Four Lullabies for piano, op. 33

Half a world away in Hawaii, my friends Sheryl Dare and A.A. Attanasio had a child on December 10th of last year. Unable to reach me, the novelist asked a mutual friend, his literary agent Mary Evans, to convey the news, which finally reached my ears on the 14th. When Mary mentioned the infant's name, Alexis Emma Dare Attanasio, I commented that all the initials represented musical tones. "Oh really, what do they sound like?" Mary asked. Being a baritone, I sang down from A to E, down again to D and back up to the A I had started with. She liked the tone set, and suggested I write some kind of piece using those four notes. After I got off the telephone I thought about it and decided that the only music an infant girl could possibly use was a lullaby. I figured I should write one for solo piano because then Sheryl would be able to play it for her. I set to work right away, and within an hour I was calling Mary back to play her my fledgling composition over the wires! The notes A–E–D–A generate the opening melody in the right hand. These same notes will also close out the composition: augmented into half notes, they provide a wistful coda. The number is of course dedicated to Alexis.

In the two days before Christmas I decided that I would complement the A–E–D–A lullaby with some more music of the same ilk. On the 23rd I wrote the second Lullaby and dedicated it to my friend Allen Evans (no relation to Mary). By the way, I used the musical letters in Allen's name (A–E–E–A–S, the last letter being the way Germans pronounce our E-flat) in an organ fugue I wrote earlier this year (opus 32, no.5). The next day I wrote the pensive third Lullaby in E minor, inscribing this one to my dear friend Gerard DeMan. (It was one of his piano students who premiered the A–E–D–A lullaby, by the way.)

My twin brother was visiting from California for the holidays, and I played him the three extant Lullabies when he came to see me on Christmas eve. He was so taken with them that I peremptorily said I planned to write one more and would dedicate it to him! On Christmas day I played a church service in which one of the featured hymns was the Polish carol W ZLOBIE LEZY (always sung in English as "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"). This melody is in three, but I improvised a pastoral variation on it (in 6/8) as a postlude to the service, and I liked what I played enough to write it down when I got home. I soon realized that this would make a good basis for a final lullaby, this one for the infant Jesus. I tried to write some music in 6/8 to go with it, but things were not working out, so I put the composition aside. On the 29th, I realized what the problem had been: in my binary (AABB) form, I had been trying to make the W ZLOBIE LEZY variant serve as the A-section, but nothing seemed fit to follow it. When I made my own melody the A-section, with the variation then getting the last word as the B-section, everything fell into place.

