Kyle Gann:

Nocturnes

for piano

No. 1: *Collines de Lavande*
No. 2: *Souvenirs d'un Tango*
No. 3: *Crépuscule sans fin*
No. 4: *Nora in the Night*
No. 5: *The Argument of Innocence*
No. 6: *Spectral Dance*
No. 7: *Night Sky*
No. 8: *Homage to Clementi*
No. 9: *Am Grab von Bruckner*
No. 10: *The Eddying River*
No. 11: *Managing Expectations*

(2021-23)

Kyle Gann: Nocturnes

I had long wanted to write some nocturnes, because I love the original ones by John Field, and I am partial to the genre in general - but in the Romantic era the form became so bound up with piano virtuosity that I feel that few examples are sufficiently... nocturnal. I wanted quiet piano pieces that one could listen to, musing, on a calm evening. I also wanted to dissociate the genre from the sectional, often ABA form into which Chopin developed it (in frequent contradistinction to Field), bringing it into a more postminimal idiom.

Nocturne No. 1. *Collines de Lavande* (Lavender Hills)

Nocturne No. 2 in E-flat: *Souvenirs d'un Tango* (Memories of a Tango)

Nocturne No. 3: *Crepuscule sans Fin* (Twilight without End)

Late in 2021, pianist Francois Mardirossian asked me to write a piano piece for his ambient music festival in Lyon, June/July 2022. I had long wanted to write a quasi-ambient work for piano, and as I began sketching and thinking, my preoccupation with nocturnes emerged. *Collines de Lavande* descends a hill twice, first as minimalist pattern and then as chorale. *Souvenirs d'un Tango* is based on (expanded from) a sketch for a tango I wrote in 2015. *Crepuscule sans Fin* is greatly extended from a passage in my septet *But Even So*, which I had just completed. Since this was a commission from France and I speak some conversational French myself, I thought the French titles would be a courteous gesture to my hosts.

Nocturne No. 4 in D: *Nora in the Night* (2022)

My fourth nocturne was inspired by a nonsense poem, "Northern Lights," by the incomparable cartoonist Walt Kelly, creator of *Pogo*:

Oh roar a roar for Alice,
Nora Alice in the night,
For she has seen Aurora
Borealis burning bright.

A furore for our Nora!
And applaud Aurora seen!
Where, throughout the Summer, has
Our Borealis been?

I immediately wanted to write something with a similar rhythm, and similarly playful treatment of rhythm.

Nocturne No. 5: *The Argument of Innocence* (2023)

Like several of my pieces, my fifth nocturne was inspired by a poem by my favorite poet Kenneth Patchen. *The Argument of Innocence* is one of his picture poems, the entire text of which reads, "The argument of innocence / can only be lost / if it is / won."

Nocturne No. 6: *Spectral Dance* (2023)

The central section of Nocturne 6 is a melody I wrote in 1997 for a piece I never brought to completion. At that time the musical movement known as spectralism was not yet on my radar; I imagined a dance of ghosts, specters, and intend no reference to that European idiom. The intro and outro passages came from another earlier sketch, closely related in rhythm. Thus the piece rather harks back to my style of the 1990s based on shifting among various tempos. I do love the 9:4 ratio between dotted and triplet eighth-notes.

Nocturne No. 7 in A-flat: *Night Sky* (2023)

Nocturne No. 7, perhaps the simplest piece I've ever written, requires no explanation.

Nocturne No. 8: *Homage to Clementi* (2023)

Muzio Clementi, justly admired by Beethoven, is one of history's most underrated composers, and his piano sonatas (far more ambitious than the sonatinas for which he sadly remains best known) deserve to stand next to those of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. My Eighth Nocturne is a collage of some of my favorite passages - not the driving themes one associates with him, but the delicate, static moments which evoke music boxes. Most often quoted here is the slow movement of Op. 40, No. 1 in G, and also Op. 36, No. 2 in F (second movement), Op. 50 No. 3 in G minor ("Didone abbandonata," first movement), and Op. 34, No. 2, also in G minor (second movement). I wanted to hear all his delicious pedal points freed from the obligatory dramatic tropes of sonata form. Visiting Westminster Abbey once, I chanced to glance at the pavement and was startled to see Clementi's name, for he is buried there. It was like running into an old friend.

Nocturne No. 9 in F minor: *Am Grab von Bruckner* (2023)

Nocturne No. 9, rather uncharacteristic for me, arose spontaneously from an emotionally charged experience: visiting the St. Florian Monastery outside Linz where the great Anton Bruckner worked, and seeing his grave in the vault beneath his favorite organ. I was taken there by the dedicatee, composer Martin Gut, to whom I am grateful. There are no quotations from Bruckner's music, but I did try to match the mood of the Seventh Symphony's Adagio, and the F minor tonality seemed apt.

Nocturne No. 10 in B: *The Eddying River* (2023)

My image for Nocturne No. 10 was a flowing river dotted with spiraling eddies. I looked up the phrase "the eddying river" and found it associated with *The Iliad* and other pre-Homeric texts, so it seems to be the translation of a rather common ancient Greek phrase.

Nocturne No. 11 in F-sharp: *Managing Expectations* (2023)

Nocturne 11 in F-sharp Mixolydian mode (occasionally sneaking into Lydian) is a jaunty exercise in pandiatonic counterpoint that keeps making you expect something specific, sometimes giving it to you, sometimes not.

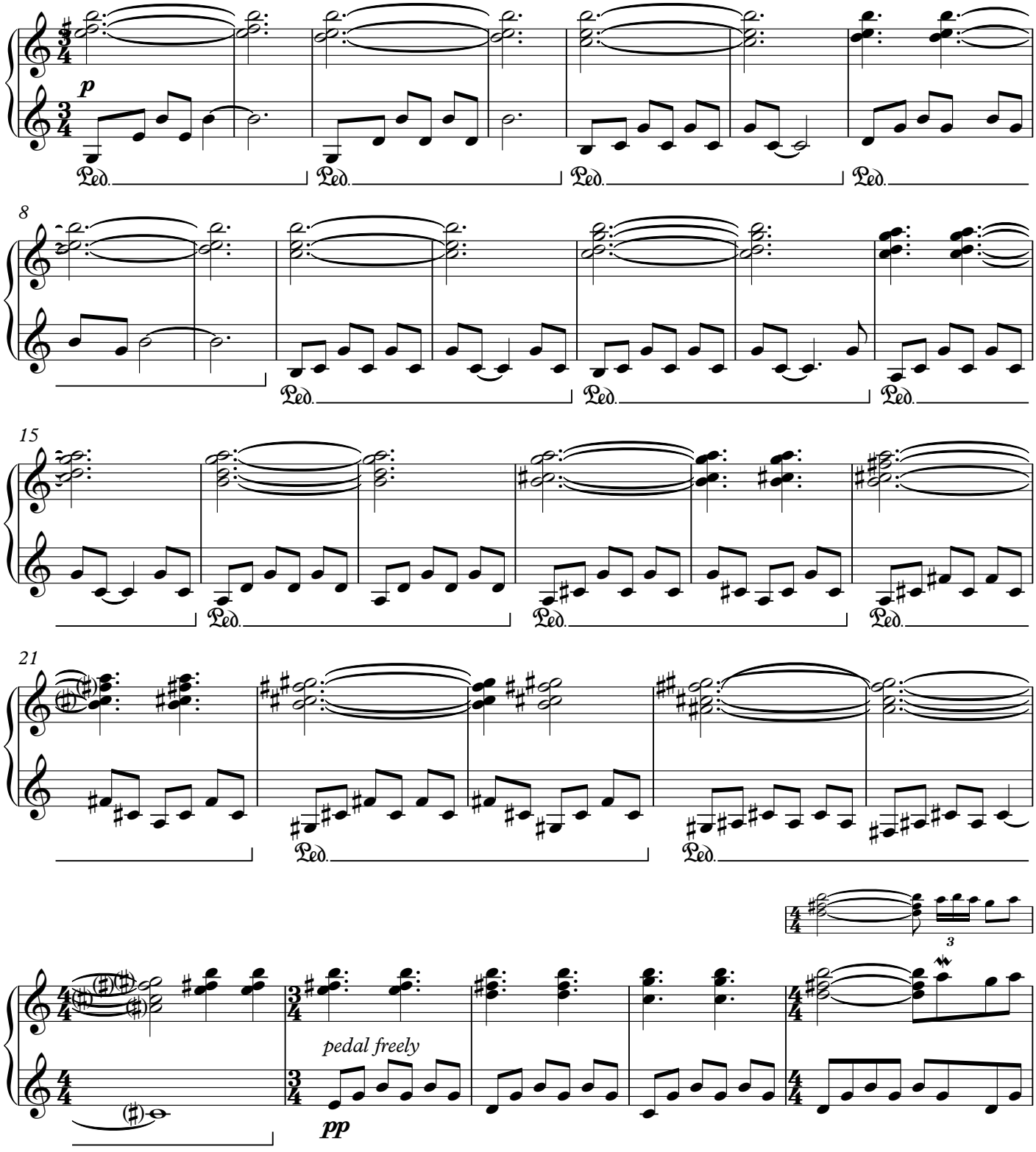
- Kyle Gann

For François Mardirossian

Nocturne I:
Collines de lavande

by Kyle Gann
2021-22

Graceful, gentle
♩ = 112



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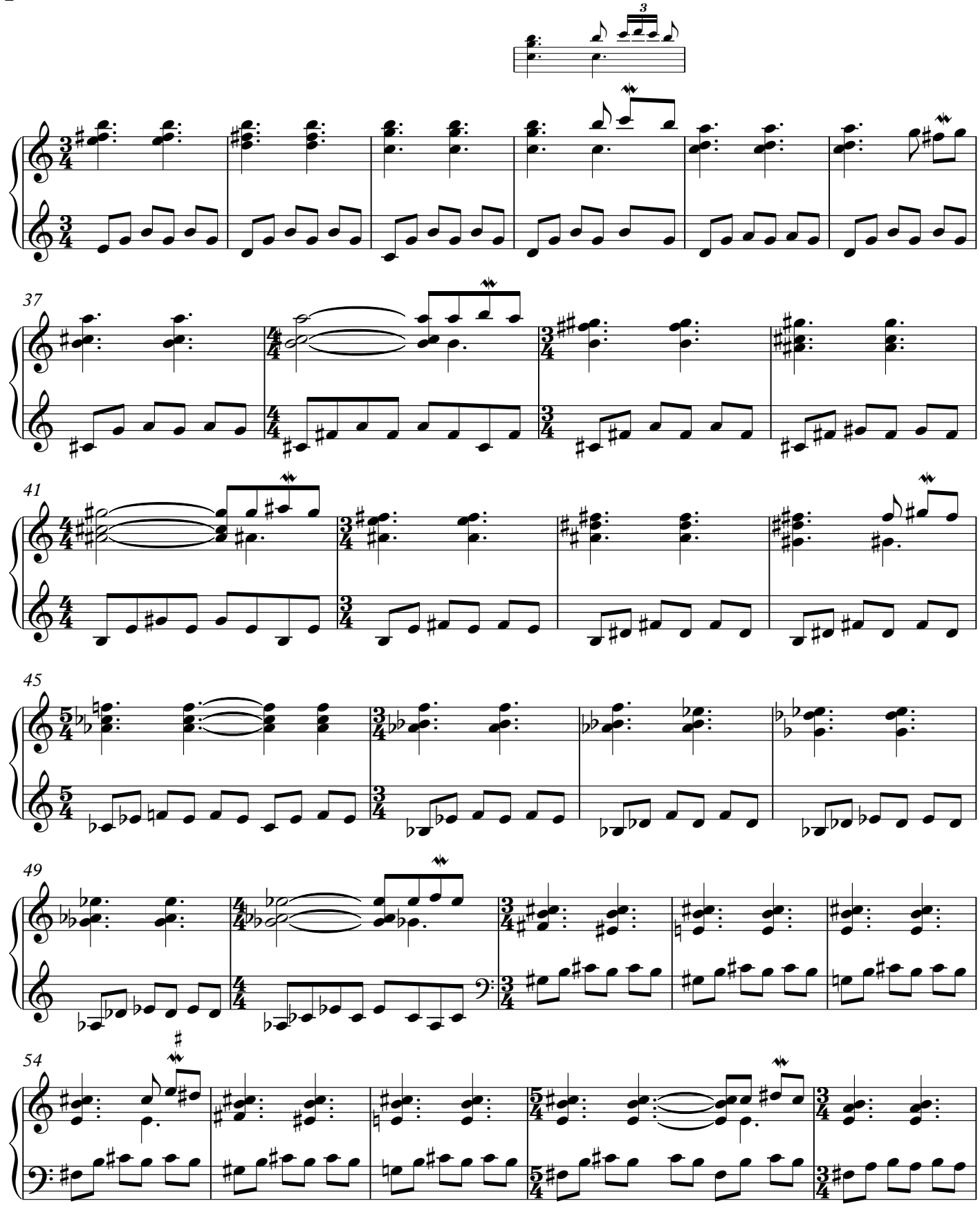

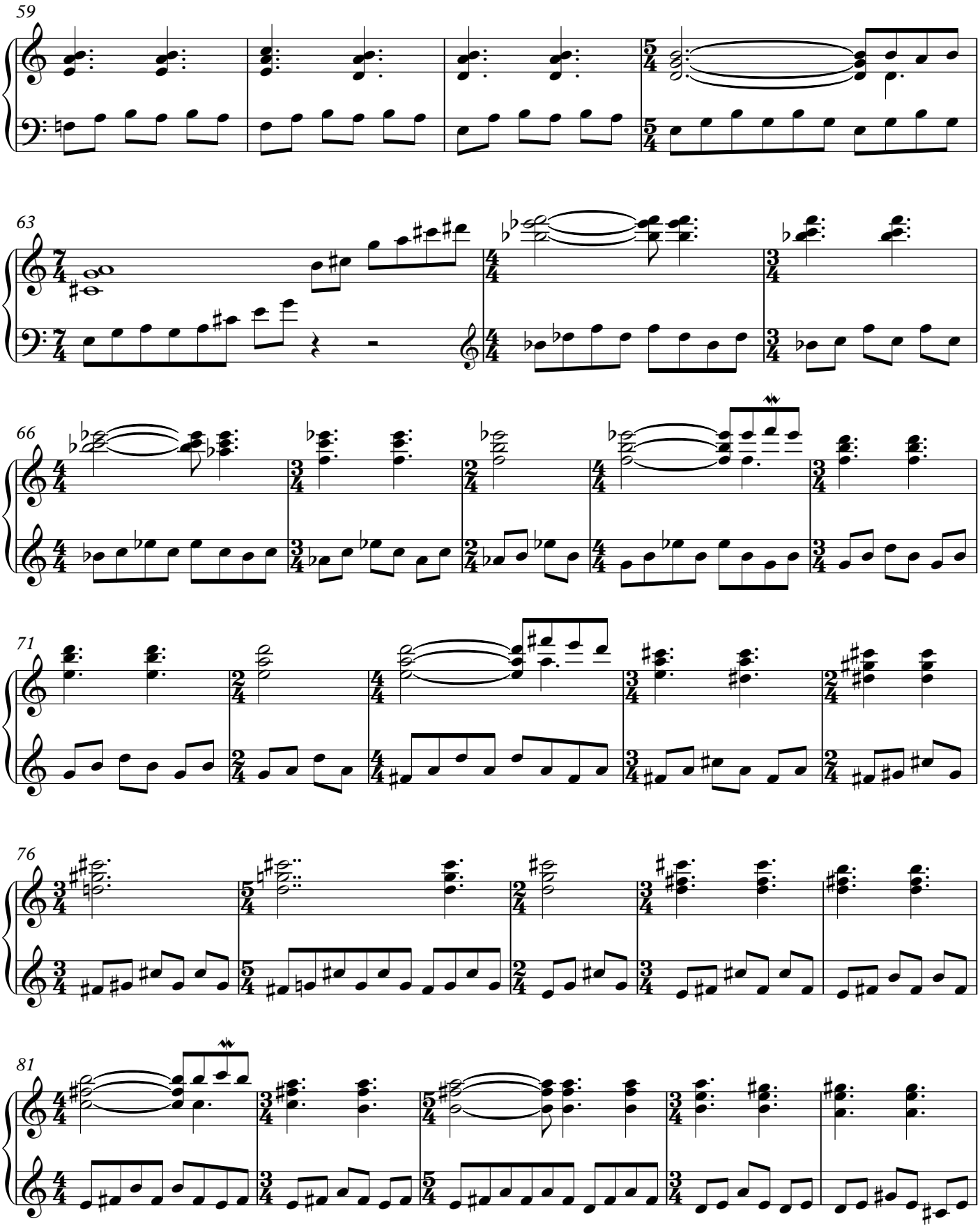
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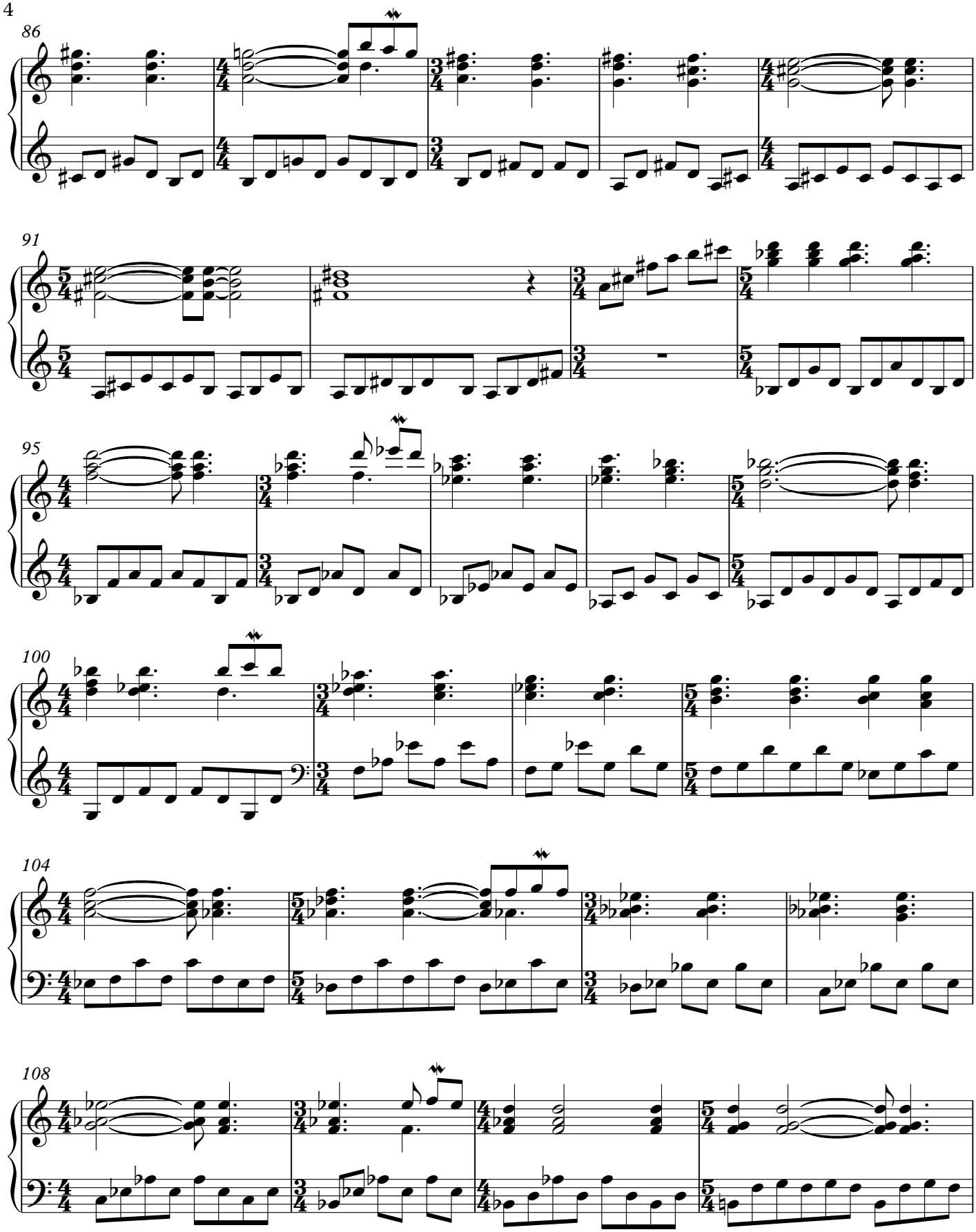
66
71
76
81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95
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104
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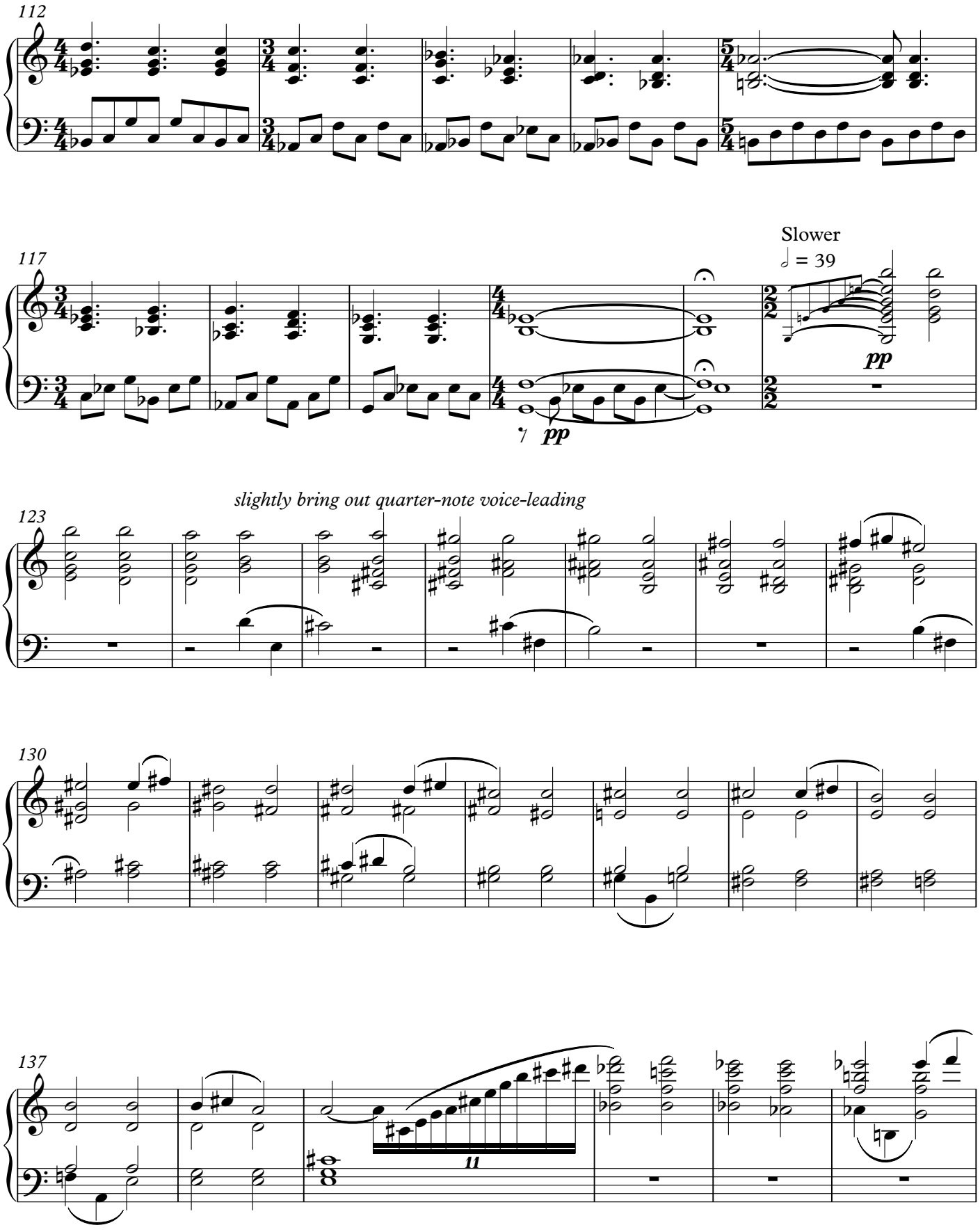
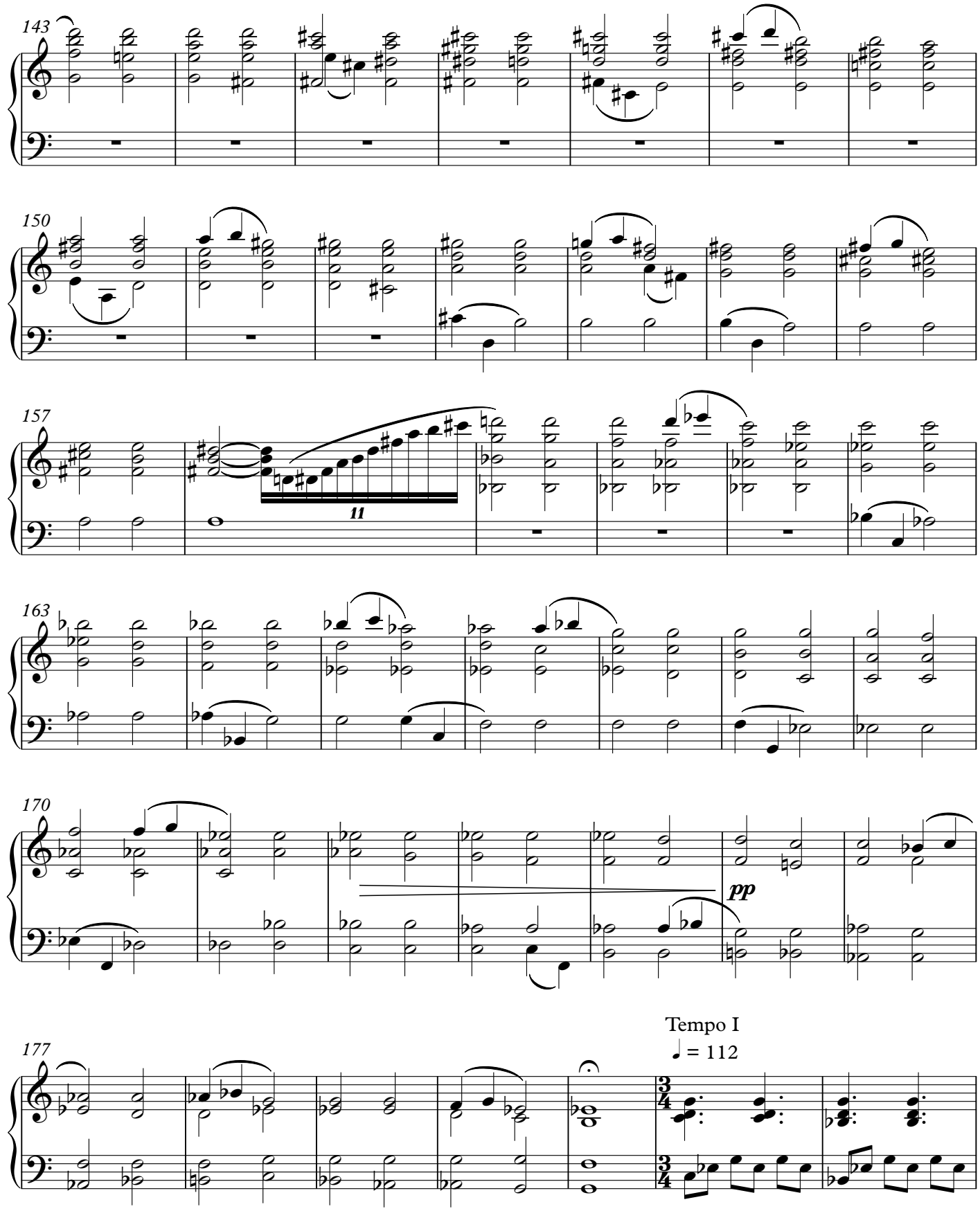
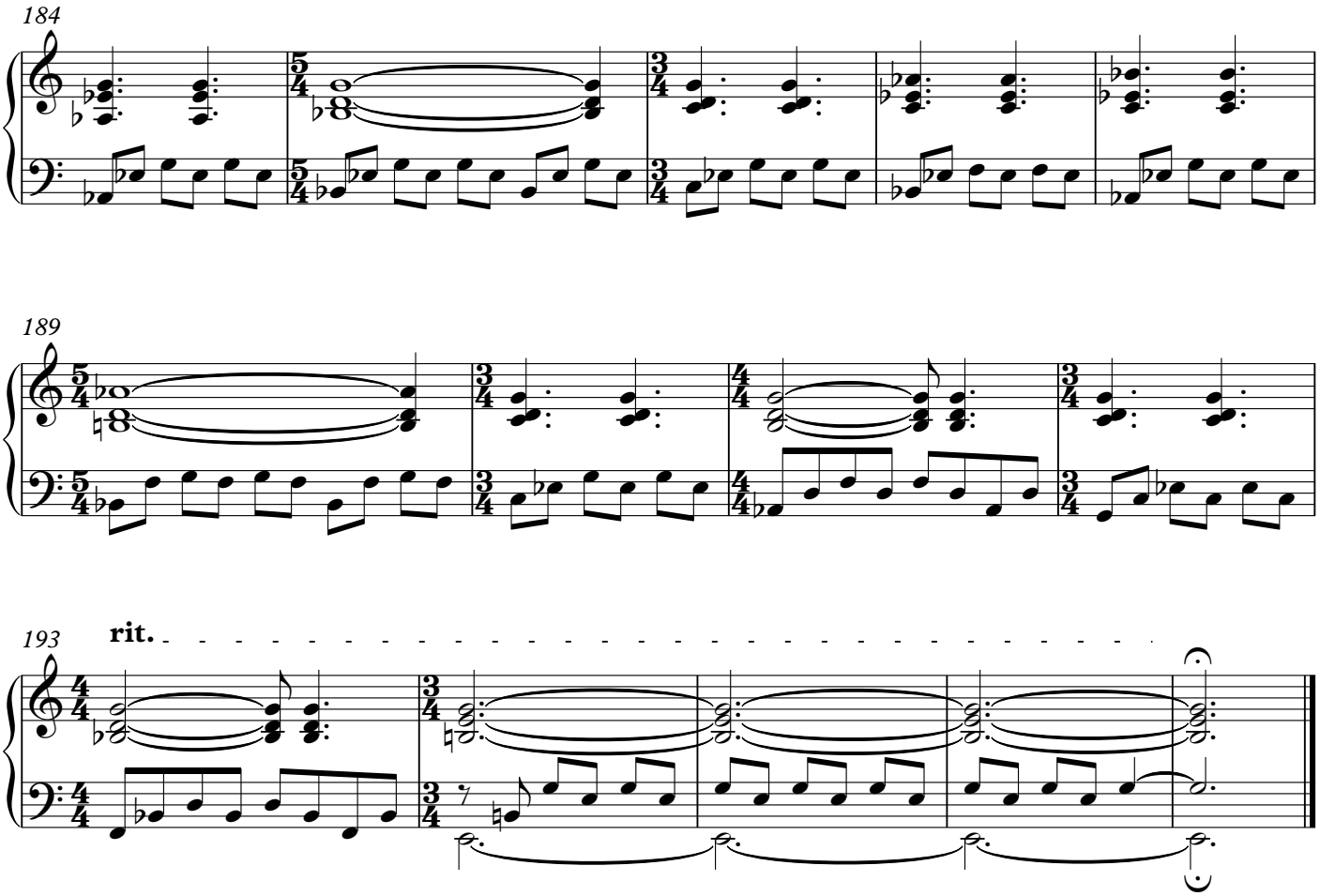

