Fantasy Sonata

Michael A. Kimbell (ASCAP)

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Program Notes by Edmund Kimbell

Conceived in the tradition of the nocturne and "night music", the **Fantasy Sonata** is a musical and philosophical reflection on recent astronomical and cosmological research. In addition to evoking the mysterious beauty of cosmic phenomena and the vastness of space, it delves inward as a spiritual quest prompted by the wonders of space exploration. As the sonata proceeds, the initial narrow perspective of glimpses of space probes, comets and asteroids is progressively widened to encompass galactic dust and gas clouds within which stars are born and die, the primordial atomic forces that initiated the quiet but insistent power of life, and finally black holes and other unknown mysteries. Full use is made of the piano's sonorities and technical possibilities to create sound pictures that range from minute to gigantic.

The first movement, *Celestial Encounters*, was inspired by pictures sent back by the Voyager and Giotto space probes. In the very beginning, staccato notes in irregular rhythms mimic radio signals from spacecraft and answering frequencies from outer space. A plaintive melody takes over and is developed in increasingly complex figurations to depict various types of encounters within the solar system involving objects both natural and man-made; these include inter-crossings of asteroid, comet and planetary orbits, spacecraft fly-bys of the outer planets and Halley's Comet, and culminate in a body smashing into a planet. Here is a dramatic example of art presaging nature, for this movement was written eight years before Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 plunged into the planet Jupiter! As the shock waves subside, the opening melody is restated, but at half speed and softer, as if to broadcast it into the infinity of space.

Nebulæ celebrates images returned by the Hubble and Keck telescopes of cloudlike formations and similar phenomena. The movement opens with rumbling arpeggios that gradually rise in register and unfold into a luminous melody, interrupted by bursts of alternatingly soaring and tumbling arpeggios, the last of which is heralded by a cascade of augmented chords. The picture thus stimulated is one of vast, dark columns of interstellar dust, of which one eventually condenses into a star whose brilliance intensifies until it explodes, creating an expanding ring nebula. The movement closes with a condensed retelling of the same, this time set against twinkling chords that suggest the stars already created in the first cloud.

The third movement, *Energies*, is a driving toccata-like fugue which evokes both the constant pulse of sub-atomic energies and radiation, and the inexorable recurrance of living and spiritual energies. The various restatements of the subject—by turn plaintive, insistent against driving octaves, or lilting against cascading counterpoint—mirror the manifold mysteries of the forces that emanate from the primordial explosion. The closing stages of the movement suggest the energy of the untrammeled human spirit, in a glorious push to a fortissimo C major.

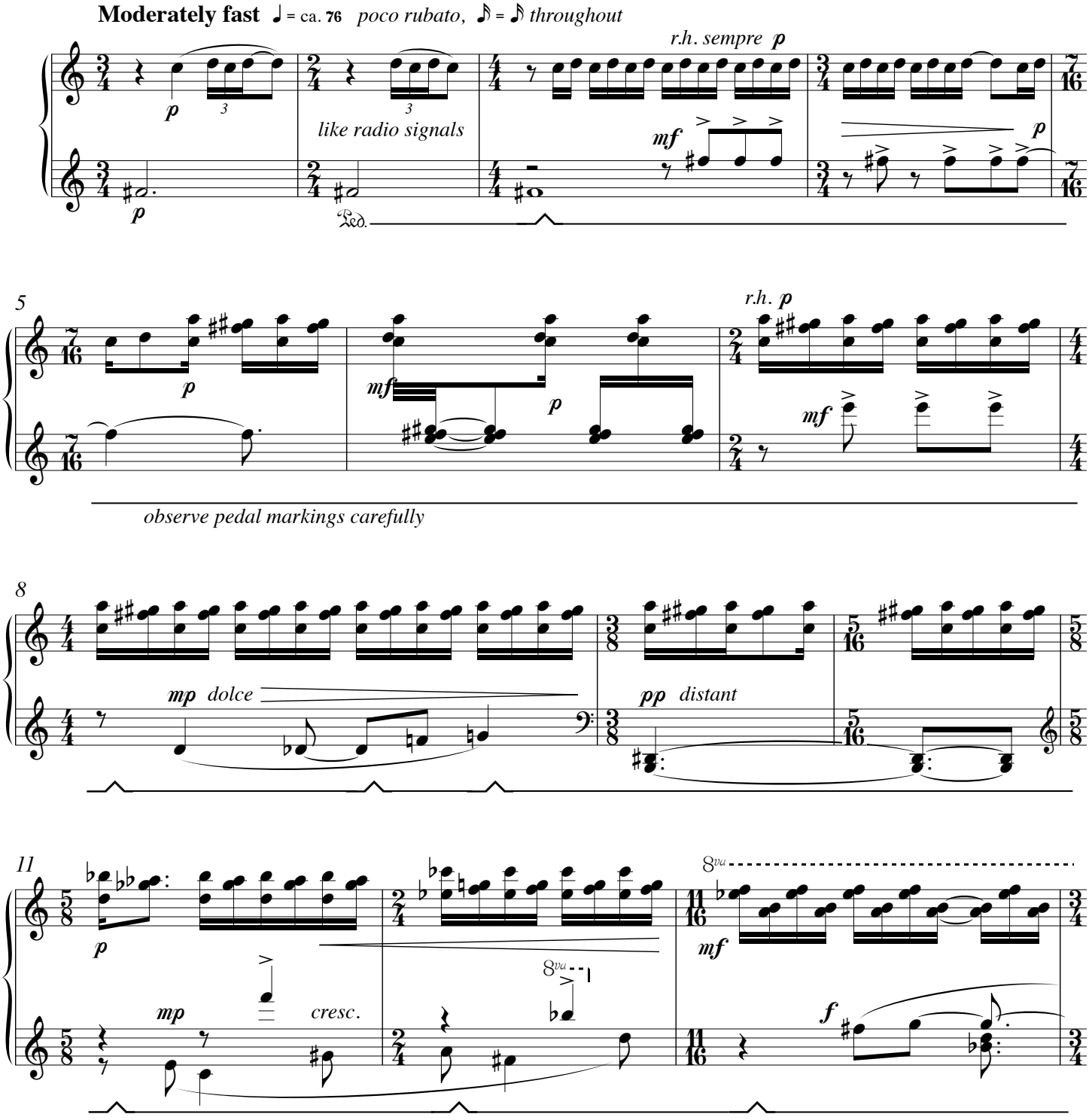
The fourth and final movement, *Dark Forms*, confronts the listener with dark matter, black holes, and forces of destruction both universal and personal, but with the promise of regeneration. It opens with slow, dissonant chords that carry the quality of a cosmic *de profundis*, over which high notes seem to keen intermittently. A middle section of cascading arpeggios parallels the inexorable swallowing of all, even light, by black holes. Yet a gentle melody in canon escapes into the final section, returning in ever soaring registers of intricate contrapuntal filigree. This last passage was composed, according to the composer, as "a musical vision of the Rose Nebula created by a closely entwined pair of stars." During this closing stage, interjections of the opening chords increase in duration, and finally release into tolling notes, leaving the listener to contemplate the intangibility of immortality.

