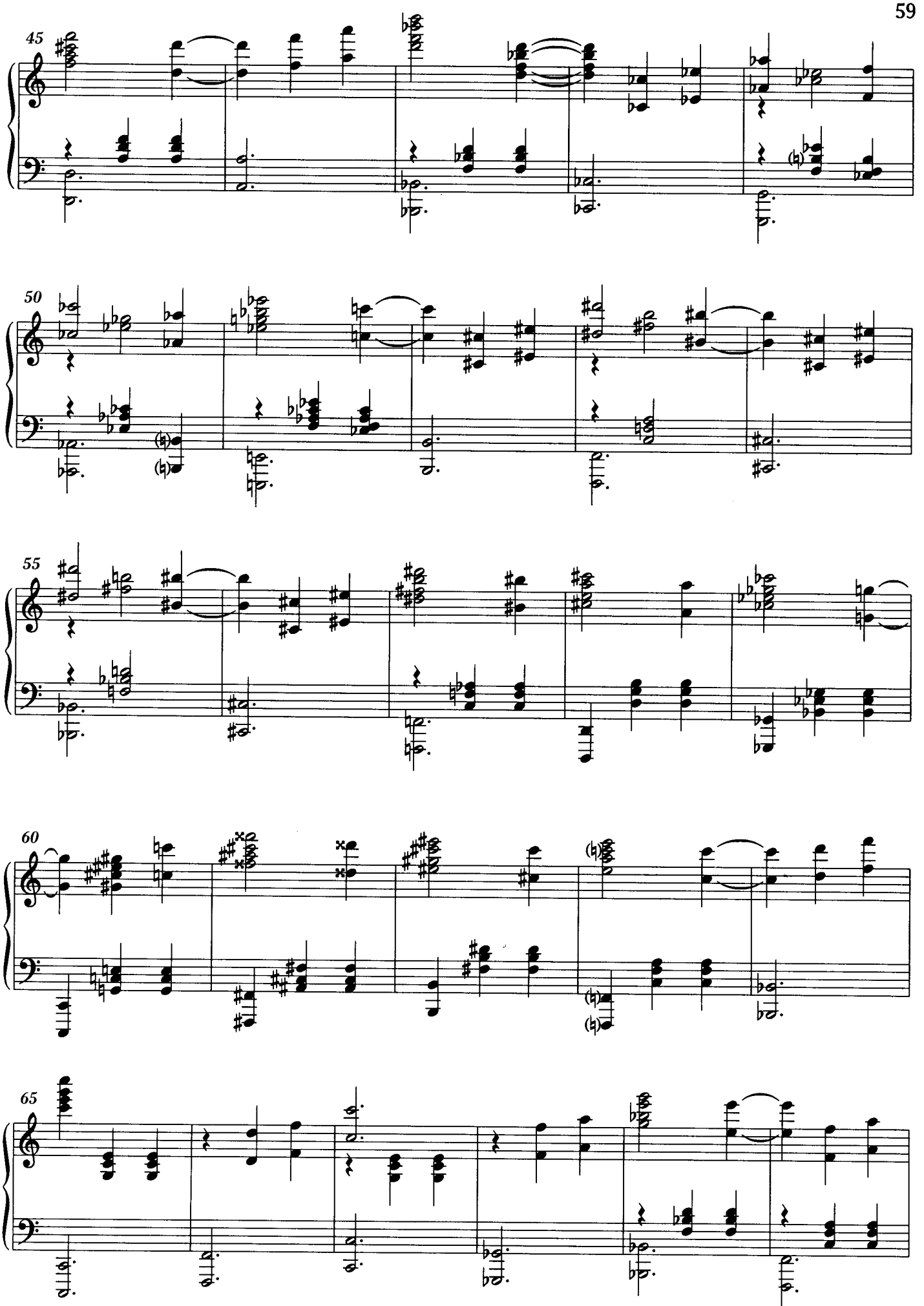
Andante ♩. = 48**

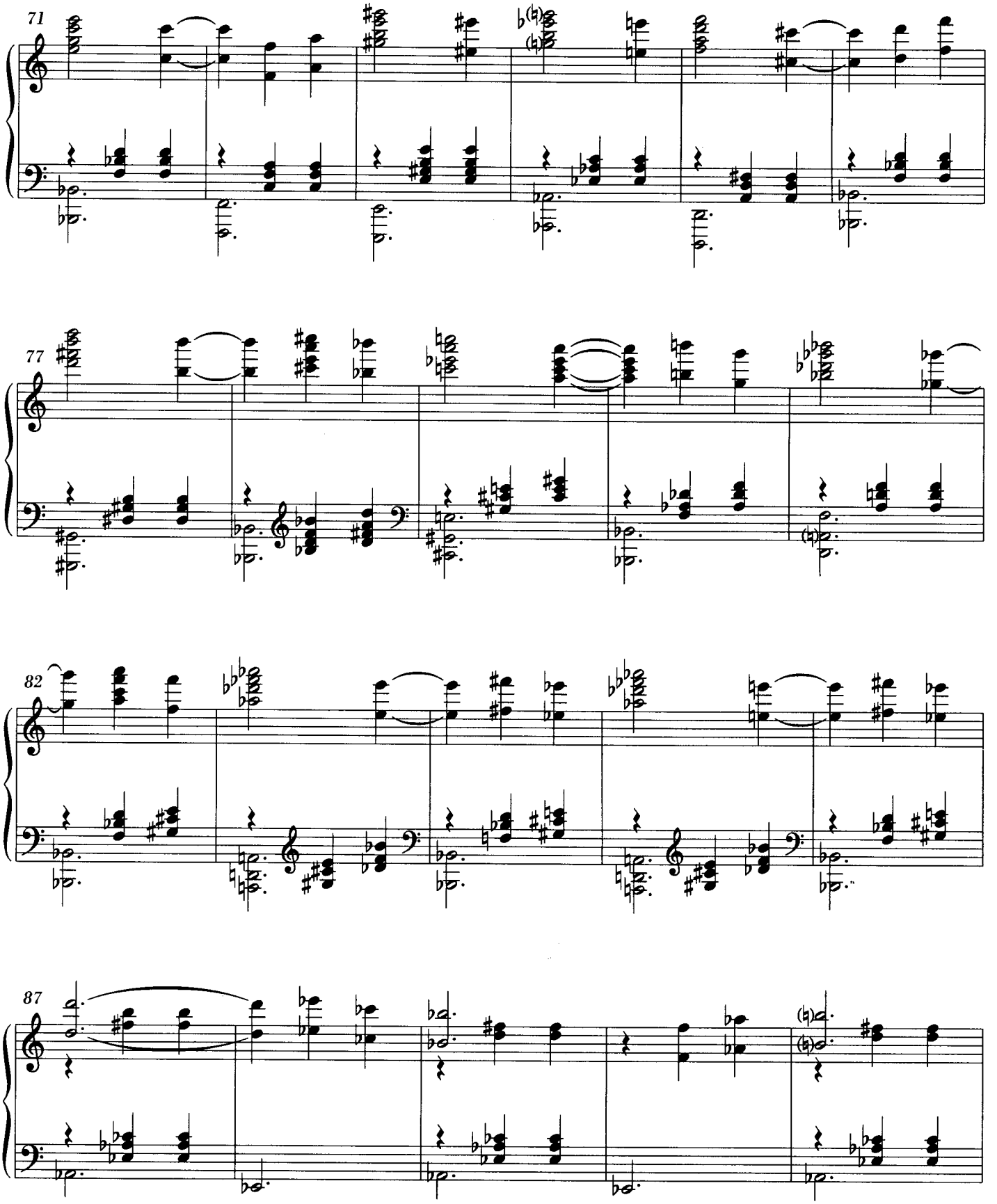


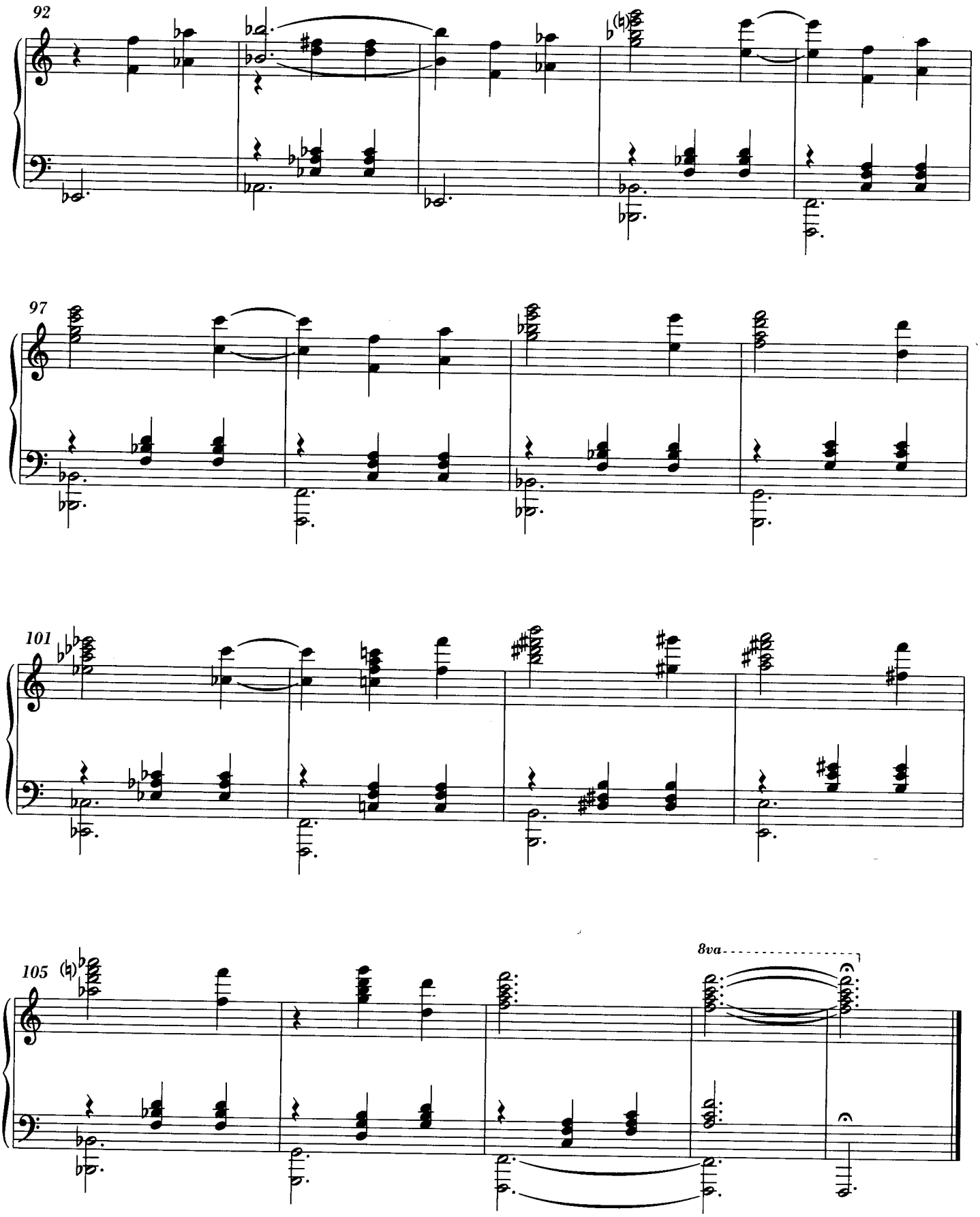
* This is machine-music. Antheil probably had in mind a carousel or calliope going on and on heartlessly. — Ed.

