Janet Graham

A Cycle of Poems

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This suite of pieces was written in the early months of 2024. The poems were chosen to follow the cycle of seasons, starting and ending with autumn.

Bare ruin'd choirs
The general mood of Shakespeare's well-known sonnet "That time of year thou may'st in me behold" seems melancholic and valedictory. The boughs of 'bare ruin'd choirs' might be reminiscent of an ancient church or cathedral and are suggested in the piece by organum-like chordal passages. These are interspersed with quiet flurries of quicker notes evoking ghostly bird-song.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
Robert Frost's 'dark and deep' woods are represented here by slow-moving notes and hand clusters in the low register of the piano. This contrasts with more brittle-sounding chords in a high register and gently-falling semiquavers, suggesting the frozen lake and 'downy' snowflakes respectively.

The trees be green
William Barnes' 19th Century poem "May", written in Dorset dialect, is a joyful celebration of spring. Most of the piece consists of continuous lively semiquavers in one hand with phrases of thirds in the other.

Visible silence
Dante Gabriel Rossetti's well-known love poem "Silent Noon" evokes a countryside scene of peace and beauty in a shared moment on a summer's day. It was one of 4 poems I set for soprano and piano in 1979, and I have adapted some of the original material for this piece.

Twirling leaves
The final piece is based on images from the first stanza of John Clare's poem "Autumn." The twirling leaves are suggested by short phrases of rising and falling semiquavers which continue until the middle of the piece. Here, a reminder of the 'bare ruin'd choirs' appears in the shape of the opening chords of this cycle as a sort of *memento mori.* After this interruption, the twirling leaves resume their progress down the lane.

Janet Graham, 20th March 2024.

Bare ruin'd choirs
From Sonnet 73, William Shakespeare

That time of year thou may'st in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening
By Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

The trees be green
From "May" by William Barnes

Come out o' door, 'tis Spring! 'tis Maÿ
The trees be green, the vields be gaÿ;
The weather's warm, the winter blast,
Wi' all his traïn o' clouds, is past;
The zun do rise while vo'k do sleep,
To teäke a higher daily zweep,
Wi' cloudless feäce a-flingèn down
His sparklèn light upon the groun'.

4. Visible silence

From "Silent Noon" by Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Your hands lie open in the long fresh grass,-
The finger-points look through like rosy blooms:
Your eyes smile peace. The pasture gleams and glooms
'Neath billowing skies that scatter and amass.
All round our nest, far as the eye can pass,
Are golden kingcup-fields with silver edge
Where the cow-parsley skirts the hawthorn-hedge.
'Tis visible silence, still as the hour-glass.

5. Twirling leaves

From "Autumn" by John Clare

I love the fitful gust that shakes
The casement all the day,
And from the mossy elm-tree takes
The faded leaves away,
Twirling them by the window pane
With thousand others down the lane.

