Four Impromptus for piano, op. 14

Inasmuch as there are those who find this *recueil* quite satisfying as an integral set, it is probably unwise of me to admit that its four members were not originally designed to go together. The opus number was originally held by just the Variations (no. 4 here). Early on I considered having them make way for the Galop (no. 1) and Biscayne Bay Waltz (no. 3) when I found myself continuing to play the piano originals of these works even after orchestrating them in the late 70's. (My opp. 1–3 are comprised of ensemble numbers which all first saw the light of day as piano pieces. At first I thought these reworkings completely superseded the original keyboard versions, and indeed, with the exception of the aforementioned Galop and Biscayne Bay, I ceased to play any of the originals anymore on the piano. Now, inasmuch as I only began to employ opus numeration around the time I worked out the orchestrations, the piano versions of these two numbers had been in a kind of opus limbo until I made the decision to include them here so others can play them too.) For the record (in case anyone is interested), opp. 1 (orchestra) and 3 (strings) utilize the themes from the present Biscayne Bay Waltz, while op. 2 (band) contains a more elaborate version of the Galop.

As if all of this weren't confusing enough, recently I decided to reinstate a work for flute and guitar, which took the opus number 5 only late in 1999. I had to make room for it among my earlier (that is to say, unknown) music, or all subsequent opus numbers would have been thrown off. I took the opus number that had been reserved for the left hand Scherzo (no. 2 here) and used it for a contemporary work instead. So my first inkling to combine the present works under a single opus umbrella derived purely from practical considerations. Now, I like to think that the order I chose—for the four individual numbers generally, and for the waltz strains that make up Biscayne Bay specifically—at least represents a well developed instinct for structure! Those who enjoy the set as such do not seem to mind the stylistic disparity between the earliest of the waltz tunes (February 1976, and as such my earliest music promulgated in its original form) and the left hand Scherzo, written in October of 1979, which is to say after I had moved up to New York to work as a free-lance musician.

The Galop is a study in alternating thirds for the two hands. The Scherzo seems to employ an alternation between two contrasting modes of speech: one motoric and propulsive, the other lyrically warm. The latter voice seems to hold sway at the end, but there is an unexpected, perhaps even unwelcome, final incursion of the motoric impulse. Thus the Scherzo ends enigmatically, the conflict really unresolved.

Improvisation has been a major source for the ideas I use in my compositions, whether for piano or other forces. Surely the Galop originated that way. I used to play ballet classes, and that is the origin of the tunes in Biscayne Bay Waltz. (That is also the reason all the phrases in this number are eight or sixteen

measures long.) First comes a pair of cantabile *rondes de jambe*. These are followed by two big "across the floor" waltzes, as they are called. One of the Miami companies for which I played had a view of the water, which view I recall much better today than the circumstances under which I did my improvising! That's what prompts me to use this geographic appellation now. I wrote a short intro for the Waltz as it is currently comprised, a kind of "invitation to the dance" for the *right* hand (at first). It seems to be saying to the left hand after the latter finishes its rigors in the Scherzo, that's all very nice, now let's just dance!

My dear friend, the sensational pianist and probing musicological scholar Joseph Smith, had an accident late in 1979 temporarily affecting the use of his right hand. The discussions that we had about the left hand repertoire he was exploring as a result (he hadn't known about Bartók's early Study, for example) prompted me to add a piece to this repertoire myself. Scherzo was dedicated to Joseph, as is in fact the entire collection here.

A different kind of accident gave rise to the final Variations on "Blest Be the Tie." This was the signature hymn in the Southern Baptist church I was serving at the time in Florida. When a storm knocked out local power facilities, we had the Sunday morning service in almost Popish candlelight! I couldn't play the organ voluntary I had listed as a postlude, and so chose to improvise these variations on the piano. A member of the congregation was so taken with them that she came up and asked me how she could go about securing her own copy. When she realized that this had actually been my own improvisation, she insisted that I write them down, which indeed I did before even leaving the church for lunch (while the ideas were still fresh). There is a unifying left hand (that is to say, accompaniment, usually) motive heard regularly throughout the piece, and a thematic interlude which connects the variation in minor with the final, spirited one. A coda restores the mood to its opening quiet pensiveness, perhaps betraying a certain wistfulness that it was time, Victor, to just let the people be on their way, into the light of afternoon.

