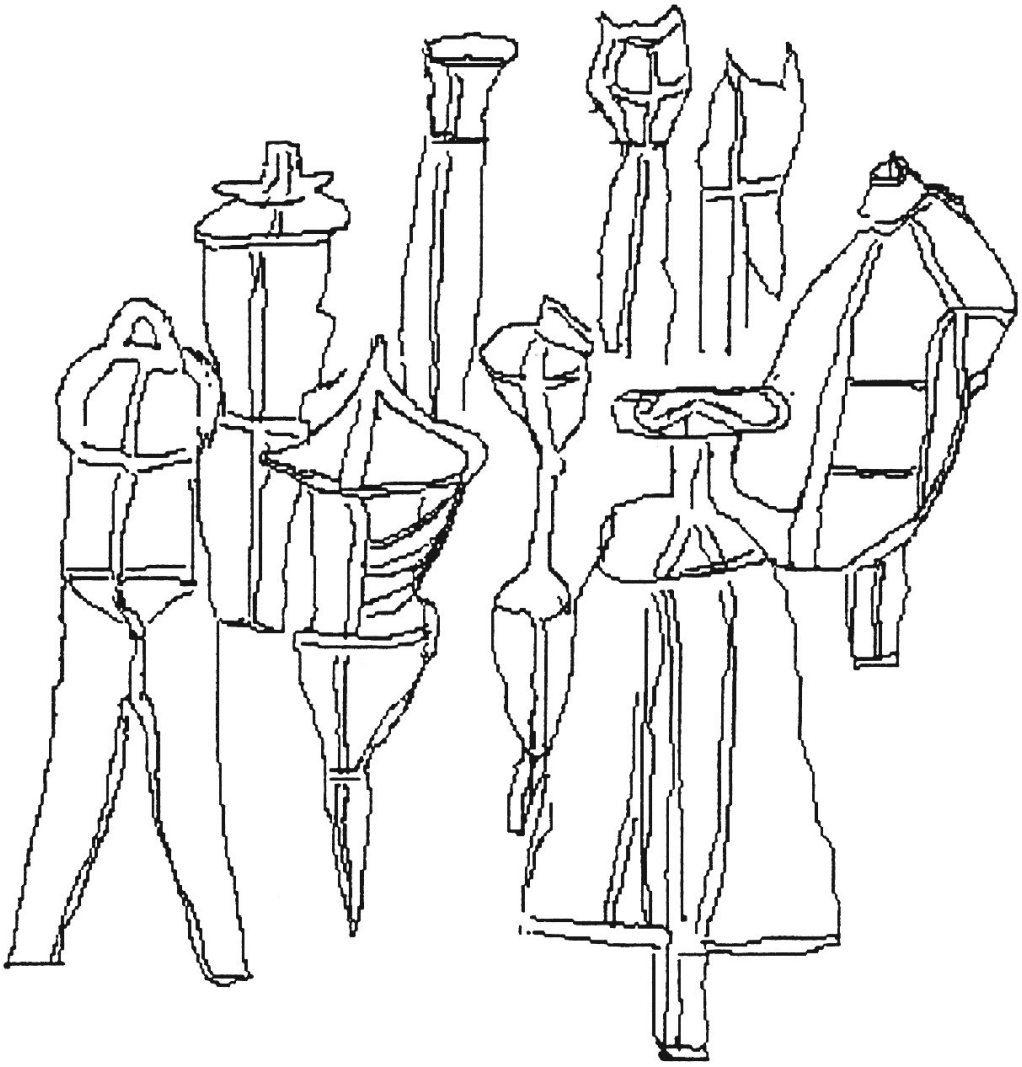
Sonata Bachelor Machine

1983-1989

Charles Shere



Ear : Press : 2016

This piece was completed November 10 1989 but composed mostly in 1983 and 1984 while working on (in fact, as part of) the opera *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* after Marcel Duchamp's painting of that name. A long ballet dominating the middle of the second act, the center of the opera, was conceived as representing the mechanical workings of the Bride and her Bachelors, with solo material given, respectively, to violin and piano. This sonata is the piano material, lacking all other music (solo and choral singing and orchestral accompaniment) but fleshed out slightly with additional notes.

There are two intentions: to make an extended, somewhat virtuosic piece of music for solo piano, and to retain the arbitrary, quirky, stiff characteristic of Duchamp's conception. The part of the bachelor apparatus that is most present is the "chariot" or "glider," a contraption that comes and goes in a reciprocating movement, sounding its "litanies (slow life: everyday junk: onanism: buffer of life") and actuating an elaborate train of machinery which ultimately fails to strip bare the bride.

Sonata: Bachelor Machine was first played by Eliane Lust, July 25, 1990, in San Francisco, on a wonderful program also including Debussy's Hommage à Rameau, Bartók's Sonata, 1926, and Schumann's Davidsbündlertänze. What a night!

Parts of the sonata were later used by the choreographer-stage director Margaret Fisher for mixed-media productions of her own: for these, Eliane returned to the piece, even performing it in costume while being towed, with her piano, from one side of the stage to the other.

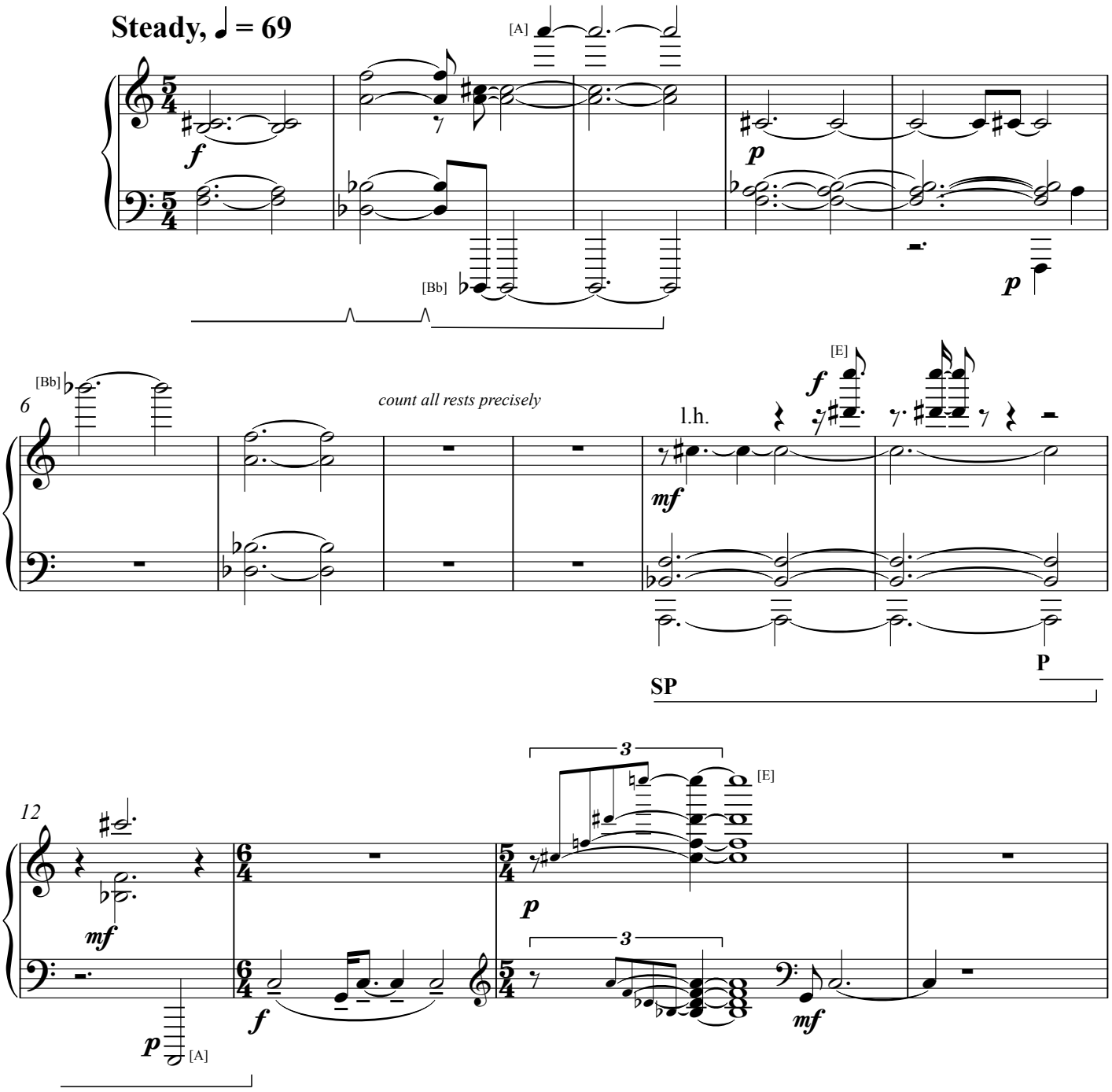
The three movements are called Cadre, Desires and Frustrations, and Action and Inaction. I wouldn't mind finding an English word for the title of the first movement, but nothing quite does what the French *cadre* does: framework, context, grouping…

The music of the Sonata can also make a fairly substantial Piano Concerto, a Big Concerto to complement the Small Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, but it hasn't yet been notated, except as part of the Duchamp opera. Perhaps one day.

i:	Cadre	page 1
ii:	Desires and Frustrations	4
iii:	Action and Inaction	11

printed in healdsburg september 2016

I: Cadre


Steady, ♩ = 69
[A]
f
p
[Bb]
p
6
[Bb]
count all rests precisely
l.h.
[E]
f
mf
SP
P
12
mf
p
[A]
f
3
[E]
p
3
mf

16

p

f

f

P

22

f

pp

♩=84

p

28

f

ff

l.h.

l.h.

[A]

[A]

[Bb]

[B]

SP

32

p

P

SP

f

P

SP

SP

37

ff [B] p mf mp f [D#] mf

P P

41

ff mf l.h. r.h. r.h. f mf f

SP P [A]

45

[C] [A] p subito f [E]

♩ = 69

rit.