112
117
Slower
♩ = 39
pp
pp
slightly bring out quarter-note voice-leading
123
130
137


143
150
157
11
163
170
pp
177
Tempo I
♩ = 112



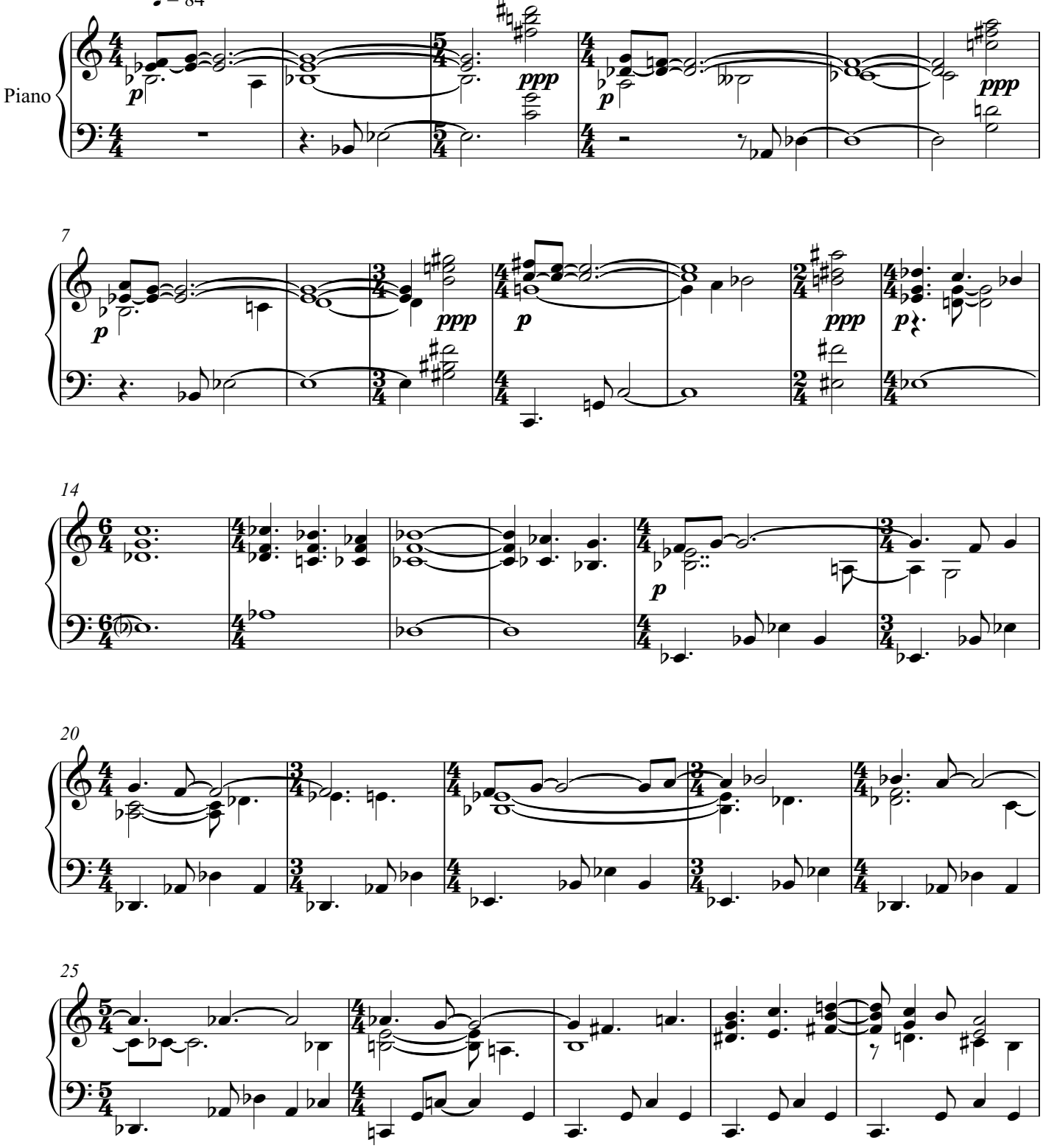
November 30, 2021 - April 2, 2022
Germantown, NY

For François Mardirossian

Nocturne II:
Souvenirs d'un tango

Slyly

Kyle Gann
2022



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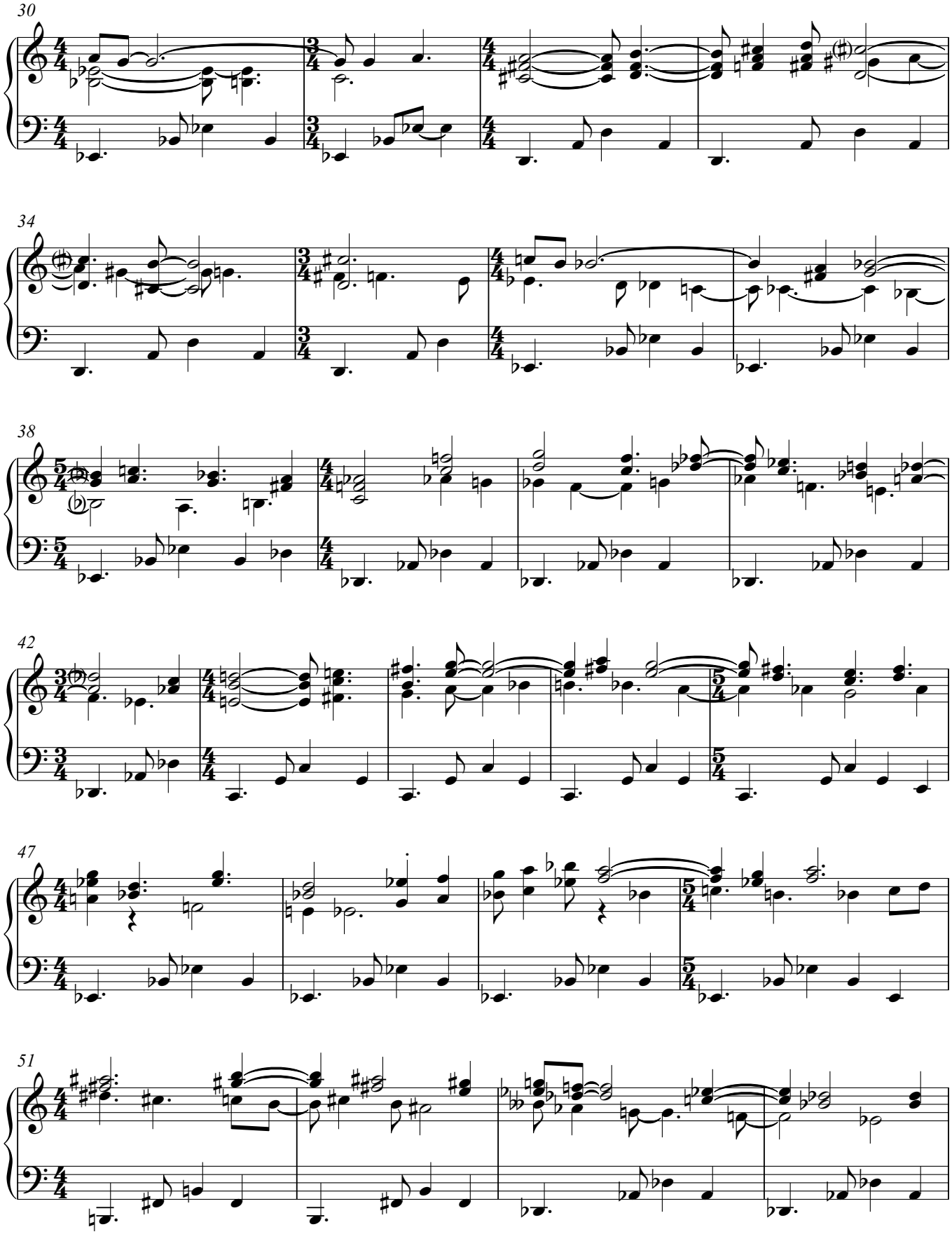
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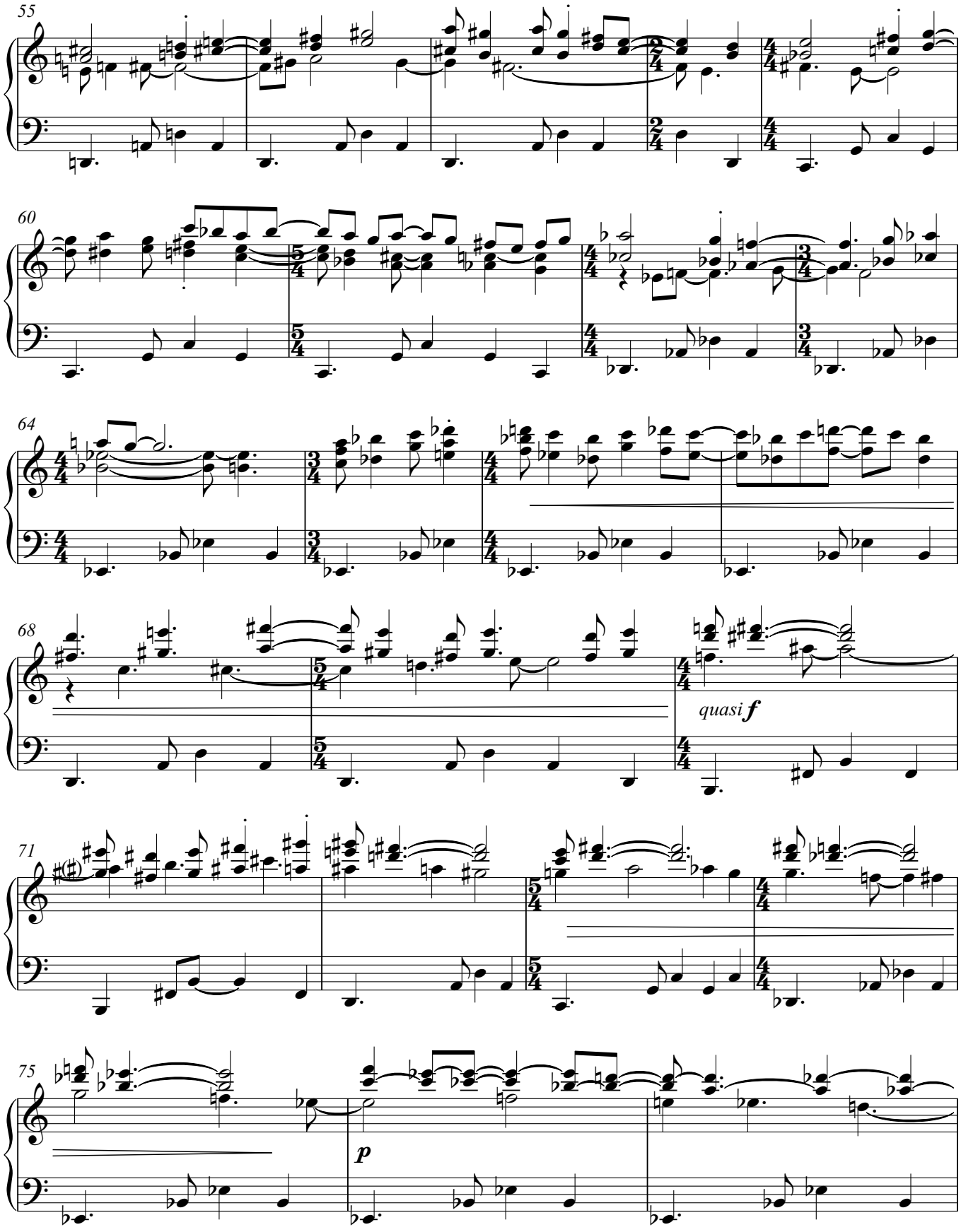
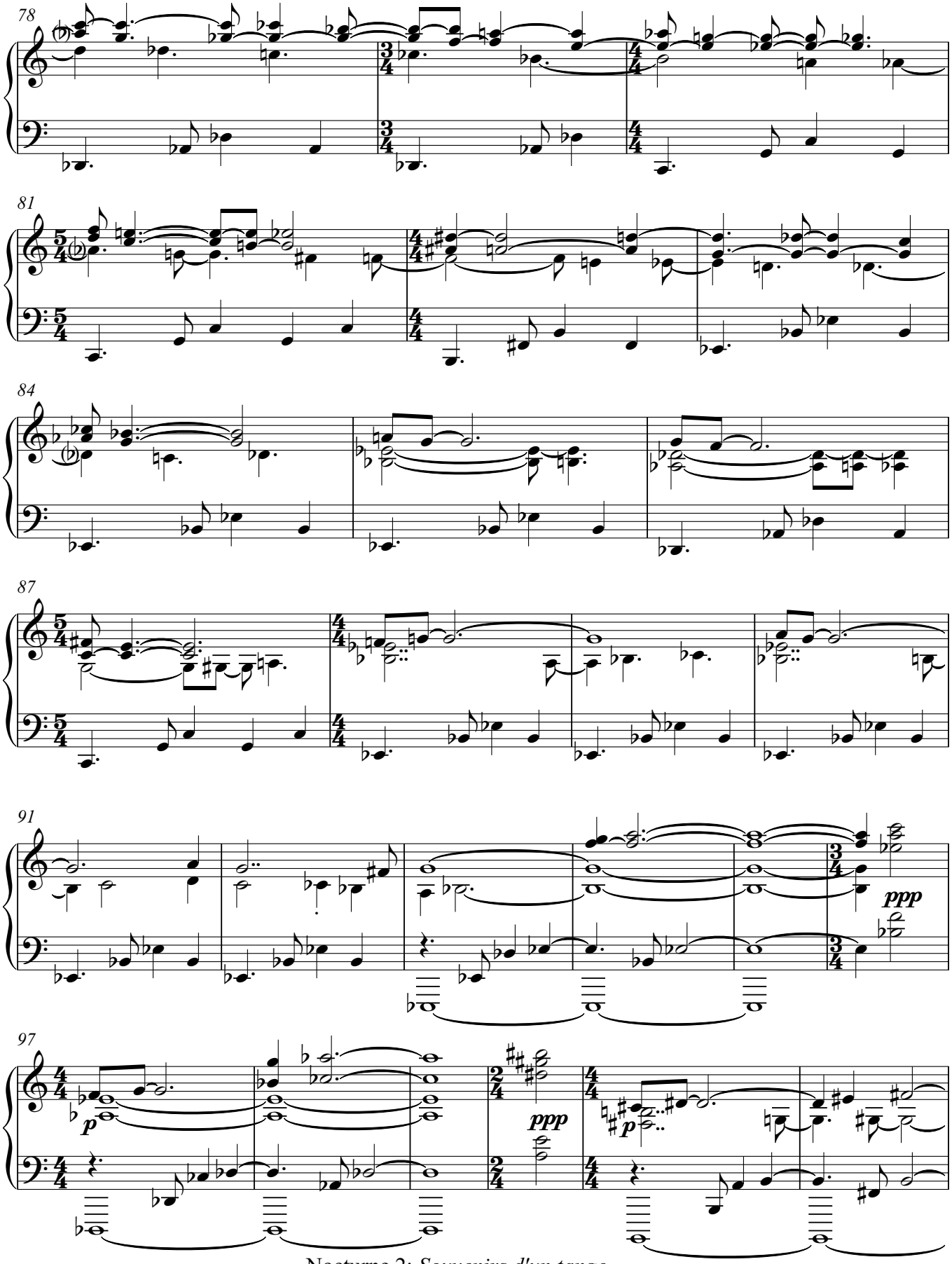
47
51


55
60
64
68
quasi f
71
75
p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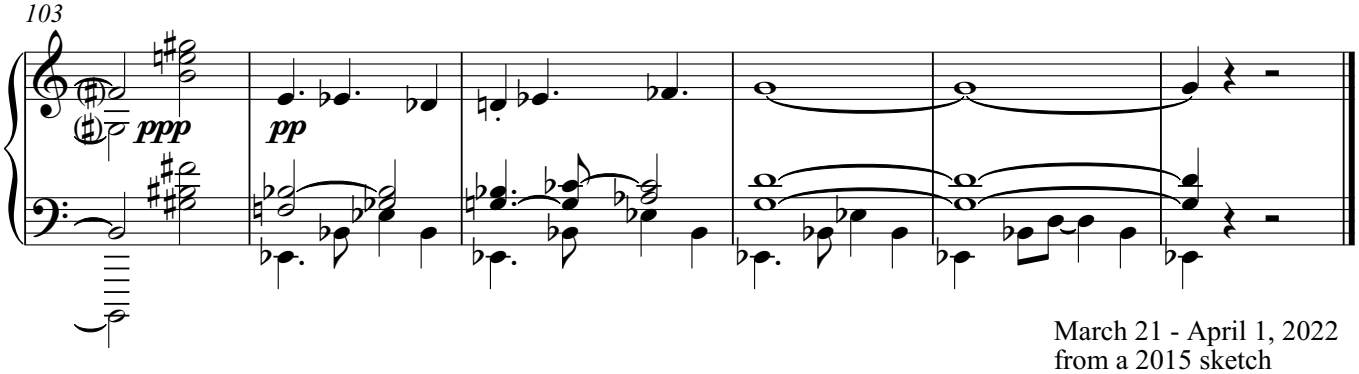
81
84
87
91
ppp
97
p
ppp
p



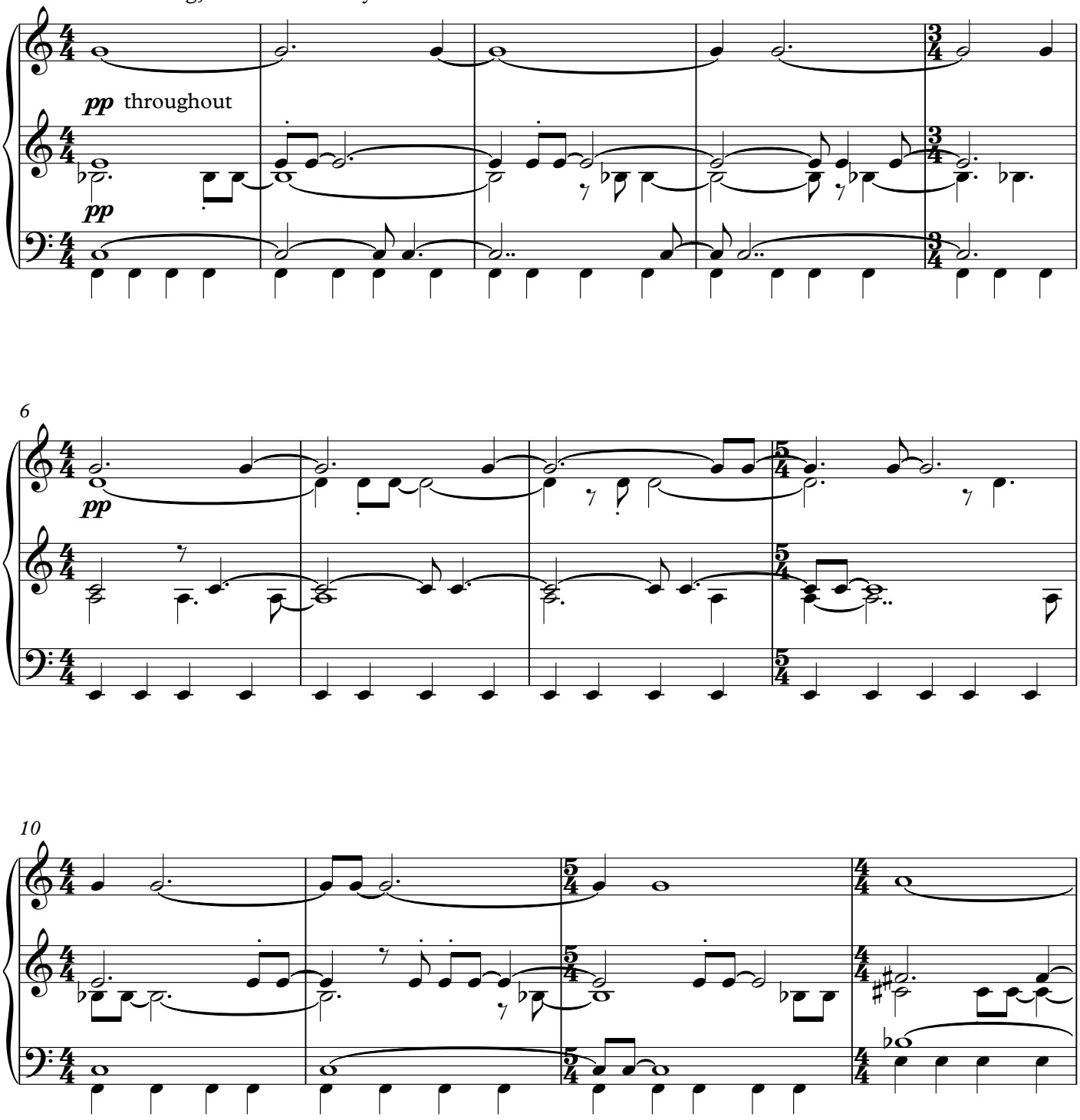
March 21 - April 1, 2022
from a 2015 sketch
Germantown, NY

For François Mardirossian

Nocturne III:
Crépuscule sans fin

Kyle Gann
2022

♩ = 58 or thereabouts; extremely gentle;
with feeling, not mechanically



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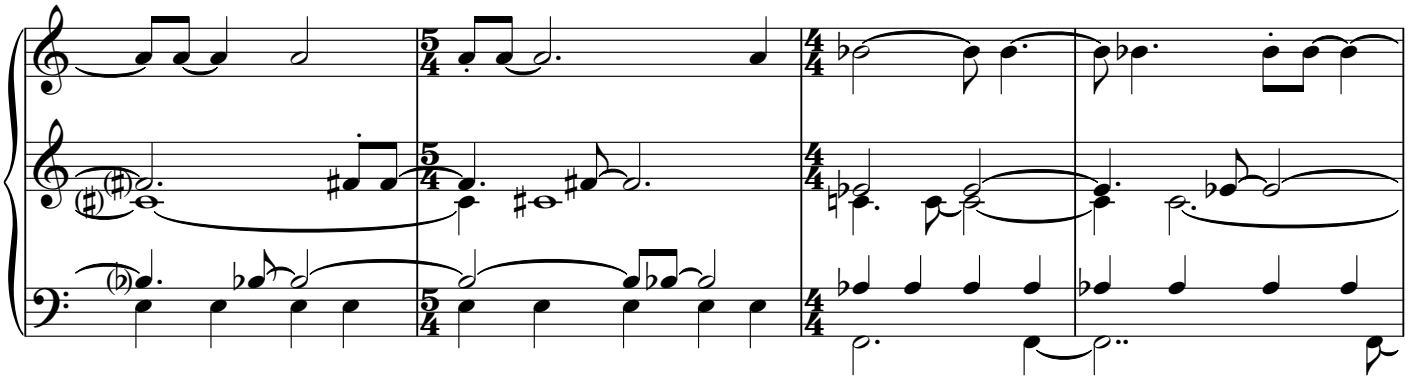
14



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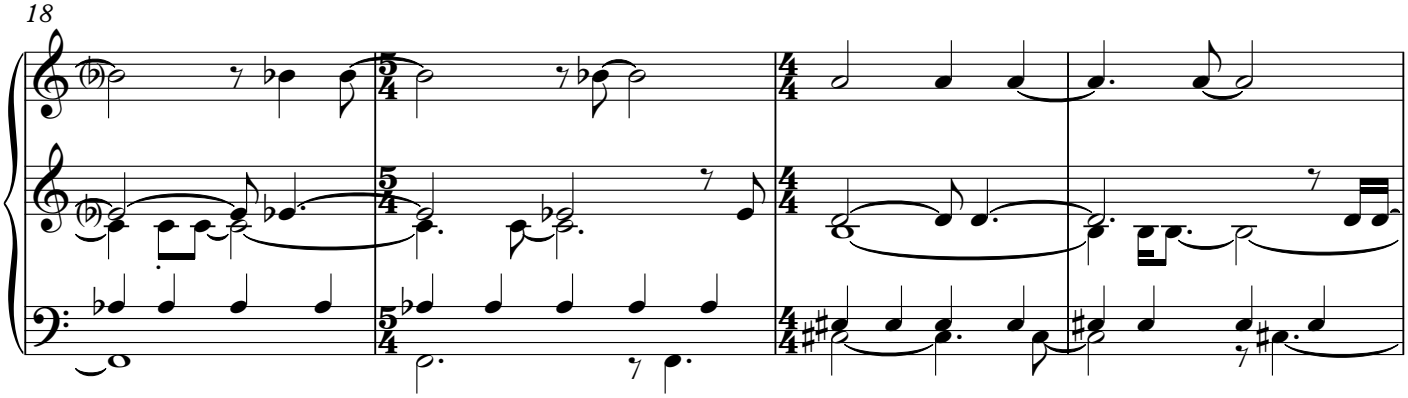