Victor Frost
4 XI 99
New York City

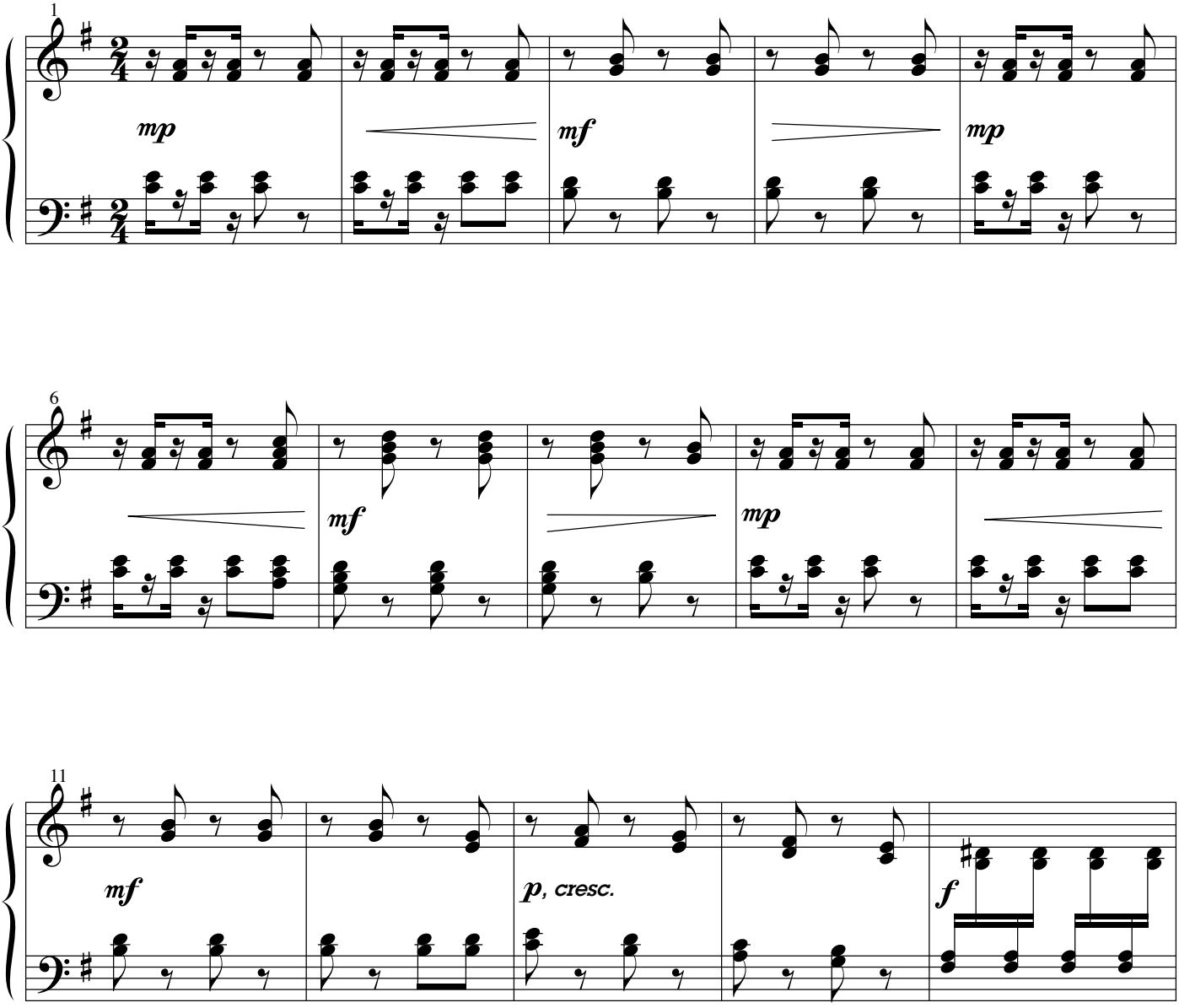
Four Impromptus

for piano, op. 14

1. Galop

Allegretto vivace ♩ = 110

Victor Frost



