For Miss Bonnie Einstadt
with best wishes of
W. Otto Miessner

To Edgar Stillman Kelley

W. OTTO MIESSNER

SONATA
EXCELSIOR

IN

E MINOR

PIANO SOLO

÷ OPUS 10 ÷

PRICE 3.00 NET

AMERICAN MUSIC COMPANY
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN.

EXCELSIOR

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed
A youth who bore, 'mid snow and ice,
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

His brow was sad; his eye beneath,
Flashed like a falchion from its sheath,
And like a silver clarion rung
The accents of that unknown tongue,
Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior!

"Try not the Pass!" the old man said;
"Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
The roaring torrent is deep and wide!"
And loud that clarion voice replied,
Excelsior!

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!"
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered with a sigh,
Excelsior!

"Beware the pine-tree's withered branch!
Beware the awful avalanche!"
This was the peasant's last good-night,
A voice replied, far up the height,
Excelsior!

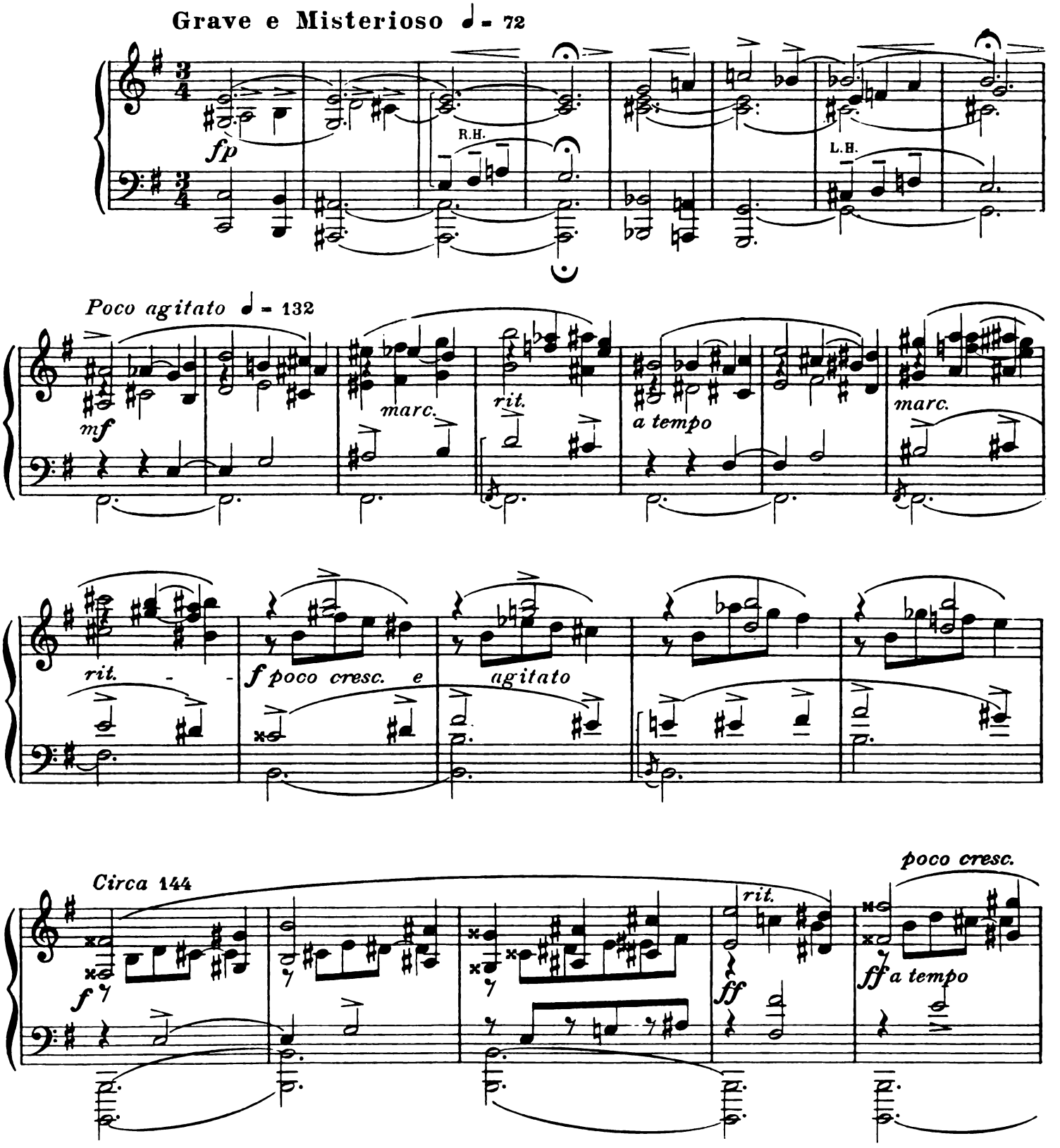
At break of day, as heavenward
The pious monks of Saint Bernard
Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,
A voice cried through the startled air,
Excelsior!

A traveler, by the faithful hound,
Half-buried in the snow was found,
Still grasping in his hand of ice
That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,
And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell like a falling star,
Excelsior!

I. Heroism

W. OTTO MIESSNER, Op. 10



Those who find pleasure in associating music with a more or less definite program are referred by the composer to Longfellow's poem "Excelsior," which has been the source of inspiration for this work.

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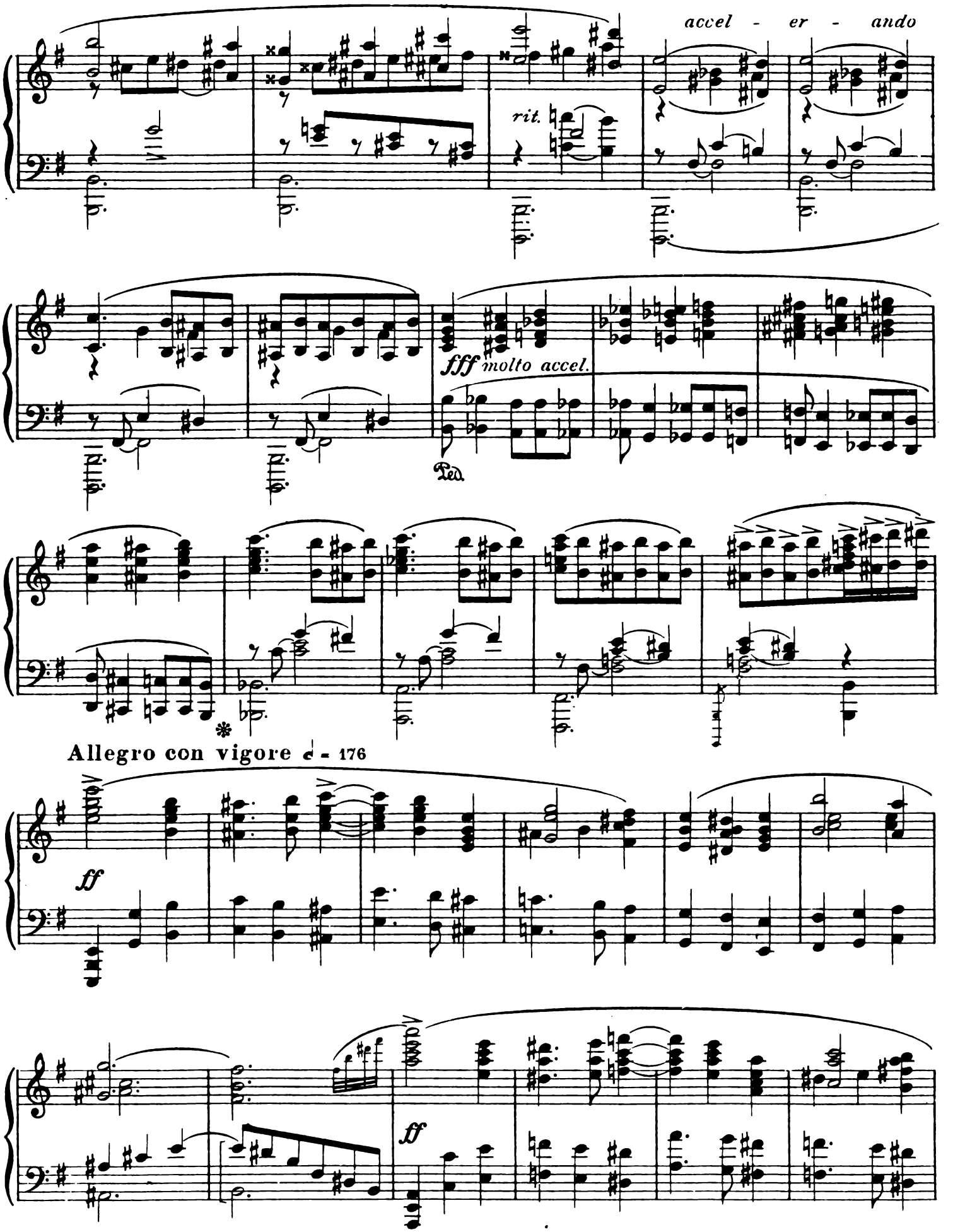
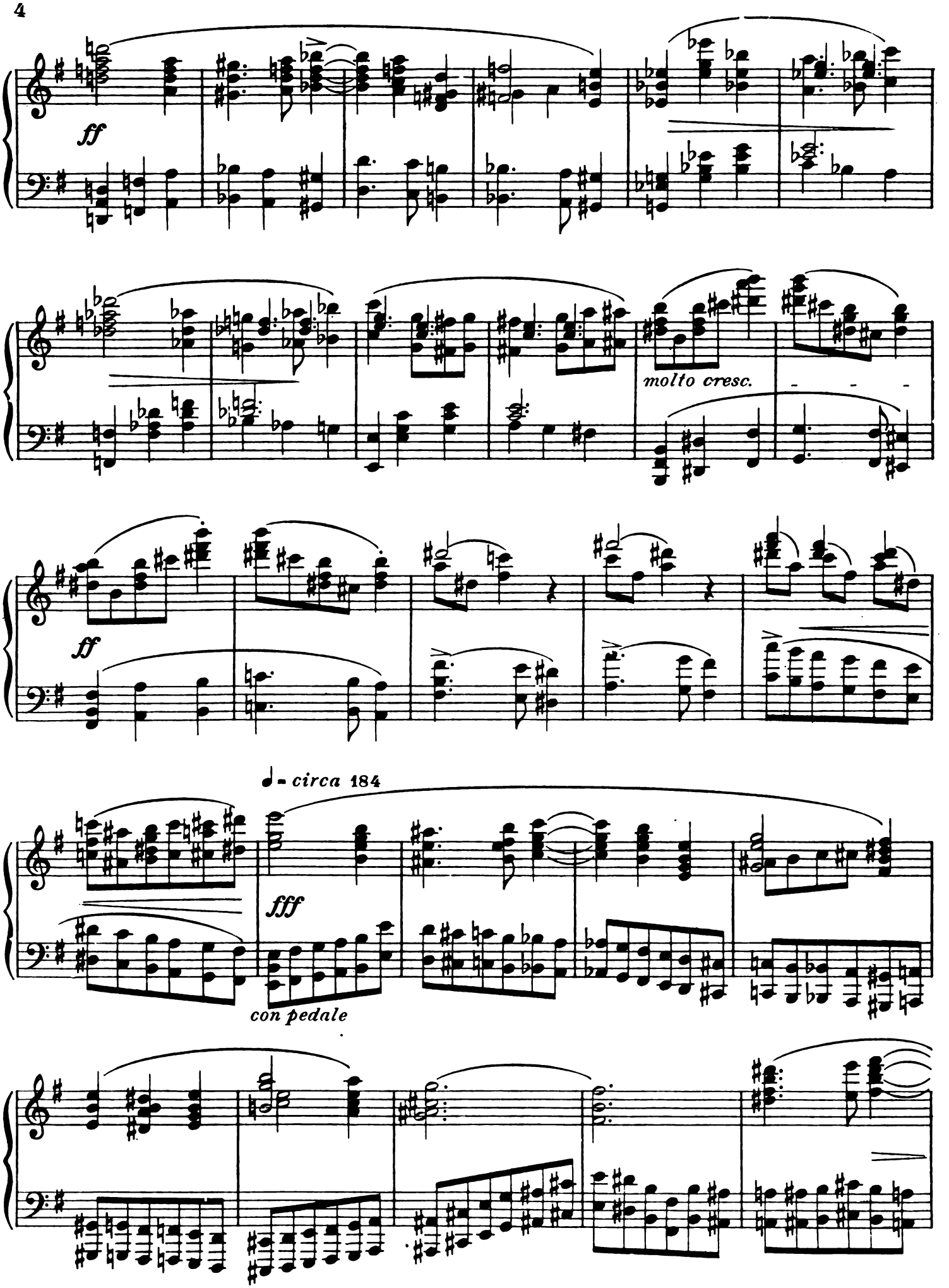
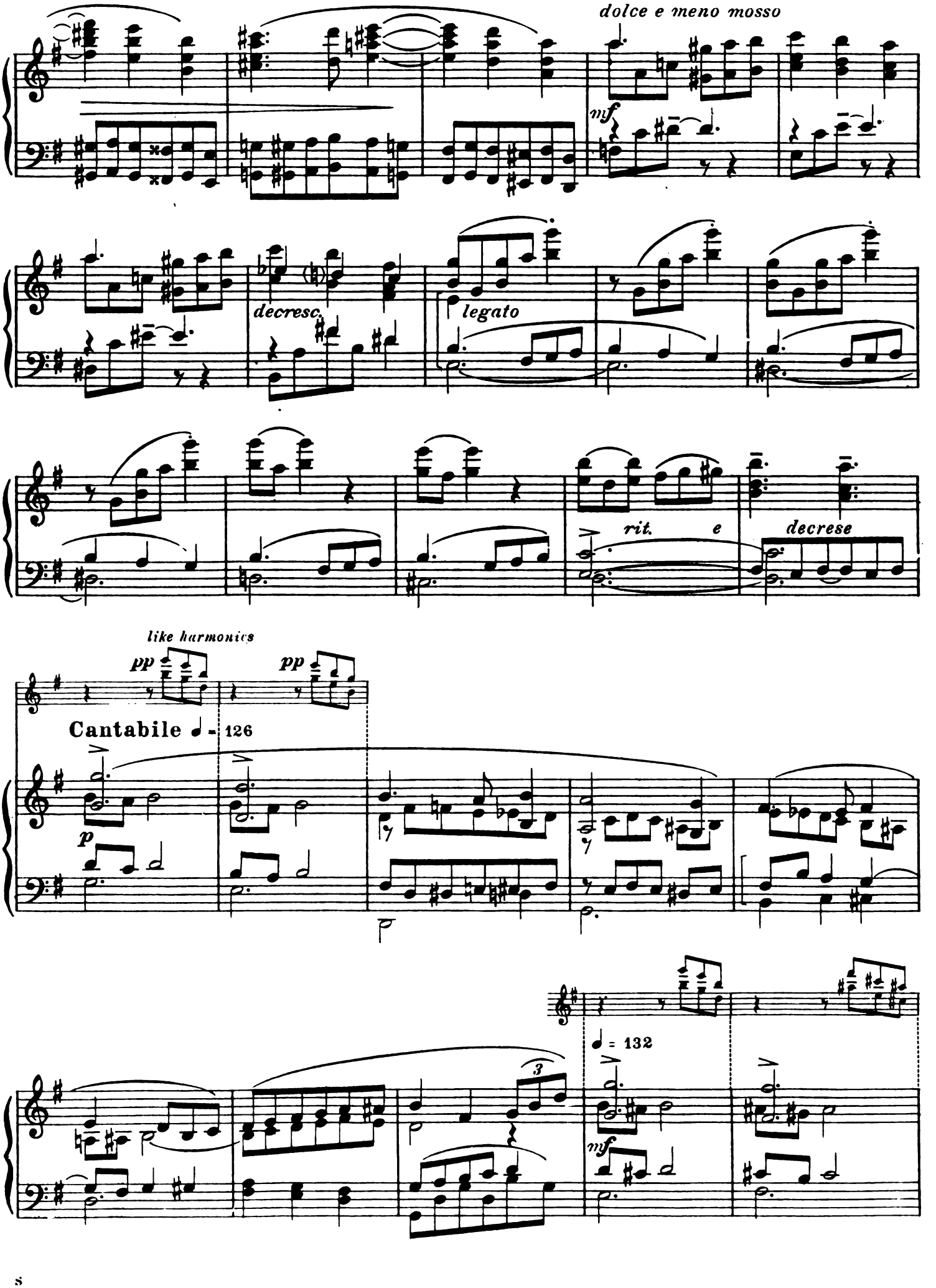
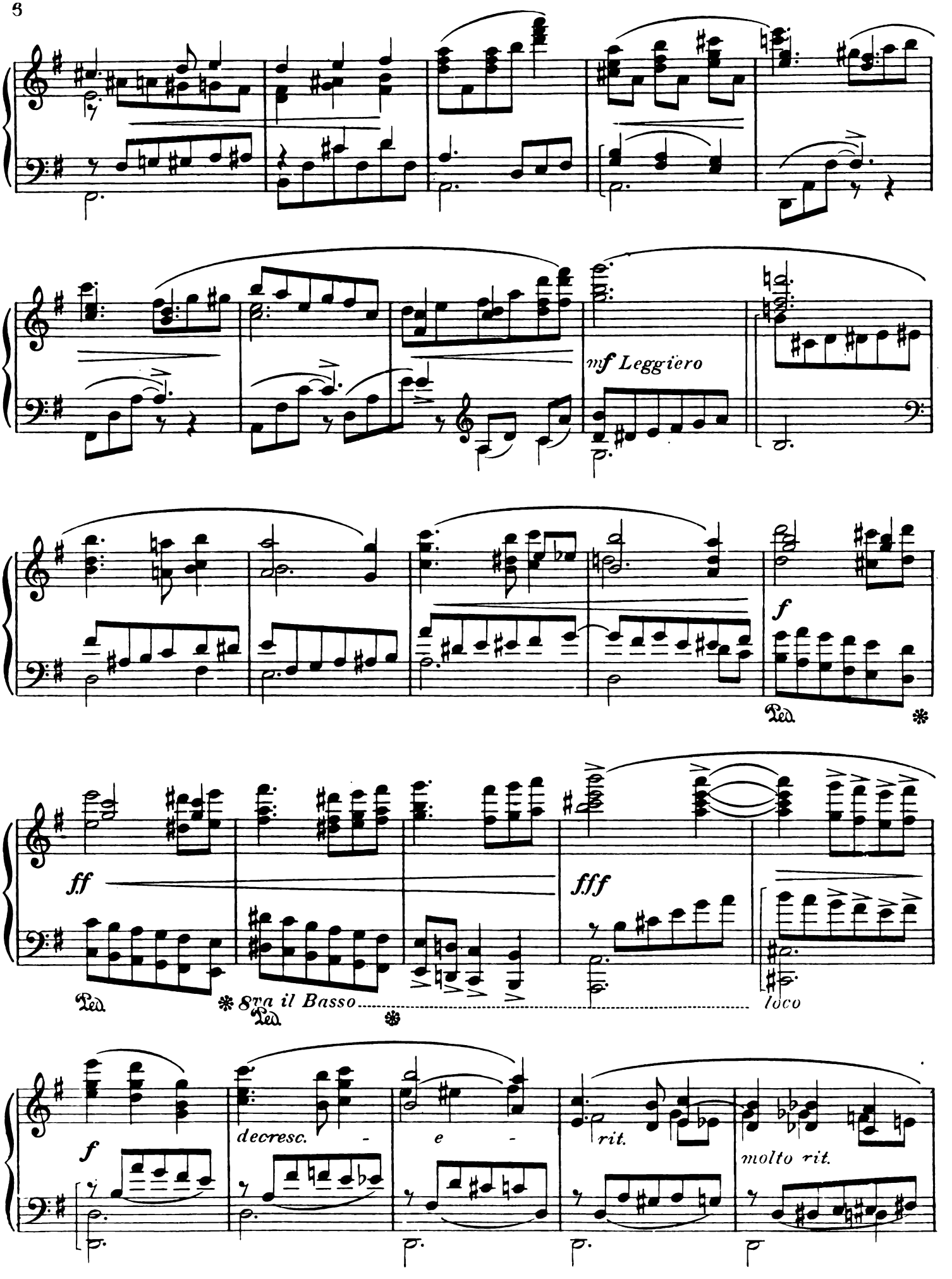
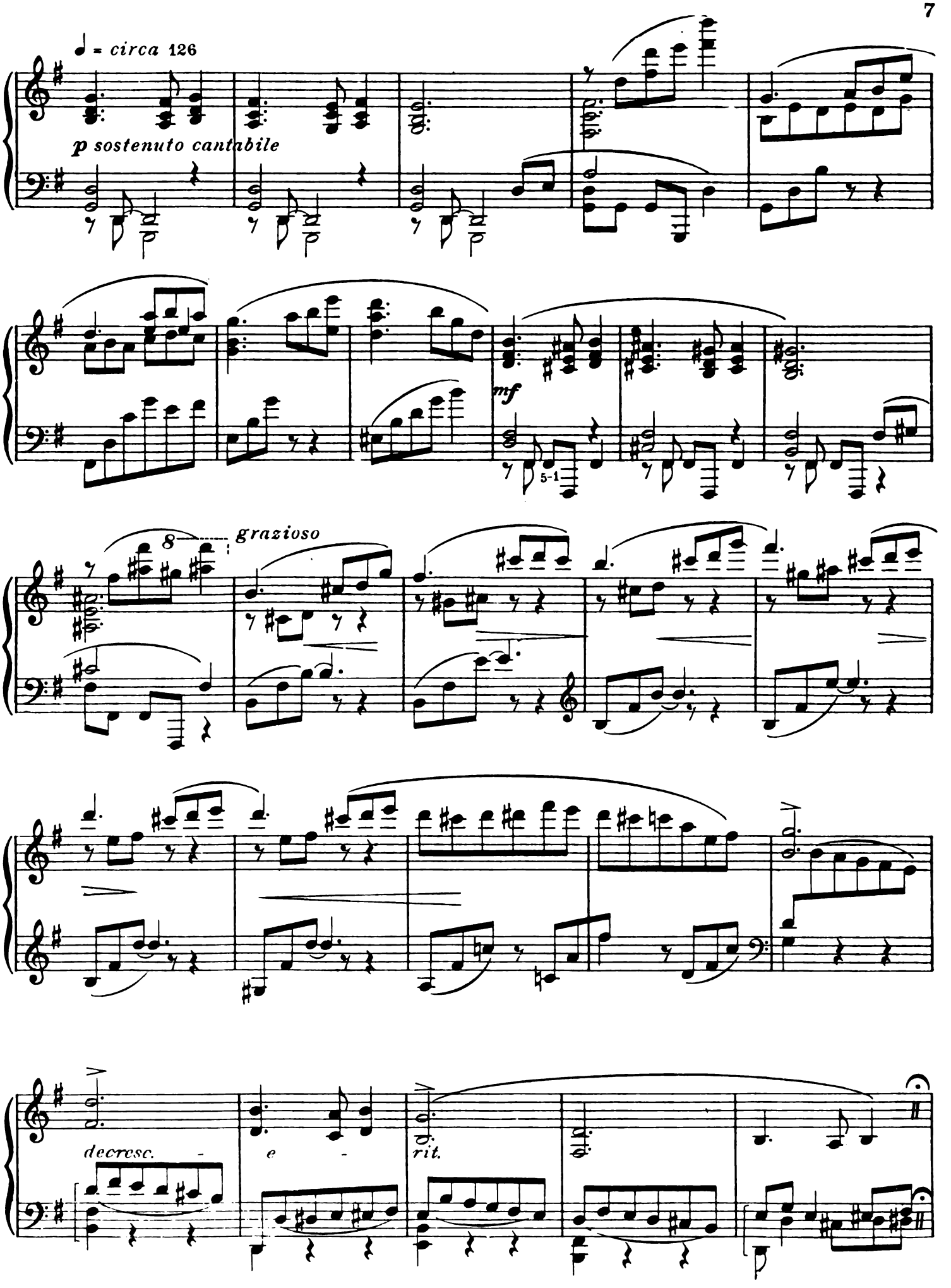