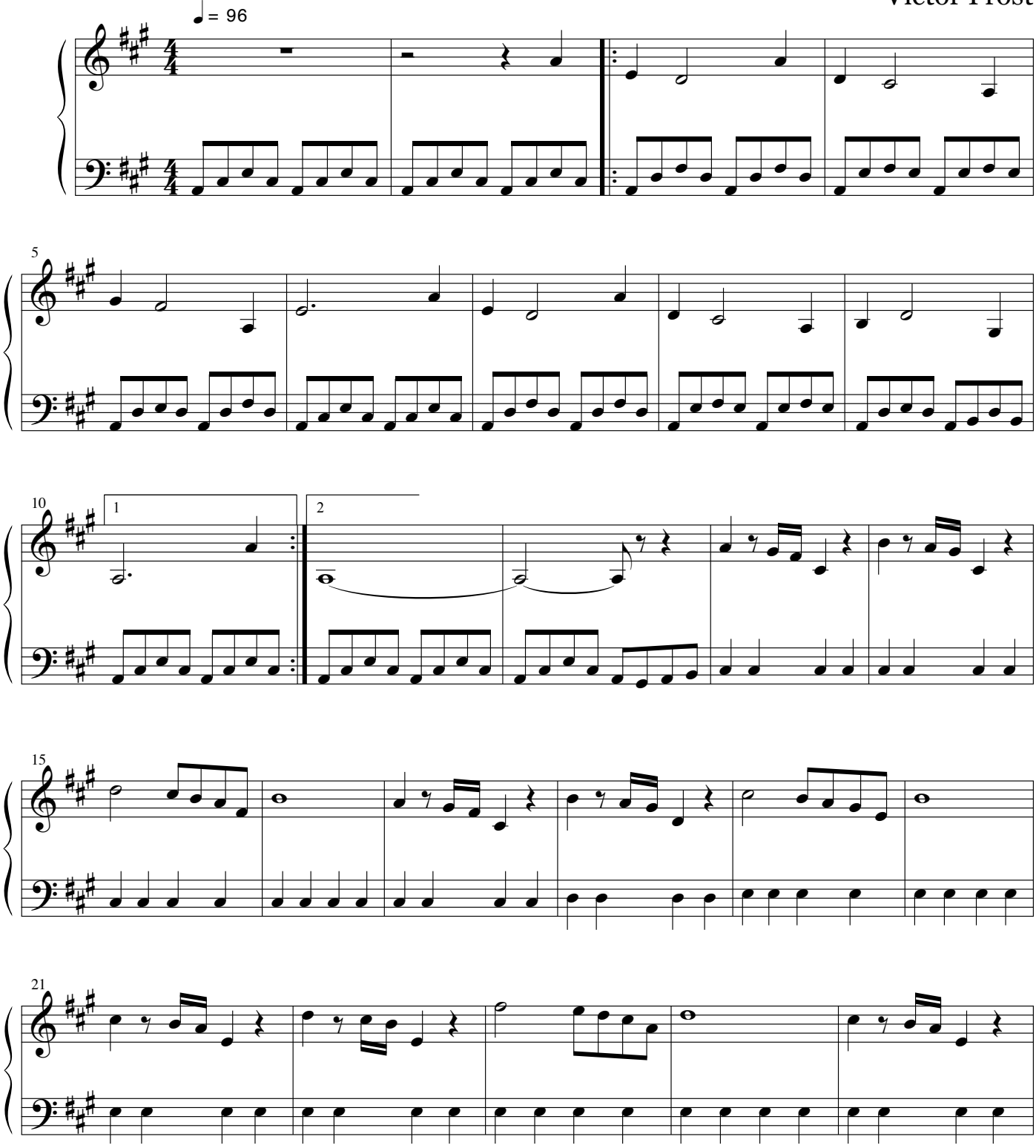
Victor Frost
10 XII 82 *Alexis's 1st birthday, and César Franck's 160th*
Weehawken, New Jersey

Four Lullabies

for piano, op. 33

1.

