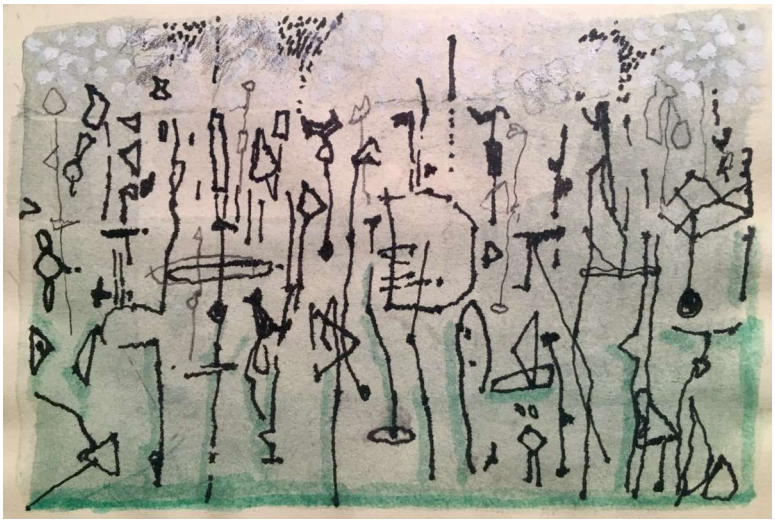


Steps Volume 7: Dances on the Head of a Pin

Peter Seabourne

Peter Seabourne

Steps Volume 7: Dances on the Head of a Pin

for piano solo

1	Spanish Sun Dance	5
2	Sand Dance	8
3	Galumph	10
4	Musing Dance	12
5	Uncertain Steps	14
6	Doll's Dance	17
7	River Dance	18
8	Weaving Dance	23
9	Minuet, or even a Sarabande	25
10	Snake Dance	29
11	One False Step	31
12	Spiteful Dance	34
13	How Still the Dancer Lies	36
14	Dance of Death	38
15	Lollop	40
16	Un-Ravelling Dance	43
17	Fall Down Seven Times, Get Up Eight!	46
18	Impatient Mazurka	48
19	Pas des Deux: L'Ancien et la Jeune Danseuse	50
20	First Attempts at a Pirhouette	52
21	The Lead Dancer Shows his Mettle	55
22	Three Legs	56
23	Pavan for a Revived Princess	58
24	Danse Françaix?	62
25	Bacchanalian Whirl	64
26	Slow Movement	67
27	The Amazing Dance of the Peacock Spider	69
28	Tread Softly...	70
29	Stamping Dance	72
30	Helter Skelter	74
31	Hop of Hope - with Harp	76
32	Carefully, Carefully! Slow Sword Dance	78
33	Snap Shot - Ecossaise	79
34	With How Sad Steps	81
35	Hobble	83
36	Unreel	85
37	Before a Tarantella	87
38	Tarantella	89

duration c.49 minutes

Never give a sword to a man who can't dance.
Confucius

[I cannot...]

This seventh Steps volume forms part of an ongoing and open ended compositional journey.
The project is dedicated to the young pianist whose playing rekindled my compositional spark,
and to whom I will always be deeply indebted. P.S.

NOTES:

Pedal markings are not intended to be prescriptive, or exhaustive; they are kept to a minimum in some pieces.

Their absence does not mean that no pedal is intended unless marked so. Players should use their discretion based on hall acoustics, instrument and so forth.

Quintuplets, septuplets etc. are always to be played evenly throughout the group and not subdivided into 2+3 etc.. The stress is always on the first note.

Where 8va, 8vb, 15ma signs are used accidentals are not respelled if already in the bar on that stave position.

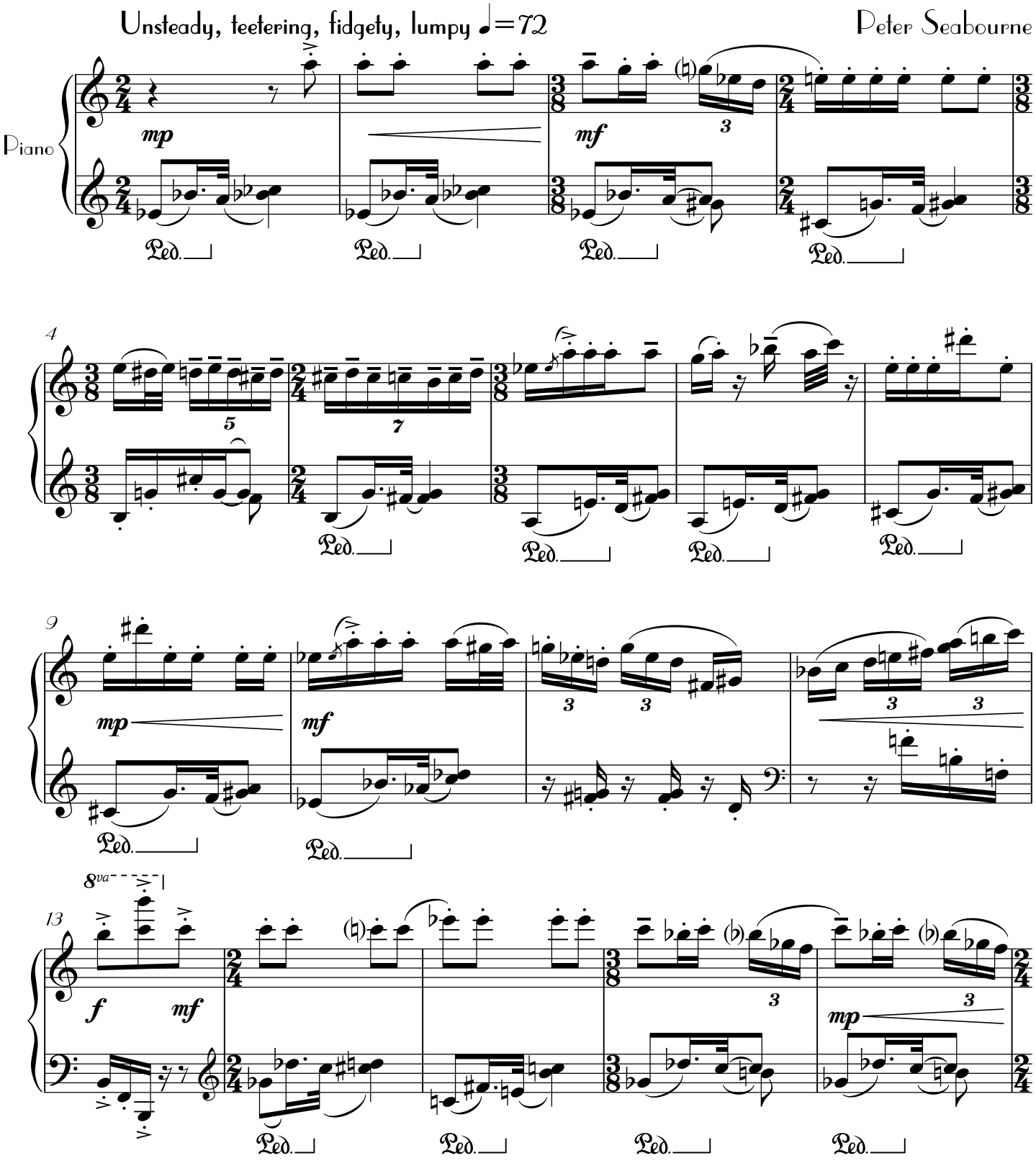
Arpeggi always start before the beat, the top note arriving on it.

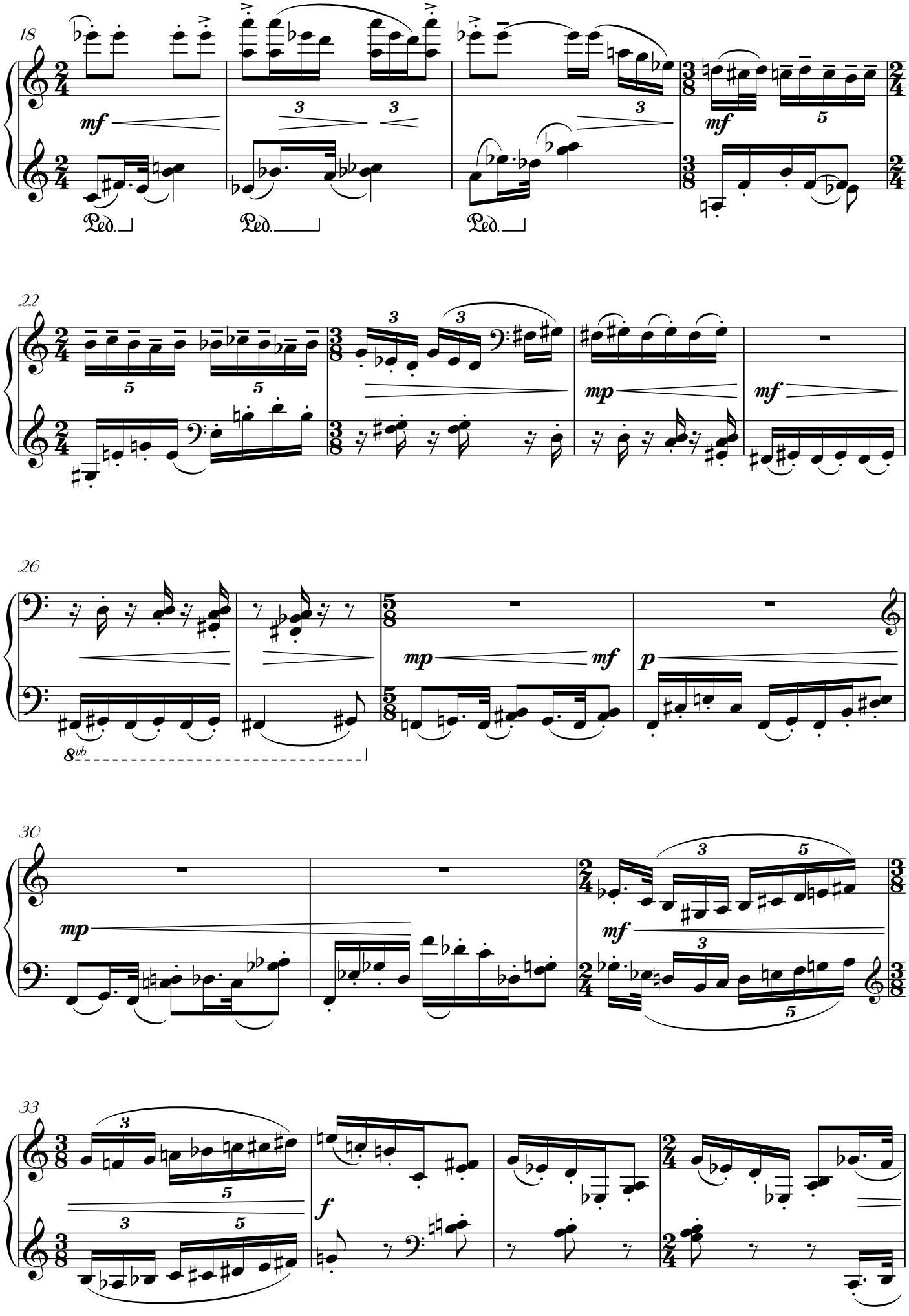
Straight lines indicate lines swapping hands not glissandi which are always marked as such.

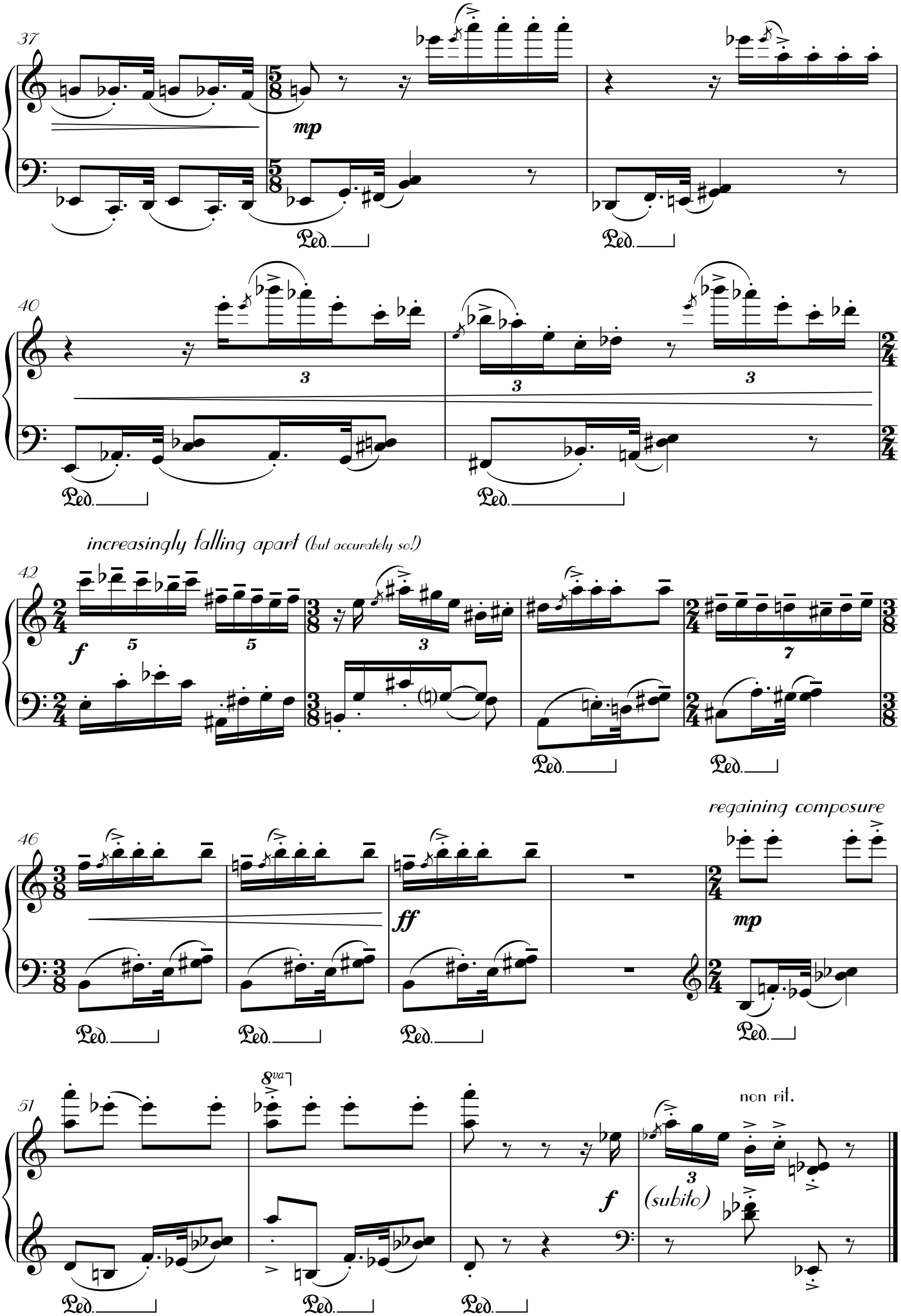
As in all my work rhythmic accuracy is central. I do not mean this as mathematics and, with exposure, my "quirky logic" will start to feel natural (at least so a good number of pianists have now told me). However, I do not intend "generalised, free, Romantic twiddles and splurges", only articulated rhythms (unless marked).

Steps Volume 7
Dances on the Head of a Pin

1
Spanish Sun Dance




18
mf
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
mf
22
mp
mf
26
8vb
mp
mf
p
30
mp
mf
33
f


37
mp
Ped.
Ped.
40
3
3
3
Ped.
Ped.
increasingly falling apart (but accurately so!)
42
f
5
5
3
7
Ped.
Ped.
regaining composure
46
ff
mp
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
51
8va
non rit.
f
(subito)
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

2
Sand Dance

Trance-like, subdued, looking inward ♩=88

pp

8vb

secco (no pedal) - like a small drum

* if small hands make the legato impossible here, use alternative small notes in lower part

4

poco

(8)

7

poco

(8)

9

(non stacc.)

più

mp

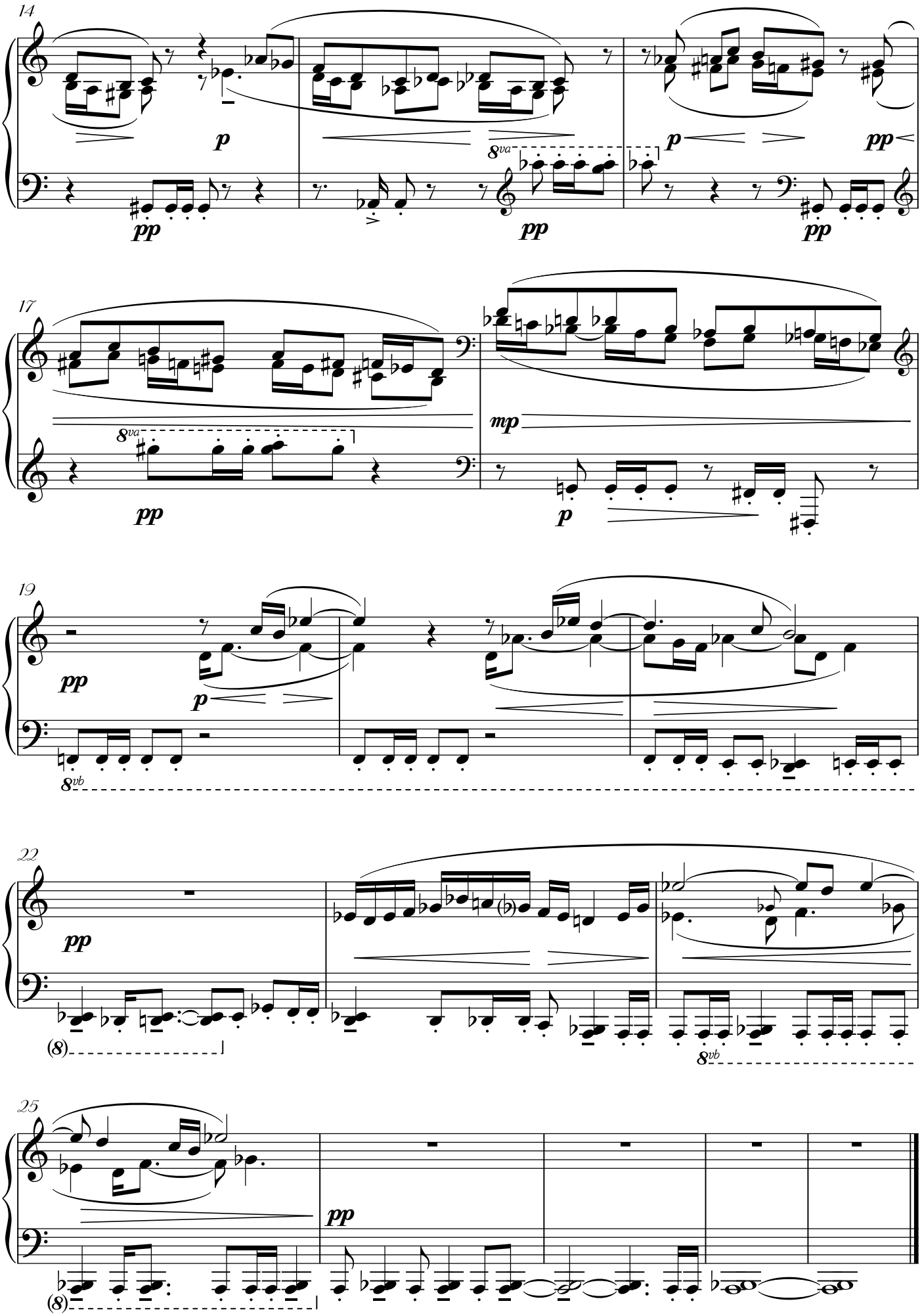
8vb

11

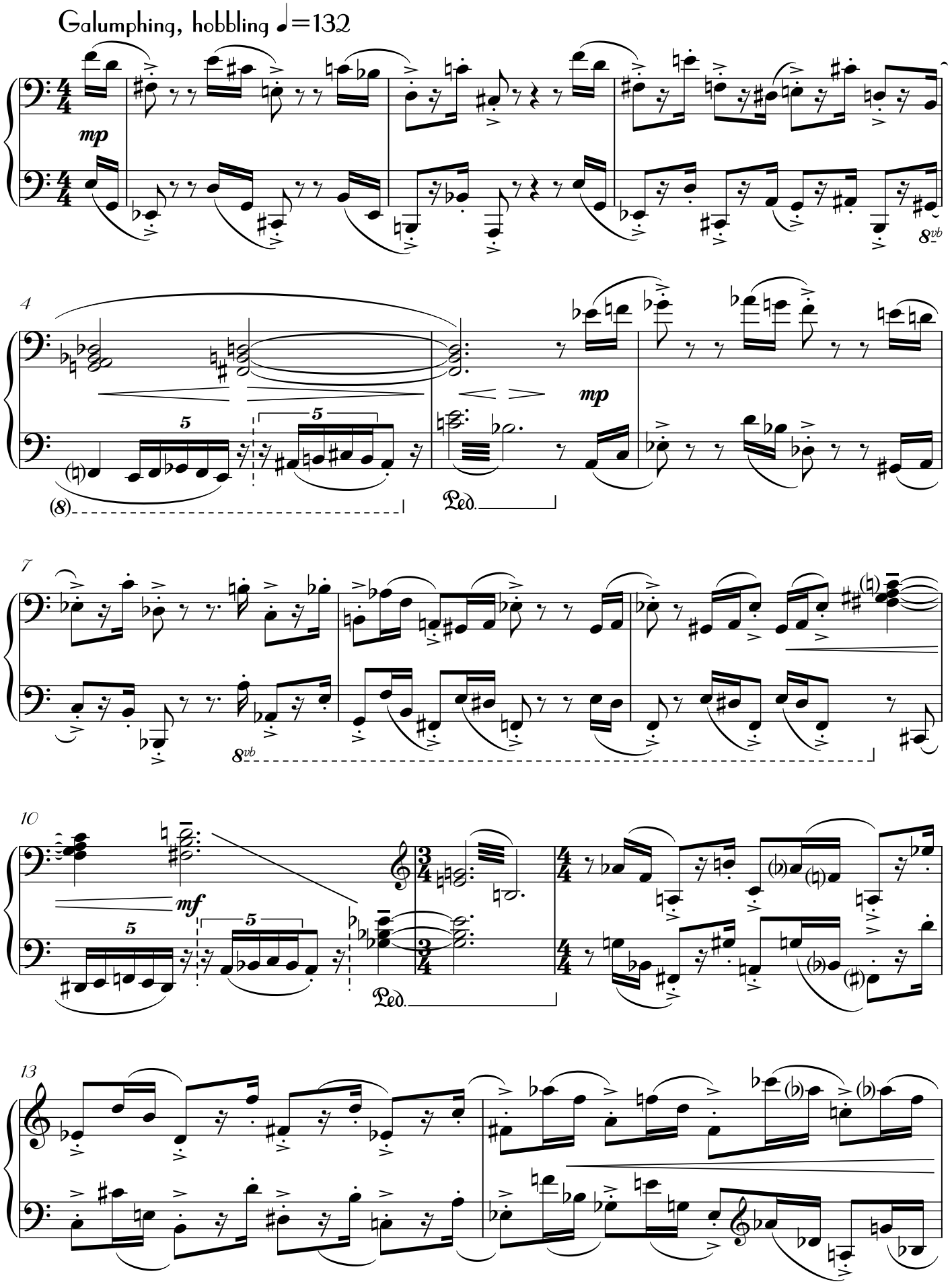
meno

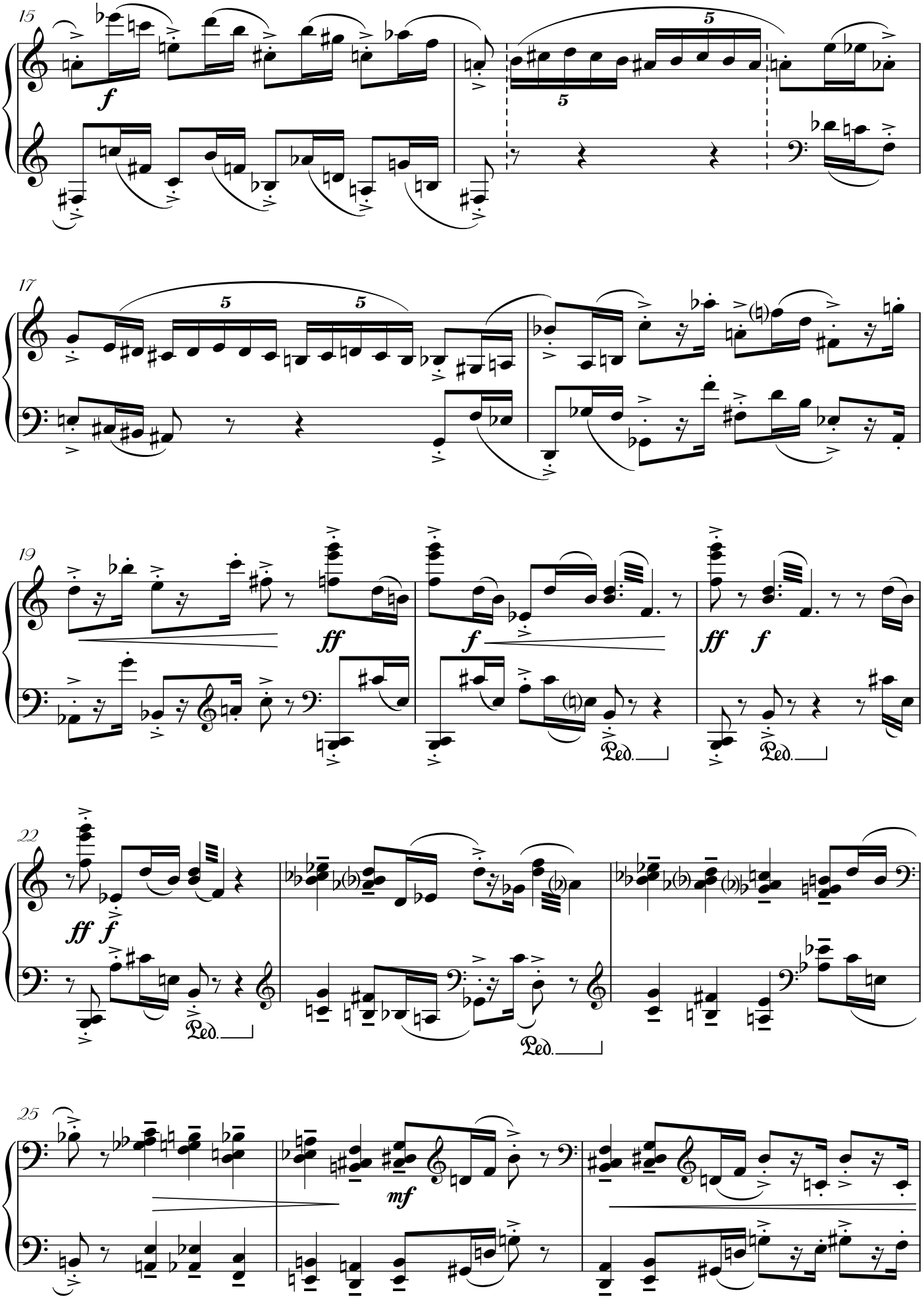
p

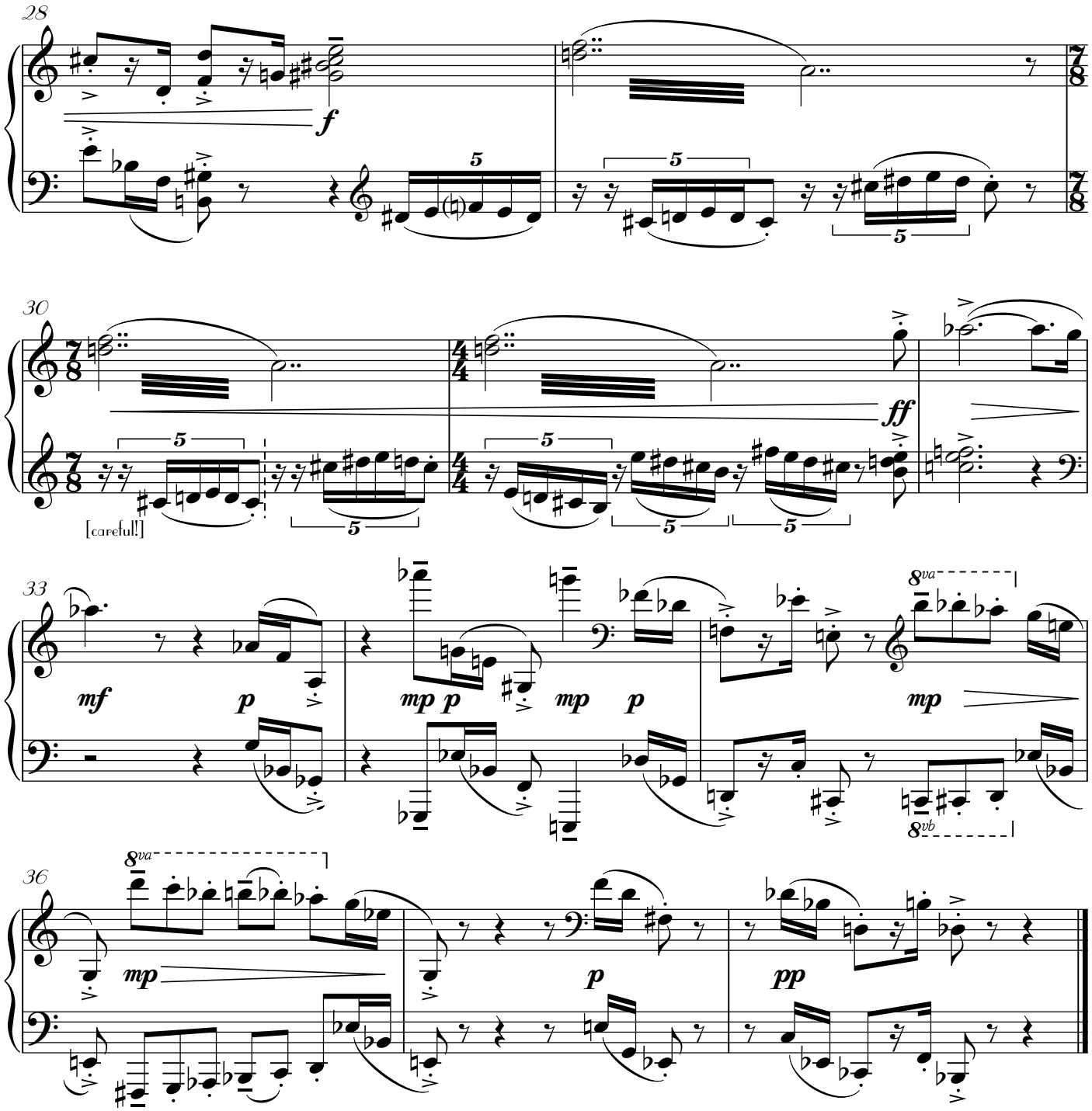
(8)


14
p
pp
8va
pp
p
pp
pp
17
8va
pp
mp
p
19
pp
p
8vb
22
pp
(8)
8vb
25
pp
(8)

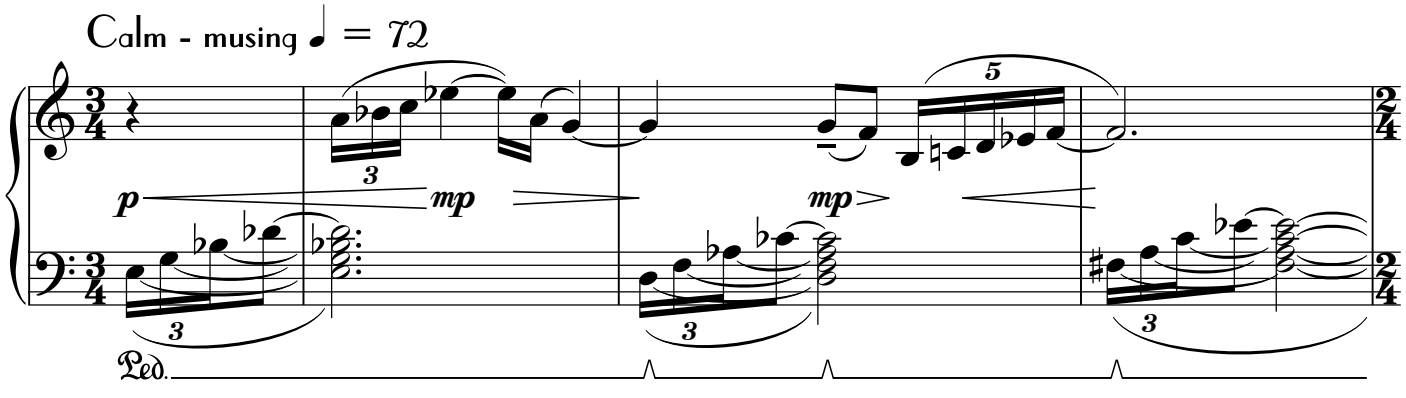
3
Galumph

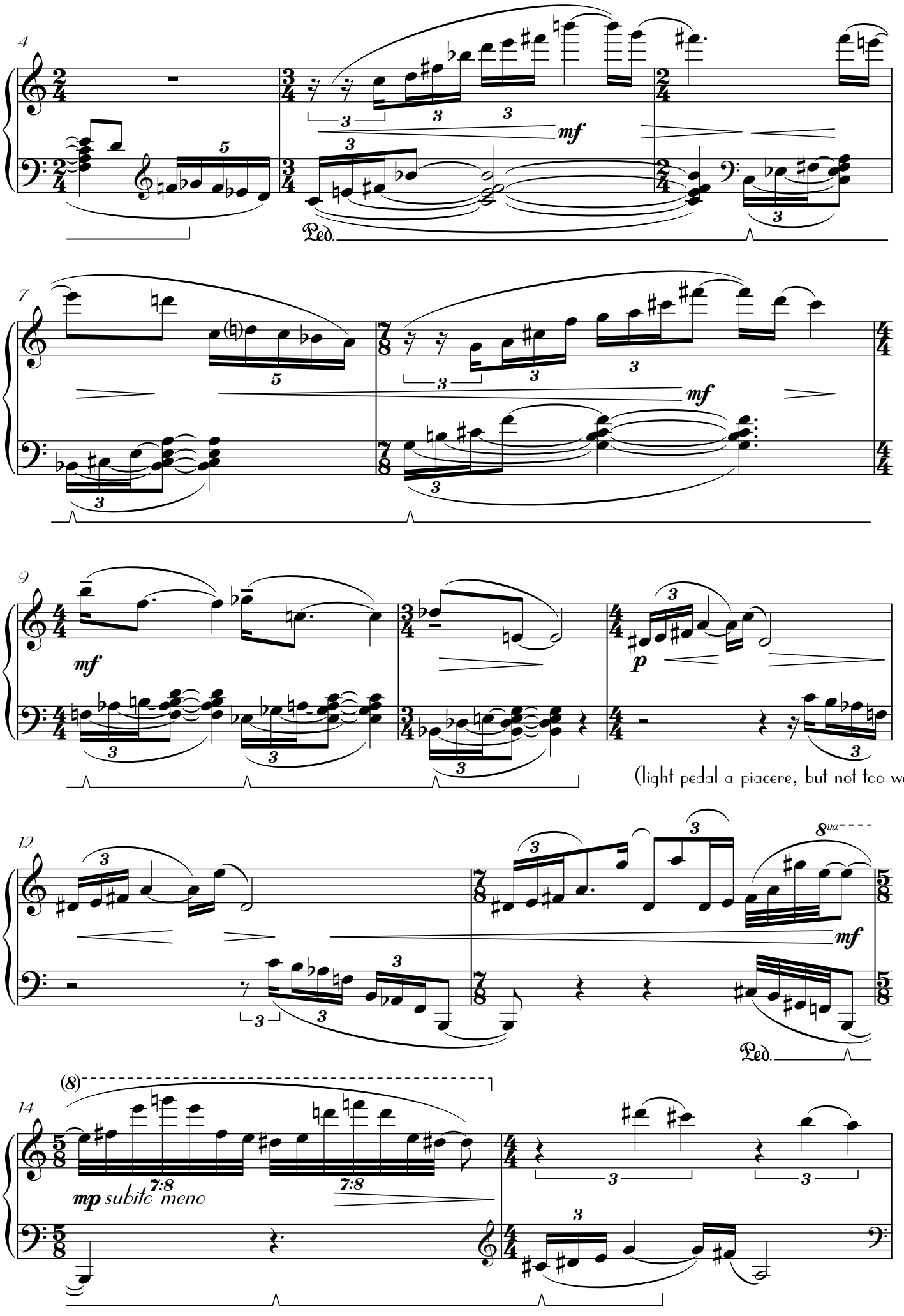


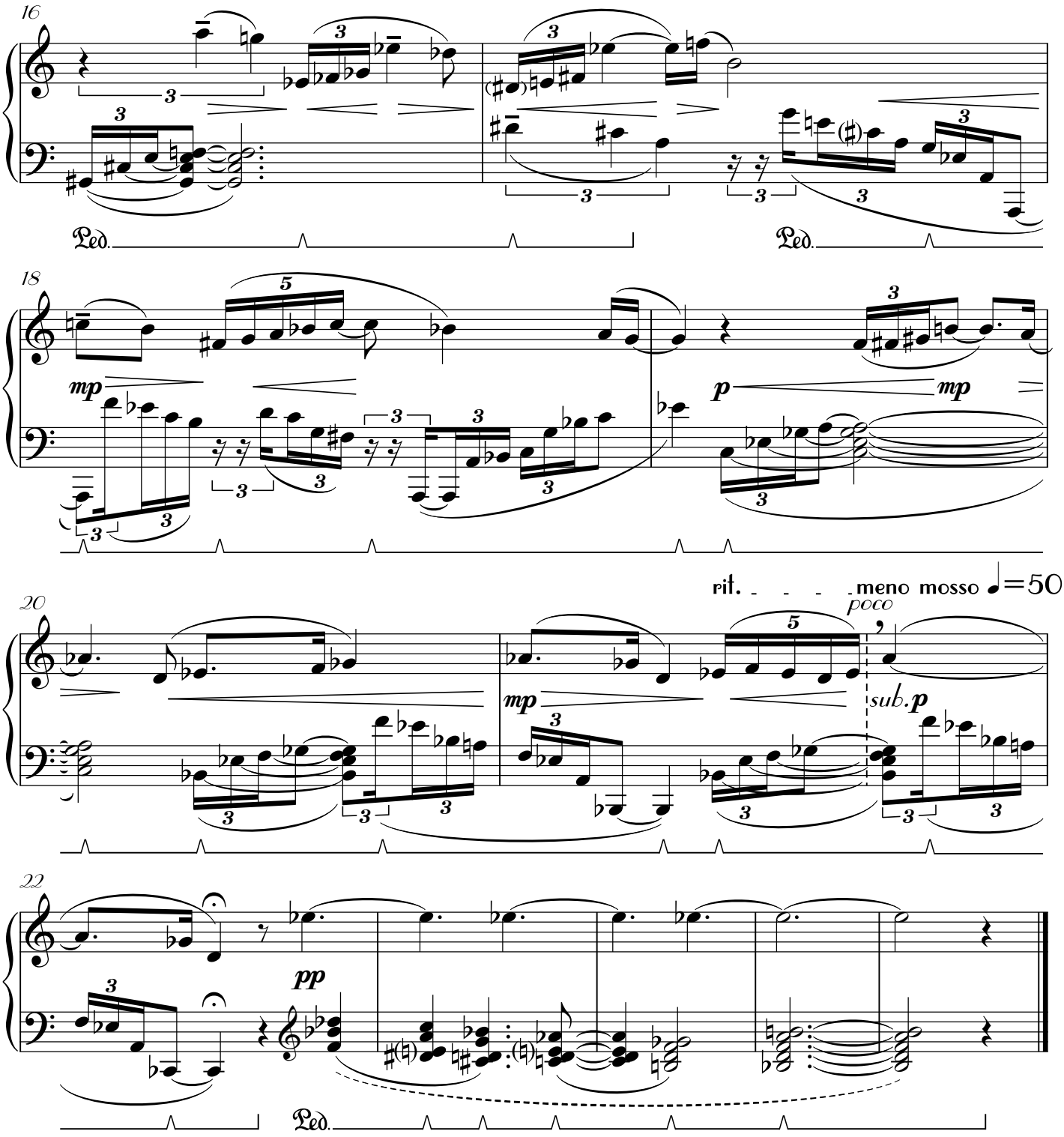

15
f
5
5
17
5
5
19
ff
f
ff
f
Ped.
Ped.
22
ff
f
Ped.
Ped.
25
mf



4
Musing Dance



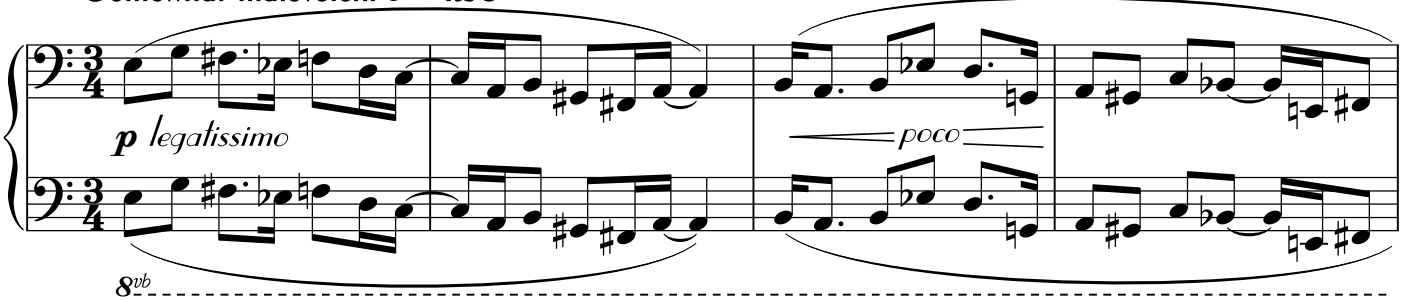

4
mf
Ped.
7
mf
9
mf
p
(light pedal a piacere, but not too wet)
12
8va
mf
Ped.
14
(8)
mp subito meno
7:8
7:8



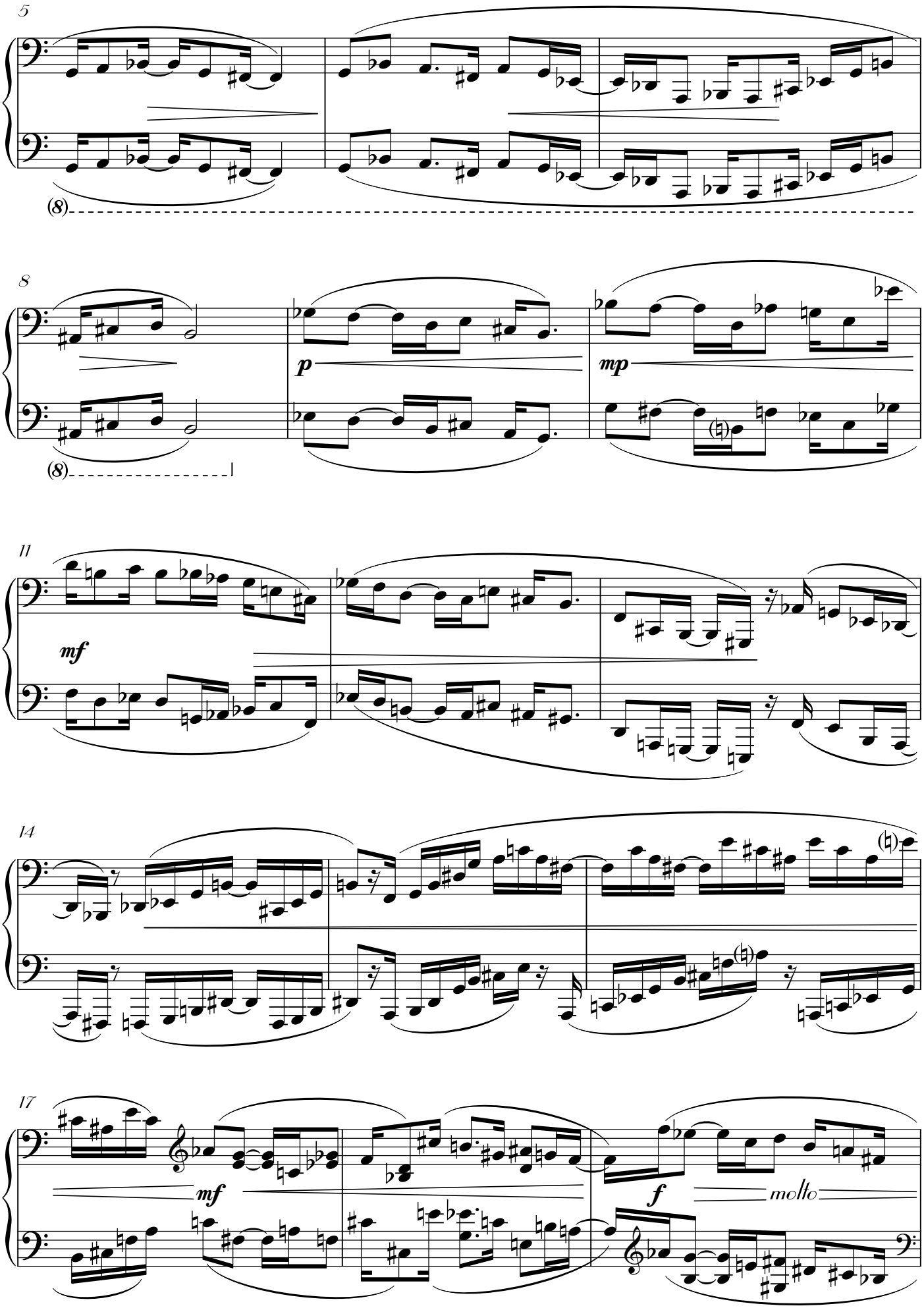
5

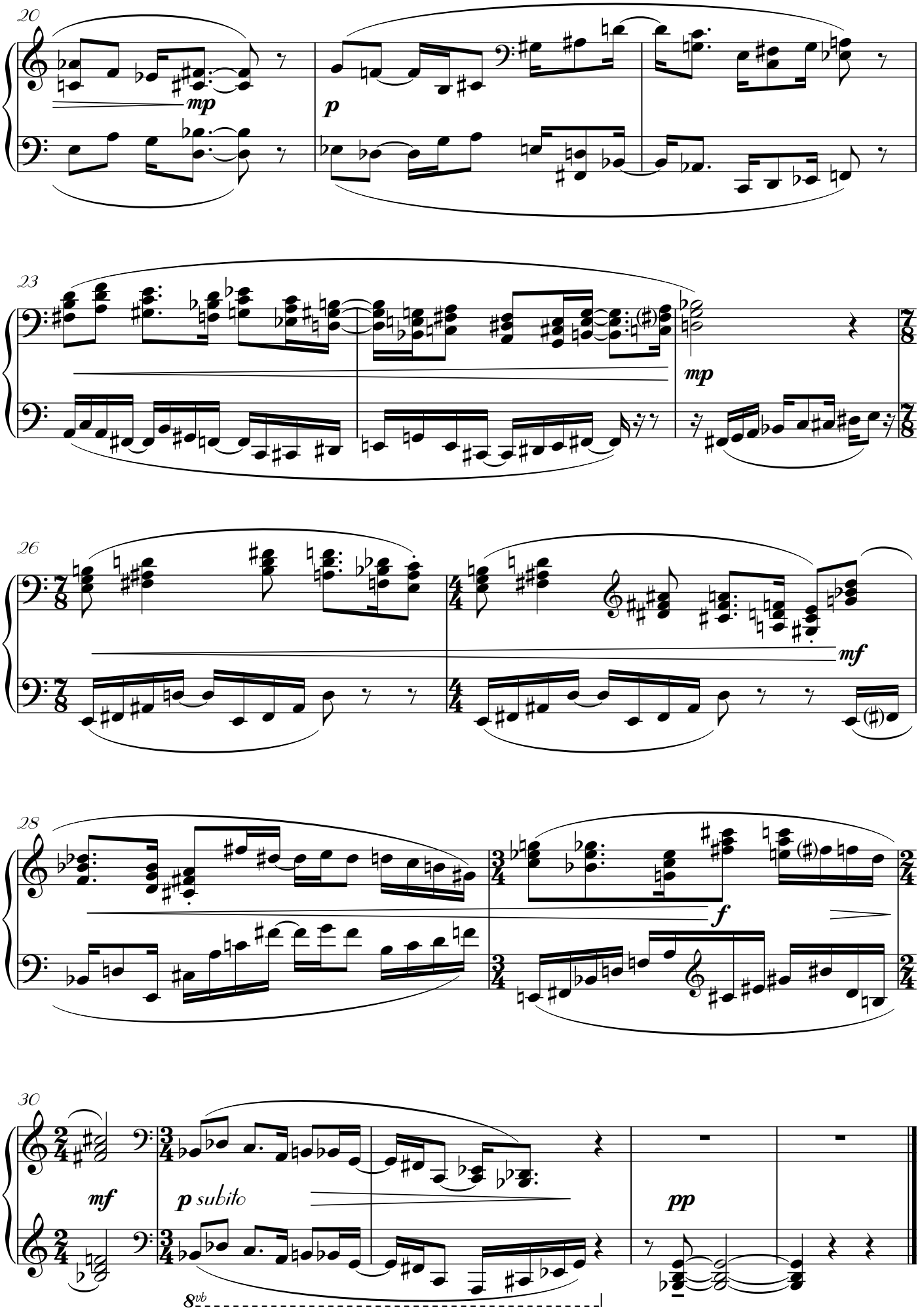
Uncertain Steps

Somewhat malevolent ♩=120



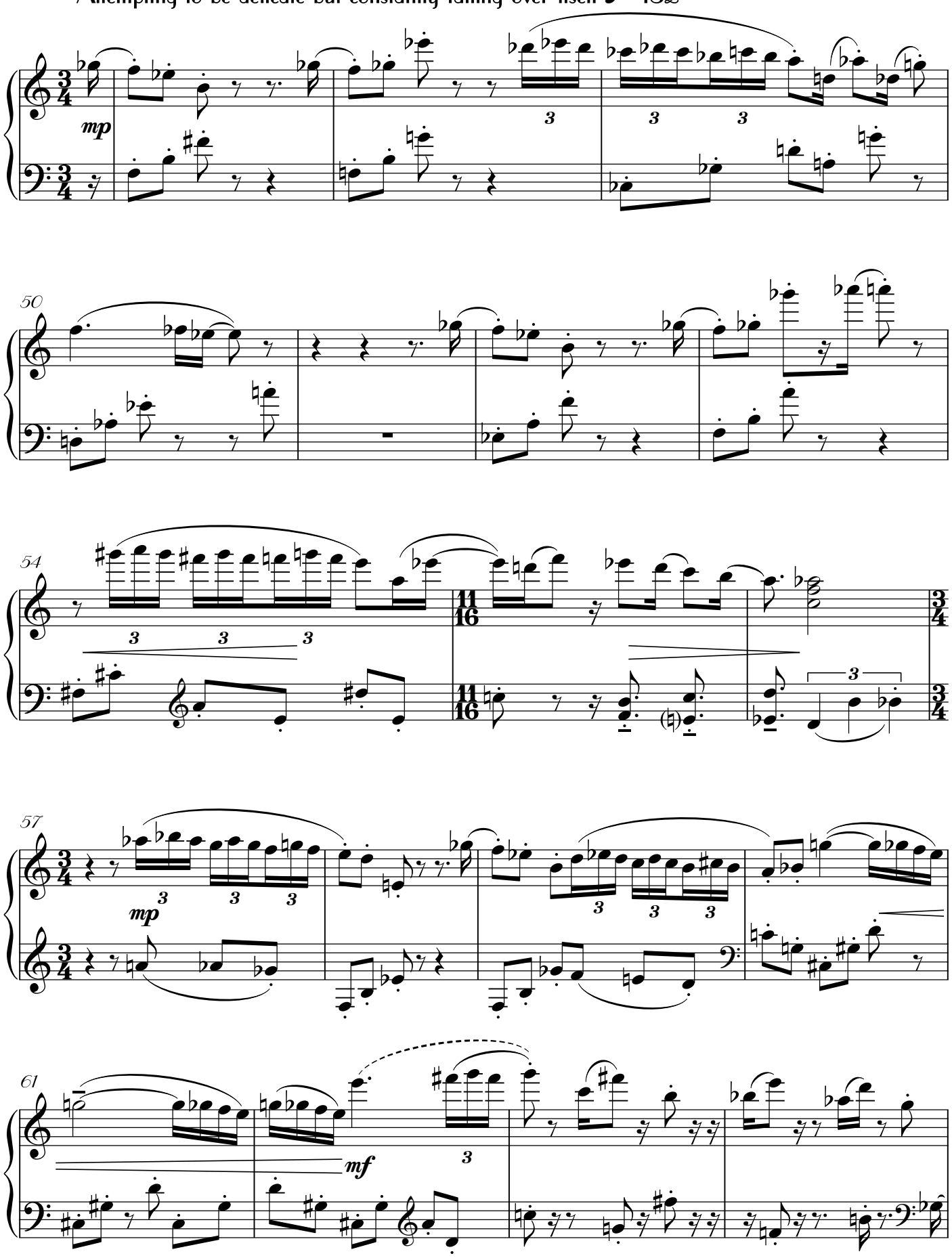
In this piece there should be long unbroken phrases - not over-accented, dancing smaller groups