accel - er - ando
rit.
fff molto accel.
Ped.
Allegro con vigore ♩ = 176
ff
ff

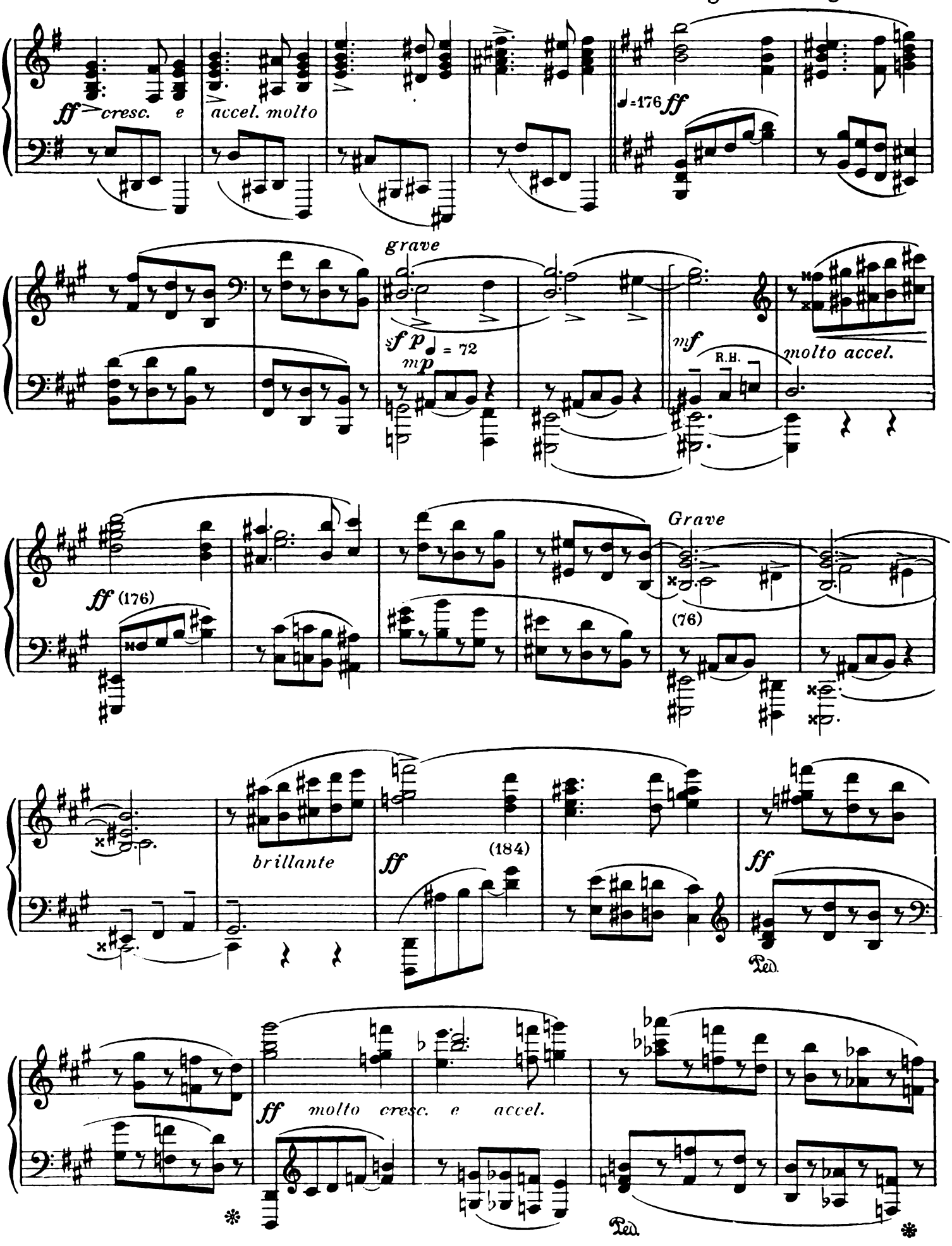

ff
molto cresc.
ff
♩ = circa 184
fff
con pedale

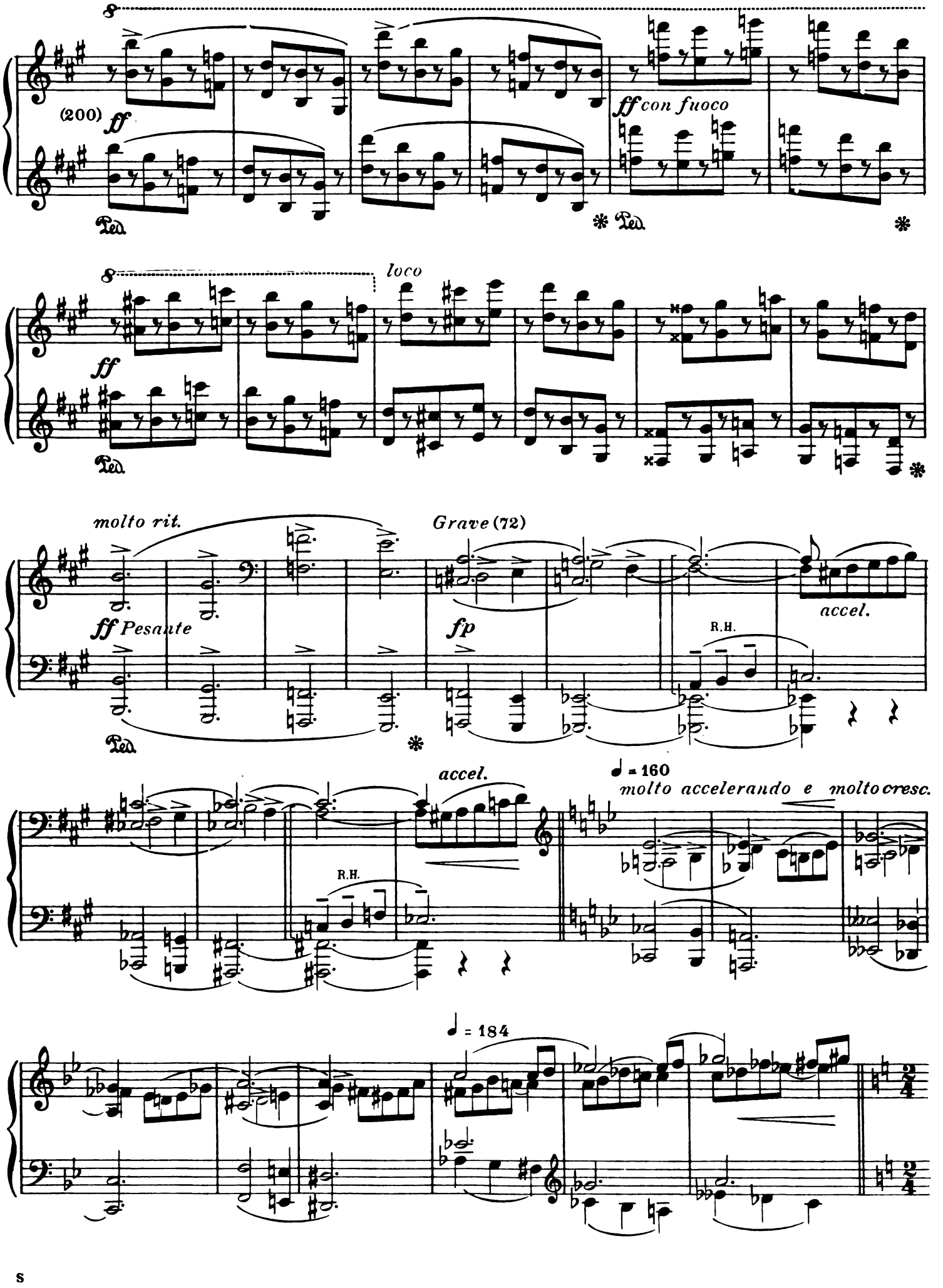

dolce e meno mosso
mf
decresc.
legato
rit. e
decrese
like harmonics
pp
pp
Cantabile ♩ = 126
p
♩ = 132
mf

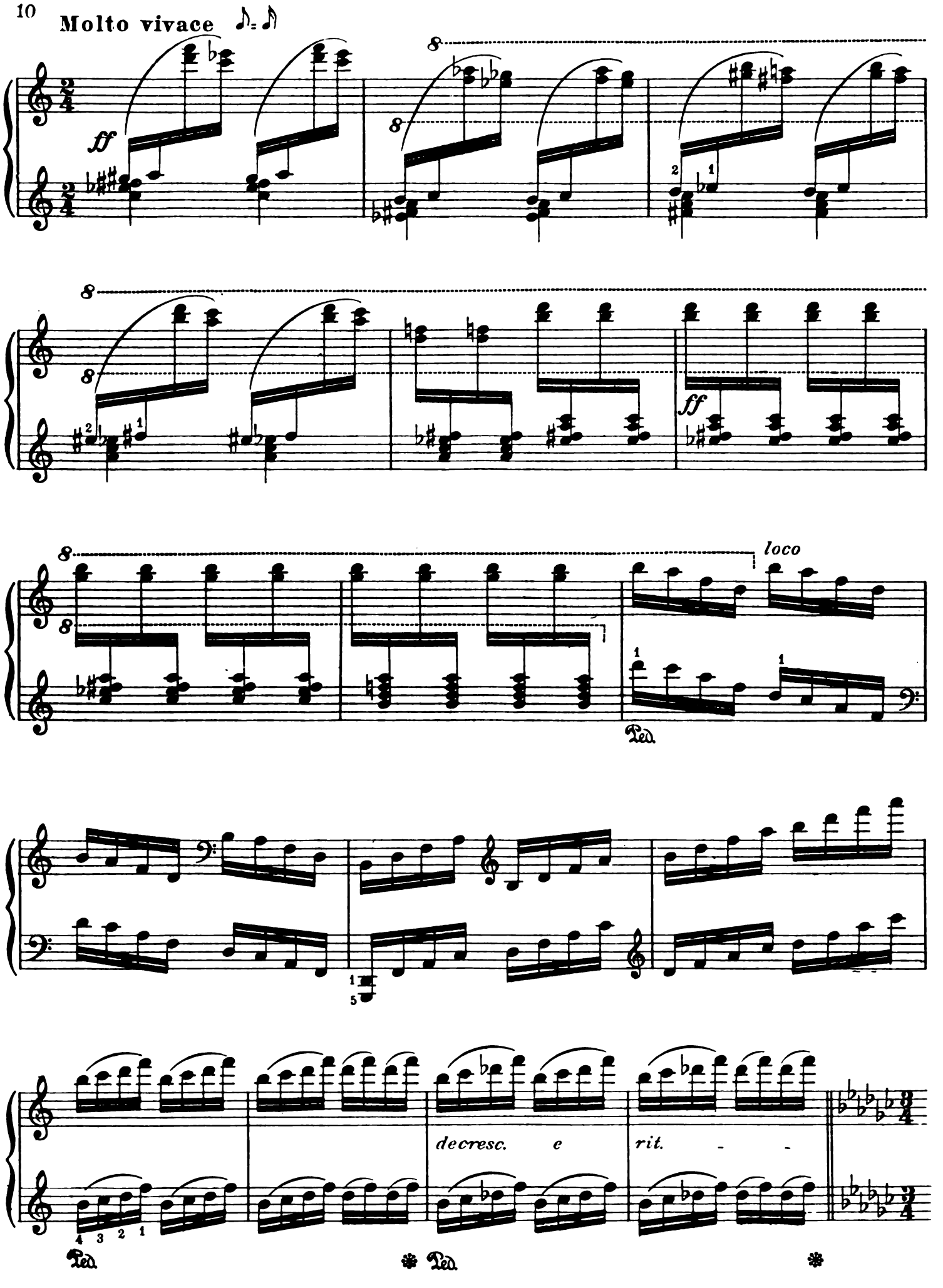

mf Leggiero
f
Ped.
ff
fff
8va il Basso
loco
decresc.
e
rit.
molto rit.

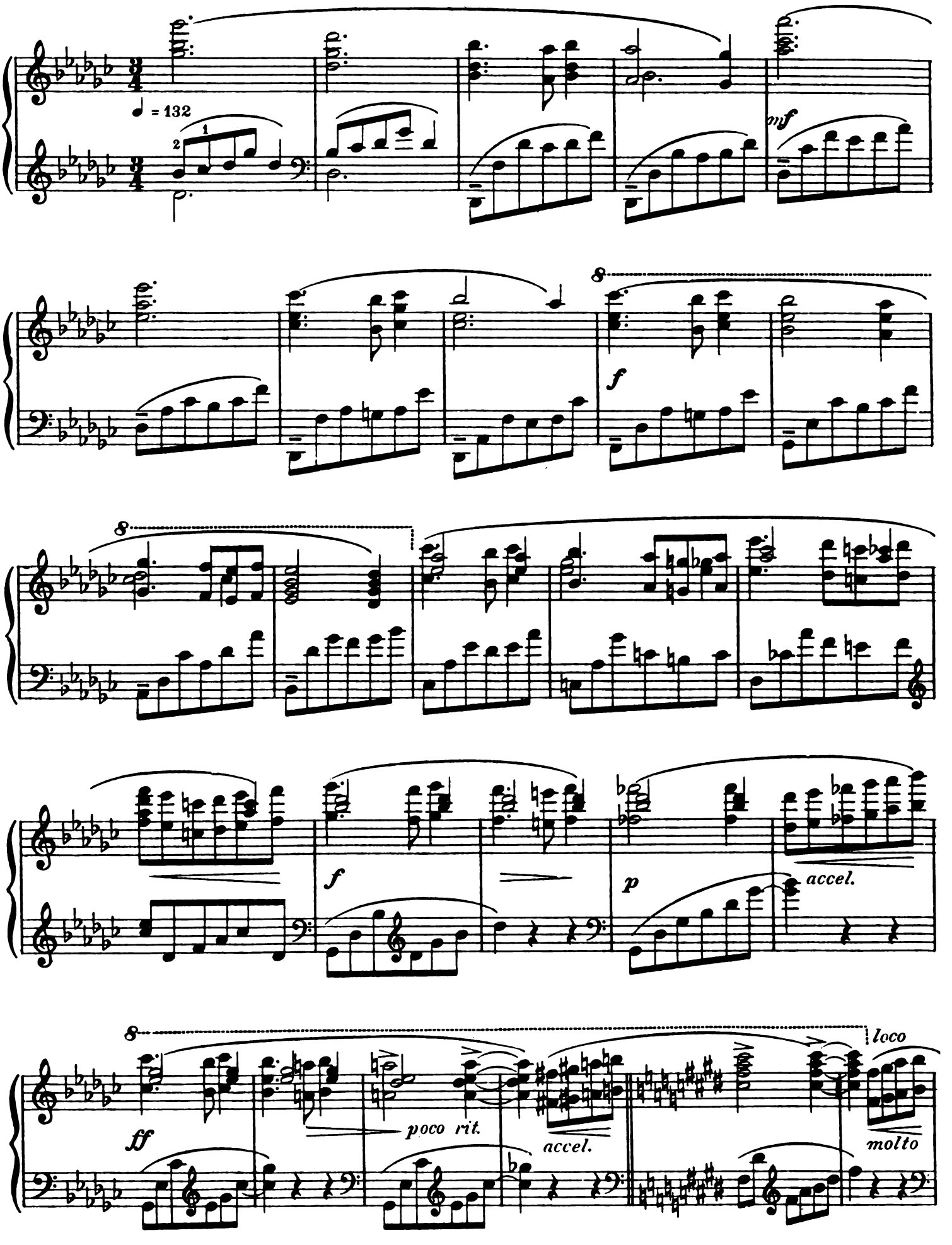

♩ = circa 126
p sostenuto cantabile
mf
5-1
8
grazioso
decresc.
e
rit.

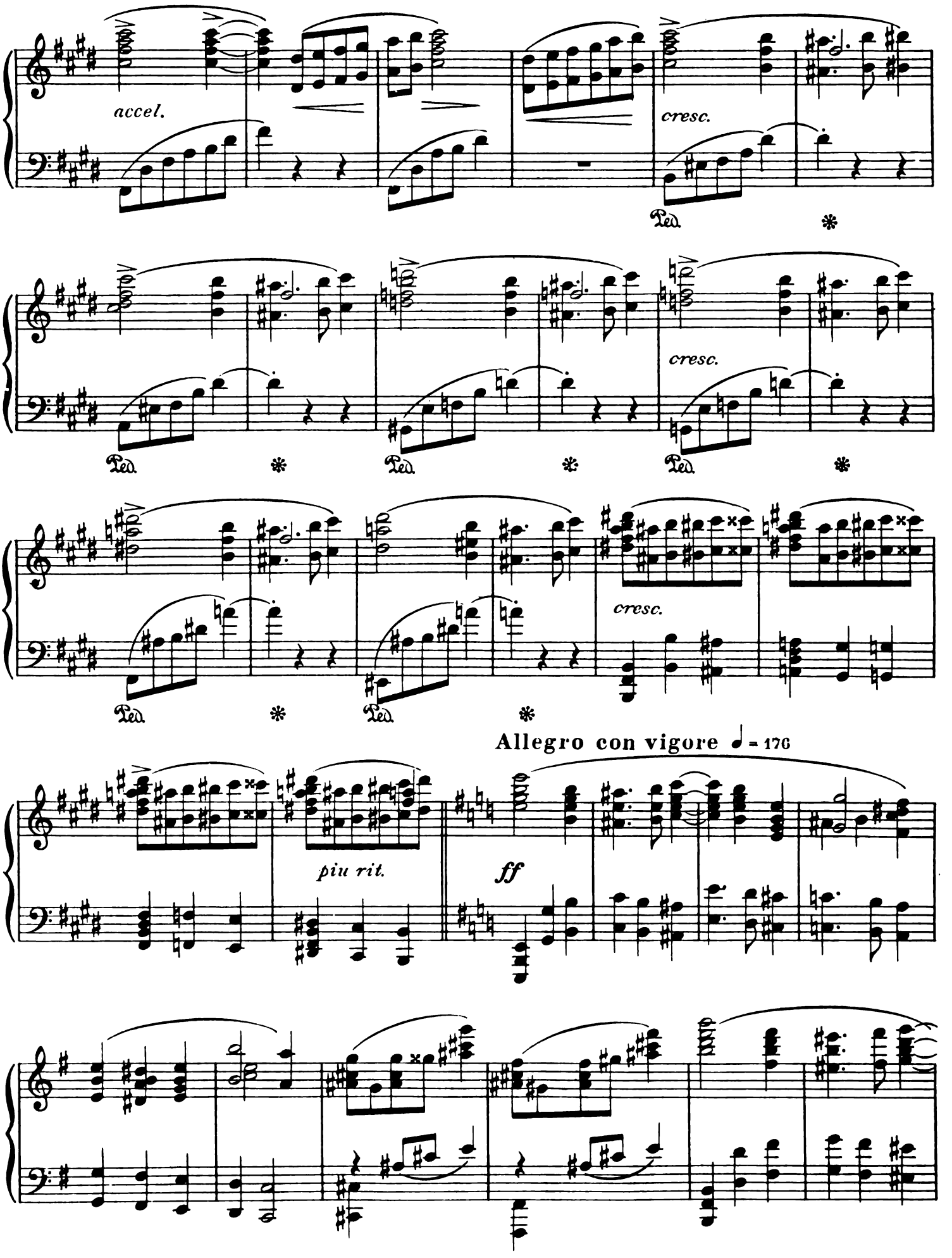
Allegro con vigore

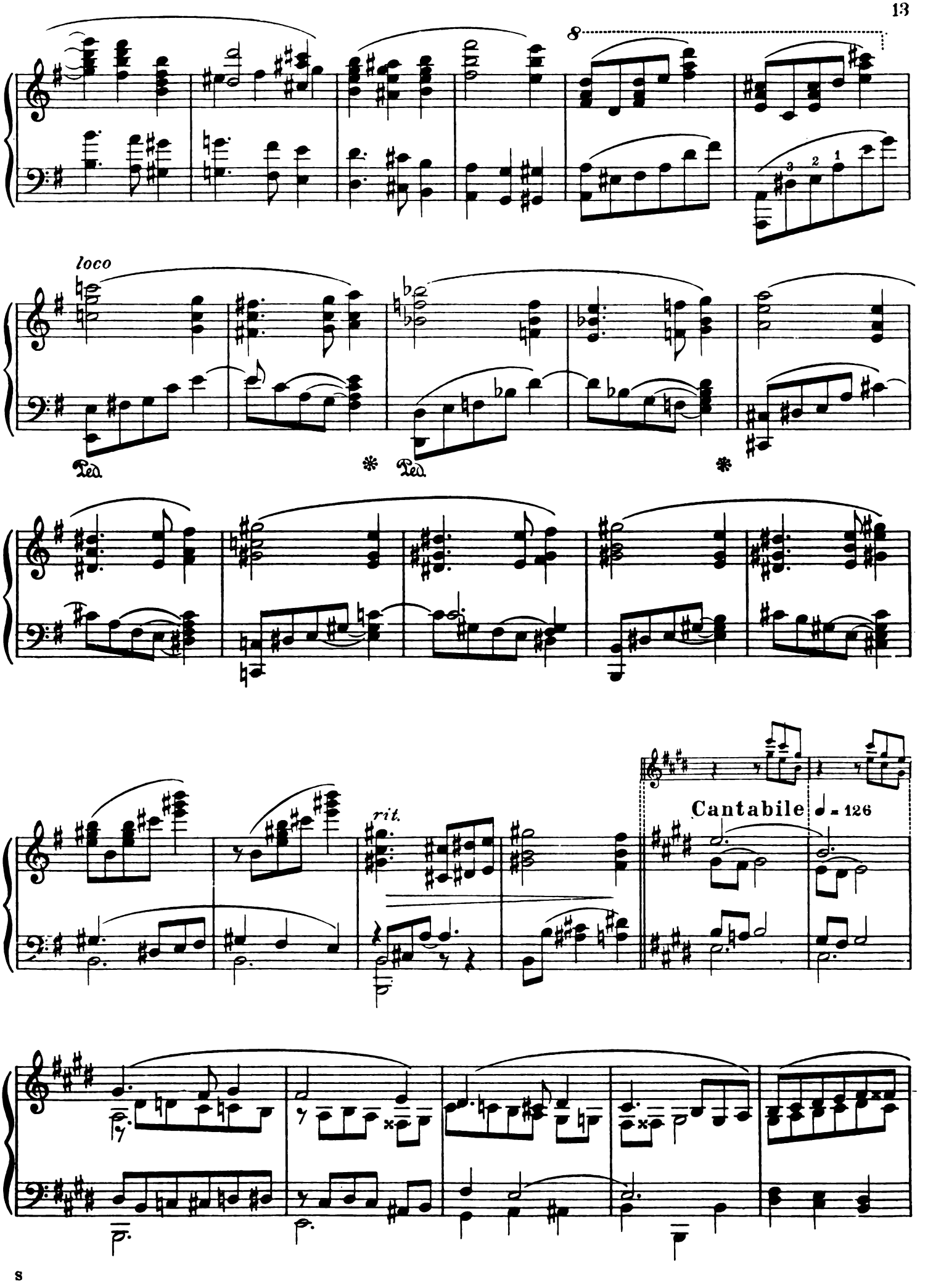


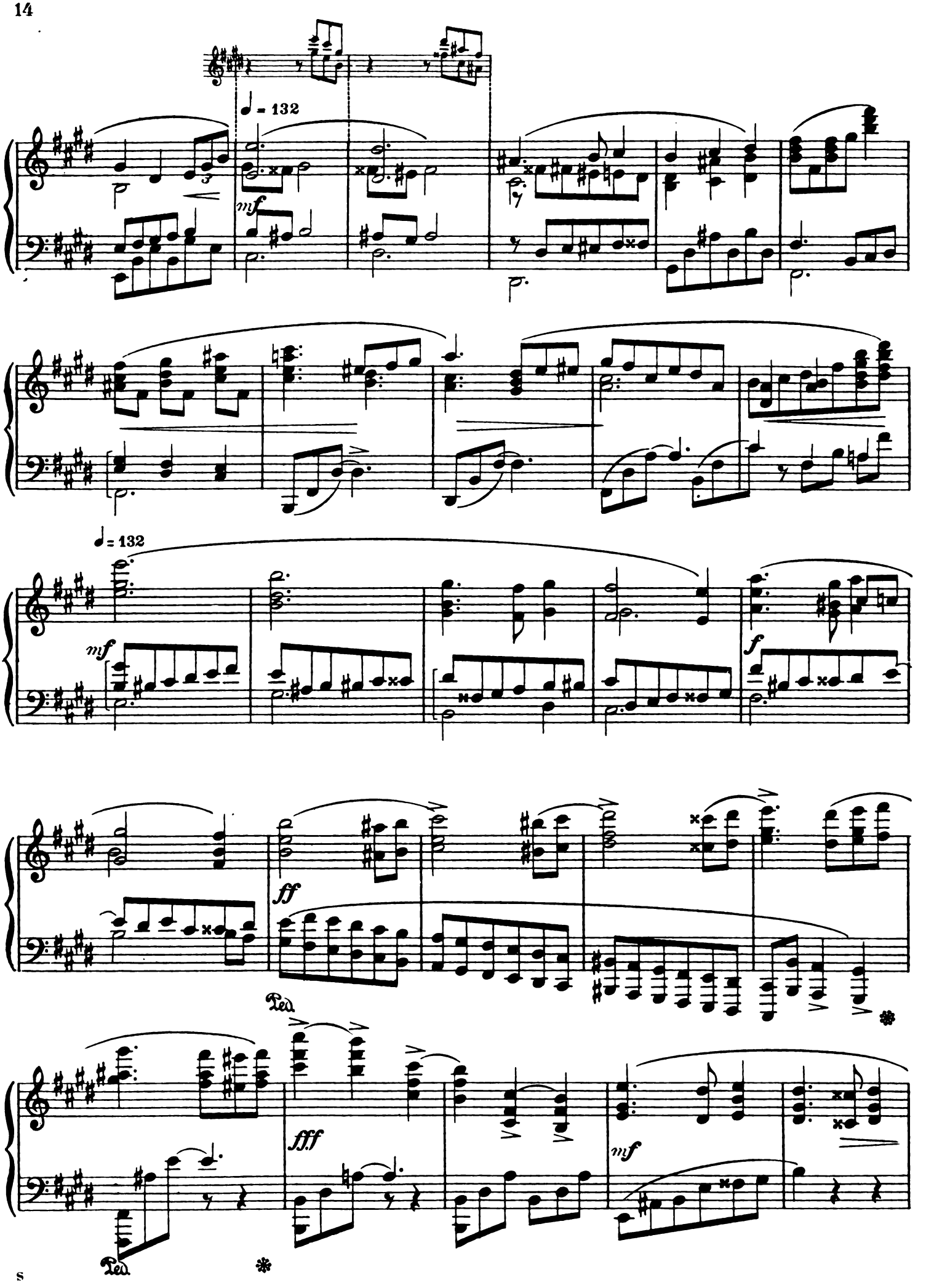

8
(200)
ff
Ped.
*
ff con fuoco
Ped.
*
8
loco
ff
Ped.
*
molto rit.
ff Pesante
Ped.
*
Grave (72)
fp
R.H.
accel.
accel.
R.H.
♩ = 160
molto accelerando e molto cresc.
♩ = 184

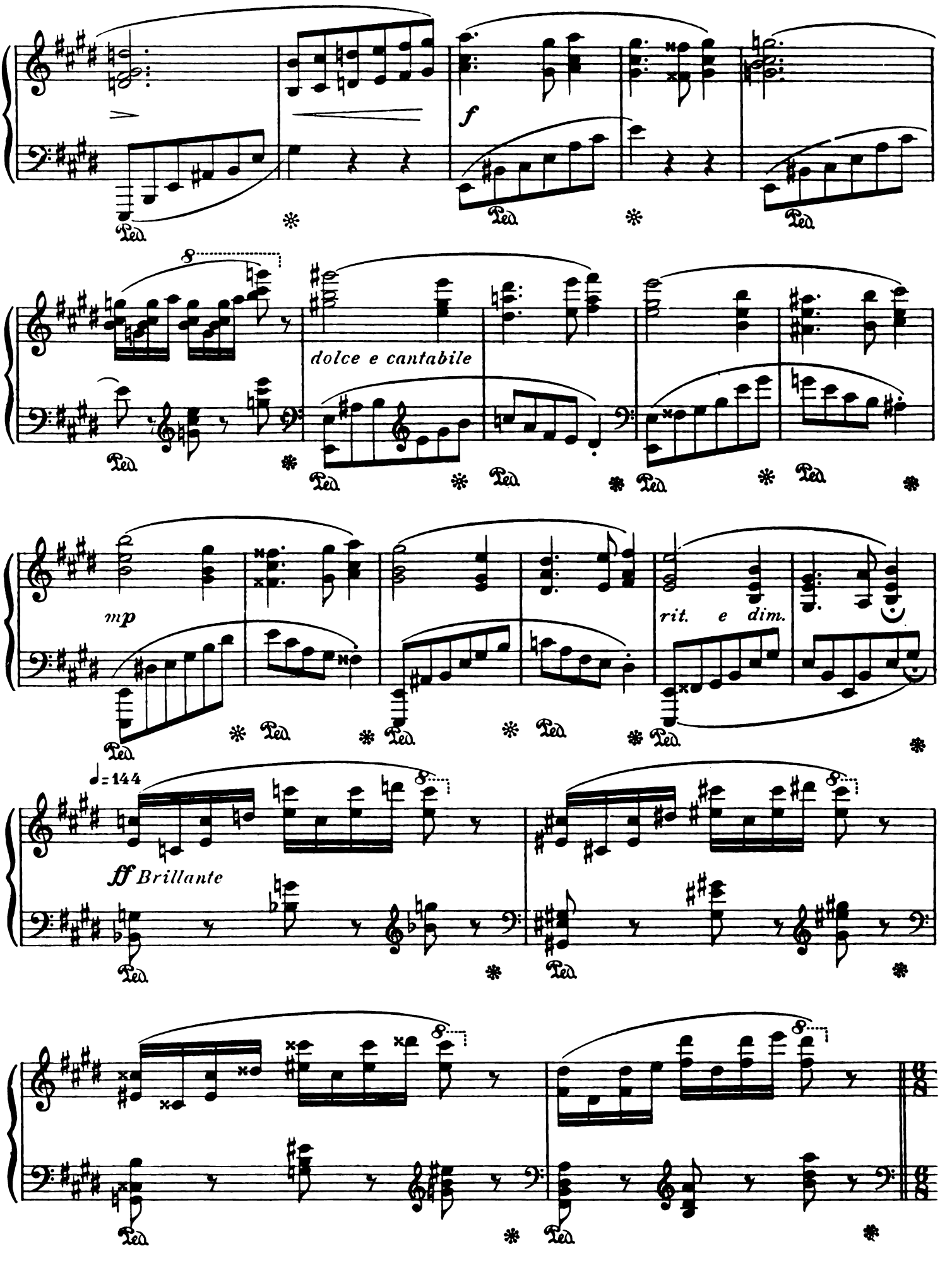

Molto vivace
ff
8
loco
Ped.
decresc. e
rit.
Ped.
Ped.