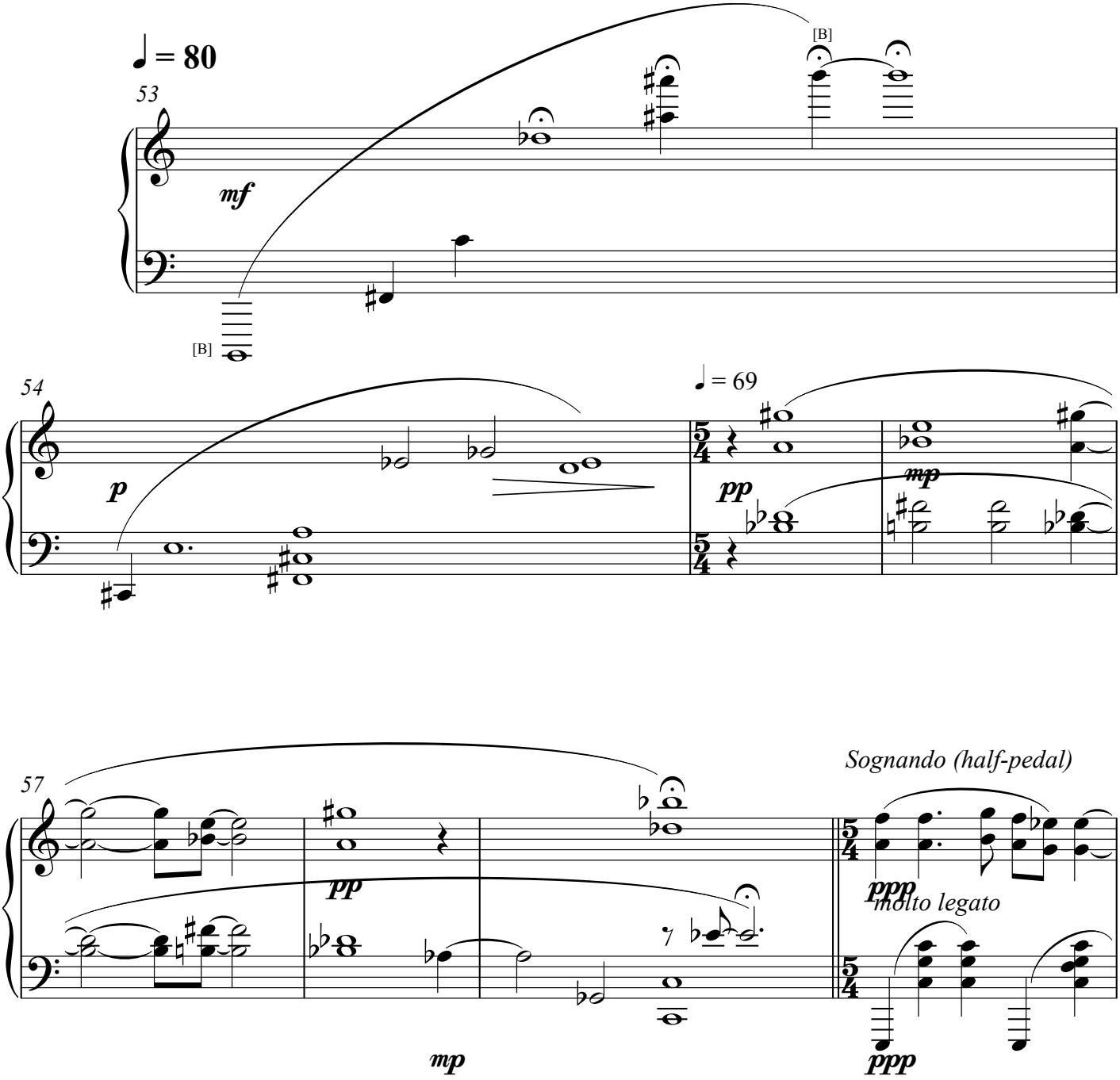
49

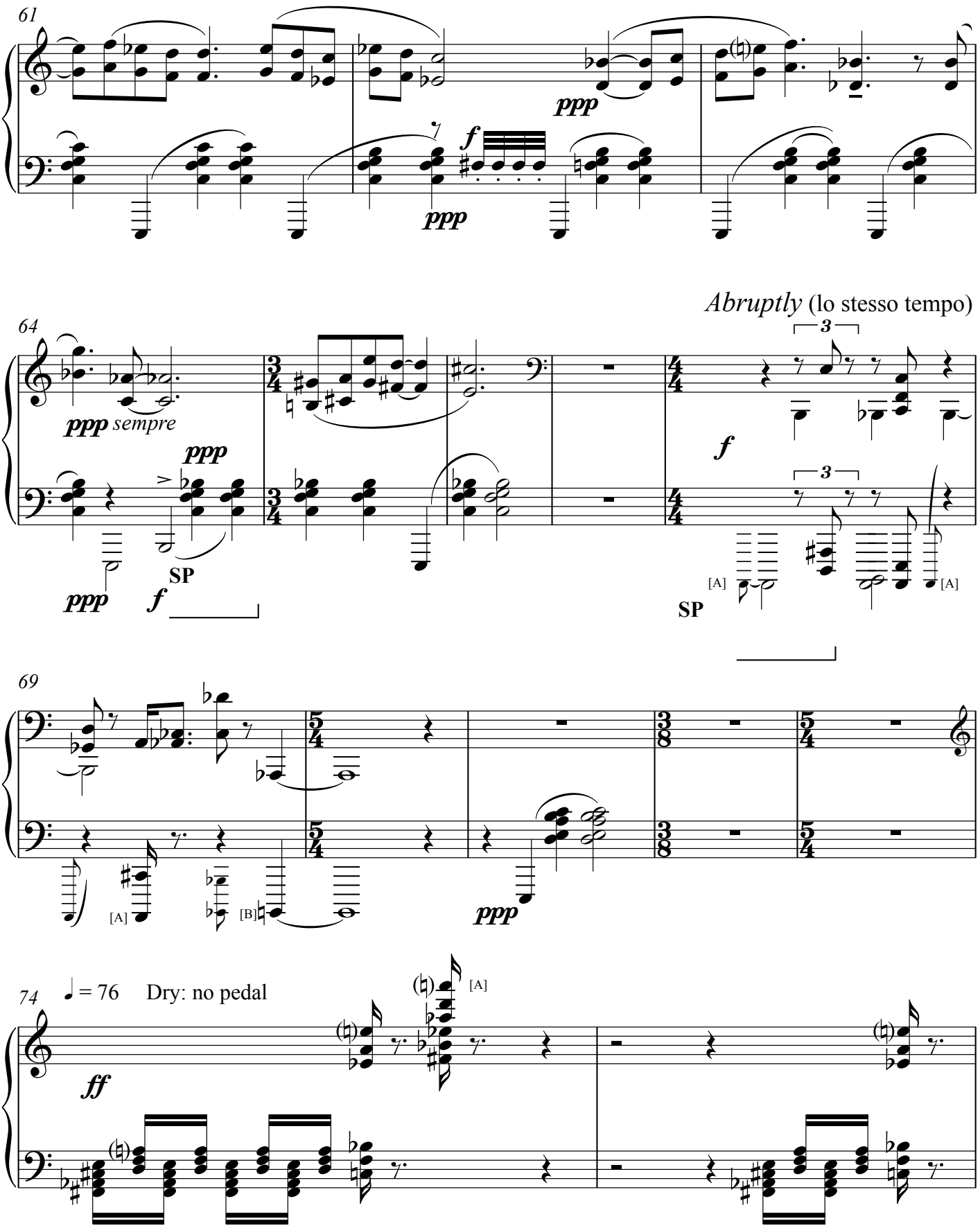
6 f p [Bb] mp p pp [Bb] pp

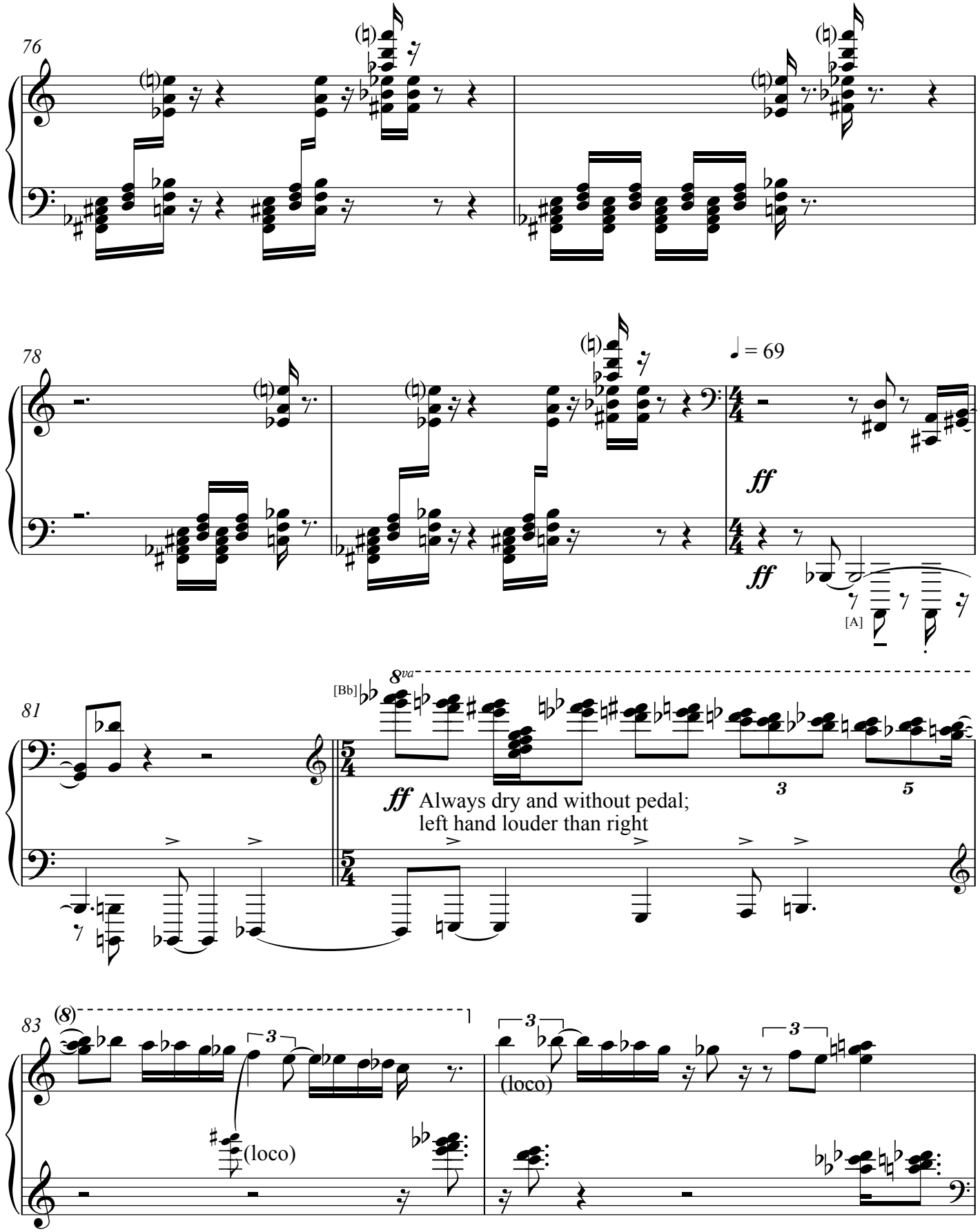
SP SP [A]

