Desert Sonata

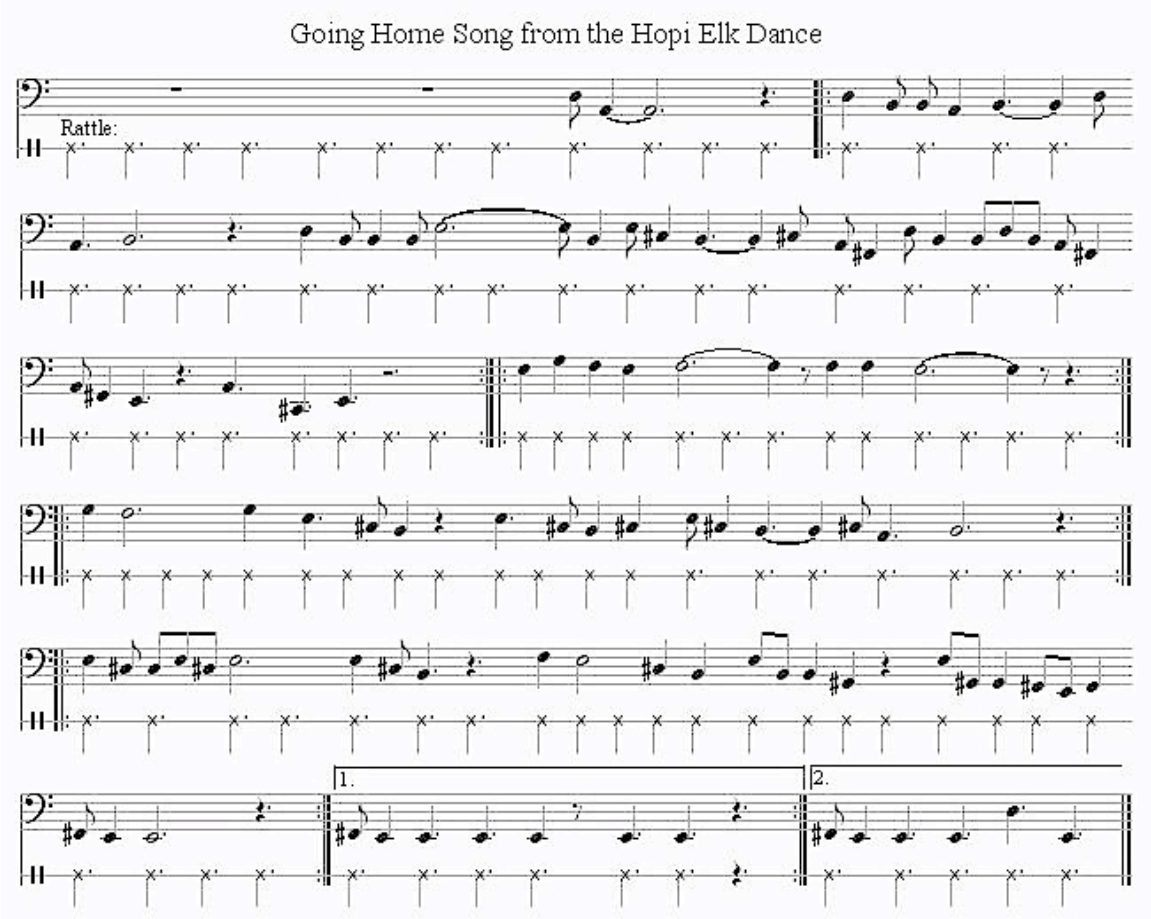
in E minor
for piano

Kyle Gann
1994-95

Desert Sonata (1994-95)

I. Wind
II. Night

Desert Sonata for piano uses a rhythmic language I've developed from indigenous American sources: the multi-tempo structures of Conlon Nancarrow and Charles Ives, and the dances of the Hopi, Zuni, and other Pueblo Indians. Some material is derived from the "Going Home" section of a Hopi Elk Dance, whose melody, switching between quarter-note and dotted-quarter-note beats, appears almost in full (if harmonically disguised) in the latter half of the "Night" movement. Here's my own transcription of the original melody:



The "Wind" movement borrows isorhythmic techniques from Conlon Nancarrow's Studies for Player Piano, especially Studies Nos. 7 and 45, which probably never appeared before in works for a live keyboard player. In particular, it ends with an isorhythmic passacaglia in 41/16 meter, while a section of "Night" called

"Canonlands" subjects the theme's motives to canonic treatment. I was working on the piece in 1994 when I visited Conlon Nancarrow in Mexico City. Every morning I was there a neighboring rooster woke me up with incessant repetitions of a five-note motif - C E E E-flat C. Its rhythm was similar to that of the beginning of the Elk Dance, and in desperation I finally worked the rooster's melody into the second movement's coda.

Pianist Lois Svard commissioned Desert Sonata, and I wrote it to take advantage of not only her phenomenal technique, but even more of the atmosphere of mystery she weaves so wonderfully around every piece she plays. The piece is recorded on her Lovely Music CD *Other Spaces*.