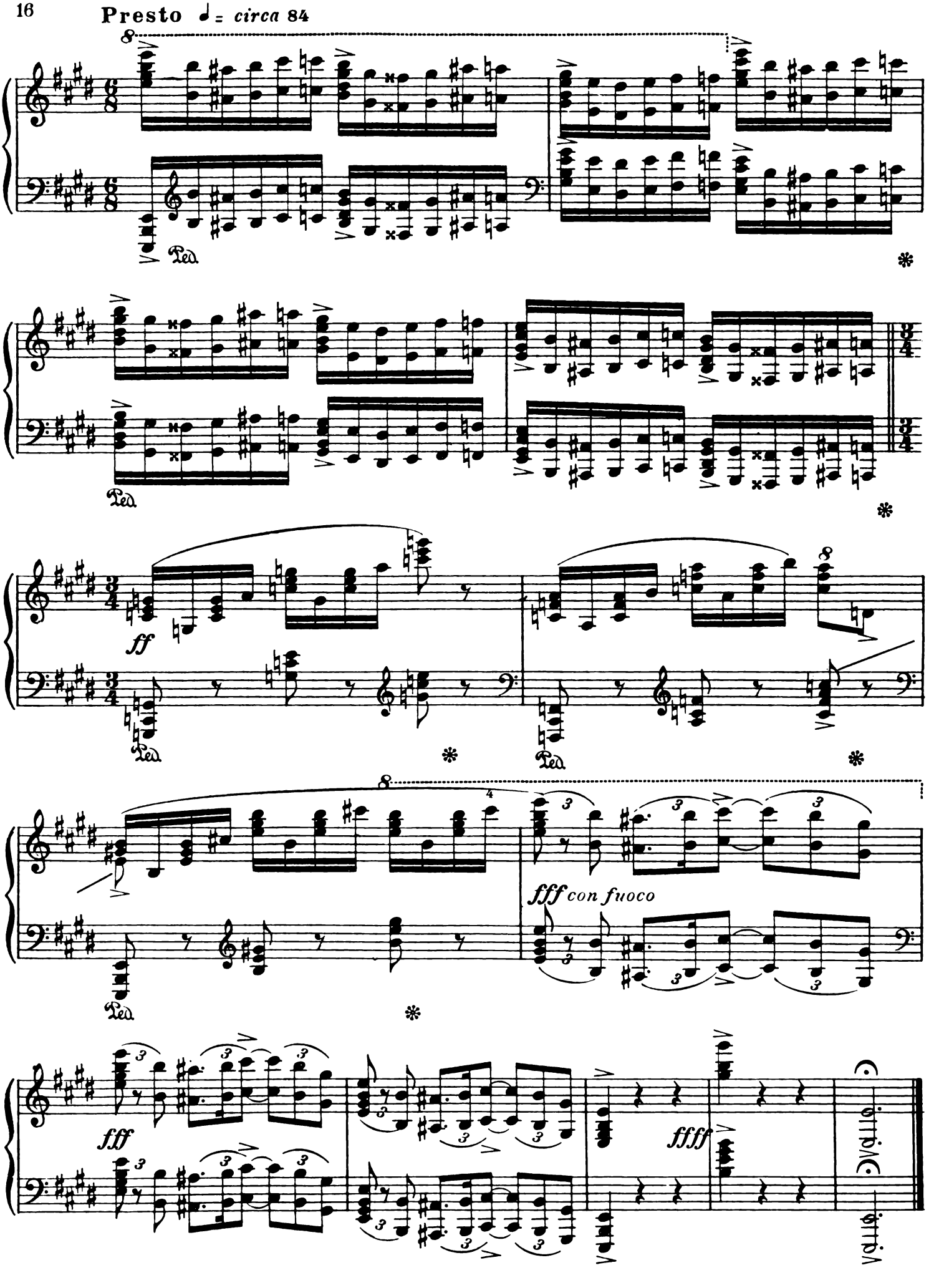

♩ = 132
mf
f
8
f
p
accel.
ff
poco rit.
accel.
loco
molto


accel.
cresc.
Ped.
cresc.
Ped.
cresc.
Ped.
Allegro con vigore ♩ = 176
piu rit.
ff

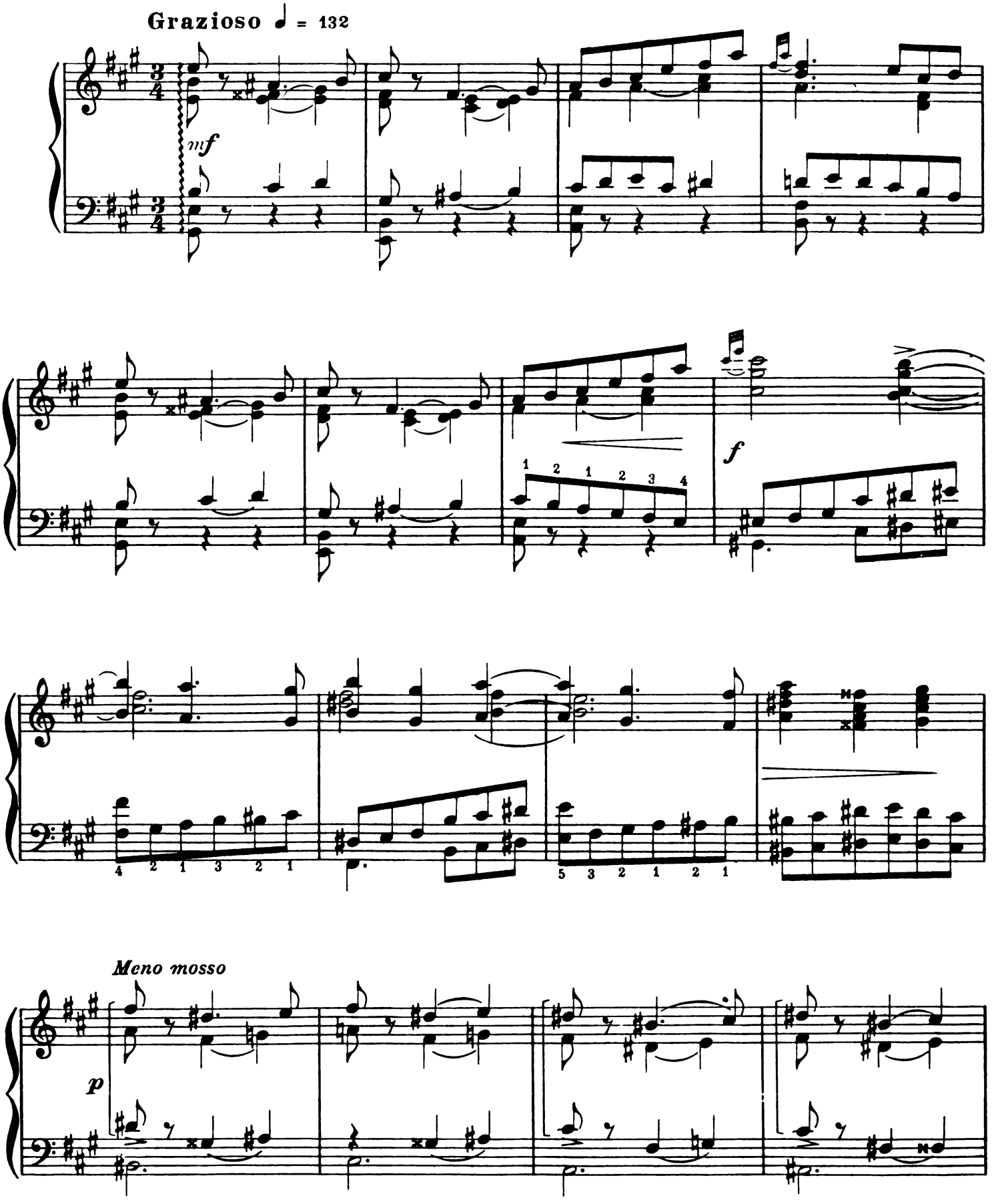

8
loco
Ped.
Ped.
rit.
Cantabile
♩ = 126

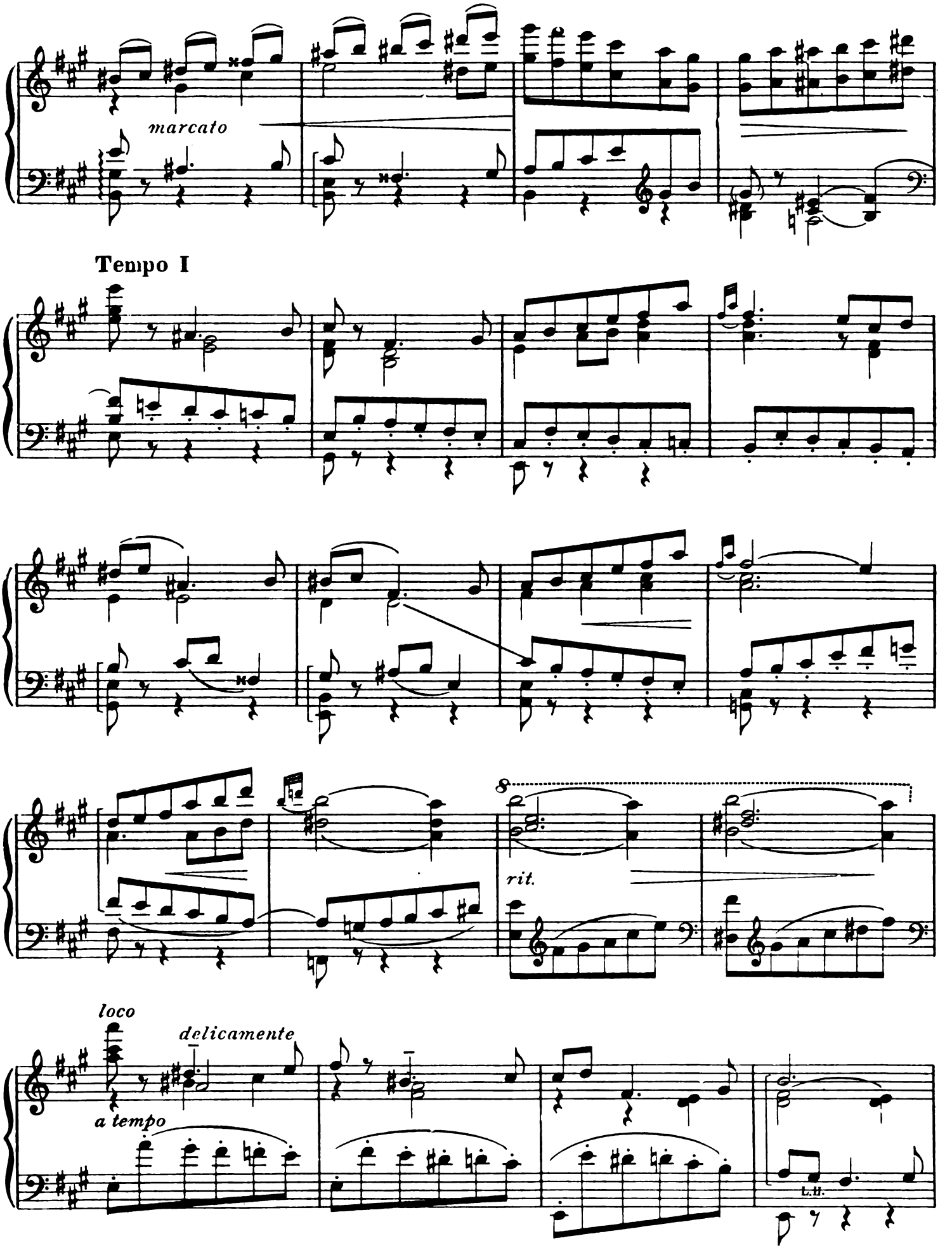

♩ = 132
mf
♩ = 132
mf
f
ff
Ped.
fff
Ped.
mf

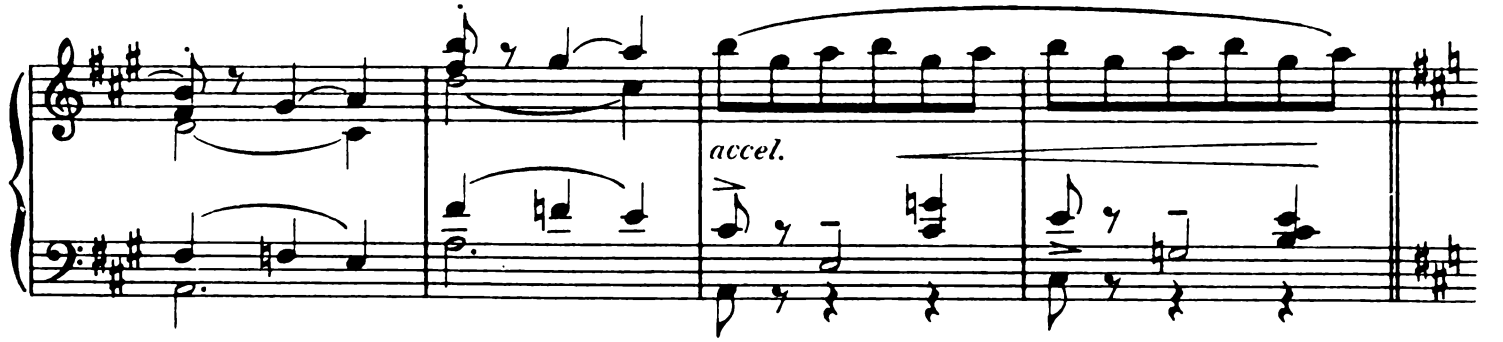

f
dolce e cantabile
mp
rit. e dim.
♩= 144
ff Brillante


Presto ♩= circa 84
Ped.
ff
fff con fuoco
fff
ffff
Vivace

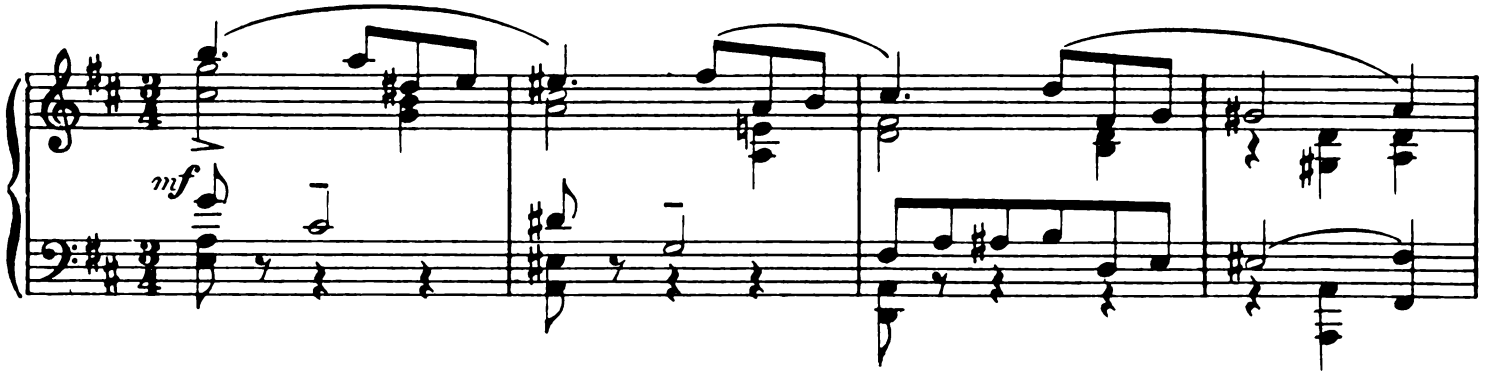
II. Temptation

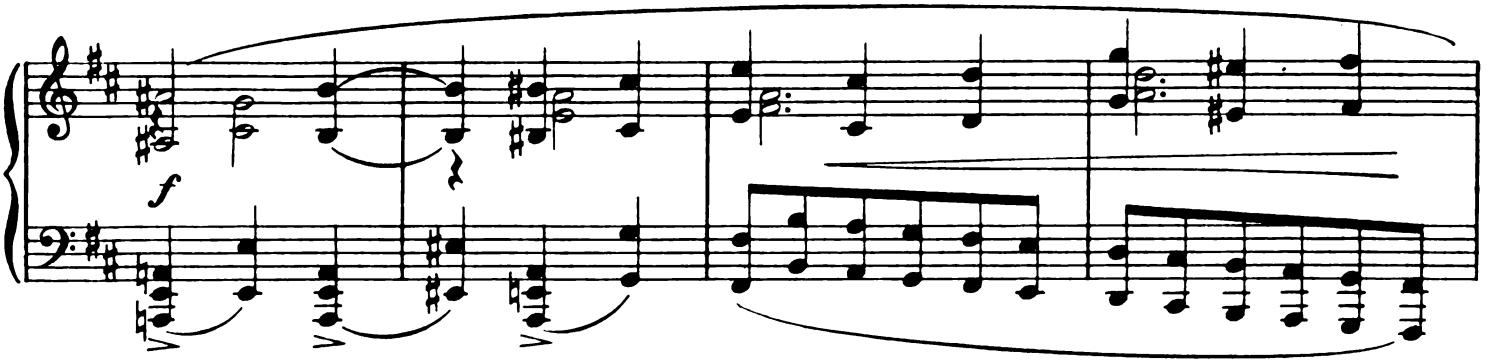


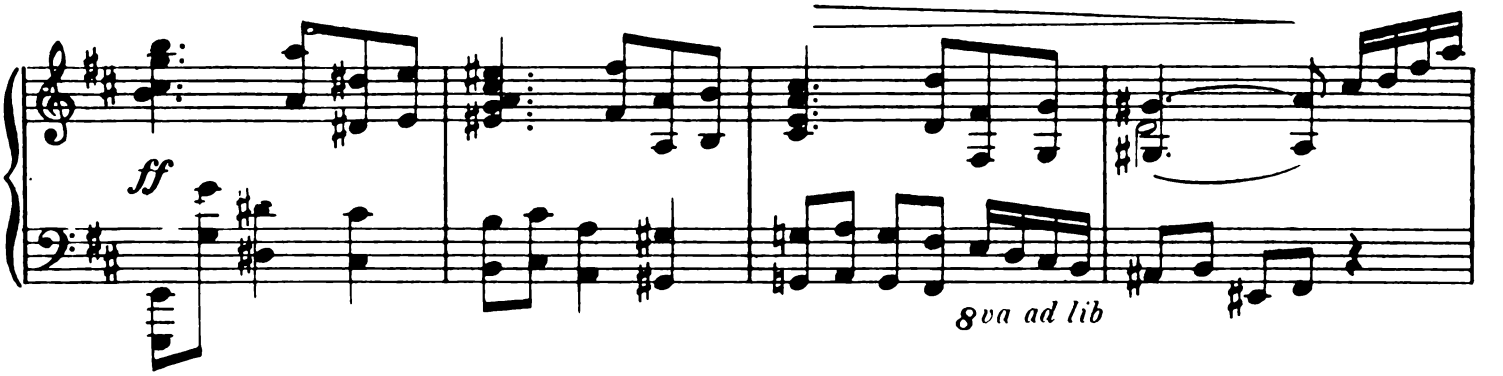

marcato
Tempo I
8
rit.
loco
delicamente
a tempo
L.H.

