Steps Volume 9:
Les Fleurs de la Maladie

Peter Seabourne

In 1883 the painter Edouard Manet was a dying man. Over the course of his last months he painted an extraordinary series of sixteen small still-lifes of flowers brought to him by his family and friends, among whom were painters, musicians, poets, novelists, models and collectors. It was a final act of artistic defiance, joy and summation. Too ill to paint large canvases, these miniatures condense and distil the essence of his art.

In 2020 my wife, Marcelle, also a talented artist, lived out her final months under the cloud of cancer. She, too, painted flowers though her intended series for this collaborative project remained unfinished. Alas, Fate intervened; thus I have completed the project alone in her memory.

My piano cycle imagines the free-ranging of both artists' thoughts, recollections, resonances, and emotions as they painted, each piece carrying particular associations (in Marcelle's case explained to me or only imagined). For both artists their final creative acts were not morose but life-affirming and summatory.

Manet counted the composer Emmanuele Chabrier and the famous operatic baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure among his closest friends. Music is a recurring theme in his life's work. Furthermore his wife, Suzanne, was an accomplished pianist (Chabrier wrote his *Impromptu* for her), so the choice of instrument for this work is doubly appropriate.

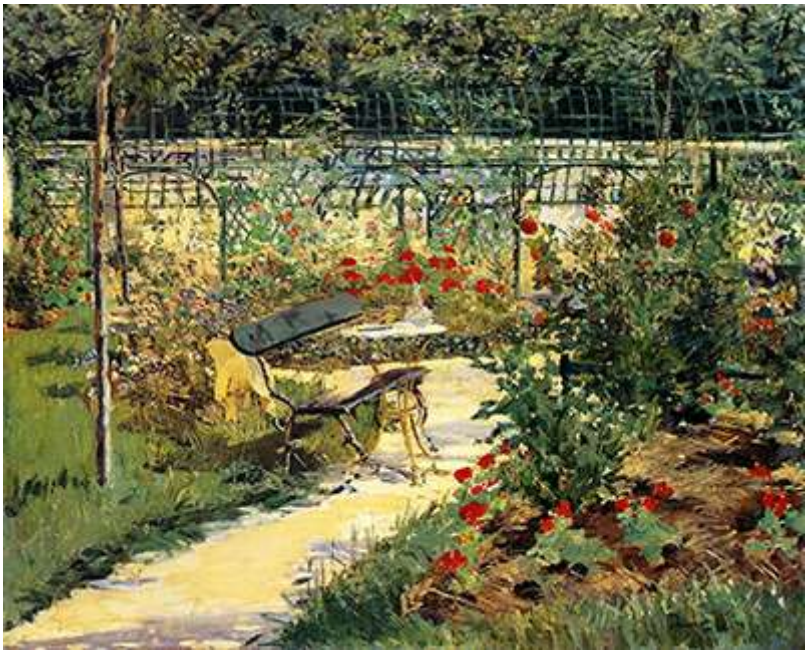
Another of Manet's closest friends was the poet Baudelaire. My title makes obvious, punning reference to his most famous collection, *Les Fleurs du Mal*.

This cycle comprises sixteen "paintings" - eight respond to some aspect of Marcelle's works; these alternate with a further eight imagined "bouquets" given to Manet by a friend, each revealing something of the donor's character or work. None of these movements is, however, a direct depiction of flowers.

Providing a frame are Manet's late painting of an empty bench in a garden, and a small sketch by my wife of an empty chair in our garden - perhaps flowers transported both artists into imagined internal garden havens as they worked whose flowers remain eternally beautiful. A thrush sings, as if speaking for them.

I am deeply grateful to Thera Coppens and Dr. Lois Oliver for their enormous assistance with the details of Manet's life, family, work and relationship to music.

The work of Marcelle Seabourne can be found at www.marcelleseabourne.com



An Empty Bench - My Garden (1881) 1

Snowdrops (now is the globe shrunk tight) 12
Imagined Bouquet from Berthe Morisot 15
Helleborus Foetidus (hope in winter) 20
Imagined Bouquet from Suzanne Manet 25
Tulips (the flame) 29
Imagined Bouquet from Antonin Proust 36
Dandelions in flower and in seed (any way the wind blows) 41
Imagined Bouquet from Stéphane Mallarmé 47
Delphinium (nothing can restrain this heart) 50
Imagined Bouquet from Victorine Meurent 60
Lilies on a Windowsill (outside-in) 64
Imagined Bouquet from Charles Baudelaire 70
Rosa Glauca (departures) 77
Imagined Bouquet from Émmanuel Chabrier 81
Marigolds on a blue chair (last summer) 85
Imagined Bouquet from Méry Laurent 89

An Empty Chair - My Garden (2020) 95

NOTES
Quintuplets etc. are to be played exactly evenly, not 2+3, 3+2 etc., with the stress always on the first.
Pedalling may need to be adjusted according to performance circumstance
I do not like una corda!...

Steps Volume 9: Les Fleurs de la Maladie

To the memory of my dear wife Marcelle

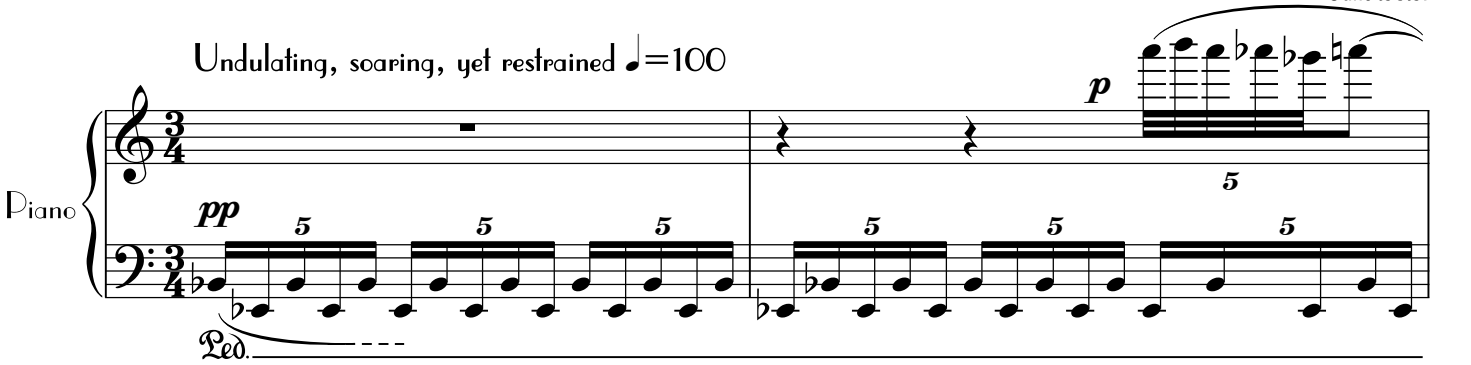
1. An Empty Bench - My Garden (1881)

Happy is he who can with his vigorous wing
Soar up towards those fields luminous and serene,

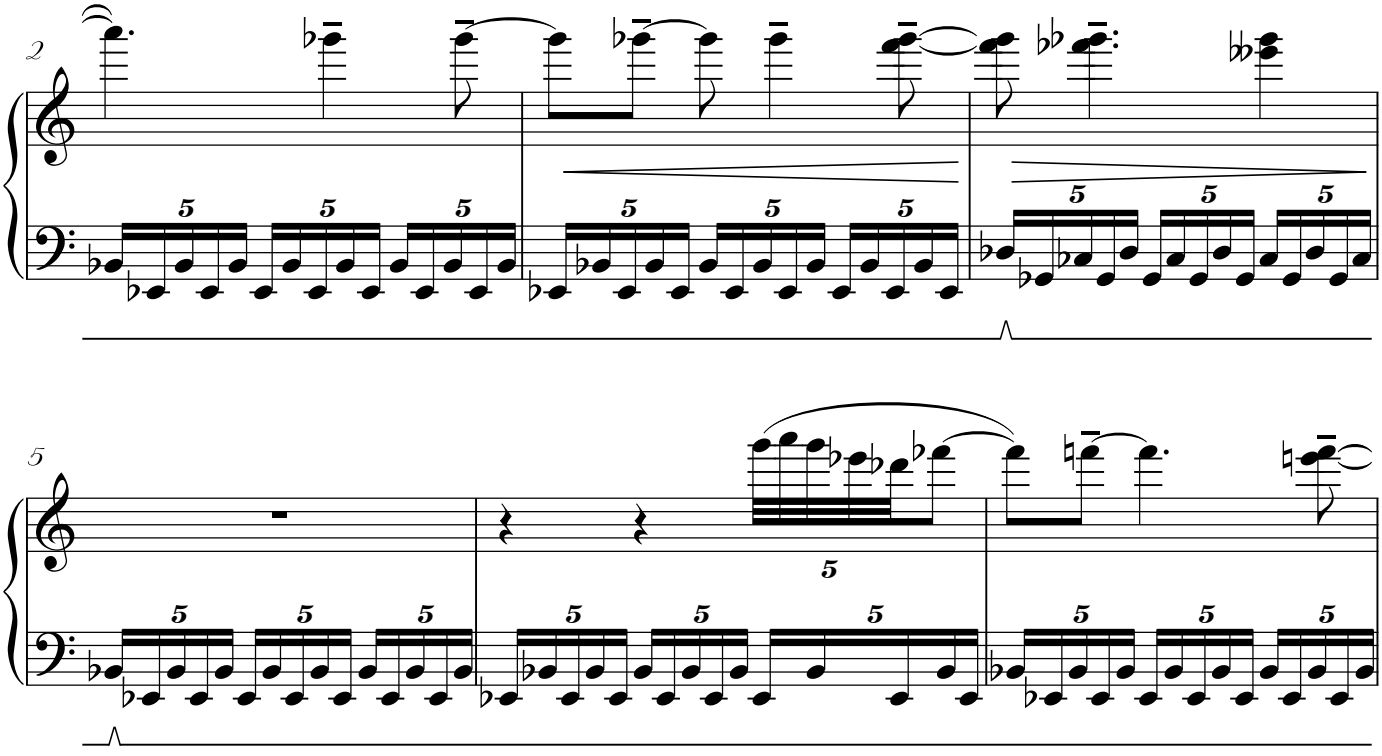
He whose thoughts, like skylarks,
Toward the morning sky take flight
- Who hovers over life and understands with ease
The language of flowers and silent things!

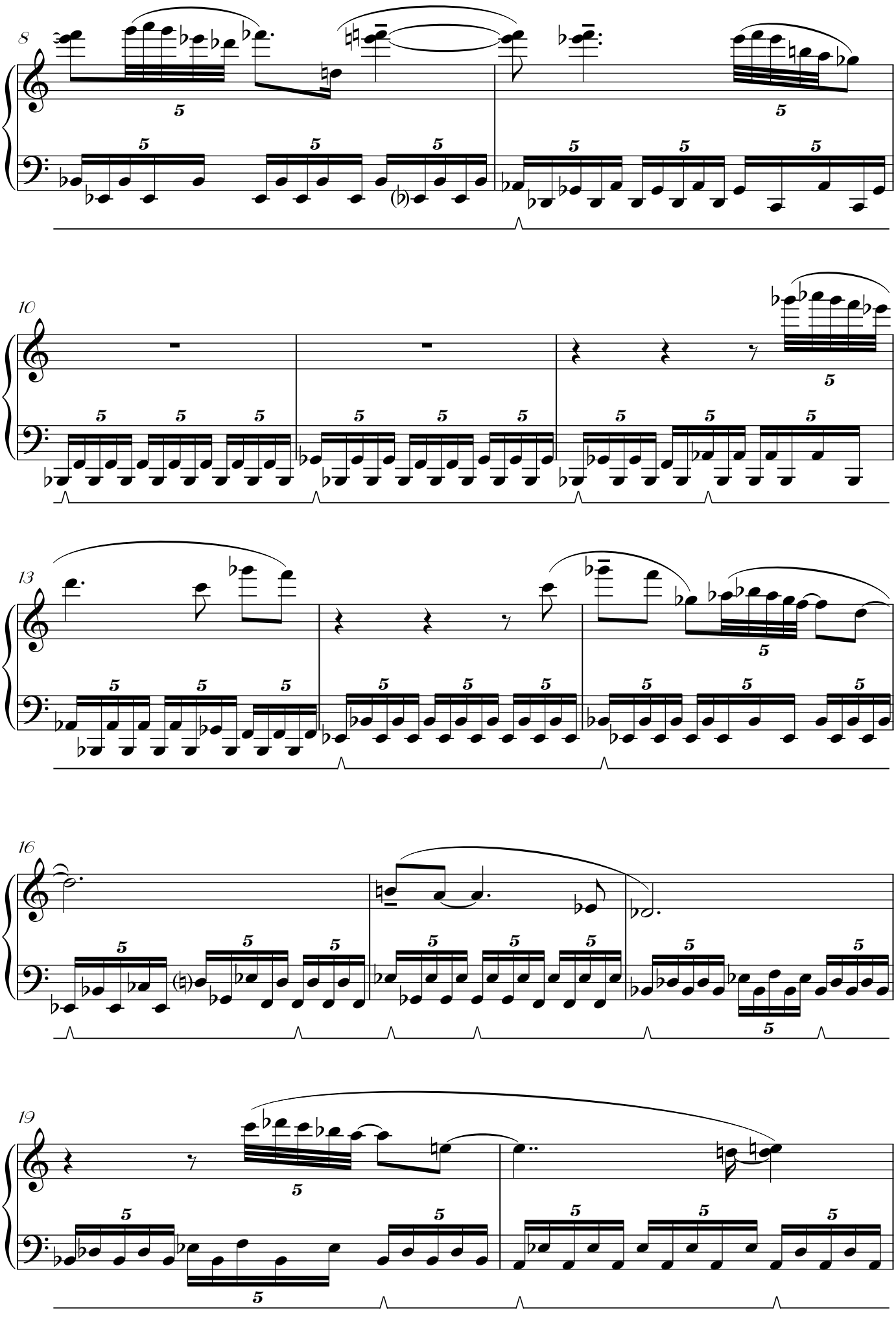
[Charles Baudelaire - from Élévation - Les Fleurs du Mal]

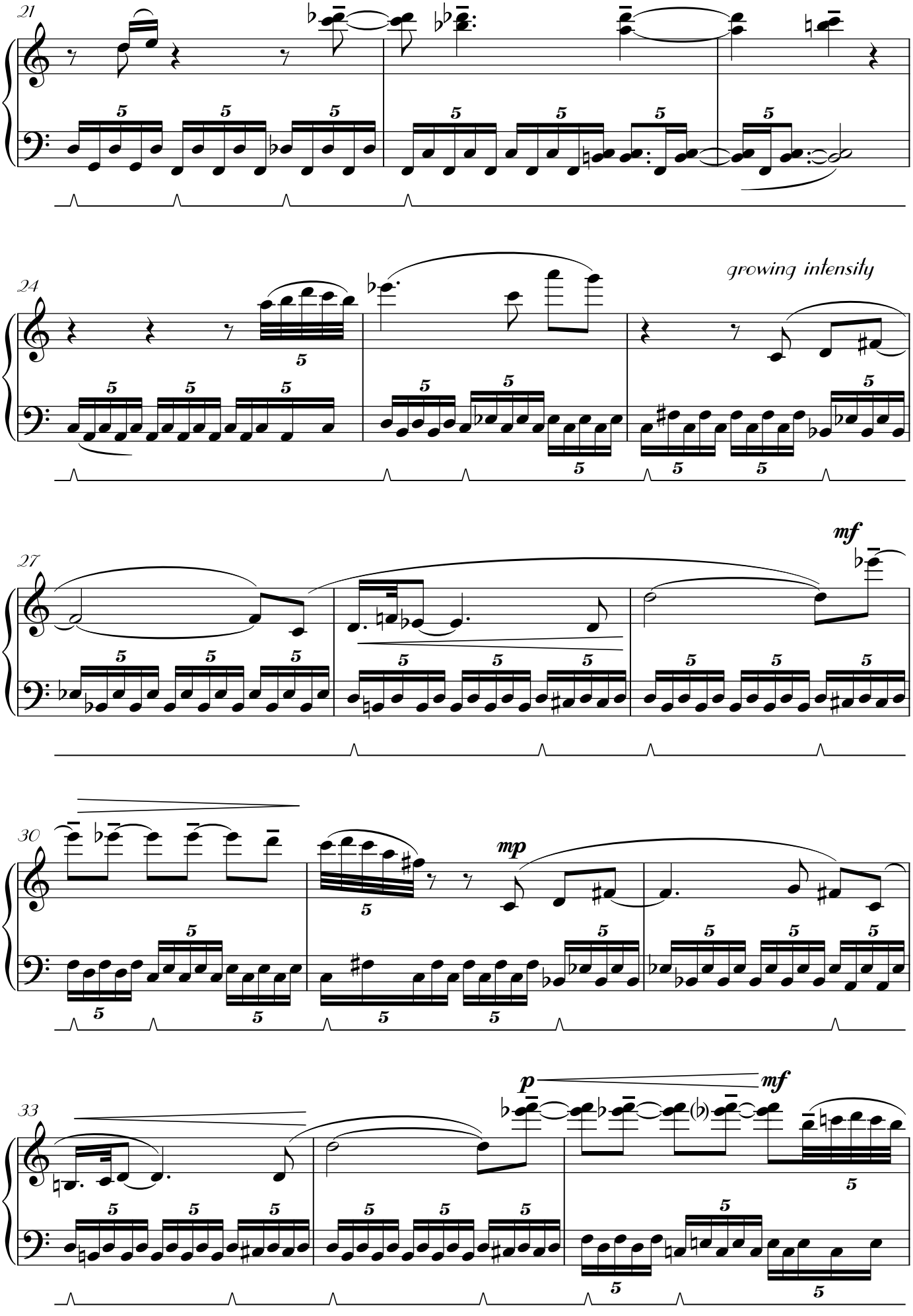
Peter Seabourne
June 2021

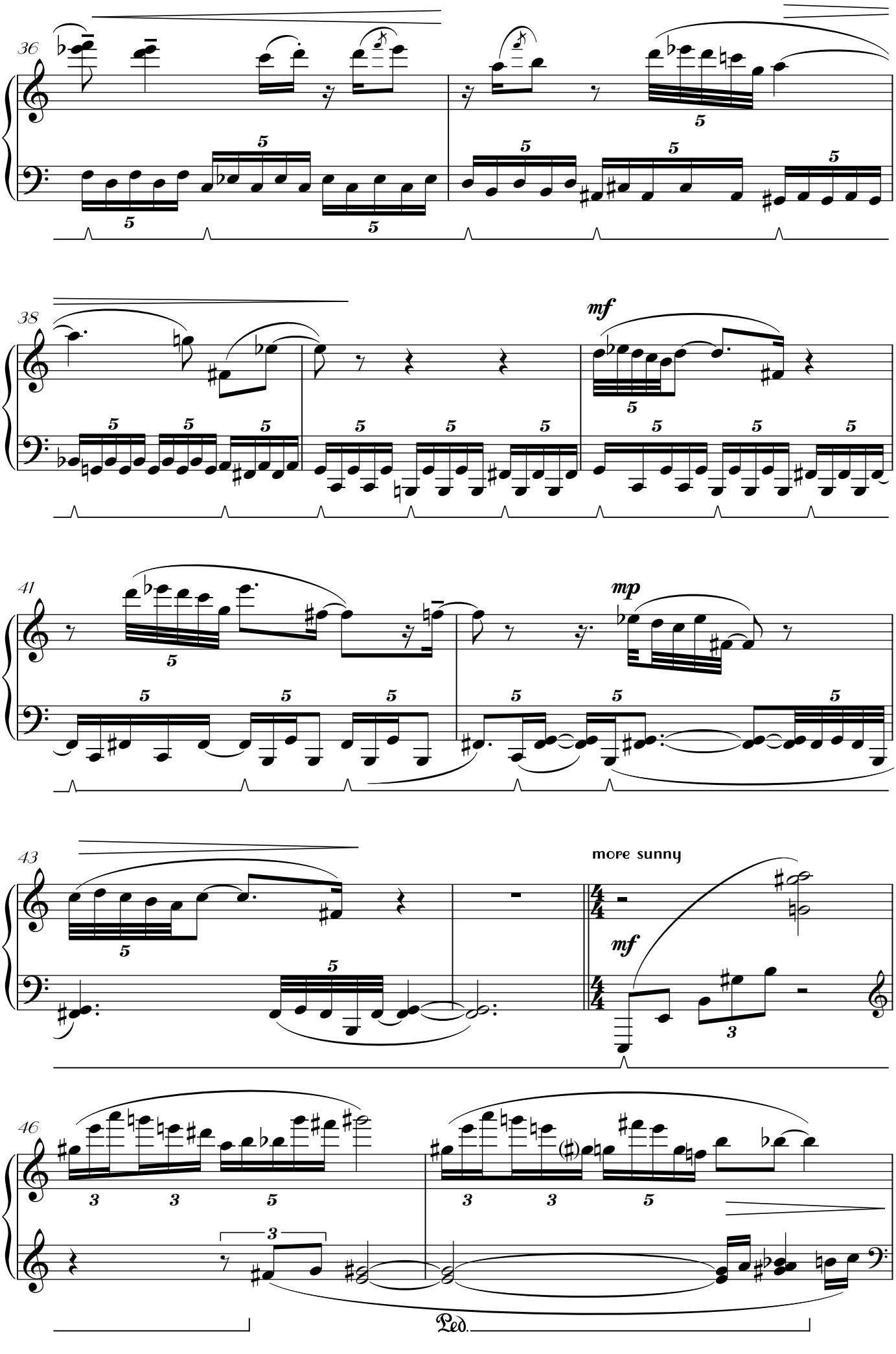


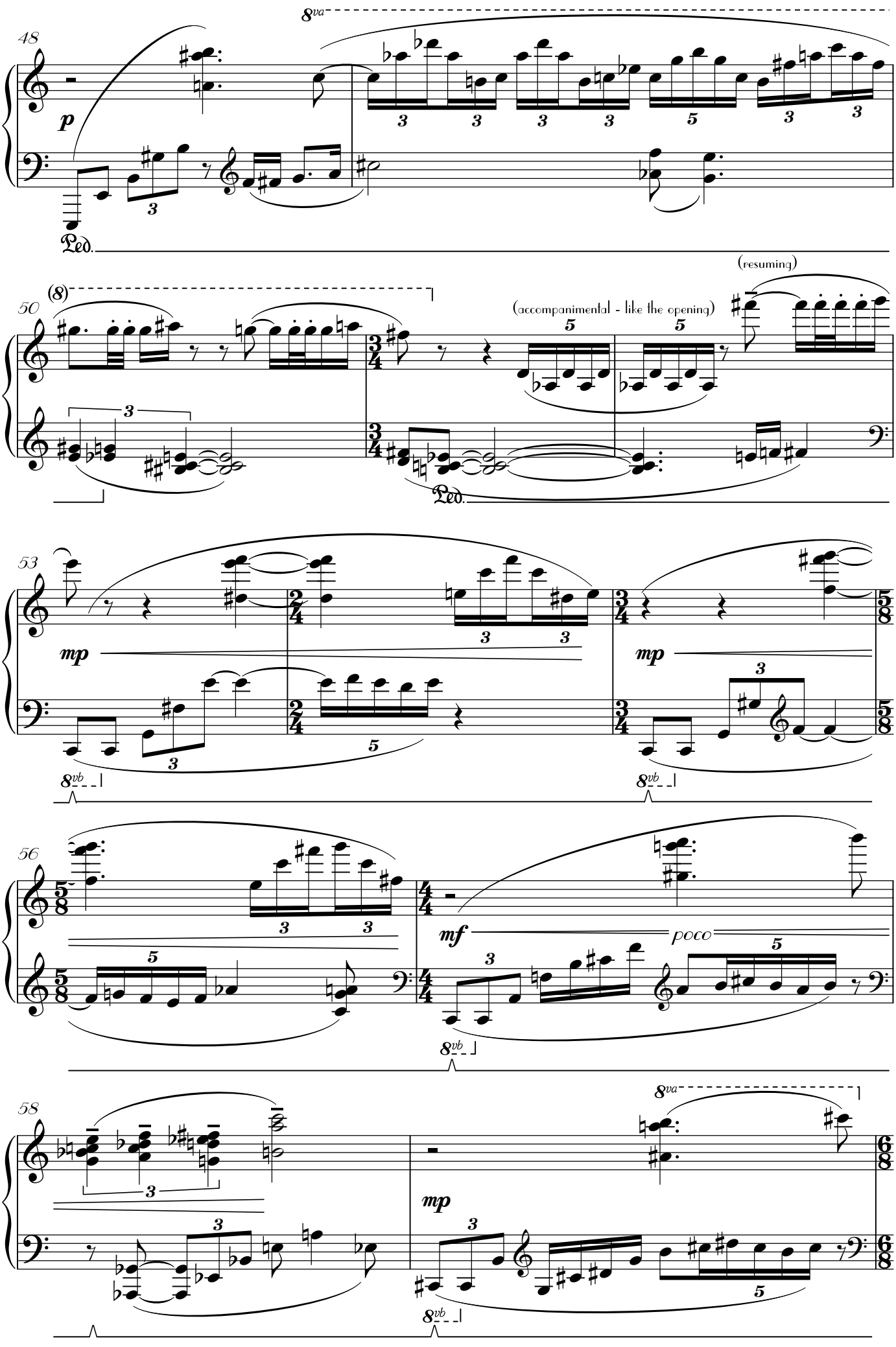
R.H. clear, singing - louder than the L.H. - the way a thrush dominates a garden at dusk. The quintuplet groups should have a slight accent on the first note, even when on a weak beat. L.H. very even, continuous - no "rhythmic" delineation of groups - subdued

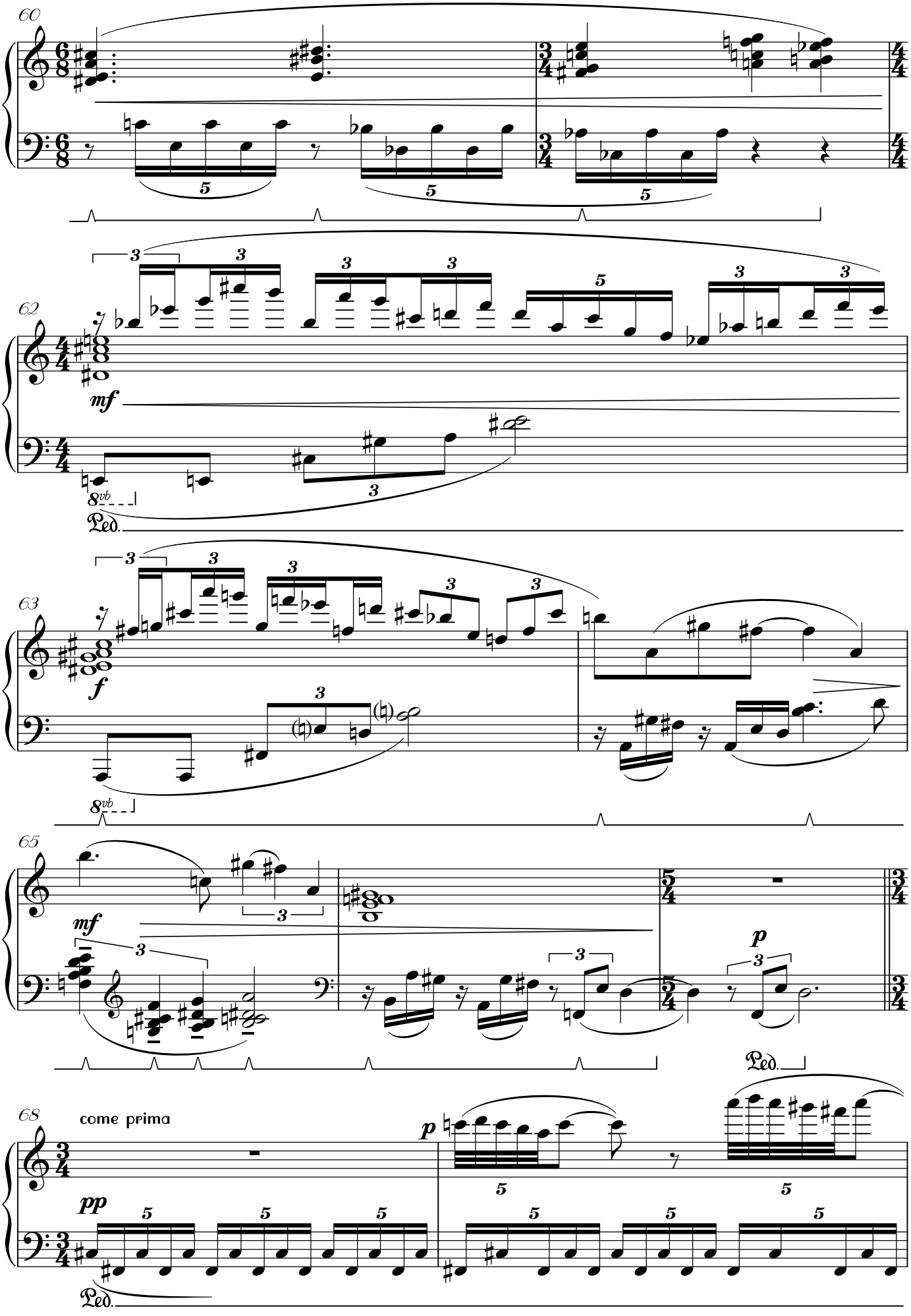


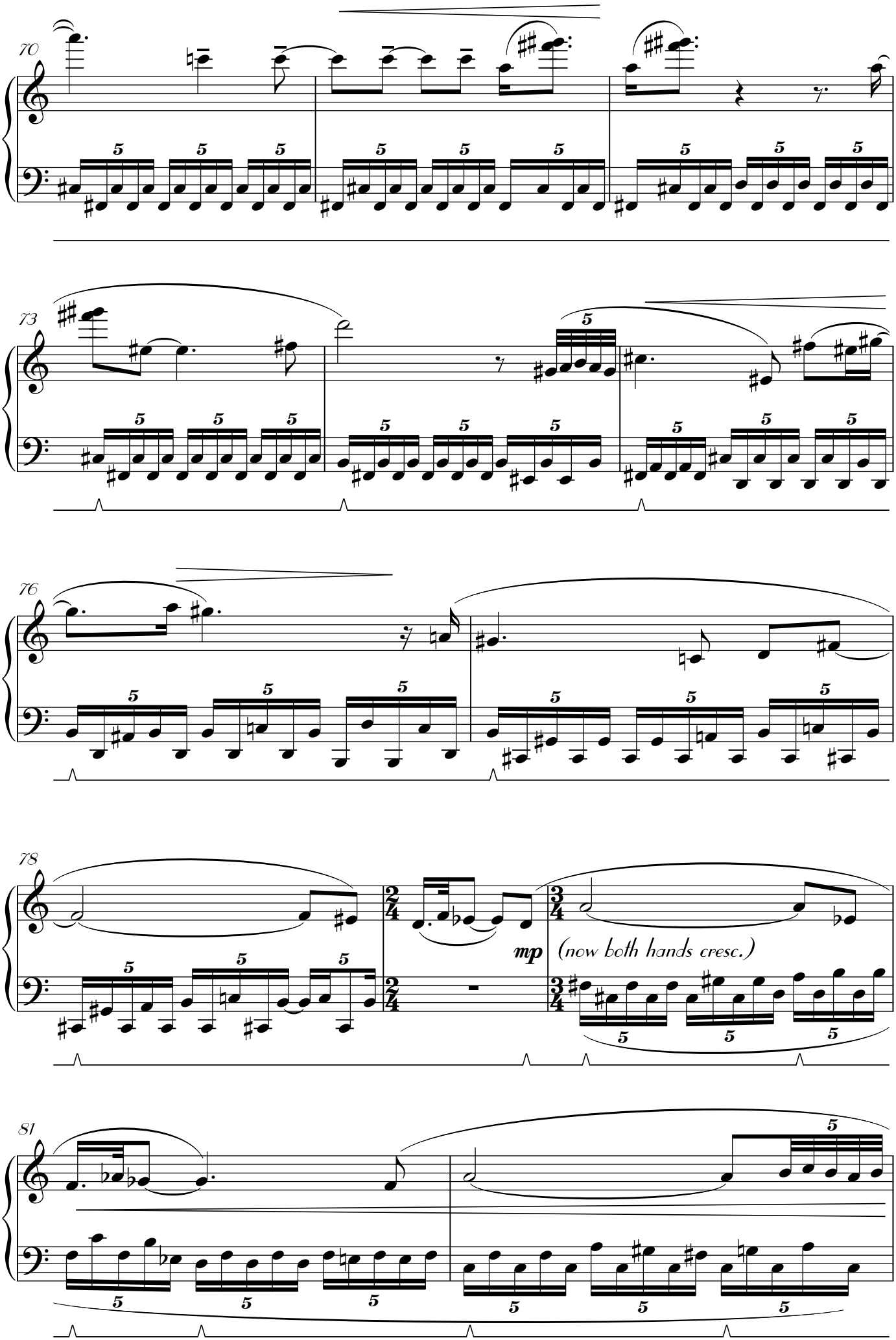

8
10
13
16
19

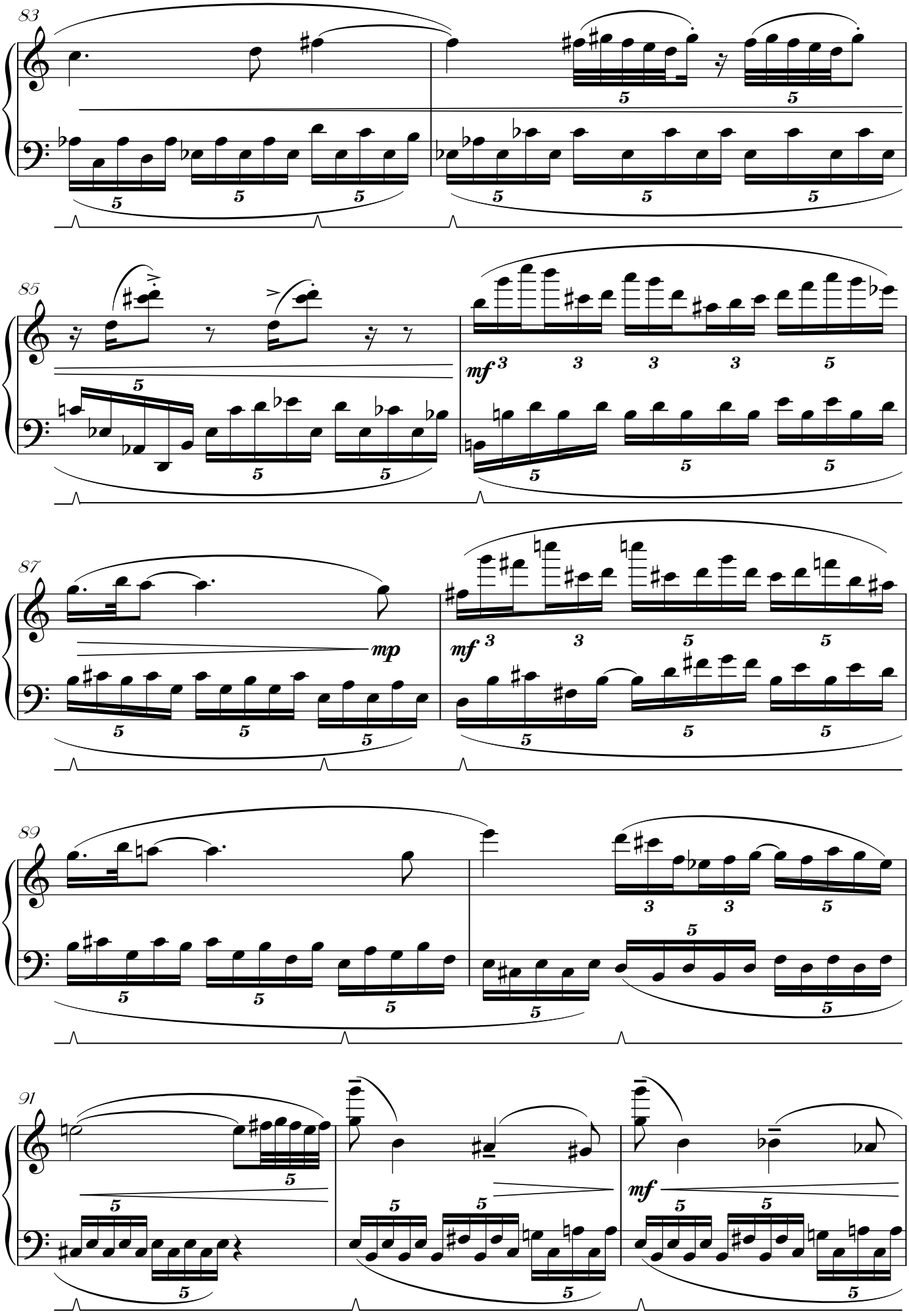

21
24
growing intensity
27
mf
30
mp
33
p
mf

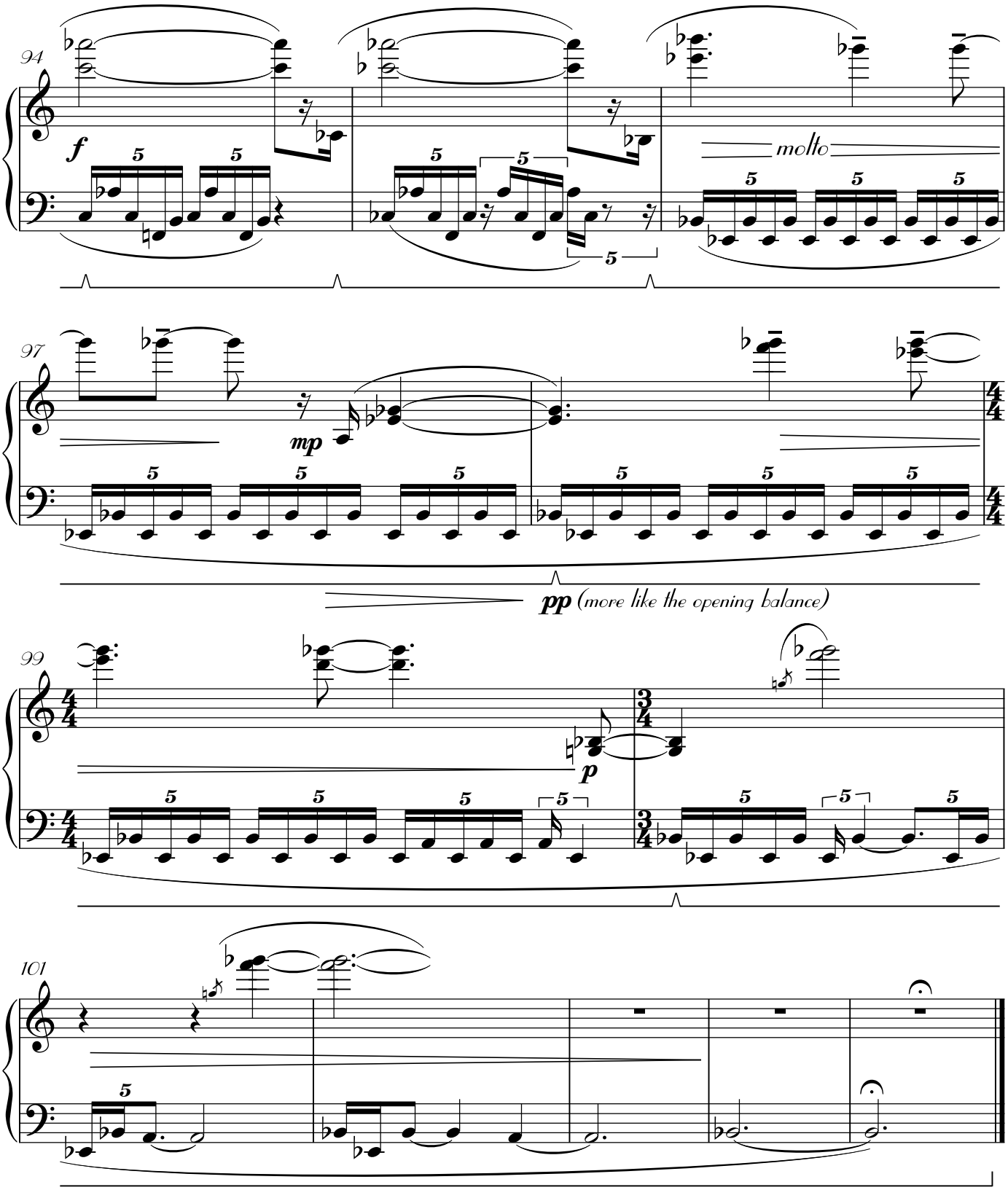

36
38
mf
41
mp
43
more sunny
mf
46
Ped.


48
8va
p
Ped.
50
(8)
(accompanimental - like the opening)
(resuming)
Ped.
53
mp
8vb
mp
8vb
56
mf
poco
8vb
58
8va
mp
8vb


60
62
mf
8vb
Ped.
63
f
8vb
65
mf
p
68
come prima
p
pp
Ped.


