Ten Miniatures for guitar, op. 57

I spent much of the late 90s, as well as the present decade, putting into order a creative house whose "bohemian" (the kindest word I can think of for what I mean to say...) nature I had come to find unacceptable. I largely eschewed original creative work that would contribute more objects to the unmanageable disarray, devoting the time I had instead to sprucing up and releasing some of the unfinished or inadequately realized essays from the previous two decades. As an example, take my opus 24 Preludes for organ. In the early 80s I had the idea to collect some of the improvisations I did in various churches into a set that traversed all the major and minor keys. I set aside the opus number 24 for this project and kept a folder in which I placed my jottings of original *morceaux* and chorale preludes. As late as 1992 I was still adding to the folder, but it was not until I had the opportunity, in 2003, to publish something for organ online that I finally came to terms with the sprawling contents of the decades old folder. I had more than enough original material that I was able to dispense with the hymn-based numbers entirely, and did the necessary transpositions and shuffling of the fragments to organize things into the present book which organists around the world now enjoy playing.

When I met guitarist Peter Fletcher this year I was as impressed by his heartfelt and technically dazzling interpretations as by his earnest desire to effect an expansion of repertoire for his instrument. When he approached me about arranging a commission, I said that I had some fragments for guitar collected in the 80s and 90s that I could possibly work up, and he became enthusiastic at the prospect. Familiar as he was with some very early works of mine for guitar (opp. 4 to 6) as well as one of my very latest efforts, for flute and guitar (op. 74), he was keen on filling in the chronological gap (from 1977 to 1999), as of course was I.

When I examined the sketches, I realized that the undeveloped, or possibly underdeveloped, nature of what I found didn't have necessarily to do with laziness or lack of suitable outlets, but devolved instead from the DNA in the materials themselves. Perhaps so little seemed to be going on because I was supposed to be pithy and reticent with their contents. I changed the name from Album for guitar (op. 52 is a Children's Album for piano, op. 53 is Album for trumpet) to the one heading these notes.

Like everyone else, I have been reading Jill Taylor's wonderful book *My Stroke of Insight.* This probably made me more sensitive than I would have been otherwise to the *Affekt* of each of the fragments I was examining. I realized that they fell pretty neatly into a balance of attributes associated with the left brain (decisive, judgmental) and the right brain (compassionate, joyous). I decided to have five pairs of contrasting pieces, and to alternate their orders (left/right, then right/left, then left/right, etc.). For those of you who haven't sampled the book yet, I'll point out that my sensitivity to the music's emotional aspects and the

opening of the creative space wherein I could play with and spin out the materials were functions of my right brain. The transcription of the music floating about my head (right brain, pretty much) into standard notation and the organizing principles I have just described (and indeed, the very verbalization into these program notes of ideas heretofore inchoate) were functions of the left brain. Yes, I can say that I have learned more about the left brains of composers I revere from reading about them and taking a slide rule to their music, but more about their right brains from just the music itself!

Three of the ten Miniatures were newly coined for this project, viz., nos. 3, 4 and 6. The rest represent my efforts to work out my older fragmentary sketches into finished compositions. In most cases the form (left brain) was set in the present, but a few subsisted in a successful mould even from my more right-brained days, such as the final mazurka, which only needed a coda. The numbers are

1. Decisive (left) 2. Flippant (right)
3. Serene (right) 4. Frantic (left)
5. Self-absorbed (left) 6. Devoted (right)
7. Compassionate (right) 8. Judgmental (left)
9. Melancholic (left) 10. Joyous (right)

My Ten Miniatures are gratefully dedicated to Peter.

