Birthday Quartet

for Violin, Clarinet, Violoncello, and Piano

Bill Robinson

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Composed May 9—October 20, 2013; Aug. 29—October 5, 2015
Duration: about 30 minutes

In early 2010, I had a peculiar dream of a respectful conversation with Elvis Presley. He said I should write a symphony based on speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. Well—who can refuse the King of Rock and/or Roll? Especially since I share my birthday, January 15, with MLK, and classical radio stations frequently play a composer's music on his birthday.

The speeches of Martin Luther King are copyrighted, and the MLK Center is notoriously litigious. Thus this cannot be a choral work, nor can it have direct references to texts in the score. Instead I use the rhythms and inflections from speeches that are incorporated in themes. The first movement uses a few phrases from the "How long? Not long" speech of March 25, 1965 at the Alabama State Capitol. The second movement is based on the Buddhist mantra "Gate gate, paragate, parasamgate, bhodi swaha"; this can be roughly translated (as by Ram Dass) as "Beyond, beyond the beyond, beyond the beyond the beyond, hail the goer." The third movement returns to MLK and uses bits of the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech given on April 3, 1968 in Memphis Tennessee. The first version of the fourth movement (started writing it Aug. 28, 2013) used the final section of the Dream Speech given at the March on Washington on August 28, 1968, with narrator. After hearing the chamber version, I thought this first version of the fourth movement was not suitable, and I withdrew it.

On August 29, 2015, I started writing a second version of the last movement. The beginning uses the rhythm of the words "And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood." The music then departs from the text, with the motives from "table of brotherhood" and "I have a dream" used repeatedly. Next comes "Let freedom ring" along with other phrases from the speech. The movement closes with "Free at last, free at last (repeated), thank God almighty we are free at last!"

After writing this version for clarinet quartet, I orchestrated the score, which was performed by the Raleigh Symphony Orchestra in 2016; the last movement was performed by the Durham Symphony. However, I was displeased with my orchestration, and in 2023 I withdrew the symphonic version.

The premiere performance of this piece was of this chamber edition for violin, clarinet, cello and piano on February 18, 2014, with the original fourth movement. There is also a version for piano quartet.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and do not refer to other octaves. Sometimes I include courtesy accidentals to avoid confusion.

Bill Robinson

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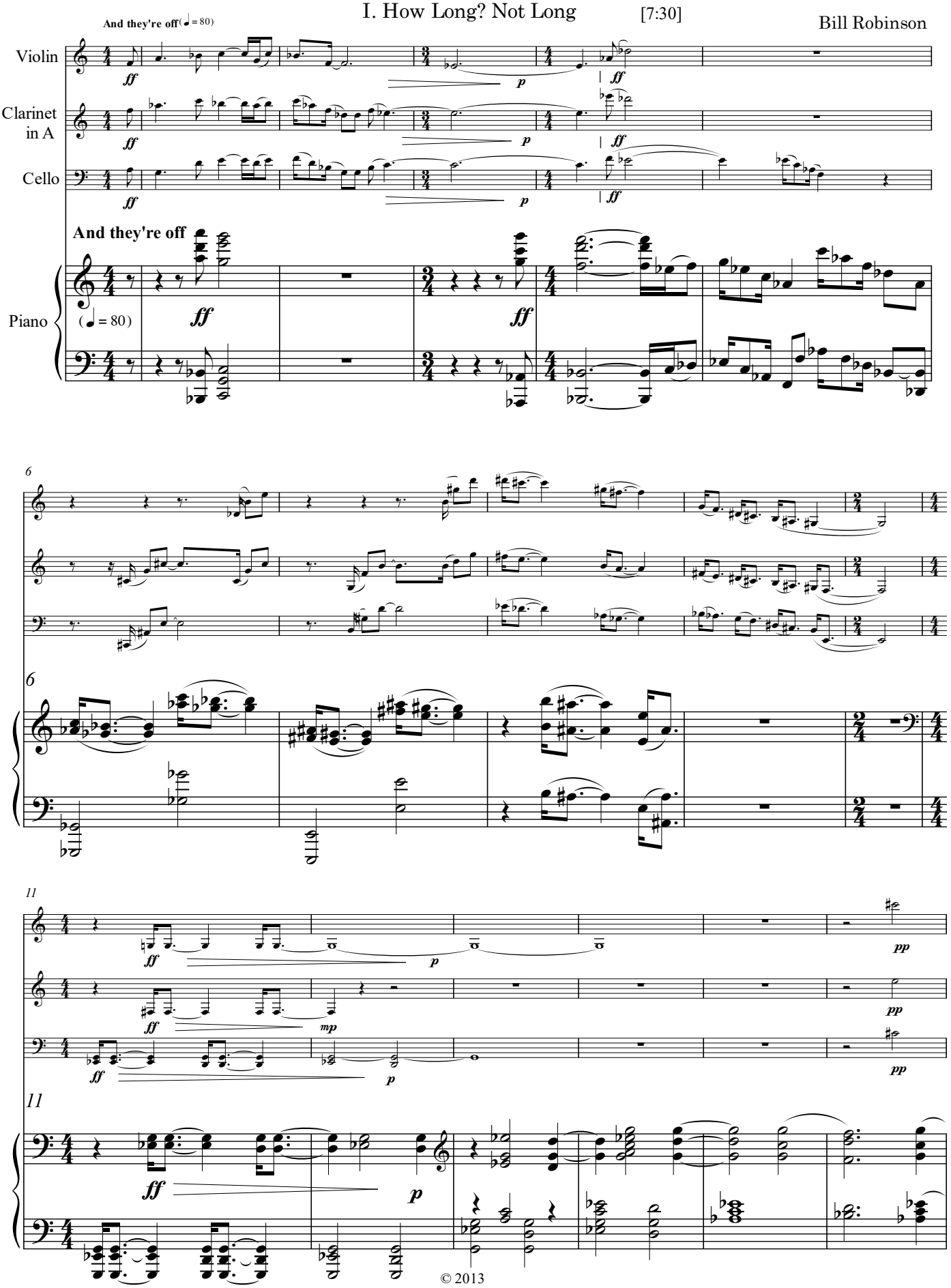
www.billrobinsonmusic.com

cover photograph; March on Washington, August 28, 1963

Birthday Symphony, Chamber Edition (Clarinet Quartet)

I. How Long? Not Long [7:30]

Bill Robinson



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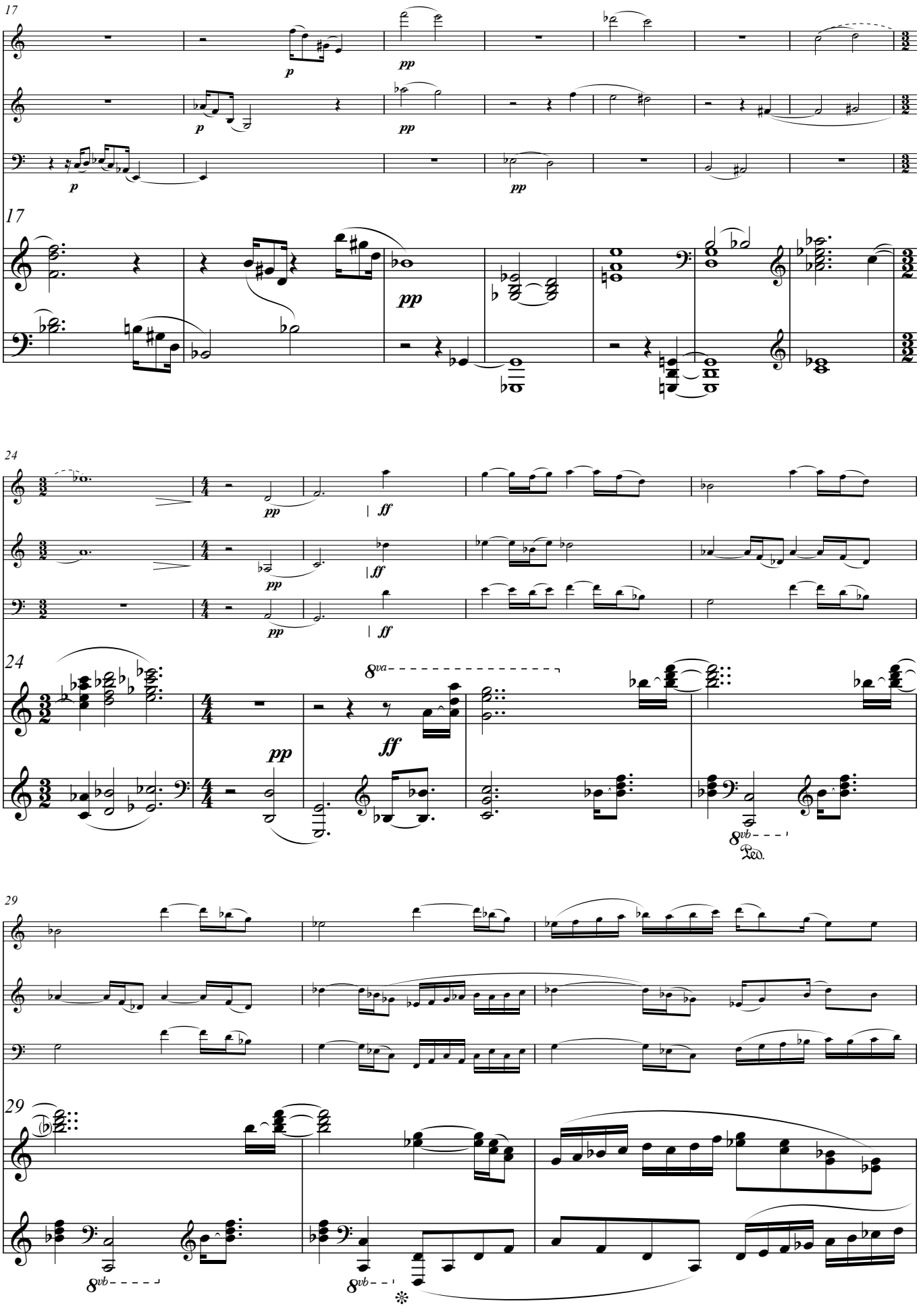
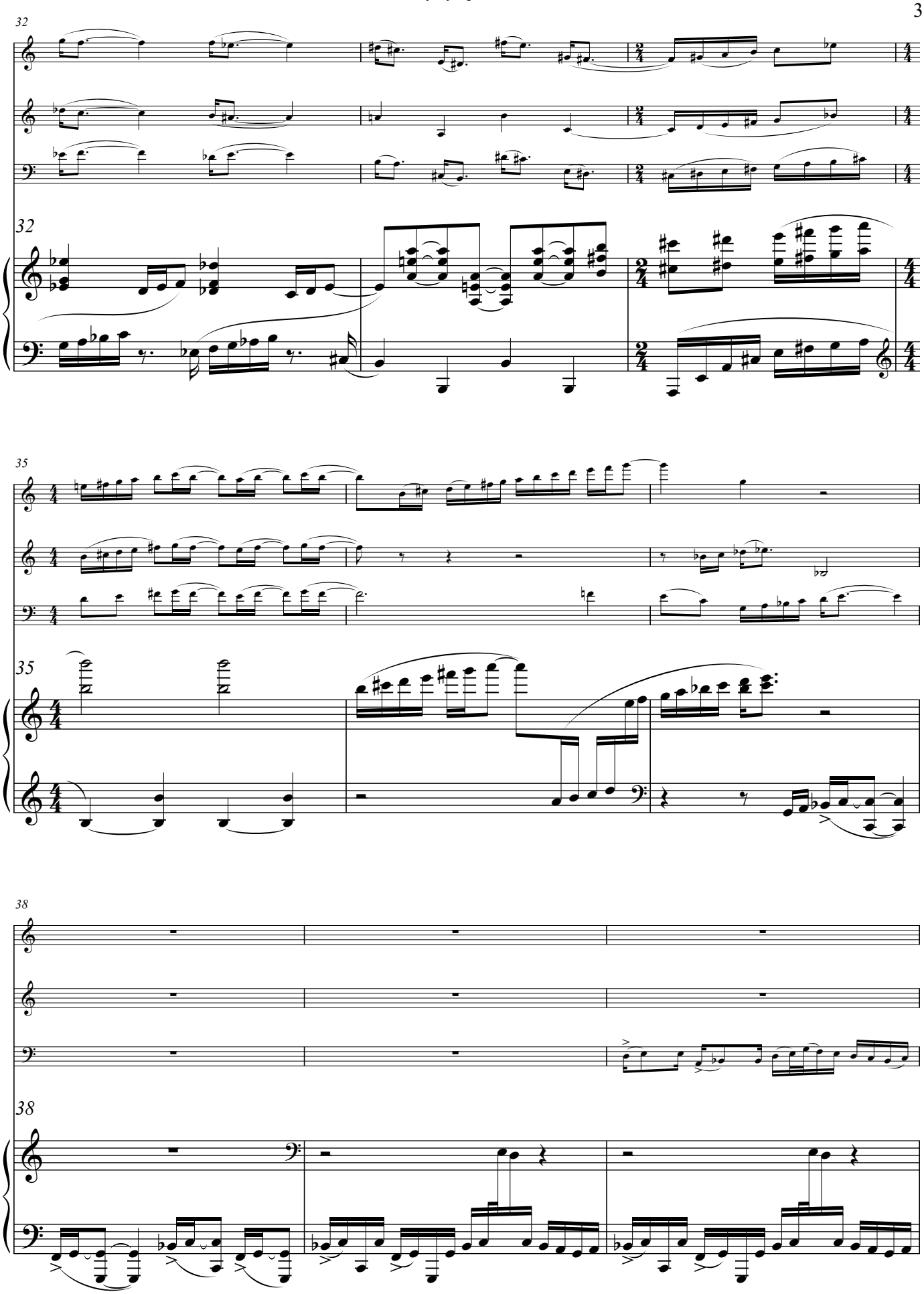
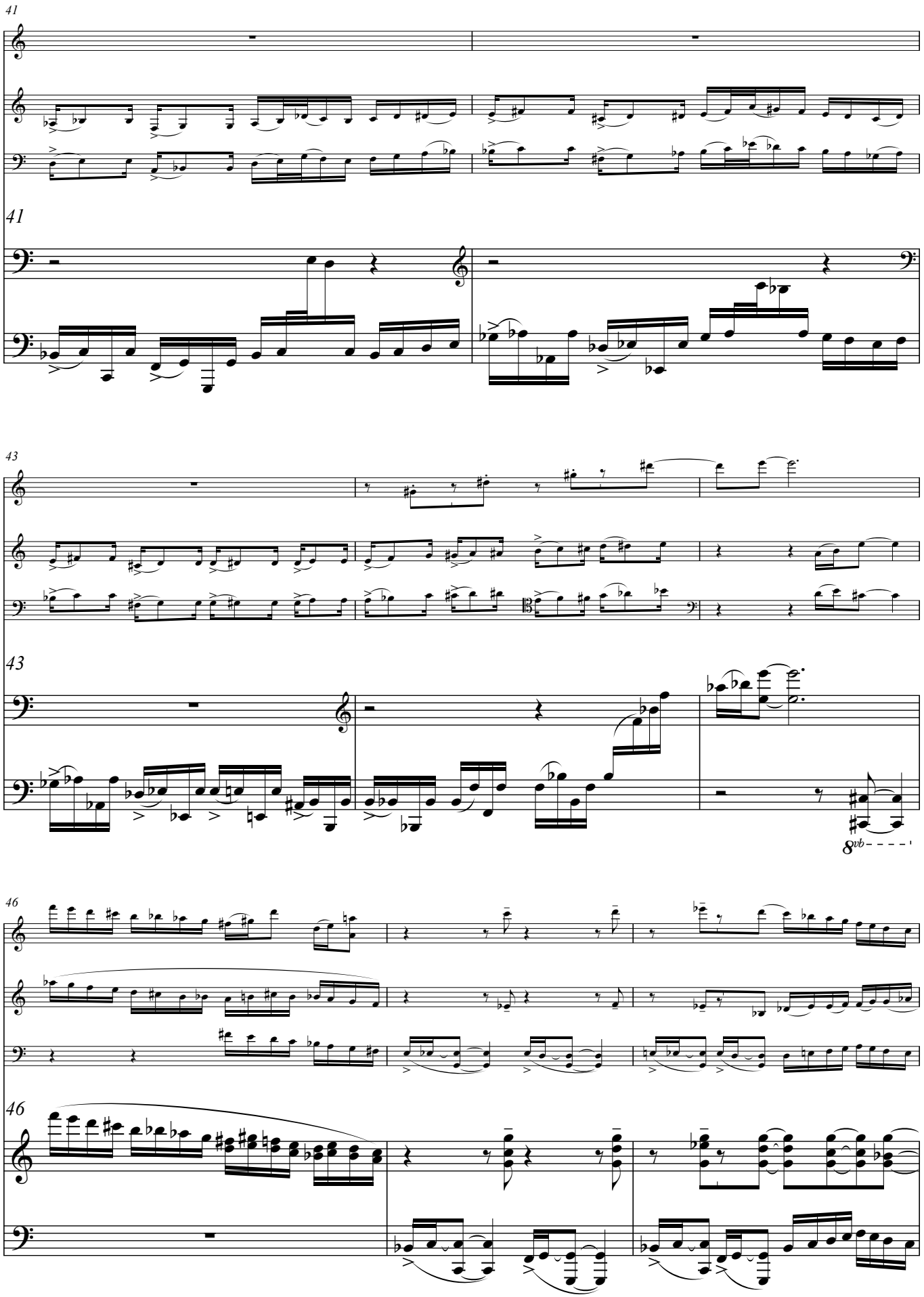
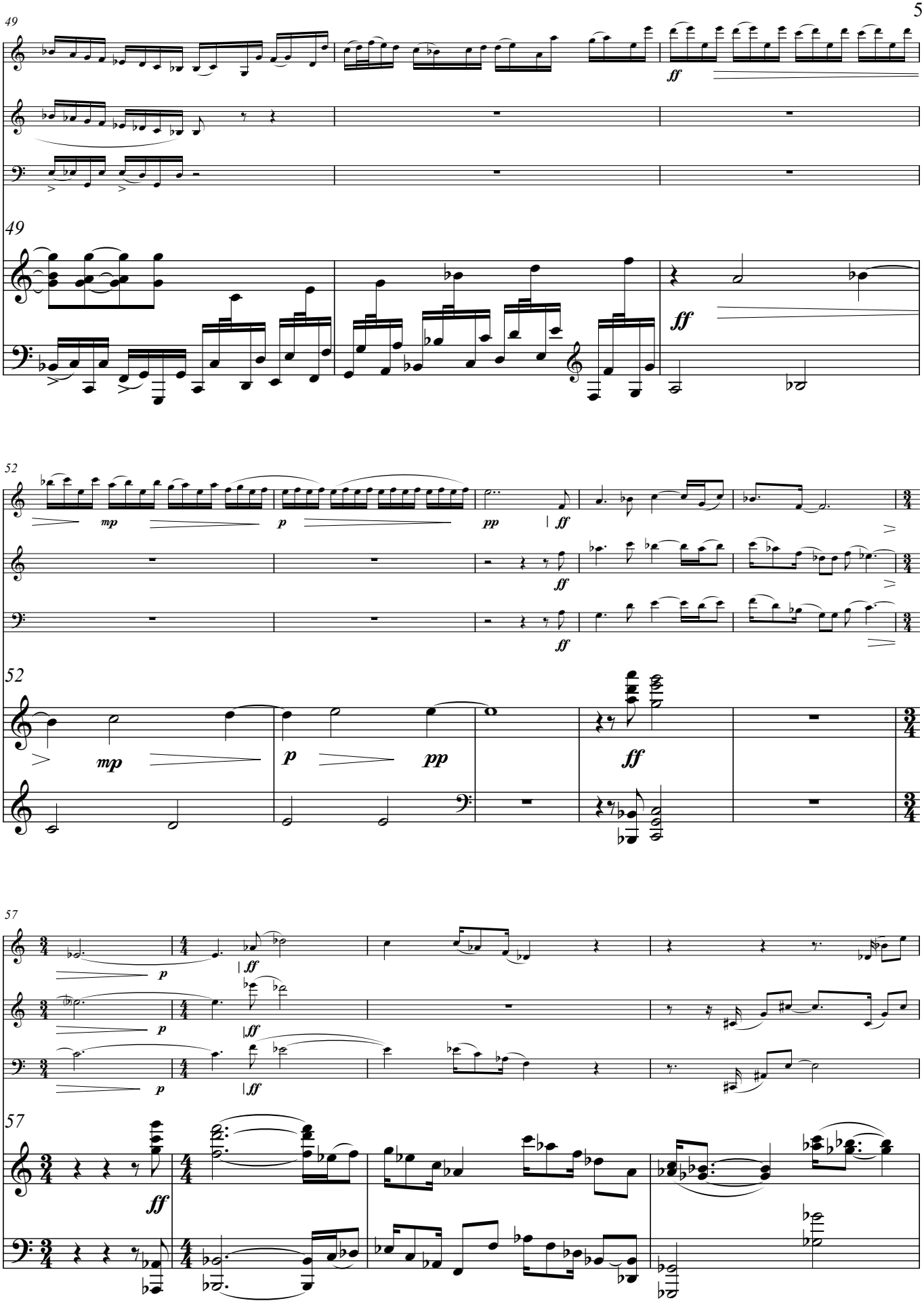
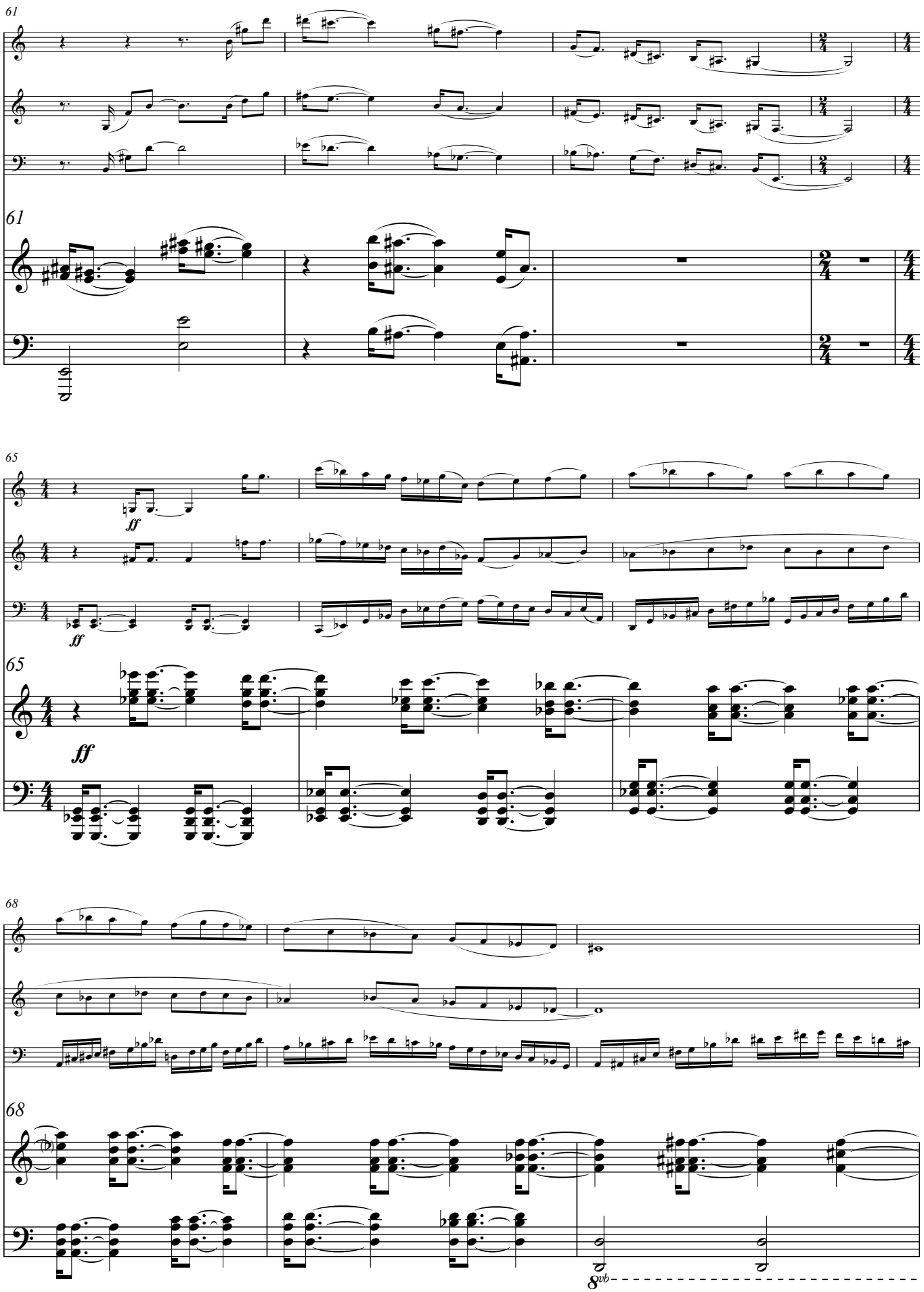
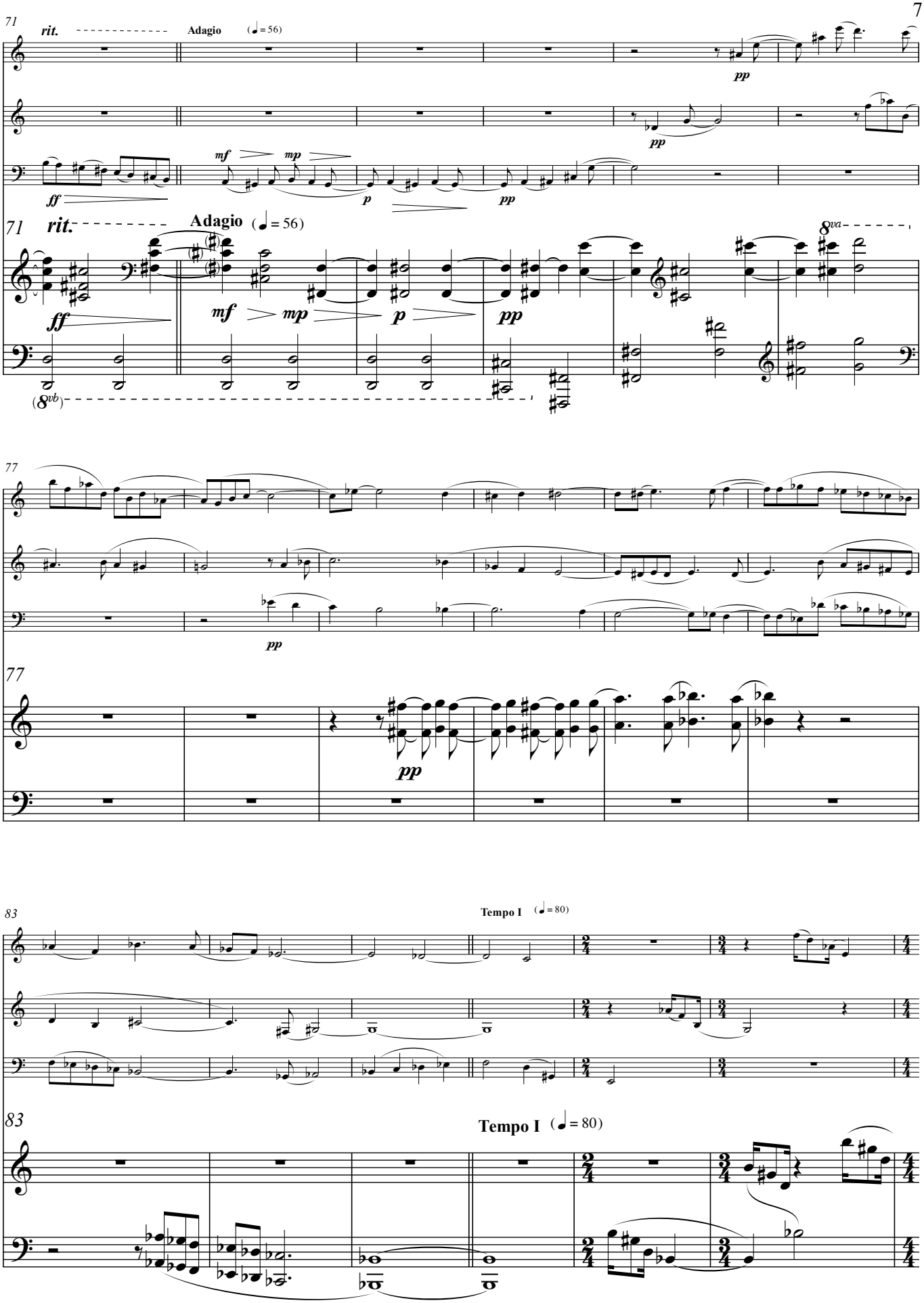

