STILL HERE

for B♭ clarinet and piano

(2022)

JONATHAN RUSSELL

STILL HERE
for B♭ clarinet and piano

by Jonathan Russell

PROGRAM NOTE:

It's the evening of February 25th, 2022. In the darkness, a grainy 30-second selfie video of five men on the streets of Kiev: "Good evening to all" says the gravelly voice of the man in front, holding the phone. "The leader of the bloc is here. The head of the President's office is here. Prime Minister Schmyhal is here. Podoliak is here. The President is here. We are all here. The soldiers are here, the citizens are here, and we are here….We defend our independence. Glory to our defenders, glory to Ukraine." No press conference. No soaring rhetoric. No lectern or flag or presidential seal. Just a 30-second video calmly stating the only fact that mattered in that moment: We Are Here. Still Here.

That video and its message became the inspiration for this composition. Like millions around the world, I was deeply moved by Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky's calm resolve and courage, rallying his people – and the world – in the face of unprovoked Russian aggression. As I worked on the piece, I thought about this idea of "Still Here" and everything it represents. It is the rallying cry of any marginalized group that refuses, against all odds, to be destroyed or forgotten. I thought of my own Jewish ancestry and the generations upon generations who endured discrimination, expulsions, pogroms, and genocide, but who nonetheless continued to assert: We Are Still Here. Our people, our religion, our culture: Still Here. I thought of the dehumanizing institution of slavery in my own country and the extraordinary resilience of African-Americans who, through generations of violence and oppression, continued to assert through culture, religion, music: We Are Here. Still Here. I thought of how, even today in the United States, there is an ongoing attempt to effectively legislate LGBTQ people out of existence. It will not and cannot succeed. Because our LGBTQ brothers and sisters are here. They have always been here. They will always be here. Still Here. And on a more personal note, every act of artistic creation is in some sense a statement of "Still Here." It asserts for all time that this person, this being, this soul existed. Even long after I am gone, some small shred of my soul will persist in the music I leave behind. Still Here.

Still Here is scored for B-flat clarinet and piano, and is in four movements. Movement 1 is inspired most directly by the Zelensky video. It begins with solo clarinet on its lowest note (E) slowly spinning out a mournful, stately, insistent melody. Piano enters, quiet and spare at first, and both voices gradually grow in confidence and intensity. It builds to a searing high note in the clarinet, before plummeting once more to the low E and ending quietly, questioning. It is sombre, yet also defiant, like Zelensky in the video. Still Here.

Movement 2 interrupts with a racing scherzo. Towards the middle, a klezmer tune nearly breaks out, and then the movement 1 theme returns, but now bopping along over a funky bass line. At first, I struggled to accept the more dance-y, playful, even humorous music that seemed to want to be part of this piece. But then I read an article about the thriving stand-up comedy scene in Ukraine, and thought about the rich comedic tradition in my own Jewish heritage. I realized that part of the idea of "Still Here" is proclaiming that we will not merely survive, but we will live fully. We will experience joy and love and laughter, despite our sorrows and oppression.

Movement 3 is a respite, a simple love song, tinged with nostalgia.

A brief clarinet cadenza then leads directly into movement 4, a rollicking klezmer tune marked "defiantly joyful." After building to a climax, the movement 2 theme returns, leading into a dramatic return of the movement 1 melody, now played with even greater intensity. The piece ends with the clarinet back on the same low E that began the whole piece, now played five consecutive times at top volume, while the piano bangs out the main theme one last time. With that defiantly fortissimo low E, the clarinet proclaims again what it has been proclaiming from the beginning of the piece, what Zelensky proclaimed in that video, and what generations of marginalized and oppressed peoples have proclaimed throughout history: We Are Still Here.

This work was generously commissioned by a consortium of 52 clarinetists. I am deeply grateful to every single one of them for believing in the vision of this piece and coming along on the journey. The members of the consortium are:

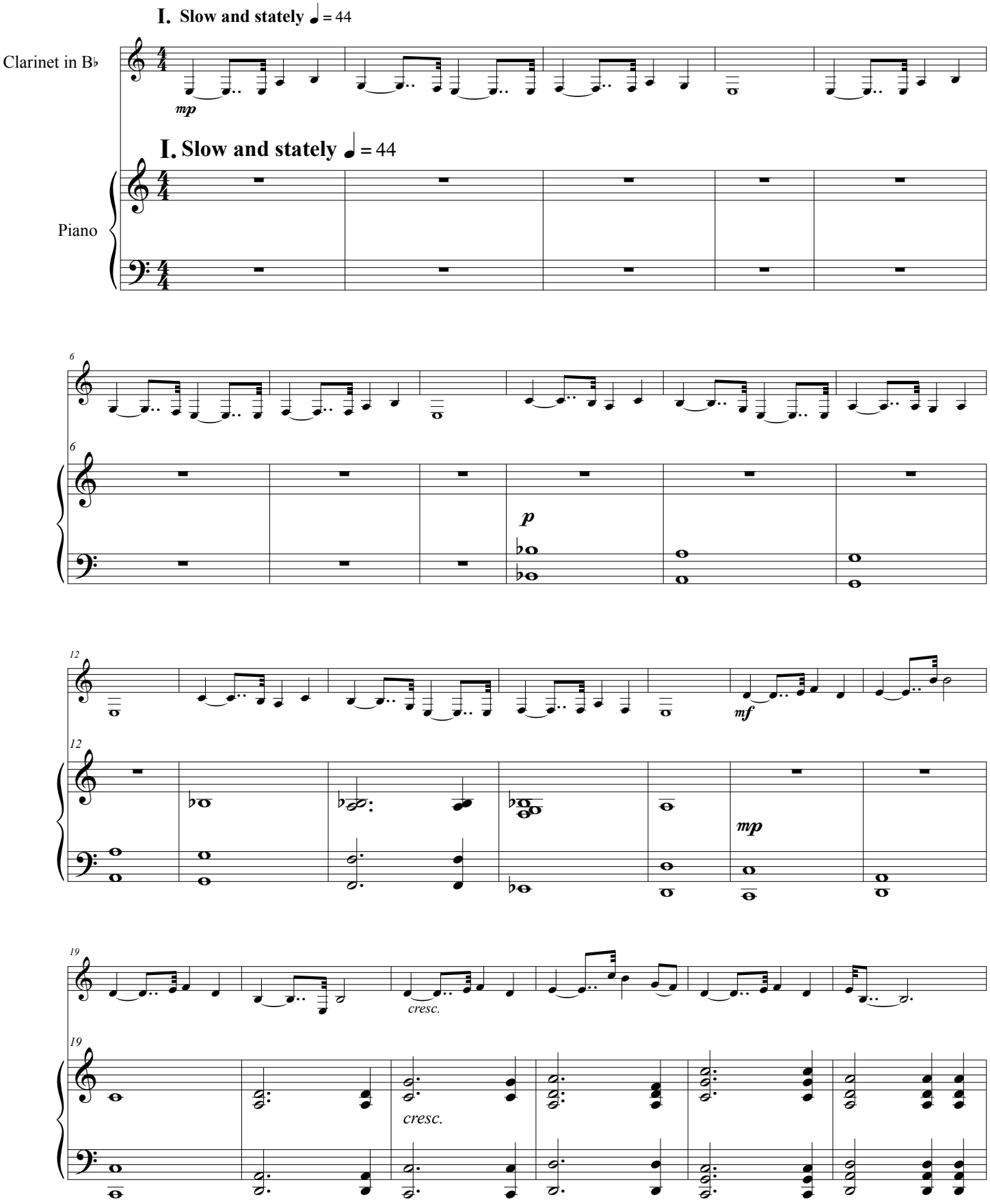
Alan Kay, Annie Phillips, Benjamin Mitchell, Brittany Barry, Bruce Belton, Christin Hablewitz, Christopher Nichols, Christy Banks, Debbie Rawson, Diane Barger, Dickson Grimes, Digital Clarinet Academy, Eva Tartaglia, Gary Gorczyca, Gracie Barrett, Jack Liang, Jackie Glazier, Jason Marquez, Jeremy Ruth, Jeremy Wohletz, Jo-Ann Sternberg, Joel Russell, Jonathan Aubrey, Josh Woods, Joshua Gardner, Julie Stuckenschneider, Katie Kimmel, Katie Ravenwood, Kim Fullerton, Laura Ramsey Russell, Leslie Moreau, Lynne Snyder, Macey Campobello, Marcy Bacon, Margalit Patry-Martin, Margaret Thornhill, Marguerite Levin, Mariam Adam, Nathan Soric, Peter Hansen, Ralph Skiano, Robert Spring, Shengwen Wu, Stefanie Gardner, Stephanie Grubbs, Stephen White, Tara Glaspey, Tim Sutfin, Timothy Bonenfant, Victor Drescher, Vince Dominguez / Claire Annette, and Wolcott Humphrey.