Victor Frost
28 VII 08
New York City

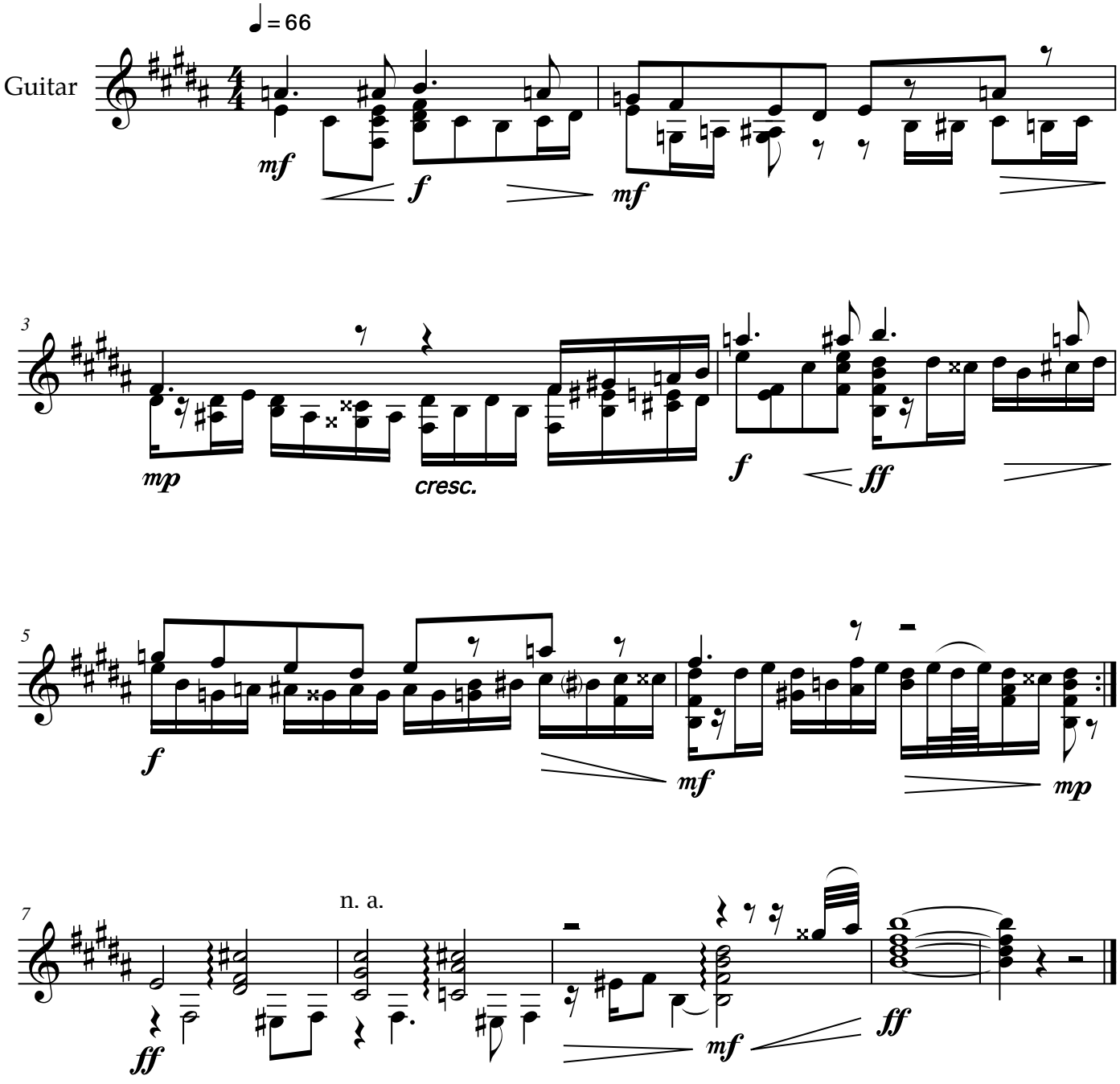
to Peter Fletcher

Ten Miniatures

for guitar, op. 57

I

Victor Frost



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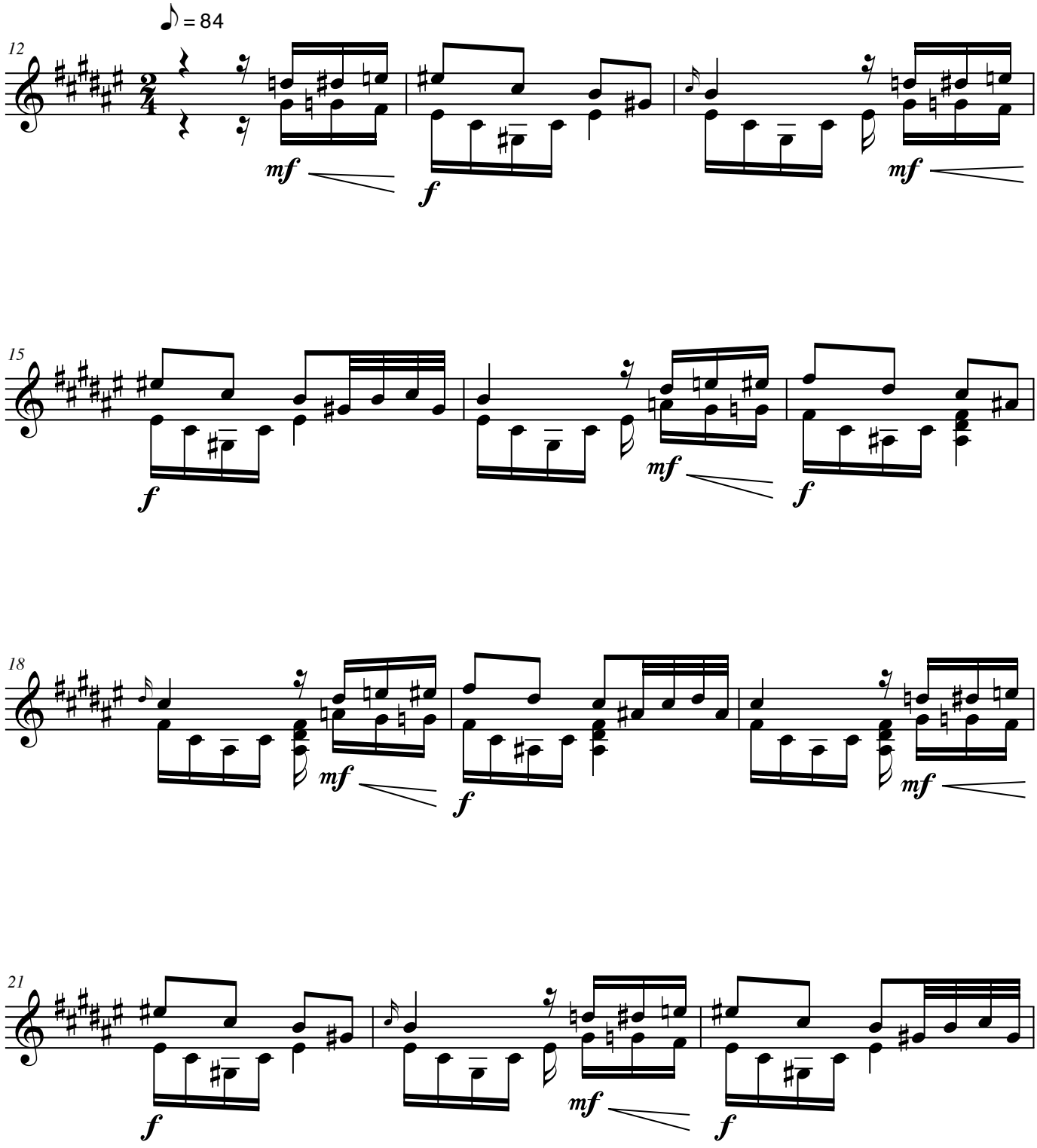
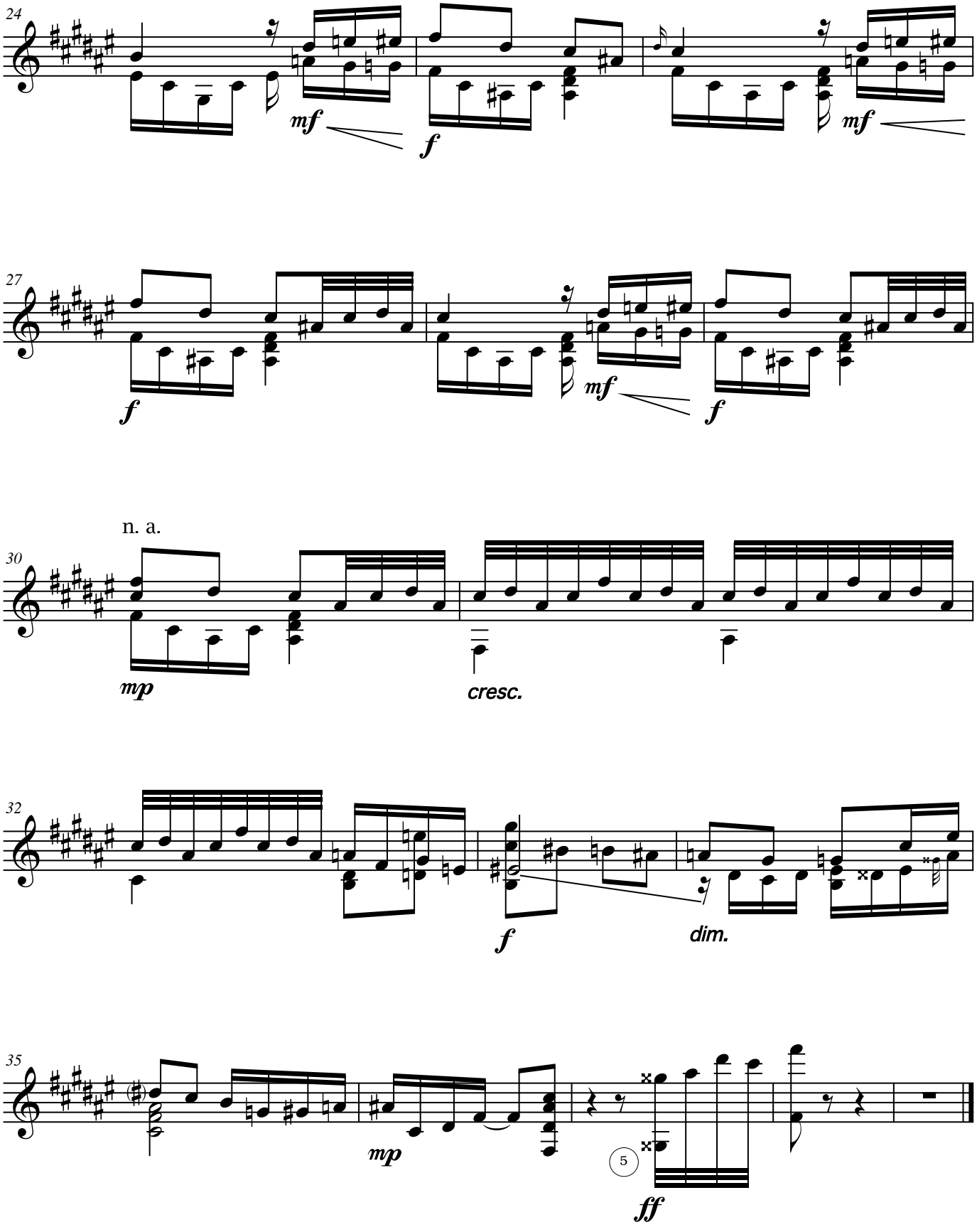
II