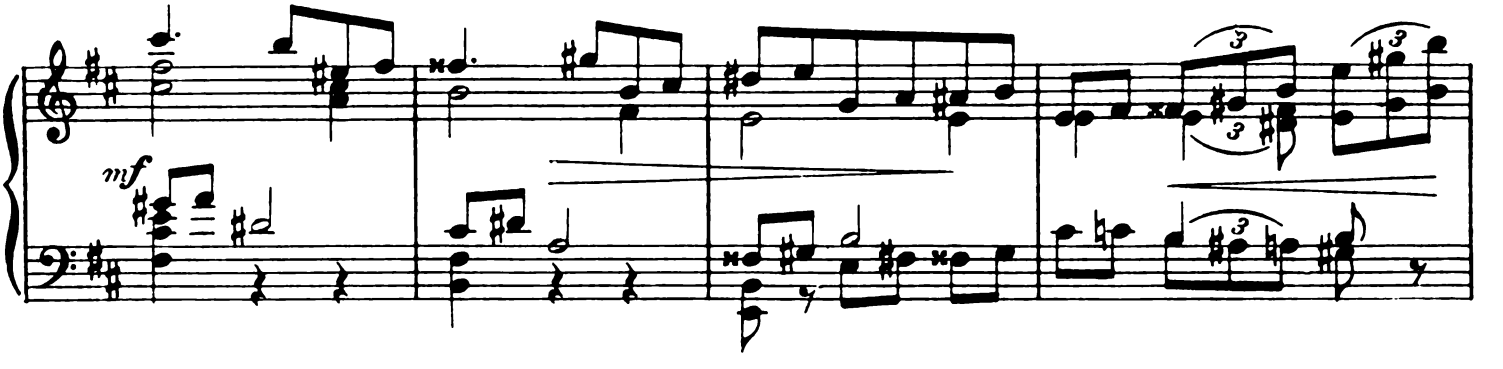


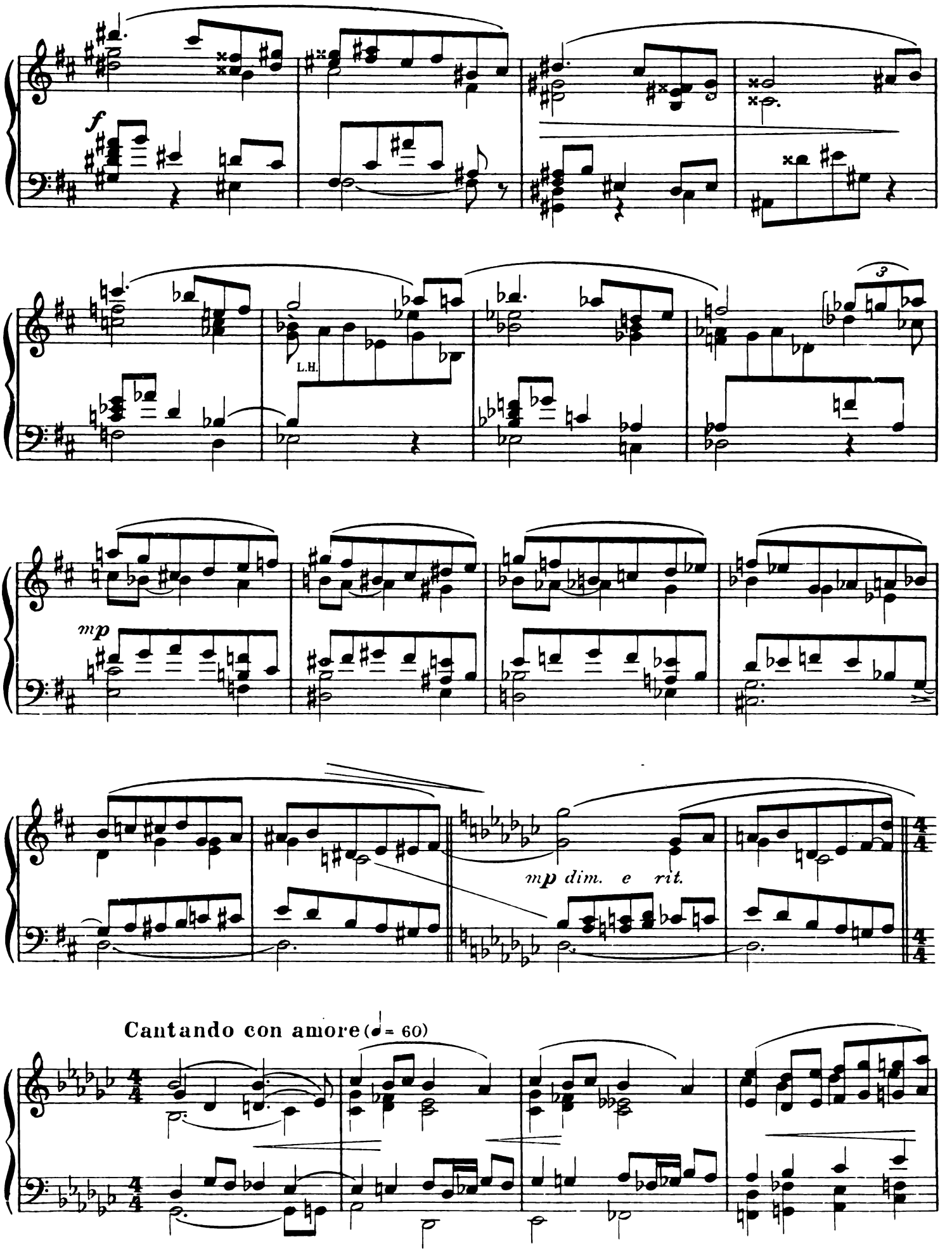
Con amore ♩ = *circa* 120

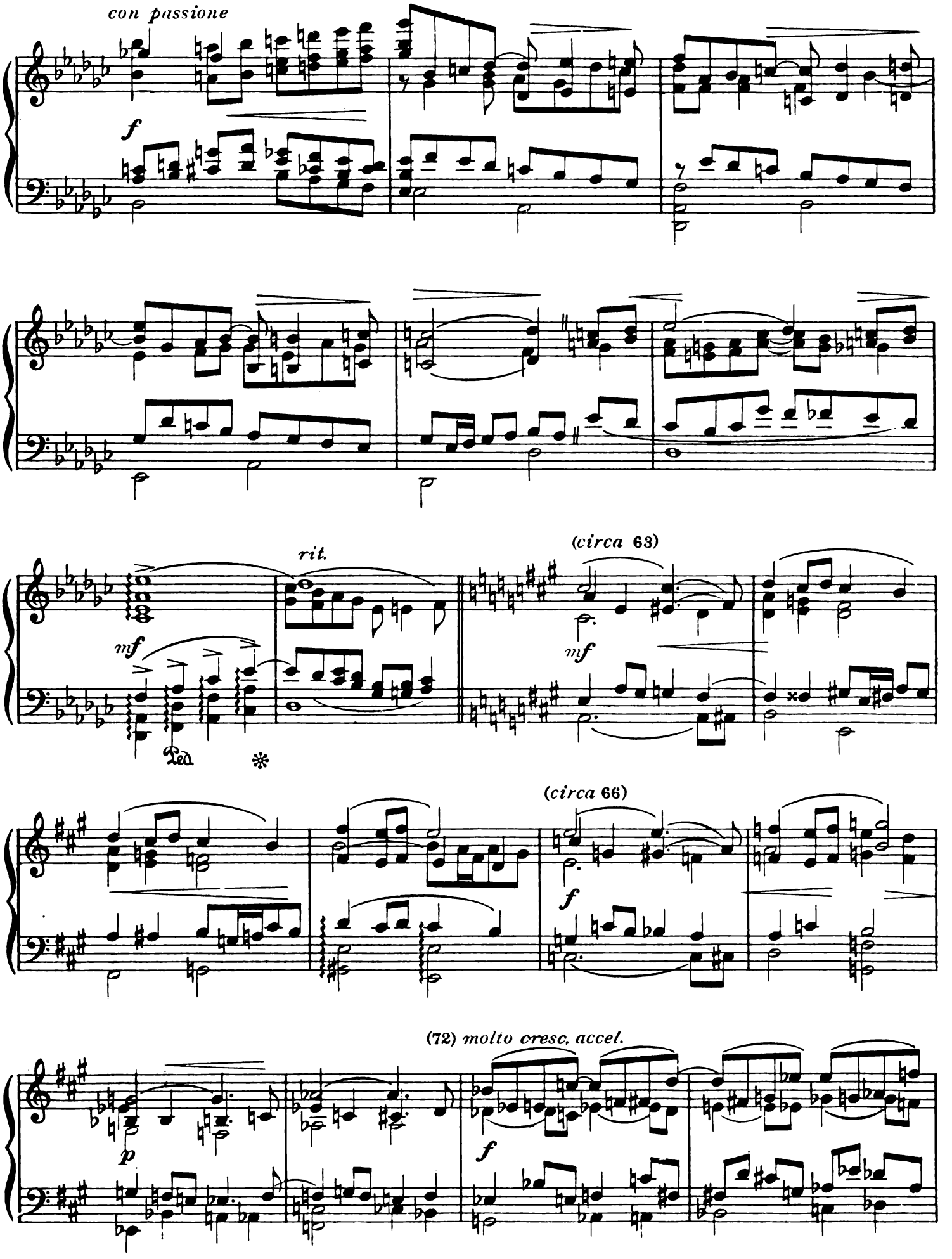


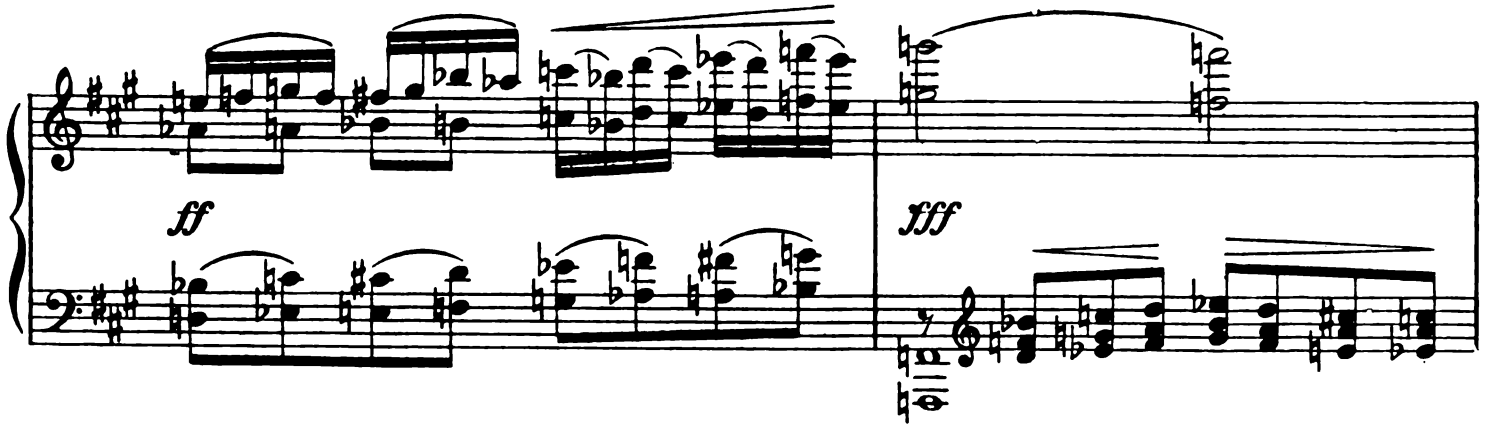


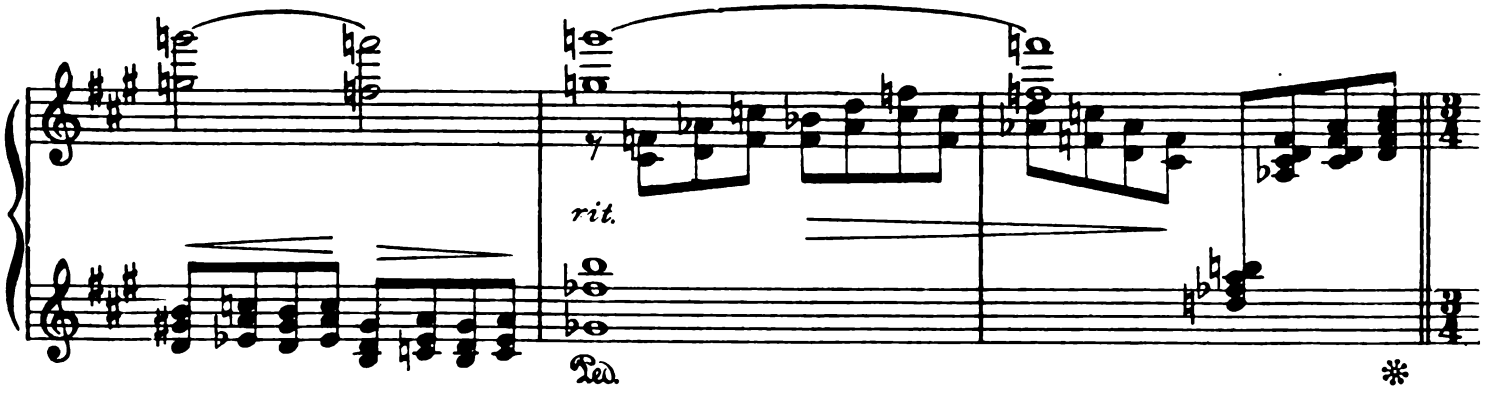


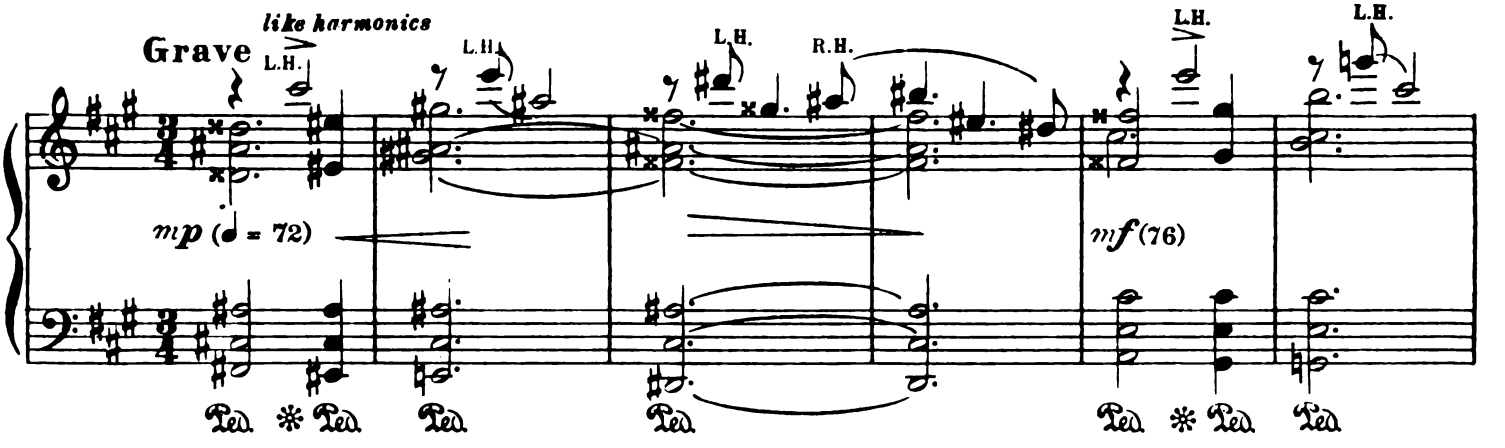


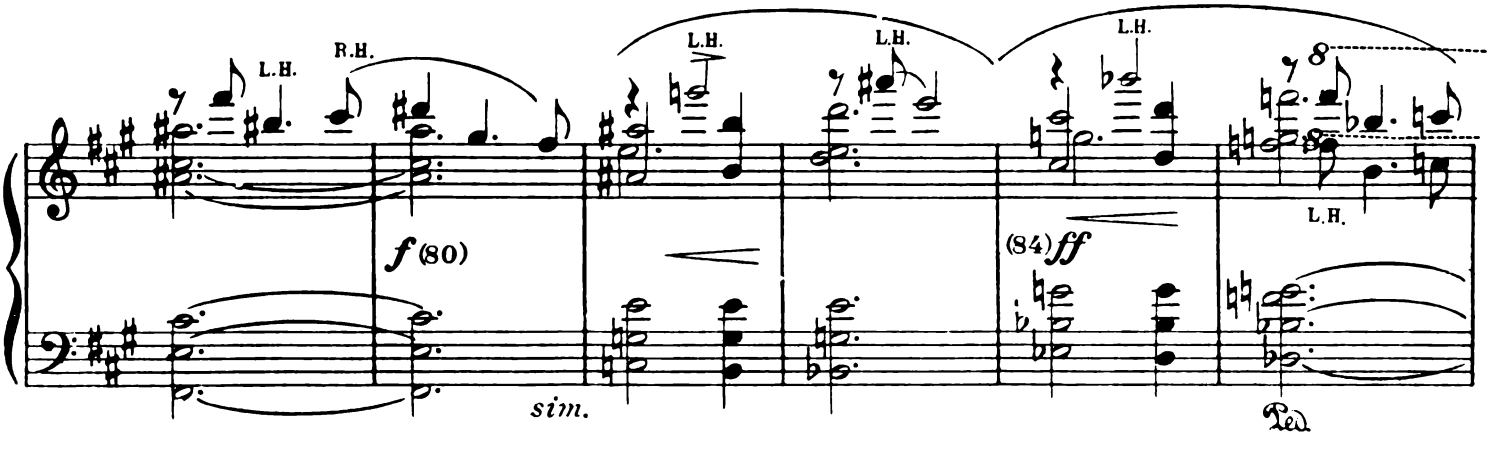

f
L.H.
3
mp
mp dim. e rit.
Cantando con amore (♩= 60)

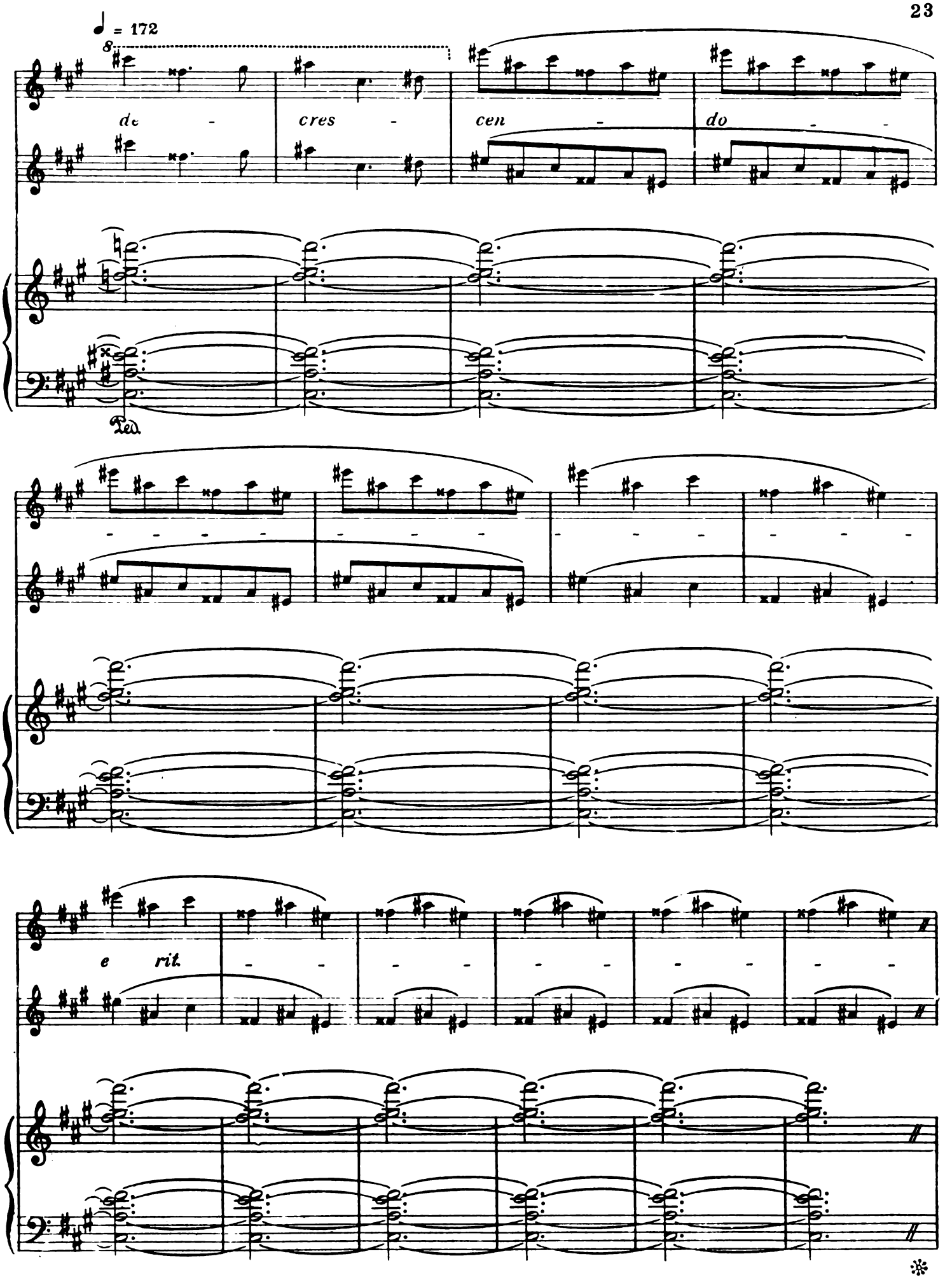

con passione
f
rit.
(circa 63)
mf
mf
Ped.
(circa 66)
f
(72) molto cresc. accel.
p
f

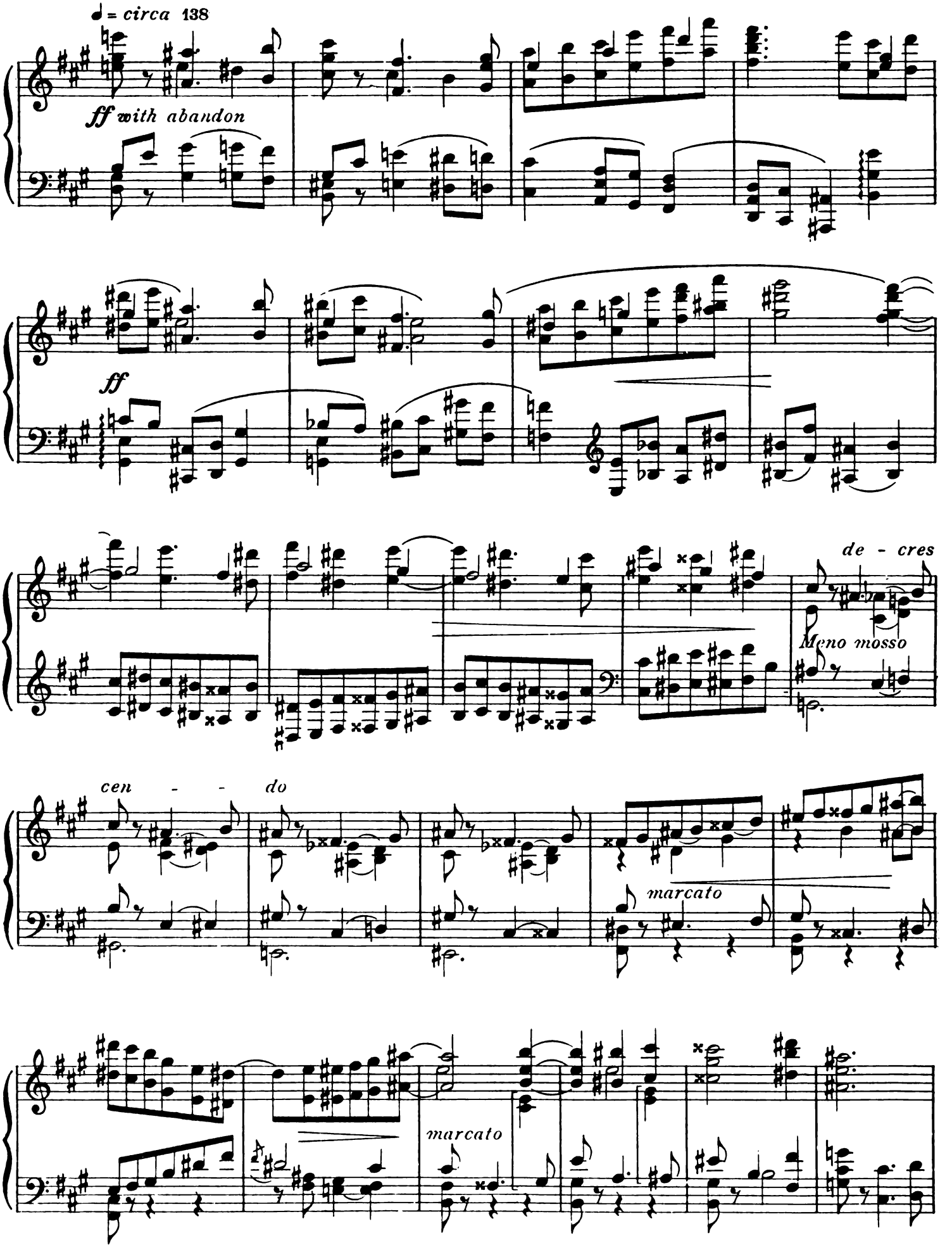

ff
fff

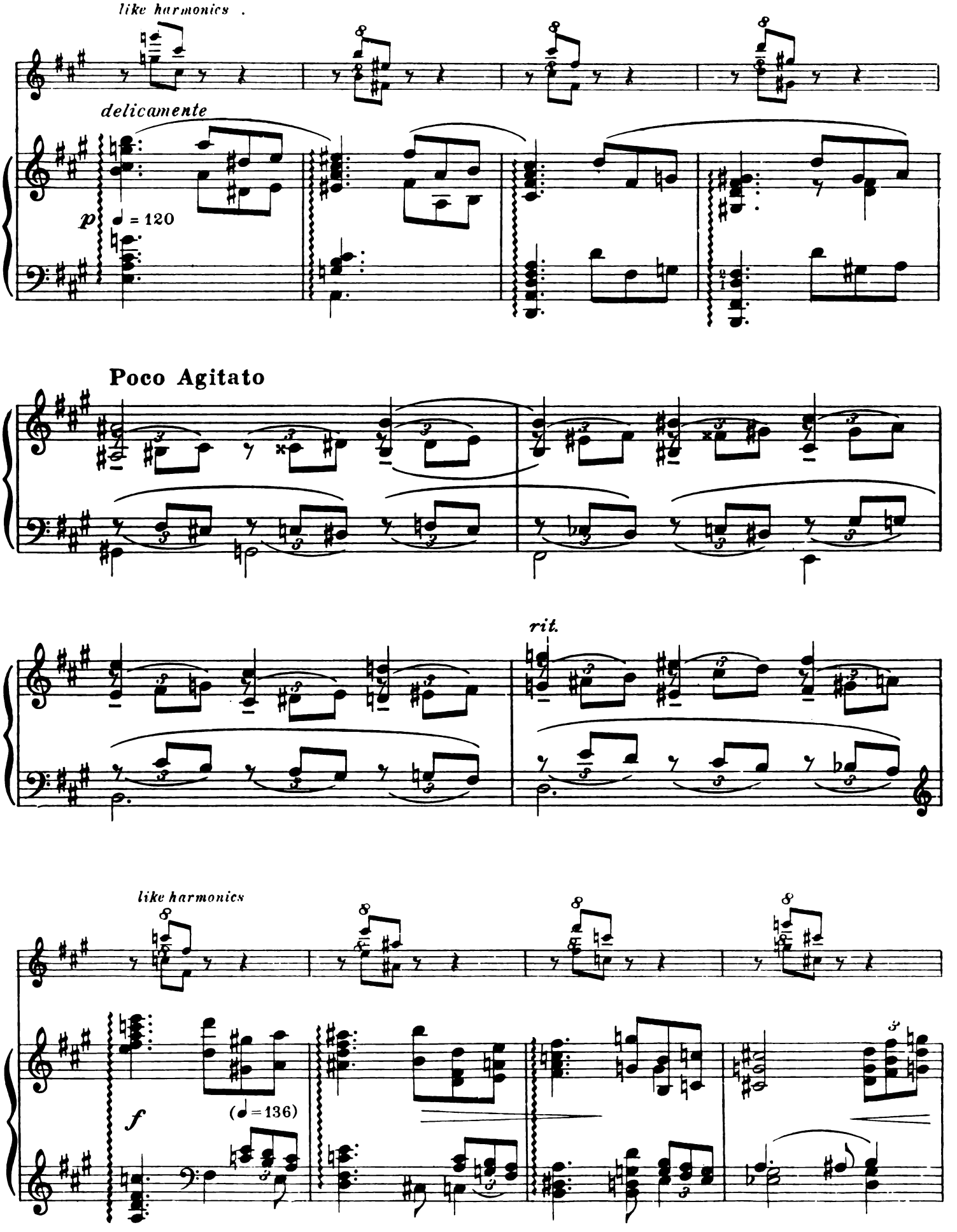

rit.
Ped.
*

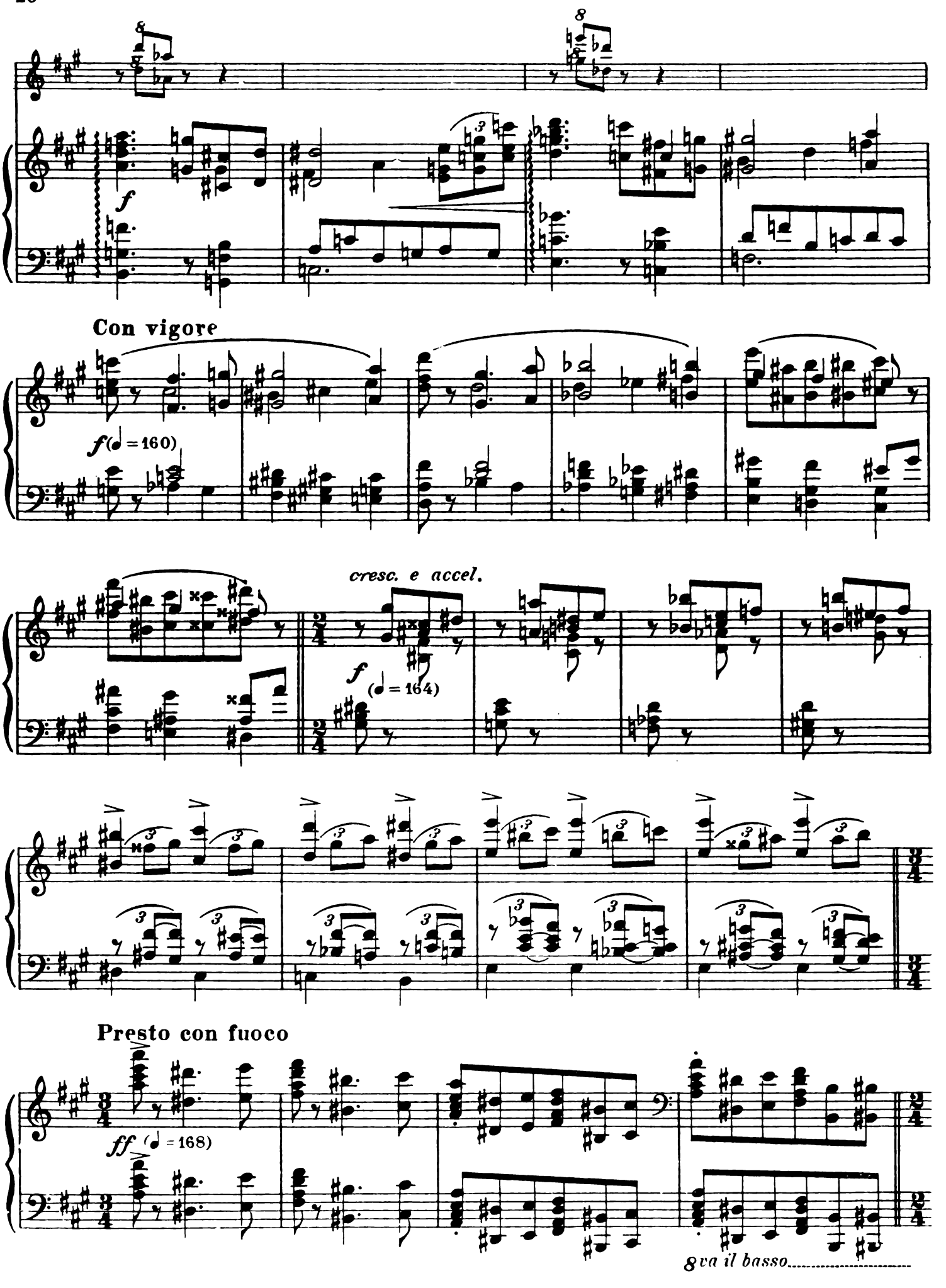

Grave
like harmonics
L.H.
R.H.
mp (♩ = 72)
mf (76)
Ped. * Ped.