A Cycle of Poems

1. Bare ruin'd choirs

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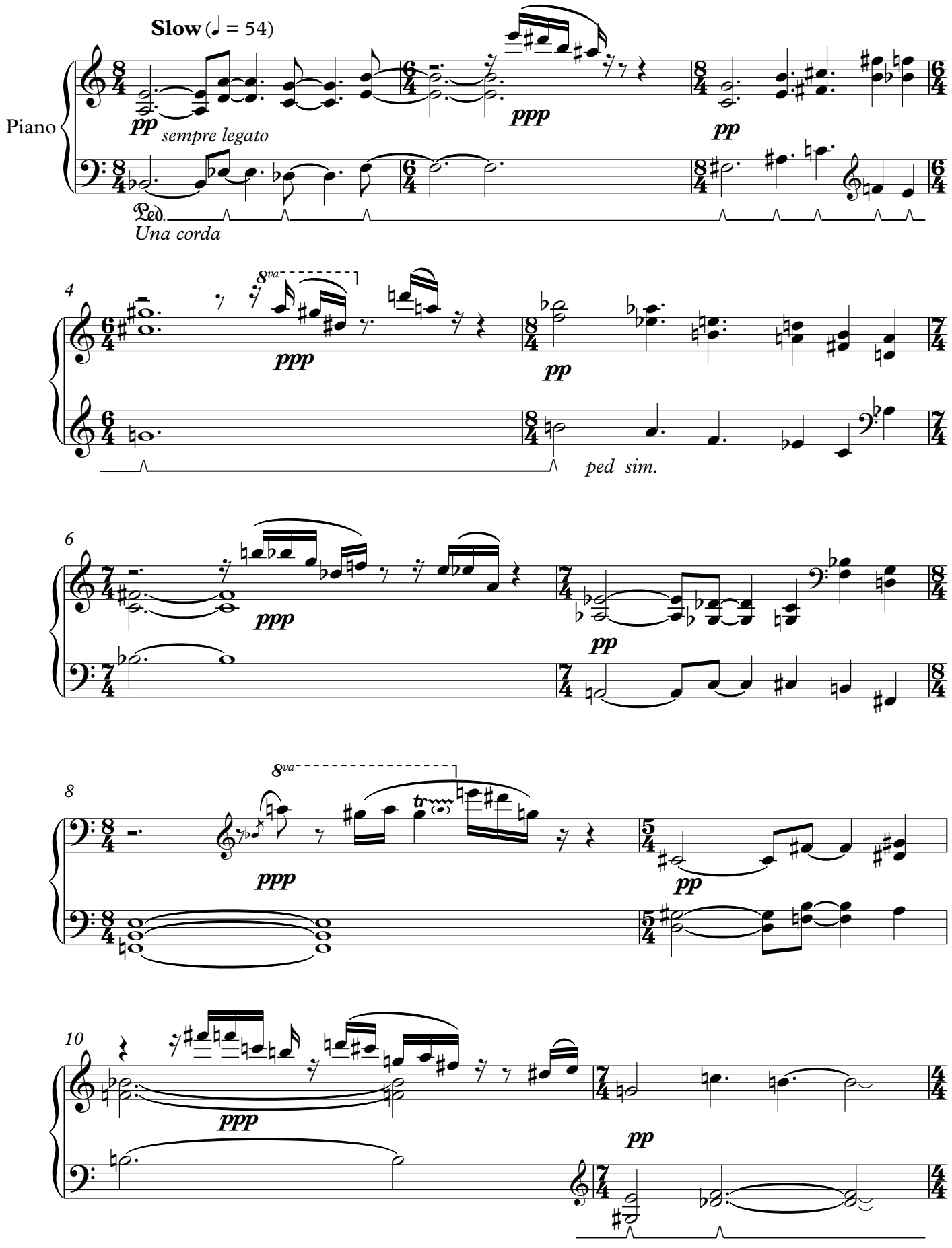