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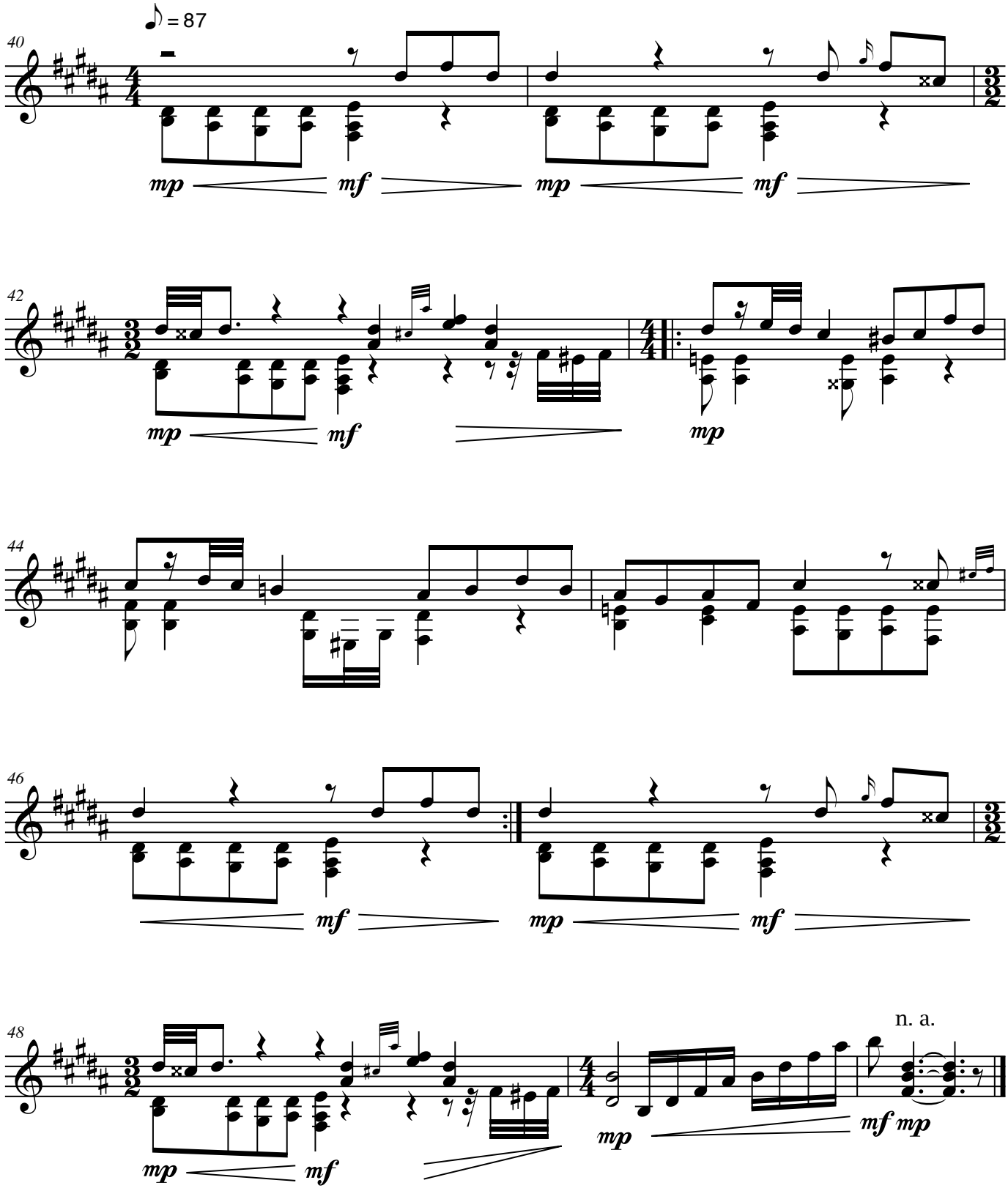
III



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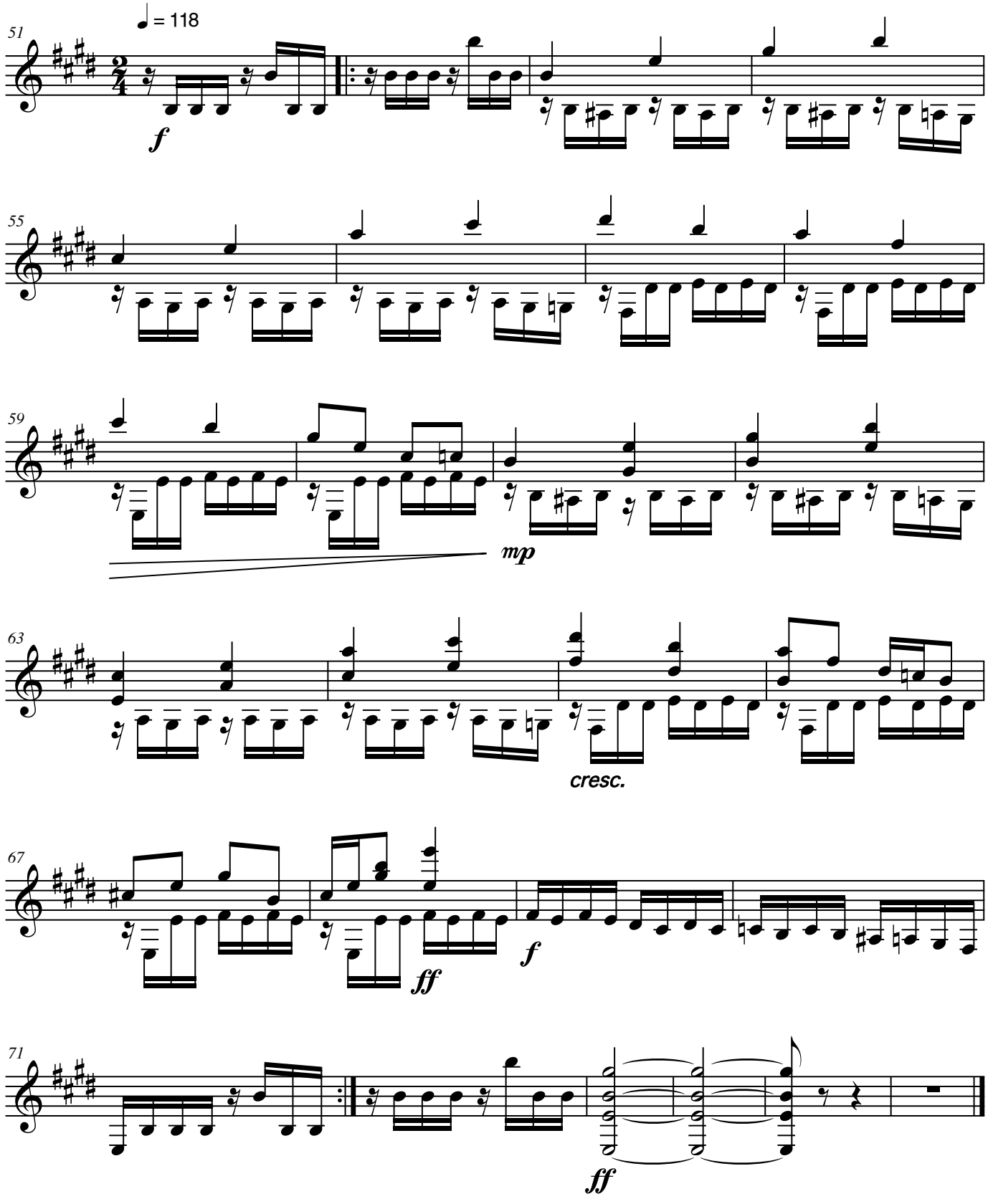

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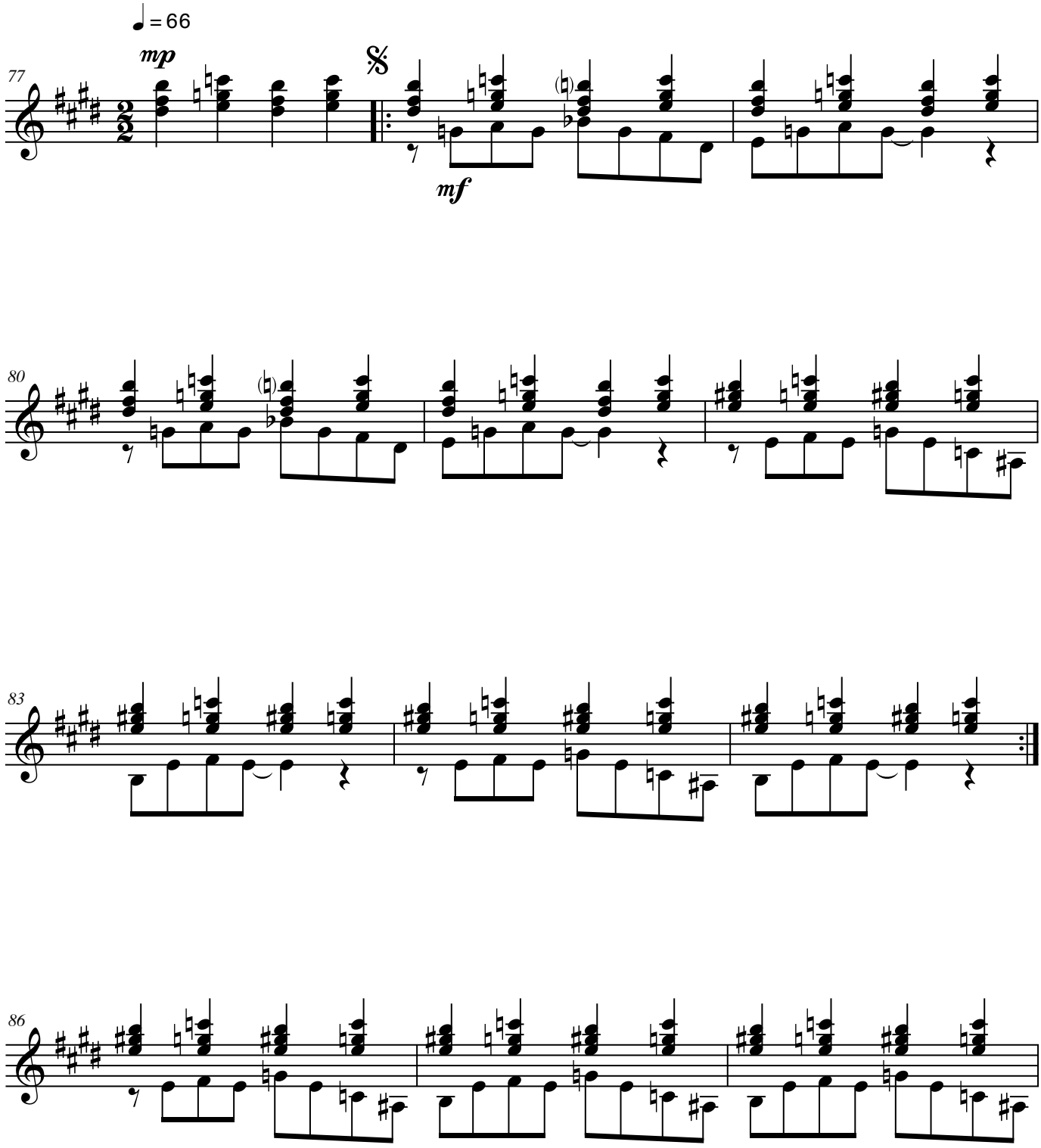

