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# Variations on a Russian Folk Song

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# Variations on a Russian Folk Song

**Abstract**
This piece for solo piano demonstrates a wide range of techniques utilized in twentieth century composition. The theme is taken from the Finale of Igor Stravinsky's ballet "The Firebird", which itself is based on a Russian folk song. Each subsequent variation focuses on one or more compositional technique.

I. Theme

II. March (chords by thirds, extended triads)

III. Molto grave e expressivo (chromaticism)

IV. L'istesso tempo (ten-tone row)

V. Fast and light (twelve-tone row, secundal harmony)

VI. Much less (minimalism, extended techniques)

VII. Hazy (quartal harmony, modal melody)

VIII. Finale (spectralism)

The order of the variations partly reflects a chronological motion of harmony through the twentieth century, but also demonstrates a building of large-scale tension, releasing that tension, then focusing on the aftermath of that release. The final variation creates a symmetry within the form of the piece, with chords rising into the uppermost register of the piano, just as the piece began.

**Keywords**
theme and variations, piano, russian folk song, Stravinsky, Firebird, music theory

**Disciplines**
Composition | Fine Arts | Music Theory

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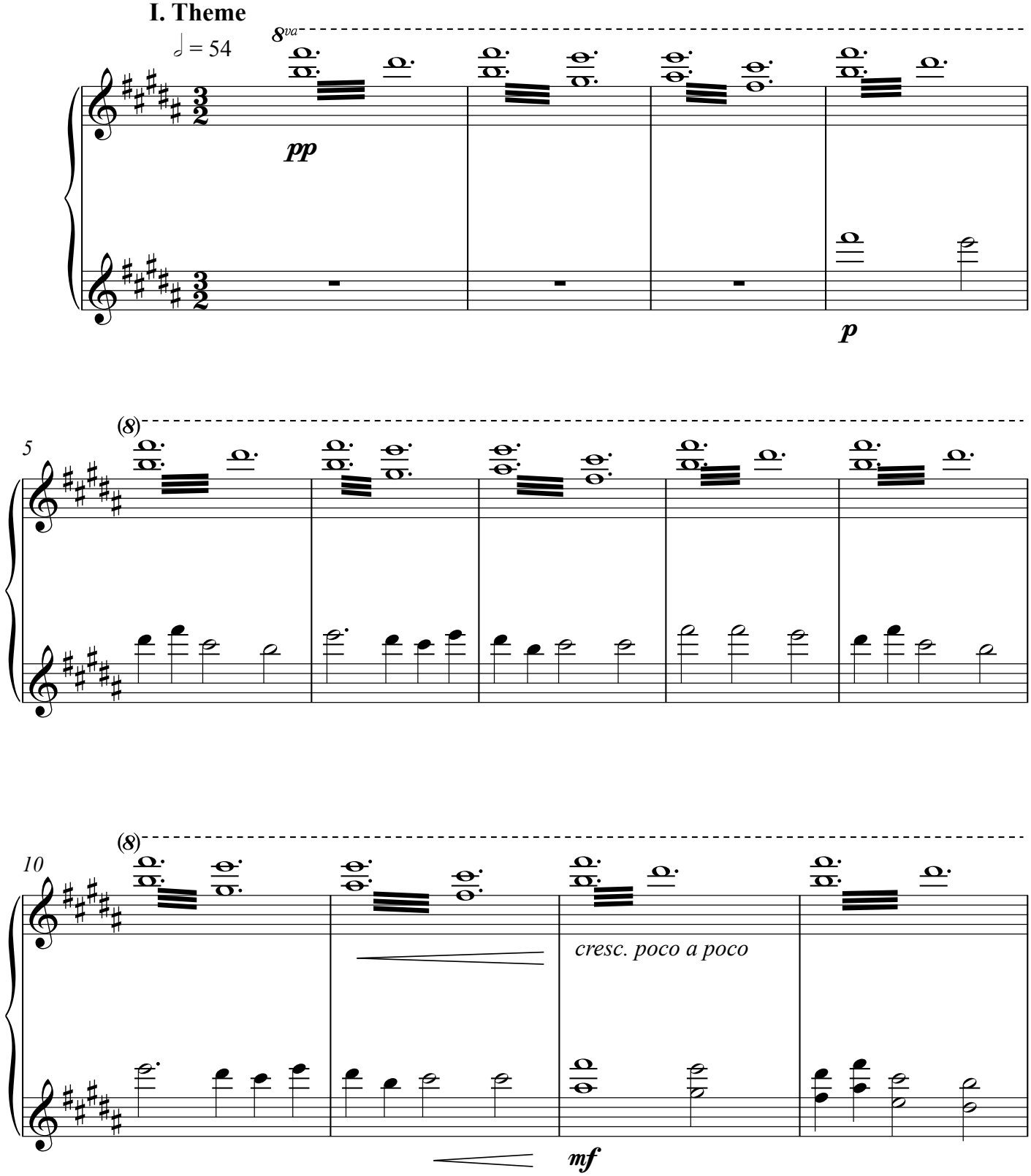
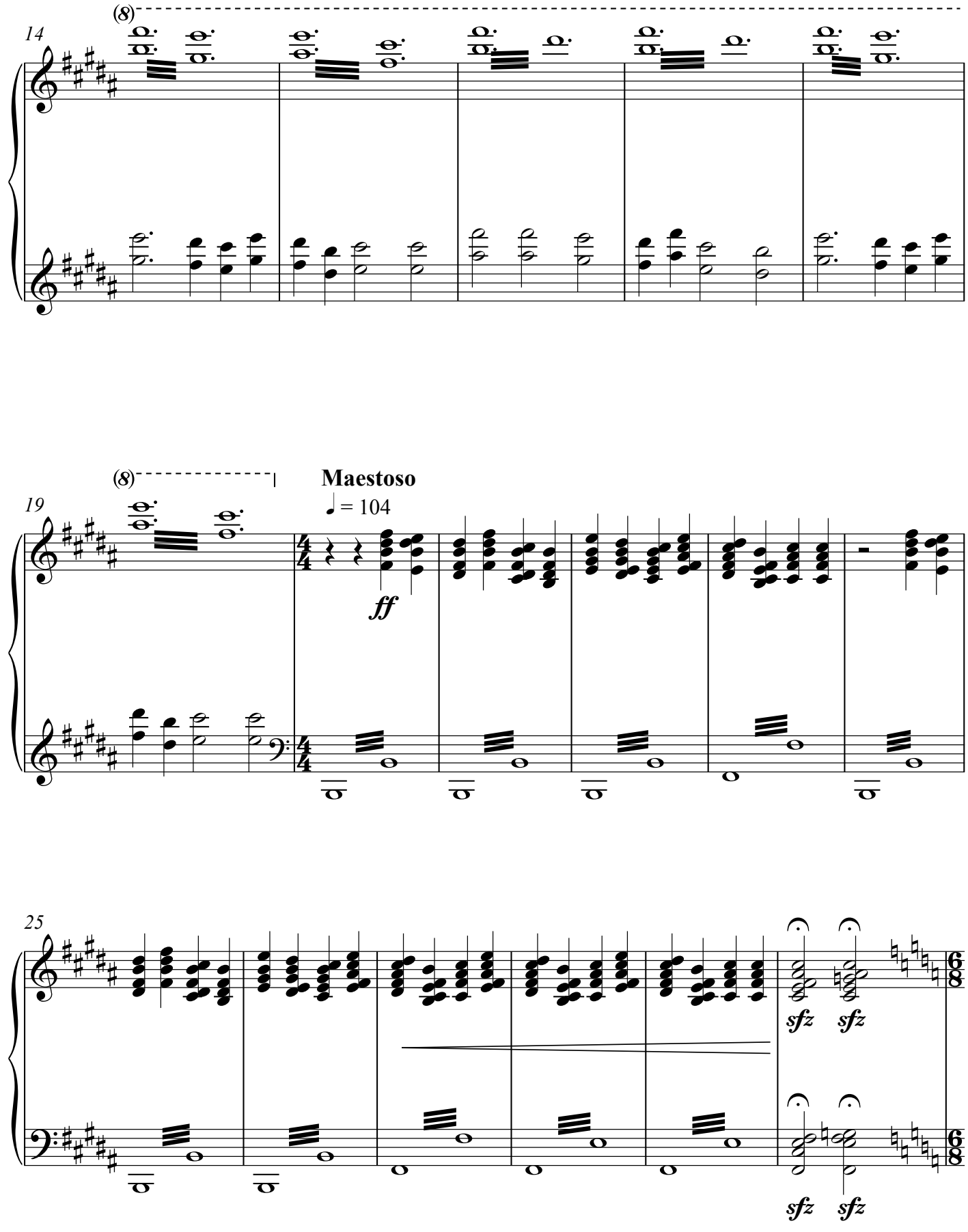
# Variations on a Russian Folk Song

