SONATA #2

for Bass Clarinet and Piano

(2023)

JONATHAN RUSSELL

SONATA #2 FOR BASS CLARINET AND PIANO

Duration: c. 17:30

by Jonathan Russell

I think of *Sonata #2 for Bass Clarinet and Piano* as a sort of exhale after the tumultuous Trump and Covid-19 years. During that time, I wrote a series of pieces responding pretty directly to external events – the Trump presidency, the covid-19 pandemic, the Black Lives Matter protests, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This had not been typical of my artistic output previously, which was generally more abstract and non-programmatic. But something about the Trump years in particular made artistic engagement with the outside world feel unavoidable. *Sonata #2* – as the generic title implies – is in many ways a return to this less topical, more abstract approach to composing. There is no program behind the piece, and no issue or event it is consciously responding to. Now that the immediate crises of the pandemic and the Trump presidency are behind us, perhaps there is some space to breathe again, and to create art that is not so directly concerned with politics and human affairs.

However, if the piece *is* an exhale, it's a somewhat *anxious* one. The major issues of the past several years are hardly resolved. The after-effects of the pandemic linger, the war in Ukraine still rages, and Trump could very well be a year and a half away from another presidential term (or a prison term, or both). So while the piece is not consciously addressing anything outside of itself, and generally has a more relaxed, joyful vibe than my other recent works, there is lingering uncertainty as well. In each of the three movements, the same upbeat, pop-y chord progression gives way to darker, more sinister harmonies. And while each movement ends gently and serenely, it is with the sense of a lingering question rather than a resolution. Are we in the process of closing a dark chapter in our history? Or is this merely the calm before the much larger storm that is about to come crashing down on us? Only time will tell.

Musically, the first and third movements are energetic, groove-based, and influenced by pop music. In the first movement, the piano lays down the fierce, swinging groove, and the bass clarinet sings improvisatory lines above. In the third movement, it's the bass clarinet that lays down the grooves, with the piano adding color and shoring up the bass. The second movement is a different animal, meditative and serene, with a pronounced influence from the timeless slow movements of Olivier Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time.* As it progresses, however, it becomes increasingly expressive and anguished, culminating in a searing high bass clarinet note over pounded dissonant piano chords, before ending with a gently melting coda.

The outer movements are best performed with the energetic, bold, confident drive of pop music, rather than with the classical refinement that many performers may be more accustomed to. Both bass clarinetists and pianists are strongly encouraged to listen to the audio mockup to get a sense of the feel and style, which is not possible to fully capture in musical notation. The mockup can be found here: https://on.soundcloud.com/ikAAU

Sonata #2 for Bass Clarinet and Piano was generously commissioned by a consortium of 61 bass 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:

Amy Advocat, Andrea Vos-Rochefort, Andrew Grenci, Andrew Rutten, Anthony Costa, Ben Freimuth, Bill Kirkley, Brian Almanza, Brian Corbin, Brian Gnojek, Bruce Abbott, Cameron Page, Celine Ferro, Christina Rawady, d'Art Richard, Dalton Ringey, Daniel Dorff, Elisabeth Stimpert, Elizabeth Bley, Gary Gorczyca, Gary Whitman, Georg Kühner, George Georgiou, Henry McNamara, Jacob Jackson, Jacques Pion, Jeff Anderle, Jenny Ziefel, Jeremy Wohletz, Jessica Harrie, Jesus Olivares, Joanna Wiltshire, Joel Russell, John Harden, Johnny Engelke, Josh Woods, Joshua Gardner, Julie Stuckenschneider, Katherine Carleton, Katherine Ravenwood, Katie Rice, Kimberly Fullerton, Kristin Fray, Lara Mitofsky Neuss, Laura Ramsey Russell, Leonardo Palma, Lucas Gianini, Matthias Höfer, Nicholas Chesemore, Noah Stone, Rachel Jones, Rongbing Shen, Rudy Rodriguez, Stefanie Gardner, Stephen White, Steven Henry, Tim Young, Timothy Hanley, Tyler Mazone, Wolcott Humphrey, and Yannick Joseph.

Score

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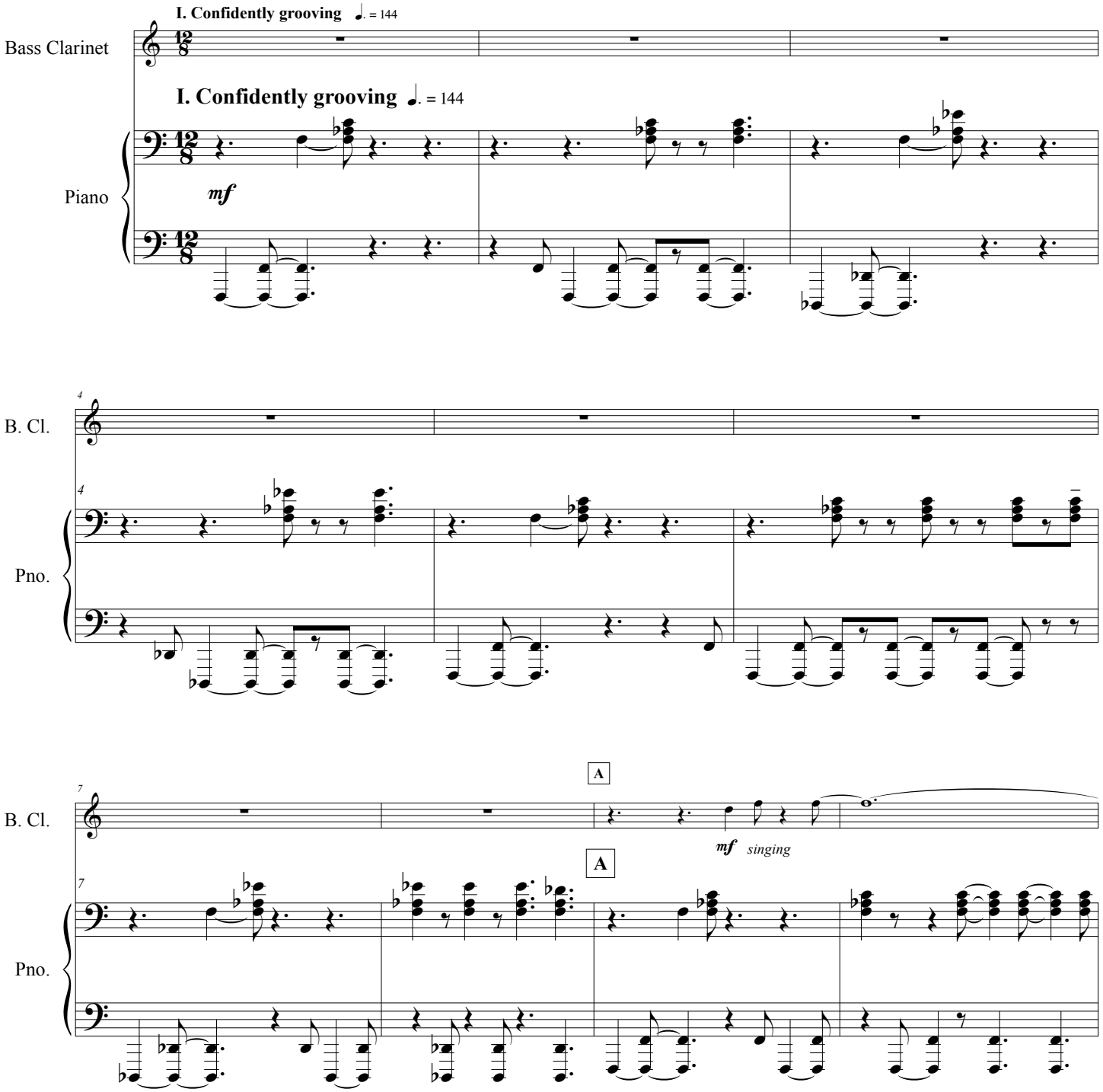
Commissioned by a consortium of 61 bass clarinetists