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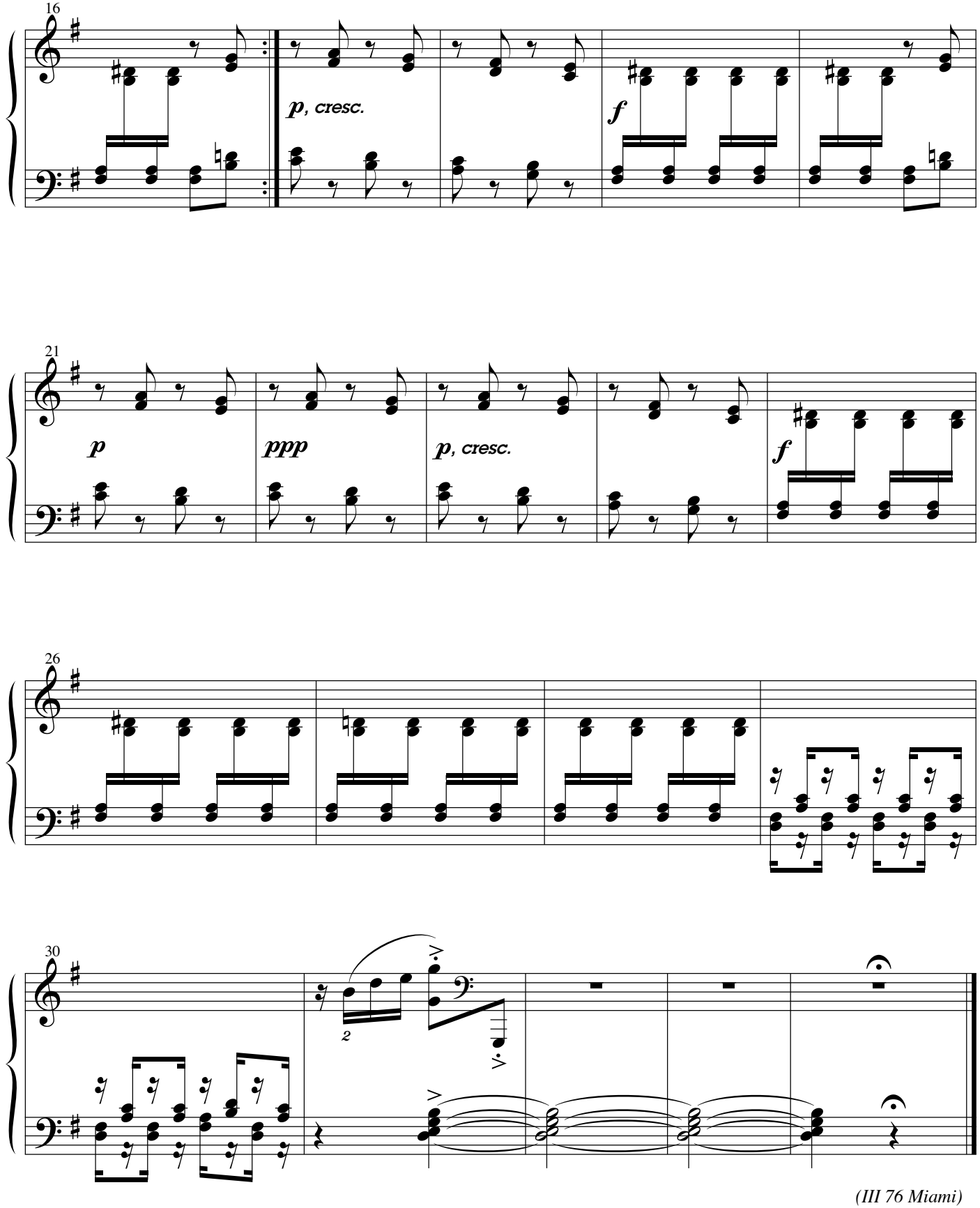
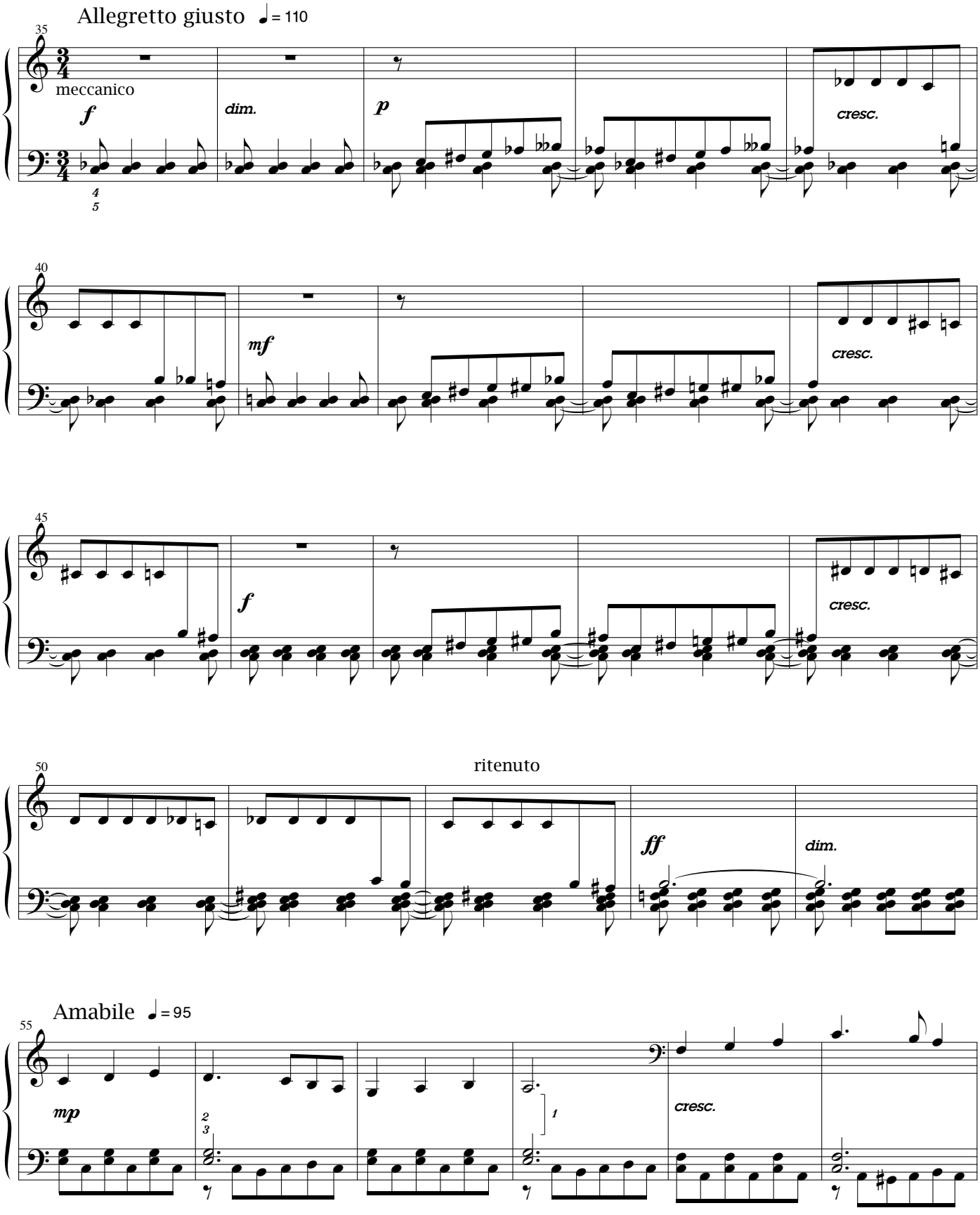
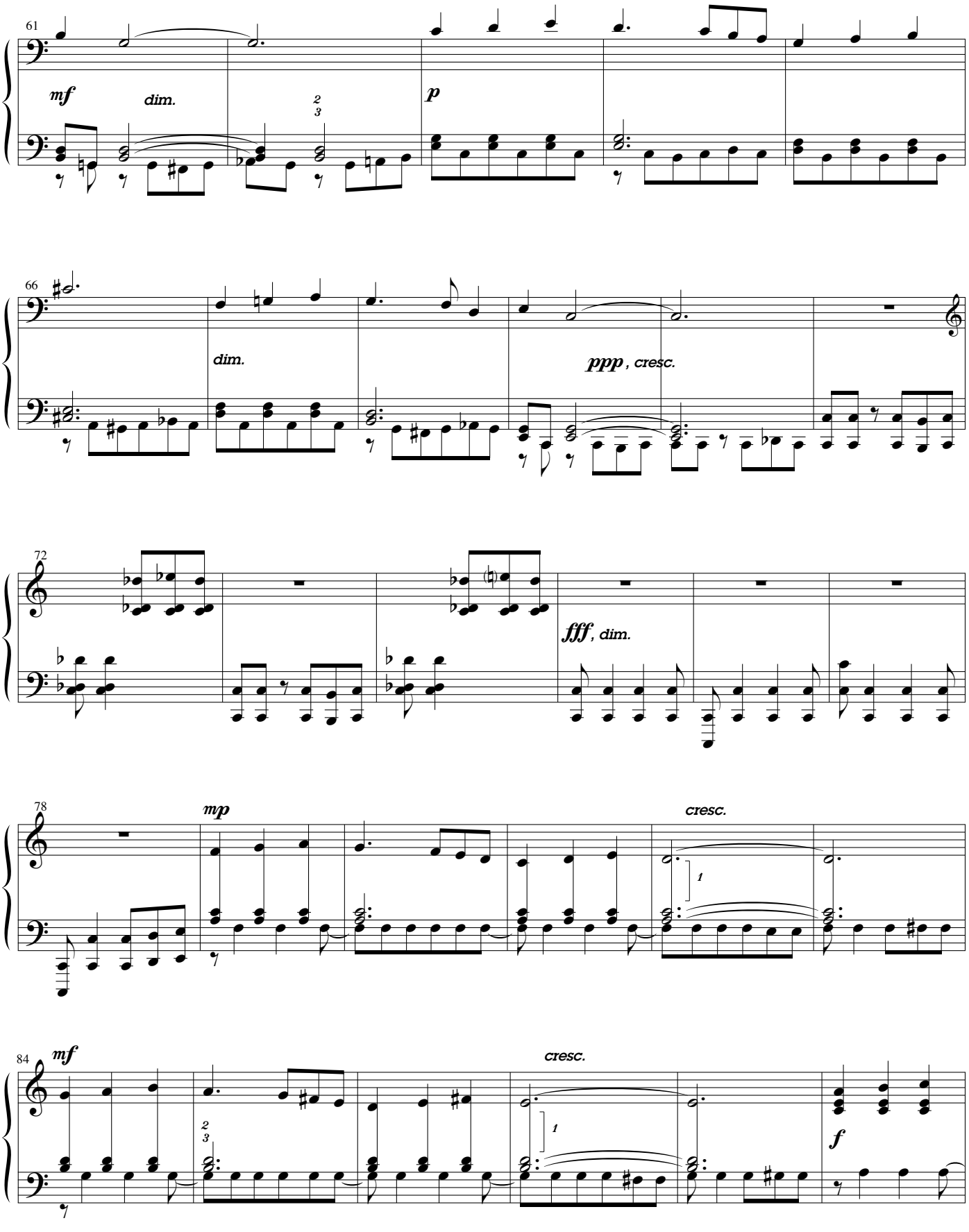
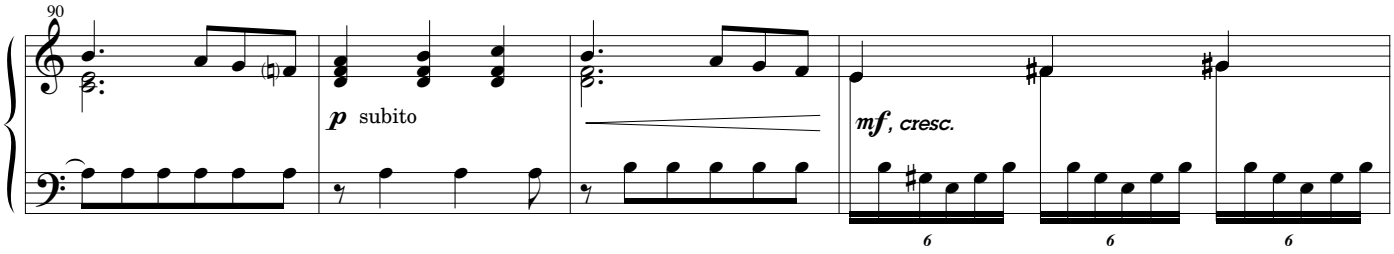