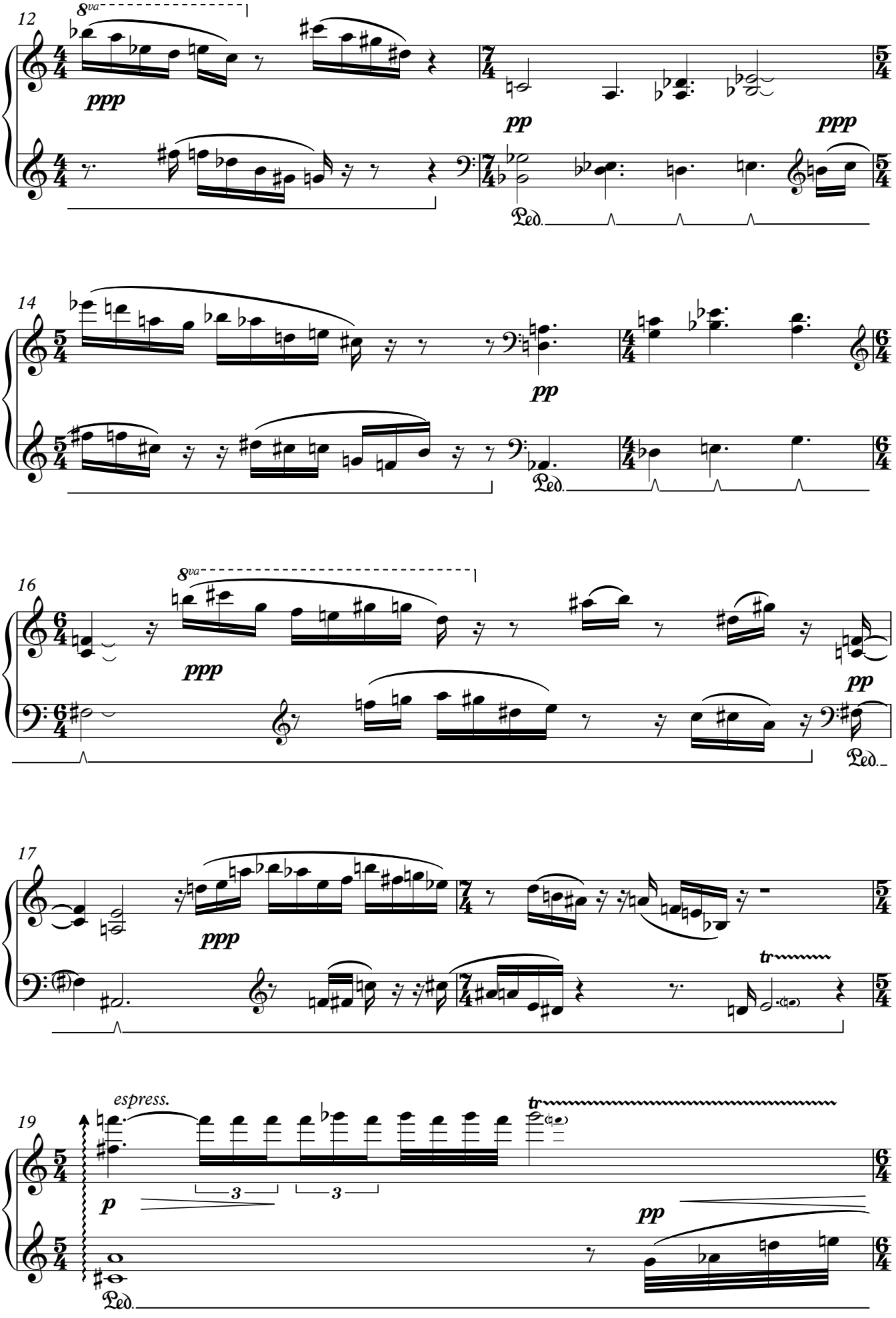
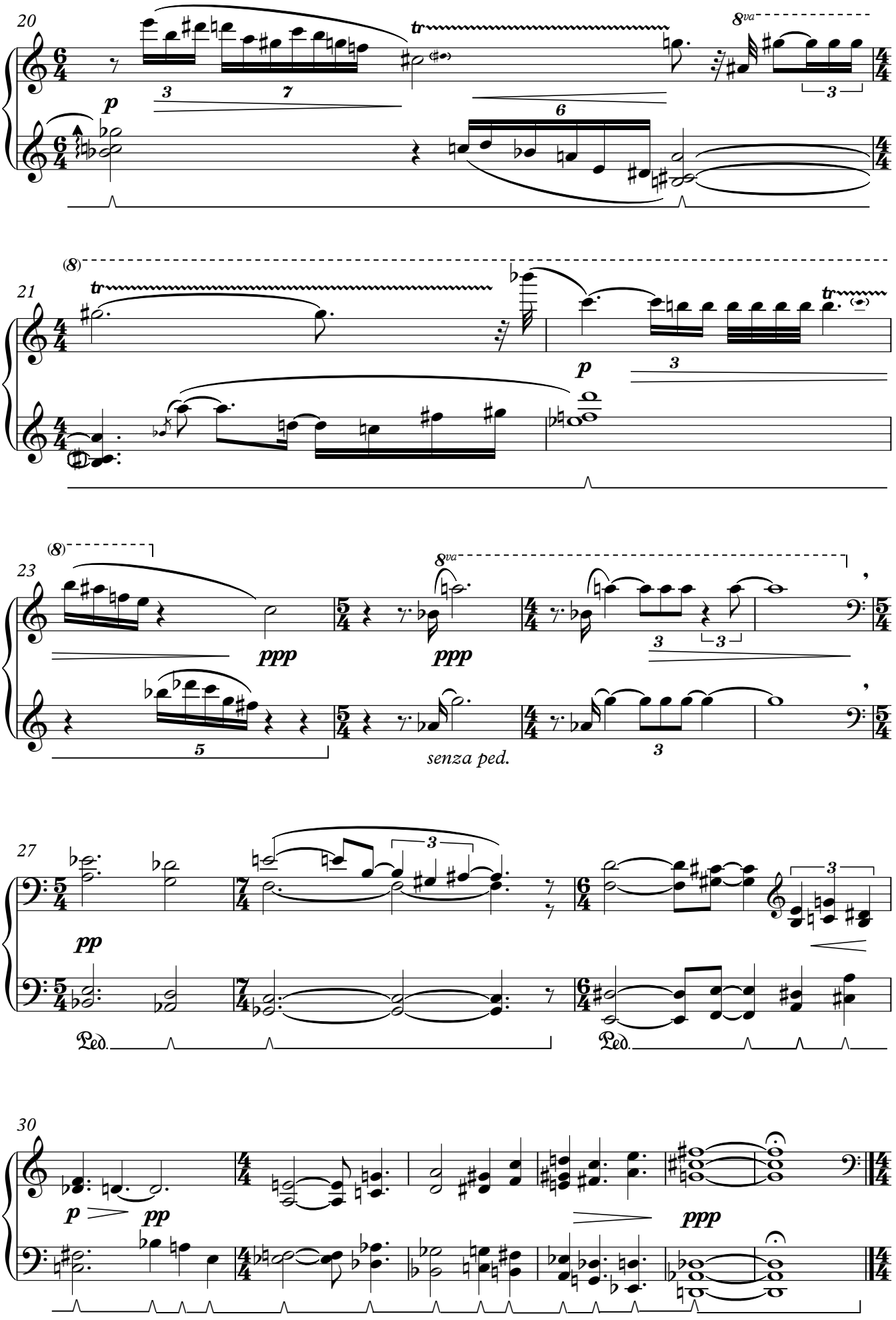
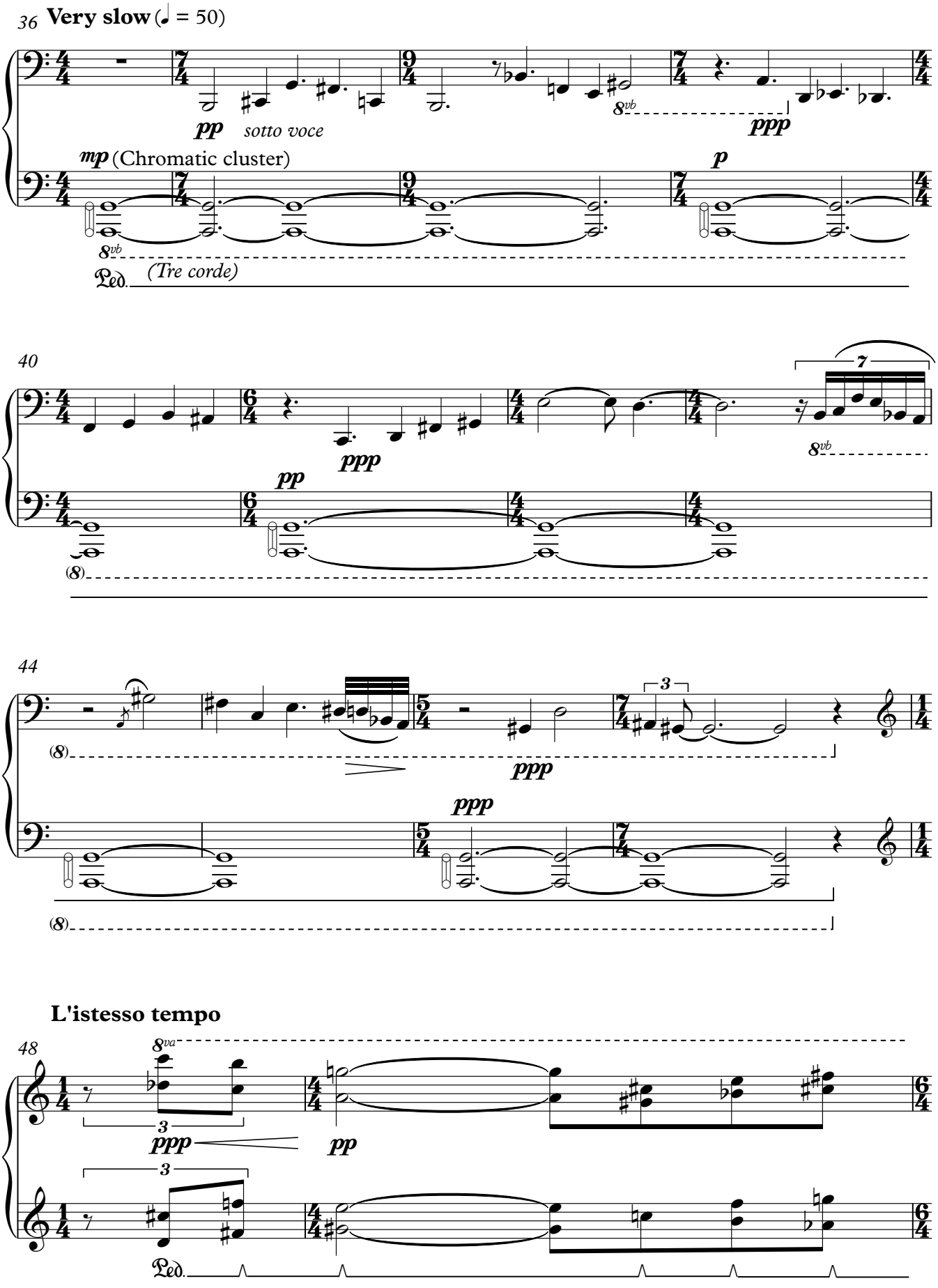
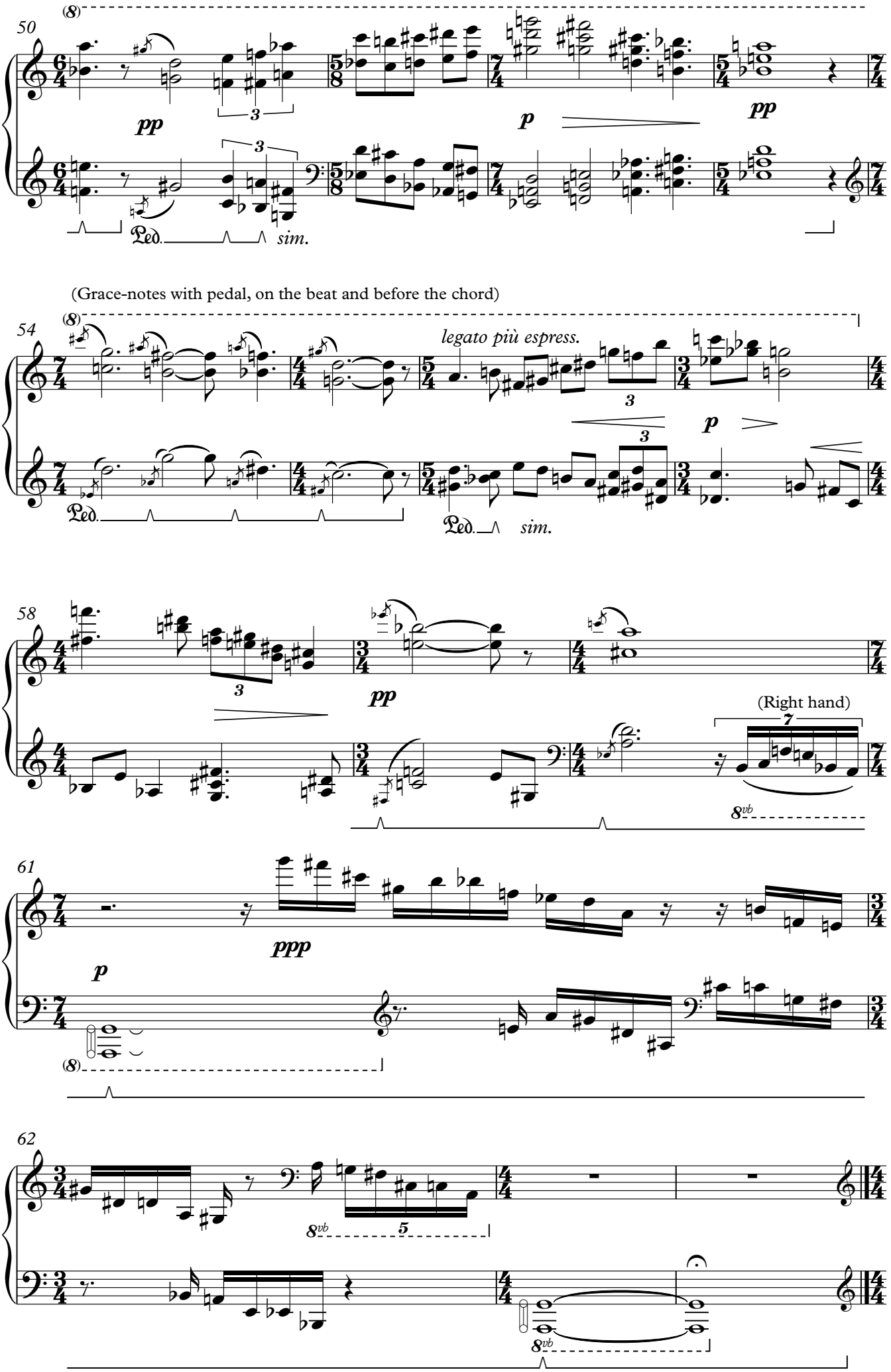



