César FRANCK

PRÉLUDE, CHORAL ET FUGUE

Piano Practical Editions
pianopracticaleditions.com

Piano Practical Editions

Musical Health Warning : please be aware that these editions are definitely not urtext and should be consulted together with a traditional version. They have been devised purely to help solve musical and technical problems at the piano.

Please send comments and error reports to
Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

César FRANCK 1822 - 1890

PRÉLUDE, CHORAL et FUGUE

à Mademoiselle Marie Poitevin

Prélude page 1
Choral 9
Fugue 15

I first discovered this outstanding work 50 years ago, and every few years re-study it with enthusiasm, always finding something new within its intrinsic beauty and depth. A somewhat academic title conceals divine creation; from the opening bars of its poetically intense prelude to the gloriously triumphant conclusion, it is quite perfect.

His pupil Vincent d'Indy reports that Franck originally planned to write an 'unfashionable' Prelude and Fugue as a serious gesture to contrast the popular and crowd-drawing virtuoso pieces of the time. Except for a few examples by Mendelssohn this 'antique' form, having reached such distinction with Bach, had been much neglected during the 130 years since his death. The Chorale was added as an afterthought, and this exalted central movement, originally not intended to be of any length or significance, became a unifying subject providing a sublime climax for the Fugue.

There were relatively few large-scale piano works* of substance composed during the decades preceding the French *symbolistes/impressionistes*, a period I like to refer as "Chromantic" — Berlioz, Alkan, Lalo, Bizet, Chabrier, Widor, Vierne, Lekeu, Fauré, Duparc, d'Indy, Chausson and finally Saint-Saëns, who in "Outspoken Essays on Music" (1919) was particularly scathing of d'Indy and Franck.**

Alfred Cortot wrote favourably: *the Fugue in the context of the whole work emanates from a psychological necessity rather than from a principle of musical composition. It is as if a 'fugue', as a symbol of intellectual rigour, was the only way Franck could find a voice to fully express the hesitant, truncated sobs of the Prelude and the anguished, syncopated lament of the Chorale.*

Franck's parents moved their outstanding keyboard child prodigy from Liège in Belgium to Paris, European musical and cultural centre *par excellence*. There followed *Conservatoire* prizes for piano, organ and composition, hinting at splendid prospects and a glittering career in music. However, he suffered from the typical ambitions of a father who wished to exploit the virtuosity of his pianistic talents, and his son eventually rebelled and applied his creative energy to composition and the organ, virtually abandoning his first instrument. He subsequently obtained important posts in Paris at the Basilica

Sainte Clotilde, and at the *Conservatoire*, there achieving relative obscurity.

While numerous compositions during this period were not without merit, it is his output from the later years which has attracted so much favourable attention: a number of compositions written after the age of 60, such as the Symphony in D minor, Symphonic Variations (piano and orchestra), Sonata for Violin and Piano, Piano Quintet, String Quartet and this *Prélude, Choral et Fugue*.

The dedicatee, Marie Adélaïde Augustine Poitevin*** was 19 when she was awarded *a premier prix au concours du Conservatoire*. It is not difficult to imagine a scenario from 1884 within the hallowed walls of the Paris *Conservatoire* when this young student attracted Franck's attention; exciting universal praise for her transcendental technique and a 'powerful, richly coloured tone, and an all too rare artistic conscience, which makes it a duty to sacrifice nothing to effect and lends her playing a remarkable purity of style'. In addition she must have been one of the first of her generation to include in her repertoire the long abandoned works of Bach. Poitevin proved to be a stimulus and inspiration and gave its first performance at the Salle Pleyel on 25th January 1885. It was a triumph and Franck was finally given due recognition by his peers and the general public.

Since its publication, the work is widely recognised as a masterpiece and numerous references via Google and YouTube attest to its acclaim and popularity. It is organic both in reference to the instrument and to its cyclic form and unsurprisingly the sound of the organ is often evident. The text clearly shows that the composer had very large hands (he could stretch a massive twelfth), and the challenging piano writing reflects his own extraordinary dexterity at both keyboards. A renowned talent for improvisation must have influenced the genesis of the prelude, and his appetite for frequent unexpected modulations are among his most recognisable characteristics.

Piano Practical Editions

presents an entirely personal interpretation of the work and much thought has been given to layout, engraving (varying the size of font notation), spelling, alternative hand distribution, occasional use of the *sostenuto* pedal and for what it is worth, my own individual fingering. Some time-signatures have been modified and, as will be observed from the many insertions of editorial key-signature, Franck implements an oft-repeated mantra — "modulate! modulate!". With apprehension, ***PPE*** admits to 'adaptations' of the text (usually marked with an asterisk). Comments and afterthoughts can be found in the appendix on page 32.

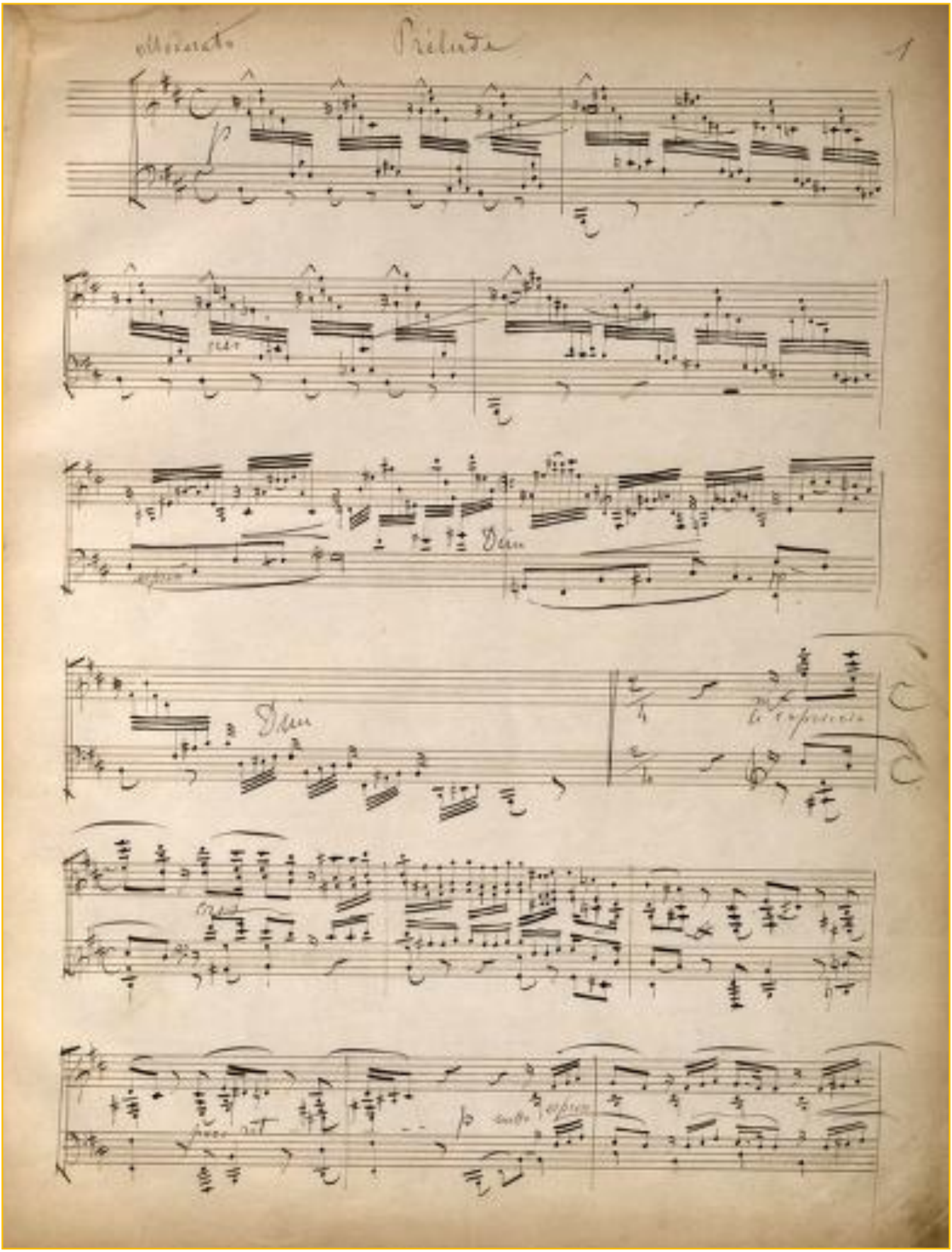
This edition is dedicated to
my very dear wife Marie-Thérèse Loing

Ray Alston July 2023

* **Brahms** *Rhapsodies, Capriccios, Intermezzi*, **Liszt** *Les Jeux d'eaux à la Villa d'Este*, **Granados** *Danzas españolas*, **Mussorgsky** *Pictures at an Exhibition*, **Tchaikovsky** *the Seasons.*

** an imperishable work, *monumentum aere perennius*, (Horace — an immortal work of art) a *morceau* anything but pleasant or convenient to play, where the Chorale is not a chorale nor the Fugue a fugue, for it speedily falls all to pieces, and continues in interminable digressions which no more resemble a fugue than a zoophyte resembles a mammifer. These digressions are scarcely atoned for by a brilliant ending.

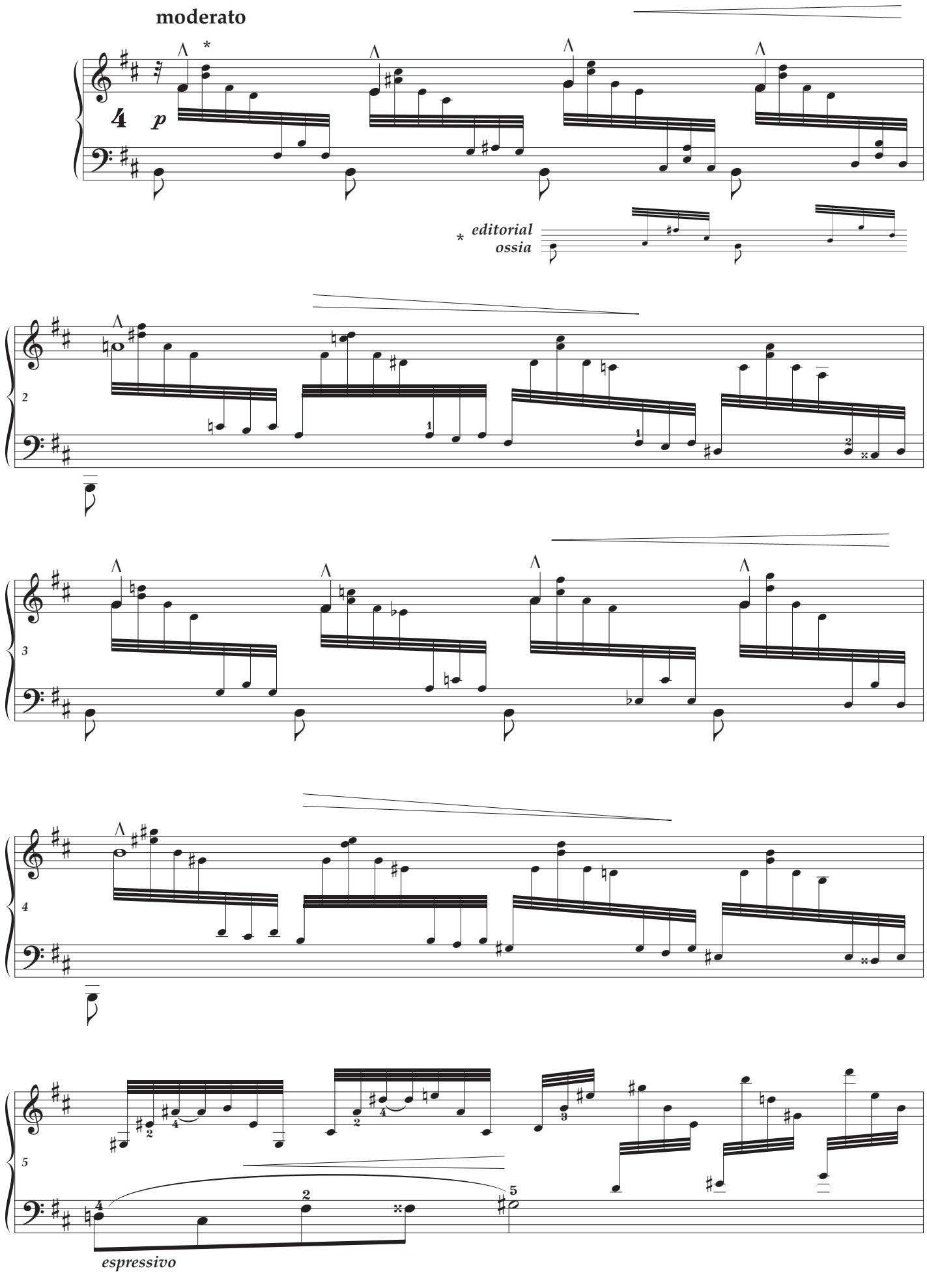
*** Female musicians at the time were unfortunately much undervalued and Poitevin is neither mentioned in current lists of French pianists nor under illustrious Parisian musicians. She was much involved with the music of Alkan, and the dedicatee of works by Saint-Saëns, Fauré and Chabrier. She also gave the second performance of Franck's Quintet.