for Solo Piano

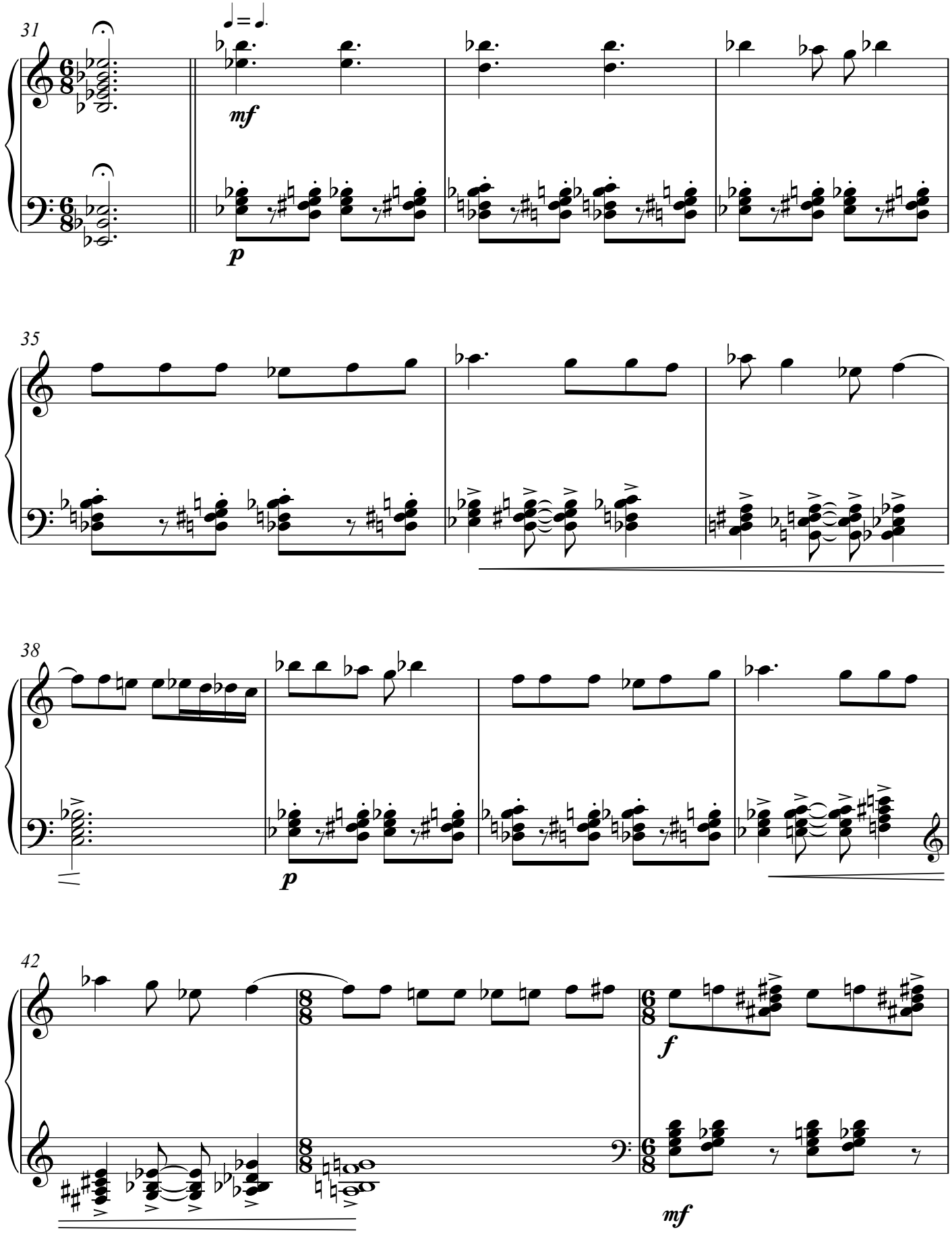
Brian R. Denu

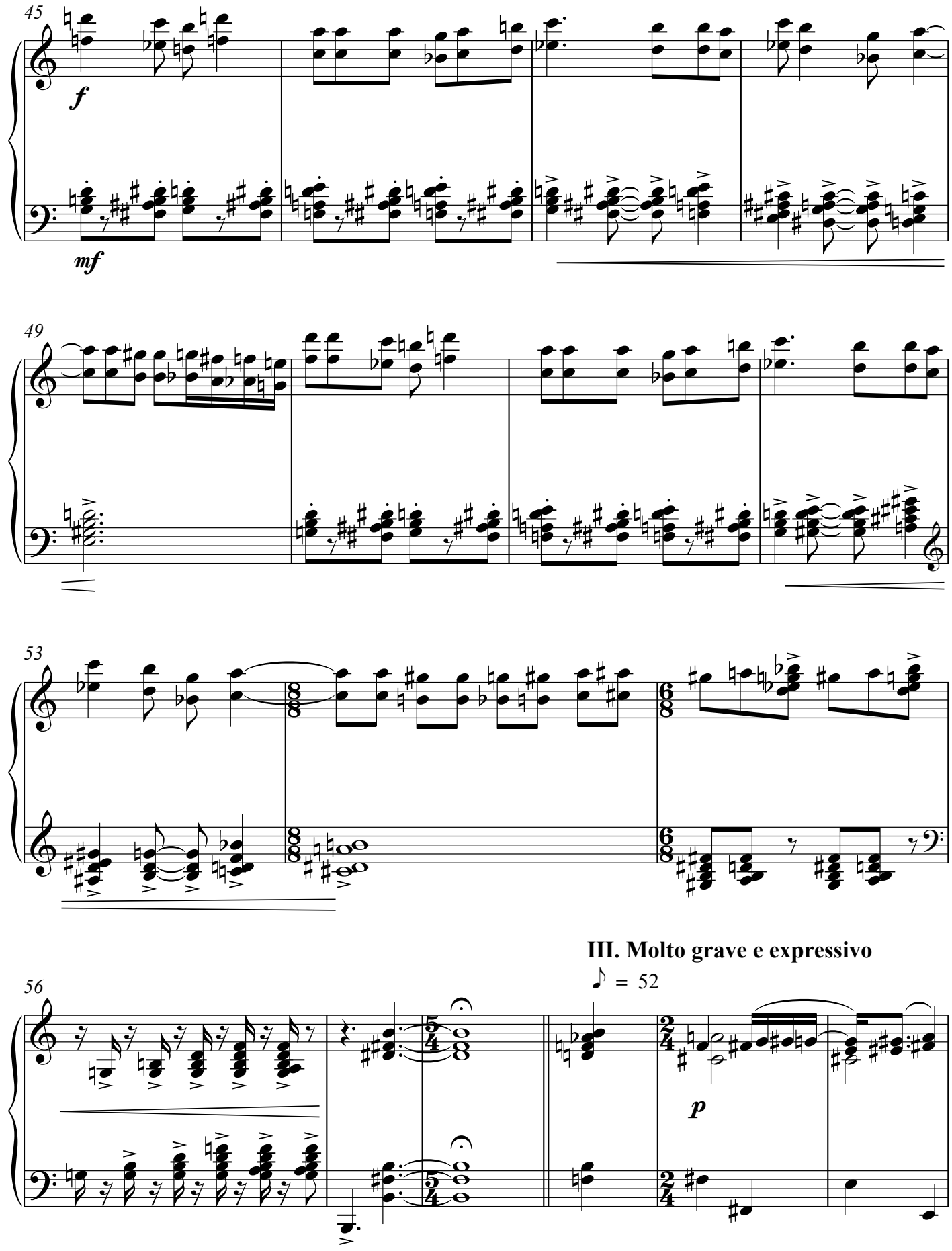
**I. Theme**

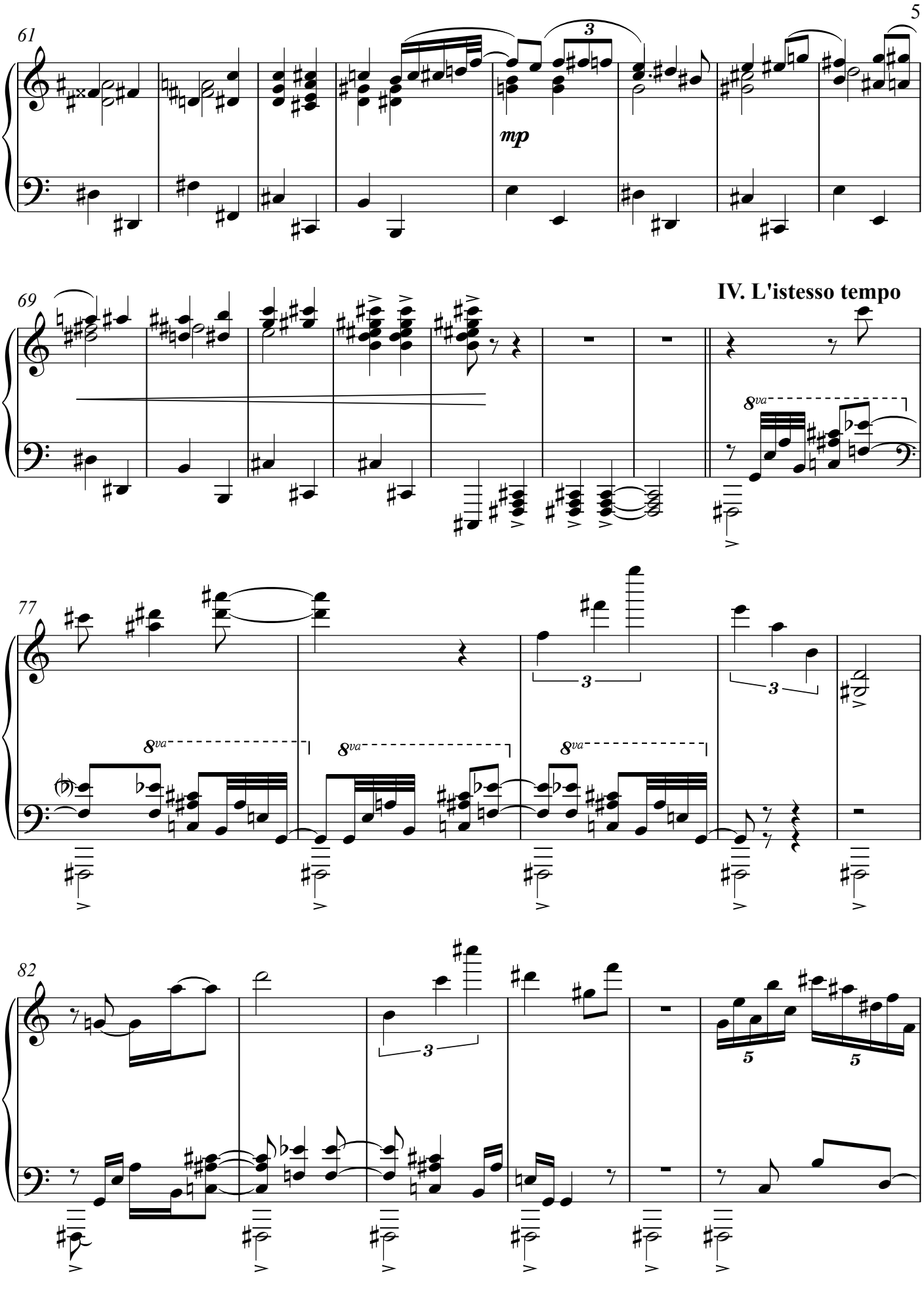


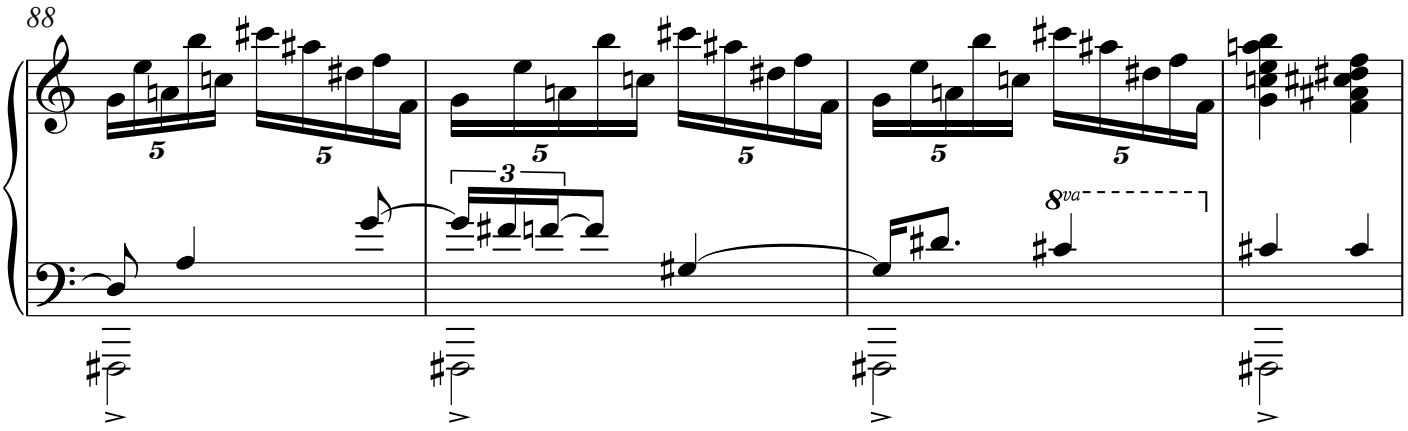

(8)
14
(8)
Maestoso
19
♩ = 104
ff
25
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz

