Jonathan Chenette

Elegy and Affirmation

(in memory of Ann Nelson and other victims of September 11 and its aftermath)

for cello and piano

2002

Program notes: (*Elegy and Affirmation* was commissioned through the Iowa Arts Council's "American Spirit" project for premiere at the Blanden Memorial Art Museum in Fort Dodge, Iowa as part of a memorial event marking the first anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The premiere took place on September 22, 2002, performed by cellist David Evenchick and pianist Eugene Gaub)

In composing *Elegy and Affirmation*, I tried to remain open to diverse influences. A conversation with the mother of a victim of the World Trade Center collapse, a snippet from a nostalgic Stephen Foster tune, various moving elegies and laments by other composers, a song sung by Afghan girls returning to school, melodies borrowed from repertories of various Asian bowed string instruments, and a poem by W.H. Auden -- these were some of the sources from which I sought to find a musical language that might help to heal and affirm in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Auden's "September 1, 1939" was the impetus for the "Affirmation" part of the title. The poem begins with despairing language, reflecting on the approach of World War II, but ends with lines that struggle to affirm:

"…dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash our wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame."

After a tentative beginning, the "Elegy" (movement 1) moves at a stately and respectful pace, with a highly ornamented cello melody and steady chords in the piano. The movement culminates in a quote from Stephen Foster's "Gentle Annie," followed by a brief return of the movement's main theme in canon between the two instruments.

"Affirmation" (movement 2) begins with and is dominated by a tune transcribed from a National Public Radio news report about the official opening of school for Afghan girls in the spring of 2002. It was sung on the broadcast by a group of girls returning to the classroom for the first time in years. Other borrowed musical elements in this movement come from the instrumental introduction to an Afghan song performed on a 'ritchak' or spike fiddle (m. 39 in the score, from *Air Mail Music: Afghanistan*, track 2, CD SA 141052), a melody from China's Autonomous Uyghur Region performed on 'satar' or bowed lute (m. 62 in the score, from *The Silk Road: A Musical Caravan*, track 20, CD SFW 40438), and a Mongolian melody performed on 'morin khuur' or horsehead fiddle (m. 135 in the score, from *The Silk Road: A Musical Caravan*, track 16, CD SFW 40438). These elements come together in various combinations as the composition builds to its energetic conclusion.

Composer biography: **Jonathan Chenette**'s (b. 1954) compositions have appeared on the ISCM World Music Days in Amsterdam, at the World Harp Congress in Vienna, at the Bishop Auckland Early Music Festival in the U.K., and on a national radio broadcast by the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra in the U.S. He has received fellowships from the MacDowell Colony and the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy, and several of his scores are published by Boosey & Hawkes and Theodore Presser. Chenette received a PhD from the University of Chicago and is Dean of the Faculty at Vassar College in New York.