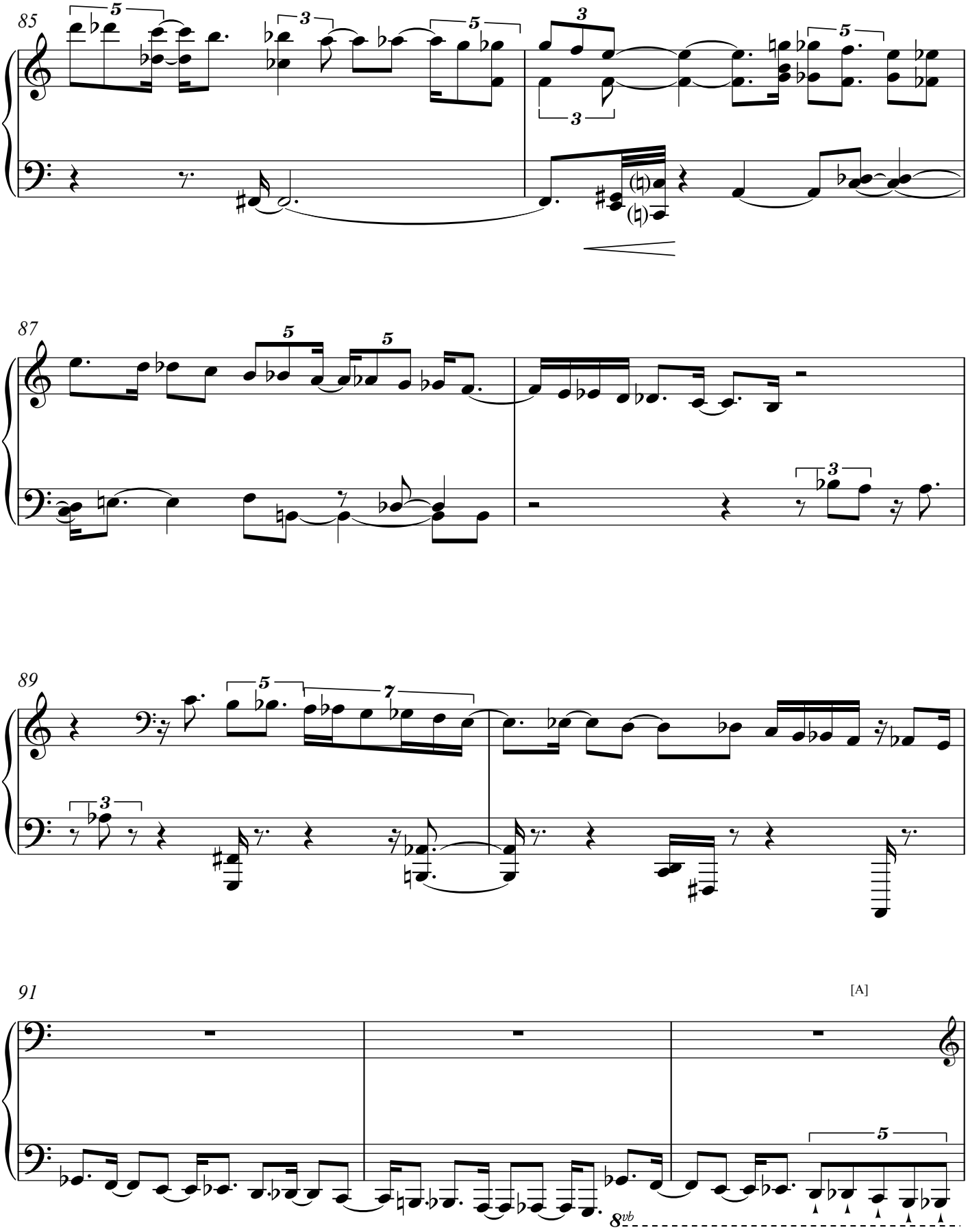
3:30 ca.

