Goldbug Variations

for Piano

(arranged from Harpsichord)

Bill Robinson

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, and in time was discarded.

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. 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.

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 no objections to a short selection presented on a concert instead of the whole piece, as long as the theme is included.

The original score was in this legal-size format, which helps with page turns, but is hard to print, bind, and store for many musicians. In 2022, I made a fresh edition, including a letter-size version suited for either print or electronic music readers.

Bill Robinson

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billrobinsonmusic.com

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

Bill Robinson

Moderato (♩ = 66)

p

Var. 1 (♩ = 90)

7

mp cantabile

13

17

mf

f

21

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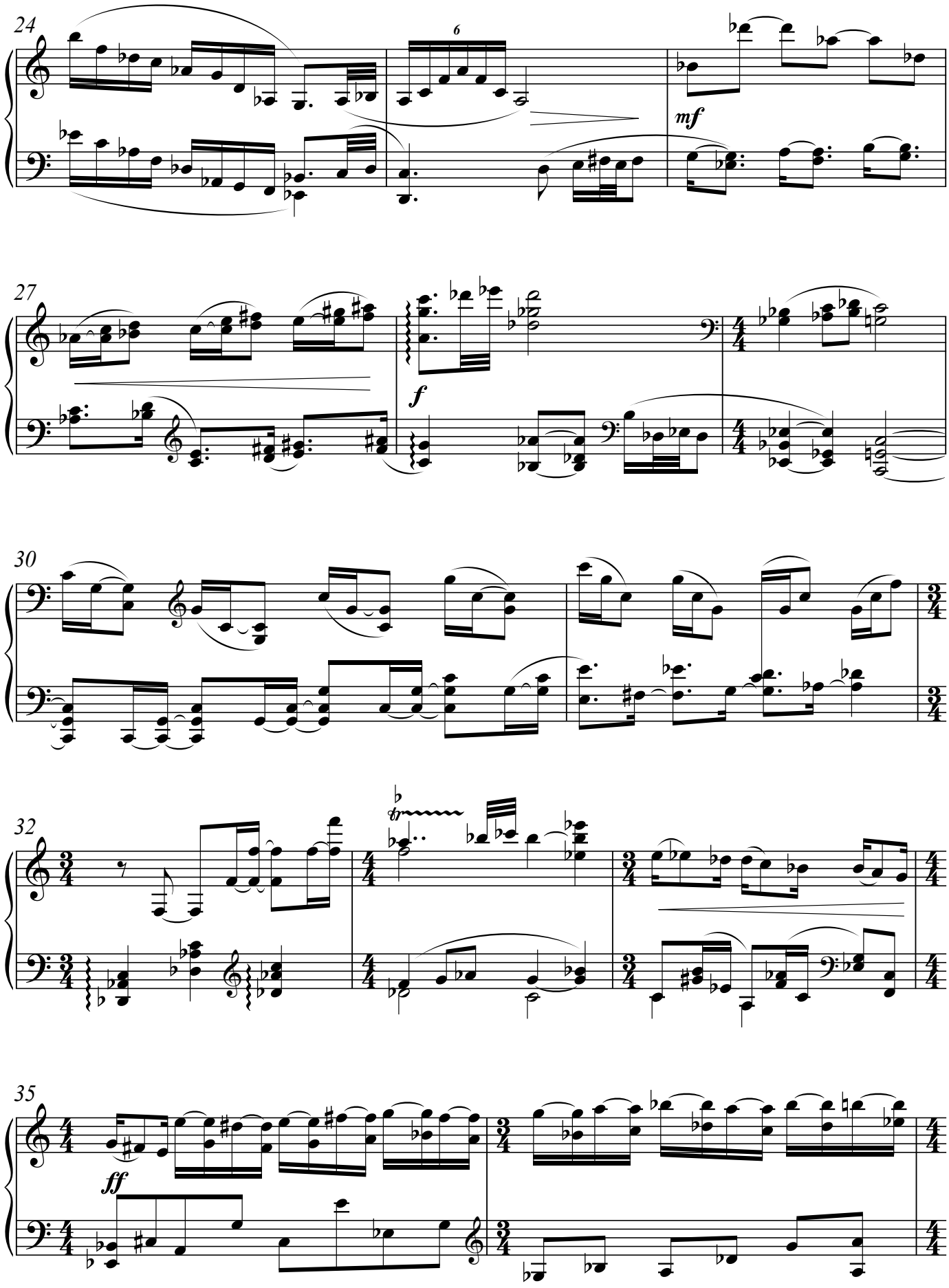
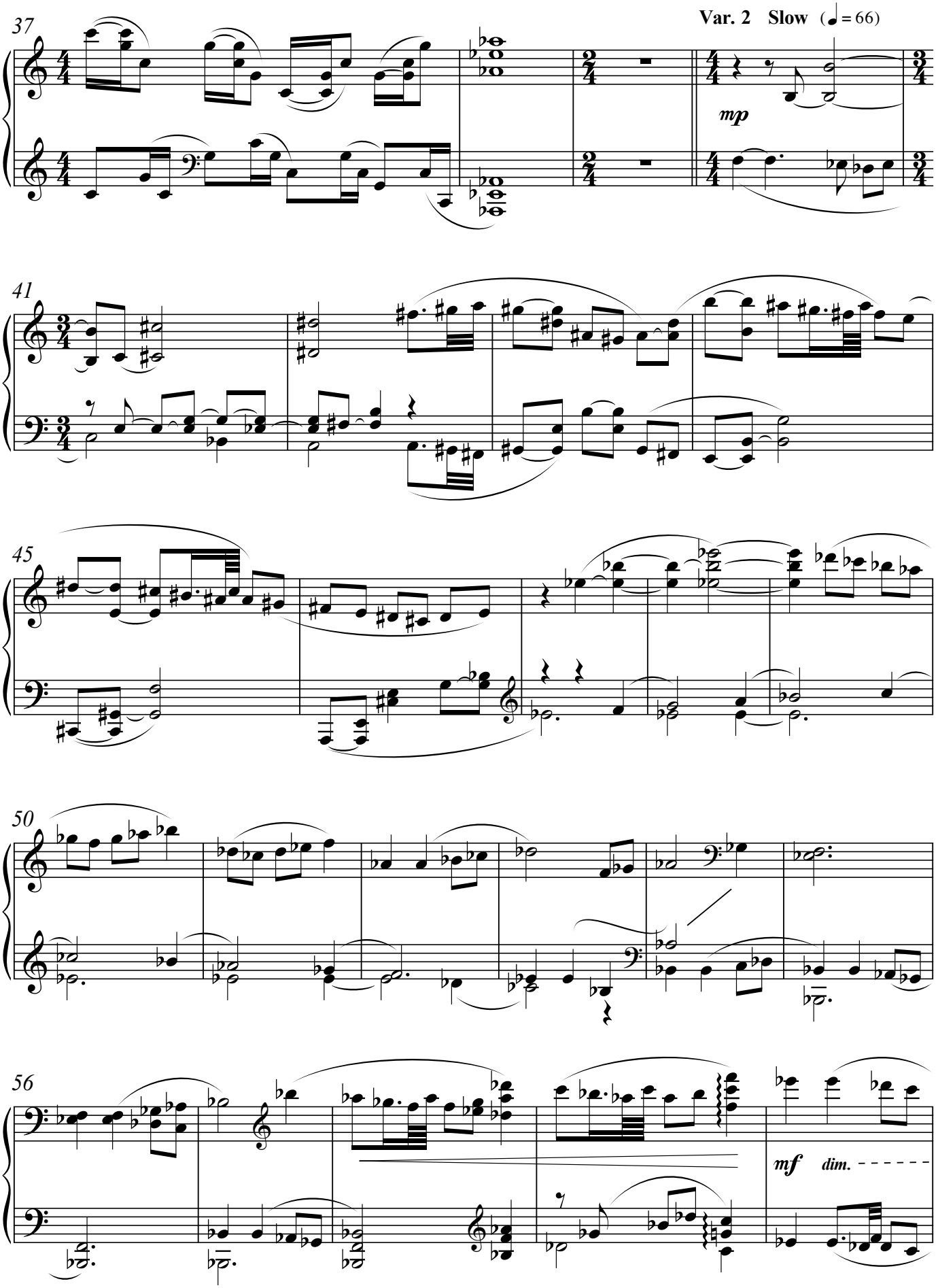
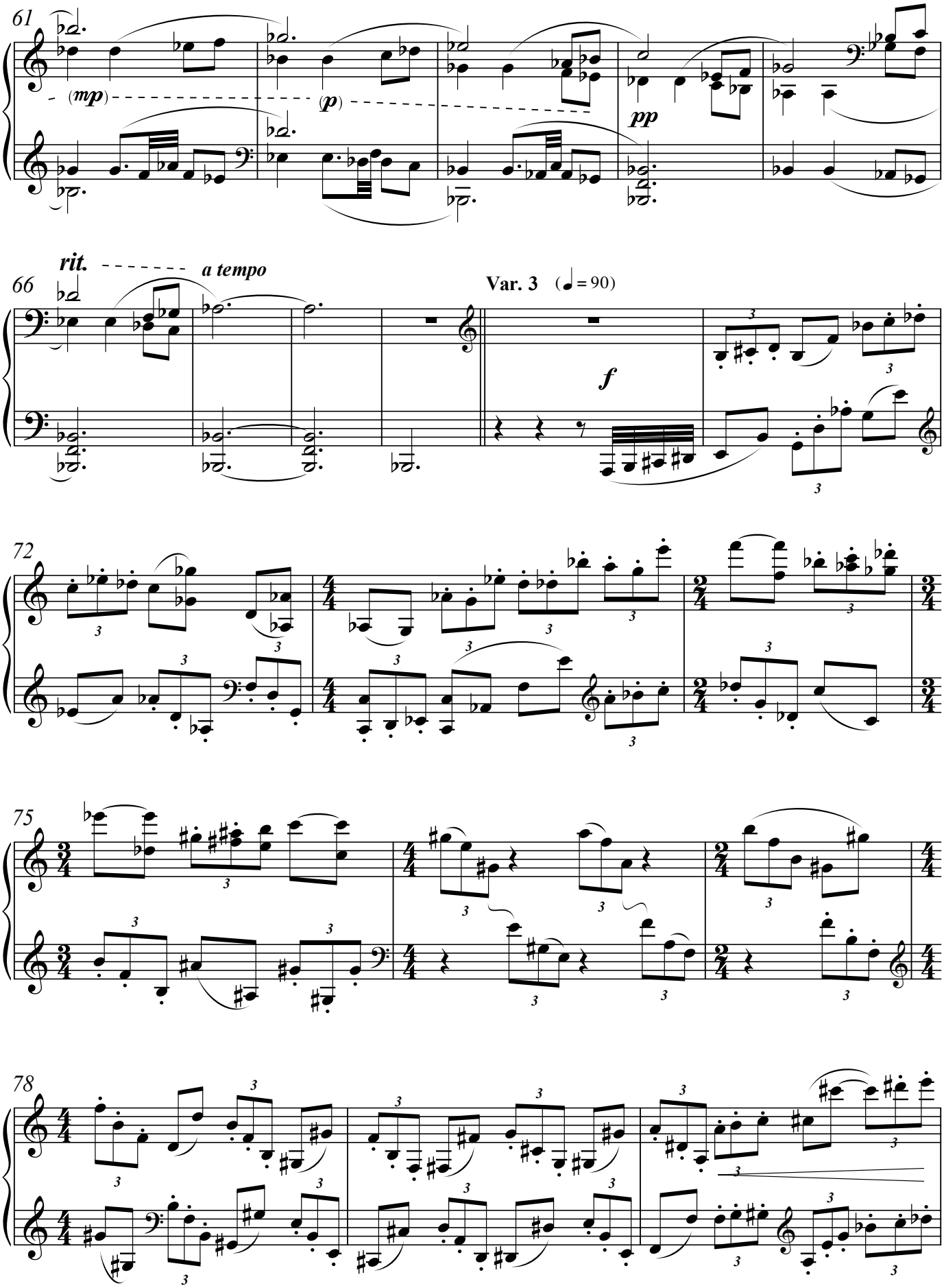
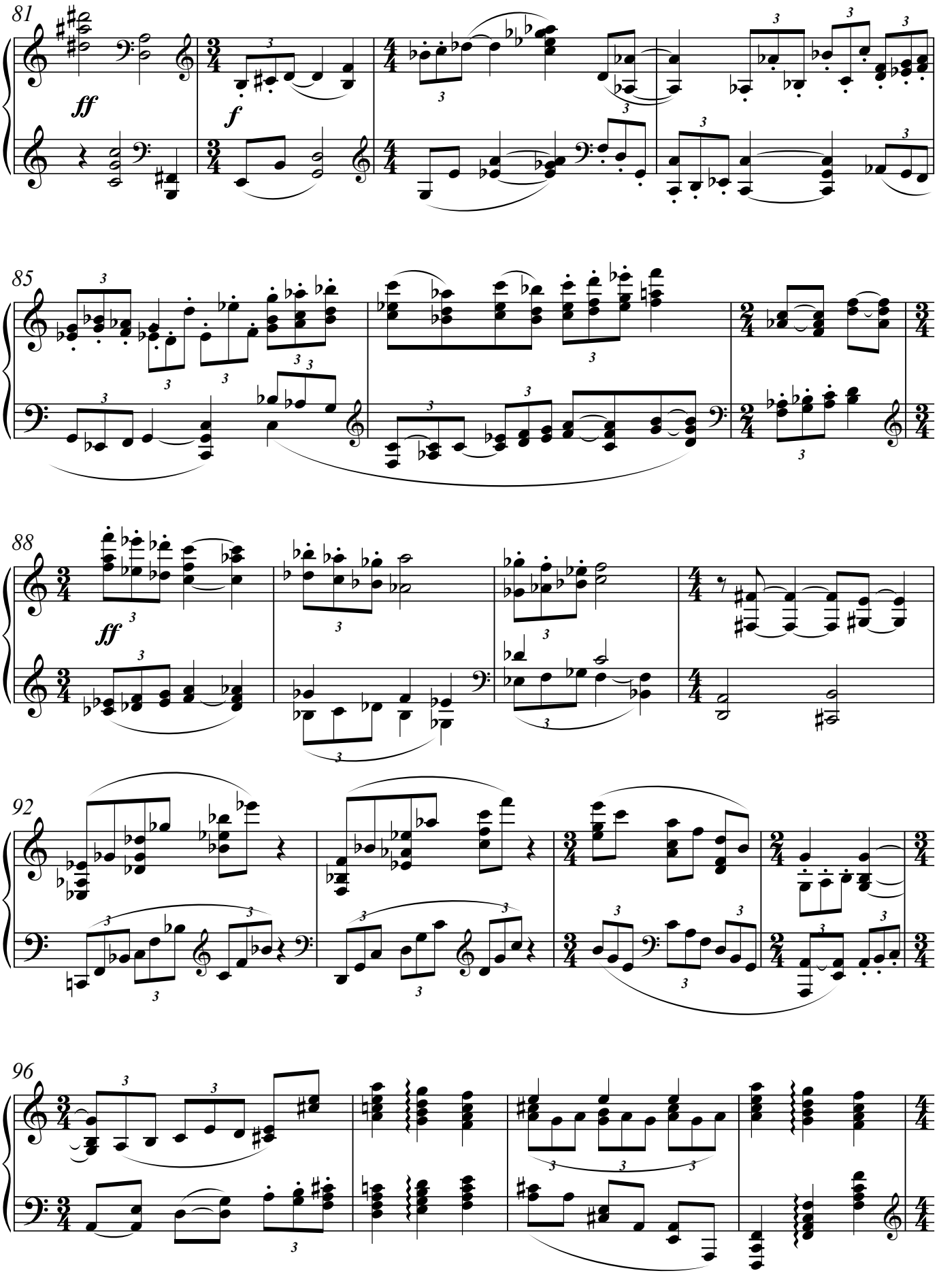
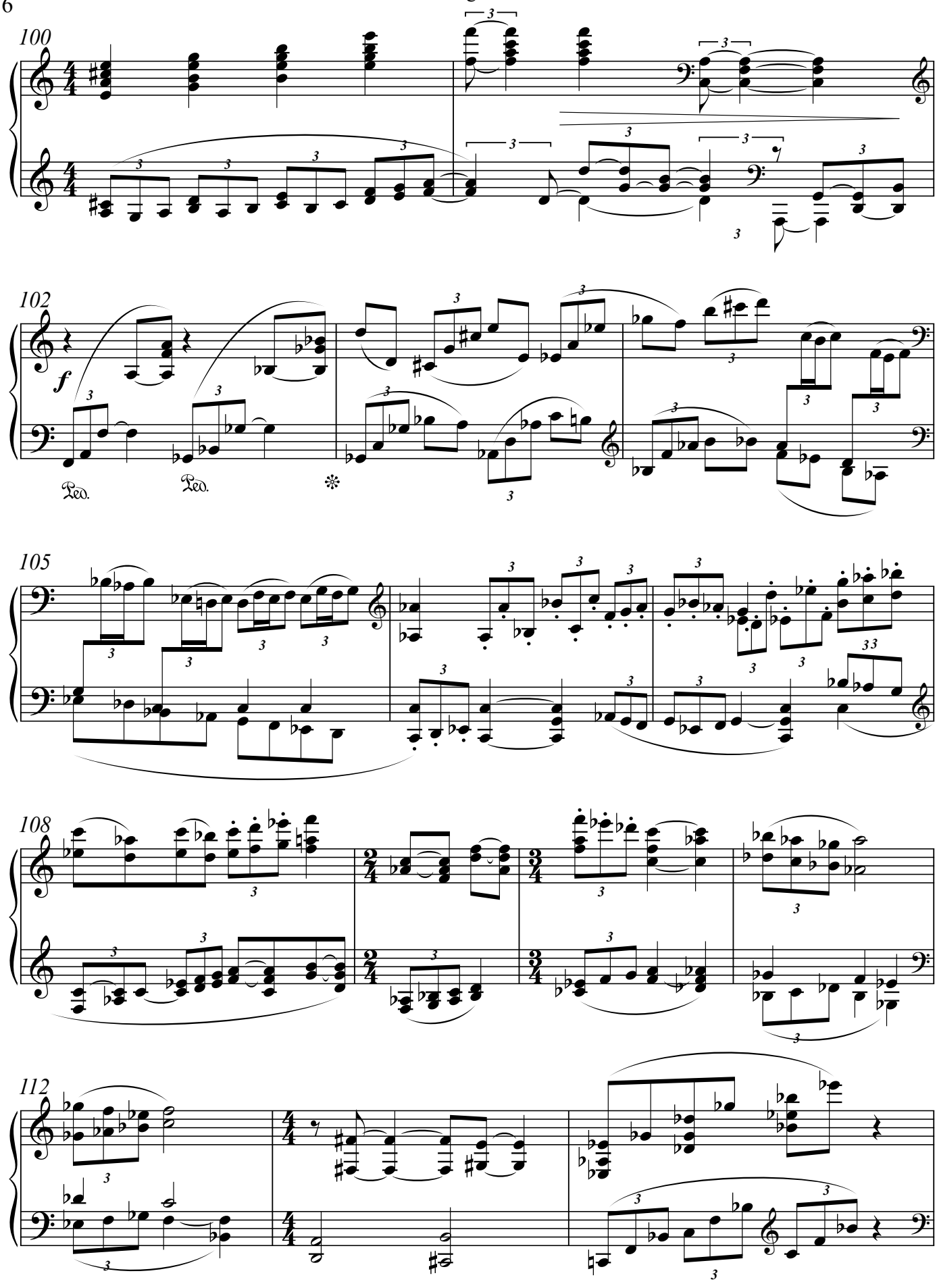
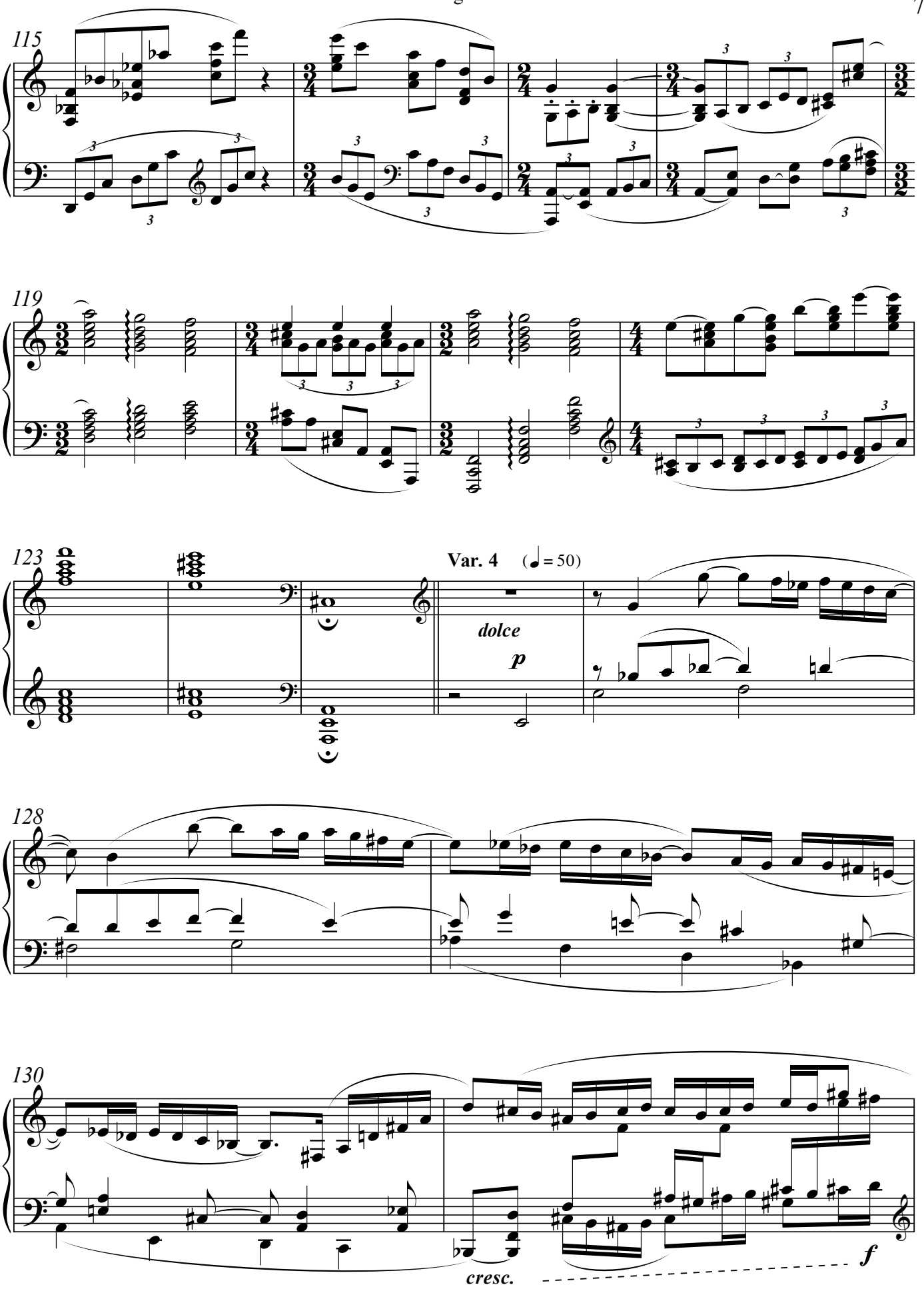