70
73
76
78
mp
(now both hands cresc.)
81


83
85
mf
87
mp
mf
89
91
mf


94
f
molto
97
mp
pp (more like the opening balance)
99
p
101

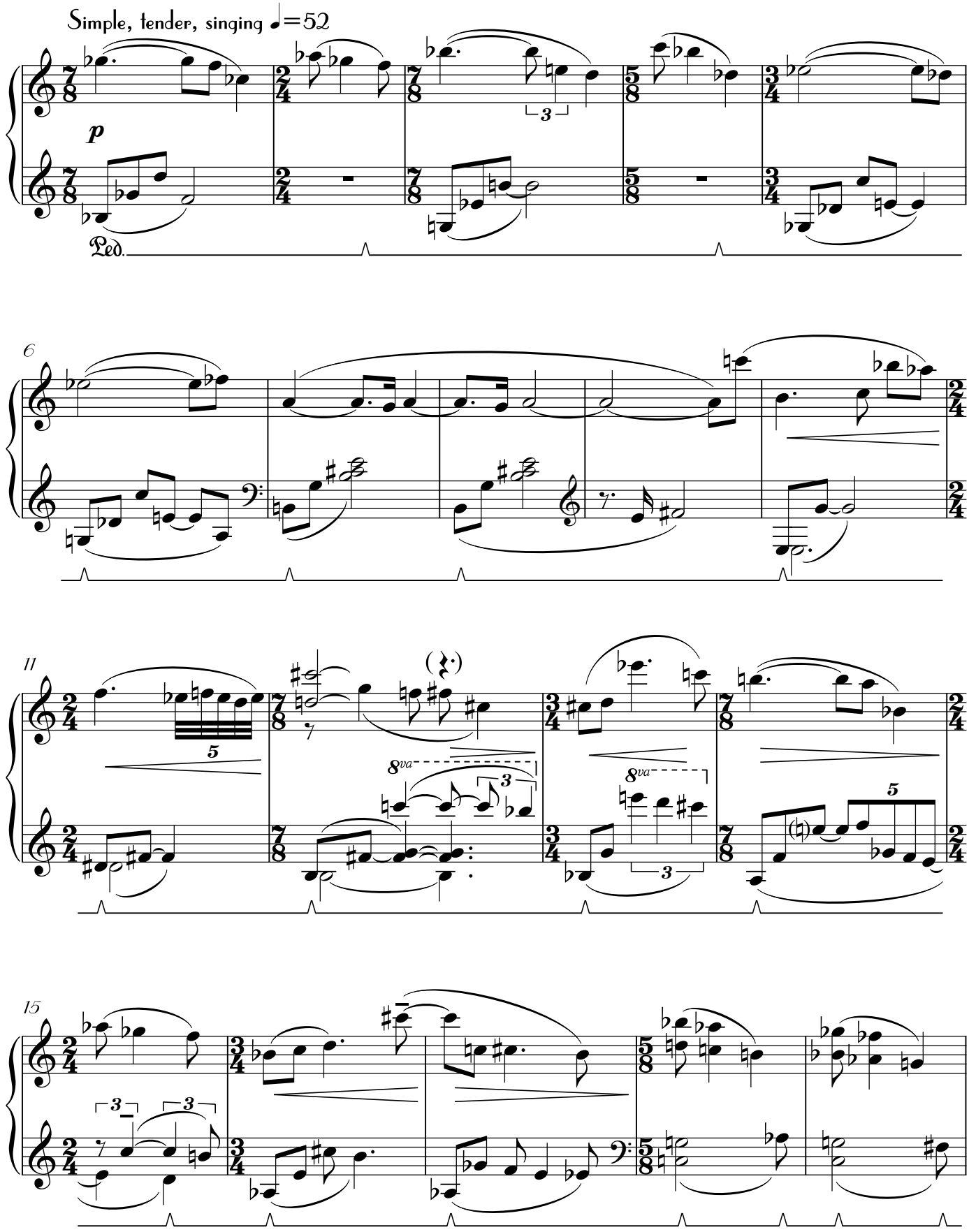
Snowdrops

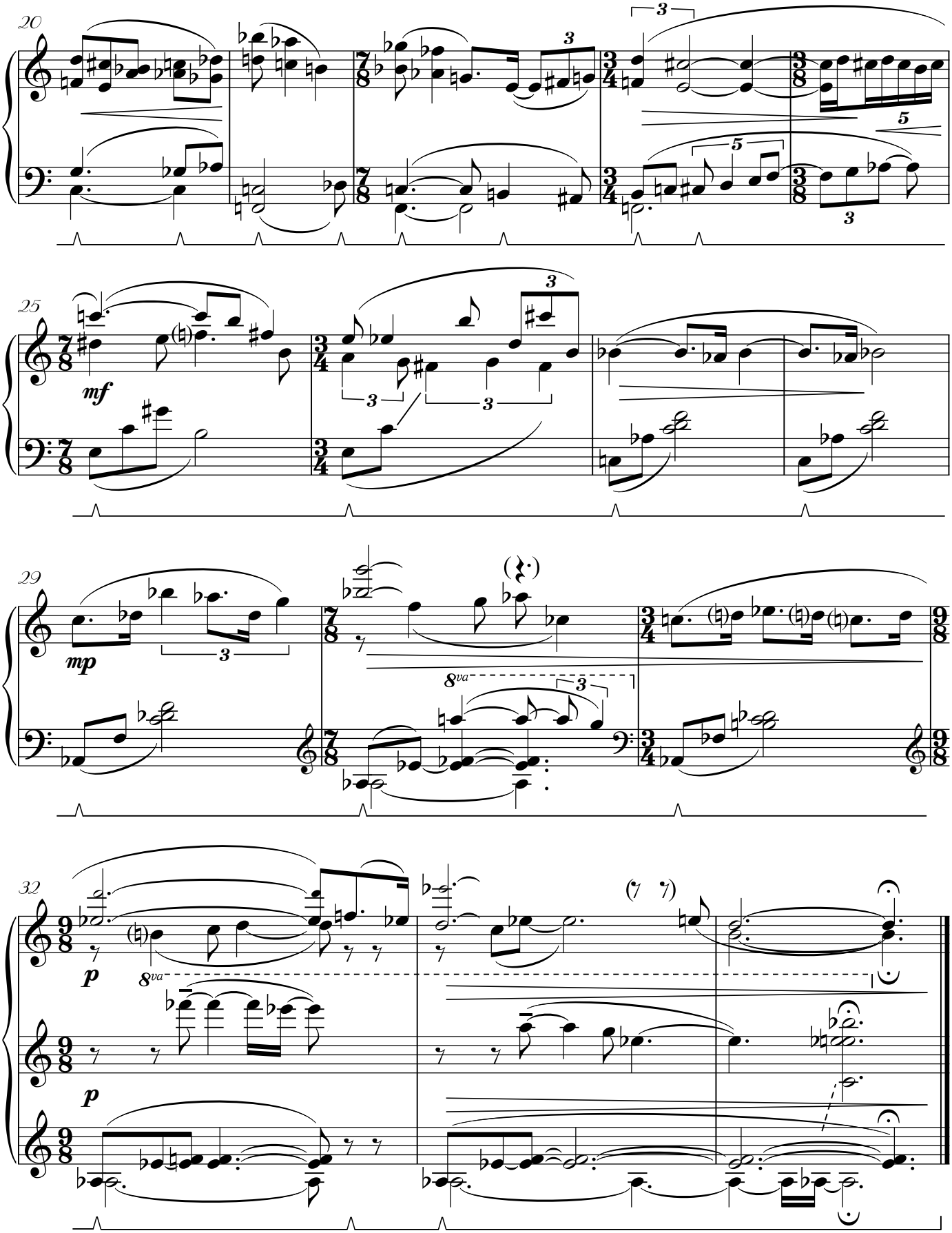
Marcelle Seabourne

(watercolour)

Snowdrops

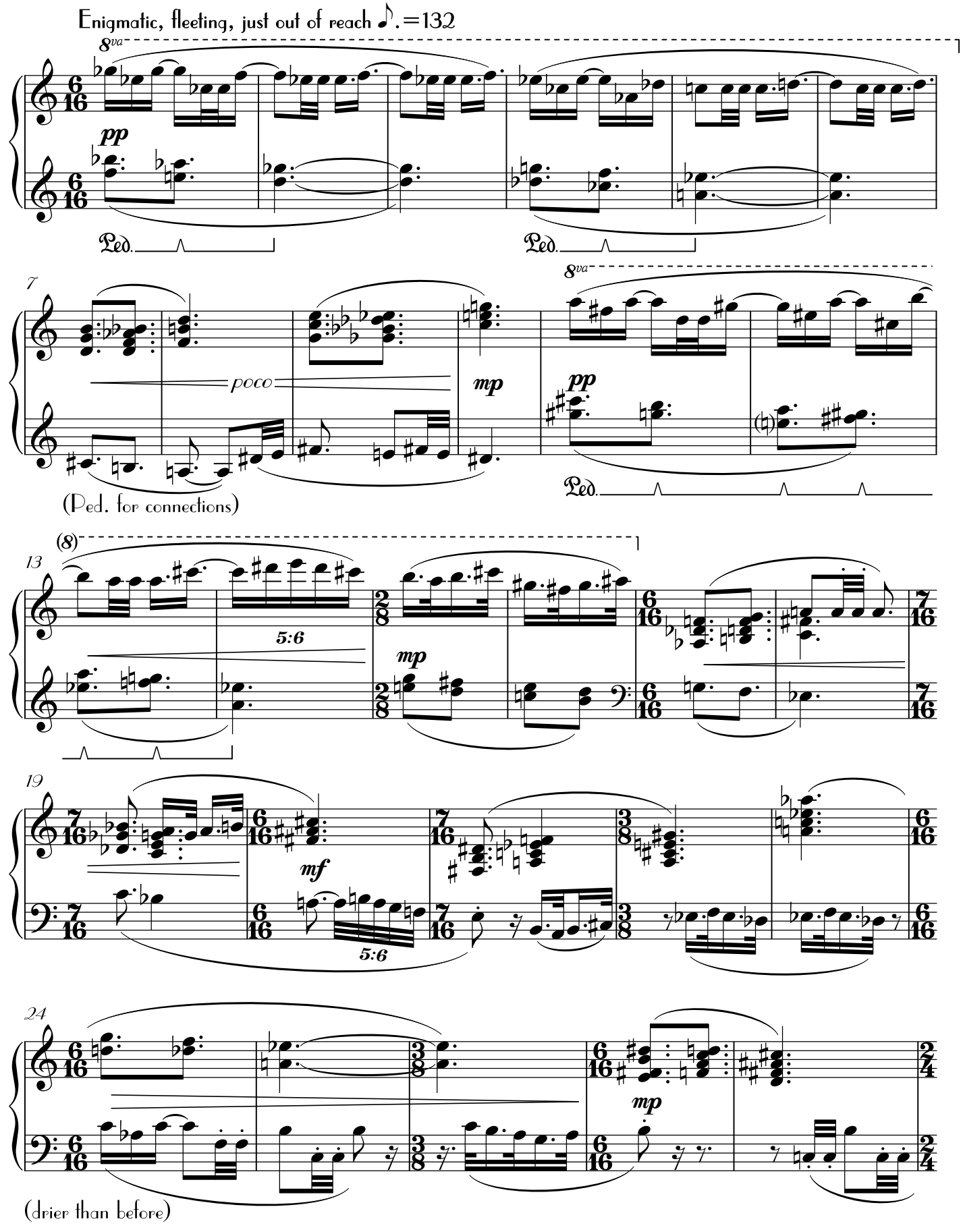
Now is the globe shrunk tight
Round the mouse's dulled wintering heart.
[Snowdrop - Ted Hughes]



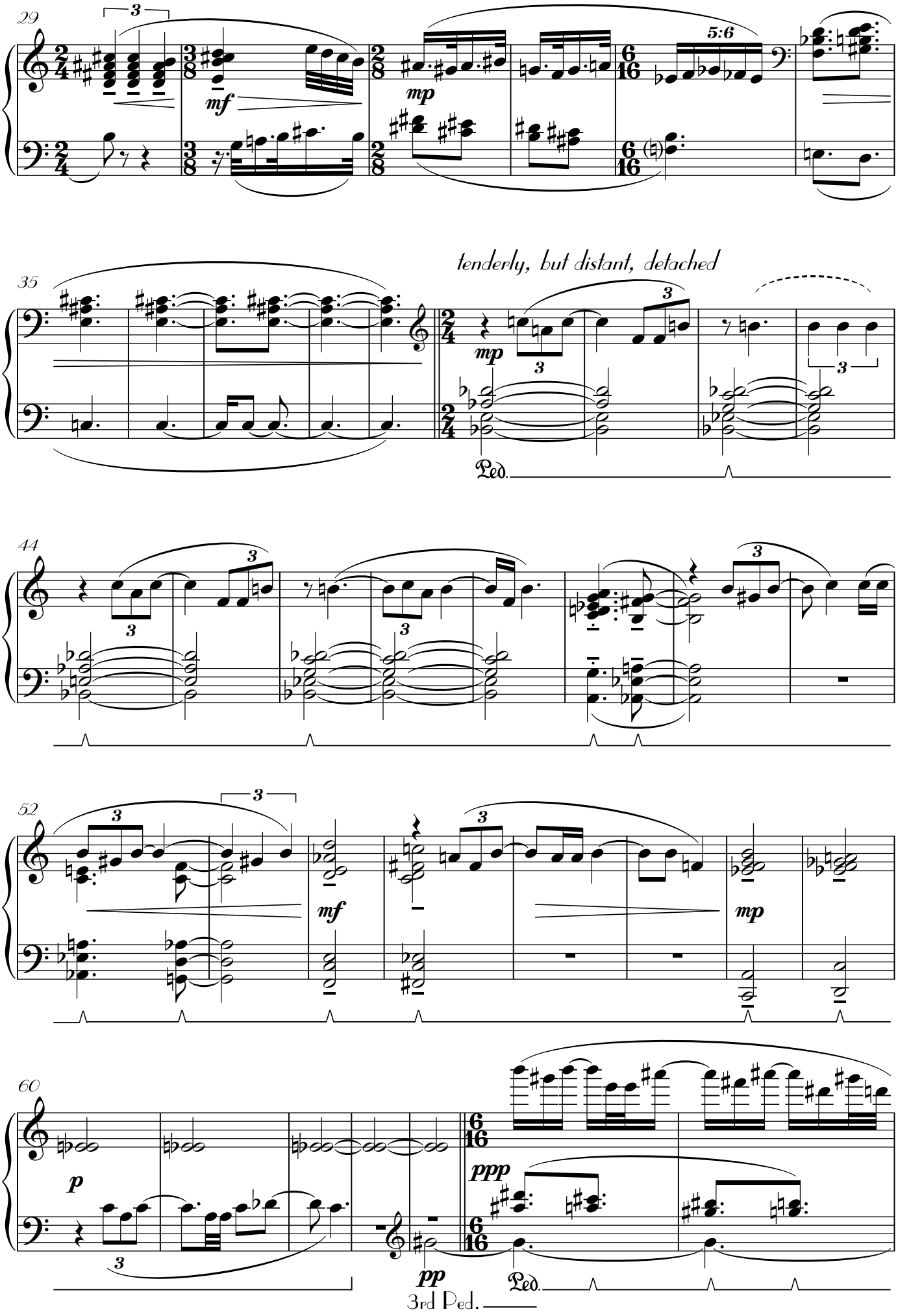

20
25
mf
29
mp
8va
32
p
8va
p

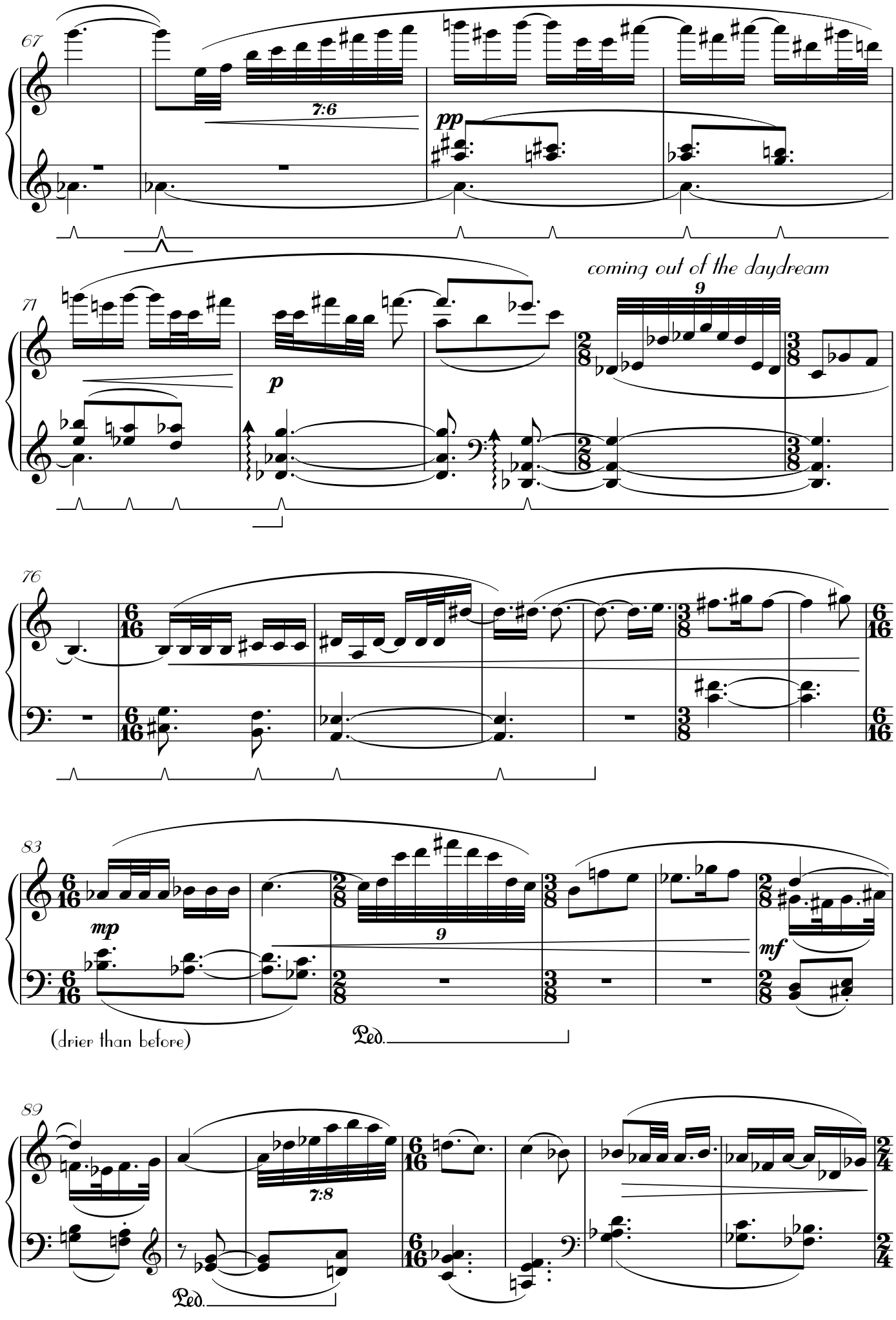
Imagined Bouquet from Berthe Morisot

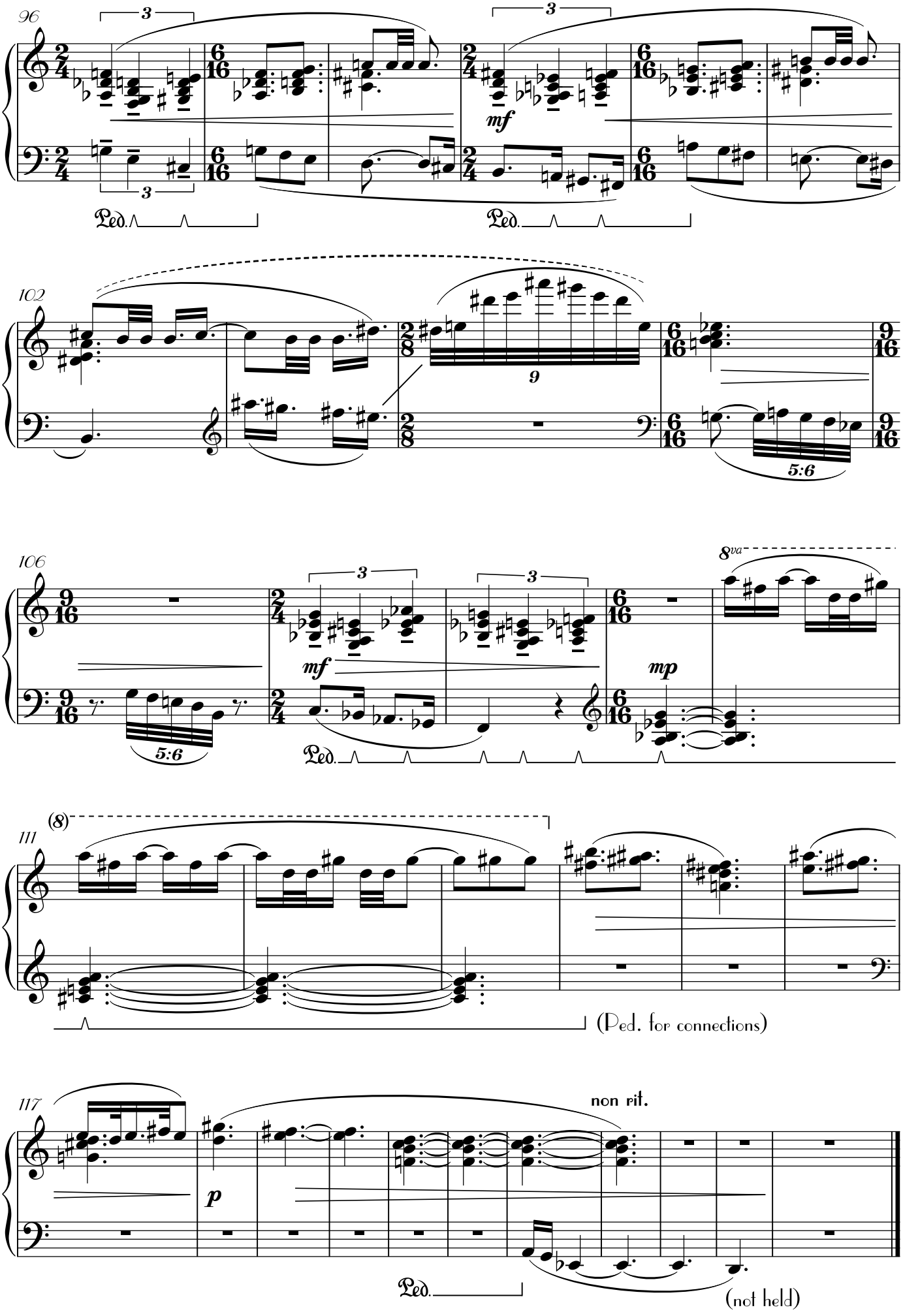
(a presence of absence)



*words of poet, Paul Valéry (Morisot's nephew by marriage), on Manet's portrait of her with violets.


29
3
mf
mp
5:6
35
tenderly, but distant, detached
mp
3
Ped.
44
3
52
mf
mp
60
p
pp
ppp
Ped.
3rd Ped.


67
7:6
pp
71
p
coming out of the daydream
9
76
83
mp
9
mf
(drier than before)
Ped.
89
7:8
Ped.


96
3
3
mf
Ped.
Ped.
102
9
5:6
106
3
3
mf
mp
8va
5:6
Ped.
111
(8)
(Ped. for connections)
117
non rit.
p
Ped.
(not held)

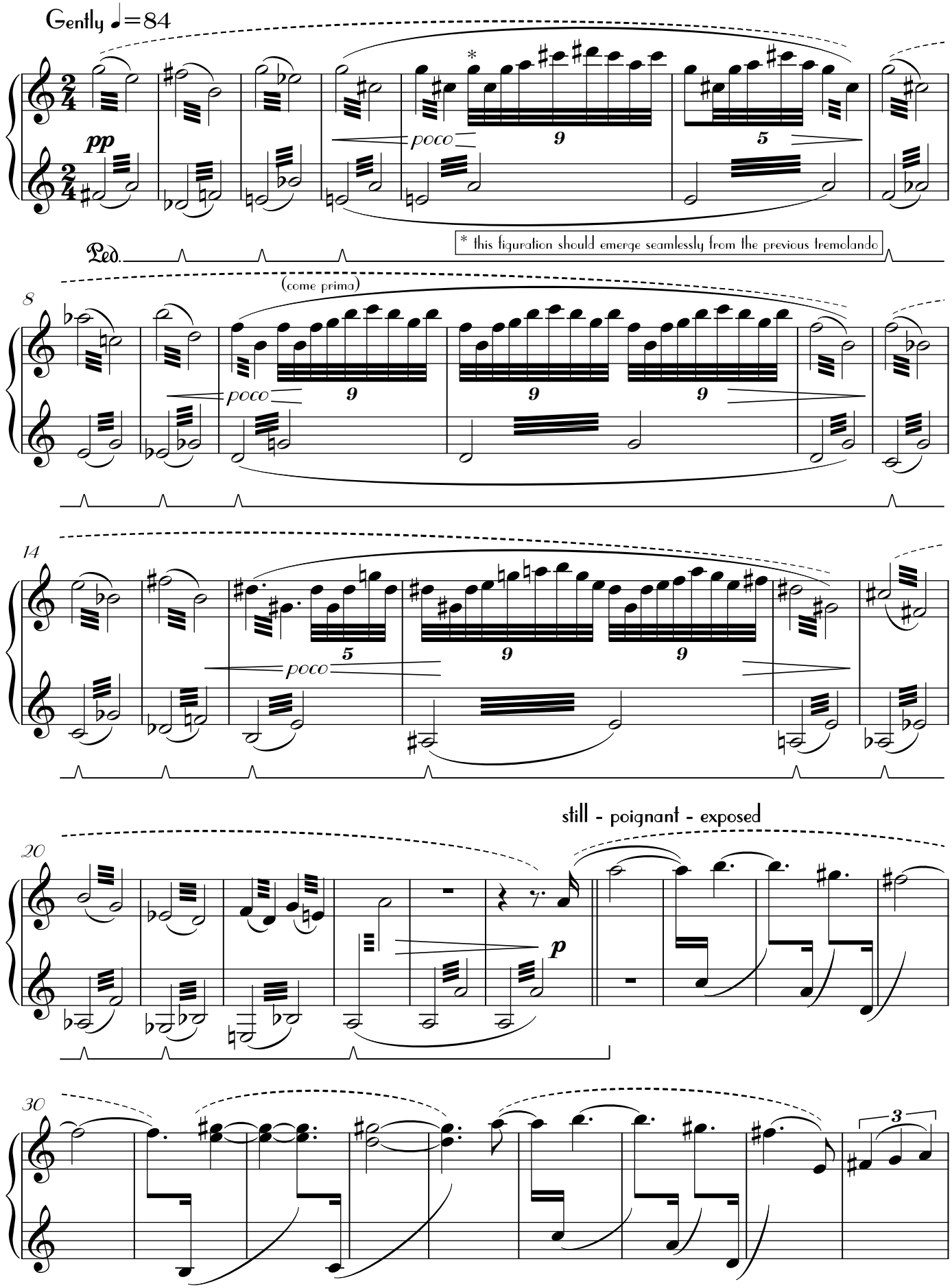
Helleborus Foetidus - Hope in Winter

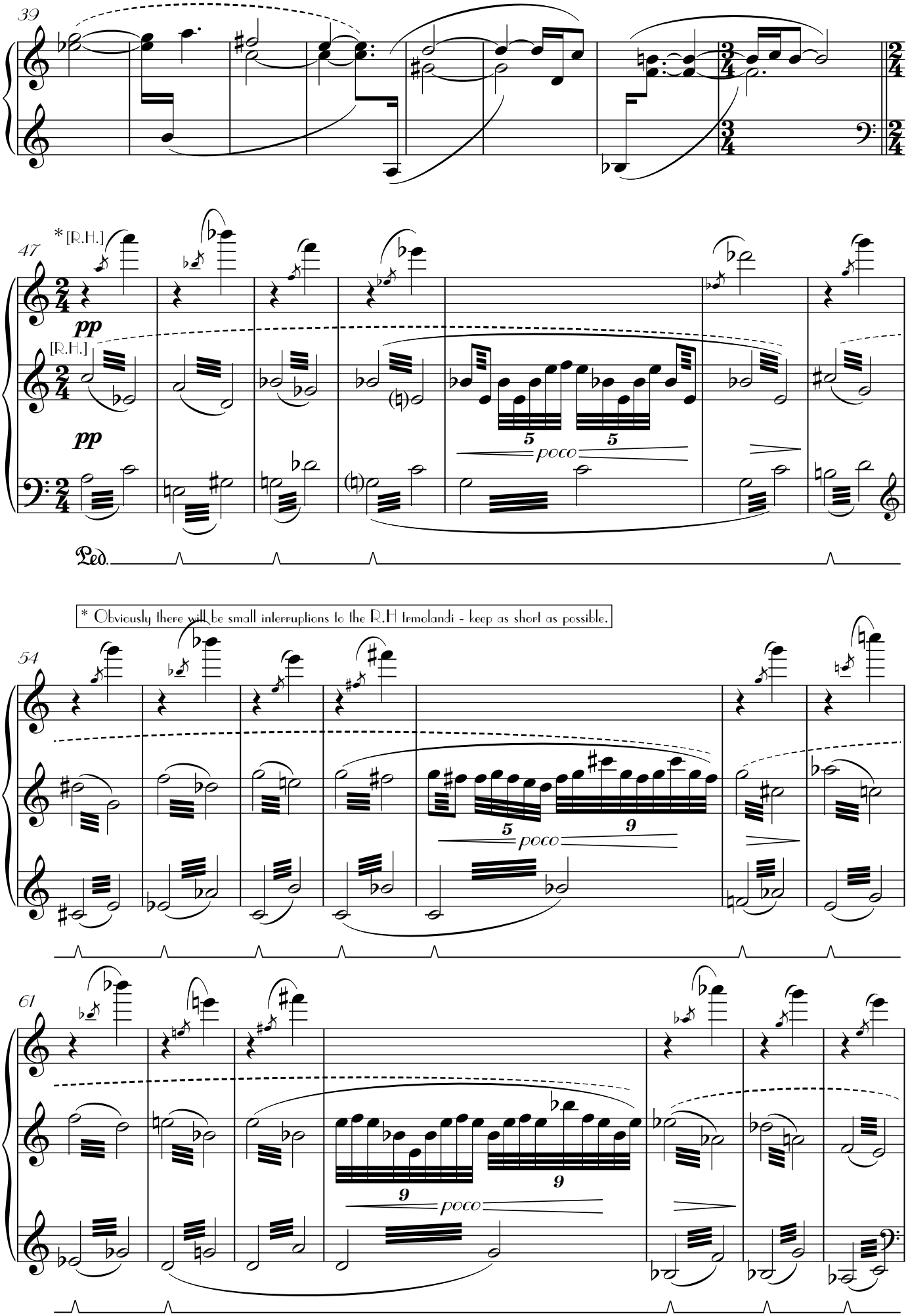
Marcelle Seabourne

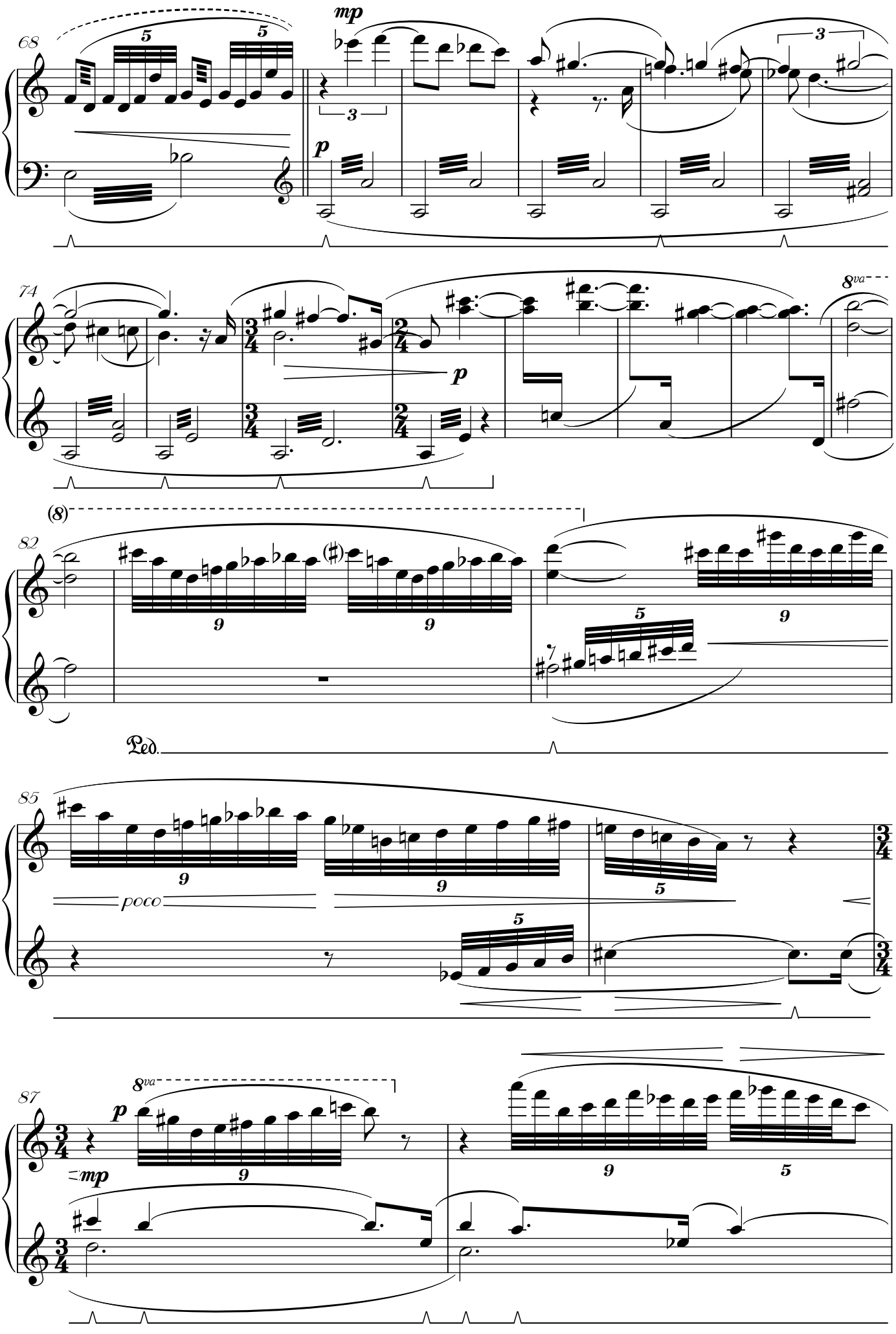
(watercolour)

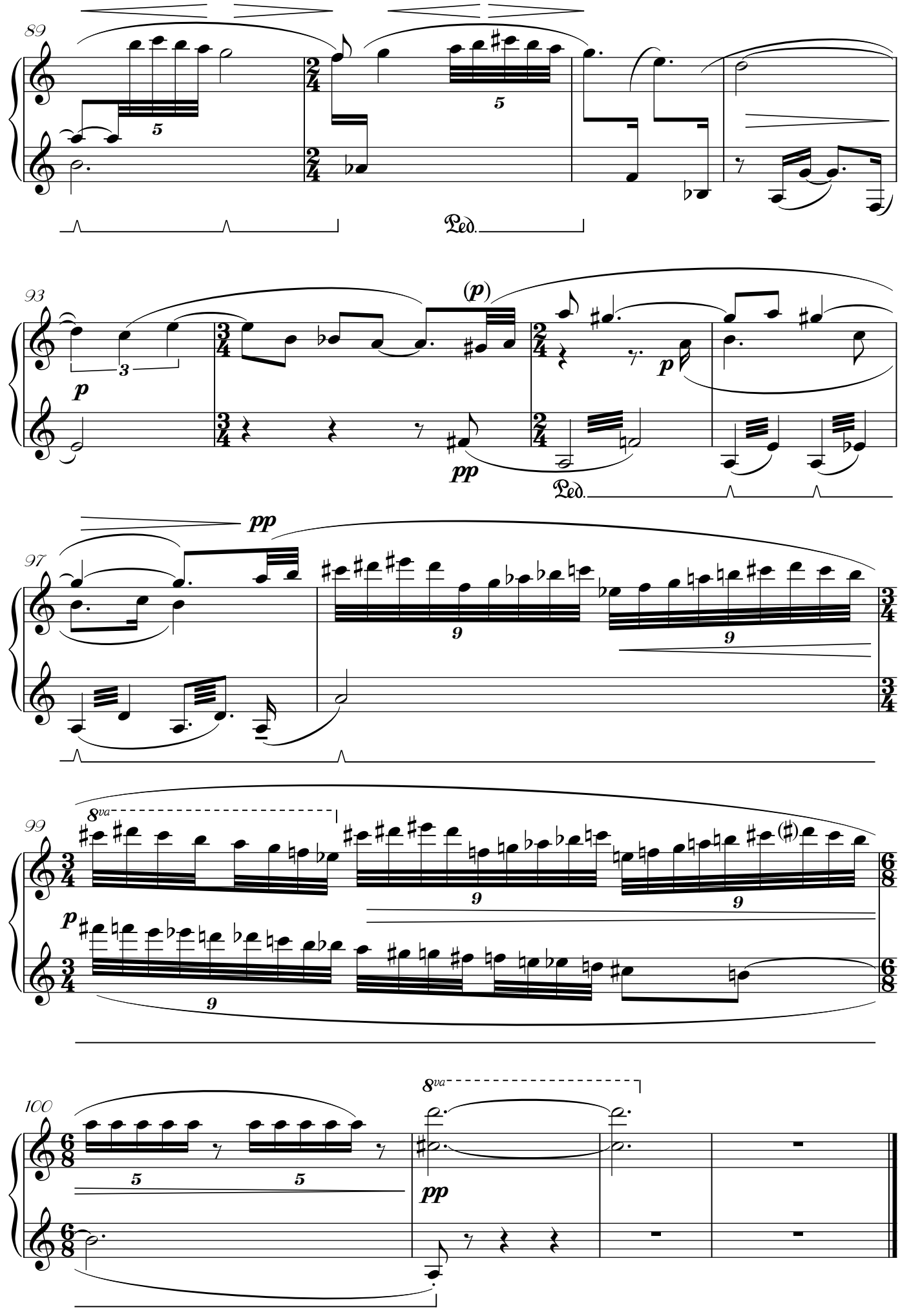
Helleborus Foetidus

(Hope in Winter)



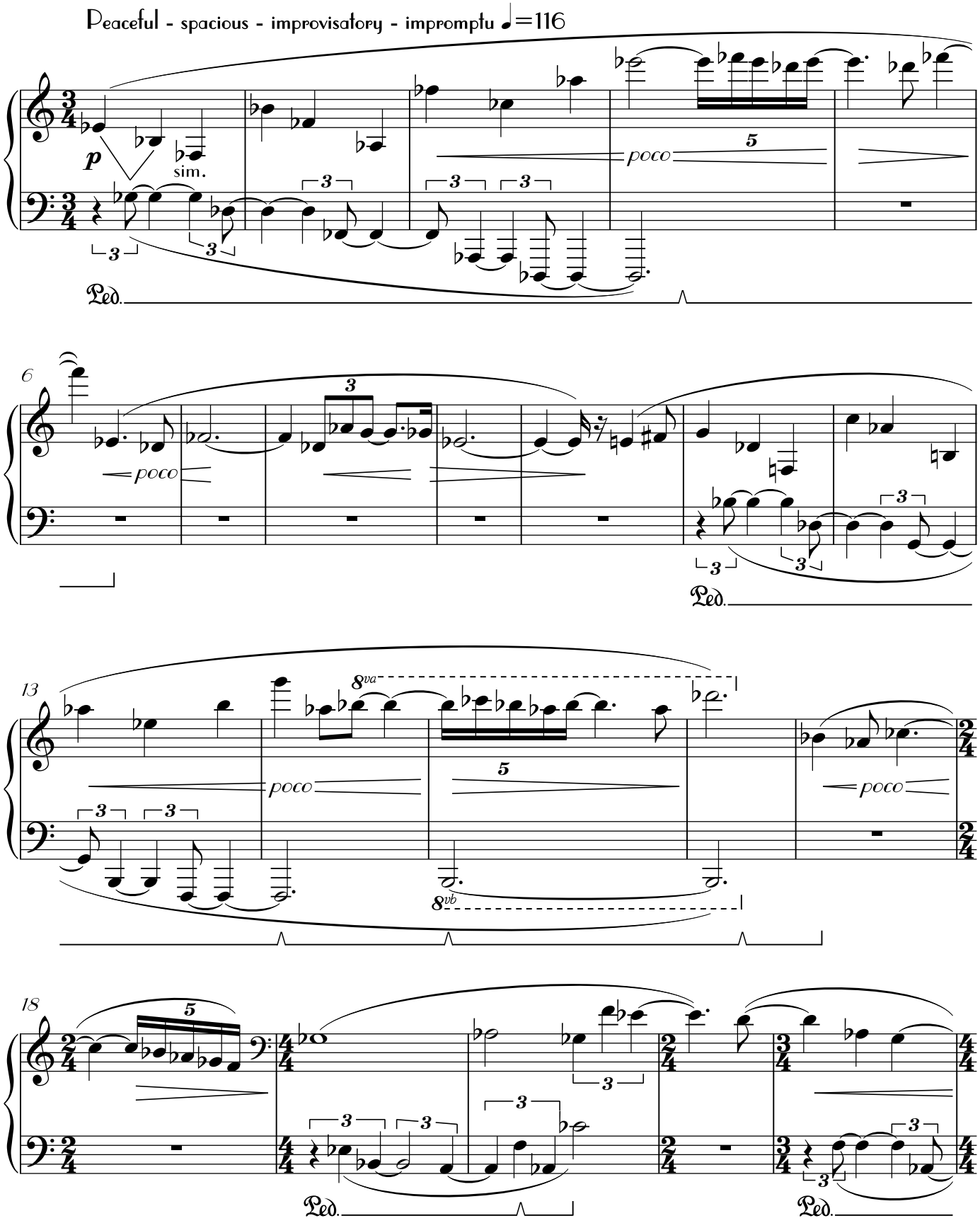

39
47
* [R.H.]
pp
[R.H.]
pp
5
5
poco
Ped.
* Obviously there will be small interruptions to the R.H tremolandi - keep as short as possible.
54
5
9
poco
61
9
9
poco