Fantasy Sonata

Michael A. Kimbell
ASCAP

1. Celestial Encounters

for my son Edmund



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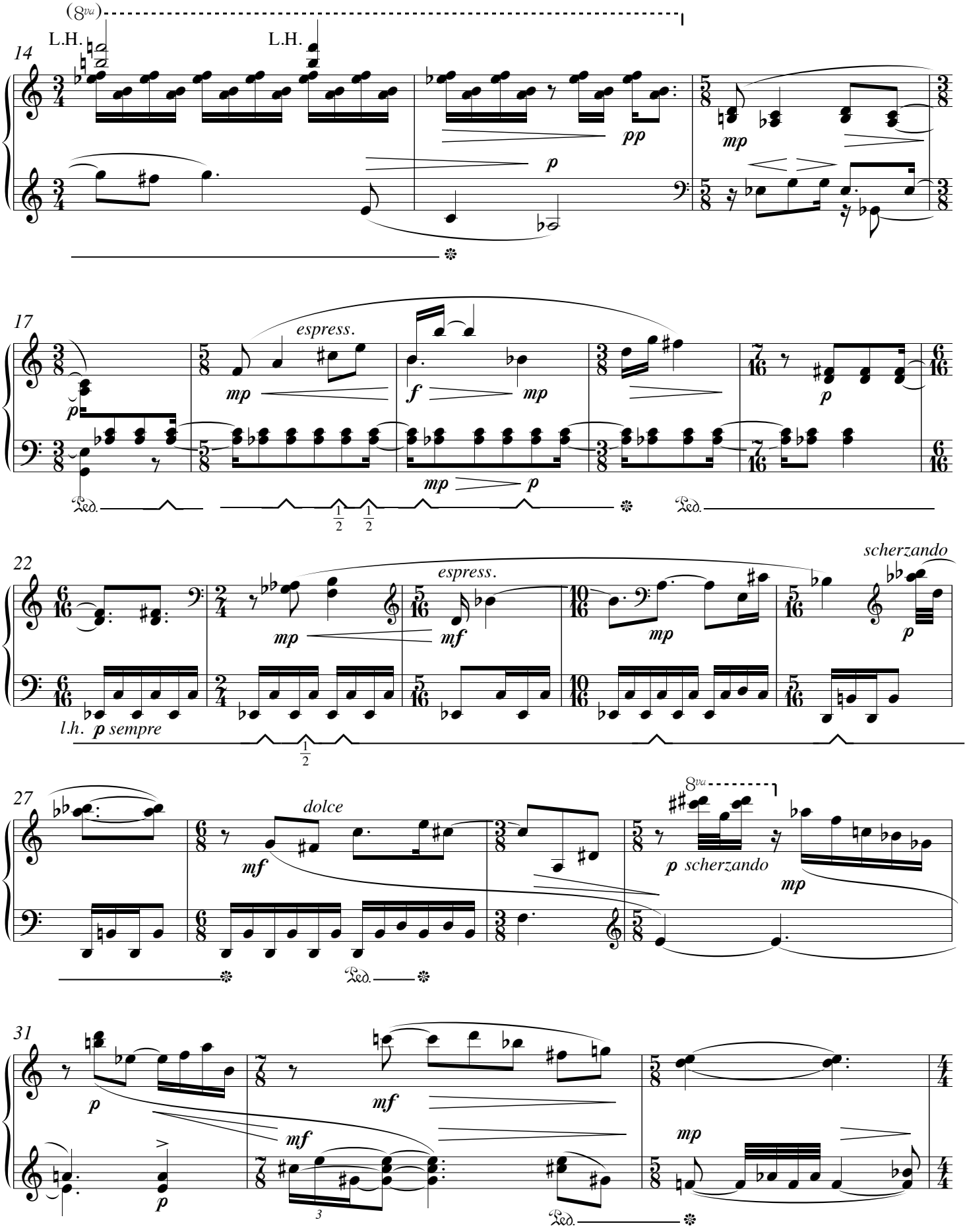
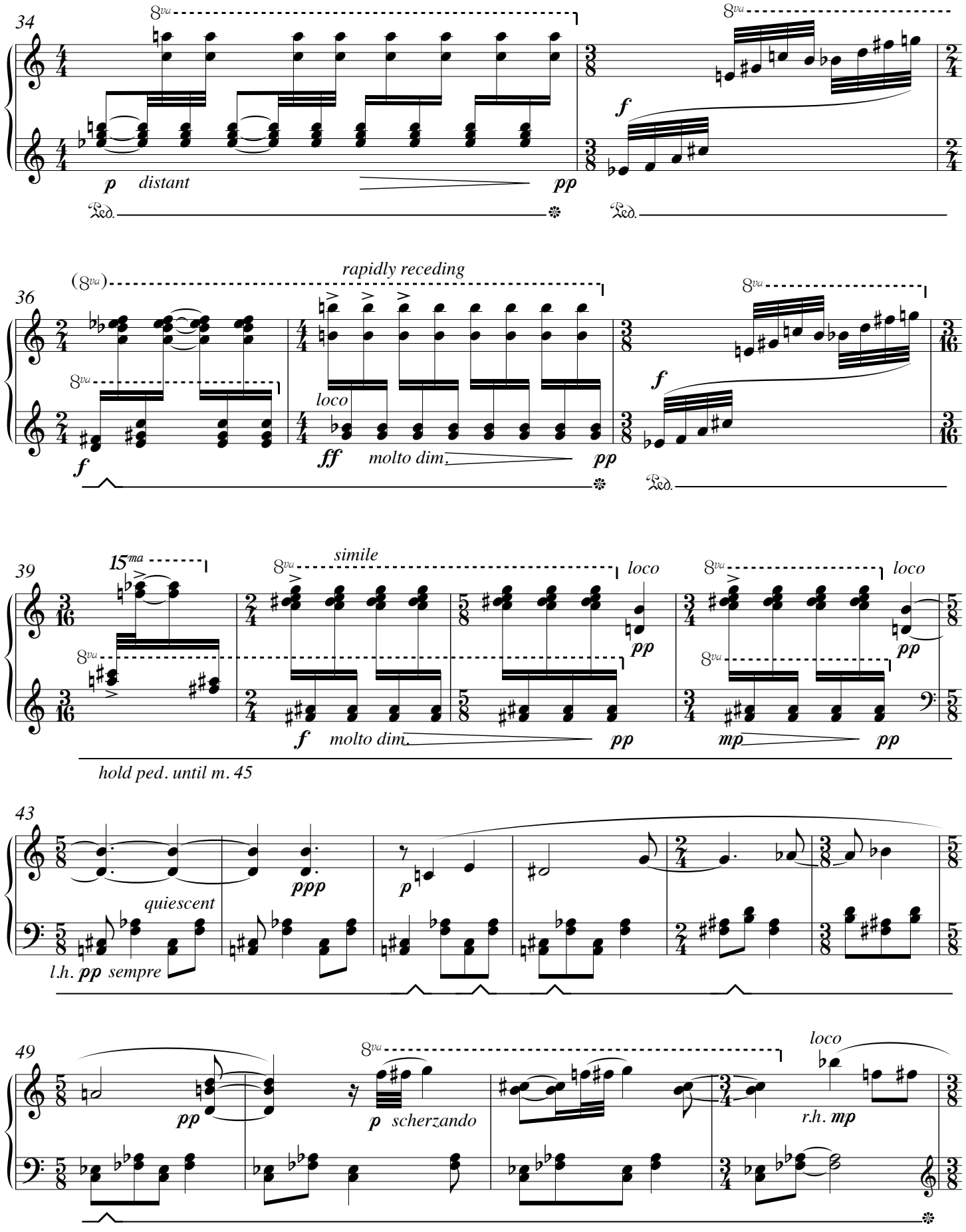
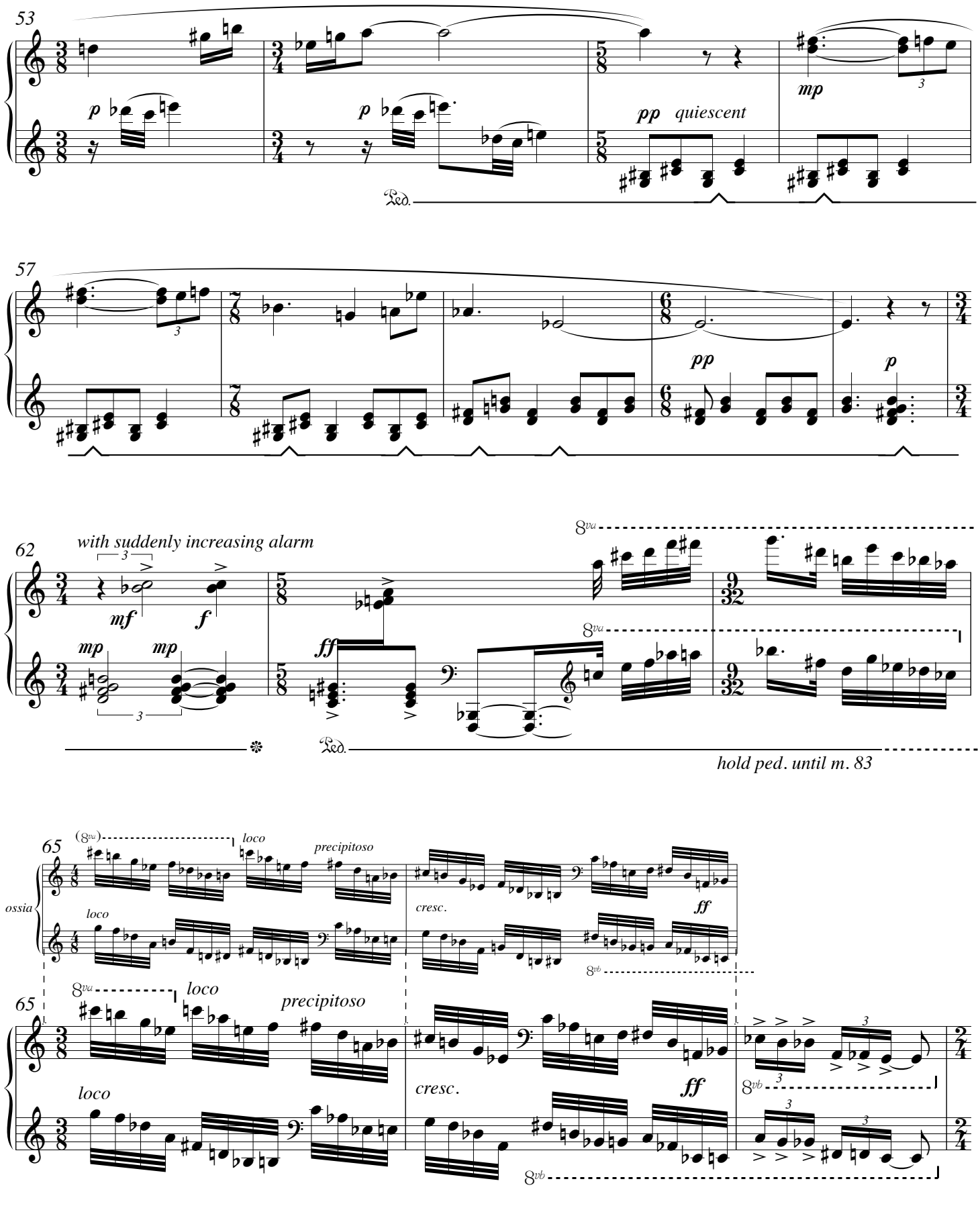
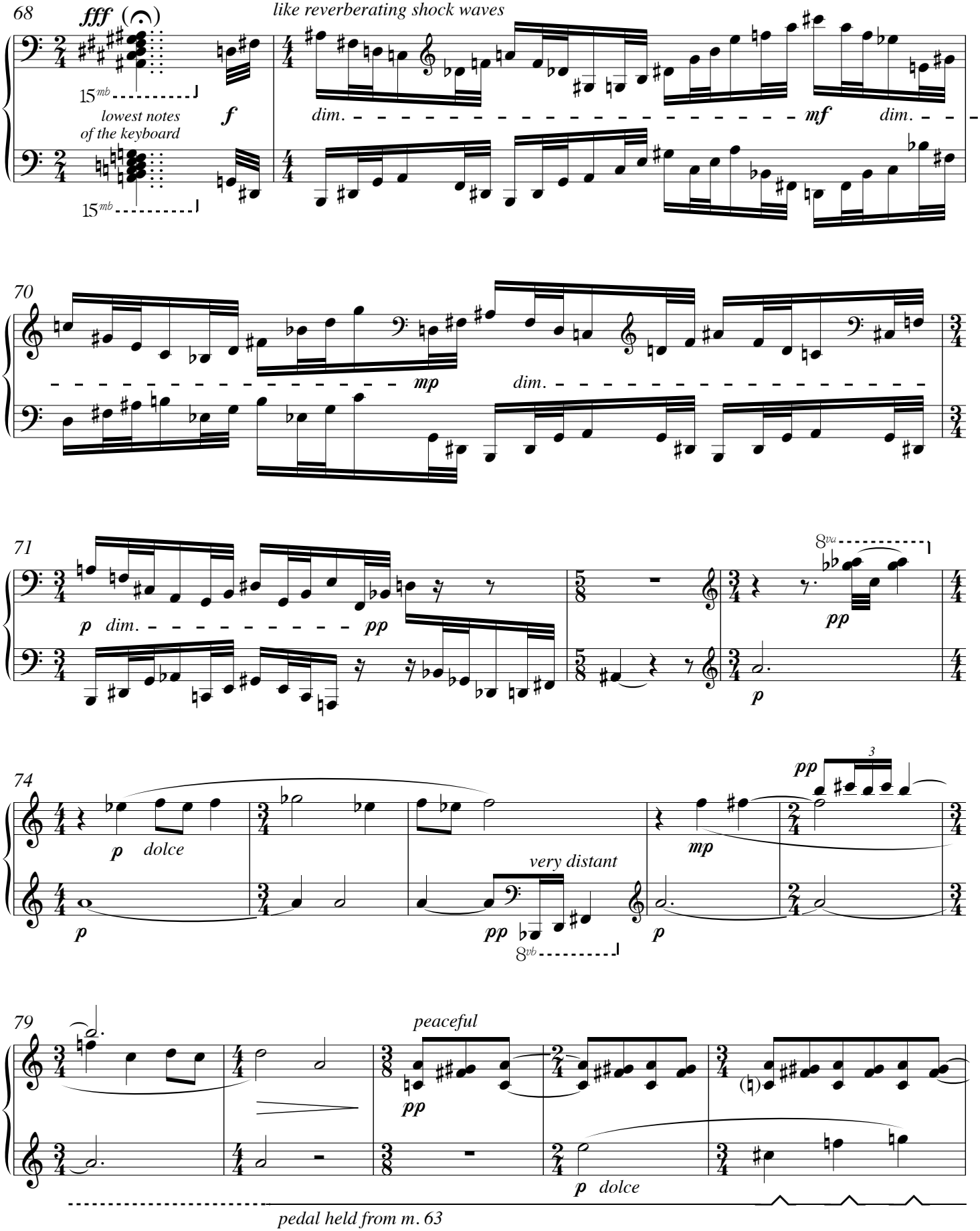
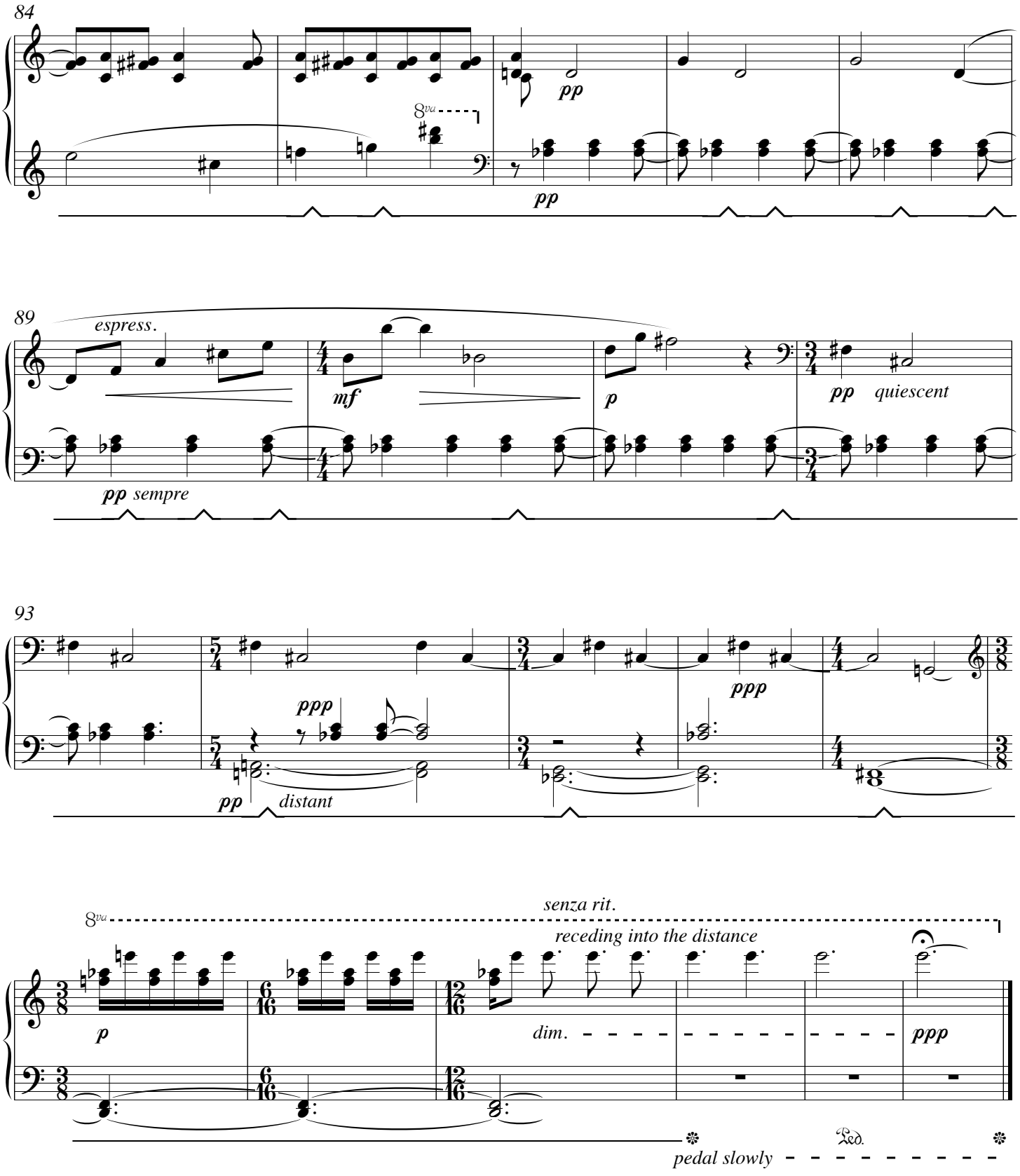

(8va)
L.H.
L.H.
14
pp
mp
p
17
espress.
mp
f
mp
p
mp
p
Ped.
Ped.
22
scherzando
espress.
mp
mf
mp
p
l.h. p sempre
27
dolce
mf
8va
p scherzando
mp
Ped.
31
p
mf
mf
mp
p
3
Ped.


34
8va
p distant
pp
Ped.
f
36
(8va)
rapidly receding
loco
ff molto dim.
39
15ma
simile
molto dim.
mp
hold ped. until m. 45
43
quiescent
ppp
l.h. pp sempre
49
scherzando
r.h. mp


53
p
p
pp quiescent
mp
Ped.
57
pp
p
62
with suddenly increasing alarm
mf
f
mp
mp
ff
8va
Ped.
hold ped. until m. 83
65
ossia
(8va)
loco
precipitoso
cresc.
ff
8vb
65
8va
loco
precipitoso
loco
cresc.
ff
8vb


68
fff
like reverberating shock waves
15mb
lowest notes
of the keyboard
f
dim.
mf
dim.
70
mp
dim.
71
p
dim.
pp
8va
pp
p
74
p
dolce
very distant
pp
8vb
mp
pp
3
p
79
peaceful
pp
p
dolce
pedal held from m. 63

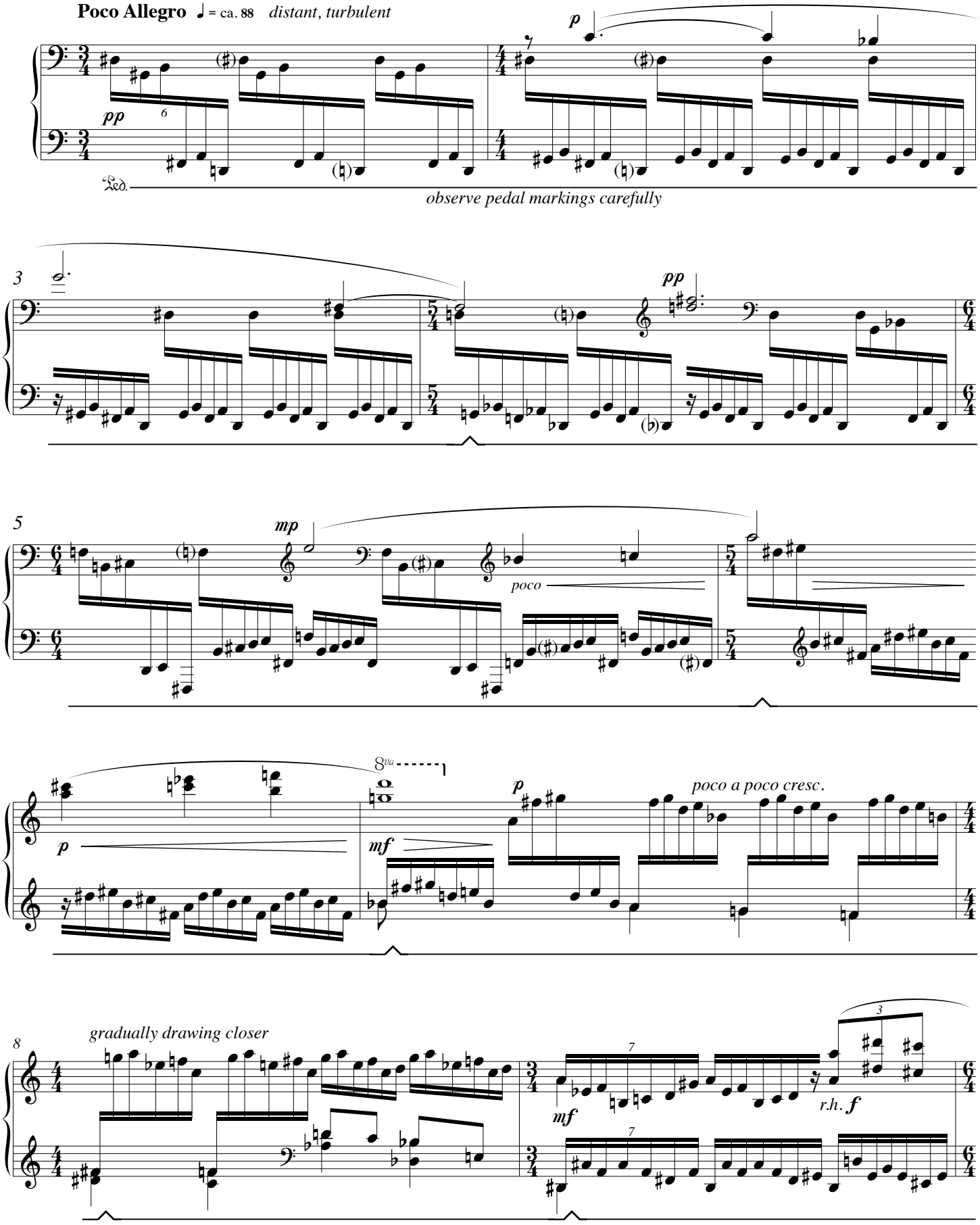

84
8va
pp
pp
89
espress.
mf
p
pp quiescent
pp sempre
93
ppp
ppp
pp distant
senza rit.
8va
receding into the distance
p
dim.
ppp
pedal slowly
Ped.

