La valse

For Solo Piano

Maurice Ravel
(Arr. Holden Mui)

cover art by {artist}

for all masochistic pianists

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Program Notes

La valse, poème chorégraphique pour orchestre ("The Waltz, a choreographic poem for orchestra") is, in the words of Francis Poulenc, "one of the most imaginative, virtuosic, and terrifying orchestral creations of the 20th century." Conceived as a tribute to Johann Strauss II and the Viennese waltz, it depicts the life cycle of a waltz, from its birth to its eventual destruction. The work exists in three forms: a piano solo, a piano duet, and the orchestral version.

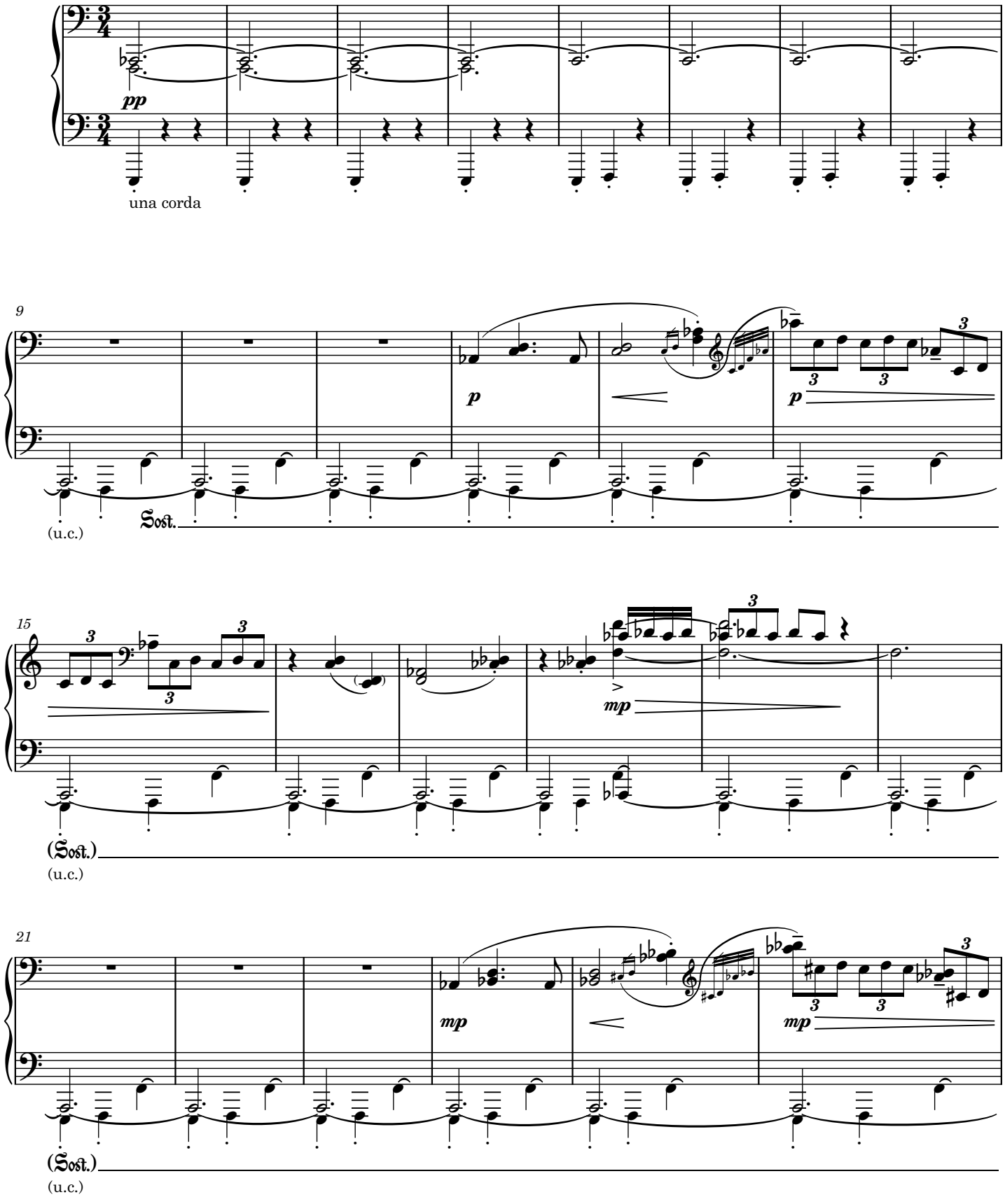
In the preface to the score, Ravel described the opening scene as:

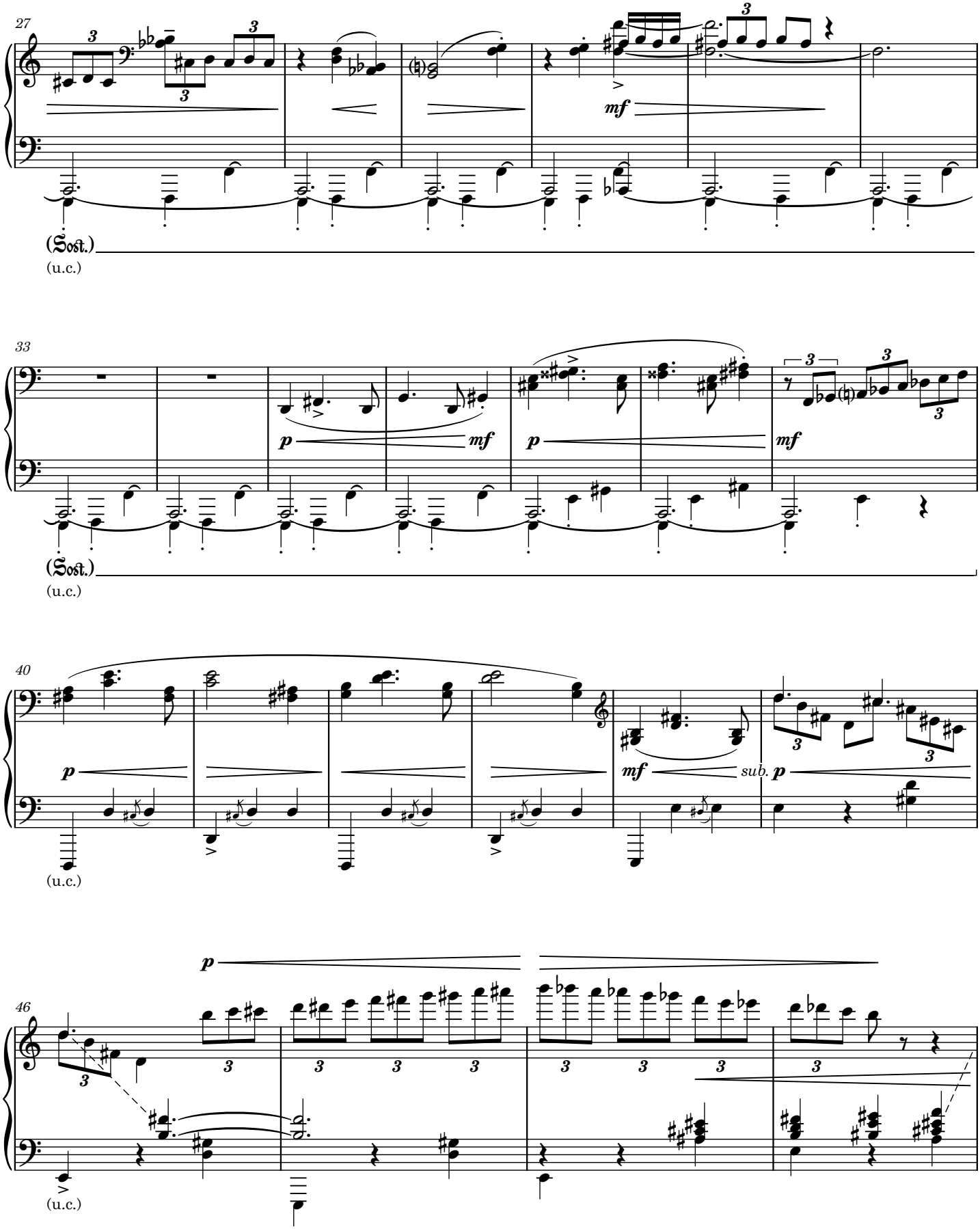
Swirling clouds afford glimpses, through rifts, of waltzing couples. The clouds scatter little by little; one can distinguish an immense hall with a whirling crowd. The scene grows progressively brighter. The light of the chandeliers bursts forth at the fortissimo. An imperial court, about 1855.

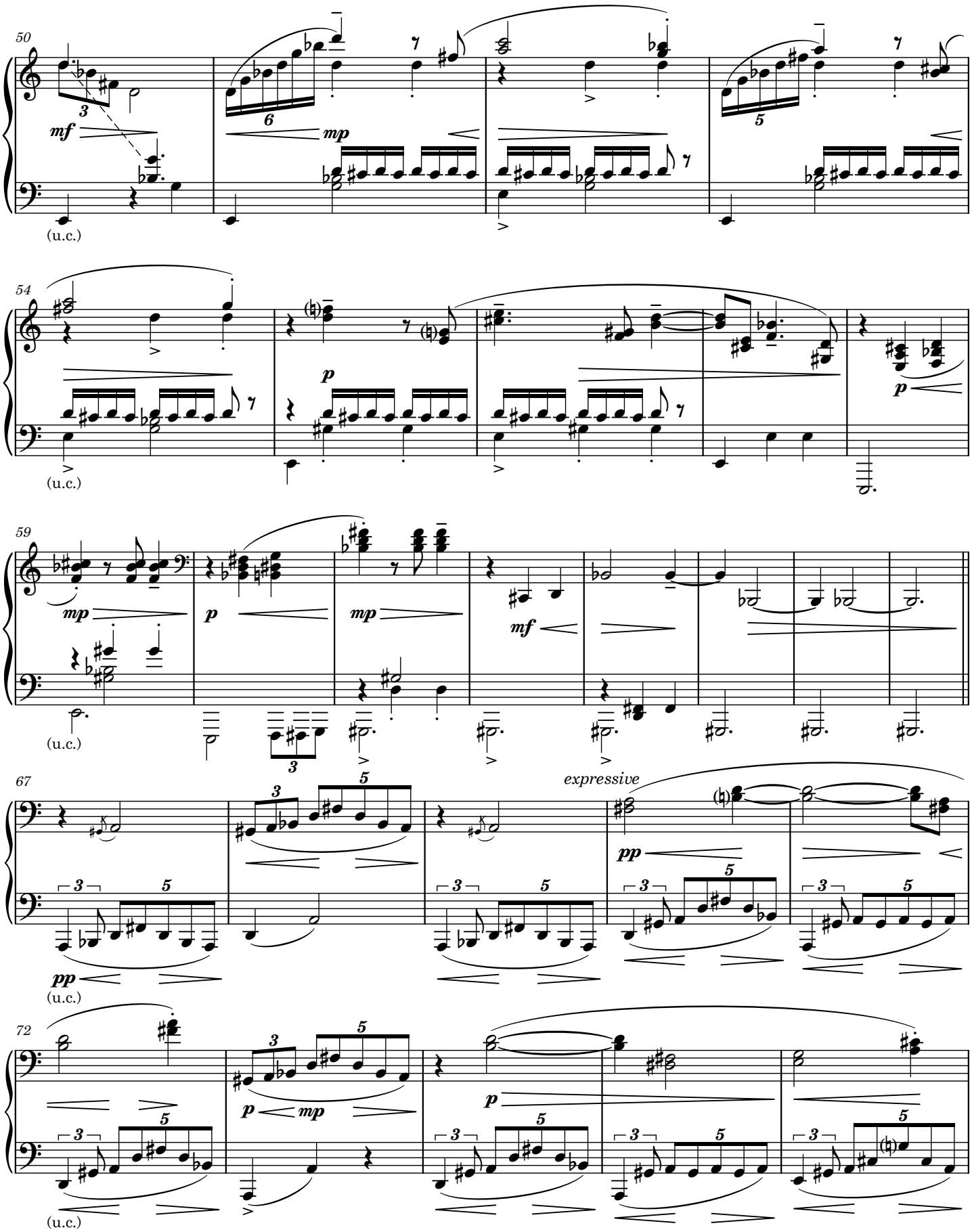
In the second half of the work, the themes fragment and recombine in increasingly complex ways as the piece reaches its chaotic climax. In a final gesture, Ravel ends the work with a quadruplet tuple, ultimately obliterating any remaining semblance of a waltz.