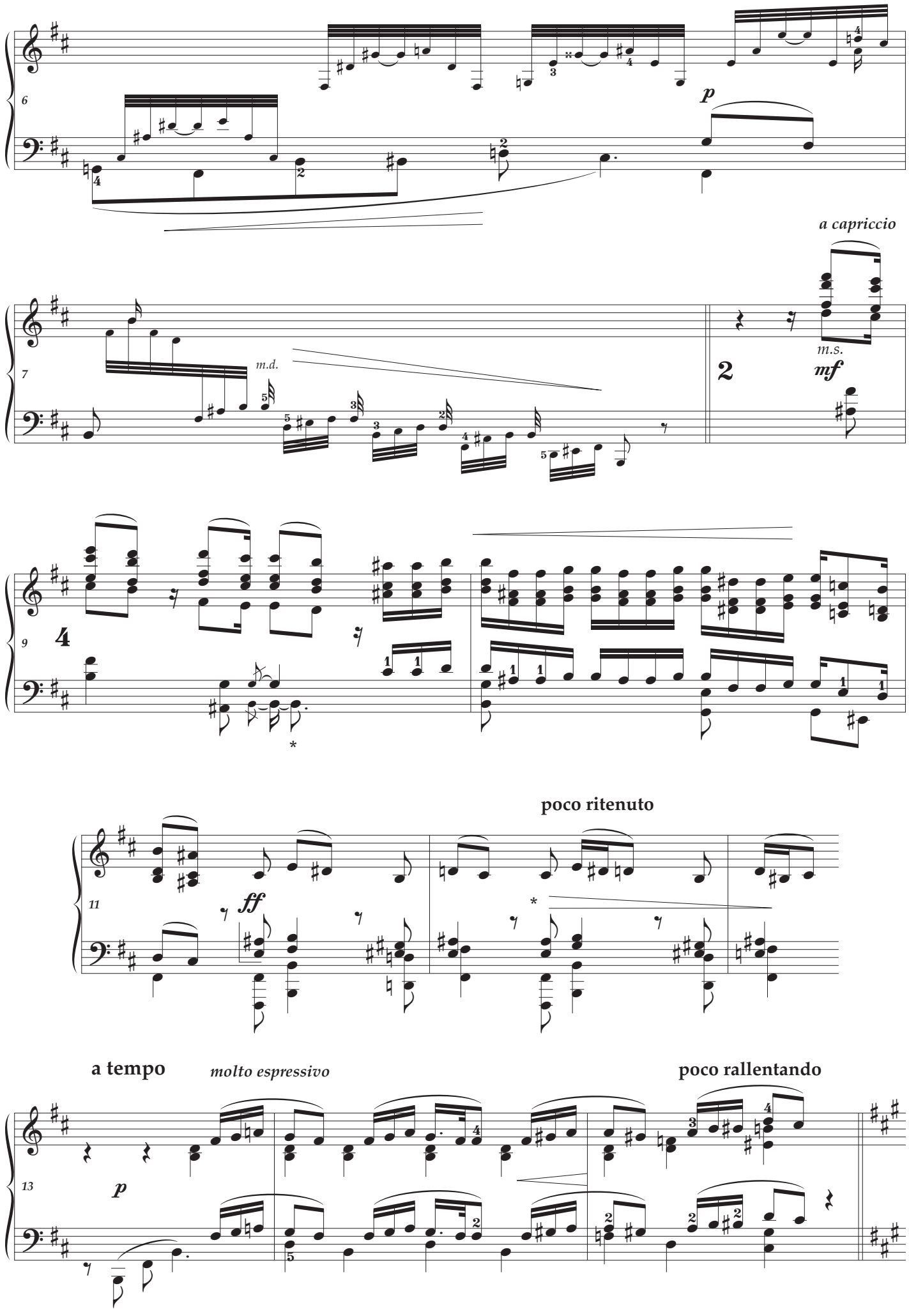

Prélude
1
Dim
Dim

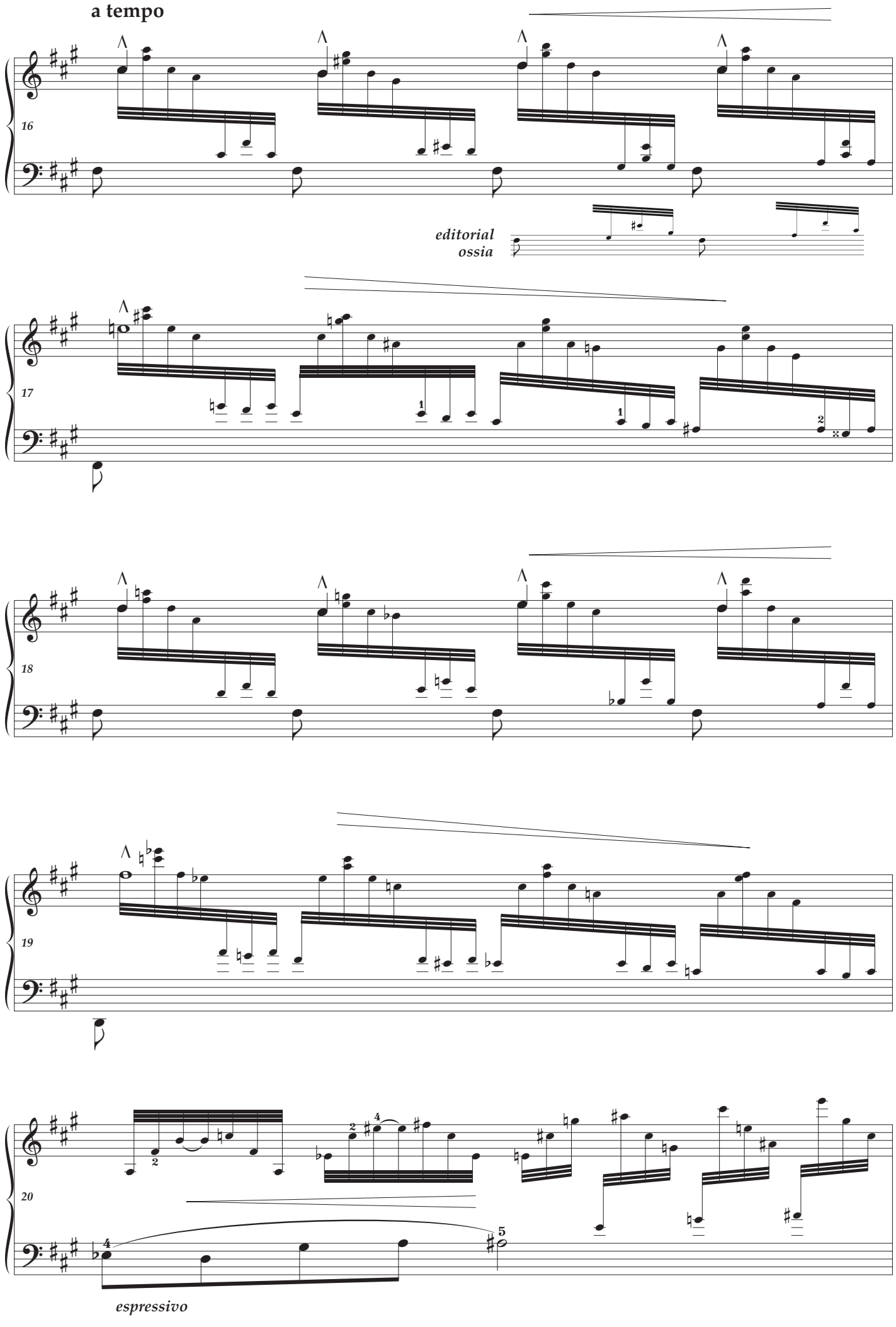
Prélude, Choral et Fugue

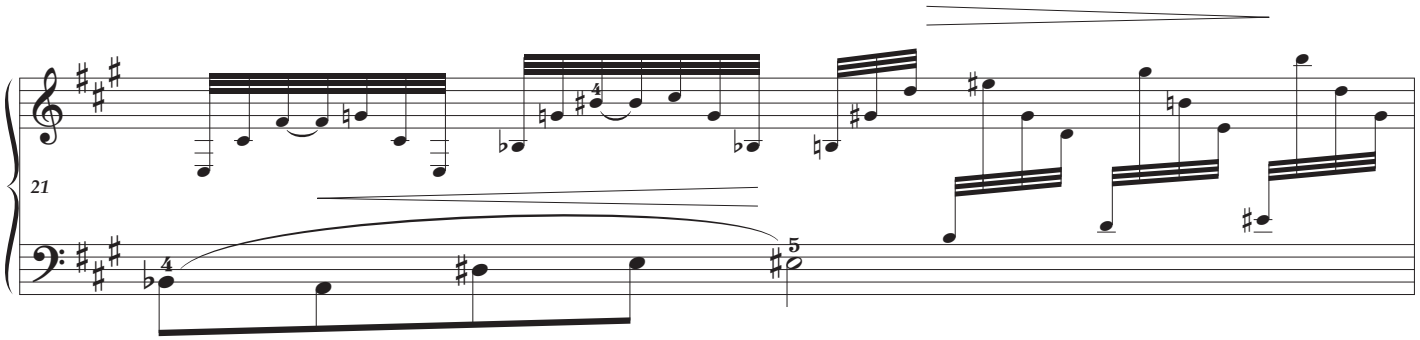
PRÉLUDE

moderato

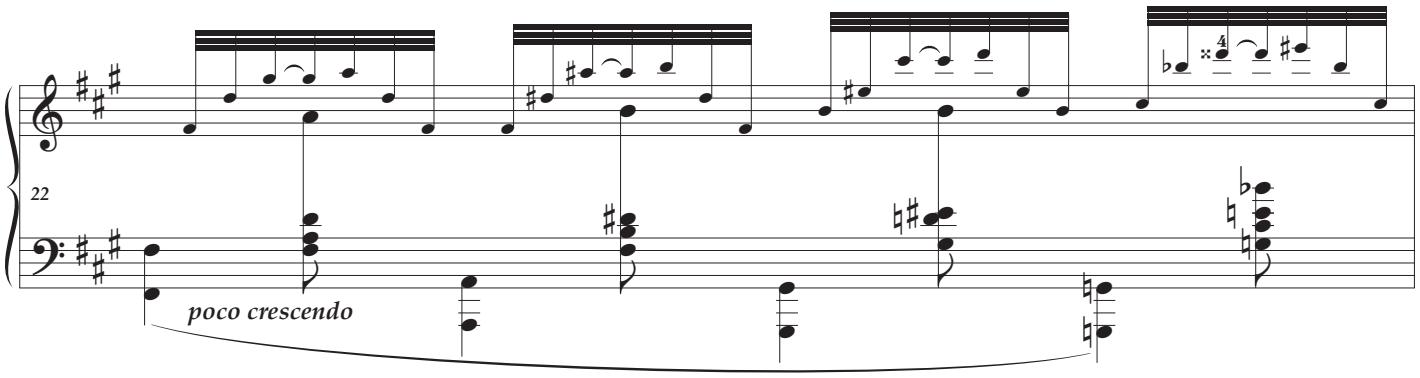



6
p
a capriccio
7
m.d.
2
m.s.
mf
9
4
*
poco ritenuto
11
ff
*
a tempo
molto espressivo
poco rallentando
13
p


