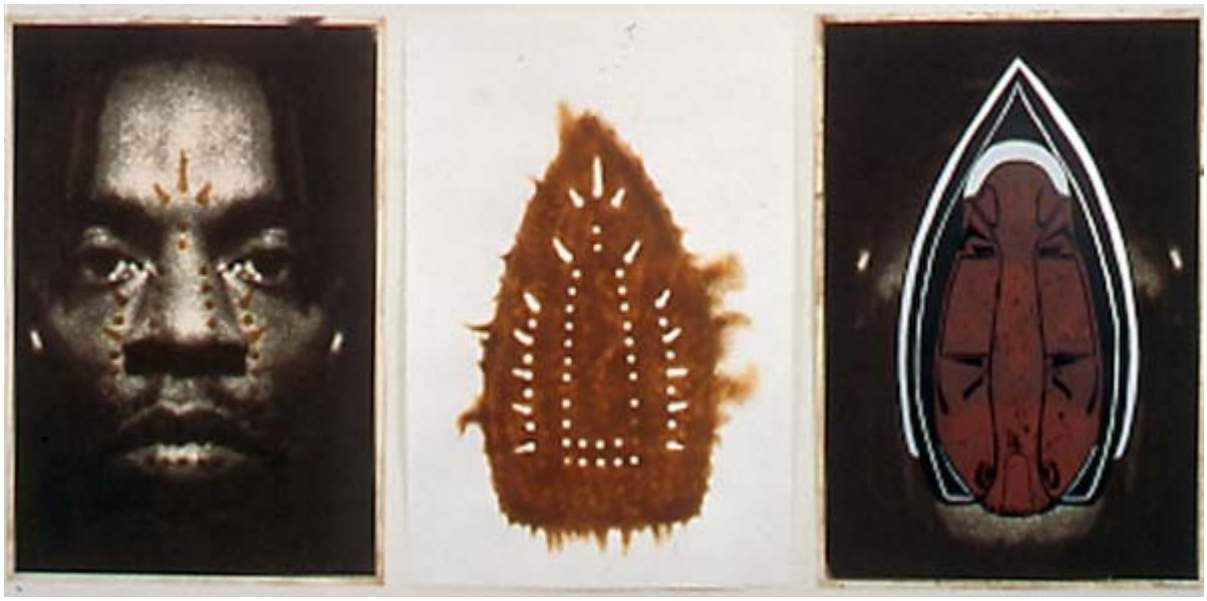
John Link

Silex Variations

for Piano



Willie Cole - Man Spirit Mask, 1999, Triptych: photo etching; silkscreen; photo etching with woodcut, 39 1/8 x 79 1/2 in., Courtesy of Alexander and Bonin, New York

SILEX VARIATIONS

Cakewalk (scherzando)
Nocturne / Silex Brand
Arabesque (sospeso)
Chorale / Schusterfleck
Mouresca (scherzando)

(played continuously)

PROGRAM NOTE

When the New Jersey Arts Collective asked me to write a piano piece inspired by Willie Cole's *Man Spirit Mask* I approached the commission with a good deal of trepidation. If writing about music is like dancing about architecture, what then is composing about printmaking? But as I got to know Cole's work I became more and more intrigued by his triptych—with its unmistakably Trinitarian "three-in-oneness"—and the musical possibilities it suggested. Ultimately I decided on three short movements, corresponding to the three panels of the triptych, which are played continuously and framed by two dances. An introductory Cakewalk is followed by a Nocturne, in which slow sustained chords that gradually ascend to the piano's highest register are "branded" by loud staccato notes. The wisps of sound in the Arabesque that follows were suggested by the diaphanous swirls emanating from the edges of the iron in the central panel of *Man Spirit Mask*. "Schusterfleck" is the word Beethoven used to describe Anton Diabelli's waltz, before he made it the subject of his *Diabelli Variations*, op. 120. (The word means "cobbler's patch.") Willie Cole's appropriation of shoes and irons suggested my appropriation of a fragment of Beethoven's Diabelli variation no. 20 as an "anxious object" on which I have constructed a mask in the form of an irregular Chorale. The Chorale is interrupted just before the cadence by the scherzando music of the Cakewalk, now reinterpreted as a Mouresca (a 15th-century English dance said to have been of Moorish origin), with repeated notes and a rollicking coda to evoke the bells worn by the dancers.

Man Spirit Mask is composed entirely of two elements—the artist's own face and a Proctor Silex brand iron—that are combined in different ways to produce a richly varied trio of images. In a roughly analogous way *Silex Variations* creates a broad range of musical effects by combining single note lines and block chords, all derived from a single pair of harmonies. In its broadest outlines the music moves from the low register of the Nocturne to a registral high point at the beginning of the Arabesque and back again, tracing an arc that follows the outline of Cole's spirit iron.

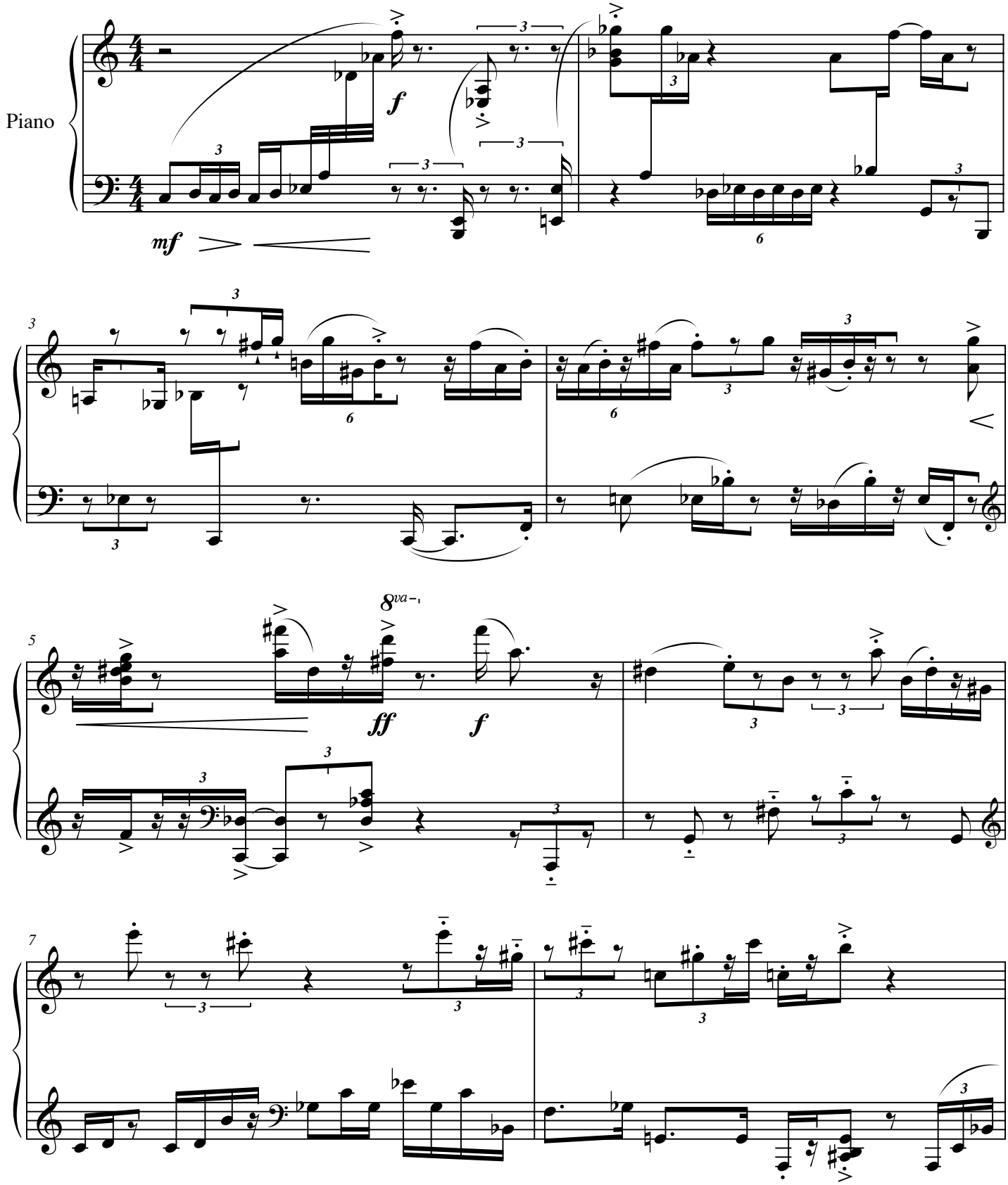
—John Link

Duration: ca. 7 minutes.

Silex Variations

—John Link (2006)