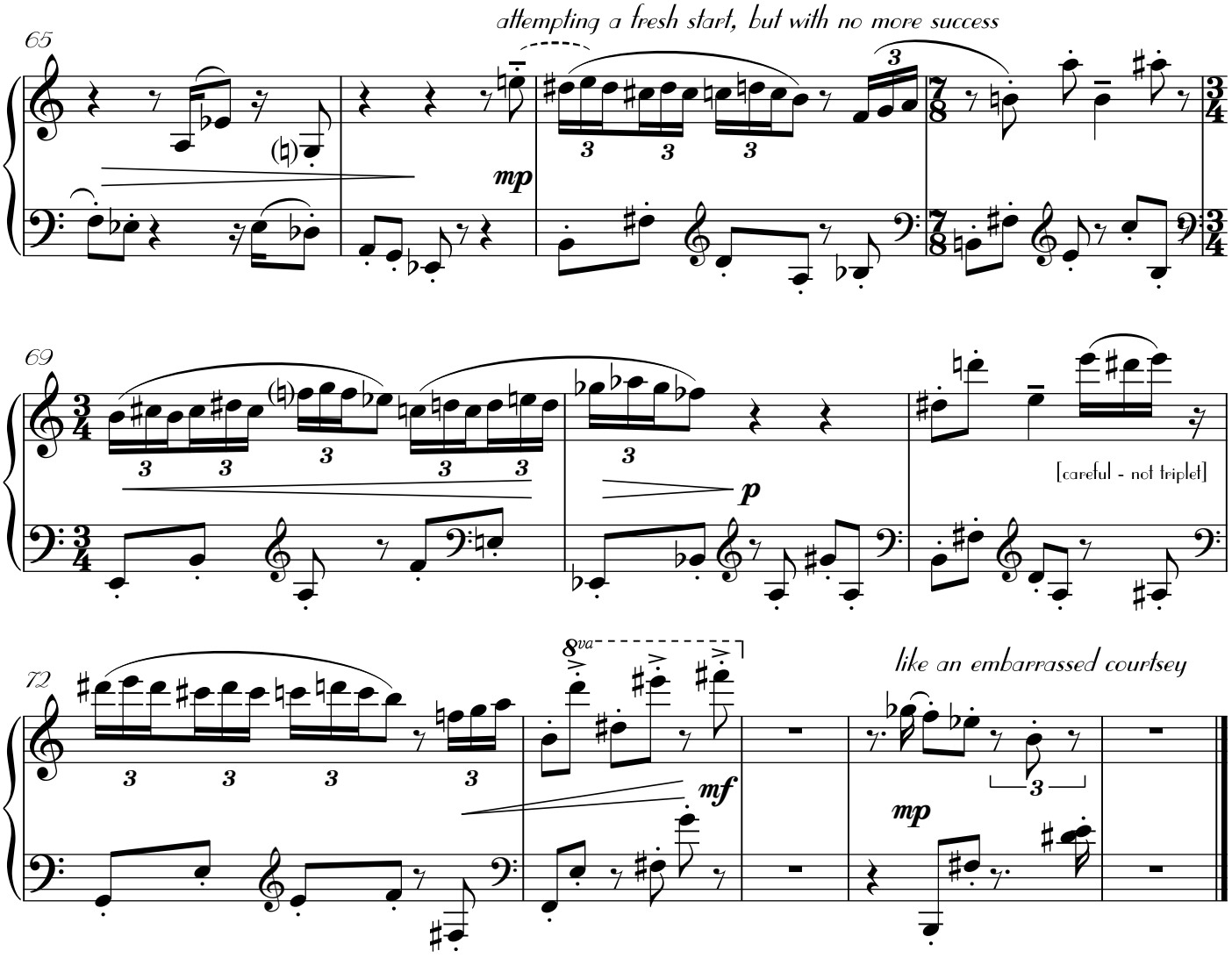

5
(8)
8
p
mp
(8)
11
mf
14
17
mf
f
molto


20
mp
p
23
mp
26
mf
28
f
30
mf
p subito
pp
8vb

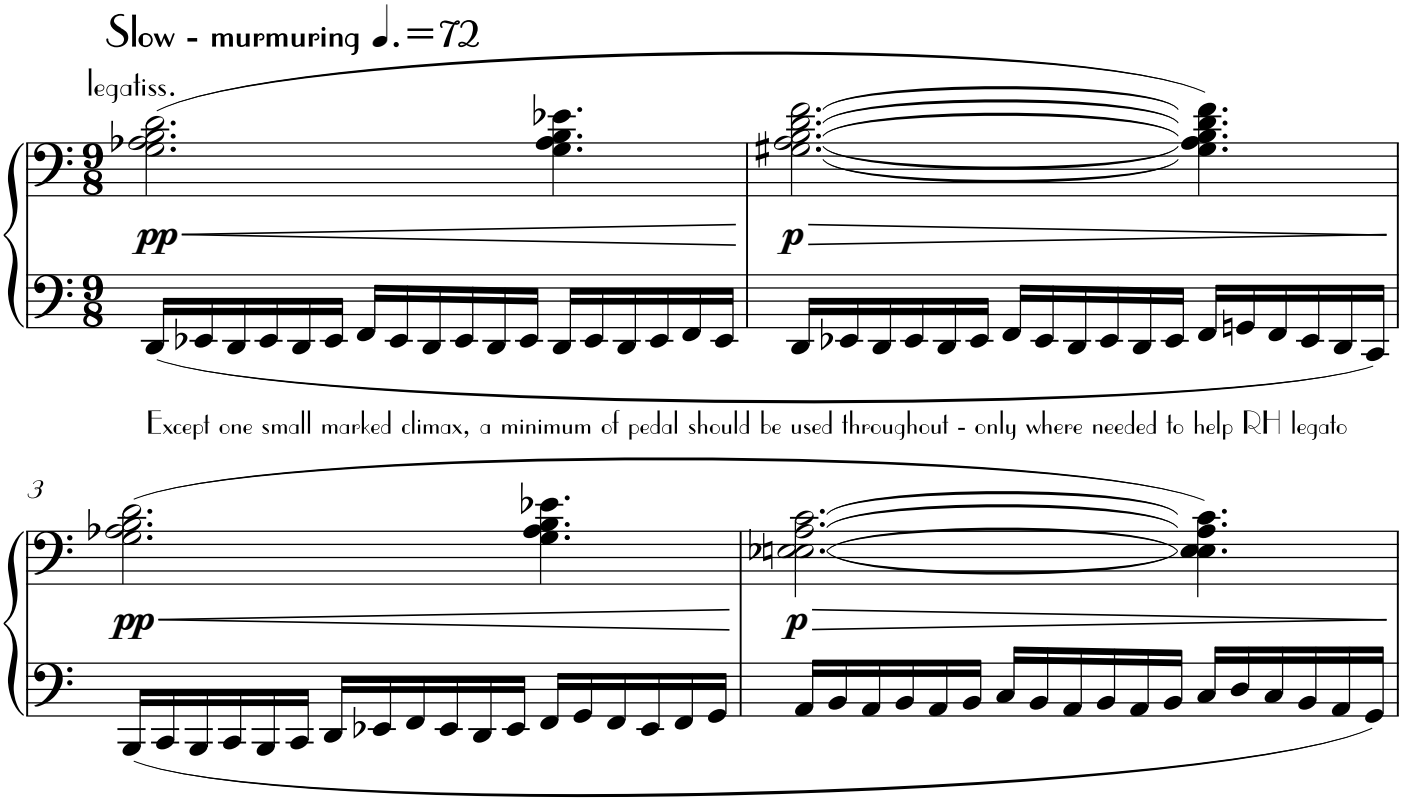
6
Doll's Dance

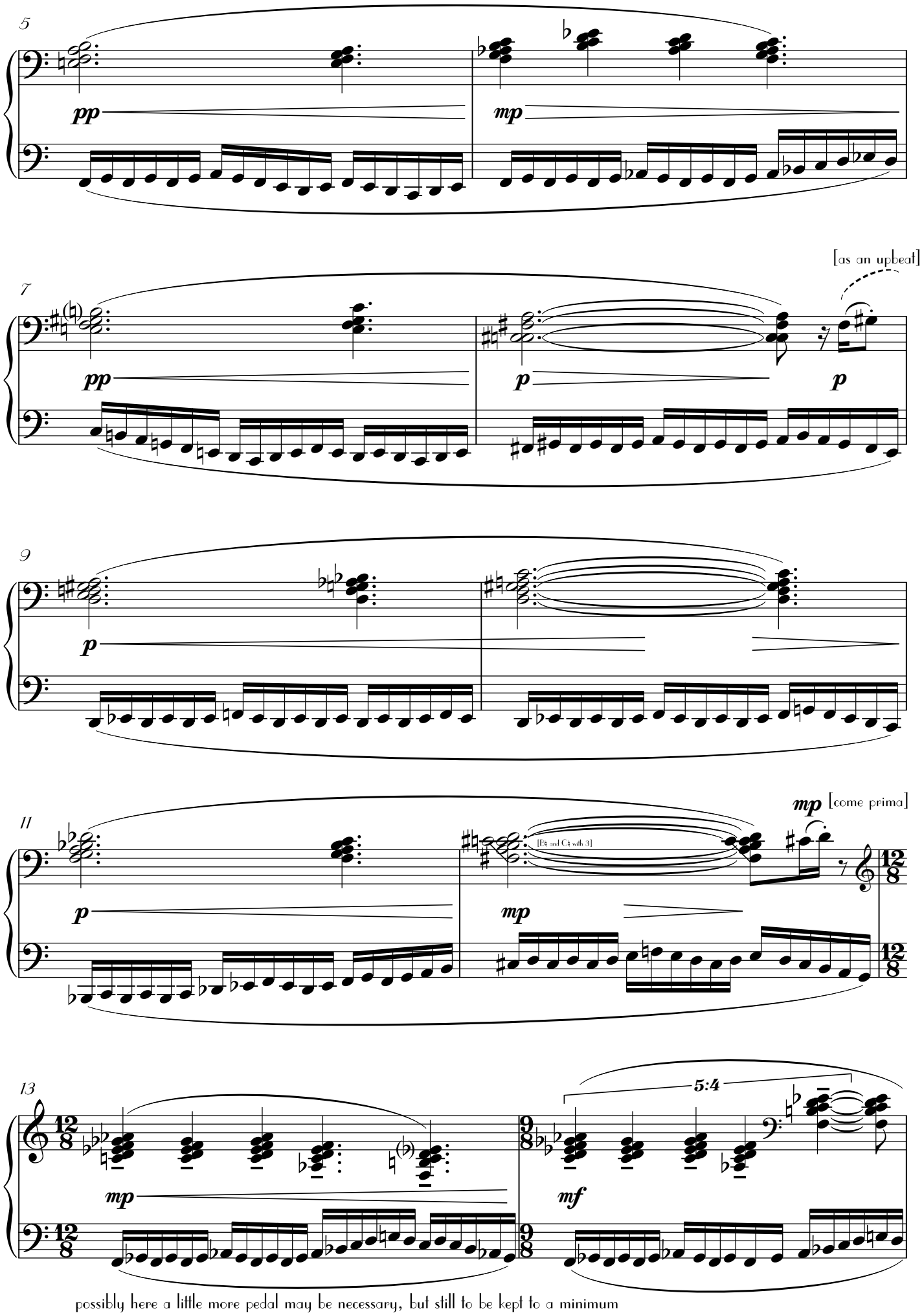
Attempting to be delicate but constantly falling over itself ♩=132

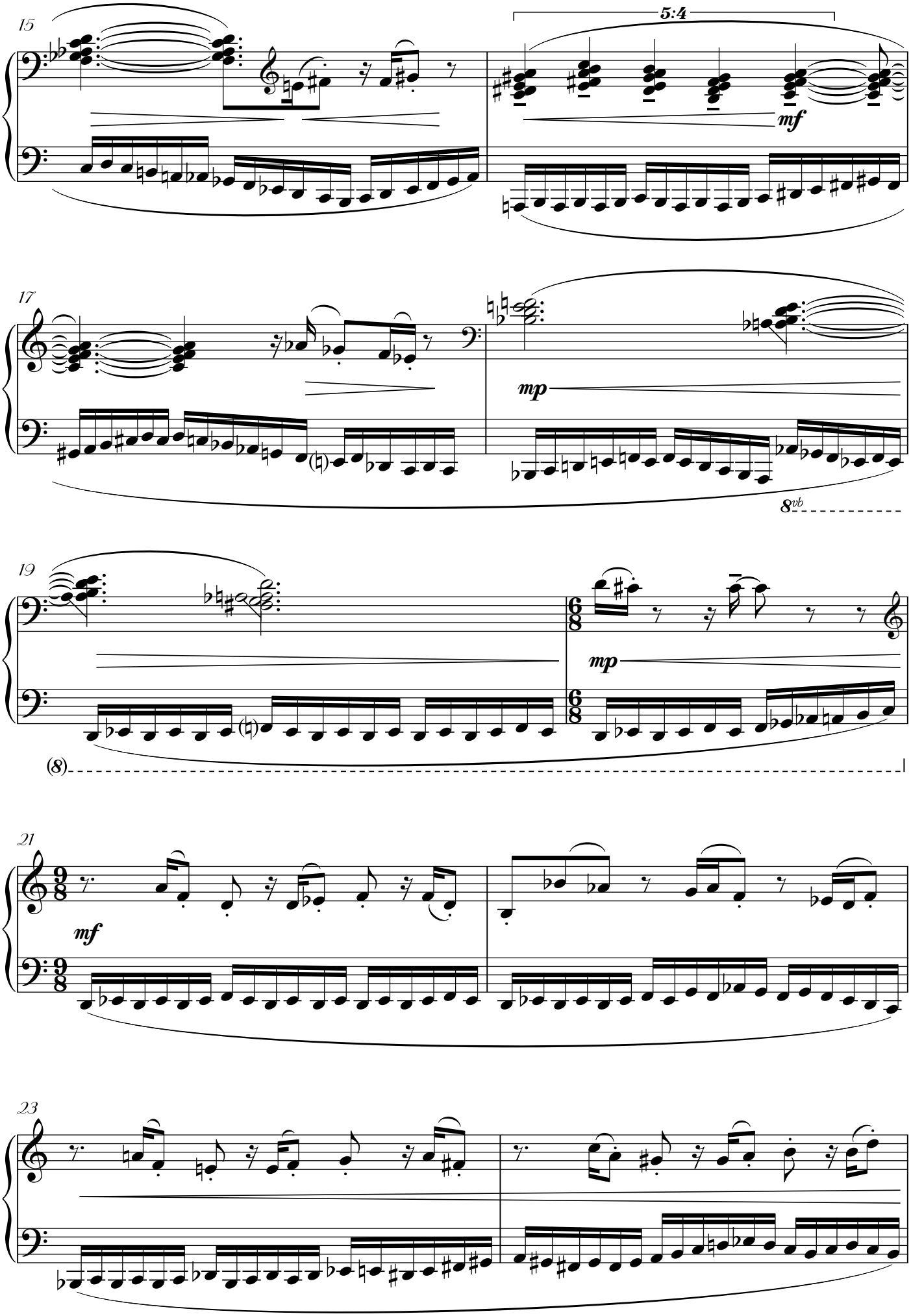


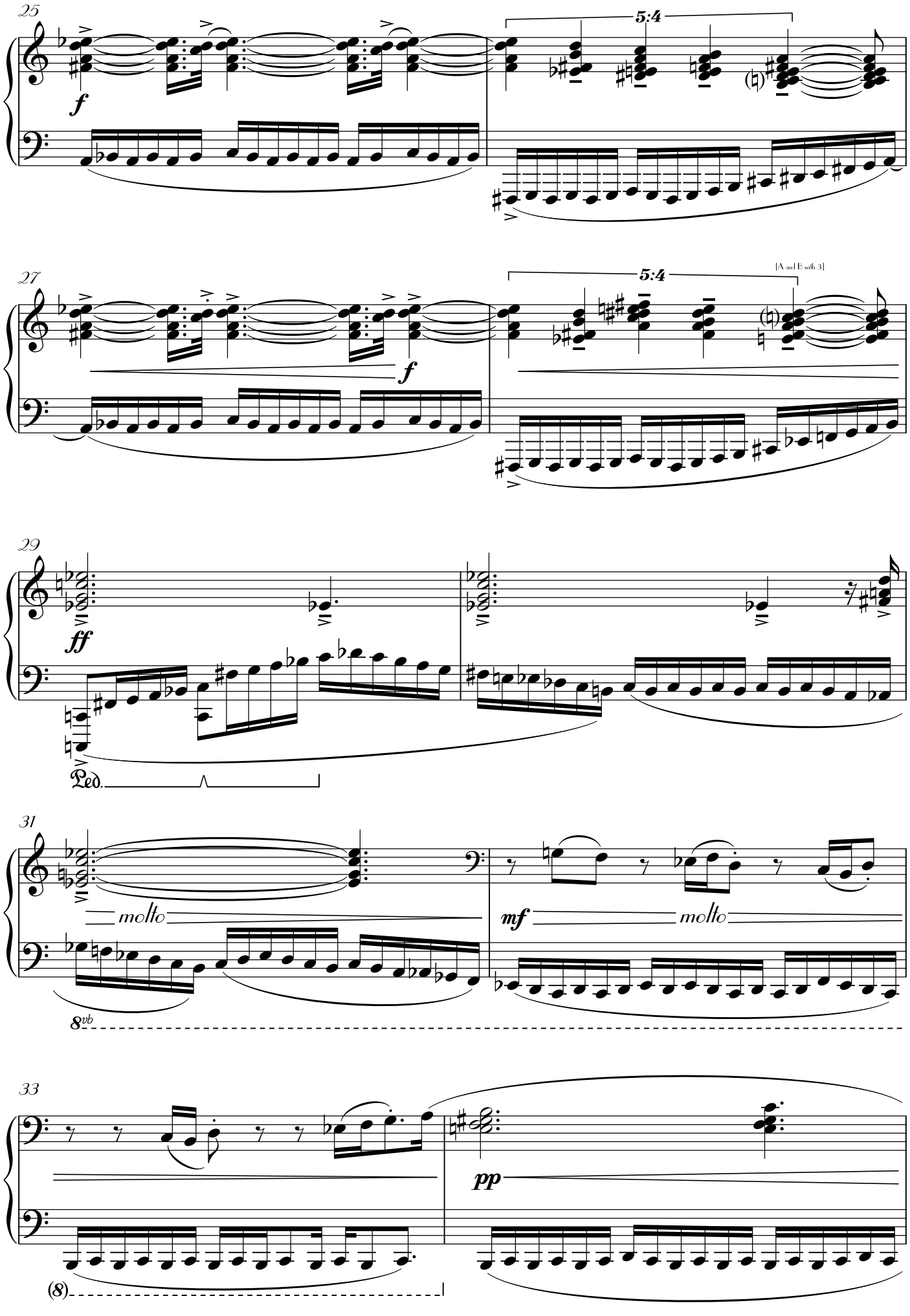


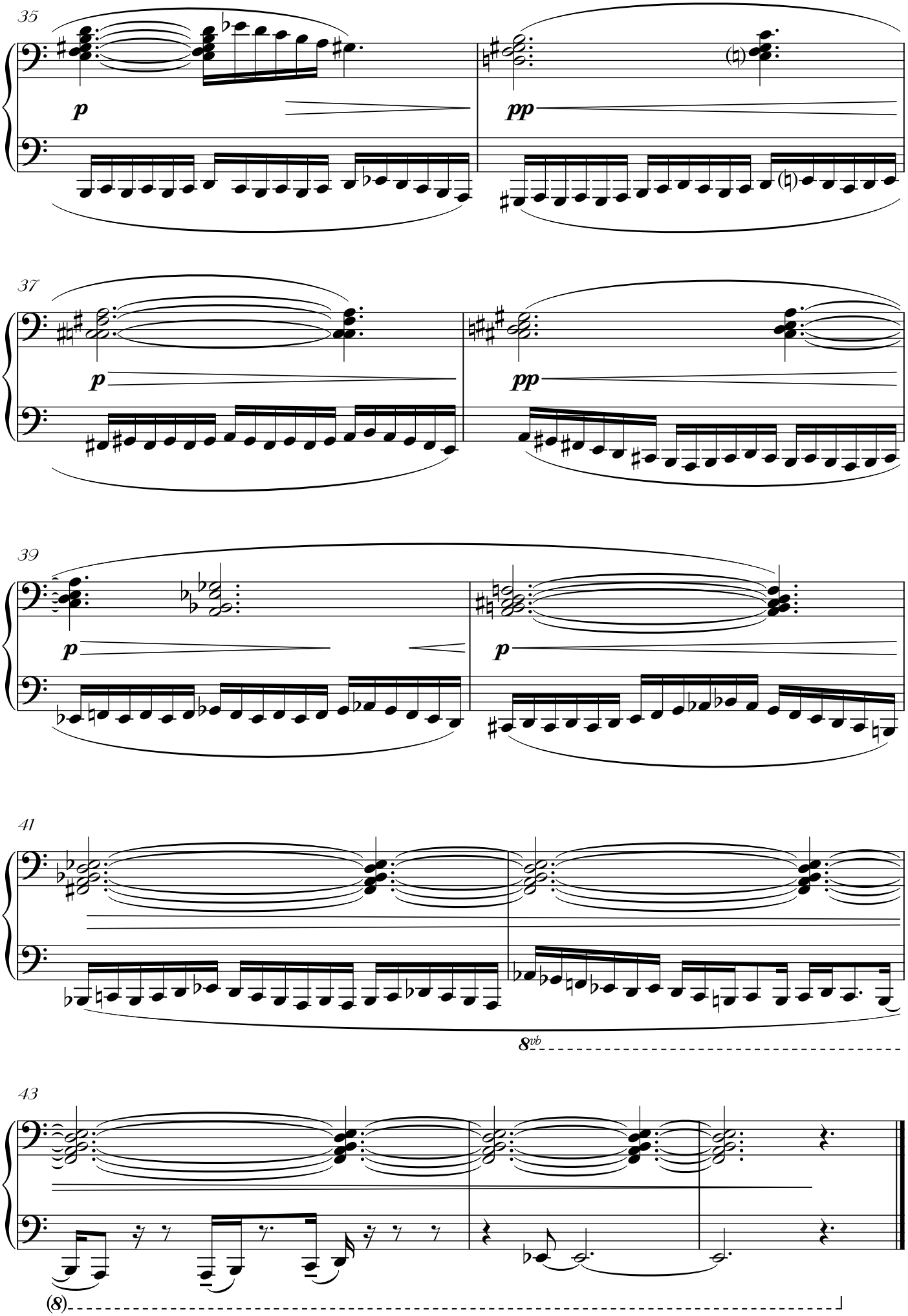
7
River Dance



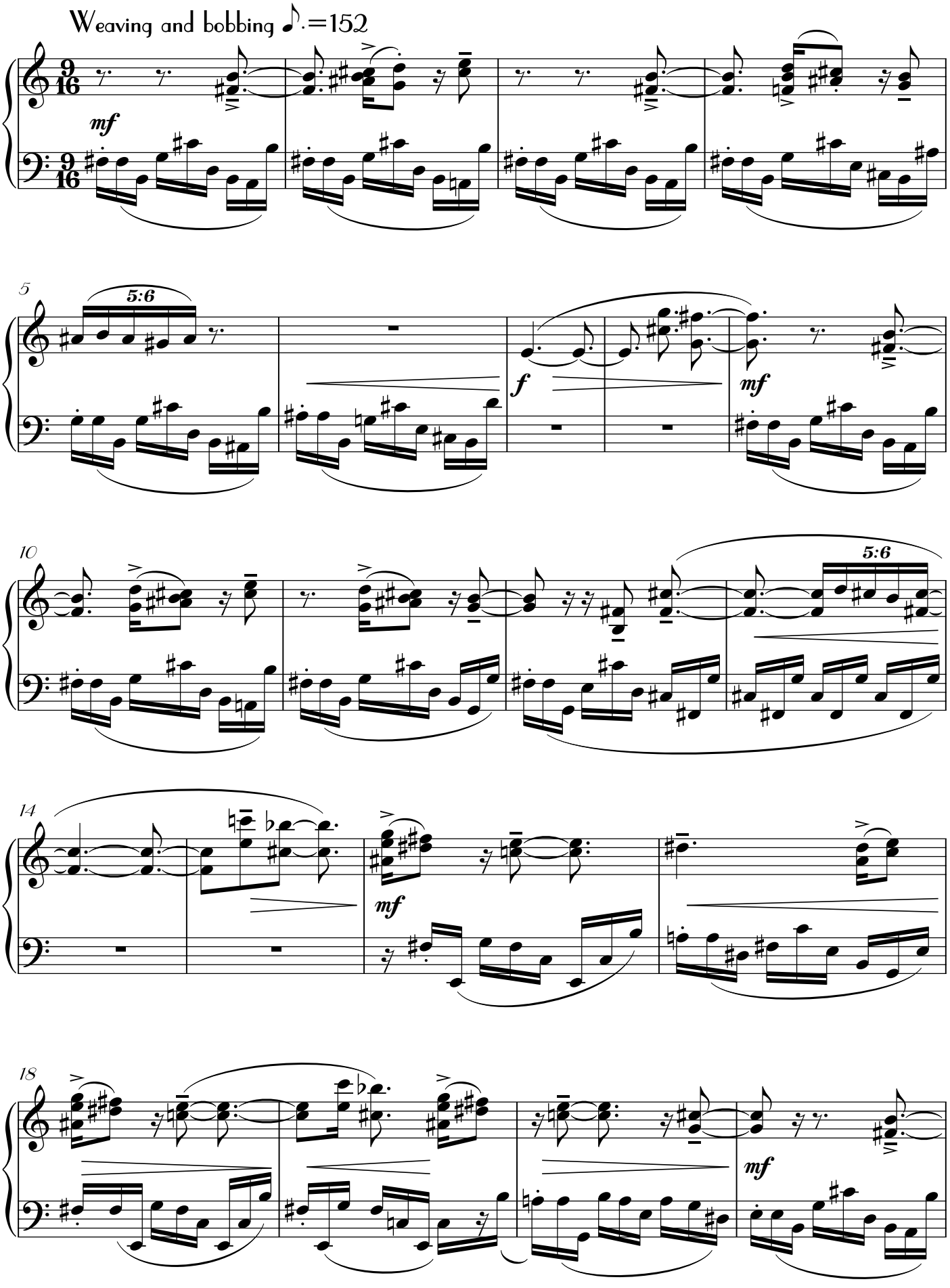

5
pp
mp
7
[as an upbeat]
pp
p
p
9
p
11
[B♮ and C♮ with 3]
mp
[come prima]
p
mp
13
mp
5:4
mf
possibly here a little more pedal may be necessary, but still to be kept to a minimum

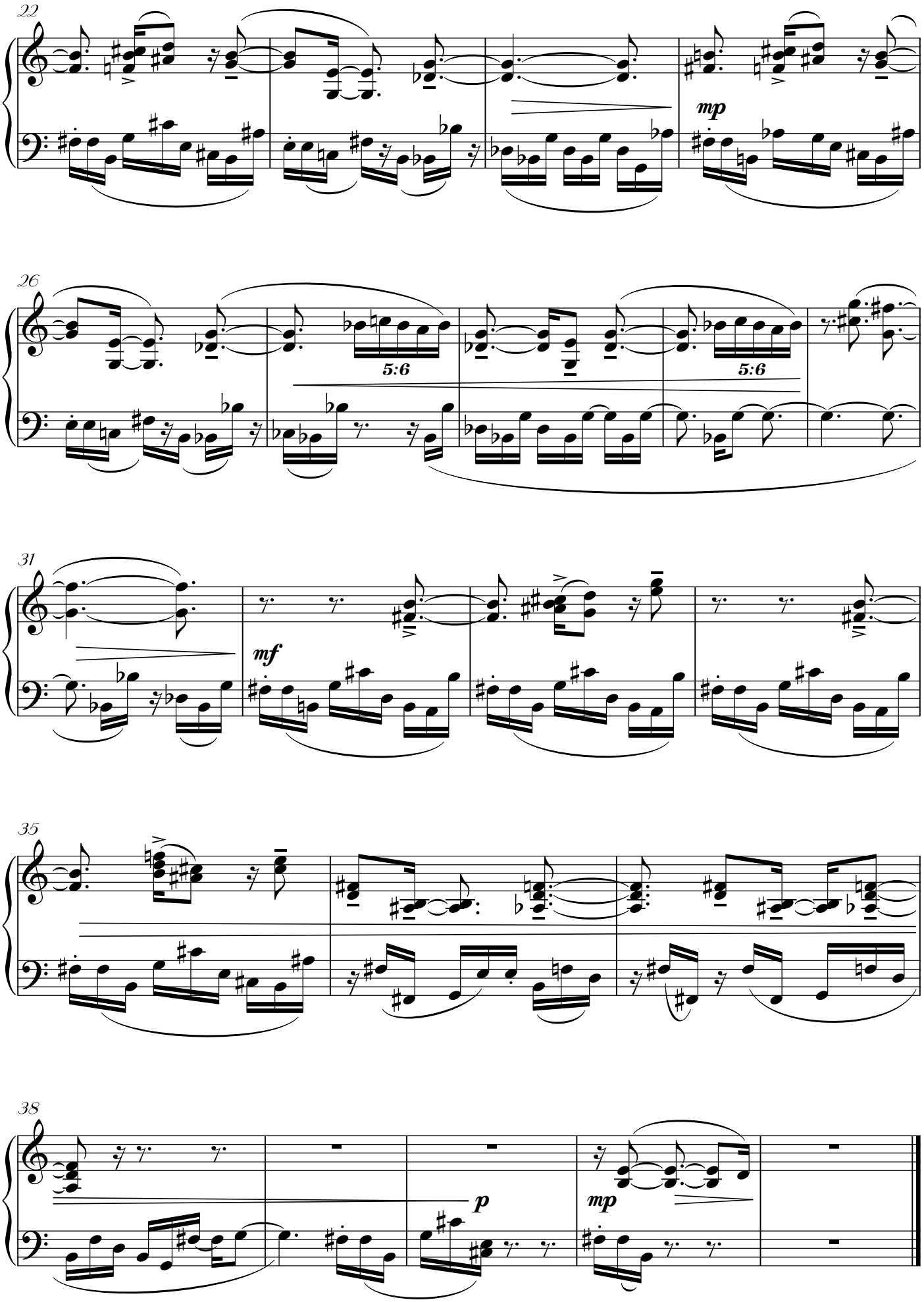

15
5:4
mf
17
mp
8vb
19
mp
(8)
21
mf
23


25
5:4
f
27
5:4
[A and B with 3]
f
29
ff
Ped.
31
molto
mf
molto
8vb
33
pp
(8)


35
p
pp
37
p
pp
39
p
p
41
8vb
43
(8)

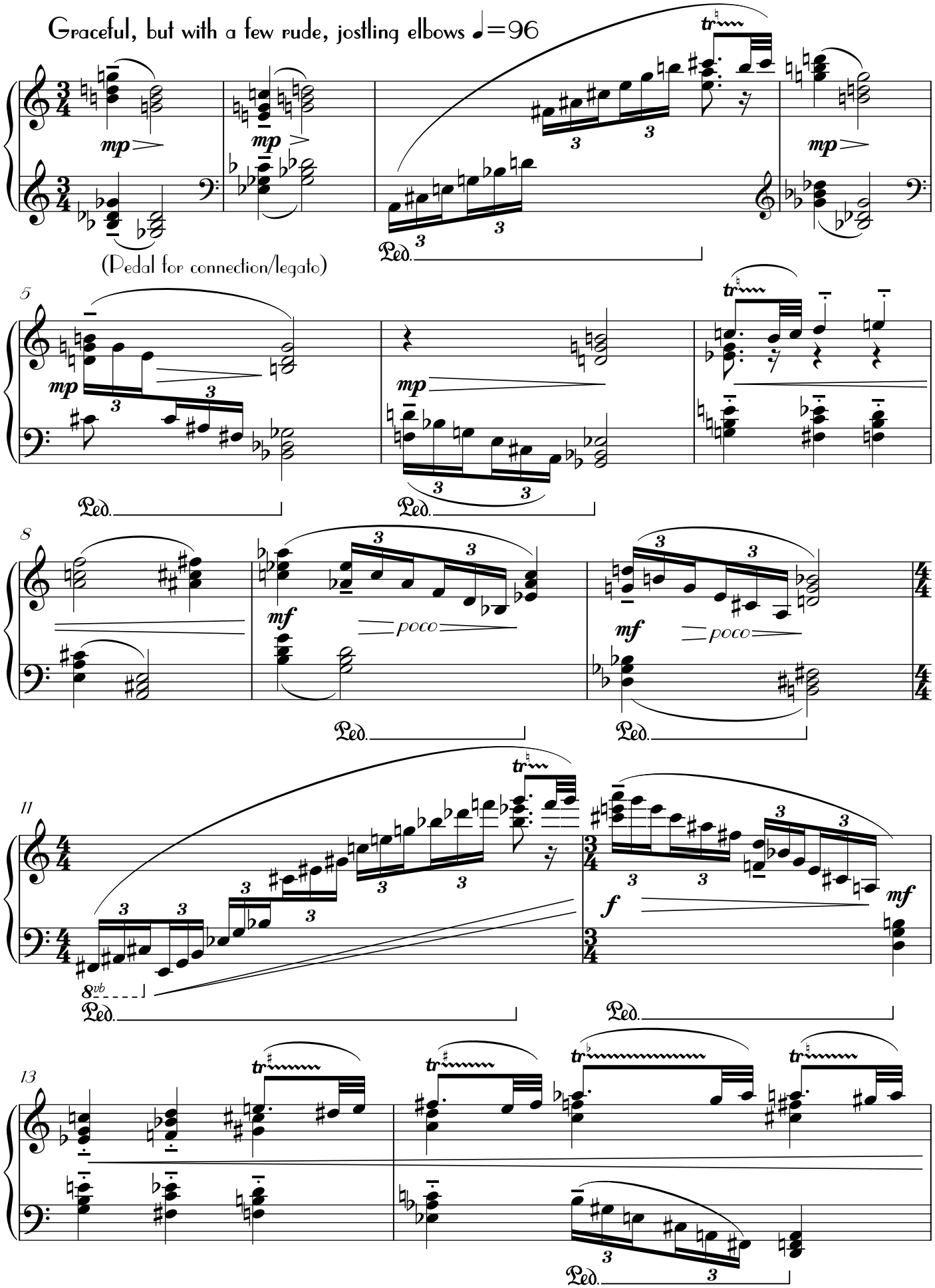
8
Weaving Dance



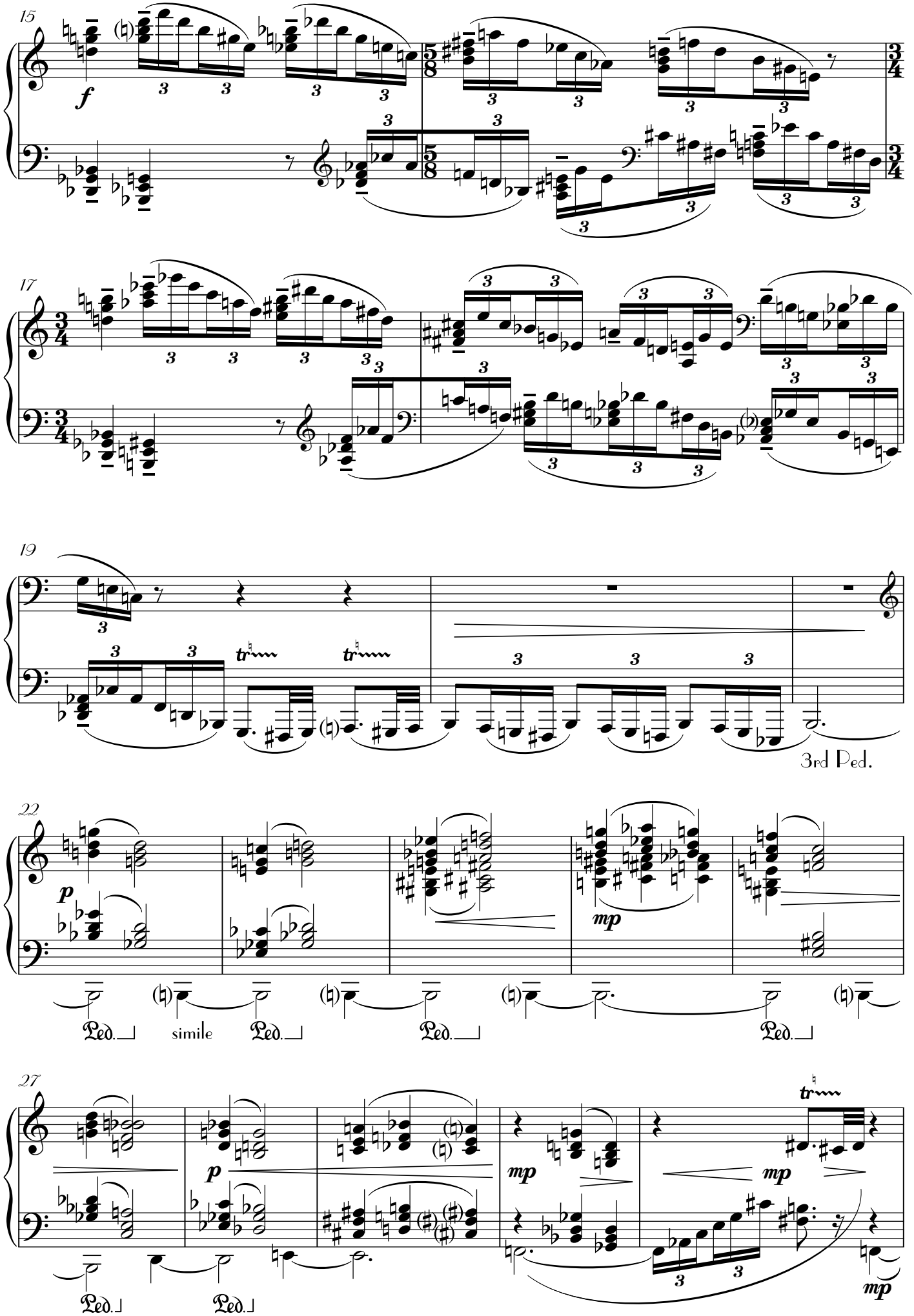

22
mp
26
5:6
5:6
31
mf
35
38
p
mp

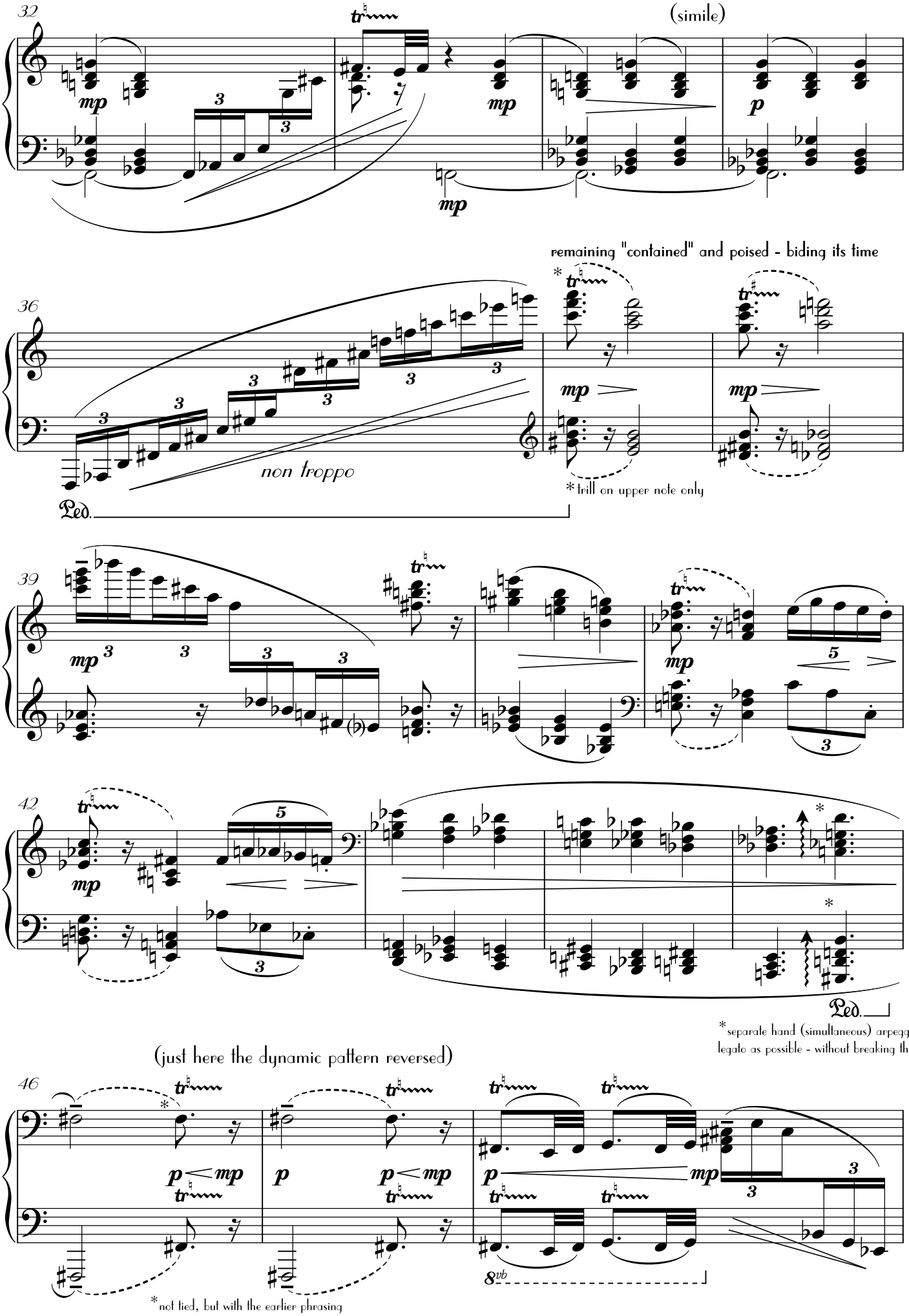
9

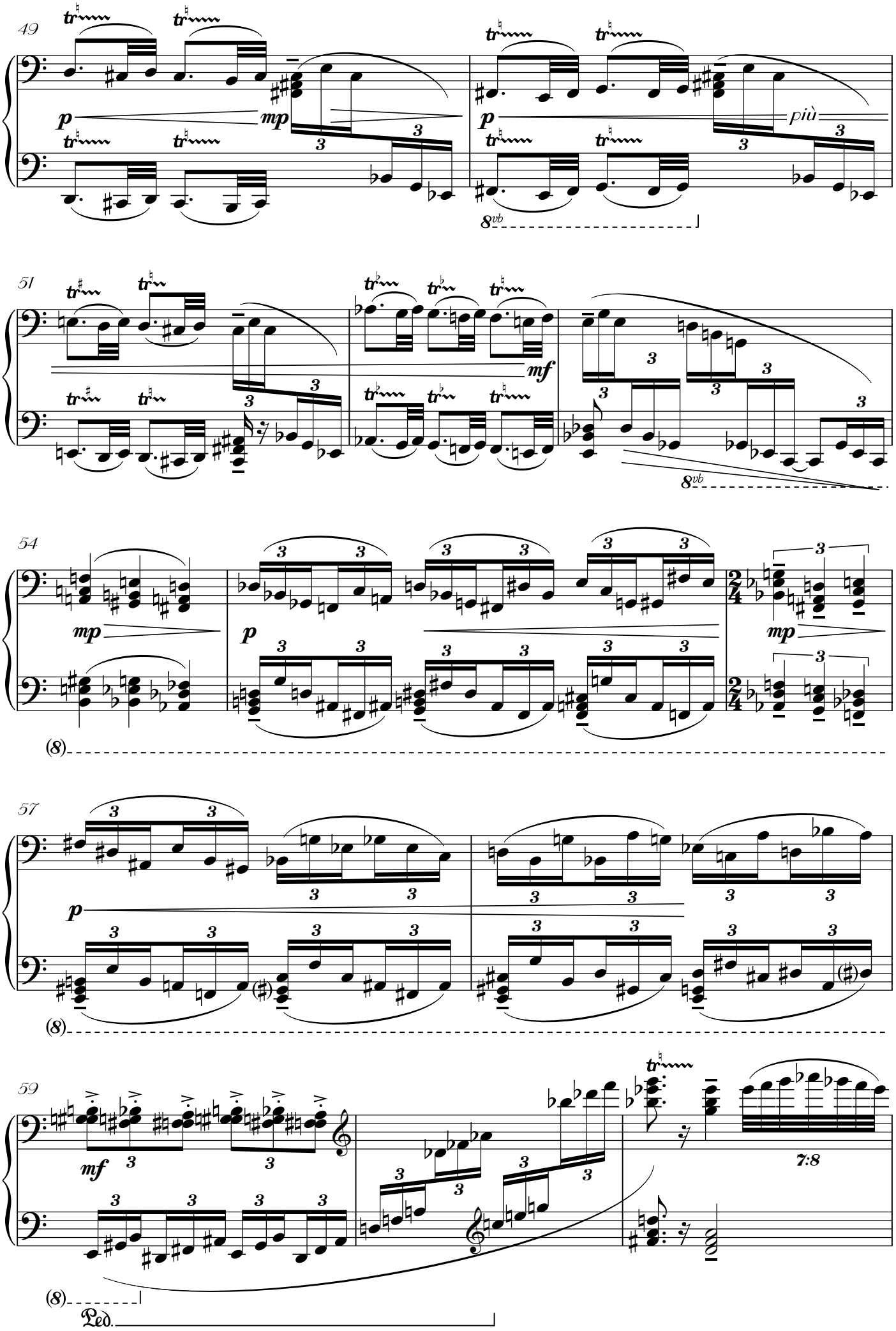
Minuet, or even a Sarabande

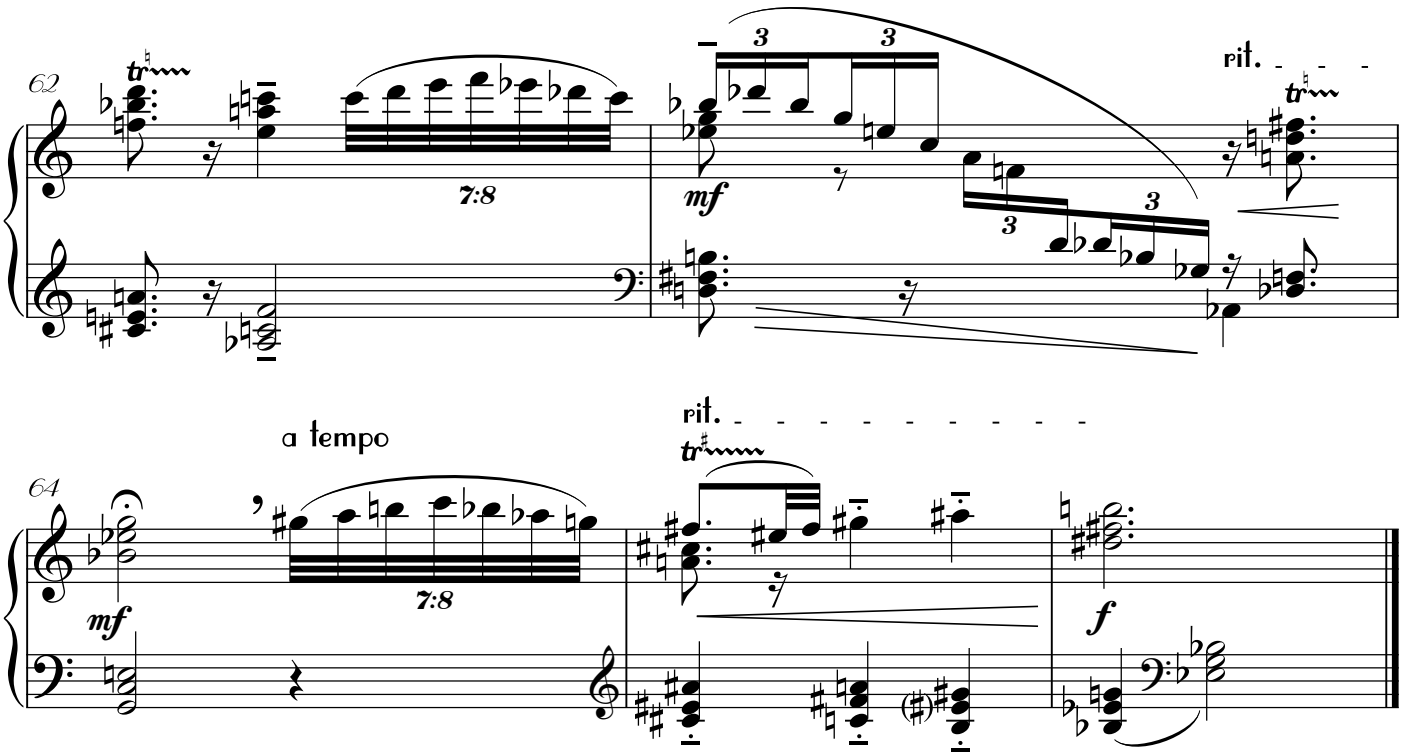


Throughout this piece the feel should be always of short l-o-n-g, with a pronounced diminuendo to the latter, even when the beats are filled in with flourishes; but with each new bar repeating the same stress pattern, so starting a little louder aover again. Elegant, polite, on the toes, not the heels…