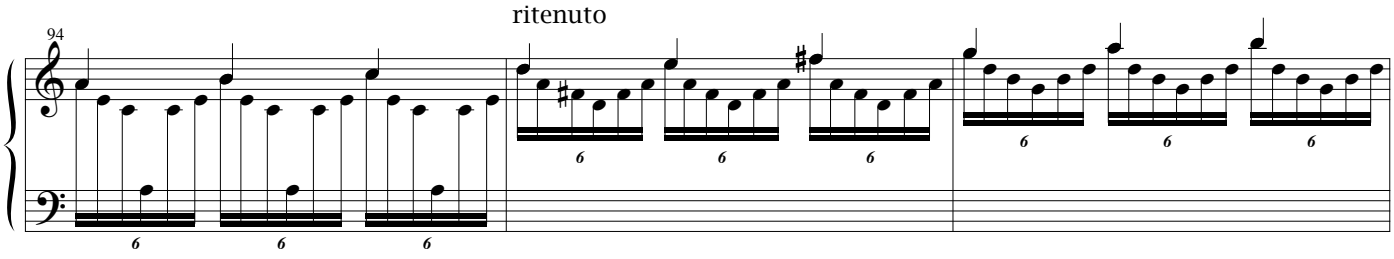
(III 76 Miami)

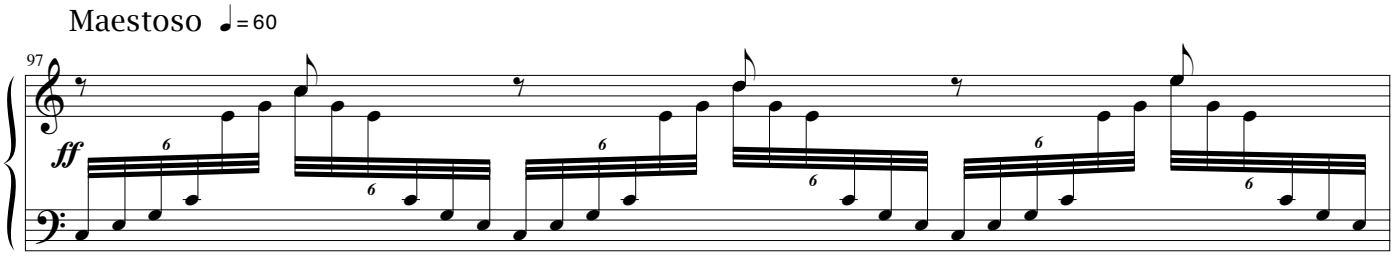
2. Scherzo (for left hand)

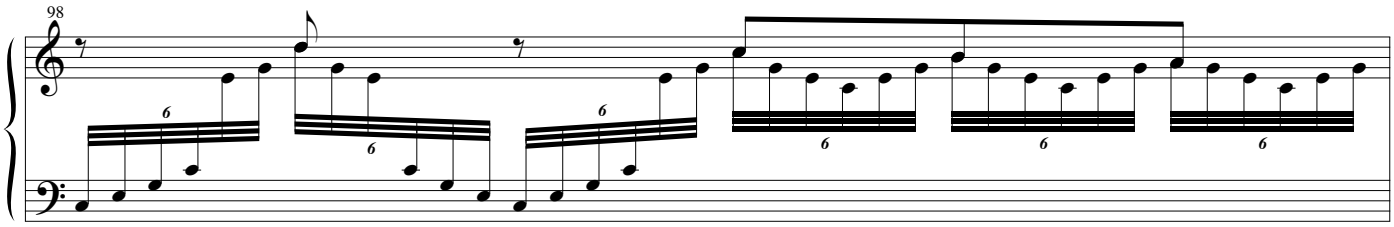



61
mf
dim.
p
66
dim.
ppp, cresc.
72
fff, dim.
78
mp
cresc.
84
mf
cresc.
f


90
p subito
mf, cresc.