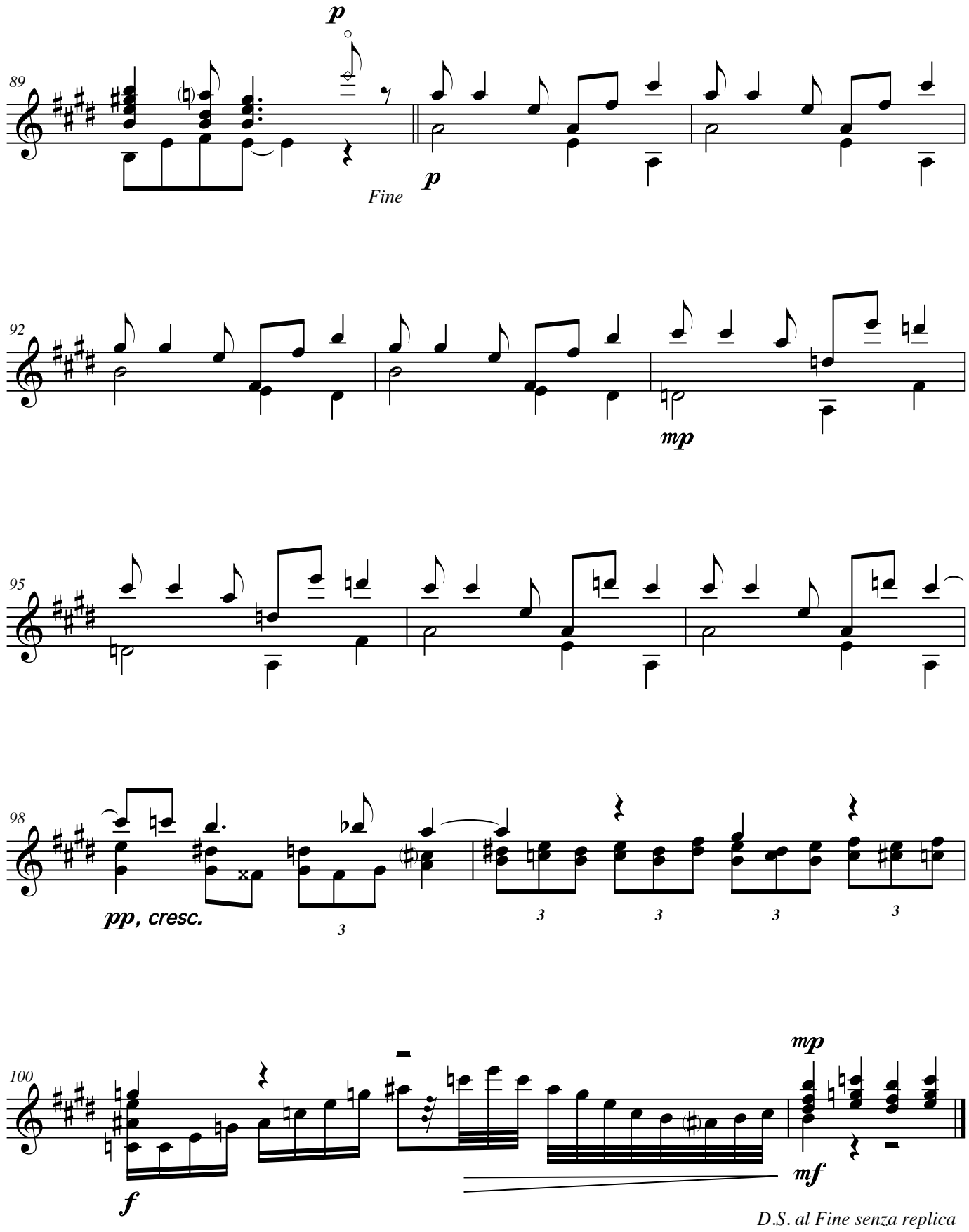
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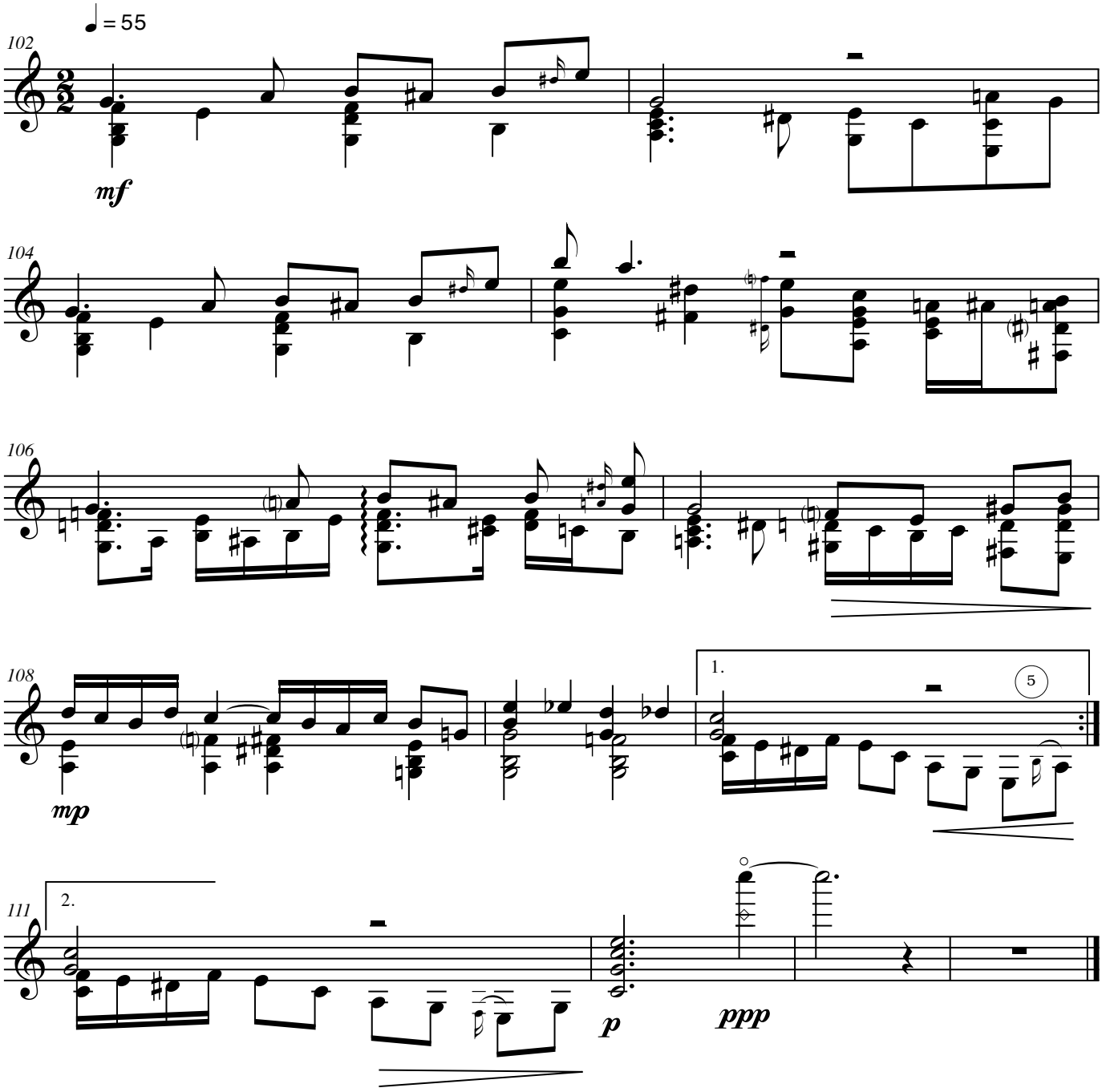
VI