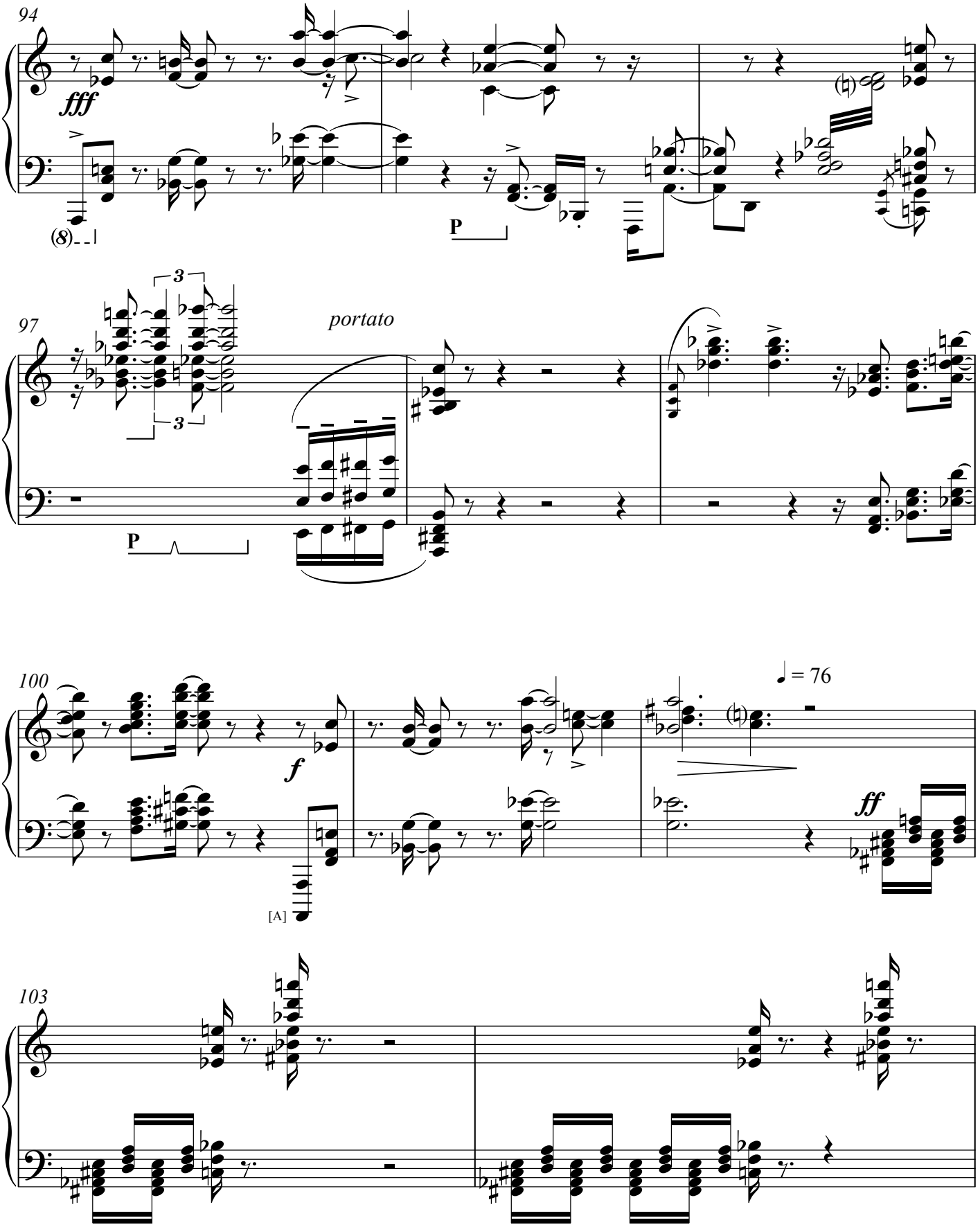
II: Desires and Frustrations

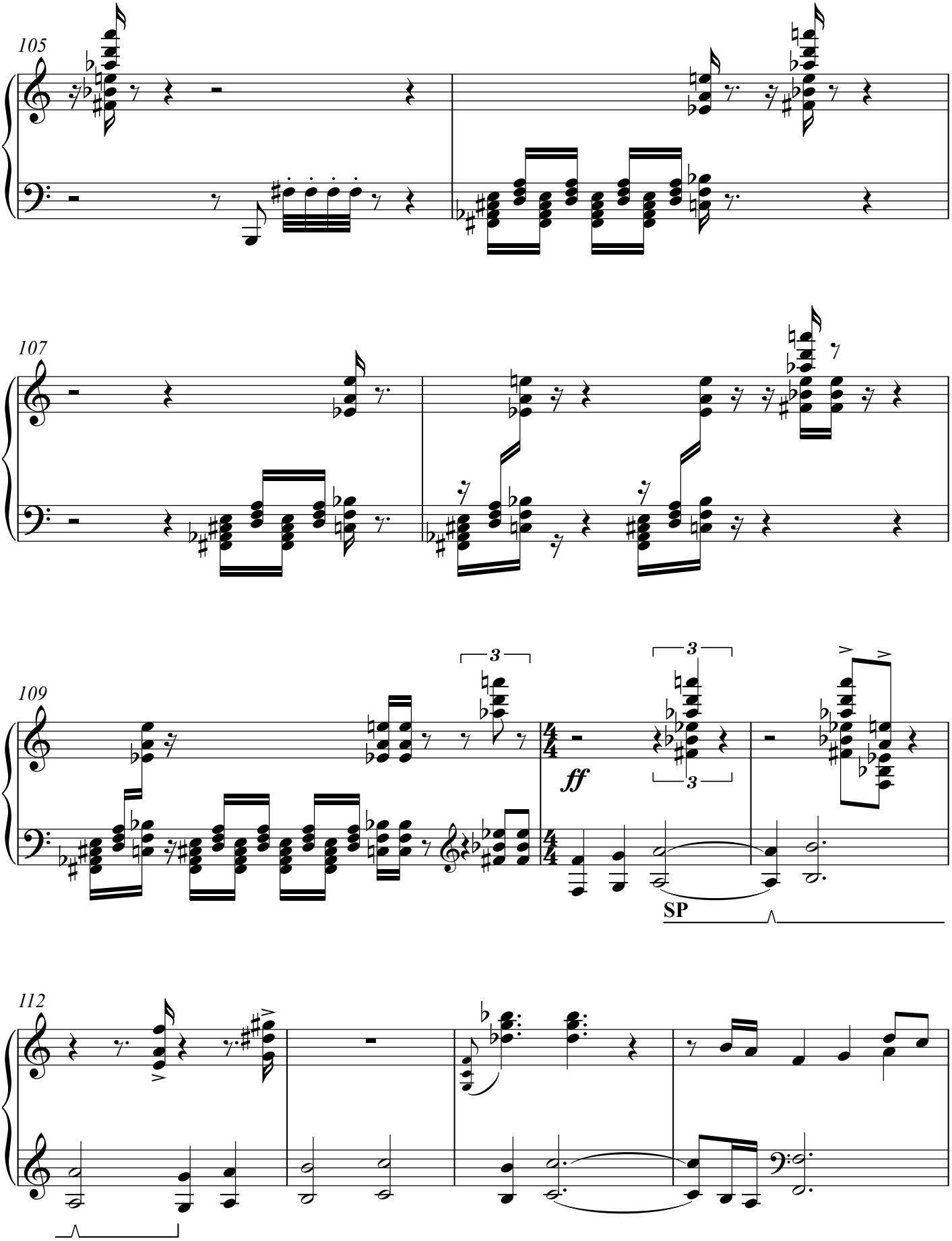


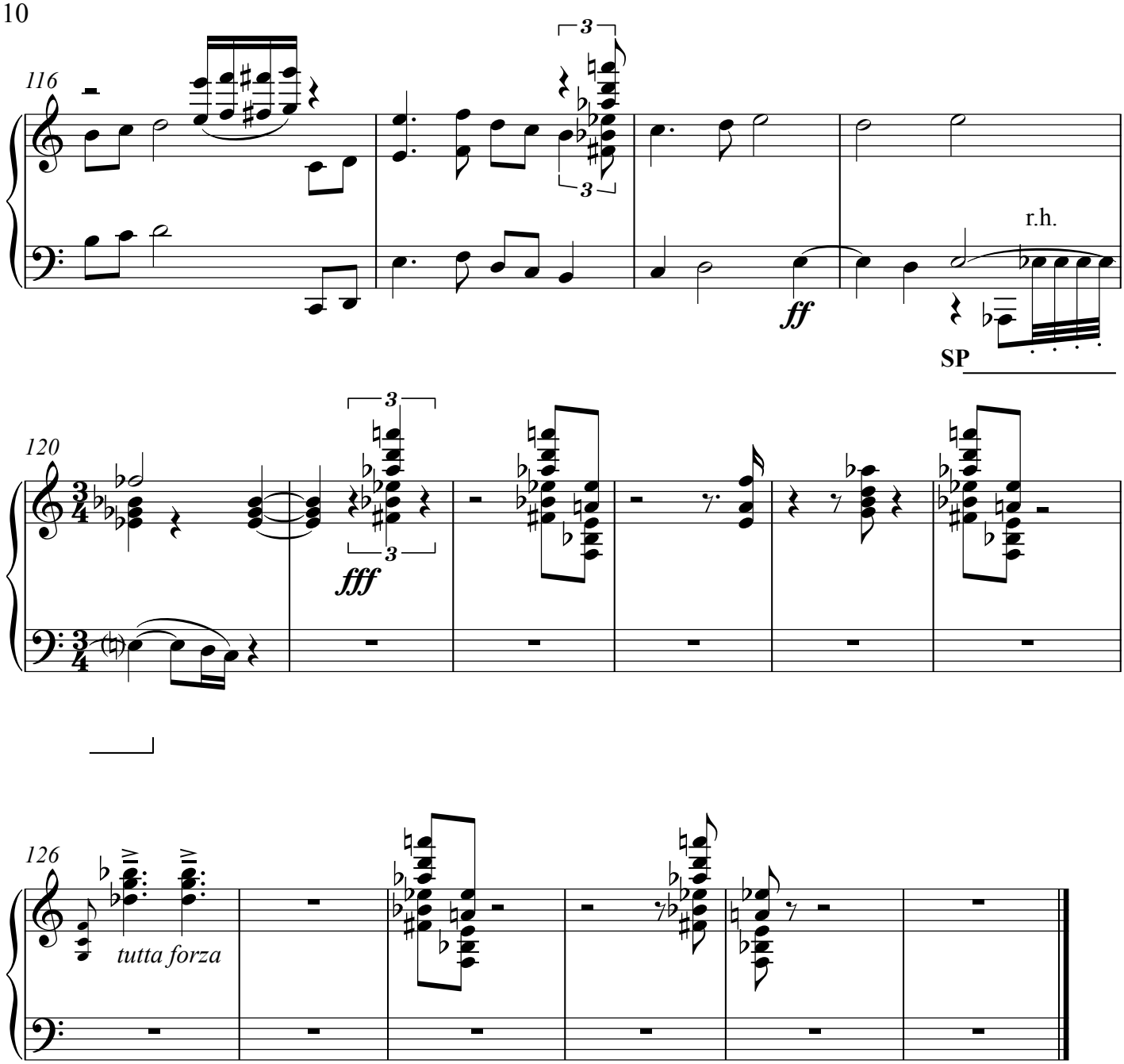

61
ppp
f
ppp
64
ppp sempre
ppp
SP
ppp
f
Abruptly (lo stesso tempo)
3
f
3
[A]
SP
[A]
69
[A]
[B]
ppp
74
♩ = 76
Dry: no pedal
ff
[A]


76
78
♩ = 69
ff
ff
[A]
81
[Bb]
8va
ff Always dry and without pedal;
left hand louder than right
83
(8)
(loco)
(loco)