12
8va
ppp
pp
ppp
Ped.
14
pp
Ped.
16
8va
ppp
pp
Ped.
17
ppp
tr
19
espress.
tr
p
3
3
pp
Ped.


20
8va
p
tr
21
(8)
tr
p
23
(8)
8va
ppp
ppp
senza ped.
27
pp
Ped.
Ped.
30
p
pp
ppp

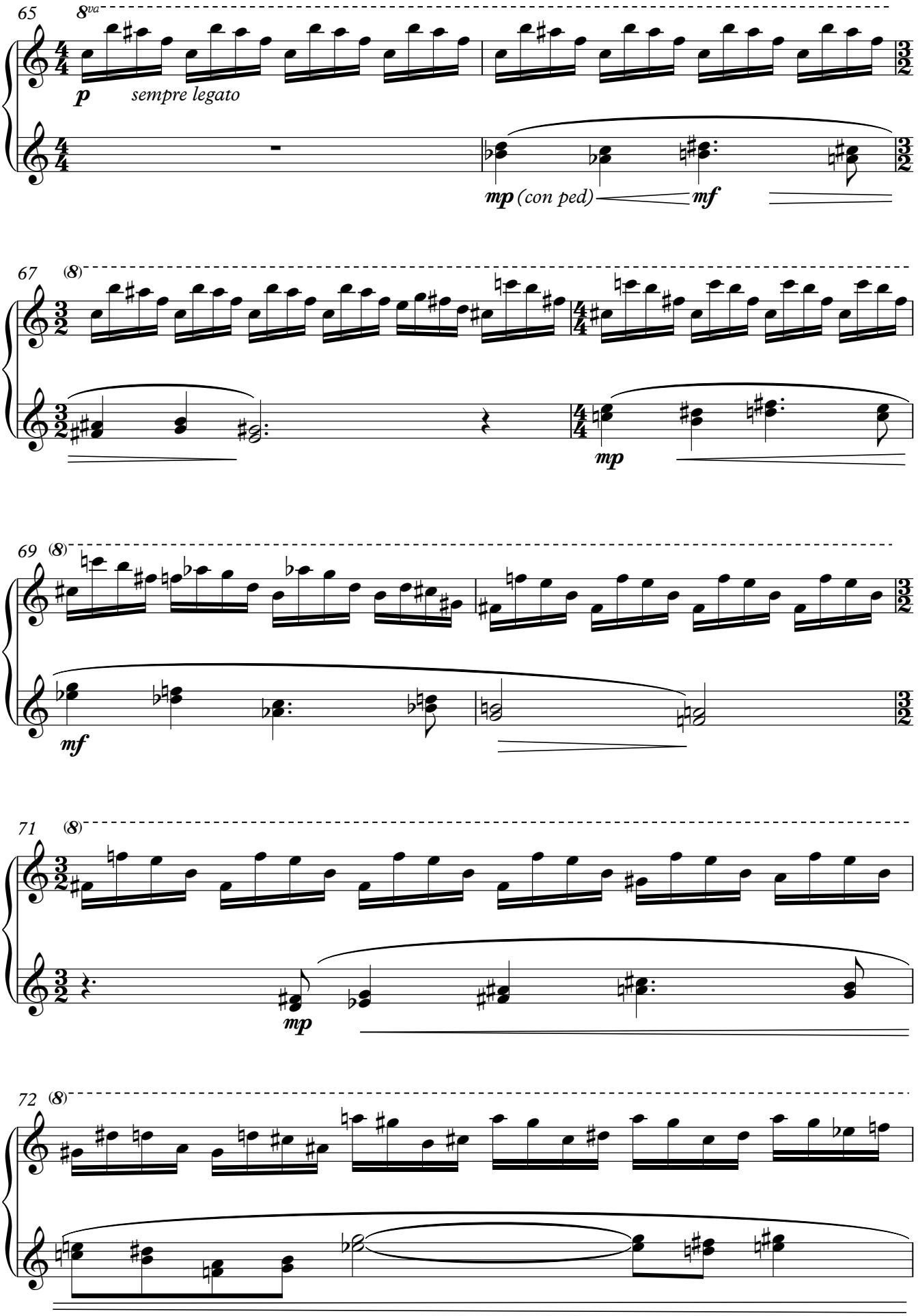
2. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