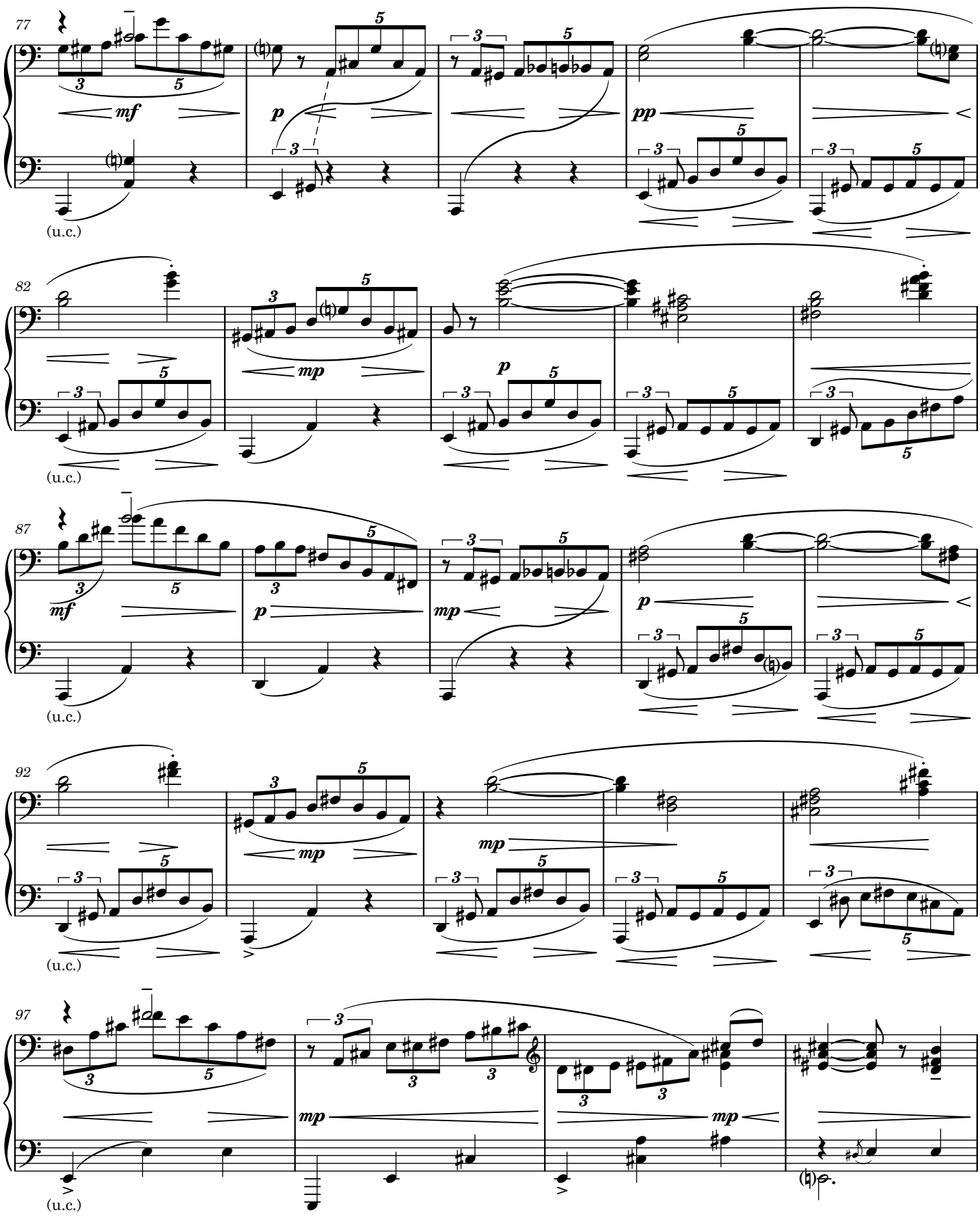
La valse

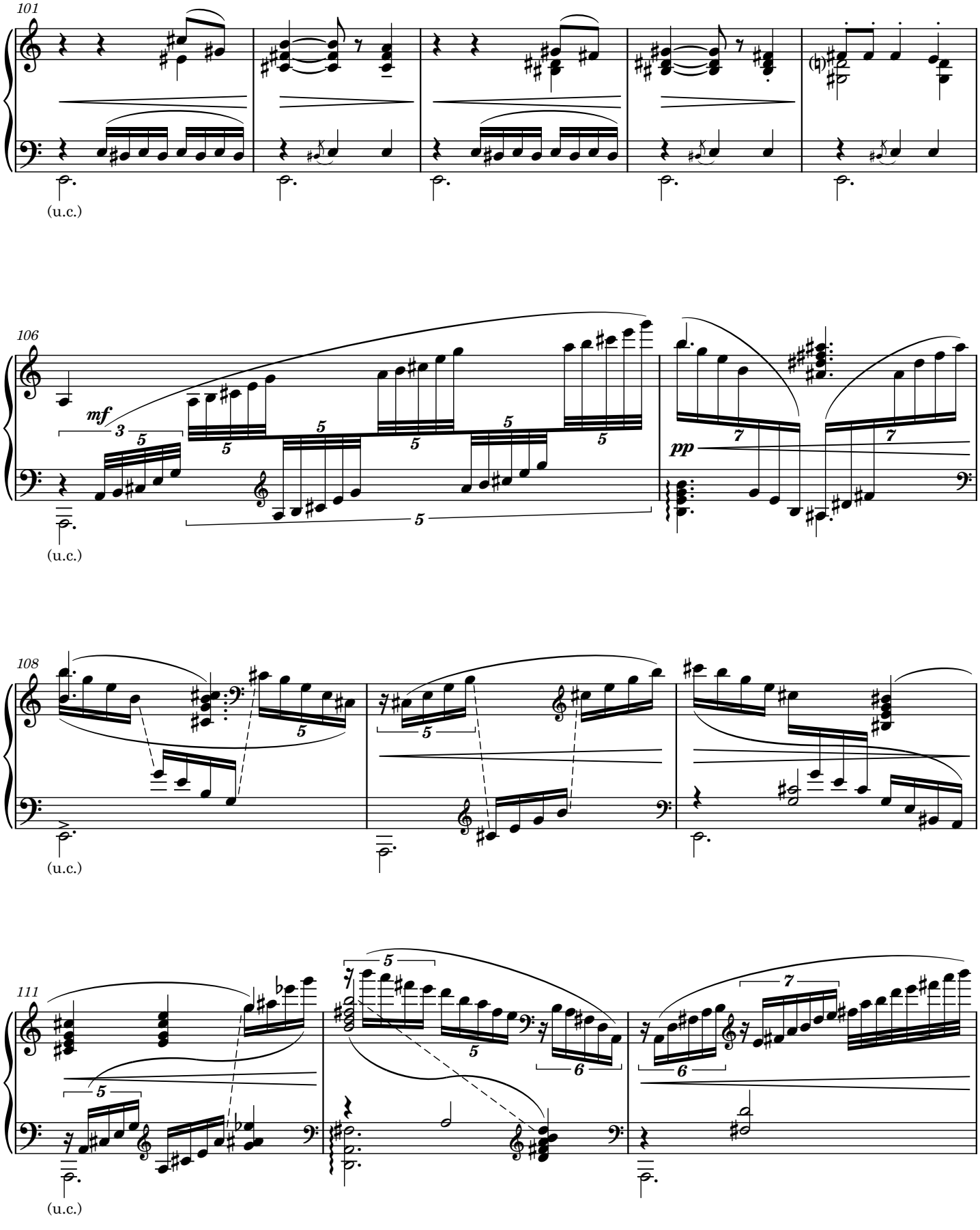
Tempo of a Viennese Waltz

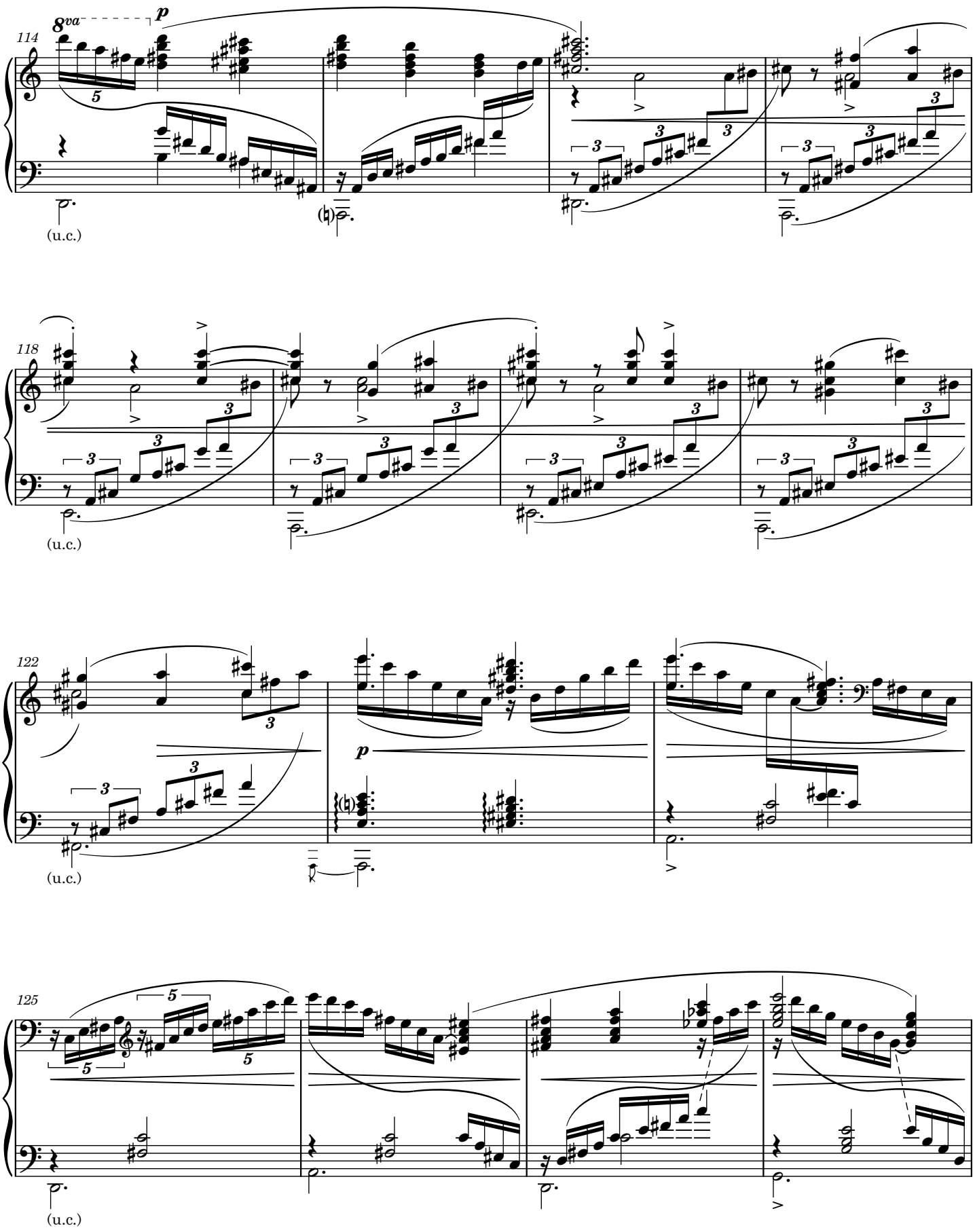



27
mf
(Sost.)
(u.c.)
33
p
mf
p
mf
(Sost.)
(u.c.)
40
p
mf
sub. p
(u.c.)
46
p
(u.c.)


50
mf
mp
(u.c.)
54
p
(u.c.)
59
mp
p
mp
mf
(u.c.)
67
expressive
pp
(u.c.)
72
p
mp
p
(u.c.)


77
mf
p
pp
(u.c.)
82
mp
p
(u.c.)
87
mf
p
mp
p
(u.c.)
92
mp
mp
(u.c.)
97
mp
mp
(u.c.)