** Antheil's recorded tempo. He played this piece with strong downbeats and a pedal at the beginning of each measure.


20
25
30
35
40


45
50
55
60
65


71
77
82
87

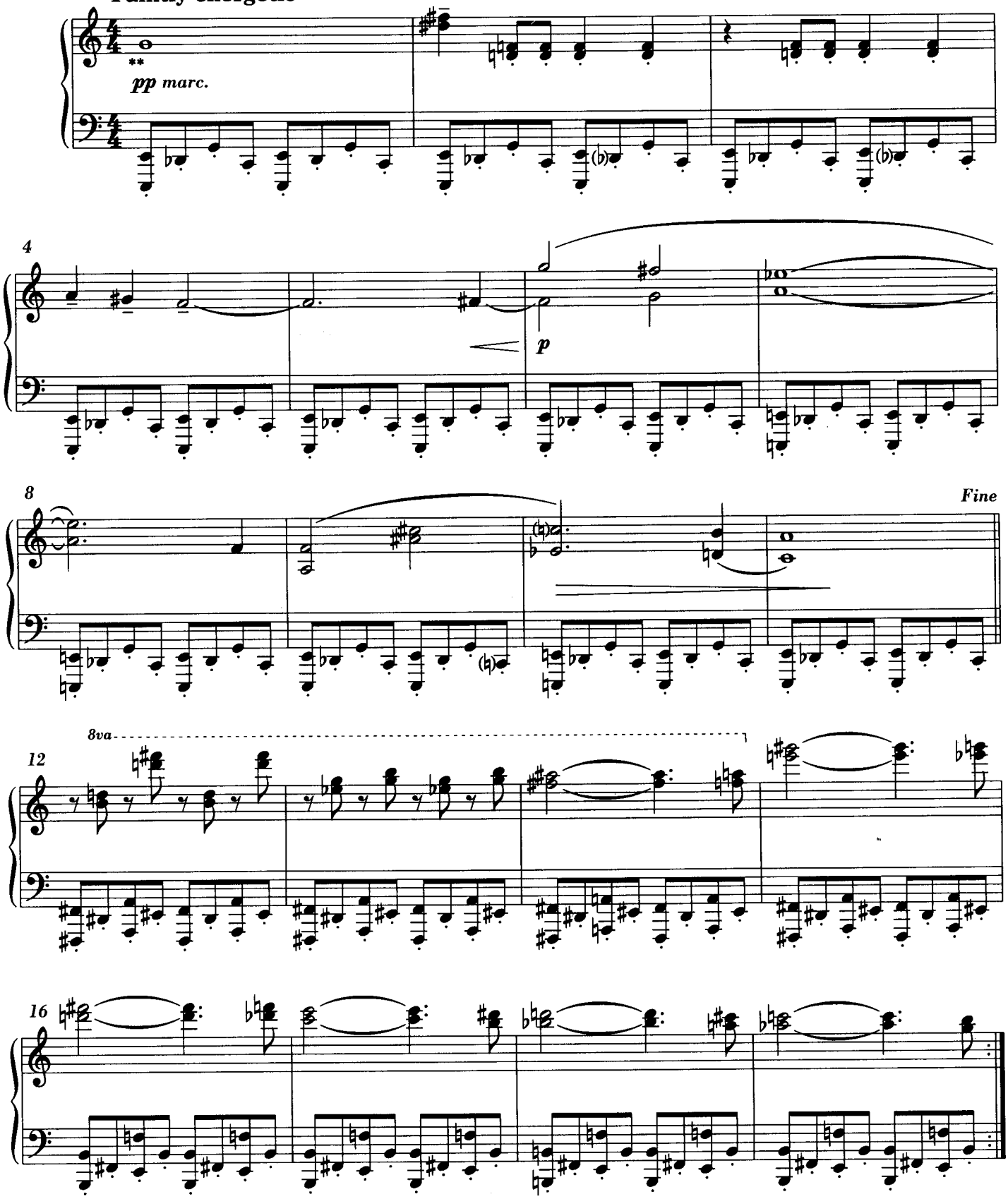

92
97
101
105
8va

LA FEMME 100 TÊTES*

III

(1932–33)

Faintly energetic



* Martha Graham choreographed 25 of these preludes for her *Dance in Four Parts*, 1934.

** In the manuscript, this G is tied from the previous piece (No. II).

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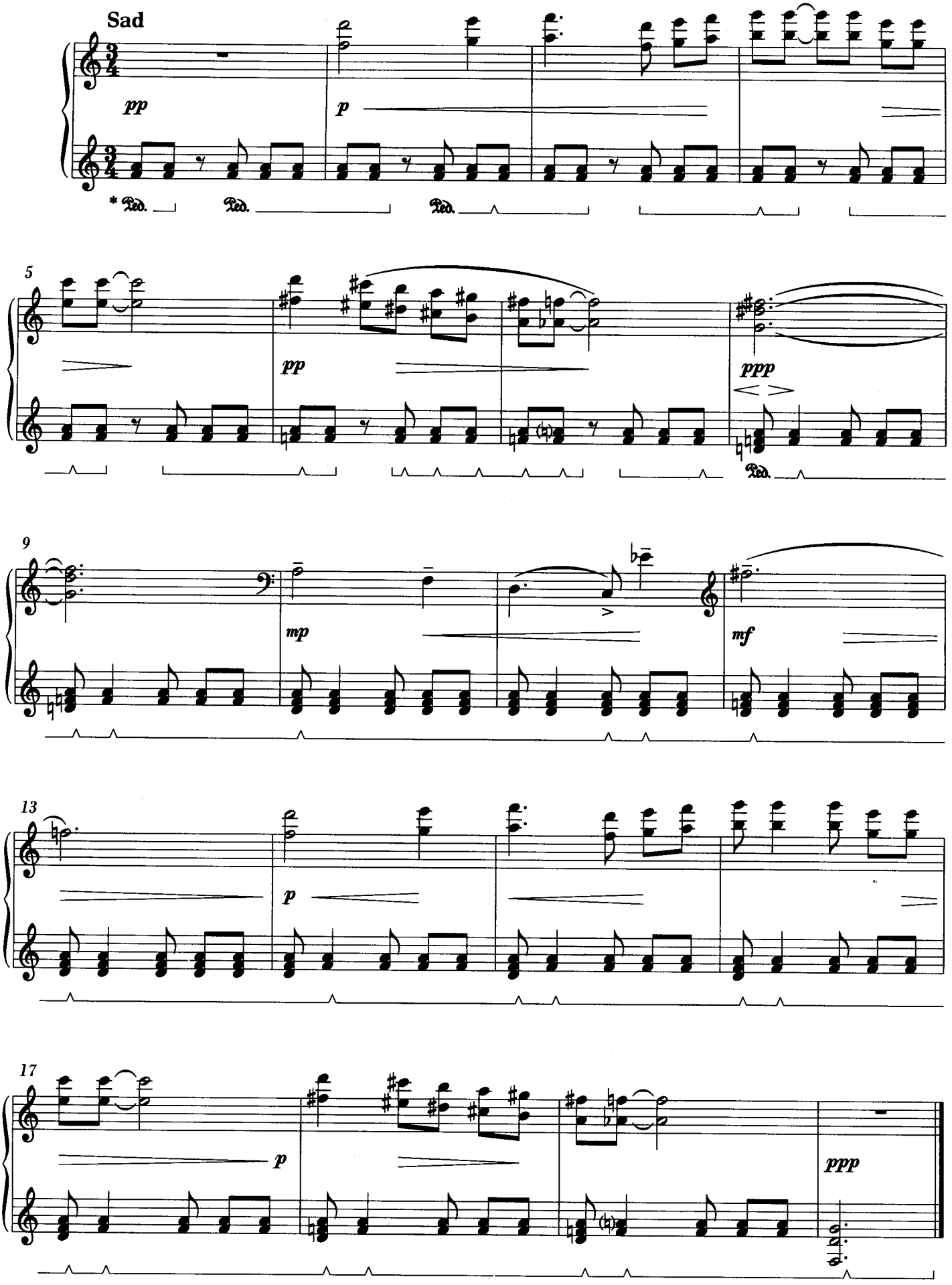
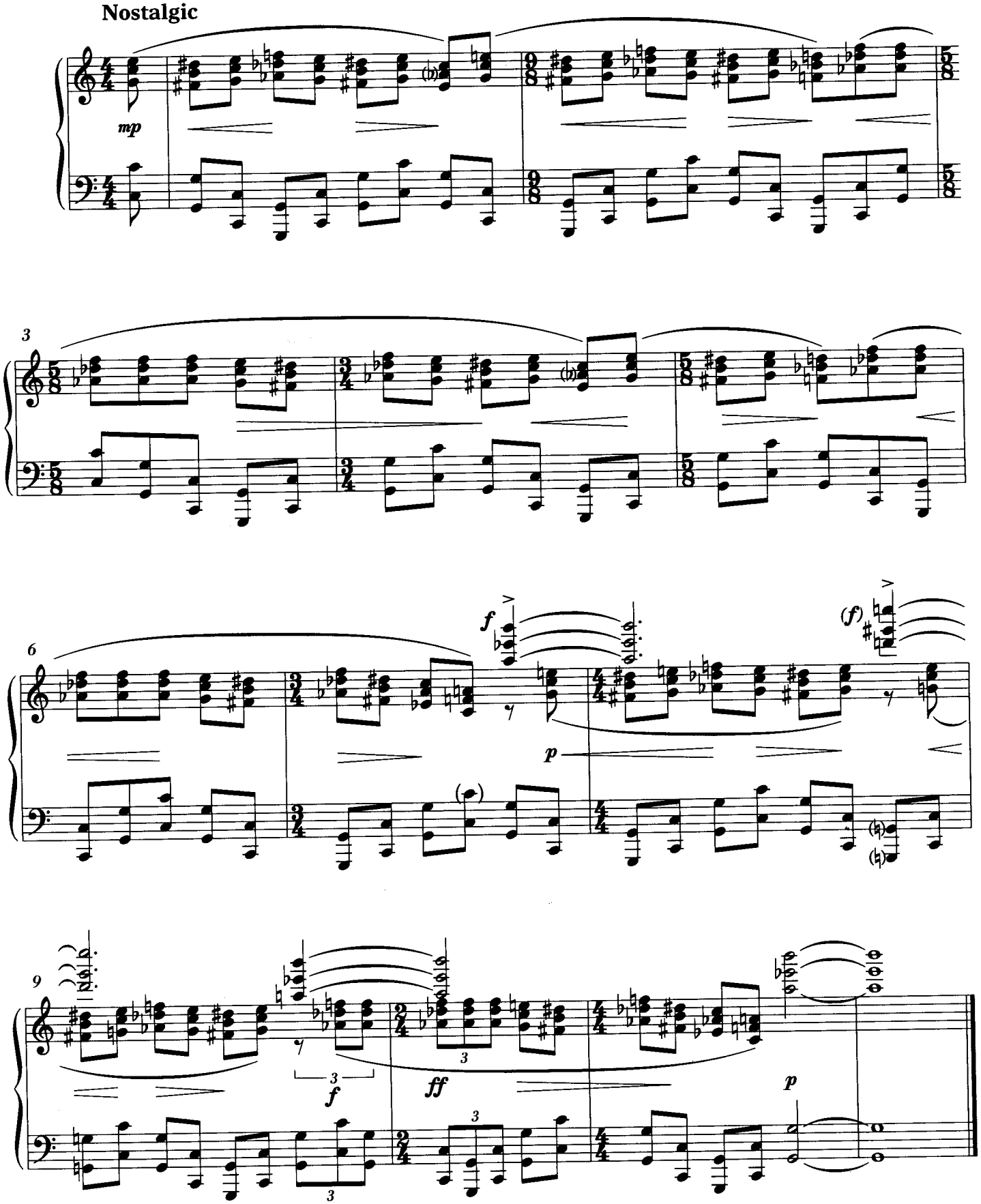