ritenuto
94


Maestoso ♩= 60
97
ff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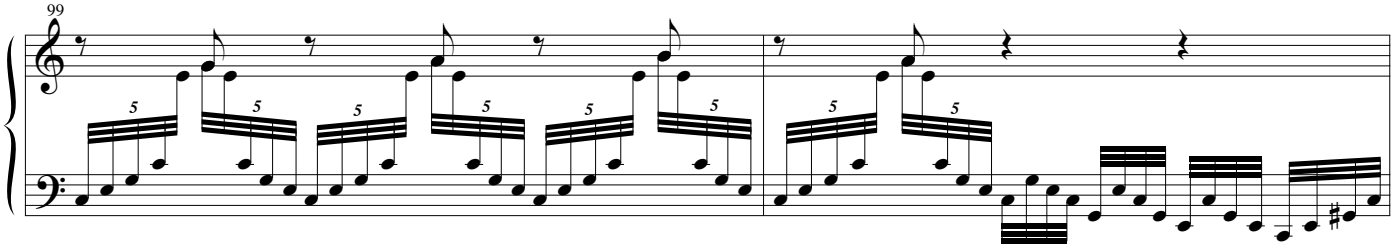
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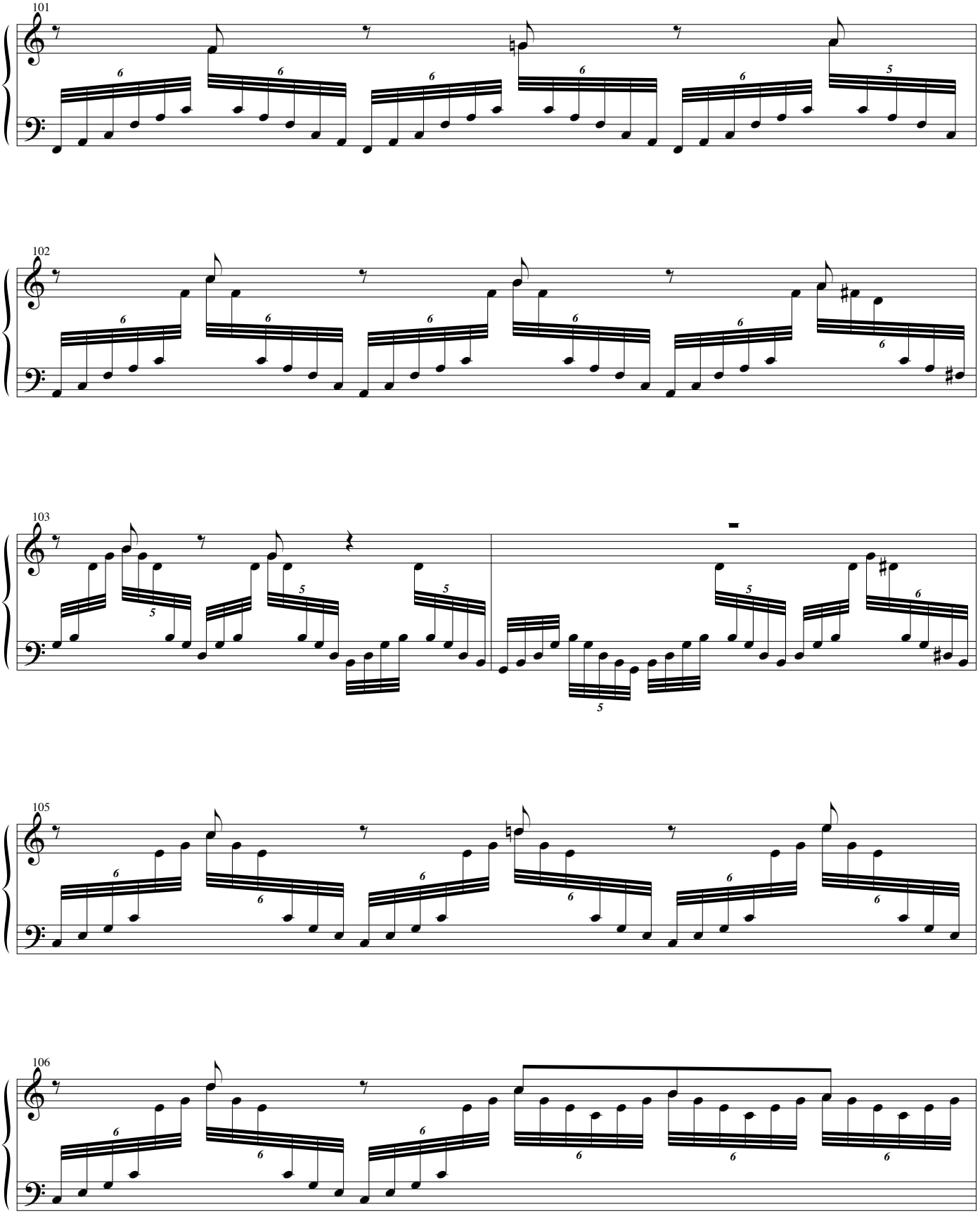
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102
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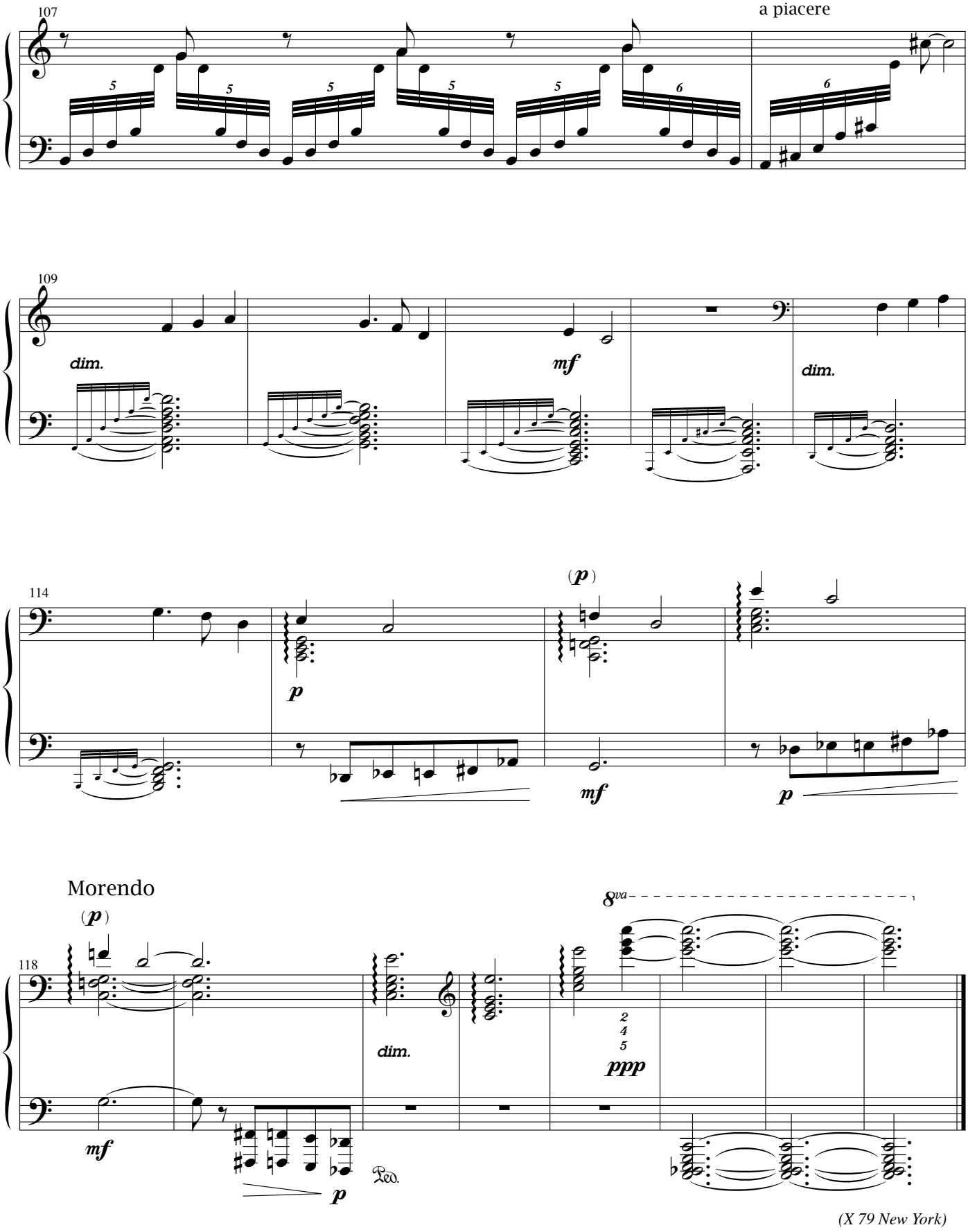
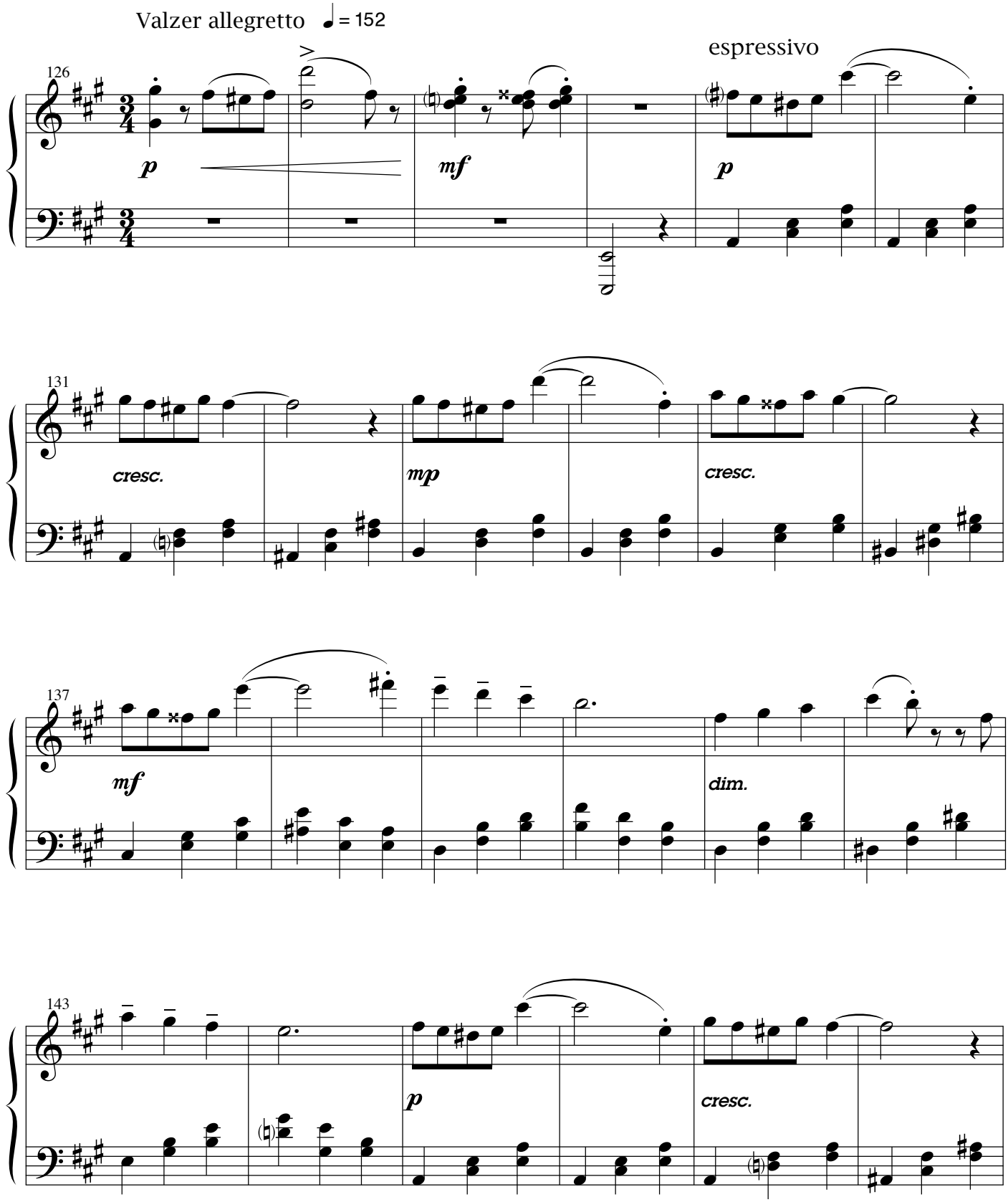
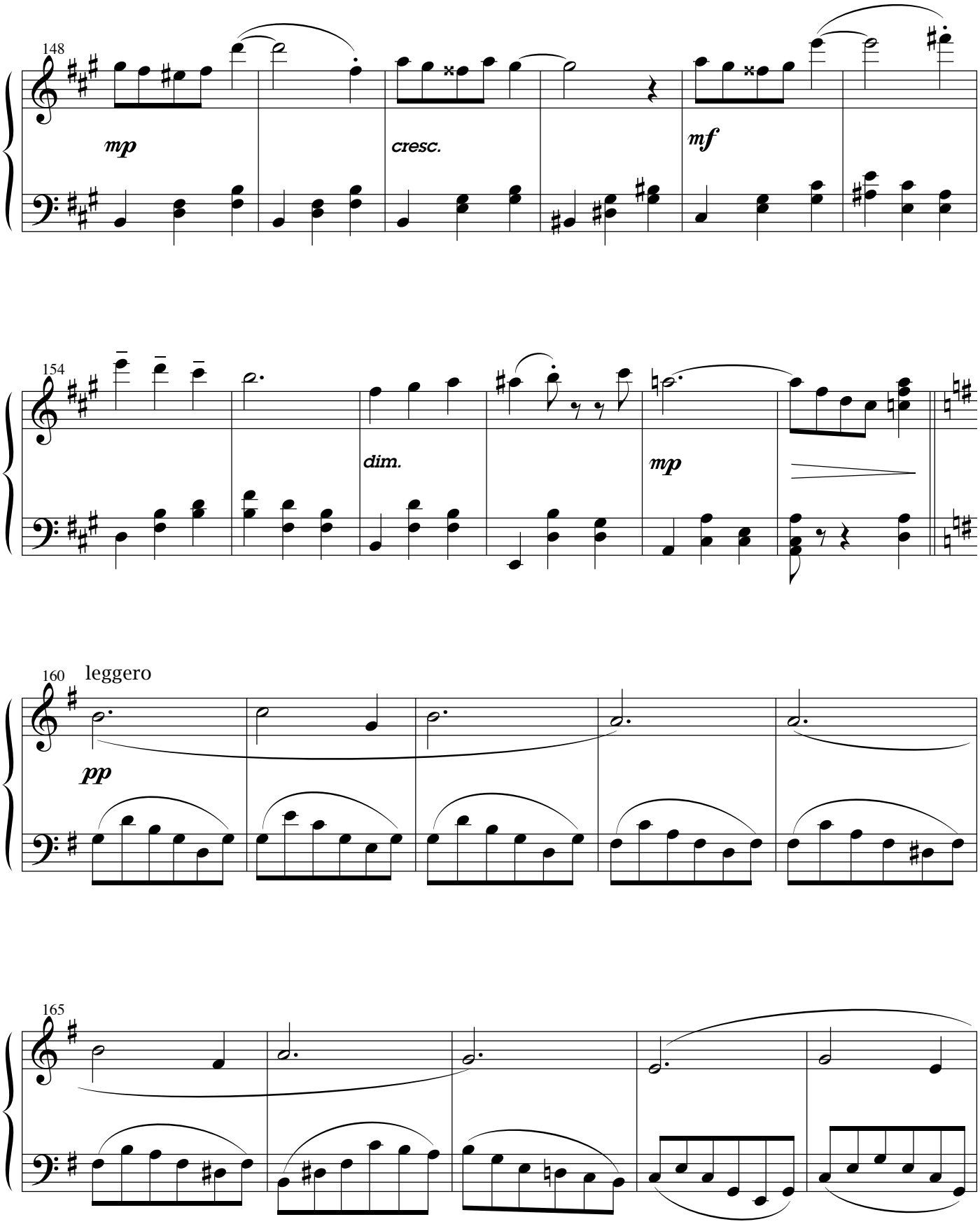
105
106