17
p
pp
17
pp
24
pp
ff
24
8va
pp
ff
8vb
Ped.
29
29
8vb
8vb

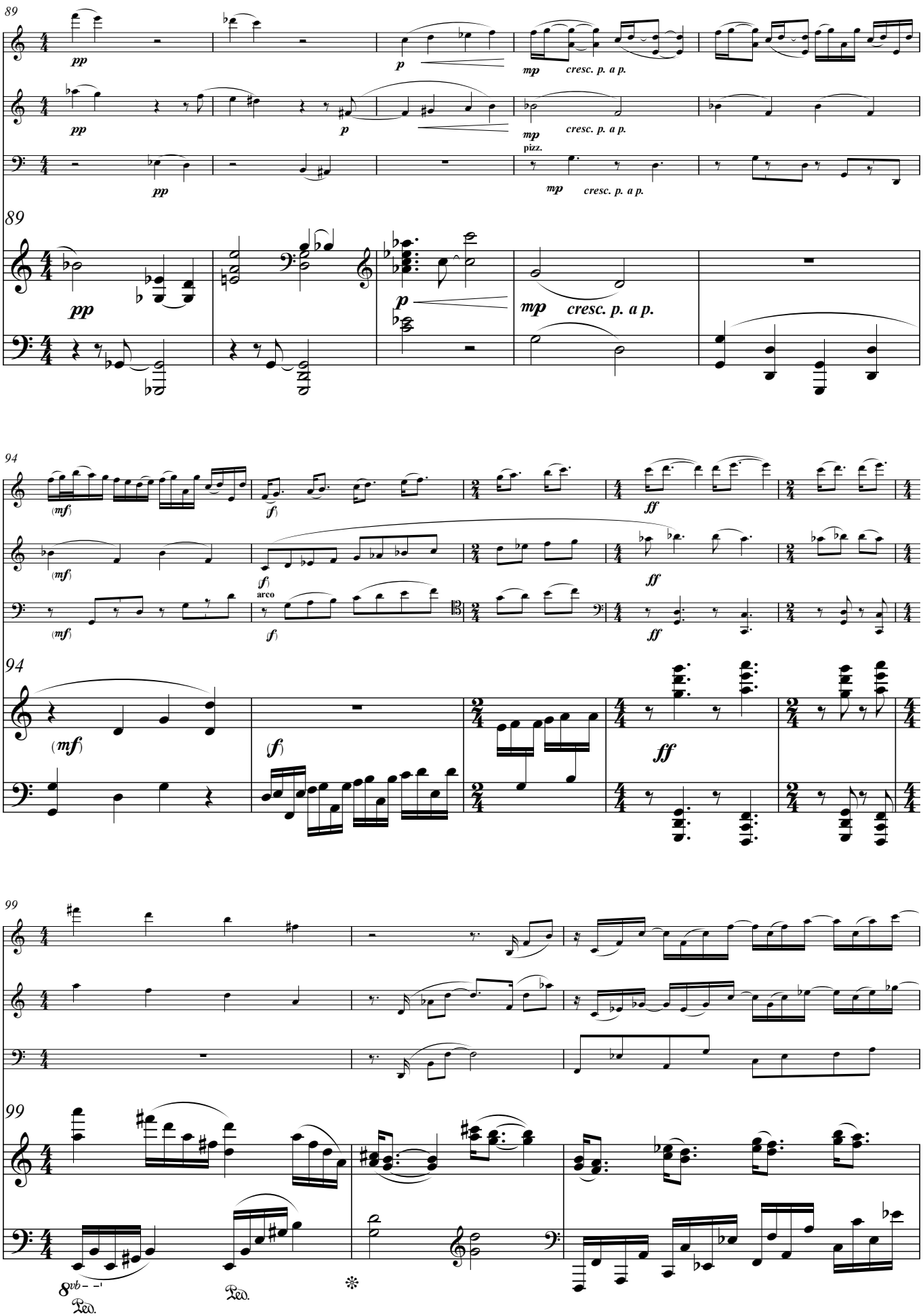

32
32
35
35
38
38

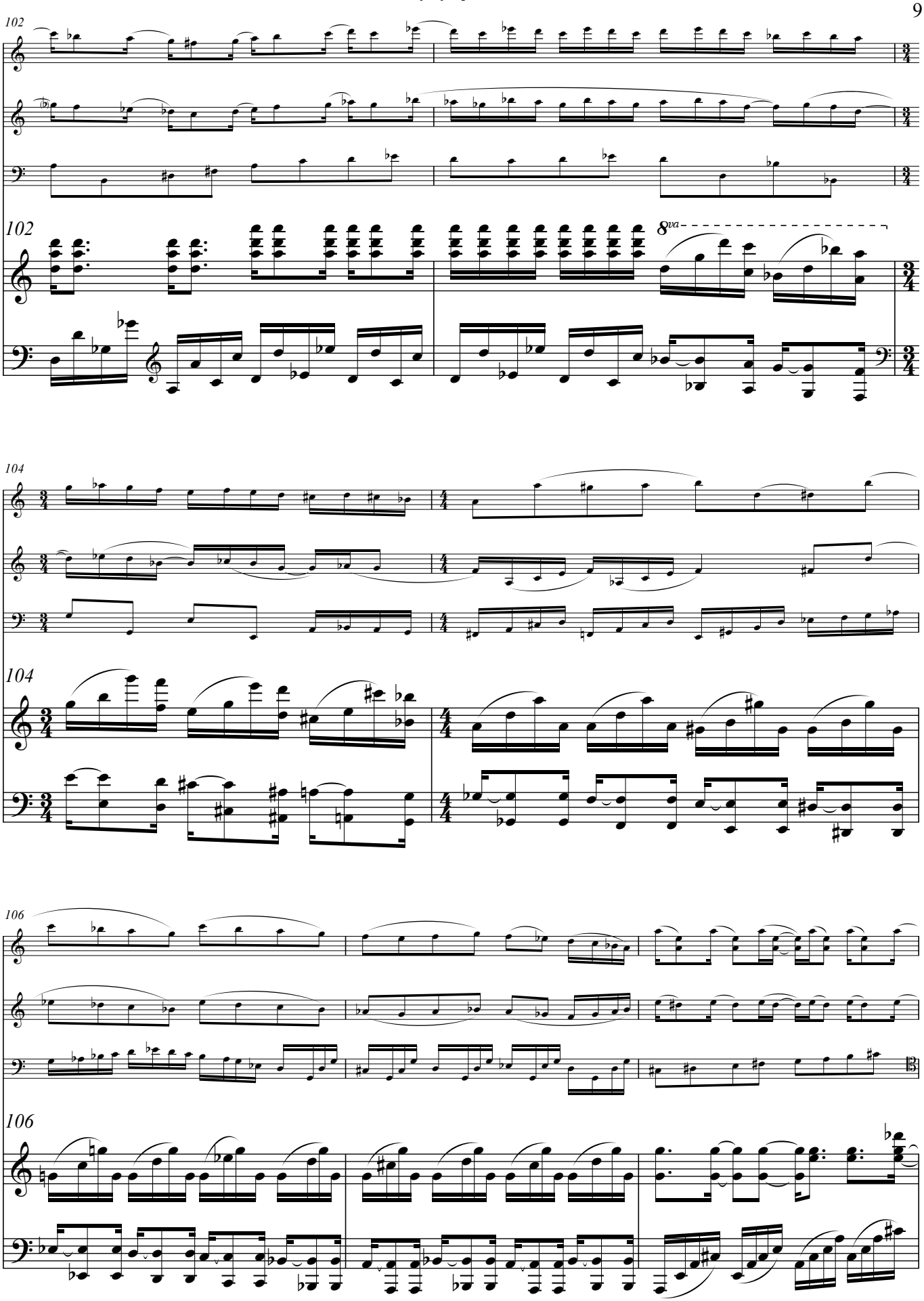

41
41
43
43
8vb
46
46

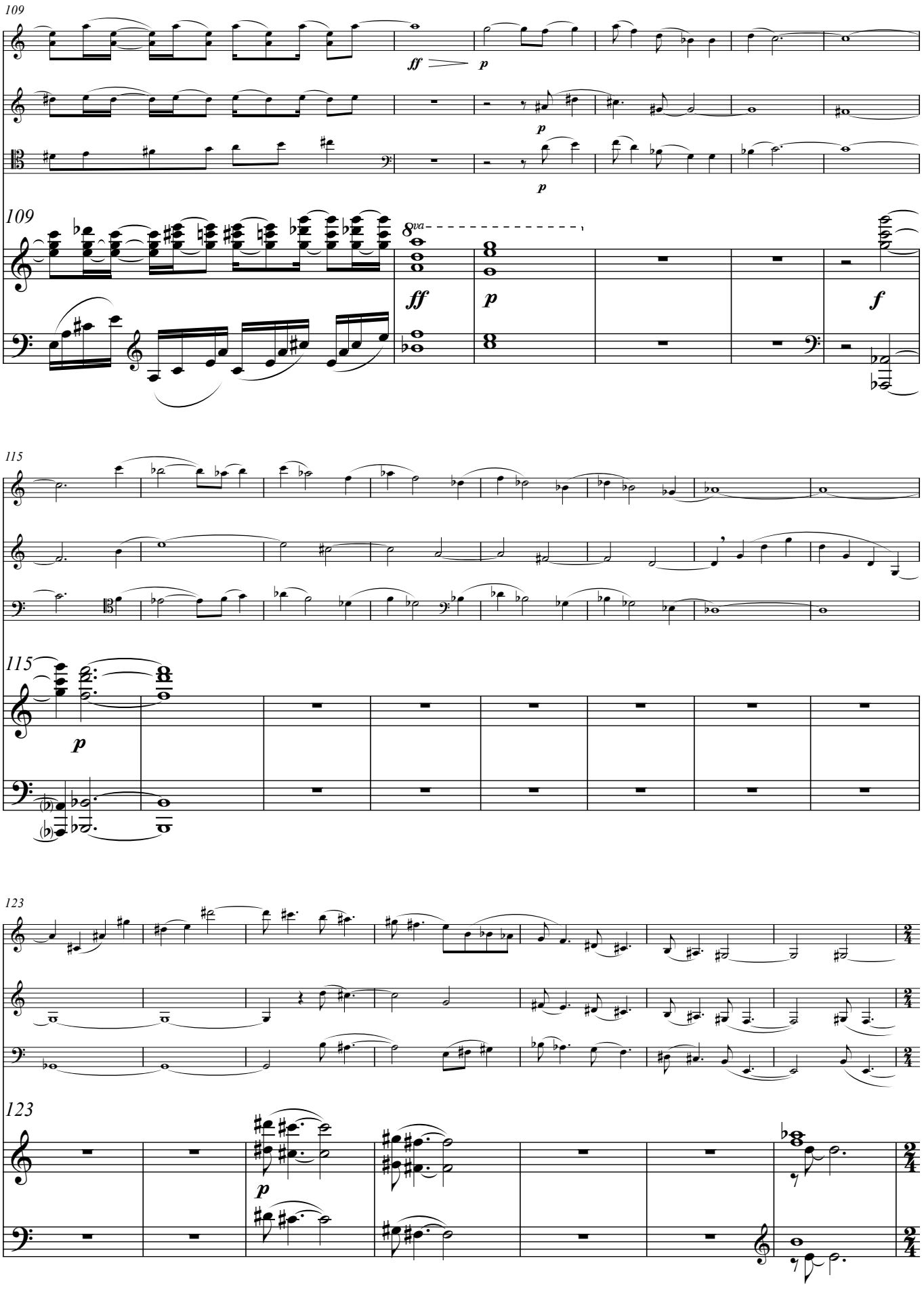

49
ff
49
ff
52
mp
p
pp
ff
ff
52
mp
p
pp
ff
57
p
ff
p
ff
p
ff
57
ff

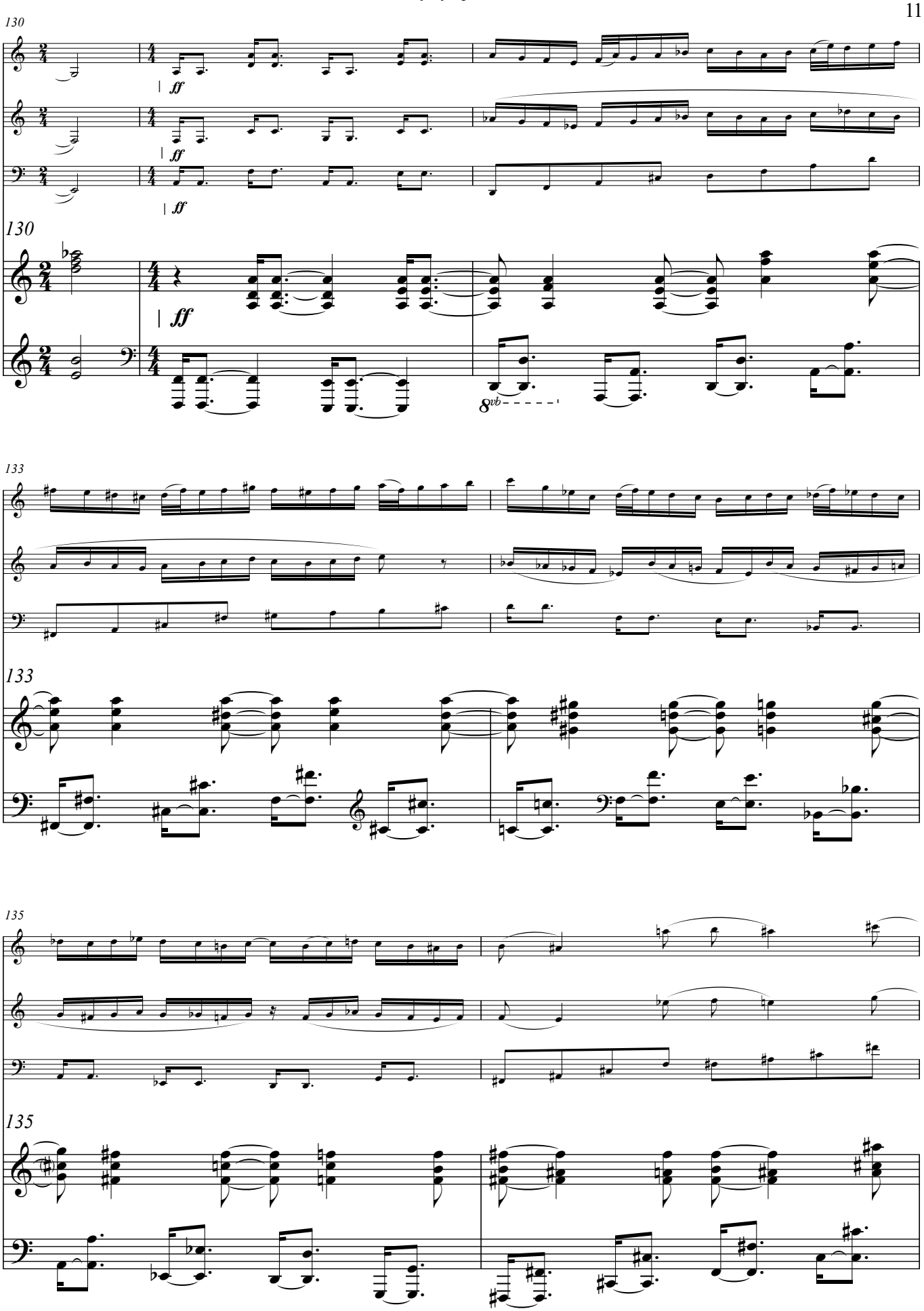

61
61
65
ff
ff
65
68
68
8vb

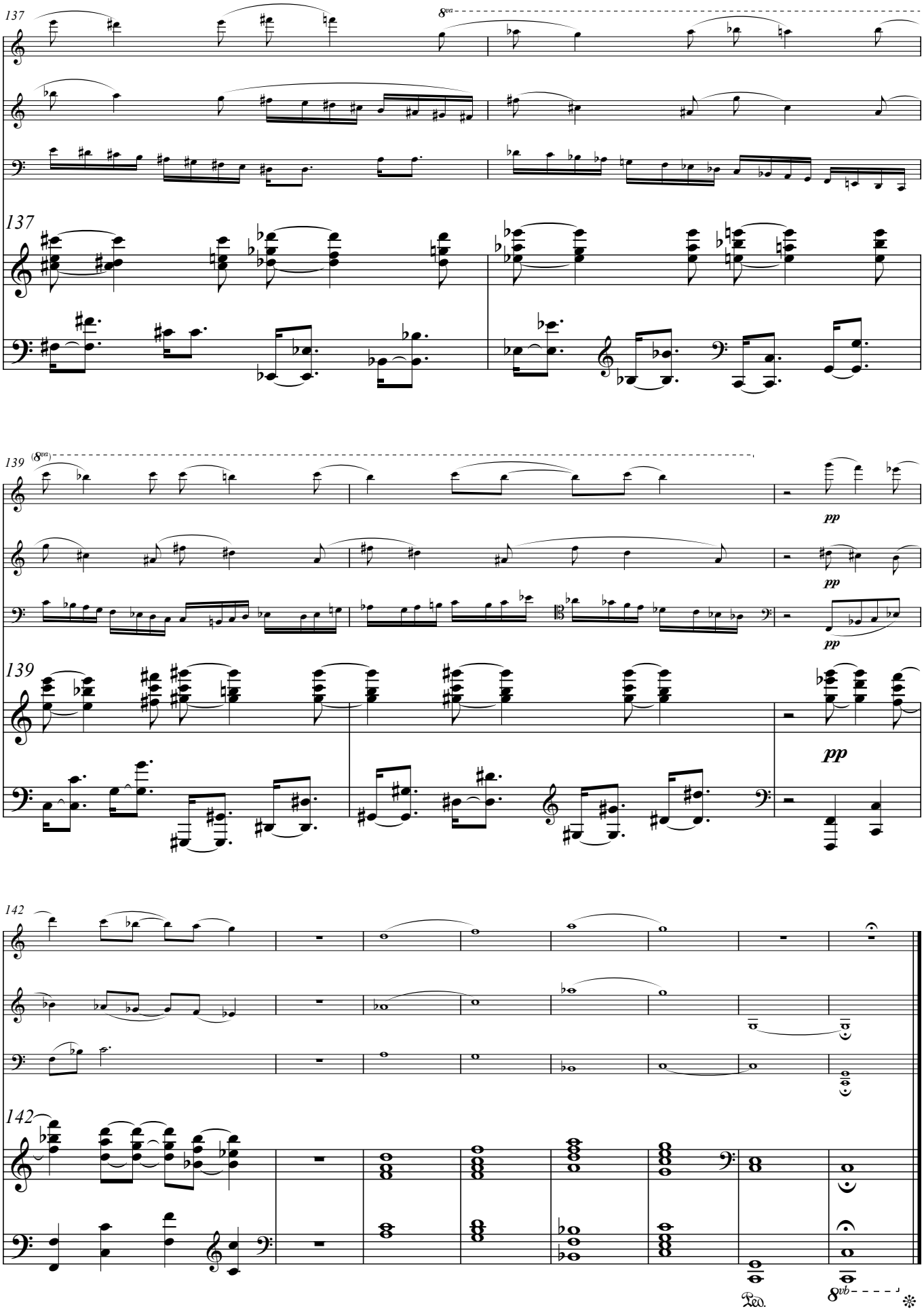

71
rit.
Adagio
(♩ = 56)
ff
mf
mp
p
pp
8va
(8vb)
77
83
Tempo I
(♩ = 80)

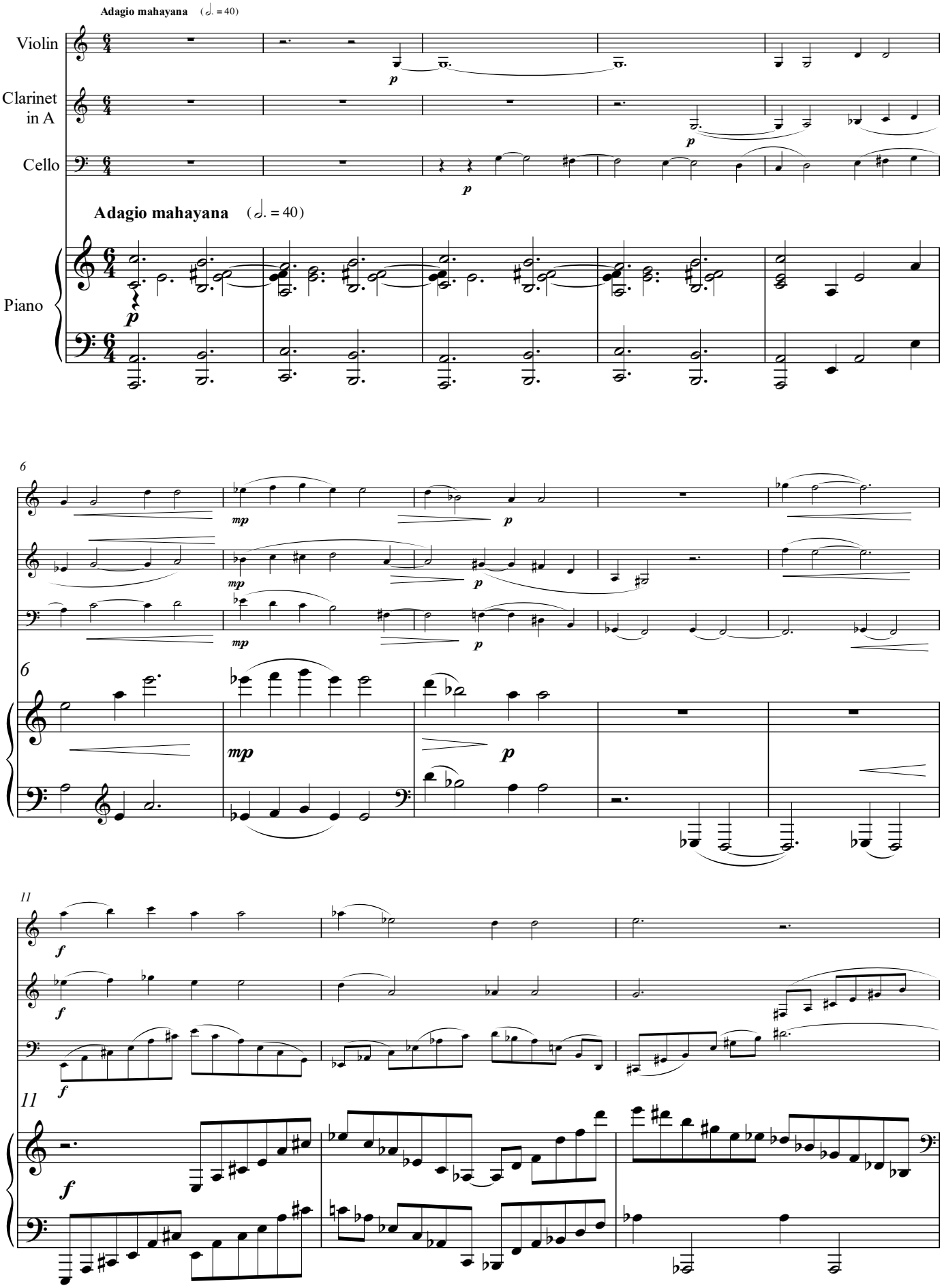

89
pp
p
mp
cresc. p. a p.
pizz.
arco
94
(mf)
(f)
ff
99
8vb
Ped.