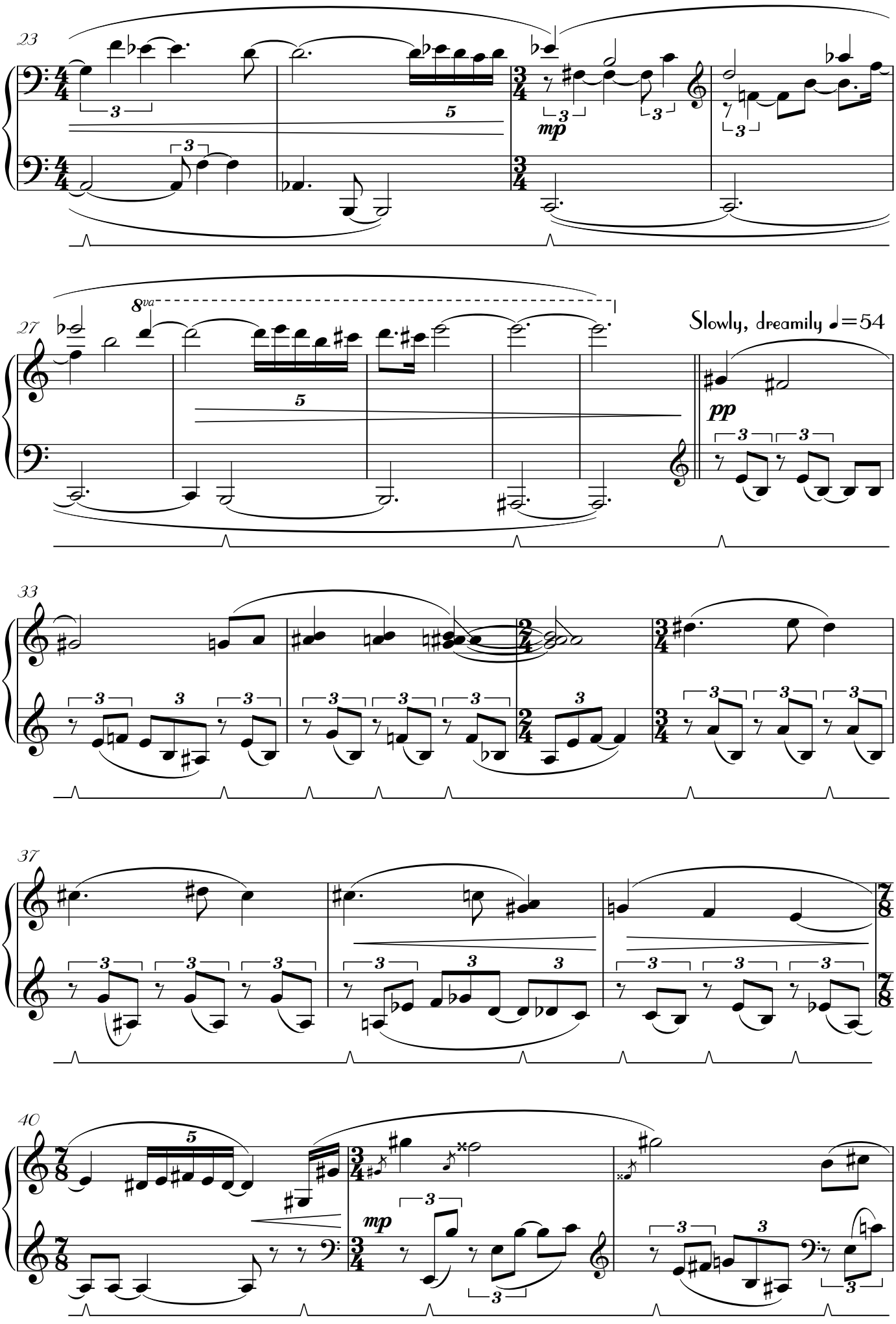

68
mp
p
74
8va
p
(8)
82
9
9
5
9
Ped.
85
9
9
5
poco
5
87
8va
p
mp
9
9
5

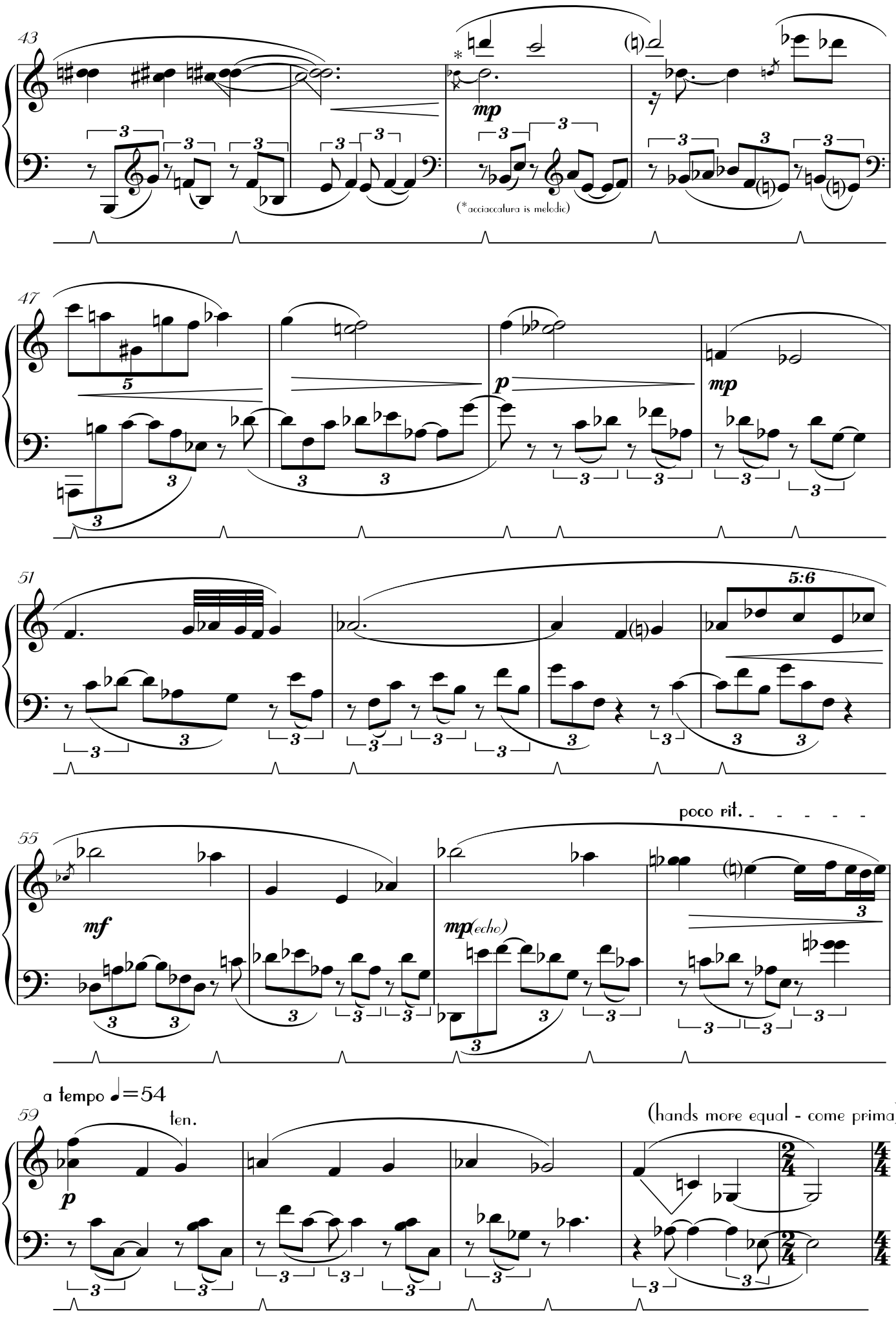

89
Ped.
93
(p)
p
pp
Ped.
97
pp
9
9
99
8va
p
9
9
9
100
8va
5
5
pp

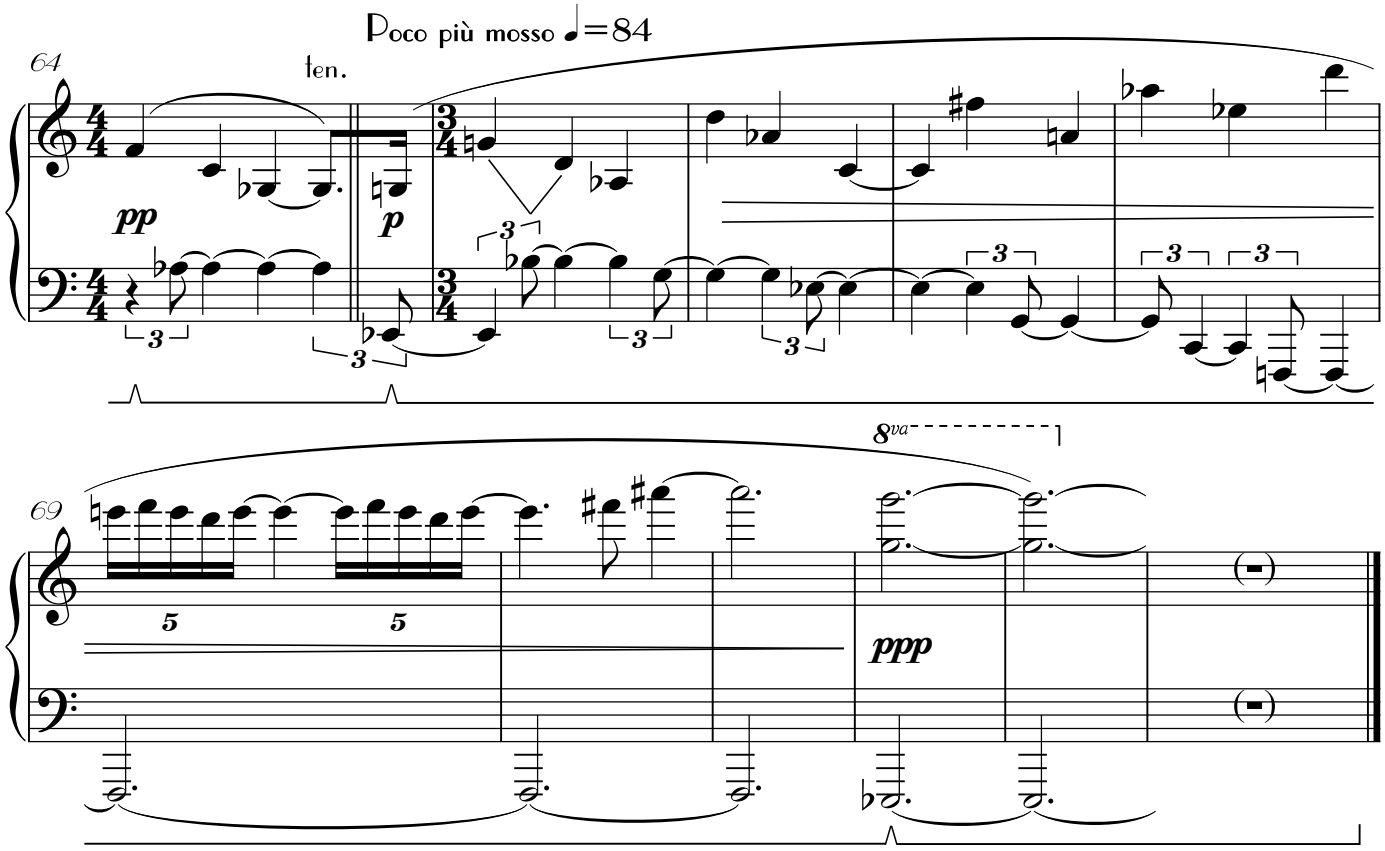
Imagined Bouquet from Suzanne Manet

Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,
And a singer who sings no more.
[from Ode - Arthur O'Shaughnessy - dedicated to Suzanne Manet]




23
mp
27
8va
Slowly, dreamily ♩=54
pp
33
37
40
mp


43
mp
(*acciaccatura is melodic)
47
p
mp
51
5:6
55
mf
mp(echo)
poco rit.
a tempo ♩=54
59
p
ten.
(hands more equal - come prima)


Poco più mosso ♩=84
64
ten.
pp
p
69
8va
5
5
ppp

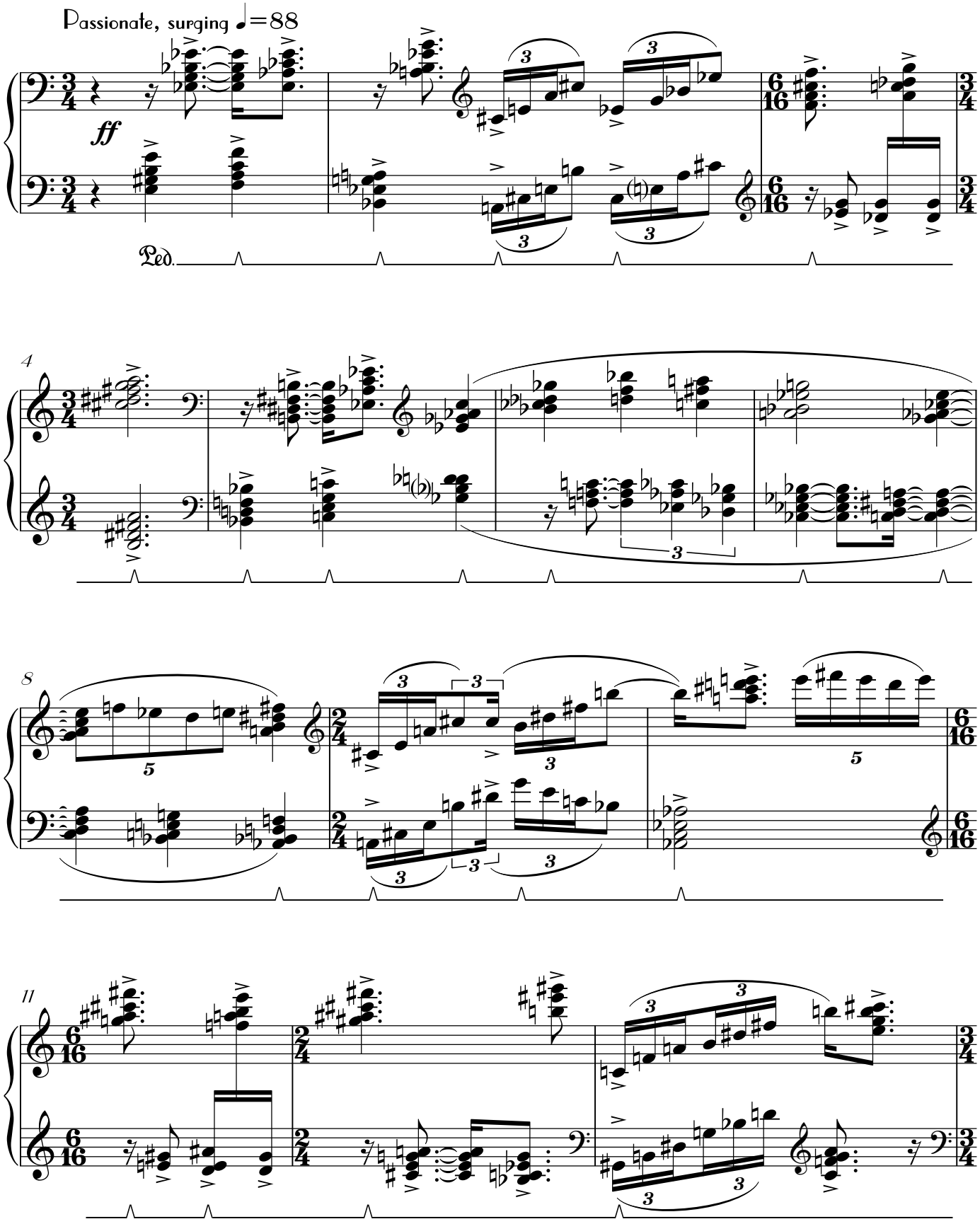
Tulips

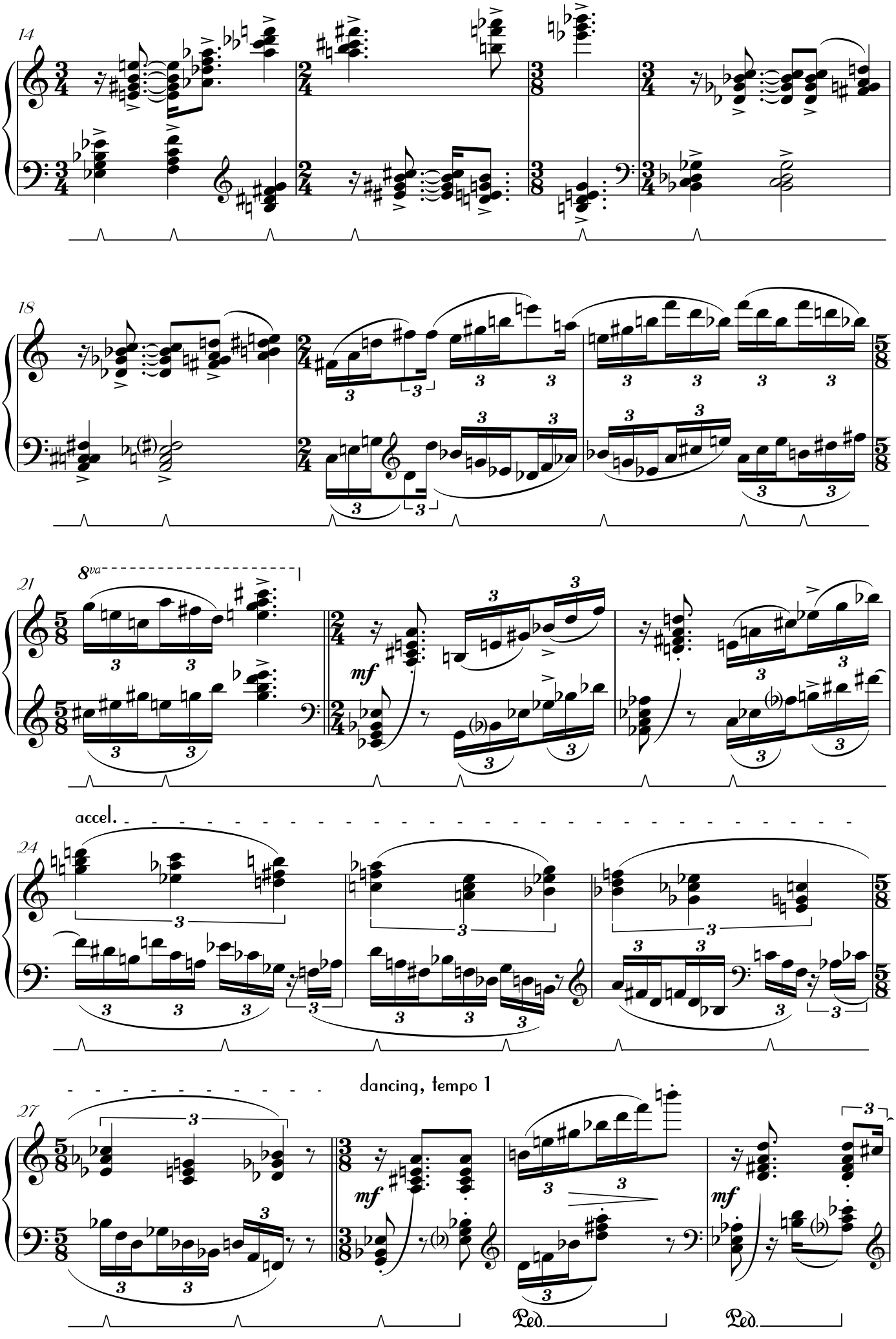
Marcelle Seabourne

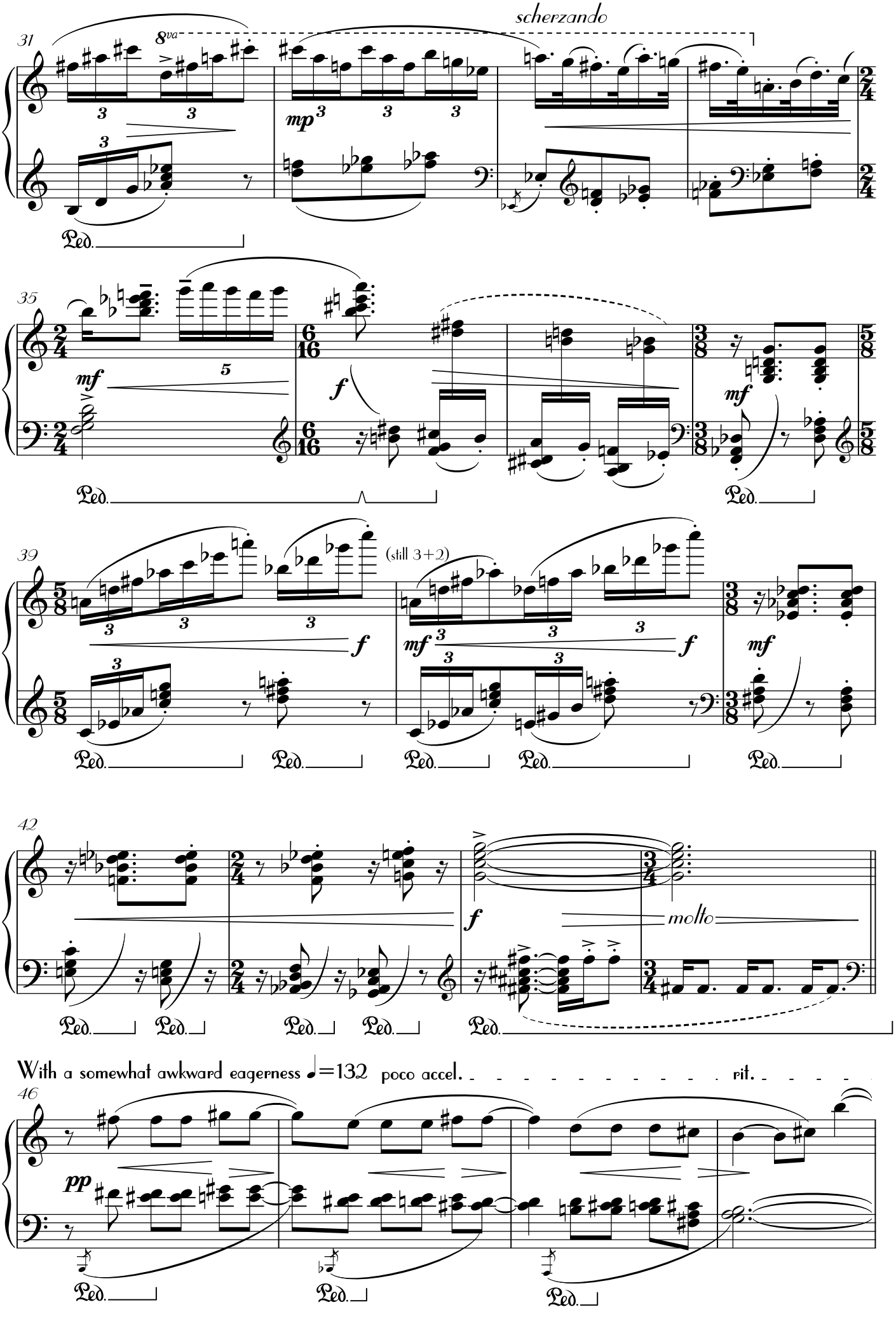
(acrylic and water-based oils)

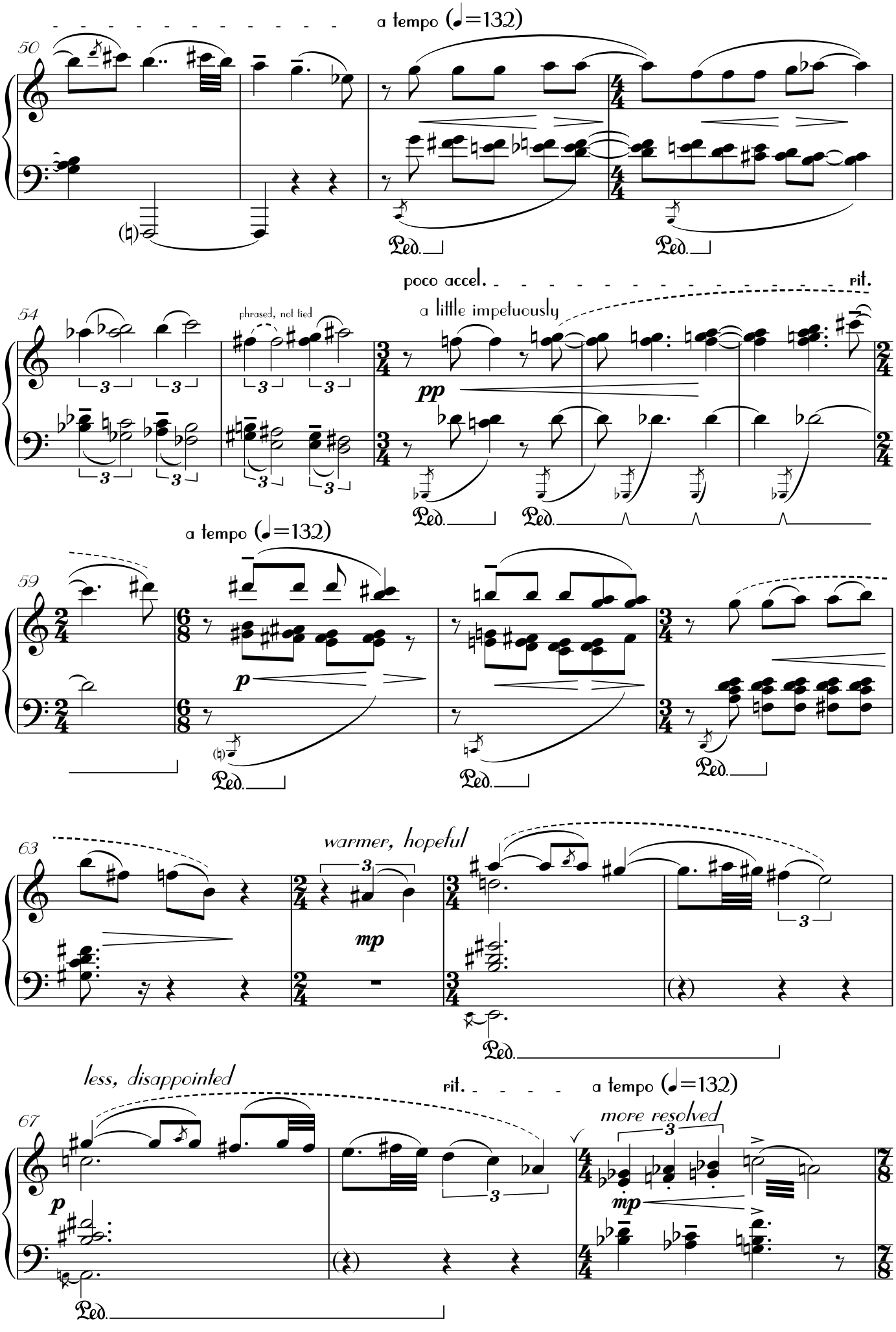
Tulips

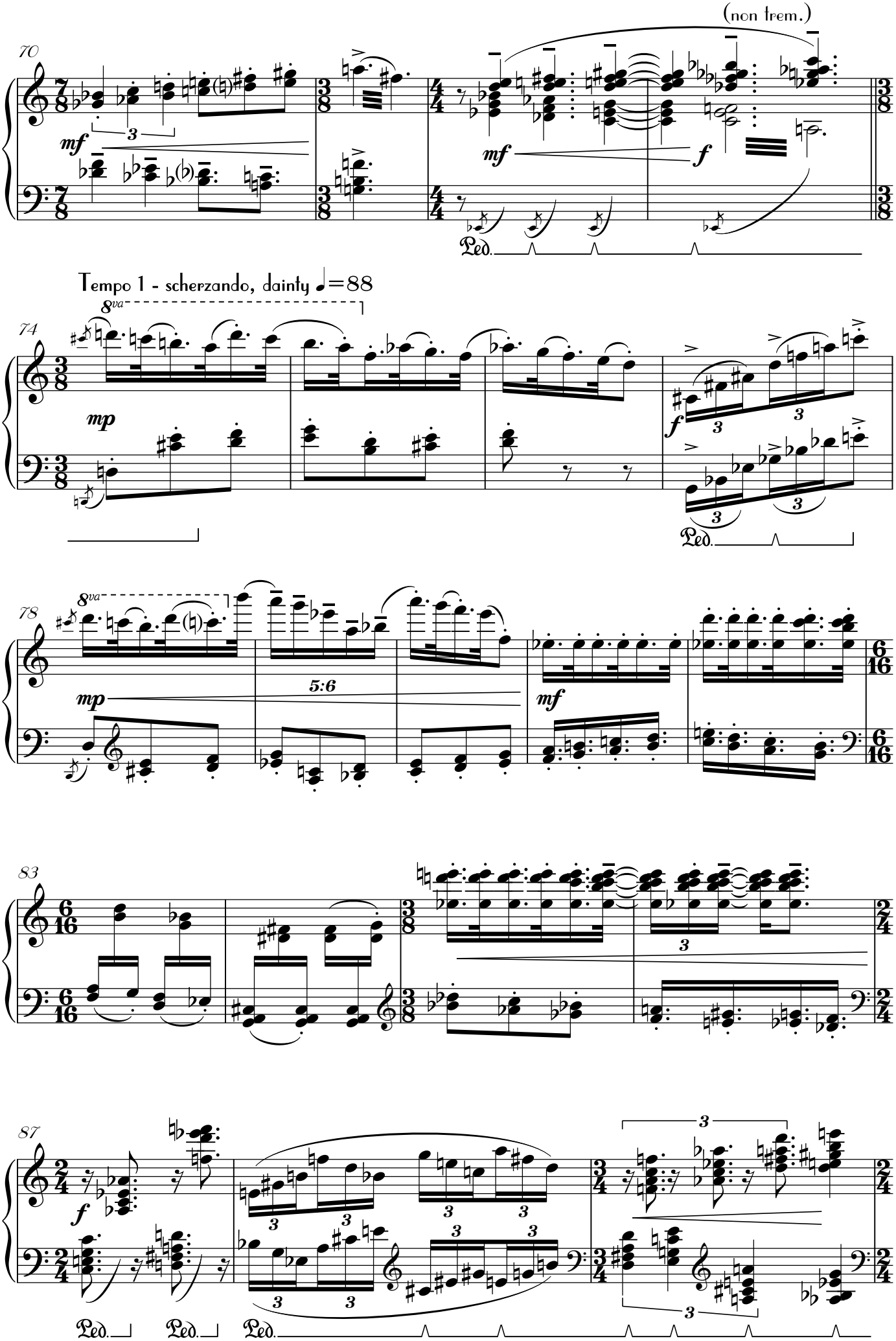
(the flame)

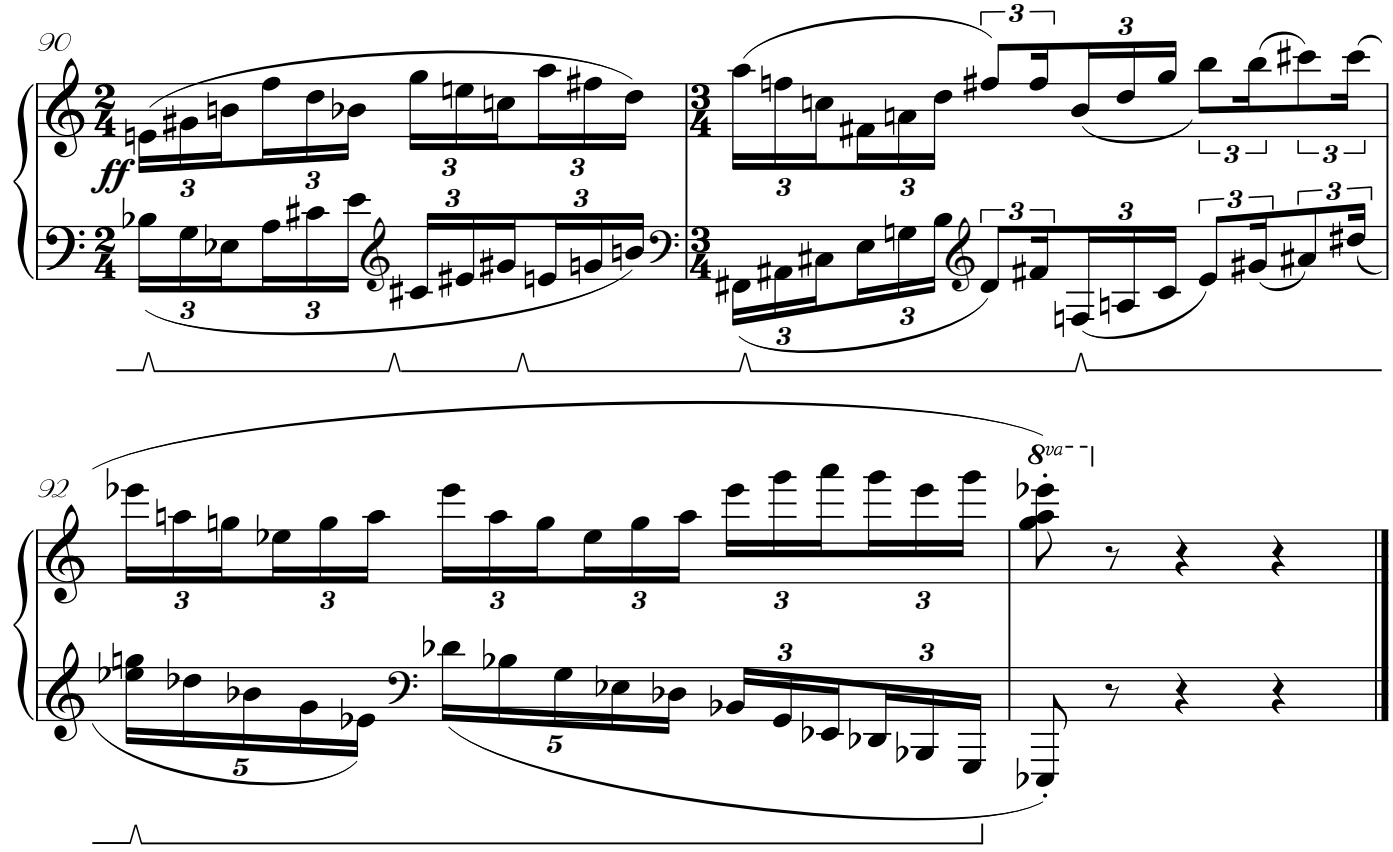



14
18
8va
21
mf
accel.
24
dancing, tempo 1
27
mf
mf
Ped.
Ped.

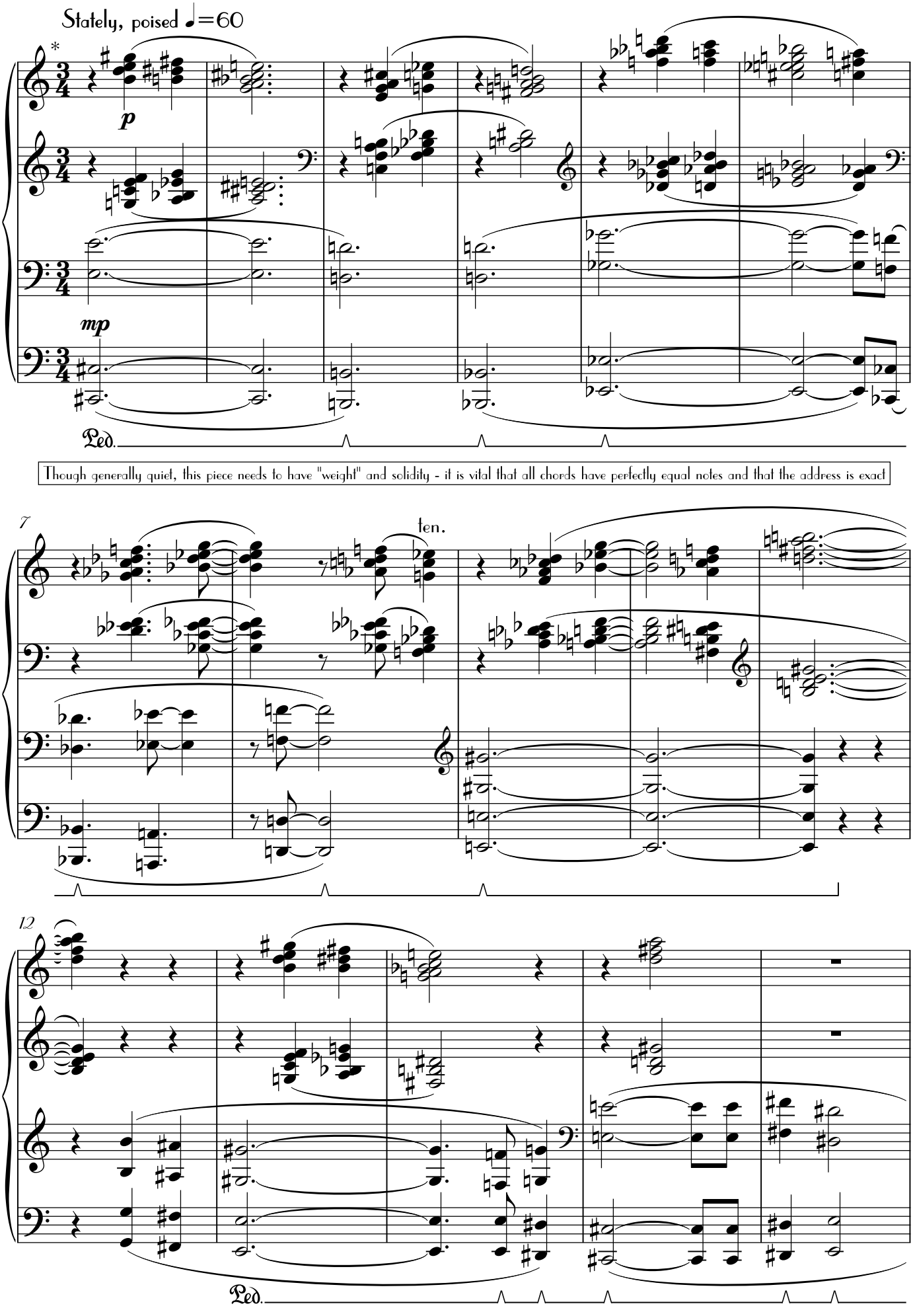

scherzando
31
8va
mp
35
mf
f
mf
39
(still 3+2)
f
mf
f
mf
42
f
molto
With a somewhat awkward eagerness ♩=132
poco accel.
rit.
46
pp
Ped.

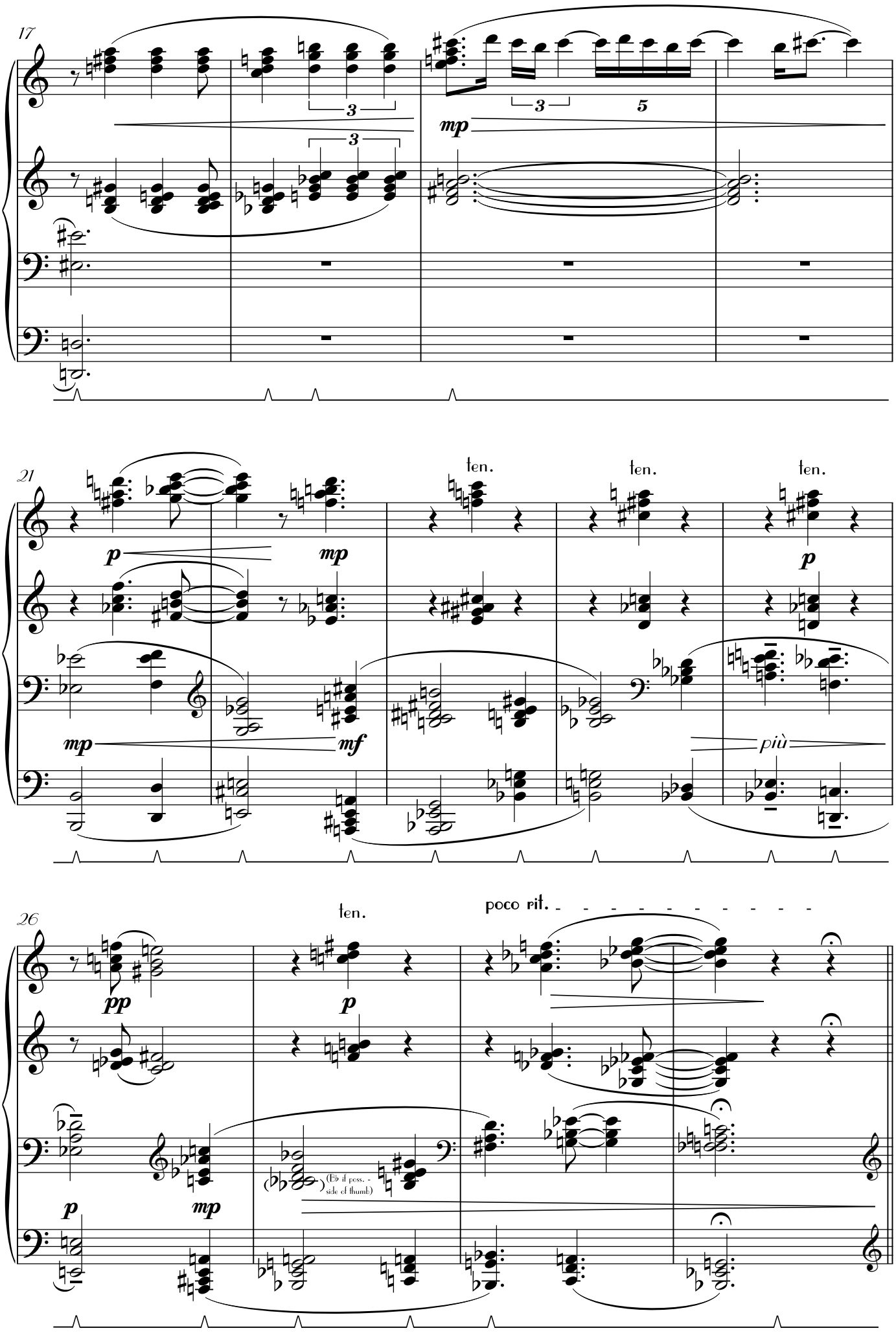

a tempo (♩=132)
50
Ped.
Ped.
poco accel.
rit.
54
phrased, not tied
a little impetuously
pp
Ped.
Ped.
a tempo (♩=132)
59
p
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
63
warmer, hopeful
mp
Ped.
less, disappointed
rit.
a tempo (♩=132)
more resolved
67
p
mp
Ped.