24
6
mf
27
f
30
32
35
ff

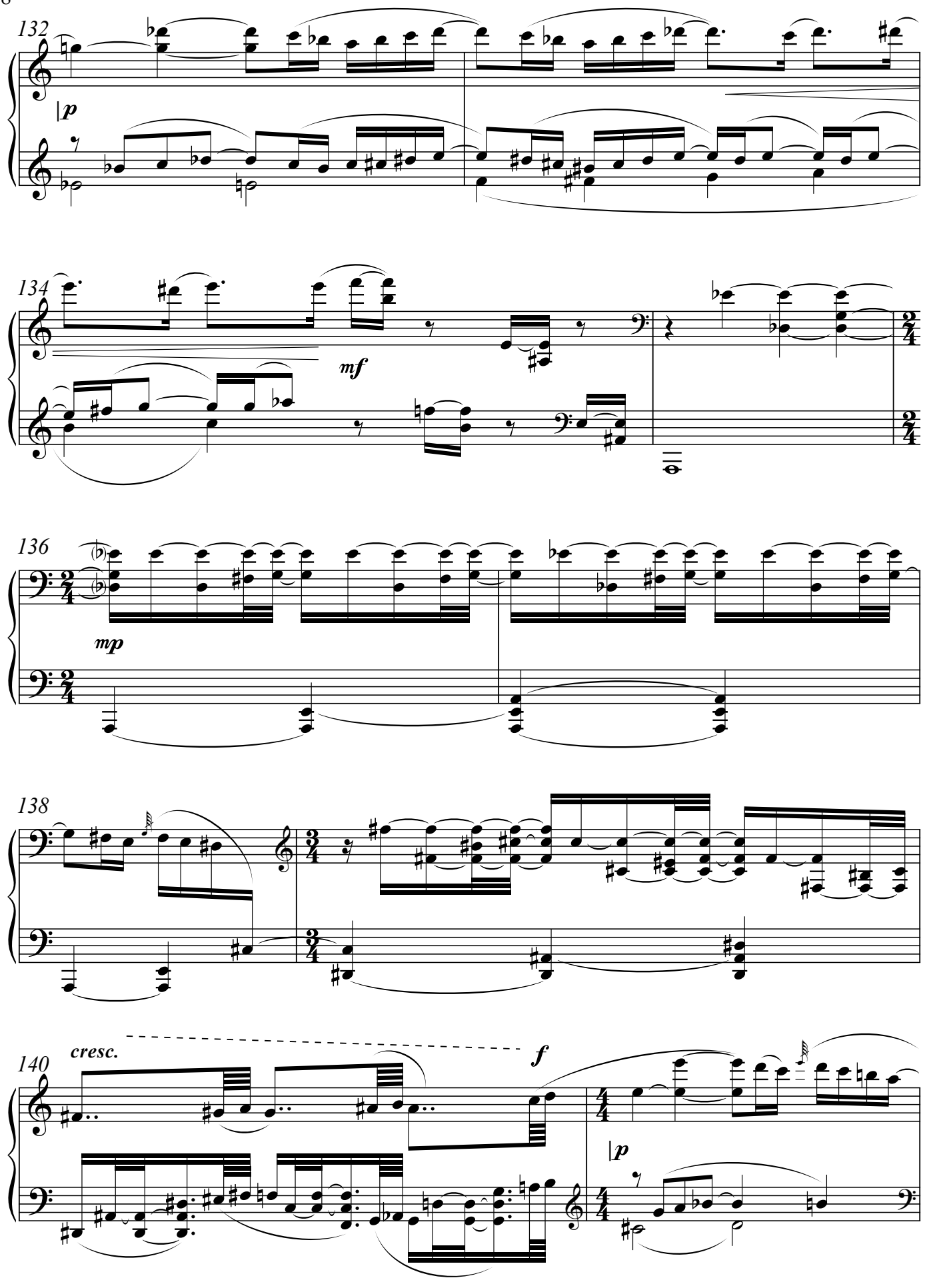

37
Var. 2 Slow (♩ = 66)
mp
41
45
50
56
mf
dim.

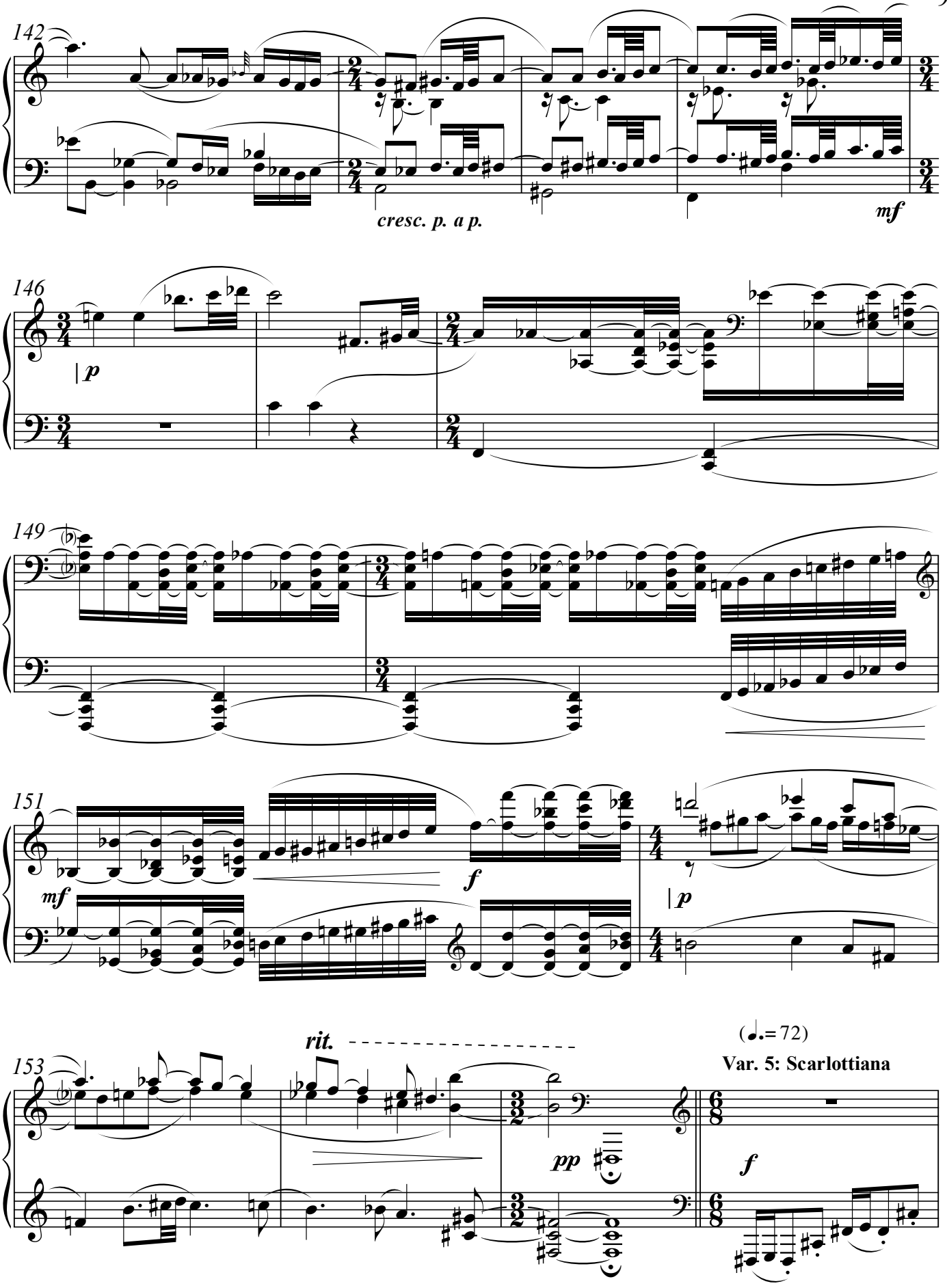

61
(mp)
(p)
pp
rit.
a tempo
66
Var. 3
(♩ = 90)
f
72
75
78

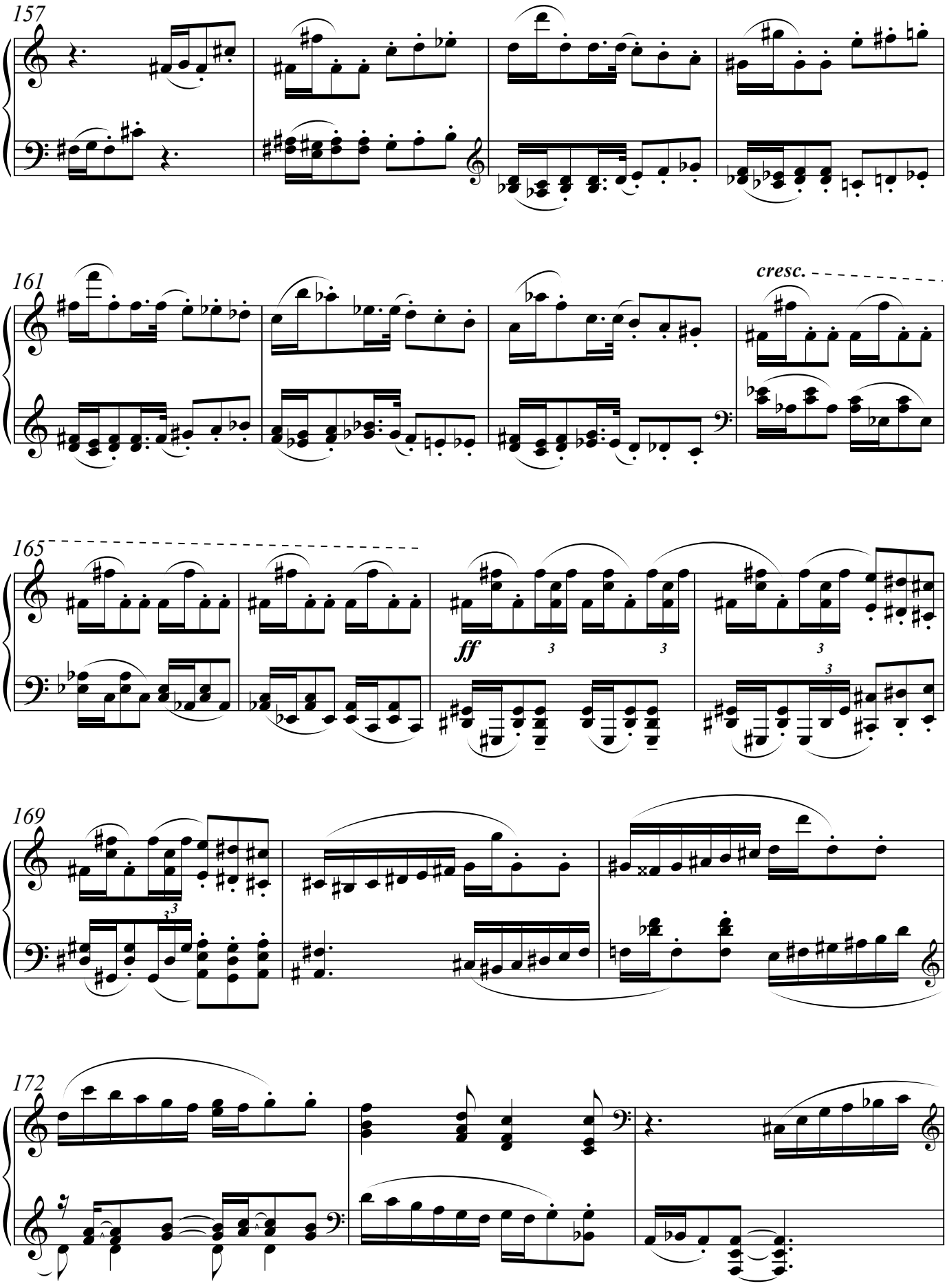

81
ff
f
85
88
ff
92
96

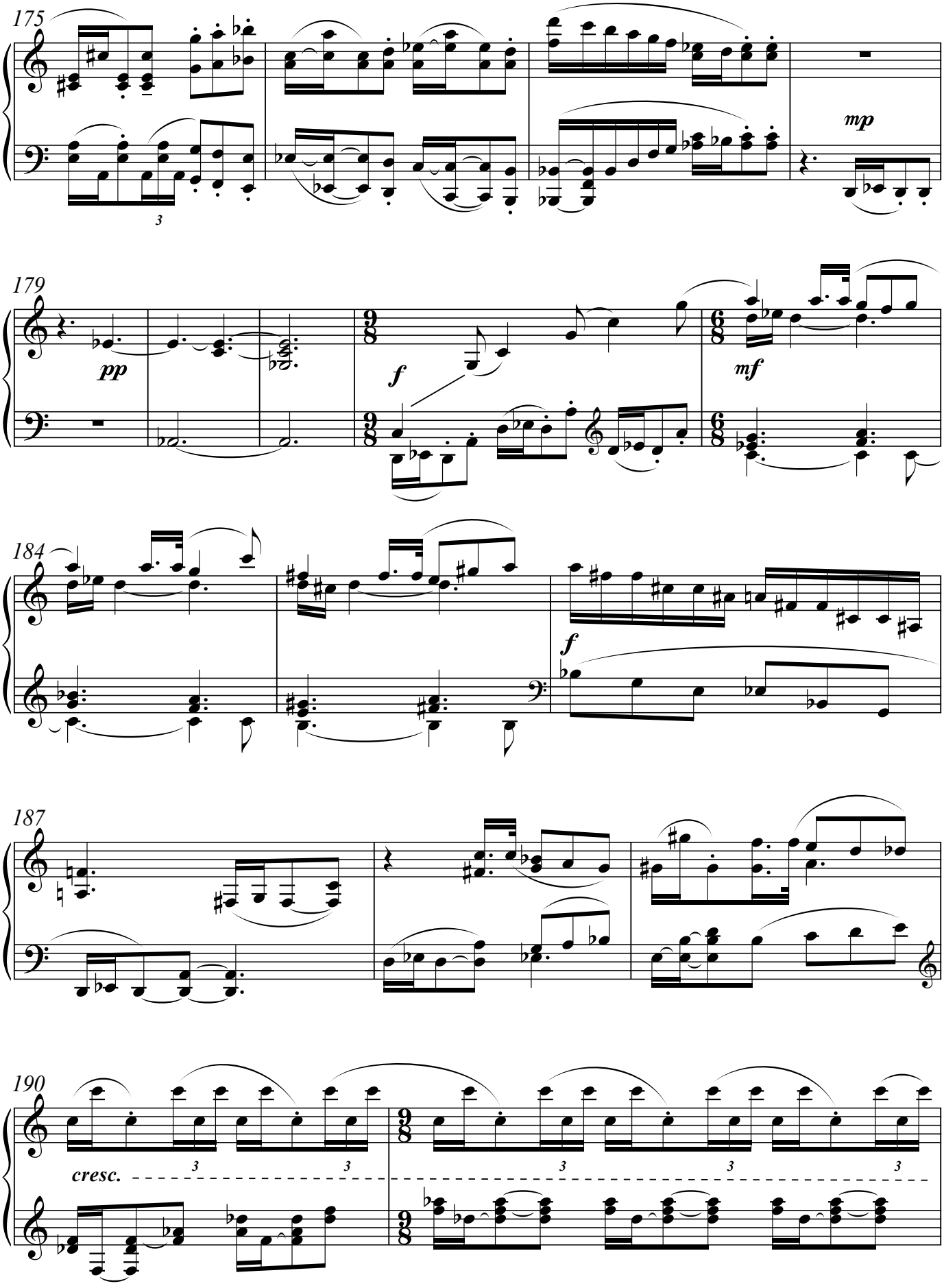

100
102
f
Ped.
Ped.
105
108
112

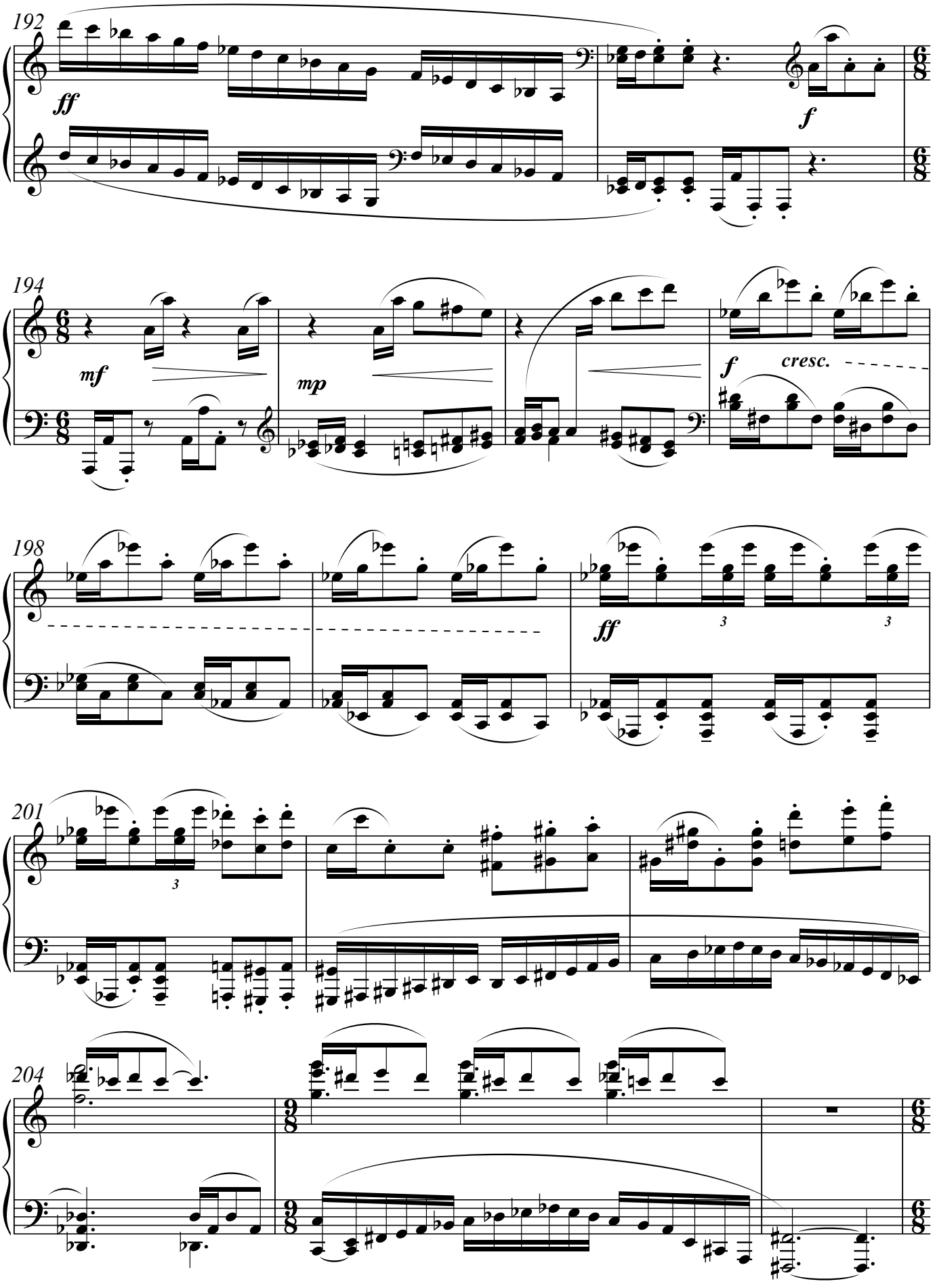

115
119
123