Cakewalk (scherzando) ♩= ca. *126*



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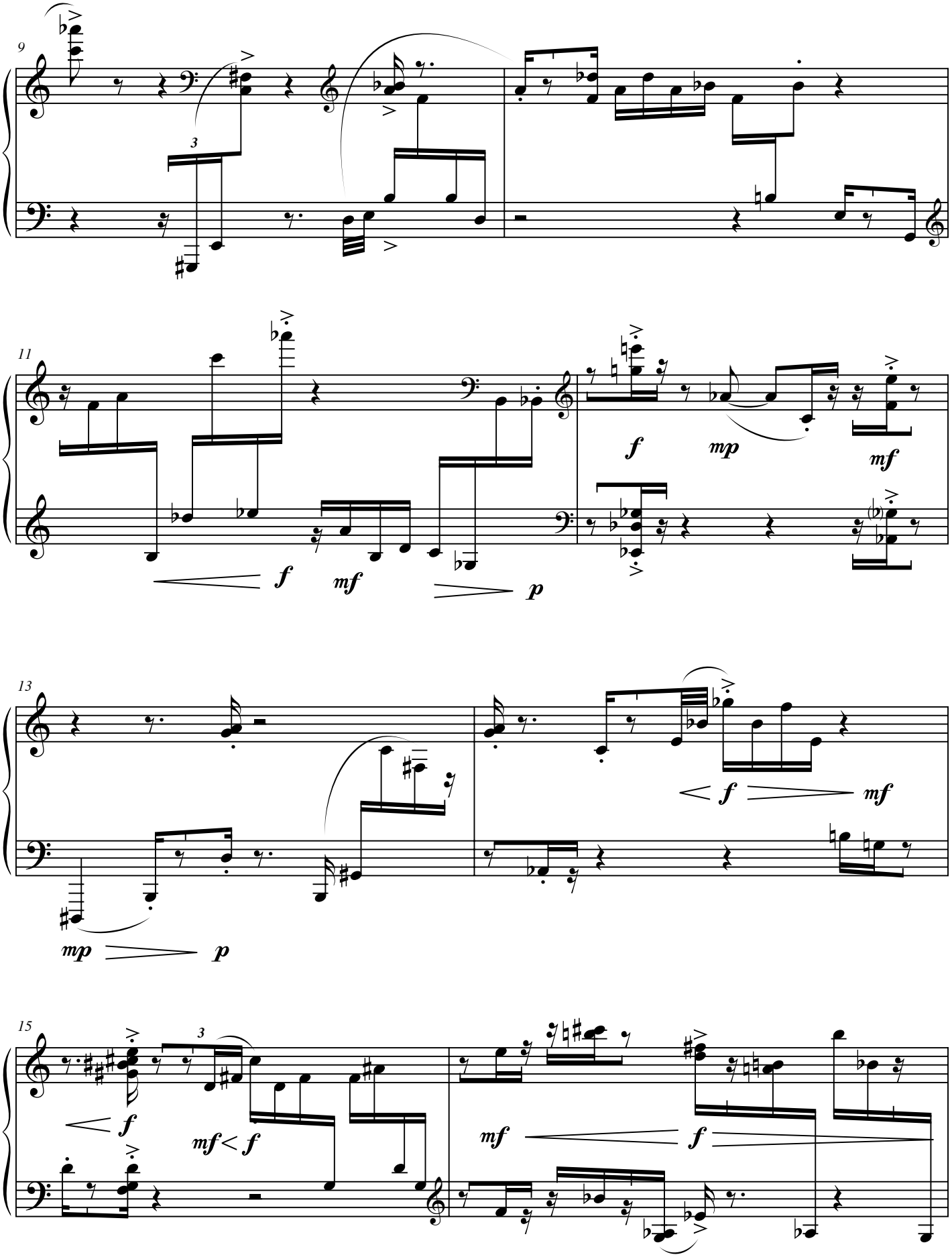
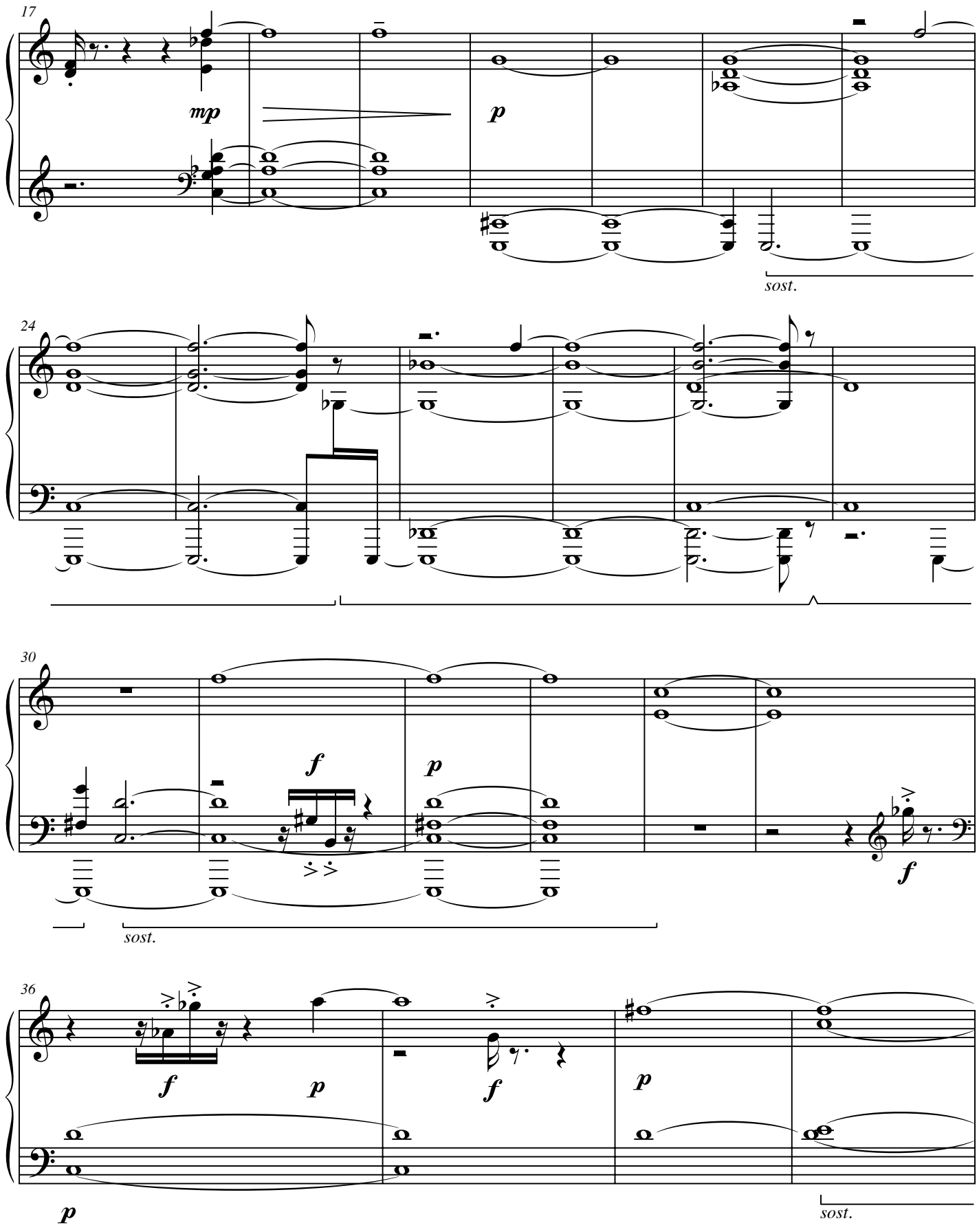