a tempo
16
editorial
ossia
17
18
19
20
espressivo

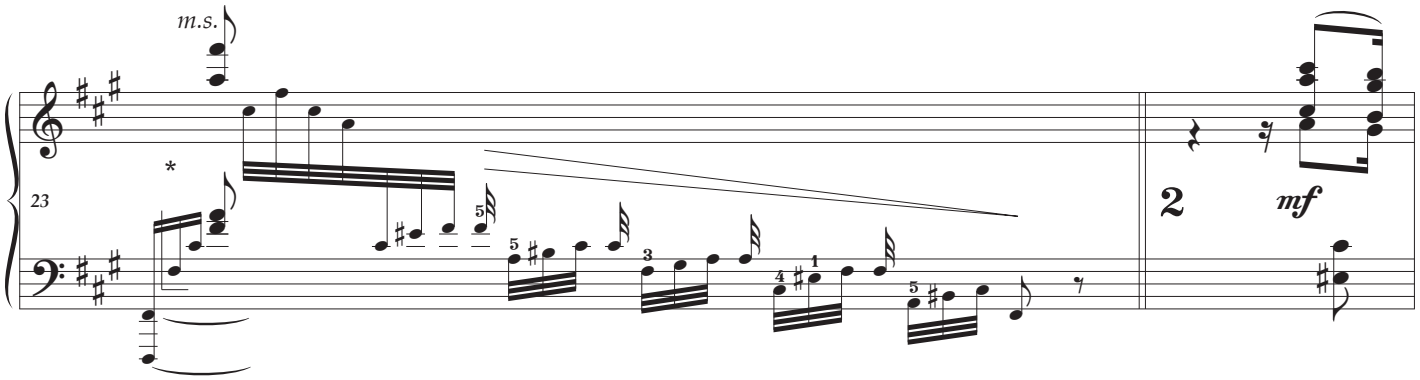


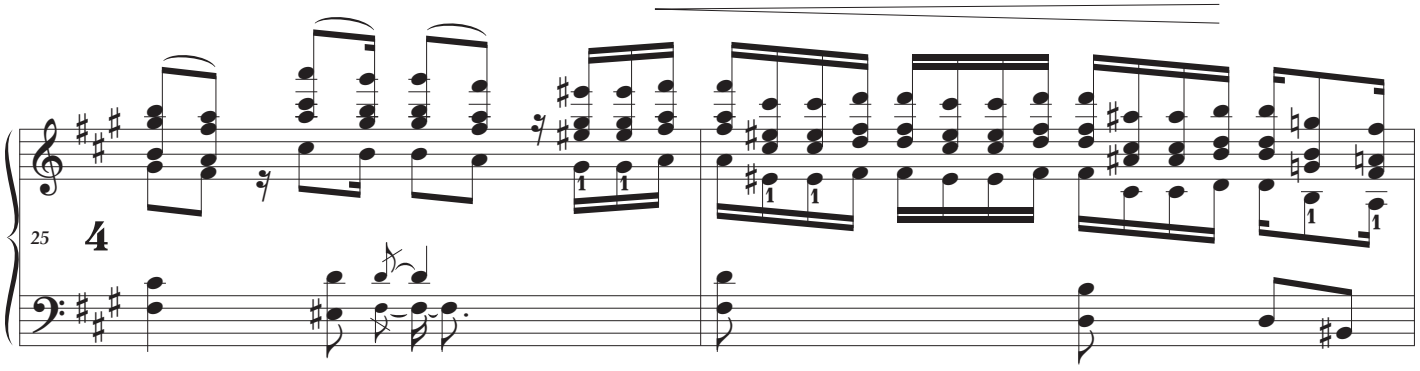
poco rallentando



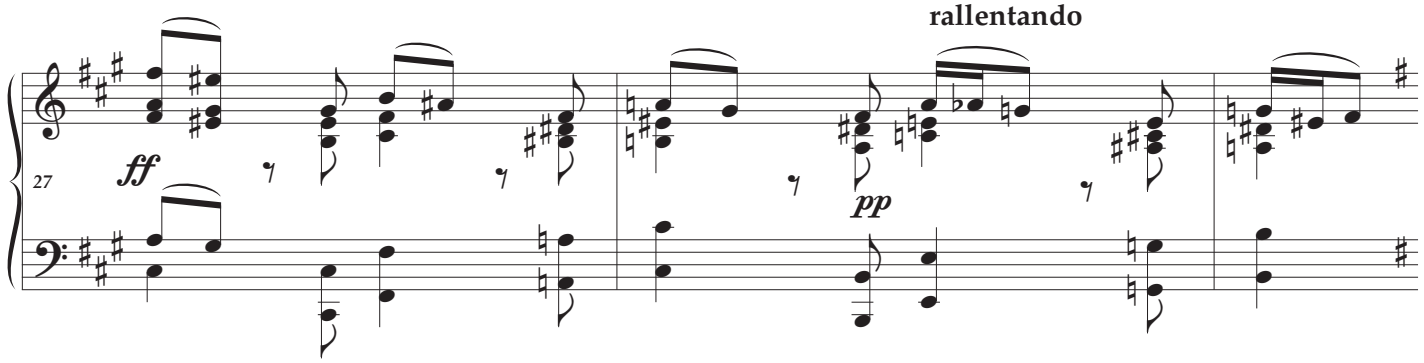
a tempo

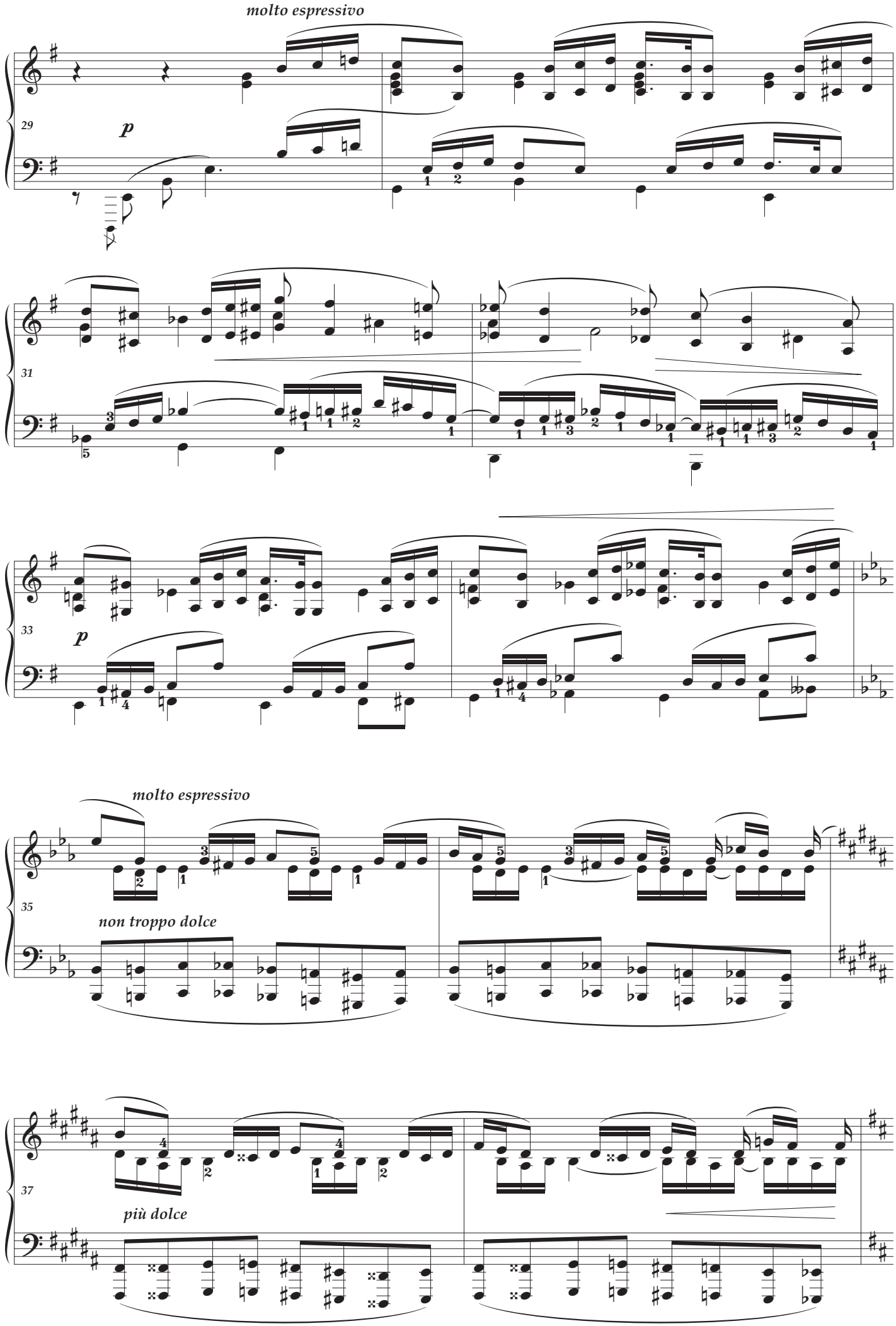
a capriccio

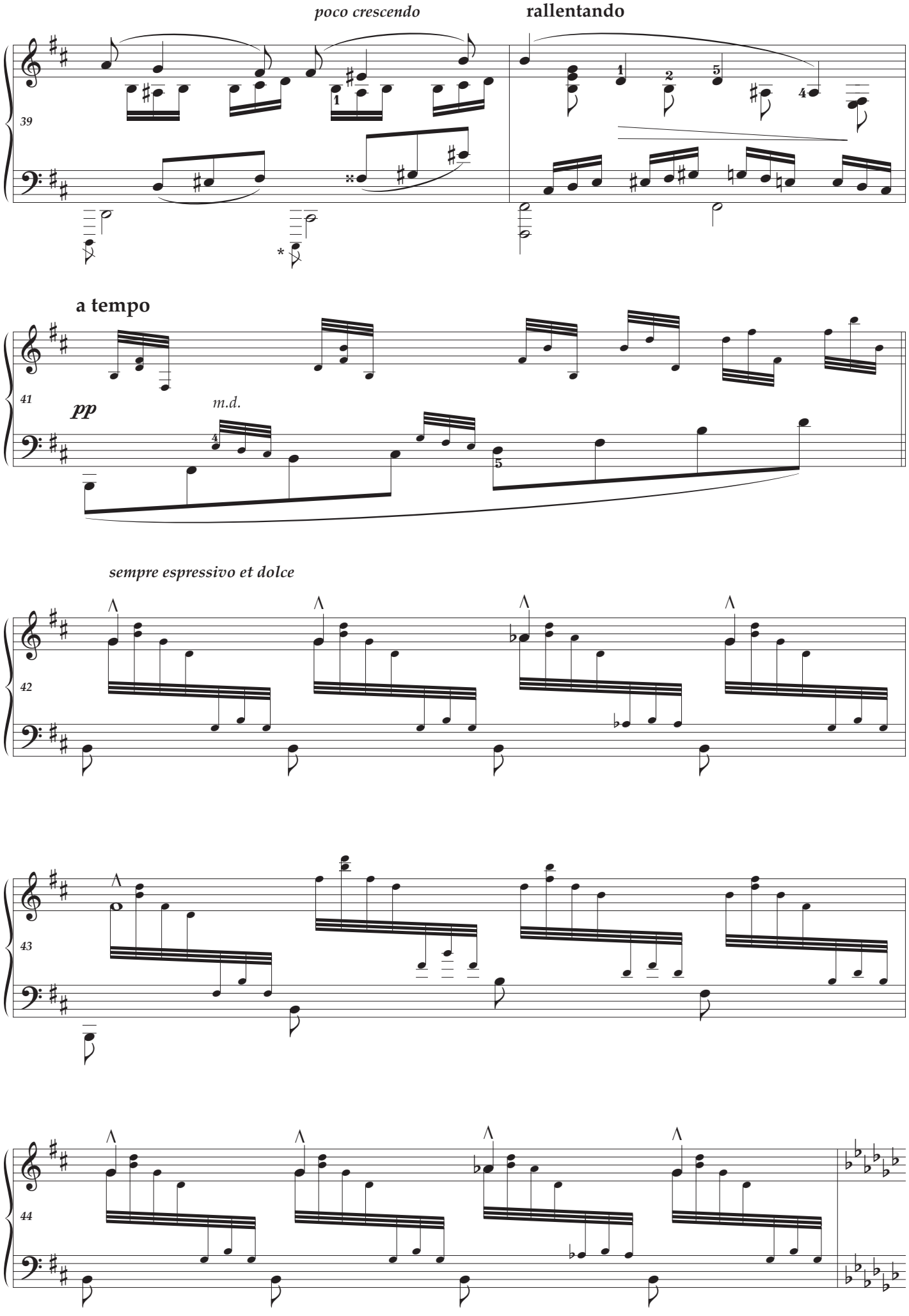


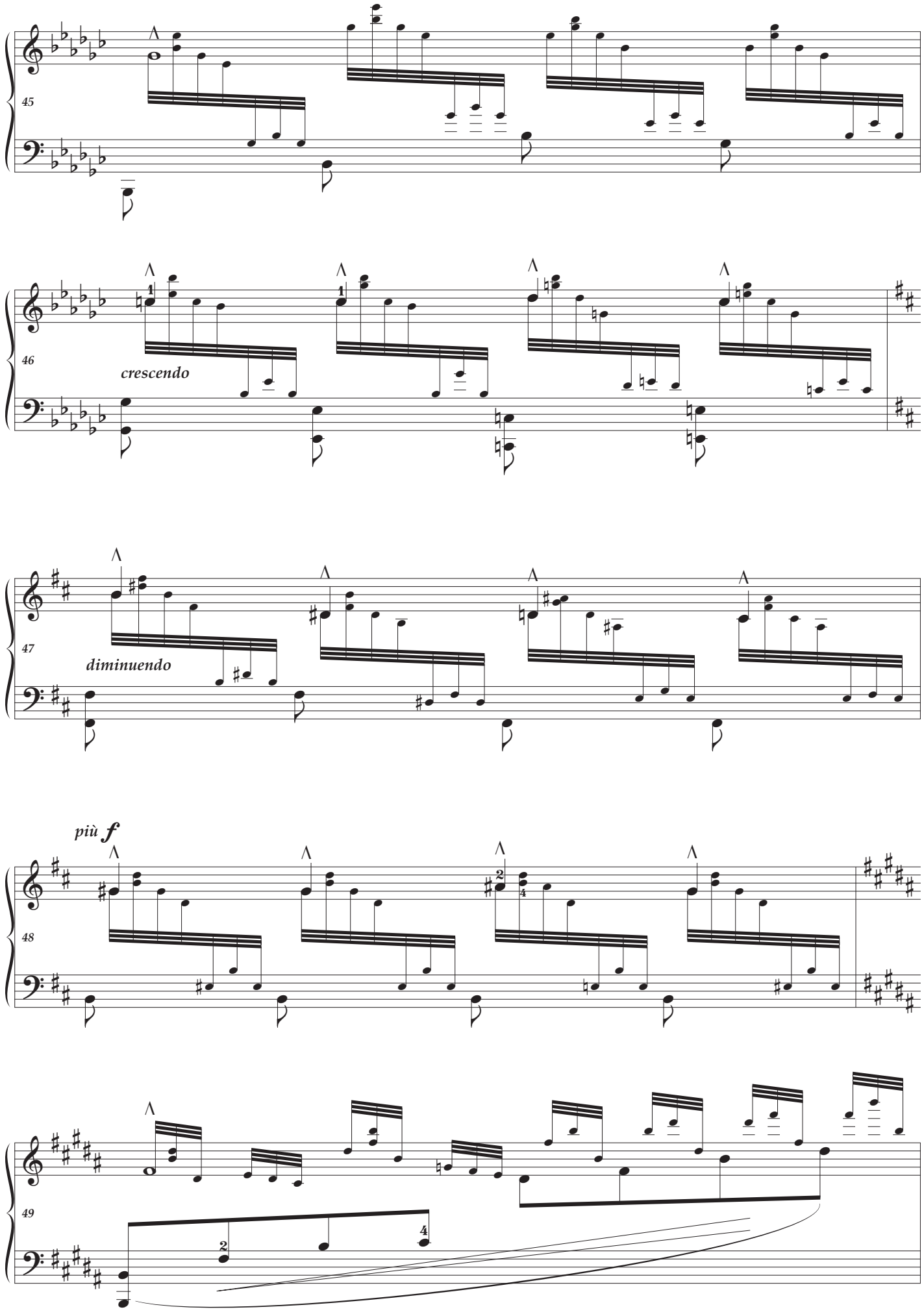


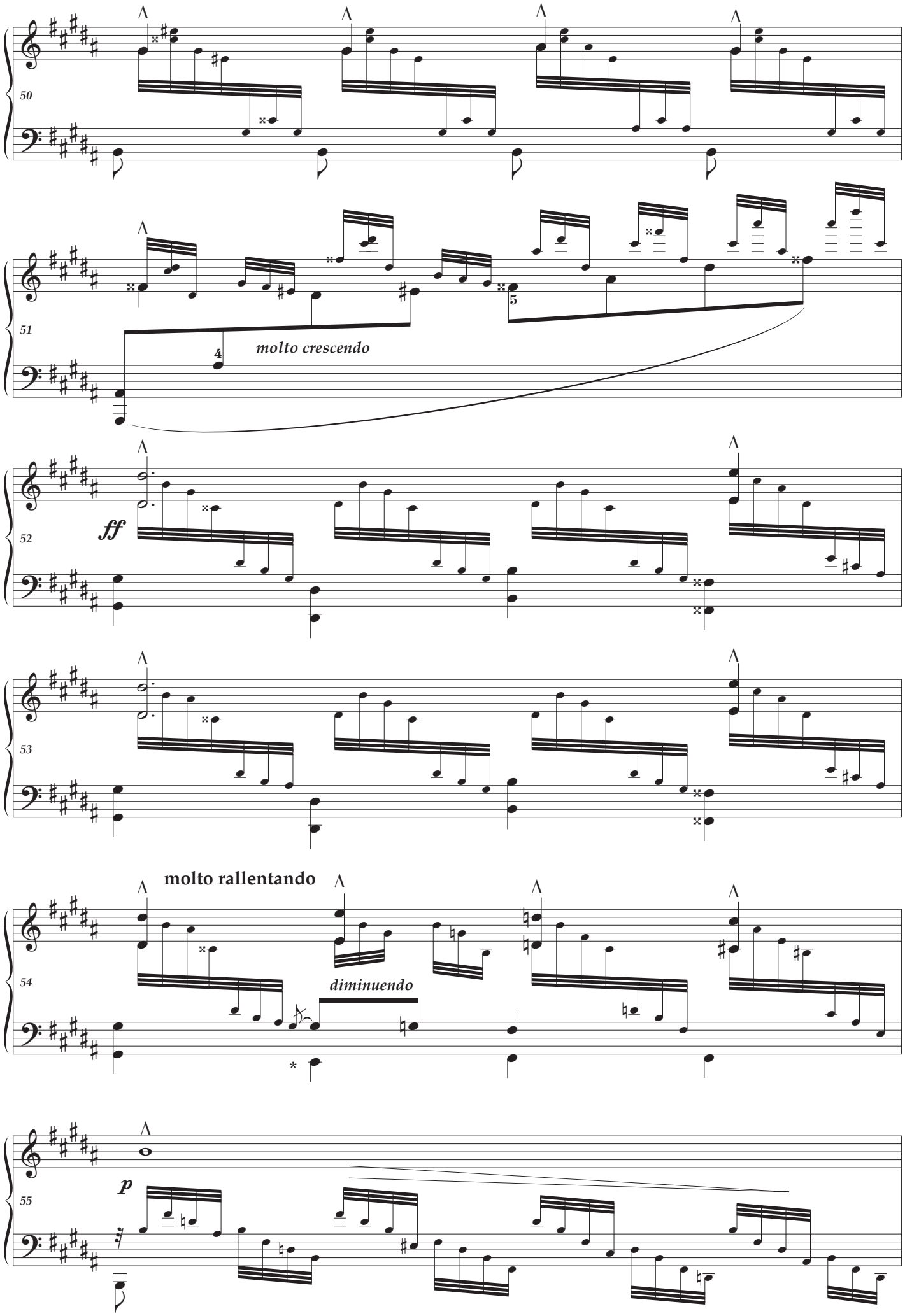
rallentando

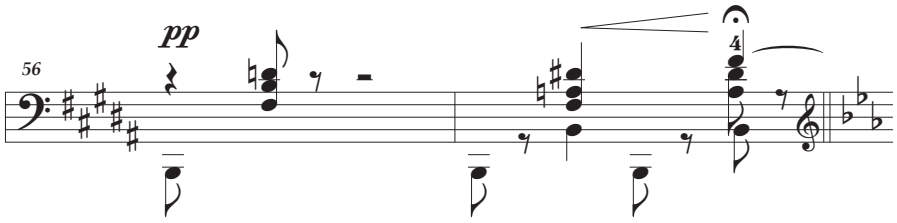



molto espressivo
29
p
31
33
p
molto espressivo
35
non troppo dolce
37
più dolce

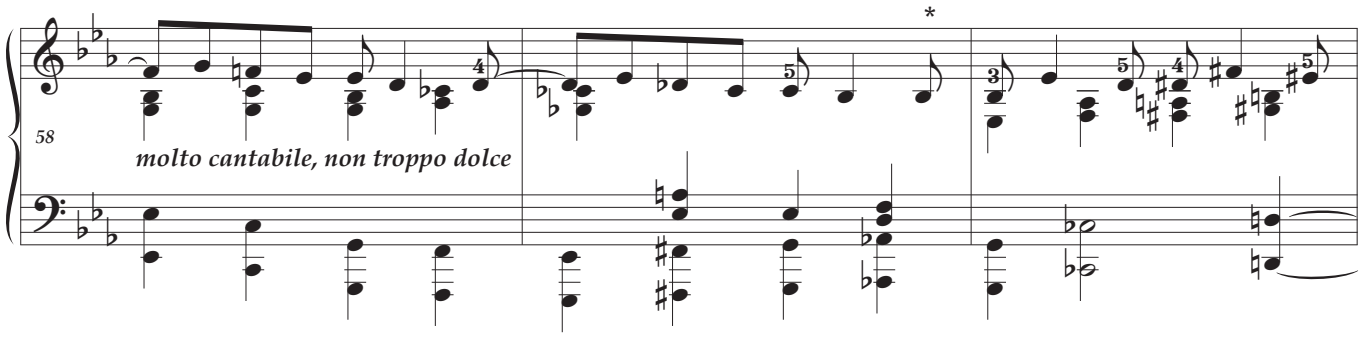

poco crescendo
rallentando
39
a tempo
41
pp
m.d.
sempre espressivo et dolce
42
43
44