## II. March

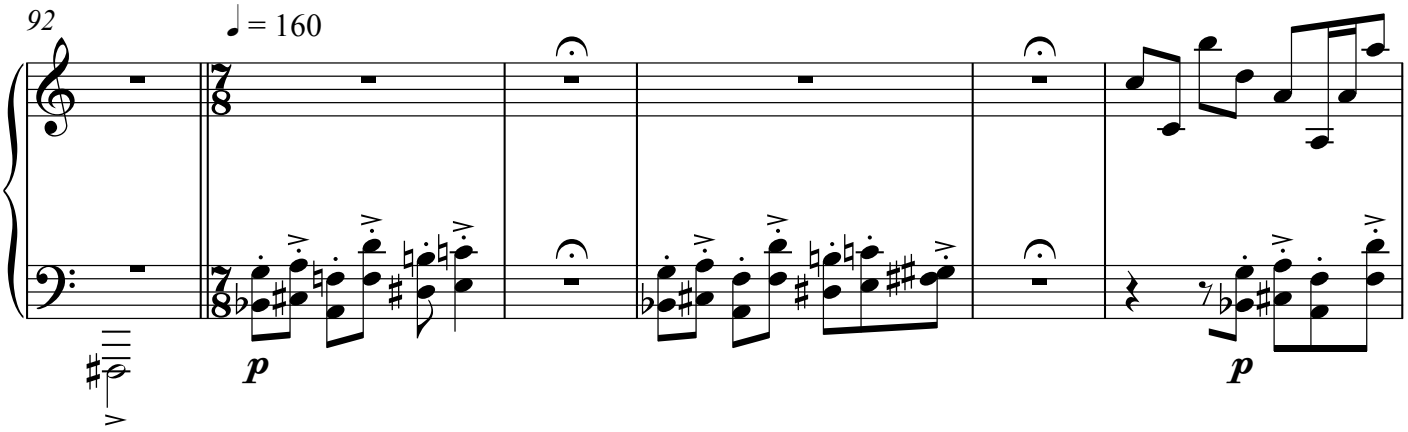


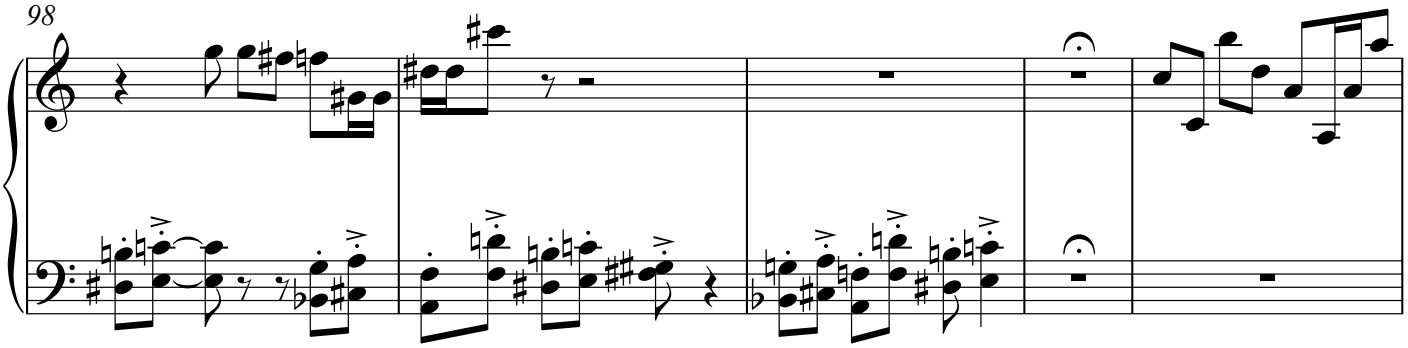

45
f
mf
49
53
III. Molto grave e expressivo
56
p

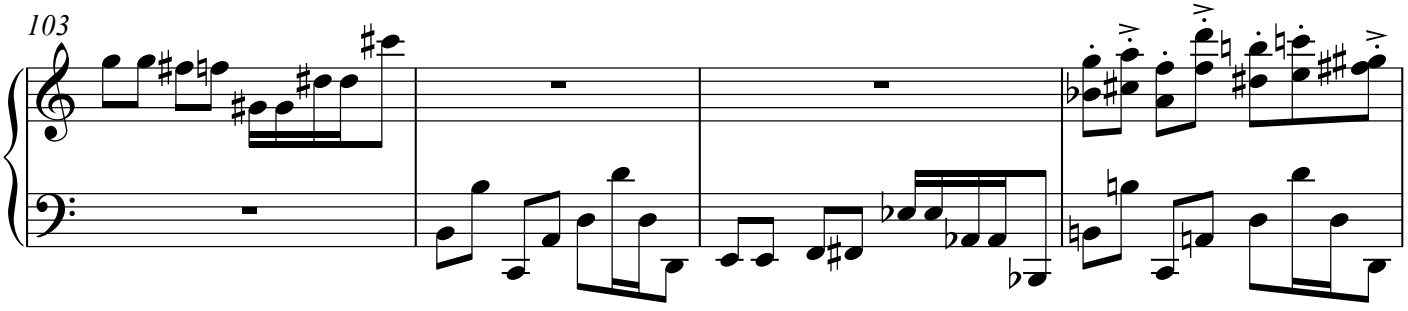

61
mp
69
IV. L'istesso tempo
8va
77
8va
8va
8va
82

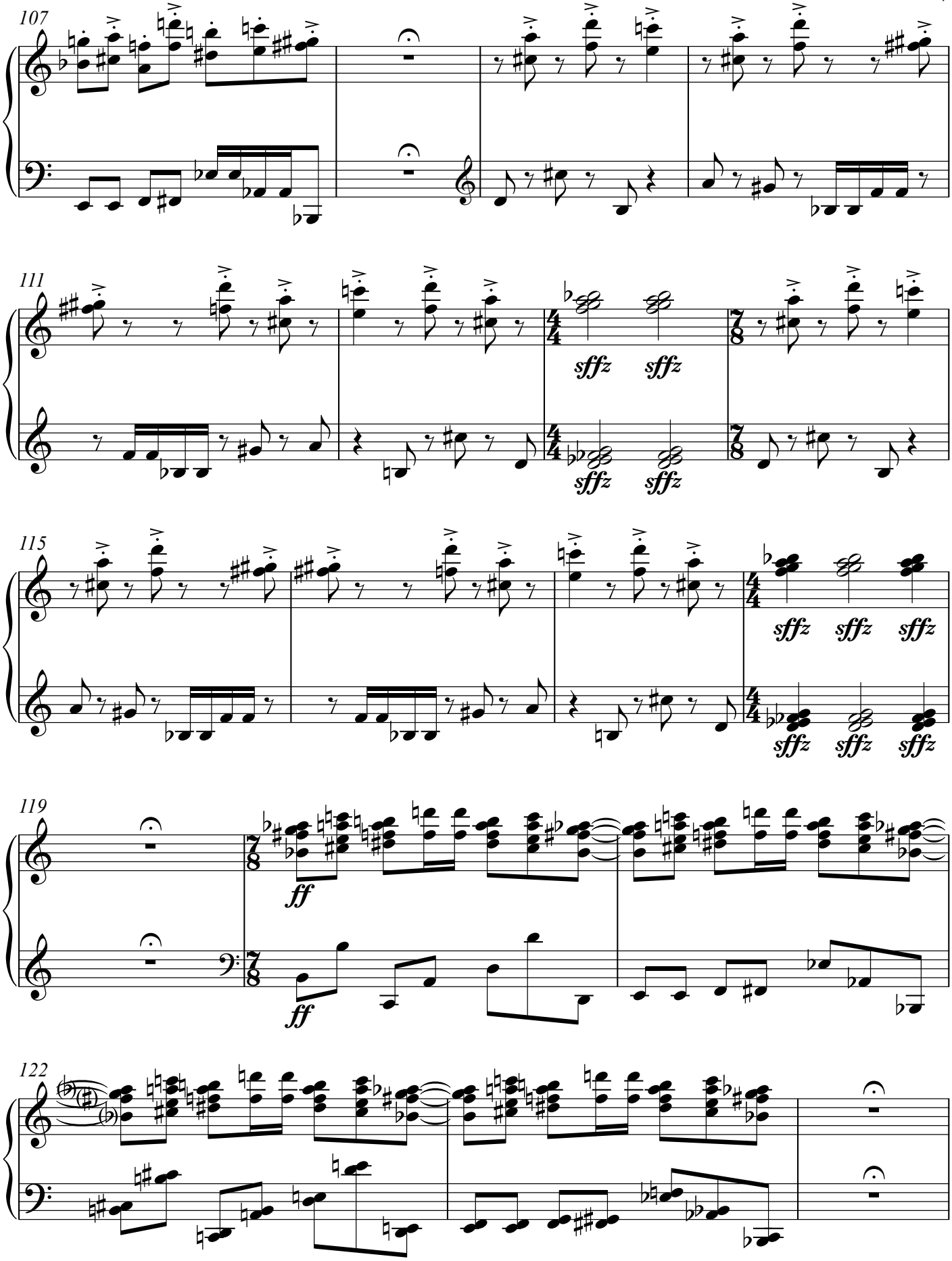



**V. Fast and light**

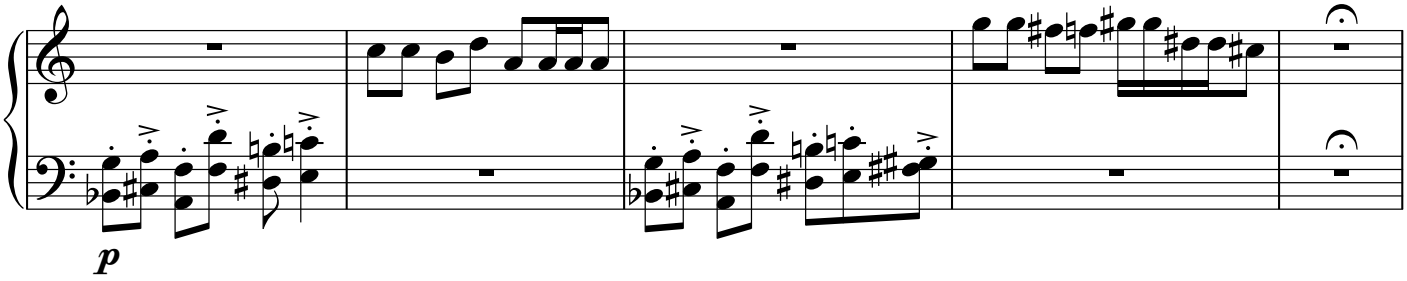


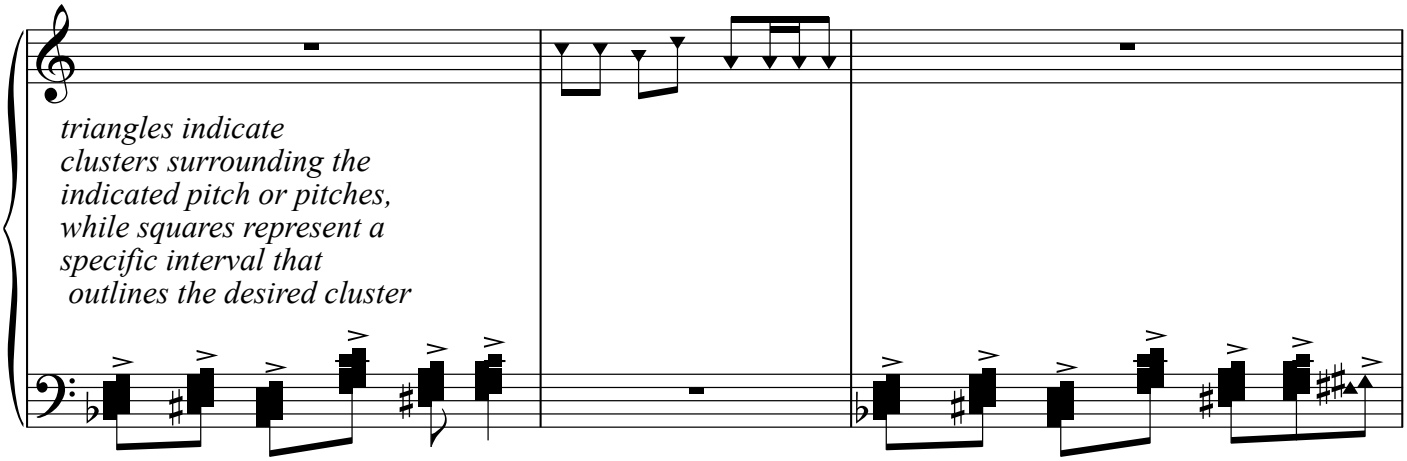




107
111
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
115
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
119
ff
ff
122