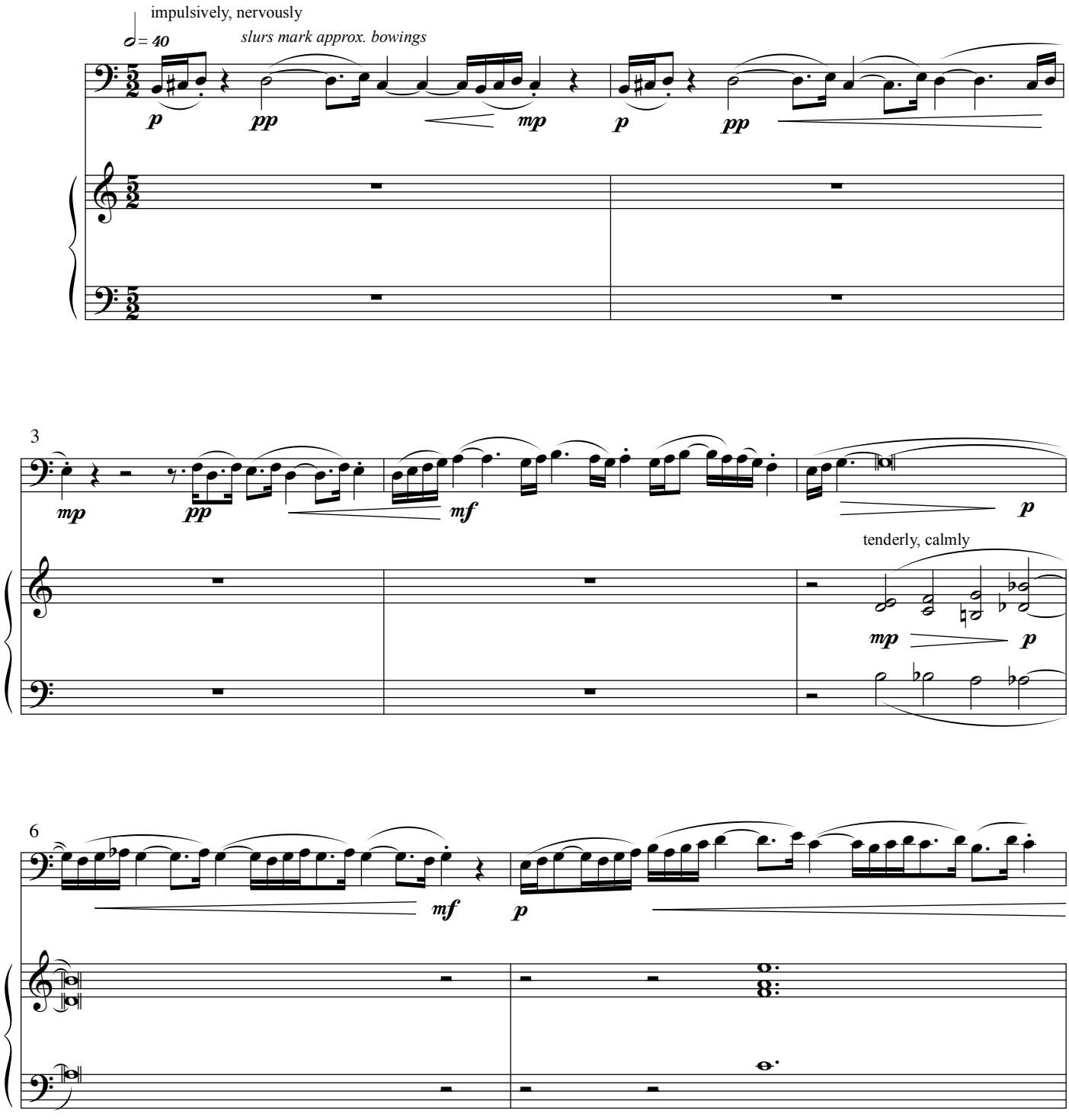
Elegy and Affirmation

for cello and piano

duration: c. 15 minutes

I. Elegy

Jonathan Chenette



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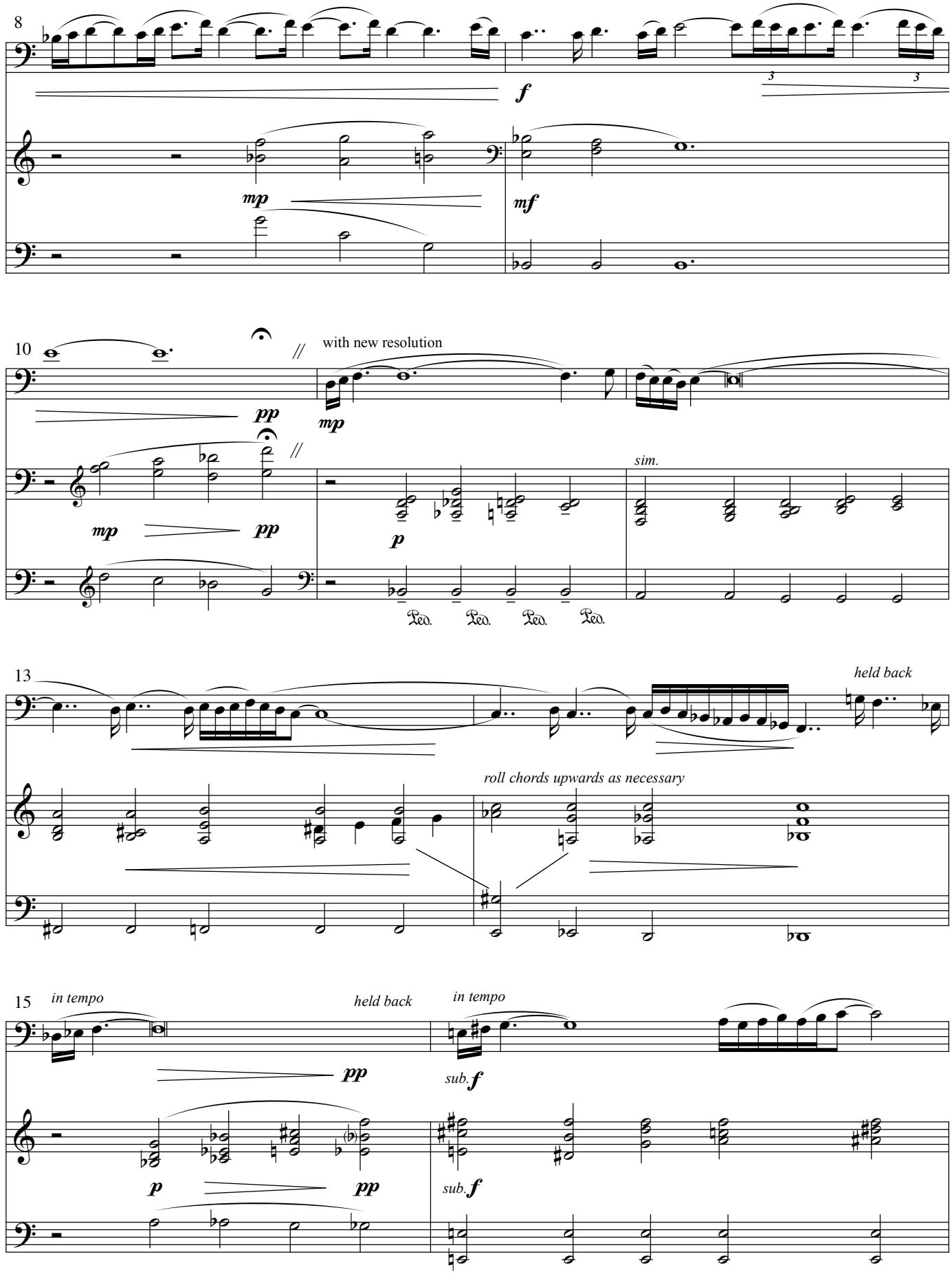