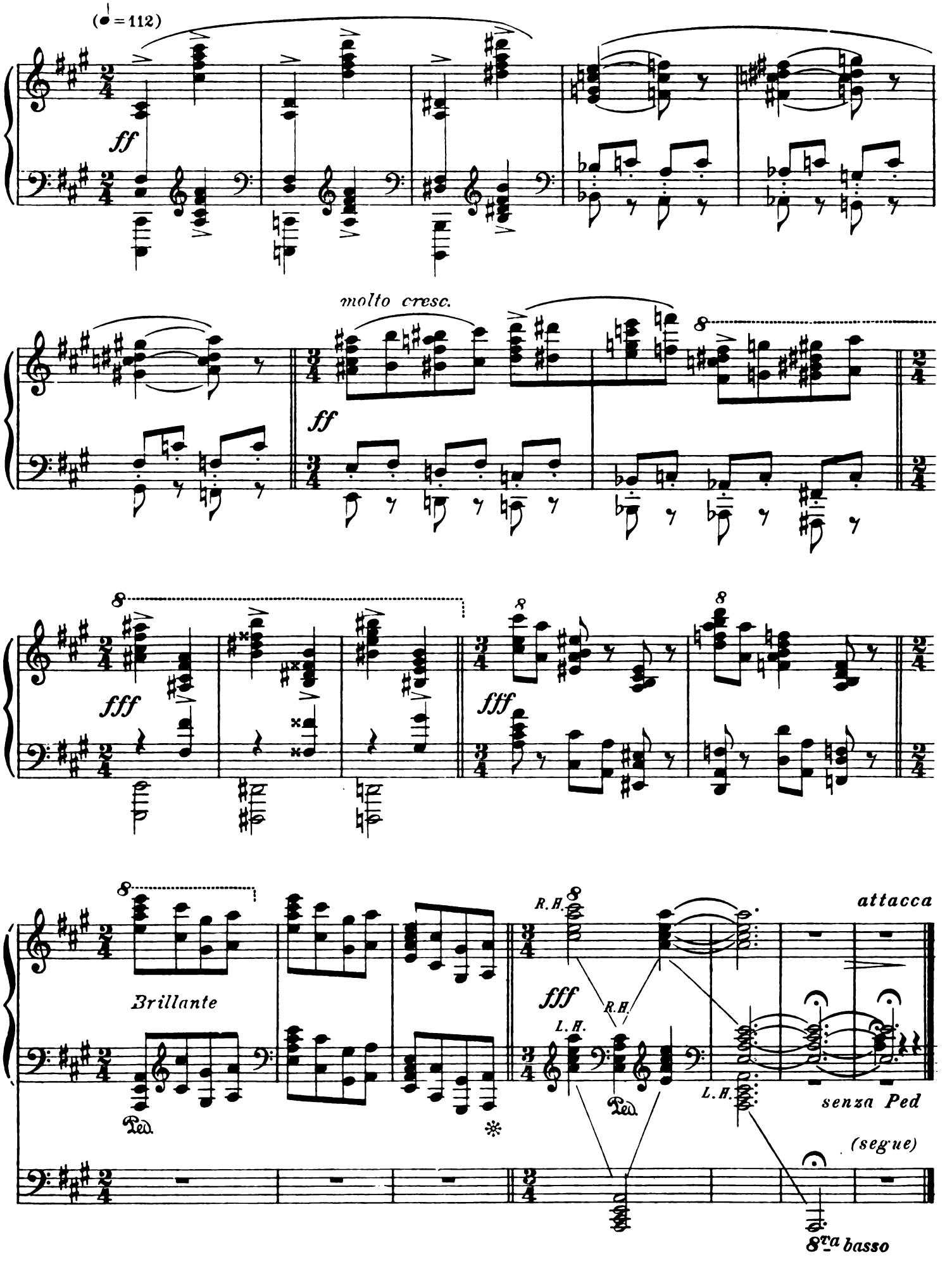

L.H.
R.H.
f (80)
sim.
(84) ff
8
Ped.


♩ = 172
8
de - cres - cen - do - -
Ped.
e rit.


♩ = circa 138
ff with abandon
ff
de - cres
Meno mosso
cen - - do
marcato
marcato

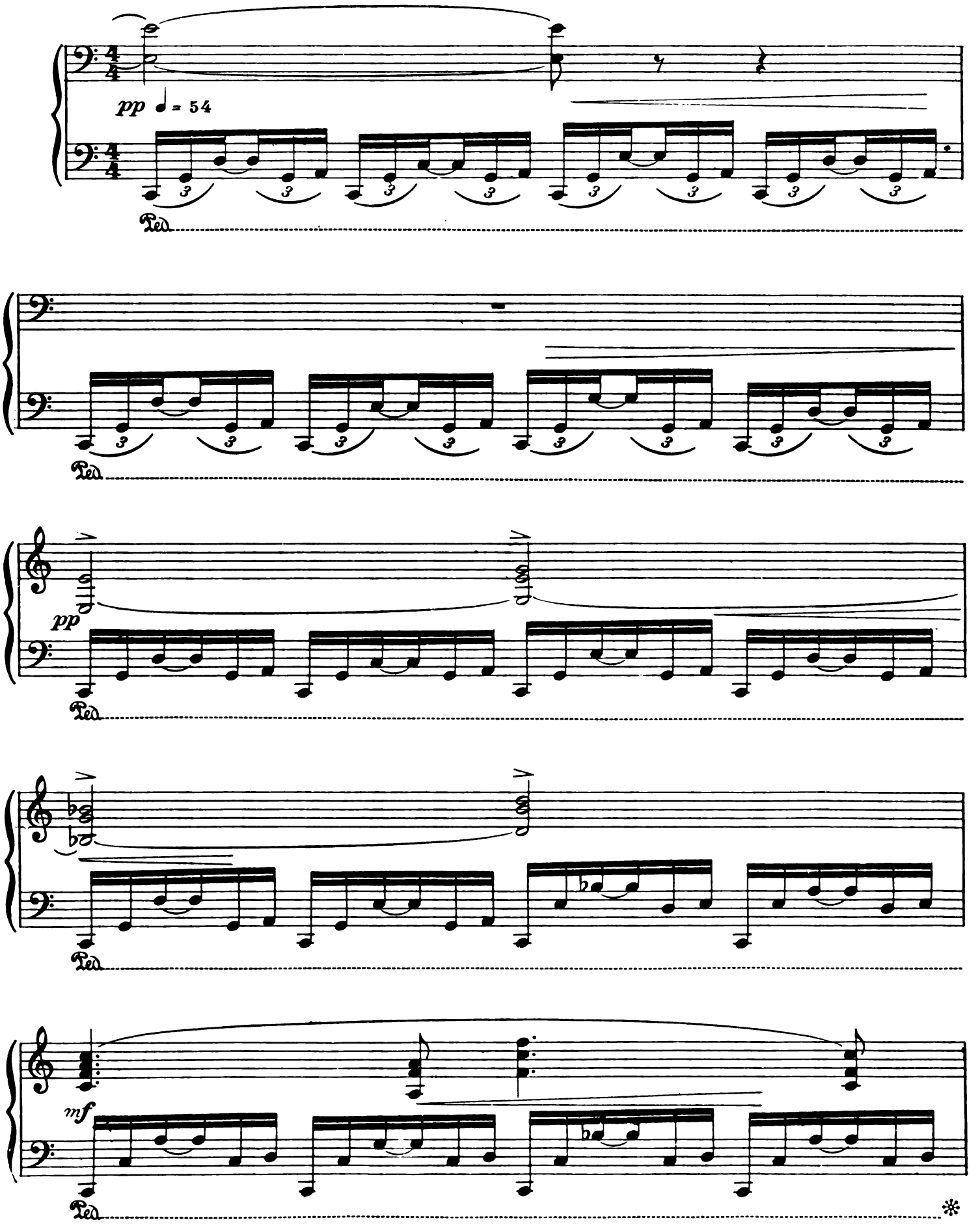

like harmonics
delicamente
p
♩ = 120
Poco Agitato
rit.
like harmonics
f
(♩ = 136)

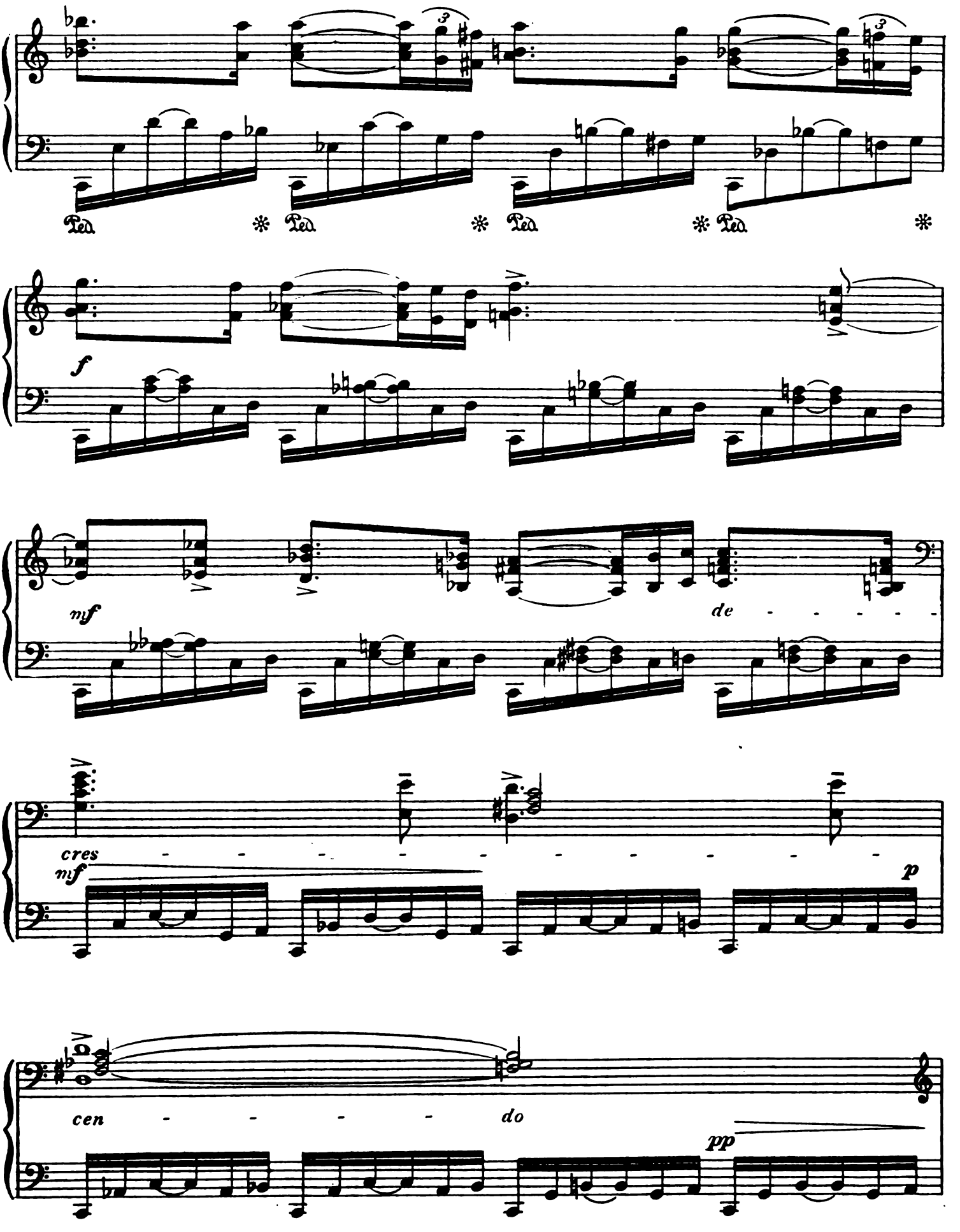

f
Con vigore
f (♩ = 160)
cresc. e accel.
f (♩ = 164)
Presto con fuoco
ff (♩ = 168)
8va il basso

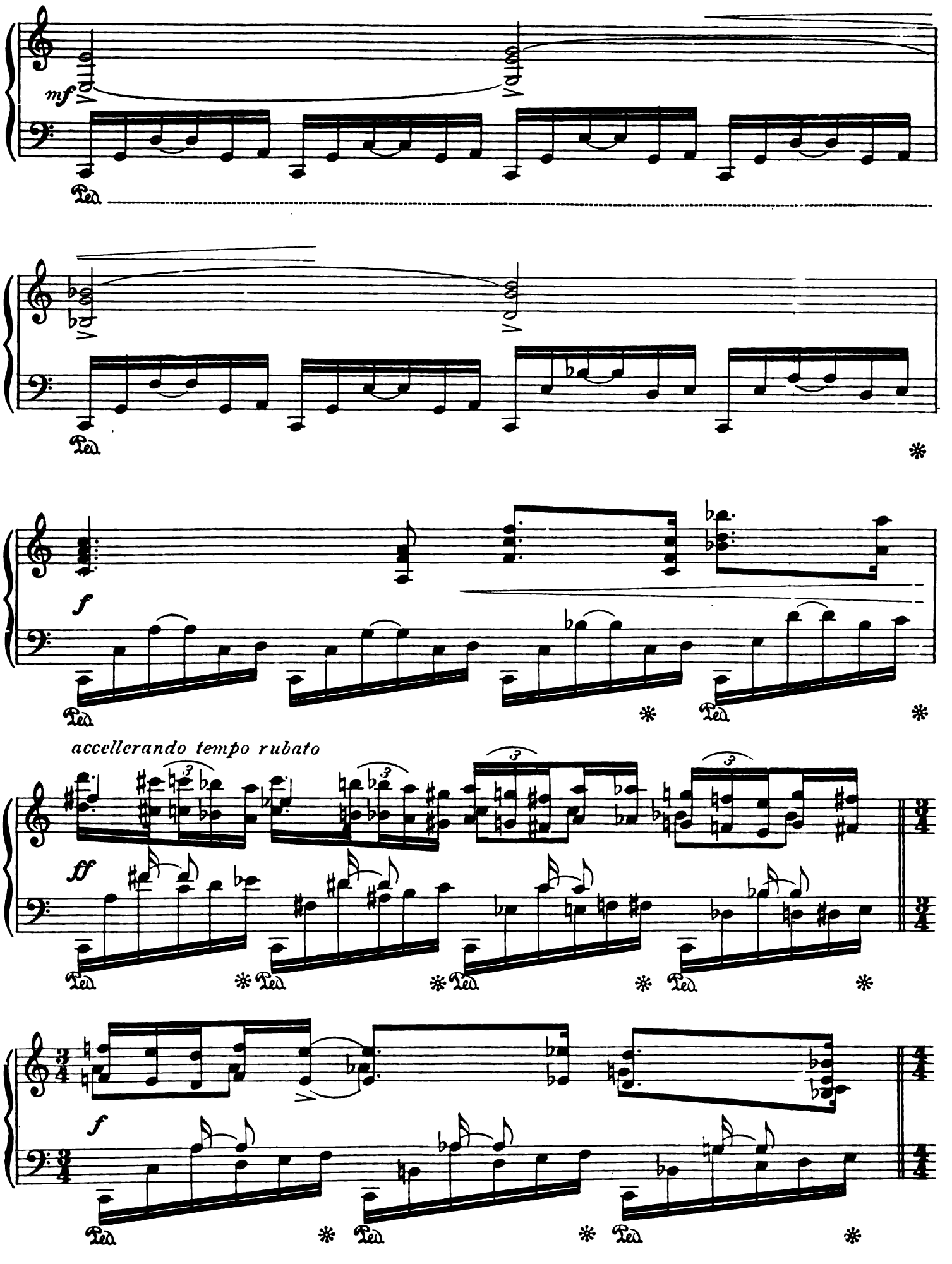

(♩= 112)
ff
molto cresc.
ff
fff
fff
Brillante
Ped.
R.H.
fff
L.H.
R.H.
Ped.
L.H.
attacca
senza Ped
(segue)
8va basso