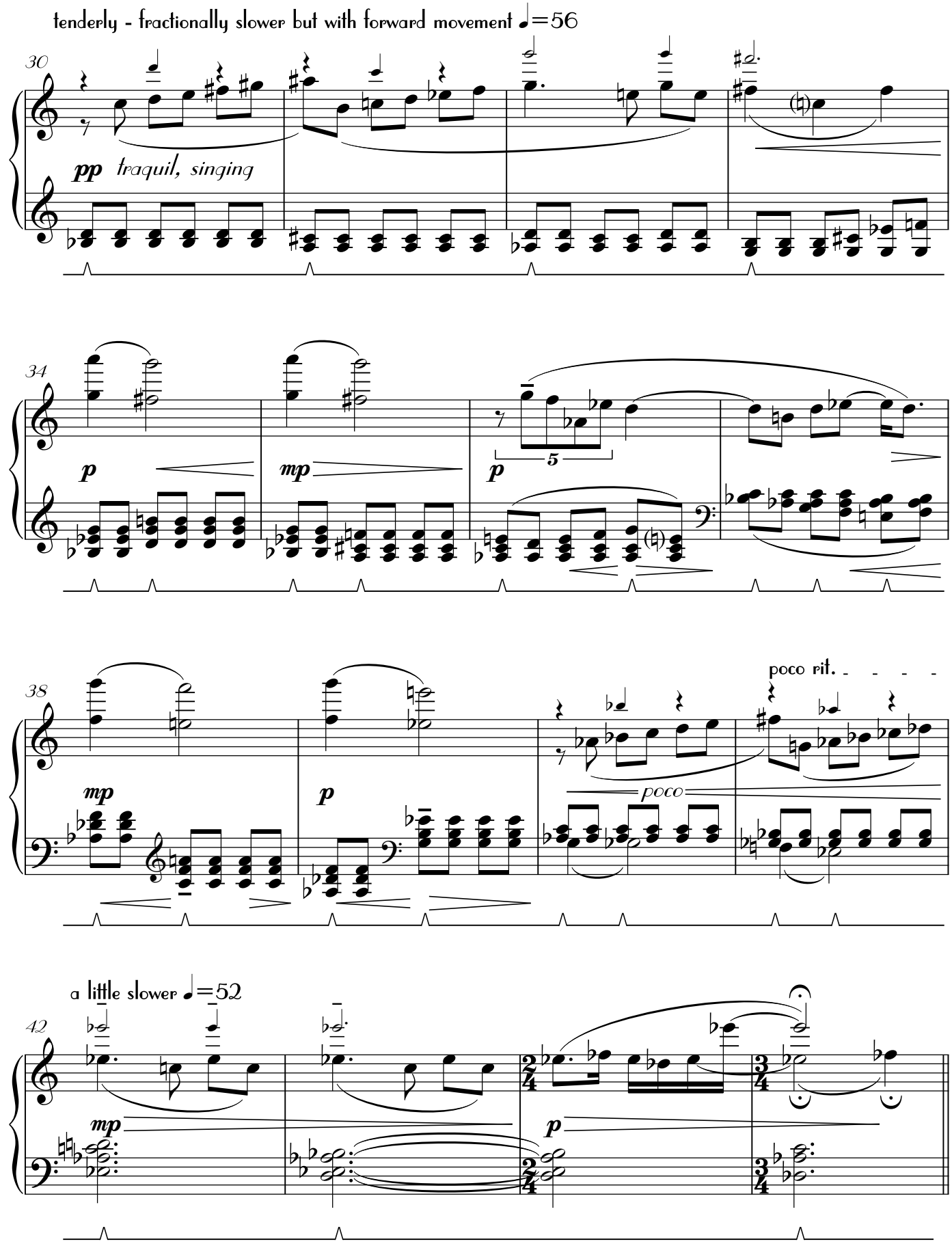

(non trem.)
70
mf
mf
f
Ped.
Tempo 1 - scherzando, dainty ♩=88
8va
74
mp
f
Ped.
8va
78
mp
5:6
mf
83
87
f
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

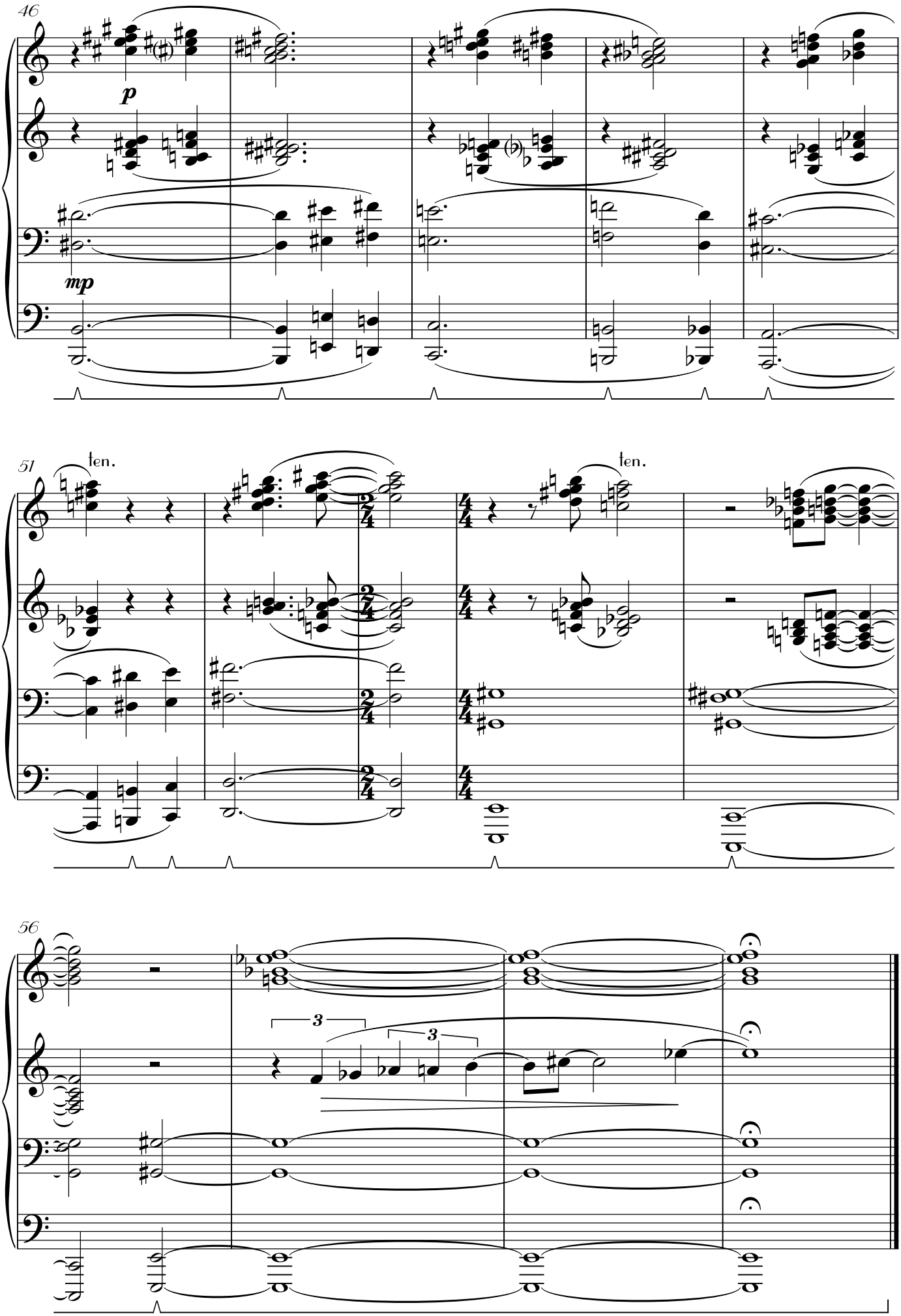

90
ff
92
8va

Imagined Bouquet from Antonin Proust




17
3
3
3
5
mp
21
ten.
ten.
ten.
p
mp
mp
mf
più
26
ten.
poco rit.
pp
p
p
mp
(Eb if poss. - side of thumb)


tenderly - fractionally slower but with forward movement ♩=56
30
pp tranquil, singing
34
p
mp
p
5
38
mp
p
poco
poco rit.
a little slower ♩=52
42
mp
p


46
p
mp
51
ten.
ten.
56
3
3

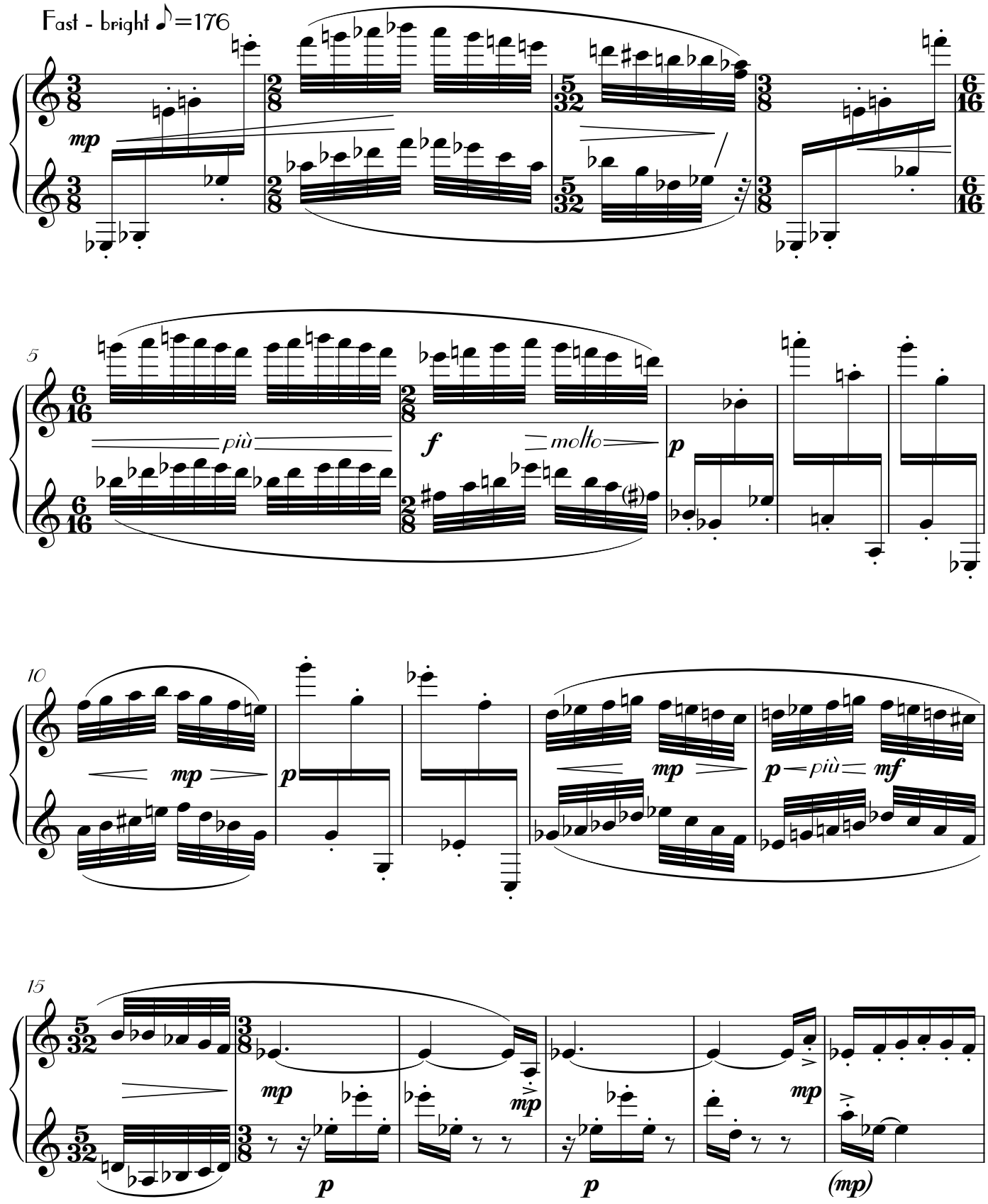
Dandelions in flower and in seed

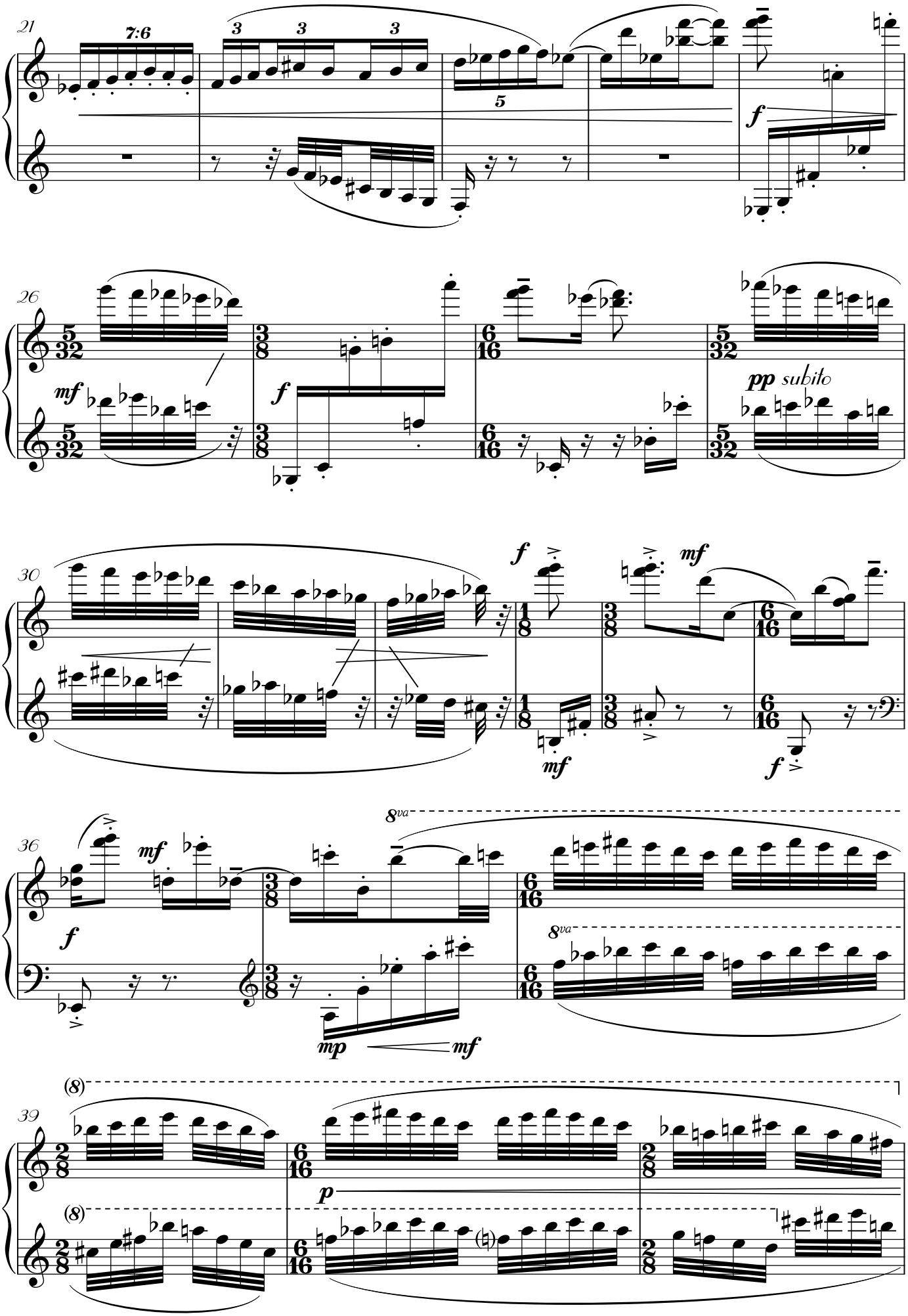
Marcelle Seabourne

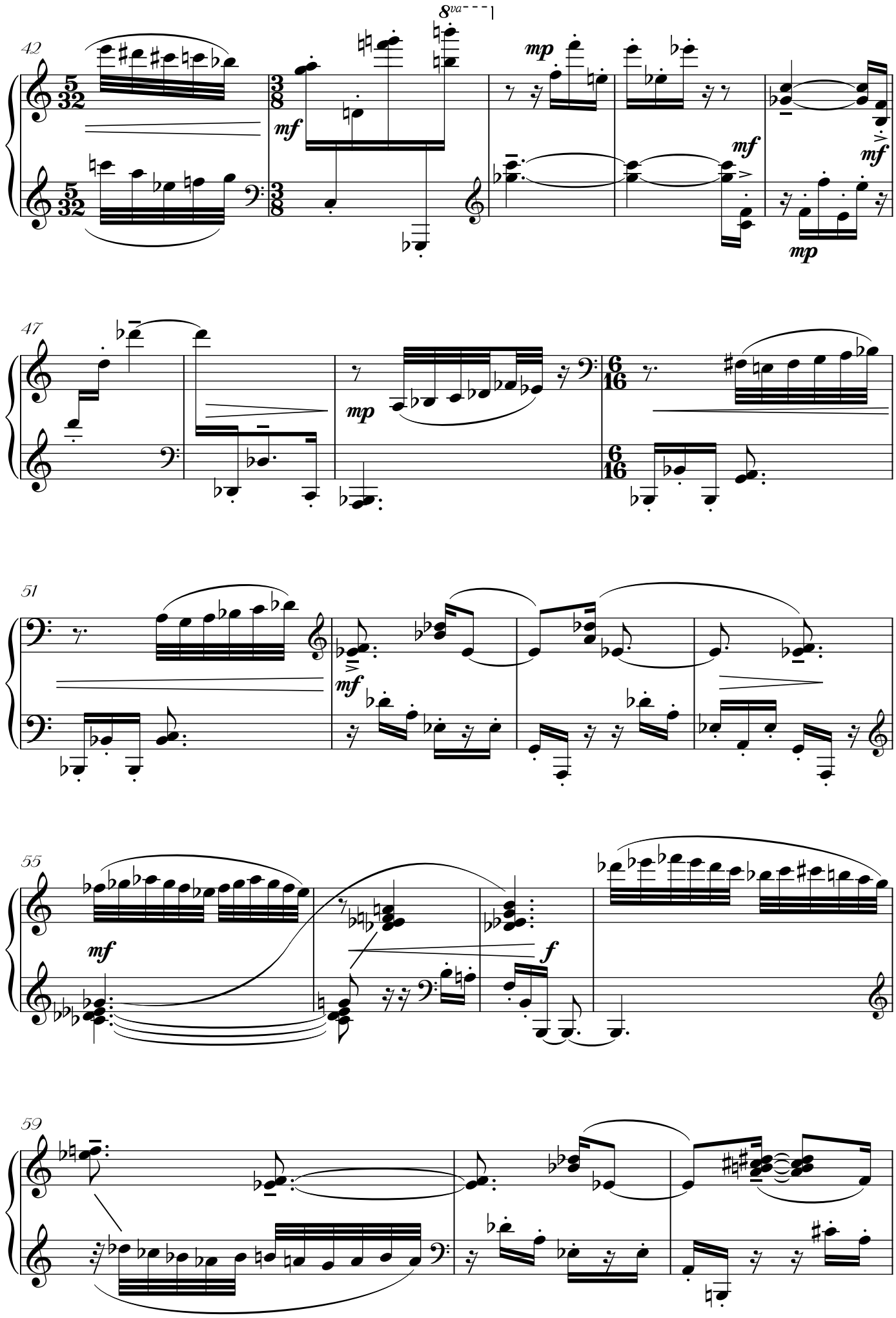
(watercolour and gouche)

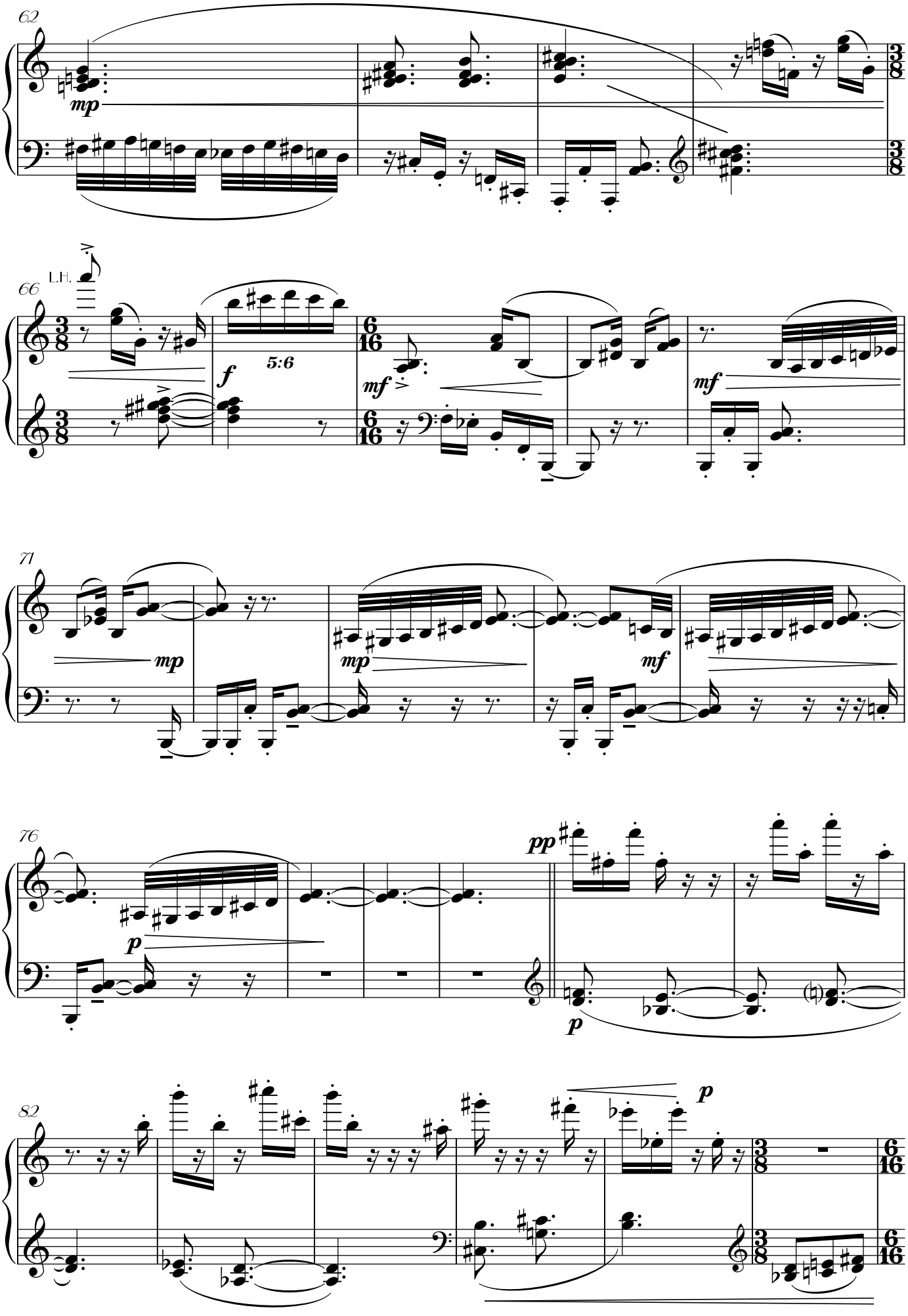
Dandelions in flower and in seed

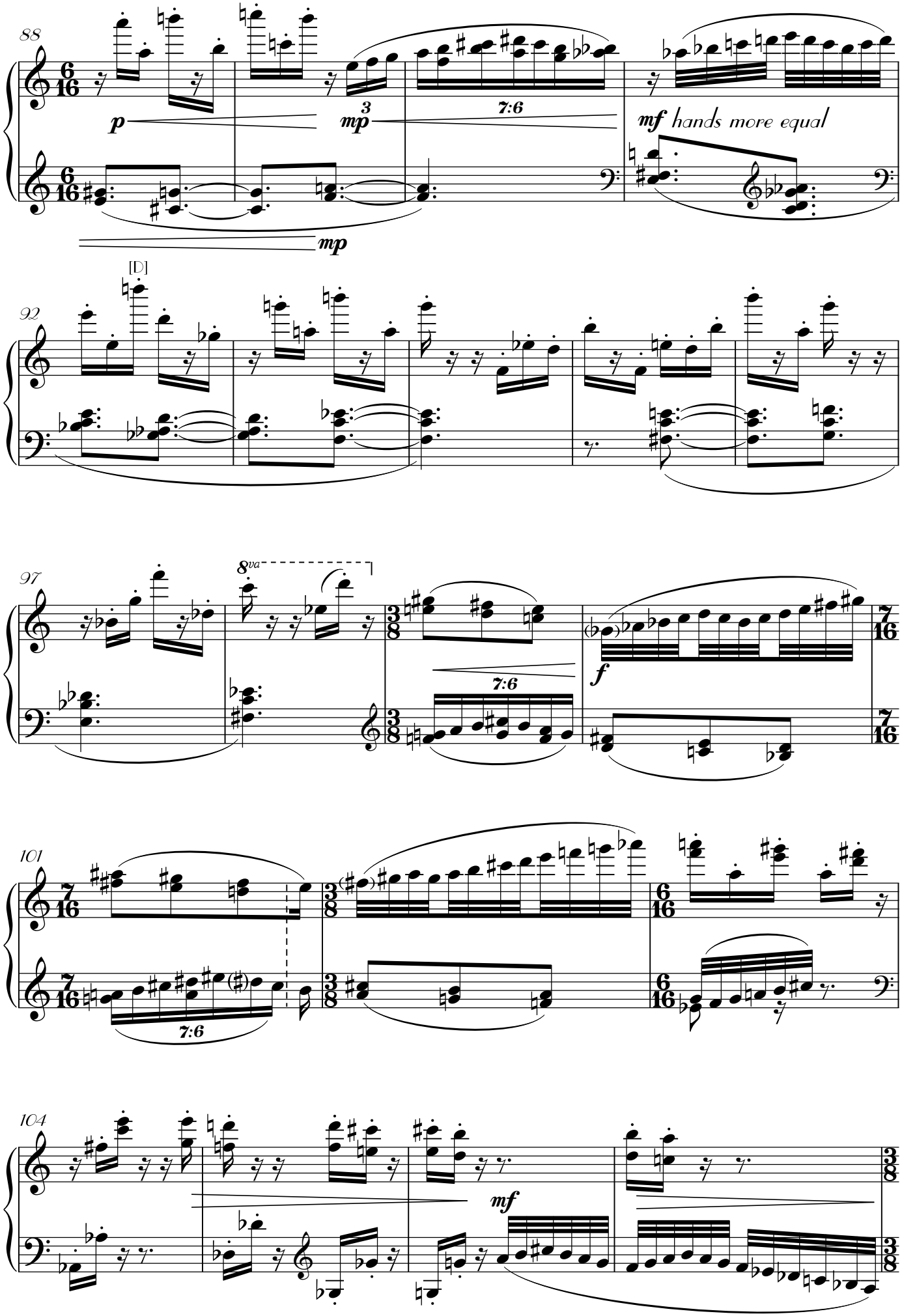
(any way the wind blows)

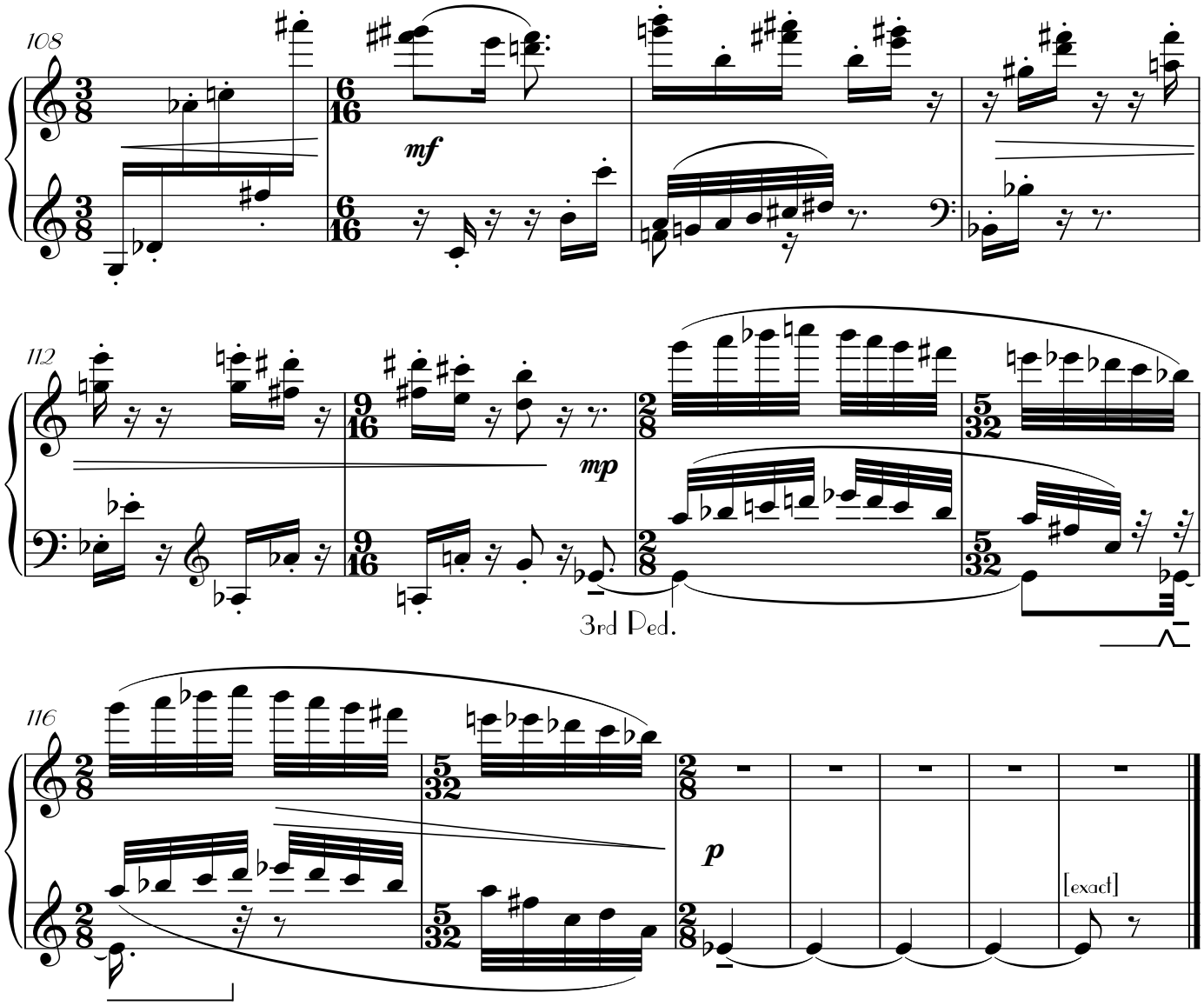



21
7:6
3
3
3
5
f
26
mf
f
pp subito
30
f
mf
mf
f
36
mf
f
8va
8va
mp
mf
39
(8)
(8)
p


42
8va
mf
mp
mf
mf
mp
47
mp
6/16
6/16
51
mf
55
mf
f
59

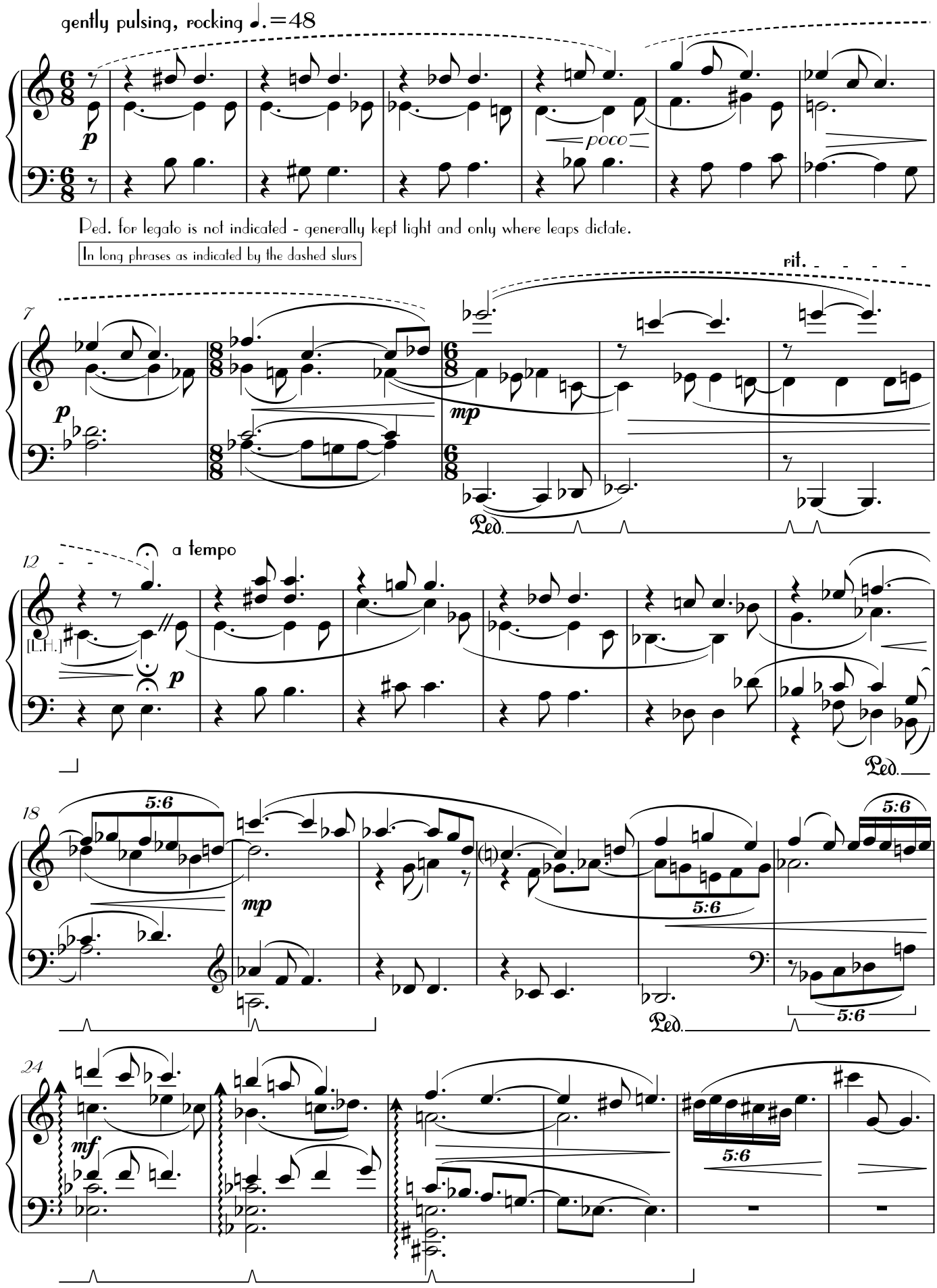

62
mp
66
L.H.
f
5:6
mf
mf
71
mp
mp
mf
76
p
pp
p
82
p


88
p
3
mp
7:6
mf hands more equal
mp
[D]
92
97
8va
7:6
f
101
7:6
104
mf

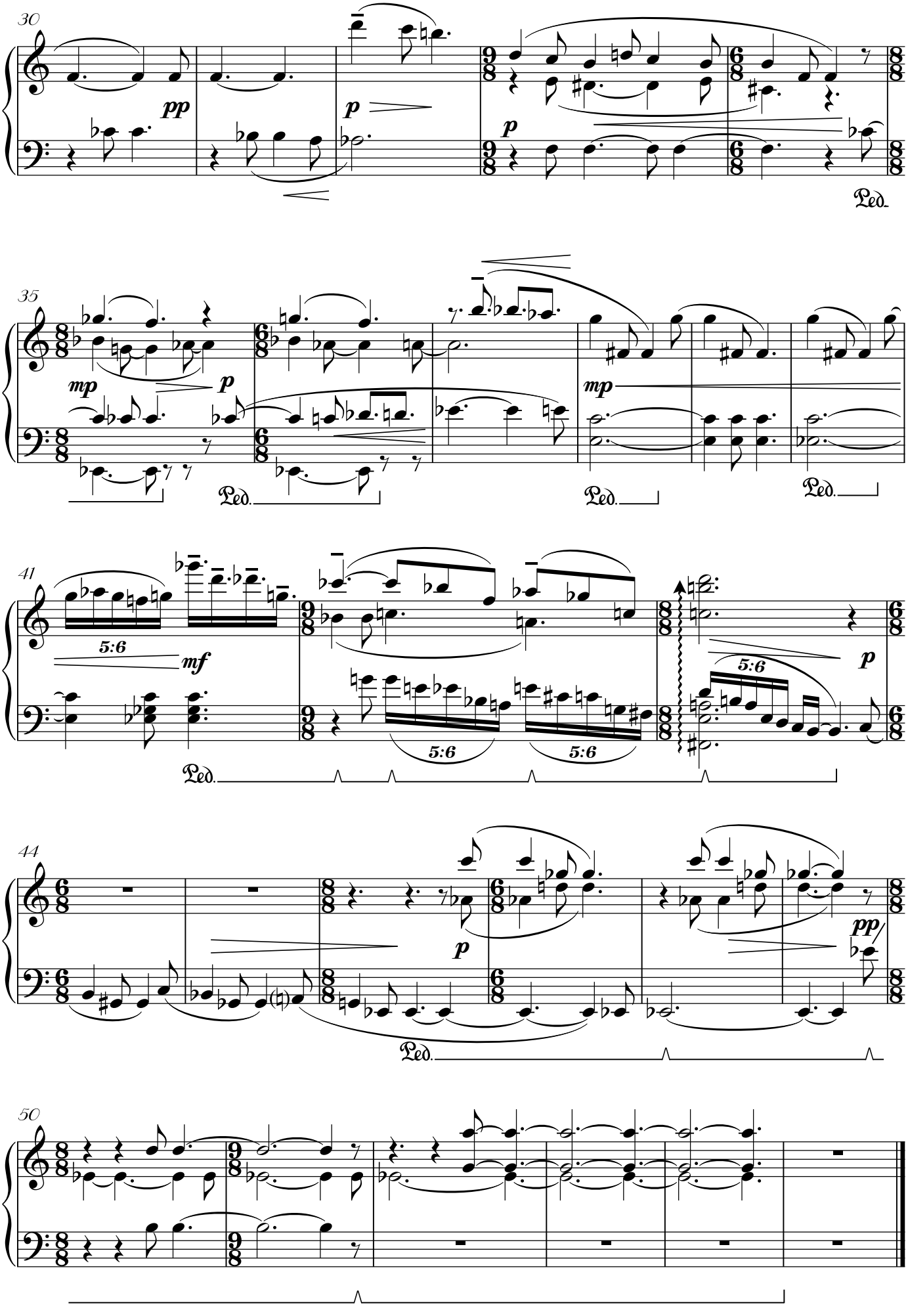

108
mf
112
mp
3rd Ped.
116
p
[exact]

Imagined Bouquet from Stéphane Mallarmé

(…il suffit qu'à tes lèvres j'emprunte
*Le souffle de mon nom murmuré tout un soir. *)*



*Sonnet: 'Pour votre chère morte, son ami…' inscribed "pour votre chère morte, son ami" - 2 November 1877 (the woman unknown, another's name murmured herein).


