Goldbug Variations

for Piano (arranged from the original for Harpsichord)

September 9—October 24, 2011 Duration: about 21 minutes

for Elaine Funaro

Program notes

In 1980, I was living in a crude hunting cabin in the woods of Maine. At an estate auction I bought an old upright piano for $75 and took it two miles from the paved road up to the cabin, cleared out the mouse corpses, and got to composing. In early 1981, I started a large work for two pianos, in variation form with a theme vaguely reminiscent of the Aria used by J. S. Bach in the *Goldberg Variations*. After many adventures, some eighteen months later it was complete, 22 minutes long, and named *Goldbug Variations*. By then I was studying physics at NTSU and had access to fine pianists at the music school, and in November of 1982 the variations had its one and only performance for some twenty people. Later, I arranged the piece for full orchestra, but it never saw the light of day.

In 2007 I wrote the *Ananda Concerto* for violin and orchestra for my friend Eric Pritchard. For the middle movement, I took the best ten minutes of the old *Goldbug Variations* and reworked it for the concerto.

Eric started performing my music in the spring of 2006. Elaine Funaro attended the first such concert at Duke, and asked me to write a piece for harpsichord. This was a big challenge, as I do not have access to an instrument, and my piano writing tends to be heavy on the pedal and dynamic changes. However the idea percolated for several years. In the fall of 2011, after eight months away from composition to author my *Autobillography*, I was ready for this new adventure. I took the theme from the original *Goldbug*, but nothing else, starting from absolute scratch. As pianos are ubiquitous and harpsichords rare, and I am an unknown composer, I have made this arrangement for piano.

My fellow composers frequently criticize my “incessant tonality”, while some audience members have asked me “Why do you write atonal music?” The chromatic nature of this theme forces me to be harmonically adventurous, while the antique nature of the instrument gives a traditional ambience, trills and all.

Posthumous apologies to Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, D. Scarlatti, Couperin, and Scott Joplin, who made this work possible by being in the public domain.

Technical issues for performers

After listening to Glenn Gould play the *Goldberg Variations,* I was very careful to mark all the tempos, which was not an option for Bach. Performers should follow these for the overall tempo of each variation until they know the piece very well. I usually end up asking musicians not to play too fast.

In general, my style tends to legato unless otherwise specified. When short notes are desired, I have put in dots, but otherwise notes should get a full value. I have written in both extensive finger pedaling (inherited from the harpsichord) and sostenuto pedal marks, but this is only a minimum, the rest being up to the discretion of the performer. Whenever the pedal is marked it should be used. Do not interpret the harpsichord origins to mean that the piece has a dry texture; quite the contrary. This is a piano work and should be performed with all that implies.

We have short attention spans these days, and this is a comparatively long work for our time. I have no objections to a short selection presented on a concert instead of the whole piece, as long as the theme is included.

Bill Robinson

billrobinsonmusic.com

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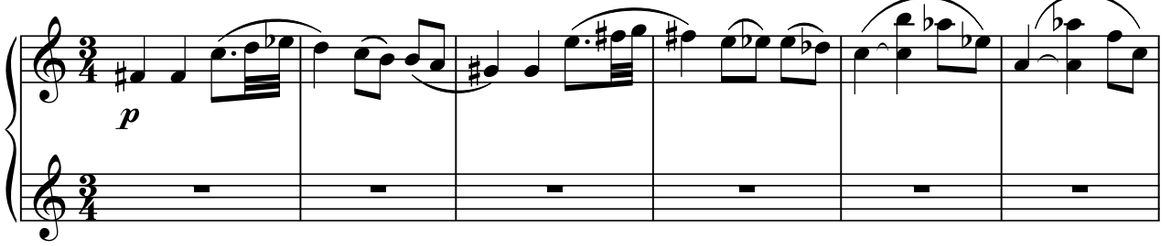
Cover credits; border from an early edition of J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. Gold bug coin from *The Market Garden*, June 27, 2011 article “Taking Issue with Some Gold Bugs”.

Goldbug Variations for Piano [21']

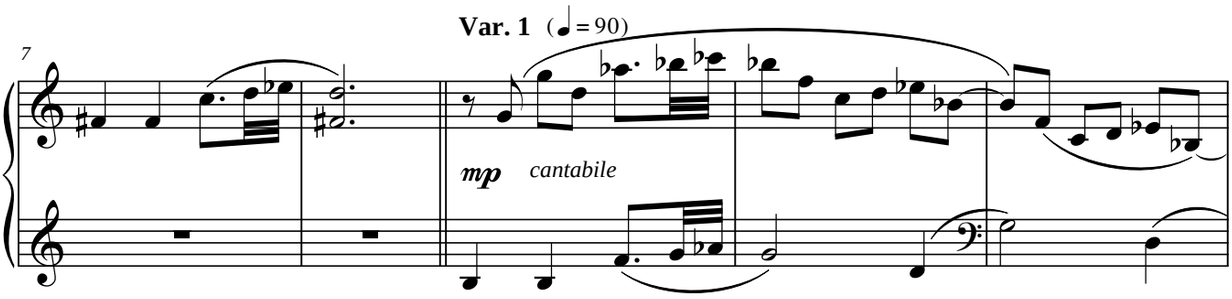
Theme

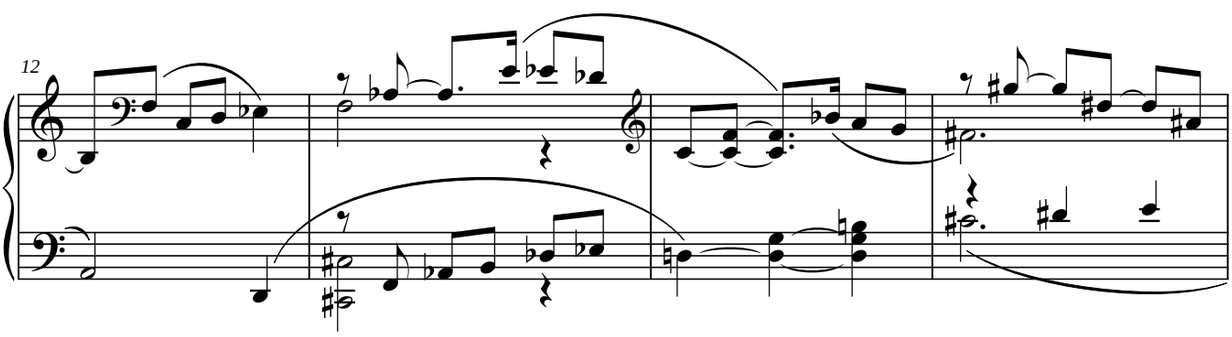
Moderato (♩ = 66)

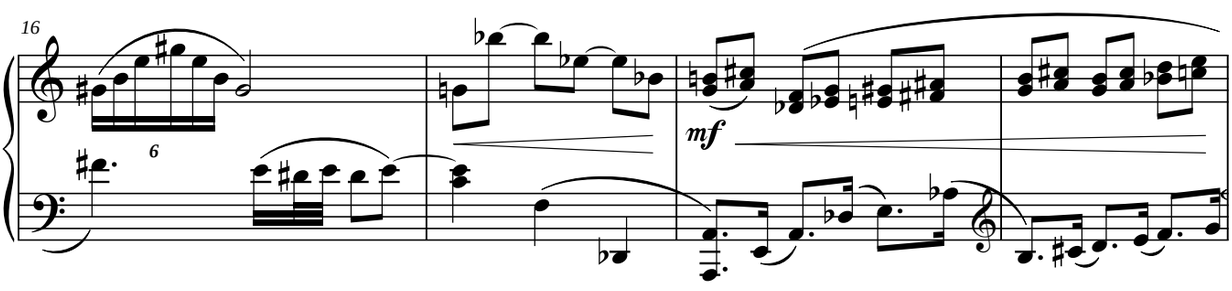
Bill Robinson

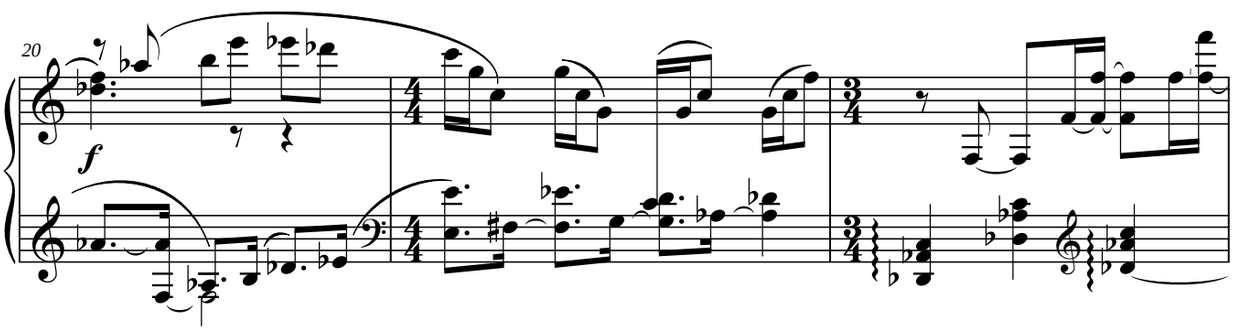


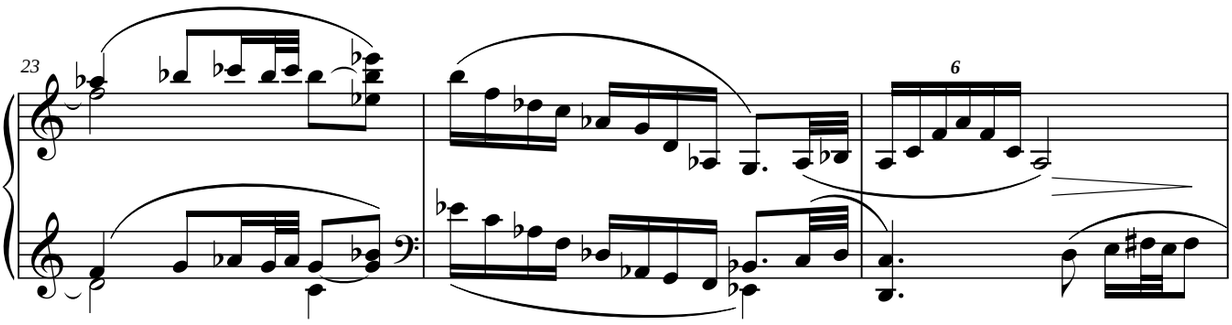
Var. 1 (♩ = 90)











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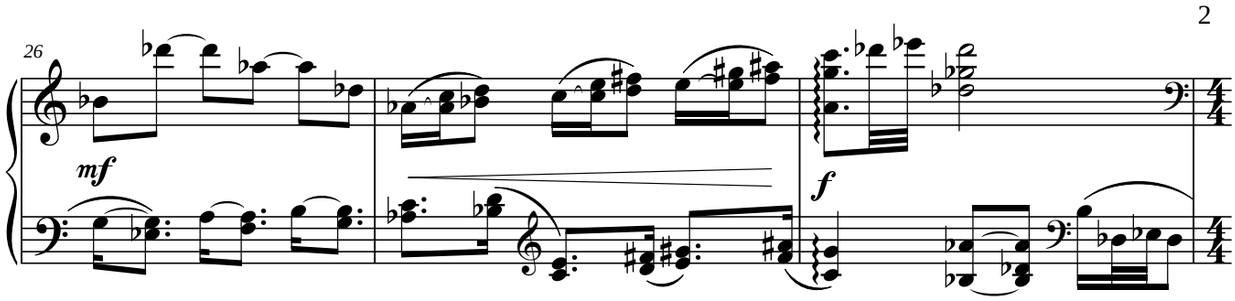
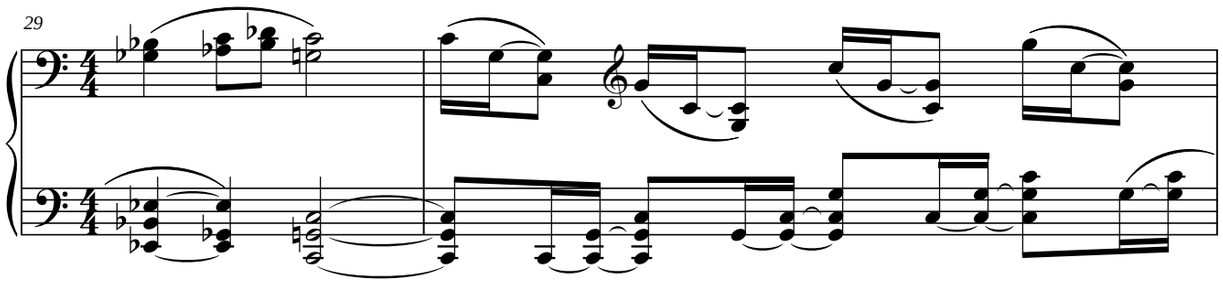