Victor Frost



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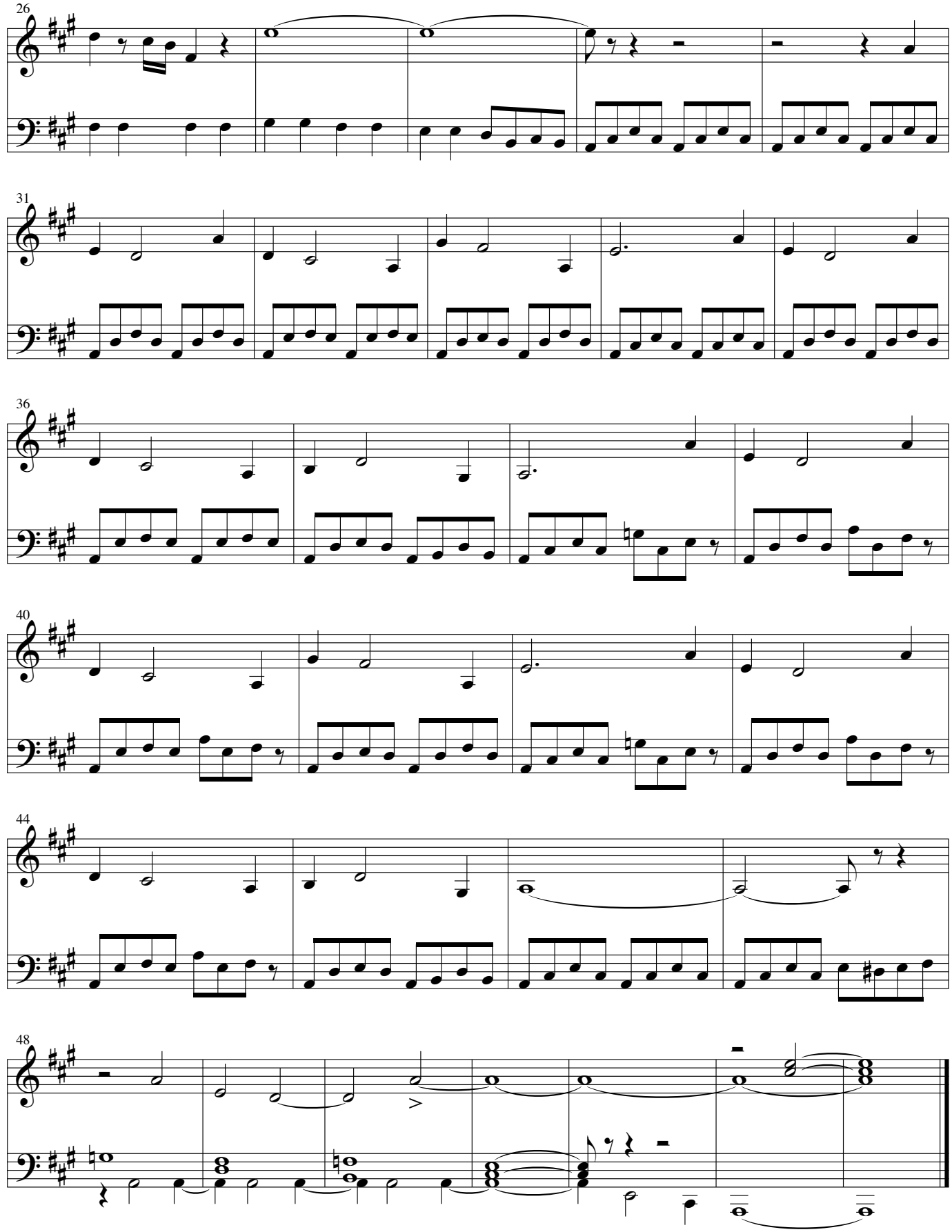
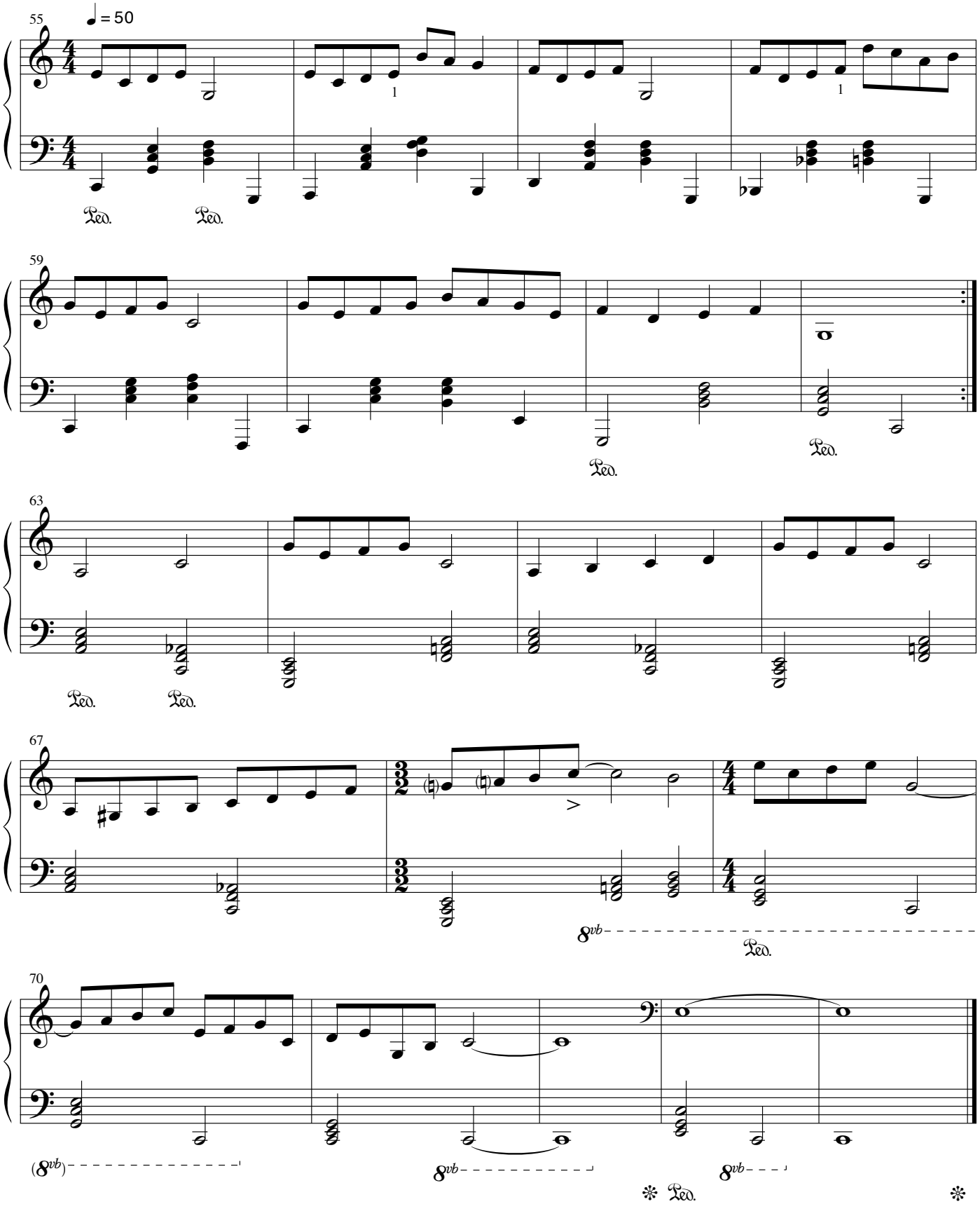