Piano Score

Still Here

Commissioned by a consortium of 52 clarinetists

Jonathan Russell



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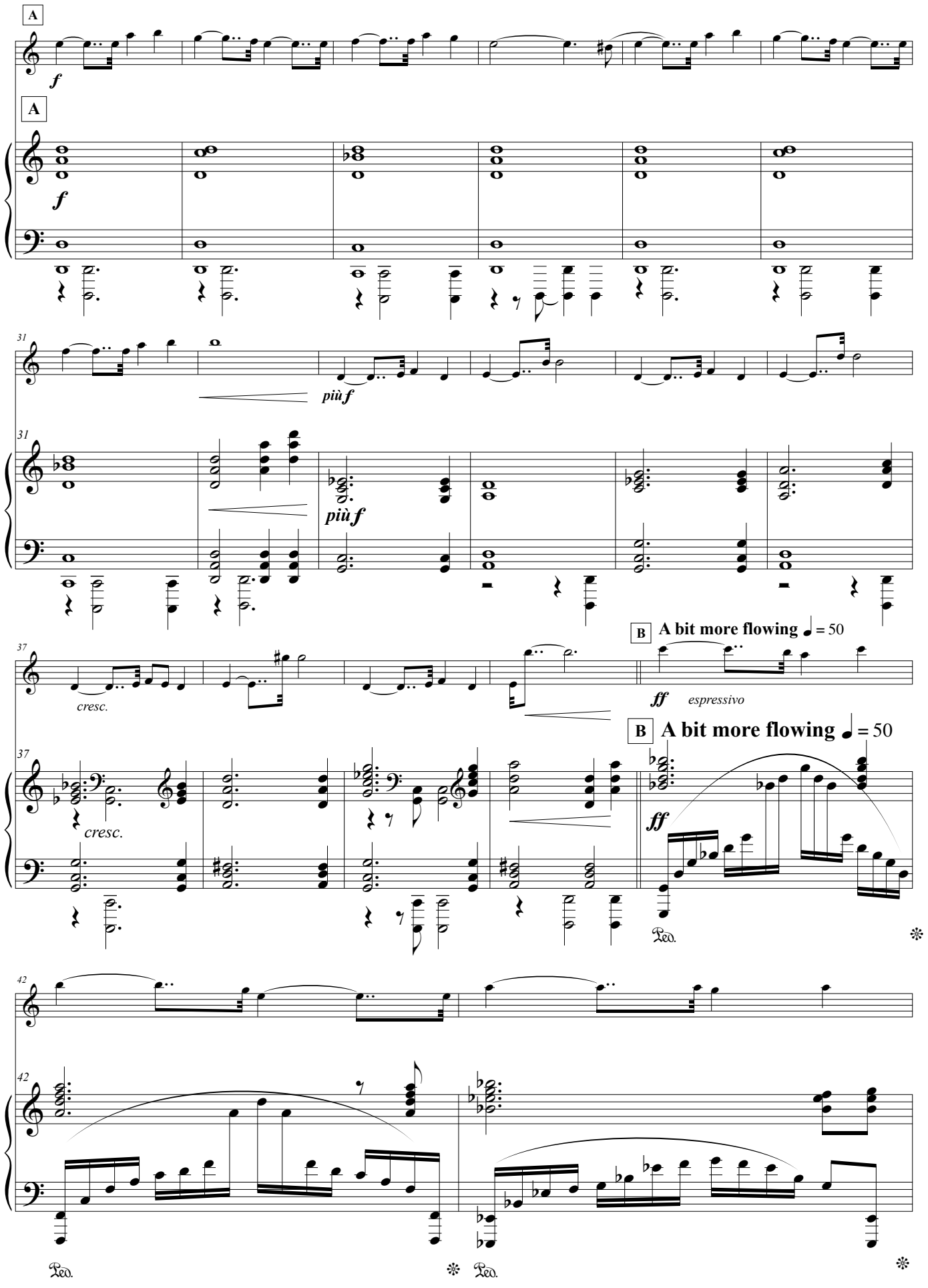
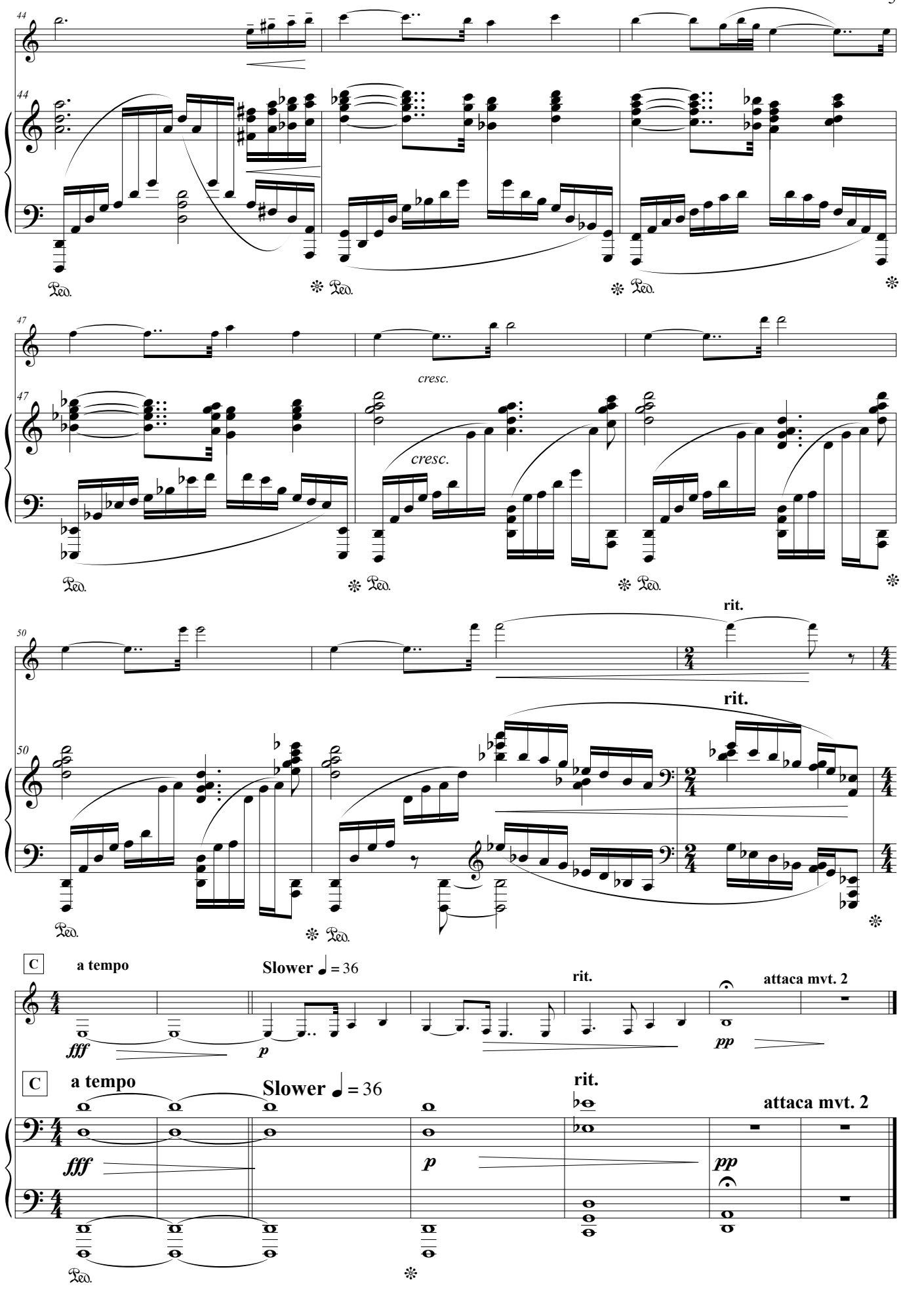
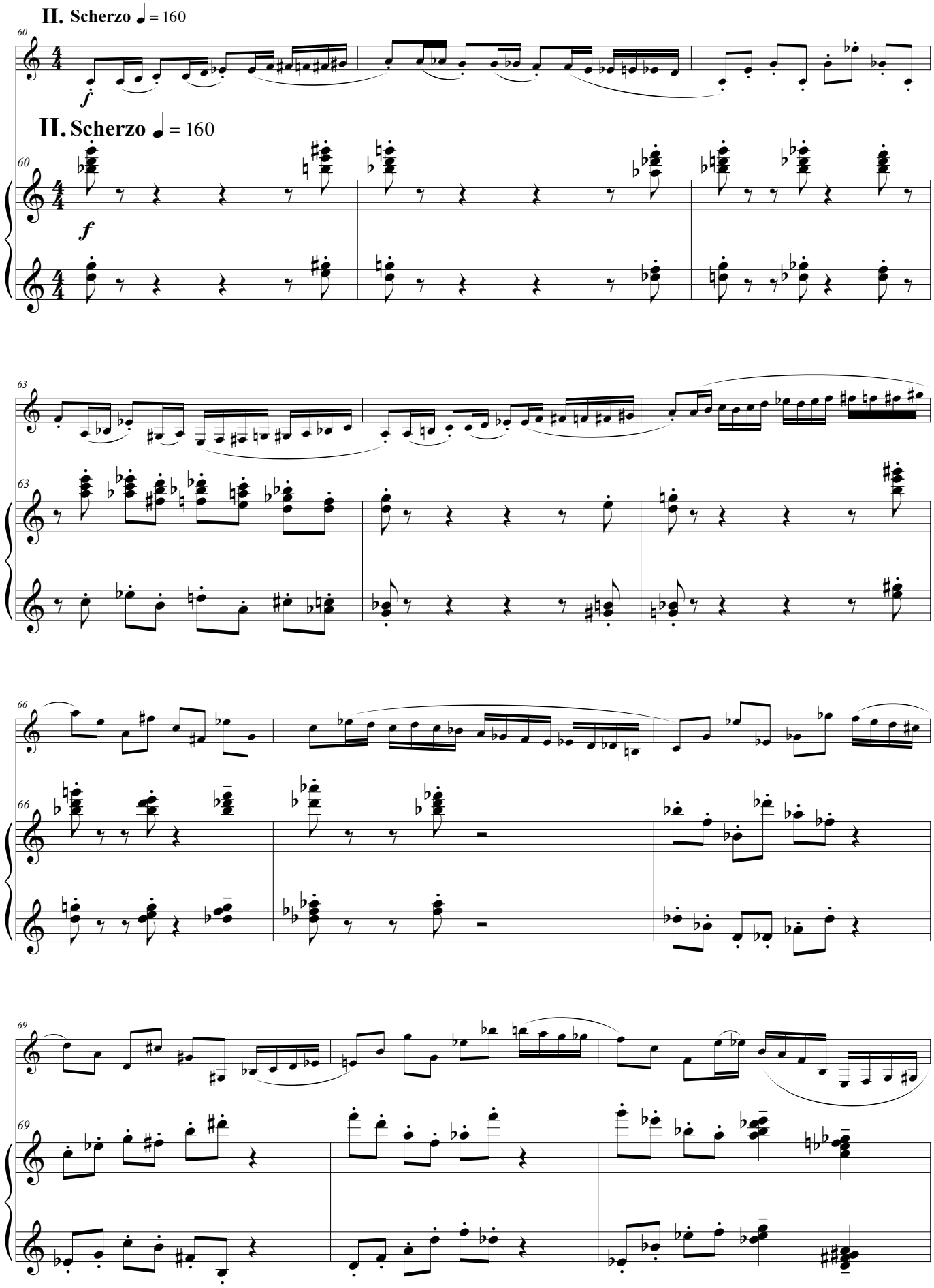
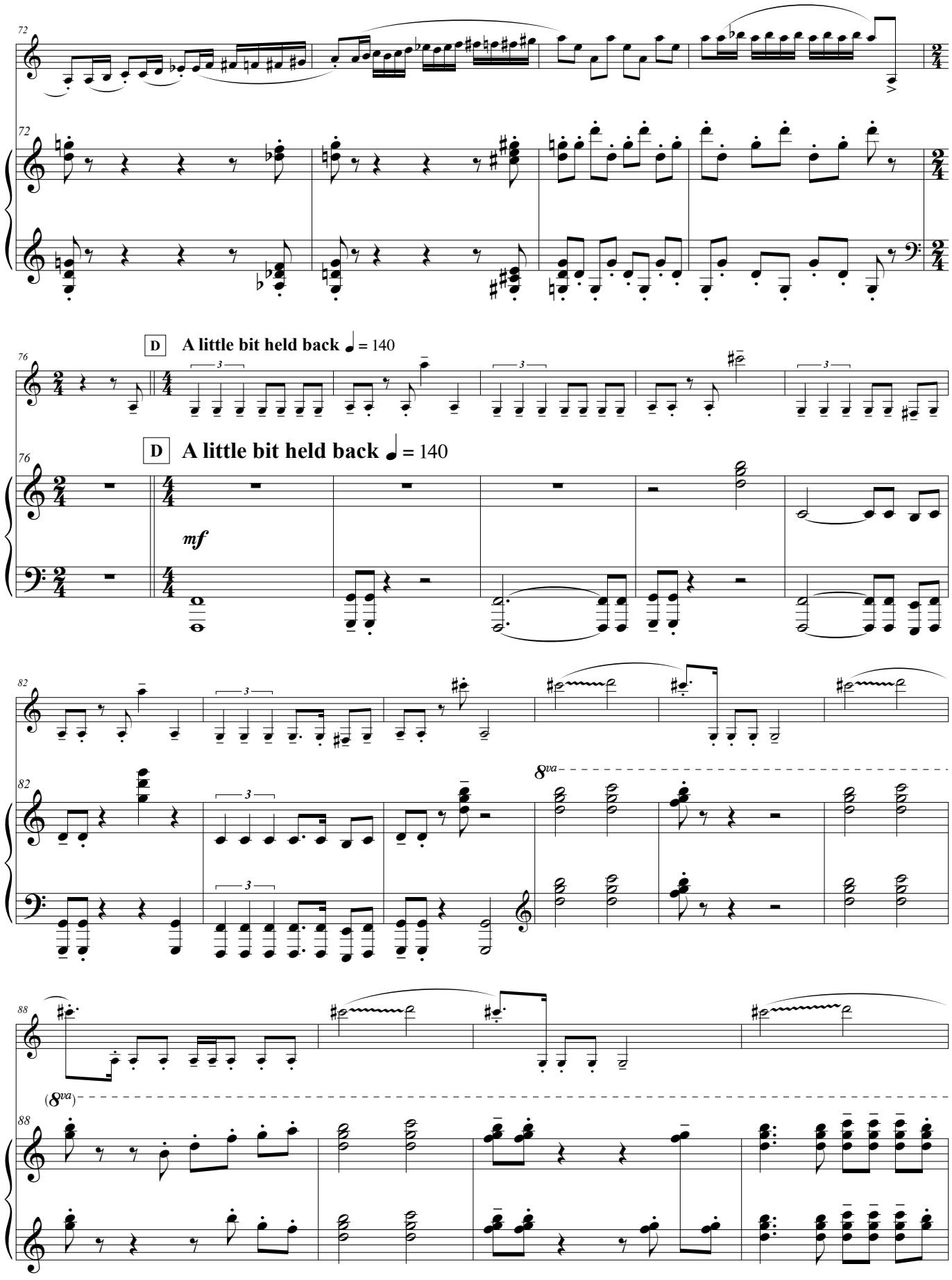
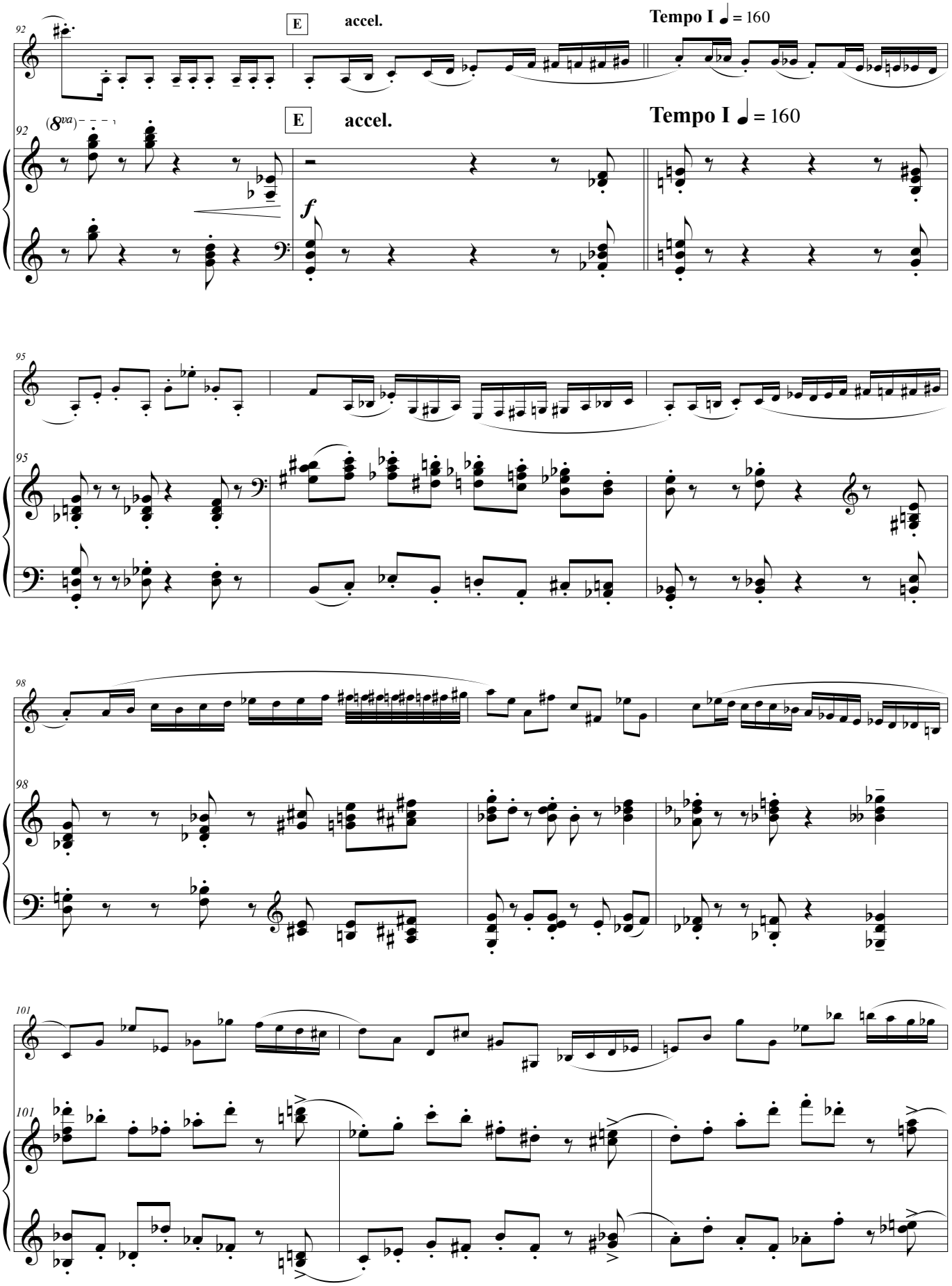
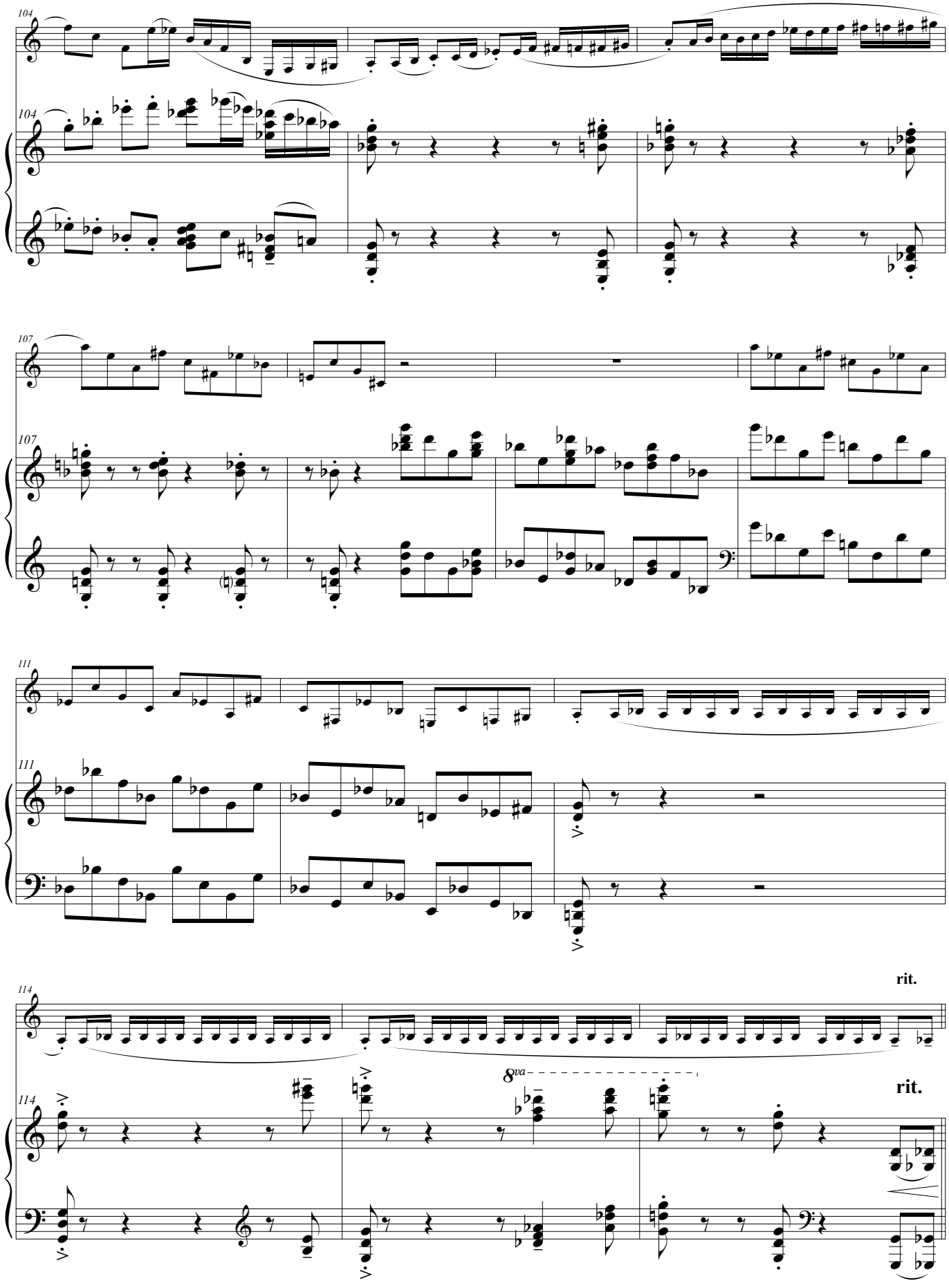

A
f
A
f
31
più f
31
più f
37
cresc.
B
A bit more flowing ♩ = 50
ff
espressivo
37
cresc.
B
A bit more flowing ♩ = 50
ff
Ped.
42
42
Ped.
Ped.