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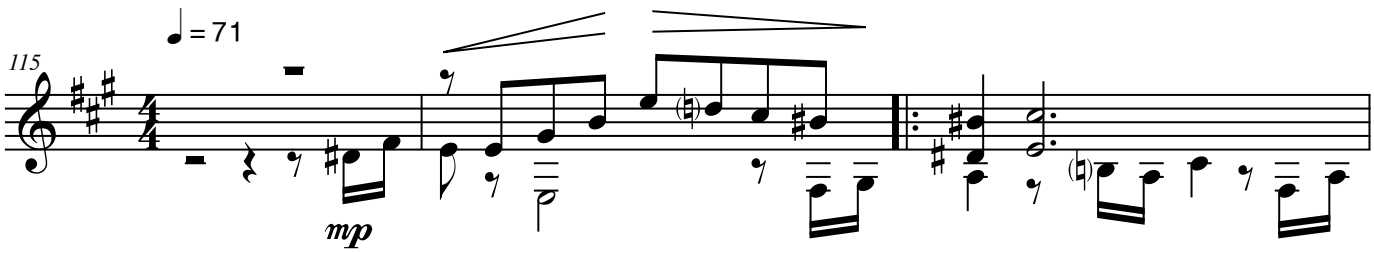

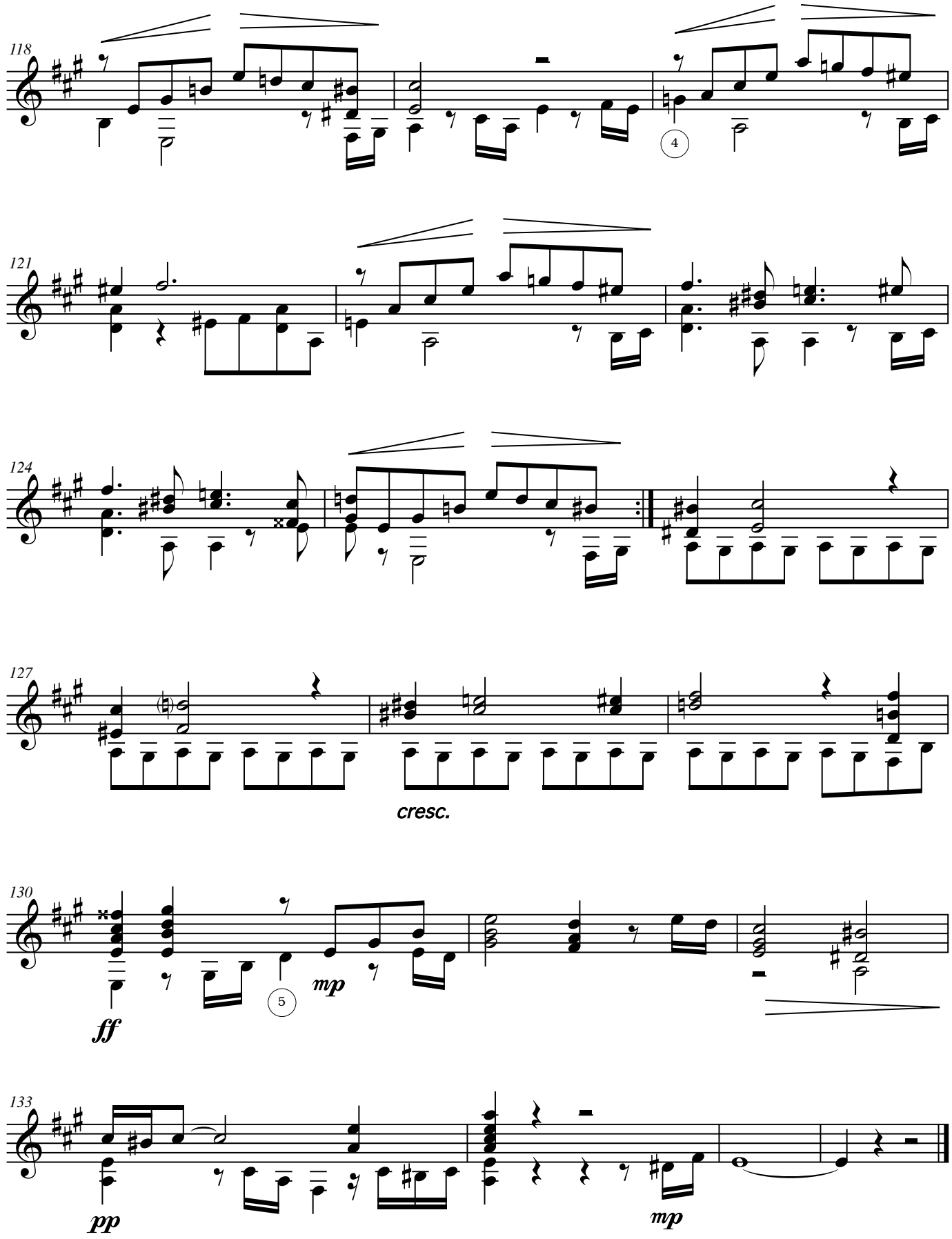
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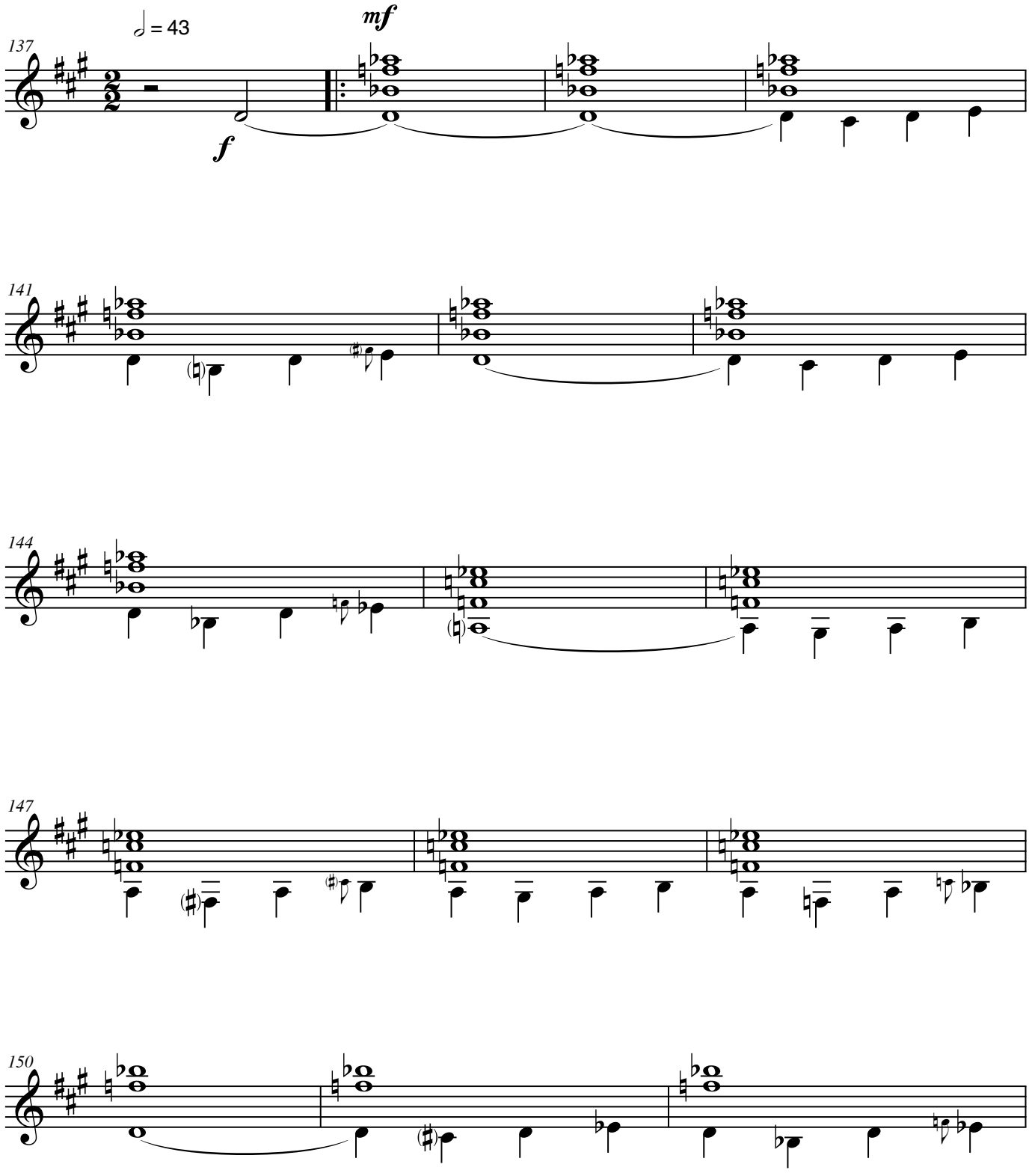

