PAUL BOWLES

TAMANAR

for Piano

A
Paul Bowles
PB
Archive
Publication

Tamanar
PAUL BOWLES
Born December 30, 1910, in Jamaica, Queens, NY
Died November 18, 1999, in Tangier, Morocco

PROGRAM NOTE

Paul Bowles's stunningly deft achievements as a fiction writer and memoirist lay many years ahead of him when he first arrived in Morocco in 1931, a twenty-year-old would-be composer traveling in the company of his musical mentor, Aaron Copland. Nor did the youth have any suspicion that he would later gravitate repeatedly to Morocco, finally making it his home for the last five decades of his life. Bowles and Copland merely intended a stay of several months, during which they would work on their music in Tangier while taking side trips all around the country. Their sojourn proved creatively fruitful. Copland began one of his most challenging orchestral scores, the Short Symphony; Bowles commenced *Tamanar*, a four-and-a-half-minute piano piece reflecting some of his earliest impressions of Morocco. *Tamanar* periodically occupied Bowles during his next year-and-a-half of globetrotting (he recalled that his Berlin neighbors so disliked its loud dissonances that they screamed "*Fenster zu!*" ["Shut the window!"] whenever he began work). Reaching completion in April 1933, the piece proved to be an artistic breakthrough for the composer.

Tamanar takes its name from a southwestern coastal village midway between Essaouira and Agadir. The road east from Tamanar through the Marrakesh plains affords one of the world's most imposing mountain vistas. Here, the highest peaks of the Atlas range loom some 13,000 feet above sea-level, grim, and gnarled, stippled with vast tracts of black sea-floor basalt that give them a forbidding appearance. In *Tamanar* Bowles attempted to recapture the mood of grandeur and menace this singular natural phenomenon evokes.

Still finding his voice as a composer in 1933, Bowles produced a dissonant, truculent, rather Teutonic work. Indeed, *Tamanar* is startling unlike his later pieces, where Gallic lightheartedness and charm would predominate amid a context of tonal euphony. The composer himself was somewhat bemused by *Tamanar* when the manuscript, lost for about half a century, turned up three years before his death (at that time, he provided the tempo indications included in the present score and clarified some dynamic markings). In *Tamanar* the young composer may have been influenced by a seminally important keyboard work recently completed by his teacher: Copland's spiky, austere, proto-serial Piano Variations of 1930.

Blessed with a natural flair for composition, Bowles showed ingenuity in drawing contrasted expressive qualities from *Tamanar*'s central melodic idea, which regularly alternates with arrays of grating mountain-crag chords. This melodizing first appears as a severe baritone-register proclamation, later takes on dreamy wistfulness in a quasi-canonic statement, and still later reenters in urgent rhythmic diminution. The climax is well-judged, and Bowles's *morendo* coda ties up loose ends with considerable grace.

One notational peculiarity was Bowles's decision to dispense with time-signatures in *Tamanar* despite its continually shifting meters. Evidently he felt that the work's steady quarter-note pulsation provided all the guidance the player needed. The only detail, in fact, that might trip up some pianists is the quirky, and not particularly convincing, rhythm of measure 112.

It almost goes without saying that, while the performer should scrupulously avoid Romantic liberties (Bowles detested excessive rubato), *Tamanar* demands far more expressive and coloristic nuance than could be programed into the MIDI-realization produced by this file.

— Benjamin Folkman

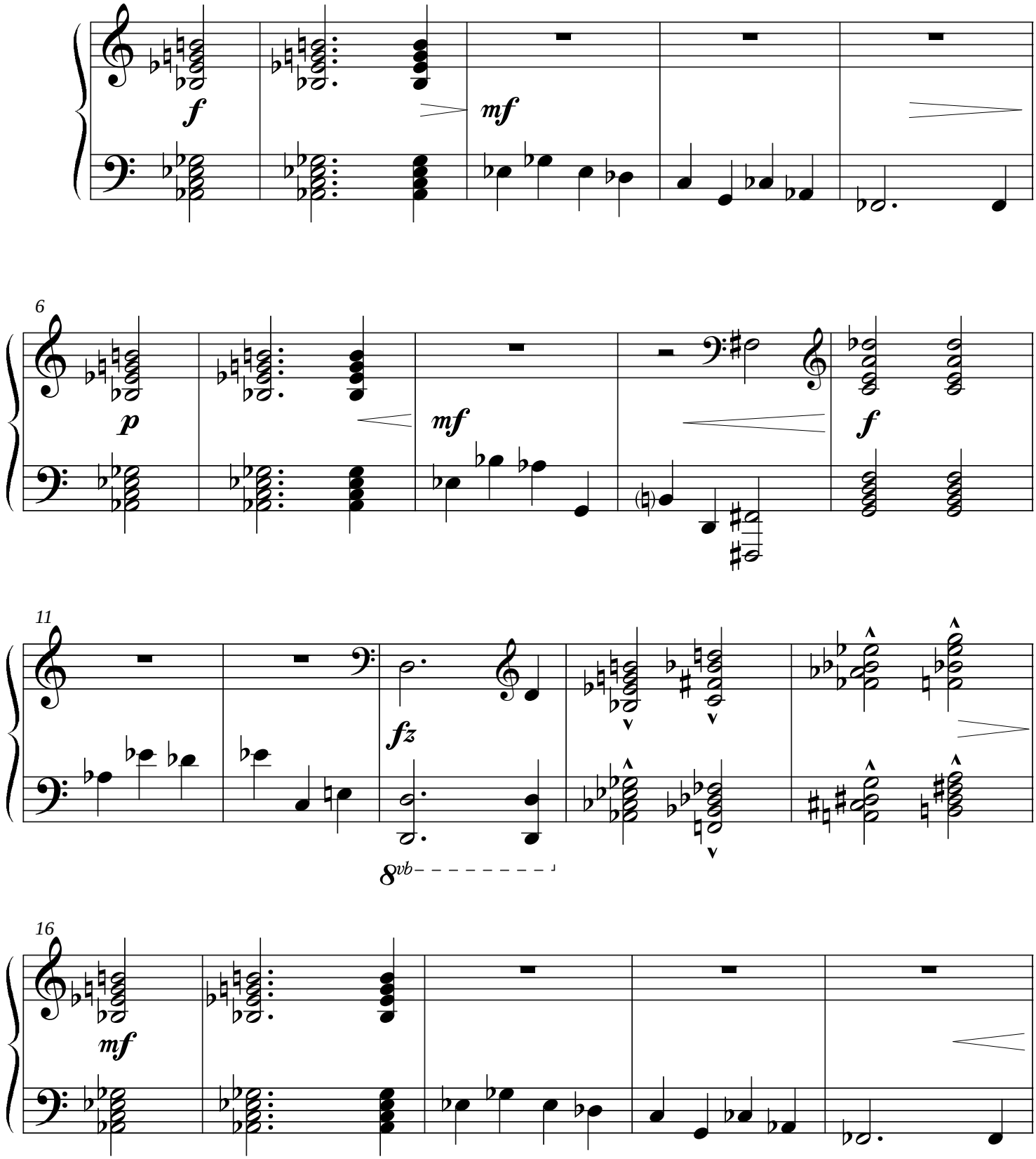
Tamanar is posted with the kind permission of Irene Herrmann, Paul Bowles's musical heir.