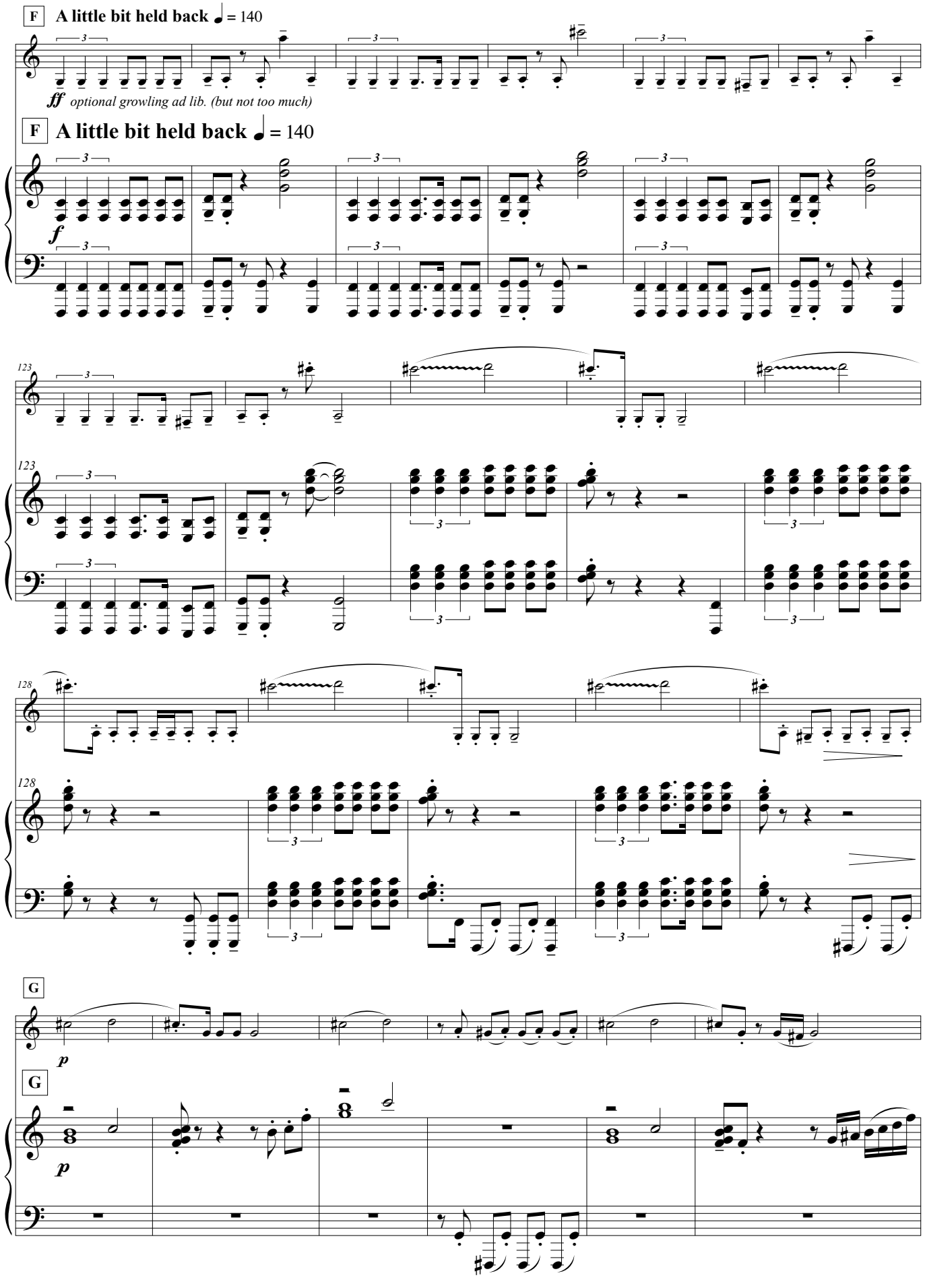

44
Ped.
47
cresc.
cresc.
50
rit.
rit.
C
a tempo
Slower ♩ = 36
rit.
attaca mvt. 2
fff
p
pp

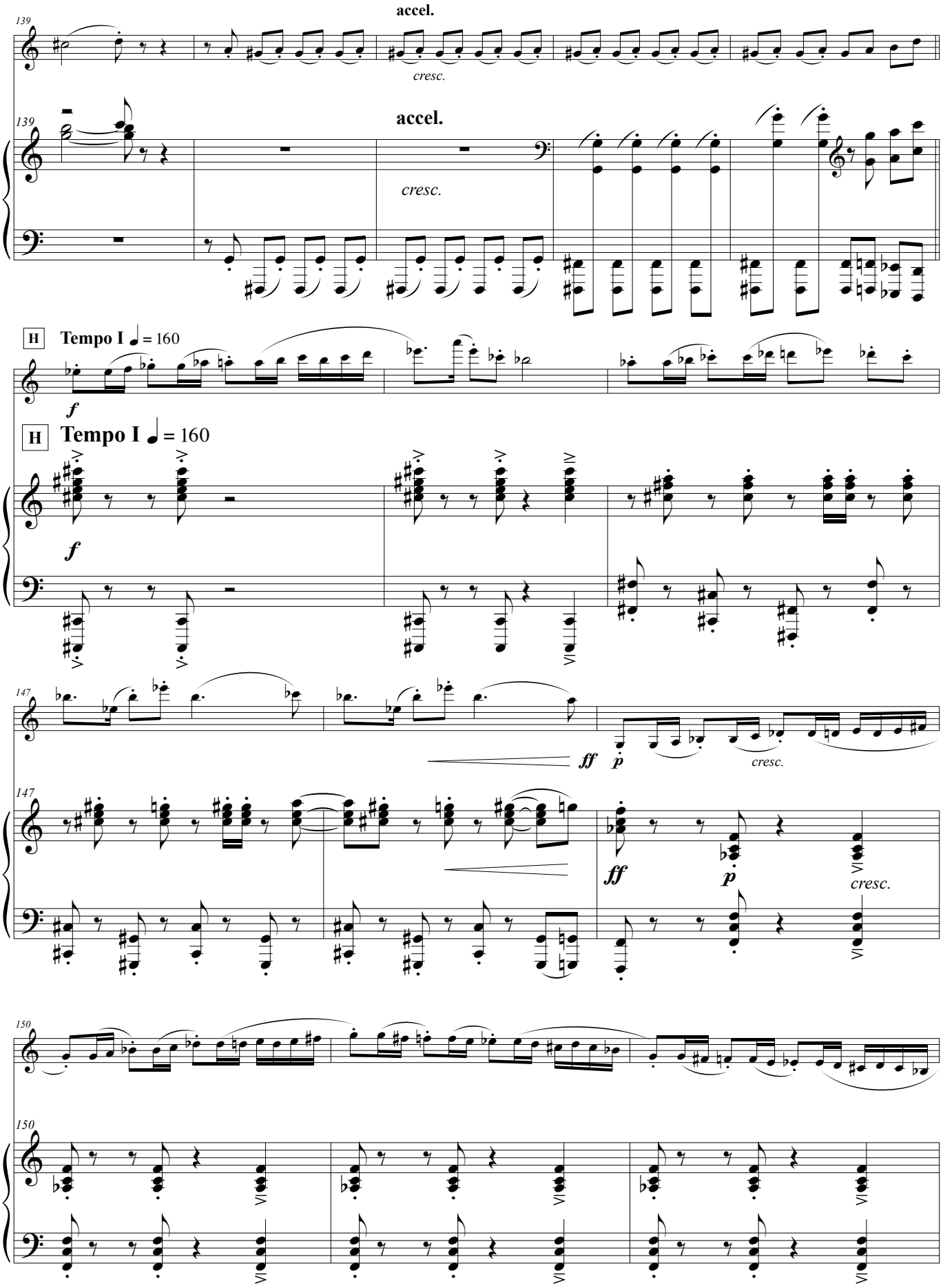

II. Scherzo ♩ = 160
60
f
II. Scherzo ♩ = 160
60
f
63
63
66
66
69
69

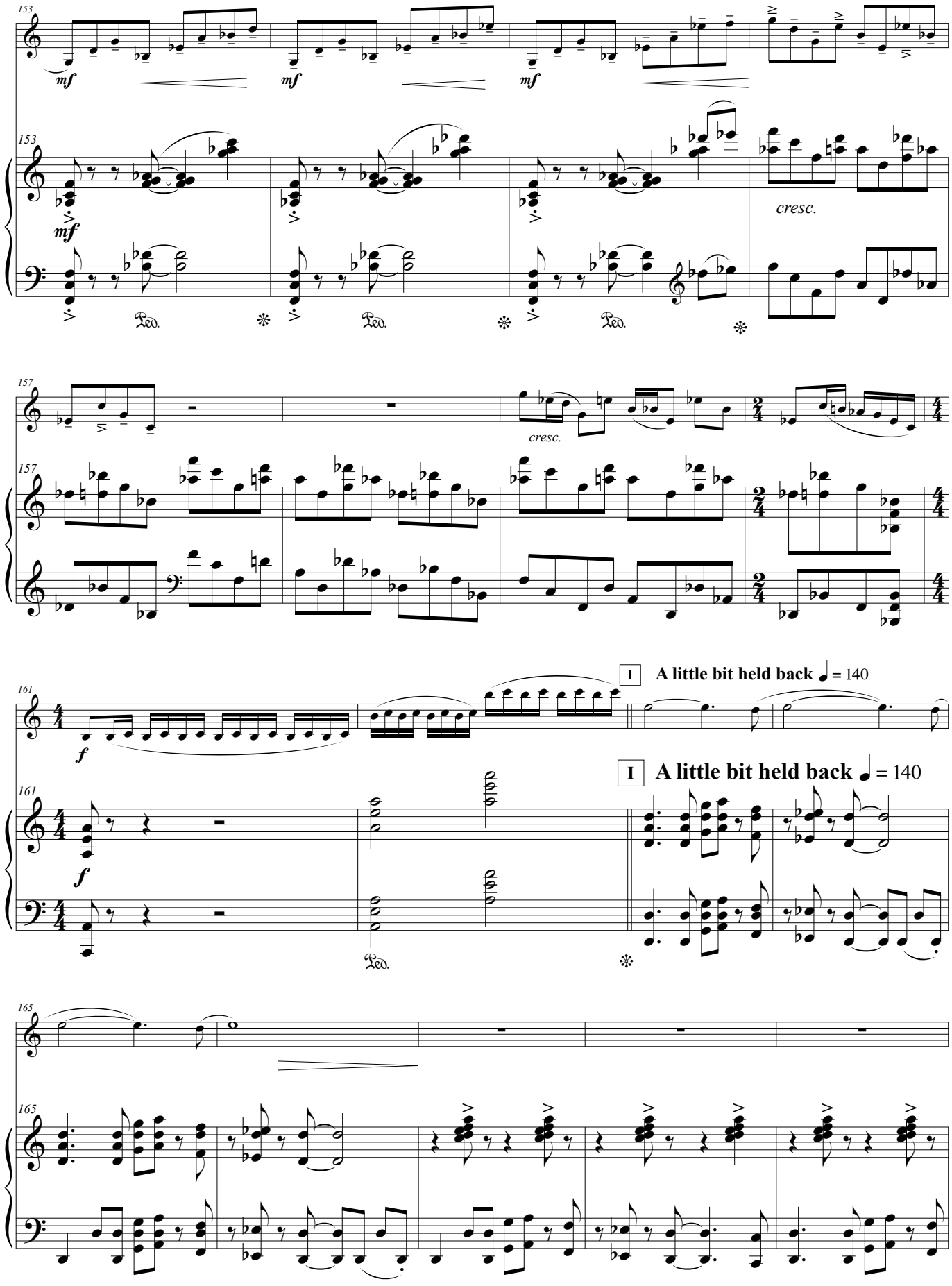

72
72
D
A little bit held back ♩ = 140
76
D
A little bit held back ♩ = 140
76
mf
82
82
8va
88
(8va)
88

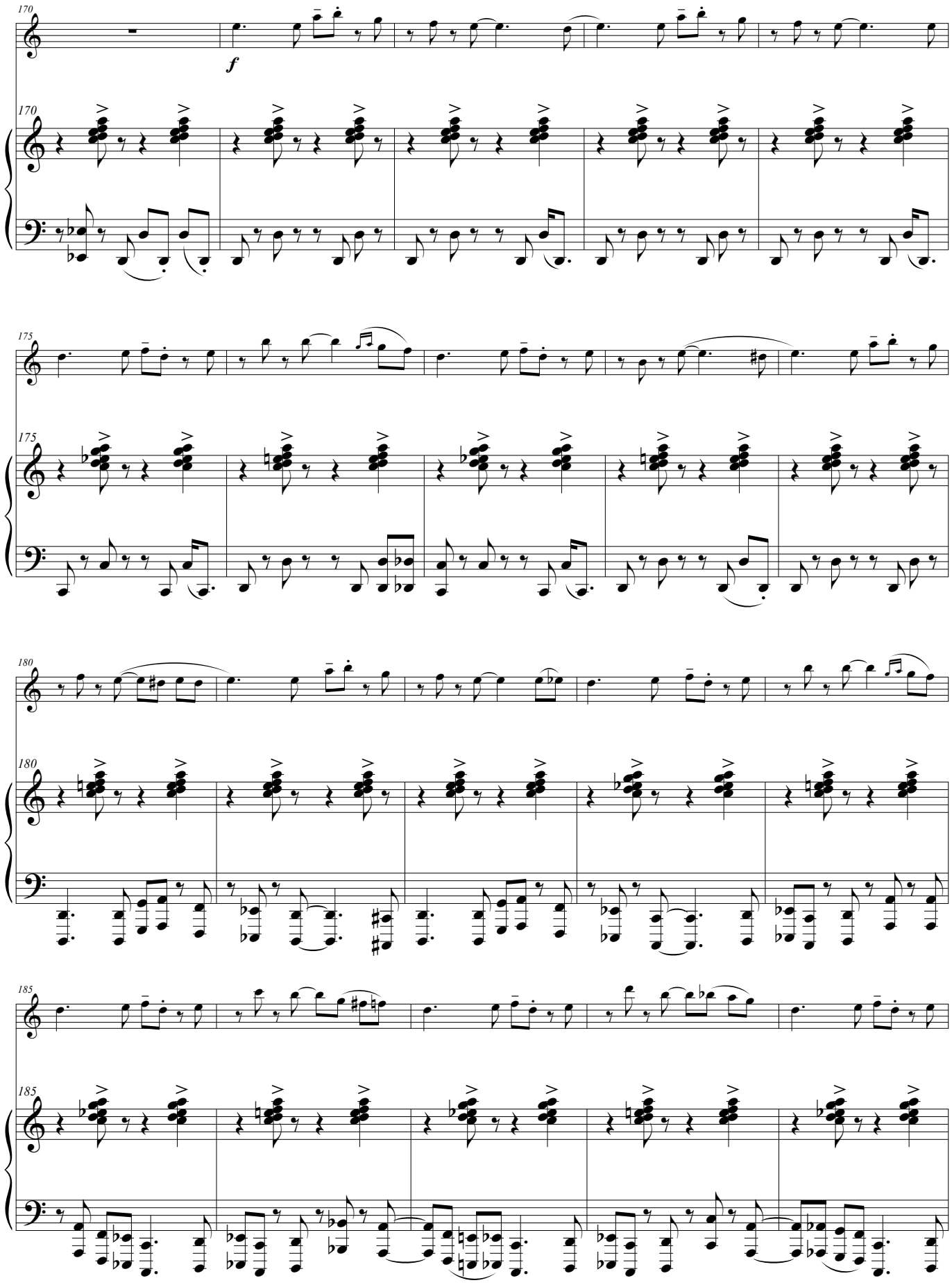

92
E
accel.
Tempo I ♩ = 160
(8va)
f
95
98
101

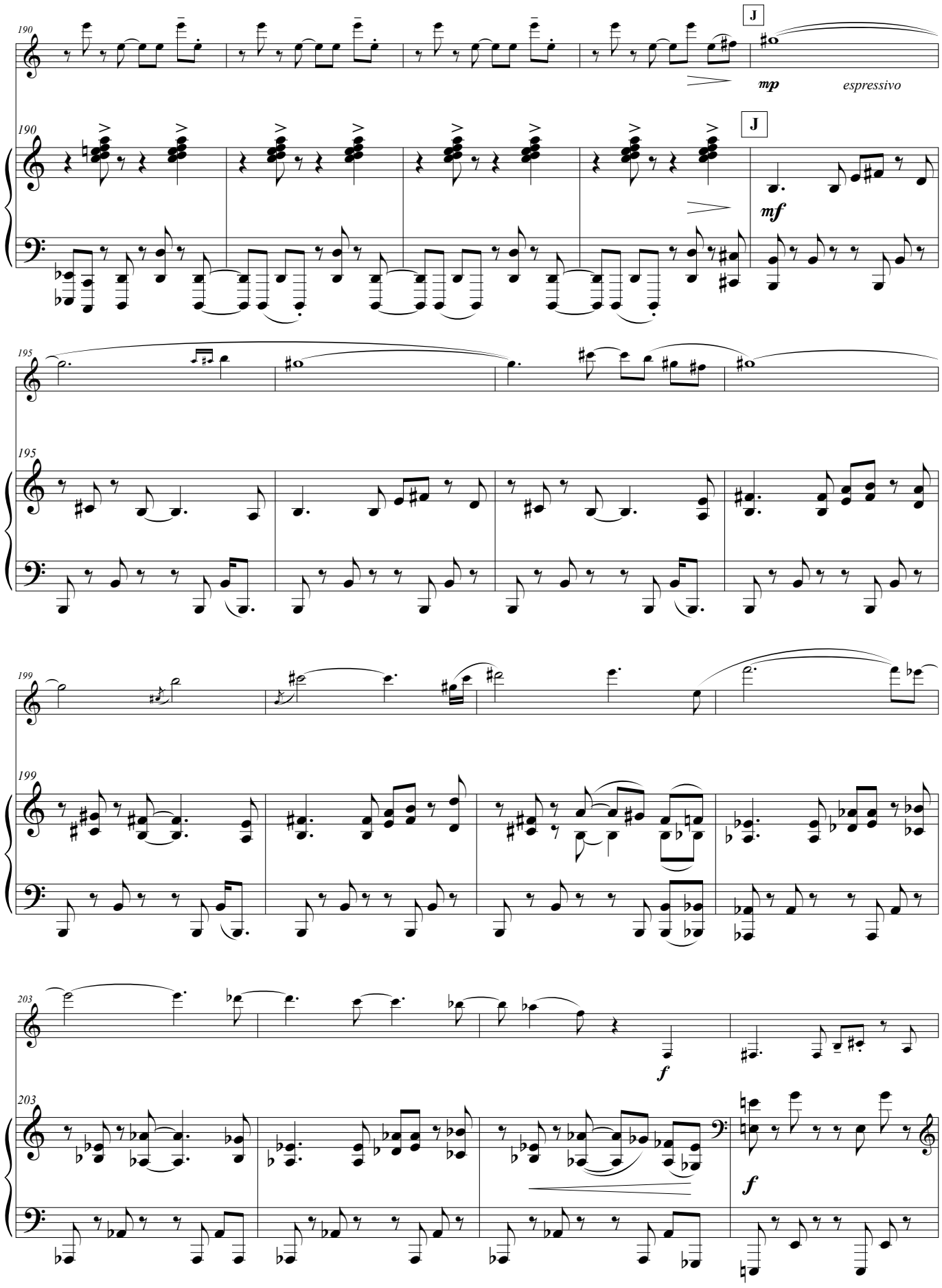

104
104
107
107
111
111
114
114
8va
rit.
rit.

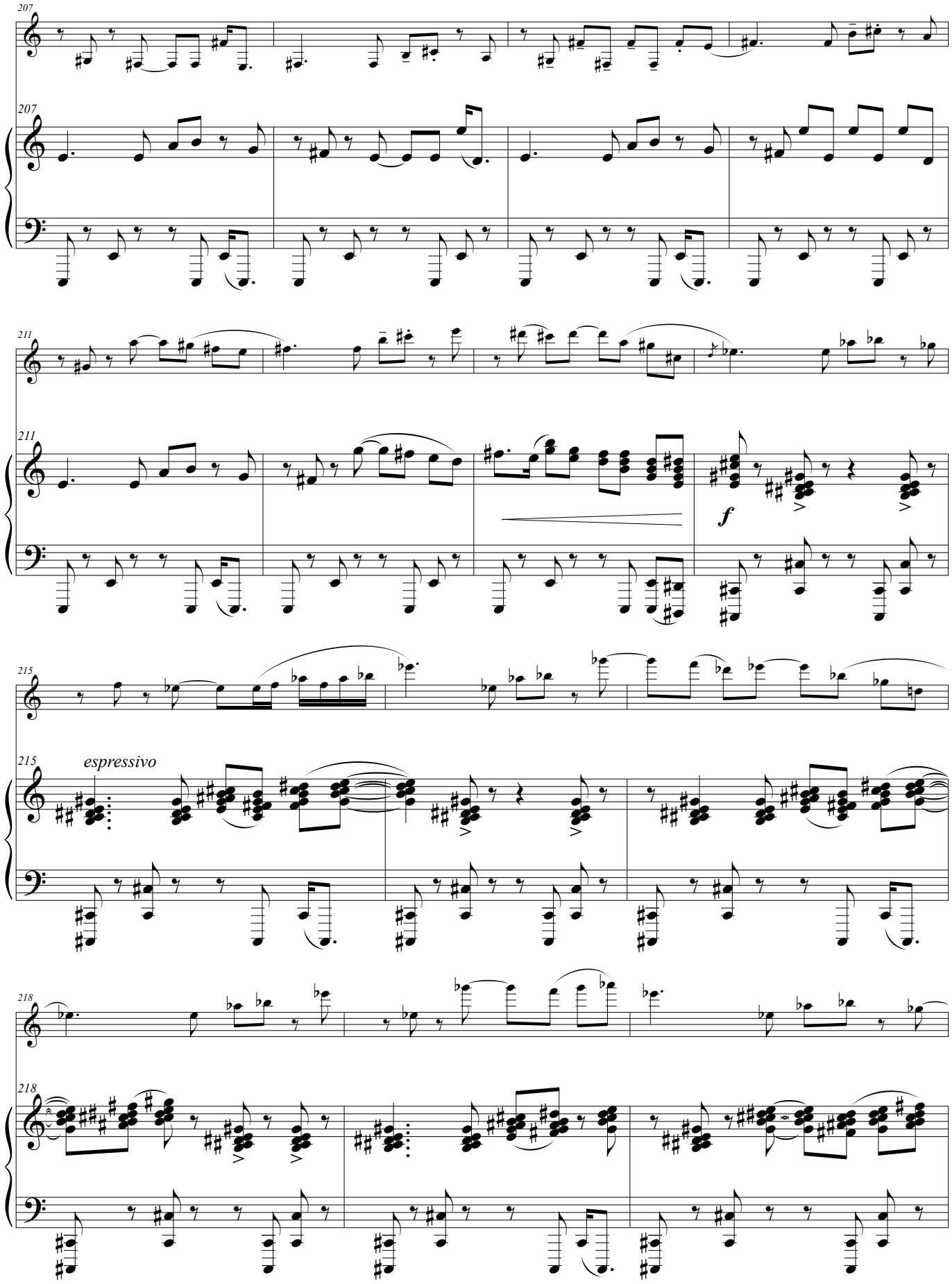

F
A little bit held back ♩ = 140
ff optional growling ad lib. (but not too much)
F
A little bit held back ♩ = 140
f
123
123
128
128
G
p
G
p