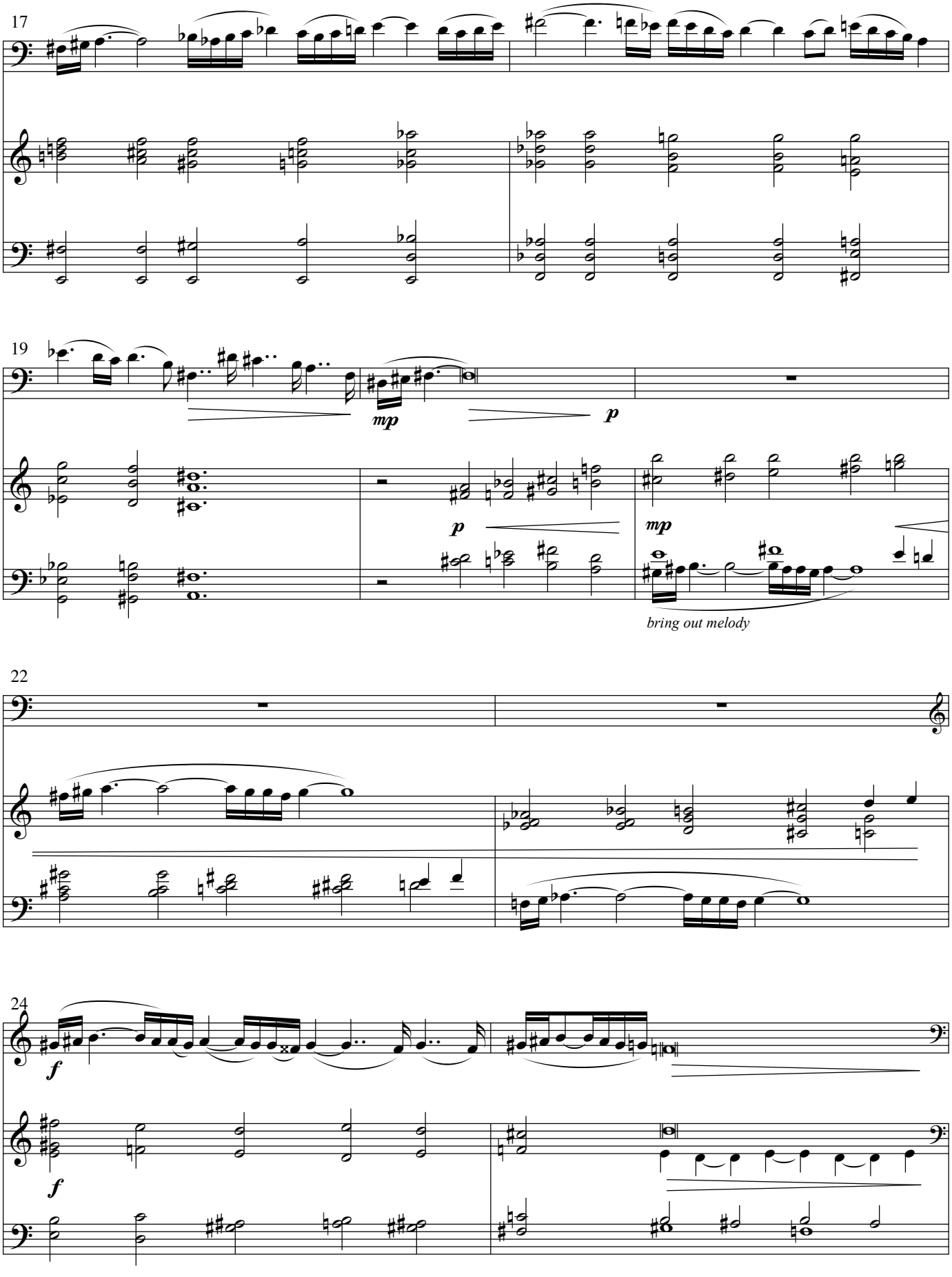
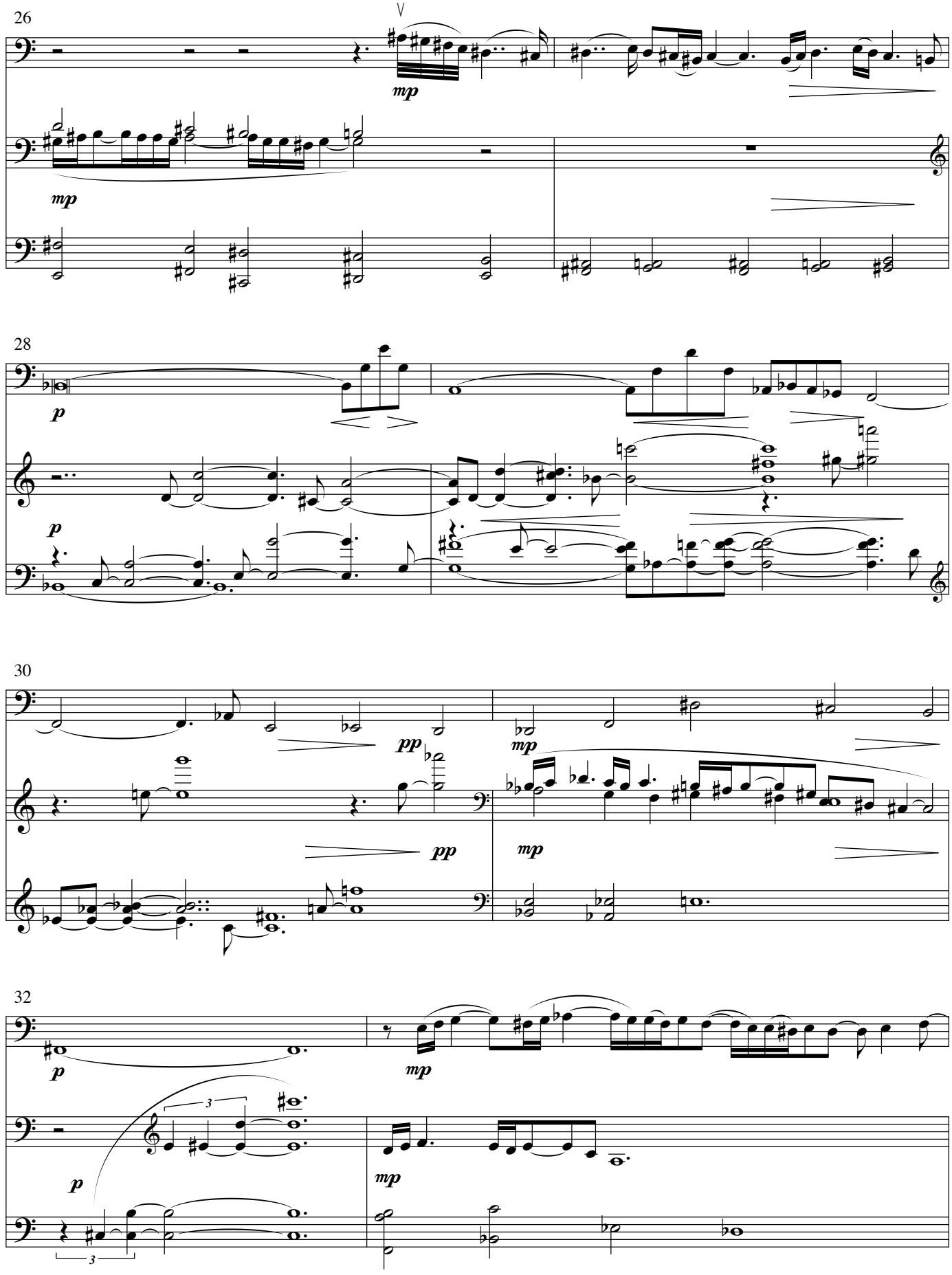
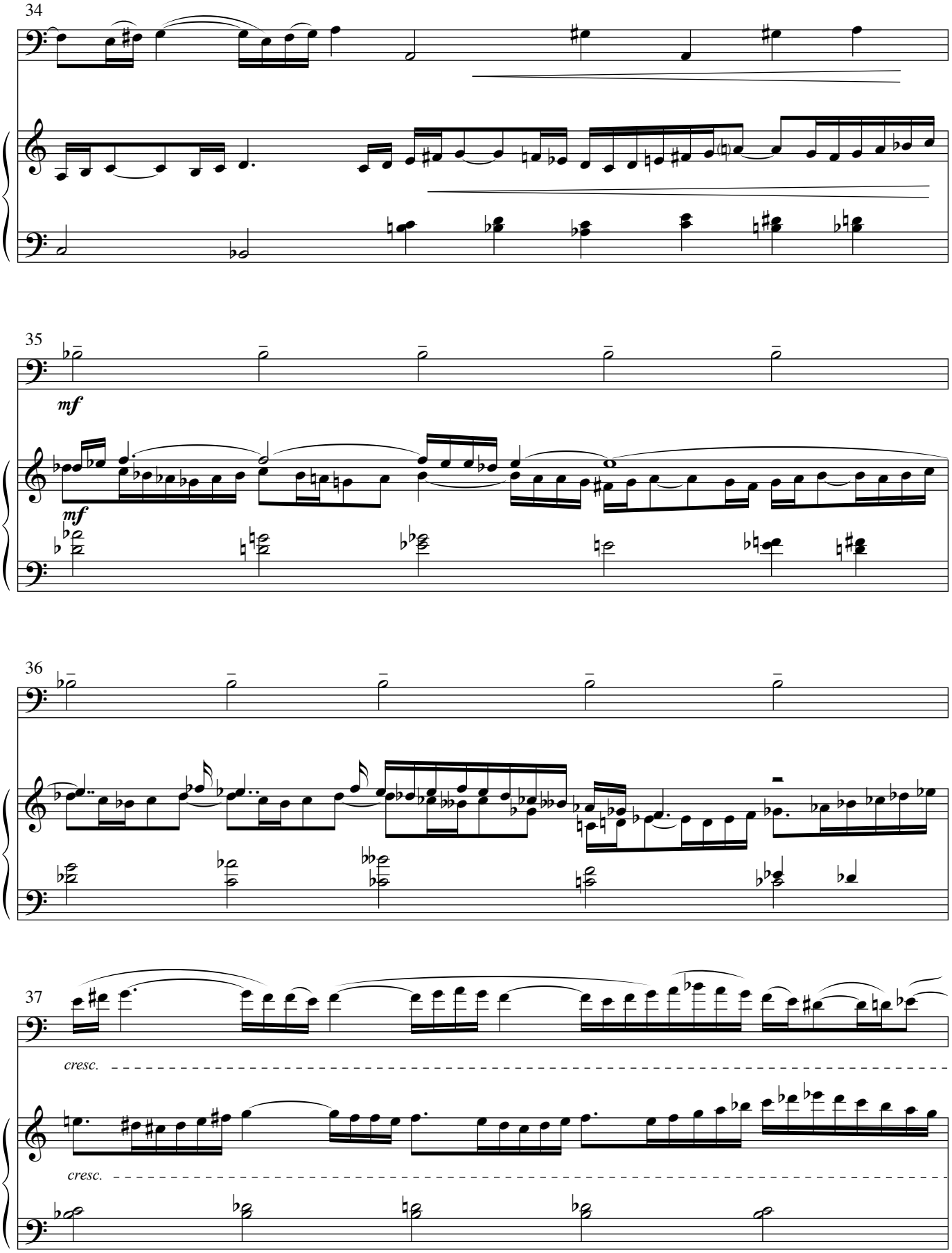
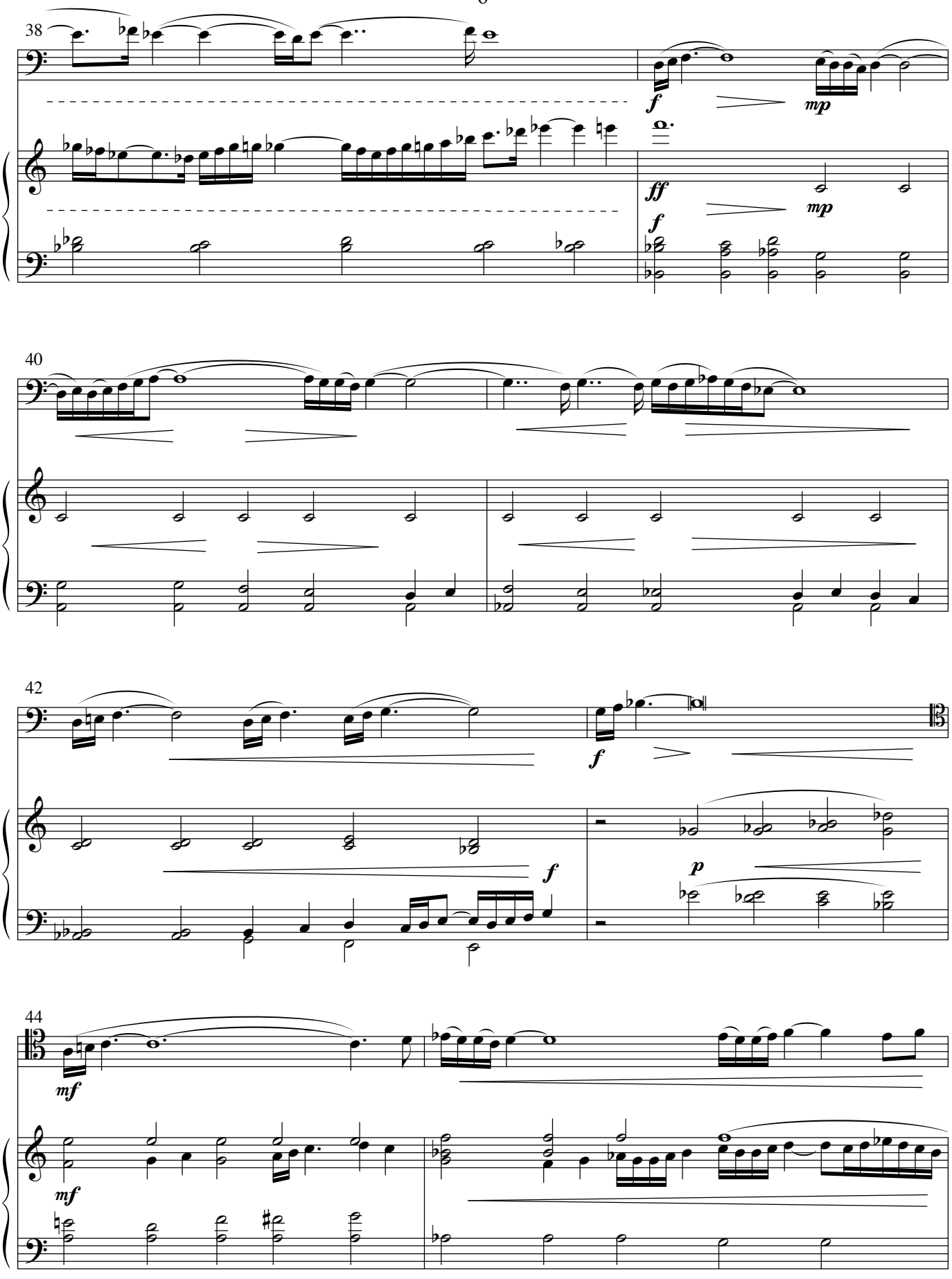
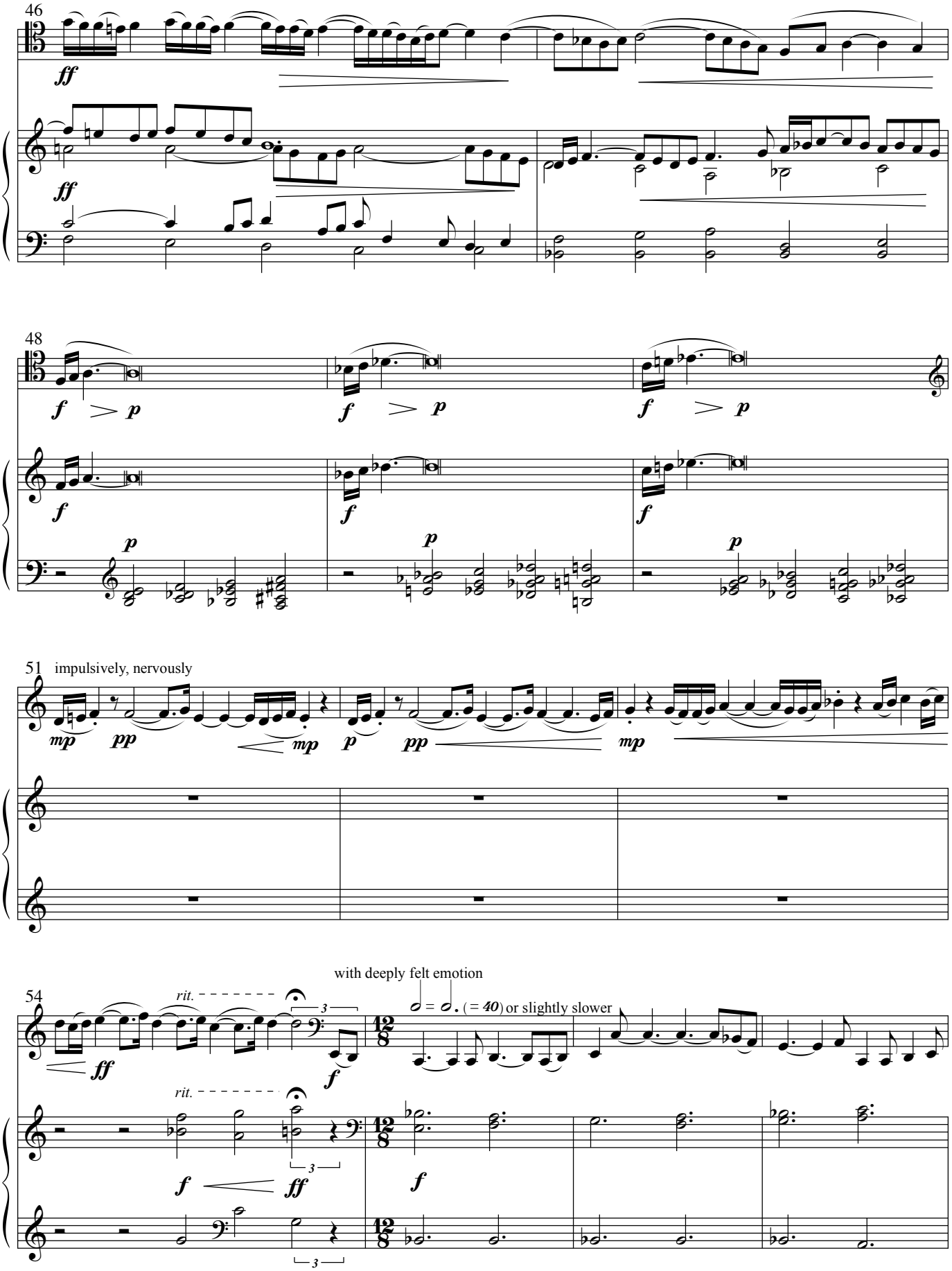

