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Inferno

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THESIS TITLE

INFERNO

for piano

Composer:

STEPHEN KACHENOVICH

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Music in Composition in the School of Music
Jordan College of the Arts, Butler University, Indianapolis, IN USA

COMMITTEE

Dr. Michael Schelle, chair/advisor _____

Dr. Frank Felice (reader) _____

DR. RUSTY JONES
~~Prof. Gary Walters~~ (reader) _____

Dr. Jeffrey Gillespie (reader) _____

Date (final approval): 25 March 2015 Advisor _____

Inferno

for piano

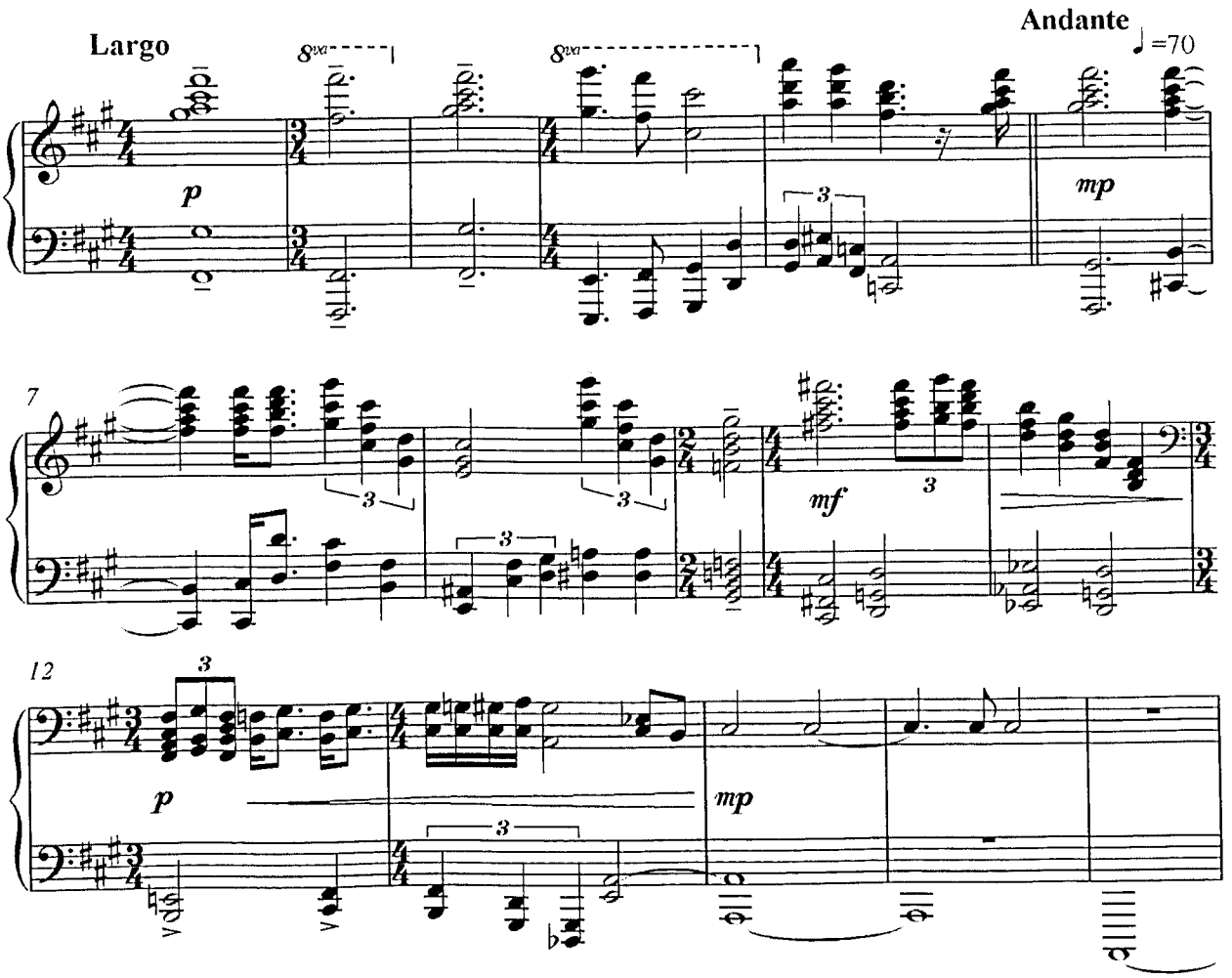
Stephen "Kyle Valentine" Kachenovich

Inferno is a large piano work in fourteen movements inspired by the "Inferno" from Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*. *The Divine Comedy,* widely regarded as one of the most important Christian works ever written, is an epic poem separated into three volumes: "Inferno", "Purgatory", and "Paradise". "Inferno" is the most recognized of the three, and is more appealing to me with its representation of Hell, death, and the afterlife. The "Inferno" is the beginning of Dante's travels with the deceased poet, Virgil. His journey begins in a forest and continues through limbo, the gates of Hell, and deep into the nine divided circles. Each circle represents a particular sin, and the souls cast into each circle are tormented with a punishment appropriate to that sin for eternity. Each circle deeper is considered to be worse than the one before it, ending with the final circle where Lucifer himself is sealed away in ice. Dante describes horrific scenes and recalls many historic figures in his work, all of which have been more than enough for many artists to derive inspiration from (Franz Liszt, Salvador Dali, and Gustav Dore, to name a few). My original idea was to write a movement for every canto (for a total of 34), approaching it like a book of preludes such as Bach or Chopin. In the end I approached it more as Liszt did in his "Dante Symphony", telling the story in a shorter piece while still trying to span the entire work. While enjoyed best as a whole, each movement also stands on its own as a solo piece in any combination.

The work is a programmatic. I wanted to represent the text and visuals through different motives, themes, and overall musical ambience of the work. The real question with such a work is one that harkens back to a conversation between Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner: the question, "How does one portray Heaven and God's everlasting love?" referring to Liszt's idea to represent Paradise in his symphony. The same principle applies to the "Inferno", here, but more along the lines of, "How does one portray the eternal punishment of the damned?" While I

personally believe such a feat is difficult, if not impossible, it is still something that can inspire great works of varying degrees that can be held as respectable representations and showcase of talent and passion.

The first two movements are the prelude to Dante's descent into Hell. The first fifteen measures of the first movement appear twice in the entire suite. (Example 1)

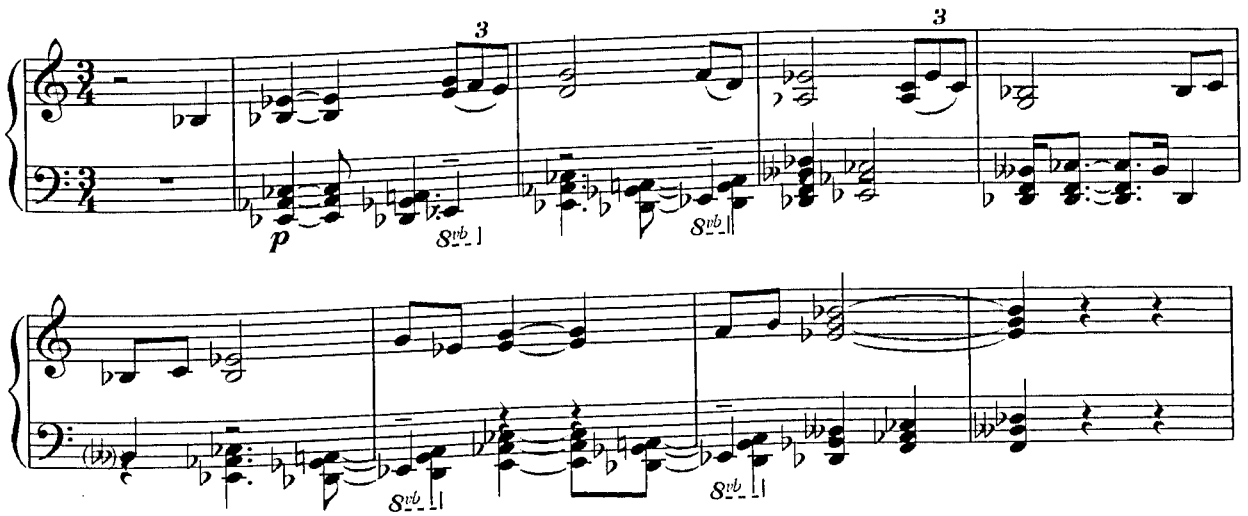


Example 1, movement no. 1, m. 1-16

This segment begins the first movement as well as the final movement, bringing the entire suite together in full circle: the beginning of a life-altering journey and finally reaching the finish line in the icy pits of the deepest circle of Hell. I wanted to use the open fifths to

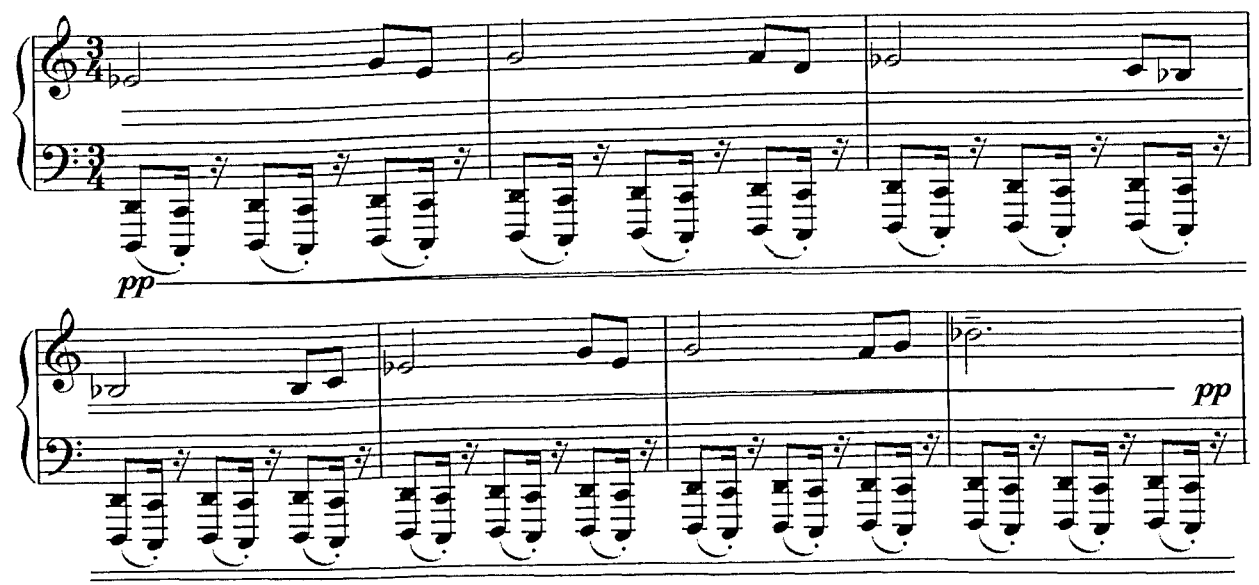
create the feeling of vast space, considering the depth of the literature and expanse of the composition. In the left hand they move up and down in half steps, and in the right hand they move in leaps. Once the introduction of the first movement quiets down to the lowest A on the keyboard, the piece progresses into atonality. The aim of the performer is to use the separation and staccato to represent the eerie silence and loneliness of the forest in which Dante begins his quest. The major key returns once Dante reaches a massive hill, representing the calm the hill brings in the dark forest. Then Virgil, a very calm soul appearing to Dante as a Shade, I felt was best represented in a hymn-like style. As a constant guide leading Dante through his travels to the righteous path, it only felt appropriate to associate his theme with a familiar church style. Despite keeping the mood in the end mellow and calm for Virgil, the inverted A-major chord sustains over a gentle low C natural, foreshadowing the upcoming journey.

The second movement is the calmest of the piece, as it represents Dante receiving wisdom and courage from St. Lucia, Beatrice, and Mary. This particular movement follows less of a step-by-step story than the first movement, rather depicting gentle grace and a glimmer of hope before the descent into Hell. The end of the movement, much like the first movement, adds unease to the rest of the piece by descending in half steps. This descent is followed by the opening of the third movement, which is the familiar melody of "Amazing Grace". I wanted the melody to be heard in a very different context than its original intention, since nearly everyone is familiar with the tune, words, and meaning of the hymn. An accidental change at the end of the initial phrase will disrupt the expected harmonies, and using bi-tonality between the hands (Eb-major in the right, Ab-minor in the left), "Amazing Grace" sounds like another piece. "I once was lost, but now am found" suddenly has a new meaning when one sees it in the guise of waking up in Hell.



Example 2, movement no. 3, m. 8-15

The piece continues as such briefly before the left hand motive represents Charon's, the ferryman to Hell, oars rowing up to the Shores of Acheron to guide the souls to judgment.

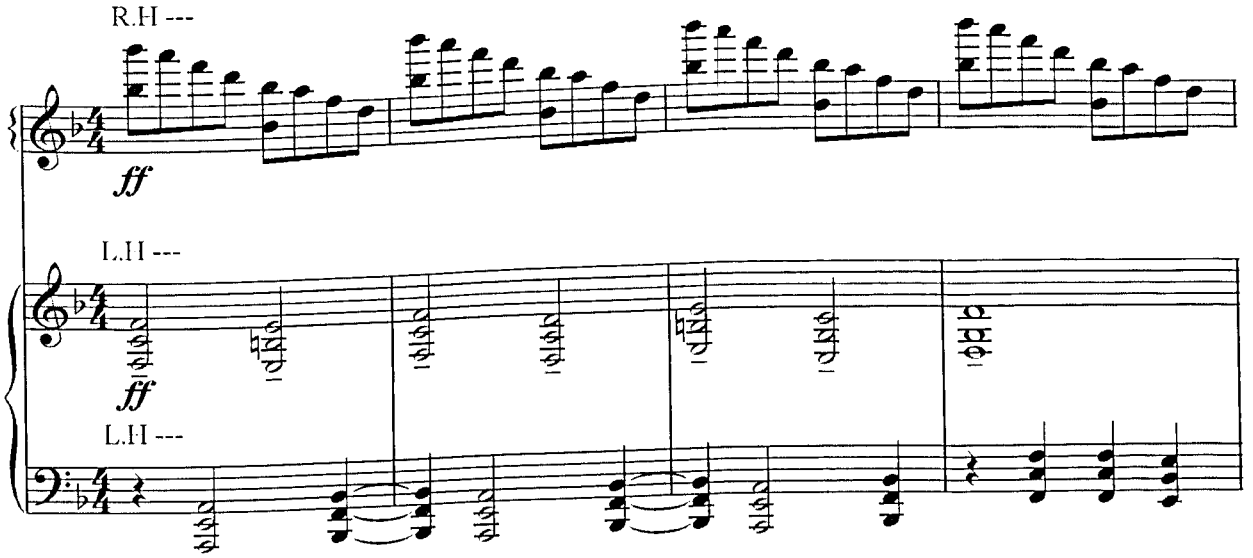


Example 3, movement no. 3, m. 26-32

The remainder of the movement is heavily influenced by the Romantic style of piano works, most notably Frederic Chopin's works, as the souls are ferried to their fate.

The fourth movement is different from the previous in that the performer plays inside the piano, and the notes are more for a lingering ambience than any true melody or harmony. This slow, ominous movement represents Limbo, the area of Hell where those who were not so much sinners to be judged to a particular circle of Hell and were not righteous enough to reach the gates of Heaven. Many of the souls here at Dante's time included many pagans and prophets that were before Christ's time, and I felt it appropriate to create unstable harmonies and longer tones to represent what kind of interesting conversations could be held with such a group of people in one place (Socrates, Plato, etc…).

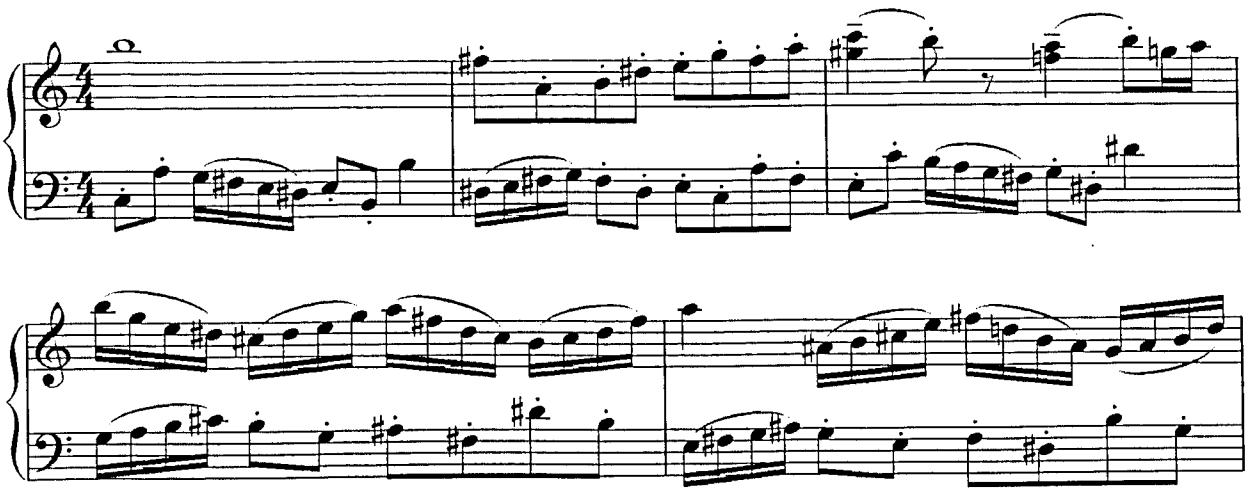
King Minos, the judge of Hell, is the focus of the chaotic fifth movement. King Minos's judgment is second only to God's, making him a very feared and powerful being. Once more, I incorporated an over-used melody, but it is one I enjoy very much and I felt it very appropriate for this scenario: the Dies Irae. The theme starts in open fifths, and closes with a falling B-flat major seventh chord. Both are very prominent in the A (m. 17-36) and C (m. 57-77) sections of the piece. The *Dies Irae*, being originally used for Judgment Day, speaks for itself in the piece. I personally see Minos gathering the souls in his hand, as he is portrayed as a very large beast, and upon judgment he hurtles them downward to the appropriate circle, hence constant use of the falling chord. The middle section is a macabre, playful dance of insanity, as I imagine flames and clouds and thunder swirling around the area. The *Dies Irae* and falling chords come back in the C section, but are separated into three staves:



Example 4, movement no. 5, m. 57-60

The left hand, in one staff, is playing the *Dies Irae* in open fifths again, and leaps down between the beats to slam pedaled (forcefully stomp the pedal and hold while at the same time as the performer hits the keys) fifths as an underlying bass. The right hand places the falling chords in two octaves, changing keys and leaping to increase the tension and excitement leading up to the finale of the performer crashing down on the keys with his or her forearms.

Now that there is a very strong basis of introduction to the "Inferno", the next several movements start spanning different instances in the poem and circles of Hell. In the sixth movement, the piece is light and polyphonic, heavily influenced by the timber of the harpsichord. It is a very light piece, as indicated by the many use of staccato articulations and monophonic lines in each hand.



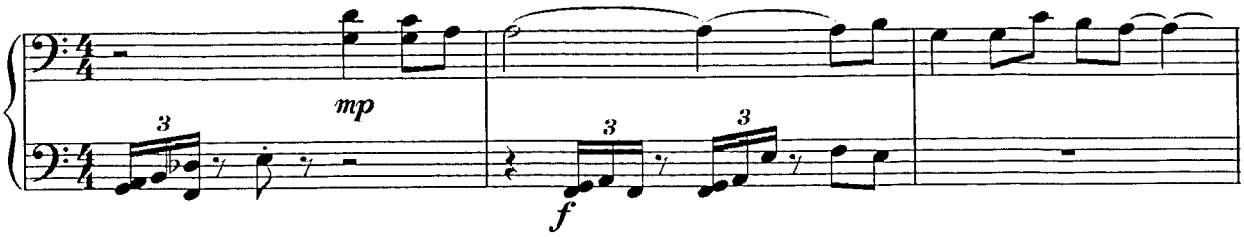
Example 5, movement no. 6, m. 10-14

At this point, we are still at the earlier circles of Hell and therefore lighter punishment. By the time the seventh movement is in full force with its frantic chord pulses and choppy melodies, it becomes very apparent that we are breaching the lower, more menacing depths of Hell.

The seventh movement, in fact, is very focused on the idea of violence and anger. Such is exactly what makes the eighth movement so much of a jolt: it is a very slow, tonal, and melodic music box style of a piece. While still being in the area of Hell reserved for the wrathful, this movement was set to those violent against themselves: suicide. I wanted to approach the subject as innocently as possible, as it is the ultimate self-harm that takes away any kind of innocence in an instant from one's self. As melodic as the piece is, the performer has several marks to slam down random keys on either end of the piano with his/her elbow while continuing to play, overpowering the piece with outbursts much like the life so quickly being taken away.

The ninth movement continues the journey into Hell with The Sand Waste and Rain of Fire, which essentially covers a travel through a desert which rains fire on the victims below. The movement is a quieter reprieve from the previous, focusing on more of the journey and the

atmosphere than the punishments surrounding Dante and Virgil. The tenth movement focuses on Dante's many encounters with the sinners below, as the piece itself is a conversation.

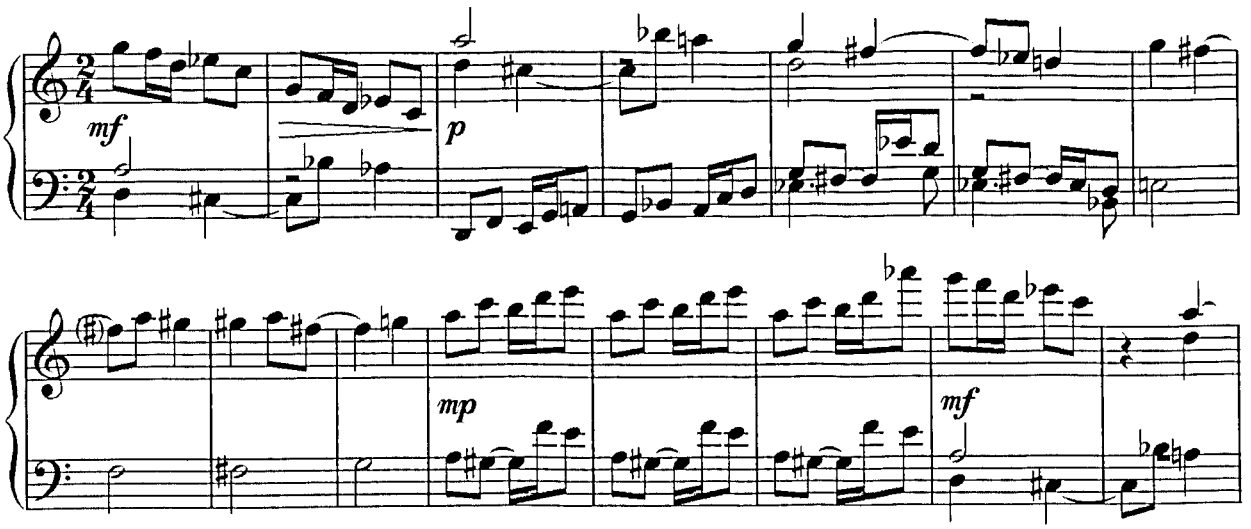


Example 6, movement no. 10, m. 8-11

In the above example, the right hand has a simple, tonal melody and is set at *mezzo piano*. At the same time, we see short and abrupt clusters in the left hand at forte. Dante is the right hand, and the sinners are the left hand. Each hand is its own entity, and together they form the representation of Dante and the sinners' conversations.