15
f
17
19
tr
tr
3rd Ped.
22
p
mp
Ped.
simile
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
27
p
mp
mp
tr
Ped.
Ped.
mp

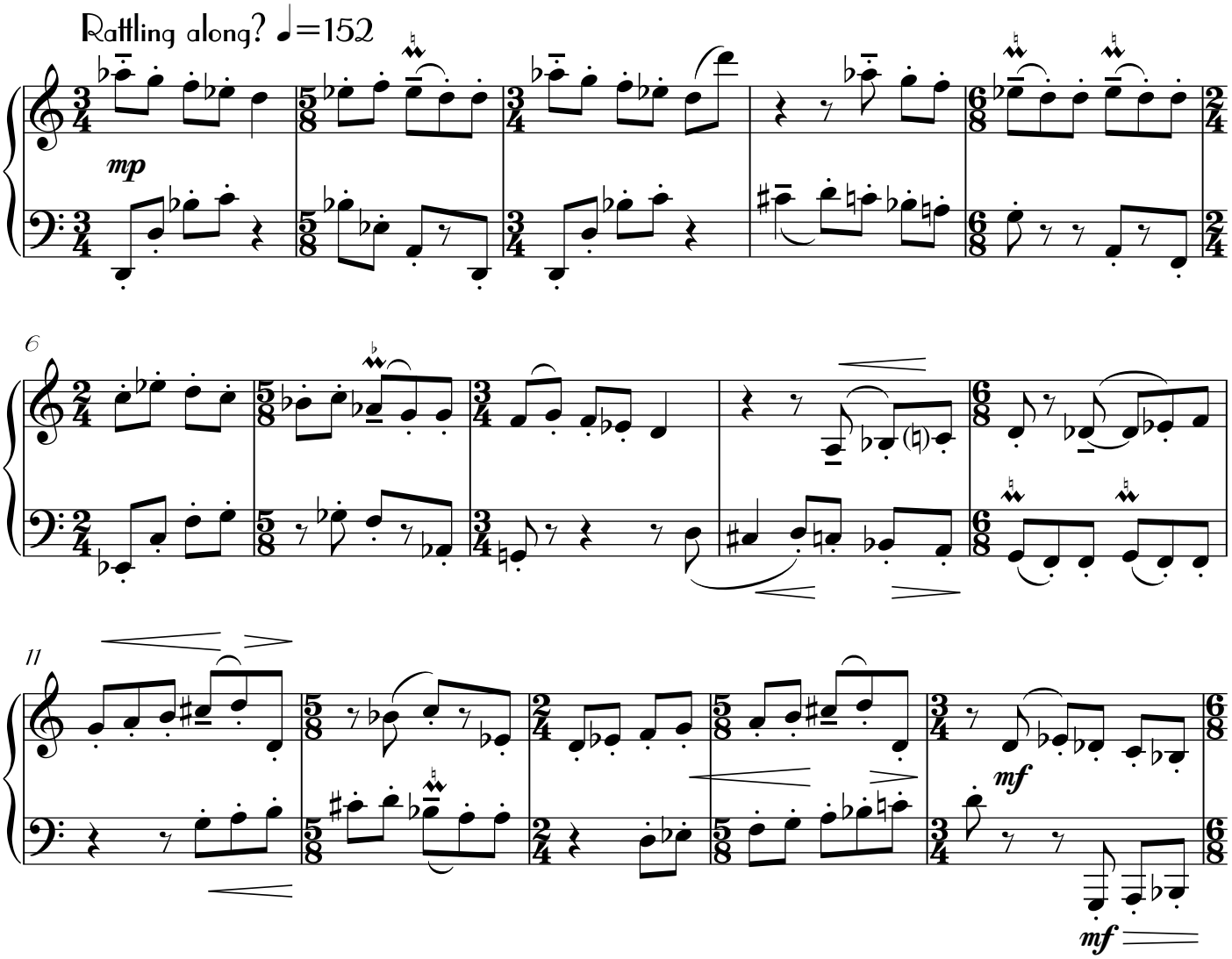

32
(simile)
mp
p
36
remaining "contained" and poised - biding its time
non troppo
Ped.
*trill on upper note only
39
42
Ped.
*separate hand (simultaneous) arpeggiations - legato as possible - without breaking the line
(just here the dynamic pattern reversed)
46
8vb
*not tied, but with the earlier phrasing

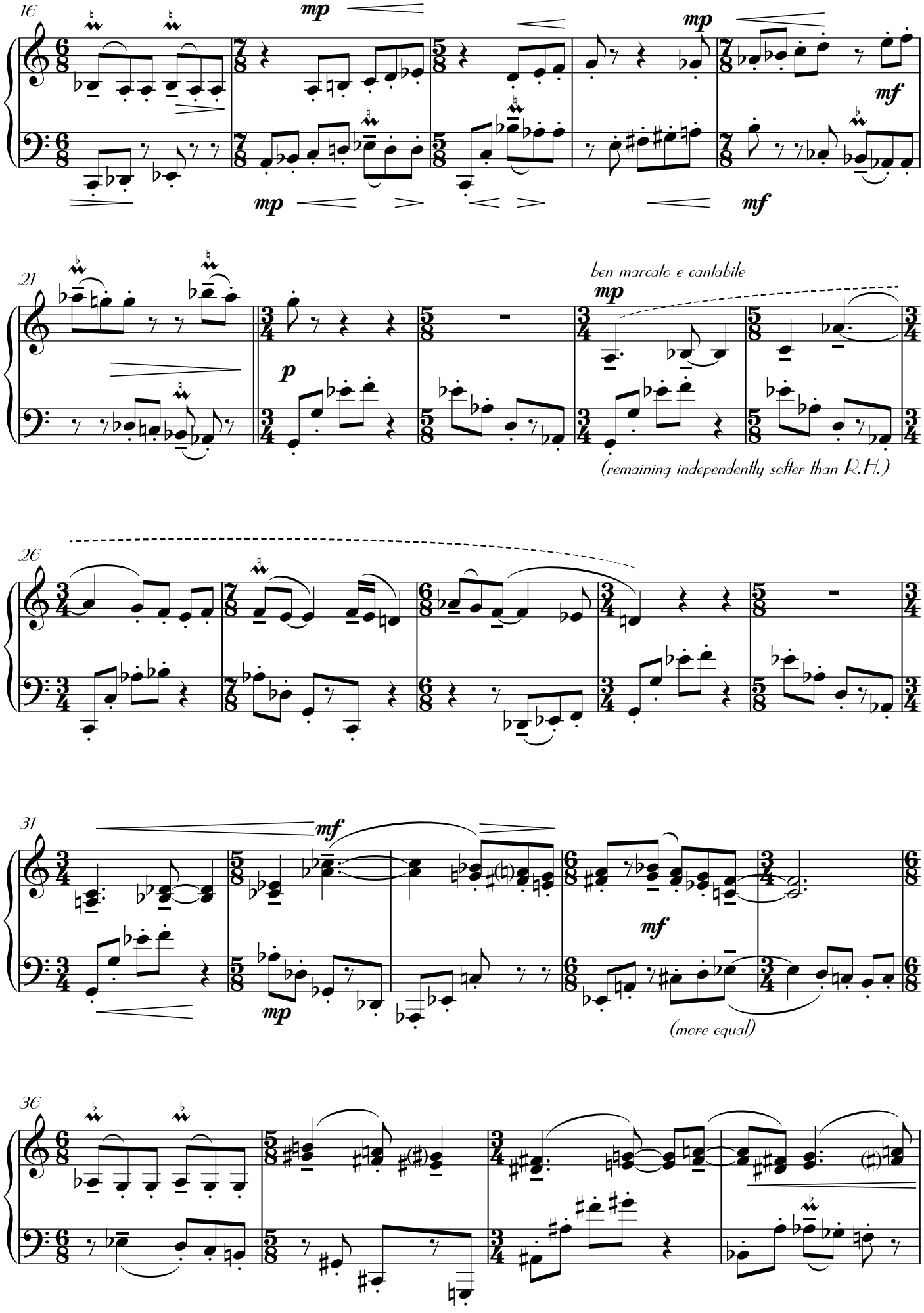

49
p
mp
più
8vb
51
mf
8vb
54
mp
p
mp
(8)
57
p
(8)
59
mf
7:8
(8)
Ped.

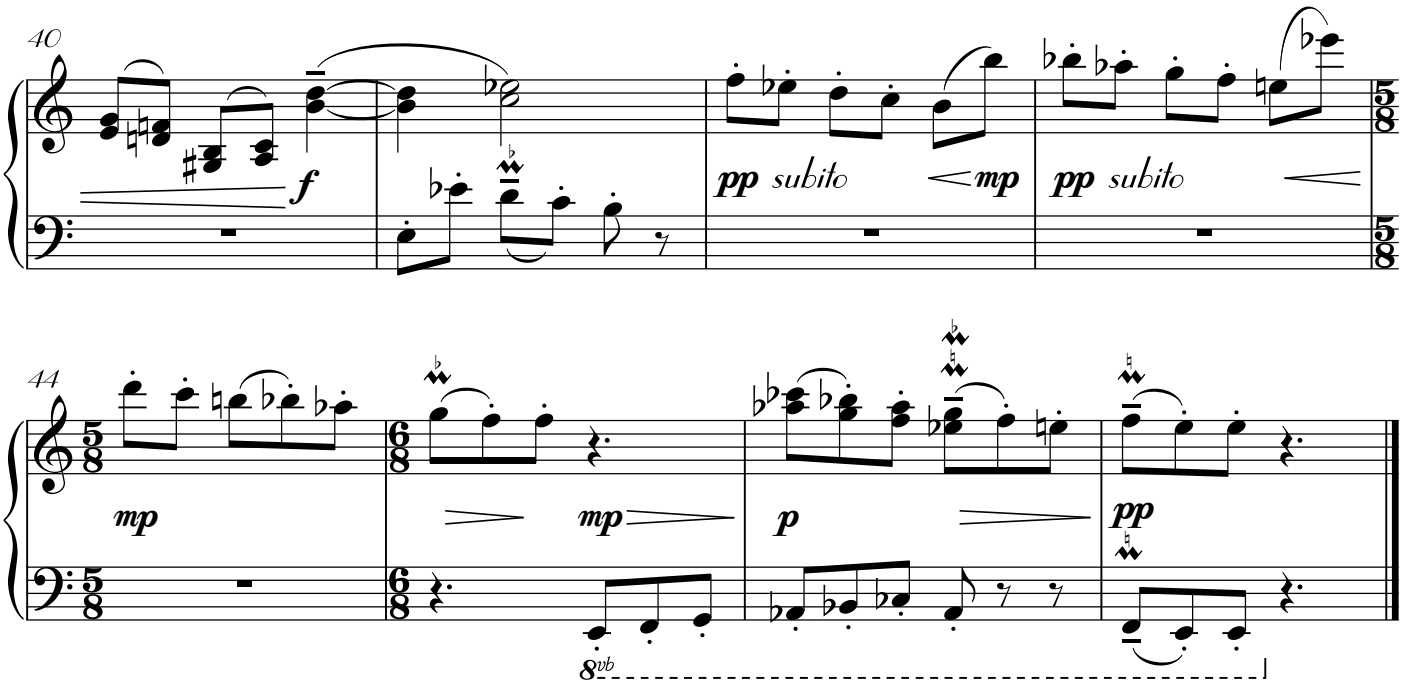


an awkward courtsey, false-smiling at the dance partner who has just trodden on her toes.

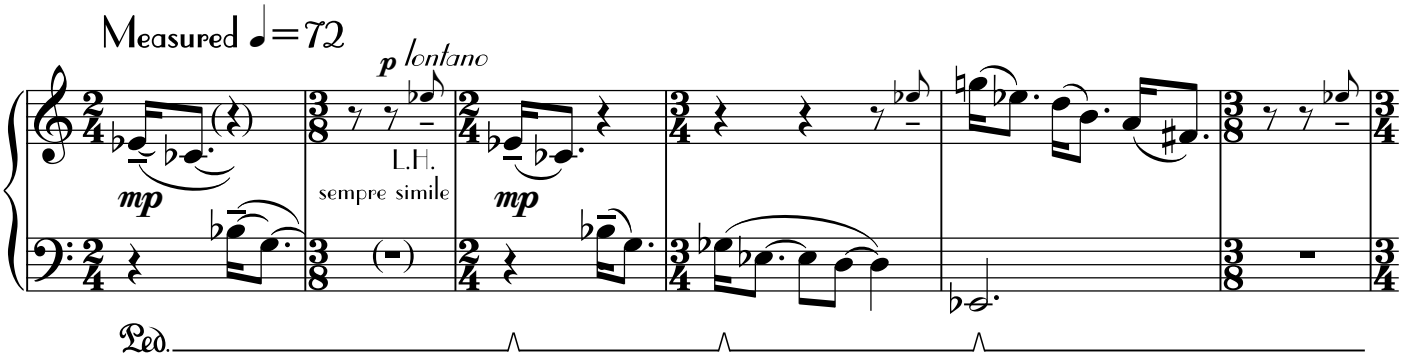
10
Snake Dance



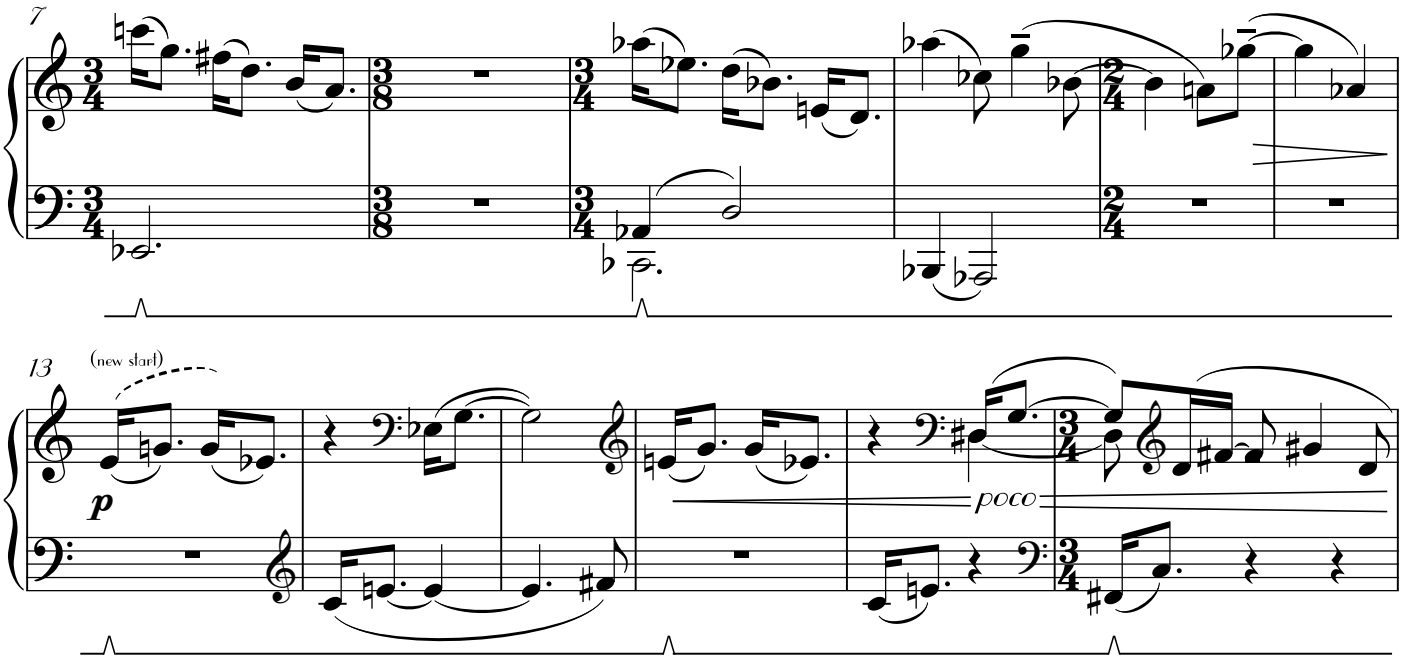

16
mp
mp
mp
mf
mf
21
ben marcato e cantabile
mp
p
(remaining independently softer than R.H.)
26
31
mf
mf
mp
(more equal)
36

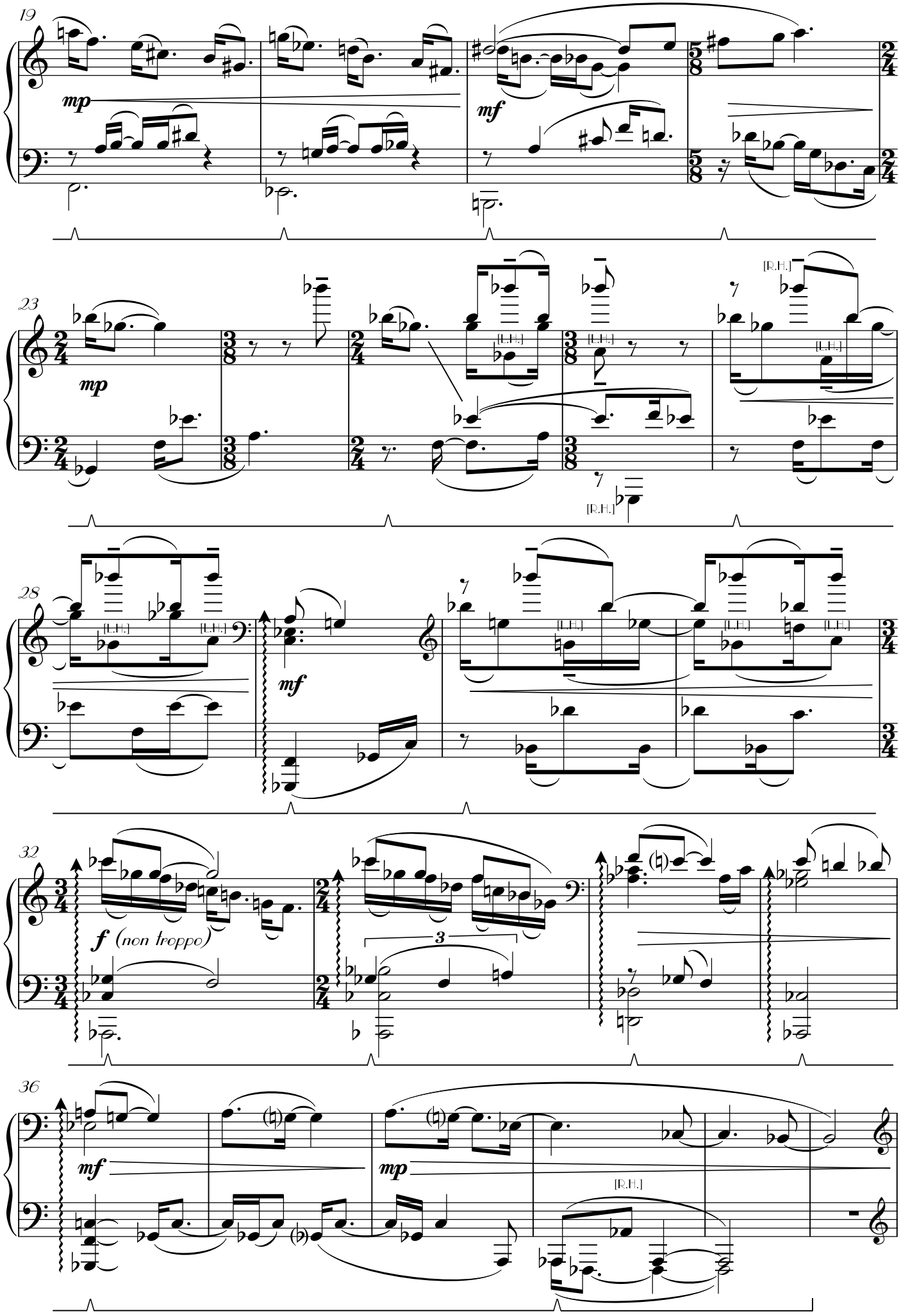


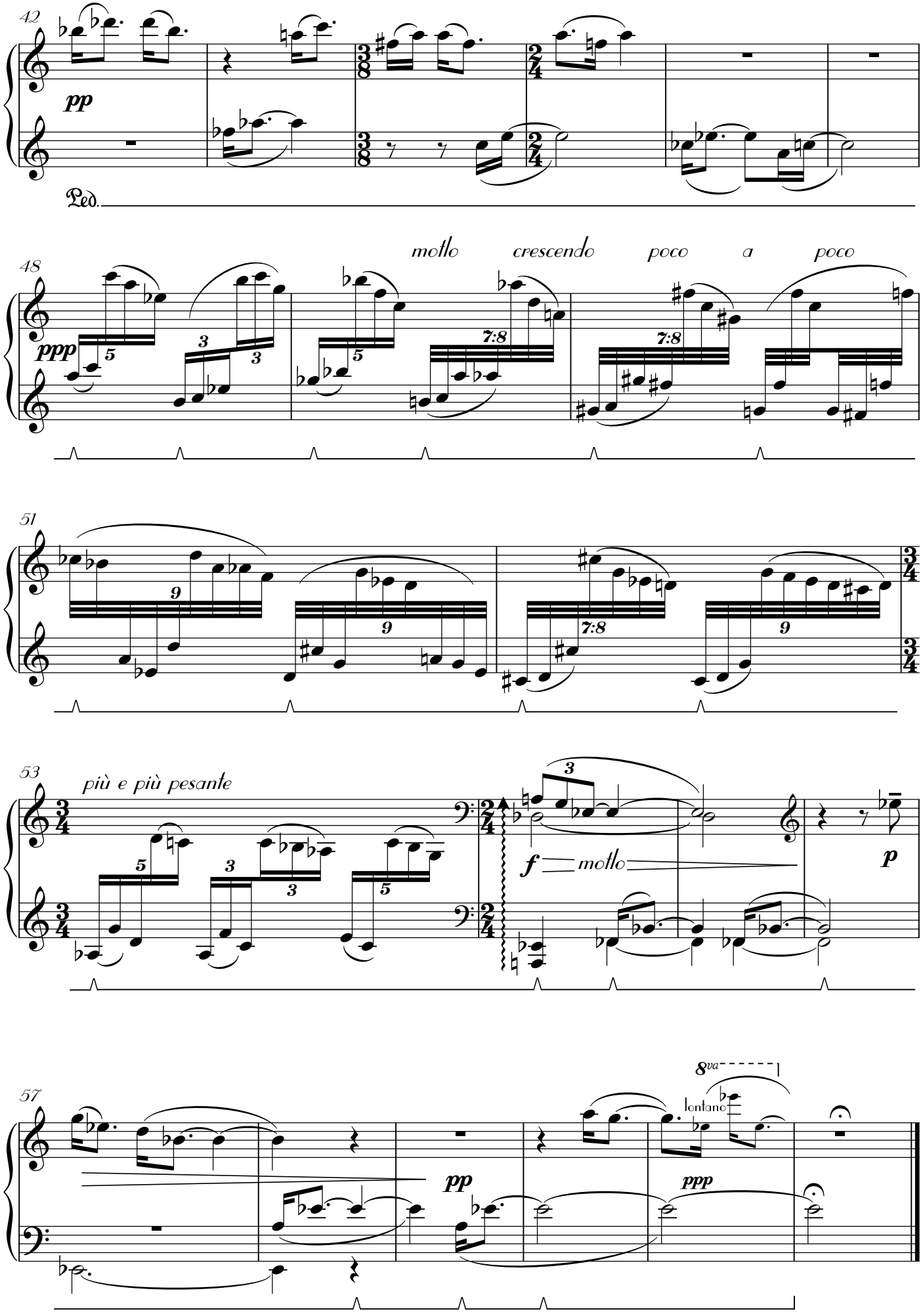
11
One False Step



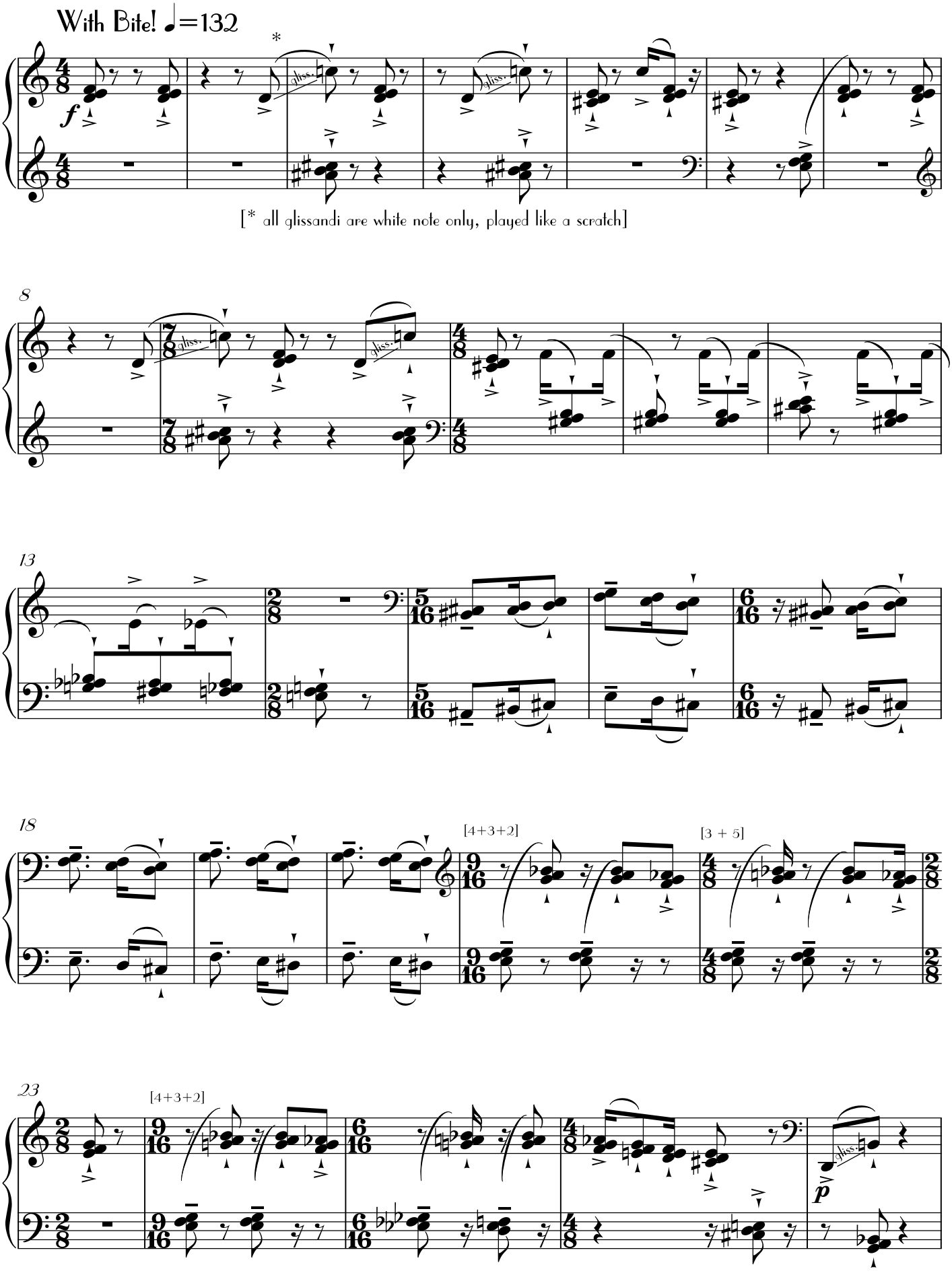
To avoid clutter, subsequent bars should follow the pattern of bar 1 and 2 with the pedals as marked, the first note of each pair being slightly stressed, and all notes within the pedal marked are laissez vibrer. The rests are thus purely "placeholders" and not silent. Further l.v. ties and brackets are omitted. The sound throughout should be "wet".

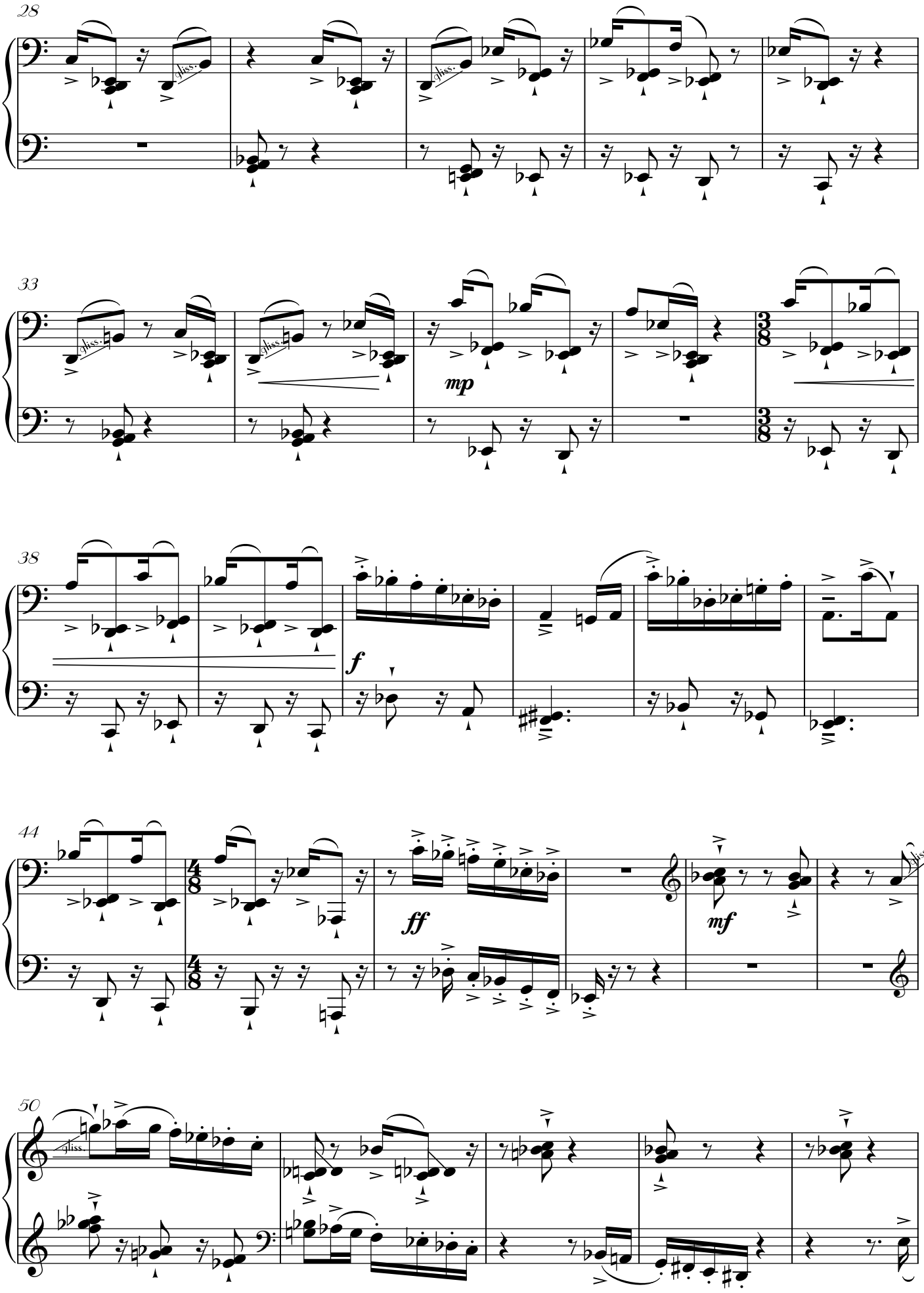


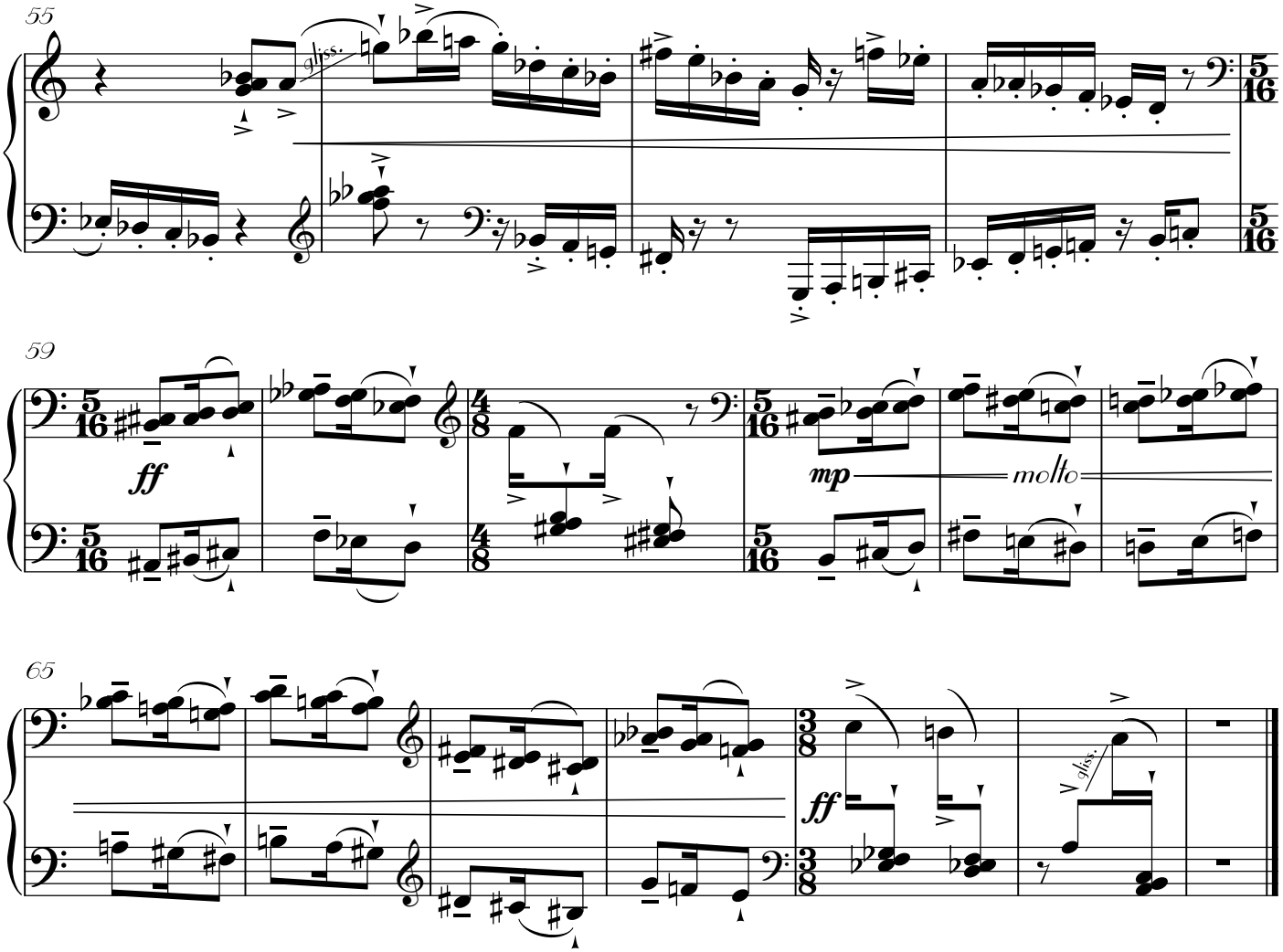

19
mp
mf
23
mp
[R.H.]
[L.H.]
28
mf
[L.H.]
32
f (non troppo)
3
36
mf
mp
[R.H.]


42
pp
Ped.
48
ppp
motto
crescendo
poco
a
poco
51
53
più e più pesante
f
motto
p
57
pp
8va
lontano
ppp

12
Spiteful Dance



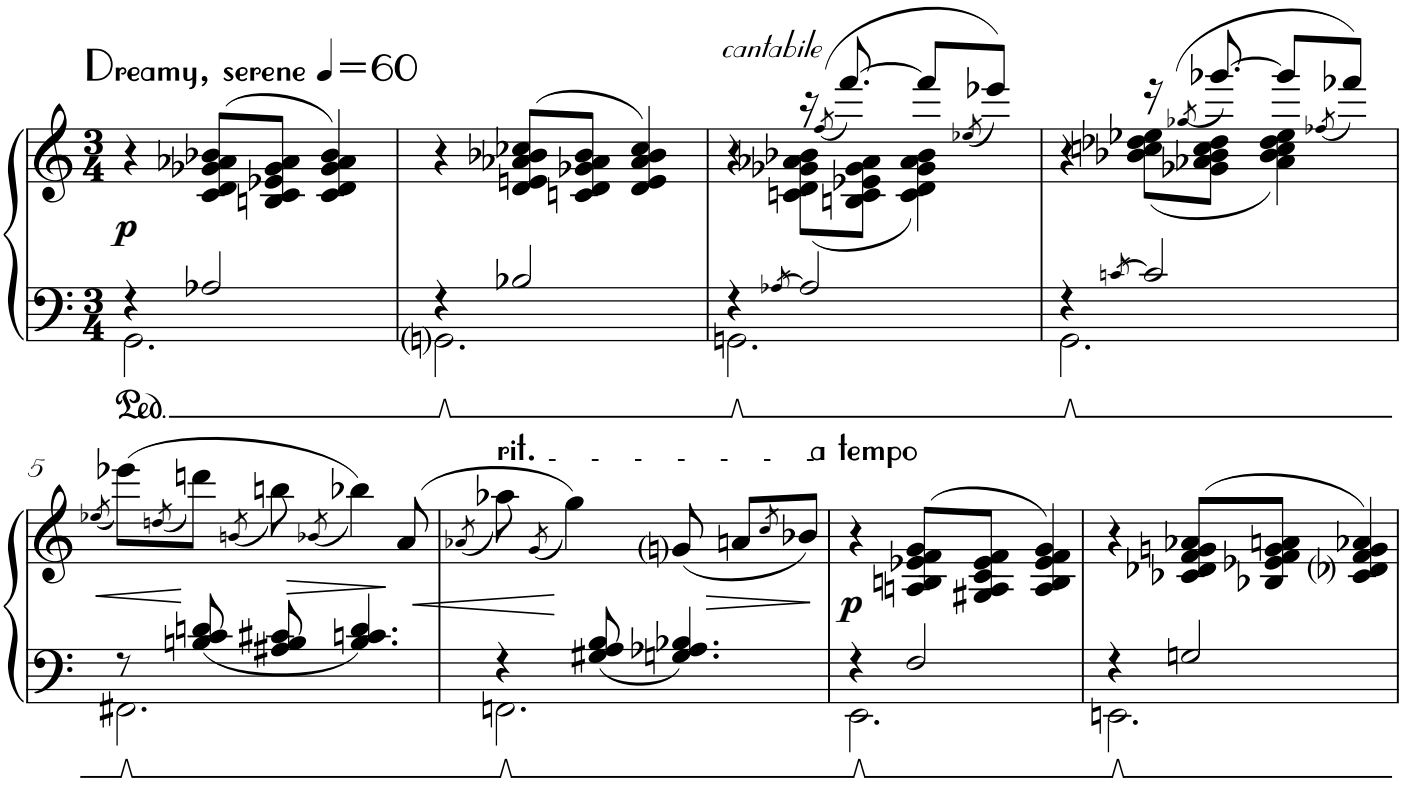

28
gliss.
33
gliss.
mp
38
f
44
ff
mf
gliss.
50
gliss.

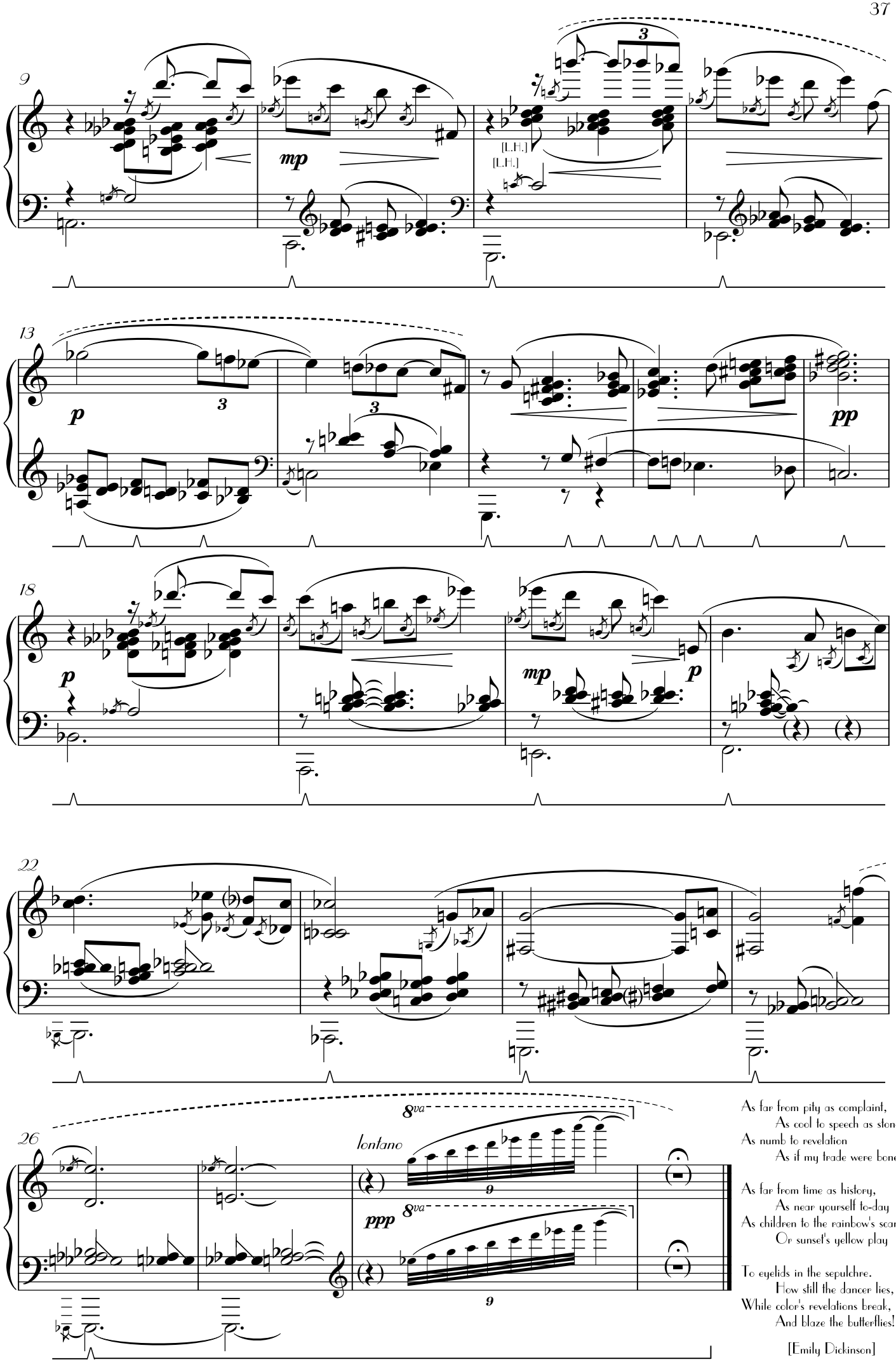


13

How Still the Dancer Lies

[*Asleep* by Emily Dickinson]





As far from pity as complaint,
As cool to speech as stone,
As numb to revelation
As if my trade were bone.

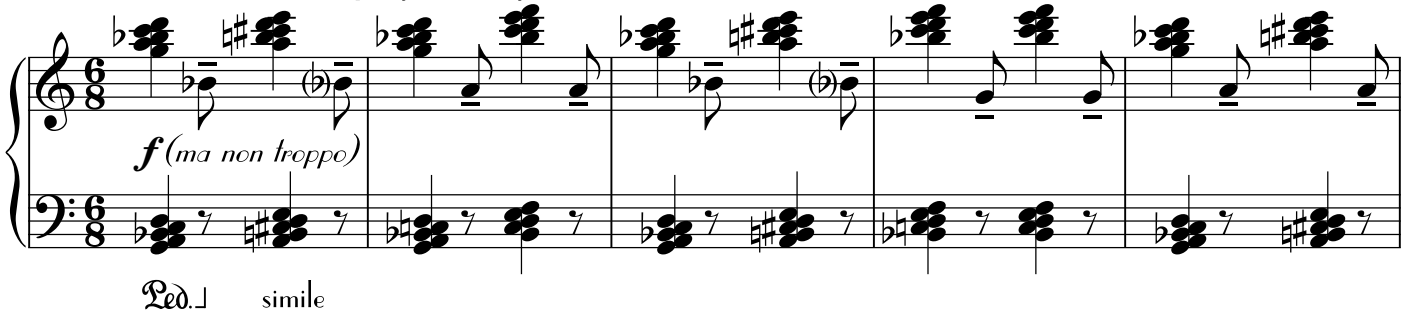
As far from time as history,
As near yourself to-day
As children to the rainbow's scarf,
Or sunset's yellow play

To eyelids in the sepulchre.
How still the dancer lies,
While color's revelations break,
And blaze the butterflies!