8
f
mp
mf
10
with new resolution
pp
mp
mp
pp
p
sim.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
13
held back
roll chords upwards as necessary
15
in tempo
held back
in tempo
pp
sub. f
p
pp
sub. f

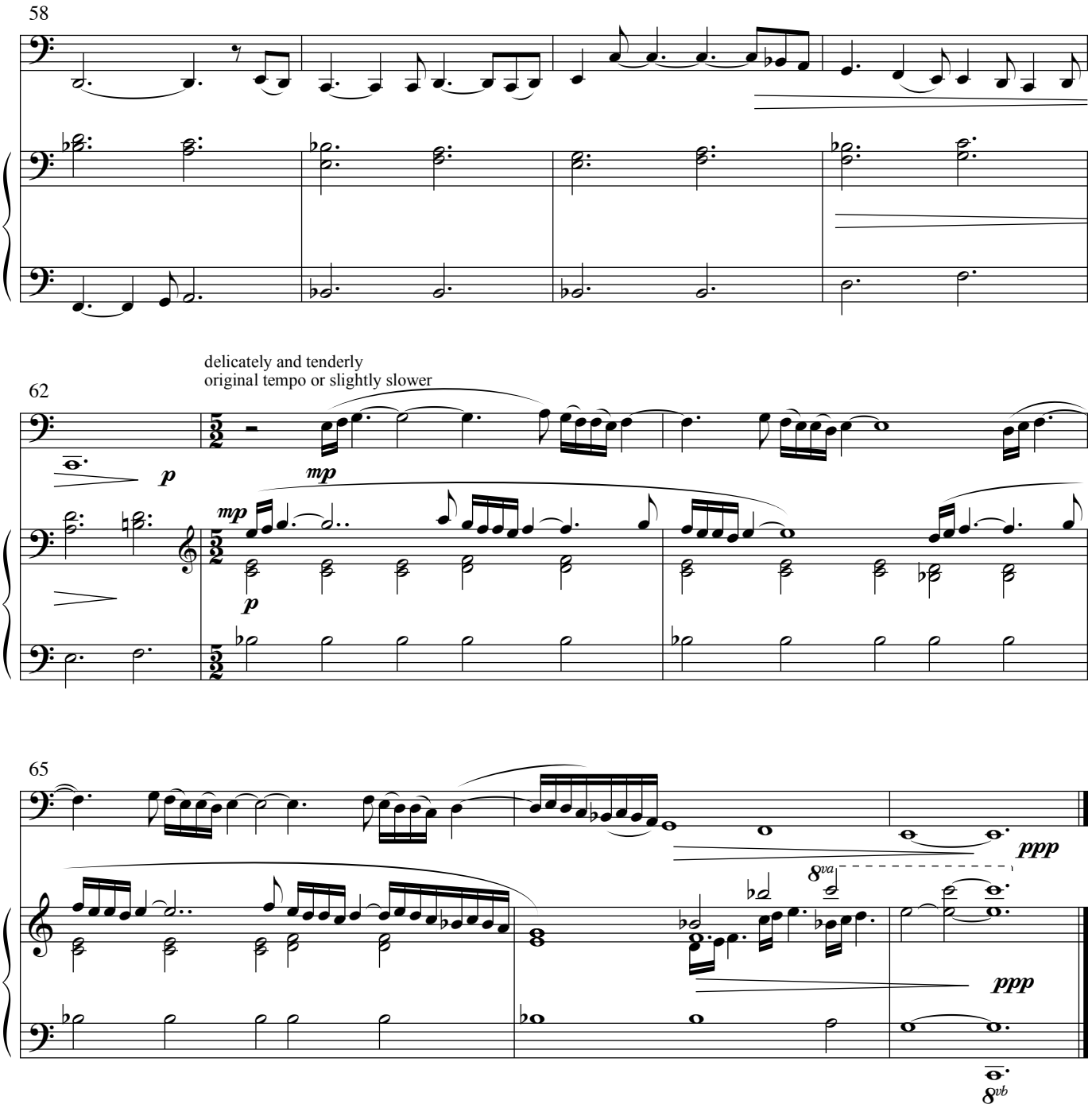

17
19
mp
p
p
mp
bring out melody
22
24
f
f


26
mp
mp
28
p
p
30
pp
pp
mp
mp
32
p
mp
p
mp
3
3

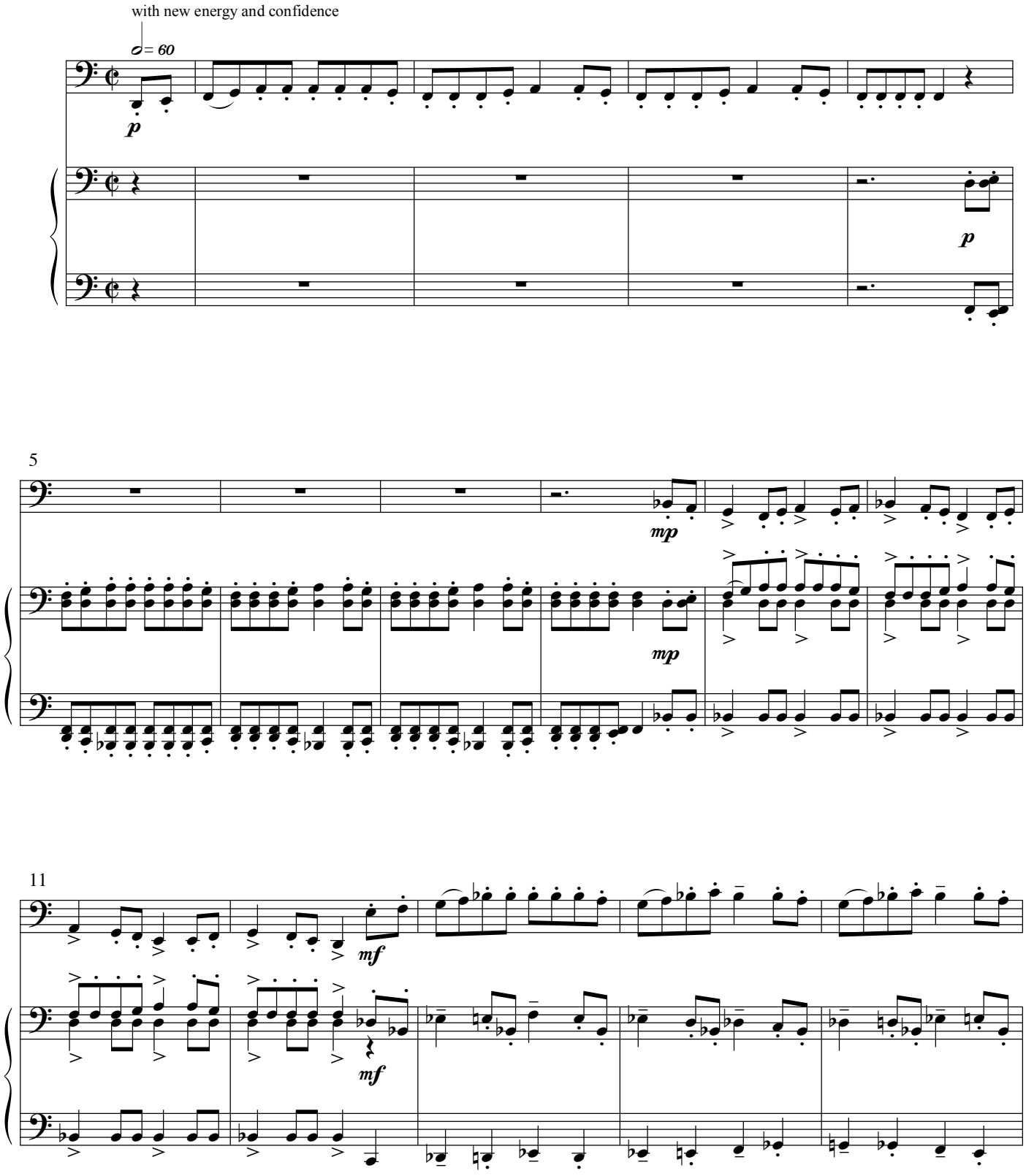

34
35
mf
mf
36
37
cresc.
cresc.


38
f
mp
ff
mp
f
40
42
f
f
p
44
mf
mf


46
48
51
impulsively, nervously
with deeply felt emotion
54
rit.
(= 40) or slightly slower


58
62
delicately and tenderly
original tempo or slightly slower
p
mp
mp
p
65
ppp
8va
ppp
8vb