26
mf
f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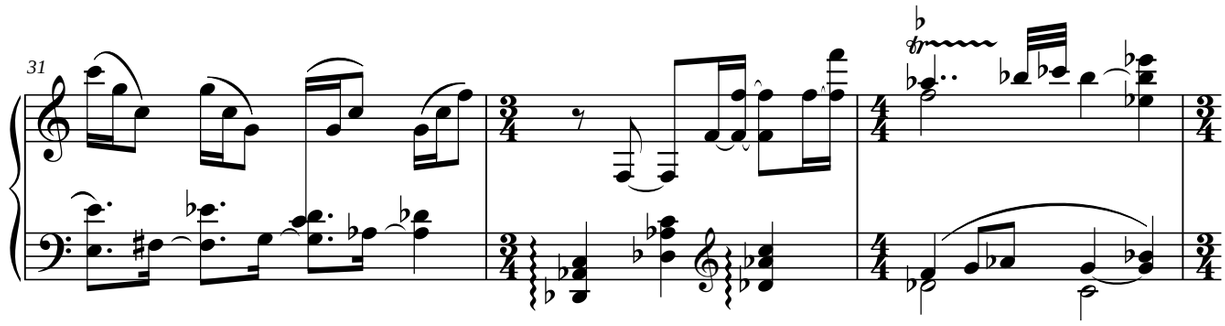
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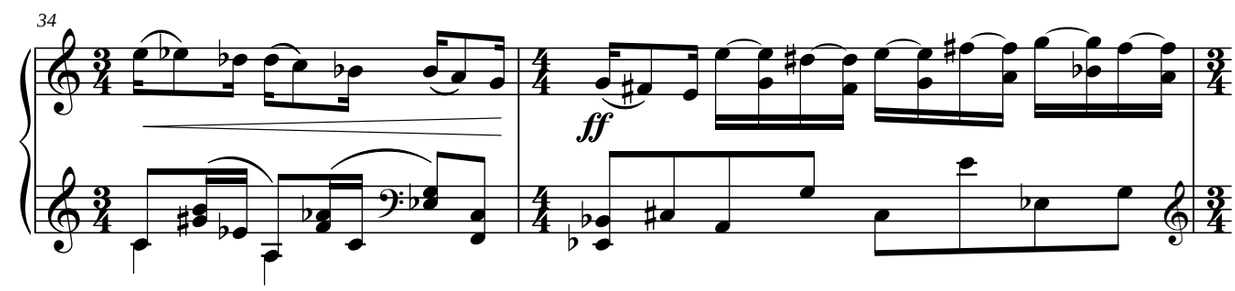
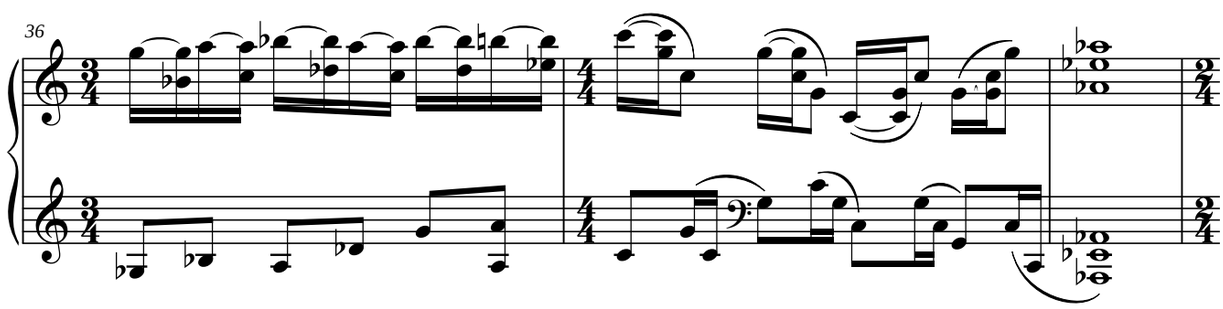

34
ff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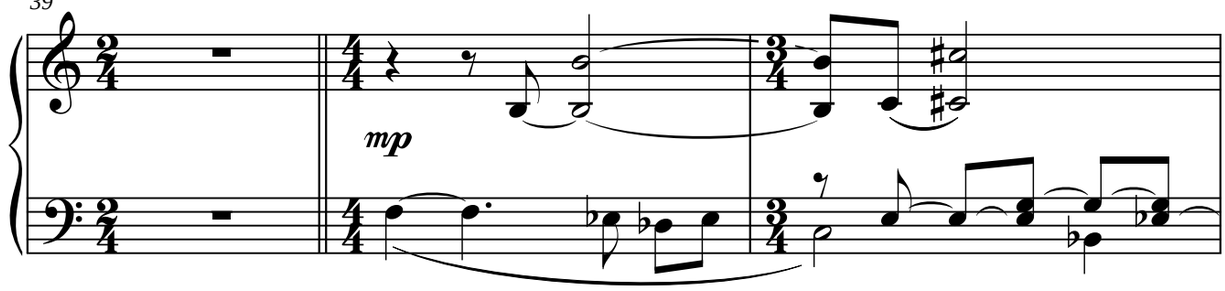
39

Var. 2 **Slow** (♩ = 66)

mp



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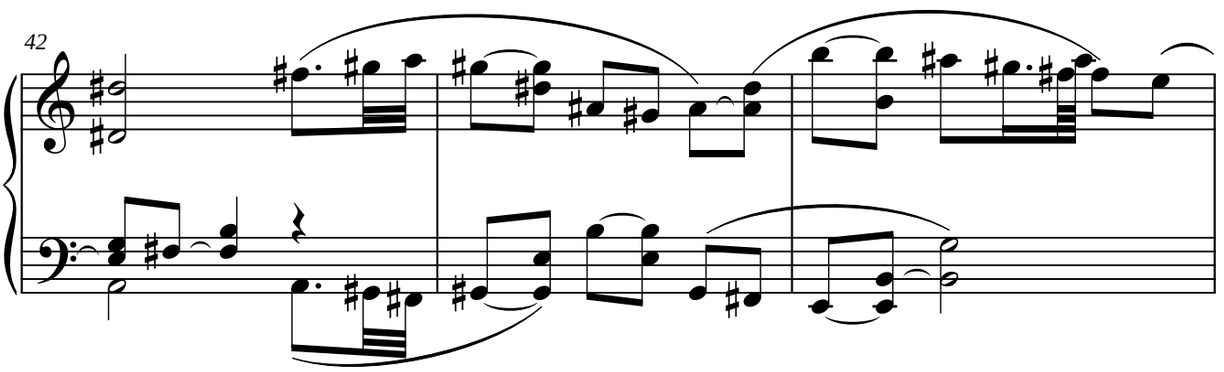

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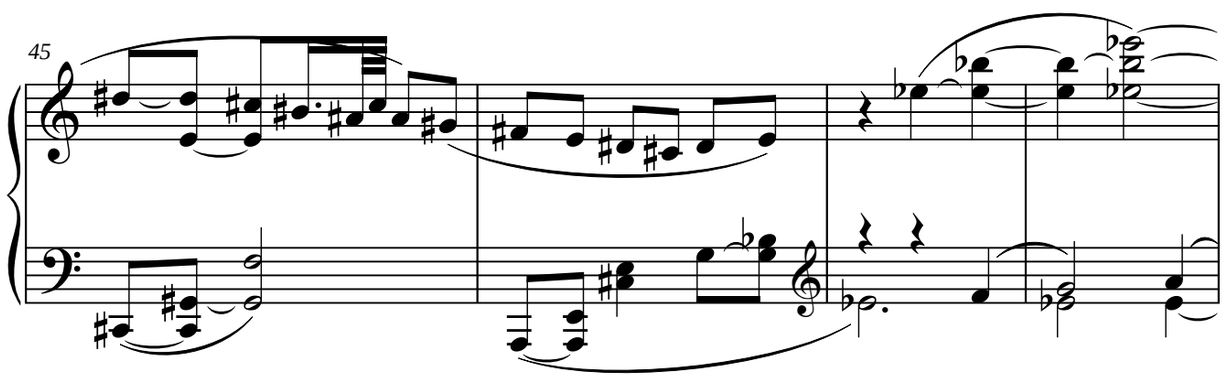