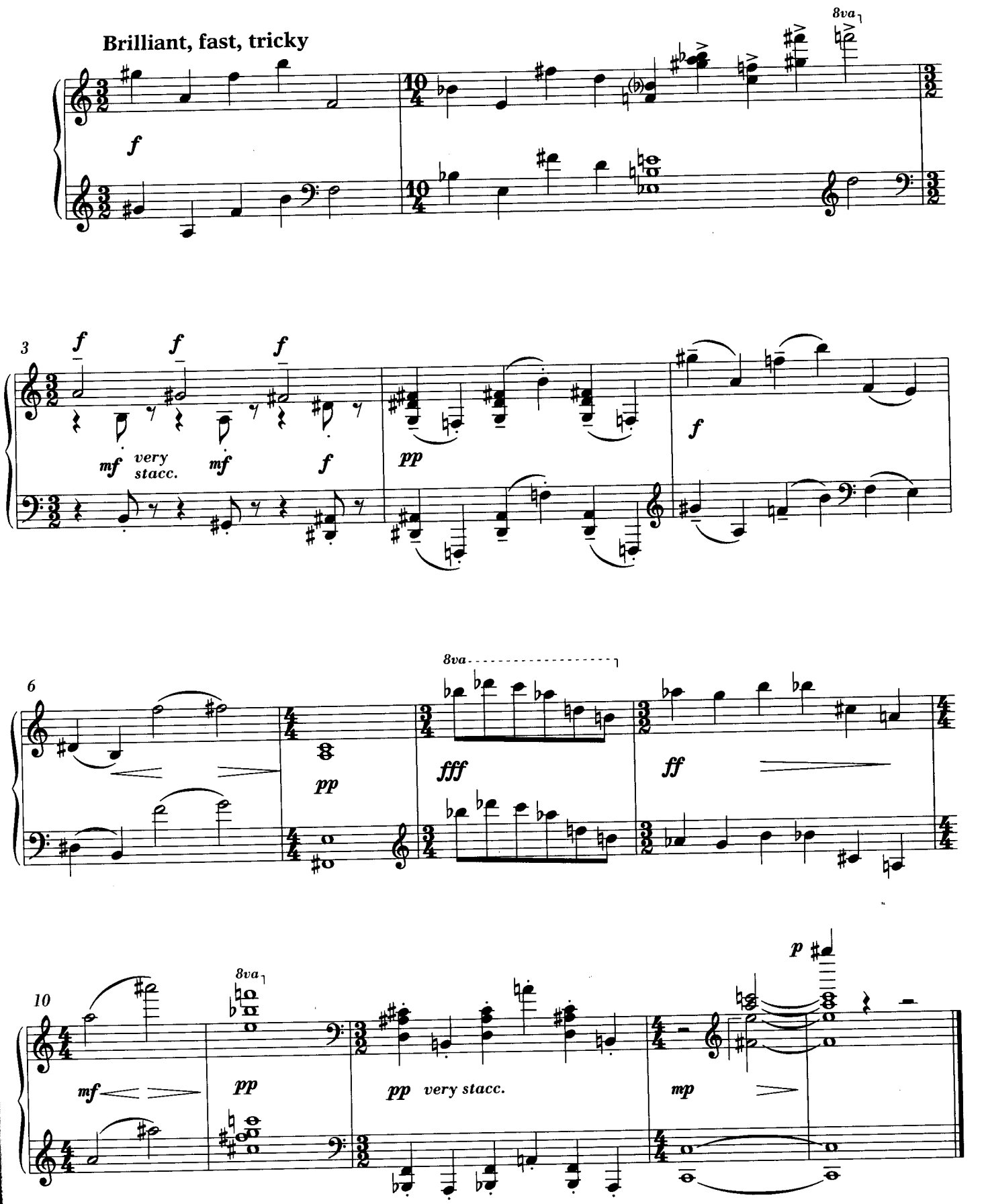
* Editor's suggested pedaling.

XL

Nostalgic

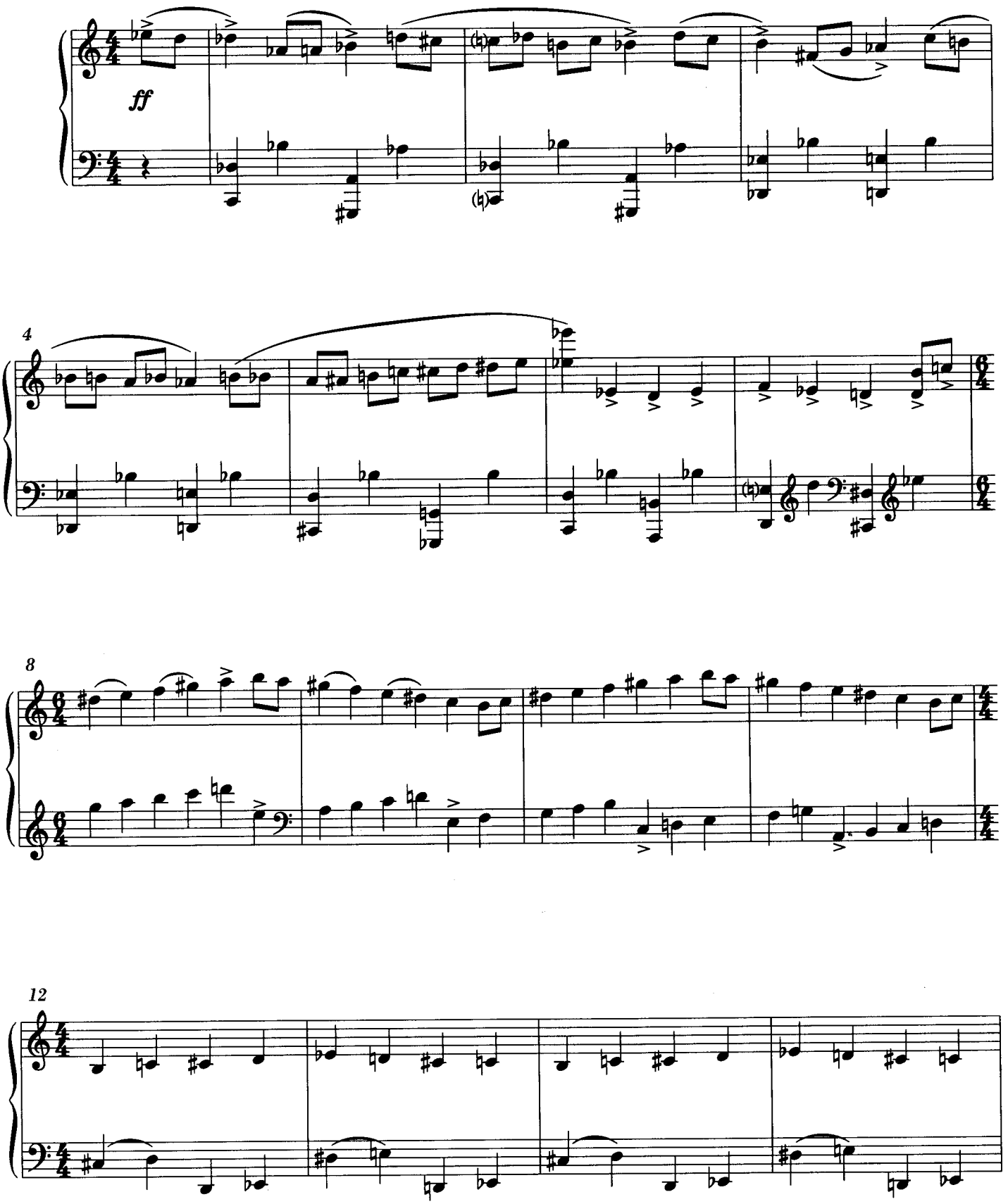


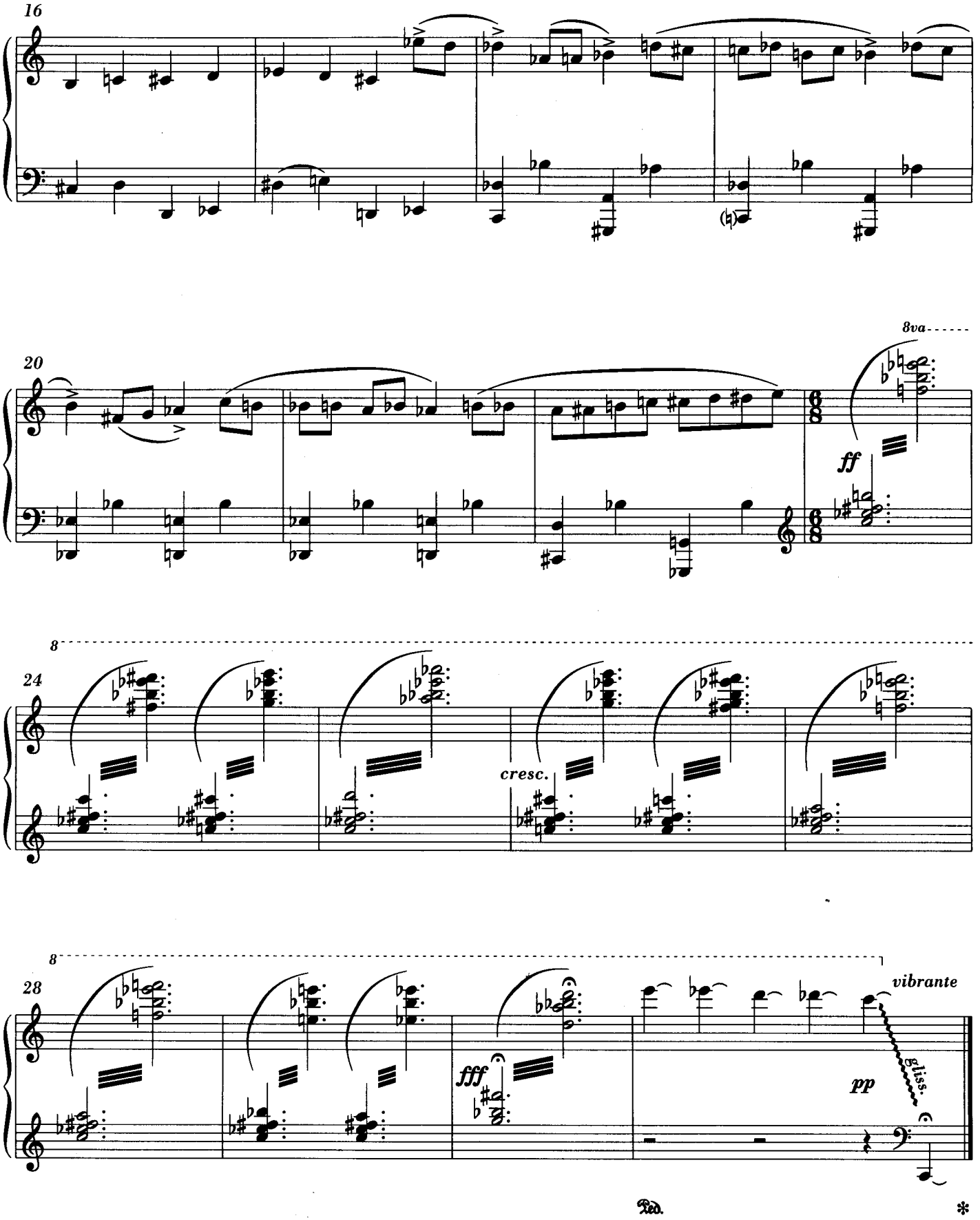
XIV


Brilliant, fast, tricky
8va
f
3
f
f
f
mf very stacc.
mf
f
pp
f
6
8va
pp
fff
ff
10
8va
p
mf
pp
pp very stacc.
mp