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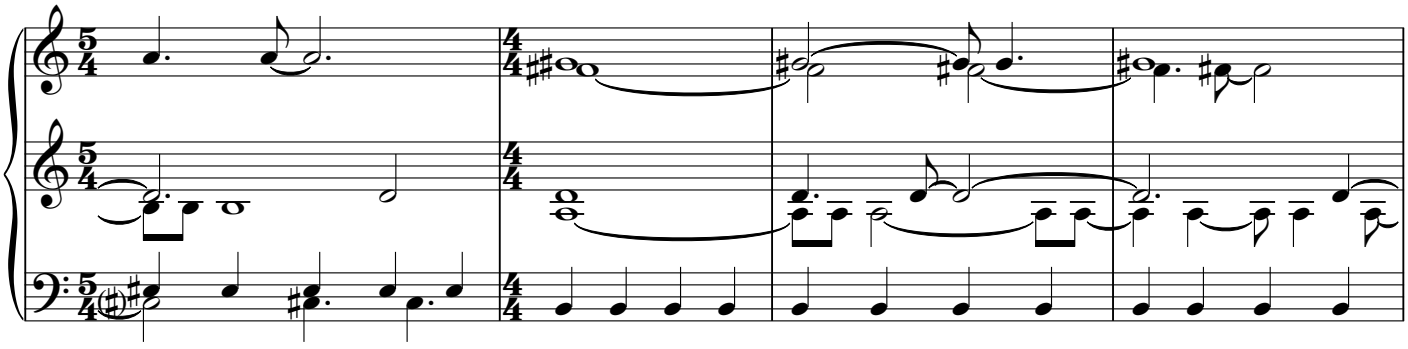

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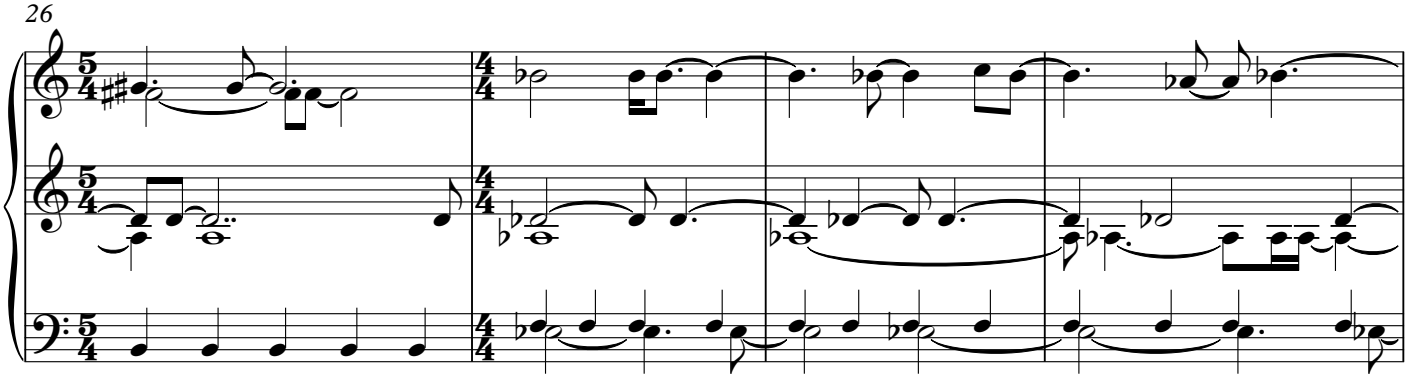

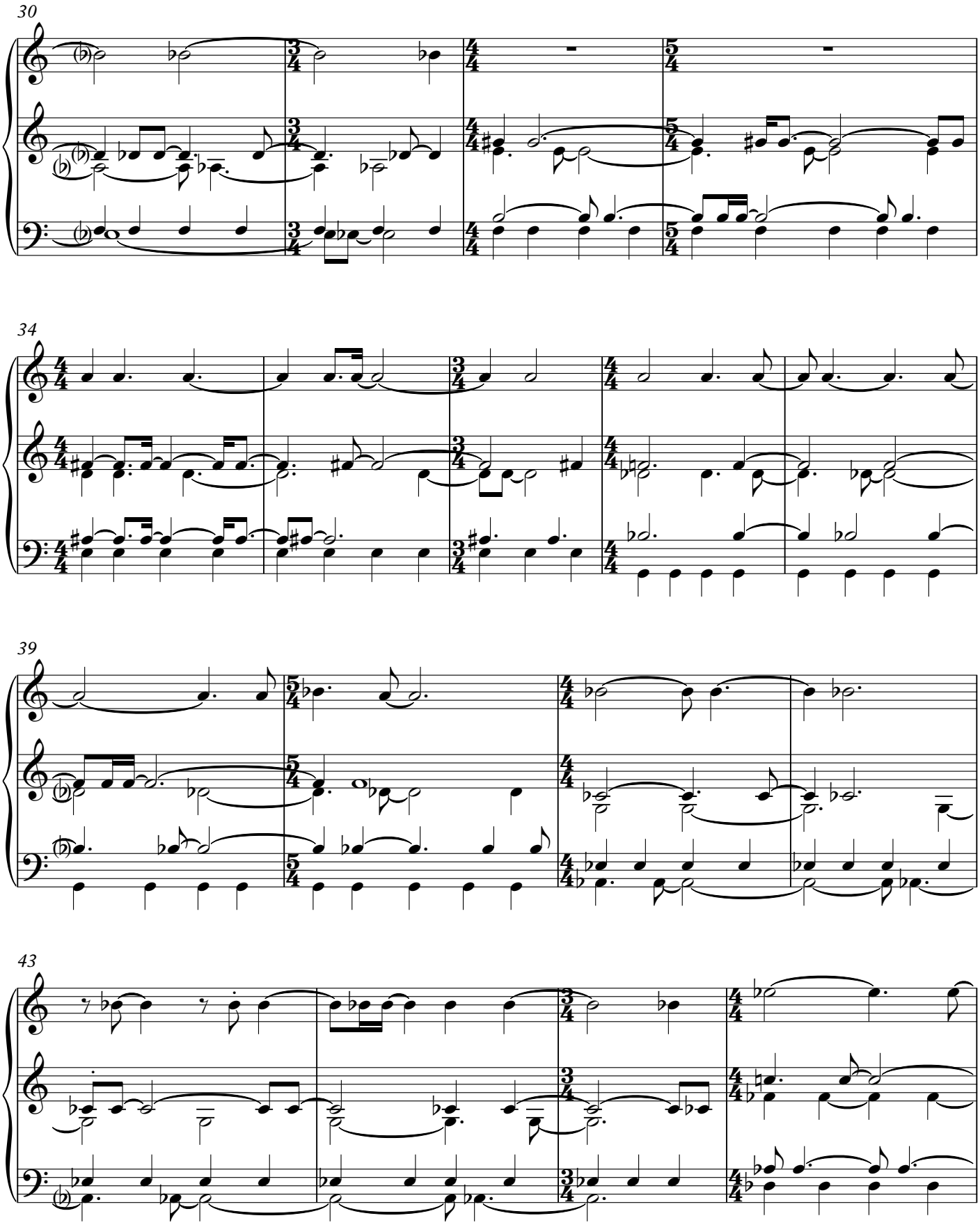
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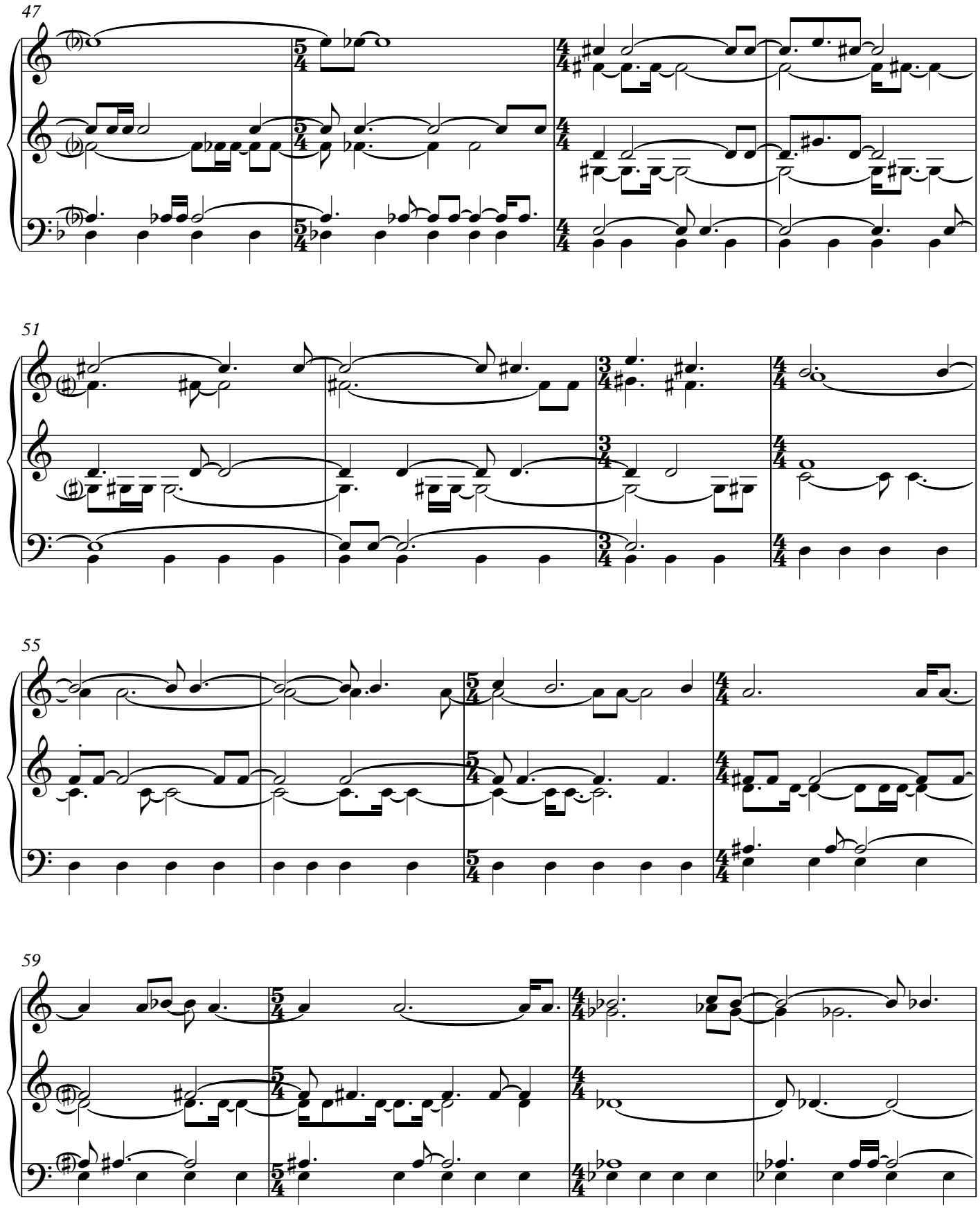
34
39
43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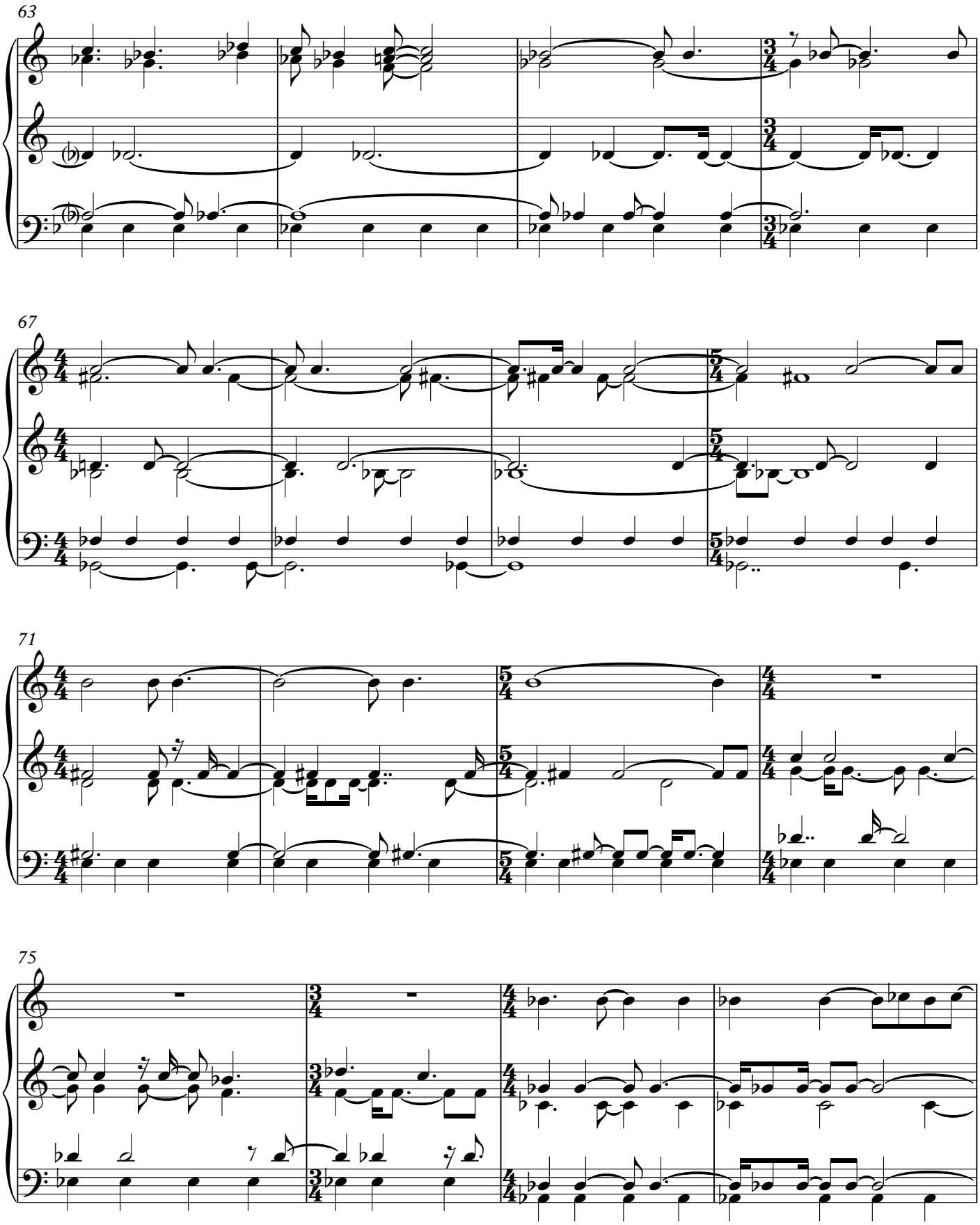
51
55
59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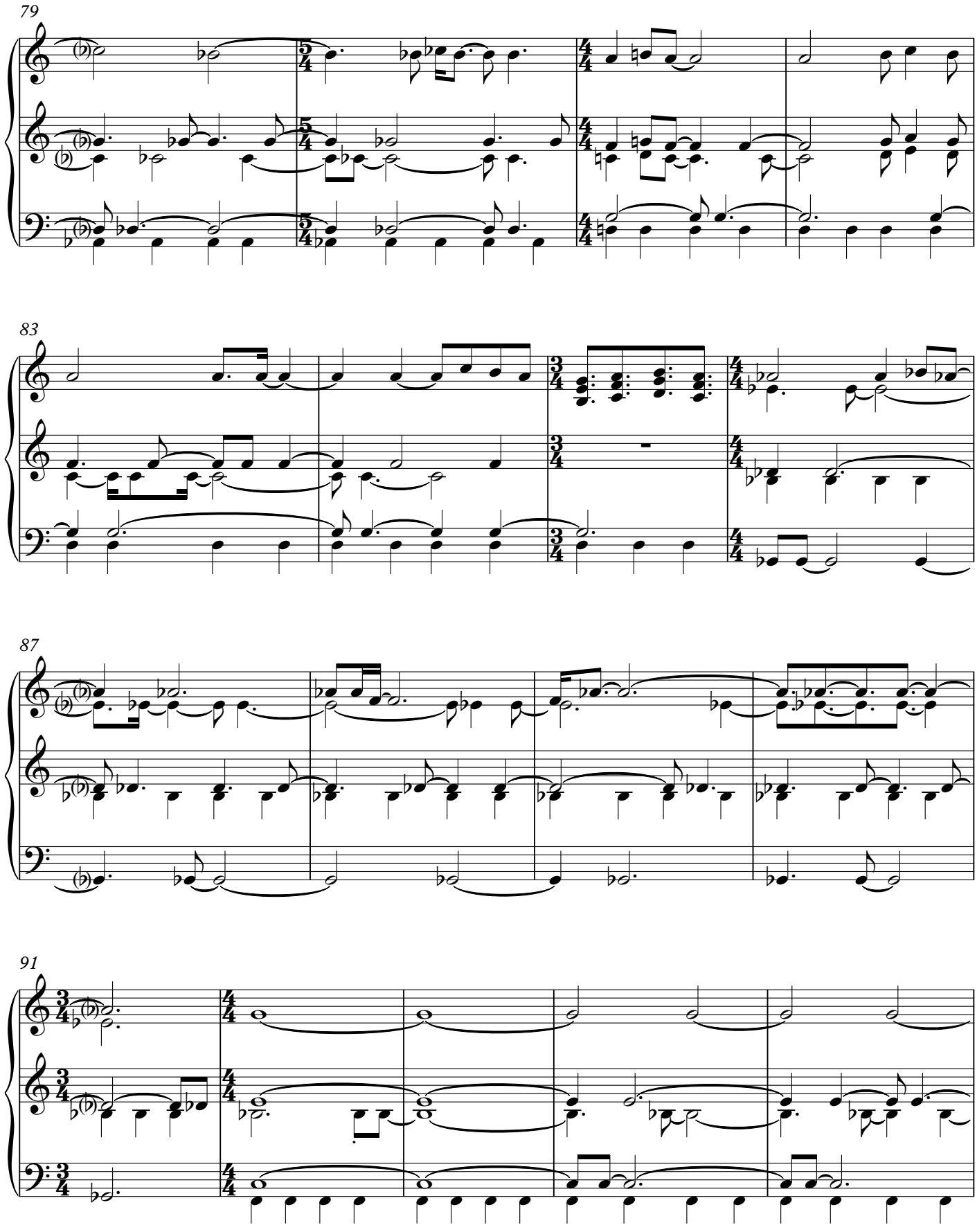
67
71
75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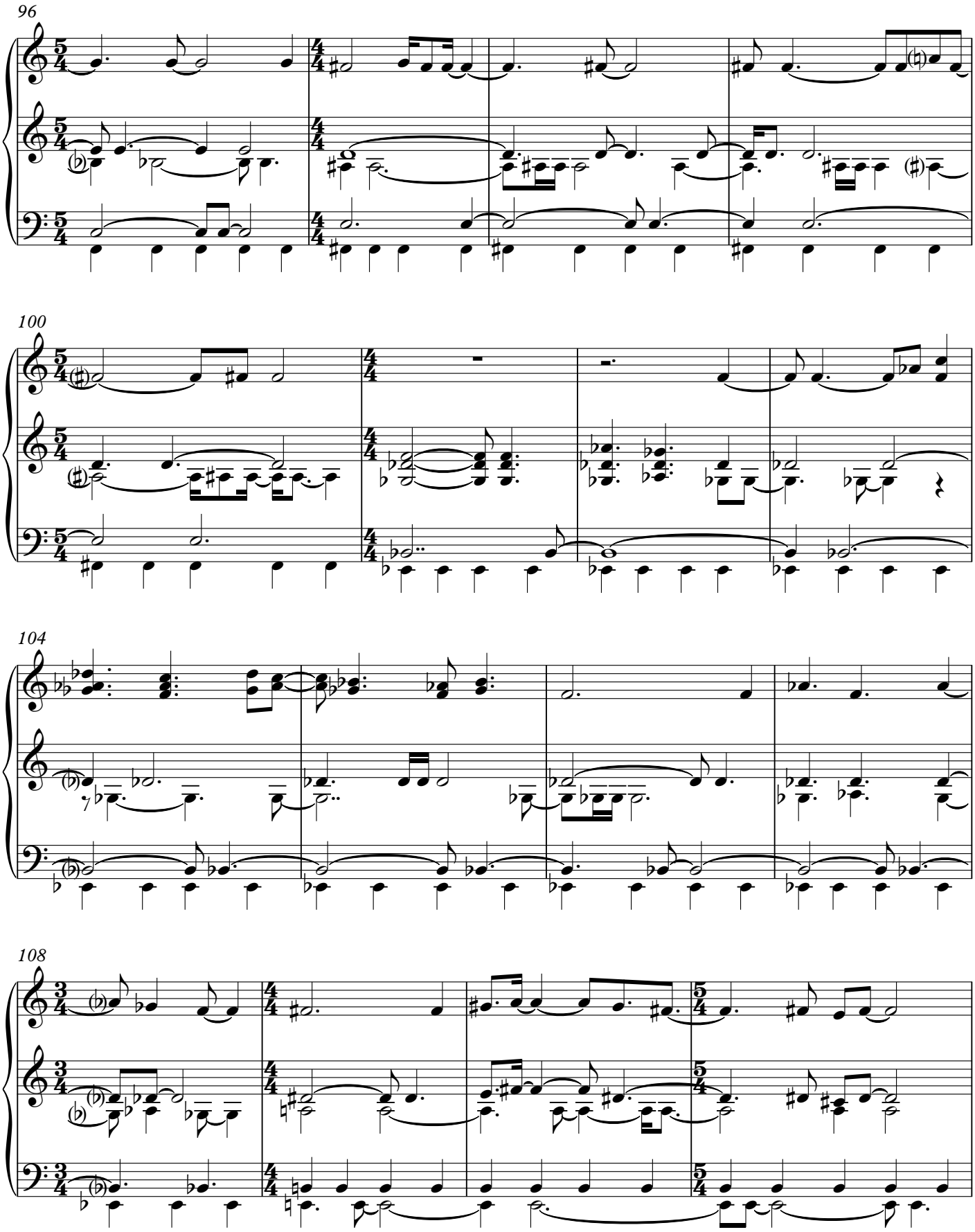
83
87
91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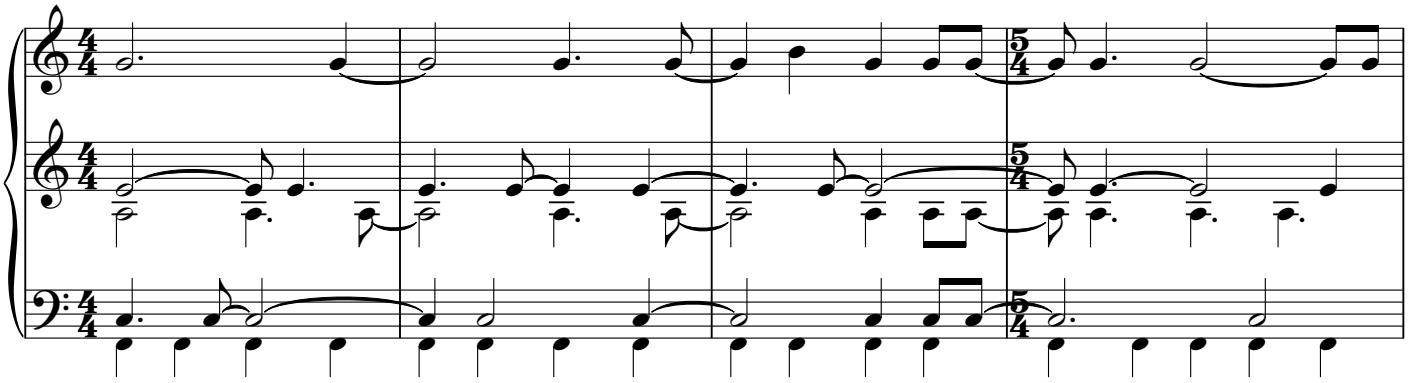
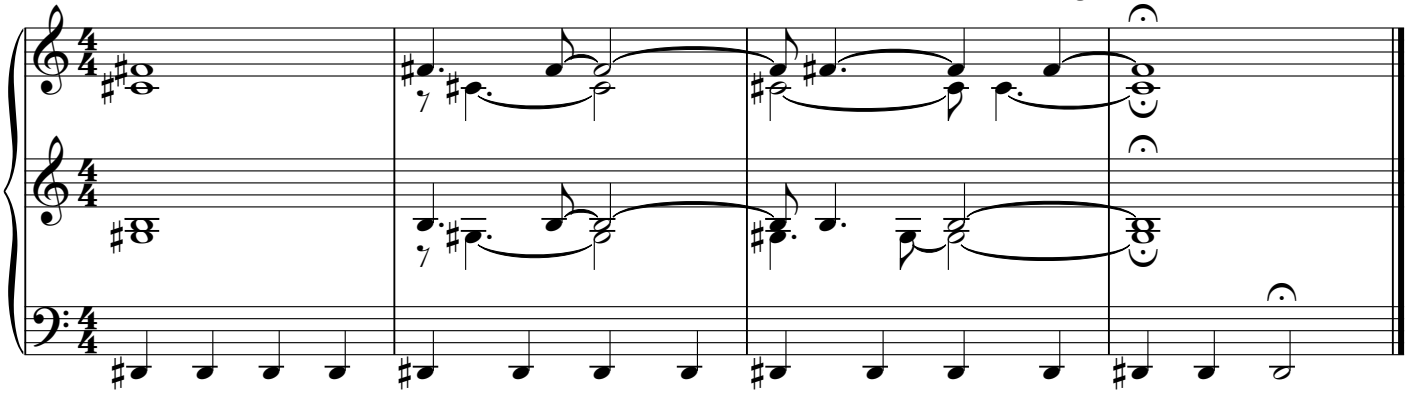
100
104
108

112



116

slight ritard.