85
87
89
91
[A]
8vb

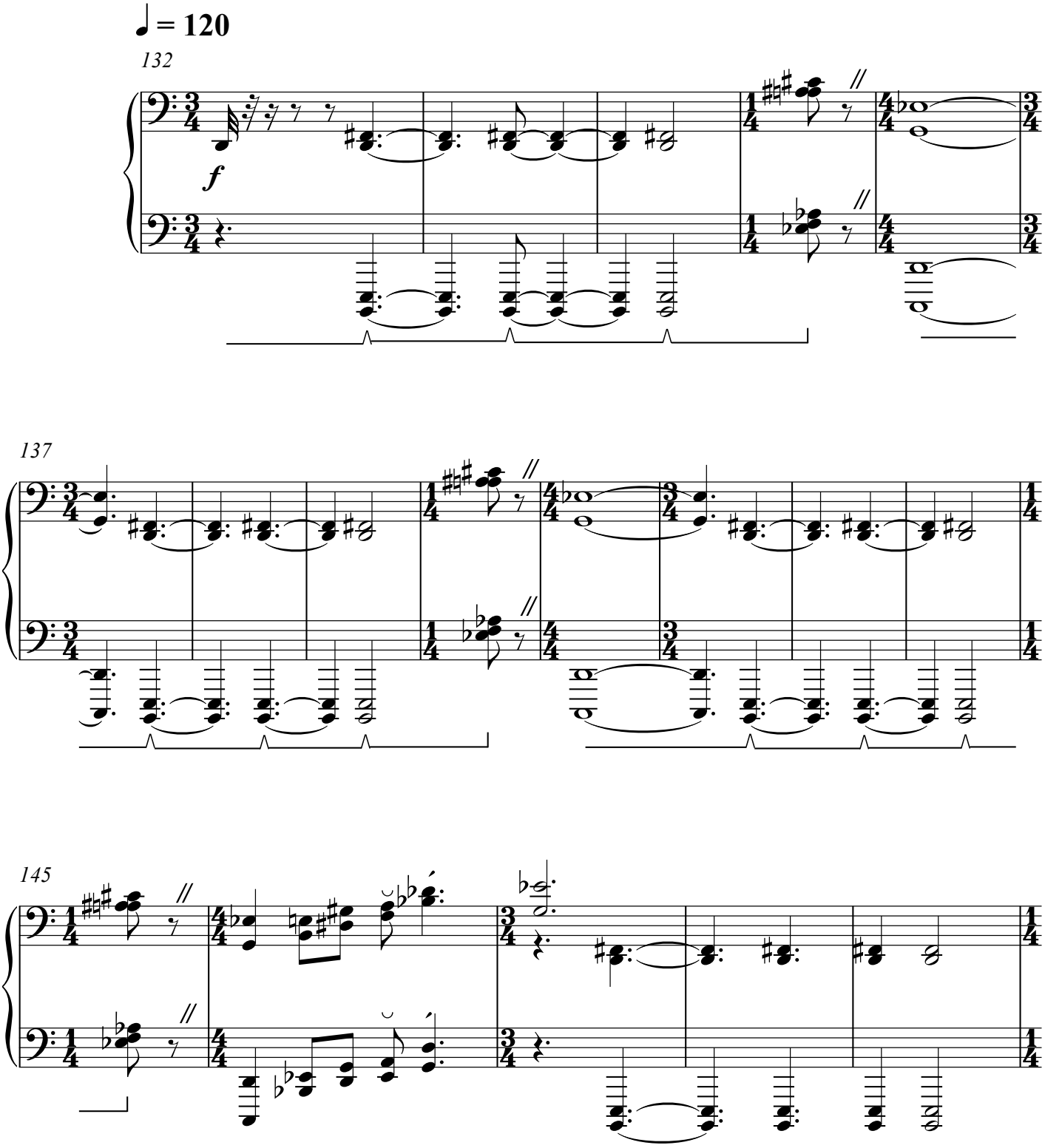

94
fff
(8)
P
97
portato
P
100
f
[A]
♩ = 76
ff
103

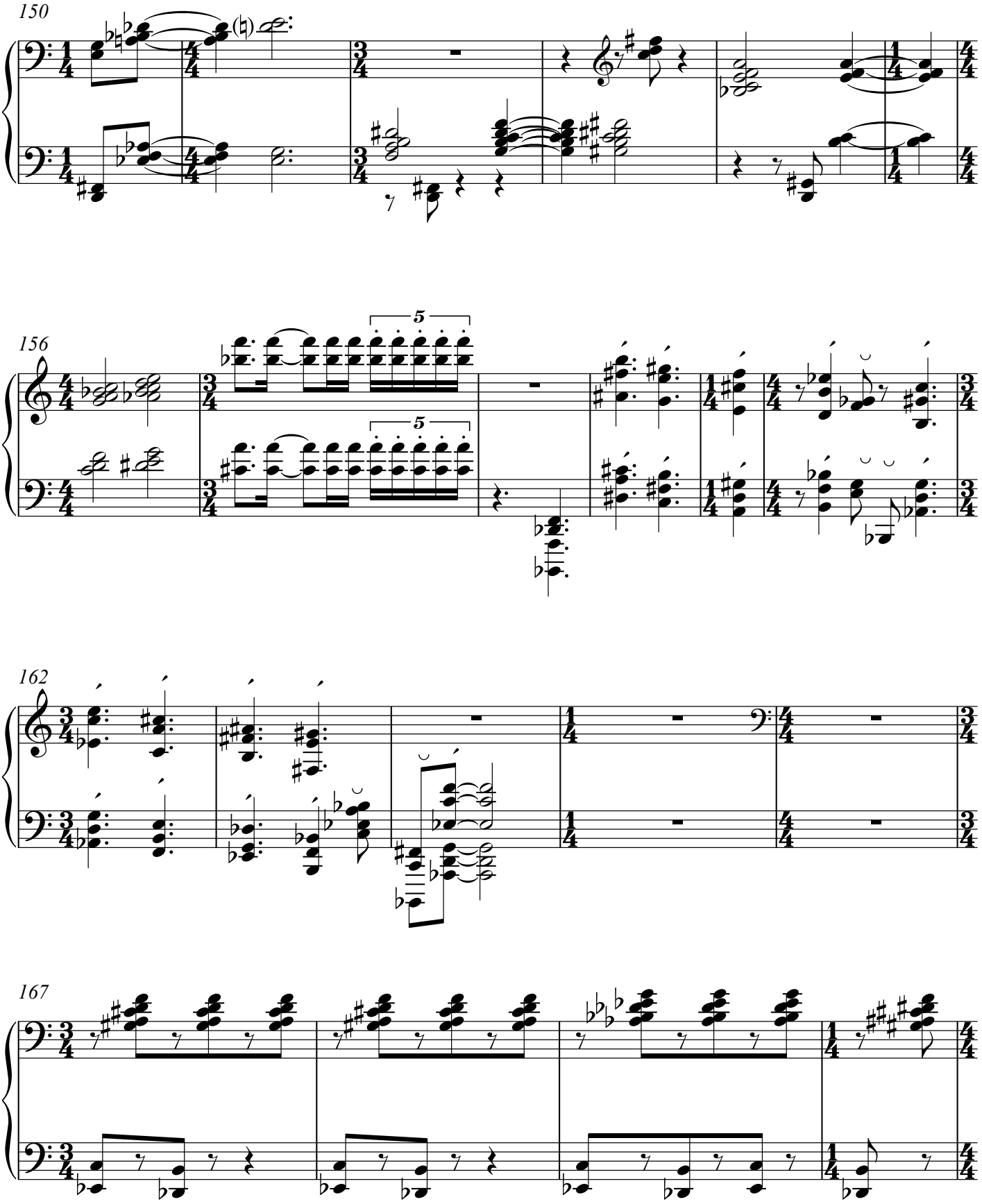

105
107
109
3
ff
3
3
SP
112

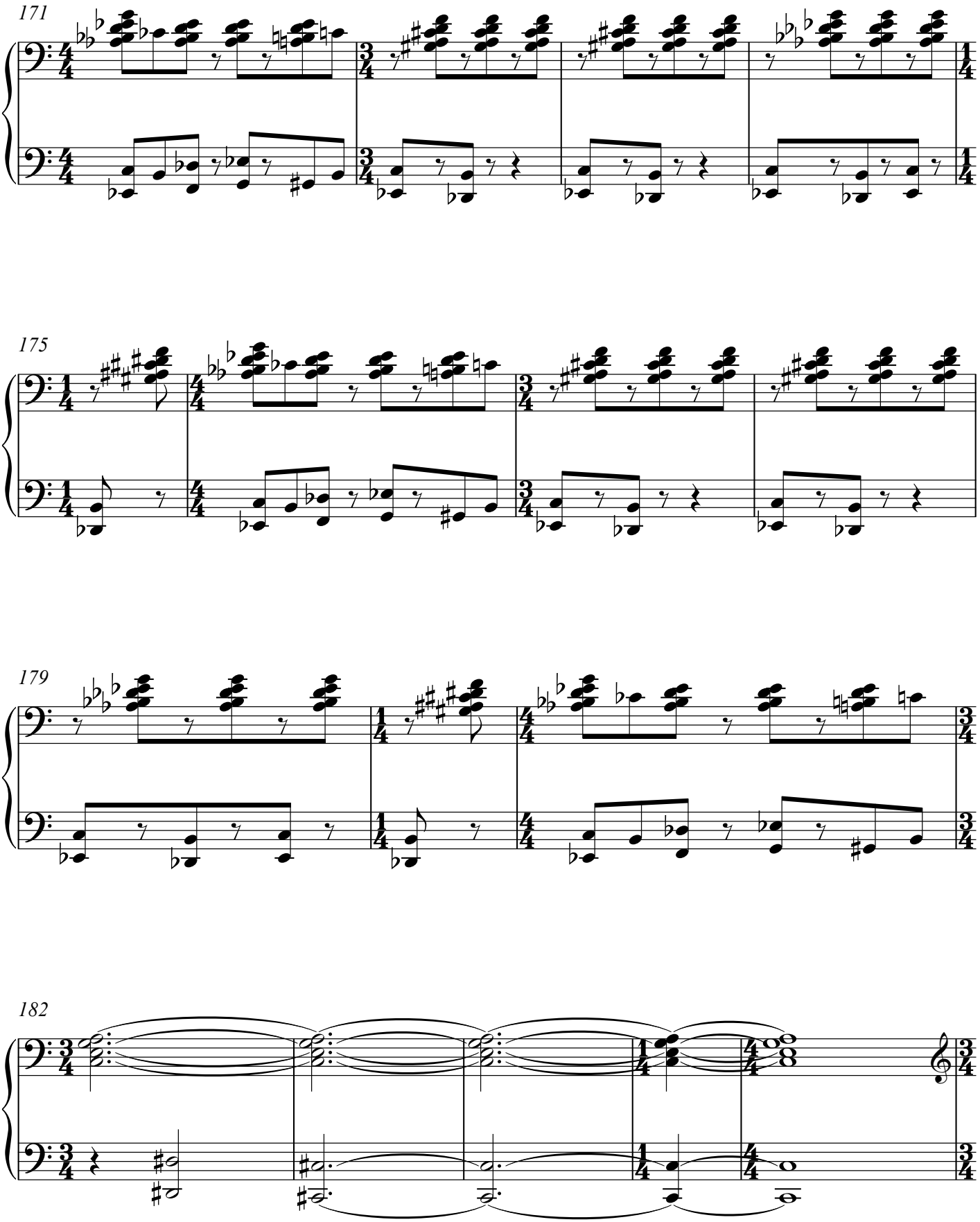


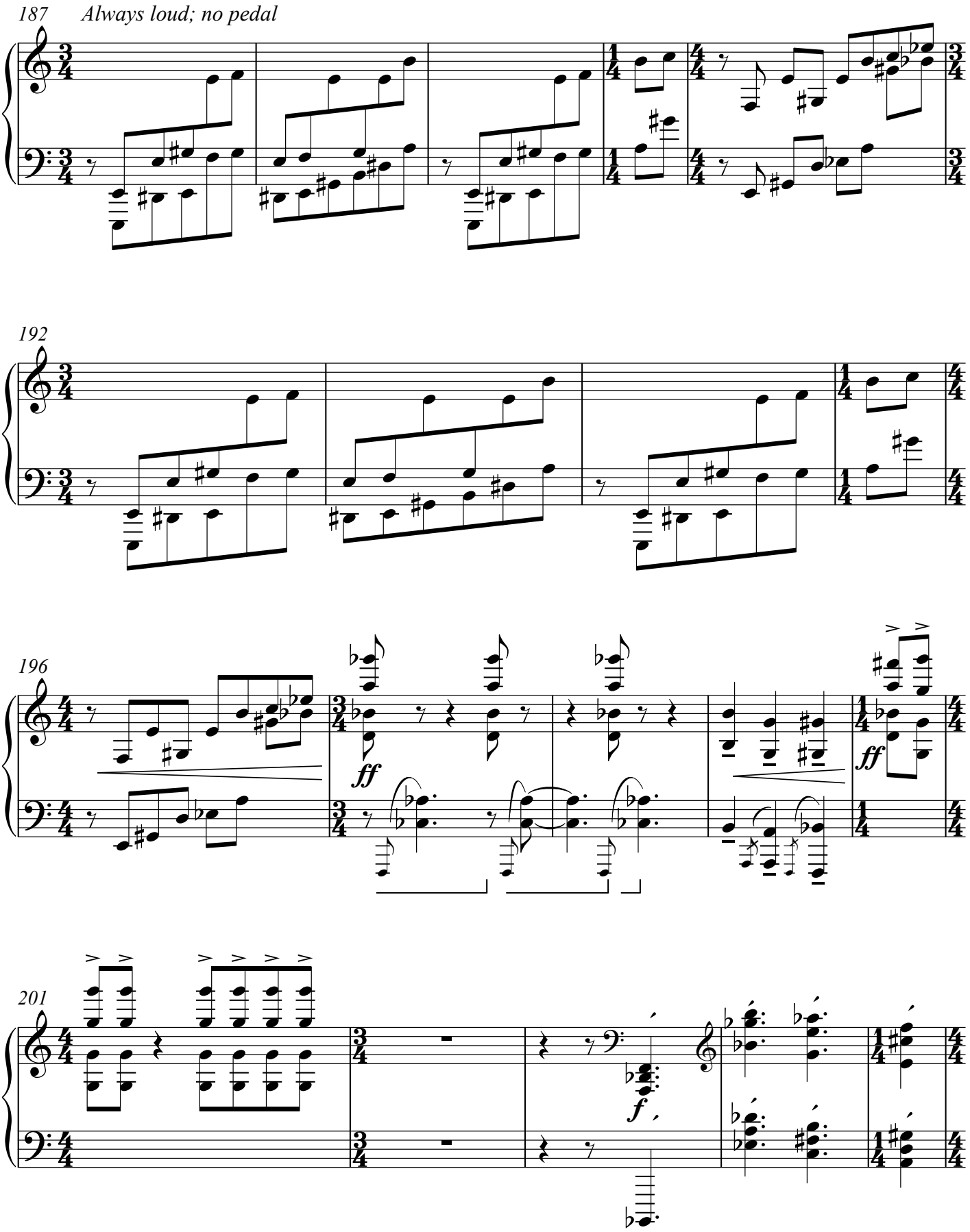
5:15 ca.

