Peter Seabourne

Steps Volume 10: In a Grain of Sand

38 Miniatures for Piano

cover image - A Grain of Sand - monoprint by Marcelle Seabourne

When grains of sand are greatly magnified they reveal an unseen and surprising complexity of form, shape, texture and colour. No two grains are the same and their multiplicity provides hidden worlds of great beauty and interest. In this volume of my Steps series each piece is derived from a single chord in some way - perhaps it simply provides an opening, or its character suggests a harmonic sonority, or its intervals seed a melody. The chord is stated and is, as it were, the everyday, mundane overview of the grain of sand - the ensuing piece unlocks by "magnification" the treasure within. It is the player's choice as to whether they actually sound the chord.

Beyond the (unimportant) "compositional mechanics", the aim of this Steps set, as with all the others, is to conjure little worlds of feeling and expression: to paint a picture; to ponder a thought; to evoke an atmosphere.

My friend, the pianist and poet Oana Rusu Tomai provided me with two beautiful verses inspired by this same stimulus and concept. Cunningly, they do the same as my pieces in that each line provides an independent, contrastingly characterised title, yet they also coalesce to form cohesive wholes. The first is predominantly exultory, the second reflective. The cycle is dedicated to her.

I.

I look through you at the sun
You ignite your own fire
Reverberate through hidden mossy chambers
Long stony corridors and marine gems
Patiently rethinking the world
Dissolving like honey on God's tongue
With a nonchalant gesture you put to my eye
A lens of magnificent refractions
To my ear, a curious sound
First, a rumbling, then, surrender
At last, the beatific moment when you fly in the air
With a stellar whoosh…
A wonder that does not know of itself
As all marvels are, innocent
Of aggrandizing and human drama
Spending of itself inexhaustibly
In prisms of glory and enigmatic hexagons
A grain of sand is a sun
Much closer to us than any other revelation planets.

II.

A letter full of breaths has arrived
A nameless sender's courtesy to me
The hand is puzzling, grains of sand
Pour in the heart, and plunge in opened earth
Time is passing without progressing
The sundial memorializes someone's joy in a return
Stunned language of silence, unvoiced throat,
Pigments of longing infuse our reunions
Who has been calling all night
In the realm of air and water?
Watching with eyes of wild birds
Breathing with lungs of tuft and grasses?
Shall I call you a Shadow?
Lithe body of quiet revolt
Your sleeves are as light as sails
Quickening a boat towards darkness
The river of love and death is ready to swallow
Our pleasure trips into what caused us pain
A silver fish's splash submerges in a last lingering chord.

Oana Rusu Tomai

PART I

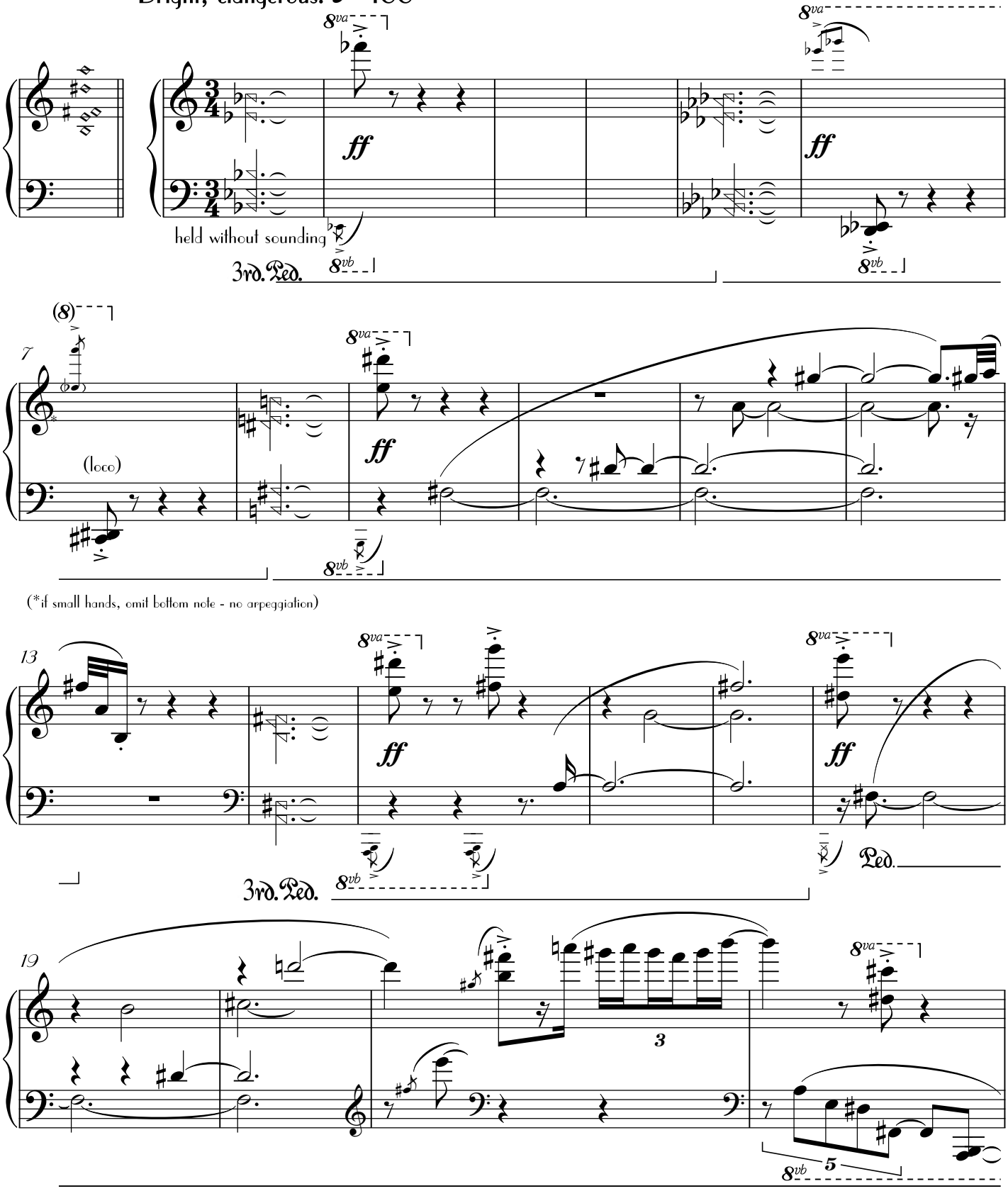
To my dear friend Oana Rusu Tomai

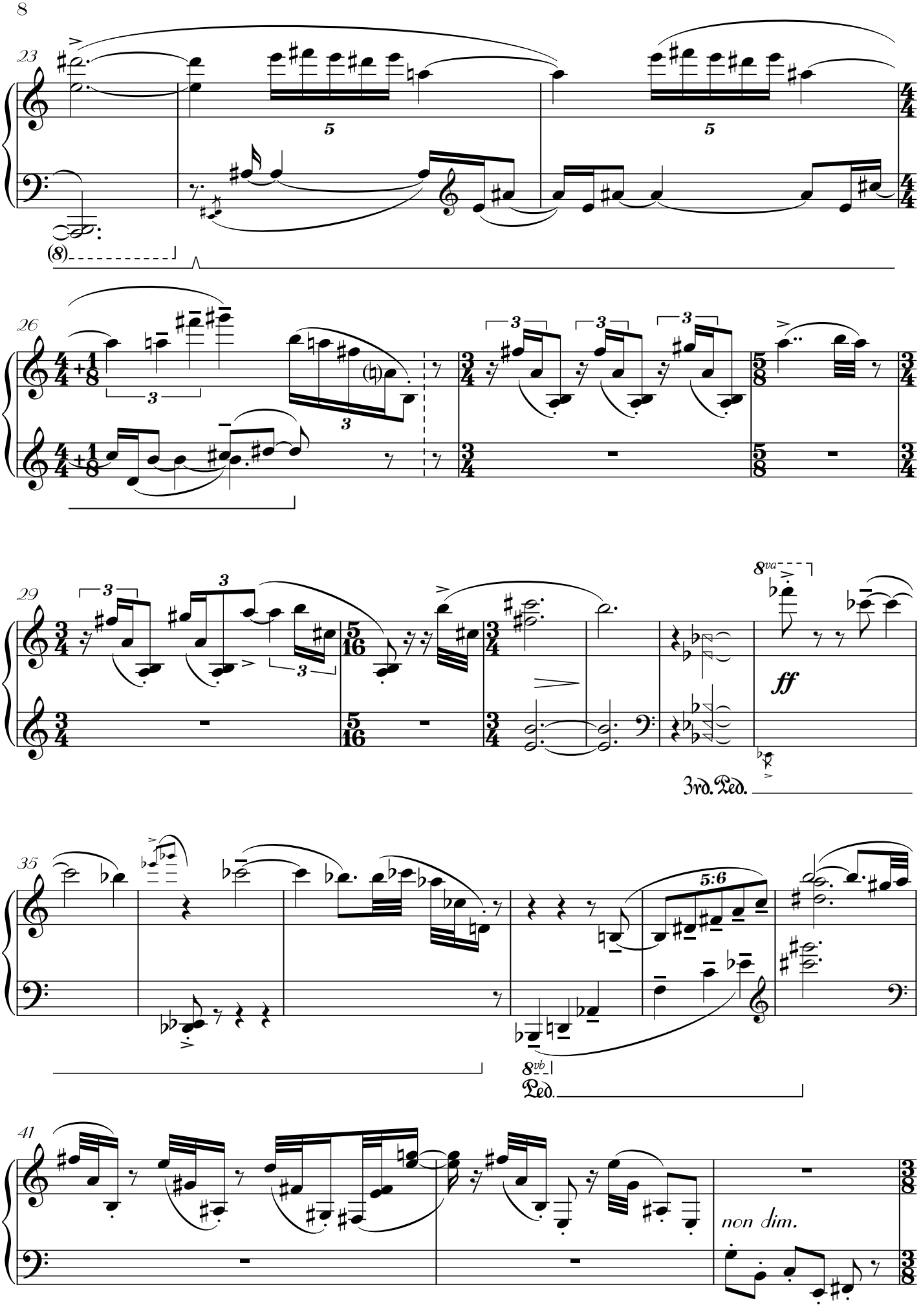
Steps Volume 10: In a Grain of Sand

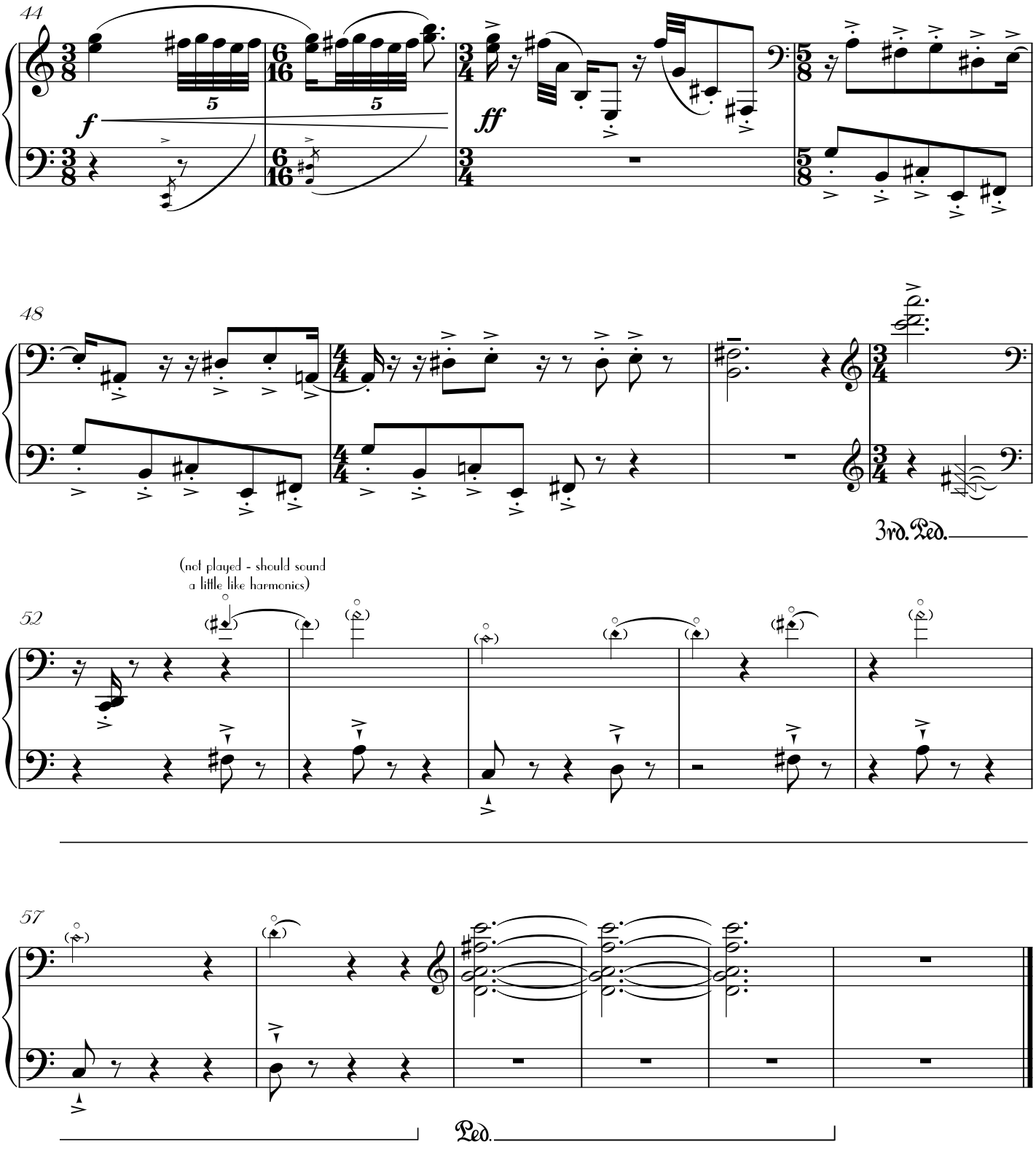
1. I look through you at the sun

Peter Seabourne

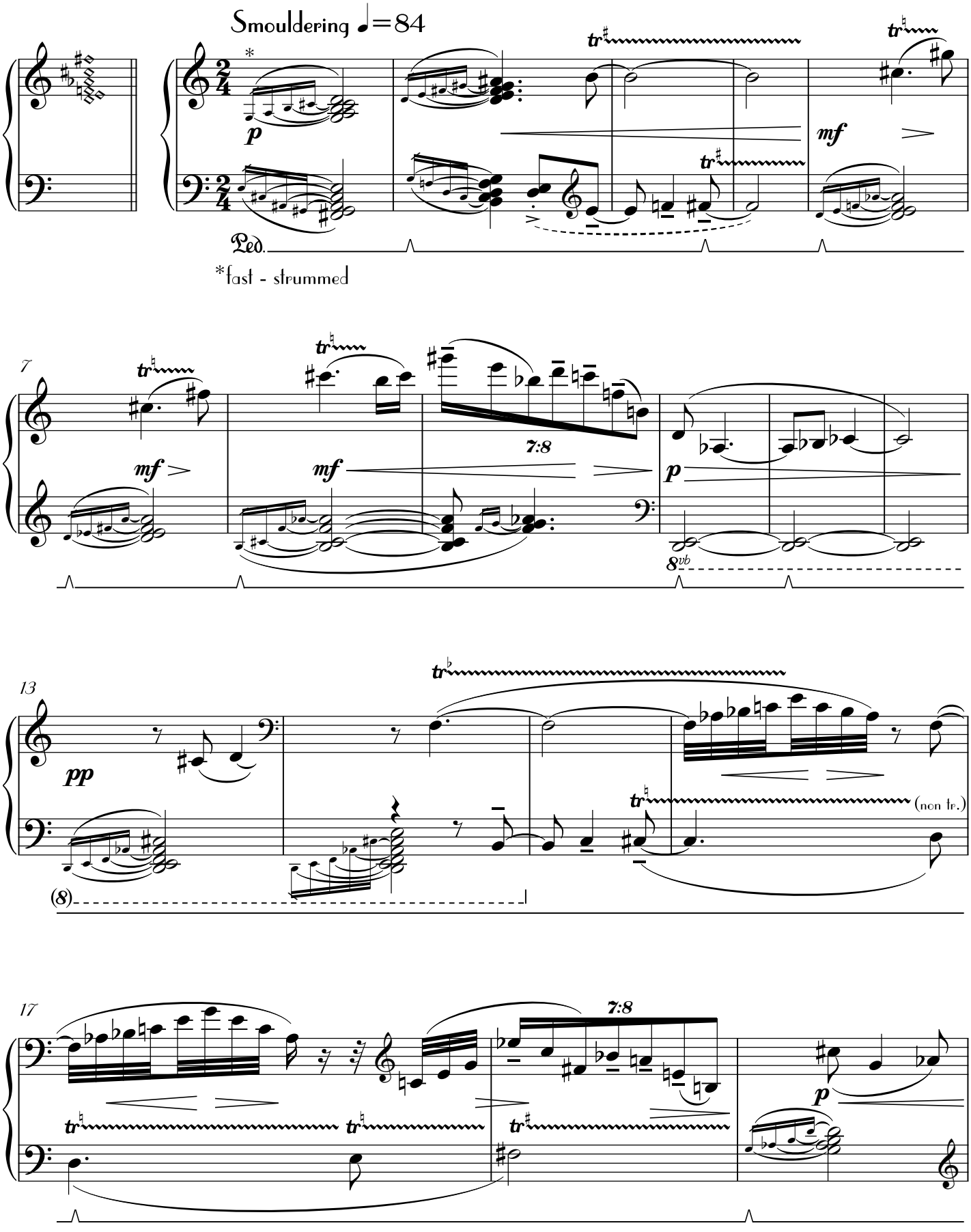
Feb. 2023

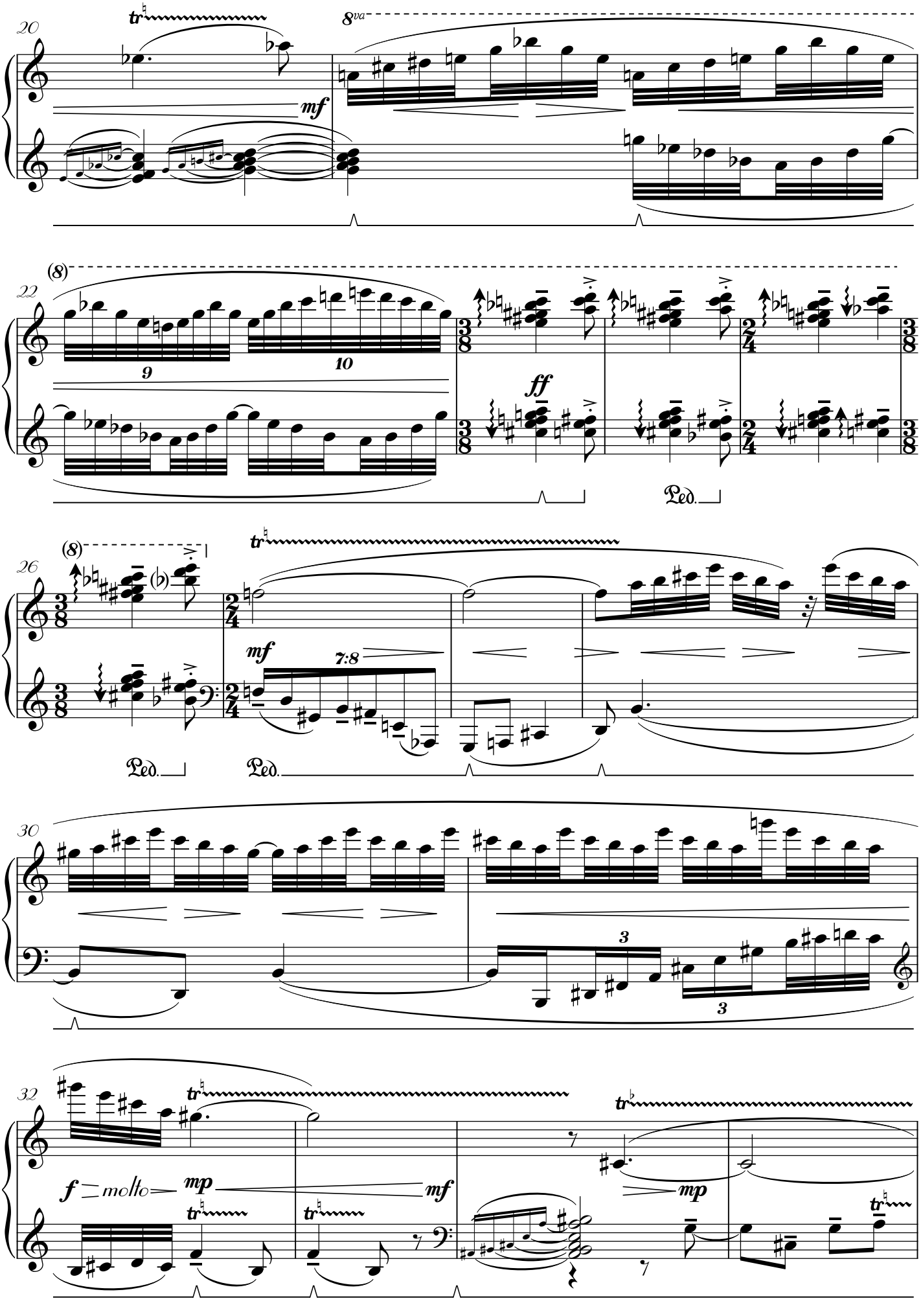


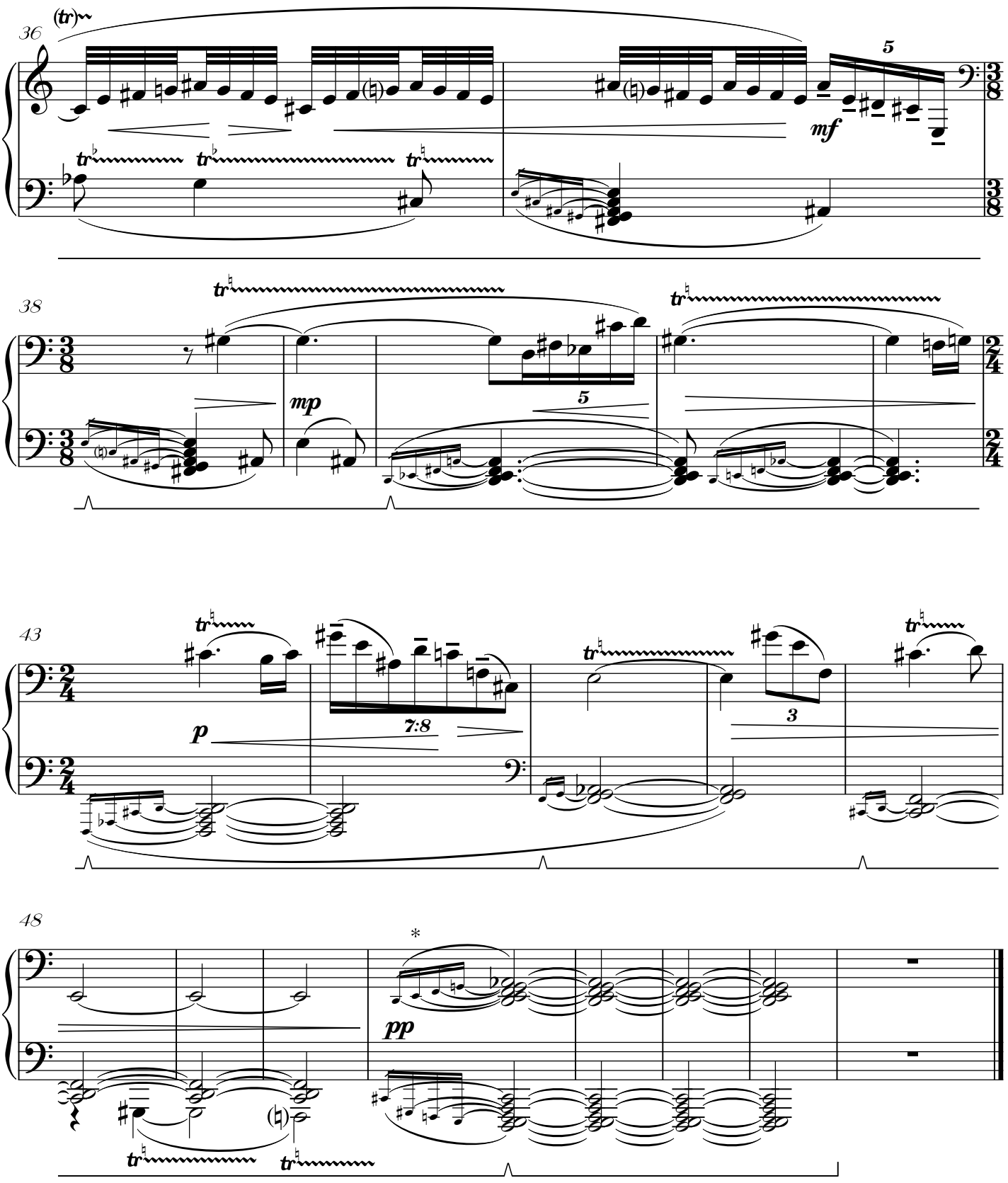

23
(8)
26
29
8va
ff
3rd. Ped.
35
5:6
8vb
Ped.
41
non dim.


44
f
ff
48
3rd. Ped.
(not played - should sound
a little like harmonics)
52
57
Ped.

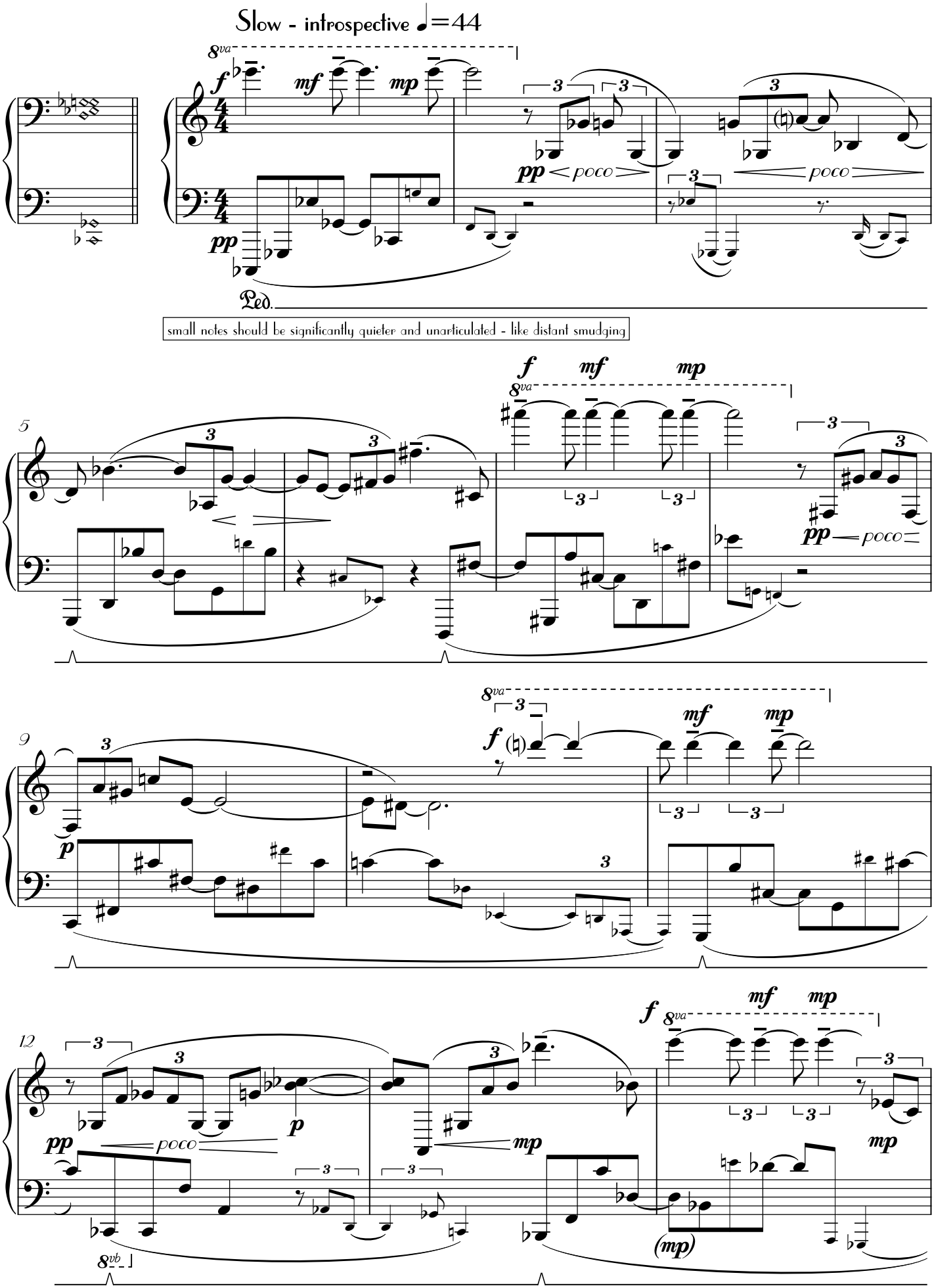
2. You ignite your own fire

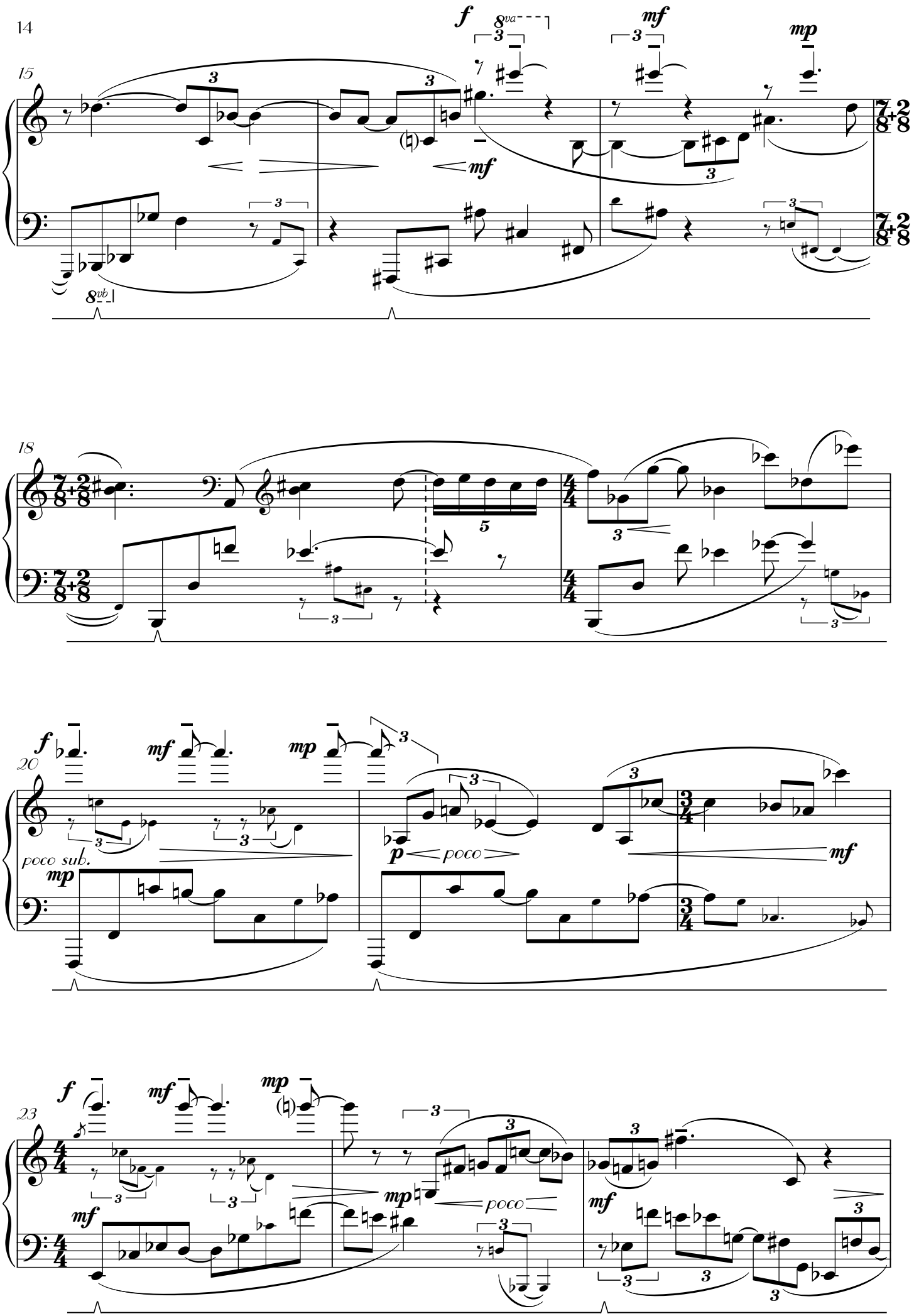


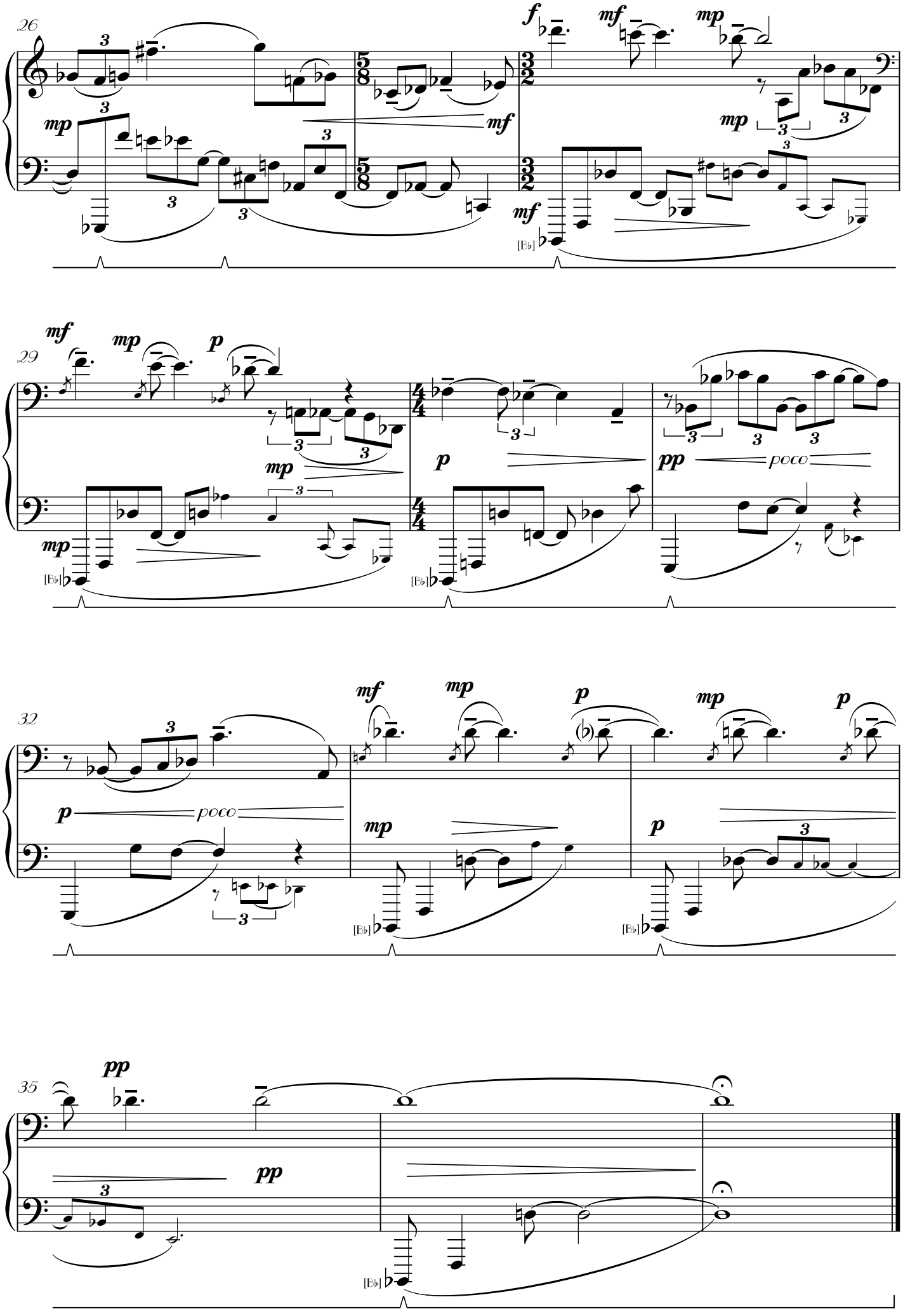

20
tr
mf
8va
(8)
22
9
10
ff
Ped.
(8)
26
mf
7:8
Ped.
Ped.
30
3
3
32
tr
f molto
mp
mf
tr
tr
tr
mp
tr


36
(tr)
5
mf
38
mp
5
43
p
7:8
3
48
*
pp

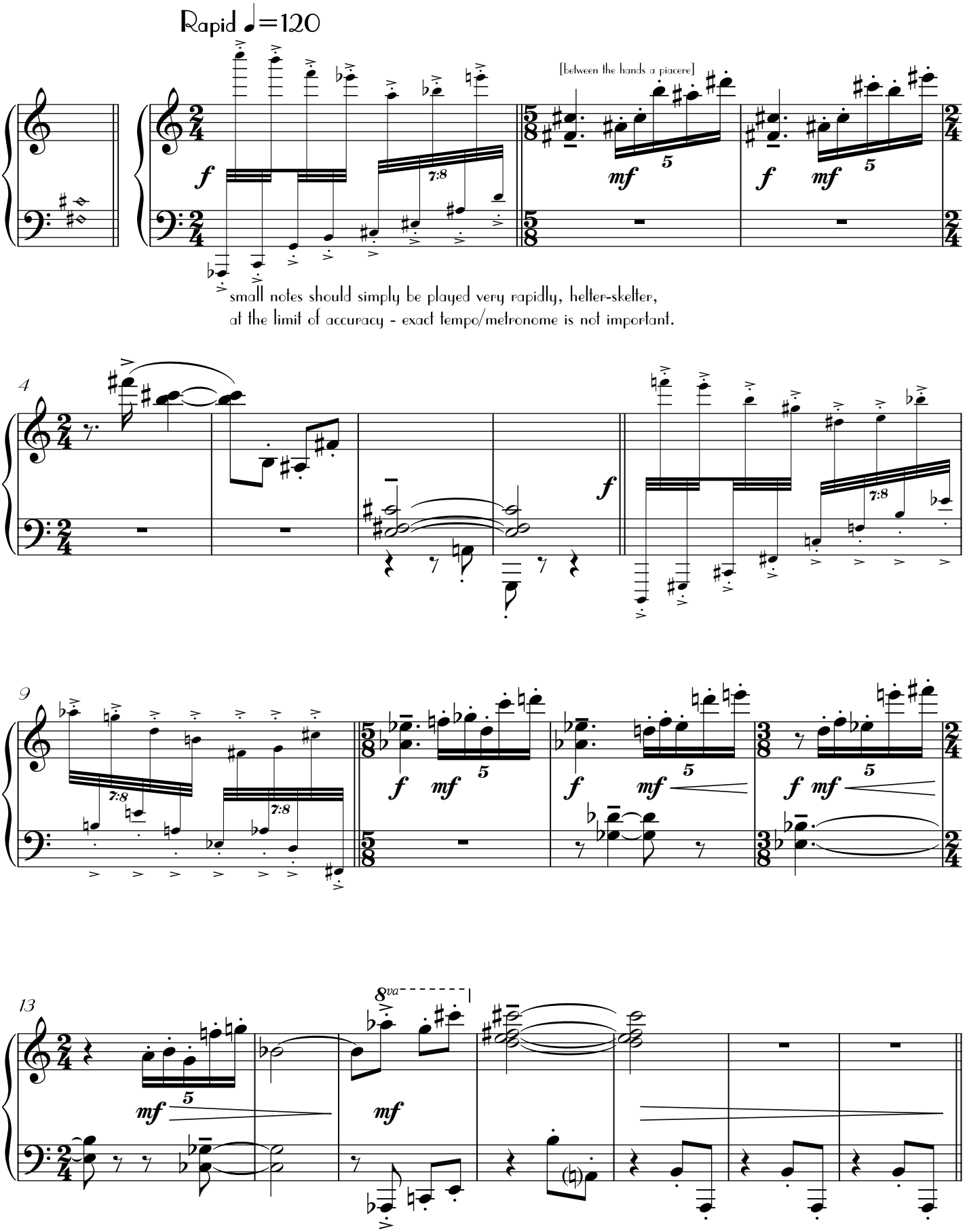
3. Reverberate through hidden mossy chambers

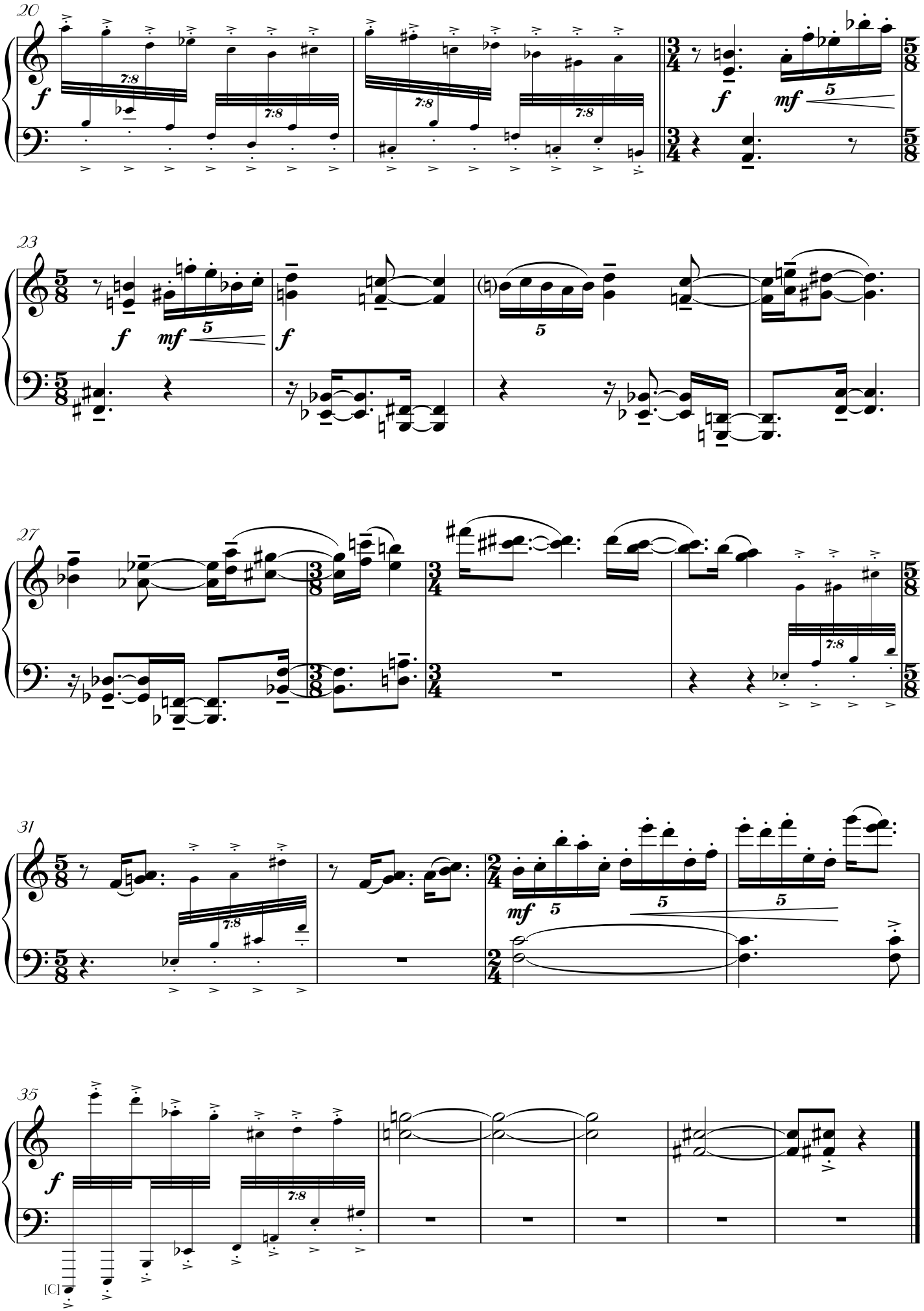



15
f
8va
mf
mp
mf
8vb
18
5
3
20
f
mf
mp
poco sub.
mp
p
poco
mf
23
f
mf
mp
mp
poco
mf