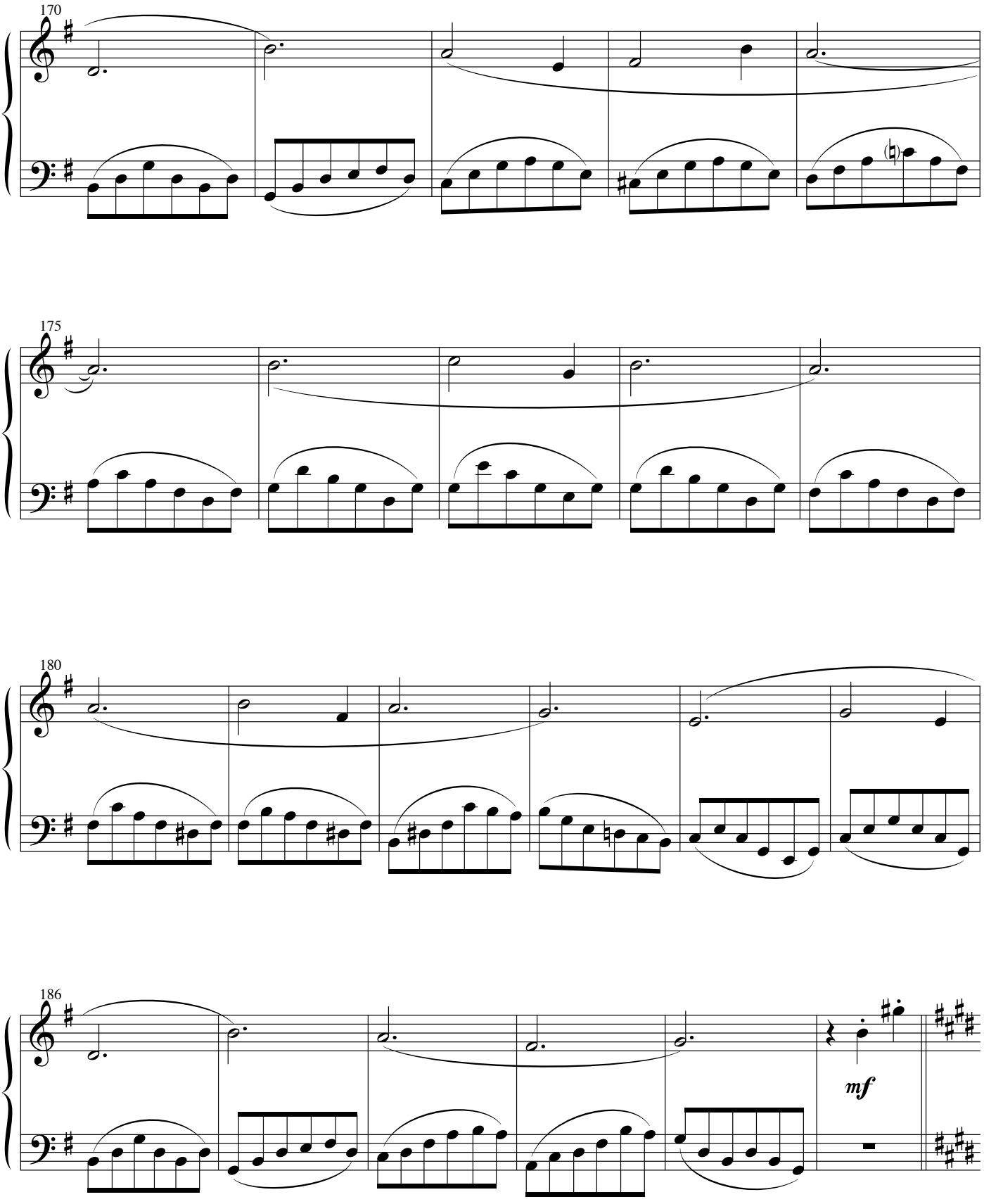

107
a piacere
109
dim.
mf
dim.
114
(p)
p
mf
p
Morendo
(p)
118
8va
dim.
2
4
5
ppp
mf
p
Ped.

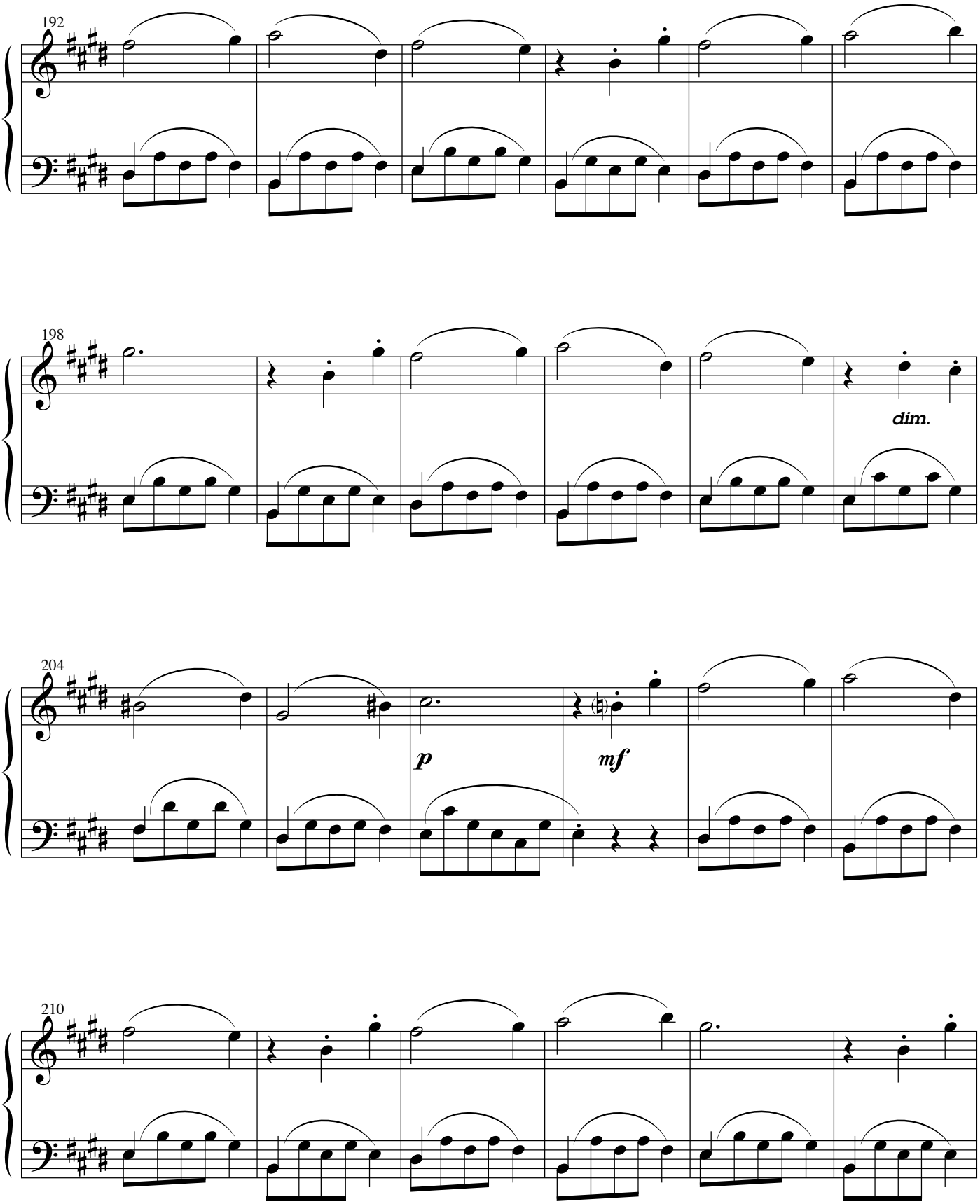
(X 79 New York)