- Kyle Gann

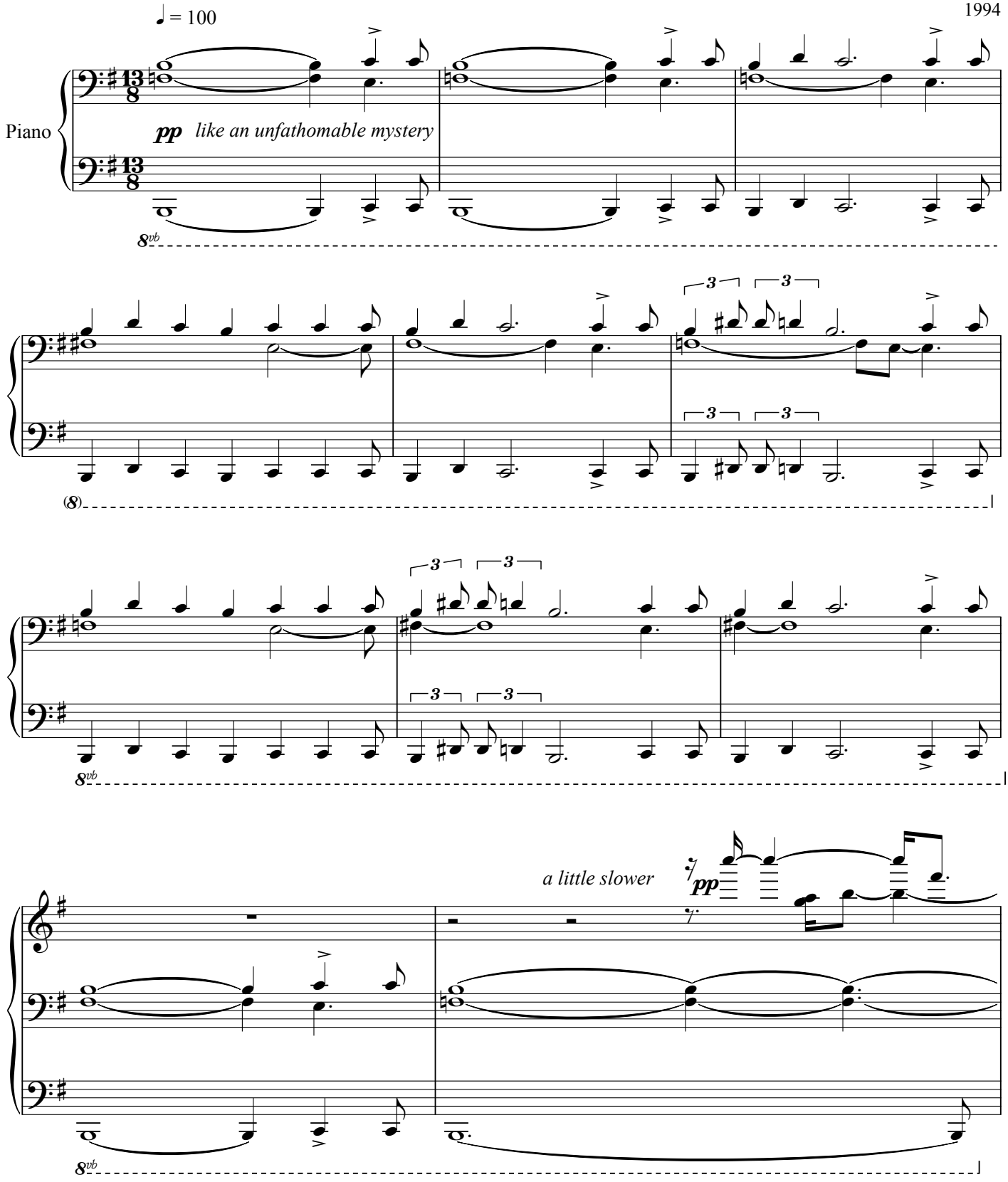
Duration: 19 minutes

for Lois Svard

Desert Sonata

I. Wind

Kyle Gann
1994



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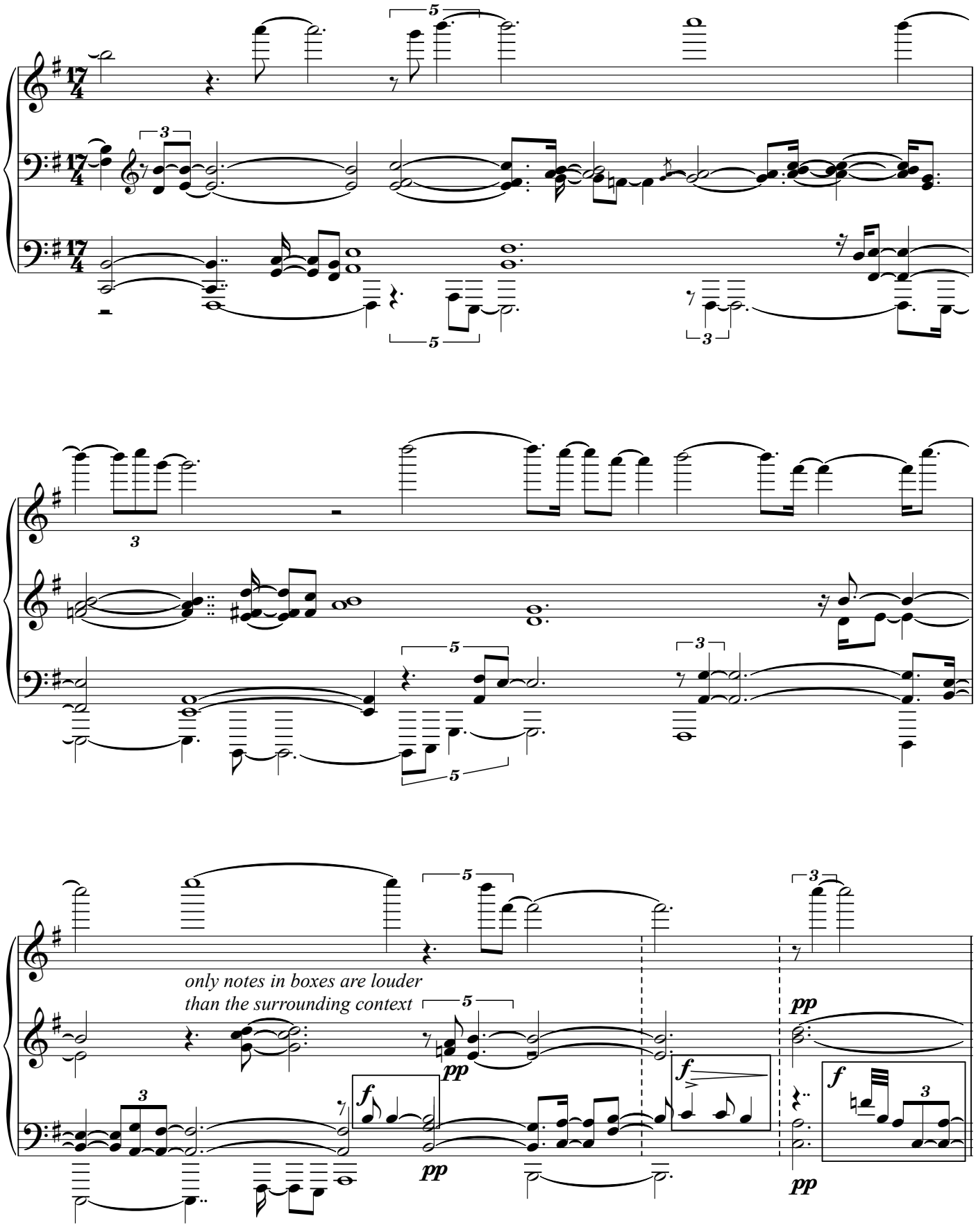