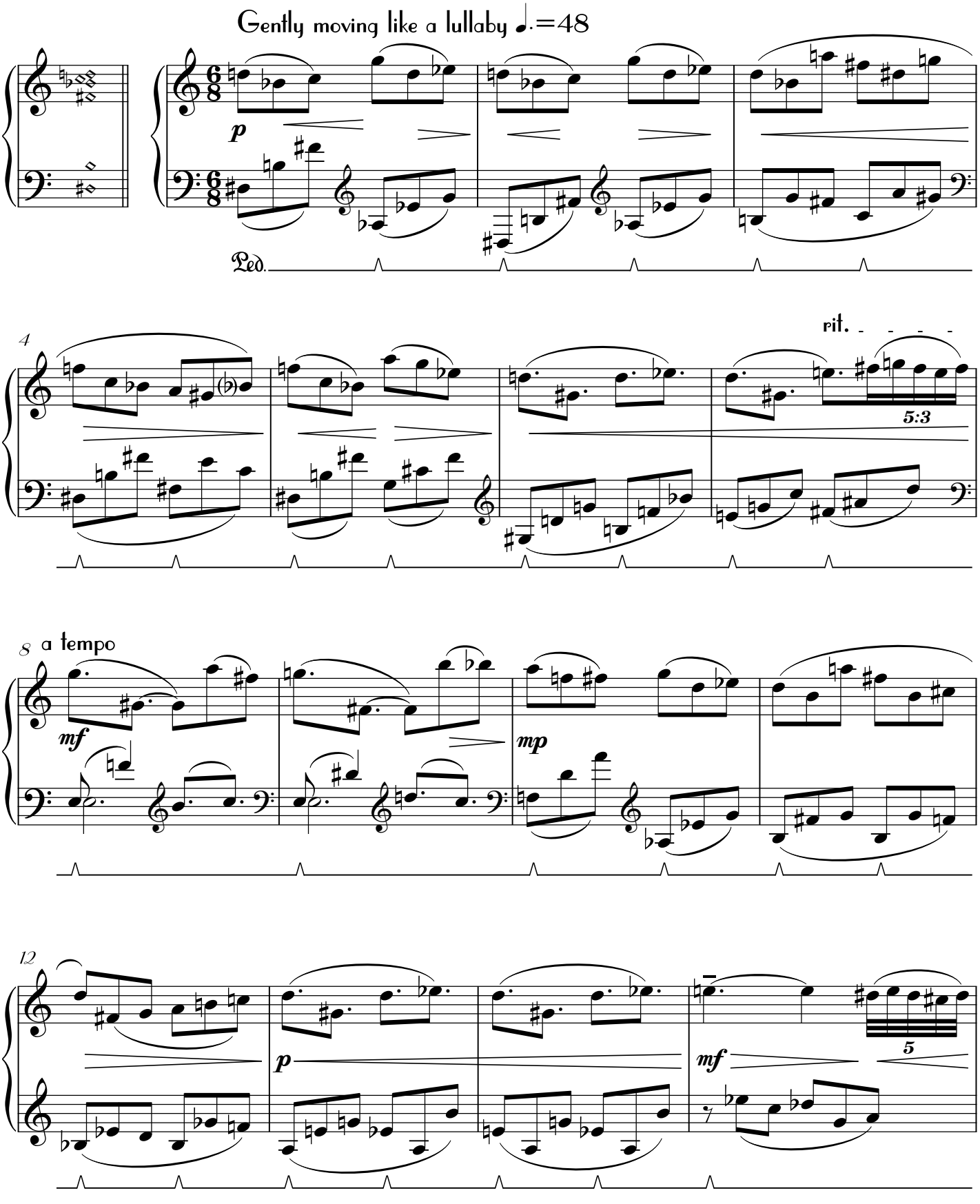

26
mp
mf
f
mf
mp
mp
mf
29
mf
mp
p
mp
p
pp
poco
32
p
poco
mf
mp
p
mp
p
p
35
pp
pp

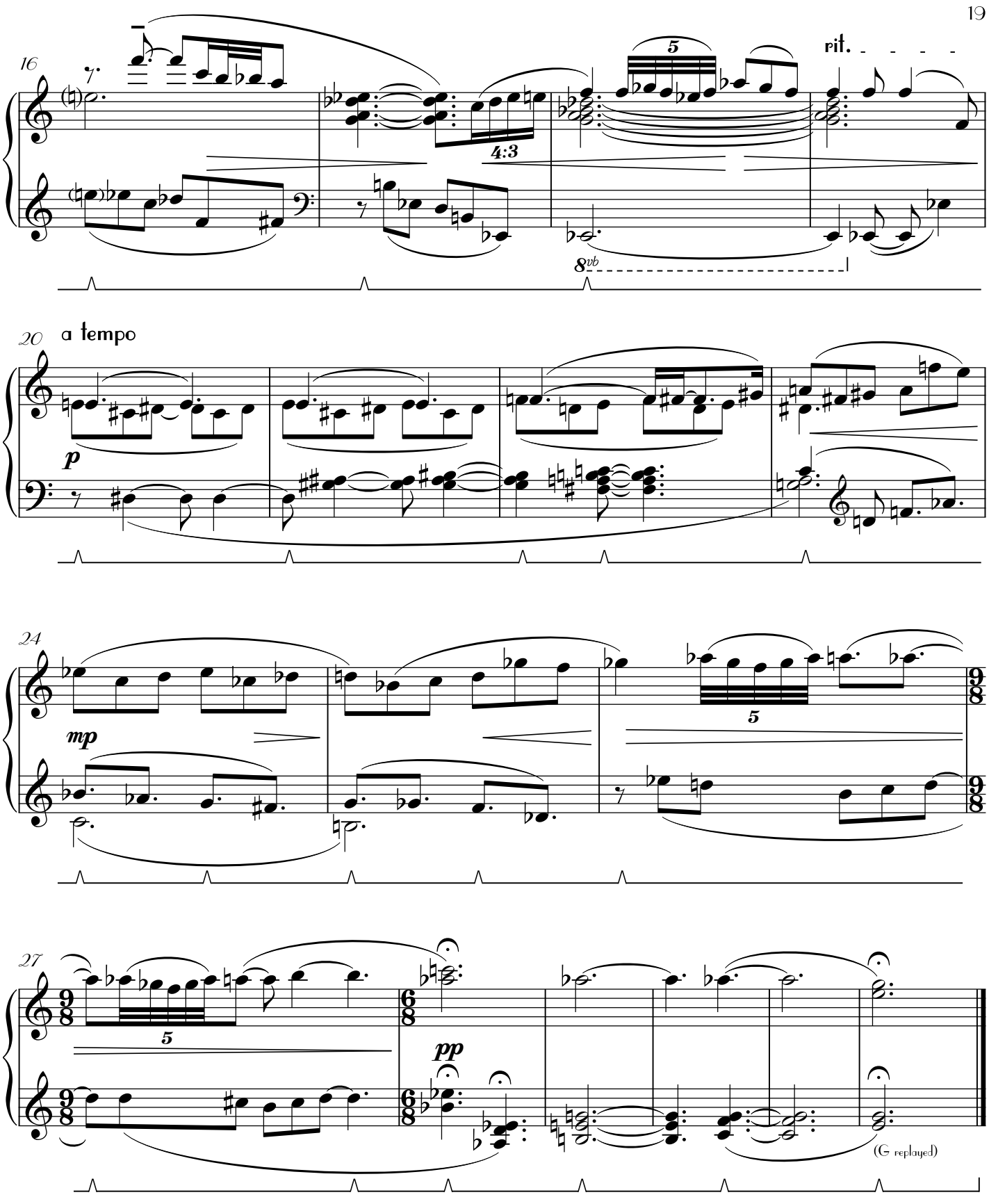
4. Long stony corridors and marine gems



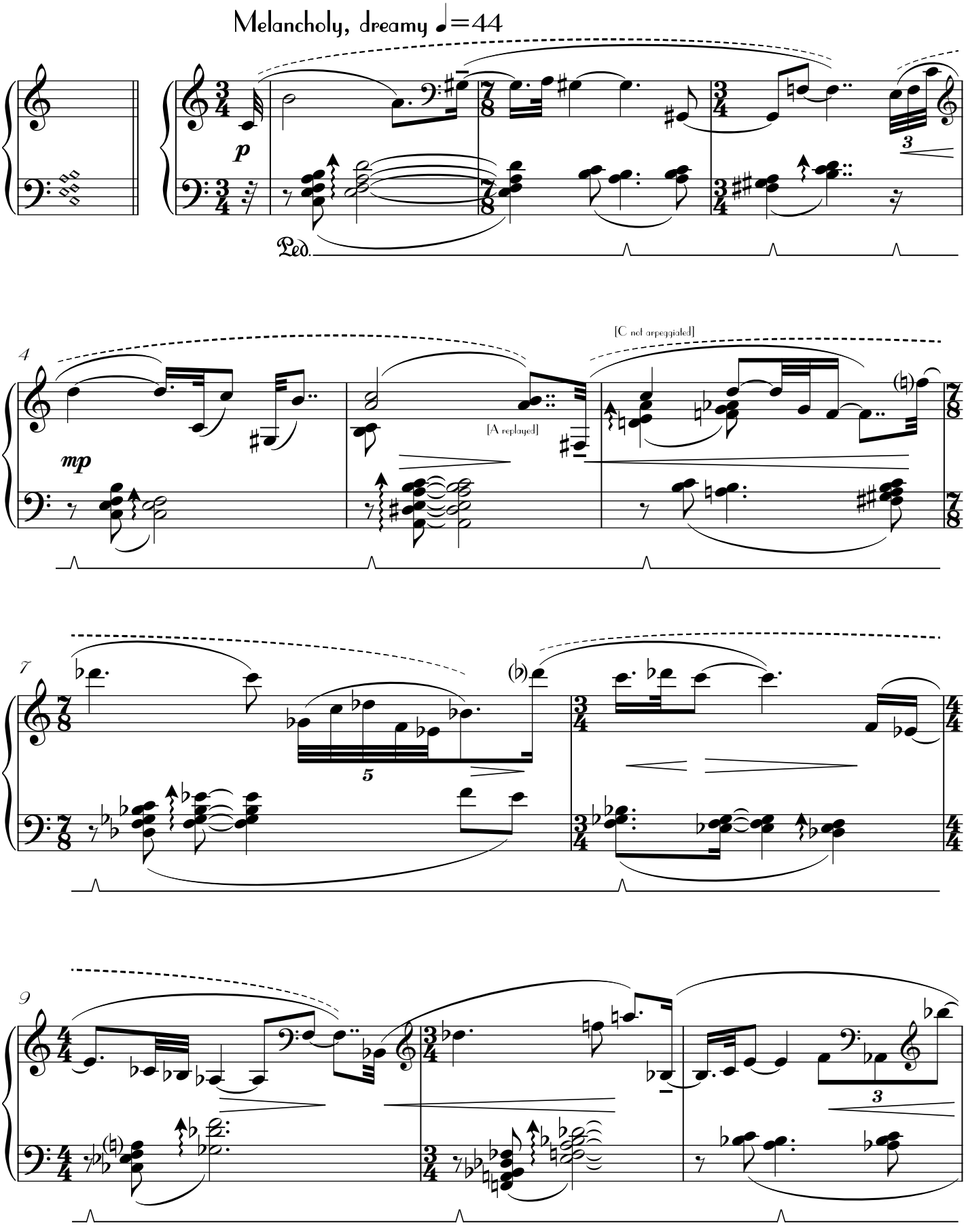

20
23
27
31
35
[C]

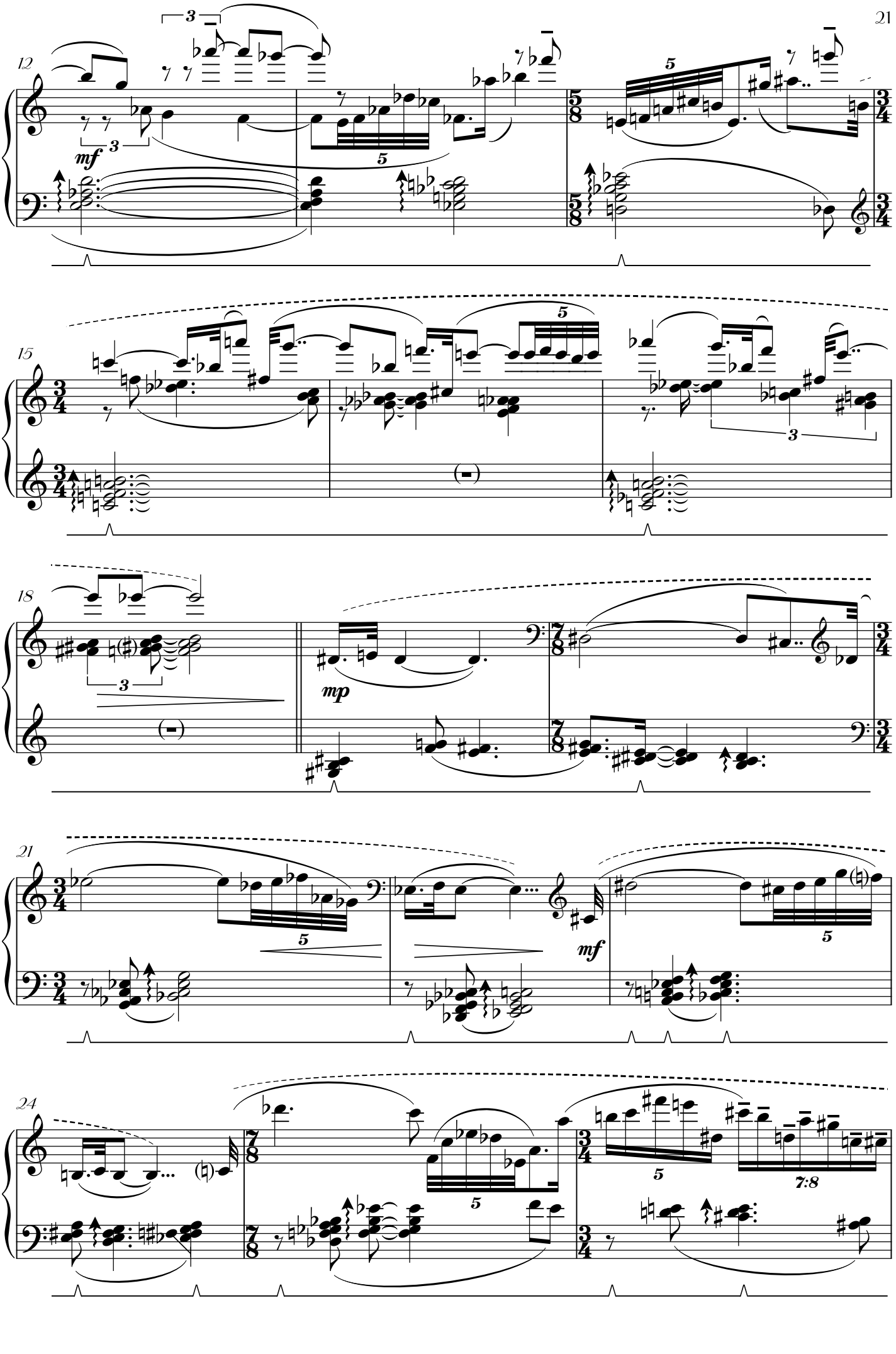
5. Patiently rethinking the world

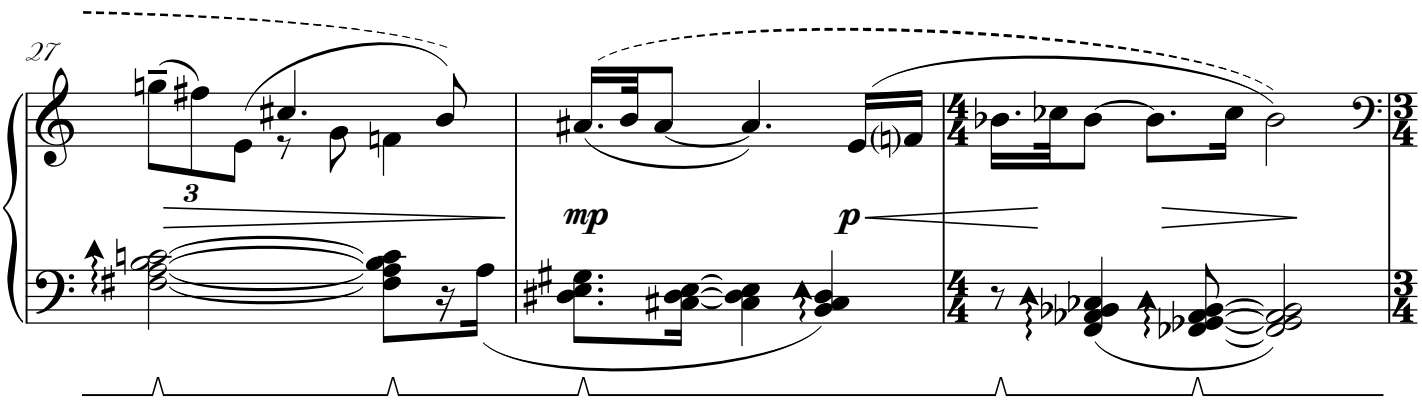


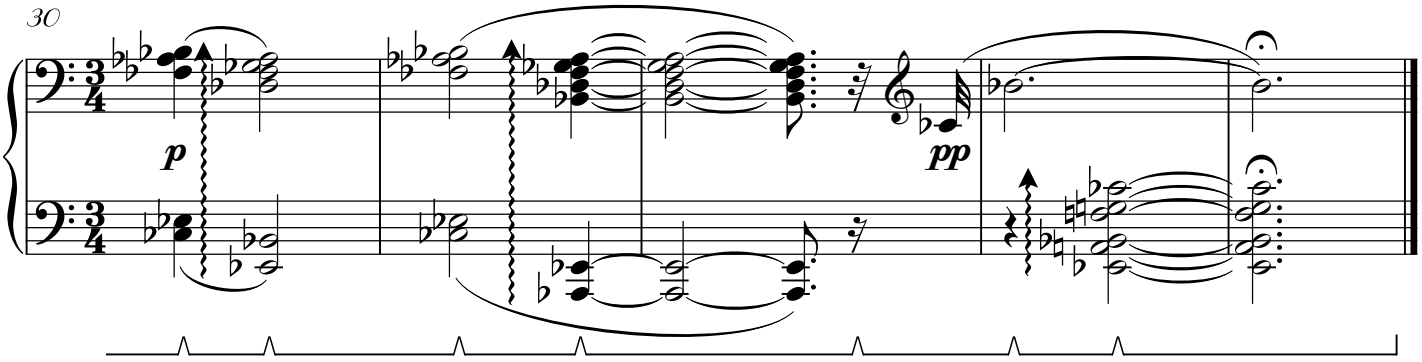

16
5
rit.
4:3
8vb
20
a tempo
p
24
mp
5
27
5
pp
(G replayed)

6. Dissolving like honey on God's tongue

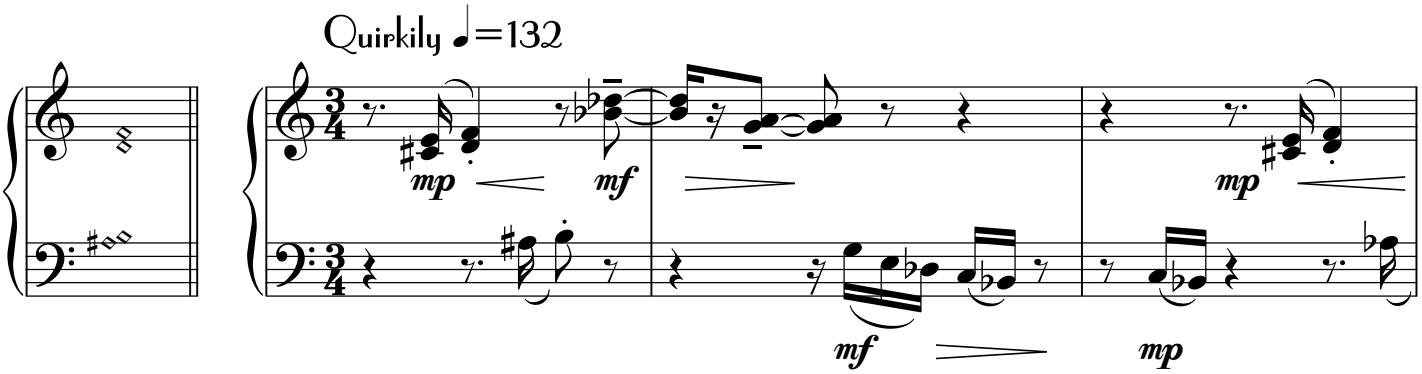


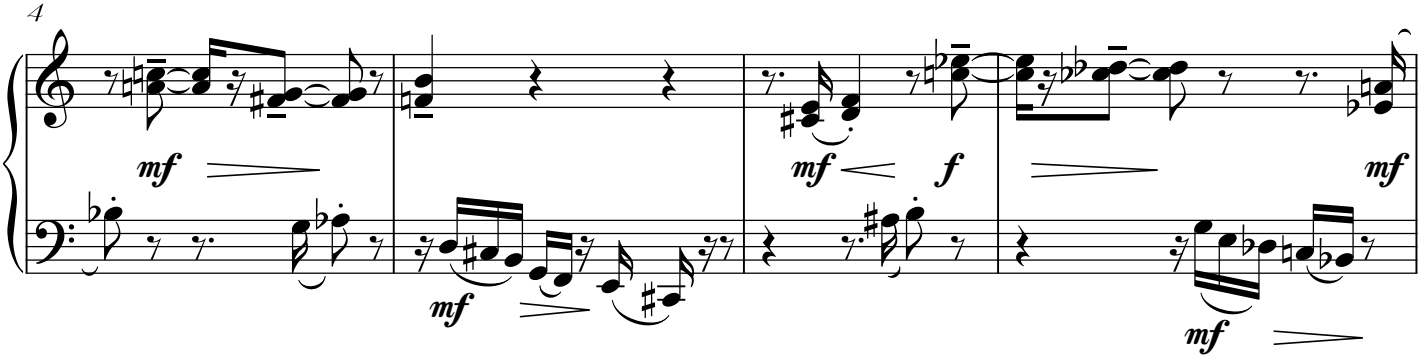

12
mf
15
18
mp
21
mf
24
7:8

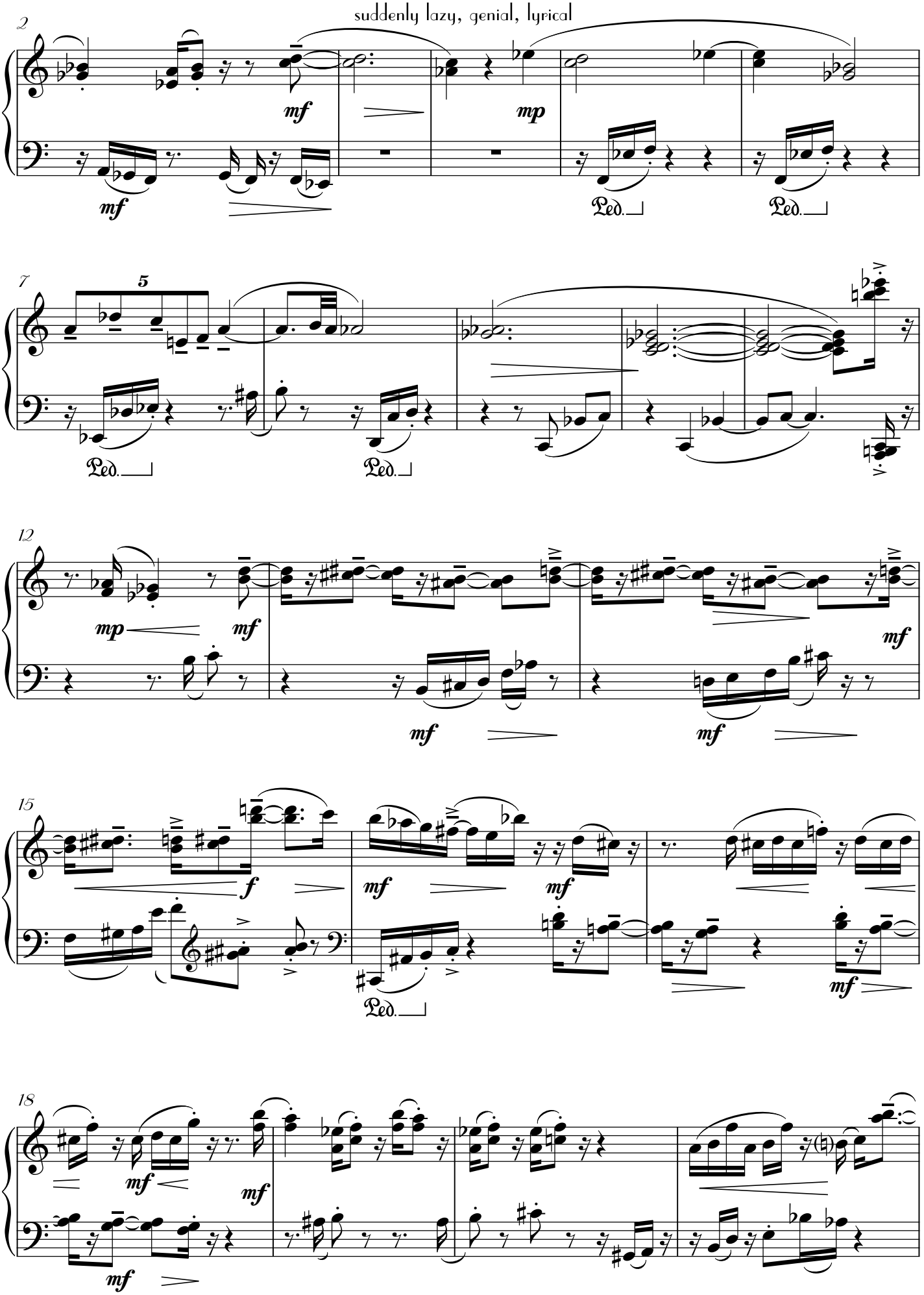


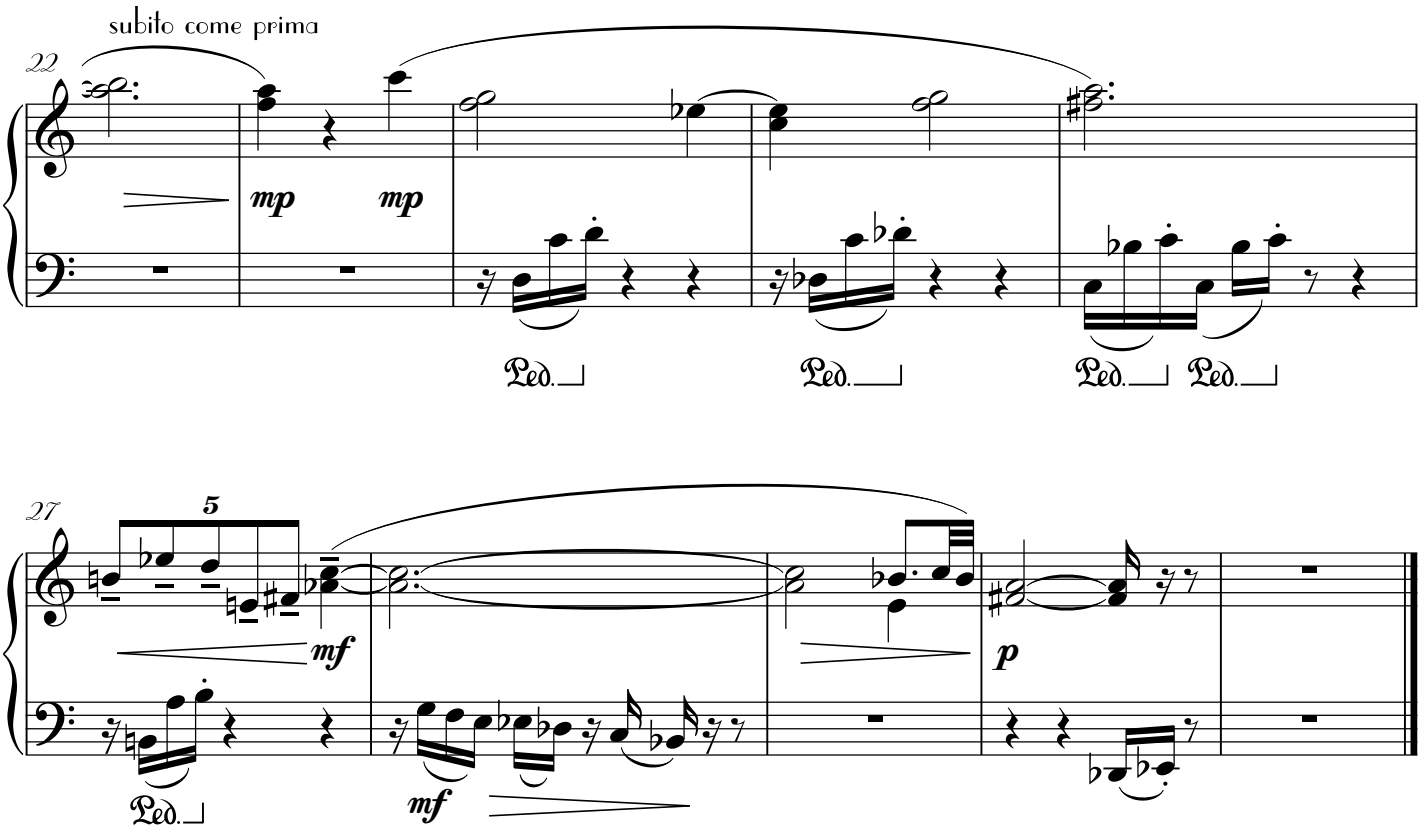


7. With a nonchalant gesture you put to my eye...

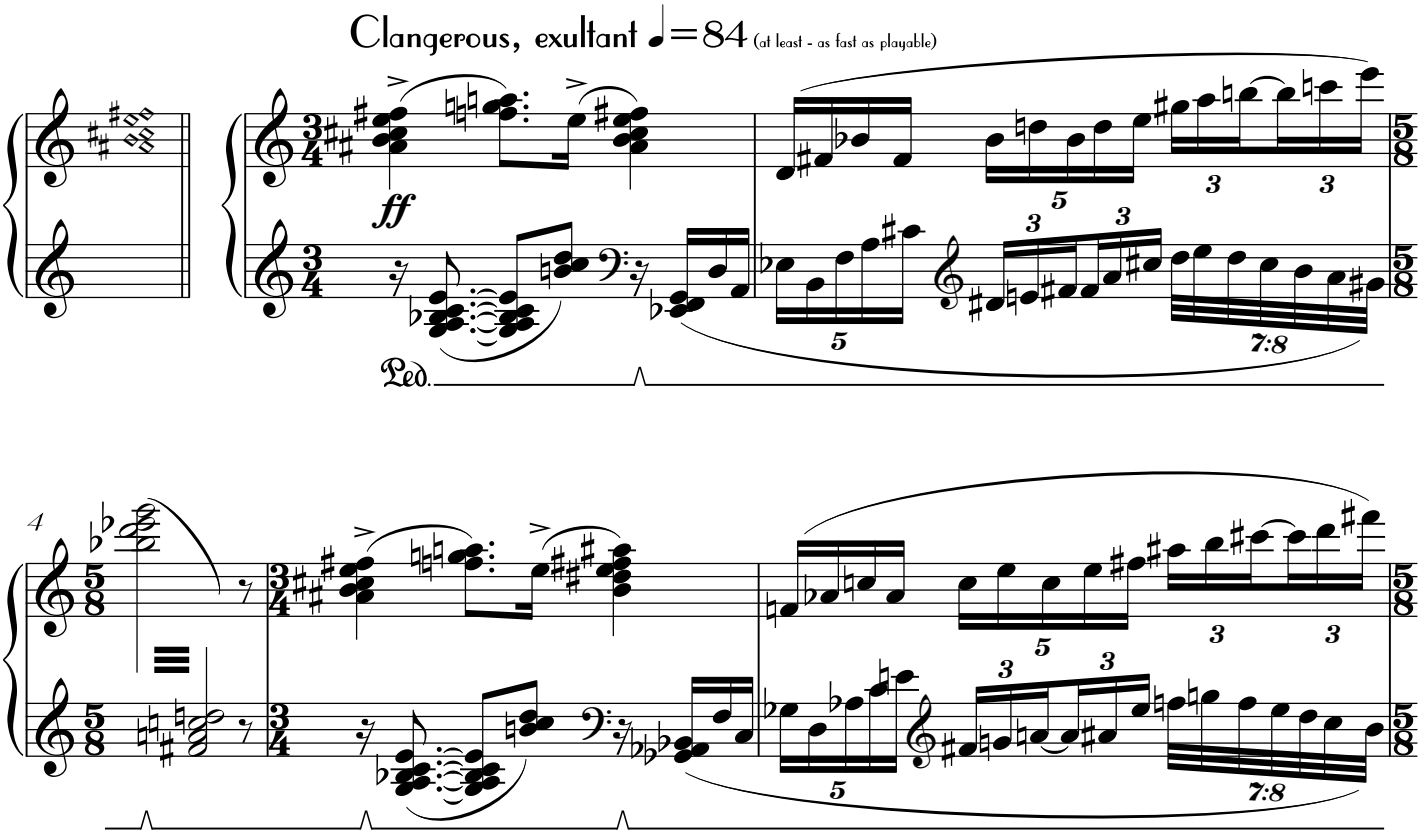


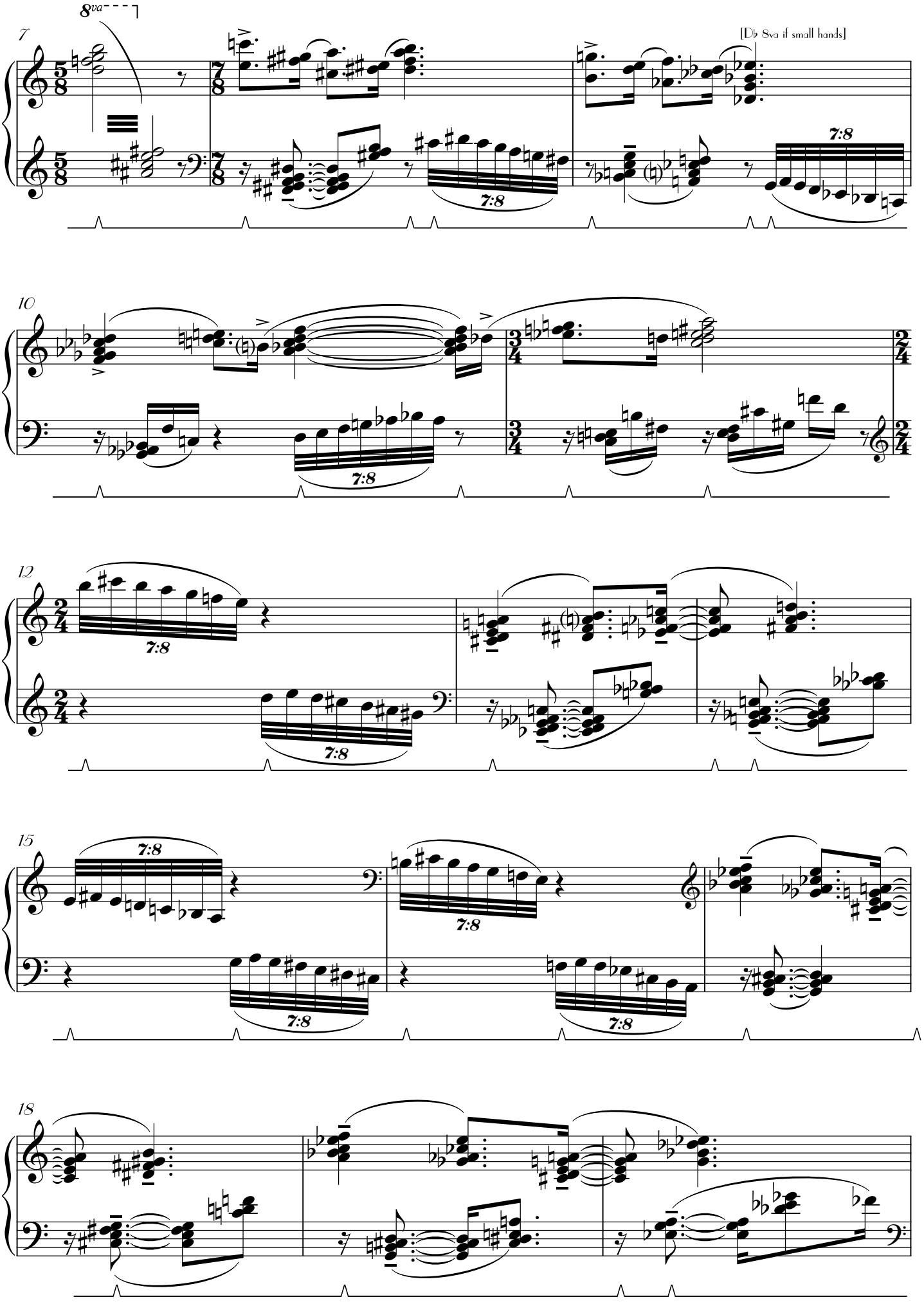


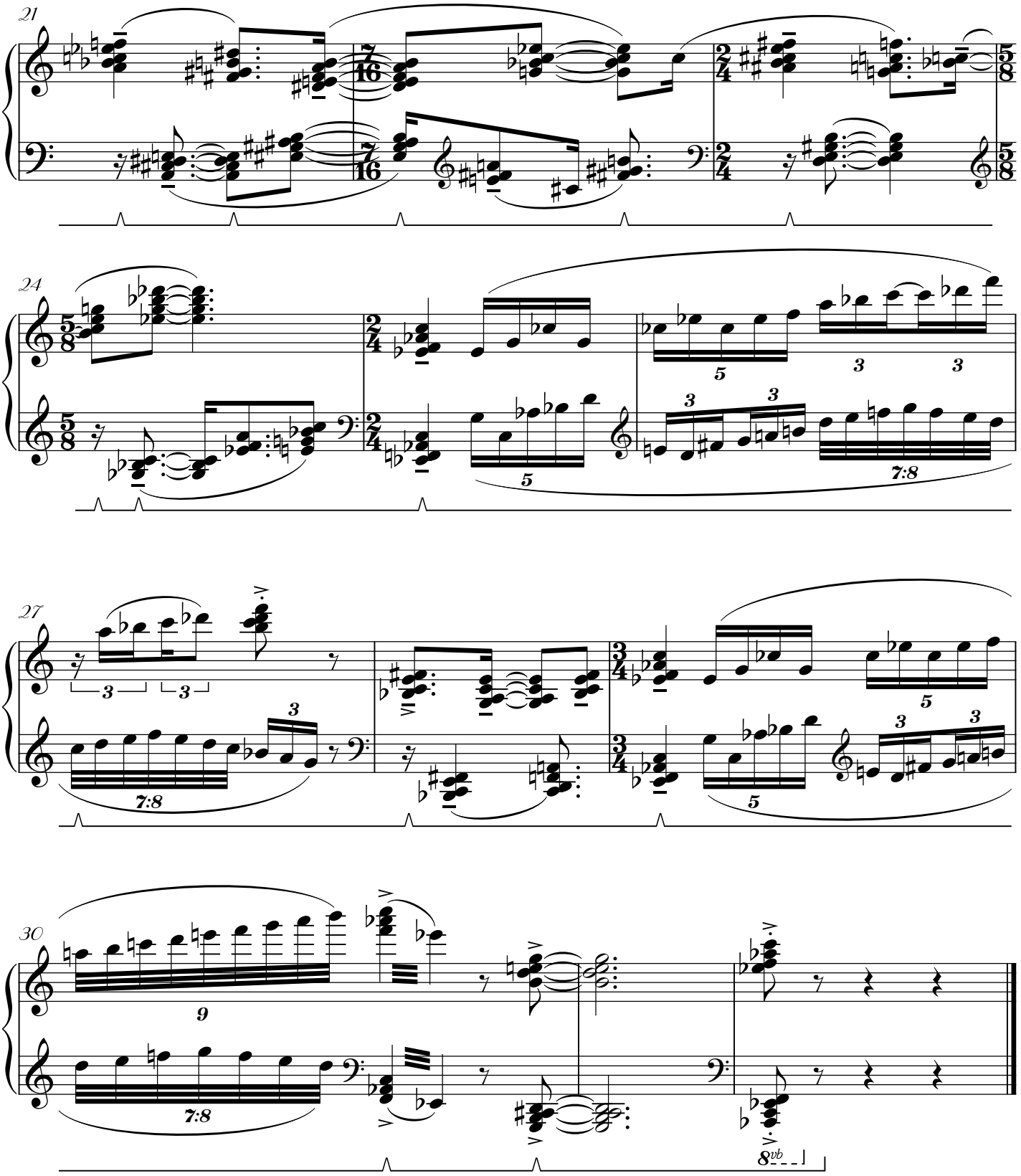

suddenly lazy, genial, lyrical
2
mf
mf
mp
Ped.
Ped.
7
5
Ped.
Ped.
12
mp
mf
mf
mf
mf
15
f
mf
mf
Ped.
mf
18
mf
mf
mf



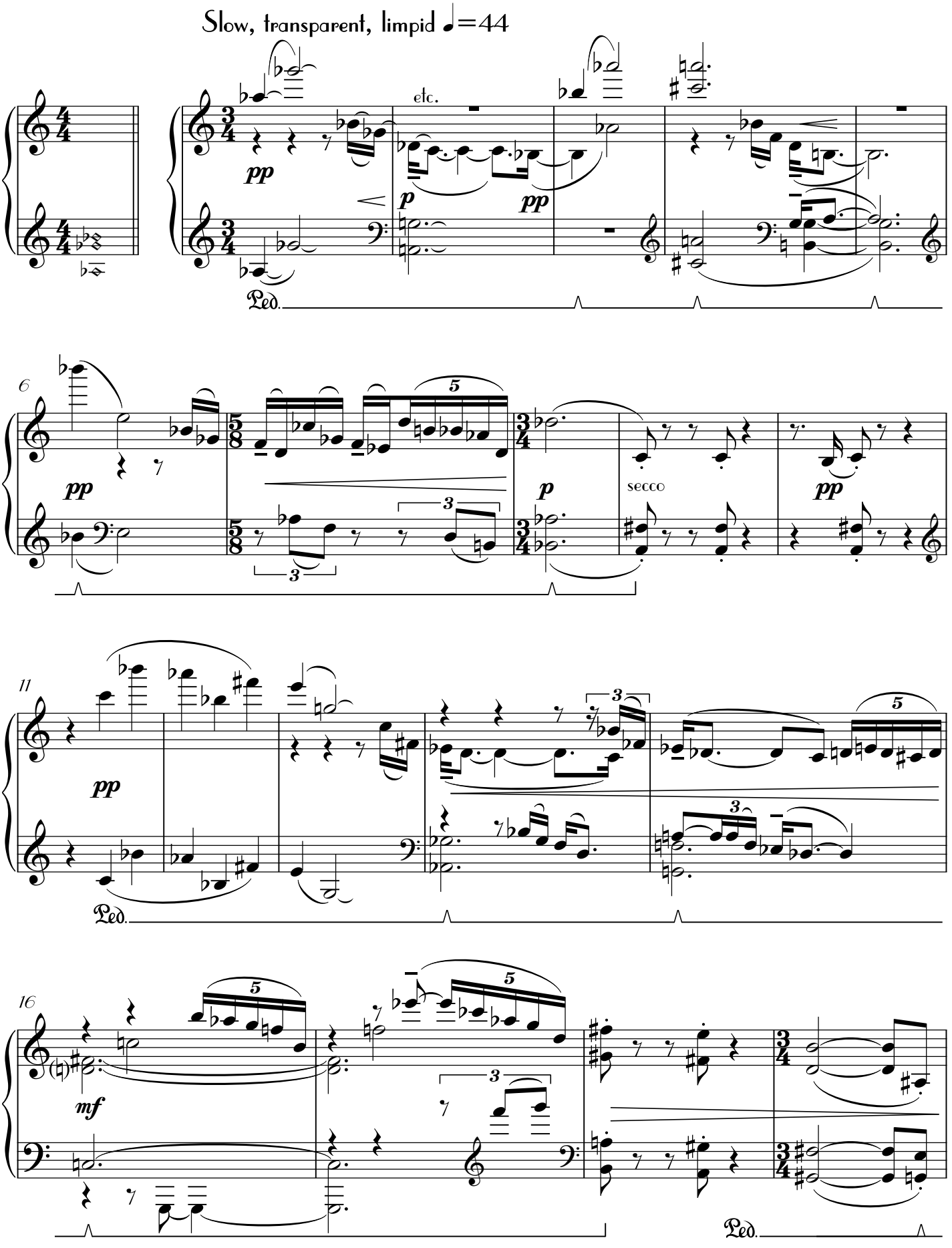
8. ...A lens of magnificent refractions

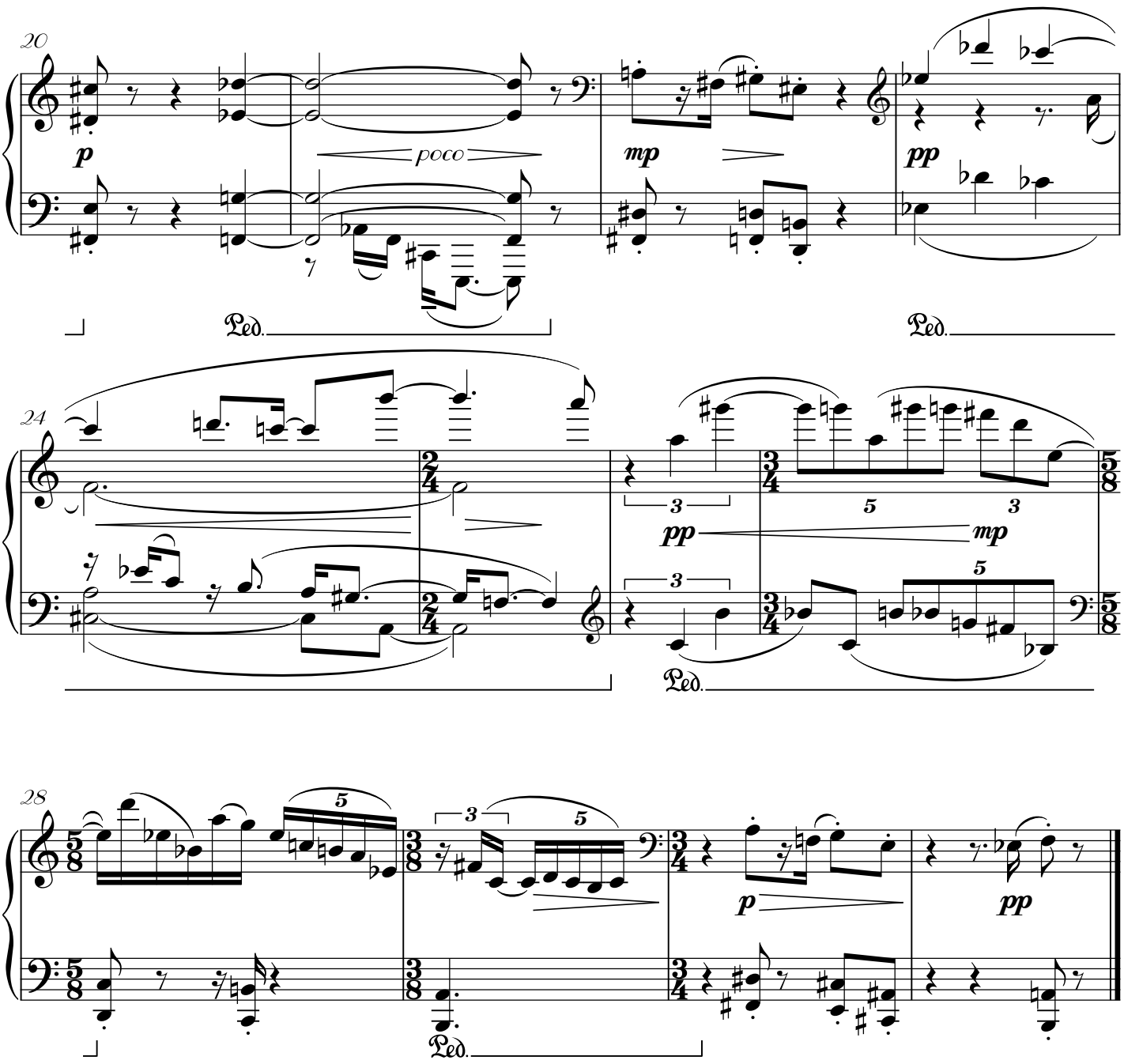



8va
[Db 8va if small hands]
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8

