J. S. Bach

Contrapunctus 19

from ***The Art of Fugue***

Completed

by

James Iliff

J. S. Bach

Contrapunctus 19

from ***The Art of Fugue***

Completed

by

James Iliff

Contrapunctus 19 from "The Art of Fugue" (BWV 1080.19)

At the time of his death Bach was preparing for the publication of the collection of fugues and canons based on the one subject which came to be called **"***The Art of Fugue***",** and this unfinished fugue may have been intended to complete the scheme. There is no reason to suppose from its incomplete state that it was necessarily the latest item to have been written. Bach was occupied in the insertion or revision of various of the earlier numbers in the collection at a late stage in its arrangement, and the fugue as we have it could represent a memorandum of work which had been put temporarily on one side.

It is concerned with invertible counterpoint on the largest scale. There are four subjects. As the fugue stands, only three appear; and as none of these is the main *Art of Fugue* theme it was long thought that this might be a separate work. Nottebohm, in 1881, first established its connection with the rest of the scheme by showing that the *Art of Fugue* theme forms a quadruple counterpoint together with the other three in a way that cannot possibly be accidental, and there can be no doubt that Bach intended to introduce this theme as a fourth subject in the unwritten portion.

Bach completed three sections. The first develops the first subject alone, in stretto. In the final combination this subject is invertible at the 12th. The second introduces the elaborate second subject, combines this with the first subject in double counterpoint, and establishes the character of the quaver movement, which is almost entirely based on the second subject's last bar. The third section develops the third subject alone, again in stretto; this subject is based upon the notes *B A C H* (B flat, A, C, B natural), and one object of the the fugue would seem to be to seal the whole collection with Bach's name, cast into a form which will combine with the *Art of Fugue* theme, in a work of fitting length. The fugue breaks off, at the beginning of a fourth section, with the first appearance of the first three subjects together. This section is very probably the final one: as Tovey has remarked,* it is most likely that the *Art of Fugue* theme is now to join the others without further interruption of the quaver movement which has just returned.

At first it might thus seem that the fugue is nearly in our hands. We may assume that we have the greater part of it; we know both the quadruple combination of themes to appear in the forthcoming entries and the character of the prevailing quaver movement; and we can find general guidance on the drafting of a sequel from various pieces, notably *Contrapunctus 8* in the present collection, that provide examples of a similar musical situation. However it must be remembered that there are no formal procedures in fugue analogous to those in sonata form whereby we can make any inferences about the exact sequence of events which Bach might have had in mind. No solution to the problem can ever claim to be definitive; and this raises the question of the purpose which any ending might serve. It would be unrealistic to pretend that as an object of study it could be anything other than a convenient exemplification. The compelling reason for securing an ending is rather to enable the overall proportions of the work to appear in performance. The extant portion is quite large enough to persuade the ear to make a vivid estimate of these proportions, and to break off at the point where Bach ceased writing is to give an almost physical shock. There is a case for leaving the the fugue unperformed, but, if performed, it must be ended. Rather than resenting having his mind made up for him, I think Bach would have deplored the insensitivity and the lack of enterprise (especially given the evident instructive aspect of the rest of the collection) of playing it in an unfinished state.

The undertaking of the present ending was prompted by reservations over a feature that seemed to be common to all the then known alternatives (and that is also to be seen in a recent organ version): an apparent bias of interest towards the demonstration of some particular procedure at the expense of attention to the general character of the piece. The first concern of this ending has been to seek to maintain unity of tone. Its proportions may seem open to

question: the first draft, made at student age, did not entirely avoid the concerto manner, and the main outlines have proved resistant to change. This outcome may not have been altogether without advantages, for certain passages in the extant second section show particular restraint as if to allow for the possibility of a more varied and extensive treatment later on. Be that as it may, the continuation has developed throughout as a composition which has been guided at every point by a consideration of Bach's procedures and by a constant effort to view the fugue as a whole; and it is my profound belief that only by adopting such an approach can any ending be expected to carry conviction. However there is inevitably an asymptotic element in this quest, and nothing but welcome can await any future lover of the work who may find a more concise answer than this one to the questions raised here.

So far as it possible to judge and contrive, an ending written primarily for performance must aim at giving an immediate impression of continuity and consistency with the rest, and this object should outweigh that of the pursuit of theoretical completeness if there should be any conflict between the two. Tovey believes that the quadruple combination is capable of mirror-inversion - melodic inversion of all four subjects simultaneously - and thinks that one of the purposes of the fugue may have been to demonstrate this method of treatment in the last section. I have not adopted this measure. Its place in the scheme is purely hypothetical and its realisation could seem out of place from the unfamiliarity of the second subject in this guise. Unlike the others, this subject is never heard in its inverted form in the extant portion; the appearance there of a few of its figures in inversion does not prove Bach's intentions or prepare one for the new kind of sound brought about by the inversion of the complete theme, and in the circumstances I do not think the listener can fairly be expected to accept the effect of its introduction. Another reason for omitting mirror-inversion treatment is that it would multiply the number of entries. The extant second section has well separated entries and developed episodes, and its general character in this respect would seem to offer the best guide for the continuation.

The main sequence of keys followed here was chosen to provide transient major colour and to play a part in an attempt to effect the rise in temperature that is a constant feature of the closing sections of Bach's fugues. (The broad correspondence between this sequence of keys and the main outline of the first subject is of a kind that sometimes seems to have interested Bach himself: cf. the B minor fugue in the first book of the '48'.) The ending follows the extant portion and by far the greater part of the rest of *The Art of Fugue* in being designed to be played on the keyboard. Much of the recent attention to *The Art of Fugue* has come from the organists' quarter, but there is nothing to show that in general these fugues were written for, or are even suitable for the organ. Throughout the bulk of the collection Bach is scrupulous in keeping the music within the compass of the hands, and the few exceptions constitute special cases which would take too long to consider here. The present final entry is in a different category from these: its two stretched 10ths exceed Bach's usual limits, but, as in the case of his own rare use of this stretch elsewhere, the passage retains its harmonic sense if one note of the 10th has to be momentarily released.

The semiquaver detail sets a limit on the tempo, and the mood of the opening is in any case reserved. However, such a large piece clearly must flow, and the impetus resulting from the combination of the 5-bar first subject with the 4-bar third subject might appear as a factor affecting performance. If the fugue is played on the piano, my few expression marks are for the most part simply suggestions, but care should be taken to maintain tone and momentum in the third (*B A C H*) section. In the present version this begins rather later than the half-way point of the work, and if it is then treated as a quiet interlude, as Roy Harris, for example, suggests in his arrangement for string quartet, the piece will not have time to recover. I have made few suggestions for fingering as this is so largely a matter of personal preference.