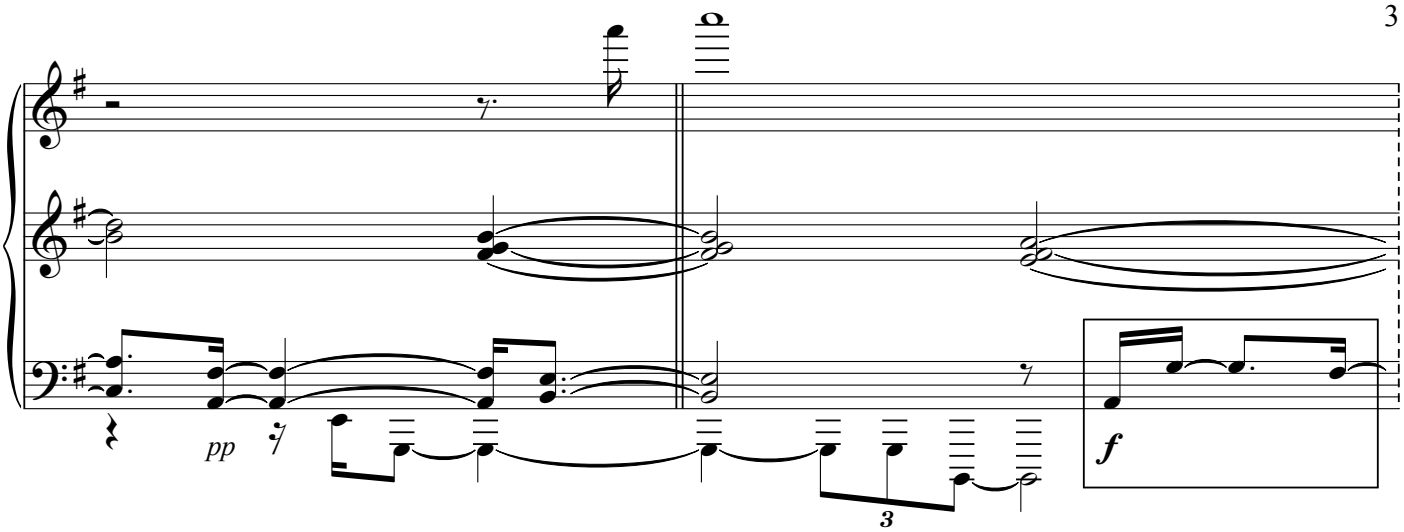
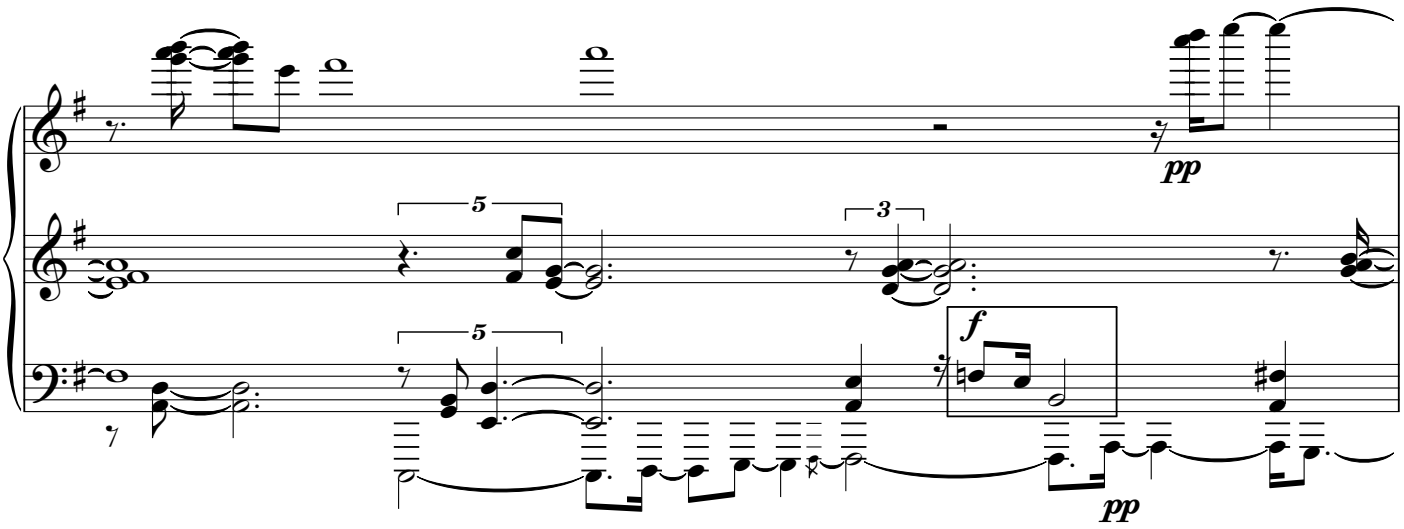
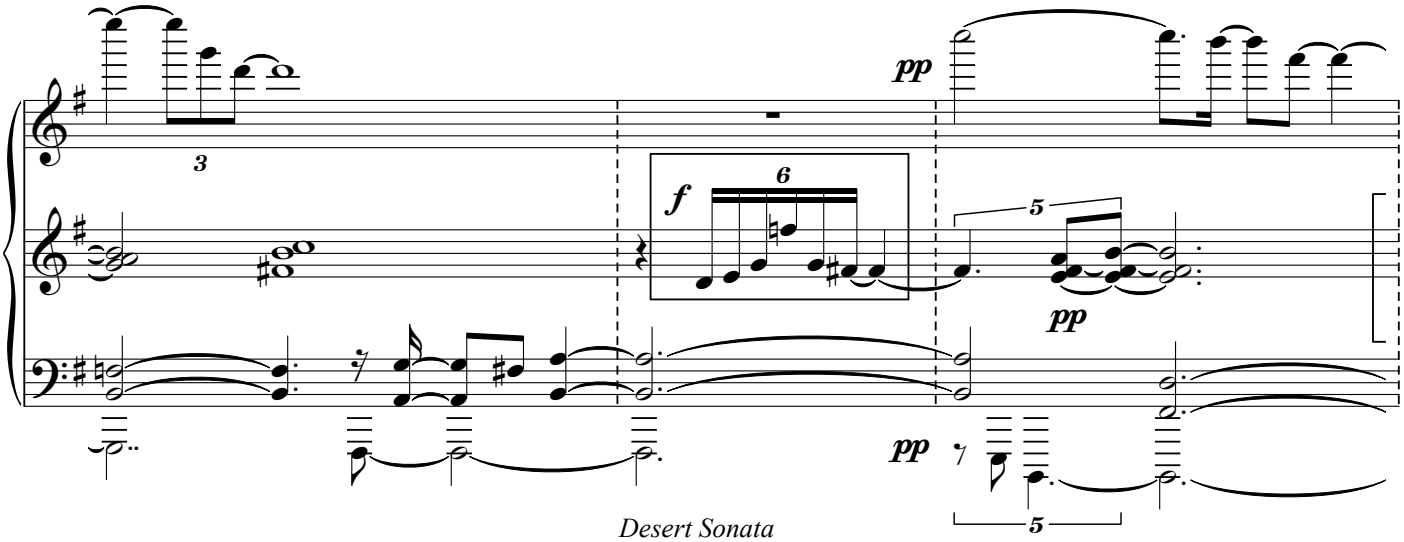
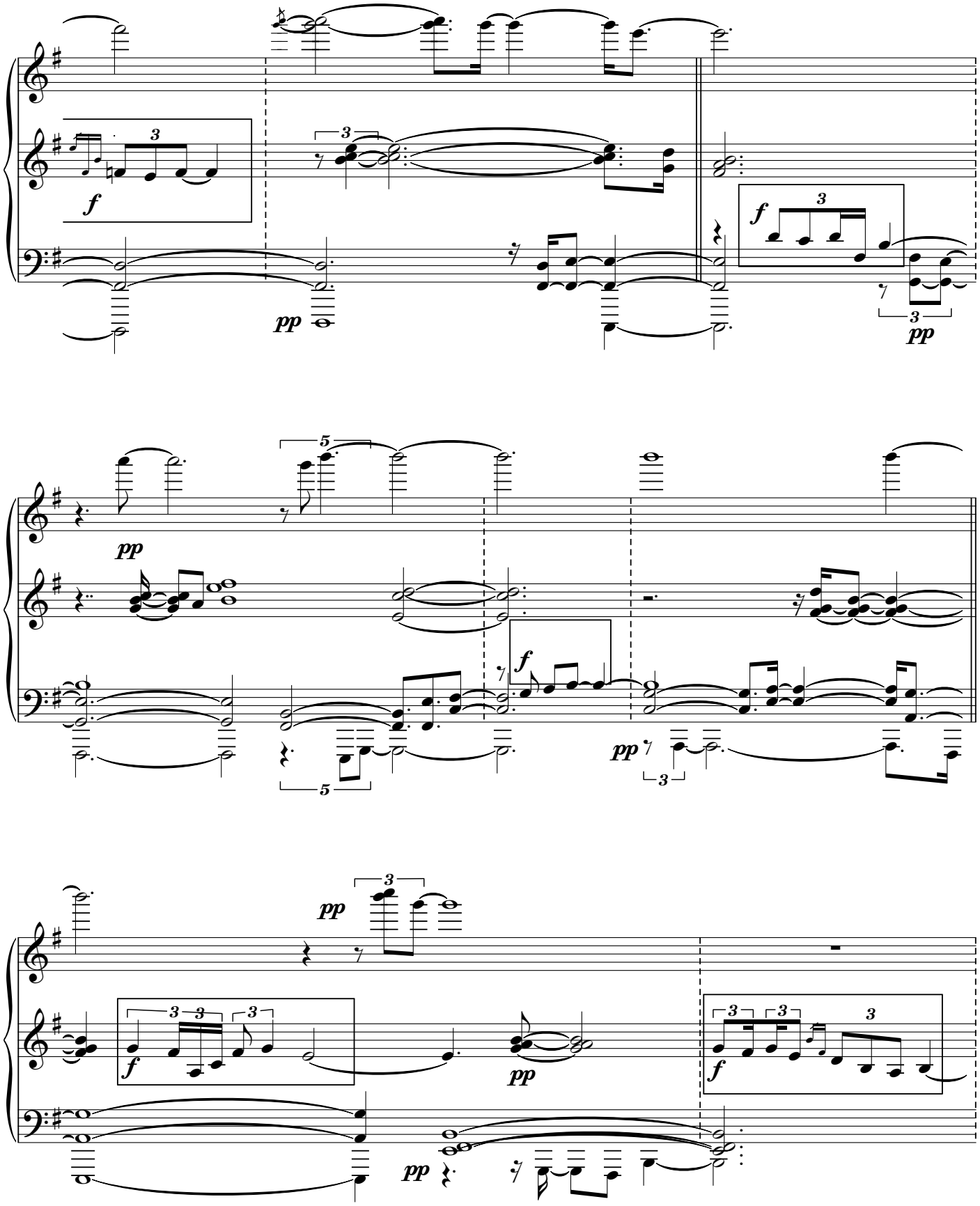
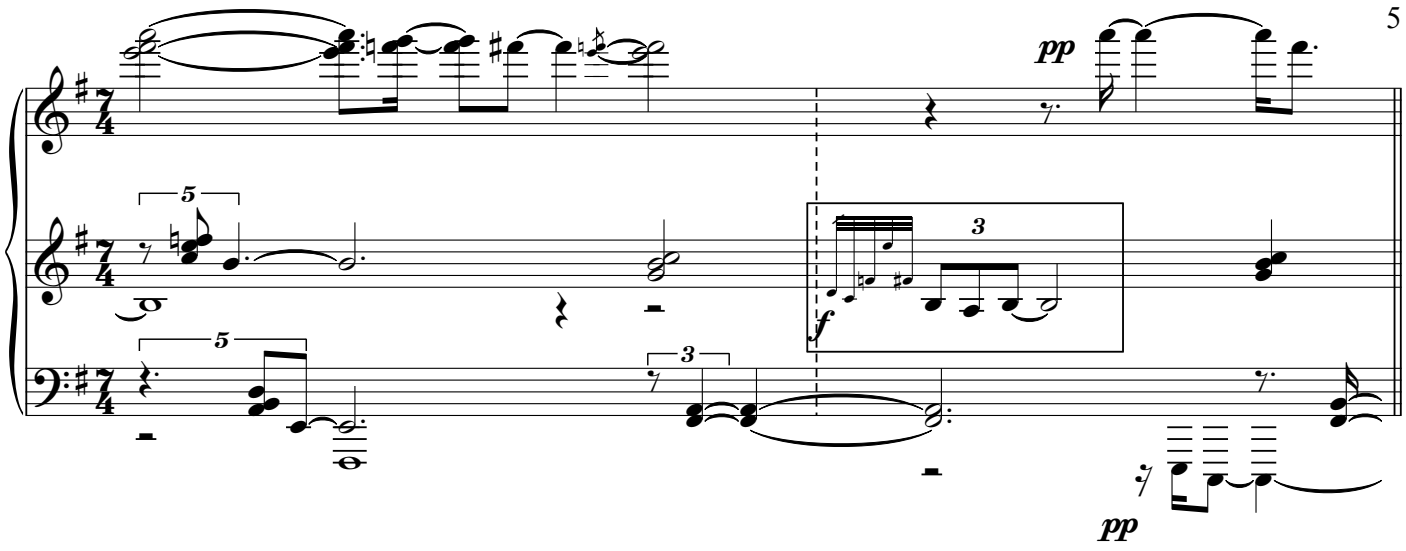