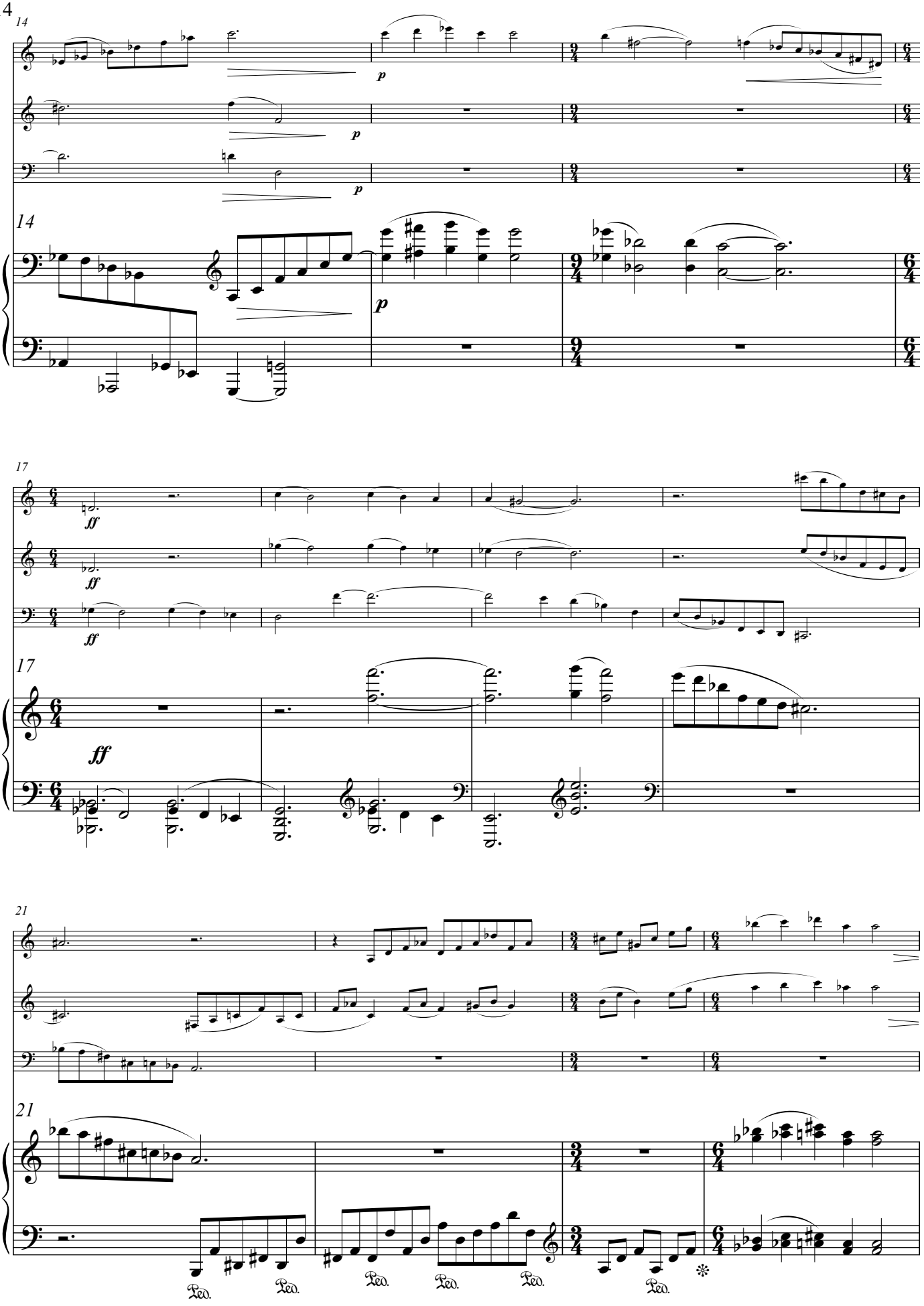

102
8va
104
106

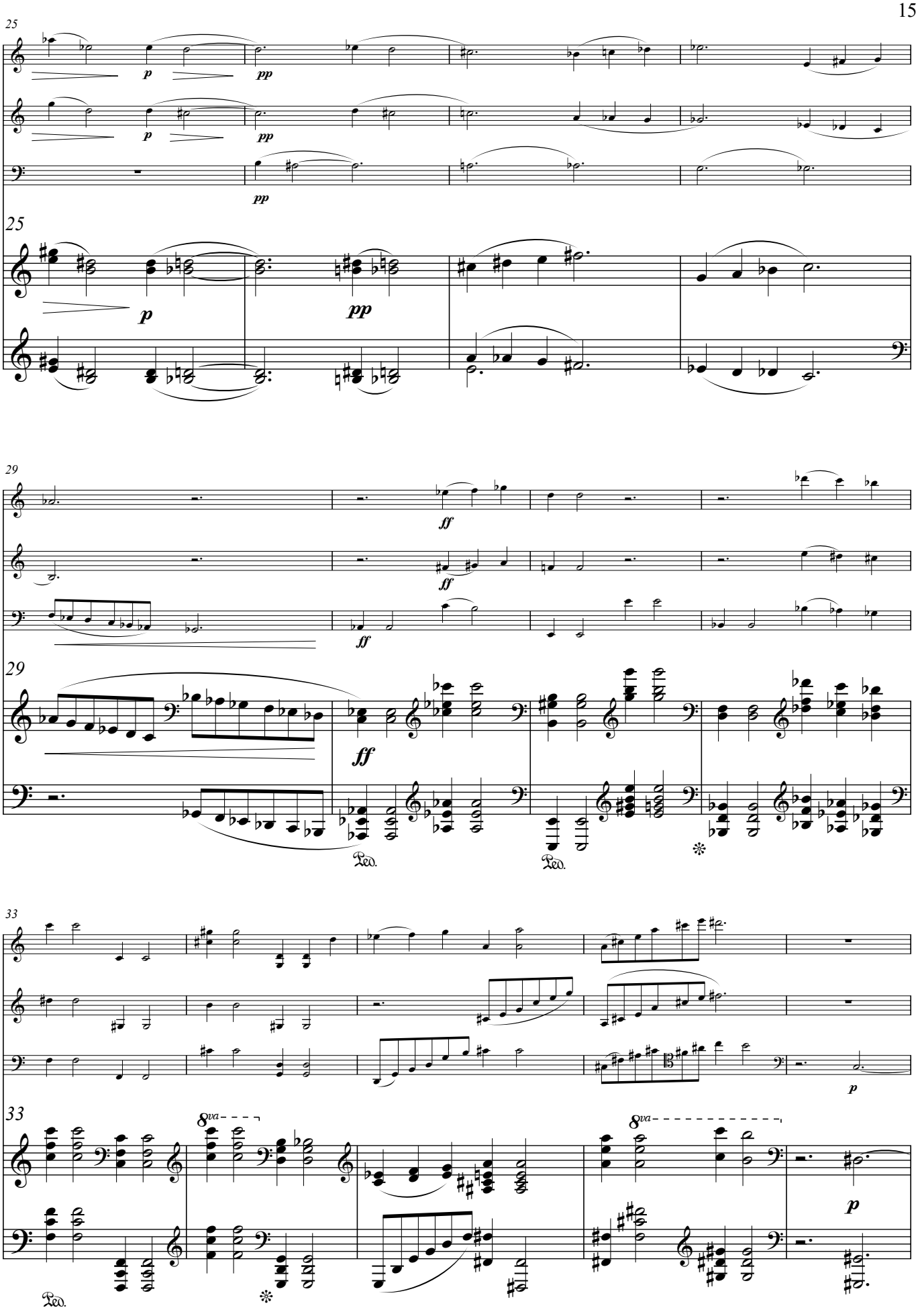

109
ff
p
p
109
8va
ff
p
f
115
115
p
123
123
p

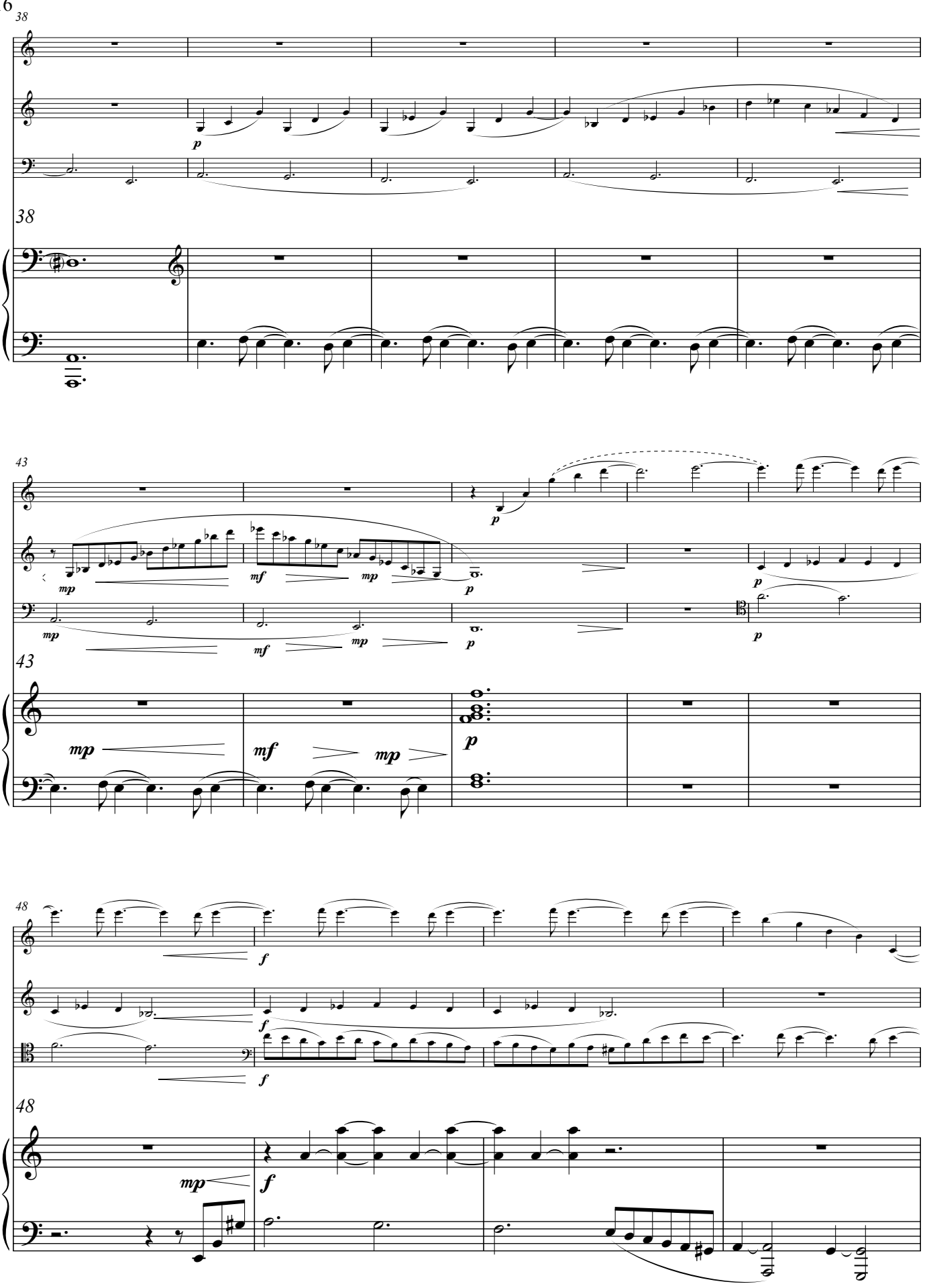

130
ff
ff
ff
130
ff
8vb
133
133
135
135

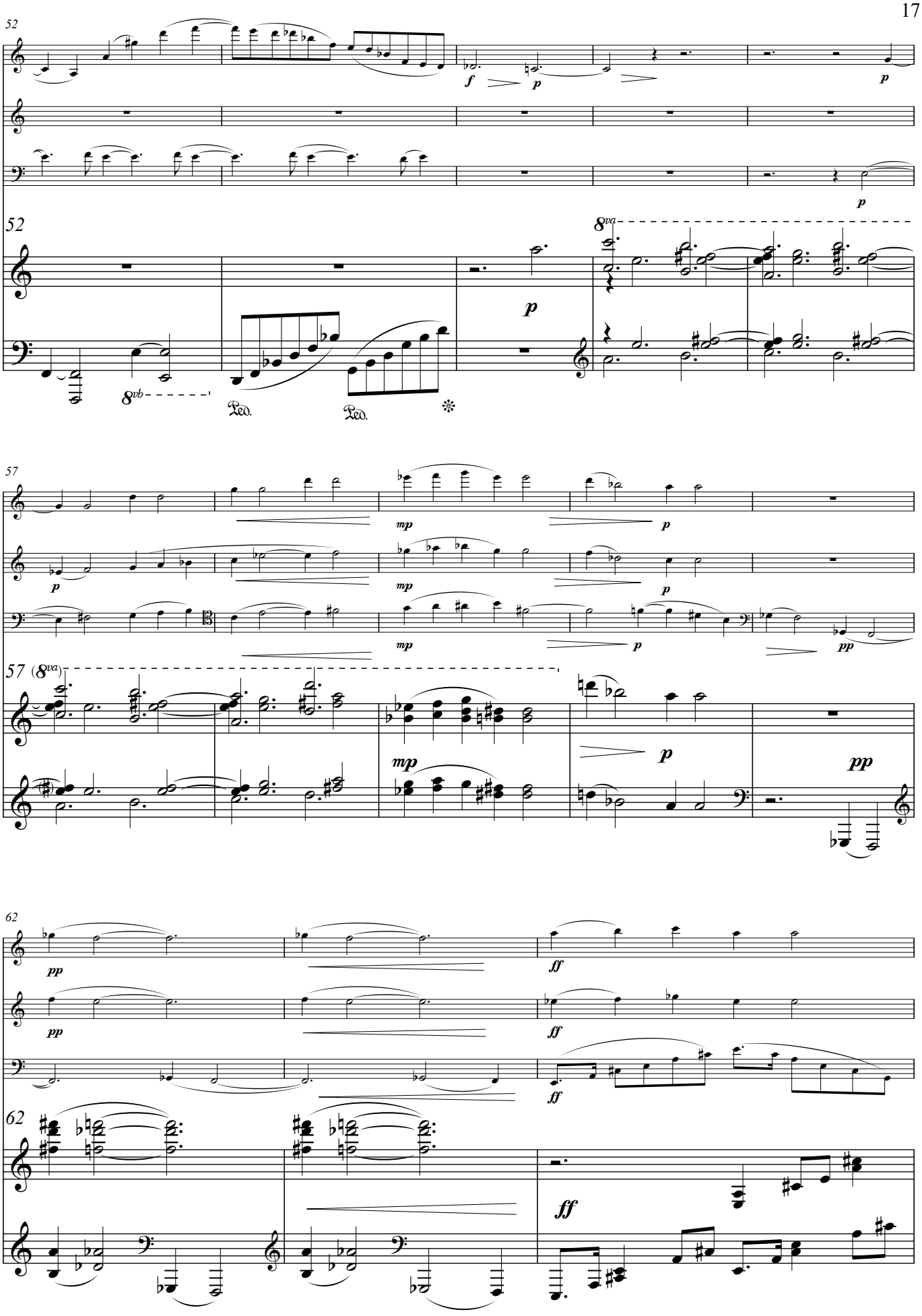

137
8va
137
139
(8va)
pp
pp
pp
139
pp
142
142
Ped.
8vb

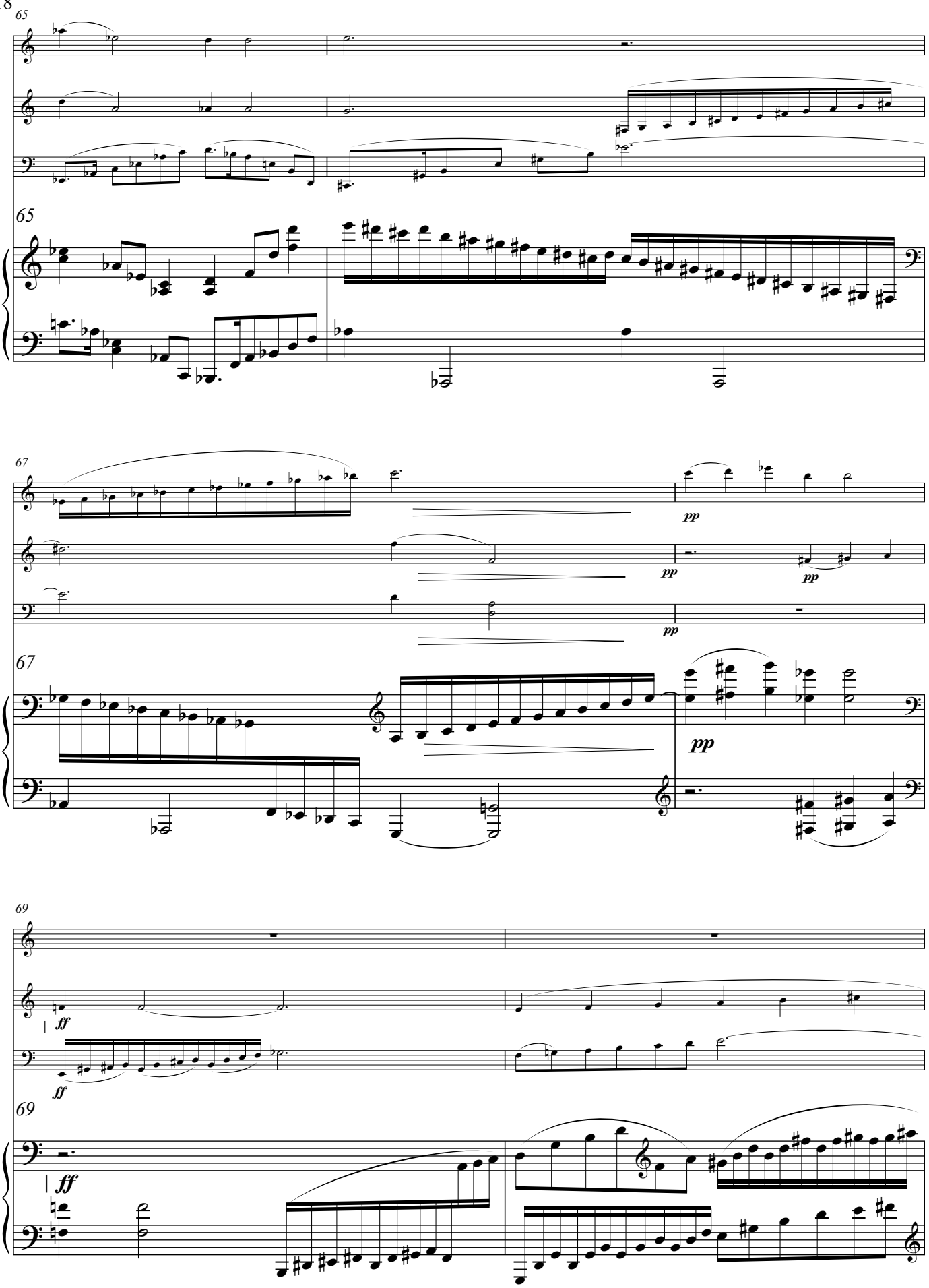

Adagio mahayana (𝅗𝅥. = 40)
Violin
Clarinet in A
Cello
Piano
Adagio mahayana (𝅗𝅥. = 40)
6
11

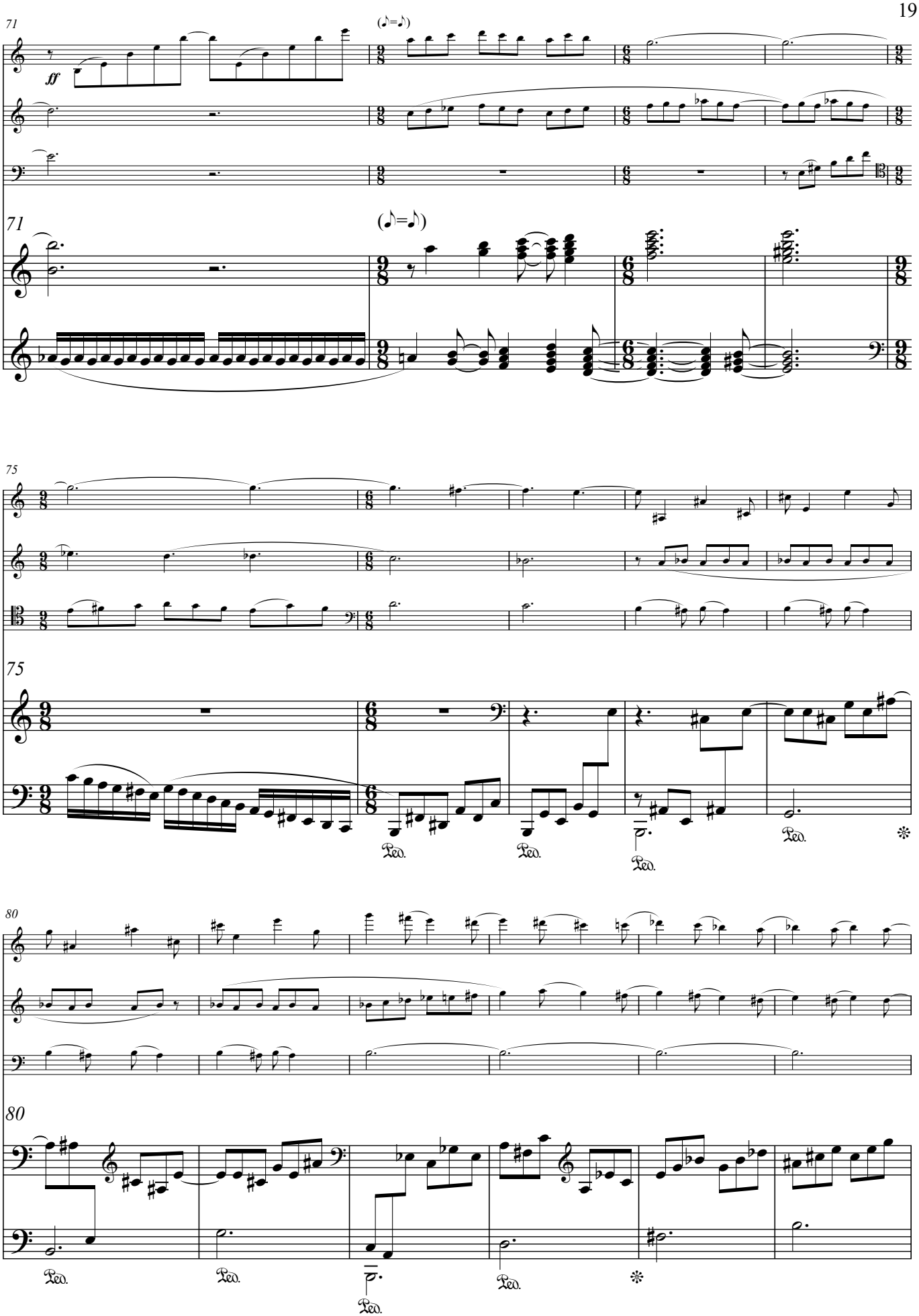

14
p
p
p
14
p
17
ff
ff
ff
17
ff
21
21
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

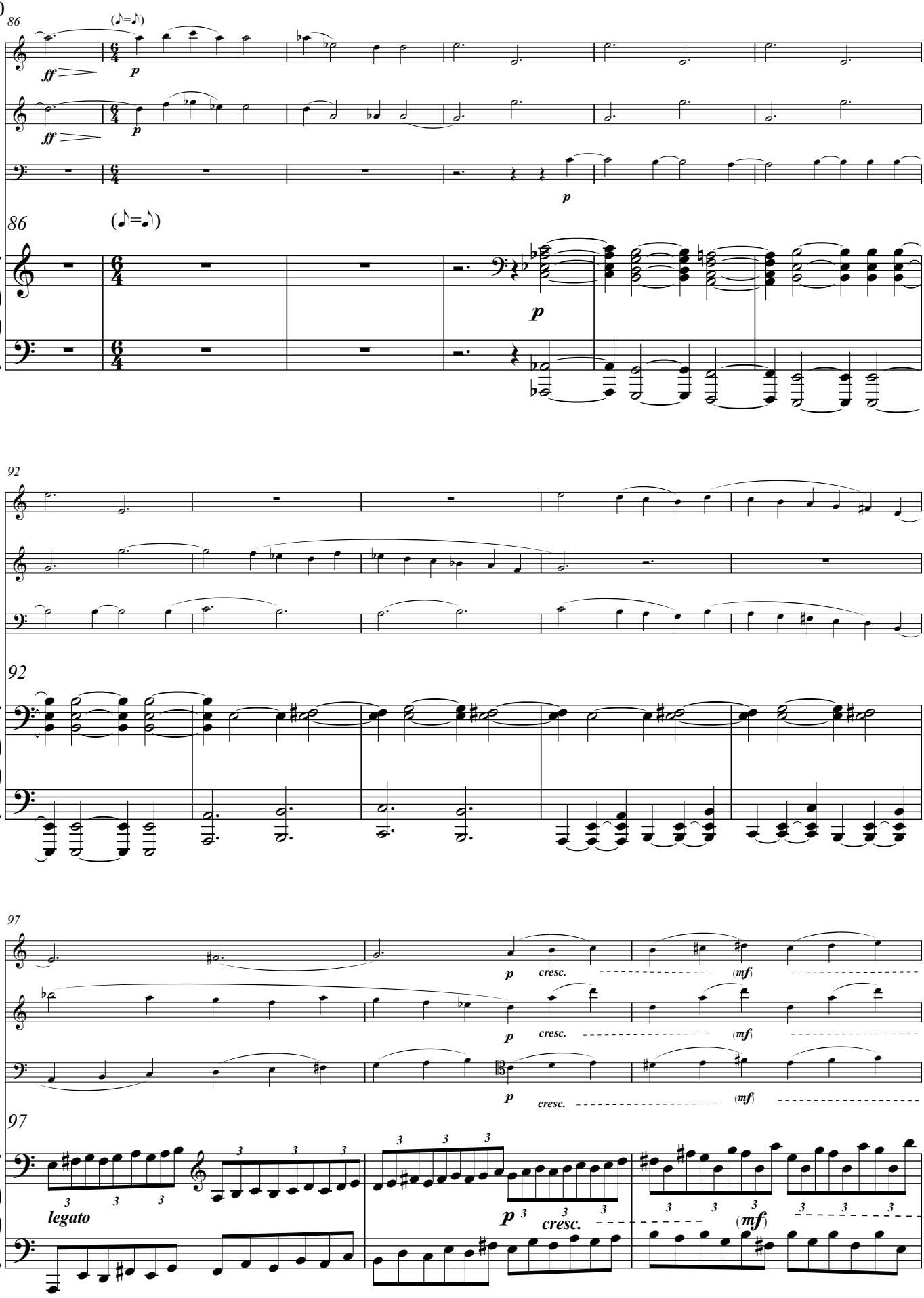

25
p
pp
25
p
pp
29
ff
ff
ff
29
Ped.
Ped.
33
8va
8va
p
p
33
Ped.