Jonathan Russell



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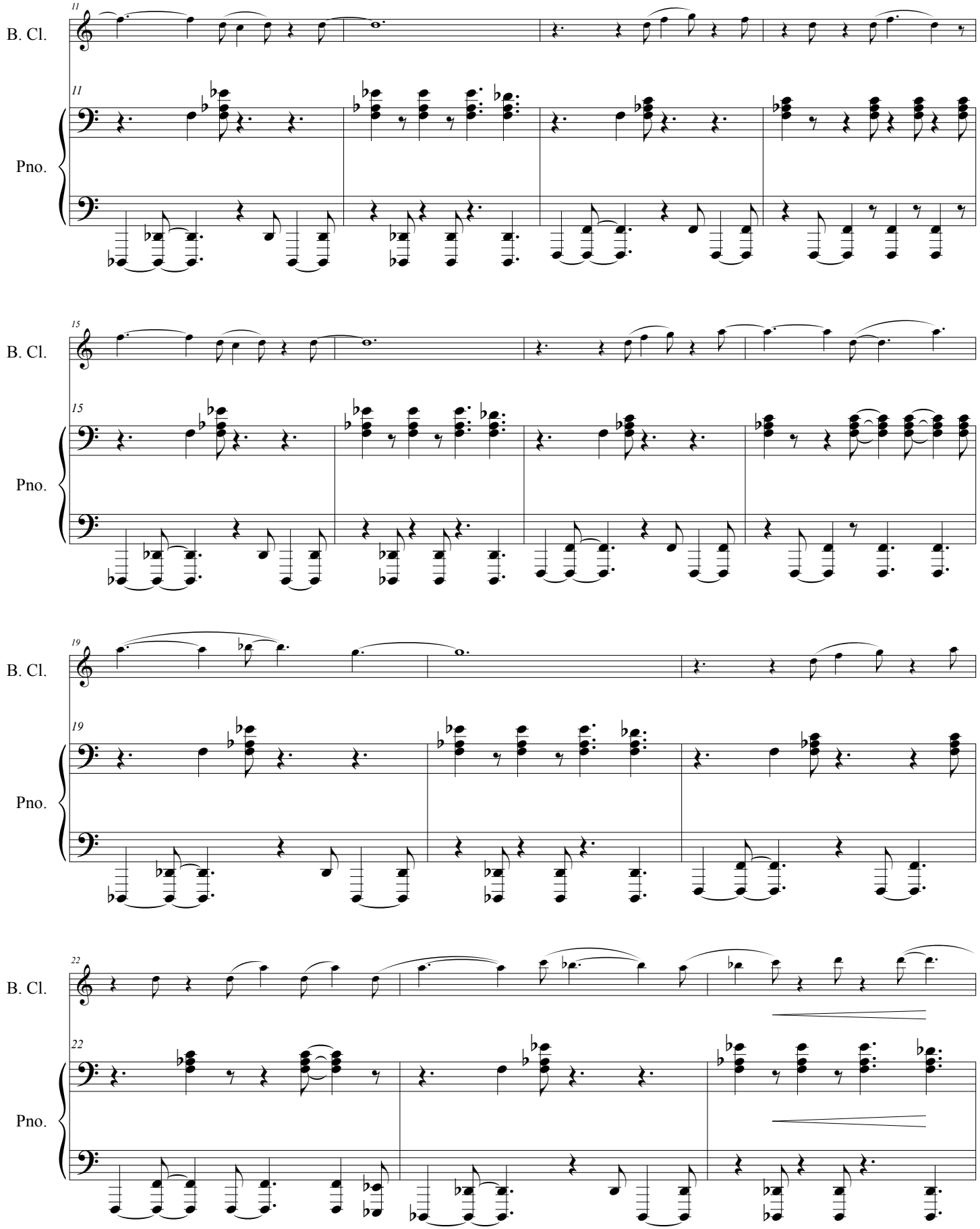
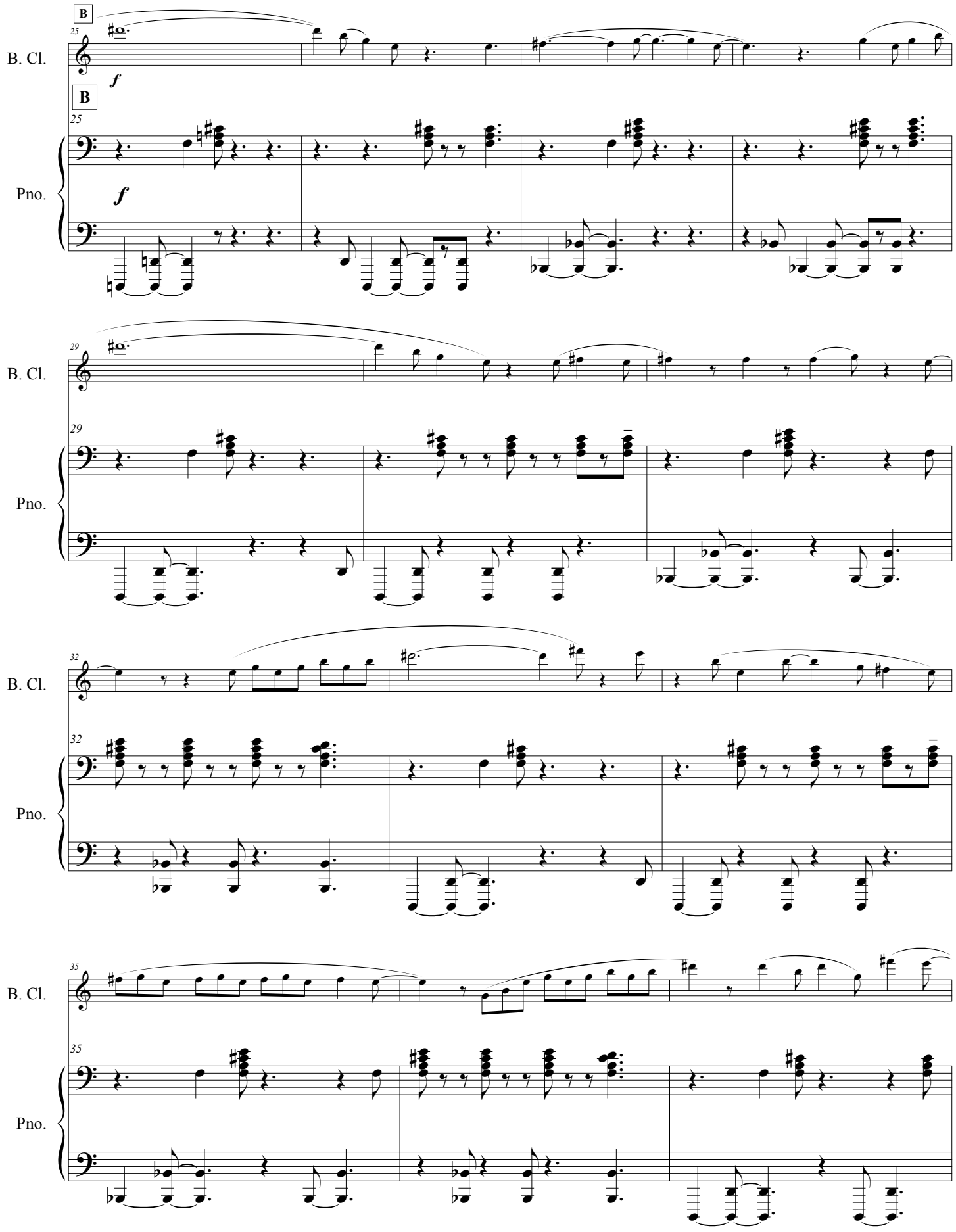
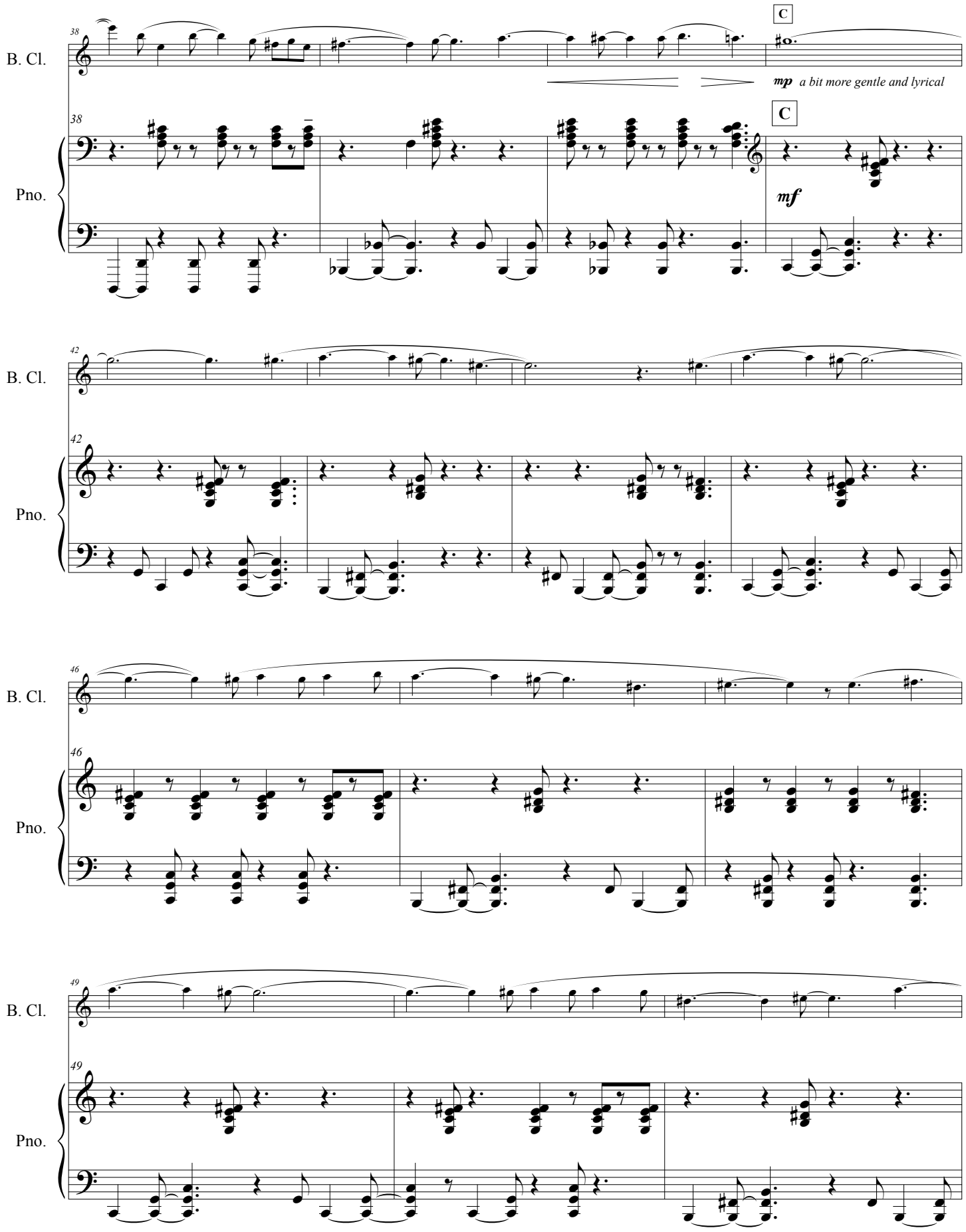
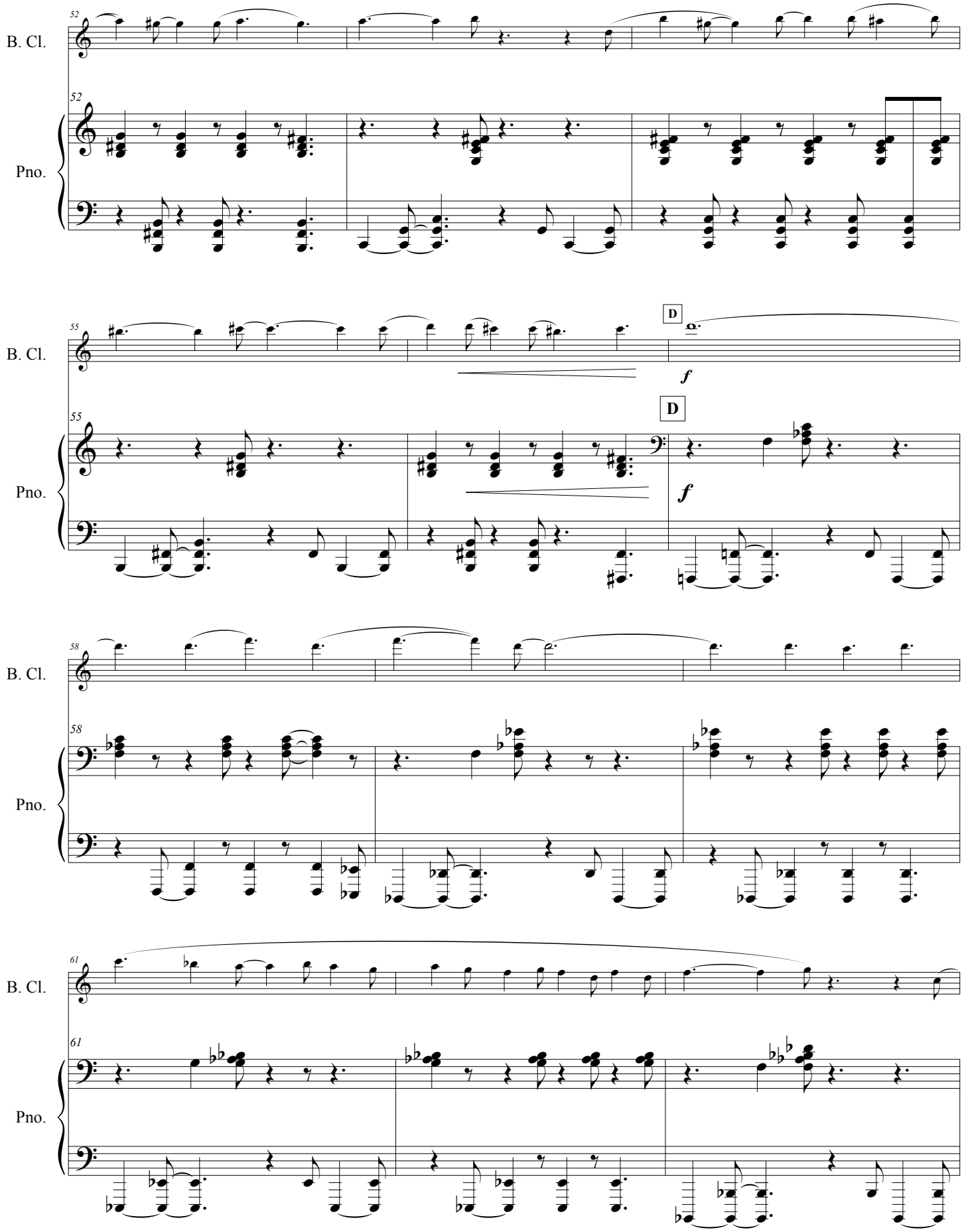
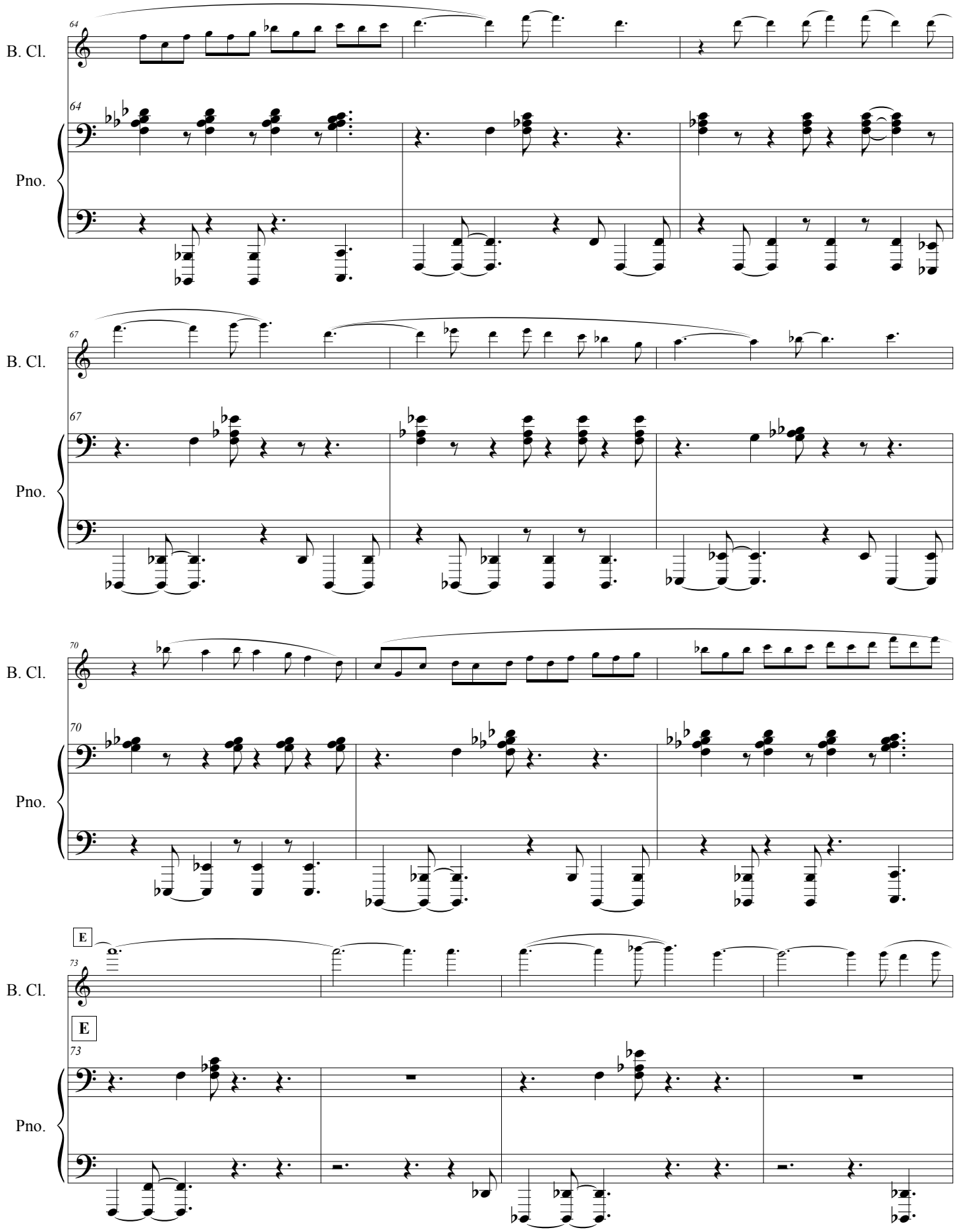
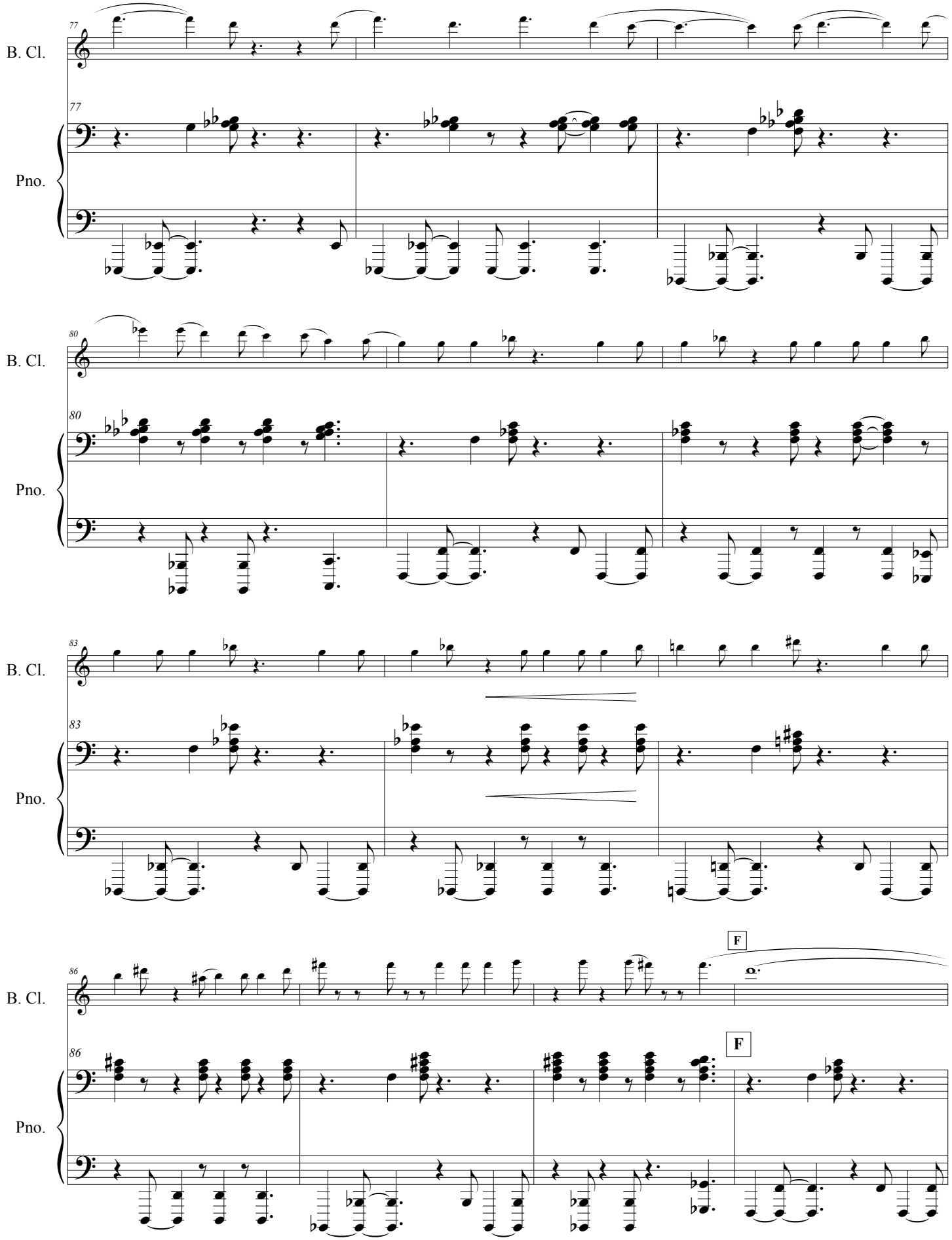