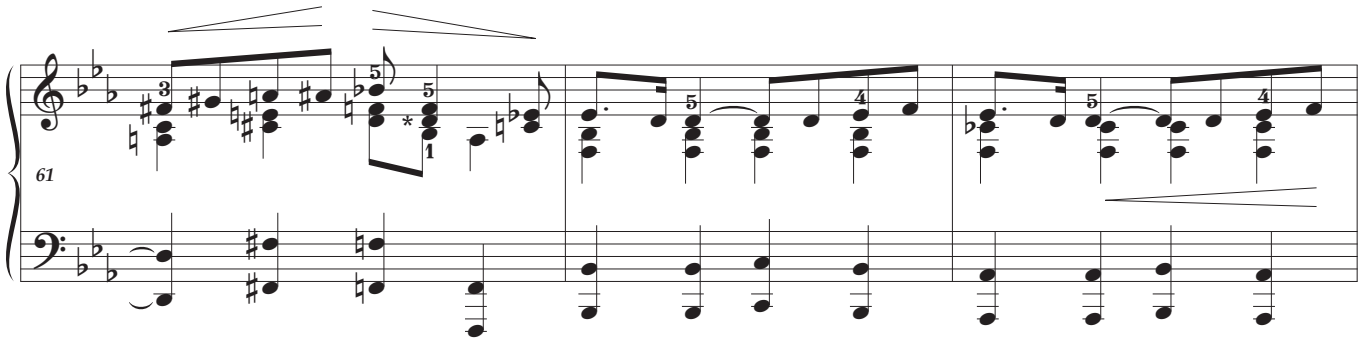

45
46
crescendo
47
diminuendo
più f
48
49

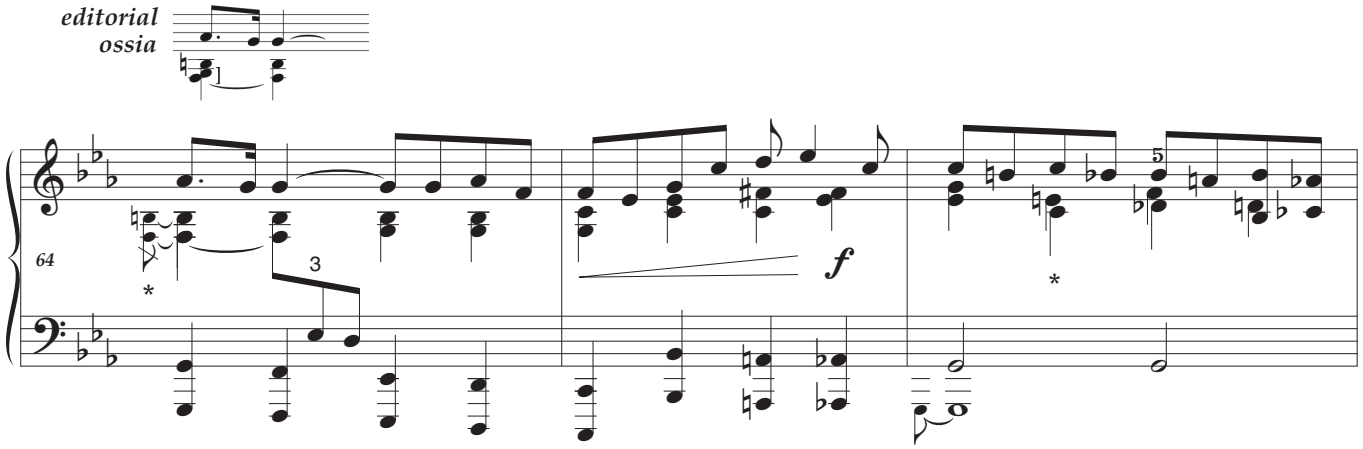

50
51
molto crescendo
52
ff
53
molto rallentando
54
diminuendo
55
p

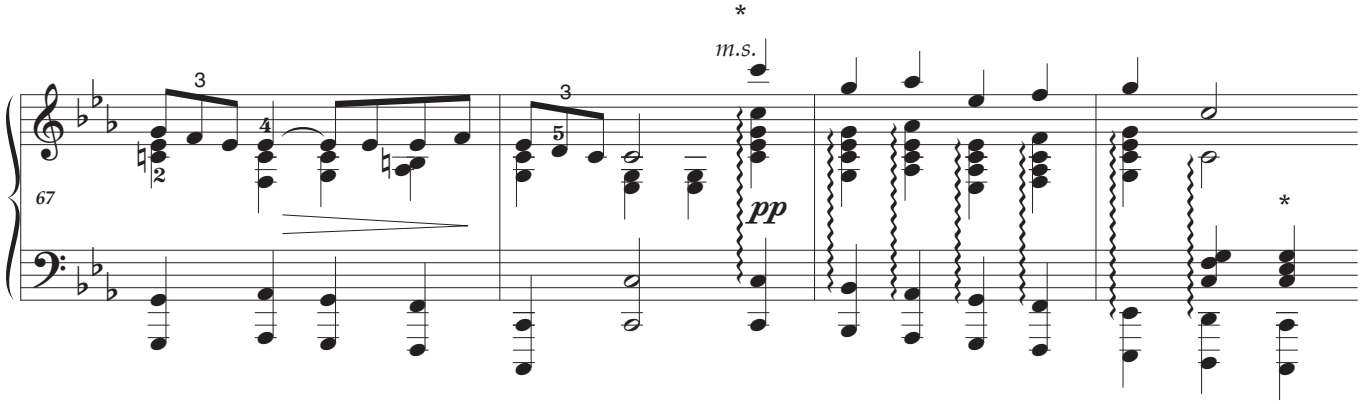


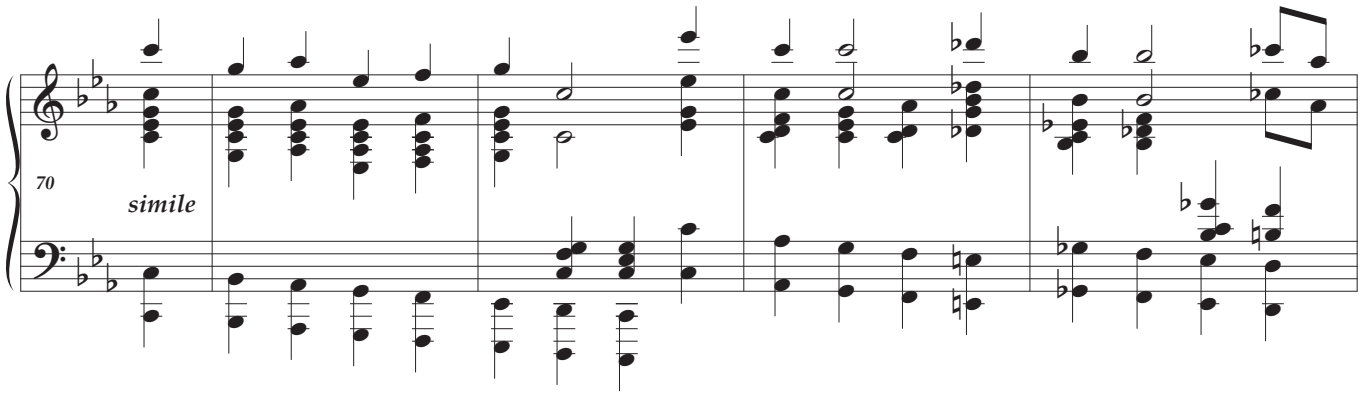
CHORAL
poco più lento

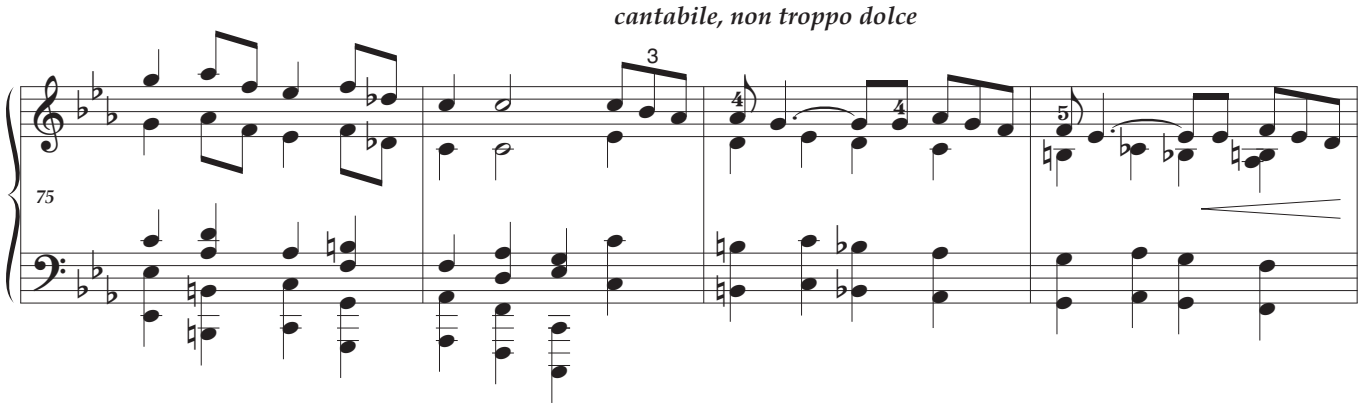


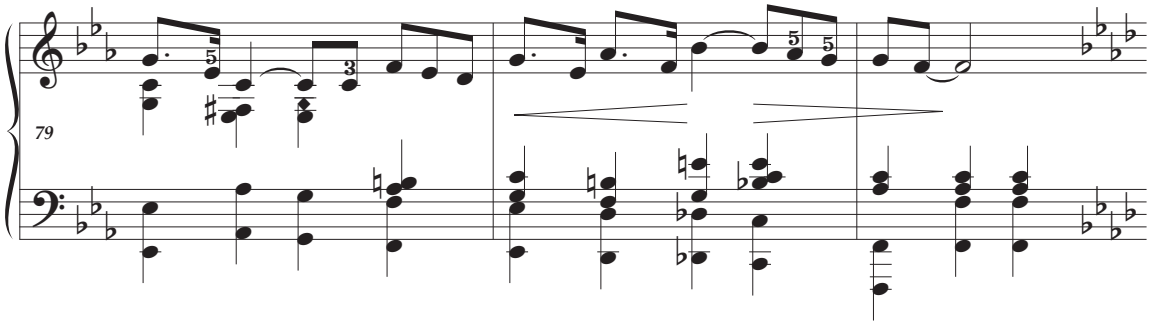


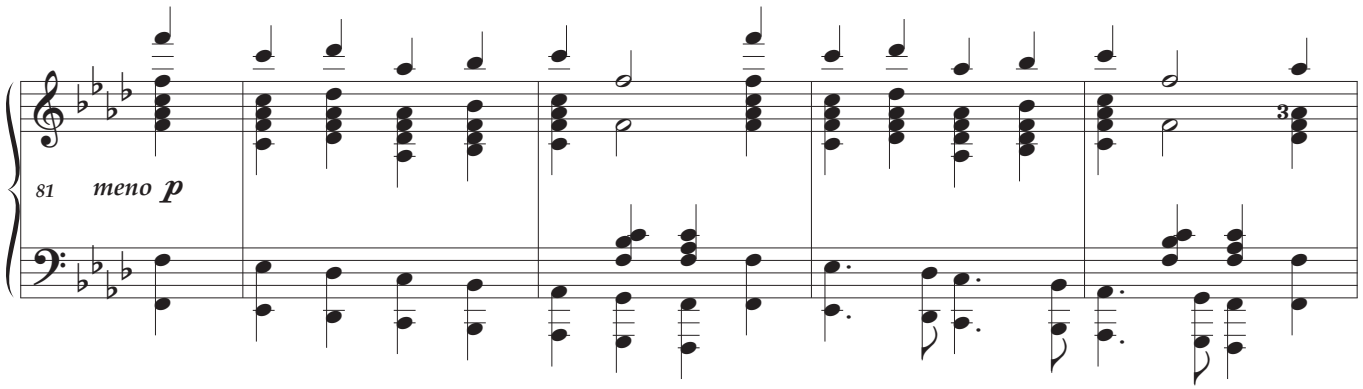


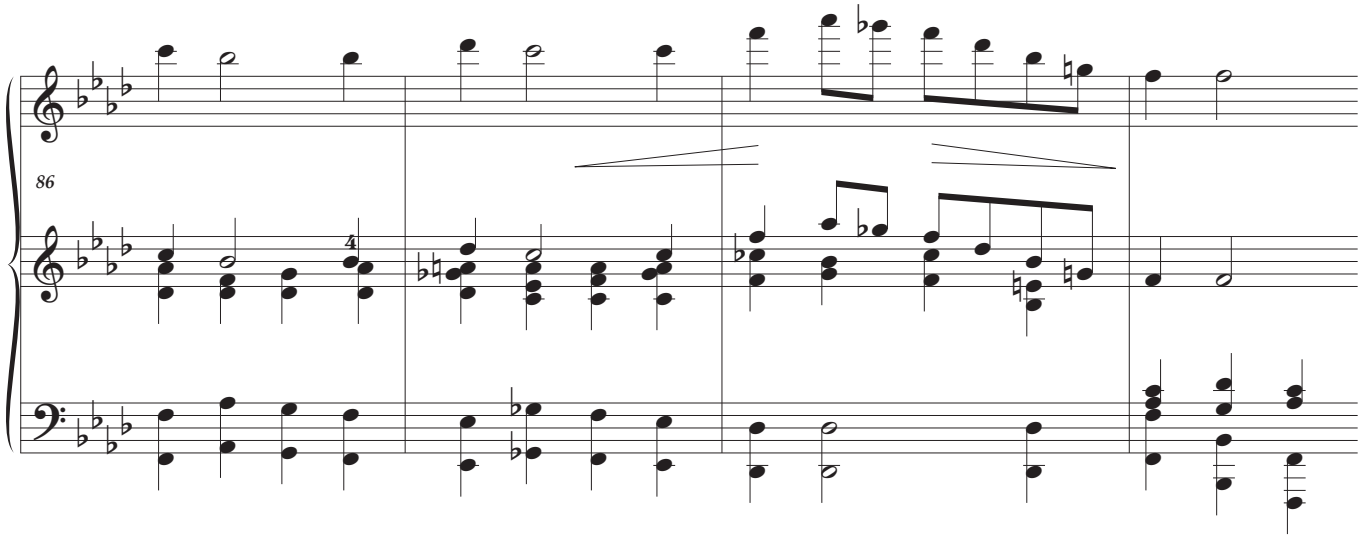


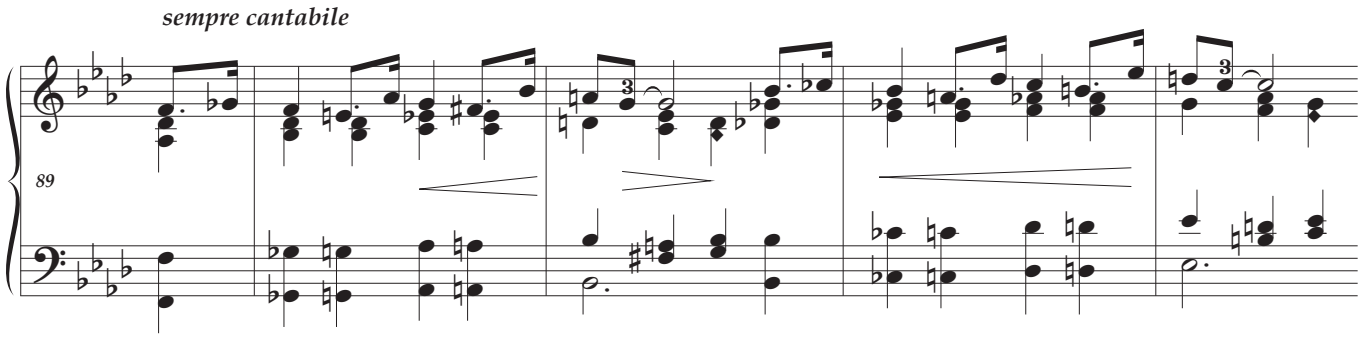

70
simile

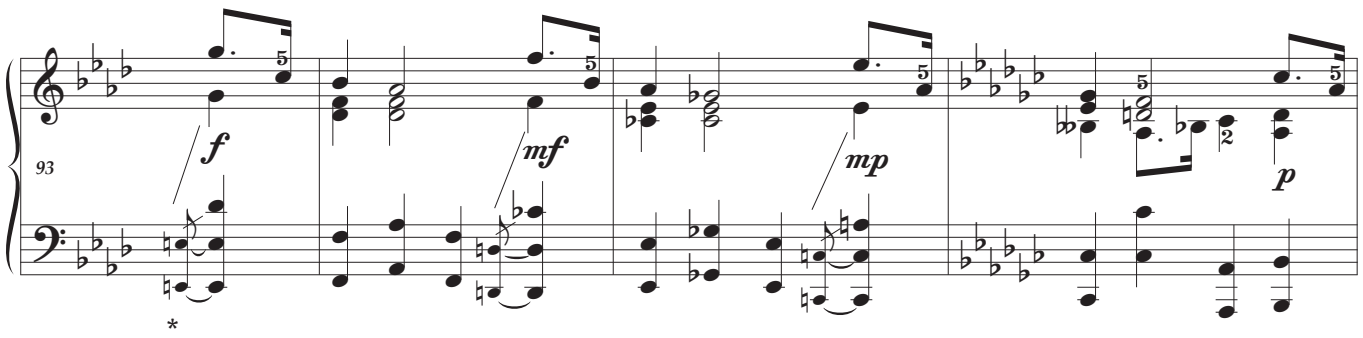

cantabile, non troppo dolce
75

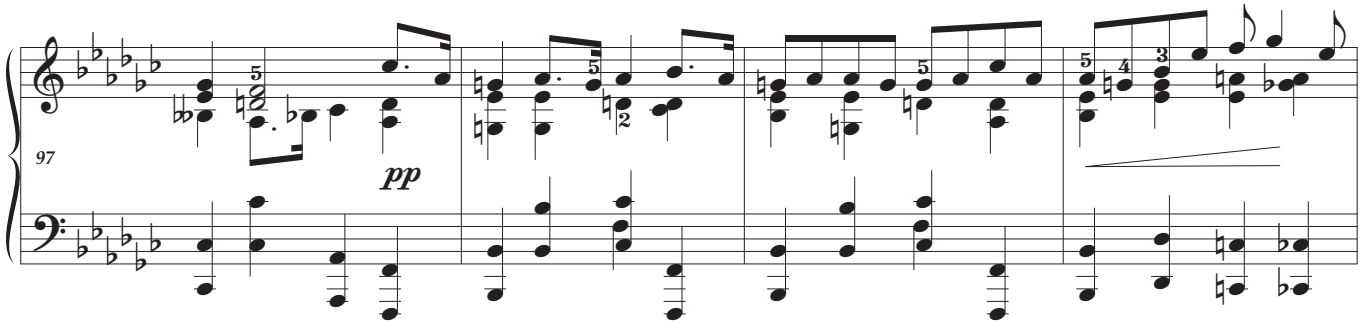

79


81
meno p


86


sempre cantabile
89


93
f
mf
mp
p
*


97
pp

largamente et forte

101

103

ff

107

ritardando

molto lento

112

sempre ***ff***

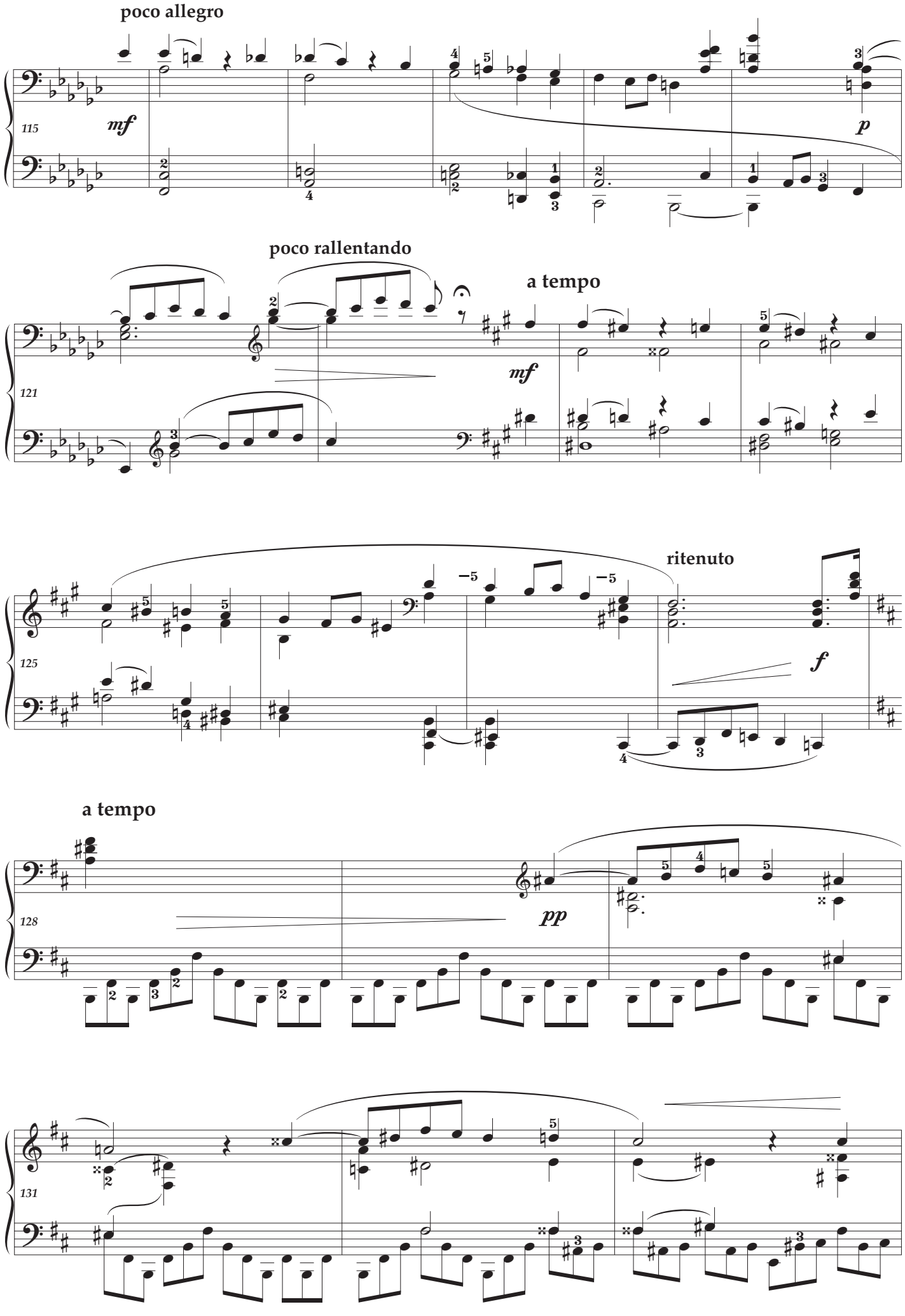
molto diminuendo

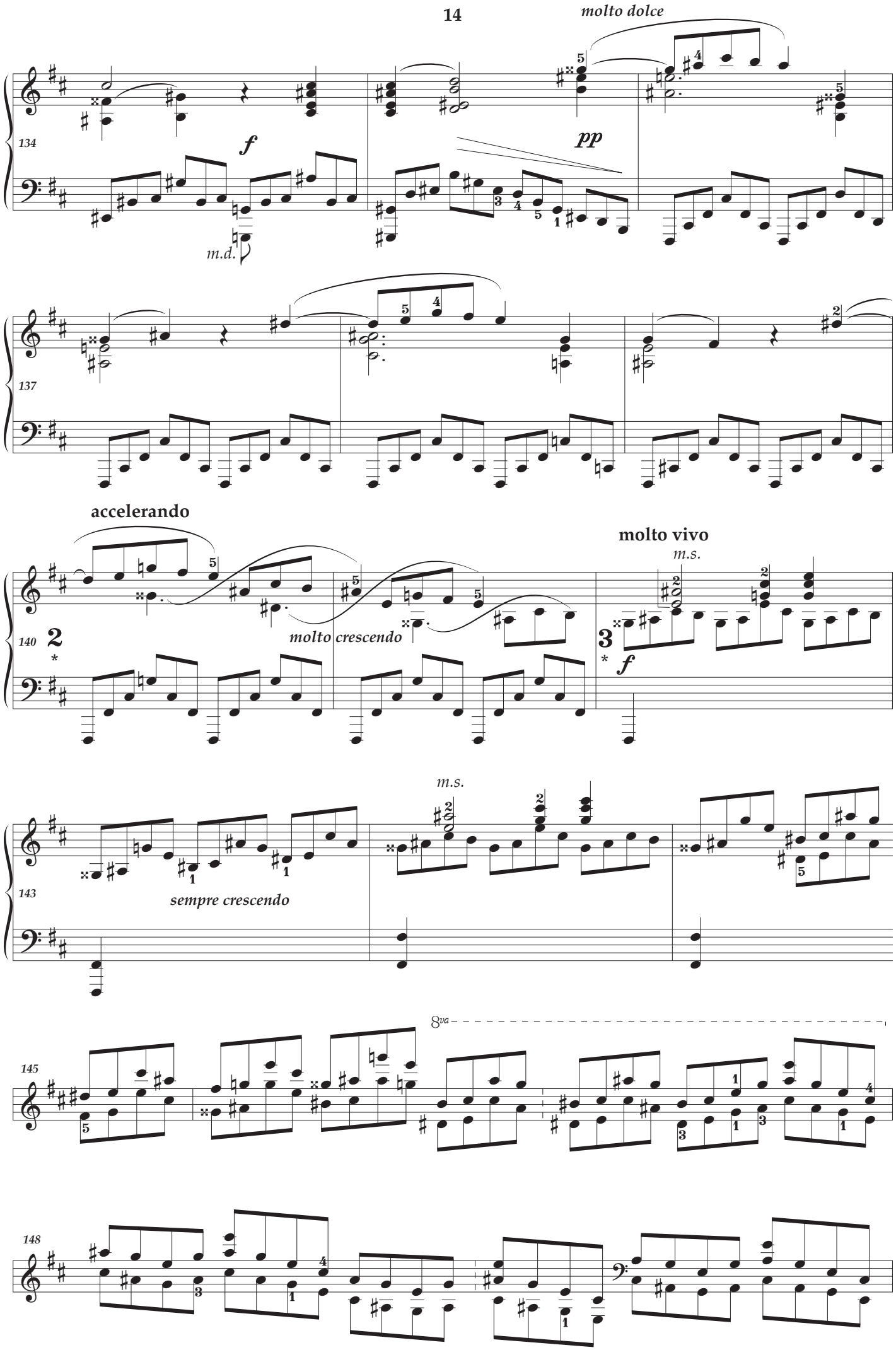
pp

m.d.

m.s.