II. Affirmation



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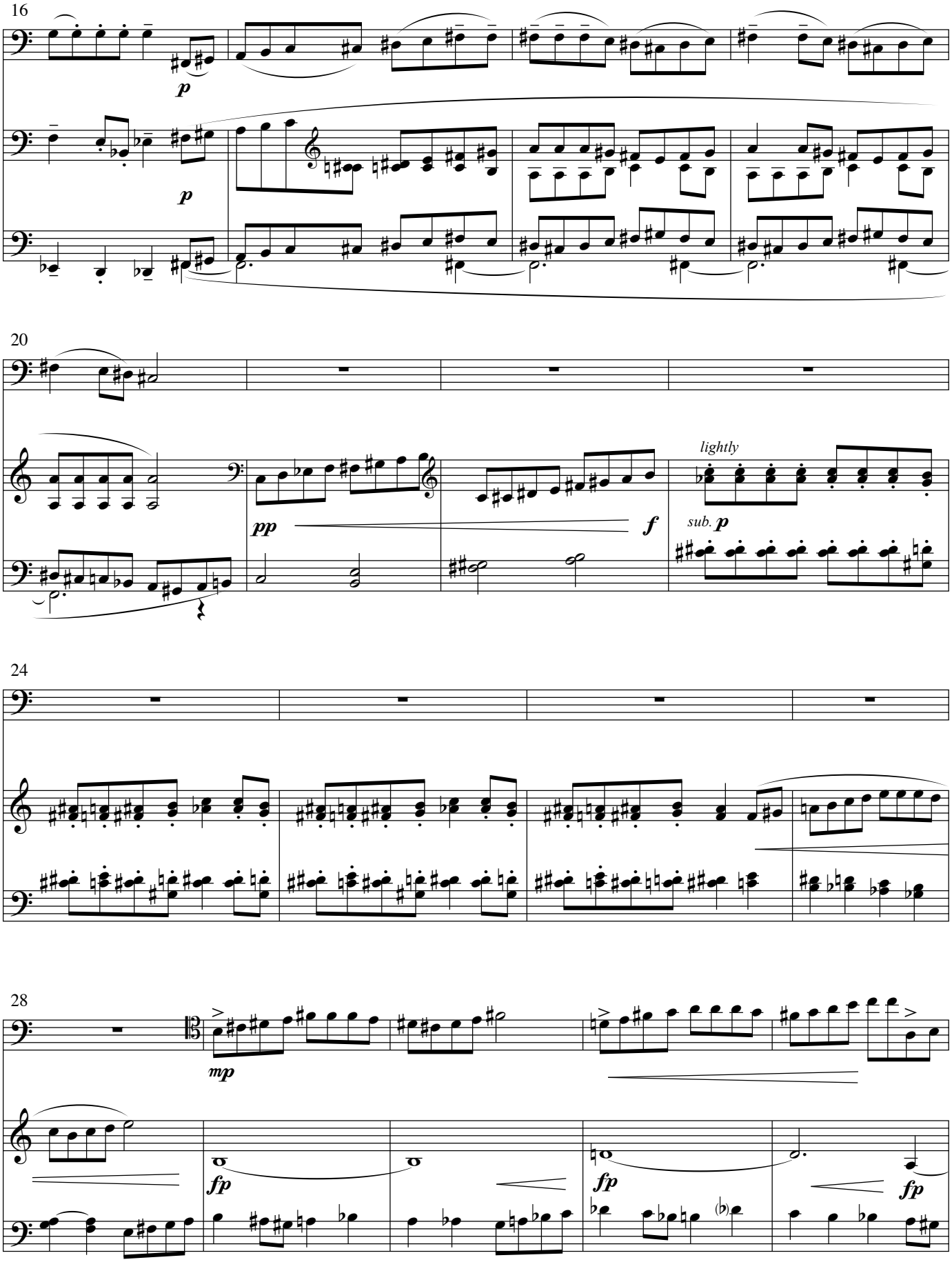
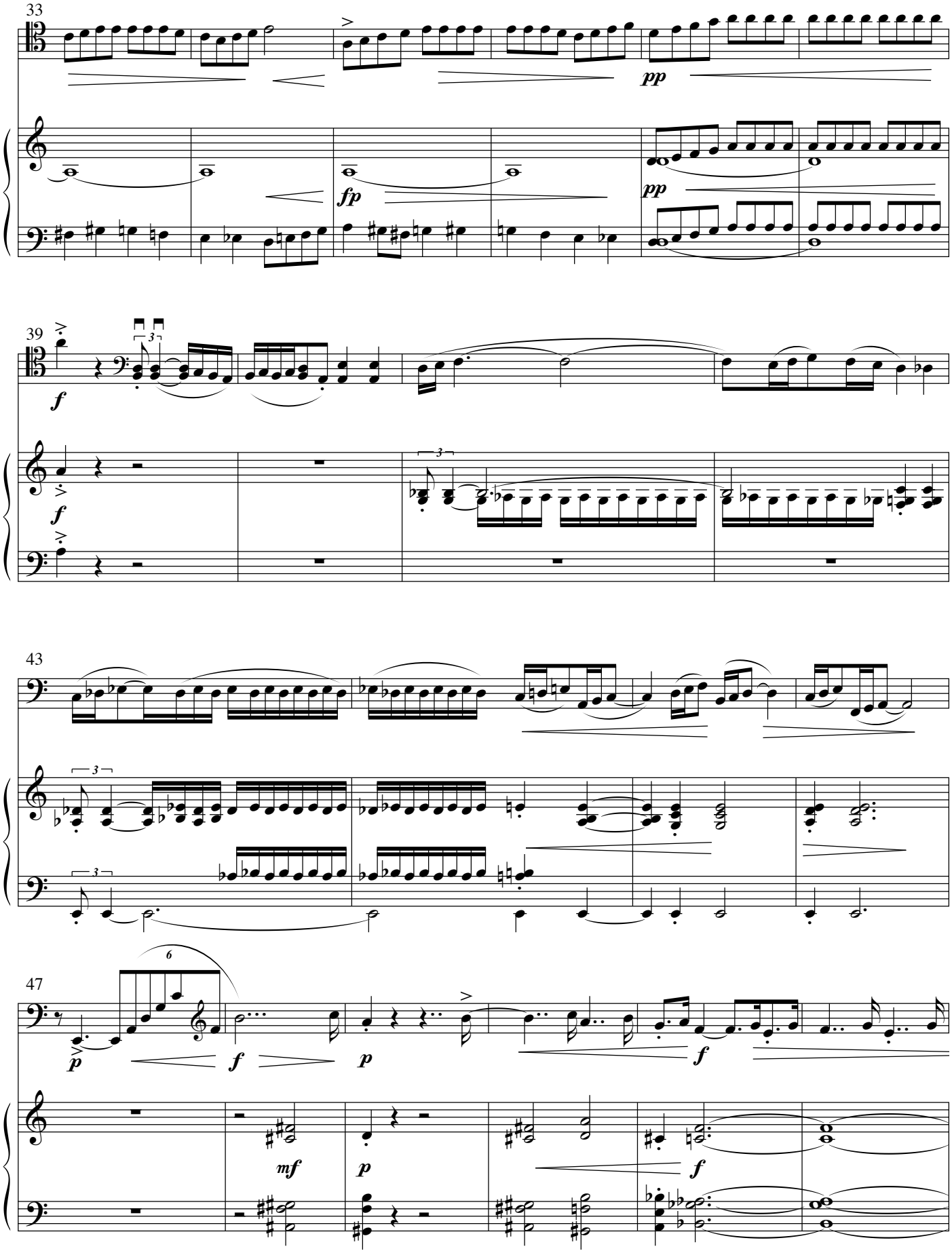