11
B. Cl.
11
Pno.
15
B. Cl.
15
Pno.
19
B. Cl.
19
Pno.
22
B. Cl.
22
Pno.

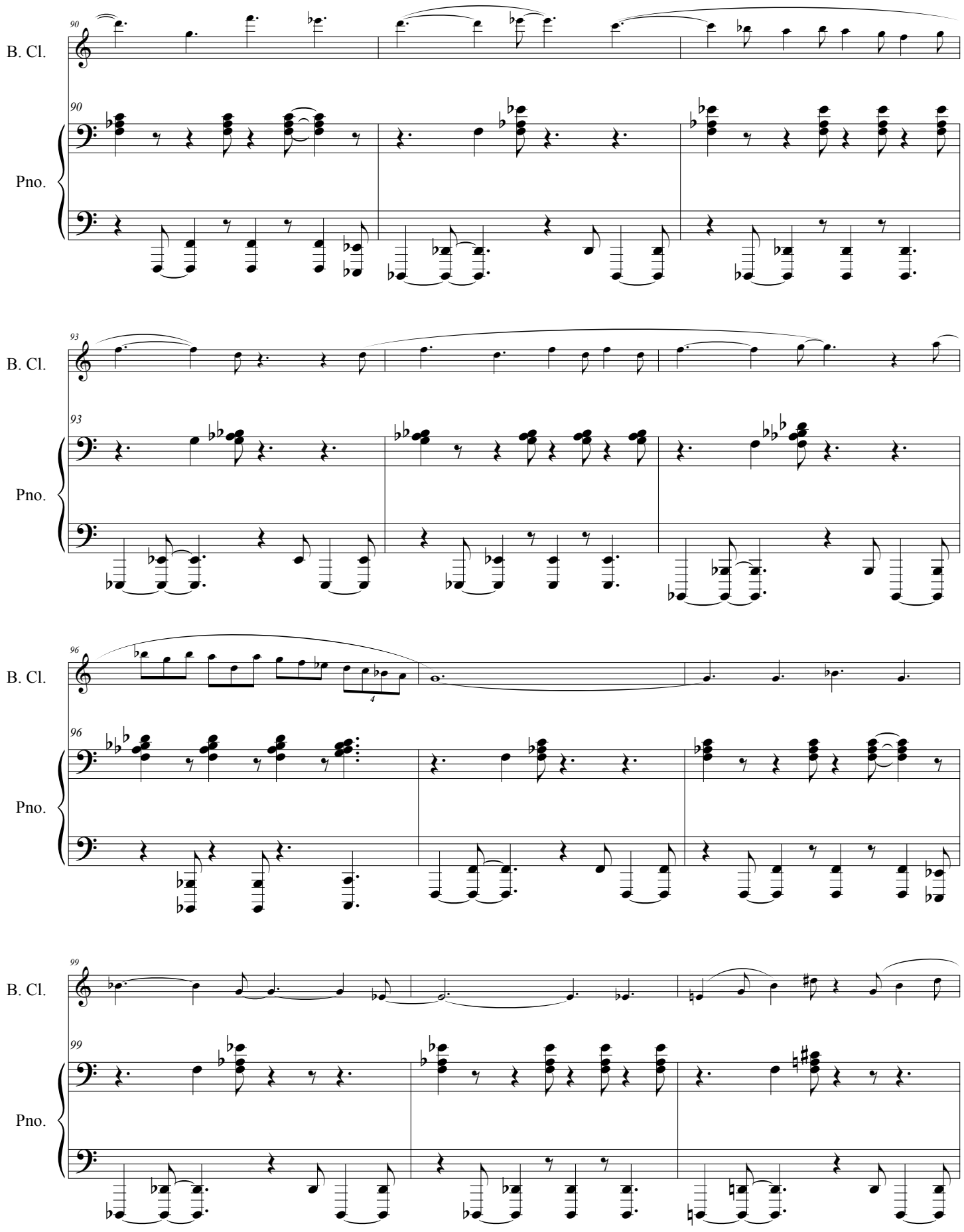

B
25
B. Cl.
f
B
25
Pno.
f
29
B. Cl.
29
Pno.
32
B. Cl.
32
Pno.
35
B. Cl.
35
Pno.