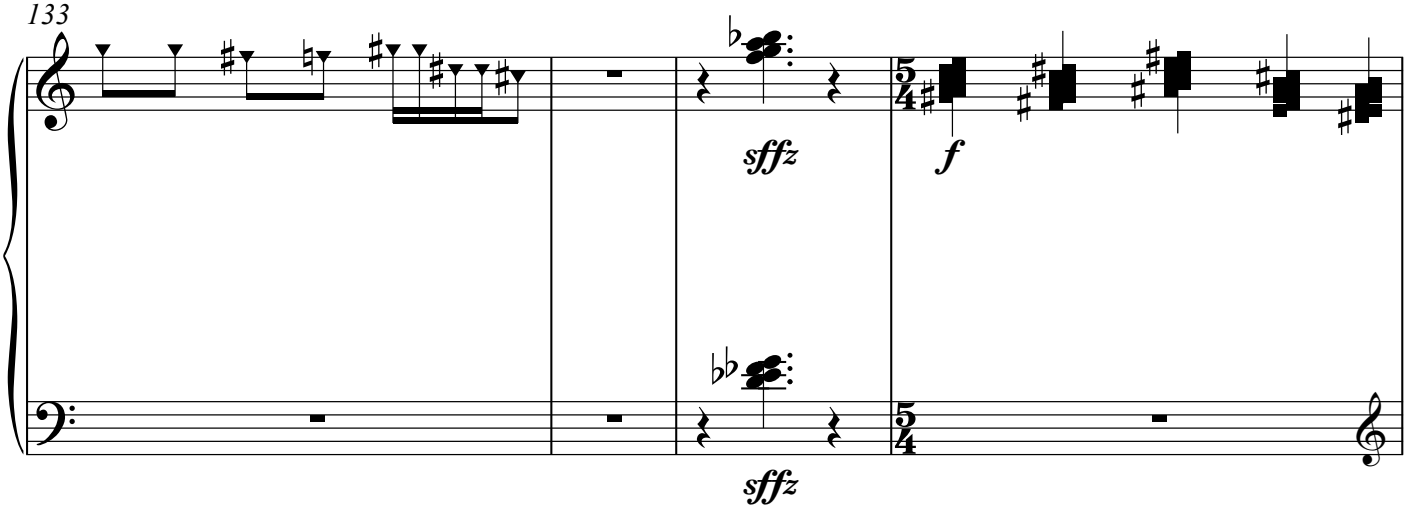
125

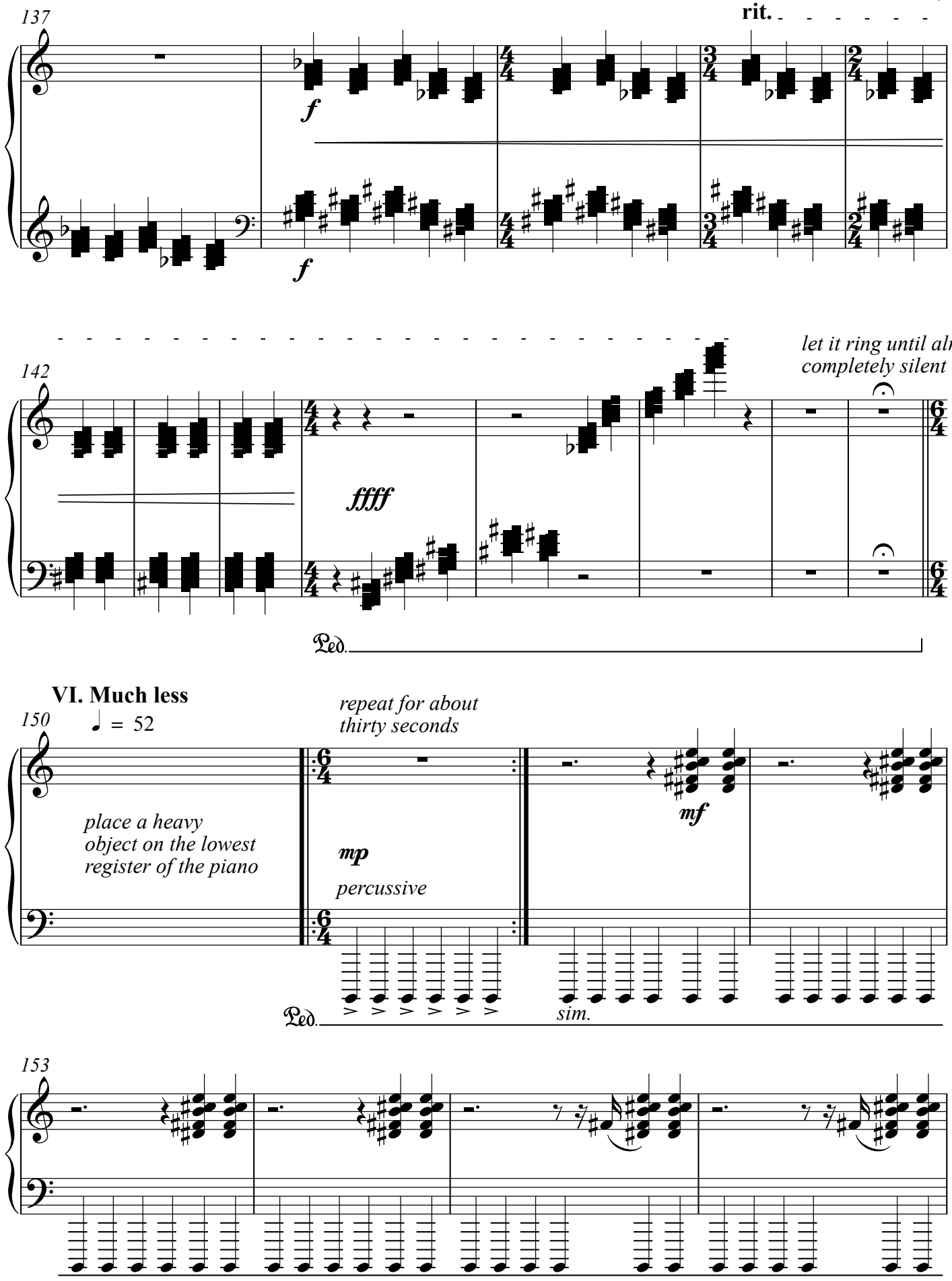

p

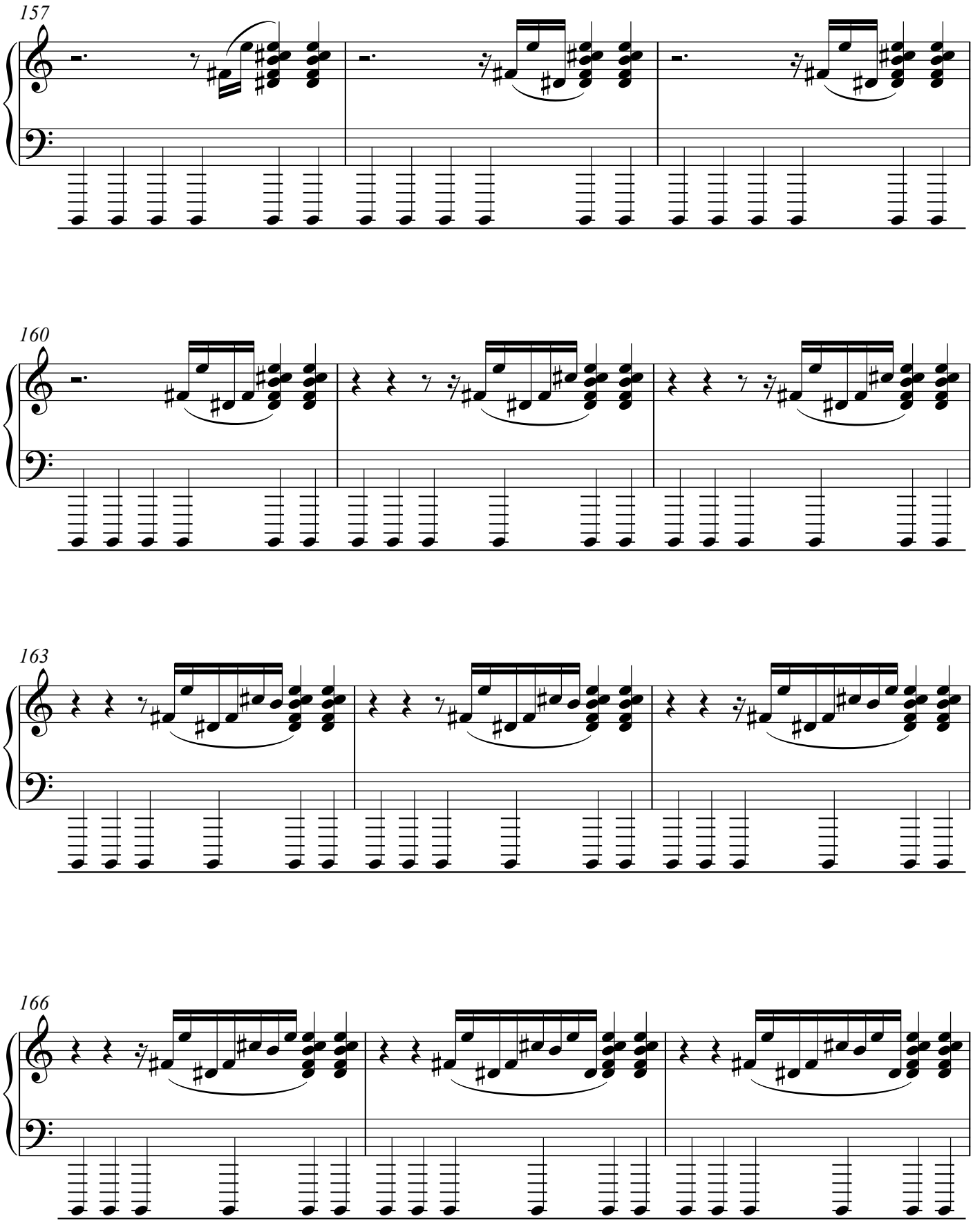
130

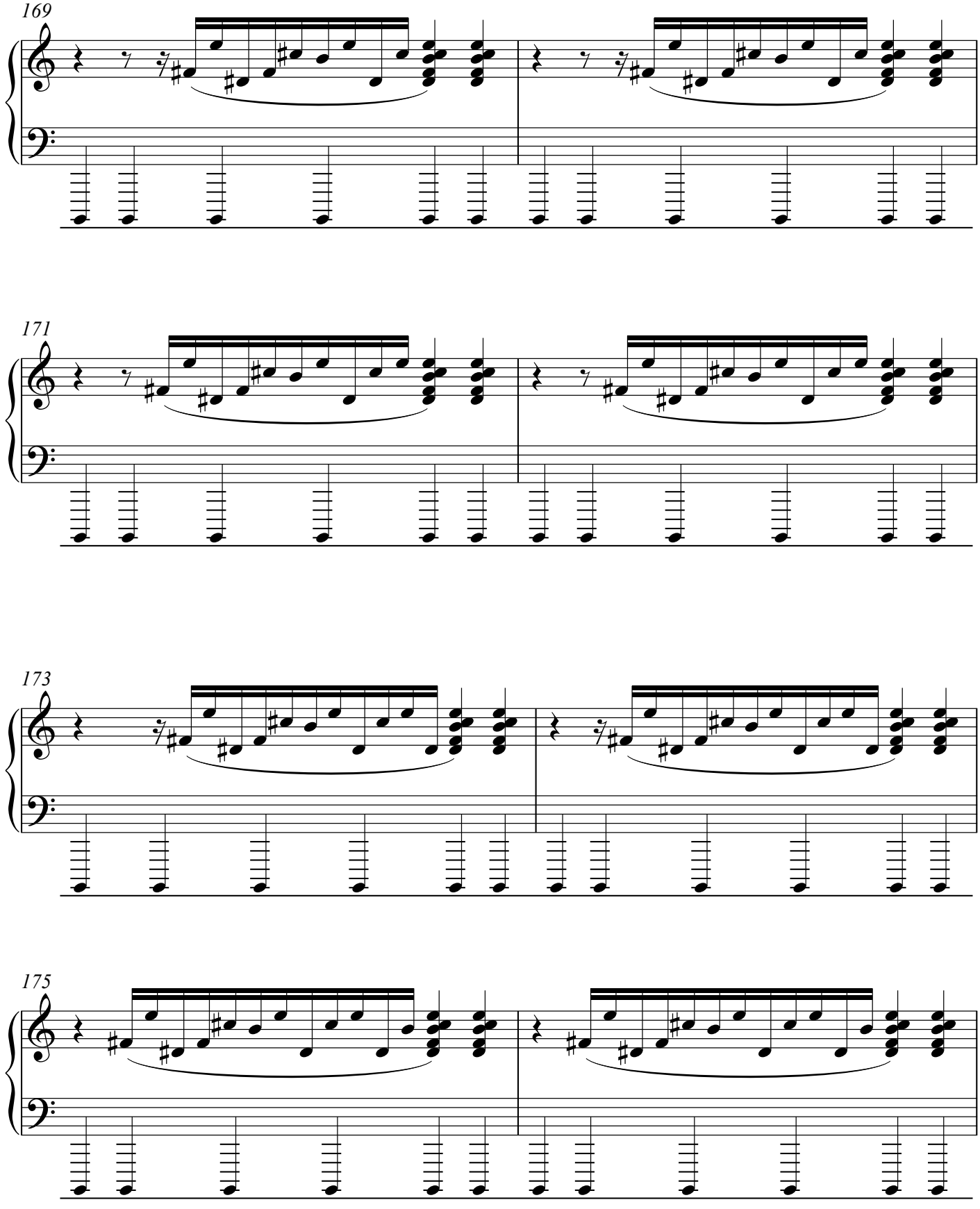

triangles indicate
clusters surrounding the
indicated pitch or pitches,
while squares represent a
specific interval that
outlines the desired cluster