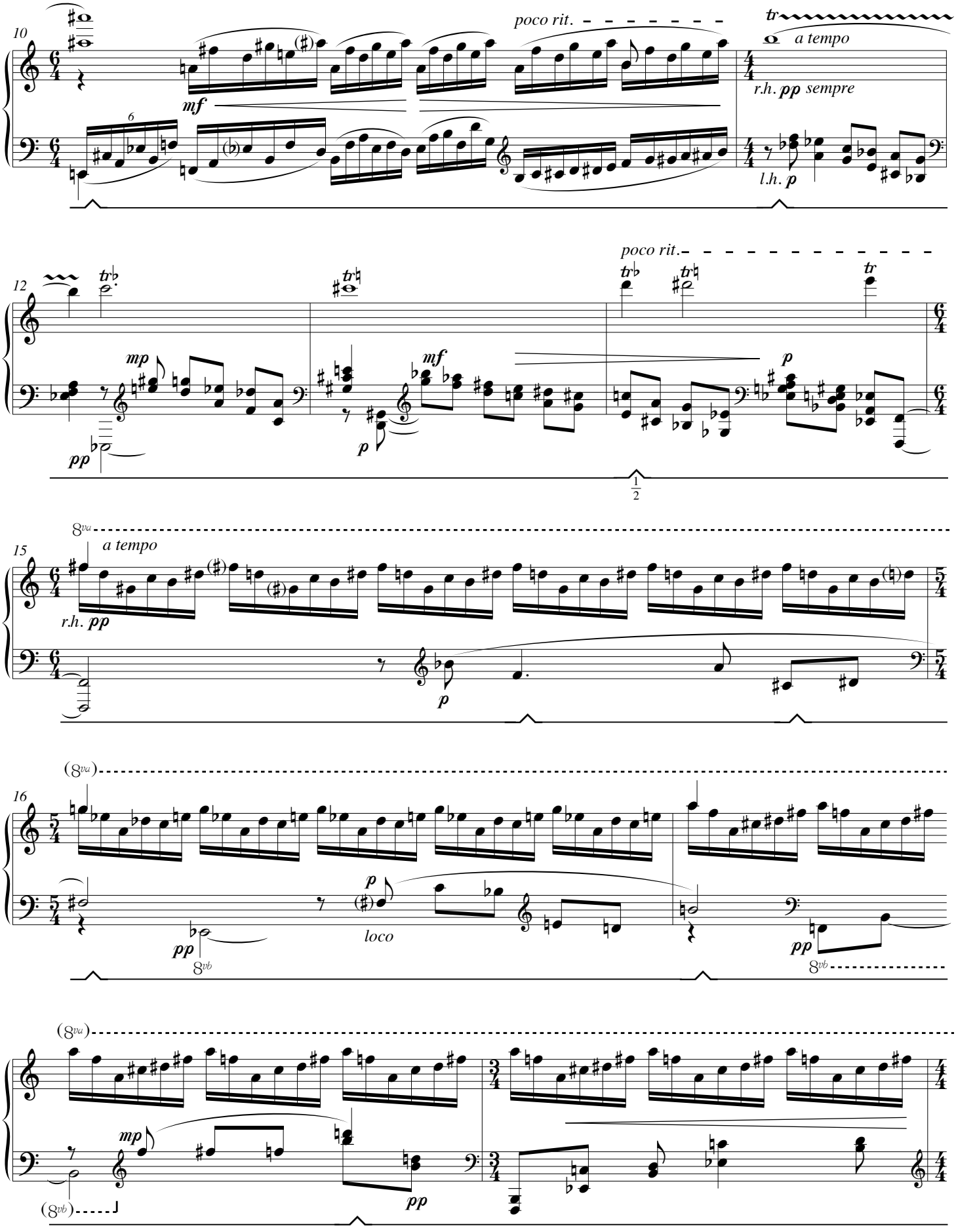
2. Nebulae

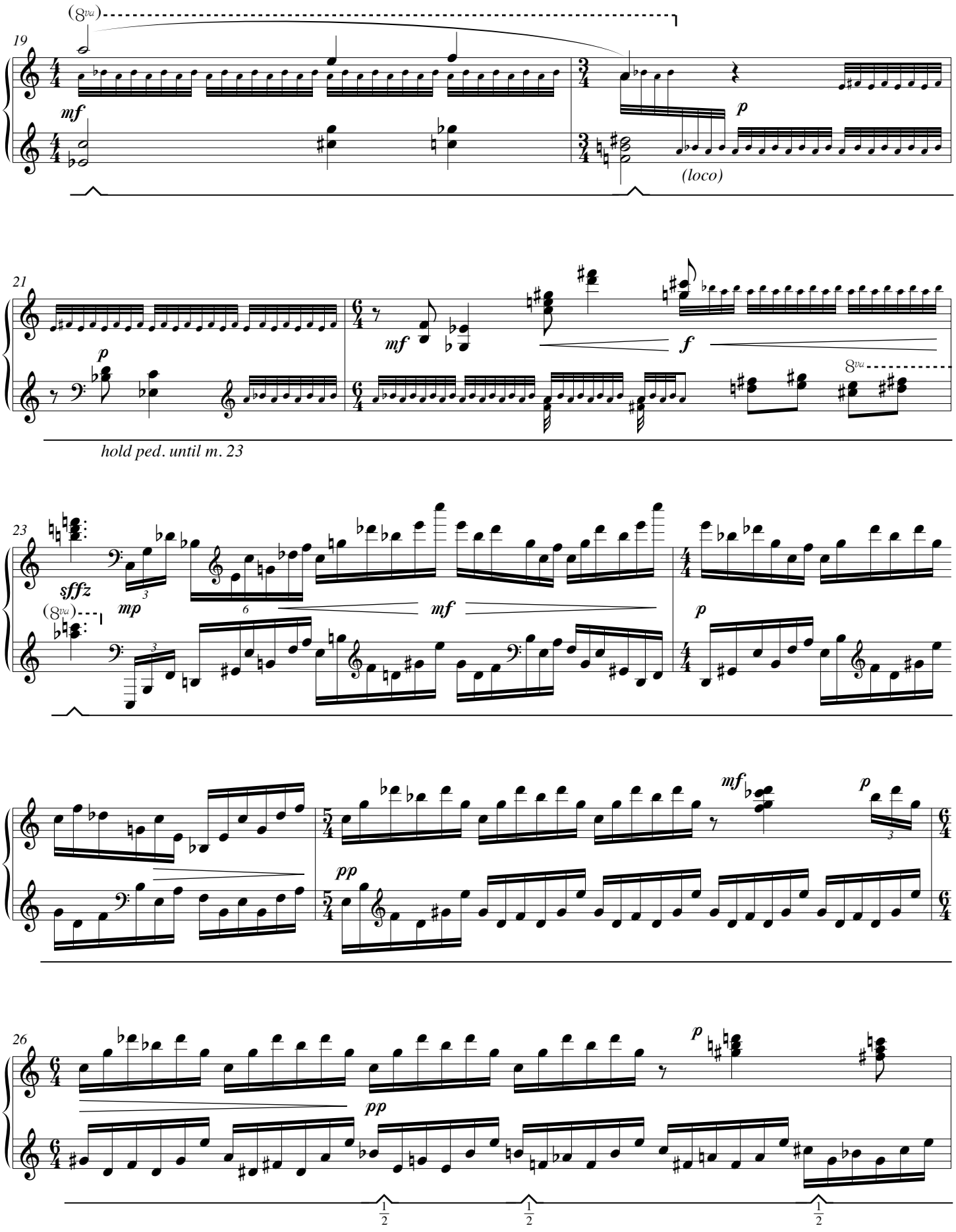
for Sally Christian

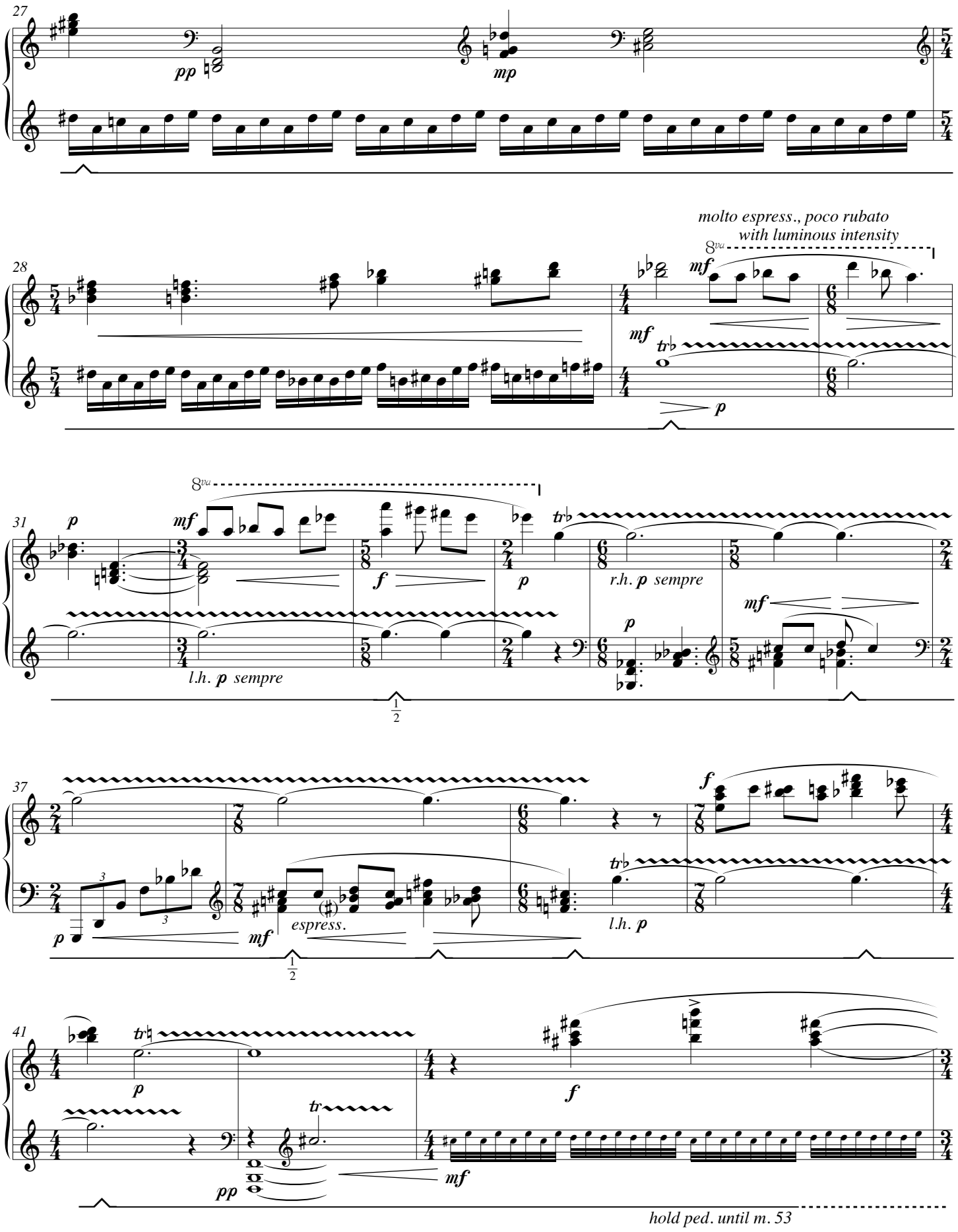
Poco Allegro ♩ = ca. 88 *distant, turbulent*