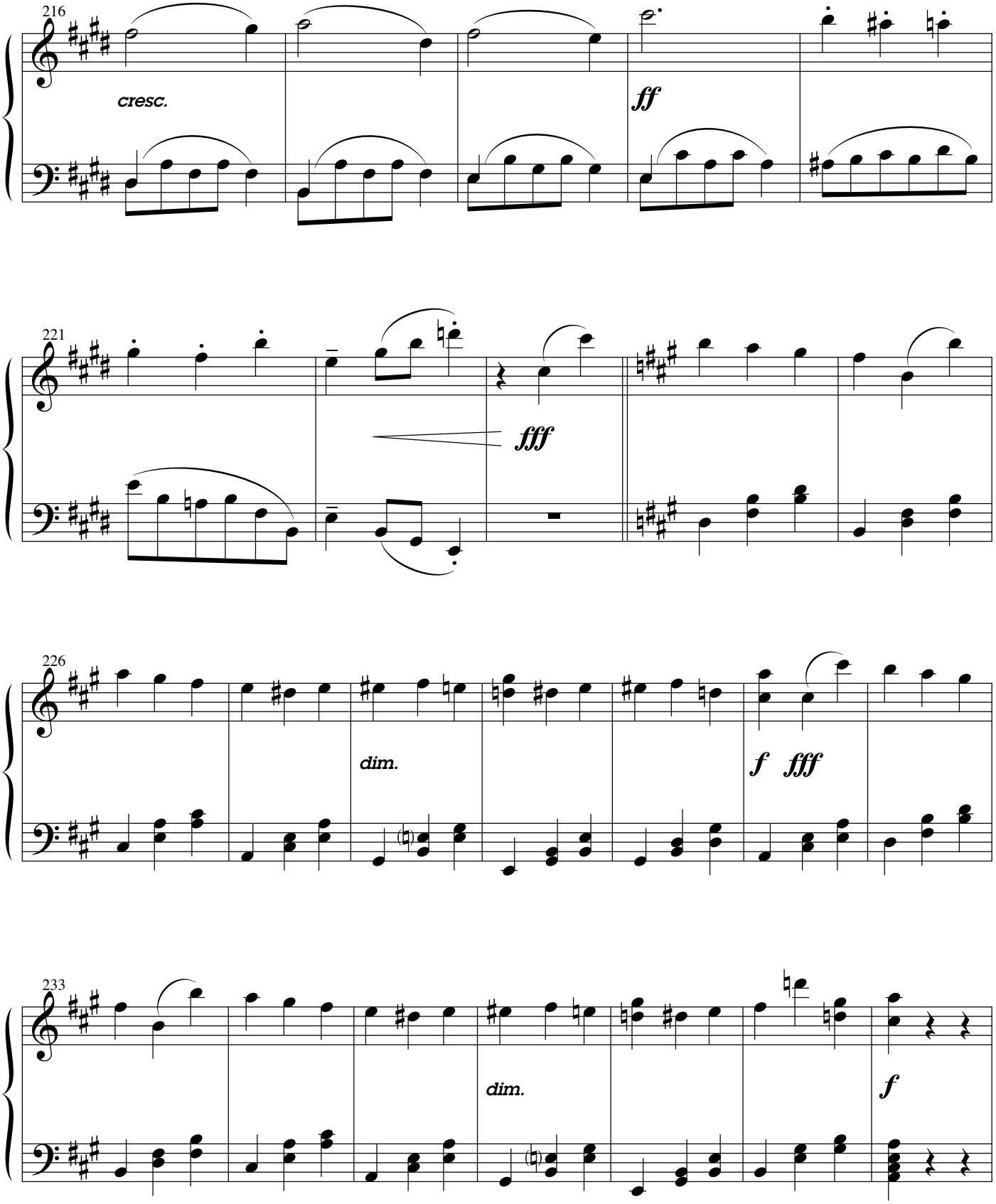
3. Biscayne Bay Waltz




148
mp
cresc.
mf
154
dim.
mp
160
leggero
pp
165


170
175
180
186
mf


192
198
dim.
204
p
mf
210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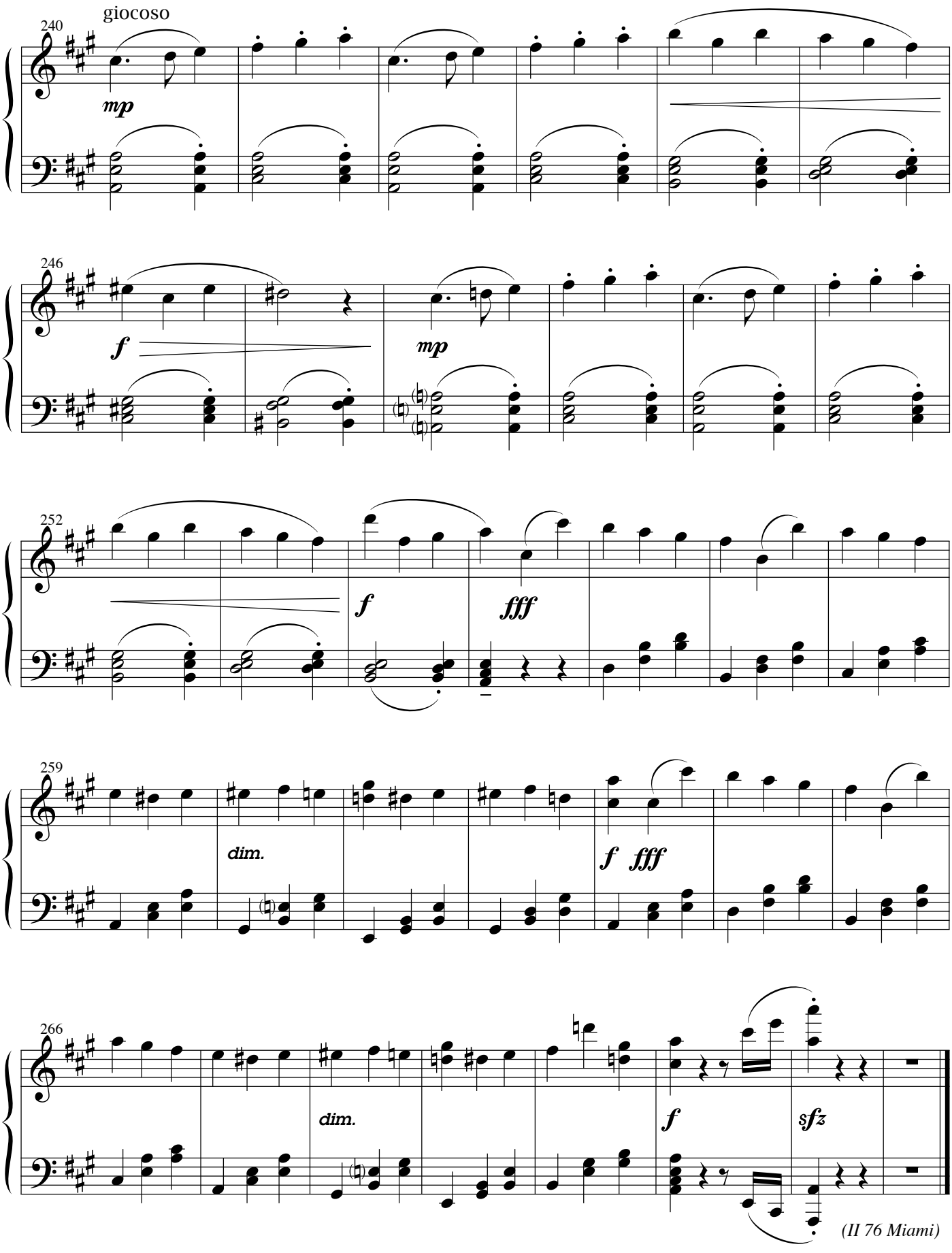
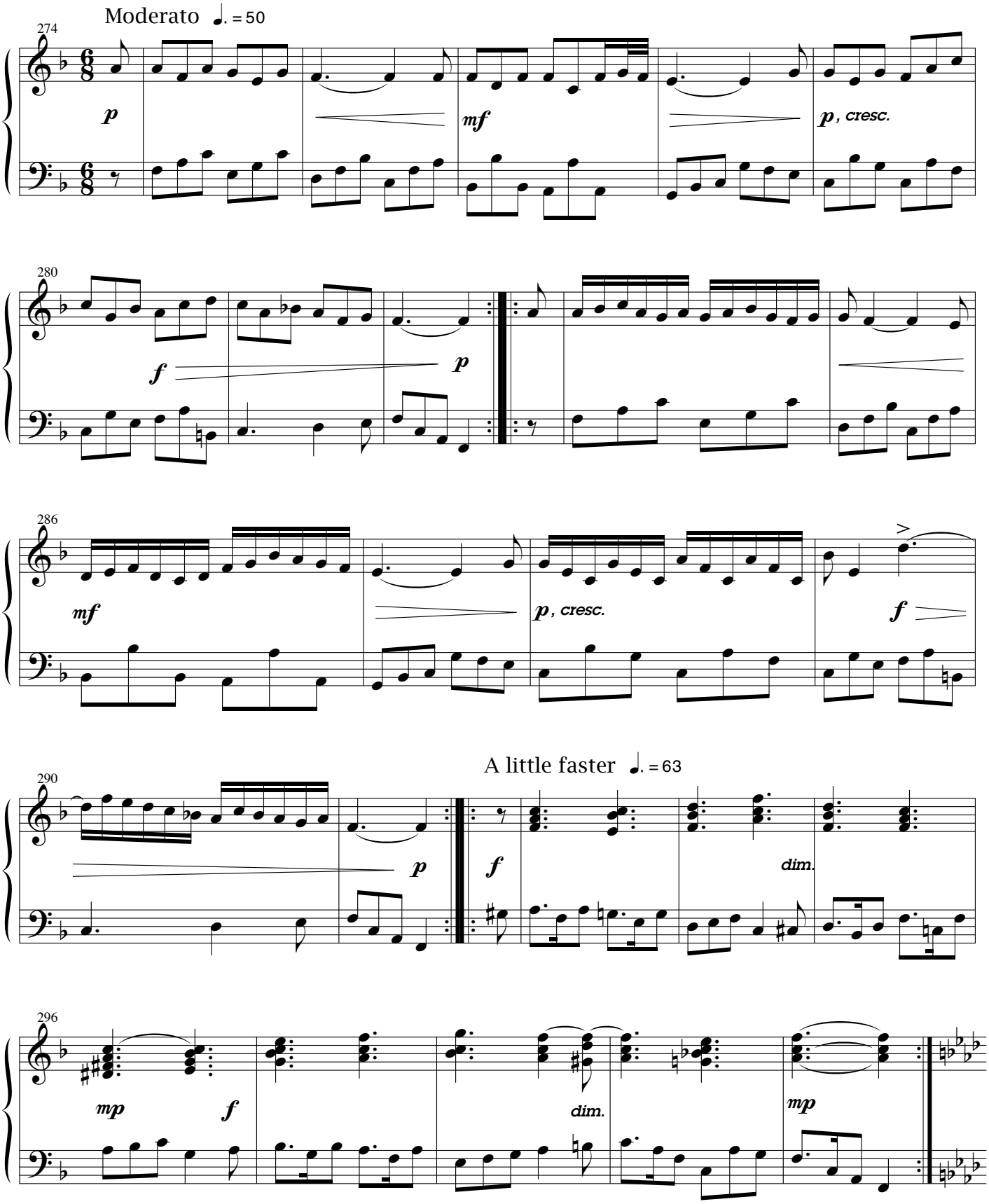
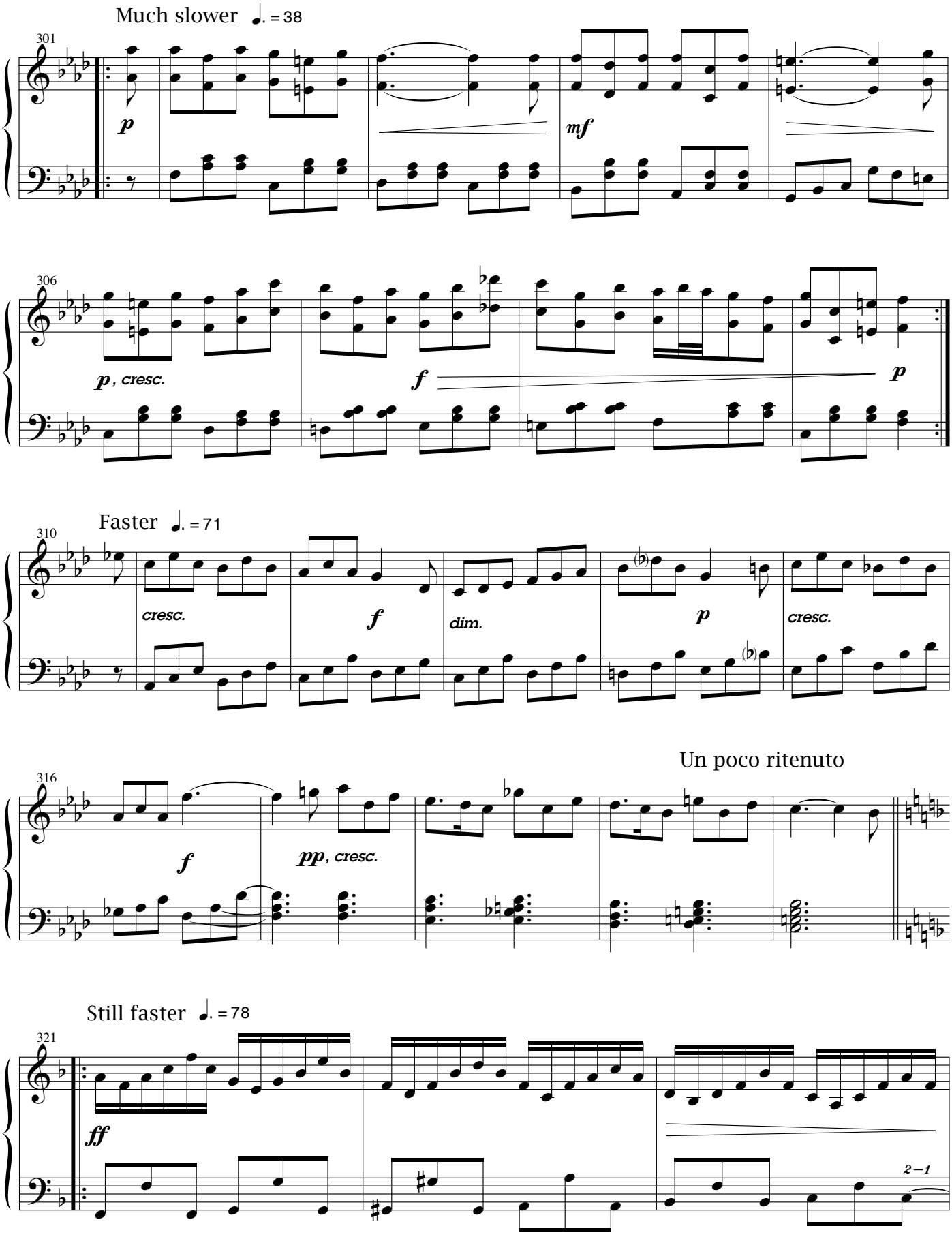
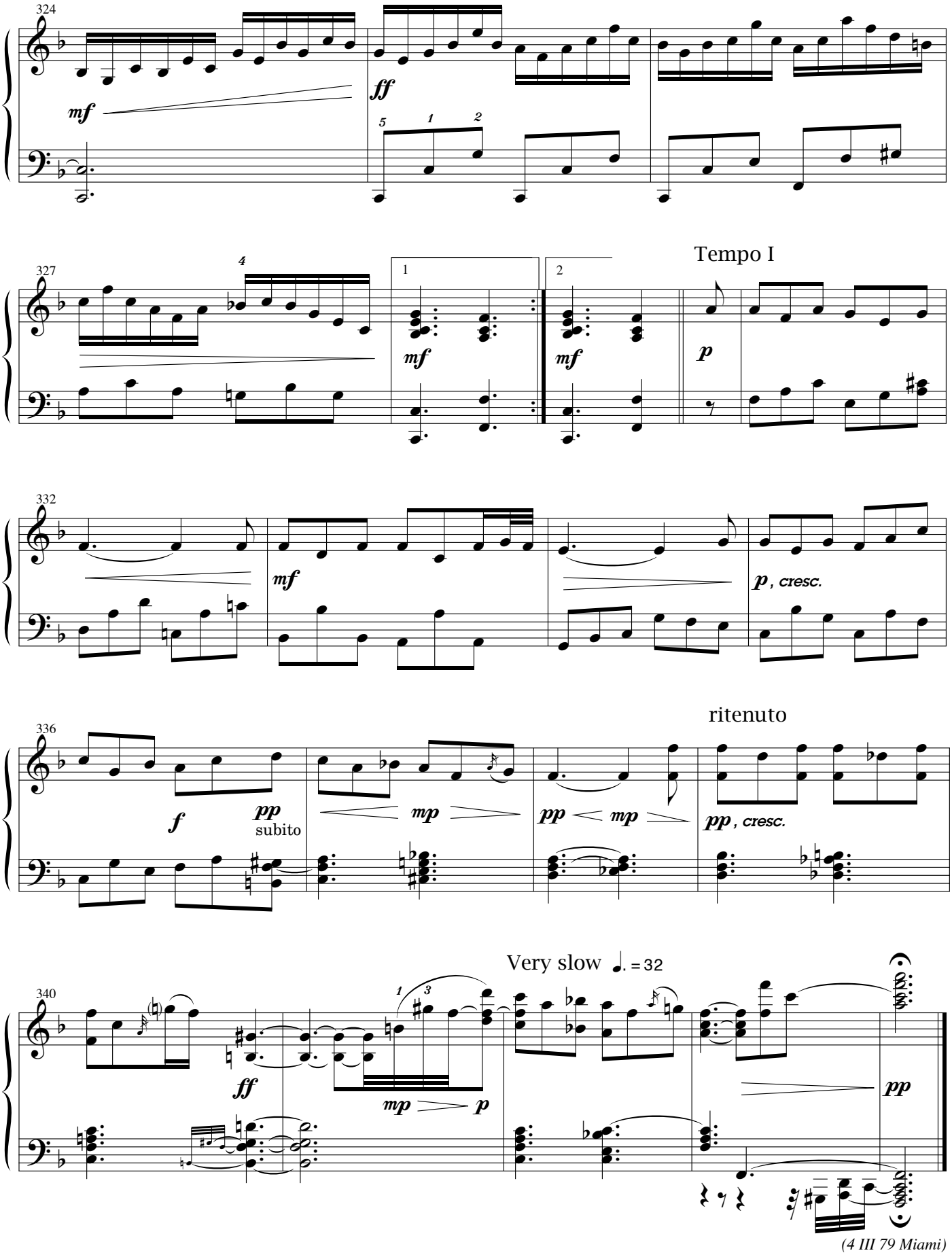
cresc.
ff
221
fff
226
dim.
f
fff
233
dim.
f


giocoso
240
mp
246
f
mp
252
f
fff
259
dim.
f fff
266
dim.
f
sfz
(II 76 Miami)

4. Variations on "Blest Be the Tie" (DENNIS)




Much slower ♩. = 38
301
p
mf
306
p, cresc.
f
p
Faster ♩. = 71
310
cresc.
f
dim.
p
cresc.
Un poco ritenuto
316
f
pp, cresc.
Still faster ♩. = 78
321
ff
2 – 1


324
mf
ff
327
mf
mf
Tempo I
p
332
mf
p, cresc.
336
f
pp
subito
mp
pp
mp
pp, cresc.
ritenuto
340
Very slow ♩. = 32
ff
mp
p
pp