James Iliff May 1 1993

* Sir Donald Tovey *A Companion to 'The Art of Fugue'* (Oxford, 1931)

Contrapunctus 19

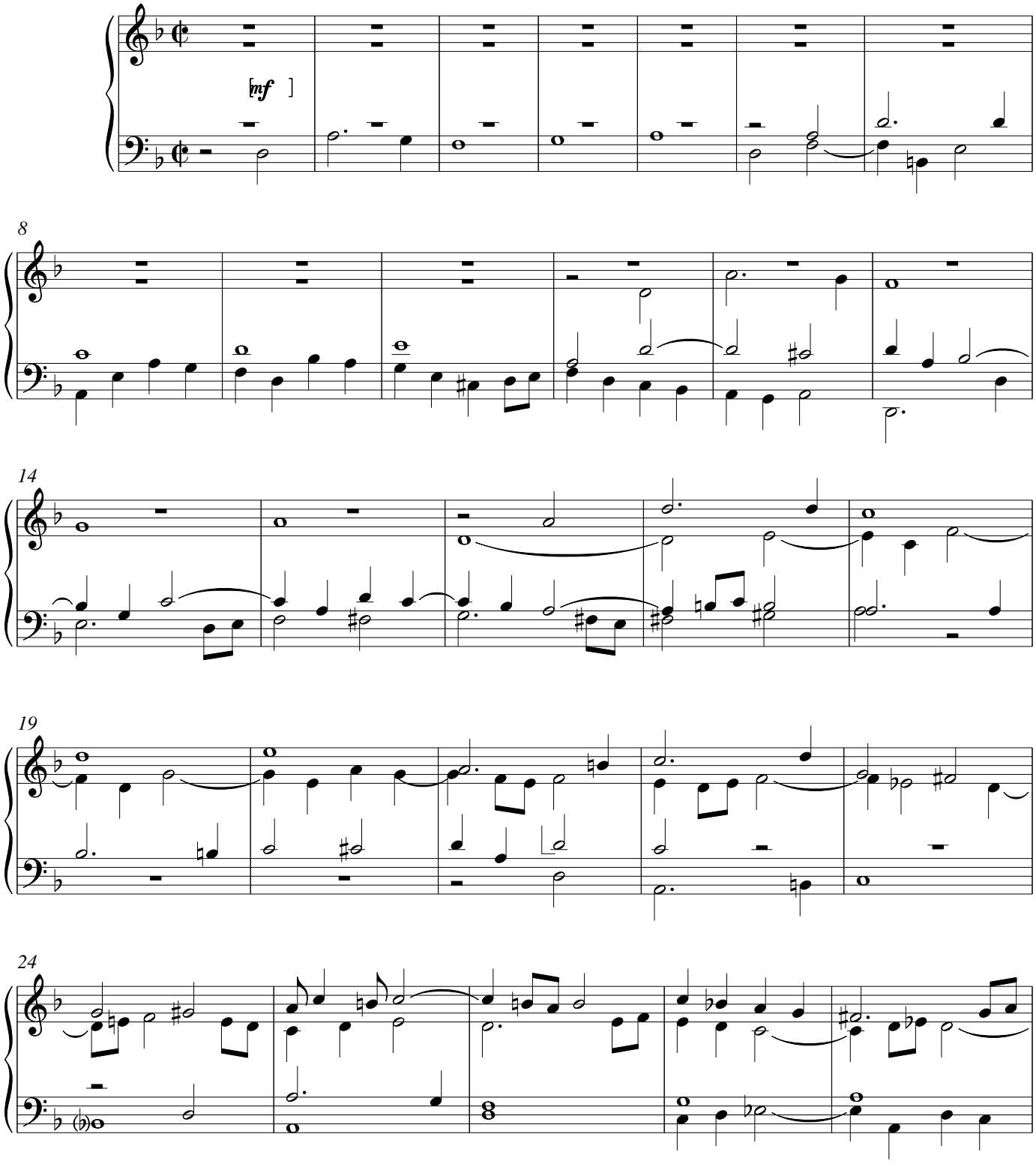
(BWV 1080.19)