* Ped.


poco allegro
115
mf
p
poco rallentando
a tempo
121
mf
125
ritenuto
f
a tempo
128
pp
131


molto dolce
134
f
pp
m.d.
137
accelerando
molto vivo
m.s.
140
molto crescendo
f
m.s.
143
sempre crescendo
8va
145
148

ritardando

FUGUE

tempo primo

150

2

sempre ***ff***

4

largamente

mf

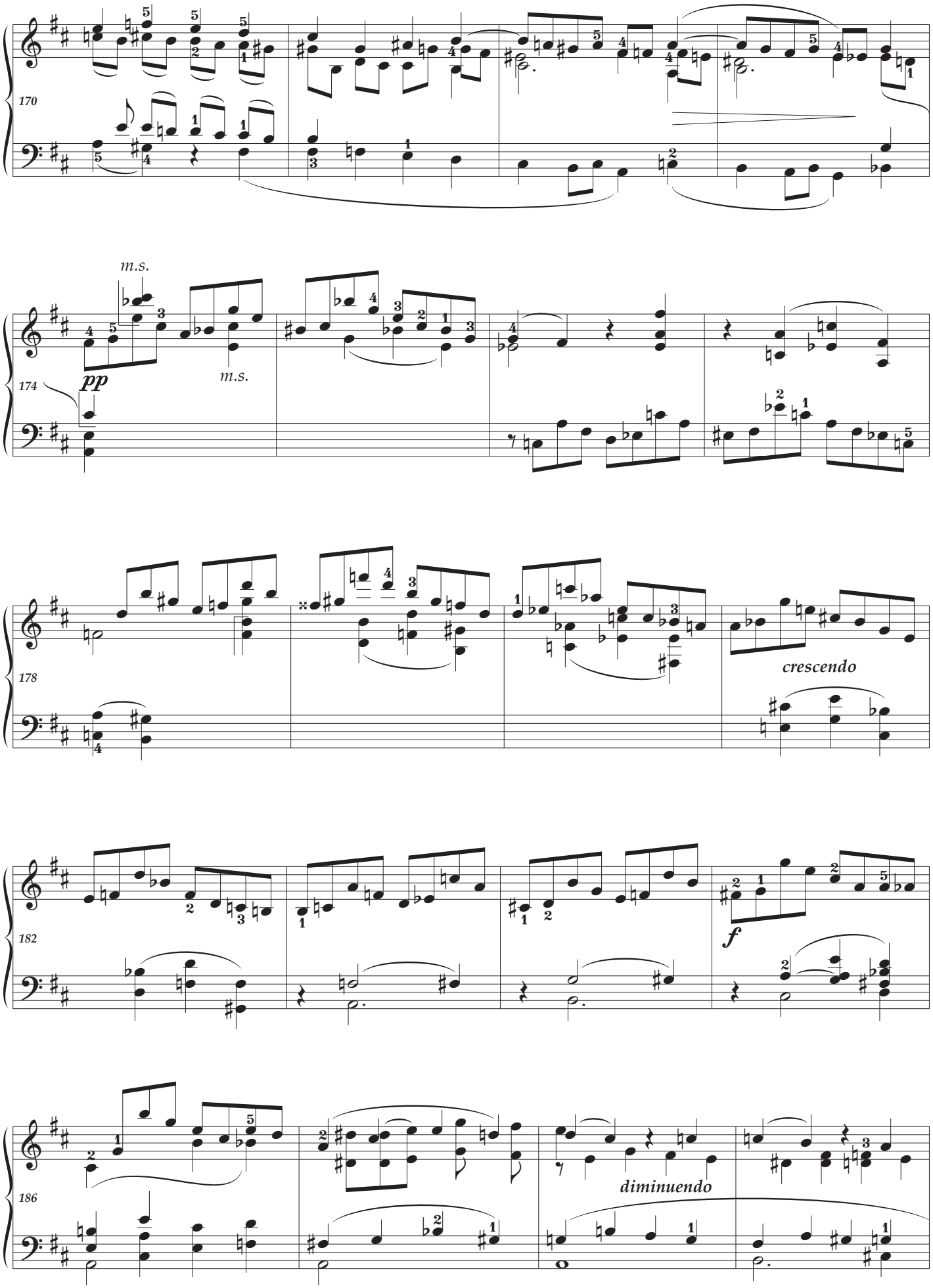
154

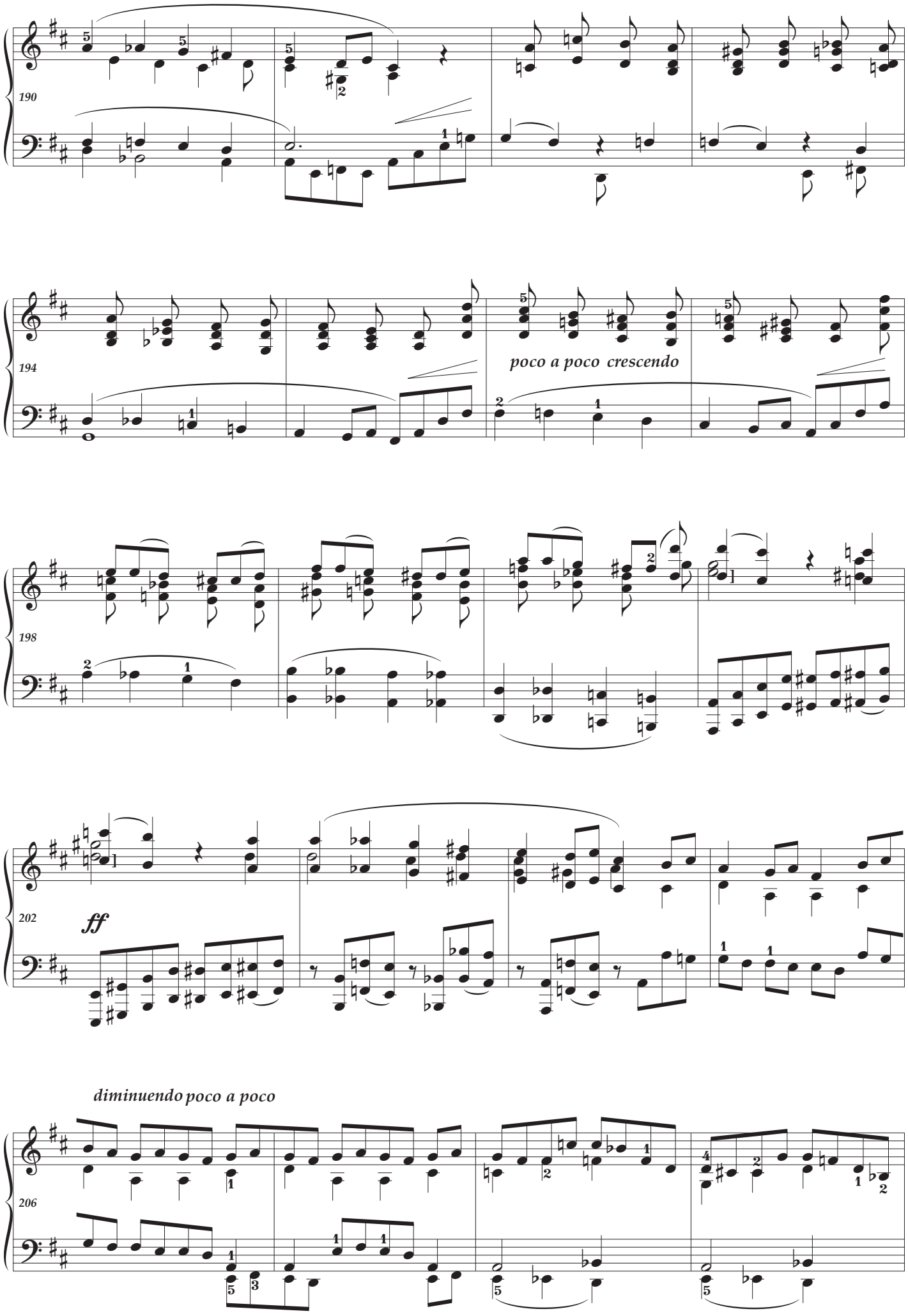
158

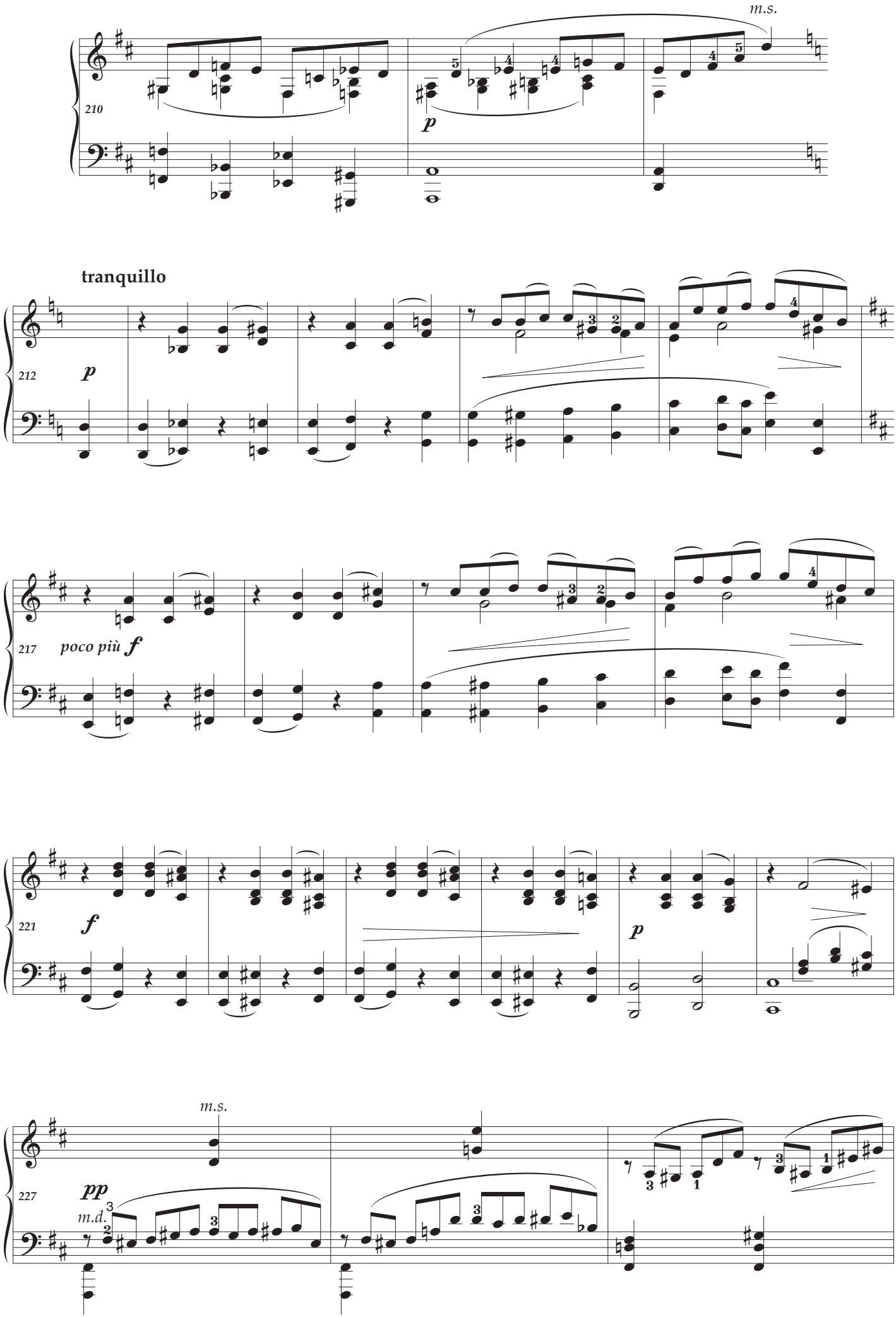
p *rubato espressivo*

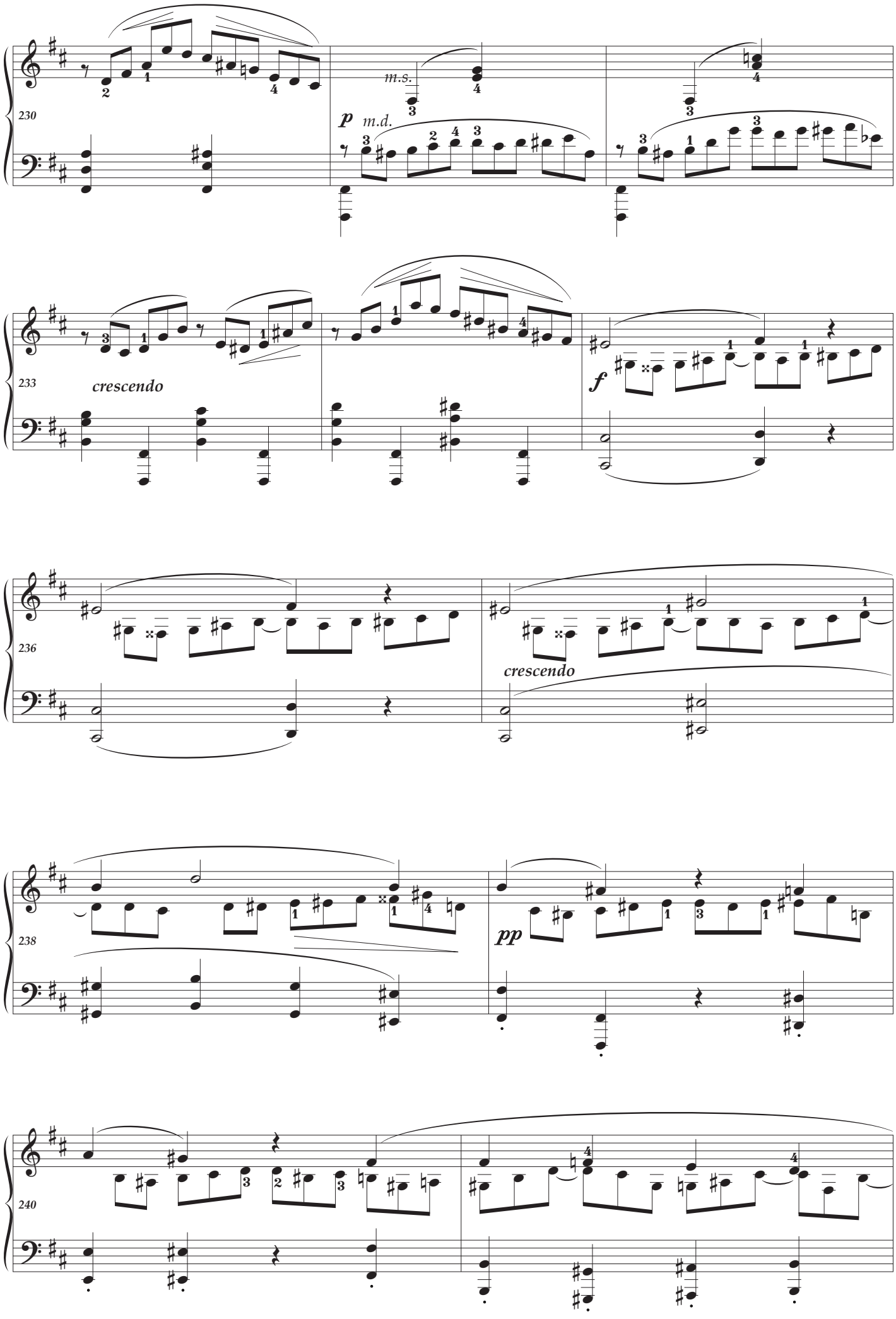
162

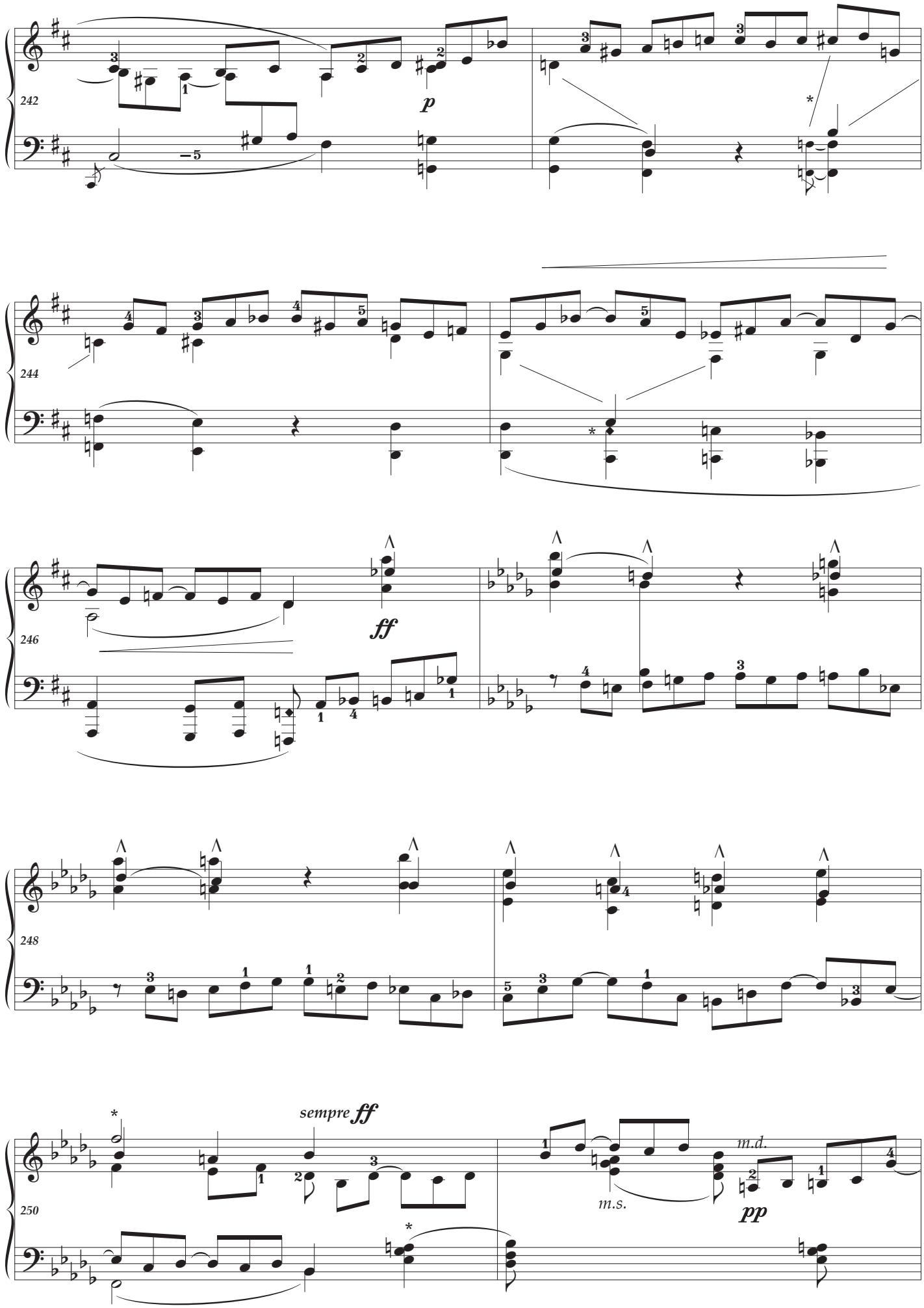
166

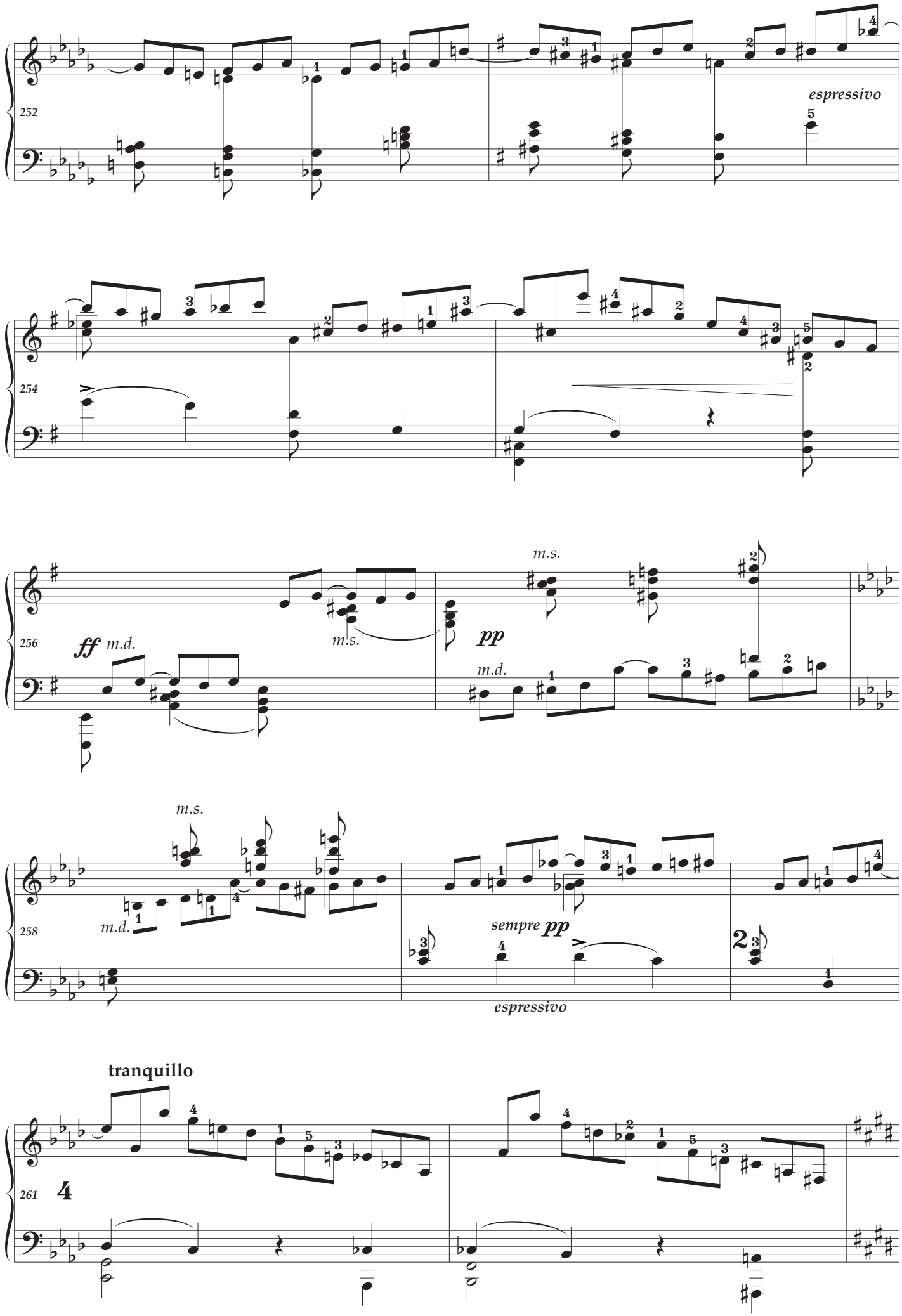

170
m.s.
pp
m.s.