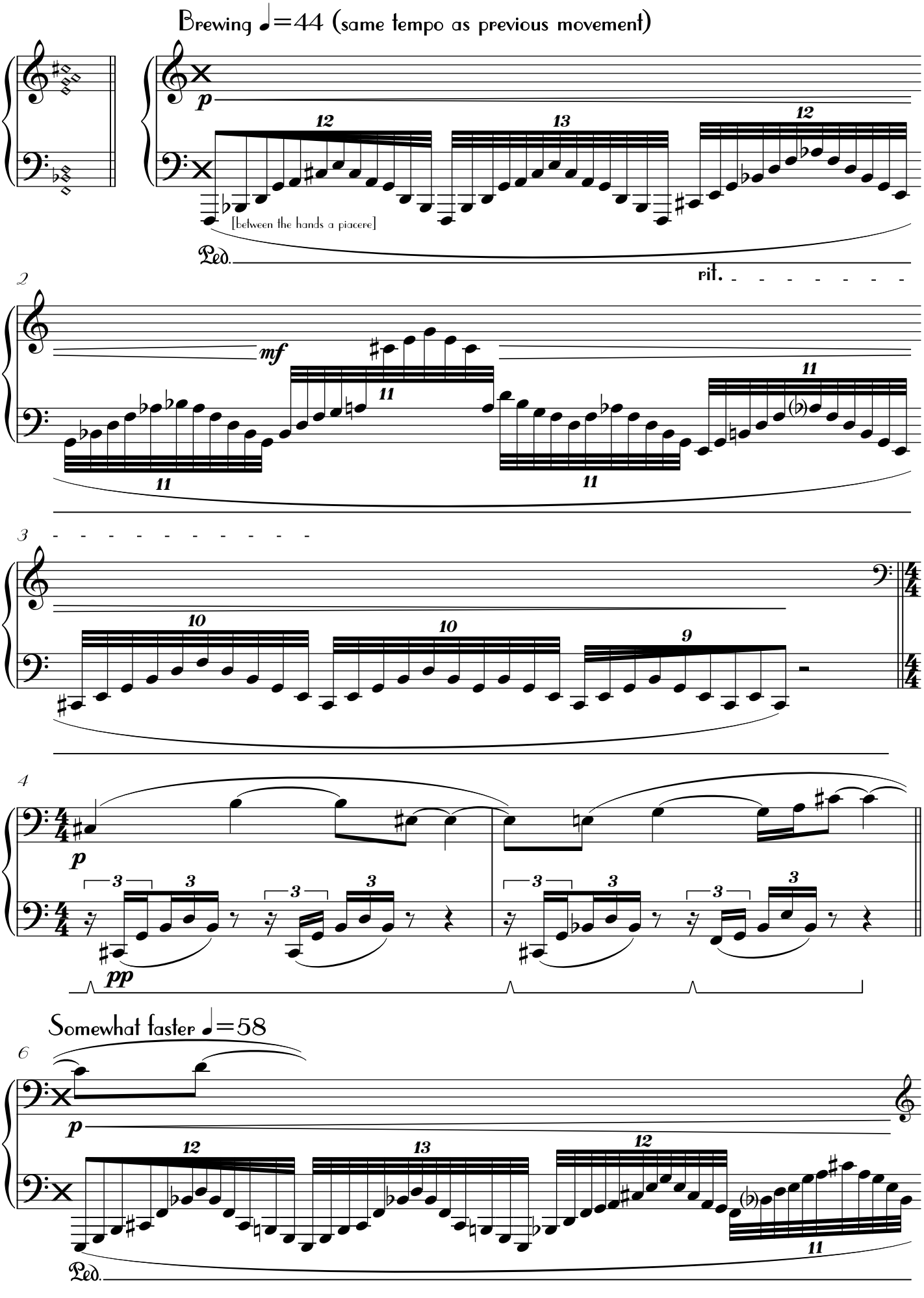

21
24
27
30
8vb

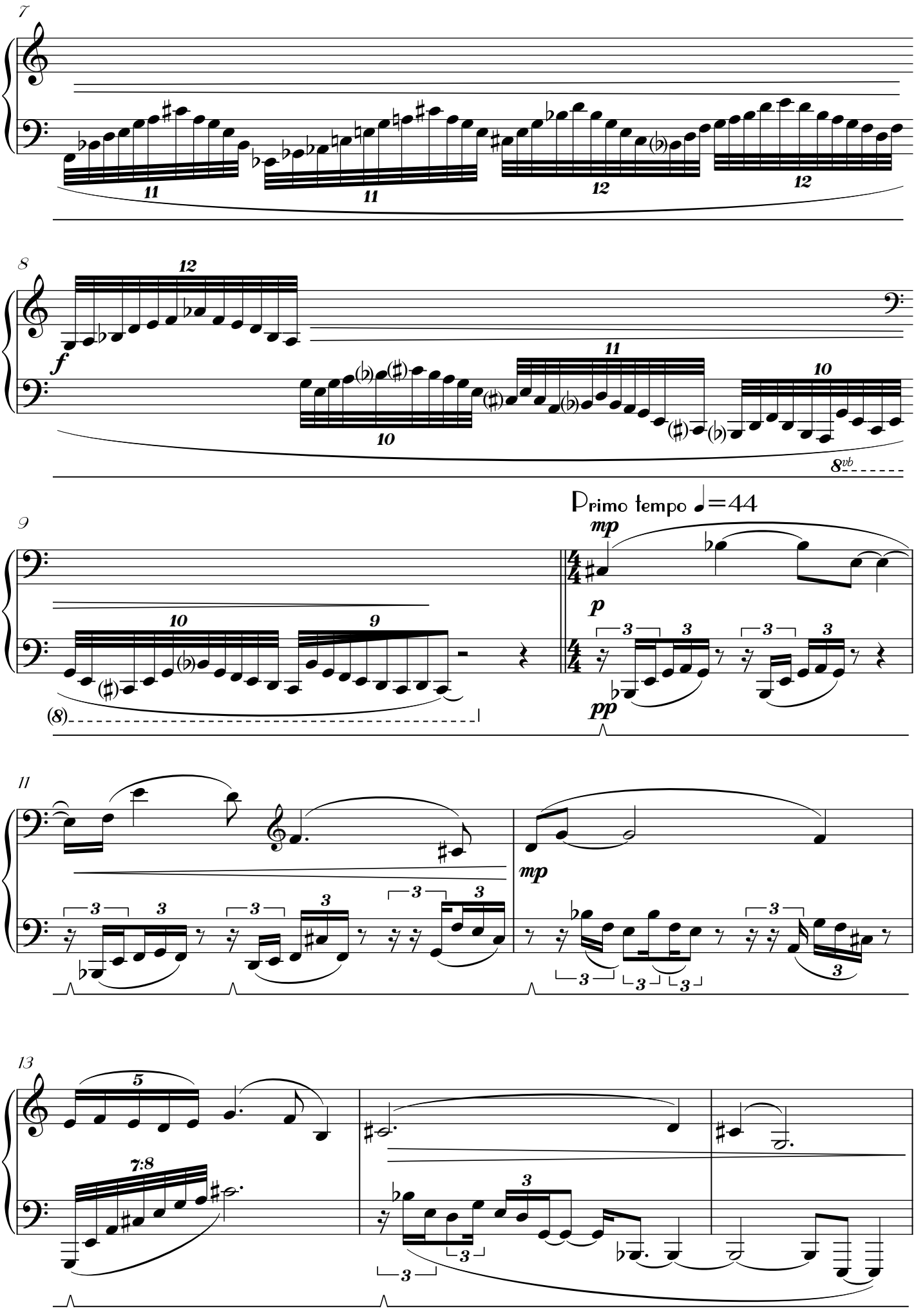
9. To my ear, a curious sound

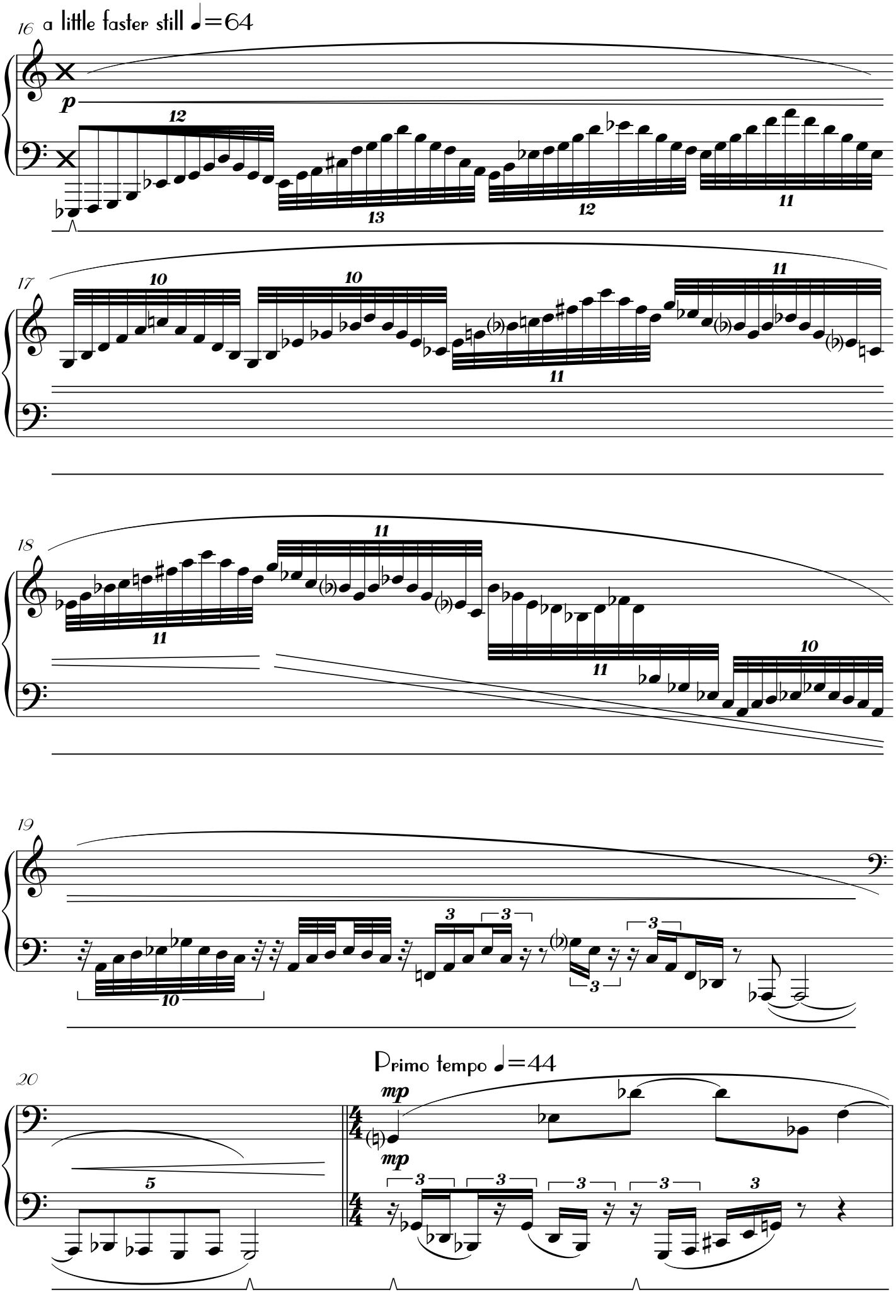


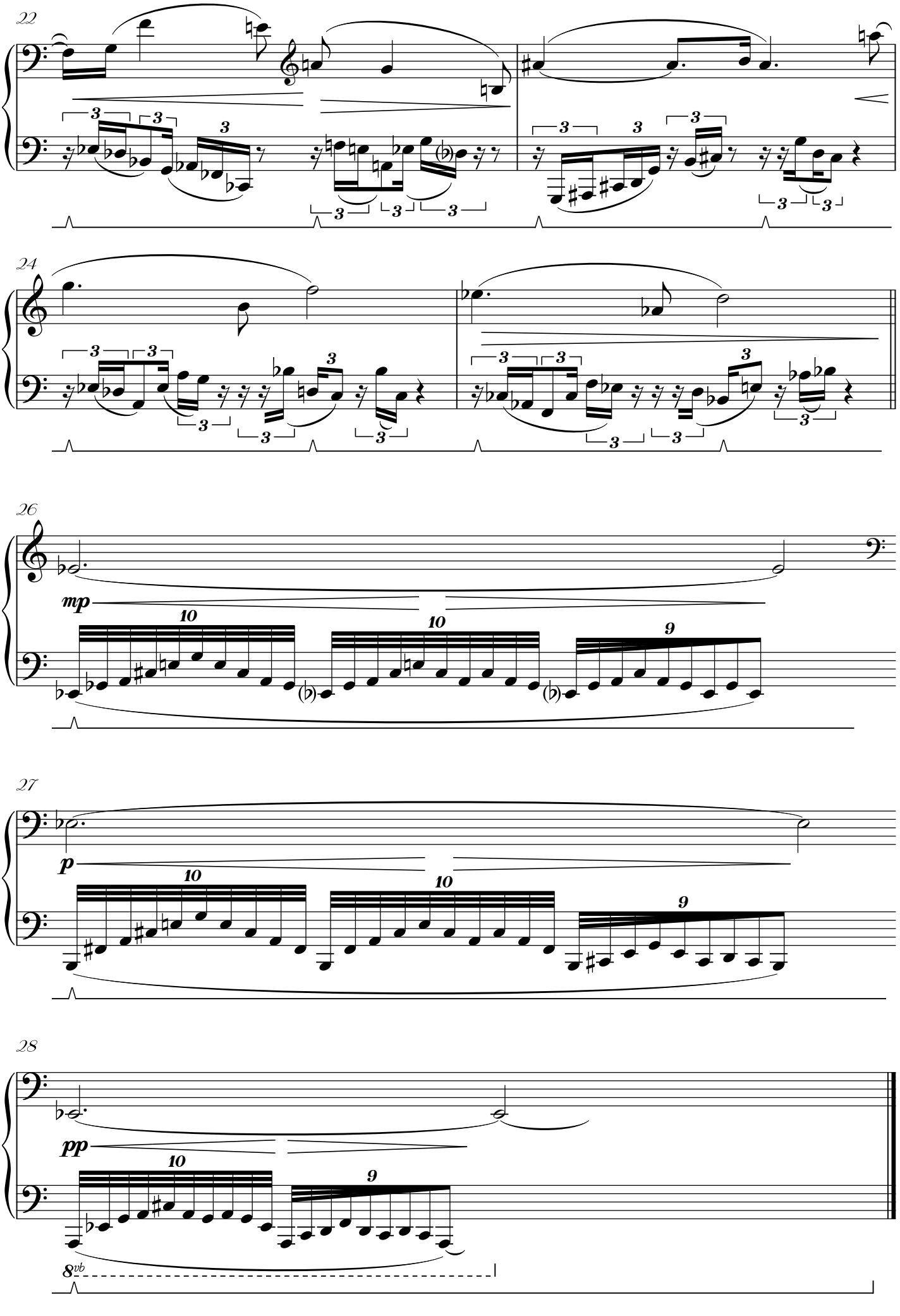

20
p
poco
mp
pp
Ped.
Ped.
24
3
pp
mp
5
3
3
5
Ped.
28
5
3
5
p
pp
Ped.

10. First, a rumbling, then, surrender




7
11
11
12
12
8
f
12
10
11
10
8vb
9
10
9
(8)
Primo tempo ♩=44
mp
p
pp
11
mp
13
5
7:8


16 a little faster still ♩=64
p
17
18
19
20
Primo tempo ♩=44
mp
mp


22
24
26
mp
27
p
28
pp
8vb

11. At last, the beatific moment when you fly in the air

Glittering ♩=108 (or faster if possible)

mf (one long undelineated phrase)

f

Because of the obvious polytonality, in this piece reminder accidentals are not used between staves.

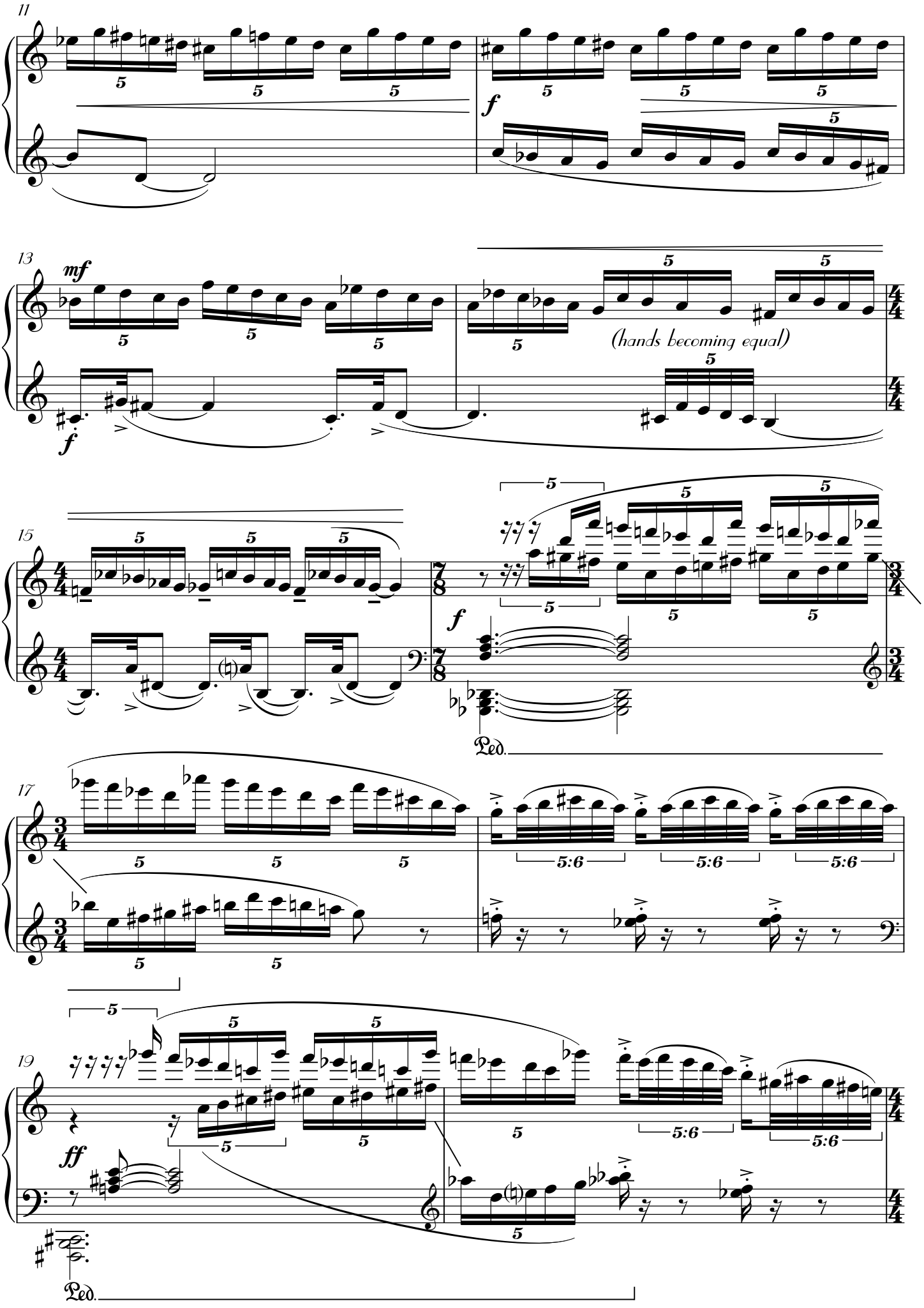
3

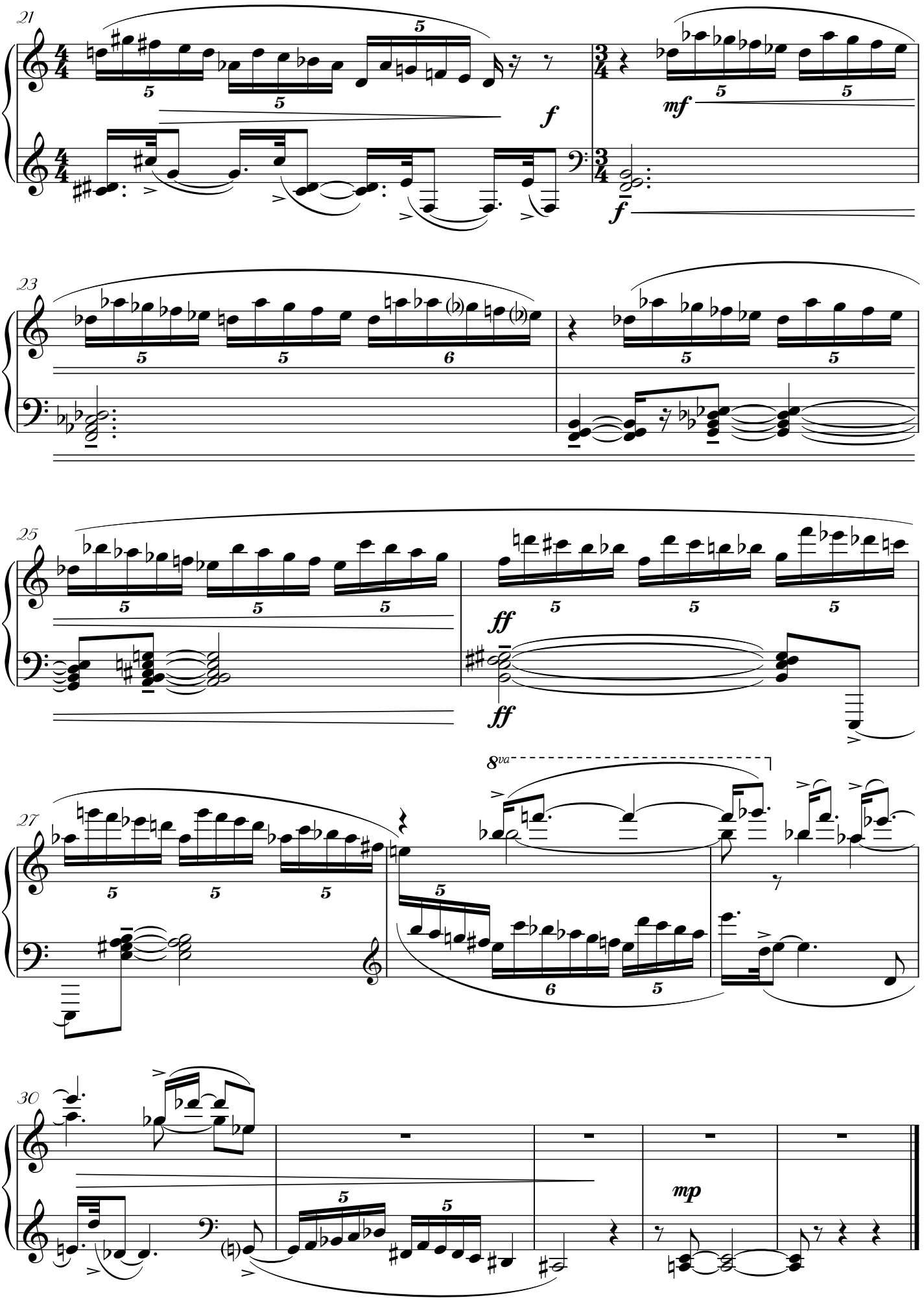
(sim.)

5

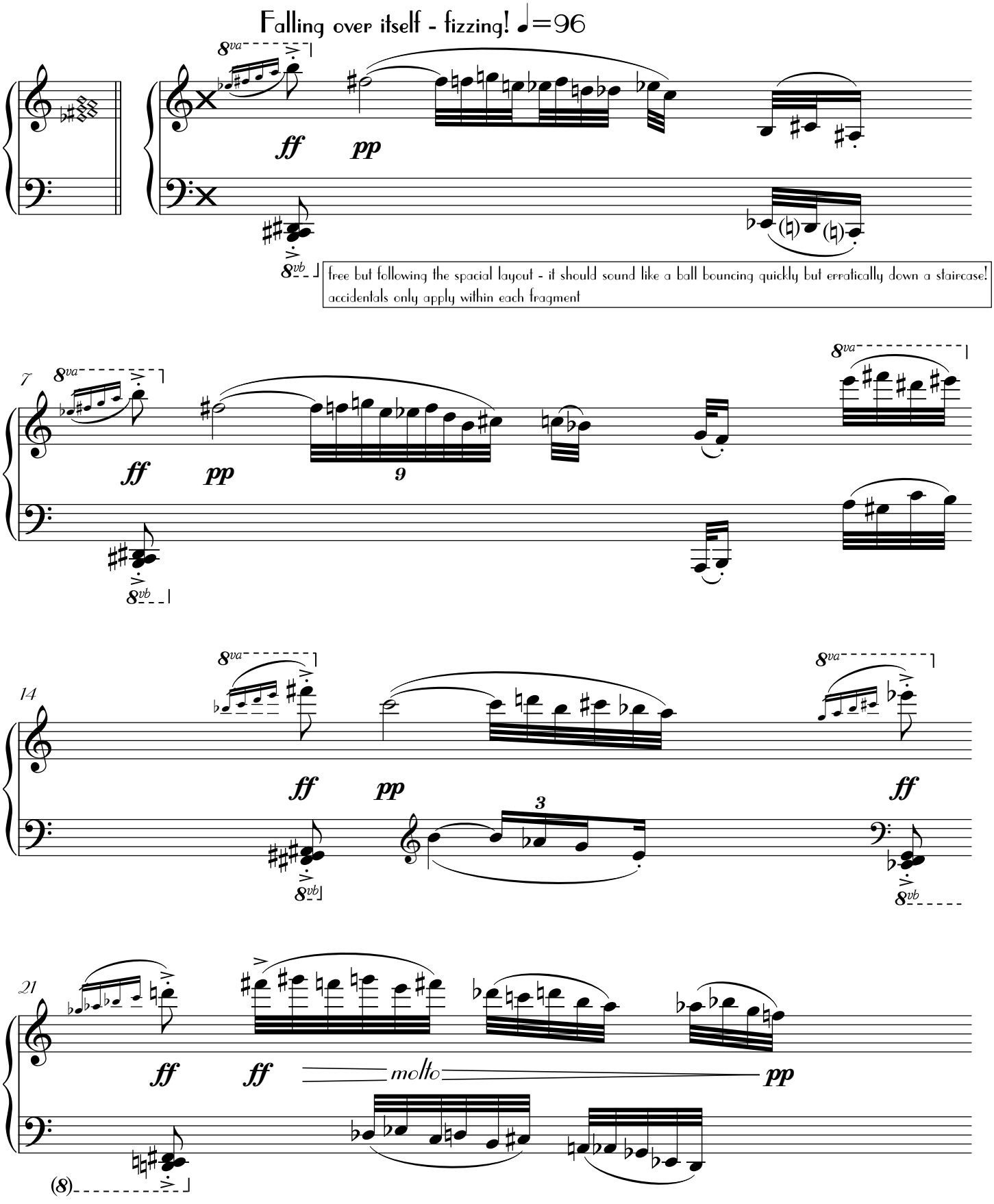
7

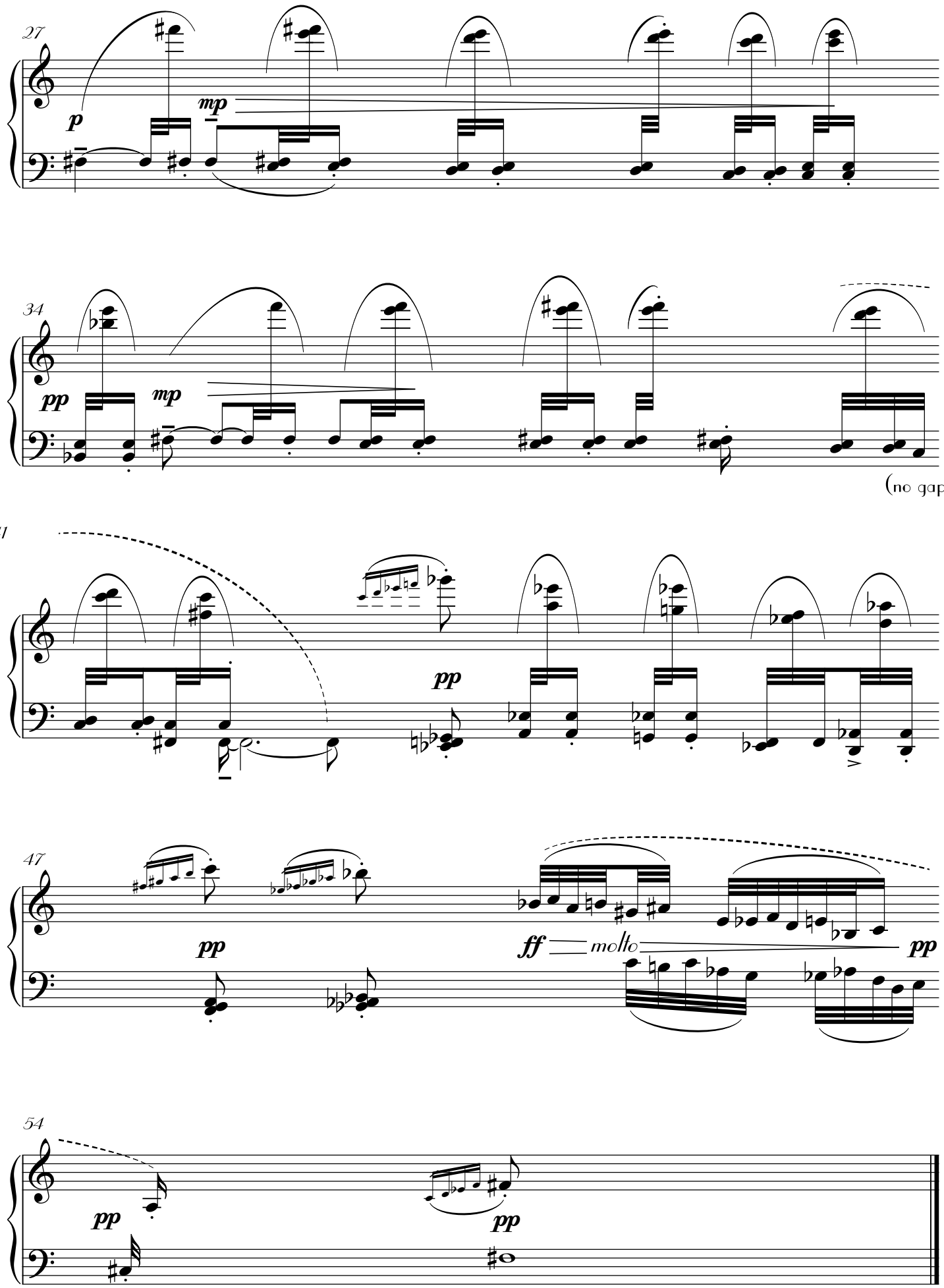
9


11
13
mf
f
(hands becoming equal)
15
f
Ped.
17
5:6
19
ff
Ped.

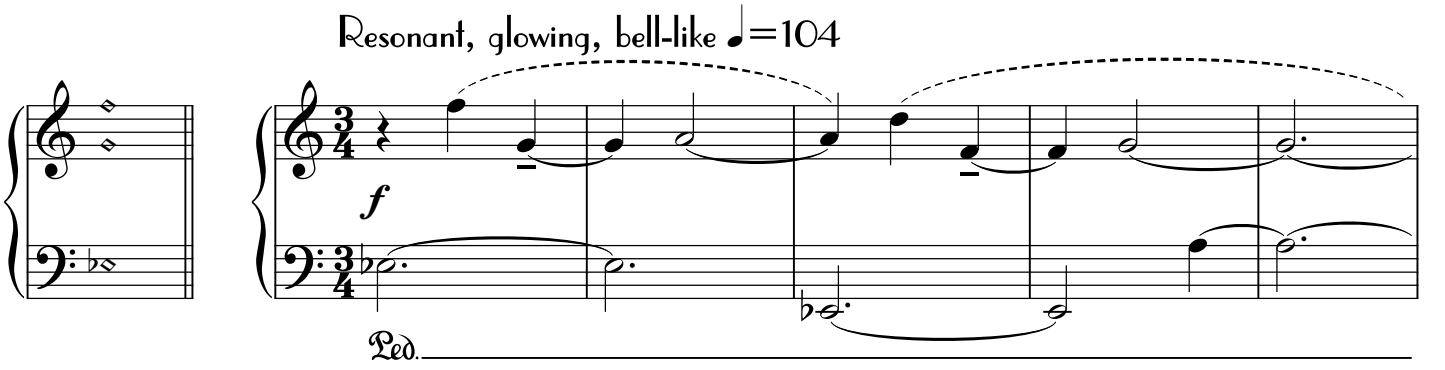

21
f
mf
f
23
25
ff
ff
27
8va
30
mp

12. With a stellar whoosh…

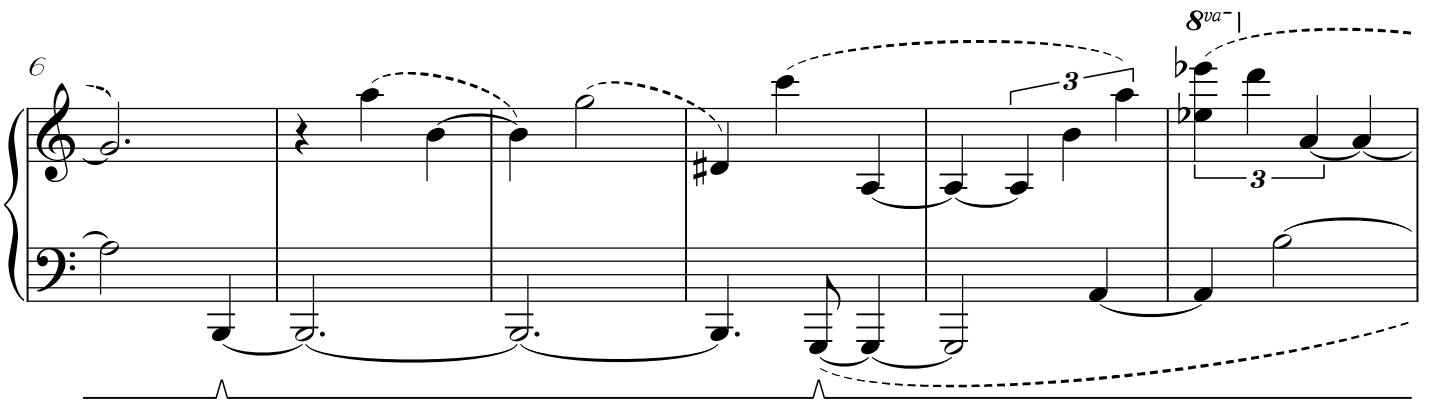


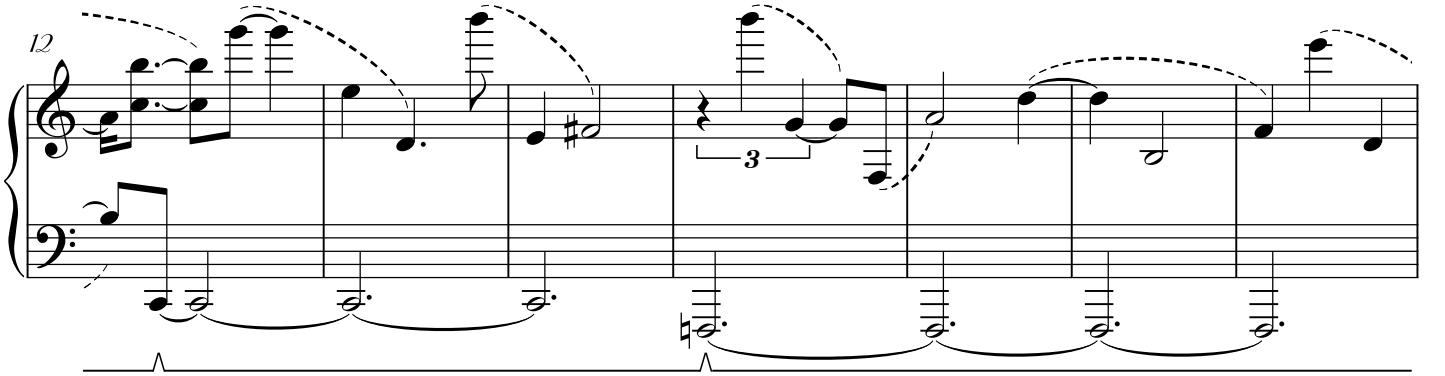

27
p
mp
34
pp
mp
(no gap)
41
pp
47
pp
ff
molto
pp
54
pp
pp

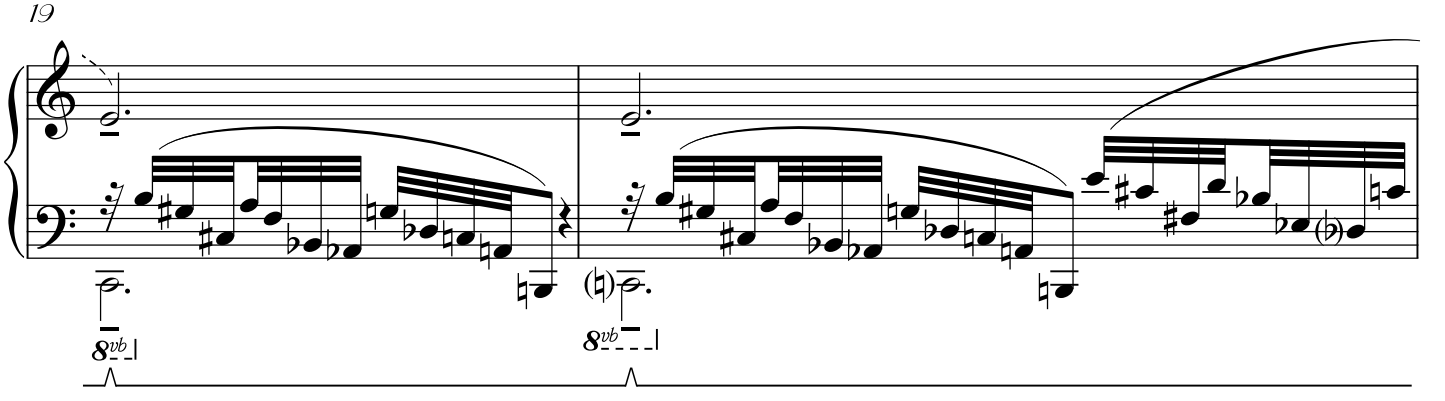
13. A wonder that does not know of itself

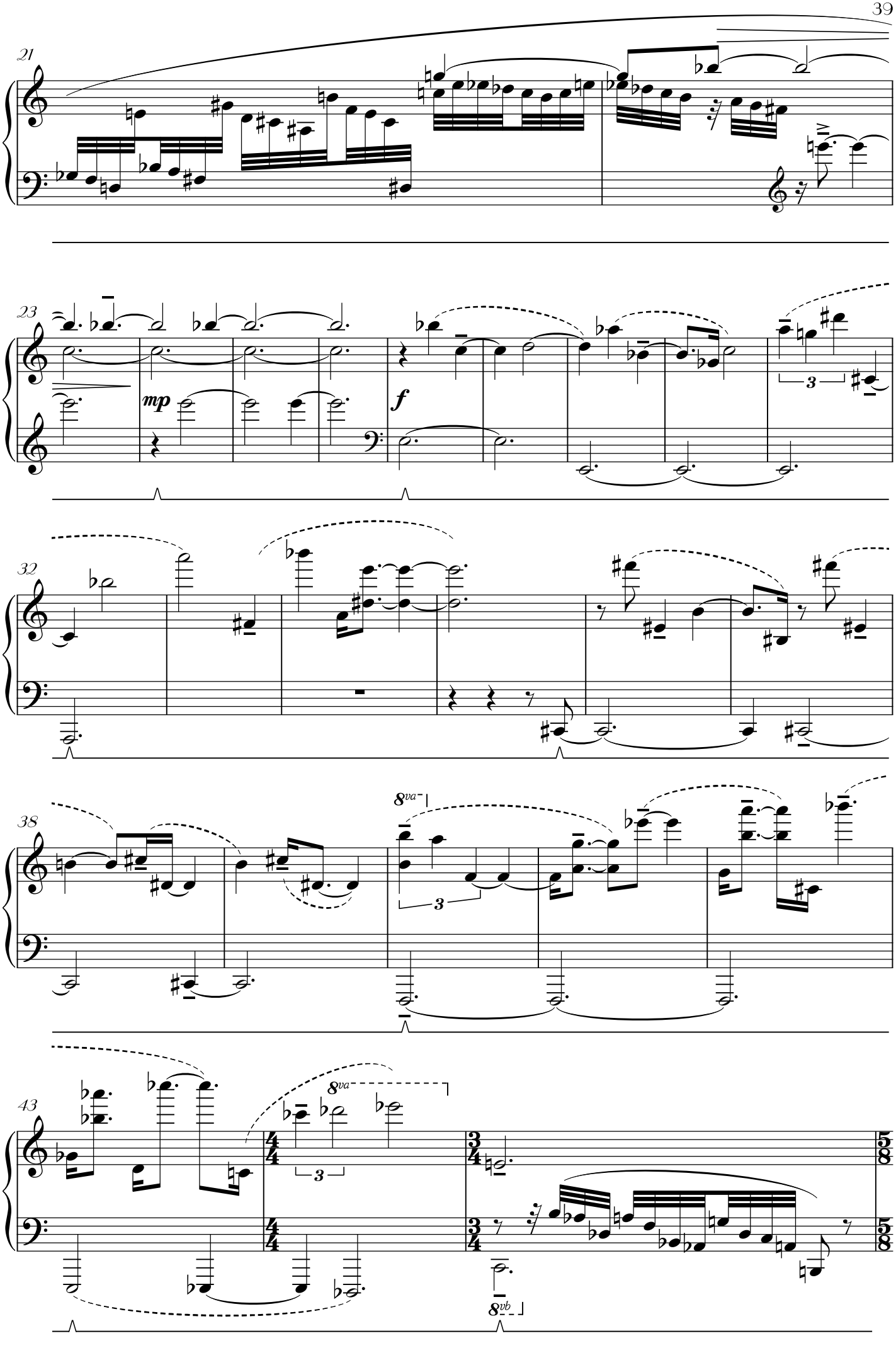


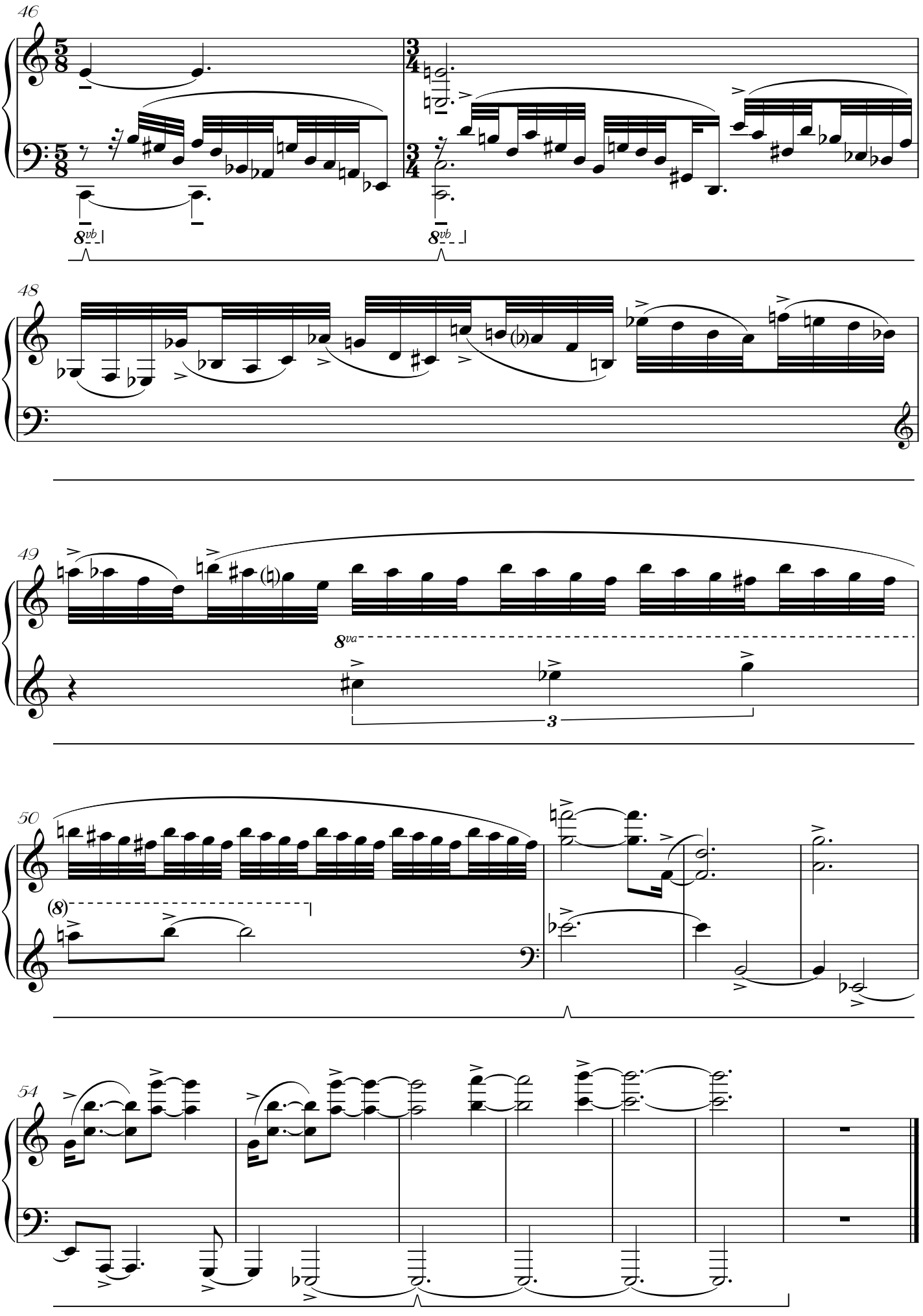
The notation only indicates durations - each note to be played like separate bell chimes/strokes - semi-staccato and let ring - with the pedal providing the "legato", except where there is a pedal change where notes will need to be physically held down. Slurs show phrasing but not the usual "finger-legato" melody.