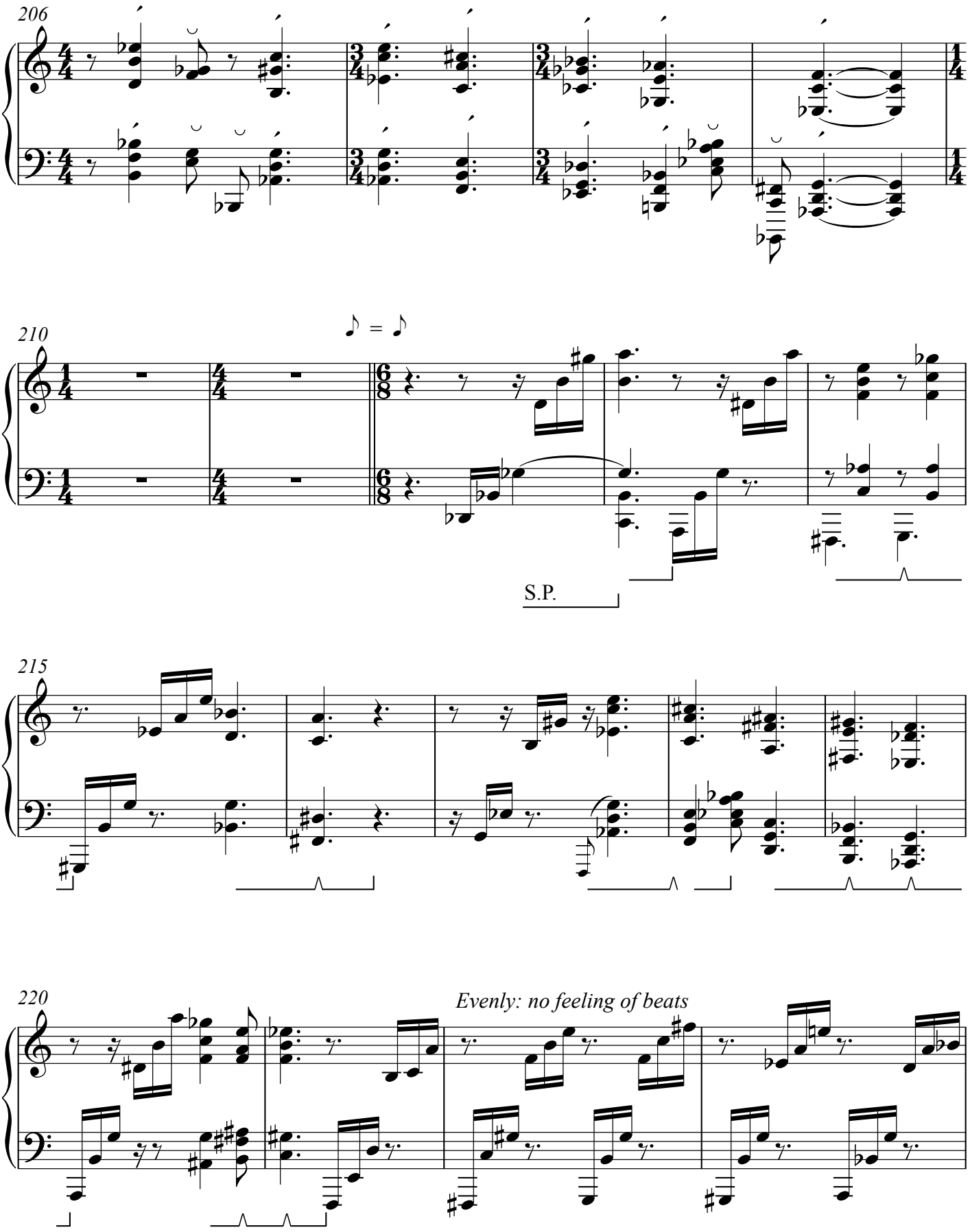
III: Action and Inaction

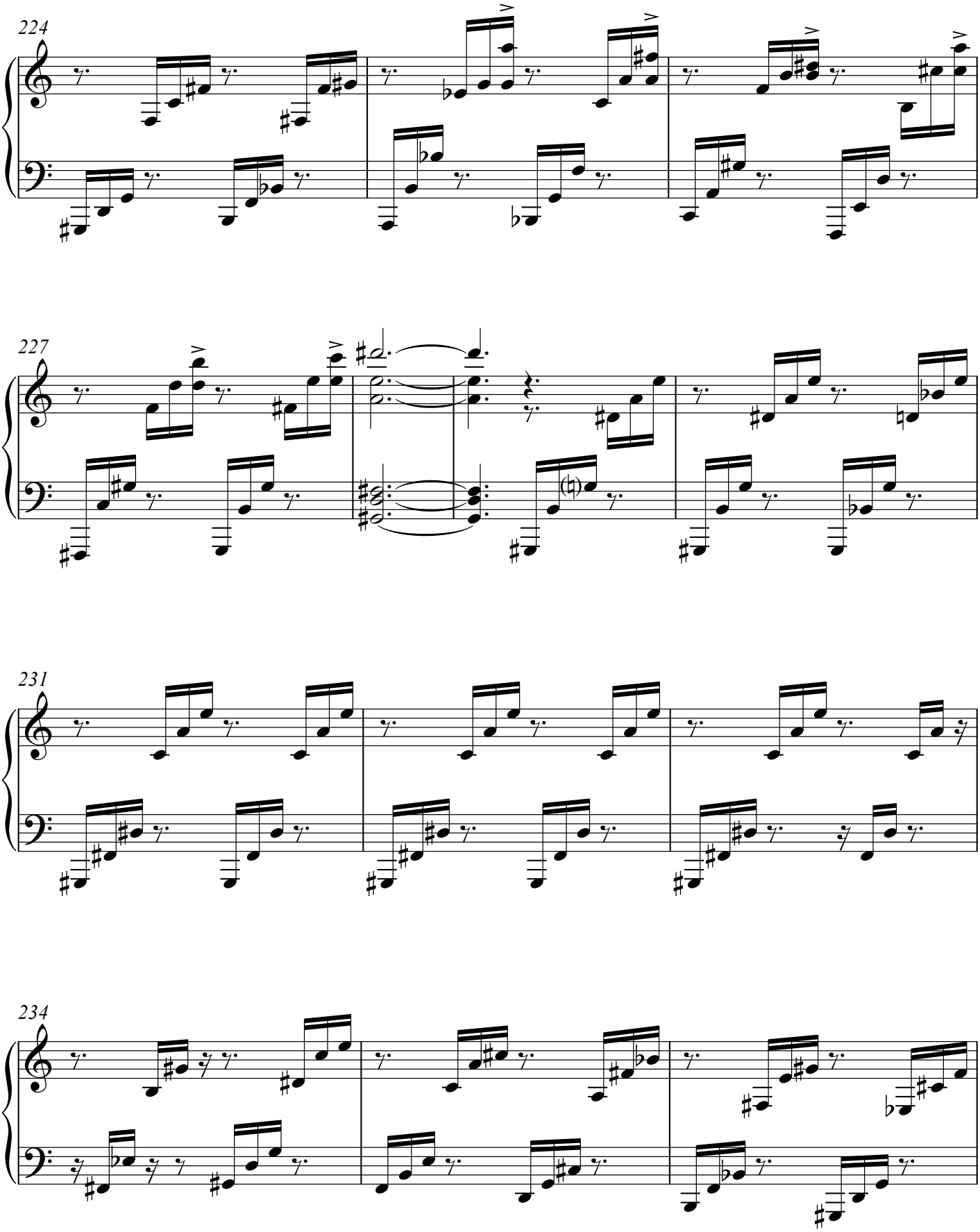


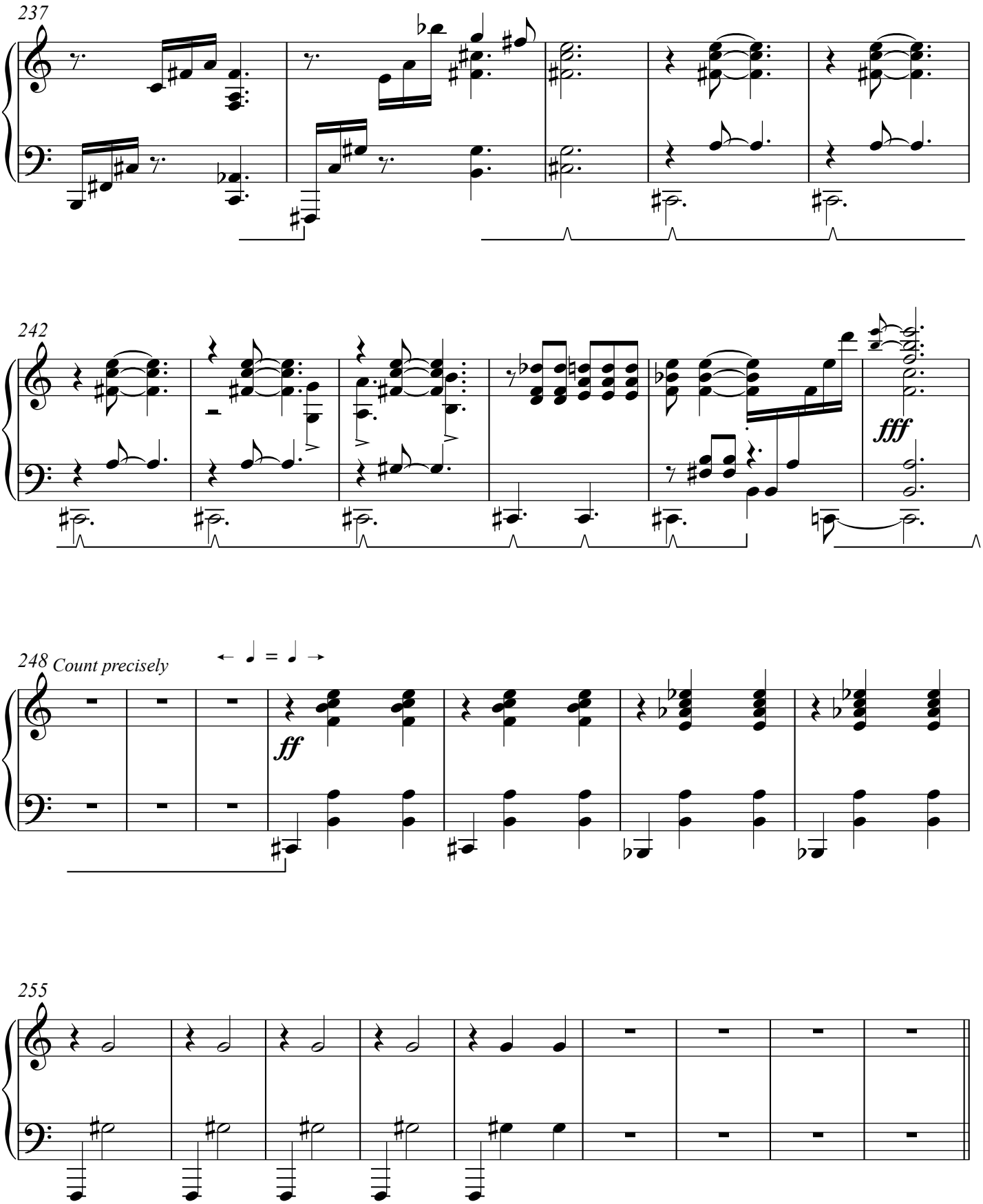

150
156
5
5
162
167

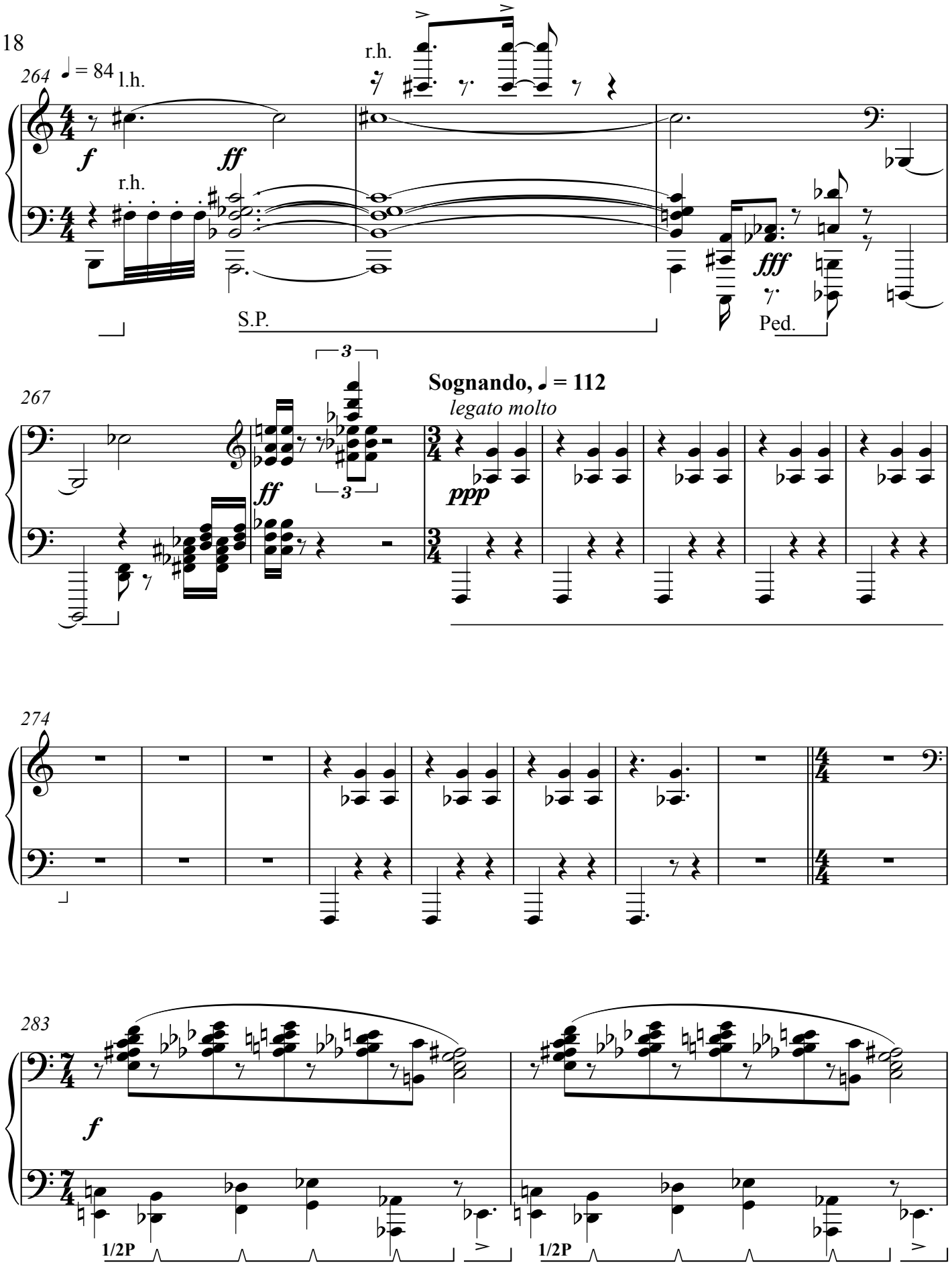

171
175
179
182

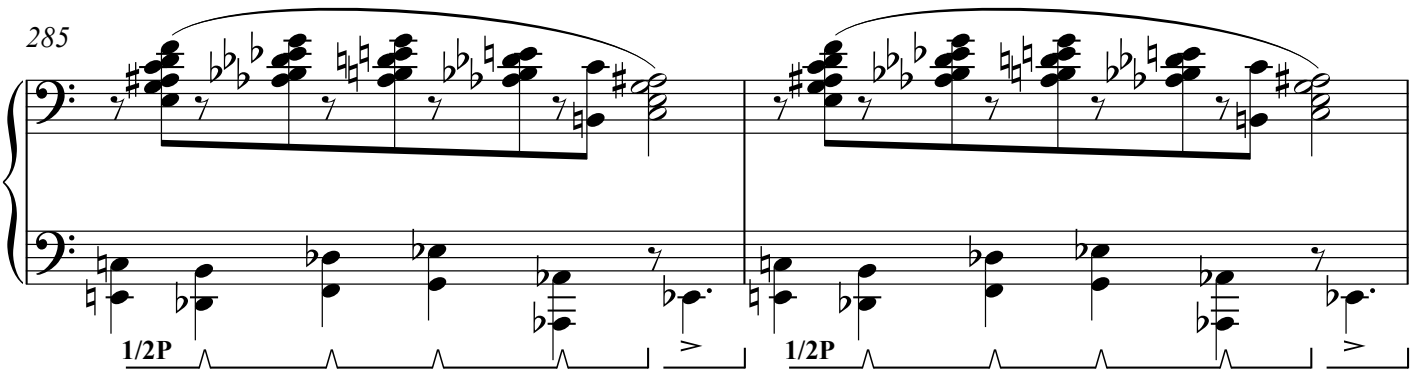

187
Always loud; no pedal
192
196
ff
ff
201
f

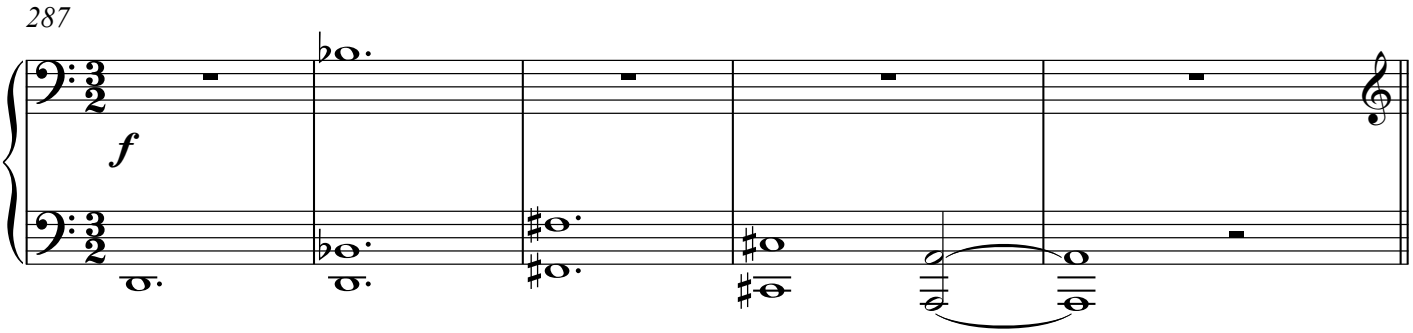

206
210
♪ = ♪