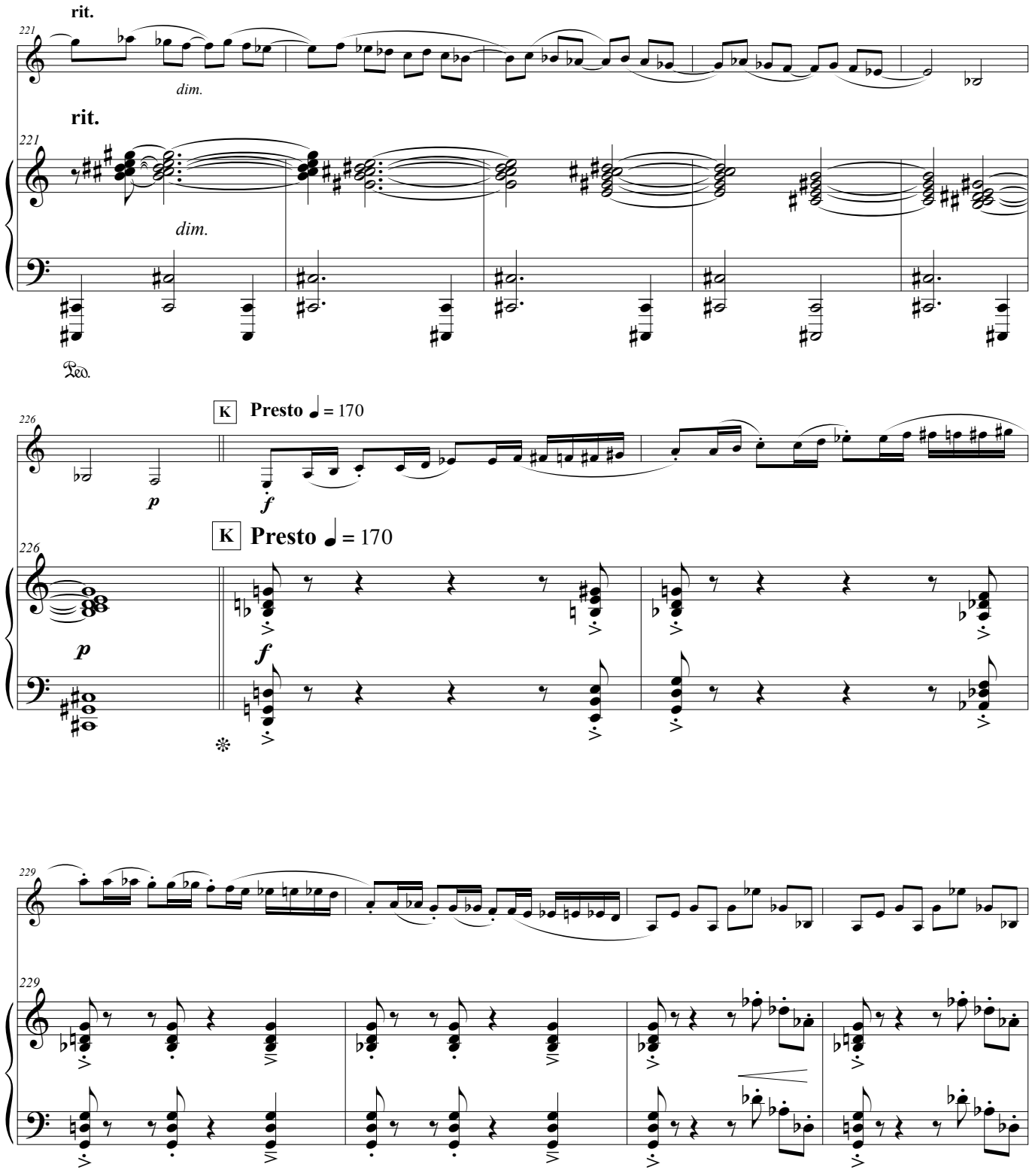

accel.
cresc.
accel.
cresc.
H
Tempo I ♩ = 160
f
H
Tempo I ♩ = 160
f
ff
p
cresc.
ff
p
cresc.