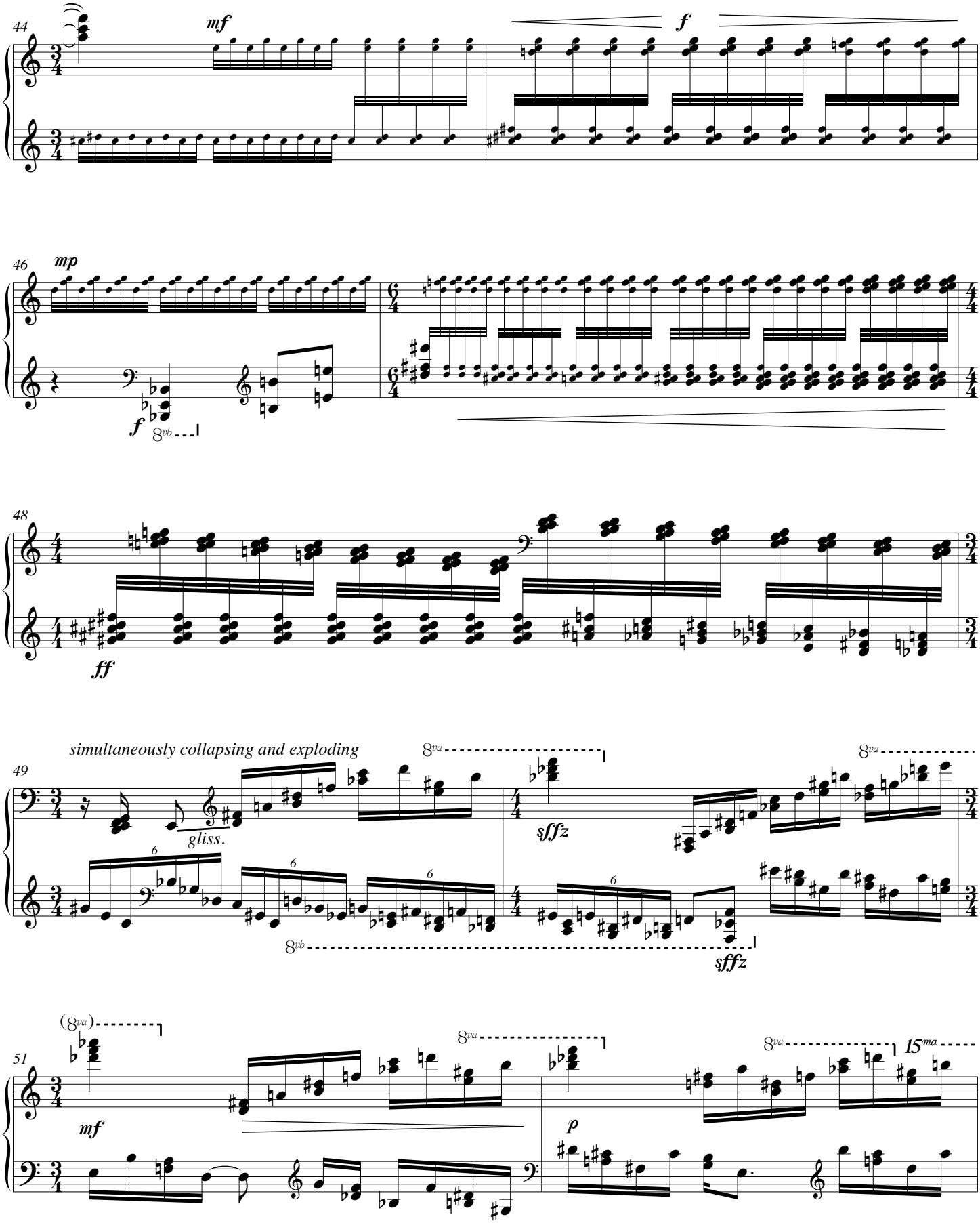
observe pedal markings carefully

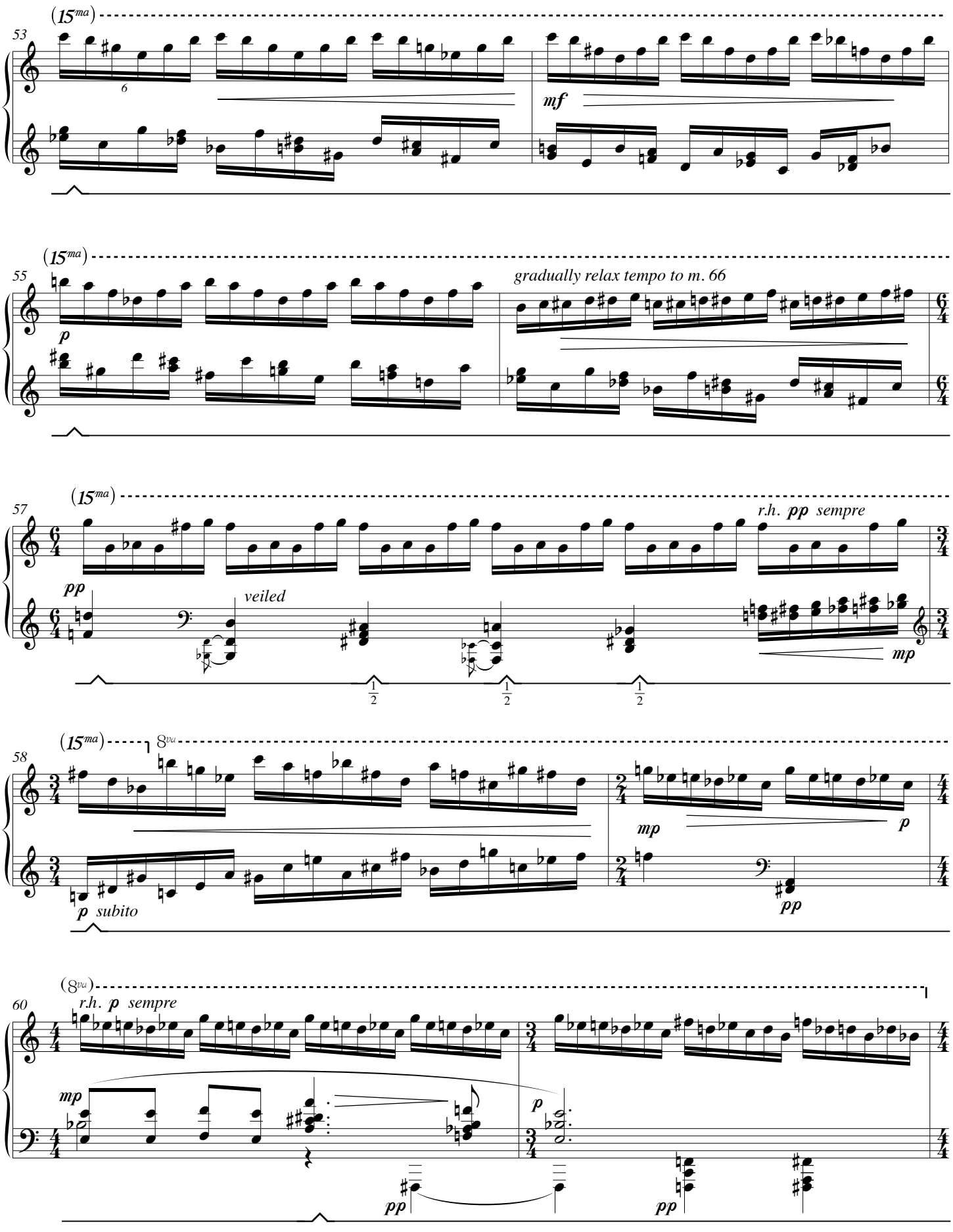


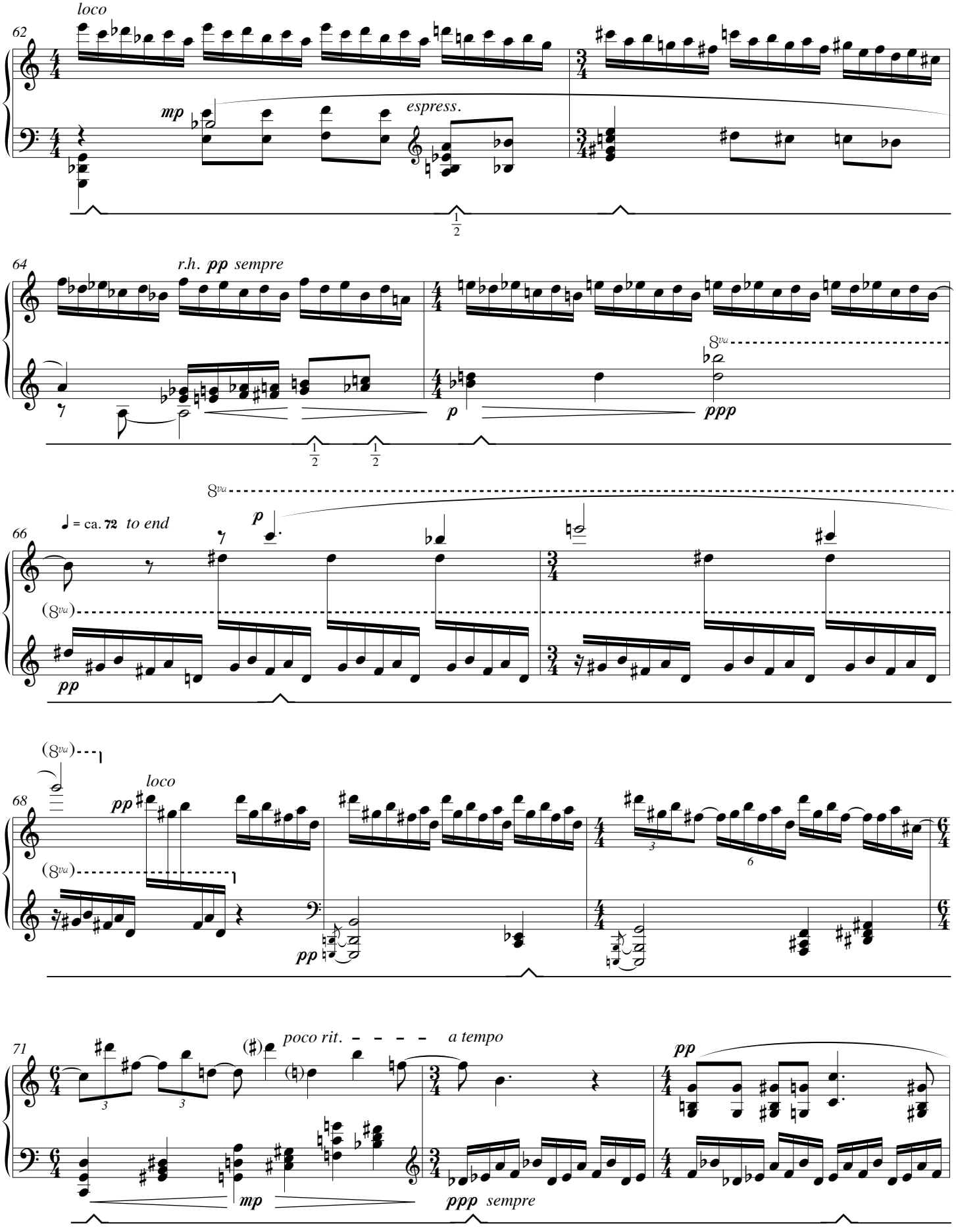

10
poco rit.
a tempo
mf
r.h. pp sempre
l.h. p
12
poco rit.
mp
pp
mf
p
15
8va
a tempo
r.h. pp
16
(8va)
loco
8vb
(8vb)

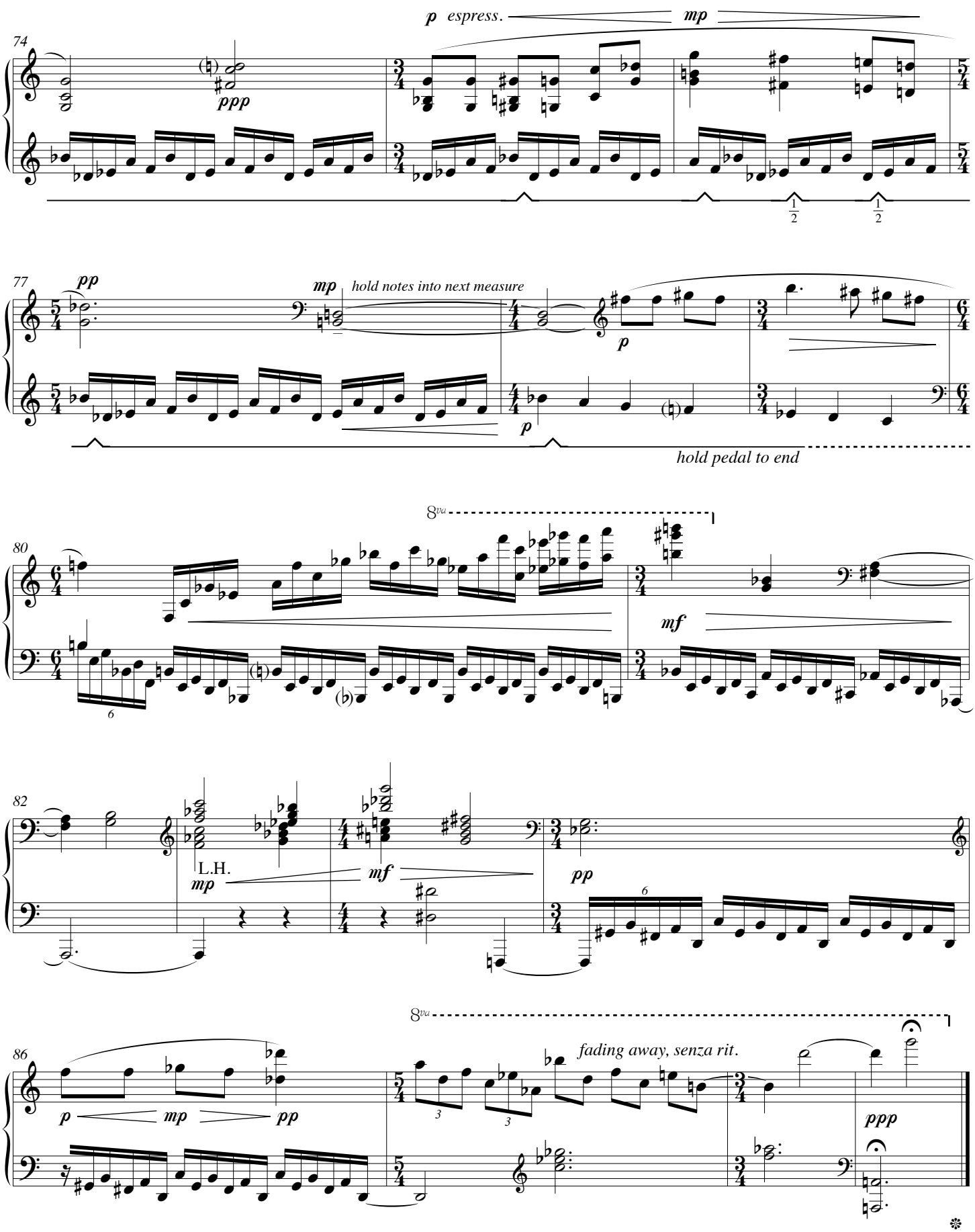

19
(8va)
mf
p
(loco)
21
mf
f
8va
hold ped. until m. 23
23
sfffz
(8va)
mp
mf
p
pp
mf
p
26
pp
p


27
pp
mp
28
molto espress., poco rubato
with luminous intensity
8va
mf
mf
tr
p
31
p
8va
mf
f
p
tr
r.h. p sempre
l.h. p sempre
p
mf
37
f
p
mf
espress.
tr
l.h. p
41
p
tr
f
tr
pp
mf
hold ped. until m. 53


44
mf
f
46
mp
f
8vb
48
ff
simultaneously collapsing and exploding
49
8va
gliss.
sffz
8vb
sffz
51
(8va)
mf
8va
8va
15ma
p

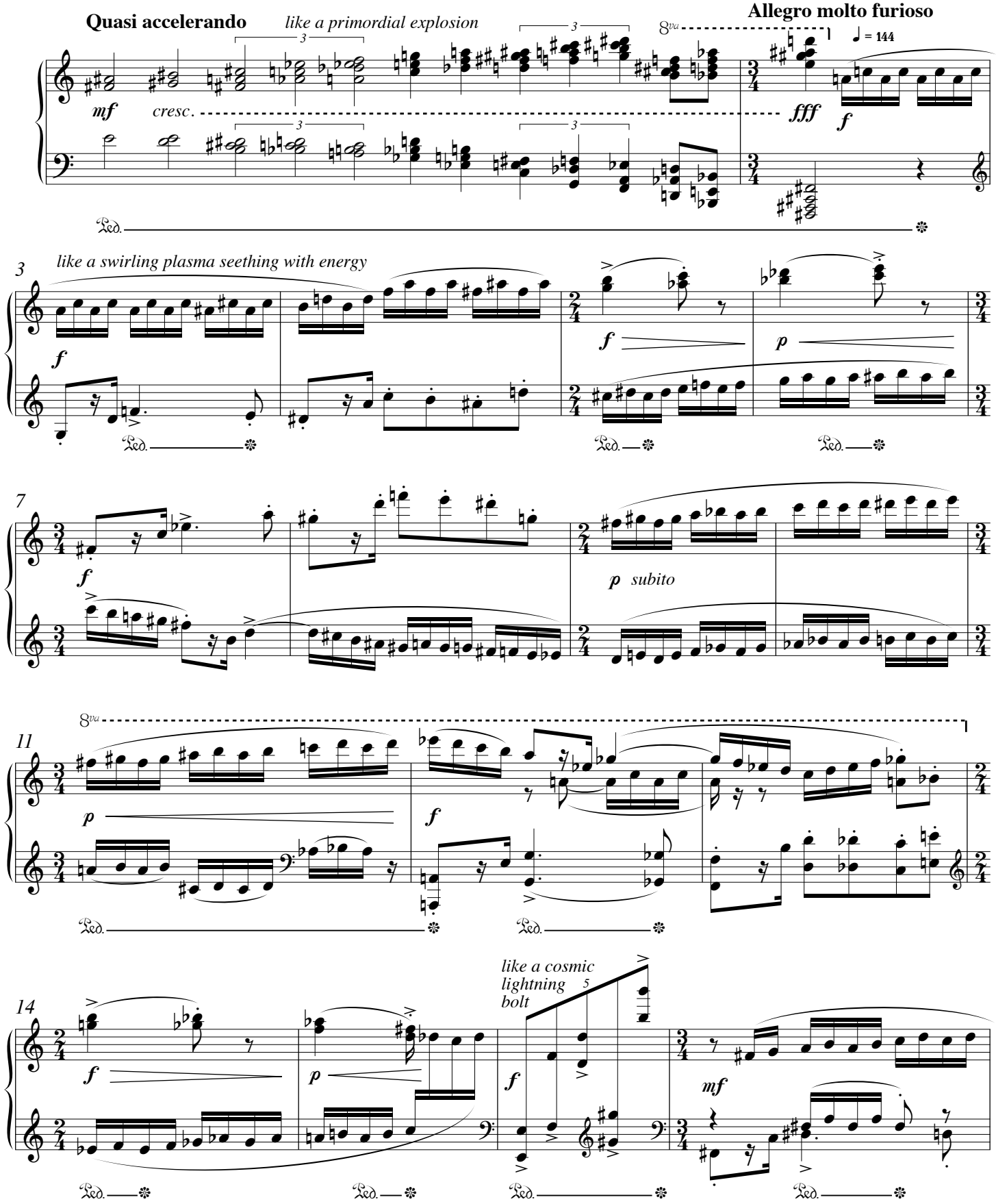

(15ma)
53
6
mf
(15ma)
55
p
gradually relax tempo to m. 66
(15ma)
57
r.h. pp sempre
pp
veiled
mp
(15ma)
8va
58
mp
p
p subito
pp
(8va)
60
r.h. p sempre
mp
p
pp
pp