Var. 4
(♩ = 50)
dolce
p
128
130
cresc.
f

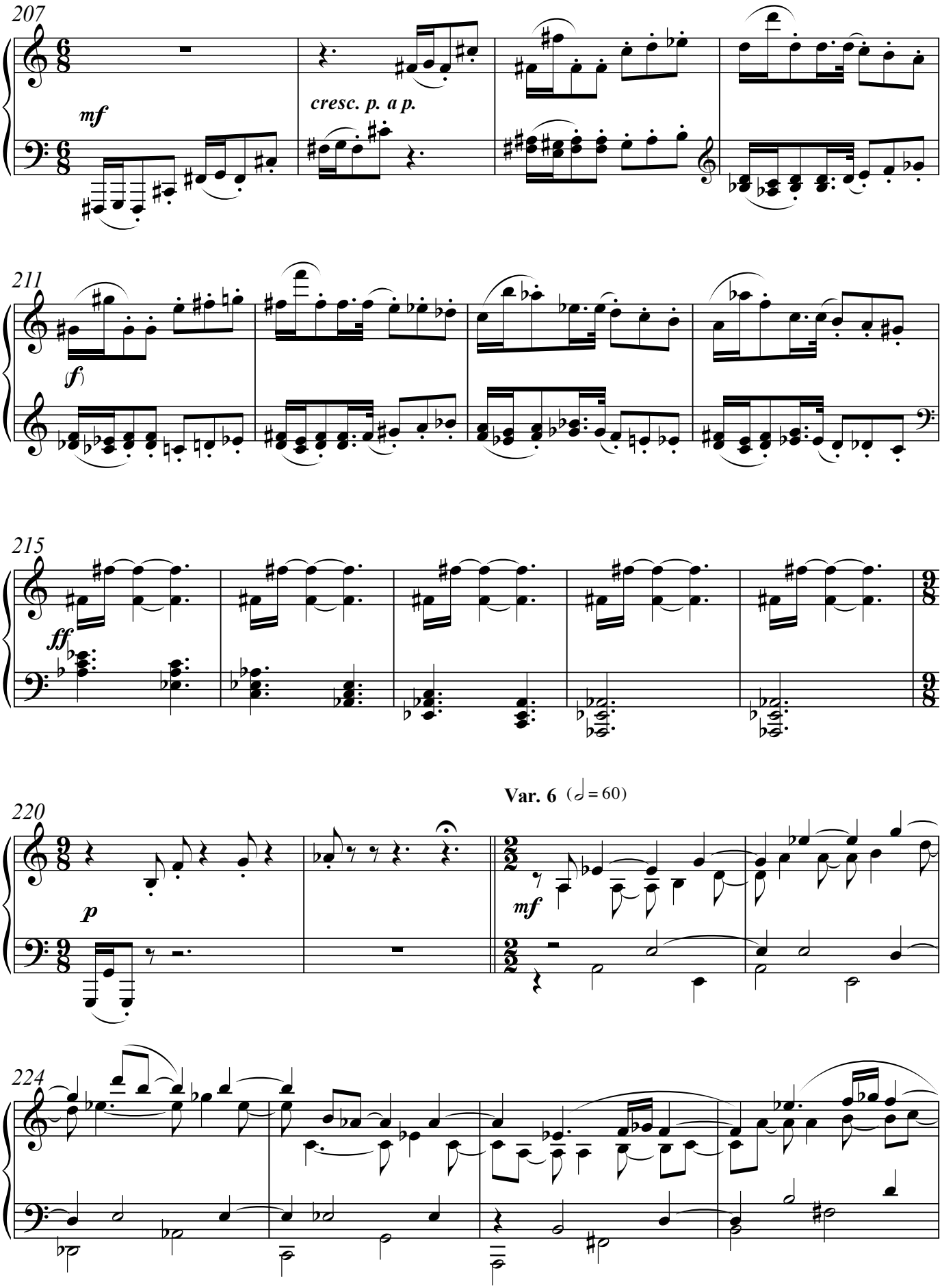

132
p
134
mf
136
mp
138
140
cresc.
f
p

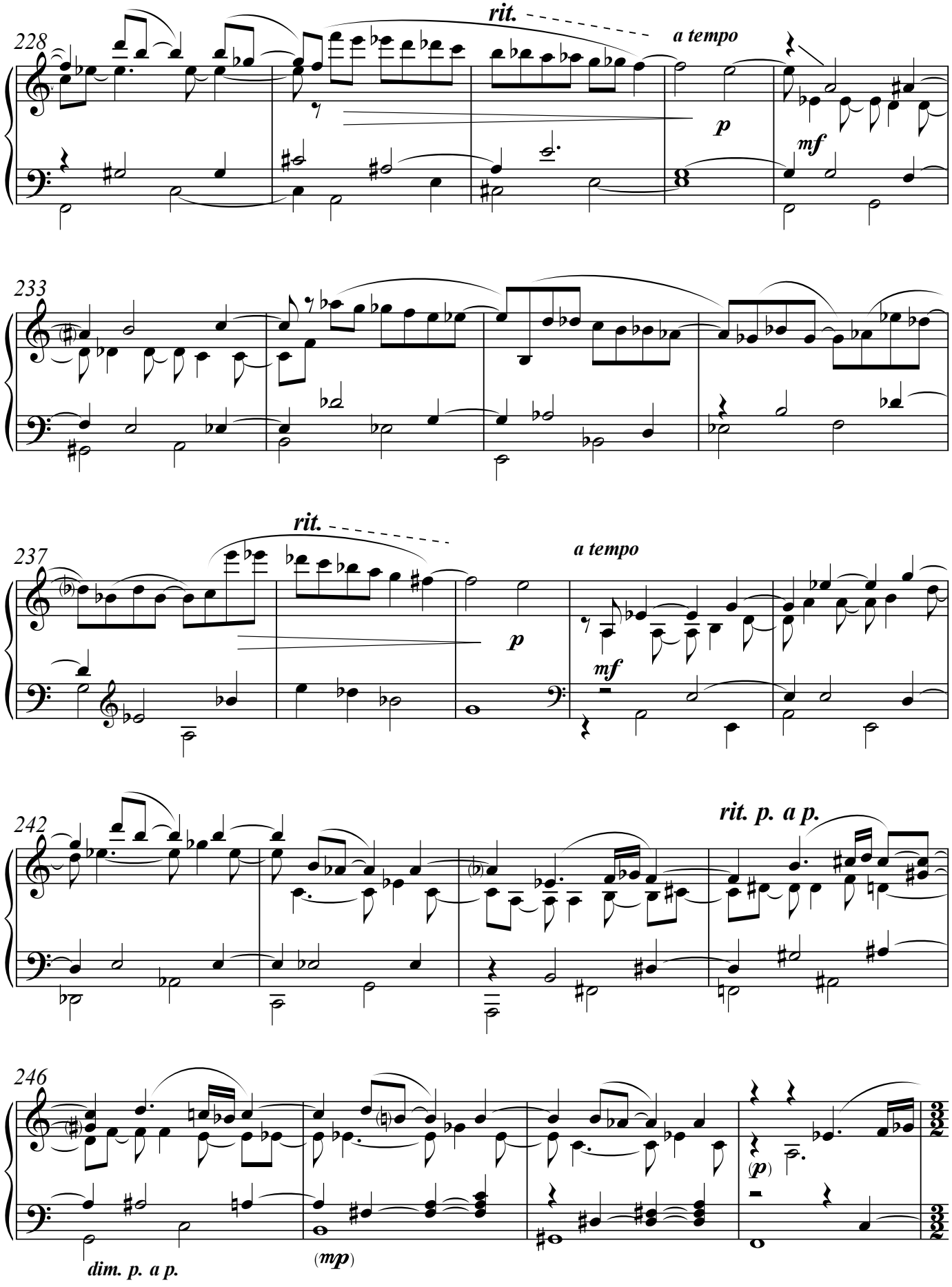

142
cresc. p. a p.
mf
146
p
149
151
mf
f
p
rit.
153
pp
(♩.= 72)
Var. 5: Scarlottiana
f

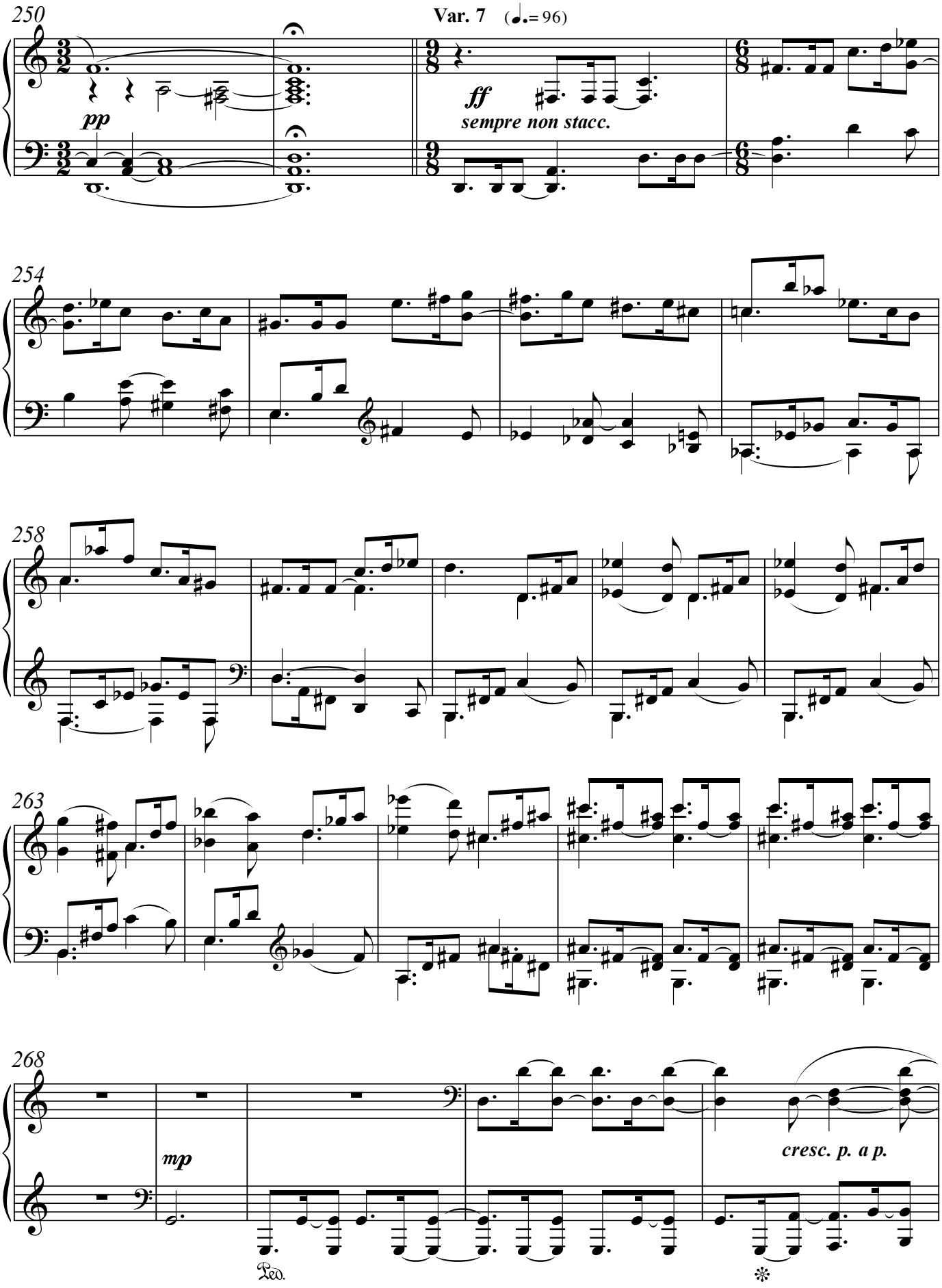

157
161
cresc.
165
ff
169
172

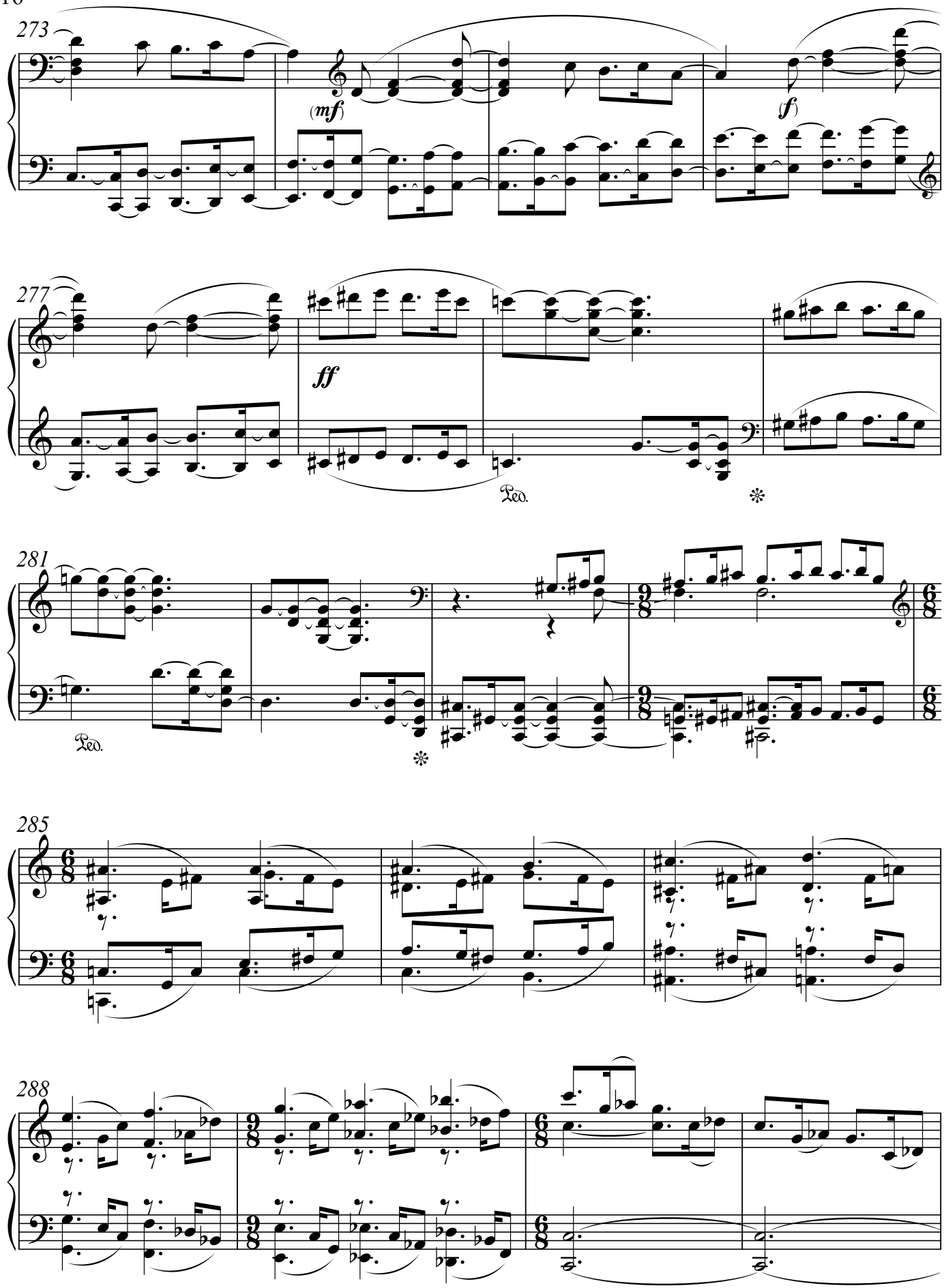

175
mp
179
pp
f
mf
184
f
187
190
cresc.