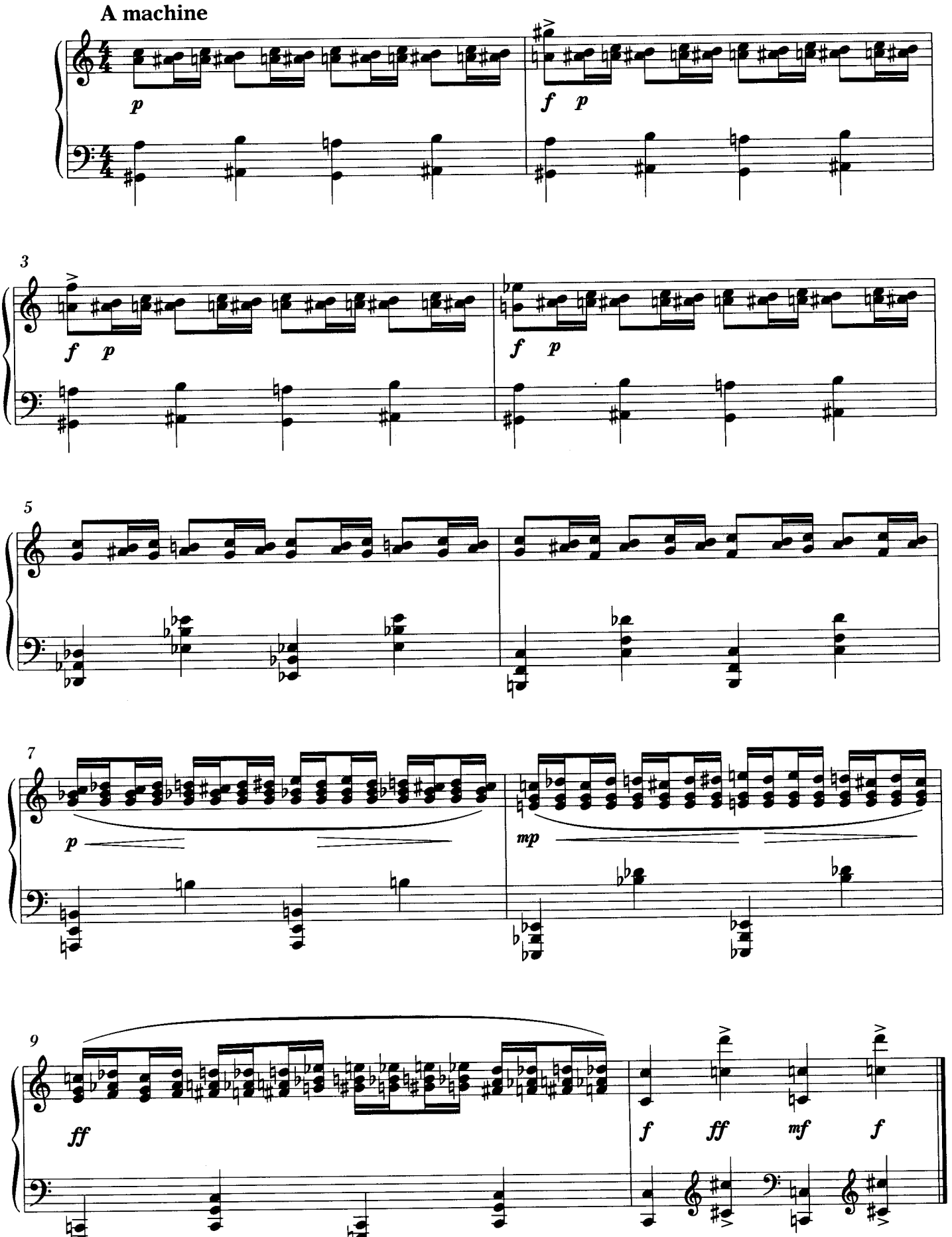
XLII

Brilliant, not too fast



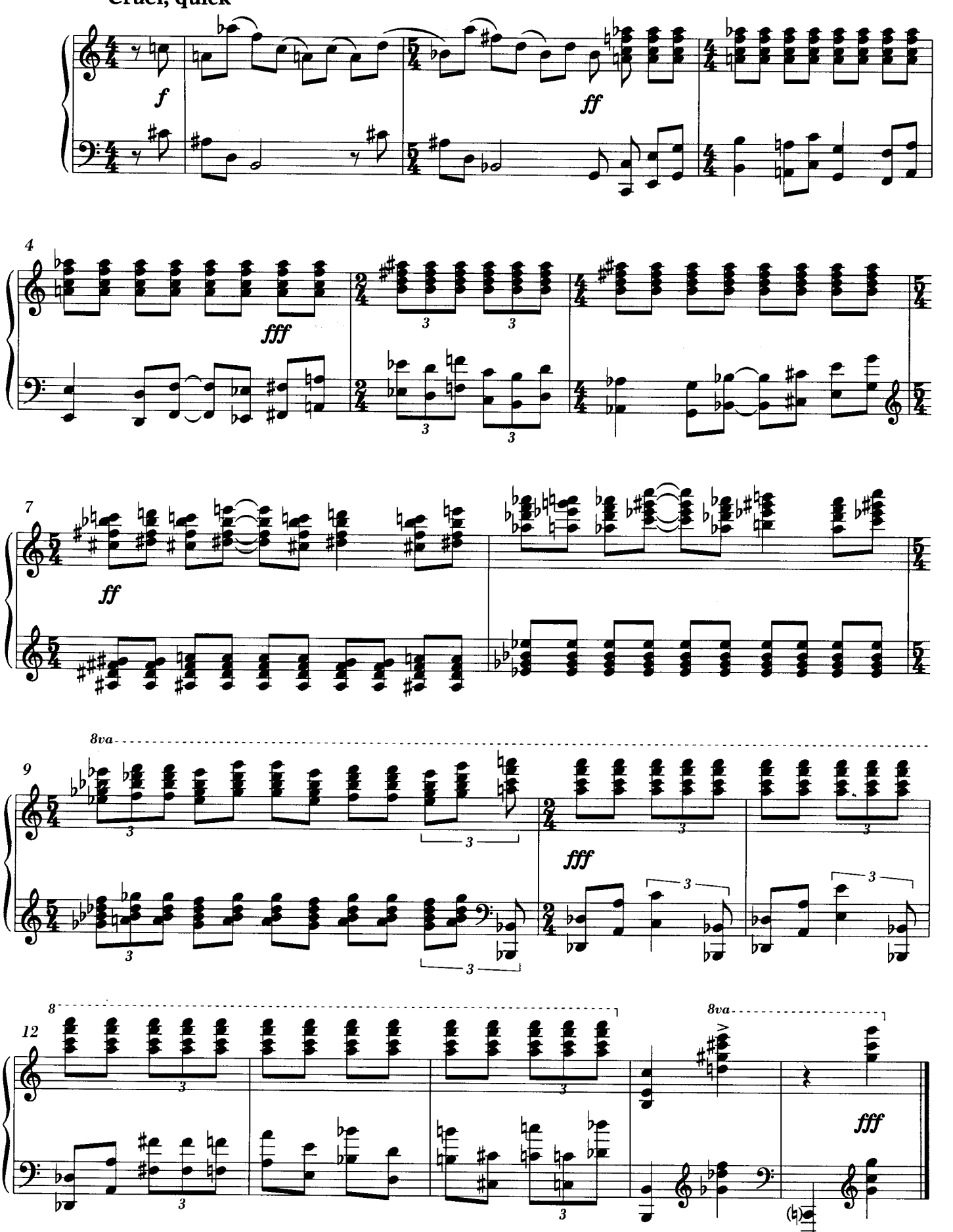

16
20
8va
ff
8
24
cresc.
8
28
fff
vibrante
pp
gliss.
Ped.
*

XLIII

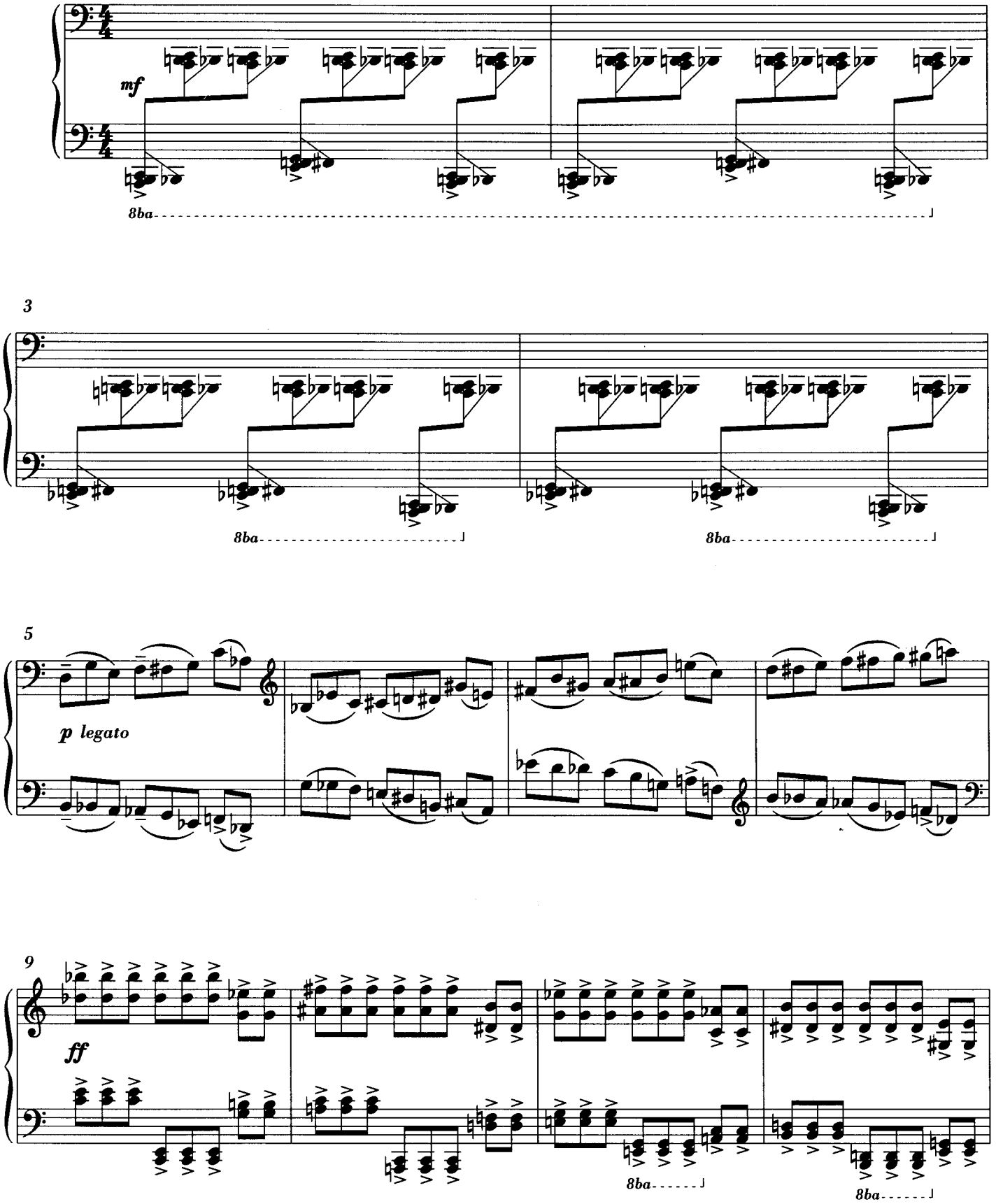


XLIV

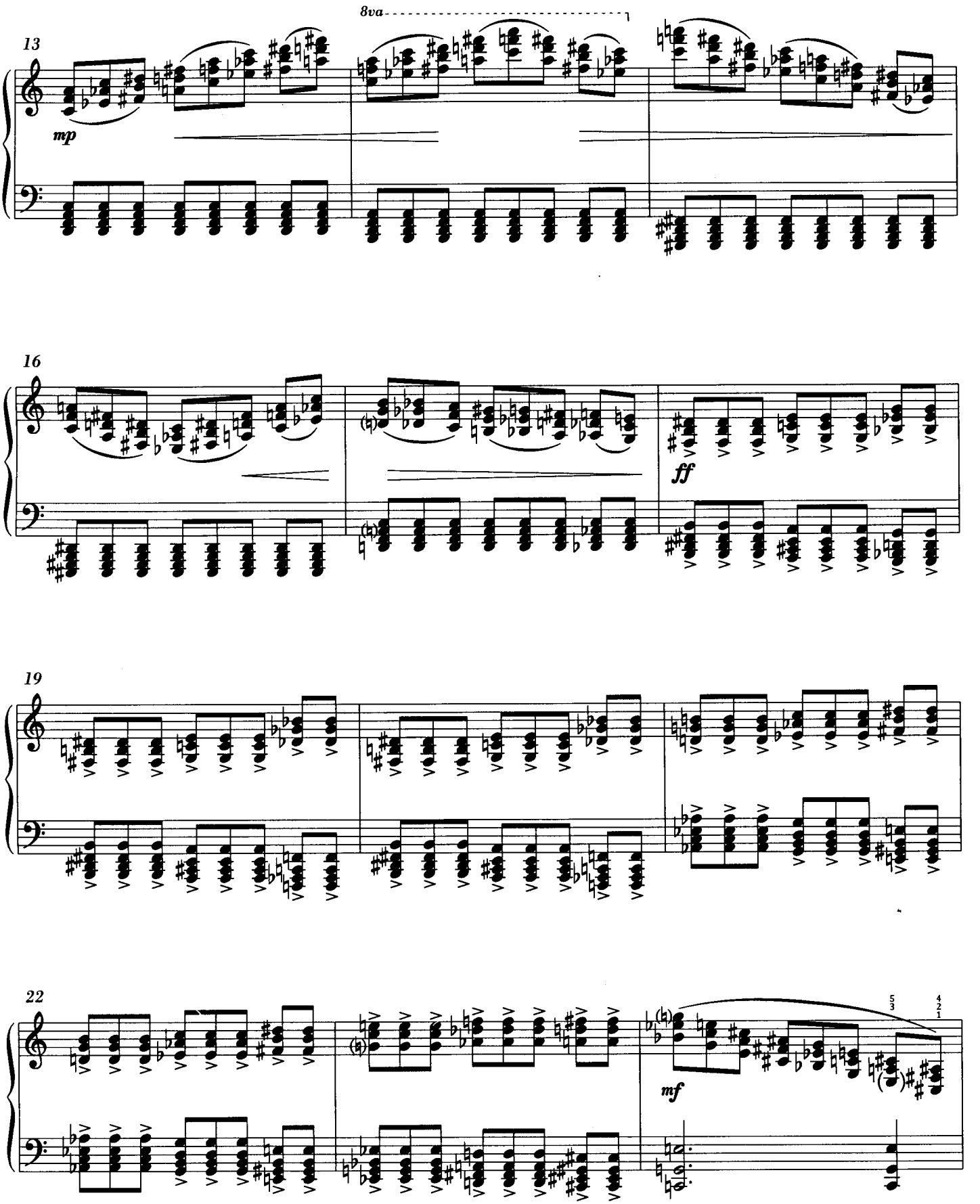
Cruel, quick



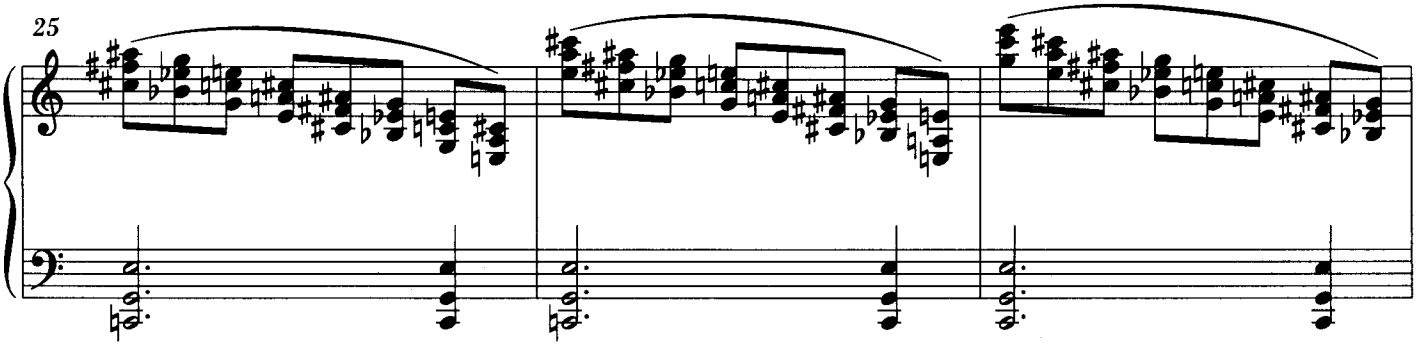
XLV
PERCUSSION DANCE*



* Choose a tempo that can be maintained to m. 42. Editor suggests ♩ = 104


13
8va
mp
16
ff
19
22
mf

25