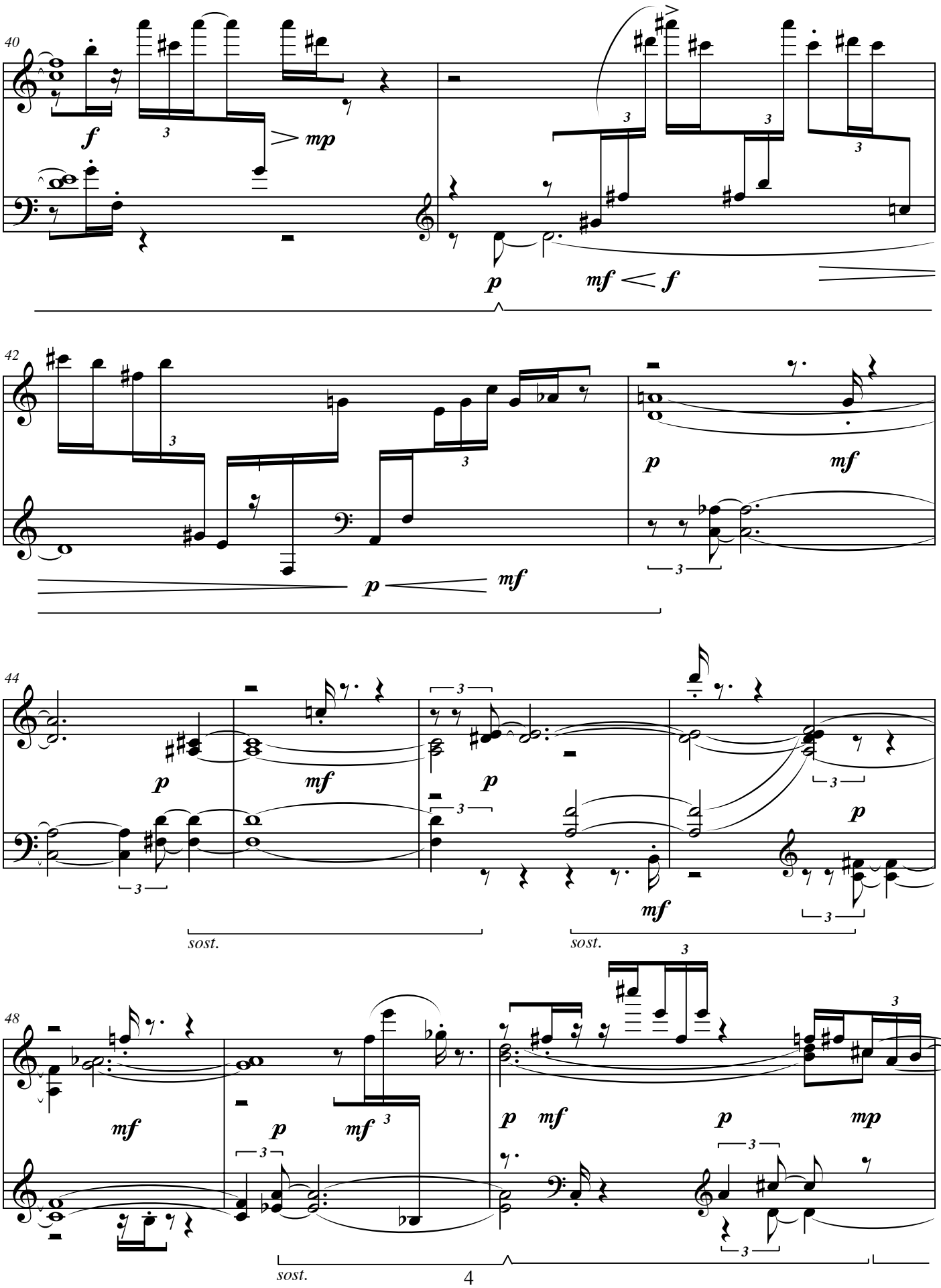
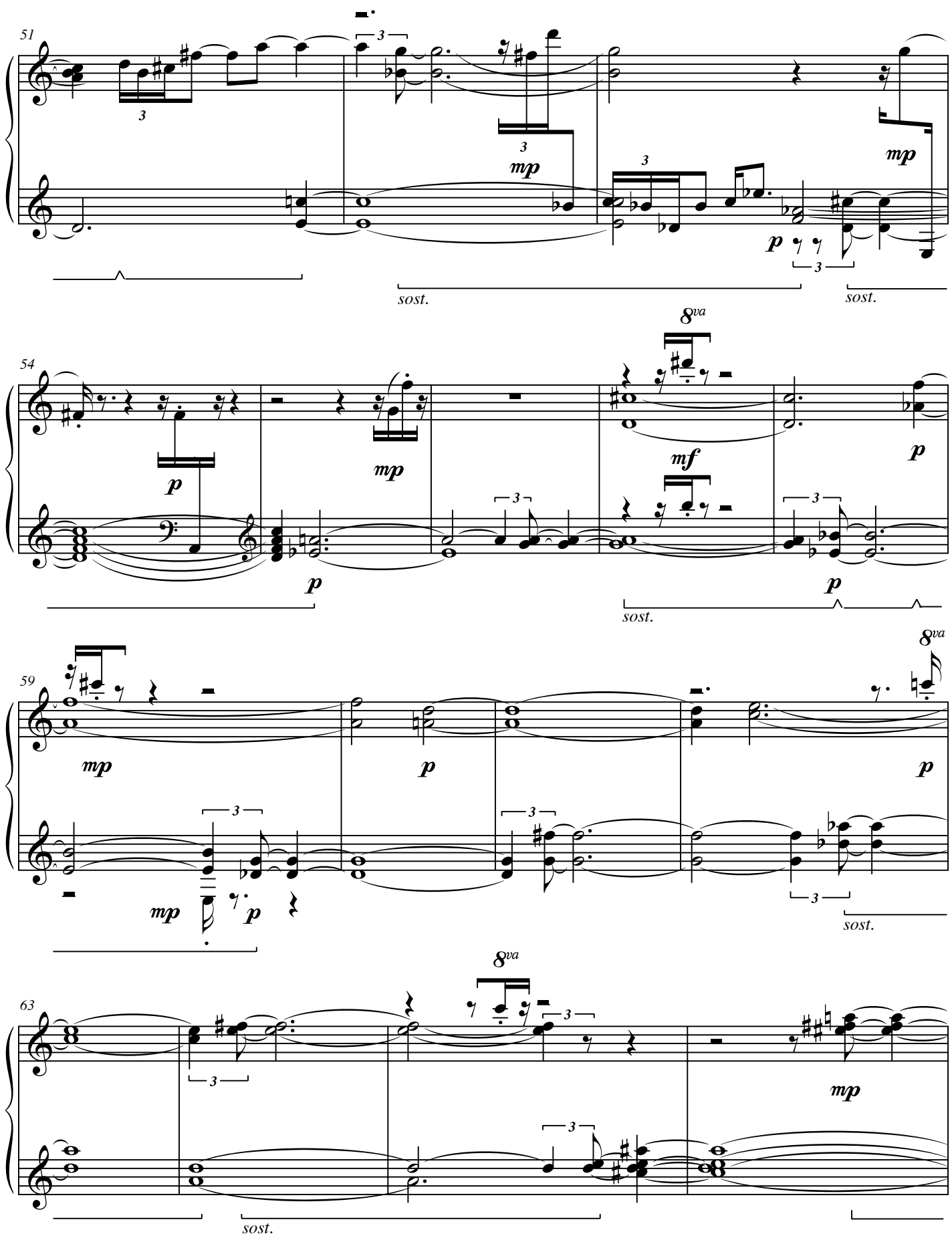
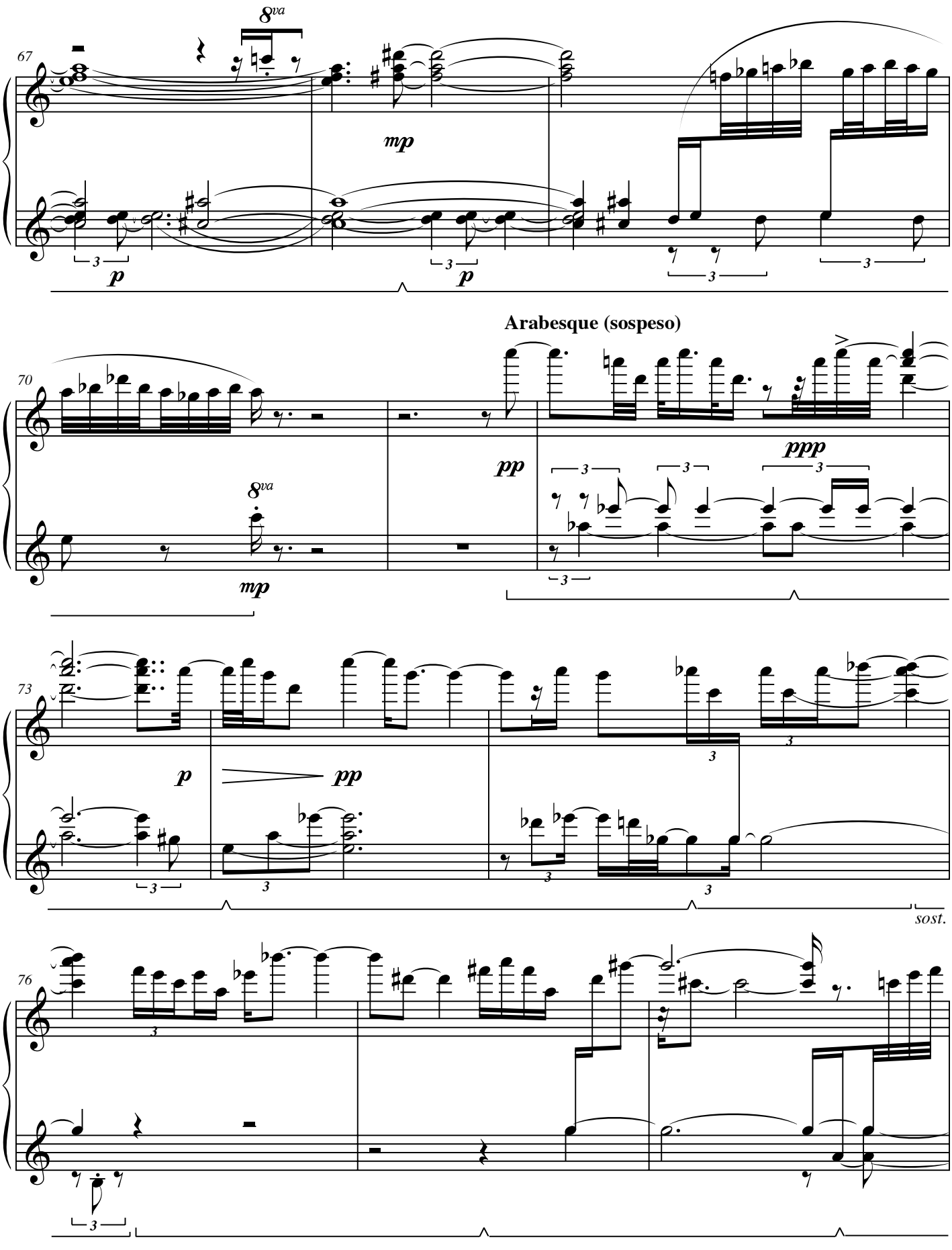
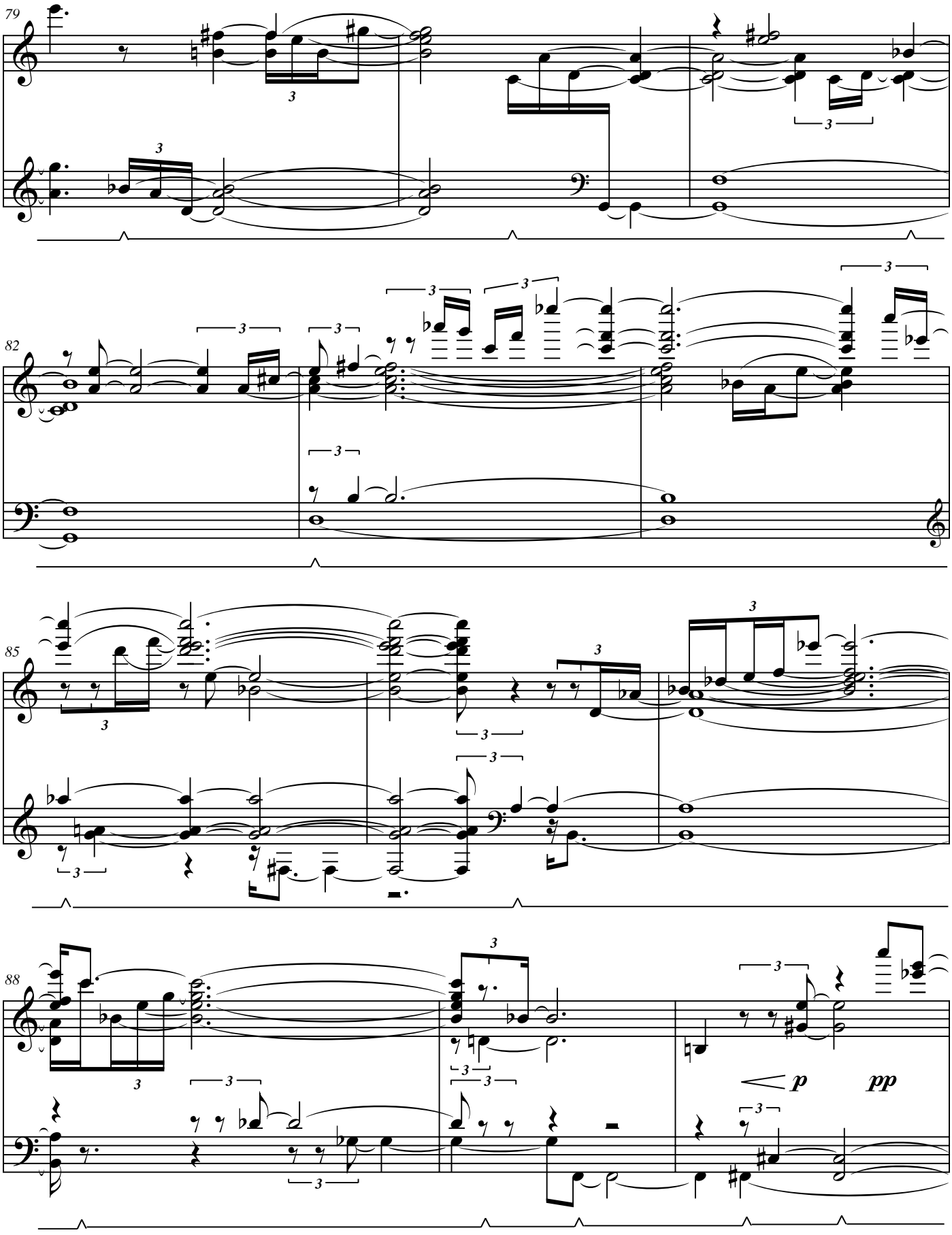