30
pp
p
p
Ped.
35
mp
p
Ped.
Ped.
mp
Ped.
41
5:6
mf
5:6
5:6
p
Ped.
44
p
pp
Ped.
50

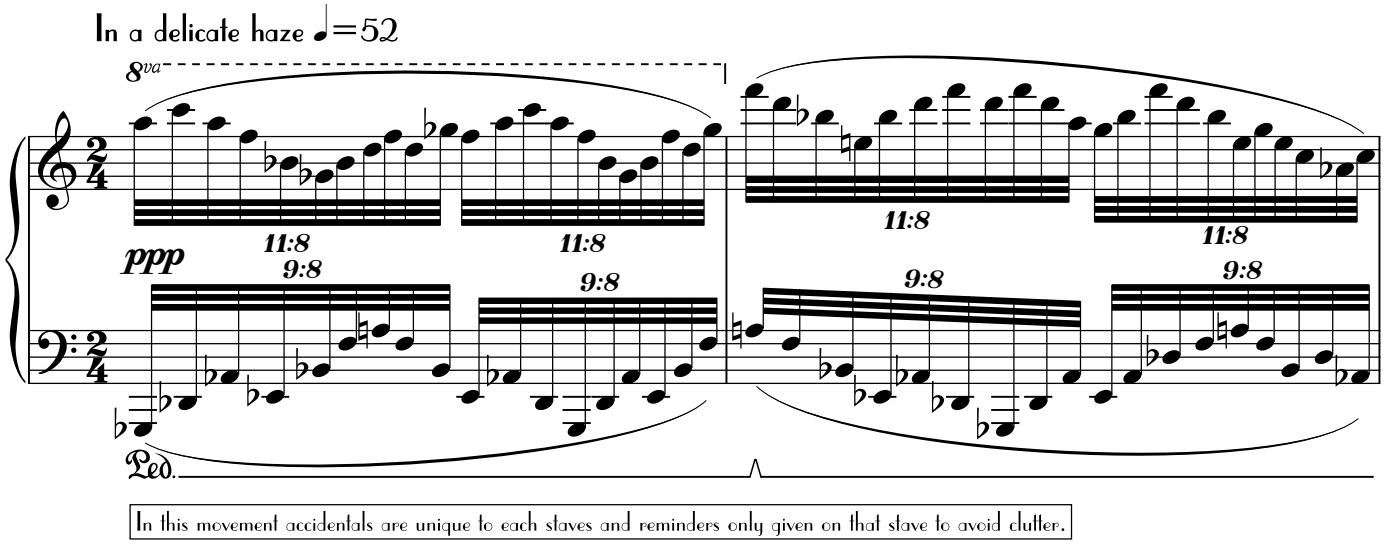
Delphinium

Marcelle Seabourne

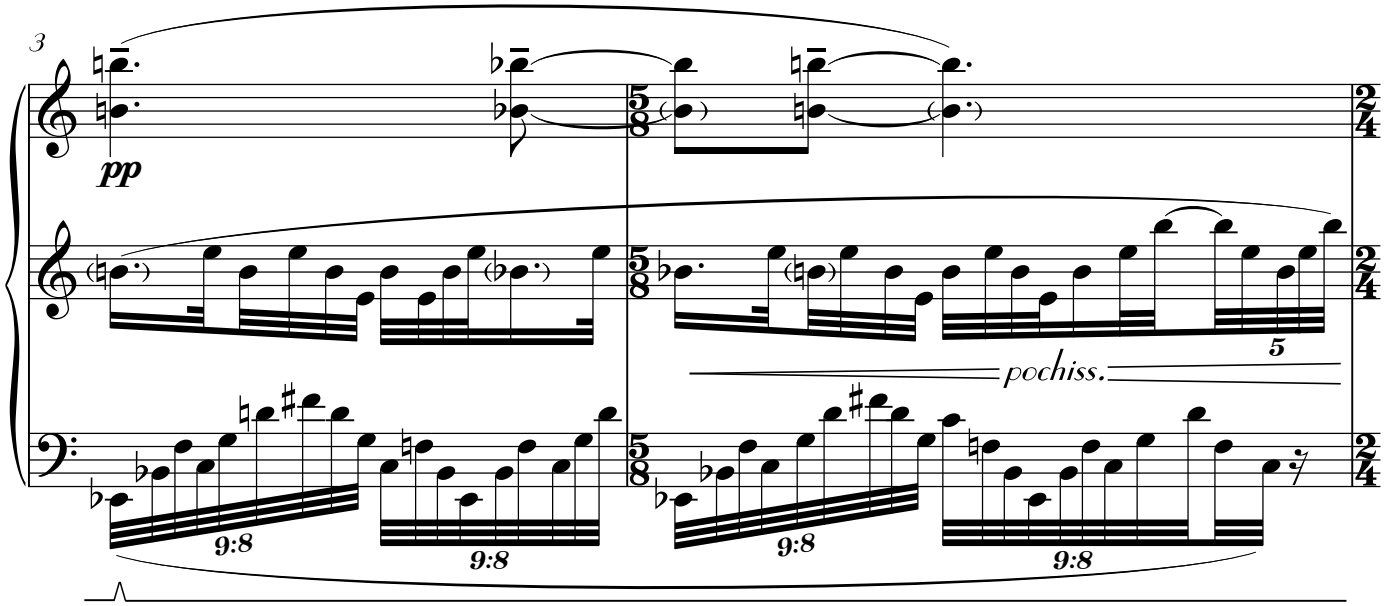
(watercolour and gouche)

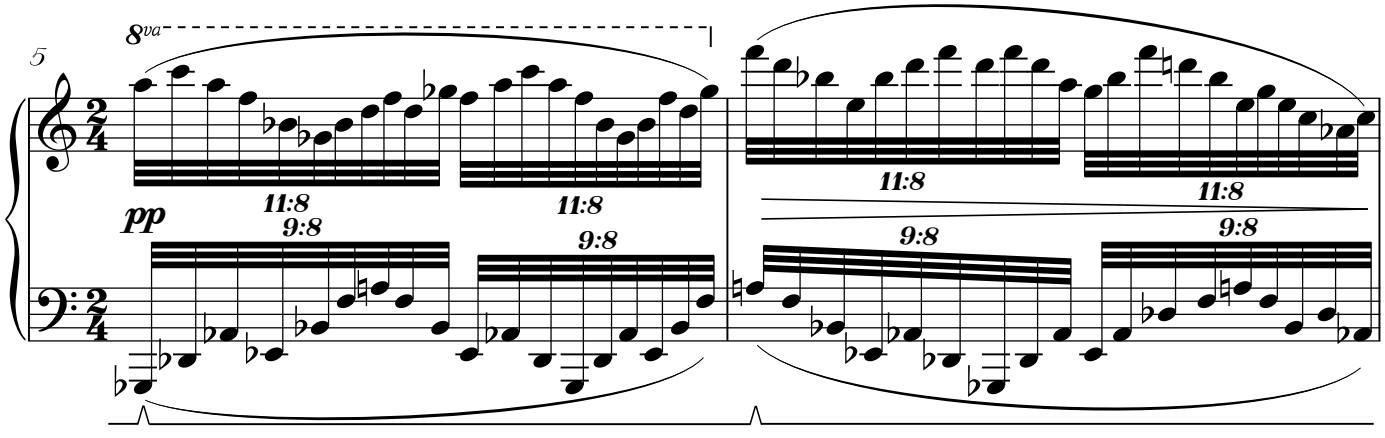
Delphinium

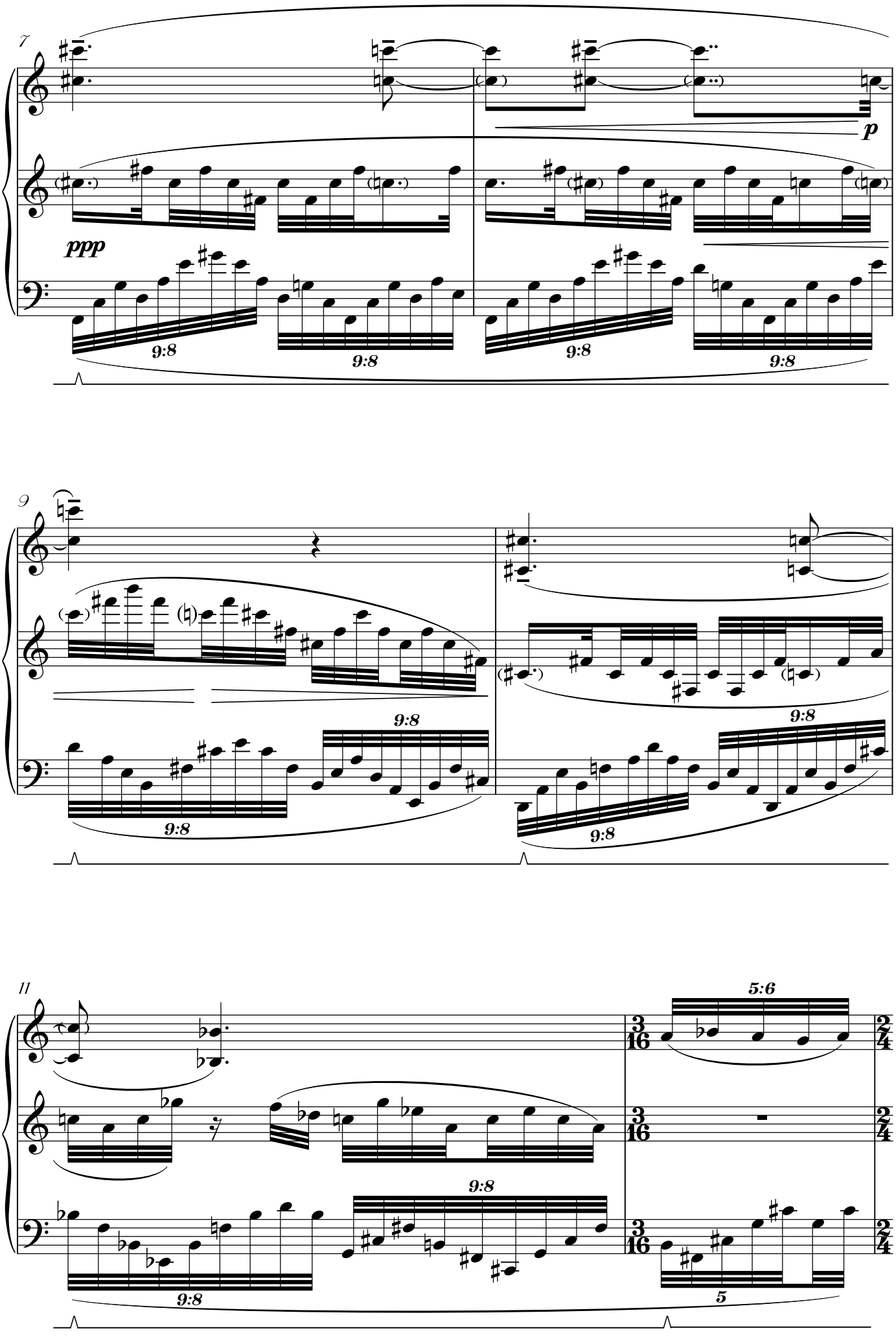
(nothing can restrain this heart)

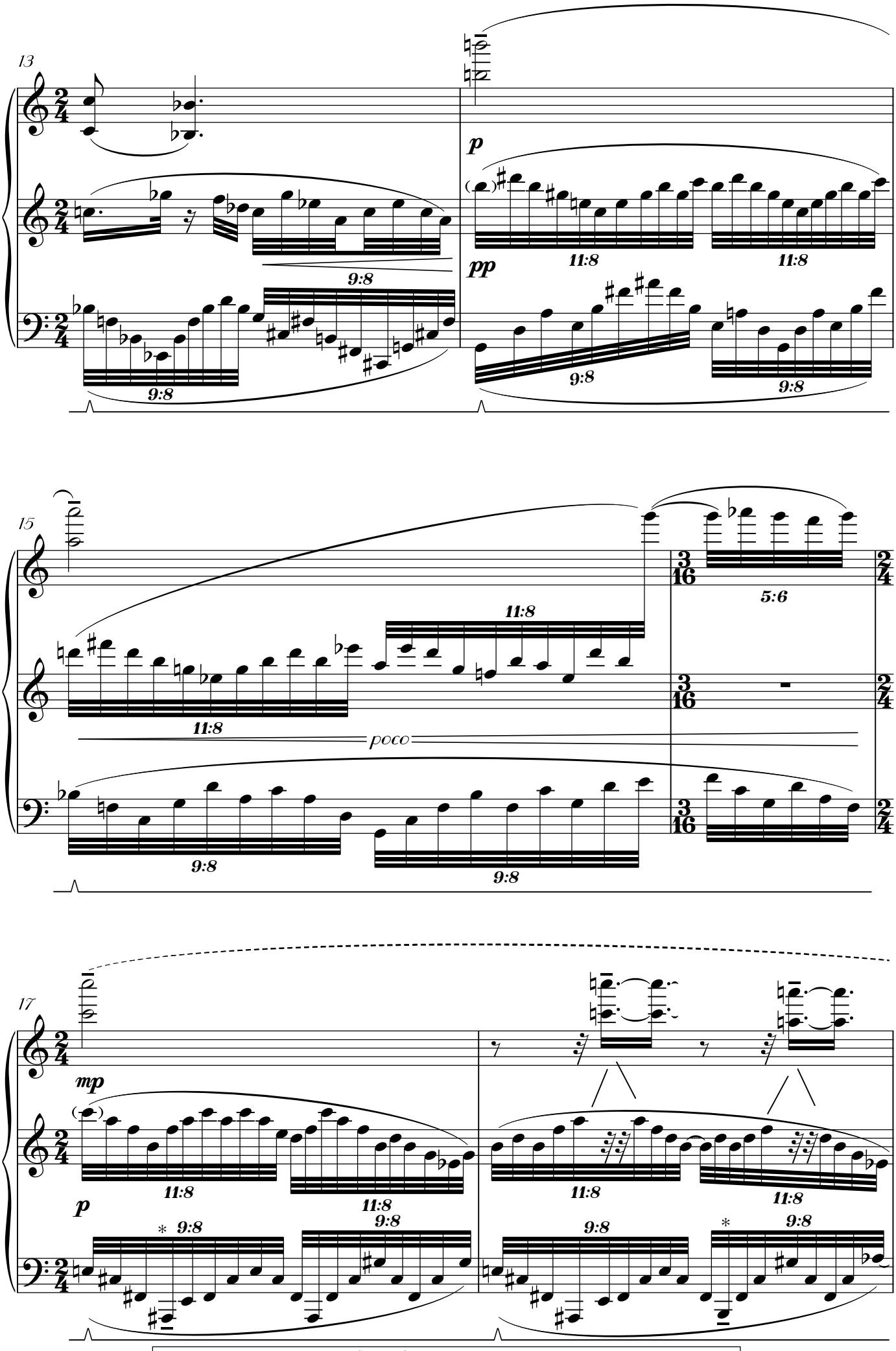


In this movement accidentals are unique to each staves and reminders only given on that stave to avoid clutter.

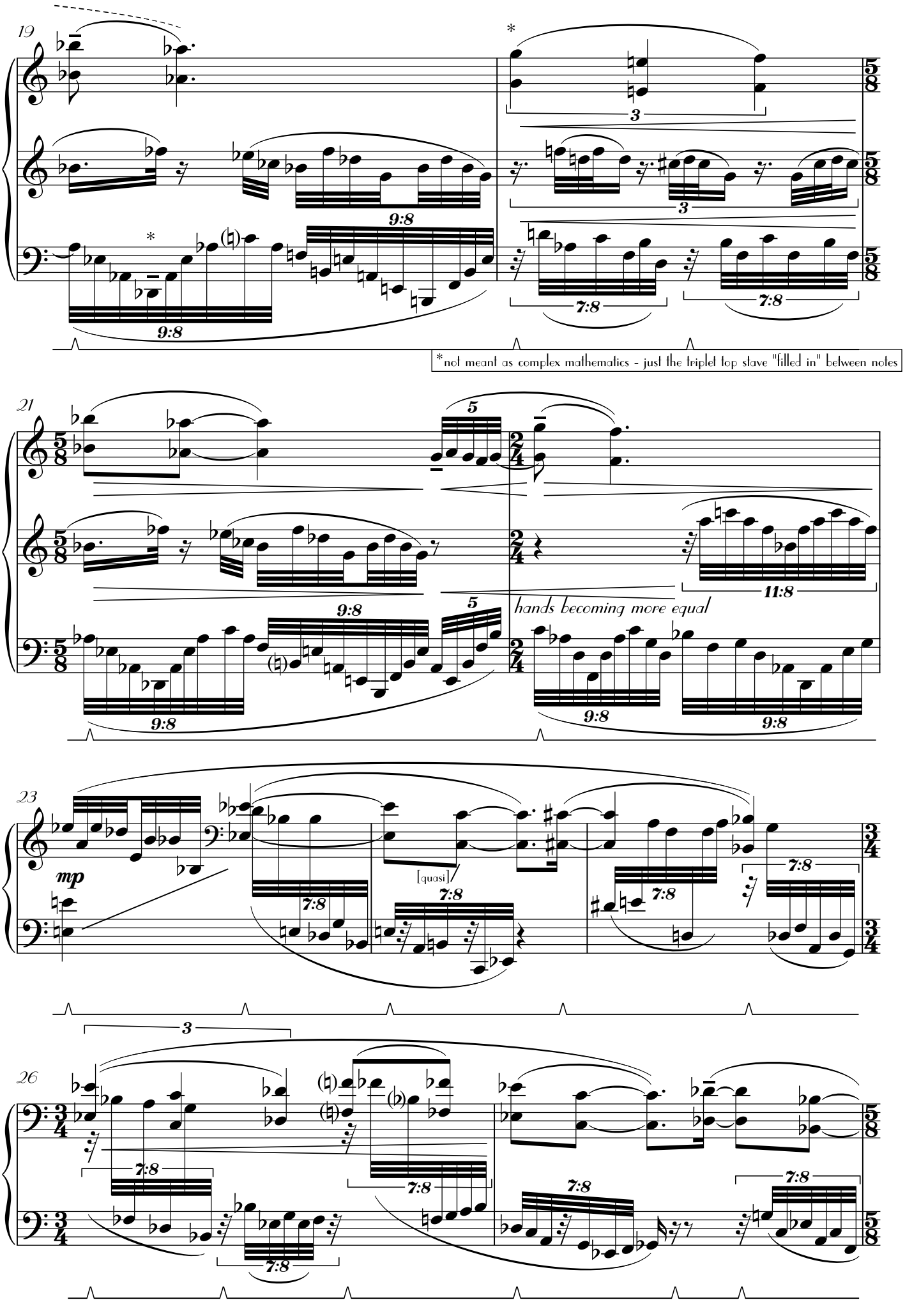


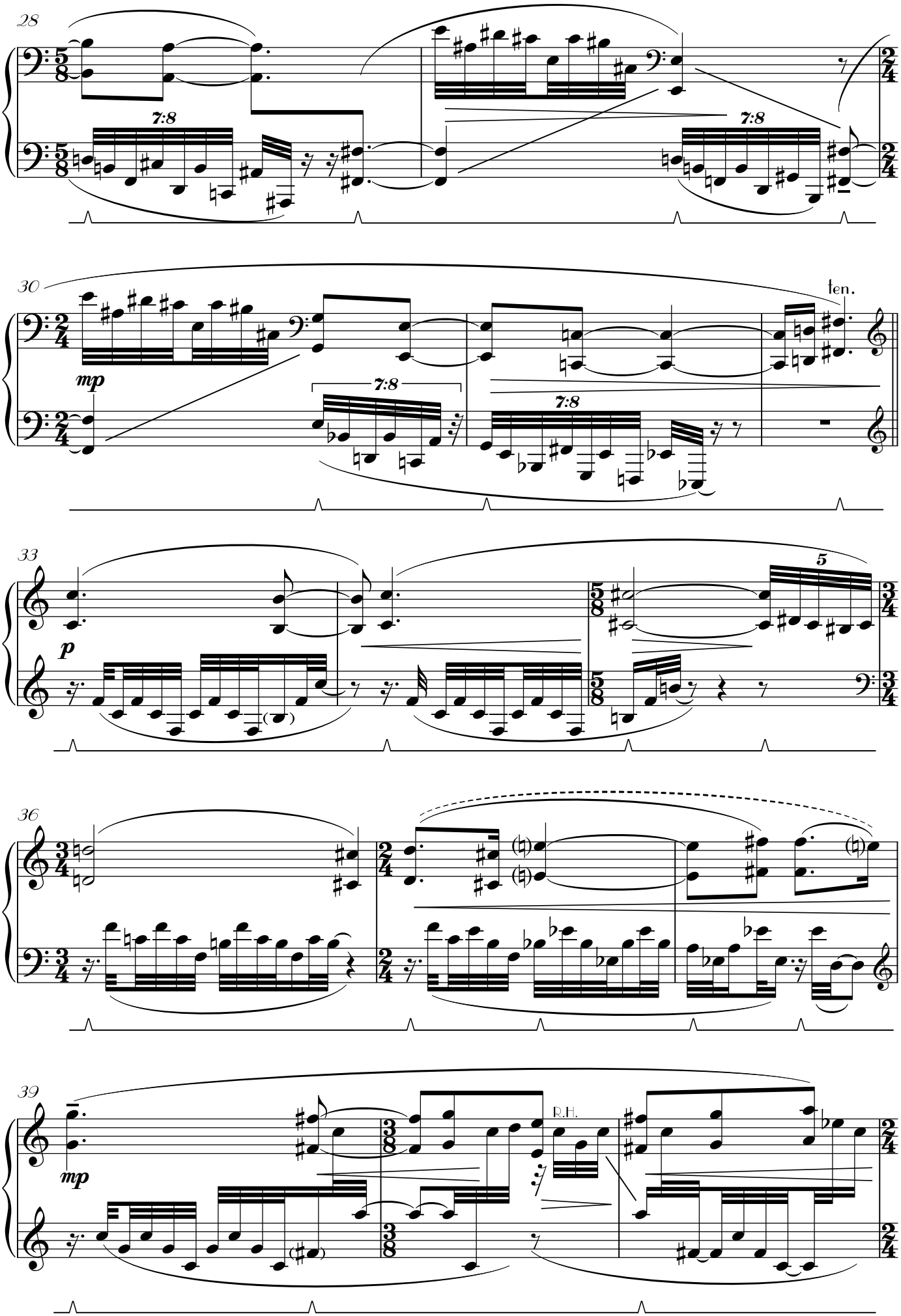


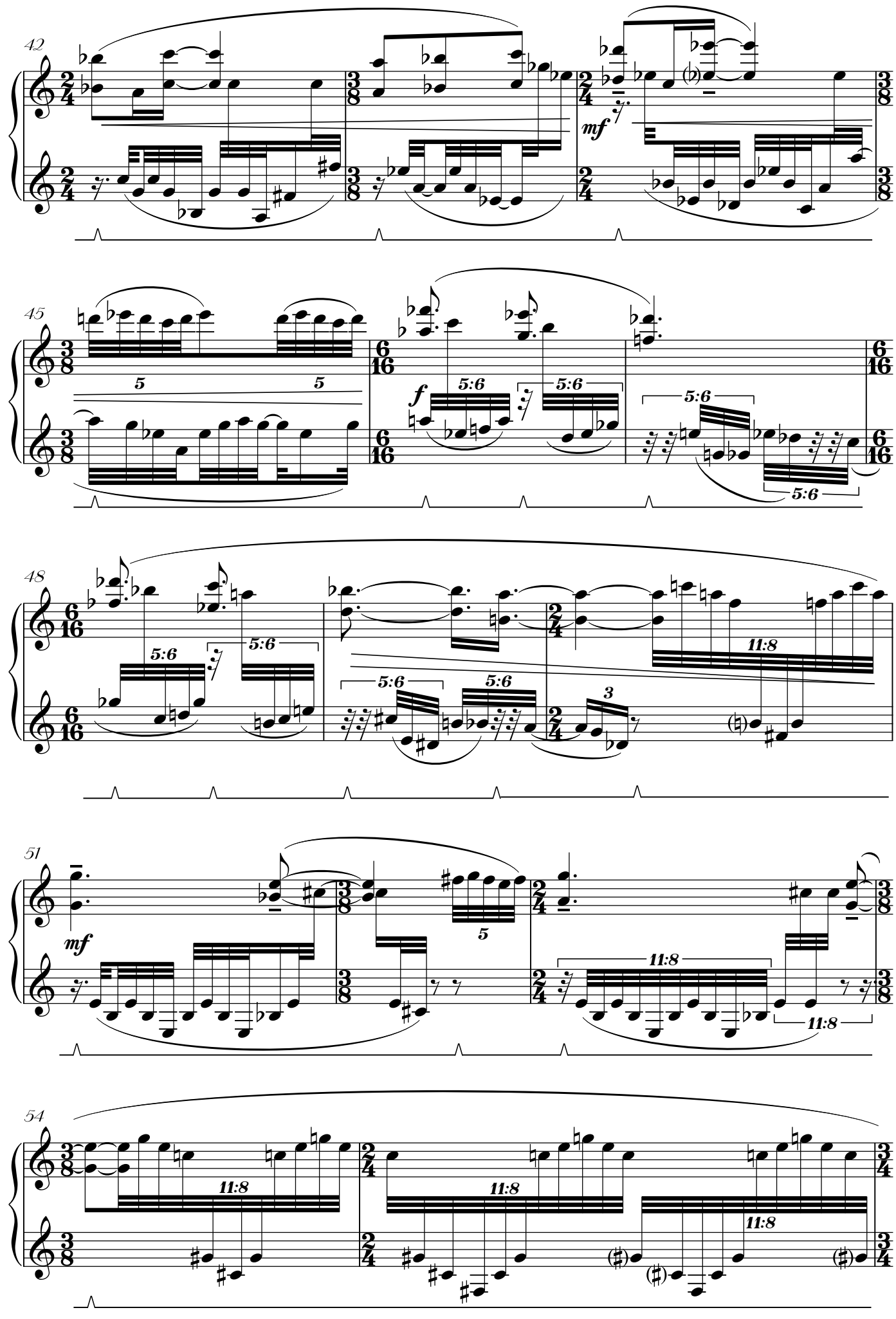

7
ppp
p
9:8
9:8
9:8
9:8
9
9:8
9:8
9:8
9:8
11
5:6
9:8
9:8
5
3
16
2
4

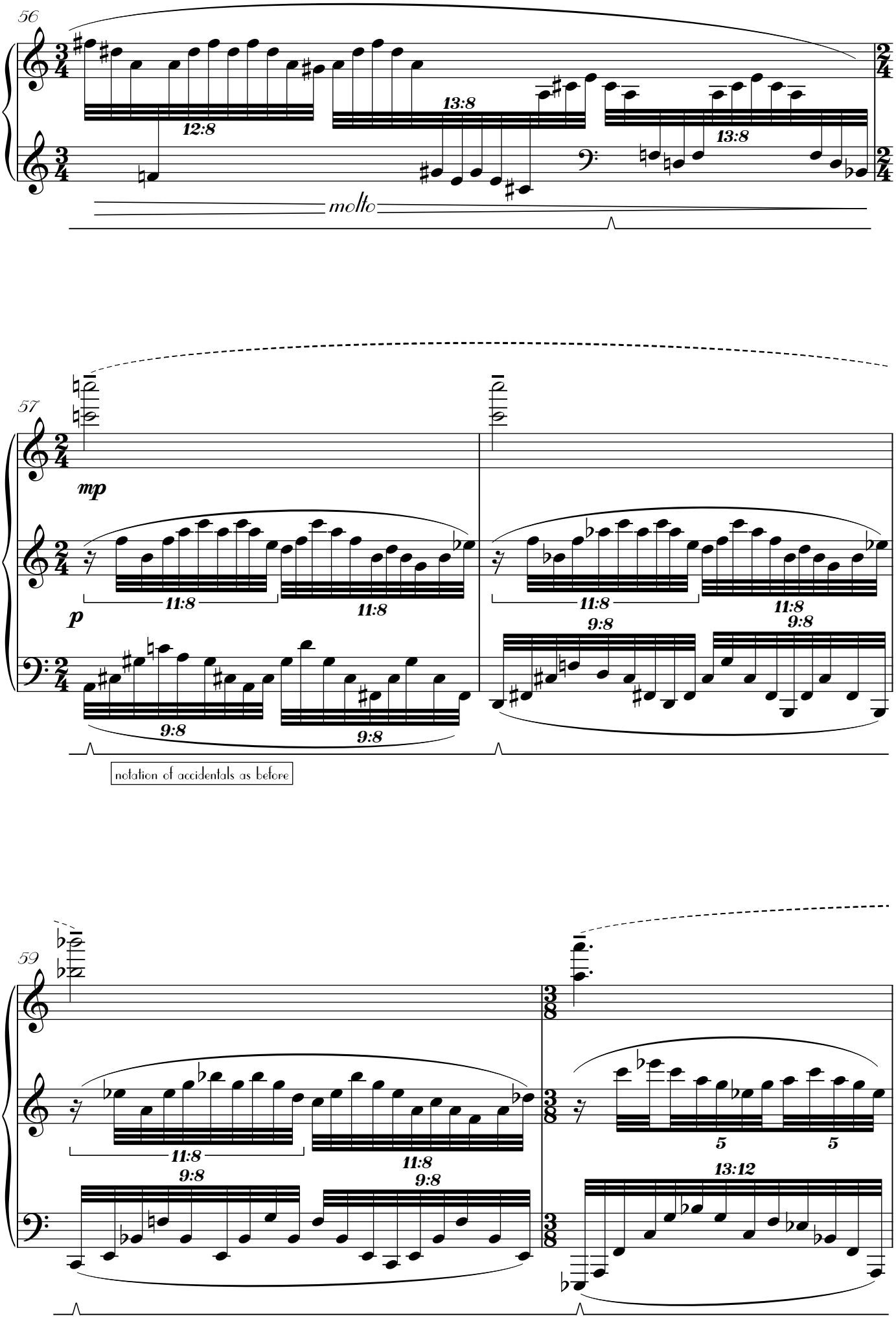


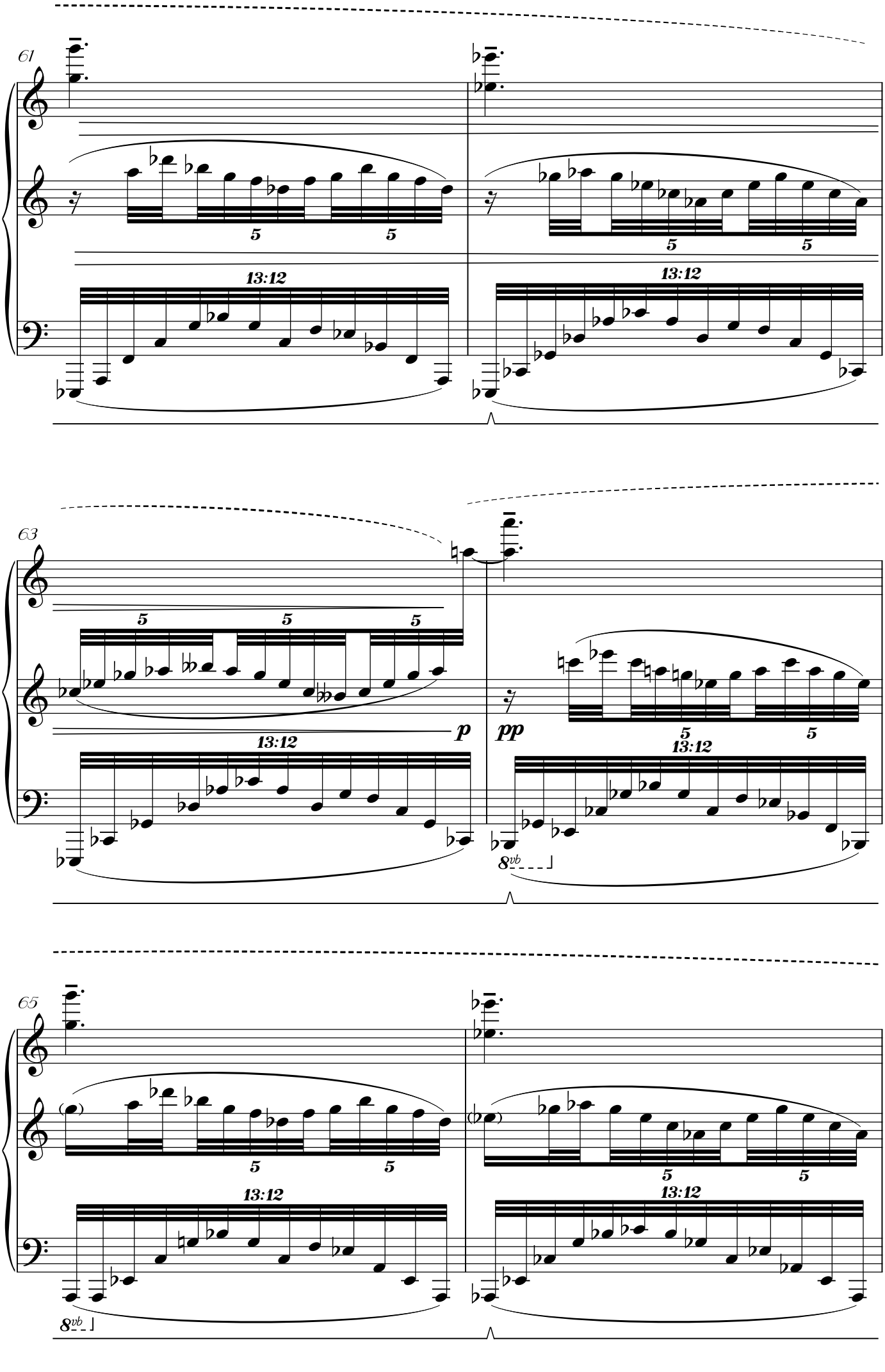
b.17-19 tenuti just indicates a slight feeling of a bass progression - not held note, and not too pronounced

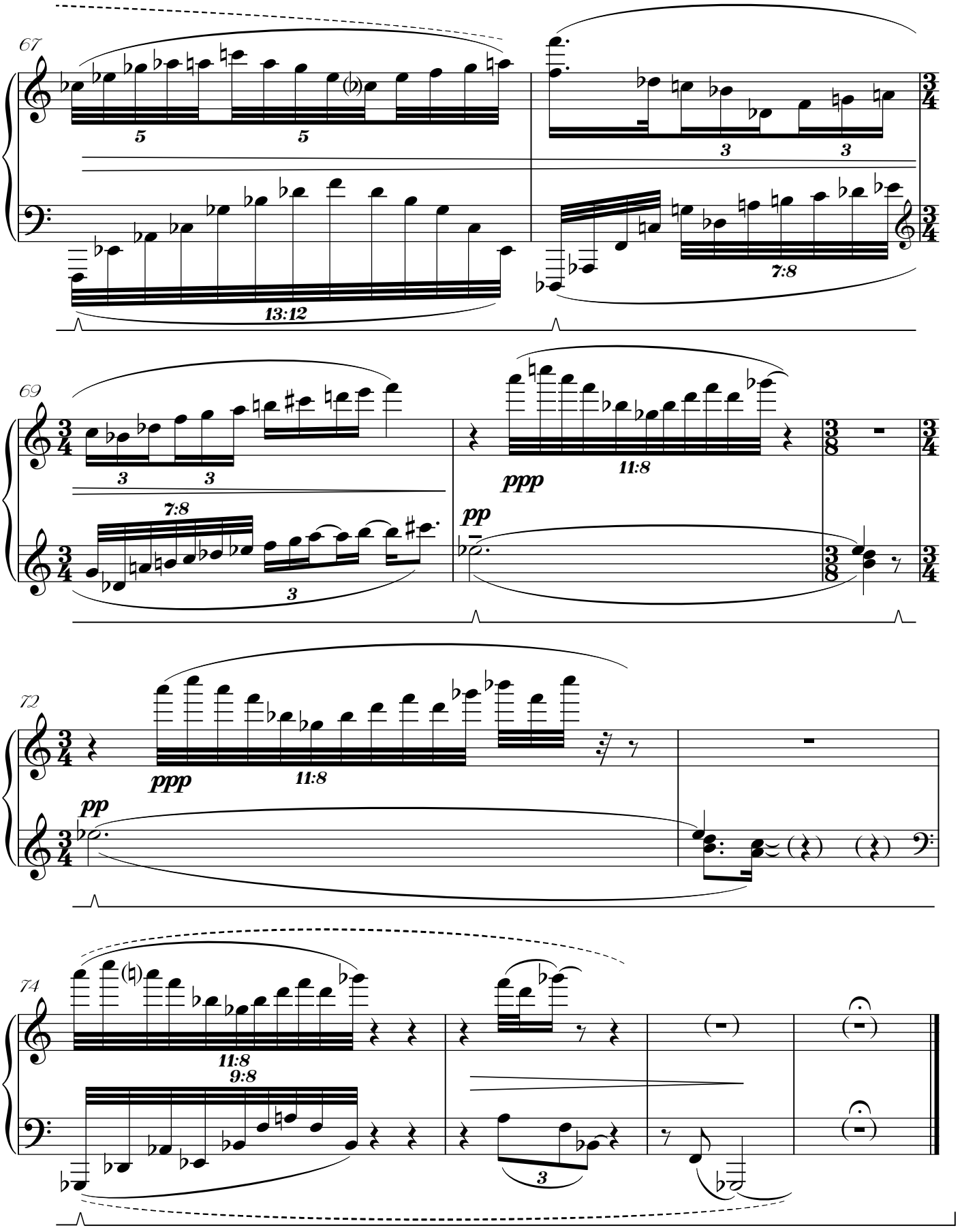

19
21
23
26
*not meant as complex mathematics - just the triplet top stave "filled in" between notes
hands becoming more equal
mp
[quasi]


28
7:8
7:8
30
mp
7:8
7:8
ten.
33
p
5
36
39
mp
R.H.

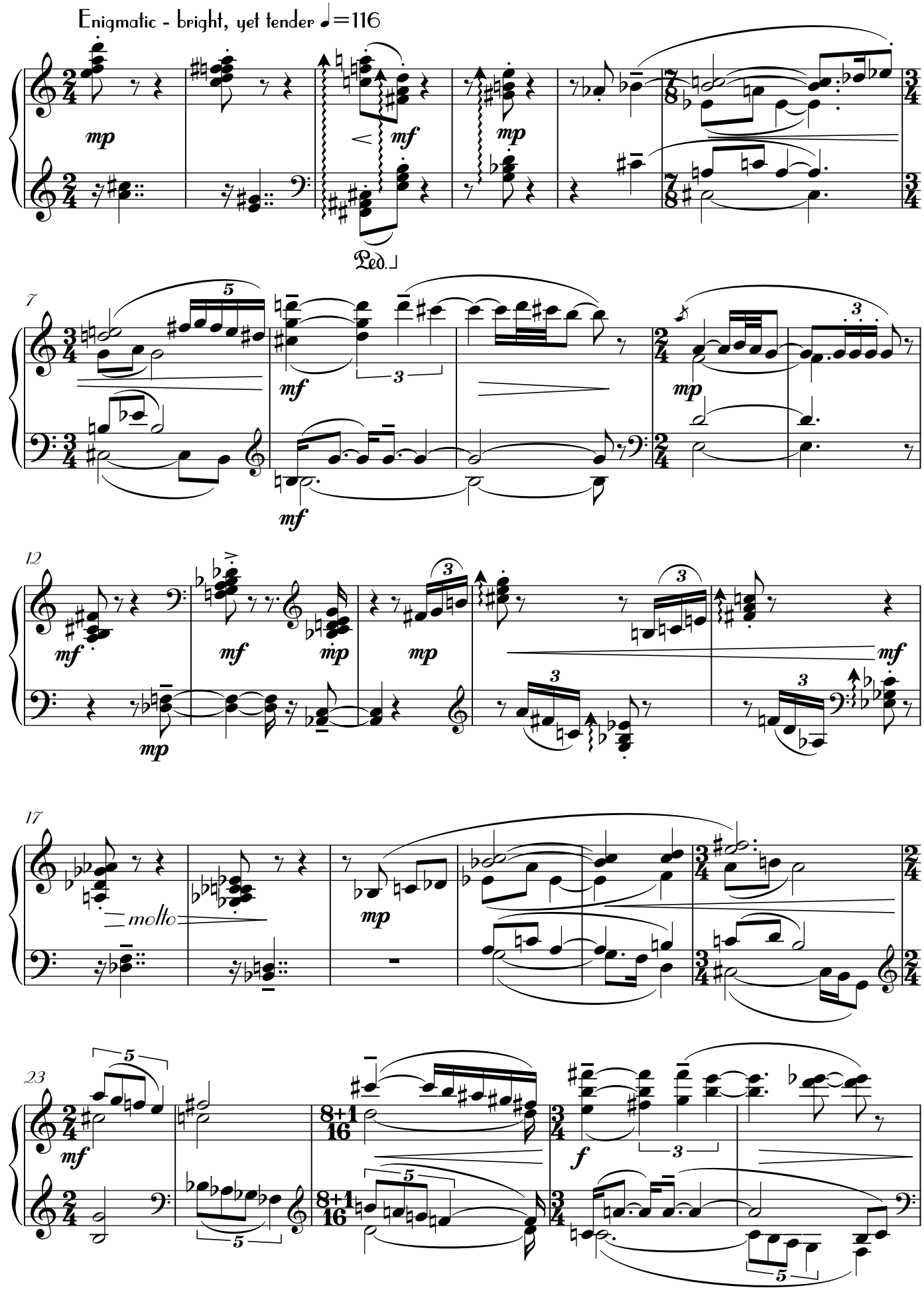

42
mf
45
5
5
f
5:6
5:6
5:6
5:6
48
5:6
5:6
5:6
5:6
11:8
3
51
mf
5
11:8
11:8
54
11:8
11:8
11:8

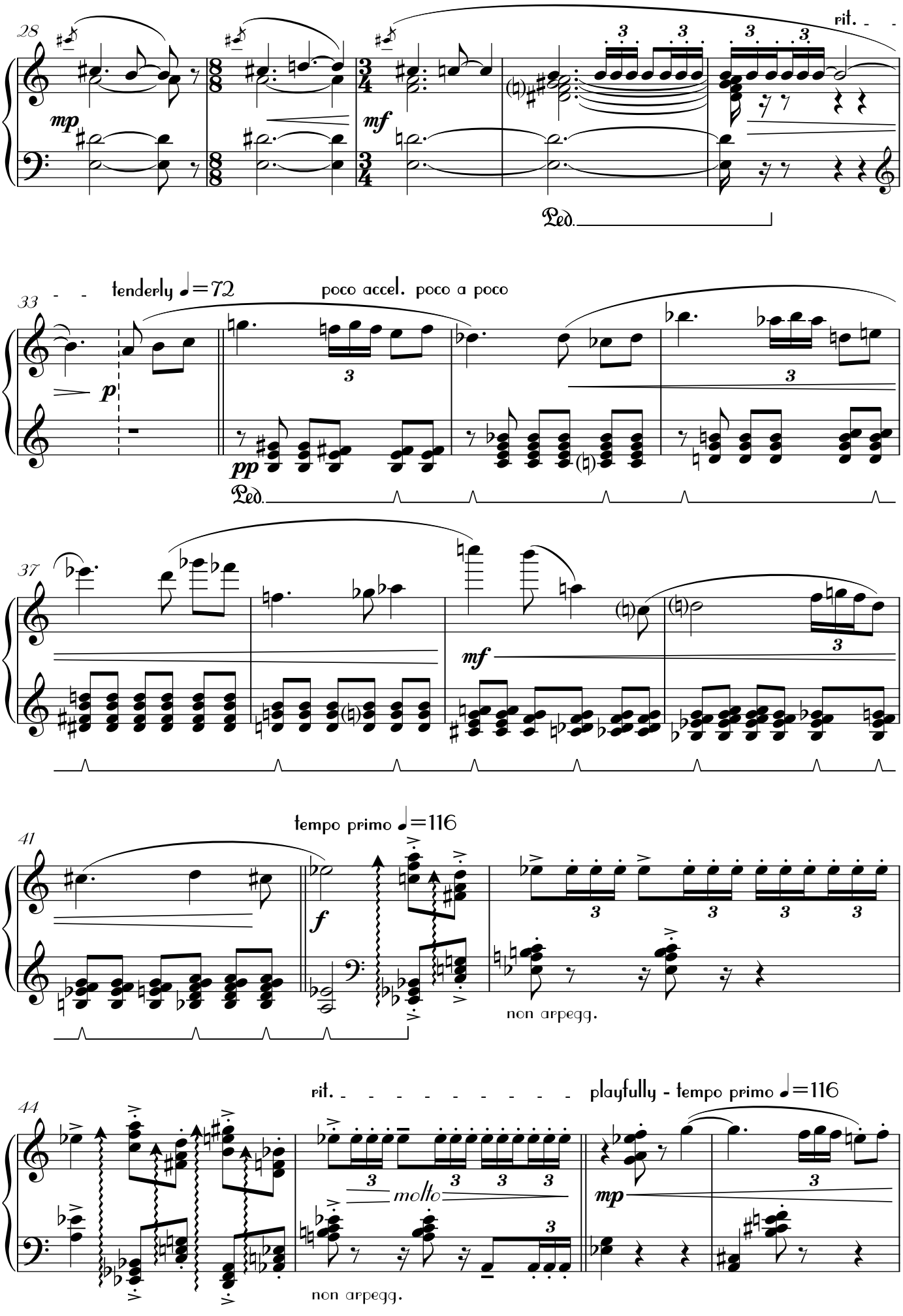

56
12:8
13:8
13:8
molto
57
mp
p
11:8
11:8
11:8
11:8
9:8
9:8
9:8
9:8
notation of accidentals as before
59
11:8
11:8
9:8
9:8
5
5
13:12

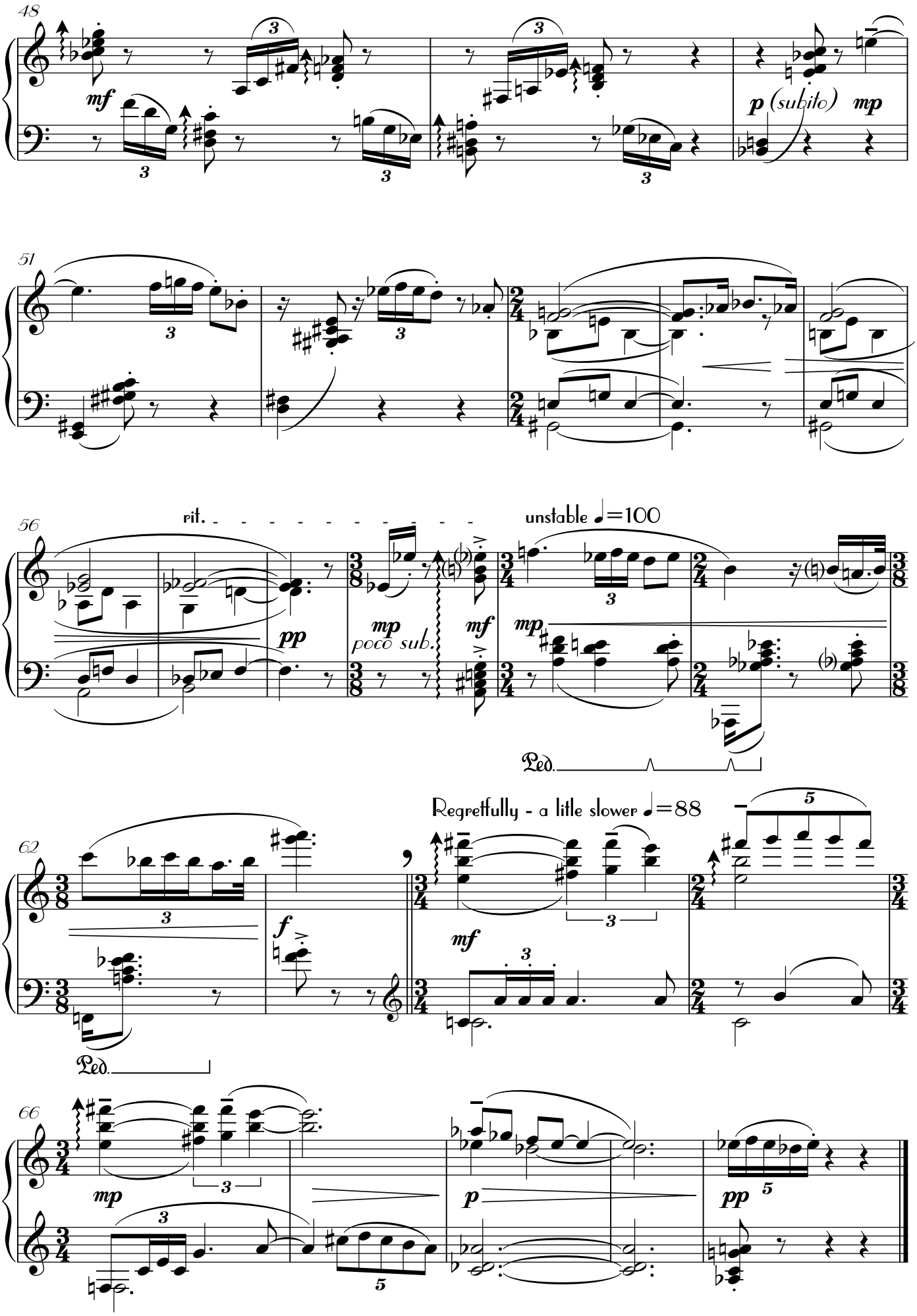

61
5
5
13:12
13:12
63
5
5
5
p
pp
13:12
13:12
8vb
65
5
5
13:12
13:12
8vb


67
5
5
13:12
3
3
7:8
69
3
3
7:8
3
ppp
11:8
pp
72
ppp
11:8
pp
74
11:8
9:8
3

Imagined Bouquet from Victorine Meurent




28
rit.
mp
mf
Ped.
33
tenderly ♩=72
poco accel. poco a poco
p
pp
Ped.
37
mf
41
tempo primo ♩=116
f
non arpegg.
44
rit.
playfully - tempo primo ♩=116
molto
mp
non arpegg.