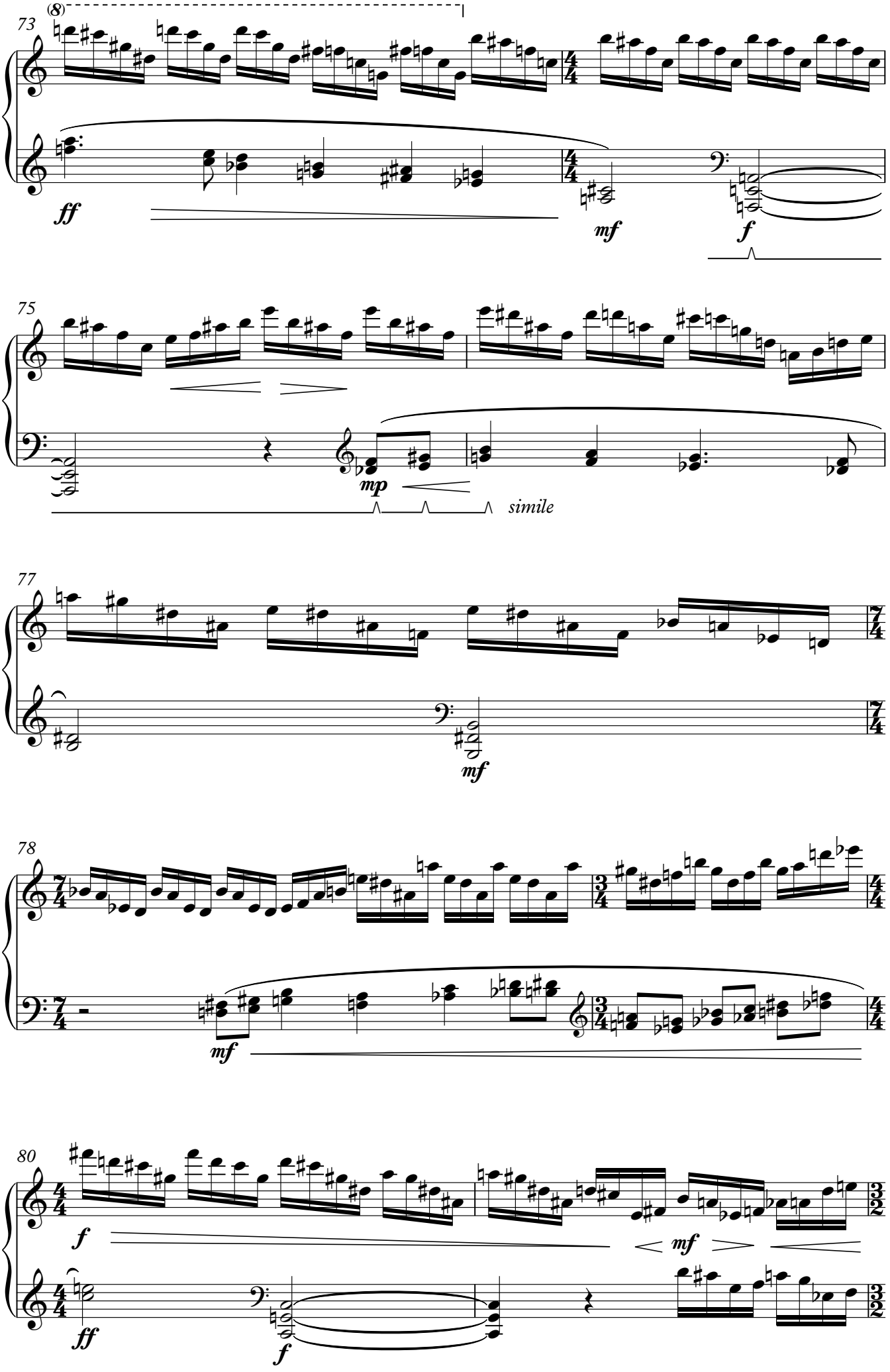


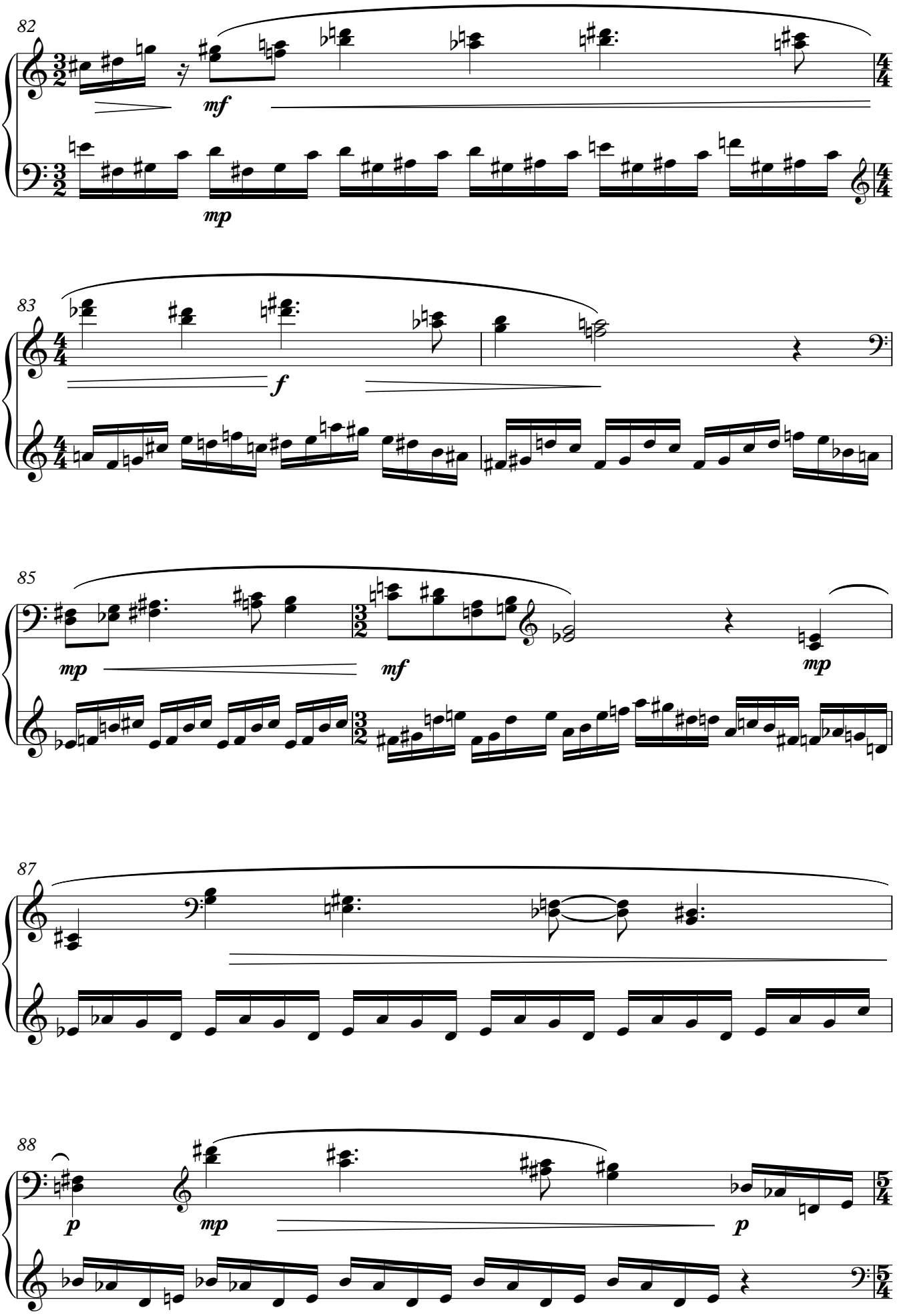

50
pp
p
pp
Ped.
sim.
(Grace-notes with pedal, on the beat and before the chord)
54
legato più espress.
p
Ped.
sim.
58
pp
(Right hand)
8vb
61
ppp
p
8vb
62
8vb
5
8vb