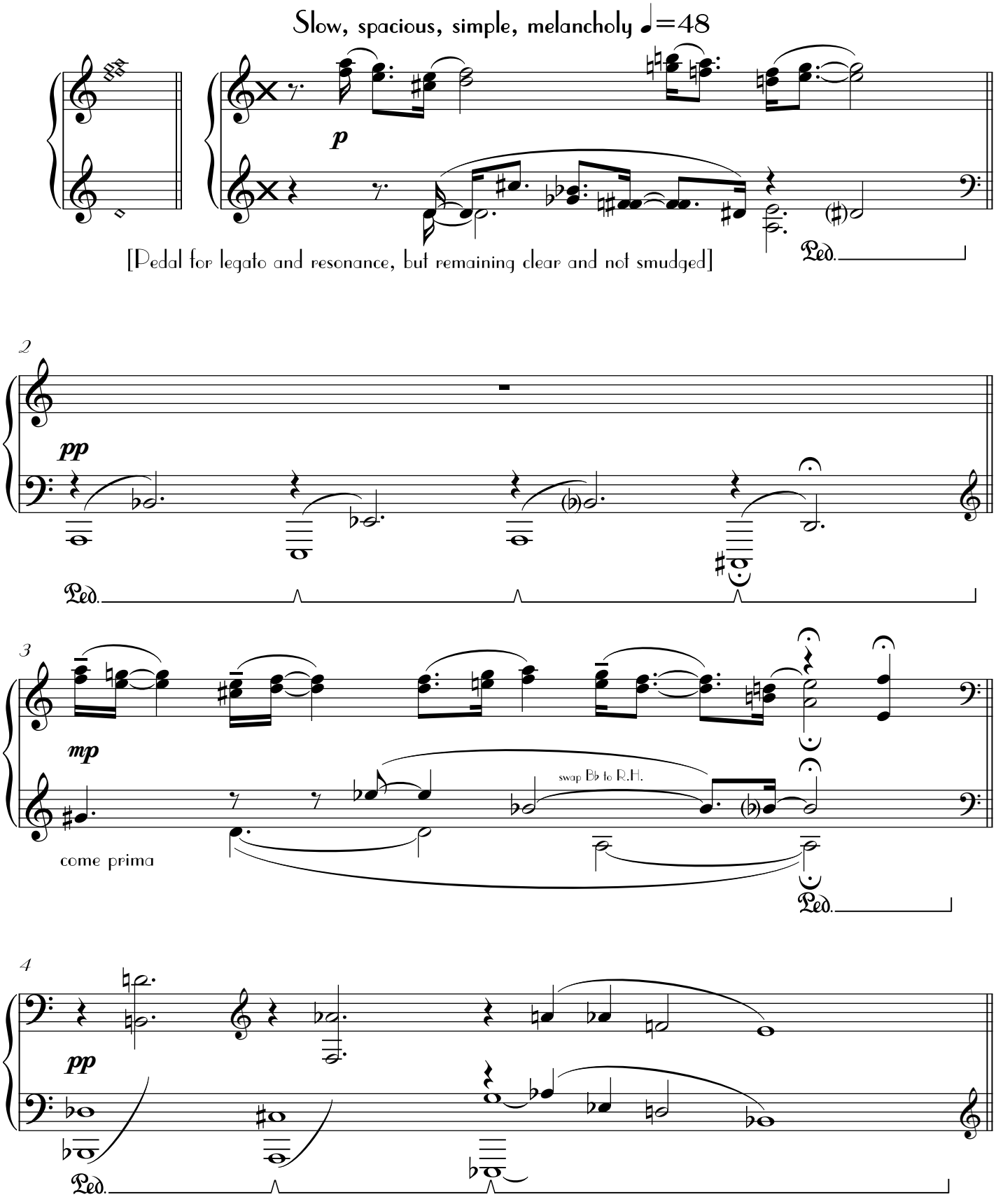


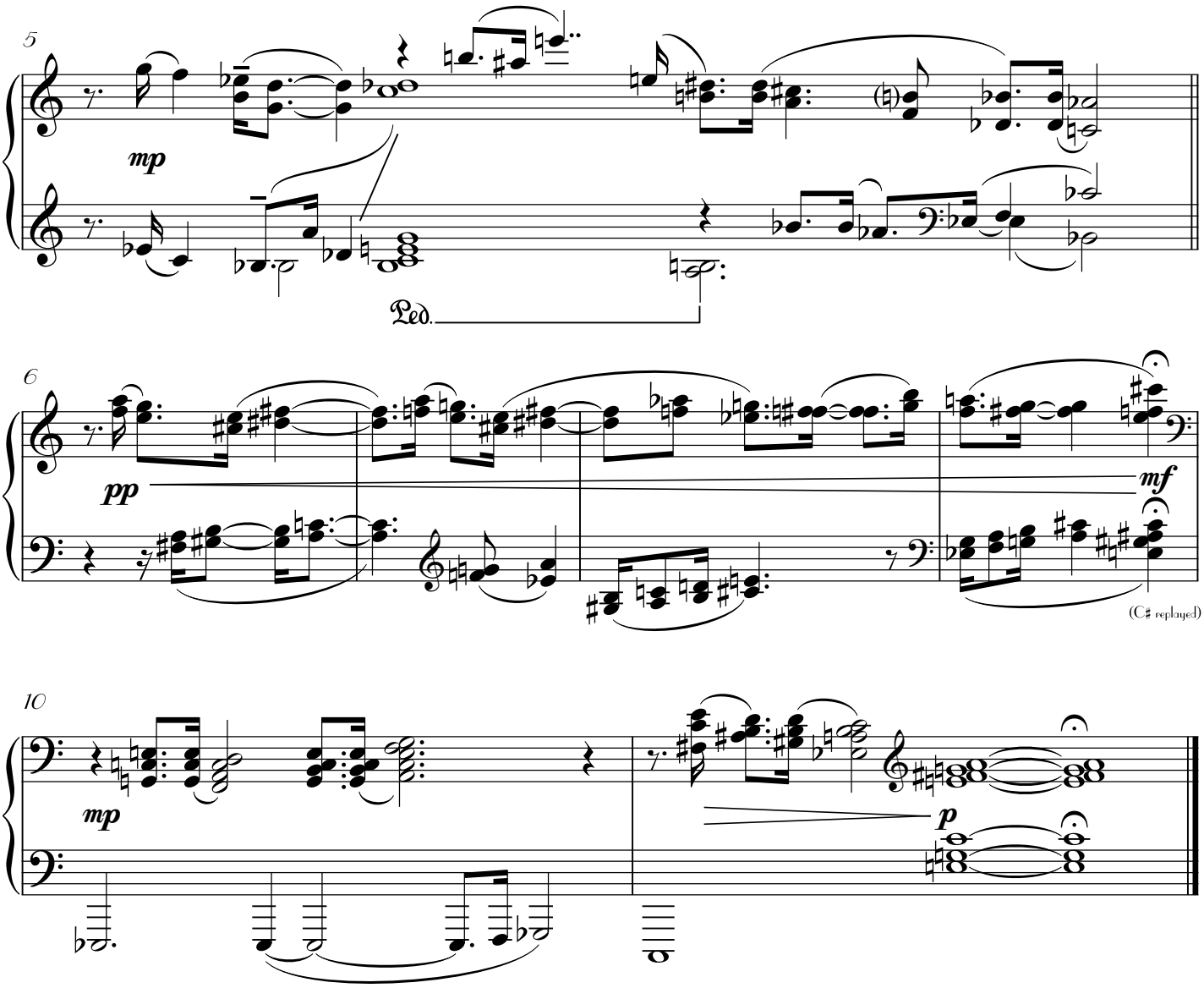



21
23
mp
f
3
32
38
8va
3
43
8va
3
8vb

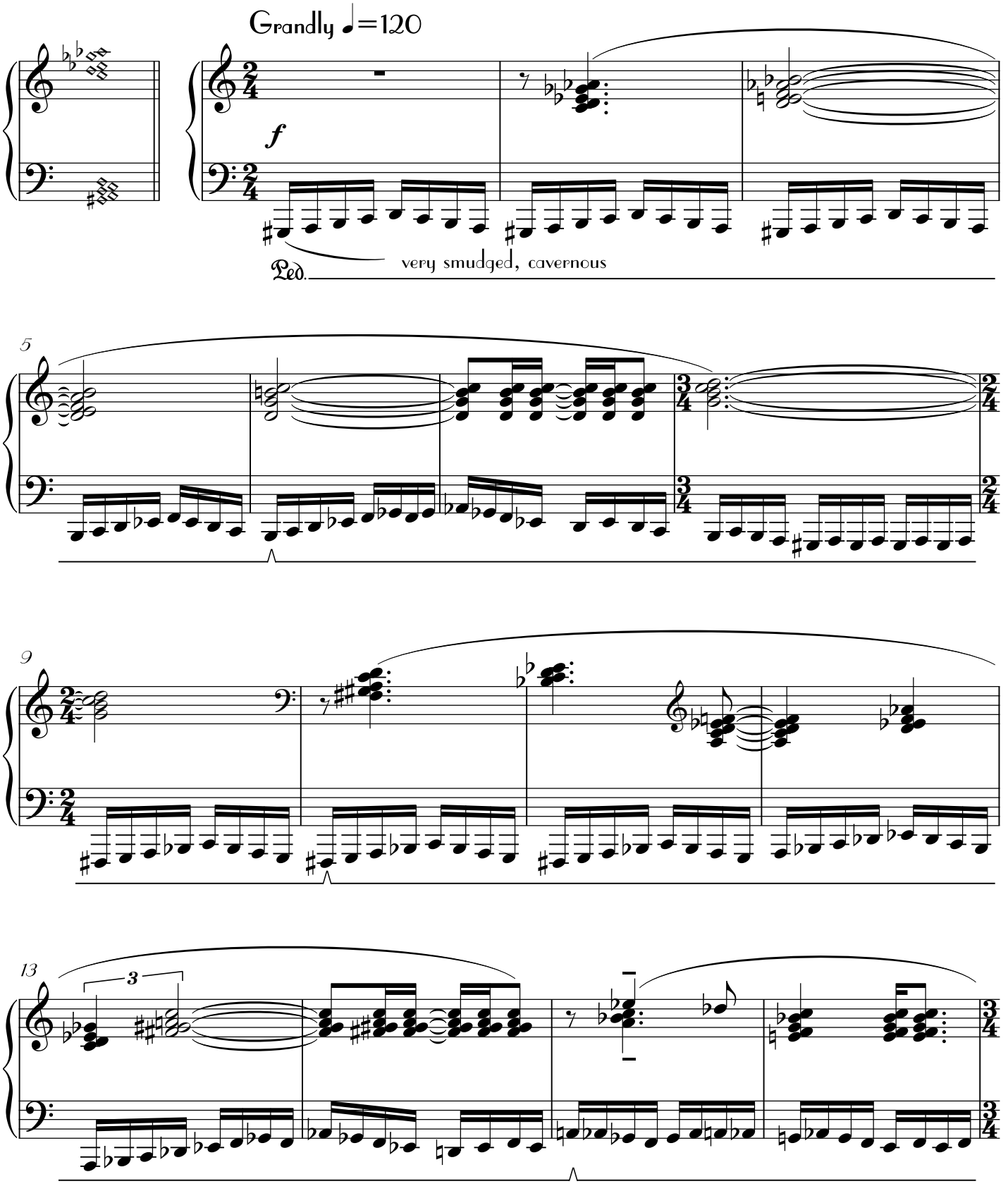

46
8vb
8vb
48
49
8va
3
50
(8)
54

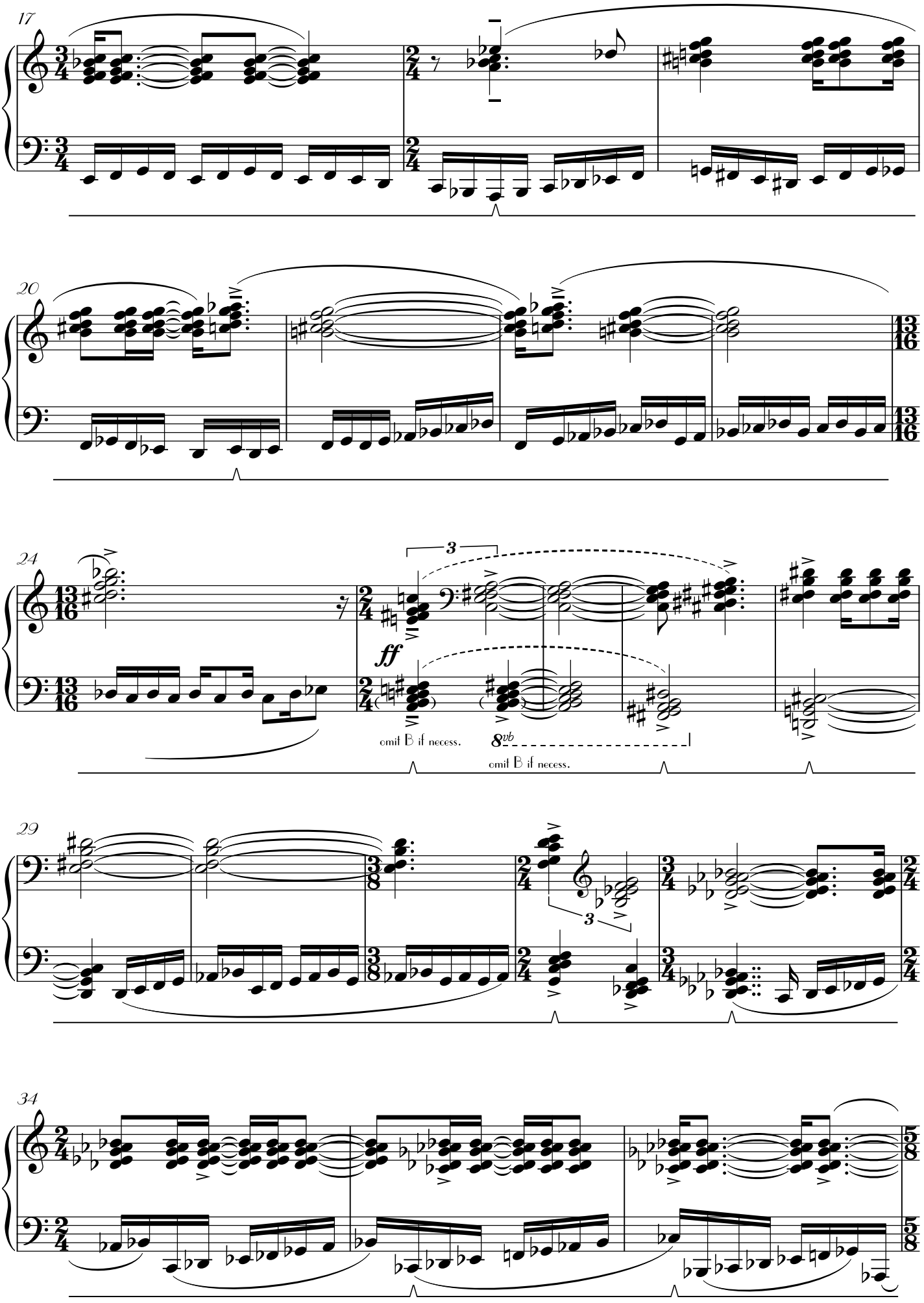
14. As all marvels are, innocent

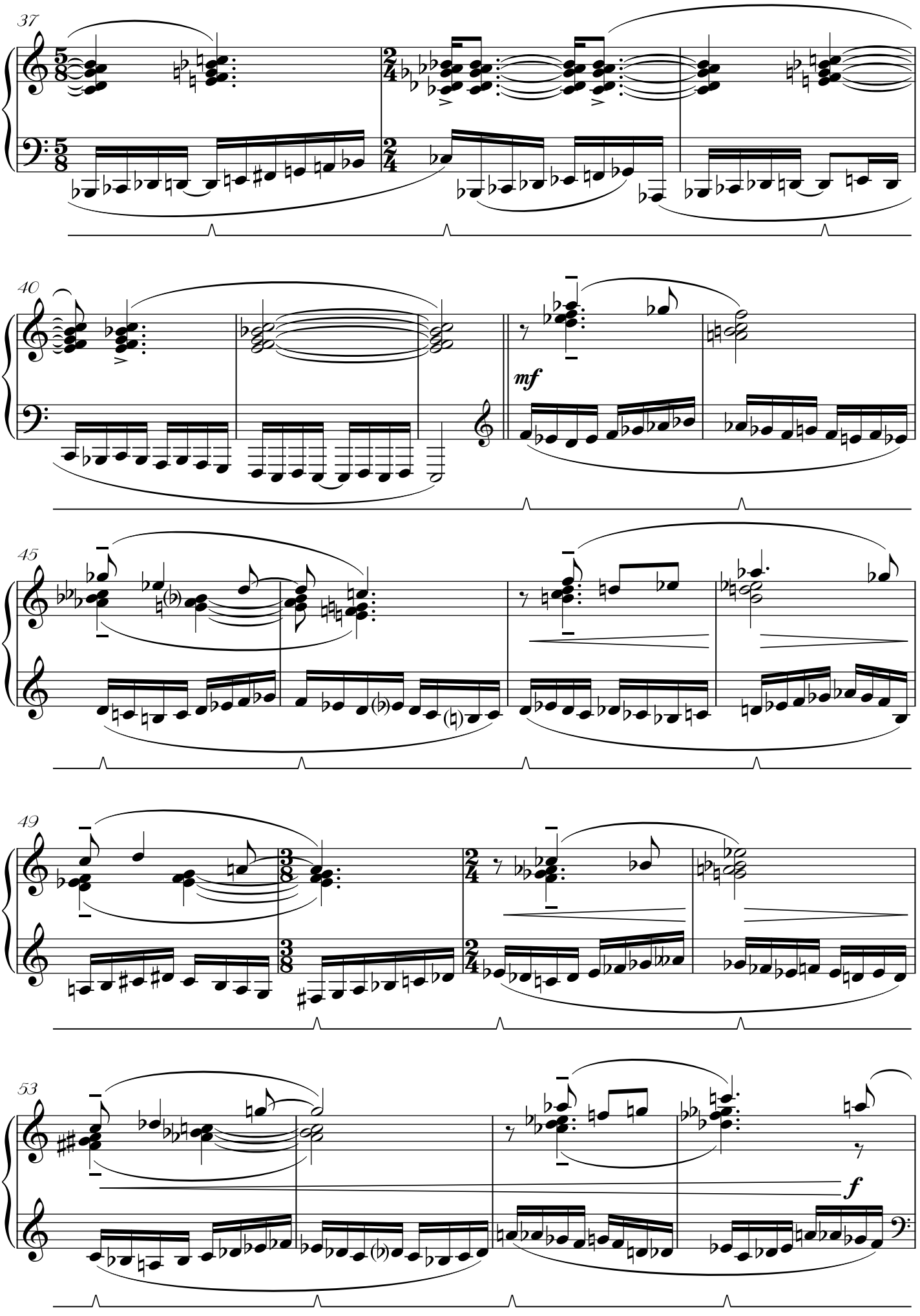


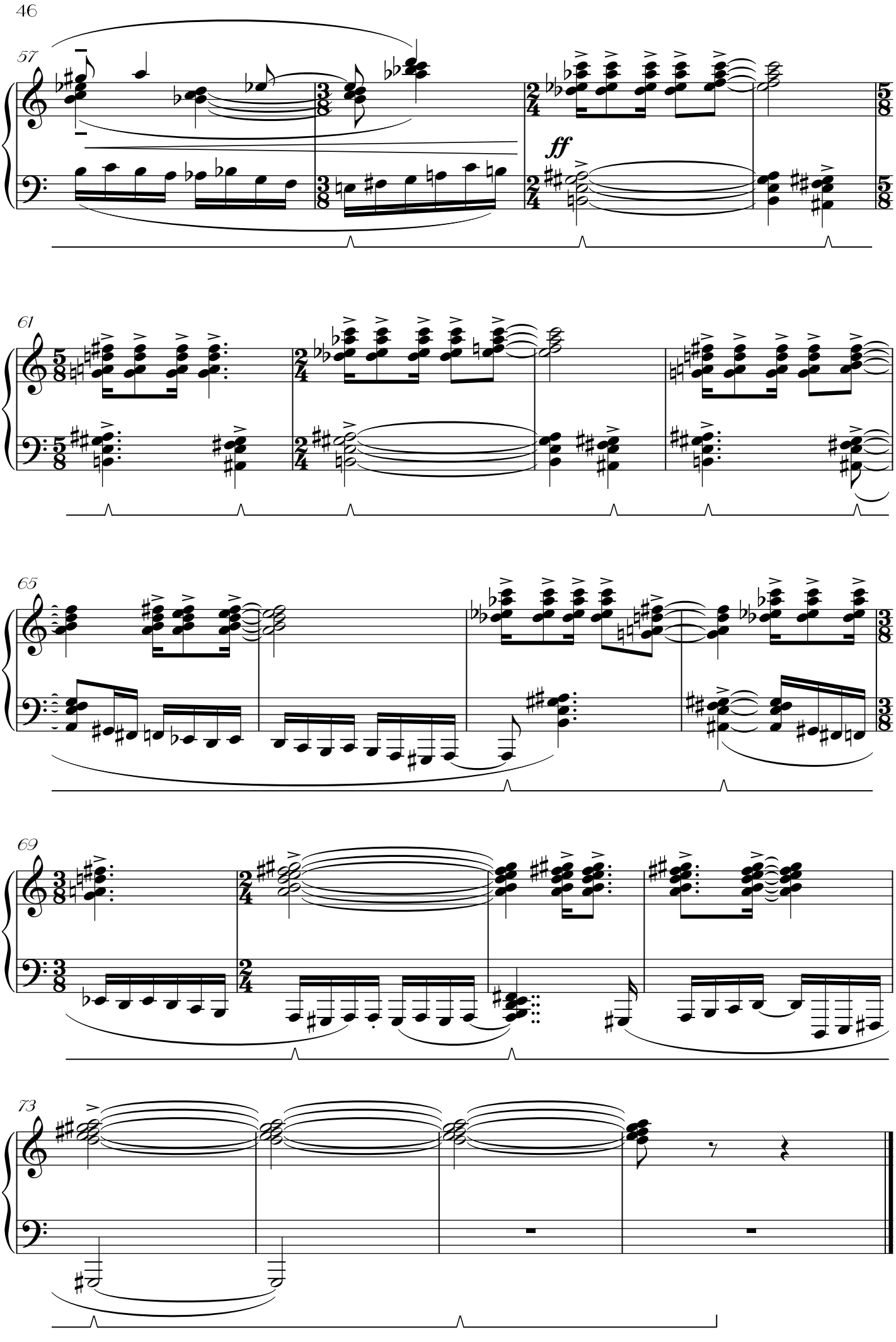

5
mp
Ped.
6
pp
mf
(C♯ replayed)
10
mp
p

15. Of aggrandizing and human drama

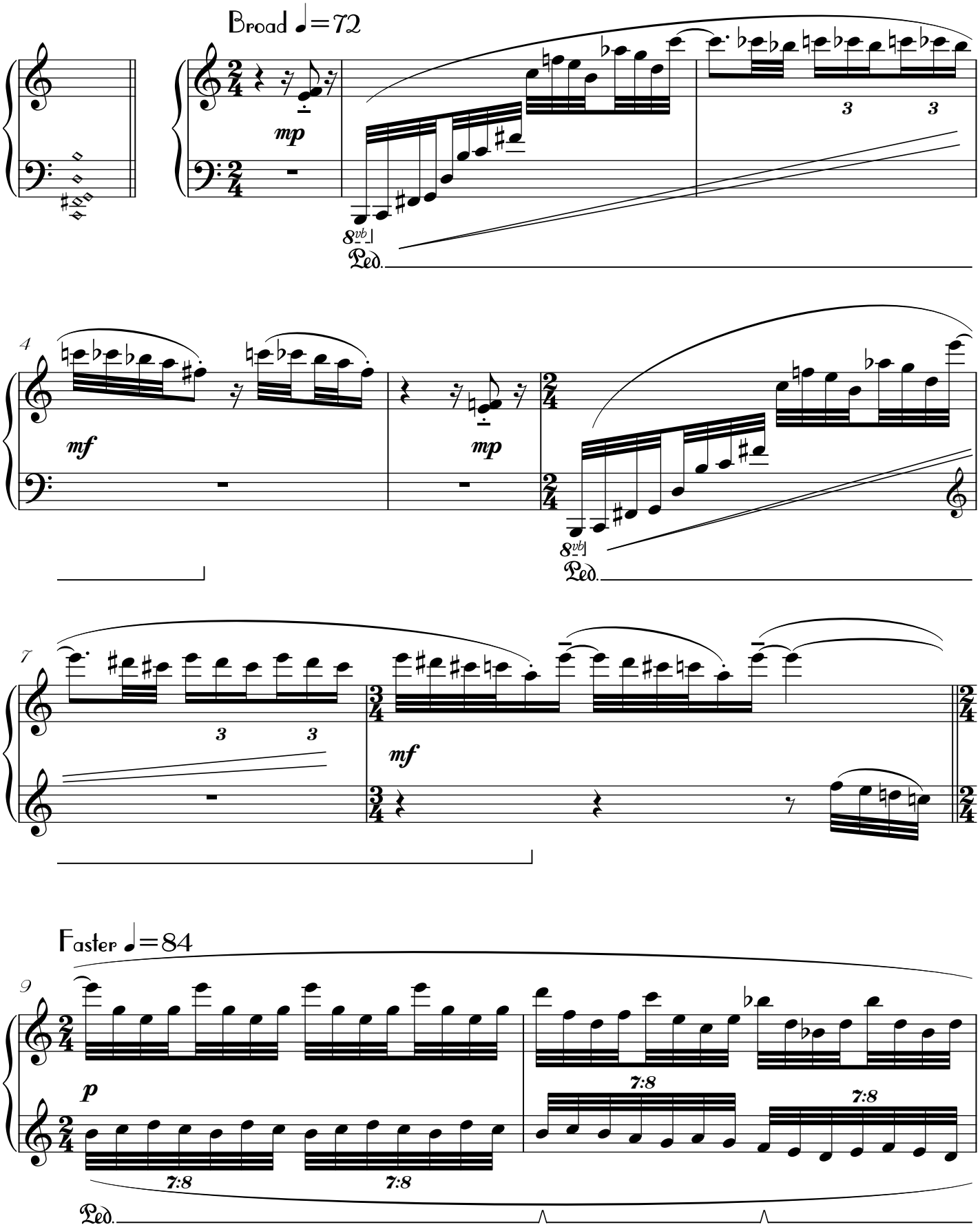


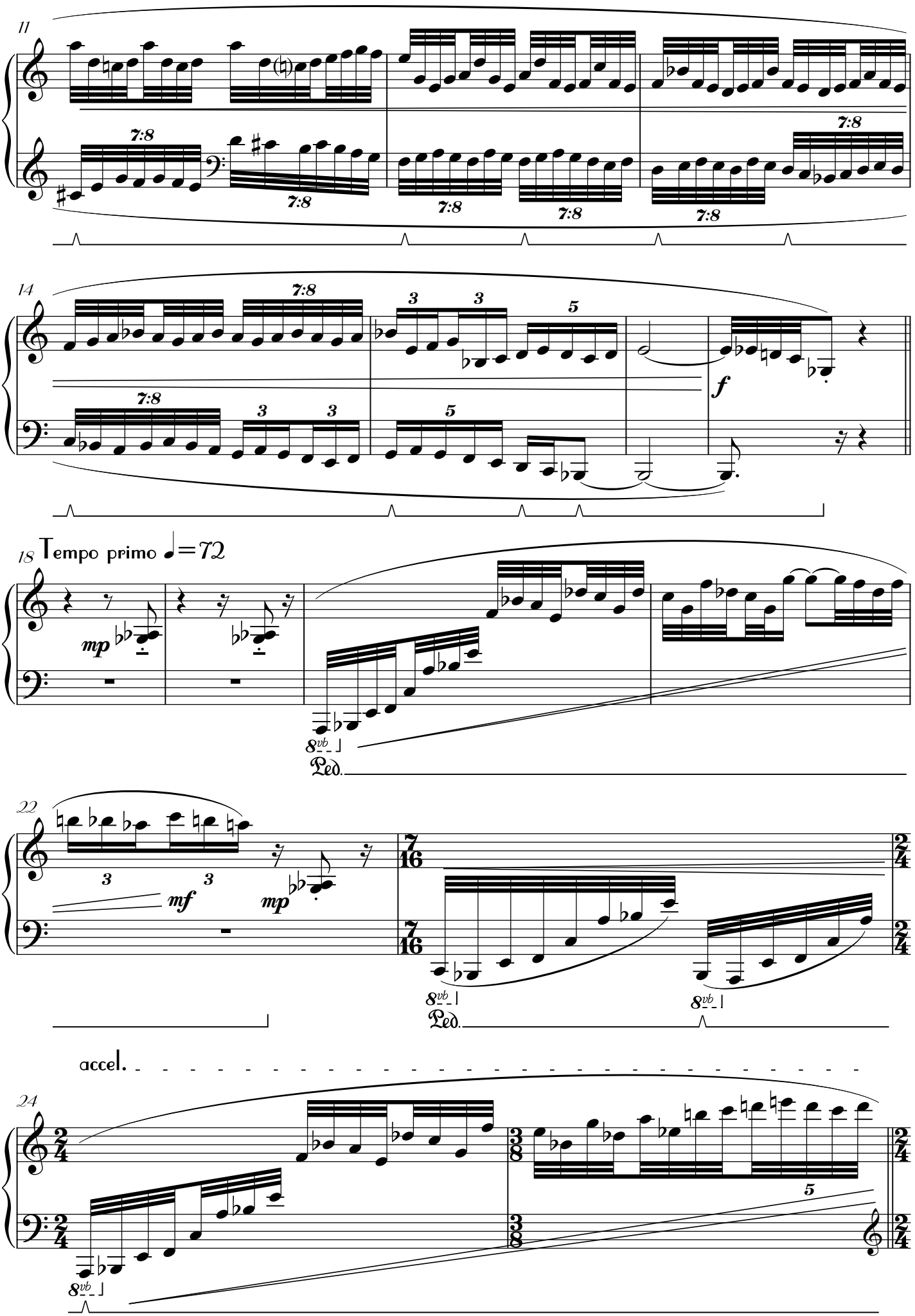

17
20
24
ff
omit B if necess.
8vb
omit B if necess.
29
34


37
40
mf
45
49
53
f

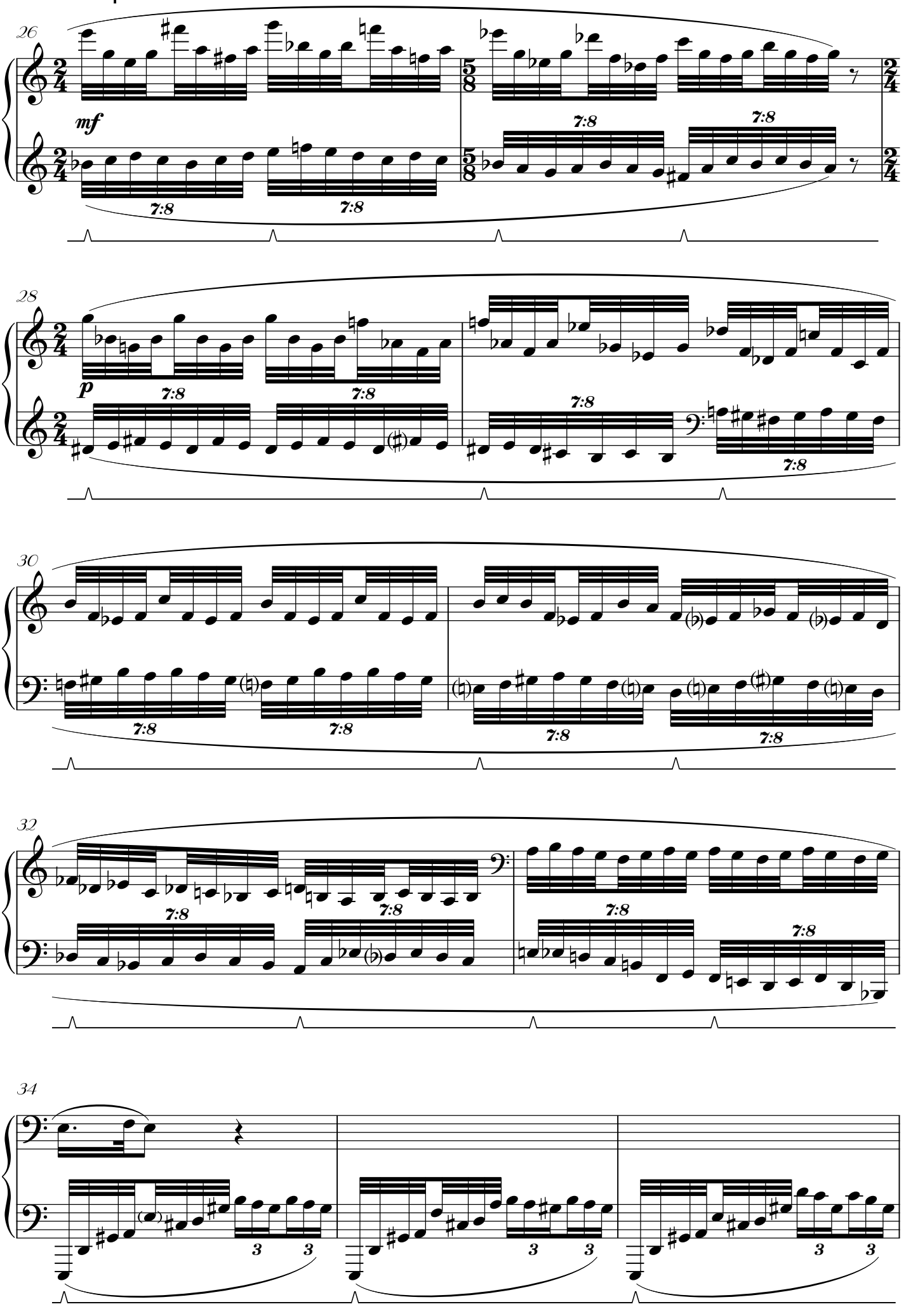

57
ff
61
65
69
73

16. Spending of itself inexhaustibly

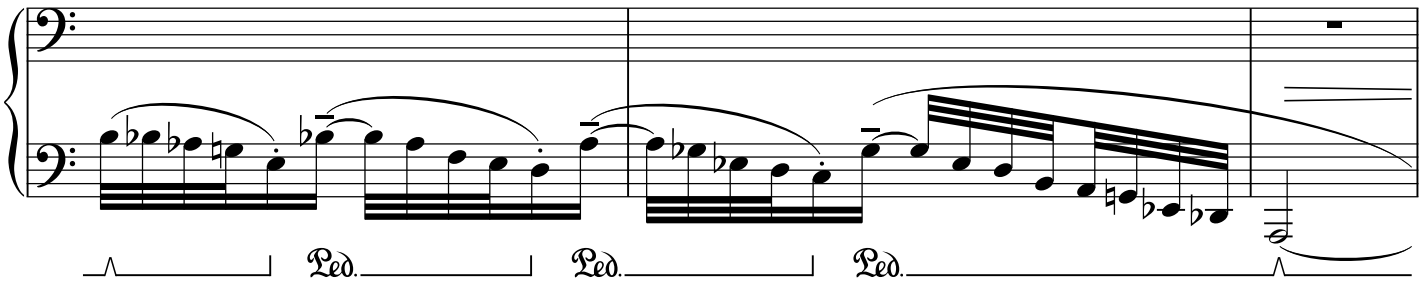



11
7:8
14
3
5
f
18 Tempo primo ♩=72
mp
8vb
Ped.
22
mf
7/16
2/4
accel.
24
3/8

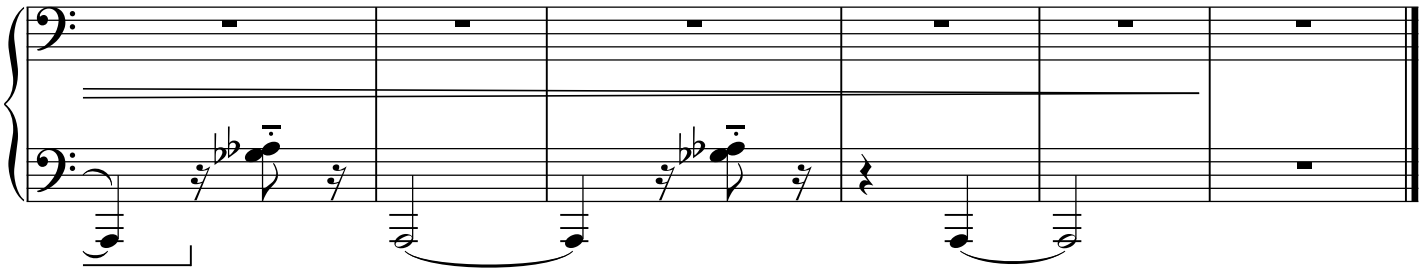
Tempo secondo ♩=84



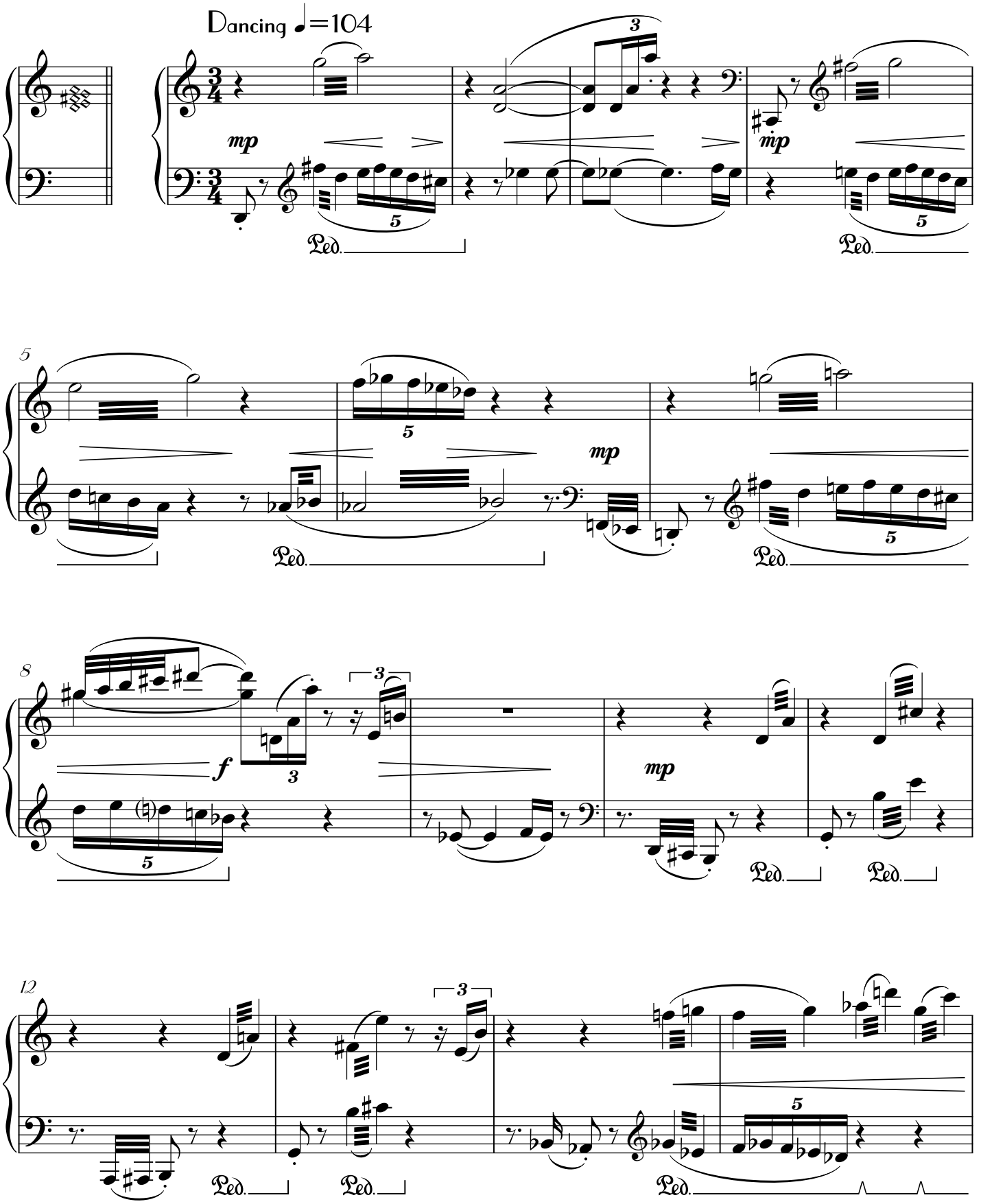
37

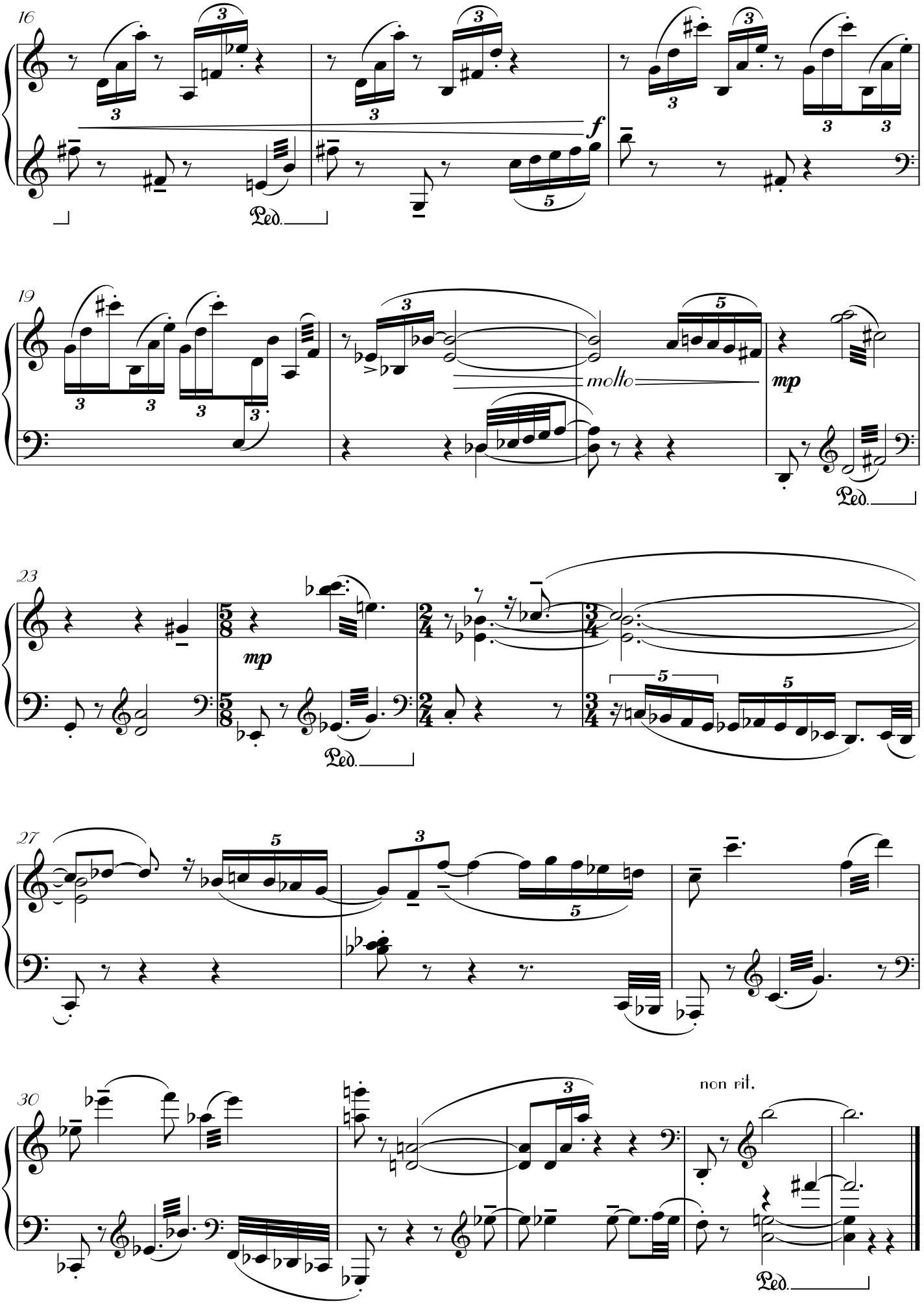


40

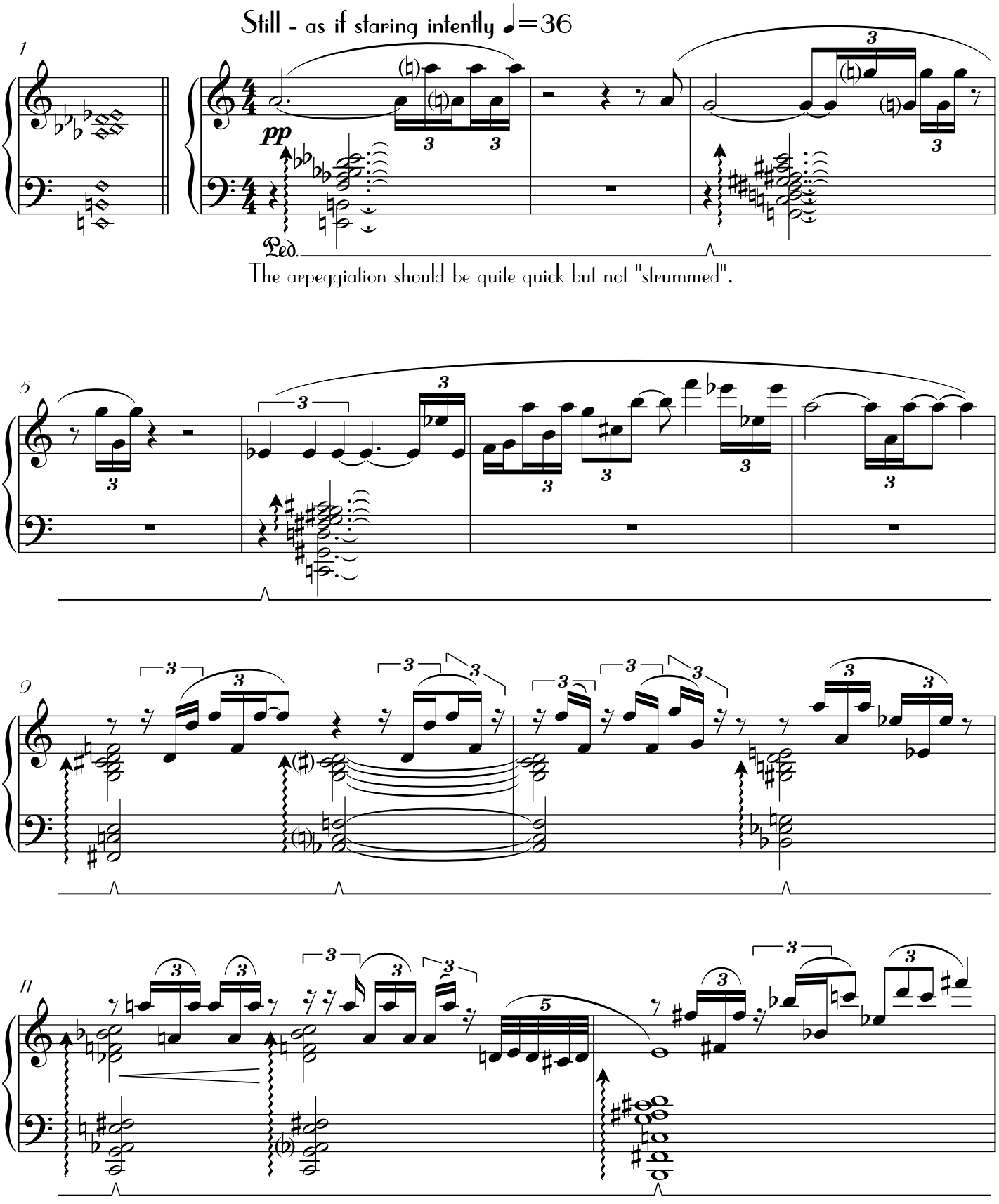


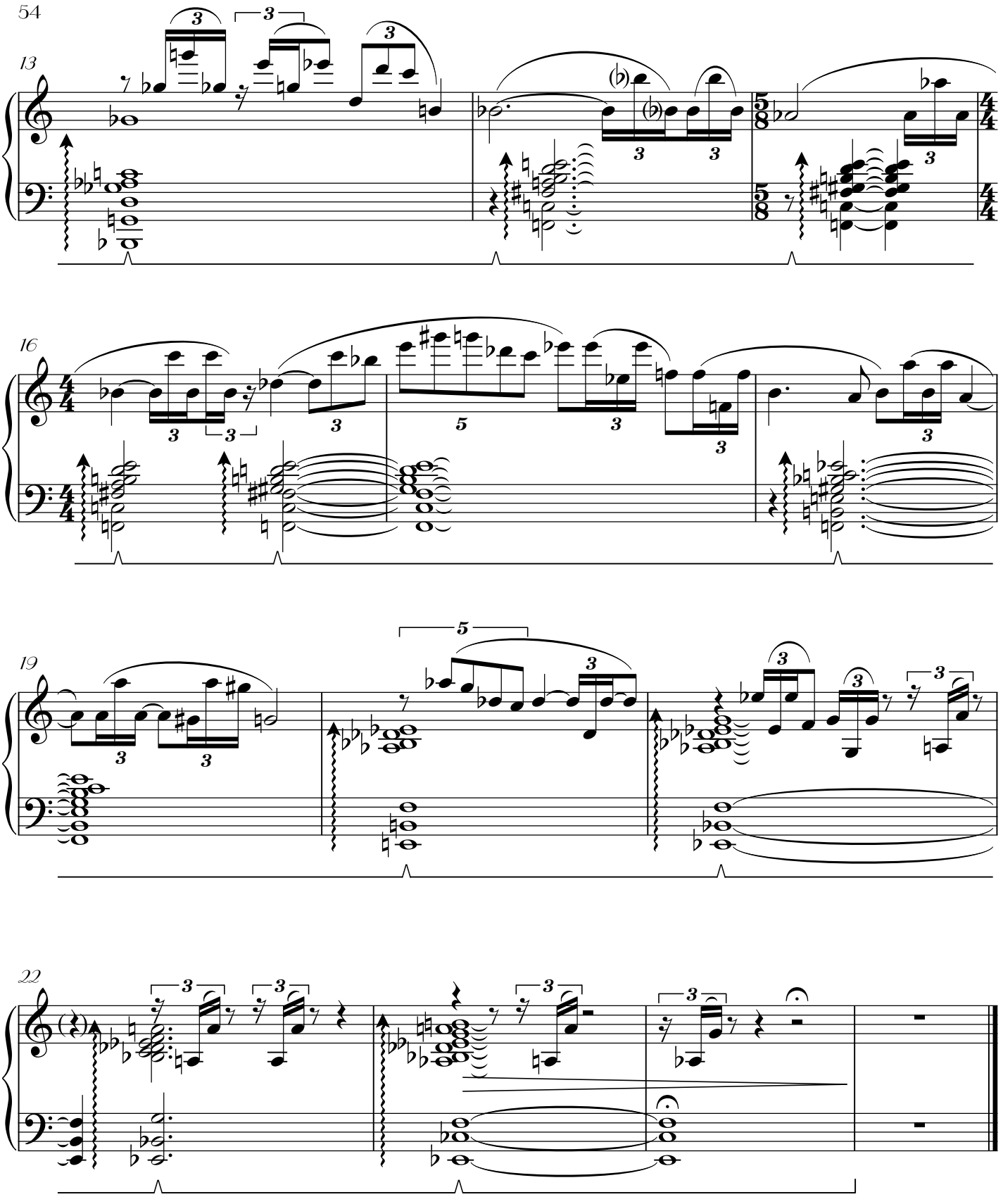
17. In prisms of glory and enigmatic hexagons



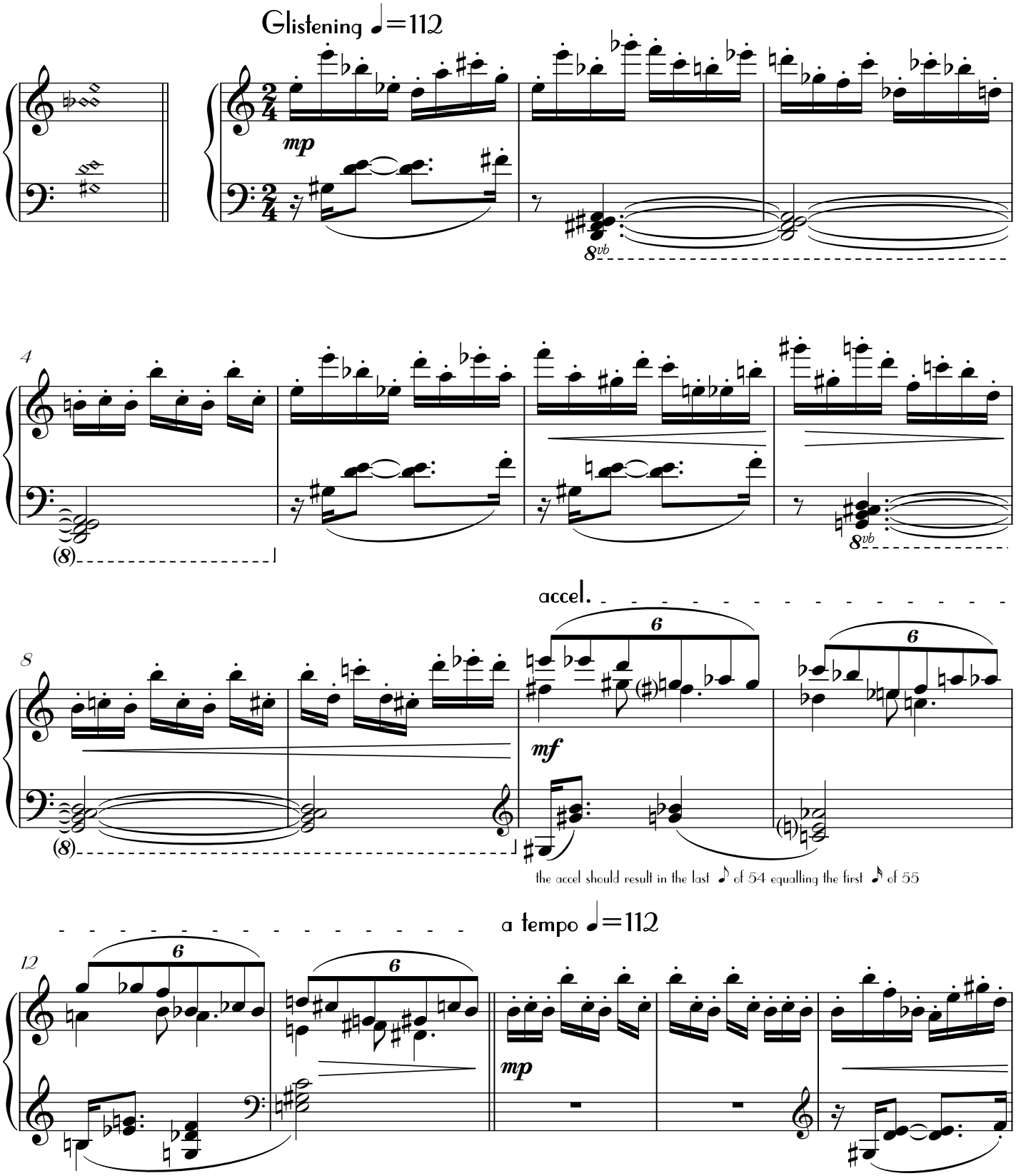

16
f
Ped.
19
molto
mp
Ped.
23
mp
Ped.
27
30
non rit.
Ped.