174
178
crescendo
182
f
186
diminuendo

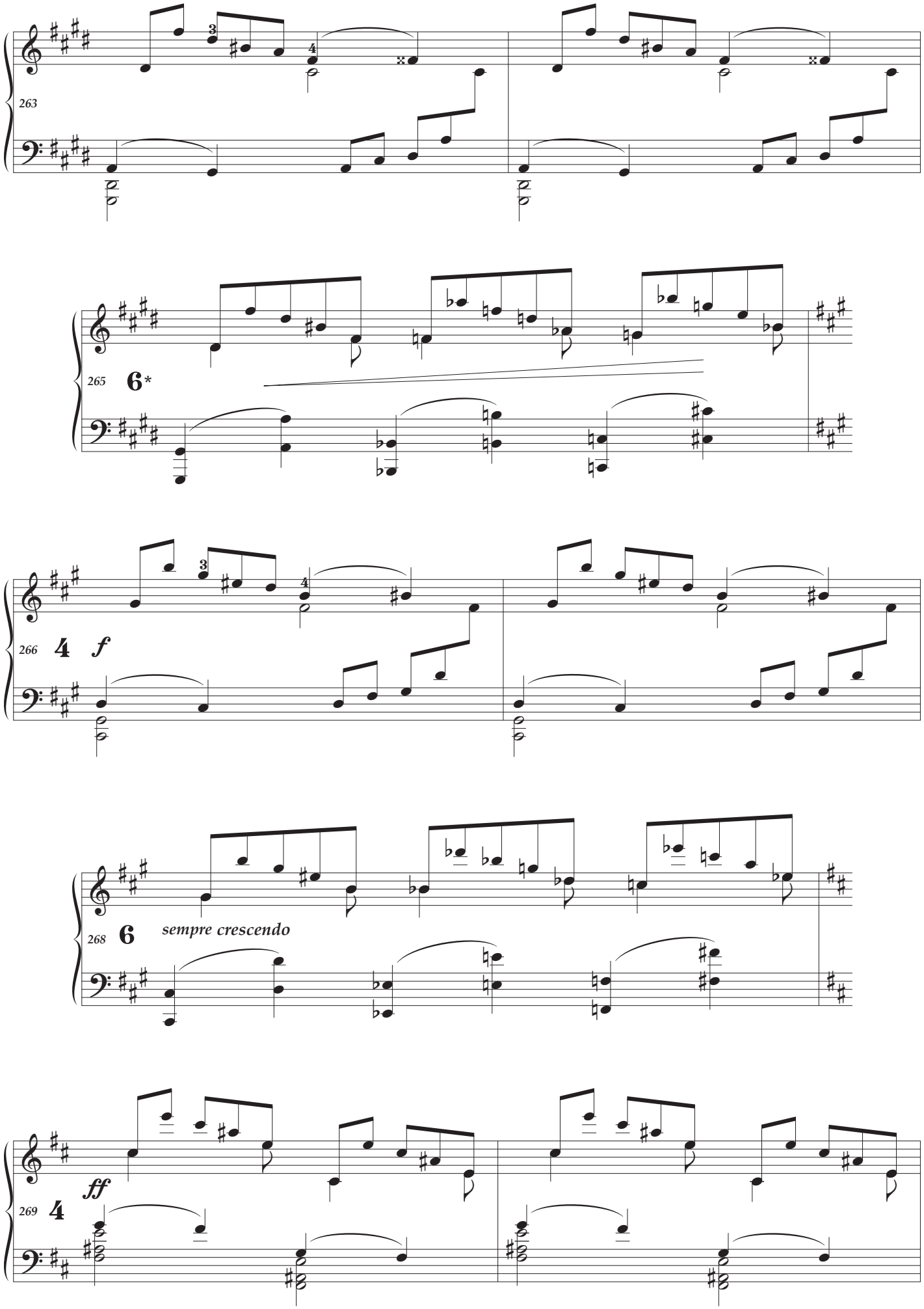

190
194
poco a poco crescendo
198
202
ff
diminuendo poco a poco
206

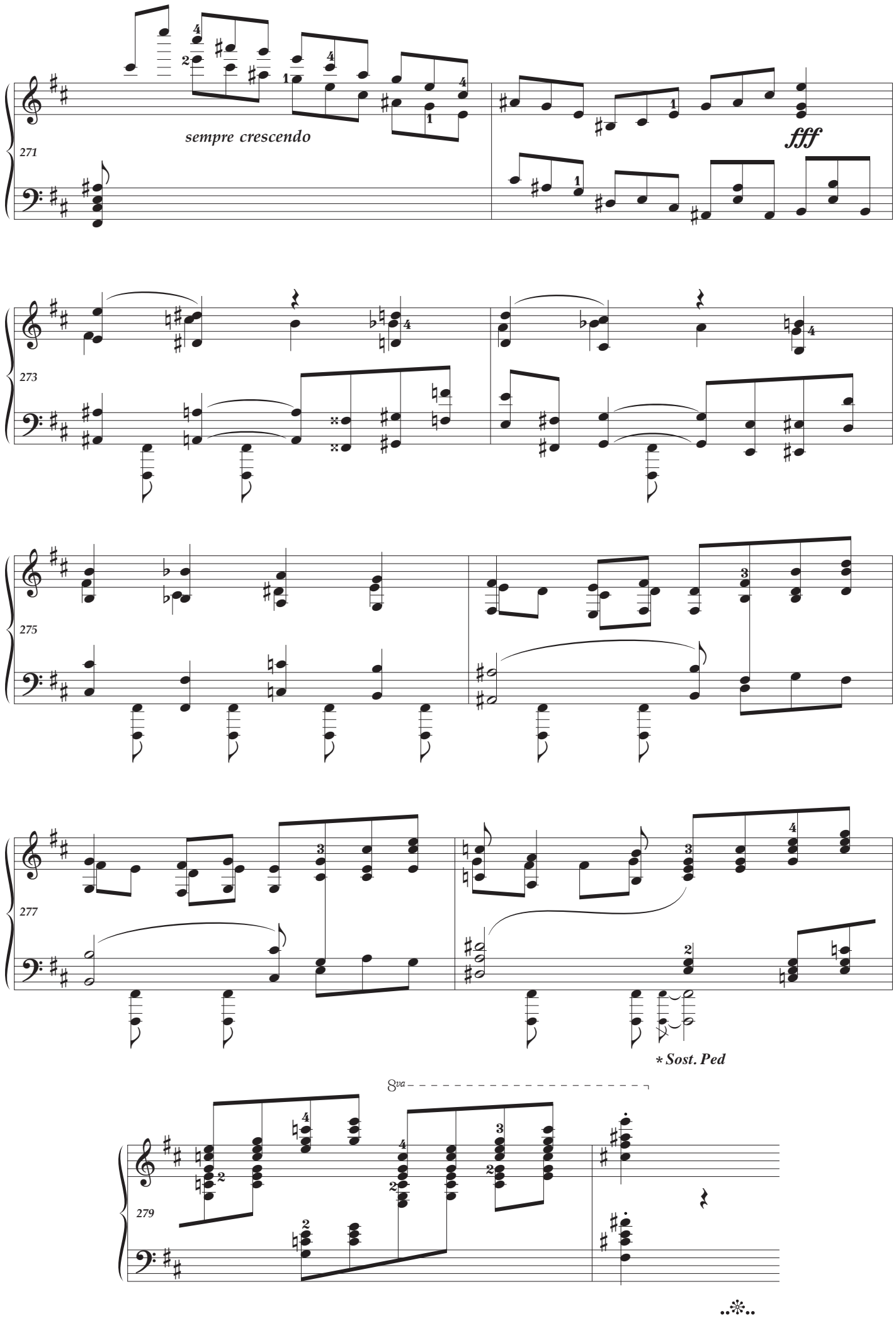

m.s.
210
p
tranquillo
212
p
217
poco più f
221
f
p
m.s.
227
pp
m.d.

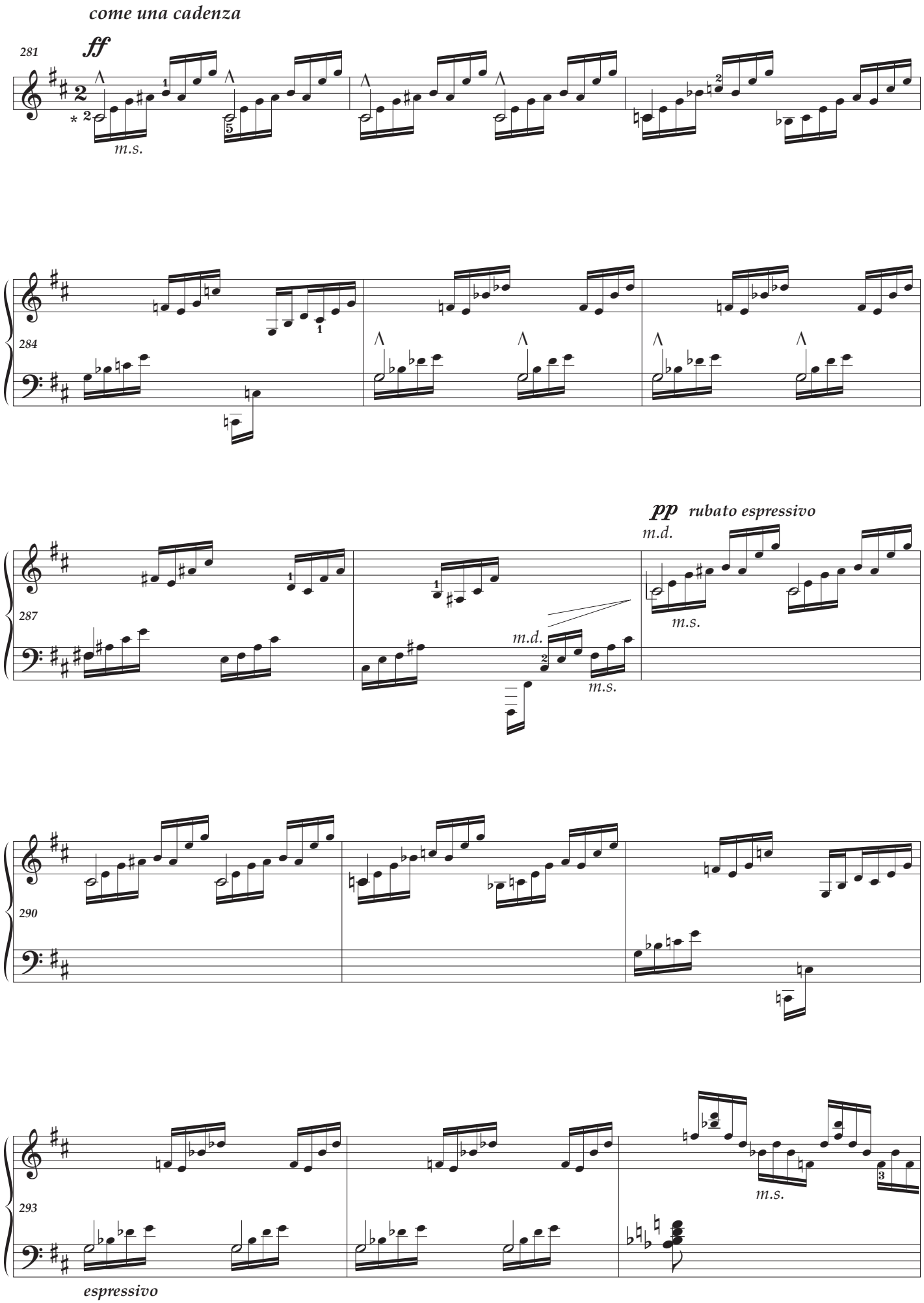

230
m.s.
p
m.d.
233
crescendo
f
236
crescendo
238
pp
240

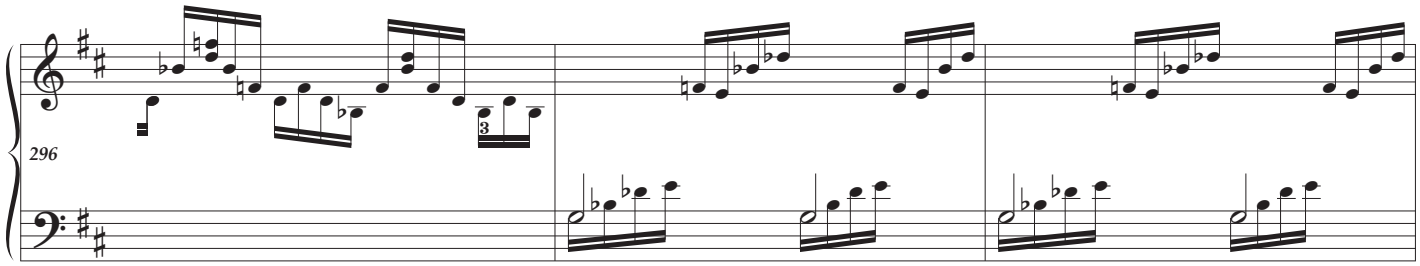

242
p
244
246
ff
248
sempre ff
m.d.
m.s.
pp
250

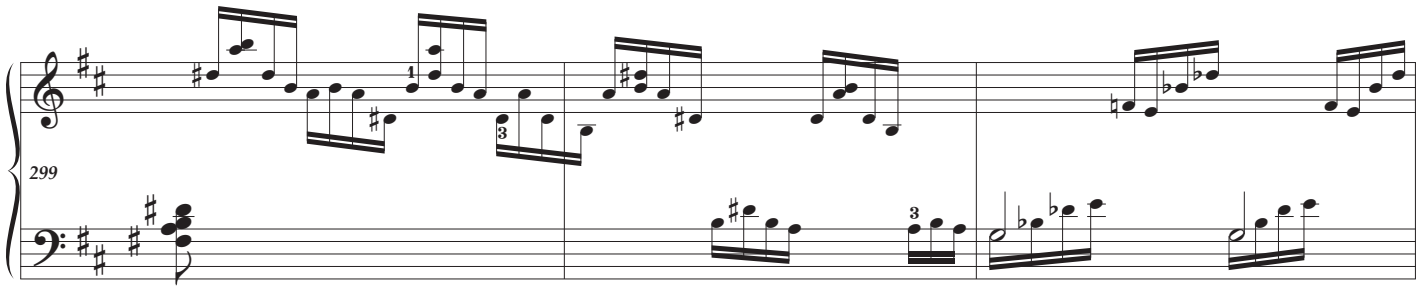

252
espressivo
254
256
ff m.d.
m.s.
m.s.
pp
m.d.
258
m.s.
m.d.
sempre pp
espressivo
tranquillo
261
4