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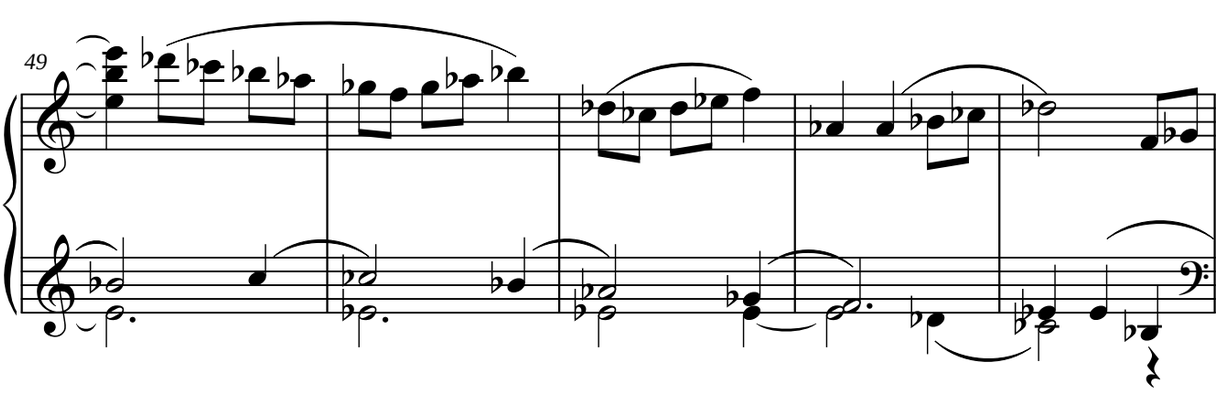
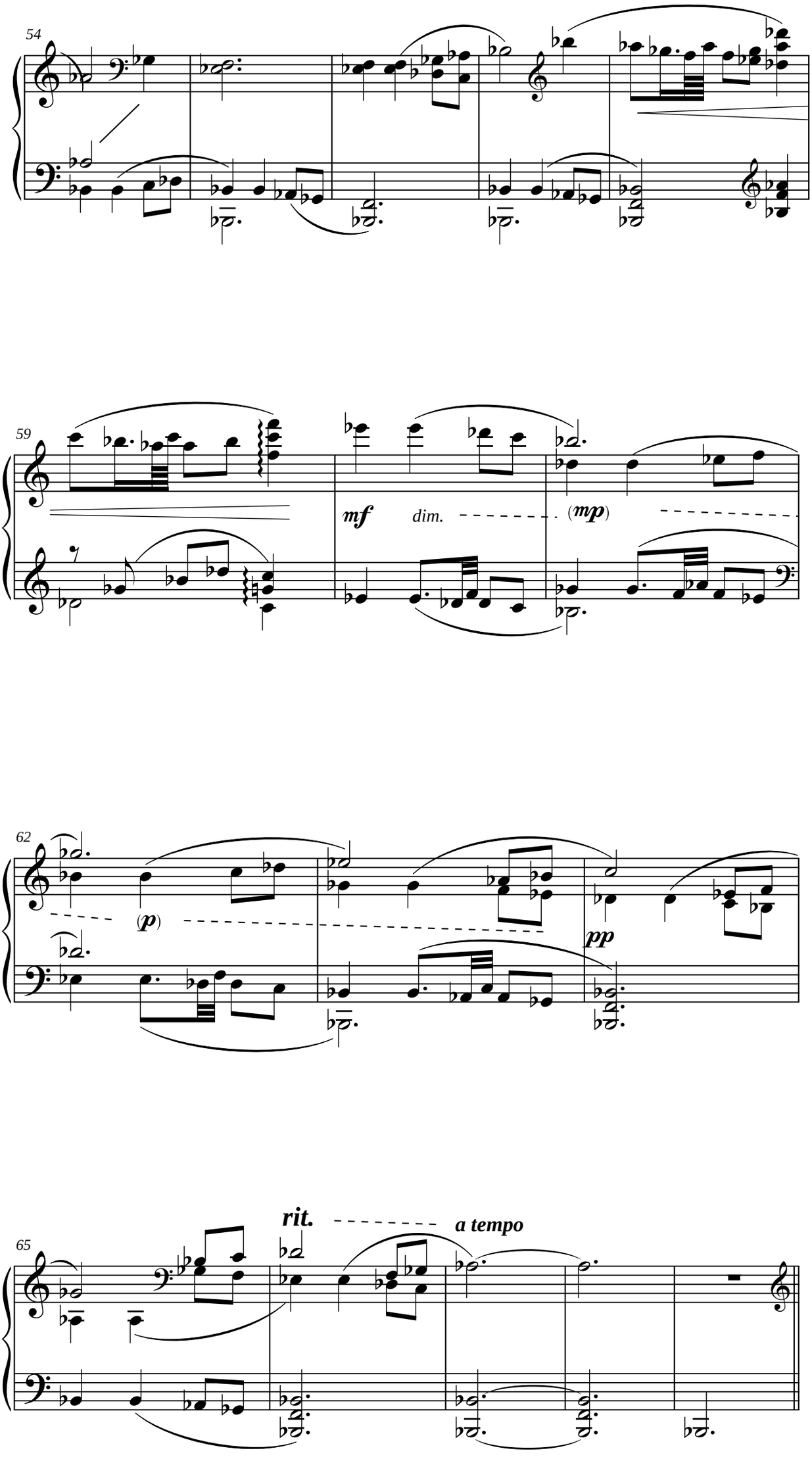
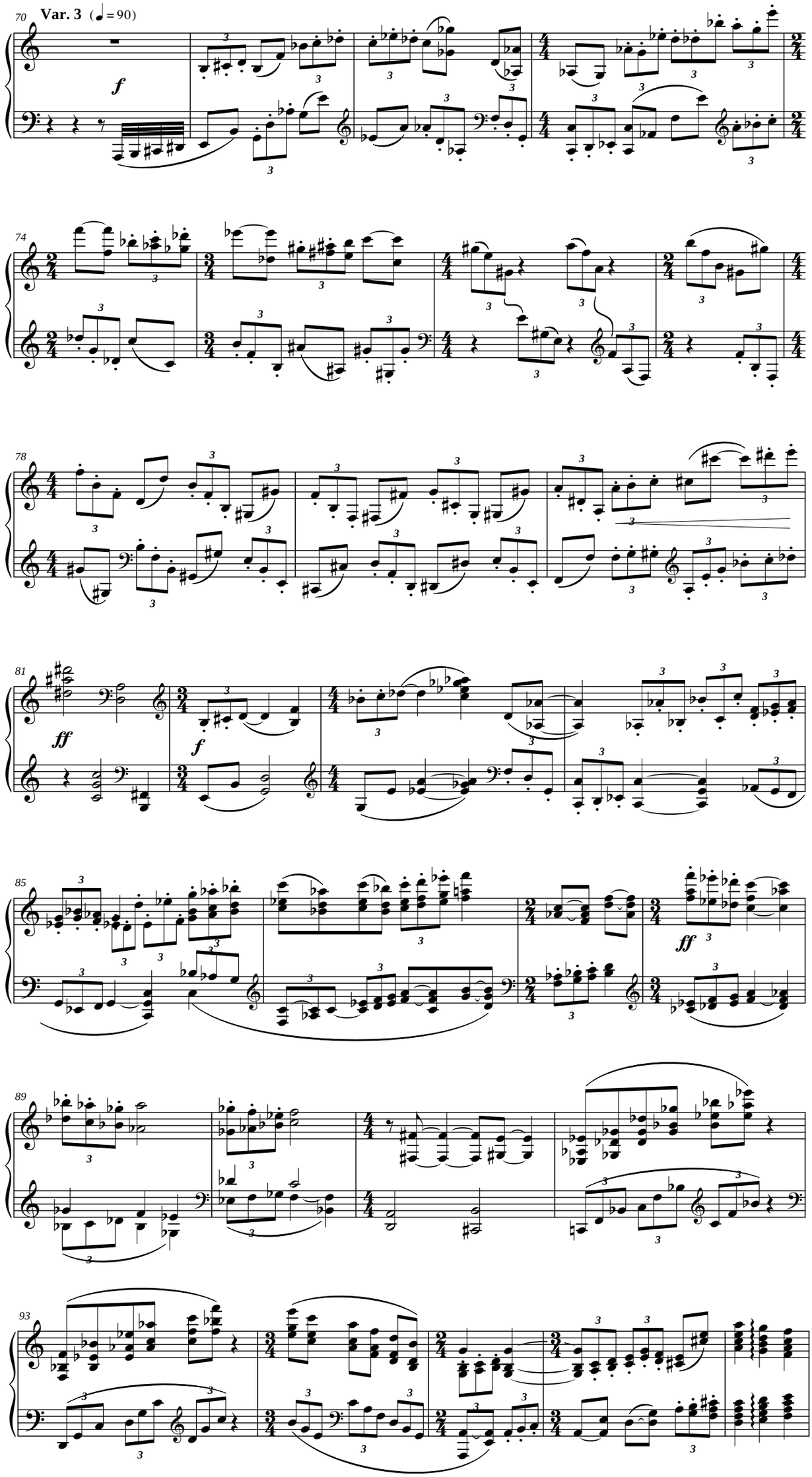
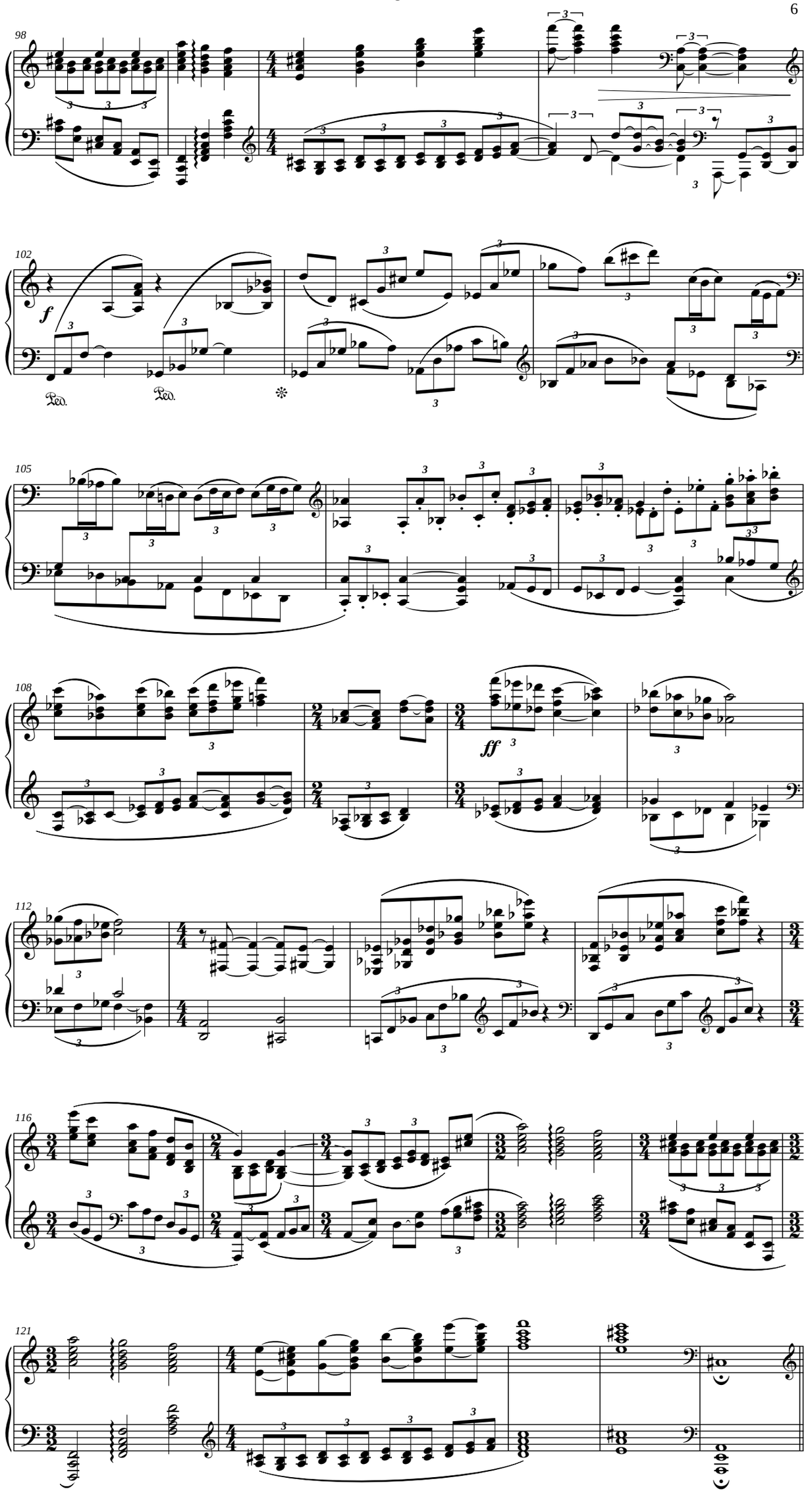
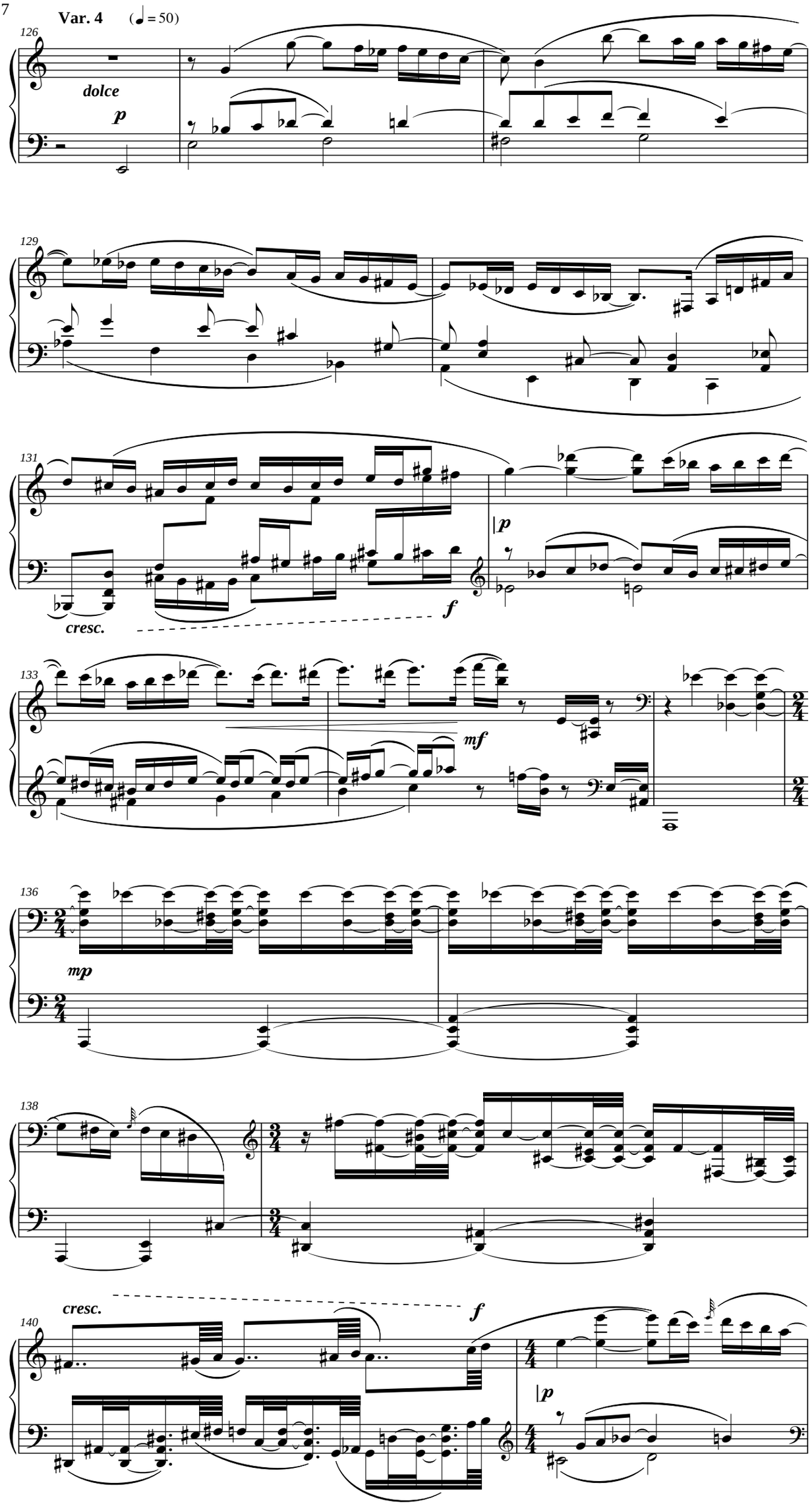
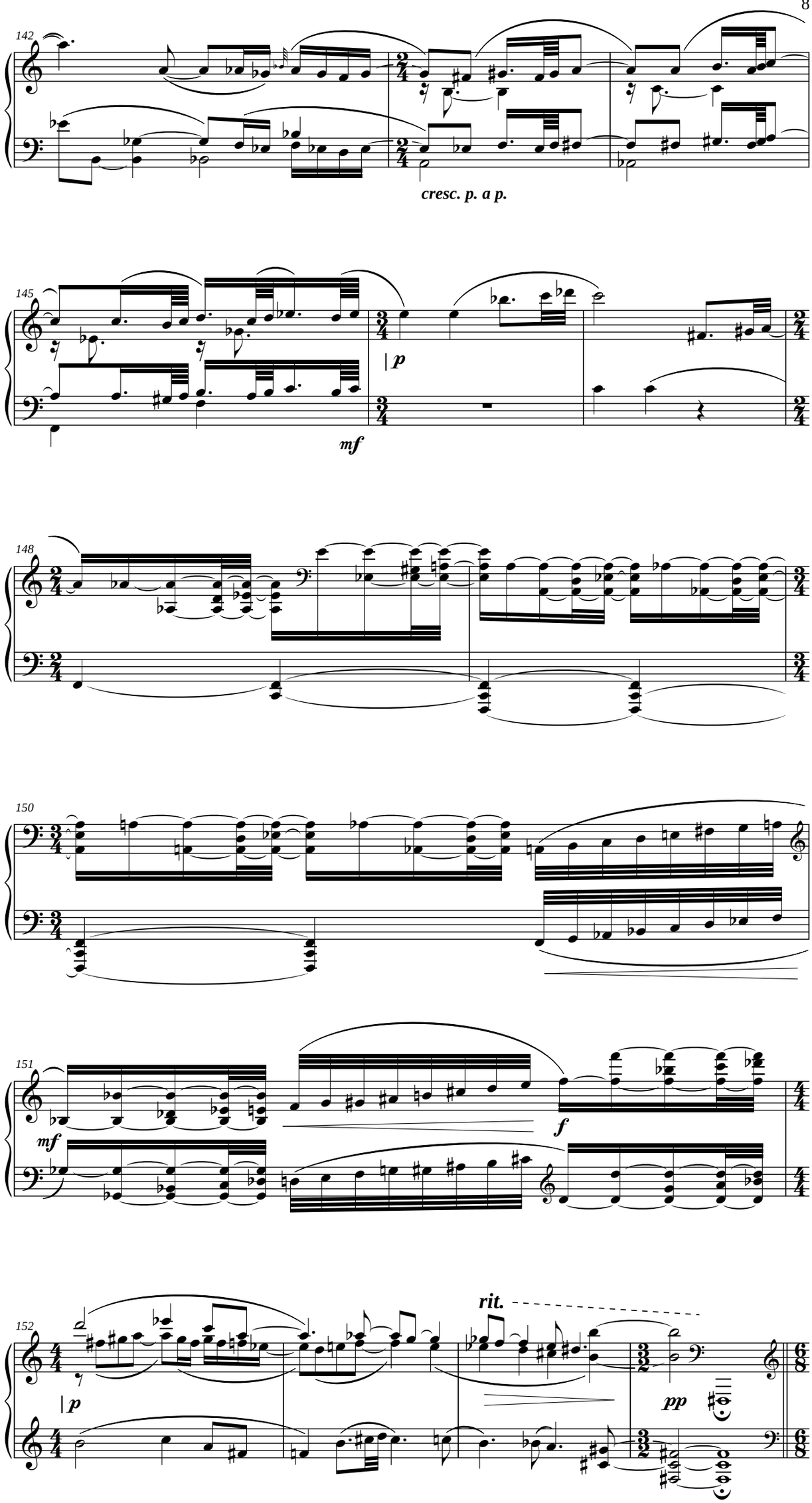