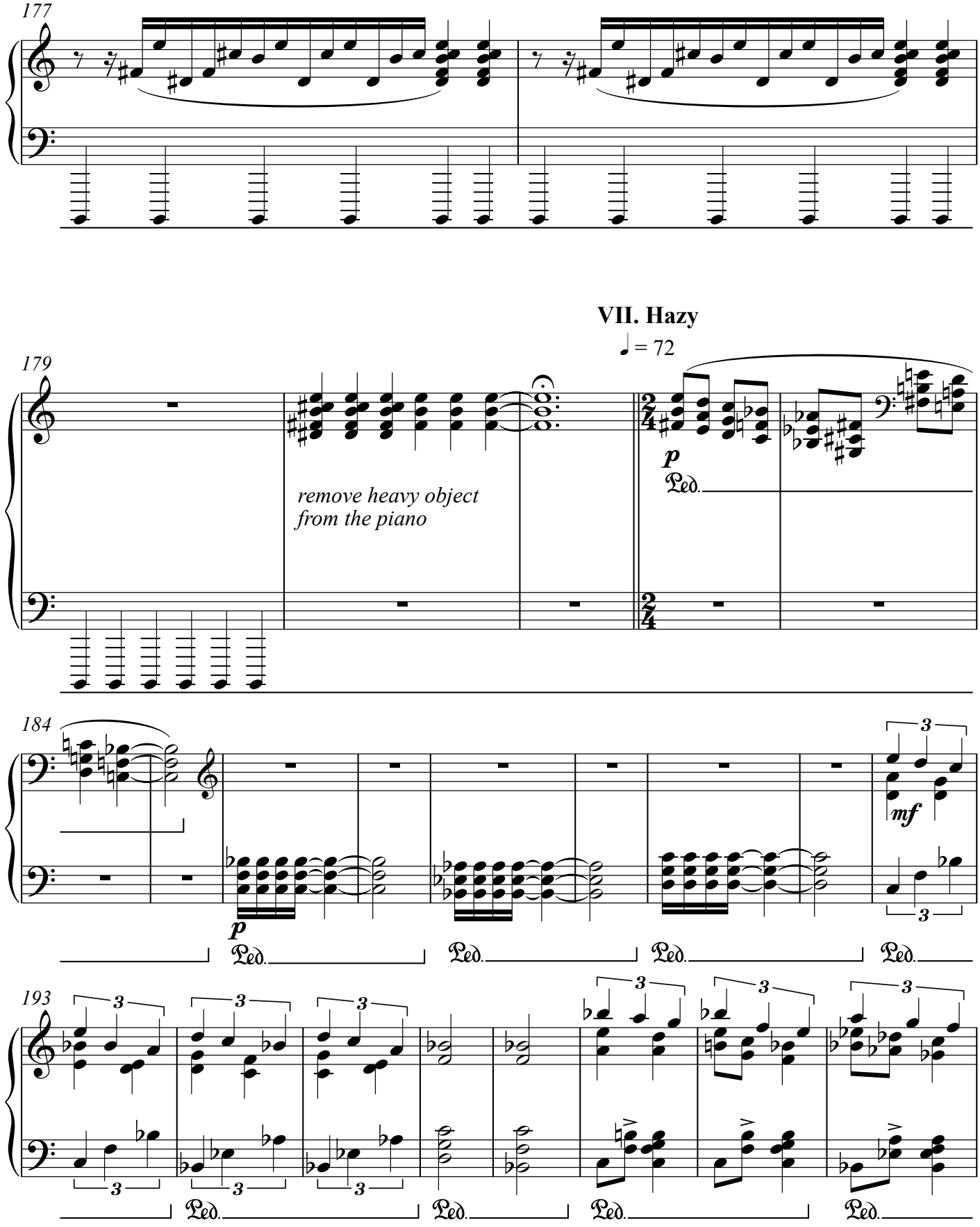
133

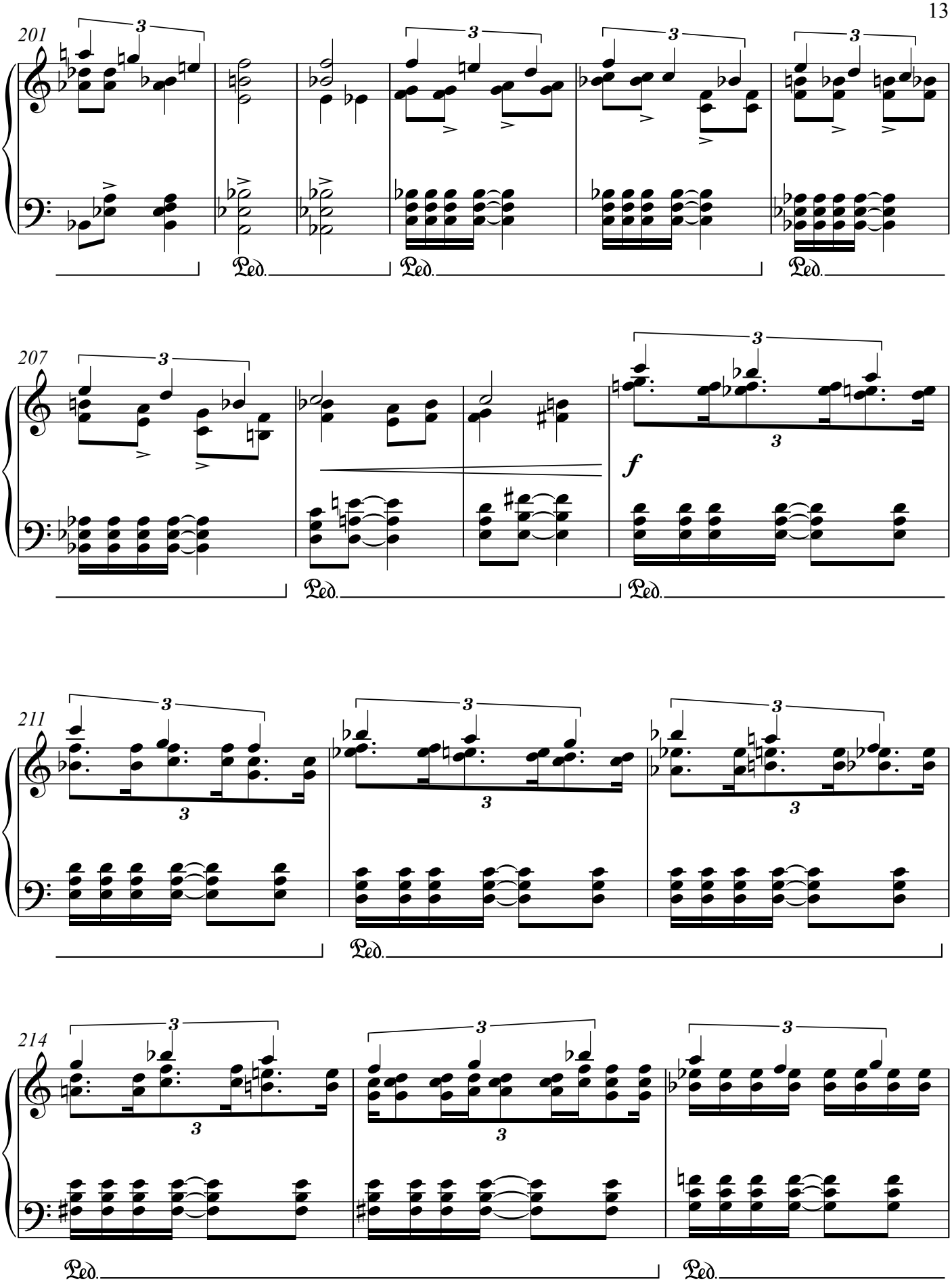

sffz
f
sffz

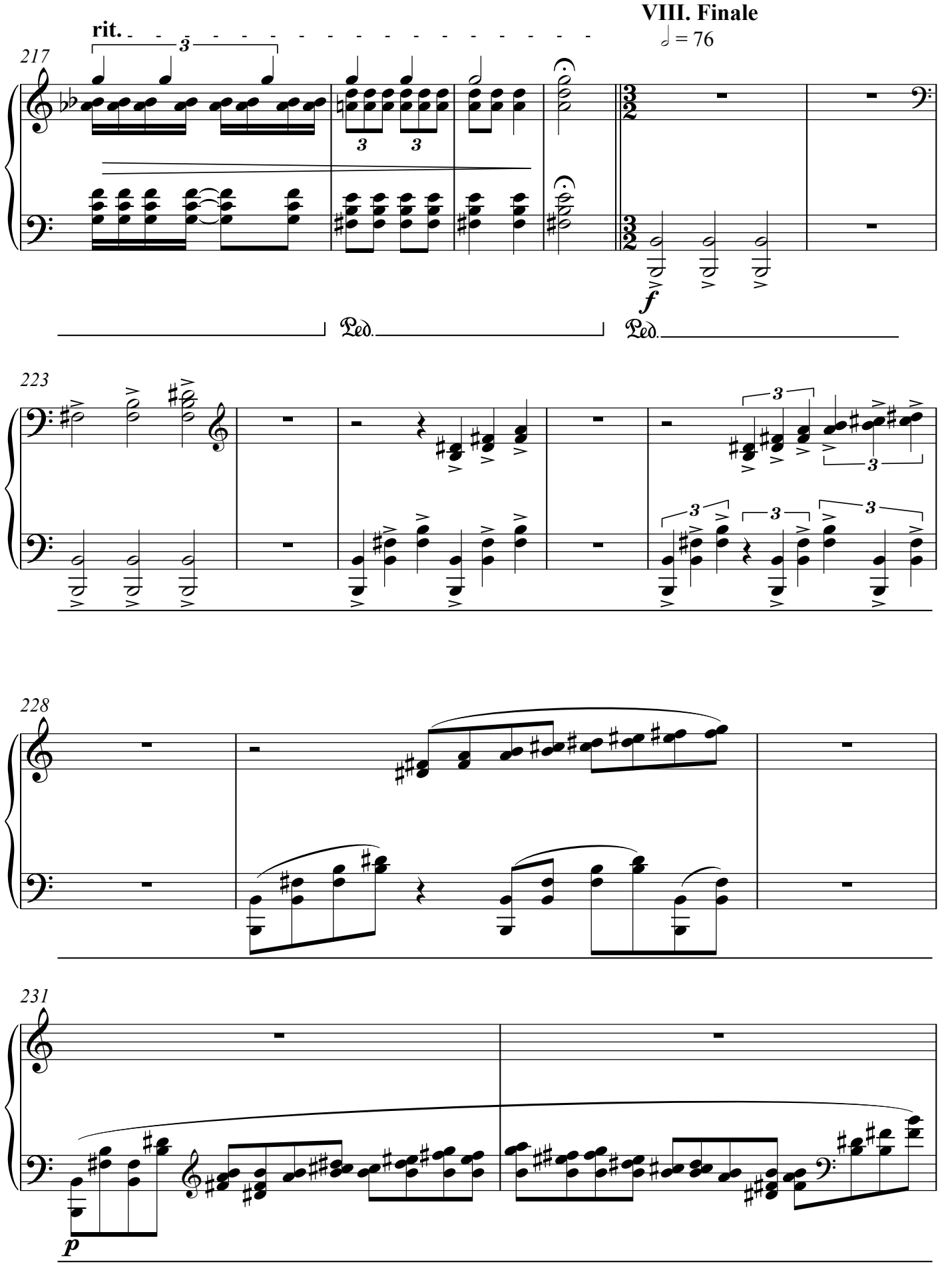

137
rit.
f
f
142
let it ring until almost
completely silent
ffff
Ped.
VI. Much less
150
♩ = 52
repeat for about
thirty seconds
place a heavy
object on the lowest
register of the piano
mp
percussive
mf
Ped.
sim.
153