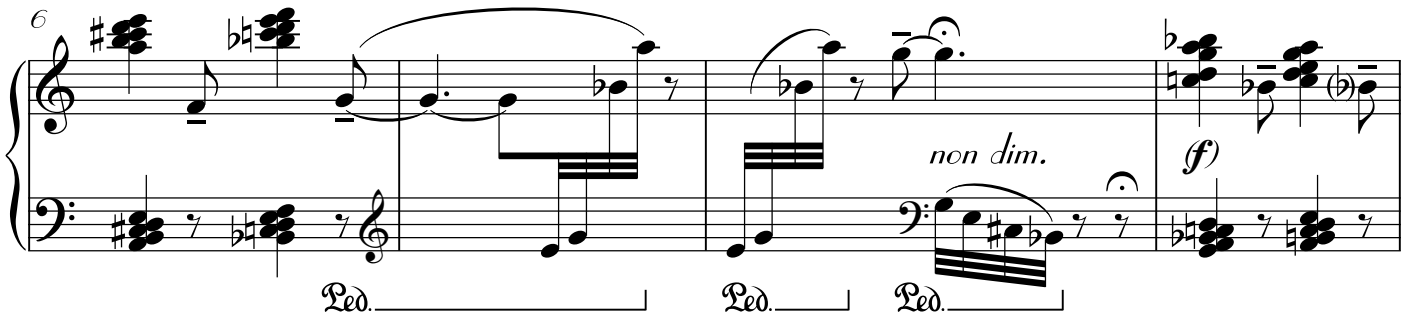
[Emily Dickinson]

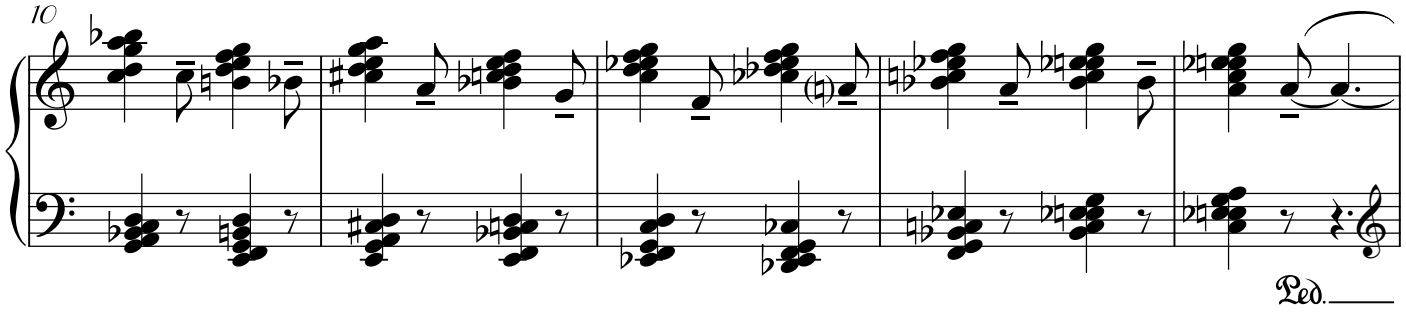
14
Dance of Death?

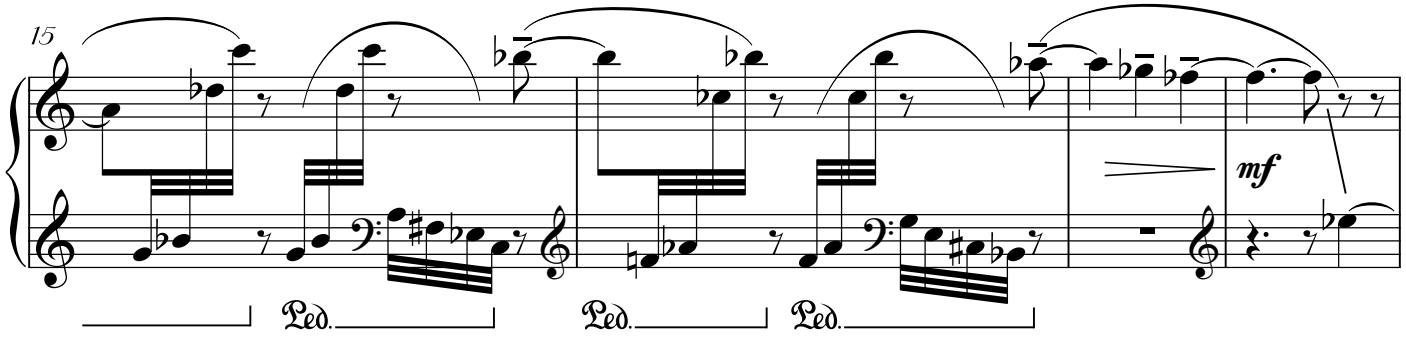
Flat footed - clomping, clumsy ♩.=60

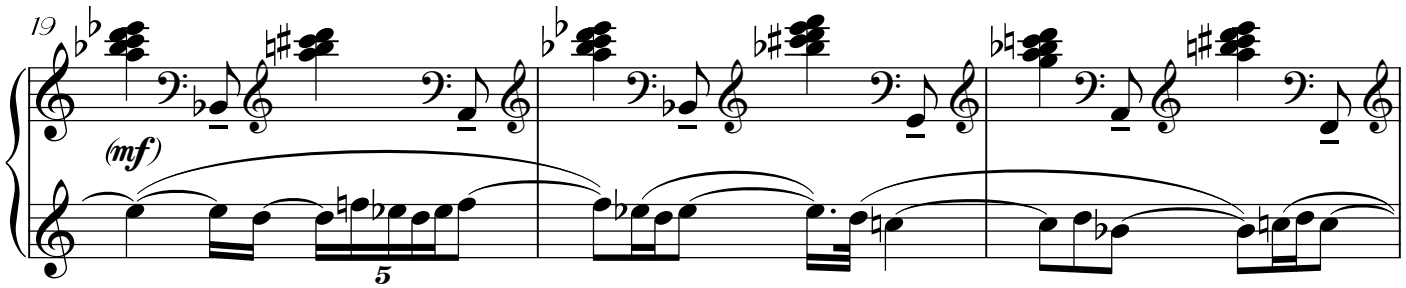


This piece should sound as if played with alternating fists and one (fat) finger!
Technical constraints accepted, there should be an effort to retain/create the L.H. quaver rests in which the R.H. quavers should protrude roughly.

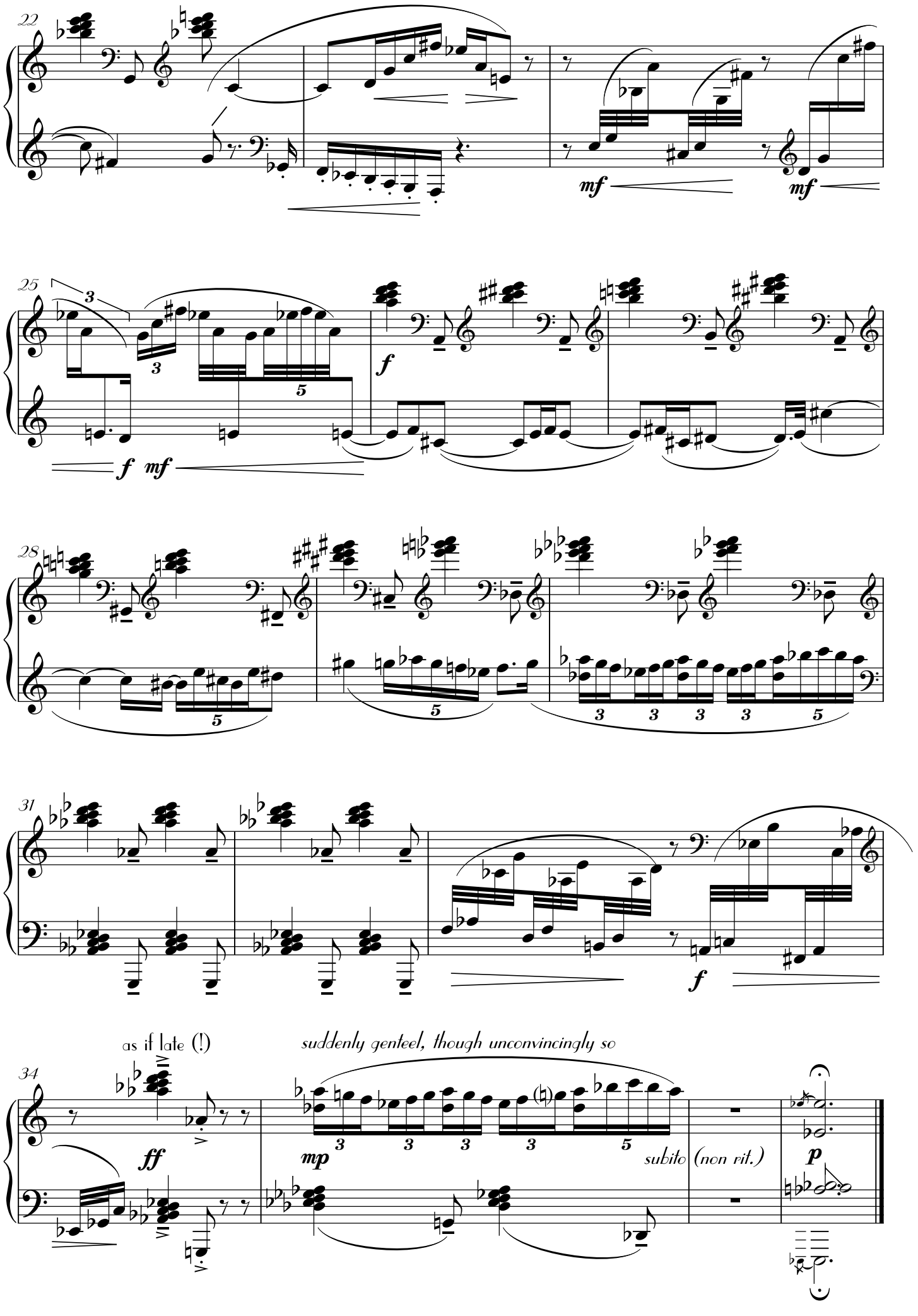




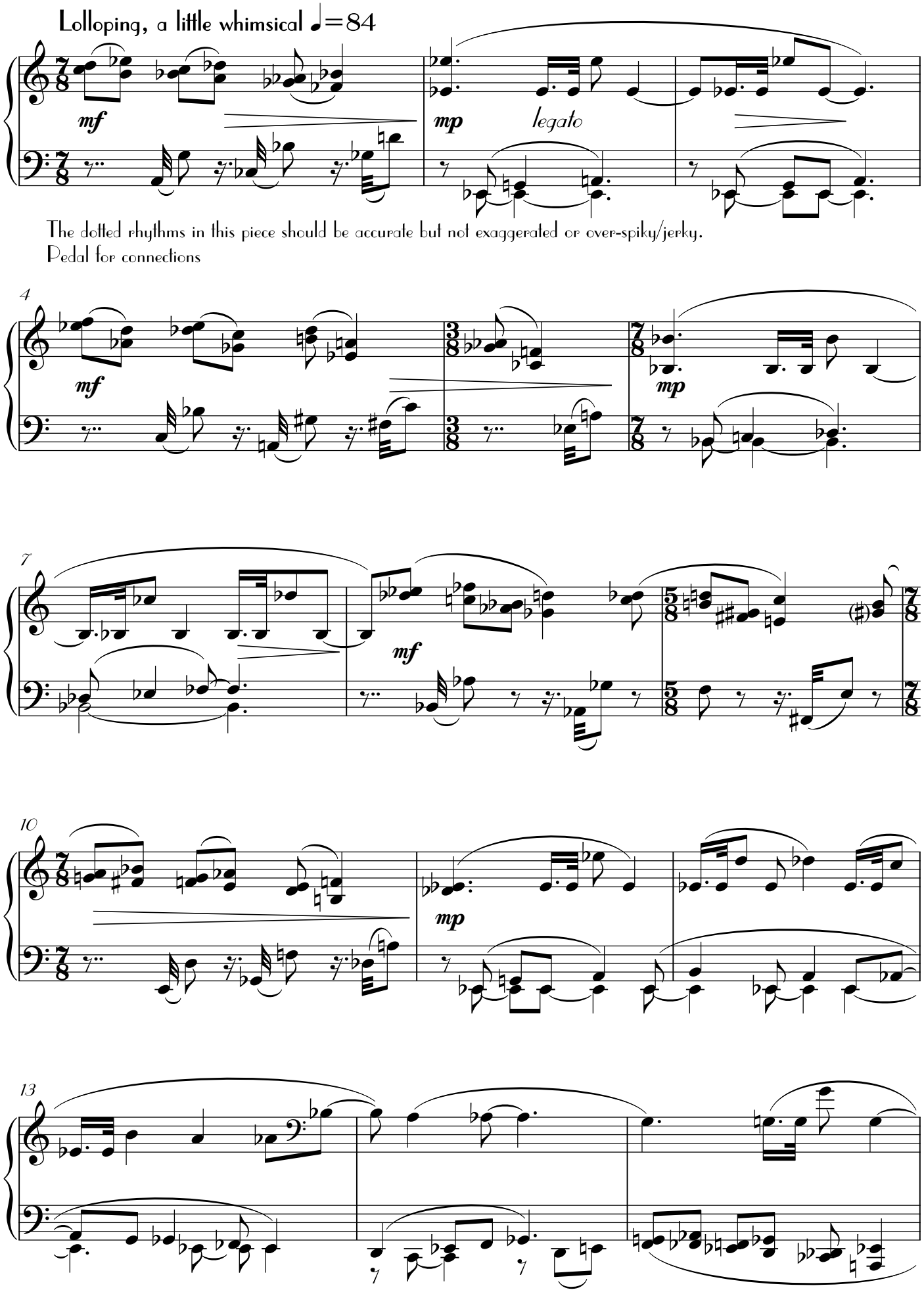


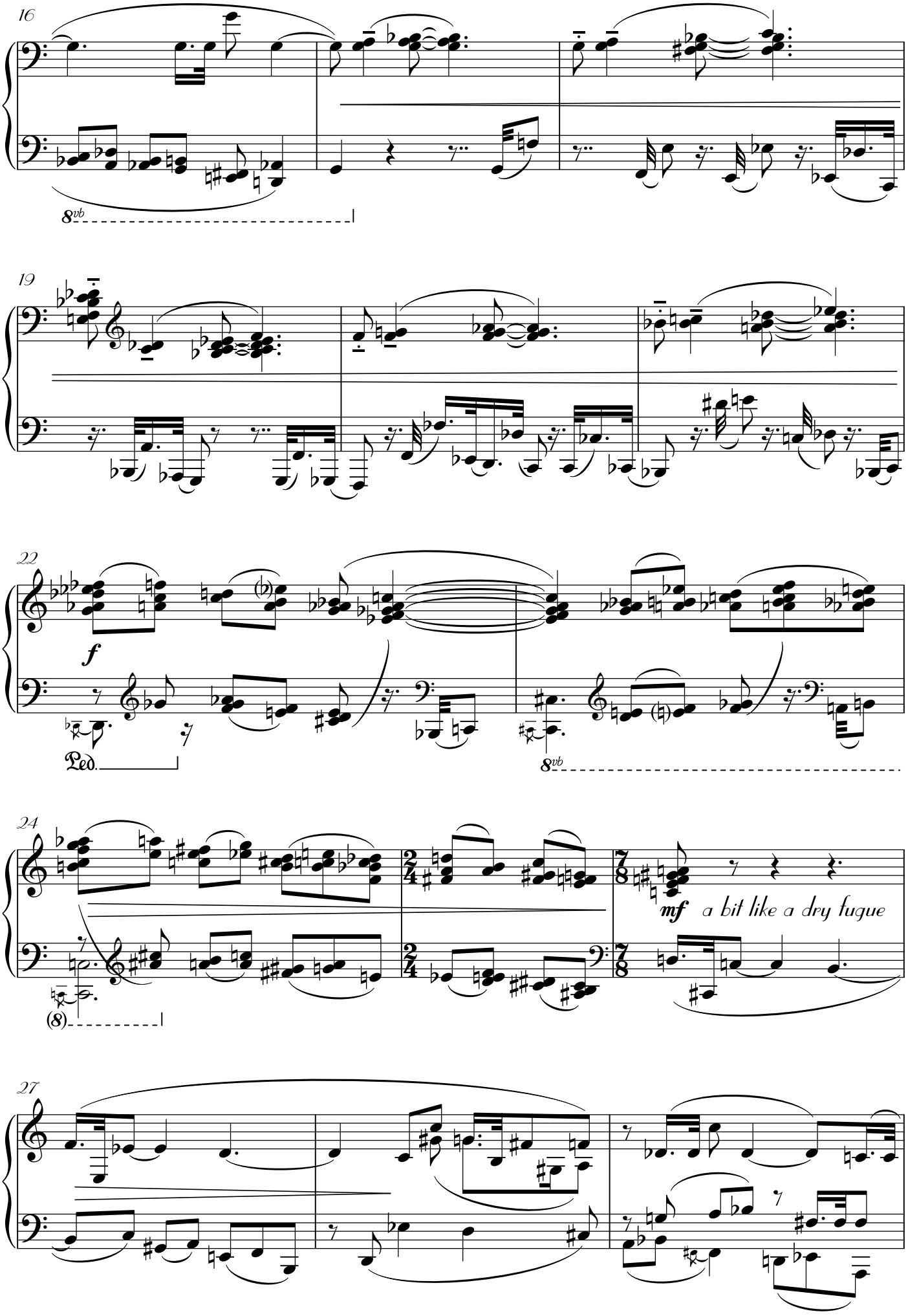


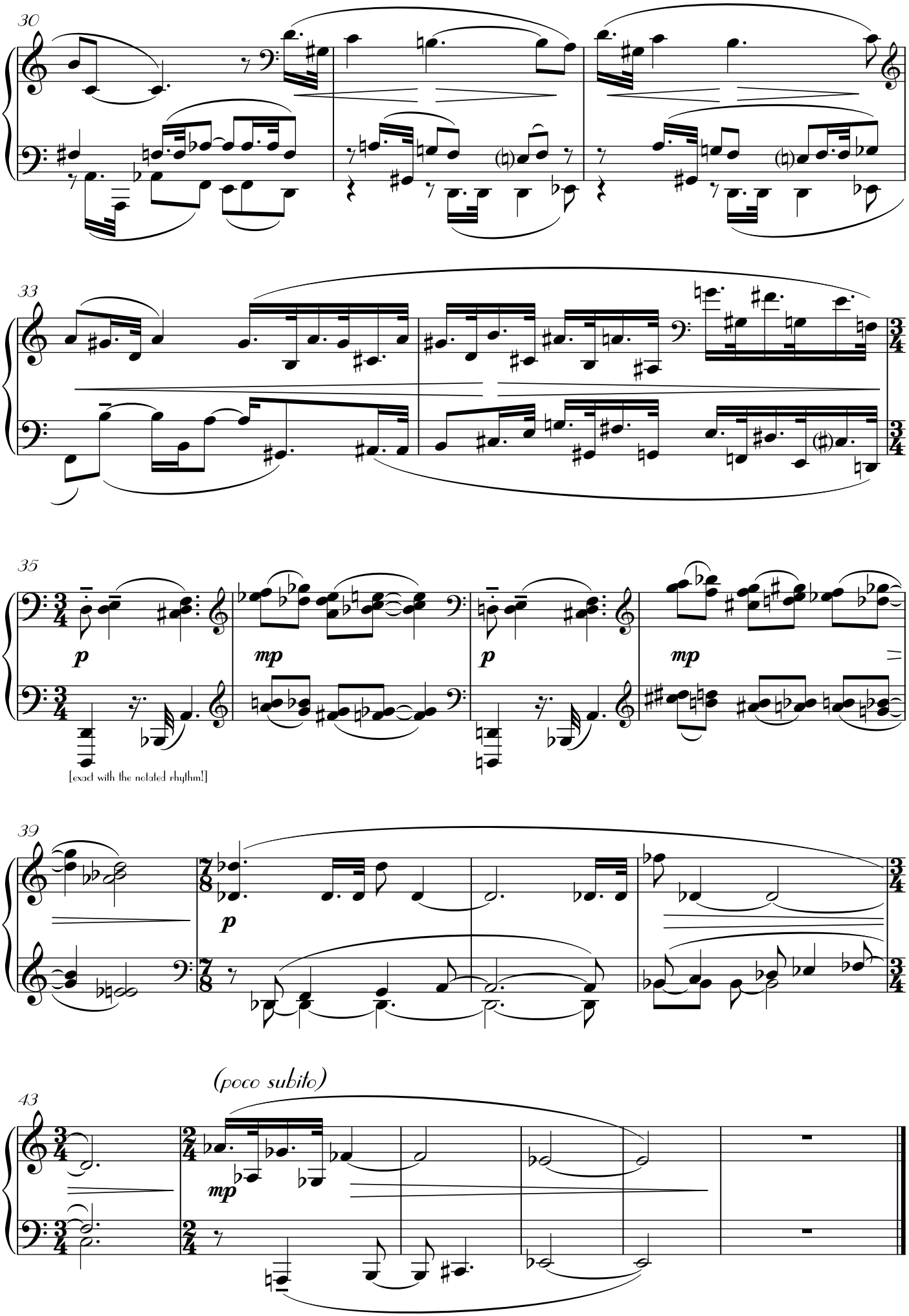
trying, awkwardly, to be elegant - gangly-legged - like a skeleton dancing


22
mf
mf
25
3
3
5
f
f
mf
28
5
5
3
3
3
3
5
31
f
as if late (!)
suddenly genteel, though unconvincingly so
34
ff
mp
3
3
3
3
5
subito
(non rit.)
p

15
Lollop

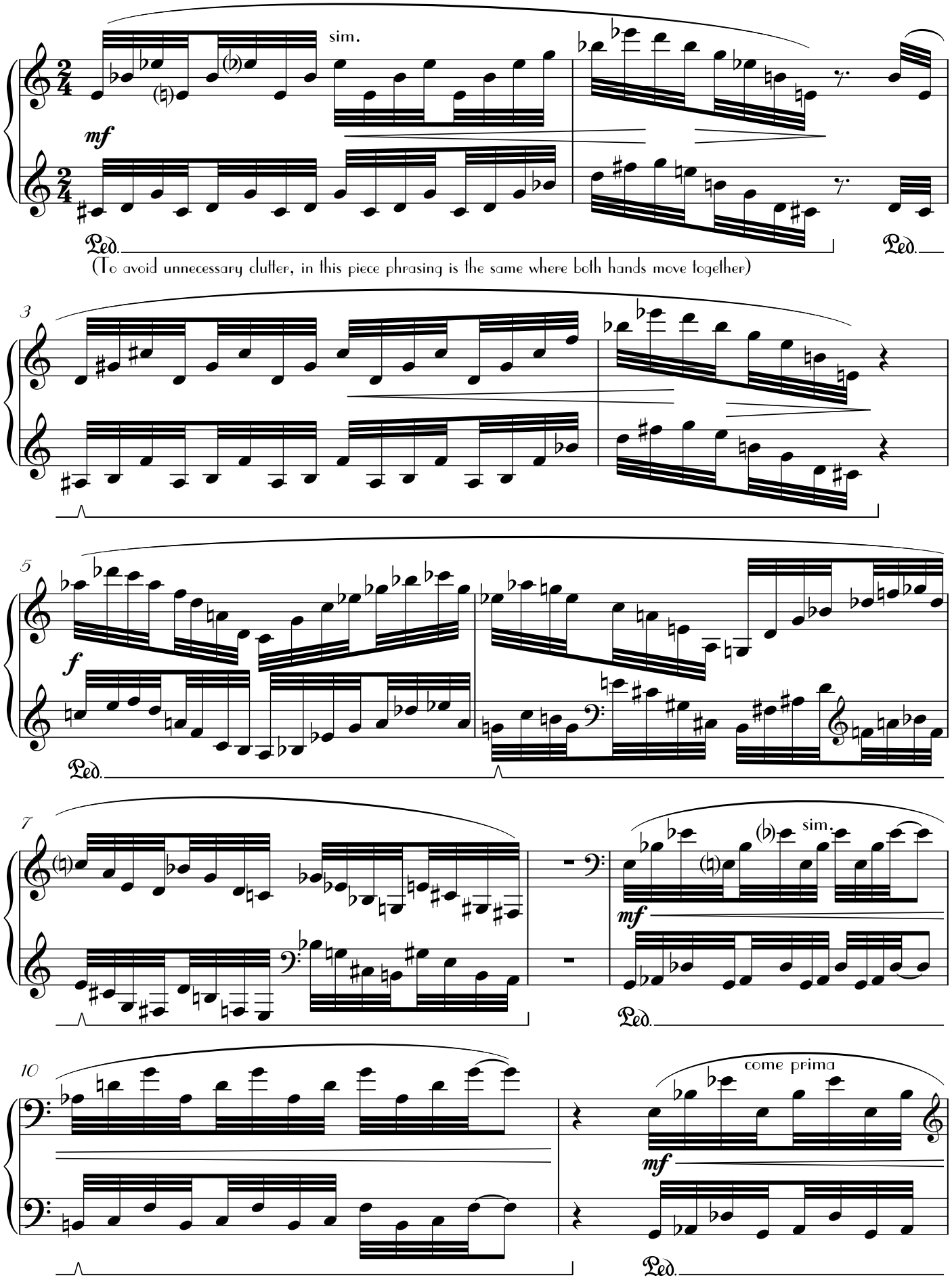

Lolloping, a little whimsical ♩=84
mf
mp
legato
The dotted rhythms in this piece should be accurate but not exaggerated or over-spiky/jerky.
Pedal for connections
4
mf
mp
7
mf
10
mp
13

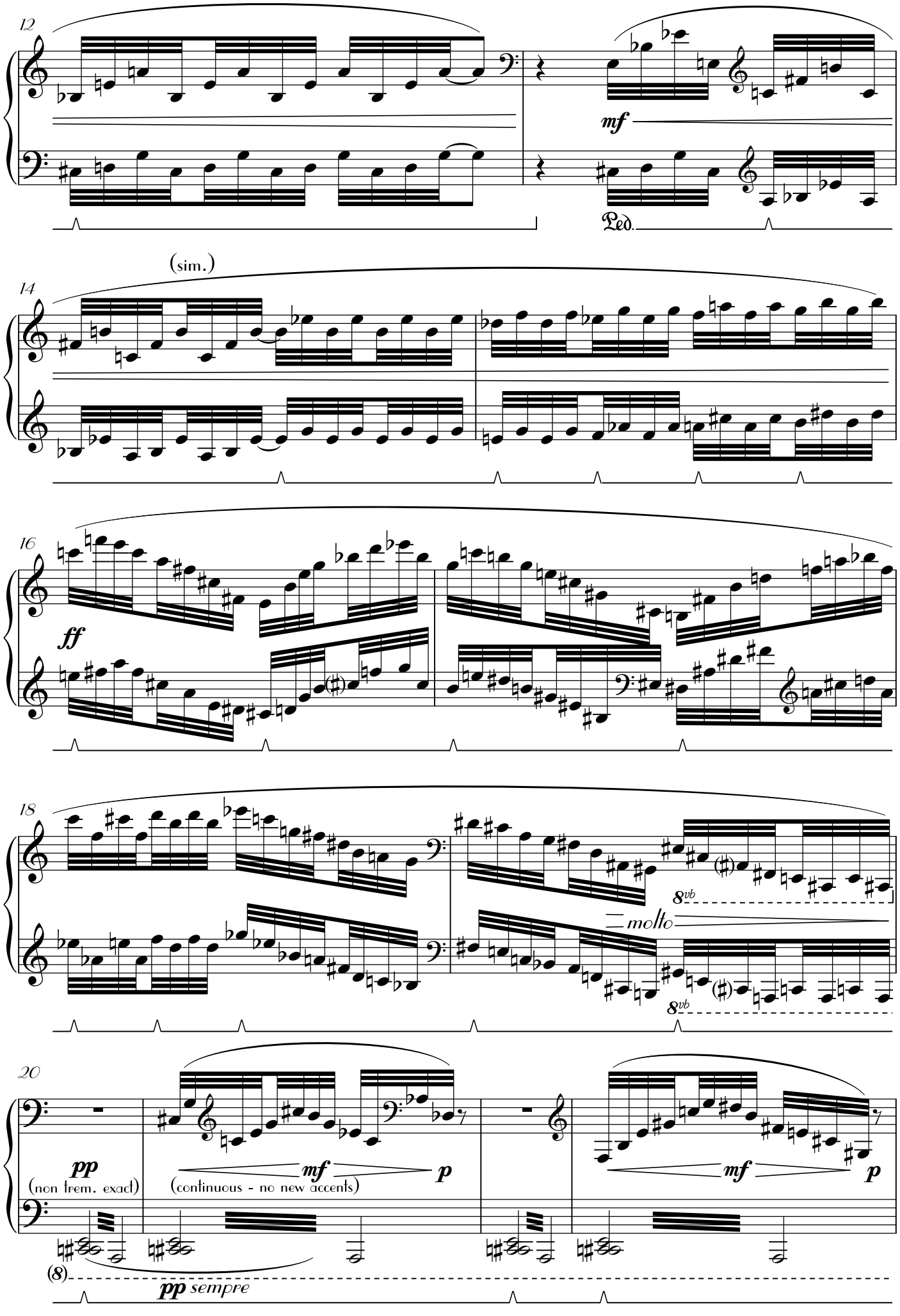

16
8vb
19
22
f
Ped.
8vb
24
(8)
27
mf a bit like a dry fugue

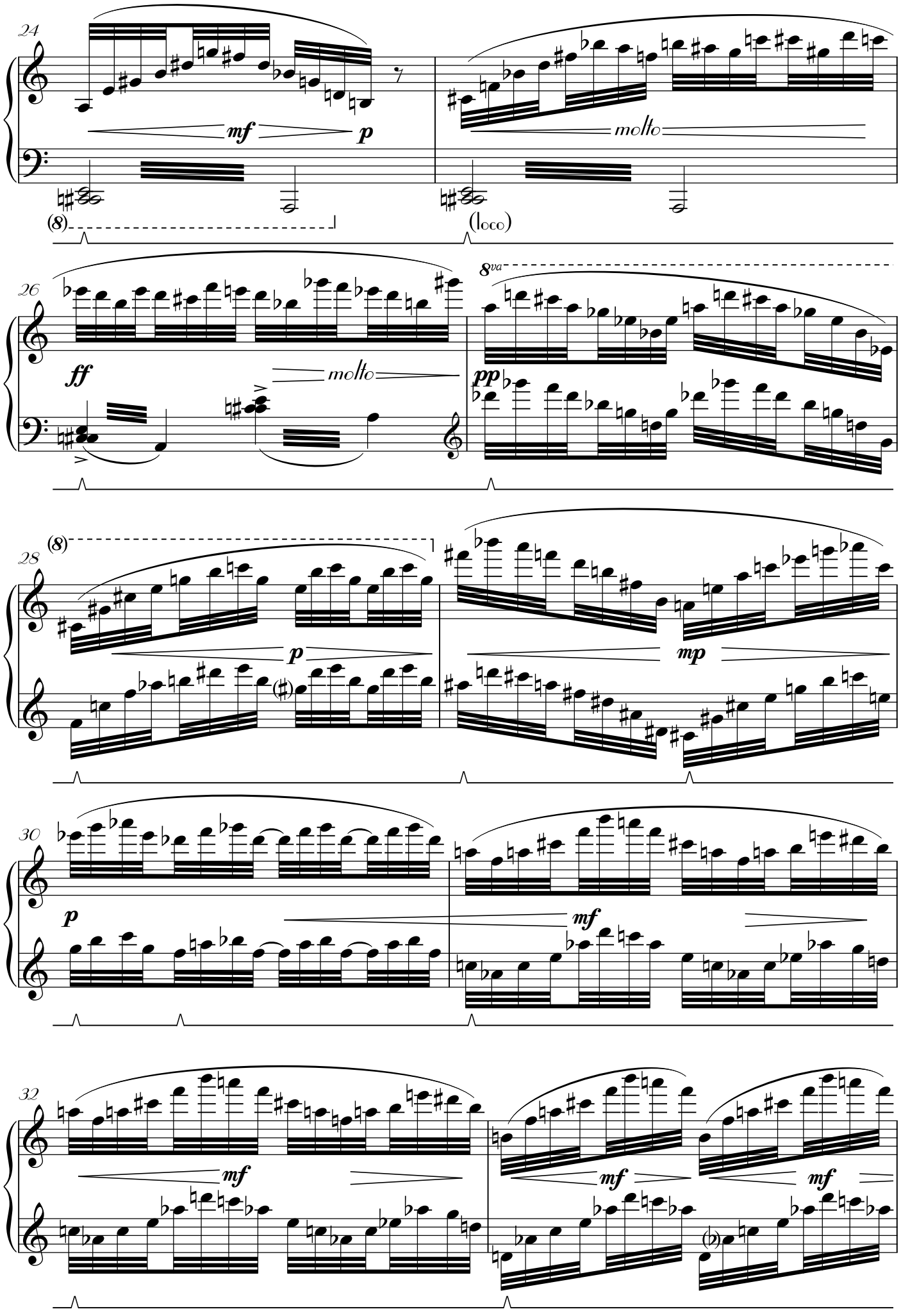

30
33
35
p
mp
p
mp
[exact with the notated rhythm!]
39
p
43
(poco subito)
mp

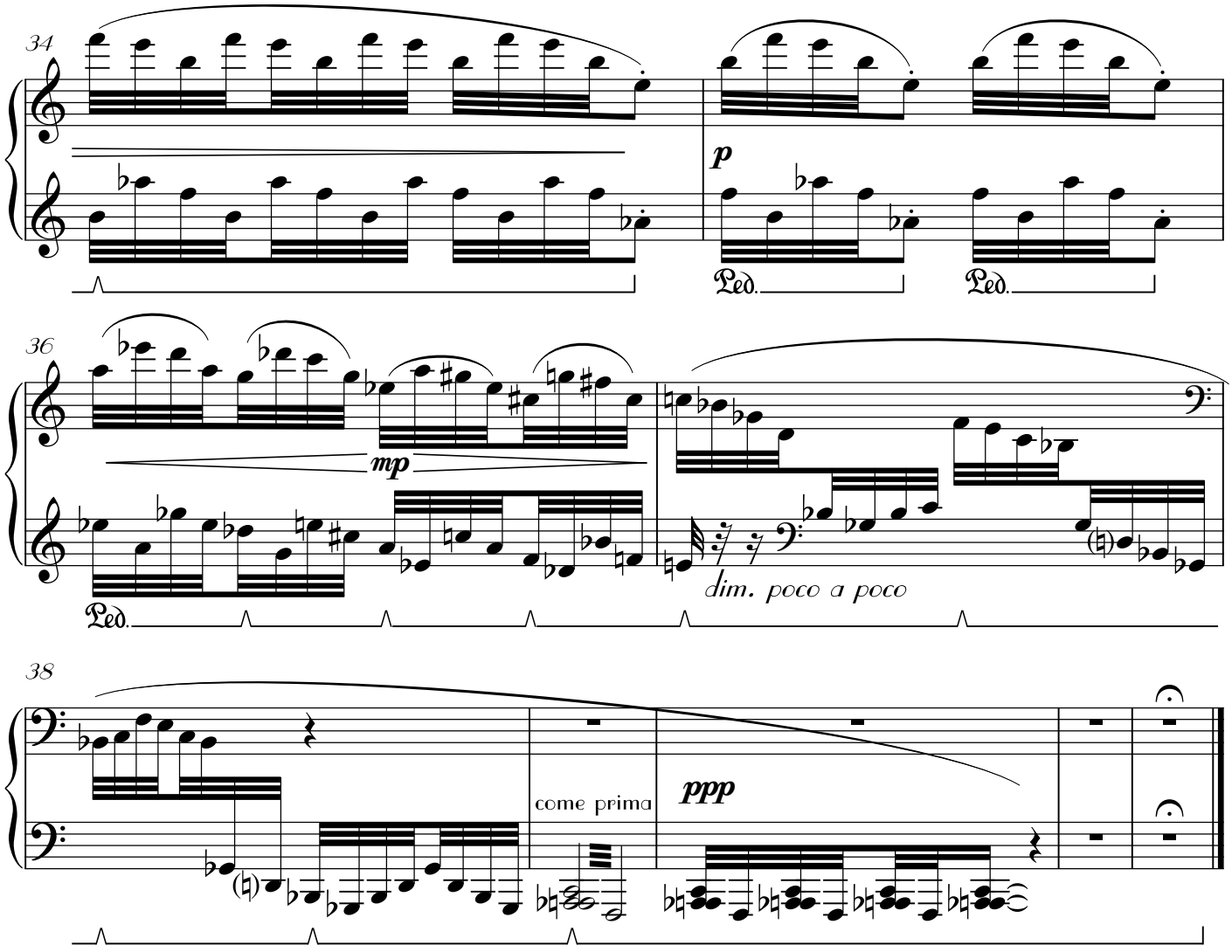
16
UnRavelling Dance

Shimmering ♩=96 - 108 (or as fast as humanly possible)



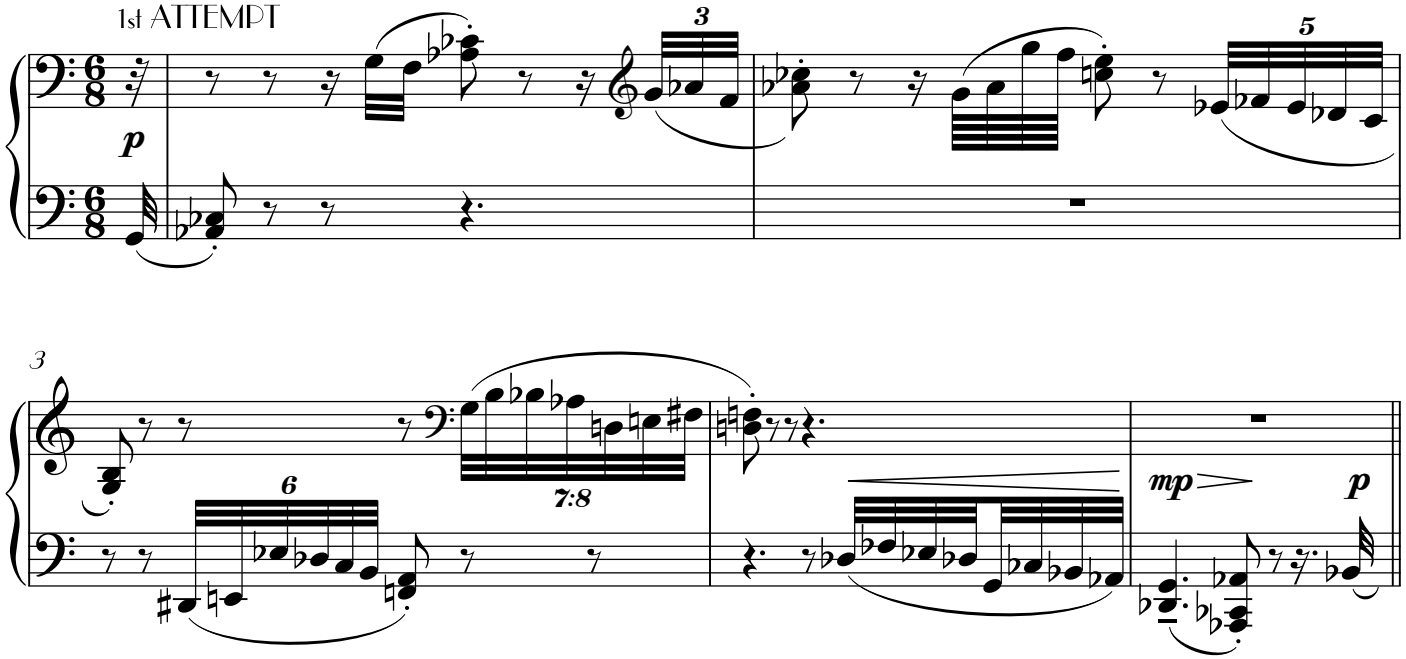

12
mf
Ped.
(sim.)
14
16
ff
18
molto
8vb
8vb
20
pp
(non trem. exact)
mf
(continuous - no new accents)
p
mf
p
(8)
pp sempre

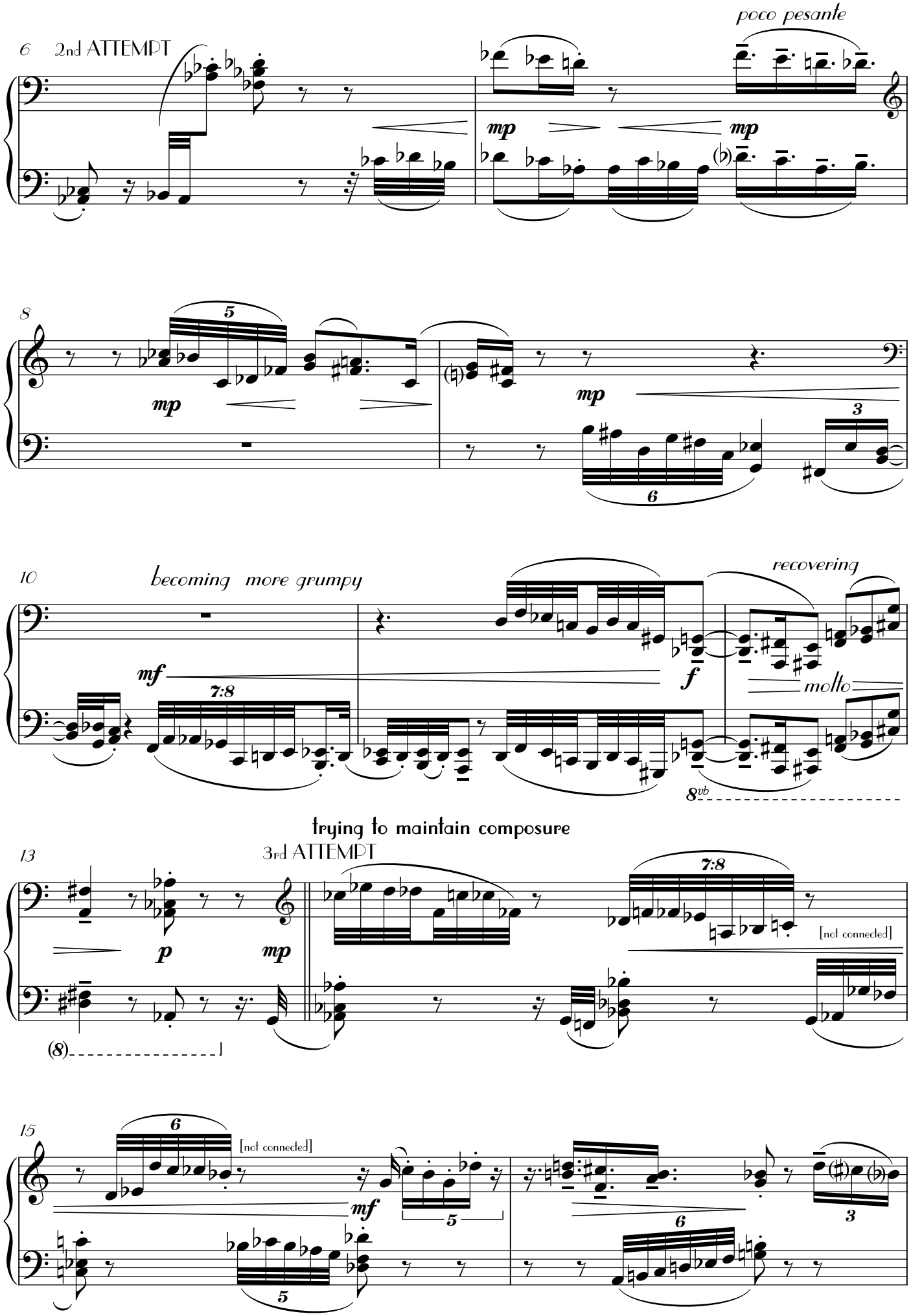

24
mf
p
molto
(8)
(loco)
26
ff
molto
8va
pp
28
(8)
p
mp
30
p
mf
32
mf
mf
mf

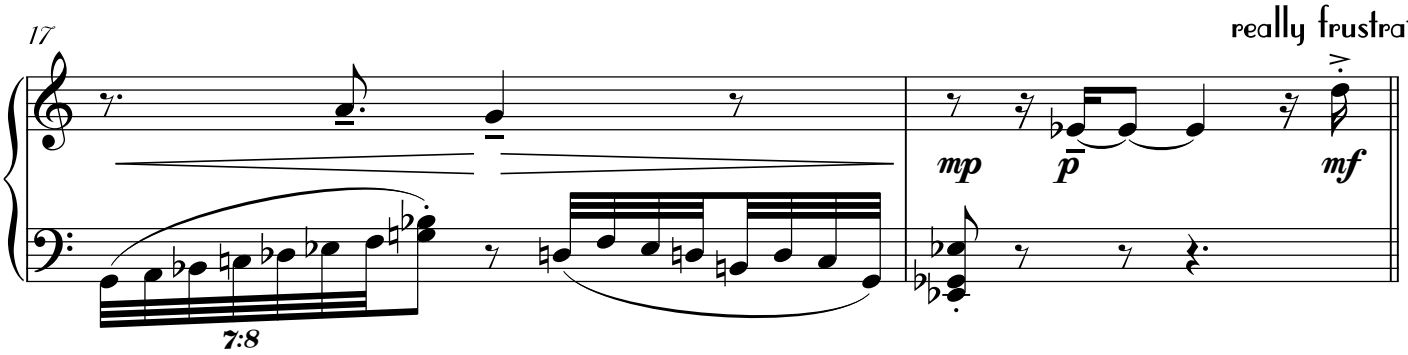


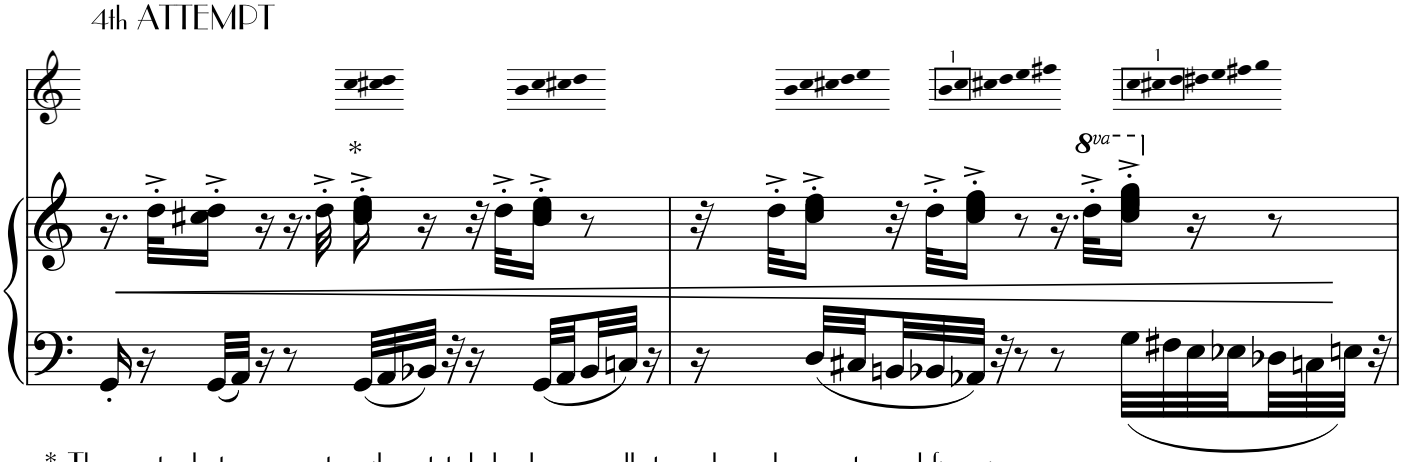
17
Fall Down Seven Times, Get Up Eight!