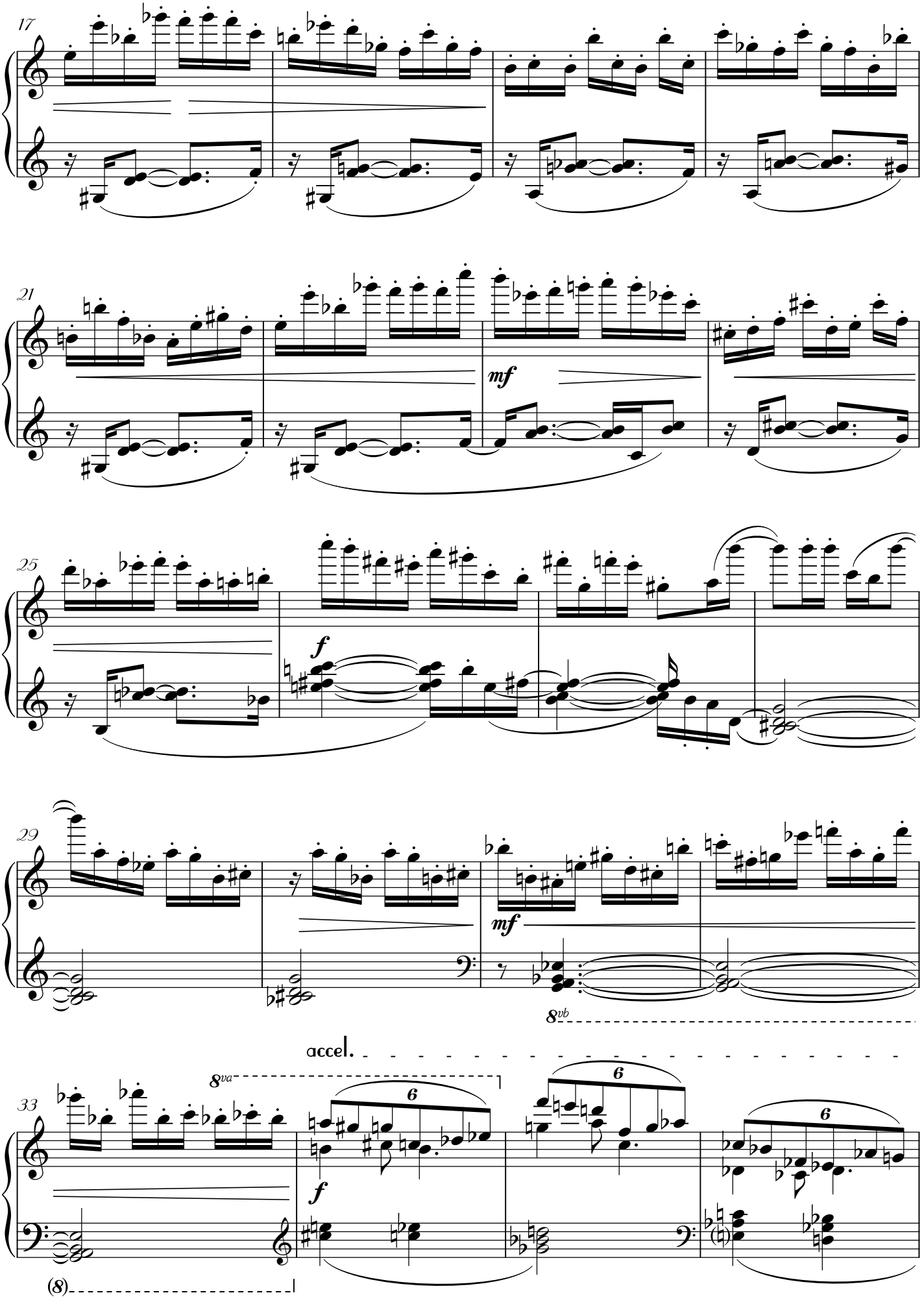
18. A grain of sand is a sun

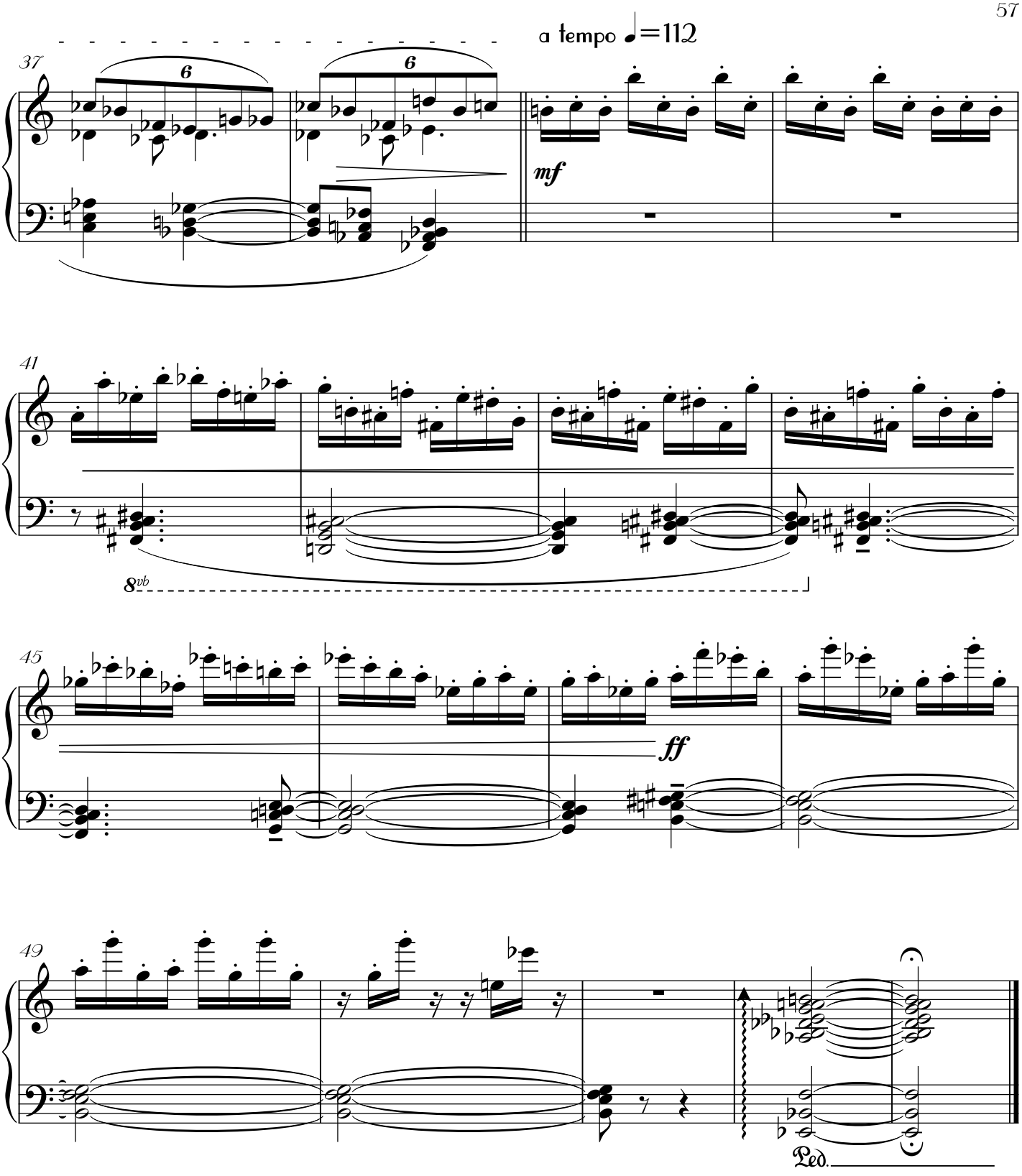



13
16
19
22

19. Much closer to us than any other revelation planets.

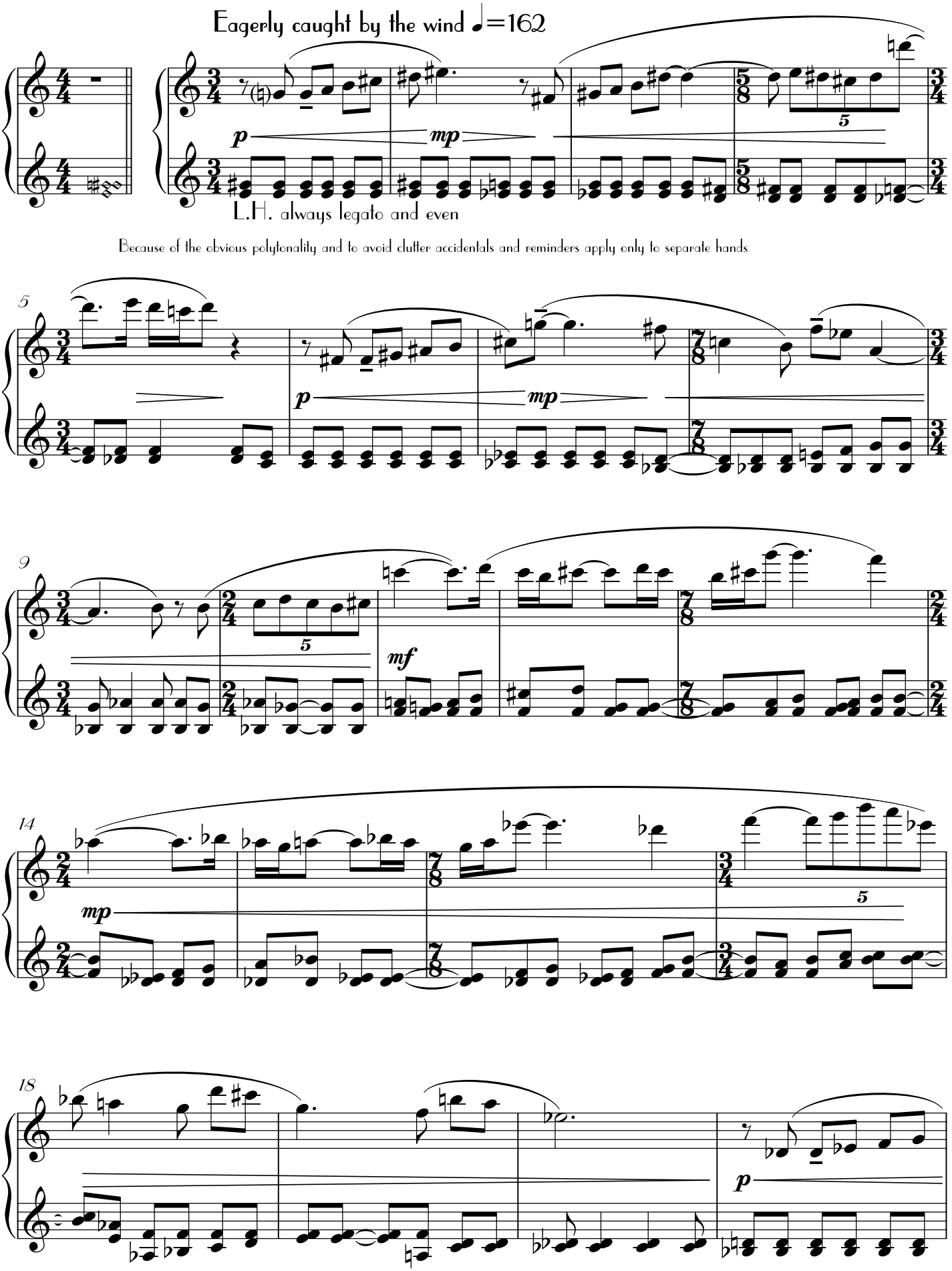


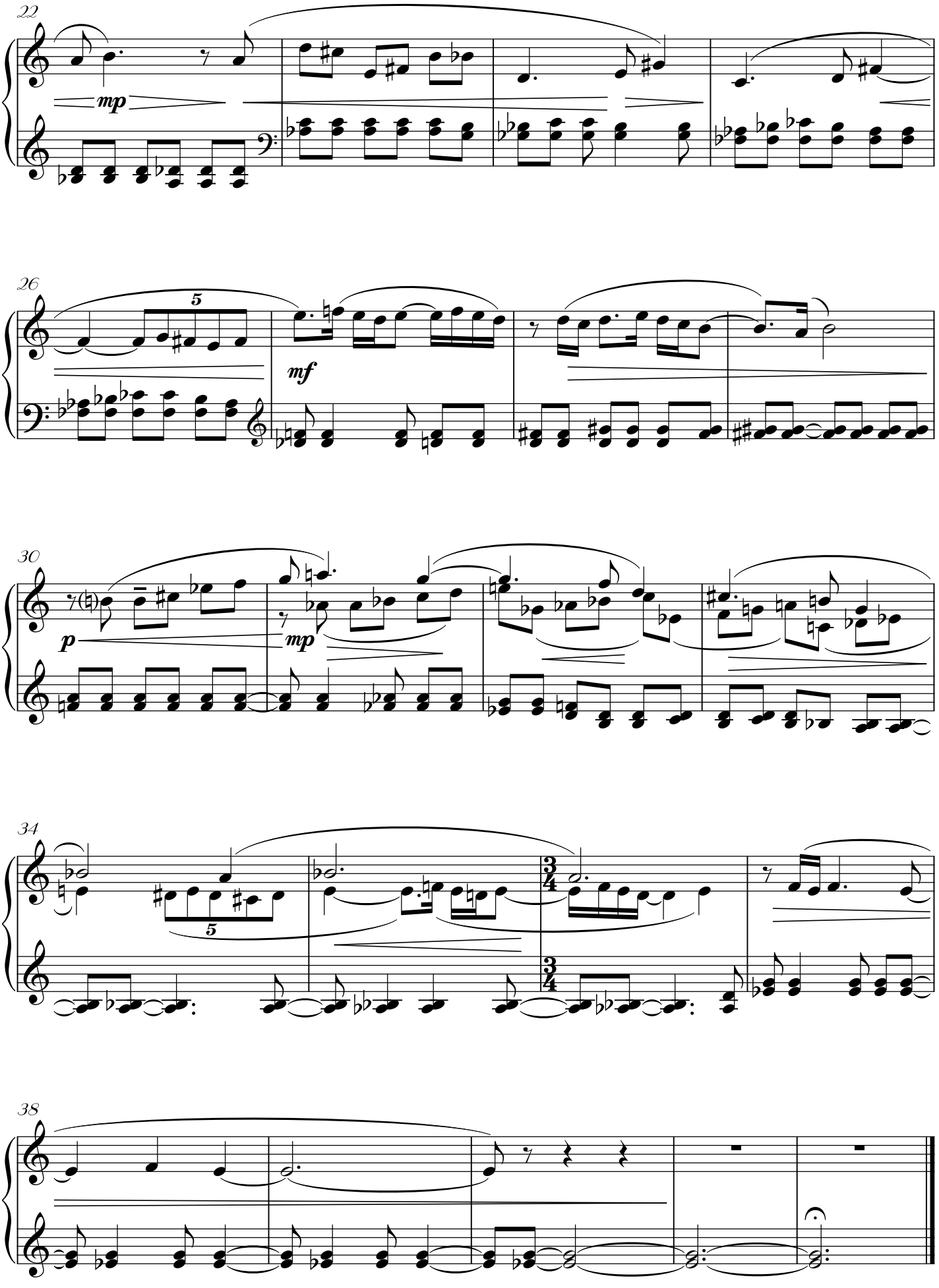

17
21
mf
25
f
29
mf
8vb
accel.
8va
33
f
6
6
6
(8)


a tempo ♩=112
37
6
6
mf
41
8vb
45
ff
49
Ped.

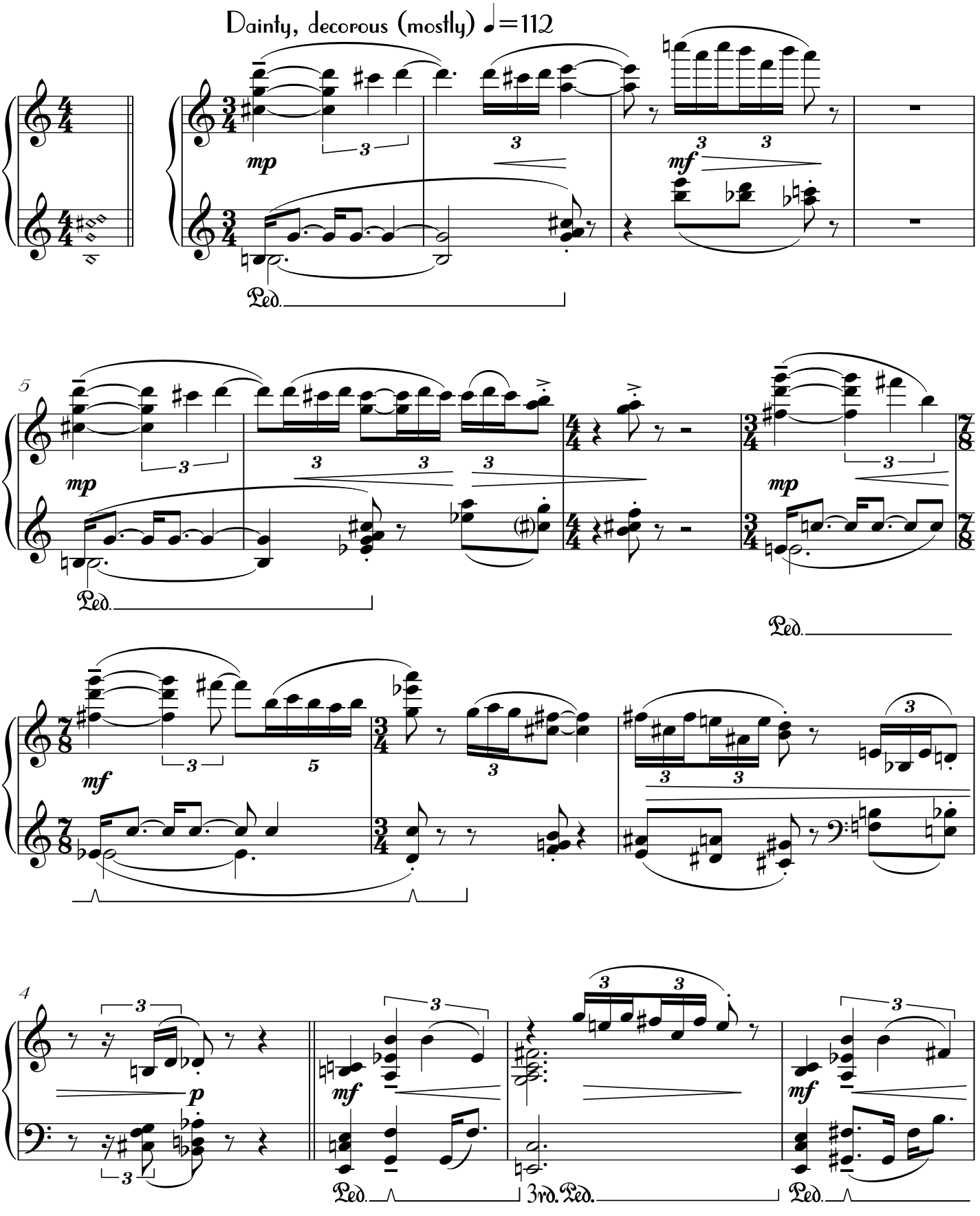
PART II

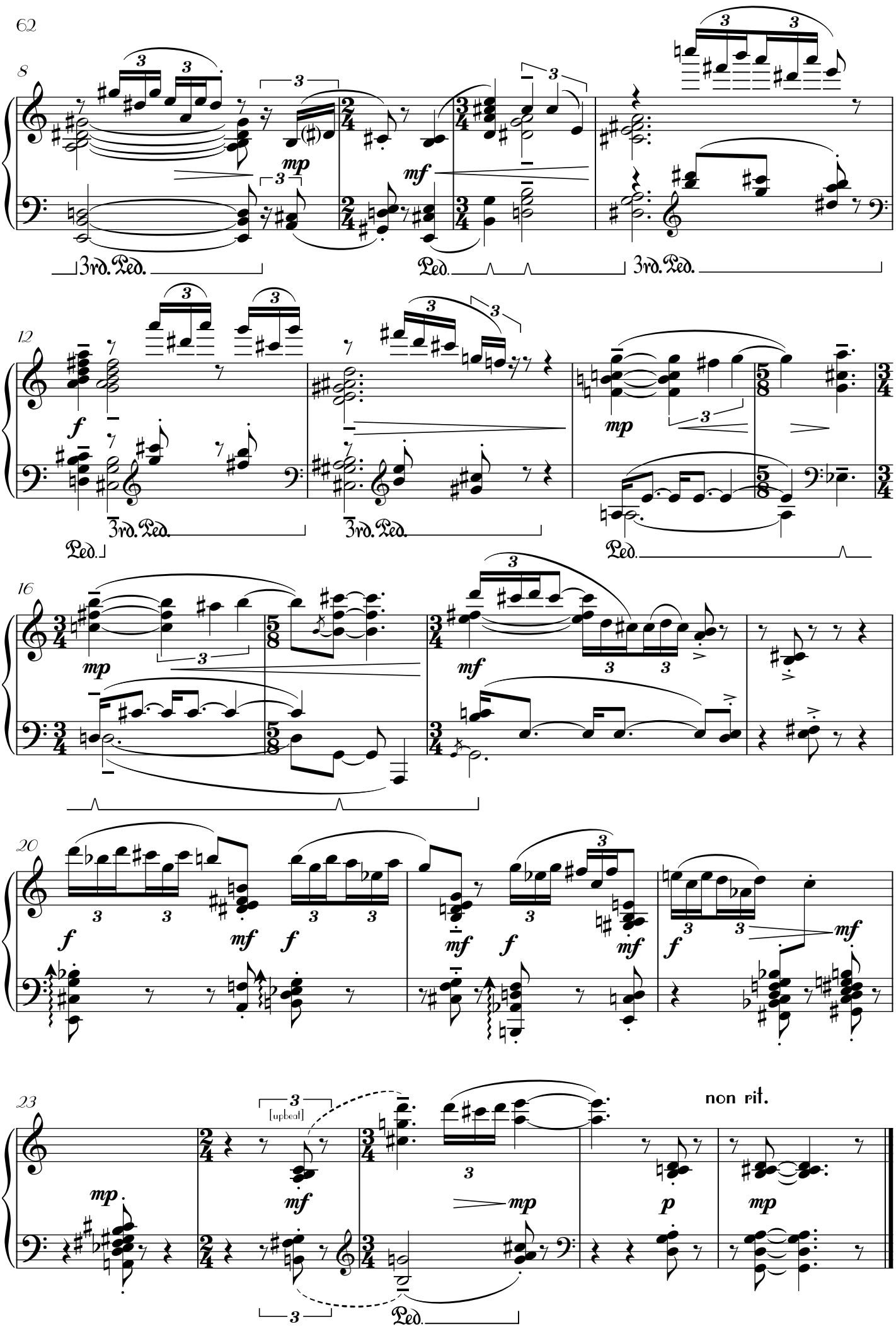
20. A letter full of breaths has arrived



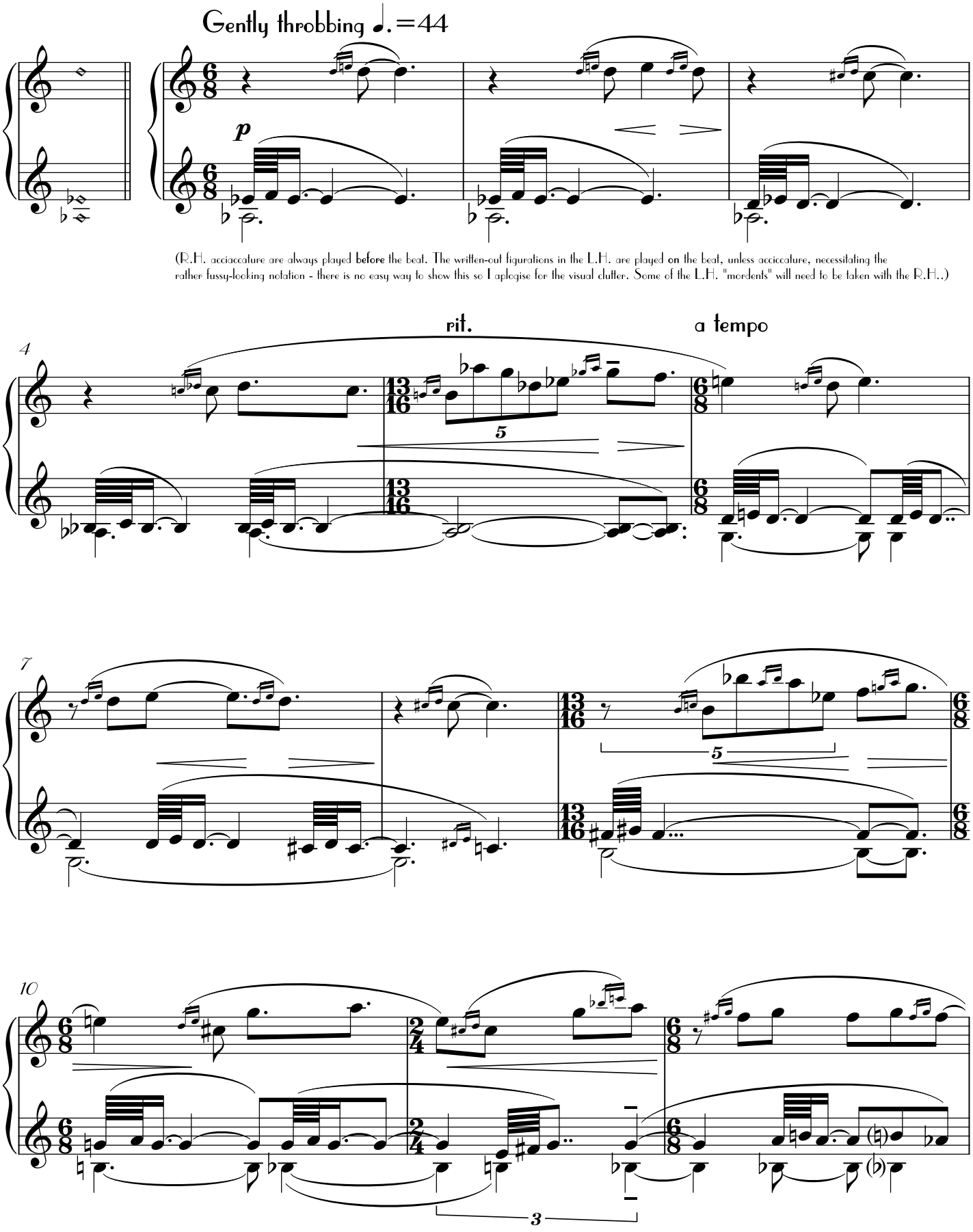

22
mp
26
5
mf
30
p
mp
34
5
3/4
3/4
38

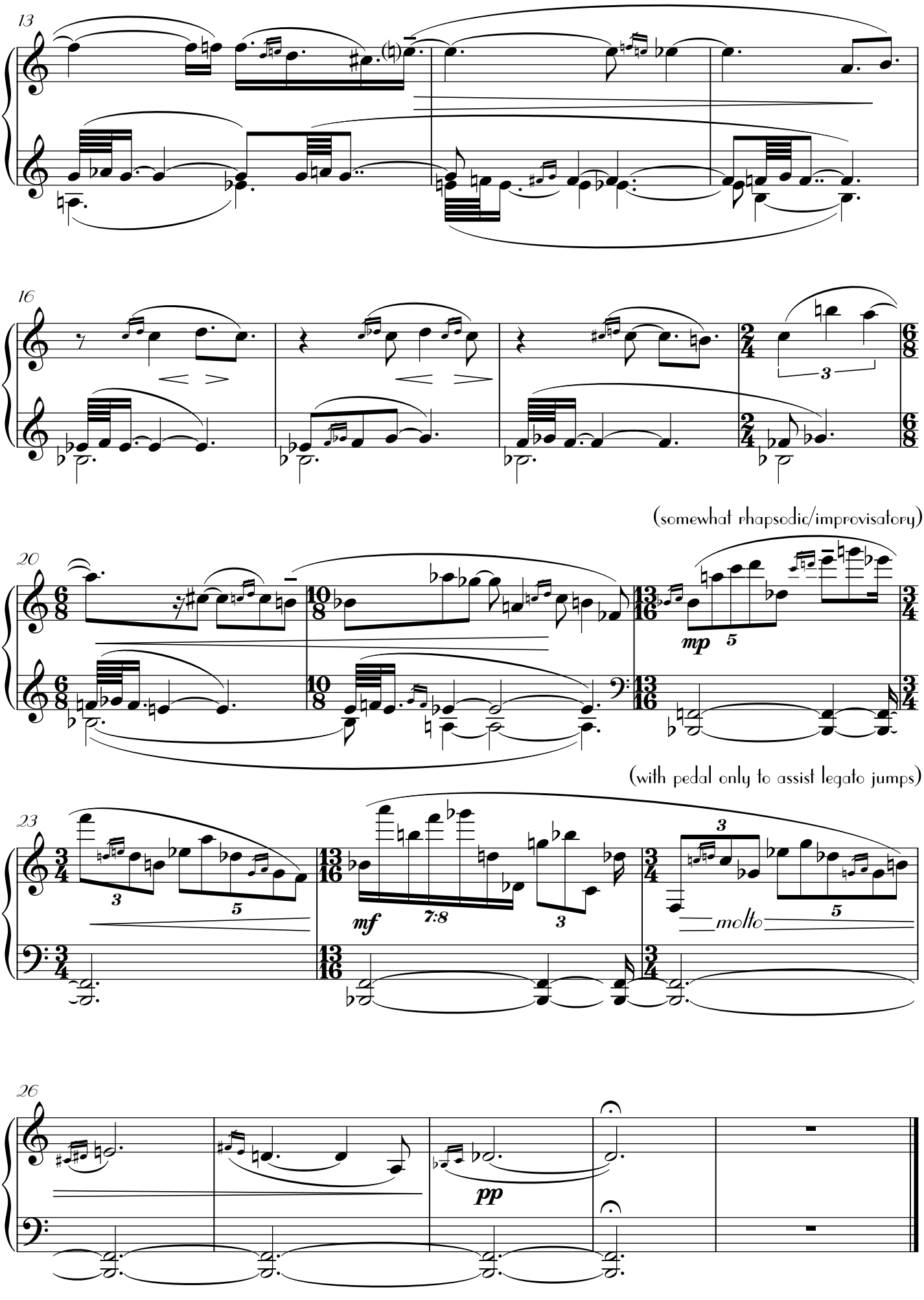
21. A nameless sender's courtesy to me



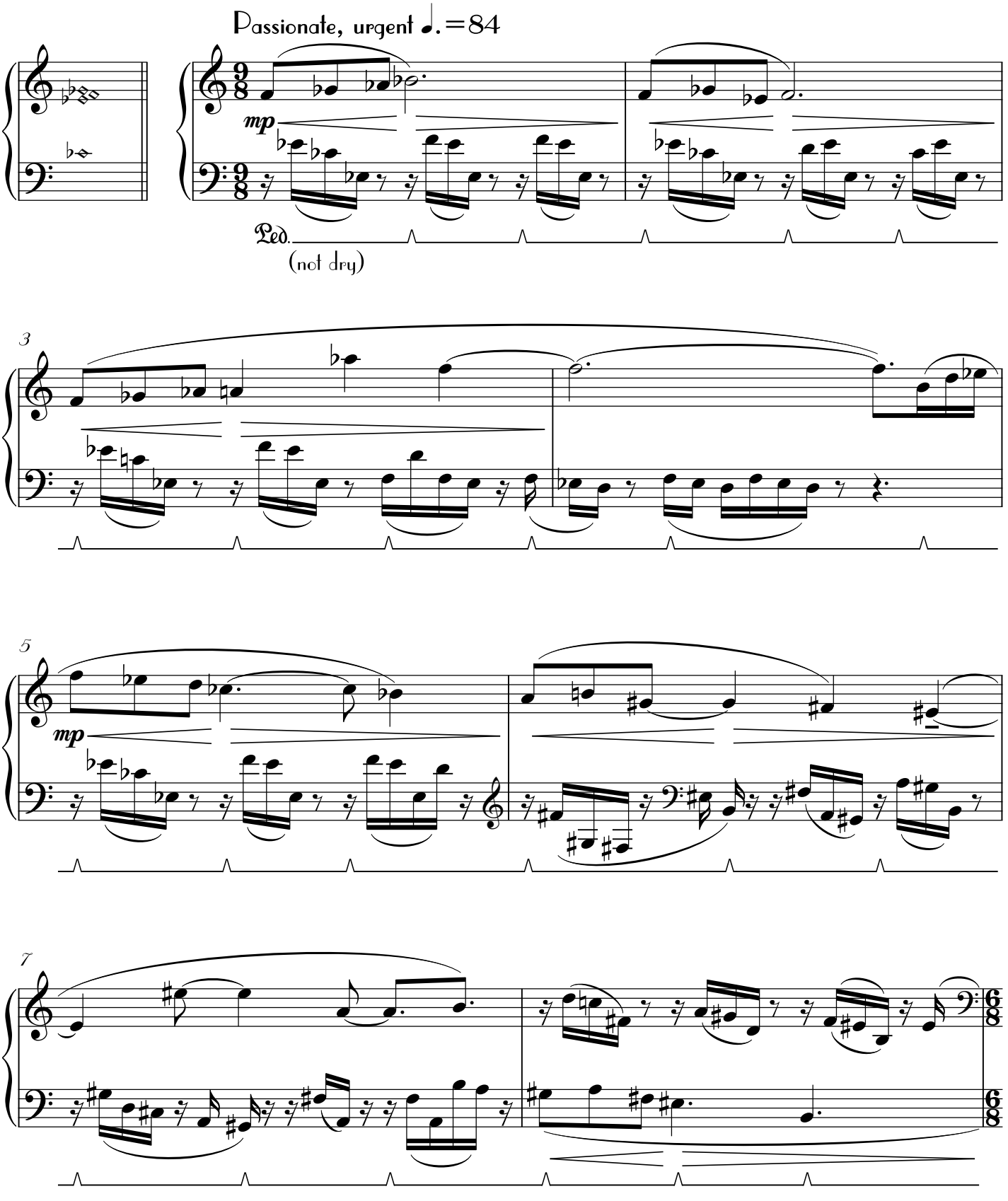

8
mp
mf
3rd. Ped.
Ped.
3rd. Ped.
12
f
mp
3rd. Ped.
3rd. Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
16
mp
mf
20
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf
23
[upbeat]
mp
mf
mp
p
mp
non rit.
Ped.

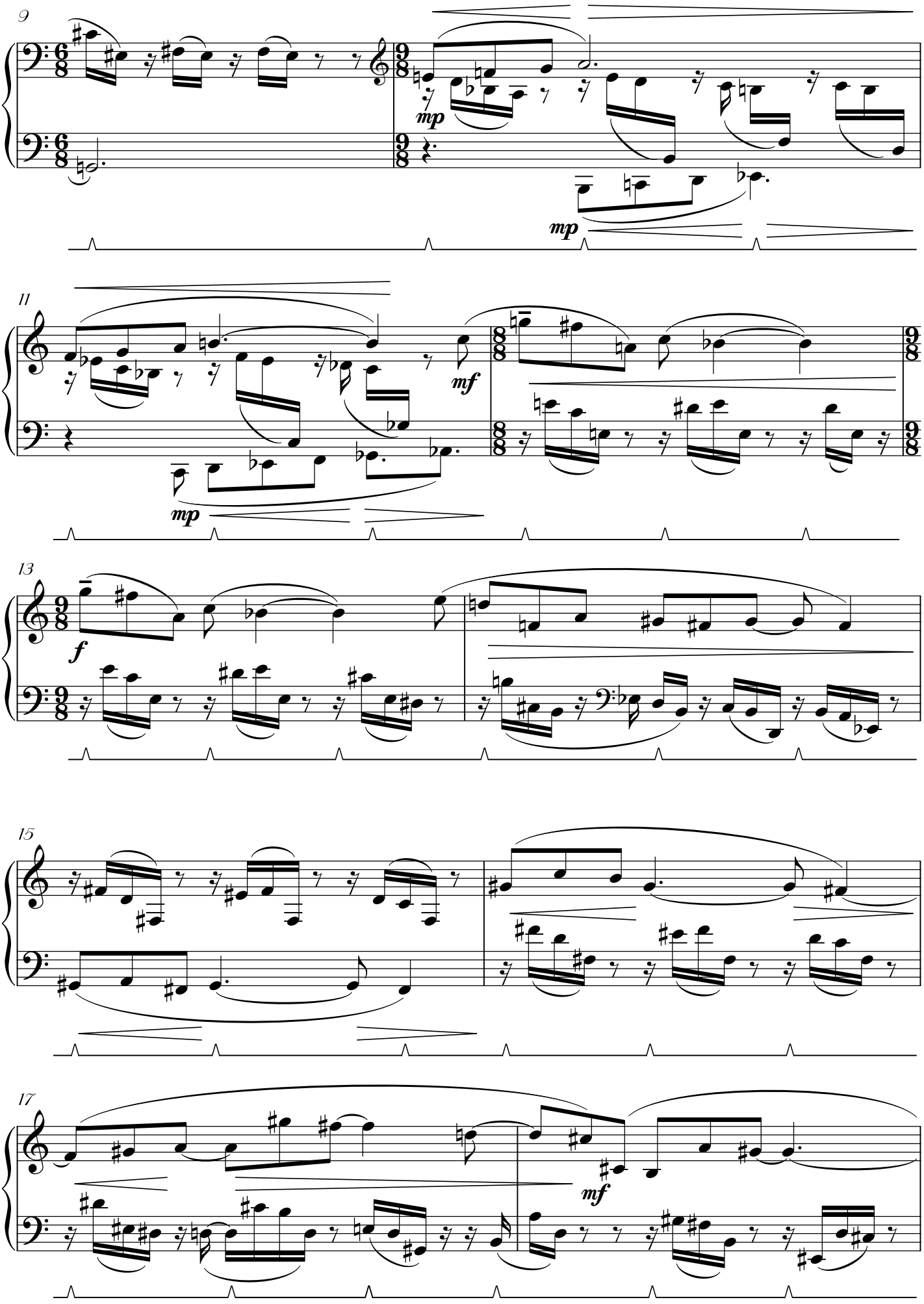
22. The hand is puzzling, grains of sand

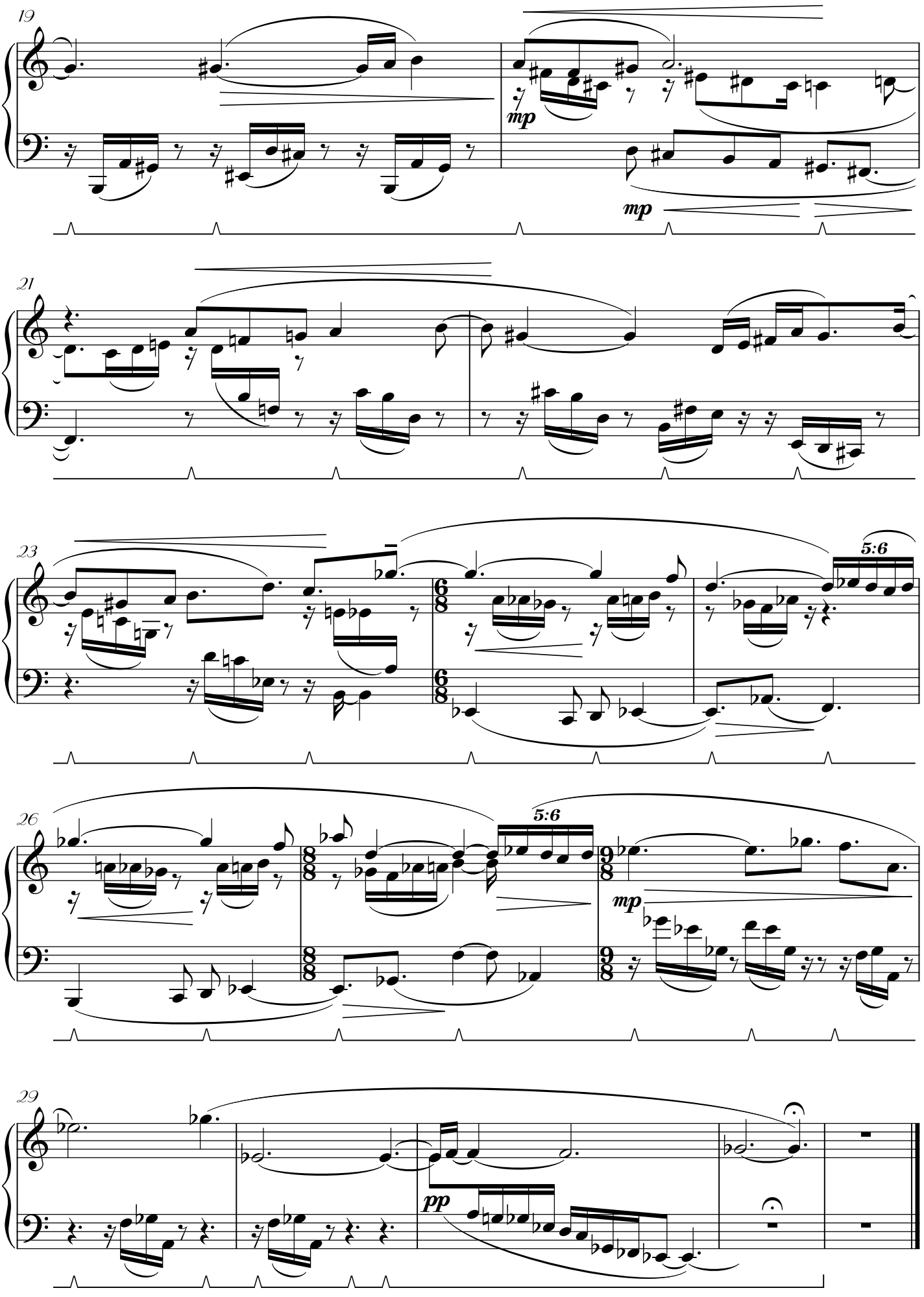



13
16
(somewhat rhapsodic/improvisatory)
20
mp
5
(with pedal only to assist legato jumps)
23
3
5
mf
7:8
3
molto
26
pp

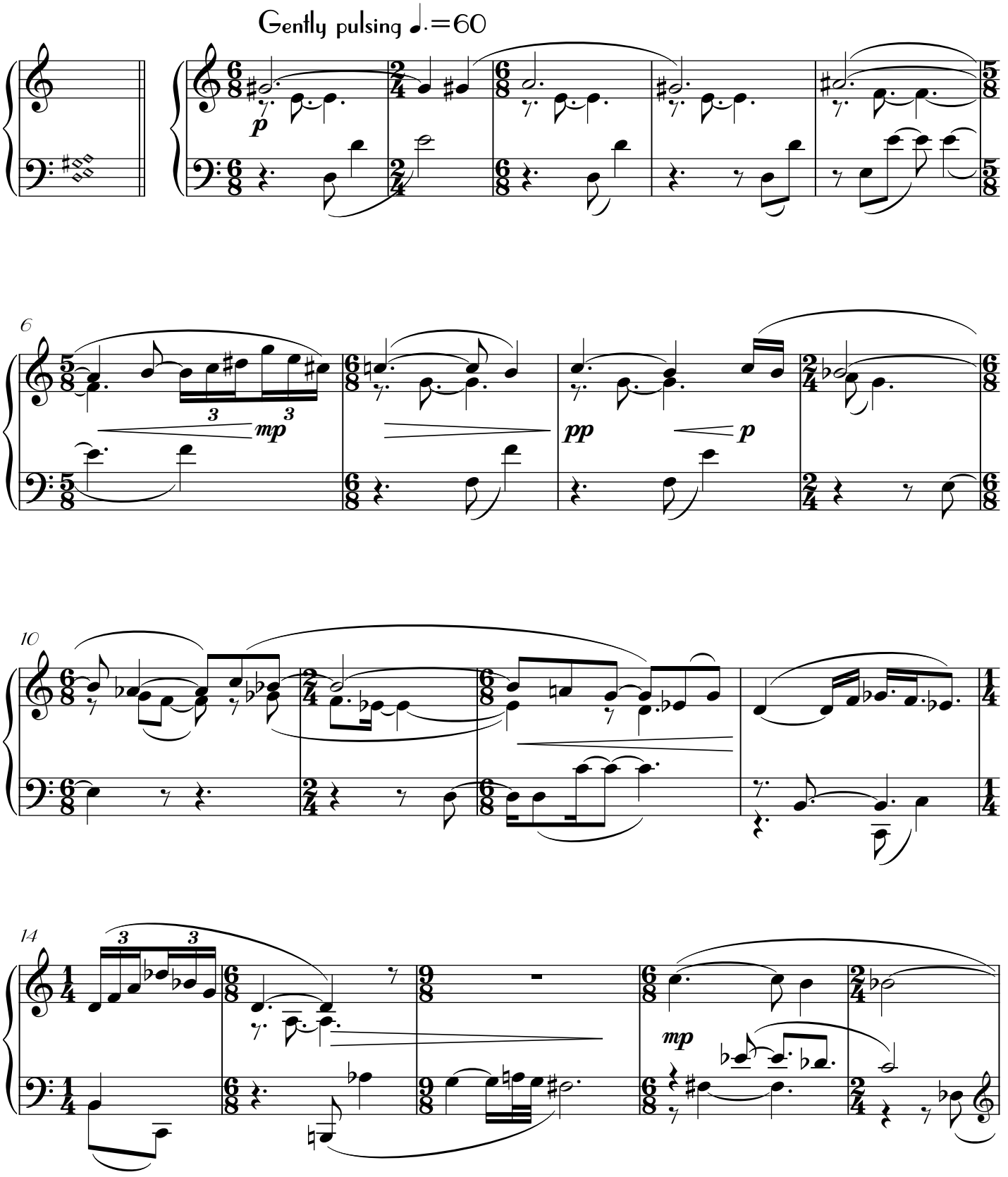
23. Pour in the heart, and plunge in opened earth