from *The Art of Fugue*

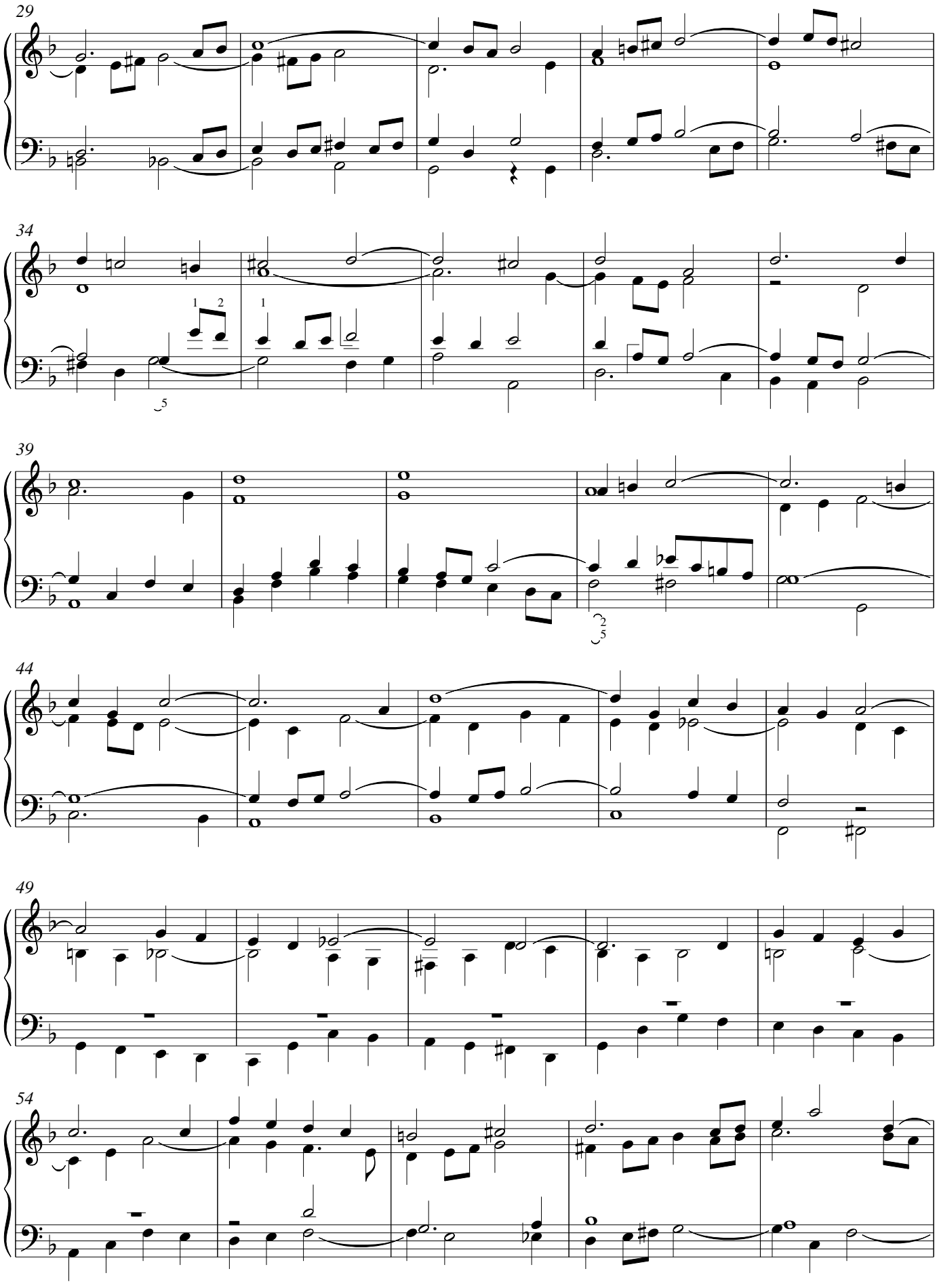
J.S.Bach

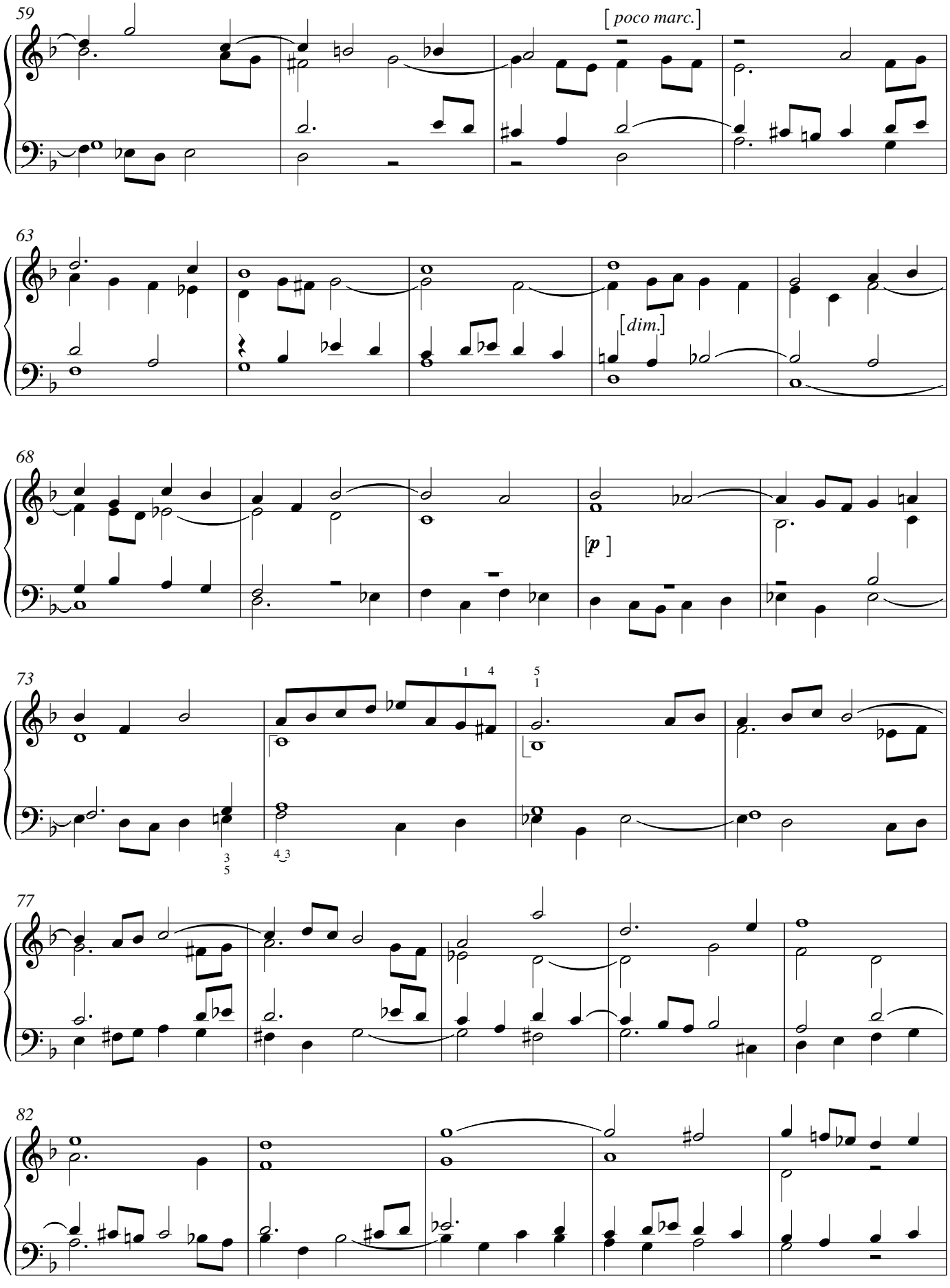
Completed for keyboard performance