Jerky, lumpy - as if concentrating on a hard task - ♩.=52

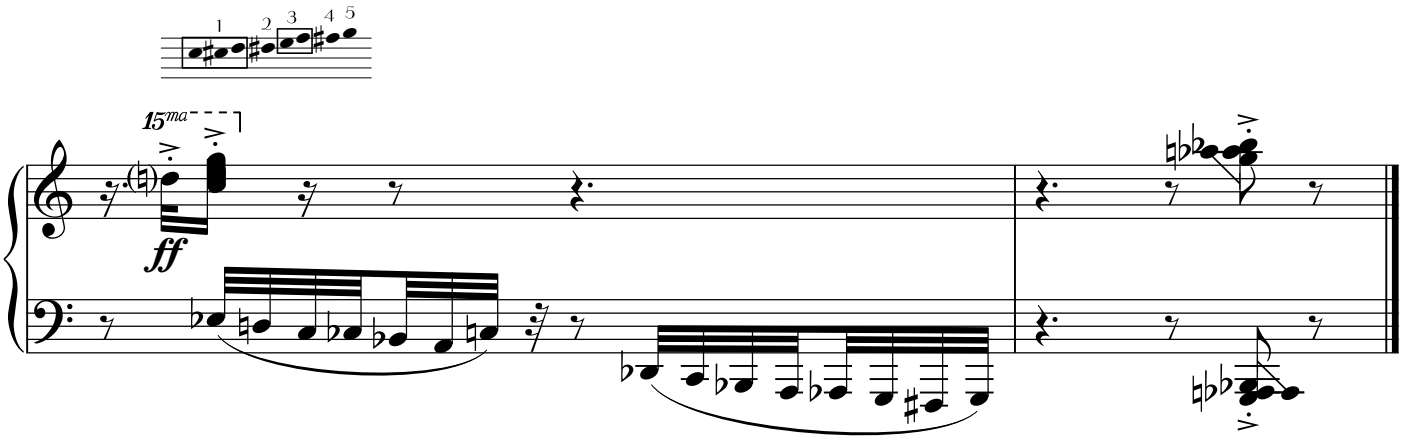



poco pesante
6
2nd ATTEMPT
mp
mp
8
5
mp
mp
6
3
10
becoming more grumpy
recovering
mf
7:8
f
molto
8vb
trying to maintain composure
13
3rd ATTEMPT
p
mp
7:8
[not connected]
(8)
15
6
[not connected]
mf
5
5
6
3





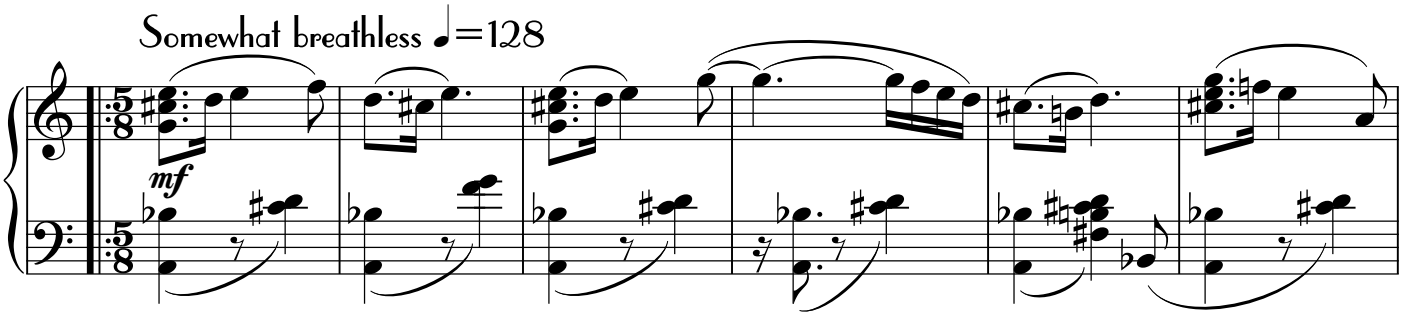
* These note clusters are not easily notated clearly so small stave above shows notes and fingerings.

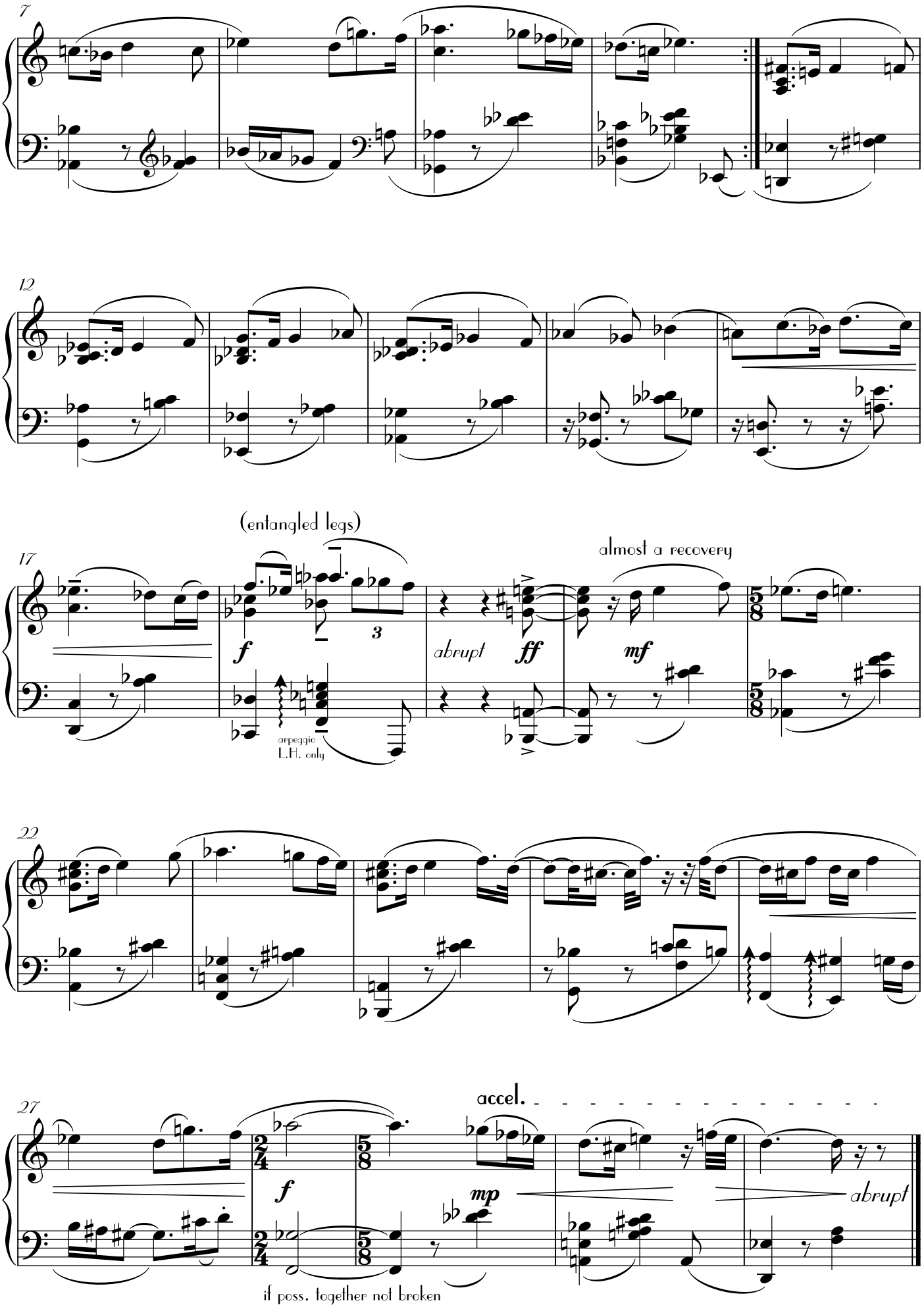


18

Impatient Mazurka

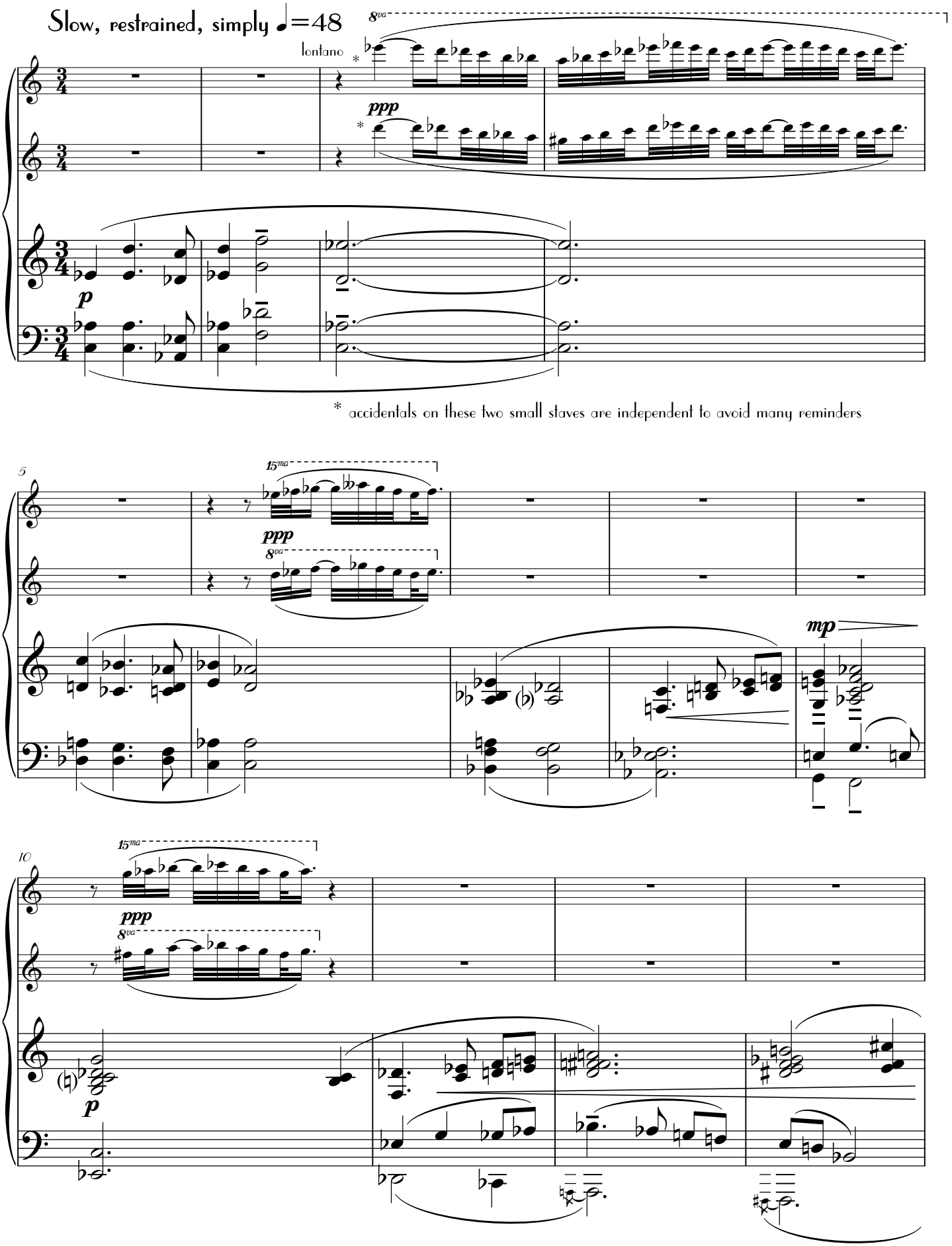
(mis-match of "short legs" and "long legs")

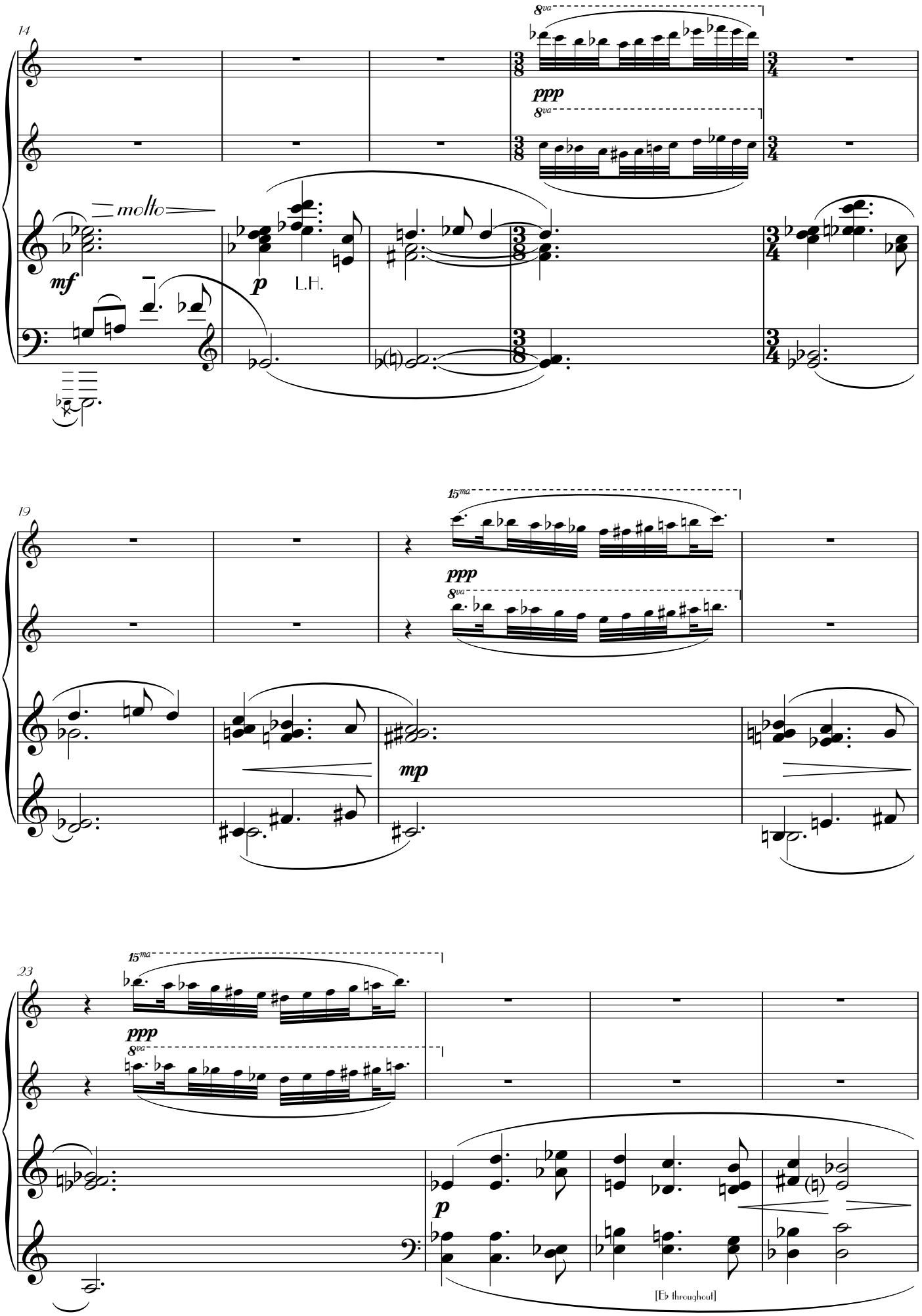


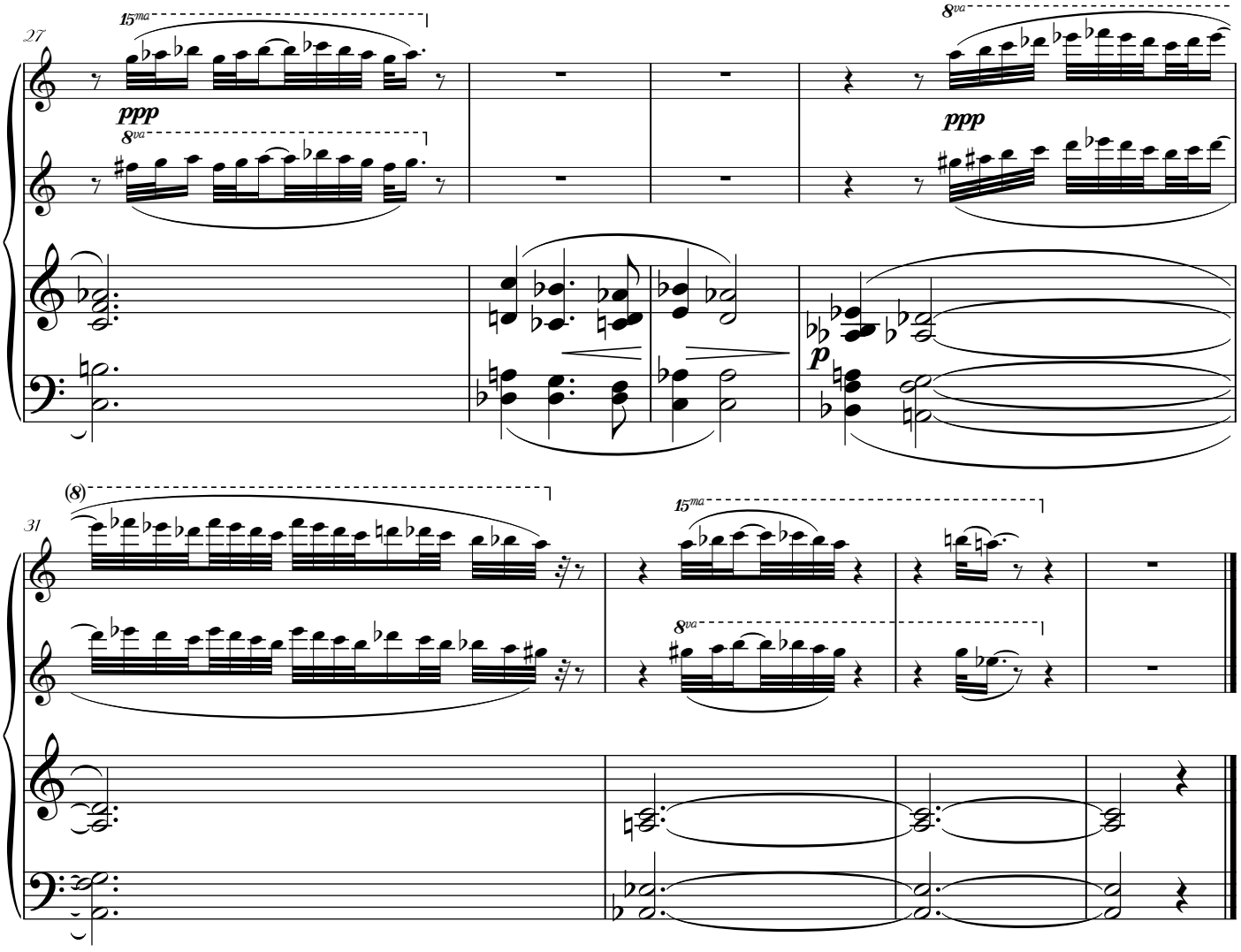

7
12
17
(entangled legs)
f
3
arpeggio
L.H. only
abrupt
ff
almost a recovery
mf
22
27
accel.
f
mp
abrupt
if poss. together not broken

19

Pas des deux - l'ancien et la jeune danseuse

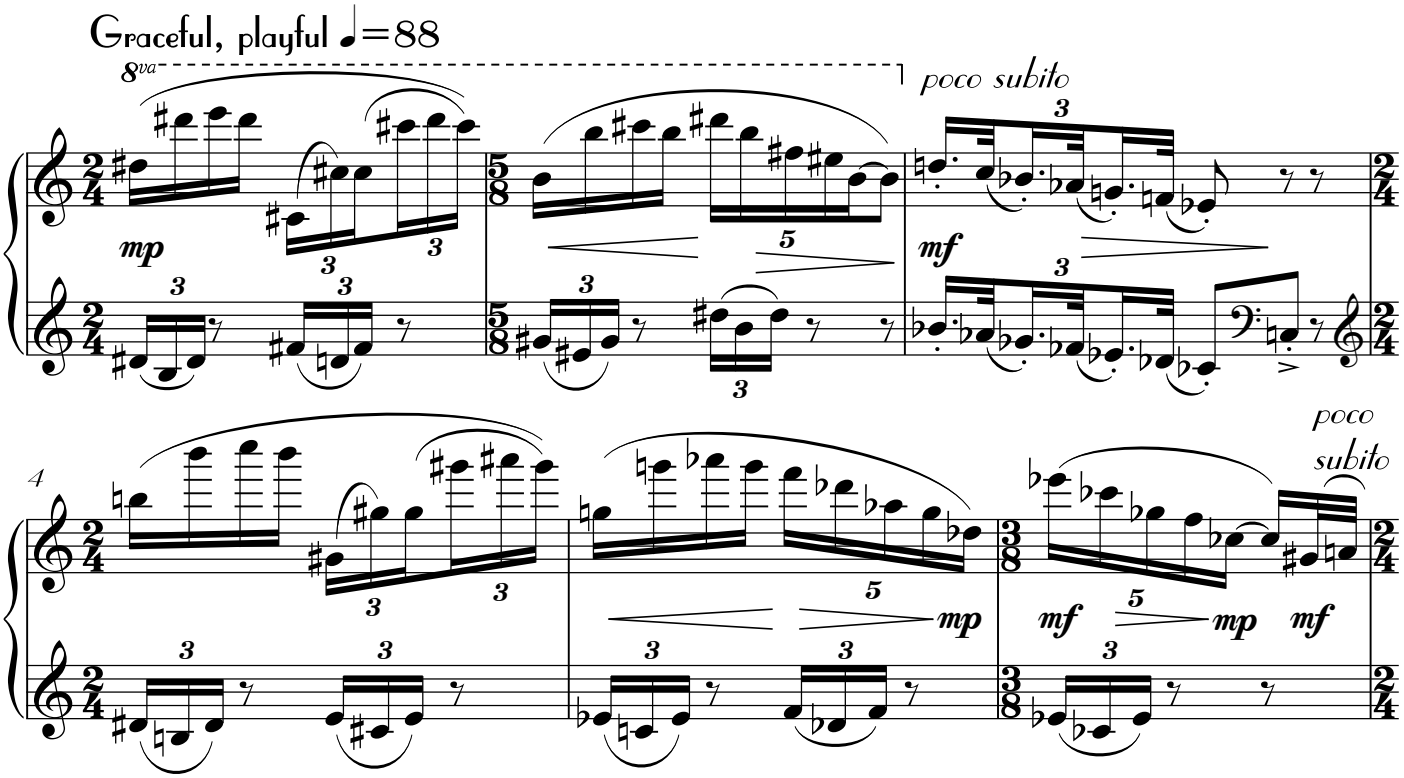


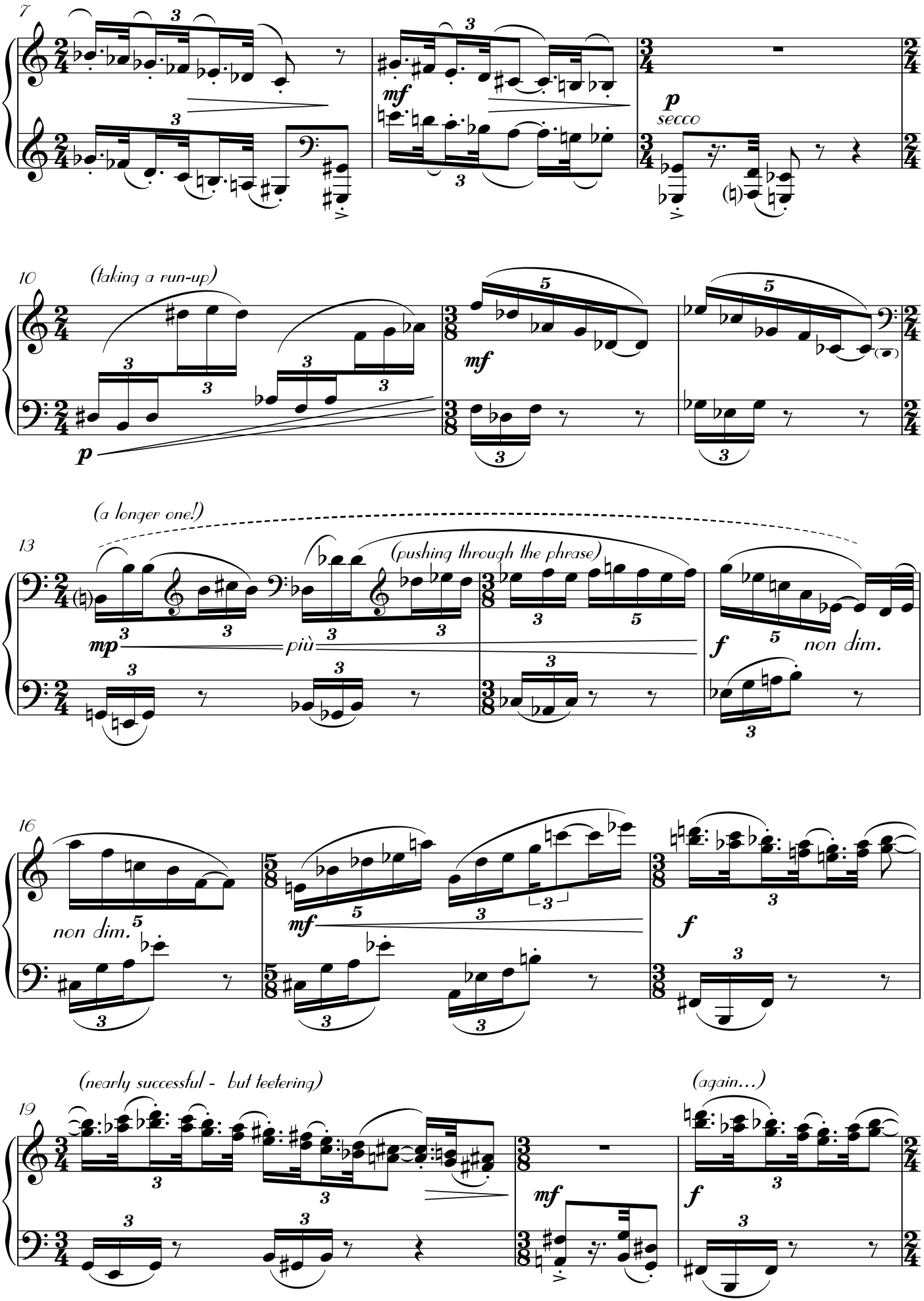

14
8va
ppp
molto
mf
p
L.H.
19
15ma
mp
23
[Eb throughout]

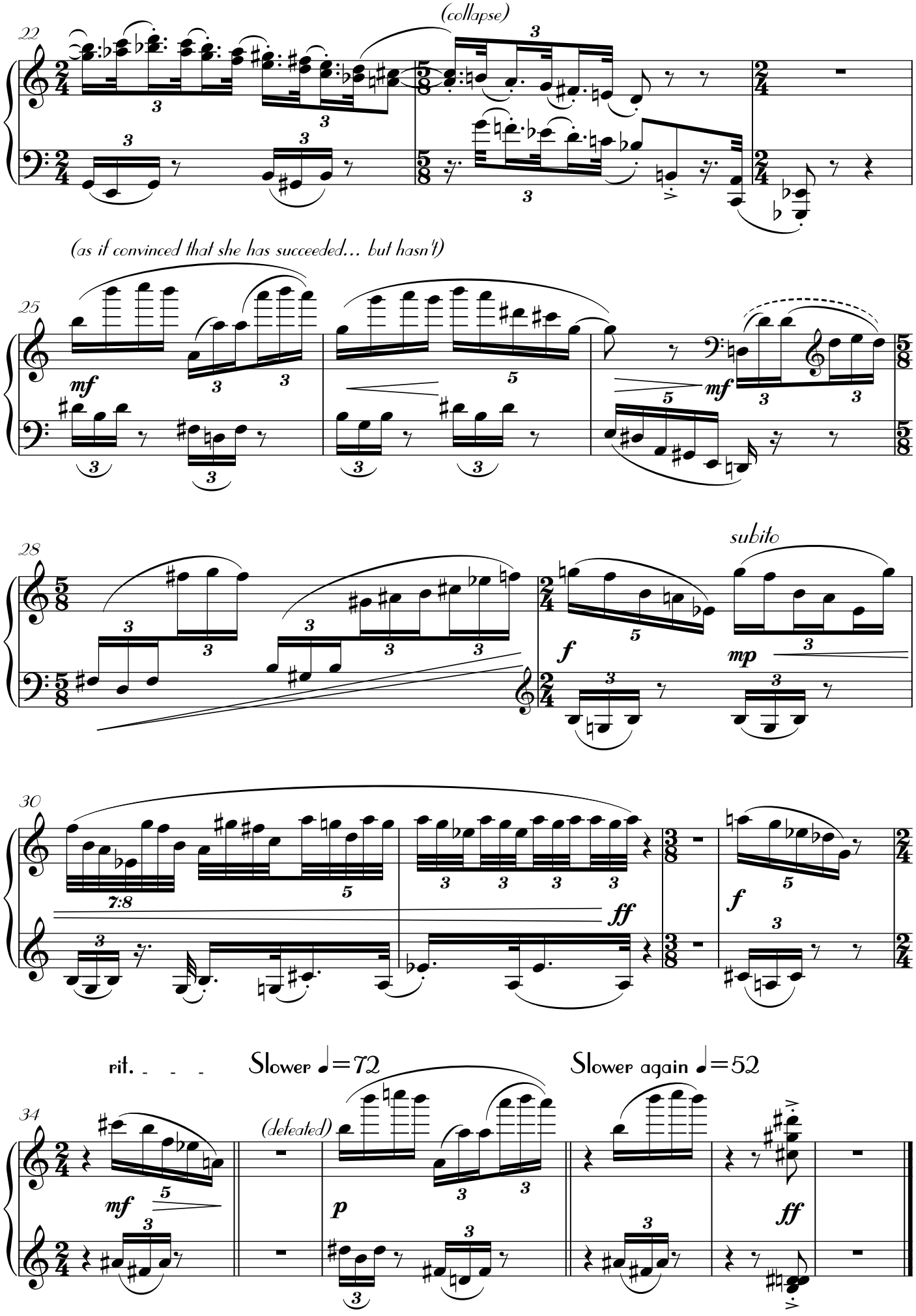


20

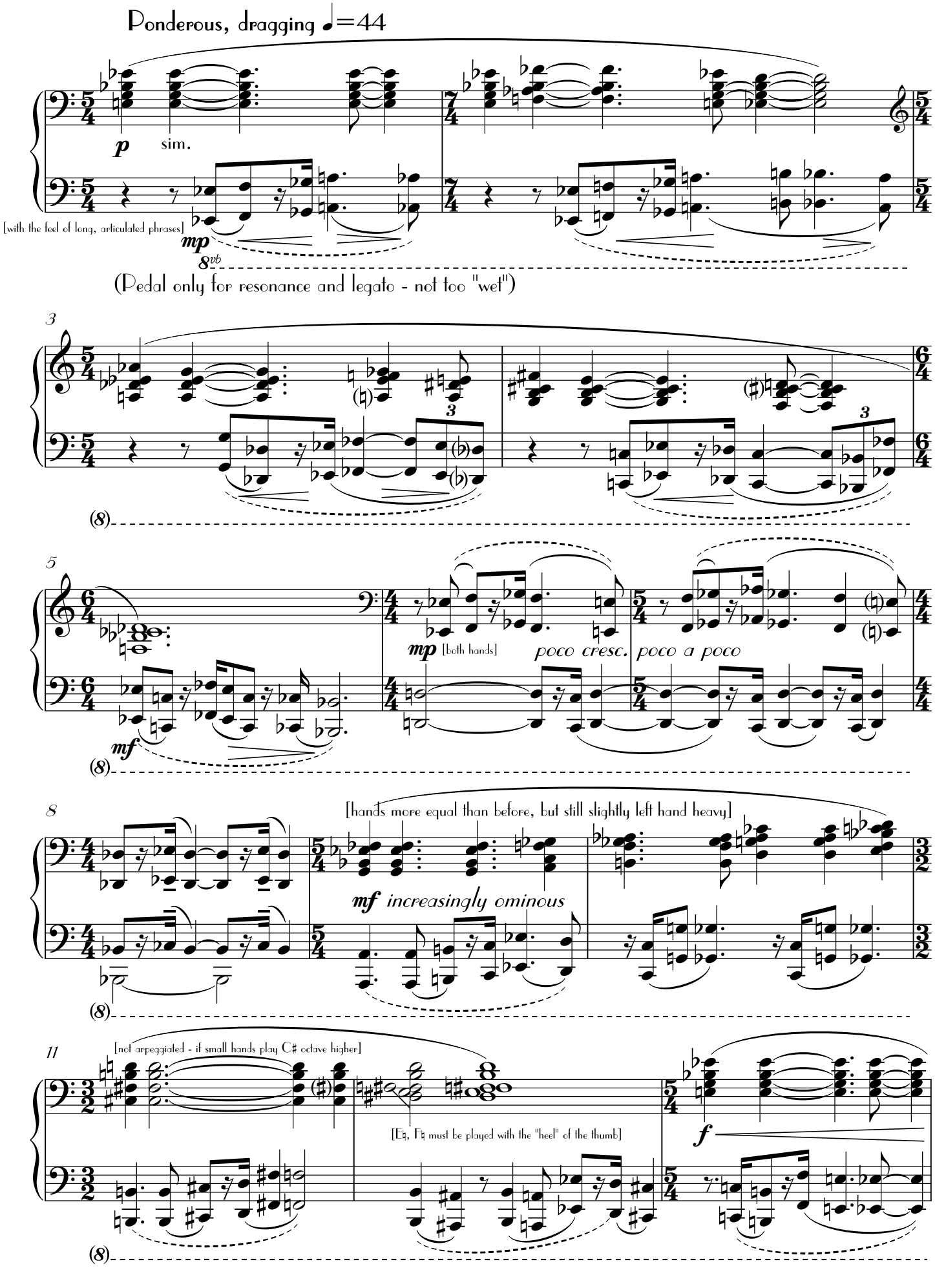
First Attempts at a Pirhouette

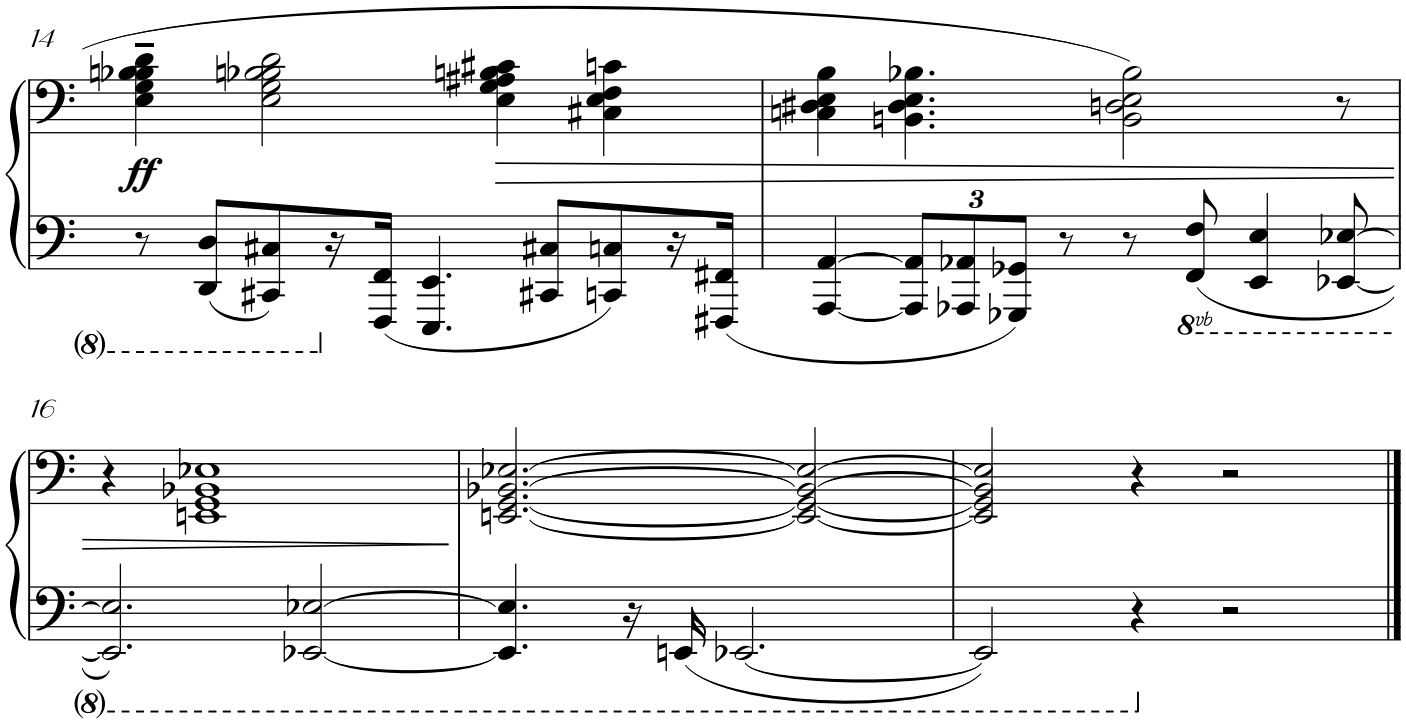



7
mf
p
secco
10
(taking a run-up)
p
mf
13
(a longer one!)
(pushing through the phrase)
mp
più
f
non dim.
16
non dim.
mf
f
19
(nearly successful - but teetering)
(again...)
mf
f


22
(collapse)
(as if convinced that she has succeeded... but hasn't)
25
mf
mf
28
subito
f
mp
30
7:8
ff
f
rit. - - -
Slower ♩=72
Slower again ♩=52
34
(defeated)
mf
p
ff

21
The Lead Dancer Shows his Mettle

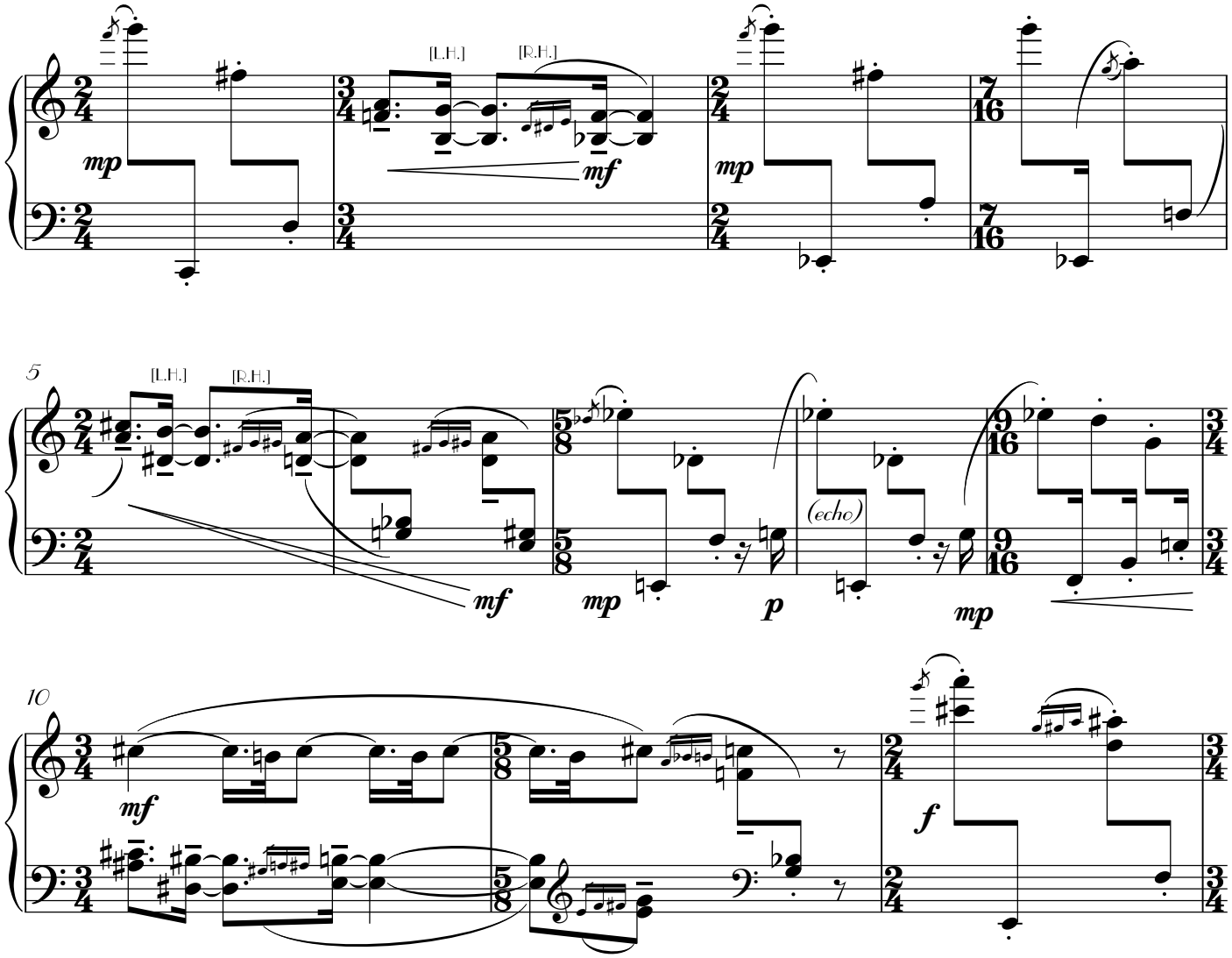


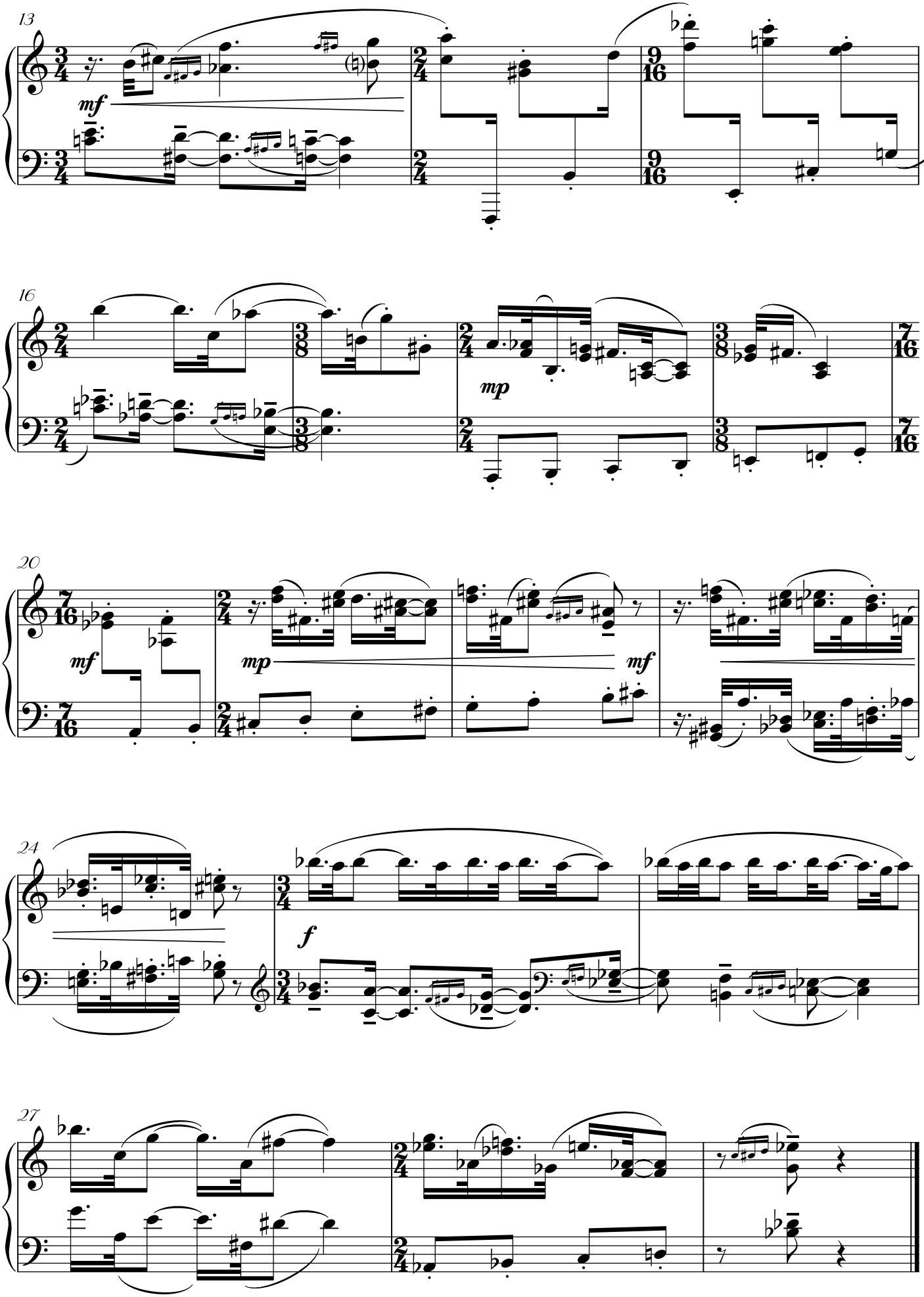


22

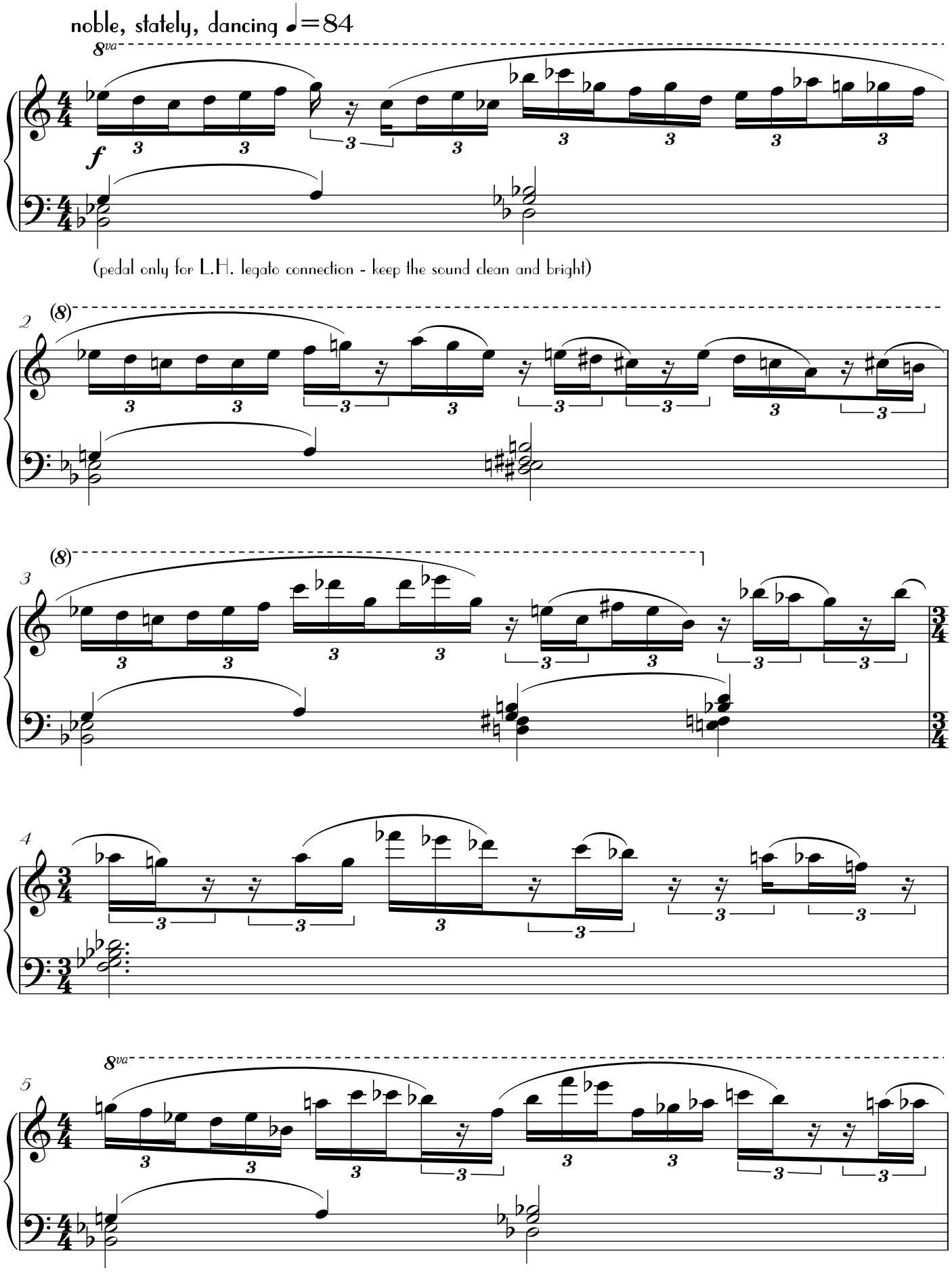
Three Legs

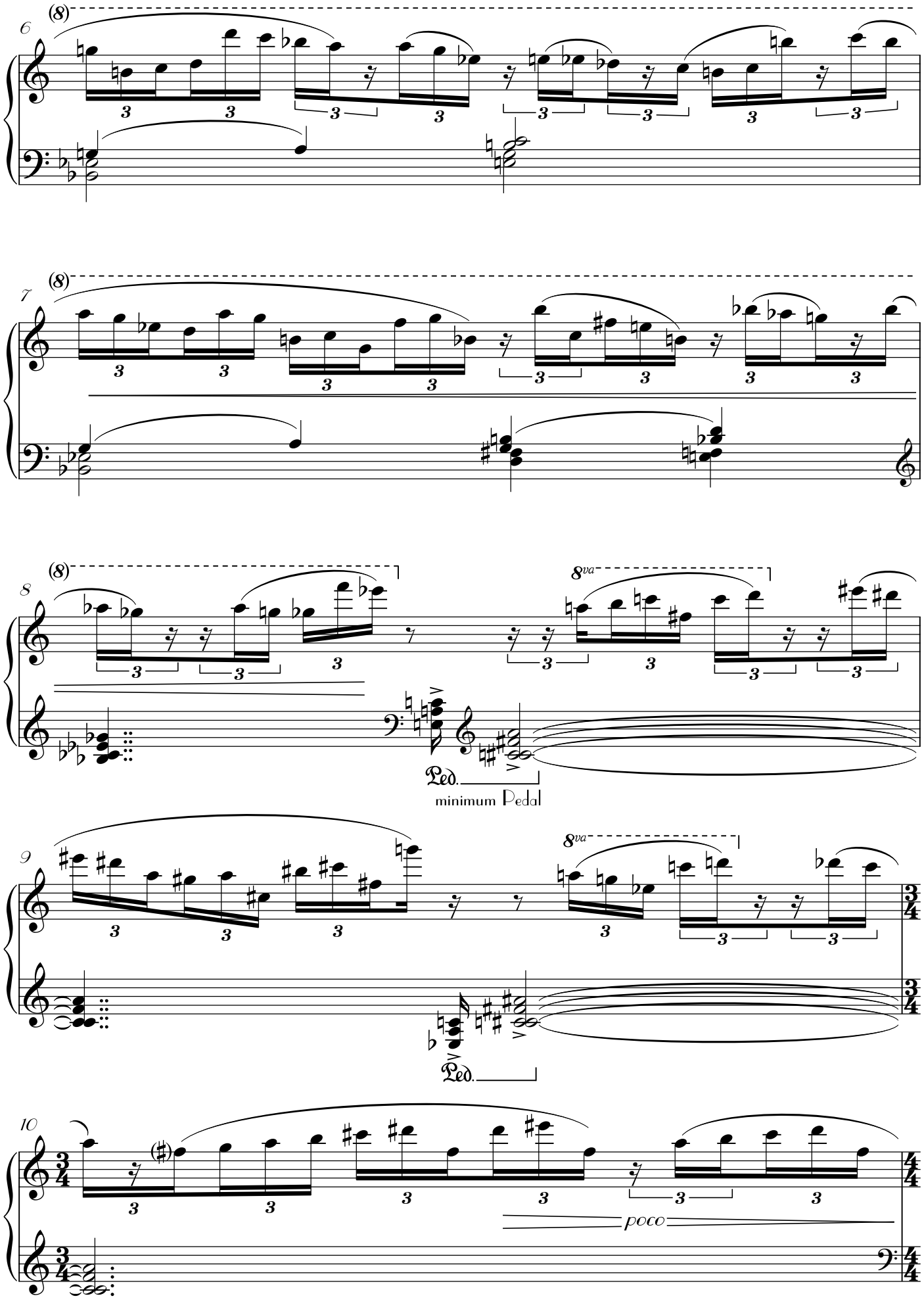
On tiptoes, nimble, but with one foot dragging ♩=96