54
59
mf
dim.
(mp)
62
(p)
pp
65
rit.
a tempo

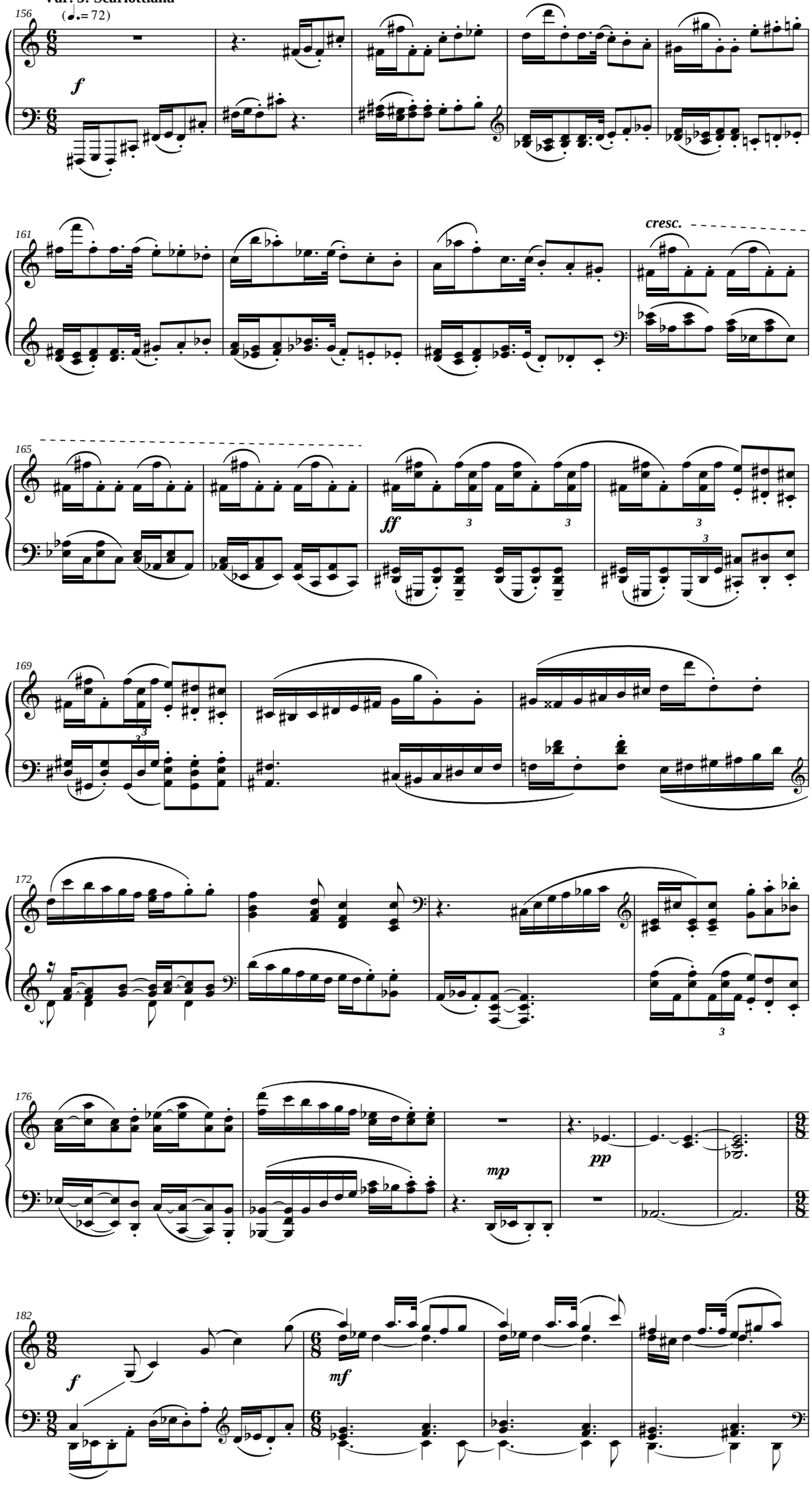

70
Var. 3 (♩= 90)
f
74
78
81
ff
f
85
ff
89
93

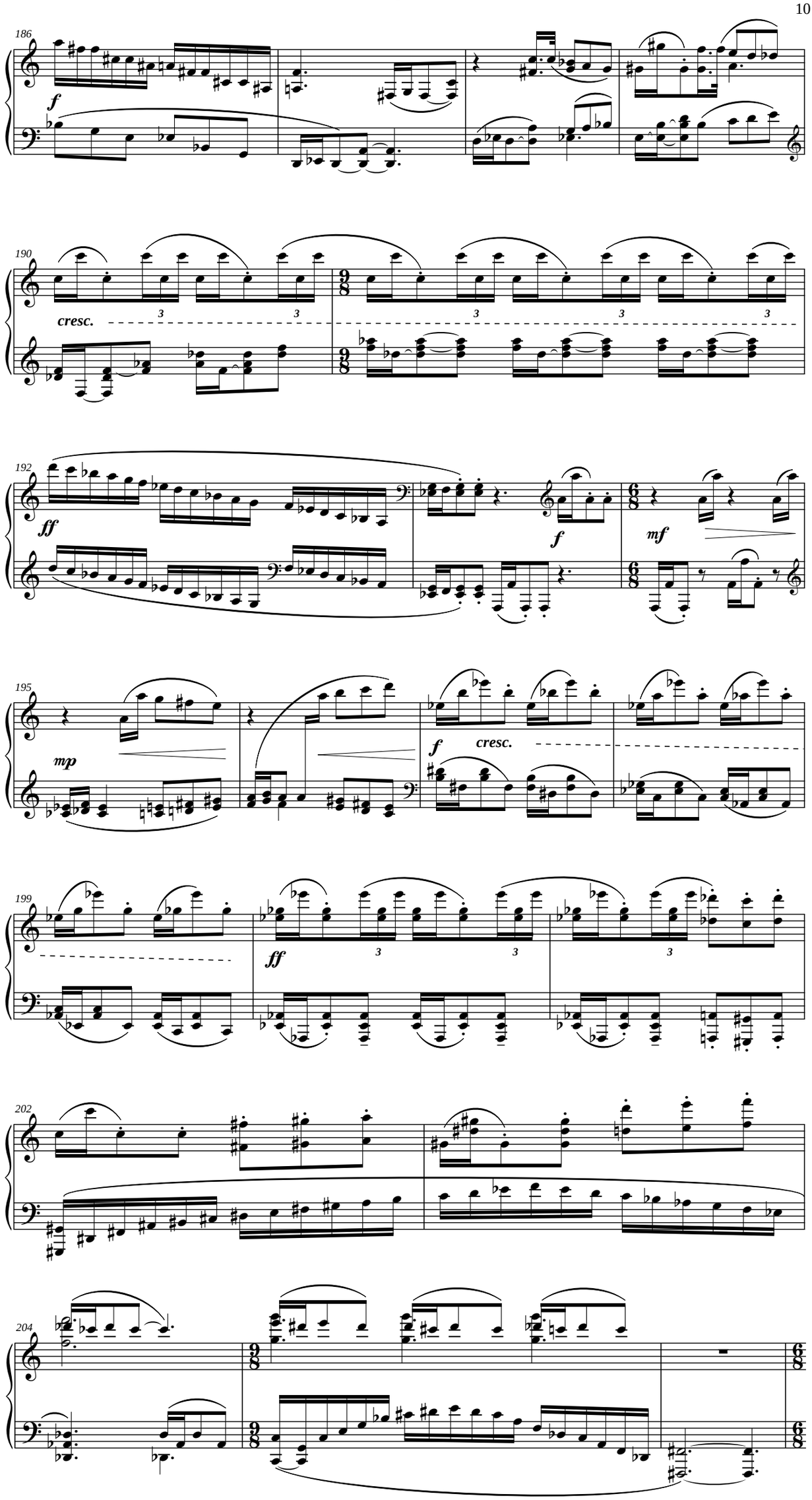

98
102
105
108
112
116
121

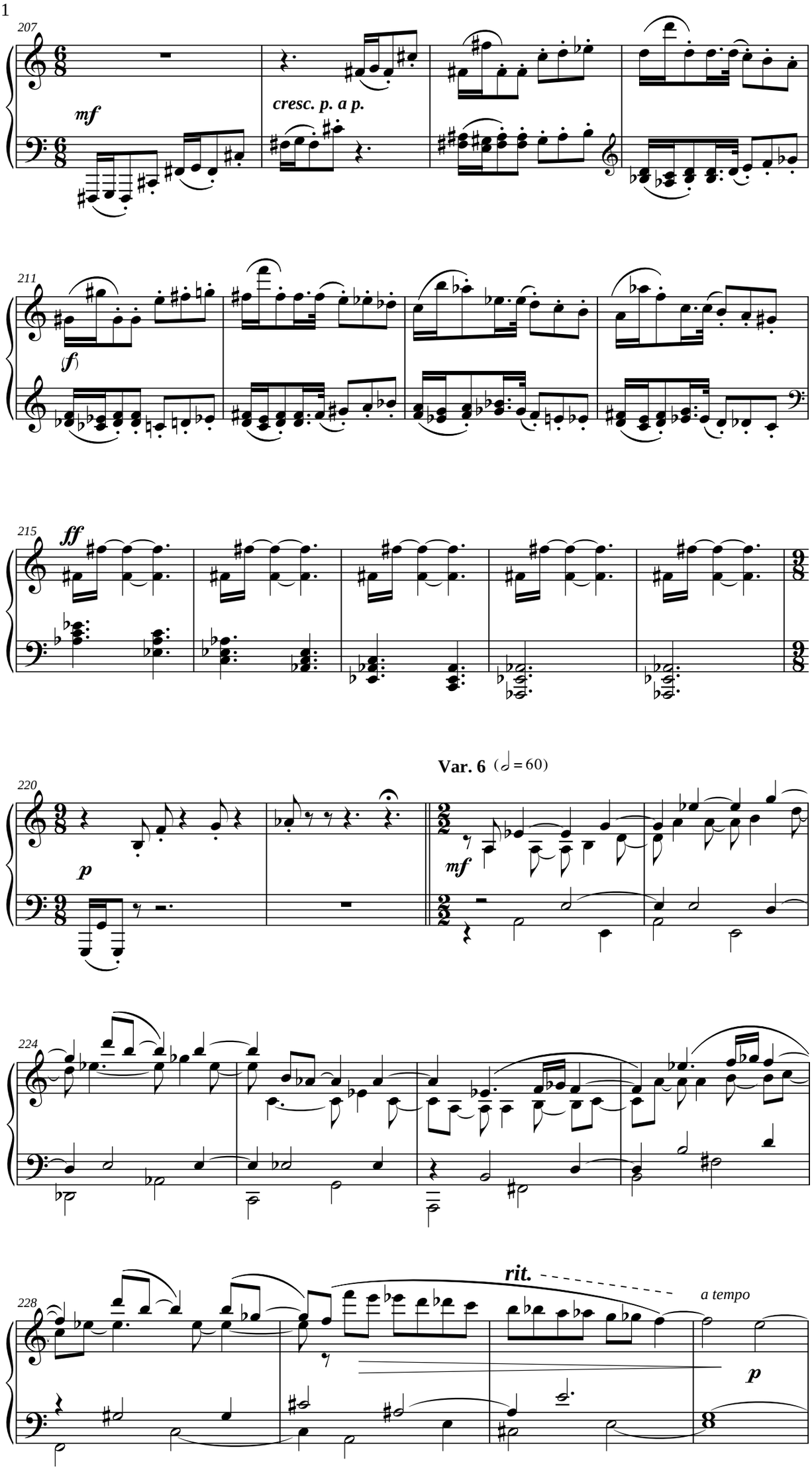

Var. 4
(♩ = 50)
126
dolce
p
129
131
cresc.
f
p
133
mf
136
mp
138
140
cresc.
f
p

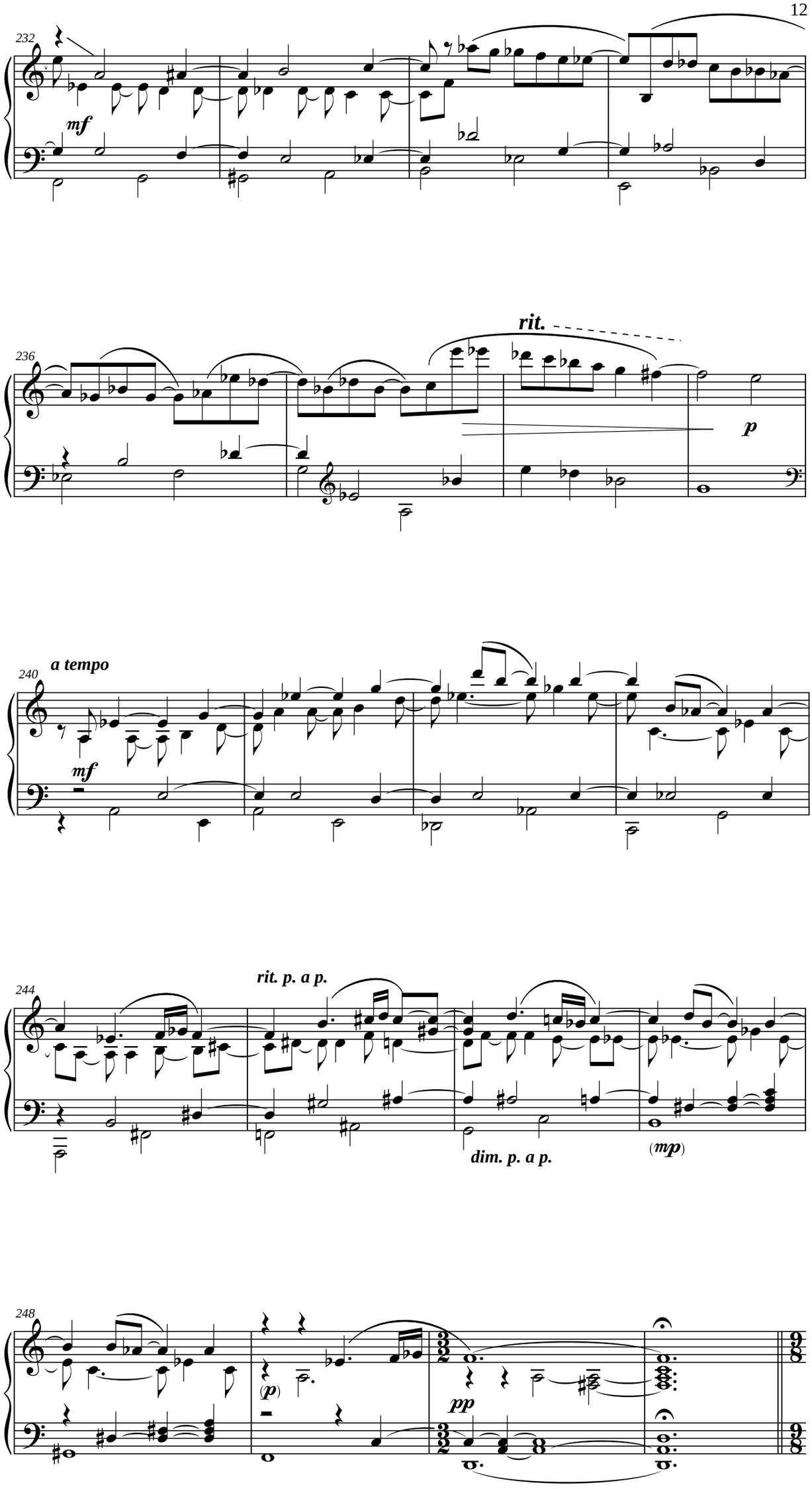

142
cresc. p. a p.
145
mf
p
148
150
151
mf
f
152
rit.
p
pp

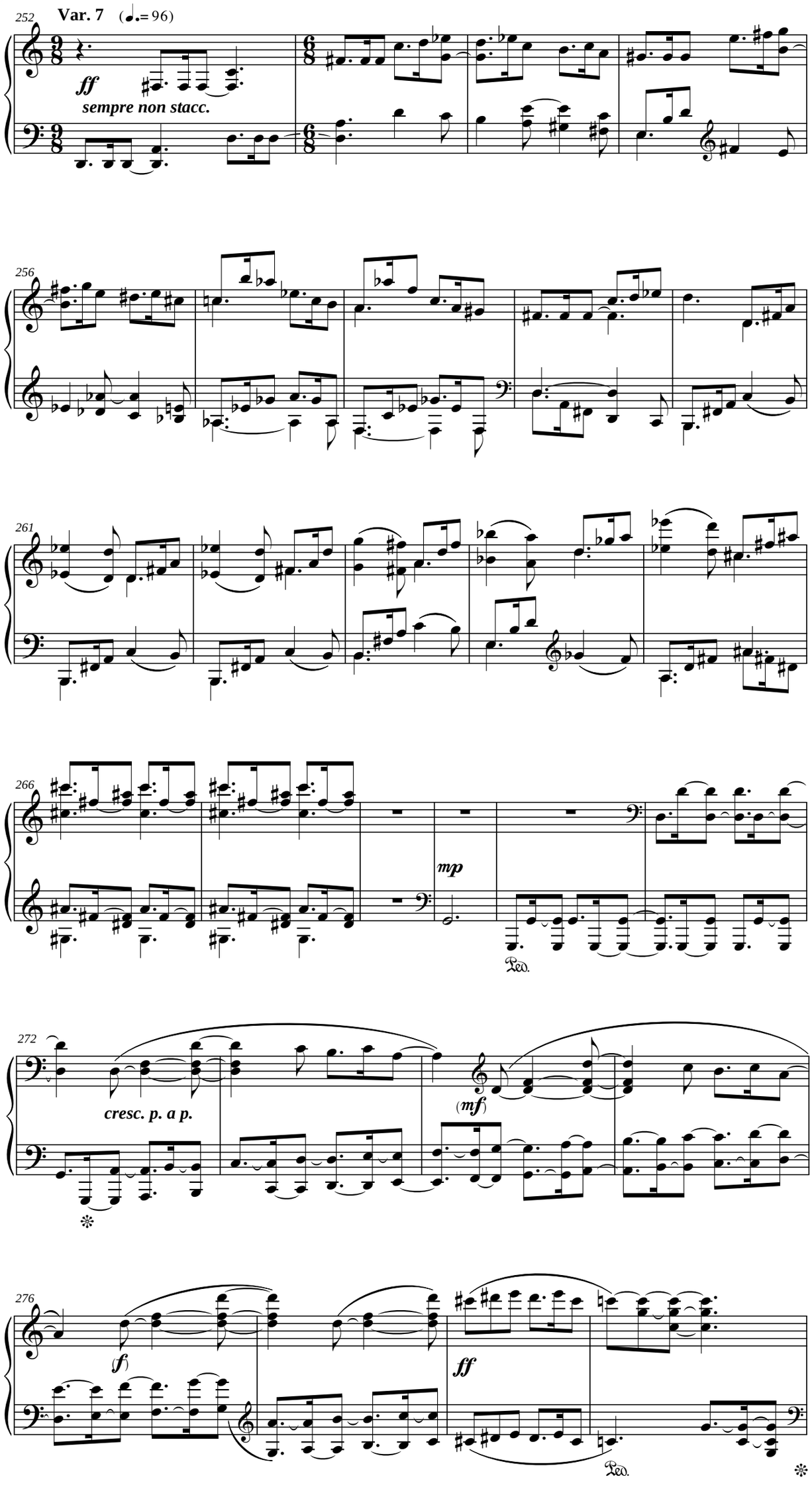
Var. 5: Scarlottiana

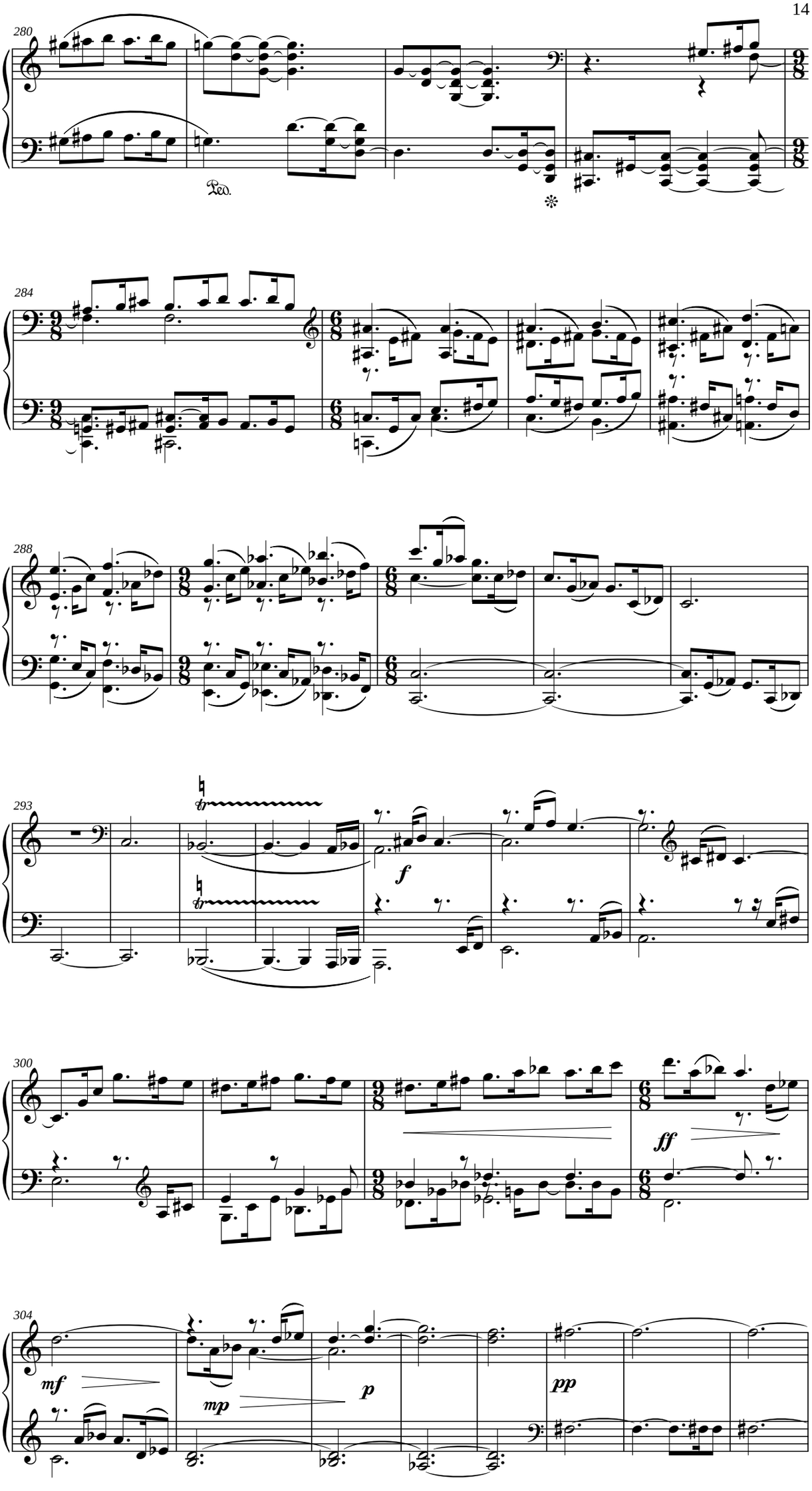