101
(u.c.)
106
mf
pp
(u.c.)
108
(u.c.)
111
(u.c.)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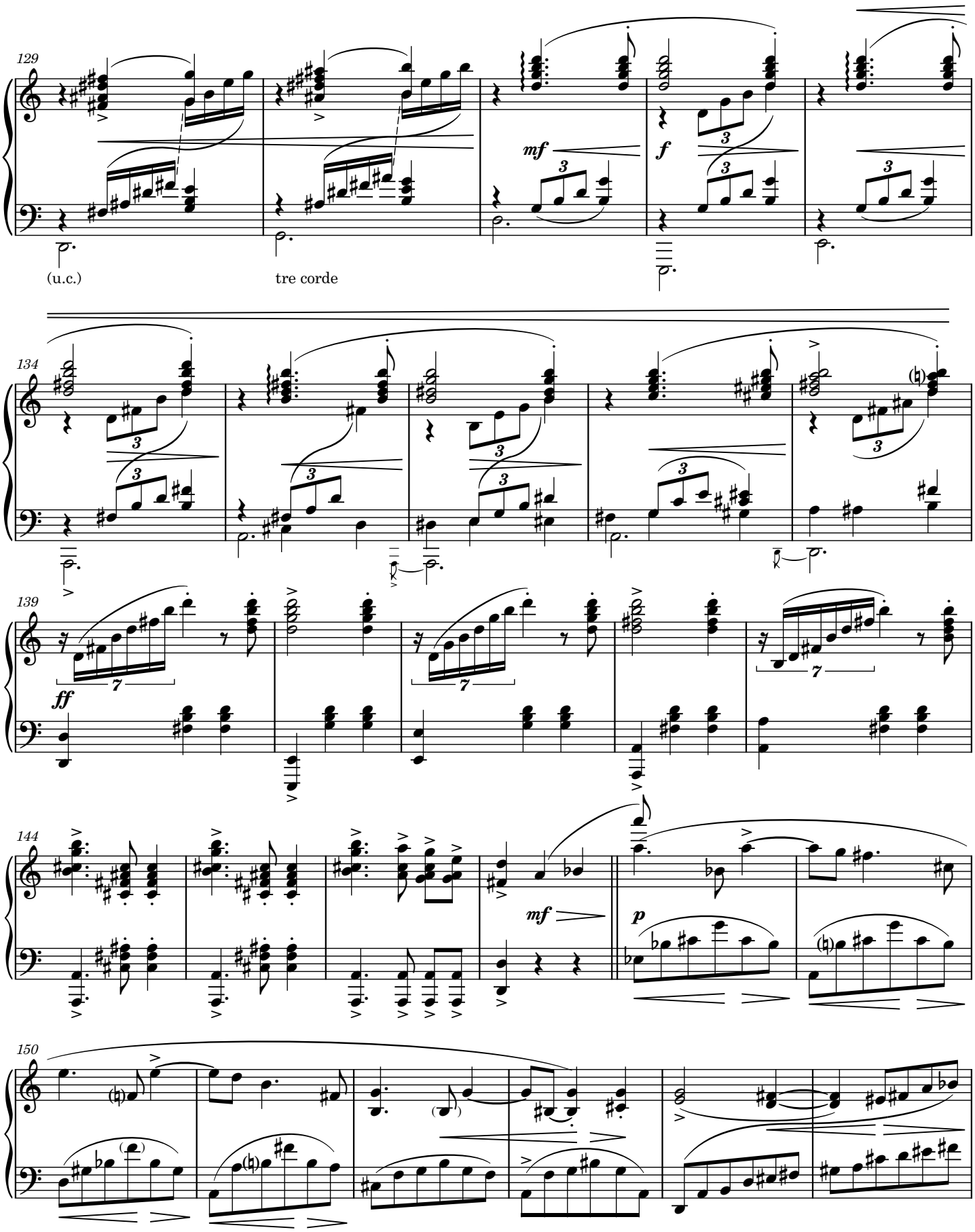
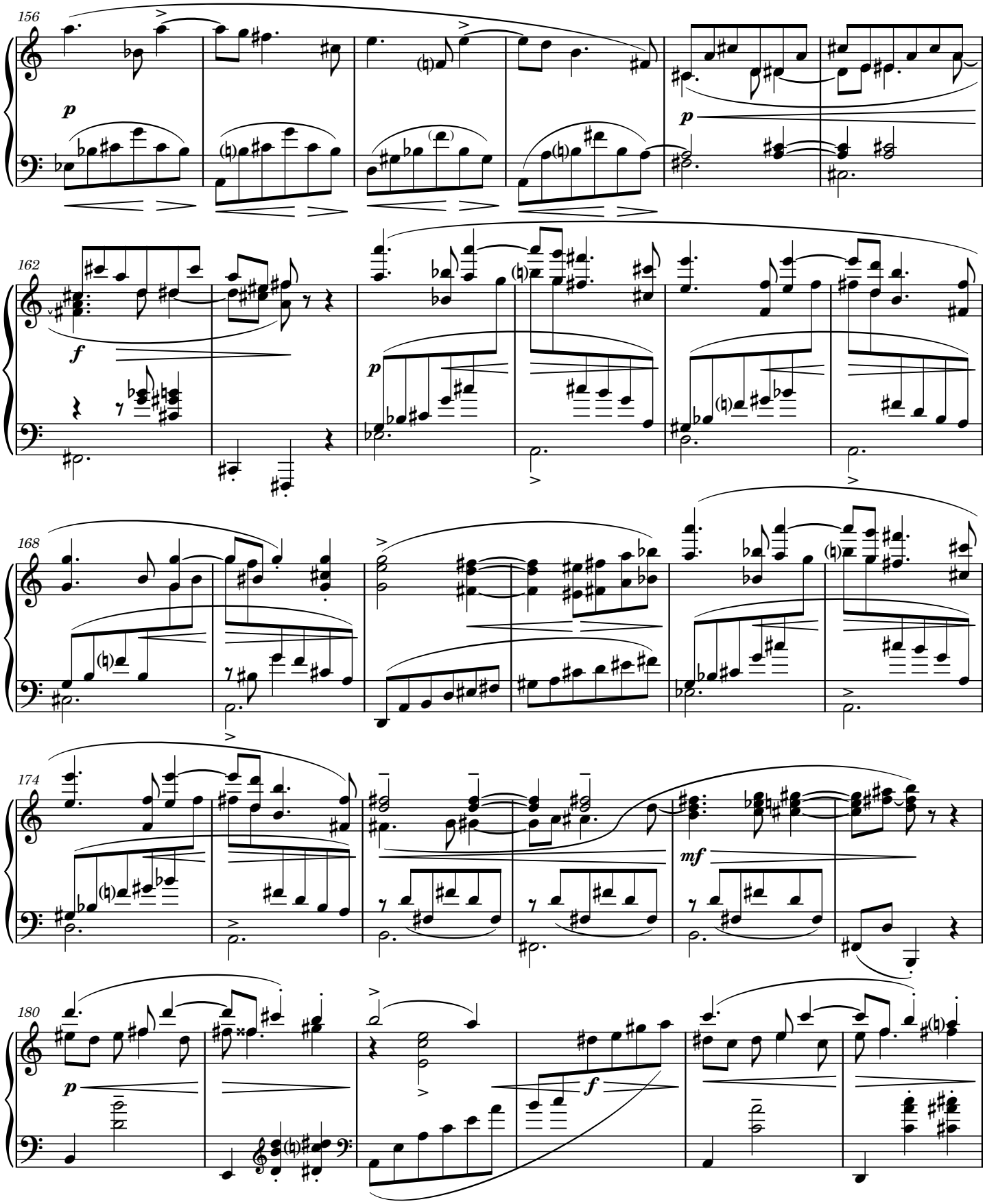
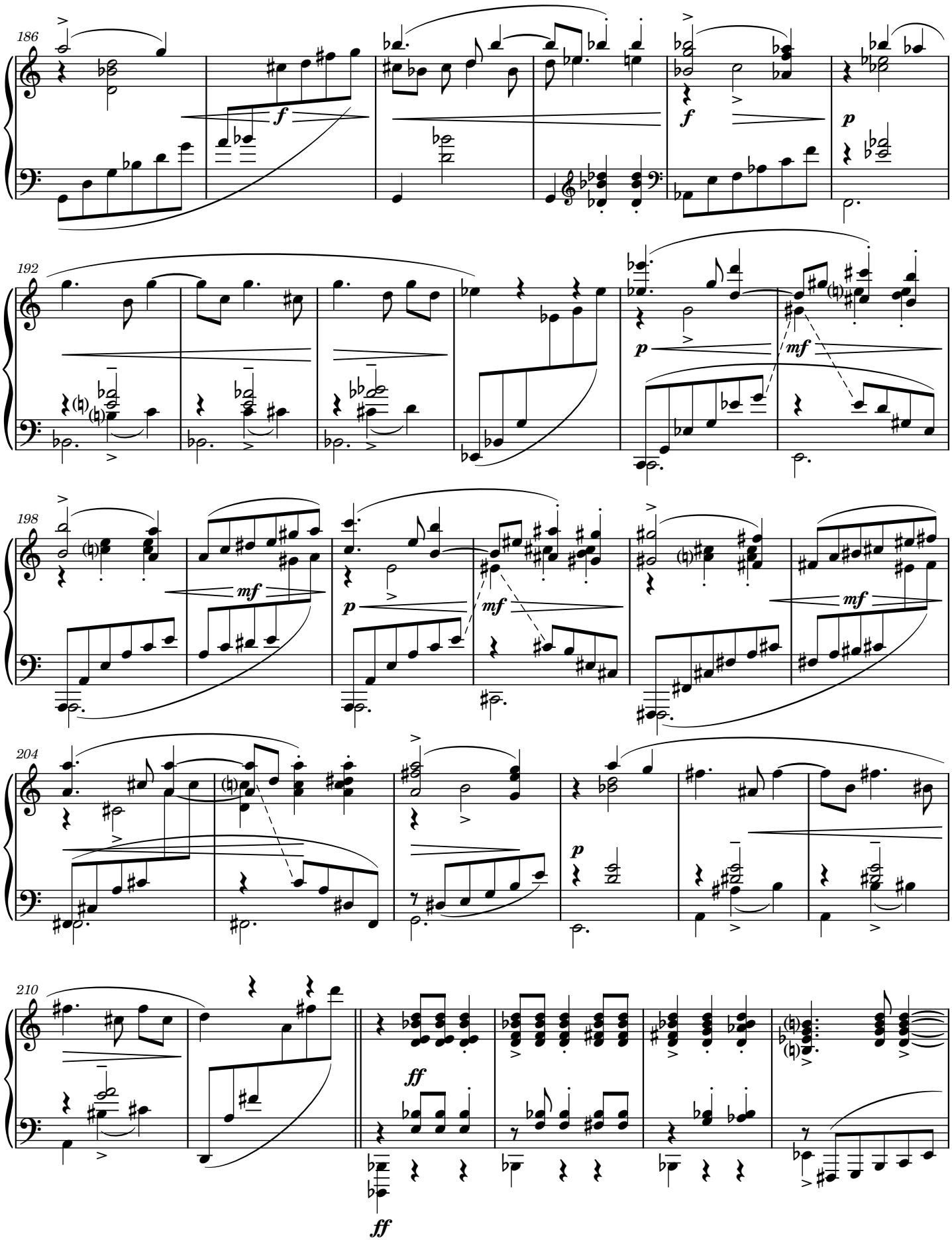
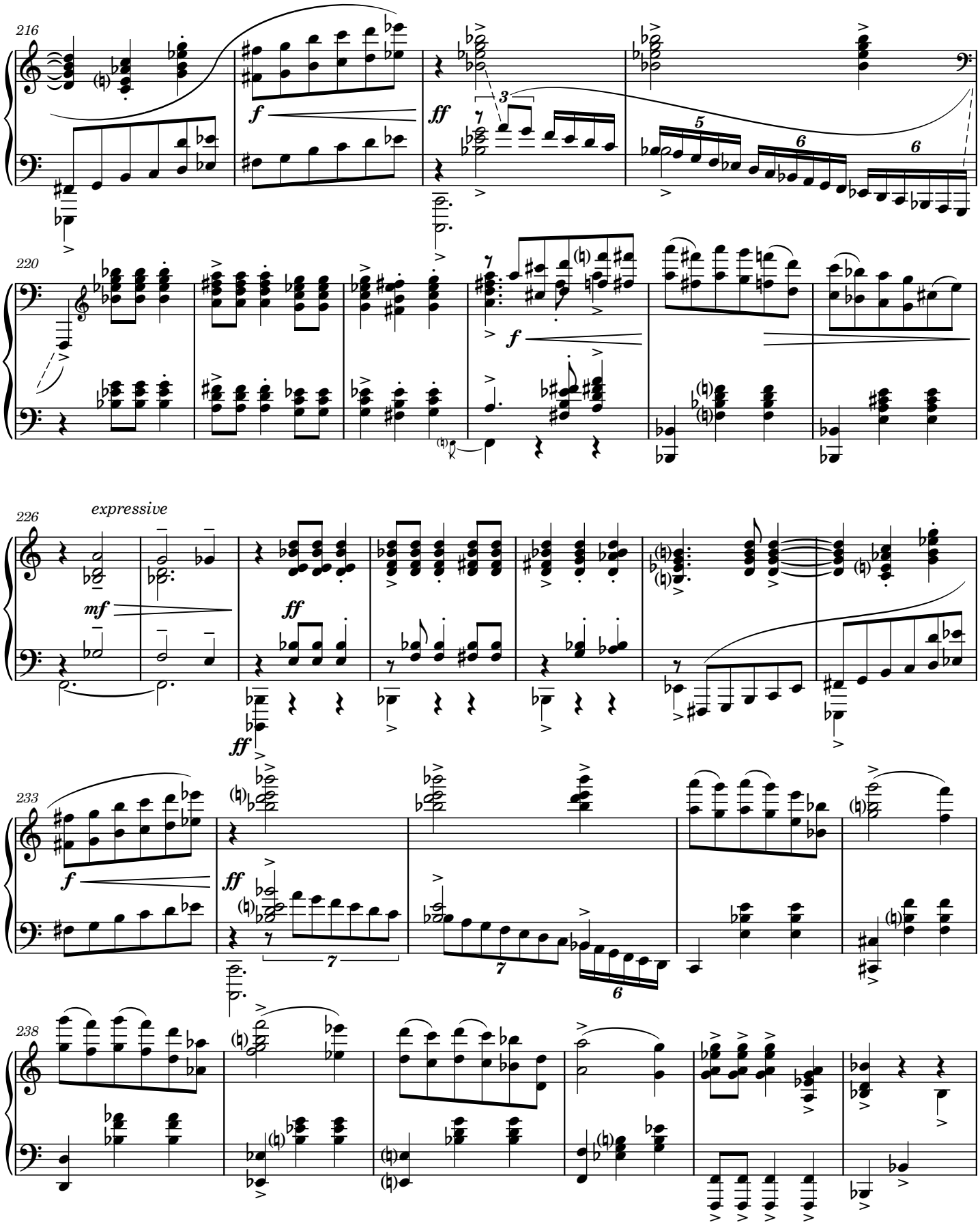
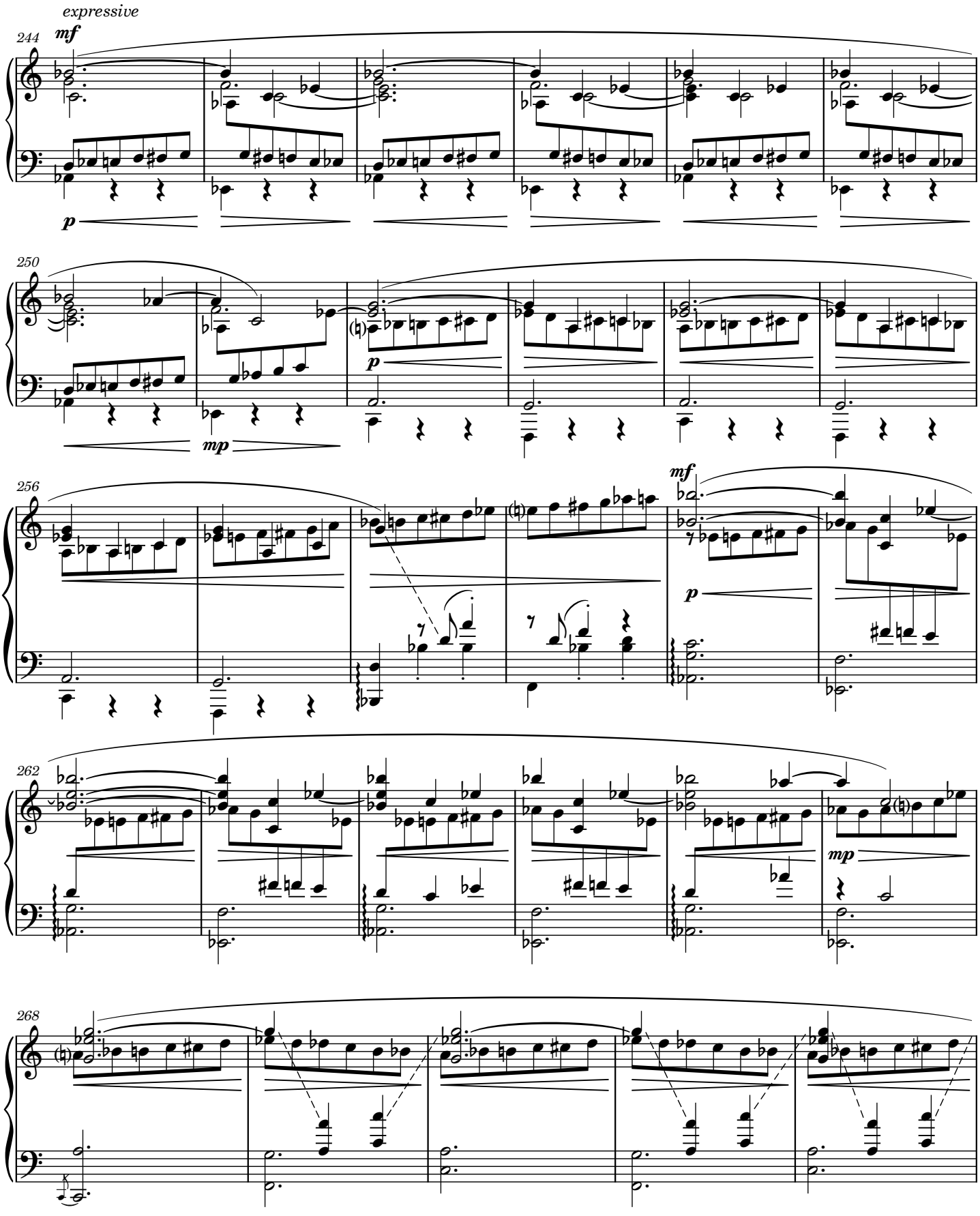
8va
p
(u.c.)
118
(u.c.)
122
p
(u.c.)
125
(u.c.)