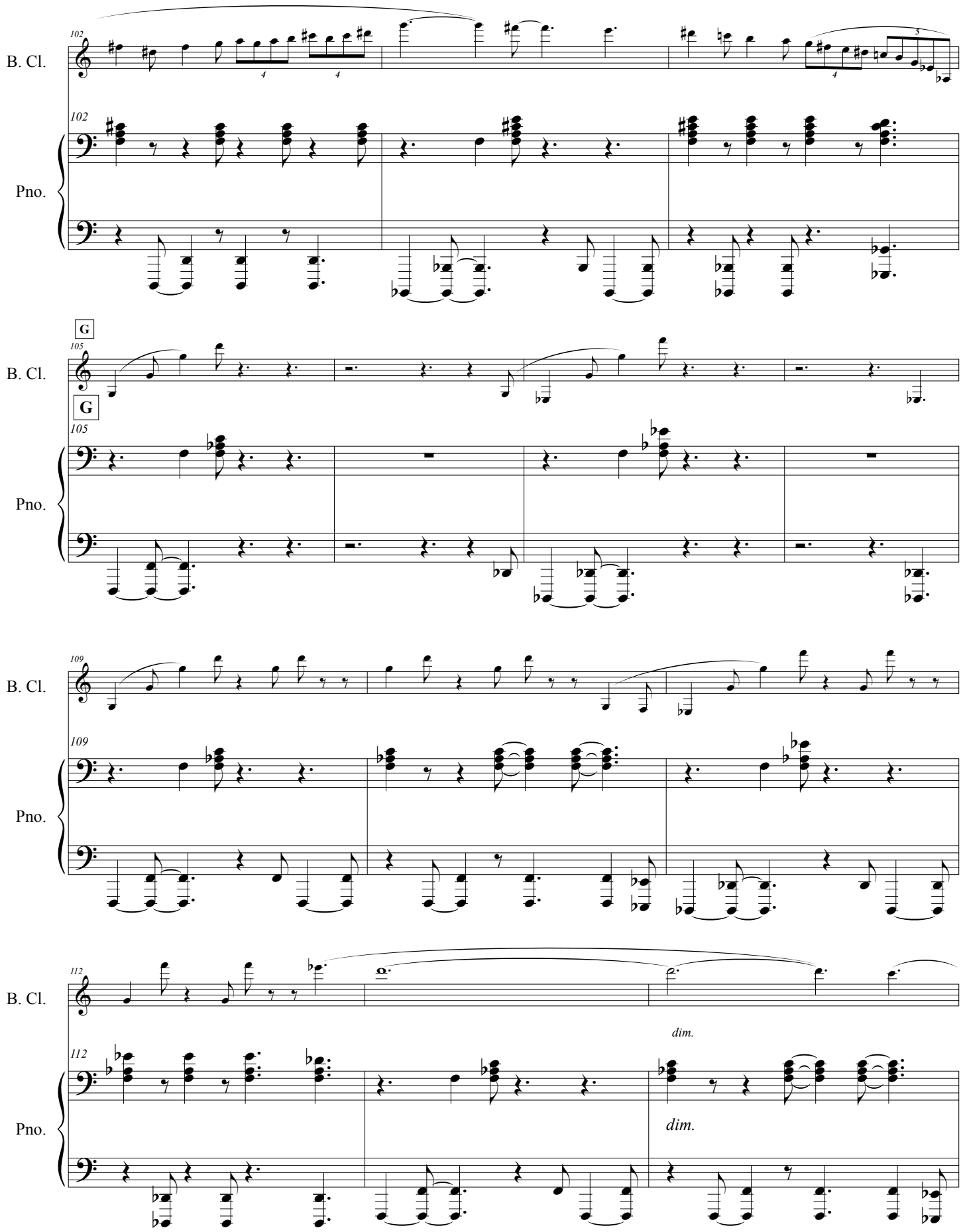

B. Cl.
Pno.
38
C
mp a bit more gentle and lyrical
mf
42
46
49

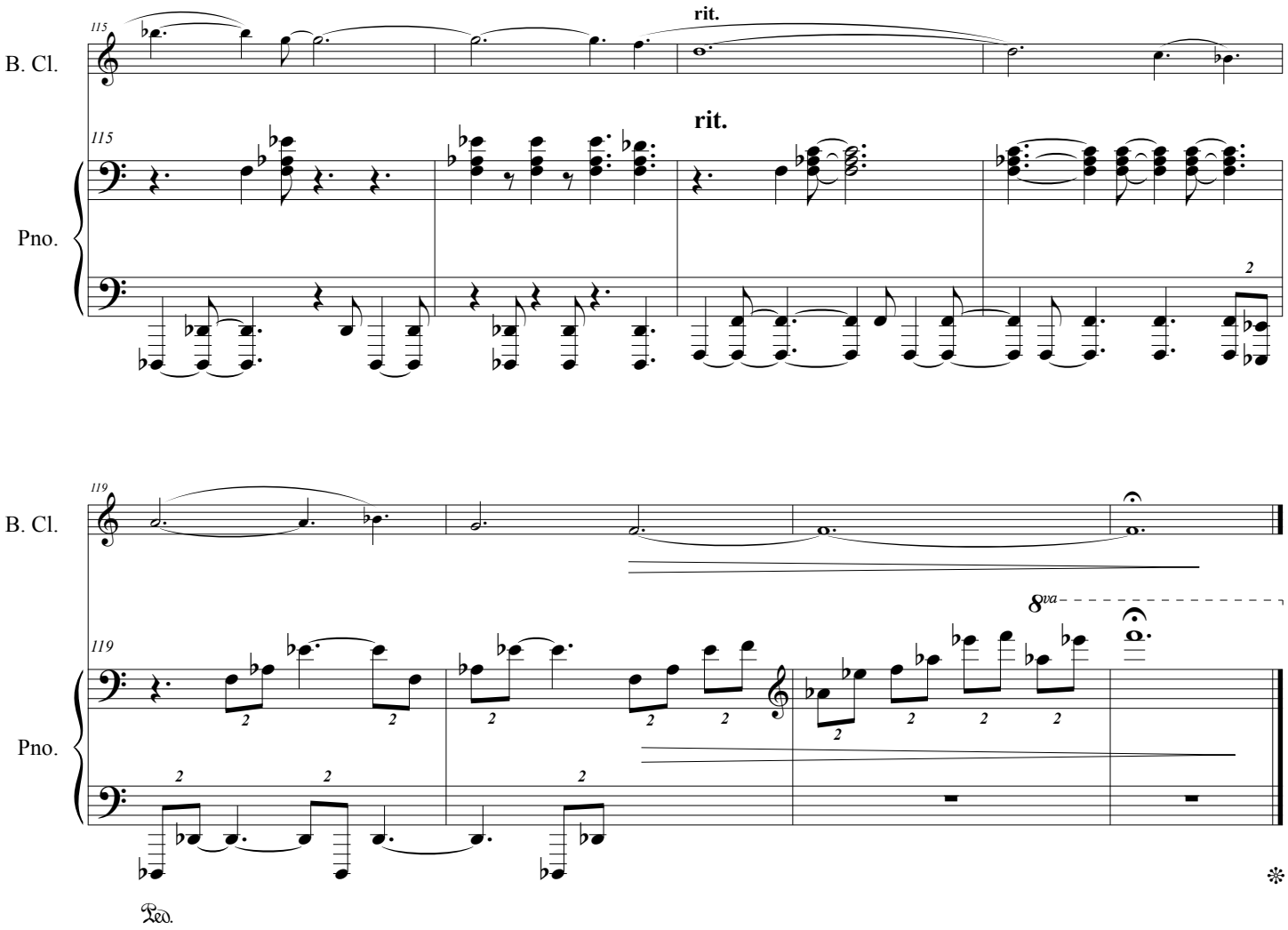

B. Cl.
Pno.
52
55
D
f
58
61


B. Cl.
64
Pno.
64
B. Cl.
67
Pno.
67
B. Cl.
70
Pno.
70
E
B. Cl.
73
E
Pno.
73

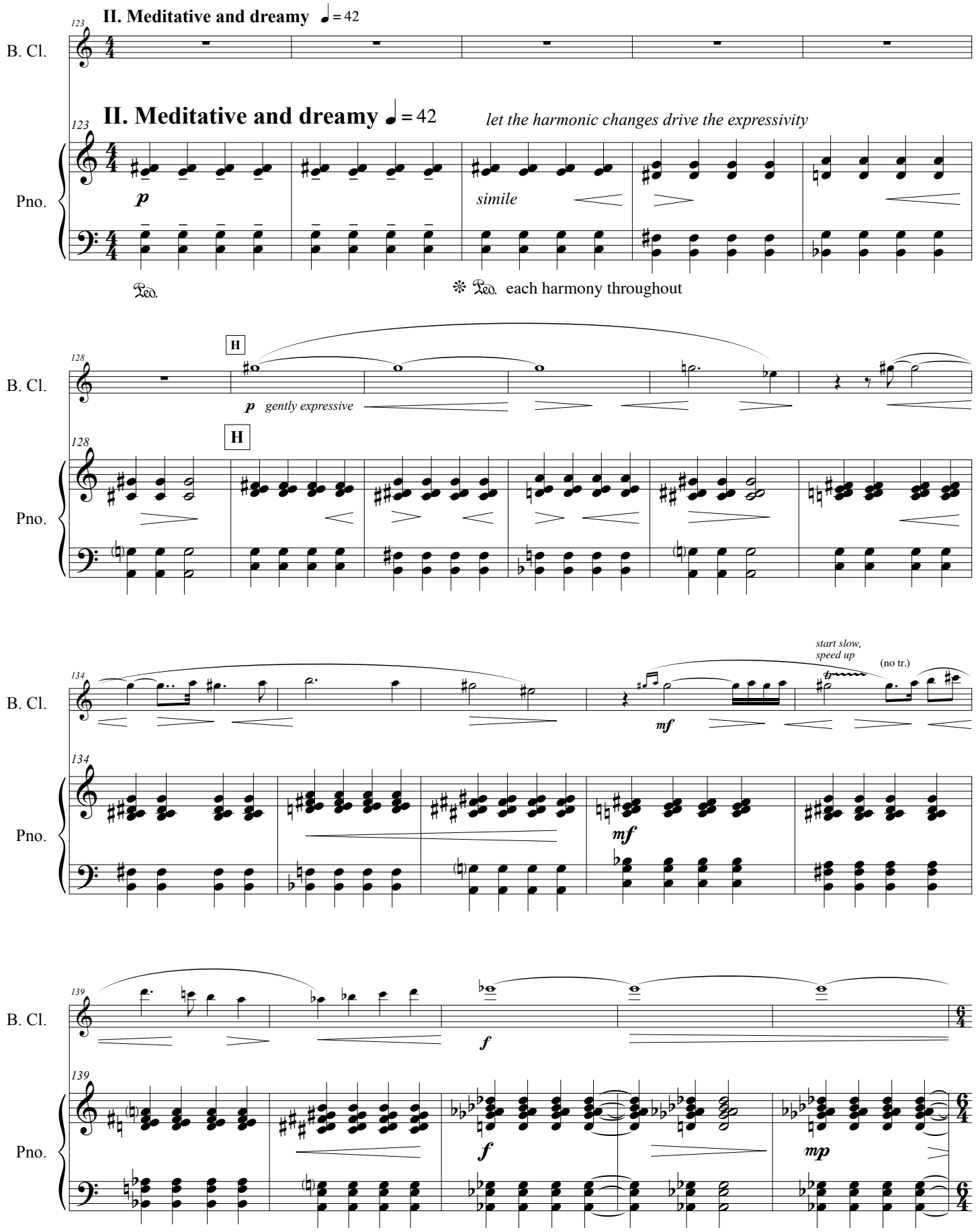

77
B. Cl.
77
Pno.
80
B. Cl.
80
Pno.
83
B. Cl.
83
Pno.
86
B. Cl.
F
86
F
Pno.

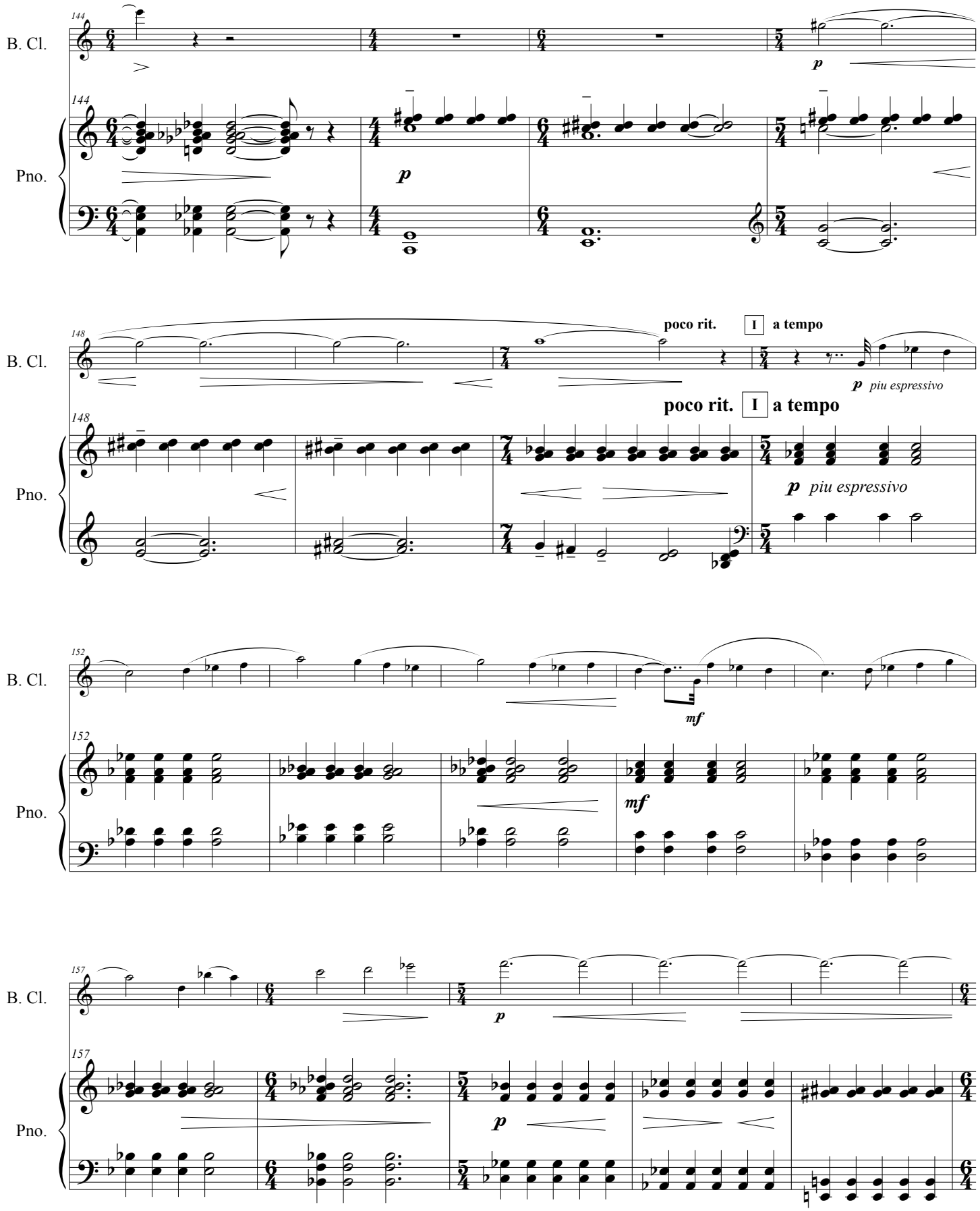

B. Cl.
Pno.
90
93
96
99