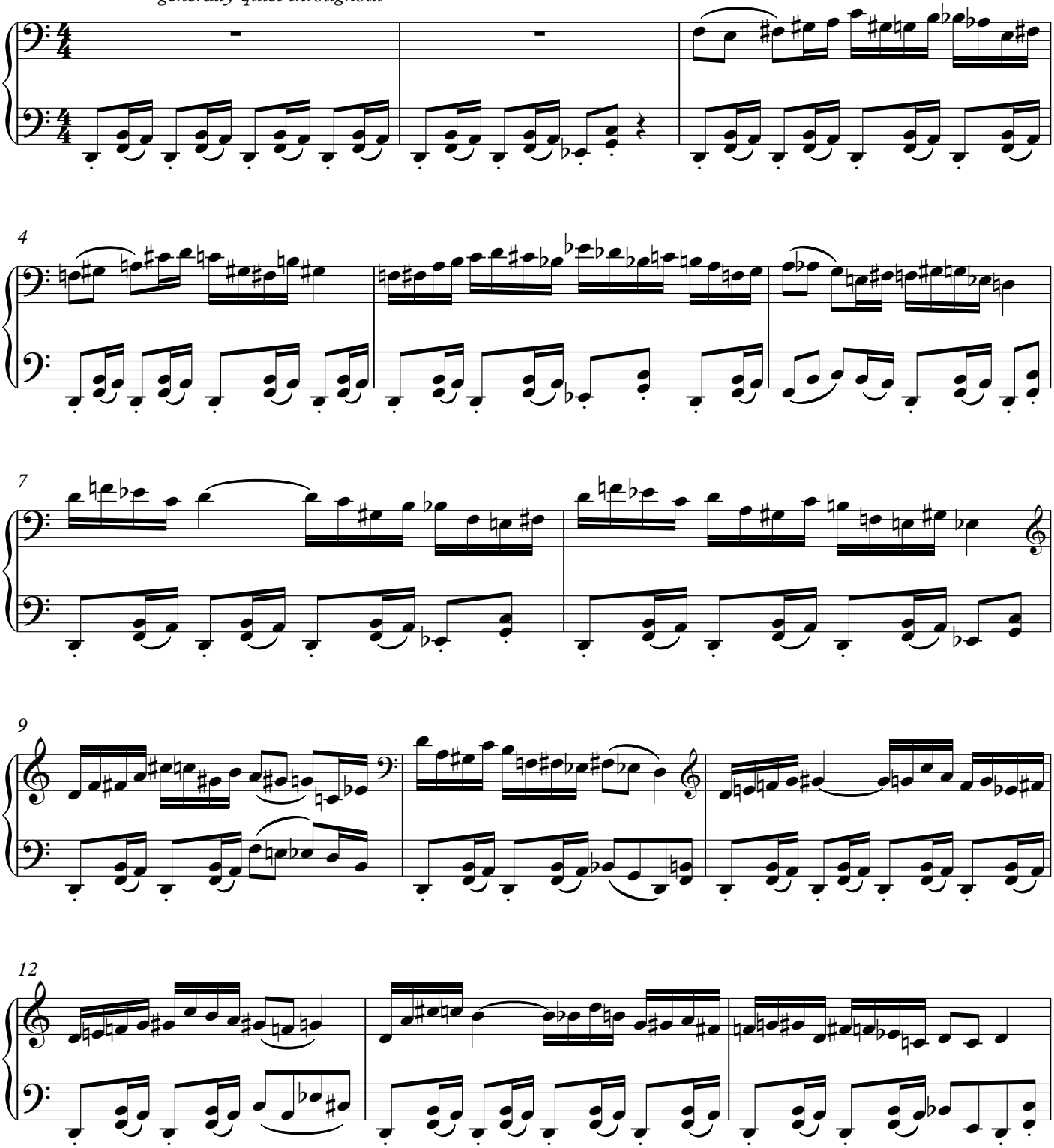


August 2-14, 2022
Germantown, NY

Nocturne IV:
Nora in the Night

Kyle Gann
2022

♩ = 77 *with energy, but generally quiet throughout*



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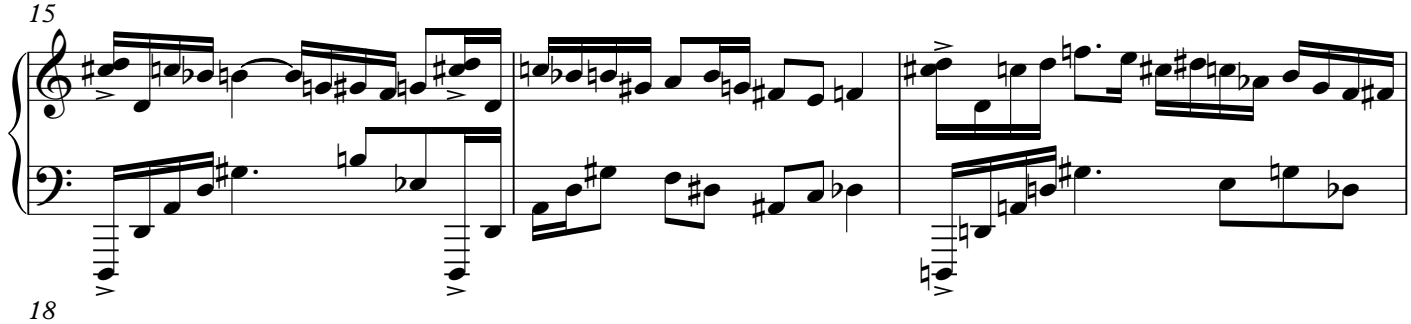

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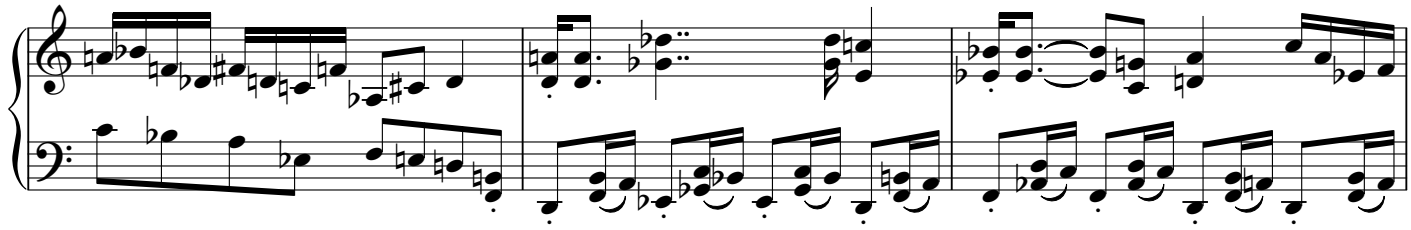

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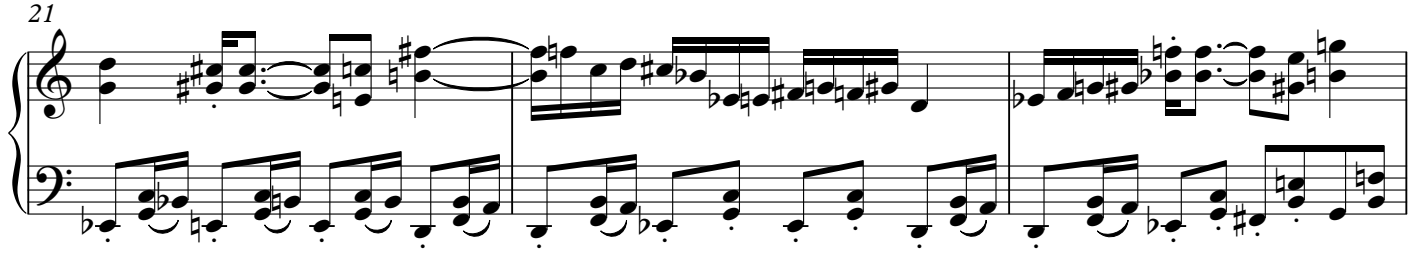

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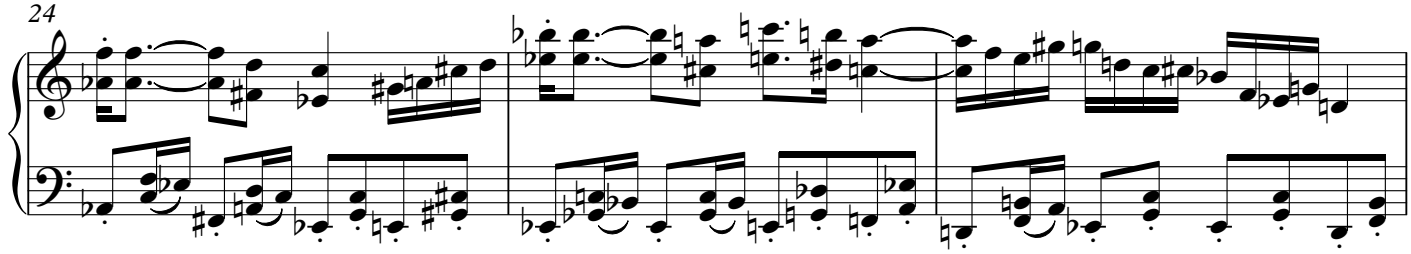

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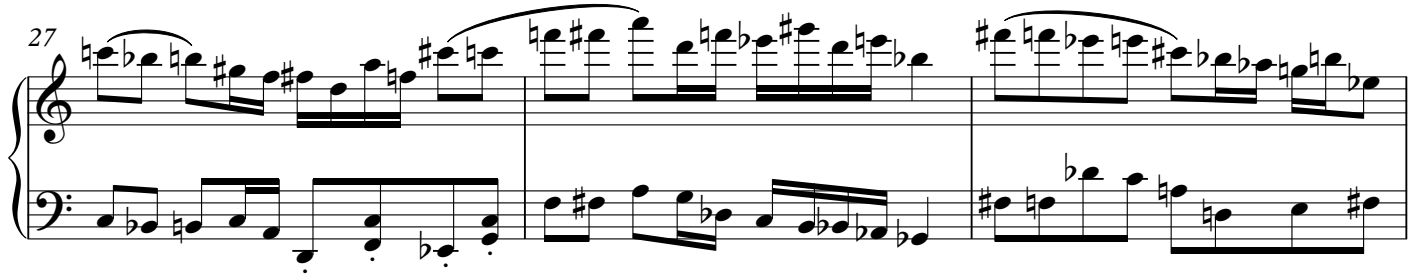

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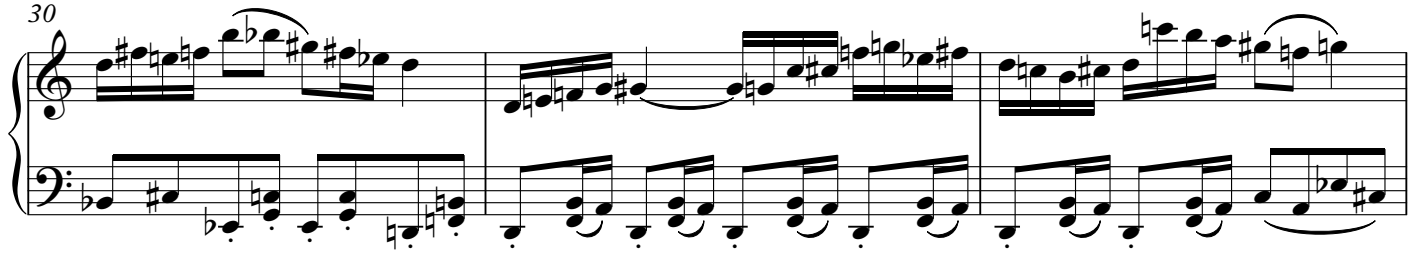
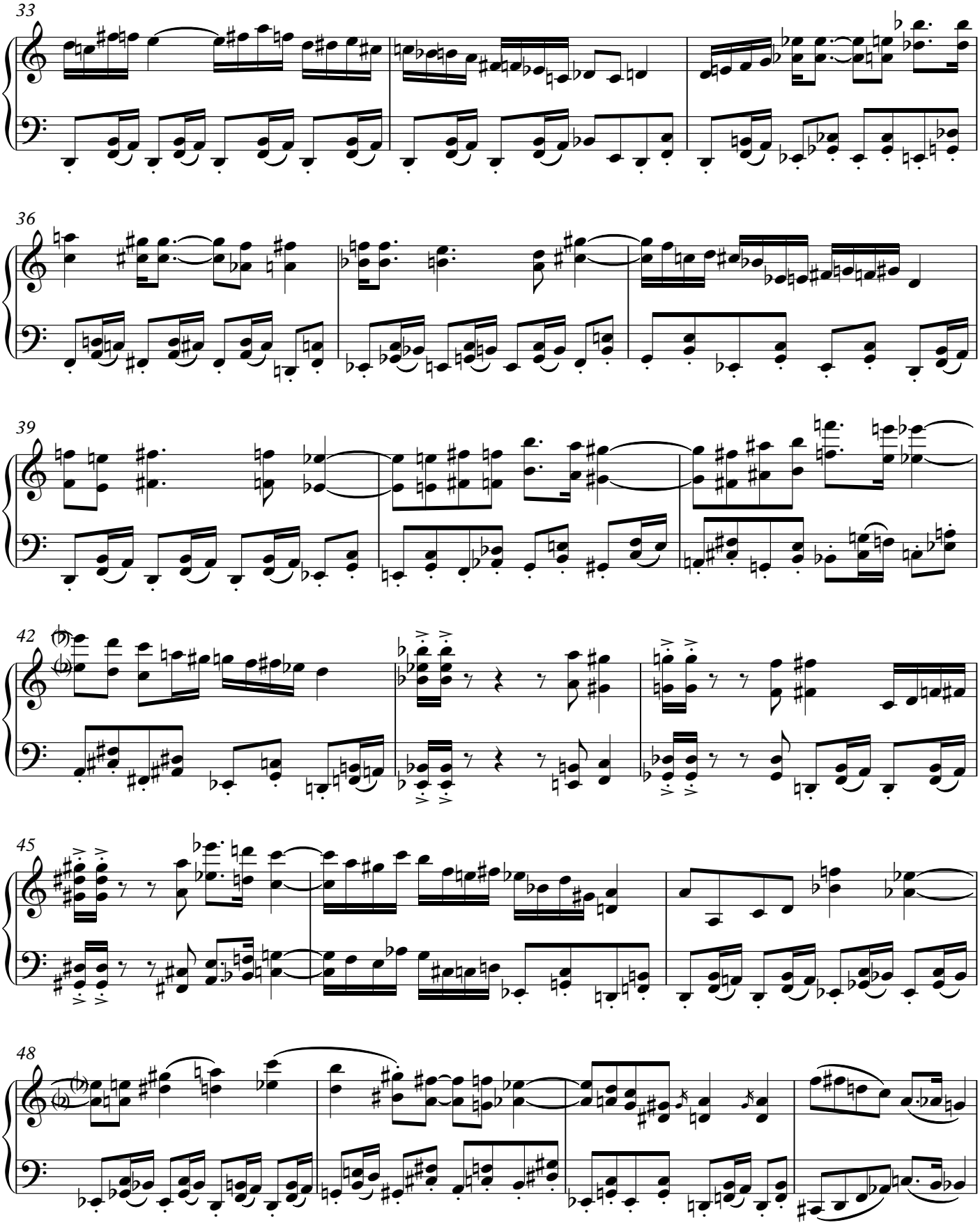



33
36
39
42
45
48

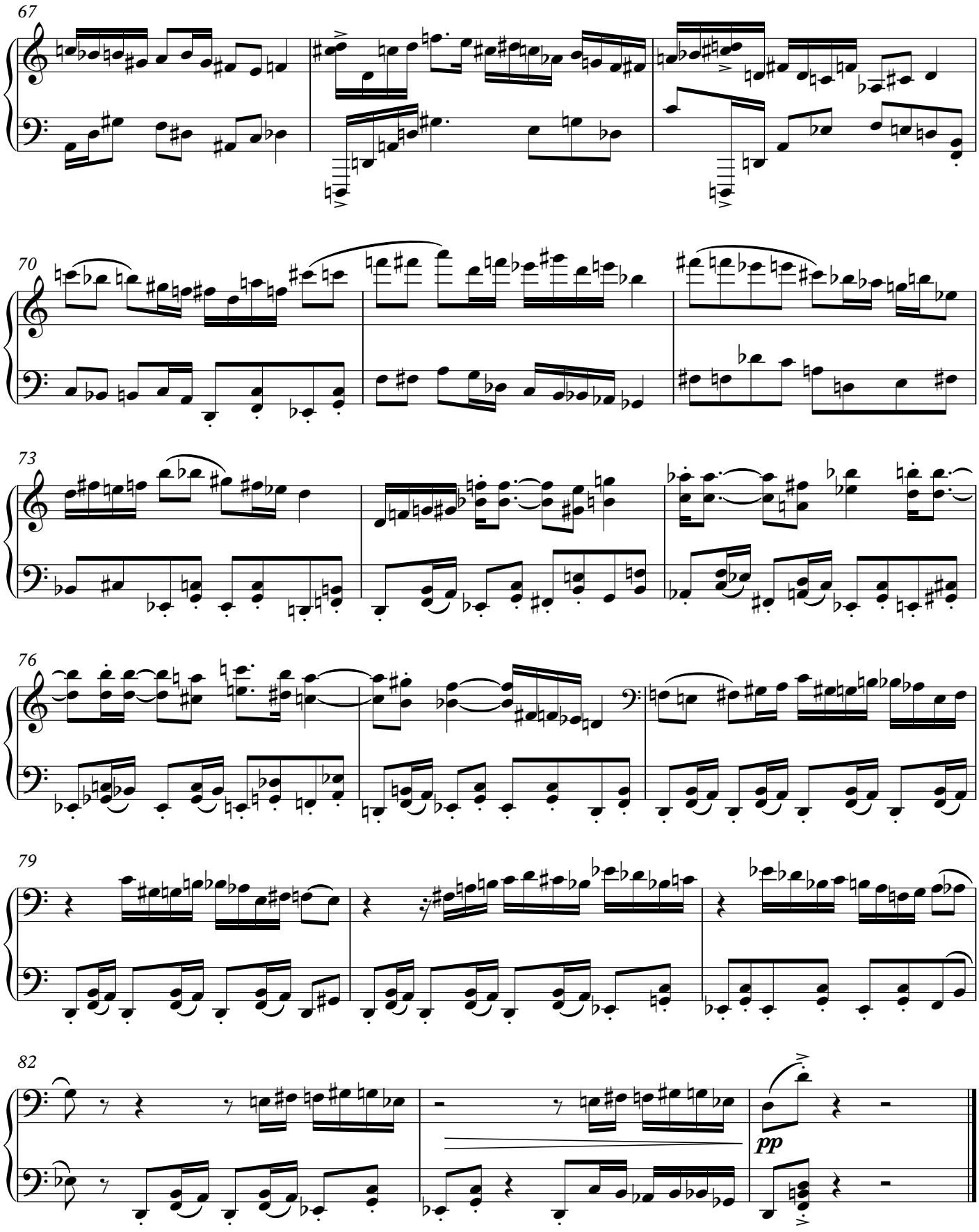
52

55

58

61

64 *Ossia:*


67
70
73
76
79
82
pp

Nocturne V:
The Argument of Innocence

Kyle Gann
2023

Simply and evenly
♩ = 37

p

Ped. *soft pedal throughout*

✻ Ped.

✻ *pedal with LH notes to m. 27*

6

11

15

19

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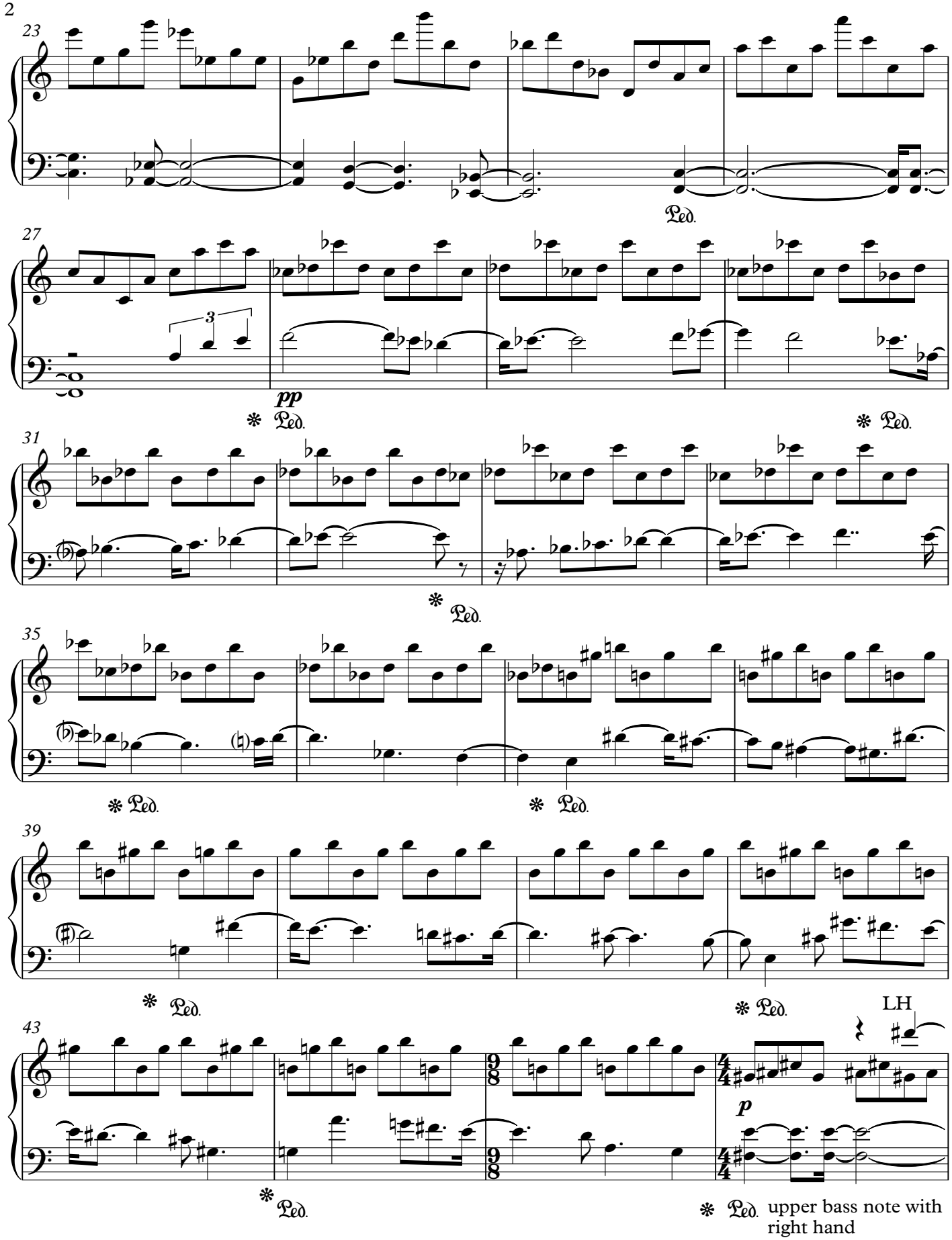
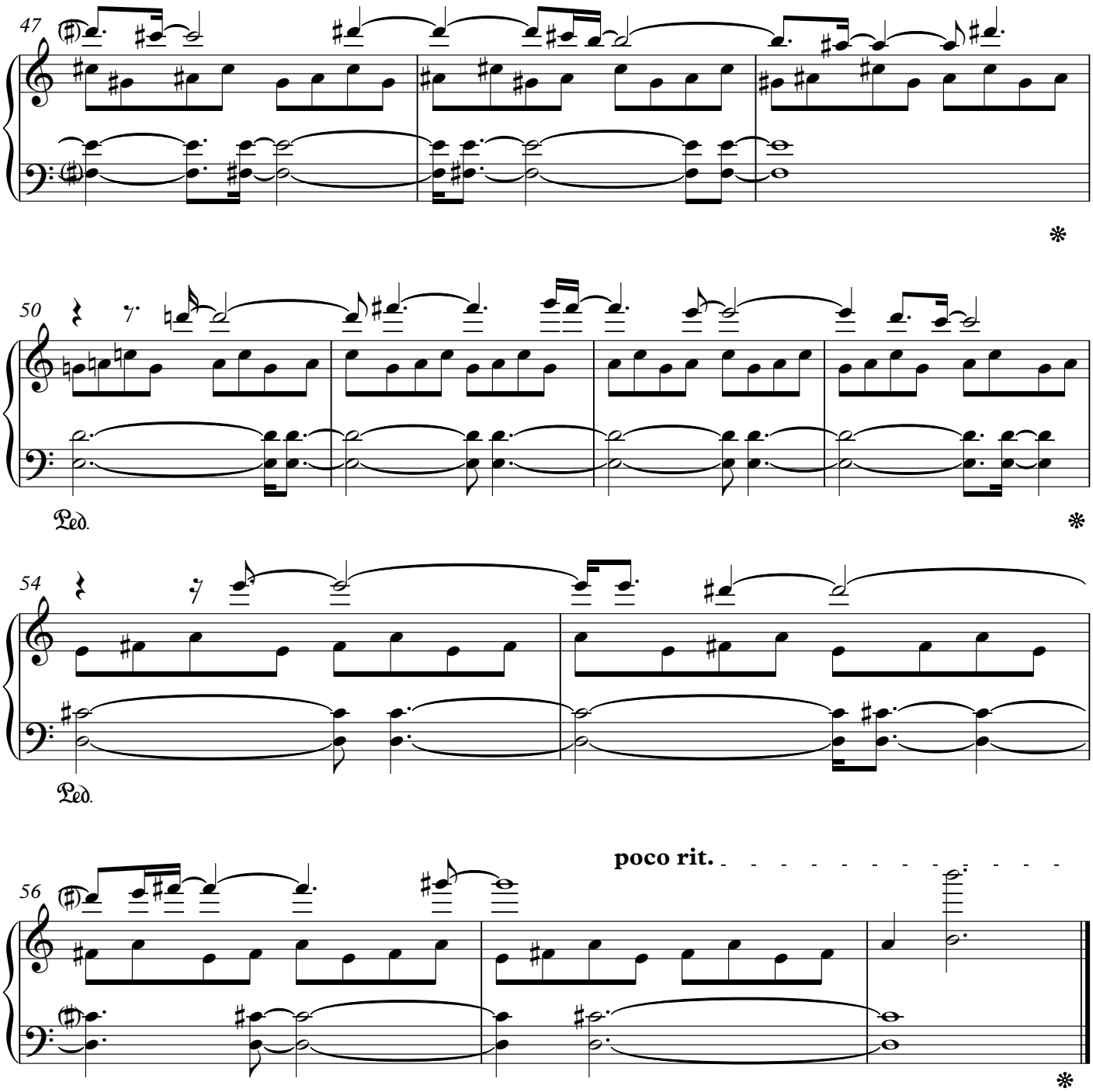