only notes in boxes are louder
than the surrounding context

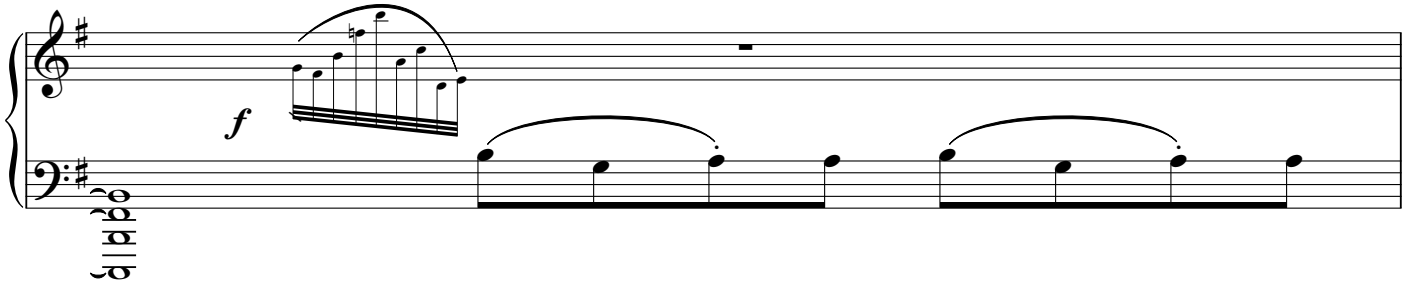

pp
3
f

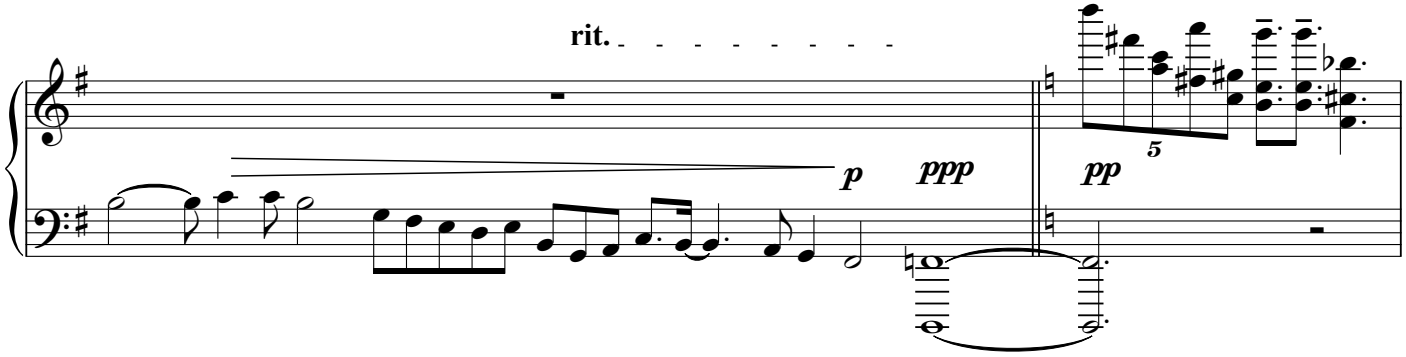

5
3
5
f
pp
pp

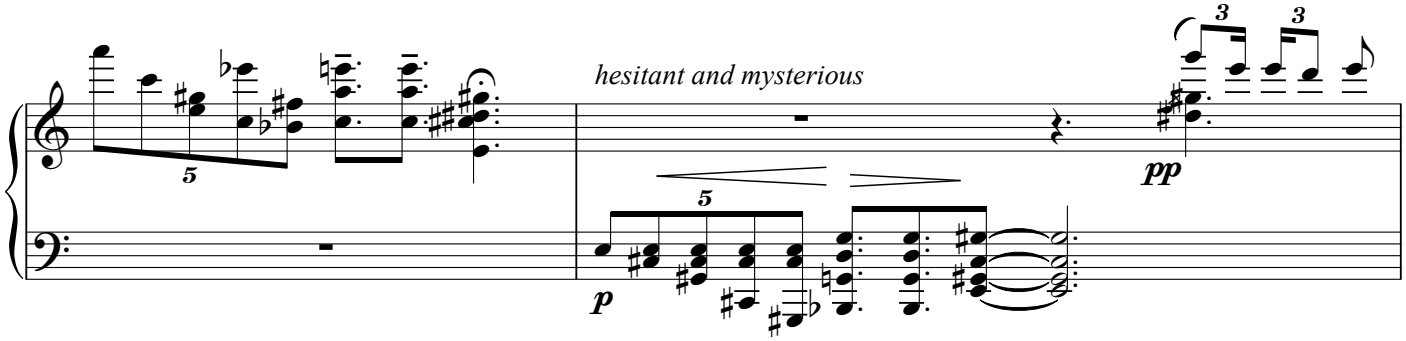

3
f
6
pp
5
pp
pp
5

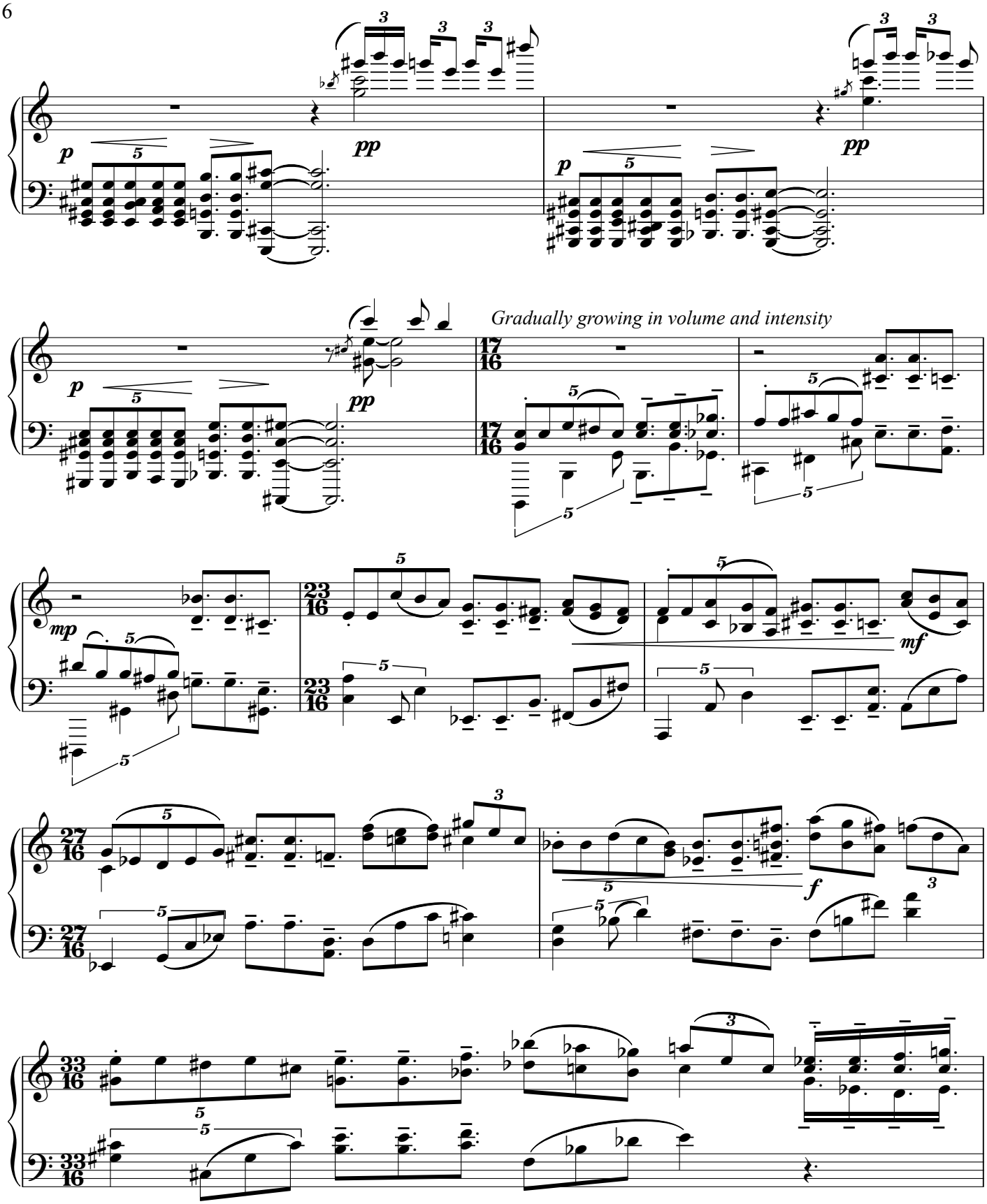

f
pp
f
pp
pp
f
pp
pp
f
pp
pp

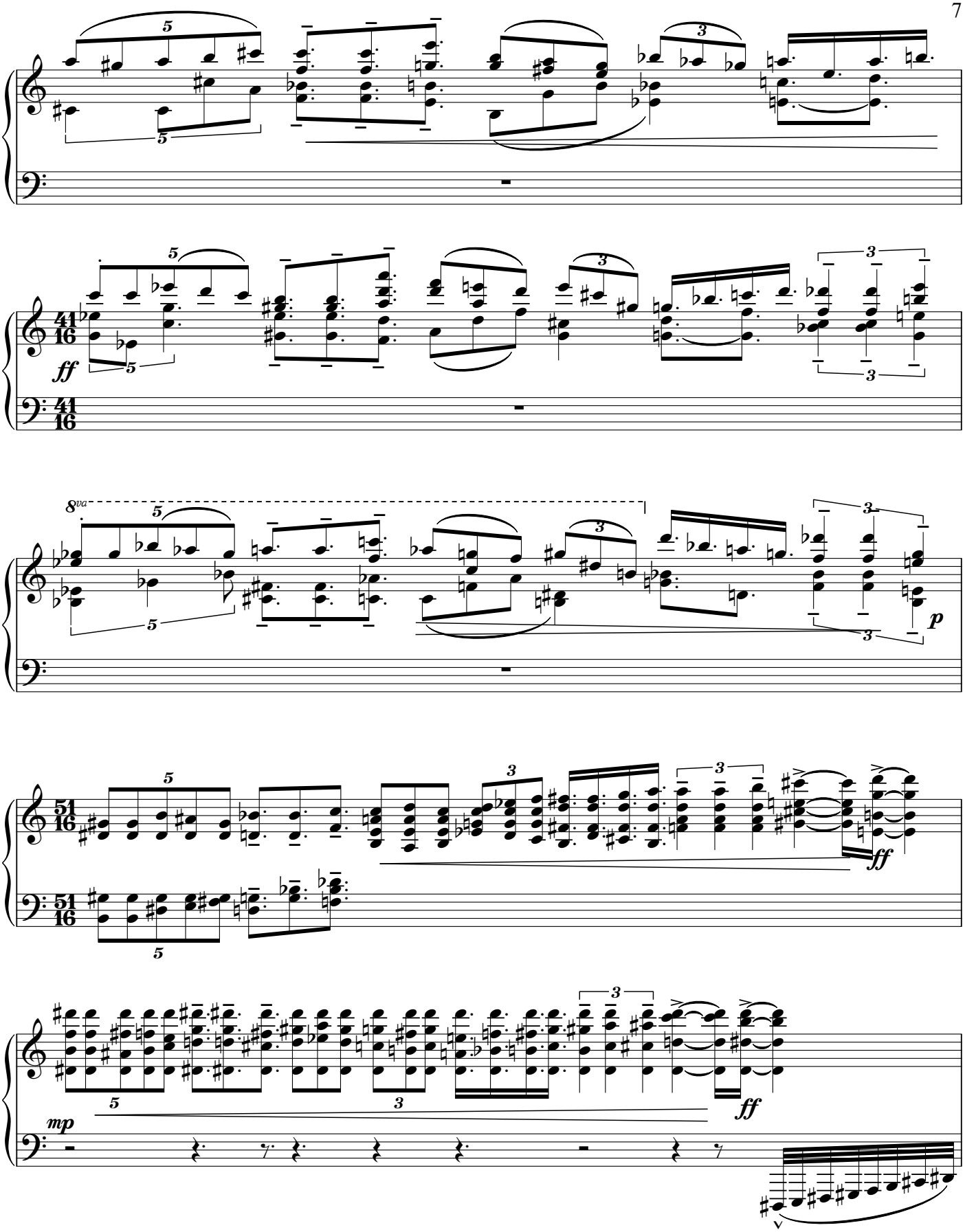

pp
f
3
5
pp

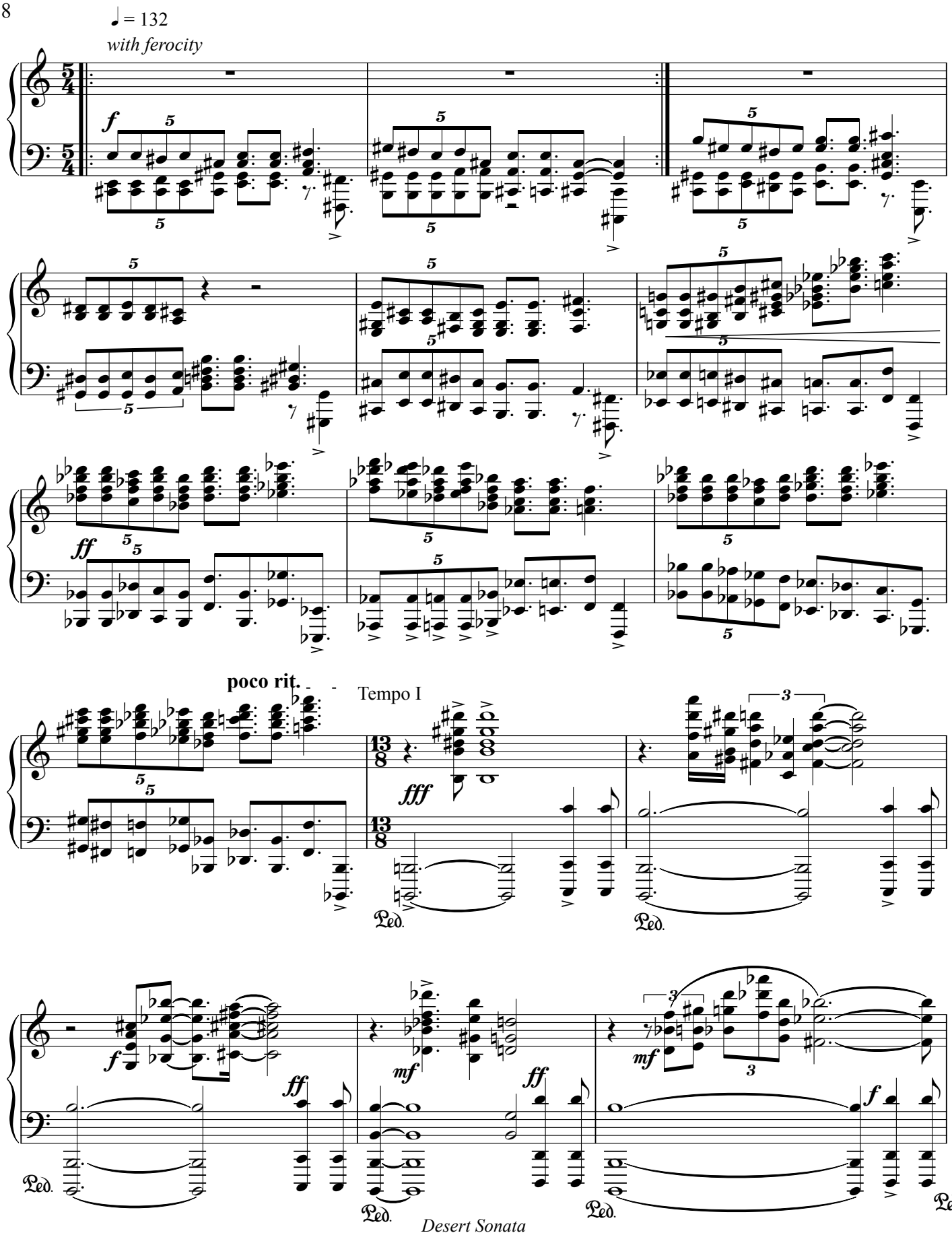

f

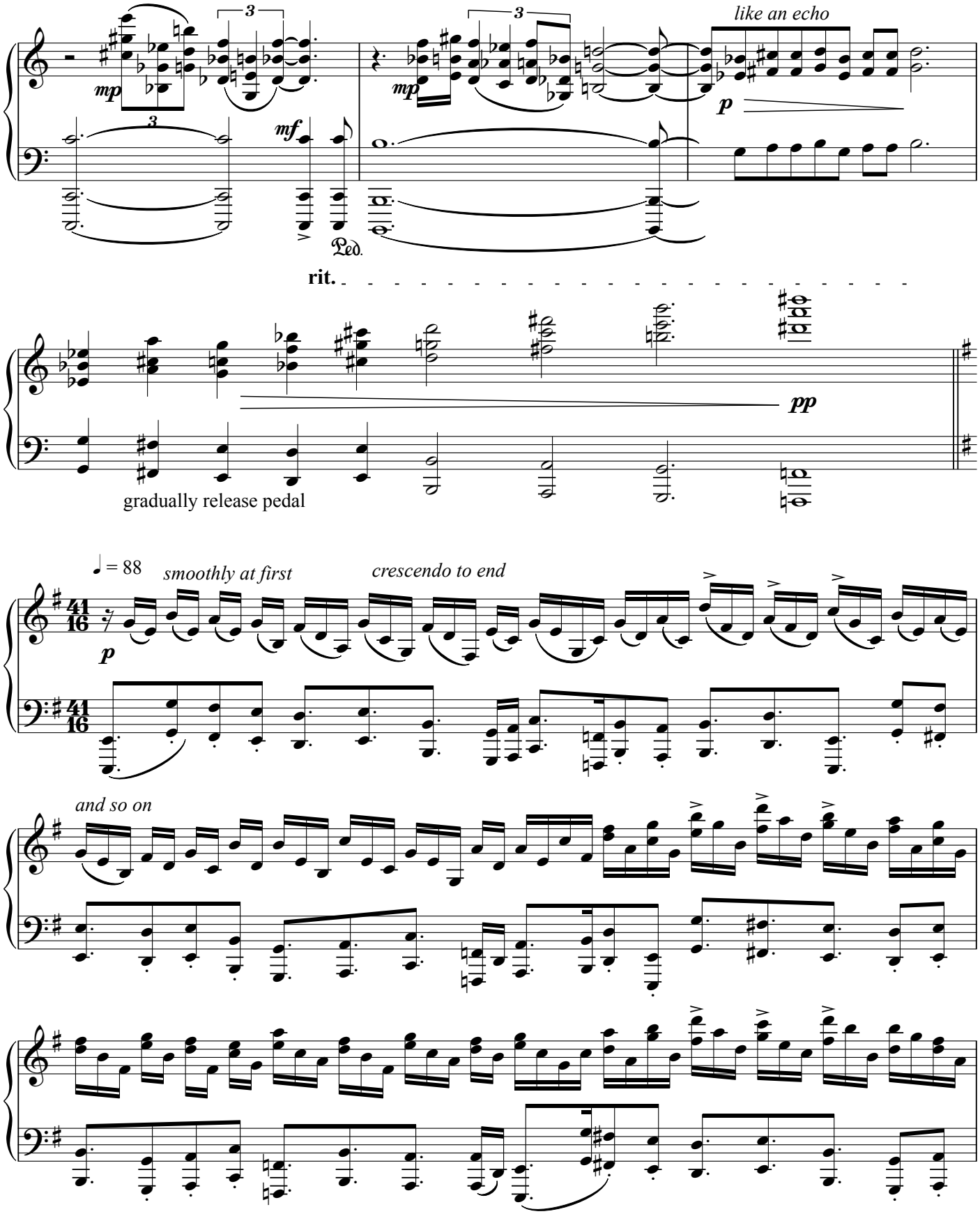