The eleventh movement takes a break from Hell. It instead focuses on a character I have become very fond of: Virgil. He was the one to lead Dante into Hell to put him back on the righteous path, and always knows when to give Dante a hard push when it was needed to move on with the journey. He was a much respected individual, and his solemn personality reveals his humbleness. I tried to wrap all of these aspects up into one piece meant for Virgil.

The twelfth movement covers the malebolges of Hell. The malebolges are pockets in the eighth circle of Hell that hold different punishments for different categories of fraudulence (seducers, soothsayers, thieves, hypocrites, etc...). With so many different sinners, punishments, and locations, it should be no surprise that this movement uses several variations and combinations of small ideas.

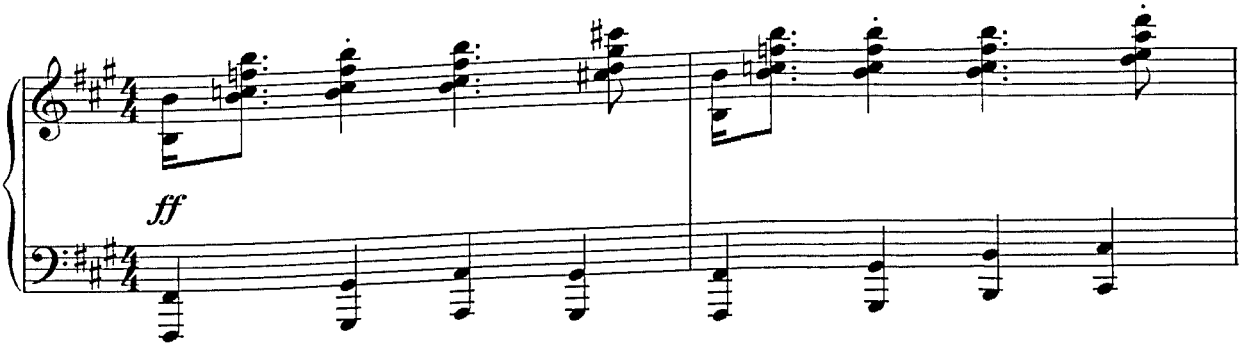


Example 7, movement no. 12, m. 30-44

Once the travel through the malebolges is finally complete, Dante and Virgil reach the lowest circle of Hell. The ninth circle houses traitors, frozen deep in Lake Cocytus and is the beginning of the thirteenth movement. Unlike popular belief, the lowest point of Hell (including the area Satan resides in) is actually iced over rather than engulfed in flames. Much of the movement is in the upper register of the piano. The right hand represents the faint echoes one might hear in this circle, all bouncing to and from the crystal-like walls and lake. In the end, the left hand gently presses the lowest B-flat octave, the lowest sound in the entire piece, representing the ominous foreboding of what lies ahead for Dante and Virgil.

The fourteenth and final movement brings the entire suite full circle with the familiar introduction used in the first movement, and is also the most diverse and biggest single movement of the entire work. As it echoes the first movement, the final movement also has snippets of other movements. We hear the oars of Charon's ship rowing again from the third movement, and after a very dramatic pause, the piece quiets down. This allows the tension to build as the left hand begins to pulse clustered notes underneath the right hand's melismatic line,

all tied together by an accelerando. After peaking at the higher end of the piano, both hands join together in a chain of octaves that works as a transition into the main bulk of the piece. Here, the clustered chords and pounding rhythm is what I used to signify Dante and Virgil descending into Lucifer's lair.



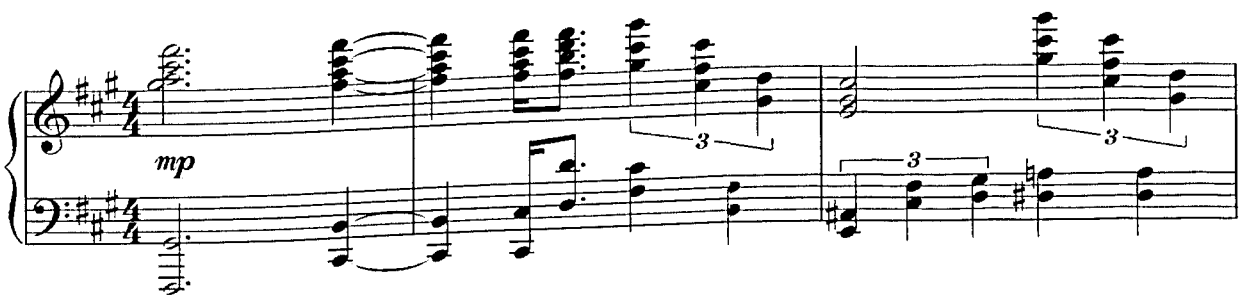
Example 8, movement no. 14, m. 31-32

The drama continues through use of rising chords in combination with varying dynamics up until a common motive returns in a new form: the stepwise motion of chords, much like the ones present in the left hand at the beginning of this movement and the first movement, return for a brief intervention of the piece. This same form of the motive is going to be used several more times as the piece continues.

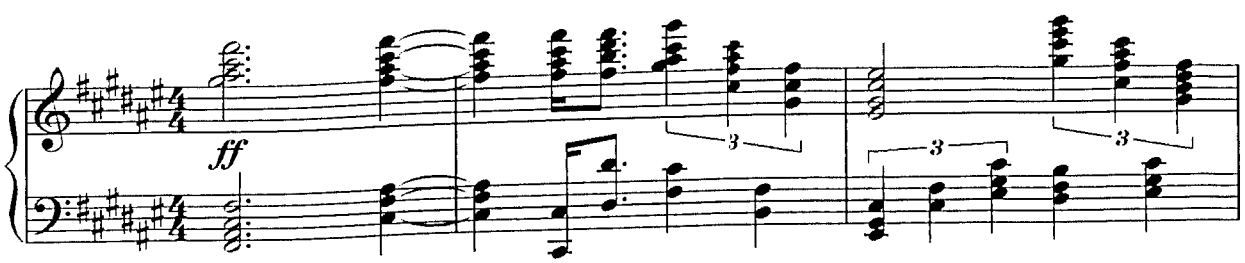
The idea of the motive remains the same, though the harmonies around the measure 53 example maintain tonality. Afterwards, the dynamics are reduced and the style becomes more marcato and light. I used this as a chance to contrast the loud sections prior, as well as represent the recollection of the biggest sinners of betrayal represented in *The Divine Comedy* (Judas, Brutus, and Cassius) in the same ice-themed demeanor as the thirteenth movement. After another iteration of the motive from m.53, one more line of the Dies Irae, as was present in the fifth movement, represents the difficult and dramatic climb Dante and Virgil make up Lucifer's

back to reach the exit of Hell. The Dies Irae ends in a B Major chord (the IV in the F# minor, the current key) held in a fermata. From there, the pianist is instructed to slam pedal the next chord to introduce the new key: a very loud and very powerful C# Major chord, one of the most dramatic uses of any major harmony in the entire suite, to signify the exit from Hell.

The same exact segment from the start of the first and last movements returns in the new key, maintaining the major tonality as opposed to the original's minor tonality.



Example 9, movement no. 1, m. 1-3 (minor)

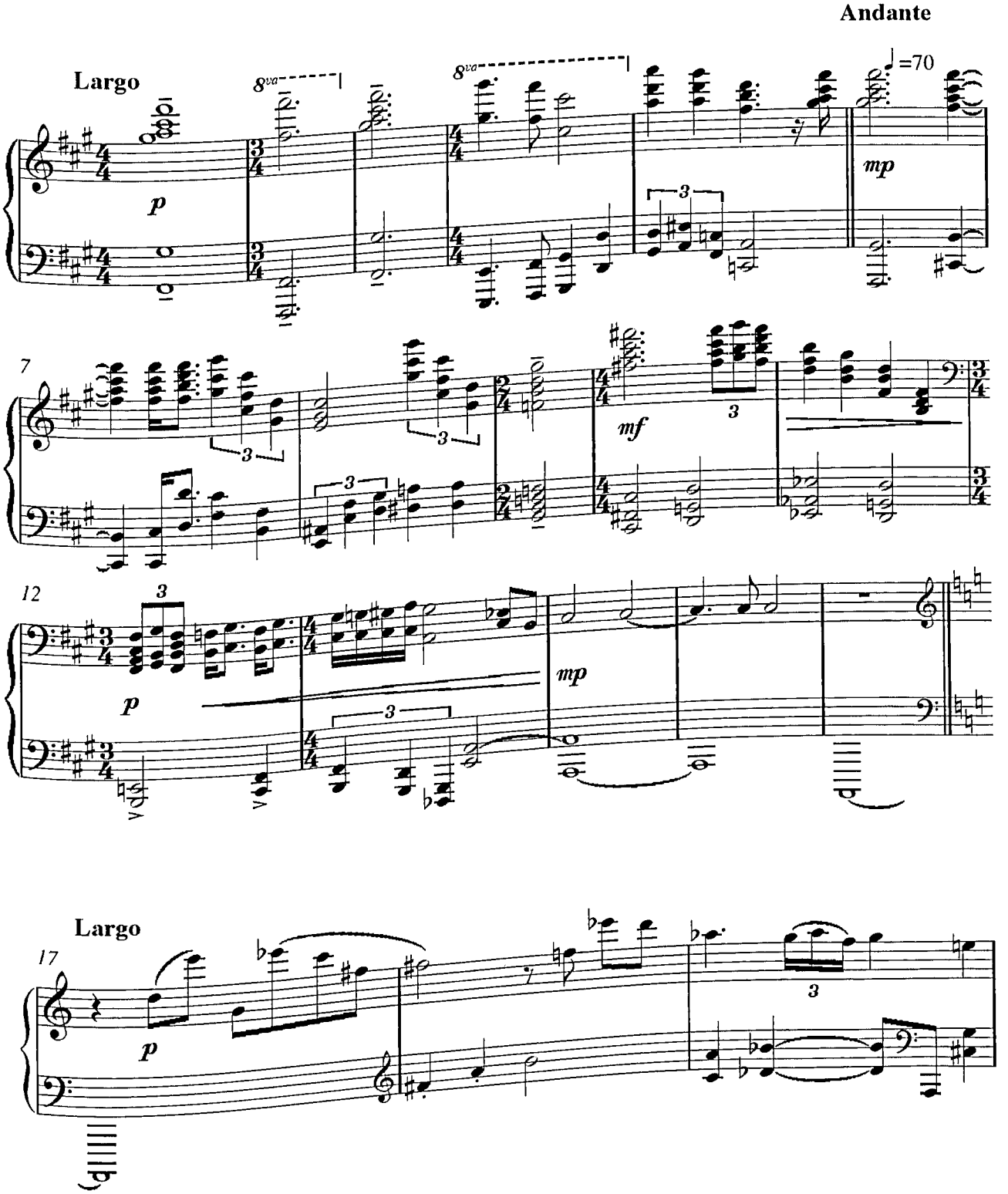


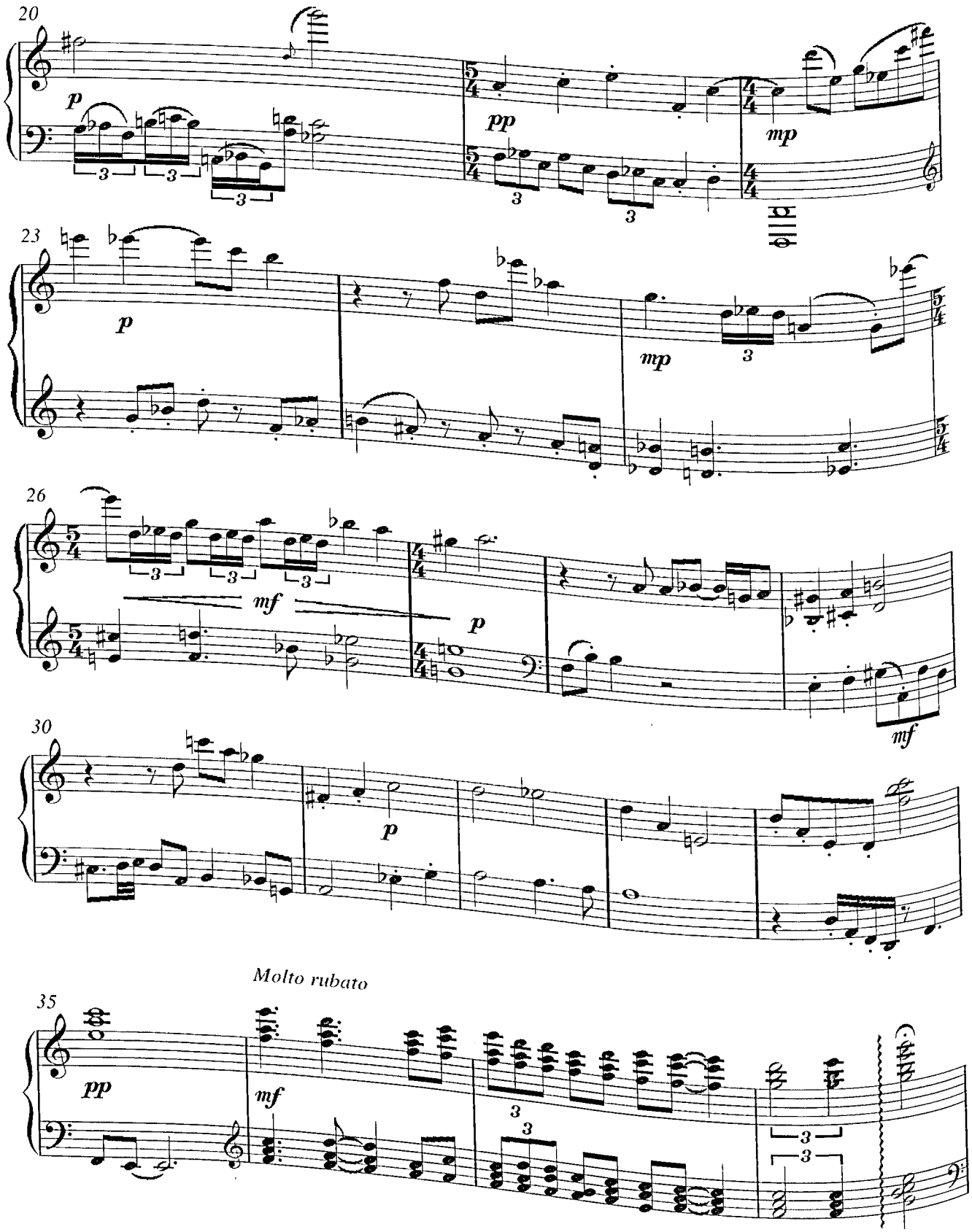
Example 10, movement no. 14, m. 123-125 (major)

This is the final wrap-up of the *Inferno* as well as Dante's and Virgin's journey through Hell, and for a familiar section from a previous movement to return in a new key secures the piece's structure. As Dante and Virgil leave Hell and view the stars and take in the fresh air, the piece allows both performer and audience to also experience relaxation after the onslaught that preceded this section, whether it were just this movement or the suite as a whole. The final section acts as a pastorale, the tonality remaining major and dynamics low as the piece becomes thinner in texture as it nears the final measures, ending in a very quiet major chord to bring the *Inferno* suite to a close.

Much like Dante's book, it can be completely enjoyed in its separate parts alone. How can one expect to see the full message if they only read "Purgatorio" before "Inferno", or if one simply stops after "Inferno"? The luster of the work is still there, but the fulfilling meaning remains to be felt! I want my listeners and performers to look at each movement and note where I have implanted segments of other movements in the suite (some not even mentioned here) and get the sense that each movement is an adequate work inside an even bigger adequate work, which will all undoubtedly become another piece of an even larger piece as I continue to explore Dante's work.

I




20
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23
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26
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30
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Molto rubato
35
pp
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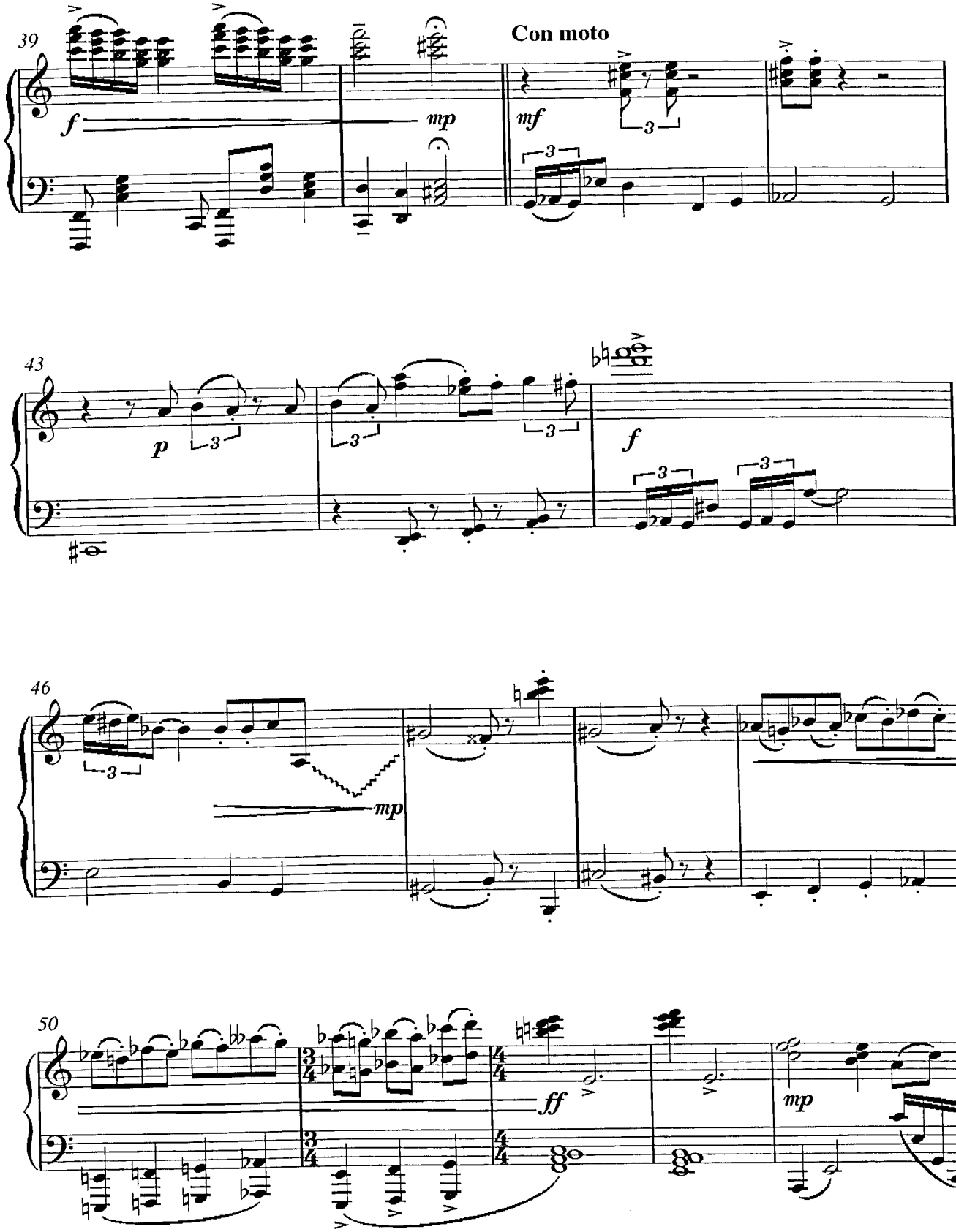
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Con moto
f
mp
mf
43
p
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46
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50
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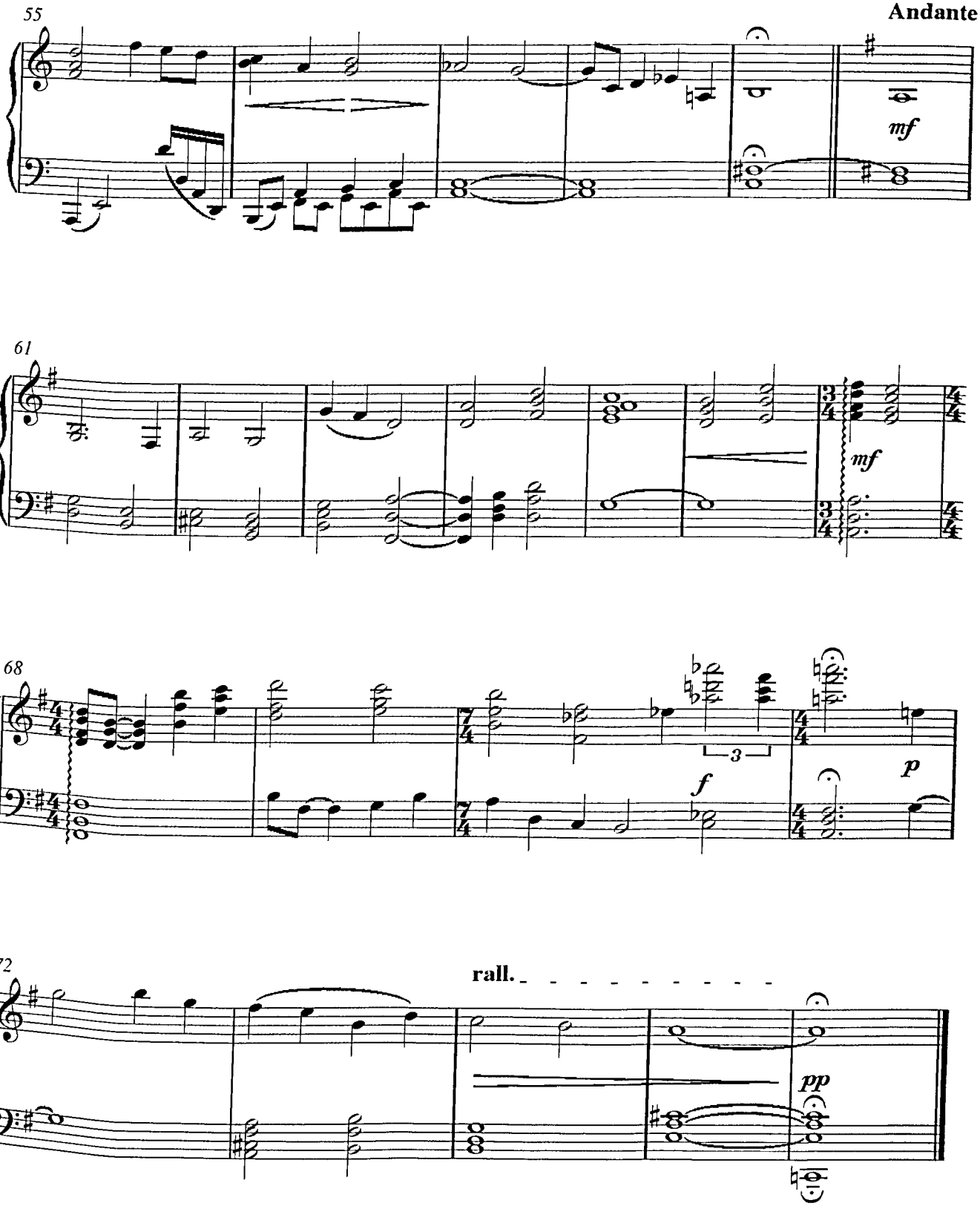
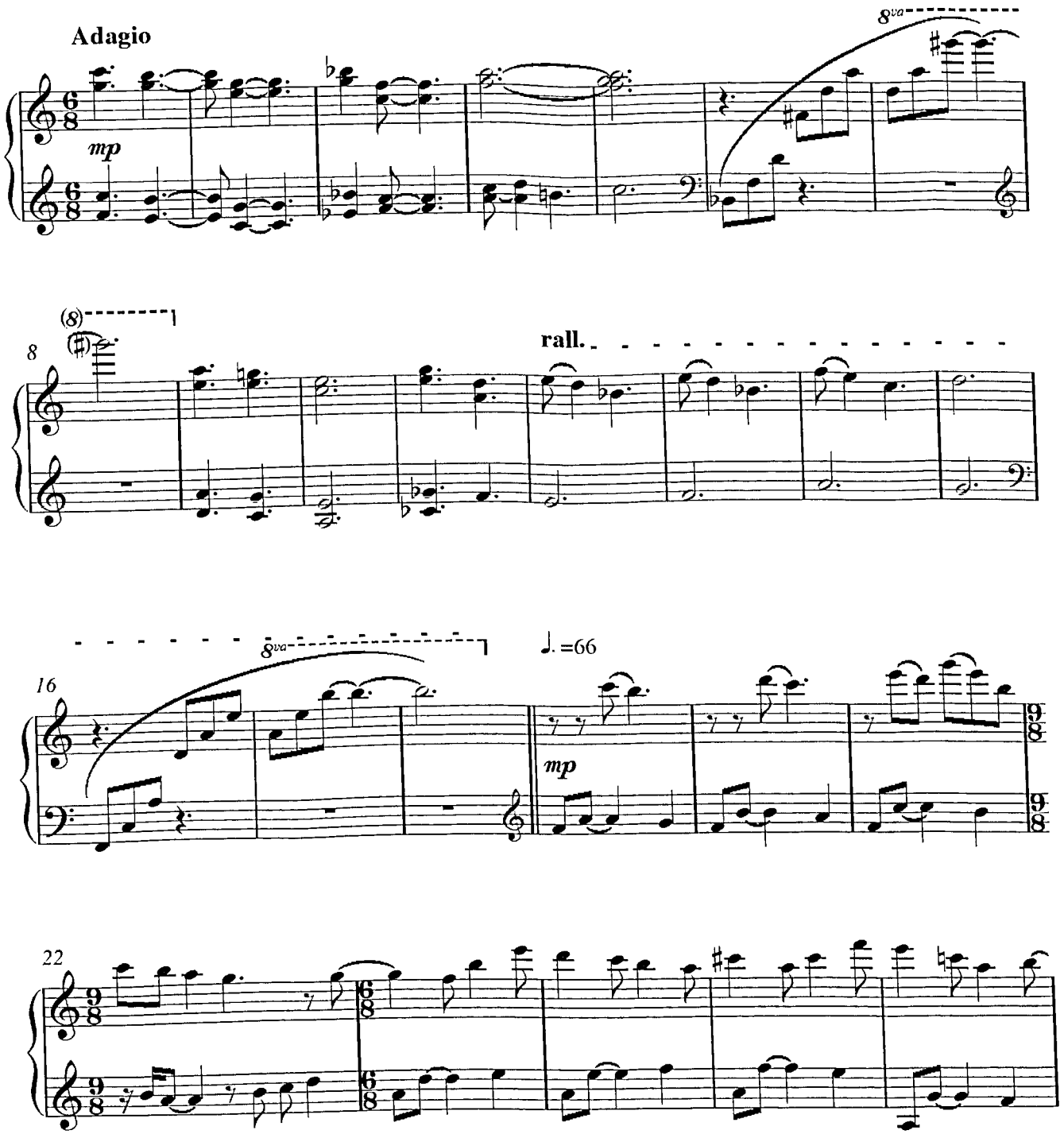
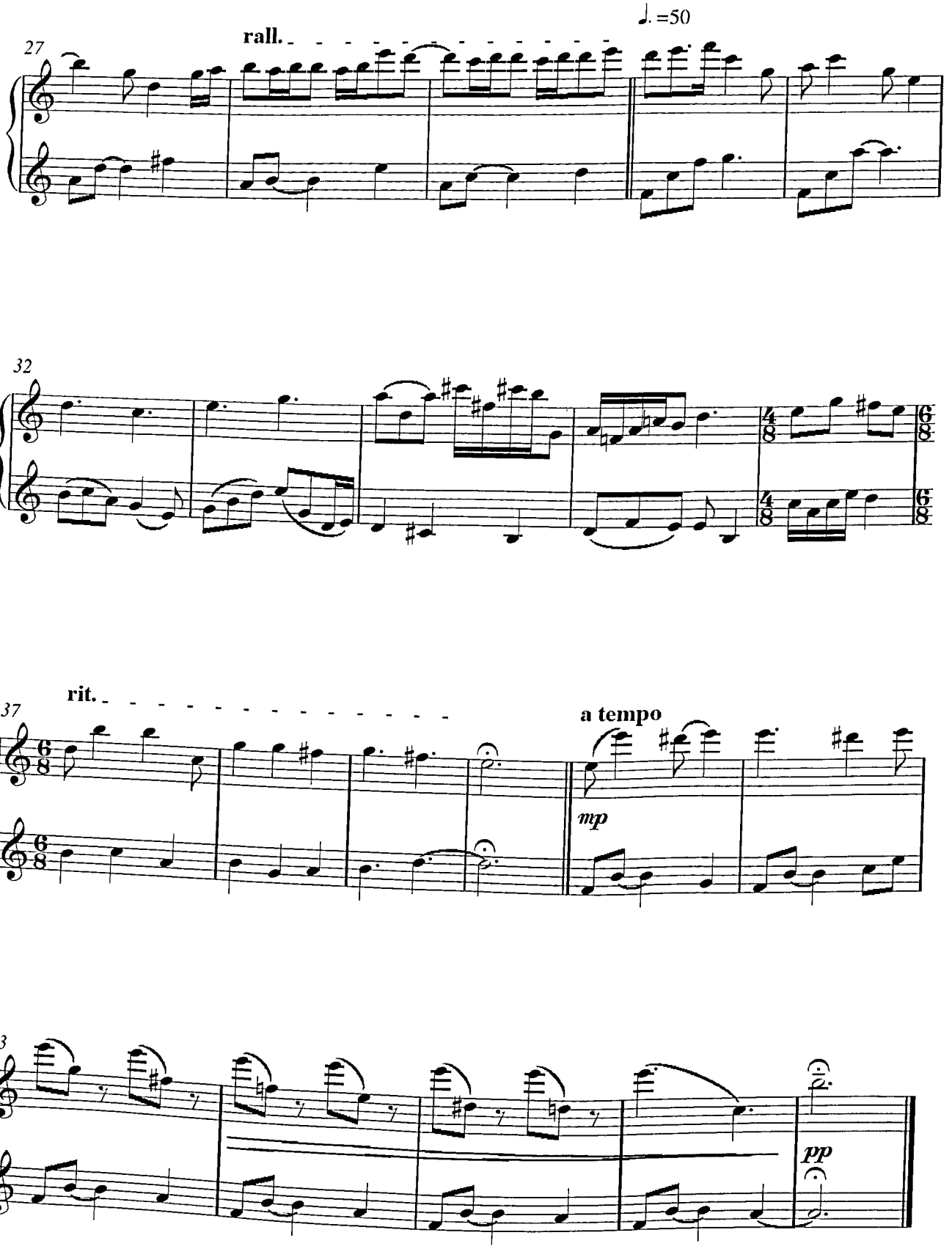