23
Ped.
27
3
pp
Ped.
Ped.
31
Ped.
35
Ped.
Ped.
39
Ped.
Ped.
LH
43
p
Ped.
Ped.
upper bass note with
right hand



Dec. 23, 2022 - Feb. 25, 2023
Germantown, NY

Nocturne VI:
Spectral Dance

Kyle Gann
2023

♪ = 108
Calmly, smoothly

p

9

16

22

still quiet

28

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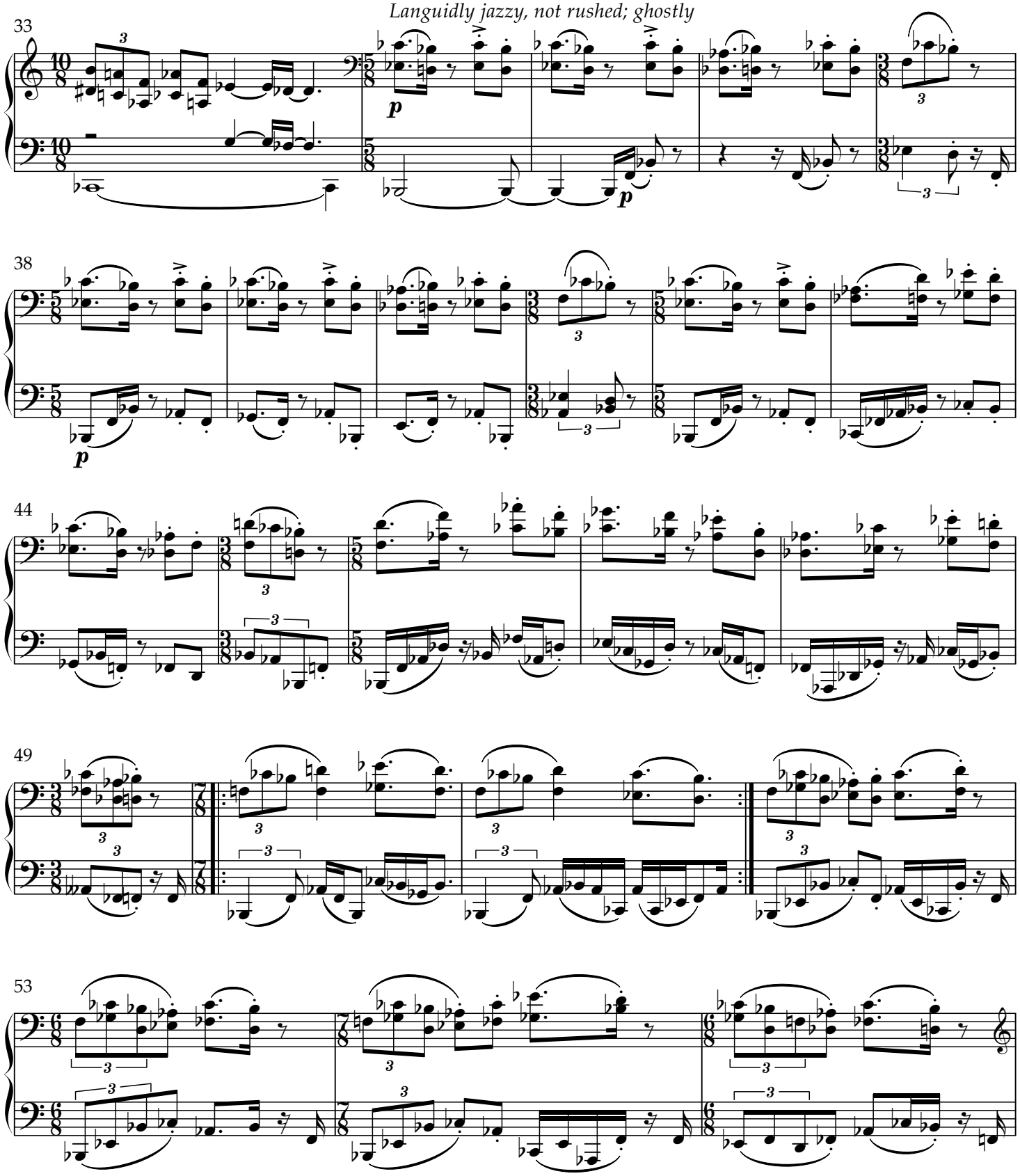
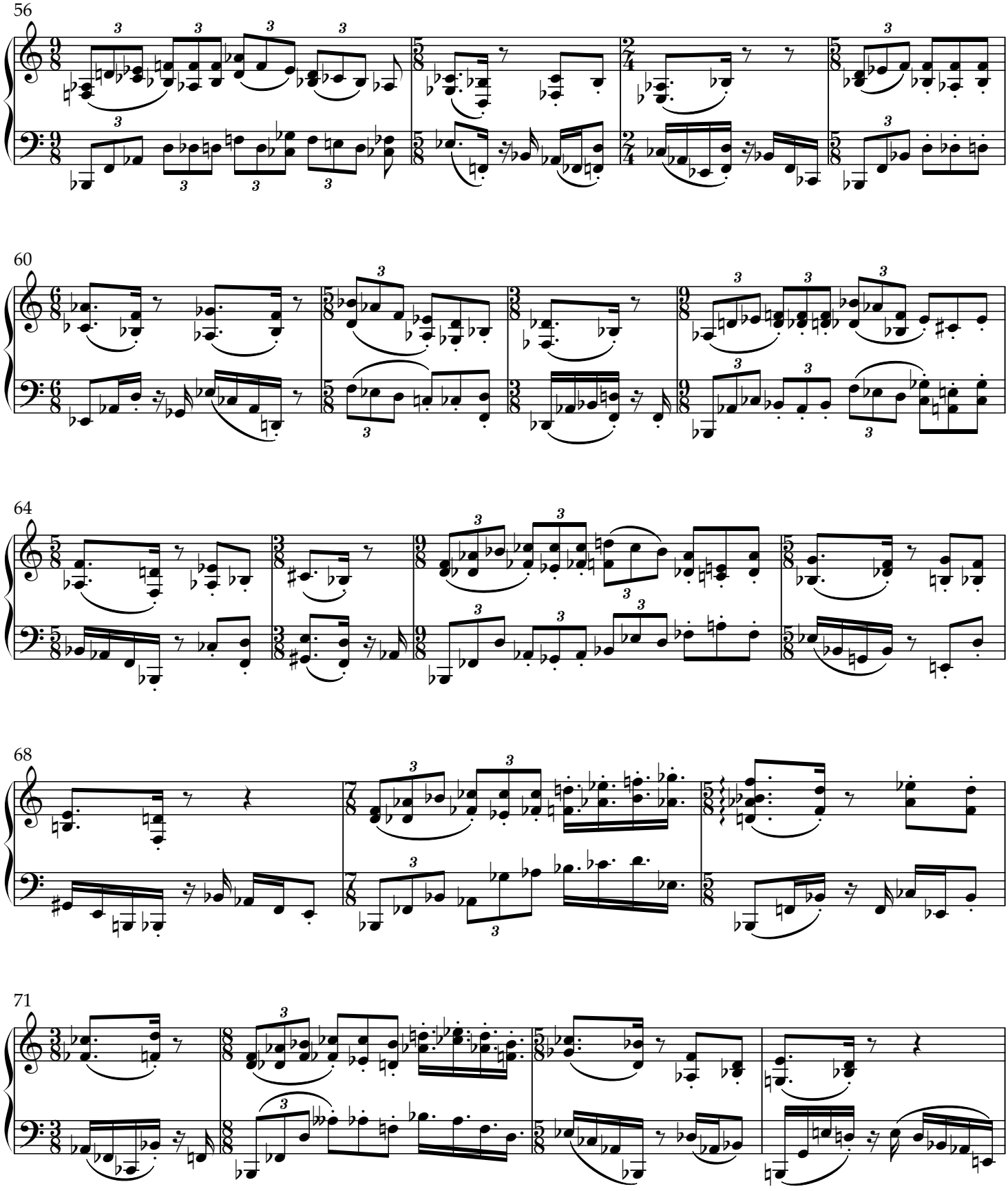
Languidly jazzy, not rushed; ghostly

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60
64
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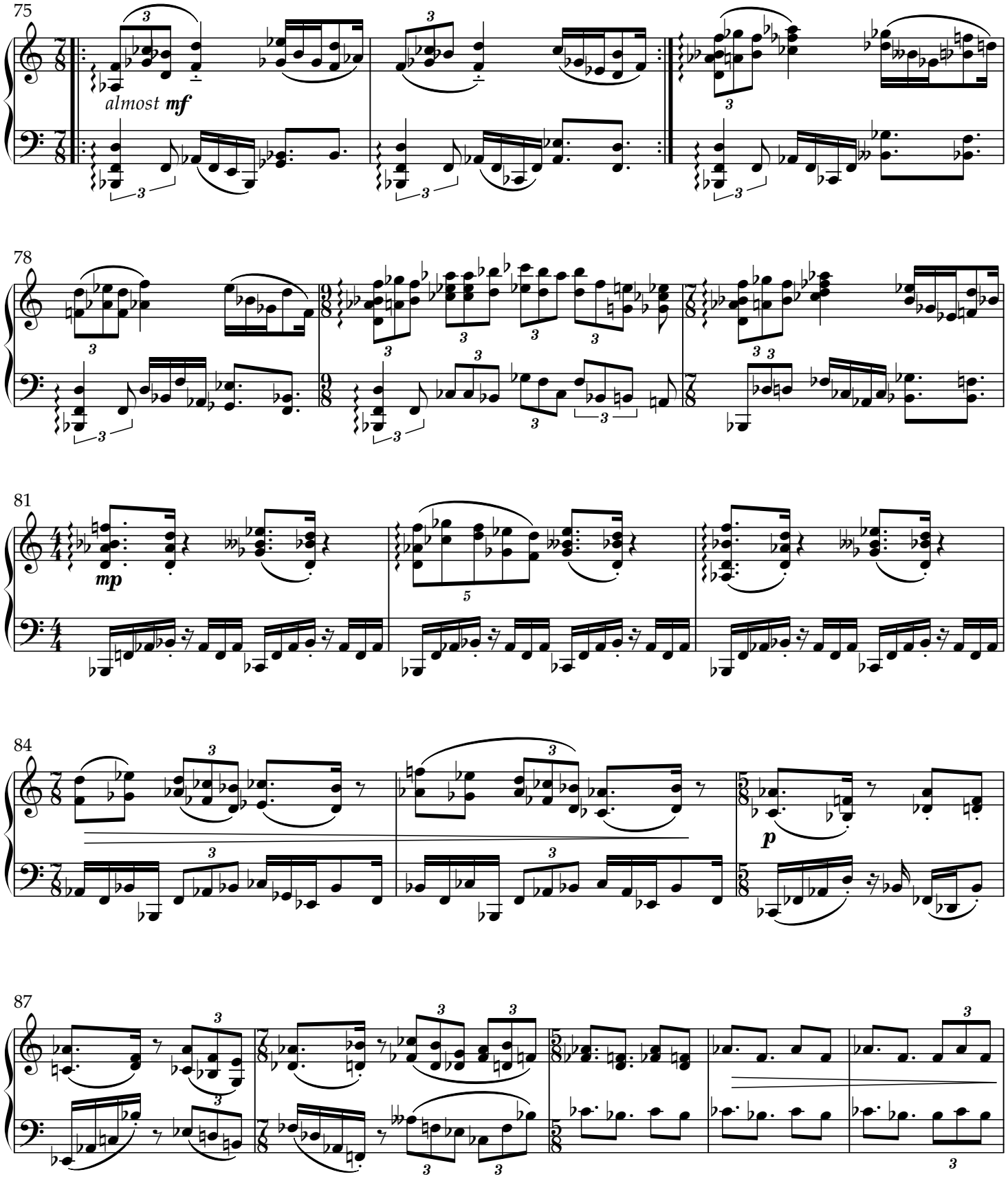
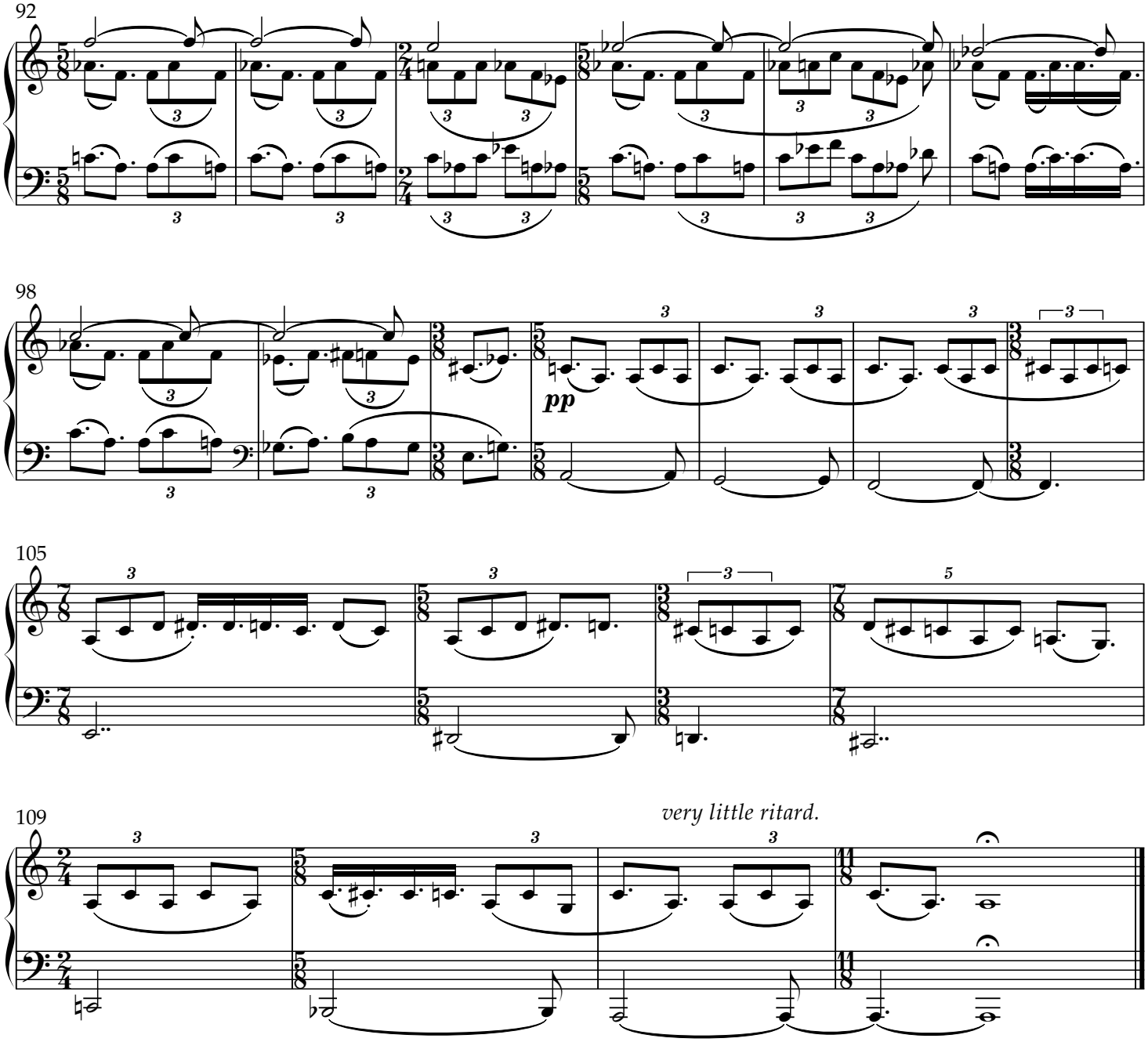
71


75
almost mf
78
81
mp
84
p
87



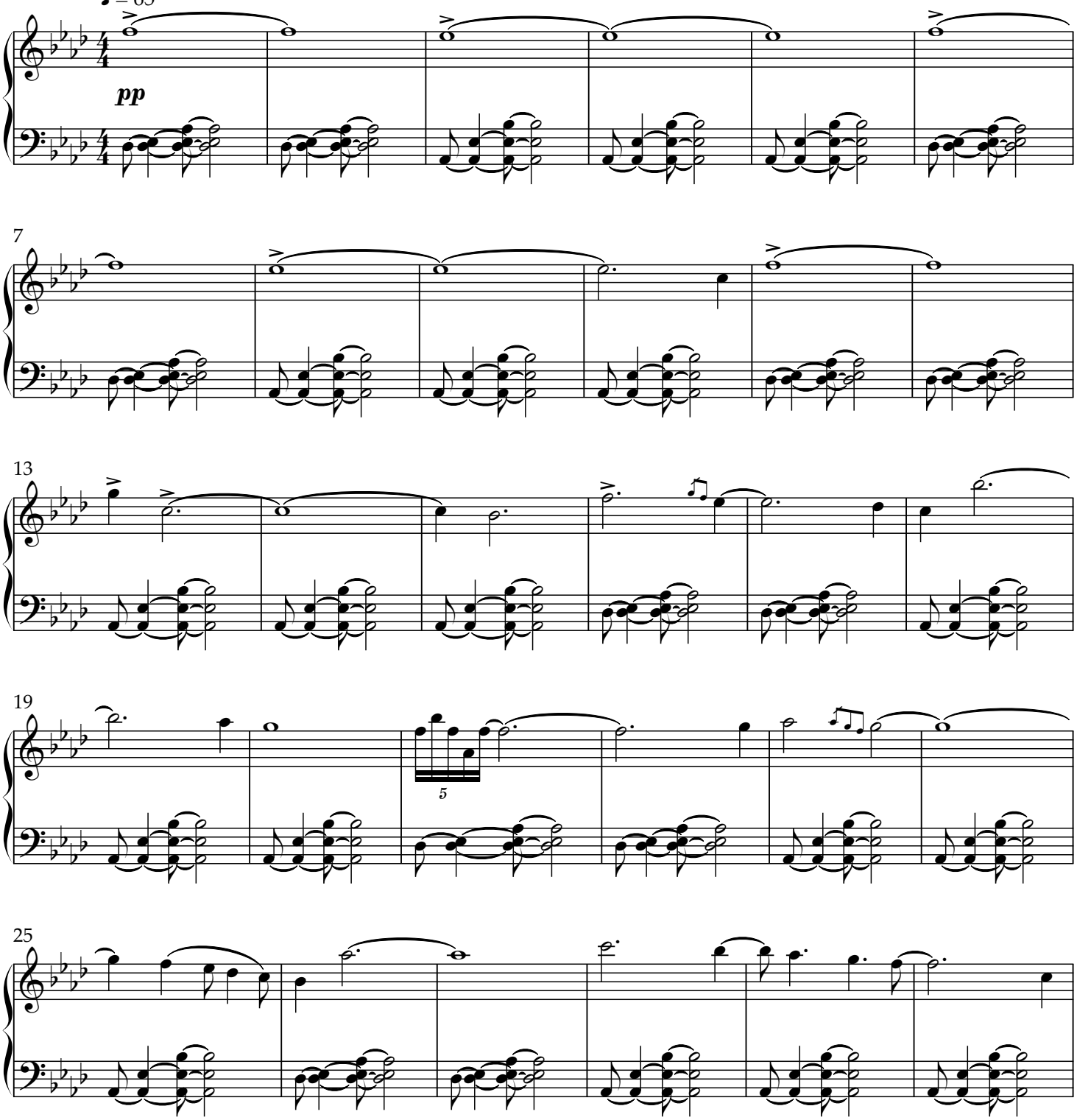
June 16-29, 2023
based on sketches from 1997 and 2014
Germantown, NY

Nocturne VII:
Night Sky

Kyle Gann
2023

Delicate, not rushed
♩ = 65

pp



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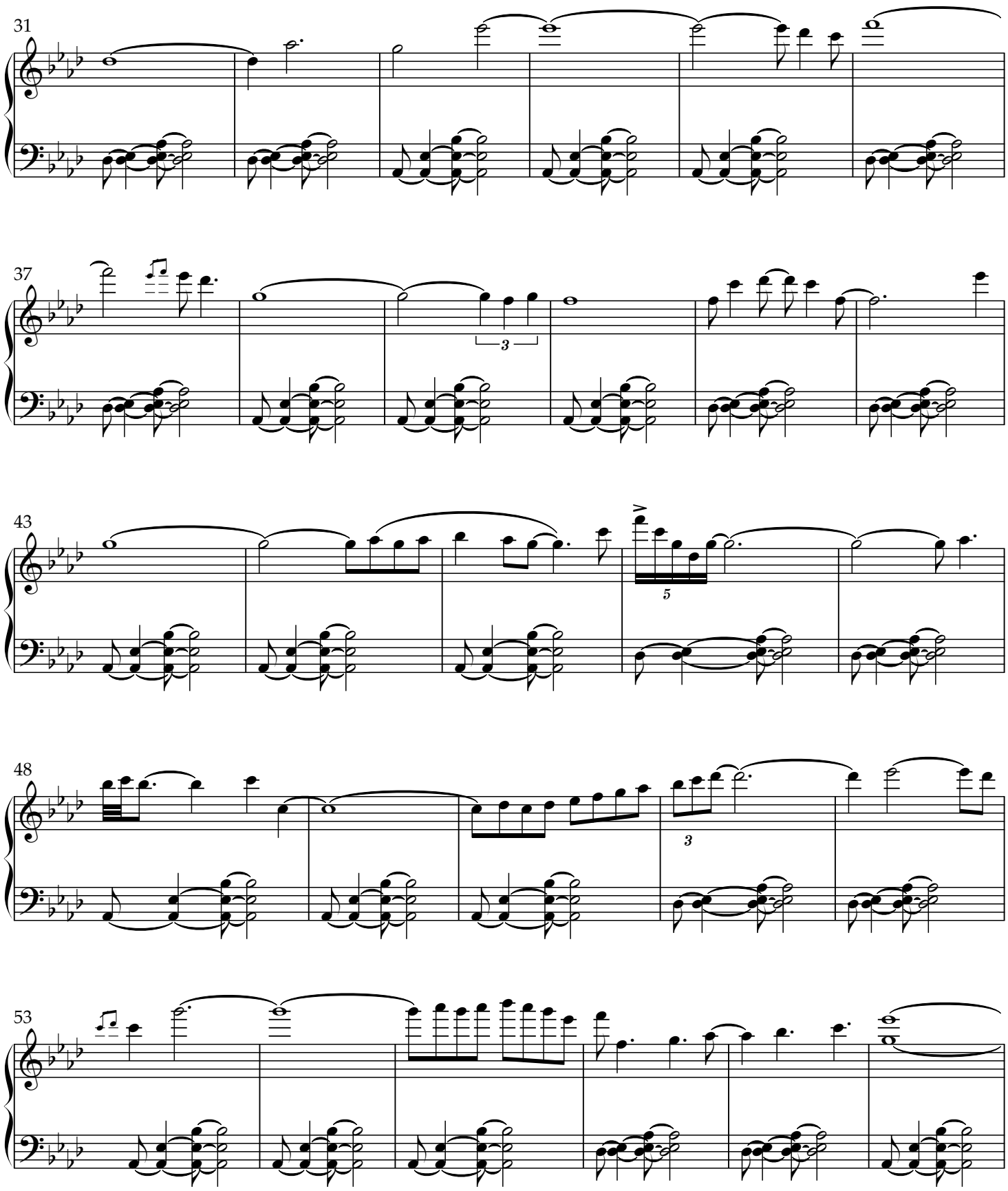
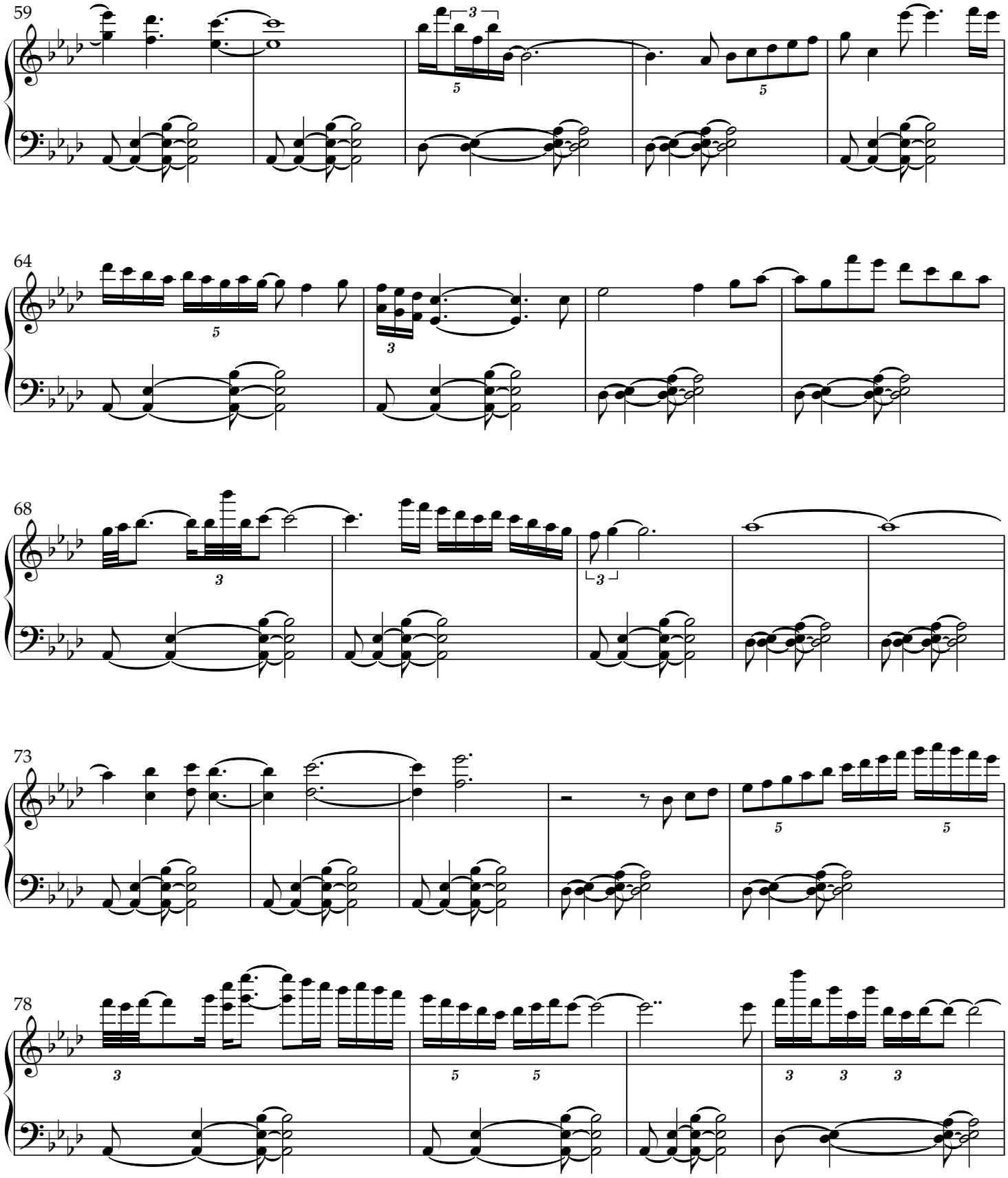
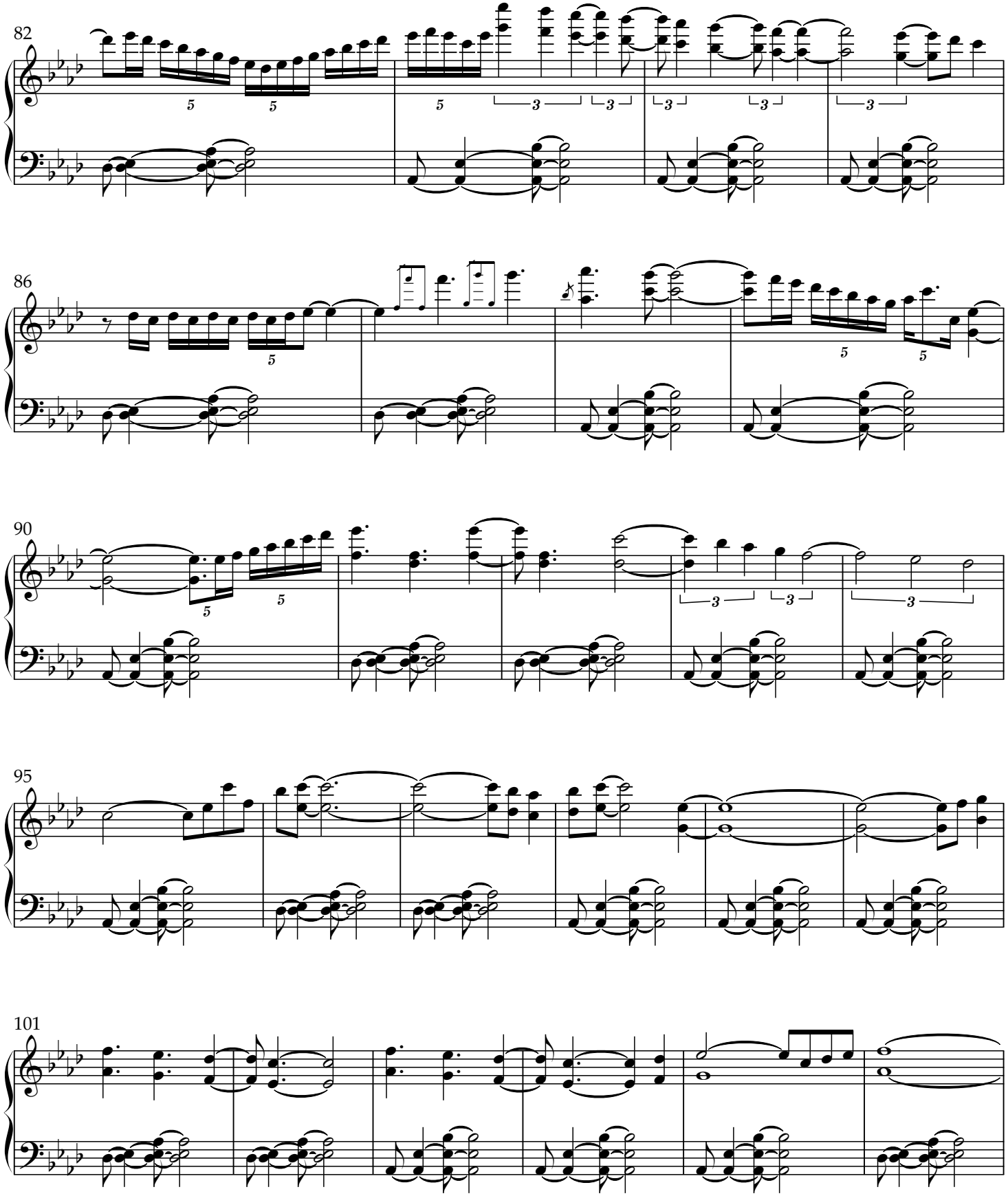
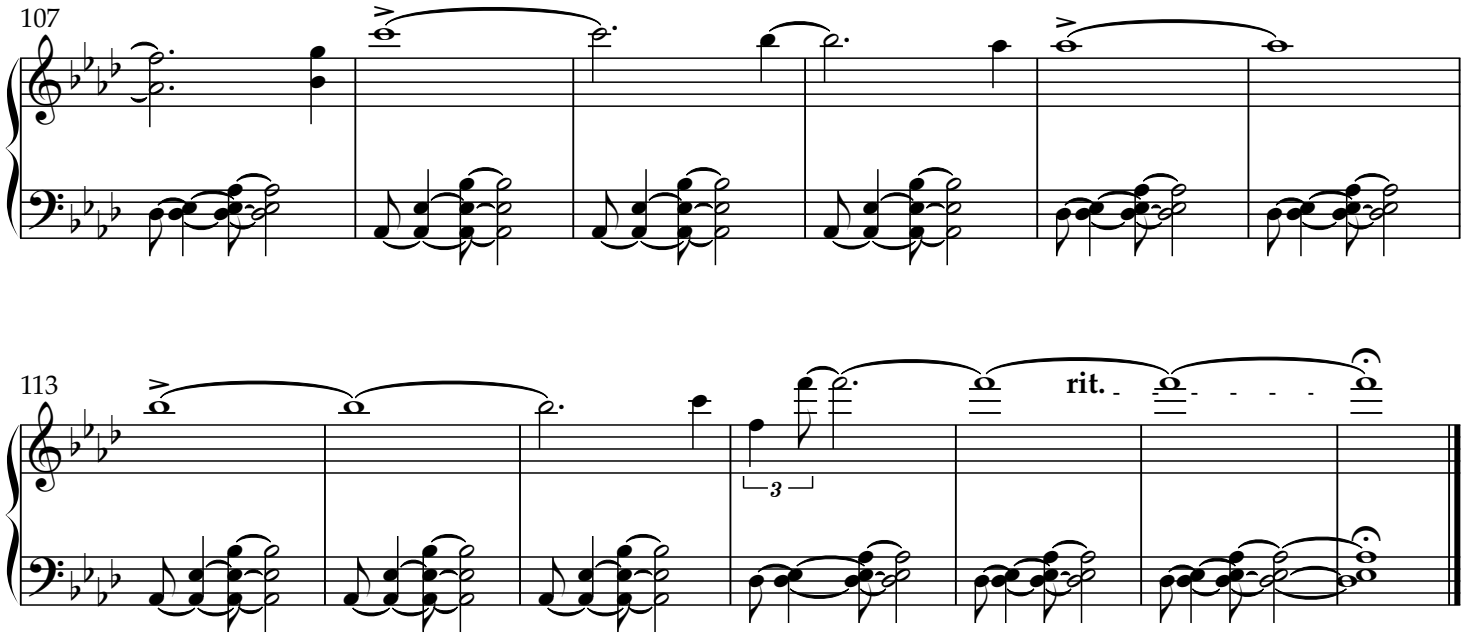