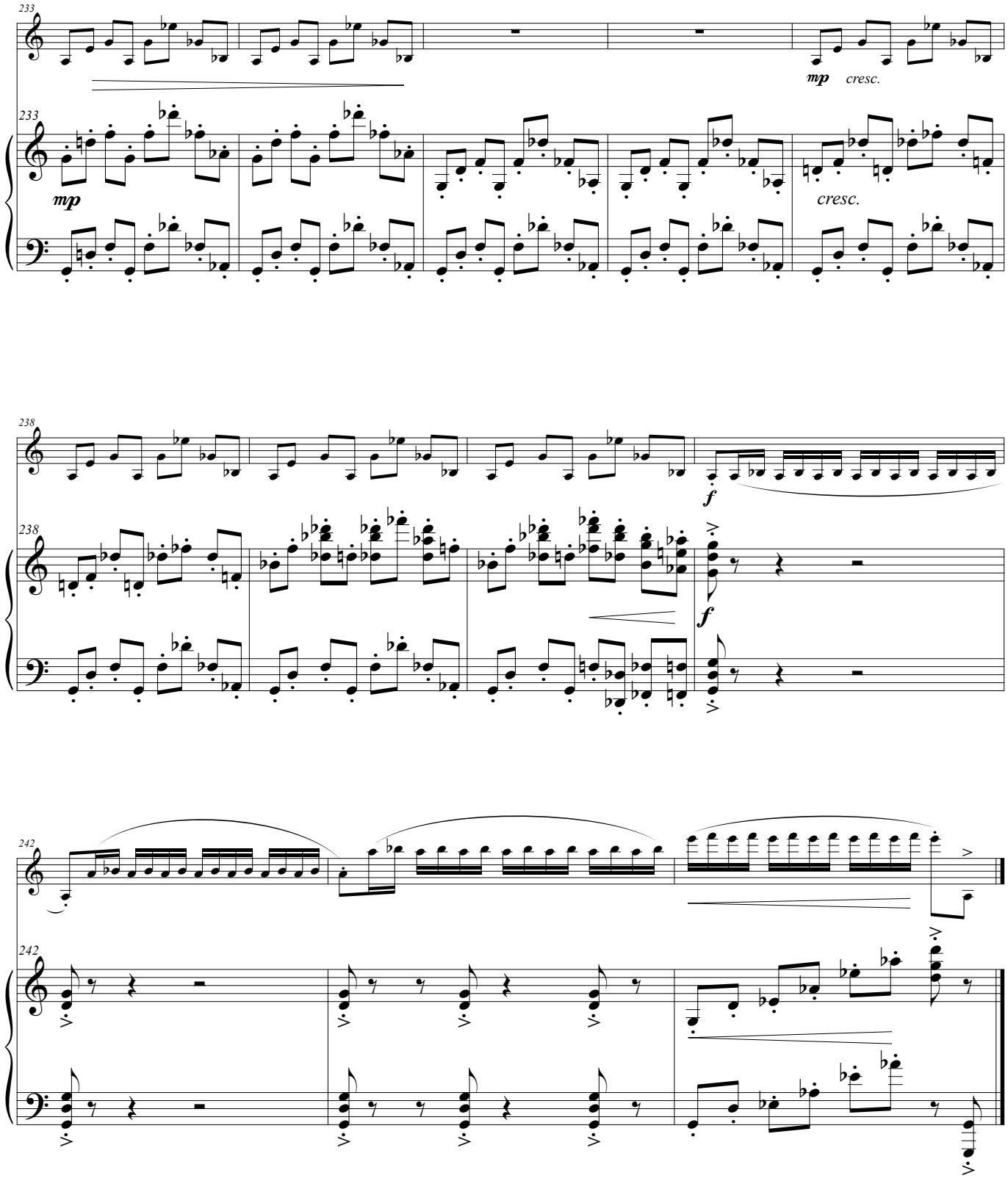

153
mf
cresc.
157
cresc.
161
f
I A little bit held back ♩ = 140
165

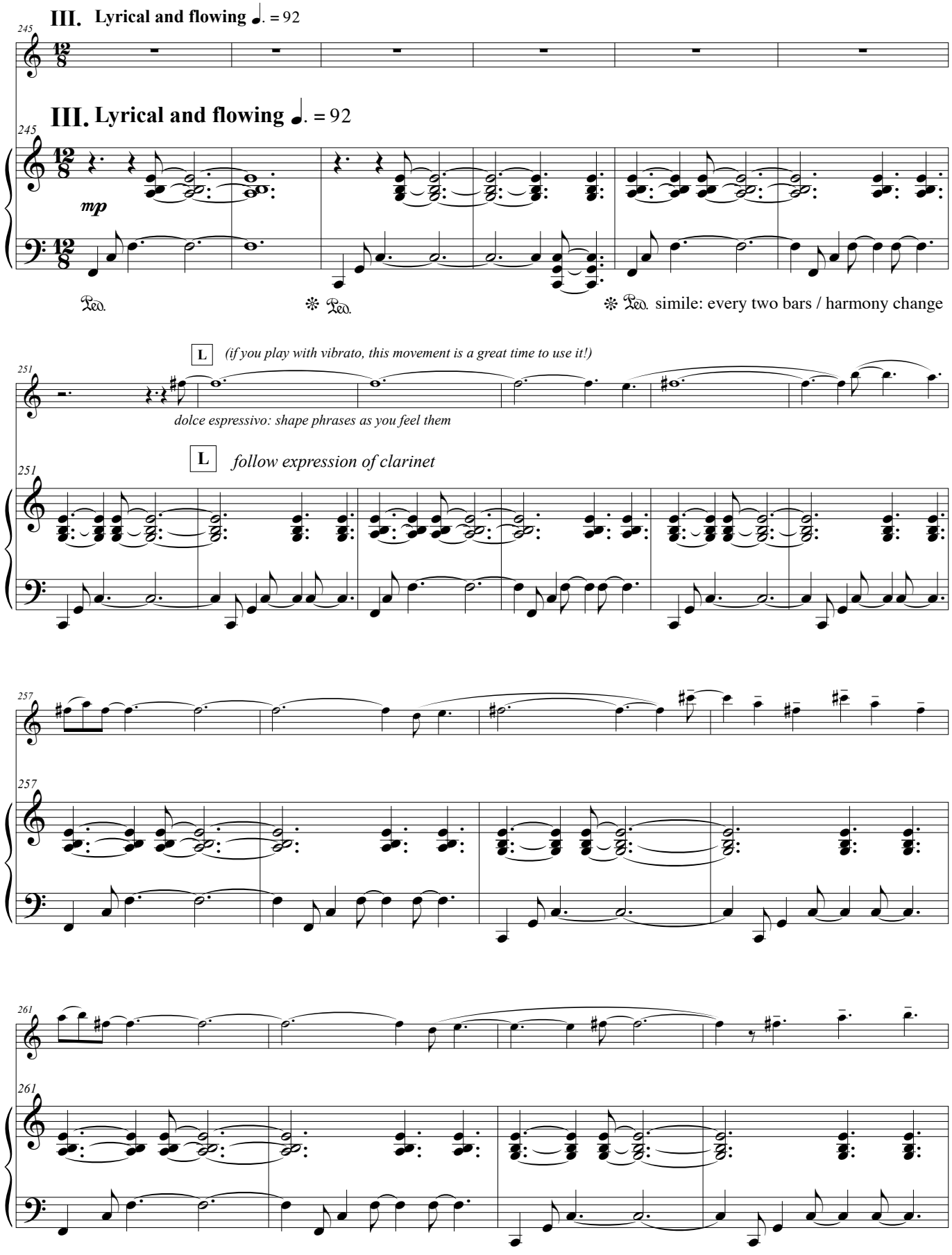

170
f
170
175
175
180
180
185
185

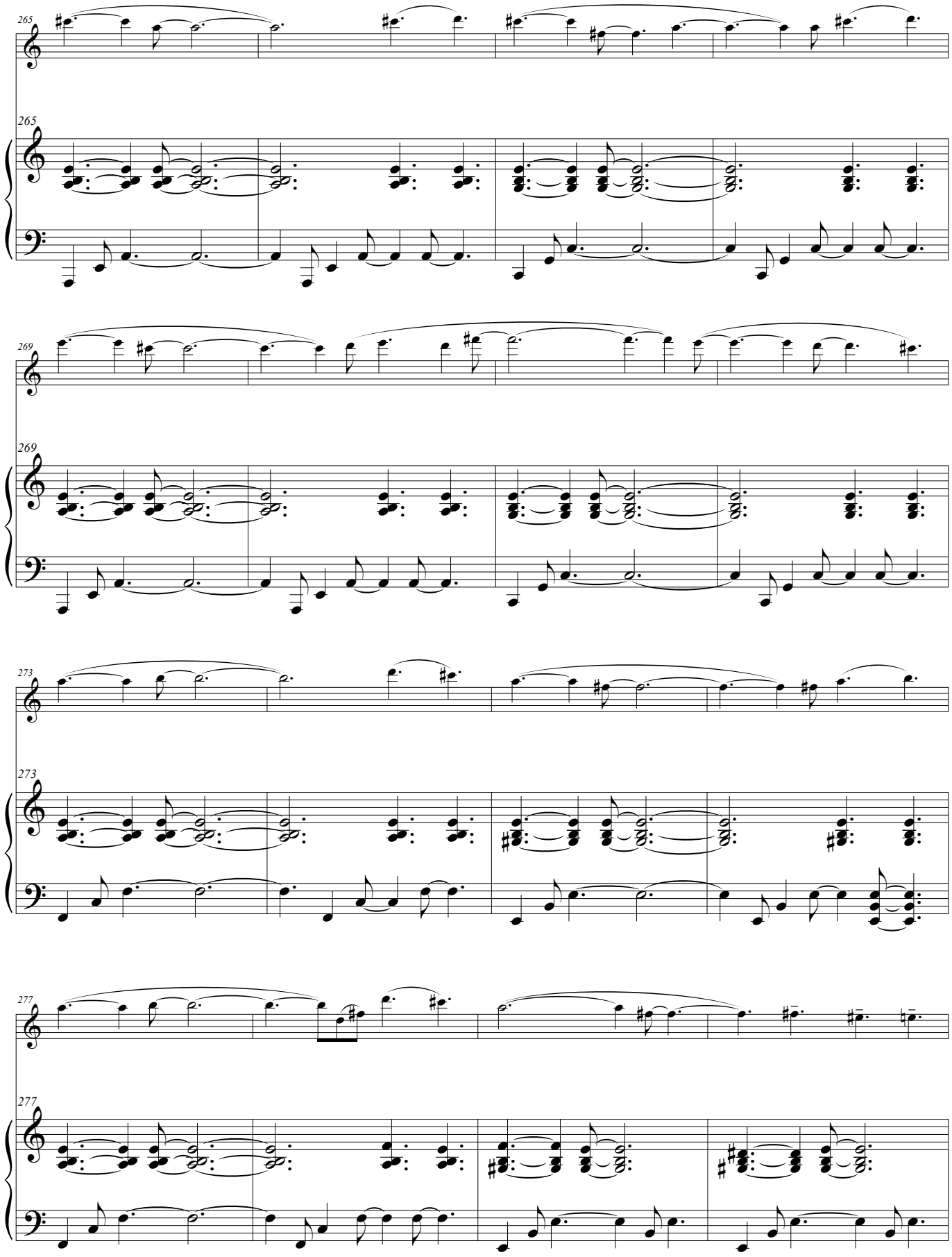

190
J
mp
espressivo
190
J
mf
195
195
199
199
203
f
203
f

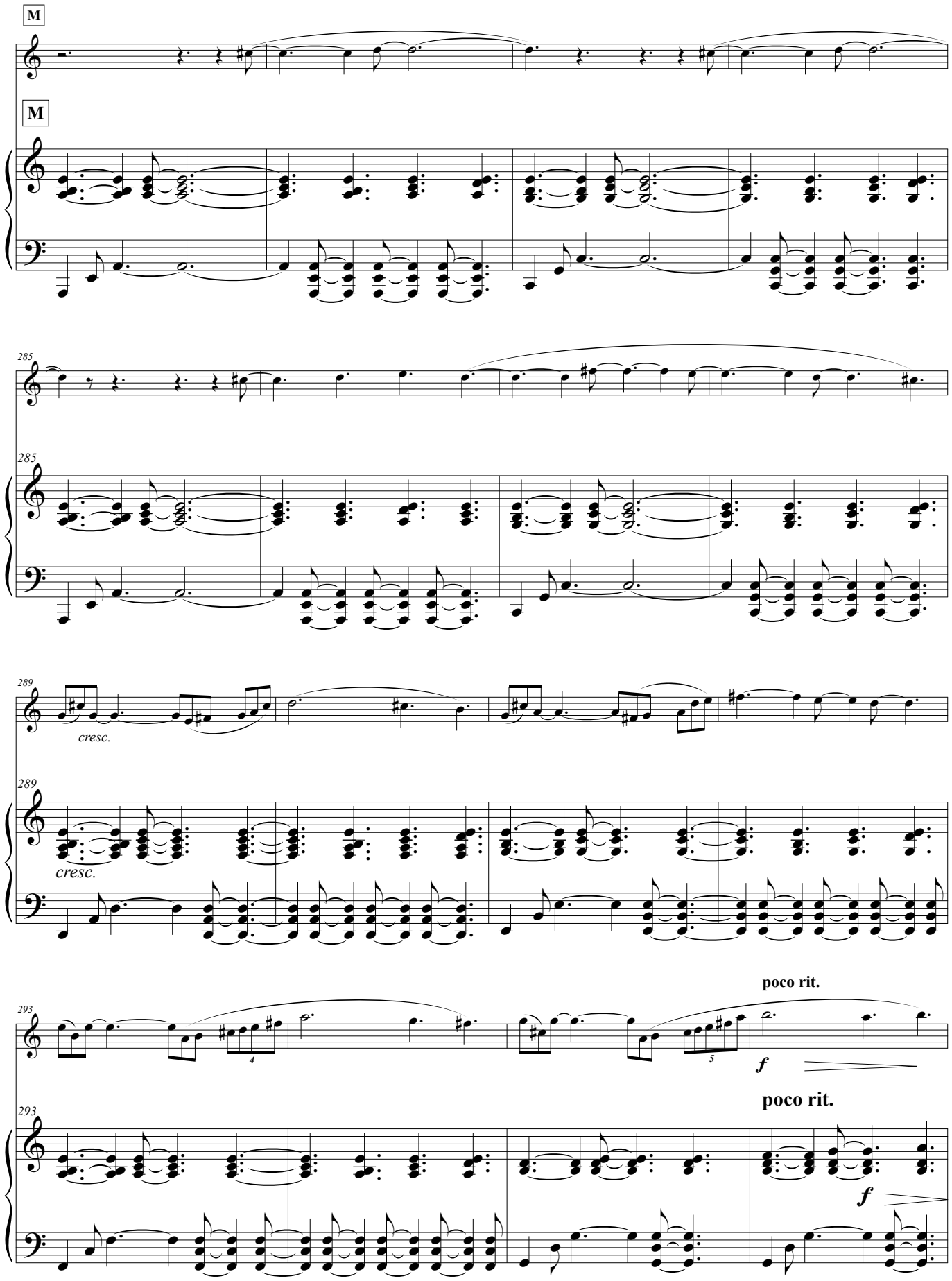

207
207
211
211
f
215
215
espressivo
218
218

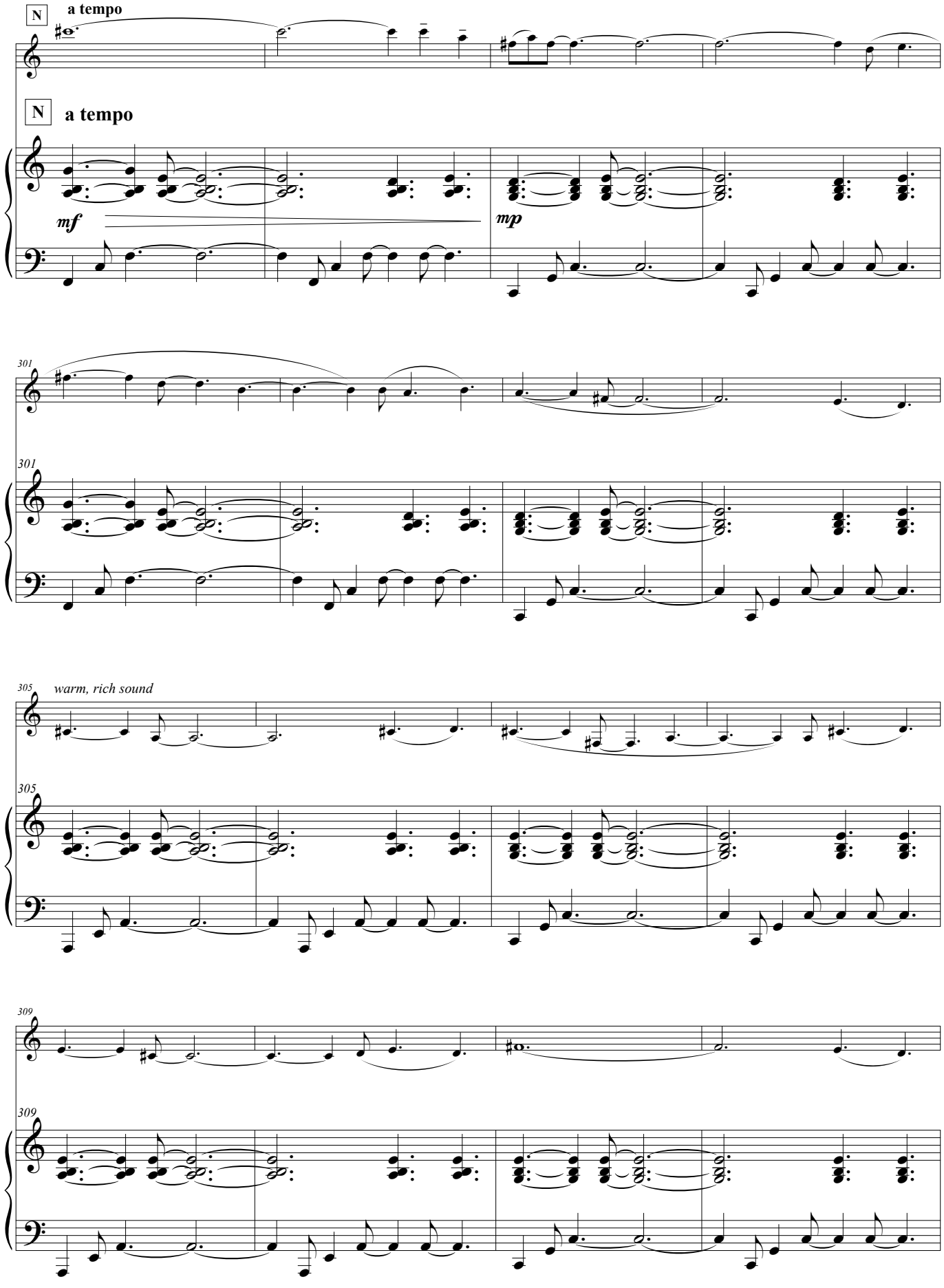

rit.
221
dim.
rit.
221
dim.
Ped.
226
K
Presto ♩ = 170
p
f
226
K
Presto ♩ = 170
p
f
229
229

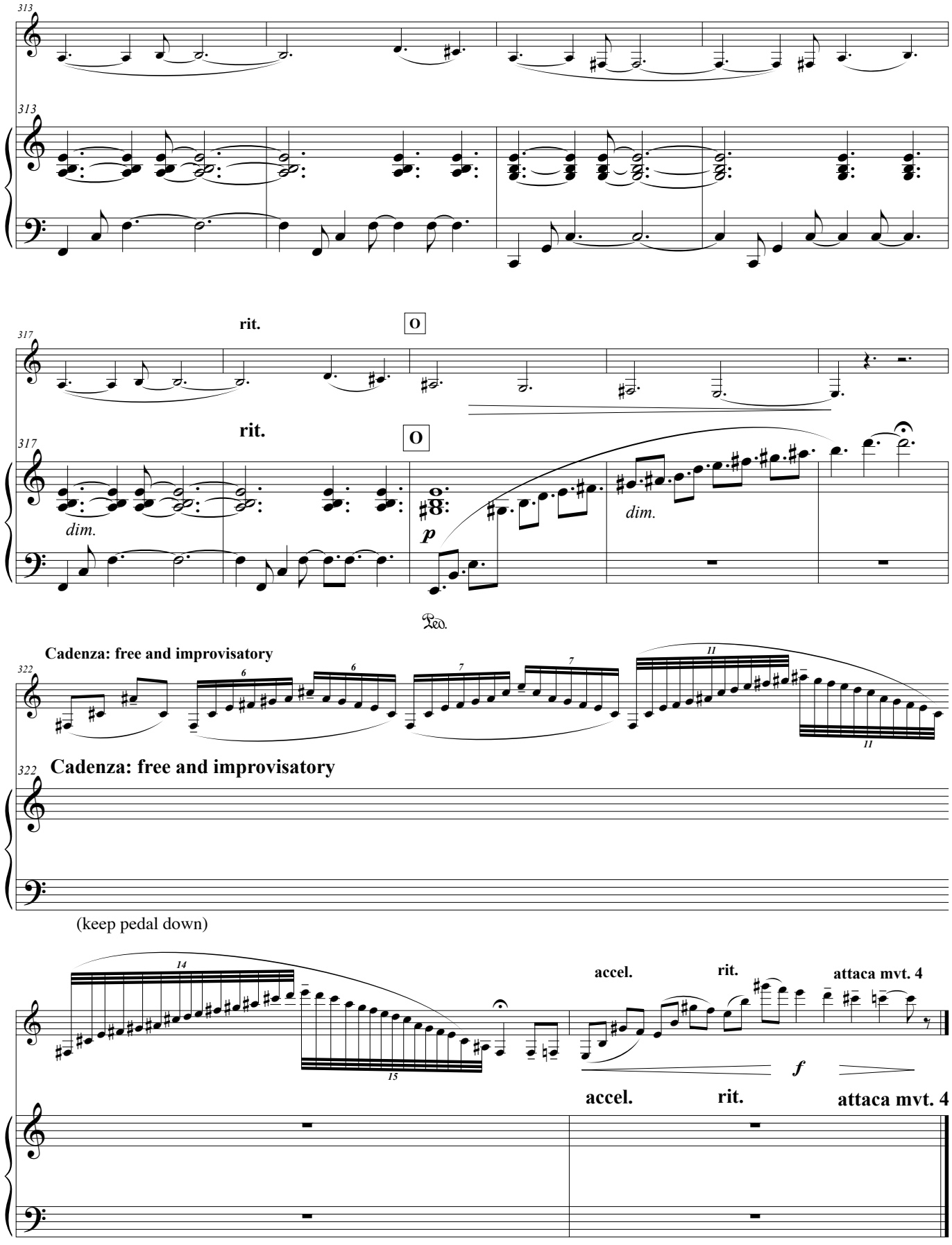

233
mp
cresc.
233
mp
cresc.
238
f
238
f
242
242


III. Lyrical and flowing ♩. = 92
245
III. Lyrical and flowing ♩. = 92
245
mp
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
simile: every two bars / harmony change
L
(if you play with vibrato, this movement is a great time to use it!)
251
dolce espressivo: shape phrases as you feel them
L
follow expression of clarinet
251
257
257
261
261


265
265
269
269
273
273
277
277

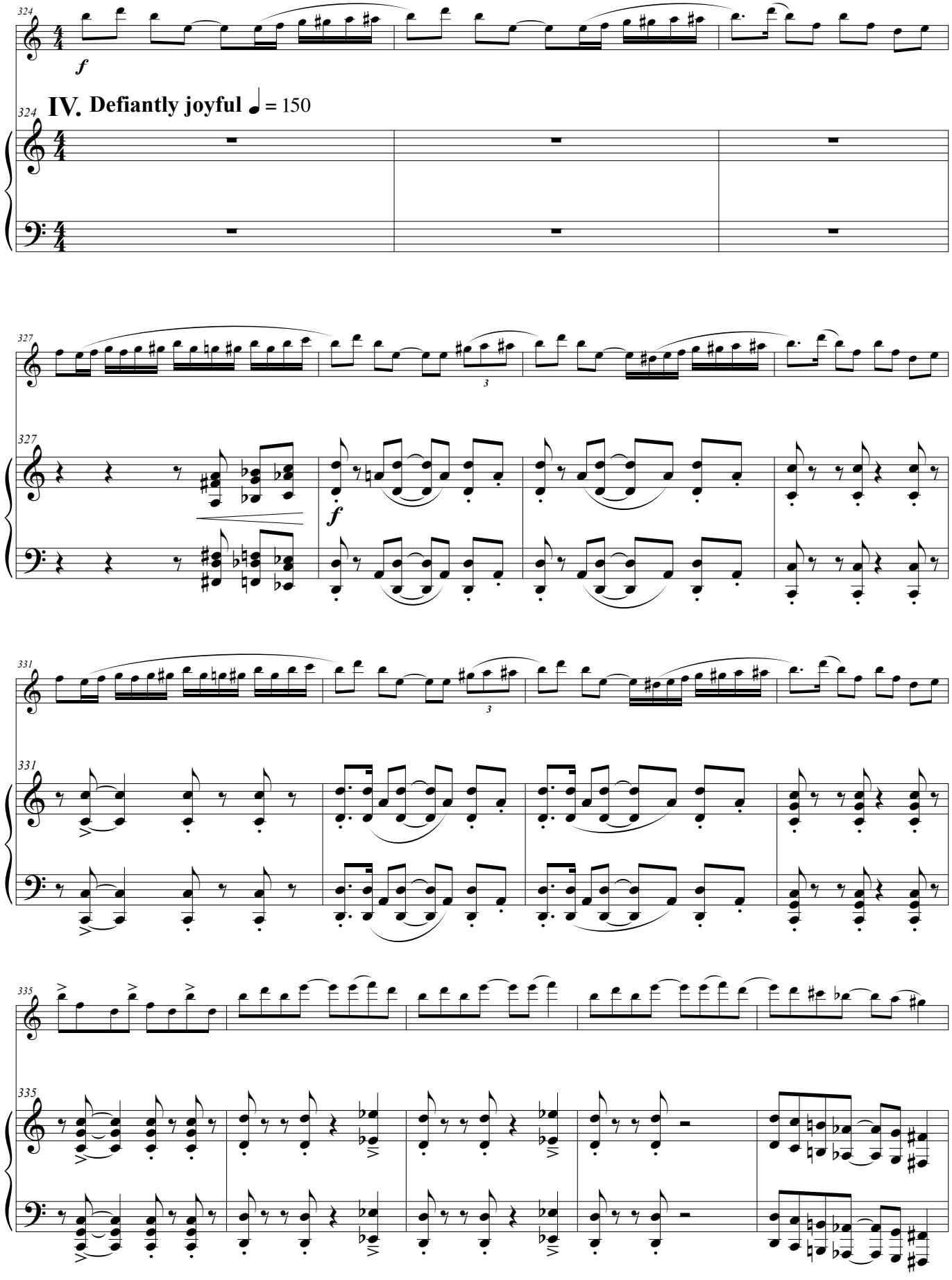

M
M
285
285
289
cresc.
289
cresc.
293
poco rit.
f
293
poco rit.
f

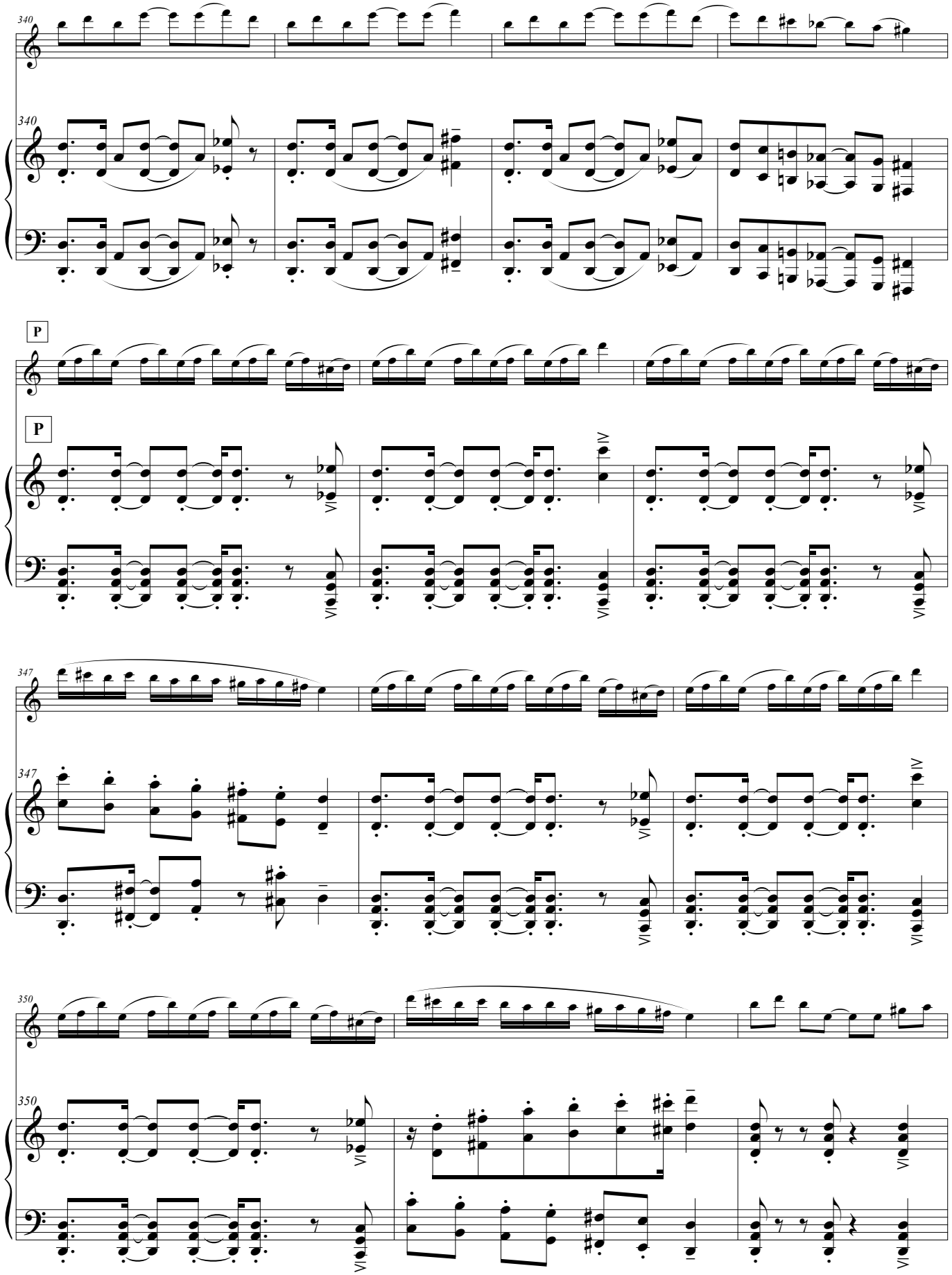

N
a tempo
N
a tempo
mf
mp
301
301
305
warm, rich sound
305
309
309

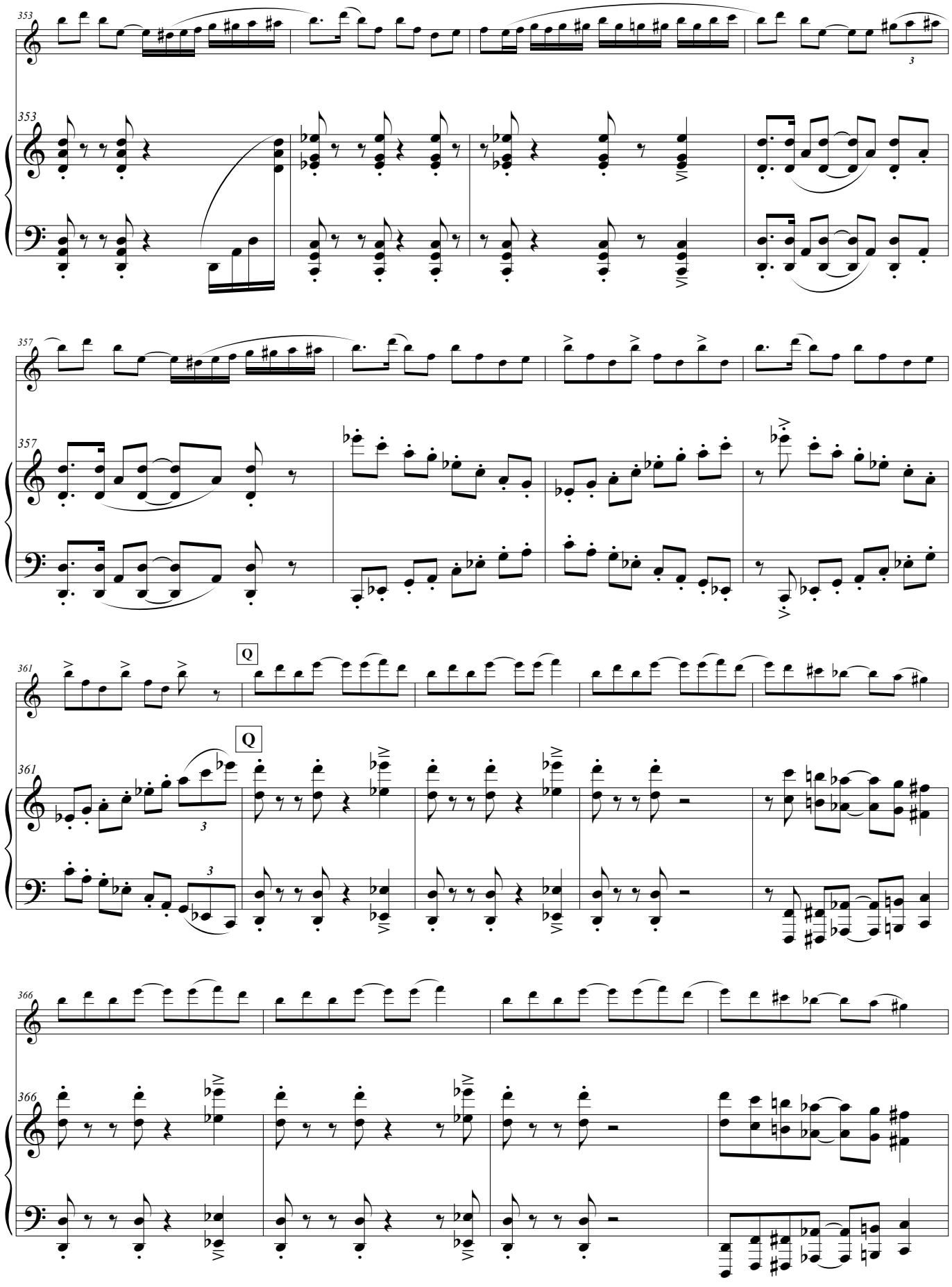

313
313
rit.
317
317
rit.
dim.
dim.
p
Ped.
Cadenza: free and improvisatory
322
322
Cadenza: free and improvisatory
(keep pedal down)
accel.
rit.
attaca mvt. 4
f
accel.
rit.
attaca mvt. 4