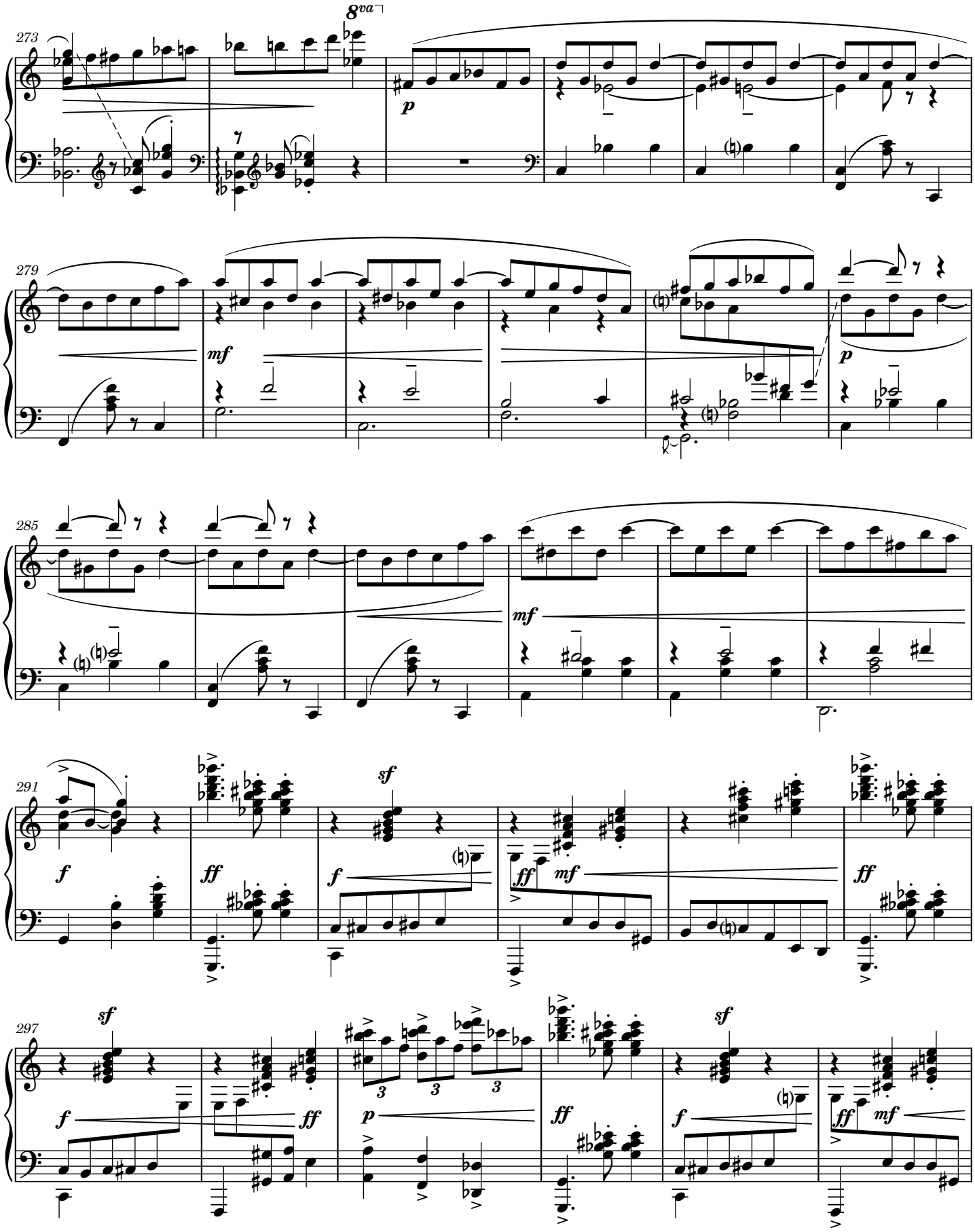

129
(u.c.)
tre corde
mf
f
134
139
ff
144
mf
p
150

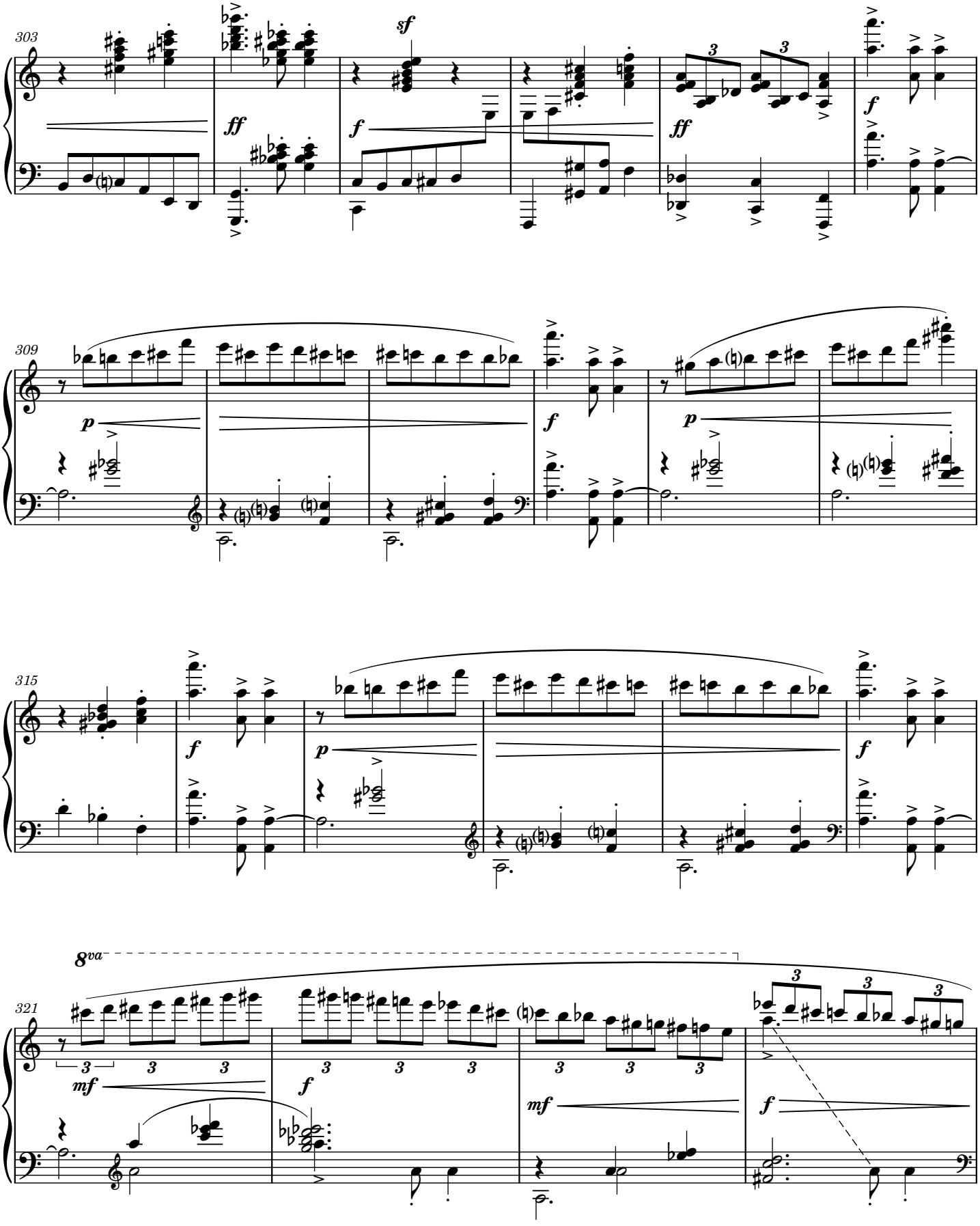

156
p
p
162
f
p
168
174
mf
180
p
f

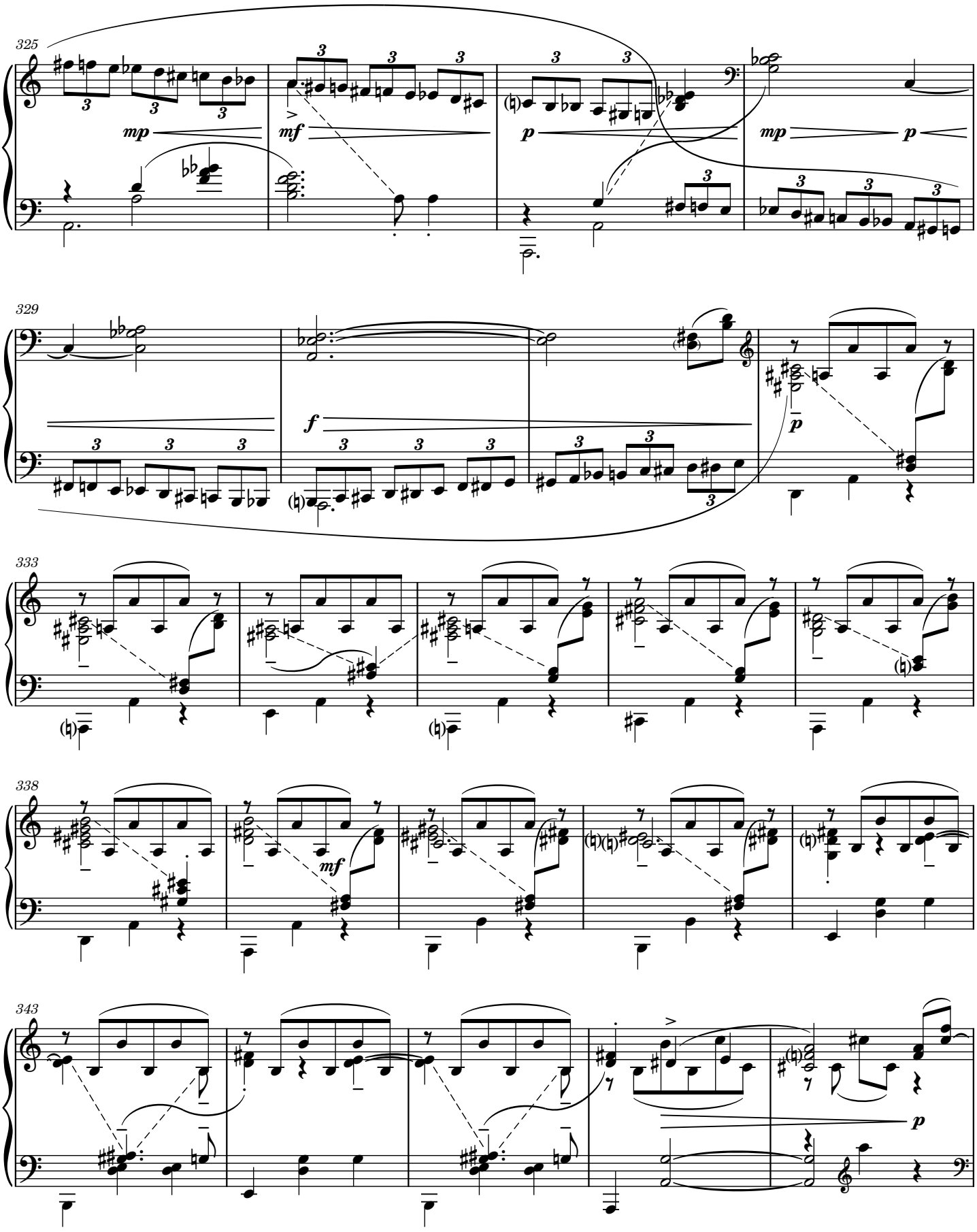

186
f
f
p
192
p
mf
198
mf
p
mf
mf
204
p
210
ff
ff

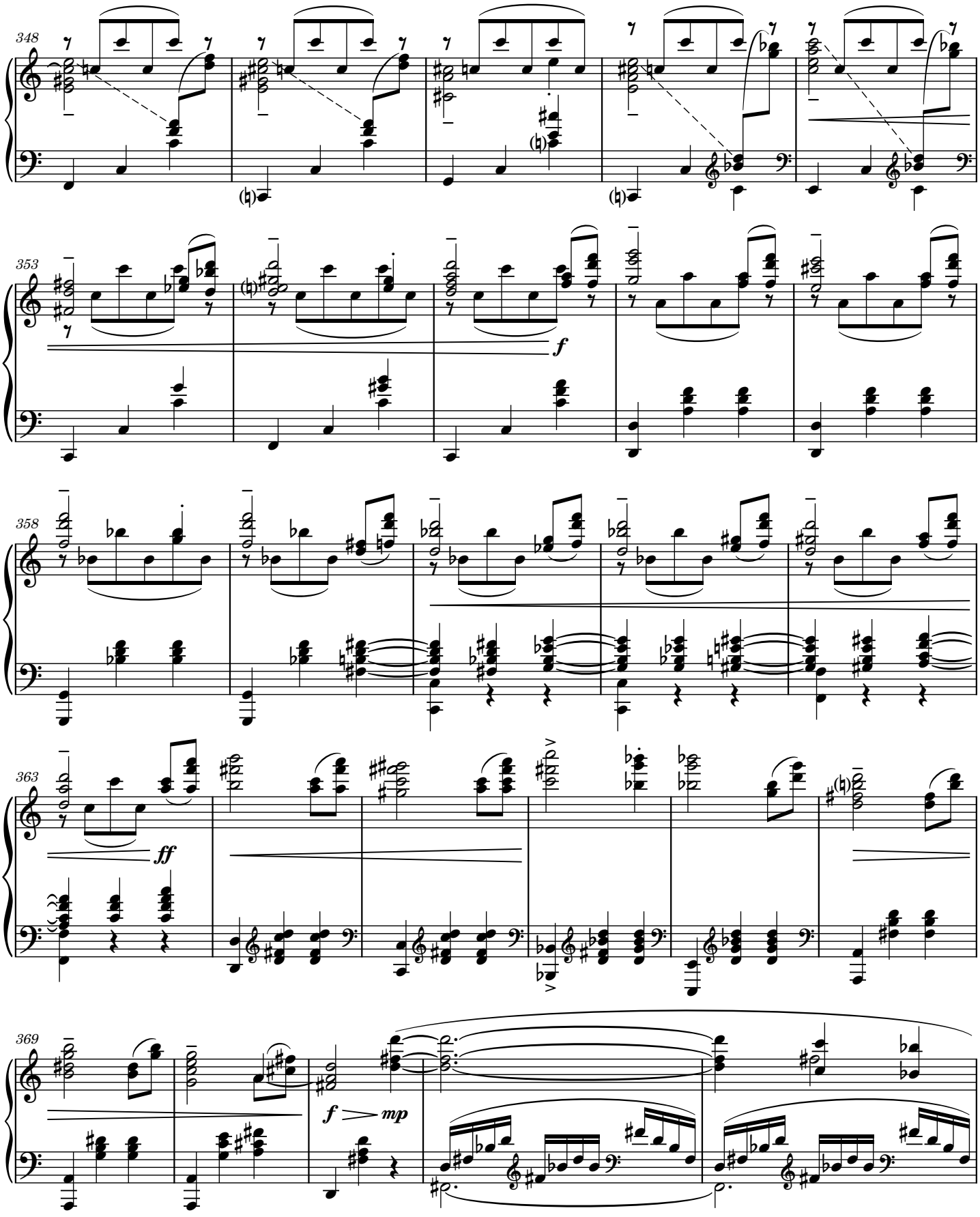

216
f
ff
3
5
6
6
220
f
226
expressive
mf
ff
ff
233
f
ff
7
7
6
238

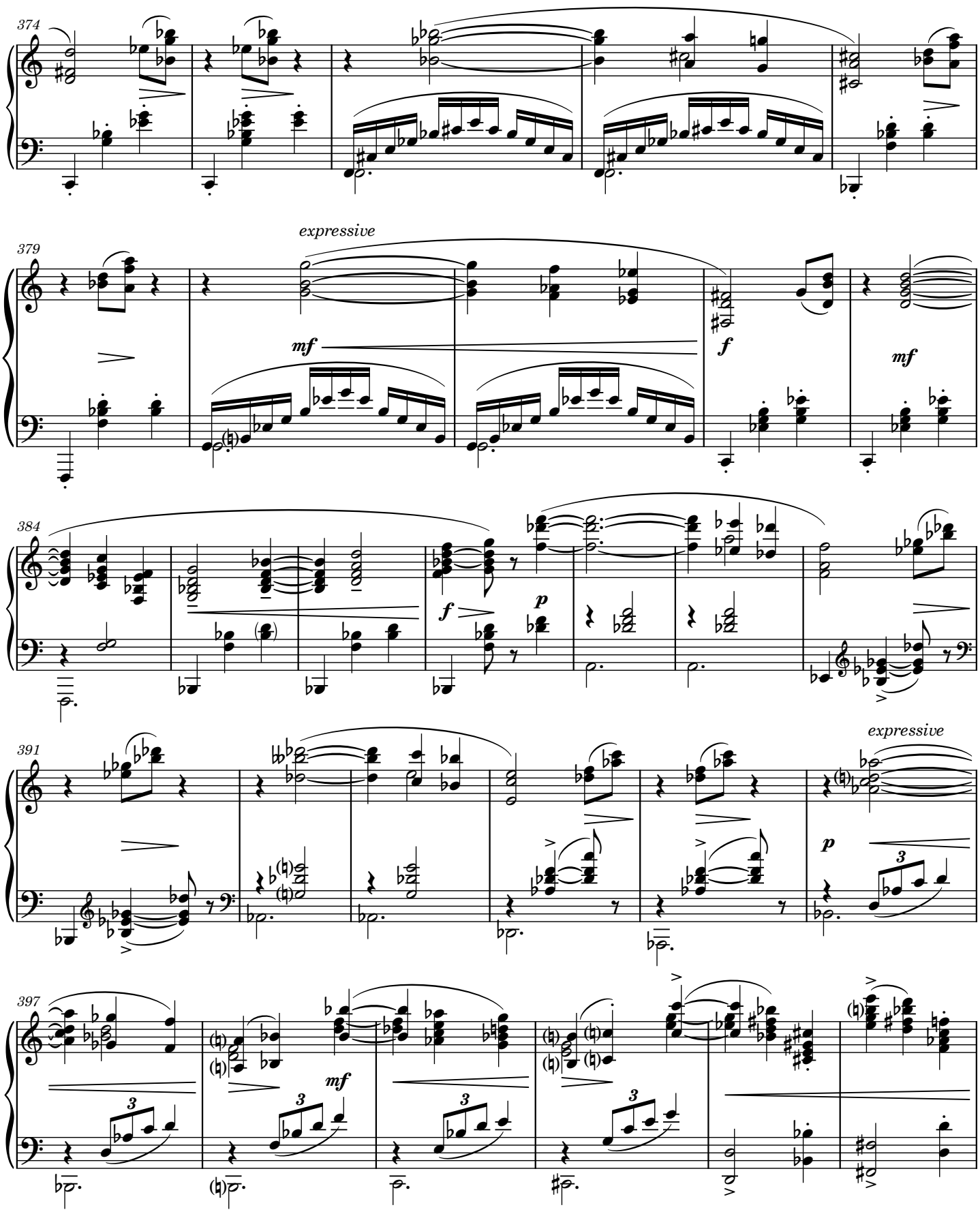

expressive
244
mf
p
250
p
mp
256
mf
p
262
mp
268


8va
273
279