S.P.
215
220
Evenly: no feeling of beats


224
227
231
234

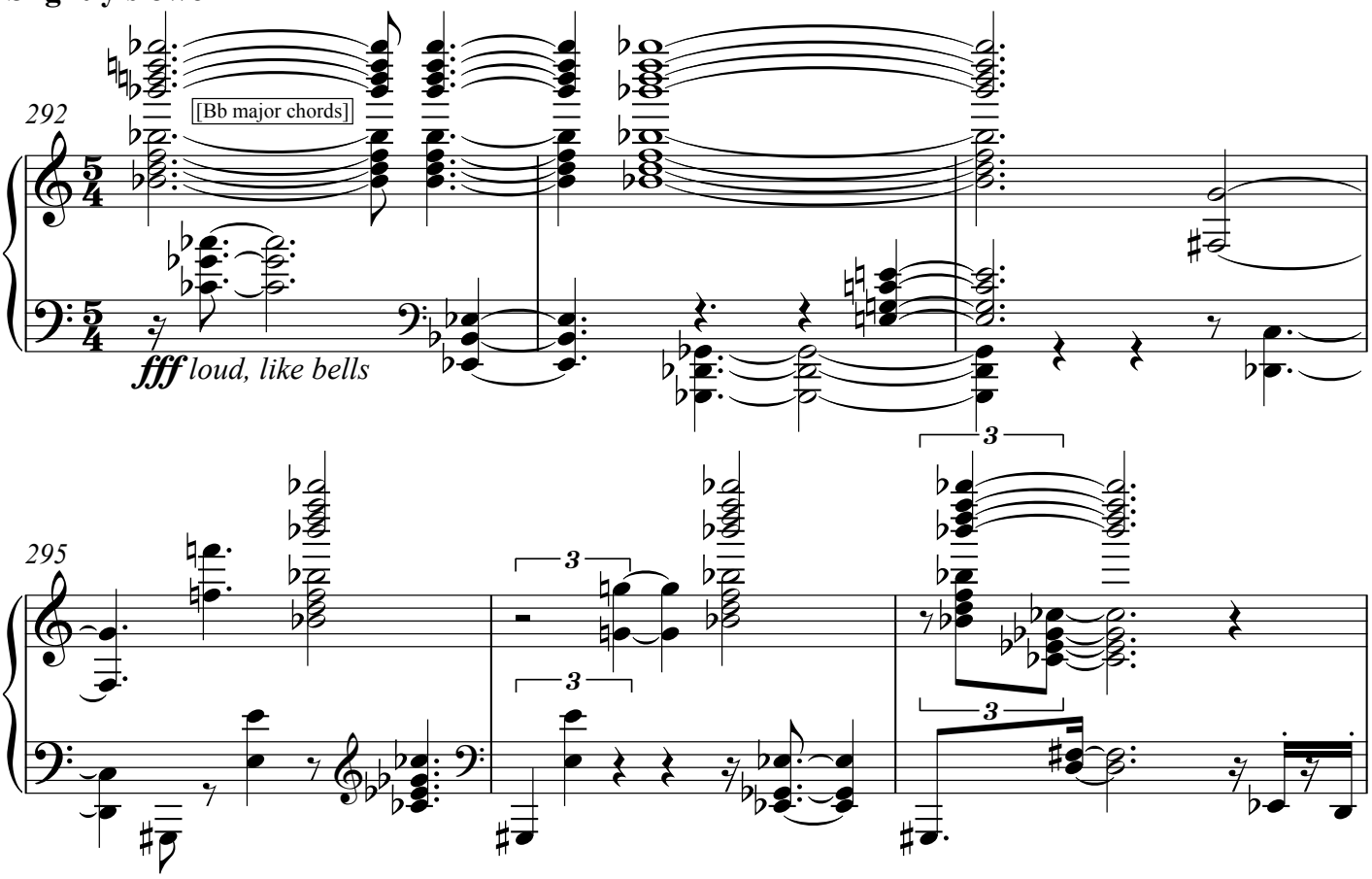

237
242
fff
248
Count precisely
← ♩ = ♩ →
ff
255


264
♩ = 84
l.h.
r.h.
f
ff
r.h.
S.P.
fff
Ped.
267
ff
3
3
Sognando, ♩ = 112
legato molto
ppp
274
283
f
1/2P
1/2P





Slightly slower



298

A tempo (♩ = 112)

Slower

302

pp

p

307

mp

A tempo (♩ = 112)

rall.

r.h.