48
mf
p (subito)
mp
51
56
rit.
unstable ♩=100
pp
mp
poco sub.
mf
mp
Ped.
62
Regretfully - a litle slower ♩=88
f
mf
Ped.
66
mp
p
pp

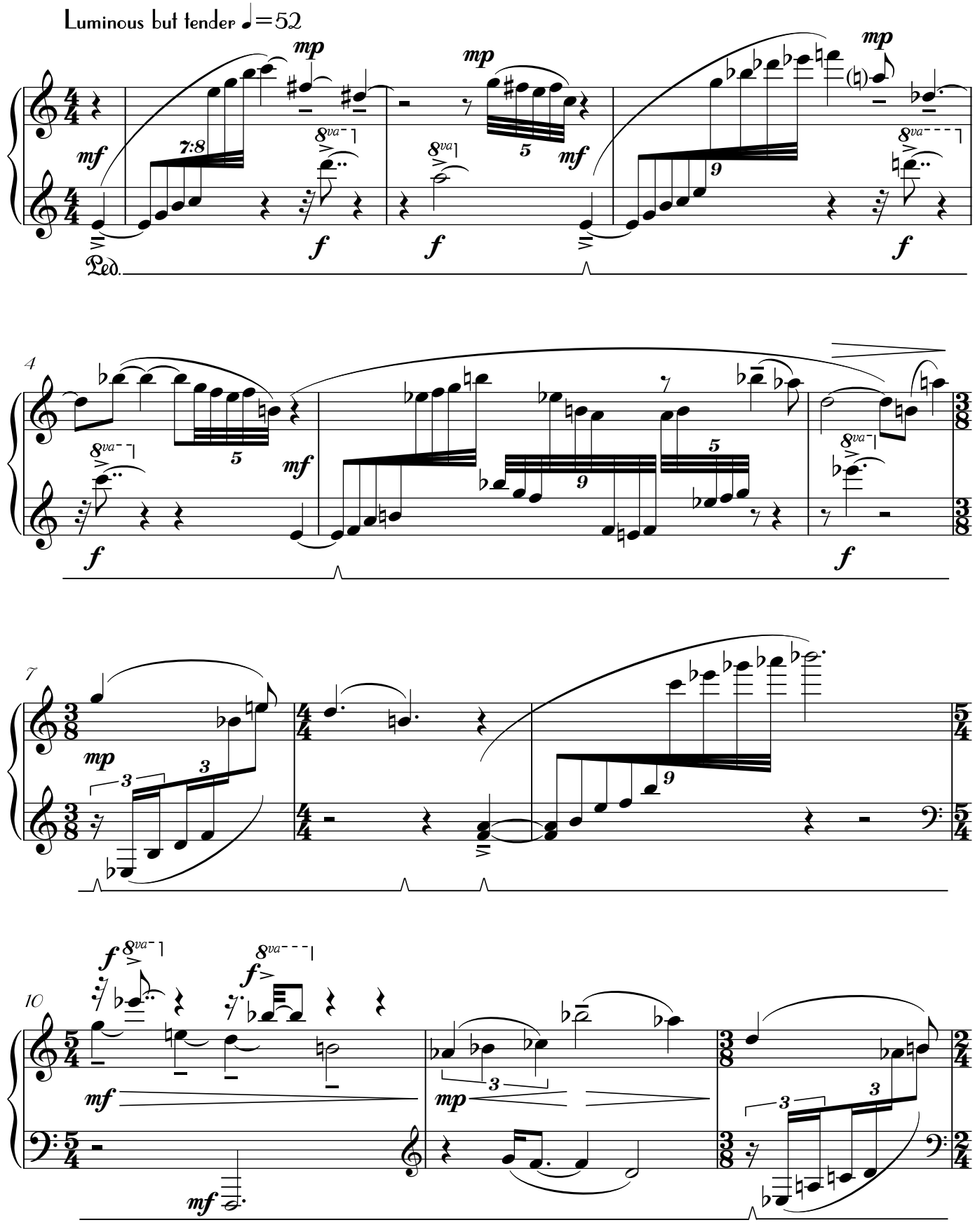
Lilies on a Windowsill - Outside In

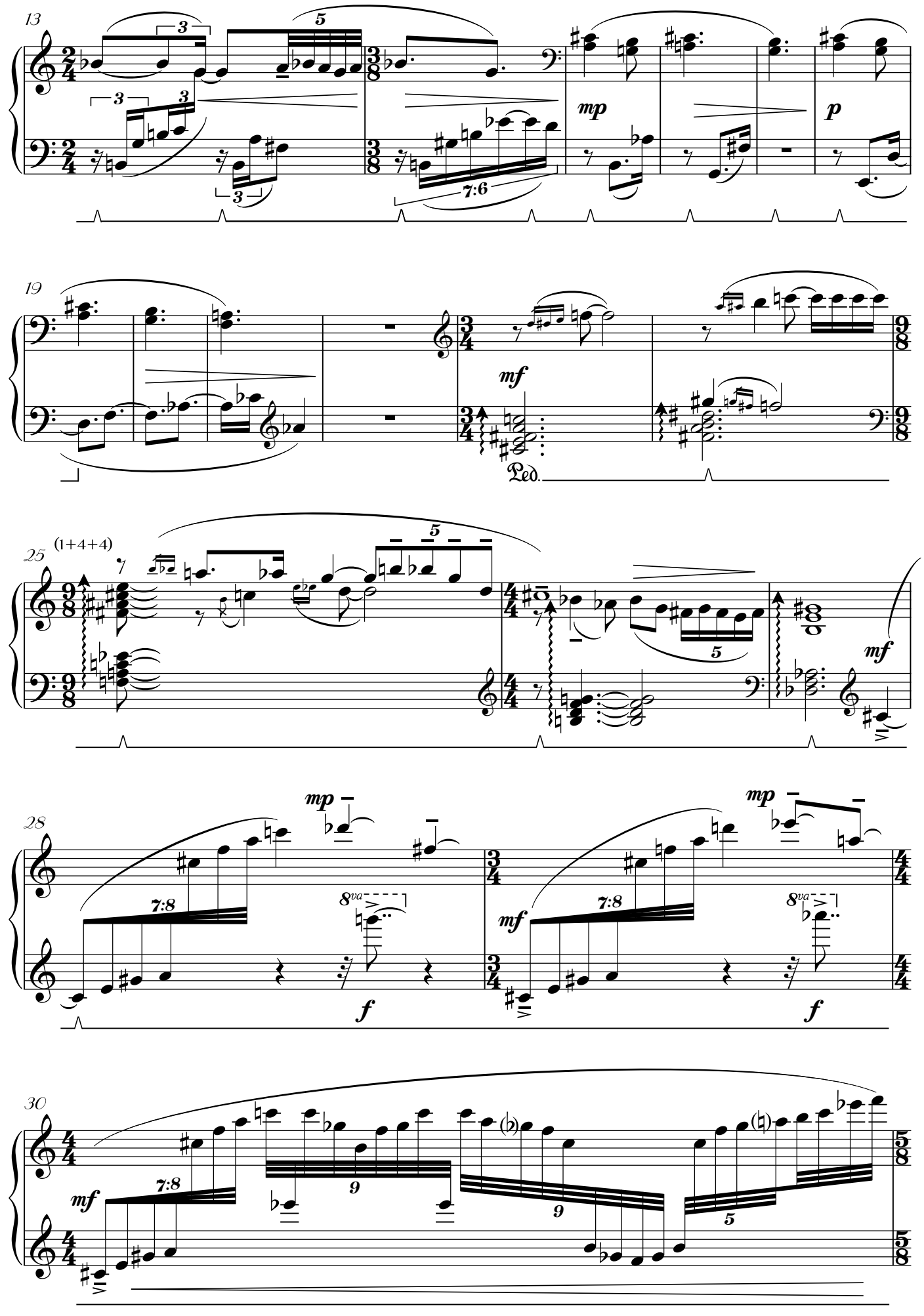
Marcelle Seabourne

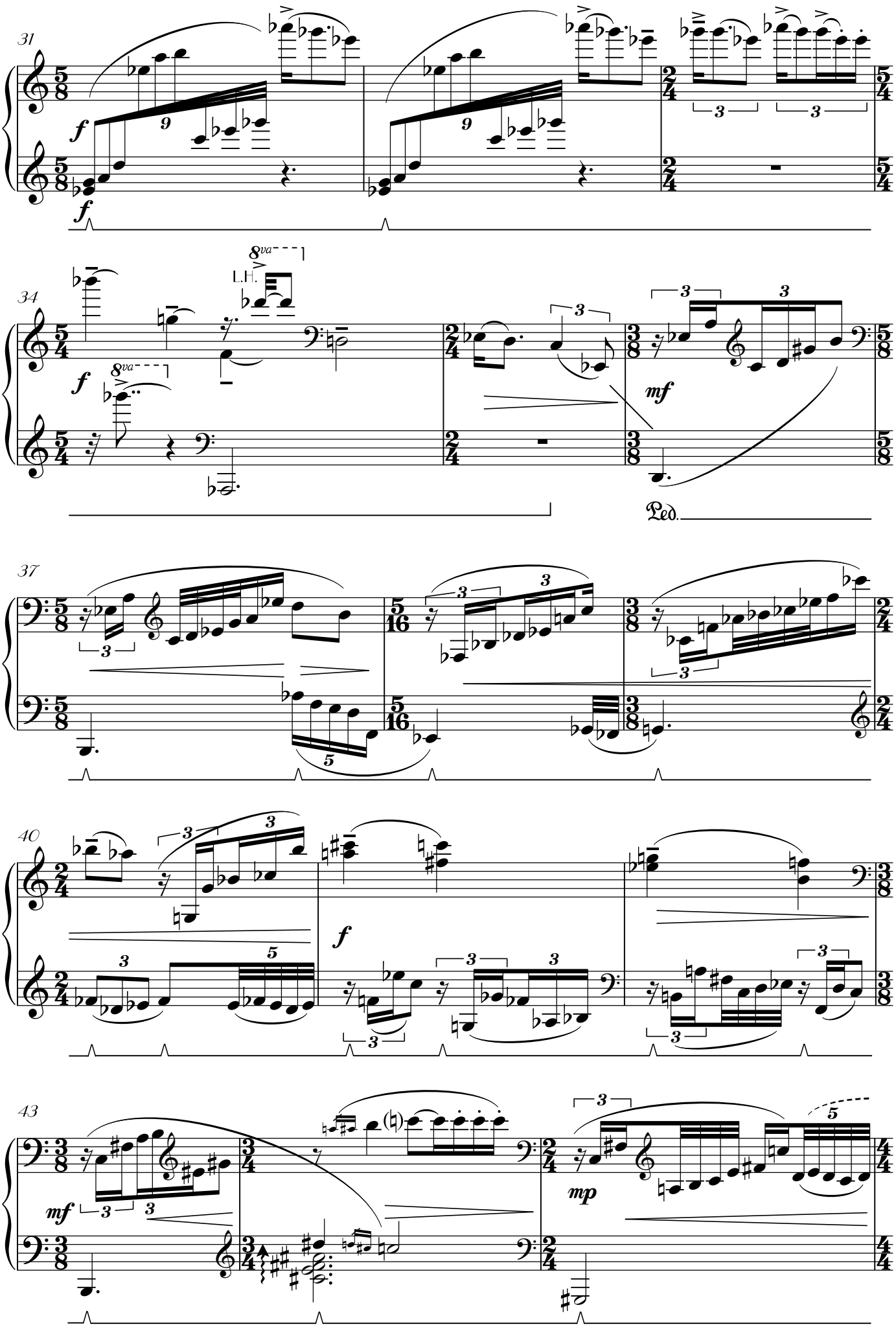
(acrylic)

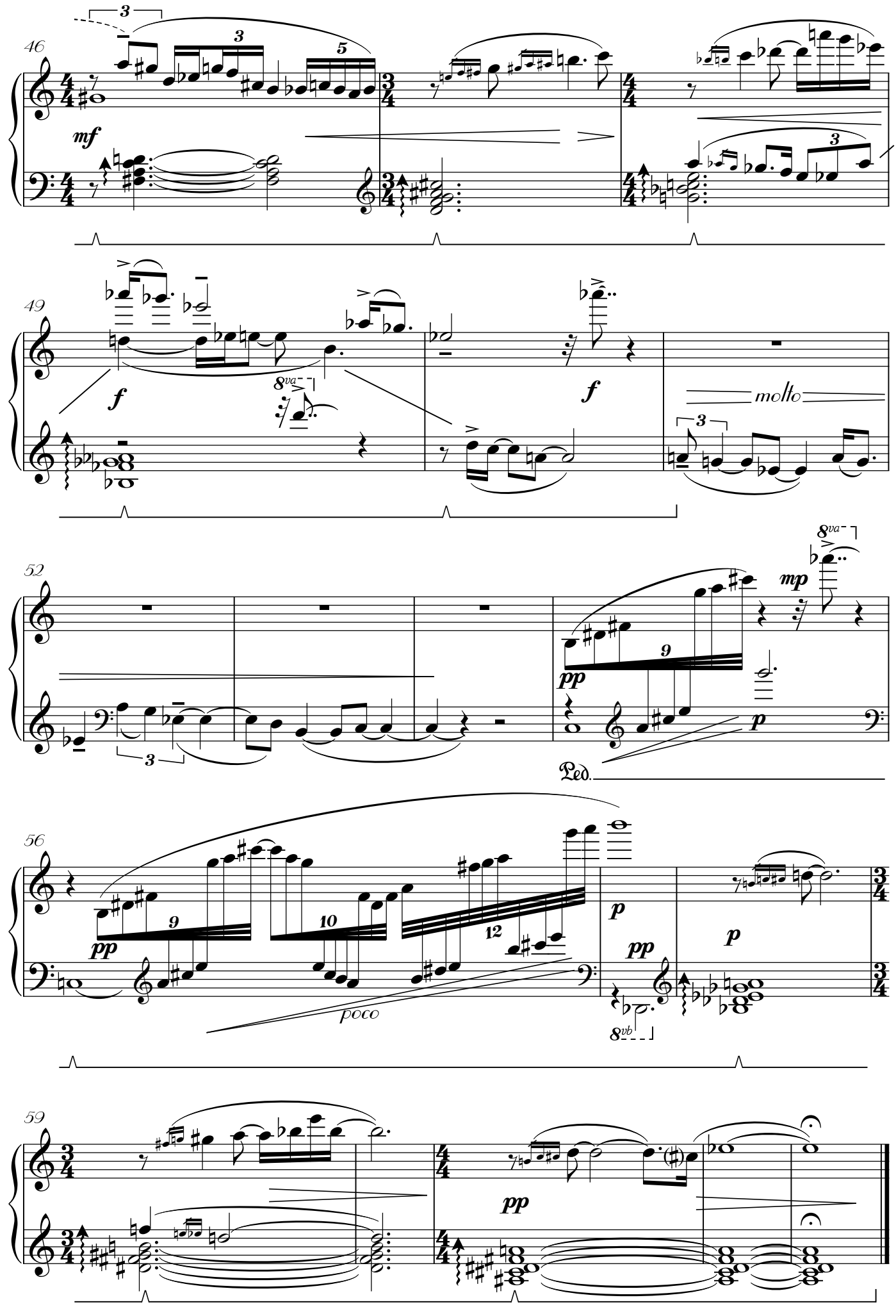
Lilies on a Windowsill

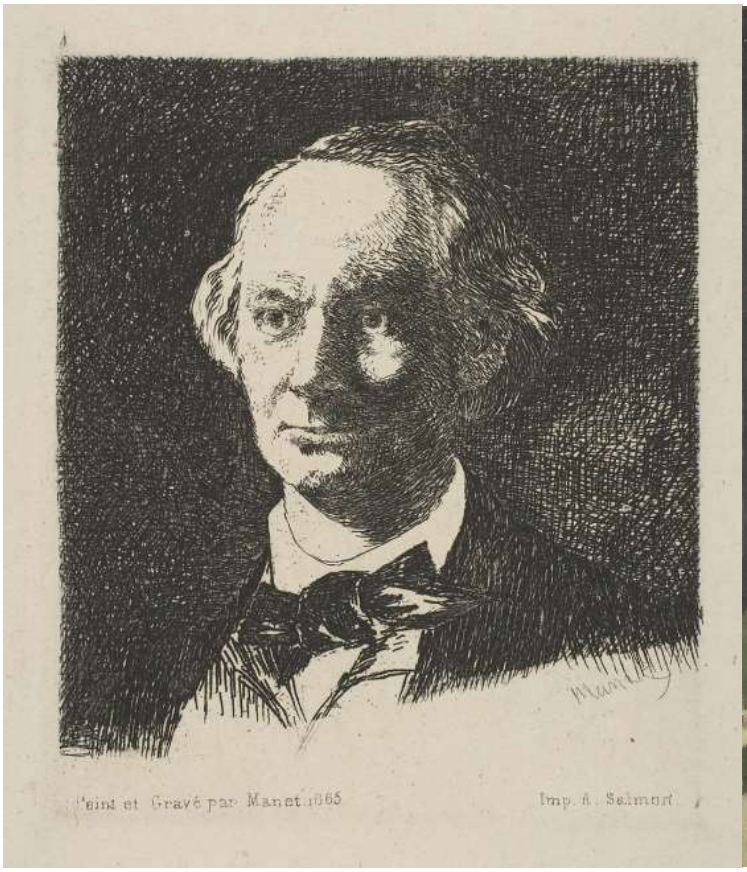
(Outside-in)




13
mp
p
19
mf
Ped.
25
(1+4+4)
mf
28
mp
f
mp
mf
f
30
mf

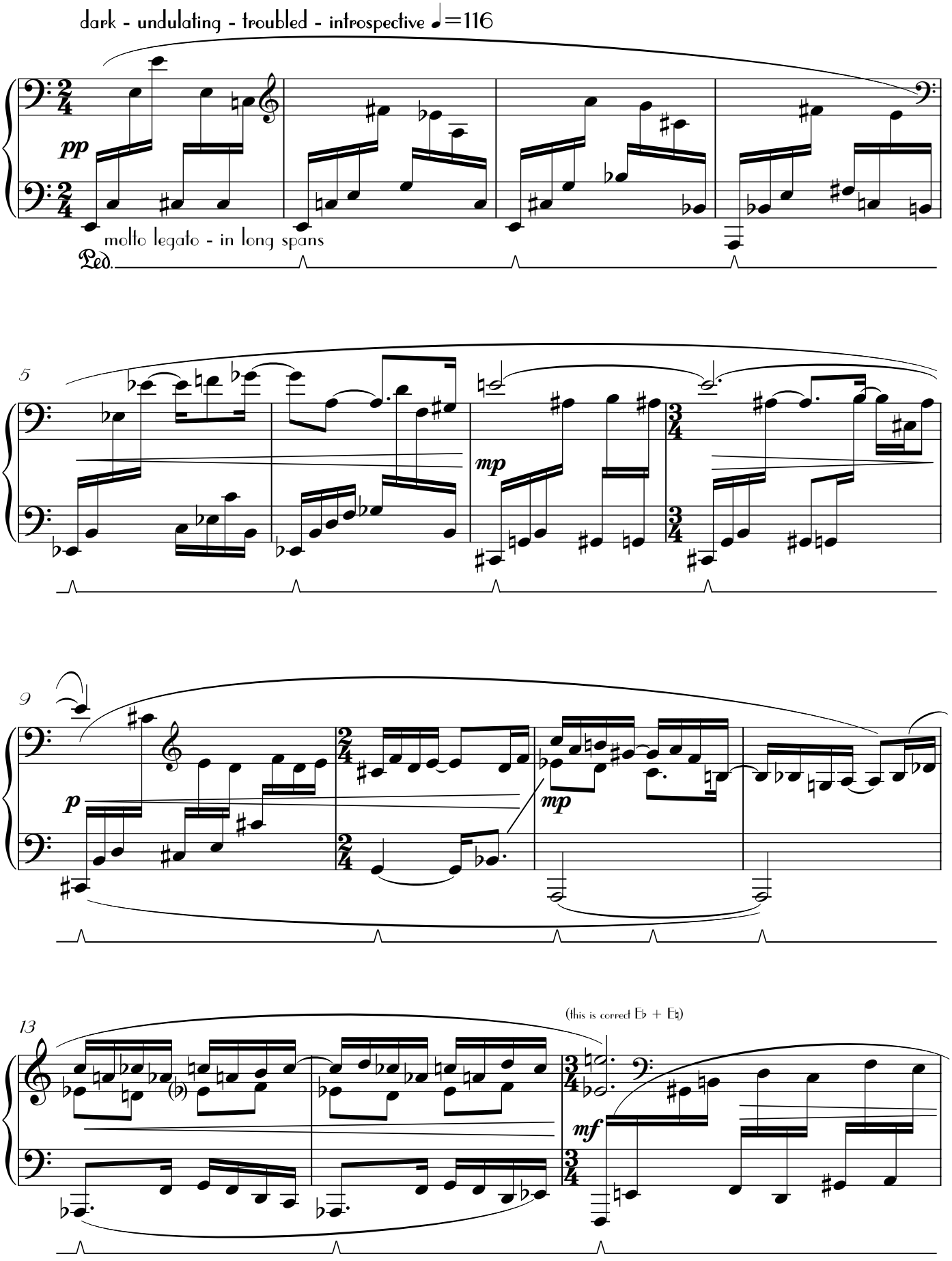

31
f
f
34
8va
L.H.
f
mf
Ped.
37
40
f
43
mf
mp

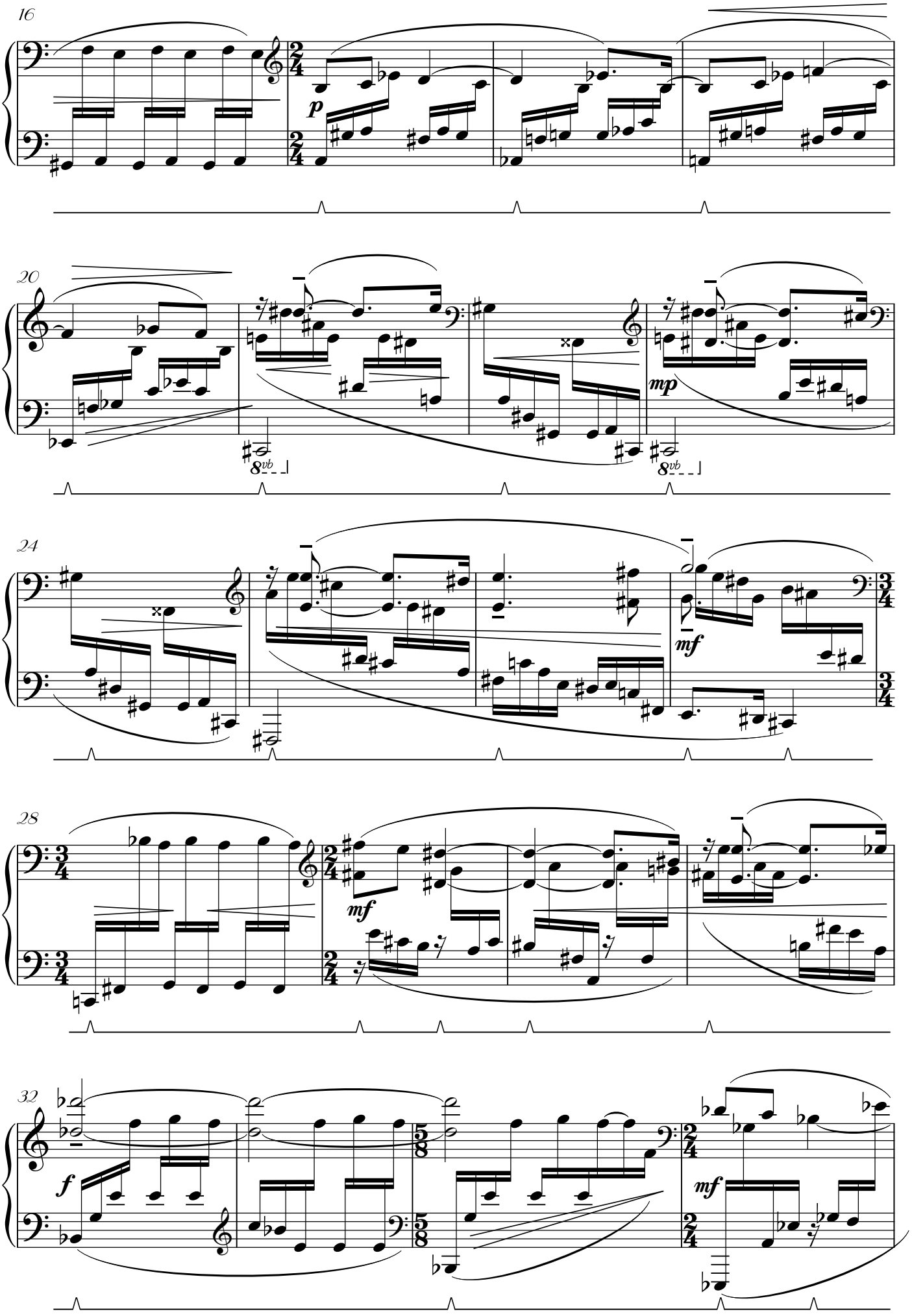

46
mf
49
f
8va
f
molto
52
8va
mp
pp
9
p
Ped.
56
pp
9
10
12
poco
p
pp
p
8vb
59
pp

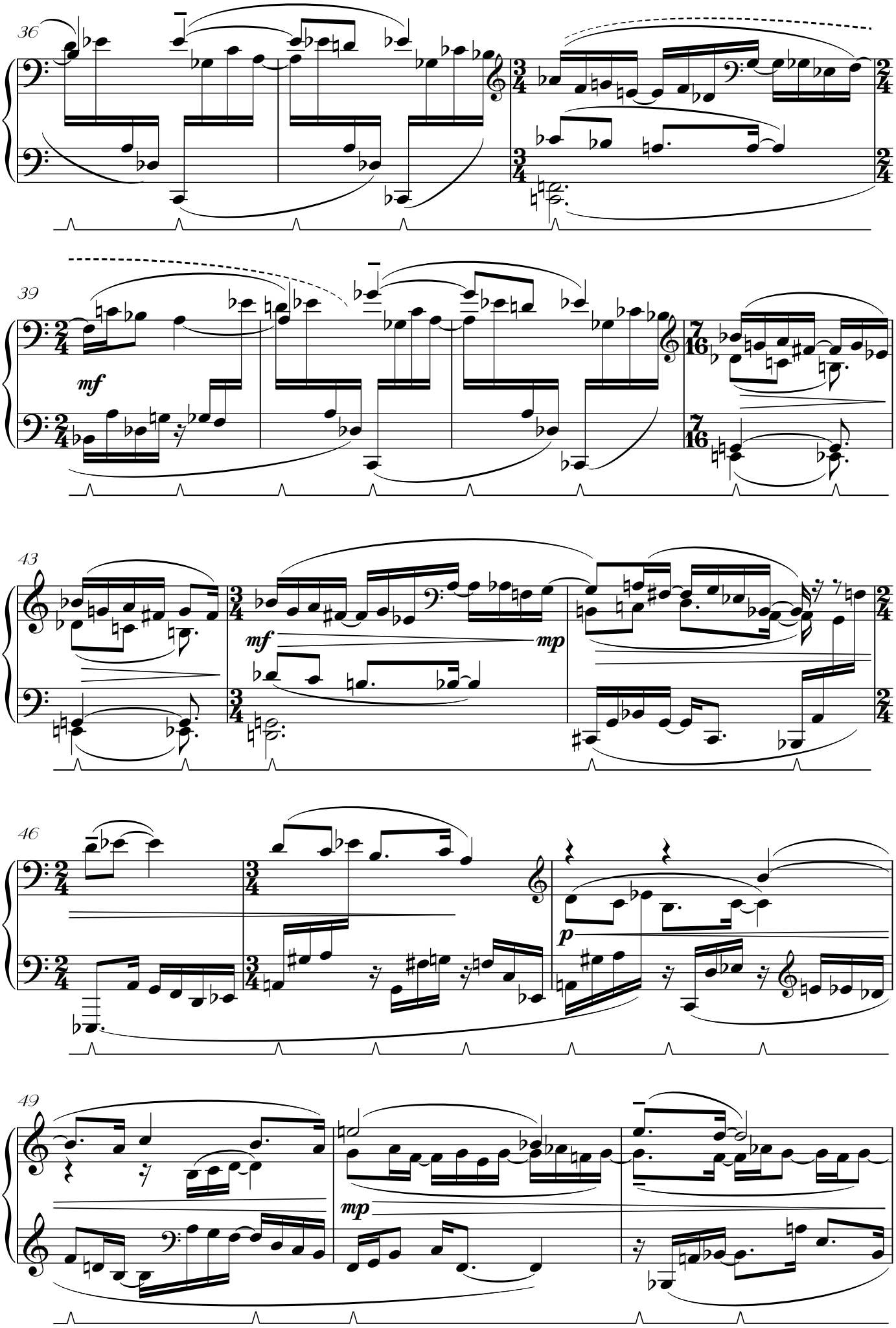

Peint et Gravé par Manet 1865
Imp. A. Salmon

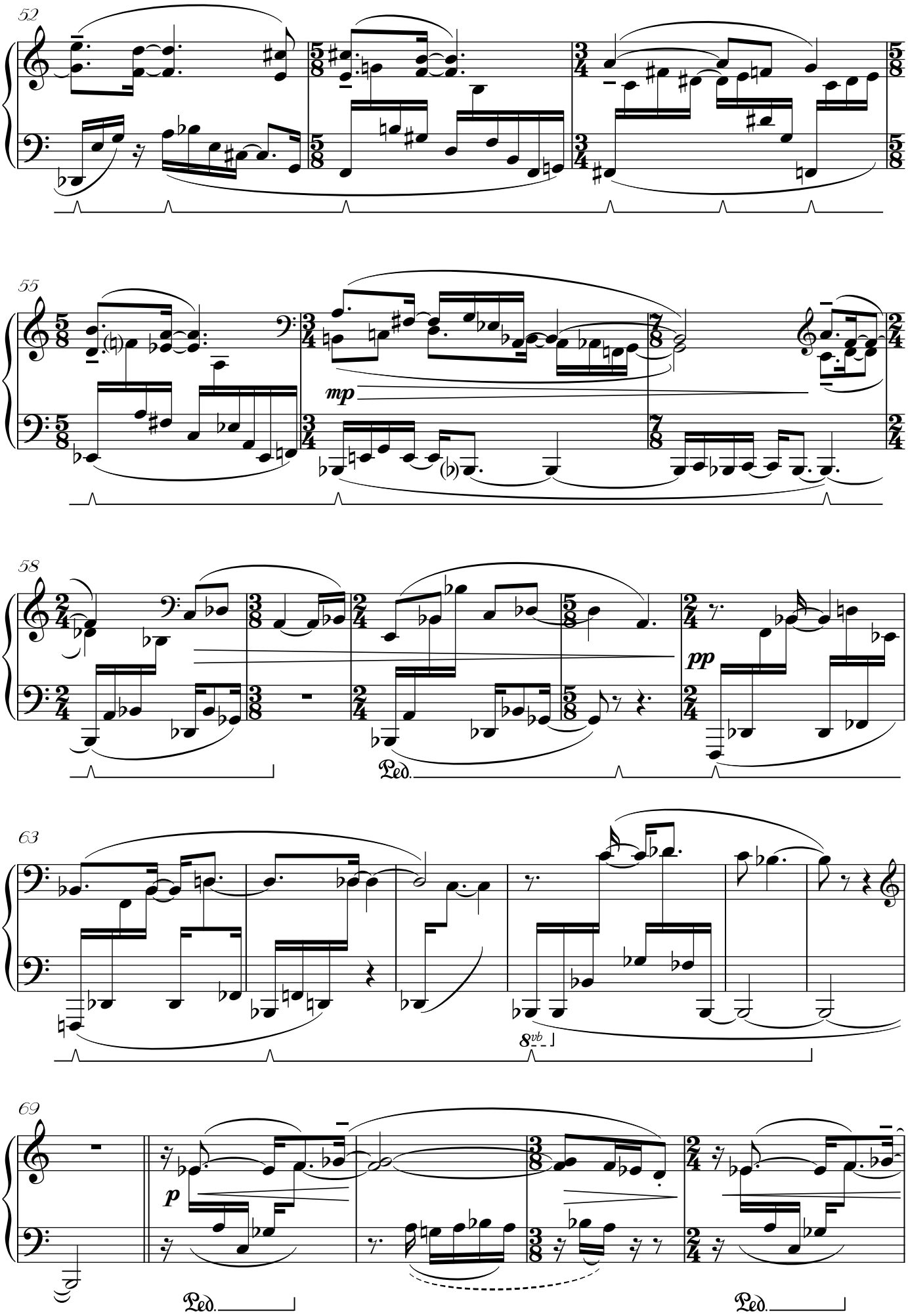
Imagined Bouquet from Charles Baudelaire

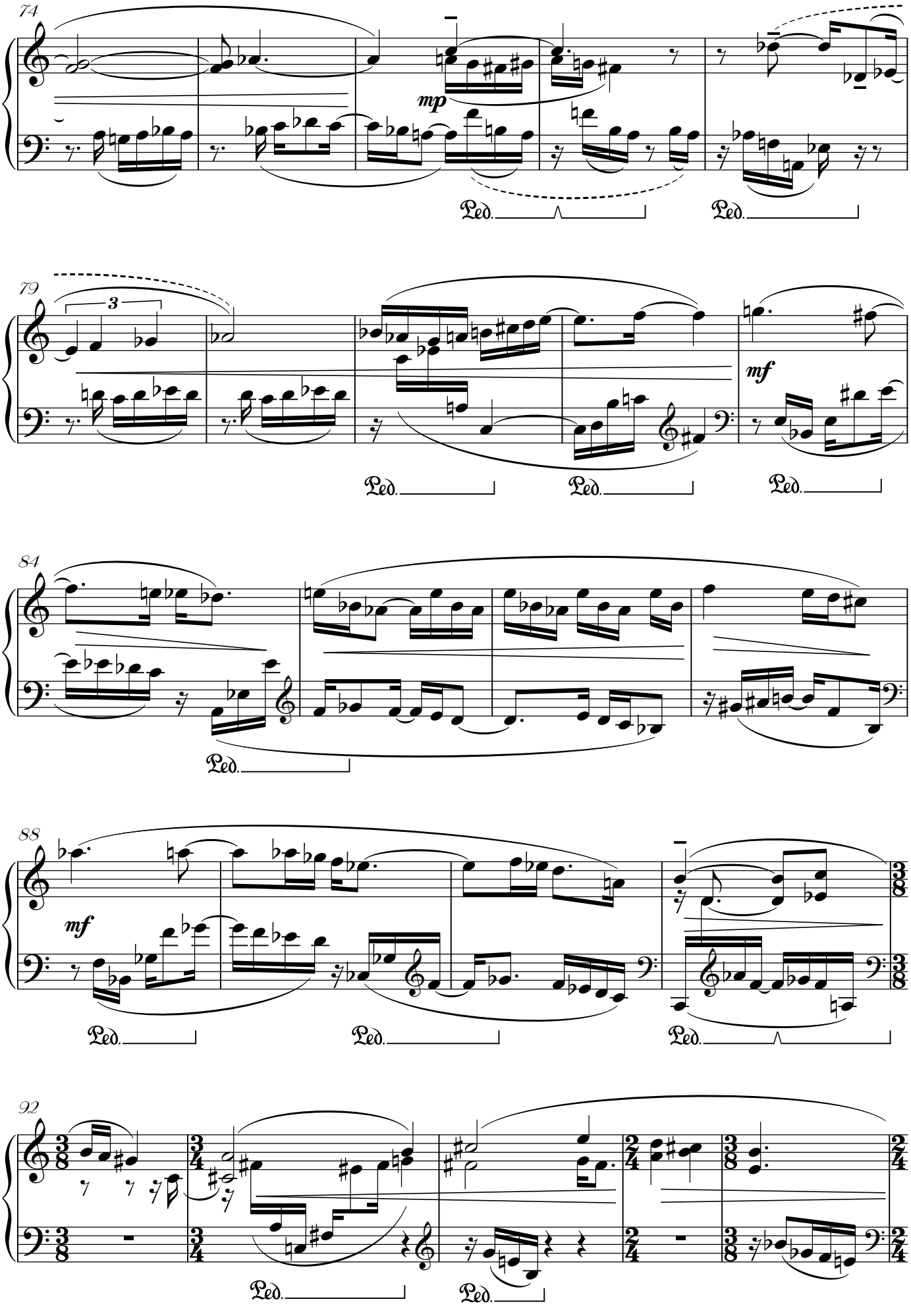
"C'est que la Mort, planant comme un soleil nouveau,
Fera s'épanouir les fleurs de leur cerveau!"
[Le Mort des Artistes - Baudelaire]

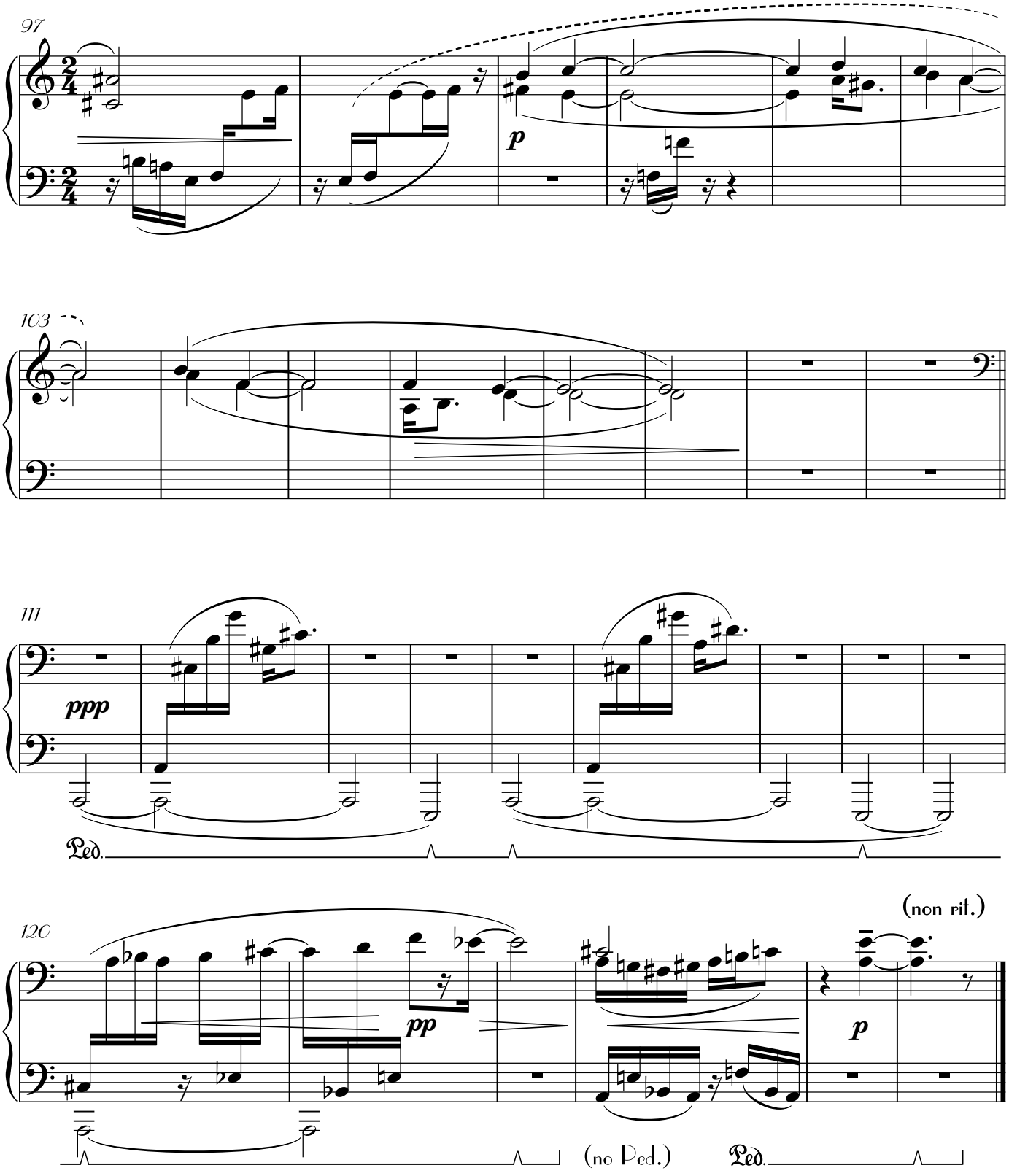



16
p
20
8vb
mp
8vb
24
mf
28
mf
32
f
mf


36
39
mf
43
mf
mp
46
p
49
mp


52
55
mp
58
Ped.
pp
63
8vb
69
p
Ped.
Ped.