285
291
297


303
ff
sf
f
ff
f
309
p
f
p
315
f
p
f
8va
321
mf
f
mf
f


325
mp
mf
p
mp
p
329
f
p
333
338
mf
343
p


348
353
f
358
363
ff
369
f
mp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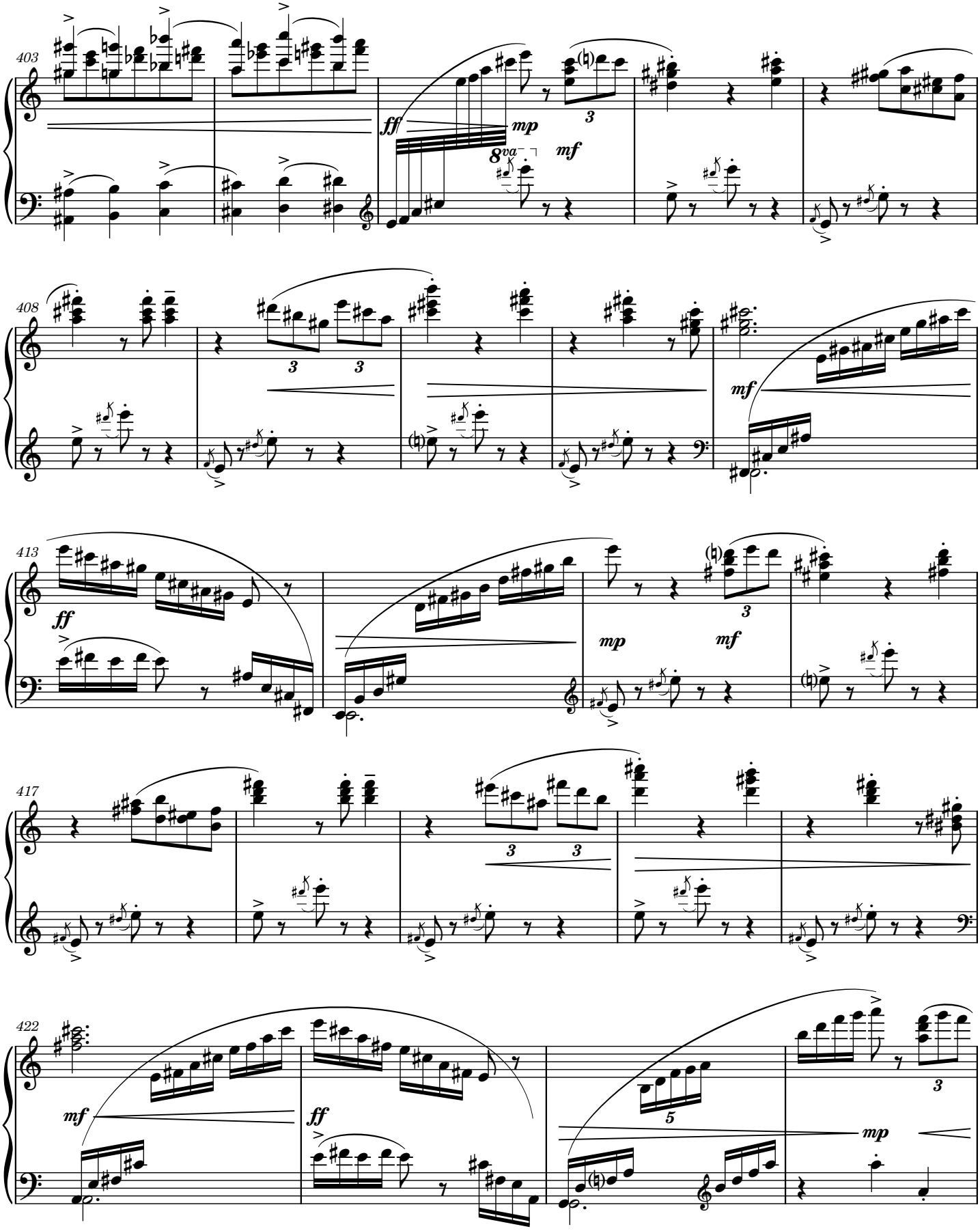
379
expressive
mf
f
mf
384
f
p
391
expressive
p
397
mf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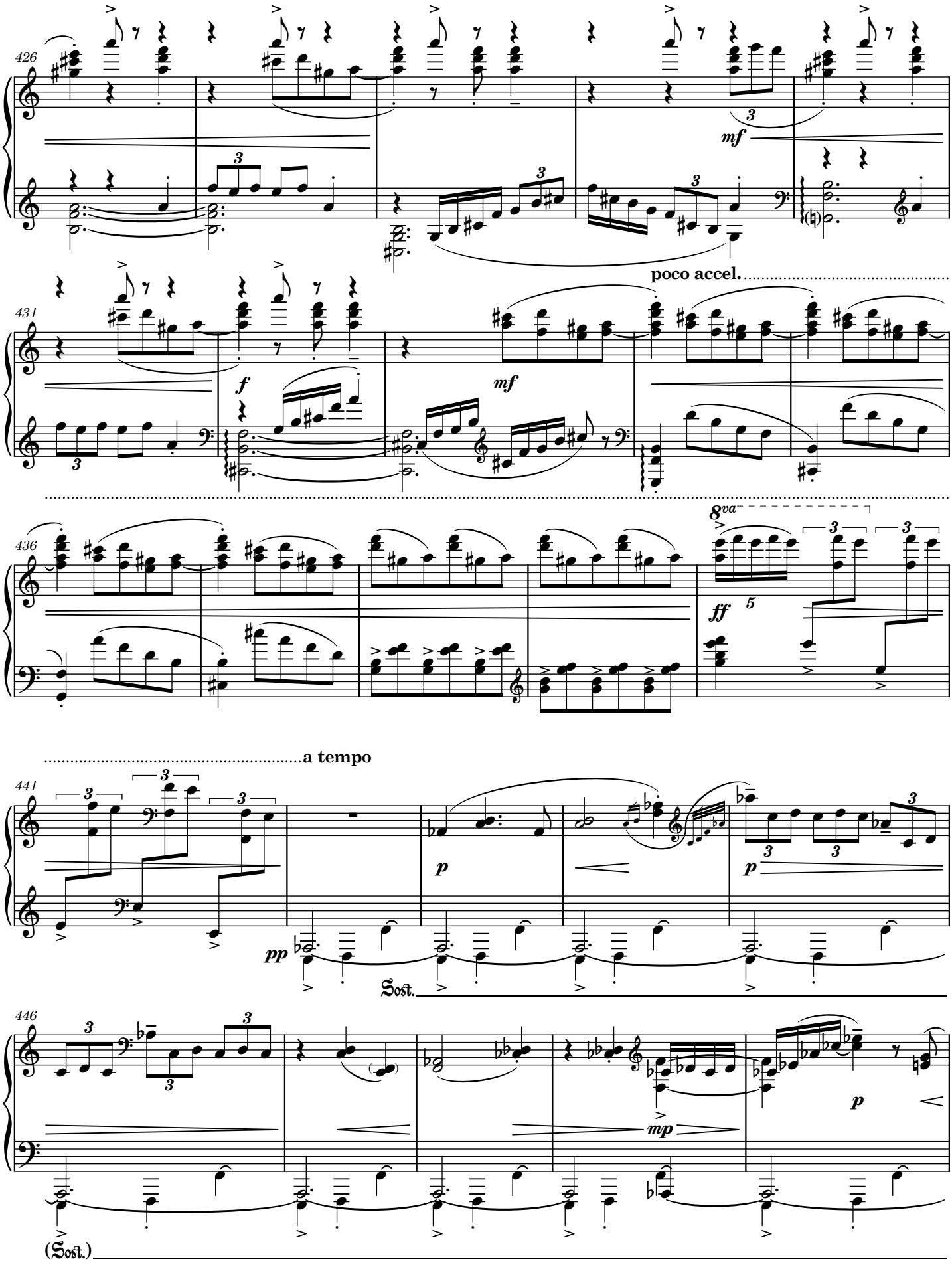
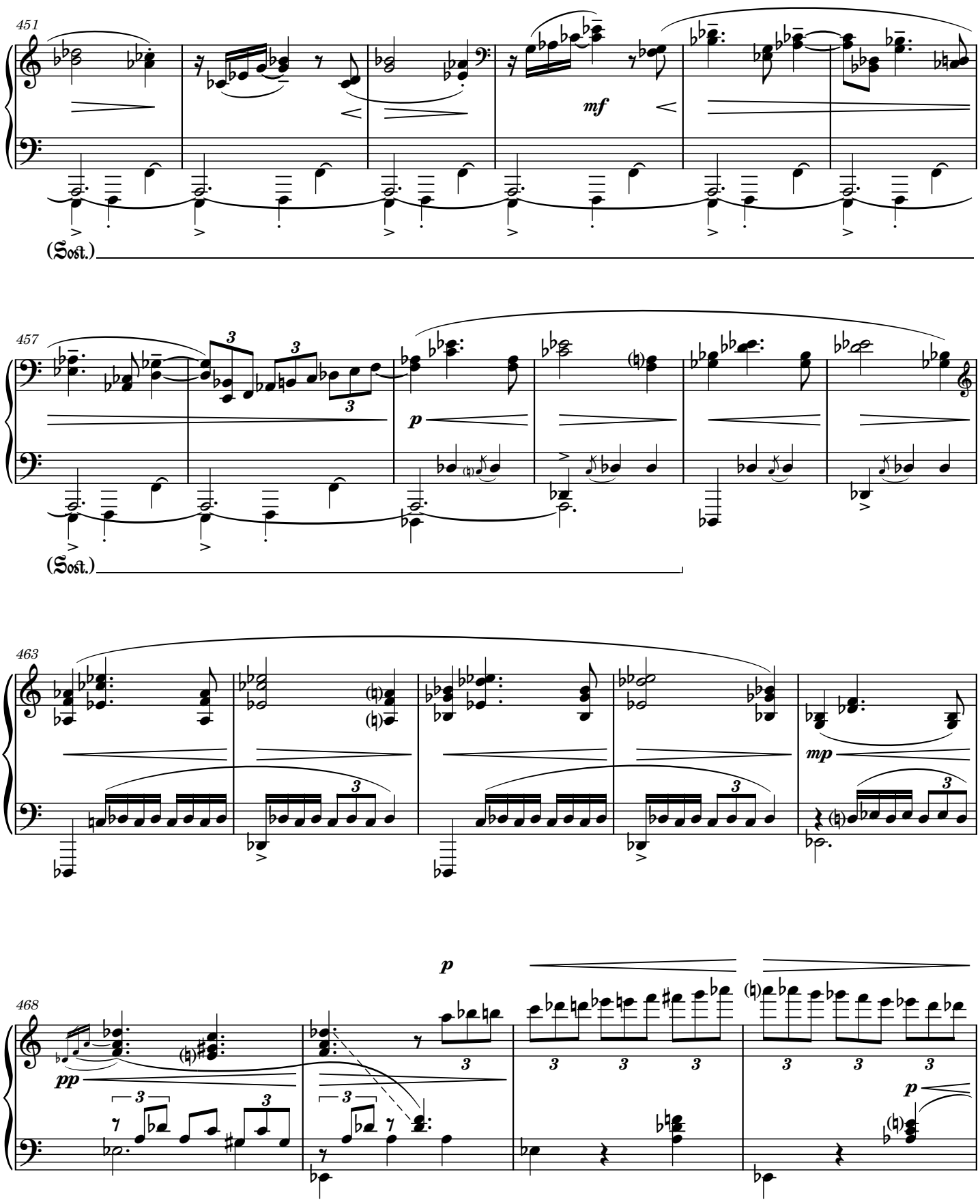
ff
mp
8va
mf
408
mf
413
ff
mp
mf
417
422
mf
ff
mp