55
Andante
mf
61
mf
68
3
f
p
72
rall.
pp

II




27
rall.
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a tempo
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43
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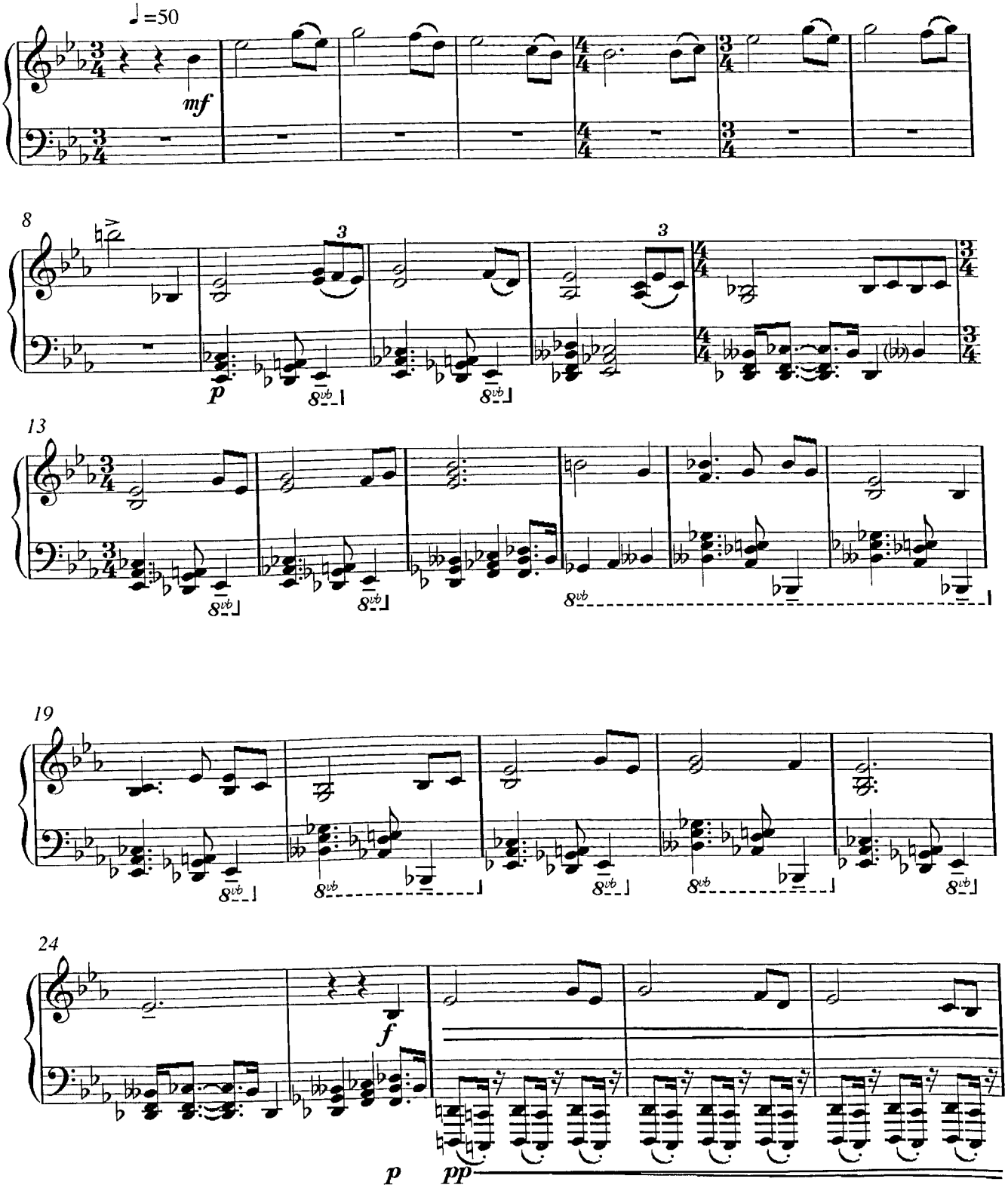
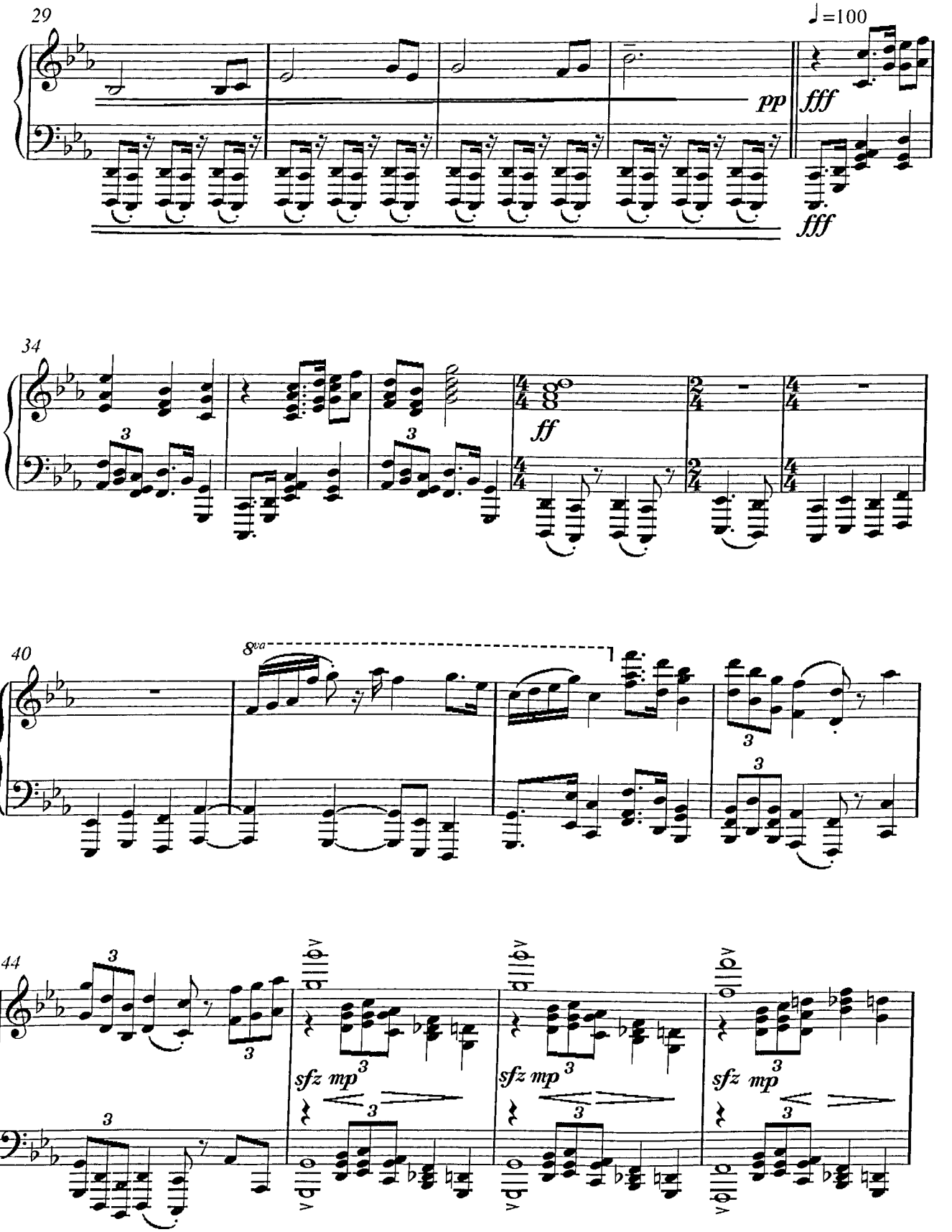
III

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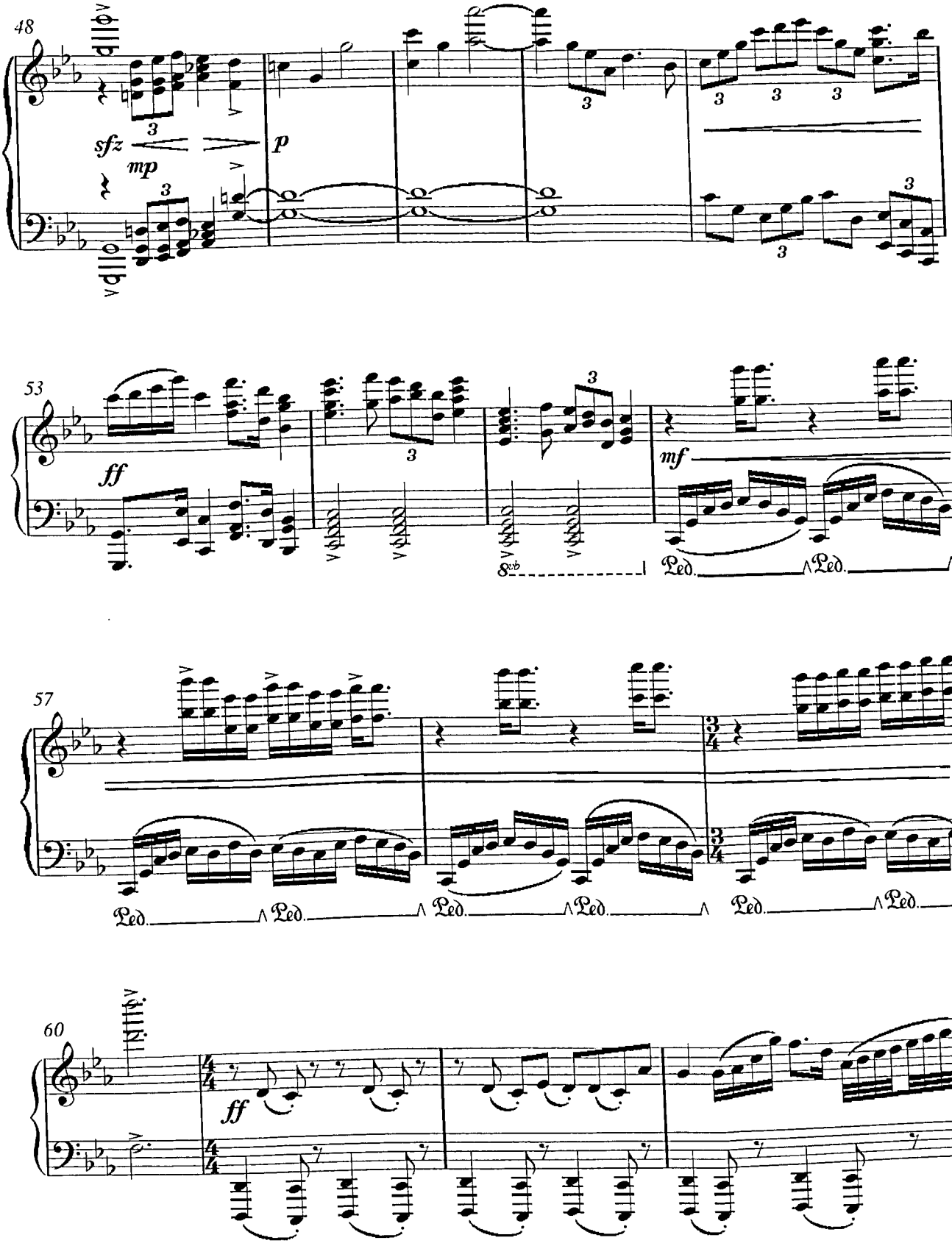
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mp
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53
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Ped.
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60
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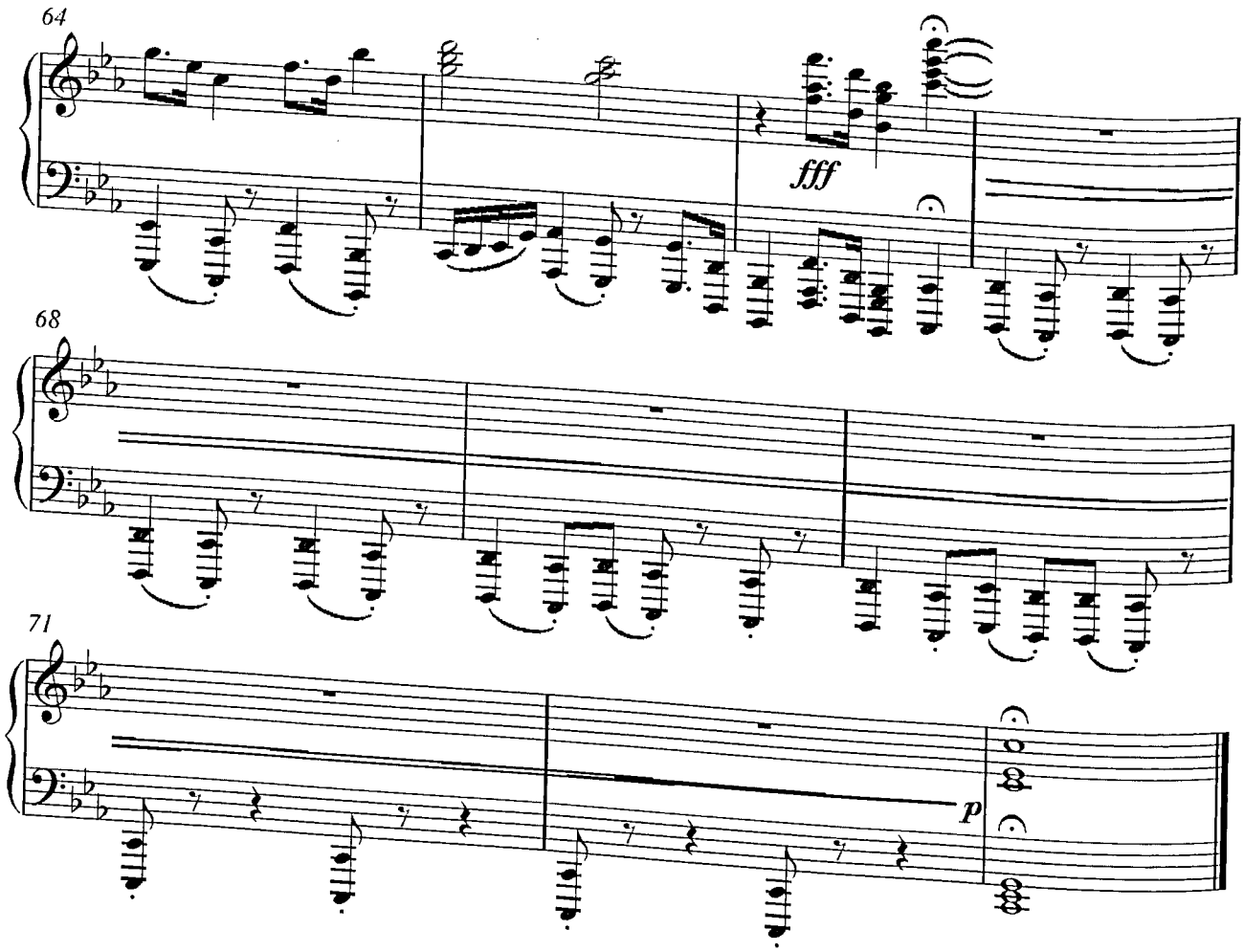
64
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68
71
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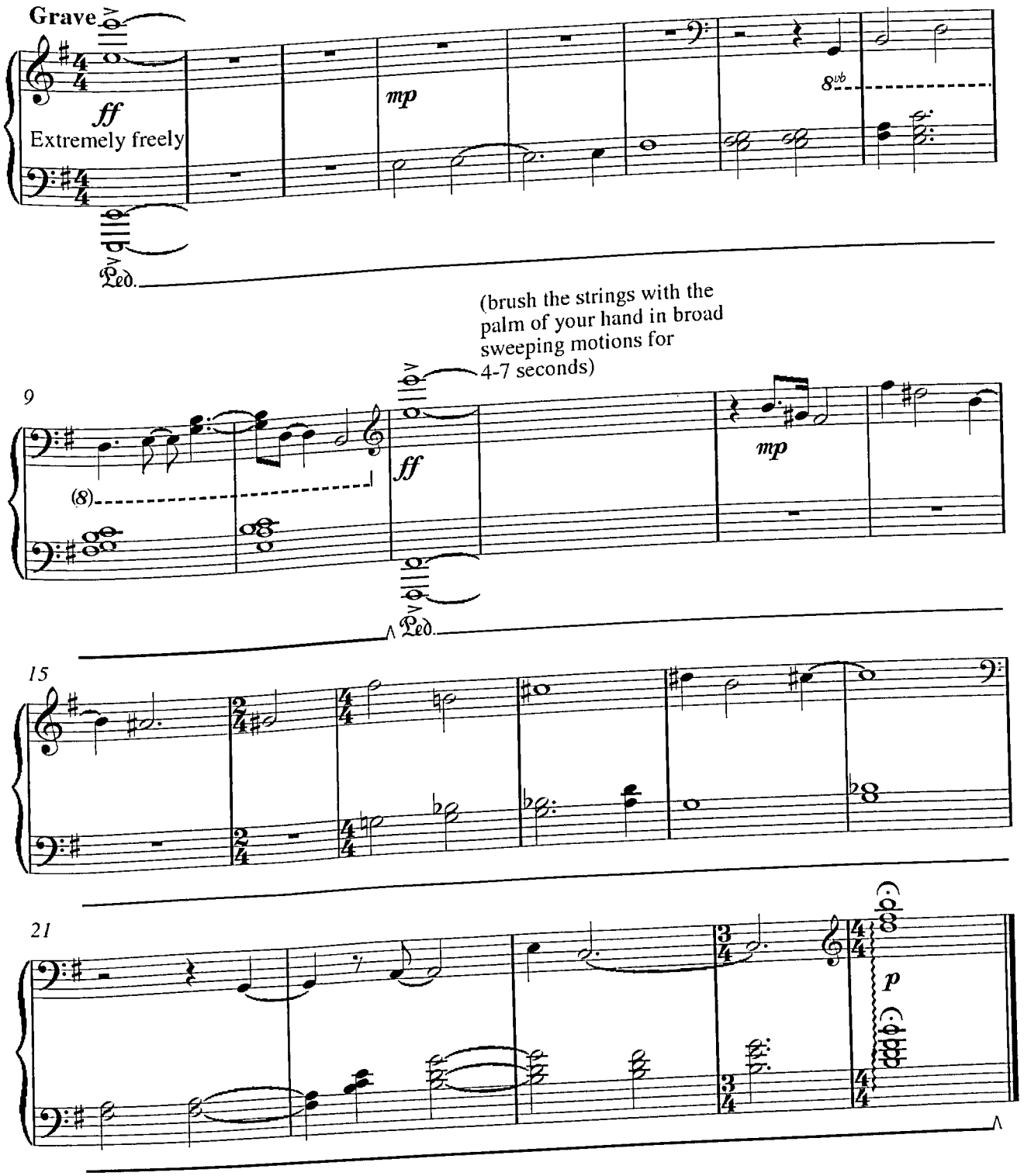
IV.