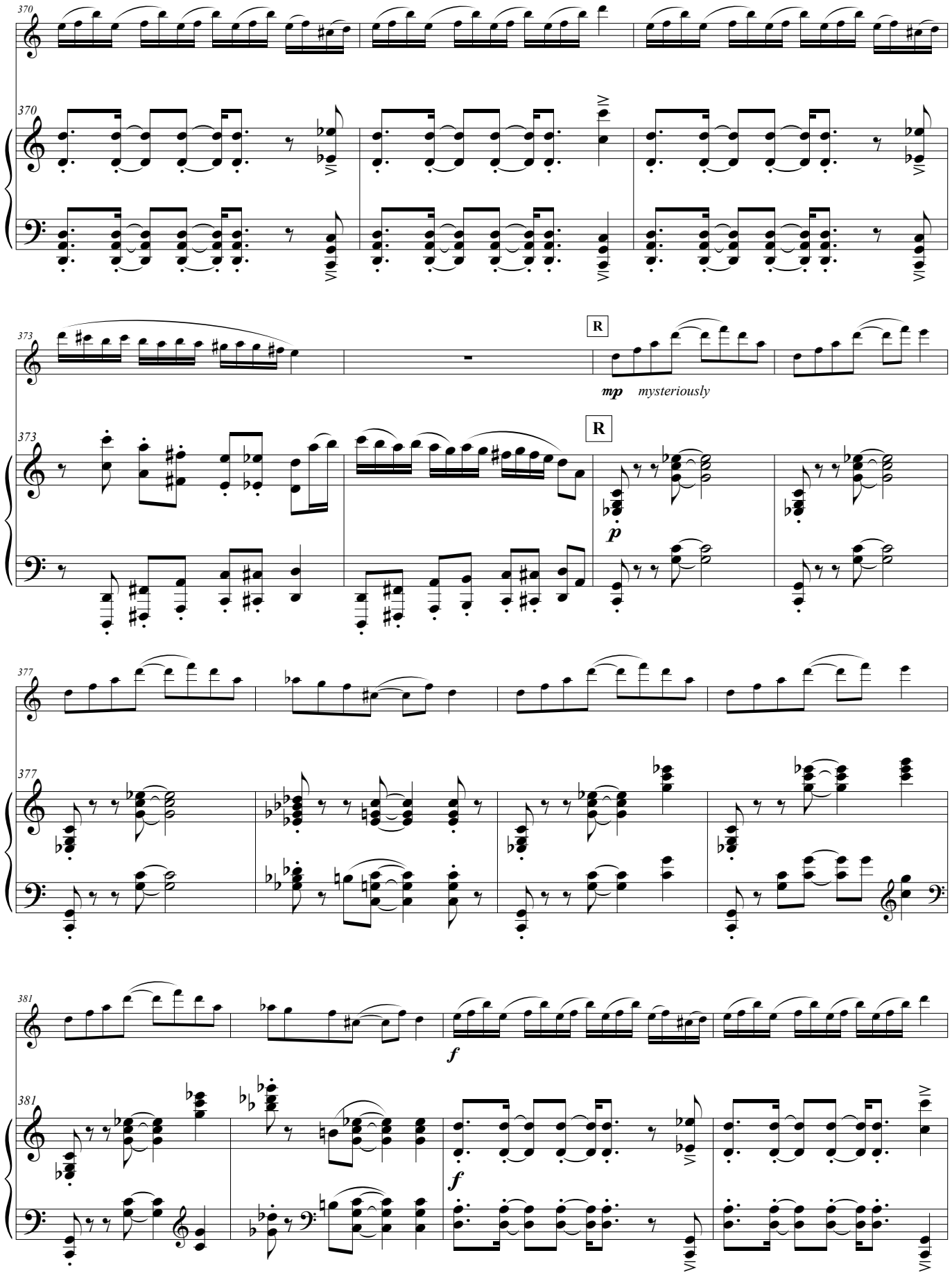
Players with experience in Eastern European clarinet styles (klezmer, Balkan, Greek, Turkish, etc.) may ornament ad lib. throughout this movement, but it is definitely NOT required.