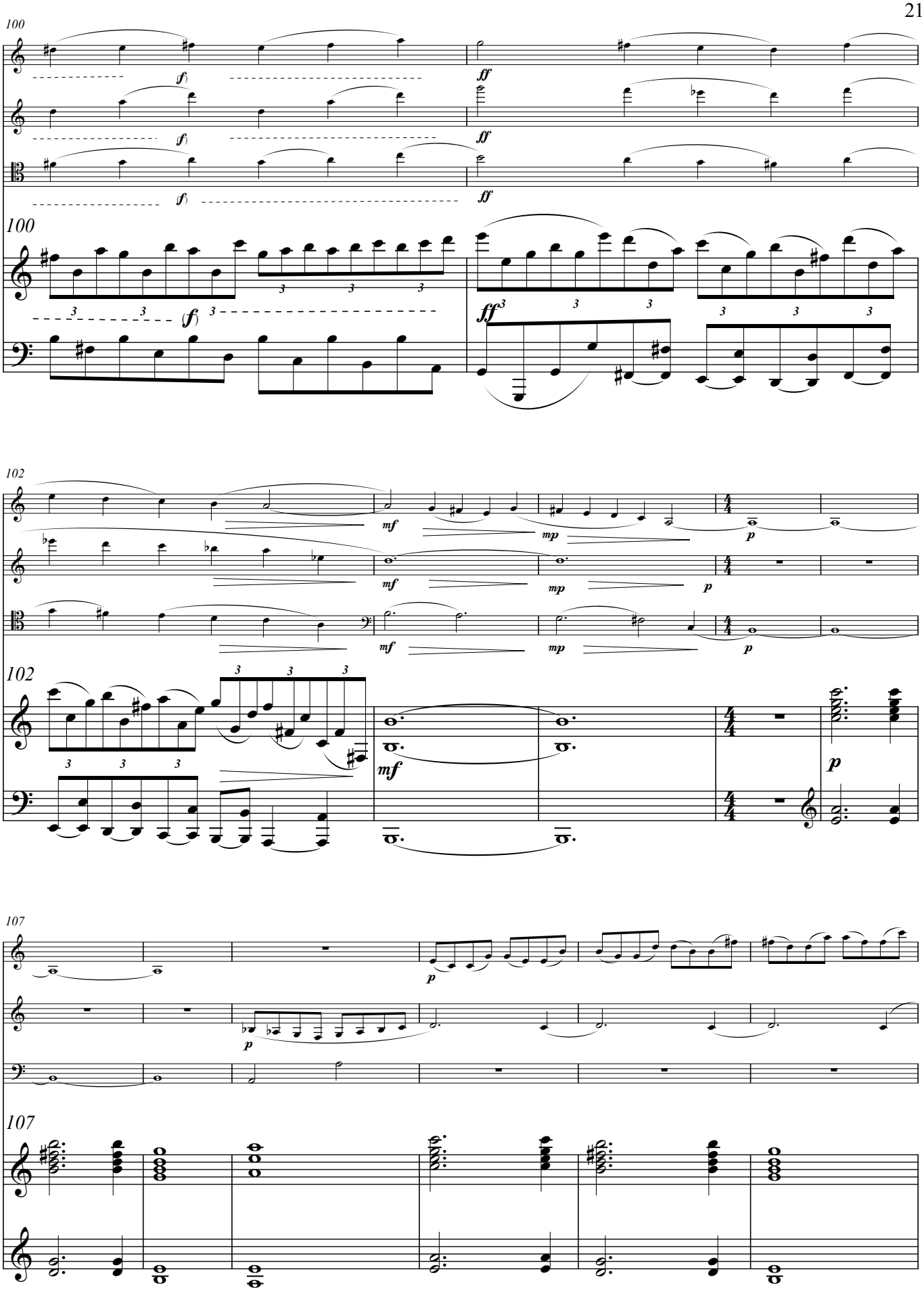

38
38
43
43
48
48

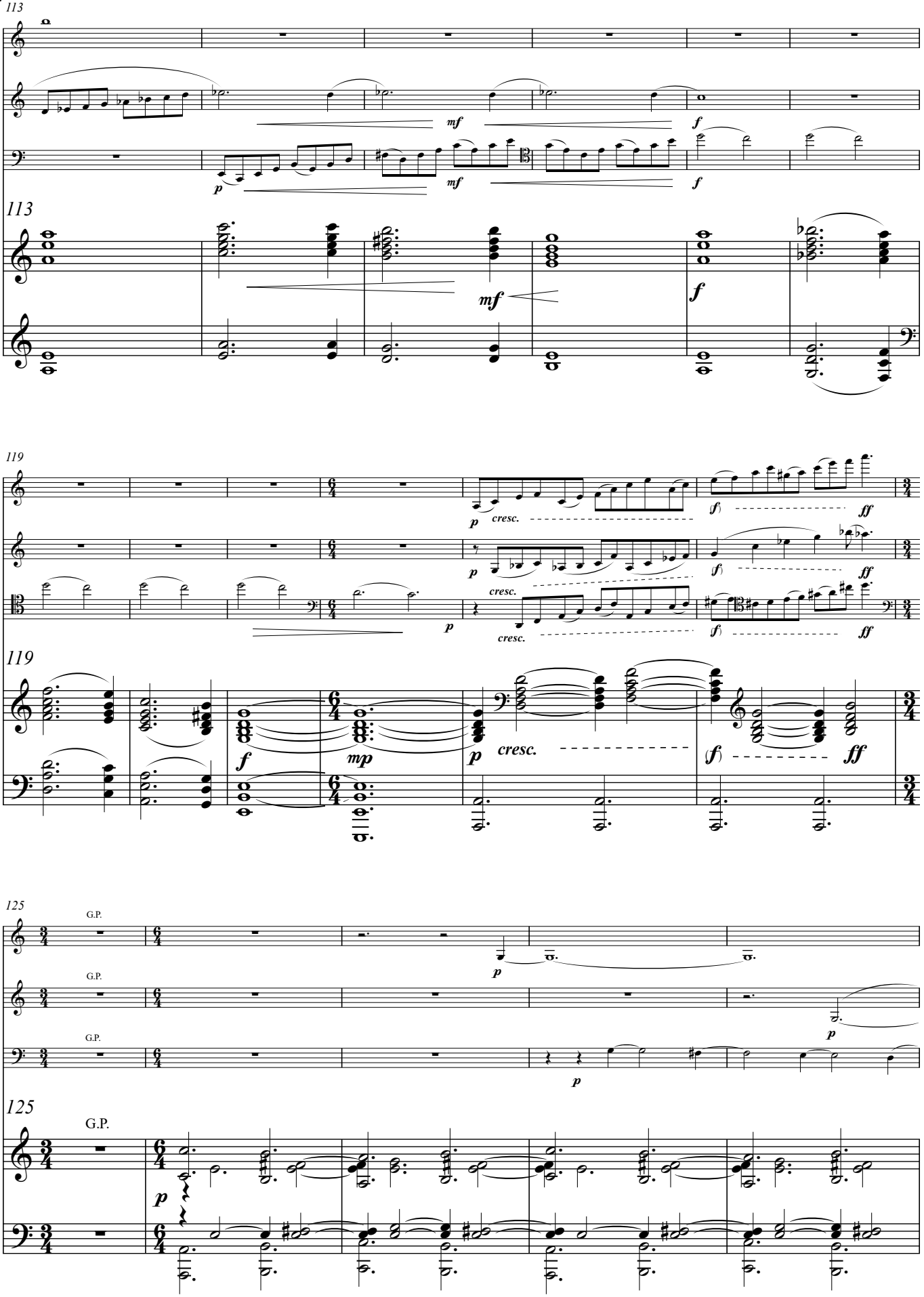

52
f
p
p
52
8va
p
8vb
Ped.
Ped.
57
mp
p
mp
p
mp
p
pp
57 (8va)
mp
p
pp
62
pp
ff
pp
ff
ff
62
ff

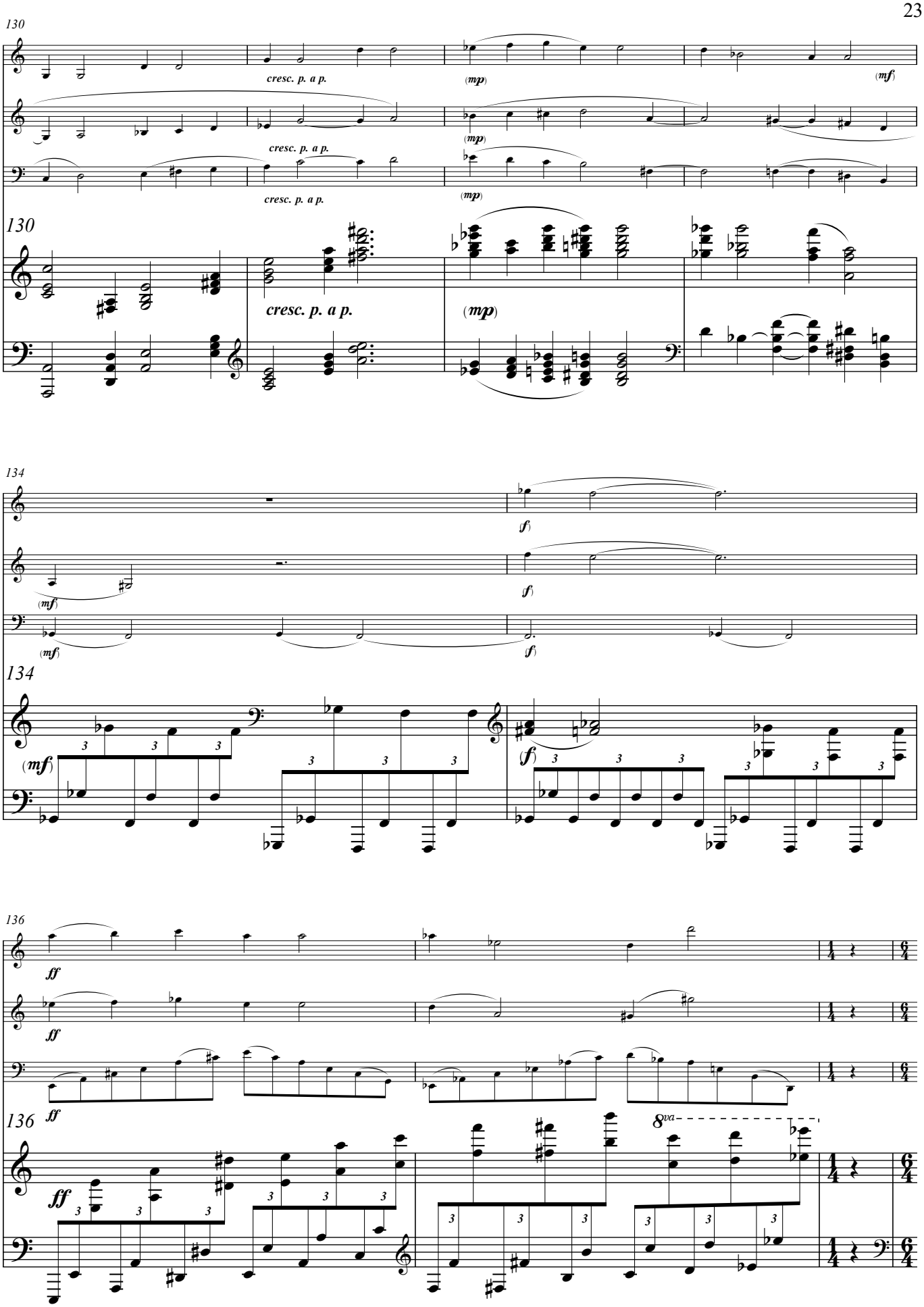

65
65
67
67
pp
pp
pp
pp
69
69
ff
ff
ff

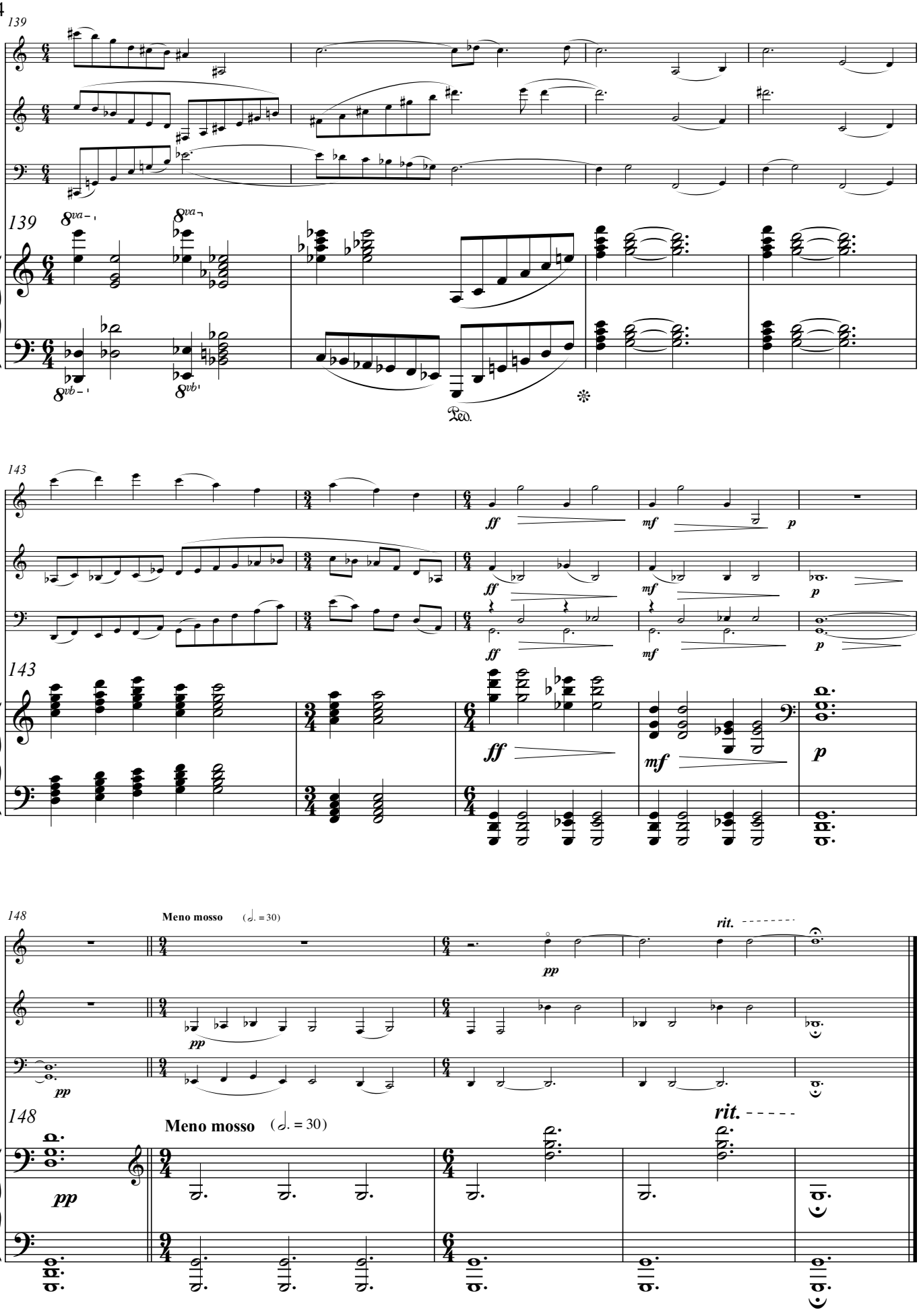

71
ff
(♪=♪)
71
(♪=♪)
75
75
80
80

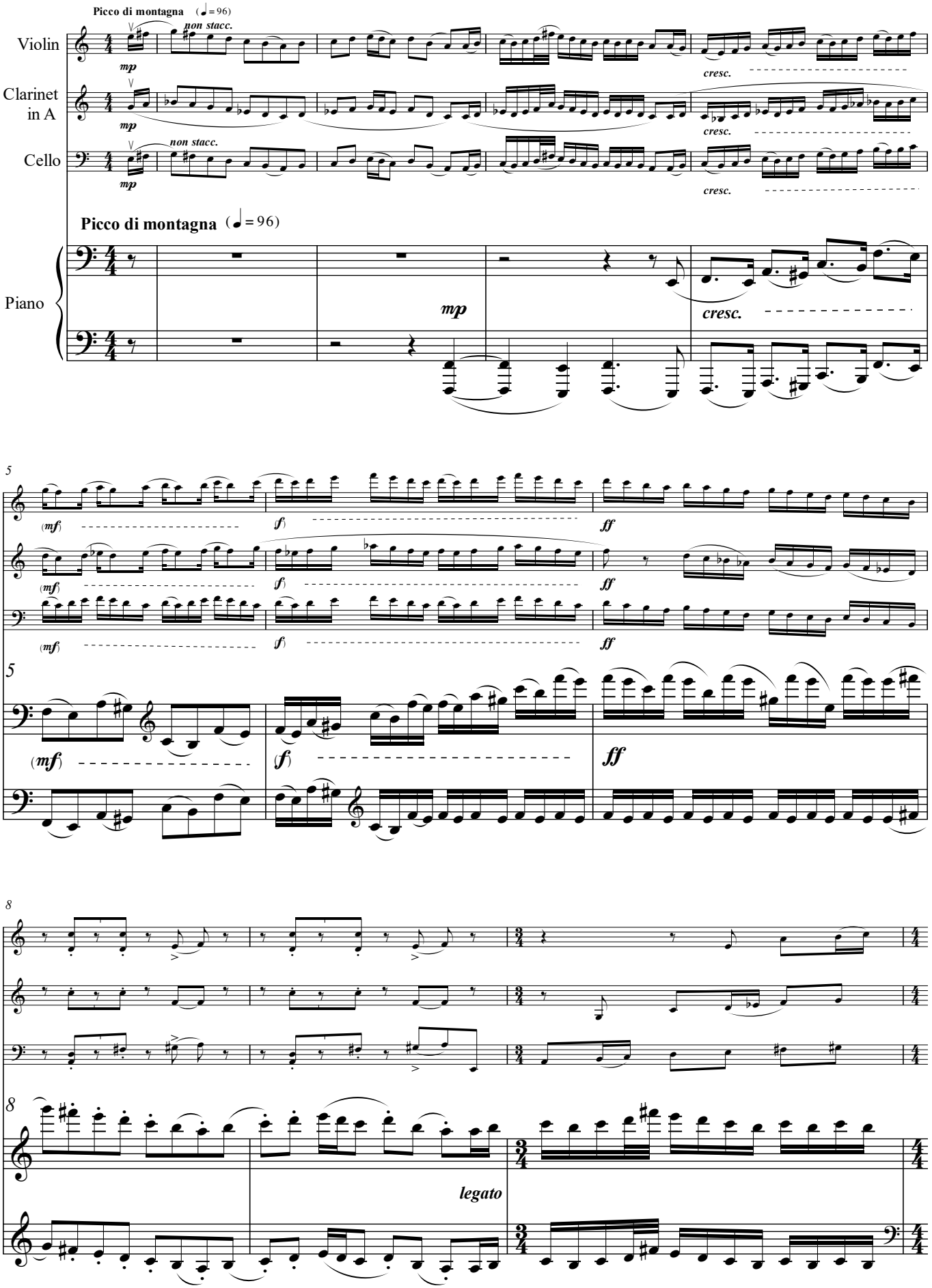

86
(♪=♪)
ff
p
86
(♪=♪)
p
92
92
97
p
cresc.
(mf)
97
legato
p
cresc.
(mf)

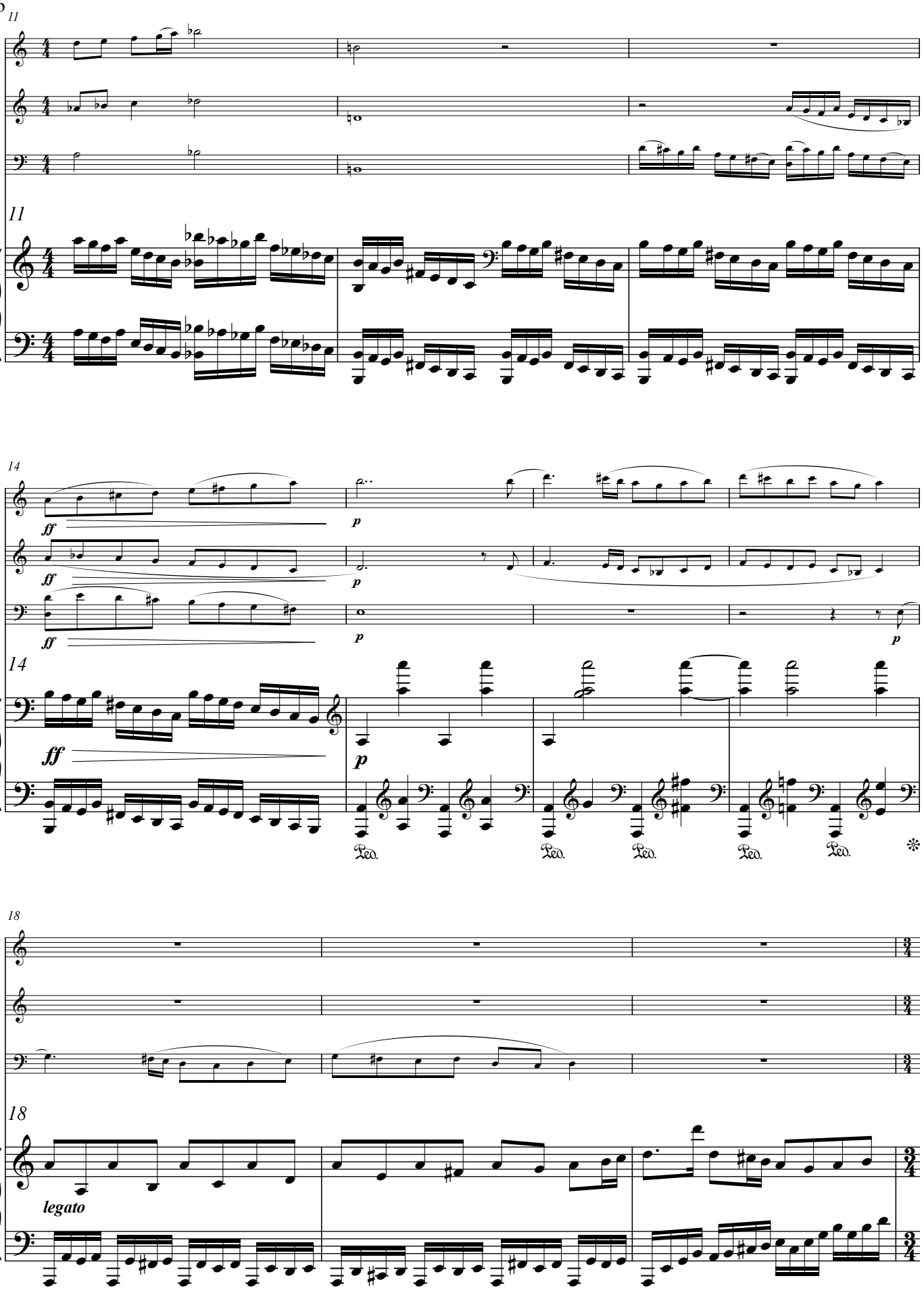

100
102
107

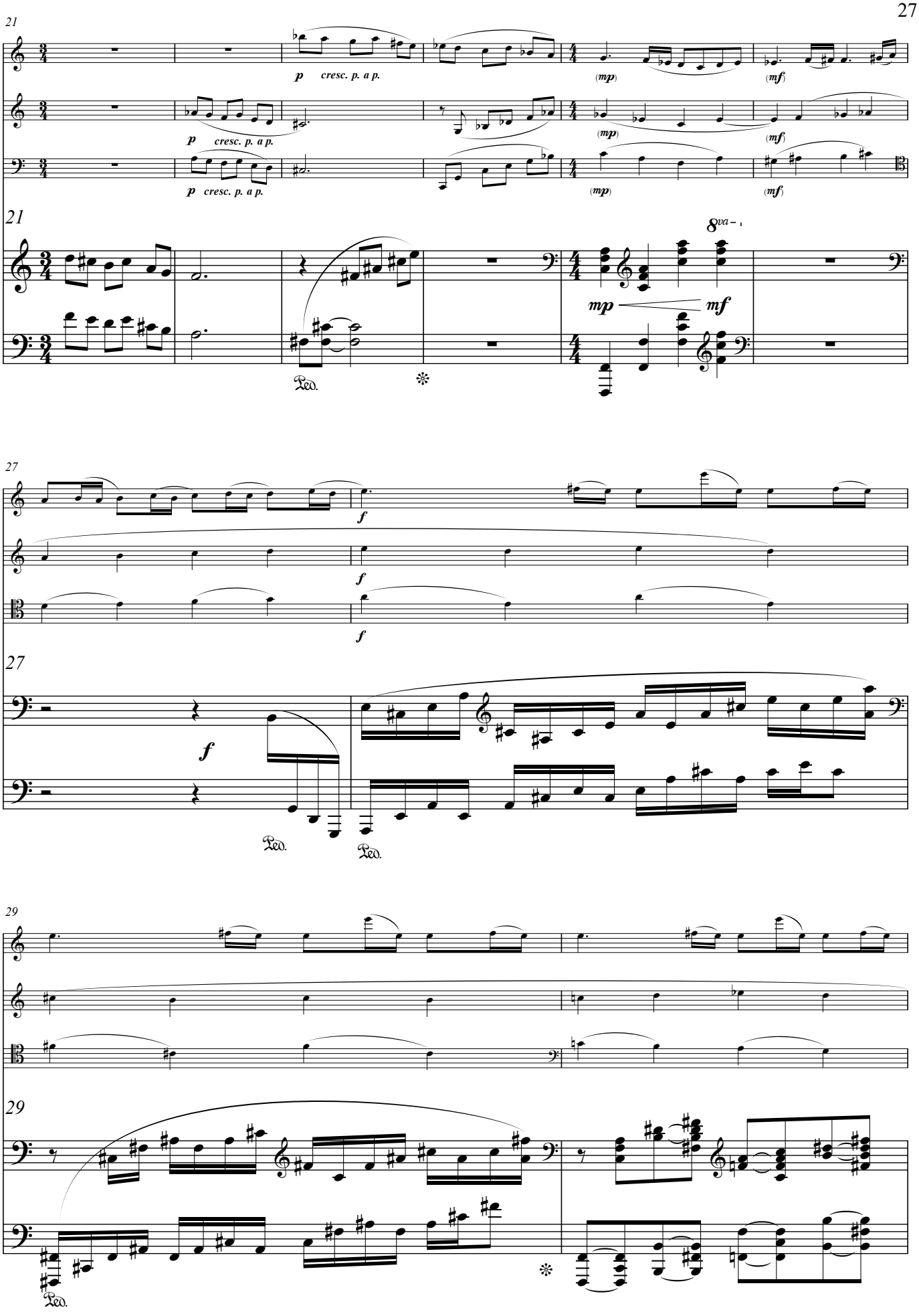

113
mf
f
p
mf
f
113
mf
f
119
p
cresc.
f
ff
p
cresc.
f
ff
p
cresc.
f
ff
119
f
mp
p
cresc.
f
ff
125
G.P.
G.P.
G.P.
p
p
125
G.P.
p