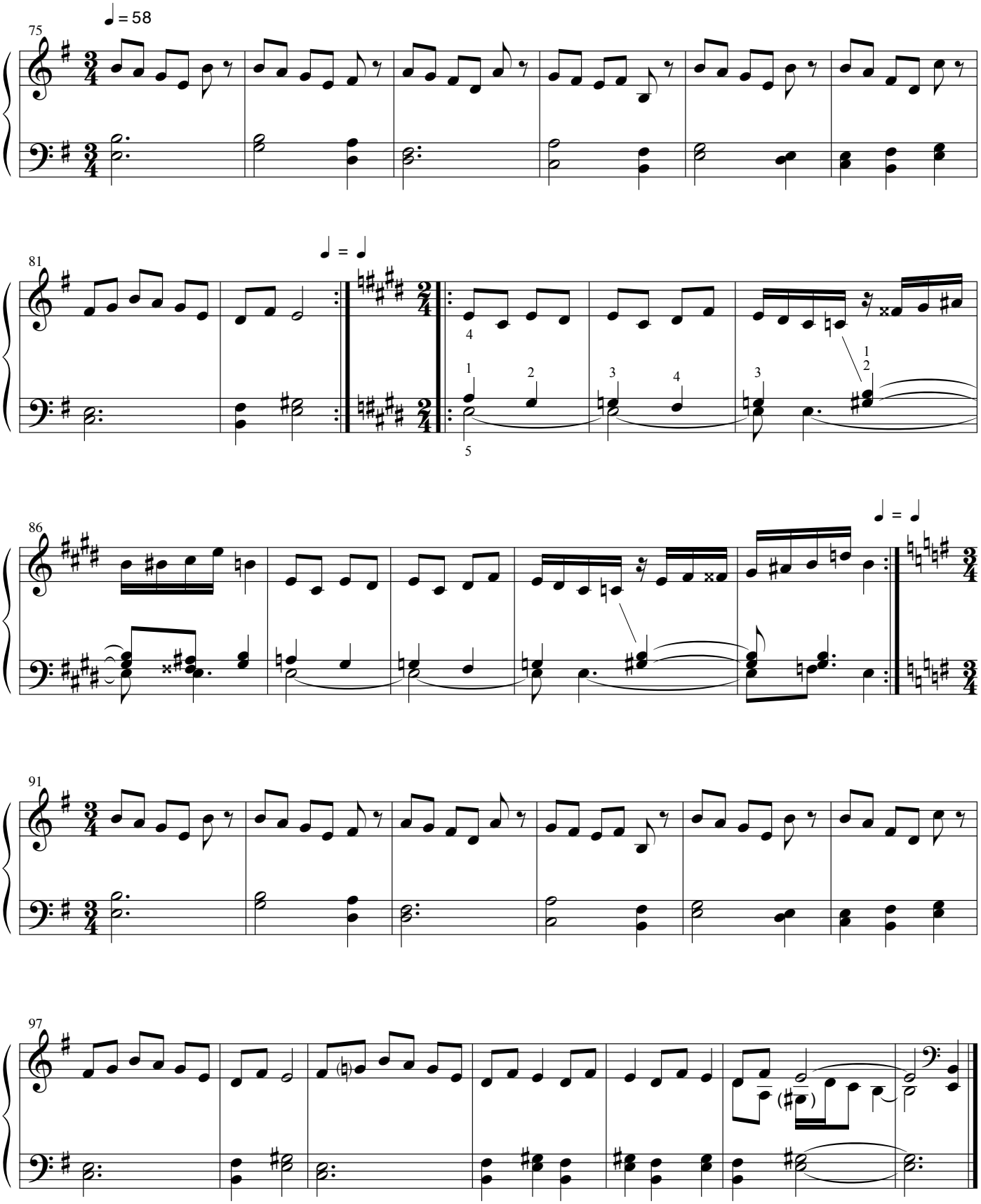
to A.E.D.A.