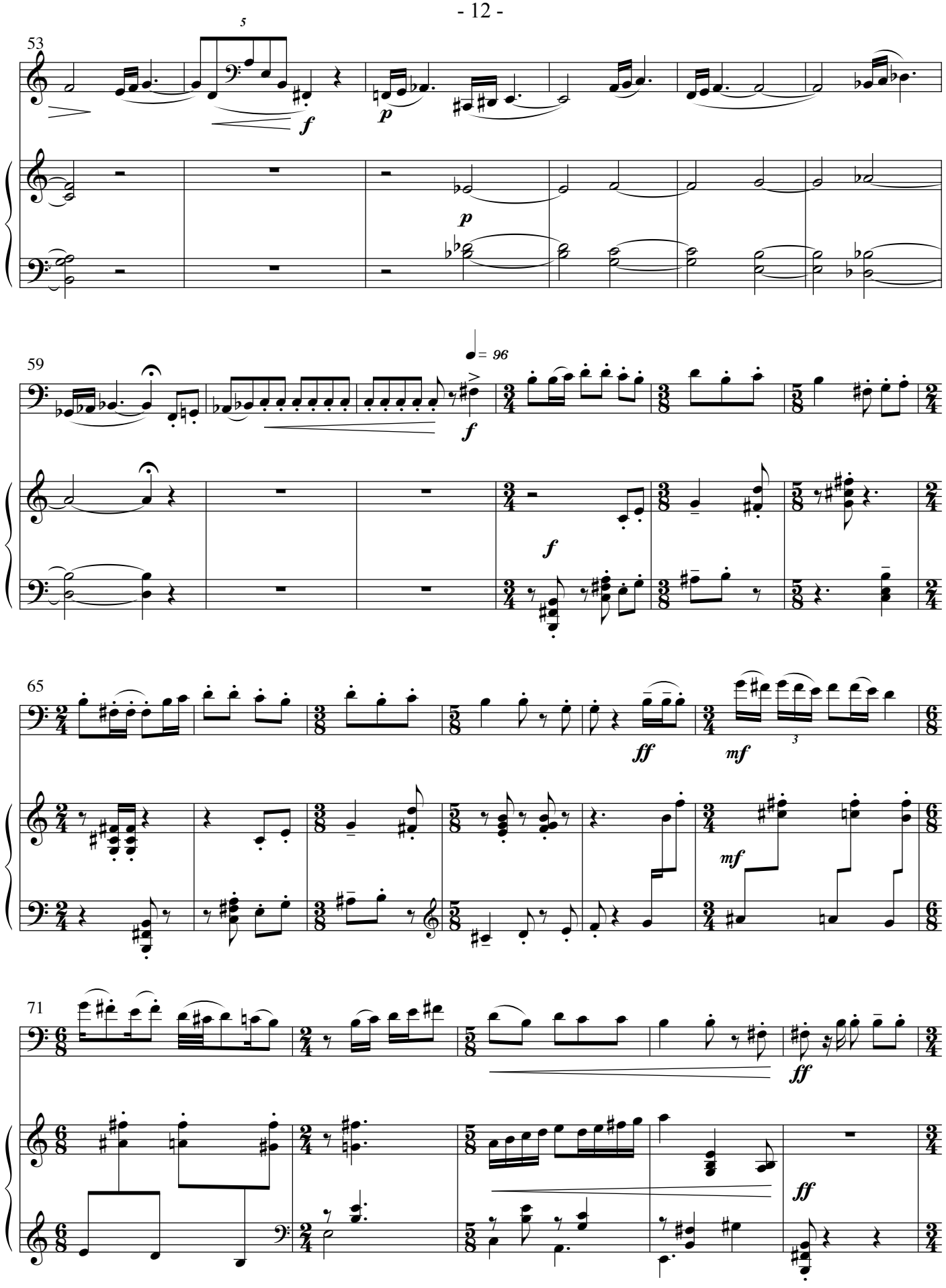
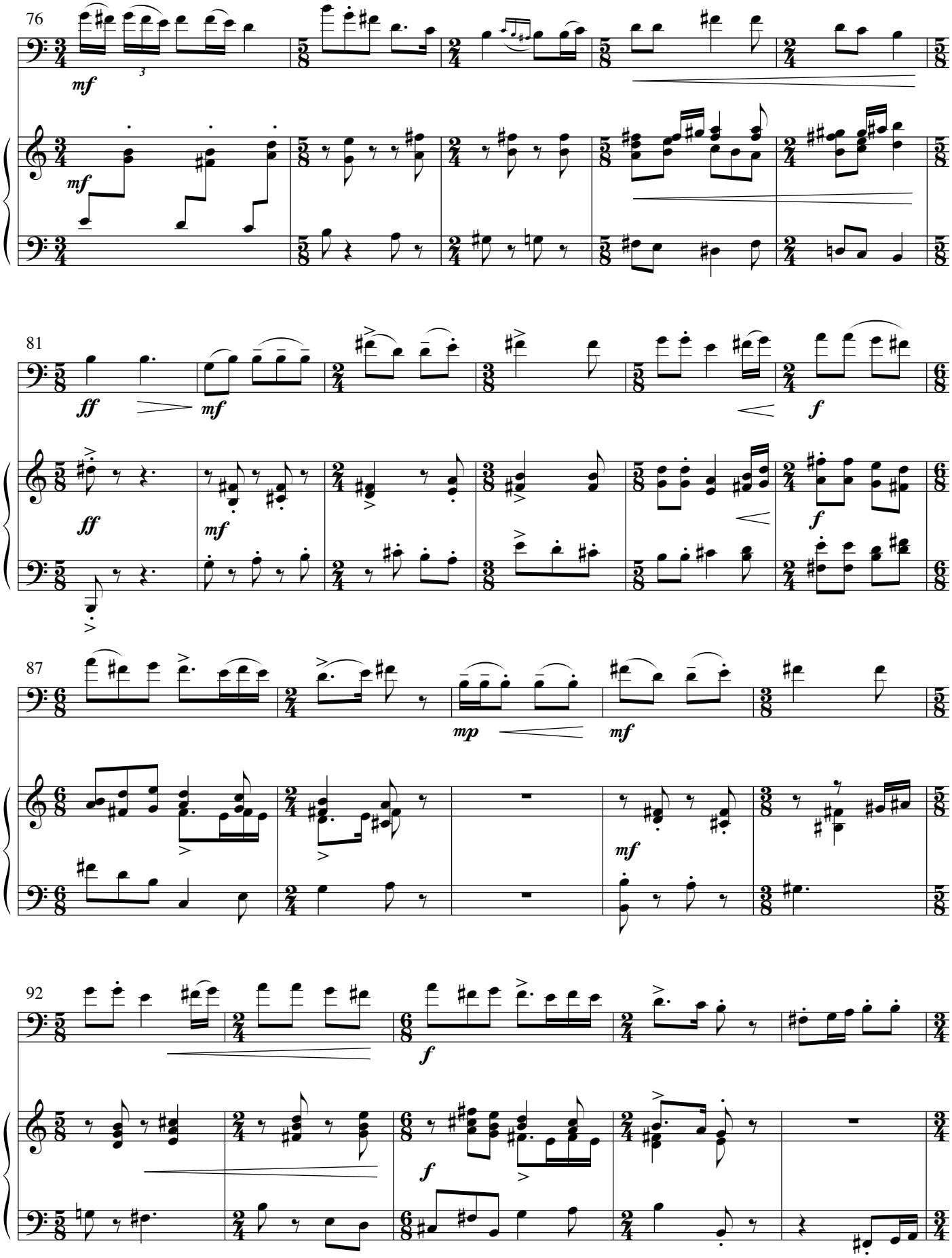
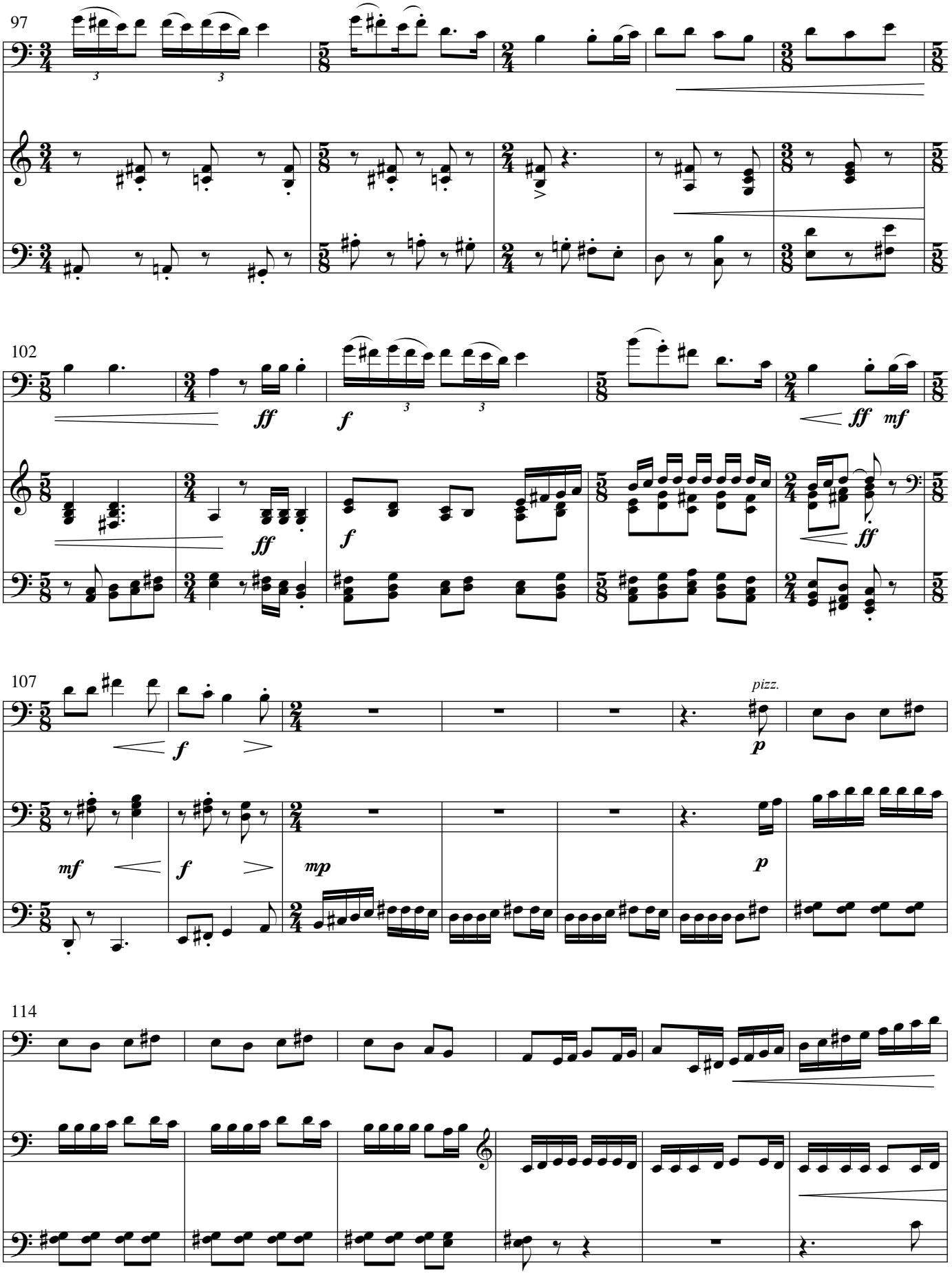
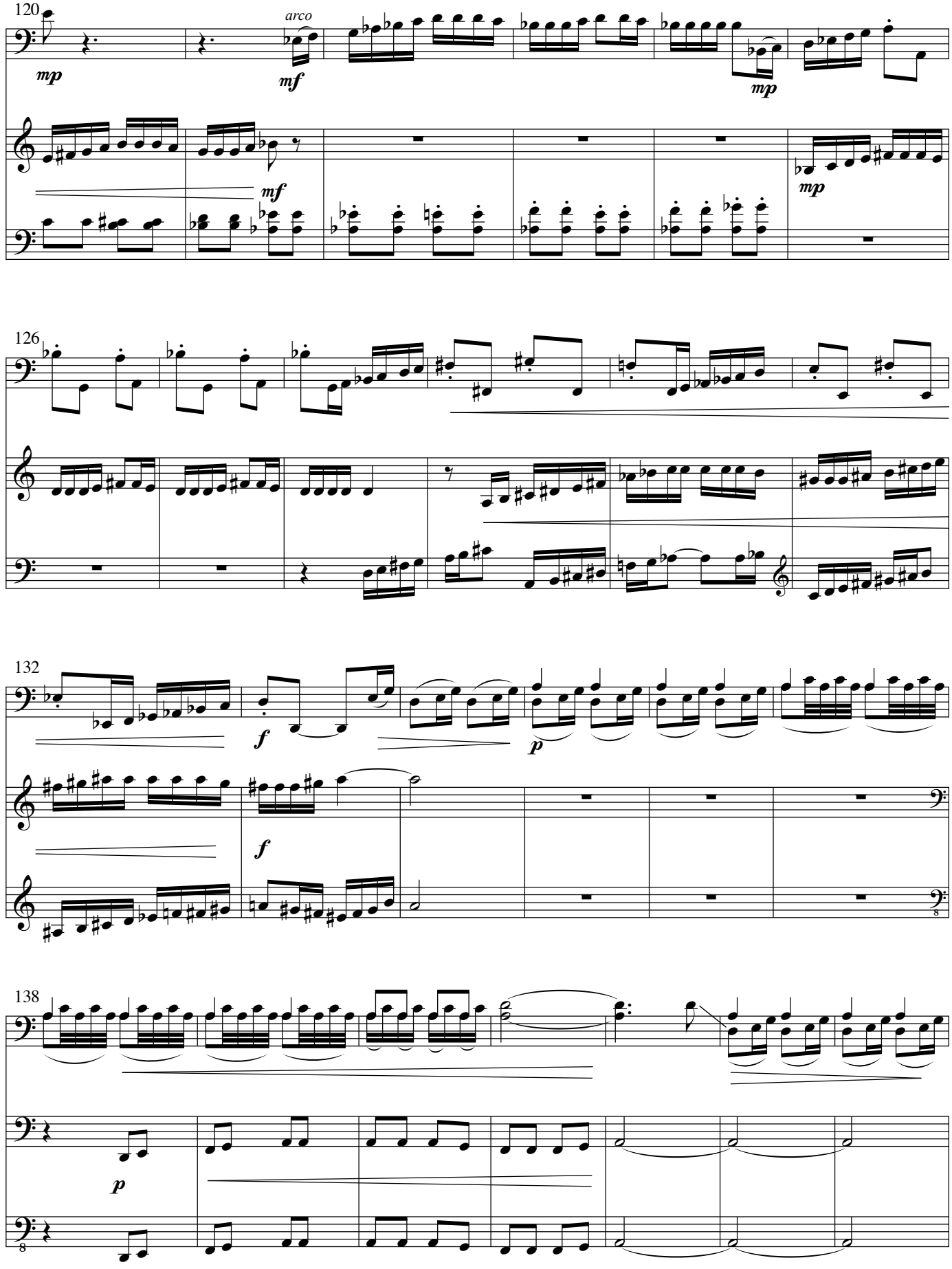