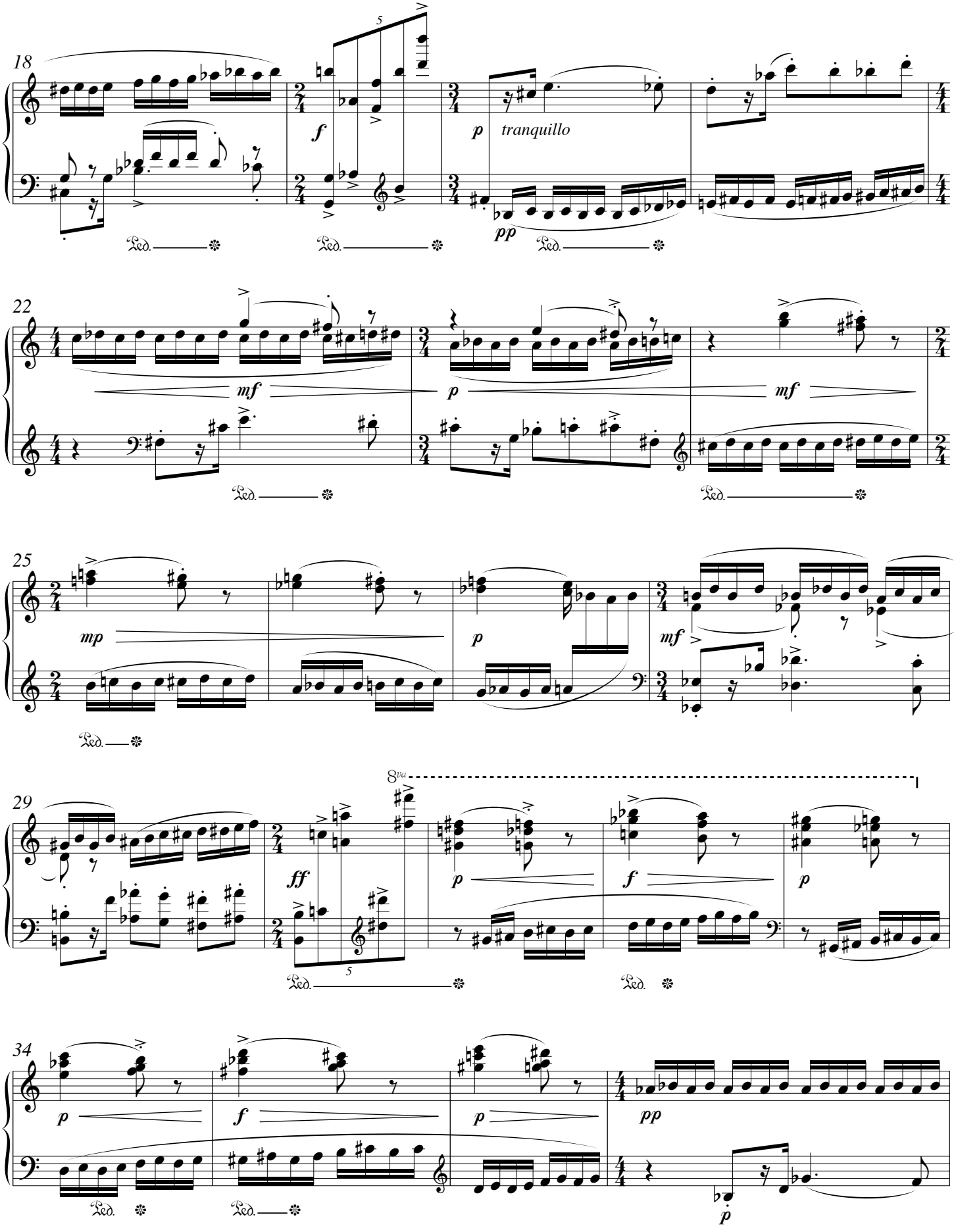

loco
62
mp
espress.
64
r.h. pp sempre
8va
p
ppp
8va
66
♩ = ca. 72 to end
p
(8va)
pp
(8va)
68
loco
pp
(8va)
pp
71
poco rit.
a tempo
mp
pp
ppp sempre

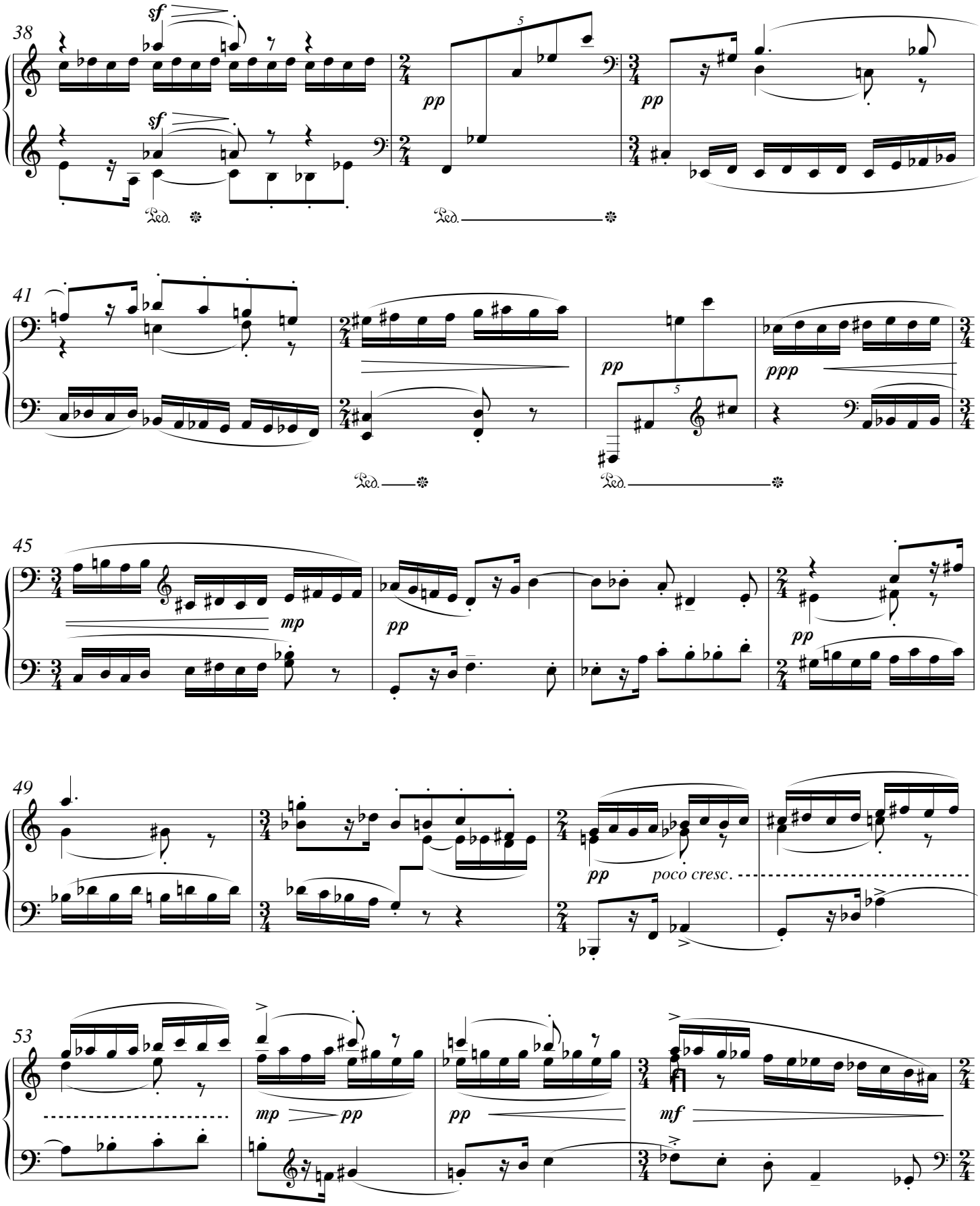

74
p espress.
mp
ppp
77
pp
mp
hold notes into next measure
p
p
hold pedal to end
8va
80
mf
6
82
L.H.
mp
mf
pp
6
8va
86
p
mp
pp
fading away, senza rit.
3
3
ppp