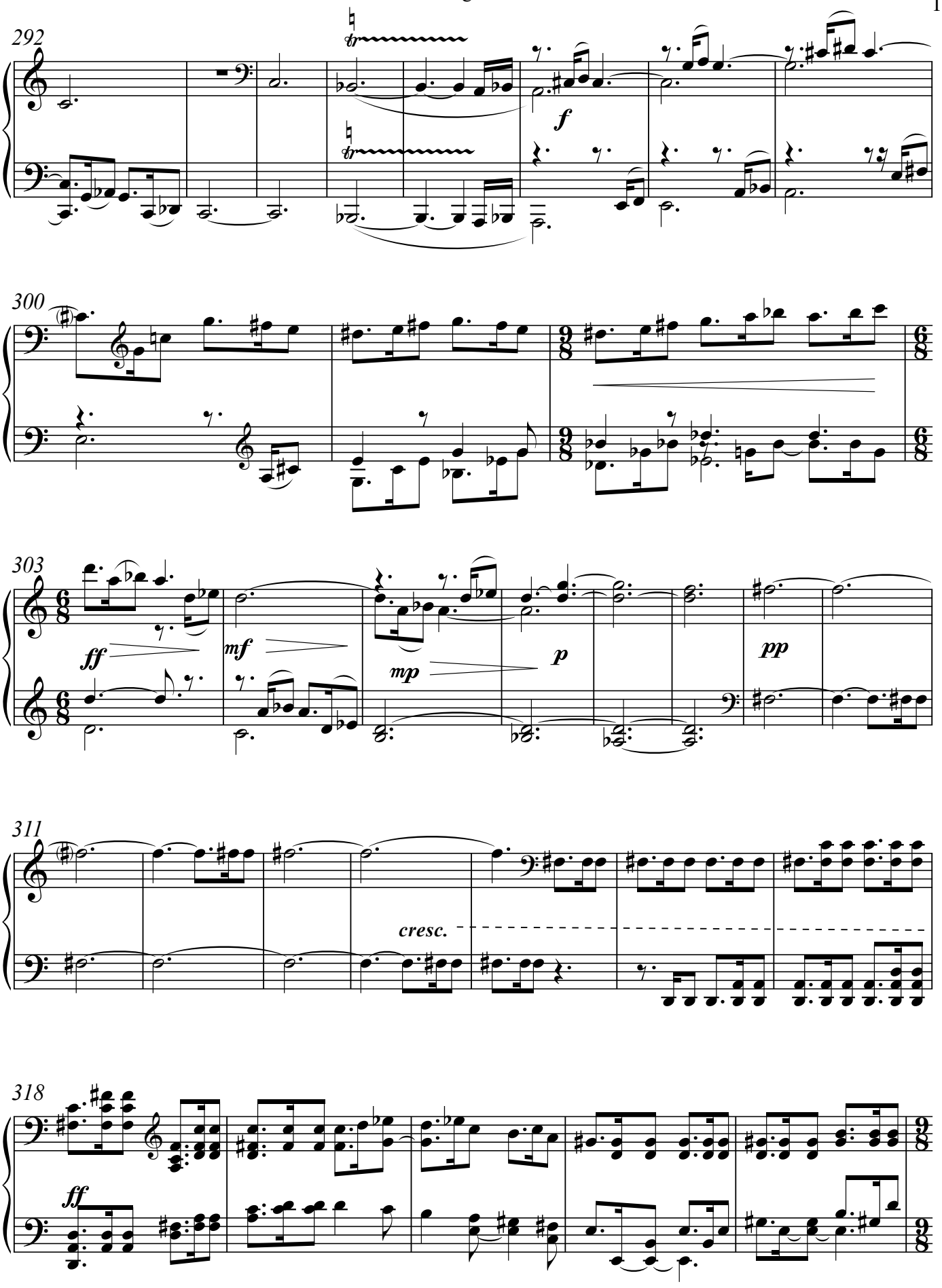

192
ff
f
194
mf
mp
f
cresc.
198
ff
3
3
201
3
204

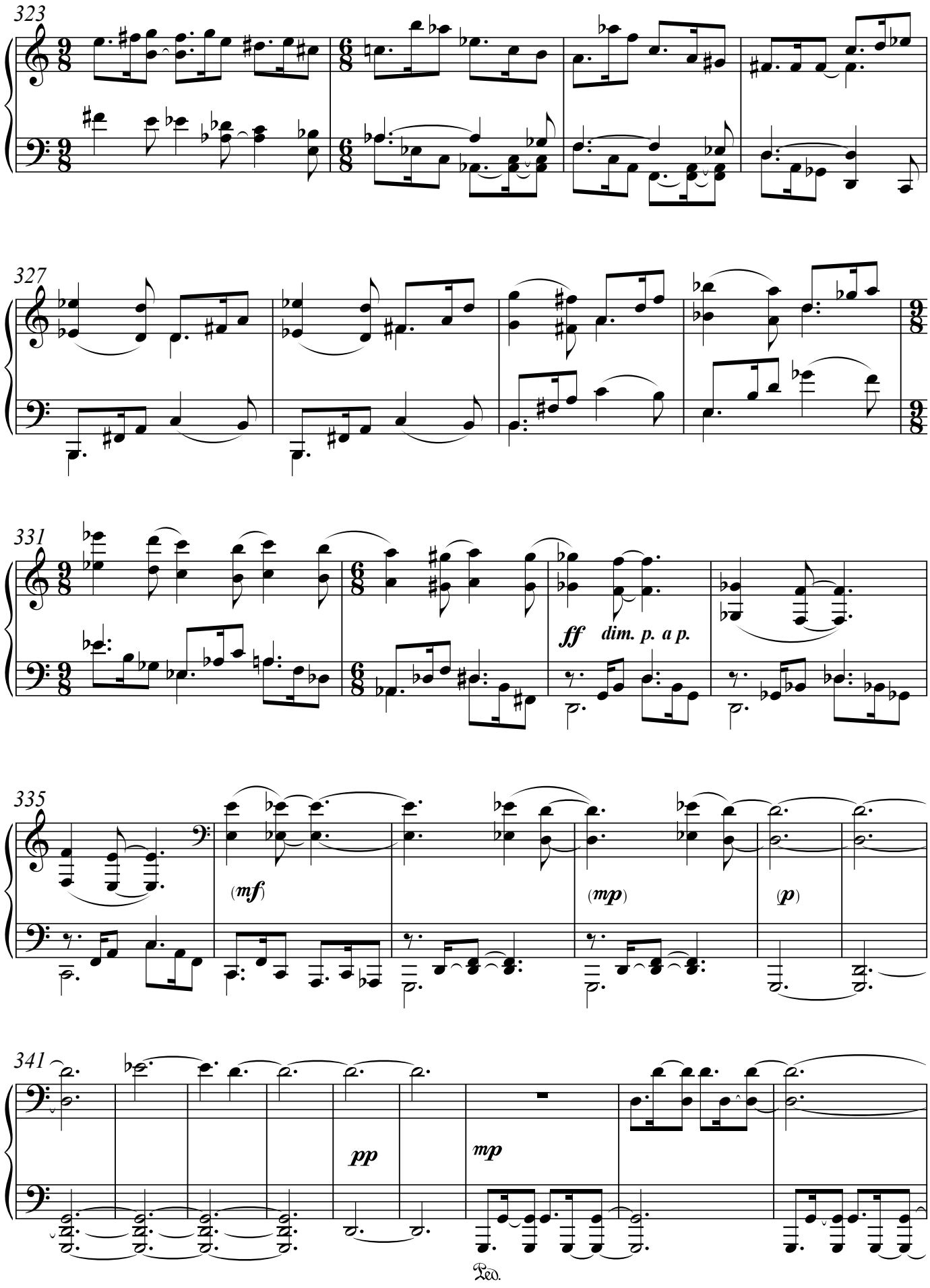

207
mf
cresc. p. a p.
211
(f)
215
ff
Var. 6 (𝅗𝅥 = 60)
220
p
mf
224

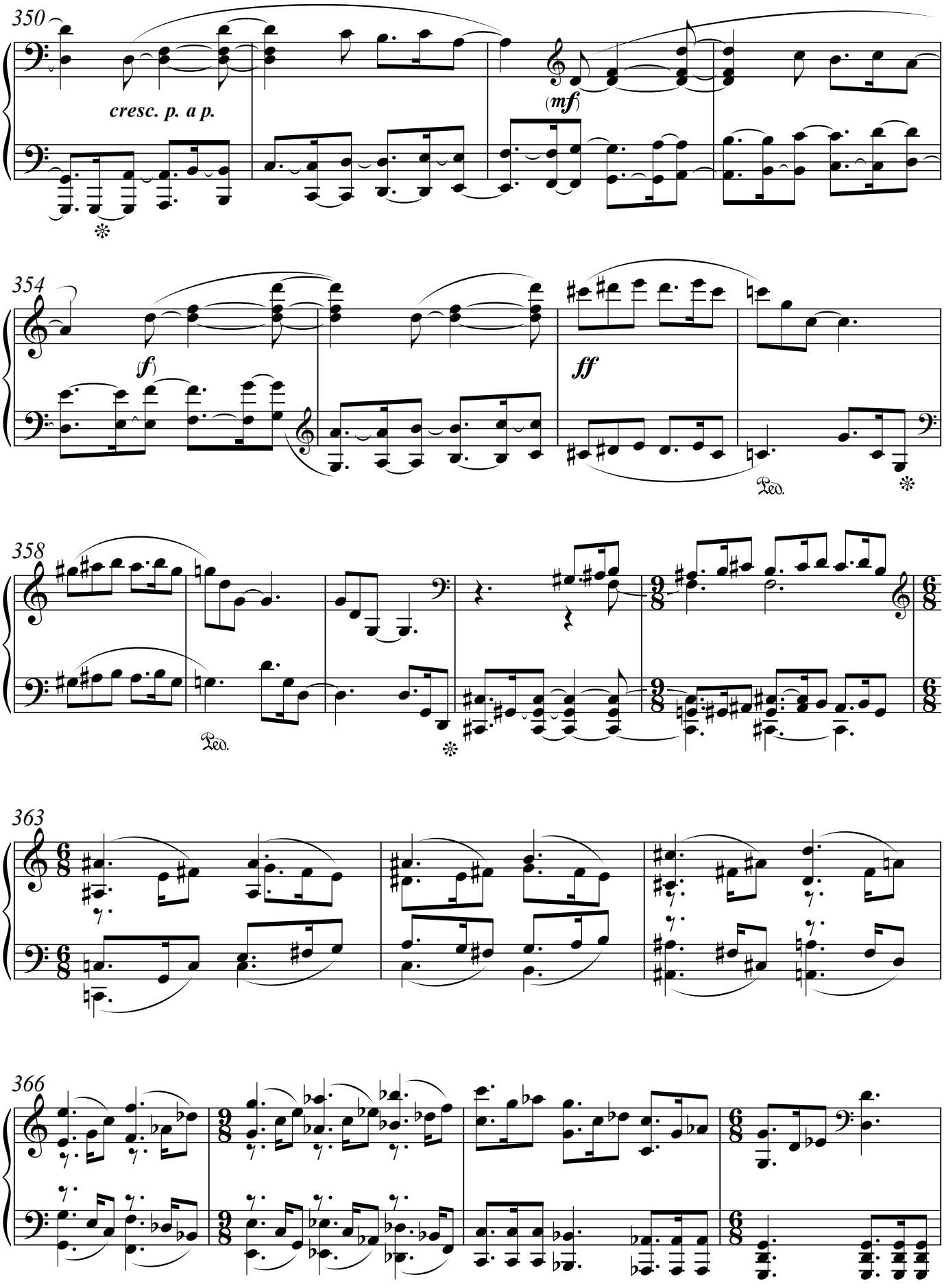

228
rit.
a tempo
p
mf
233
237
rit.
a tempo
p
mf
242
rit. p. a p.
246
(p)
dim. p. a p.
(mp)


250
Var. 7 (♩. = 96)
pp
ff
sempre non stacc.
254
258
263
268
mp
cresc. p. a p.
Ped.
*


273
(mf)
(f)
277
ff
Ped.
281
Ped.
285
288


292
f
300
303
ff
mf
mp
p
pp
311
cresc.
318
ff


323
327
331
ff
dim. p. a p.
335
(mf)
(mp)
(p)
341
pp
mp
Ped.


350
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
354
(f)
ff
Ped.
358
Ped.
363
366

Var. 8 (♩.= 50)

370

p

Ped.

374

376

cresc. p. a p.