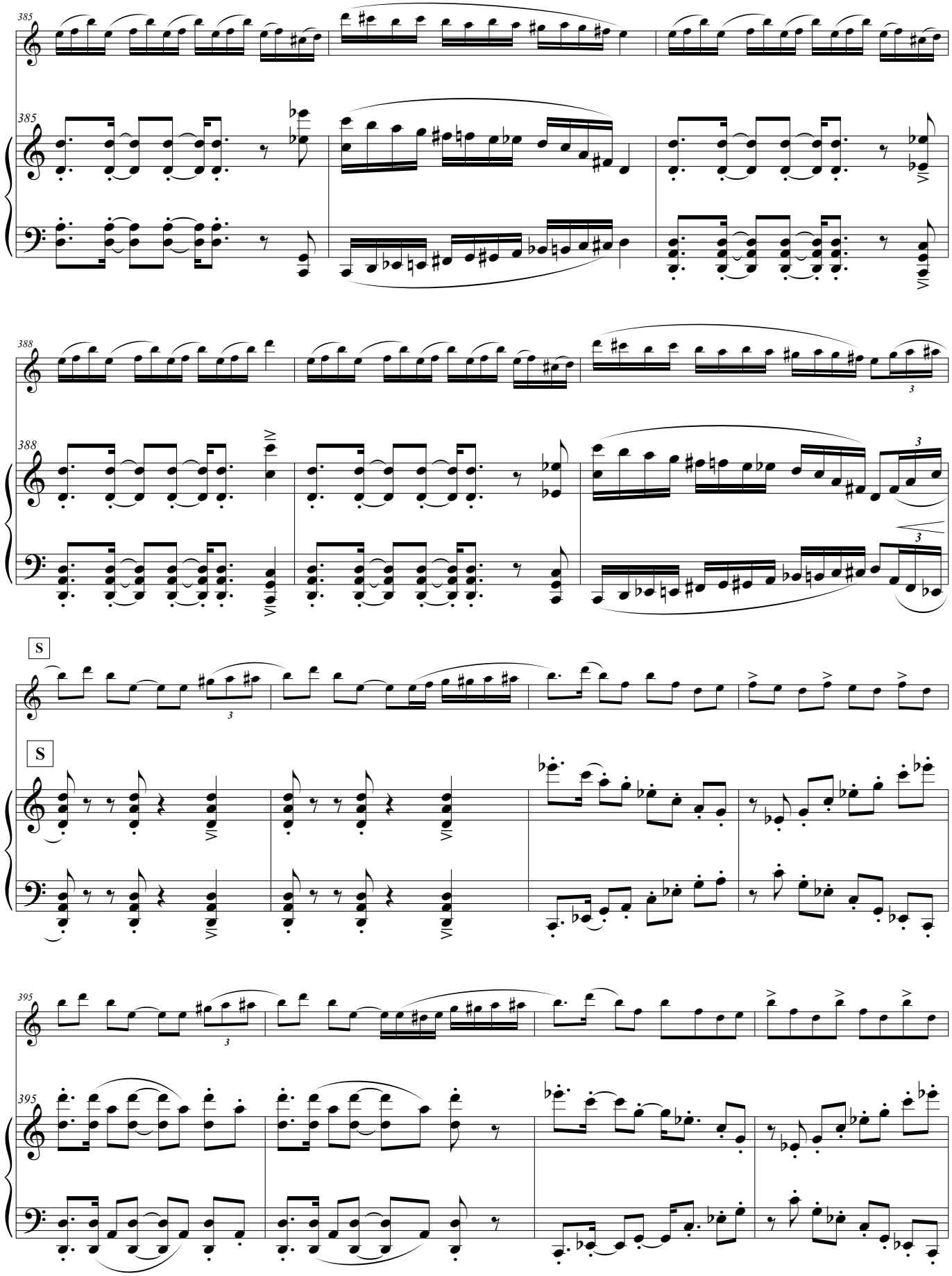
IV. Defiantly joyful ♩ = 150

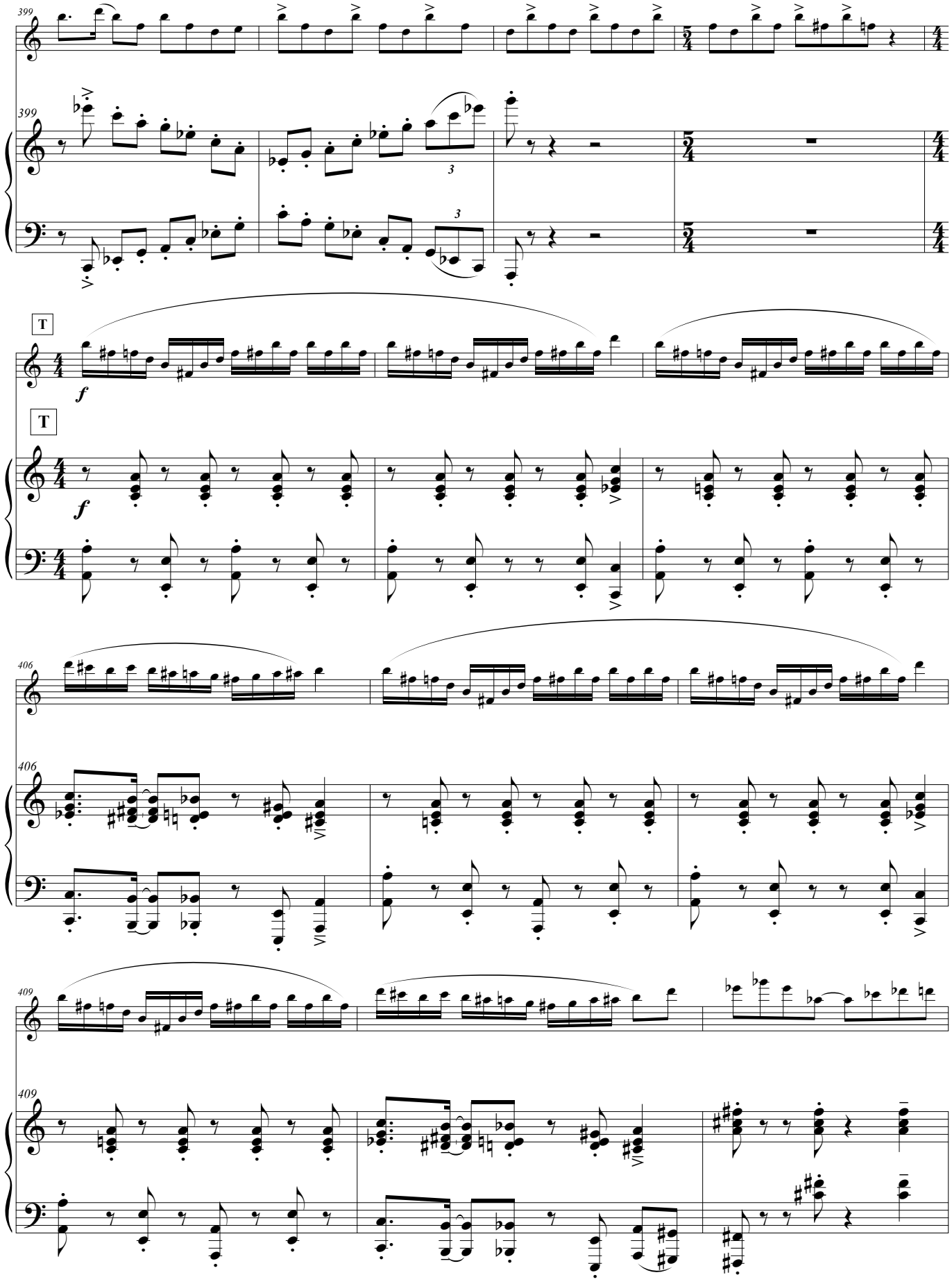


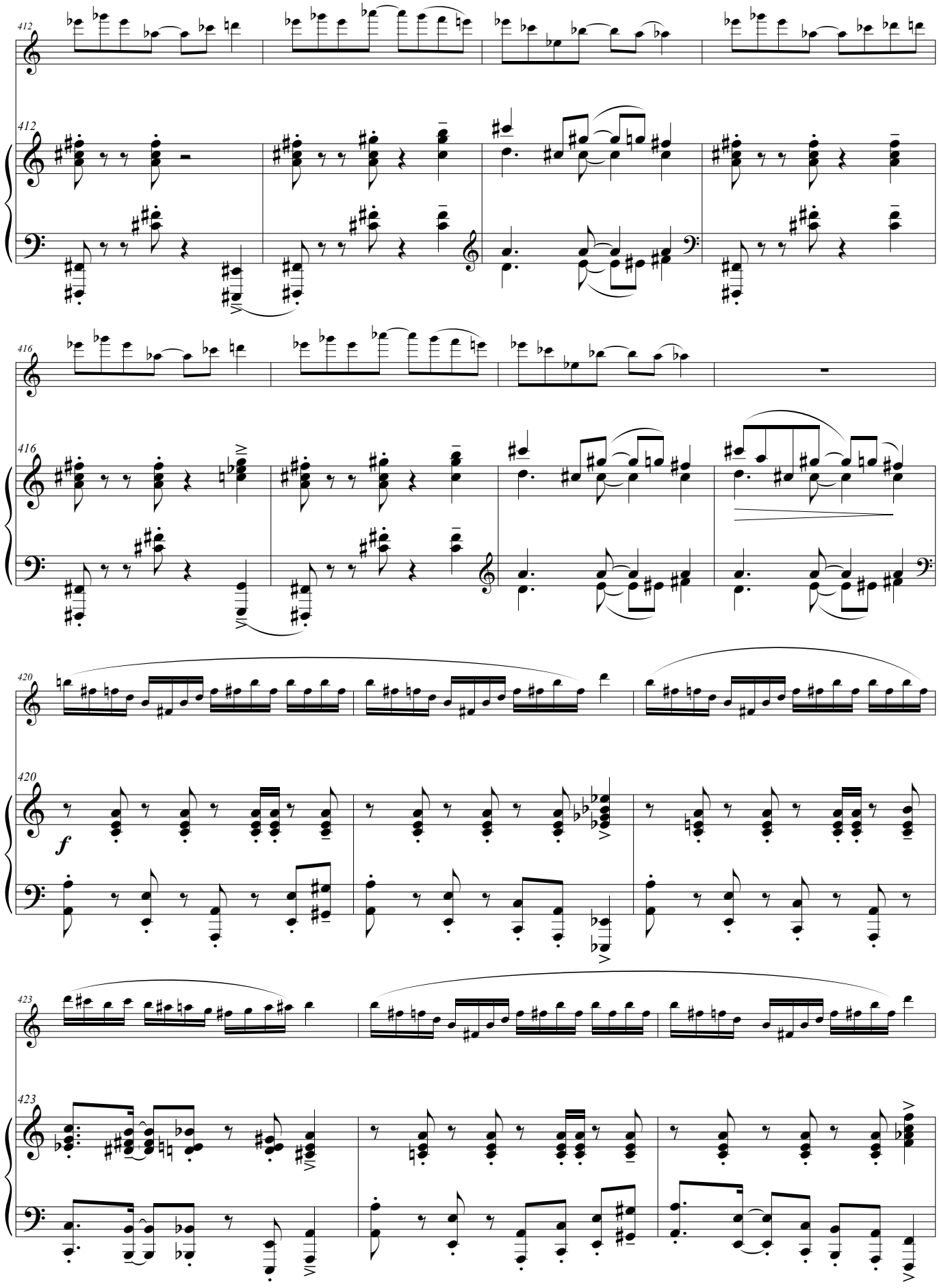

340
340
P
P
347
347
350
350

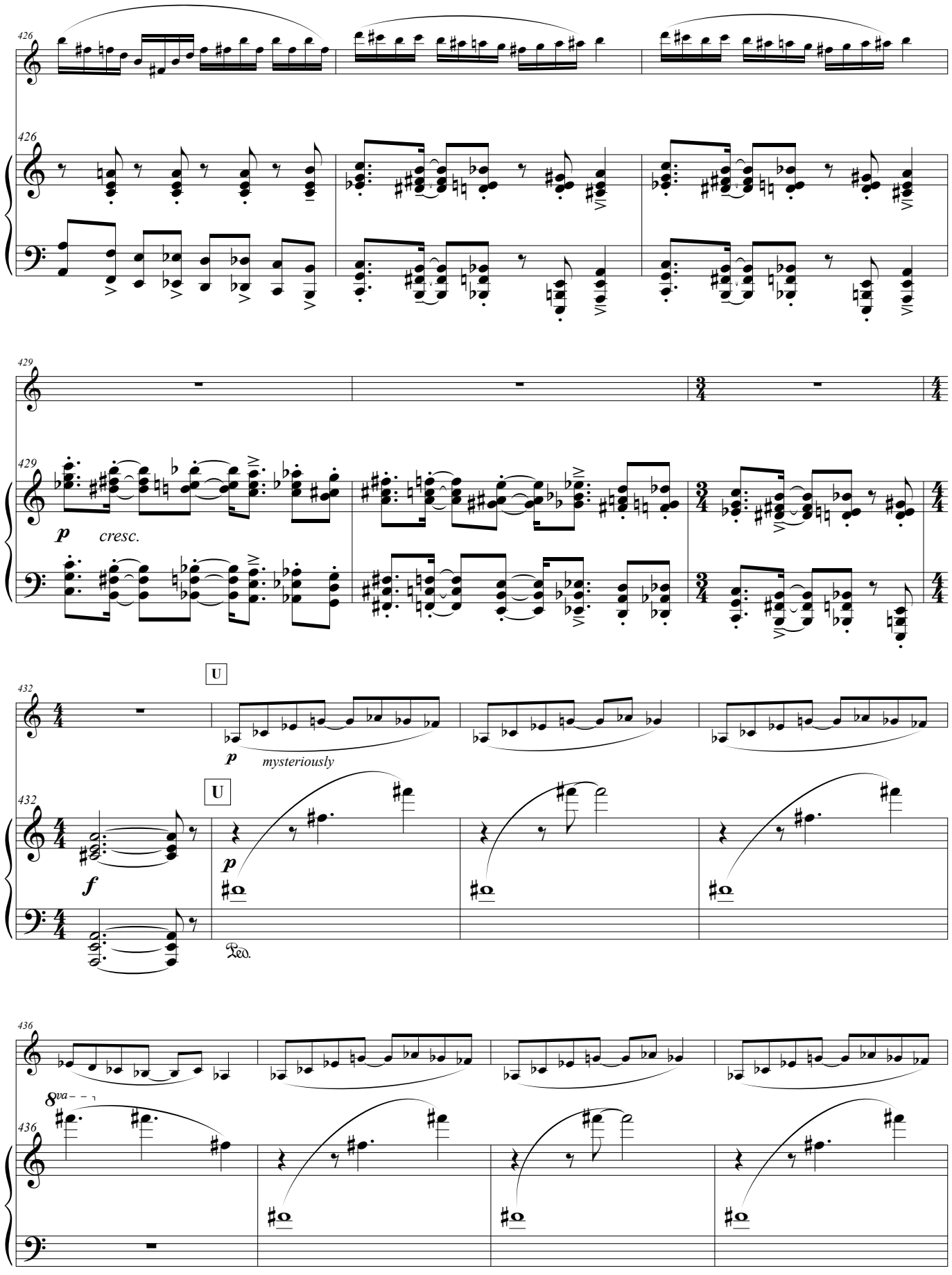

353
353
357
357
361
Q
Q
361
366
366

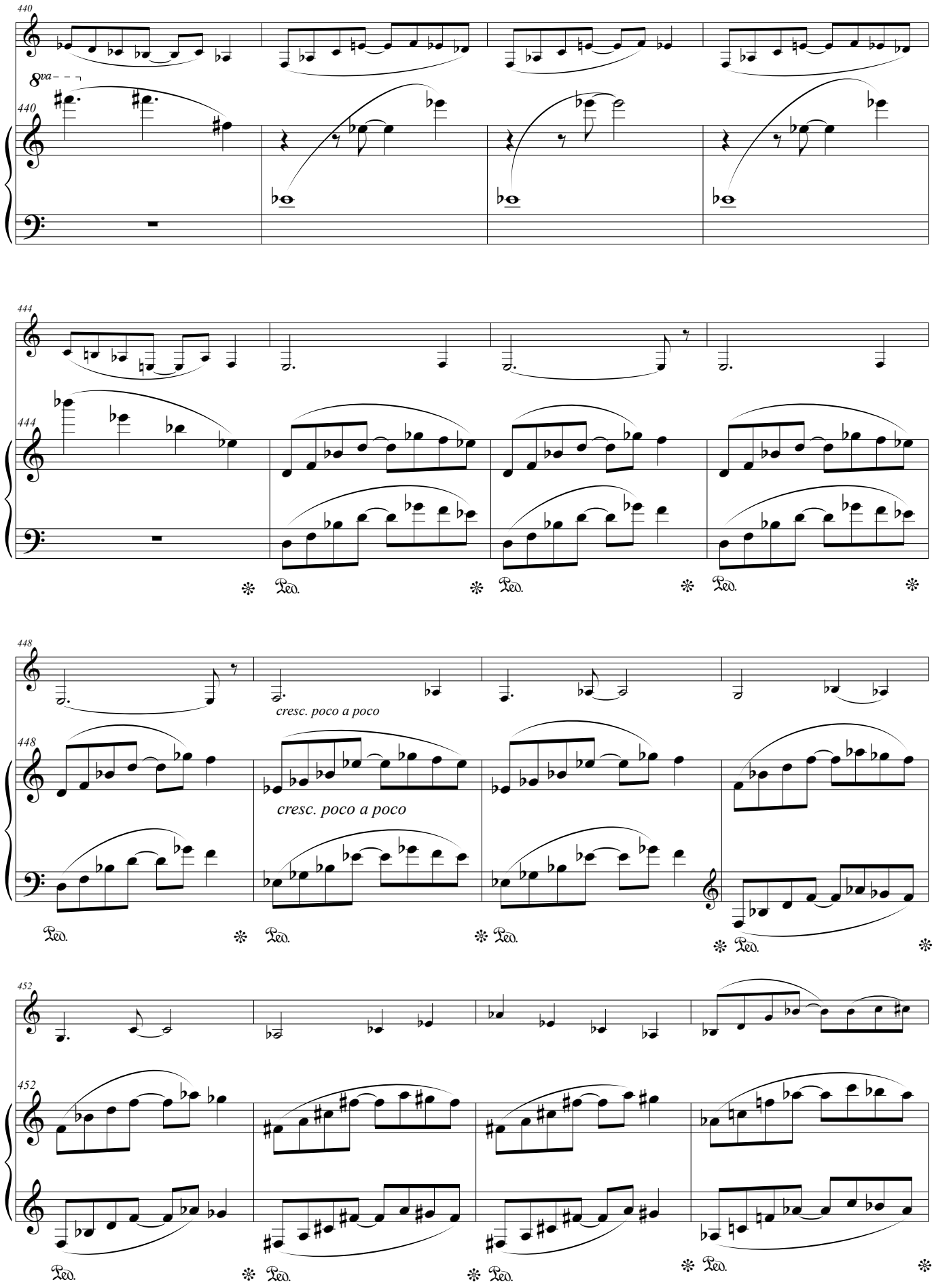

370
370
373
R
mp mysteriously
373
R
p
377
377
381
f
381
f

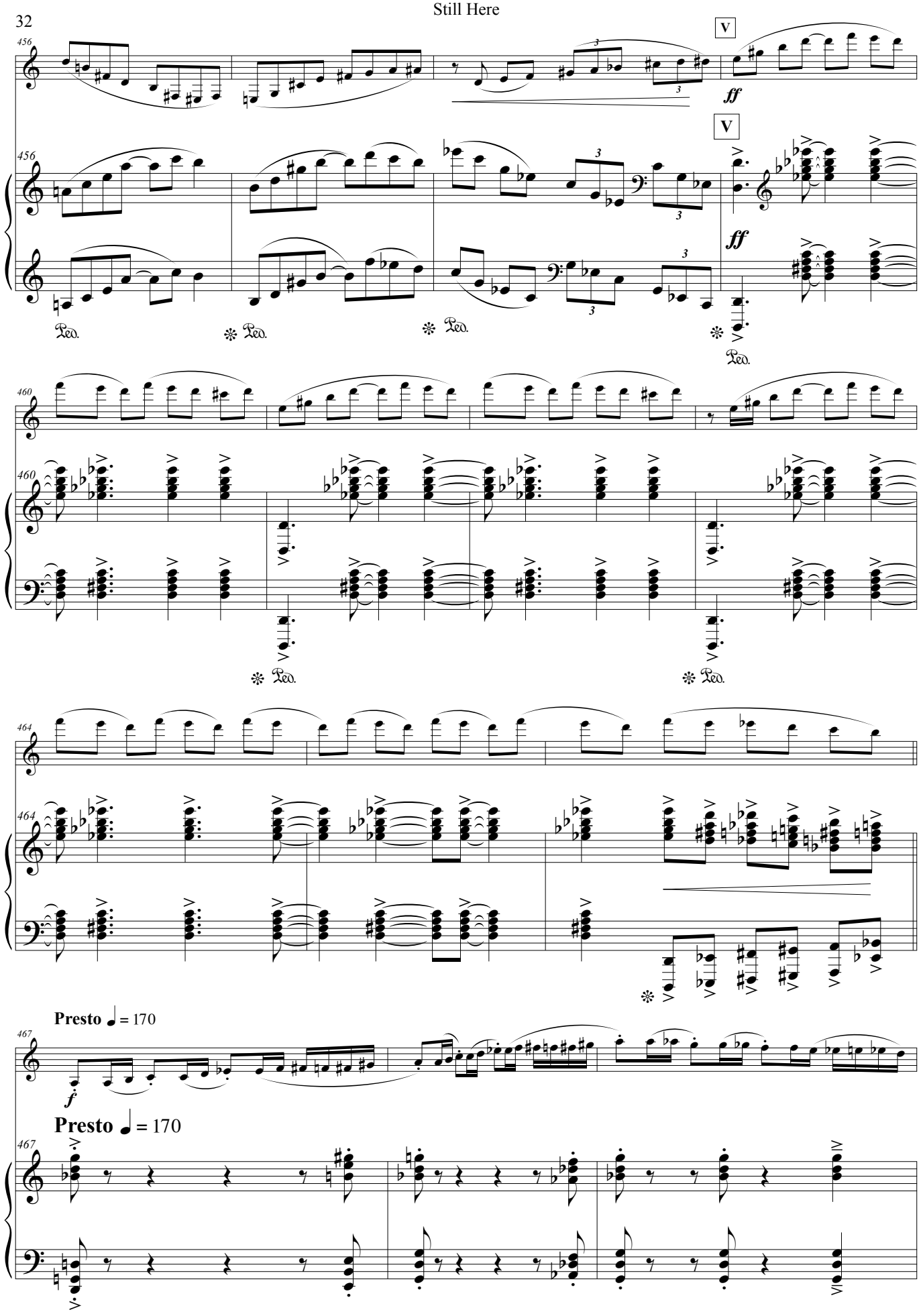

385
385
388
388
S
S
395
395

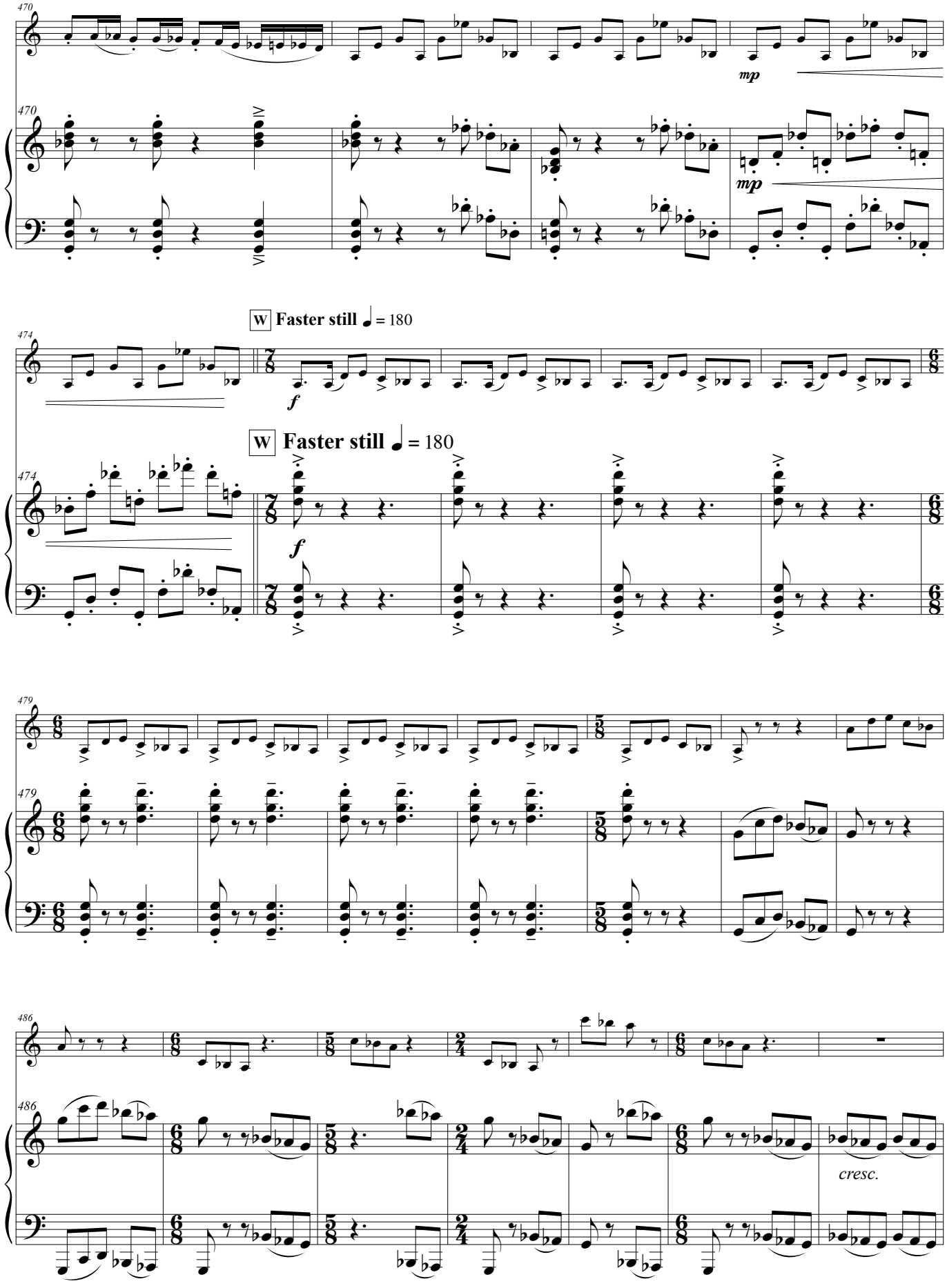

399
399
T
f
T
f
406
406
409
409

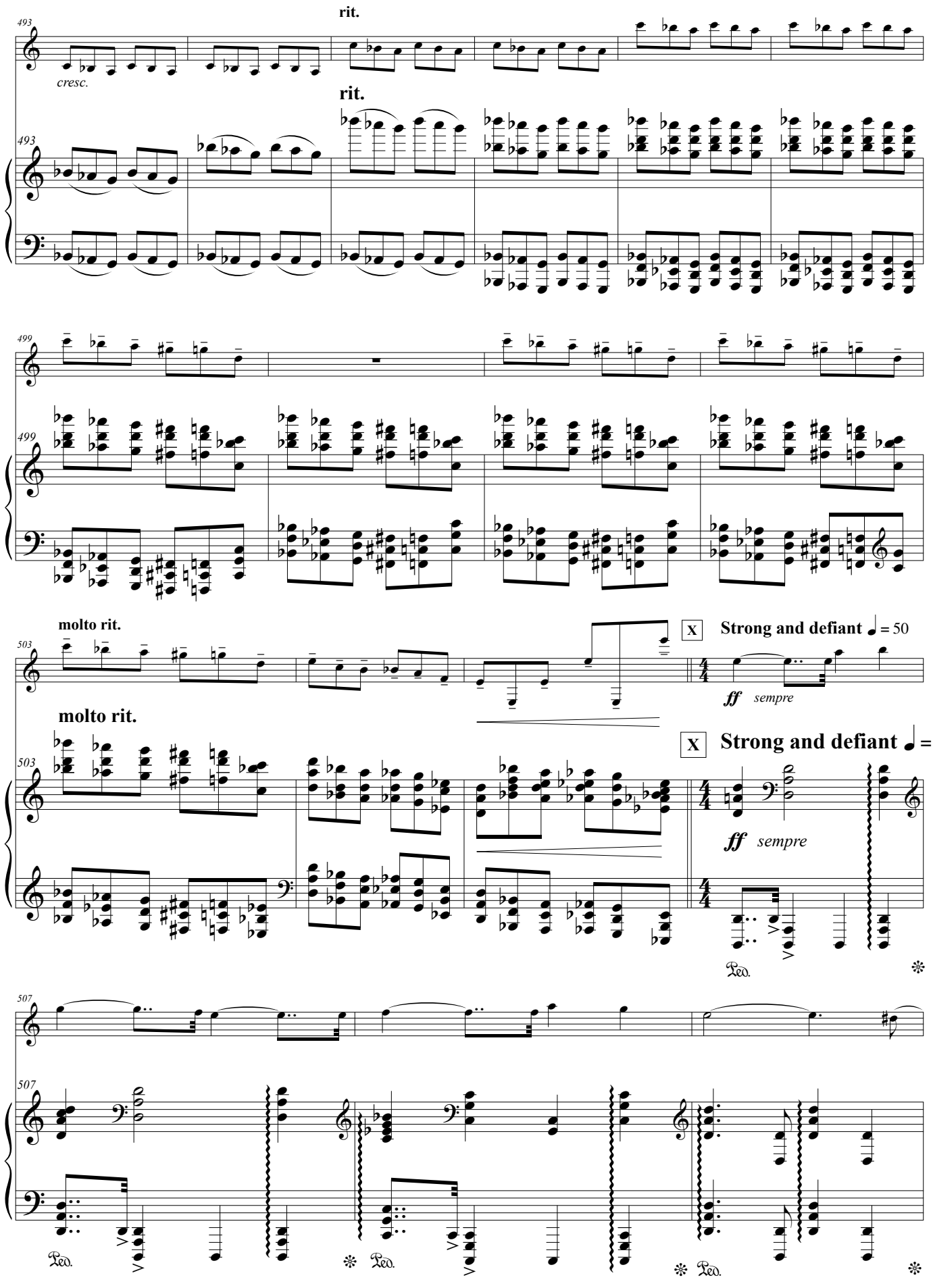

412
412
416
416
420
420
f
423
423

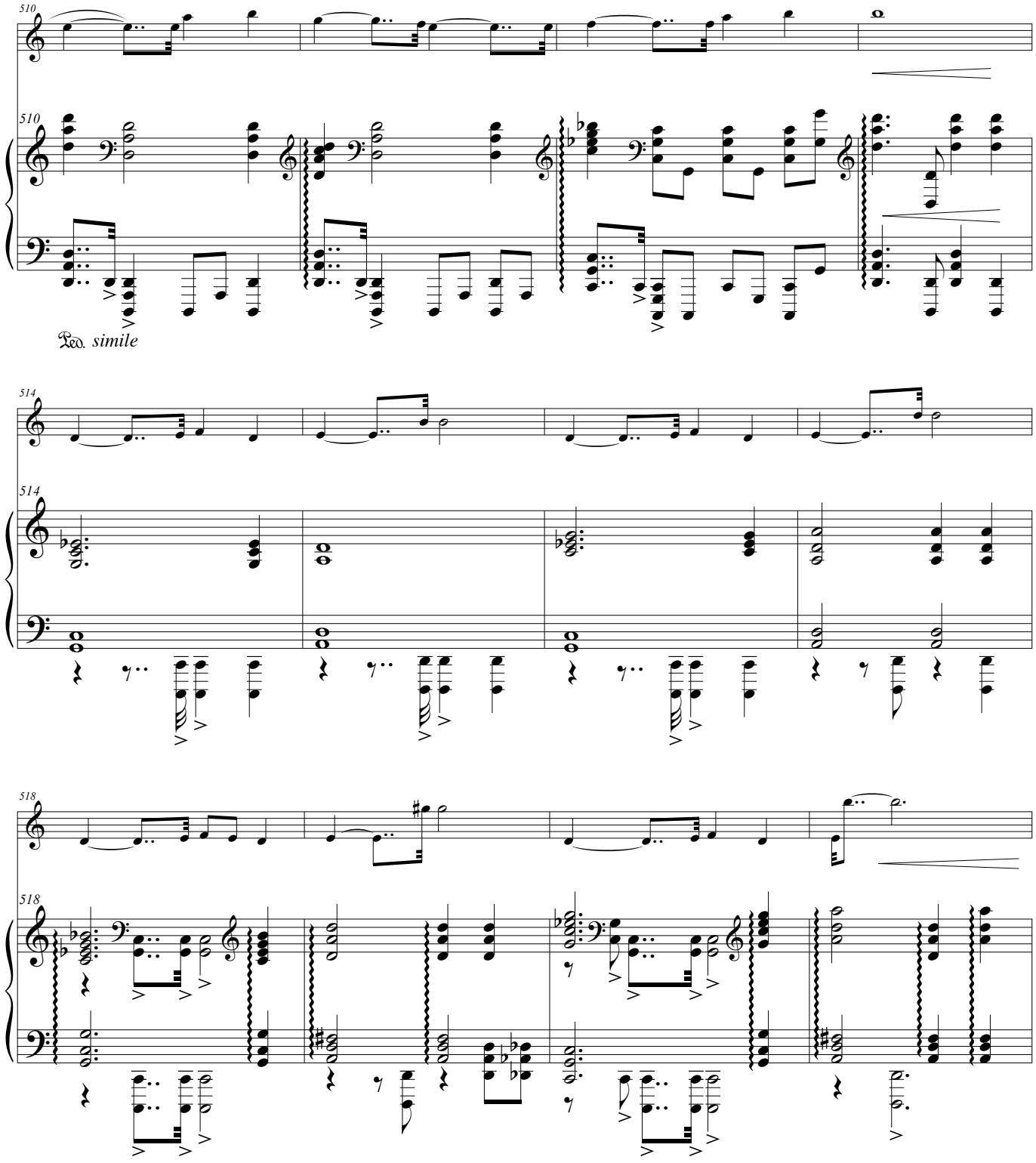

426
426
429
429
p
cresc.
U
432
p
mysteriously
U
432
f
p
Ped.
436
8va
436

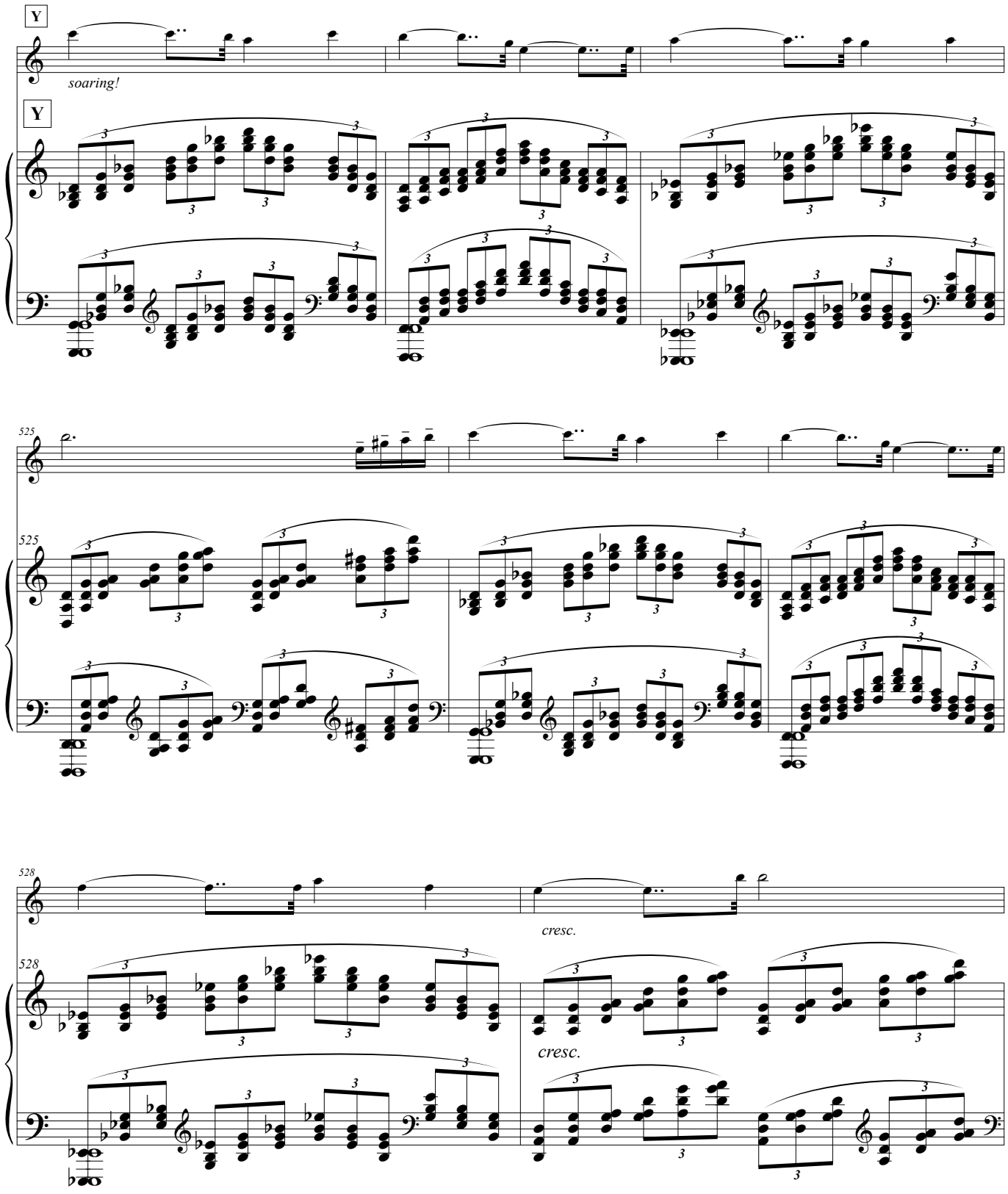

440
8va
444