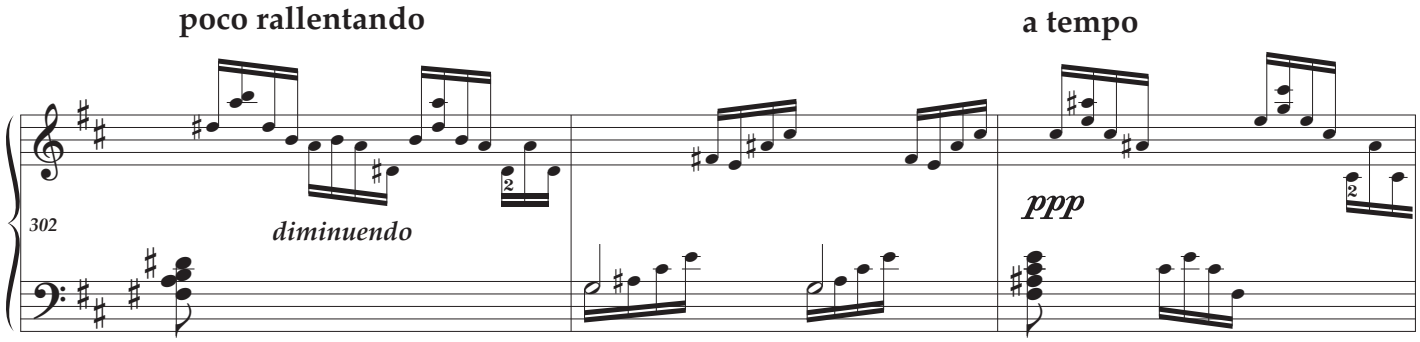

263
265
6*
266
4
f
268
6
sempre crescendo
269
ff
4

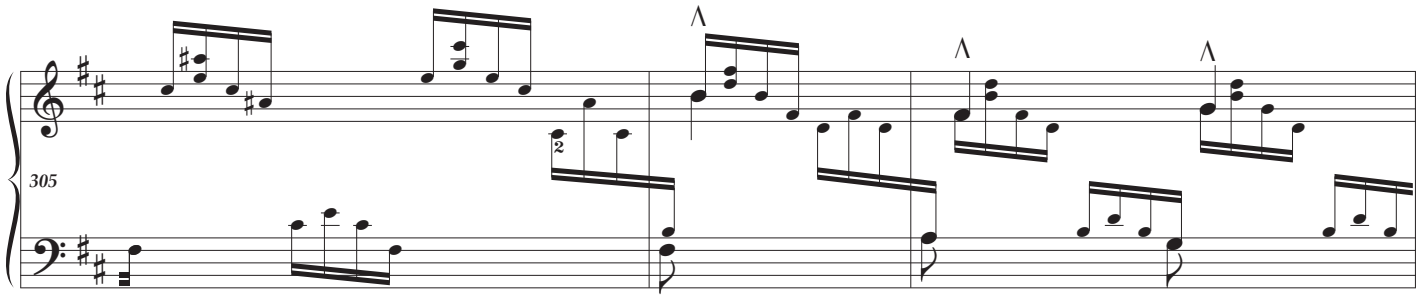

sempre crescendo
fff
271
273
275
277
* Sost. Ped
8va
279

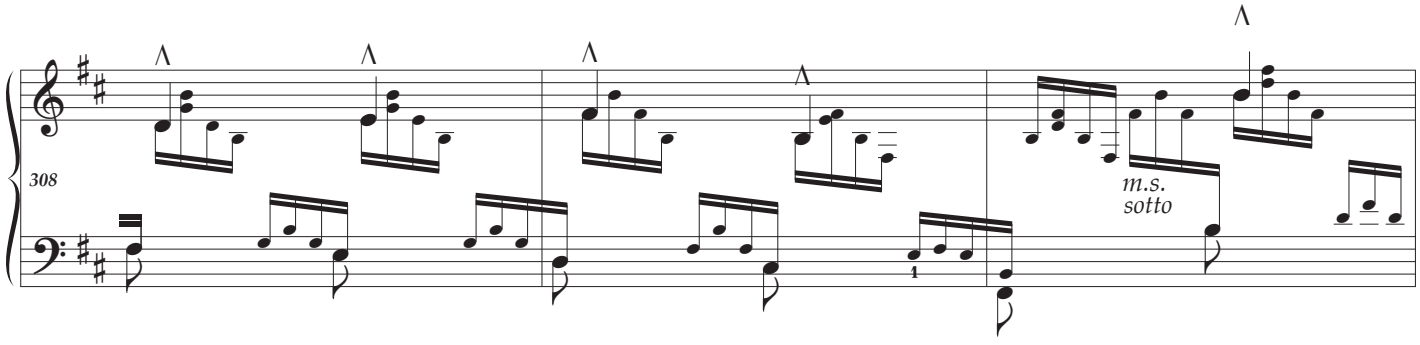

come una cadenza
ff
281
m.s.
284
287
pp rubato espressivo
m.d.
m.s.
m.d.
m.s.
290
293
m.s.
espressivo