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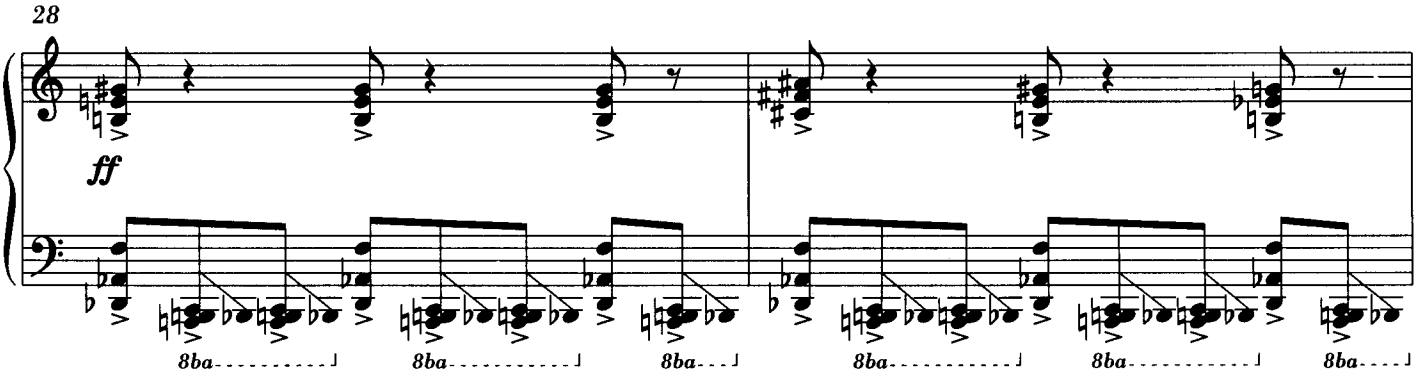
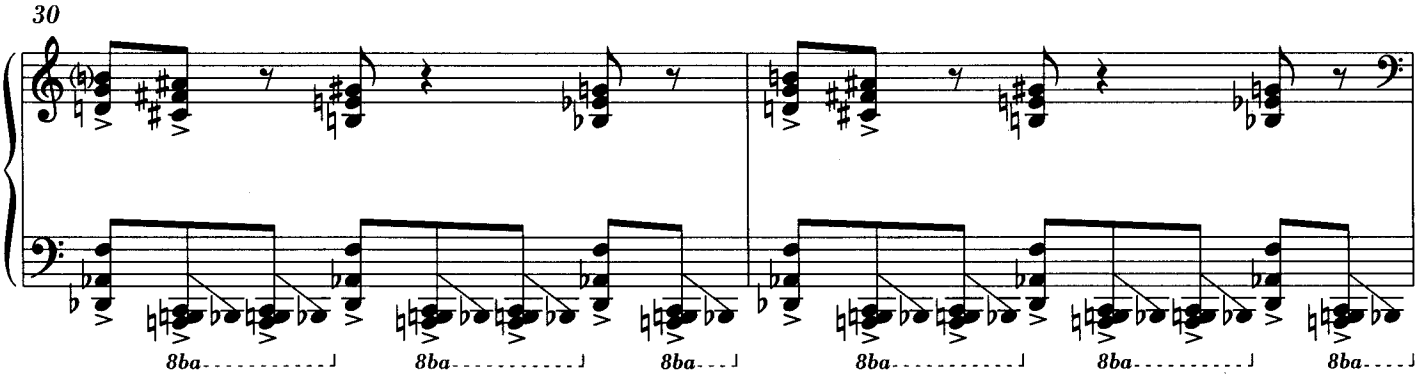

ff
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba

30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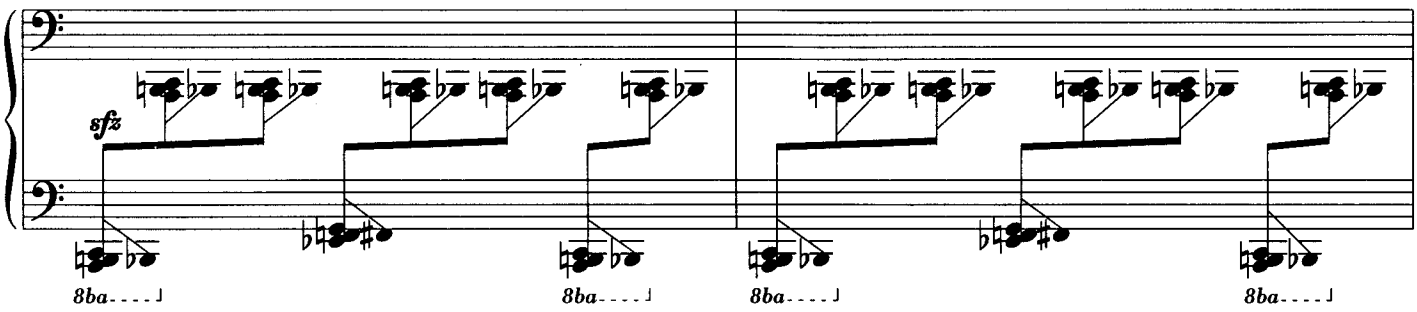
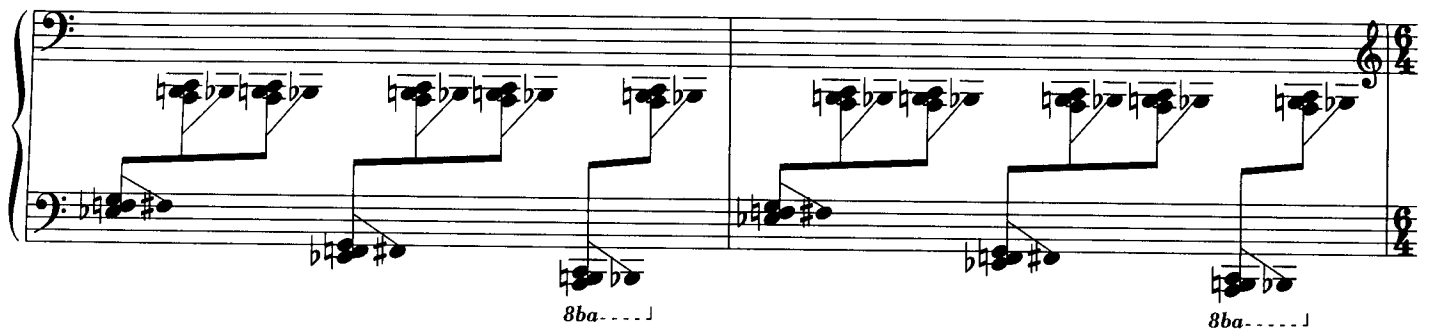
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba

32


sfz
8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba

34



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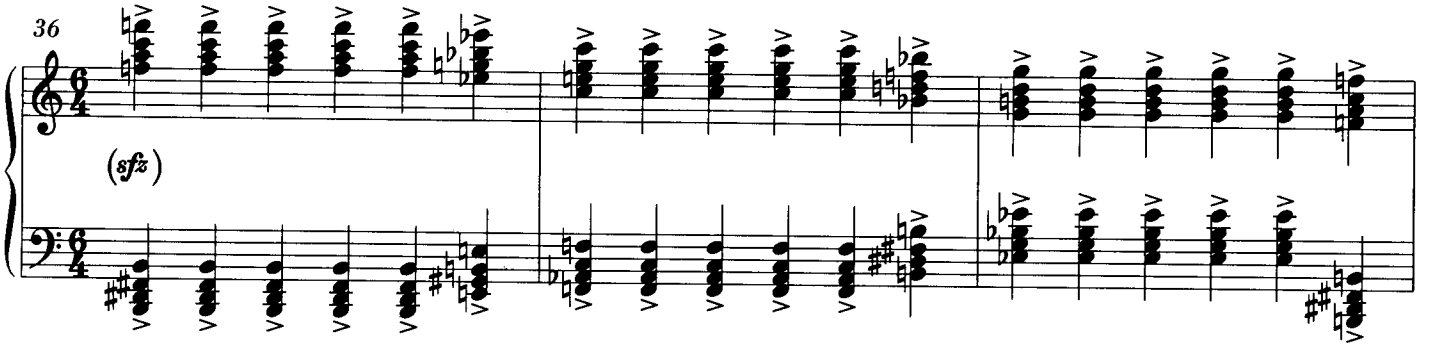