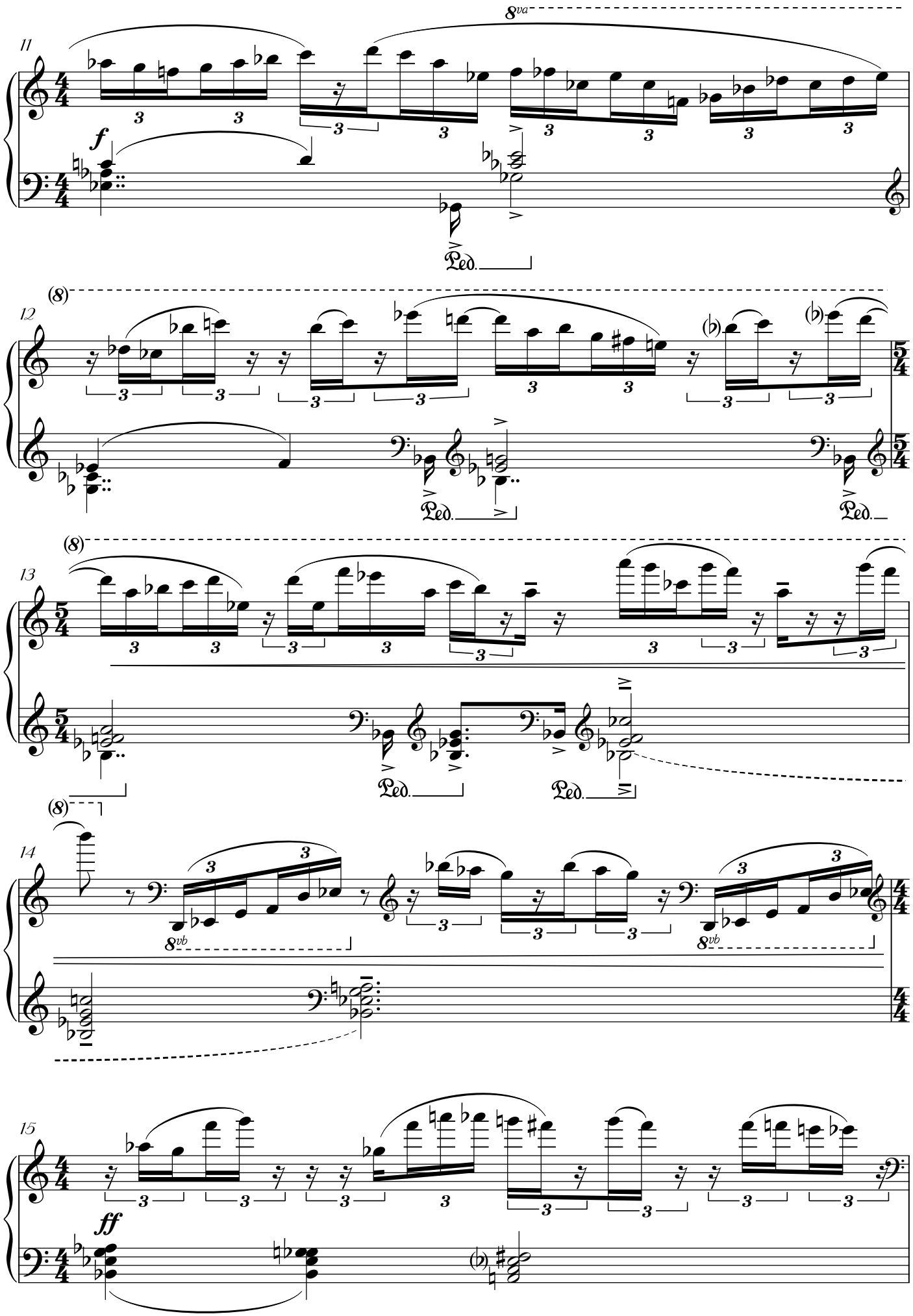


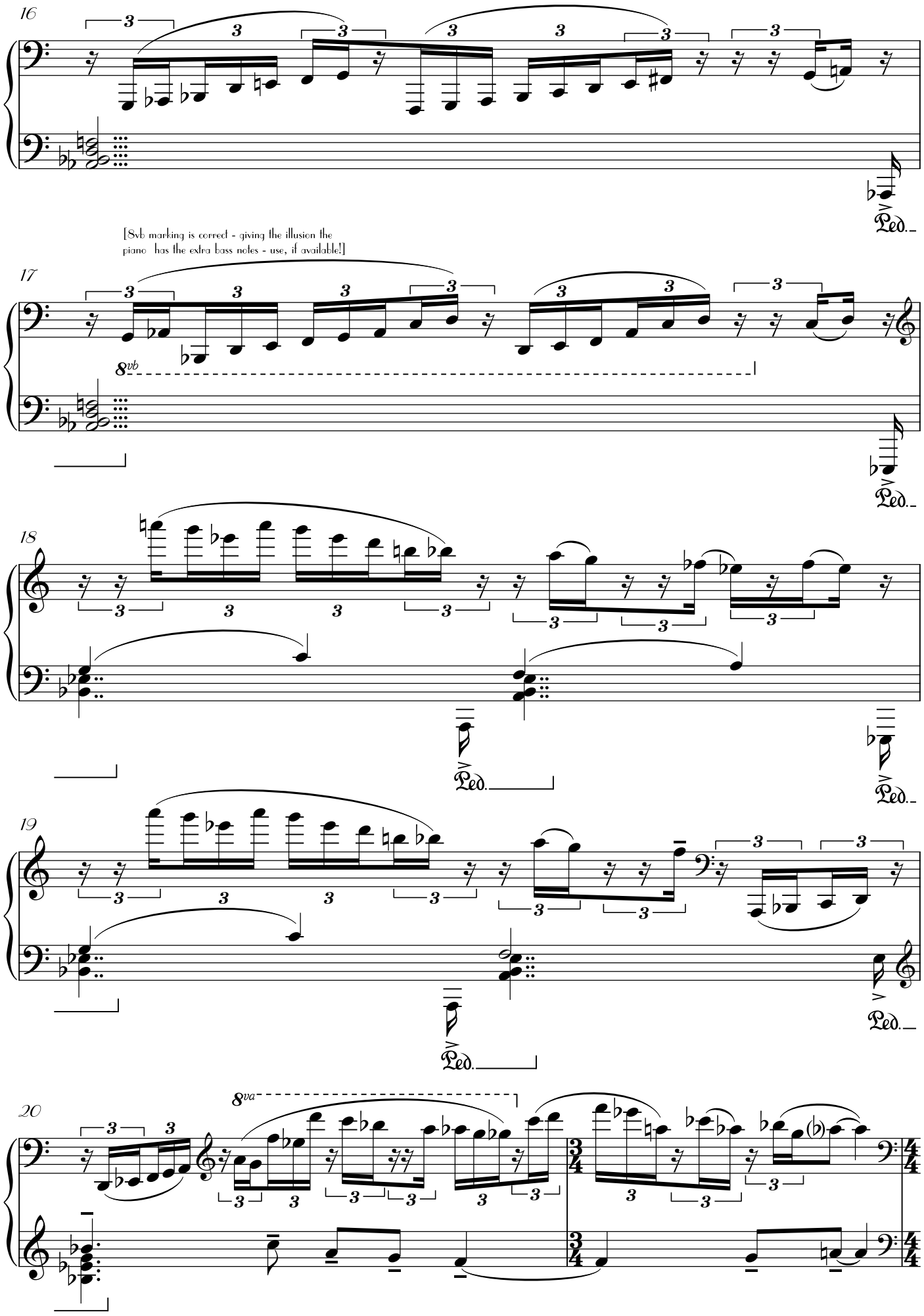

13
mf
16
mp
20
mf
mp
mf
24
f
27

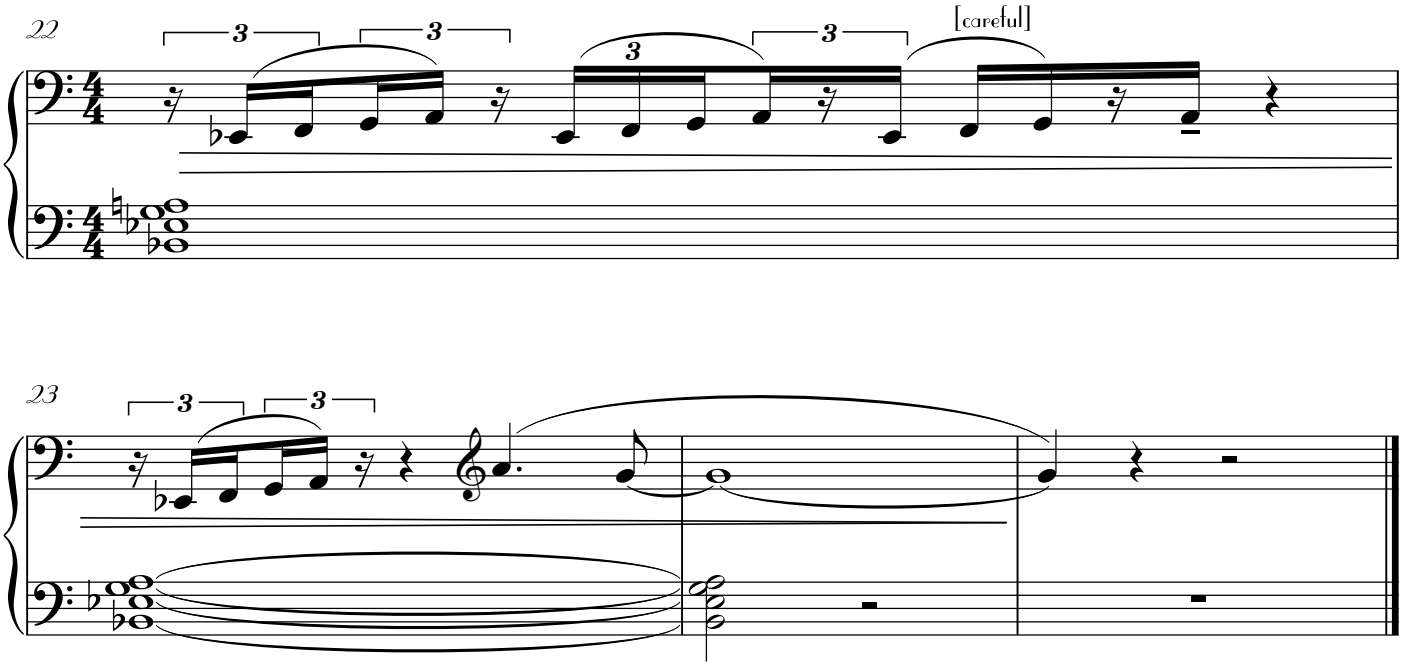
23
Pavan for a Revived Princess




6
(8)
7
(8)
8
(8)
8va
Ped.
minimum Pedal
9
8va
Ped.
10
poco

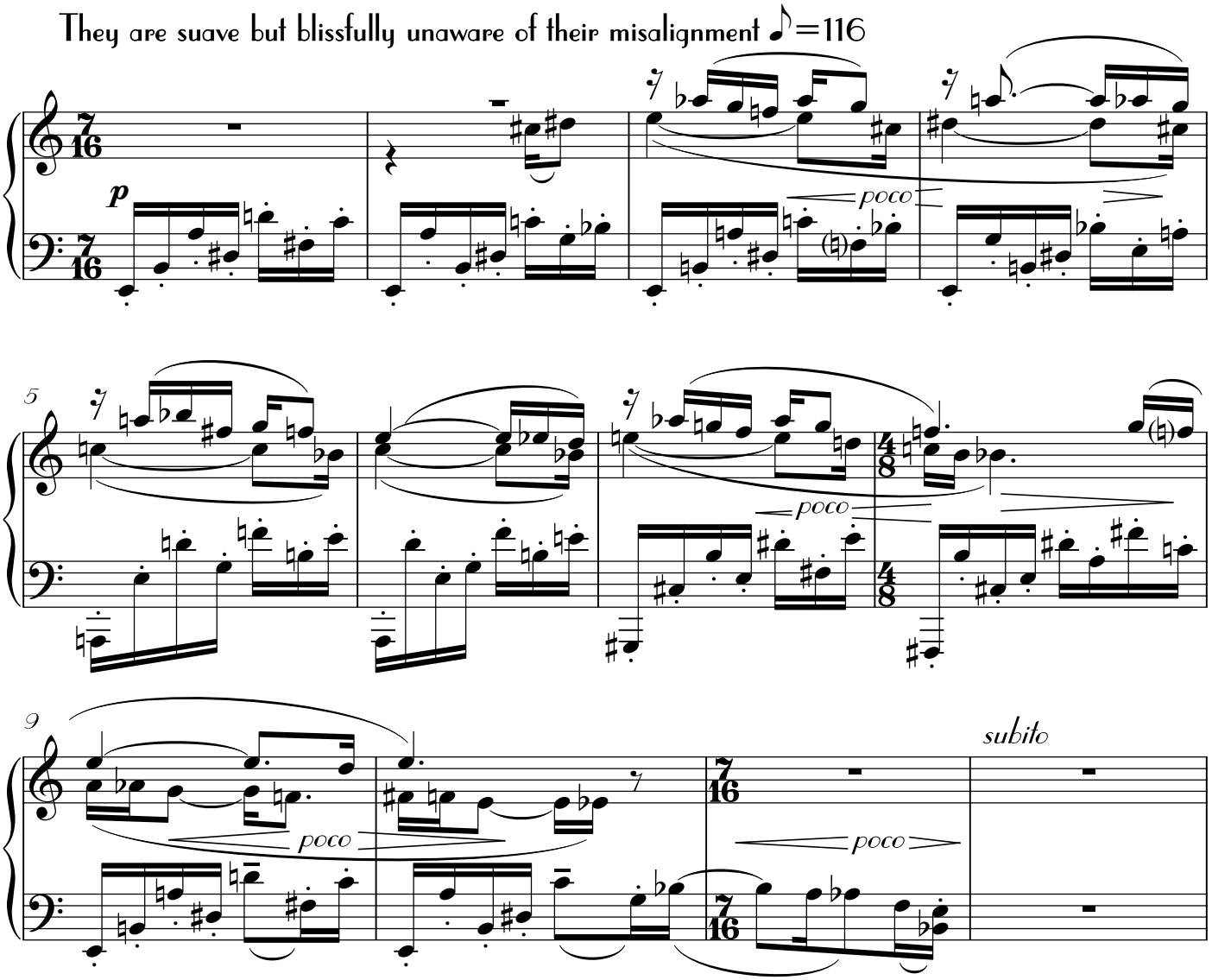

11
8va
f
Ped.
12
(8)
Ped.
Ped.
13
(8)
Ped.
Ped.
14
(8)
8vb
8vb
15
ff

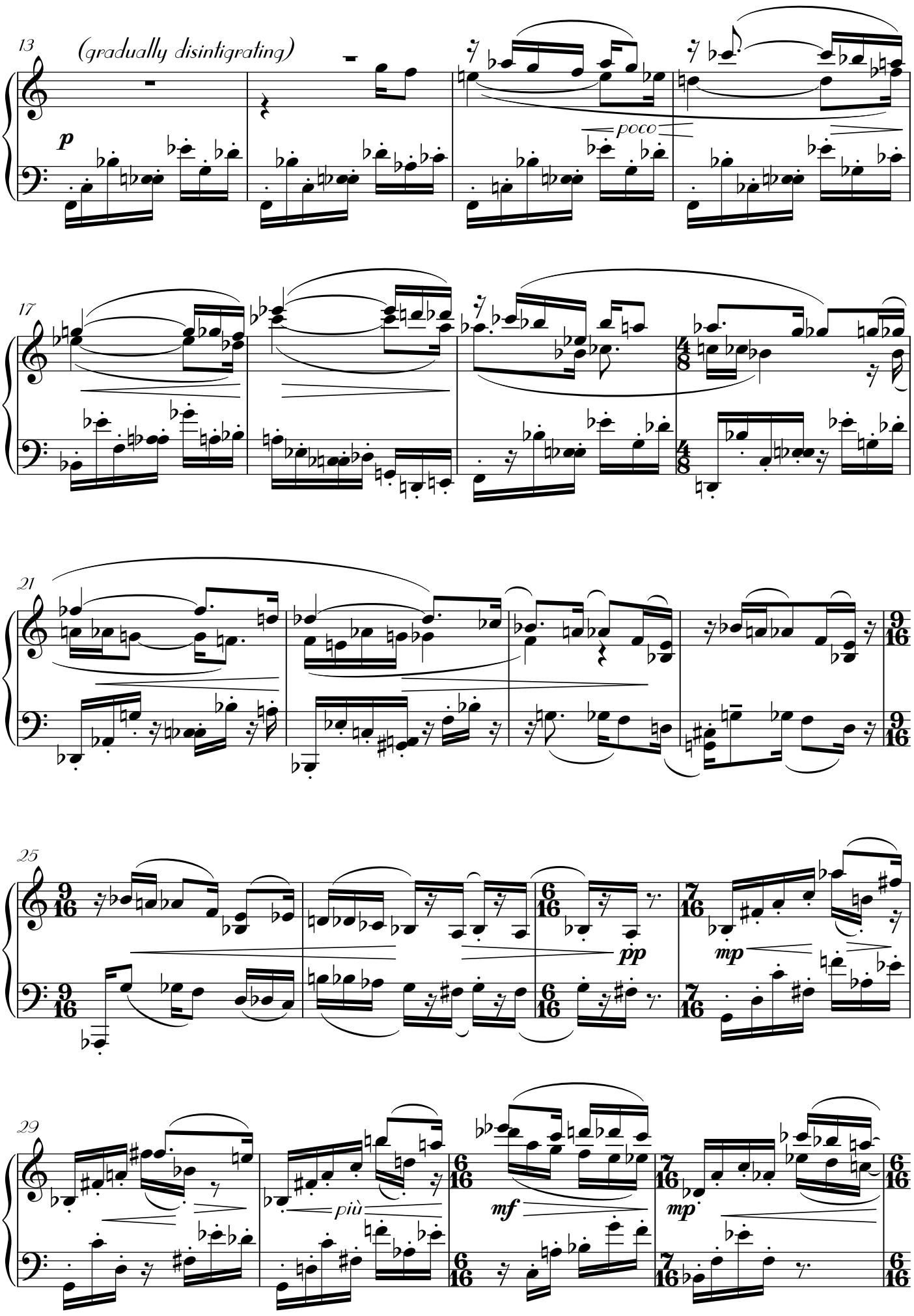

16
17
[8vb marking is correct - giving the illusion the piano has the extra bass notes - use, if available!]
8vb
18
19
20
8va
Ped.

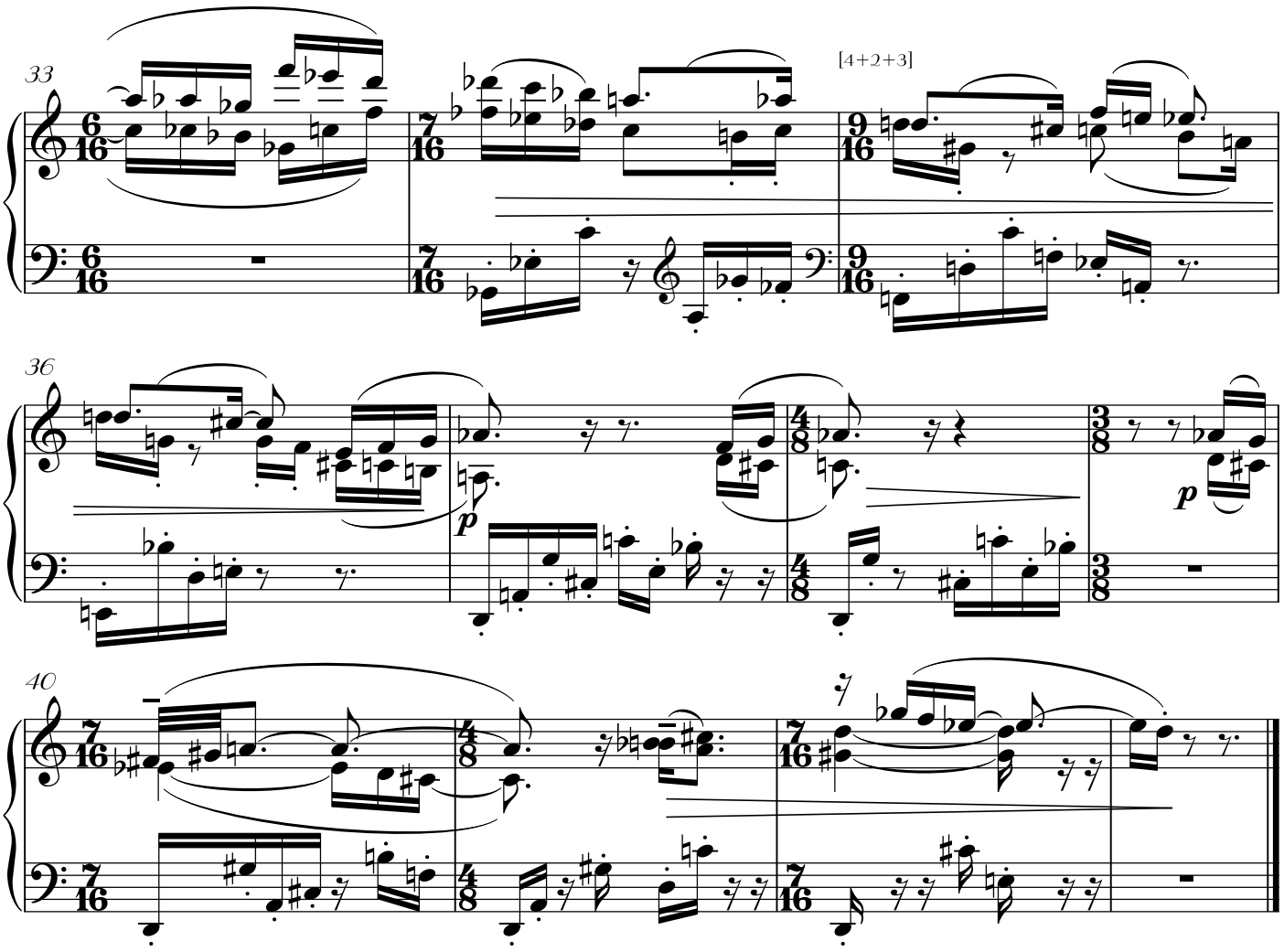


24
Danse Françaix?

They are suave but blissfully unaware of their misalignment ♪=116



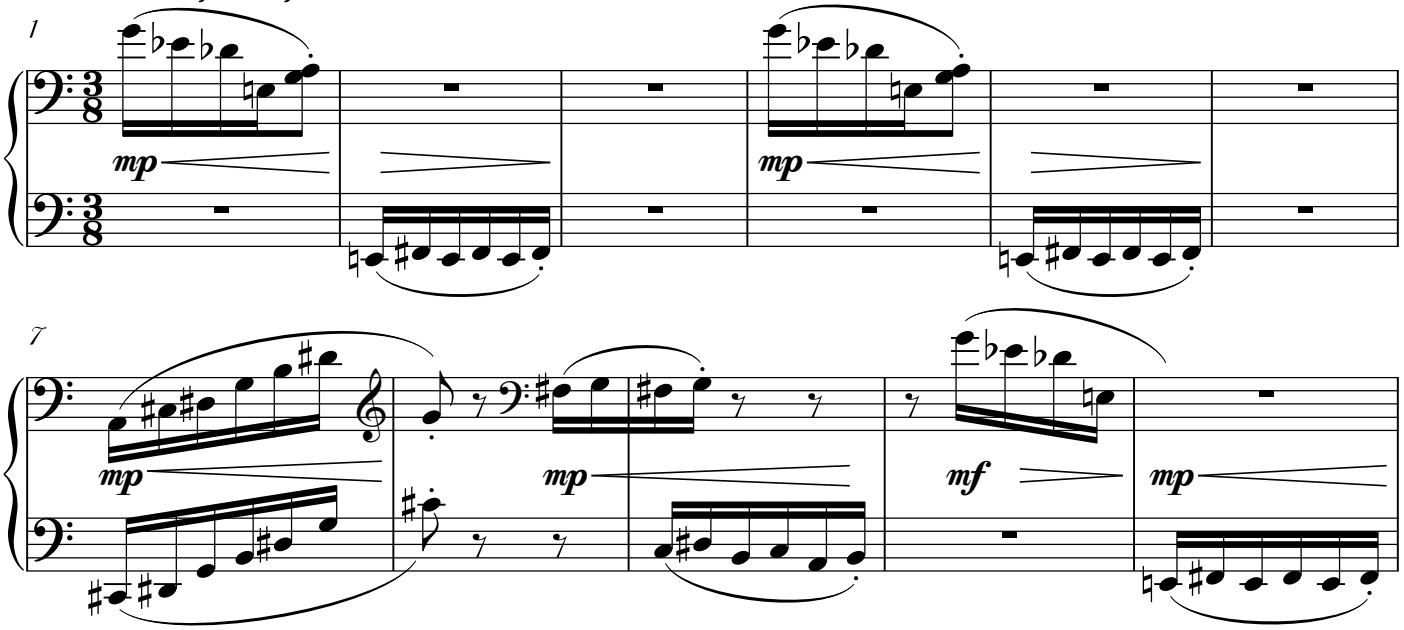

13
(gradually disintigrating)
p
poco
17
21
25
pp
mp
29
più
mf
mp

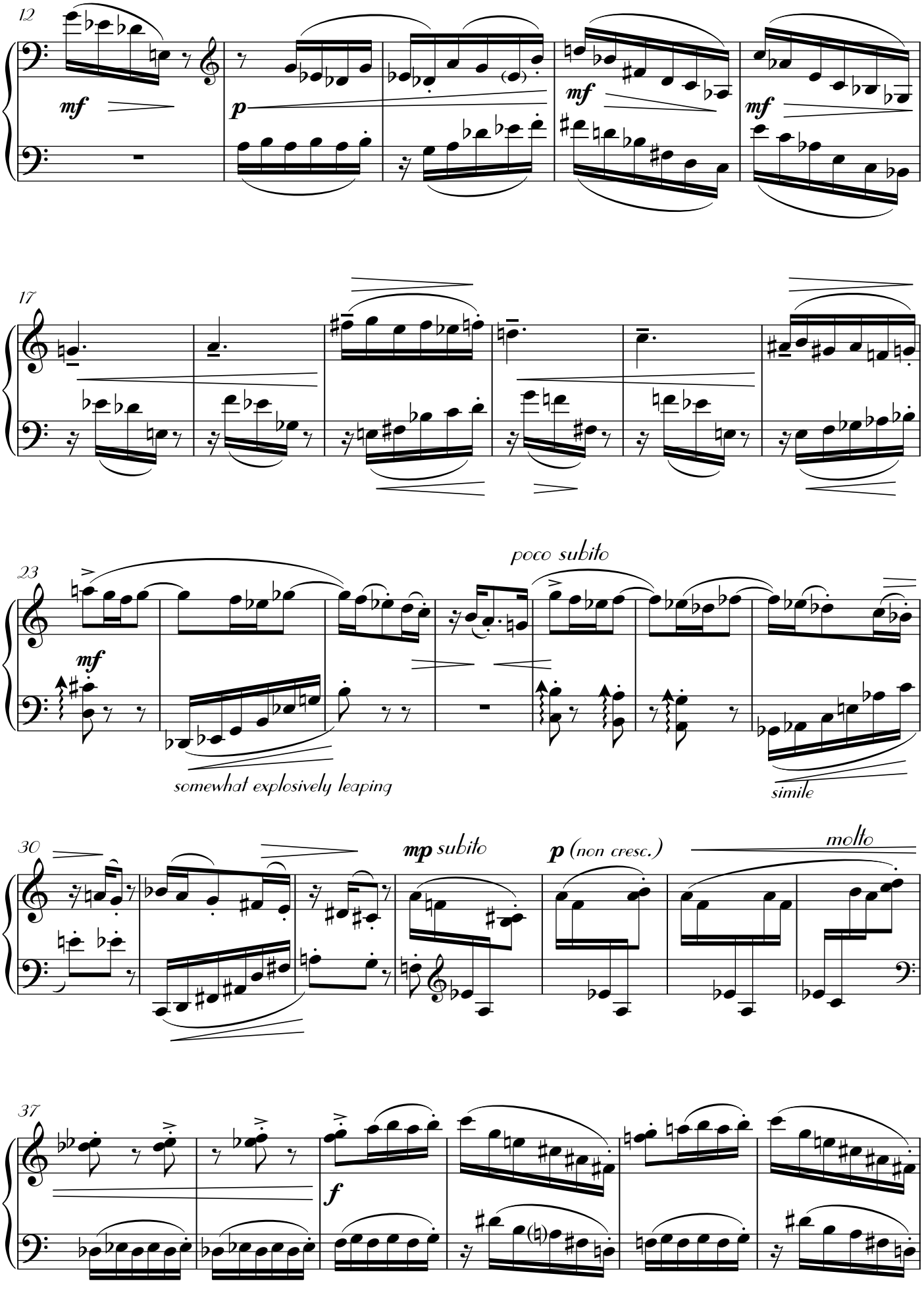


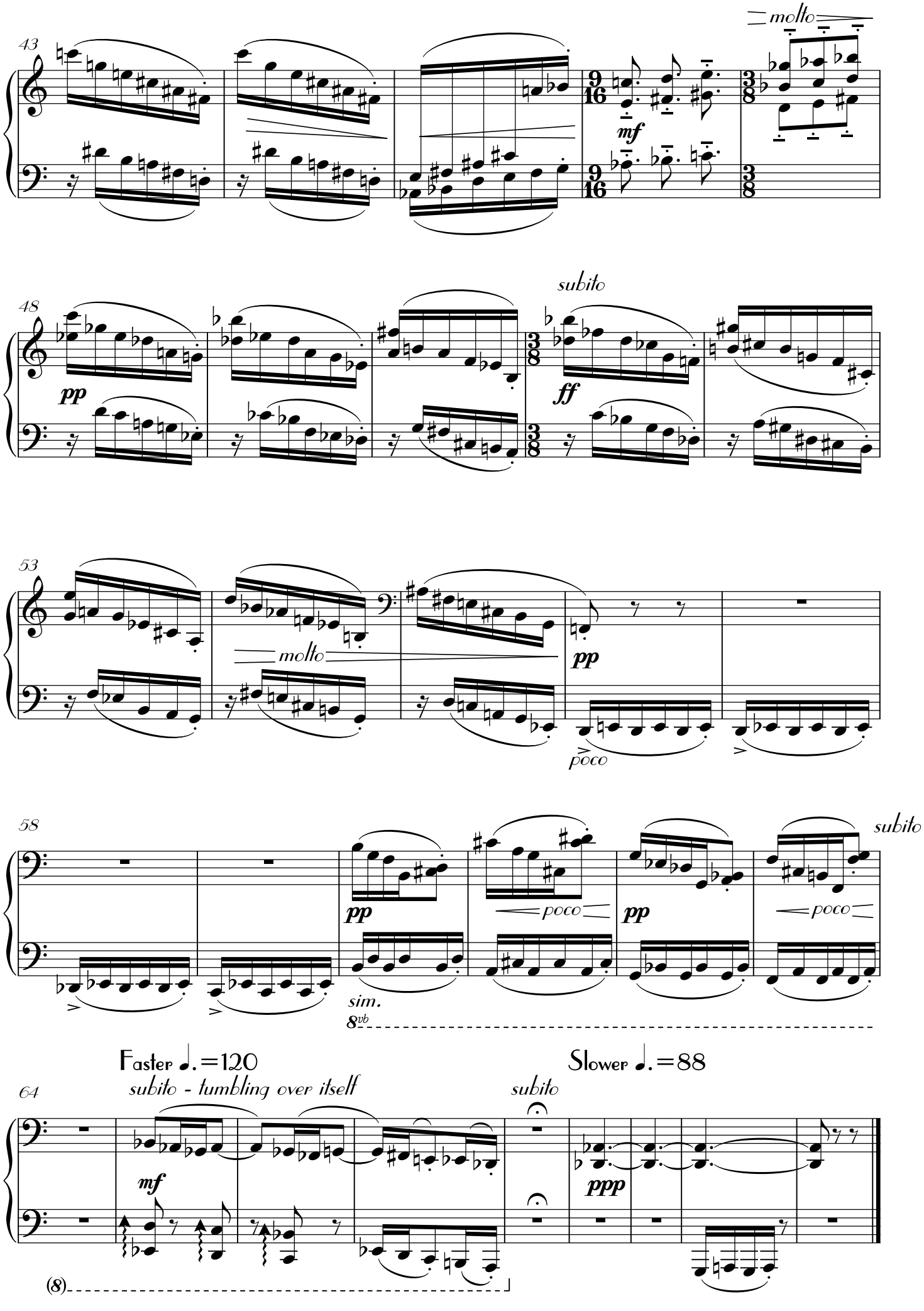
25
Bacchanalian Whirl

"The true is thus the Bacchanalian whirl in which no member is not drunken;
and because each, as soon as it detaches itself, dissolves immediately -
the whirl is just as much transparent and simple repose."
[Hegel]

Whirling along - unstable ♩.=100



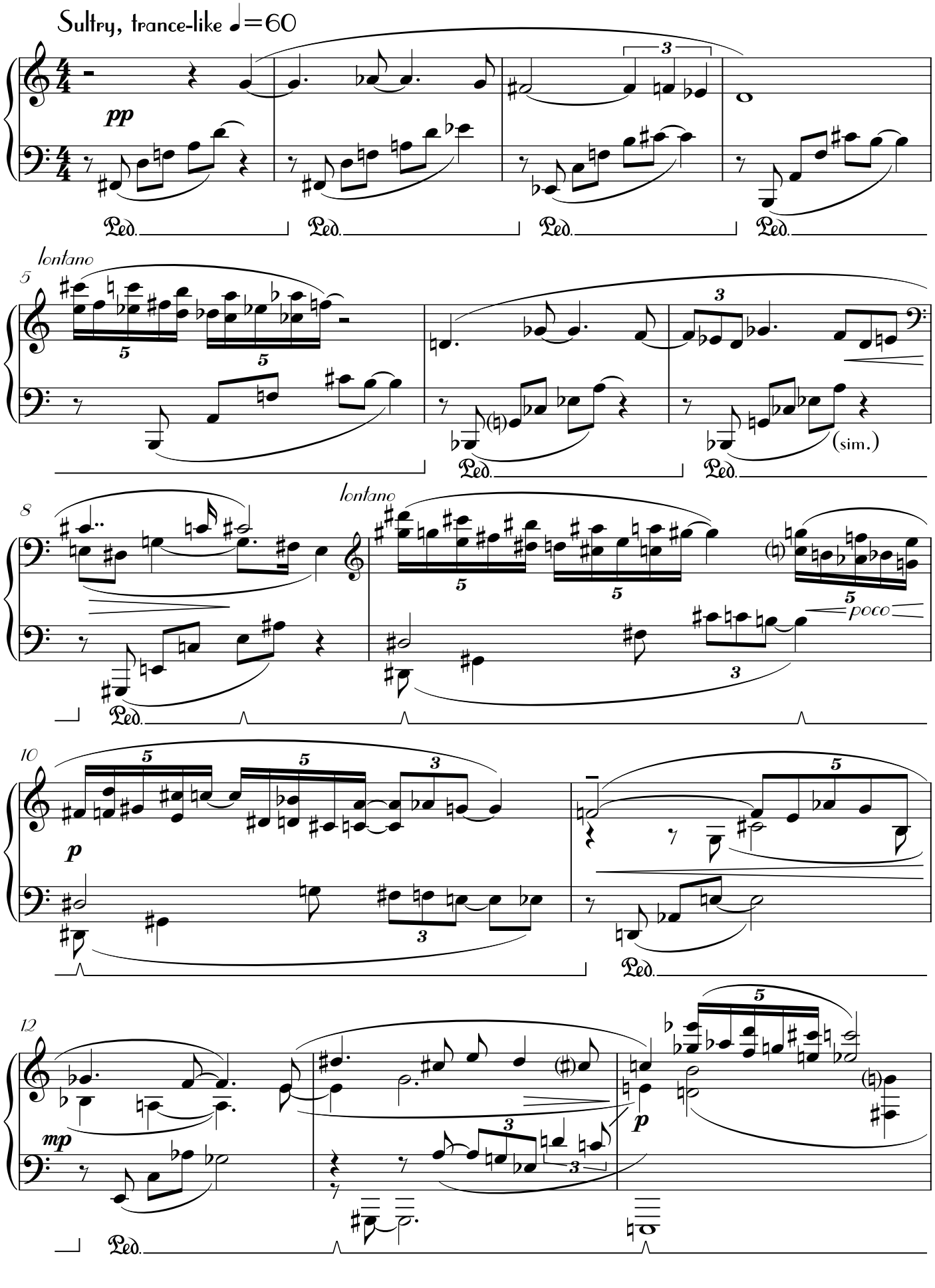

12
mf
p
mf
mf
17
23
poco subito
mf
somewhat explosively leaping
simile
30
mp subito
p (non cresc.)
molto
37
f

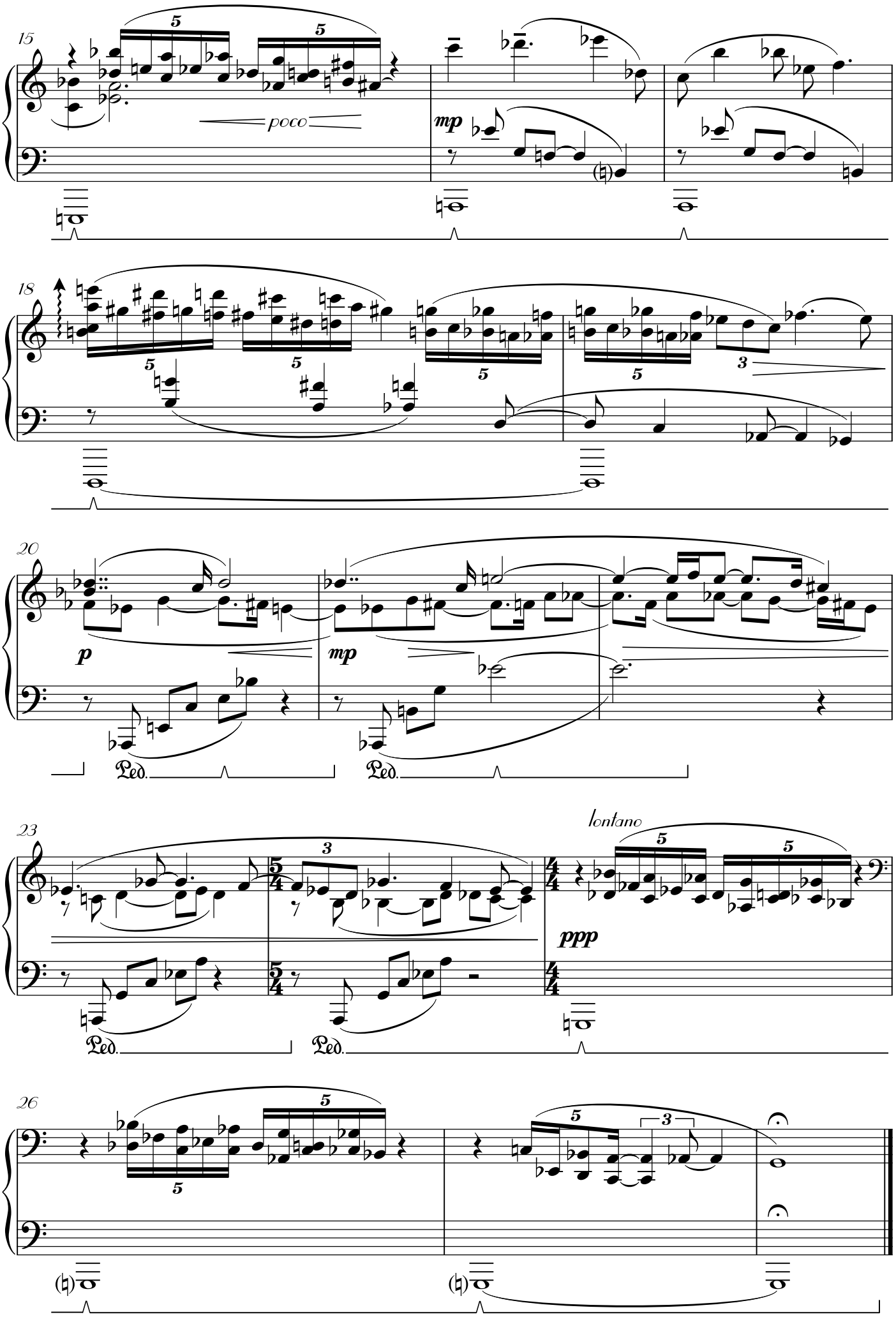

43
molto
mf
48
pp
subito
ff
53
molto
pp
poco
58
pp
poco
pp
poco
subito
sim.
8vb
Faster ♩.=120
subito - tumbling over itself
64
mf
subito
Slower ♩.=88
ppp
(8)

26

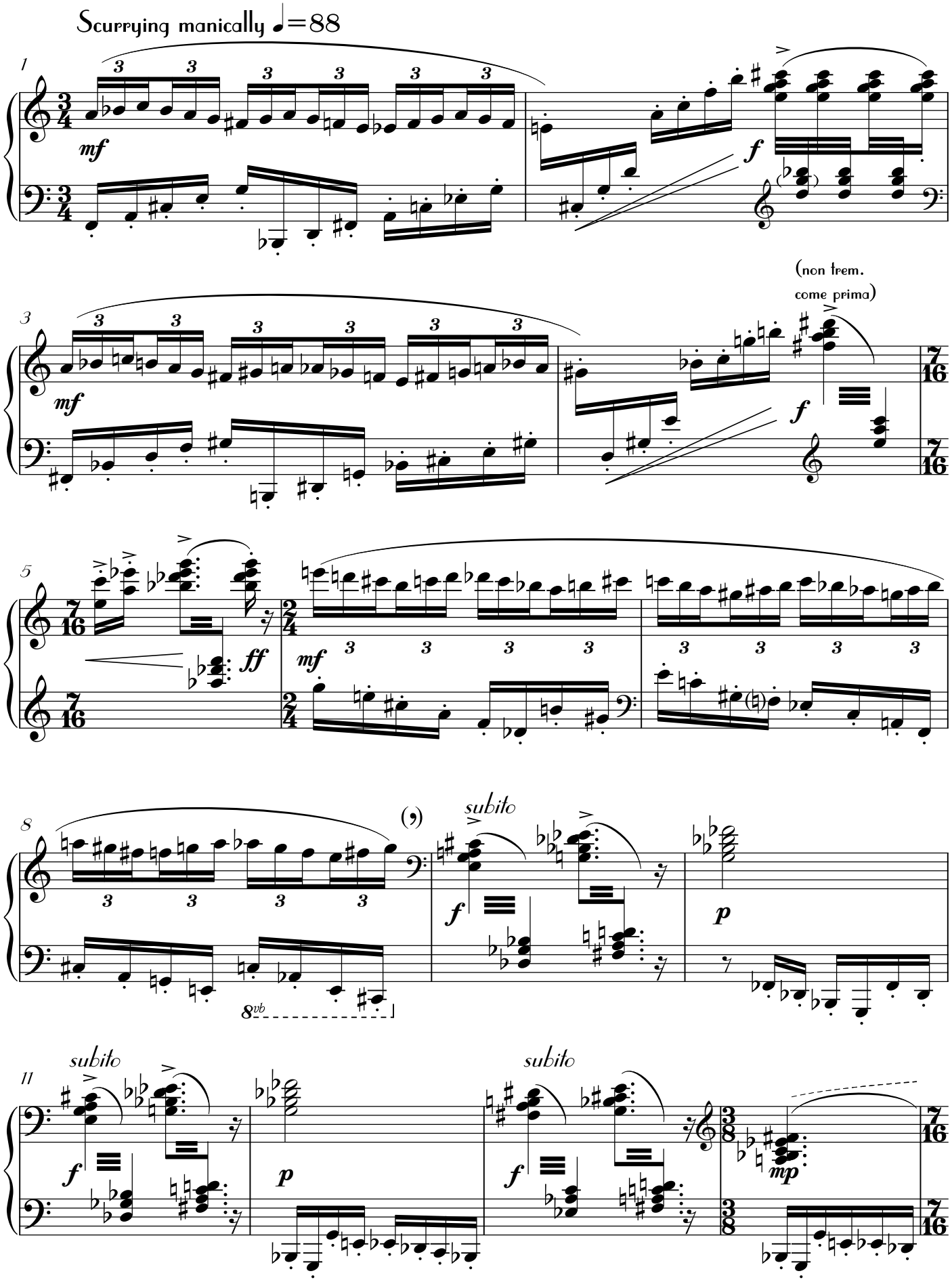
Slow Movement (loosely after Chagall's *The Blue Circus*)

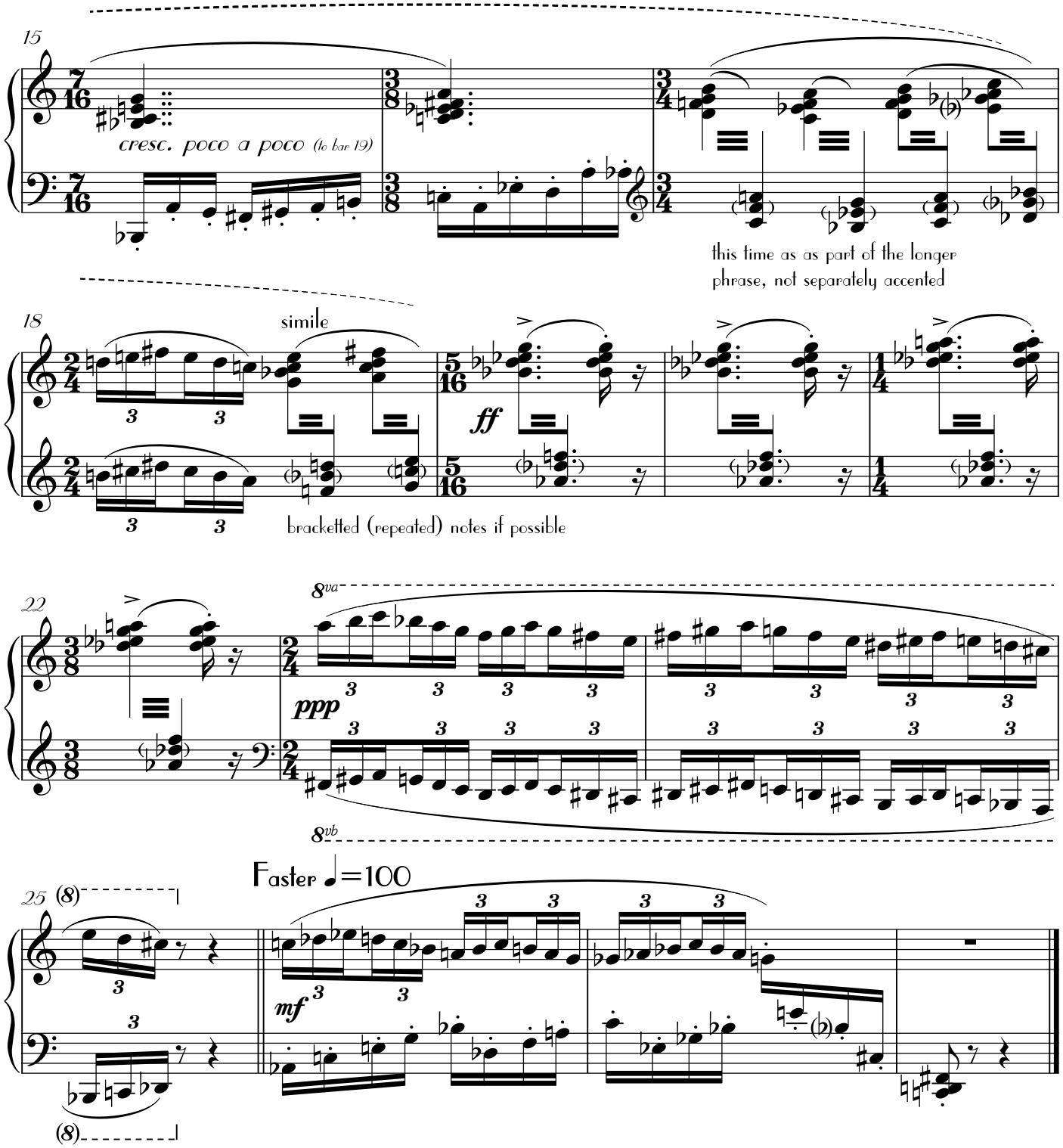
Hey diddle diddle,
The moon with a fiddle,
The girl floated up to the sky
The pea-green sheep laughed to see such sport,
But the queer fish with flowers knew why...