378

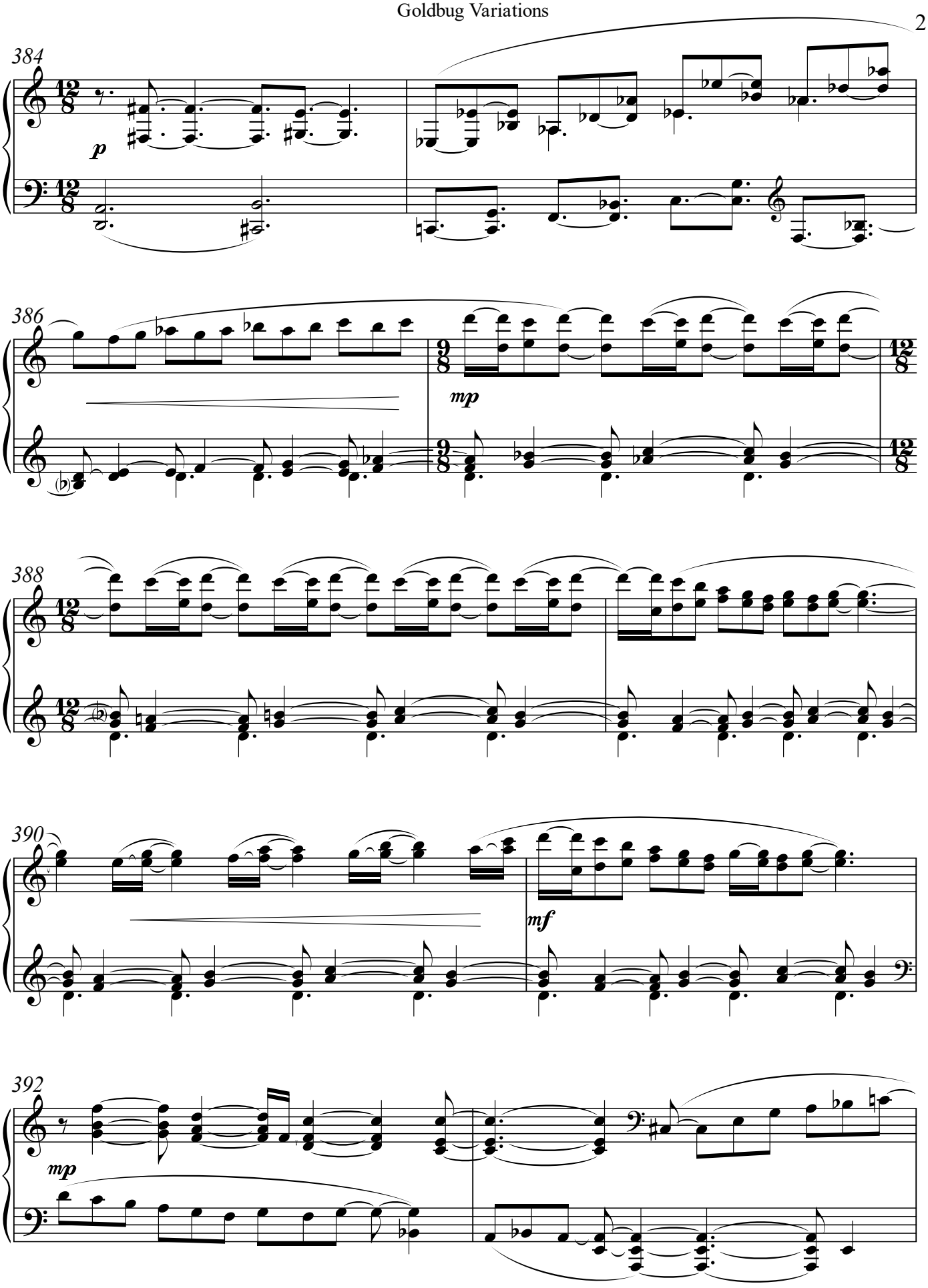
mf

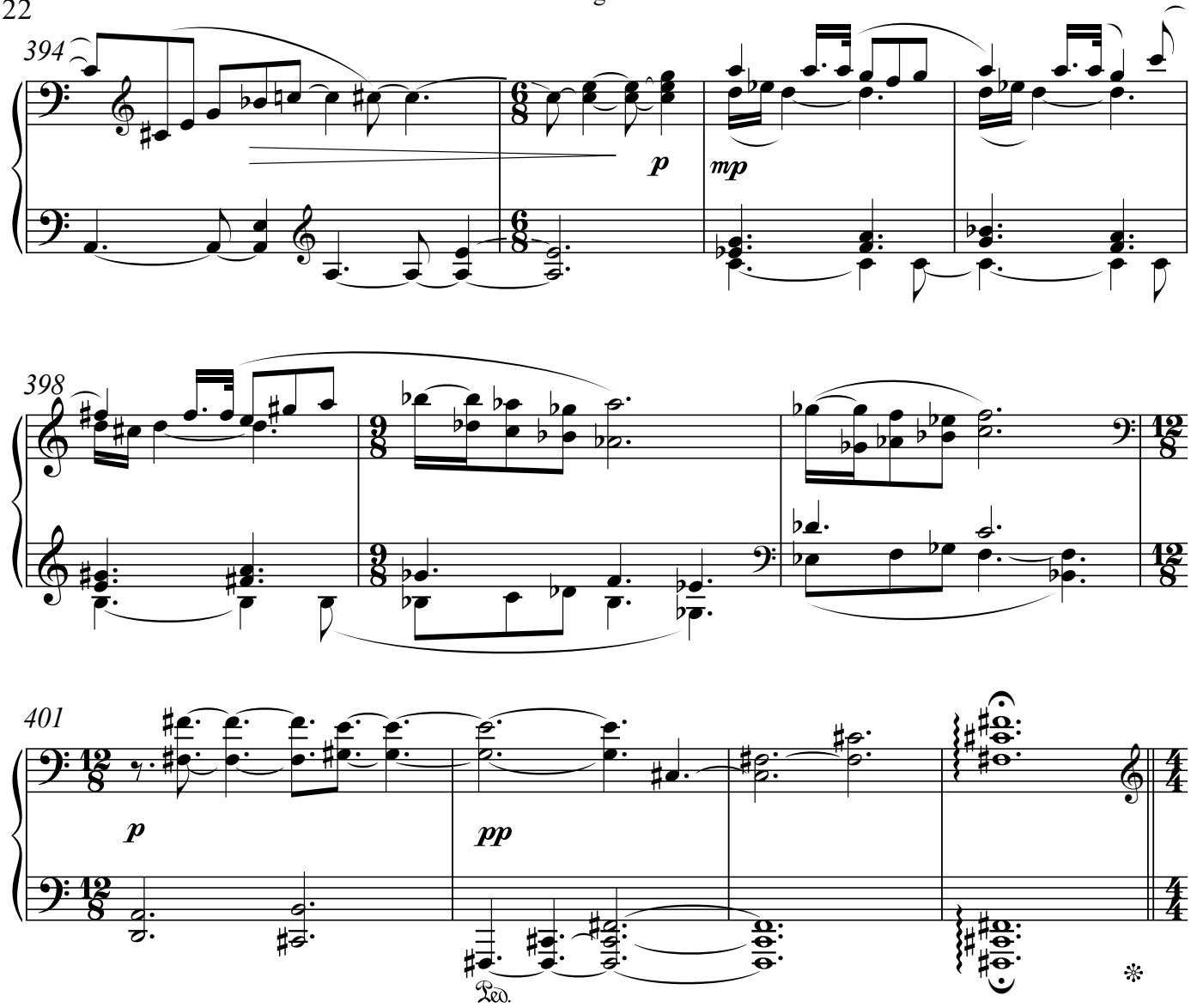
mp

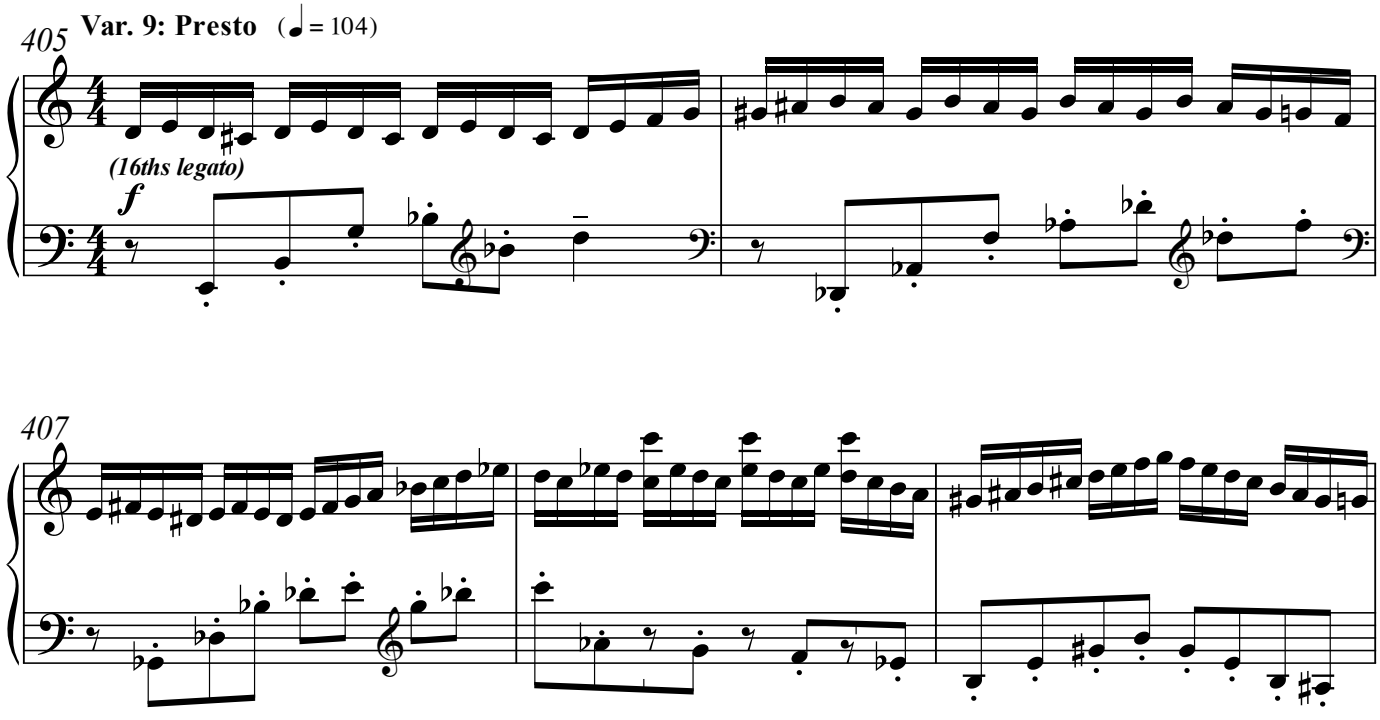
381

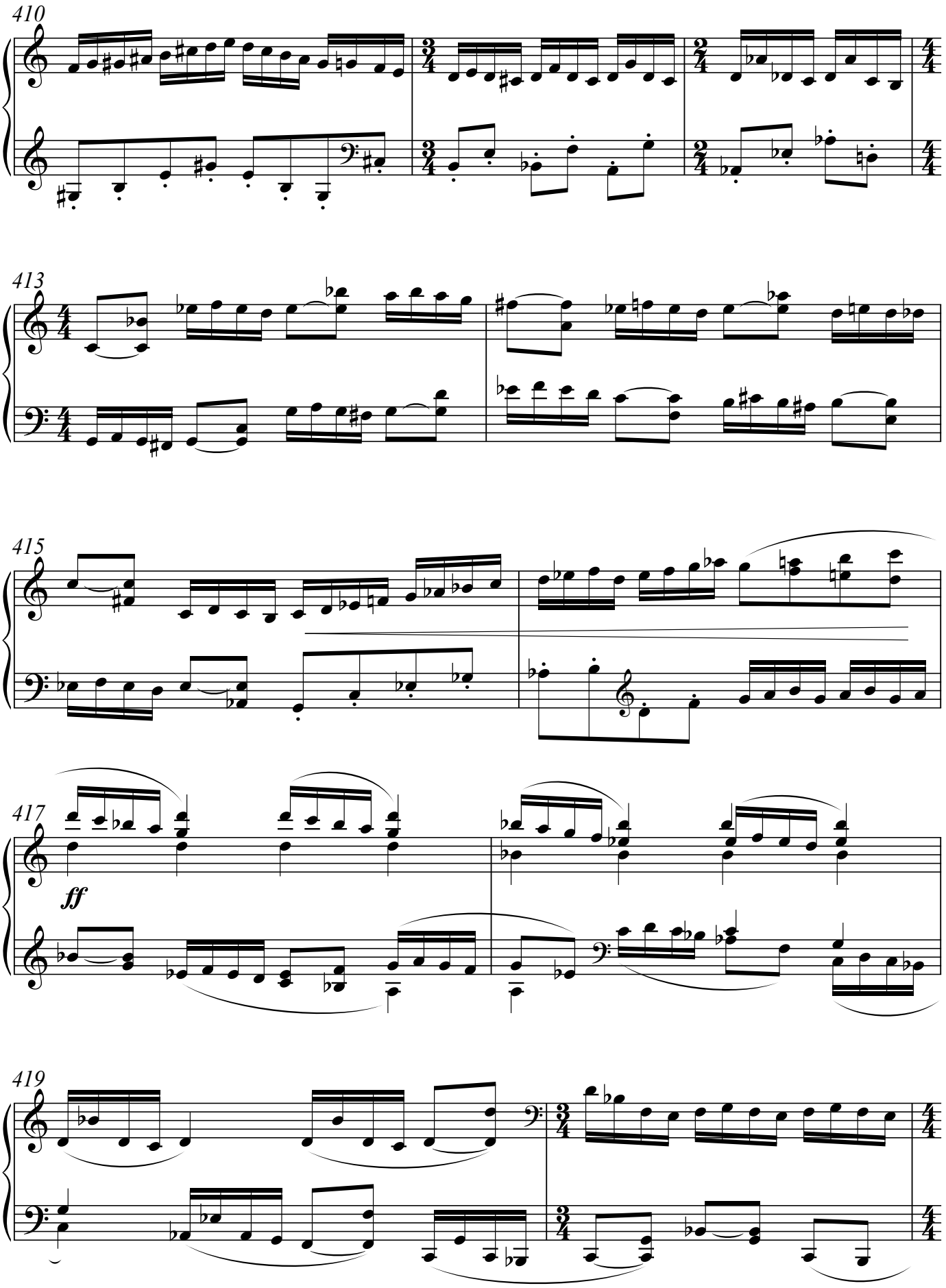
mf

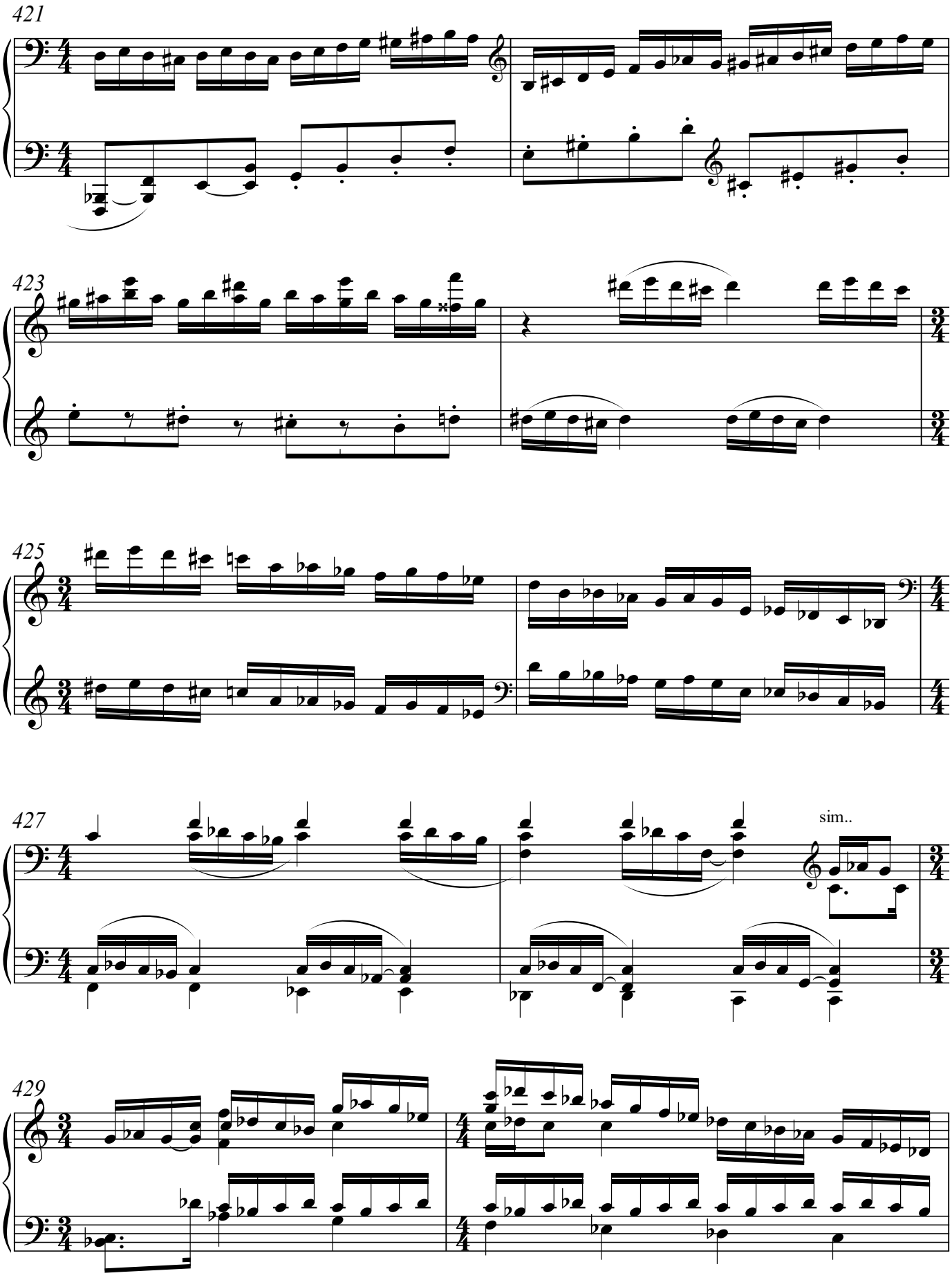
mp

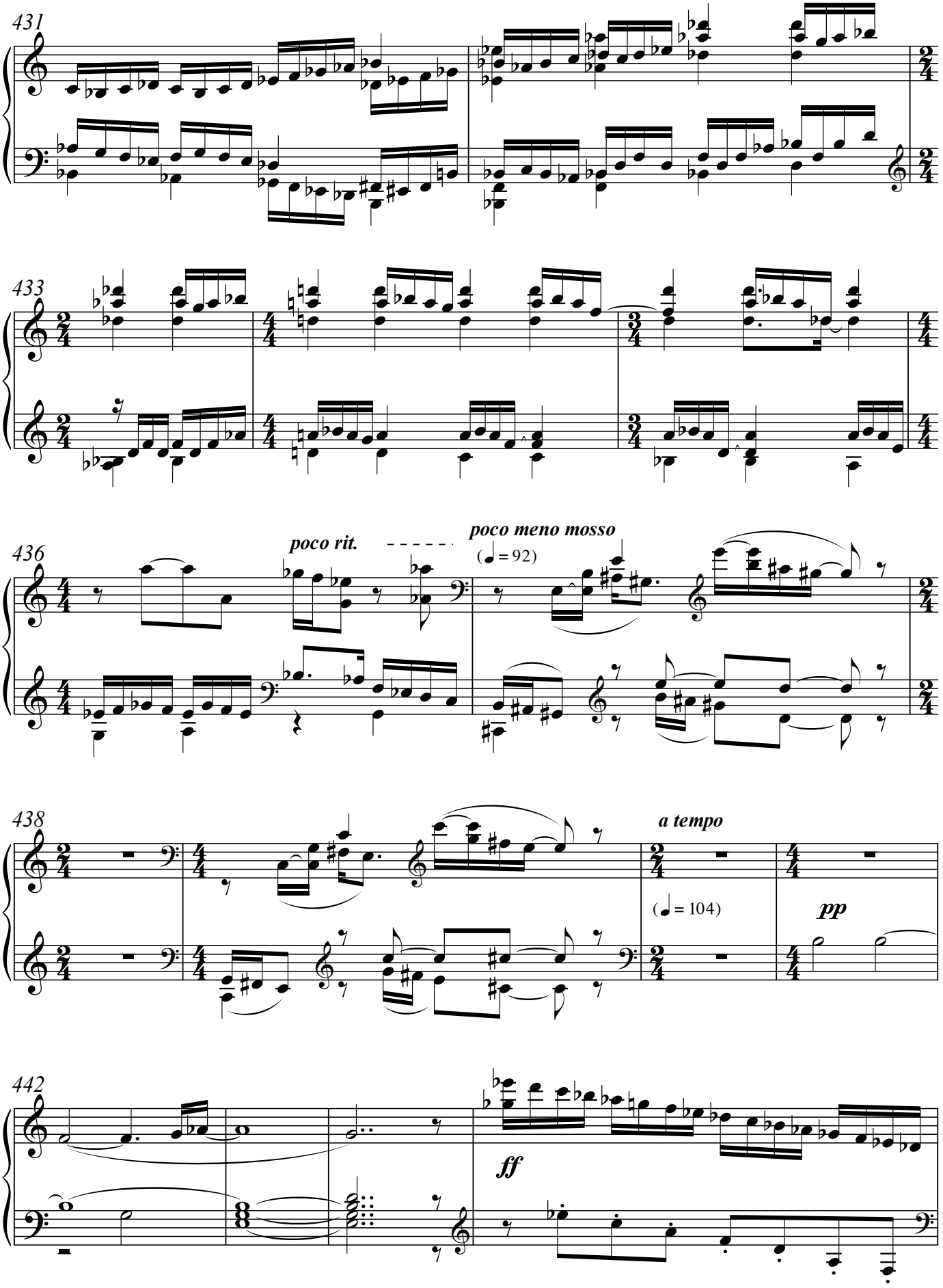

384
p
386
mp
388
390
mf
392
mp

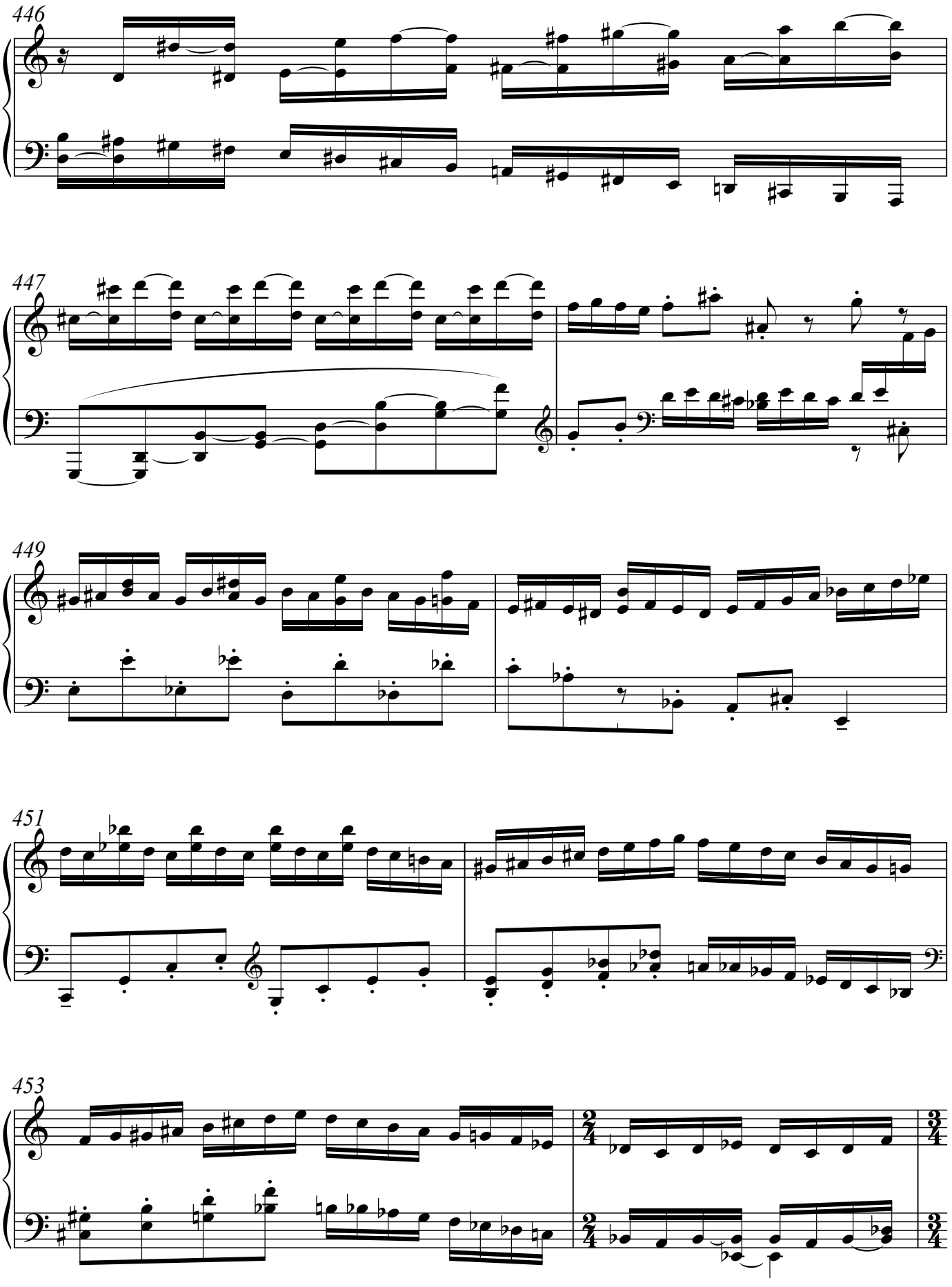

394
p
mp
398
401
p
pp
Ped.
*

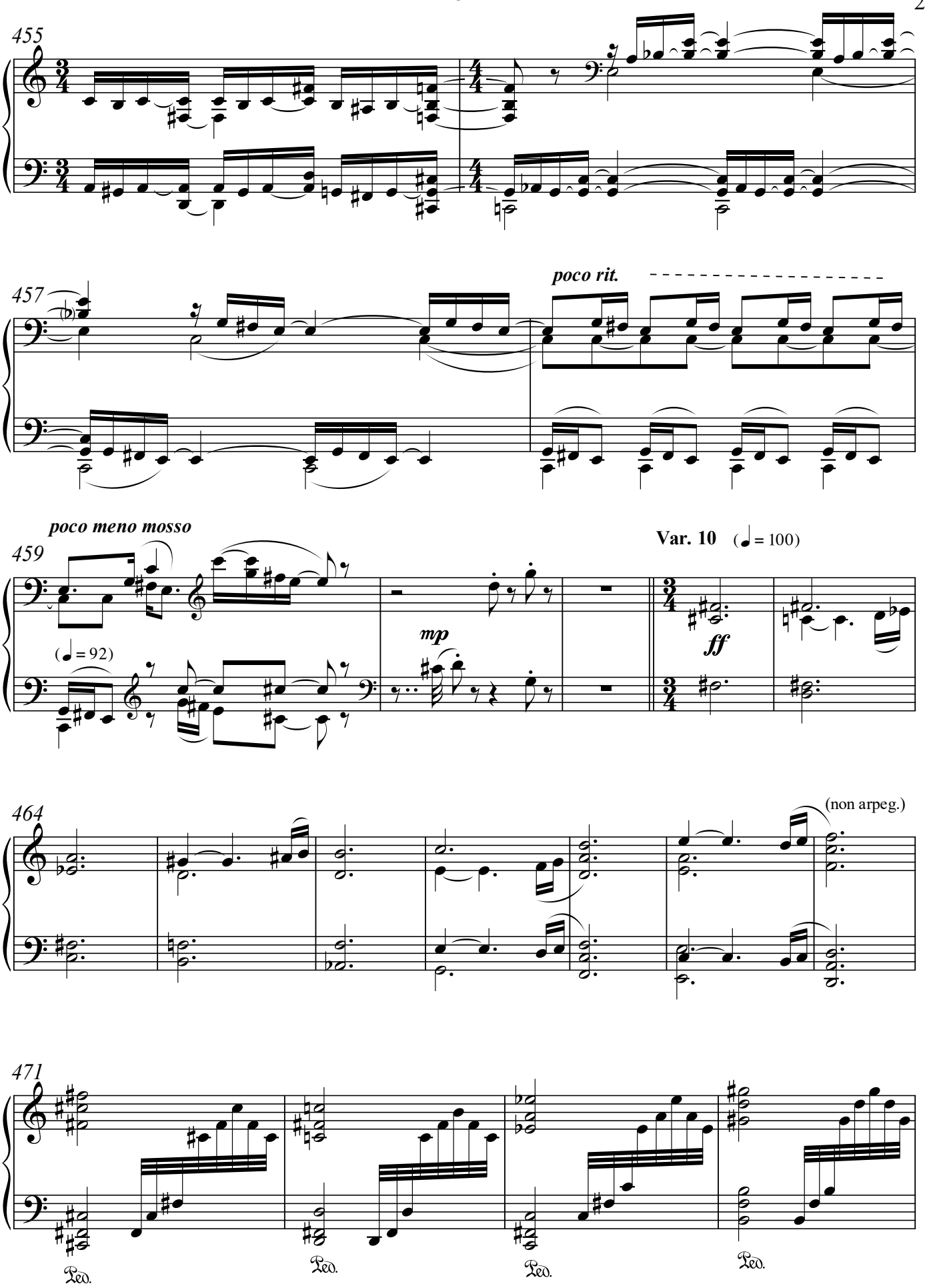

405