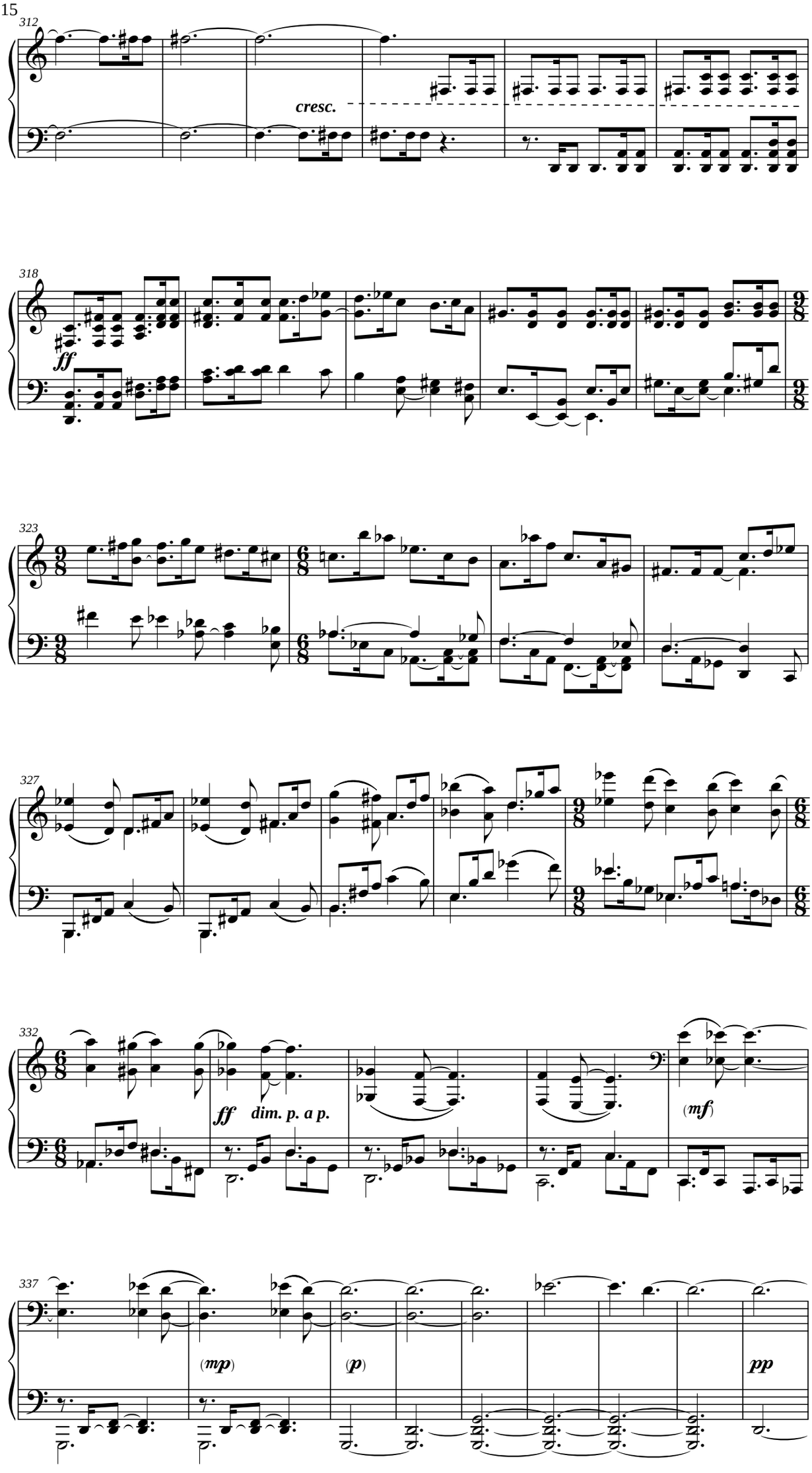

186
f
190
cresc.
192
ff
f
mf
195
mp
f
cresc.
199
ff
202
204

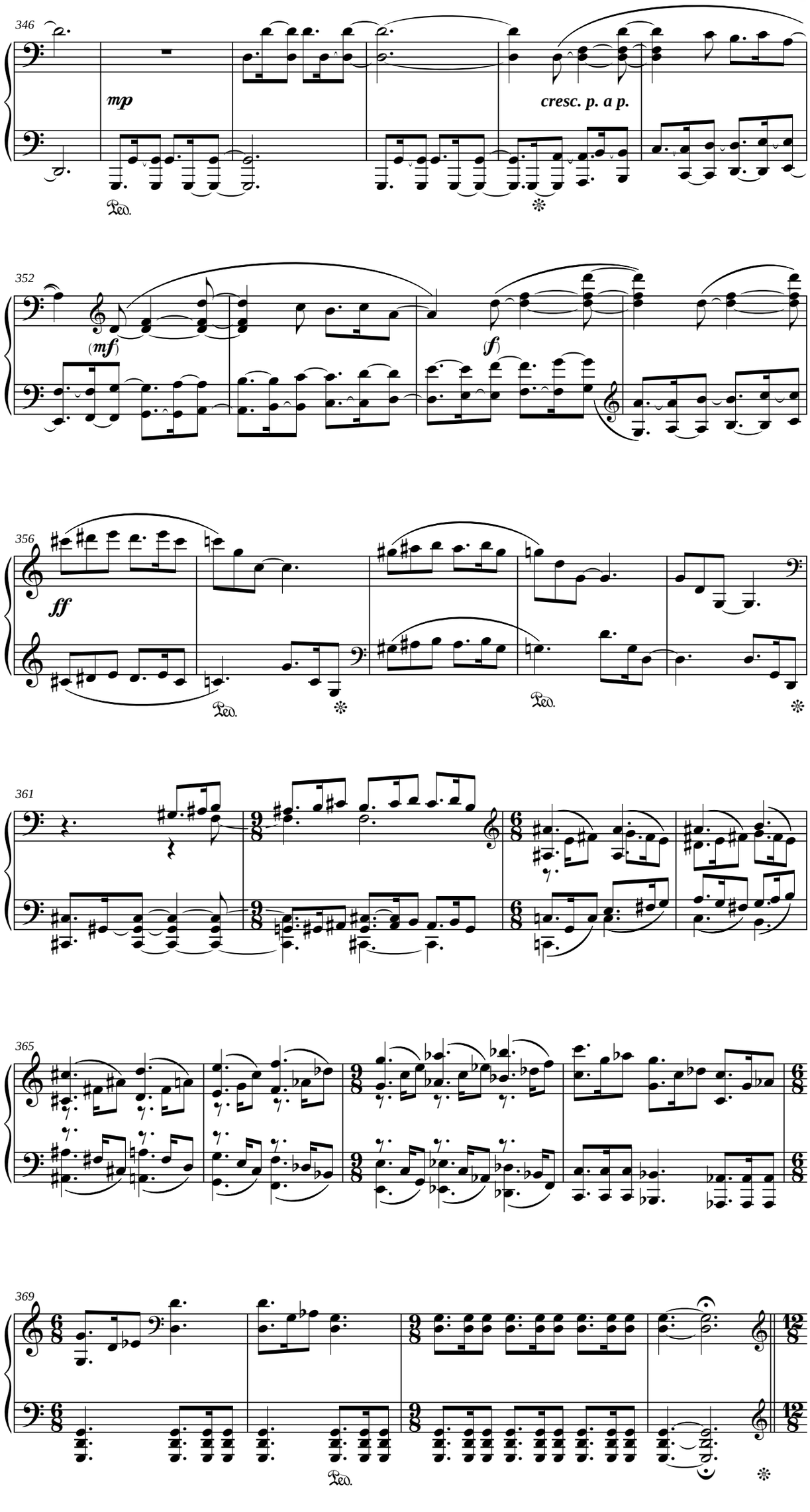

207
mf
cresc. p. a p.
211
f
215
ff
Var. 6 (𝅗𝅥 = 60)
220
p
mf
224
228
rit.
a tempo
p


232
mf
236
rit.
p
240
a tempo
mf
244
rit. p. a p.
dim. p. a p.
(mp)
248
(p)
pp


252
Var. 7 (♩.= 96)
ff
sempre non stacc.
256
261
266
mp
Ped.
272
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
276
(f)
ff
Ped.


280
Ped.
284
288
293
f
300
ff
304
mf
mp
p
pp


312
cresc.
318
ff
323
327
332
ff
dim. p. a p.