2.



to Allen Evans

3.



to Gerard DeMan

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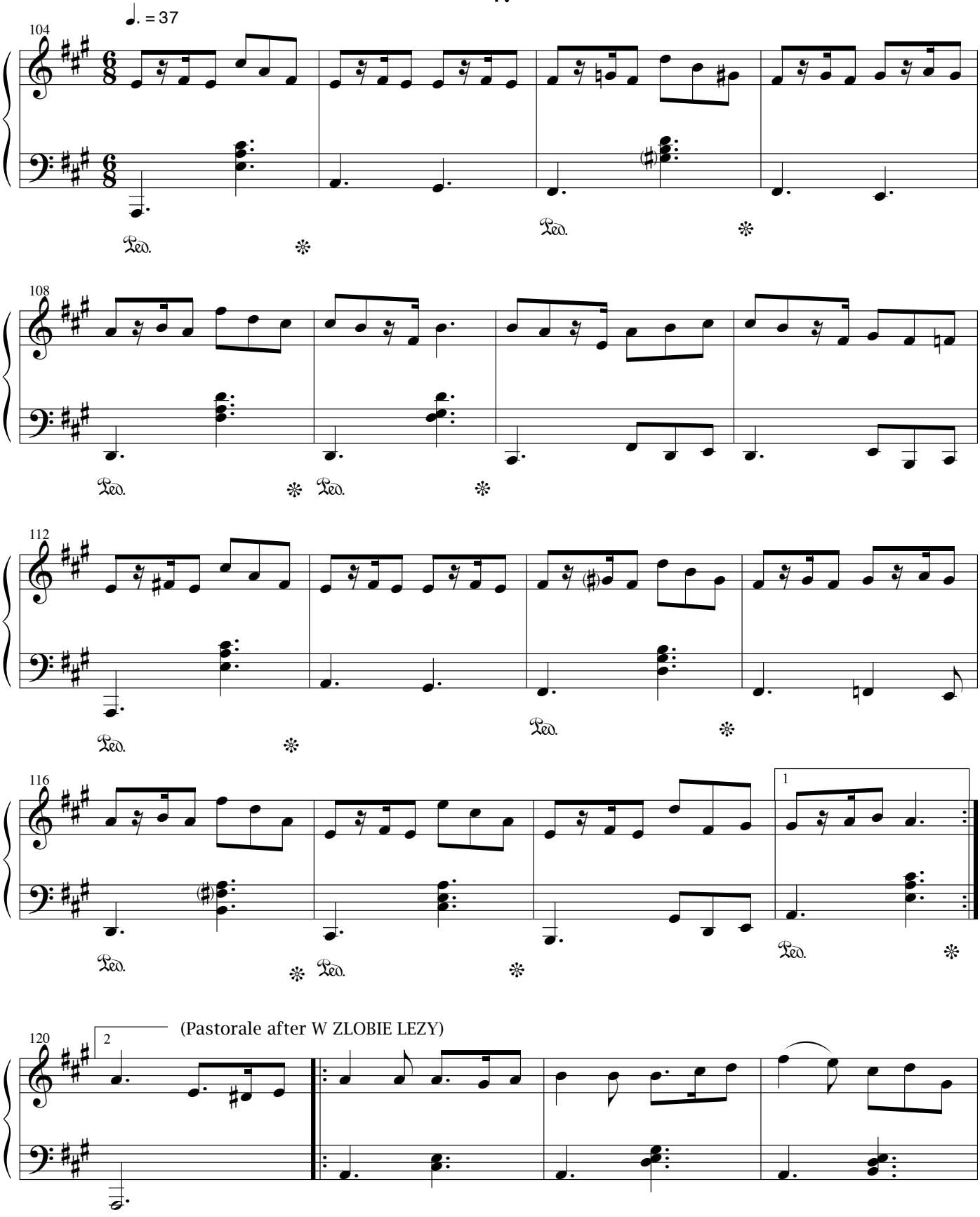