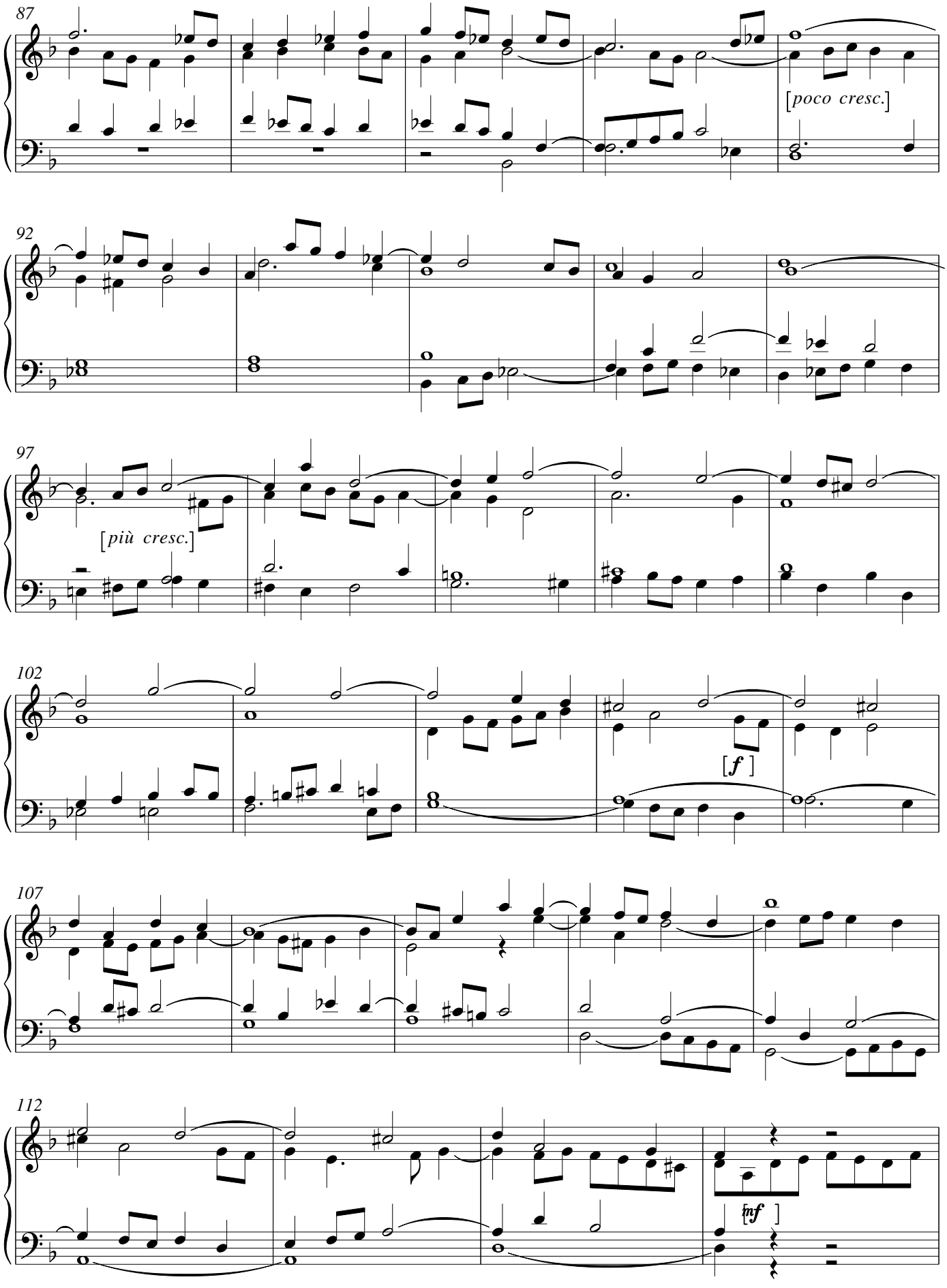
James Iliff

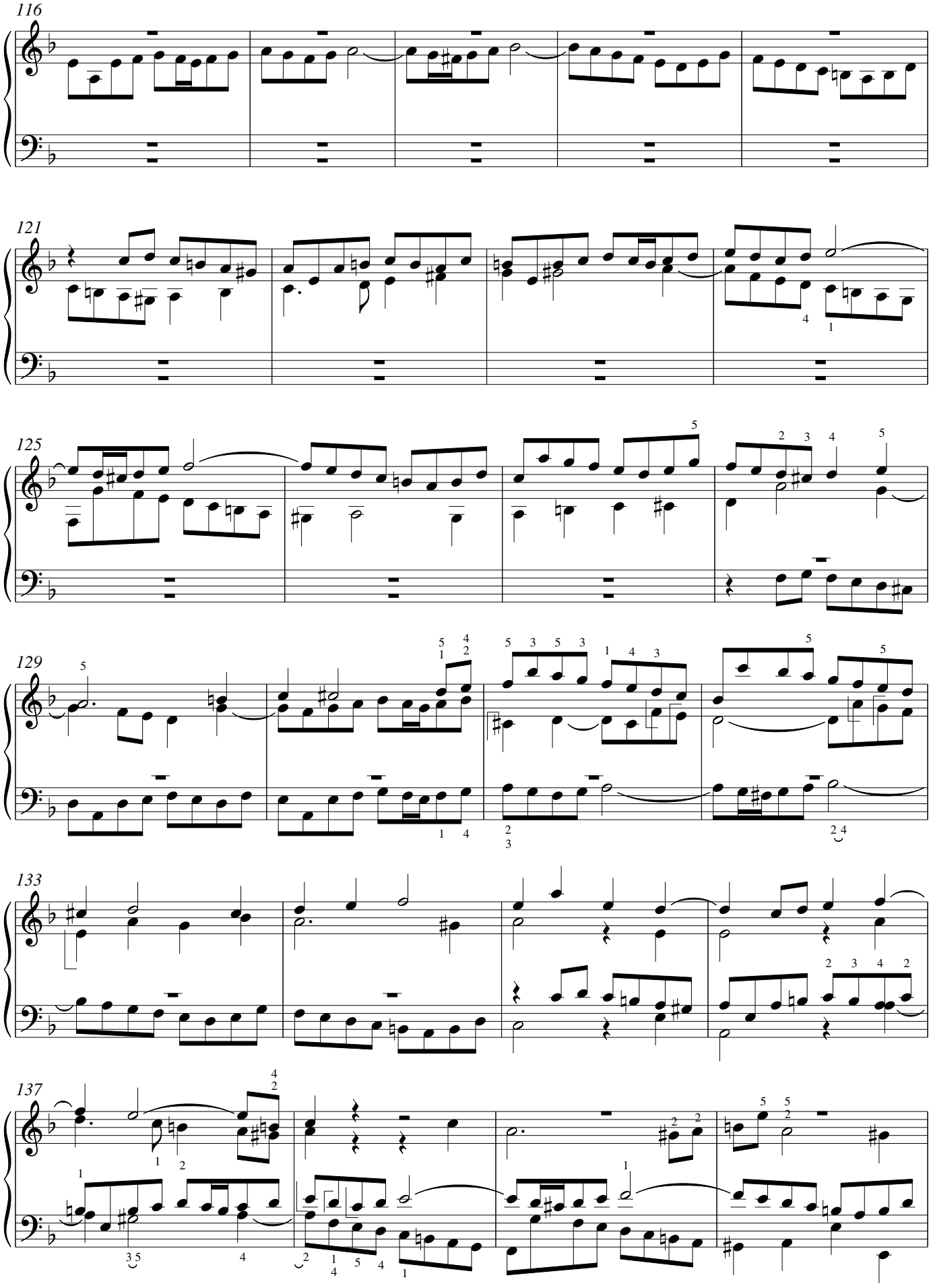


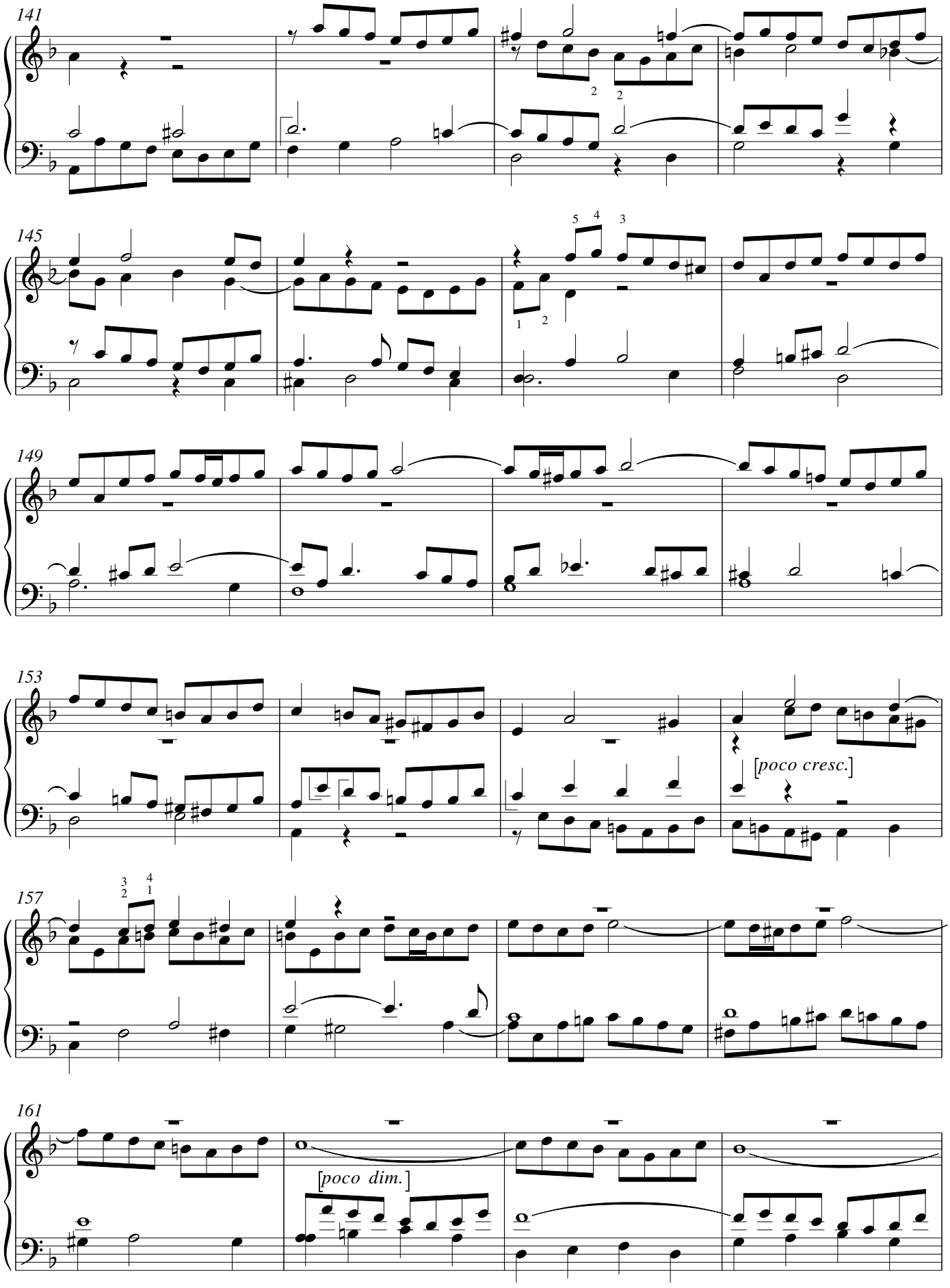