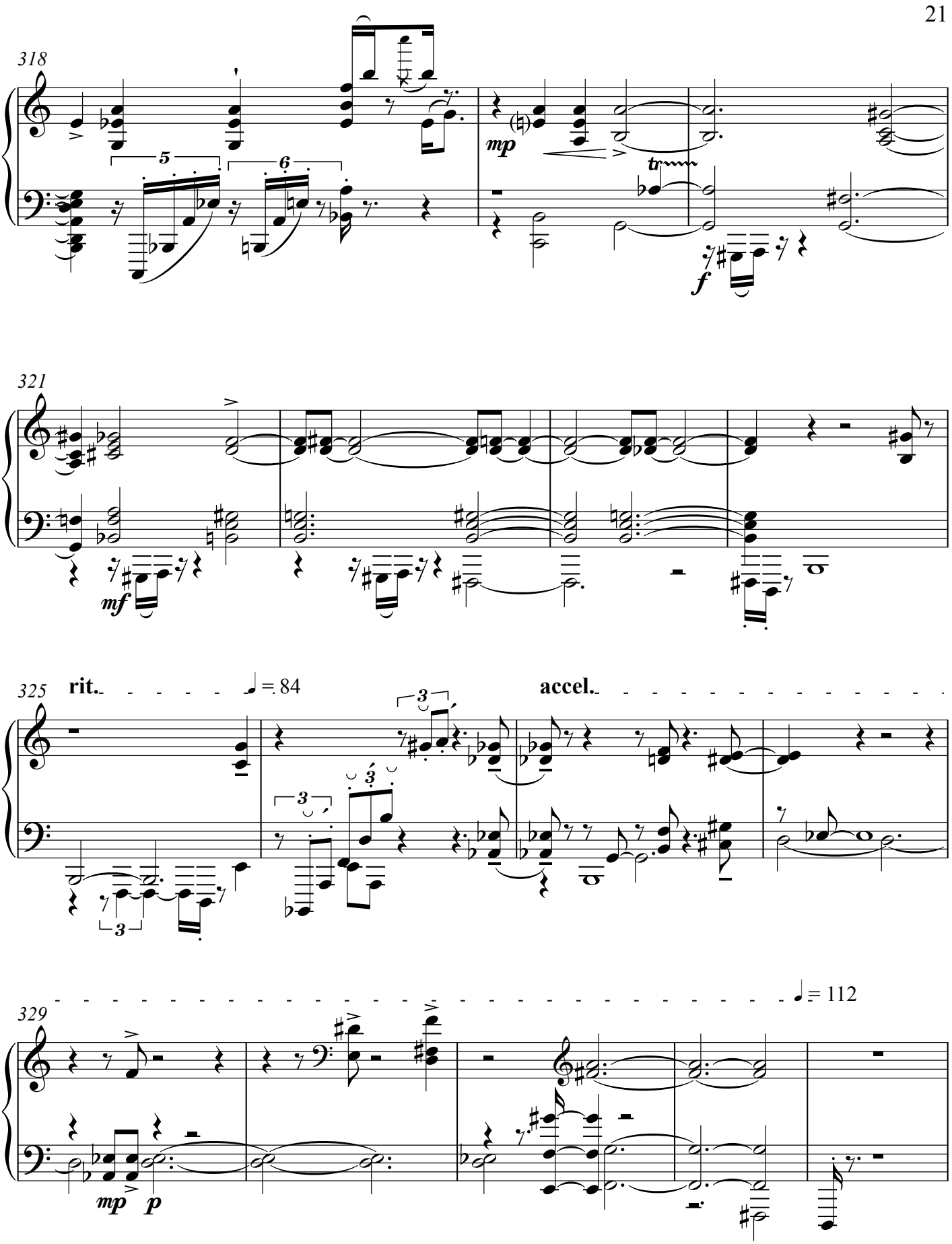
r.h.

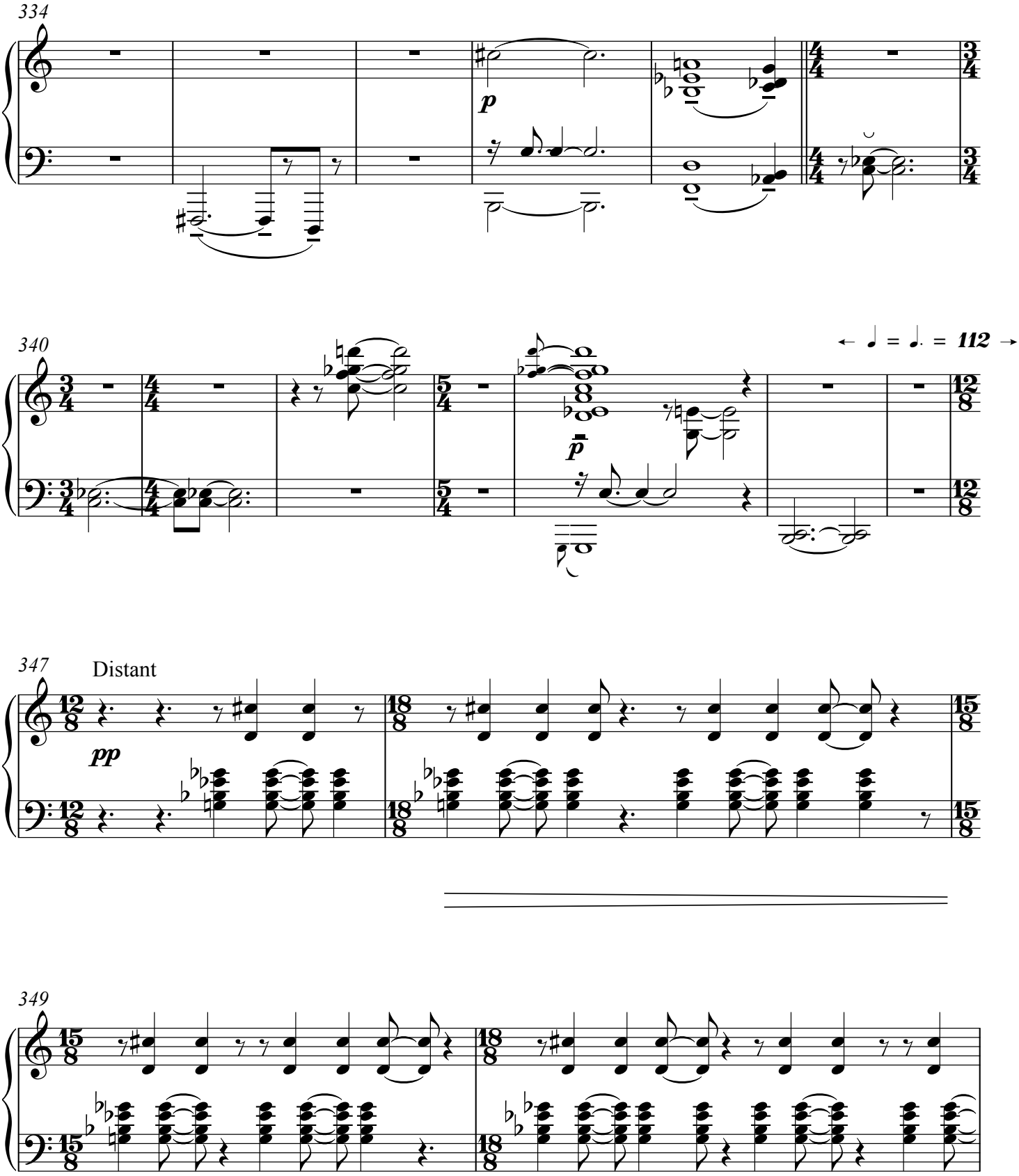
r.h.

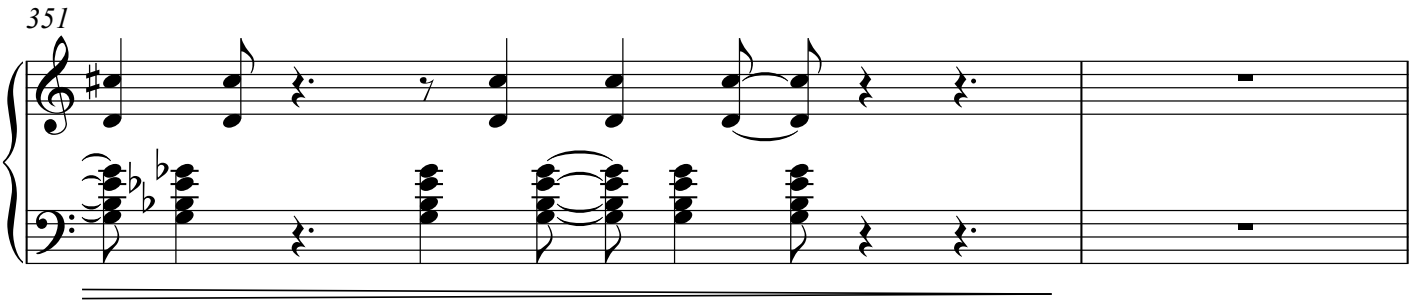
313

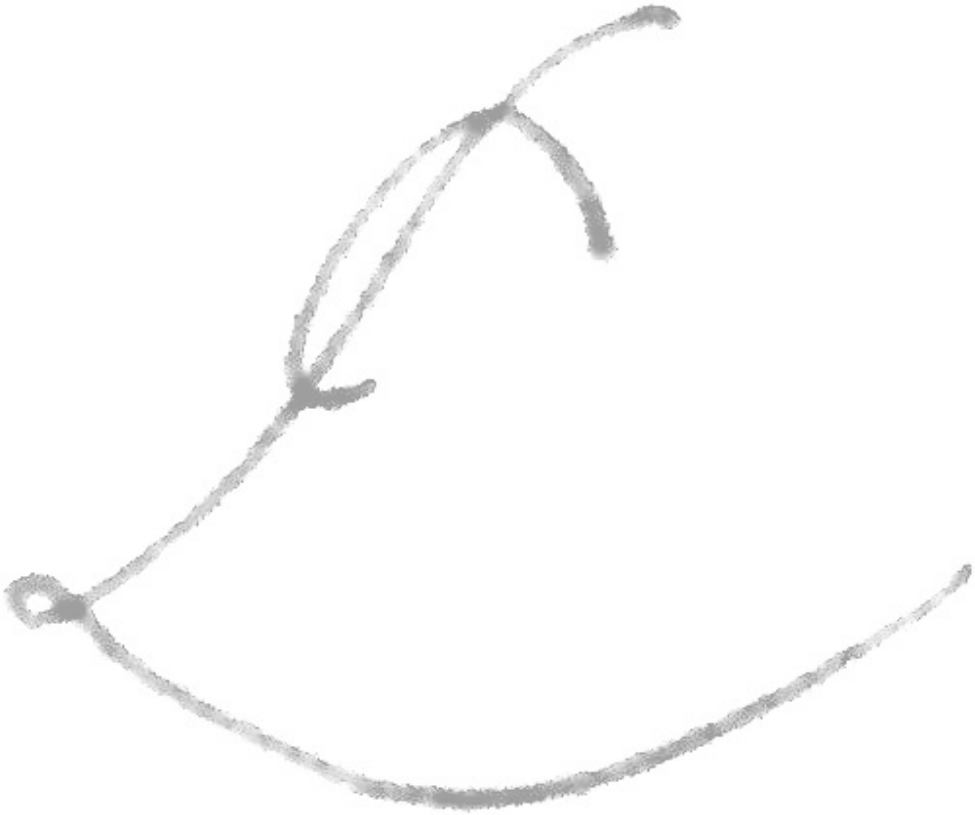
tr

♩ = 84


318
mp
f
321
mf
325
rit.
♩ = 84
accel.
329
♩ = 112
mp
p


334
p
340
← ♩ = ♩. = 112 →
p
347
Distant
pp
349



1983-1989
Ile d'Arz, Berkeley, Healdsburg

7'21"