Grave
ff
Extremely freely
mp
8vb
Ped.
(brush the strings with the palm of your hand in broad sweeping motions for 4-7 seconds)
9
(8)
ff
mp
Ped.
15
21
p

V

Moderato

p

8

accel.

rit.

14

f

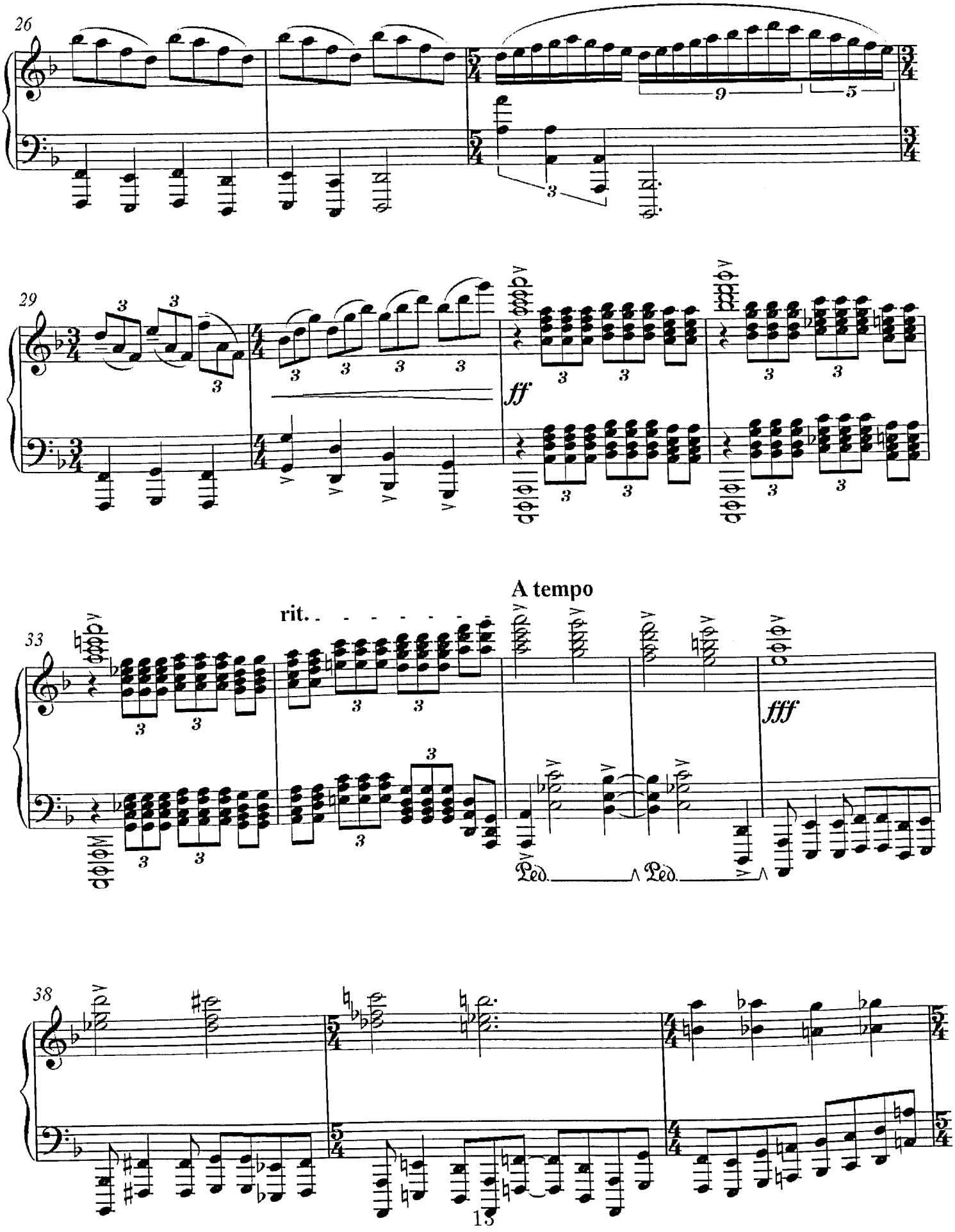
Prestissimo

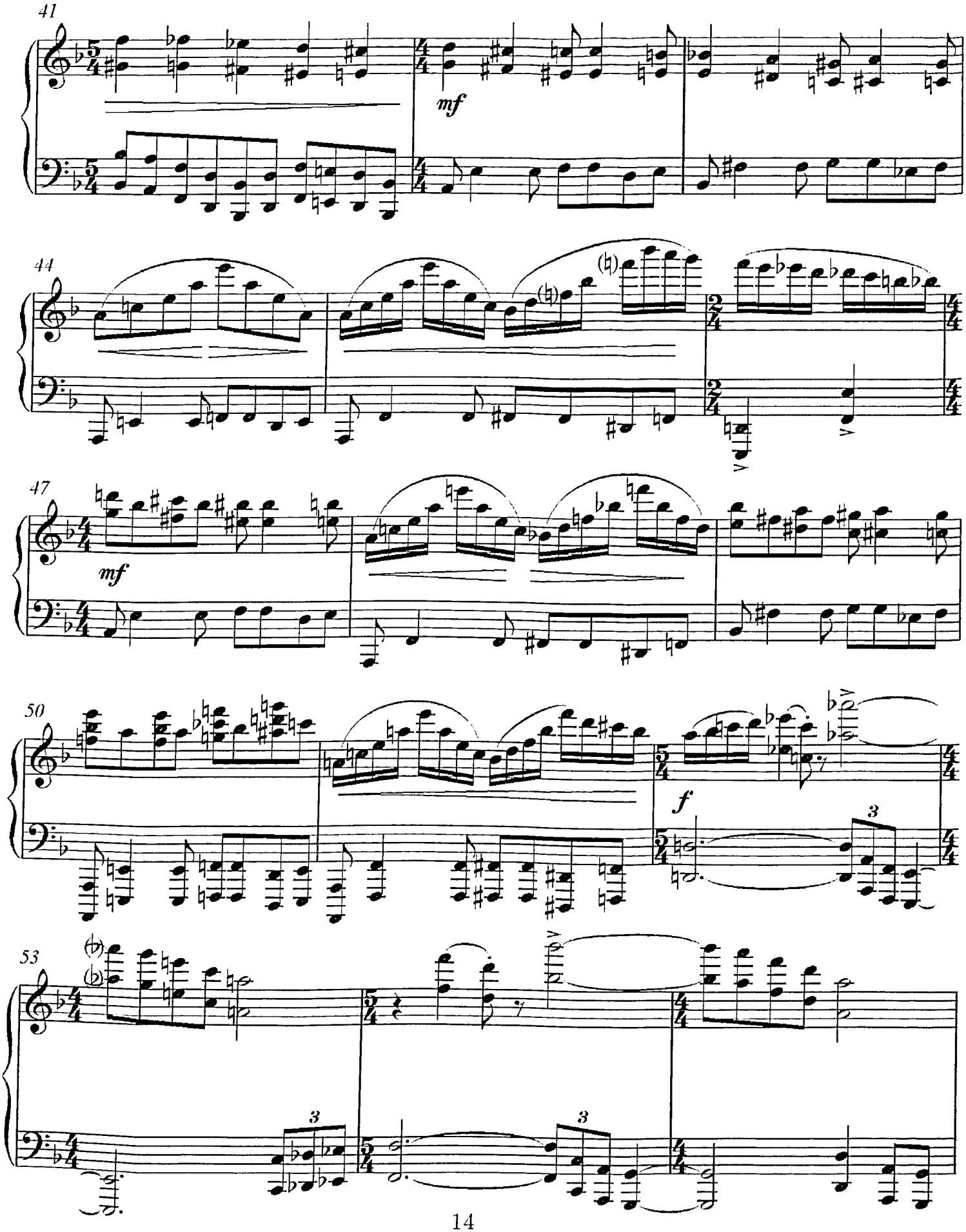
mp

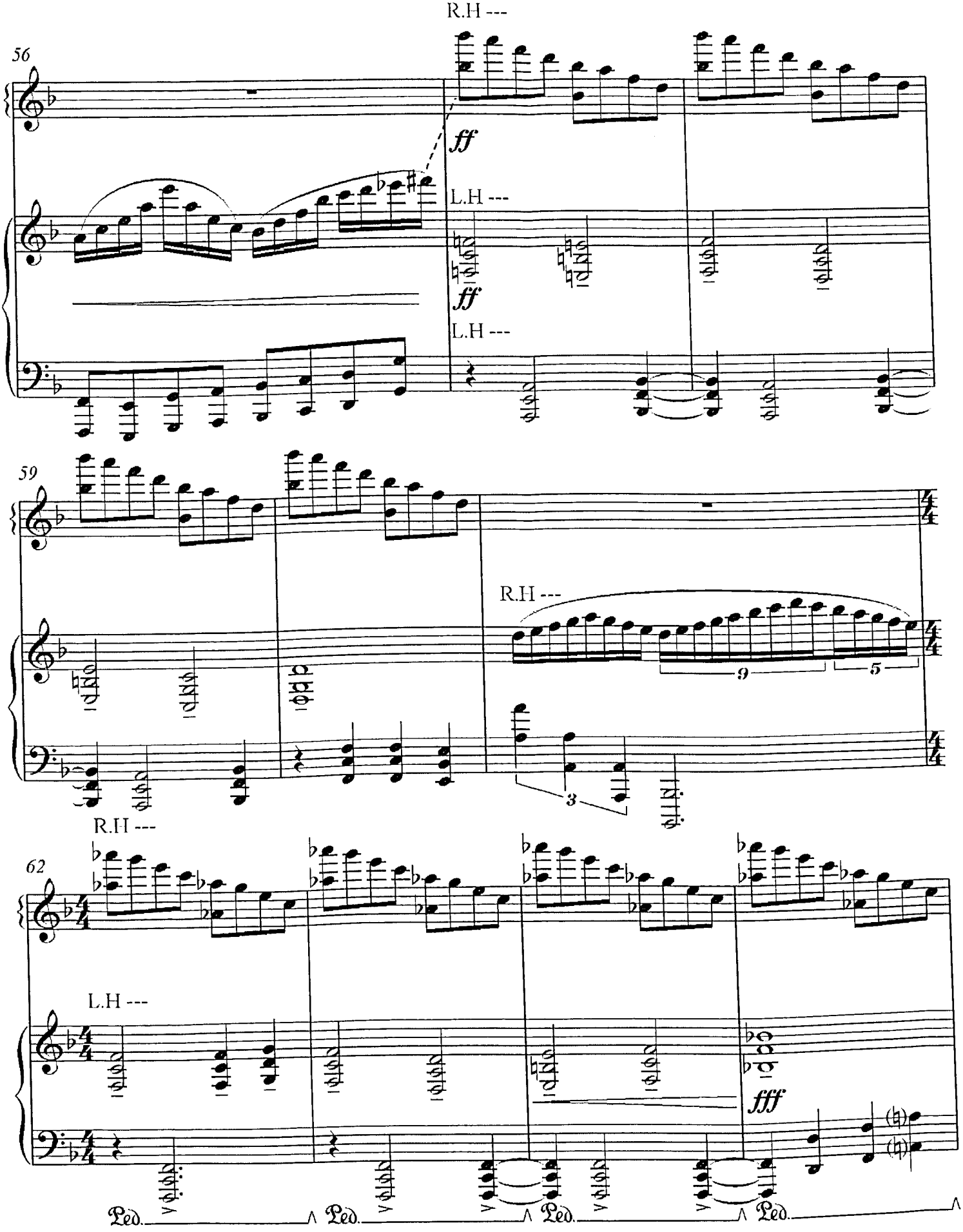
18

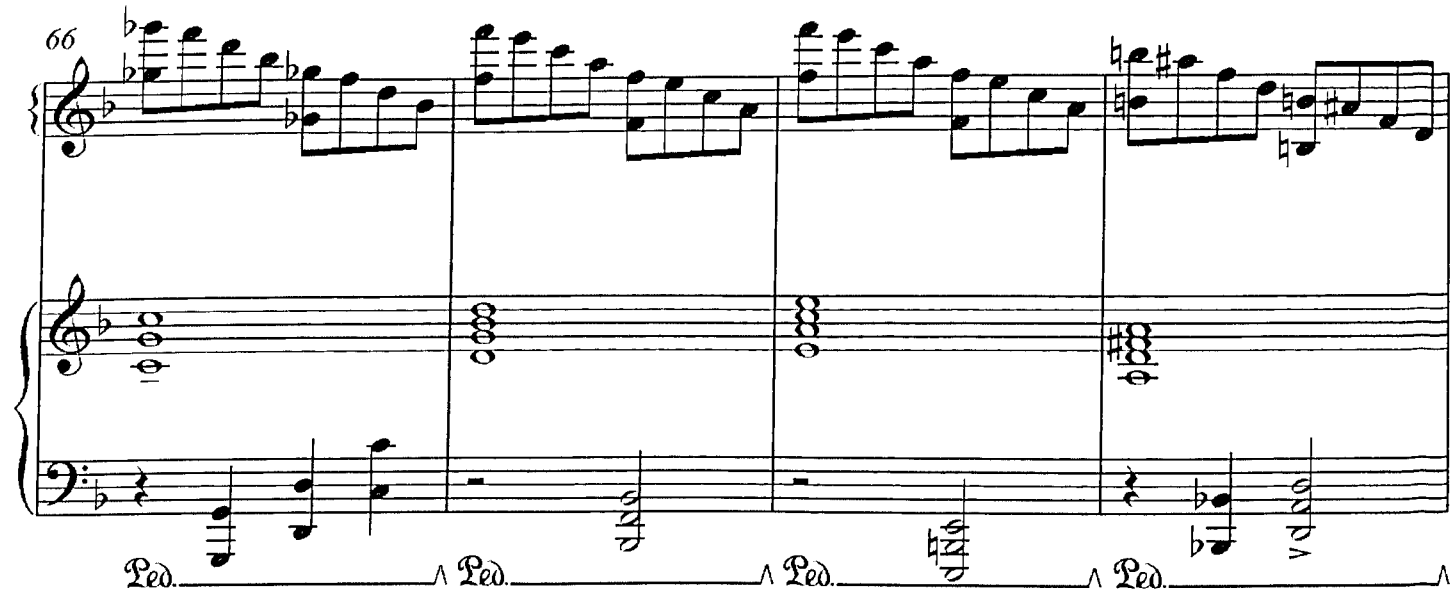
f

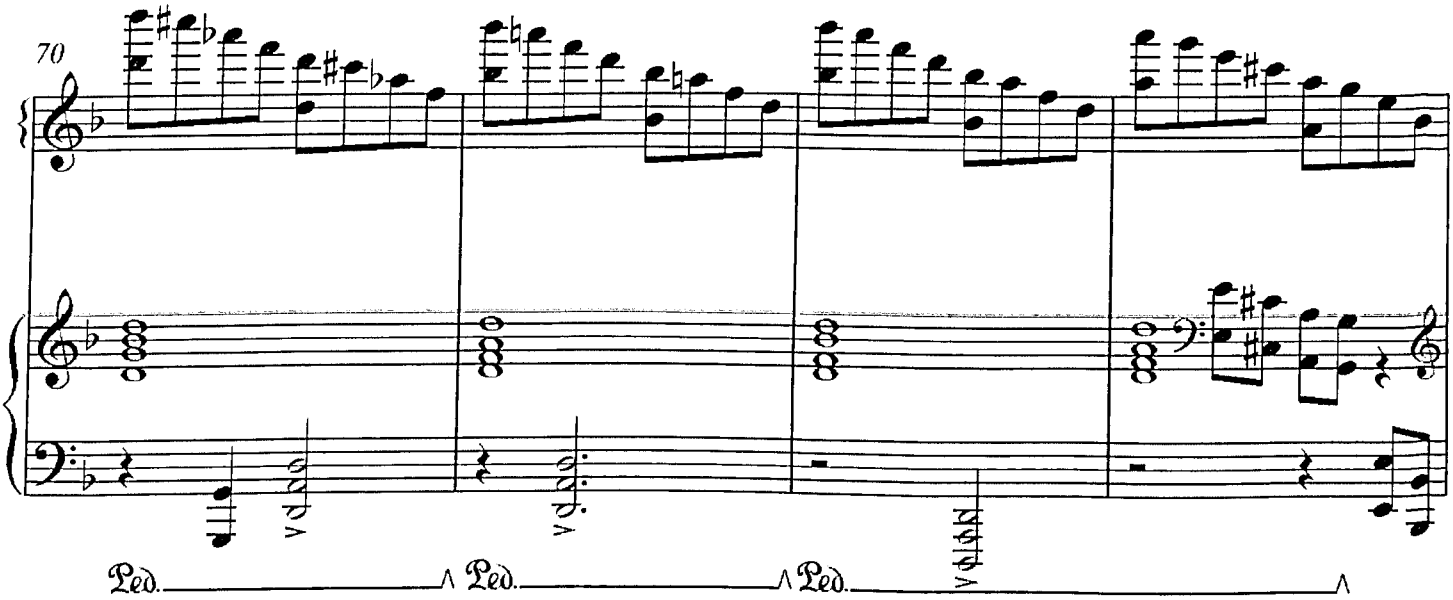
22


26
29
ff
33
rit.
A tempo
fff
Ped.
Ped.
38

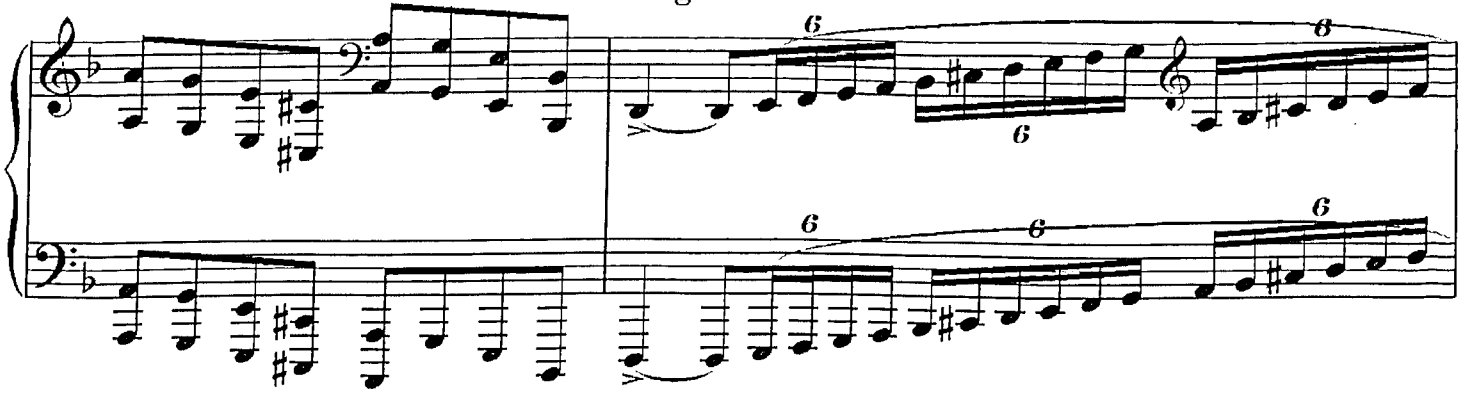

41
mf
44
47
mf
50
f
3
53
3
3

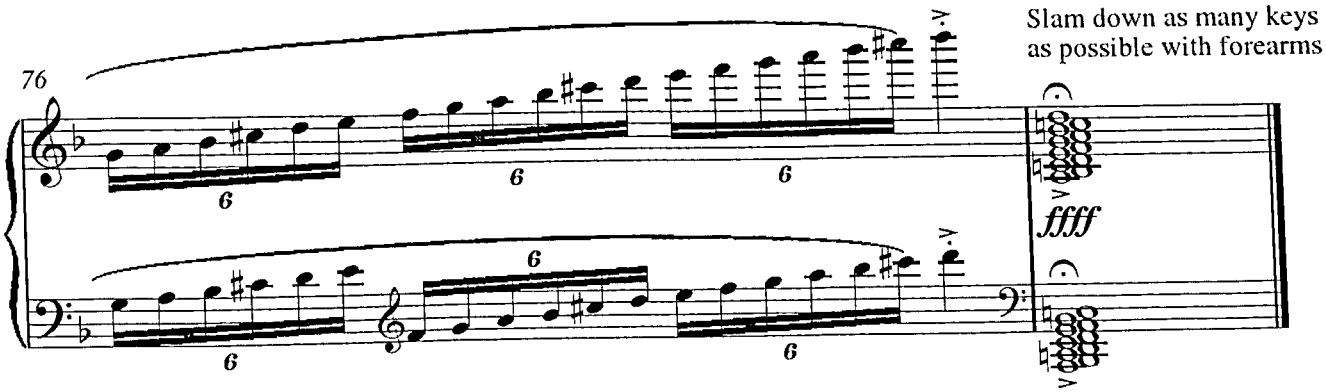

R.H ---
56
ff
L.H ---
ff
L.H ---
59
R.H ---
9
5
3
R.H ---
62
L.H ---
fff
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.