9
3
11
f
mf
p
f
mp
mf
13
mp
p
f
mf
15
3
f
mf < f
mf
f

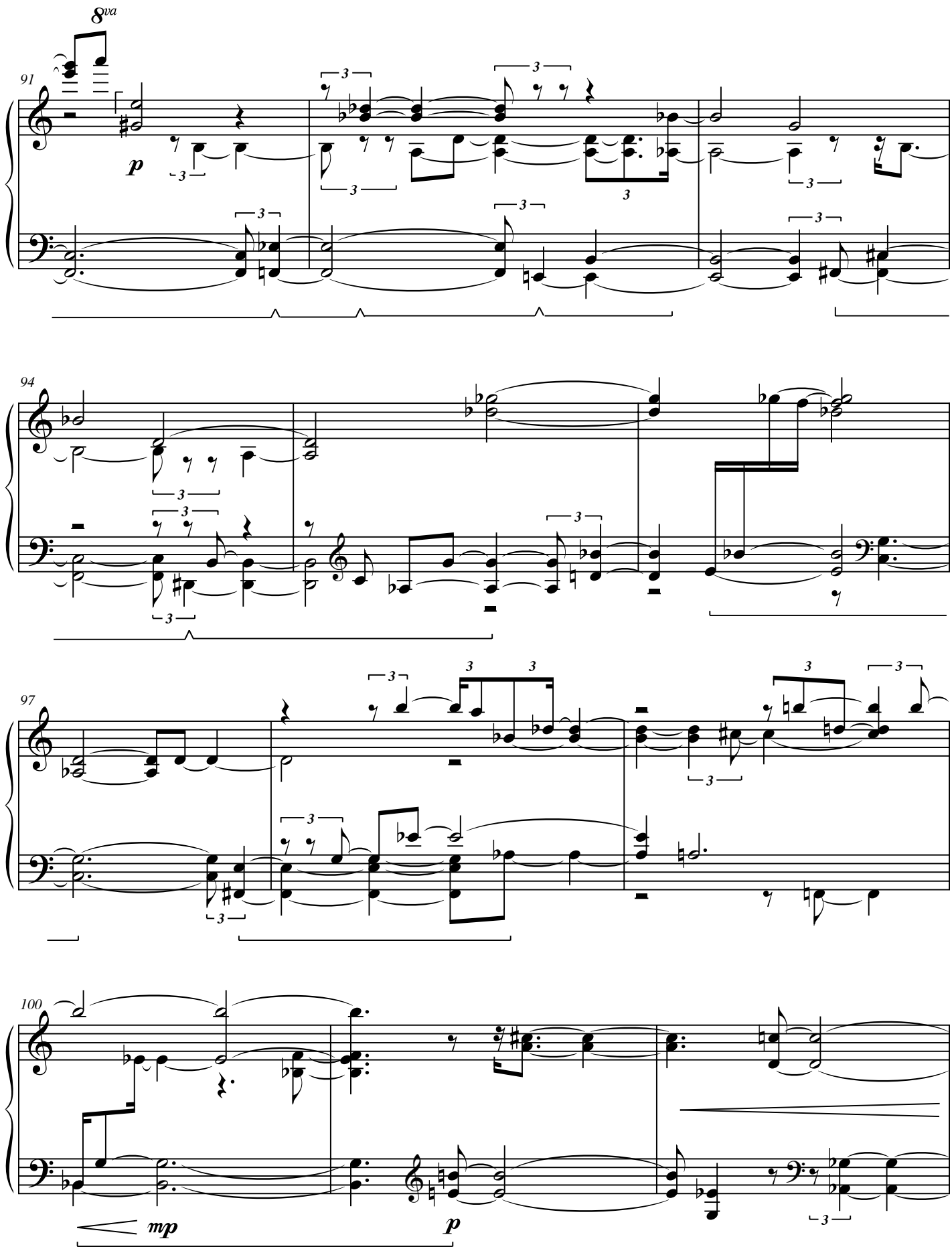

17
mp
p
sost.
24
30
f
p
sost.
f
36
f
p
f
p
p
sost.

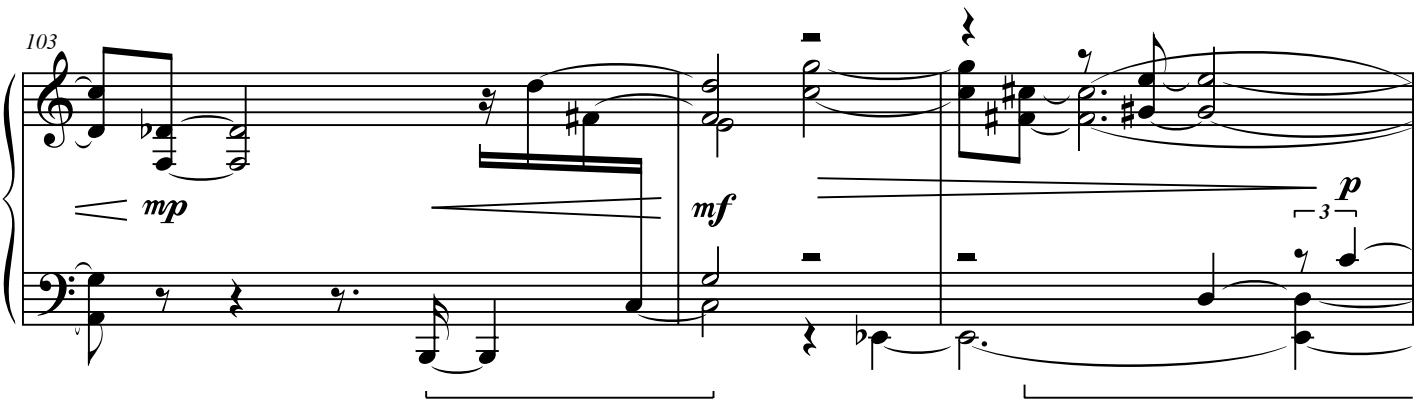

40
f
mp
p
mf
f
42
p
mf
p
mf
44
p
mf
p
mf
p
sost.
sost.
48
mf
p
mf
p
mf
p
mp
sost.


51
mp
p
sost.
sost.
54
8va
p
mp
mf
p
p
p
sost.
59
8va
mp
p
p
mp
p
sost.
63
8va
mp
sost.