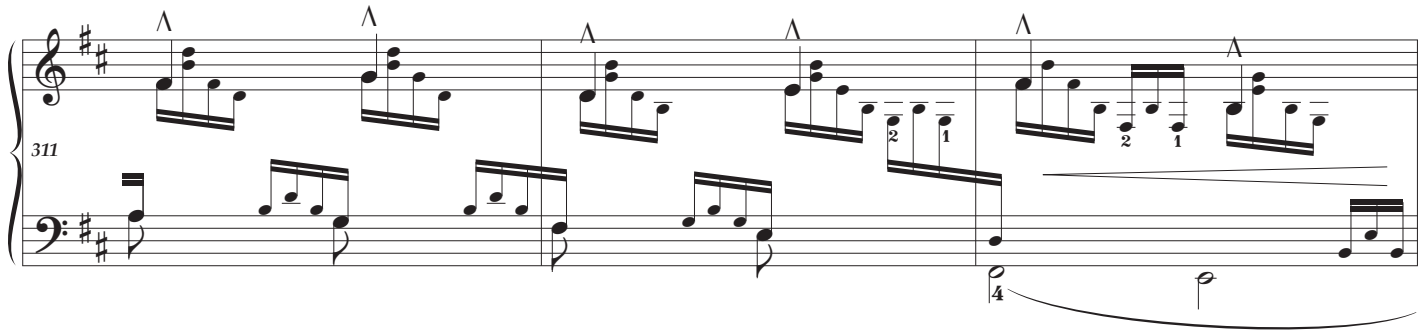

296

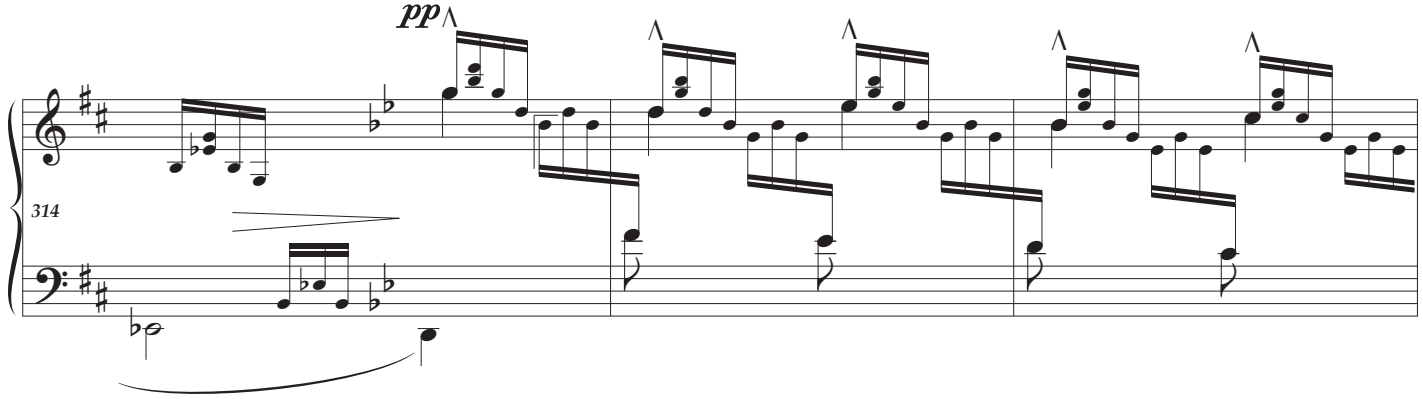

299

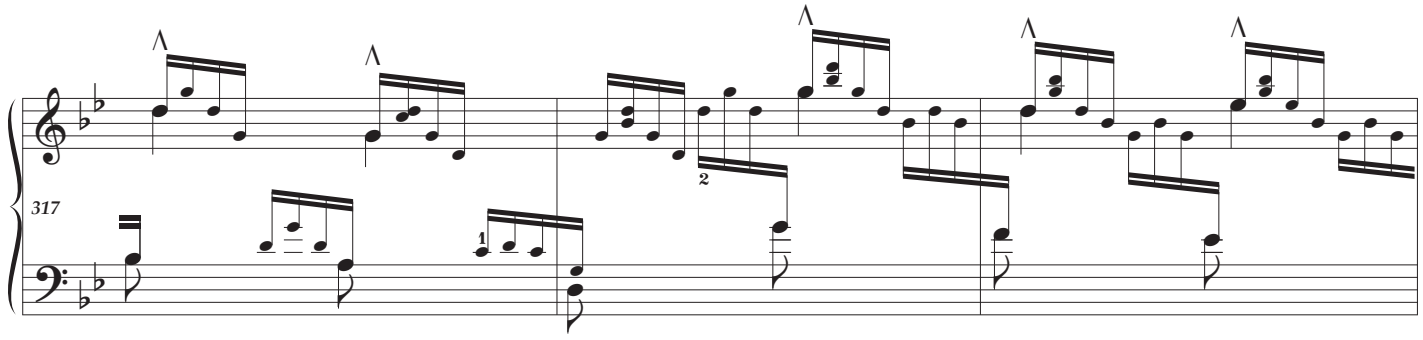

poco rallentando
a tempo
302
diminuendo
ppp


305

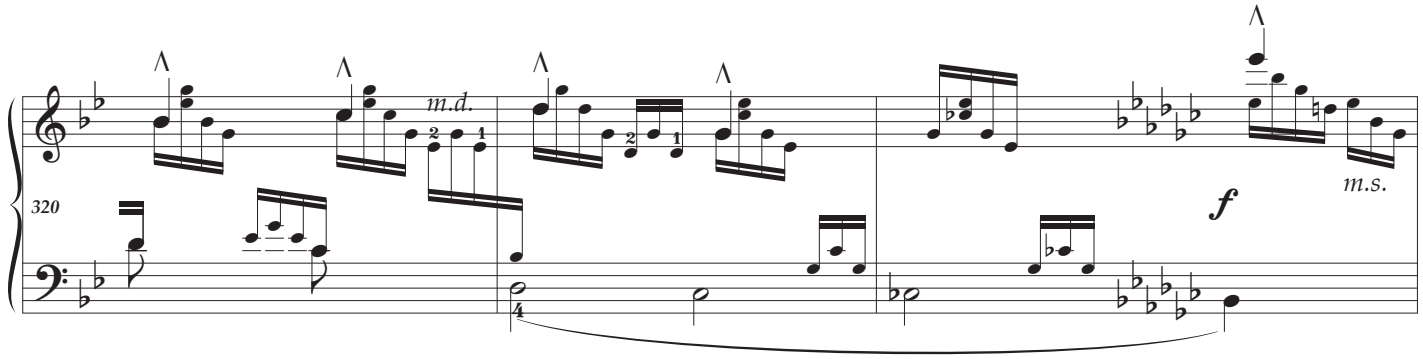

308
m.s.
sotto

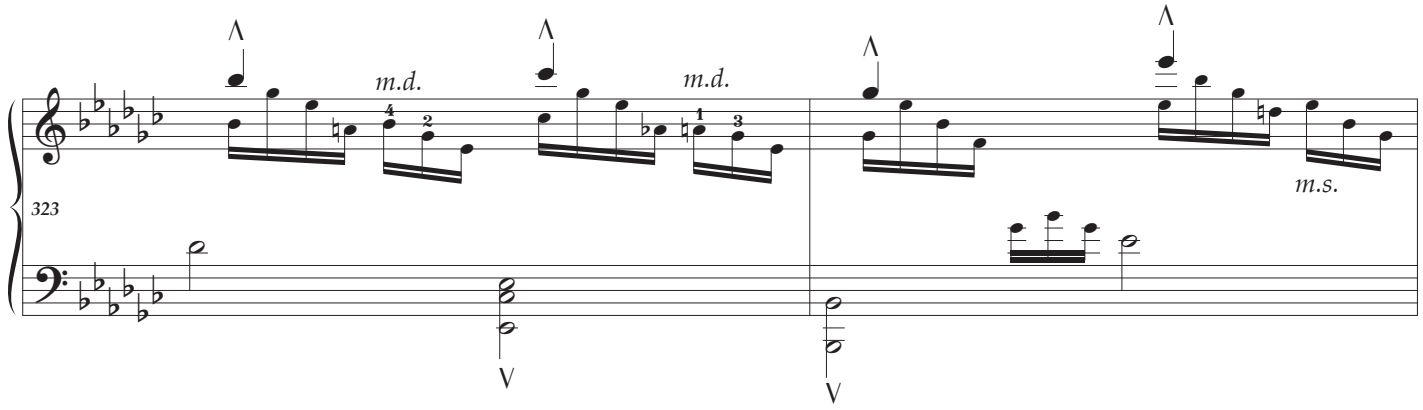


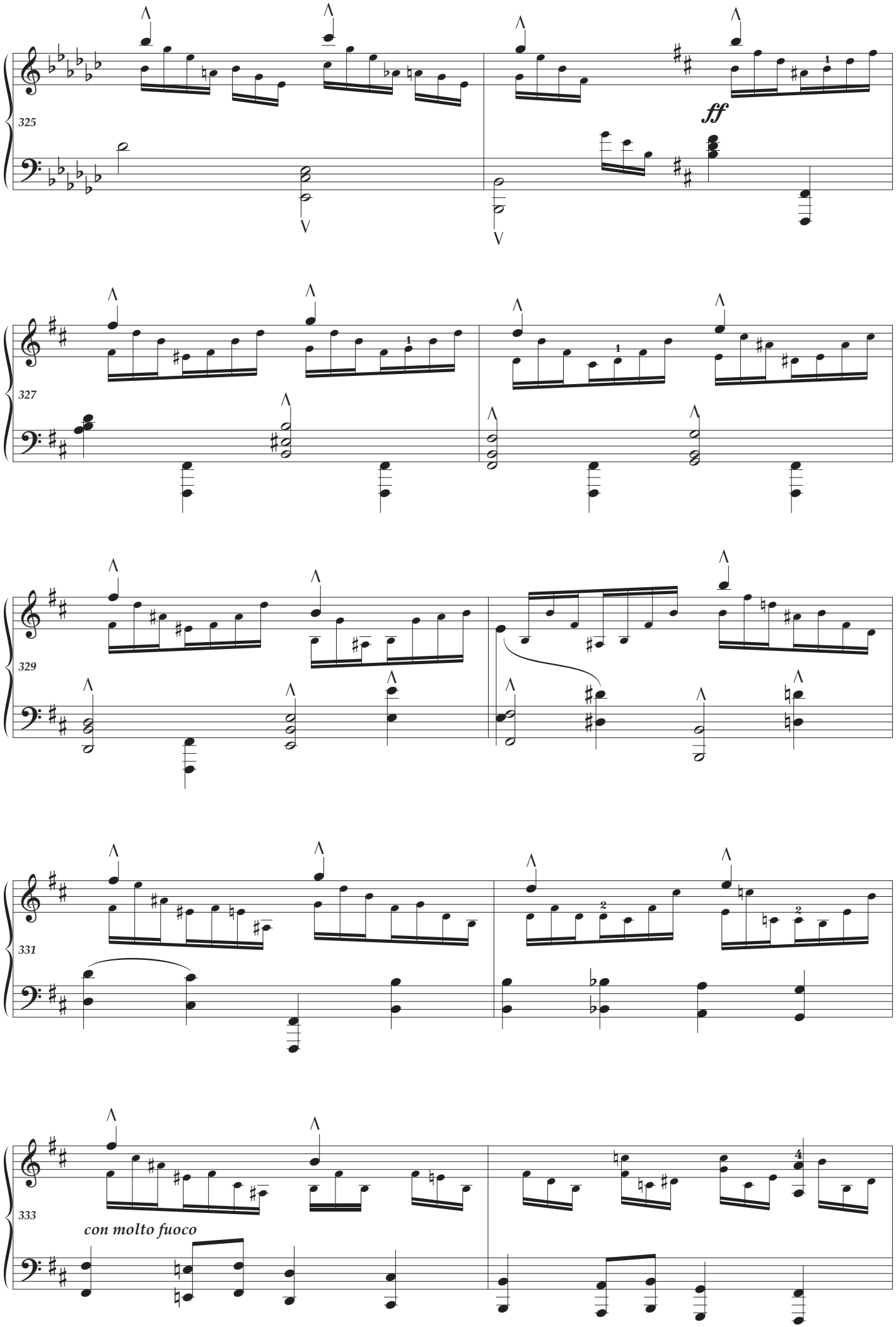


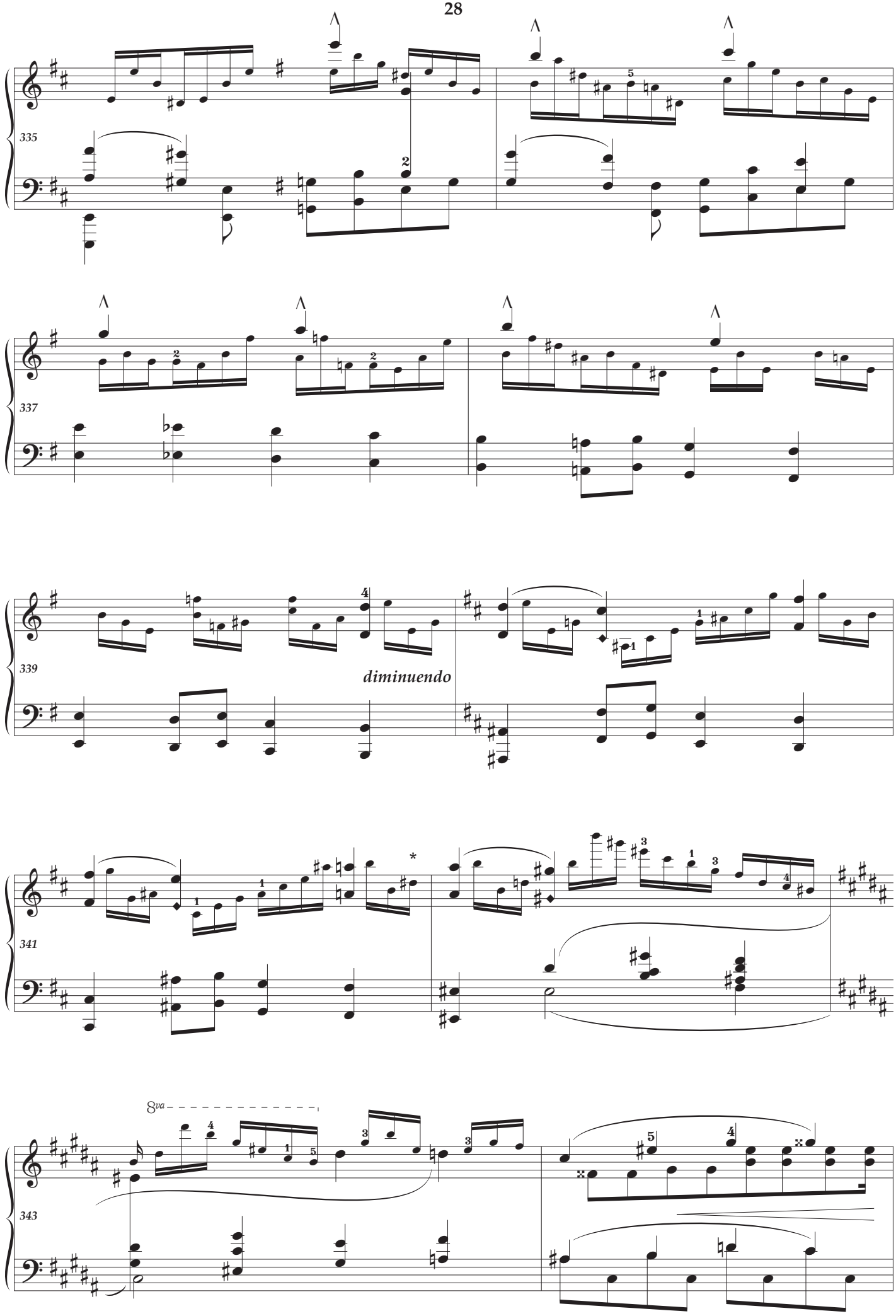


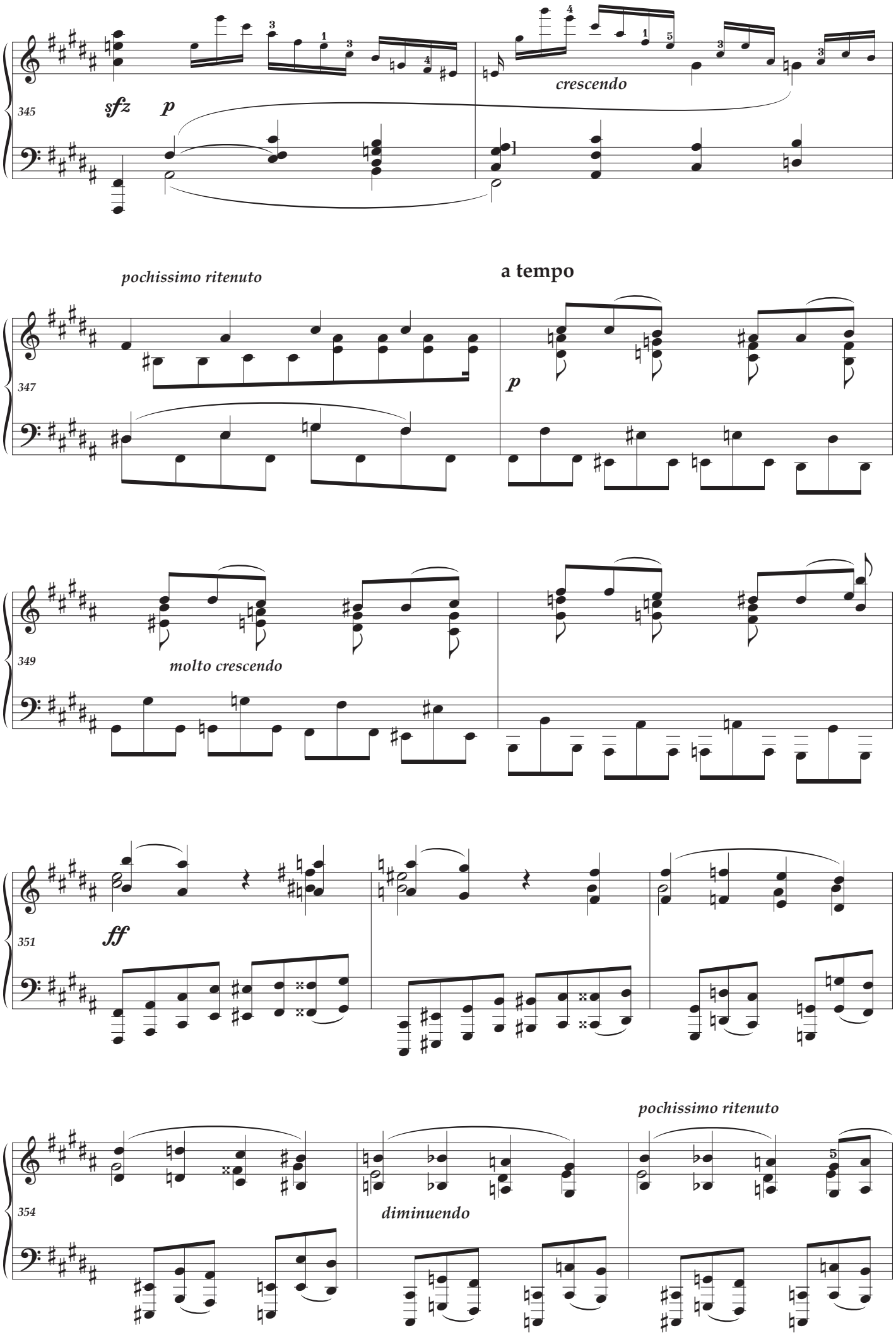
poco a poco crescendo

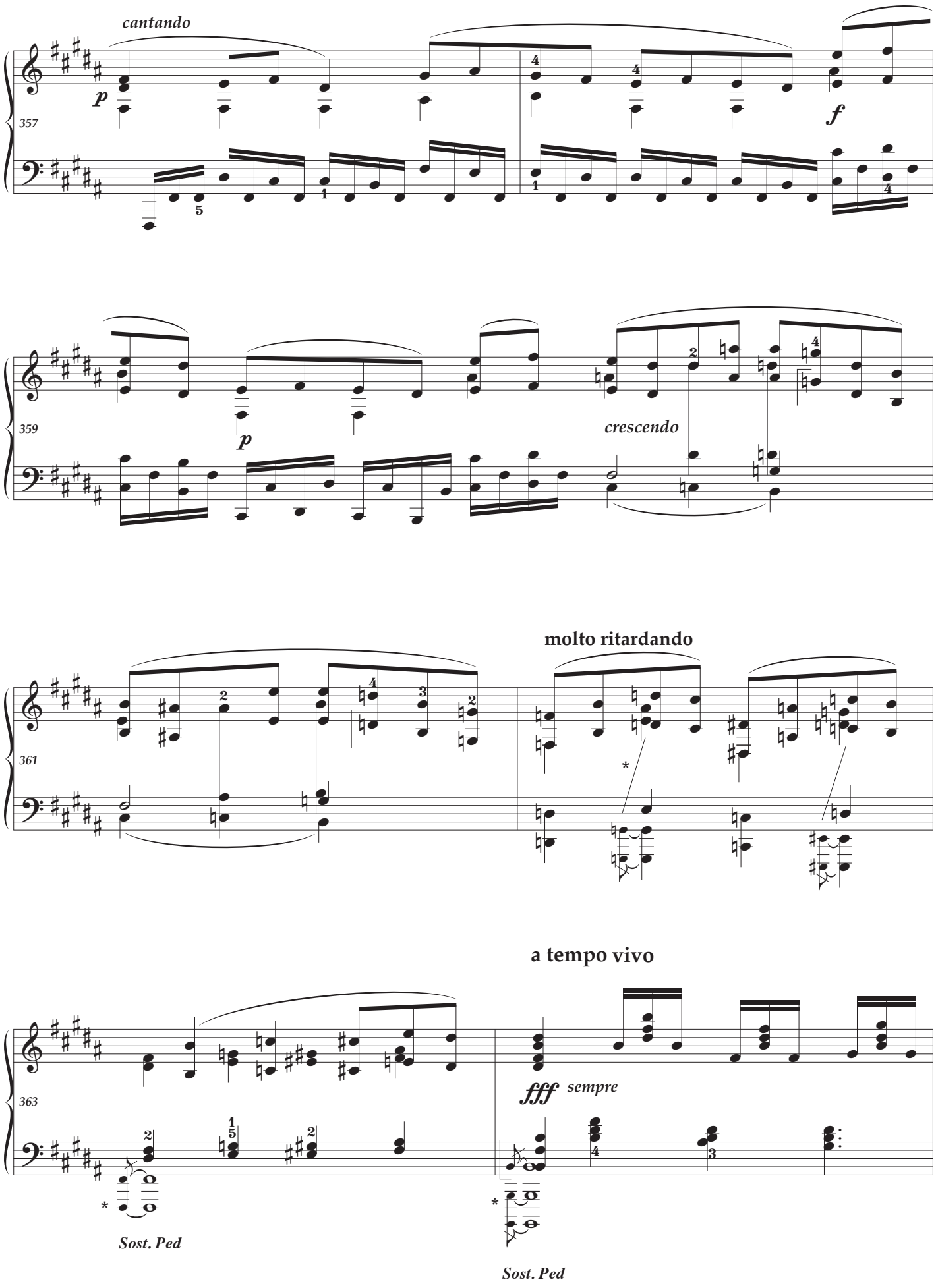


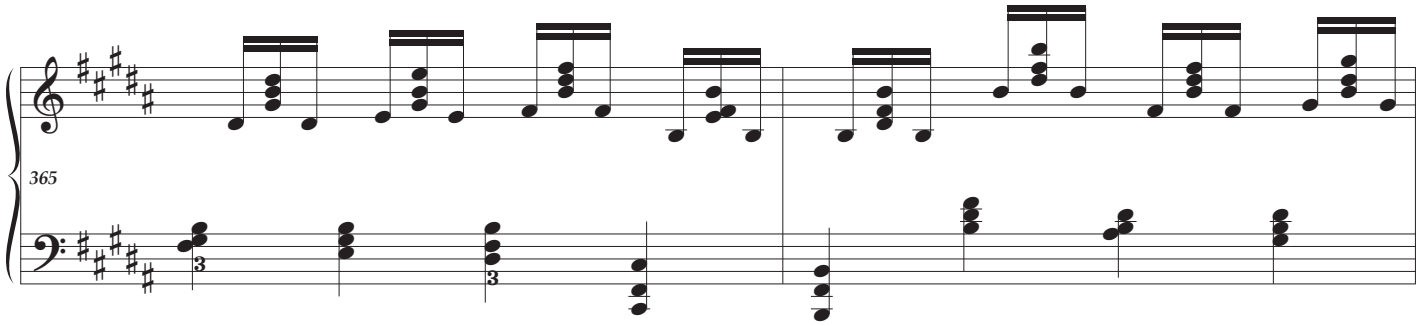


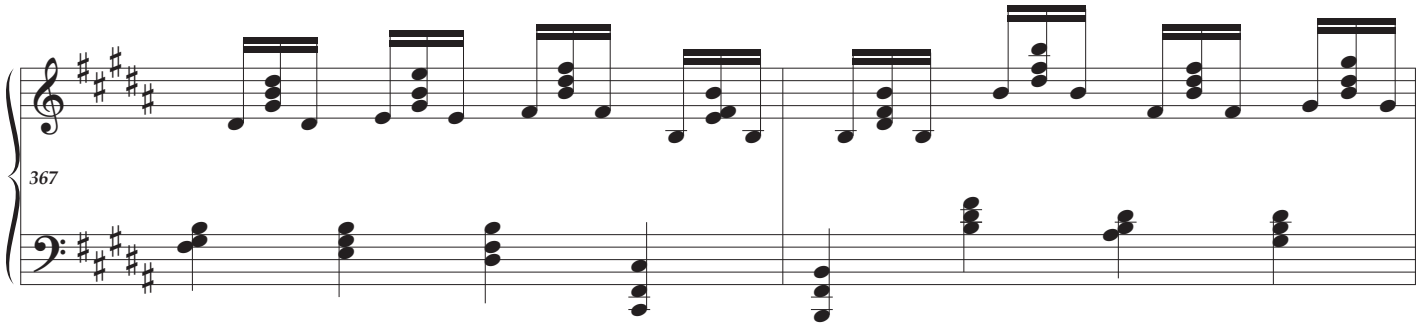

325
ff
327
329
331
333
con molto fuoco

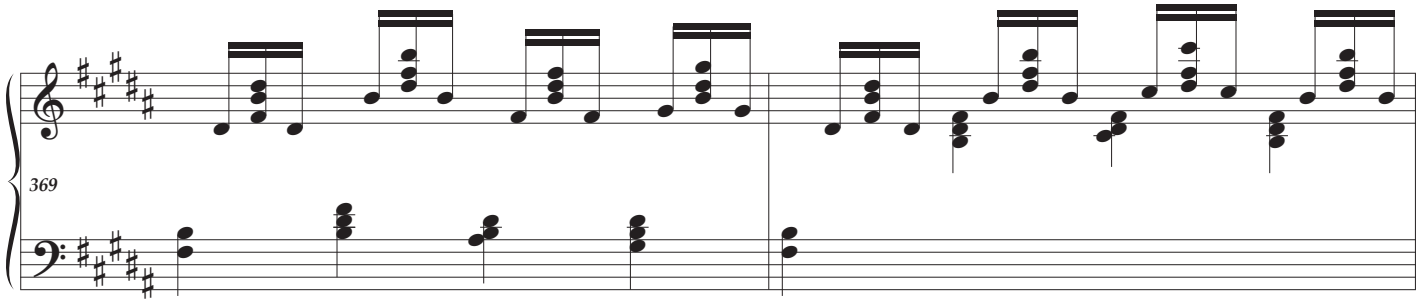

335
337
339
diminuendo
341
343
8va

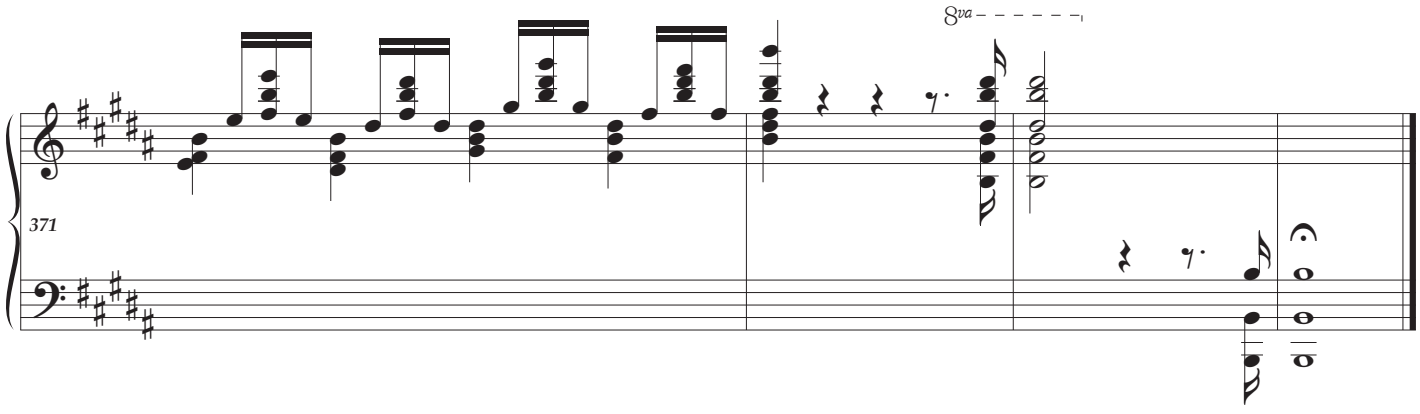

345
sfz
p
crescendo
pochissimo ritenuto
a tempo
347
p
349
molto crescendo
351
ff
354
diminuendo
pochissimo ritenuto


cantando
p
357
f
359
p
crescendo
361
molto ritardando
363
a tempo vivo
fff sempre
Sost. Ped
Sost. Ped


365
3
3


367


369


371
8va

Appendix

Prélude

The basic pulse of the Prelude and Chorale should be quite similar, with the former demanding a much more flexible approach to tempo.

- editorial reduced font
- **1/16** a possible alternative to soften the accompaniment
- **9/25** editorial *acciaccatura* — silently replay the tied bass to 'clean up' the harmony
- **12** editorial *diminuendo*
- **23** editorial arrangement
- **39** editorial *acciaccatura*
- **54** left hand editorial arrangement

Choral

Poco più lento is just a <u>little</u> slower — beware of playing too slowly and at a static tempo

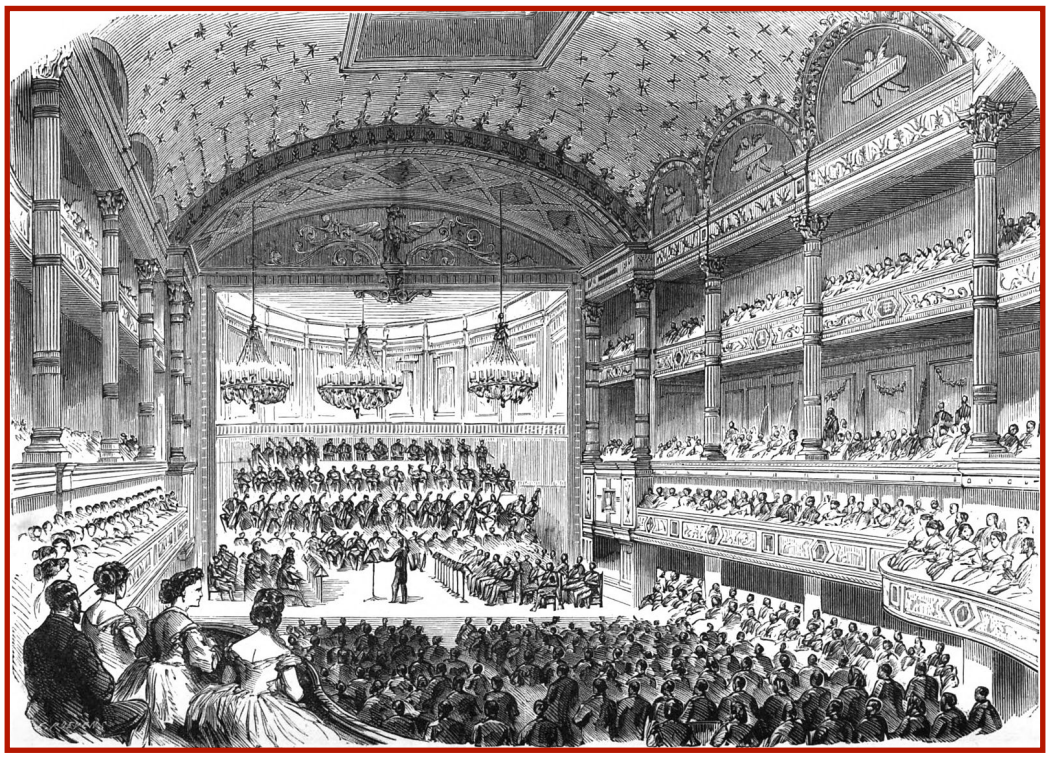
- **59** a possible tie
- **61** D quaver is a possible error
- **64** editorial *acciaccatura*
- **66/101** left hand editorial arrangement
- **68** the arpeggiation is full length from bass to treble — however, I think it is more effective as modified in this edition, with the bass and treble octaves blocked
- **70** I prefer a block chord, although it is unclear whether each phrase should end with an arpeggiated chord
- **93-95** left hand editorial arrangement
- **114** editorial pedal
- **115** editorial arrangement — silently replay the tied treble E♭

link to Fugue

- **140-149** editorial modification of time-signatures

Fugue

- editorial reduced font
- **153** bass one octave lower
- **243** editorial arrangement
- **245** the diamond-headed note may be omitted
- **250** soprano tie removed
- **265-268** editorial time-signatures
- **278** editorial arrangement with *sostenuto* pedal
- **281-306** modification of barlines and reduced font for accompaniment, editorial time-signature
- **340-342** the diamond-headed notes may be omitted
- **341** D♮ is a probable error
- **362-364** editorial arrangement with sostenuto pedal



Salle du Conservatoire de Musique — Gourdon de Genouillac 1881

F R A N C K

PRÉLUDE, CHORAL et FUGUE

p u b l i s h e d J u l y 2 0 2 3

Please send comments and error reports to
Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

Piano Practical Editions
pianopracticaleditions.com