rit.
p
ppp
pp
5

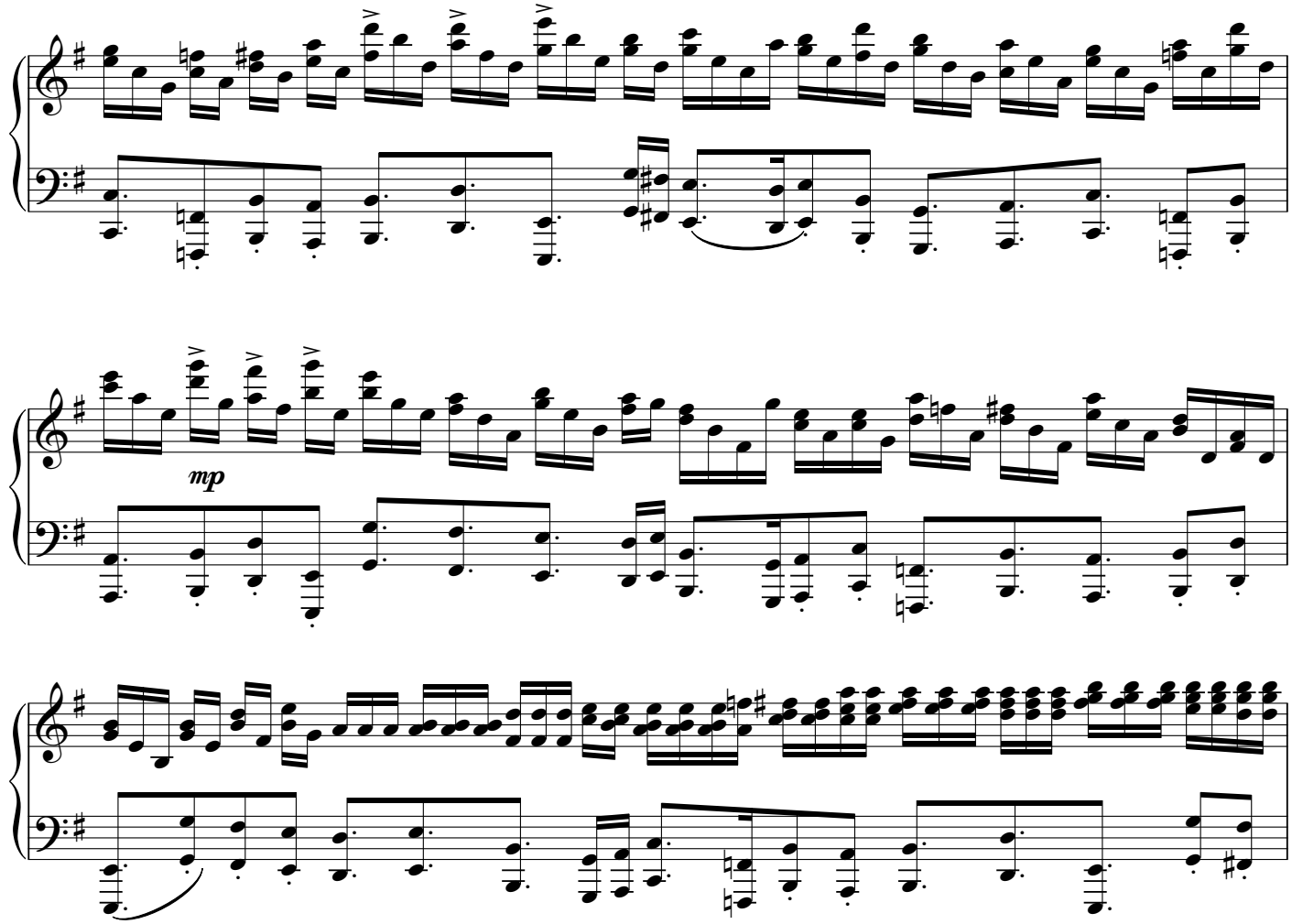

hesitant and mysterious
3
3
pp
5
p


Gradually growing in volume and intensity

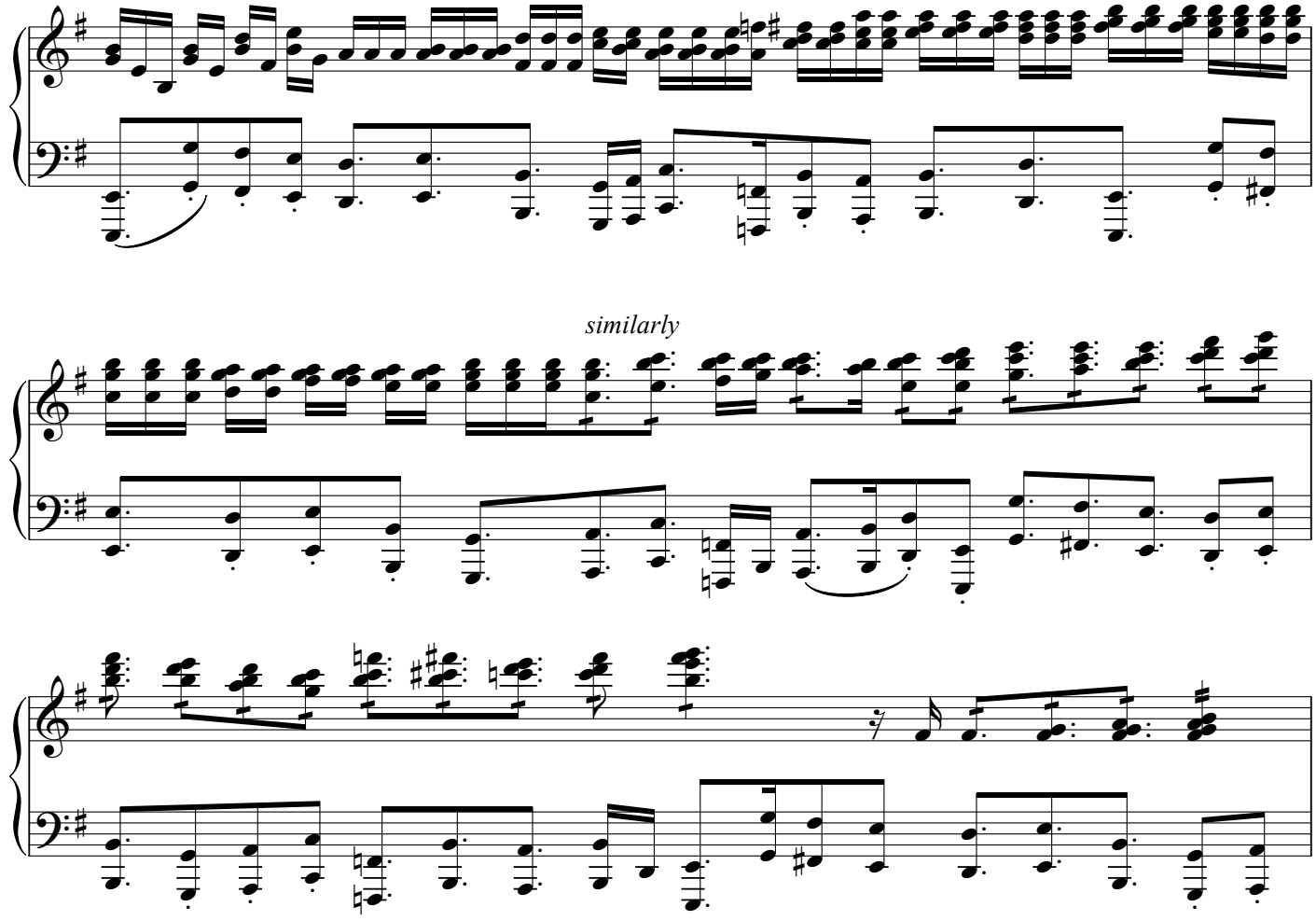

ff
8va
p
ff
mp
ff


♩ = 132
with ferocity
poco rit.
Tempo I
Ped.
Desert Sonata

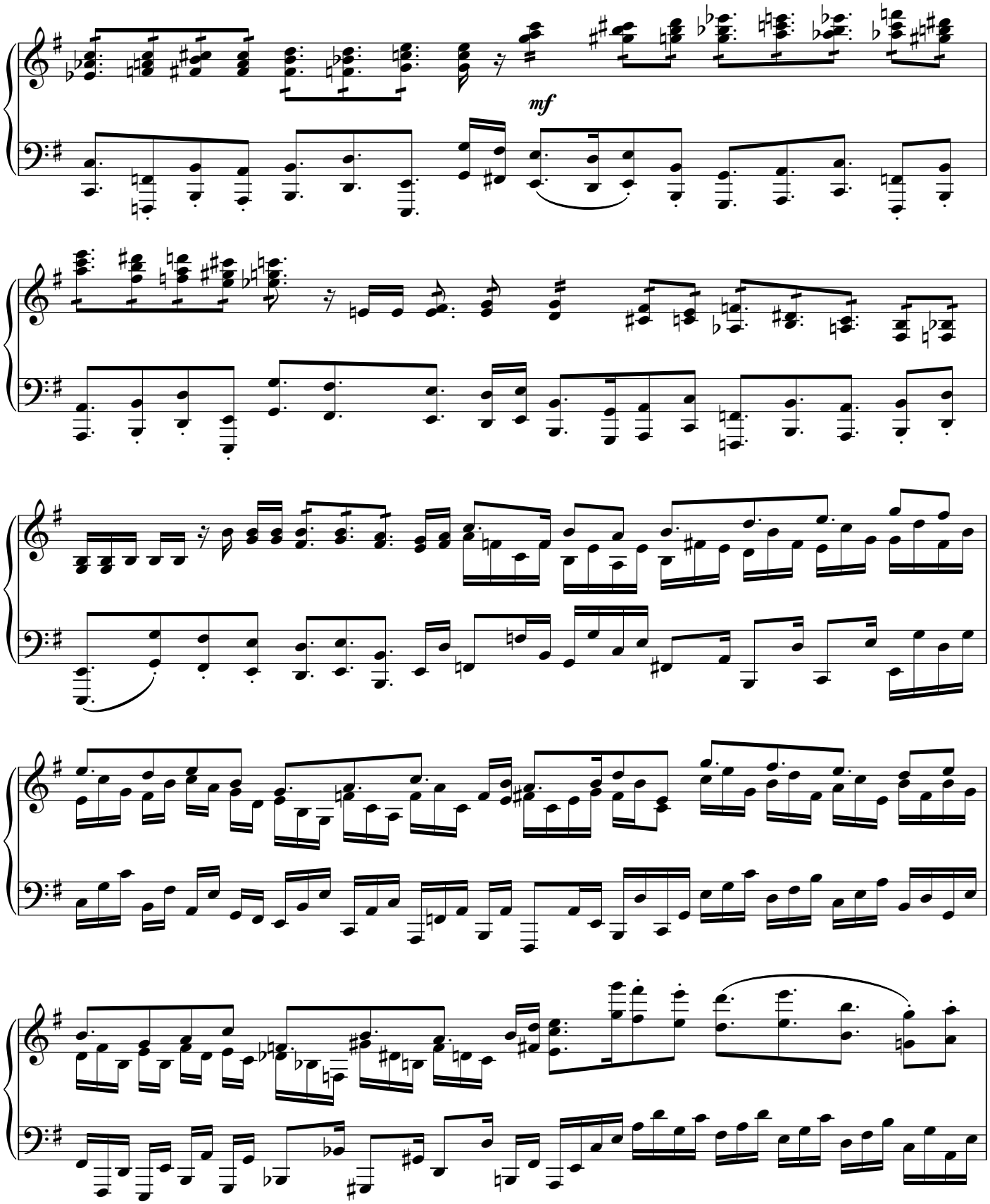

like an echo
mp
mf
p
Ped.
rit.
pp
gradually release pedal
♩ = 88
smoothly at first
crescendo to end
and so on