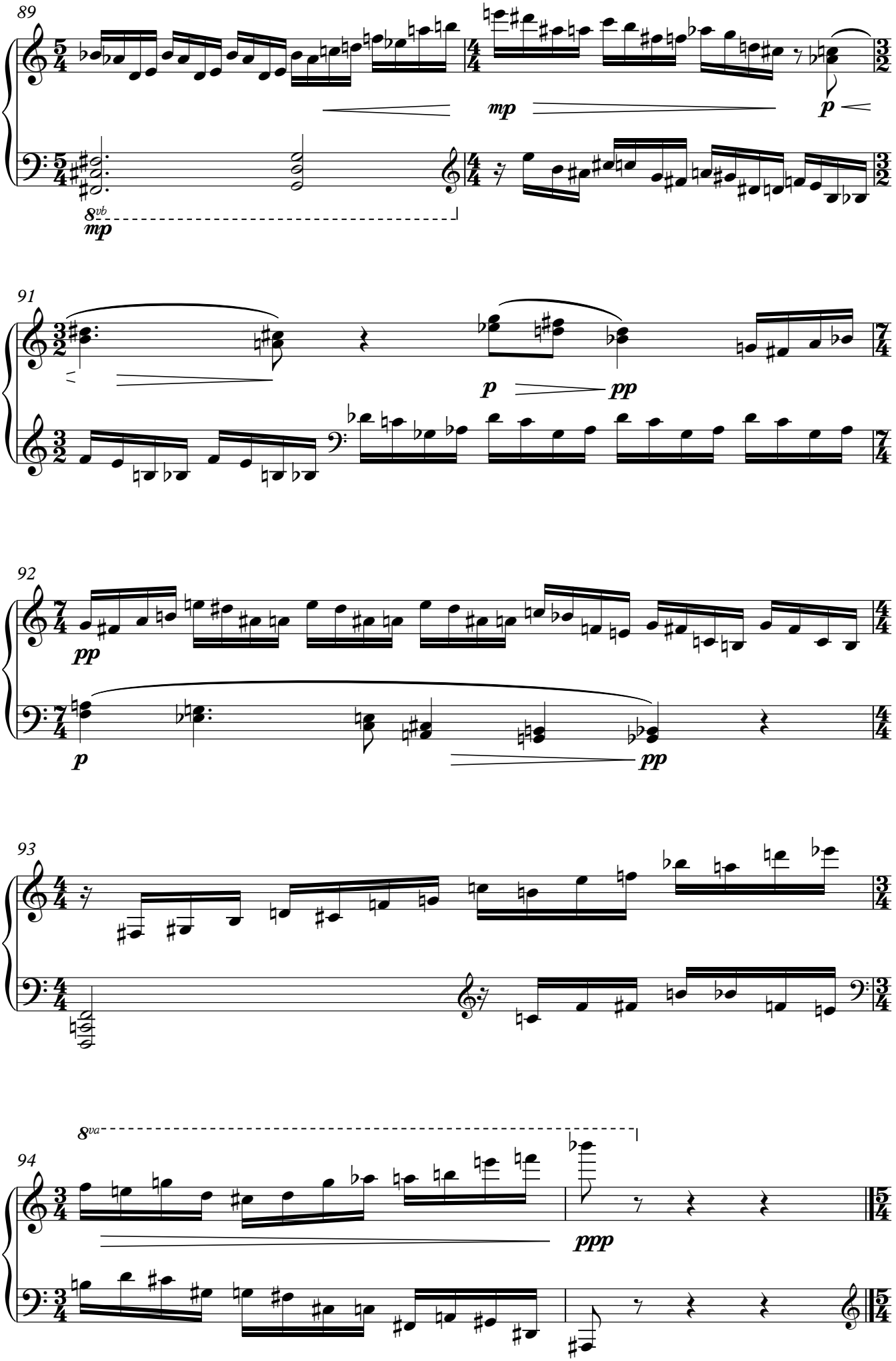
Sparkling

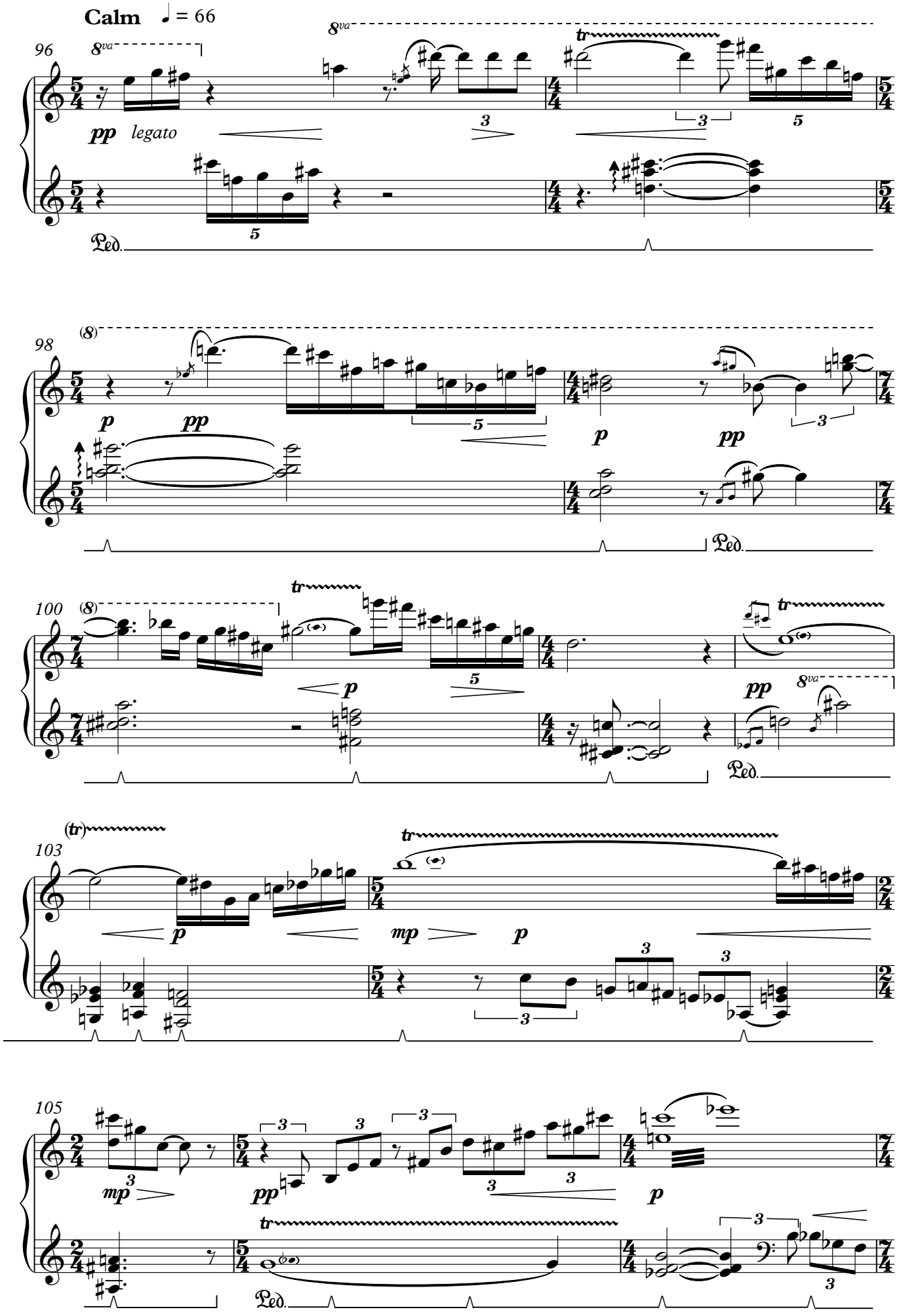
(♩ = 96)