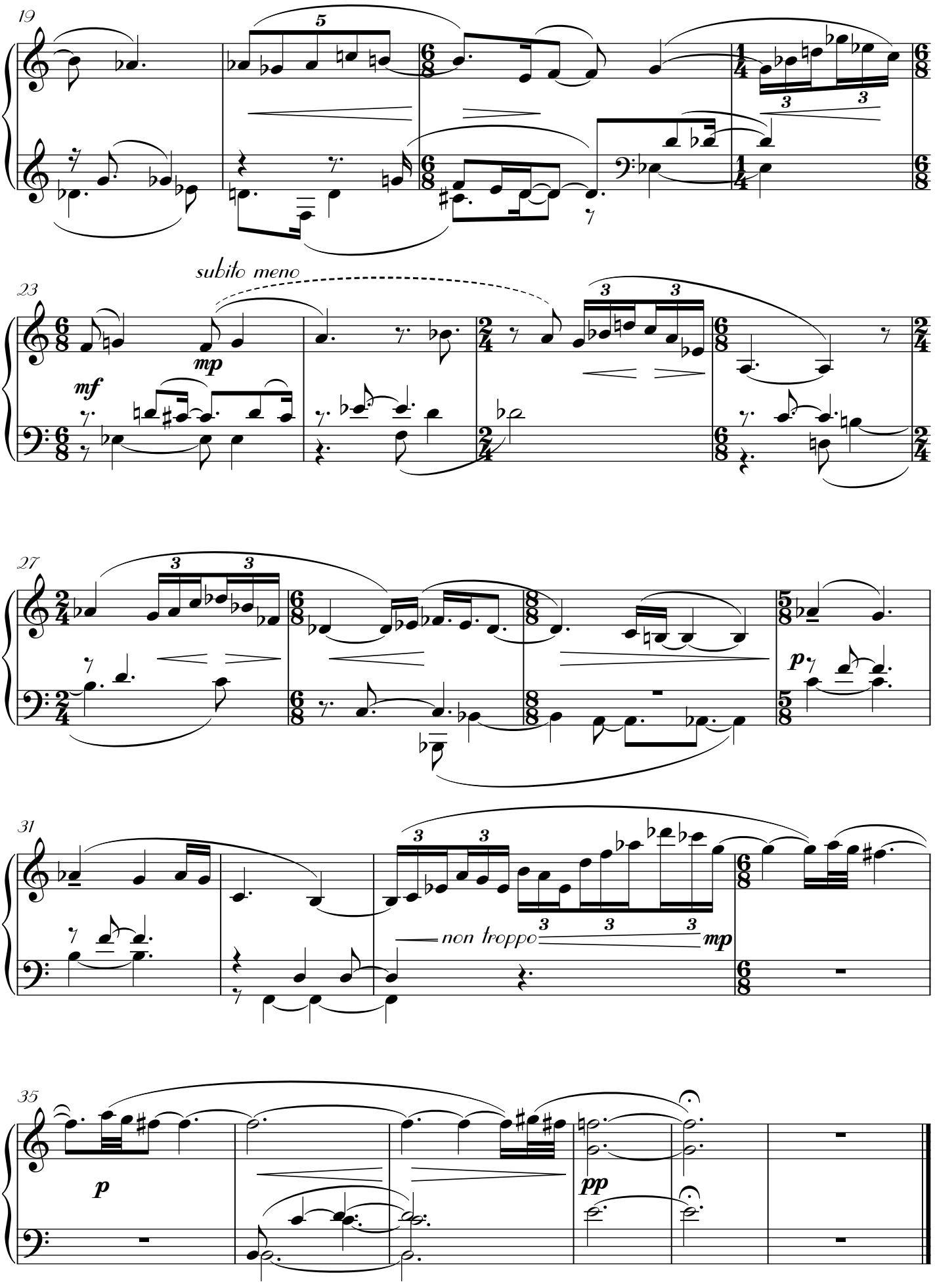



9
mp
mp
11
mf
mp
13
f
15
17
mf

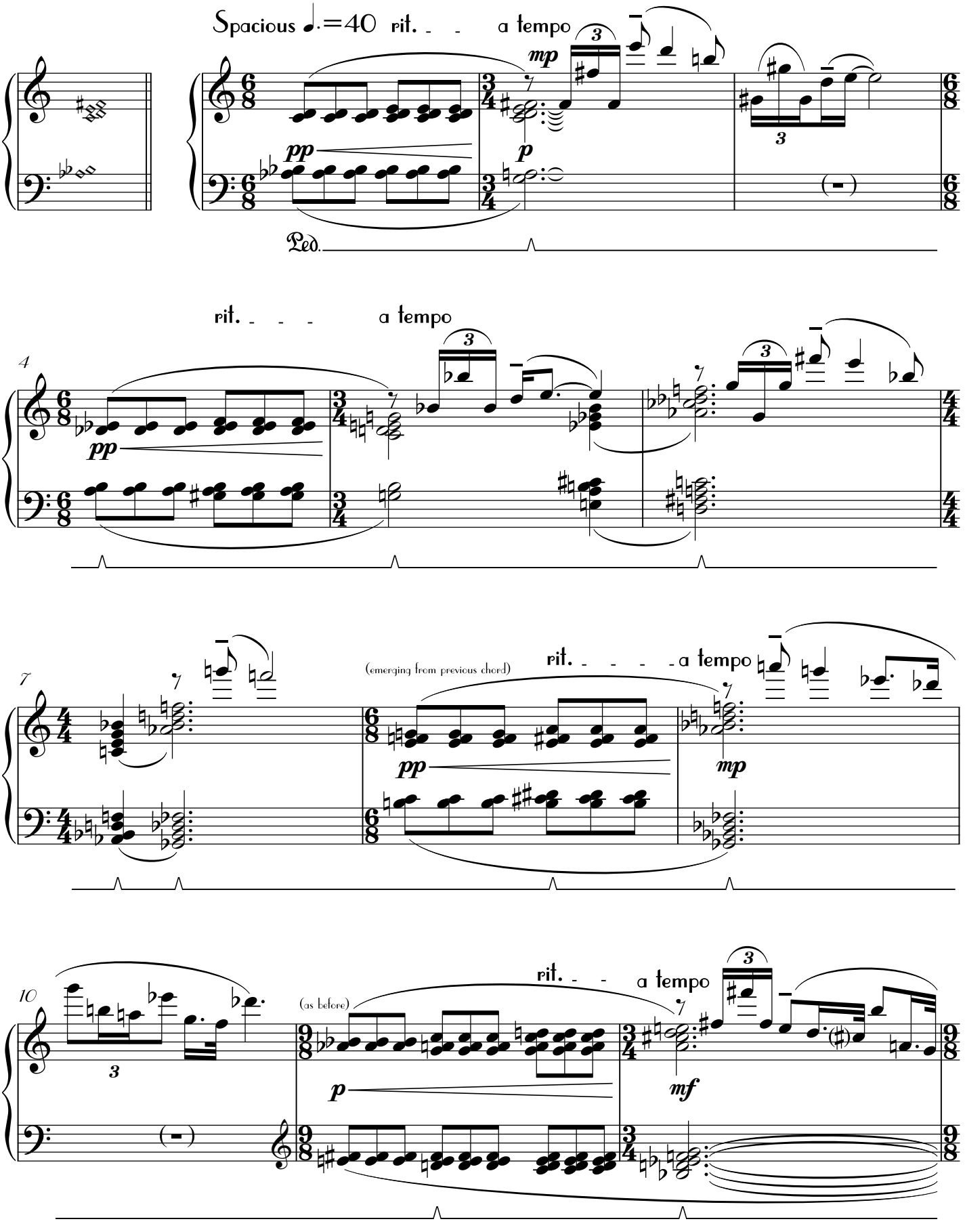

19
mp
mp
21
23
5:6
26
5:6
mp
29
pp

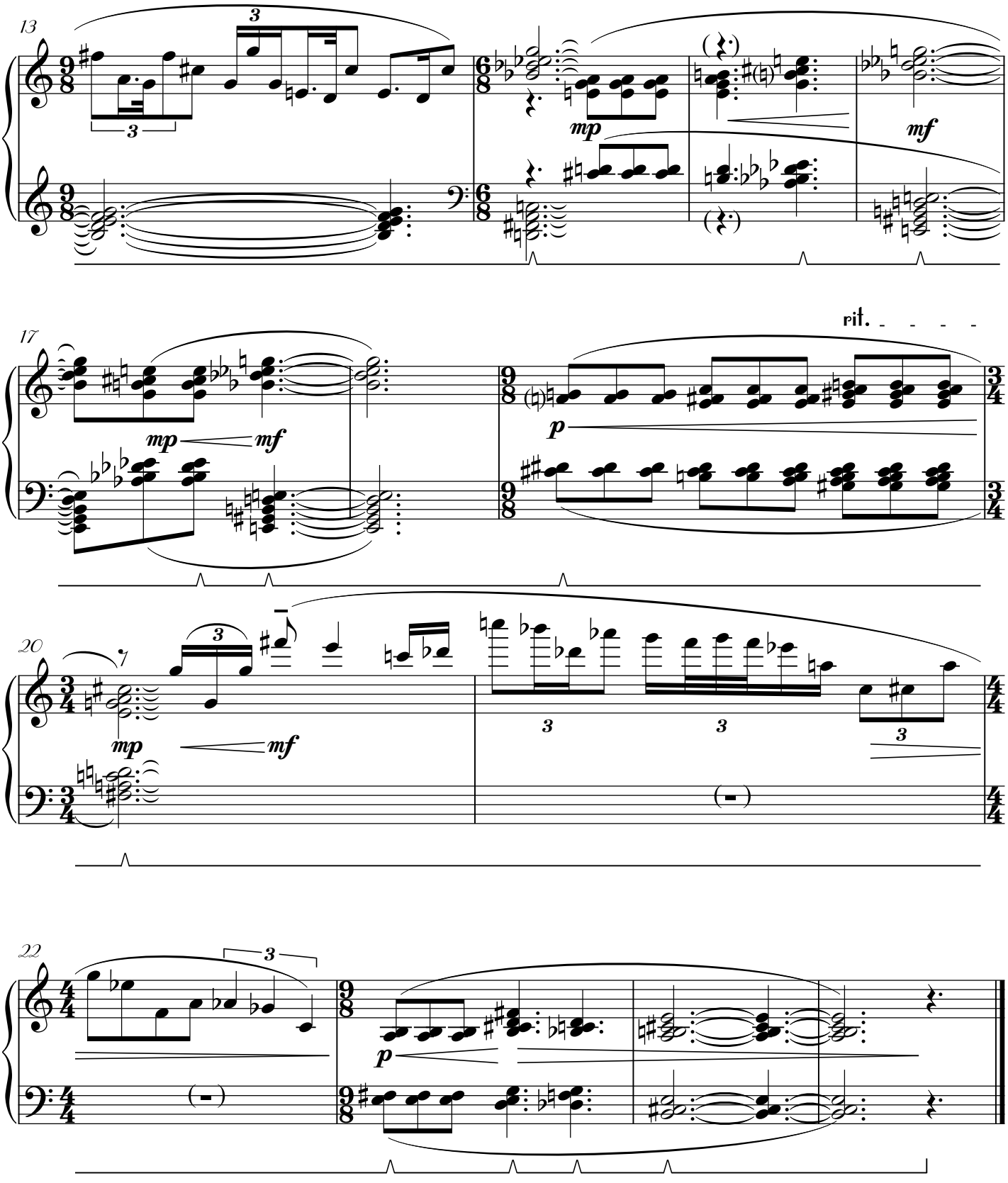
24. Time is passing without progressing



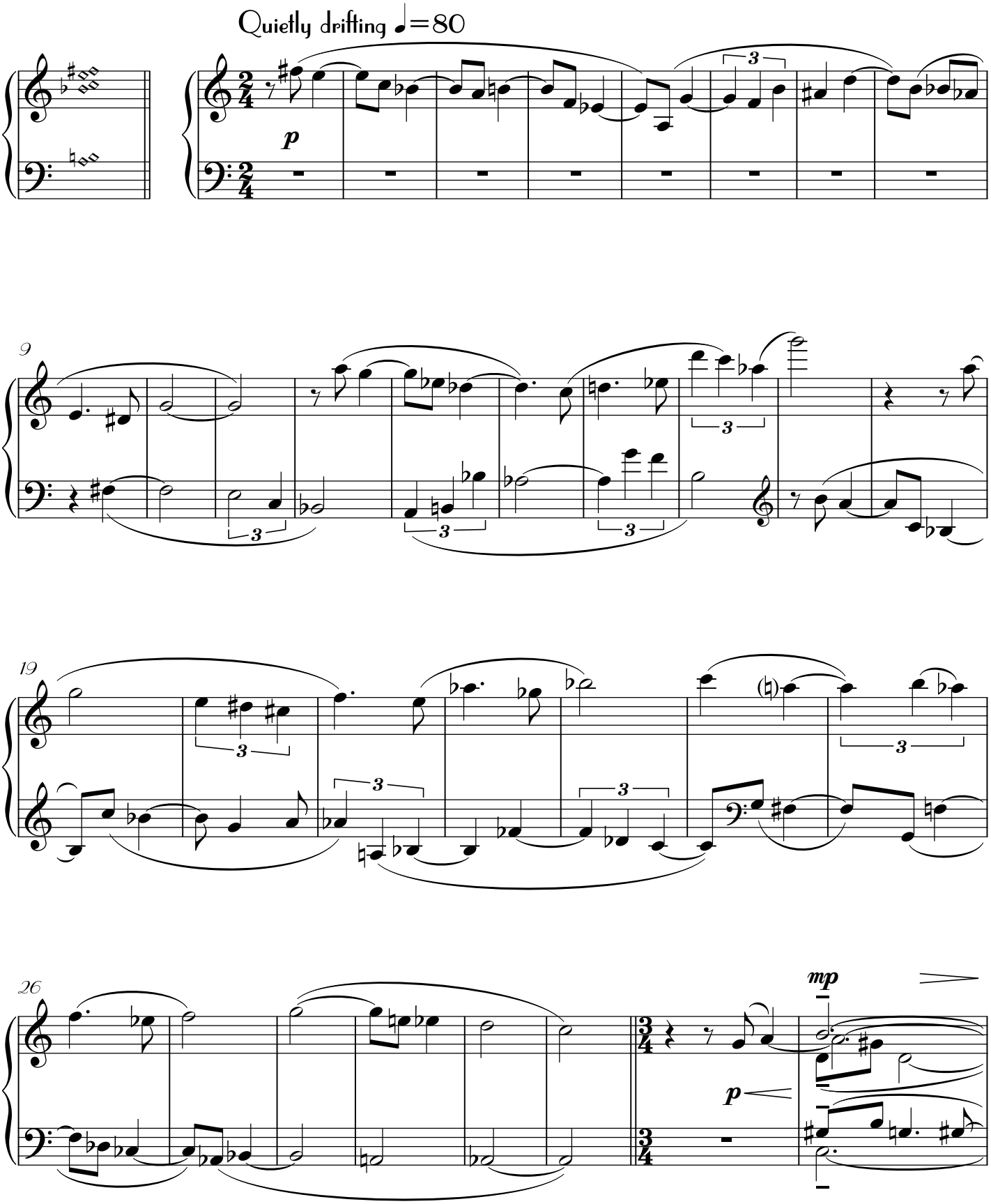

19
23
subito meno
mp
mf
27
p
31
non troppo
mp
35
p
pp

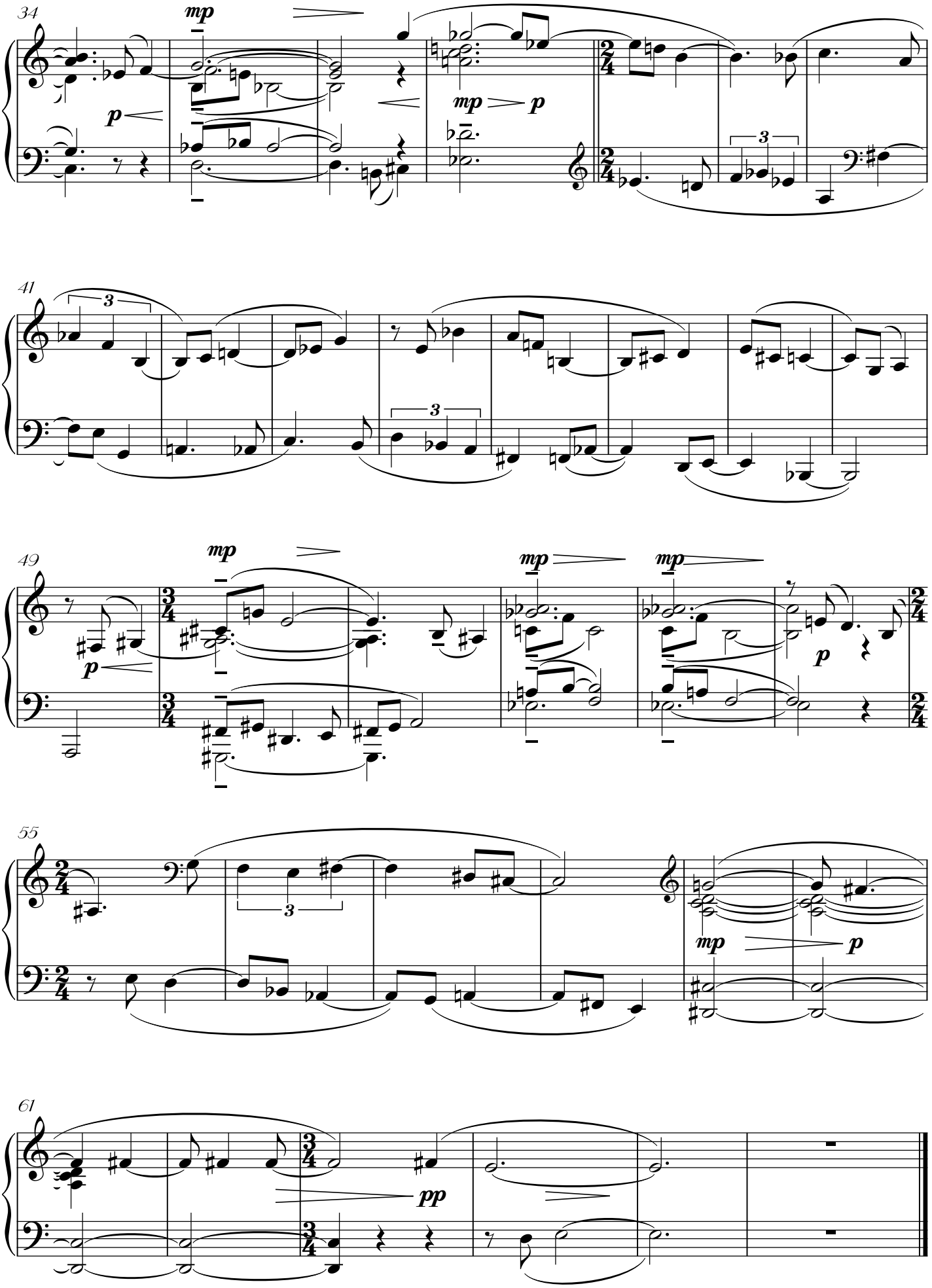
25. The sundial memorialises someone's joy in a return



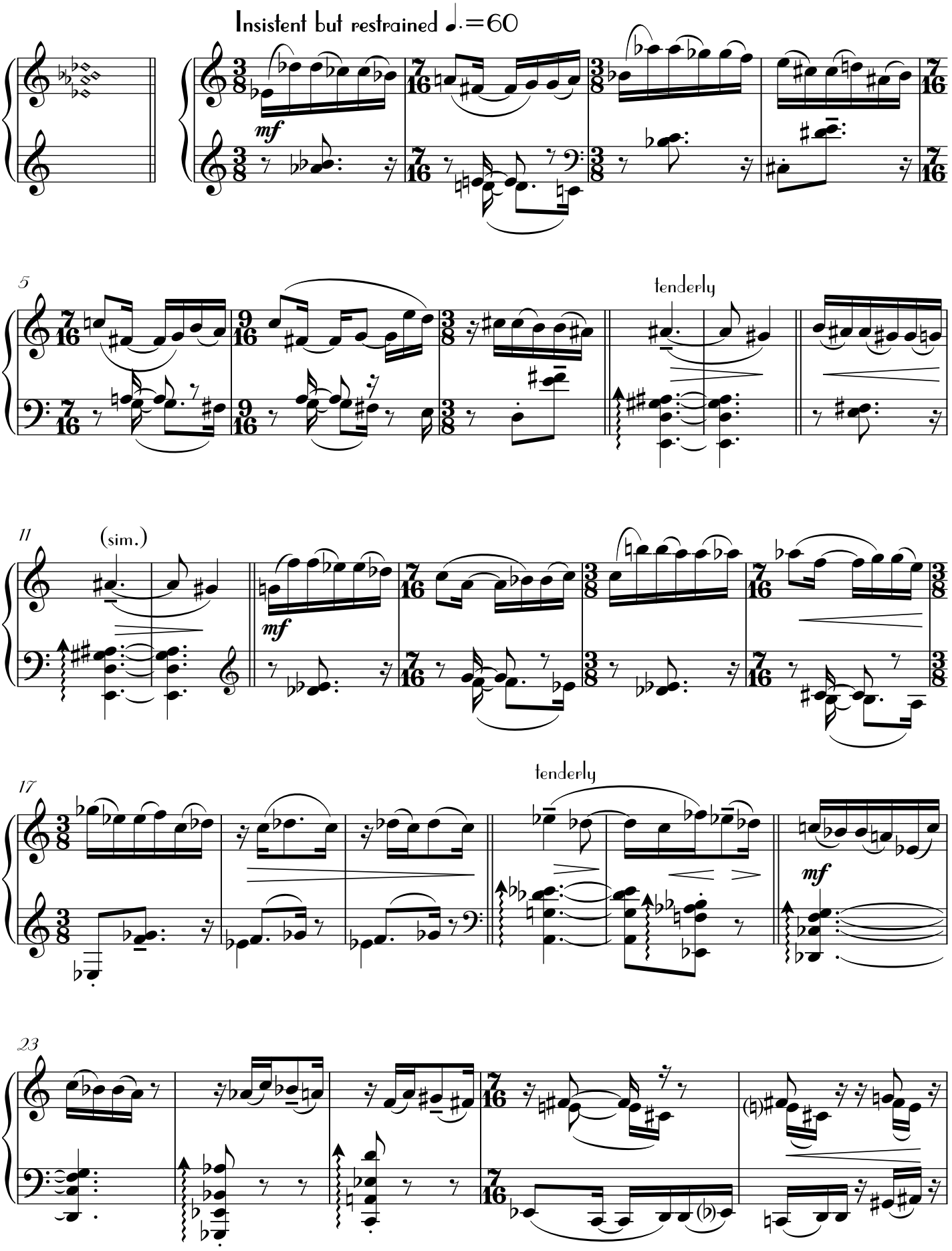

13
17
20
22
rit.

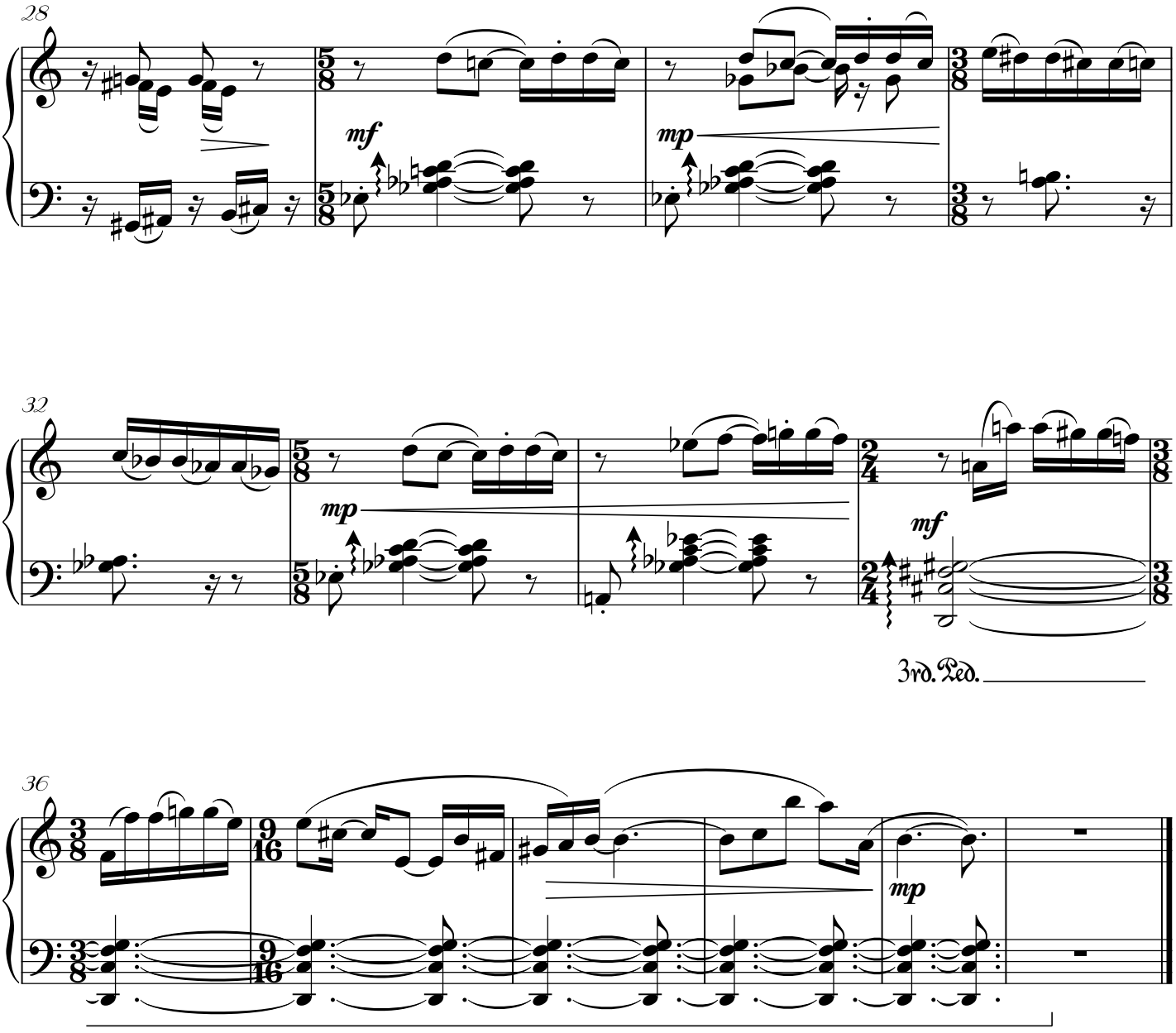
26. Stunned language of silence, unvoiced throat,



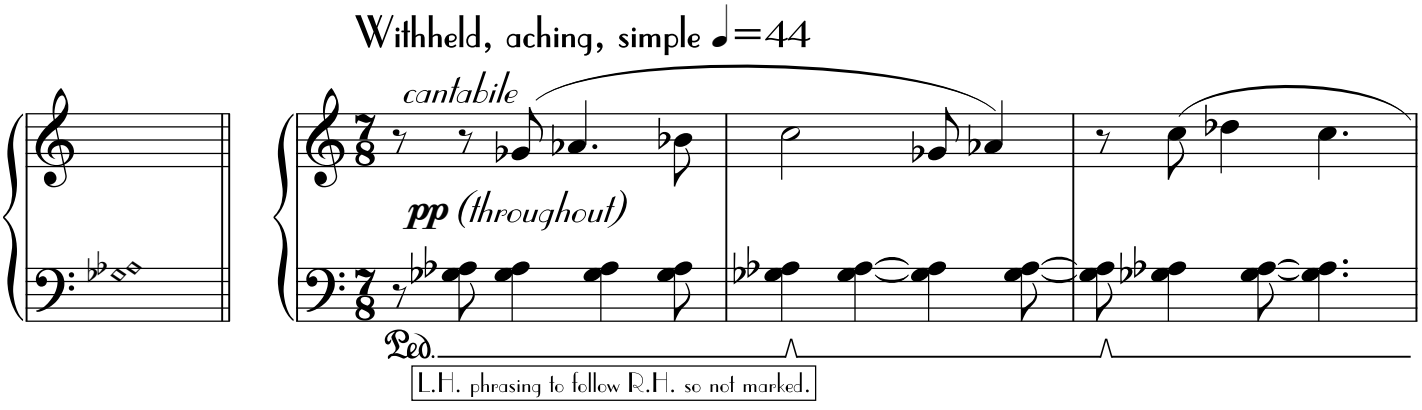

34
mp
p
mp
p
3
41
3
3
49
mp
mp
mp
p
p
55
3
mp
p
61
pp

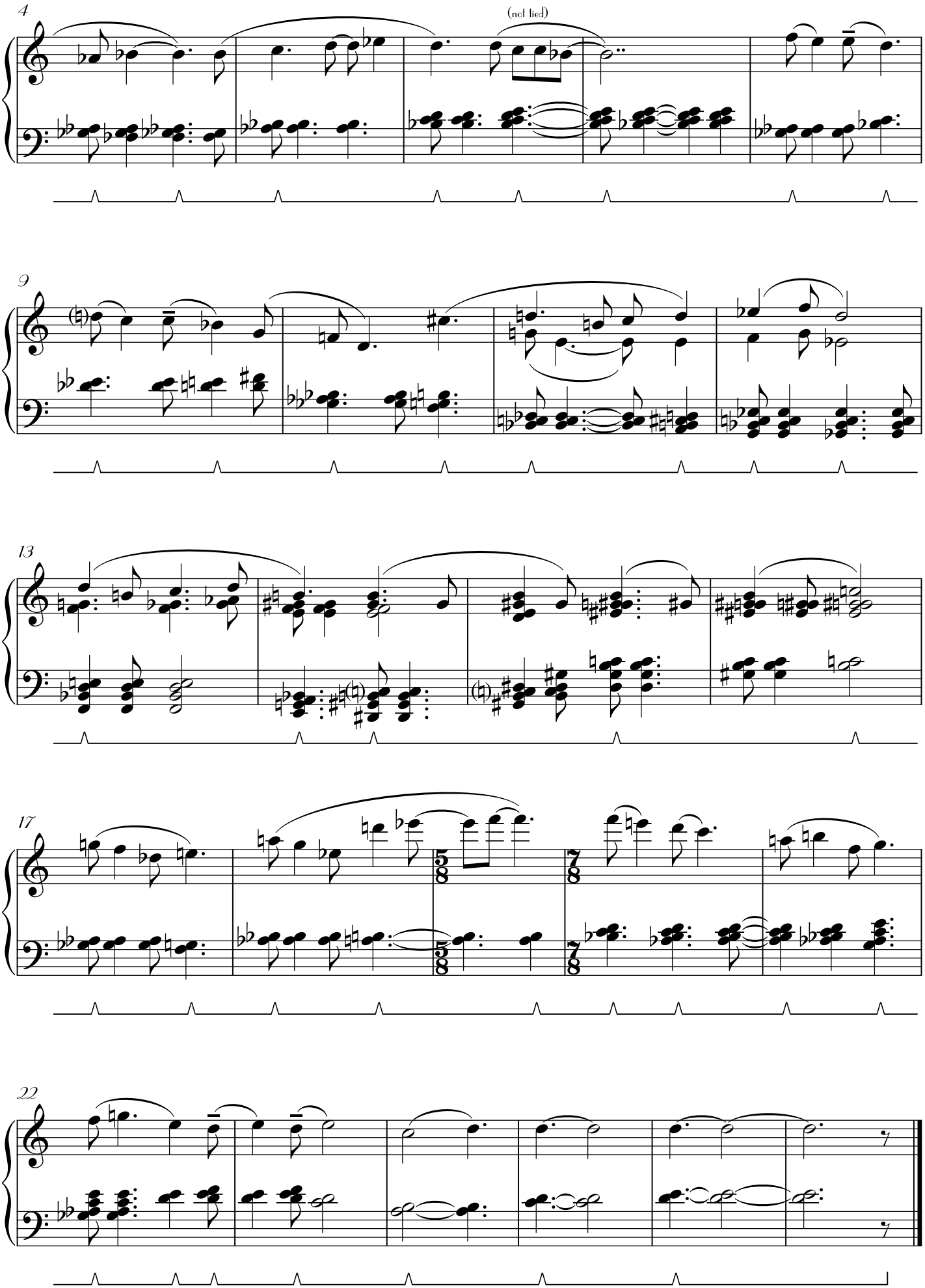
27. Pigments of longing infuse our reunions



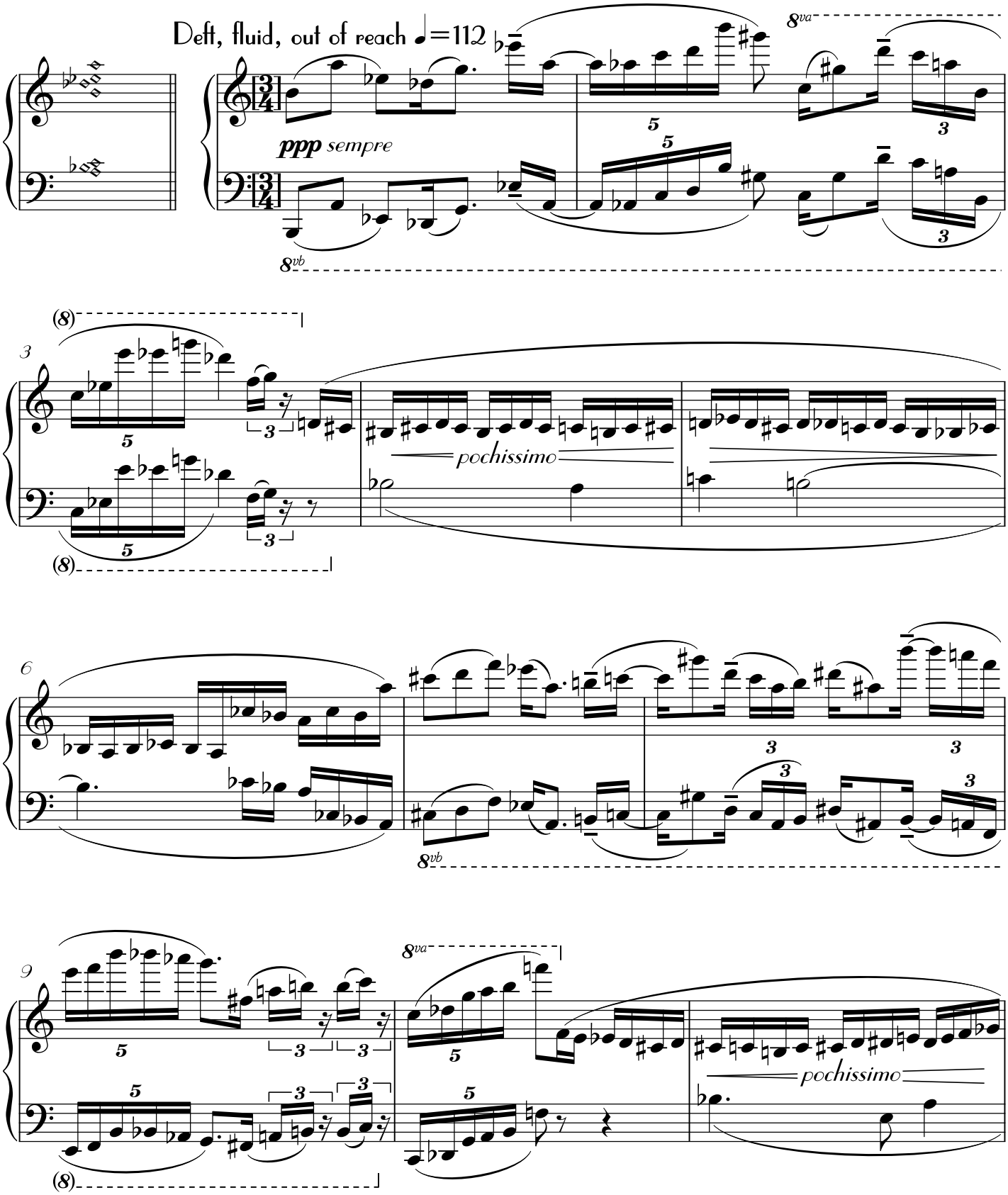


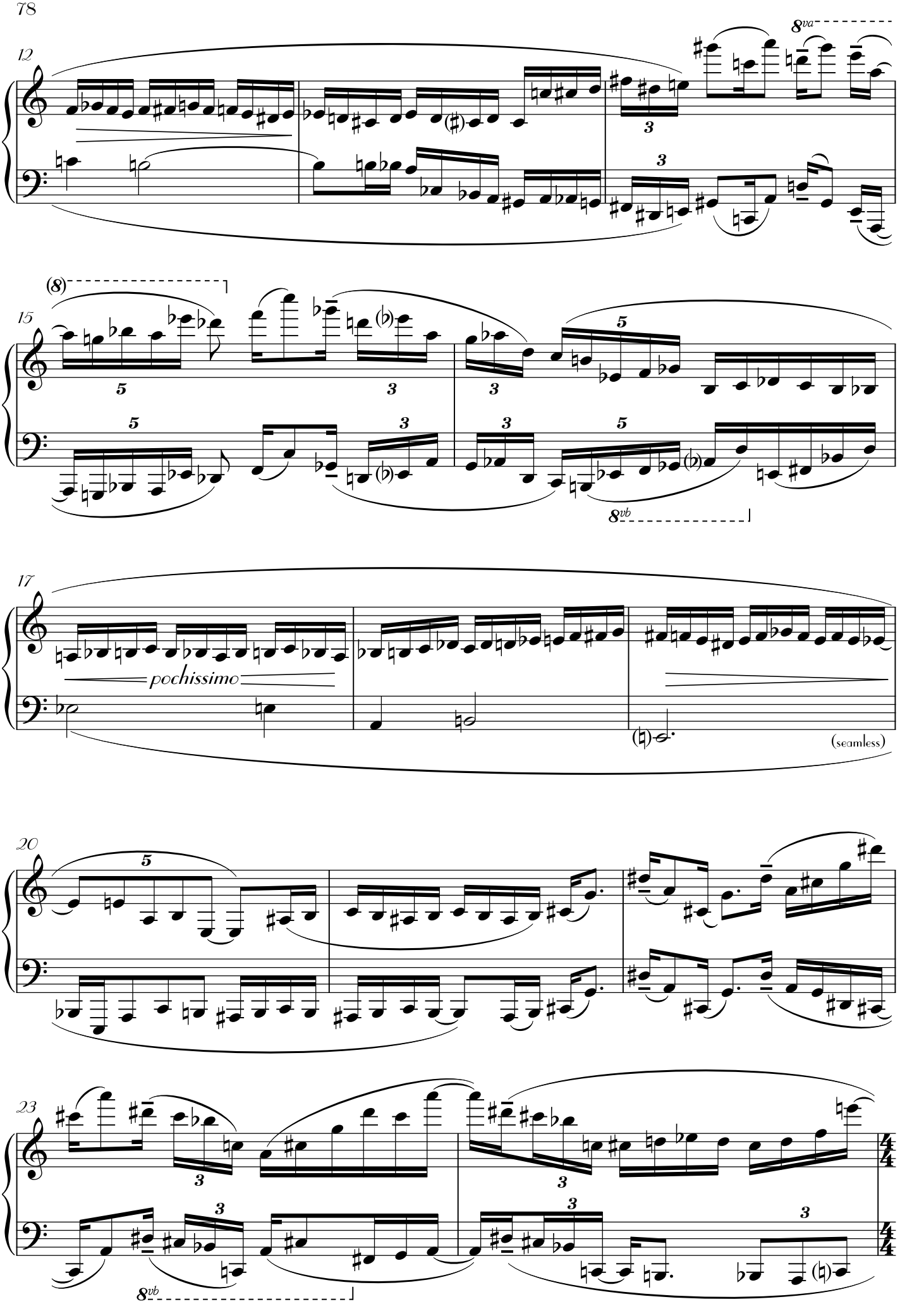
28. Who has been calling all night...

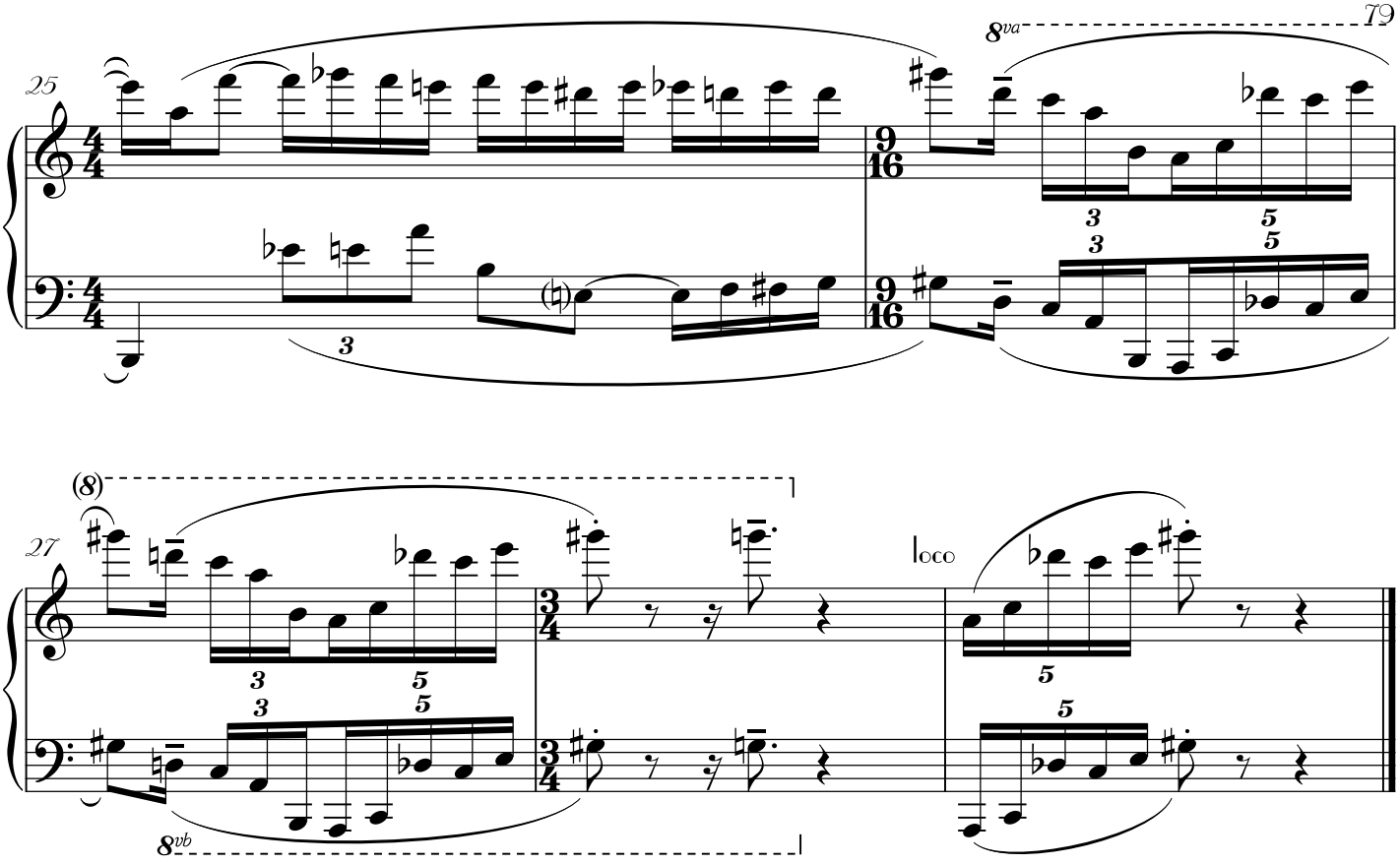



4
(not tied)
9
13
17
5/8
7/8
5/8
7/8
22

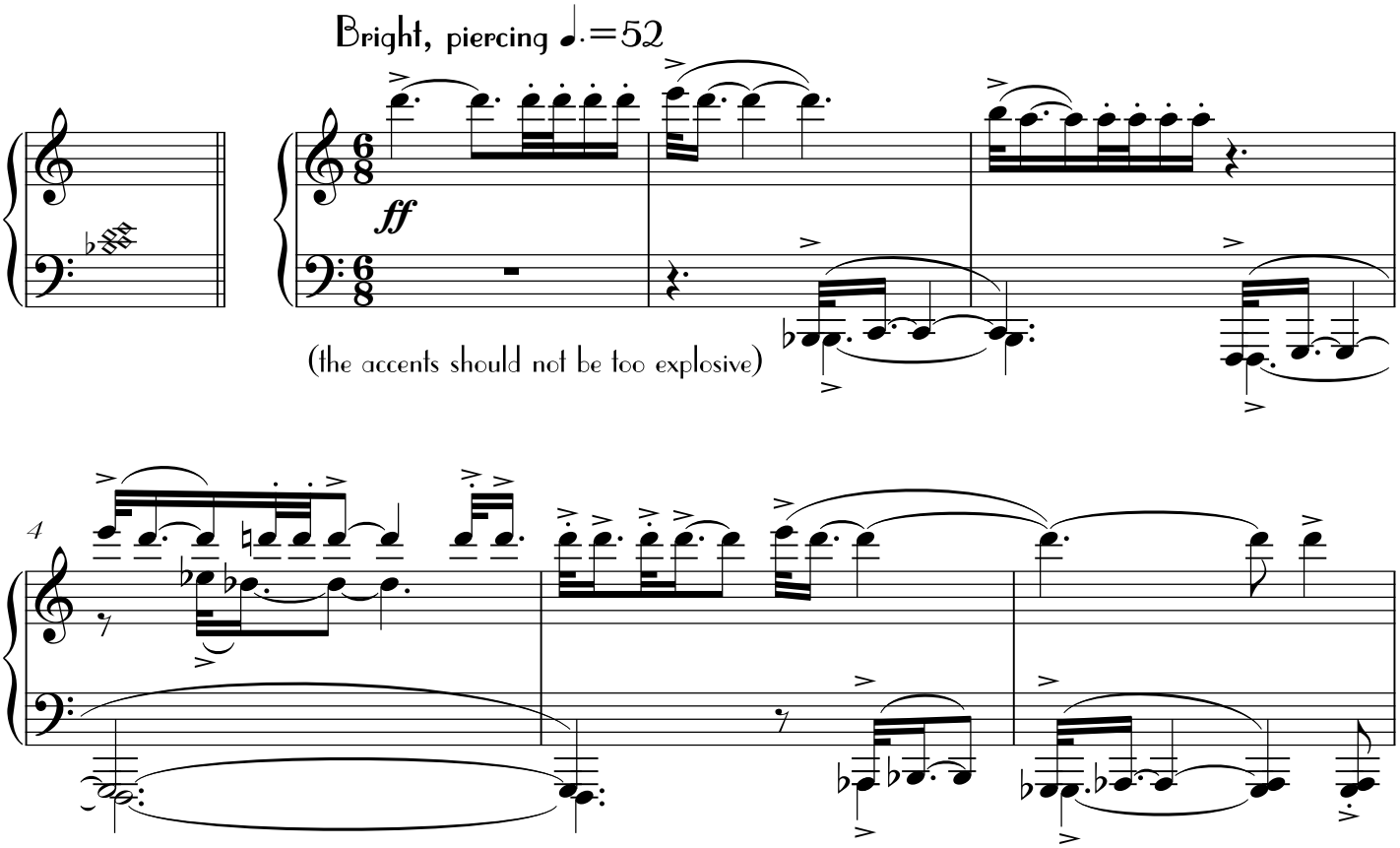
28. ...In the realm of air and water?