16
p
p
20
pp
f
lightly
sub. p
24
28
mp
fp
fp
fp

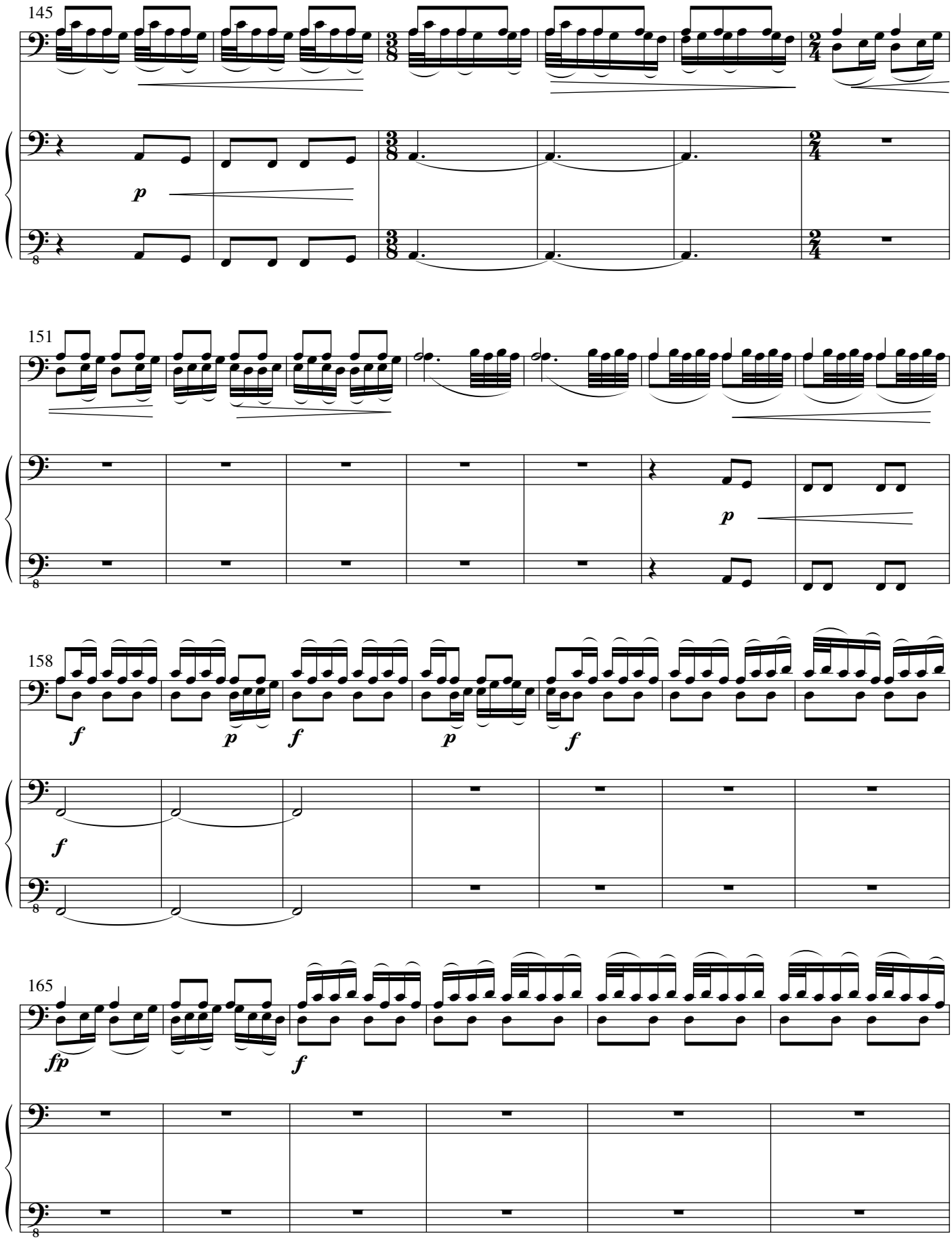

33
pp
fp
pp
39
f
f
43
3
3
3
47
6
p
f
p
f
mf
p
f

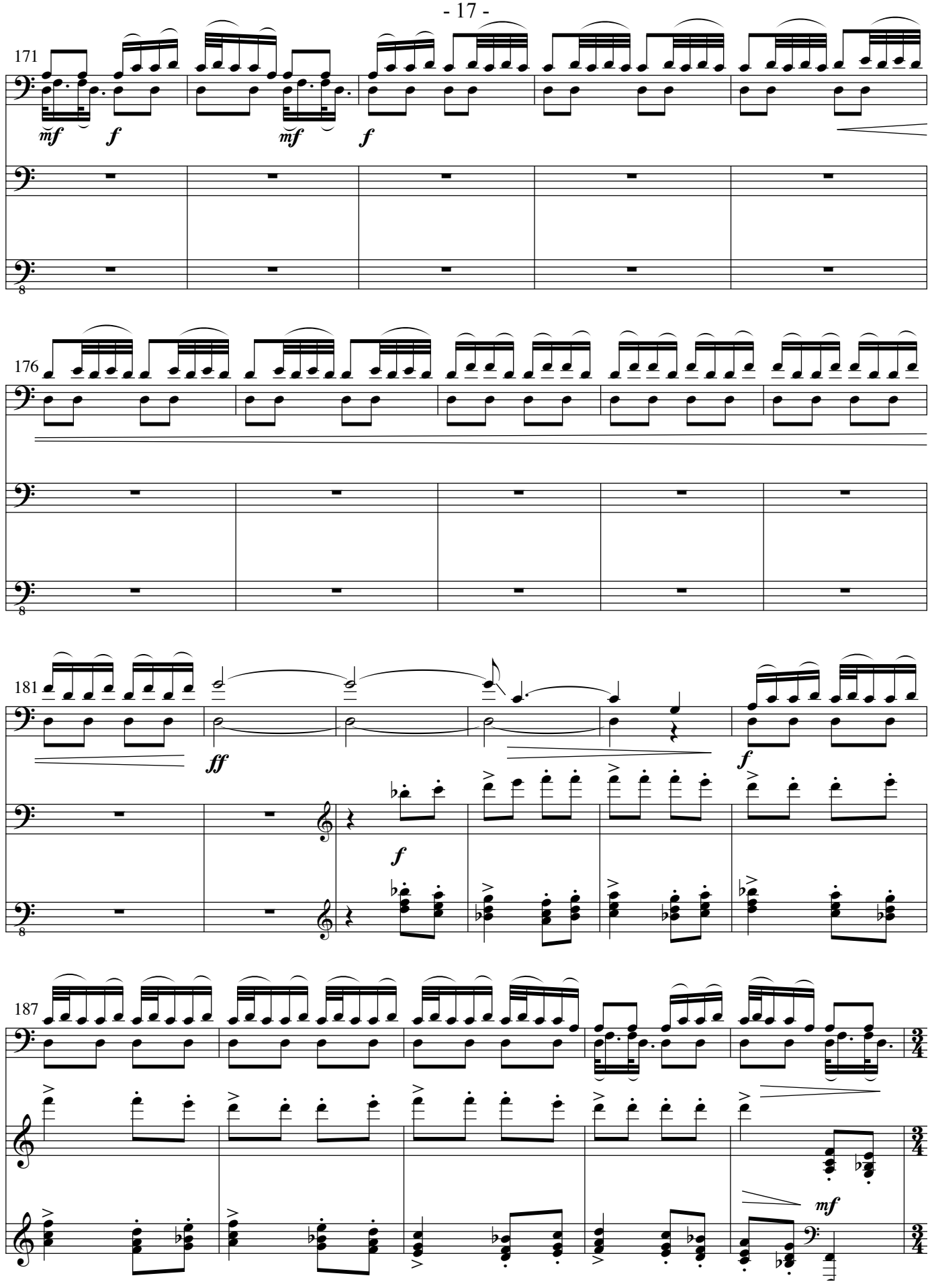

53
59
65
71
f
p
ff
mf

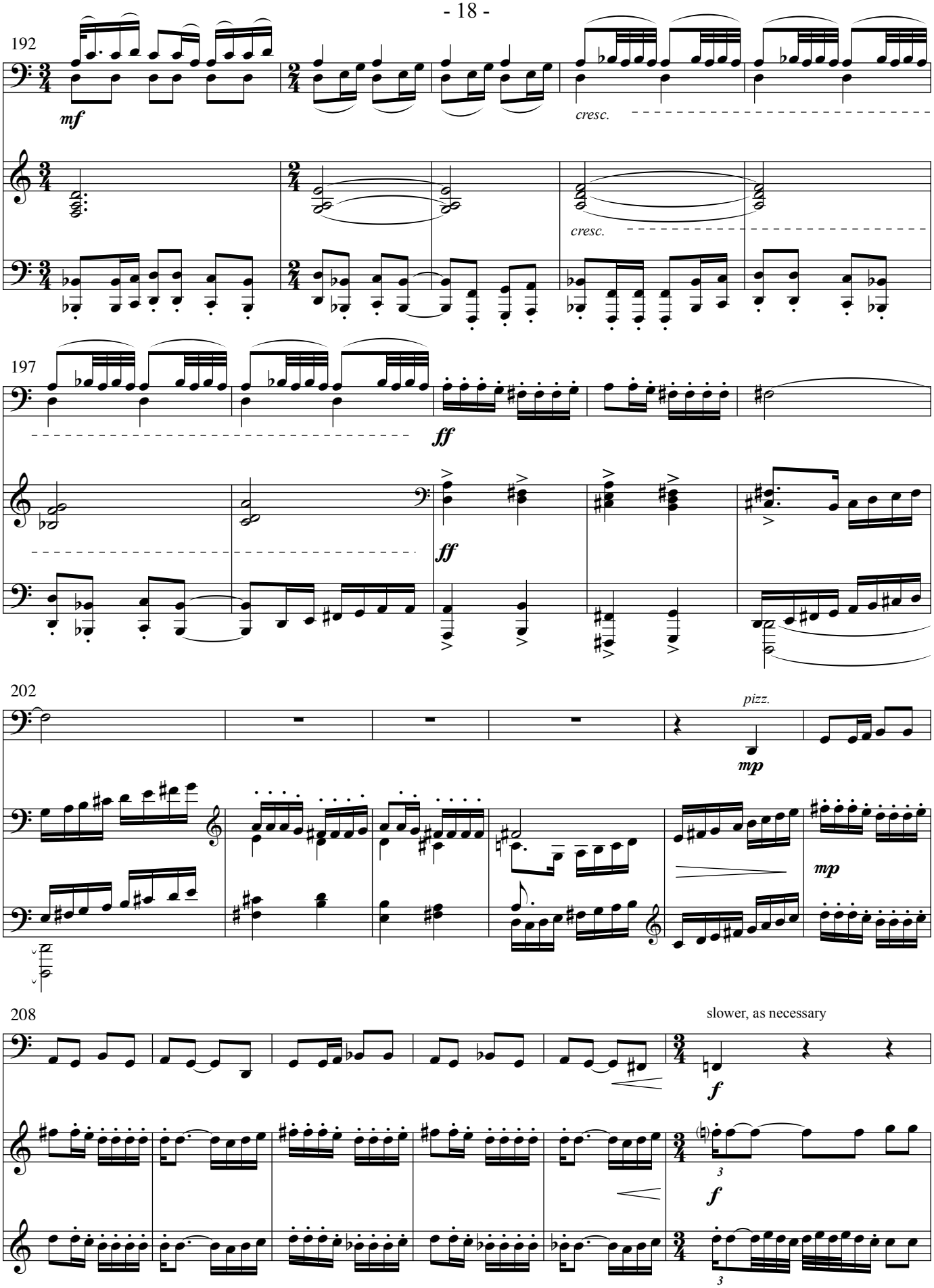

76
mf
mf
81
ff
mf
f
ff
mf
f
87
mp
mf
mf
92
f
f

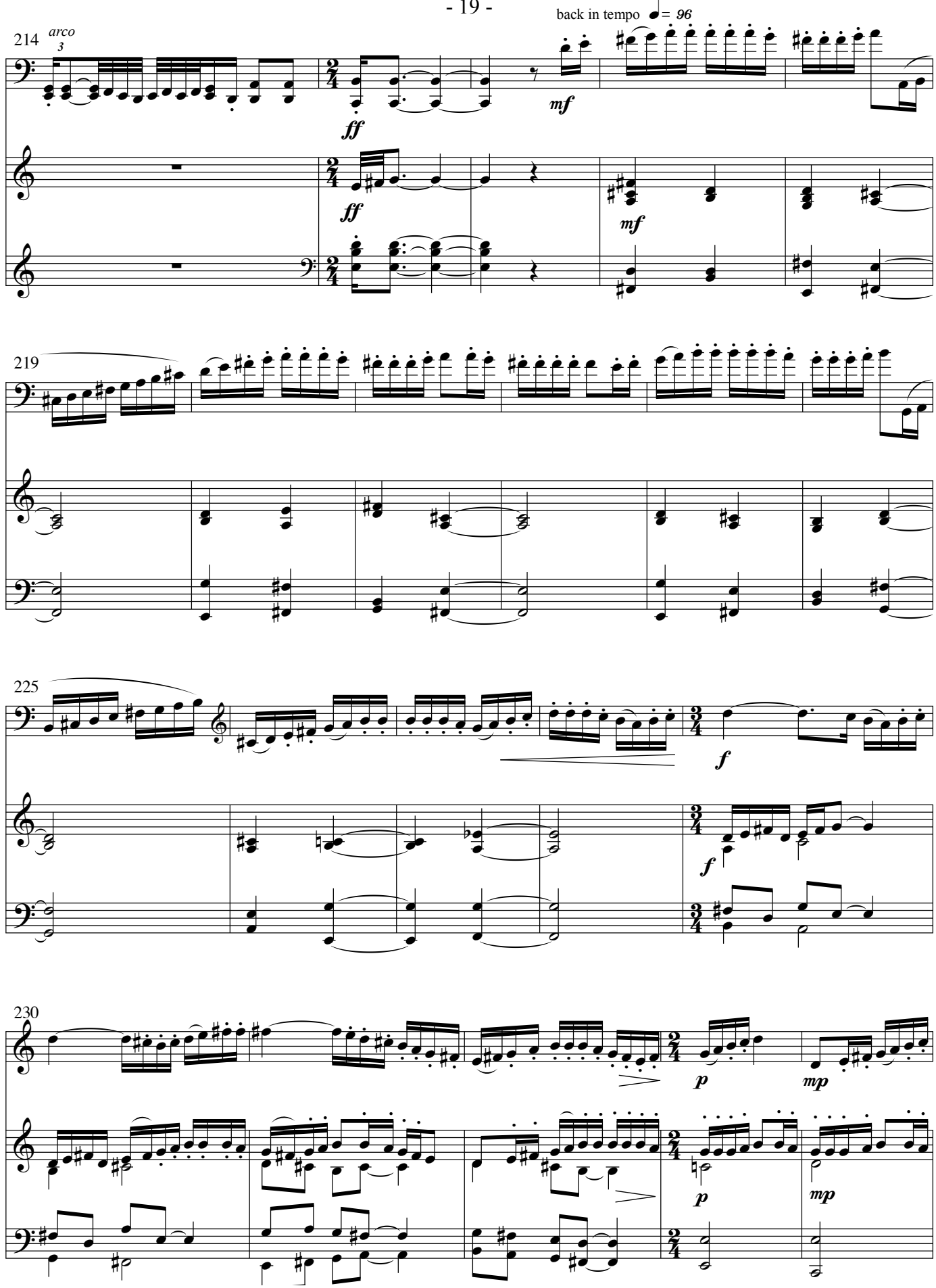

97
102
ff
f
ff
mf
ff
107
f
pizz.
p
mf
f
mp
p
114