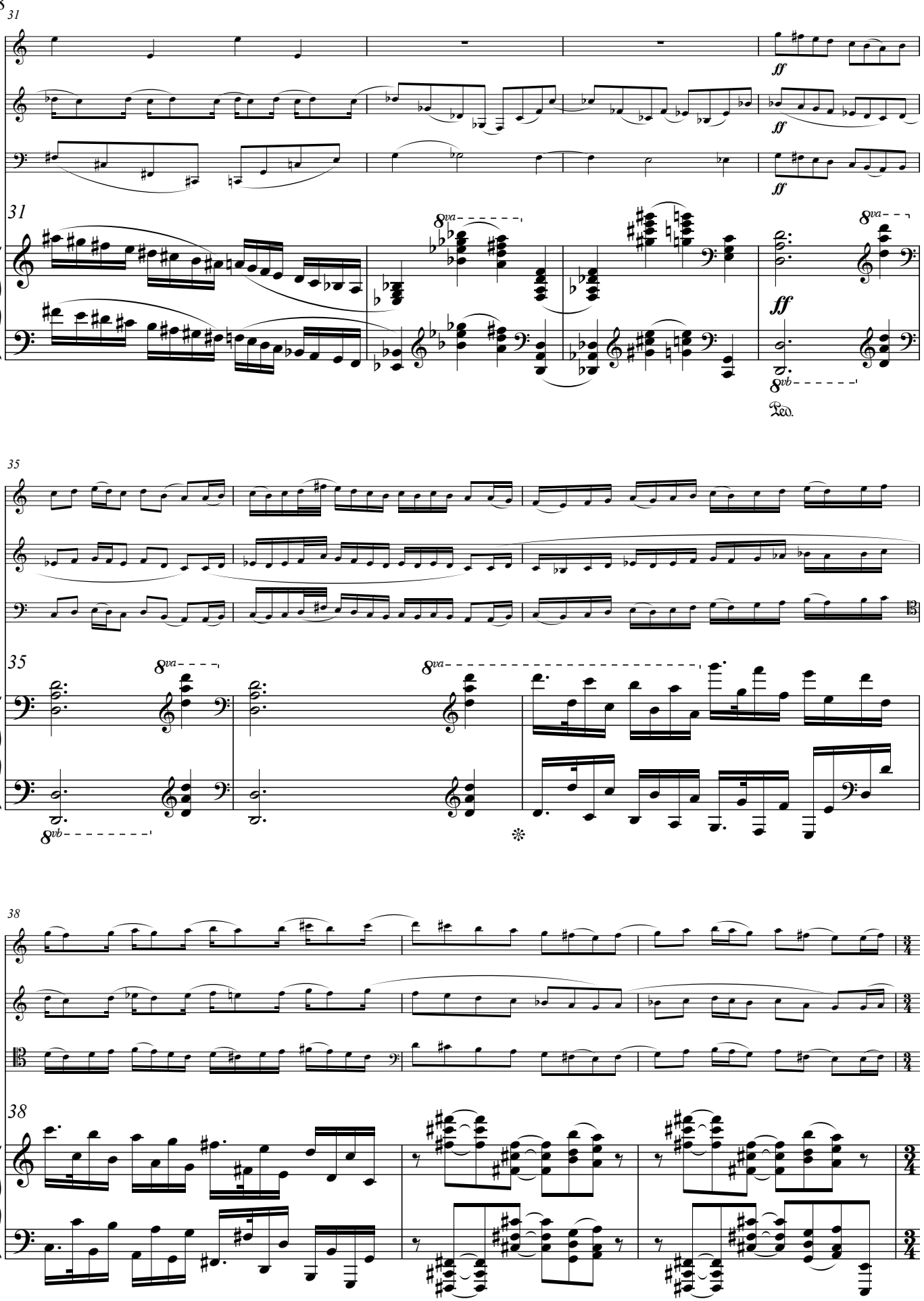

130
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
(mf)
134
(f)
136
ff
8va

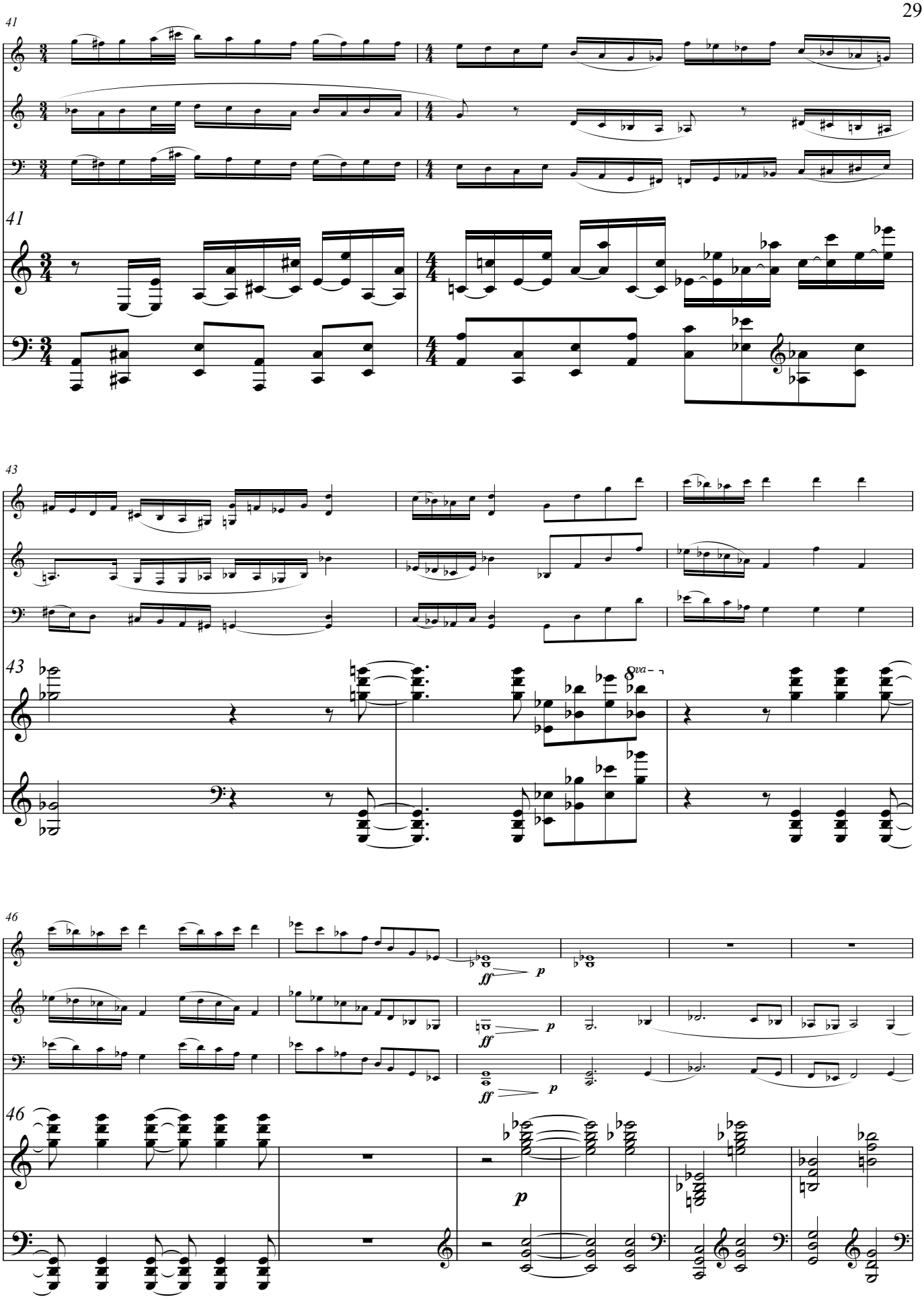

139
8va
8vb
Ped.
143
ff
mf
p
148
Meno mosso
(𝅗𝅥. = 30)
rit.
pp


Picco di montagna (♩= 96)
non stacc.
Violin
mp
cresc.
Clarinet in A
mp
cresc.
Cello
non stacc.
mp
cresc.
Picco di montagna (♩= 96)
Piano
mp
cresc.
5
(mf)
f
ff
5
(mf)
f
ff
8
legato

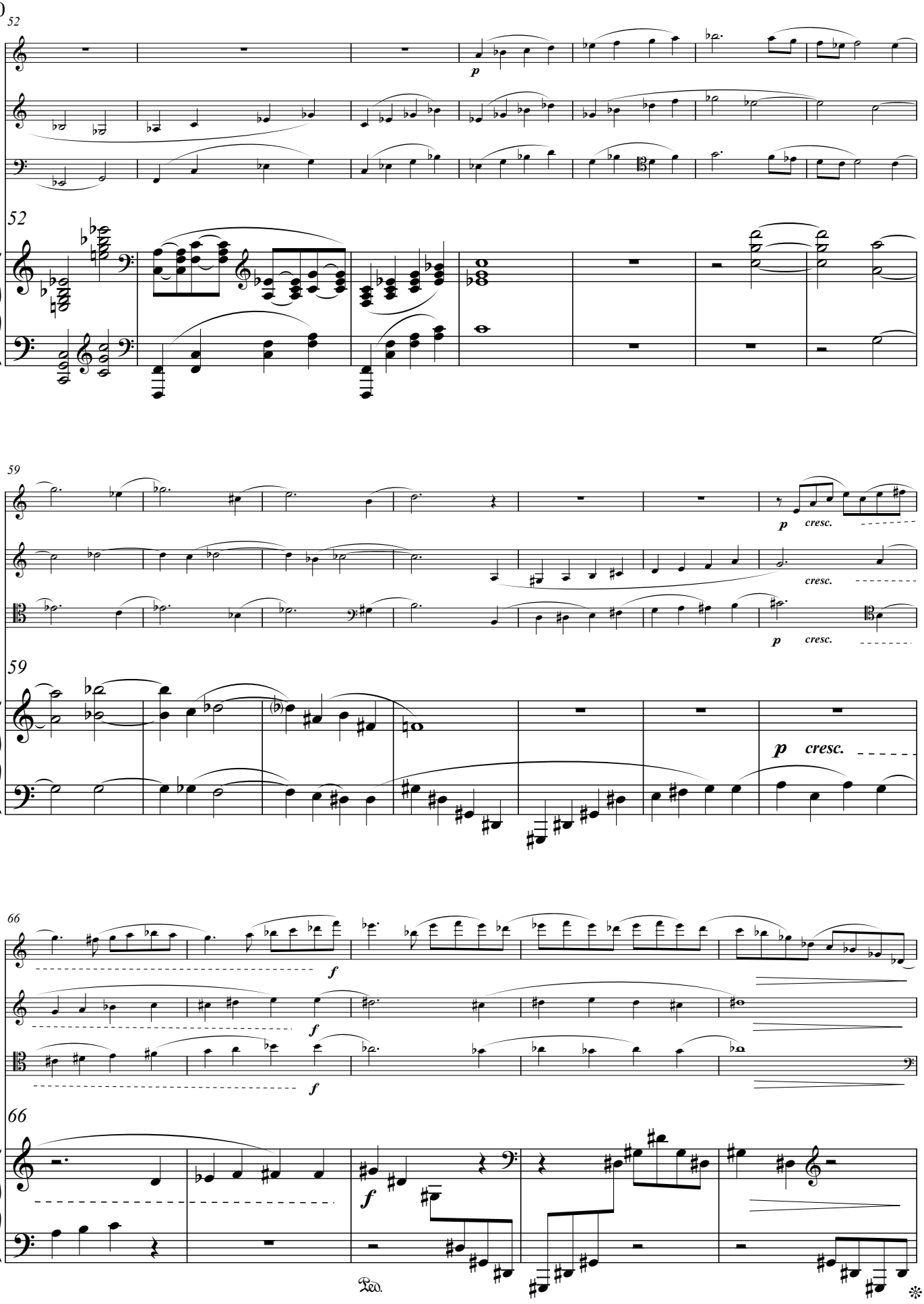

11
11
14
ff
p
14
ff
p
Ped.
18
18
legato

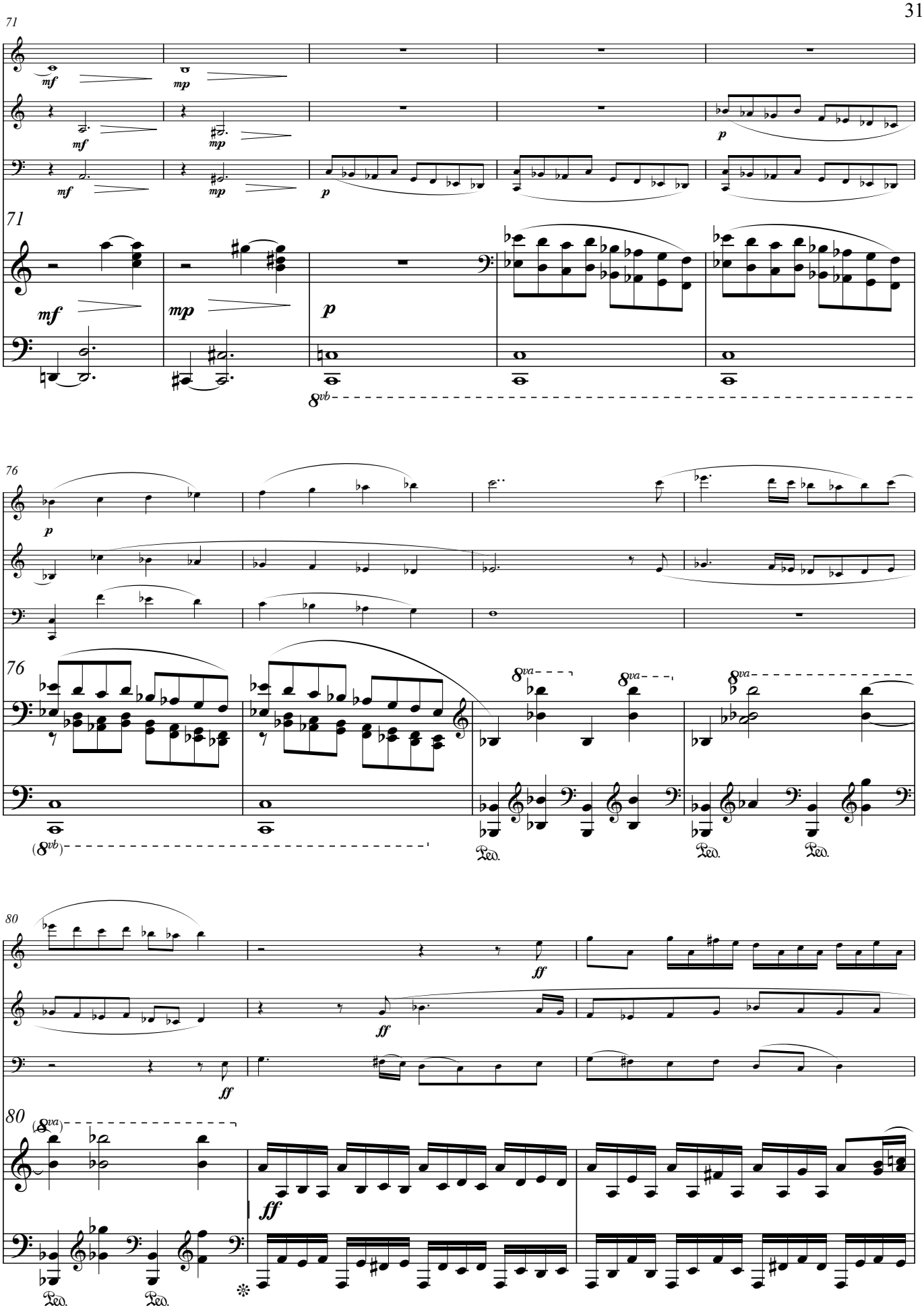

21
p cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
(mf)
8va
mp
mf
27
f
29
Ped.