31
37
3
43
5
48
3
53


59
64
68
73
78


82
86
90
95
101

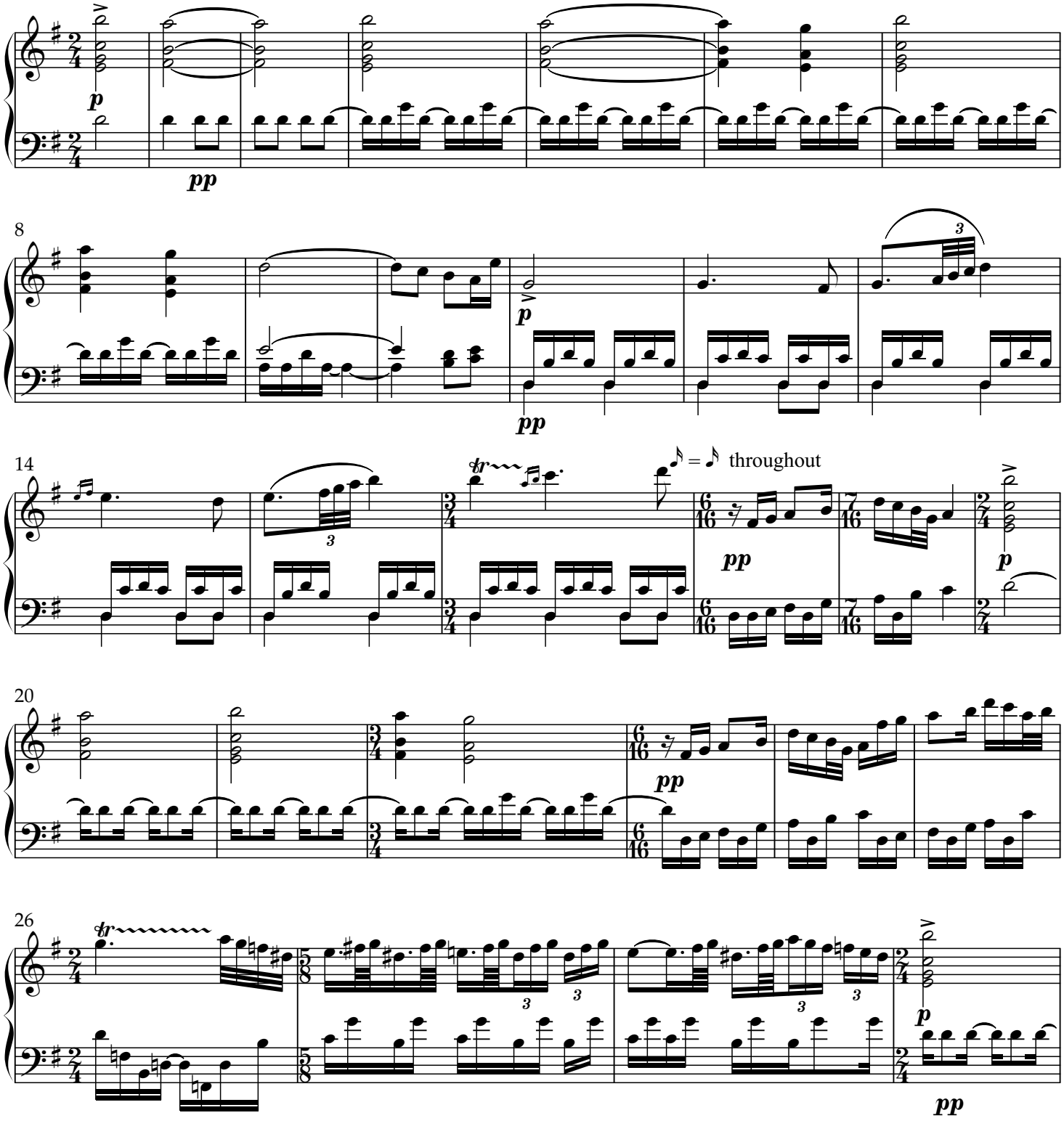


June 9-11, 2023
Germantown, NY

Nocturne VIII:
Homage to Clementi

Adagio cantabile

Kyle Gann
2023



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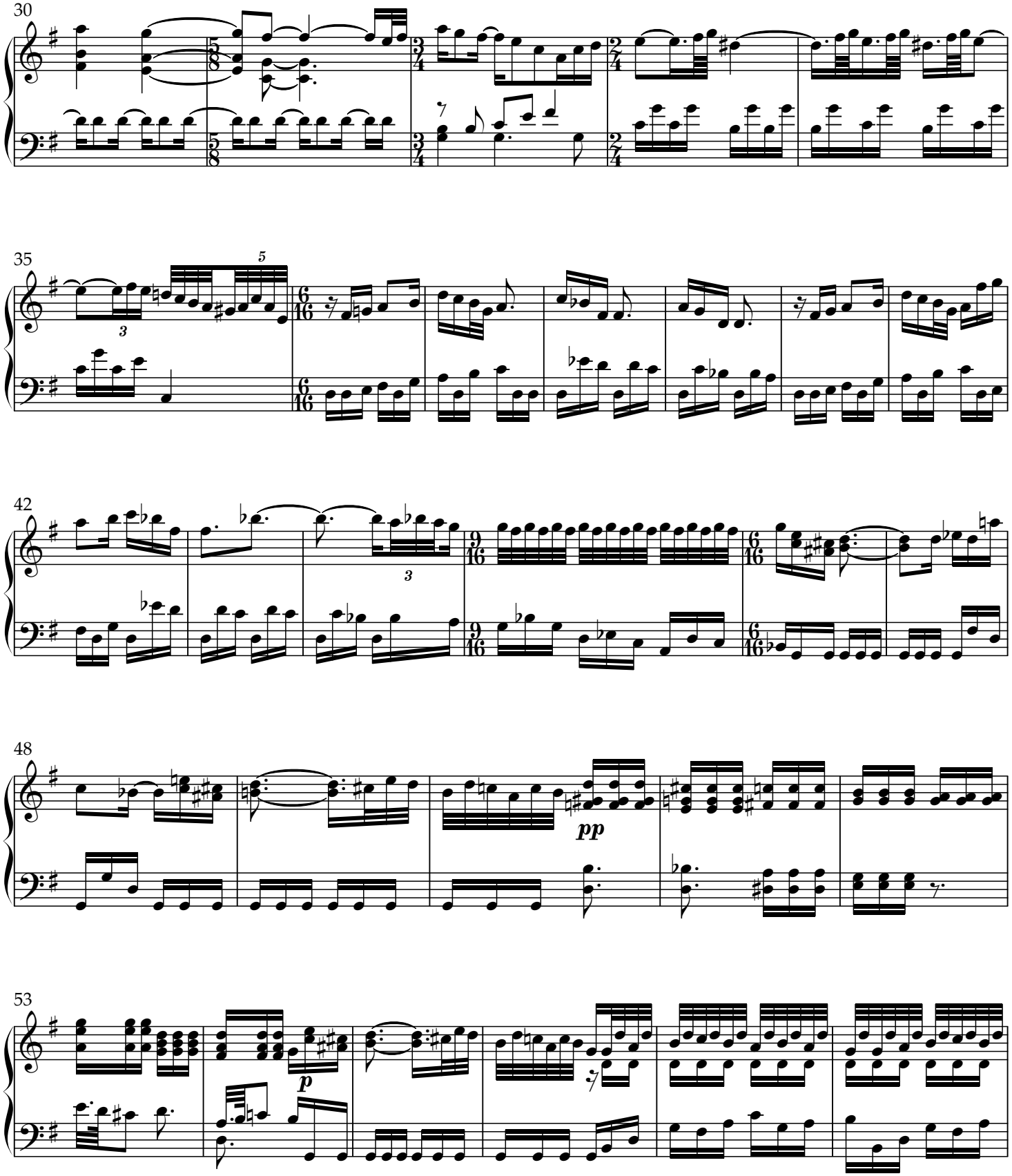
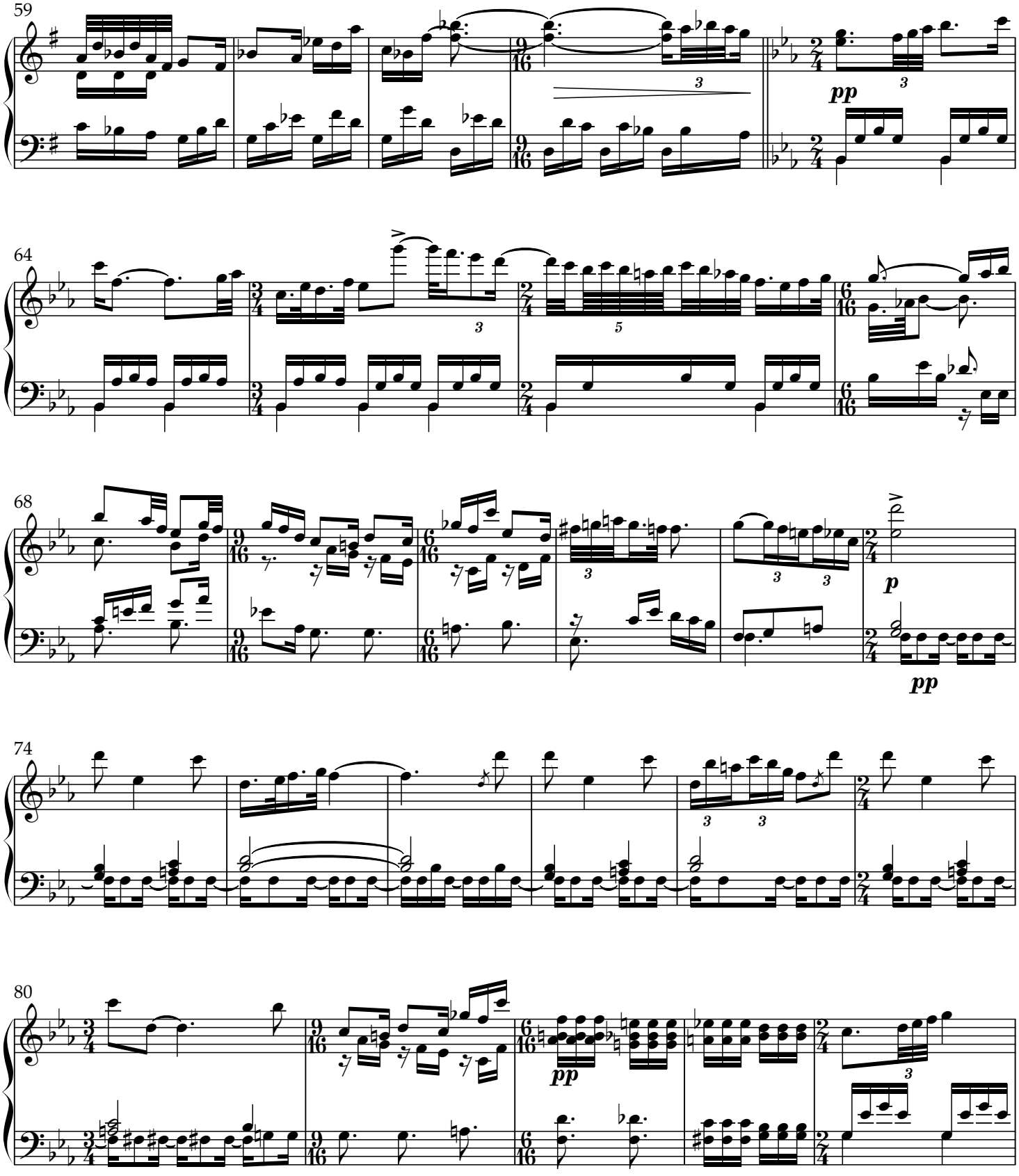
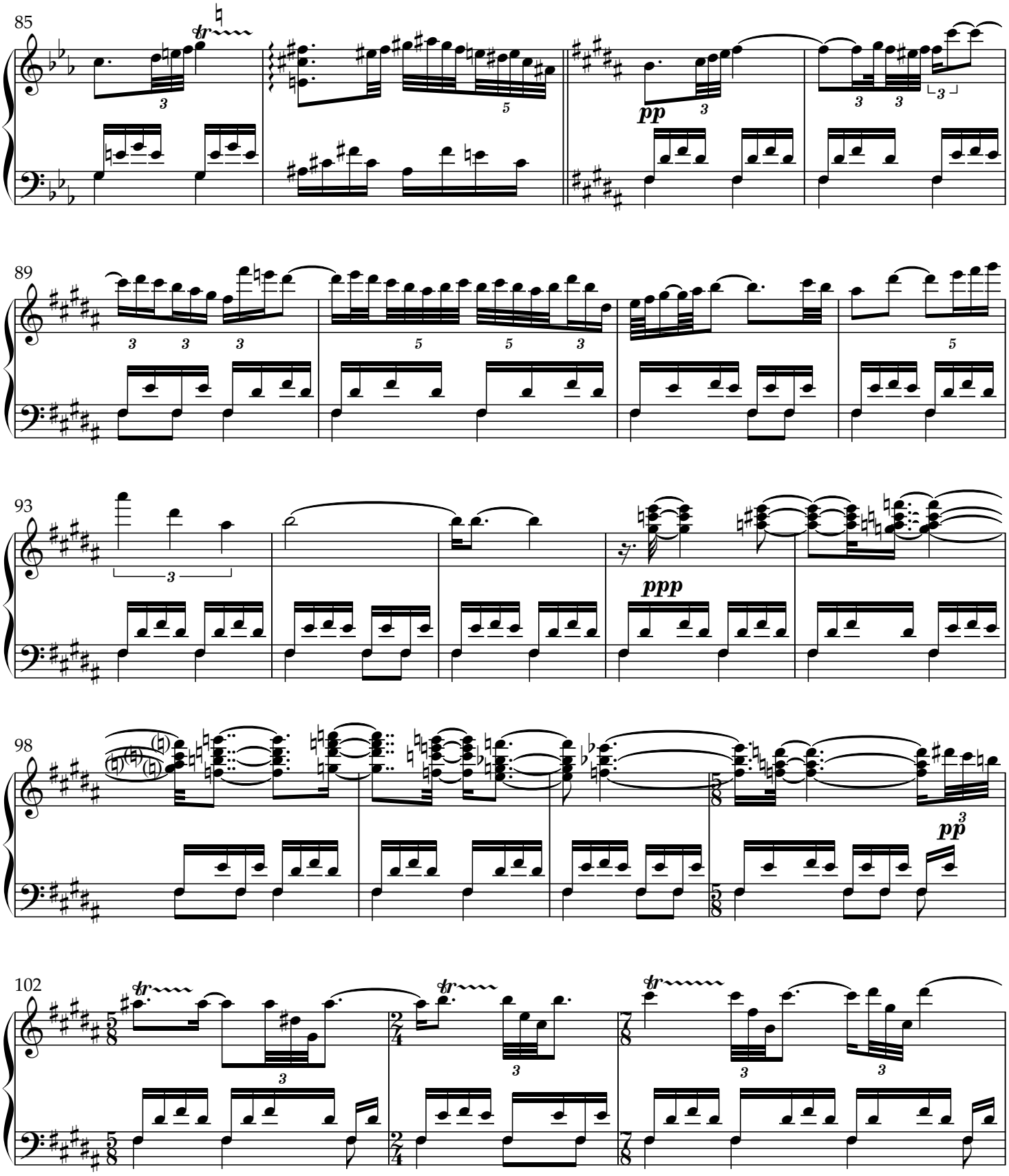
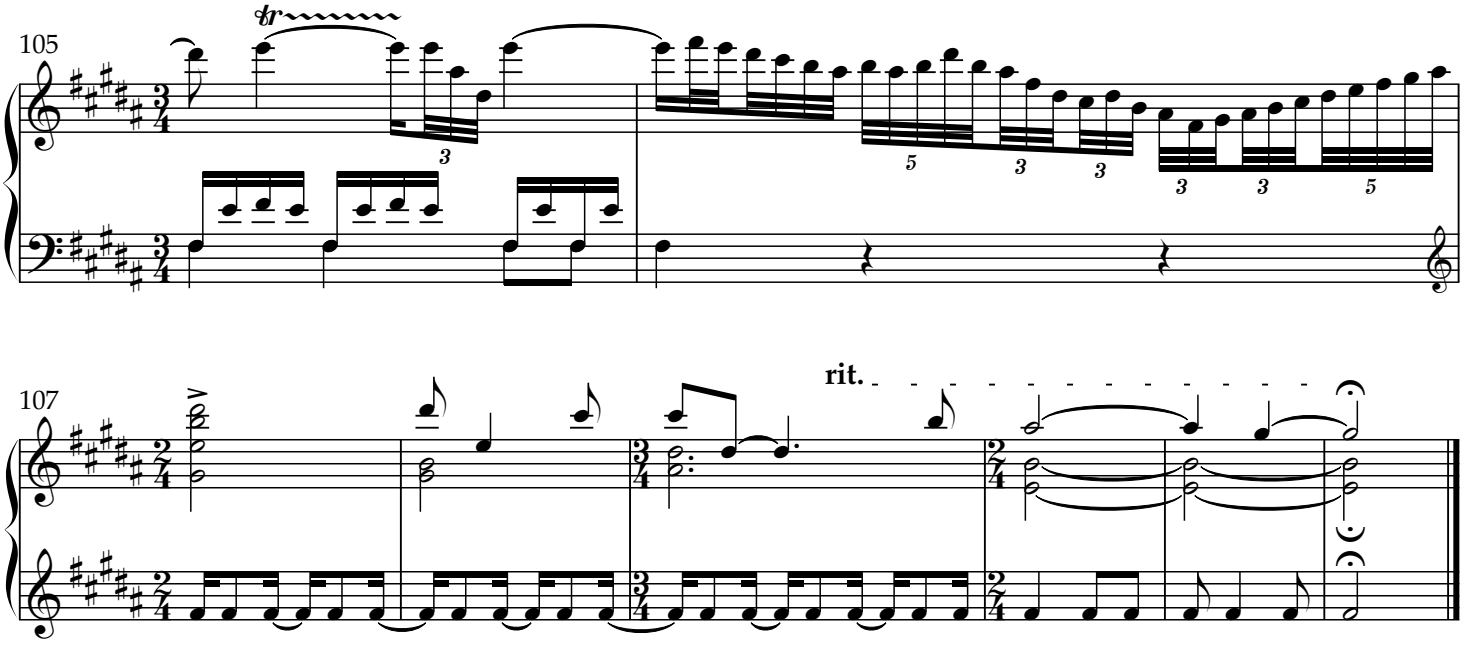