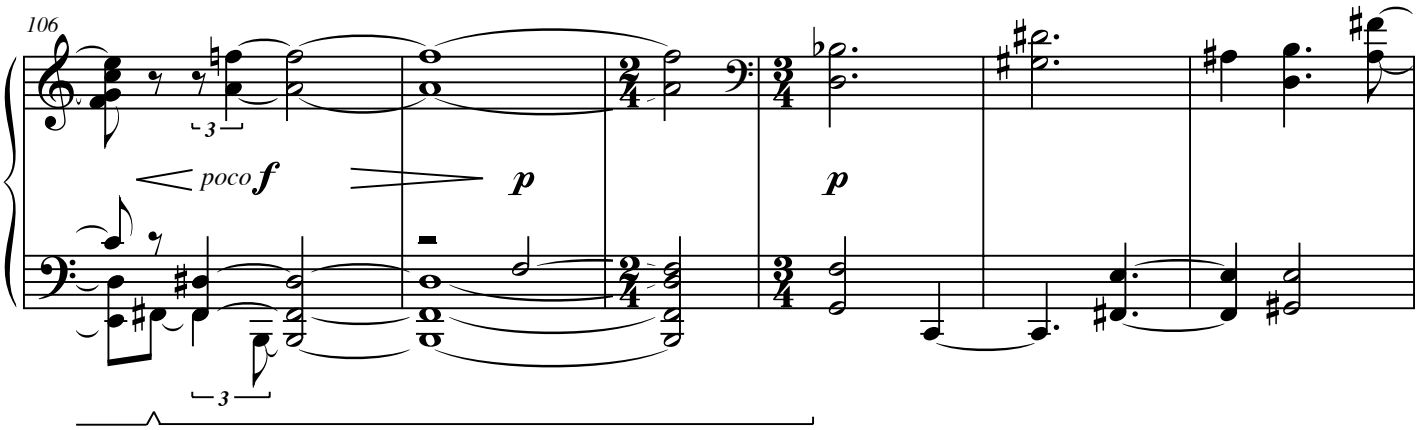

67
8va
mp
p
p
70
Arabesque (sospeso)
8va
mp
pp
ppp
73
p
pp
sost.
76

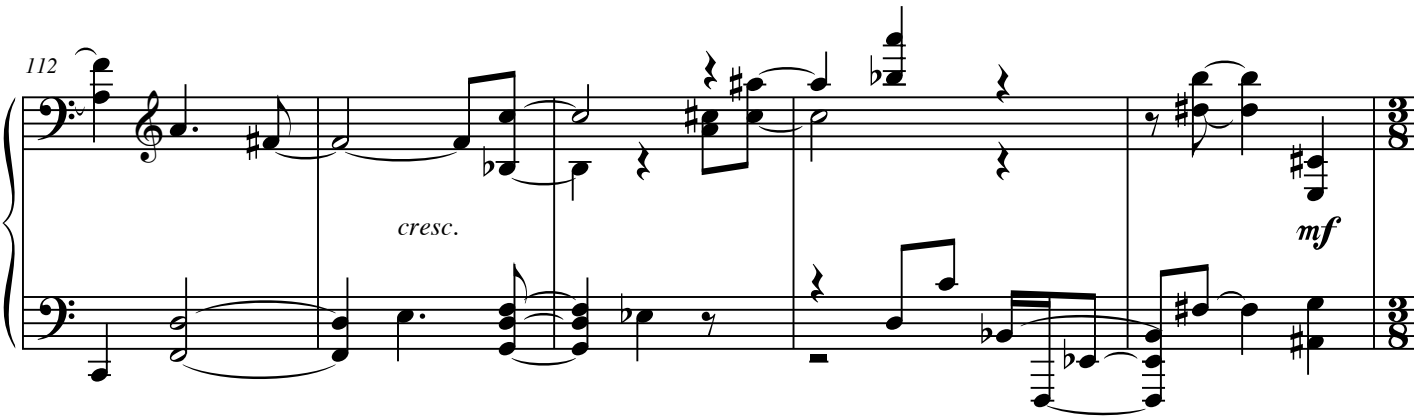

79
82
85
88
p
pp

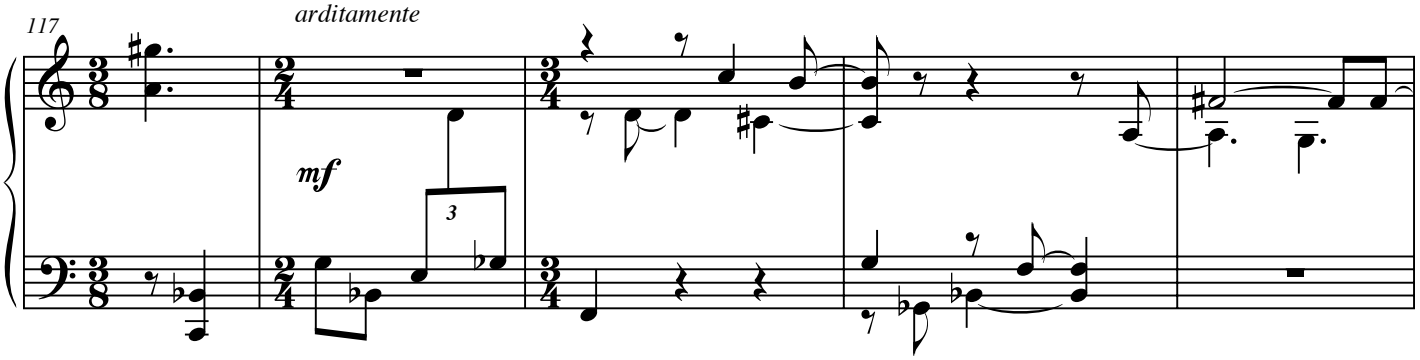

8va
91
p
94
97