(mf)
337
(mp)
(p)
pp


346
mp
cresc. p. a p.
Ped.
352
(mf)
(f)
356
ff
Ped.
Ped.
361
365
369
Ped.

Var. 8 (♩.= 50)

373

p

376

cresc. p. a p.

378

mf *mp* *mf*

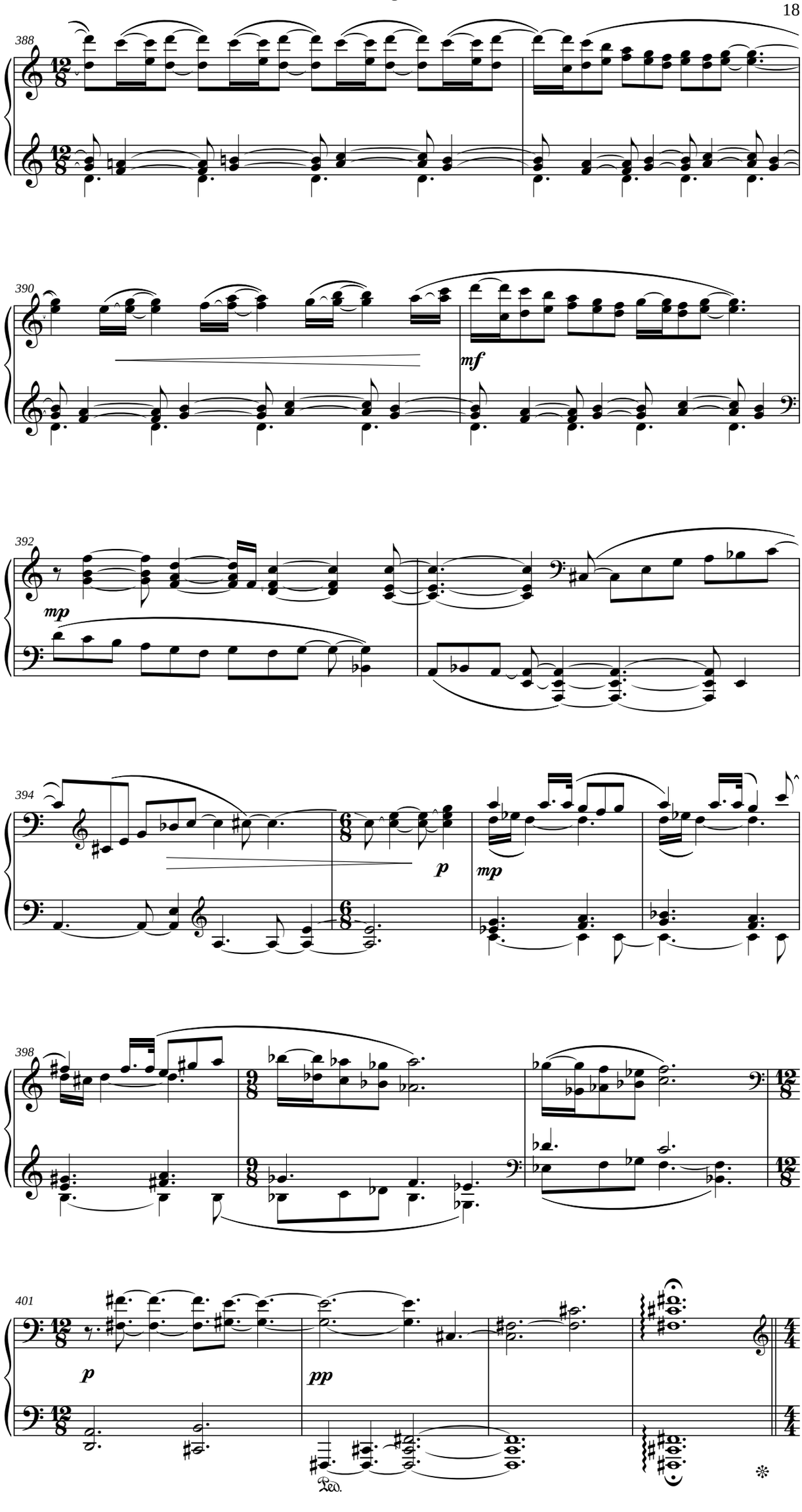
382

mp *p*

385

387

mp


388
390
mf
392
mp
394
p
mp
398
401
p
pp
Ped.

Var. 9: Presto (♩ = 104)

405

(16ths legato)

f

408

411

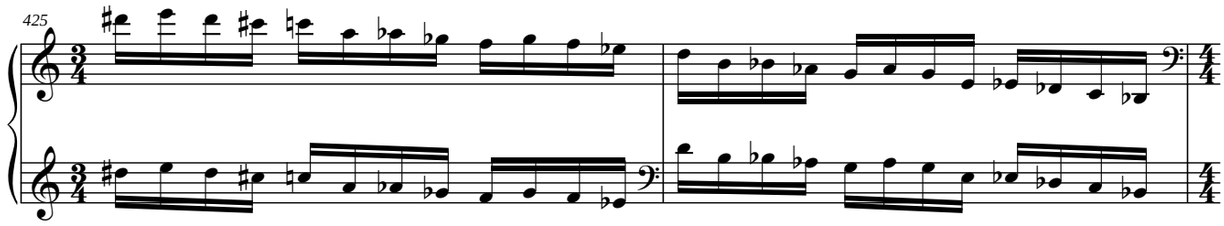
414

417

ff

420

423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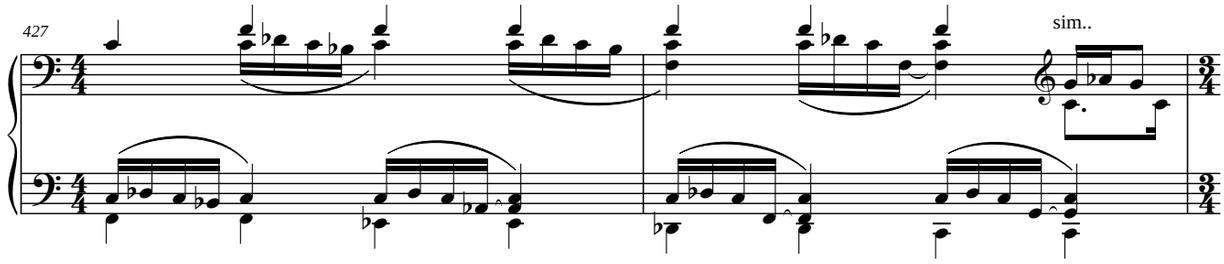
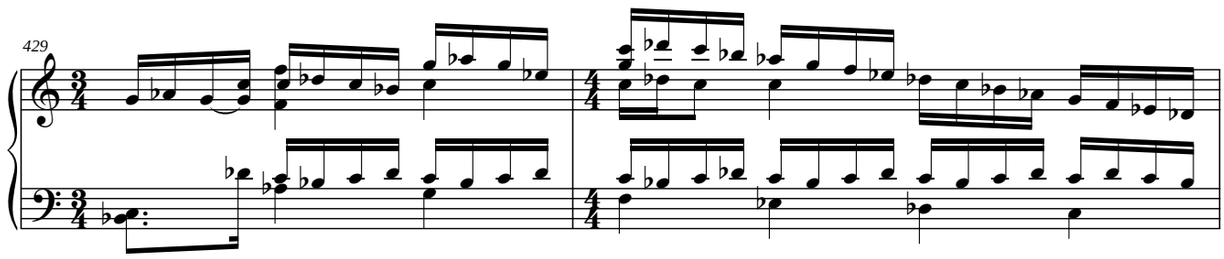