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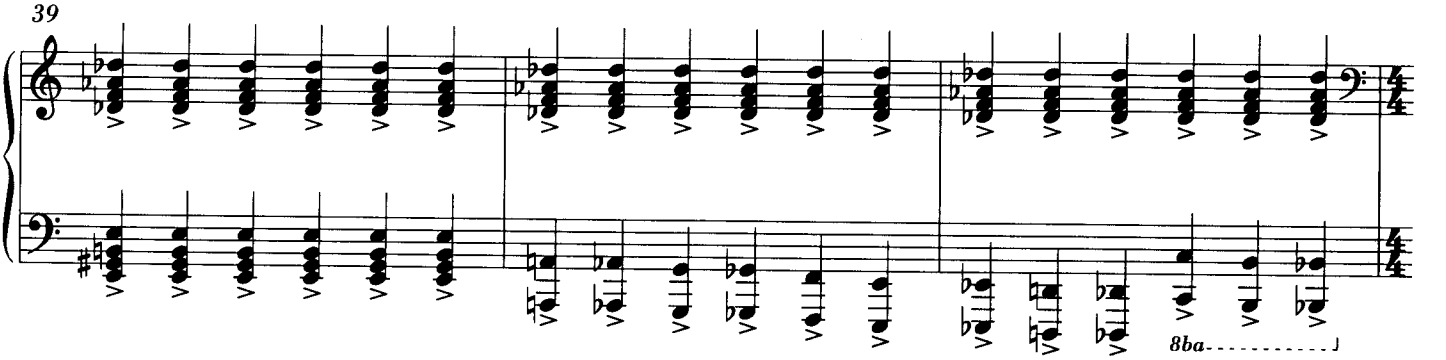
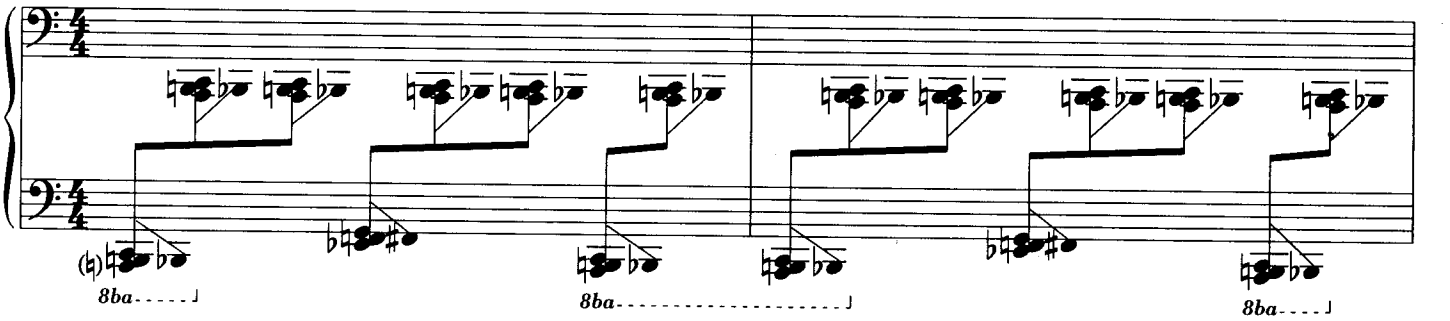


42 **Slower than beginning**



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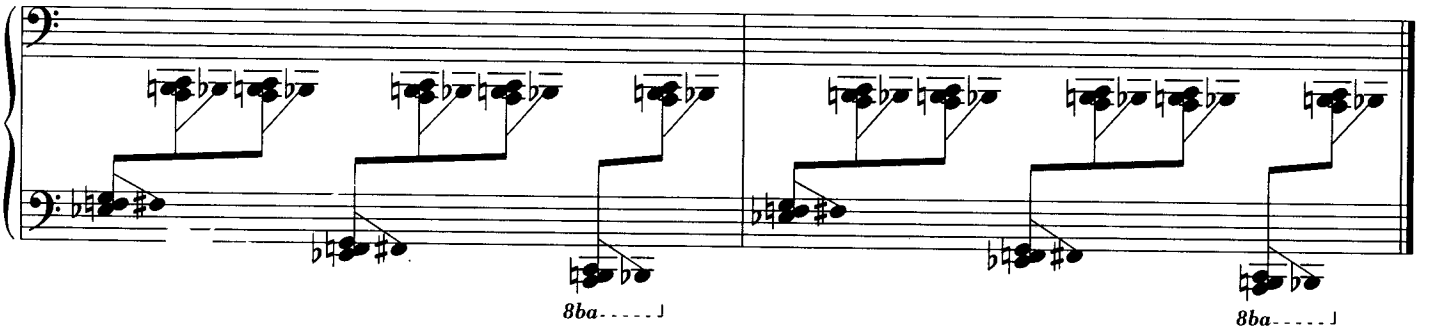
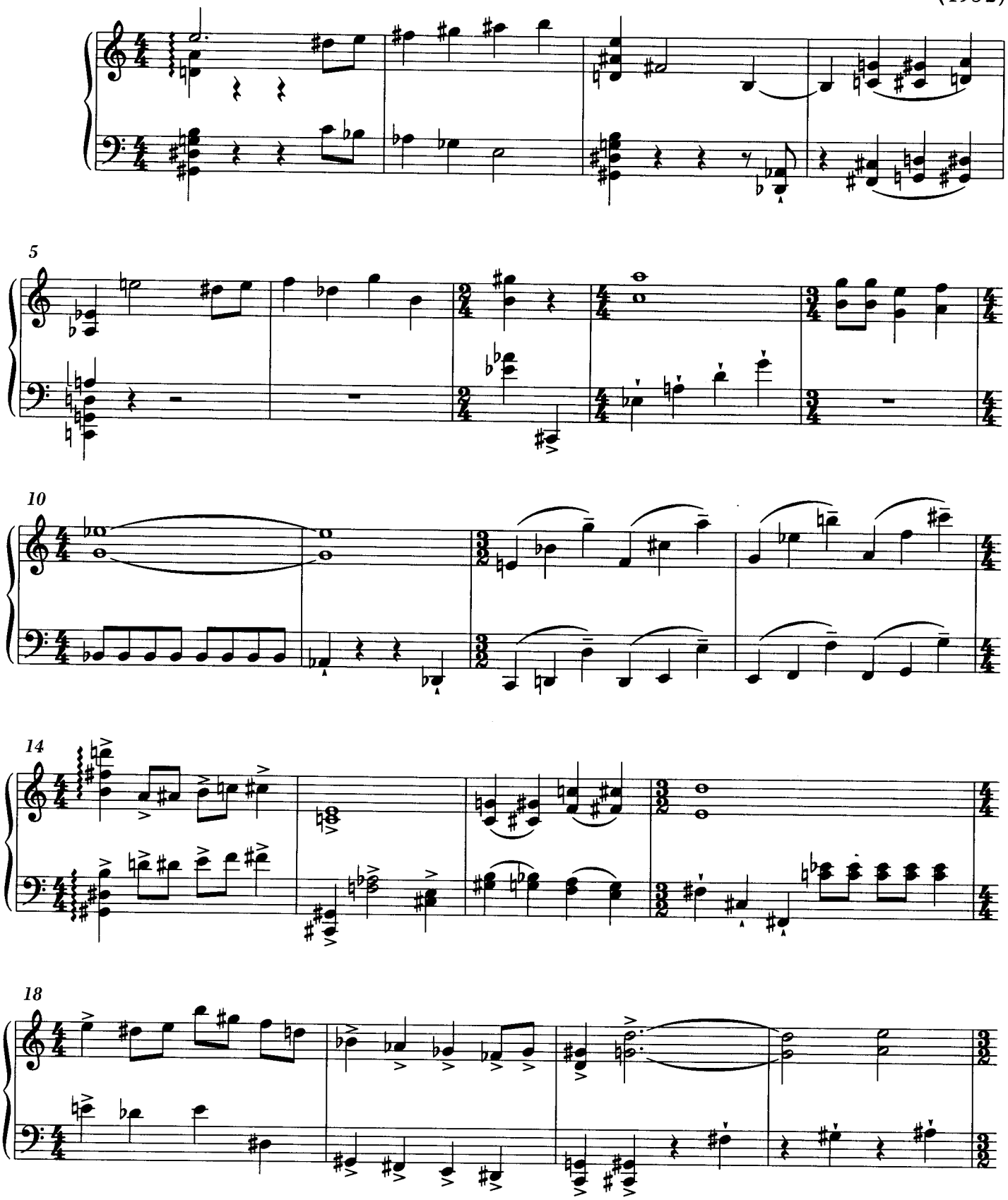


to Aaron Copland

SONATINA*

(1932)



* Antheil wrote on the title page of his manuscript, "This sonatina may be played by either a single piano, or the combination of violin and cello; but in either case, cold and rather dry." — Ed.