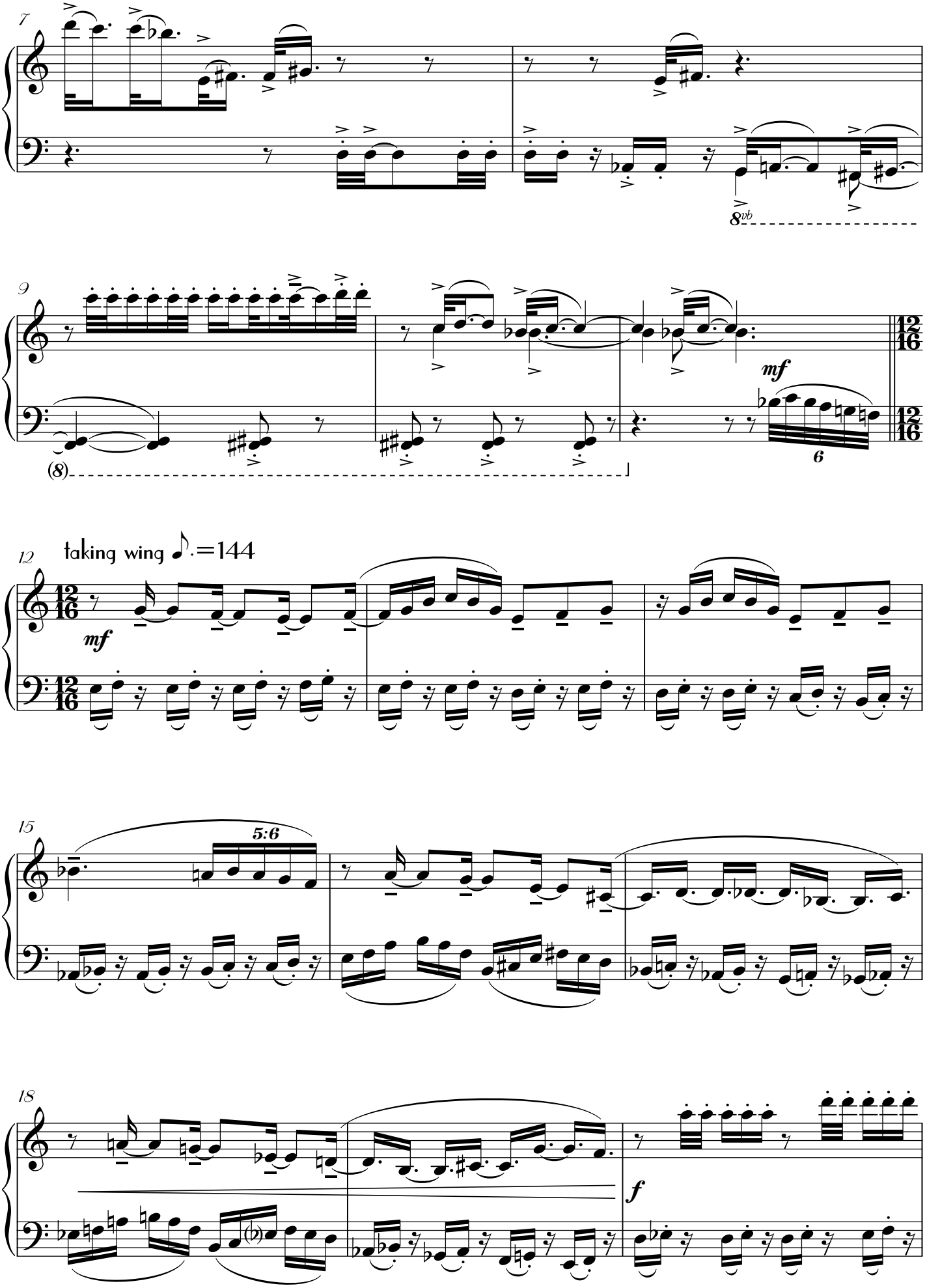



12
8va
15
(8)
8vb
17
pochissimo
(seamless)
20
23
8vb



30. Watching with eyes of wild birds




7
8vb
9
(8)
mf
6
12
taking wing ♪.=144
mf
15
5:6
18
f

Tempo primo ♩.=52

21

mf

ff

25

5:6

28

as before ♪.=144

mf

6

31

f

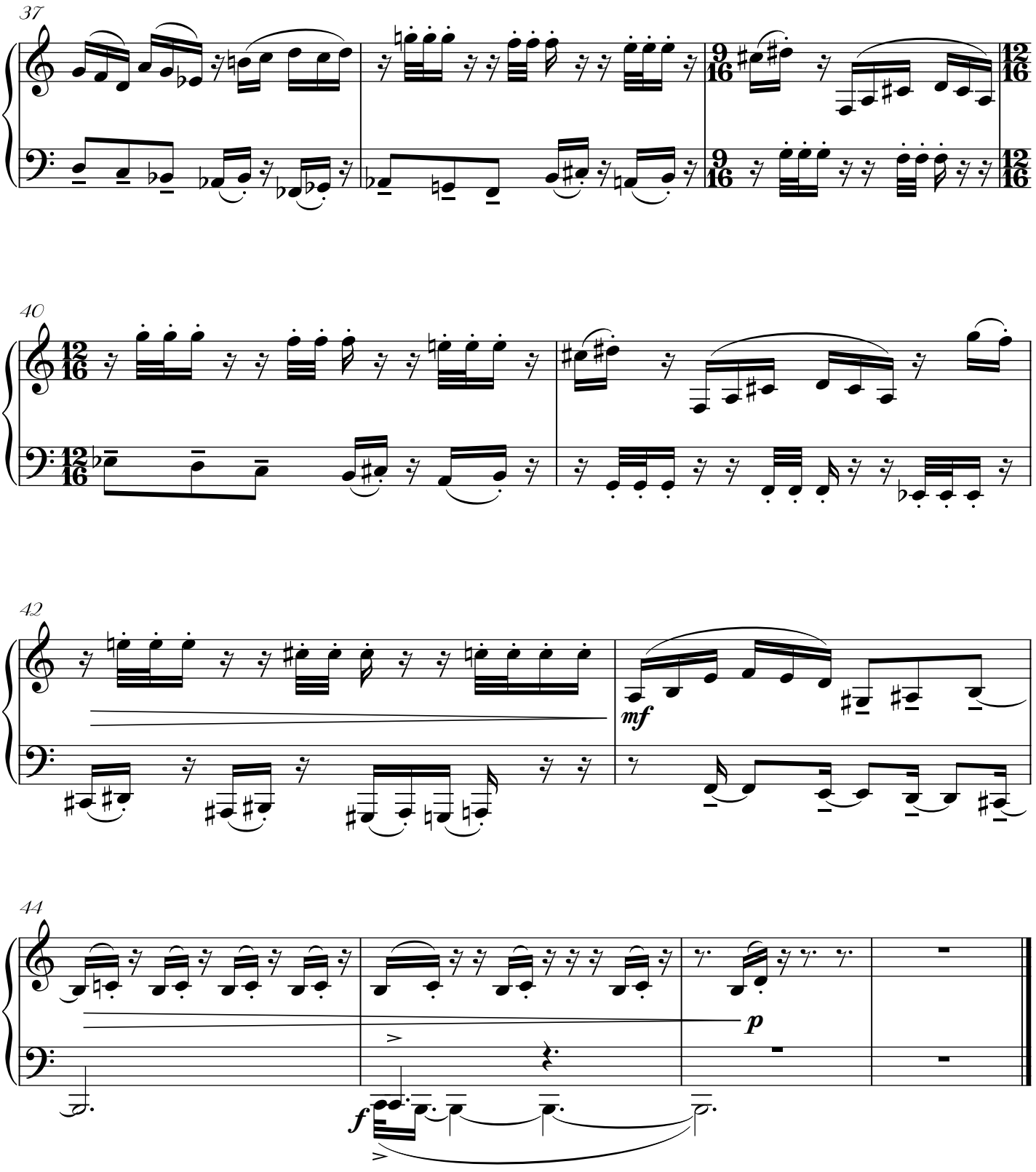
5:6

34

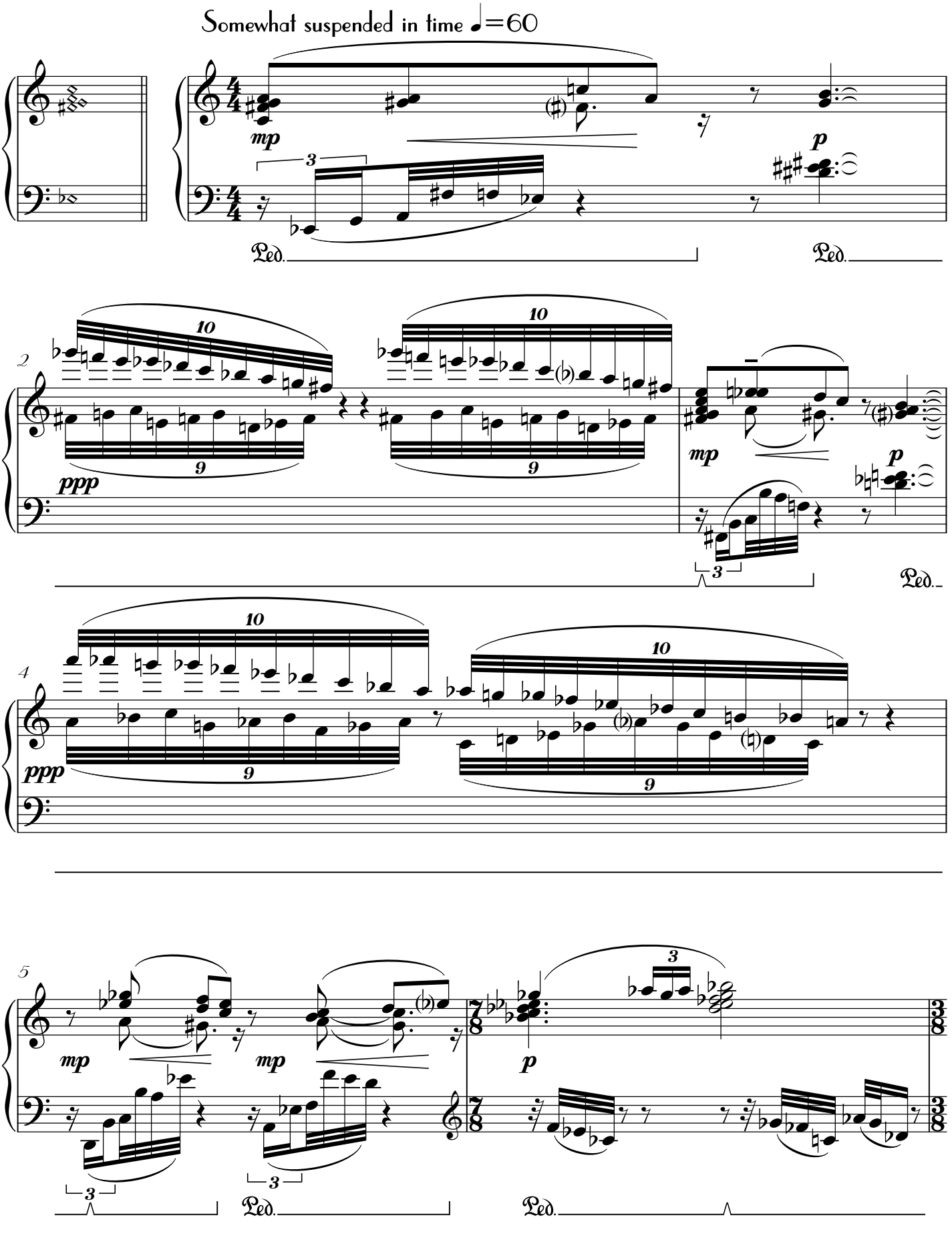
5:6

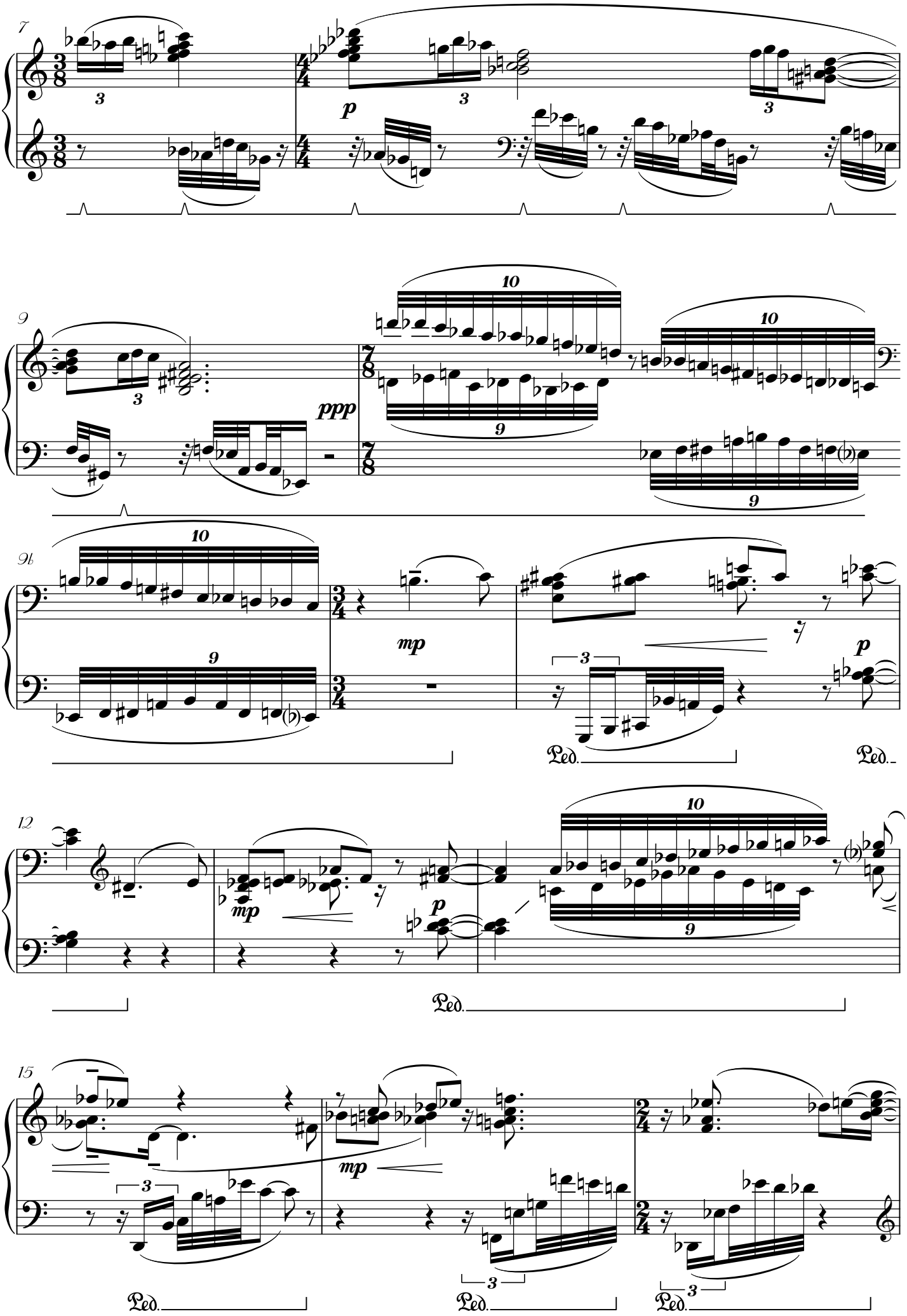
5:6

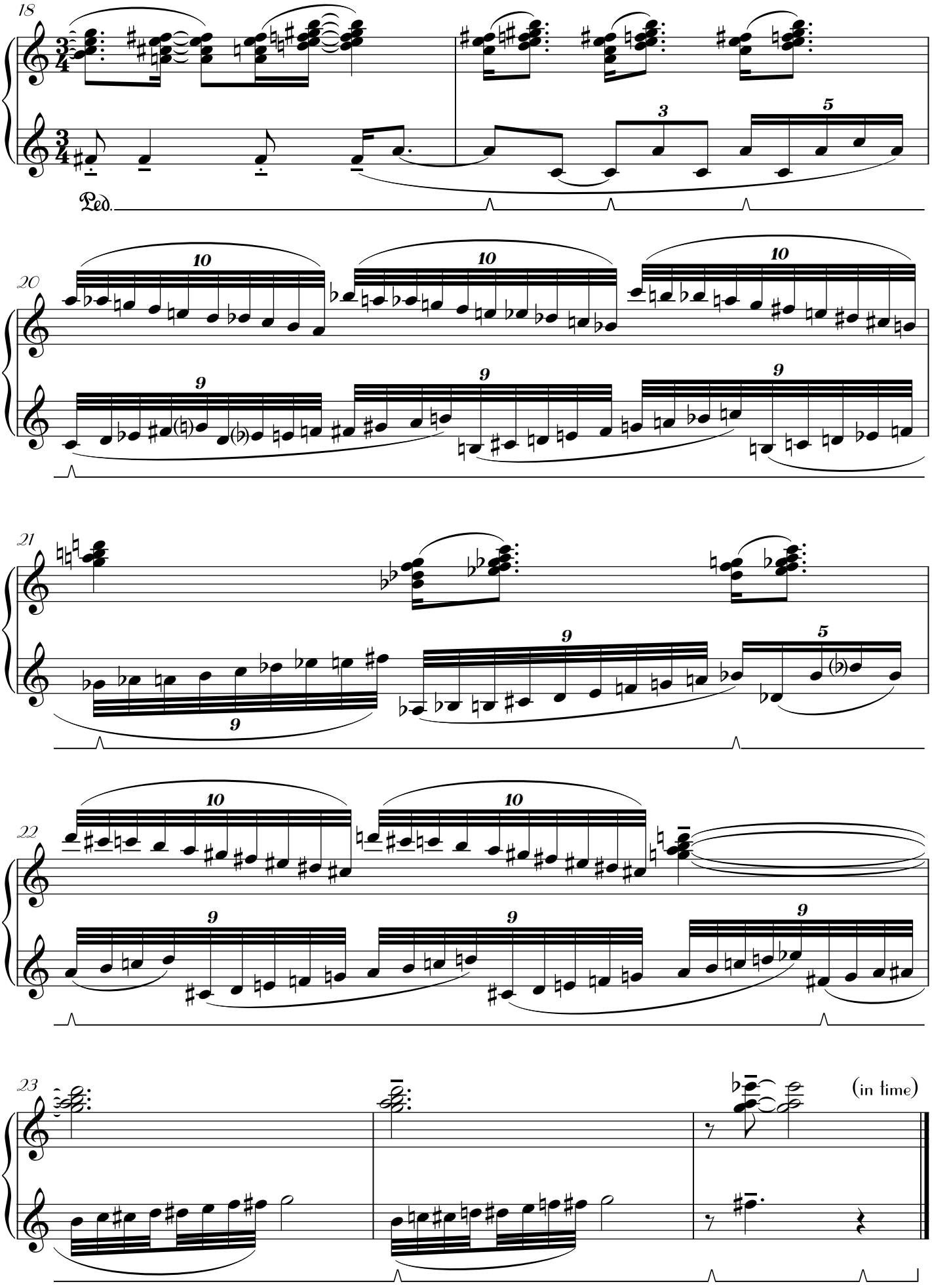
5:6


37
9/16
12/16
40
12/16
42
mf
44
p
f

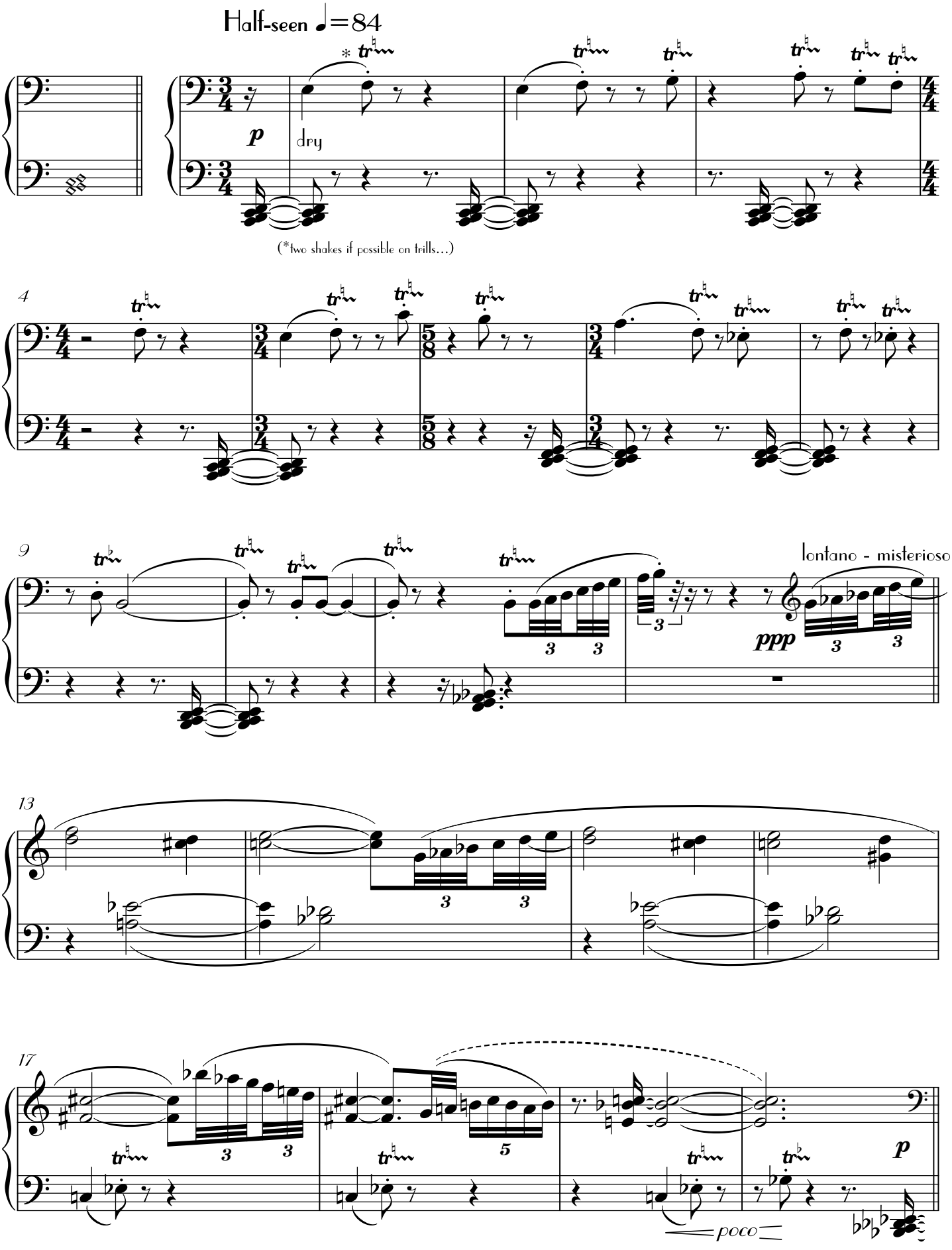
31. Breathing with lungs of tuft and grasses?

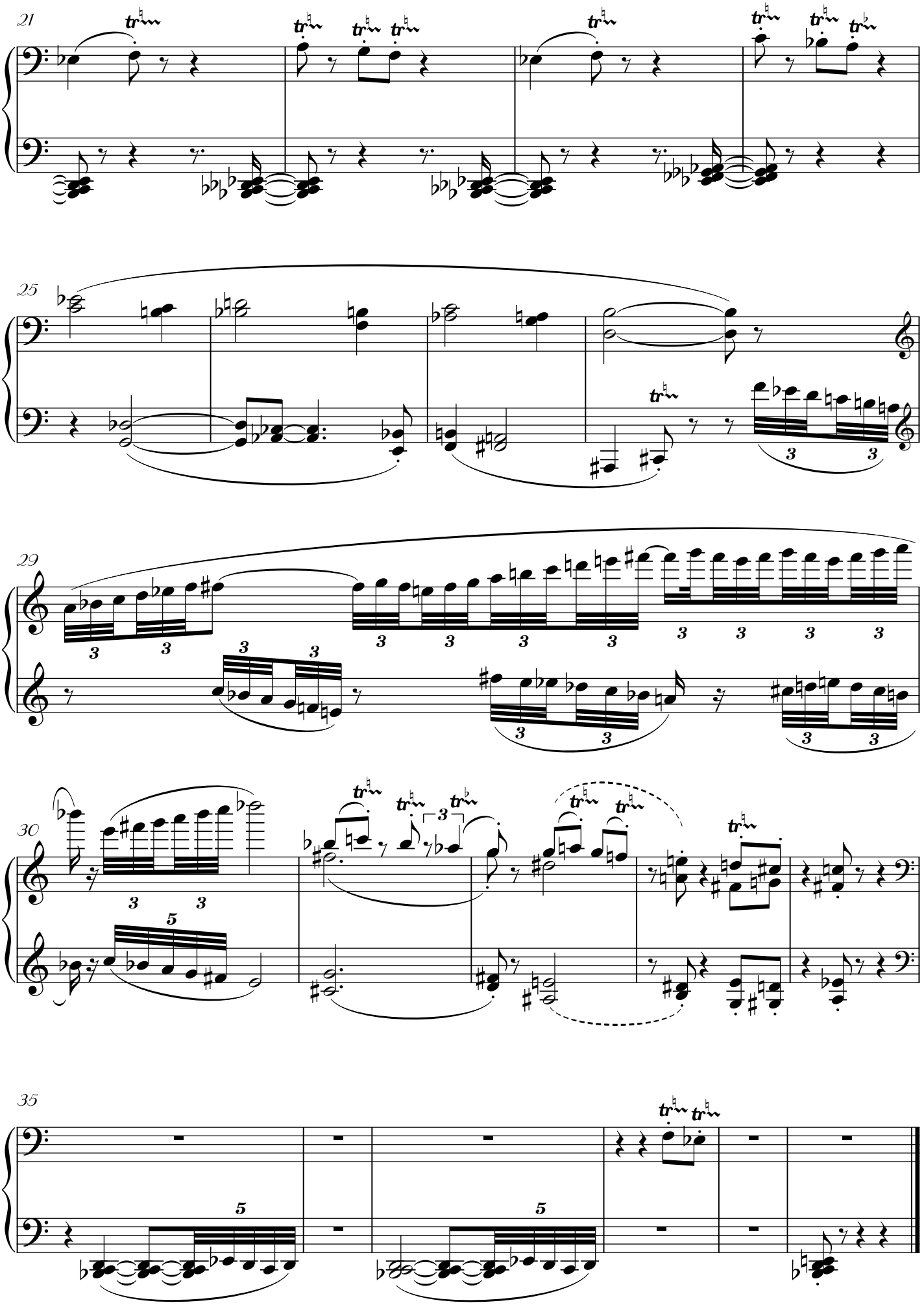



7
3
p
3
3
9
ppp
10
9
10
9
9b
10
9
mp
3
p
Ped.
Ped.
12
mp
p
10
9
Ped.
15
3
mp
3
3
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


18
Ped.
20
21
22
23
(in time)

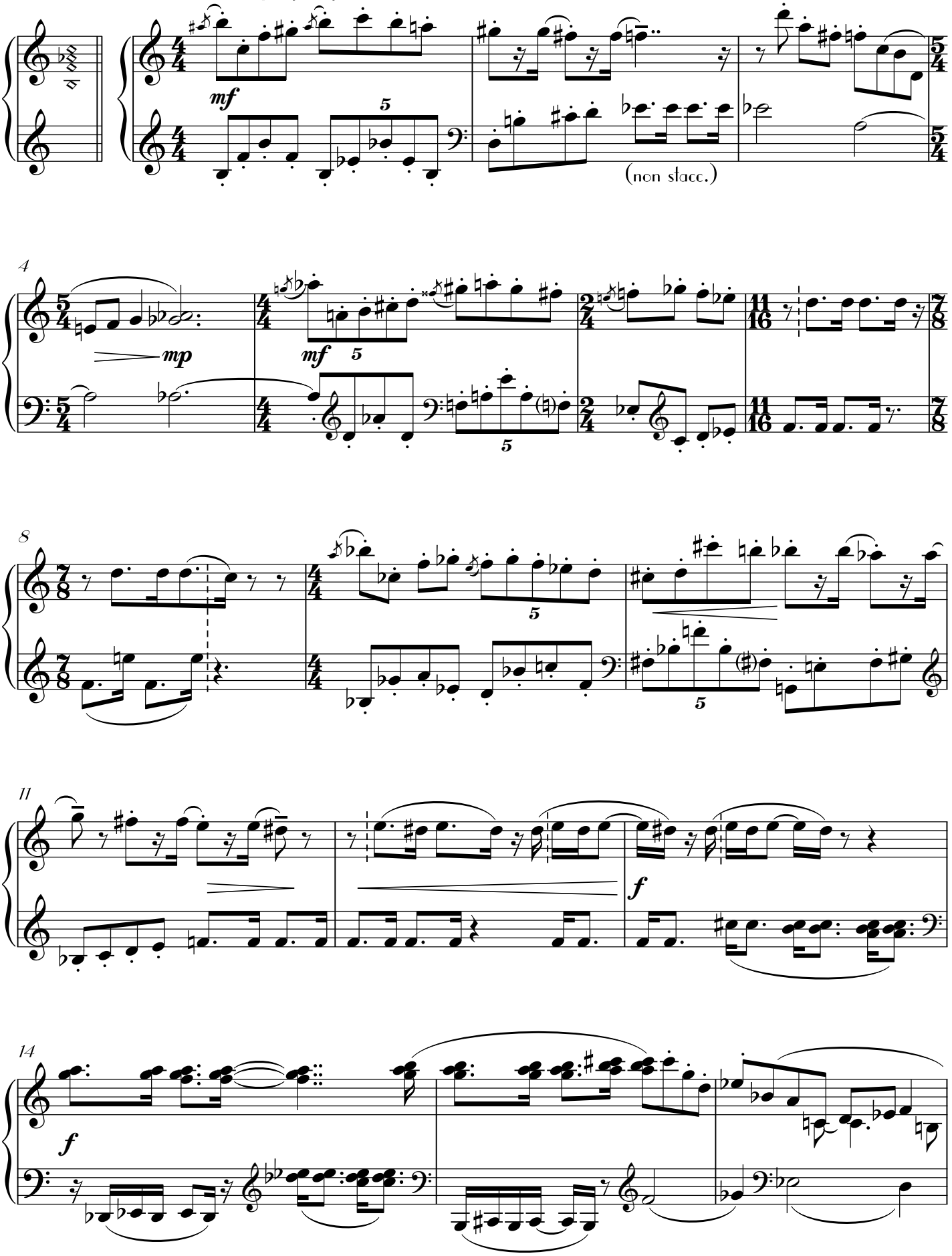
32. Shall I call you a Shadow?

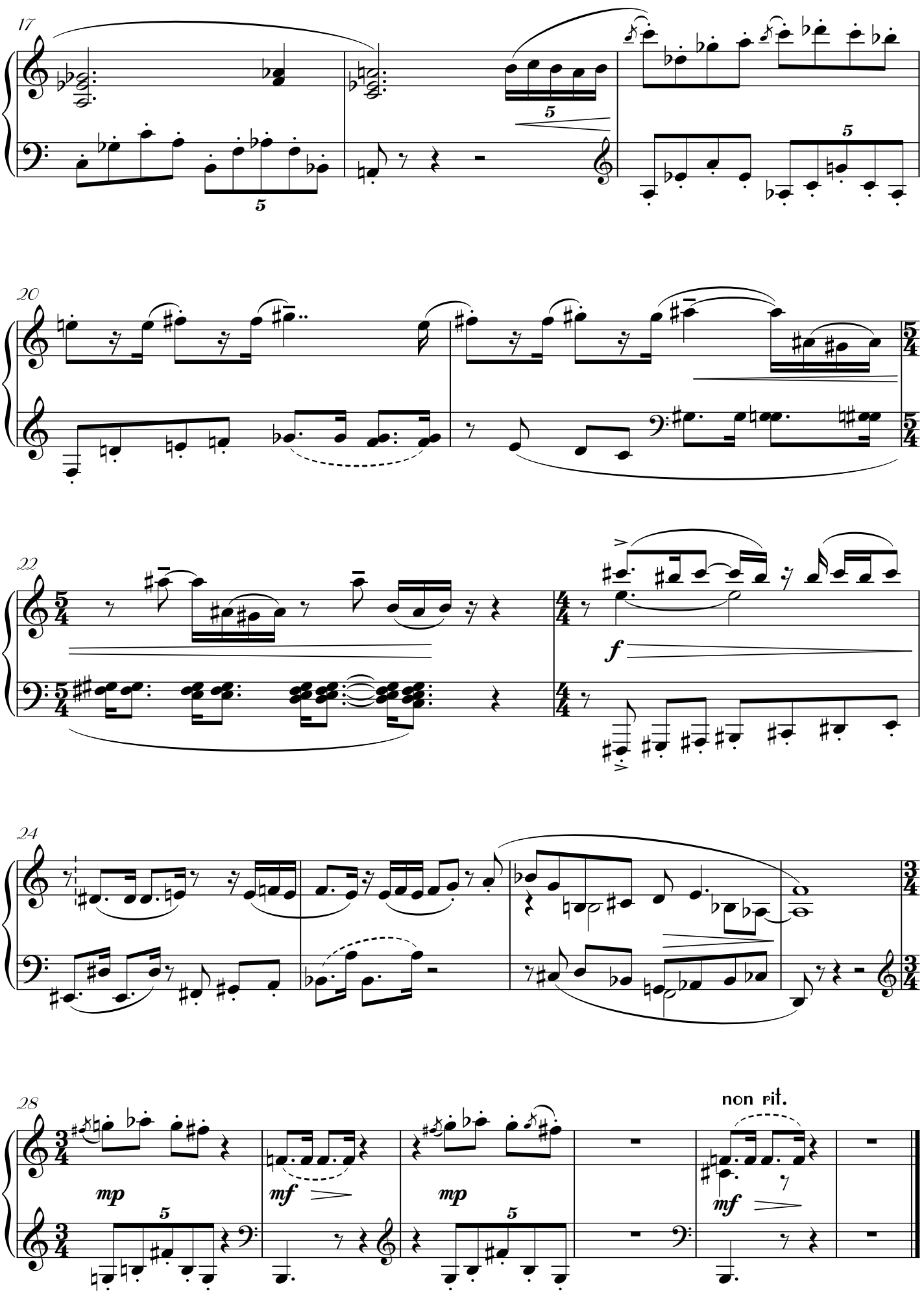



21
25
29
30
35

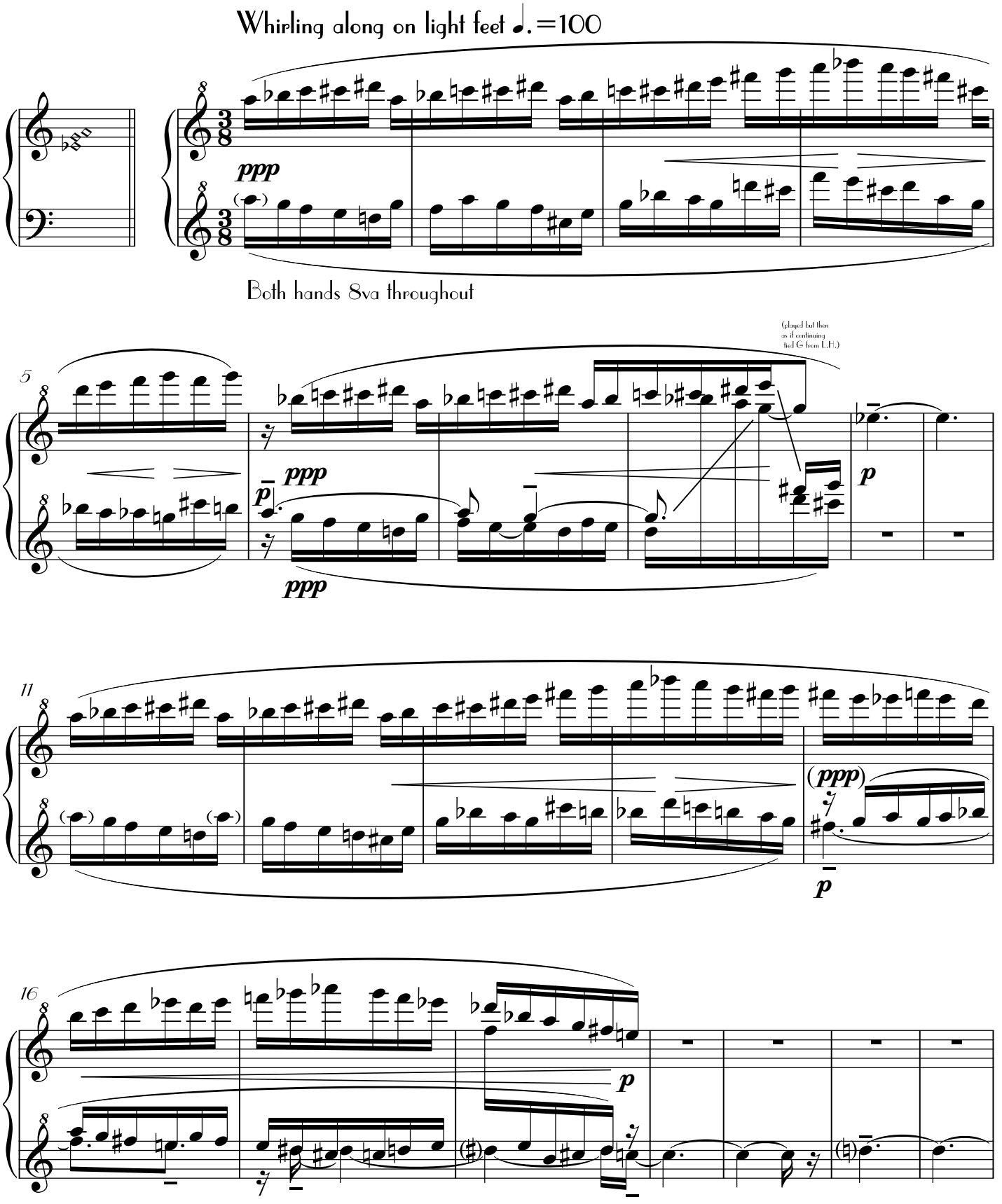
33. Lithe body of quiet revolt

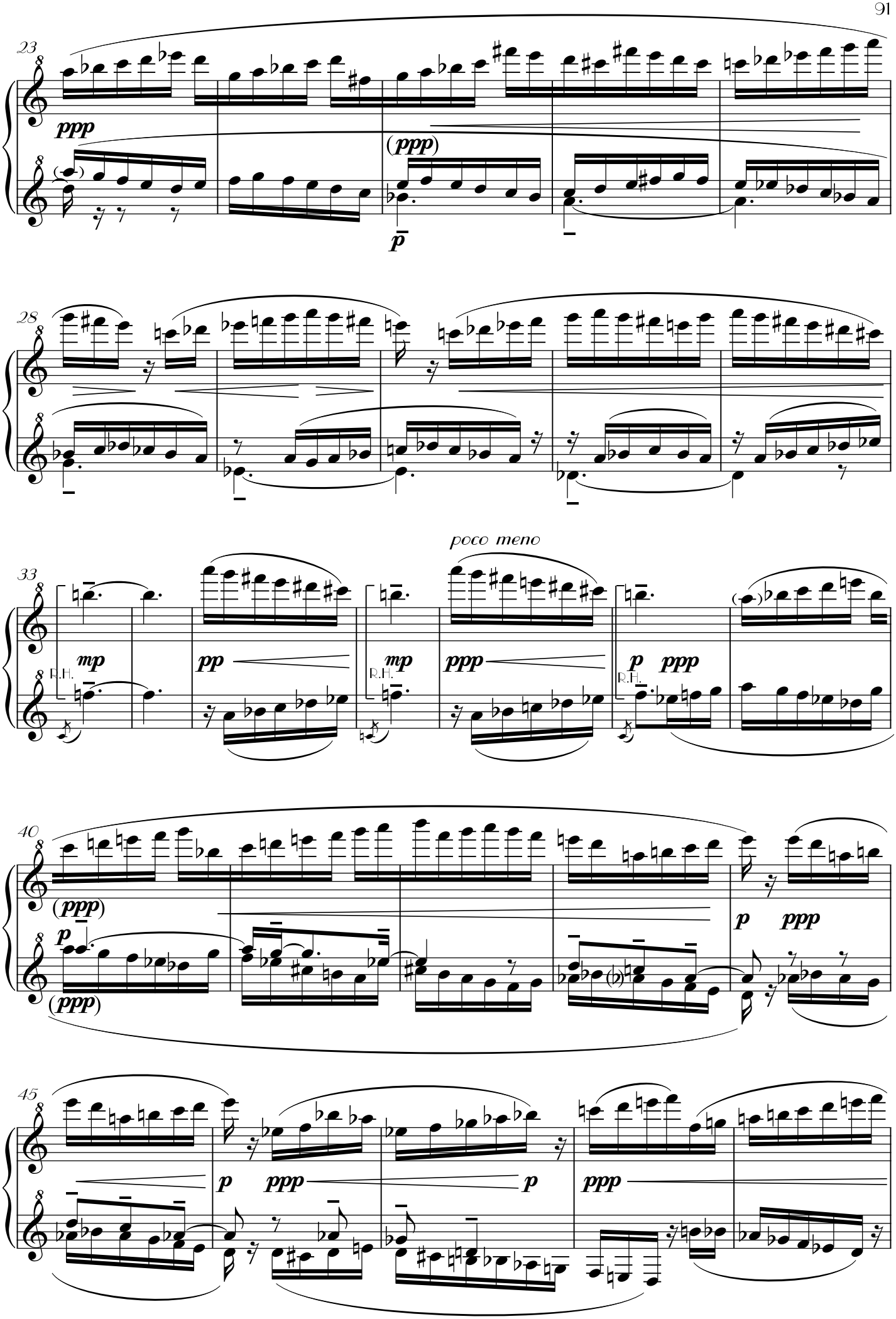
A little playfully ♩=132

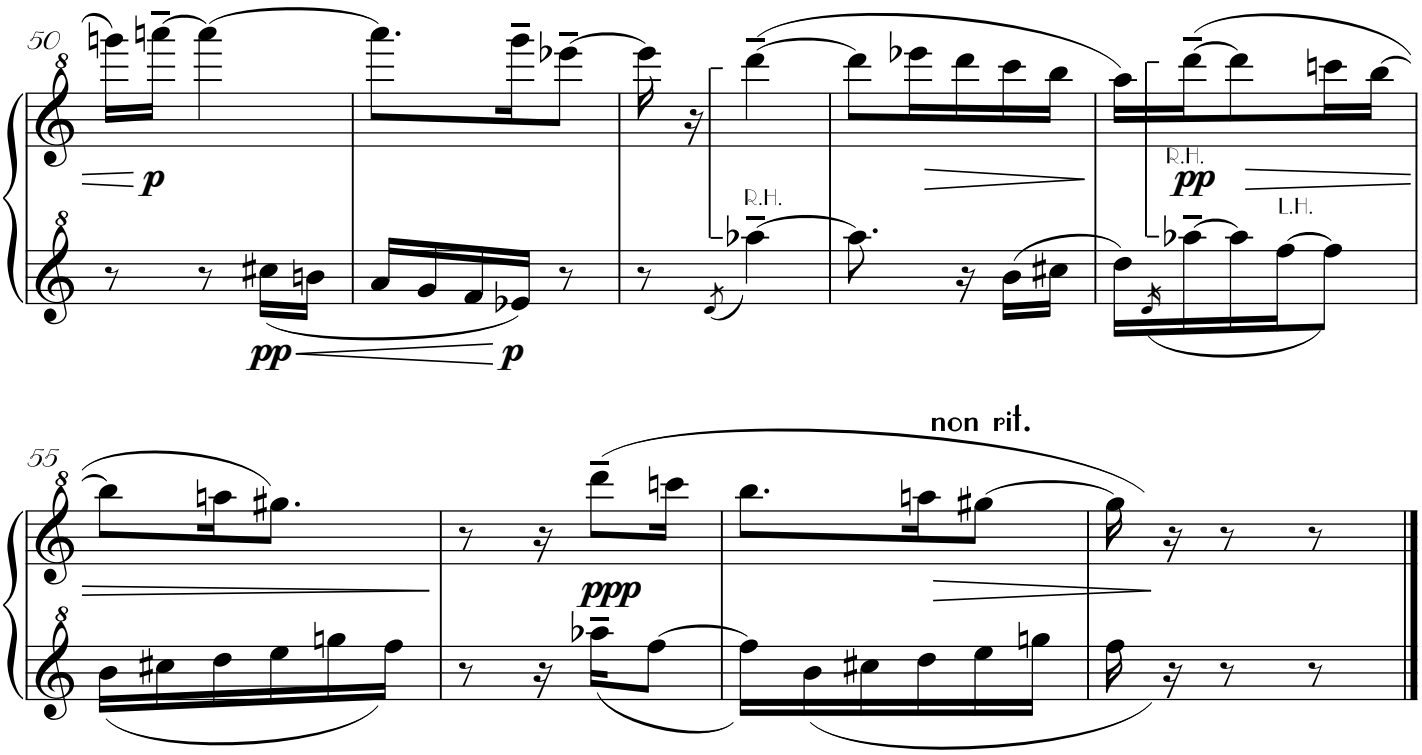



17
5
5
20
22
f
24
28
mp
mf
mp
mf
non rit.