74
mp
Ped.
Ped.
79
3
mf
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
84
Ped.
88
mf
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
92
Ped.
Ped.


97
p
103
111
ppp
Ped.
120
pp
(non rit.)
p
(no Ped.)
Ped.

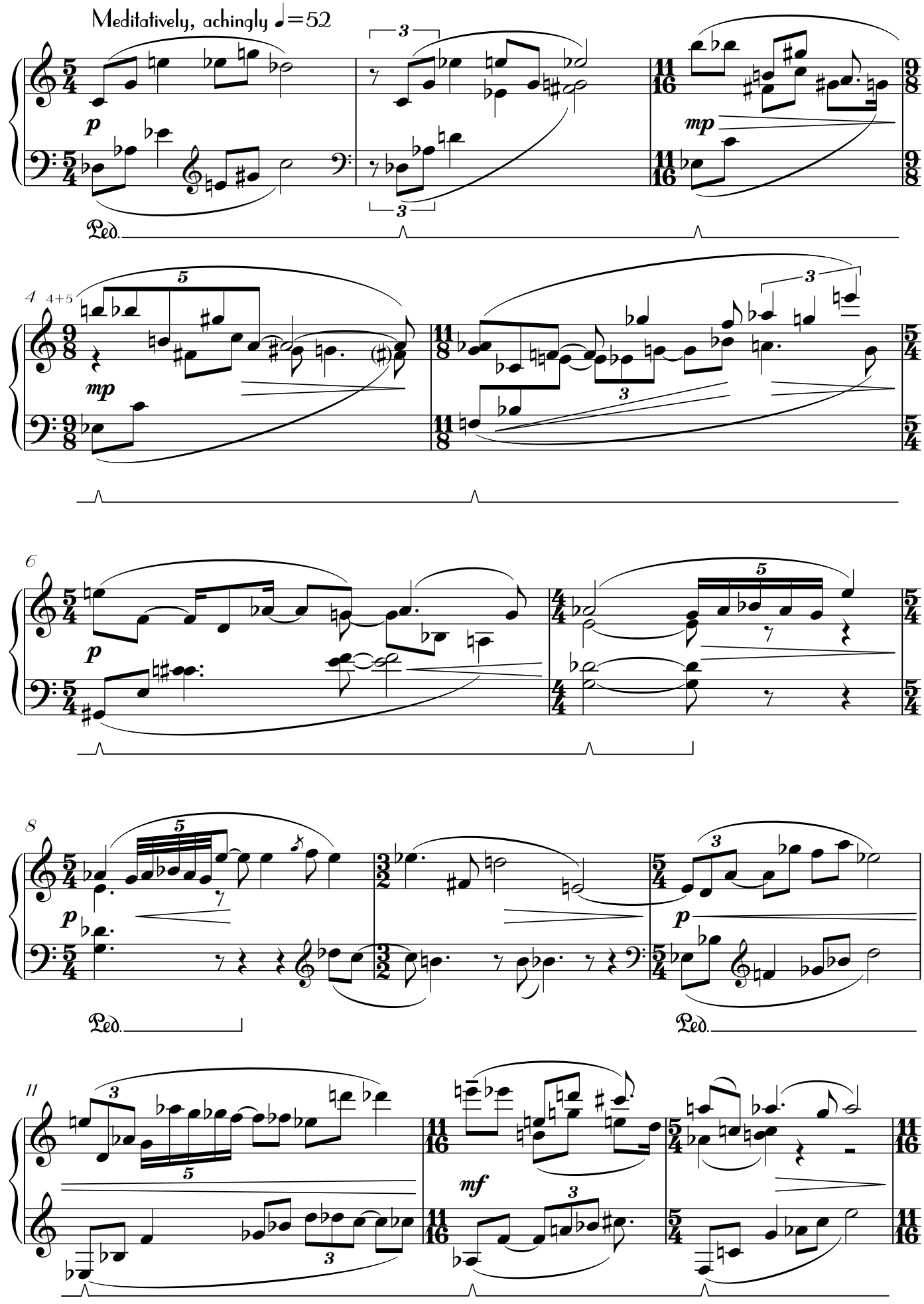
Rosa Glauca

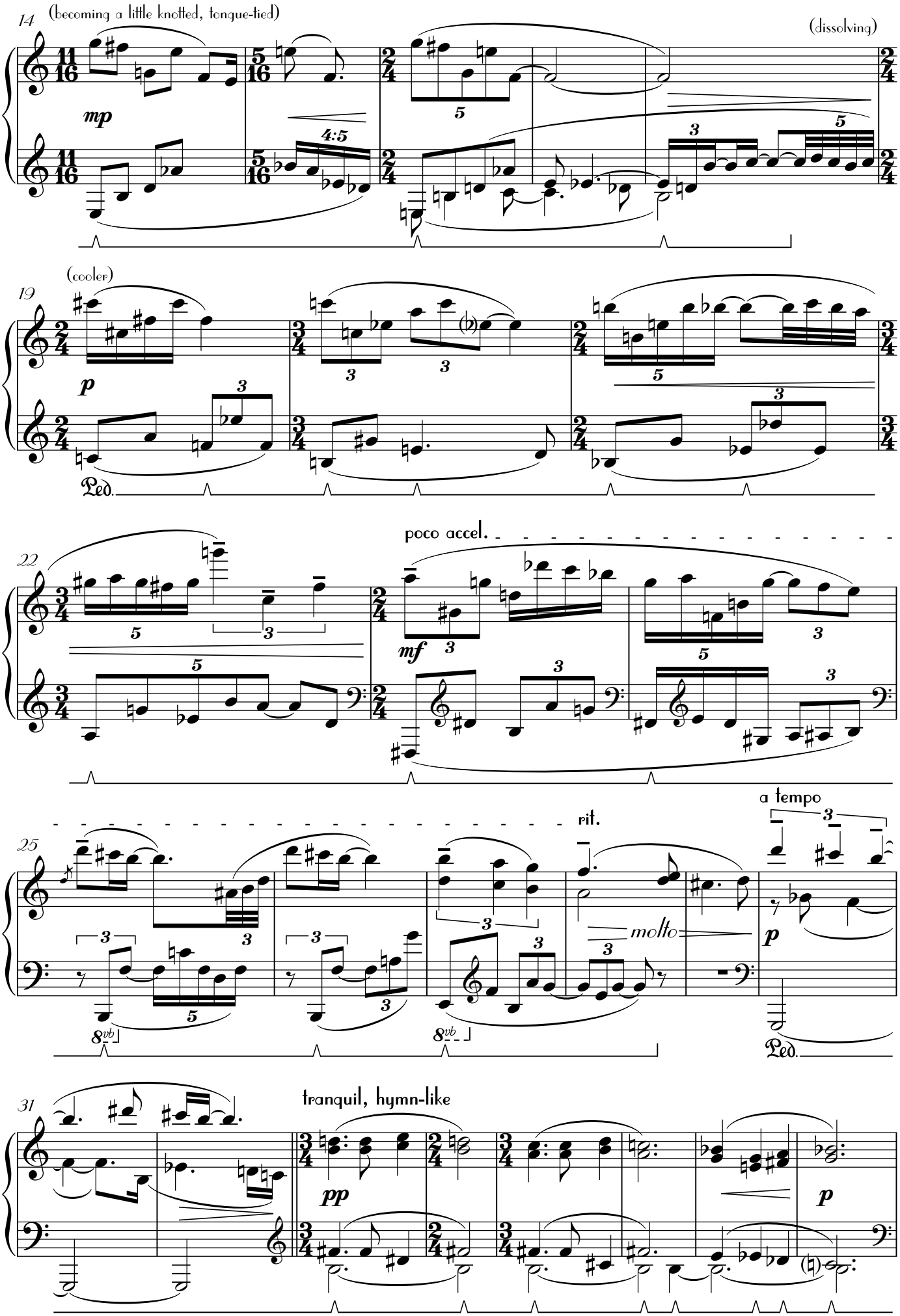
Marcelle Seabourne

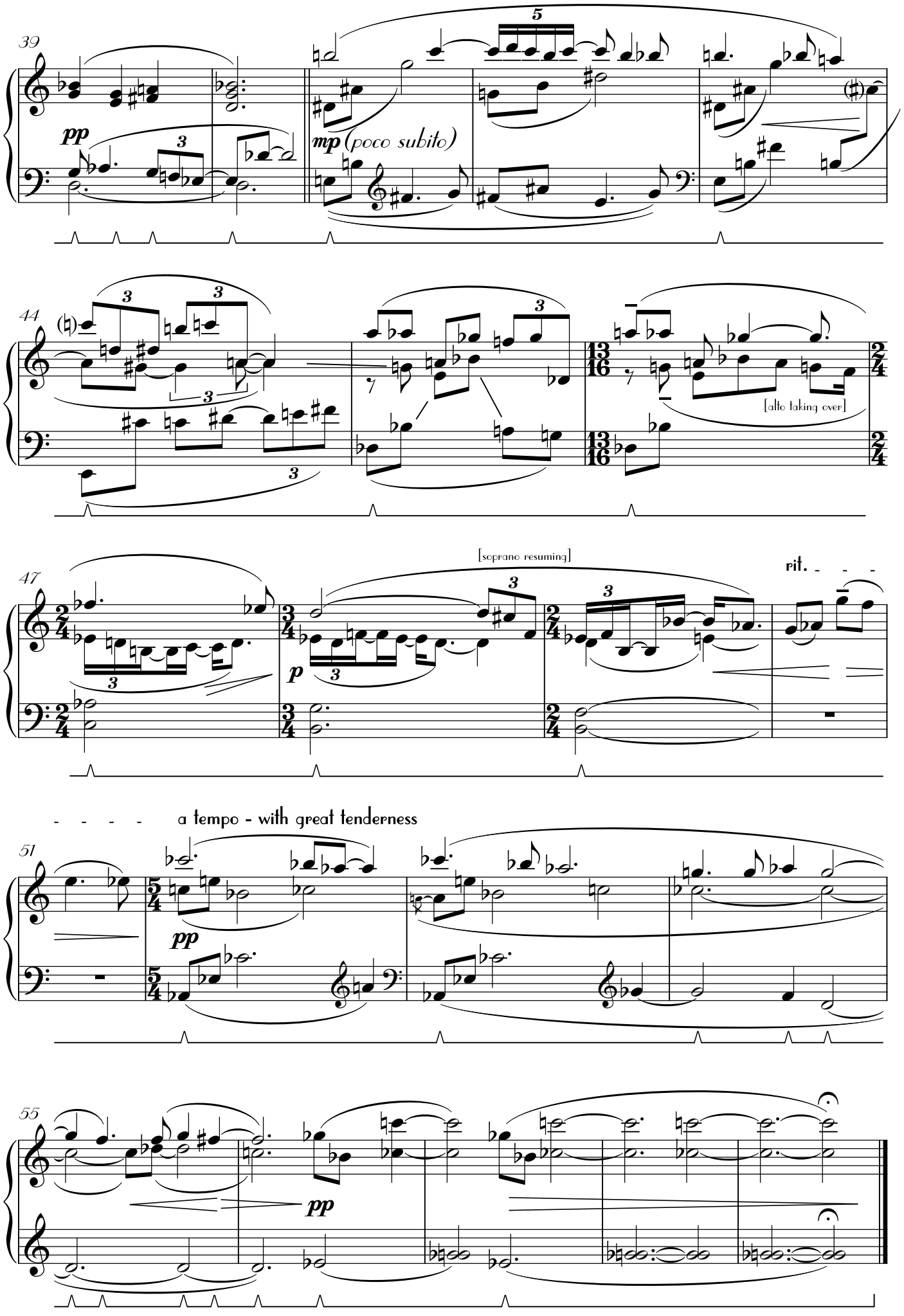
(acrylic)

Rosa Glauca

(departures)

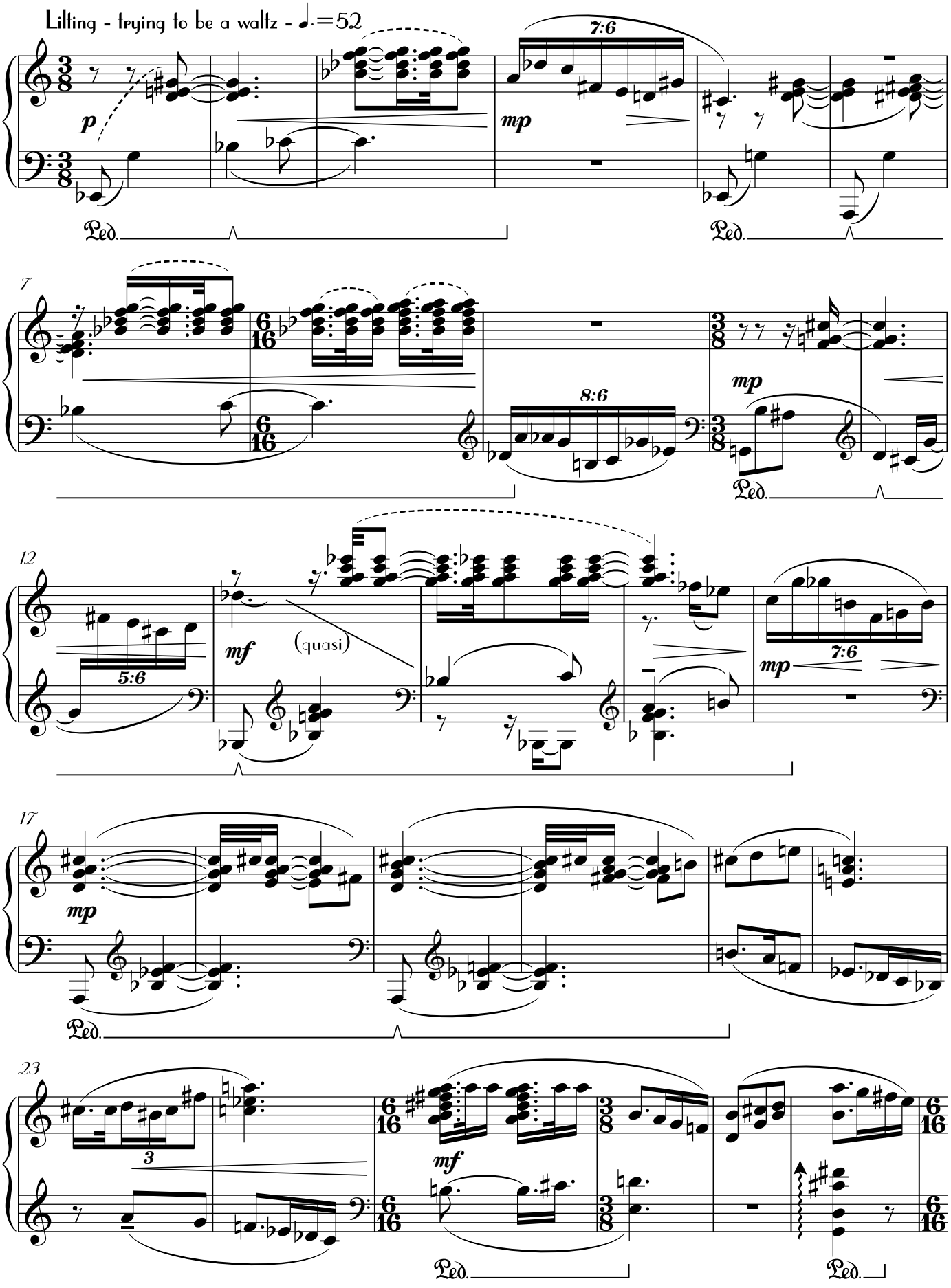


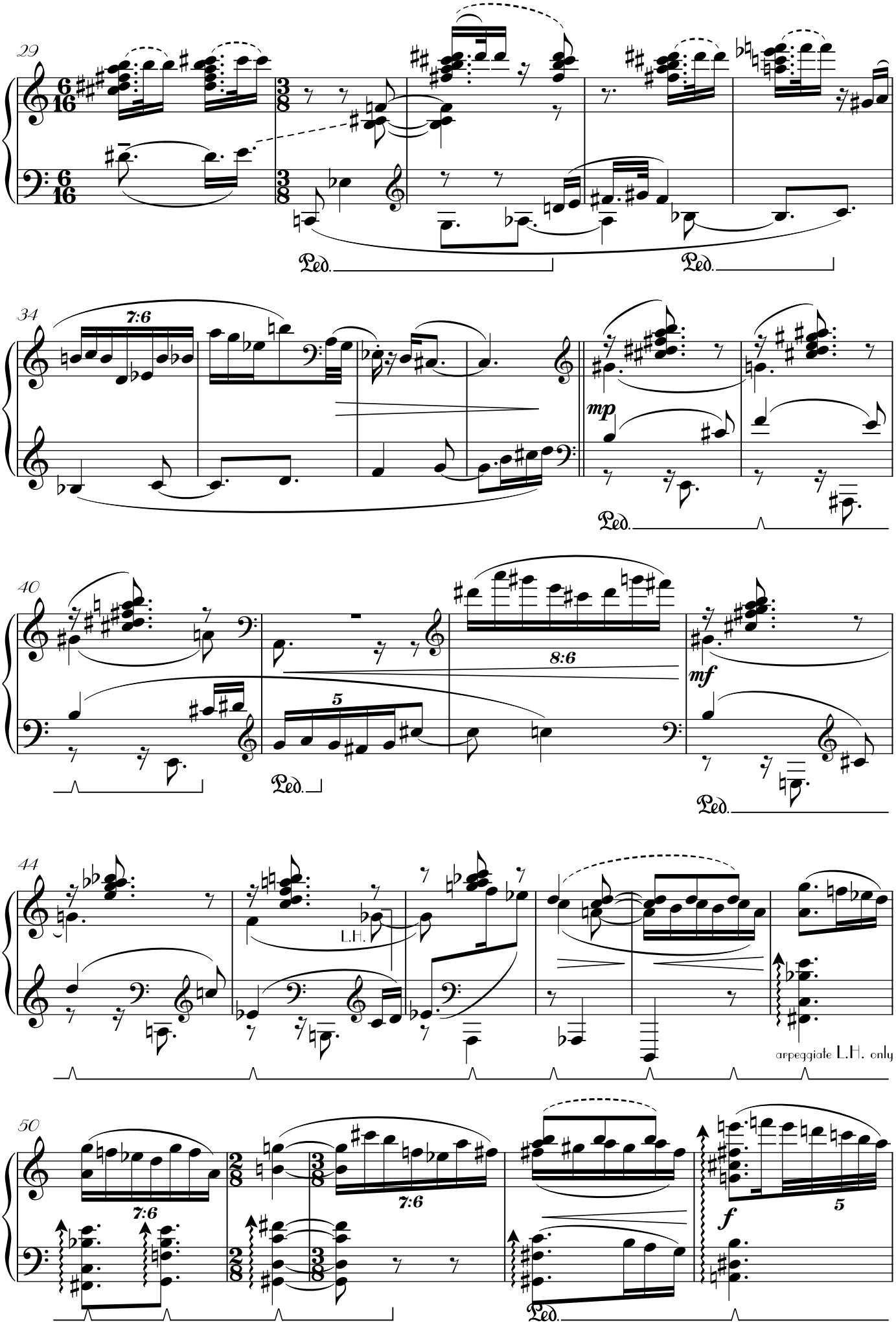

14
(becoming a little knotted, tongue-tied)
(dissolving)
mp
4:5
19
(cooler)
p
Ped.
22
poco accel.
mf
25
rit.
a tempo
molto
p
8vb
Ped.
31
tranquil, hymn-like
pp
p

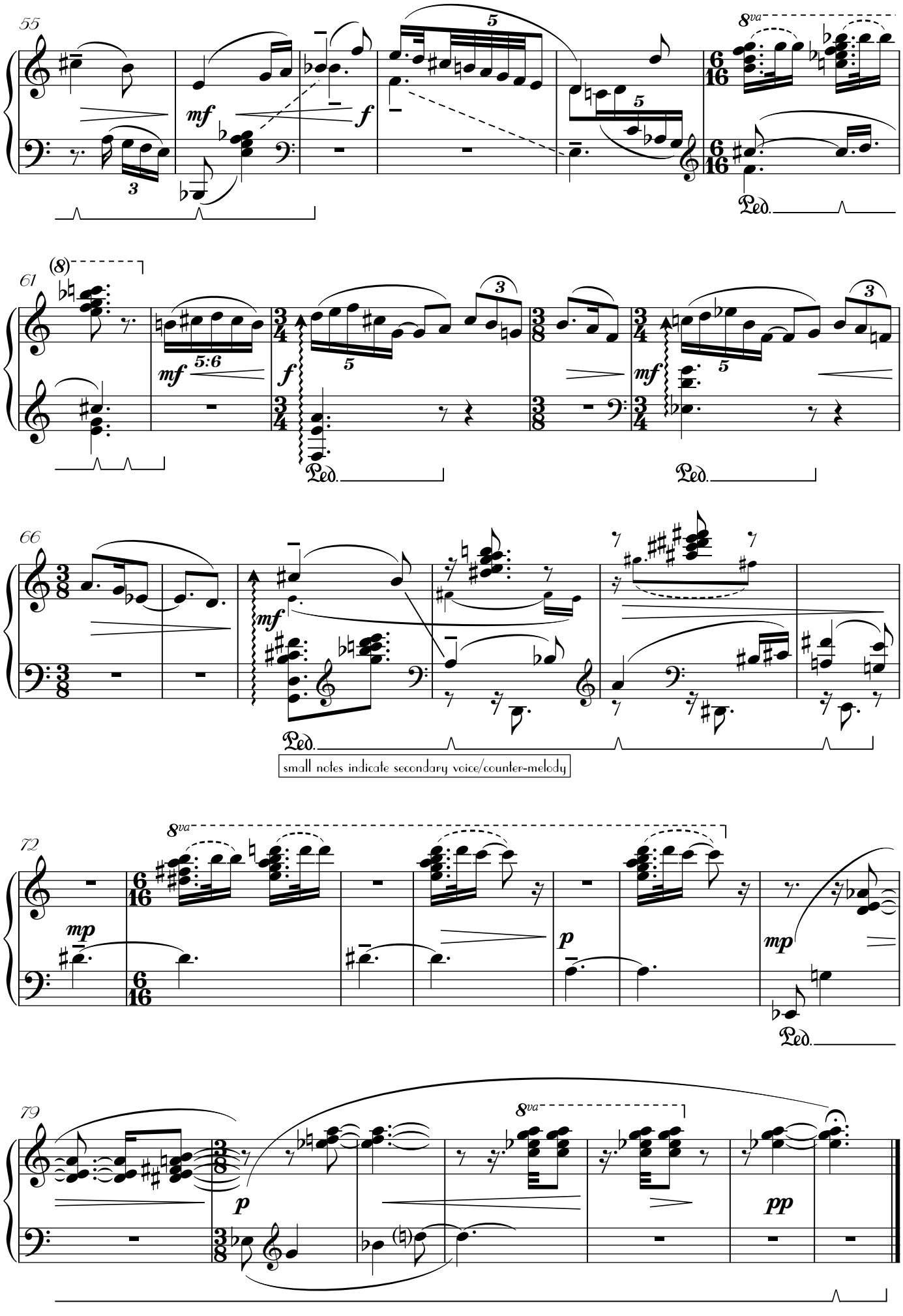

39
pp
mp (poco subito)
44
[alto taking over]
47
[soprano resuming]
p
rit.
a tempo - with great tenderness
51
pp
55
pp

Imagined Bouquet from Émmanuel Chabrier

(grown from a little seed supplied by the composer's *Impromptu*, written for Suzanne Manet)




29
Ped.
Ped.
34
7:6
mp
Ped.
40
8:6
5
mf
Ped.
Ped.
44
L.H.
arpeggiate L.H. only
50
7:6
7:6
5
f
Ped.


55
8va
mf
f
Ped.
61
(8)
mf
5:6
f
Ped.
mf
Ped.
66
mf
Ped.
small notes indicate secondary voice/counter-melody
72
8va
mp
p
mp
Ped.
79
8va
p
pp

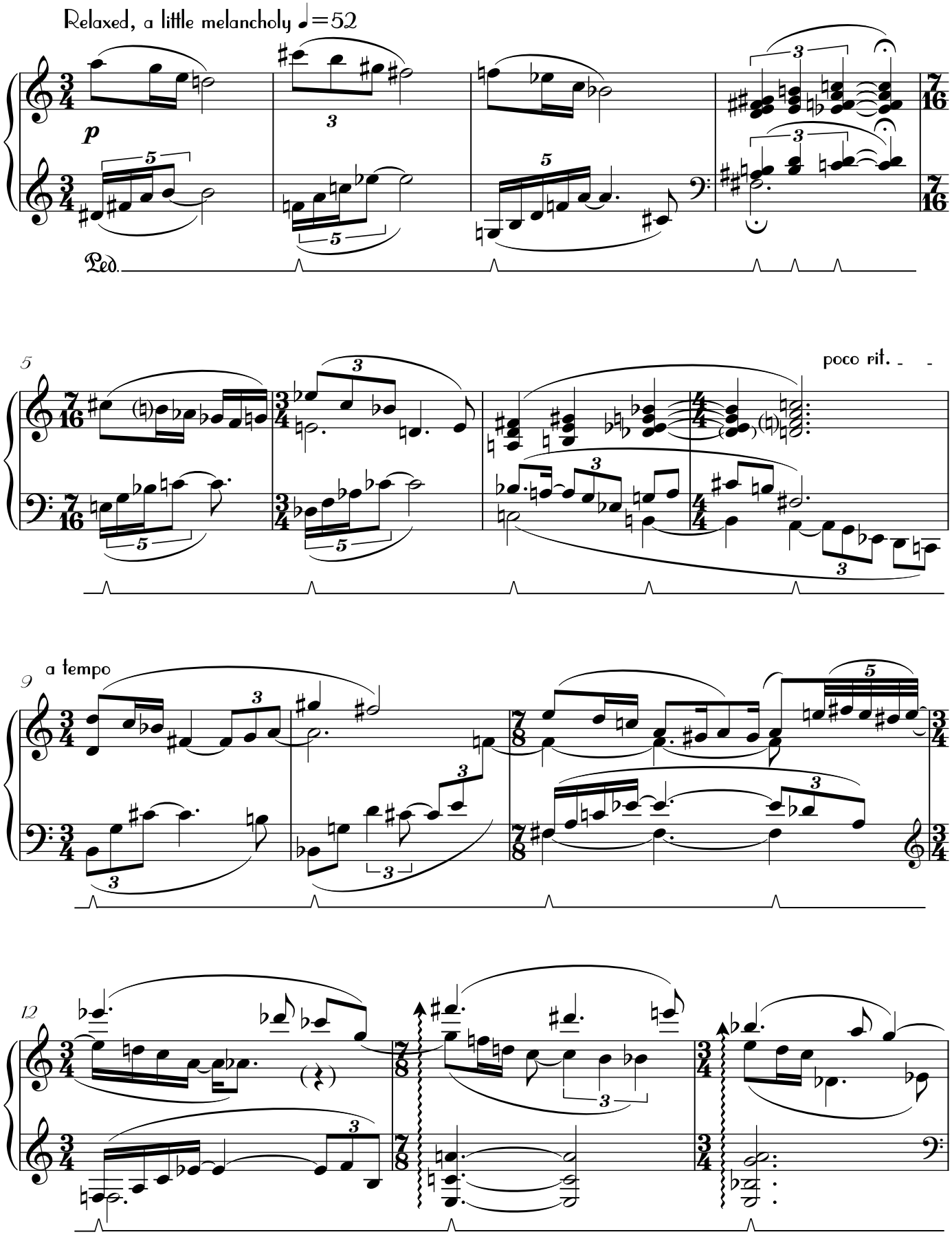
Marigolds on a Blue Chair

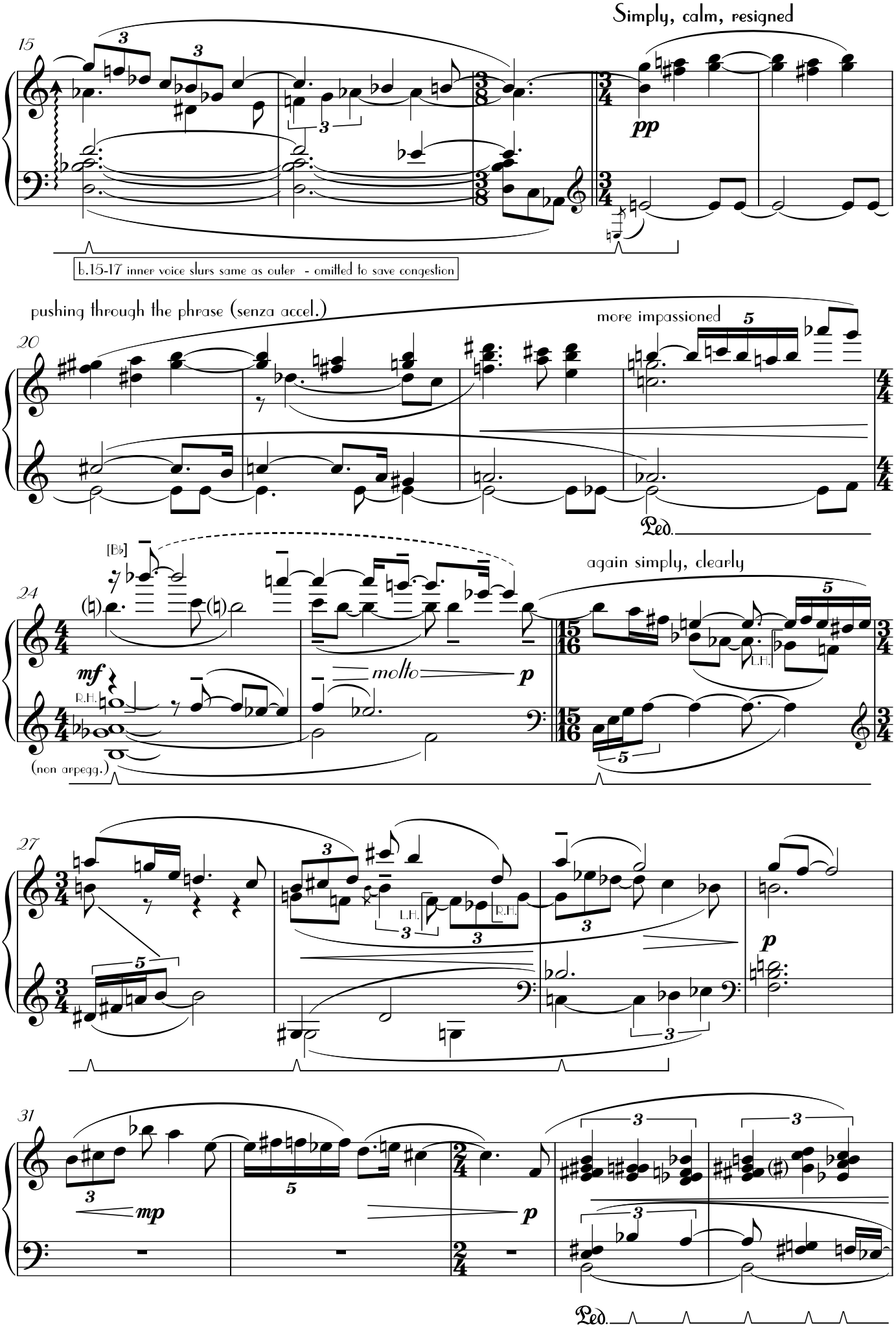
Marcelle Seabourne

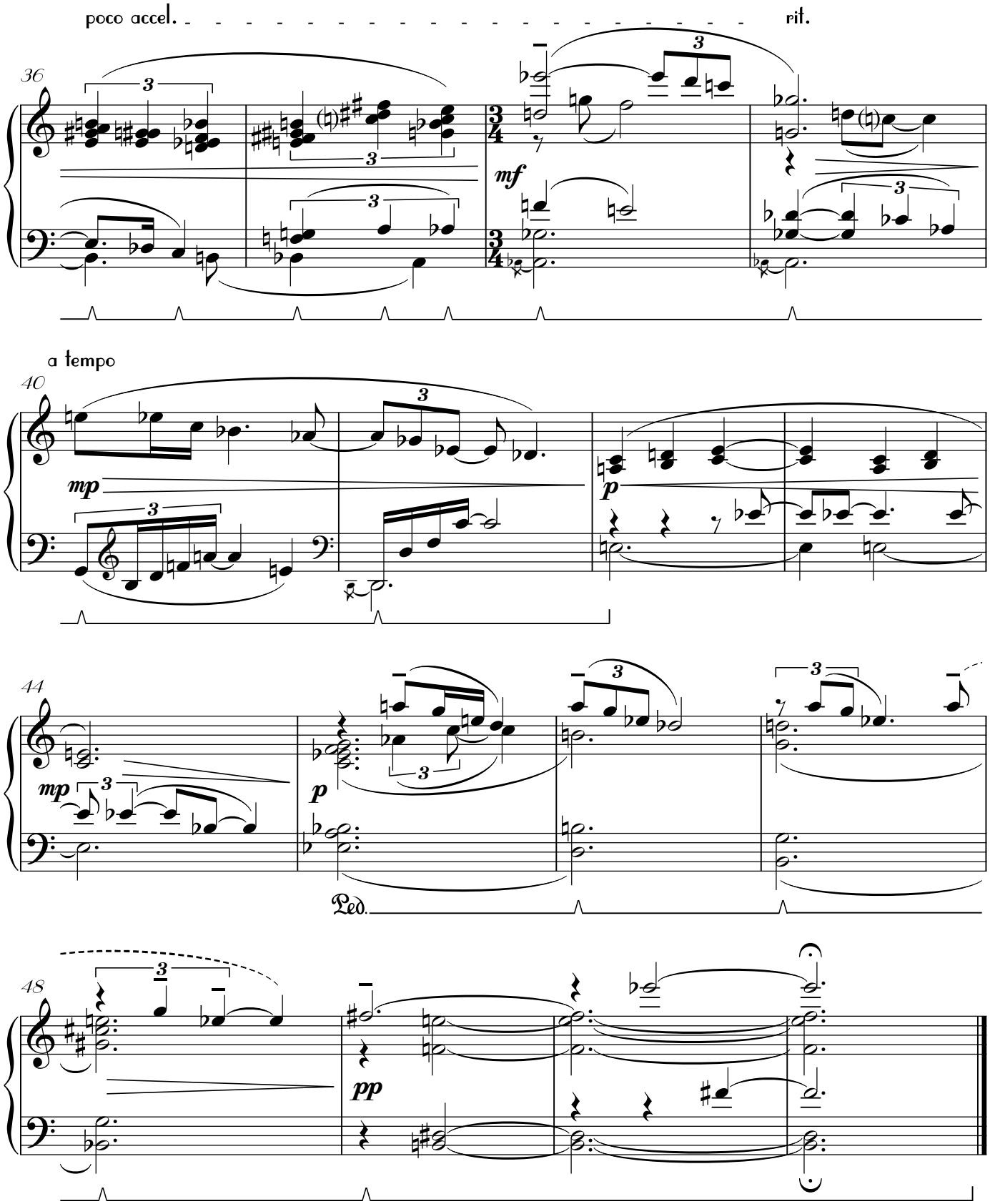
(acrylic)

Marigolds on a blue chair

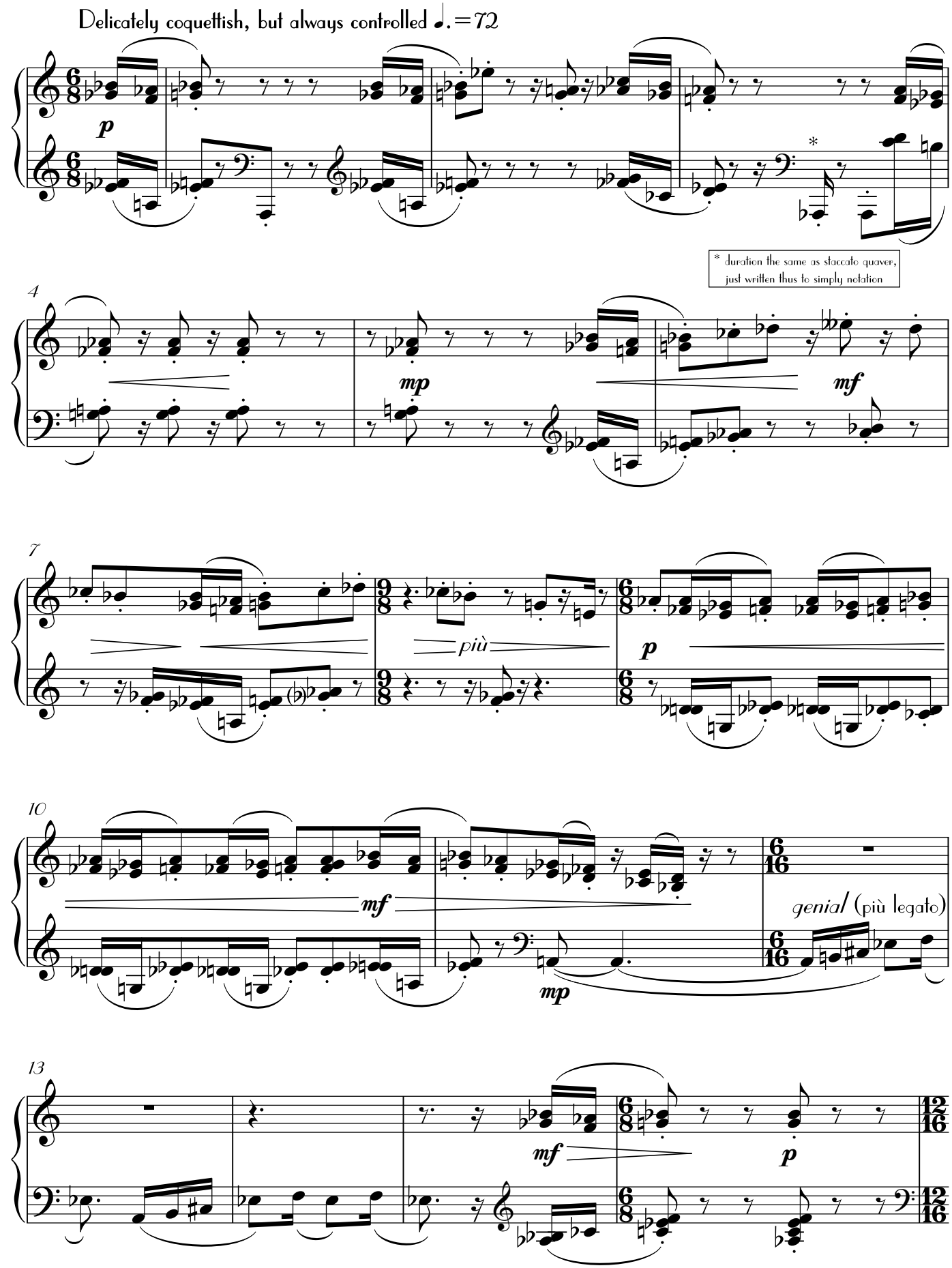
(last summer)