30
35
42
48
53
pp
p


59
pp
64
68
p
pp
74
80
pp


85
89
93
98
102
pp
ppp
pp



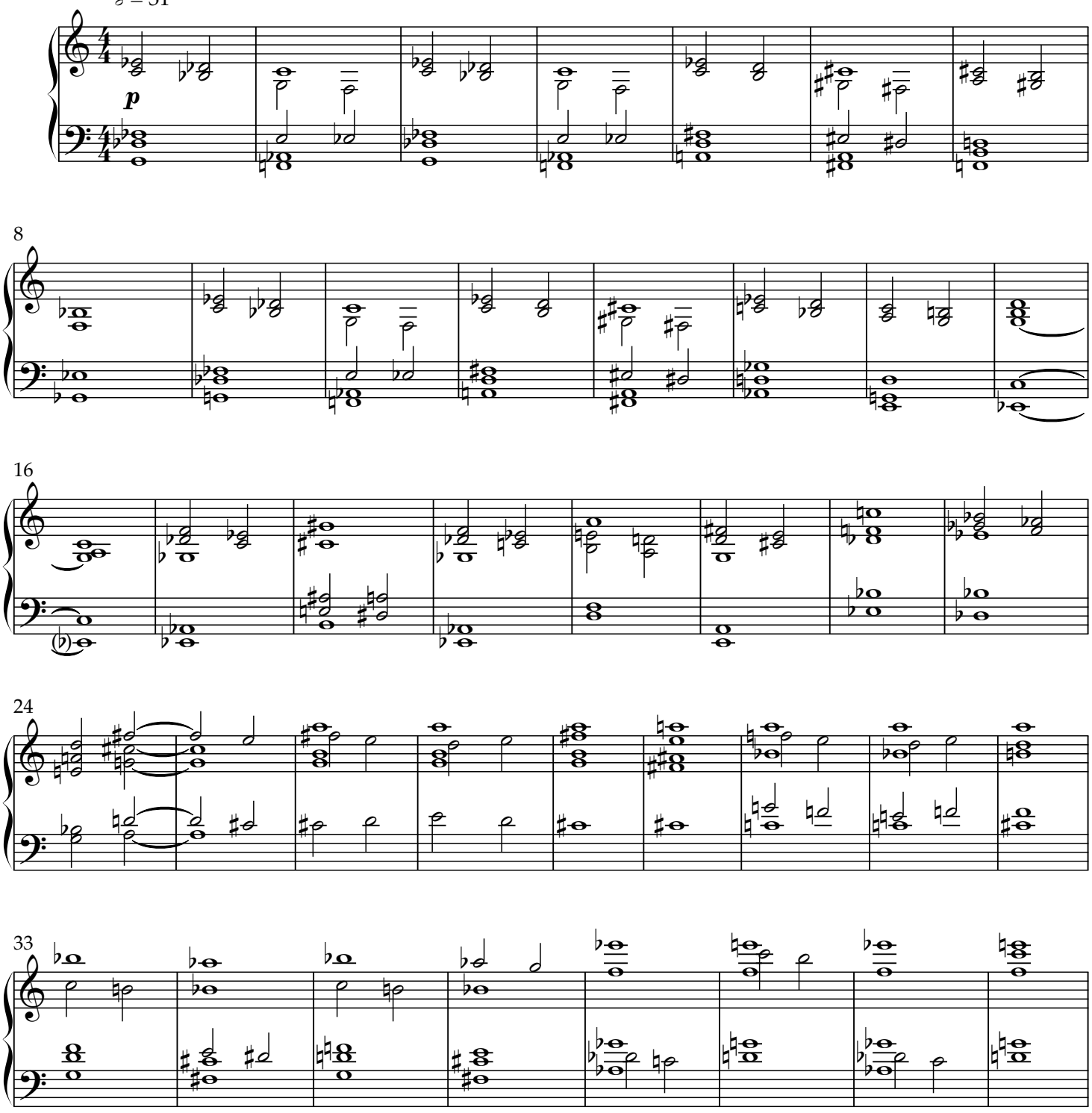
June 19-23, 2023
Germantown, NY

Martin Gut gewidmet

Nocturne IX:
Am Grab von Bruckner

Kyle Gann
2023

Mit edler Traurigkeit



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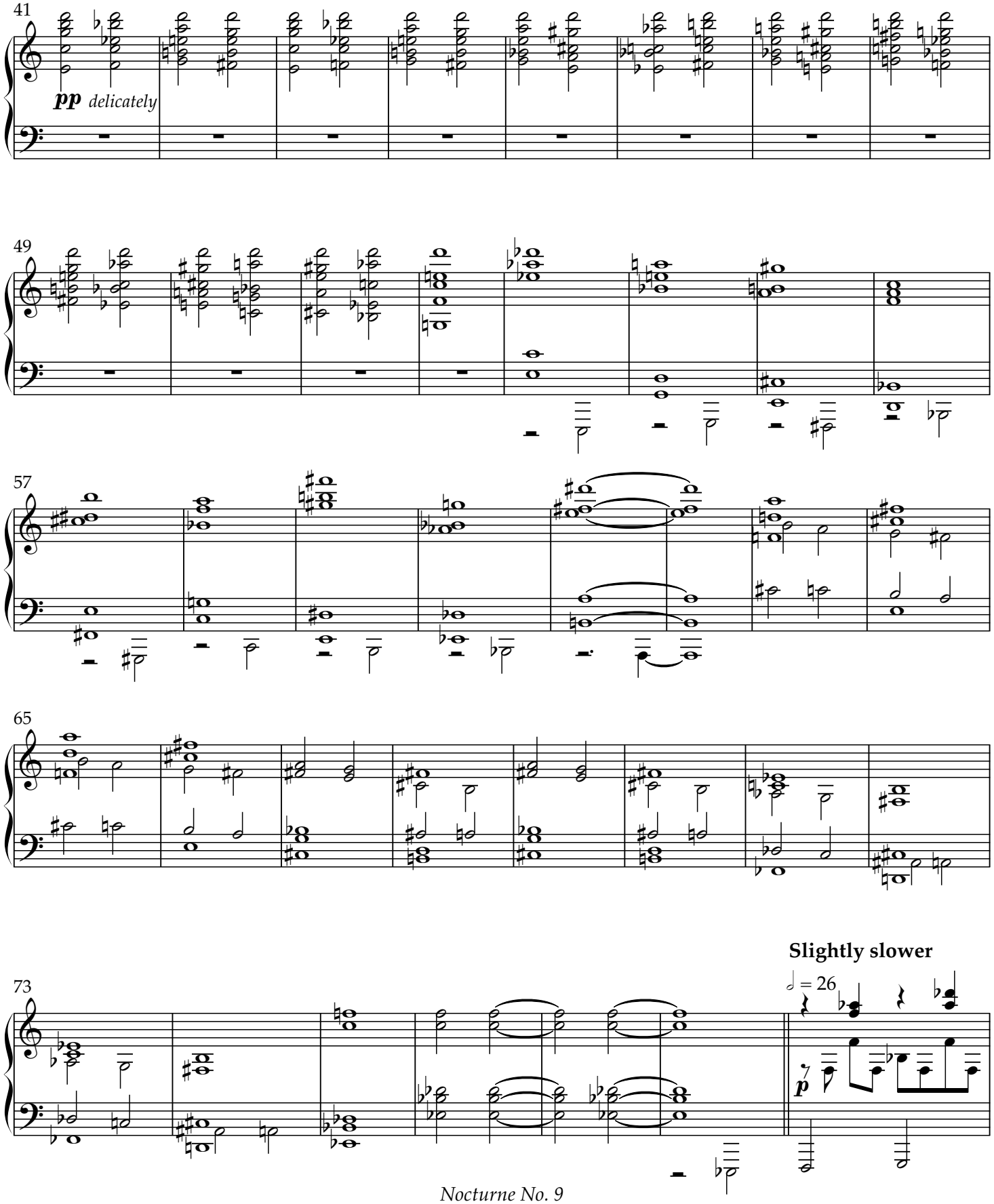
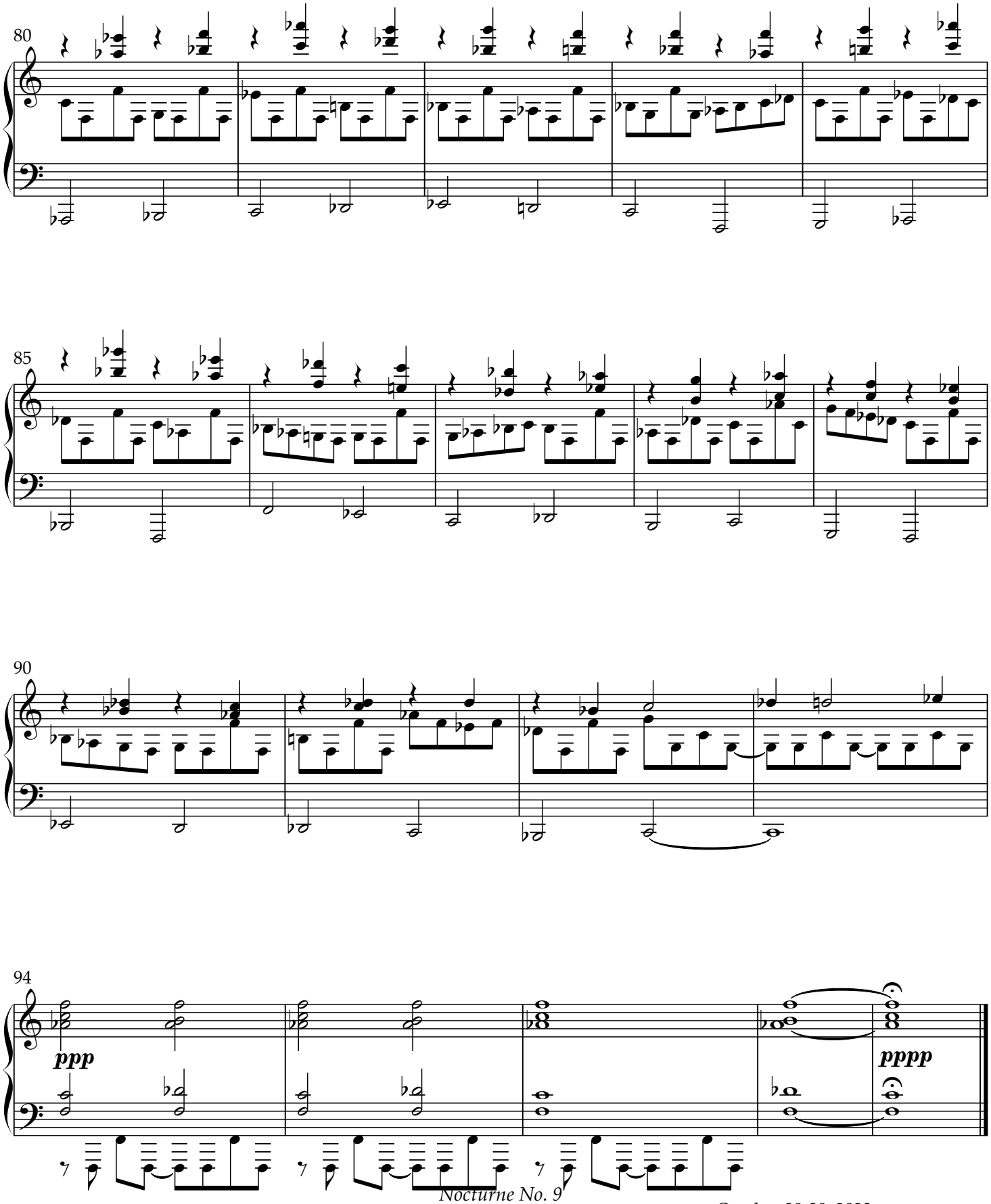

41
pp delicately
49
57
65
73
Slightly slower
♩ = 26
p



October 28-30, 2023
Krems an der Danau, Austria

Nocturne X:
The Eddying River

Supremely calm

Kyle Gann
2023

♩ = 81

with pedal - left hand soft and bell-like, with some accent on the lowest notes

and so on

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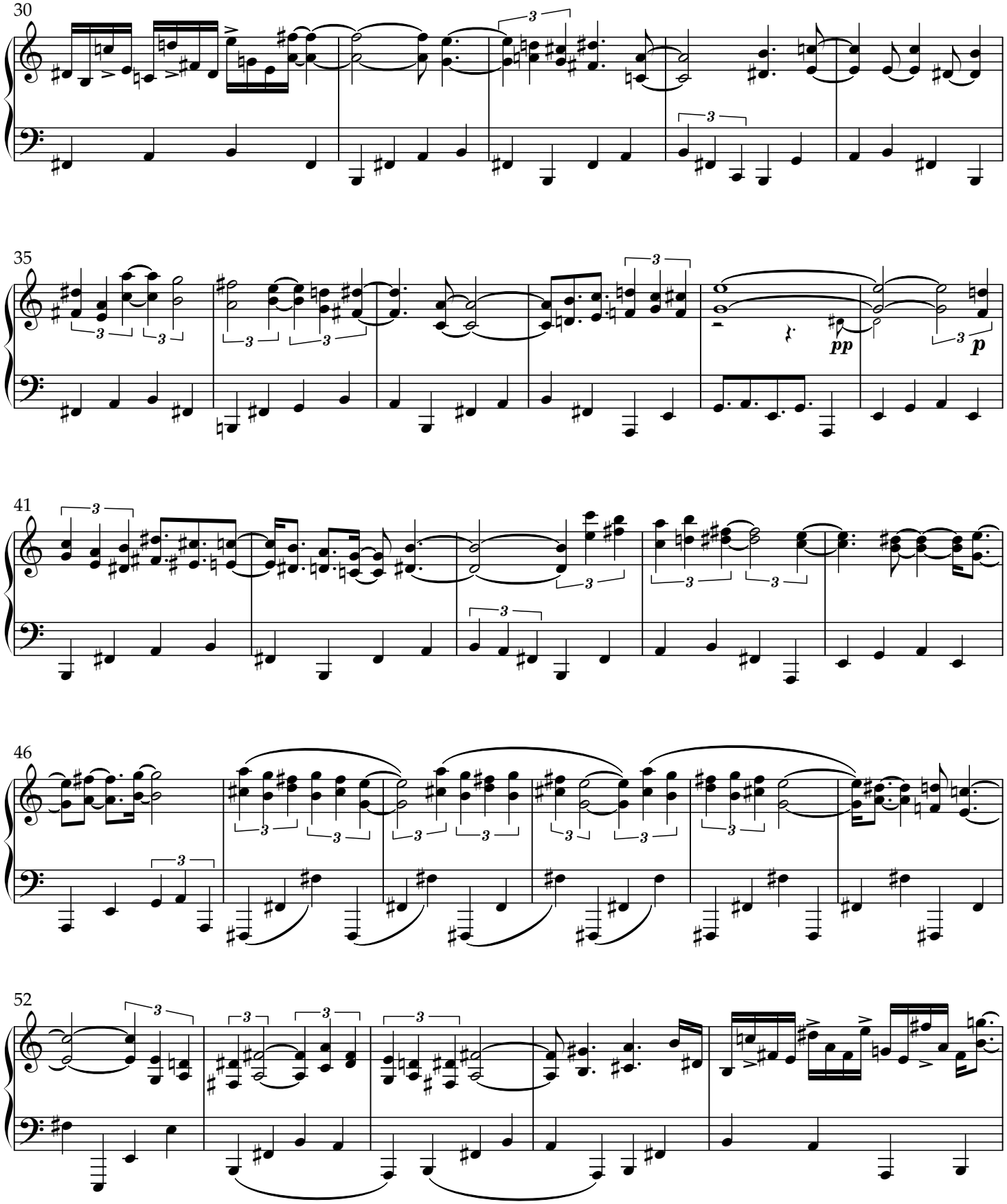
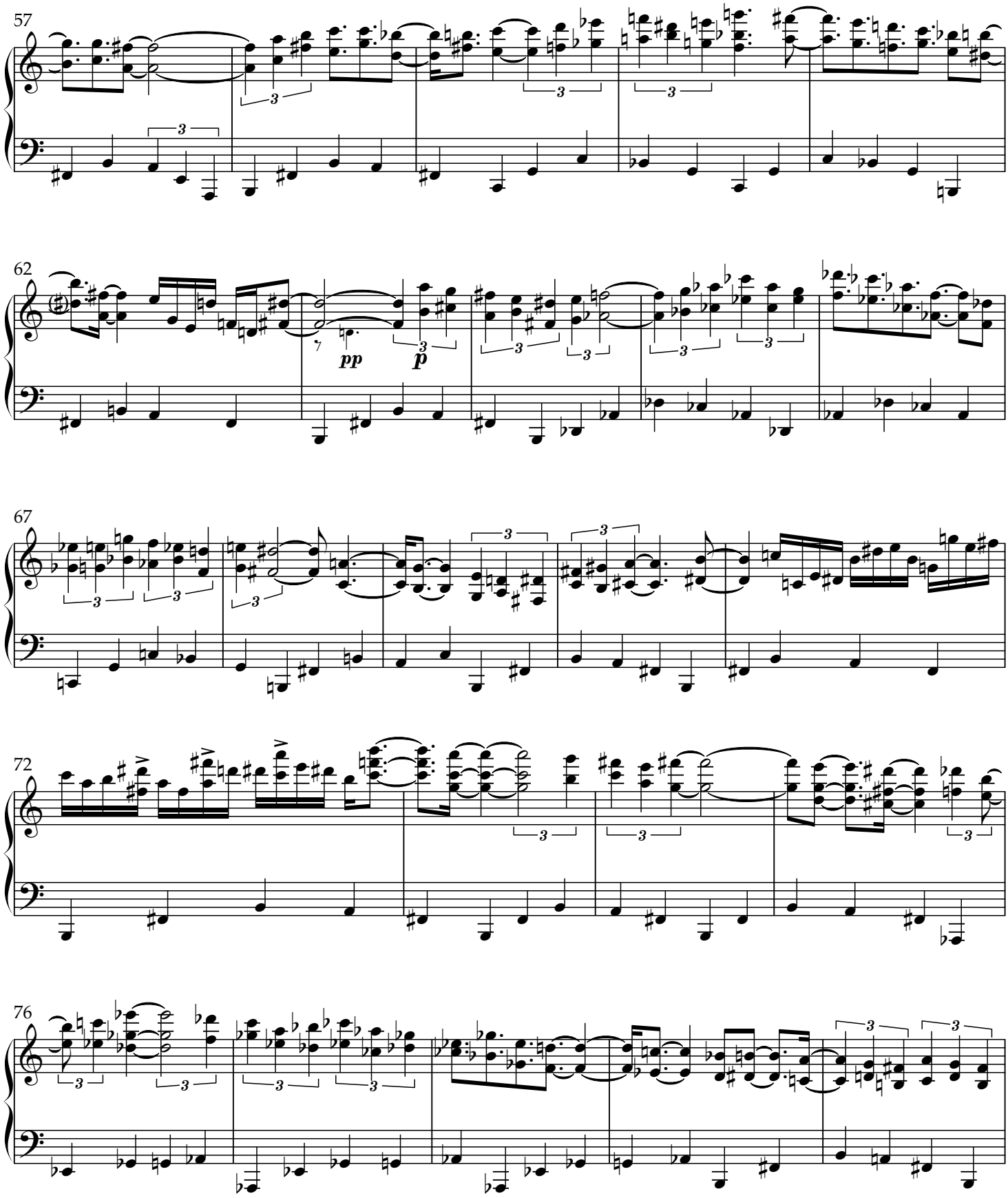
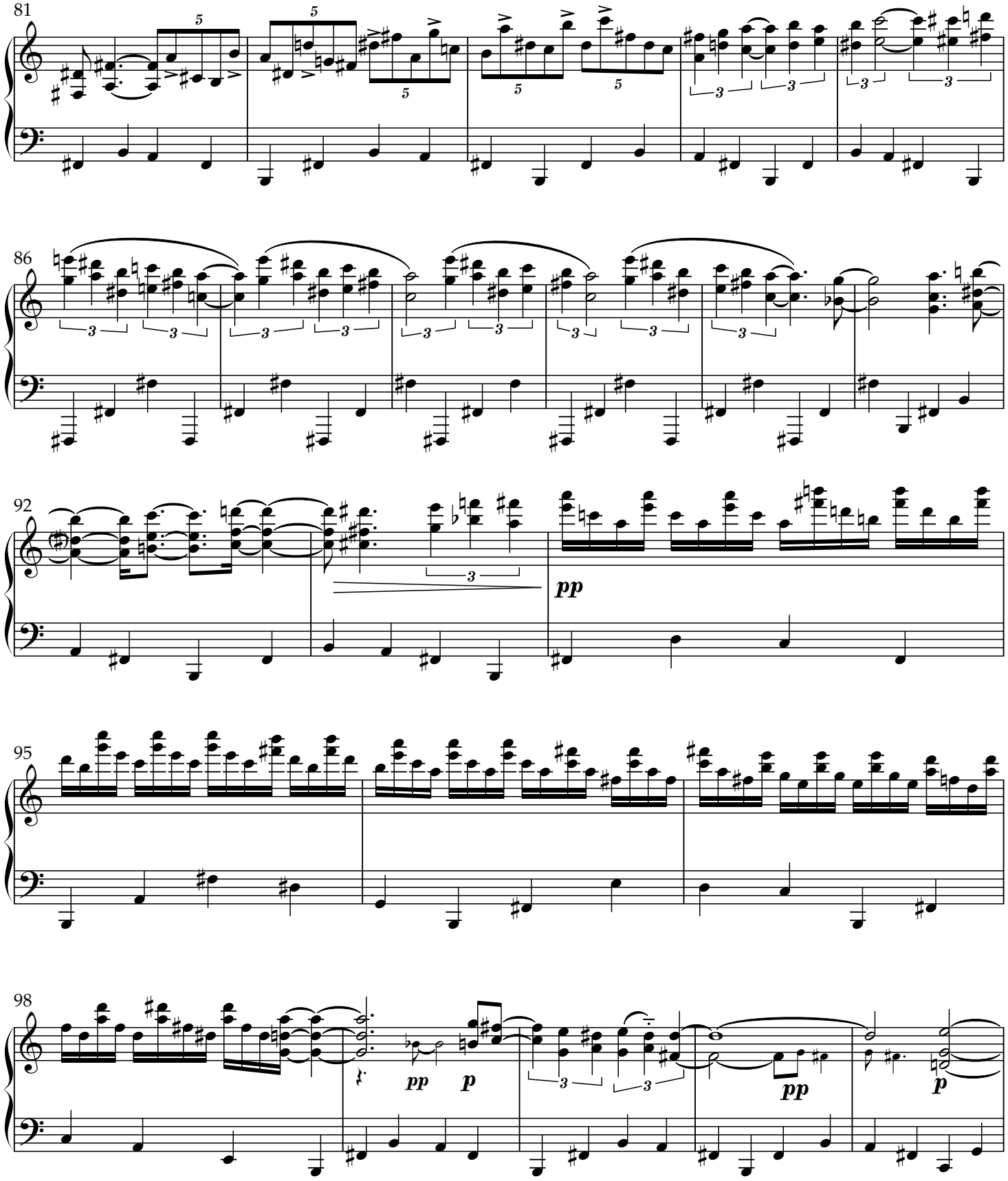
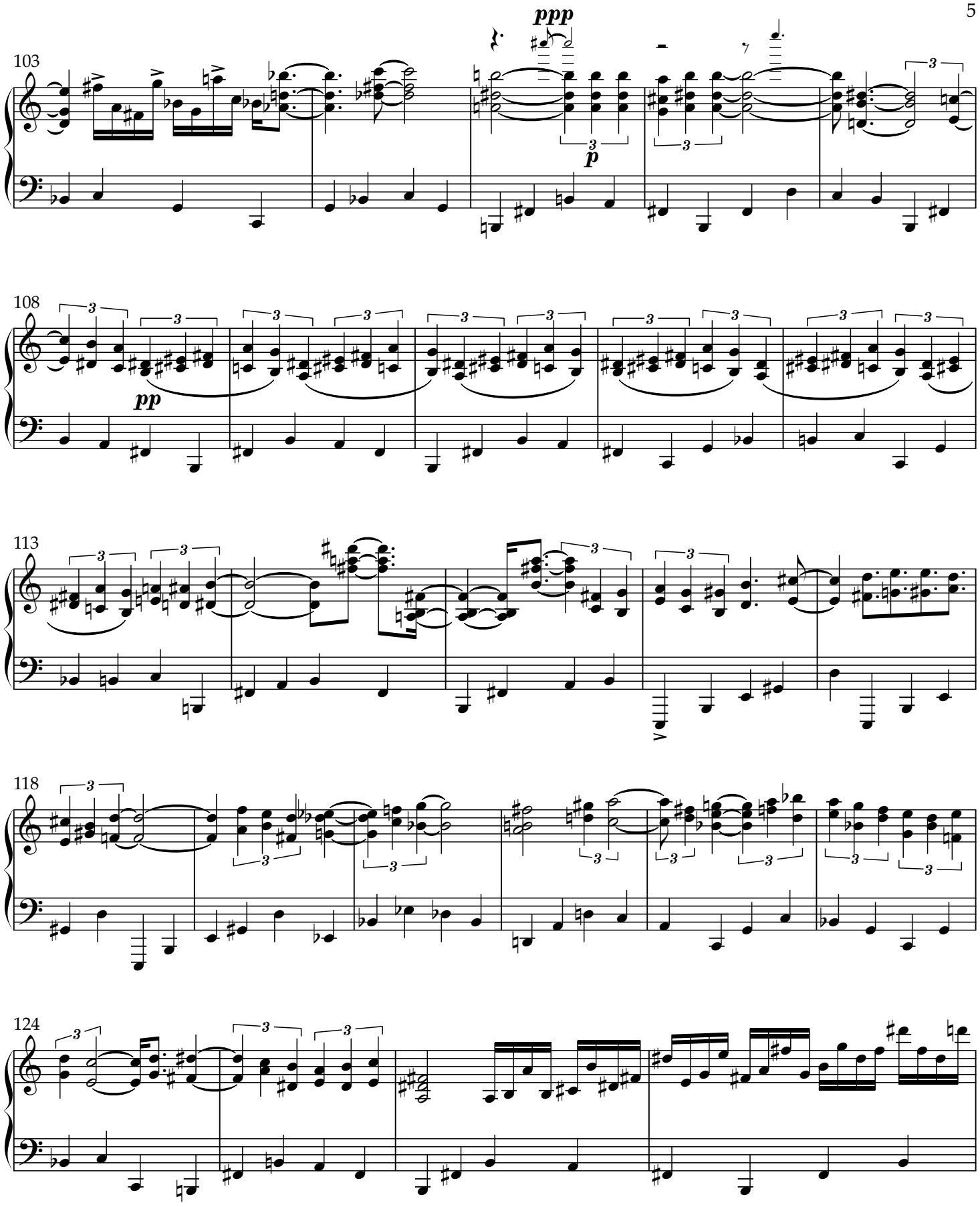
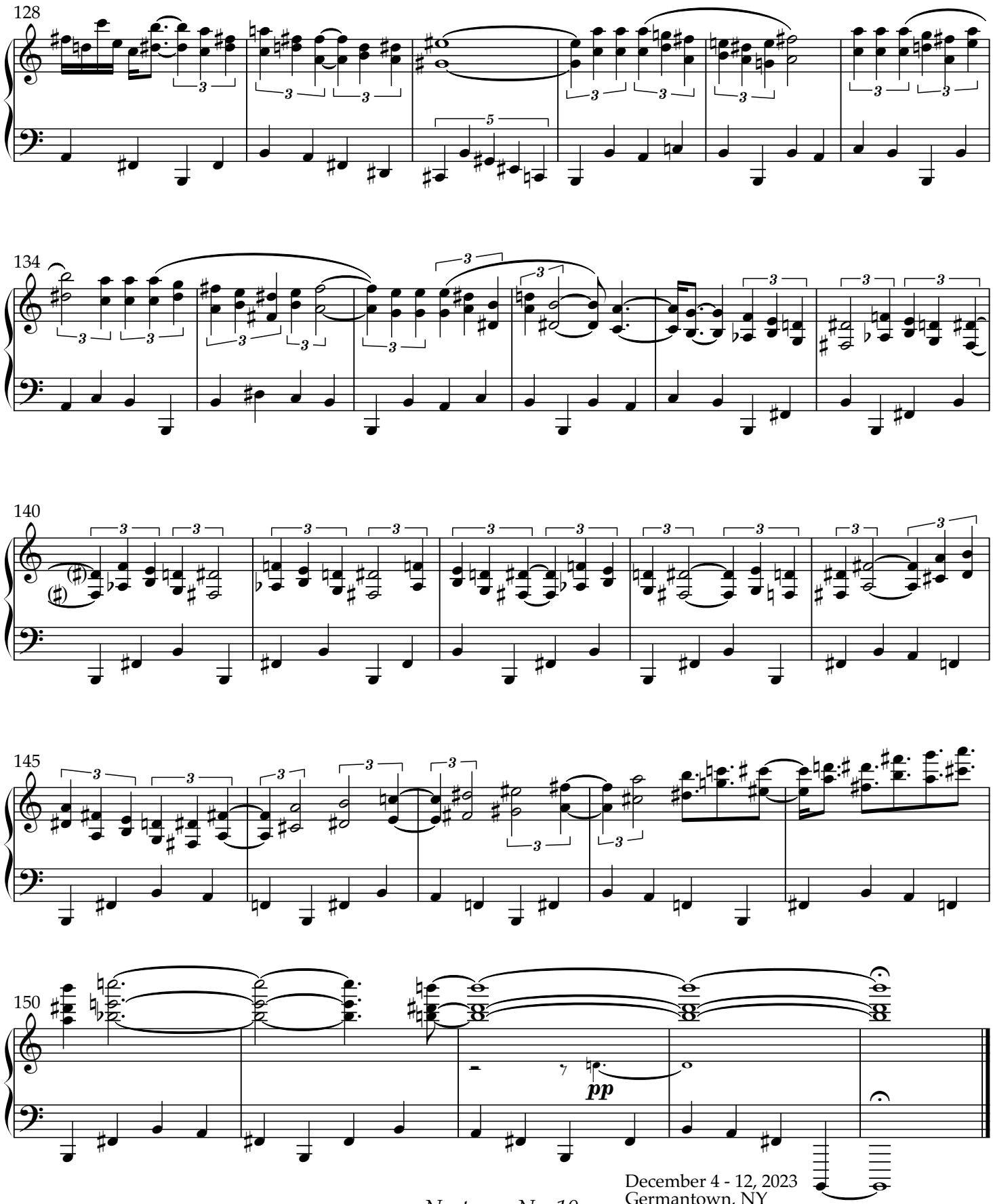