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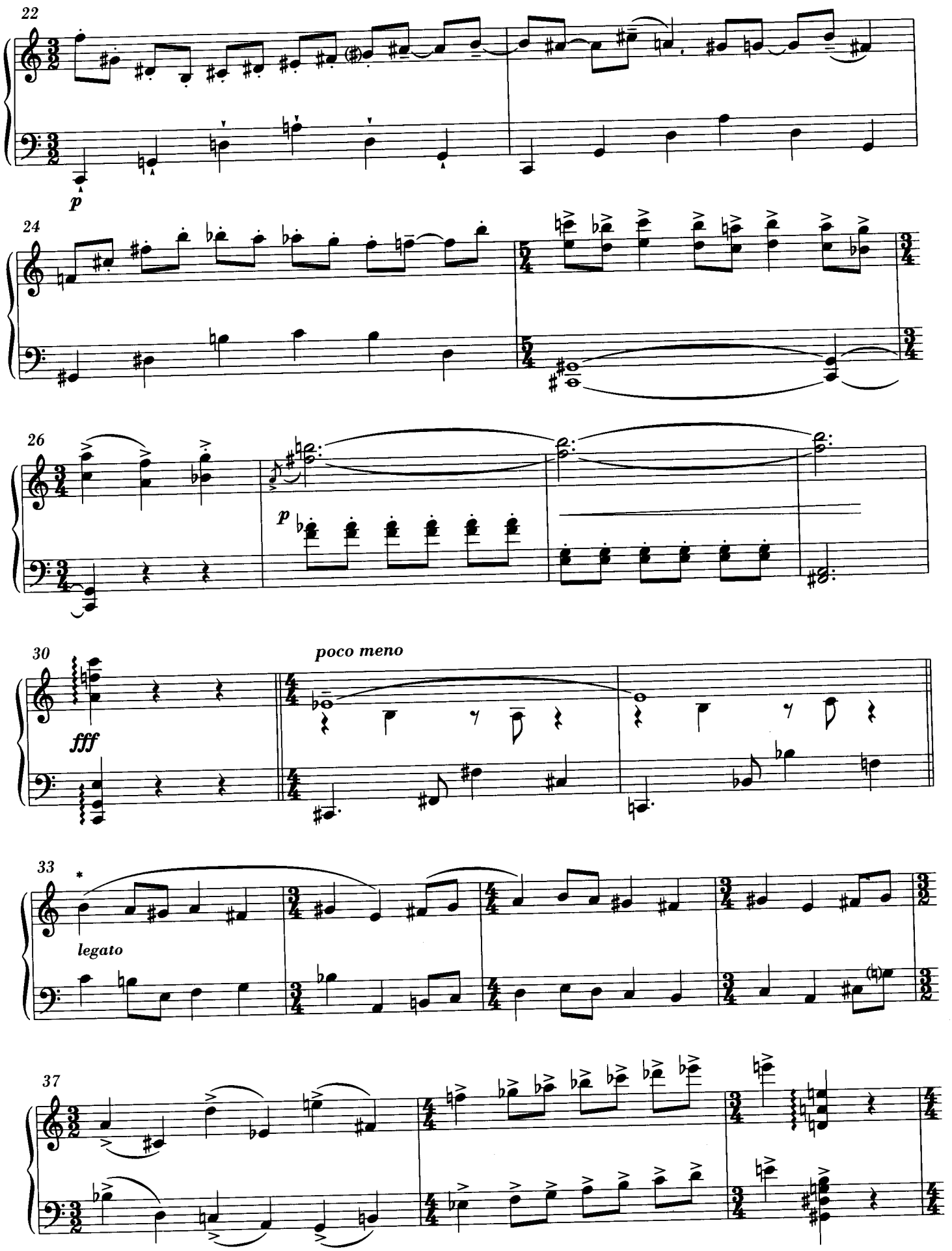
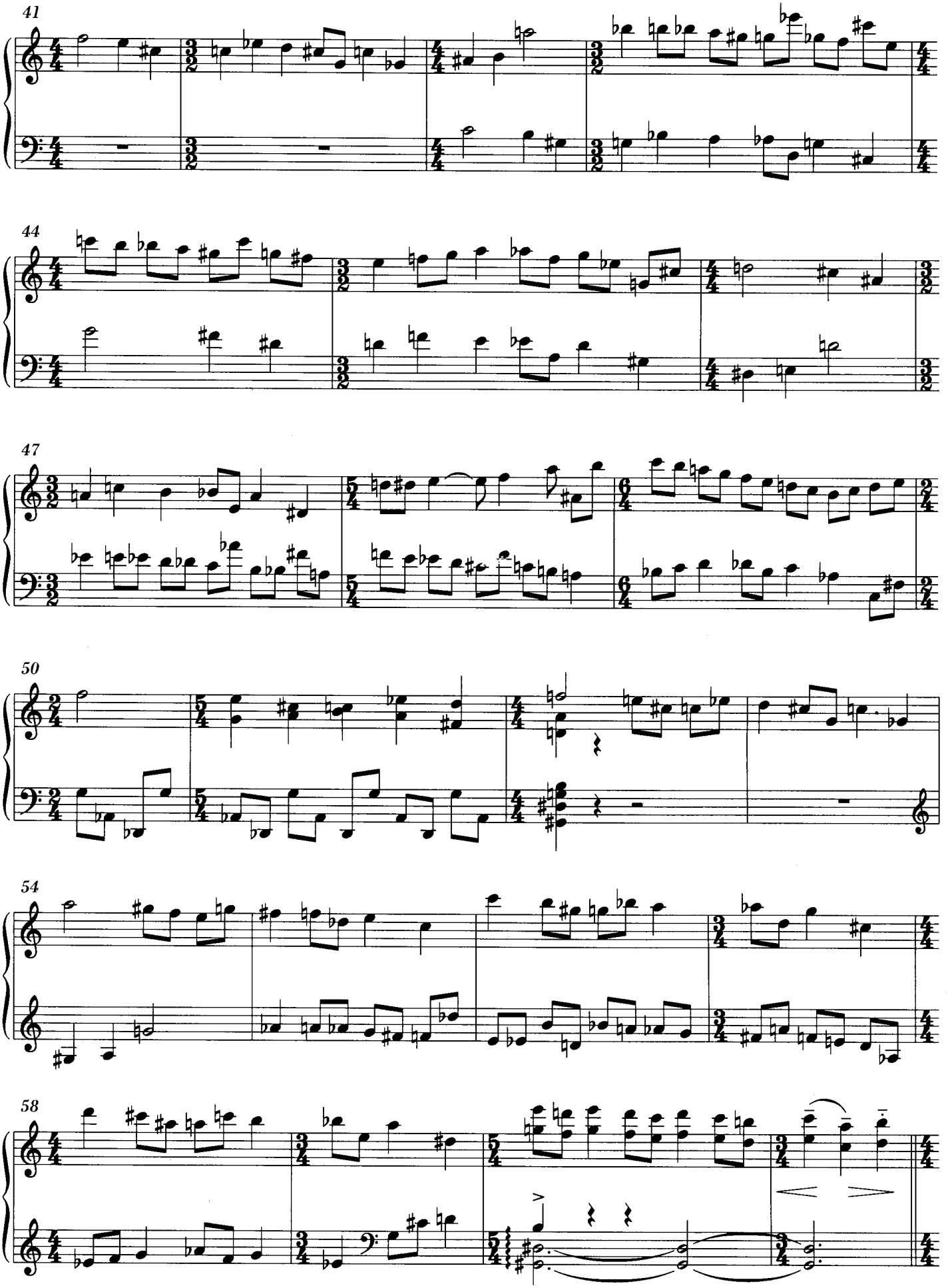