Var. 9: Presto (♩ = 104)
(16ths legato)
f
407

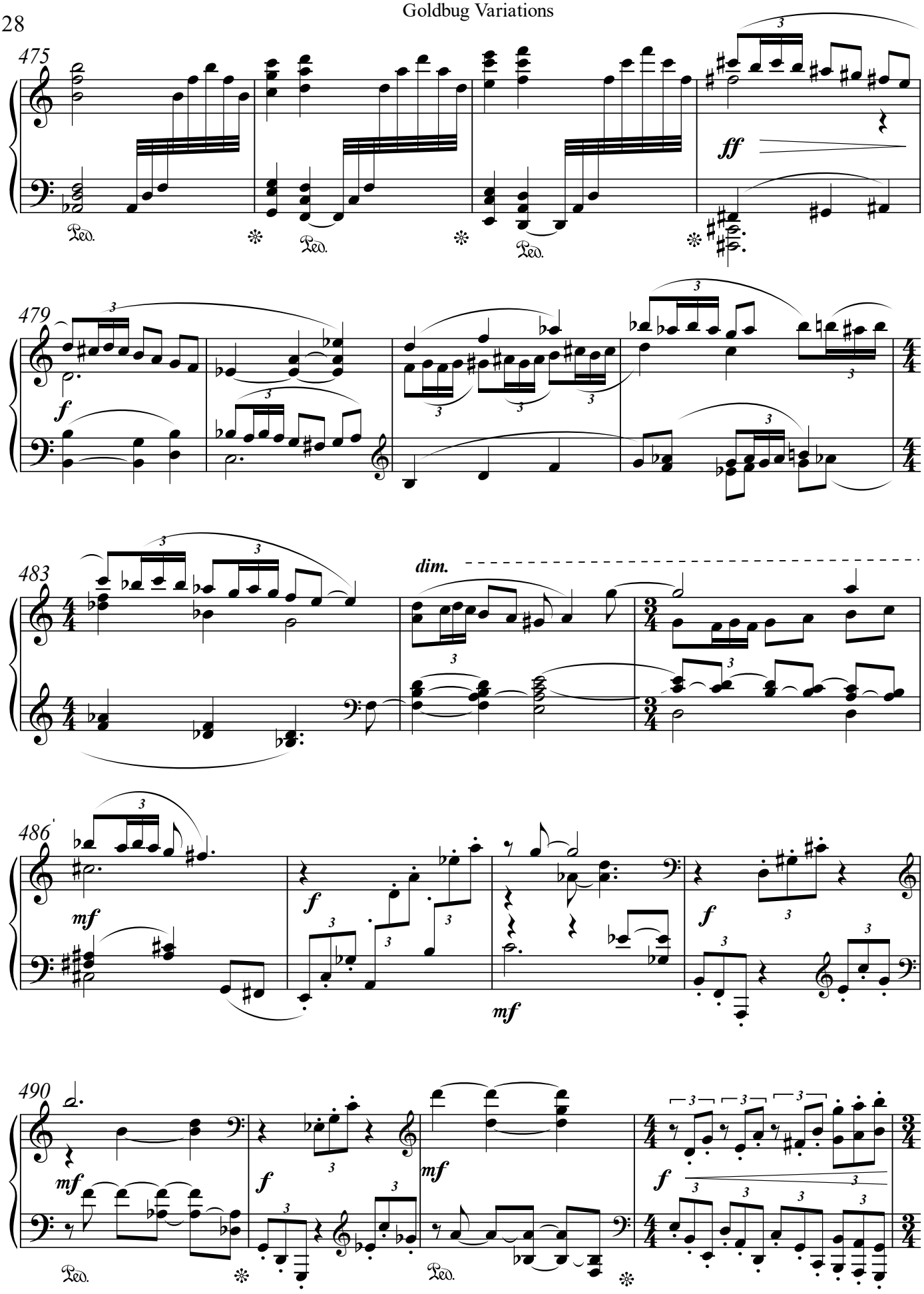

410
413
415
417
ff
419

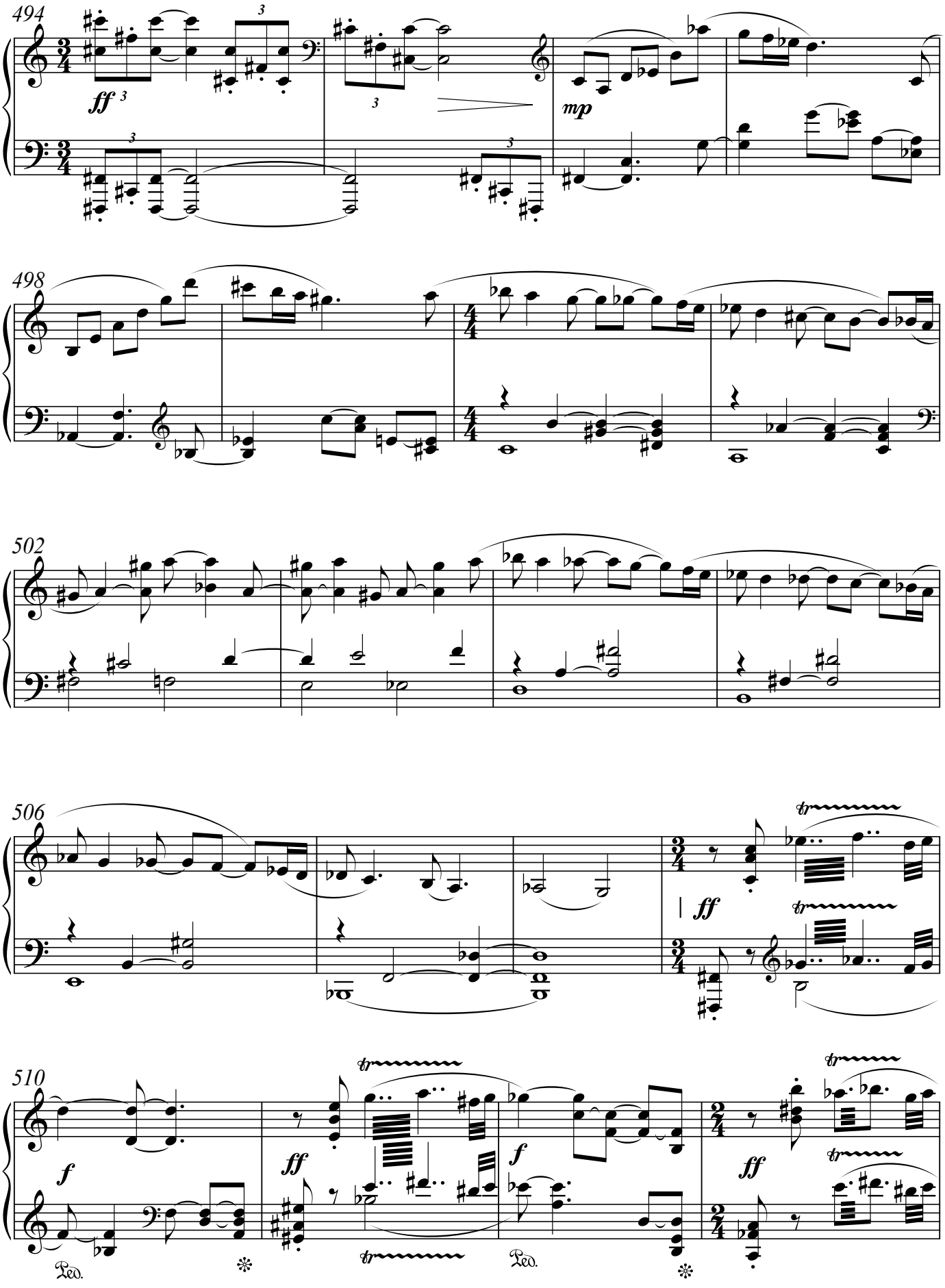

421
423
425
427
sim..
429

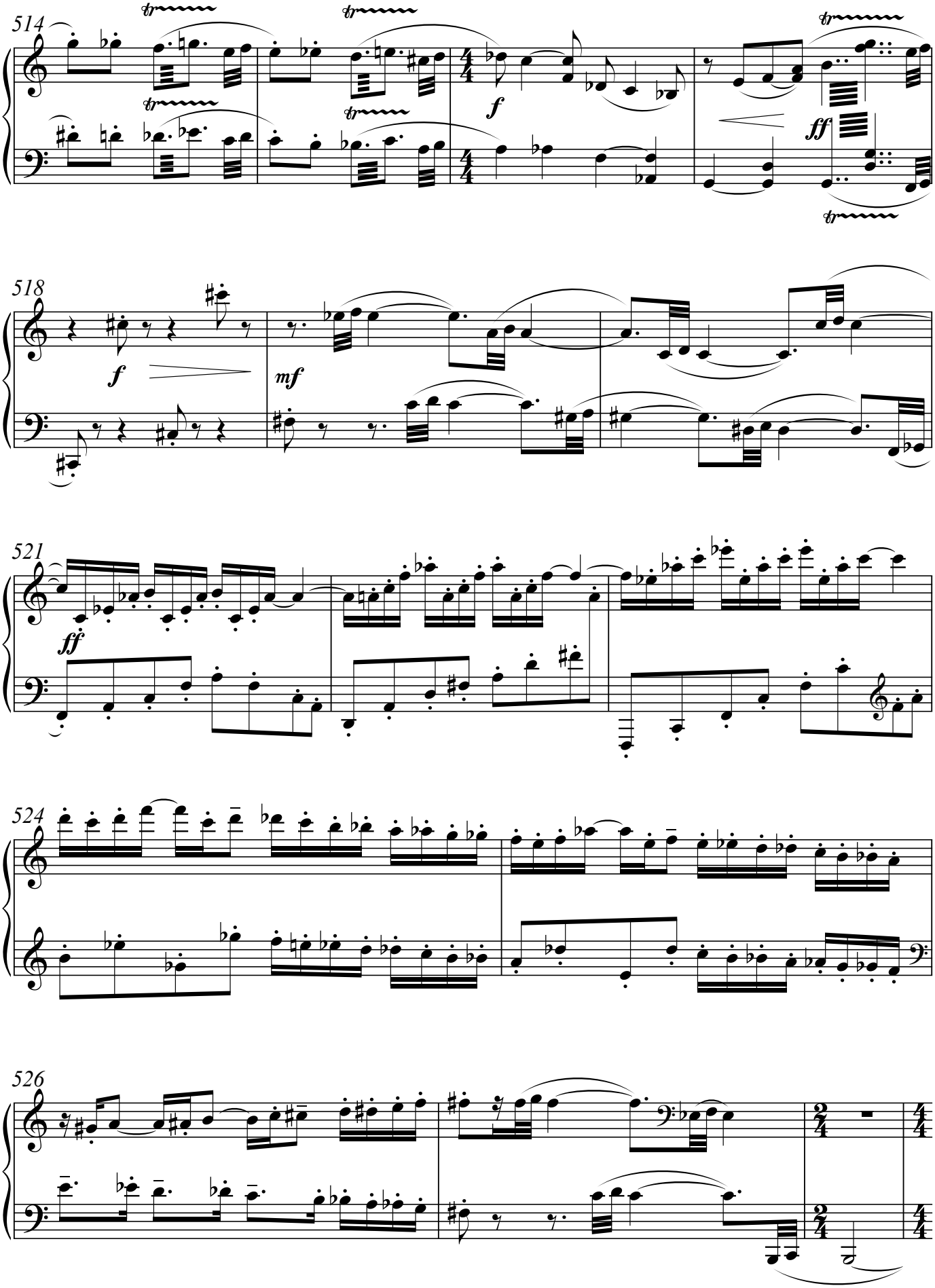

431
433
436
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
(♩ = 92)
438
a tempo
(♩ = 104)
pp
442
ff

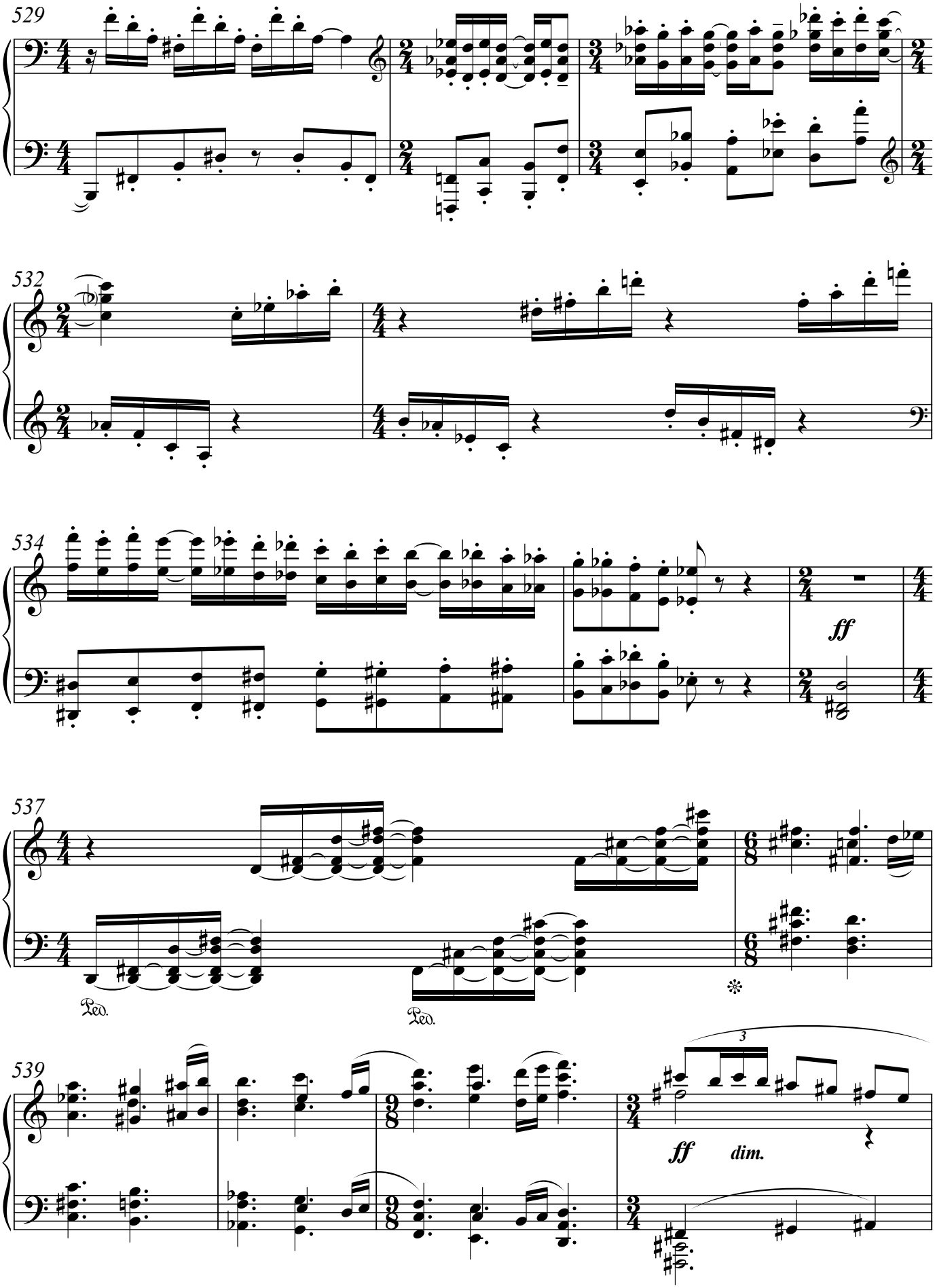

446
447
449
451
453

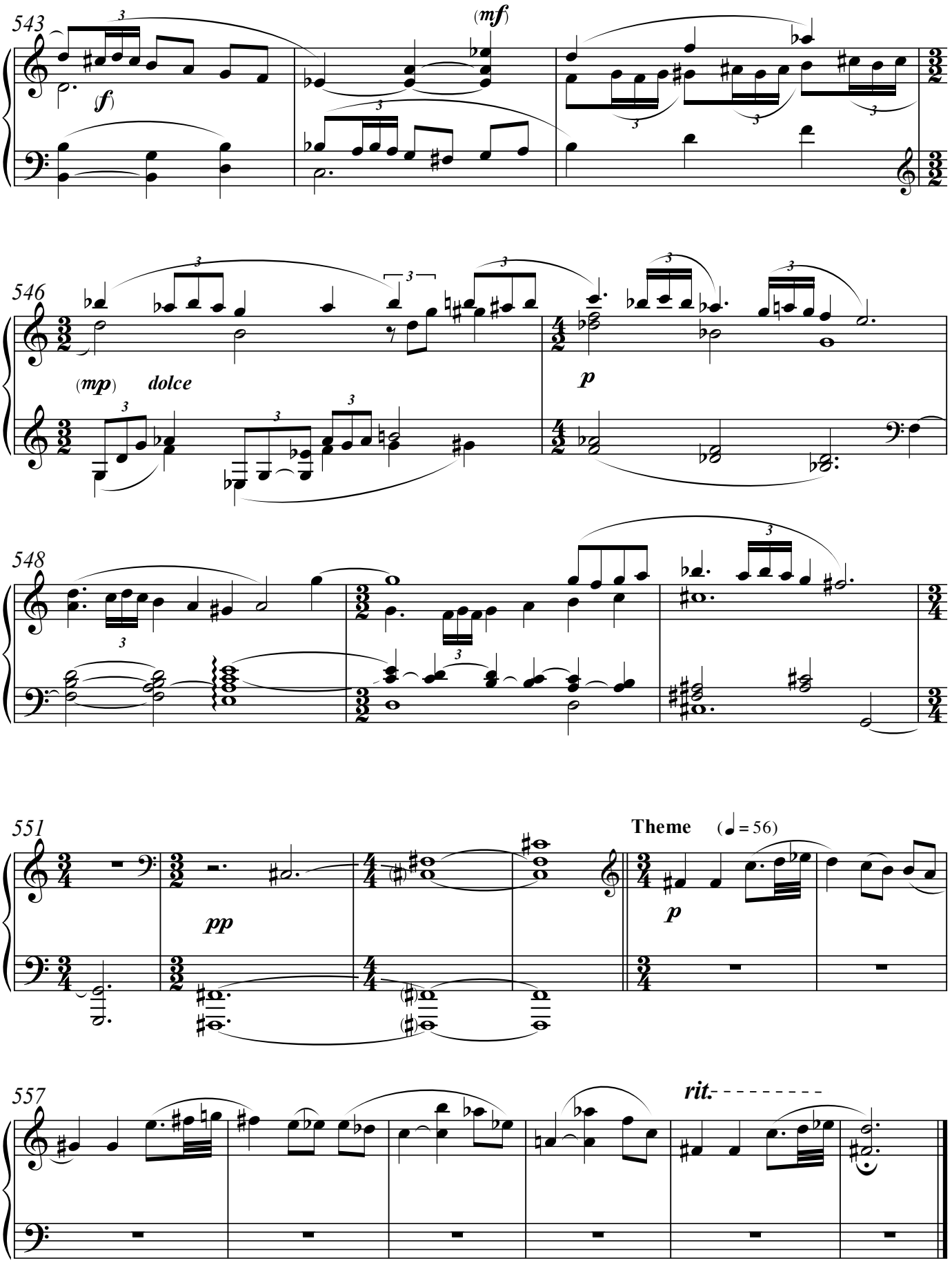

455
457
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
459
(♩ = 92)
mp
Var. 10 (♩ = 100)
ff
464
(non arpeg.)
471
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


475
ff
Ped.
479
f
483
dim.
486
mf
f
490
mf
f
Ped.


494
498
502
506
510
ff
mp
f
Ped.


514
f
ff
518
f
mf
521
ff
524
526


529
532
534
ff
537
Ped.
Ped.
539
3
ff
dim.


543
(mf)
(f)
546
(mp) dolce
p
548
551
Theme (♩ = 56)
pp
p
557
rit.