426
mf
431
poco accel.
f
mf
436
8va
ff
5
a tempo
441
p
pp
Sost.
446
mp
p
(Sost.)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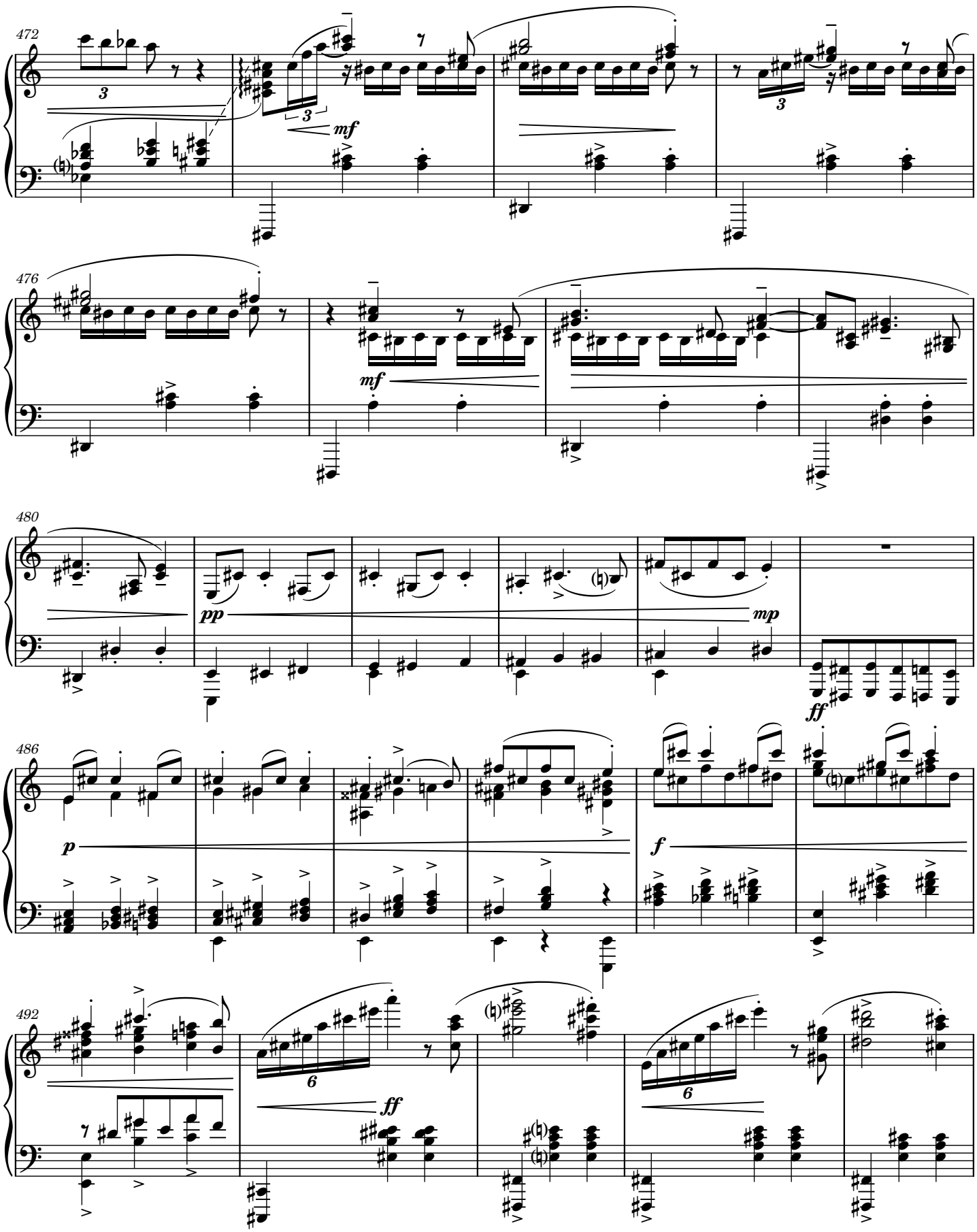
mf
(Sost.)
457
p
(Sost.)
463
mp
468
pp
p
p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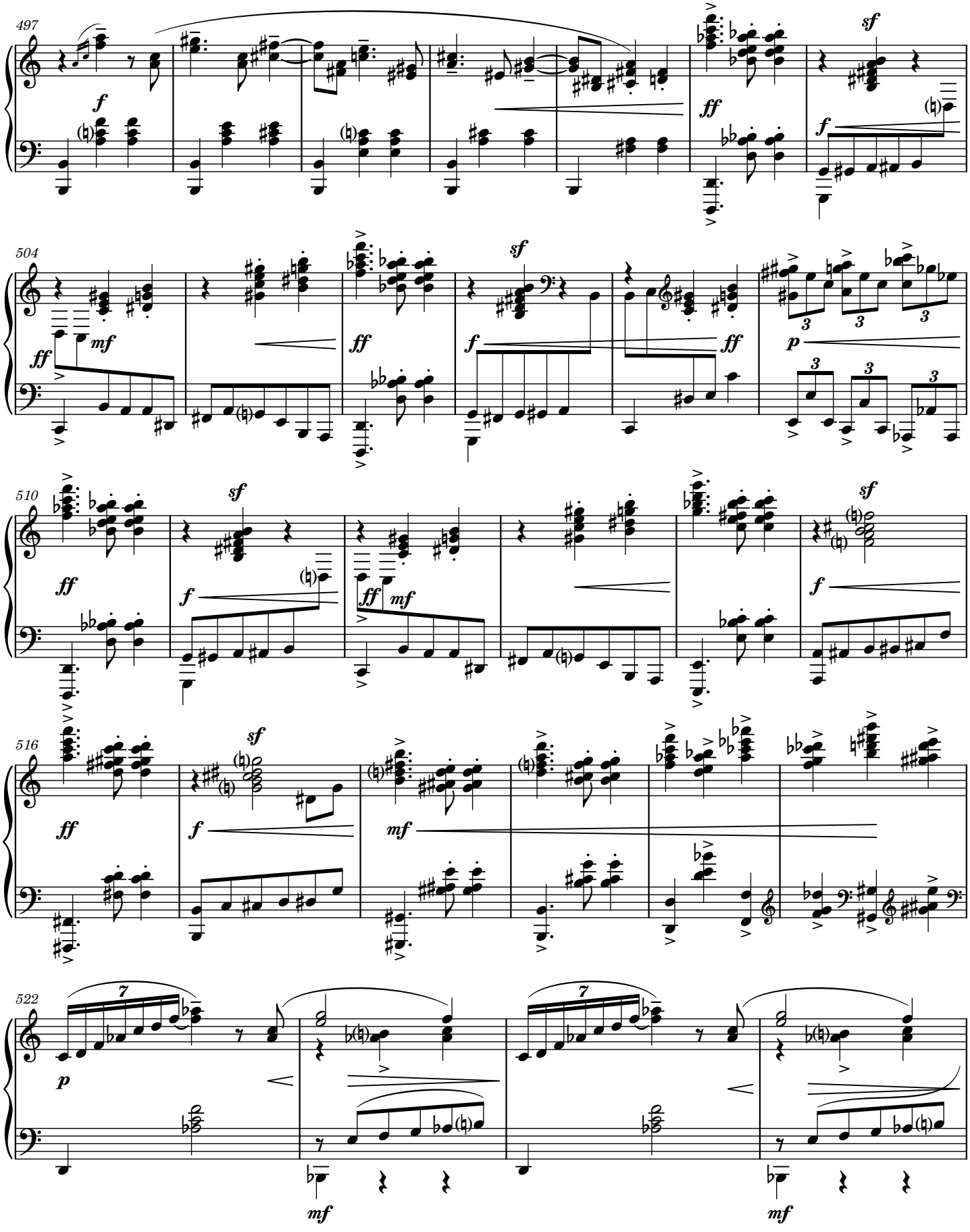
mf
476
mf
480
pp
mp
ff
486
p
f
492
ff