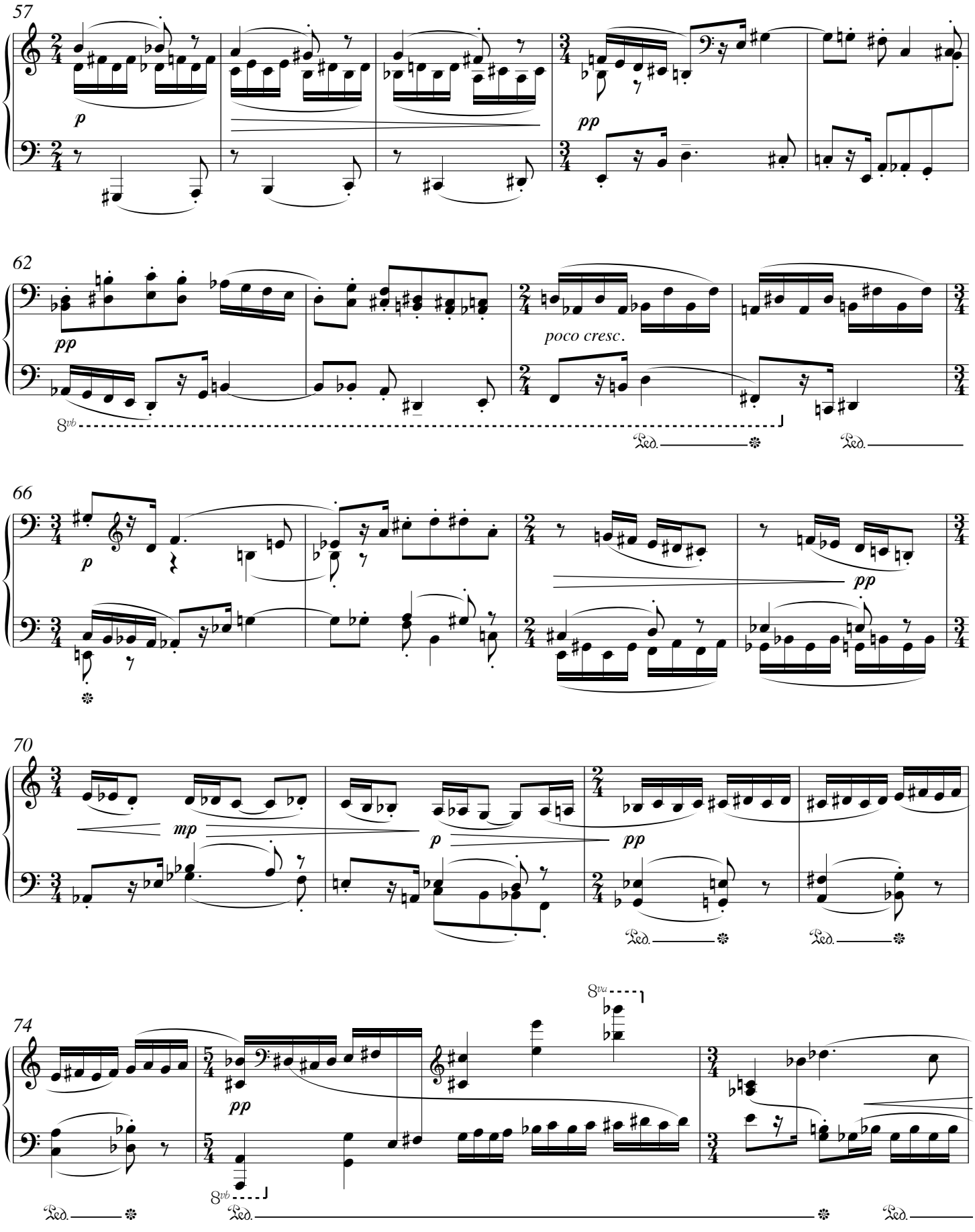
3. Energies

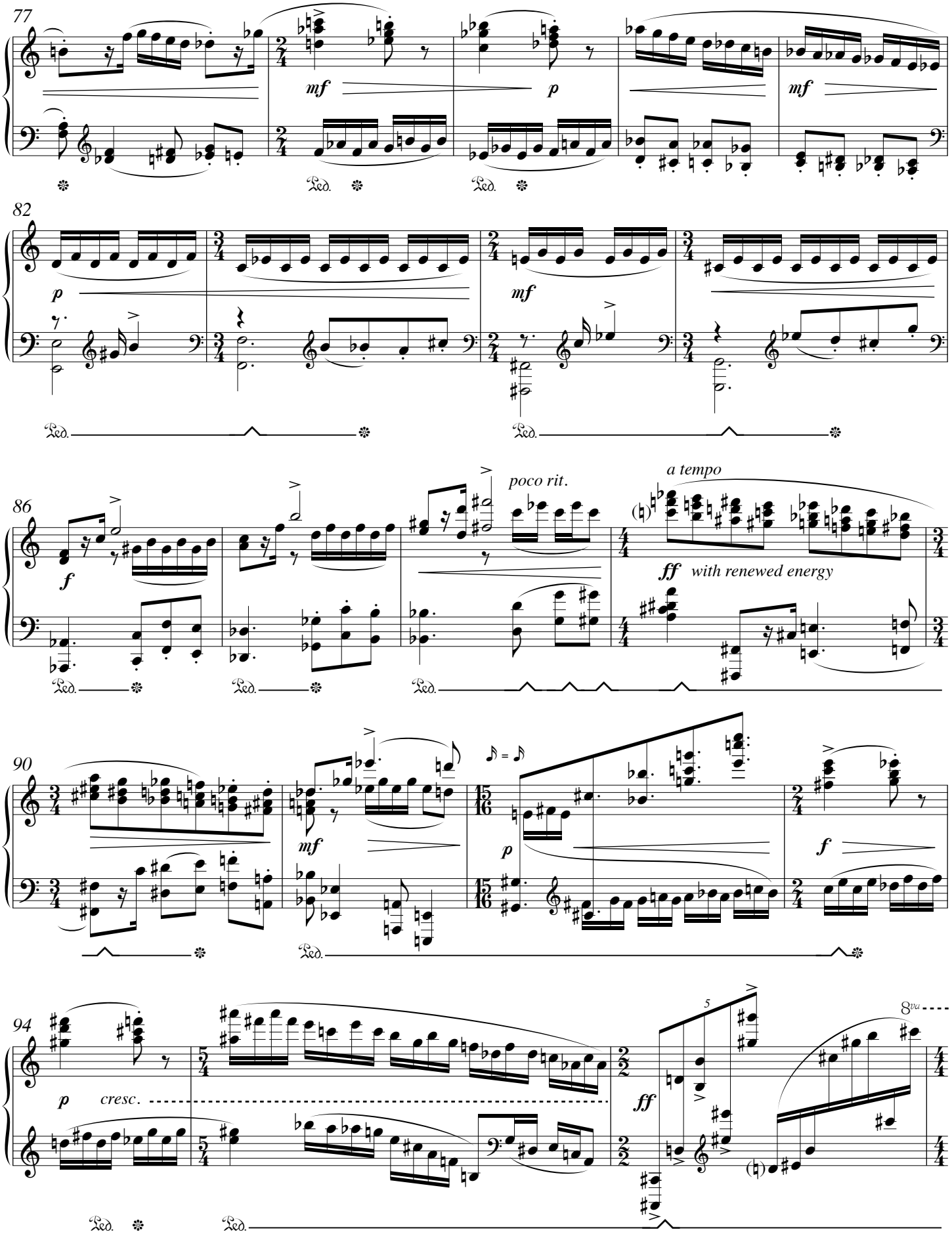
to my wife Edith

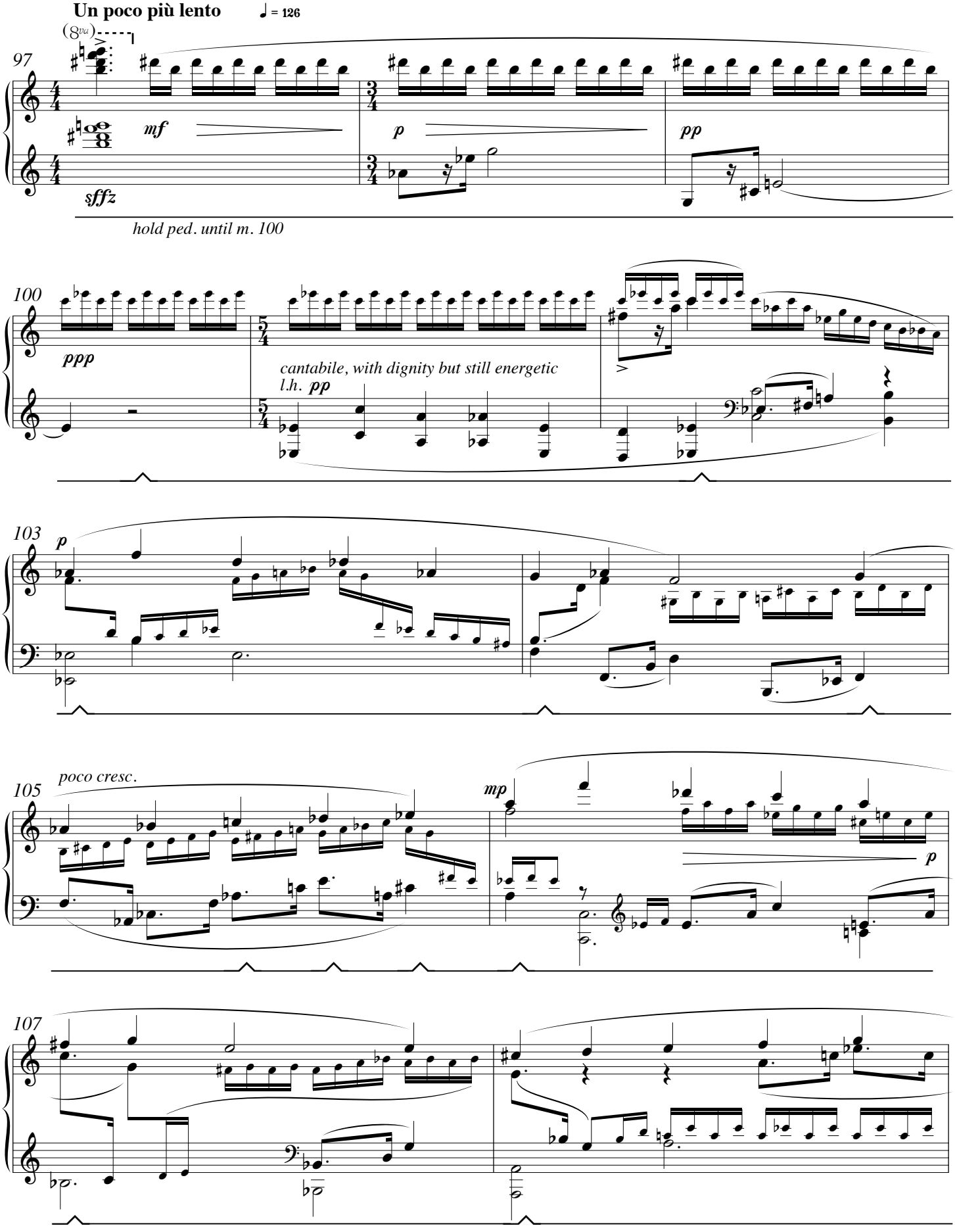


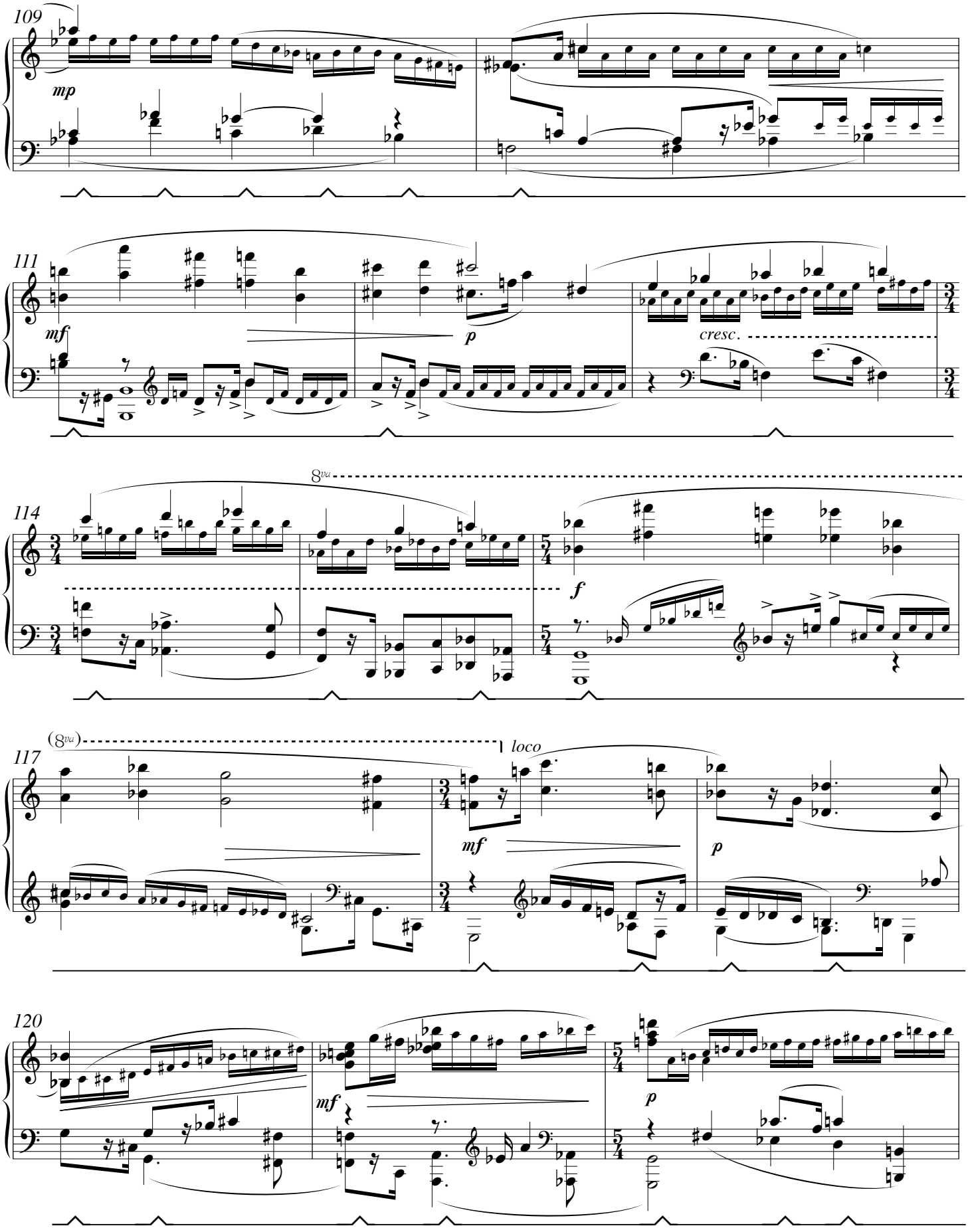

18
f
p
tranquillo
pp
22
mf
p
mf
25
mp
p
mf
29
8va
ff
p
f
p
34
p
f
p
pp
p

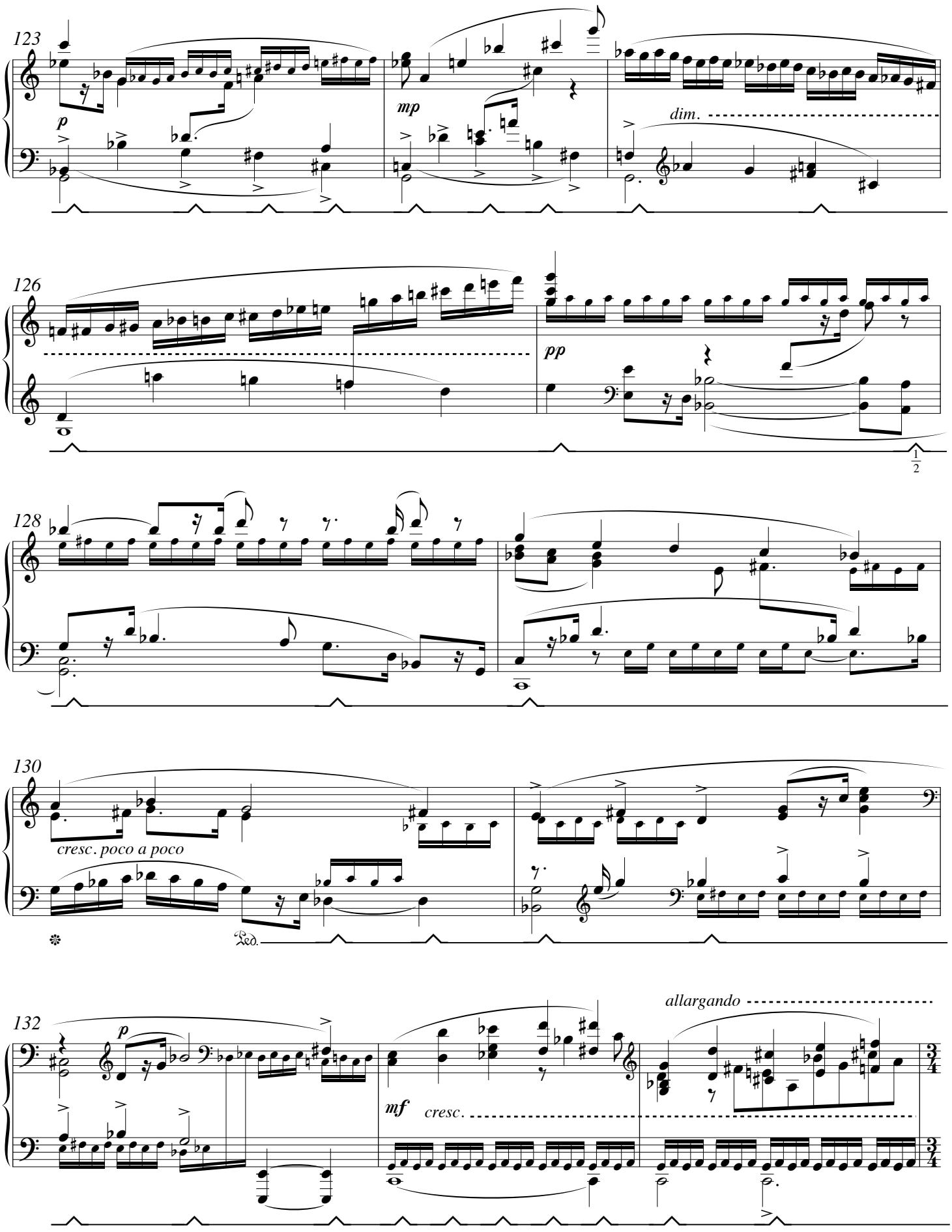

38
sf
sf
pp
pp
Ped.
Ped.
41
pp
ppp
Ped.
Ped.
45
mp
pp
pp
49
pp
poco cresc.
53
mp
pp
pp
mf

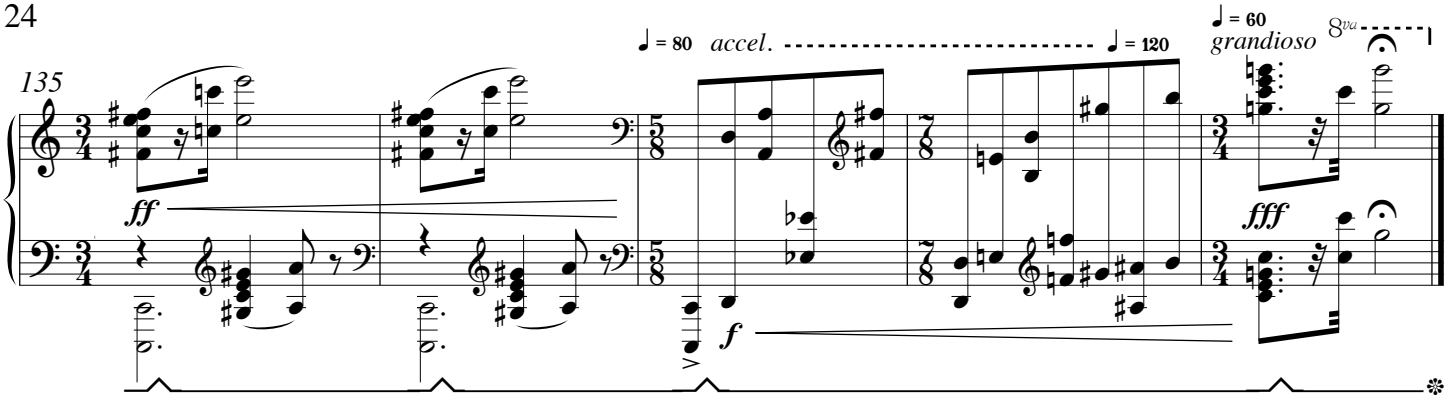

57
p
pp
62
pp
poco cresc.
8vb
Ped.
Ped.
66
p
pp
70
mp
p
pp
Ped.
Ped.
74
pp
8va
8vb
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


77
mf
p
mf
82
p
mf
86
f
poco rit.
a tempo
ff with renewed energy
90
mf
p
f
94
p cresc.
ff
8va


Un poco più lento
♩ = 126
(8va)
97
mf
sffz
p
pp
hold ped. until m. 100
100
ppp
cantabile, with dignity but still energetic
l.h. pp
103
p
105
poco cresc.
mp
p
107