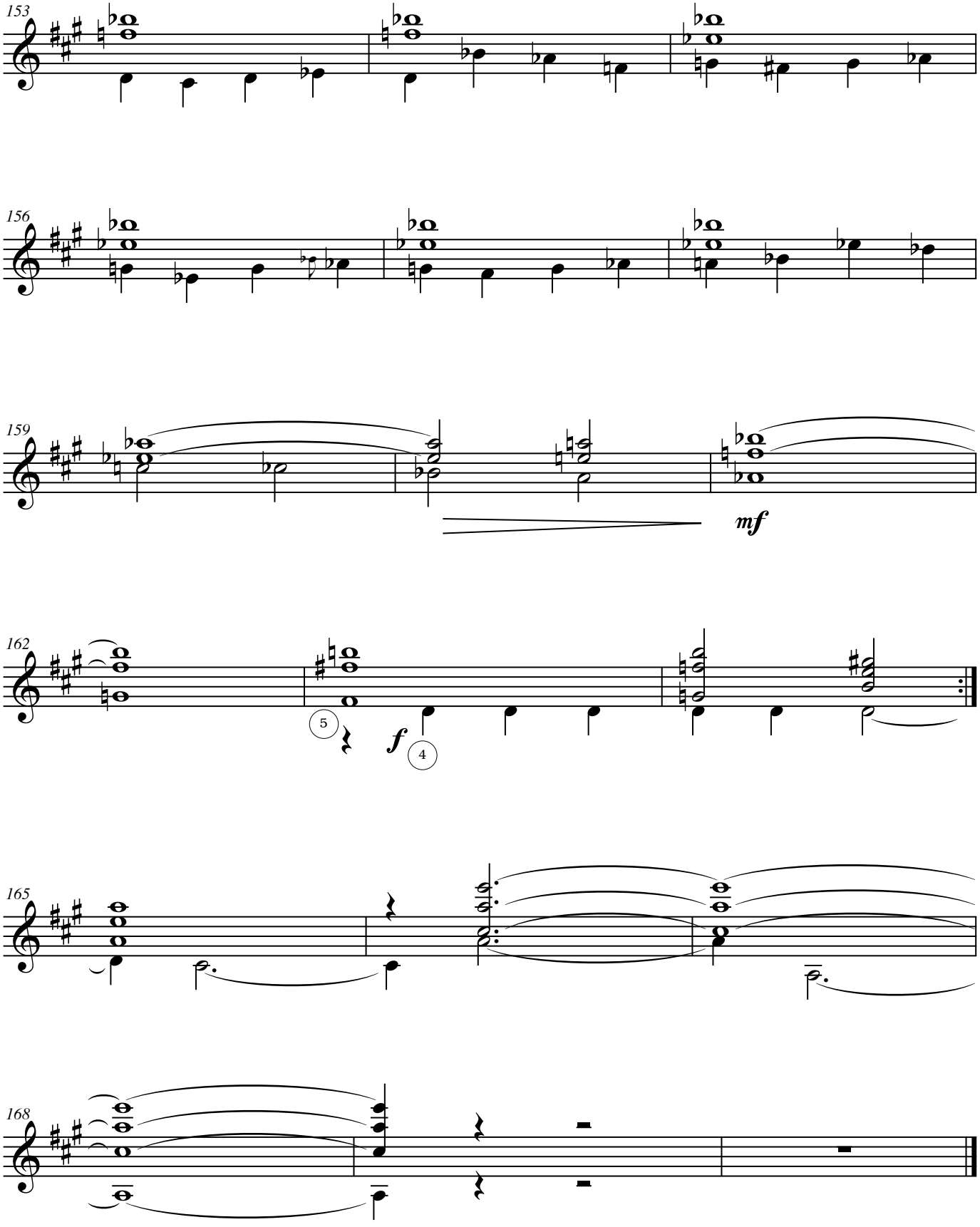
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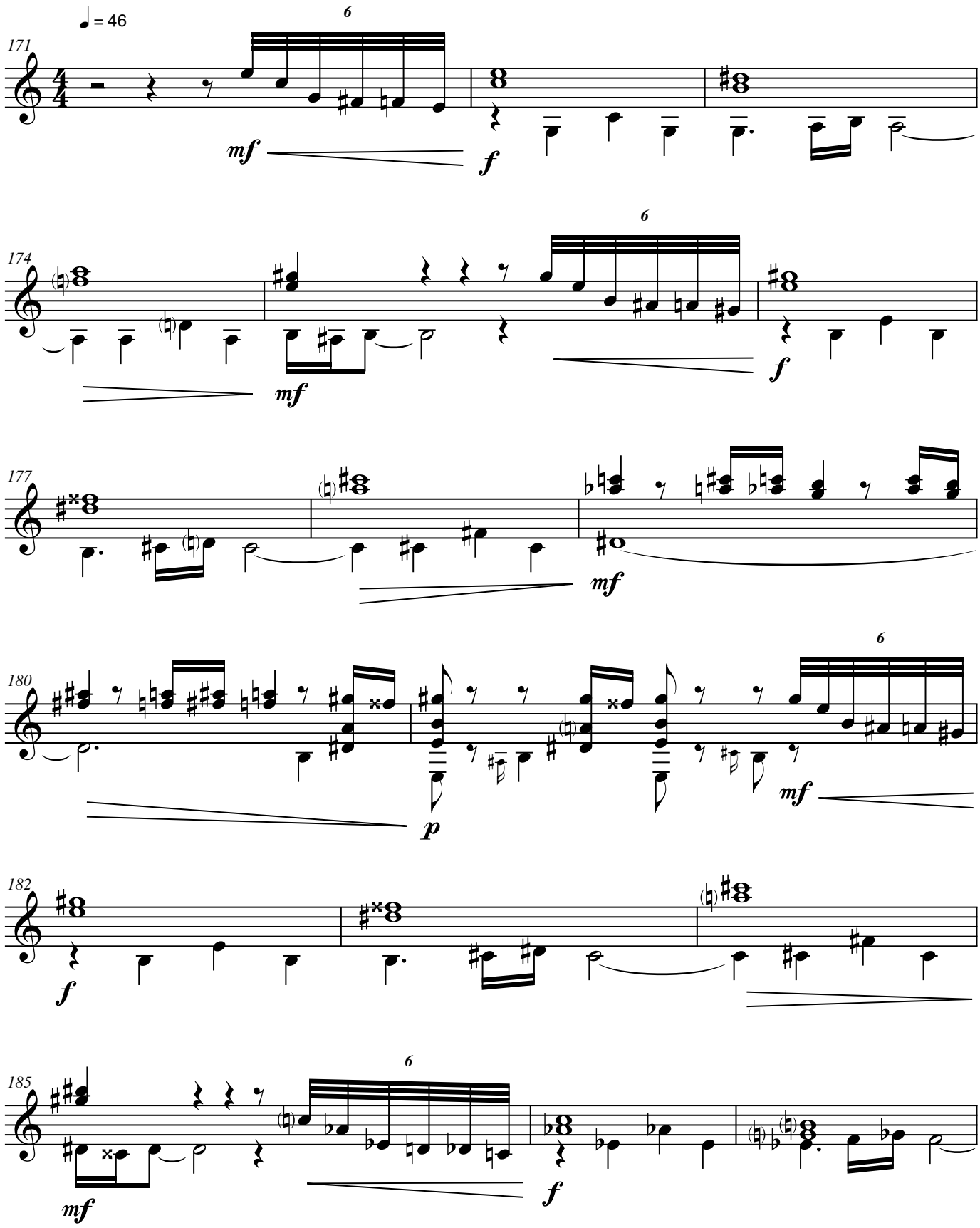
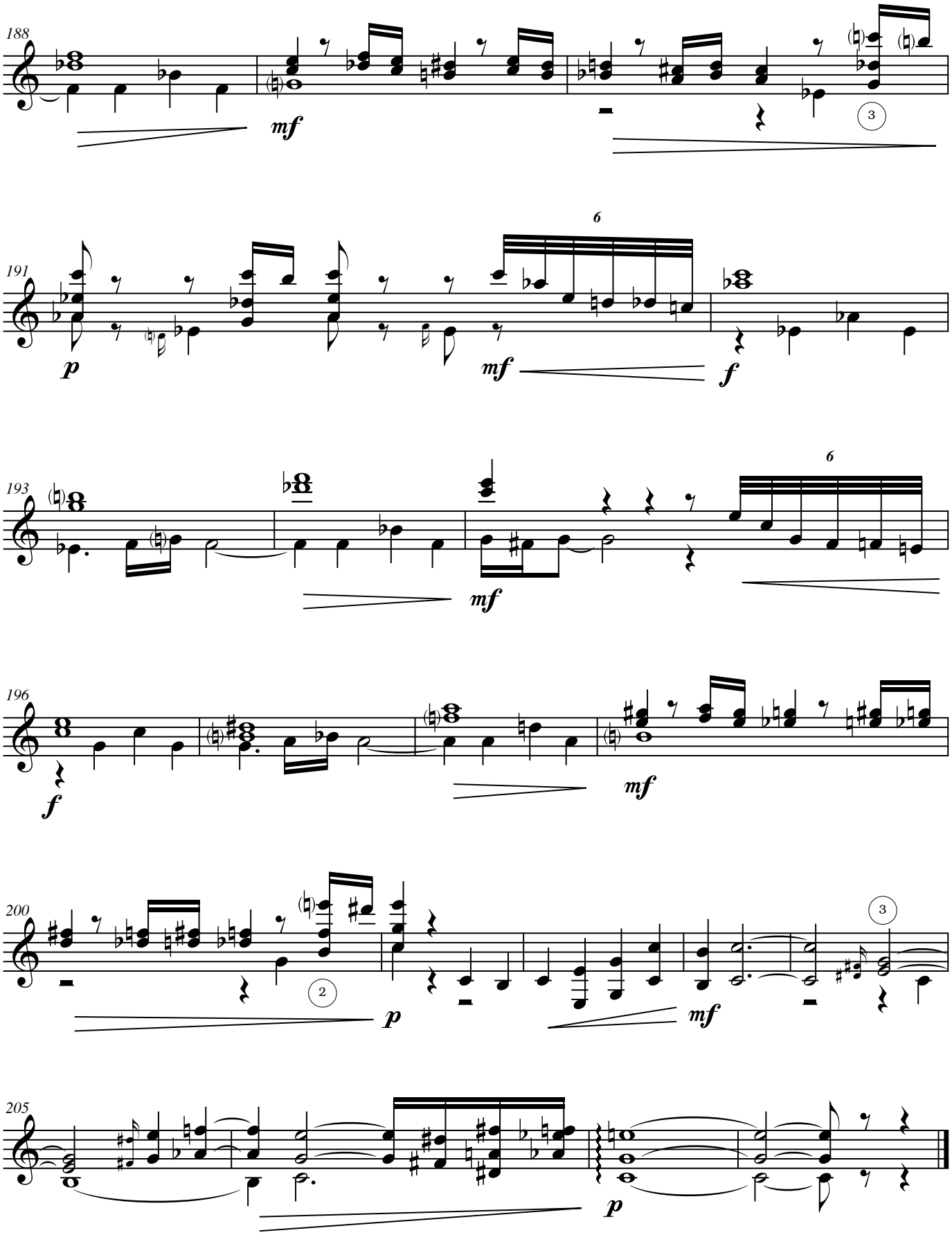
168