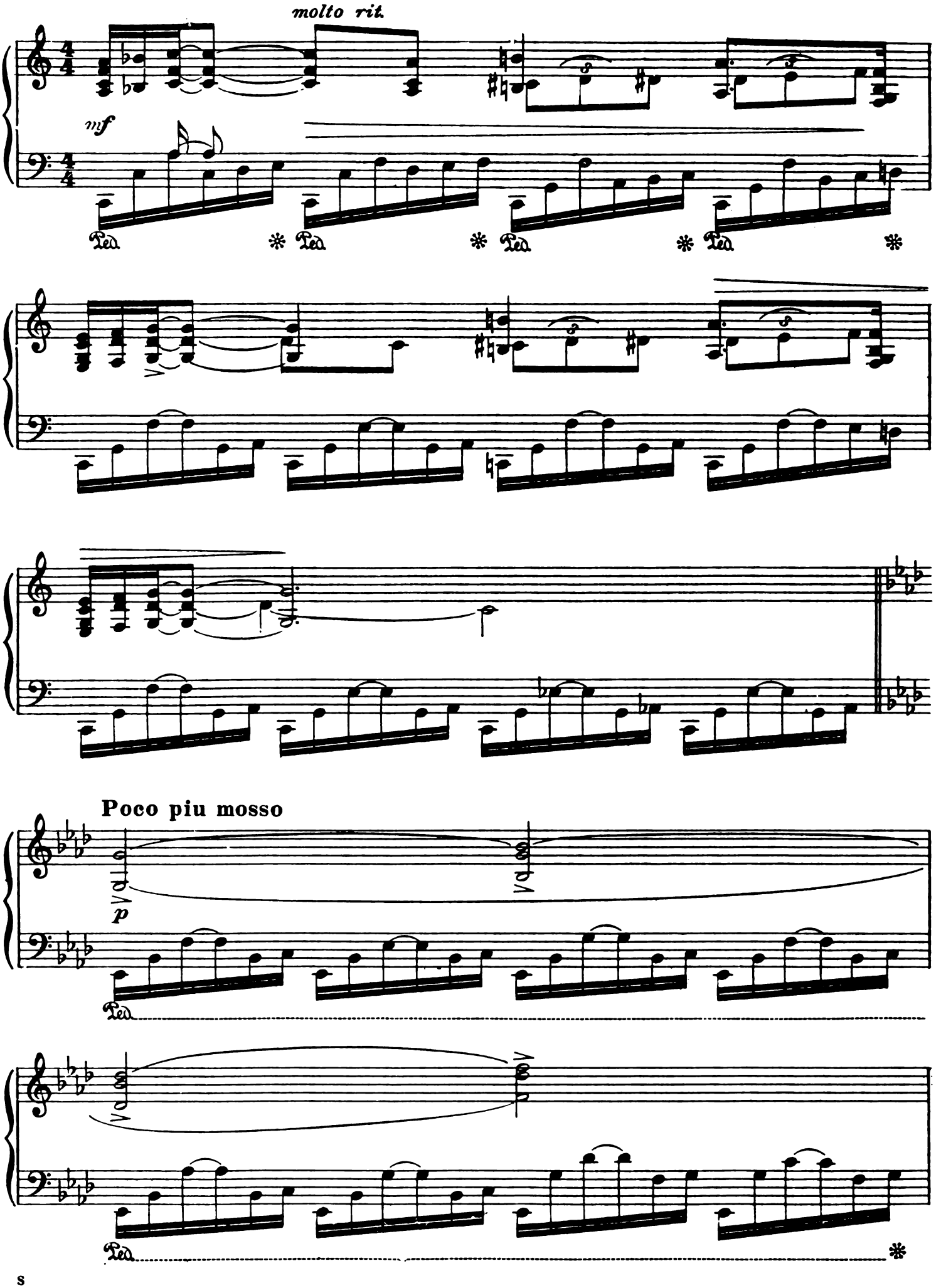
III. Renunciation

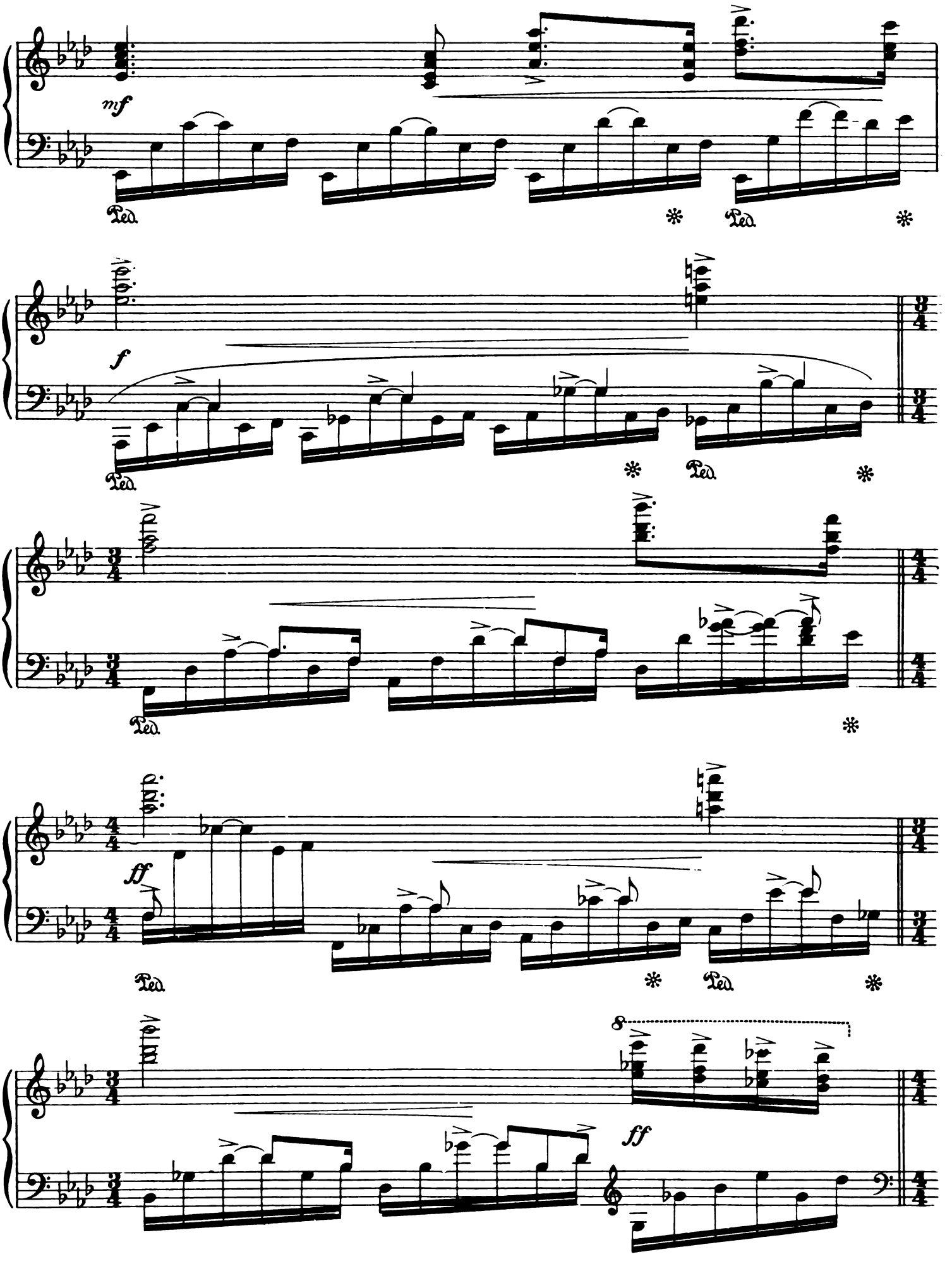
Lento sostenuto e appassionato



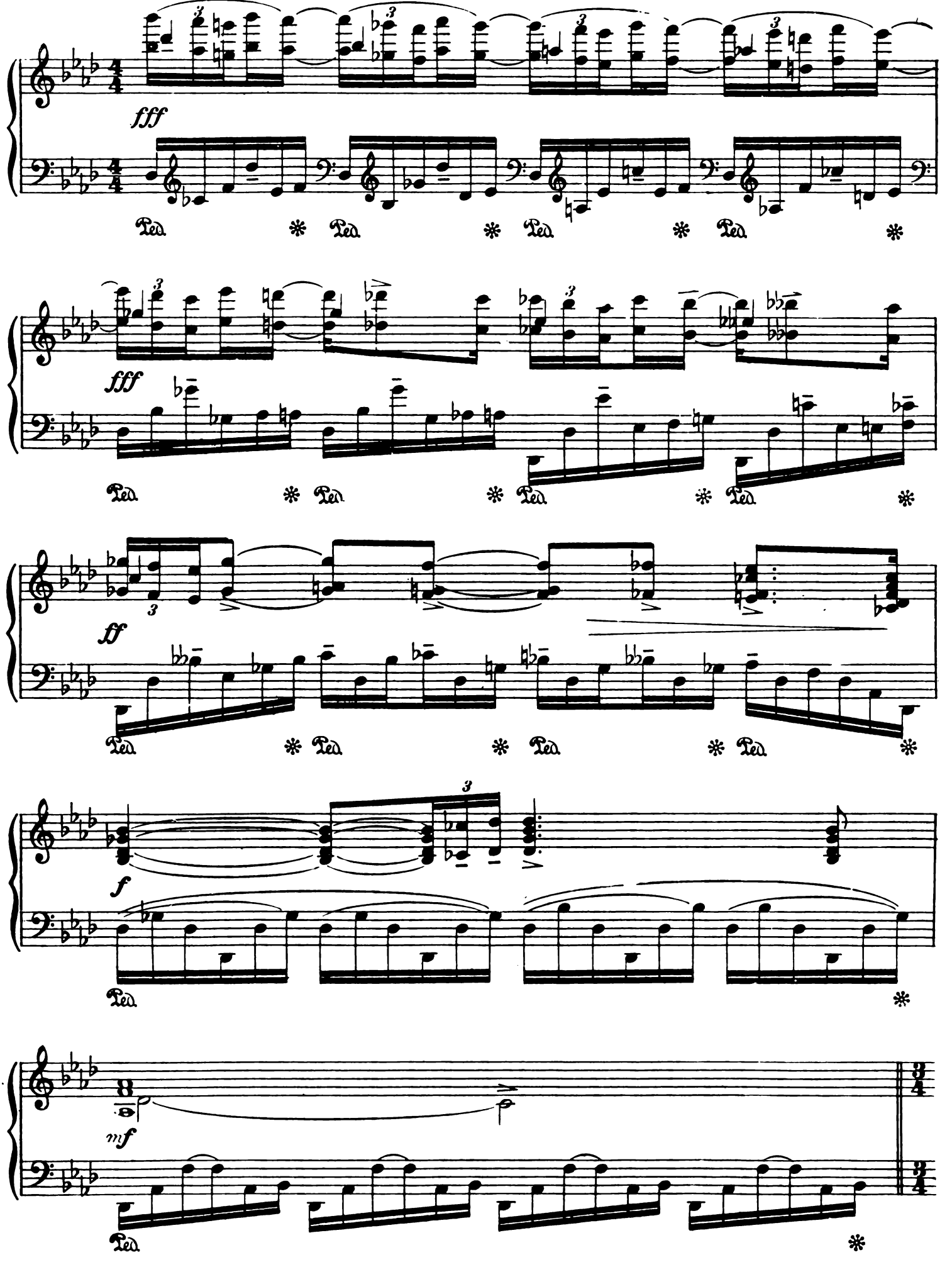

Ped
Ped
Ped
Ped
f
mf
de
cres
mf
p
cen
do
pp

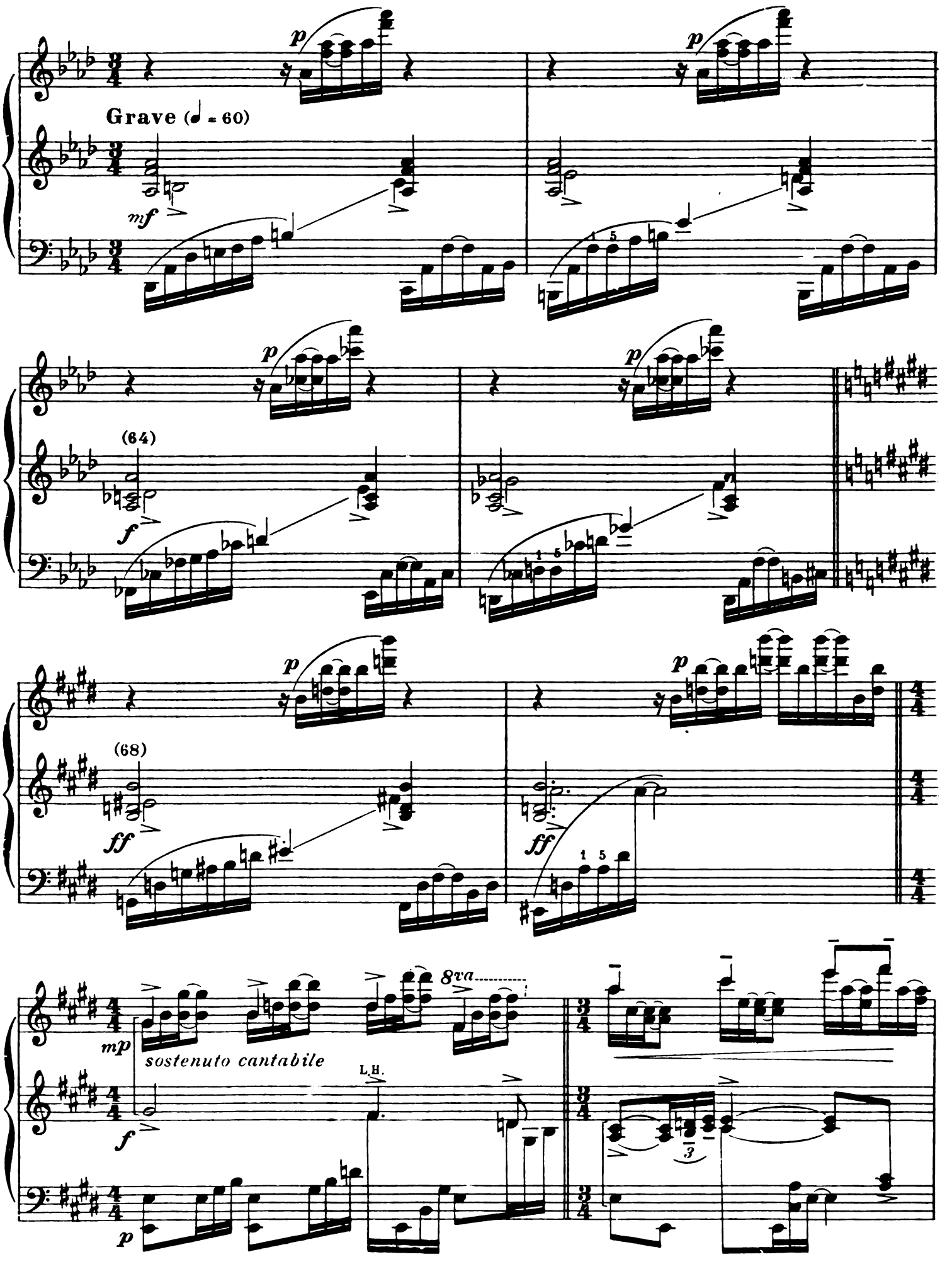

mf
Ped.
f
accellerando tempo rubato
ff

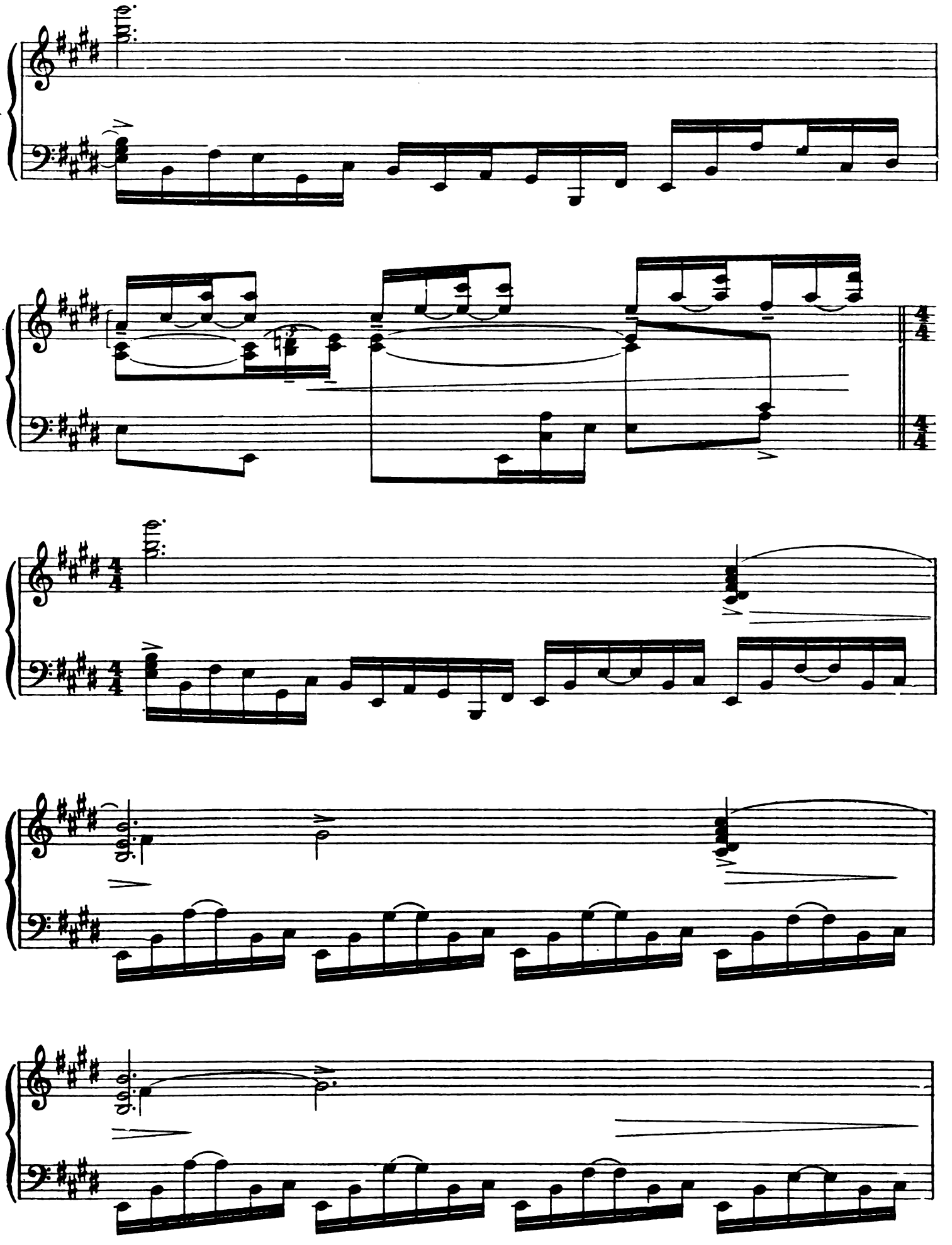

molto rit.
mf
Ped
Poco piu mosso
p

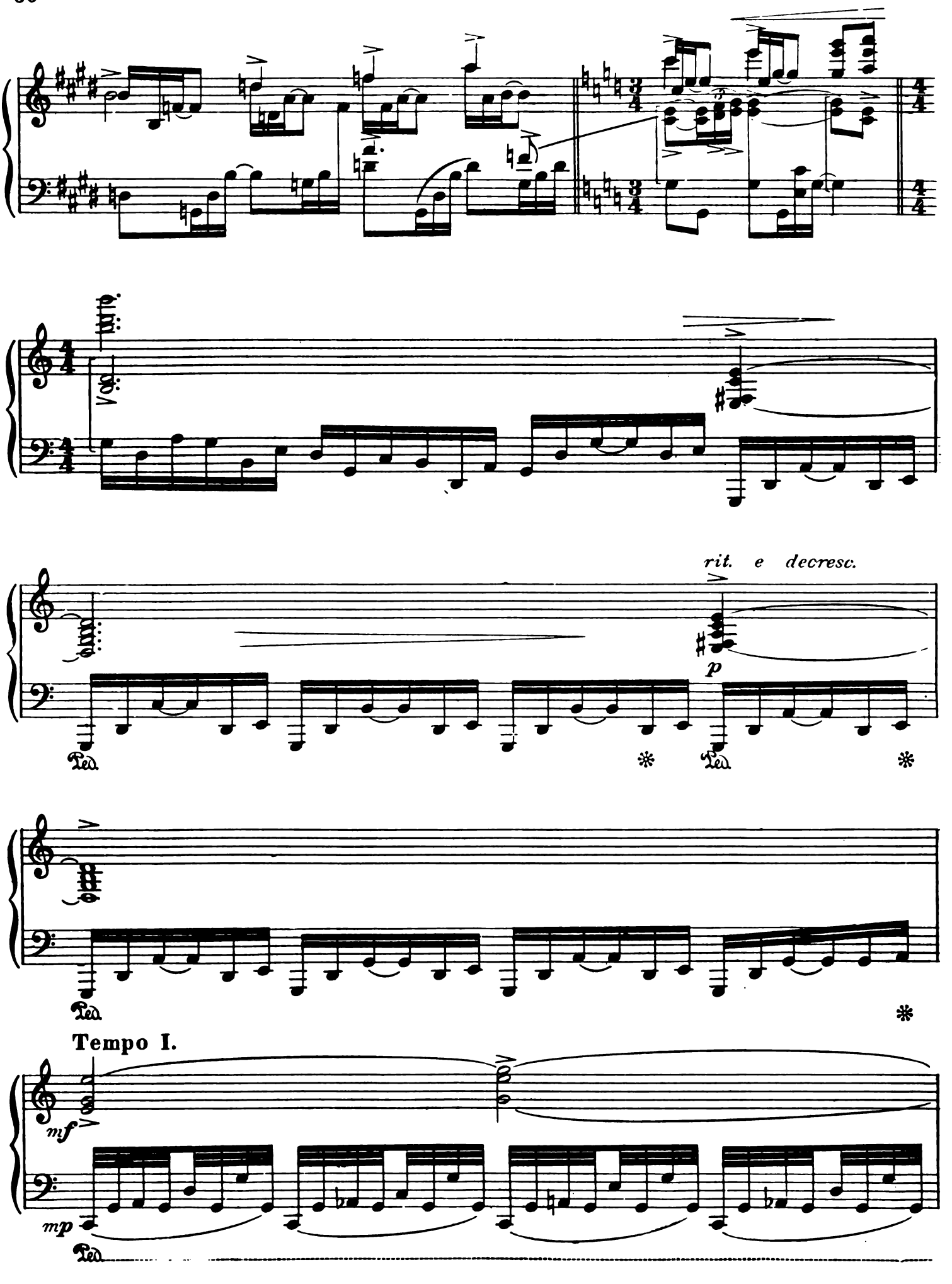

mf
Ped
f
ff
8
ff

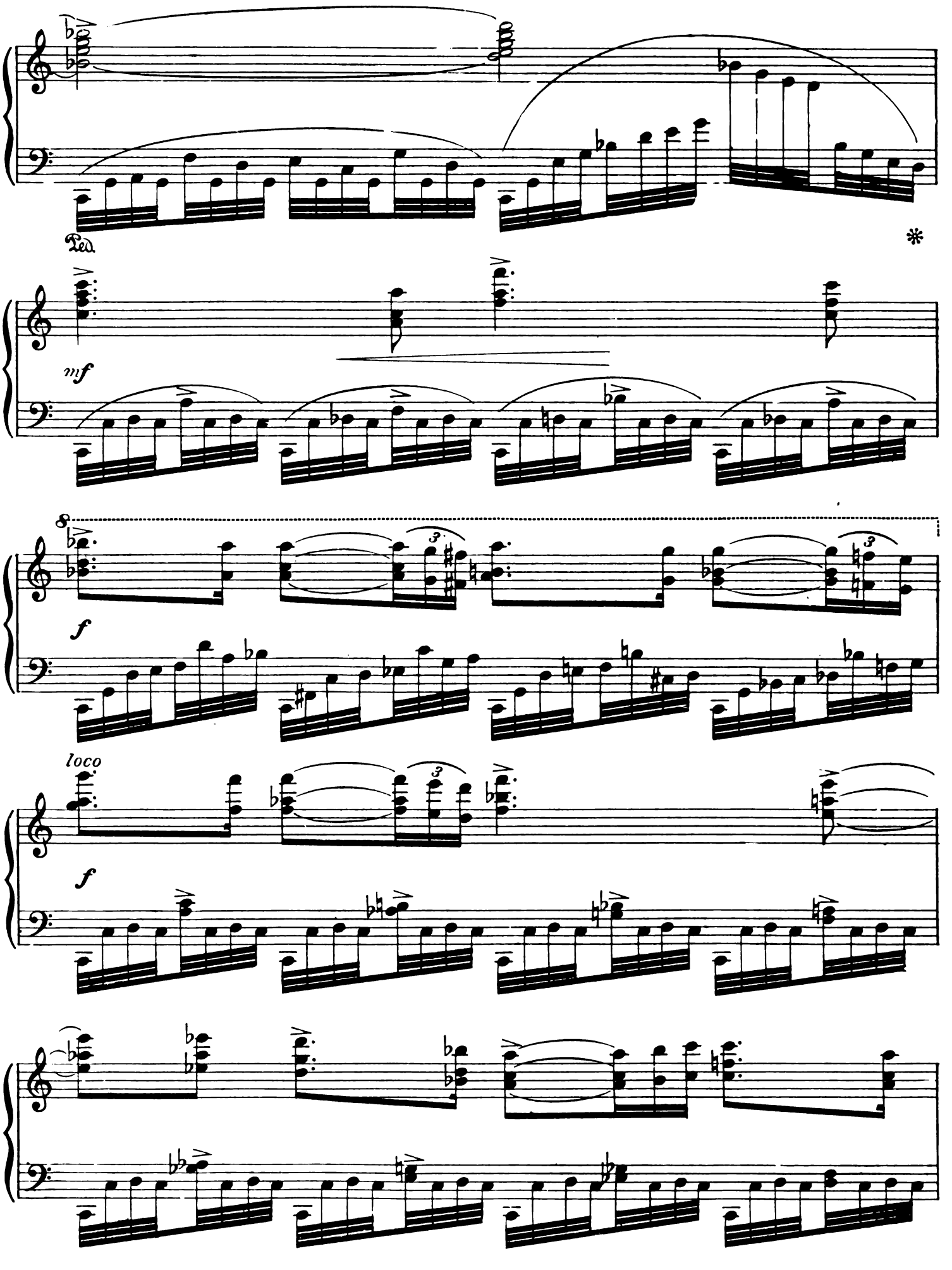
Molto appassionato e accelerando e tempo rubato