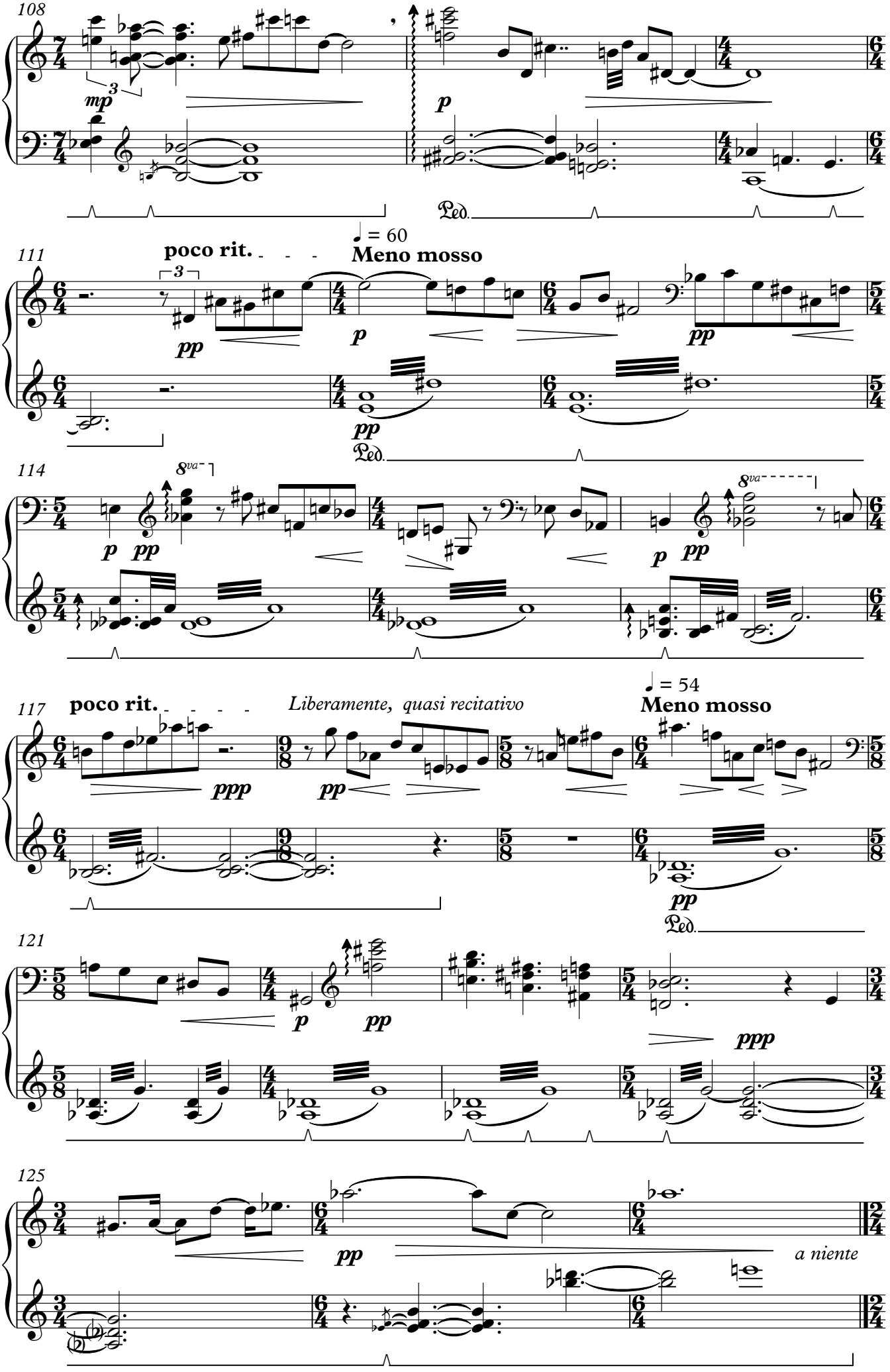



(8)
73
ff
mf
f
75
mp
simile
77
mf
78
mf
80
f
mf
ff
f


82
mf
mp
83
f
85
mp
mf
mp
87
88
p
mp
p


89
mp
p
8vb
mp
91
p
pp
92
pp
p
pp
93
94
8va
ppp


Calm ♩ = 66
pp legato
p
pp
mp
Ped.


108
mp
p
Ped.
111
poco rit.
♩ = 60
Meno mosso
pp
p
pp
Ped.
114
8va
p
pp
8va
117
poco rit.
Liberamente, quasi recitativo
♩ = 54
Meno mosso
ppp
pp
pp
Ped.
121
p
pp
ppp
125
pp
a niente

Lively

128 ♩ = 90

legato

p *mp* *mp*

Ped.