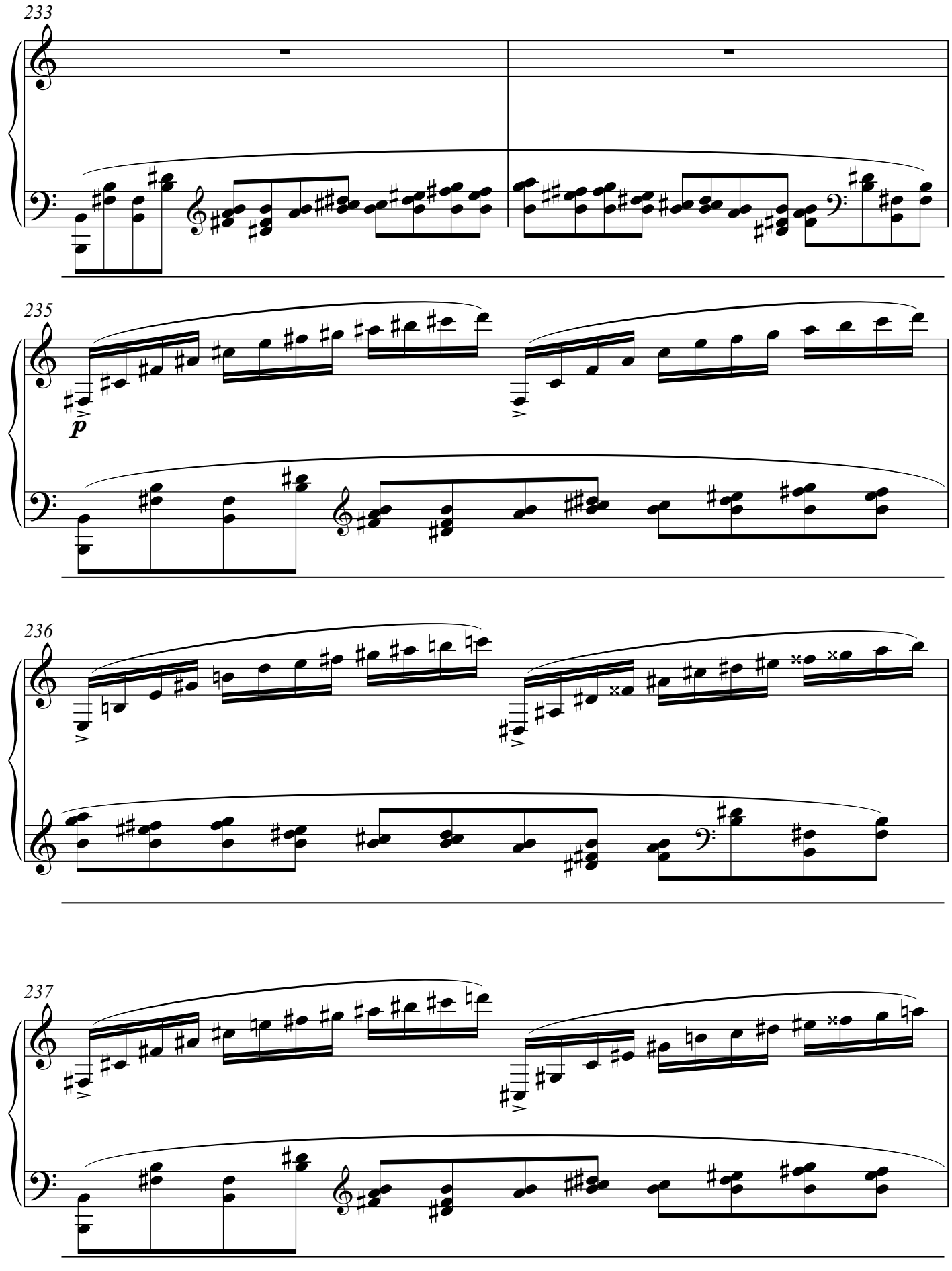

157
160
163
166

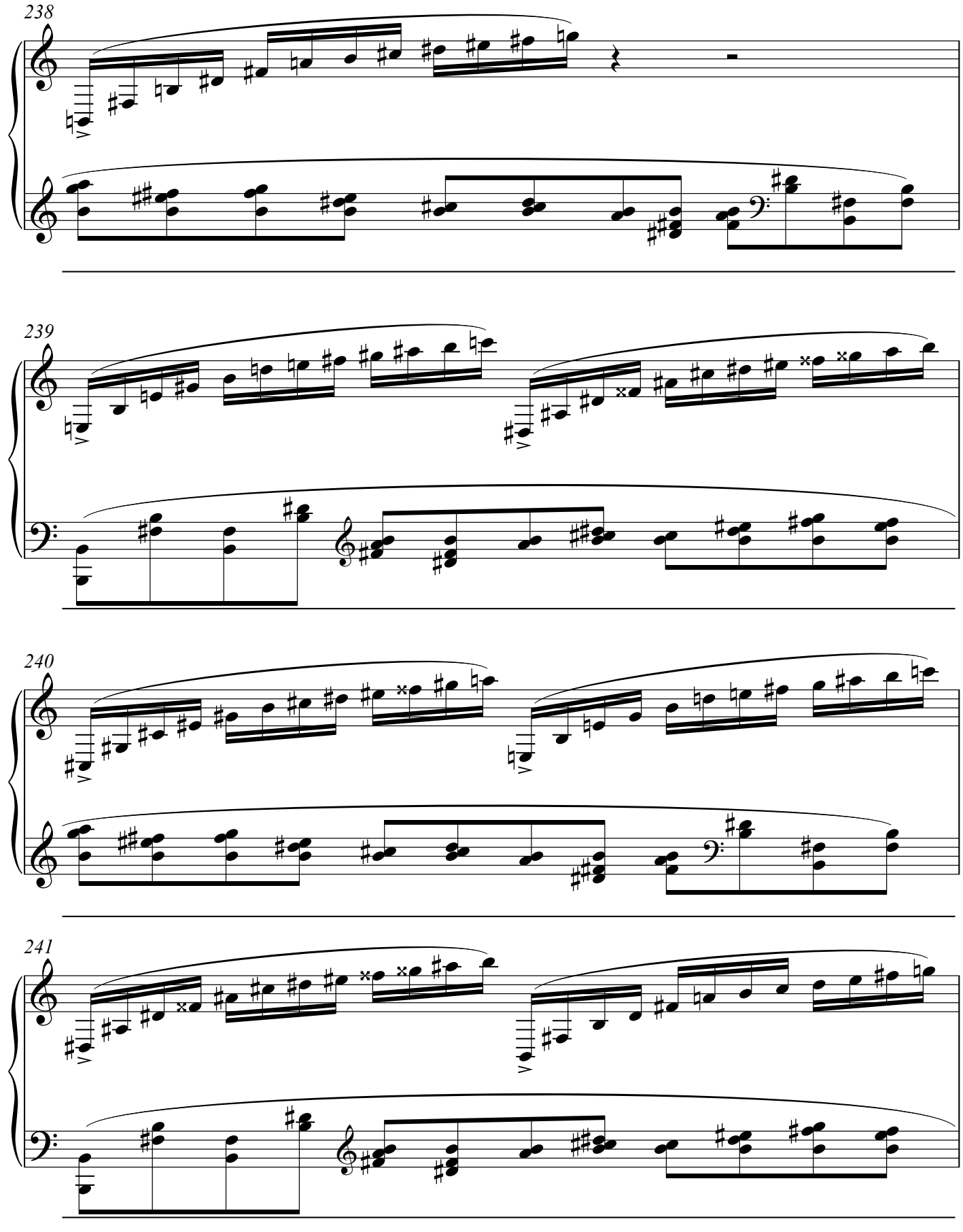

169
171
173
175


177
VII. Hazy
♩ = 72
179
remove heavy object
from the piano
p
Ped.
184
p
mf
193
3
Ped.


201
207
211
214
Ped.
f


VIII. Finale
♩ = 76
rit.
217
Ped.
Ped.
223
228
231
p


233
235
p
236
237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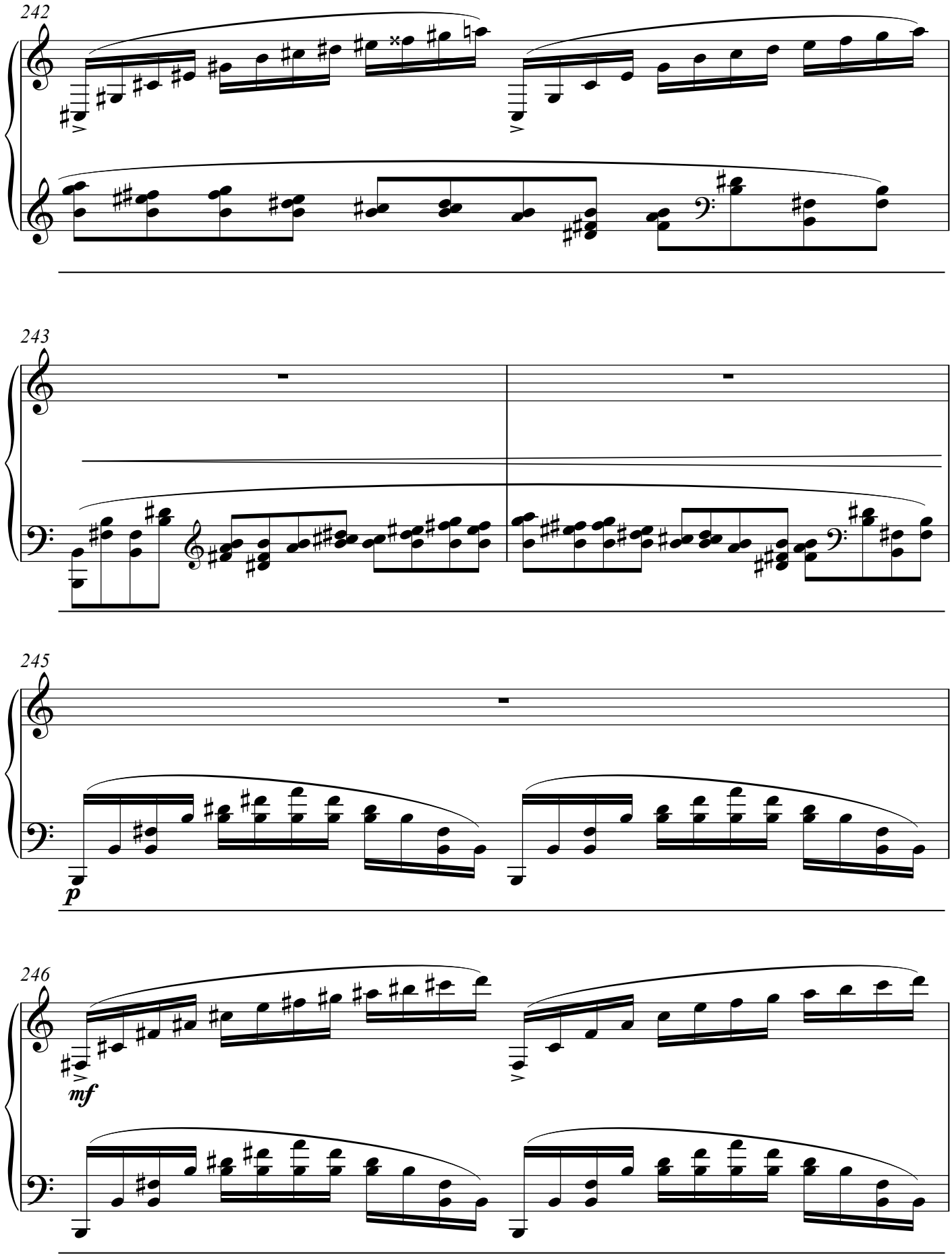
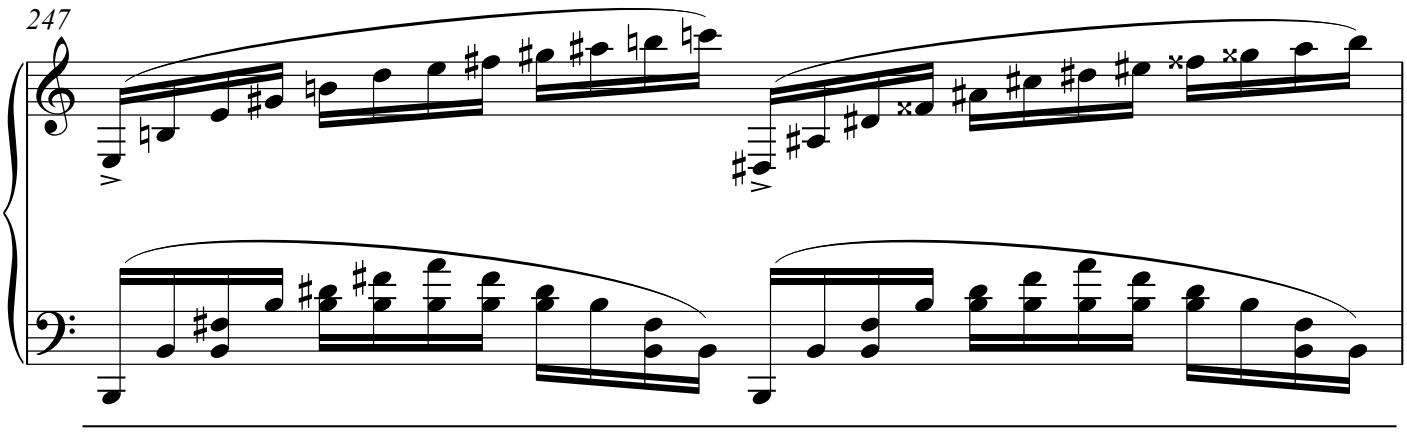
241


242
243
245
p
246
mf

247



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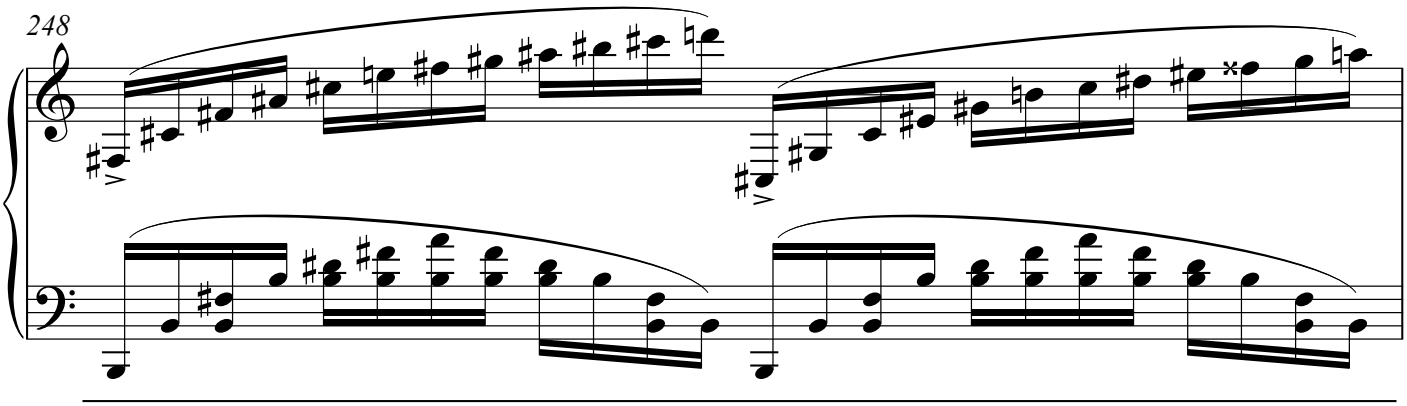

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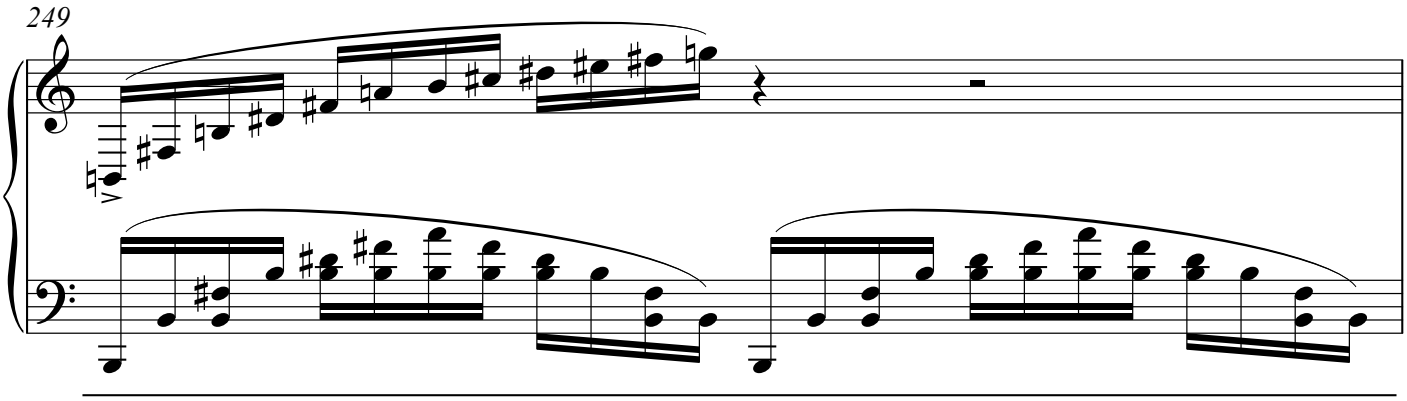