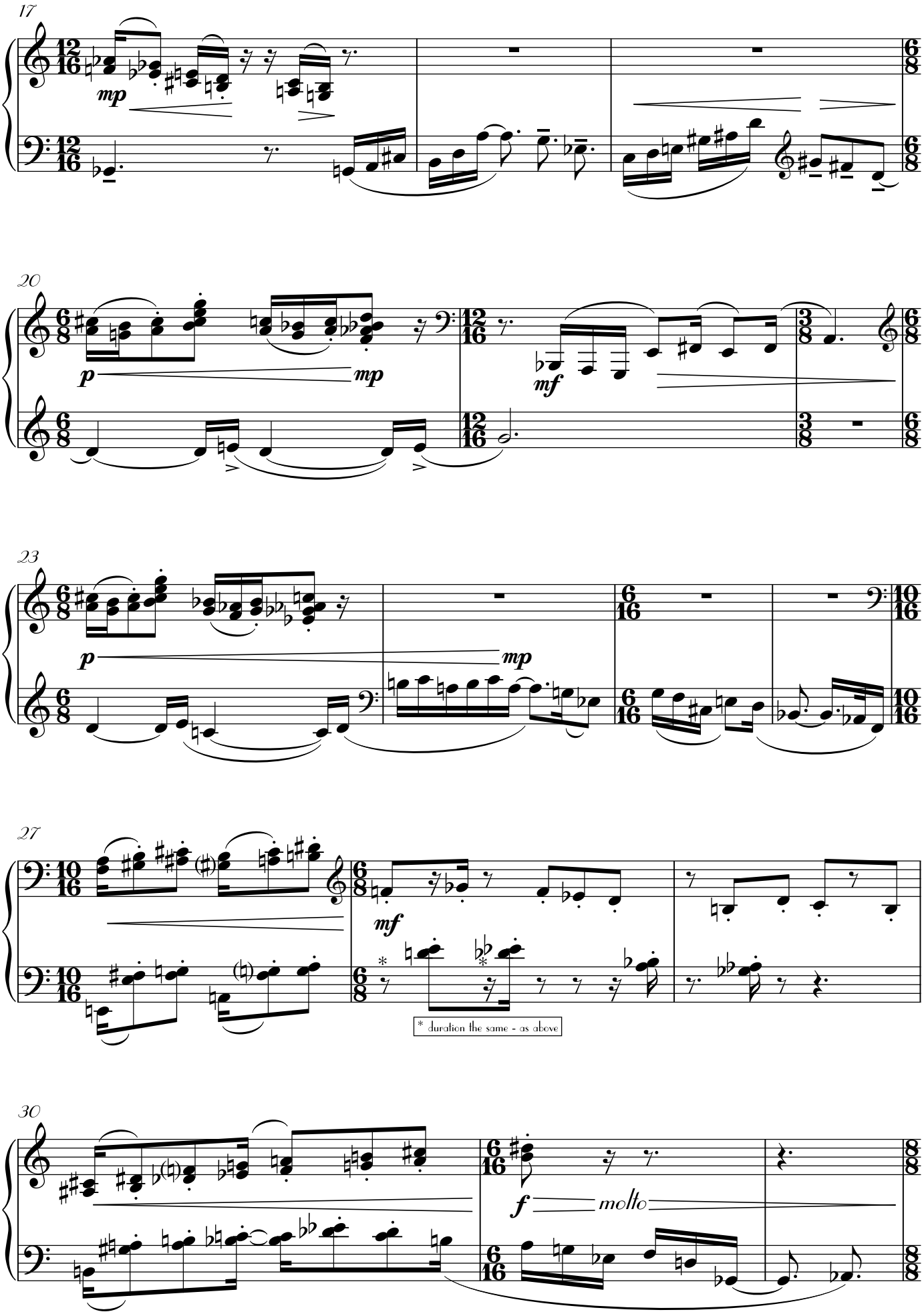


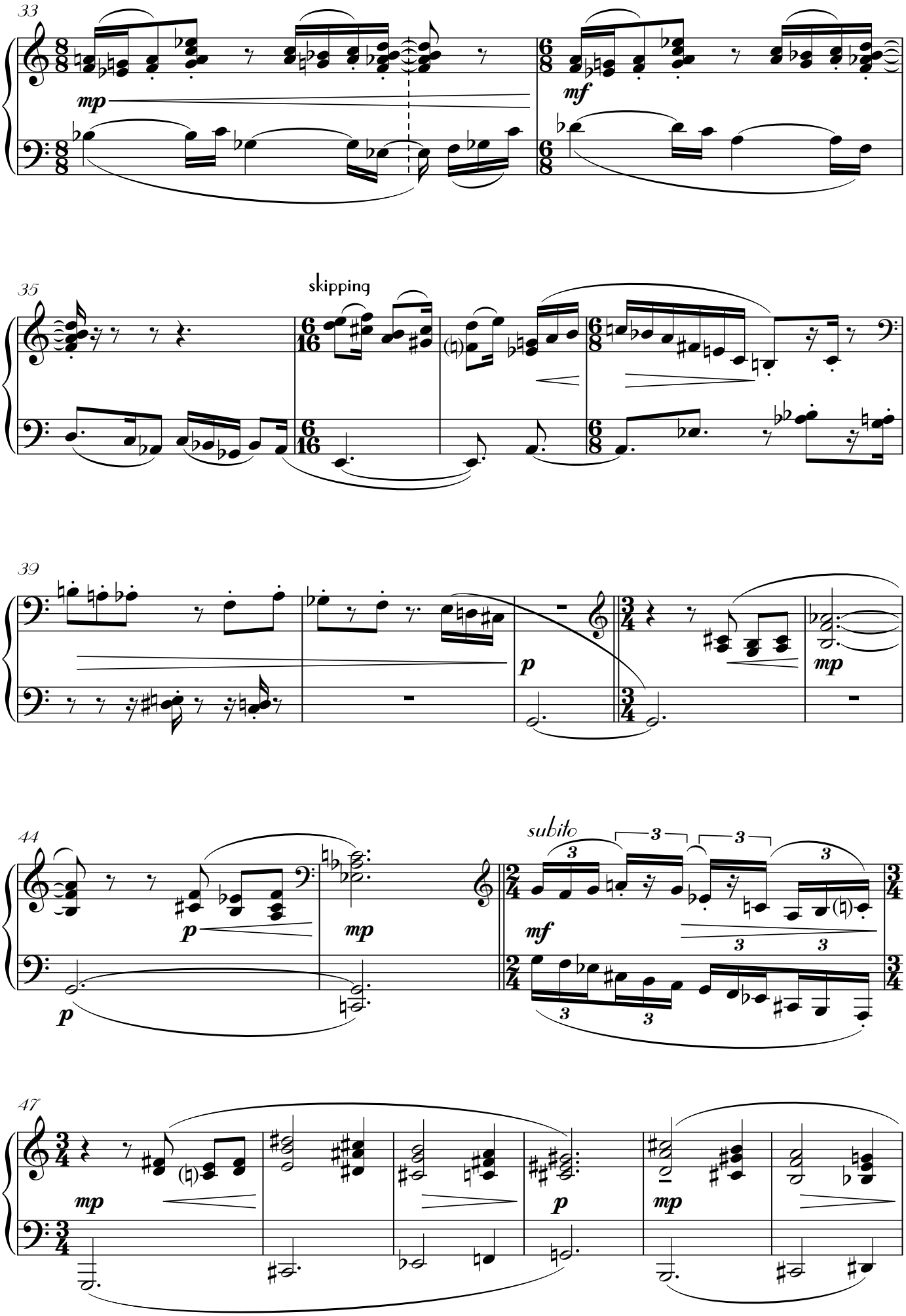

Simply, calm, resigned
15
pp
b.15-17 inner voice slurs same as outer - omitted to save congestion
pushing through the phrase (senza accel.)
more impassioned
20
Ped.
[Bb]
again simply, clearly
24
mf
R.H.
molto
p
(non arpegg.)
27
L.H.
R.H.
p
31
mp
p
Ped.

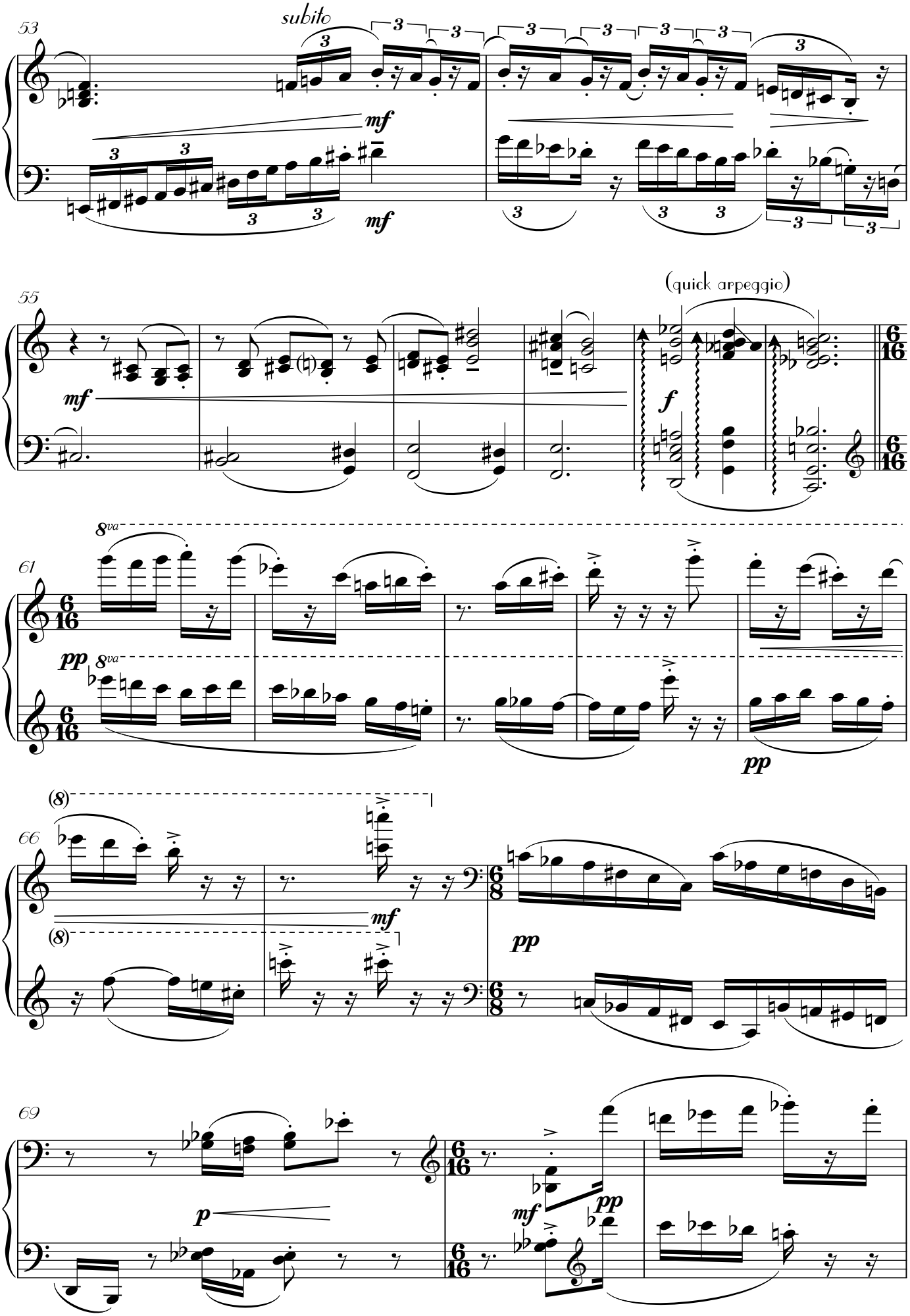

poco accel.
rit.
36
mf
a tempo
40
mp
p
44
mp
p
Ped.
48
pp

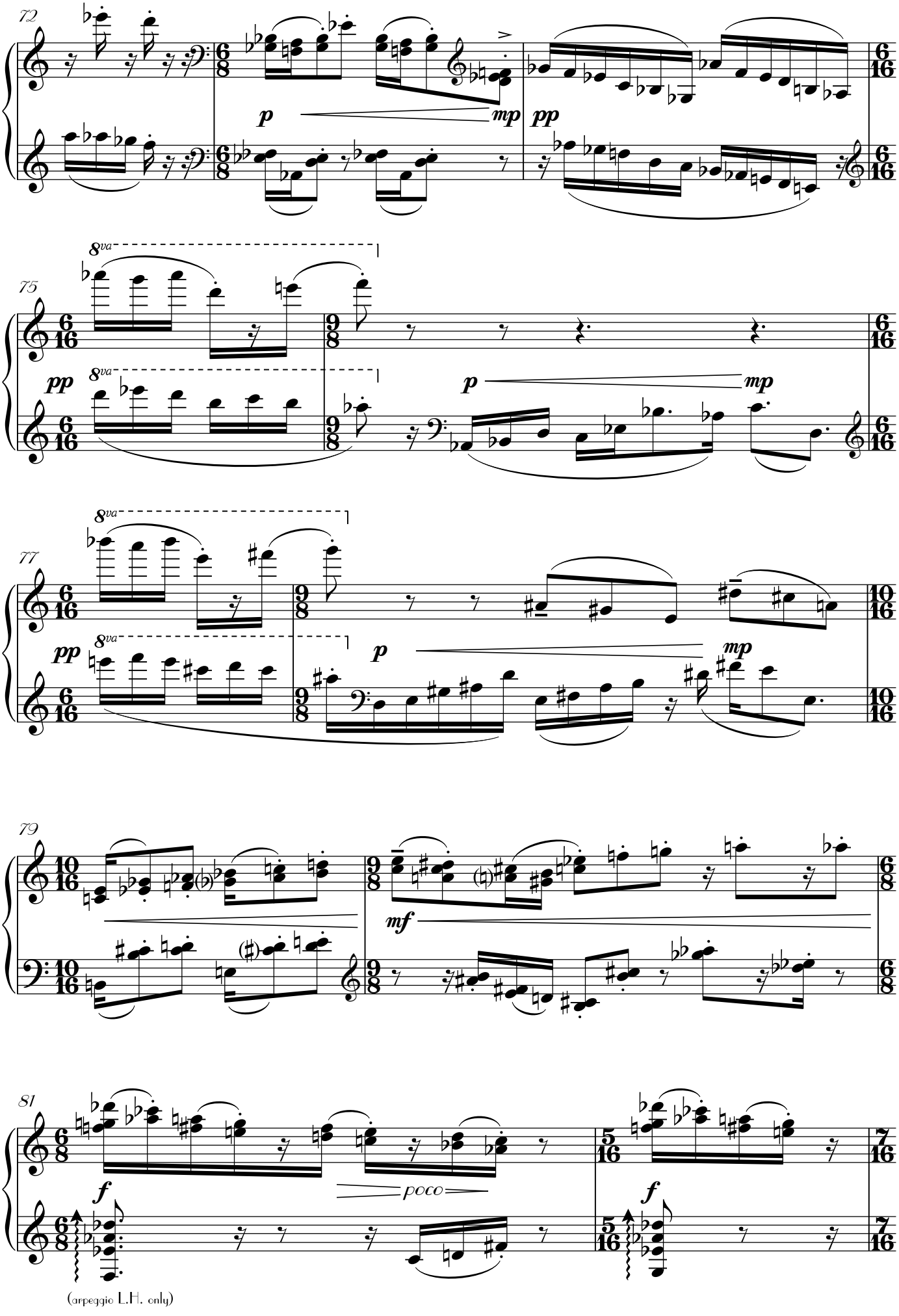
Imagined Bouquet from Méry Laurent

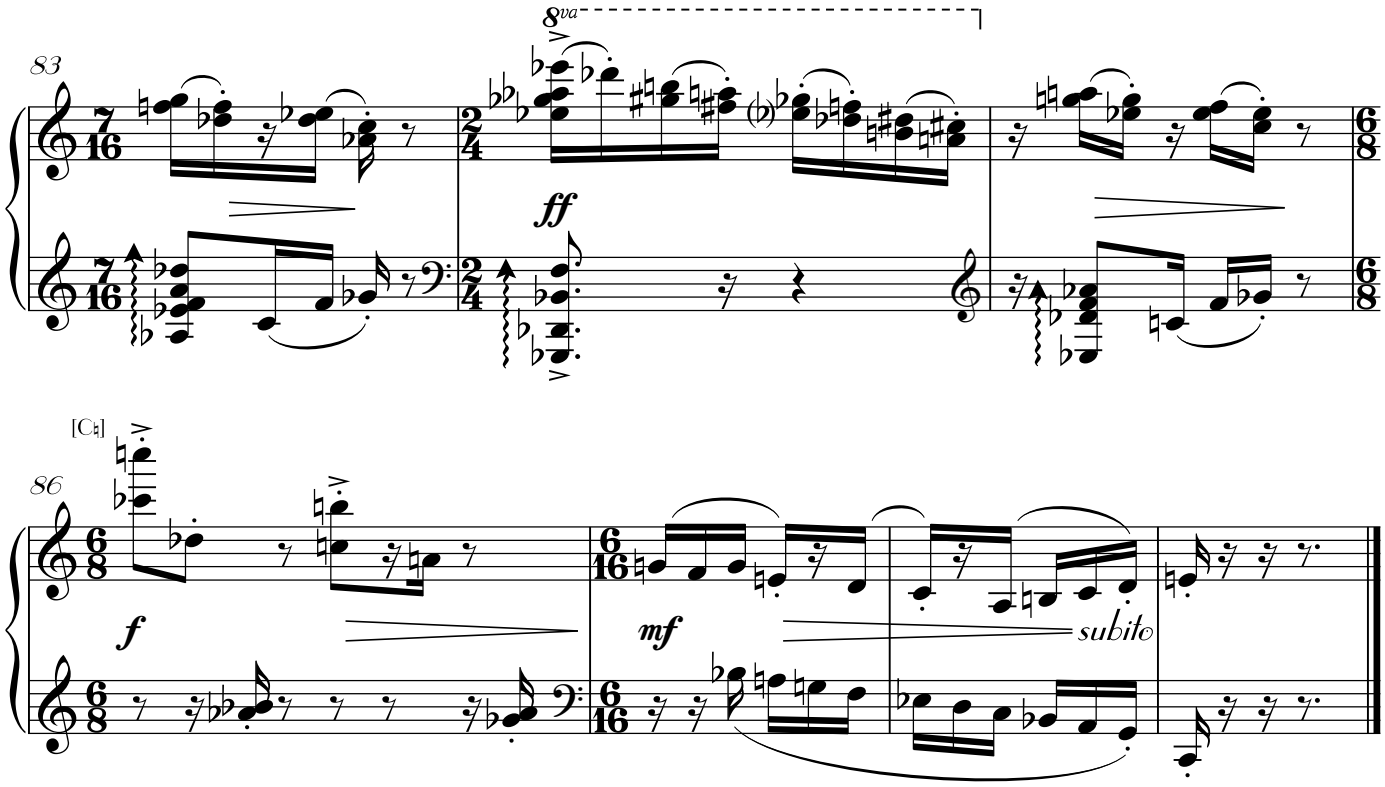



17
mp
20
p
mp
mf
23
p
mp
27
mf
* duration the same - as above
30
f
molto


33
mp
mf
35
skipping
39
p
mp
44
p
mp
p
subito
mf
47
mp
p
mp


53
subito
mf
mf
55
(quick arpeggio)
mf
f
61
8va
8va
pp
pp
66
(8)
(8)
mf
pp
69
p
mf
pp

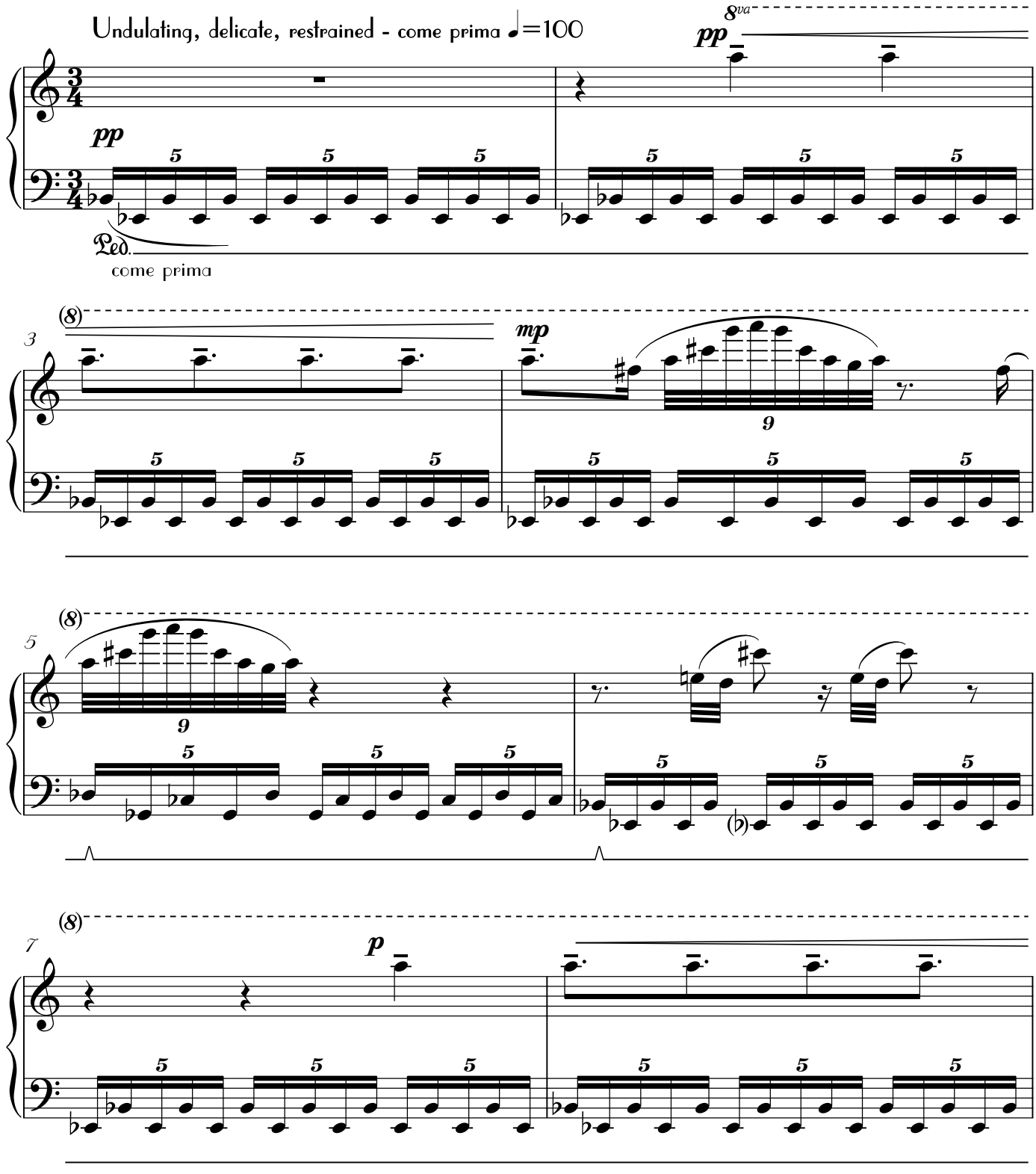

72
p
mp
pp
75
8va
pp
p
mp
77
8va
pp
p
mp
79
mf
81
f
poco
f
(arpeggio L.H. only)

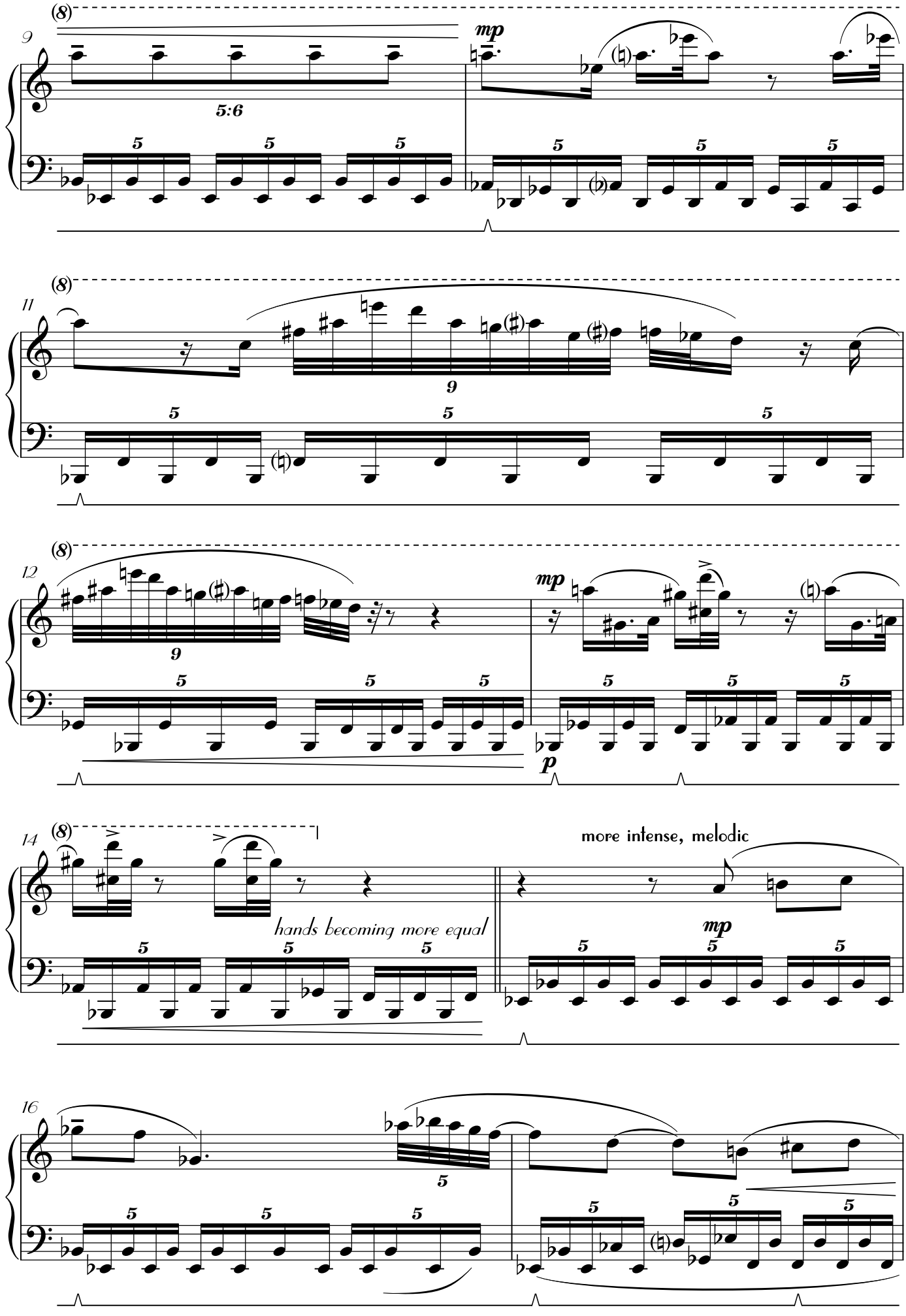

83
8va
ff
[C♮]
86
f
mf
subito

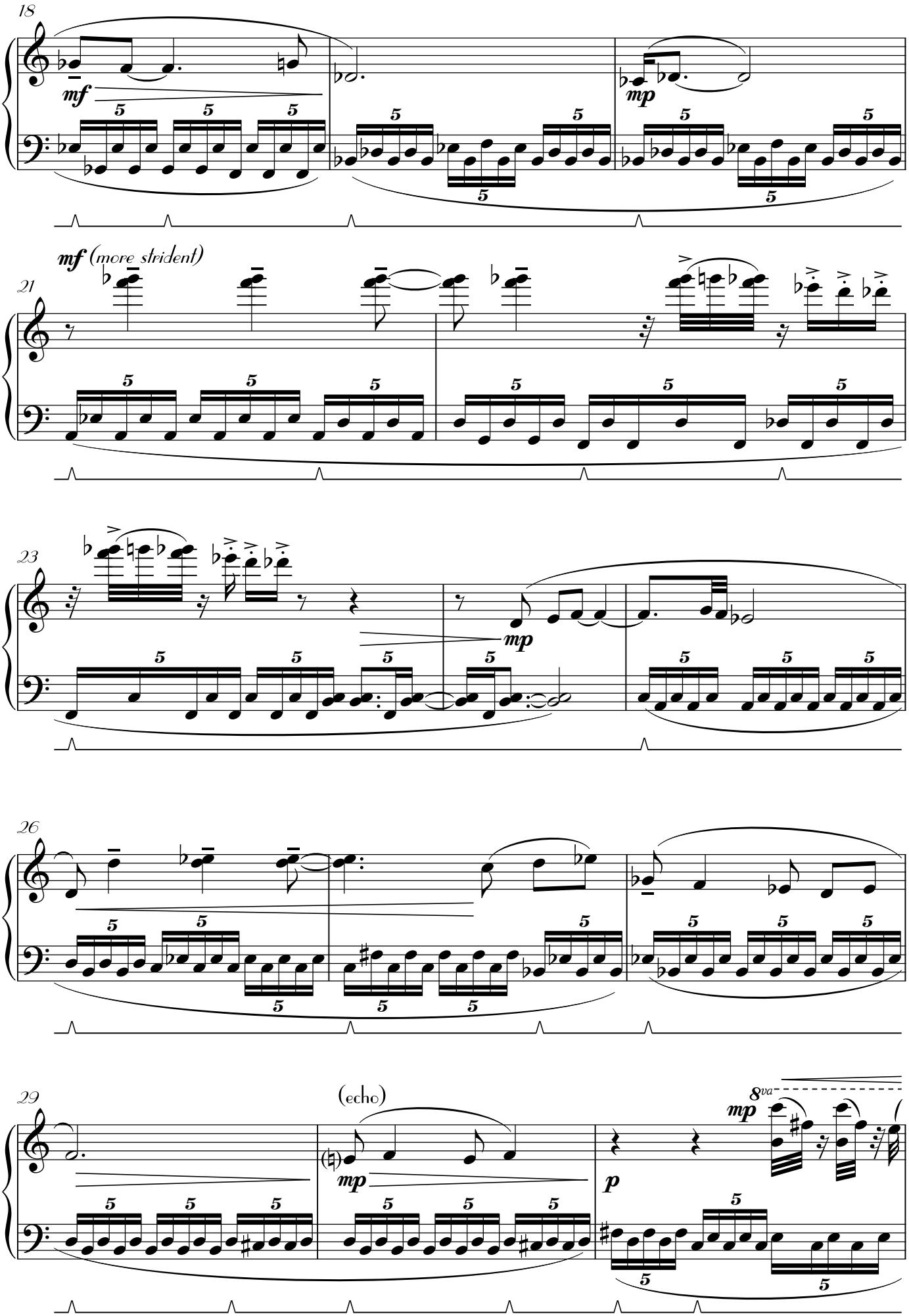
An Empty Chair

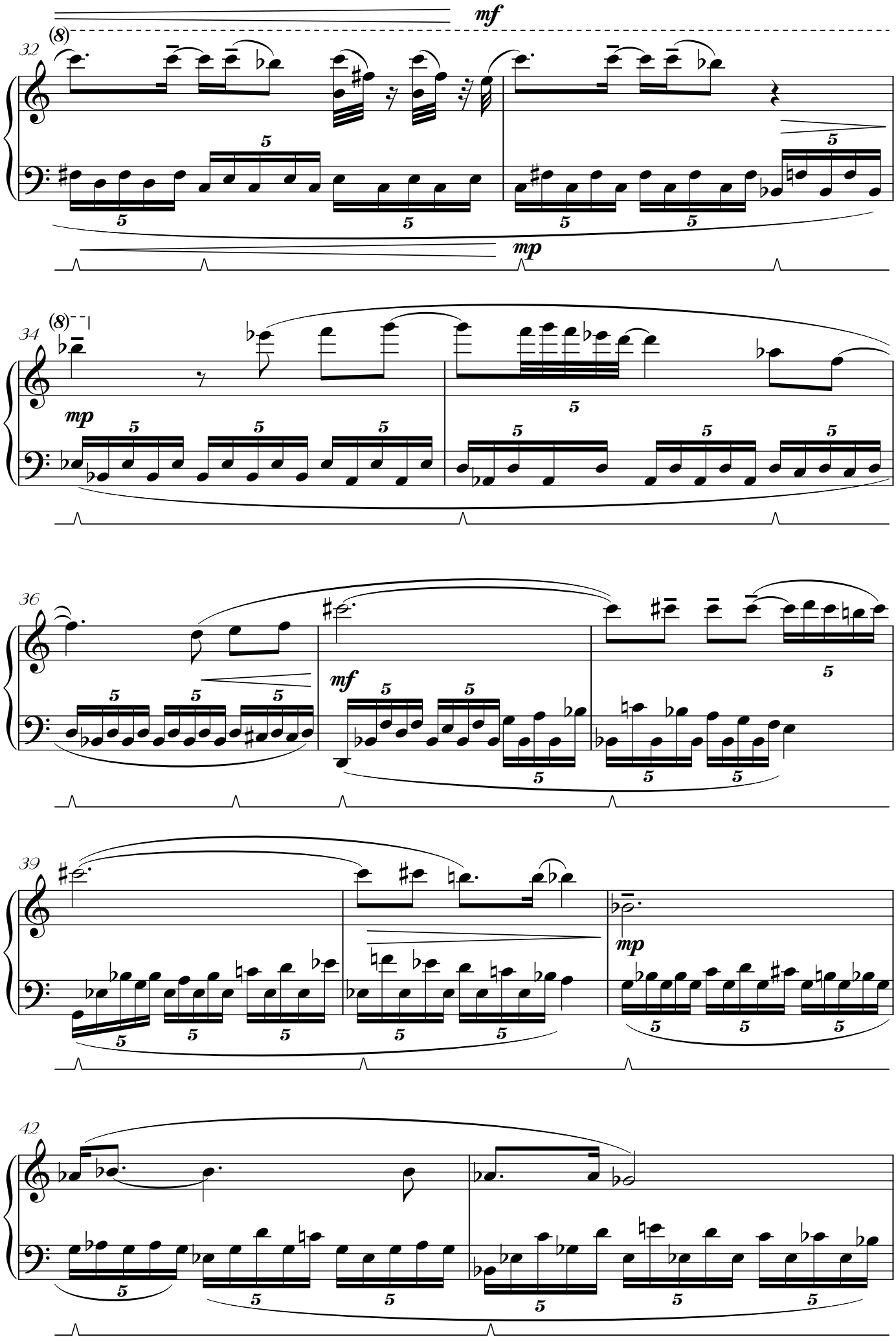
Sketch found posthumously in a notebook of Marcelle Seabourne

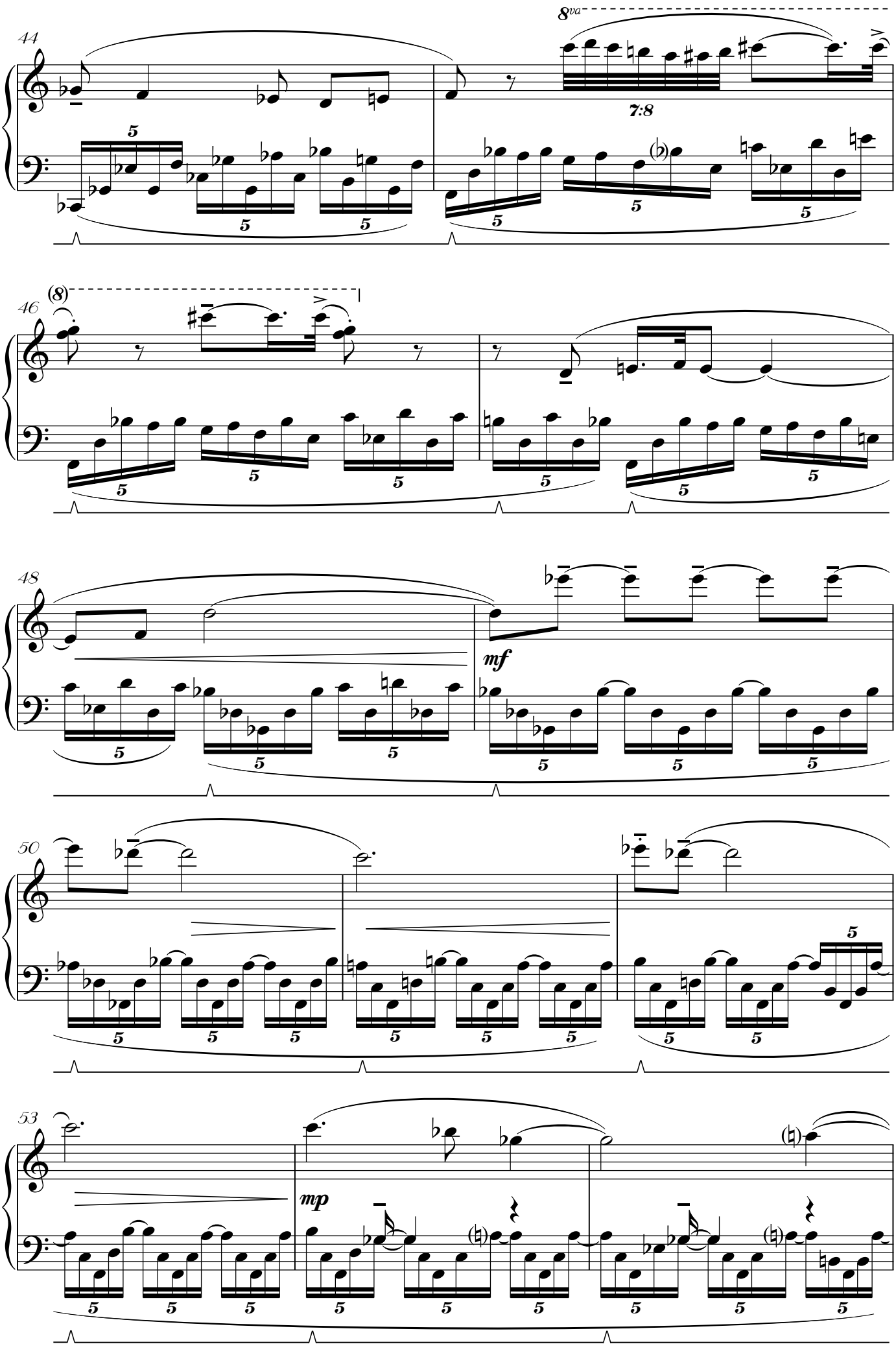
An Empty Chair - My Garden (2020)

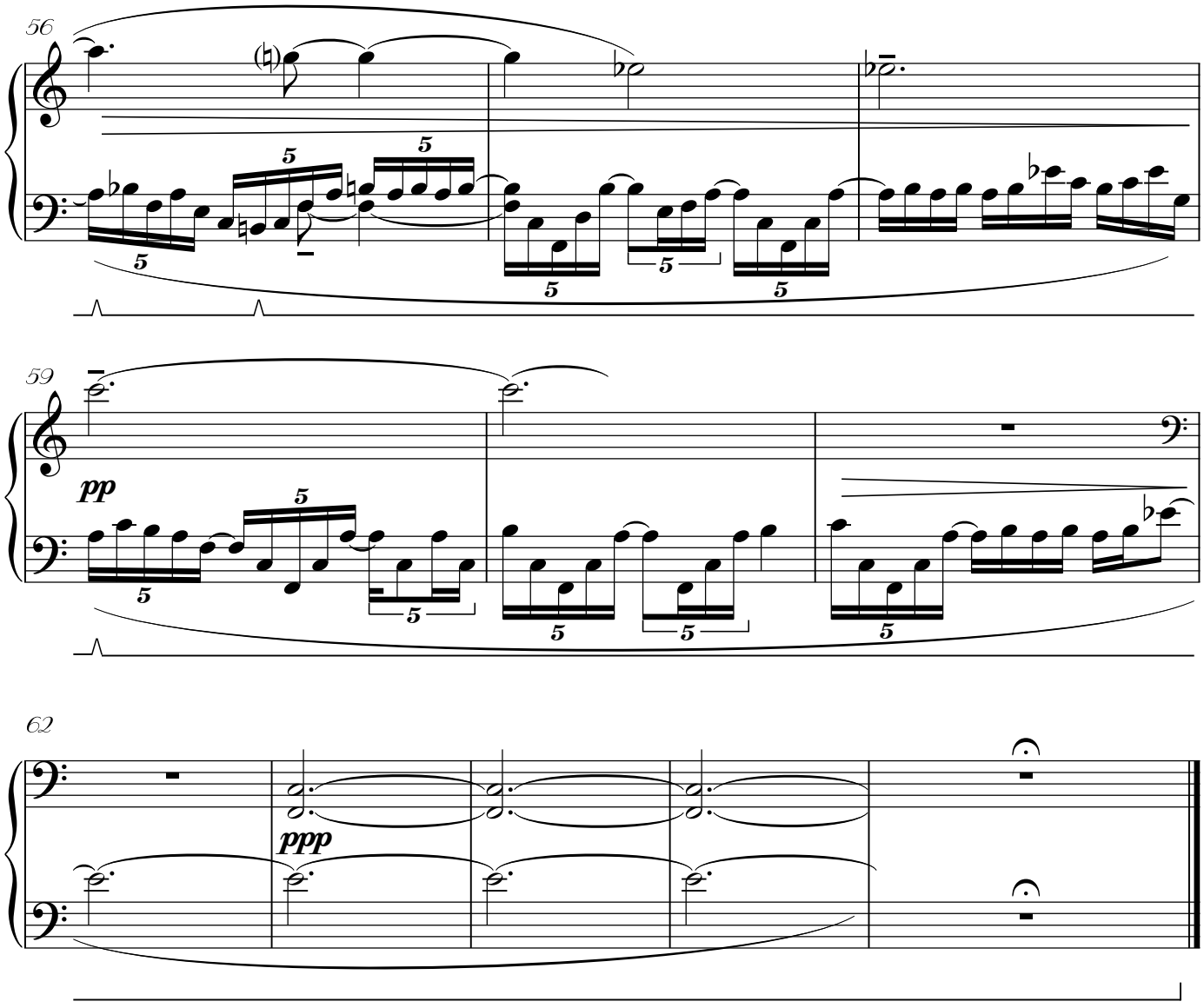



9
(8)
mp
5:6
11
(8)
9
12
(8)
9
mp
p
14
(8)
hands becoming more equal
more intense, melodic
mp
16
5


18
mf
mp
mf (more strident)
21
23
mp
26
29
(echo)
mp
8va
mp
p


mf
(8)
32
mp
(8)
34
mp
36
mf
39
mp
42


44
8va
7:8
46
(8)
48
mf
50
53
mp


56
59
pp
62
ppp