15
poco
mp
18
20
p
mp
Ped.
Ped.
23
lontano
ppp
Ped.
Ped.
26

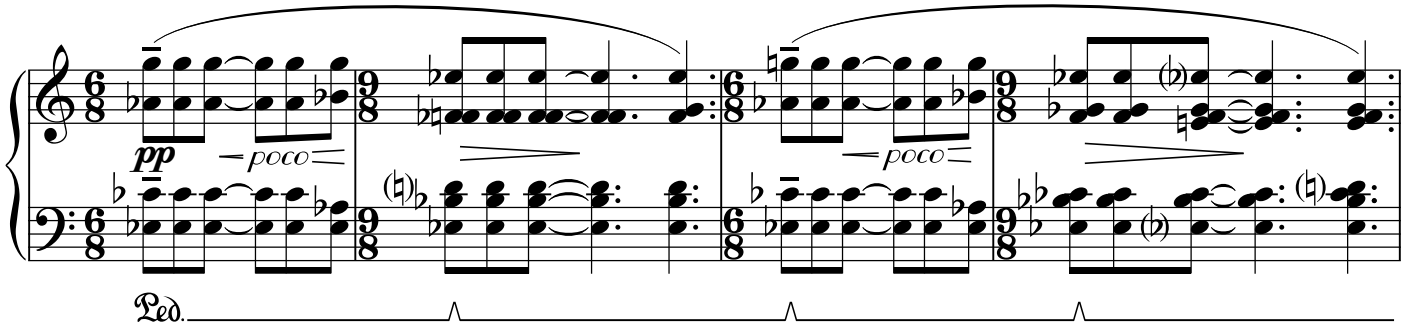
27
The Amazing Dance of the Peacock Spider



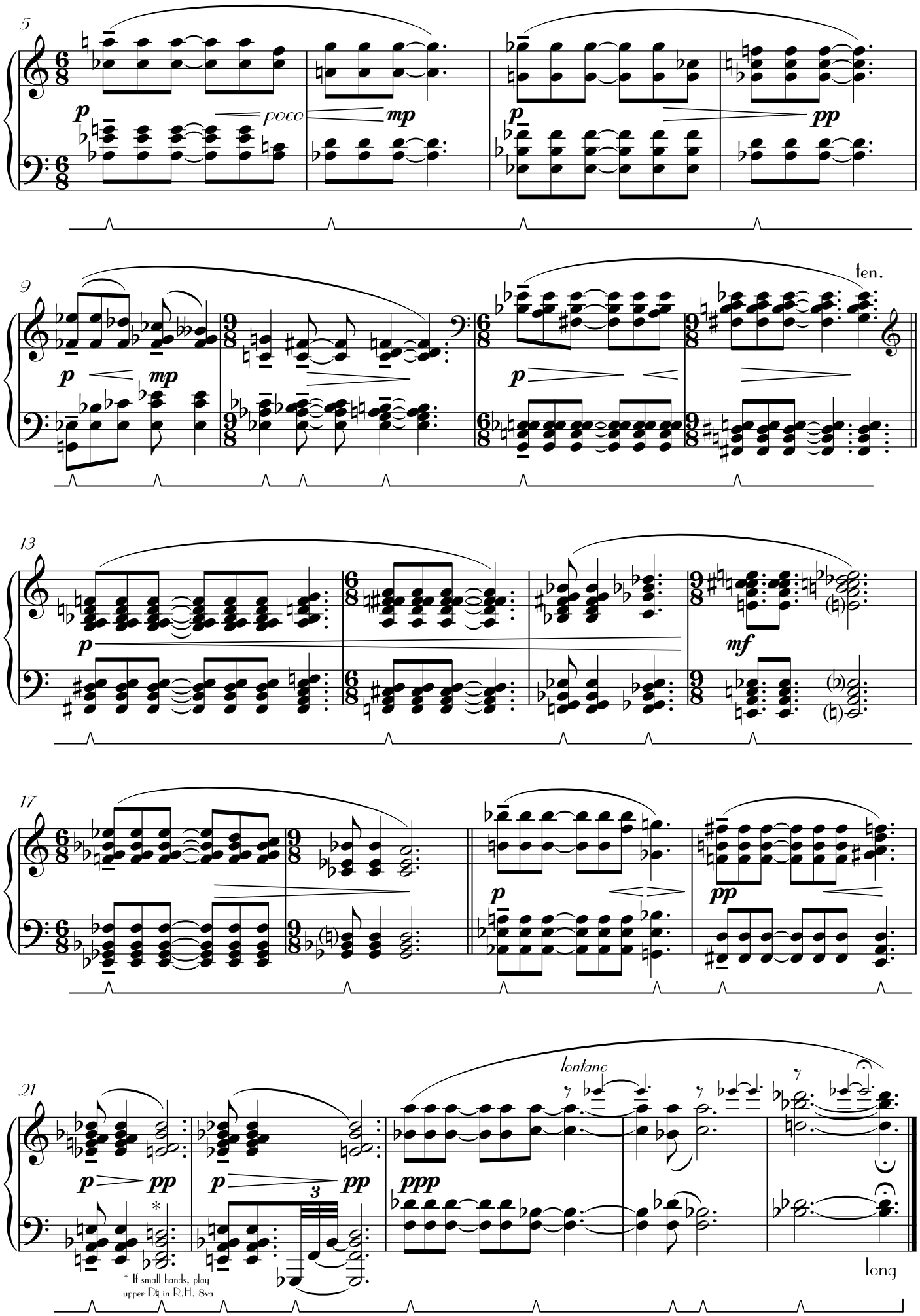


28
Tread Softly...

Gentle, simple, translucent ♩.=36

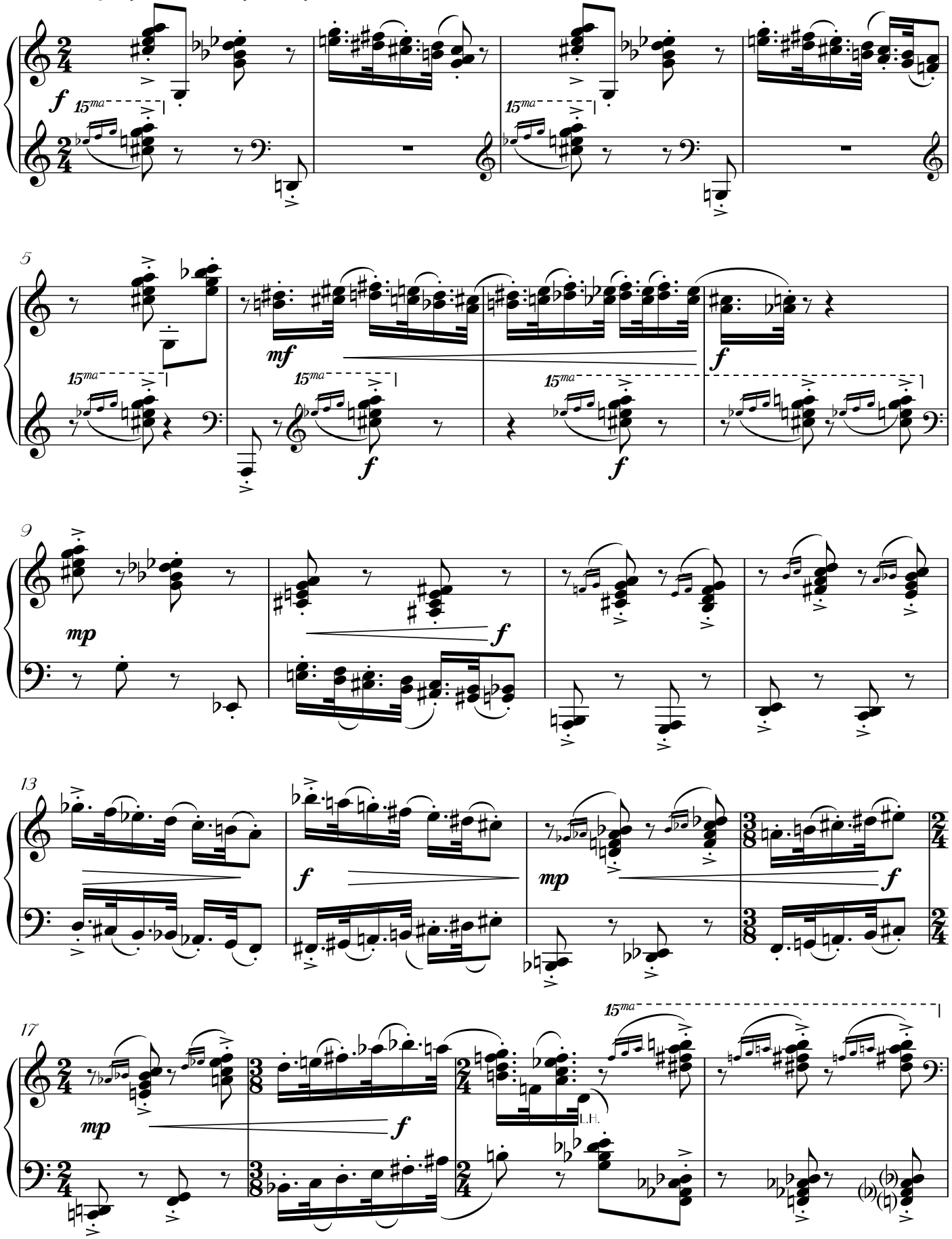


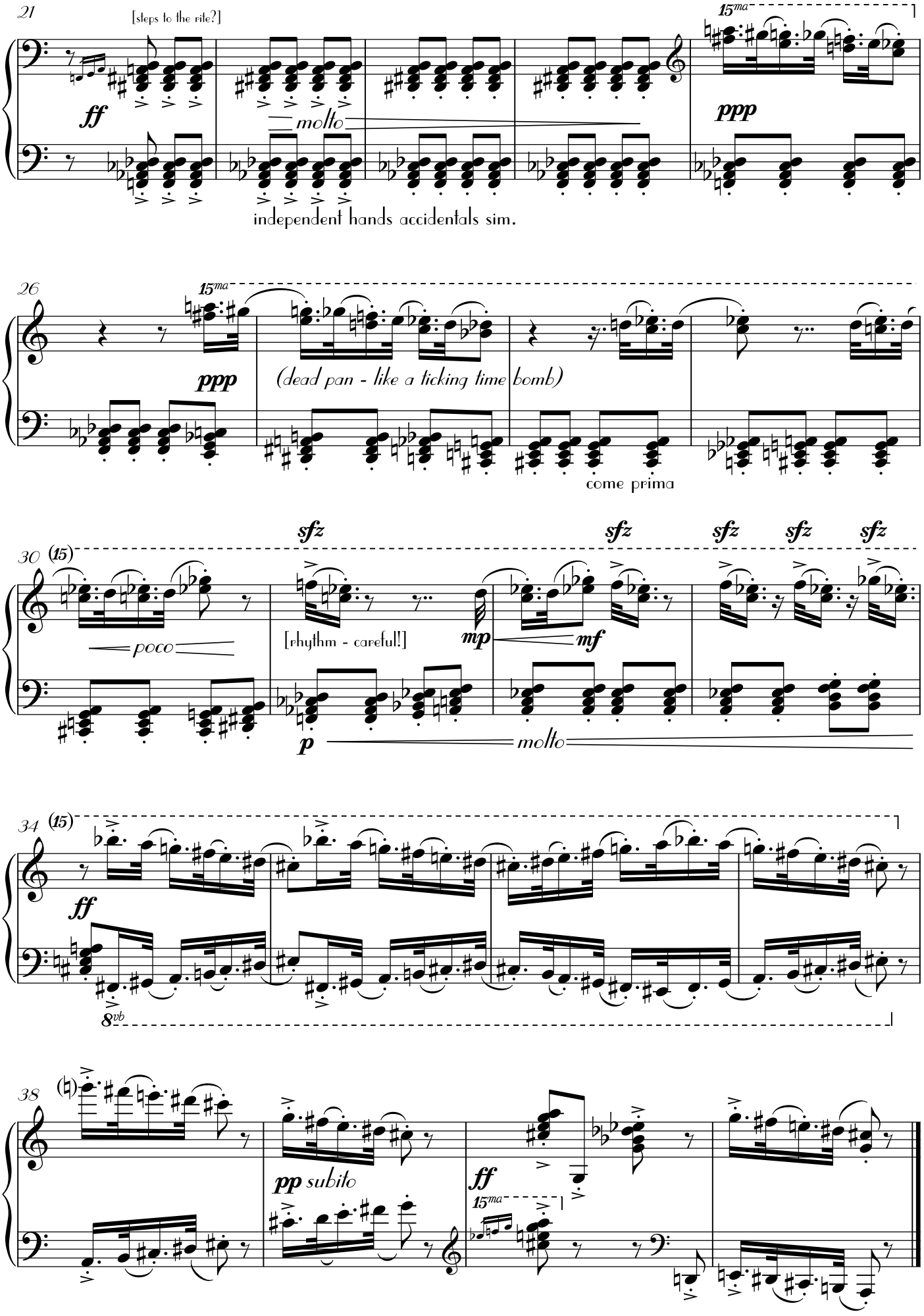
phrasing is the same in both hands throughout so only indicated on top stave


5
p
poco
mp
p
pp
9
p
mp
p
ten.
13
p
mf
17
p
pp
21
p
pp
p
3
pp
ppp
lontano
* If small hands, play upper D♮ in R.H. 8va
long

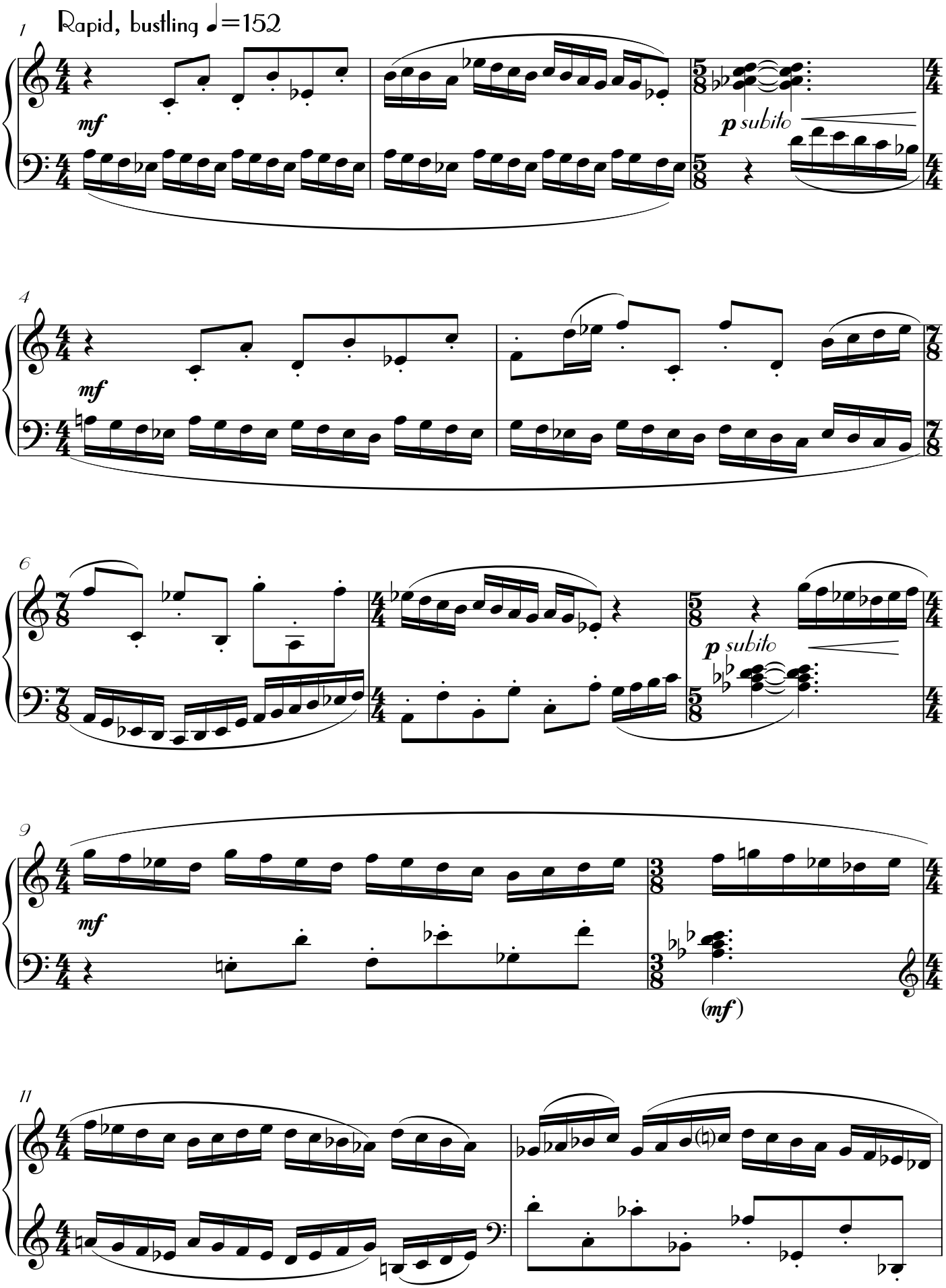
29
Stamp and Clap

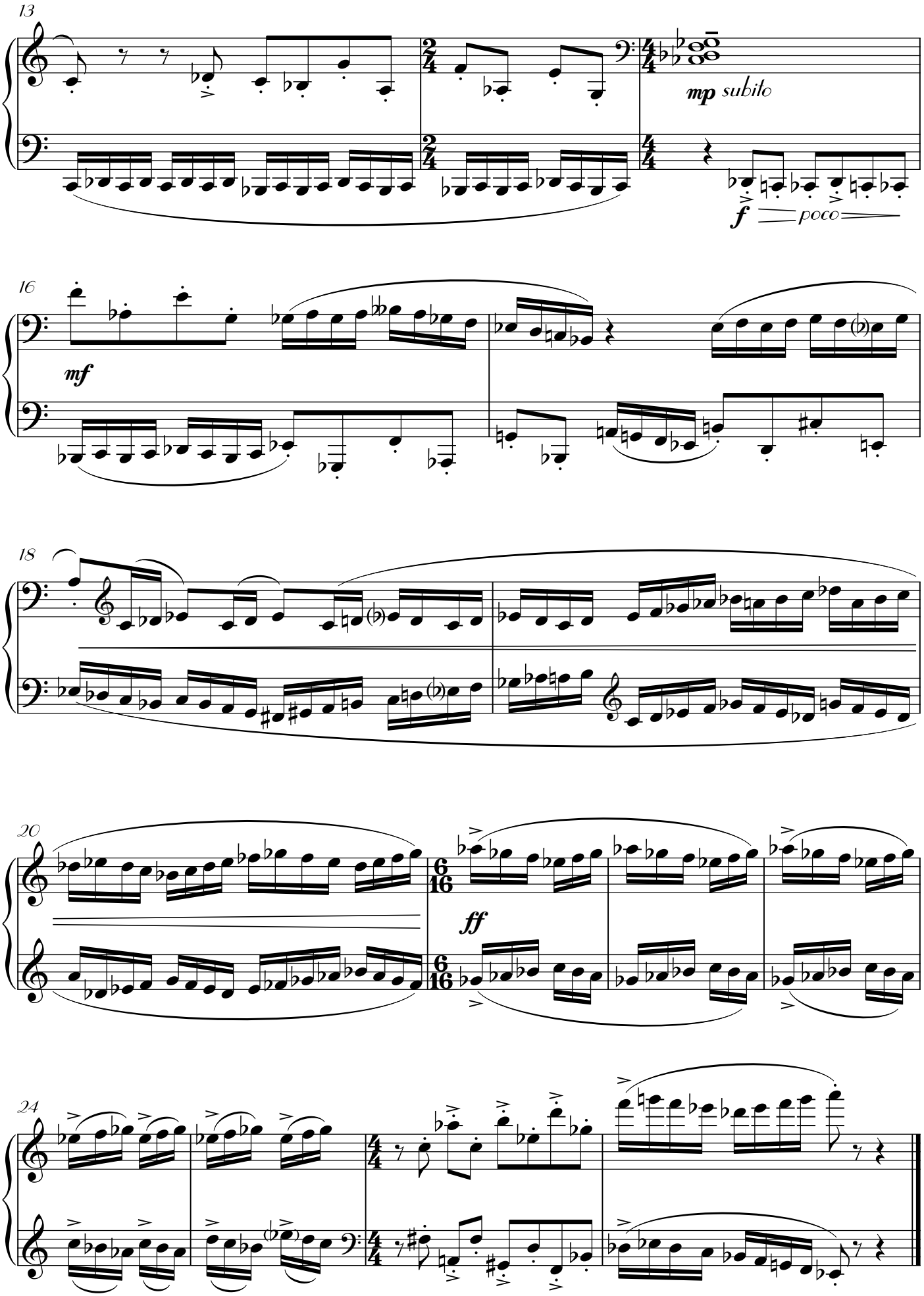
Stamping - not always in synch ♩=100!




21
[steps to the rite?]
15ma
ff
molto
ppp
independent hands accidentals sim.
26
15ma
ppp
(dead pan - like a ticking time bomb)
come prima
30
(15)
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
poco
[rhythm - careful!]
mp
mf
p
molto
34
(15)
ff
8vb
38
pp subito
ff
15ma

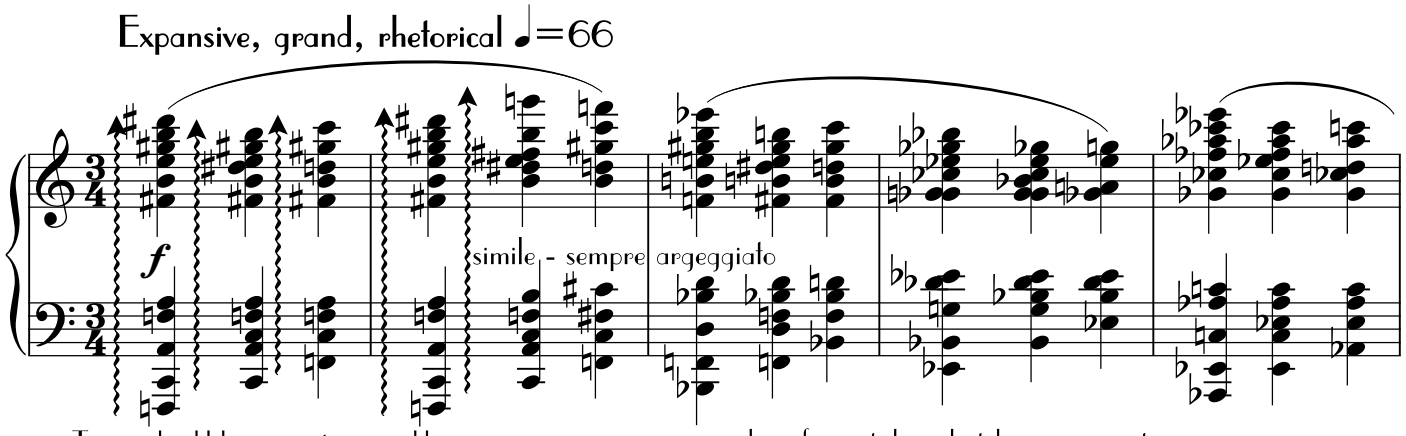
30
Helter Skelter




13
mp subito
f poco
16
mf
18
20
ff
24

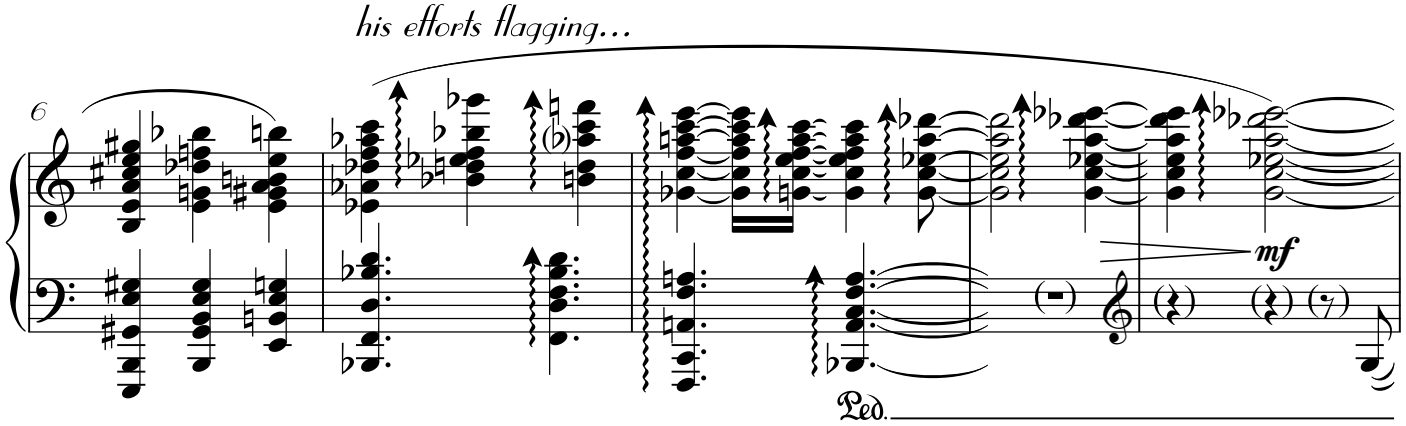
31
Hop of Hope - with Harp

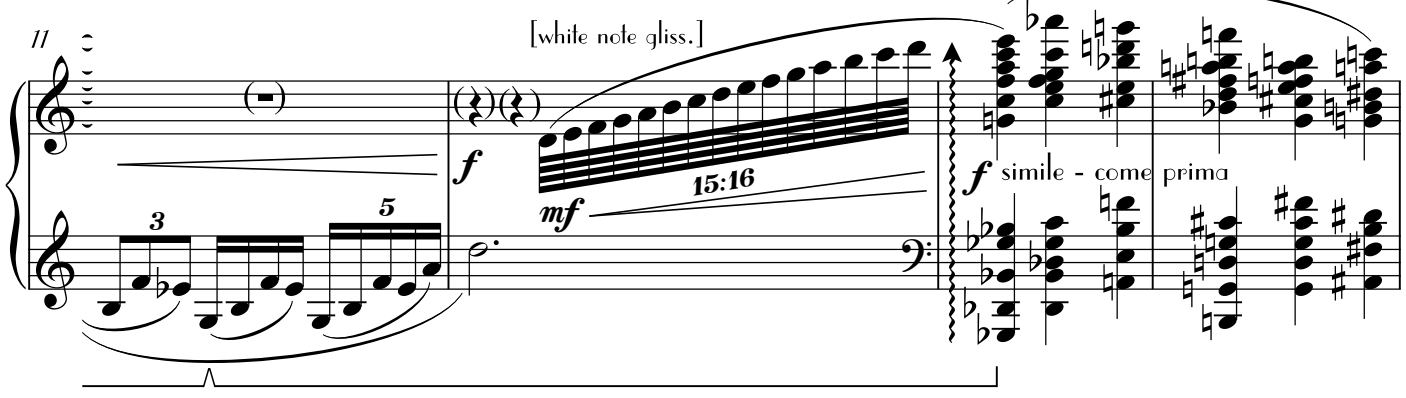
after *In You, Lord, I Have Hoped* by Merten de Vos
despite the harpist's exhortations over several centuries, the ten poor little cherubs still have not yet moved, suspended in mid-hop

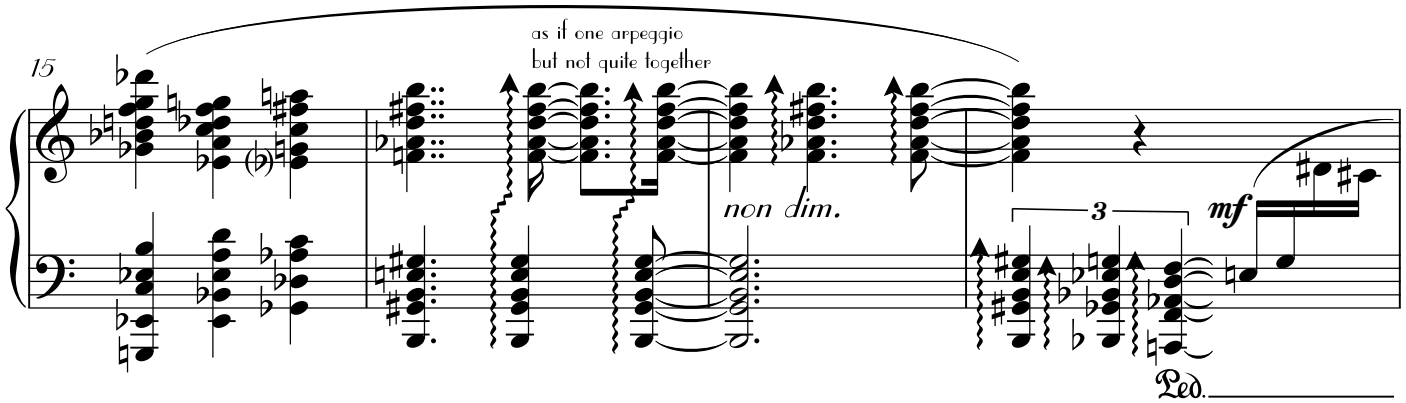


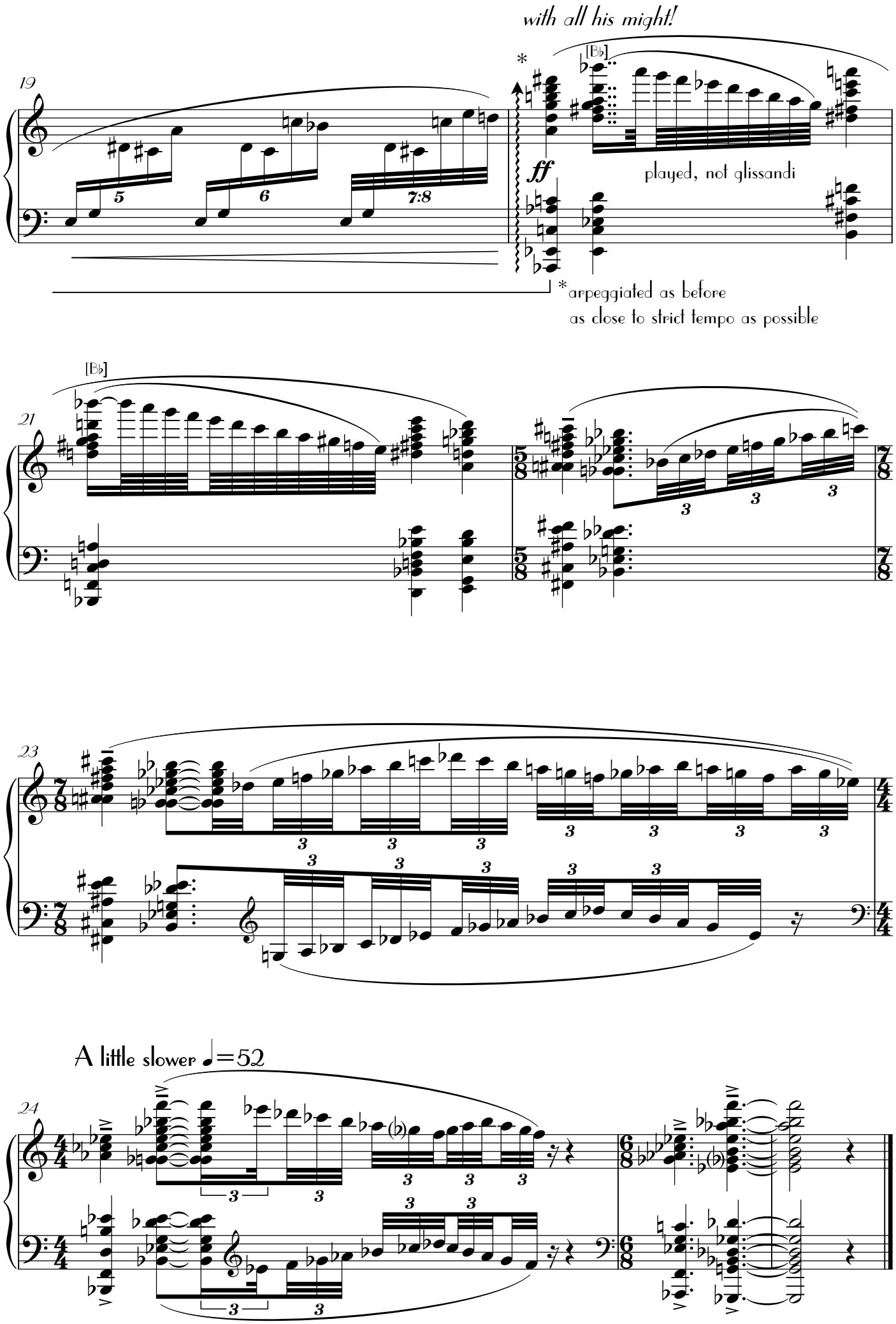
Tempo should be as exact as possible.
Each arpeggio shoud be played quickly (like strumming), and be separately pedalled

no reminders of repeated accidentals in same position



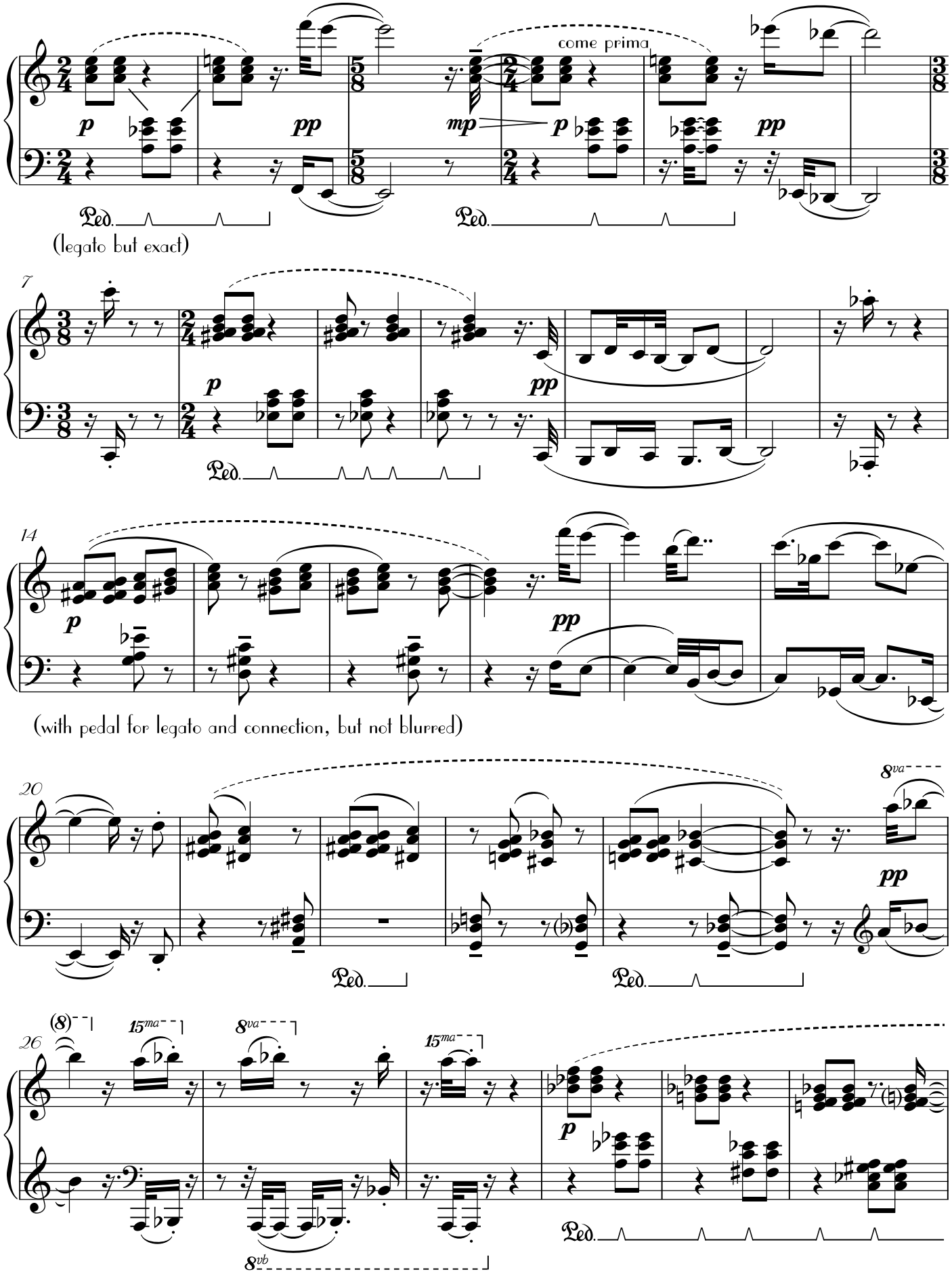


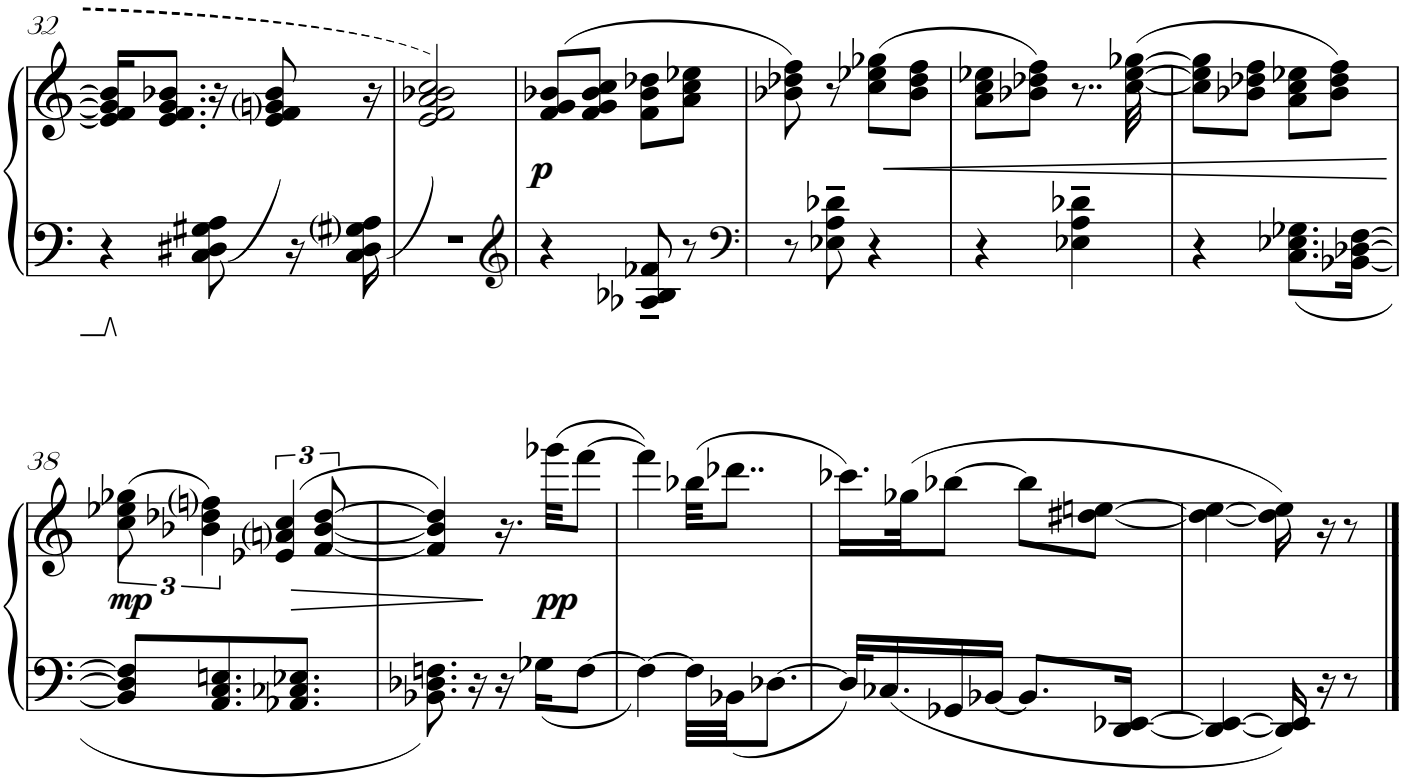



with all his might!
19
[B♭]
ff
played, not glissandi
*arpeggiated as before
as close to strict tempo as possible
21
[B♭]
23
A little slower ♩=52
24

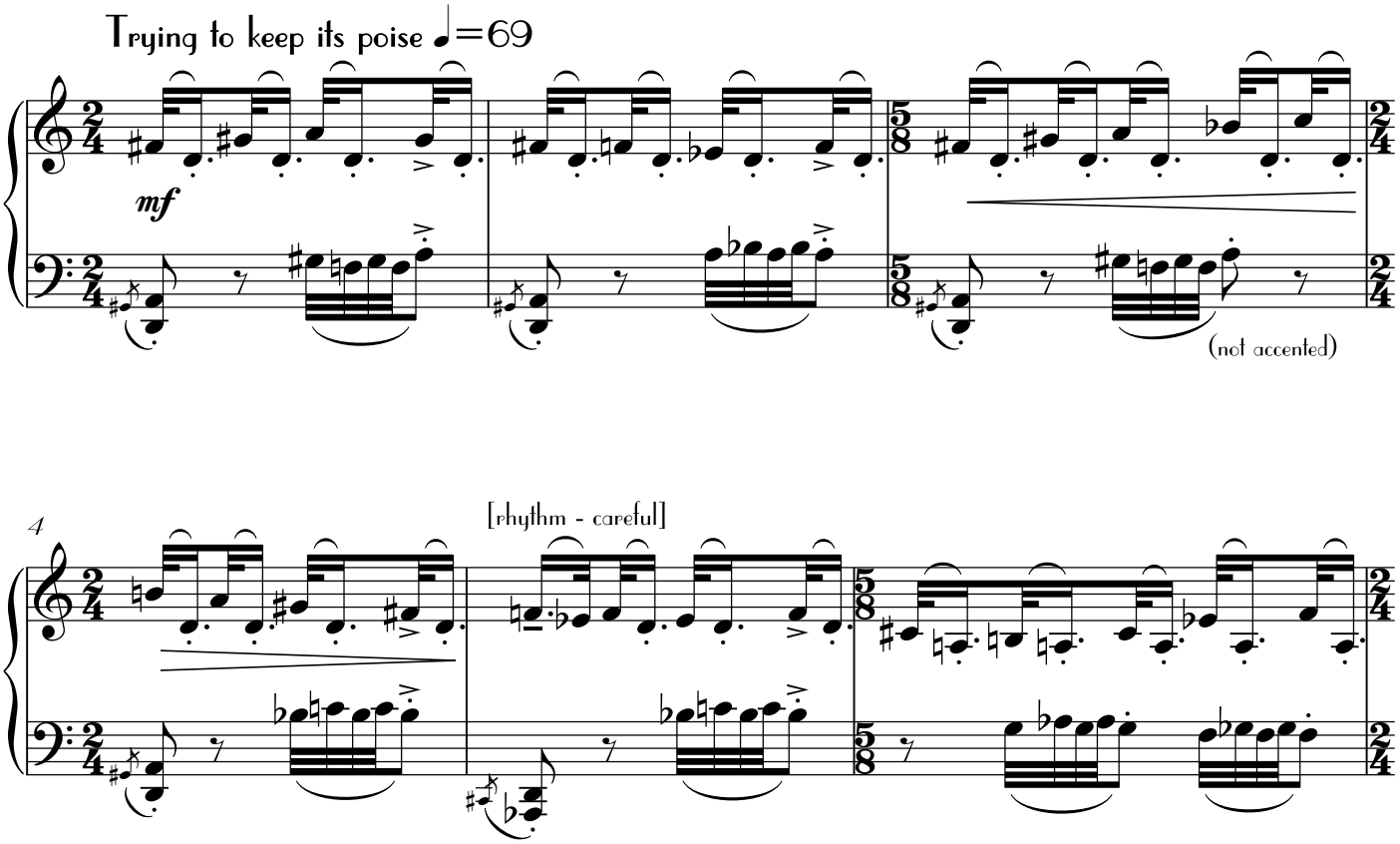
32
Carefully, Carefully! Slow Sword Dance

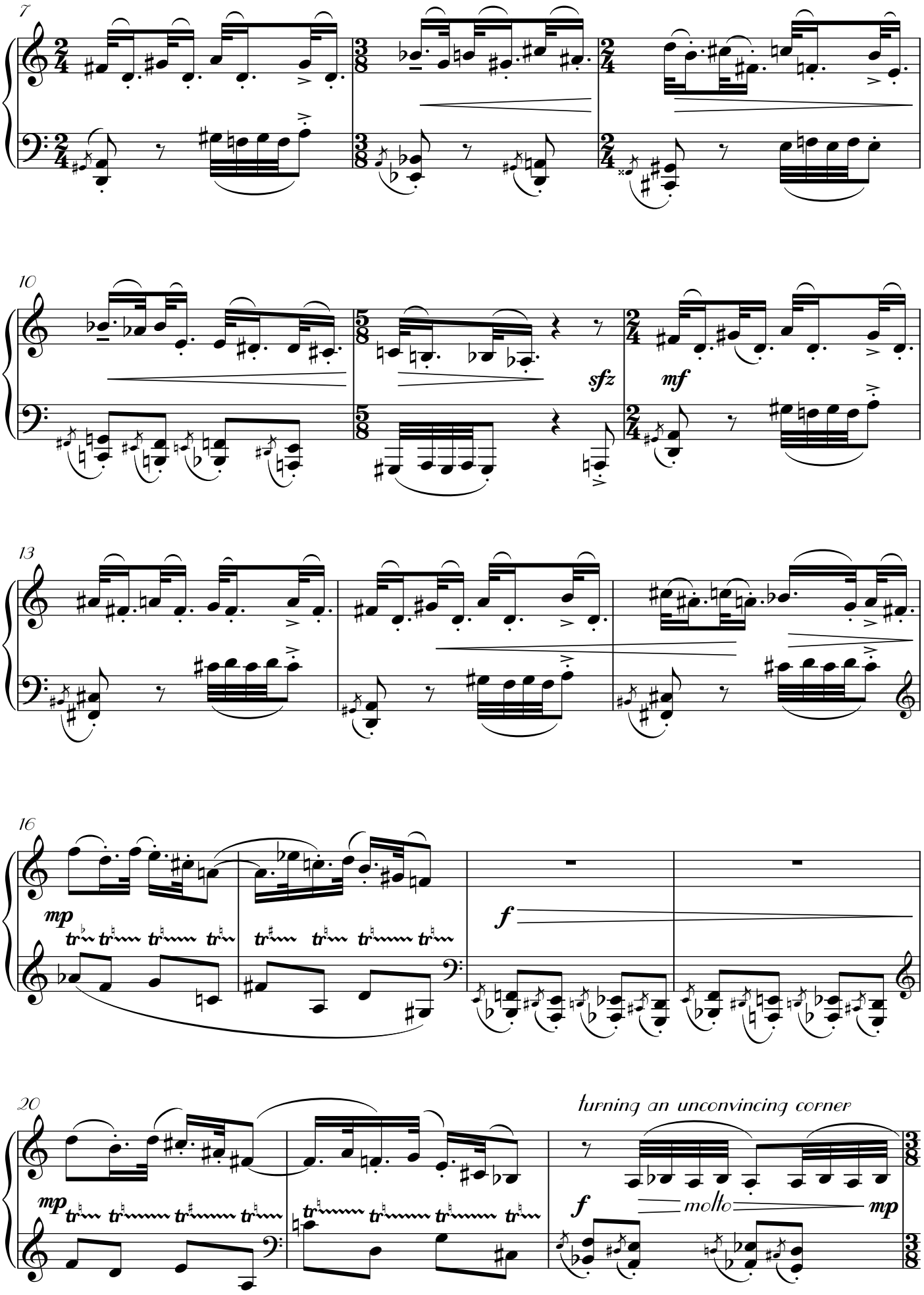
As if studiously attending to the safety of one's feet ♩=72