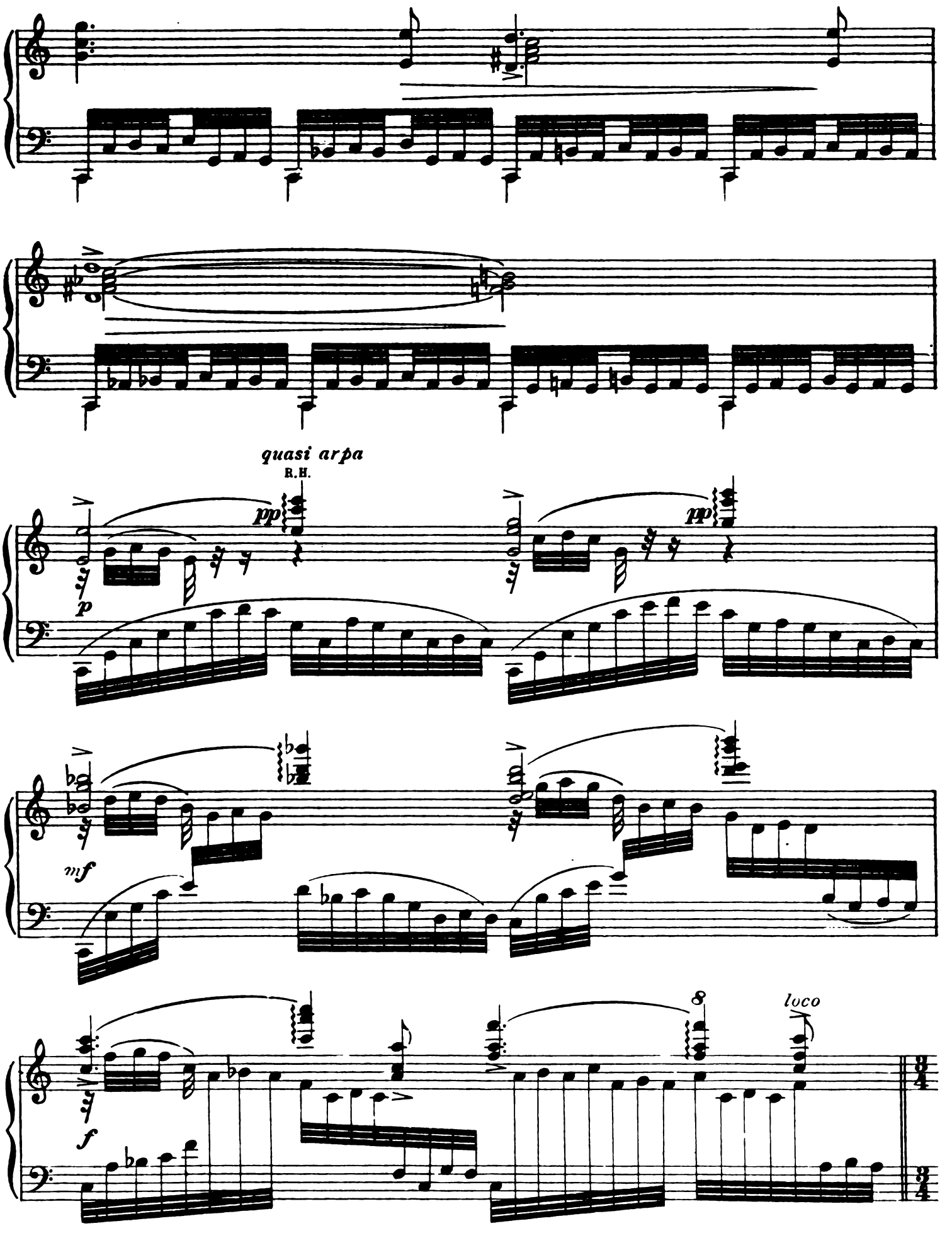


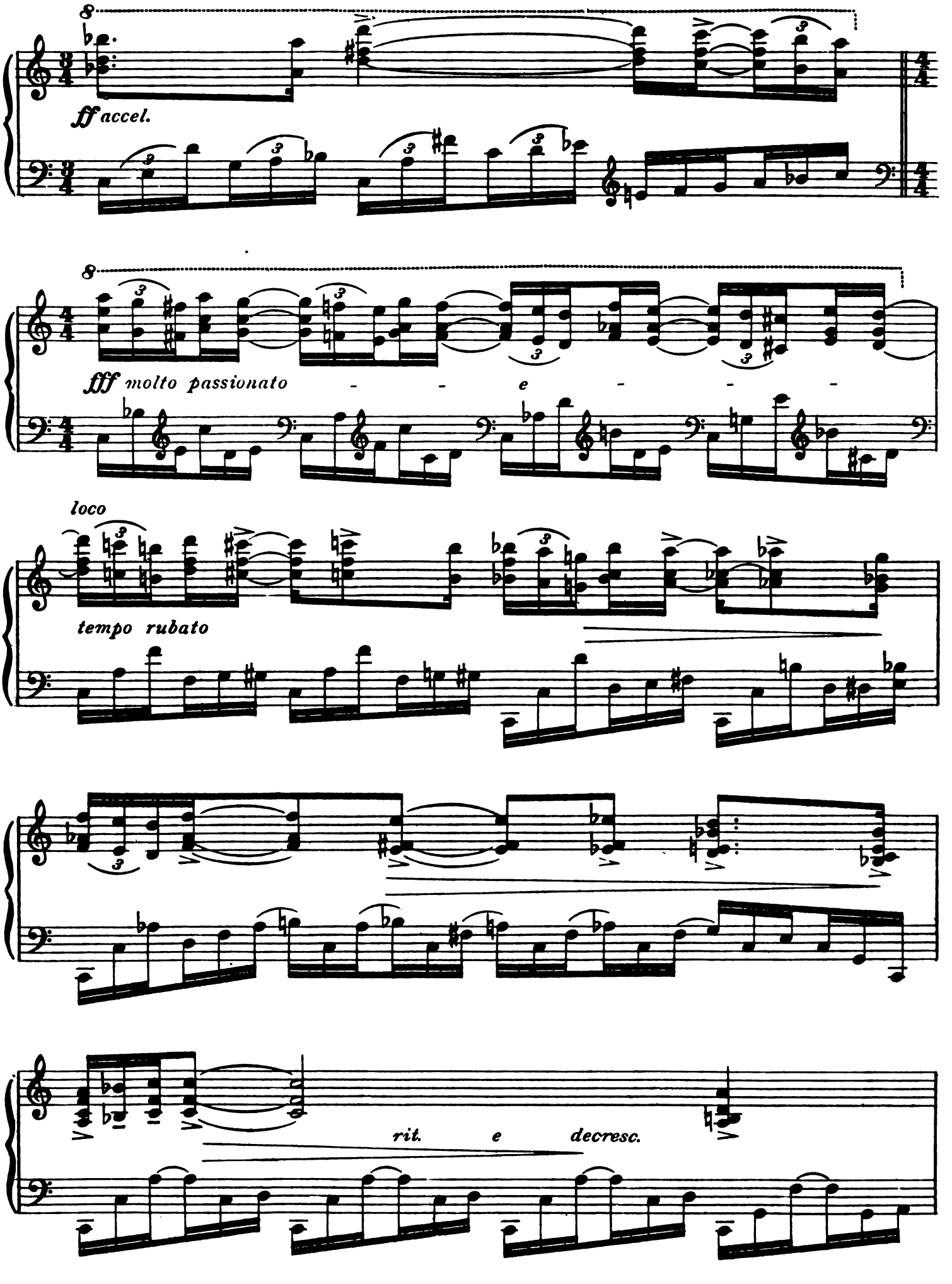

Grave (♩ = 60)
mf
(64)
f
(68)
ff
mp
sostenuto cantabile
8va
L.H.
p

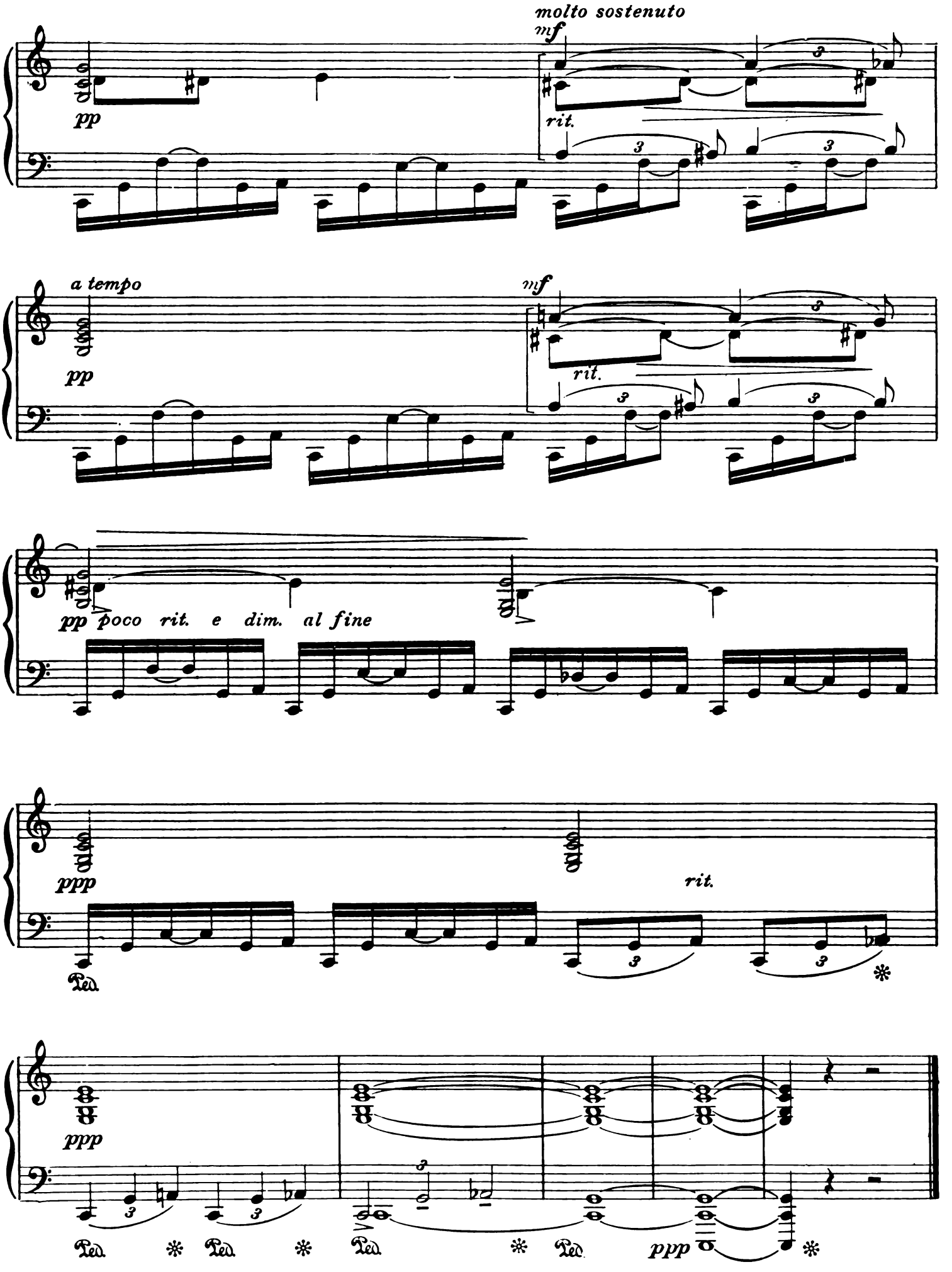



rit. e decresc.
p
Tempo I.
mf
mp

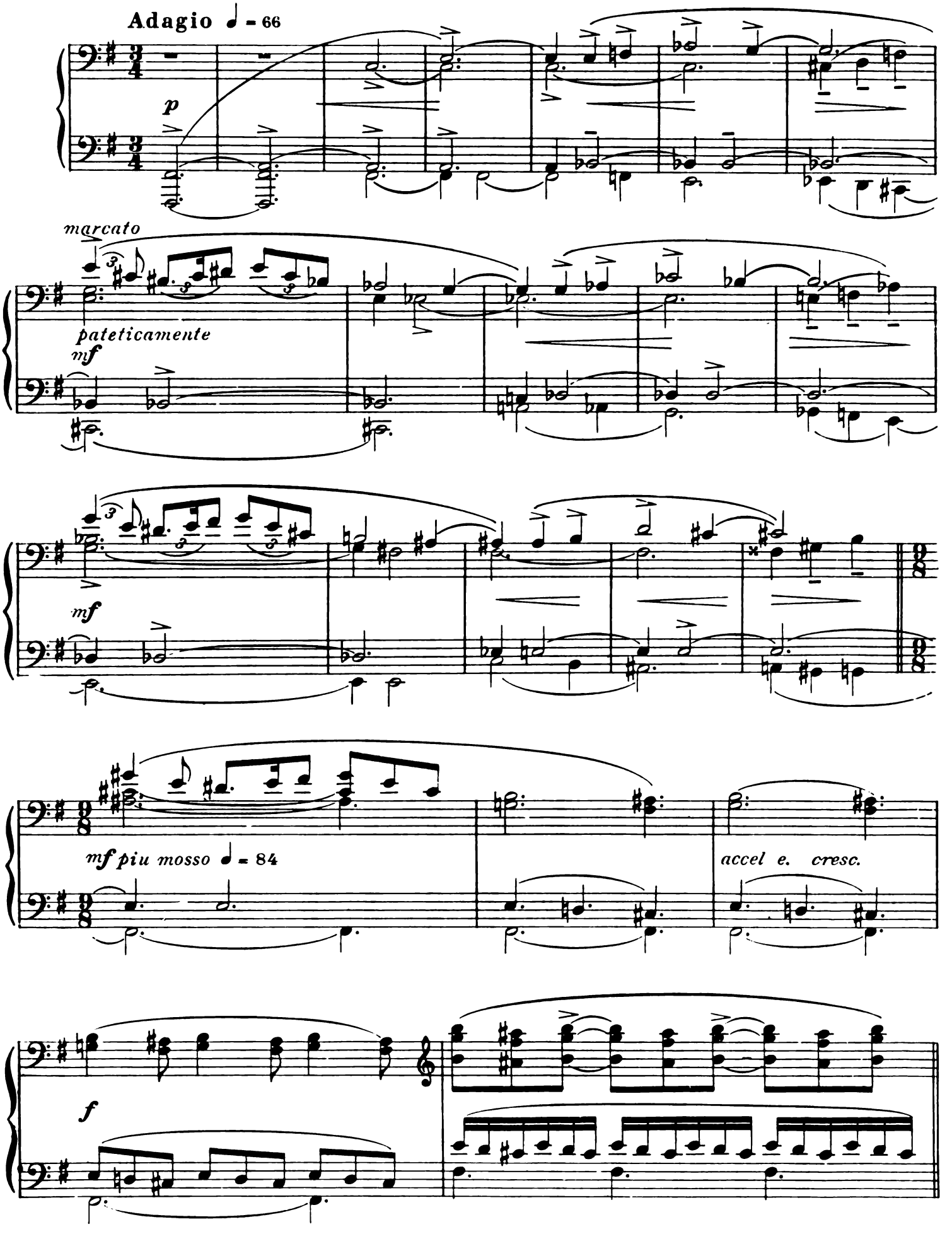

Ped.
*
mf
8
f
loco
f


quasi arpa
R.H.
pp
p
pp
mf
f
8
loco

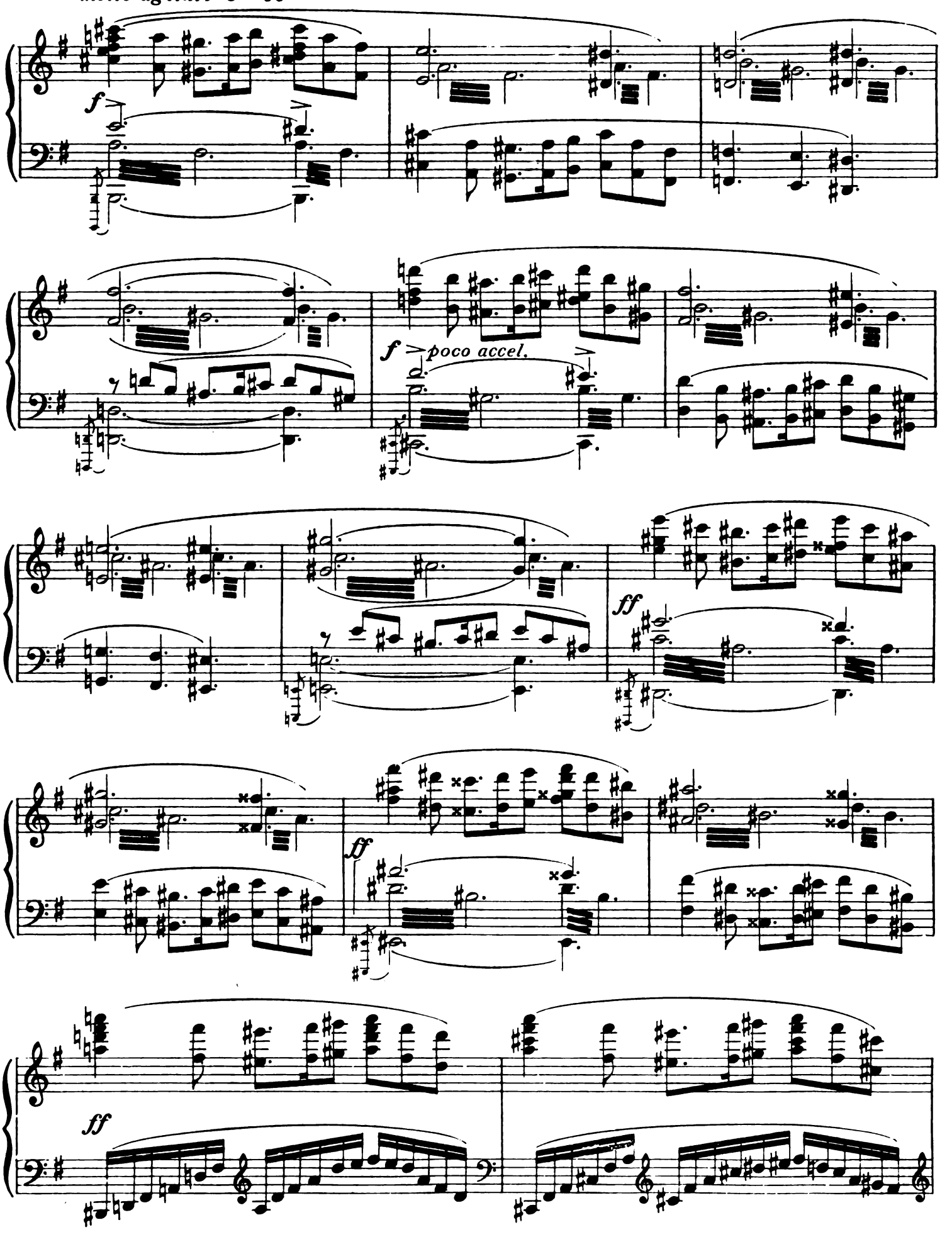

8
ff accel.
8
fff molto passionato - - - e - - -
loco
tempo rubato
rit. e decresc.

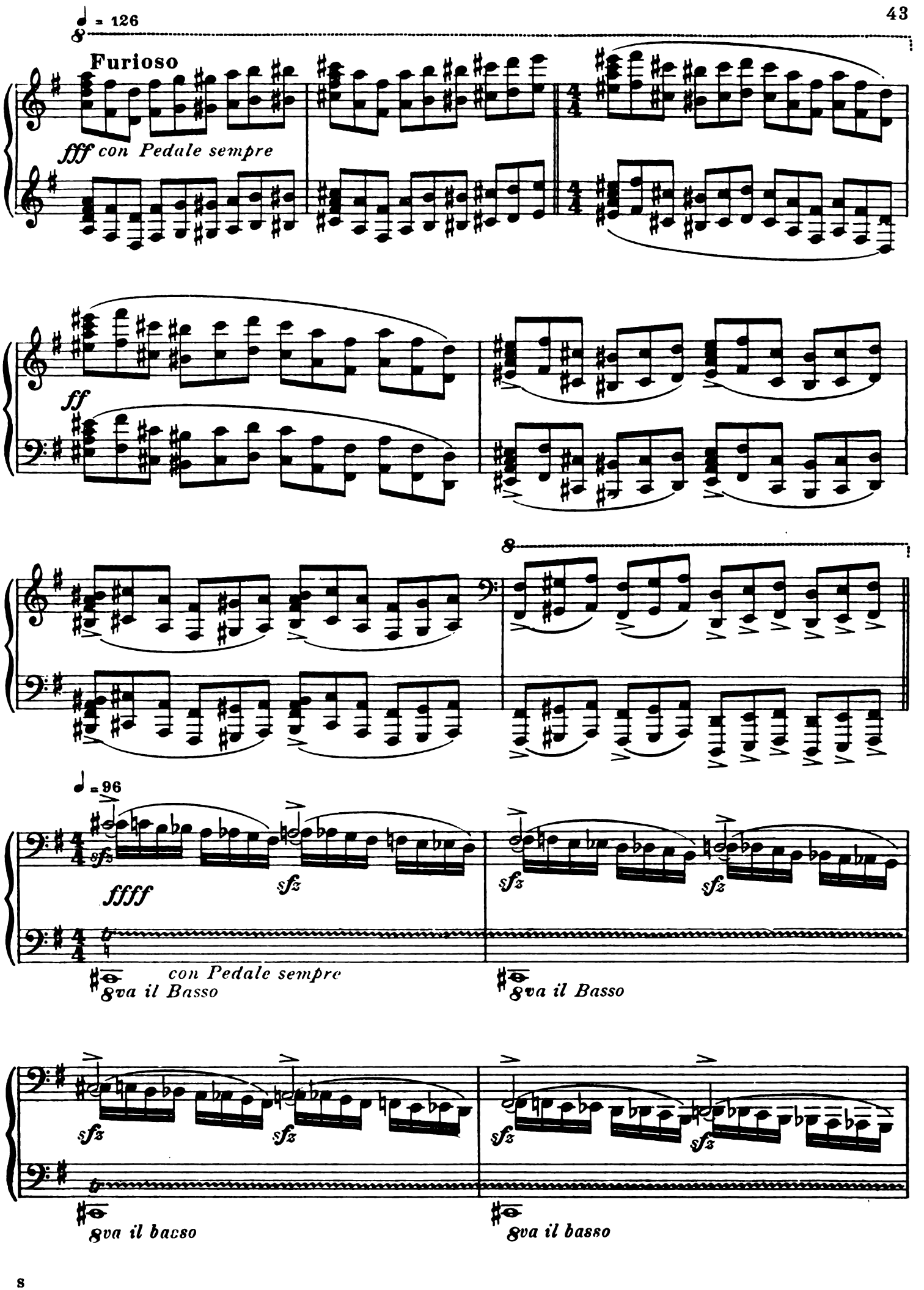

molto sostenuto
mf
pp
rit.
a tempo
mf
pp
rit.
pp poco rit. e dim. al fine
ppp
rit.
Ped.
ppp
Ped. Ped. Ped. Ped. ppp

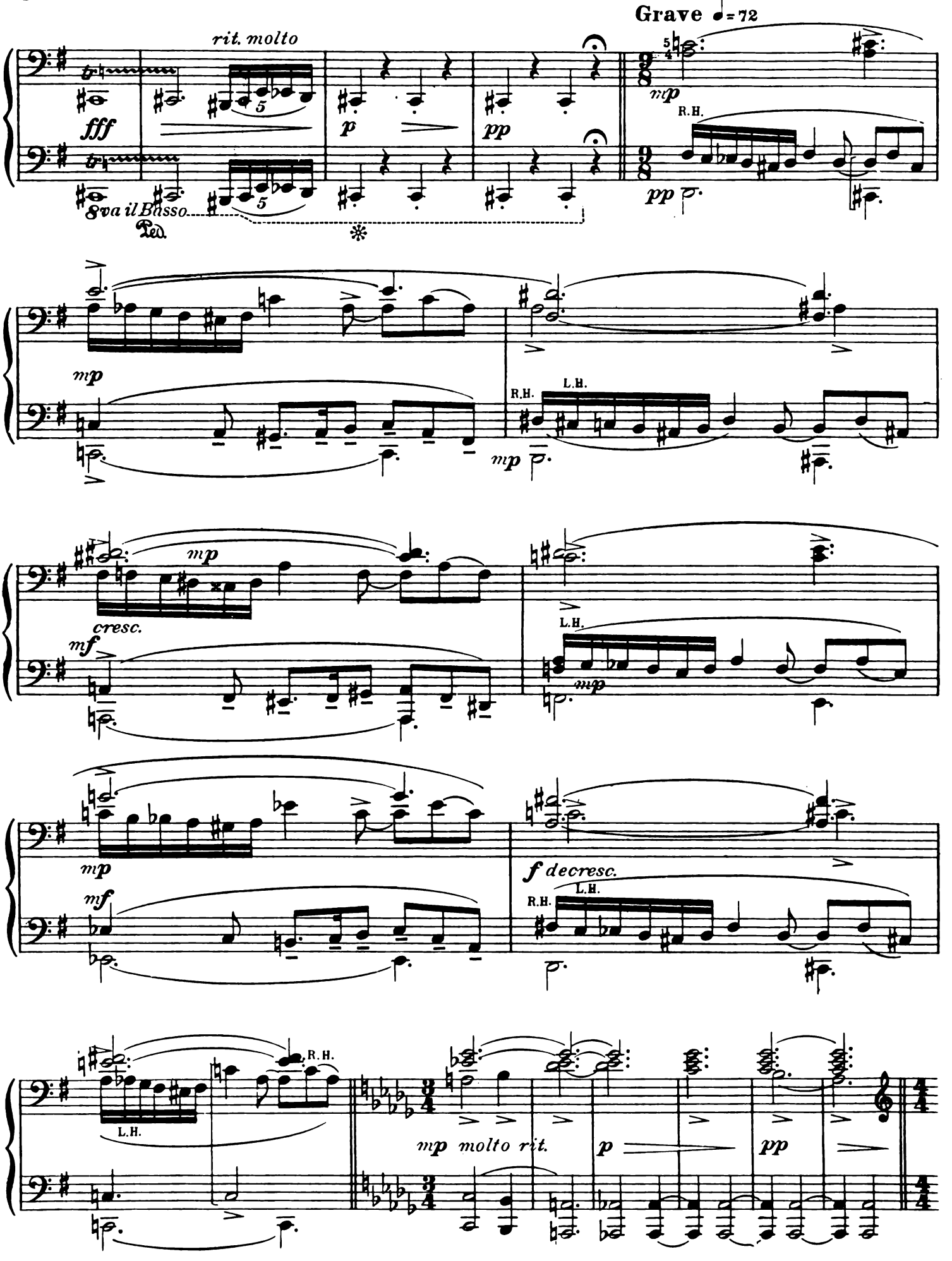
IV. Transfiguration

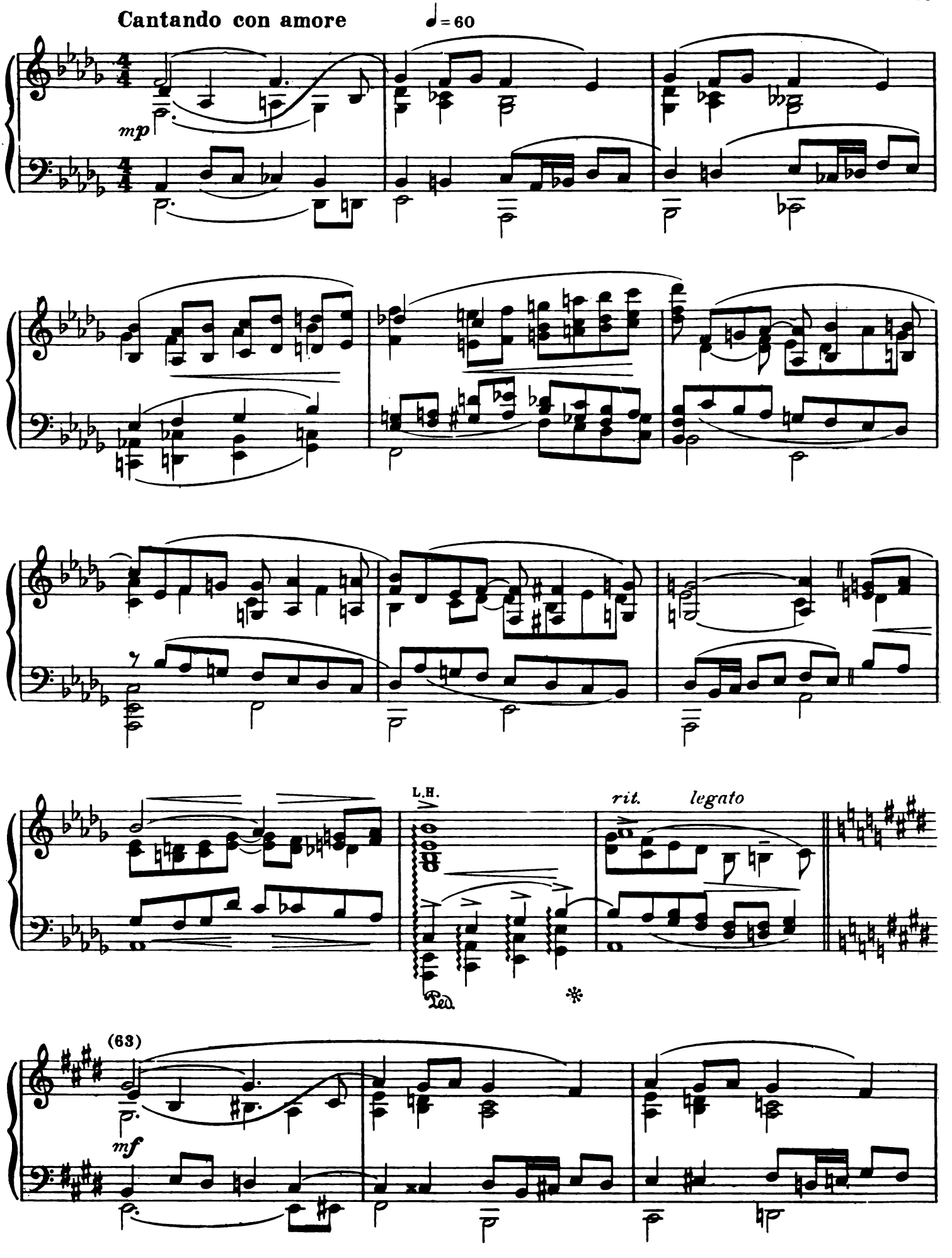


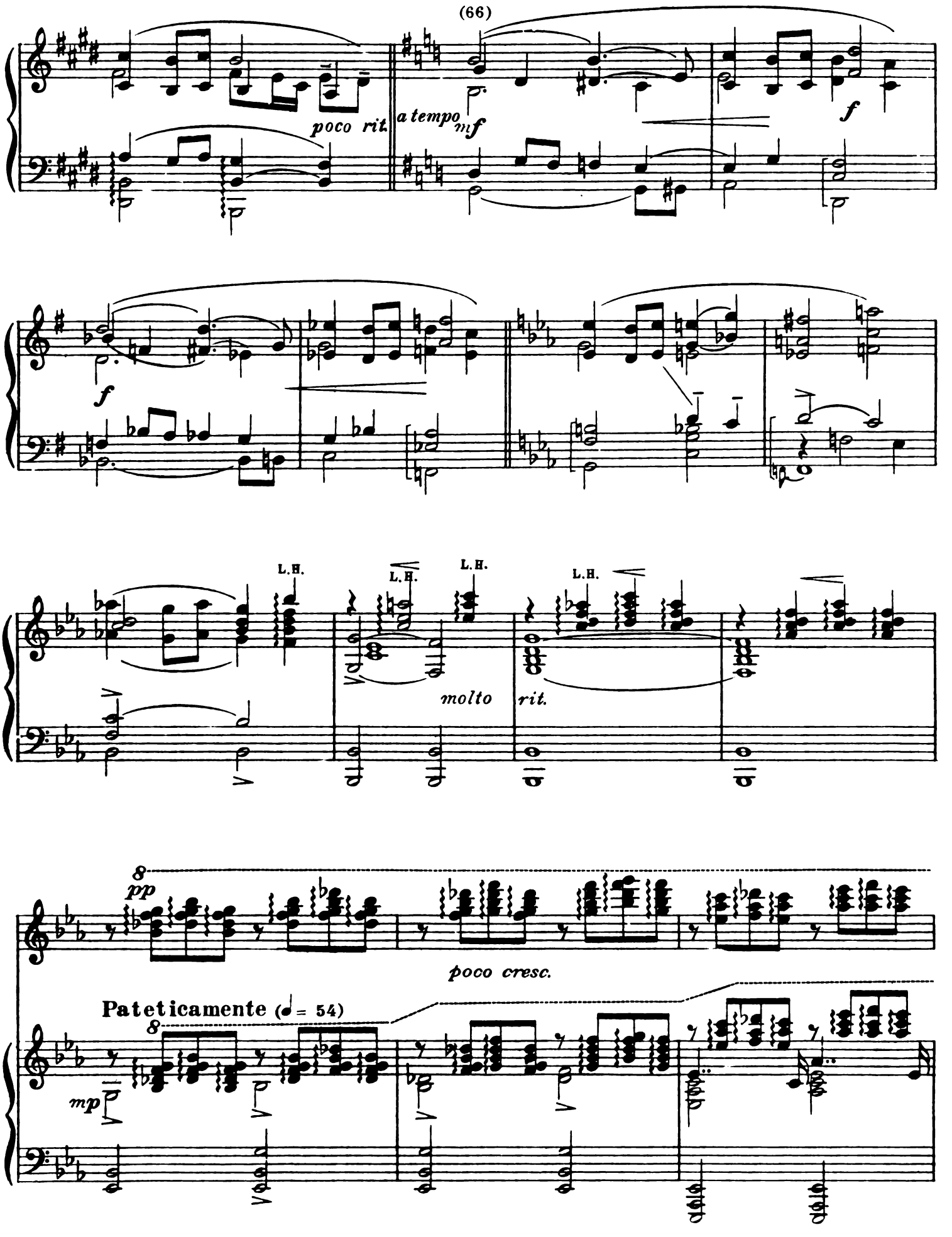
molto agitato ♩ = 96

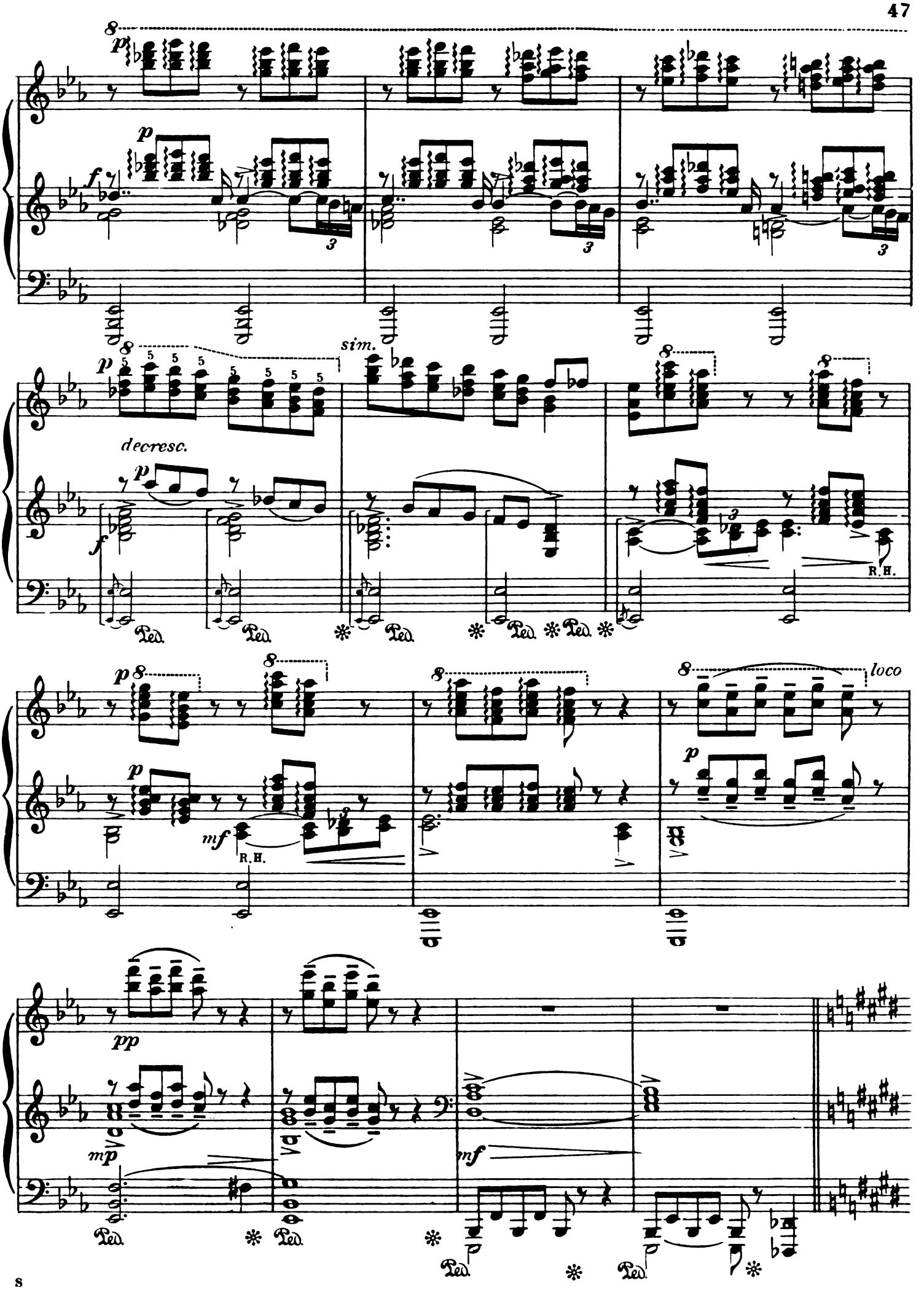


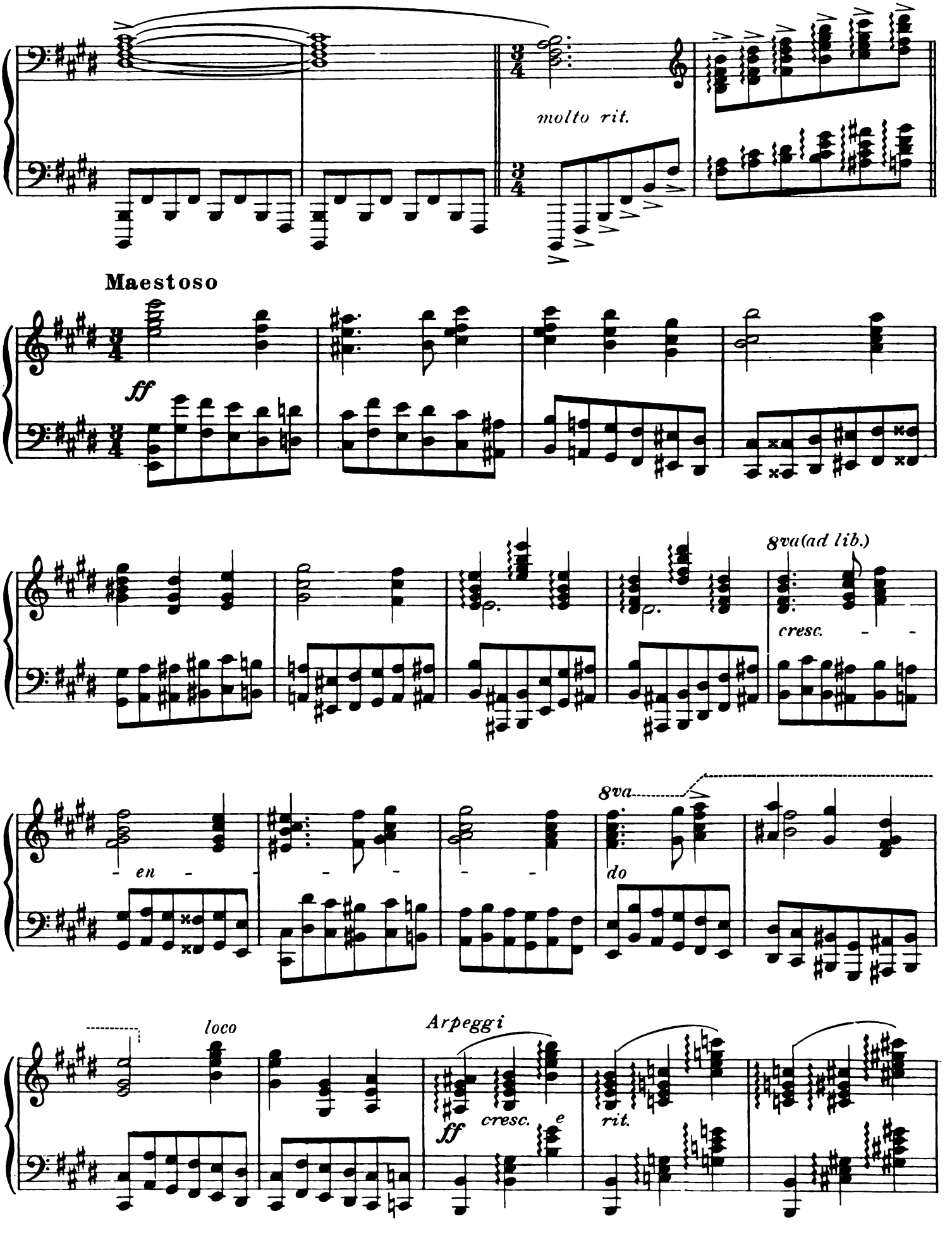

♩ = 126
Furioso
fff con Pedale sempre
ff
8
♩ = 96
sfz
ffff
con Pedale sempre
8va il Basso
8va il Basso
8va il bacso
8va il basso