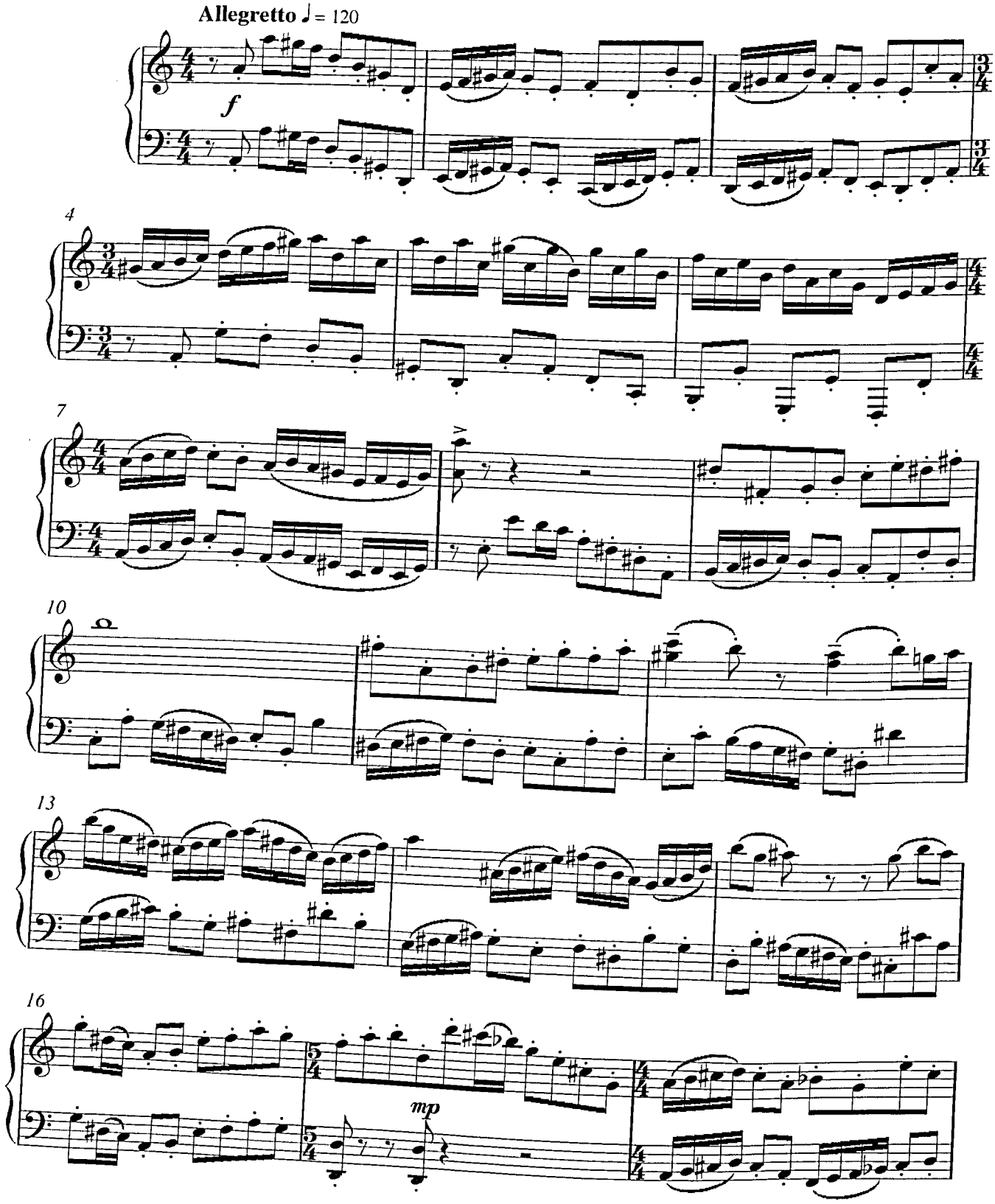


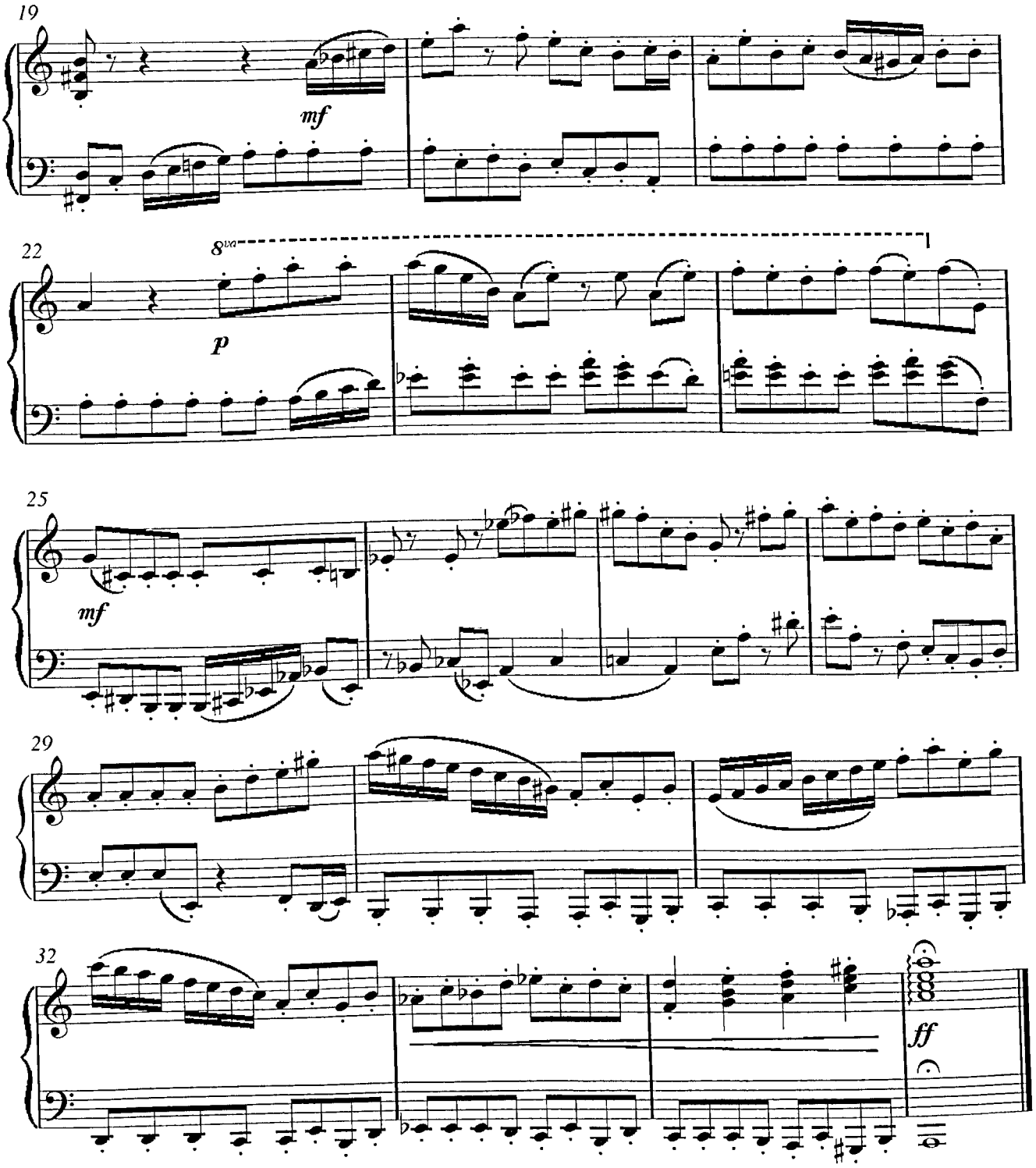
Allegro



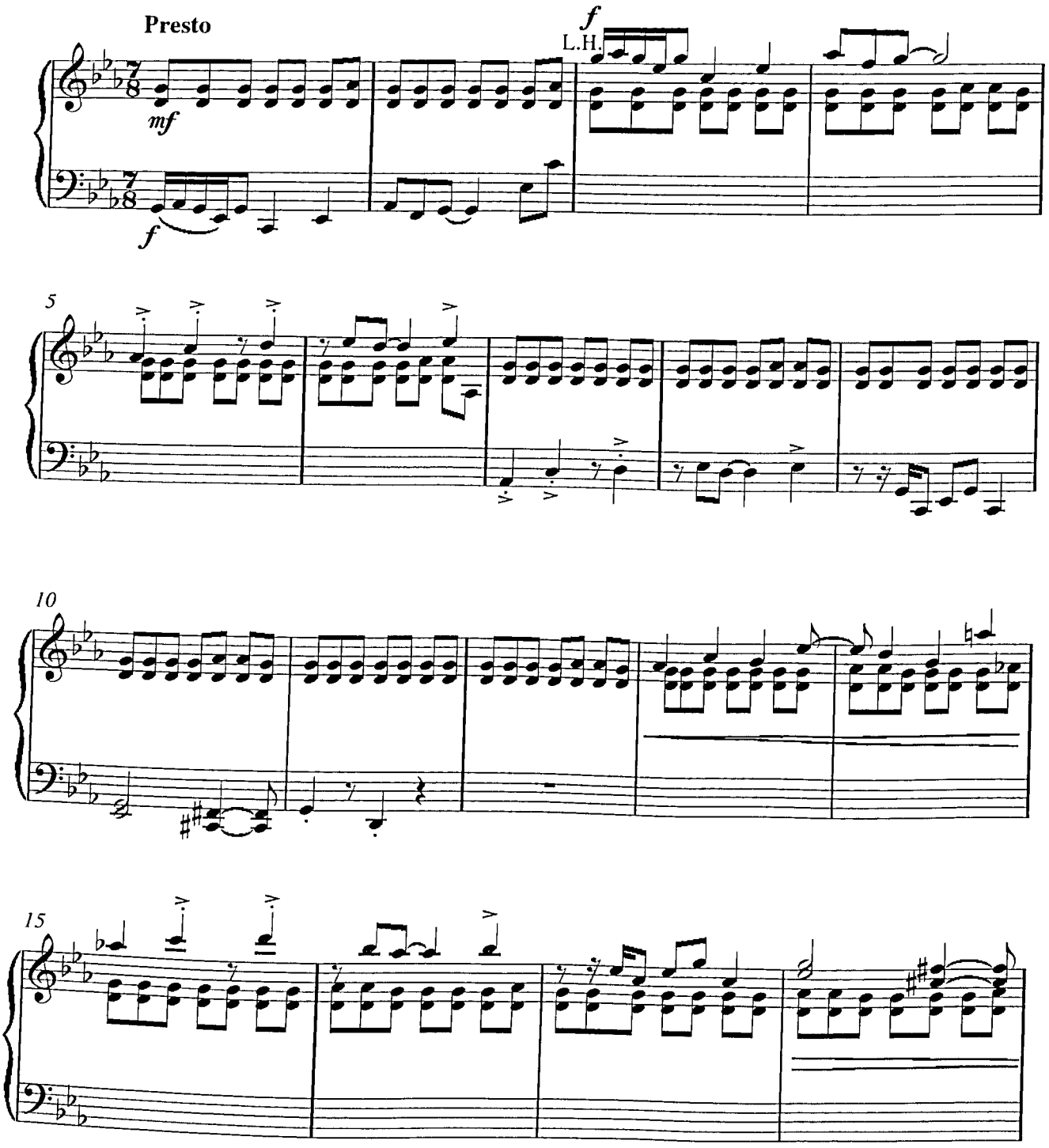

76
Slam down as many keys
as possible with forearms
ffff

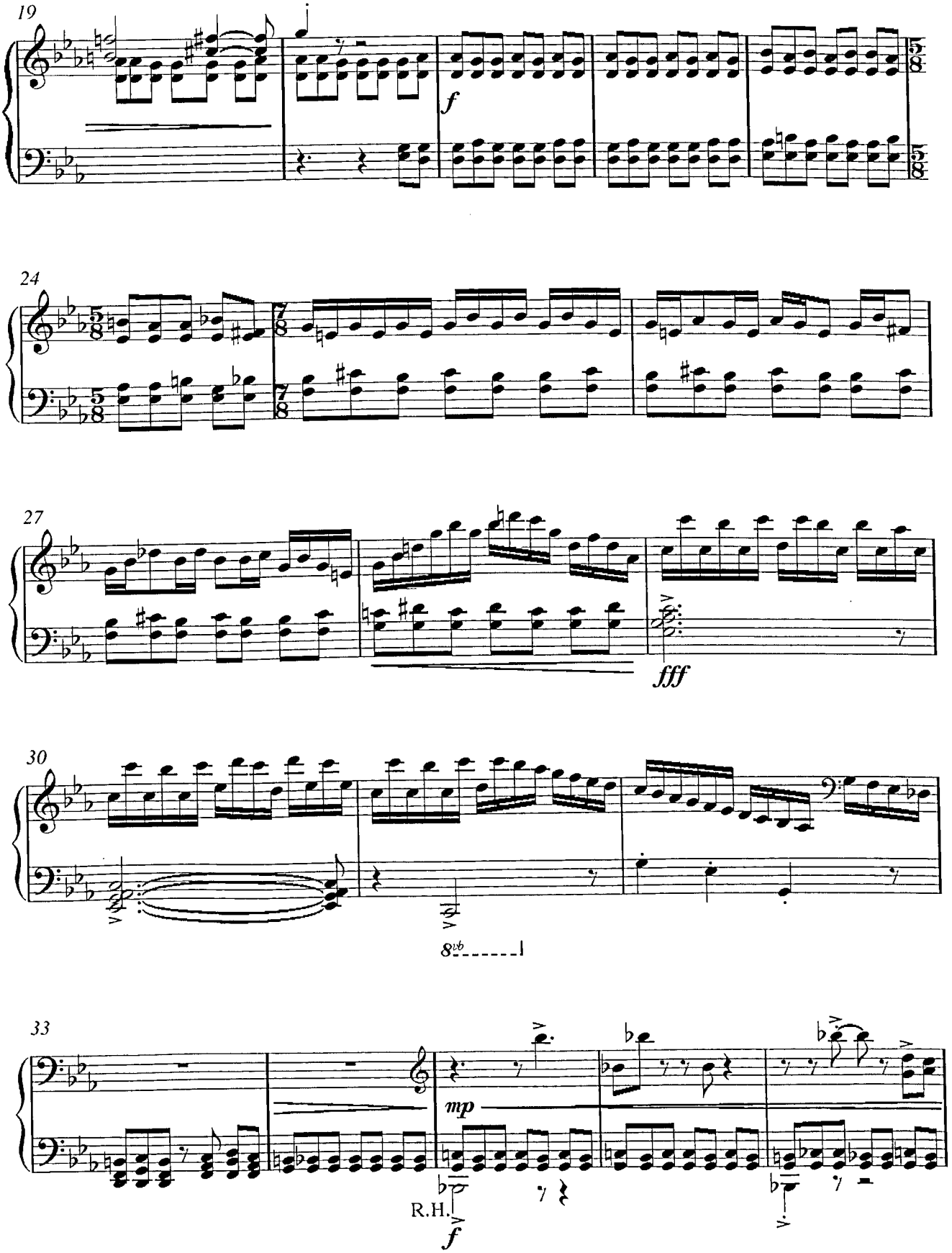
VI

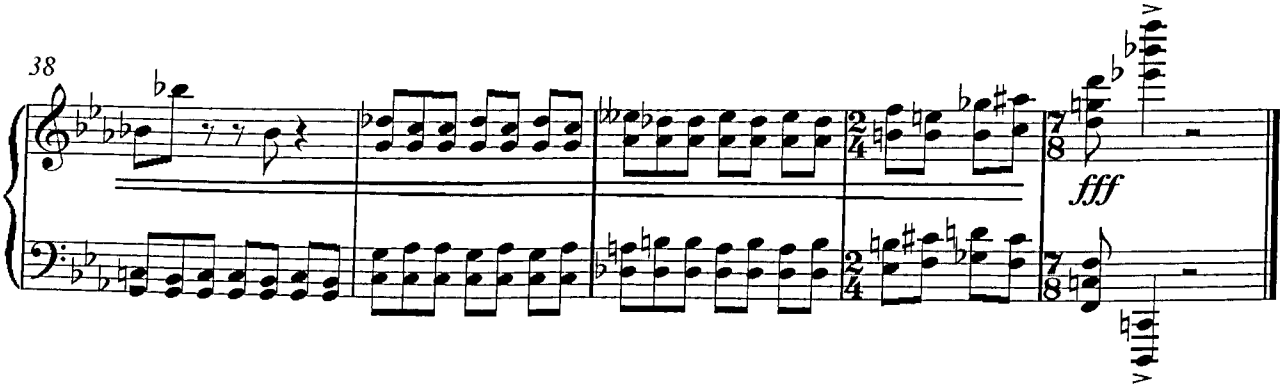



19
mf
22
8va
p
25
mf
29
32
ff

VII

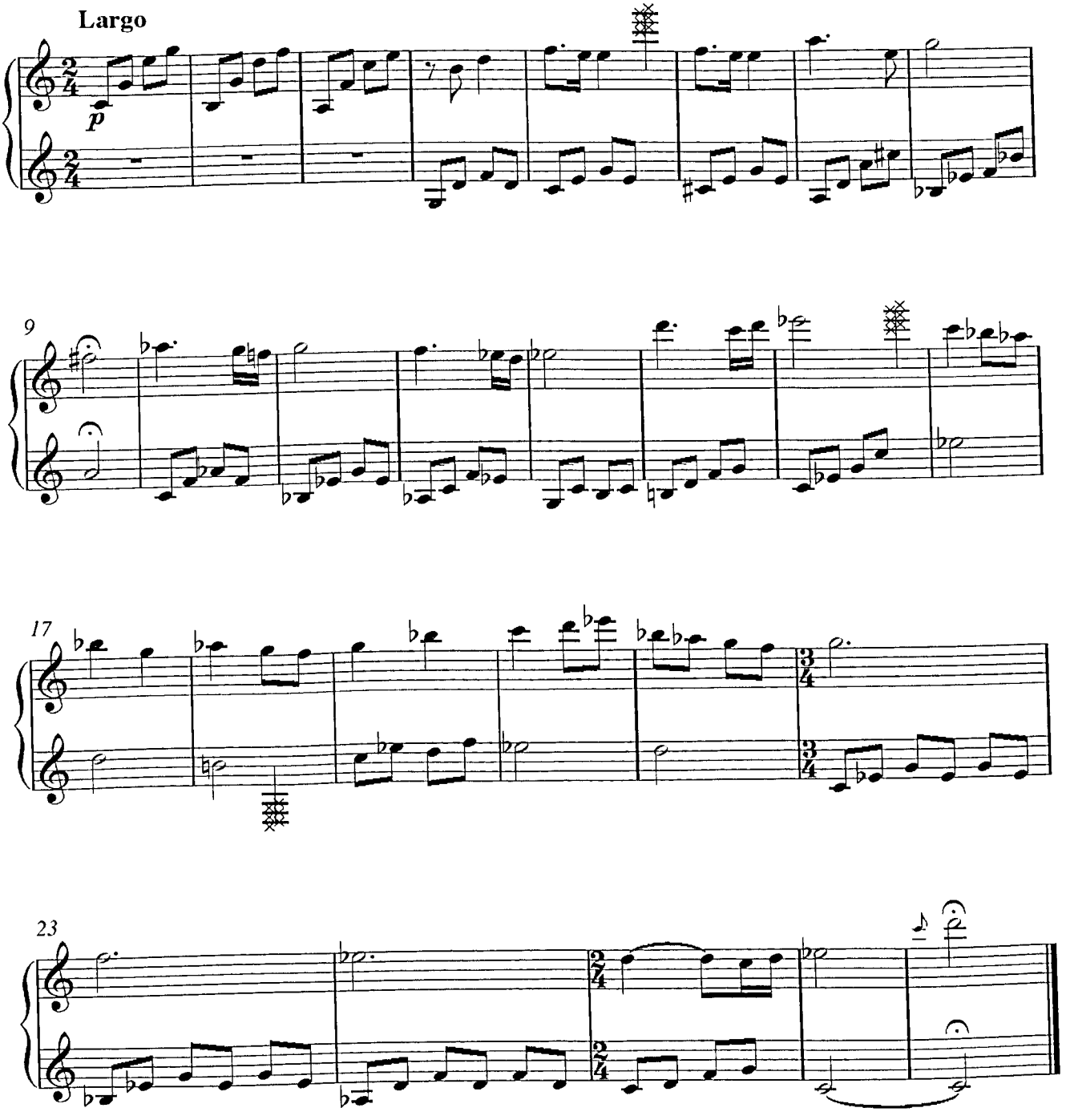



19
f
24
27
fff
30
8vb
33
mp
R.H.
f

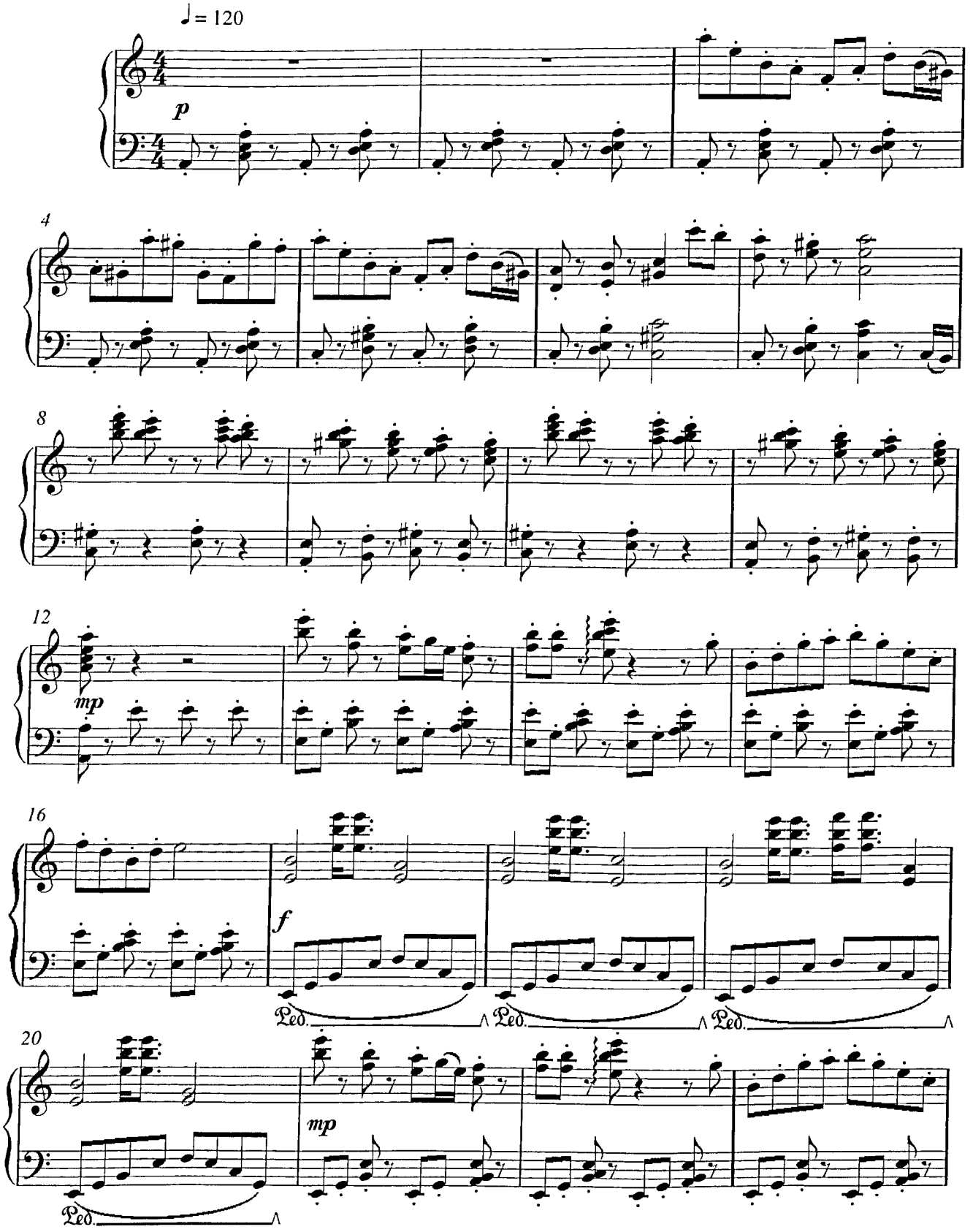

38
fff

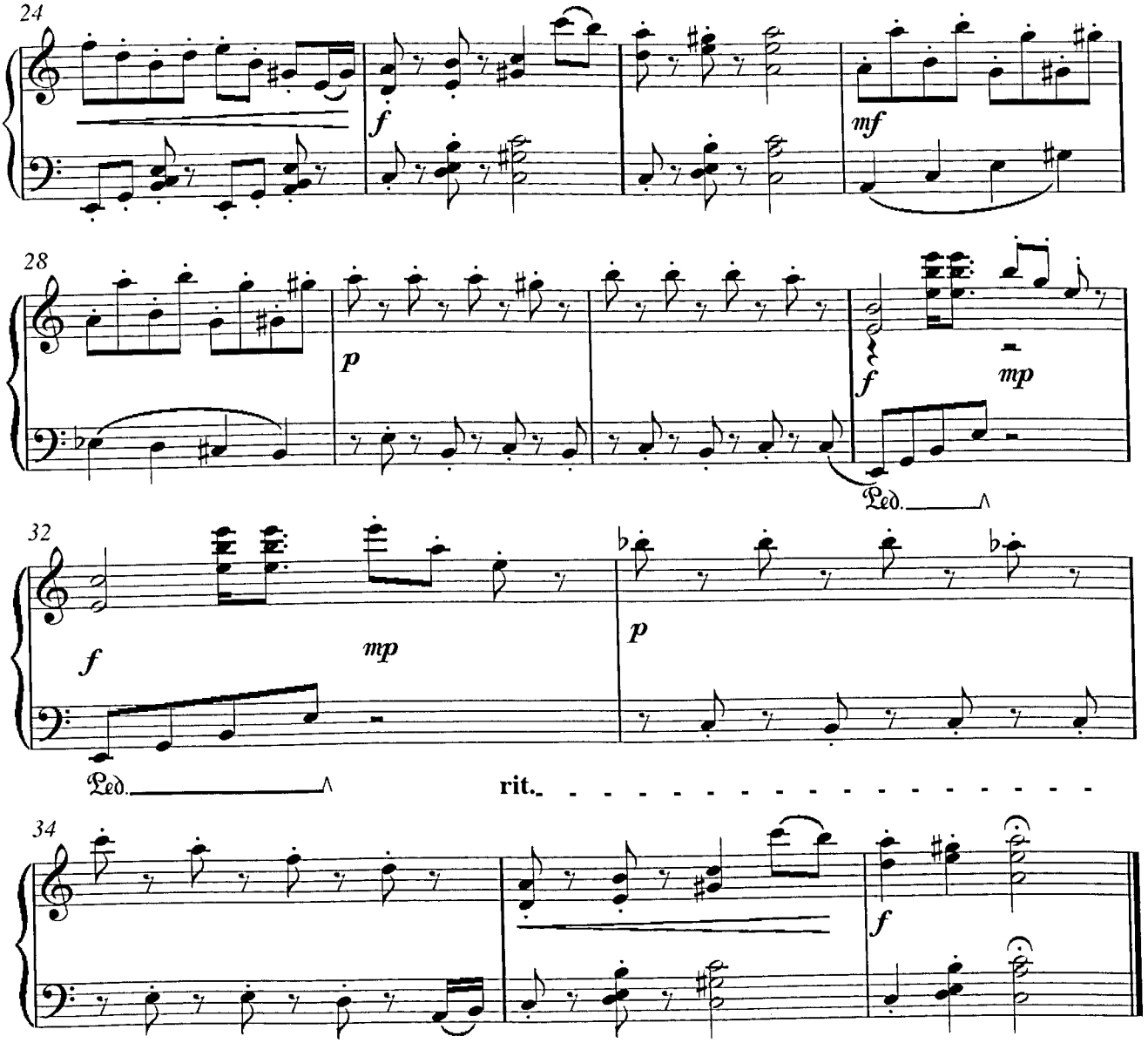
VIII

Slap random clusters in the general area of the X noteheads as in time as possible.