497
f
ff
sf
f
504
ff
mf
ff
sf
f
ff
p
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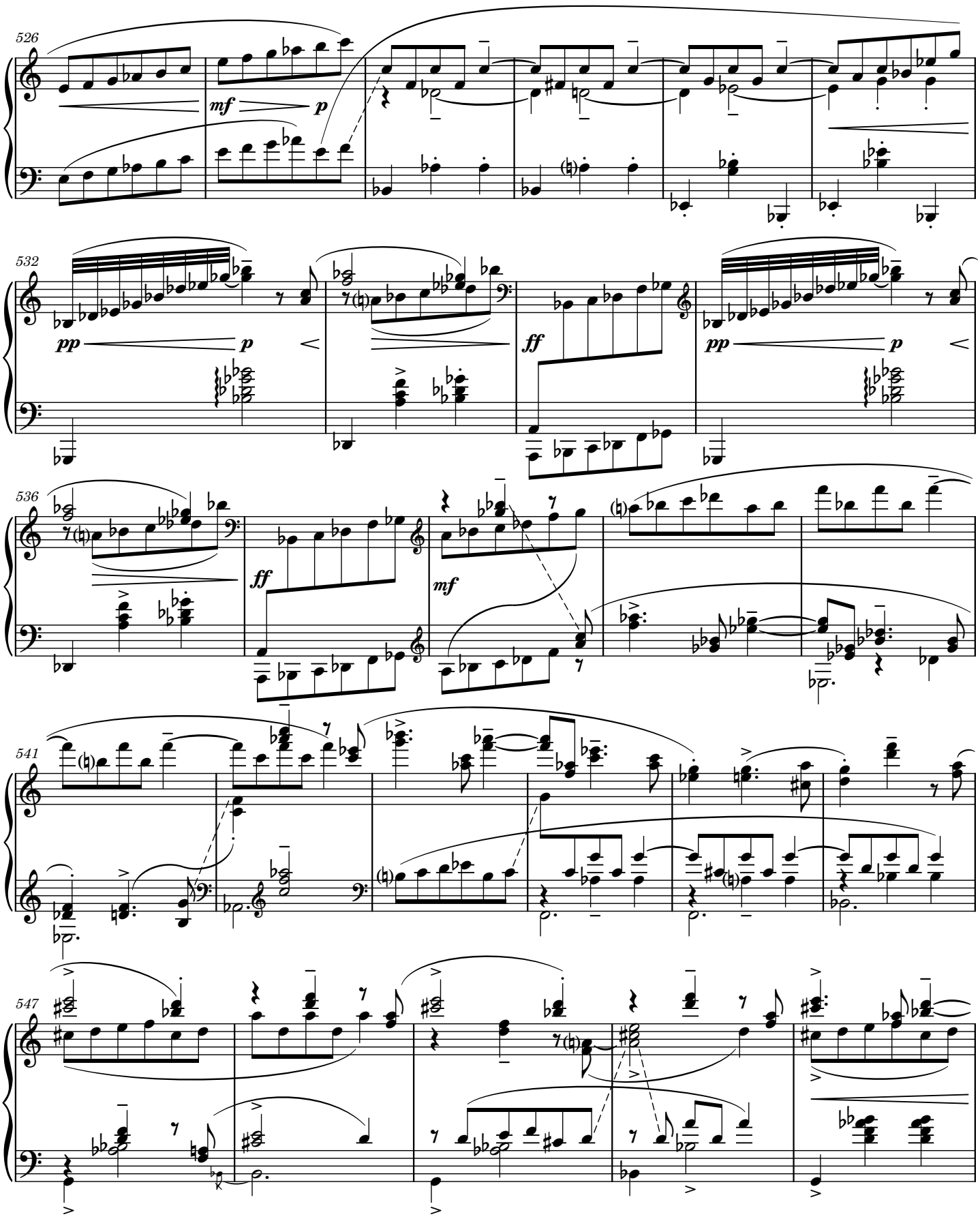
sf
f
ff
mf
sf
f
516
ff
sf
f
mf
522
p
mf
mf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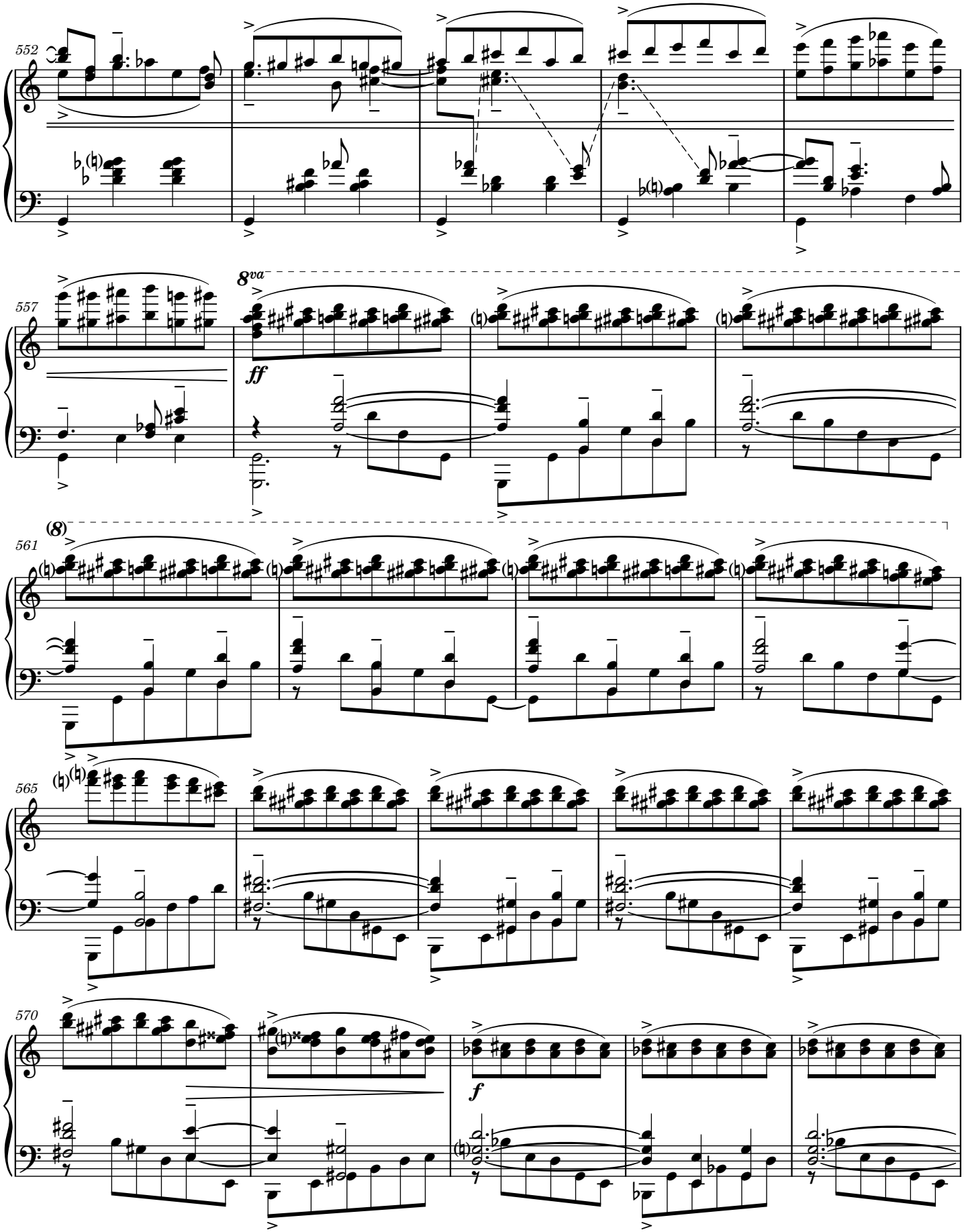
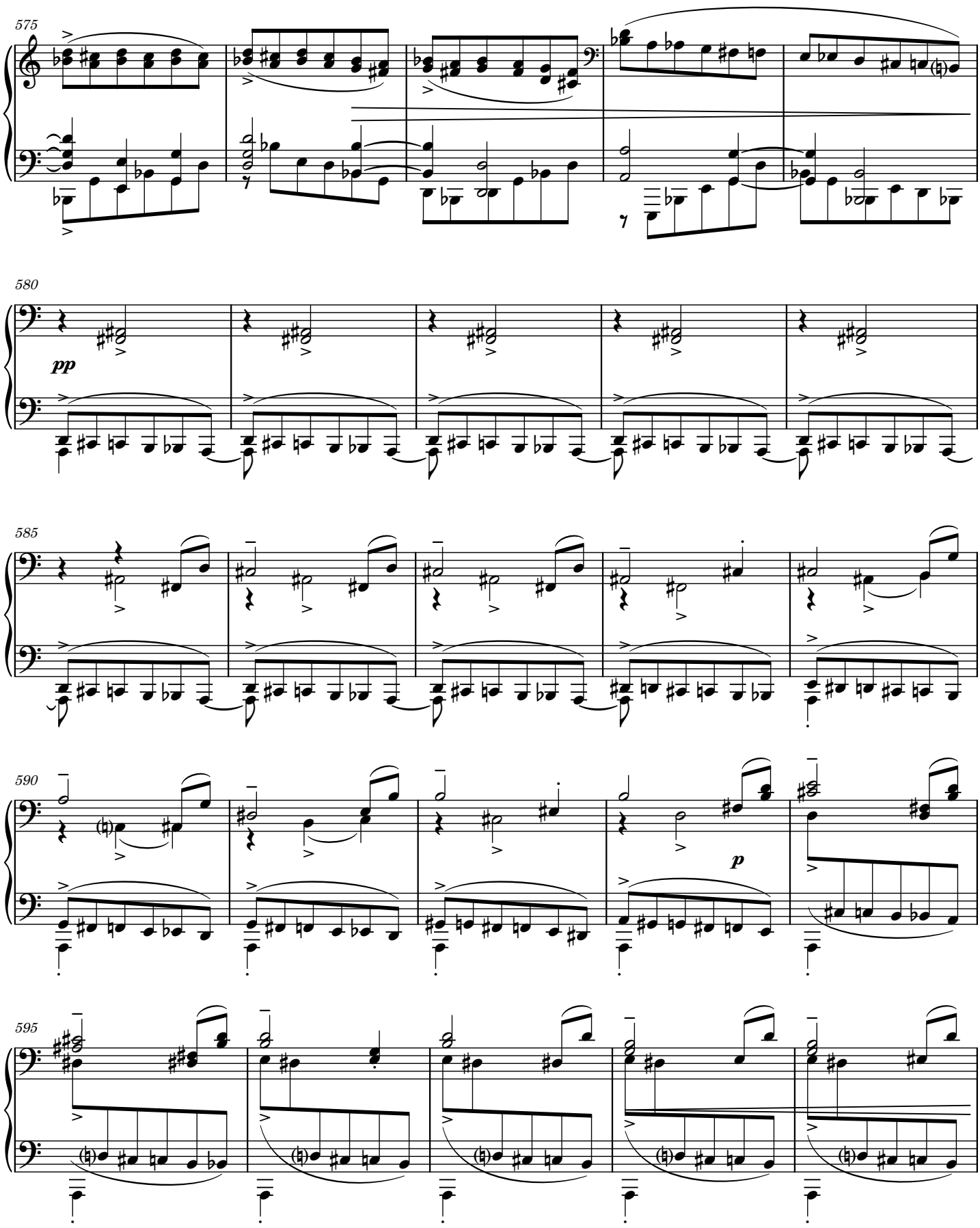
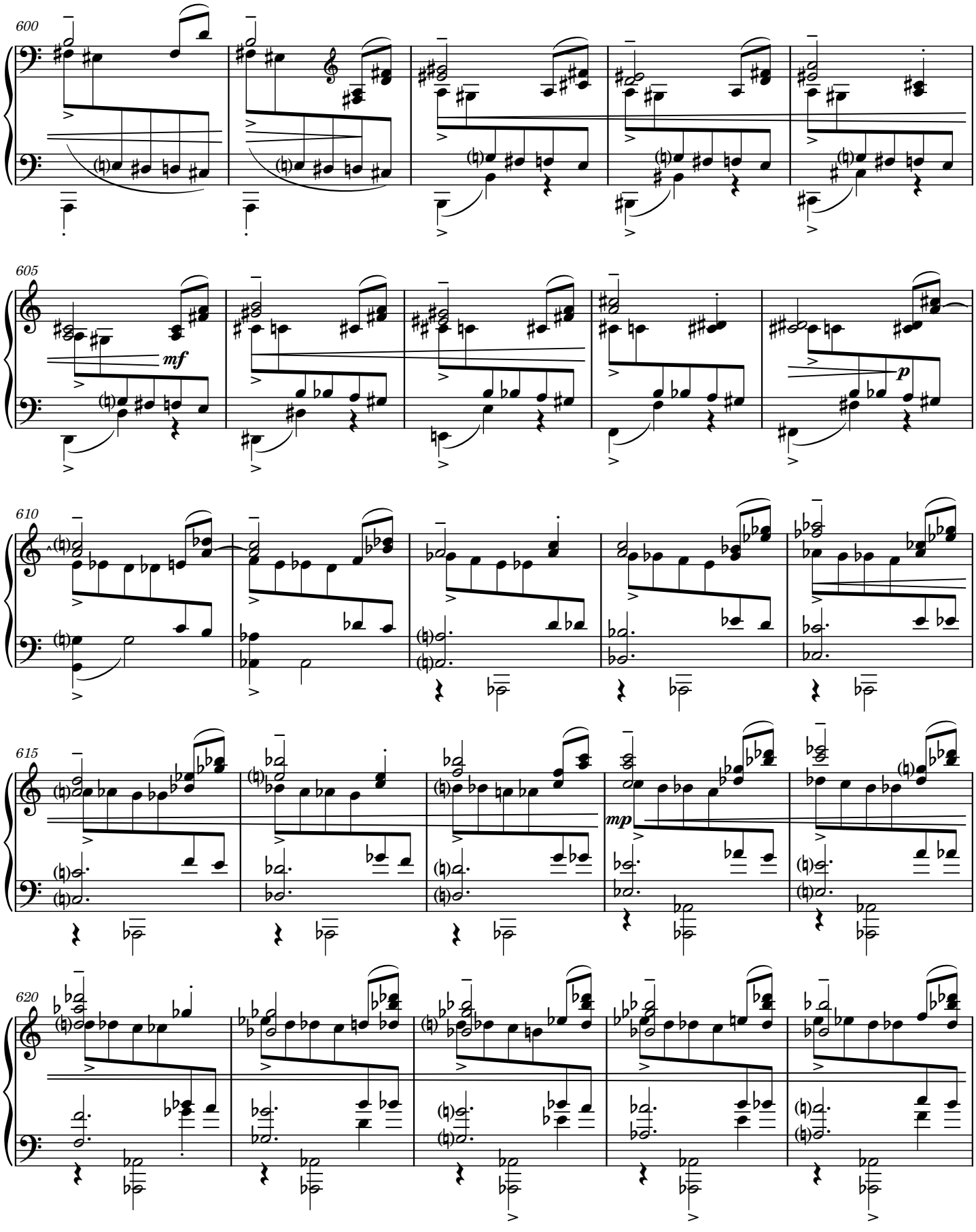
mf
p
532
pp
p
ff
pp
p
536
ff
mf
541
547