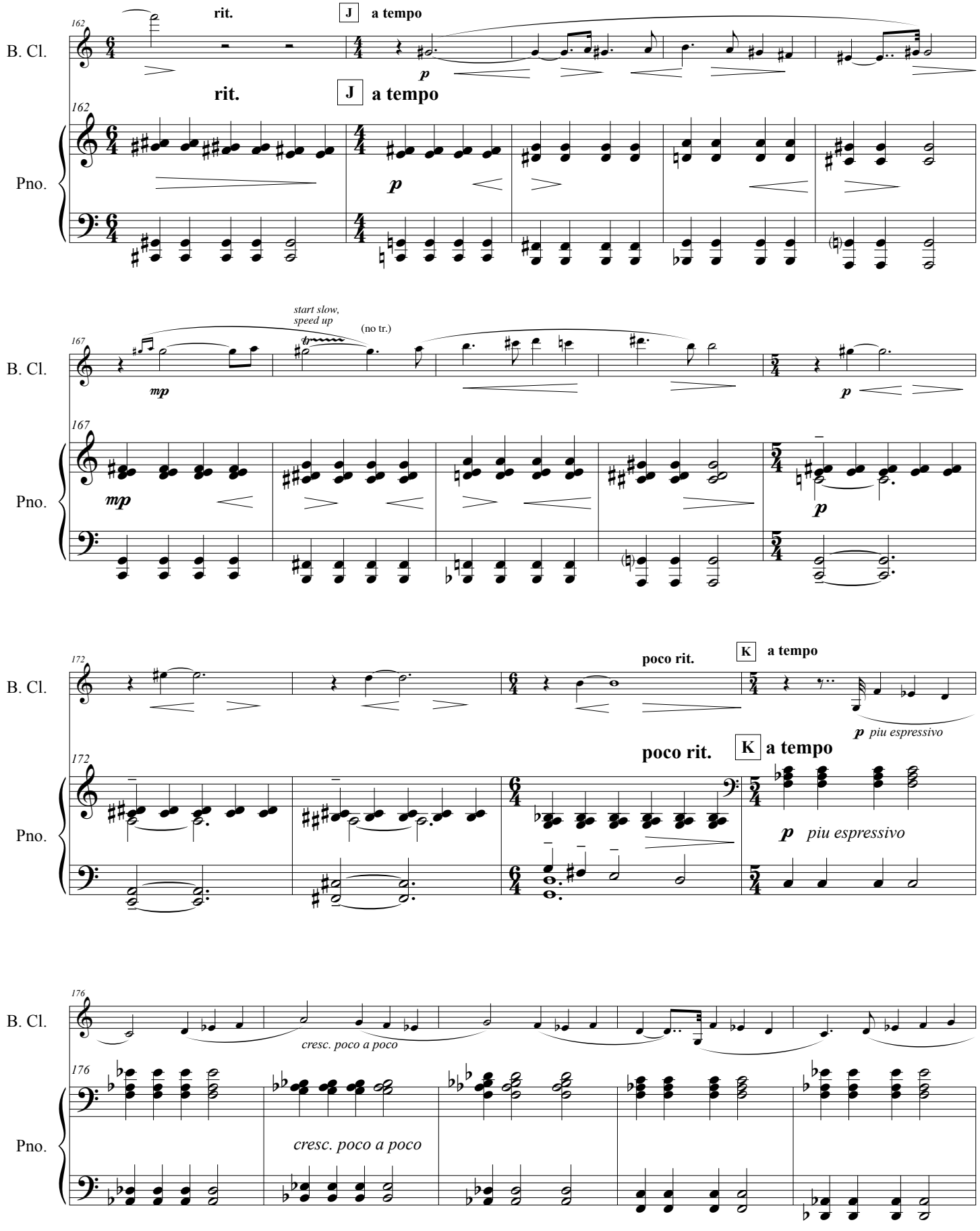

B. Cl.
Pno.
102
G
105
109
112
dim.
dim.

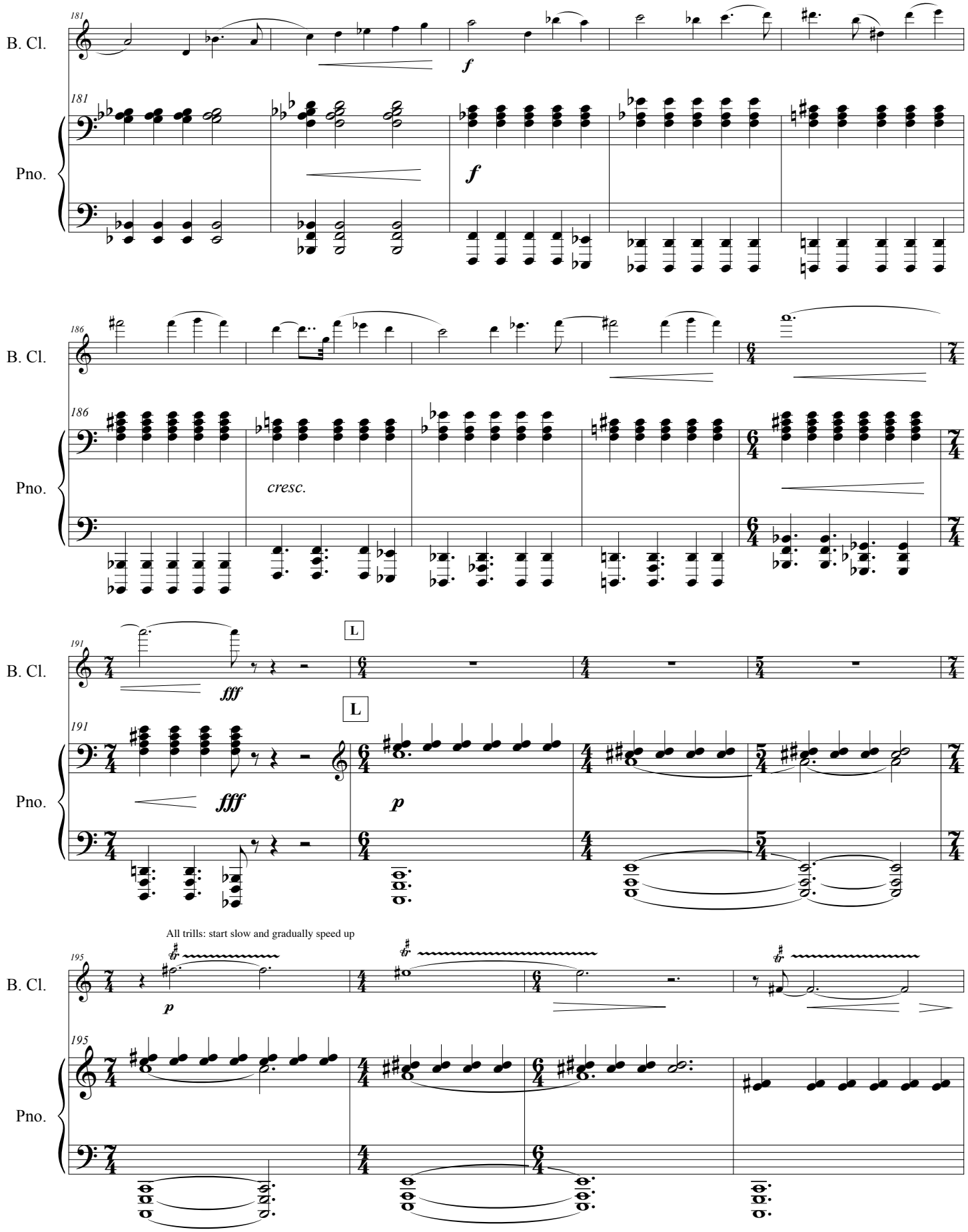

B. Cl.
115
rit.
Pno.
115
rit.
2

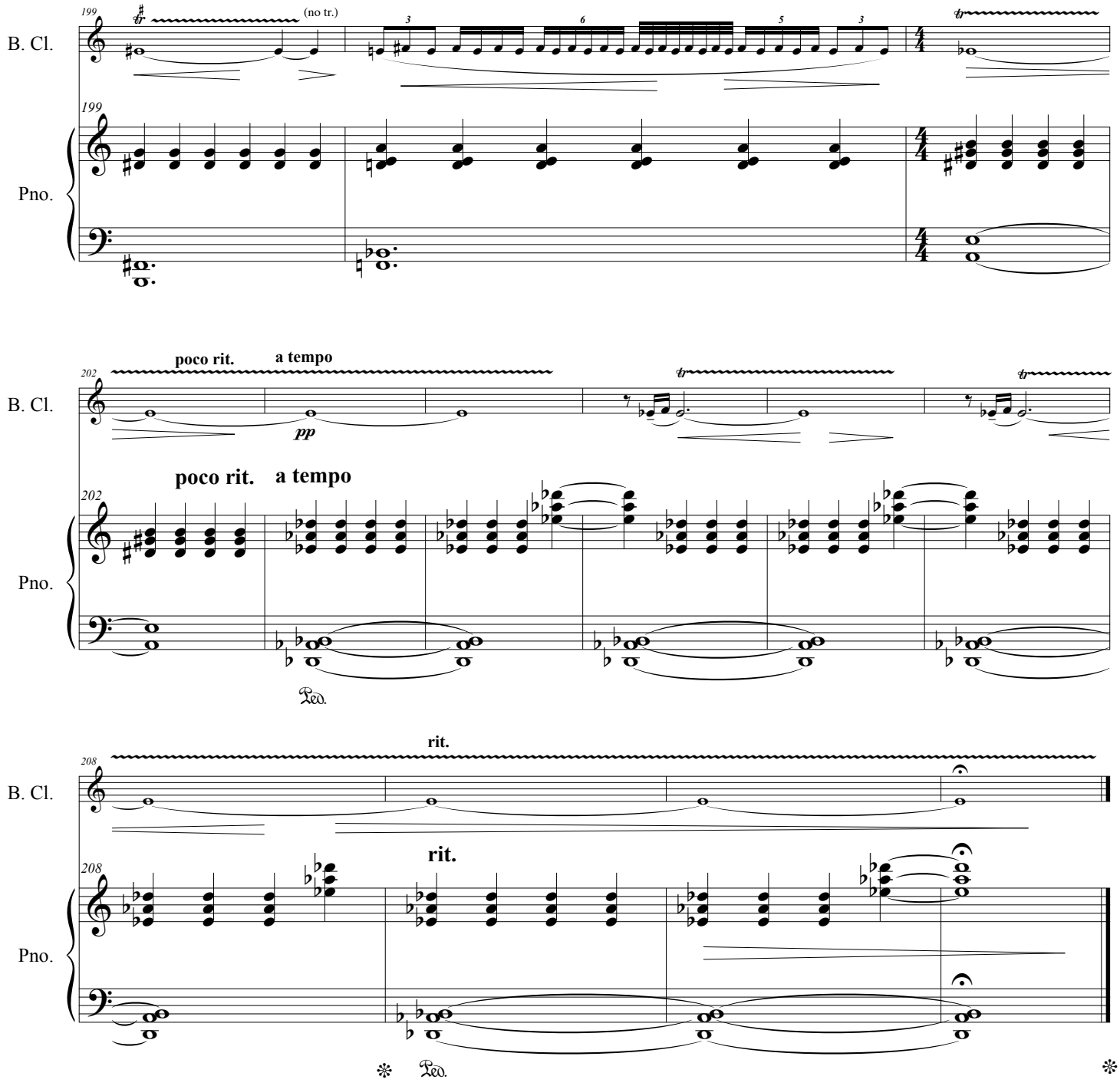
B. Cl.
119
8va
Pno.
119
2
Ped.

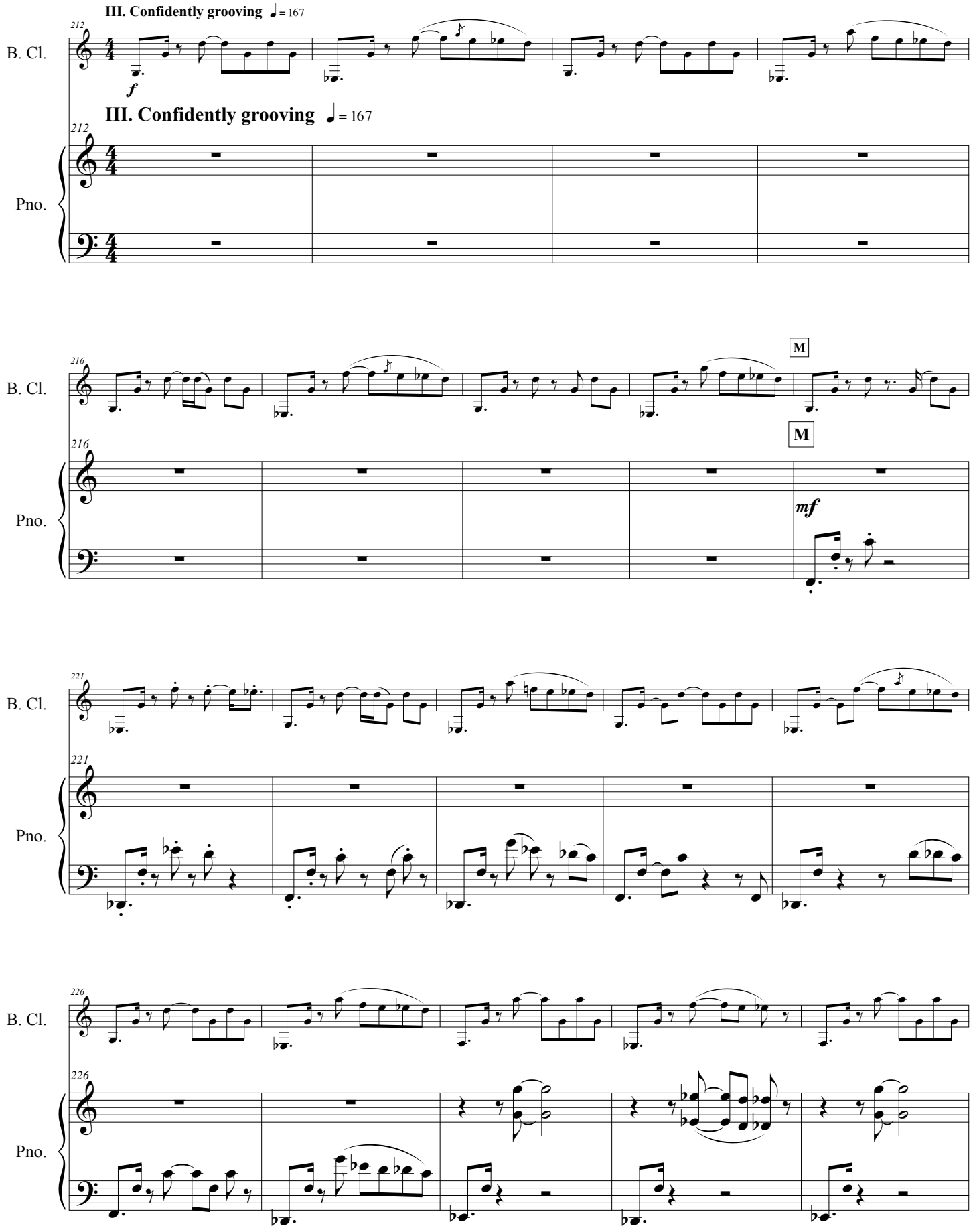

II. Meditative and dreamy ♩= 42
B. Cl.
Pno.
123
p
simile
let the harmonic changes drive the expressivity
Ped.
each harmony throughout
128
H
p gently expressive
134
mf
start slow, speed up
(no tr.)
139
f
mp