427
sim..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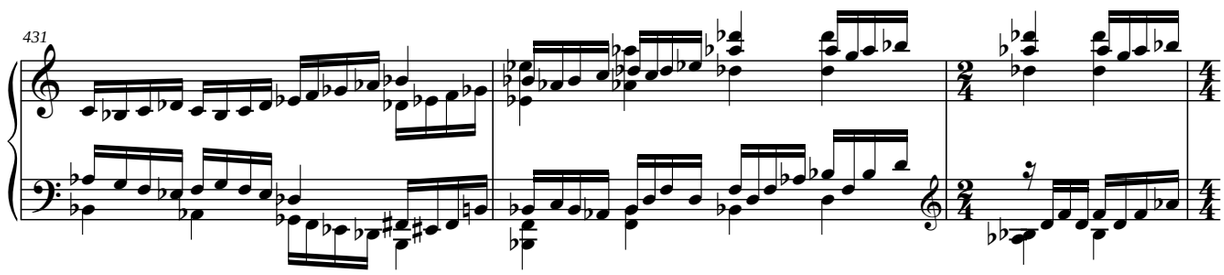
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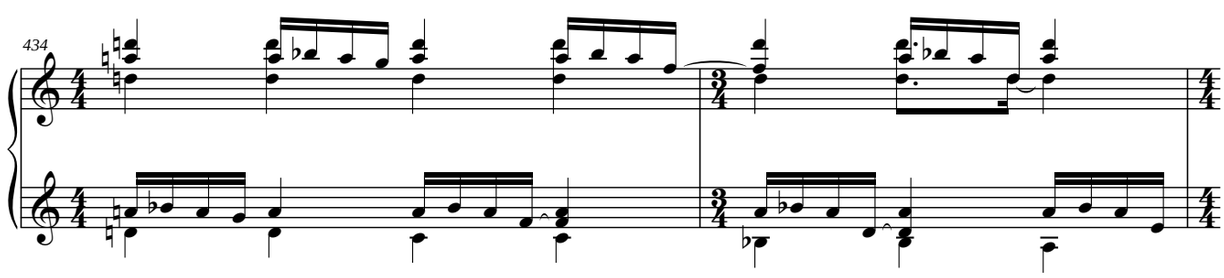
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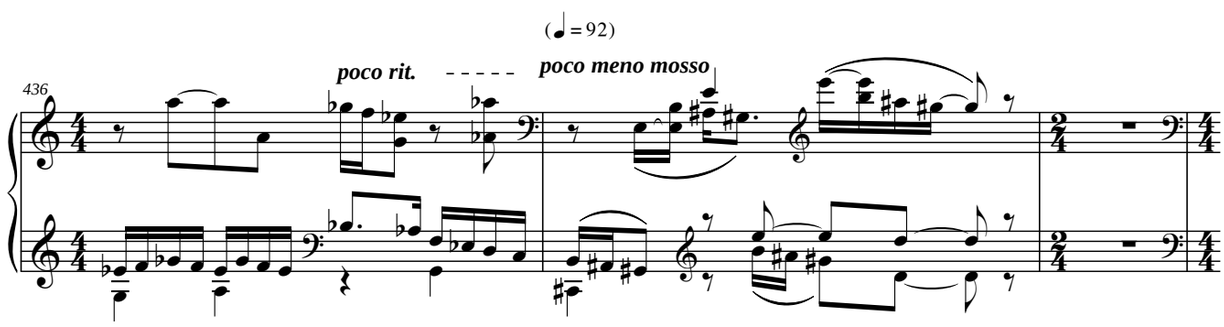
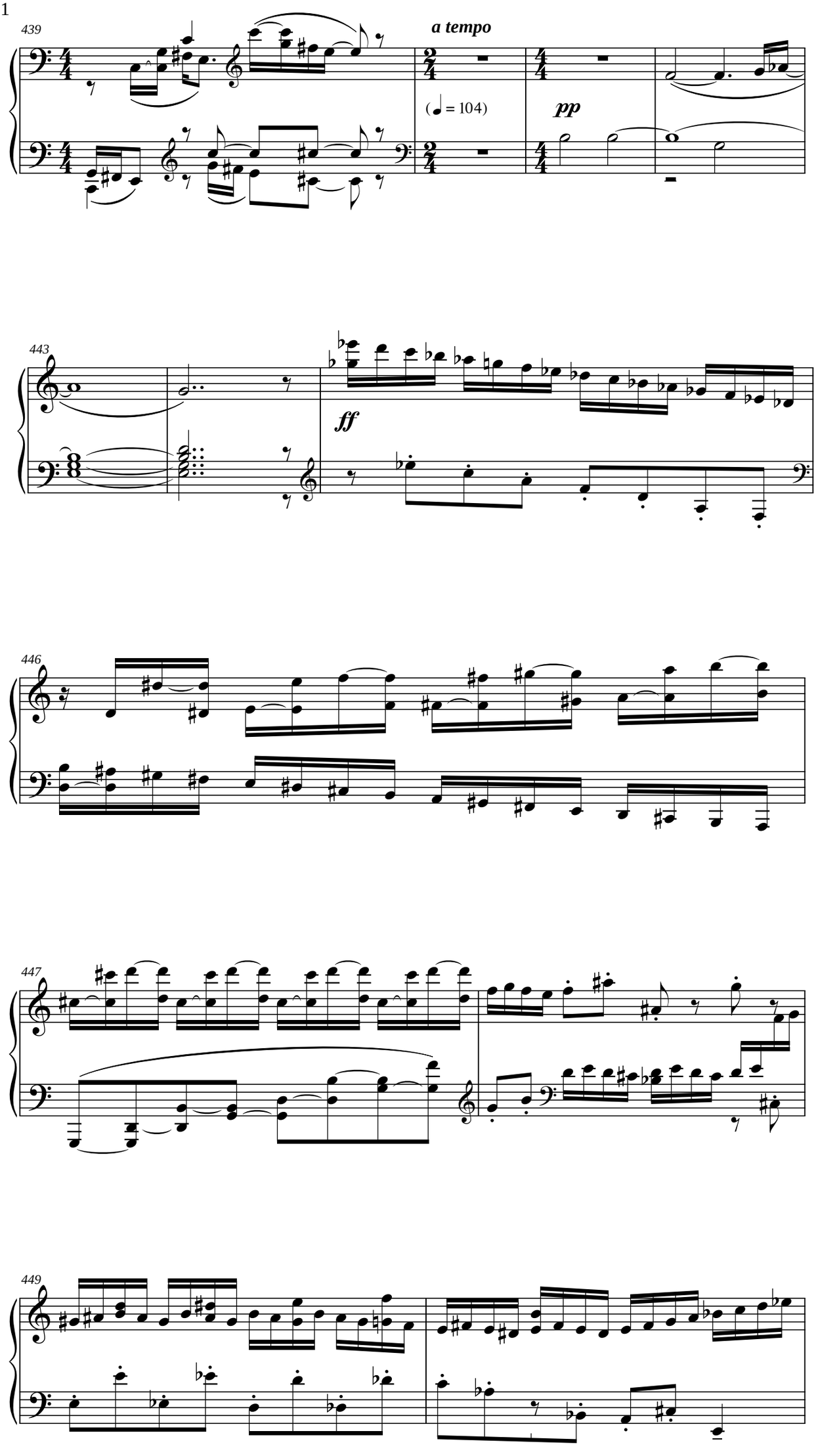
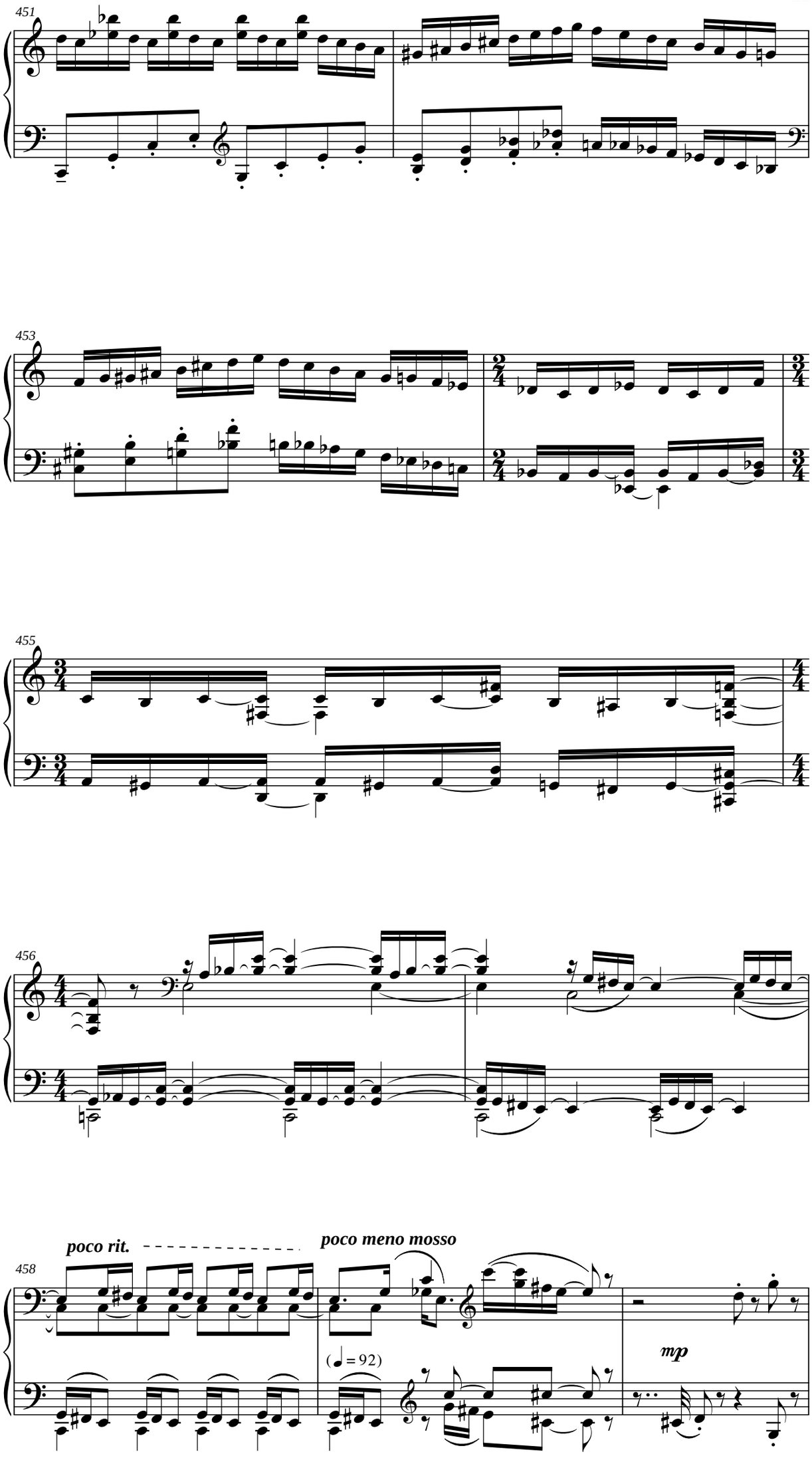

(♩ = 92)
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
436


439
a tempo
(♩ = 104)
pp
443
ff
446
447
449


451
453
455
456
458
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
(♩ = 92)
mp

Var. 10 (♩ = 100)

461

ff

468

Ped.

Ped.

473

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

Ped.

477

Ped.