* These slurs may be bowings (for the violin and cello version) in the manuscript, but they are good musical phrasings for piano. — Ed.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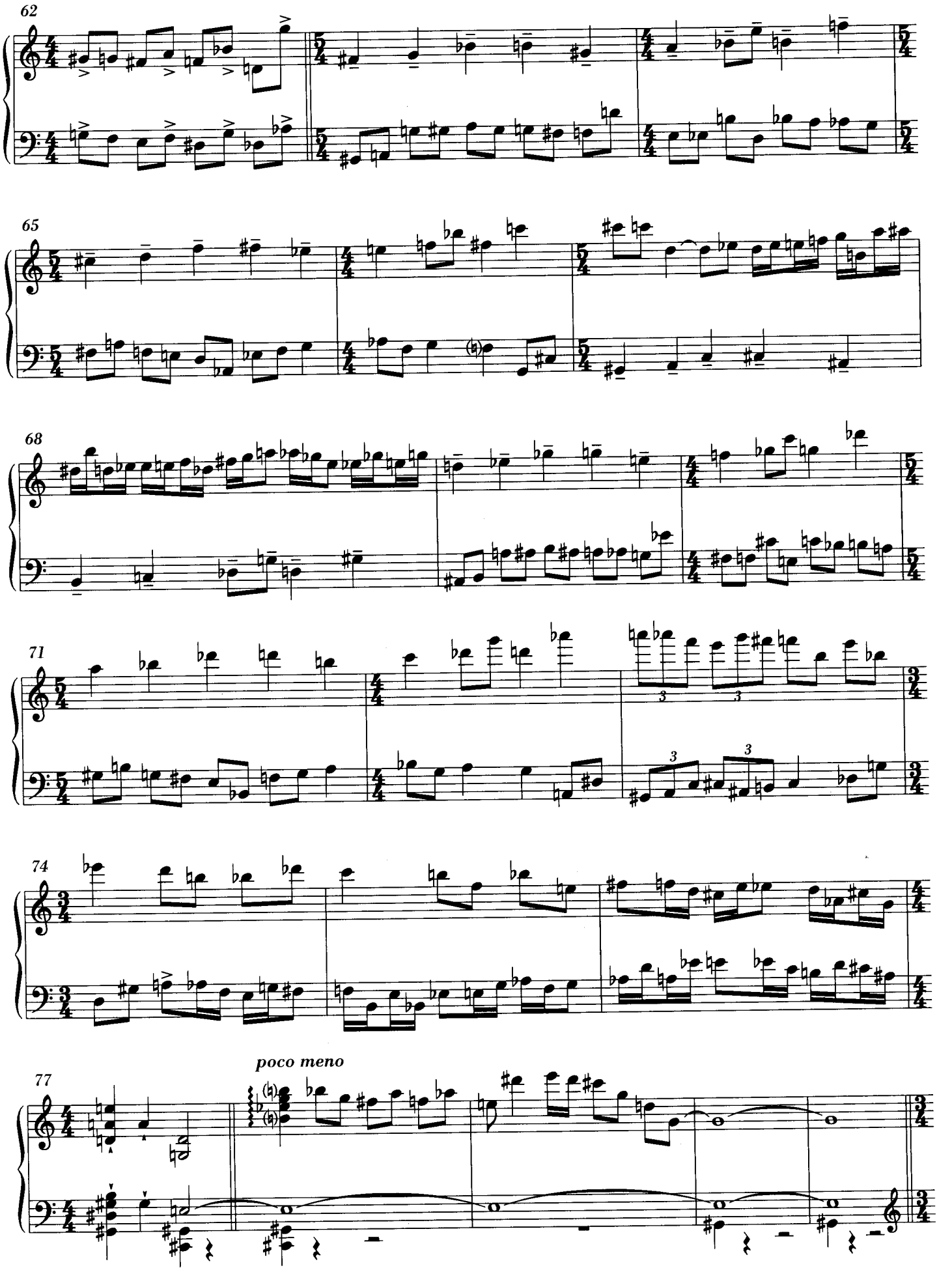
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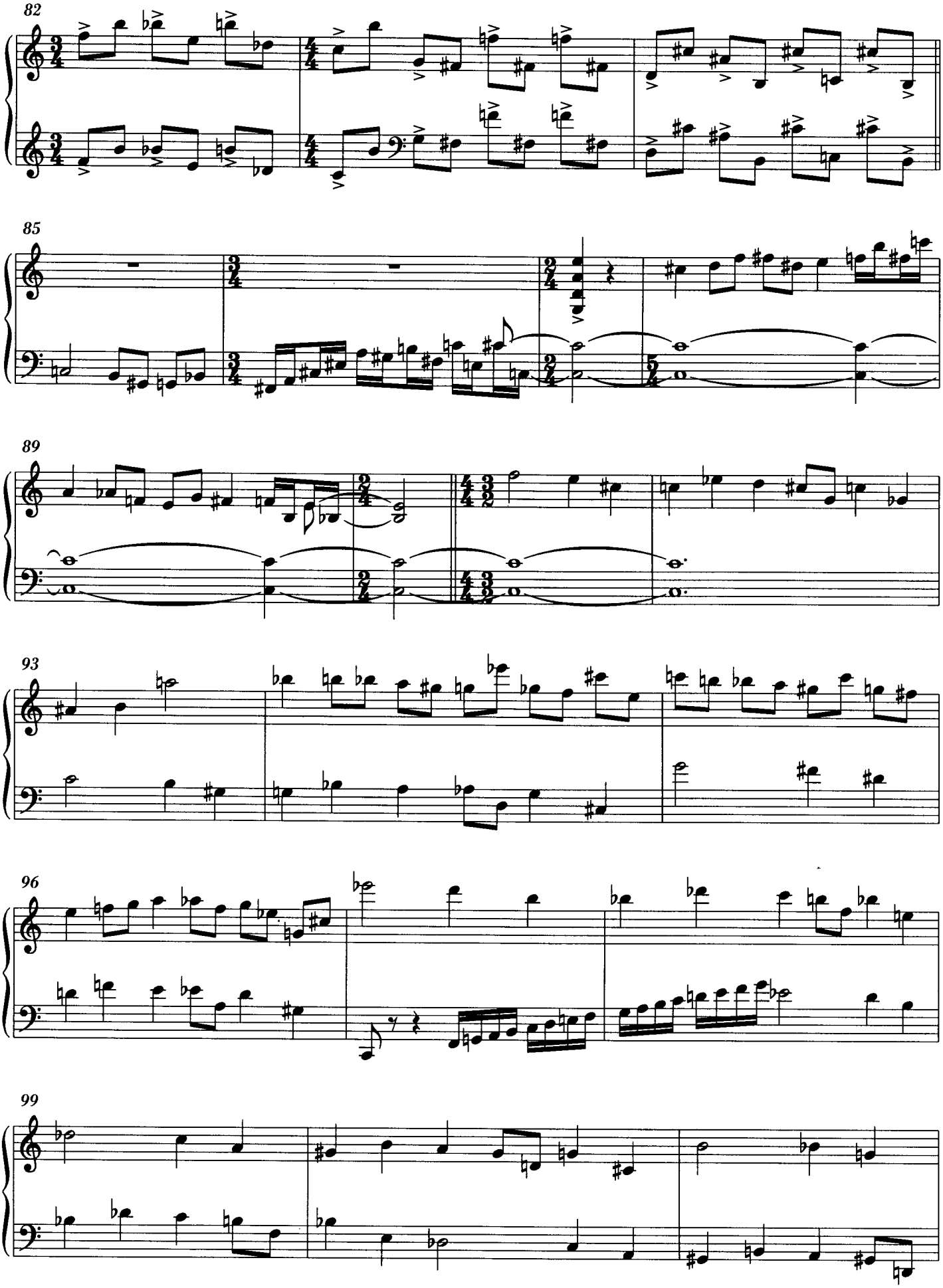
65
68
71
74
77
poco meno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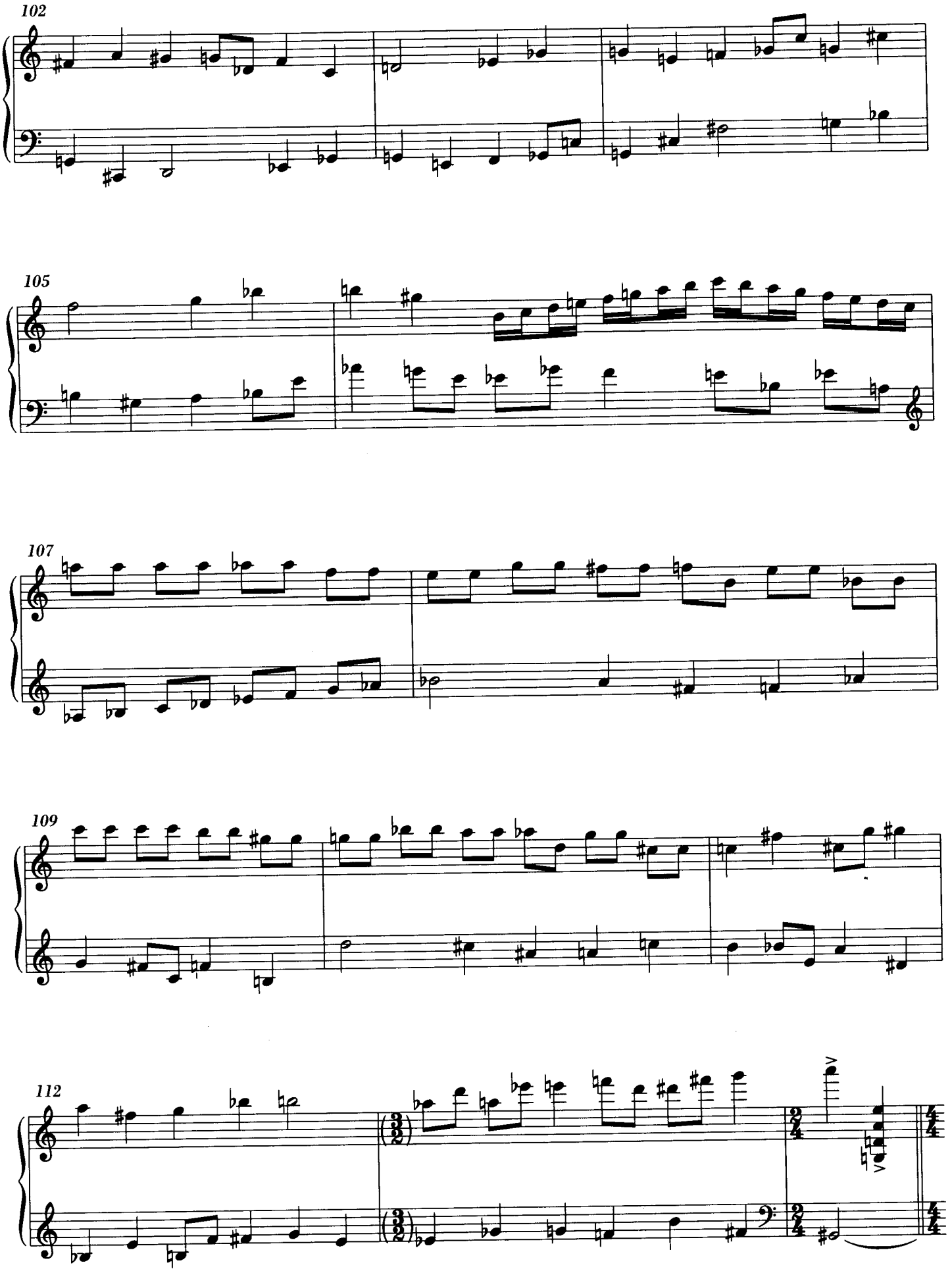
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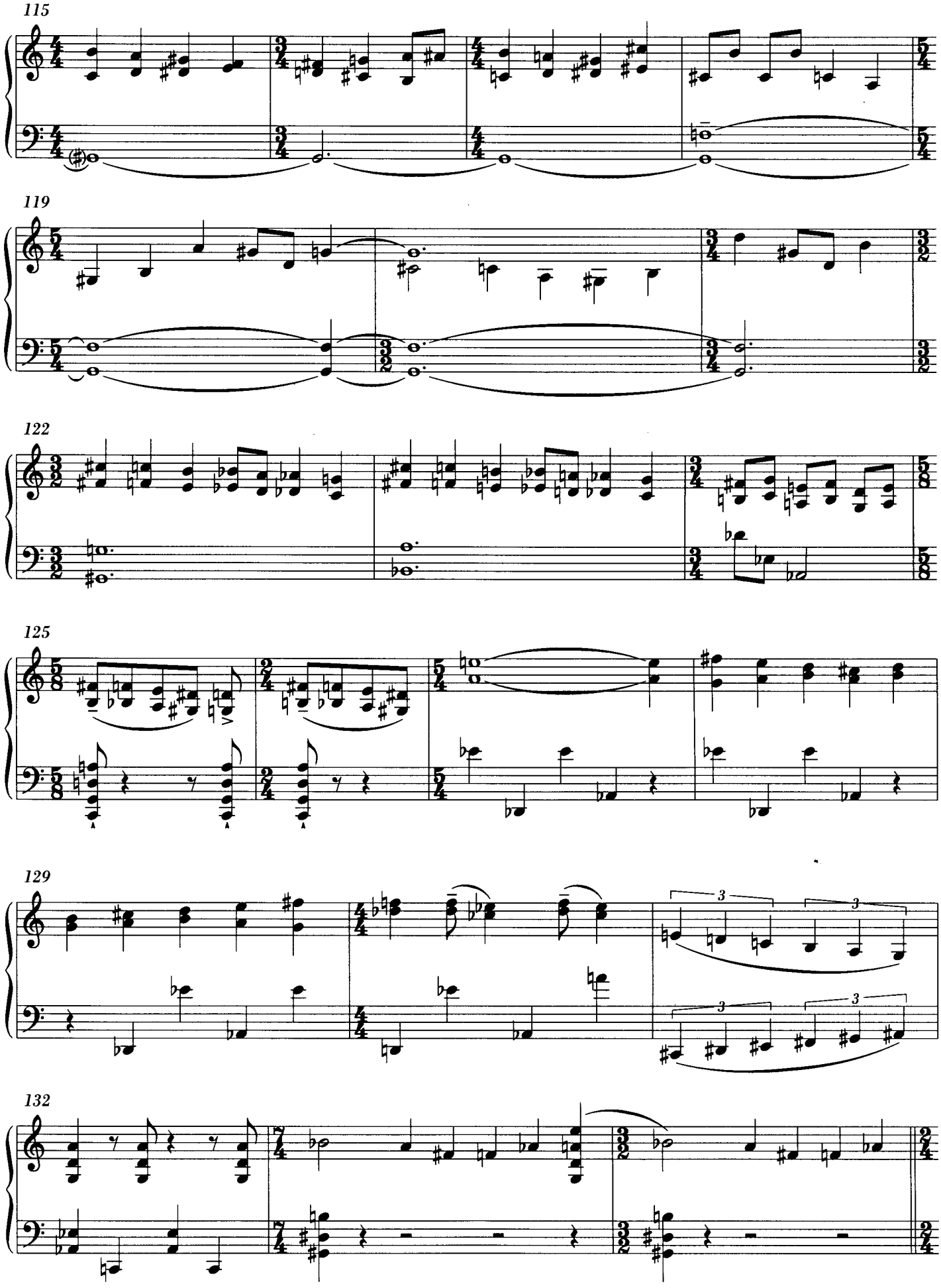
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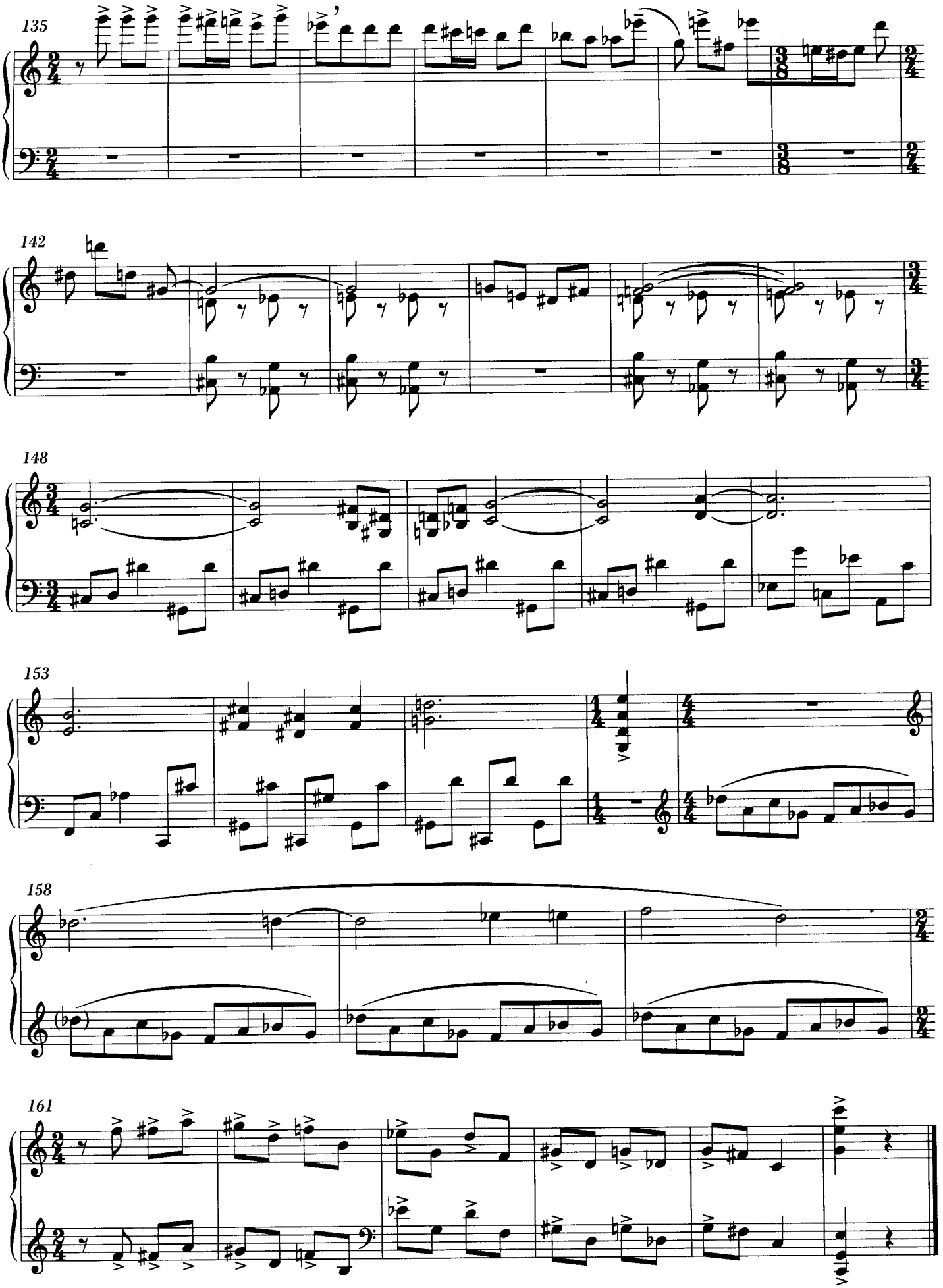
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