IX

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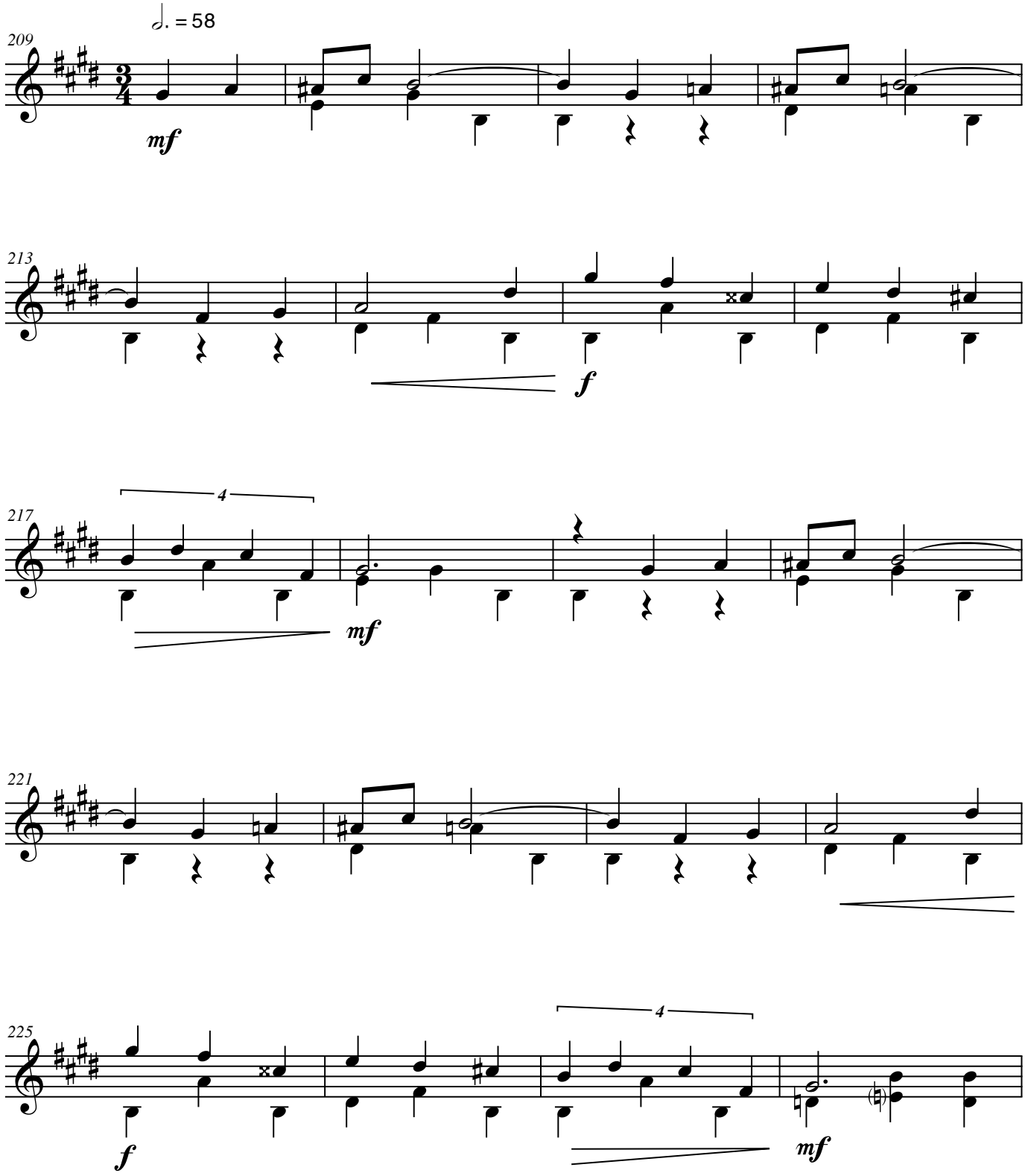
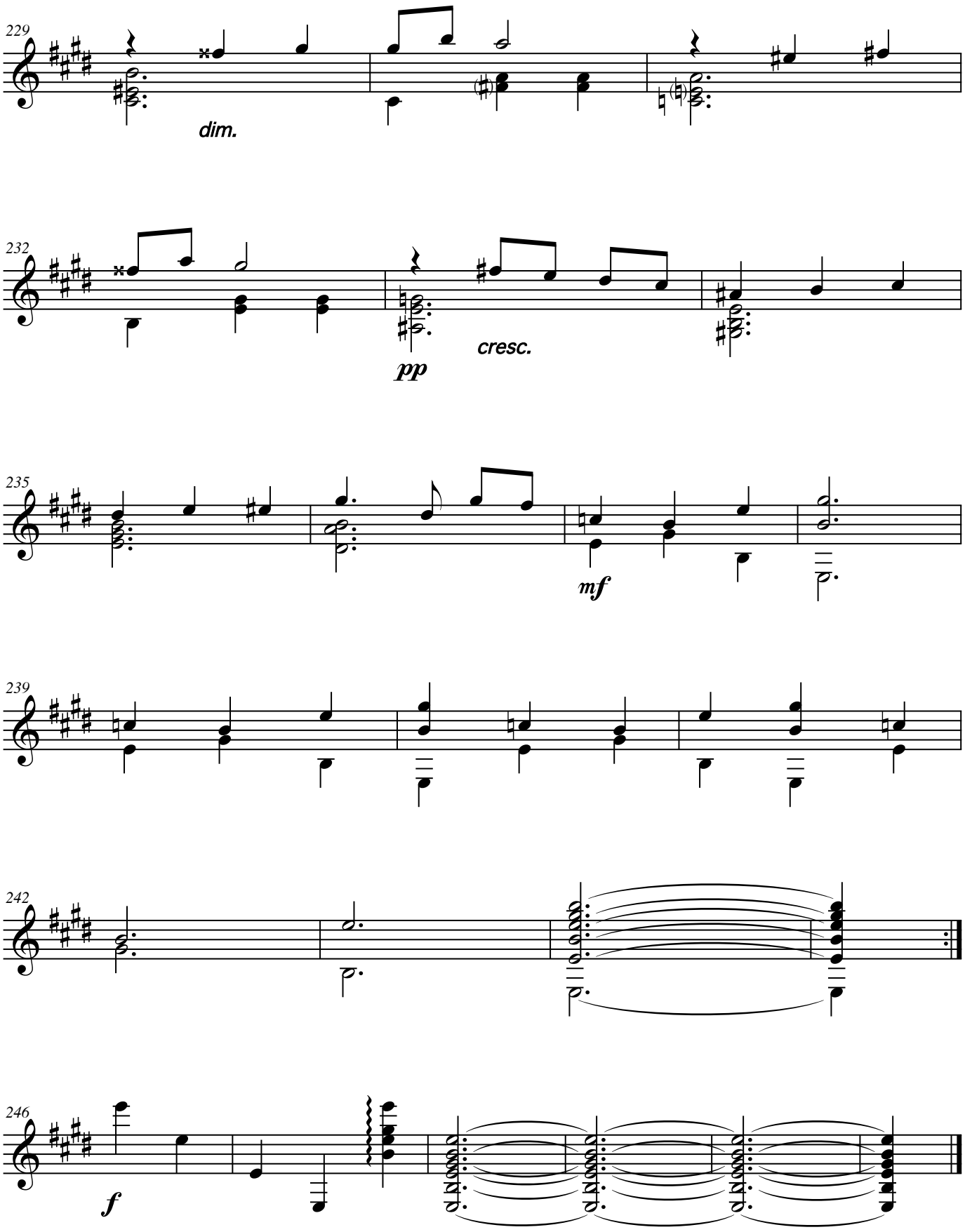
X




229
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pp
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Performance notes

1. I fully expect this set to be excerpted as often as it is played in toto. There does seem to be a certain formal integrity to the entire opus; that is to say, the whole would seem to be greater than the sum of the parts. I direct you to the general program notes. You will see that the pieces were conceived in affective pairs, and it would be ideally *effective* if they could be presented that way. The question will arise whether the subtitles (judgmental, joyous) are appropriate to be listing. I would say, yes, if a given pair (or the whole ten numbers) were being programmed. Otherwise, probably not.

2. The notation here benefits from my consultation with guitarists Peter Fletcher and Nadav Lev. As always, the ambiguity as to whether the player should assay to actually hold a long note, or whether it is there simply to make certain compositional pinions plain.

The syncopation in the melody of the third bar of Miniature V is a good example. I expect the performer to jump back to playing the swaying descant chords in a high position. But I would never want to complete the m. with a half rest in the stems-down voice. (We tend to give more emphasis to notes with ties in syncopated music.) Another example of "think but don't play" would be the simple melody of number IV. Its first notes, B and E, as open strings, can sound their full length at this tempo. The G-sharp that follows can be held longer as well. The higher B reached next will probably be closer in performance to an eighth. But the D-sharp coming up a few mm. later can only technically last the length of a sixteenth before its position must be relinquished so as to play the accompanying voice. All these melody tones should get the same emphasis, and that is why they are all notated the same as quarters.

In a few places, it might be effective to hold notes *longer* than indicated, such as the high B at the end of Miniature III. If one wants to do that with the final chord of number VI, then it should be played in high position to enable the harmonic to be executed while the chord tones are being held.

At all events, these kinds of inconsistencies, and their artistic exploitation, are part of the instrument's charm. But sometimes, attempting to smooth out inconsistencies might be the best artistic approach to a given passage. The chords that open number V will get severely shortened once the melody starts. Should one perhaps start them out in a somewhat dry and detached manner so the ear can better follow their progress when they later share the stage with the bass melody?