100
mp
p

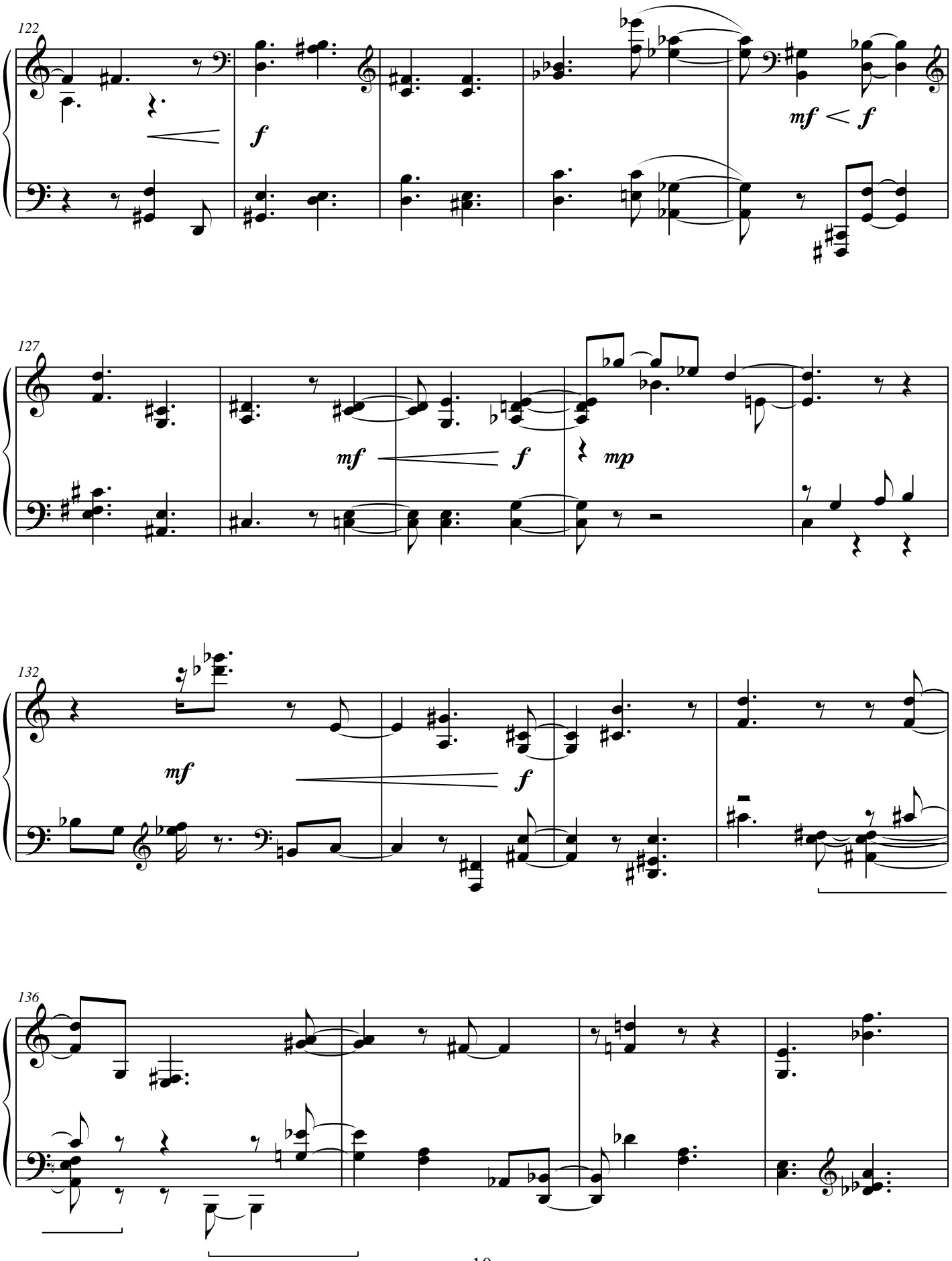


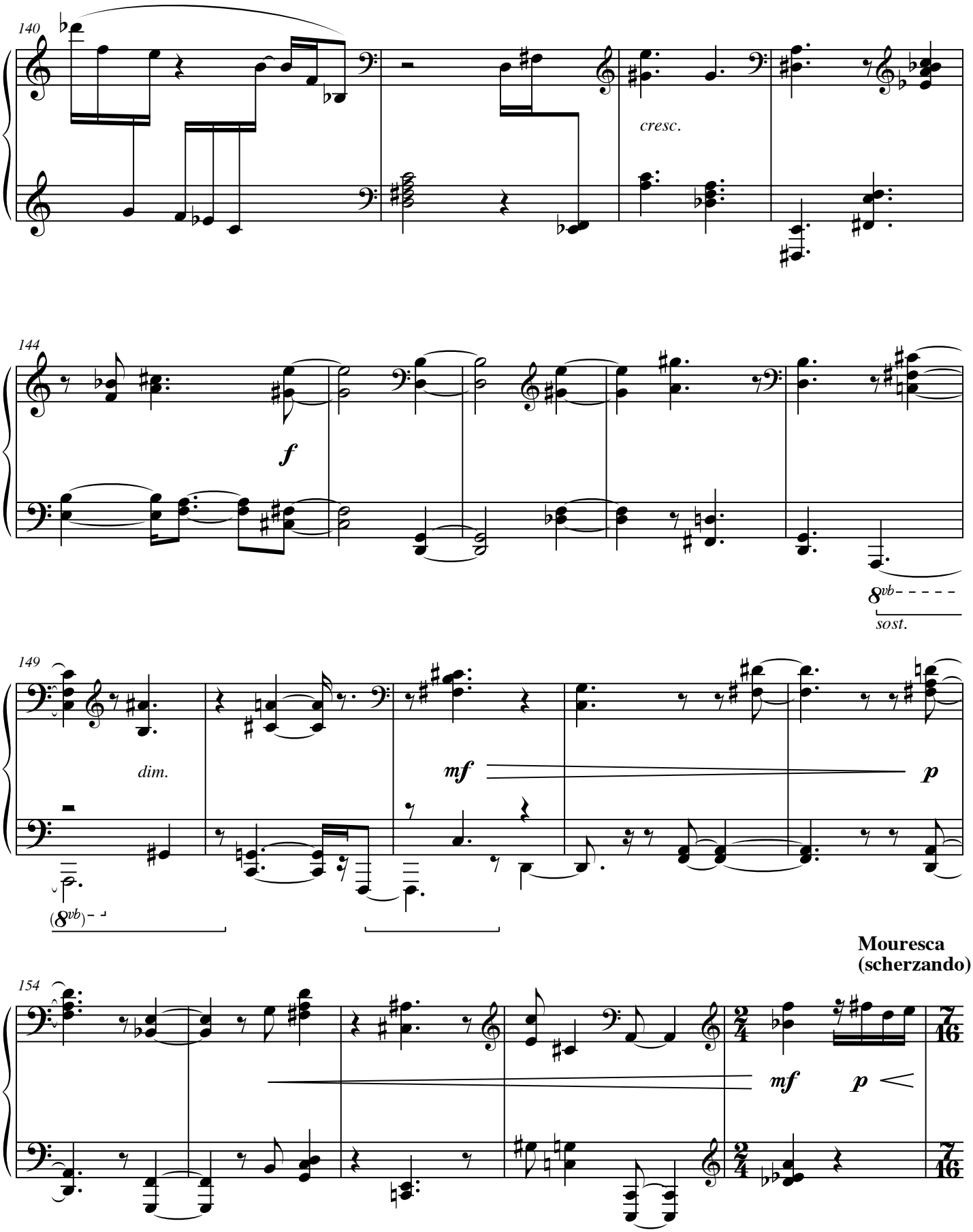
Chorale / Schusterfleck

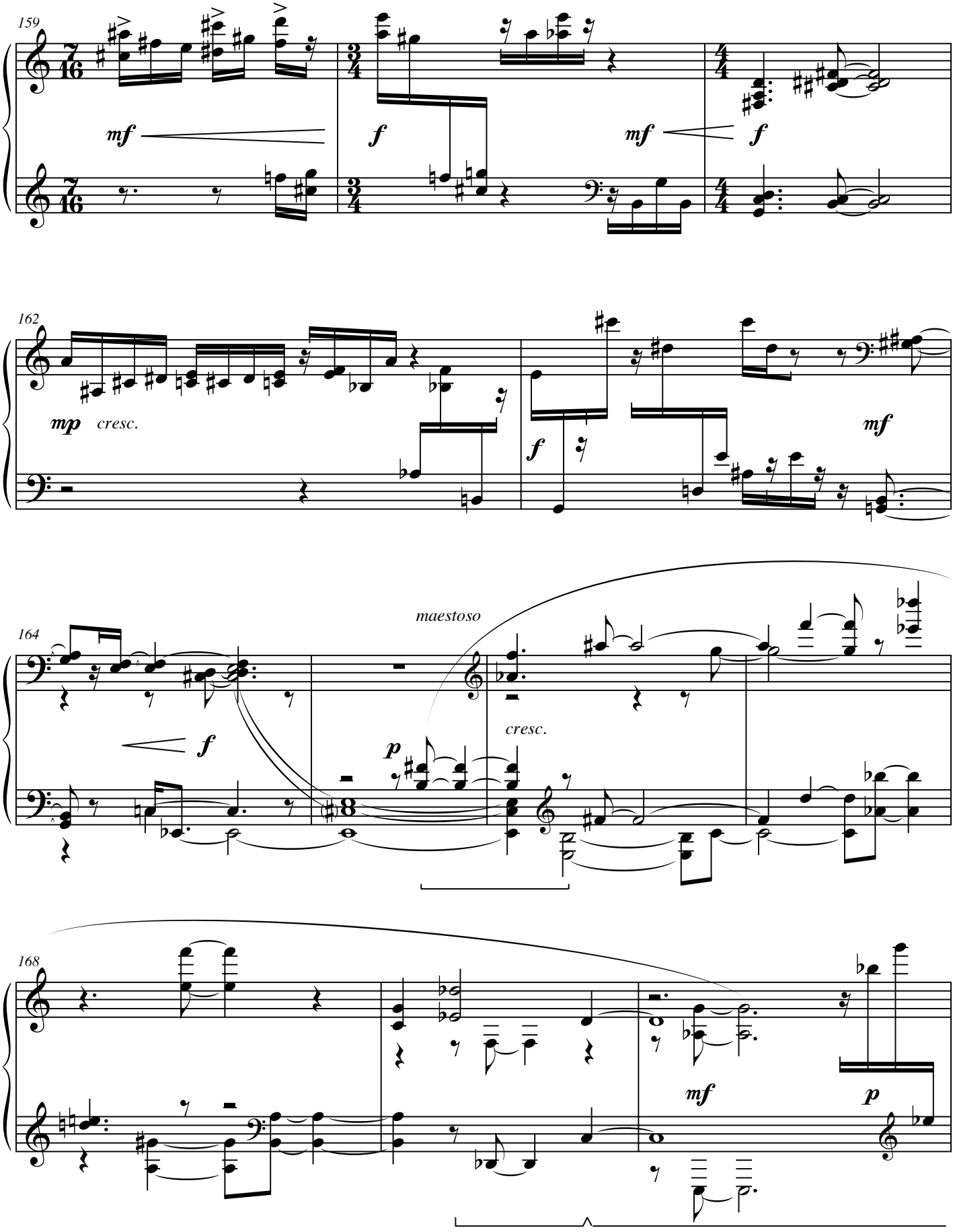


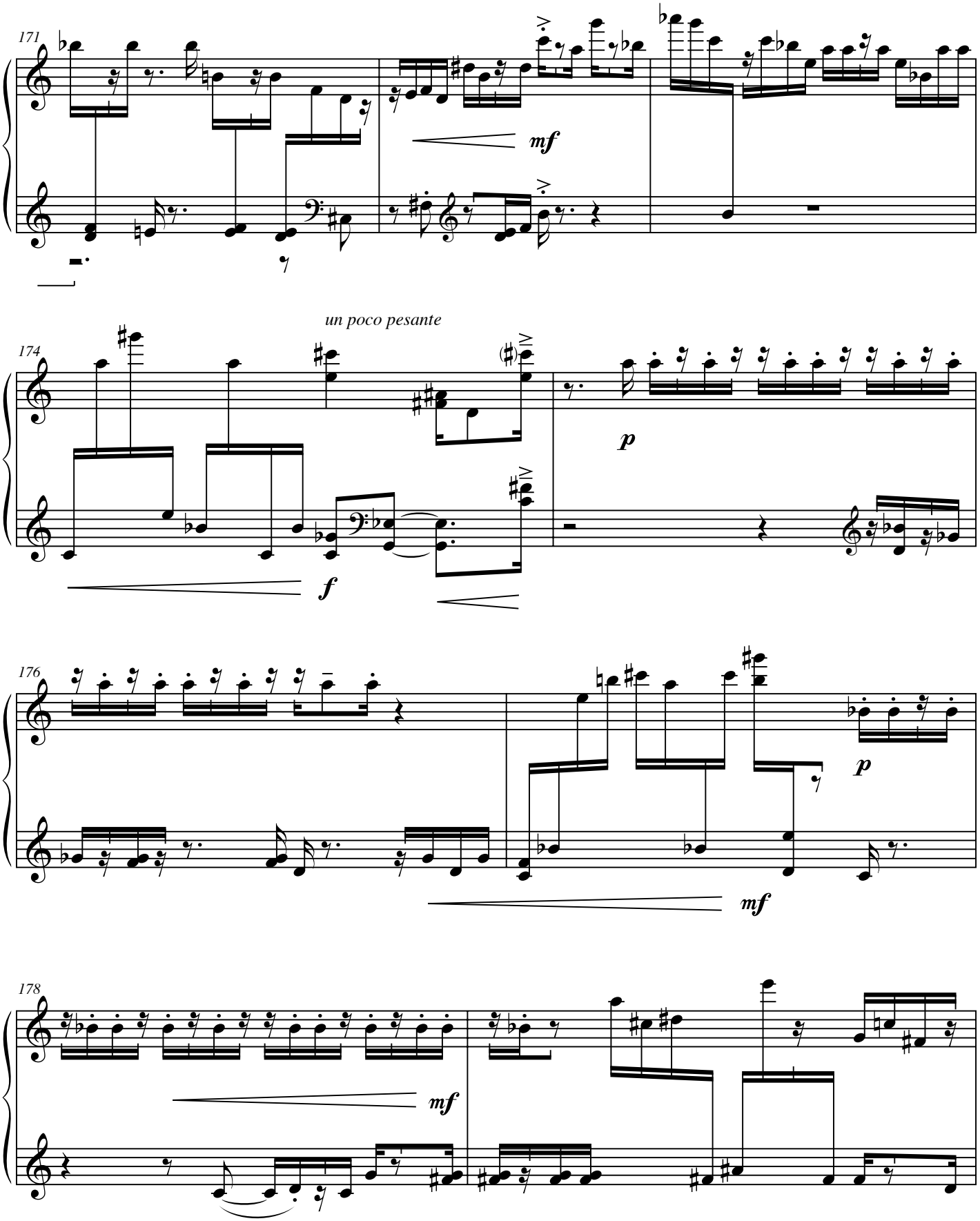


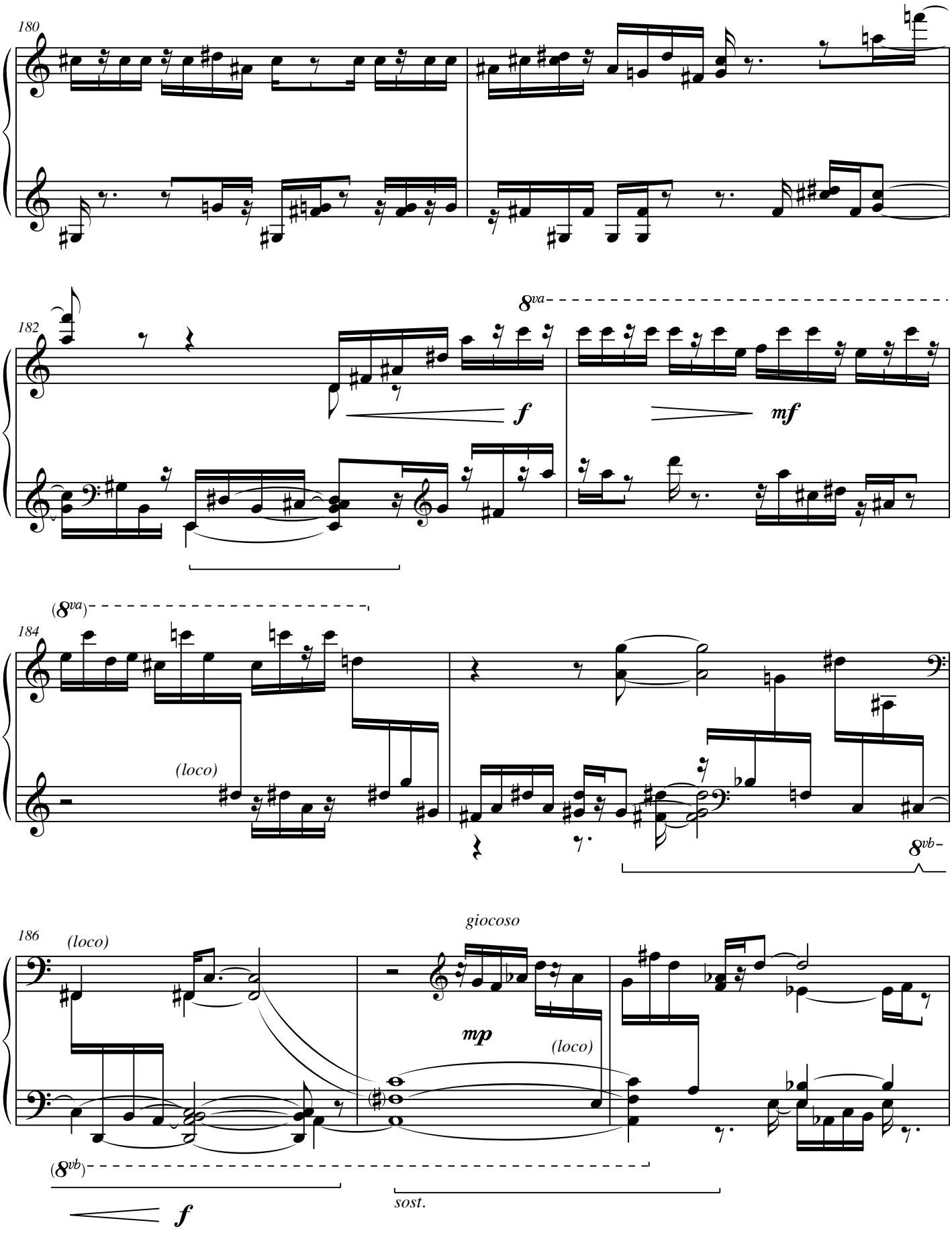