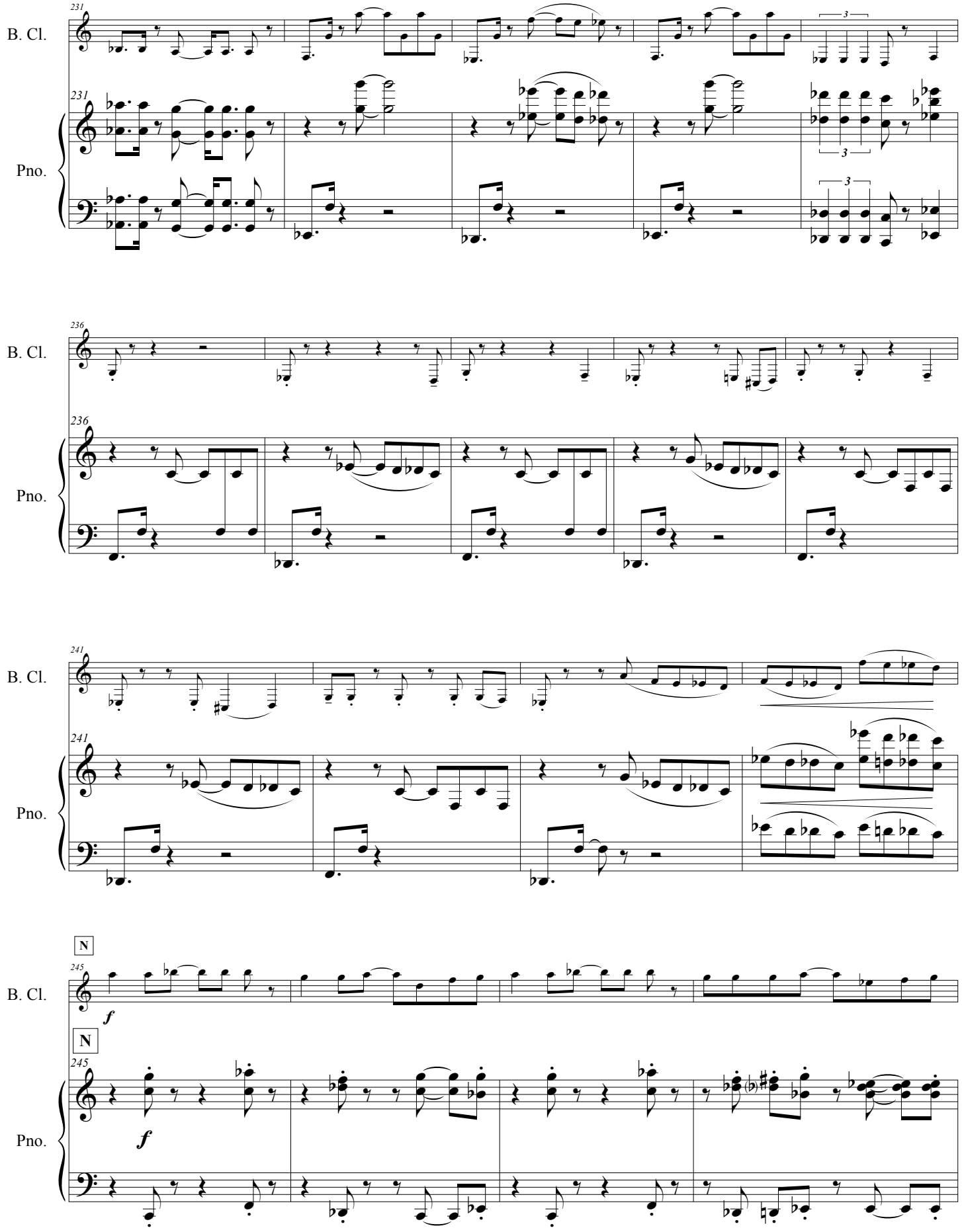

144
B. Cl.
Pno.
p
148
poco rit.
I
a tempo
p piu espressivo
152
mf
157

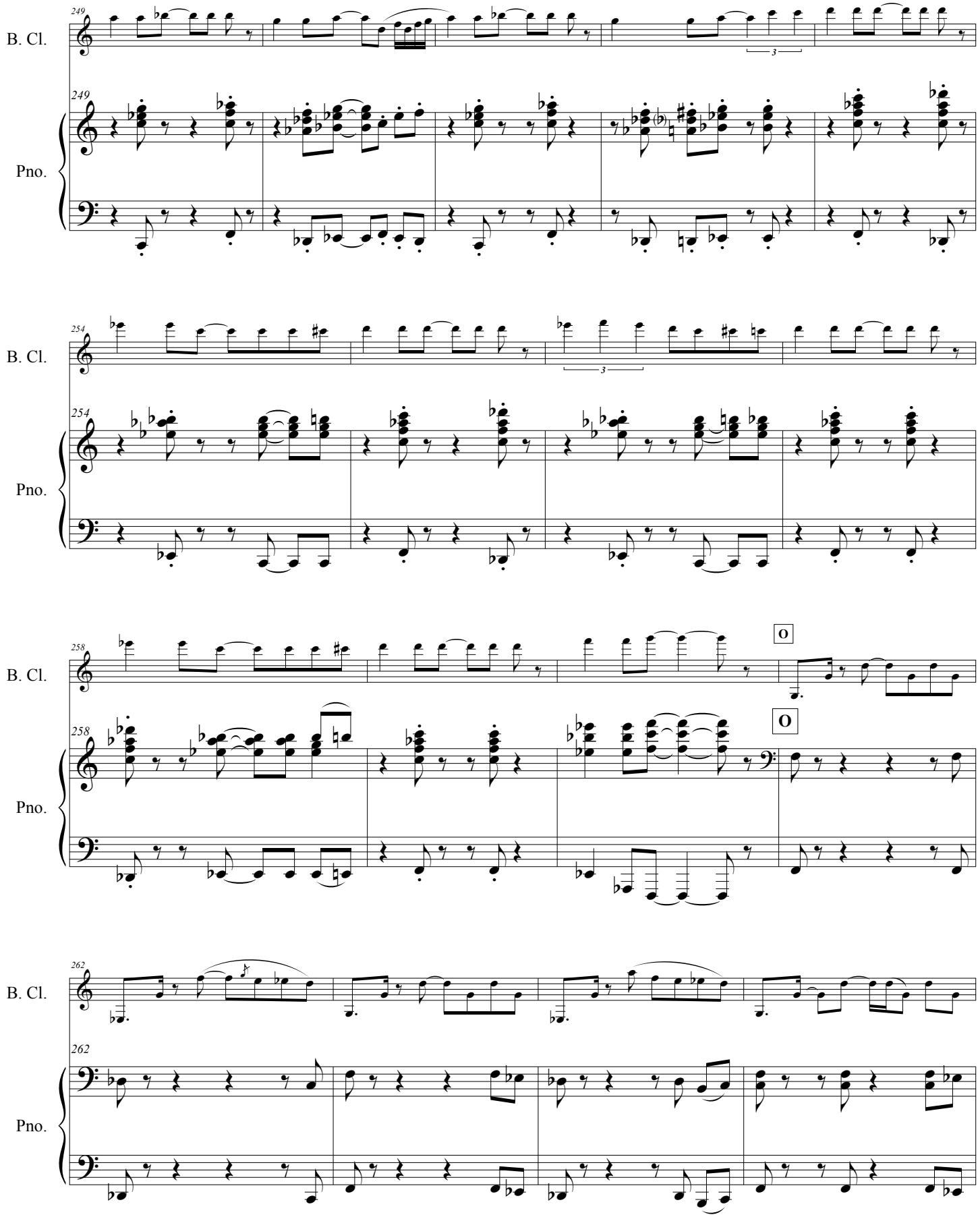

B. Cl.
Pno.
162
rit.
J
a tempo
p
167
start slow, speed up
(no tr.)
mp
172
poco rit.
K
a tempo
p piu espressivo
176
cresc. poco a poco

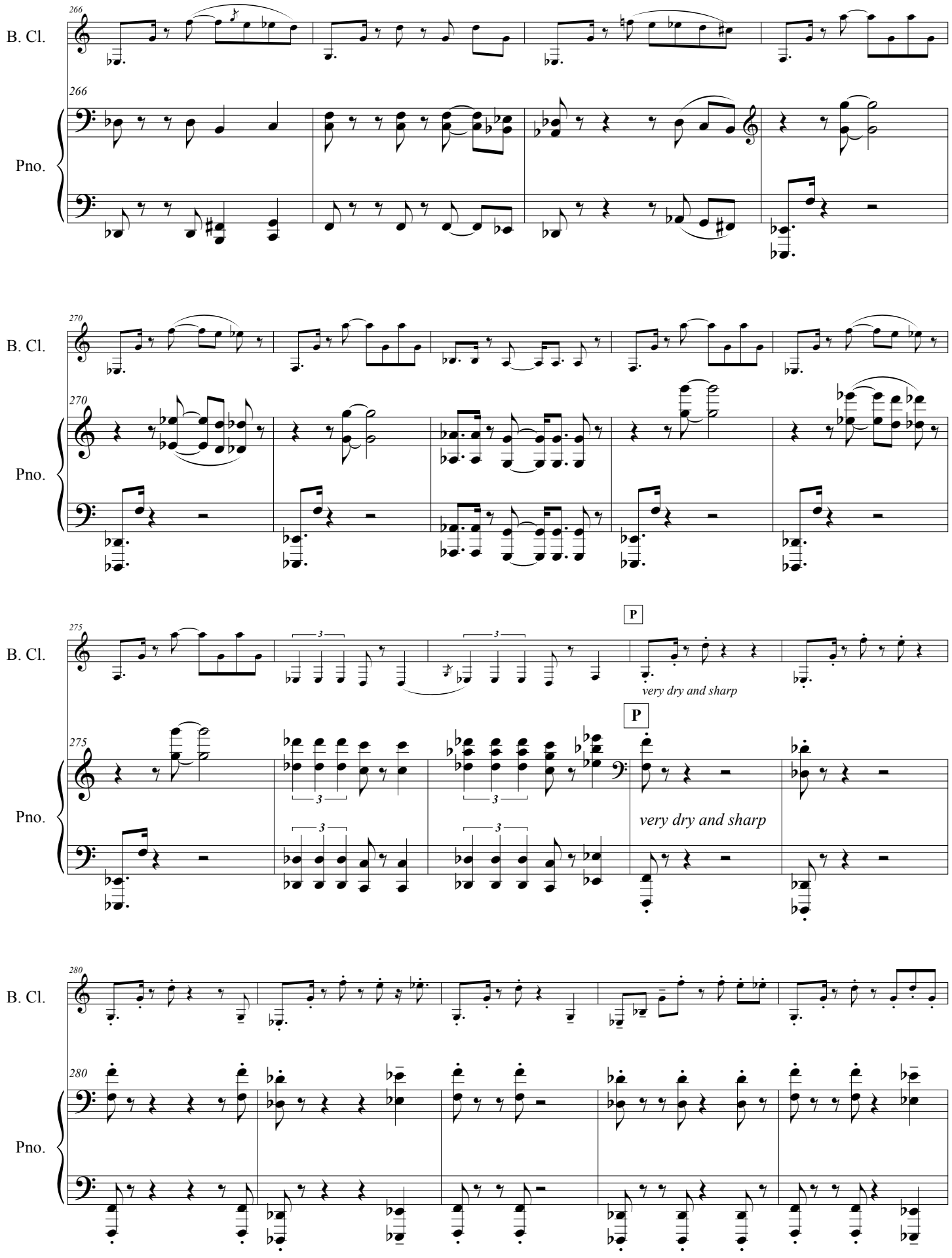

181
B. Cl.
f
181
Pno.
f
186
B. Cl.
186
Pno.
cresc.
191
B. Cl.
fff
L
191
Pno.
fff
L
p
All trills: start slow and gradually speed up
195
B. Cl.
p
195
Pno.