3. The bottom G-double-sharp in the antepenultimate m. of Miniature II is something of a joke. It is *meant* to sound sloppy (as if the guitarist wanted to be playing all double octaves in this thirty-second note figure…), an effect spoiled if one

ignores the designation to play it as an open string (which certainly should be allowed to ring through).

4. A word about arpeggios. Generally speaking, I don't have a strong opinion as to when those should be employed, and I have often been delighted over the years when guitarists have broken a chord in my music where such never occurred to me. The problem here is, I do have a few articulations to indicate that certain chords need to be rolled, and I fear that this might be viewed as exclusionary (no marking means, no roll) rather than inclusionary. Feel free to arpeggiate any time you have a mind to do so, unless you see the marking *n.a.* (*non arpeggiato).*

In the first Miniature, the two four-note chords in the first m. could be rolled quickly, or a drier effect might be preferred. The quick chords on the last beat of m. 3 probably shouldn't be arpeggiated, particularly when two of the three real voices fall twice into unisons (meaning that only two notes actually sound). The final fortissimo chord will represent the player's interpretation: should the chord be rolled like the offbeat ones in the previous three mm., or should it be played blocked, like the downbeat of m. 8.

In the second Miniature, the melody moves on the last eighth of m. 32 into a middle voice, where it remains in the next two mm. And then, in m. 35, it is the bottom note of four in the simultaneity. I know that some guitarists (such as the set's dedicatee) are adept at bringing out inner voices even in the middle of an arpeggiation, but I ask you to see if perhaps this jazzy passage might be more effective played straight.

In Miniature VI, the bass plays a diminution of the main tune (sounding simultaneously at half speed in the soprano) in m. 106. I thought that the bass voice-leading back to G on the third beat would be clearer if the upward arpeggio sign there were in place.

Miniatures VIII and IX feature melody in the bass throughout. Downward rolling arpeggios then might be appropriate.

The penultimate chord in the last Miniature has an enforced arpeggio symbol. Here I'm hoping for a *trompe-l'oreille:* between the lingering overtones ringing from the just played low E as it sounds through, and the arpeggiation itself, perhaps the fact that this chord is, in fact, inverted won't get noticed! (I went for convenient voicing as part of a snazzy ending for this number and, for that matter, the full cycle.)