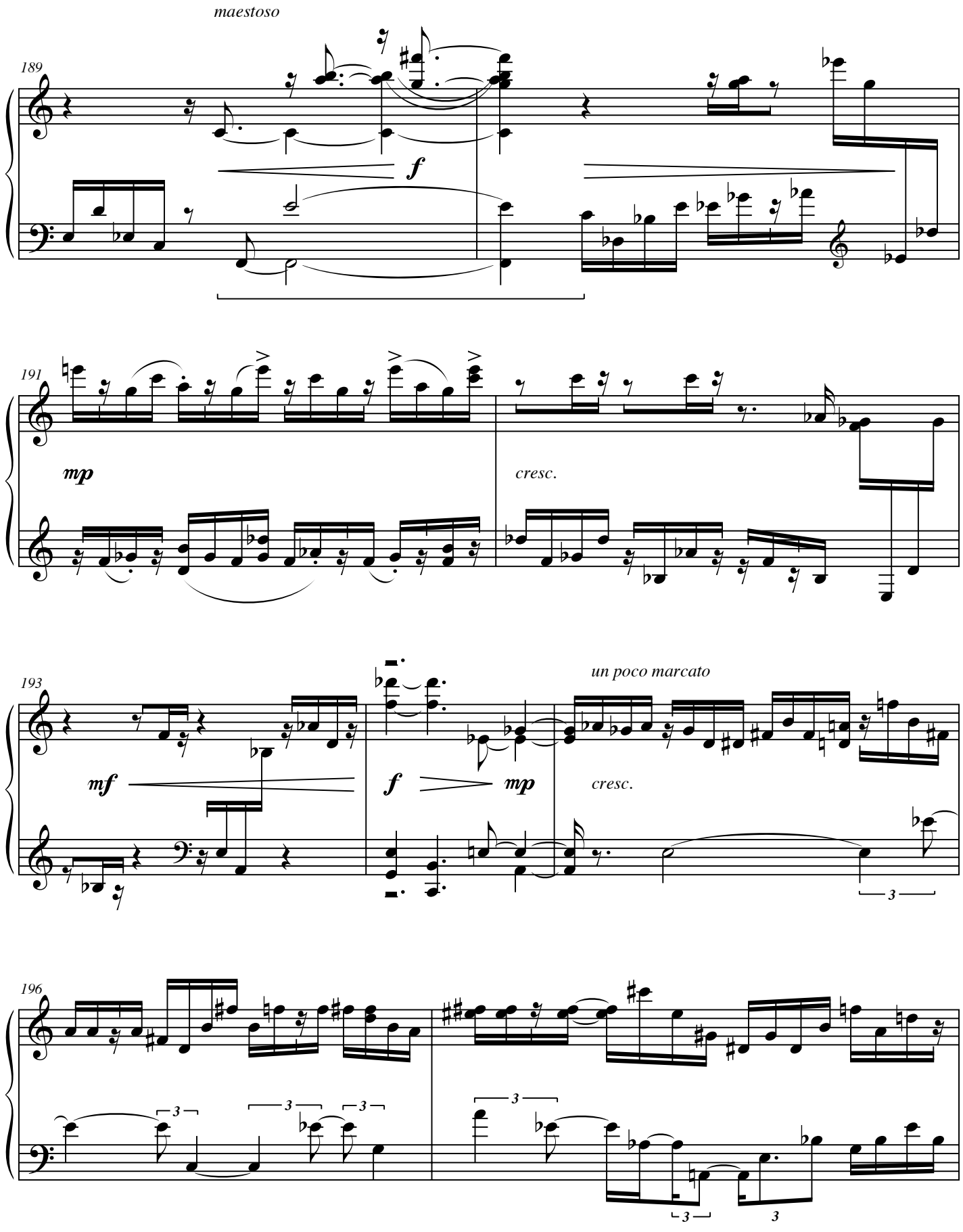

122
f
mf < f
127
mf
f
mp
132
mf
f
136

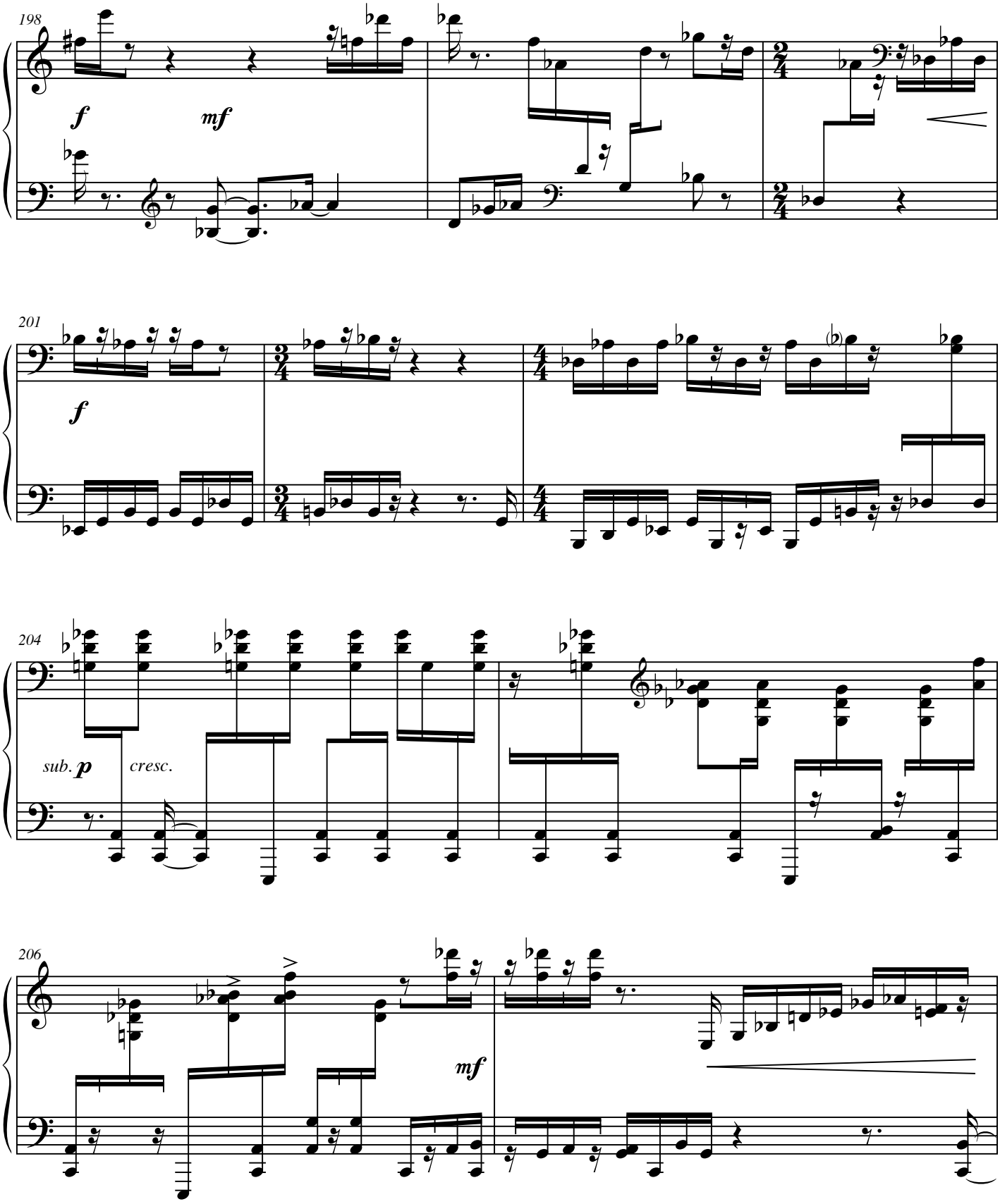

140
cresc.
144
f
8vb
sost.
149
dim.
mf
p
(8vb)
Mouresca
(scherzando)
154
mf
p
7/16
7/16