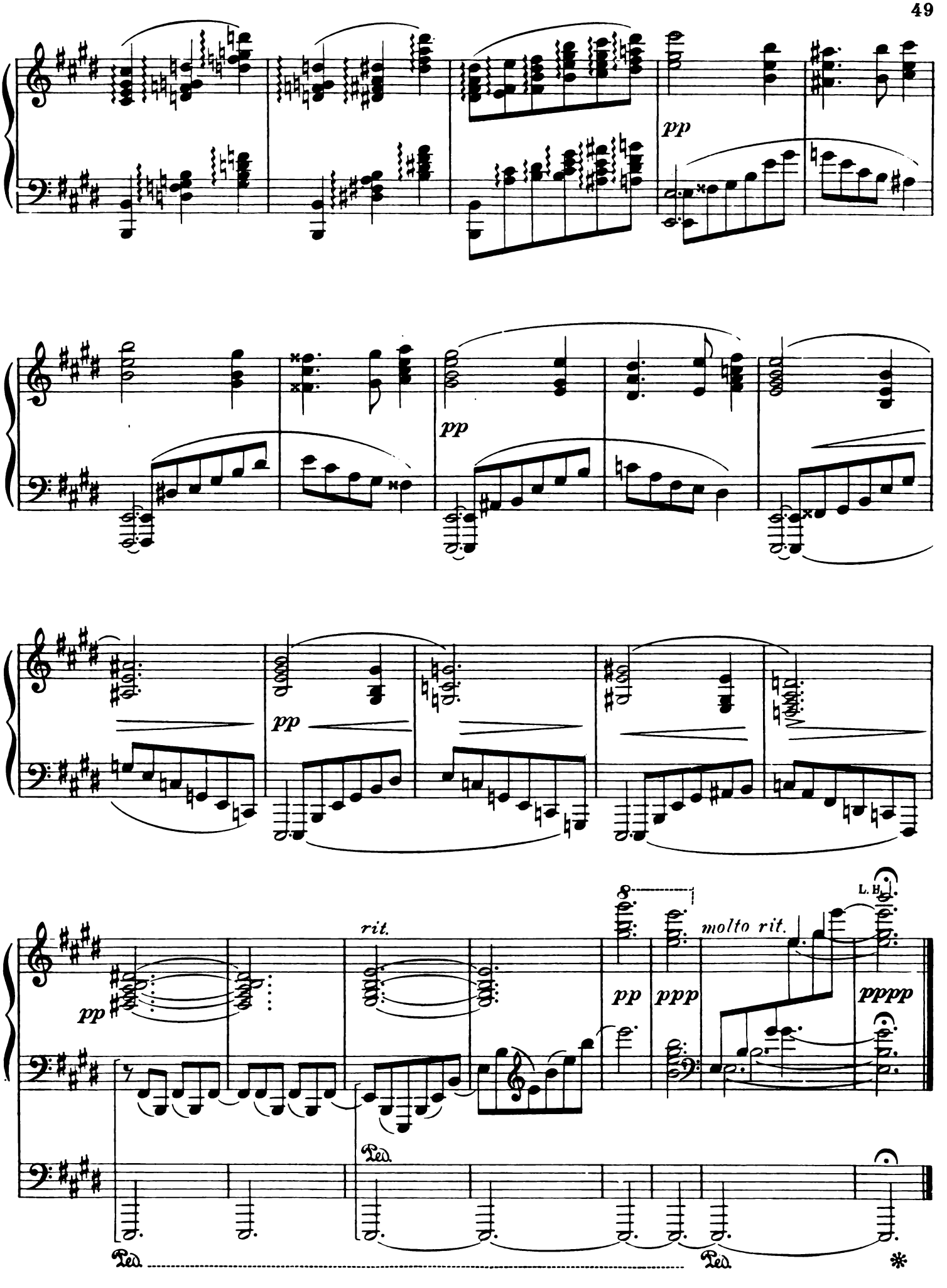

Grave ♩= 72
rit. molto
fff
p
pp
mp
R.H.
pp
8va il Basso
Ped.
mp
R.H.
L.H.
mp
mp
cresc.
mf
L.H.
mp
mp
mf
f decresc.
R.H.
L.H.
R.H.
L.H.
mp molto rit.
p
pp


Cantando con amore
♩= 60
mp
L.H.
rit.
legato
Ped.
(63)
mf


(66)
poco rit.
a tempo
mf
f
f
L.H.
L.H.
L.H.
L.H.
molto
rit.
8
pp
poco cresc.
Pateticamente (♩= 54)
8
mp


8
p
f
3
sim.
decresc.
Ped.
R.H.
mf
loco
pp
mp


molto rit.
Maestoso
ff
8va(ad lib.)
cresc.
en
8va
do
loco
Arpeggi
ff
cresc.
e
rit.


pp
pp
pp
rit.
molto rit.
L. H.
pp
ppp
pppp
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
*

An Analysis of the E minor Sonata

By W. OTTO MIESSNER.

Music differs from the sister arts in that it is mainly subjective. Sculpture and painting are largely objective; the artist appeals to the senses by representing familiar figures, objects and scenes. If he be content to copy nature he ranks merely as an imitator; he becomes creative only when he transforms the common-places of life, idealizing them for us by means of a vivid imagination.

The poet or the novelist stirs the imagination by the artistic use of language in describing situations real or imaginary, in terms familiar to his readers. The reader loses interest the moment use is made of terms and phrases which are unfamiliar to him.

The composer, unfortunately, is obliged to use as his medium of expression a tone-language which, technically speaking, but few of his listeners can understand.

Furthermore, music in performance, unlike the static arts, is constantly moving across the listener's consciousness; the sensation is much like gazing out a car window at a swiftly passing landscape; the scenery may be beautiful but our impressions are but fleeting ones unless the experience be often repeated. Again, the sensations may be compared to those we feel when viewing a motion picture. To derive the fullest enjoyment we must understand the plot; and, obvious as the plot may seem, it is nevertheless considered necessary to add the printed word of explanation.

But fortunately, on the other hand, music by its very subjective nature makes its strongest appeal directly to the emotions, rather than to the intellect. We should strive, therefore, in order to obtain the greatest pleasure and inspiration from listening to music, to put ourselves into a receptive mood—that is, a mood in harmony with the composer's intention.

This attitude toward music presupposes that the composer really has intentions—that he desires to convey moods more or less definite, or perhaps, more or less vague. He may, indeed, desire to stimulate intellectual enjoyment, rather than to arouse the emotions, in which case he will probably enlist our admiration for his erudite skill in the exploitation of themes, and in the manipulation of many-voiced counter melodies. Mastery of form and of line are prerequisites in this realm of the art.

On the other hand, his object may be to transplant us from a provincial world of realism and reason to that "beatific state of coma" where the intellect is asleep and we dream of nebulous other worlds and other states of existence. In this case the composer is obliged to draw a veil over the form by the use of melodic and rhythmic patterns of fantastic design, or by resorting to vague tonalities and unusual harmonic progressions.

There is usually some clue to the composer's intention; often this is expressed only in the title. If the piece be a dance-tune—a gavotte, a minuet or a polonaise—we obviously need not expect a message intended to explore the depths of the soul. The appeal is clearly meant to be sensuous and is directed to the motor-sense by means of strongly marked rhythmic characteristics.

If the mode of expression is a fugue or an invention we must look to beauty of line, to exquisite design, to intricate pattern for an intelligent conception of the composer's intention. It is like looking at a piece of fine lace or at a rare old etching. The warmth and glow of color are lacking; the enjoyment is intellectual rather than emotional.

A prelude or an etude leads us to admire the virtuosity of the artist; other titles, such as barcarolle or boat-song, —a nocturne or night-piece, a berceuse or lullaby, are self-explanatory. And so, "Au Bord d'une Source," translated, means "On the Bank of a Stream"; "Feux Follets" means "Will o' the Wisp." These pieces are meant to kindle the imagination, and it matters little if we do not follow the themes in detail, note for note; we want to see the picture as a whole.

In this brief space it is inadvisable to essay a discussion of the evolution of the Sonata or of the Sonata-form. Originally the term "Sonata" signified a "sound-piece" or instrumental composition, as distinguished from "cantata" a song-piece, or vocal composition.

As a form or mould for the expression of musical thought, the sonata and the symphony (a sonata for grand orchestra) reached their highest development in the great master, Beethoven, one hundred years ago, just as Shakespeare had achieved the climax in literary architecture in his dramas two hundred years earlier.

If mere mastery of form, therefore, is the modern composer's aim, there is no earthly reason why he should choose the sonata as his vehicle of expression; he is justified in doing so only when he has something so vital to express that the message requires a canvas of such magnificent proportions as the sonata-form affords.

A sonata in four movements in the world of music may be compared to a four act drama in the realm of literature. In the first movement (or act) we become acquainted with the themes, or characters; in the succeeding movements we see and feel how they react to the vicissitudes of life.

Life is never dull nor uninteresting—there is romance in the most commonplace existence— but the romance of a hero to be presented in music surely requires a canvas of heroic dimensions, such as the sonata only provides. The mystery of fate, the urge of ambition, conflict and temptation, the yearning of the soul for spiritual perfection—these are feelings universal to mankind, and these emotions, music, the most universal of all the arts, expresses more adequately perhaps than any other.

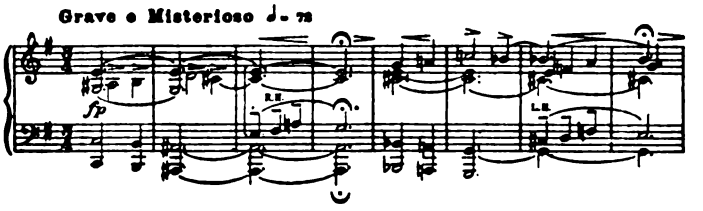
Longfellow's allegorical poem, "Excelsior" provides the composer with an ideal hero. The intention of the poem is intimated in a letter from Mr. Longfellow to Mr. C. K. Tuckerman:

"I have had the pleasure of receiving your note in regard to the poem Excelsior and very willingly give you my intention in writing it. This was no more than to display, in a series of pictures, the life of a man of genius, resisting all temptations, laying aside all fears, heedless of all warnings and pressing right on to accomplish his purpose. His motto is Excelsior—'higher'—he passes through the Alpine village—through the rough(cold paths of the world—where the peasants cannot understand him, and where his watchword is in an 'unknown tongue.' He disregards the happiness of domestic peace and sees the glaciers—his fate—before him. He disregards the warning of the old man's wisdom and the fascination of woman's love. He answers to all, 'Higher yet!' The monks of St. Bernard are the representatives of religious forms and ceremonies, and with their oft-repeated prayer mingles the sound of his voice, telling them there is something higher than forms and ceremonies. Filled with these aspirations, he perishes without having reached the perfection he longed for; and the voice heard in the air is the promise of immortality and progress ever upward."

In this Sonata I have attempted to portray the same Drama of Life which we find immortalized in "Excelsior." It did not seem advisable to follow the poem literally, stanza for stanza. However, the four movements of the sonata represent the four outstanding phases of Life as we see them unfold in the life of our hero, namely, Heroism, Temptation, Renunciation, Transfiguration—while Destiny or Fate casts its mysterious spell over all.

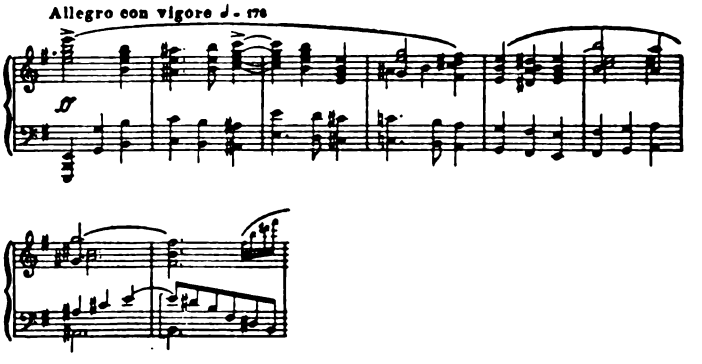
The Fate motif, (No. 1)

No. 1. FATE.



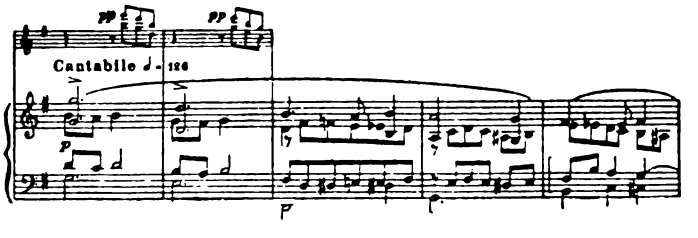
is used in each of the four movements as a Motto or "Idee Fix" (a term invented by Berlioz) in order to unify the whole work. There is a short introduction consisting of a development of the Fate motif, which leads directly into the main theme of the first movement (allegro con vigore) (No. 2).

No. 2 HEROISM.



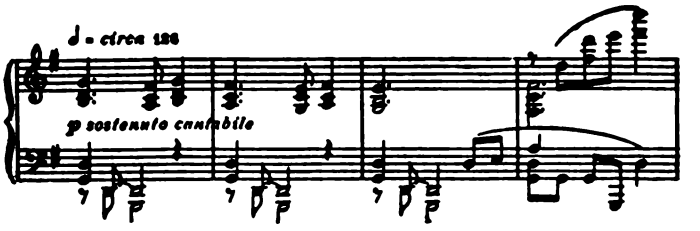
This theme is virile, masculine, or heroic in character, while the second theme, of a lyric nature, (No. 3)

No. 3 AESTHETICICISM.



represents the "eternal feminine", the tender, the human side of our hero's nature. Contrary to the general rule that "the second theme must be a contrast to the first", our second theme is closely related to the first. Note the similarity of intervals and rhythm. The contrasting mood depends upon the execution of the artist.

No. 4 PANTHEISM

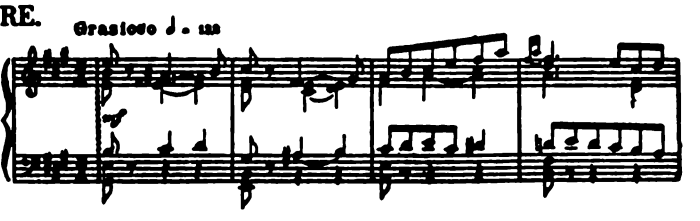


The closing theme No. 4 is a pastorale, and it is intended to portray reverence or religious feeling; it is the worship of the divine as expressed in Nature, (Pantheism) however, rather than of religious dogmas and creeds.

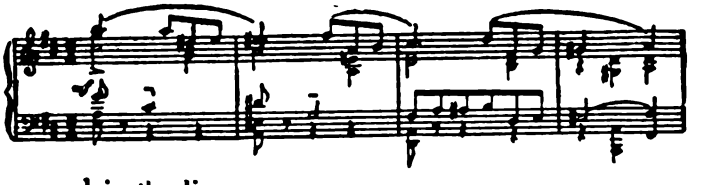
The development section is concerned with the clashings of Fate and Ambition, (note the old man's warning) with the struggles of heroic strength against human weakness. The recapitulation is orthodox in that the two themes are heard in E major rather than in E minor and in G major as at first.

The second movement (Grazioso) pictures the temptations of pleasure, the allurements and commonplaces of life. (See themes 5 and 6.)

No. 5. PLEASURE.



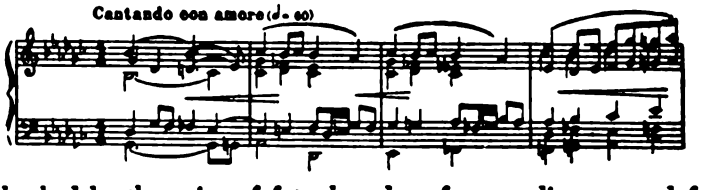
No. 6. ALLUREMENT.



The love element (No. 7) is expressed in the lines,

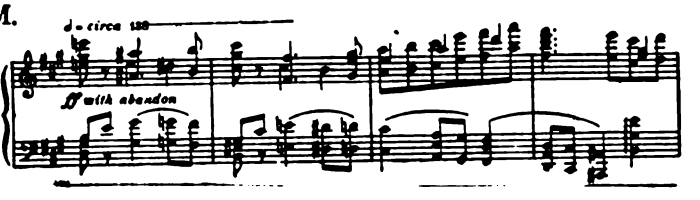
"O stay," the maiden said, "and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!"

No. 7. LOVE.



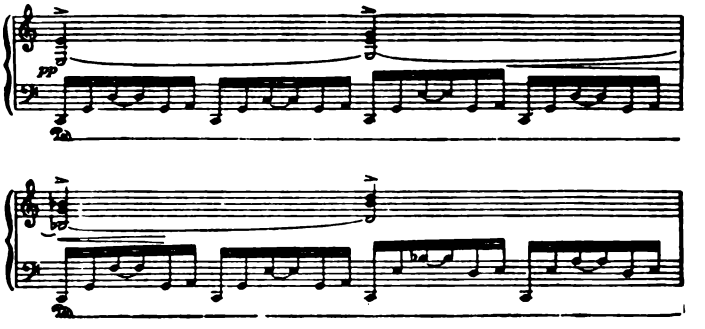
The love song of the maiden is hushed by the voice of fate, heard as from a distance and fading away in the mist, while life's pleasures make a desperate appeal to which the mind yields with reckless abandon. (No. 8)

No. 8. HEROISM.



The third movement (Lento sostenuto e appassianato) follows without a pause. The dying harmonies of the previous movement blend with the opening left hand figure which provides a background of sighing, rocking pines for the Theme of Renunciation—a long passionate outburst of emotion appearing in various phases. (See themes 9 and 10.)

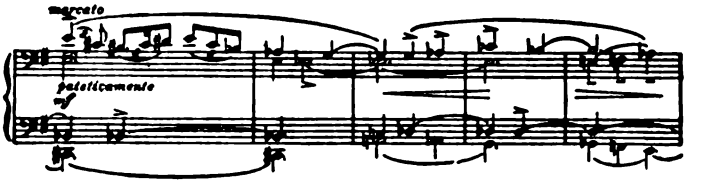
No. 9. RENUNCIATION.



It voices the depths of despair in utter loneliness, the yearning for companionship and for human understanding, yet withal a calm resignation to the decrees of fate and to the sacrifices incumbent upon spiritual development.

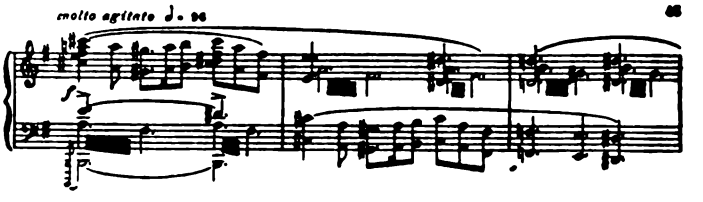
It would have been impossible to meet the dramatic requirements of the poem with the fuss and clatter of the orthodox finale. There is no occasion for the introduction of new themes; therefore the old themes reappear, subjected to new treatments, each with a new significance. The Fate motif is more ominous, more somber, more mysterious than ever before.

No. 10. DESPAIR.



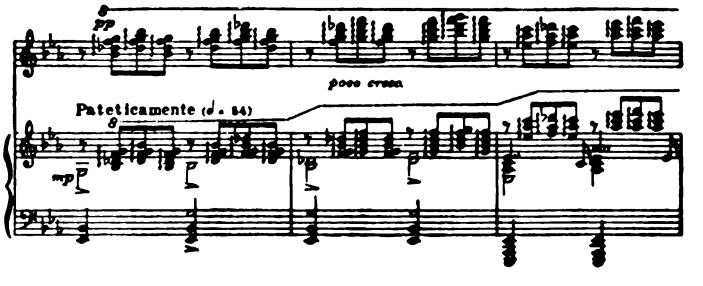
The first theme (see No. 2) becomes more and more agitated, (No. 11).

No. 11. CONFLICT.



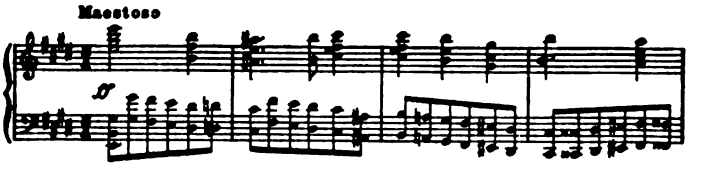
reaching its climax in the thunderous roar of the avalanche. Our hero perishes without having reached the goal of his earthly ambitions. The Love theme is heard again, symbolical of the one emotion of earth that proved enobling and uplifting. The theme of renunciation appears once more, accompanied by celestial harmonies, (No. 12)

No. 12. PEACE.



and at the final close, the first theme (refer to No. 2)

No. 13. TRANSFIGURATION.



is transformed into a majestic theme of transfiguration, (No. 13) symbolizing the passage of the soul. "Excelsior! Ever higher!"—this is the refrain of those who dwell on Olympus.

Excerpts from Recent Criticisms

To the list of worthy piano sonatas by American composers Mr. Miessner's must be added. It must further be accorded a place of prominence. For it is one of the very best, both for its subjective matter and the skill which the composer displays in the handling of his materials.

An acquaintance with this work—and the writer of these lines has known it for more than three months — has brought the conviction that it is solid throughout, that it is sincerely written. Mr. Miessner is a musician of refinement, a composer well equipped to write in the big forms and he has shown in his development section of the first movement that he is resourceful. There will be those who will contend that his themes are suggestive of MacDowell, Brahms, etc., and that his harmonies are post-Wagnerian in feeling. The contention is true. Yet what matters that, when it is virtually impossible to write a big sonata today without one's production being suggestive of some great master There are things in the sonata that makes us certain that Mr. Miessner also knows his Liszt and his Chopin. We are glad he does. His sonata has red blood in it; it is honorably conceived, masterfully written and is not an imitation of any school. Nor has Mr. Miessner in a single place in his work tried to be a relative in spirit of Messieurs Debussy and Ravel, something of an achievement for an American of our day not to attempt. Mr. Miessner has been content to be himself and not to overwhelm us with modernity. We like him and his sterling Sonata in E Minor for it. It is difficult to play, a real concert work. American pianists, wake up! Look at this sonata. It deserves to be heard next season on your programs many times.

The sonata is dedicated to Edgar Stillmann-Kelly.—A. Walter Kramer in N. Y. Musical America.

W. Otto Miessner has written a good sonata, classical not only in form and manner, but in spirit. It is earnest, serious, terse and tense, entirely free from display and passages of purely ornamental kind. The themes have nothing academic about them except their treatment, their dress, so to speak. In many new works which have their day and disappear there are to be seen plain faces and ungainly figures draped and decorated with all the latest and most expensive sartorial creations. W. Otto Miessner has chosen rather to throw the artistically plain and flowing robe of classical severity over the shoulders of antique beauty. This comparison is intentionally far fetched. It is used in order to make clear to the readers of this review the distinction between much of the modern music and the classical masterpieces. The composer of this new sonata has taken the old forms as his model but he has by no means merely made a plaster cast. His music is spontaneous and musically interesting. If it has a fault it is that the close attention to detail and high polish makes the work too difficult for the average audience to follow. It is music that the player will find full of fine workmanship. The same may be said of the forty-eight fugues of Bach, as a matter of fact. No one can justly accuse W. Otto Miessner of plagiarism. His sonata is more than usually free from those more or less definite suggestions of composers which most new works have. He is to be sincerely congratulated for his achievement of composing a practically genuine sonata in an age and a land that does not think and feel in sonata forms.—Leonard Liebling in N. Y. Musical Courier.

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