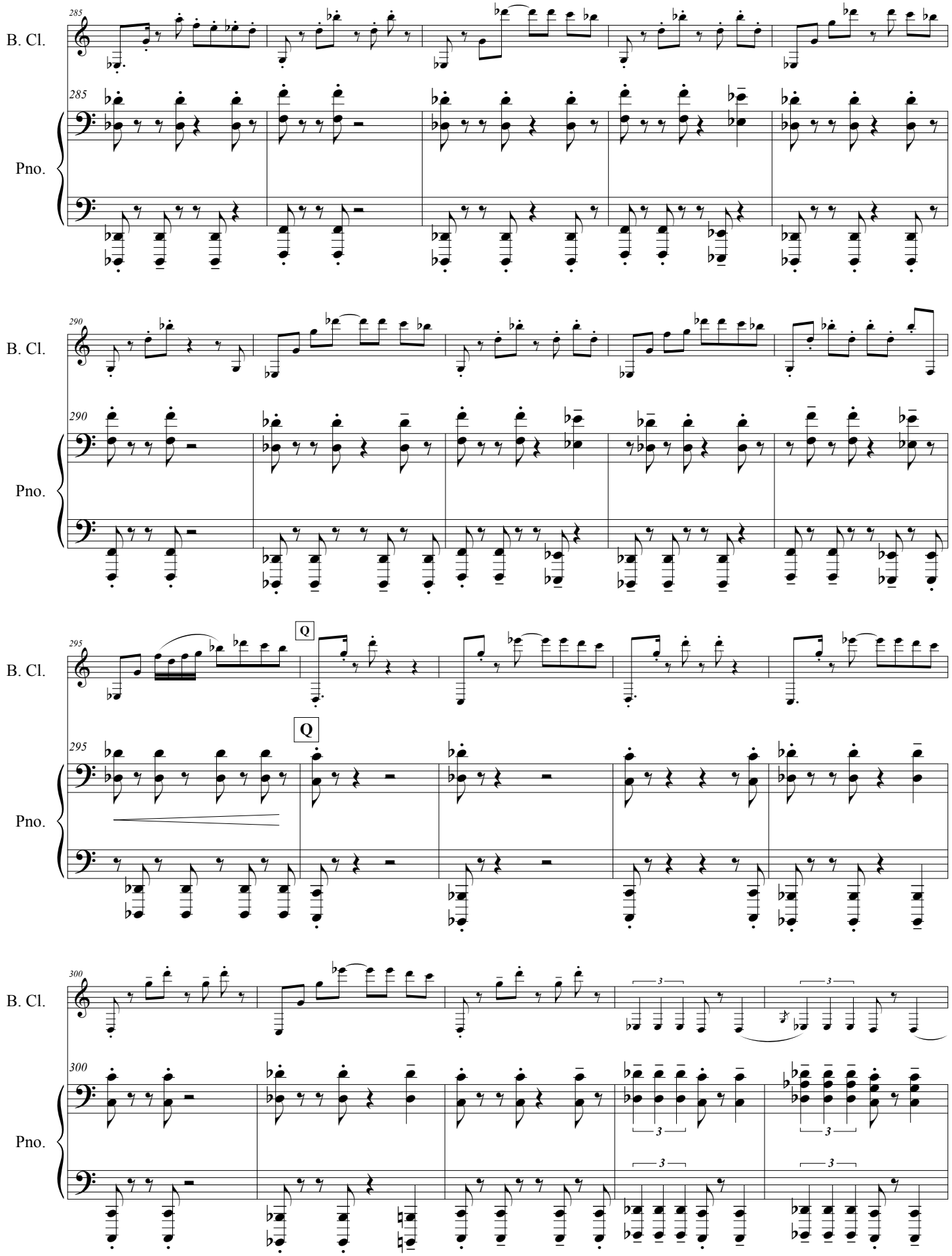

199
B. Cl.
(no tr.)
Pno.
202
poco rit.
a tempo
pp
Ped.
208
rit.
Ped.

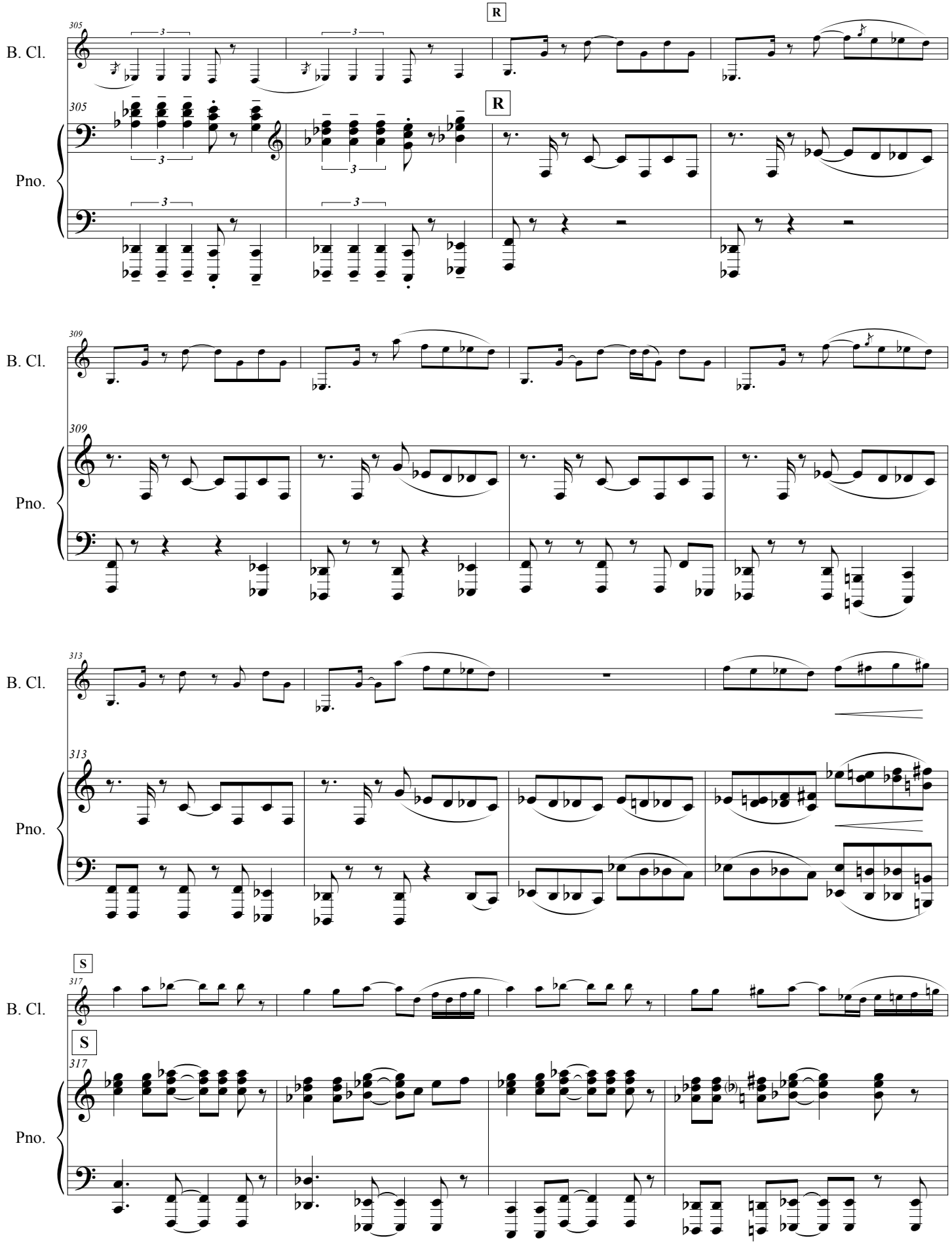

III. Confidently grooving ♩= 167
212
B. Cl.
f
III. Confidently grooving ♩= 167
212
Pno.
216
B. Cl.
M
216
M
Pno.
mf
221
B. Cl.
221
Pno.
226
B. Cl.
226
Pno.