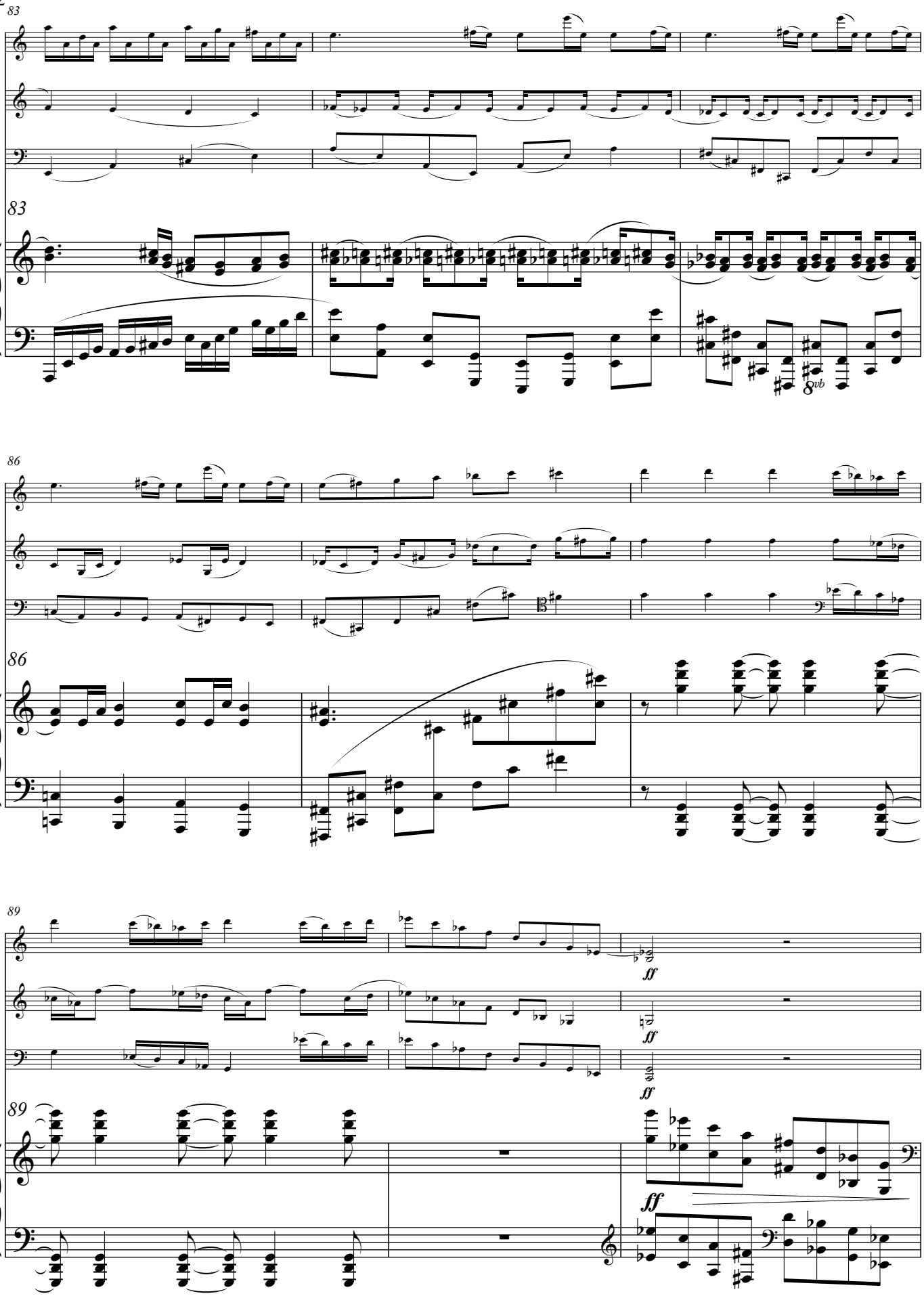

31
ff
ff
ff
31
8va
8va
8vb
Ped.
35
35
8va
8va
8vb
38
38
3/4
3/4

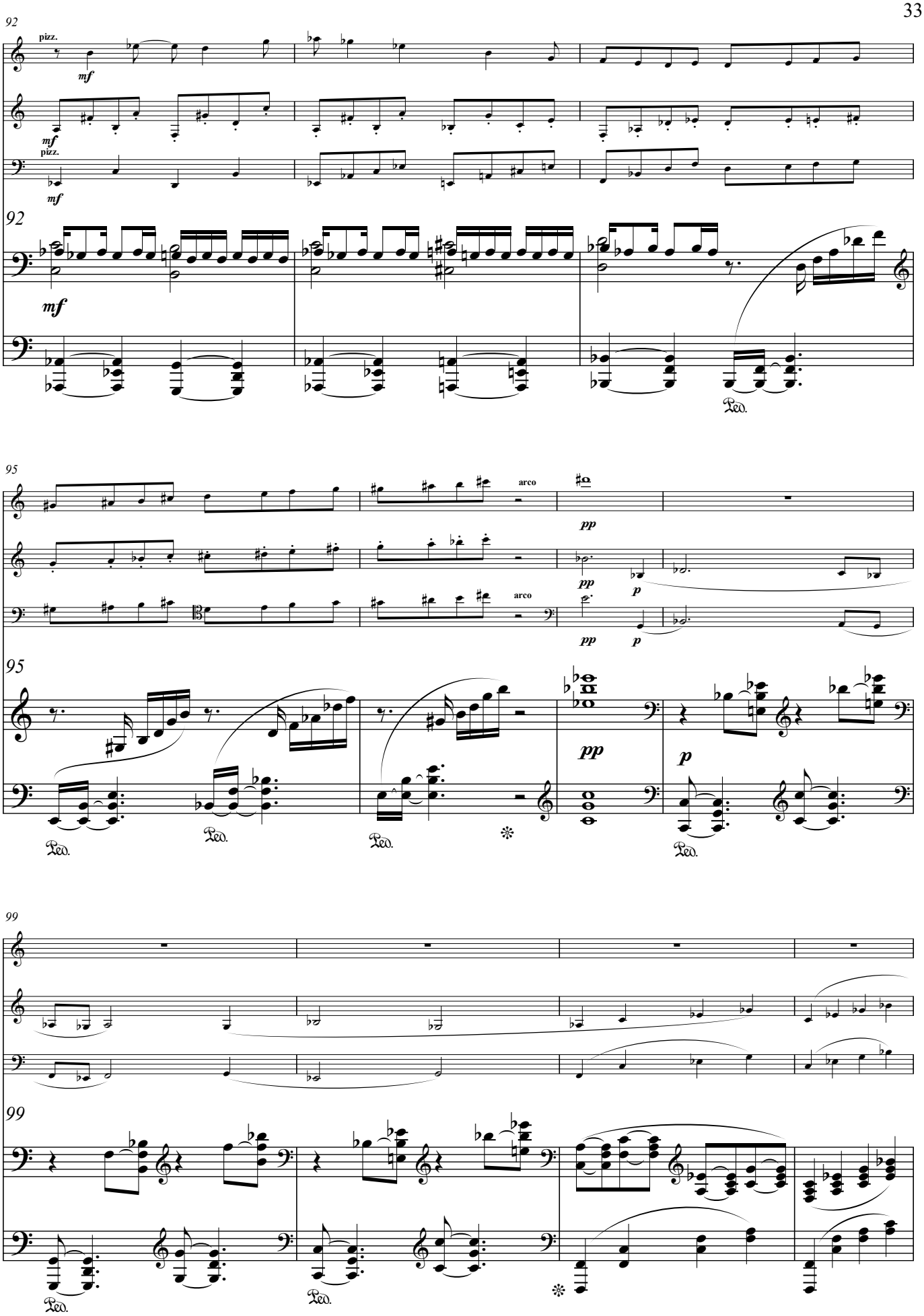

41
41
43
43
8va
46
ff
p
46
p

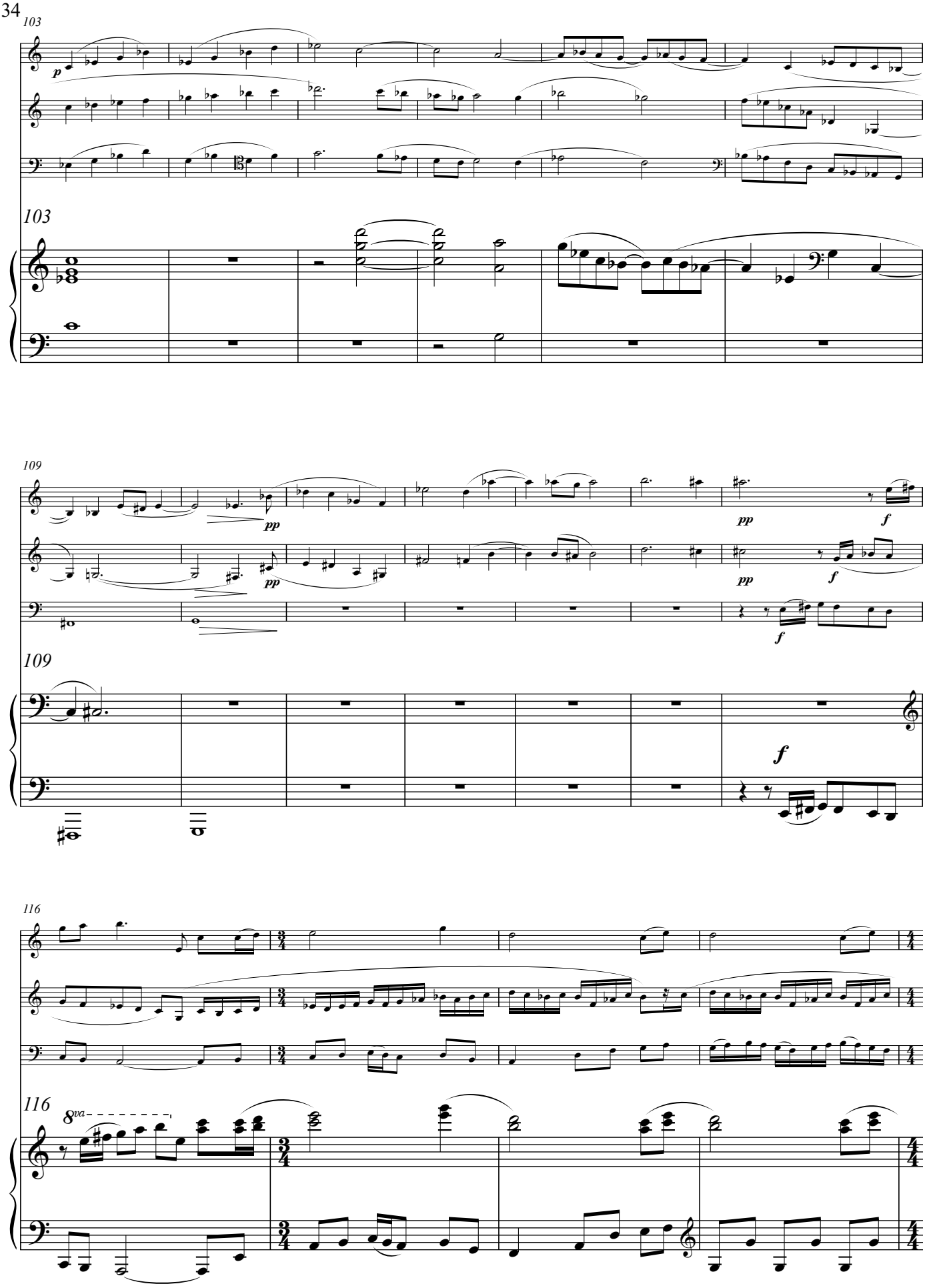
30

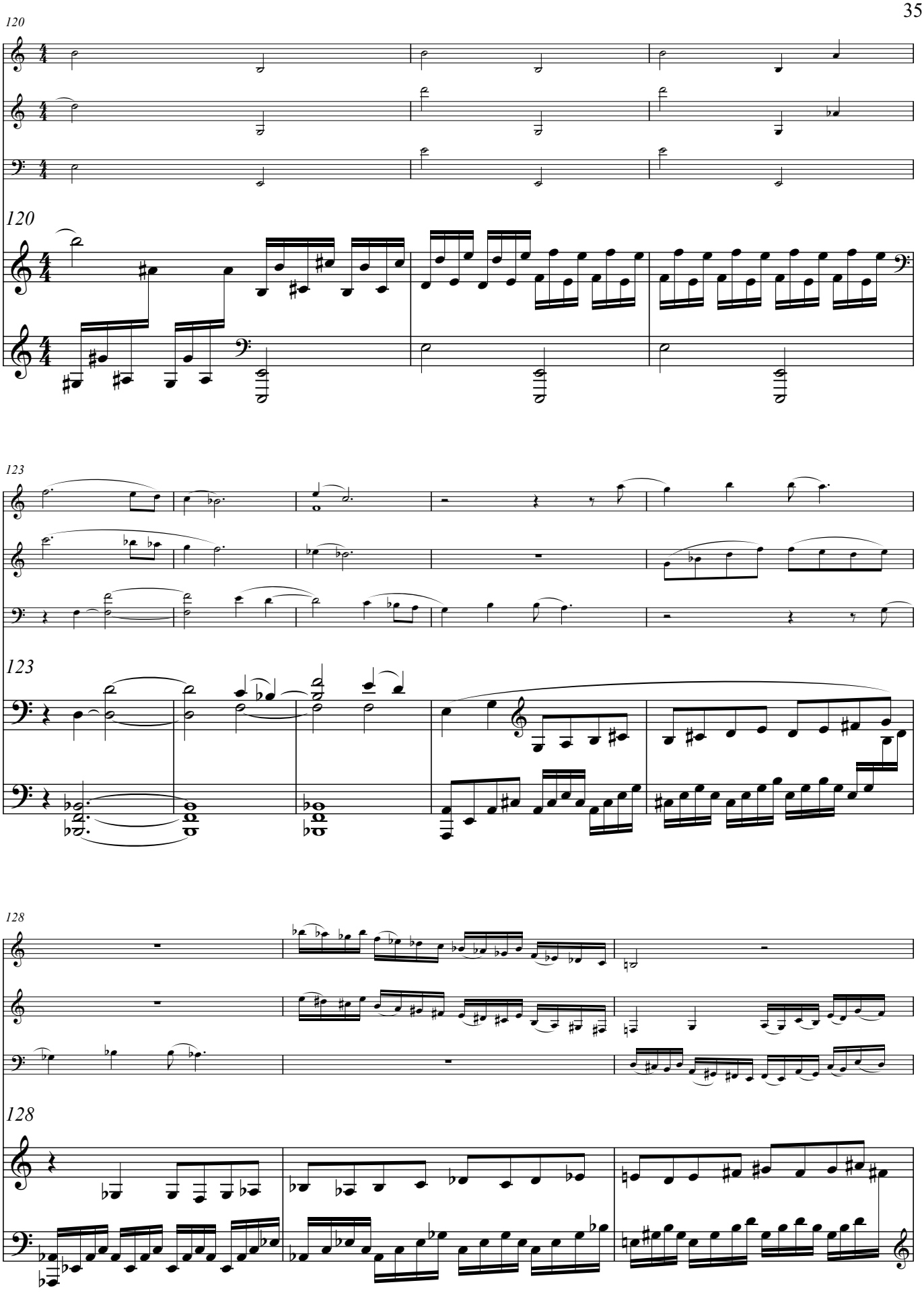


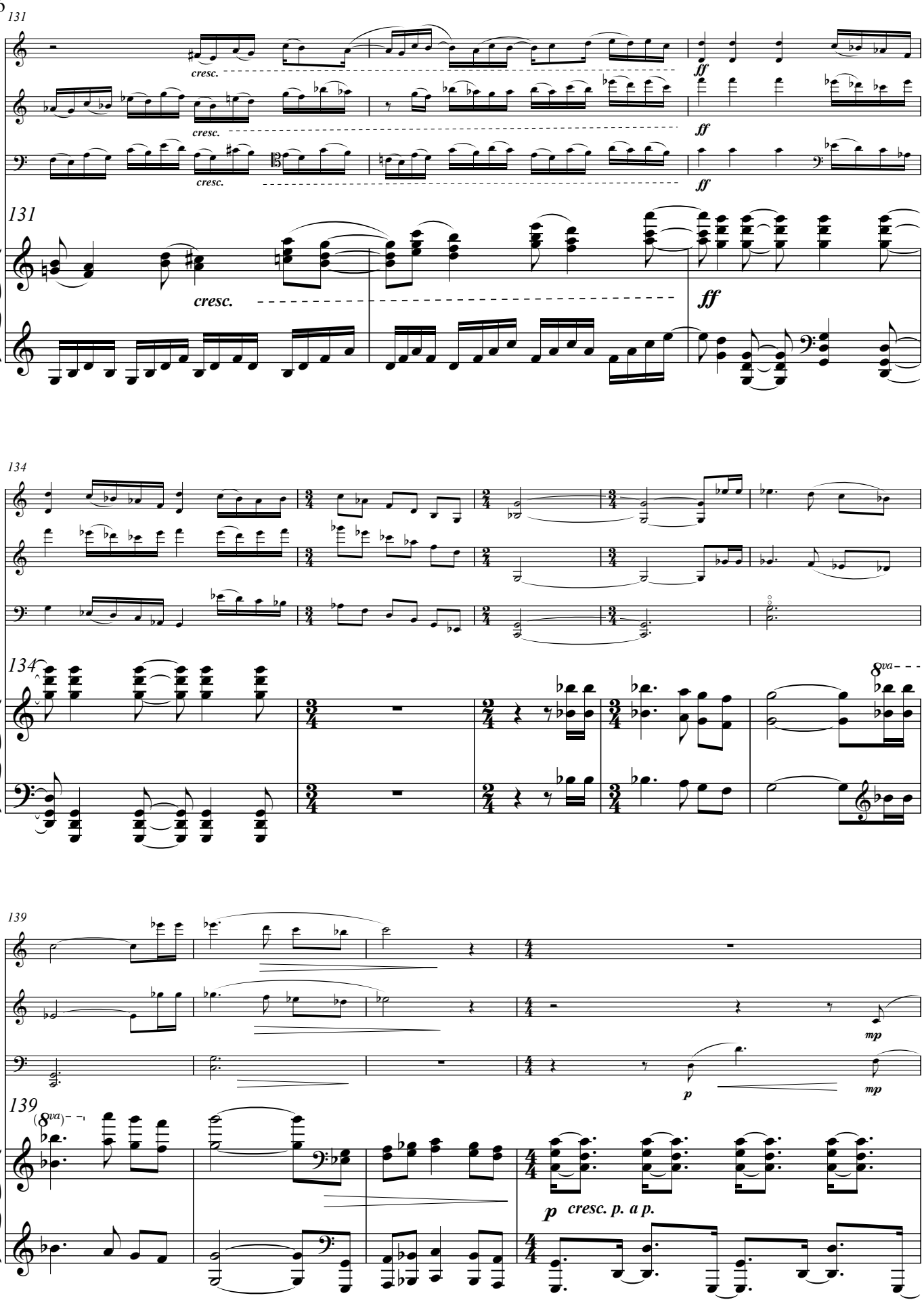

71
mf
mp
p
71
mf
mp
p
8vb
76
p
76
8va
8va
8va
(8vb)
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
80
ff
ff
ff
80
(8va)
ff
Ped.
Ped.

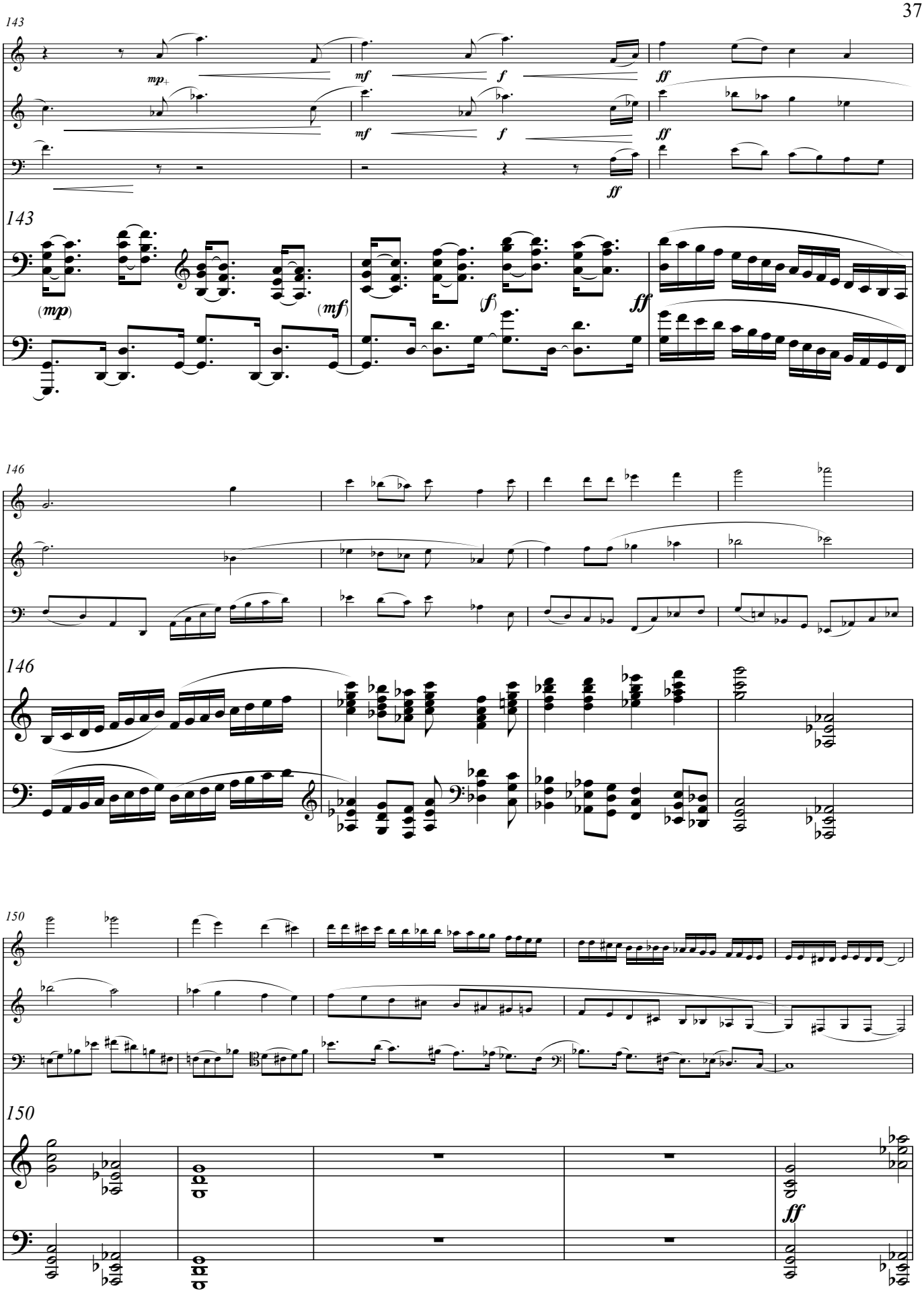

83
8vb
86
89
ff
ff
ff
ff

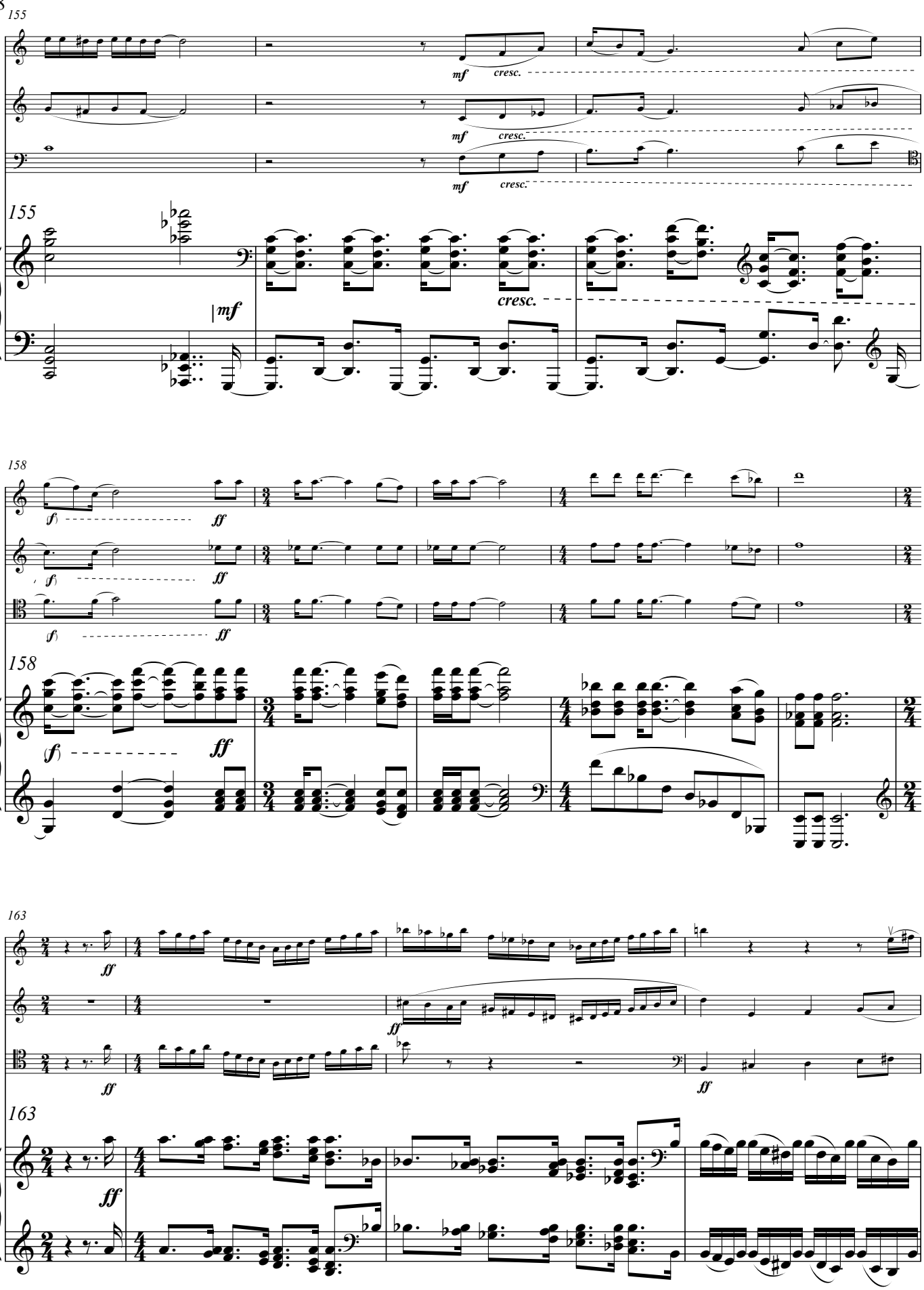

92
pizz.
mf
mf
pizz.
mf
92
mf
Ped.
95
arco
arco
pp
pp
p
pp
p
95
pp
p
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
99
99
Ped.
Ped.

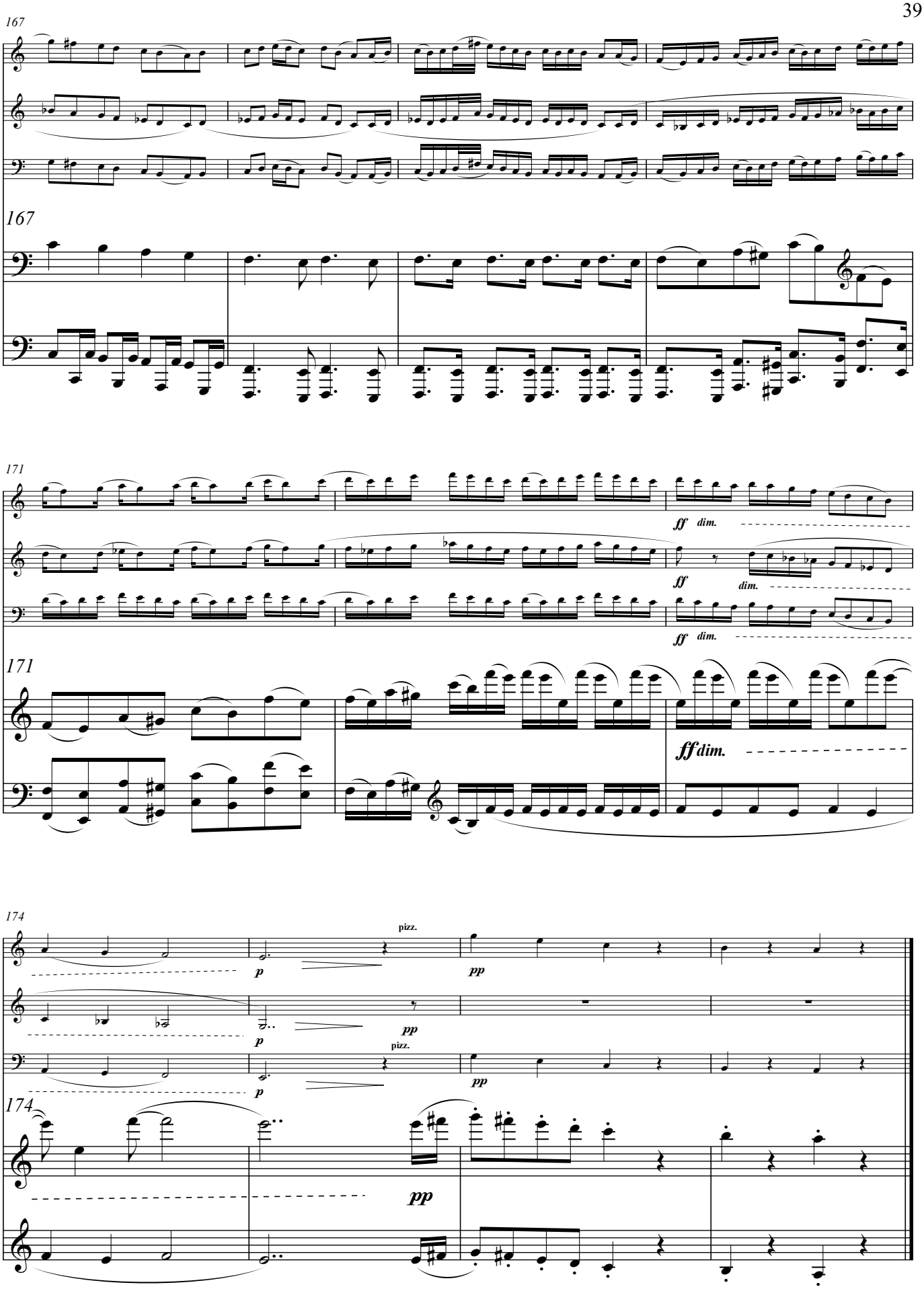

103
p
103
109
pp
pp
f
pp
f
f
109
f
116
8va
116


120
120
123
123
128
128


131
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
ff
ff
ff
131
cresc.
ff
134
134
8va
139
mp
p
mp
139
(8va)
p
cresc. p. a p.