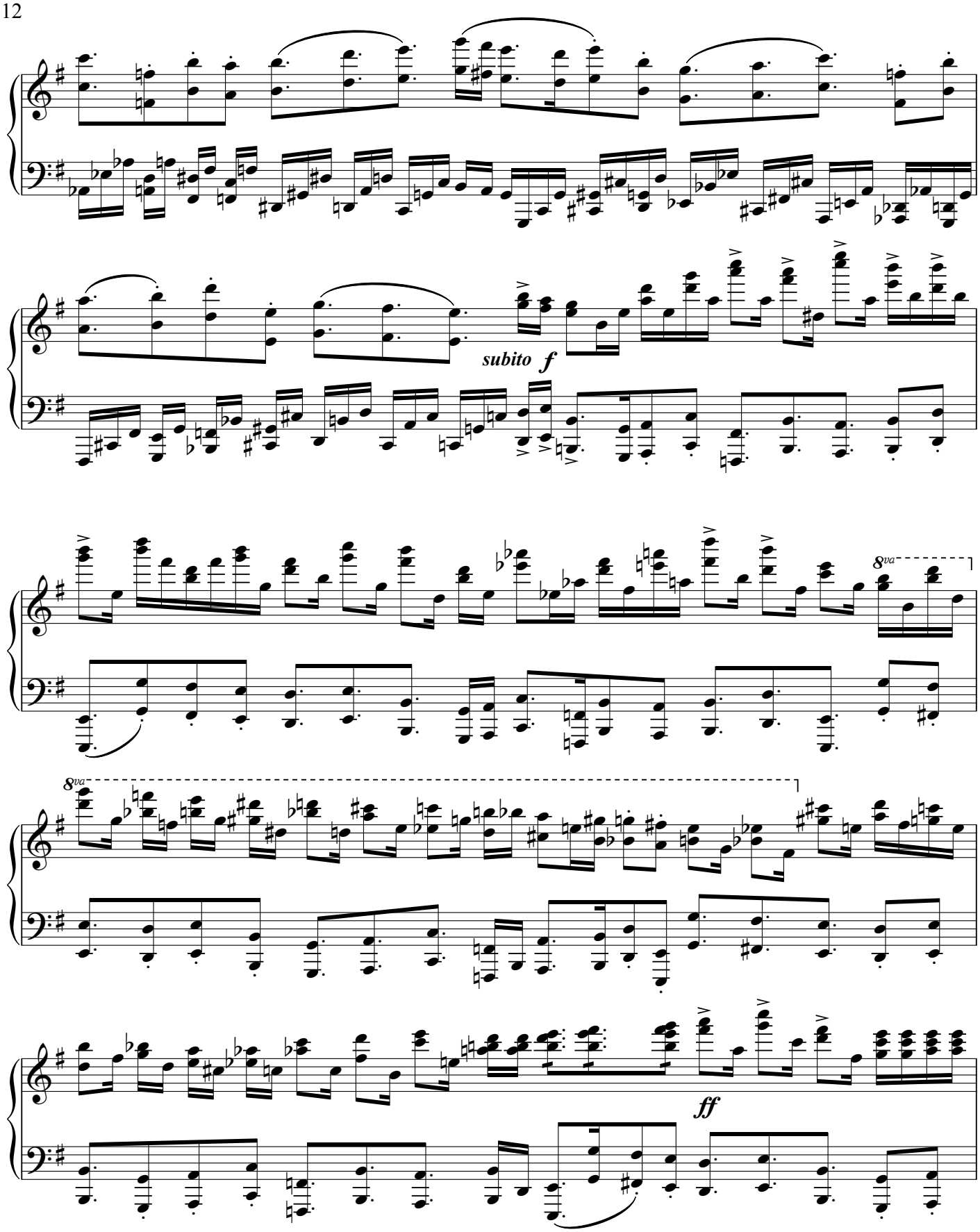


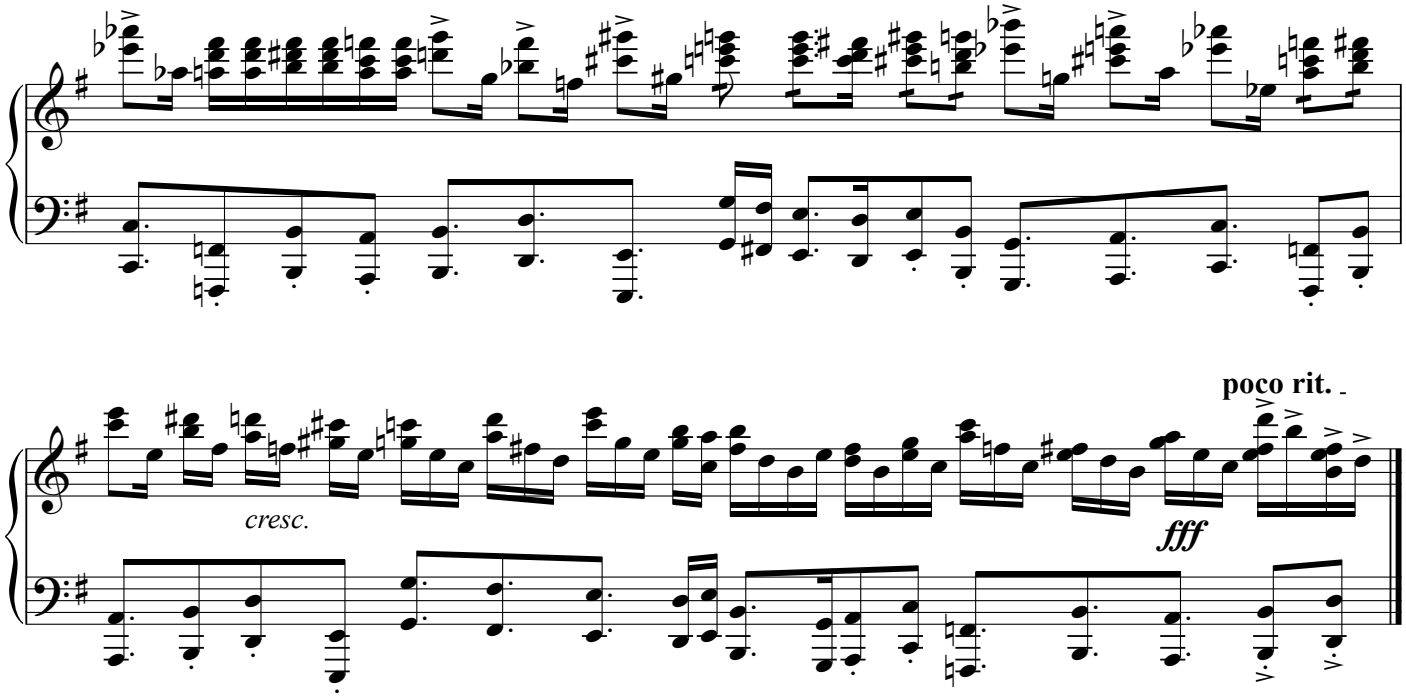
mp



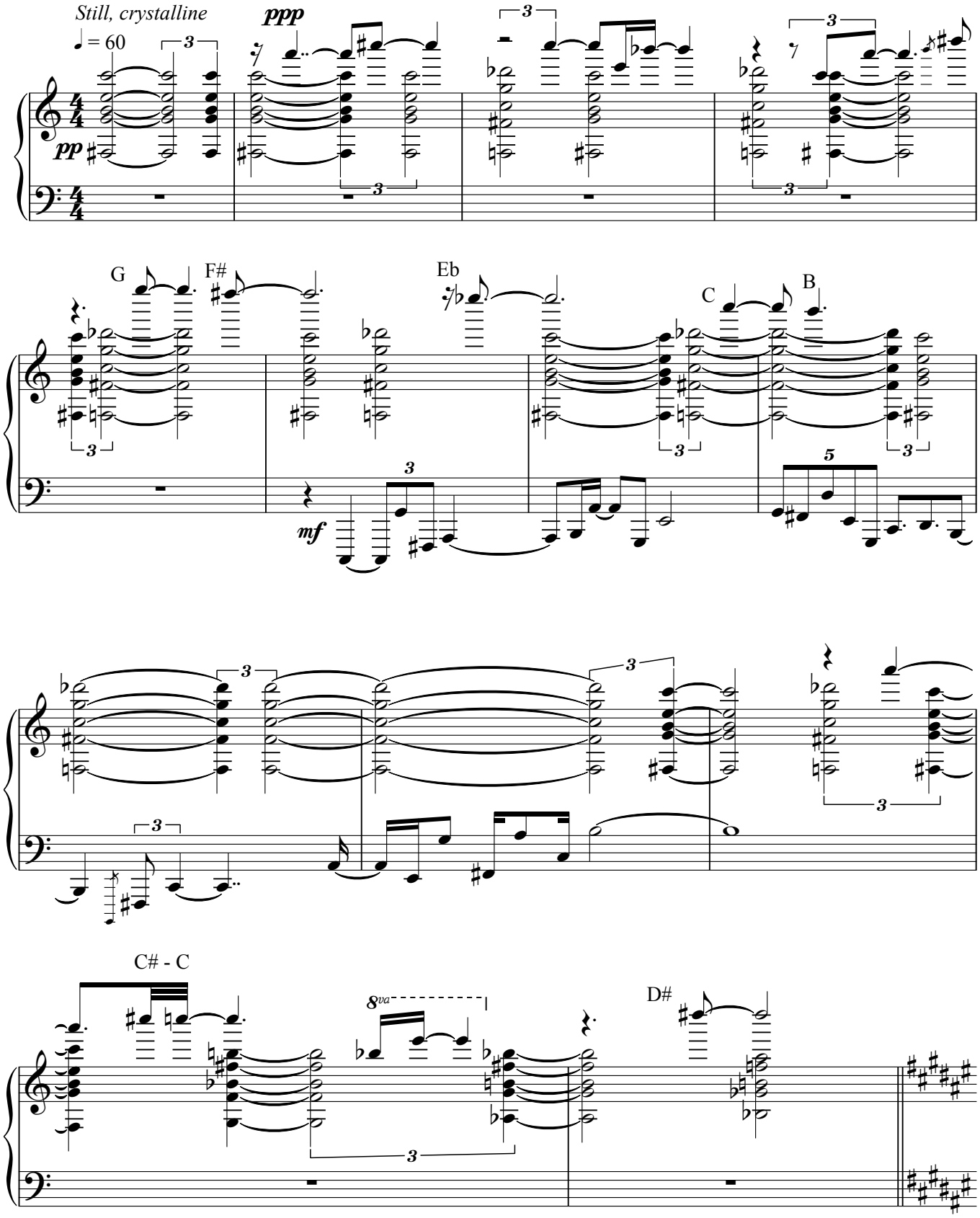
similarly

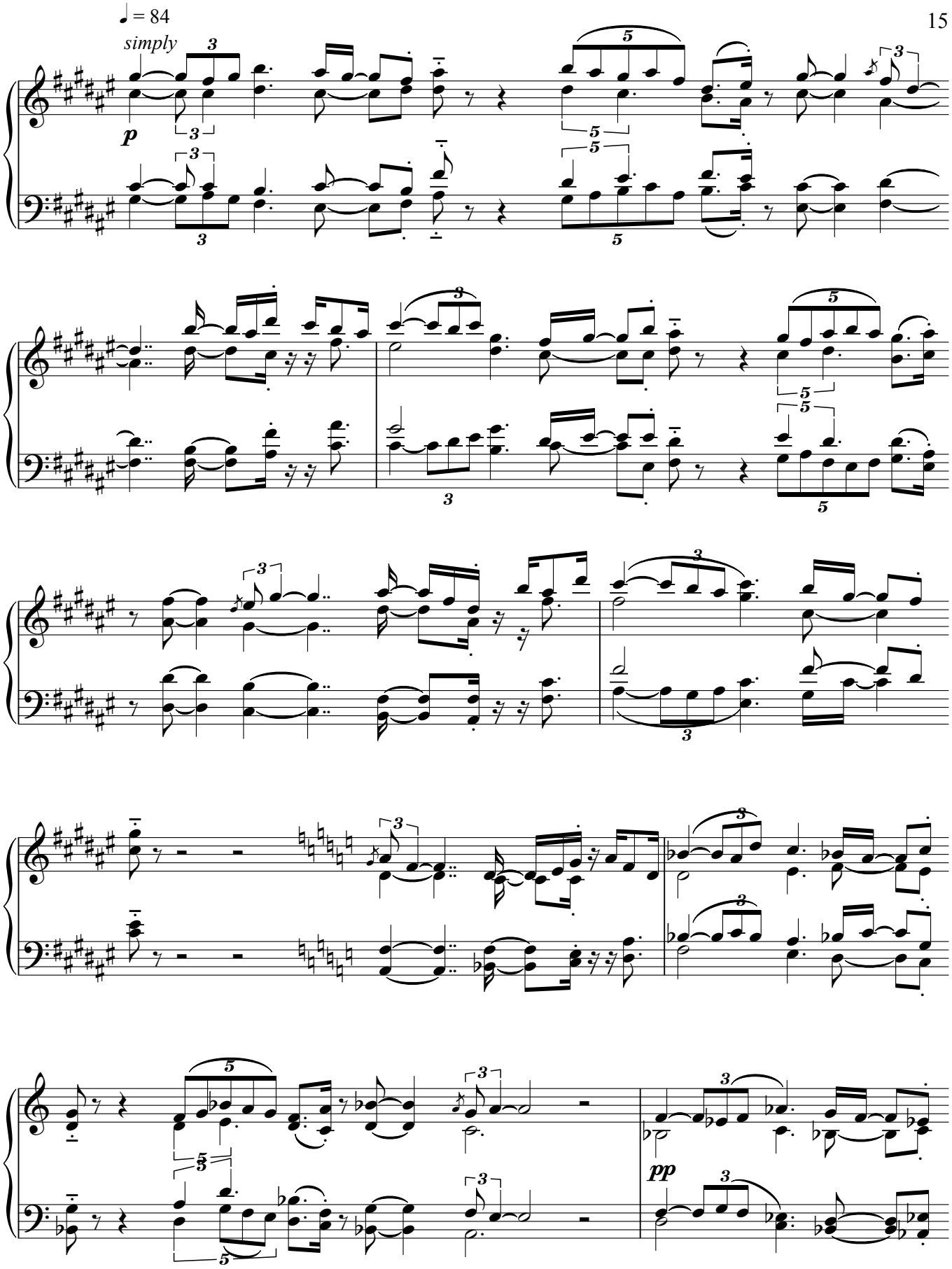

mf

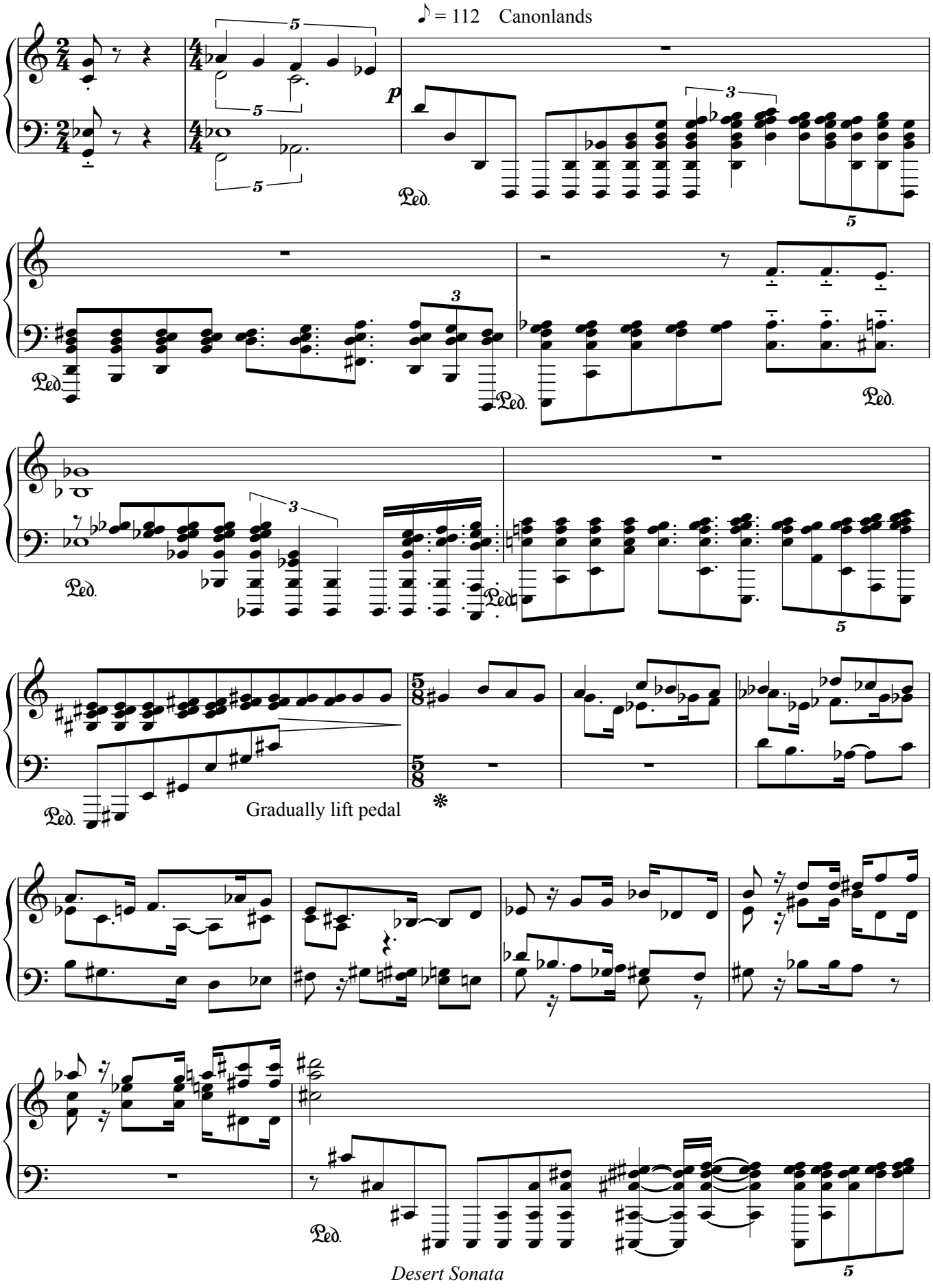

subito f
8va
8va
ff

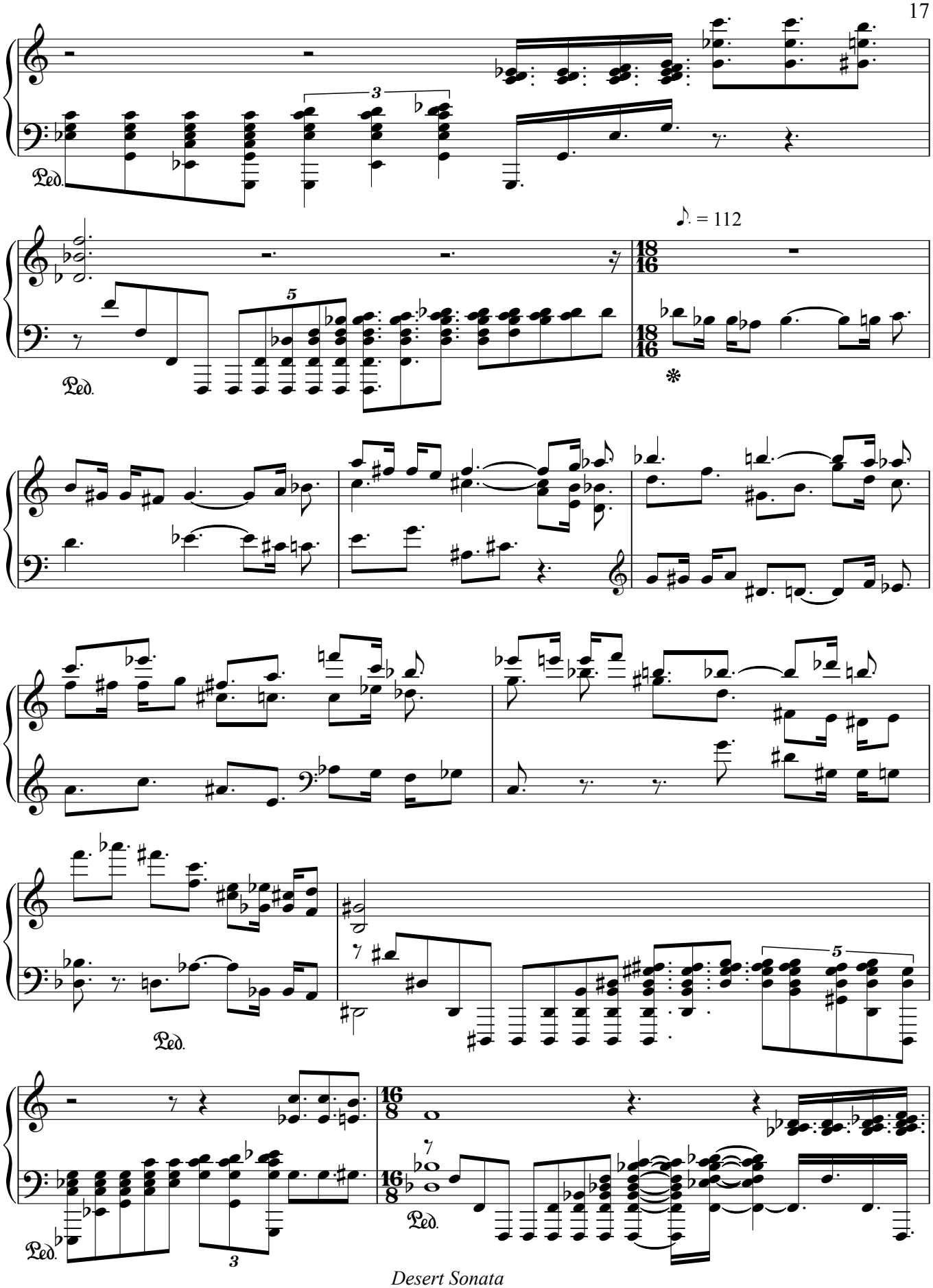

poco rit.
cresc.
fff

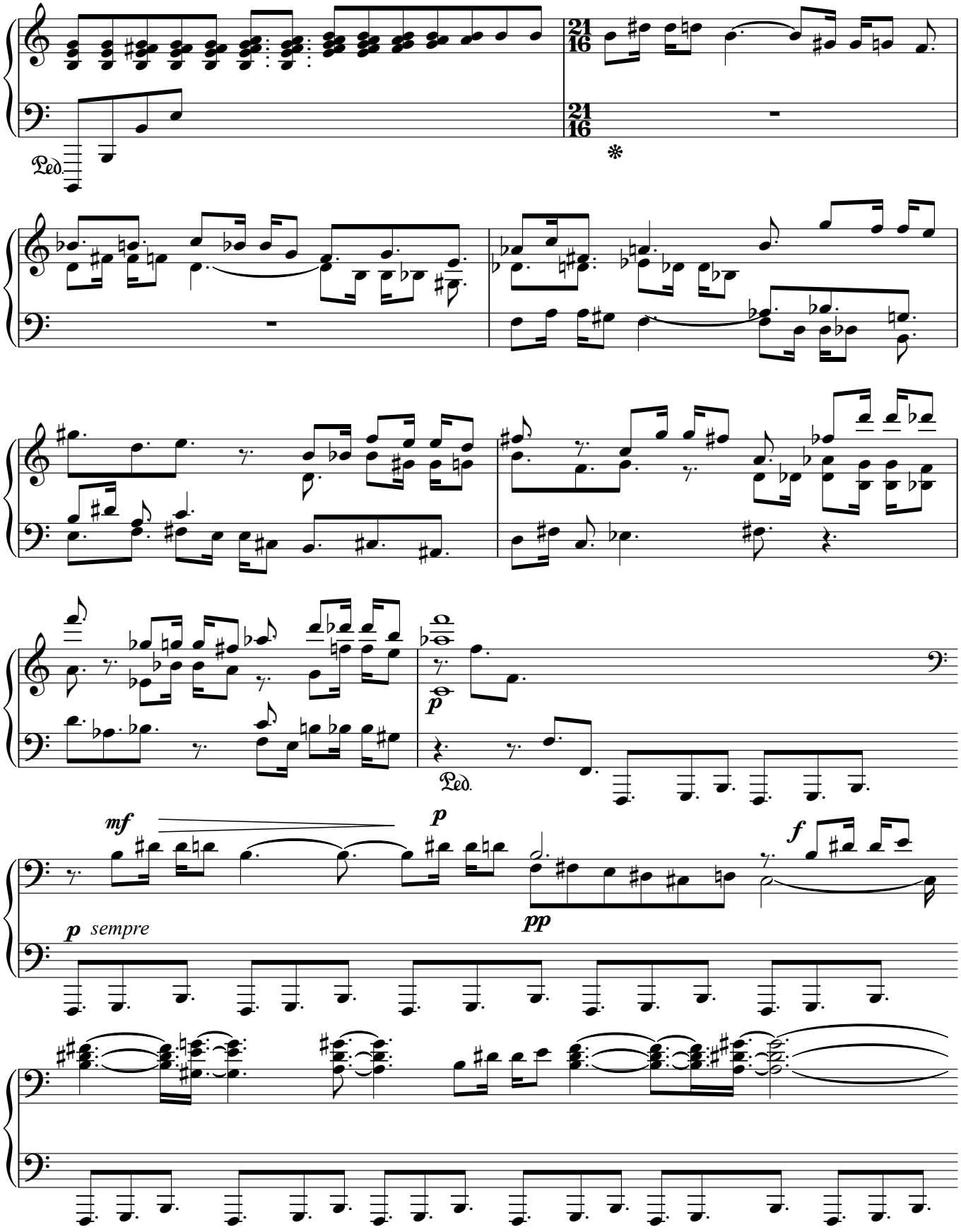
II: Night

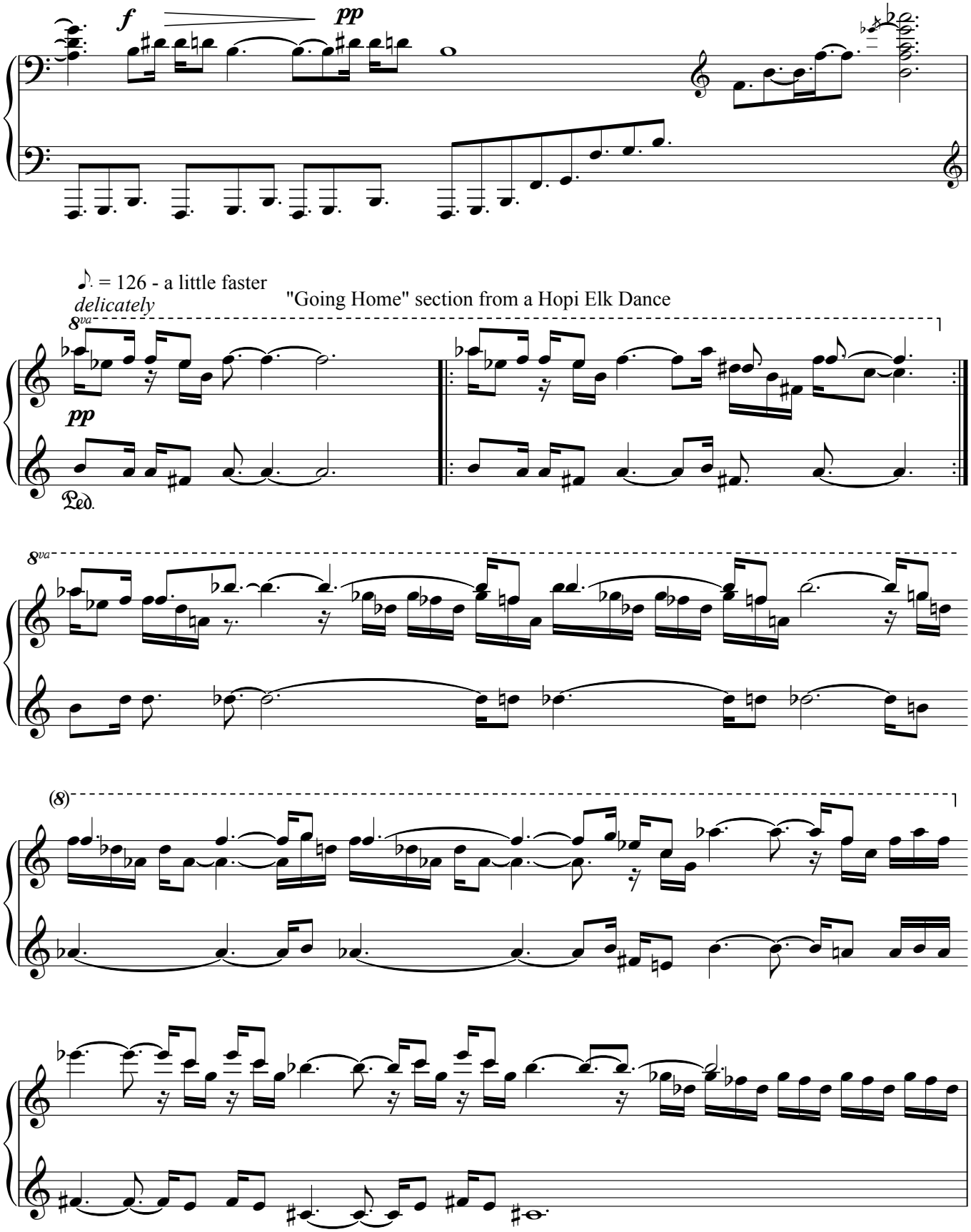