30
35
41
46
52
pp
p


57
62
pp
p
67
72
76


81
86
92
pp
95
98
pp
p
pp
p


ppp
p
pp



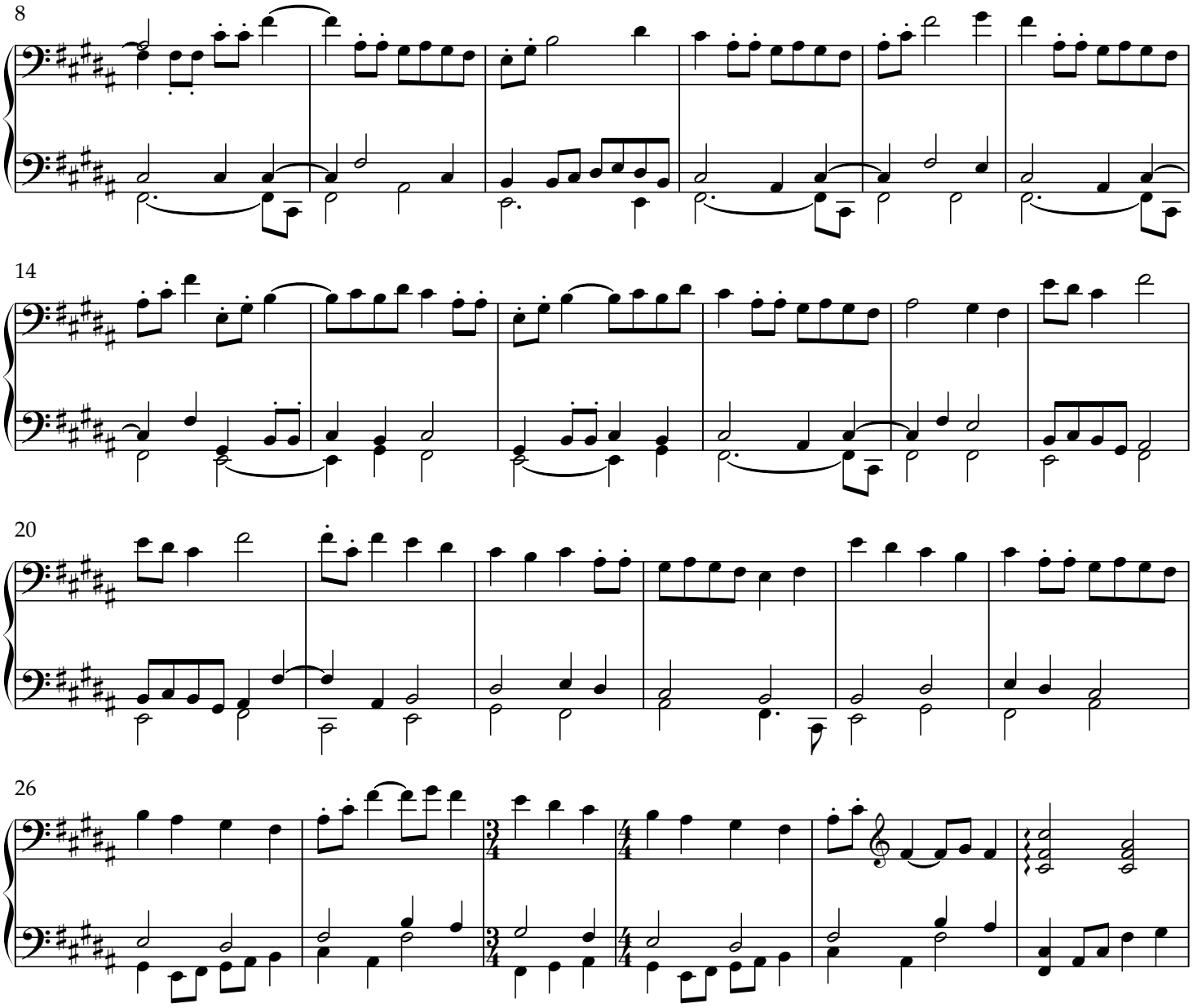
December 4 - 12, 2023
Germantown, NY

Nocturne XI:
Managing Expectations

Kyle Gann
2023

Strictly in rhythm, jaunty yet gentle
♩ = 131

mp



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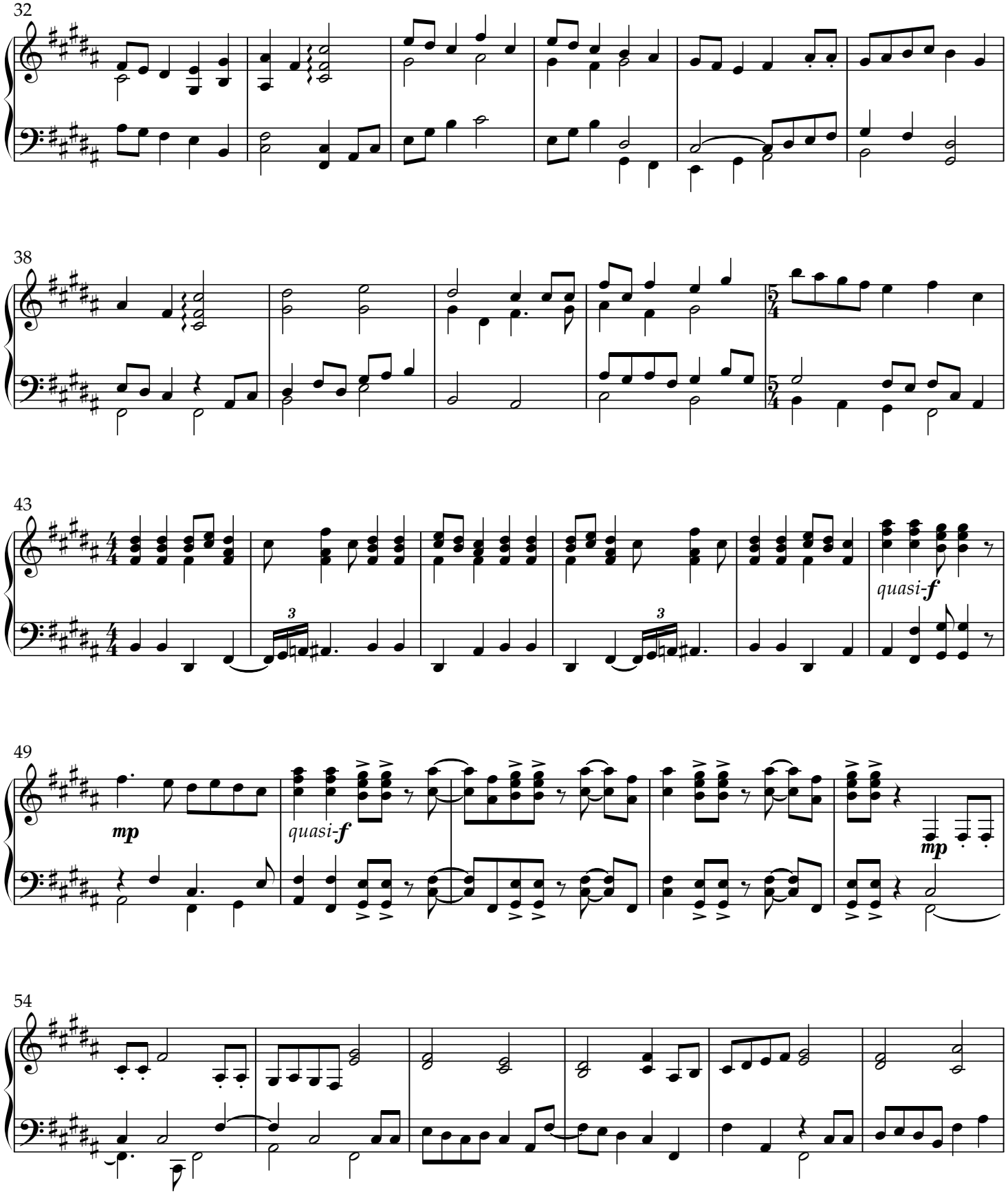
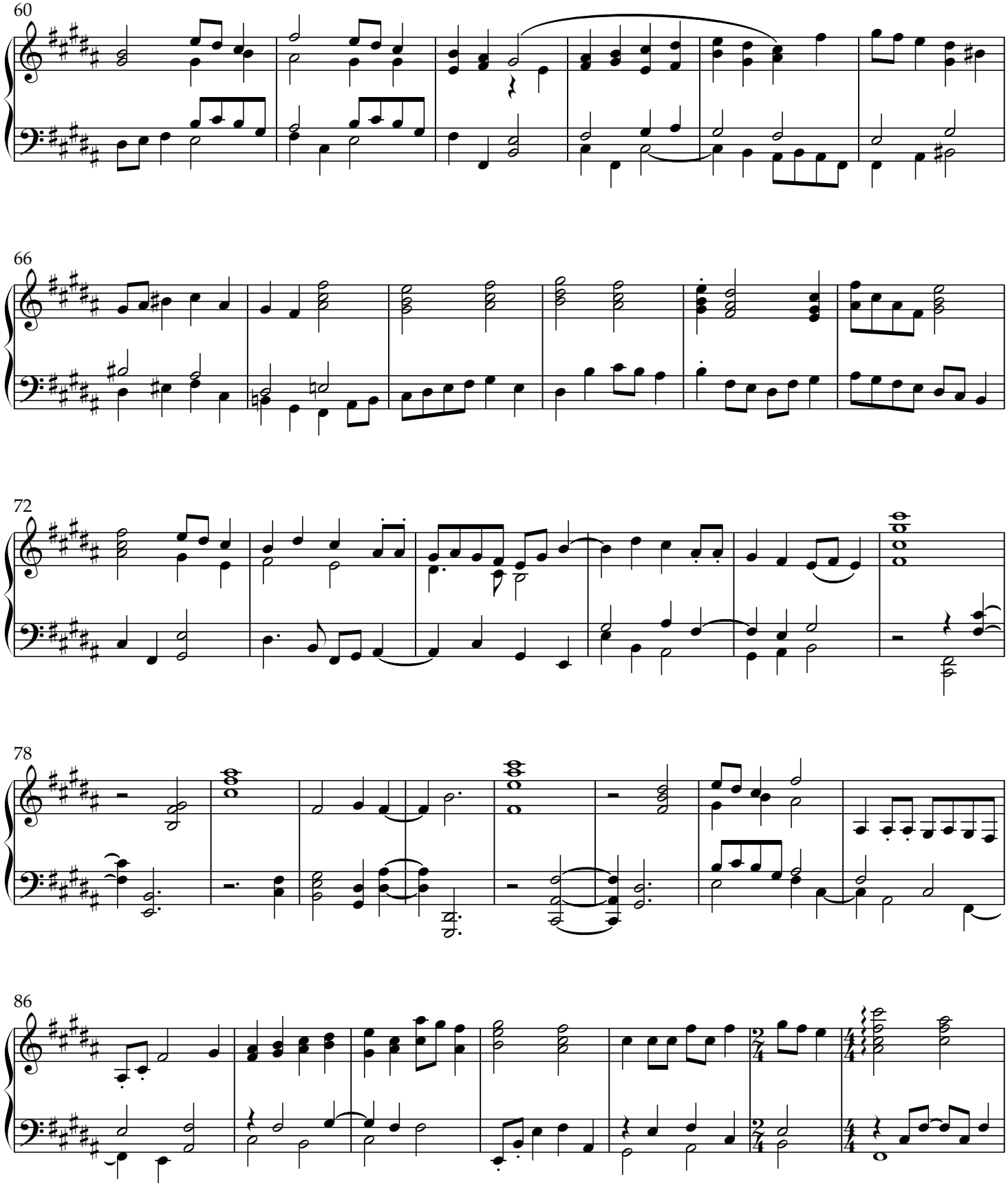
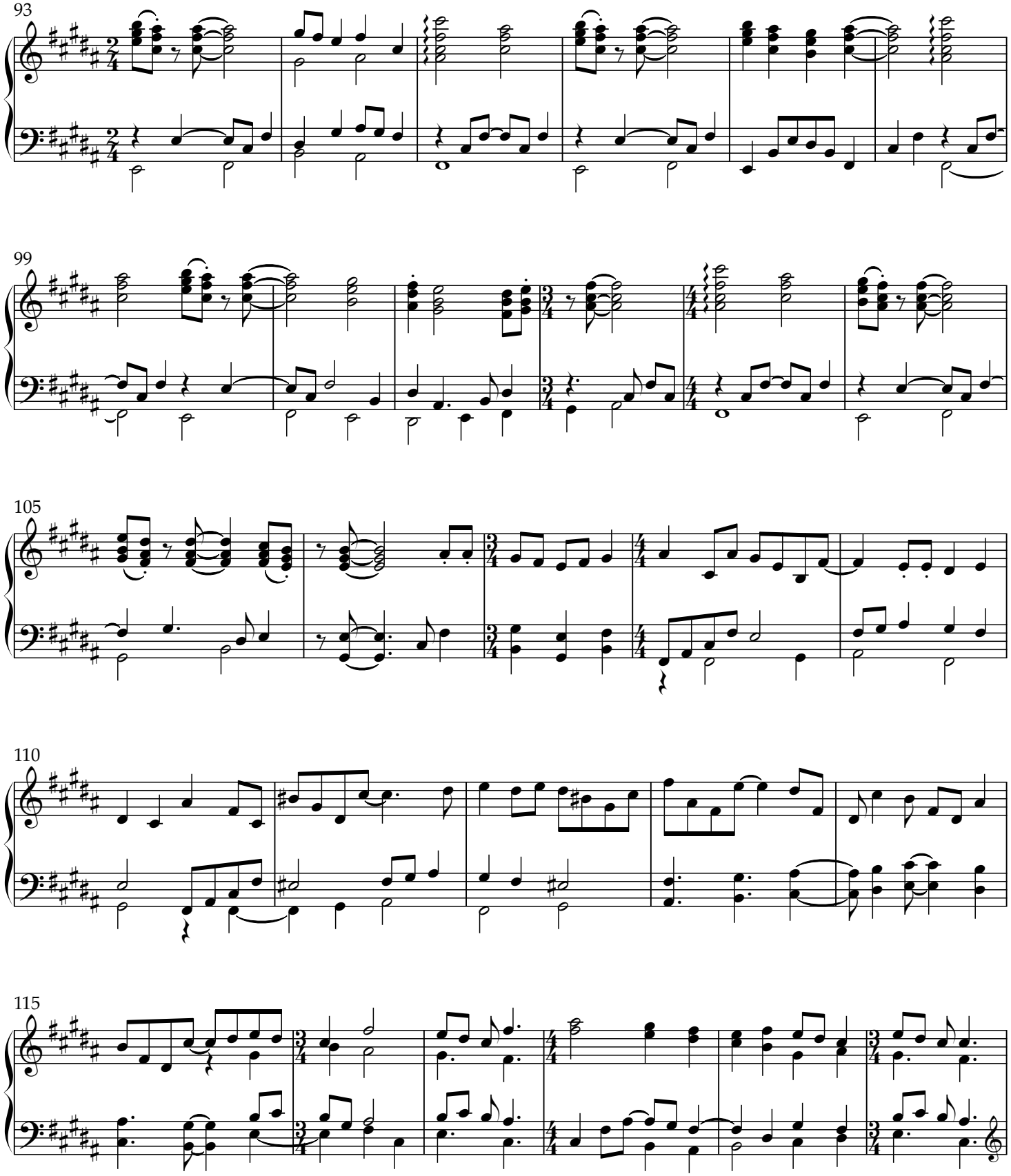
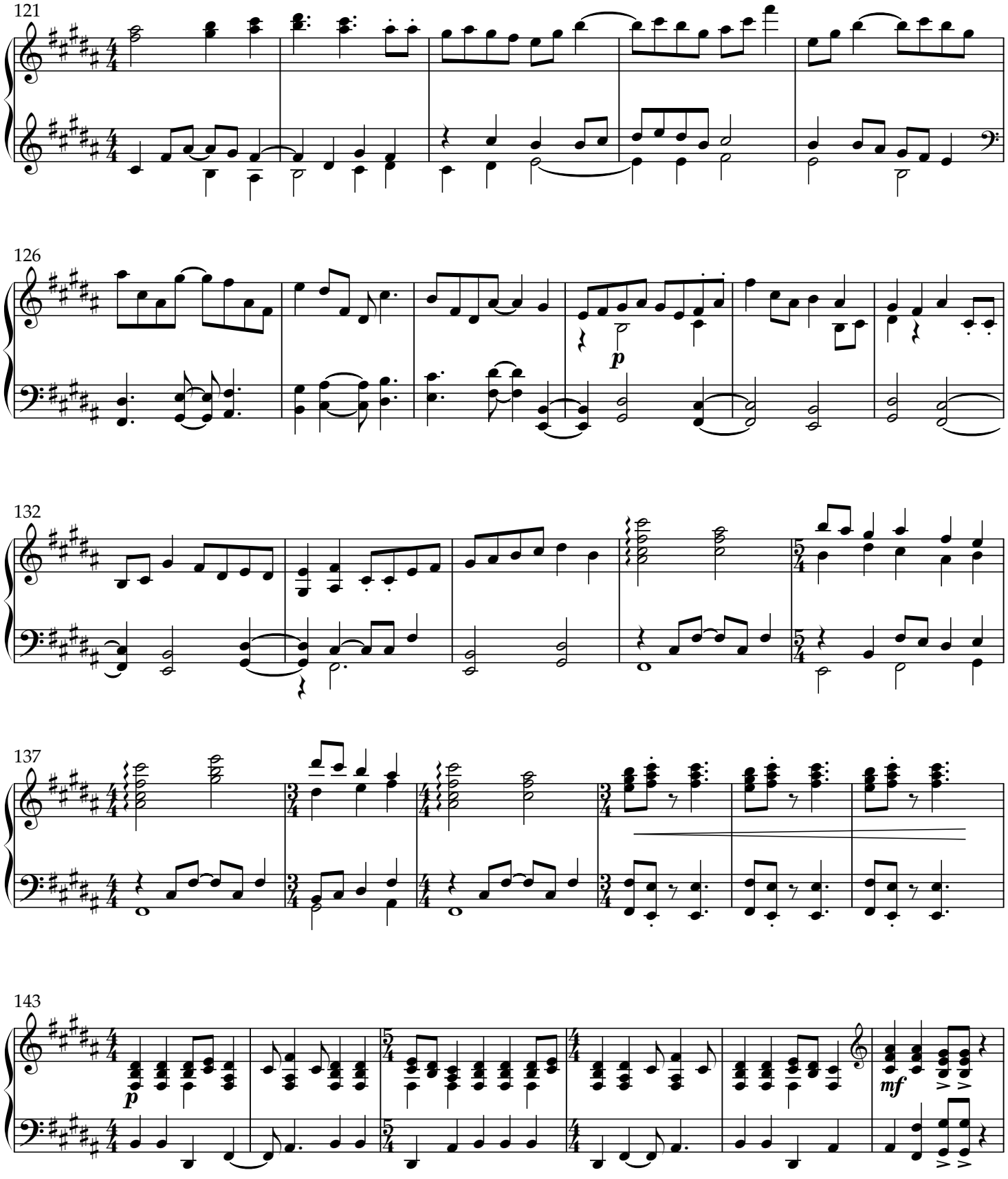
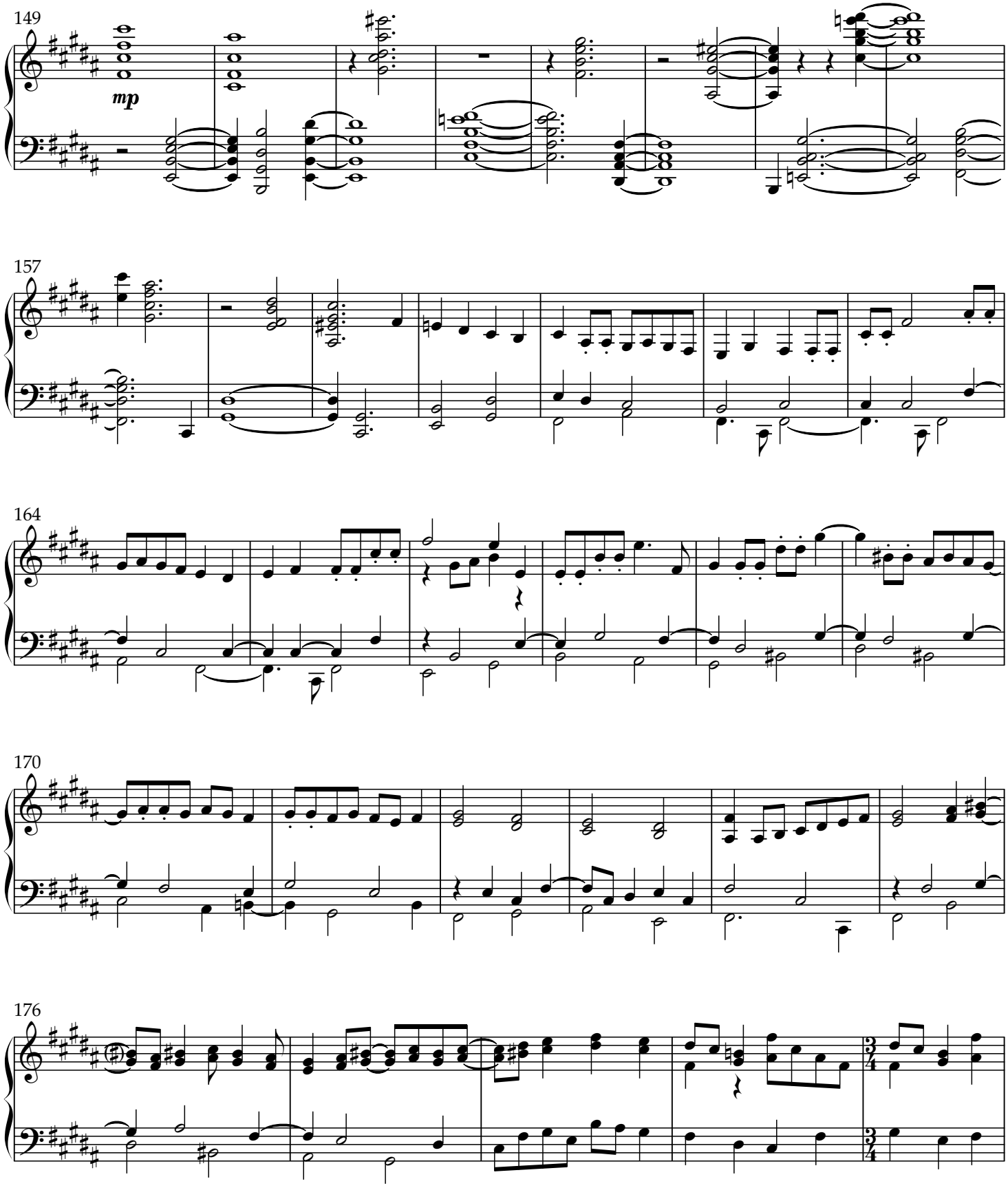
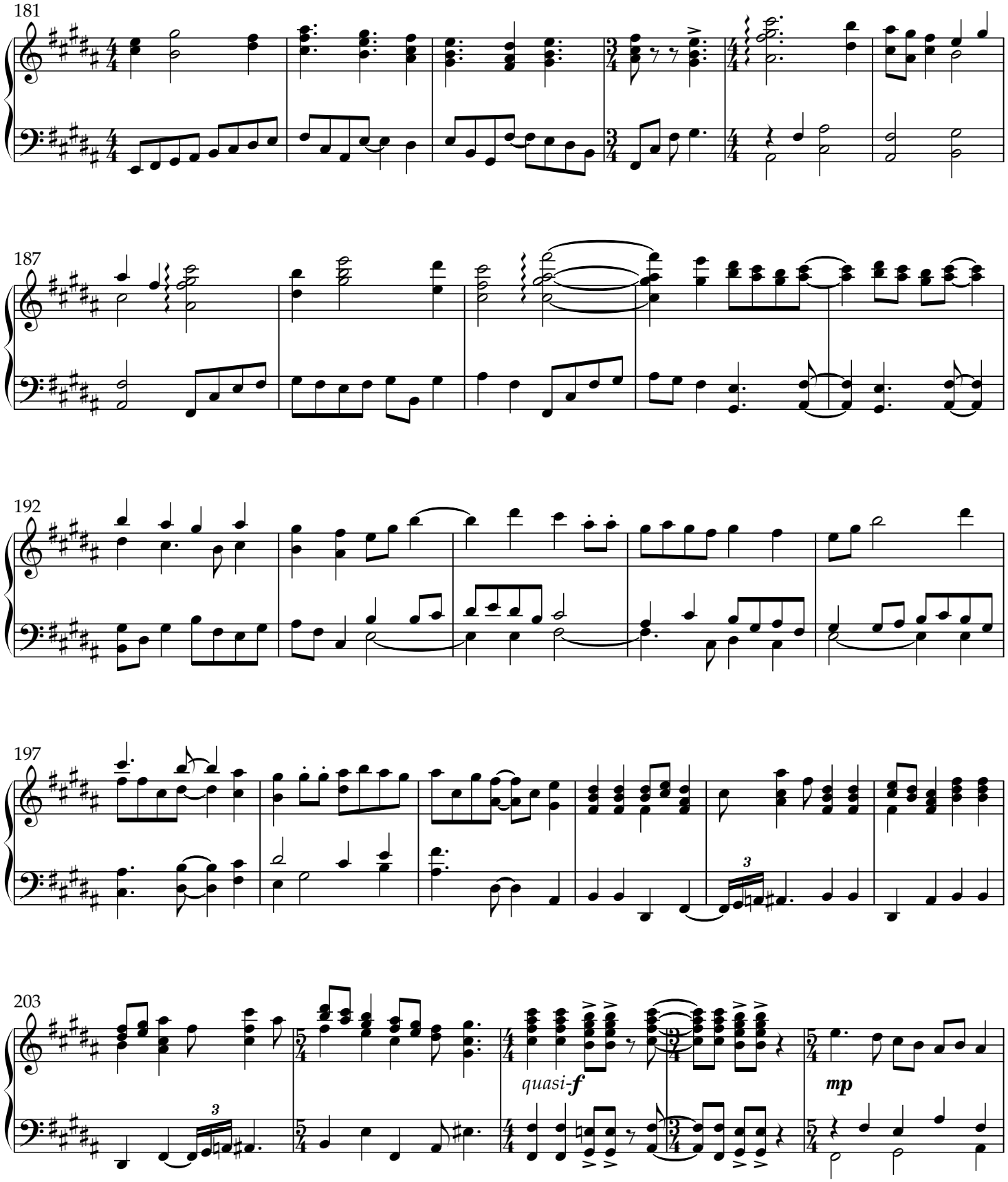

32
38
43
quasi-f
49
mp
quasi-f
mp
54

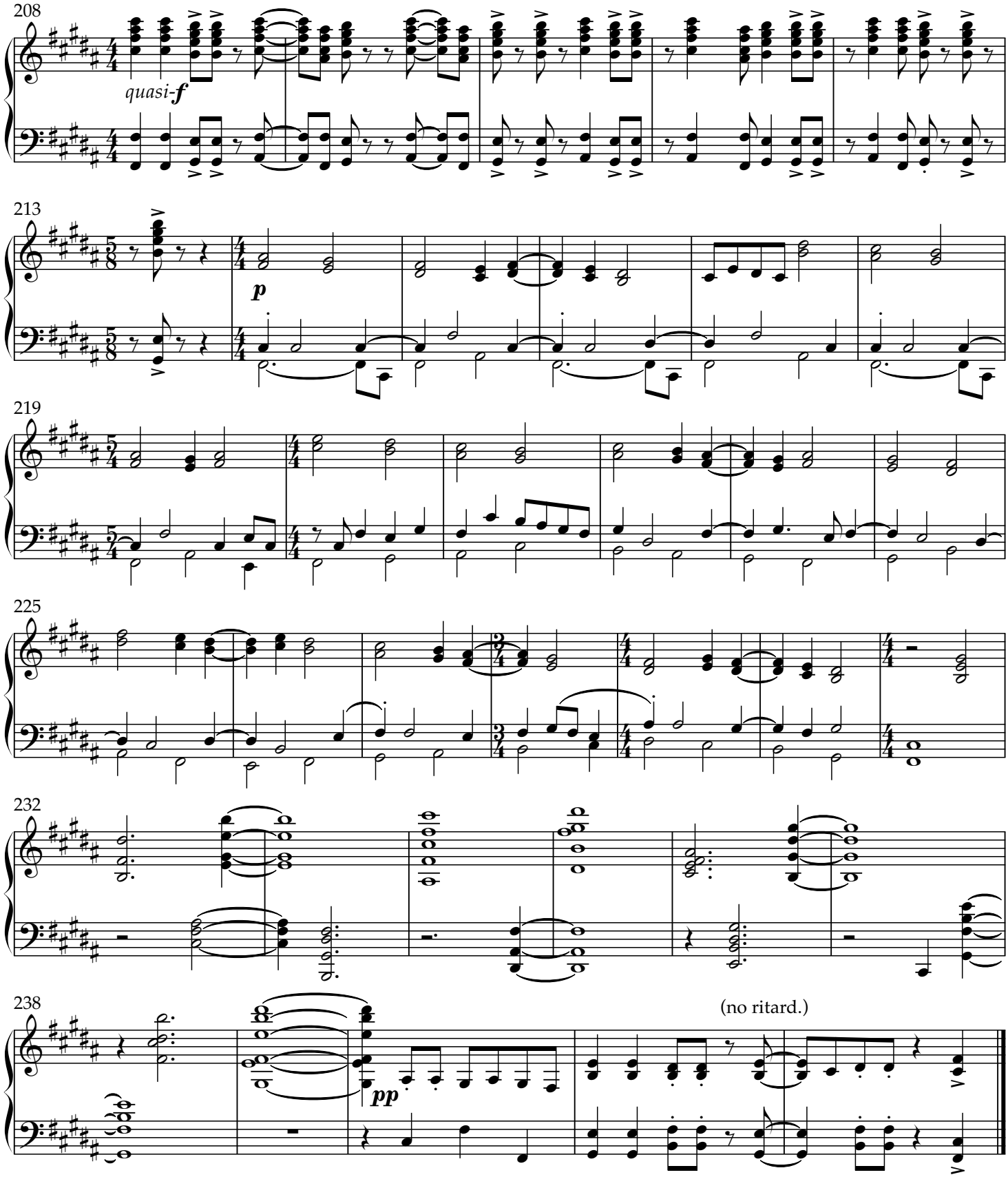

60
66
72
78
86


93
99
105
110
115


121
126
p
132
137
143
p
mf


149
mp
157
164
170
176


181
187
192
197
203
quasi-f
mp



December 7 - 18, 2023
Germantown, NY