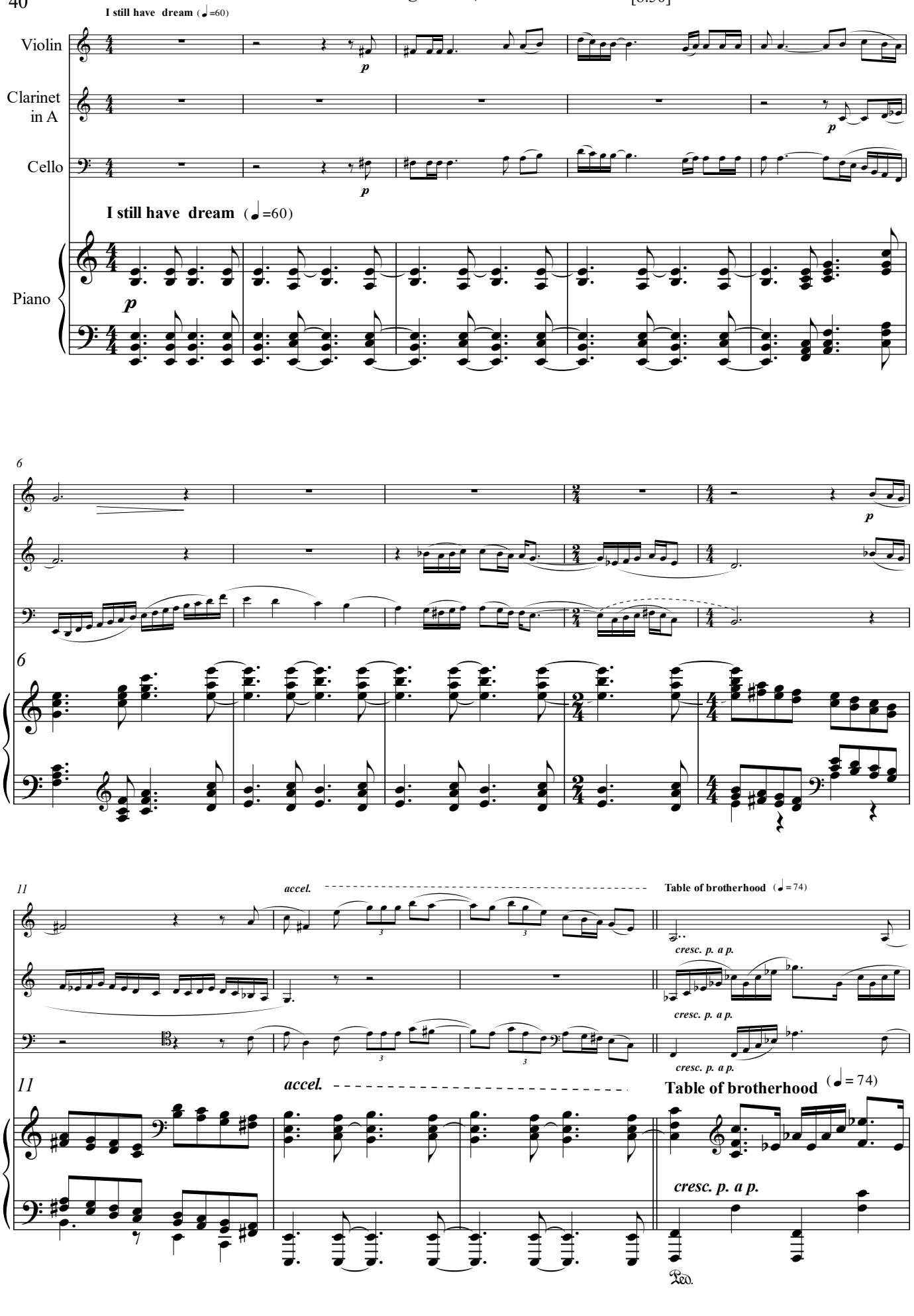

143
mp+
mf
f
ff
143
(mp)
(mf)
(f)
ff
146
146
150
150
ff

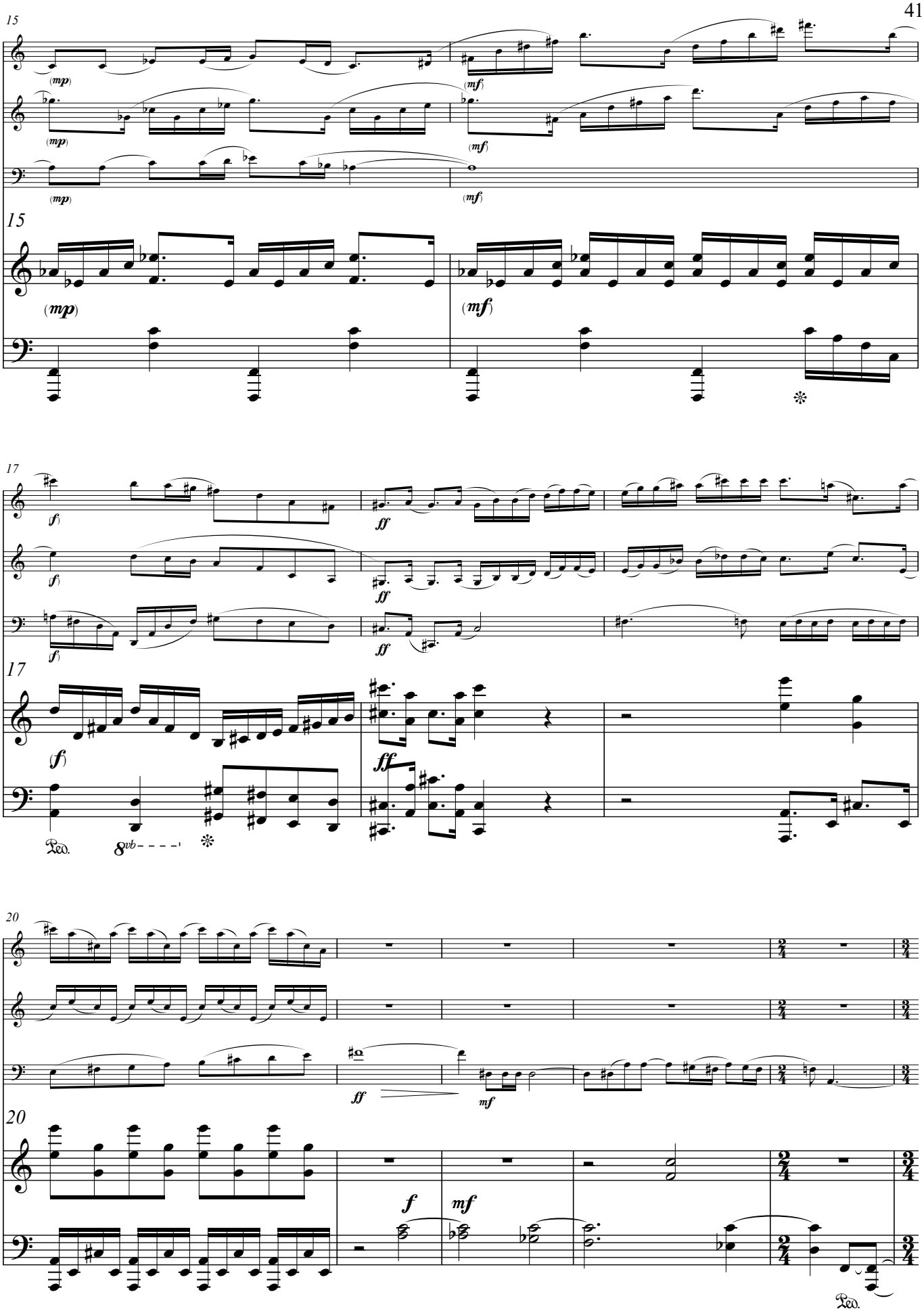

155
mf
cresc.
155
mf
cresc.
158
f
ff
158
f
ff
163
ff
163
ff

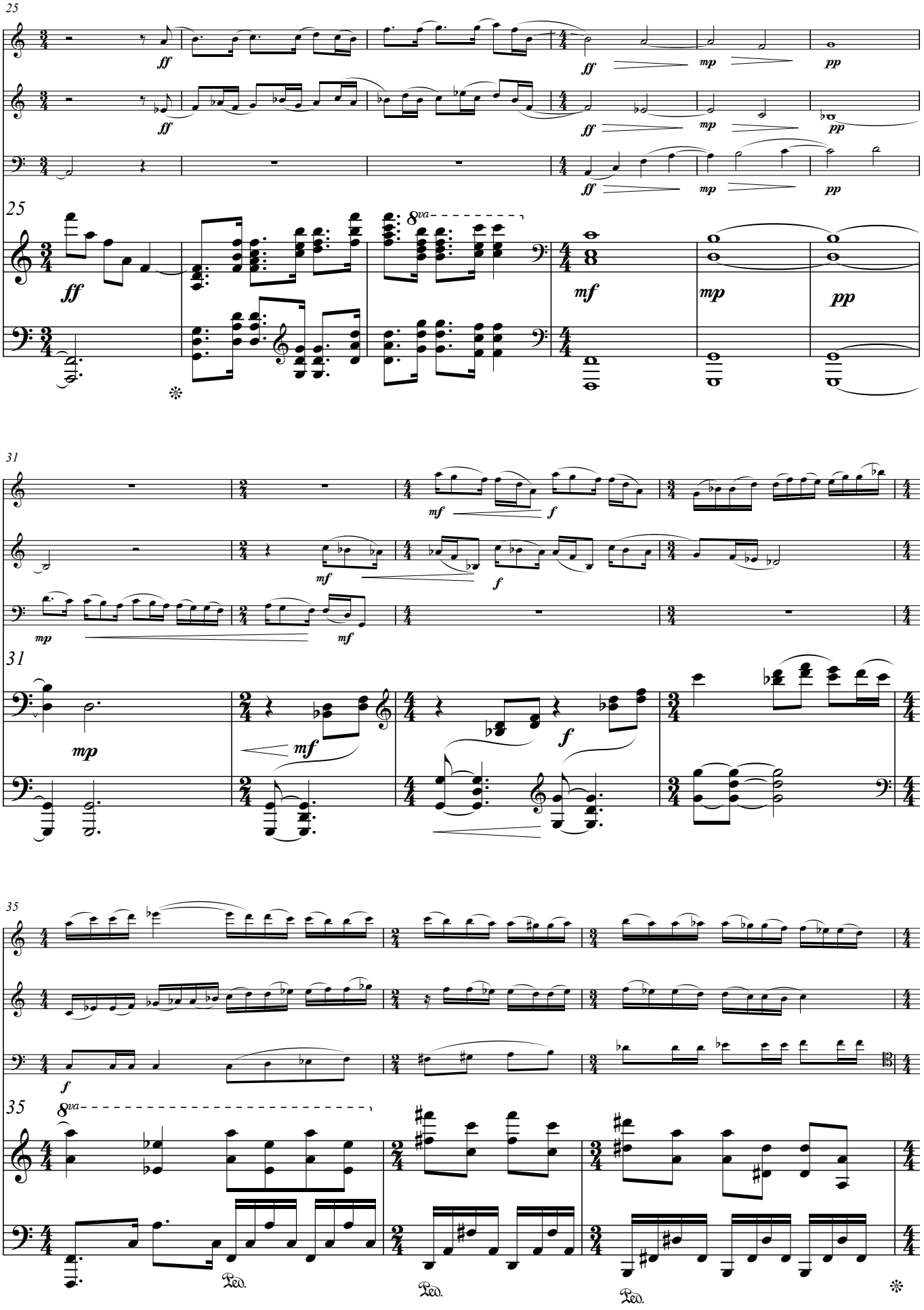

167
167
171
171
ff dim.
ff
dim.
ff dim.
ff dim.
174
174
pizz.
p
pp
pizz.
pp

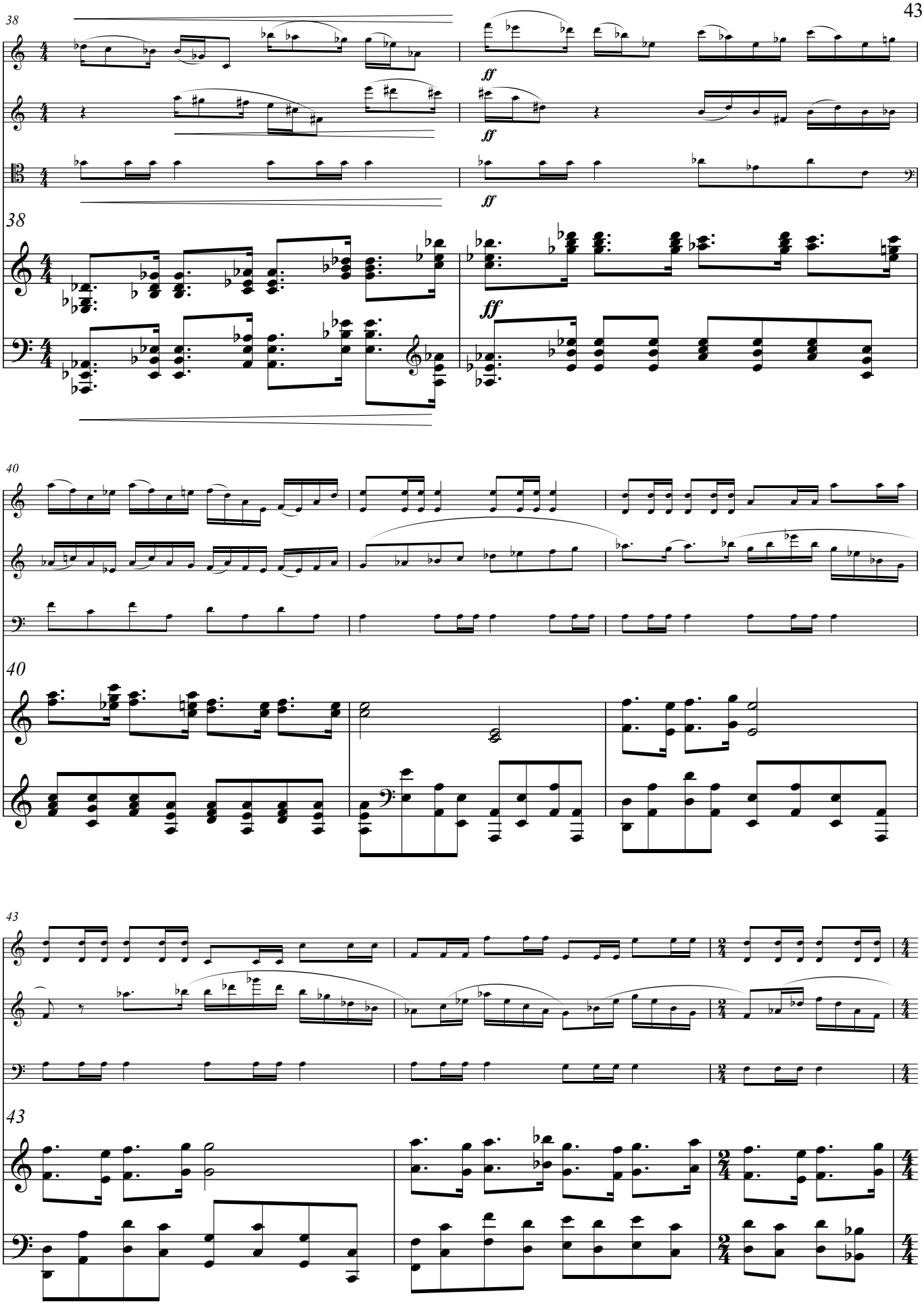
IV. August 28, 1963

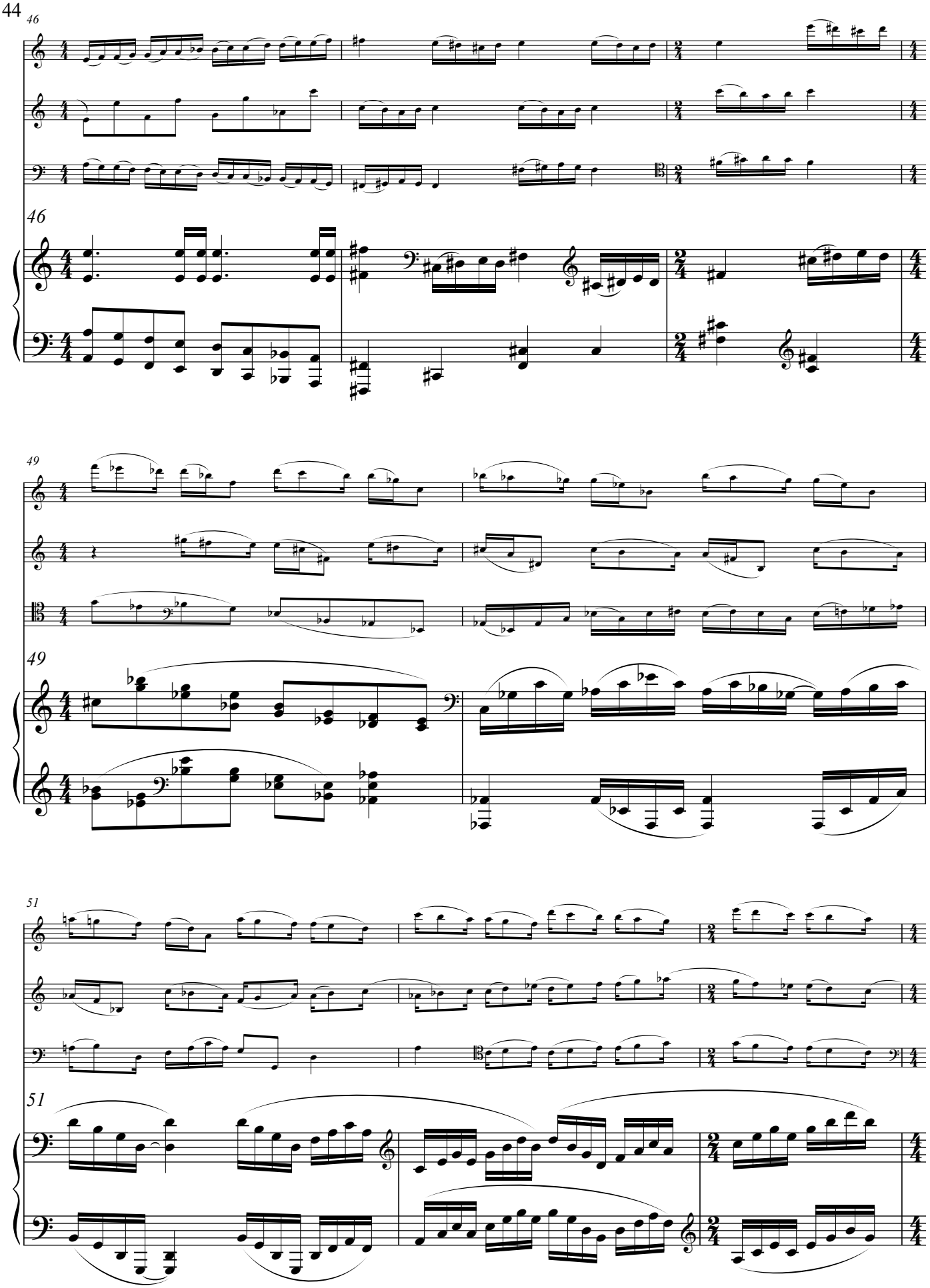
[8:50]

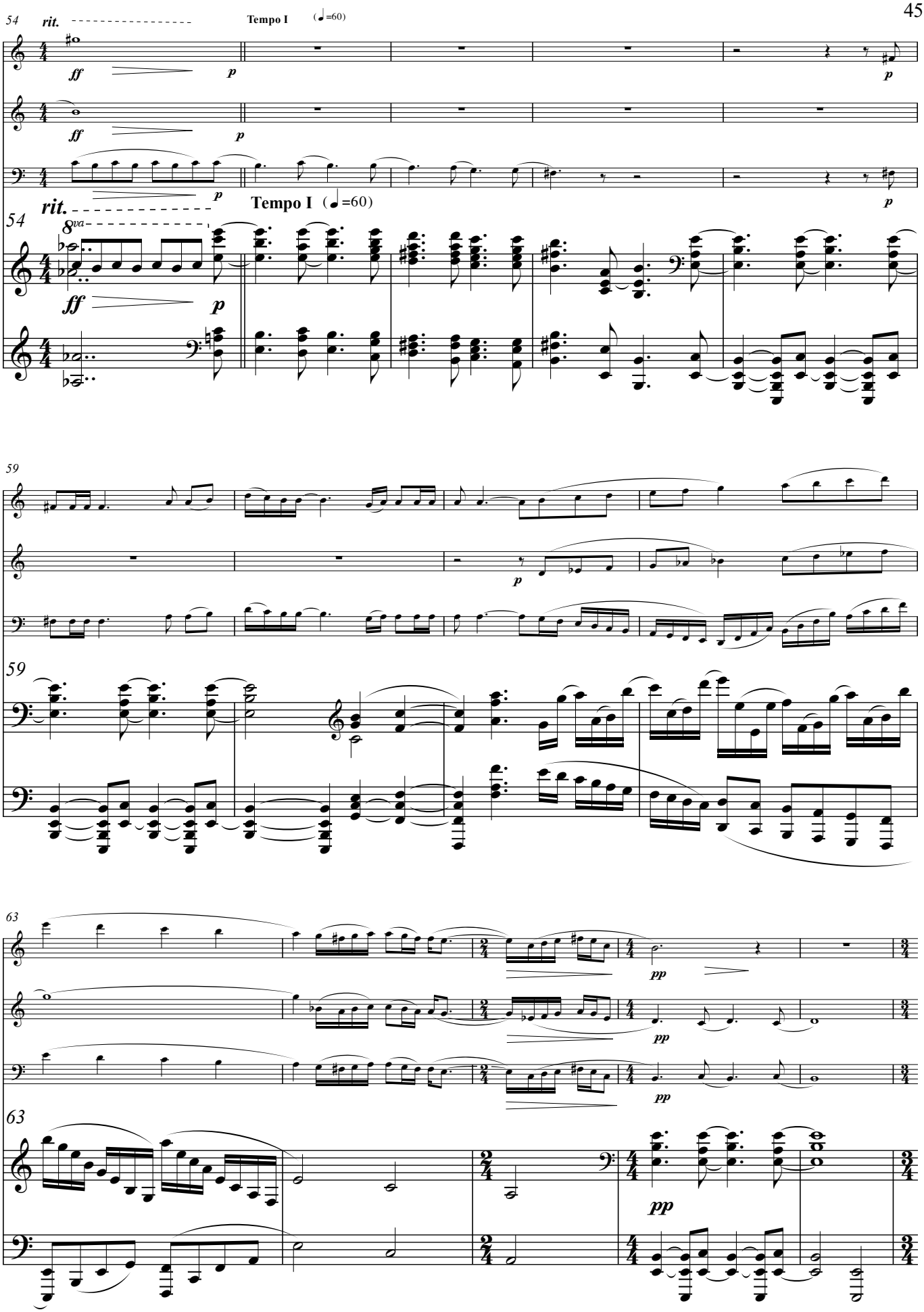


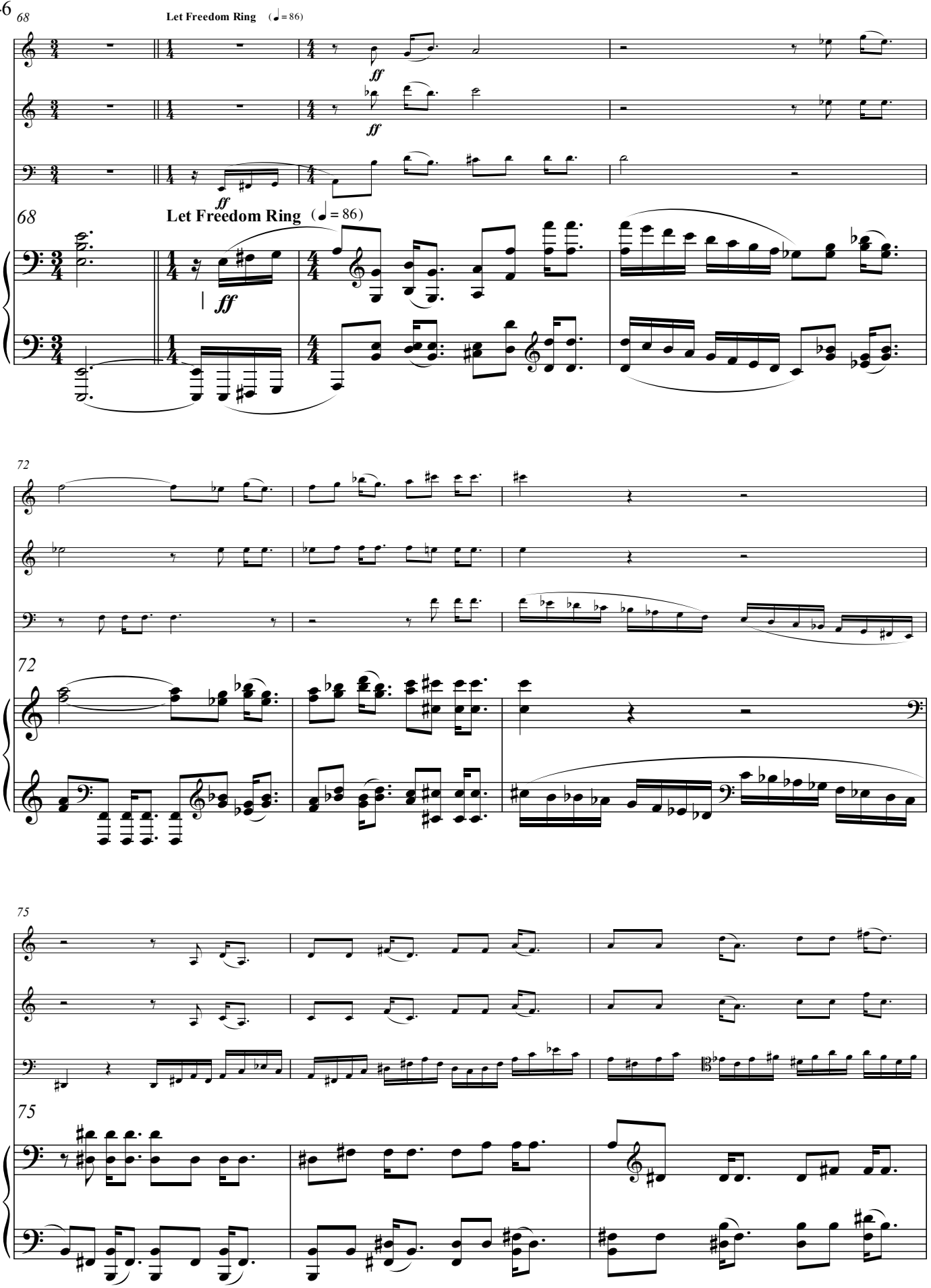

15
(mp)
(mf)
17
(f)
ff
Ped.
8vb
20
f
mf

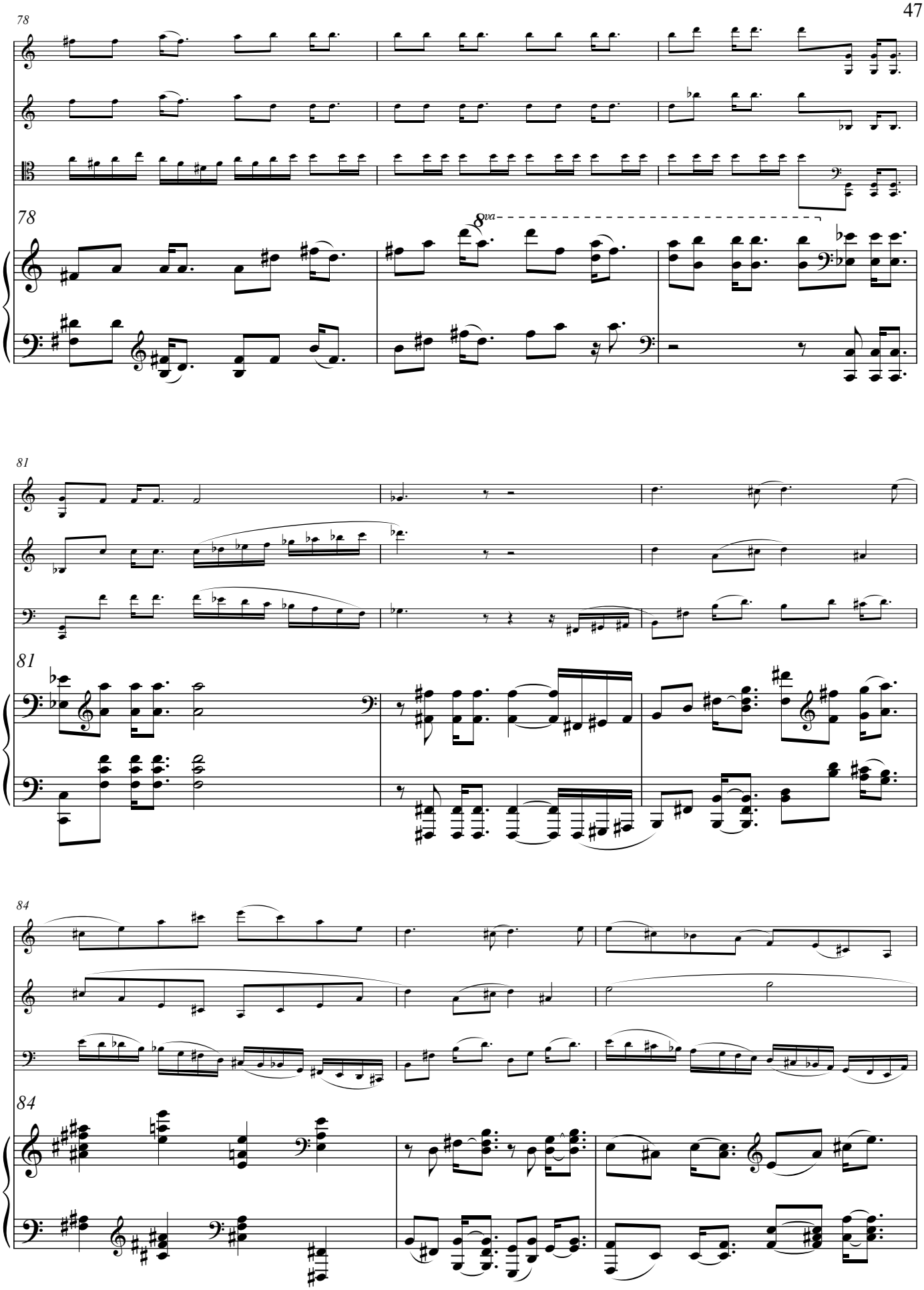

25
ff
mp
pp
8va
mf
31
f
35
Ped.