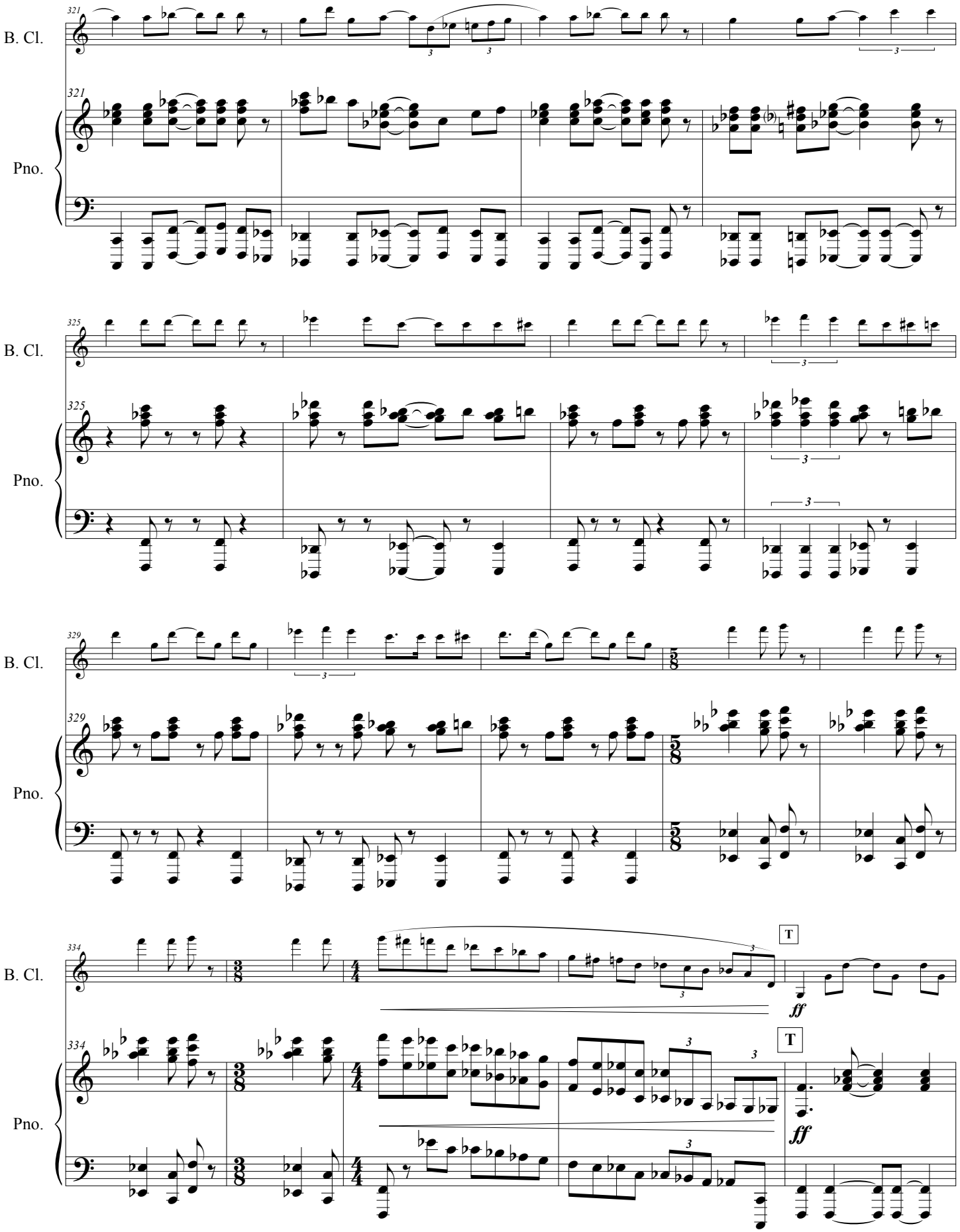

231
B. Cl.
Pno.
236
241
N
245
f

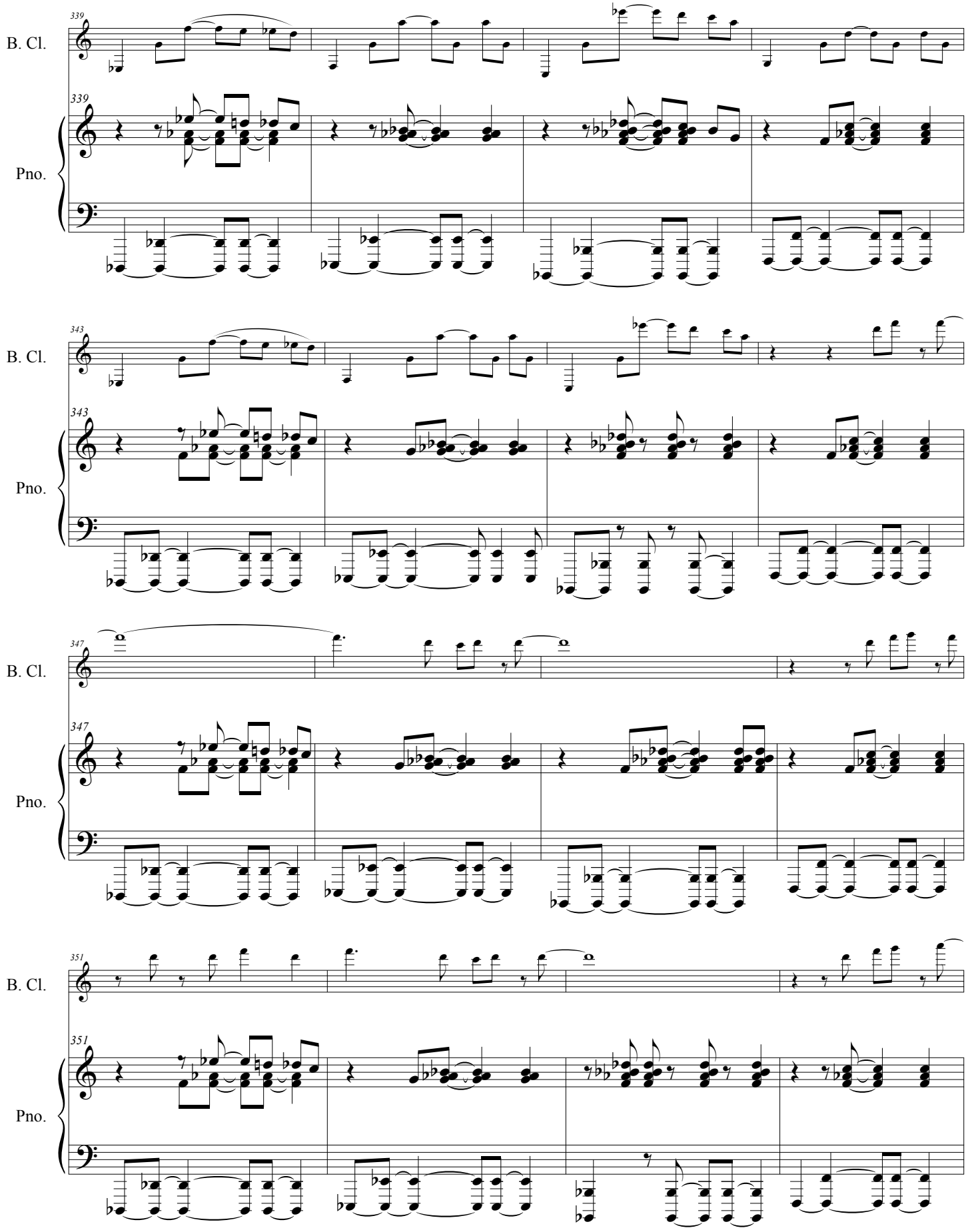

B. Cl.
Pno.
249
254
258
O
262

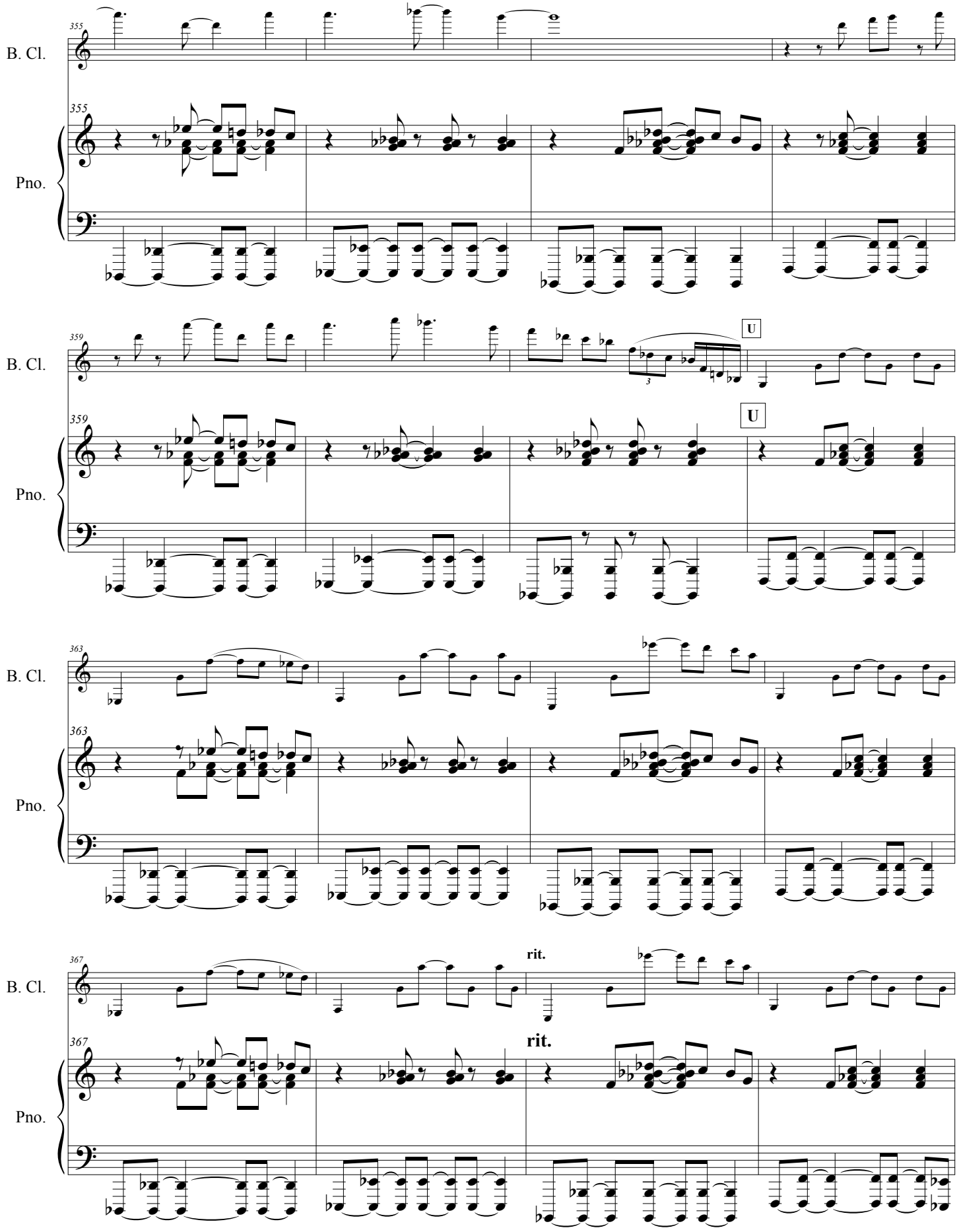

266
B. Cl.
266
Pno.
270
B. Cl.
270
Pno.
275
B. Cl.
P
very dry and sharp
275
Pno.
P
very dry and sharp
280
B. Cl.
280
Pno.

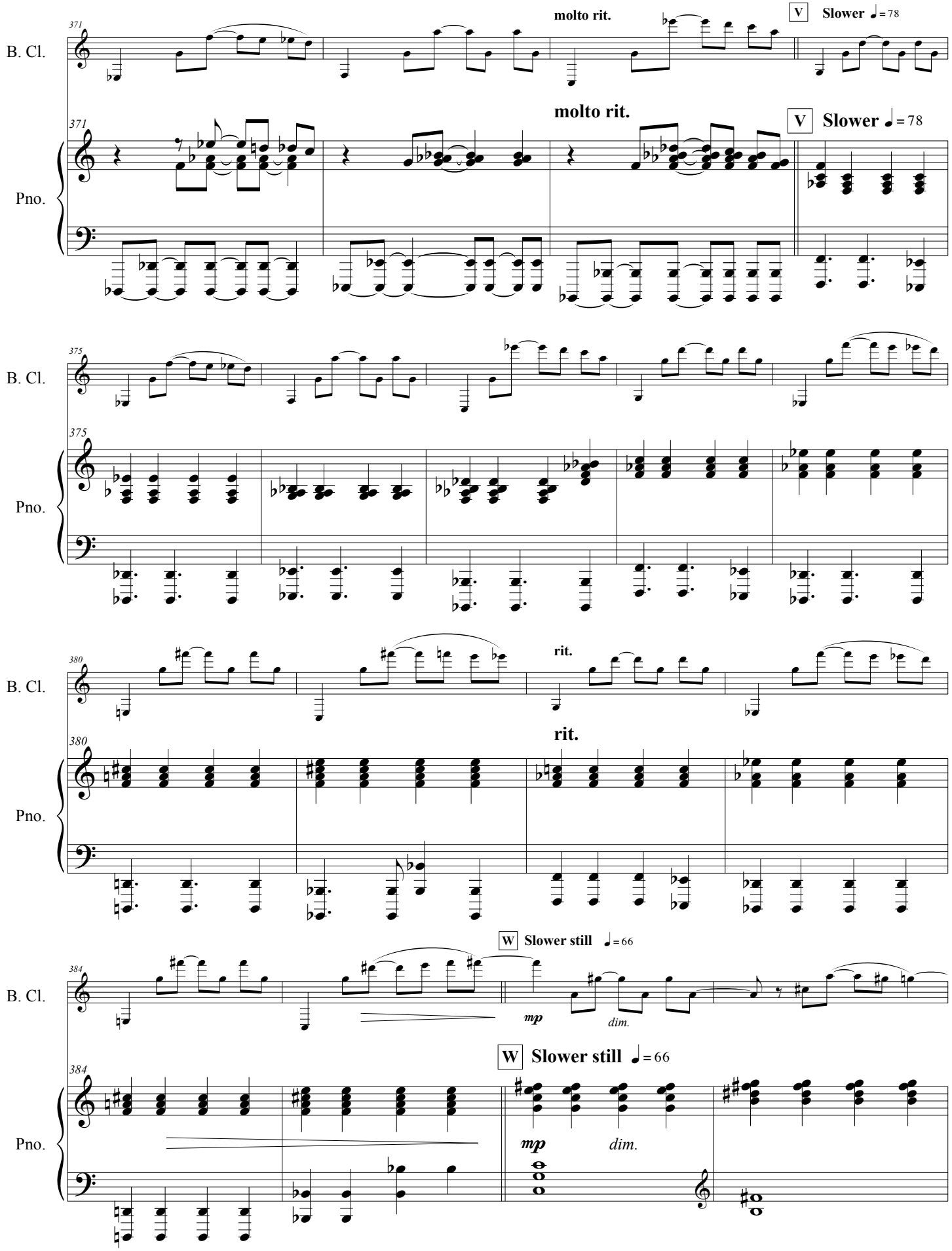

B. Cl.
Pno.
285
290
295
300
Q
3

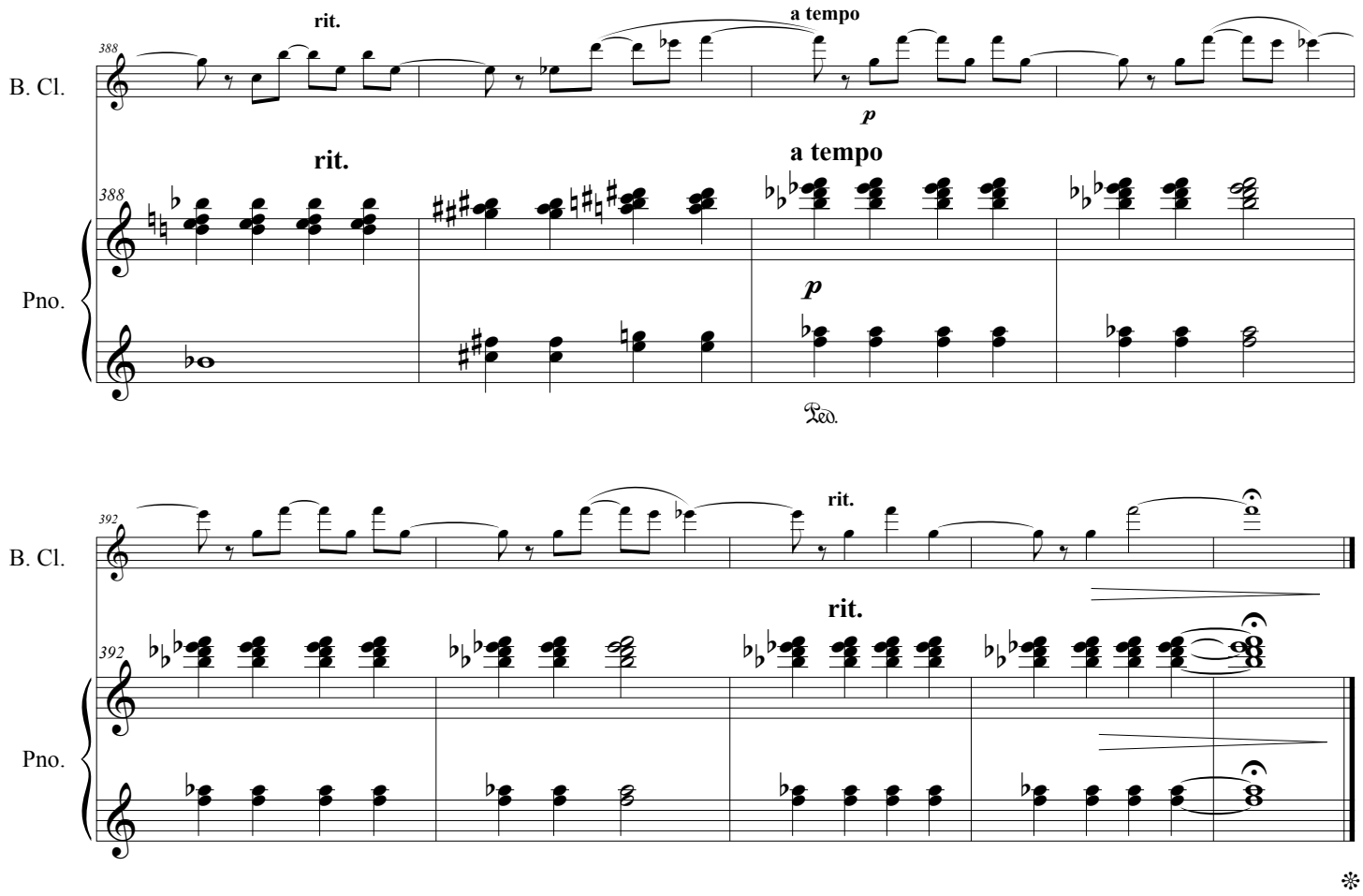

R
305
B. Cl.
Pno.
309
313
S
317


B. Cl.
Pno.
321
325
329
334
T
ff


339
B. Cl.
339
Pno.
343
B. Cl.
343
Pno.
347
B. Cl.
347
Pno.
351
B. Cl.
351
Pno.


B. Cl.
355
Pno.
355
B. Cl.
359
U
Pno.
359
U
B. Cl.
363
Pno.
363
B. Cl.
367
rit.
Pno.
367
rit.


371
B. Cl.
molto rit.
V Slower ♩= 78
Pno.
375
380
rit.
384
W Slower still ♩= 66
mp
dim.


B. Cl.
388
rit.
a tempo
p
Pno.
388
rit.
a tempo
p
Ped.
B. Cl.
392
rit.
Pno.
392
rit.