© James Iliff 1993

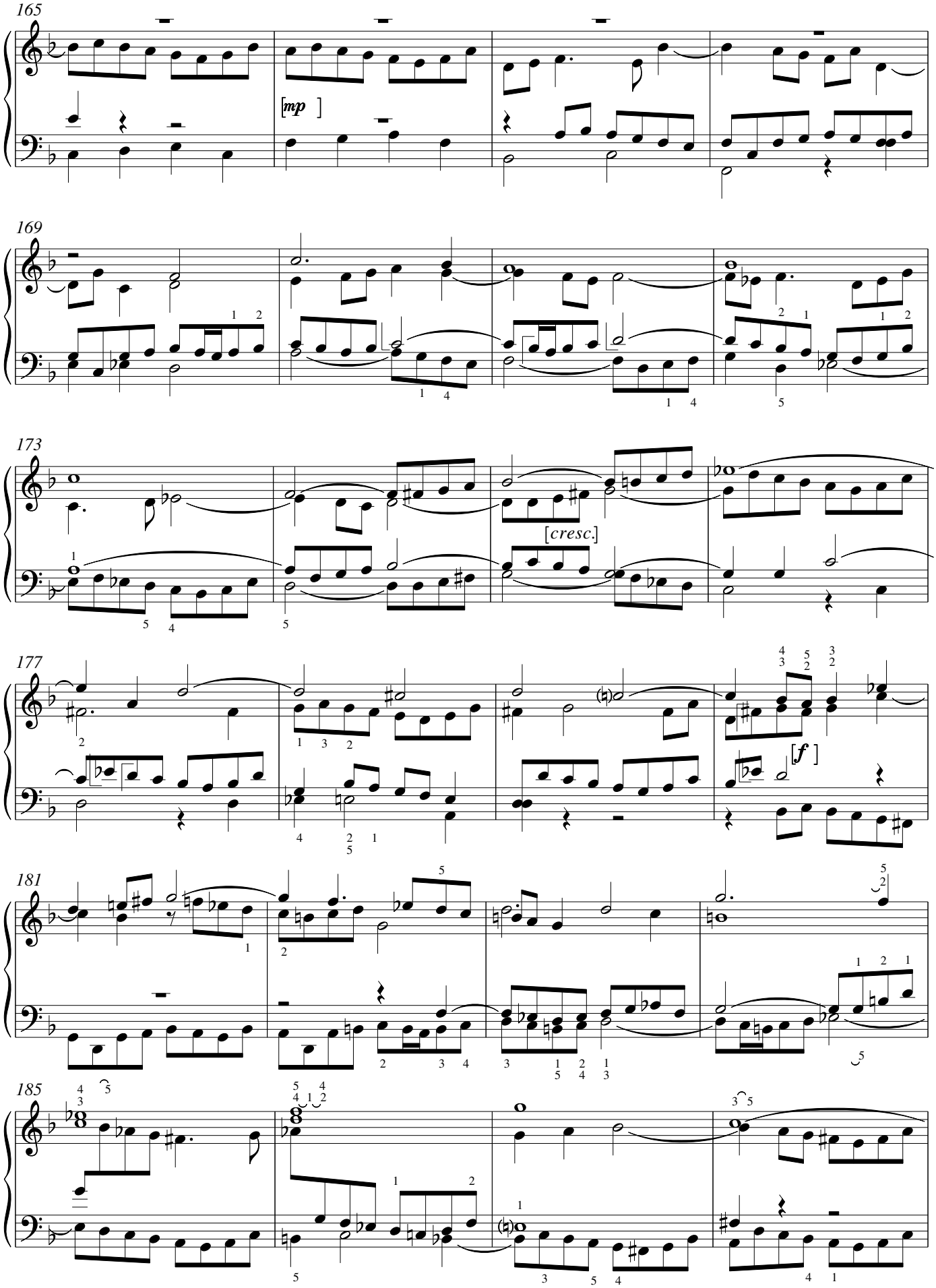

29
34
39
44
49
54

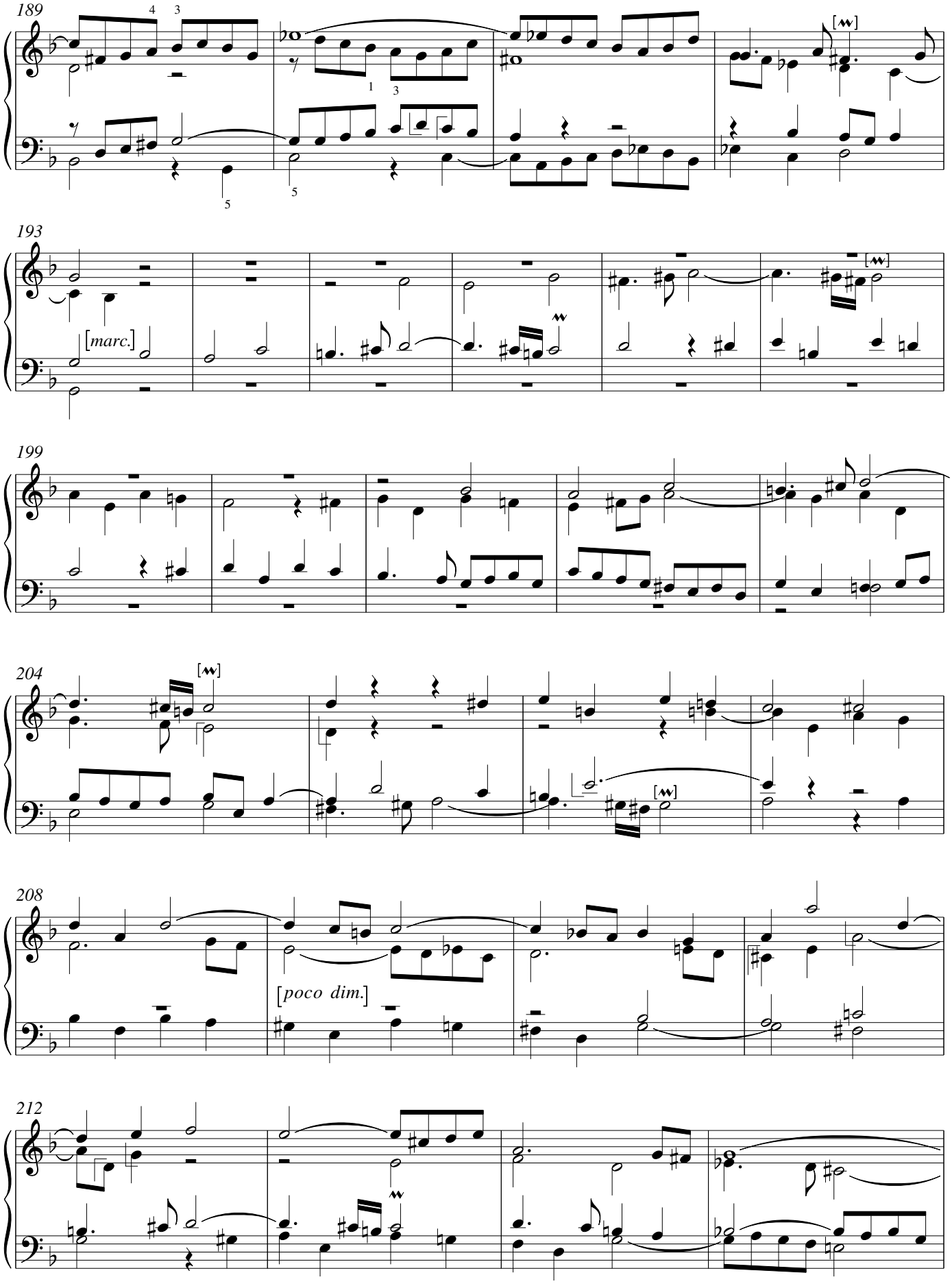

59