34. Your sleeves are as light as sails

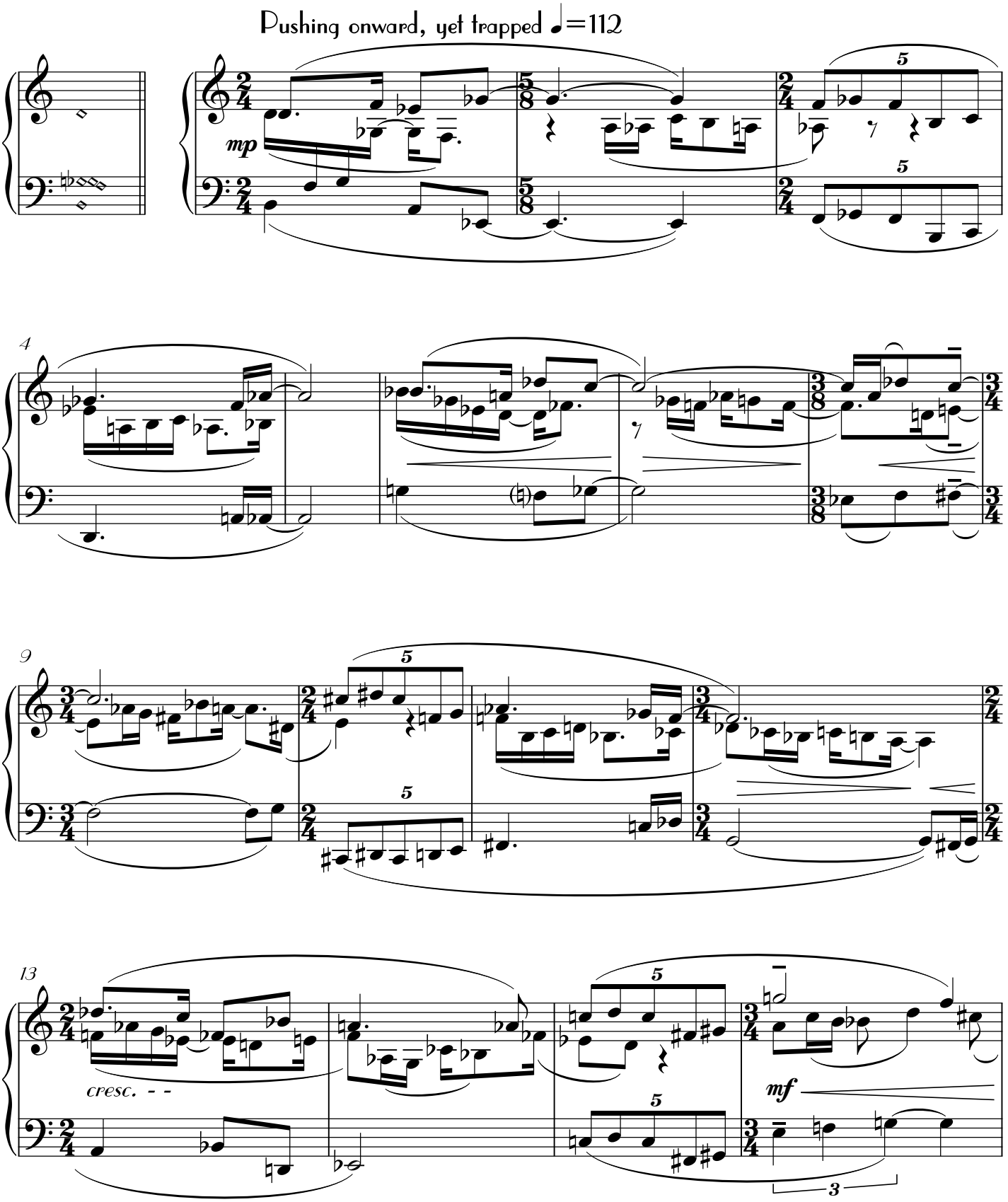


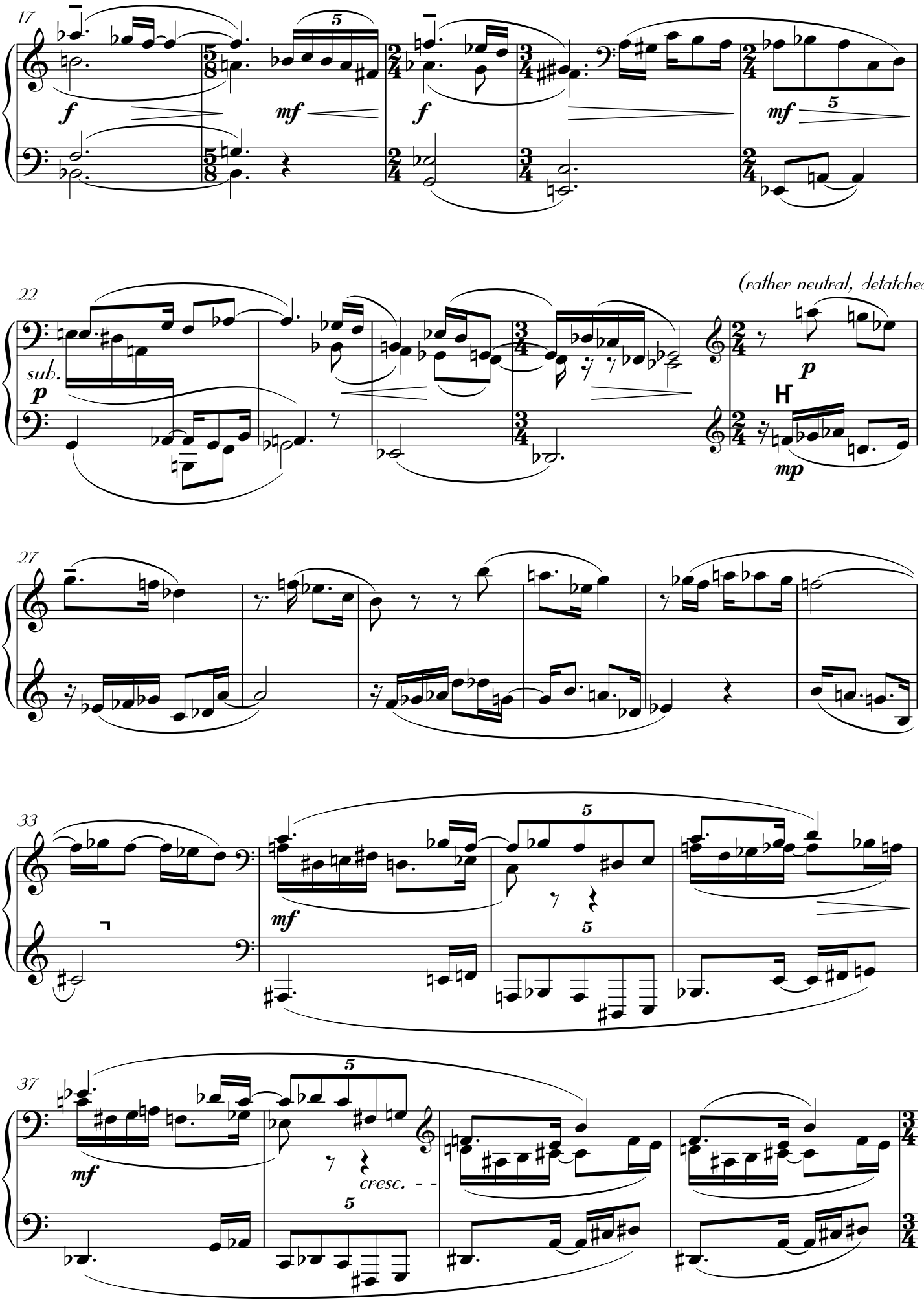

23
ppp
(ppp)
p
28
33
poco meno
mp
R.H.
pp
mp
R.H.
ppp
p
ppp
R.H.
40
(ppp)
p
(ppp)
p
ppp
45
p
ppp
p
ppp

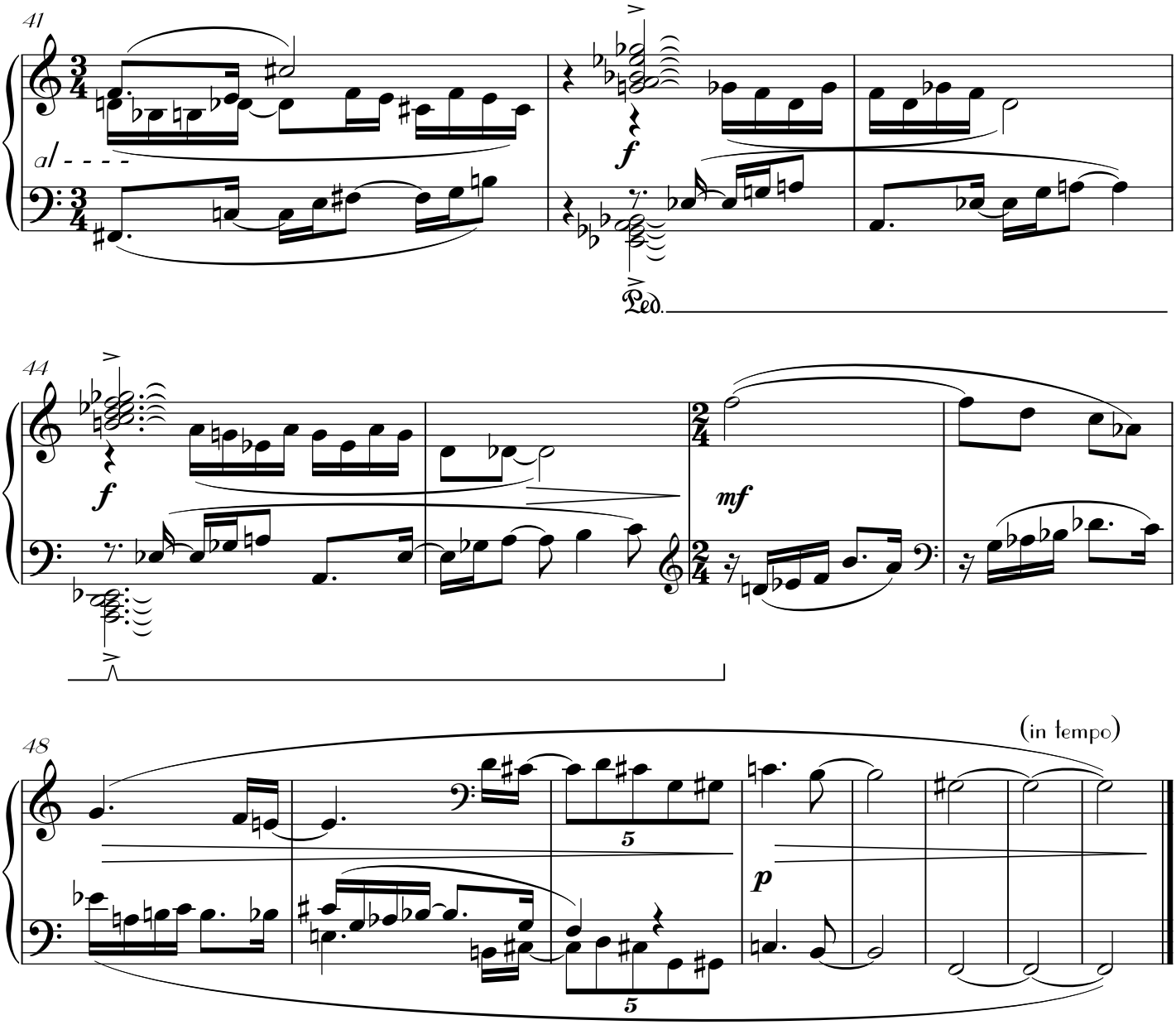

50
p
pp
p
R.H.
R.H.
pp
L.H.

55
non rit.
ppp

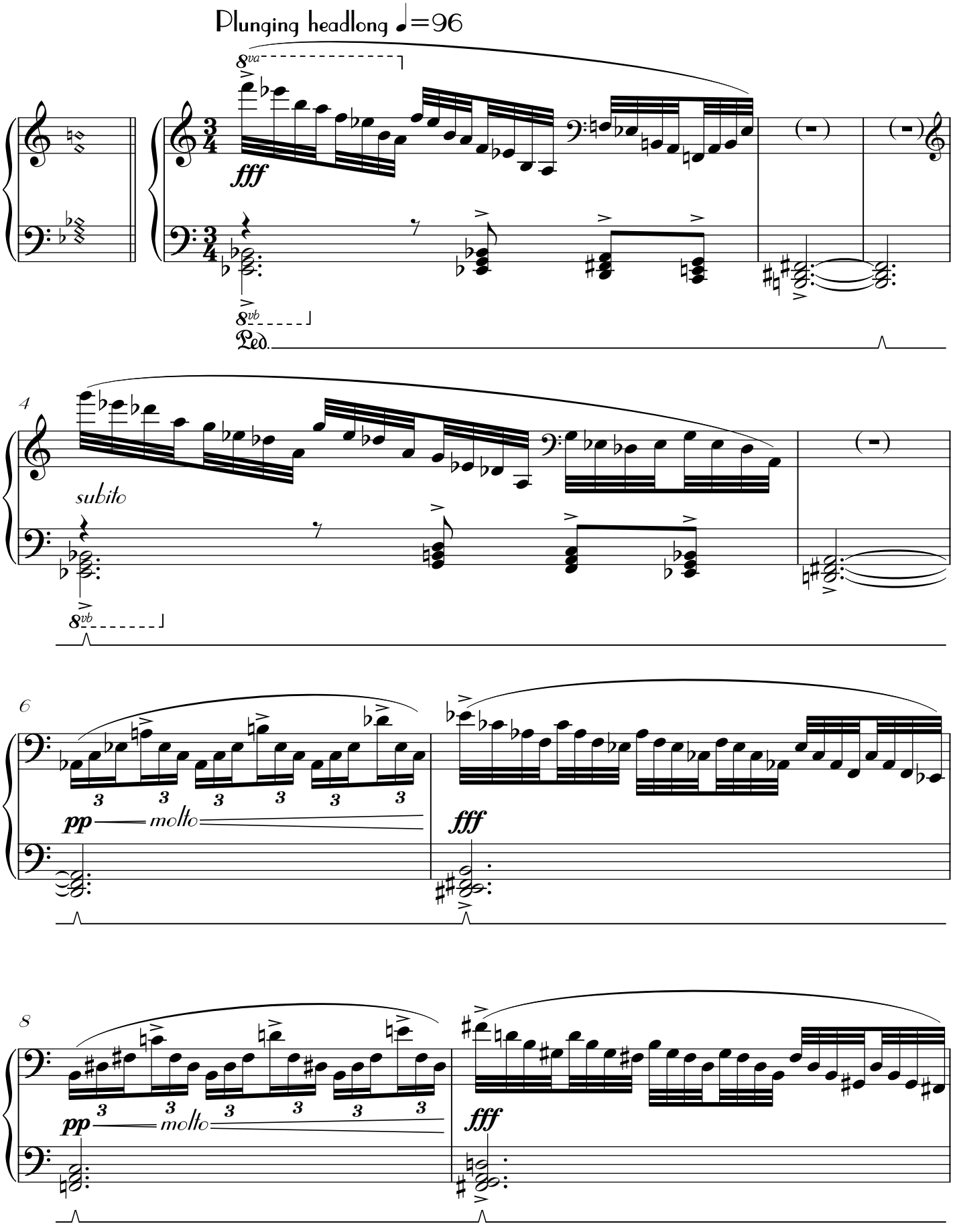
35. Quickening a boat towards darkness

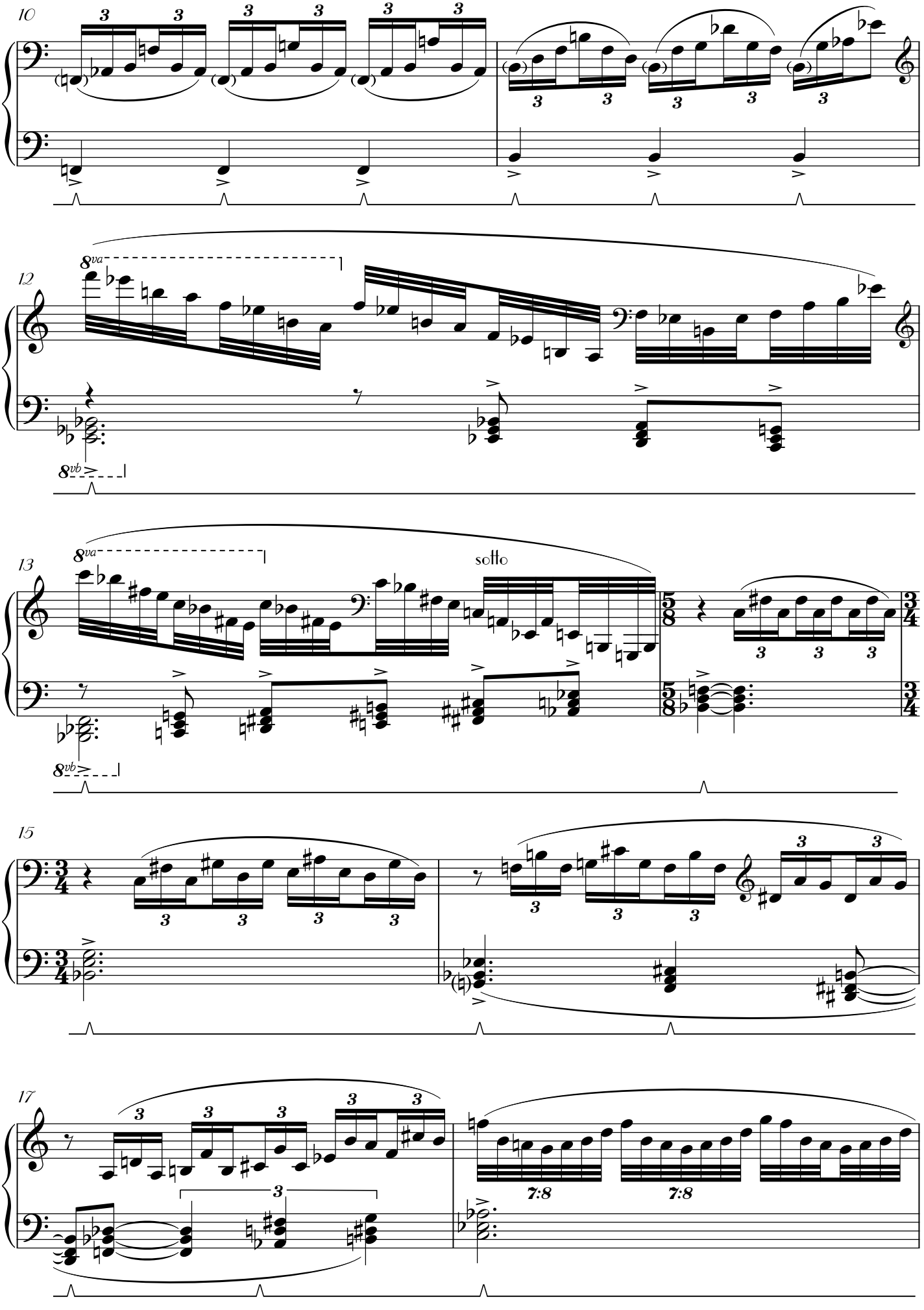


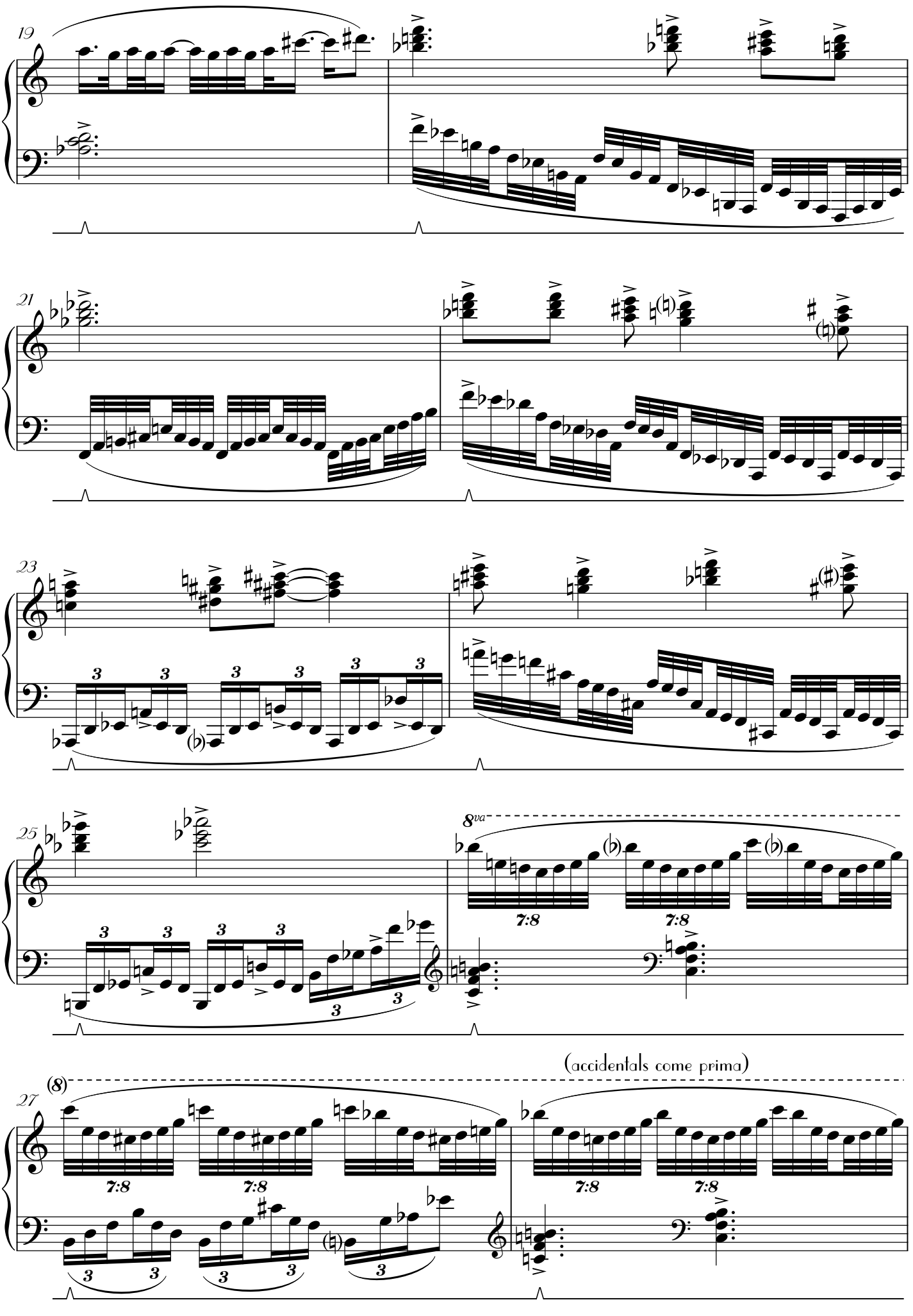

17
f
mf
f
mf
22
sub.
p
(rather neutral, detatched)
p
mp
27
33
mf
37
mf
cresc. - -

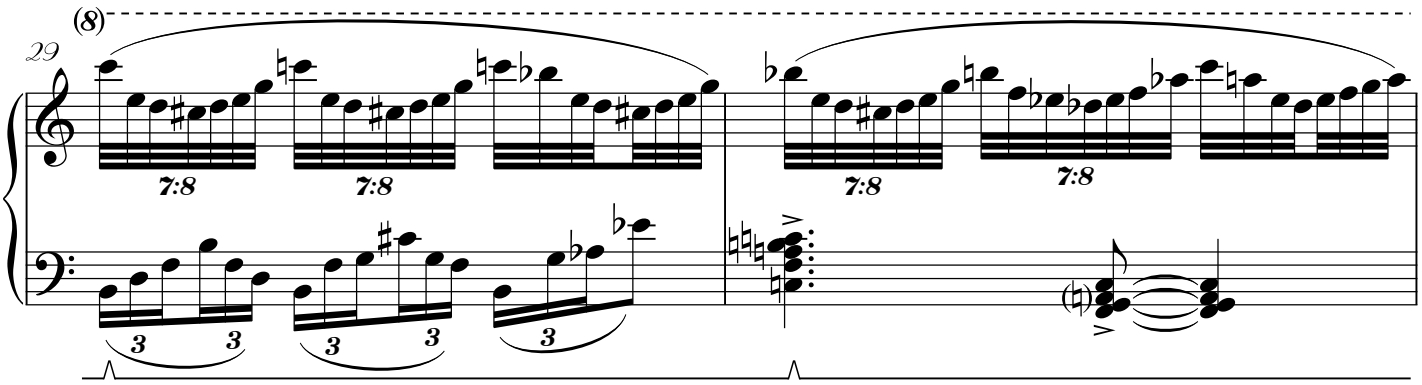

41
f
Ped.
44
f
mf
48
(in tempo)
p
5
5

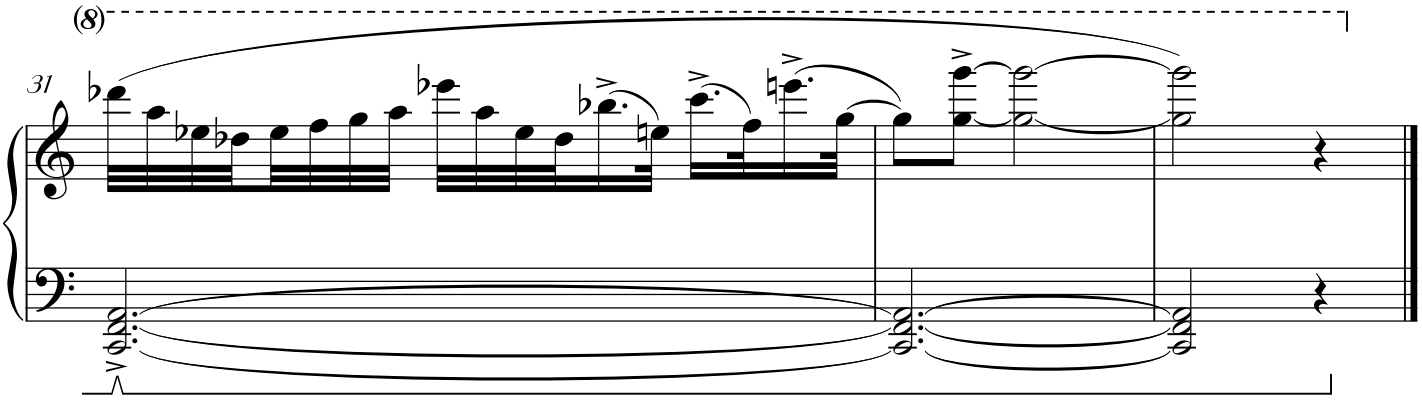
36. The river of love and death is ready to swallow



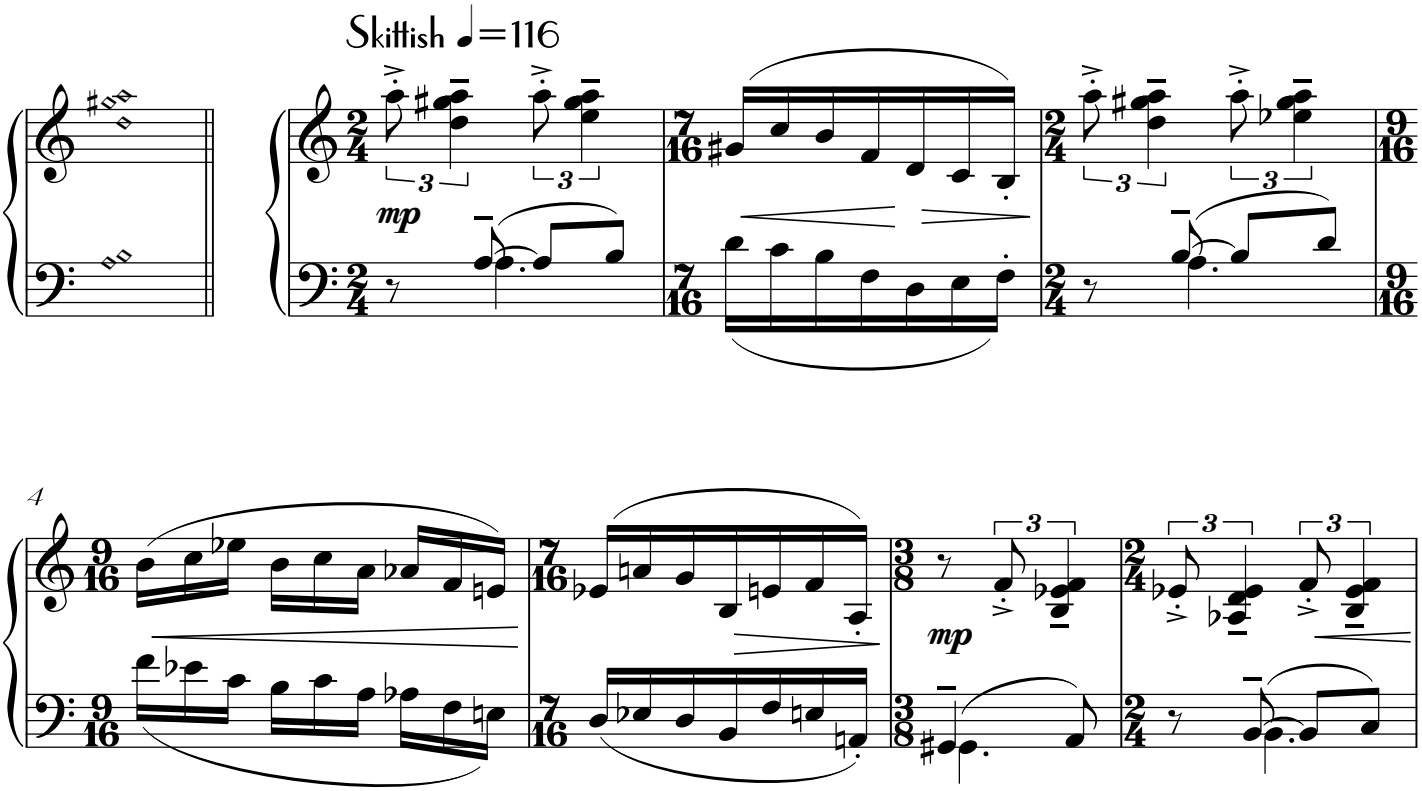

10
12
8va
8vb
13
8va
8vb
sotto
15
17
7:8
7:8

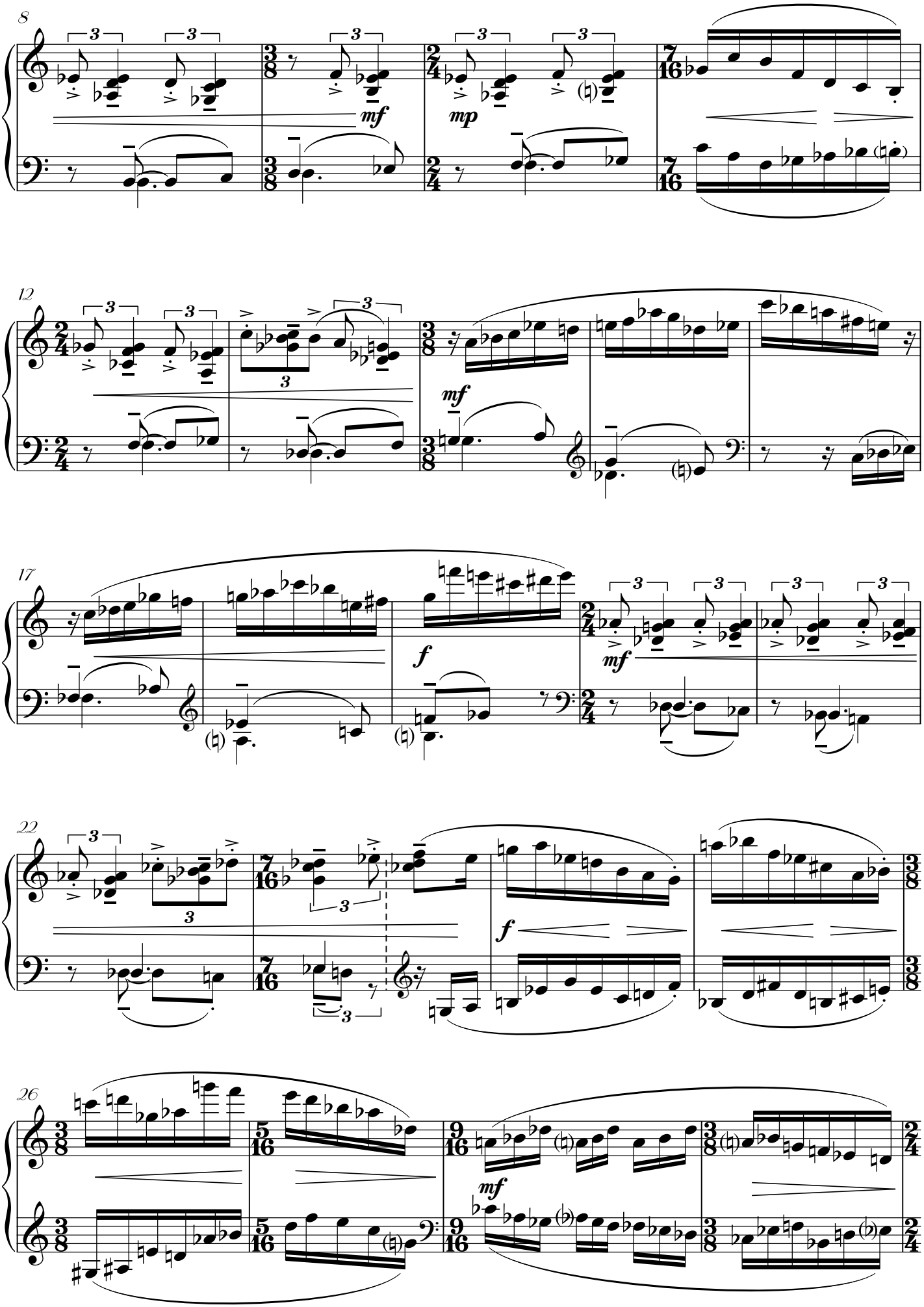

19
21
23
25
8va
7:8
7:8
(accidentals come prima)
(8)
27
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8

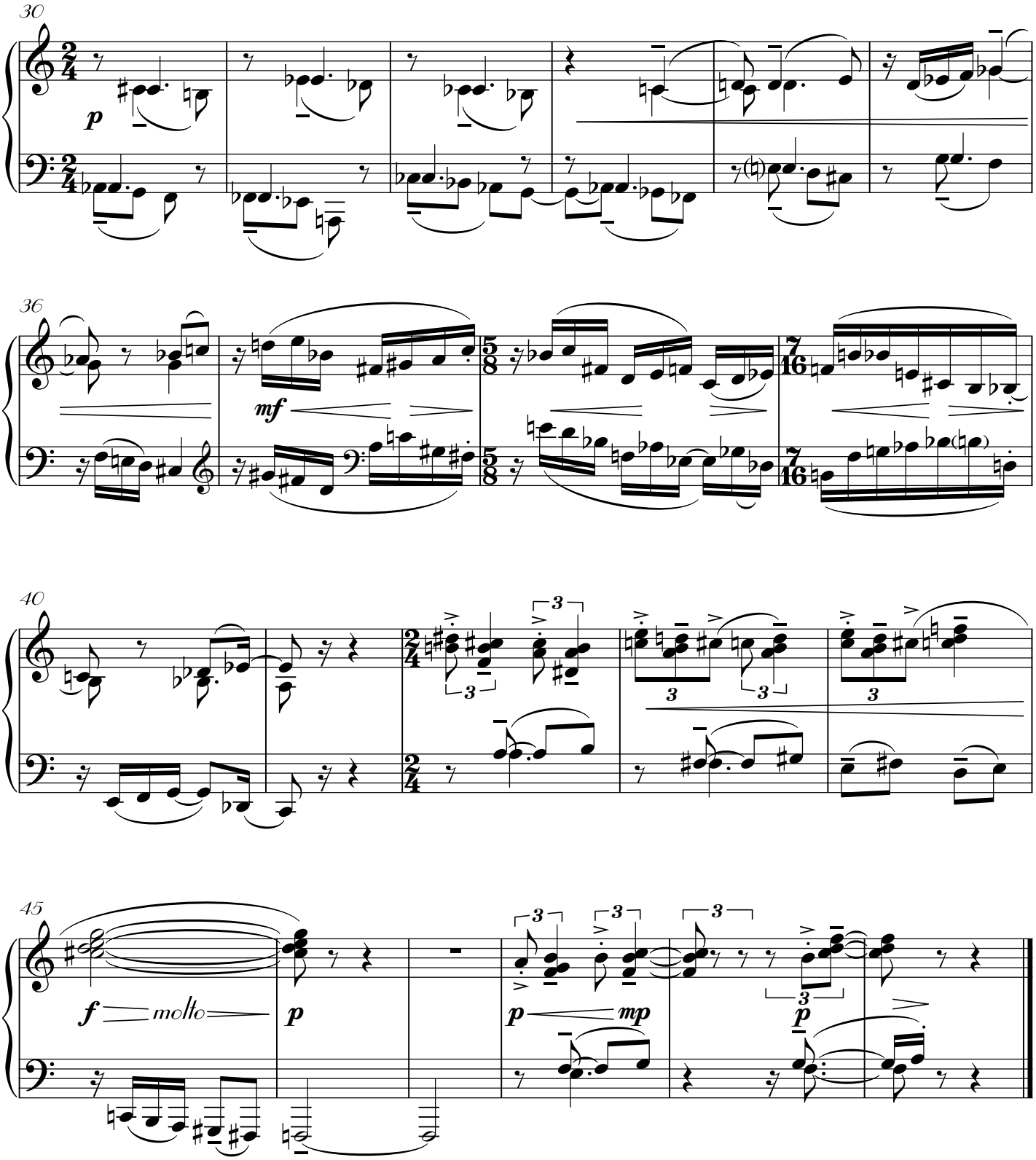




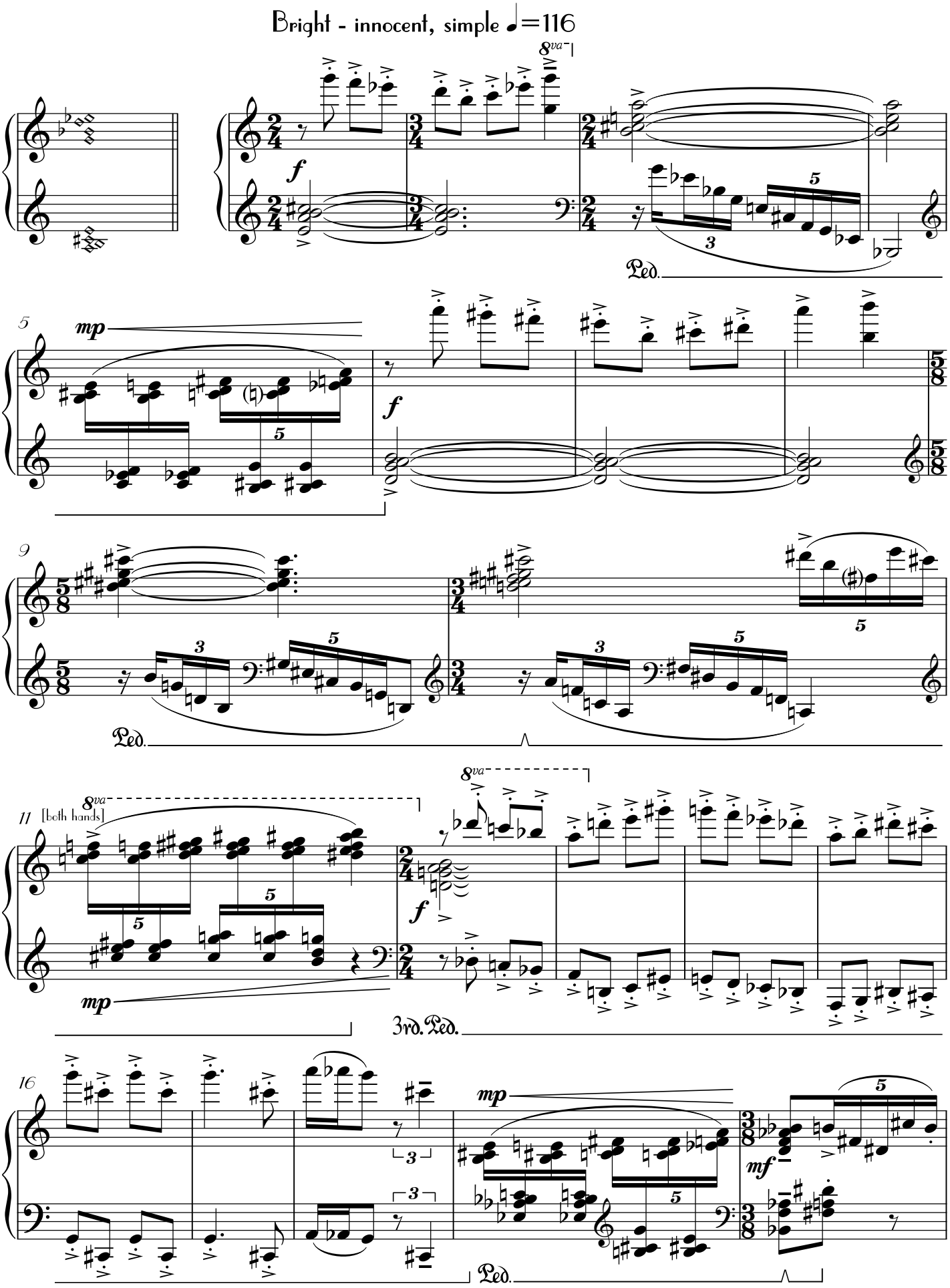
37. Our pleasure trips into what caused us pain

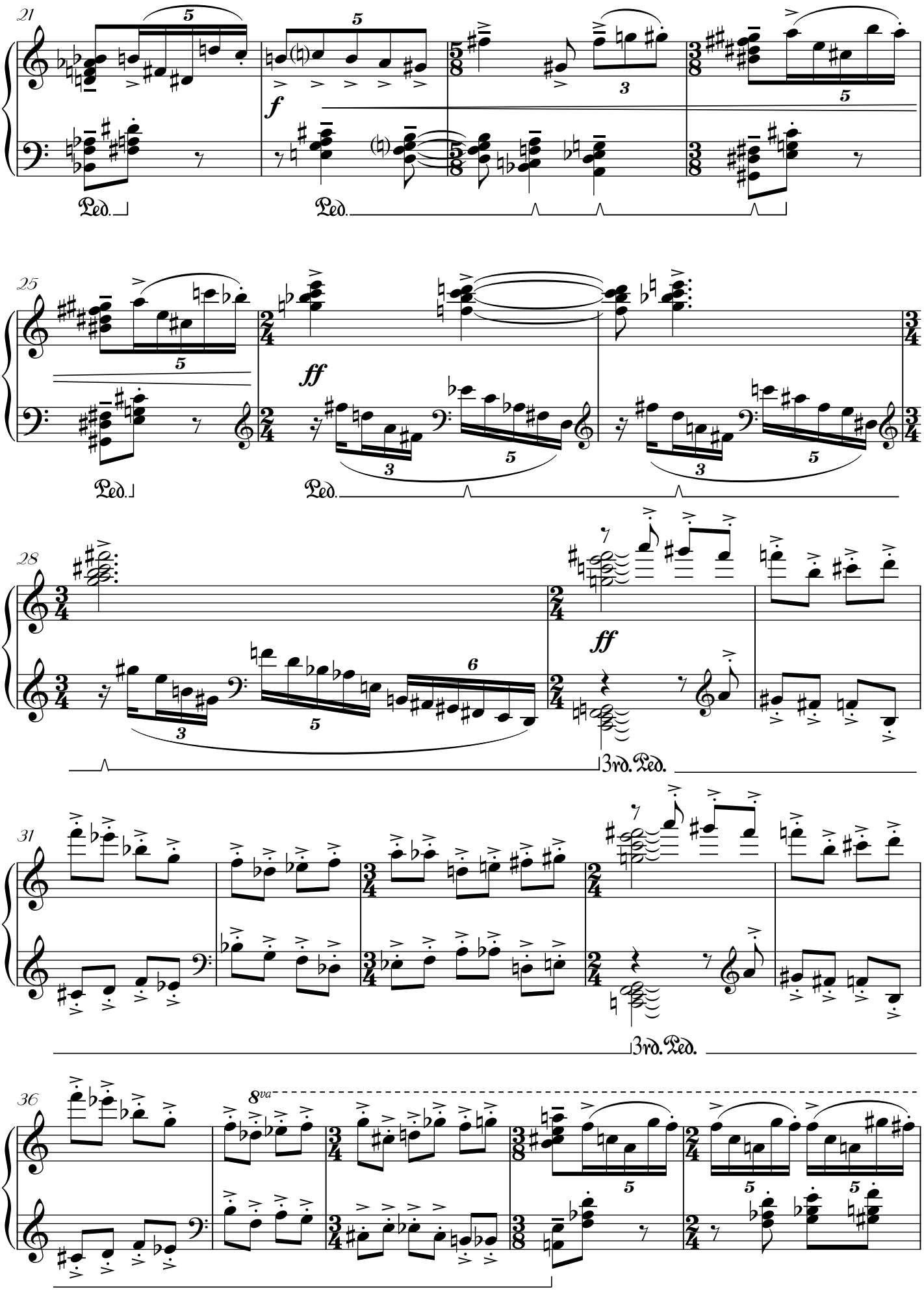


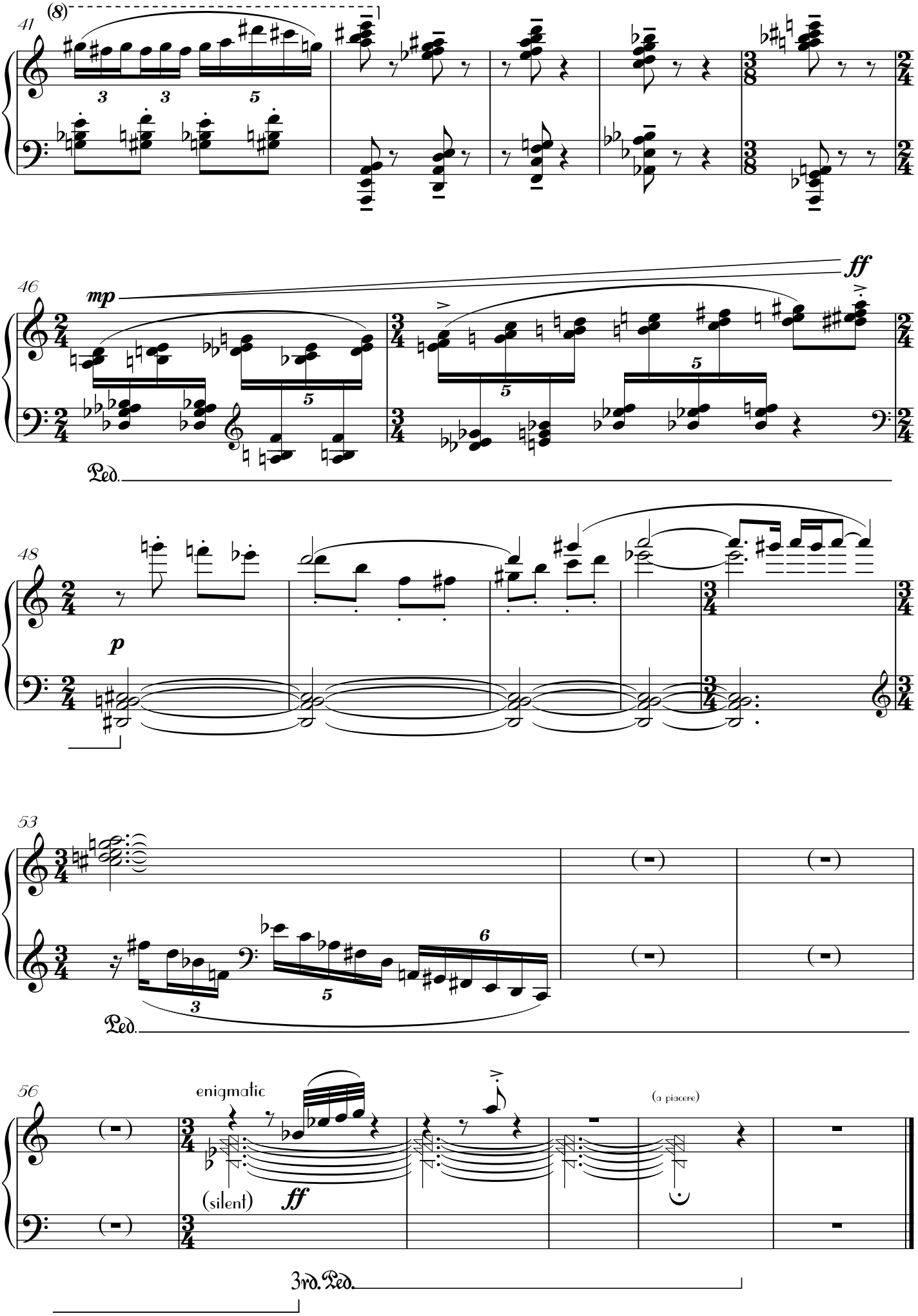

8
12
17
22
26
mf
mp
f


30
p
36
mf
40
3
45
f molto
p
mp
p

38. A silver fish's splash submerges in a last lingering chord.




21
f
Ped.
Ped.
25
ff
Ped.
Ped.
28
ff
3rd. Ped.
31
3rd. Ped.
36
8va


41
(8)
46
mp
ff
Ped.
48
p
53
Ped.
56
enigmatic
(silent)
ff
(a piacere)
3rd. Ped.