Ped.
448
cresc. poco a poco
452

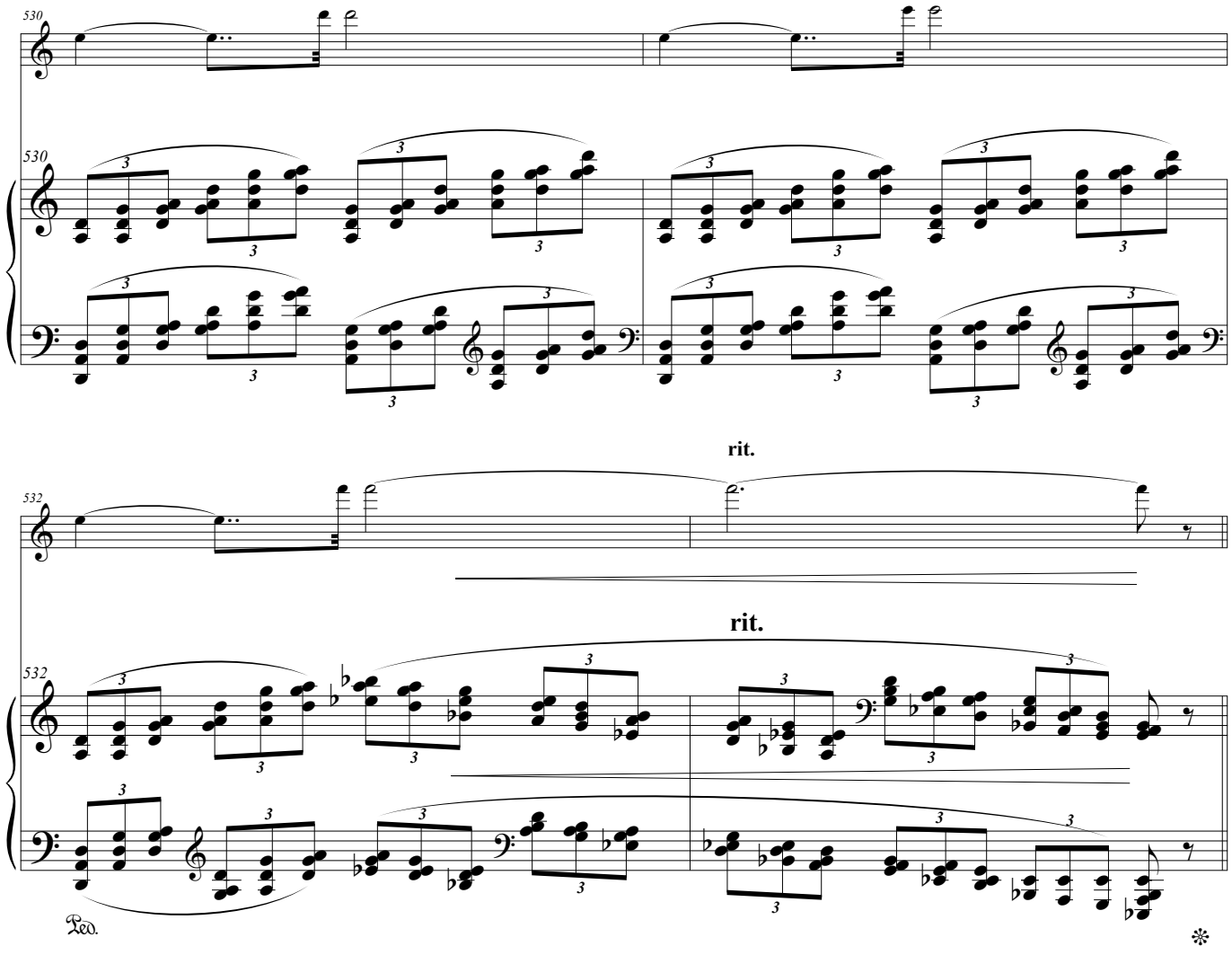

456
V
ff
Ped.
460
464
Presto ♩ = 170
467
f

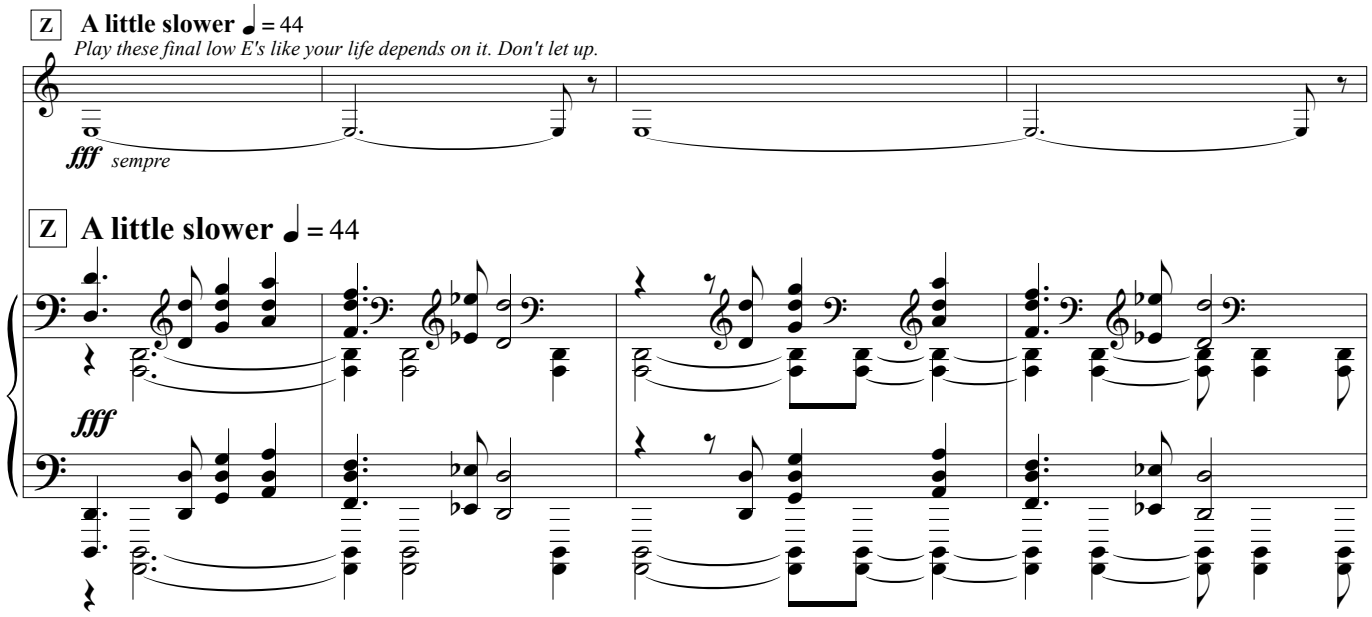

470
mp
W Faster still ♩ = 180
f
479
cresc.
486

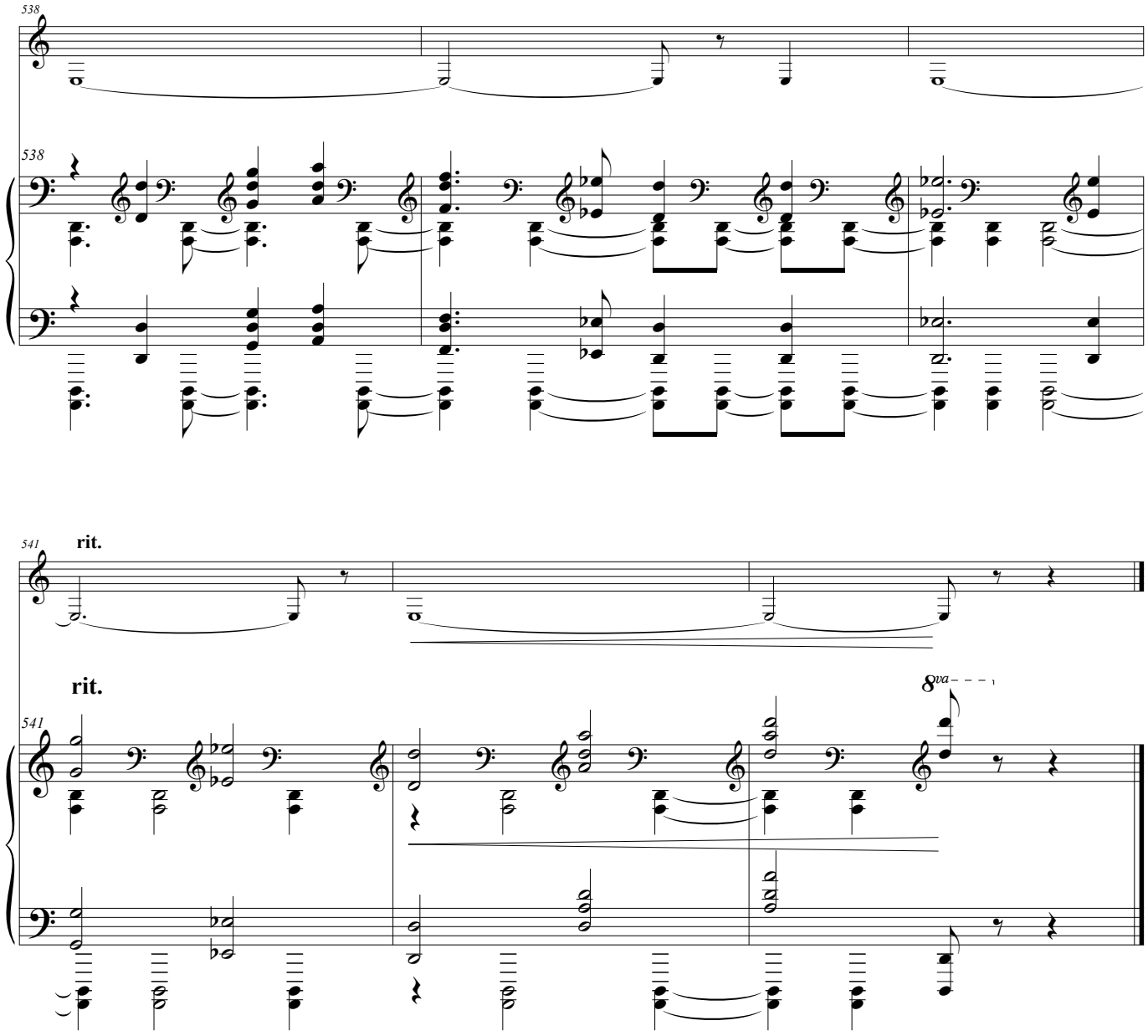

rit.
493
cresc.
rit.
493
499
499
molto rit.
503
X
Strong and defiant ♩ = 50
ff sempre
molto rit.
503
X
Strong and defiant ♩ = 50
ff sempre
Ped.
507
507
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


510
510
Ped. simile
514
514
518
518


Y
soaring!
Y
525
525
528
cresc.
528
cresc.


530
530
rit.
532
rit.
532
Ped.


Z A little slower ♩ = 44
Play these final low E's like your life depends on it. Don't let up.
fff sempre
Z A little slower ♩ = 44
fff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