[poco marc.]
63
[dim.]
68
[p]
73
77
82

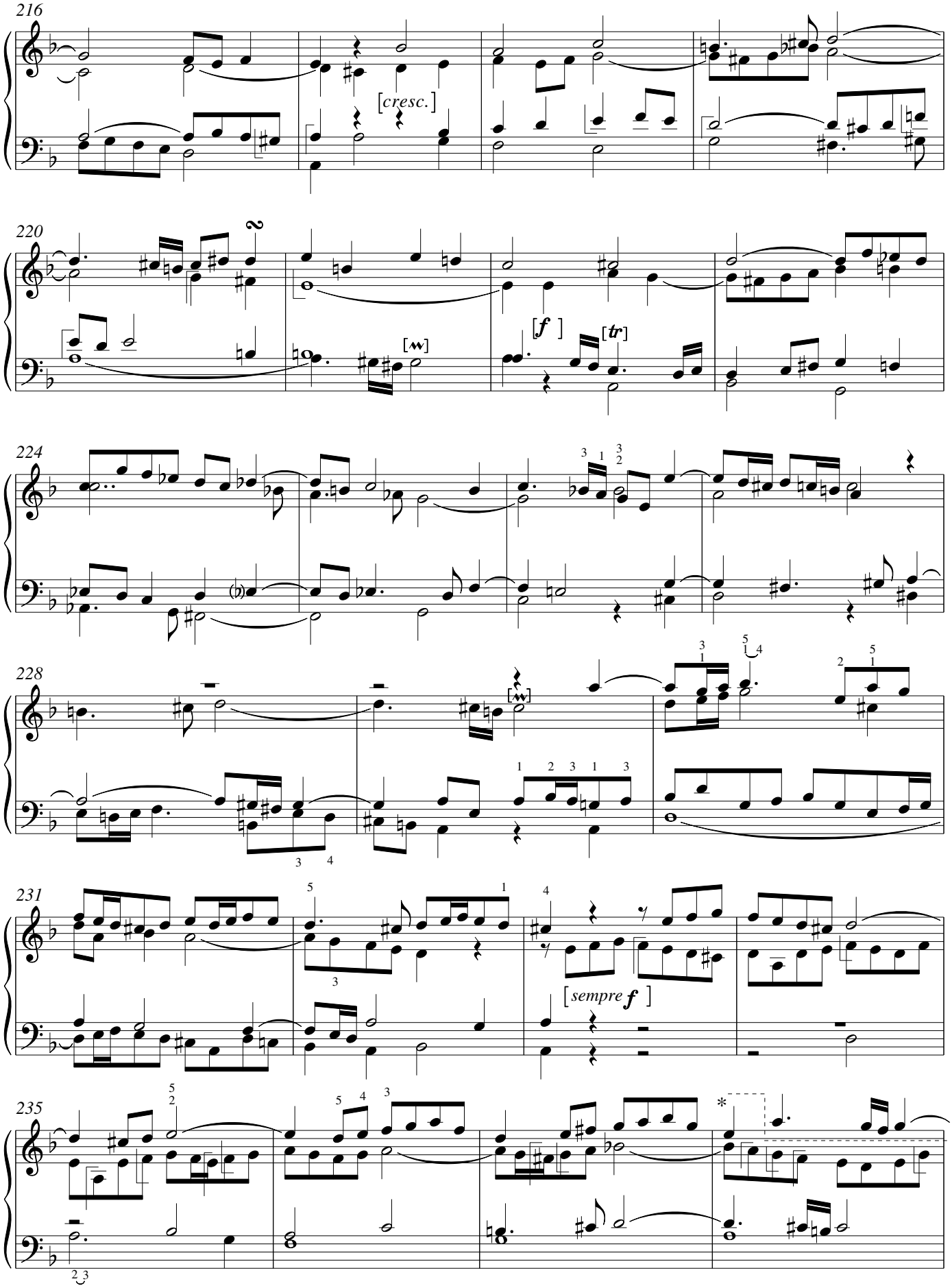

87
[poco cresc.]
92
97
[più cresc.]
102
[f]
107
112
[mf]