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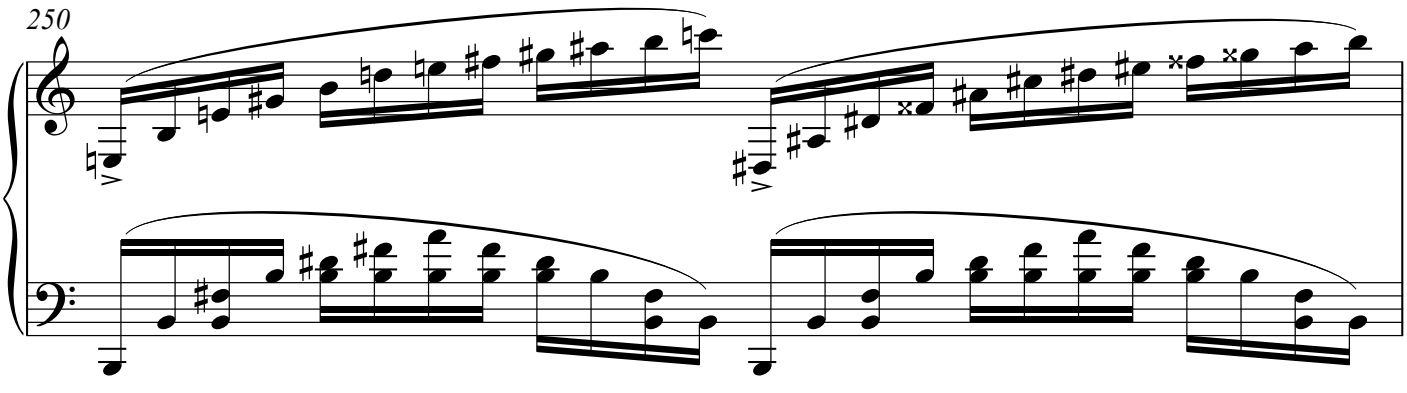
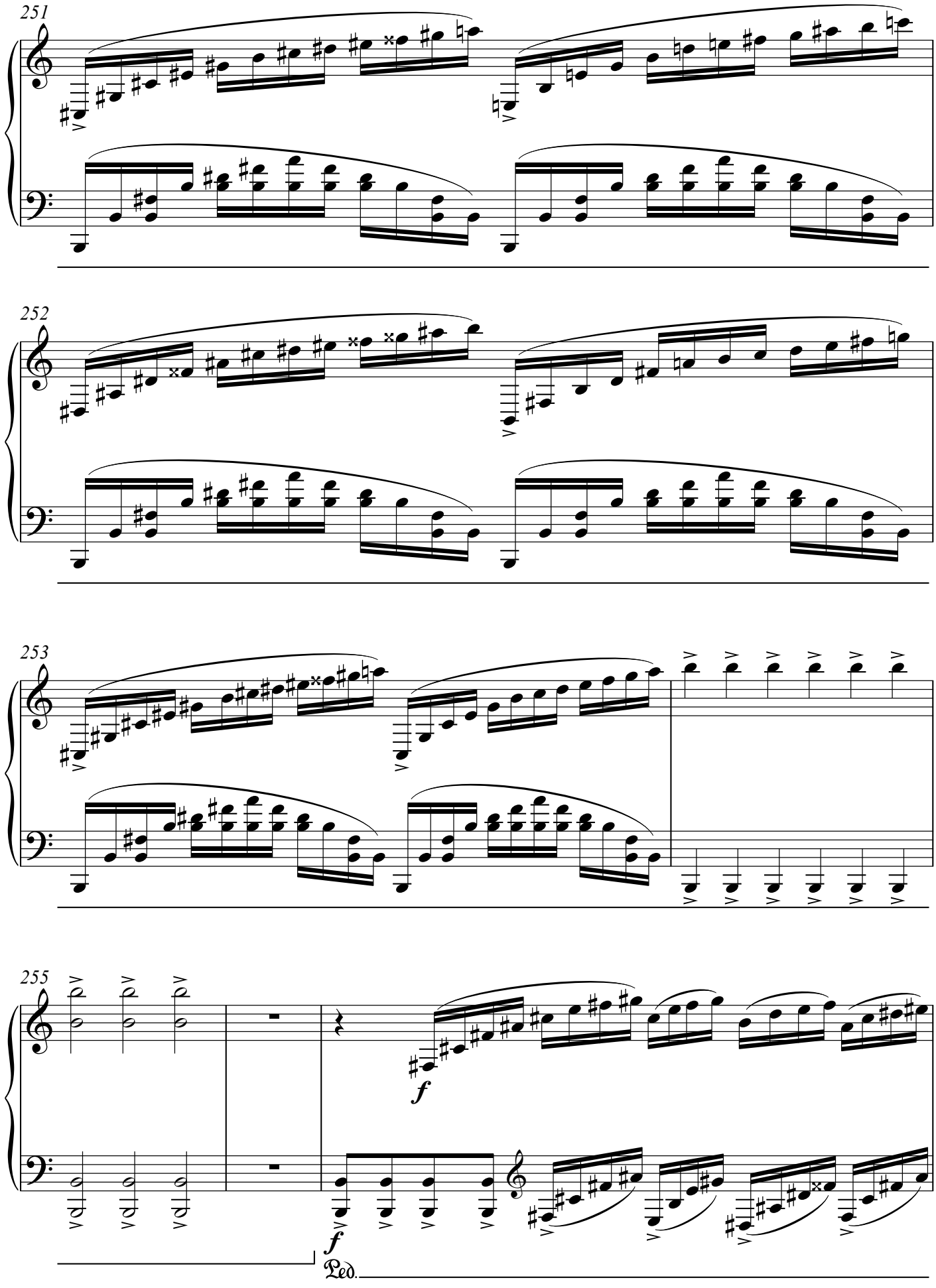
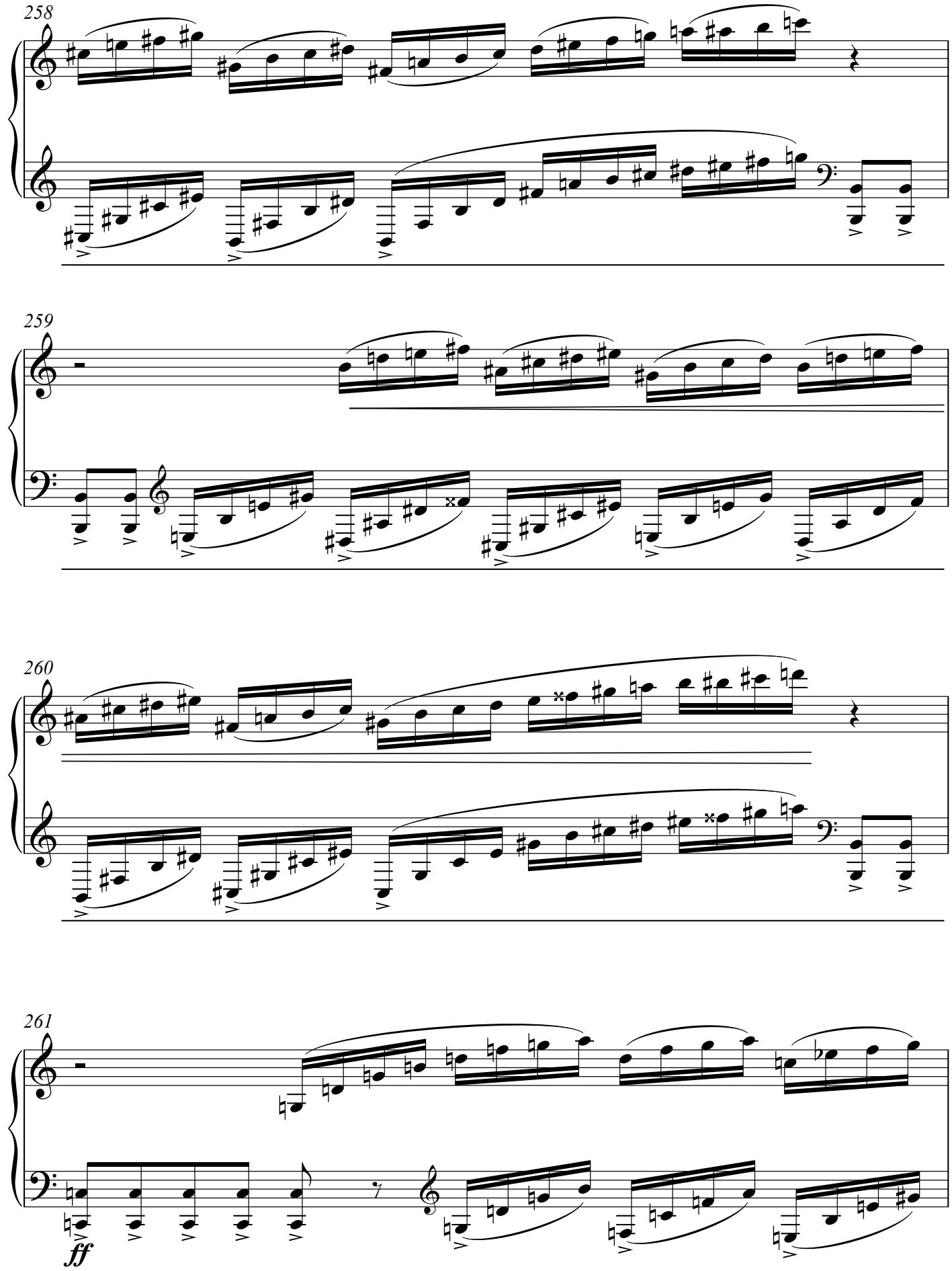
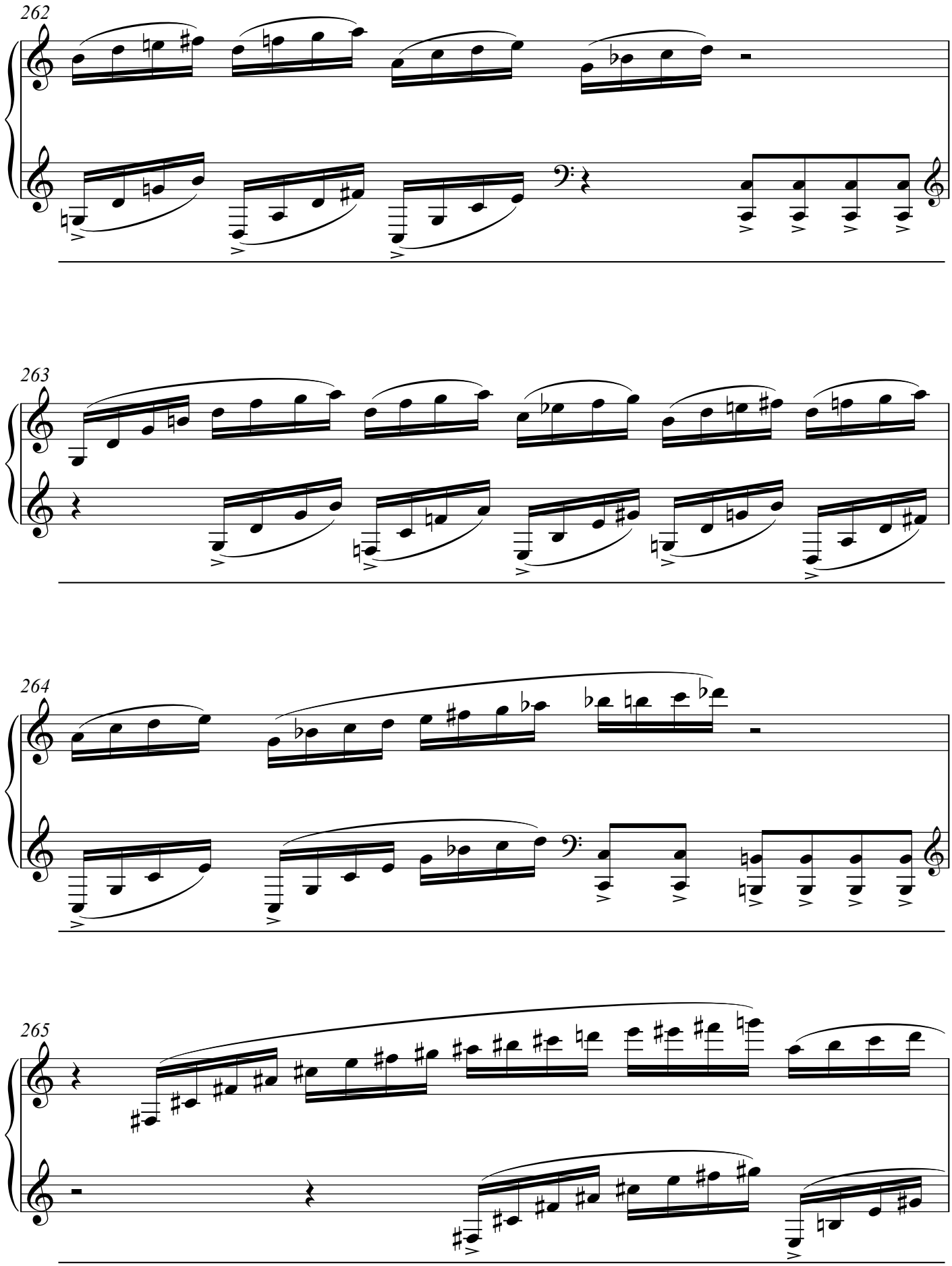



251
252
253
255
f
f
Ped.