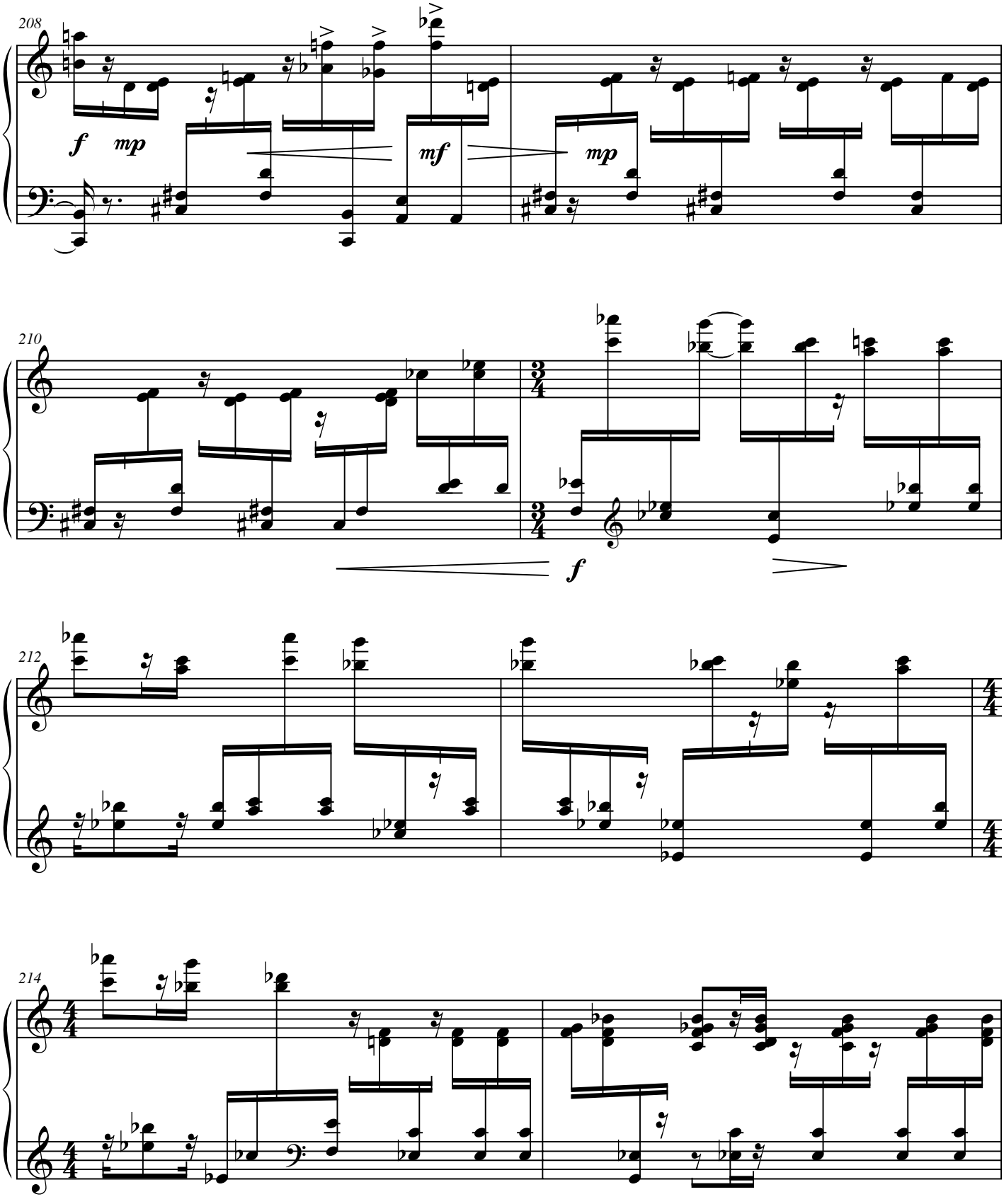

159
mf
f
mf
f
162
mp
cresc.
f
mf
164
maestoso
f
p
cresc.
168
mf
p


171
mf
un poco pesante
174
p
f
176
p
mf
178
mf


180
182
8va
f
mf
(8va)
184
(loco)
8vb
186
(loco)
giocoso
mp
(loco)
(8vb)
f
sost.


maestoso
189
f
191
mp
cresc.
193
un poco marcato
mf
f
mp
cresc.
196


198
f
mf
201
f
204
sub. p
cresc.
206
mf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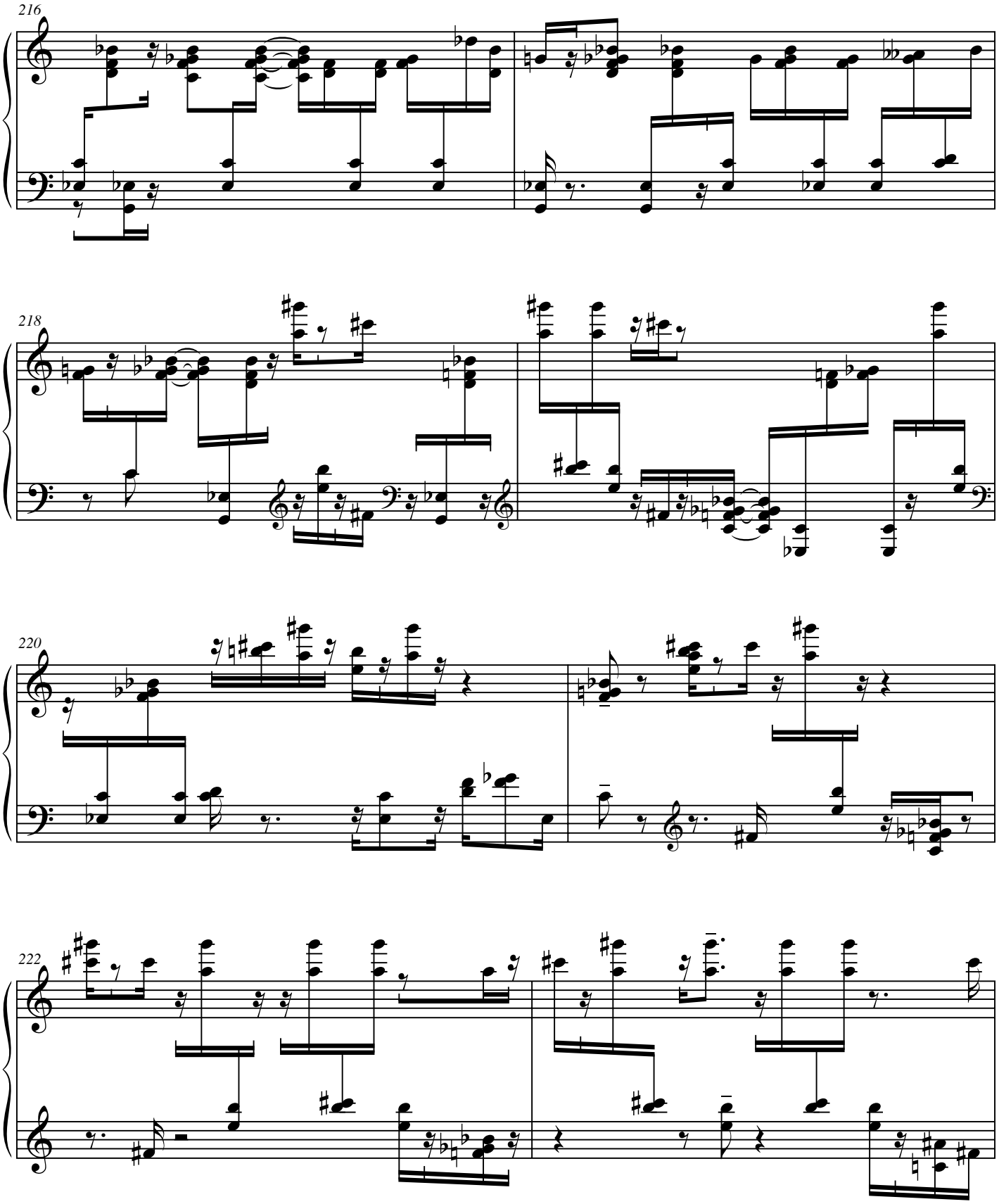
f
mp
mf
mp
210
f
212
214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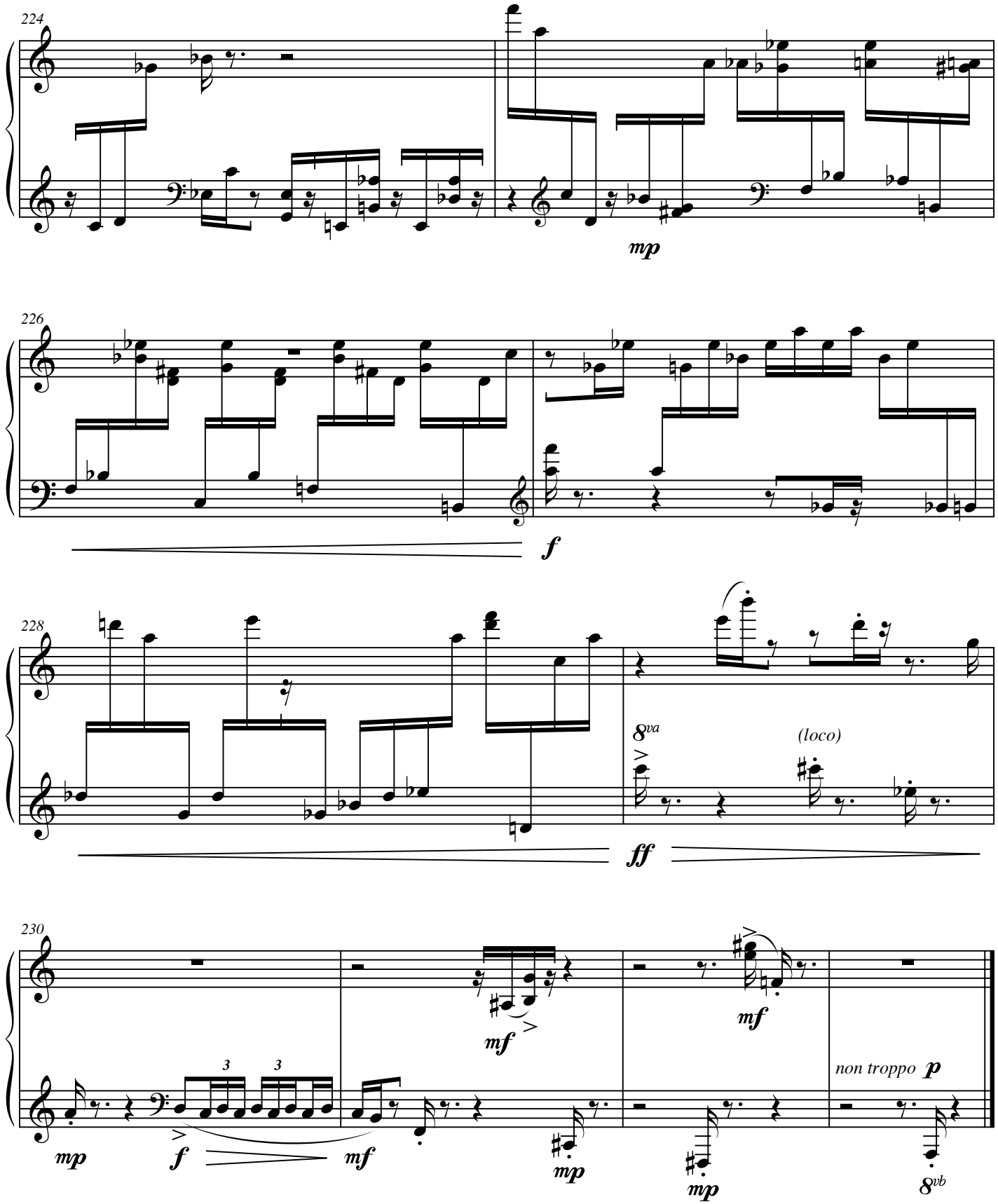
224
mp
226
f
228
8va
(loco)
ff
230
mf
mf
non troppo p
mp
f
mf
mp
mp
8vb