116
121
125
129
133
137

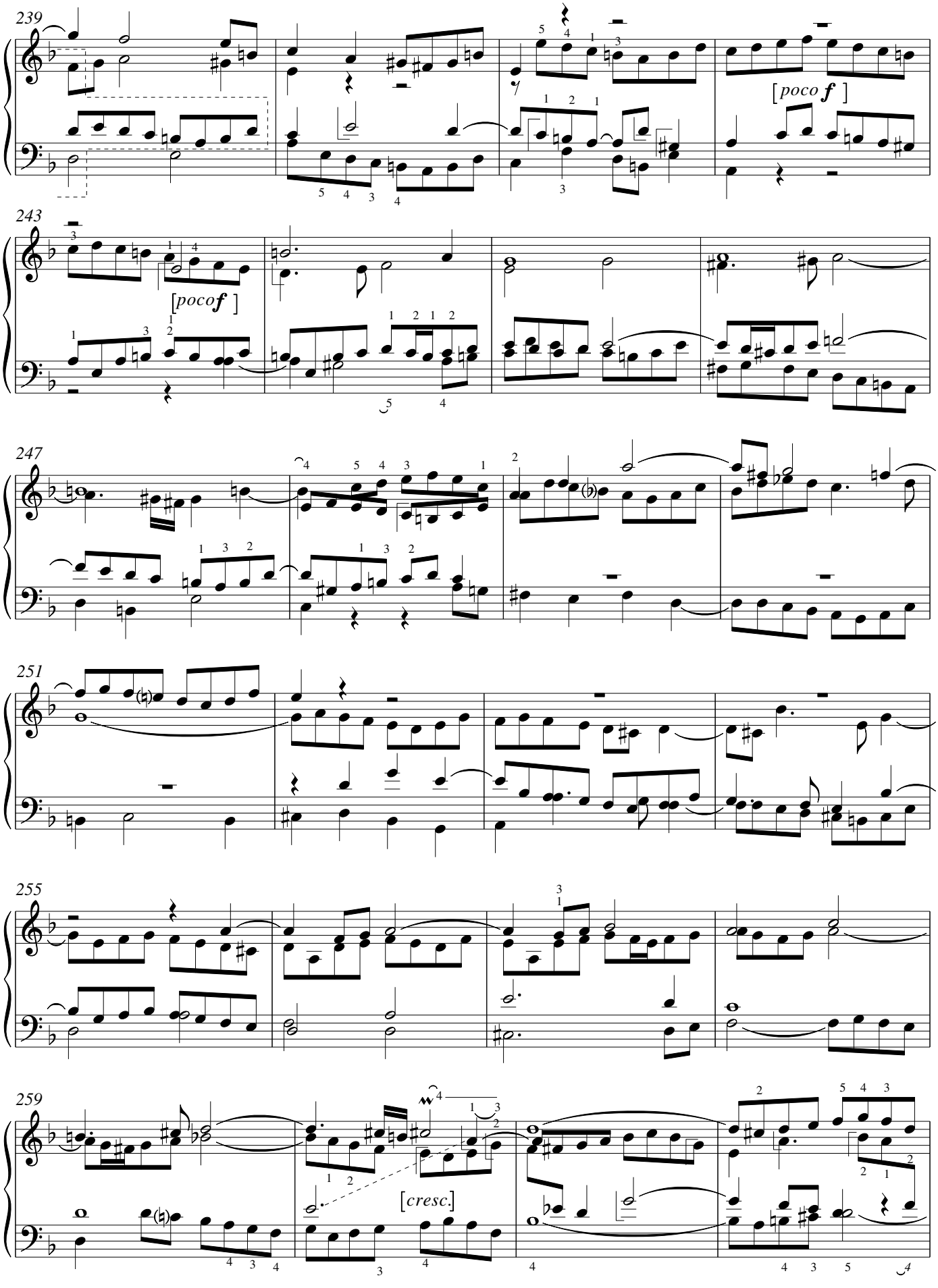

141
145
149
153
[poco cresc.]
157
161
[poco dim.]