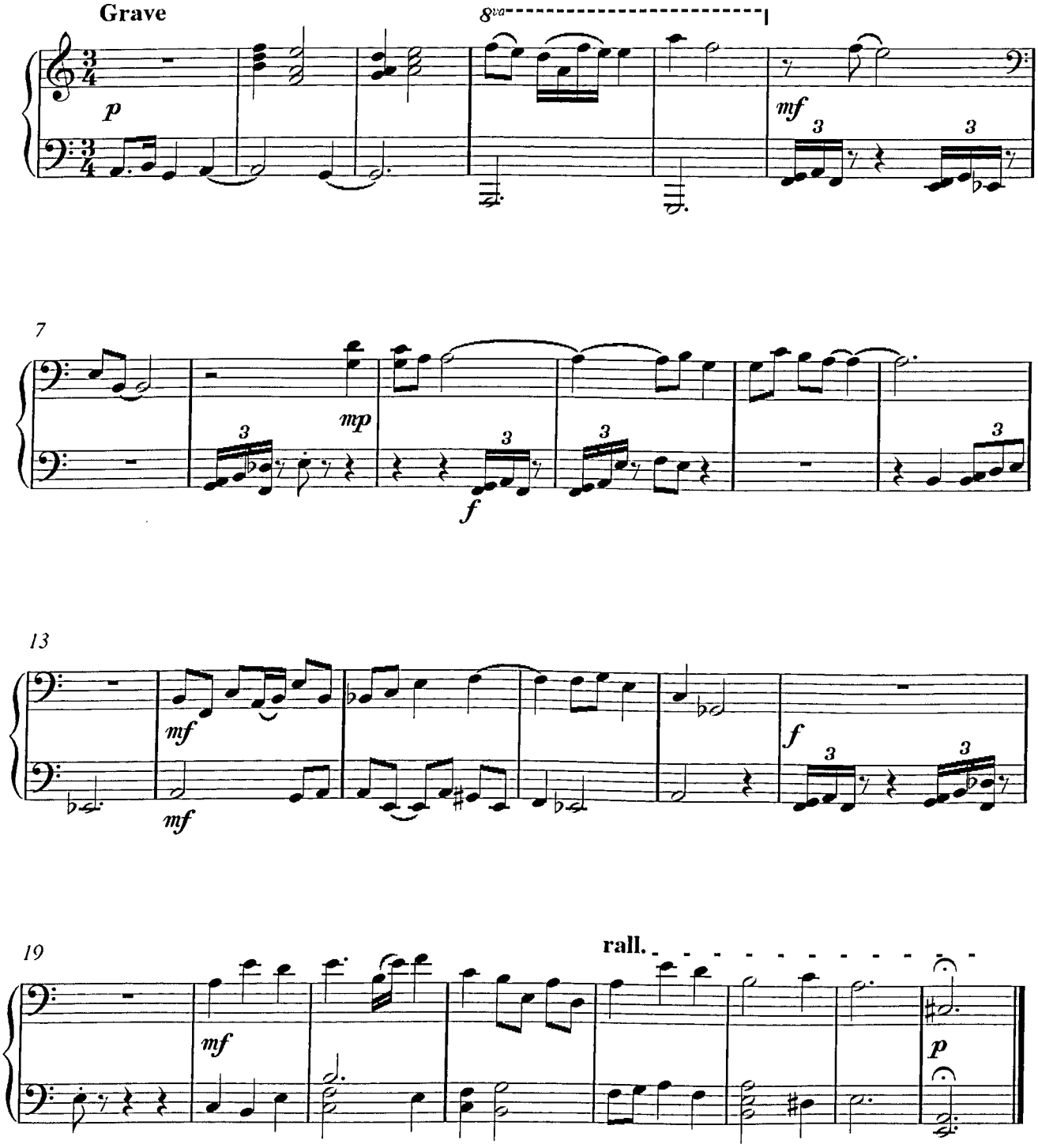


IX

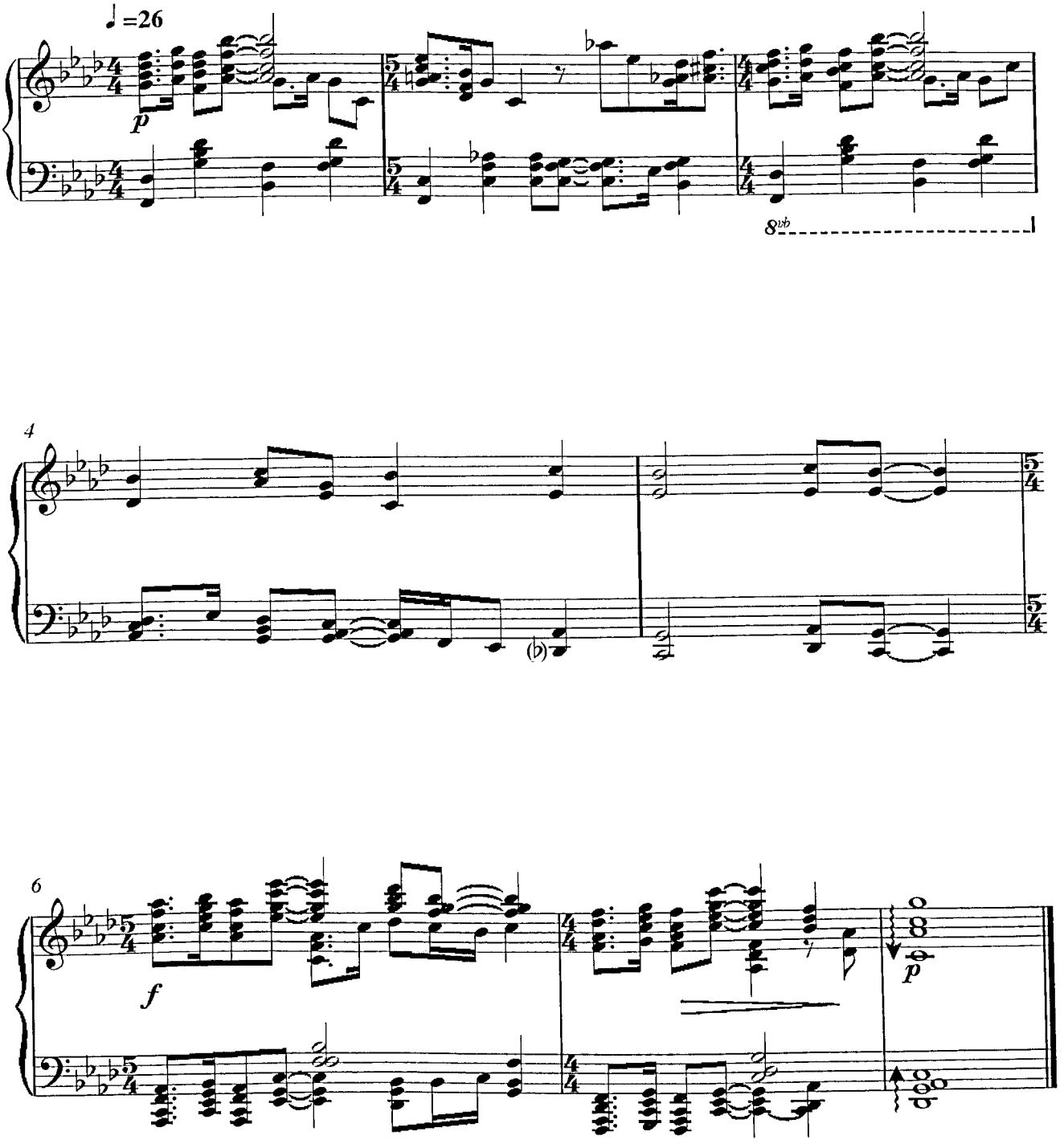



24
f
mf
28
p
f
mp
Ped.
32
f
mp
p
Ped.
rit.
34
f

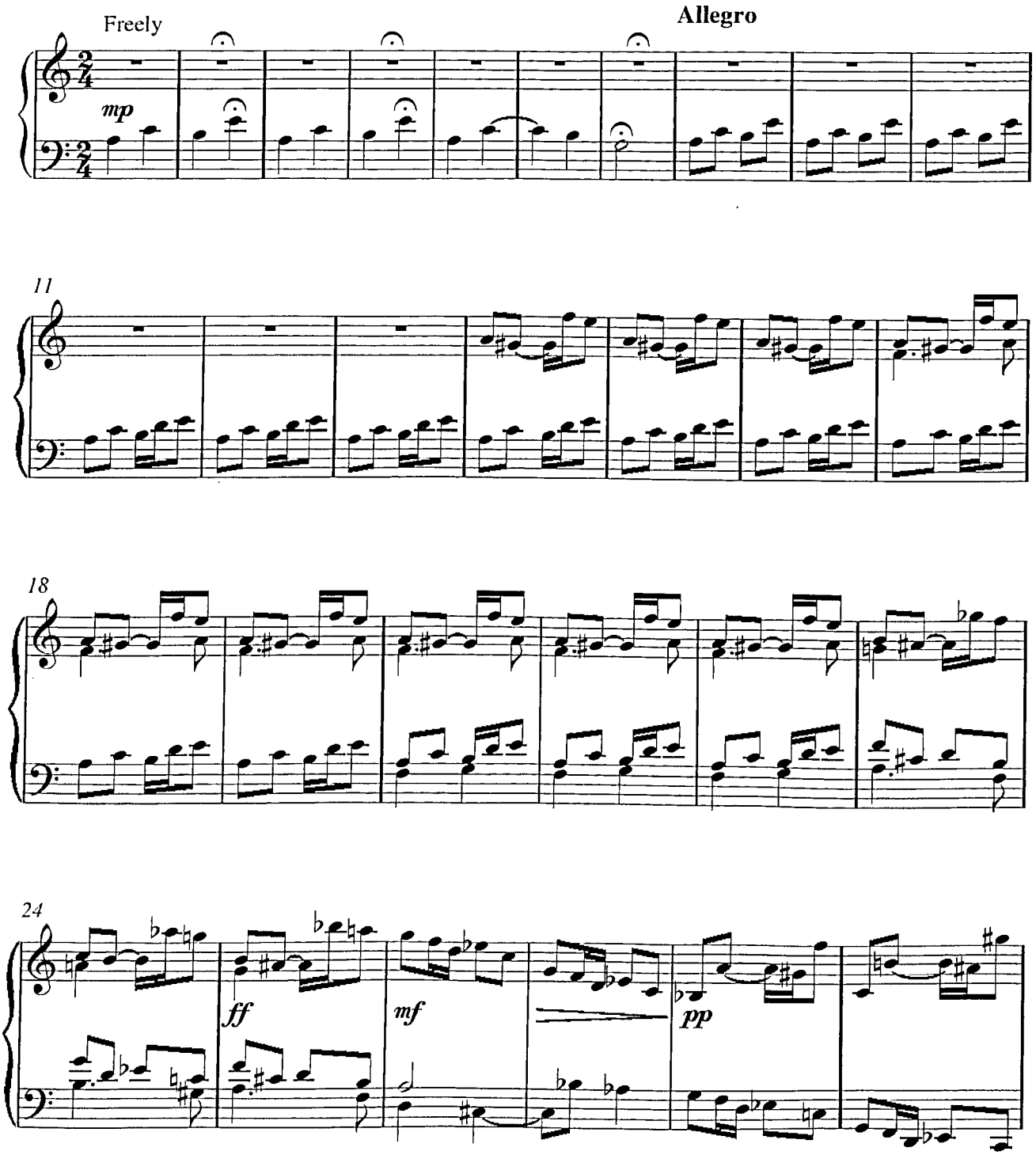
X

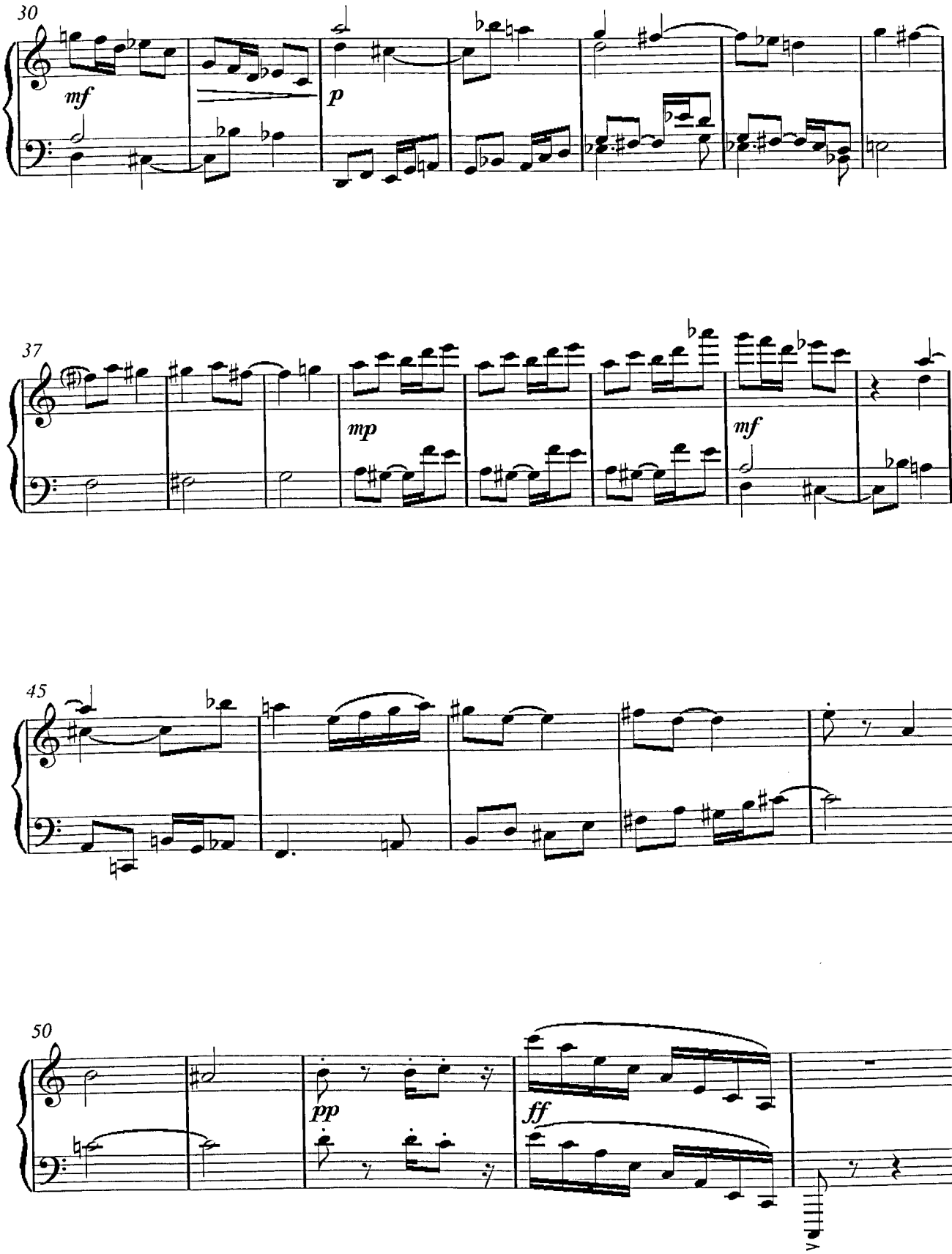


XI

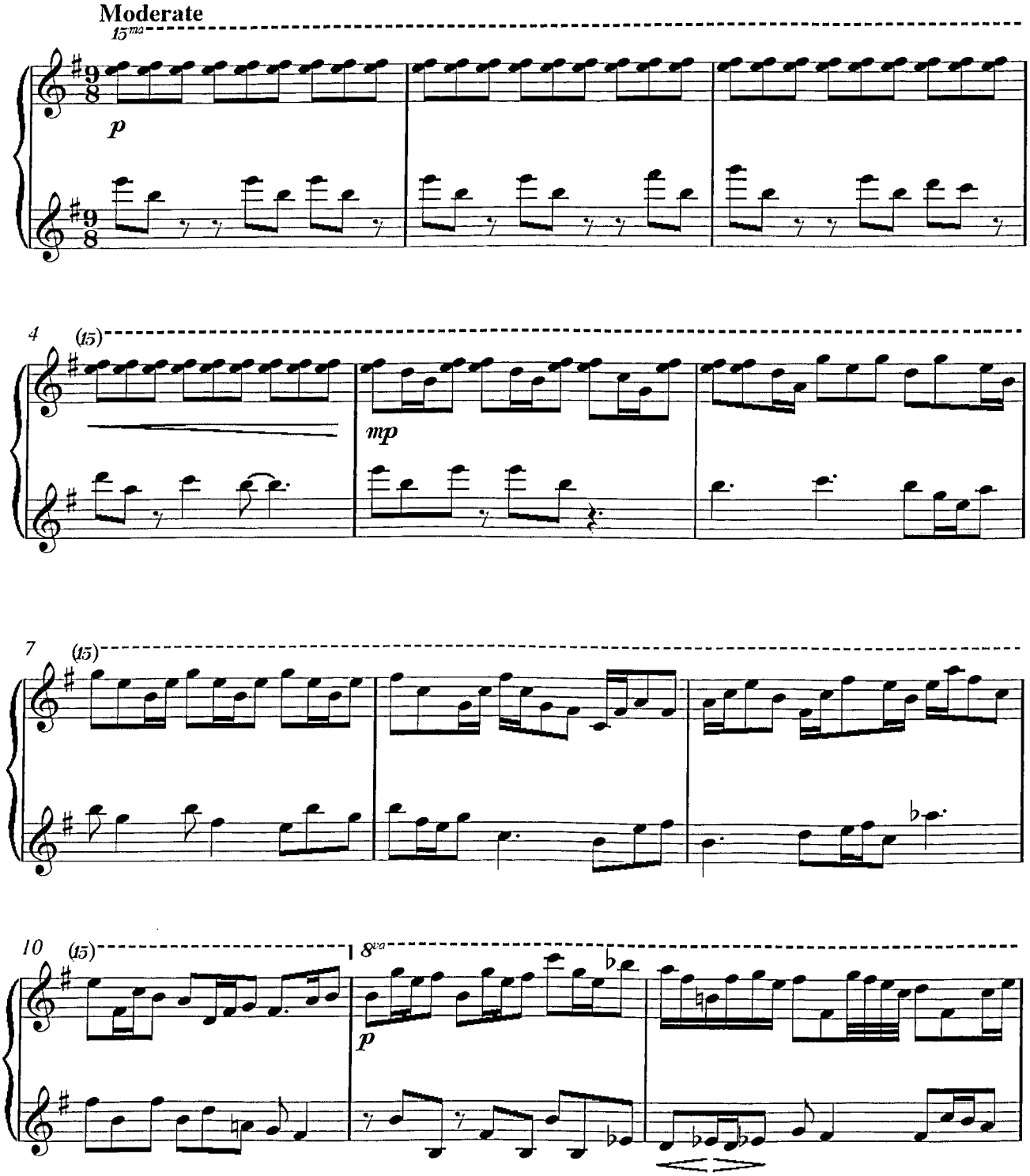


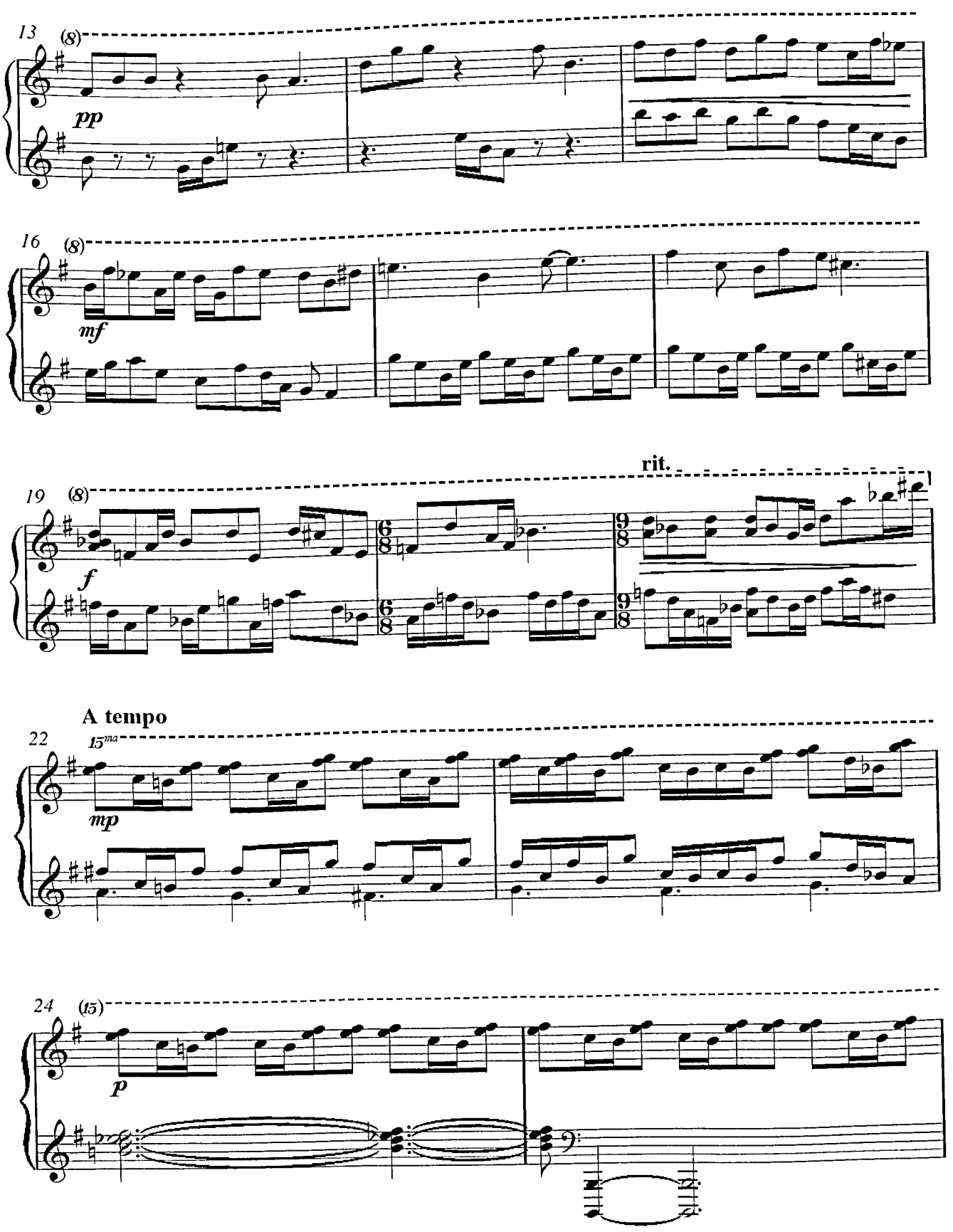
XII

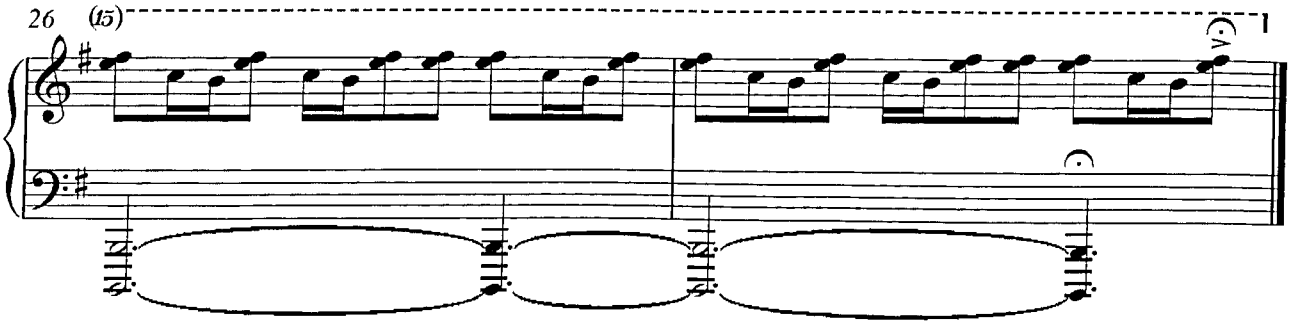



30
mf
p
37
mp
mf
45
50
pp
ff

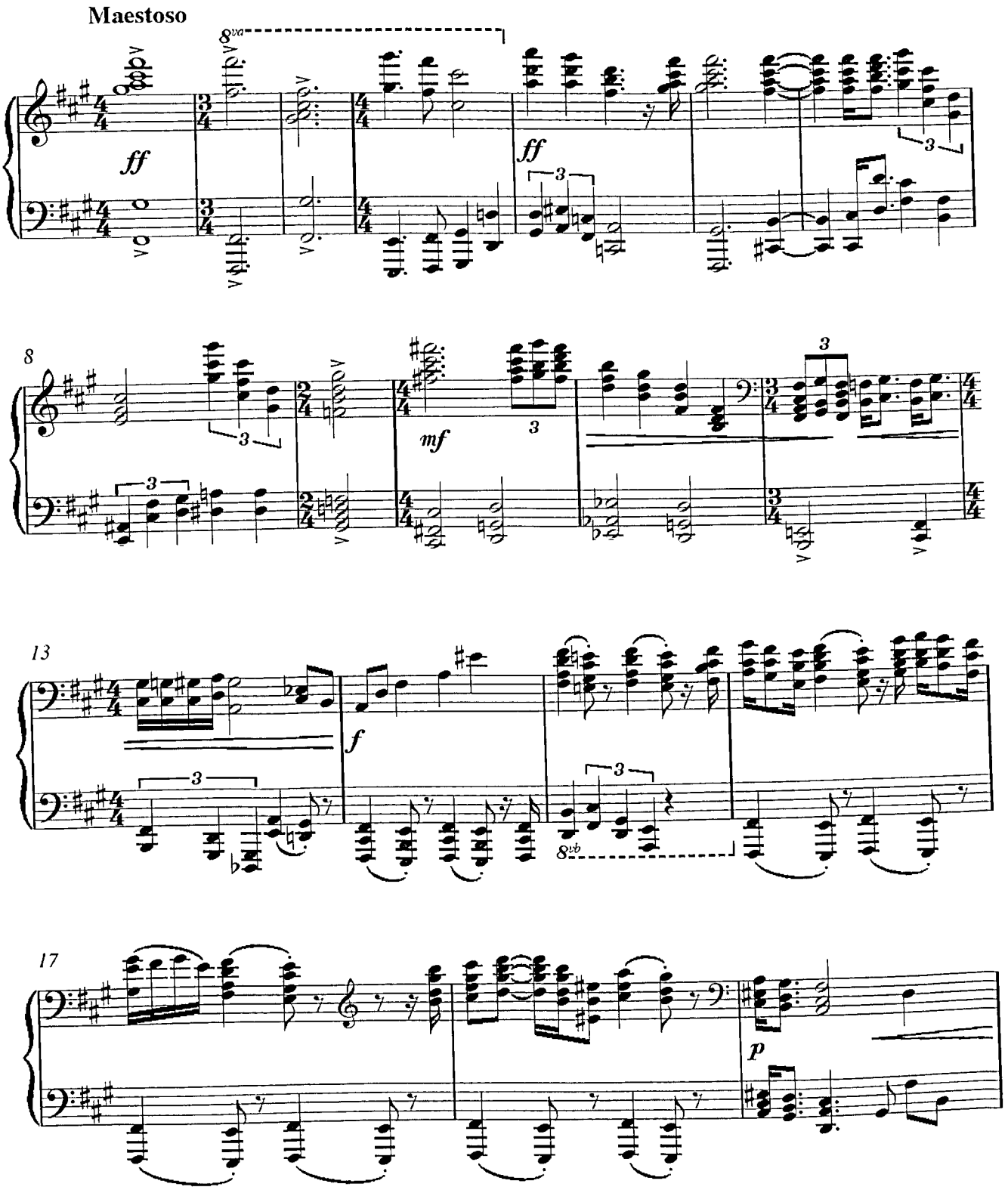
XIII.