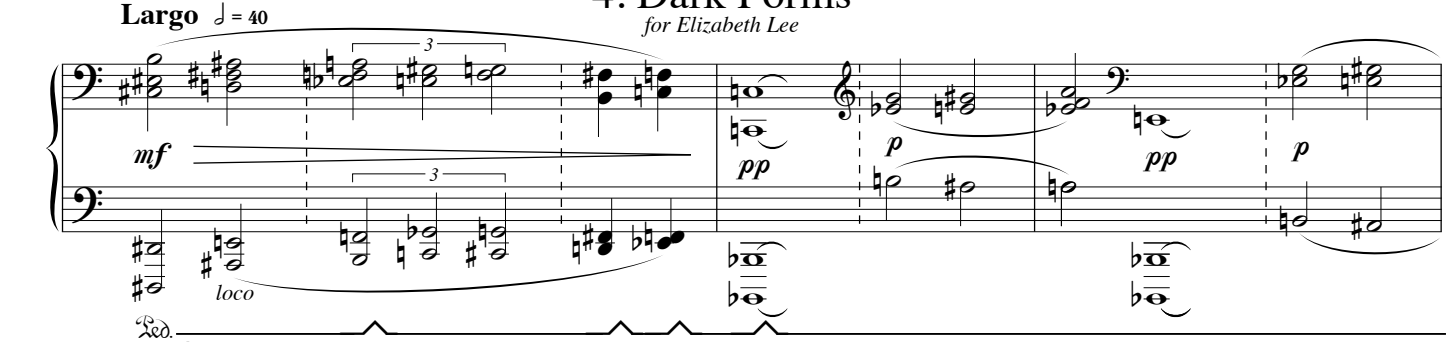

109
mp
111
mf
p
cresc.
114
8va
f
(8va)
117
loco
mf
p
120
mf
p

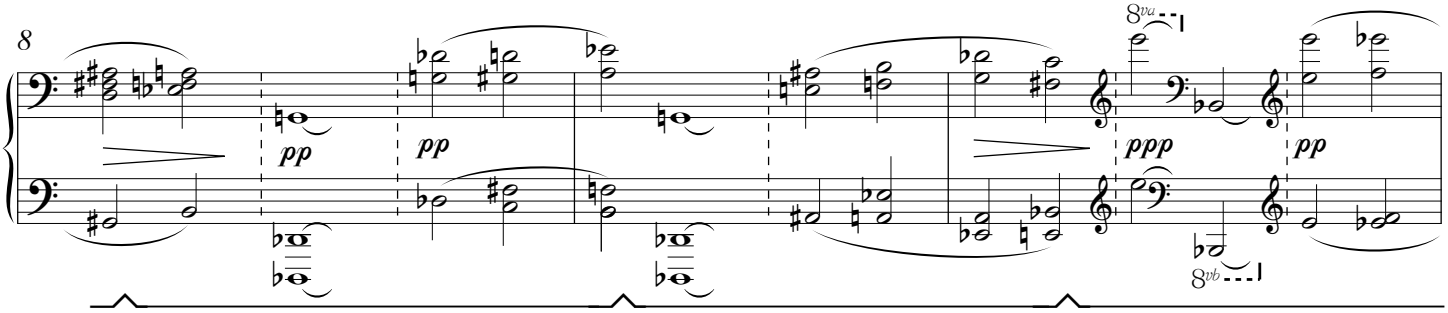

123
p
mp
dim.
126
pp
128
130
cresc. poco a poco
Ped.
132
p
mf
cresc.
allargando

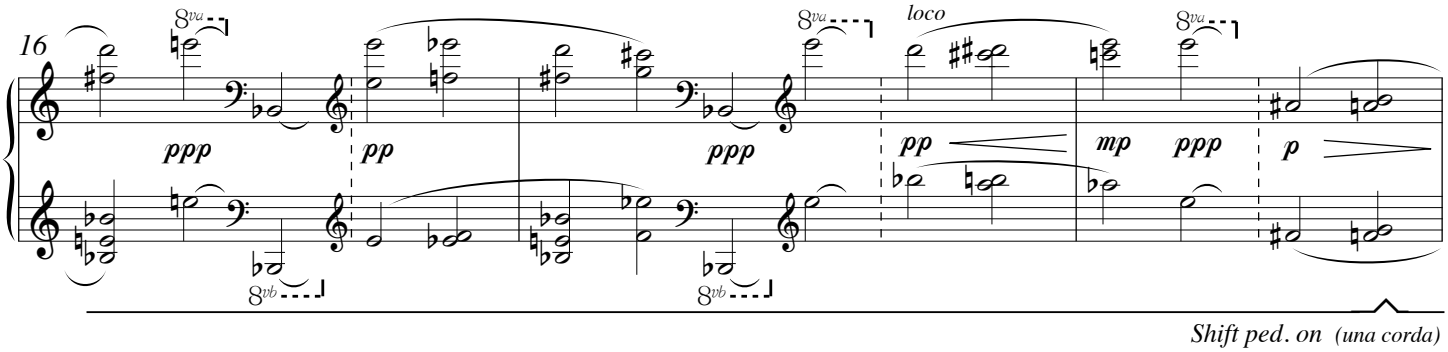


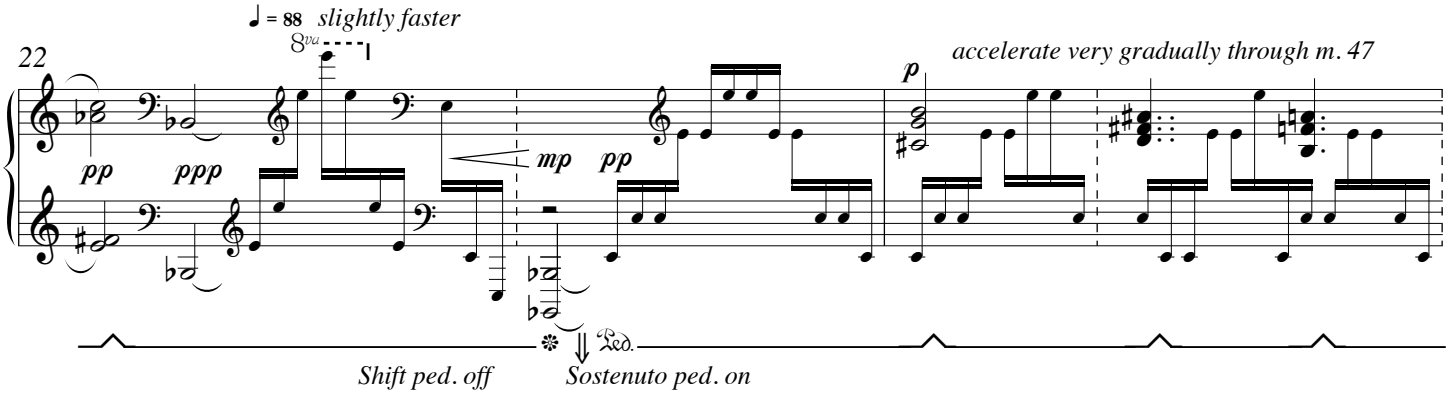
4. Dark Forms

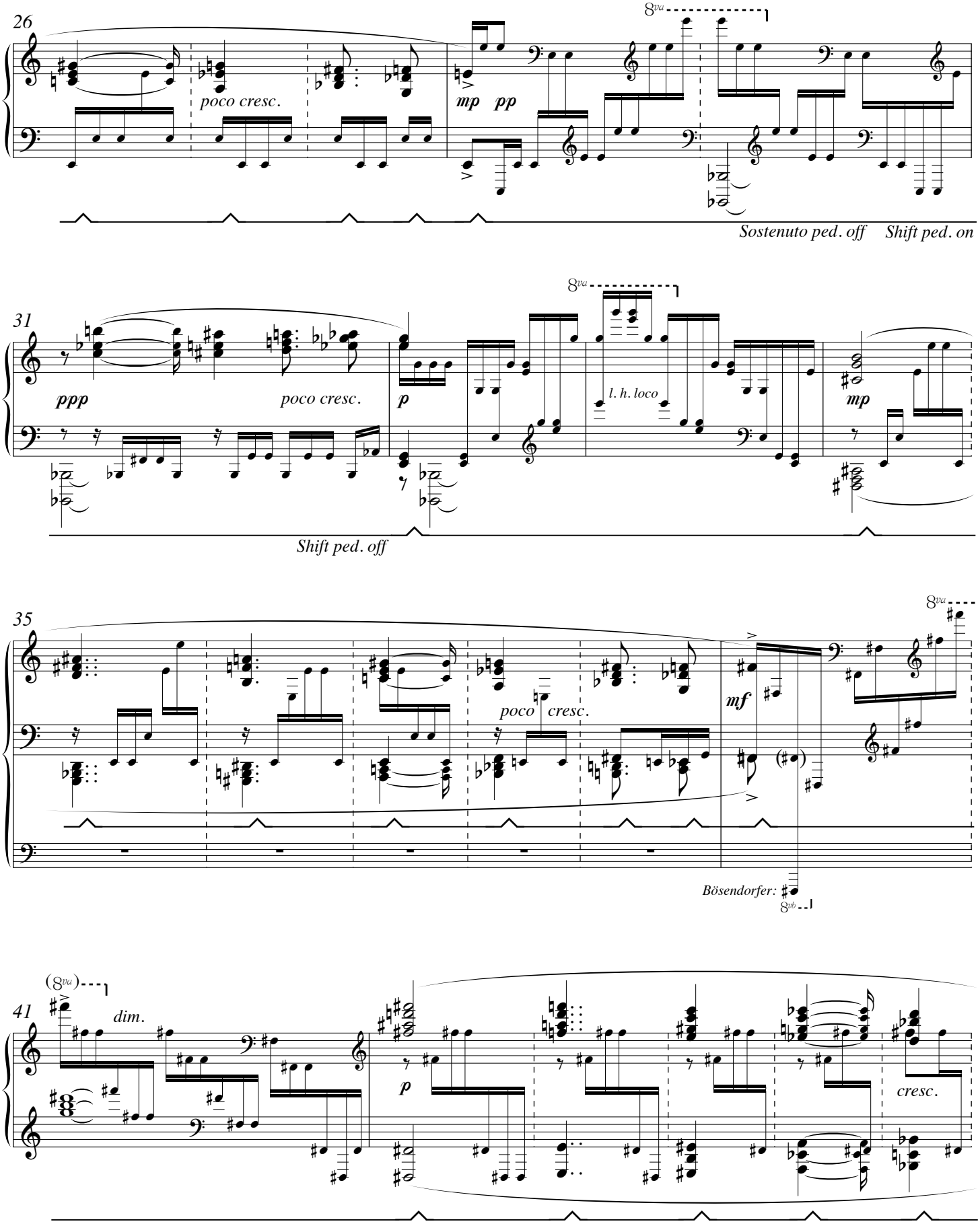
for Elizabeth Lee

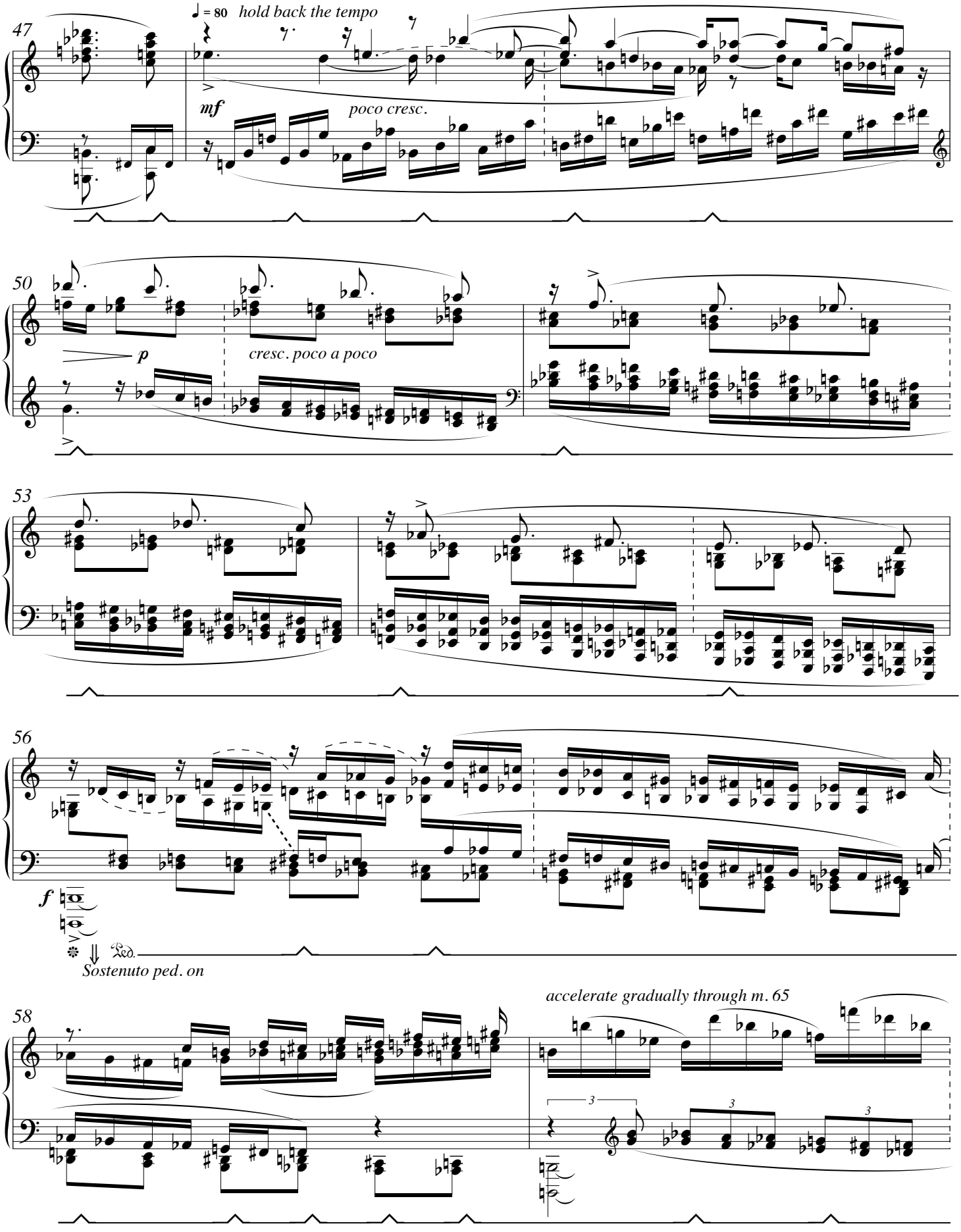


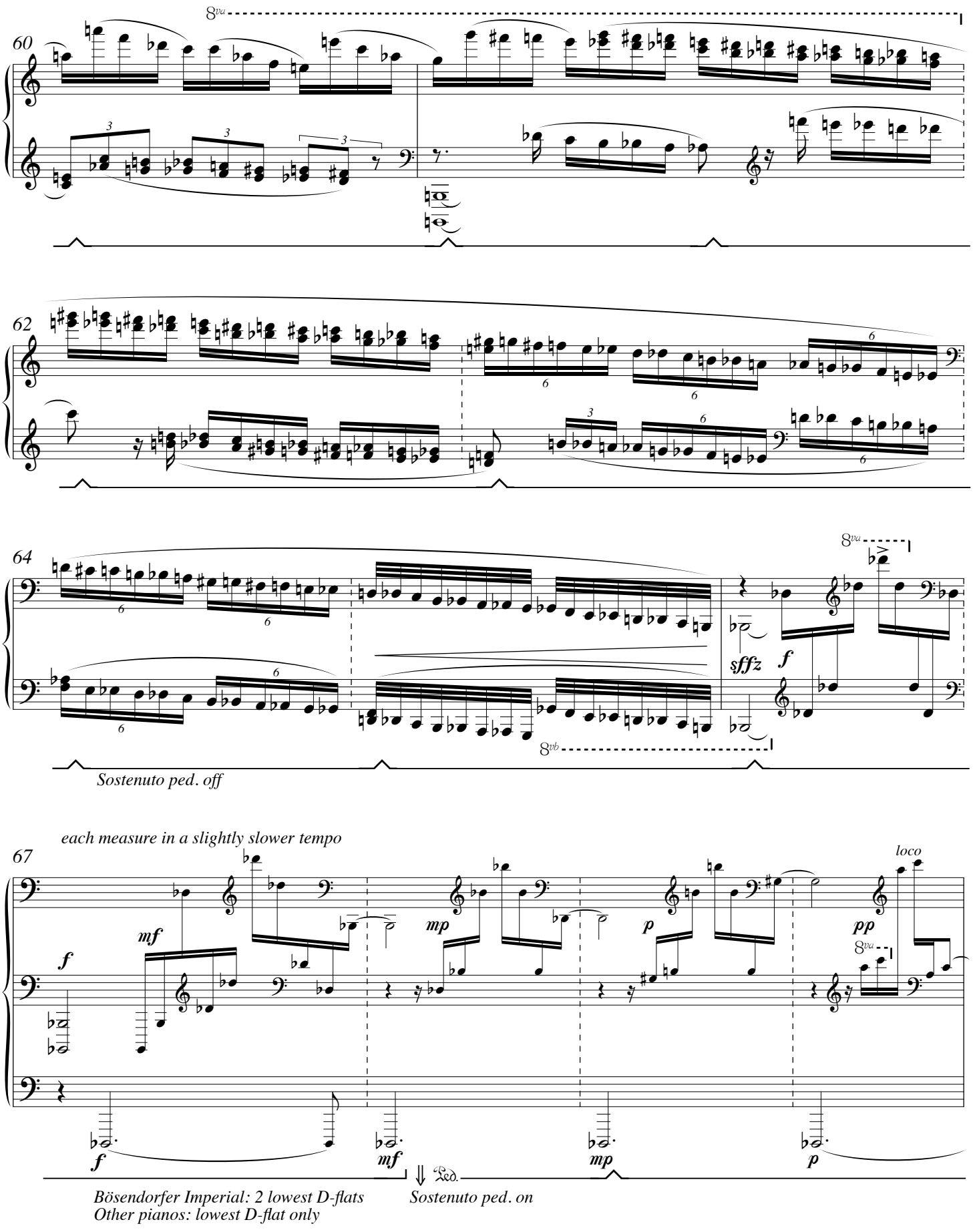


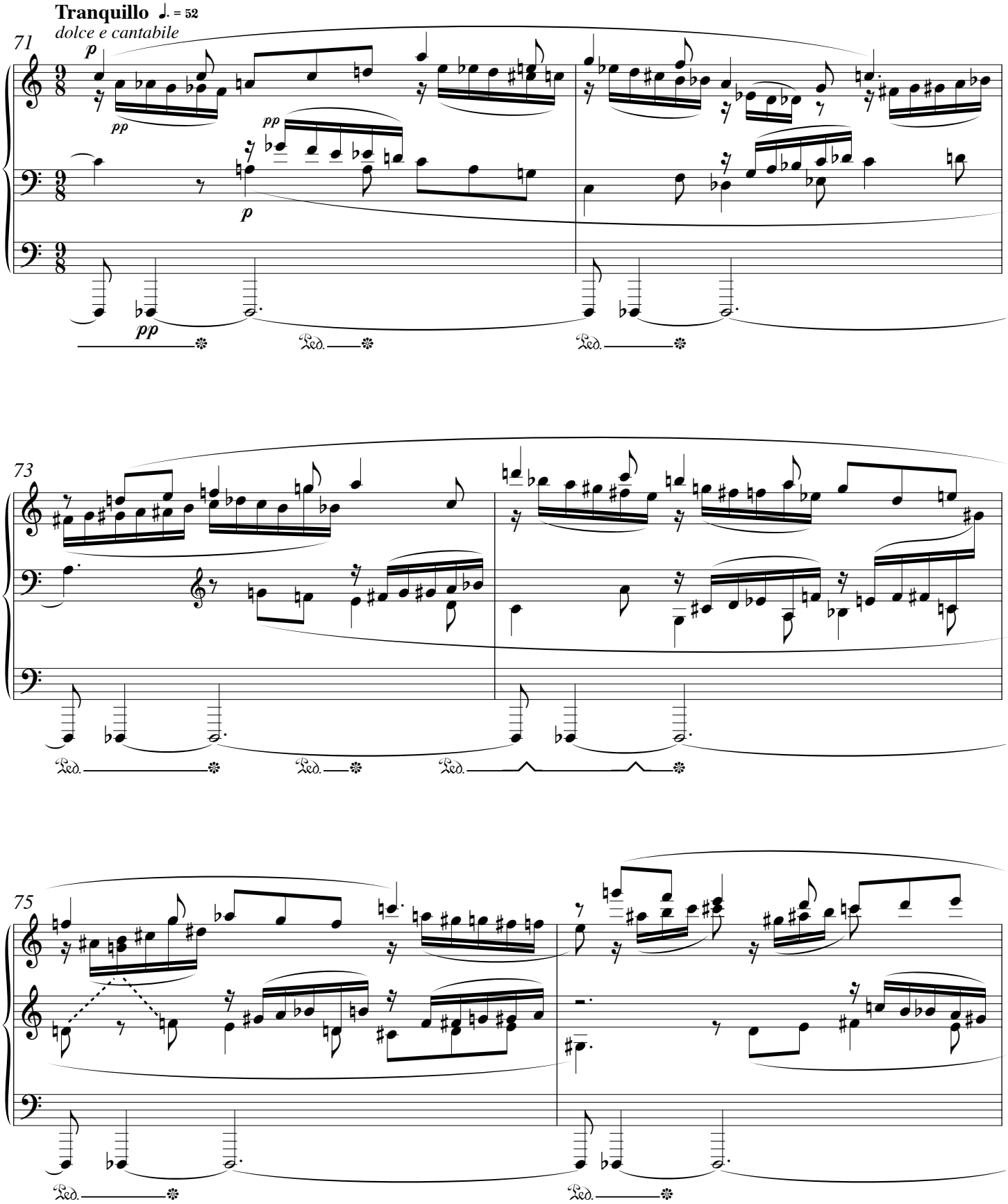


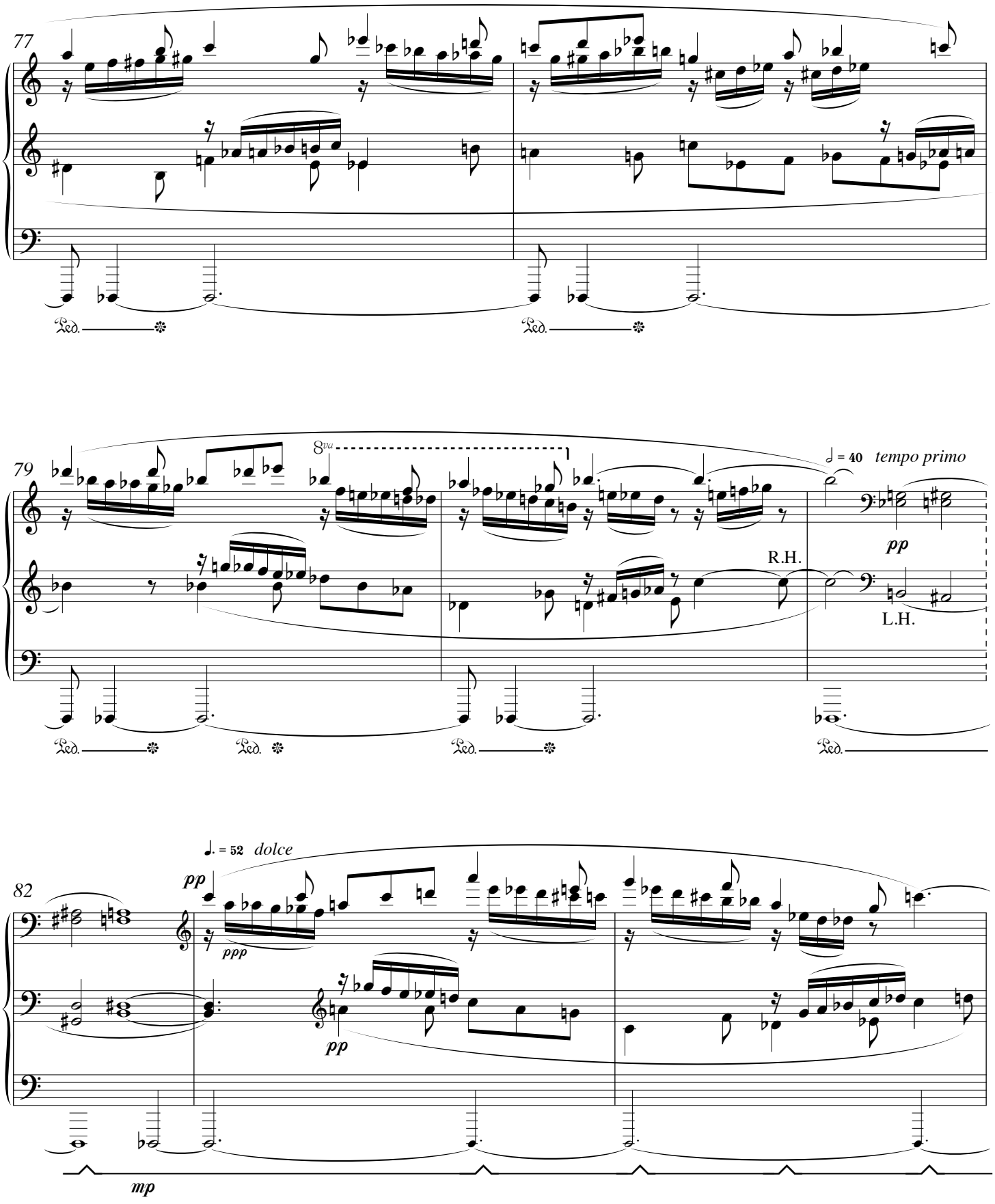


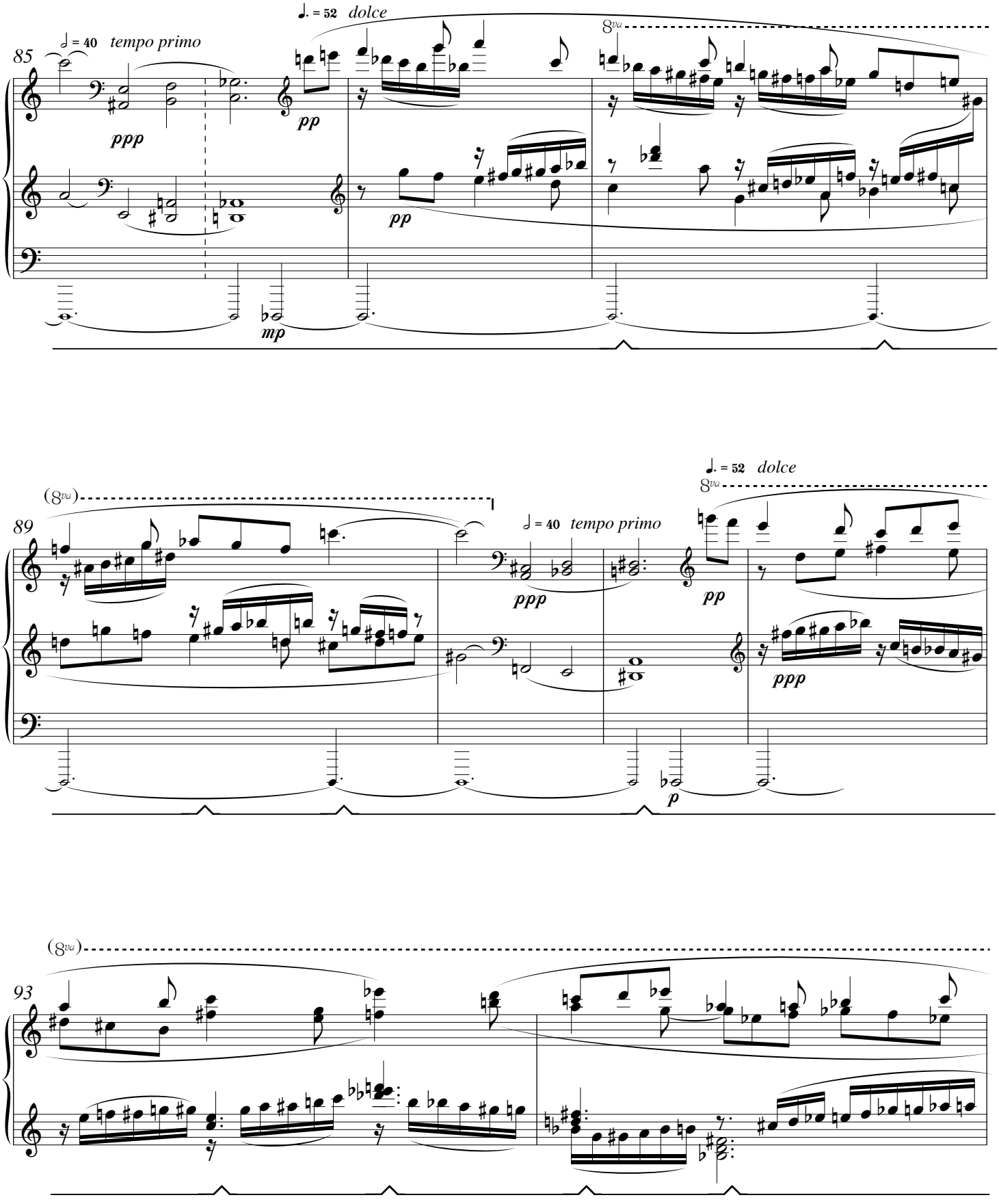

26
8va
poco cresc.
mp pp
Sostenuto ped. off Shift ped. on
31
8va
ppp
poco cresc.
p
l. h. loco
mp
Shift ped. off
35
8va
poco cresc.
mf
Bösendorfer:
8vb
41
(8va)
dim.
p
cresc.

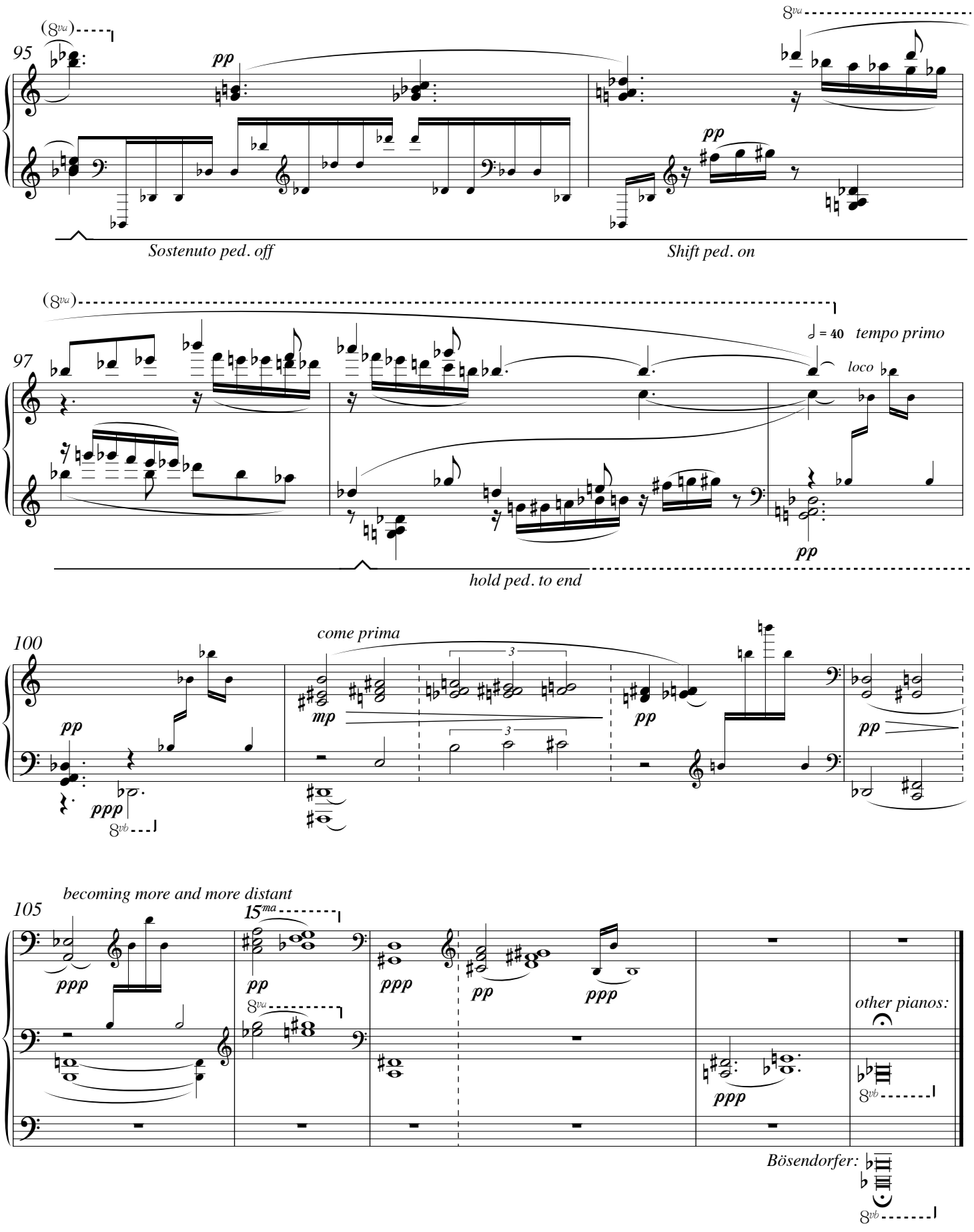

47