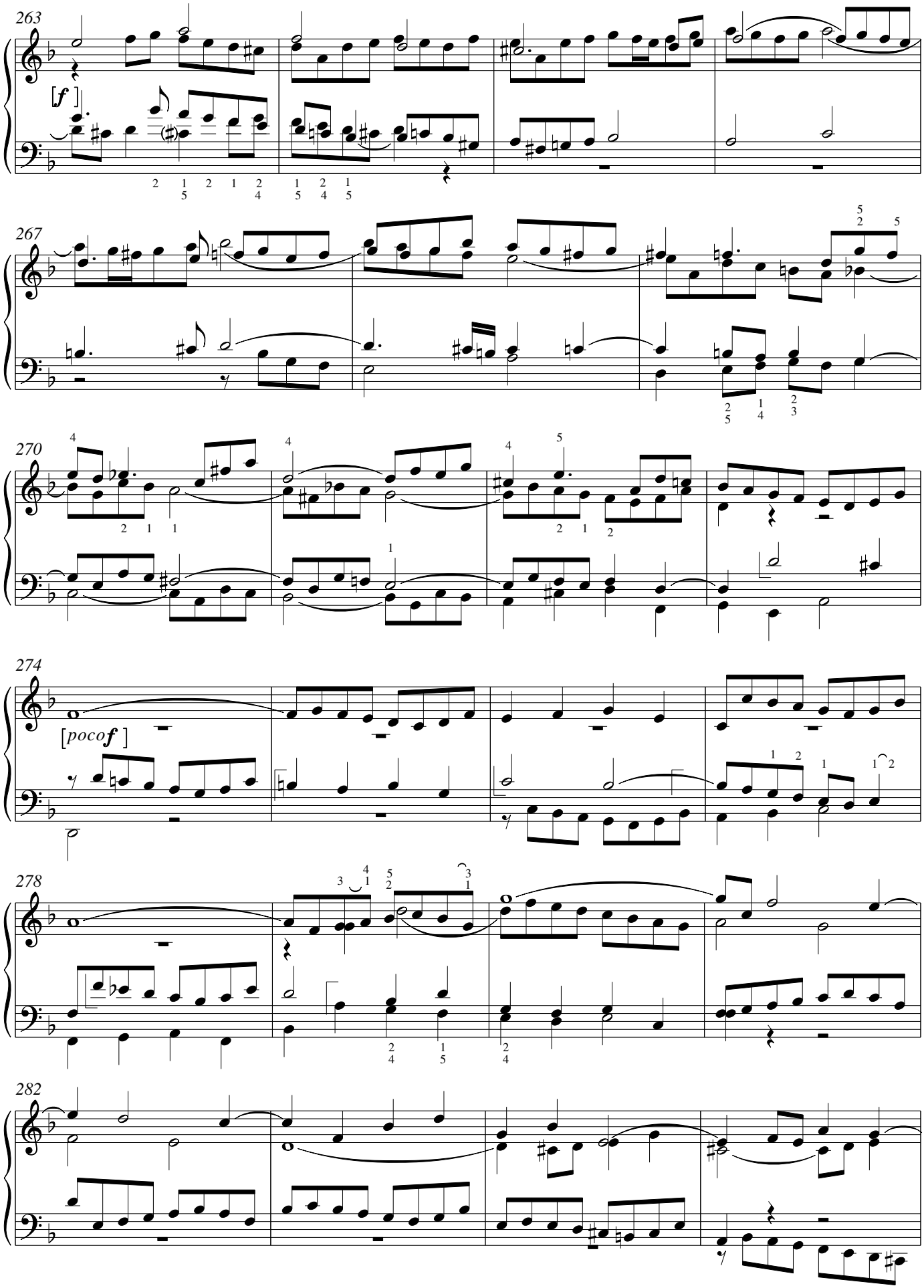

165
[mp]
169
173
[cresc.]
177
[f]
181
185

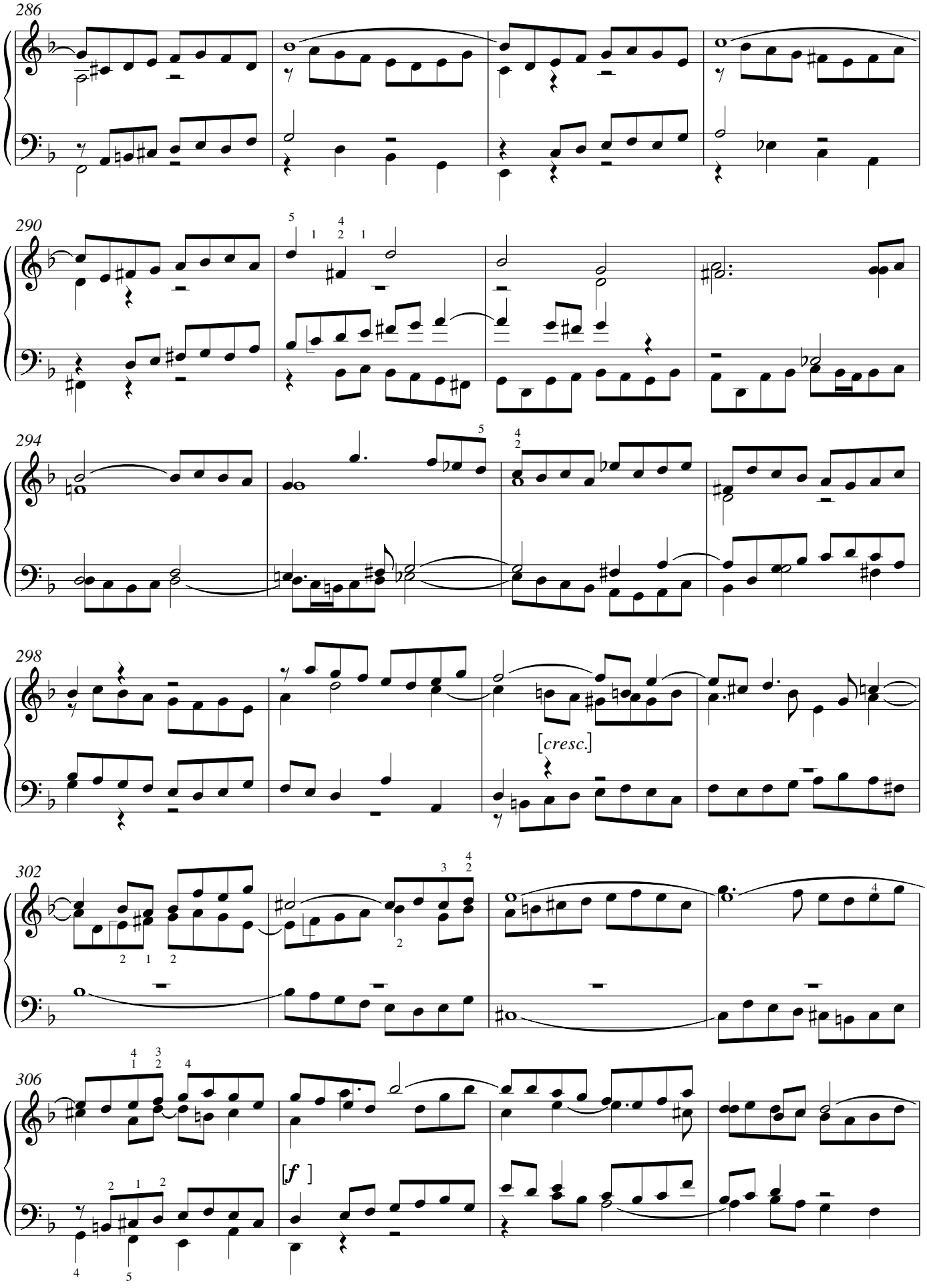

189
193
[marc.]
199
204
208
[poco dim.]
212

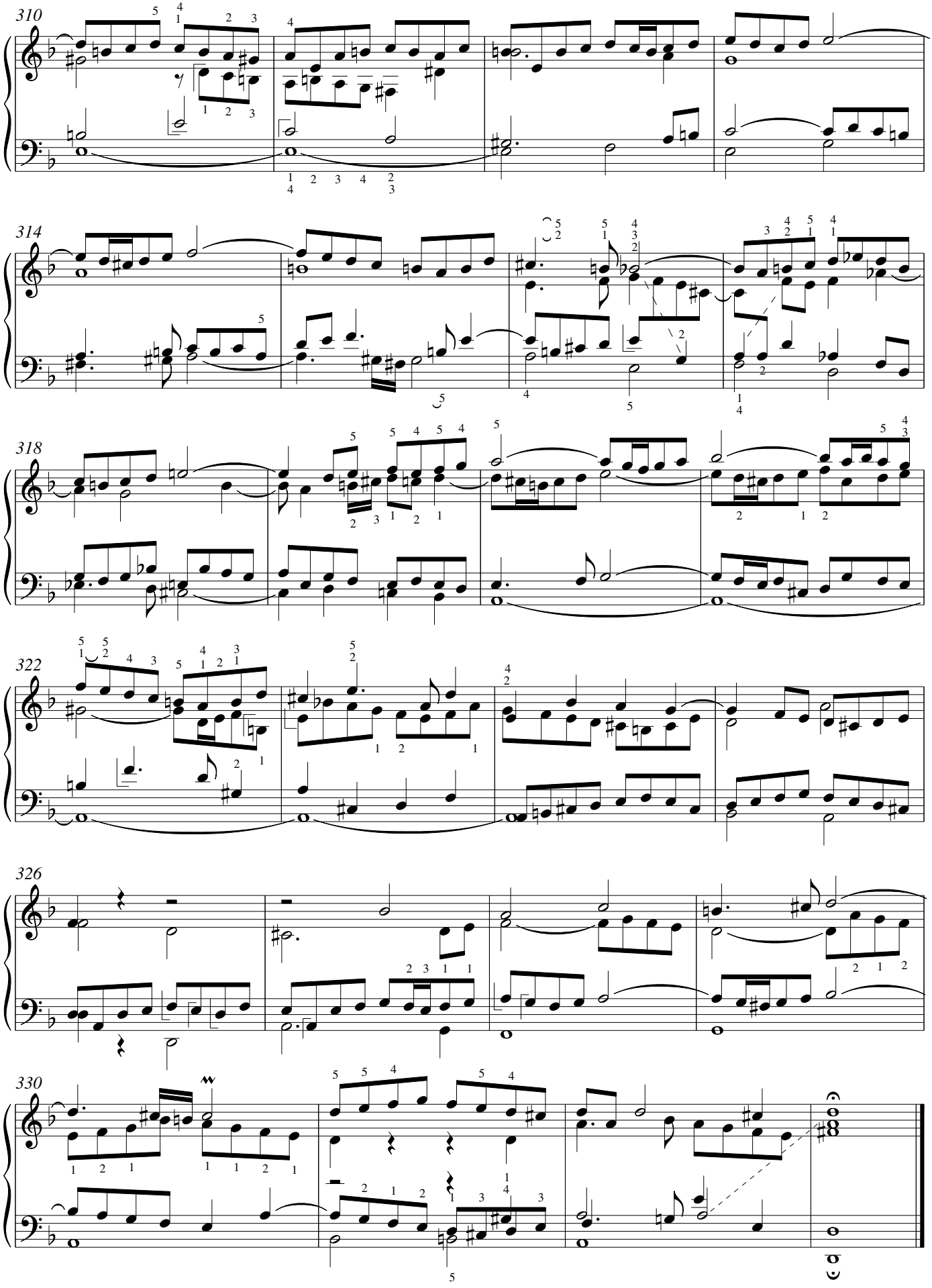


* Bach's last written pitches


239
[poco f]
243
[poco f]
247
251
255
259
[cresc.]


263
[f]
267
270
274
[poco f]
278
282


286
290
294
298
[cresc.]
302
306
[f]



Typeset by **Musography**, 6 Station Road, Catworth, Huntingdon, Cambs, PE18 0PE