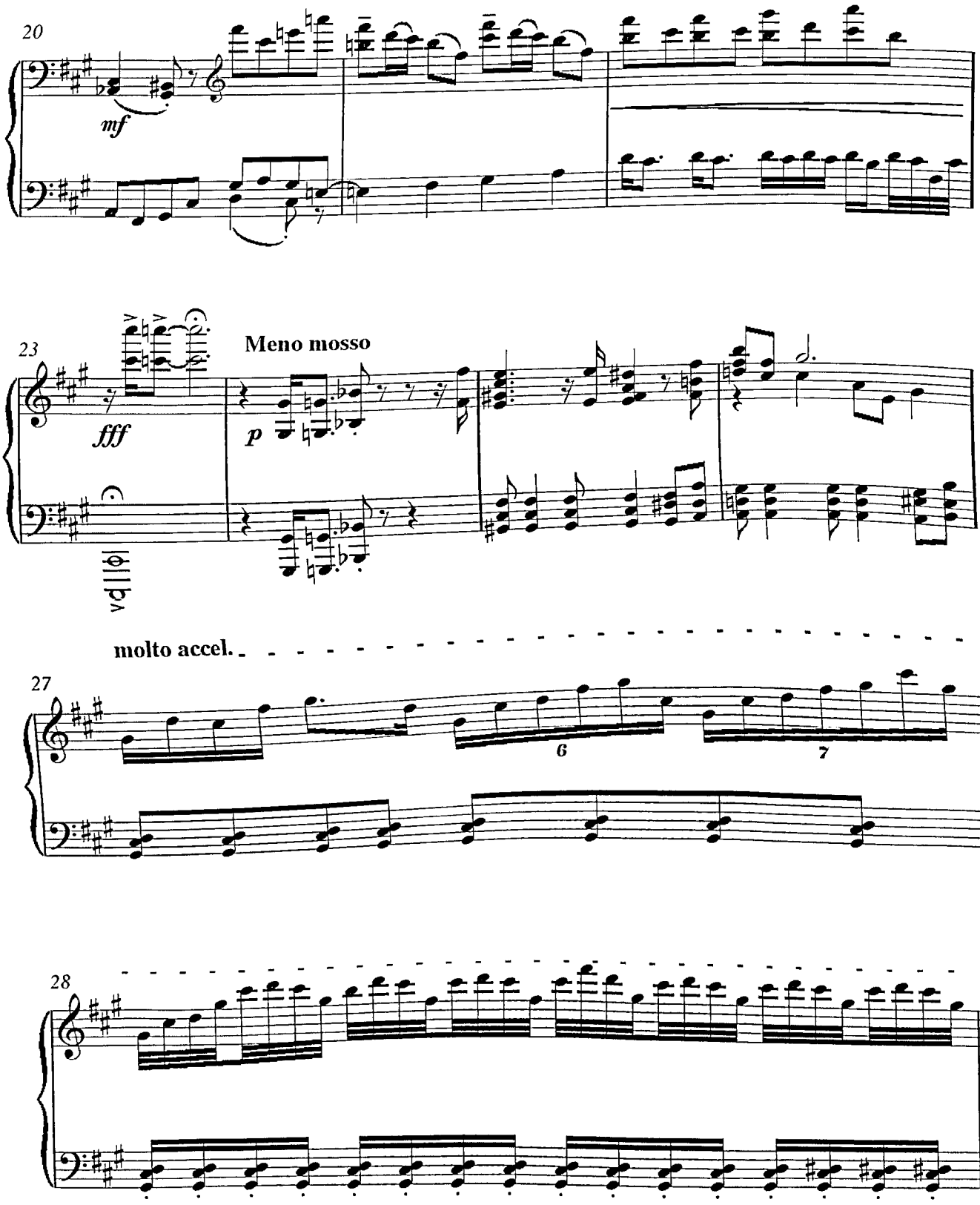


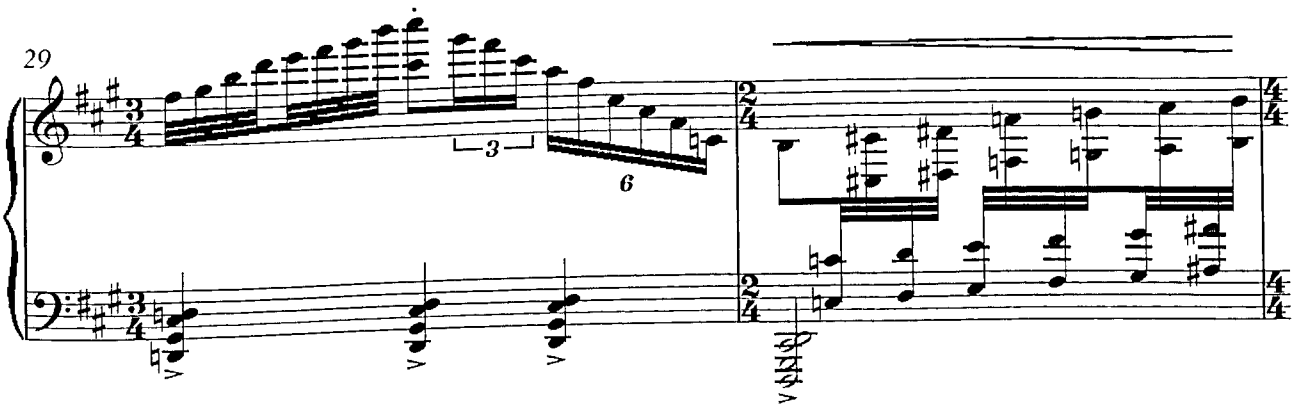

13
(8)
pp
16
(8)
mf
rit.
19
(8)
f
A tempo
22
15ma
mp
24
(15)
p

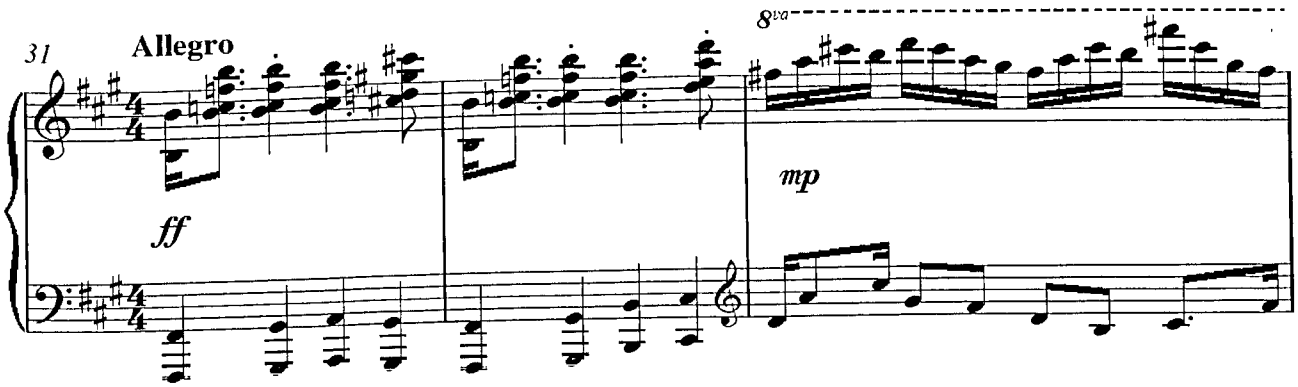

26
(15)
8va

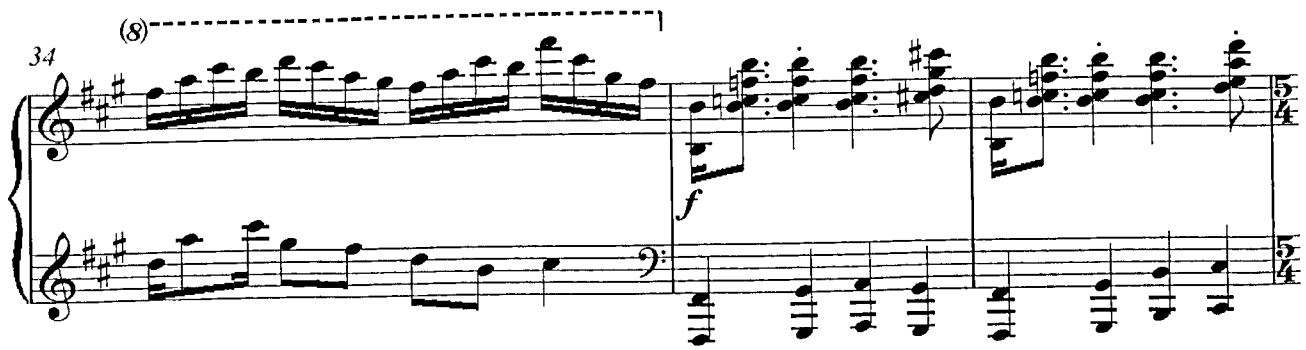
XIV

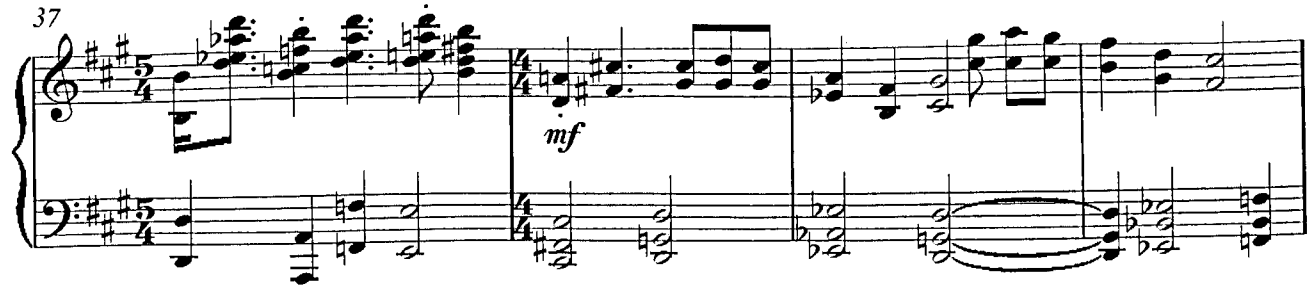


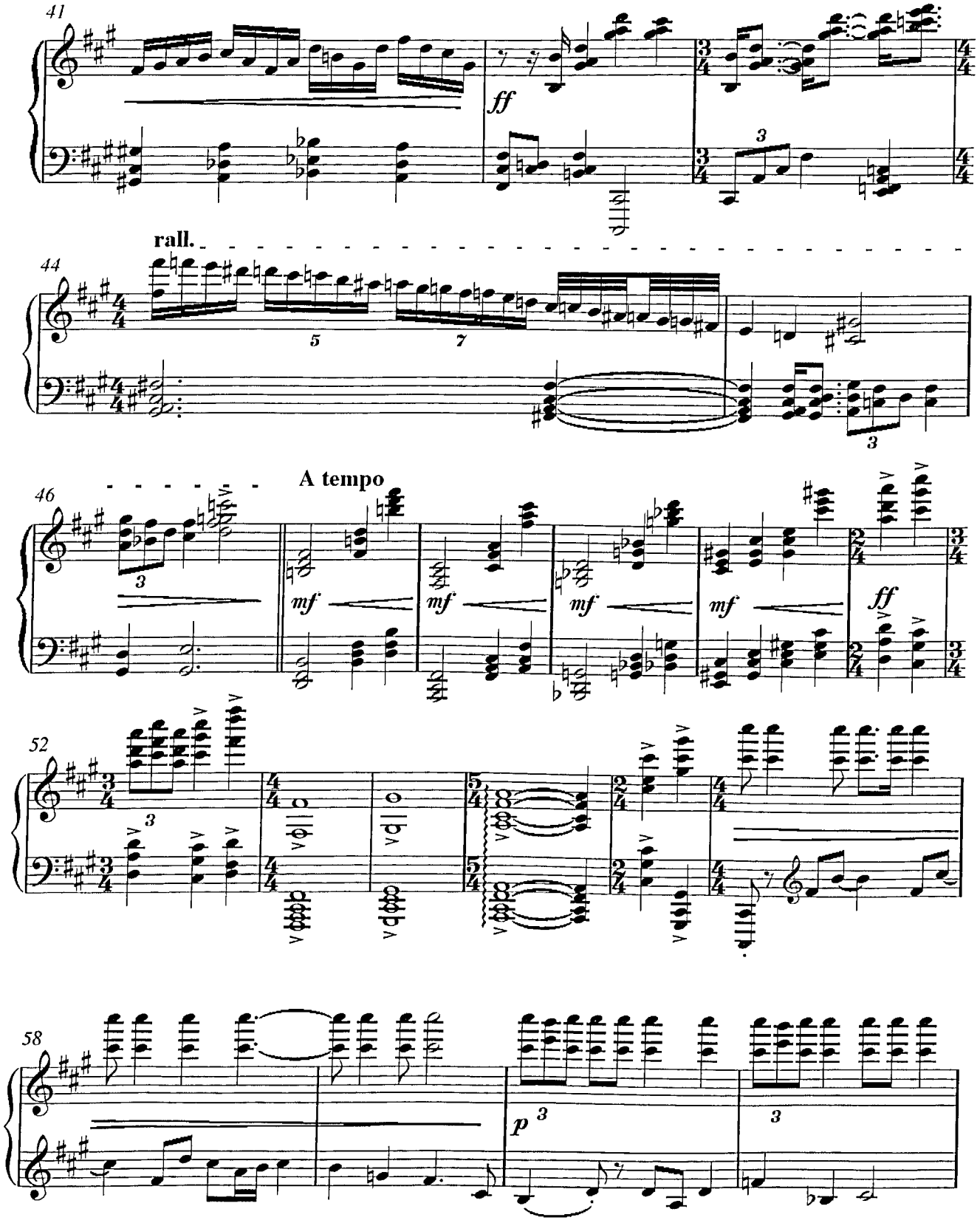

20
mf
23
fff
Meno mosso
p
molto accel.
27
6
7
28
3/4
3/4

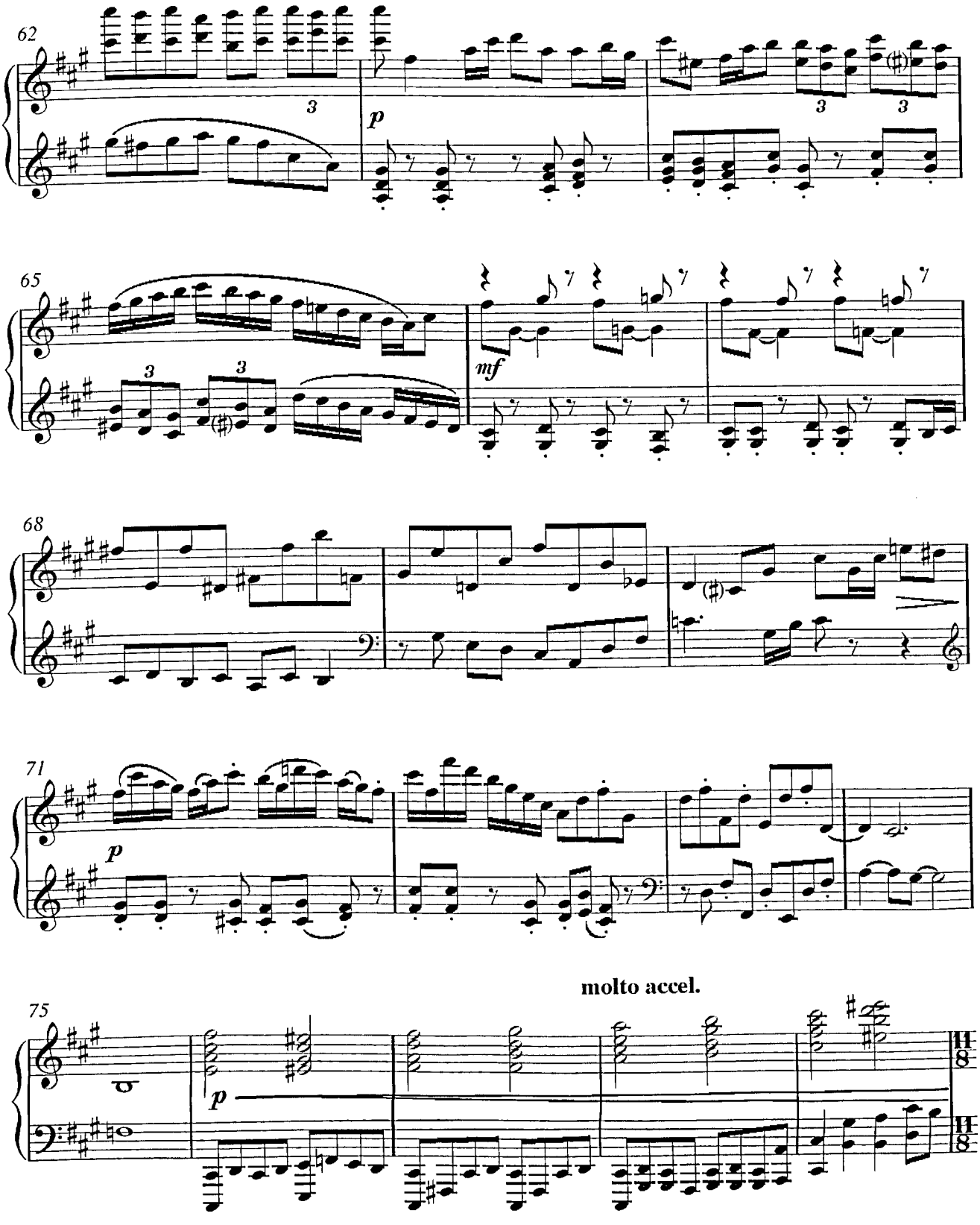

29
3
6

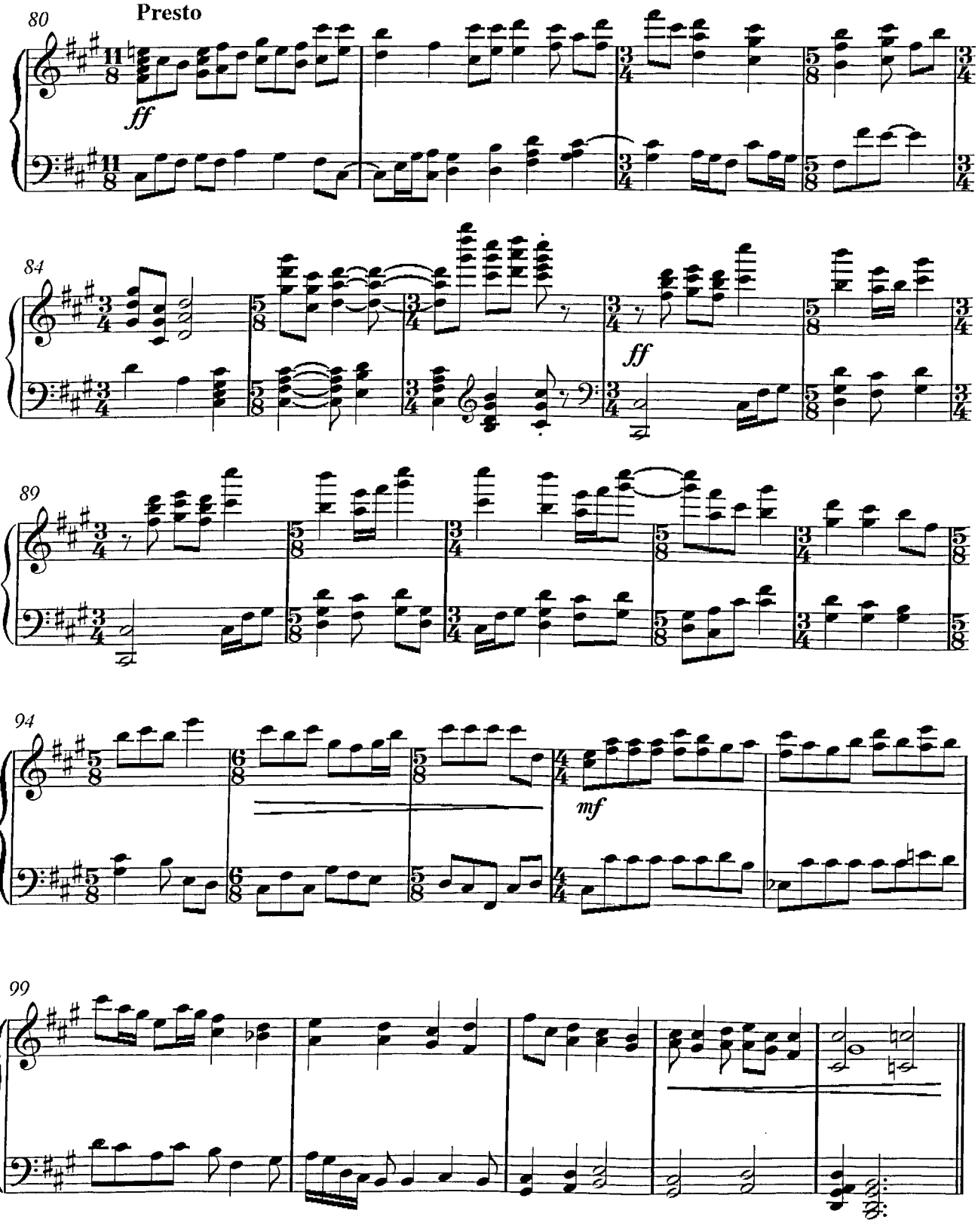

31
Allegro
ff
8va
mp

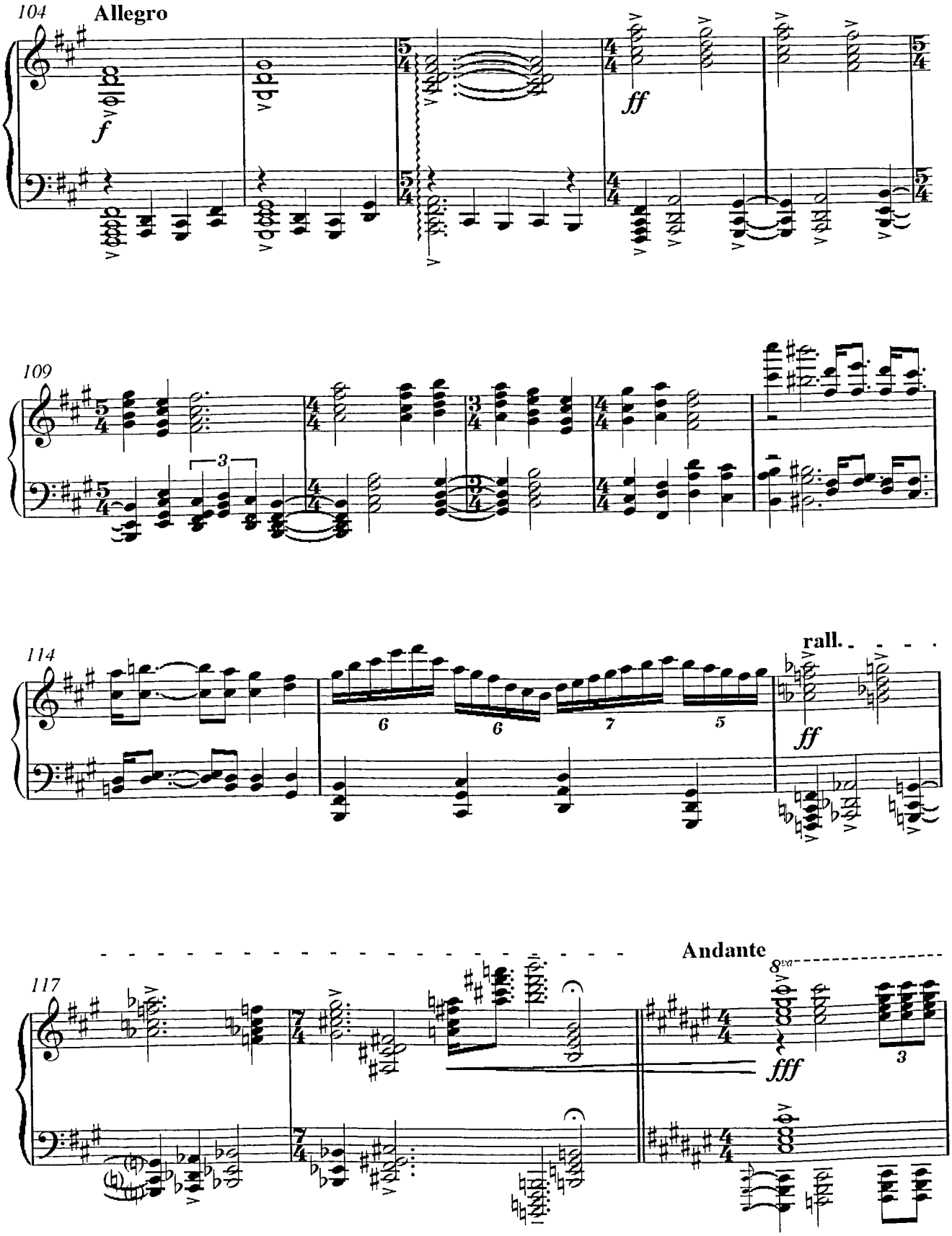

34
(8)
f