ff

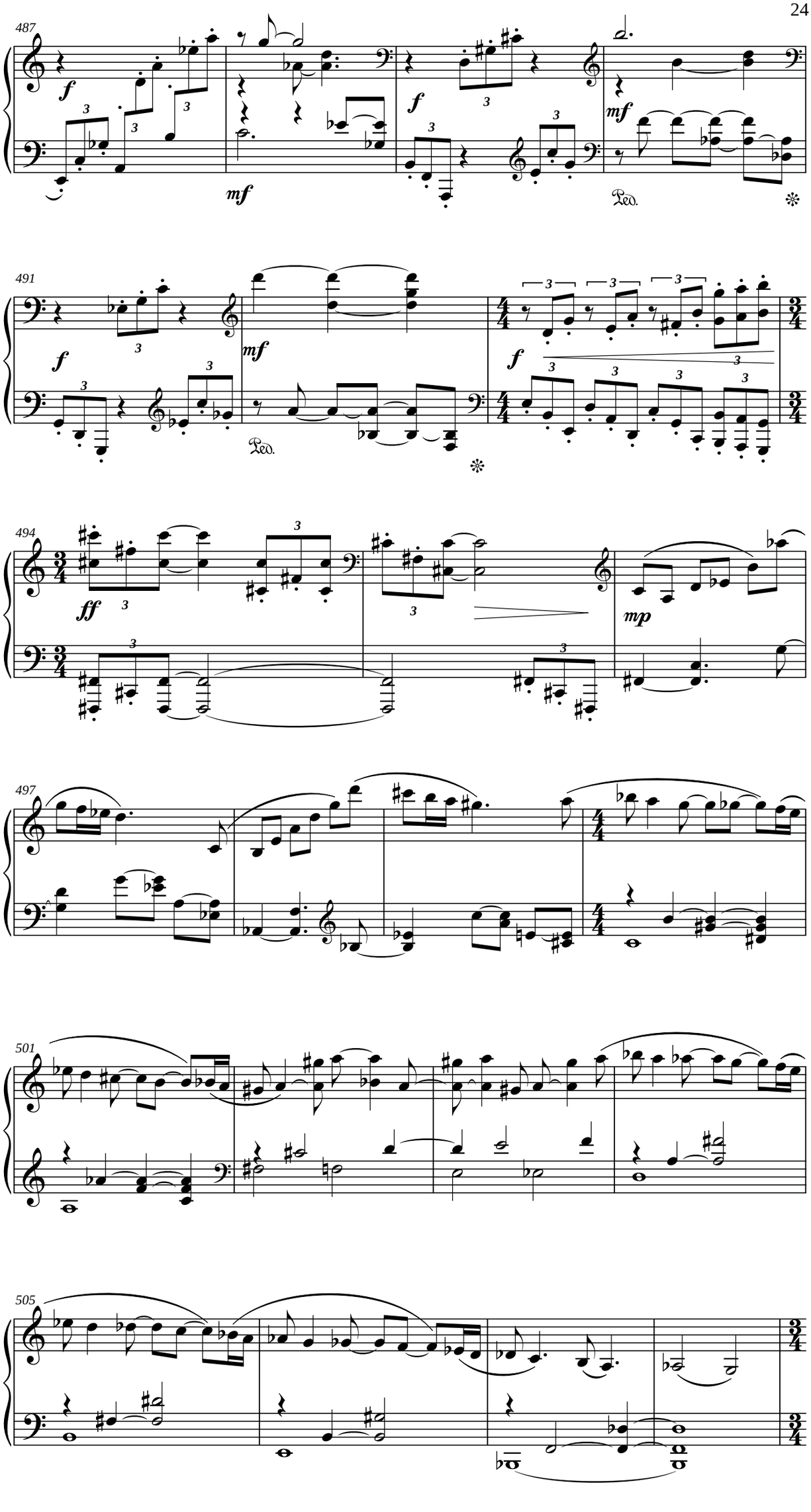
f

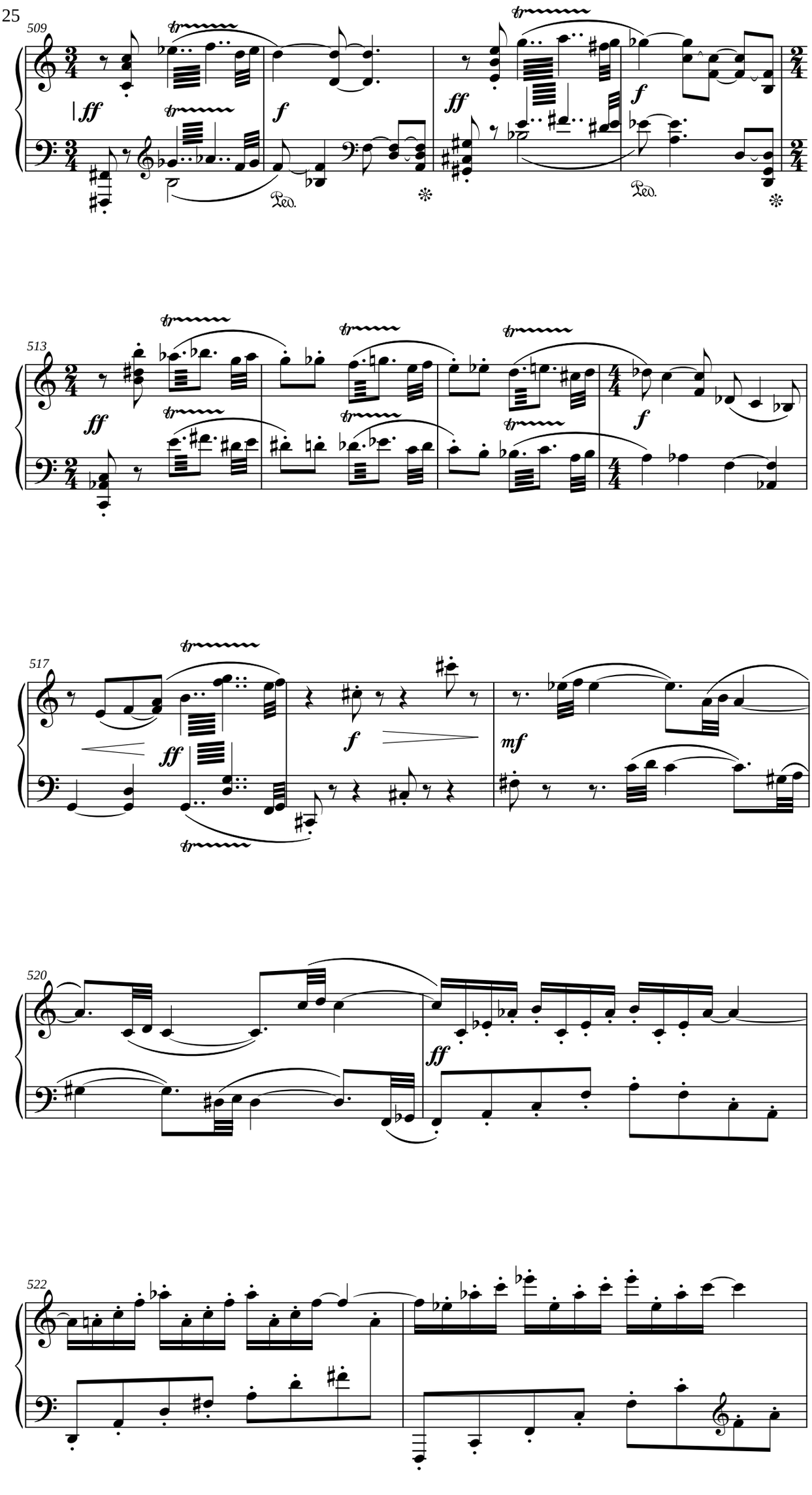
481

484

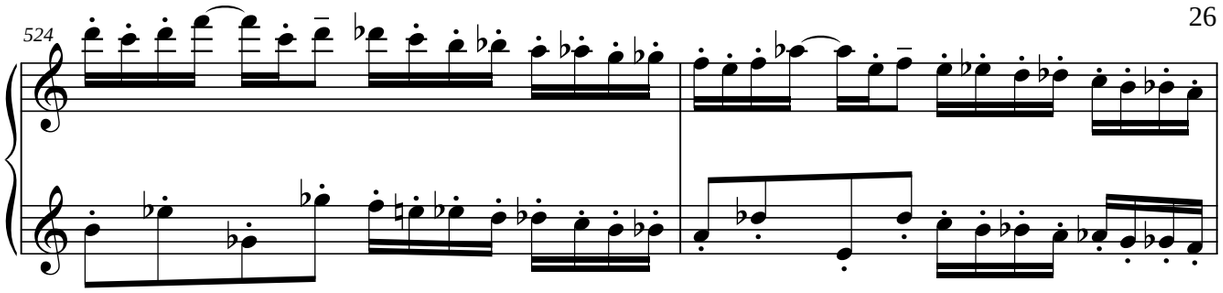
dim.

mf


487
491
494
497
501
505


509
ff
f
ff
f
Ped.
Ped.
513
ff
f
517
ff
f
mf
520
ff
522

524



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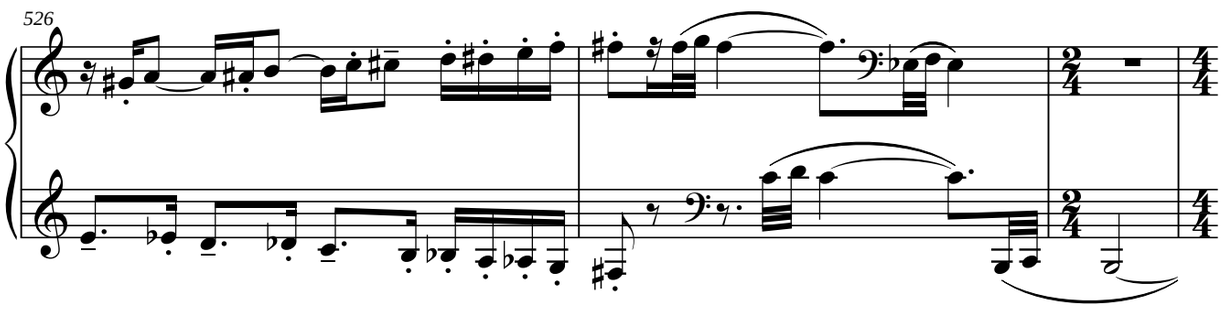

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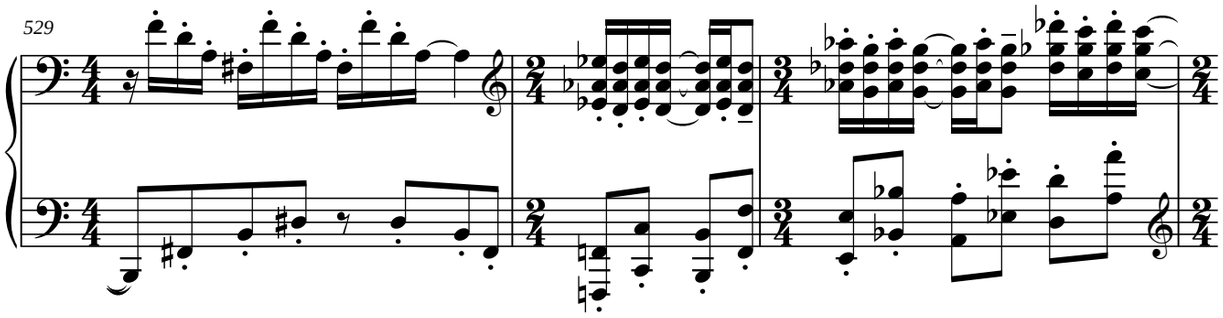

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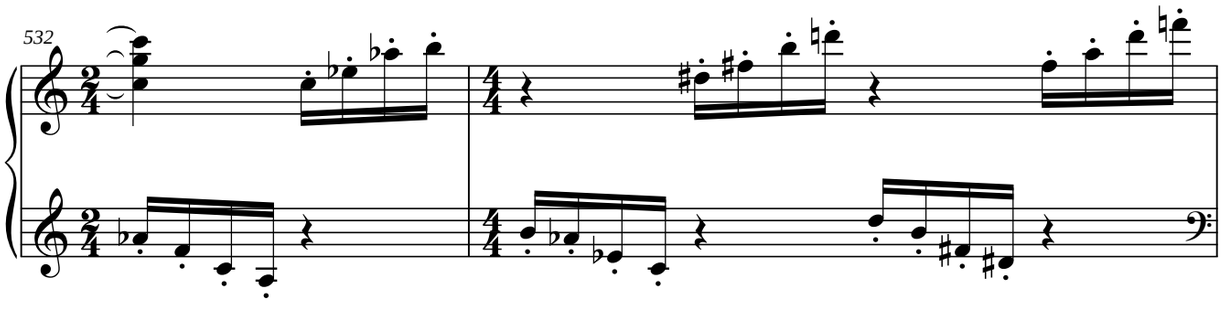
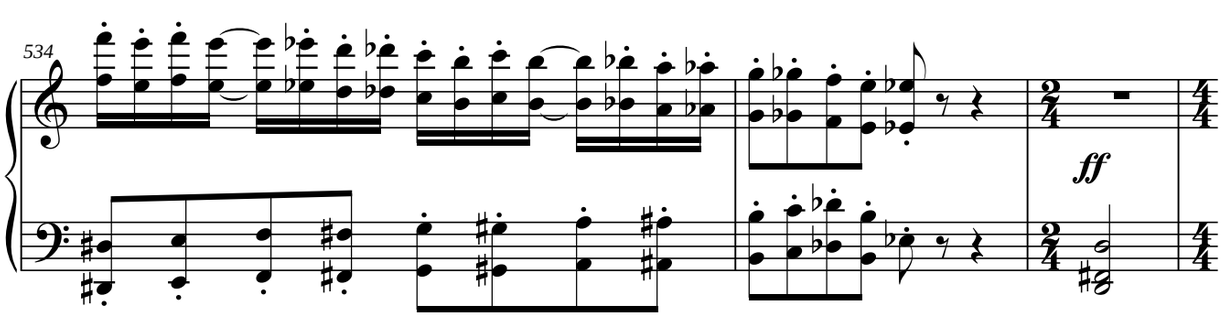
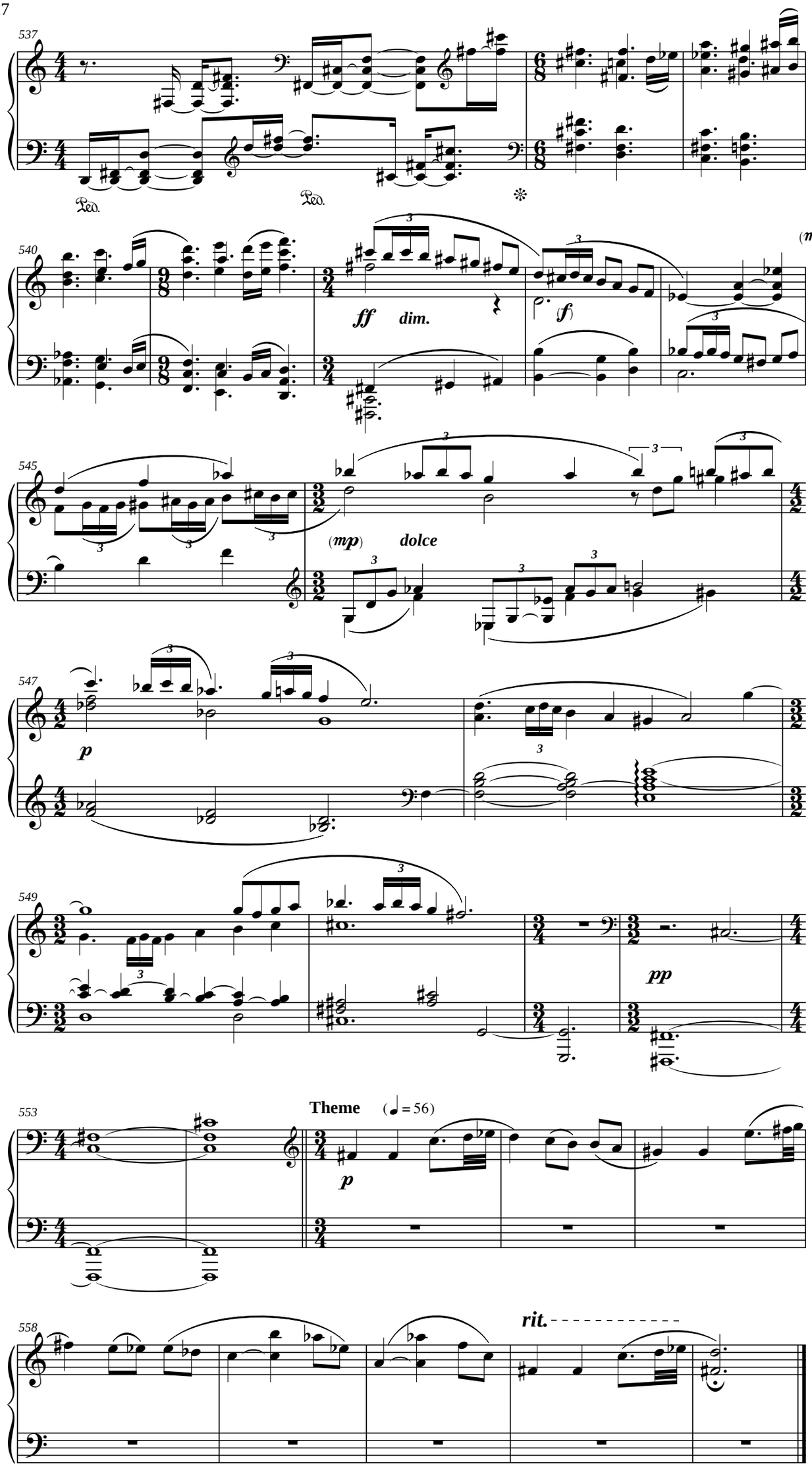


534

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