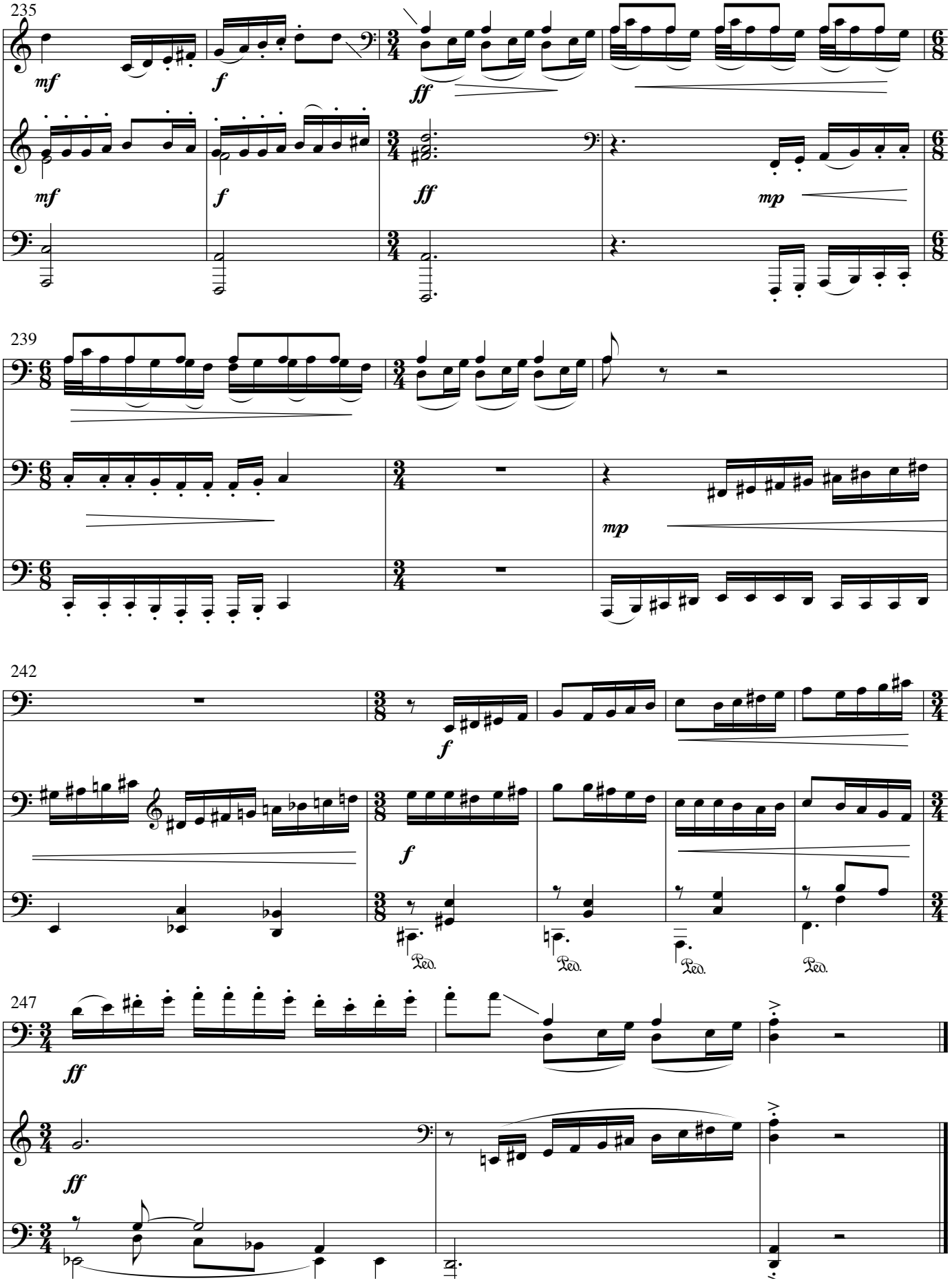

120
arco
mp
mf
mf
mp
mp
126
132
f
p
f
138
p


145
p
151
p
158
f
p
f
p
f
f
165
fp
f


171
mf
f
mf
f
176
181
ff
f
f
187
mf


192
mf
cresc.
cresc.
197
ff
ff
202
pizz.
mp
mp
208
slower, as necessary
f
f


back in tempo ♩= 96
214
arco
3
ff
mf
ff
mf
219
225
f
f
230
p
mp
p
mp


235
mf
f
ff
mf
f
ff
mp
239
mp
242
f
f
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
247
ff
ff