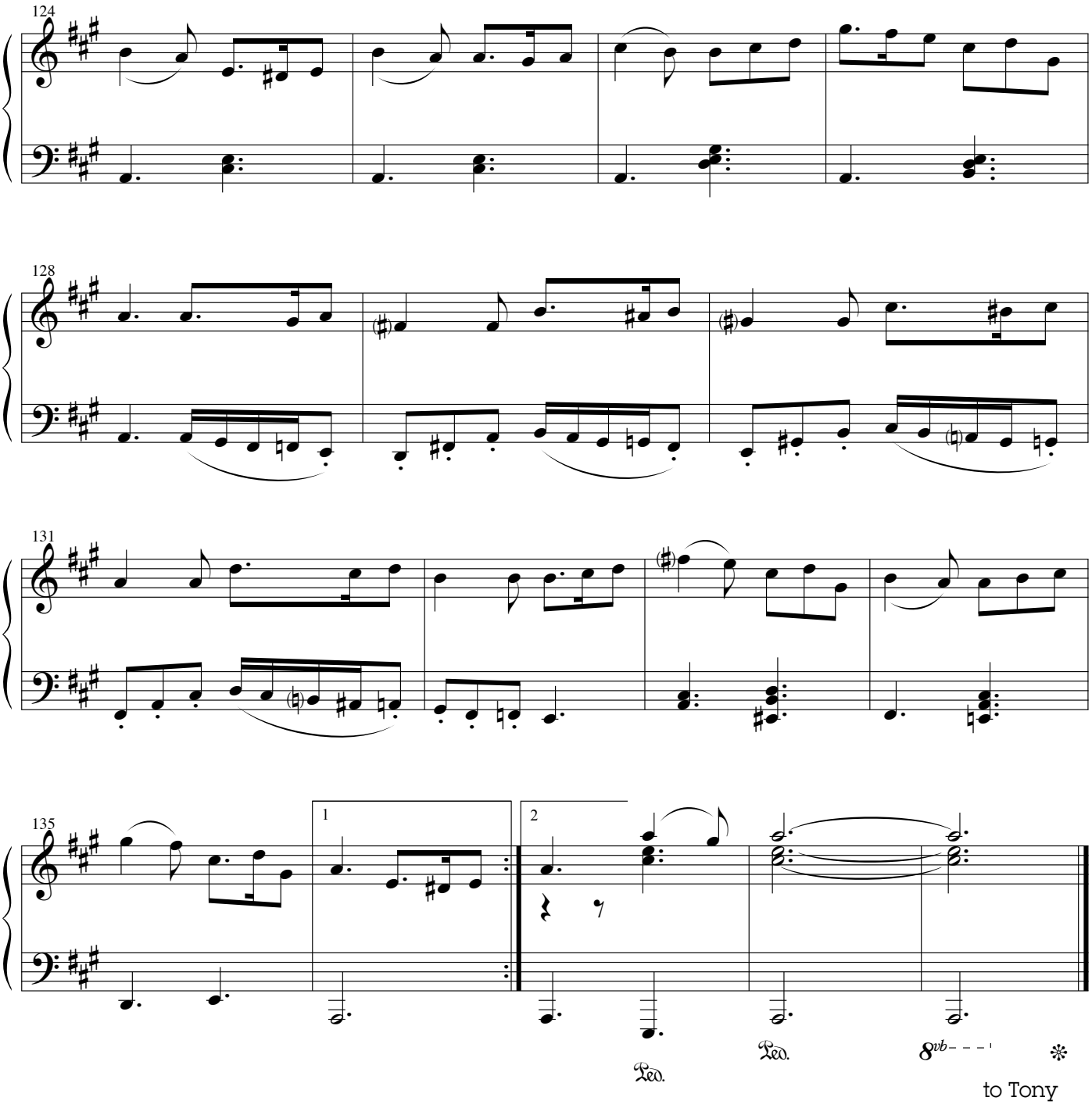
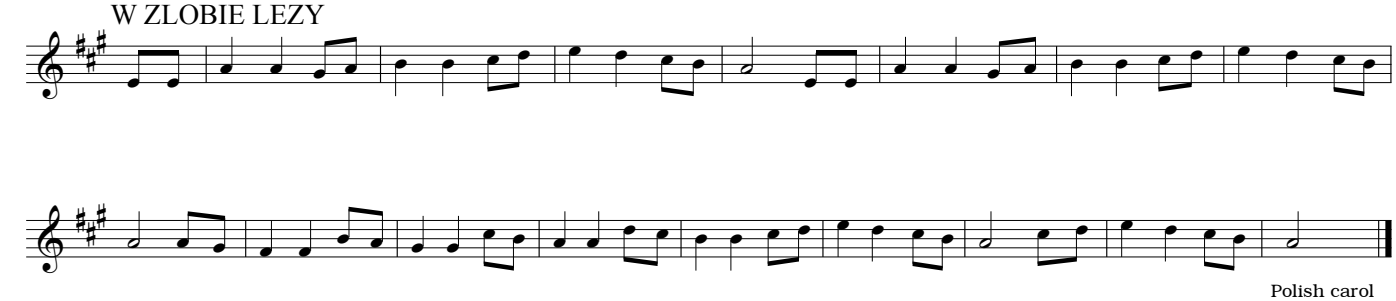




W ZLOBIE LEZY



Polish carol