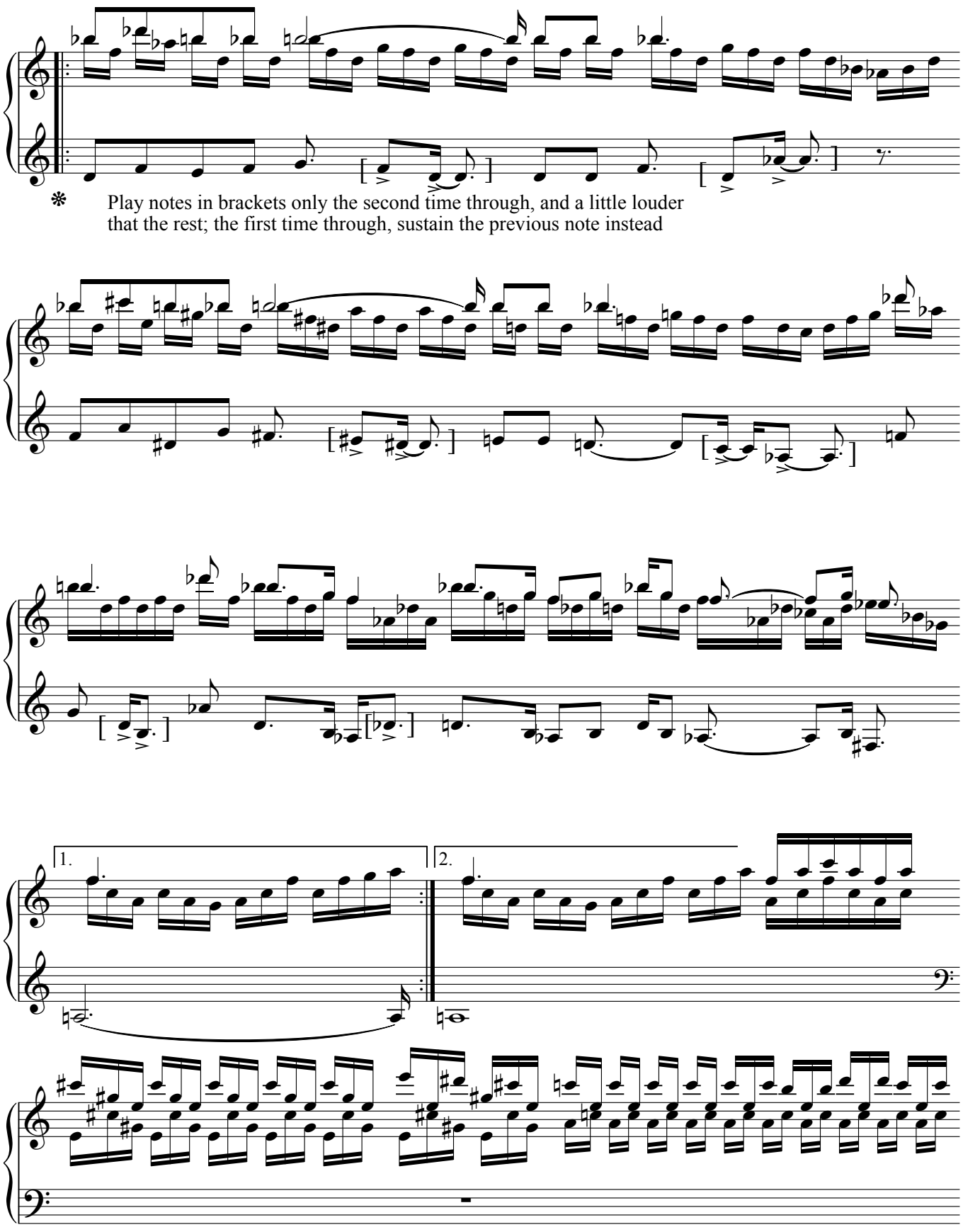

♩ = 84
simply
p
pp


♪ = 112 Canonlands
Ped.
Gradually lift pedal

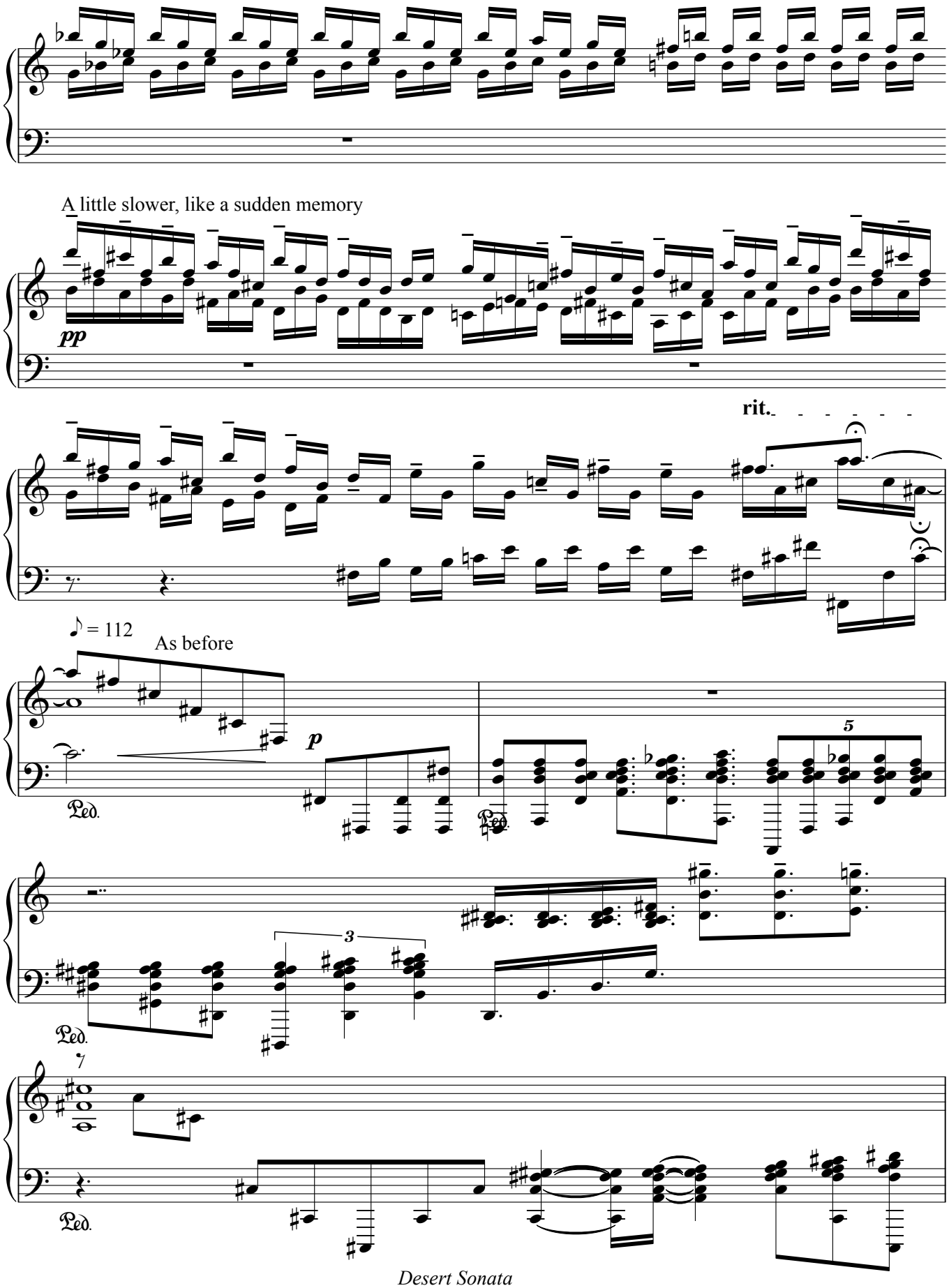

Ped.
♪. = 112
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

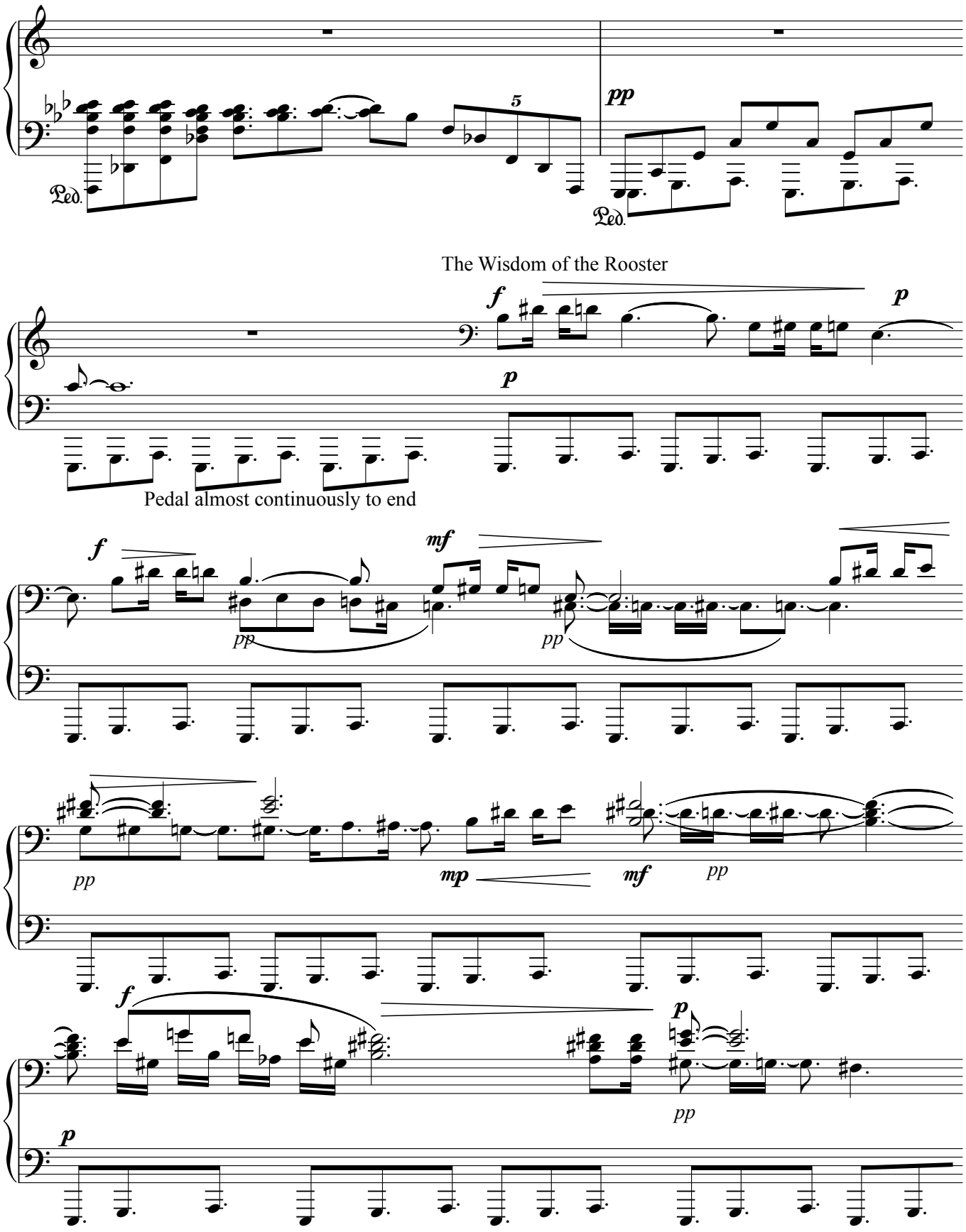

Ped.
21
16
p
Ped.
mf
p
f
p sempre
pp

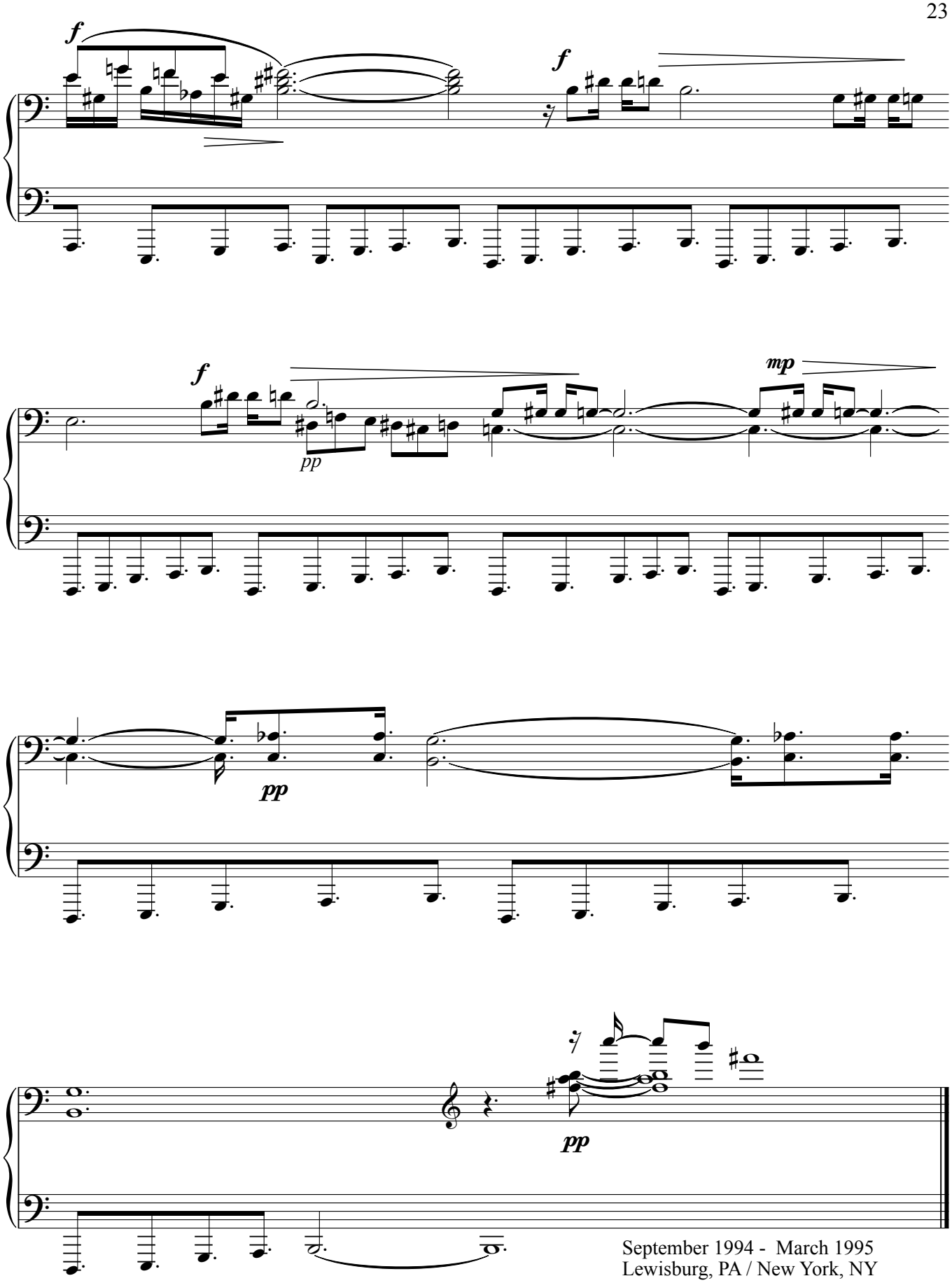

f
pp
♪. = 126 - a little faster
delicately
"Going Home" section from a Hopi Elk Dance
8va
pp
Ped.
8va
(8)



❋ Play notes in brackets only the second time through, and a little louder that the rest; the first time through, sustain the previous note instead


A little slower, like a sudden memory
pp
rit.
♪ = 112
As before
p
Ped.
5
3
7


Ped.
pp
Ped.
The Wisdom of the Rooster
f
p
p
Pedal almost continuously to end
f
mf
pp
pp
pp
mp
mf
pp
f
p
pp
p



September 1994 - March 1995
Lewisburg, PA / New York, NY