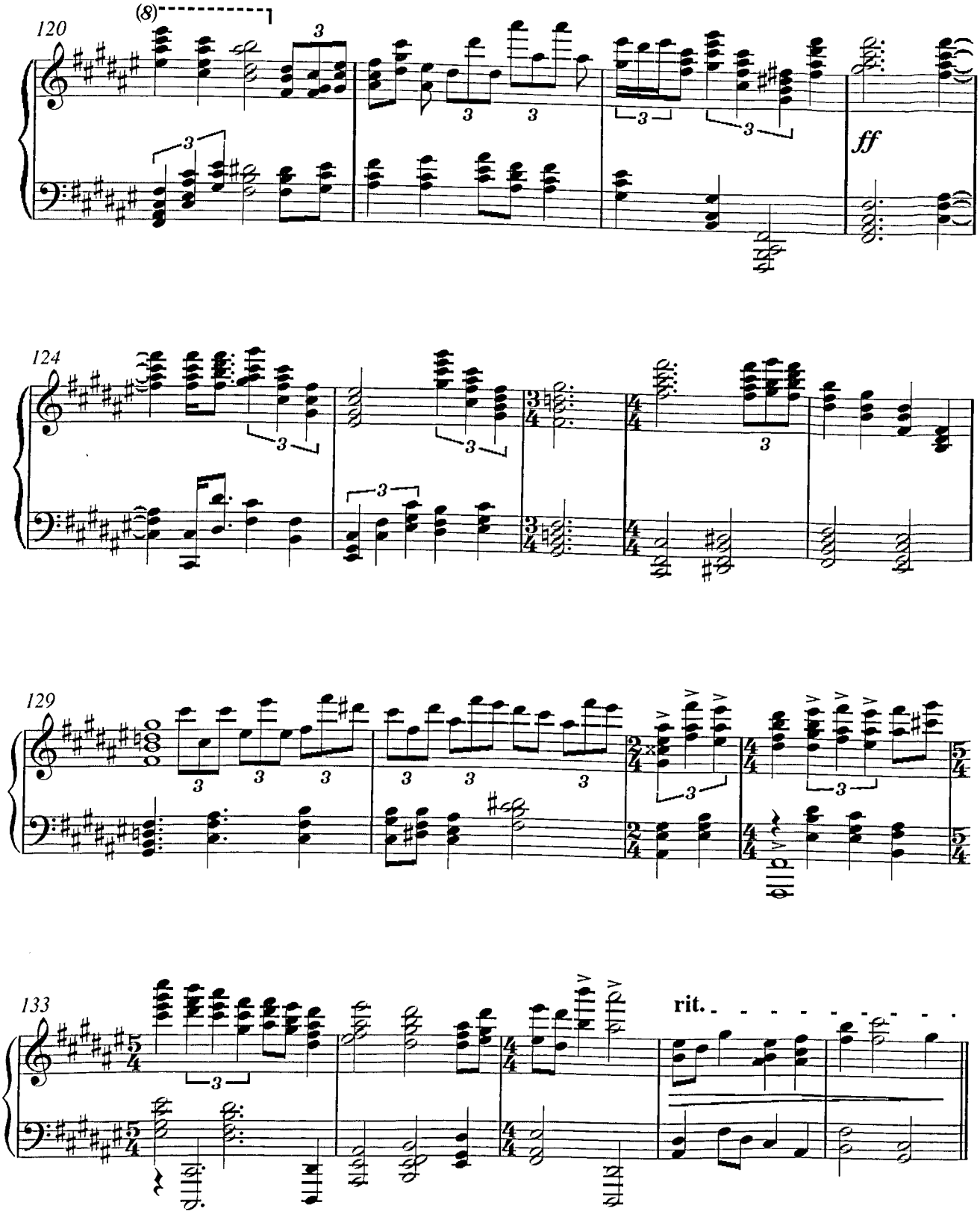

37
mf

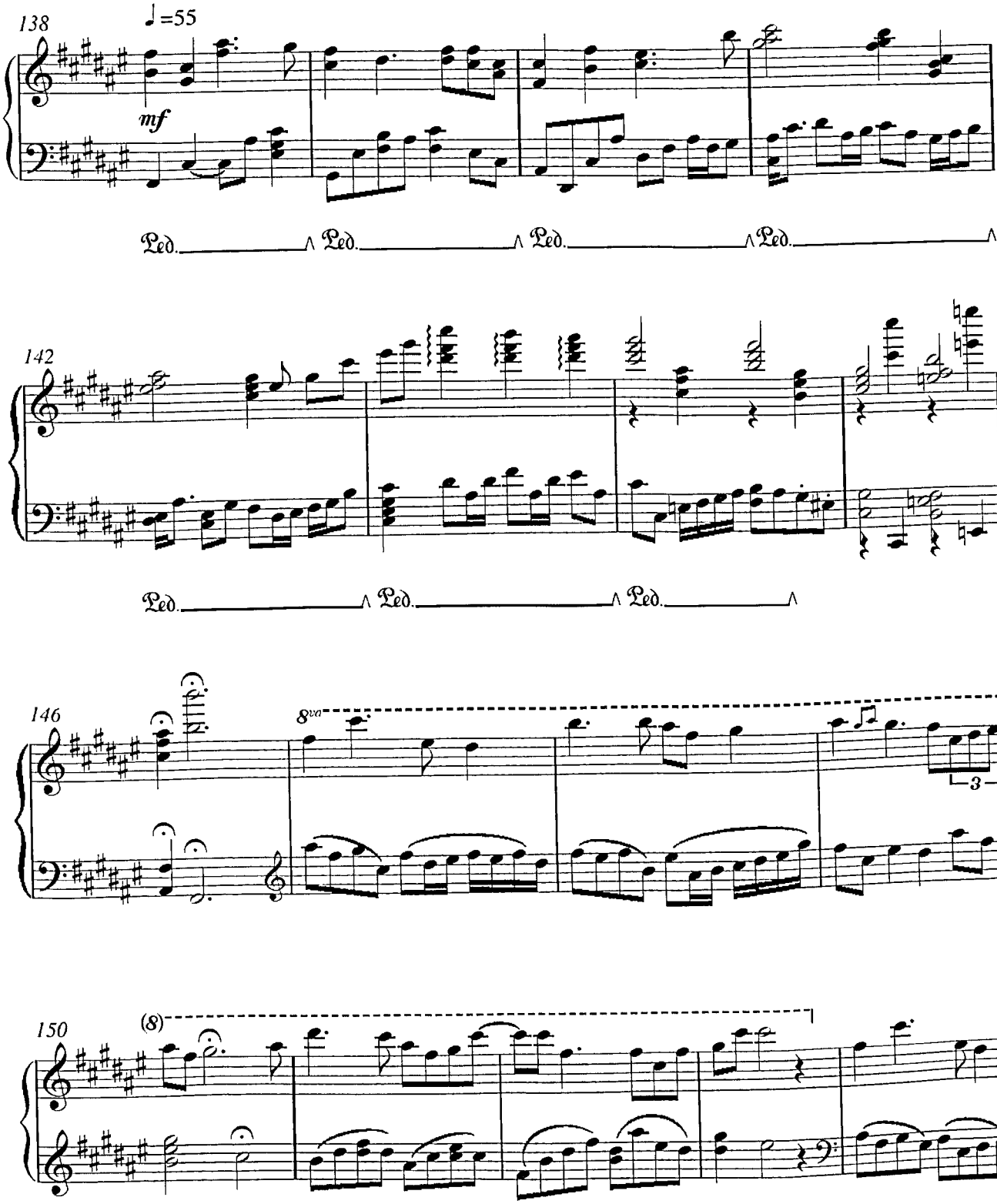

41
ff
rall.
44
A tempo
46
mf
mf
mf
mf
ff
52
58
p

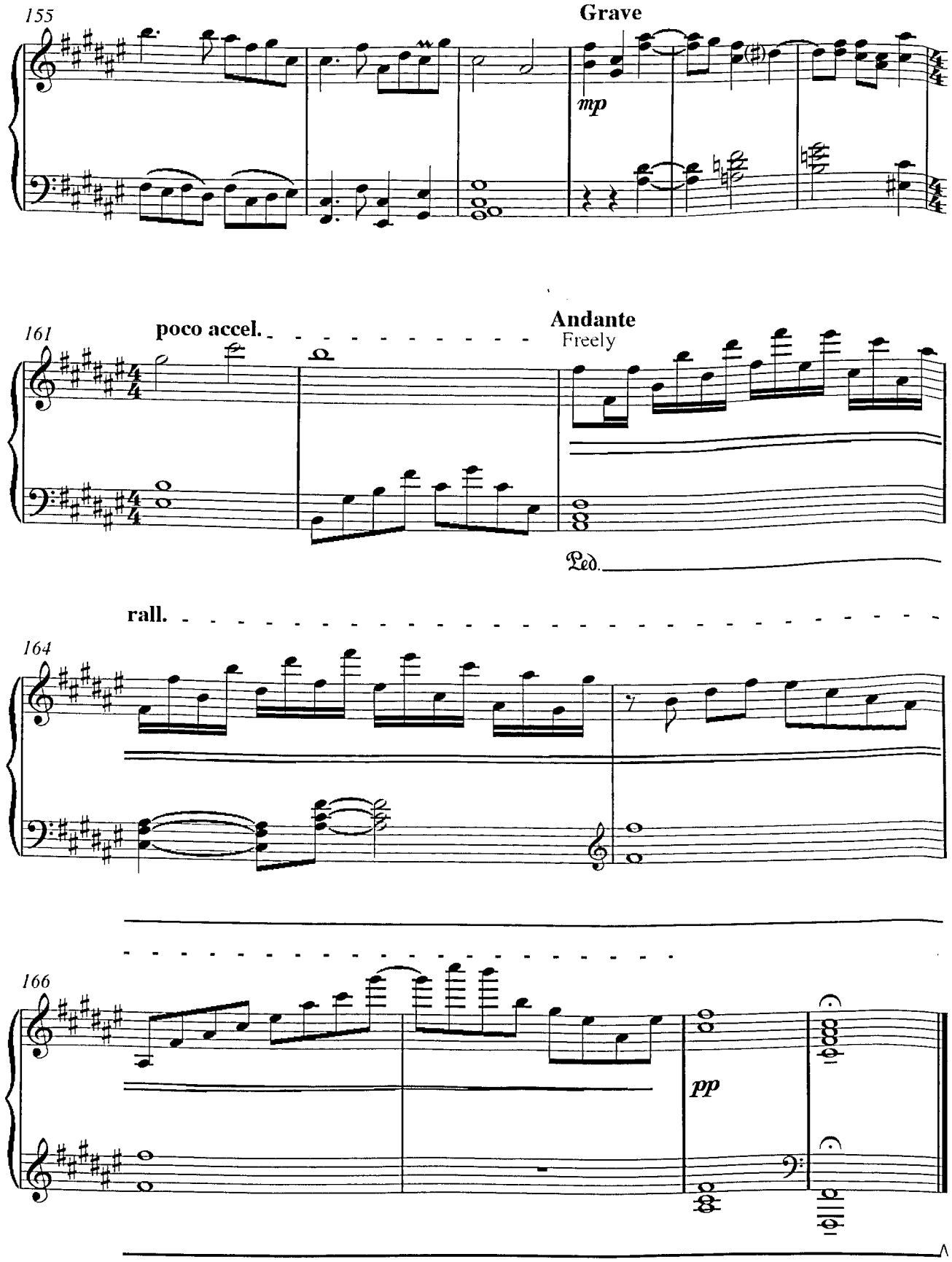

62
3
p
65
3
3
3
3
mf
68
71
p
molto accel.
75
p


80
Presto
ff
84
ff
89
94
mf
99


104
Allegro
f
ff
109
3
114
6
6
7
5
rall.
ff
Andante
117
8va
fff
3


120
(8)
ff
124
129
133
rit.


138
♩=55
mf
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
142
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
146
8va
3
150
(8)


155
Grave
mp
161
poco accel.
Andante
Freely
Ped.
rall.
164
166
pp