131

p

mf

134

137

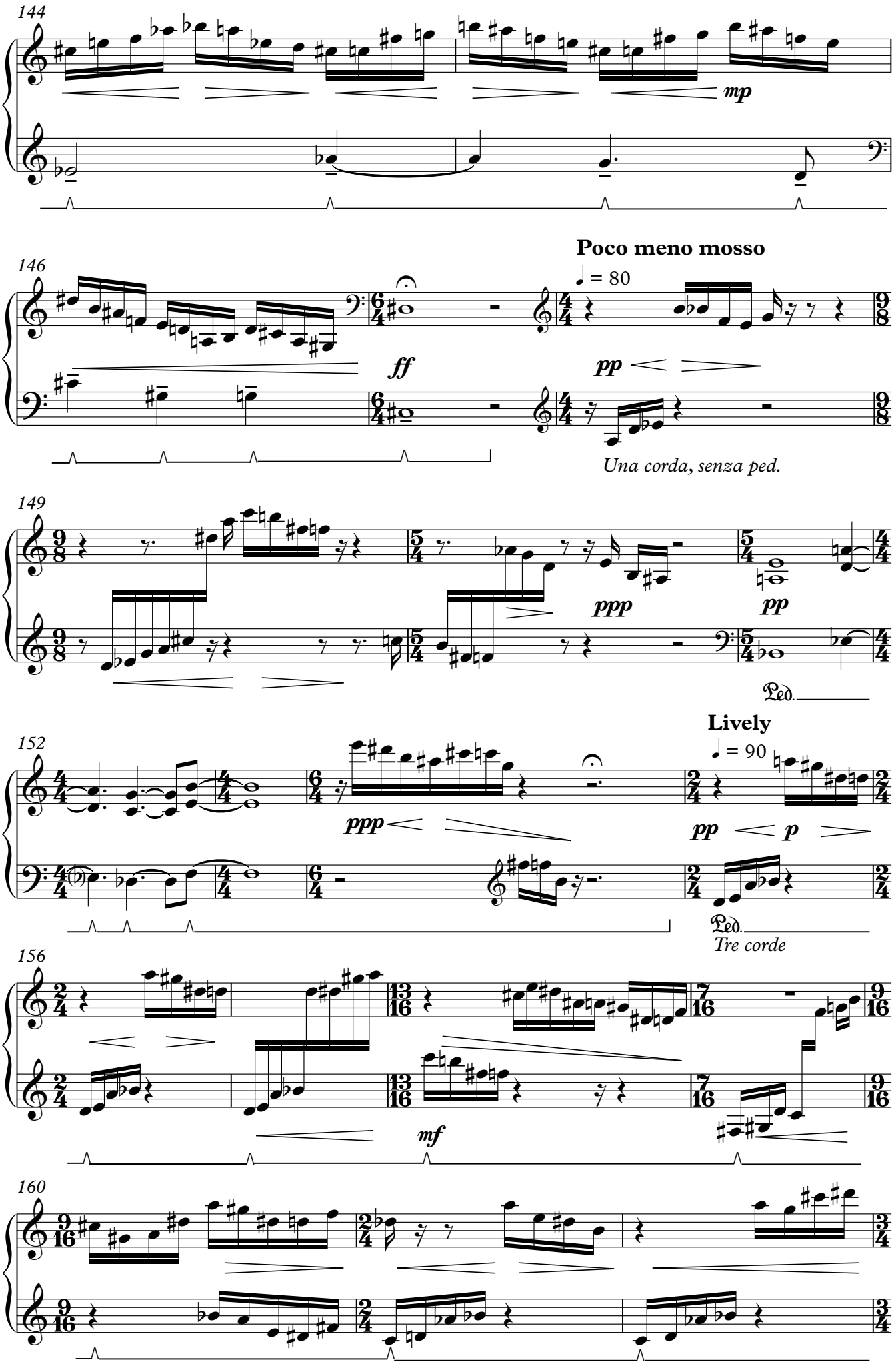
p

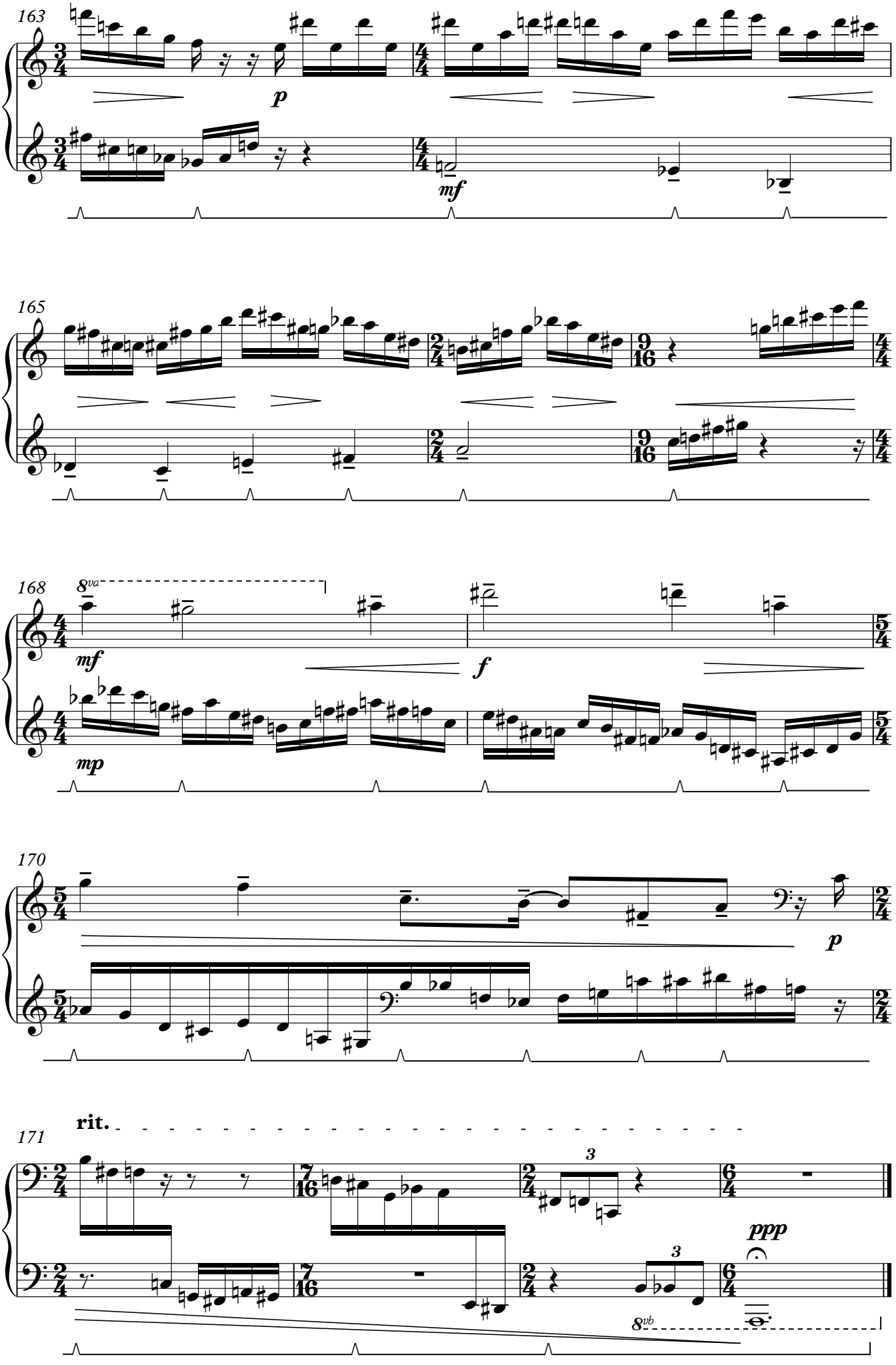
mf

140

142

mf


144
mp
146
ff
Poco meno mosso
♩ = 80
pp
Una corda, senza ped.
149
ppp
pp
Ped.
152
Lively
♩ = 90
ppp
pp
p
Ped.
Tre corde
156
mf
160


163
p
mf
165
168
8va
mf
f
mp
170
p
171
rit.
3
3
ppp
8vb