552
557
8va
ff
561
(8)
565
570
f


575
580
pp
585
590
p
595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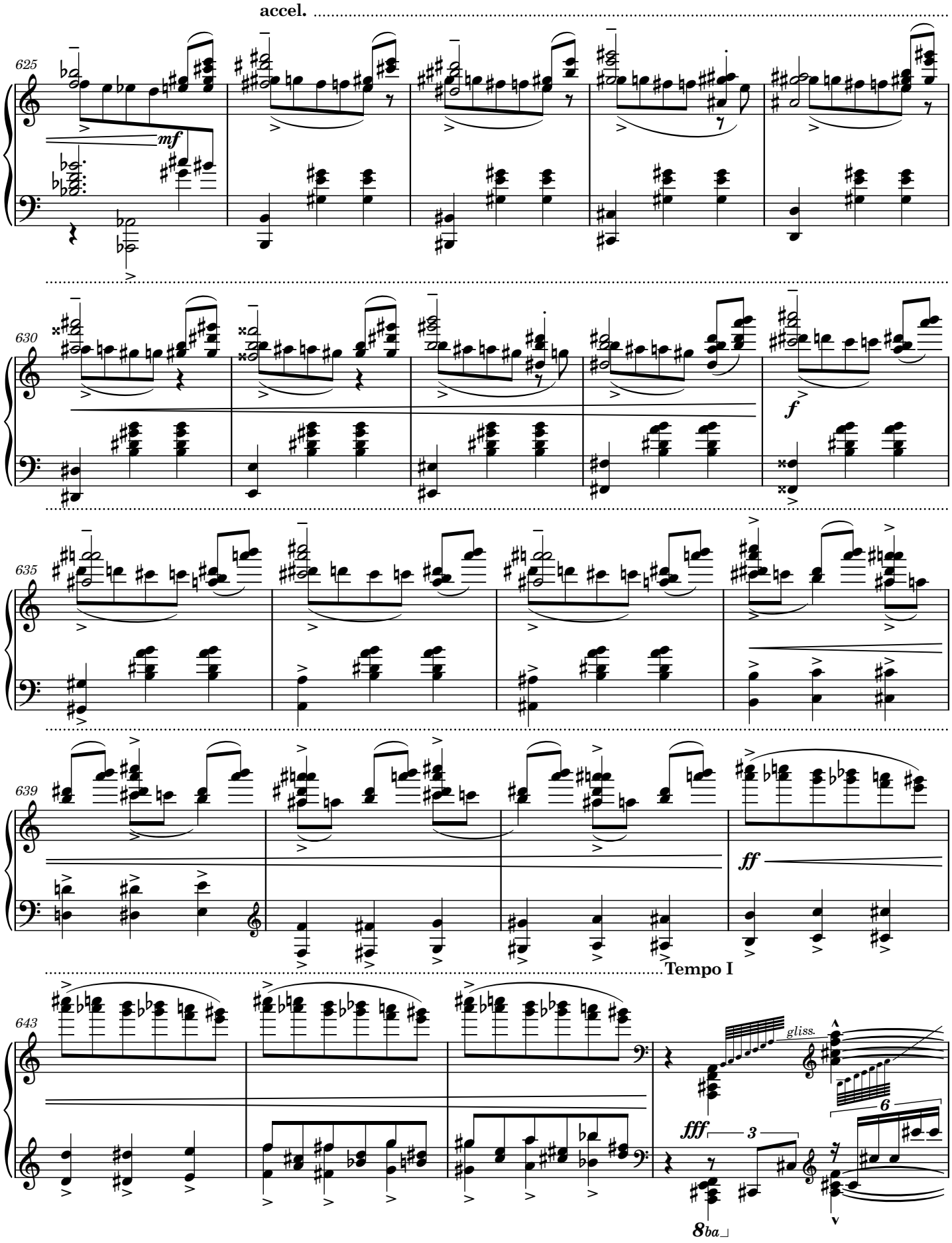
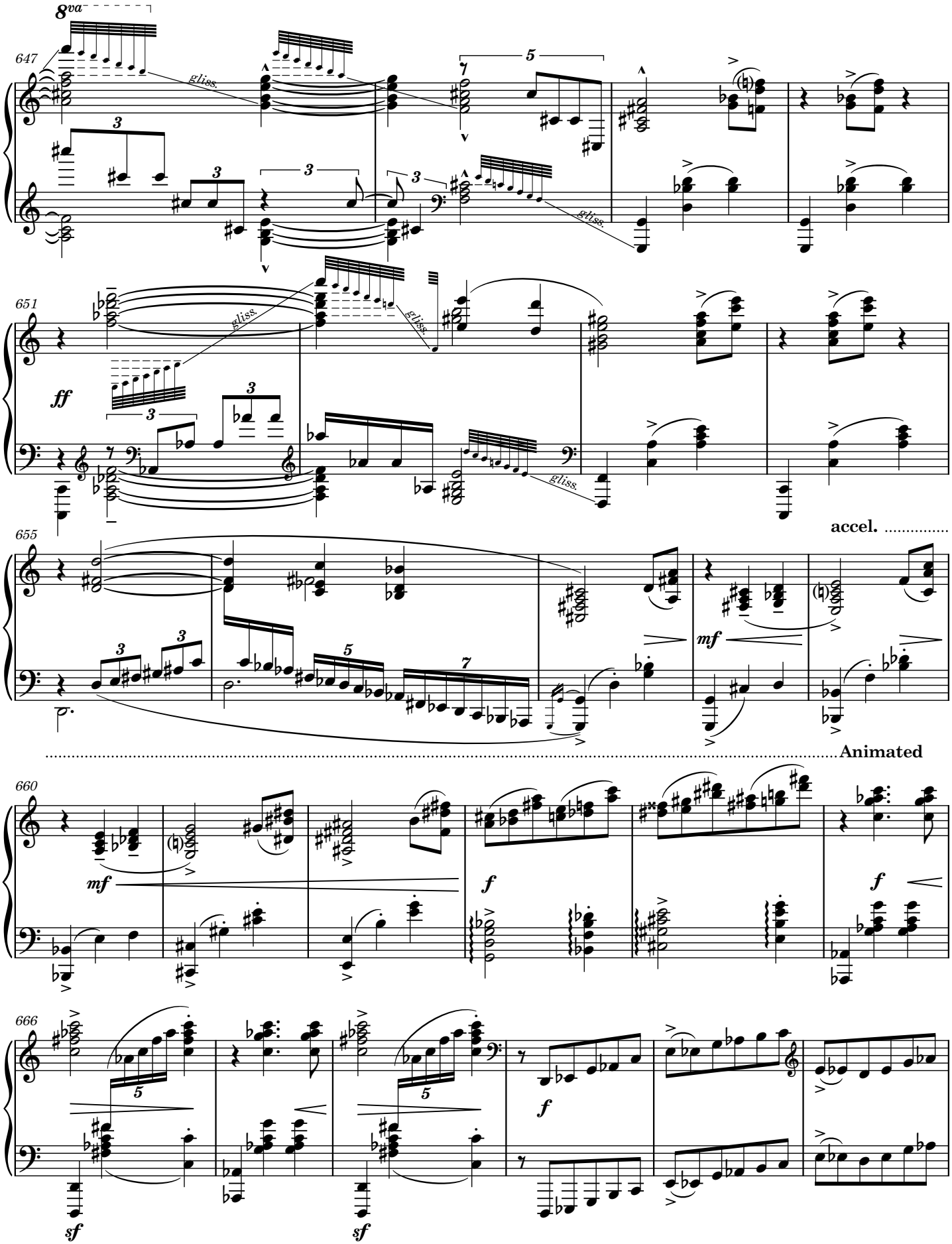
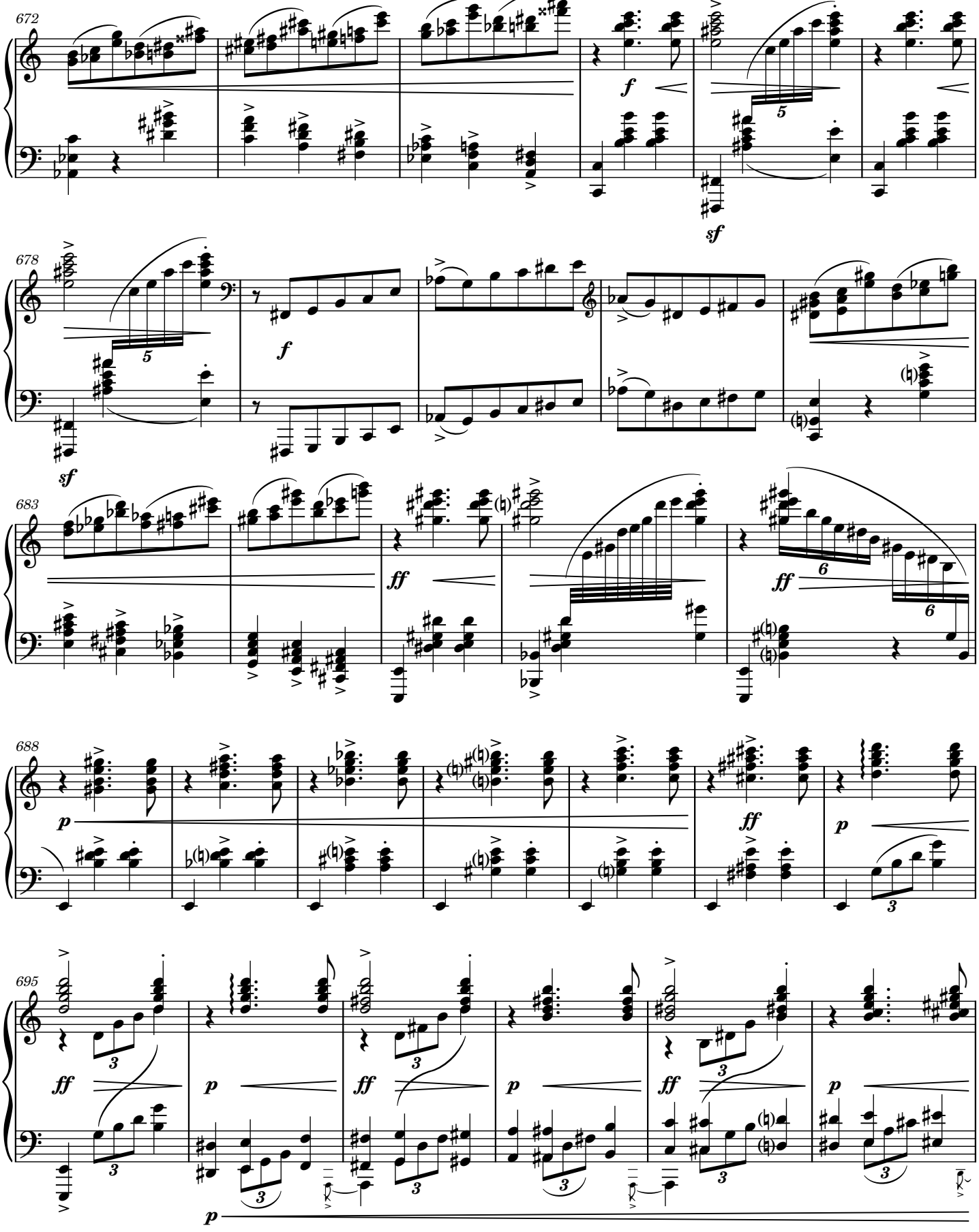
605
mf
p
610
615
mp
620


accel.
625
mf
630
f
635
639
ff
Tempo I
643
gliss.
fff
3
6
8ba


8va
647
gliss.
gliss.
651
ff
gliss.
gliss.
gliss.
655
accel.
mf
660
mf
f
f
666
sf
f
sf


672
f
sf
678
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sf
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ff
ff
688
p
ff
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695
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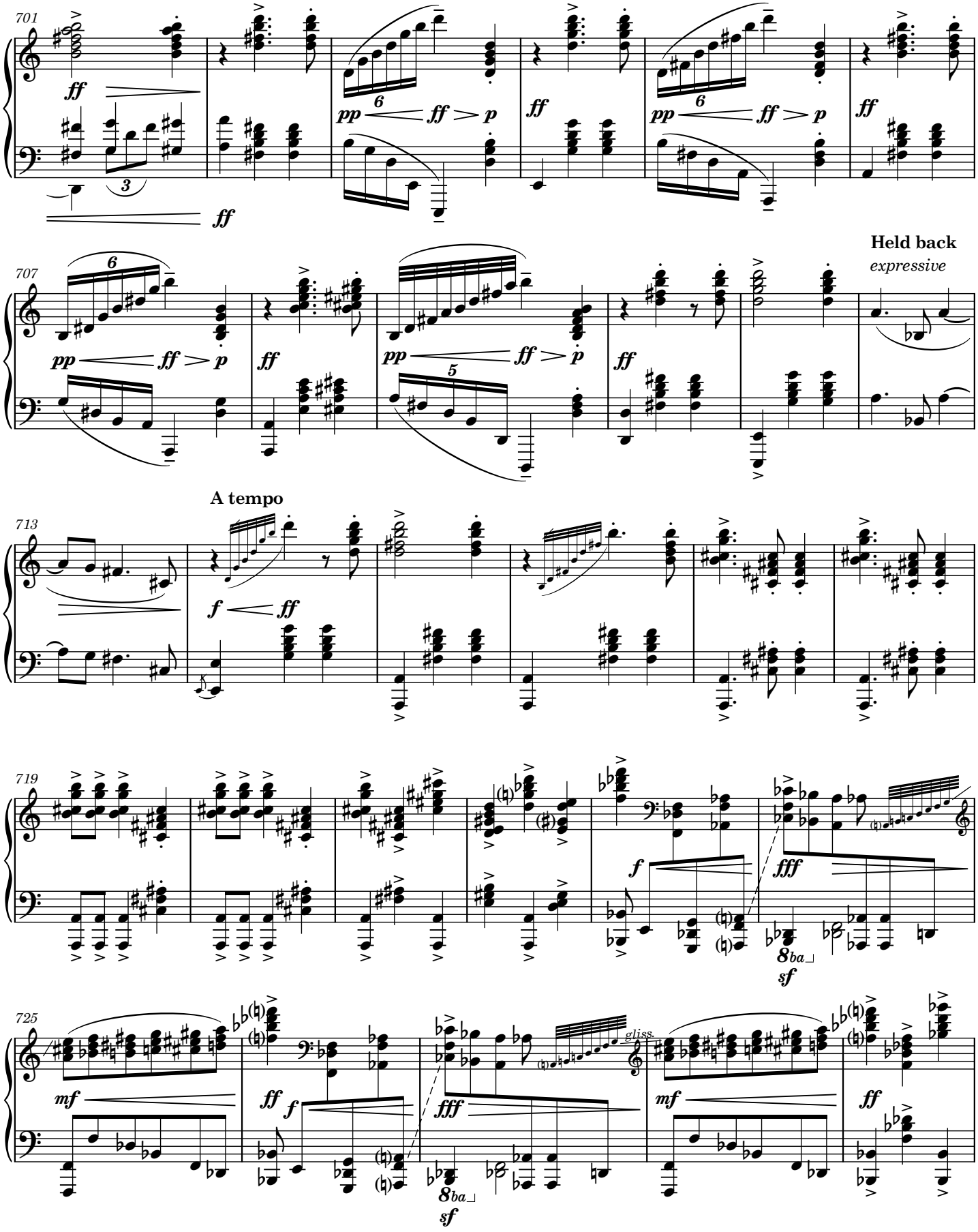
ff
p
ff
p
p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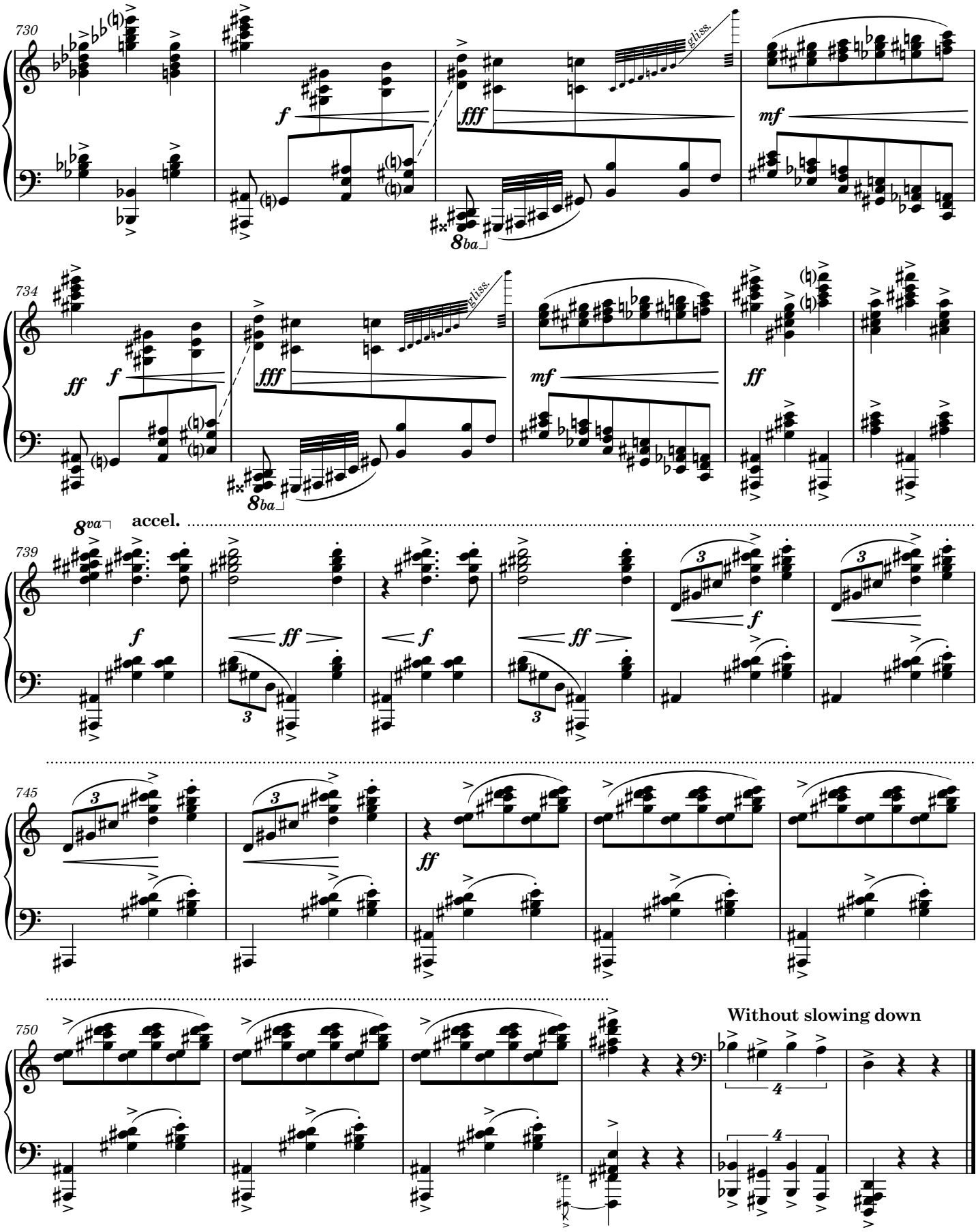
ff
pp
ff
p
707
Held back
expressive
A tempo
713
f
719
fff
sf
725
mf
gliss.


730
f
fff
gliss.
mf
8ba
734
ff
f
fff
gliss.
mf
ff
8ba
8va
accel.
739
f
ff
f
ff
f
3
745
3
ff
750
Without slowing down
4