38
ff
ff
ff
38
40
40
43
43


46
46
49
49
51
51


54
rit.
Tempo I (♩=60)
ff
p
8va
59
63
pp


68
Let Freedom Ring (♩= 86)
ff
72
75


78
8va
81
84

87

87

91

91

94

ff

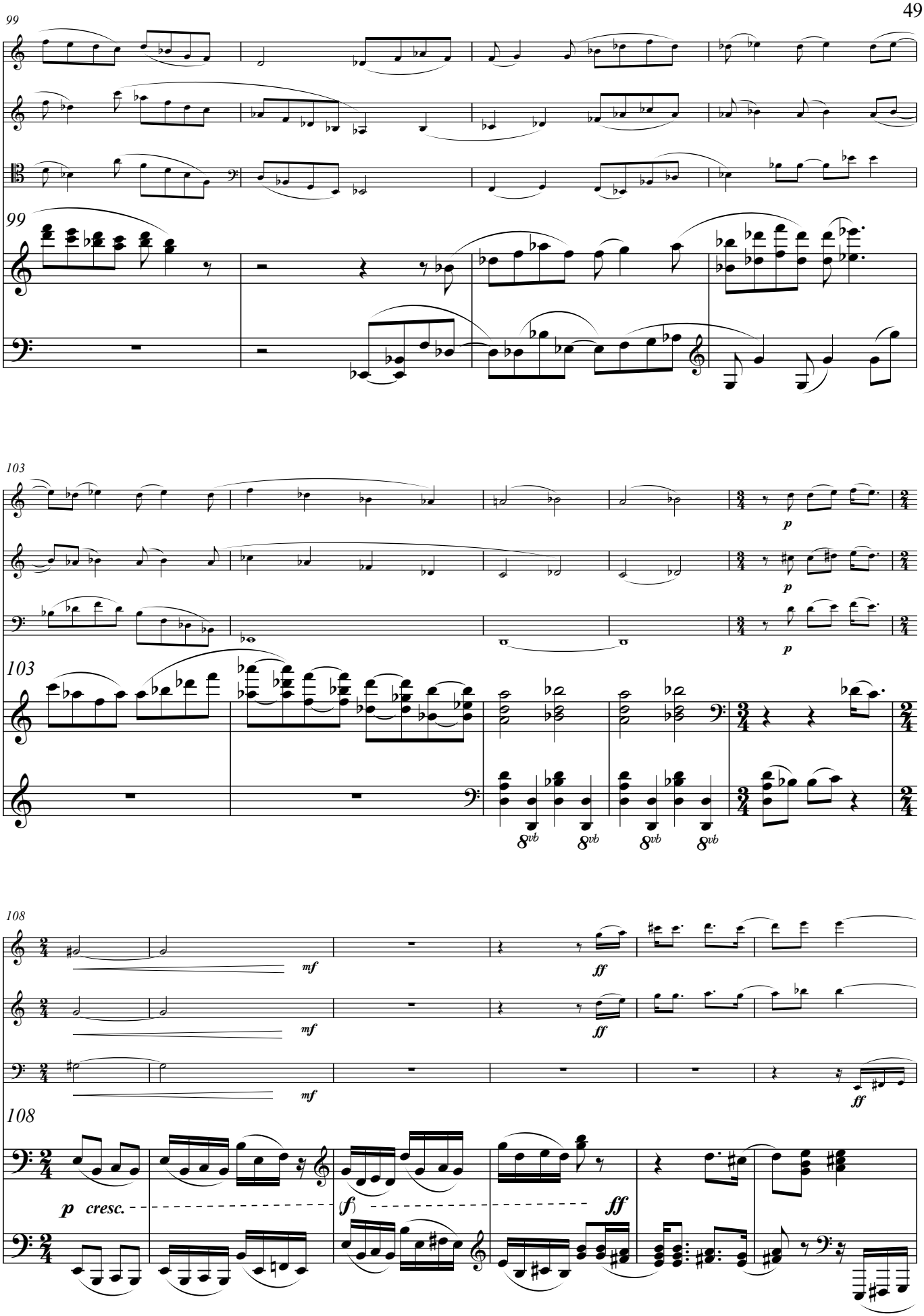
p

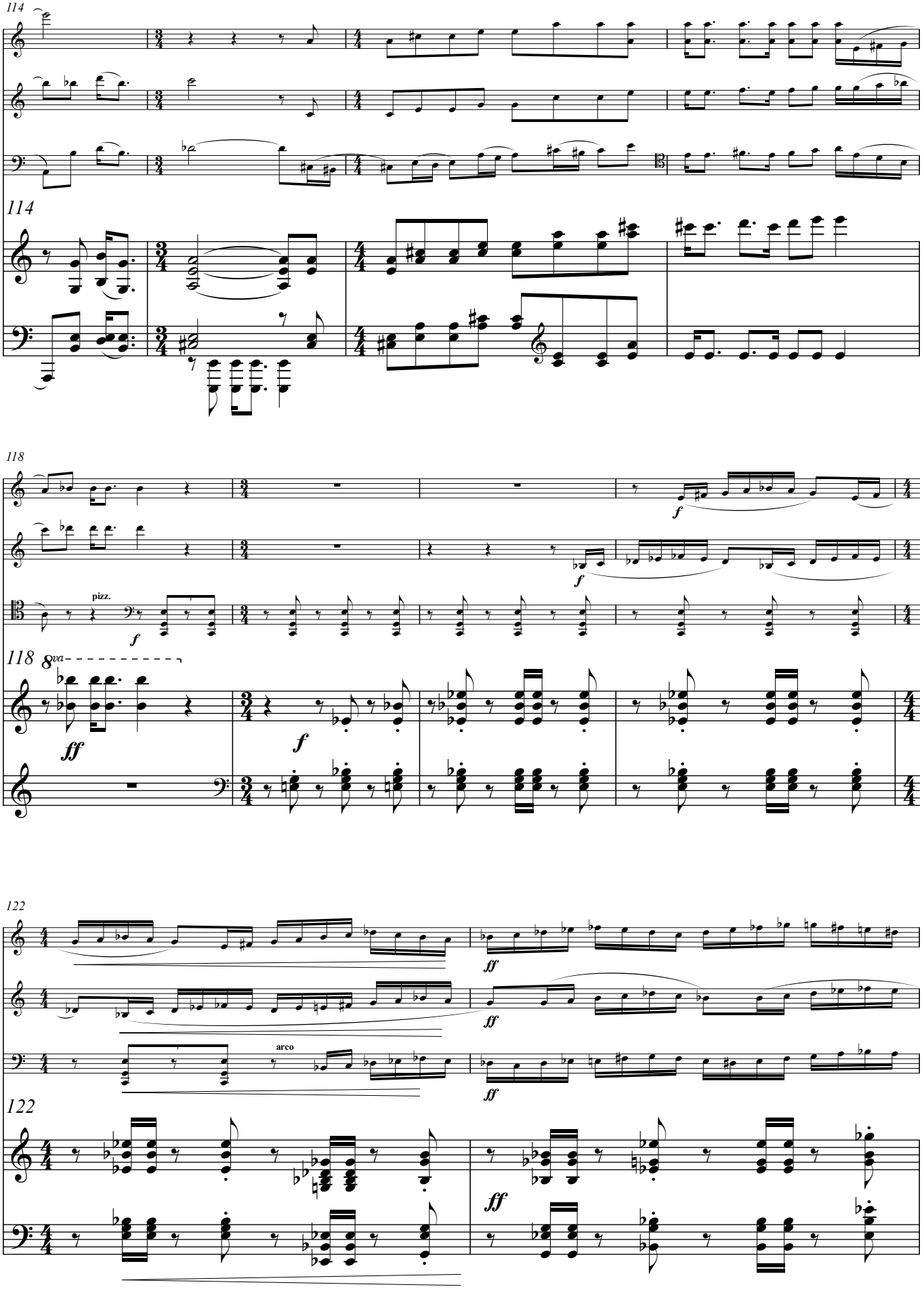
p

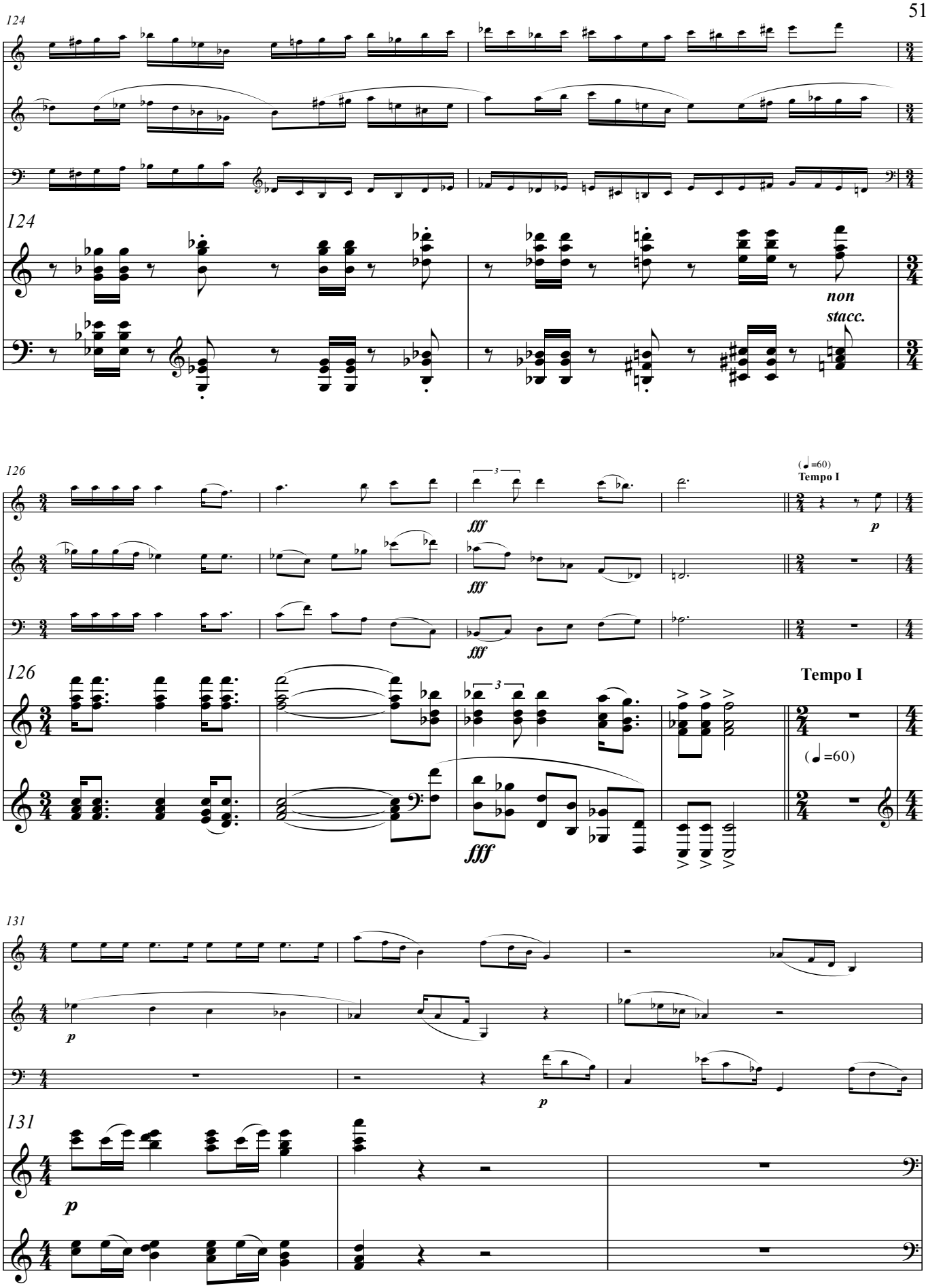
p

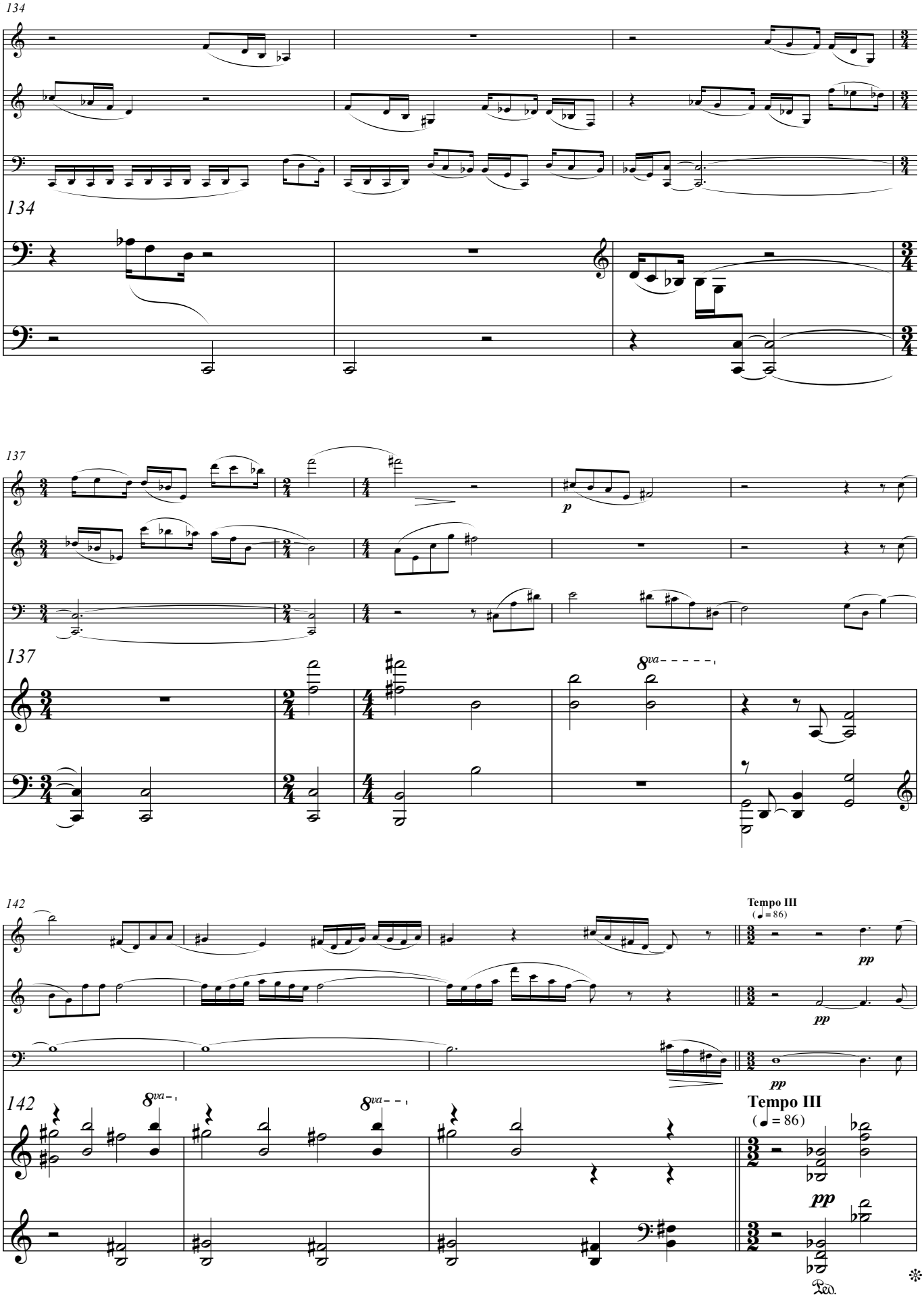
94

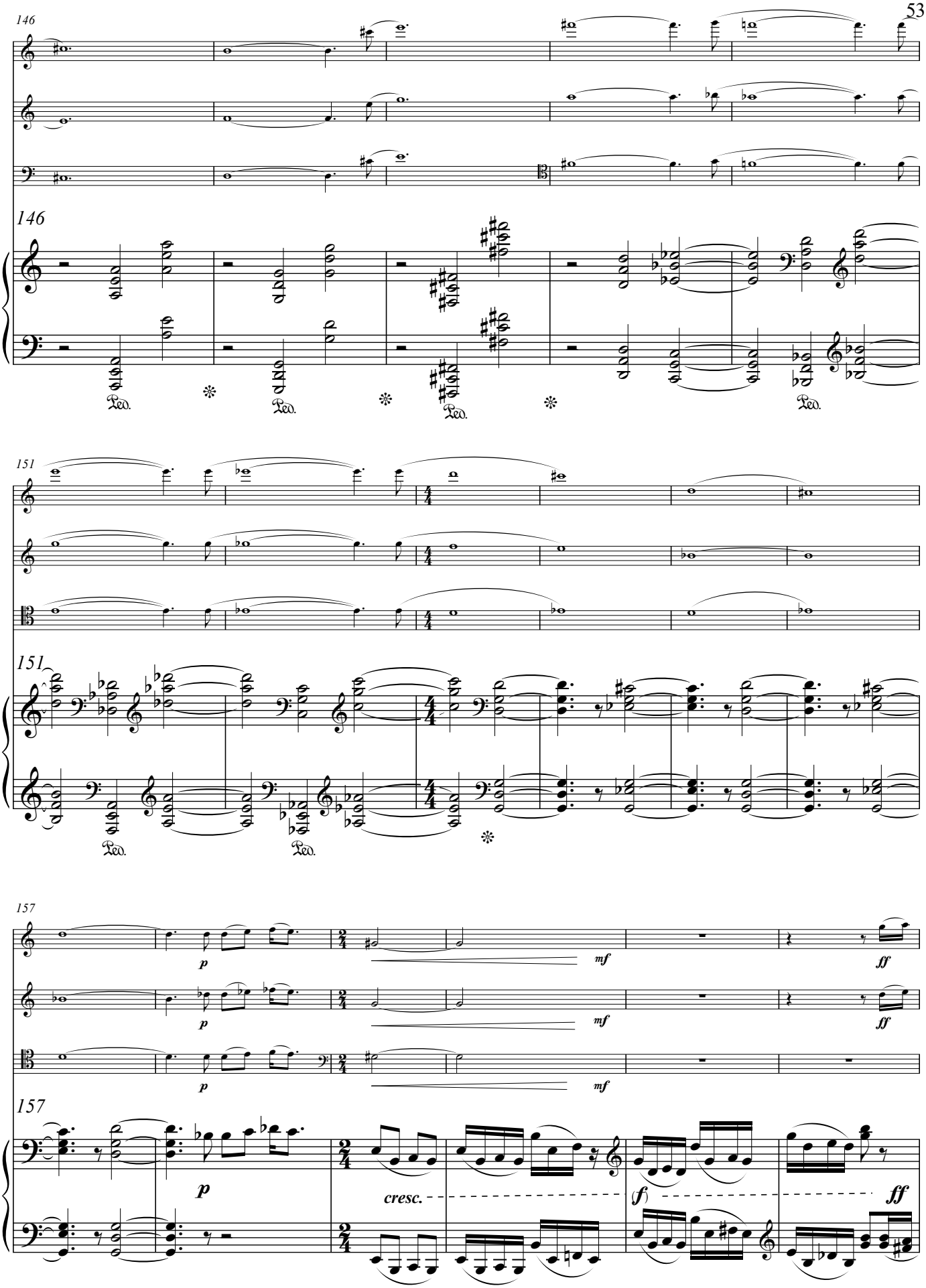
p

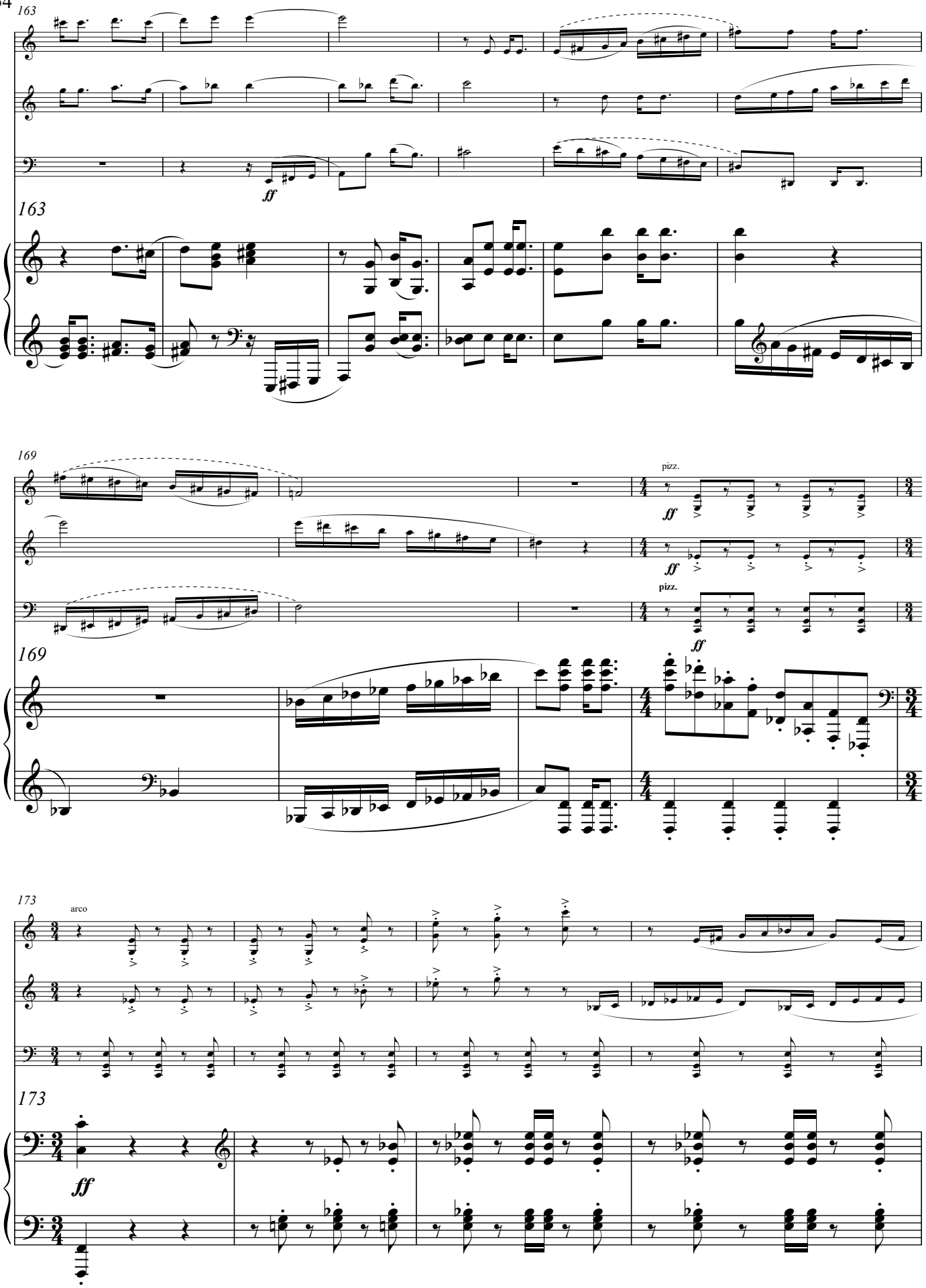

99
99
103
103
p
p
p
8vb
8vb
8vb
8vb
108
108
mf
mf
mf
ff
ff
ff
p cresc.
(f)
ff

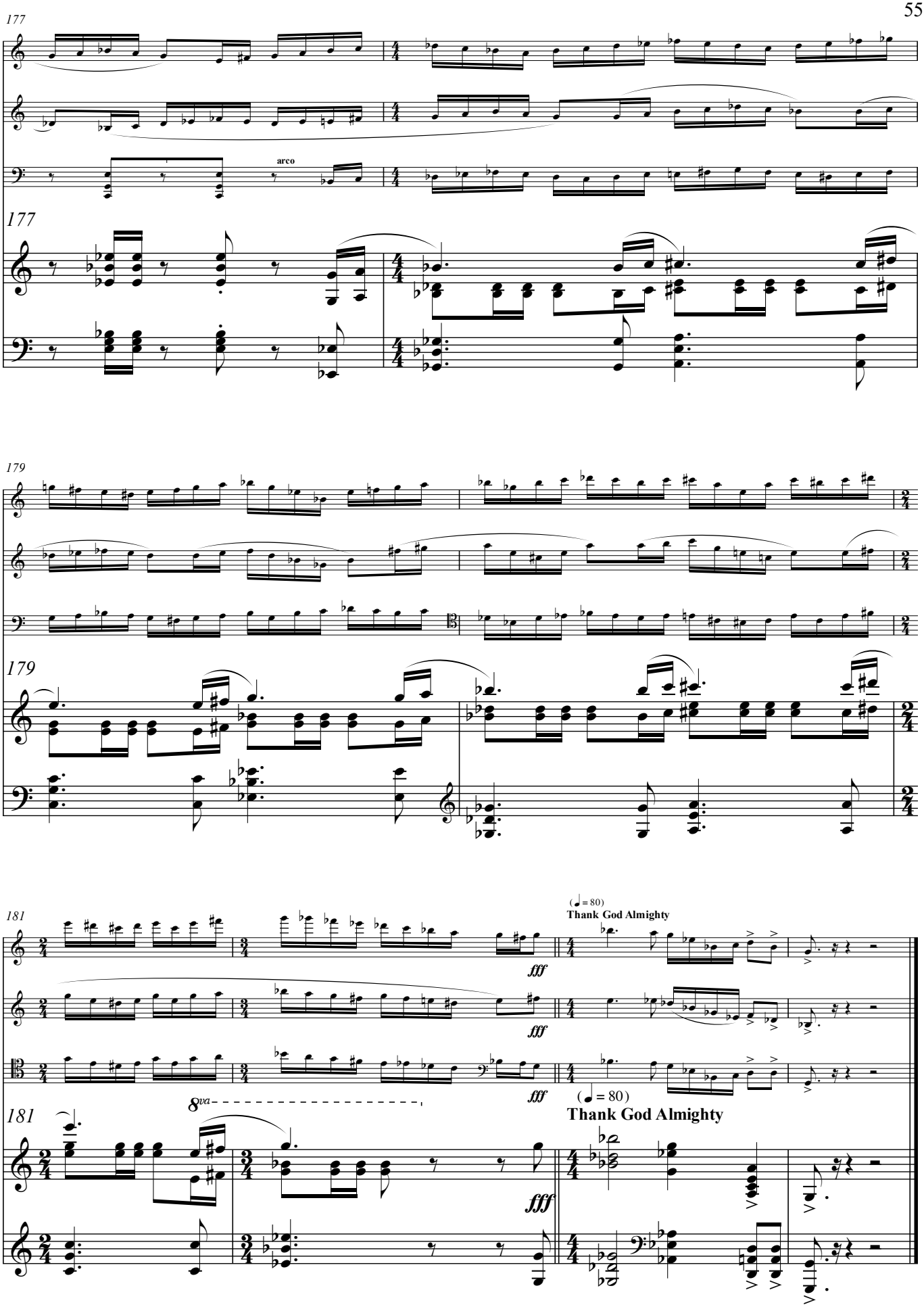

114
114
118
pizz.
118 8va
122
arco
122


124
non
stacc.
126
fff
(♩=60)
Tempo I
131
p


134
134
137
137
p
8va
142
142
8va
8va
Tempo III
(= 86)
pp
pp
pp
Tempo III
(= 86)
pp
Ped.


146
146
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
151
151
Ped.
Ped.
157
p
mf
ff
157
p
cresc.
f
ff


163
ff
163
169
pizz.
ff
ff
pizz.
ff
169
173
arco
173
ff


177
arco
177
179
179
181
(♩= 80)
Thank God Almighty
fff
fff
fff
8va
181
(♩= 80)
Thank God Almighty
fff