258
259
260
261
ff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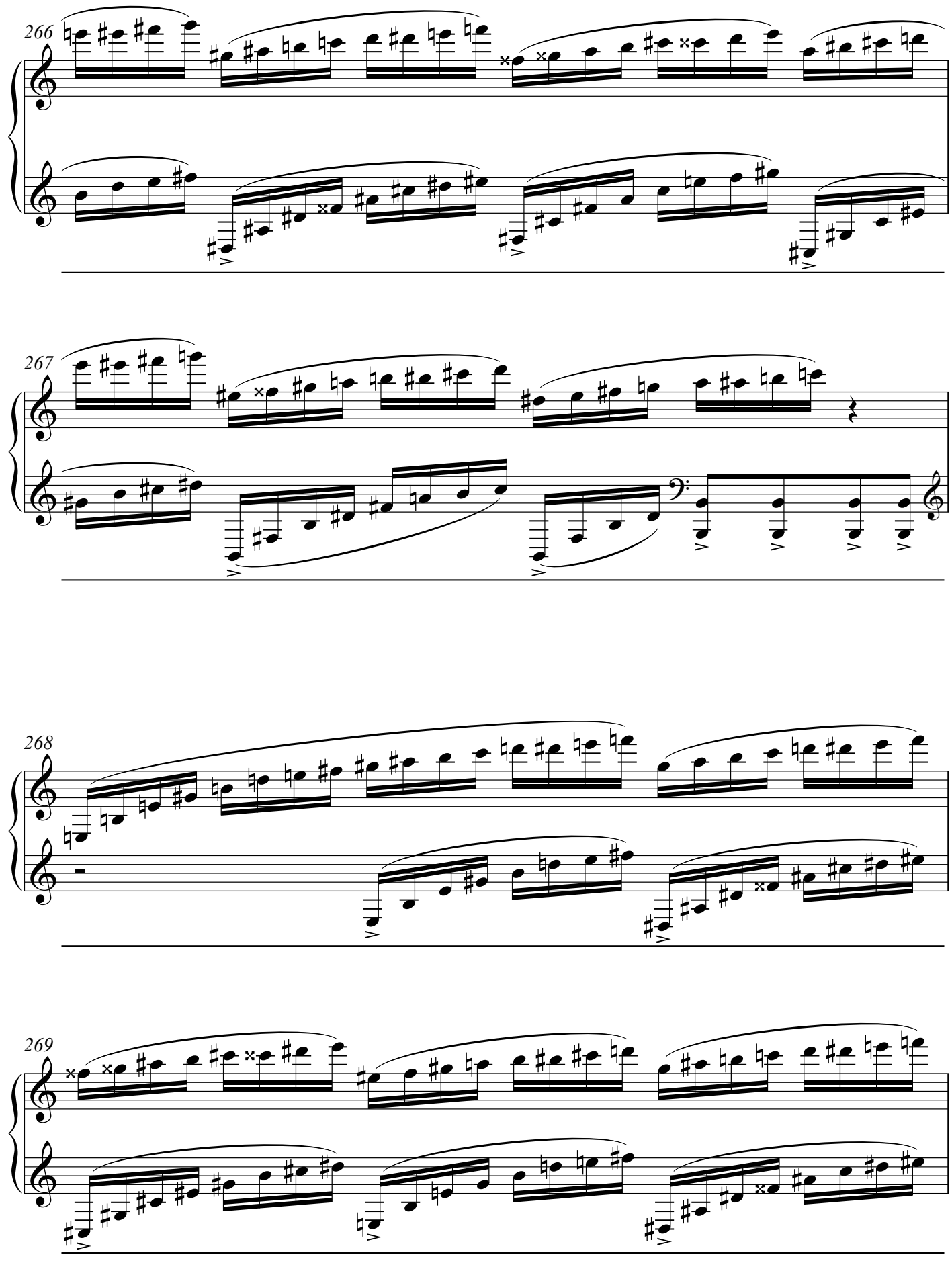
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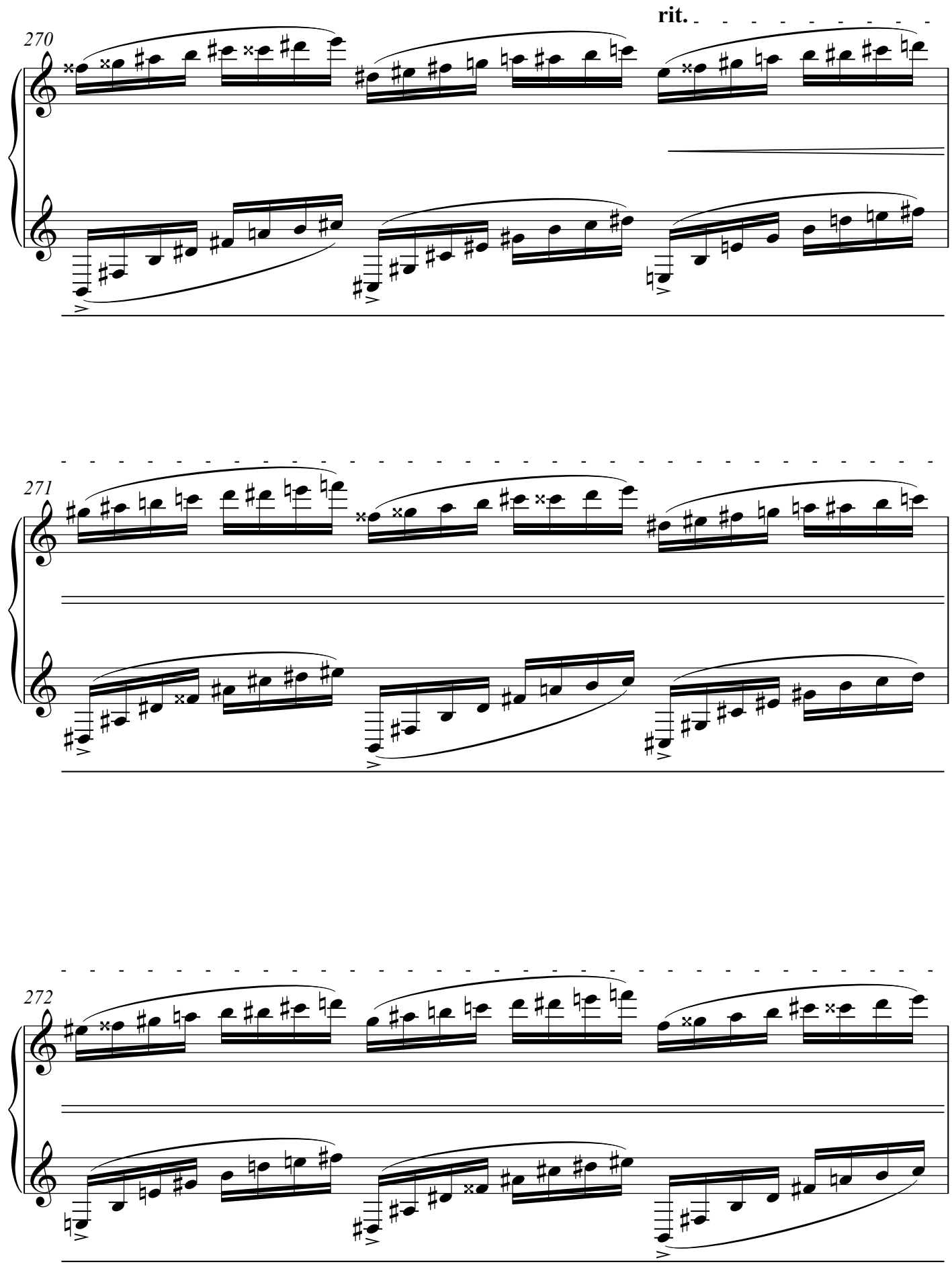
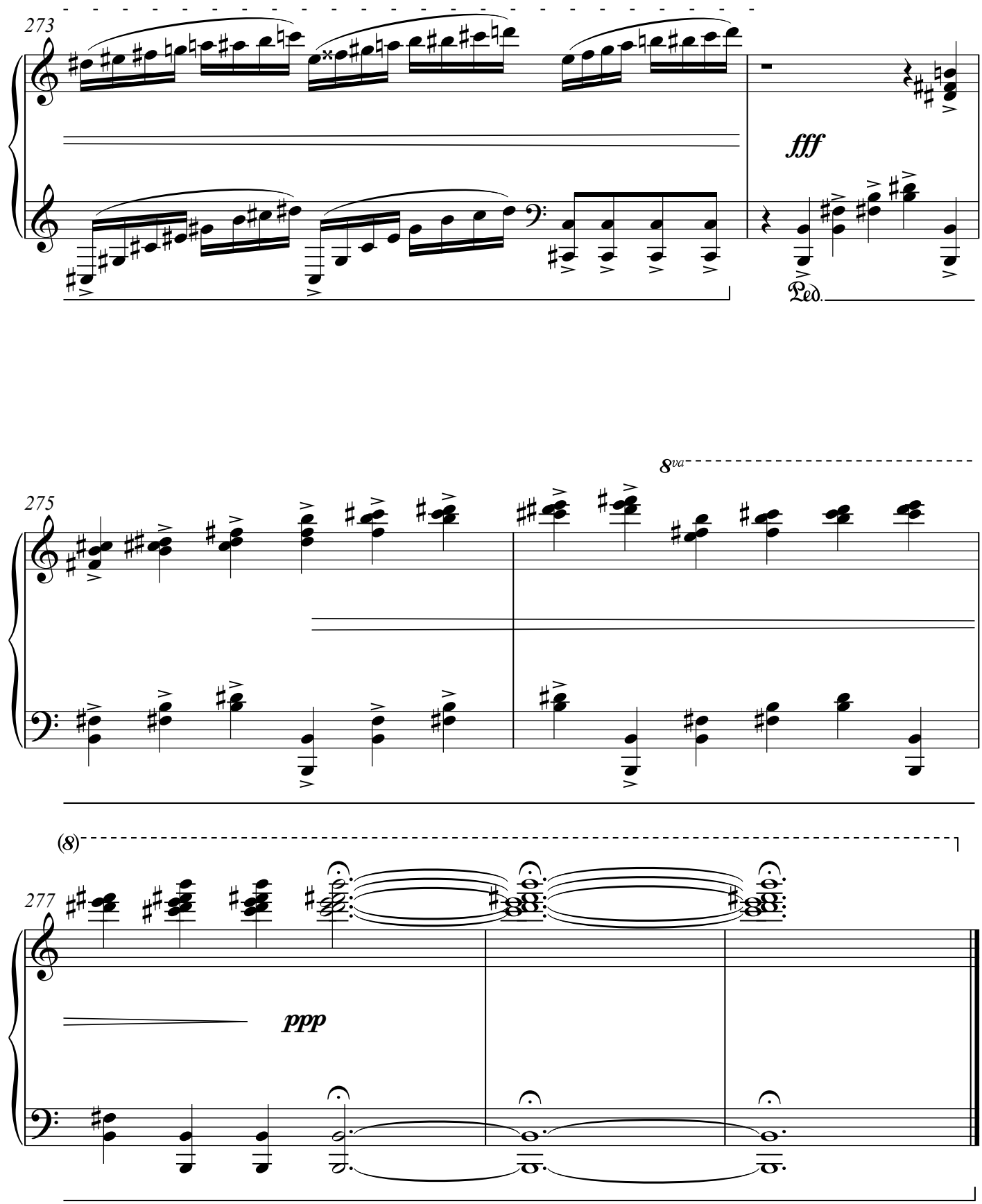
269


rit.
270
271
272


273
fff
Ped.
8va
275
(8)
277
ppp