♩ = 80 hold back the tempo
mf
poco cresc.
50
p
cresc. poco a poco
53
56
f
Sostenuto ped. on
58
accelerate gradually through m. 65


60
8va
62
64
8va
sffz
f
8vb
Sostenuto ped. off
each measure in a slightly slower tempo
67
loco
f
mf
mp
p
pp
8va
f
mf
mp
p
Ped.
Bösendorfer Imperial: 2 lowest D-flats
Other pianos: lowest D-flat only
Sostenuto ped. on


Tranquillo ♩. = 52
dolce e cantabile
71
73
75


77
79
8va
♩ = 40 tempo primo
pp
R.H.
L.H.
82
♩. = 52 dolce
pp
ppp
pp
mp


85
♩. = 52 dolce
𝅗𝅥 = 40 tempo primo
8va
ppp
pp
pp
mp
(8va)
89
♩. = 52 dolce
8va
𝅗𝅥 = 40 tempo primo
ppp
pp
ppp
p
(8va)
93


95
(8va)
8va
pp
pp
Sostenuto ped. off
Shift ped. on
97
(8va)
♩ = 40 tempo primo
loco
pp
hold ped. to end
100
come prima
pp
mp
pp
pp
ppp
8vb
3
3
105
becoming more and more distant
15ma
ppp
pp
8va
ppp
pp
ppp
ppp
other pianos:
8vb
Bösendorfer:
8vb