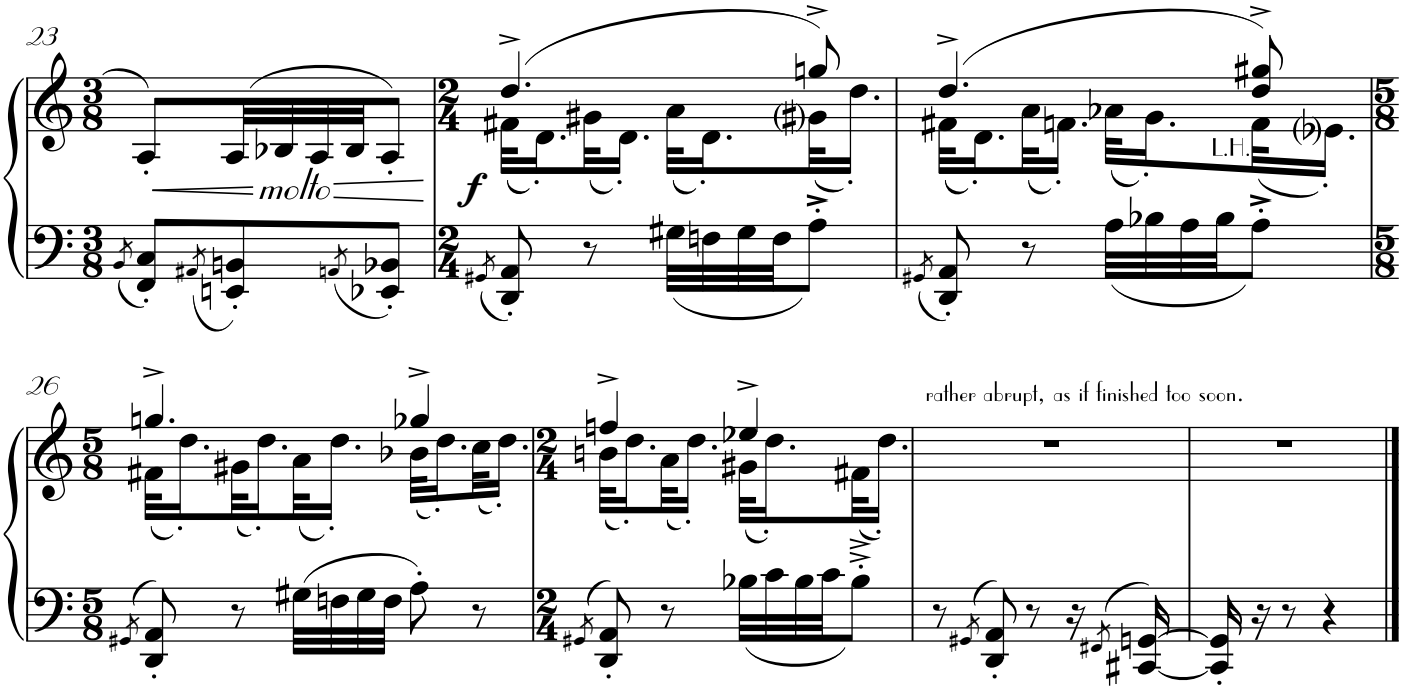




33
Snap Shot - Ecossaise



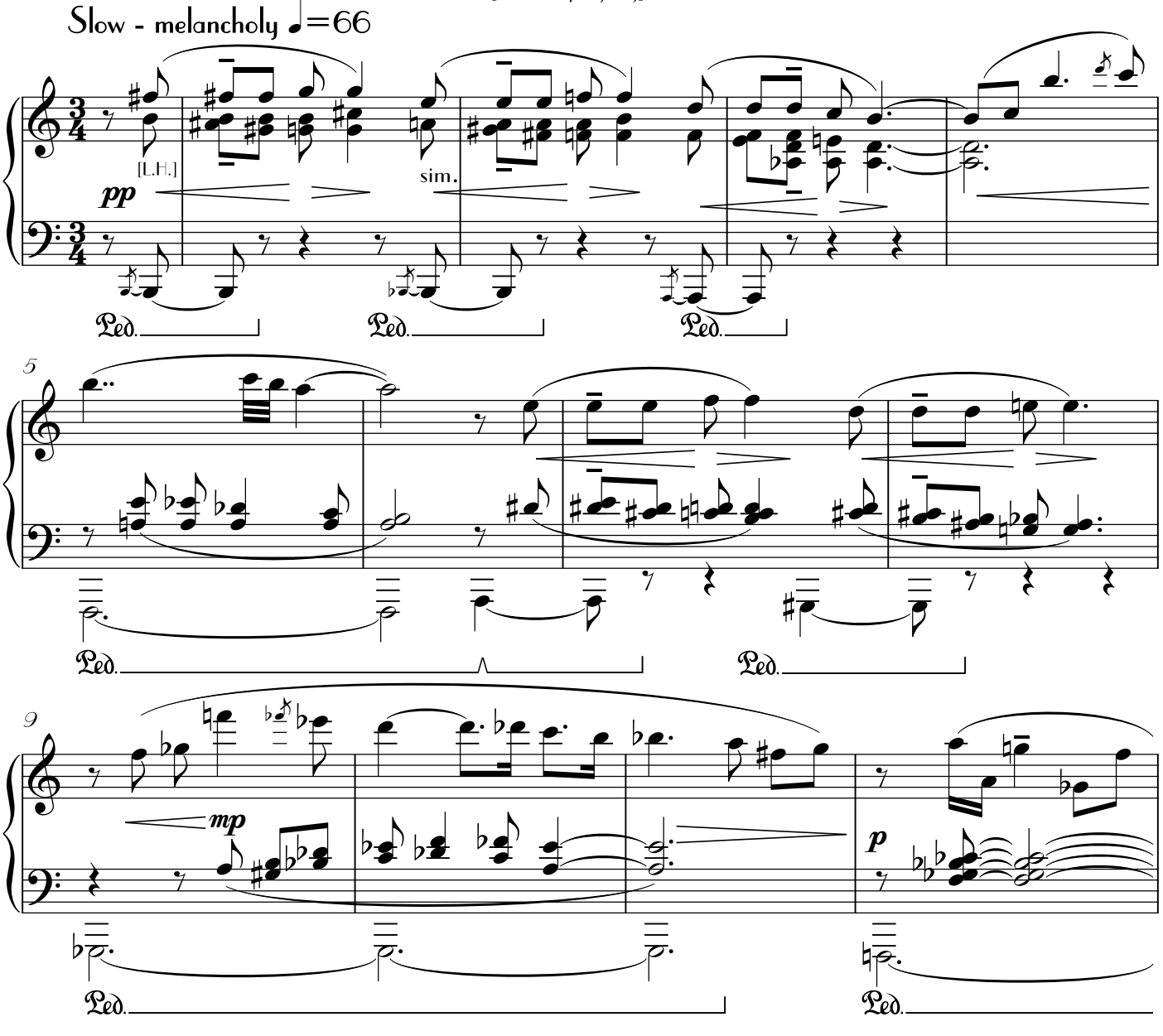

7
10
sfz
mf
13
16
mp
f
20
mp
f
turning an unconvincing corner
molto
mp

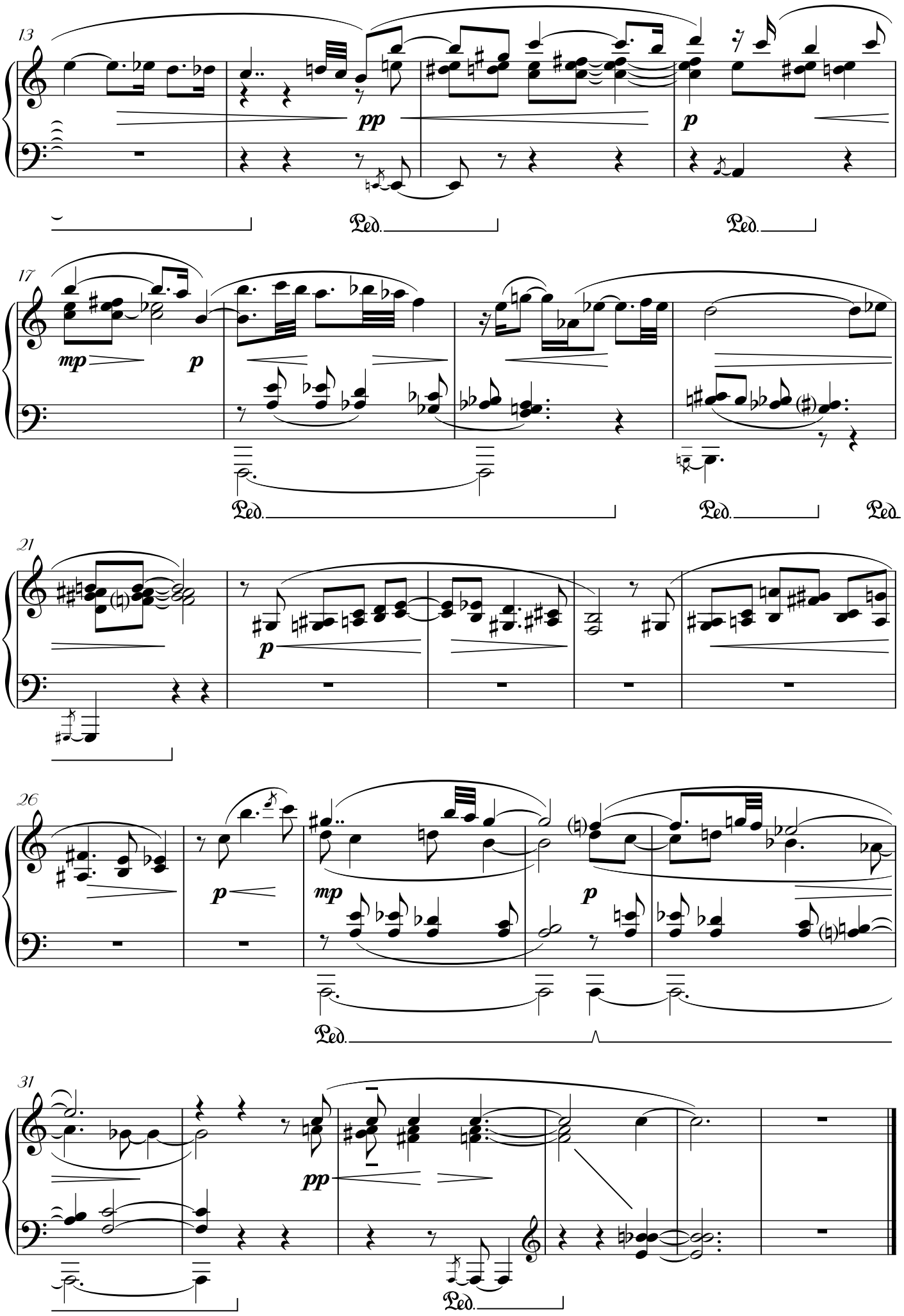


34

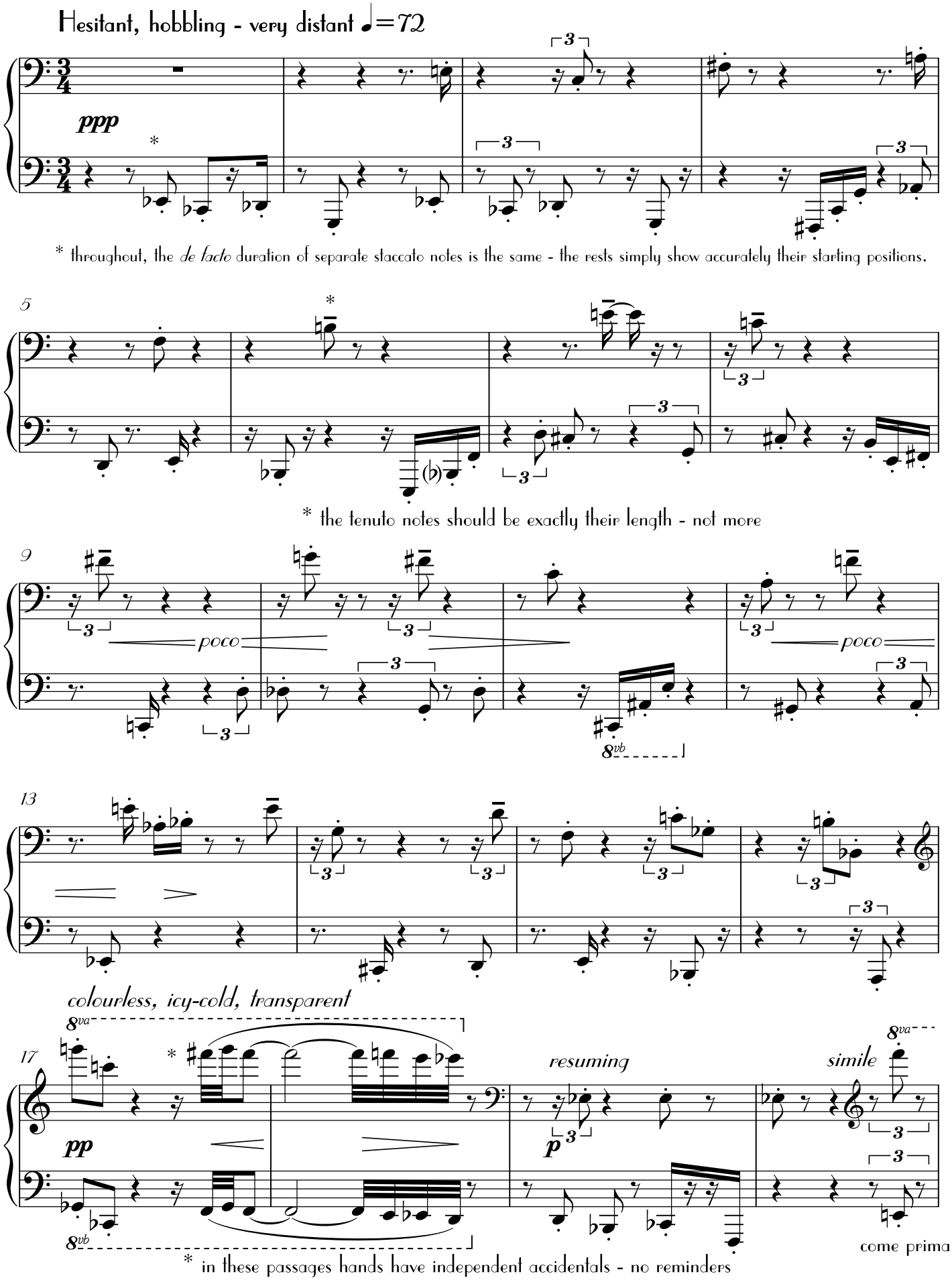
With How Sad Steps

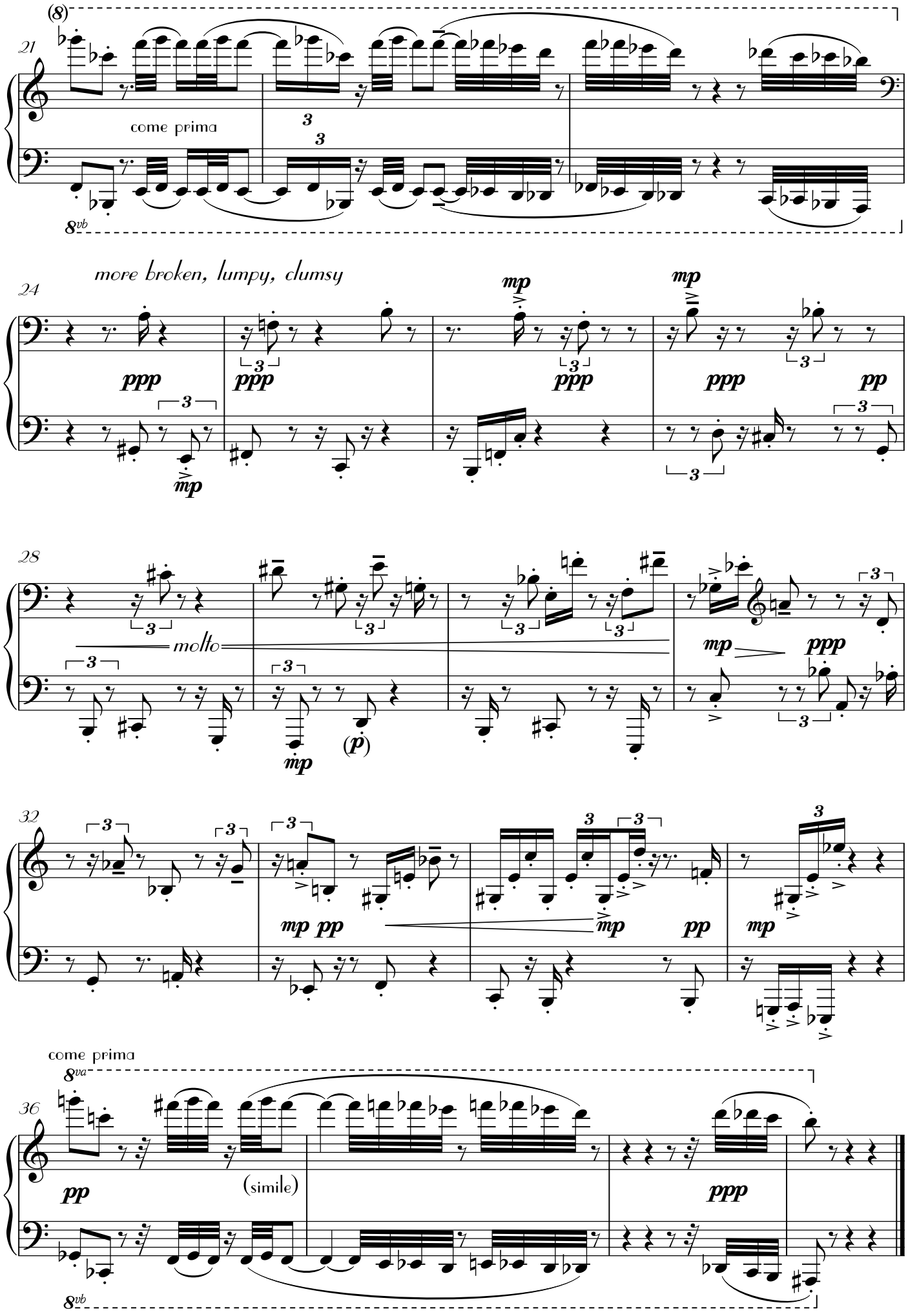
[after Philip Sydney]




13
pp
p
Ped.
Ped.
17
mp
p
Ped.
Ped.
Ped
21
p
26
p
mp
p
Ped.
31
pp
Ped.

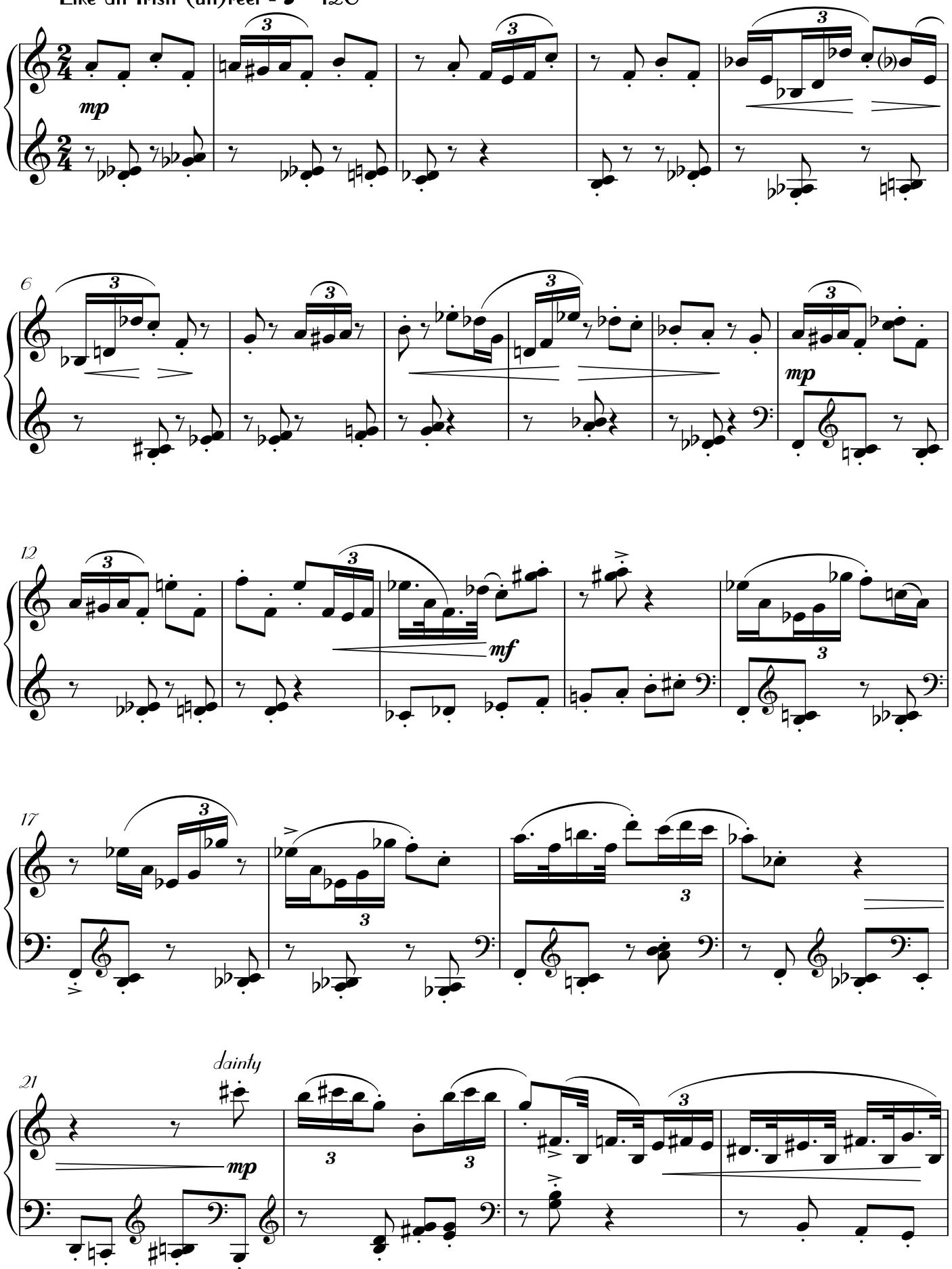
35
Hobble

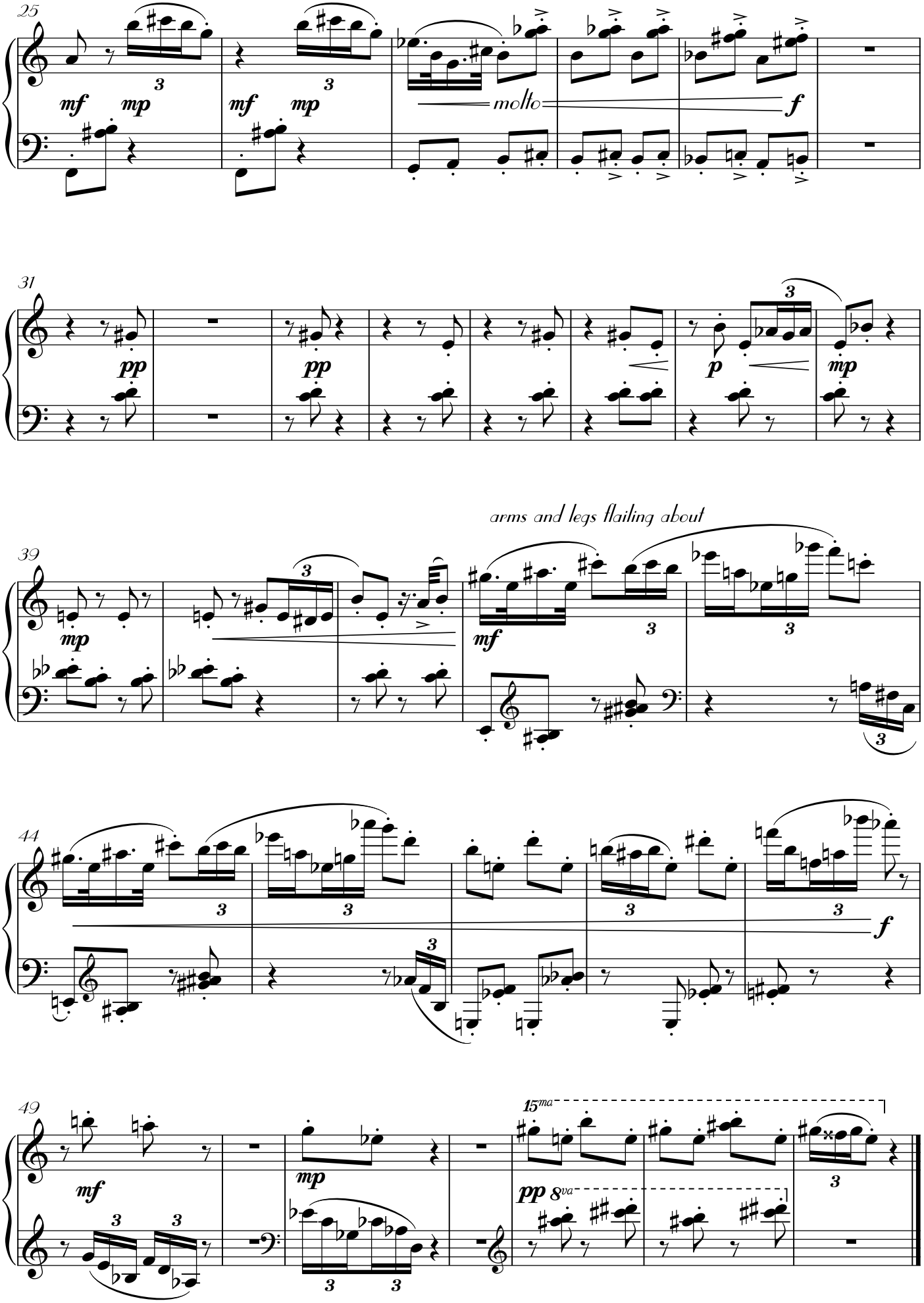

Hesitant, hobbling - very distant ♩=72
ppp
* throughout, the de facto duration of separate staccato notes is the same - the rests simply show accurately their starting positions.
5
* the tenuto notes should be exactly their length - not more
9
poco
poco
8vb
13
colourless, icy-cold, transparent
8va
17
pp
resuming
p
simile
8va
8vb
* in these passages hands have independent accidentals - no reminders
come prima


(8)
21
come prima
3
3
8vb
more broken, lumpy, clumsy
24
ppp
mp
ppp
mp
ppp
ppp
pp
28
molto
mp
(p)
mp
ppp
32
mp pp
mp
pp
mp
come prima
8va
36
pp
(simile)
ppp
8vb

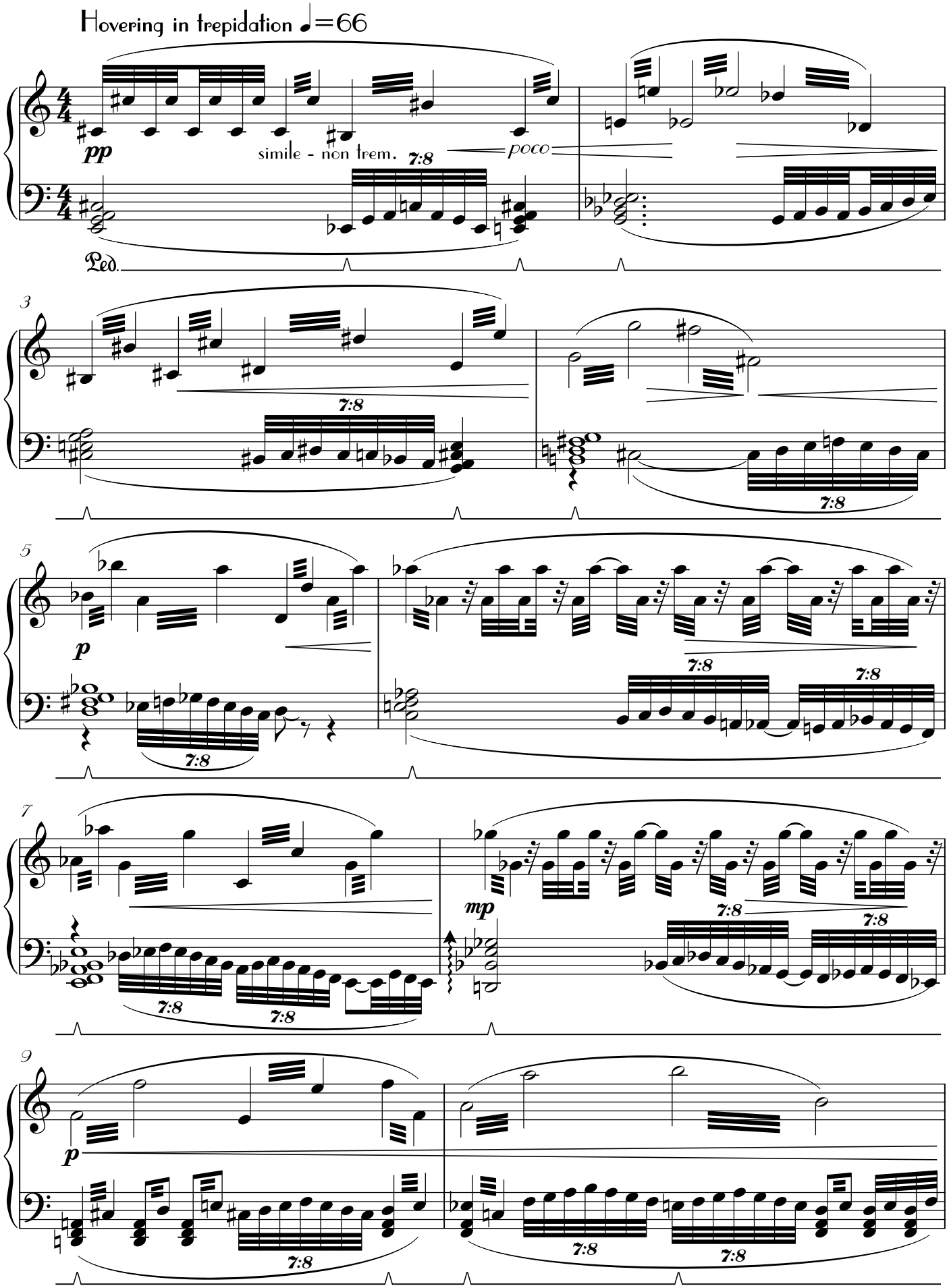
36
Un-reel

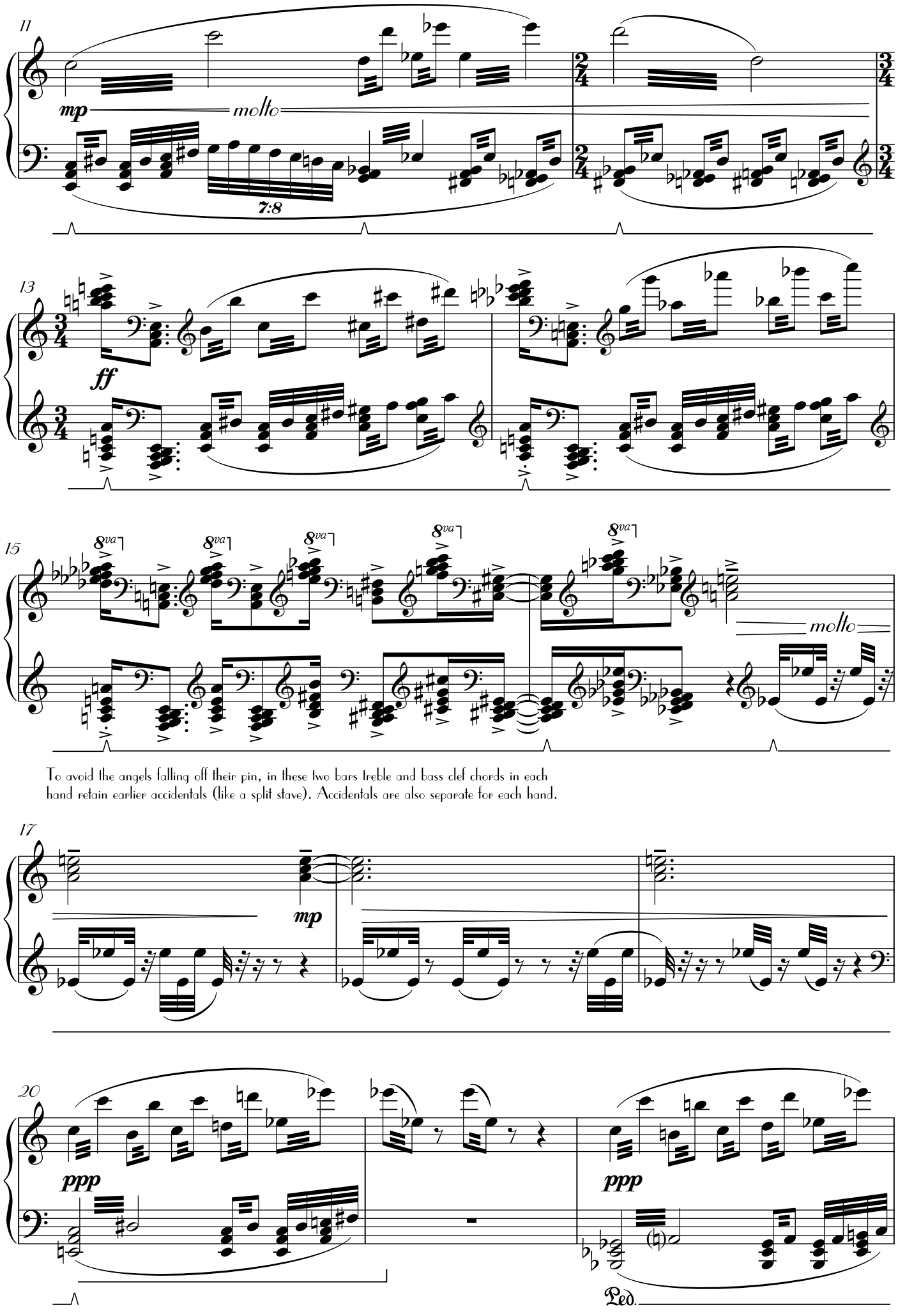
Like an Irish (un)reel - ♩=120



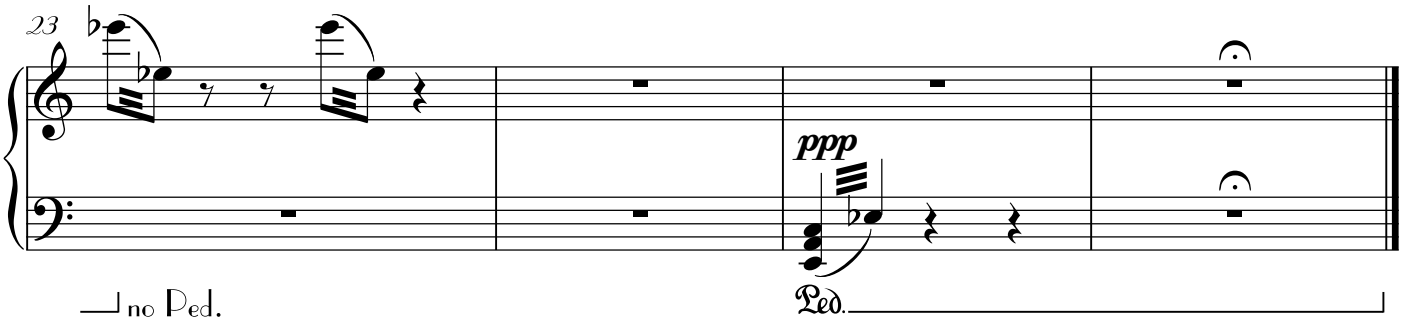

25
mf mp
mf mp
molto
f
31
pp
pp
p
mp
39
mp
arms and legs flailing about
mf
44
f
49
mf
mp
15ma
pp 8va

37
Before a Tarantella



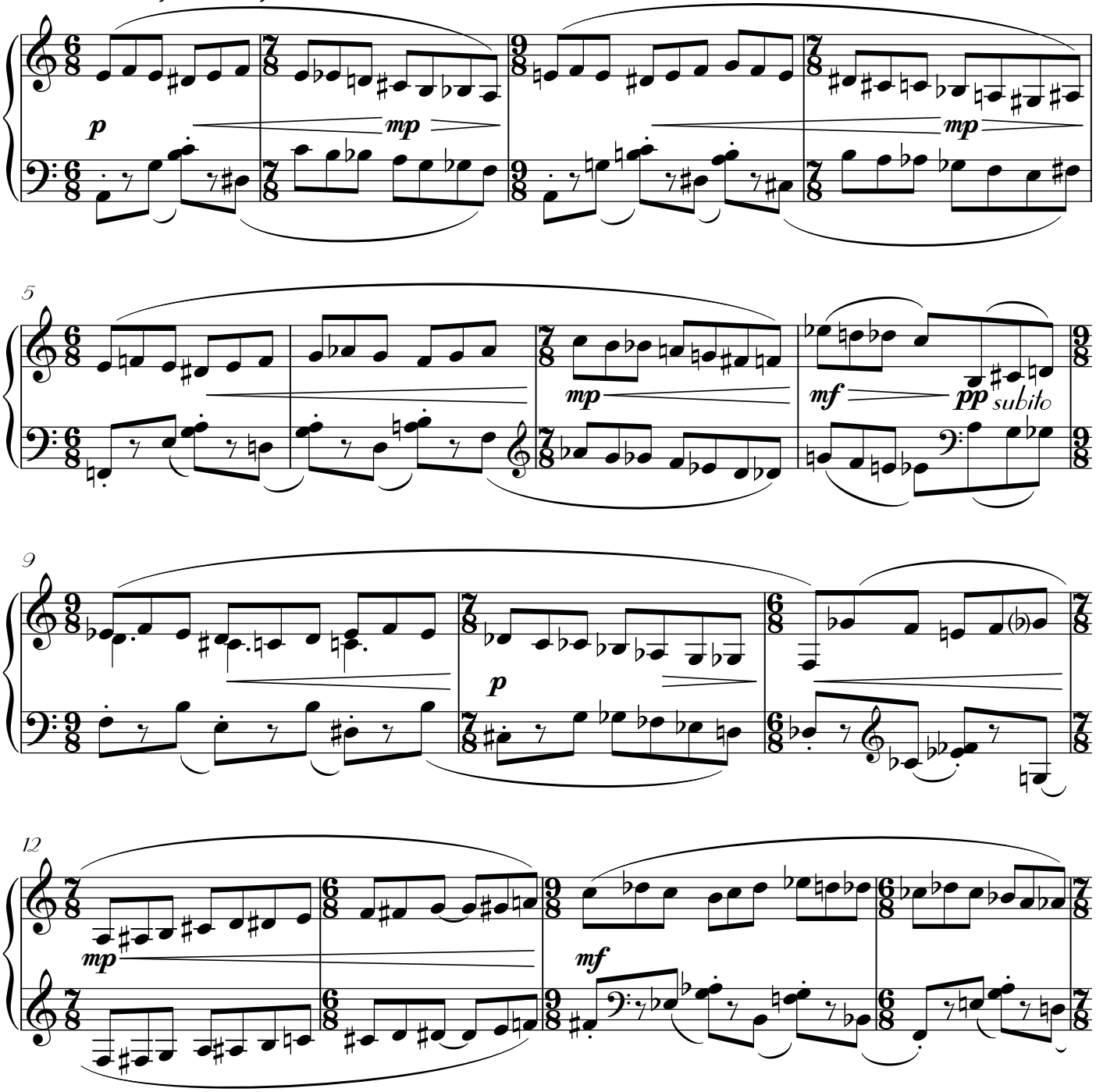


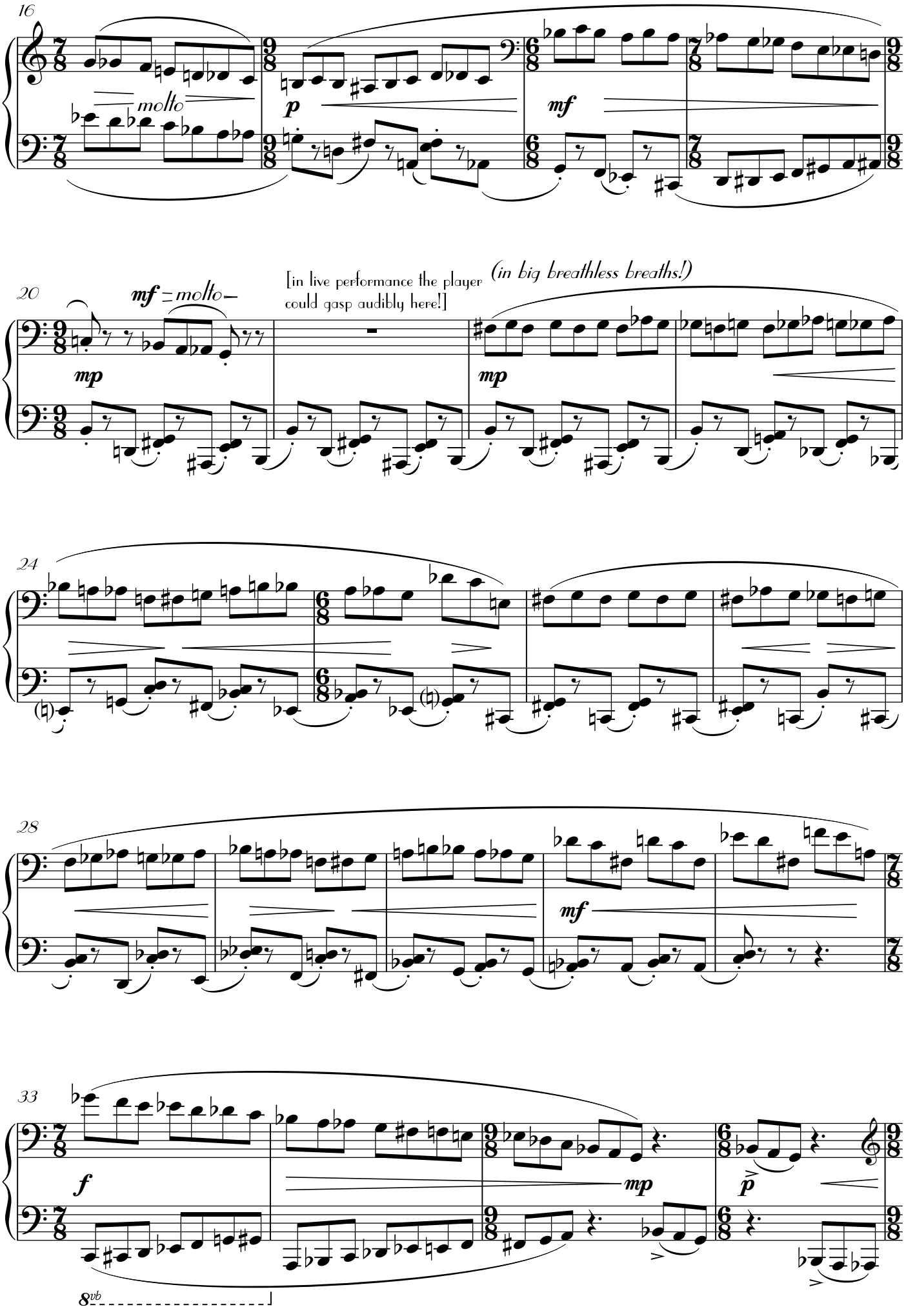
To avoid the angels falling off their pin, in these two bars treble and bass clef chords in each hand retain earlier accidentals (like a split stave). Accidentals are also separate for each hand.

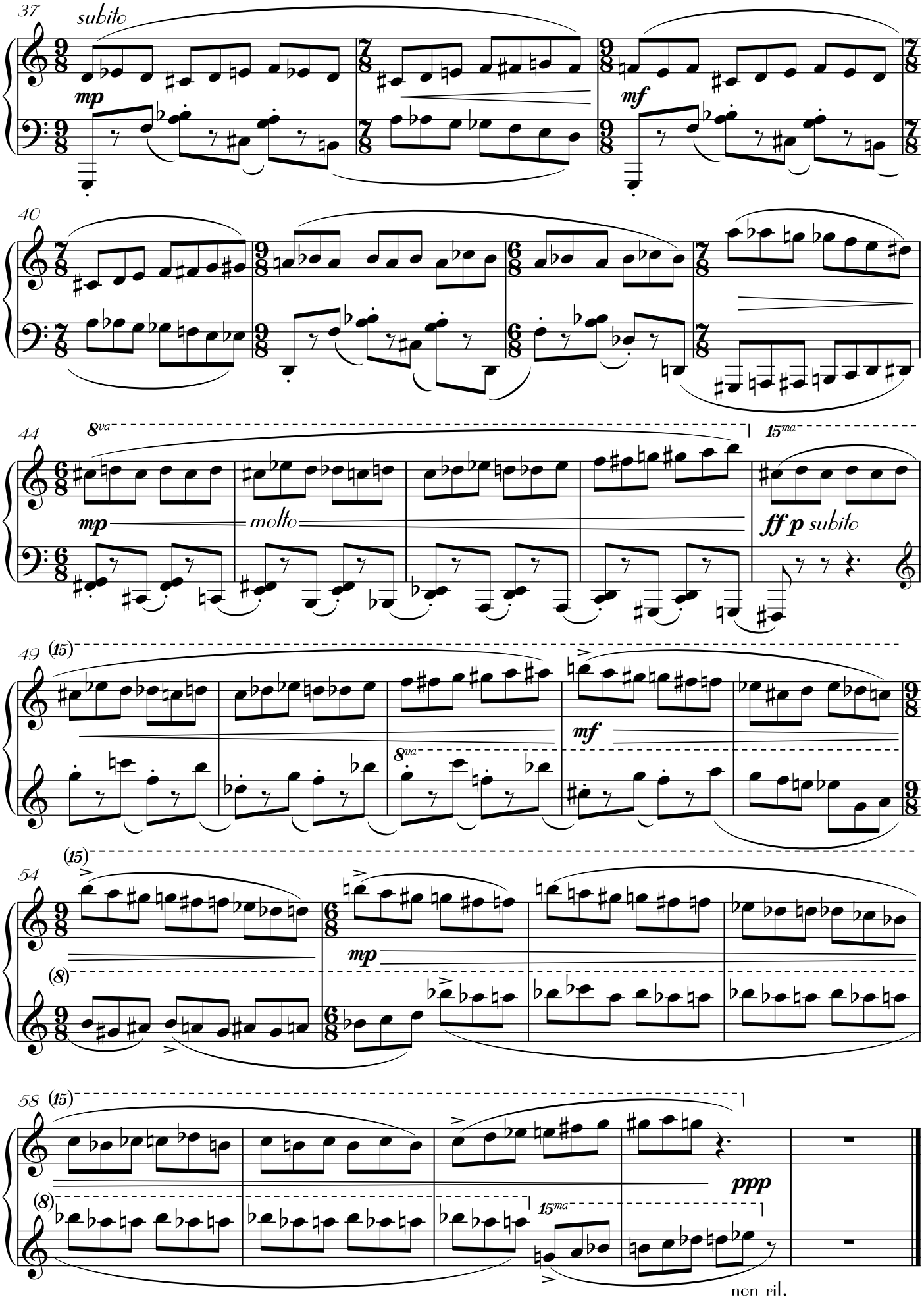


38
Tarantella

Whirring furiously - like a demented tarantella ♩.=176




16
molto
p
mf
20
mf = molto —
[in live performance the player could gasp audibly here!]
(in big breathless breaths!)
mp
mp
24
28
mf
33
f
mp
p
8vb


37
subito
mp
mf
40
44
8va
15ma
mp
molto
ff p subito
49
(15)
mf
8va
54
(15)
mp
(8)
58
(15)
ppp
(8)
15ma
non rit.