Tamanar

for Piano

Moderato ♩ = **ca. 116**

Paul Frederic Bowles



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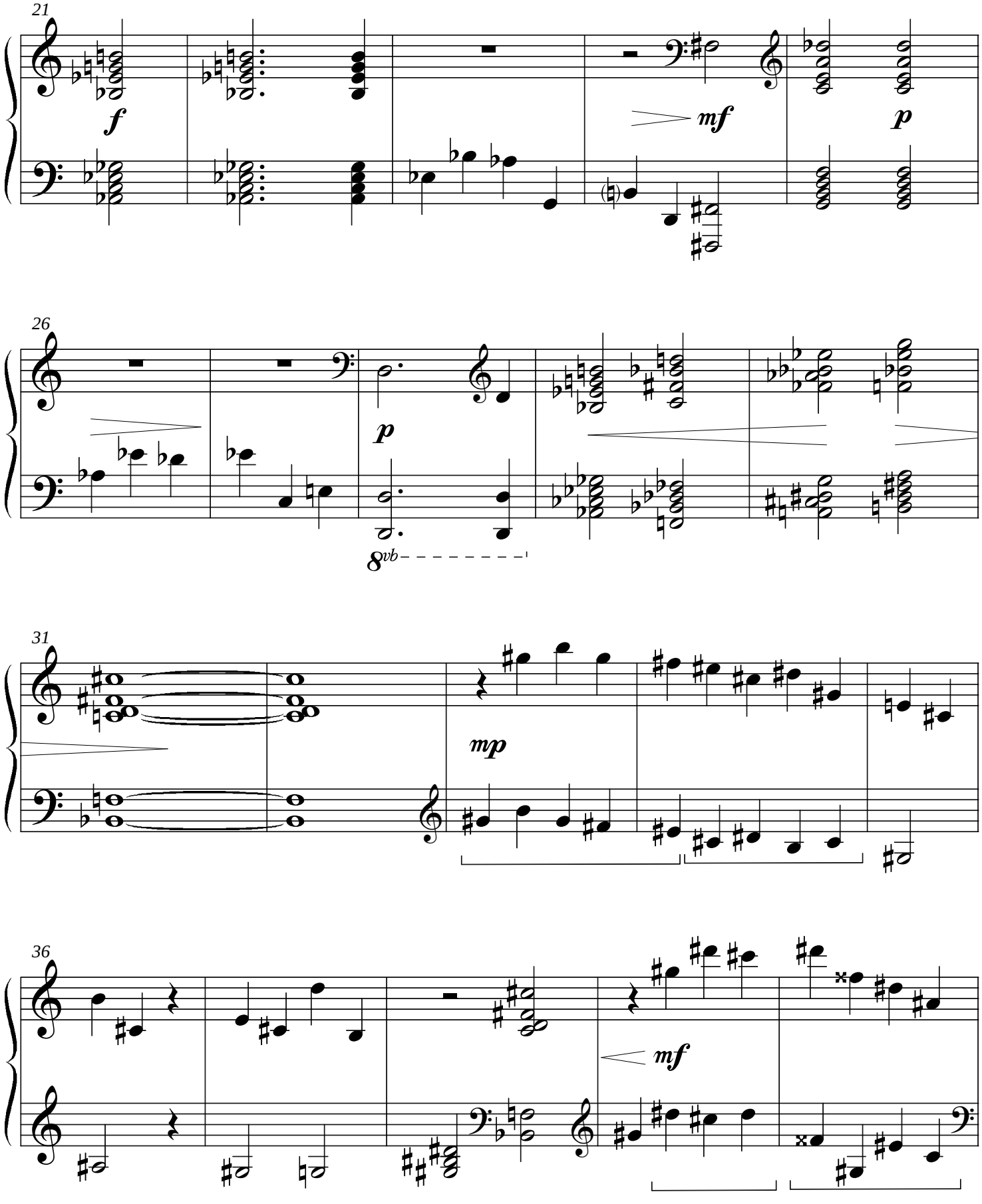
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f
mf
p
26
p
8vb
31
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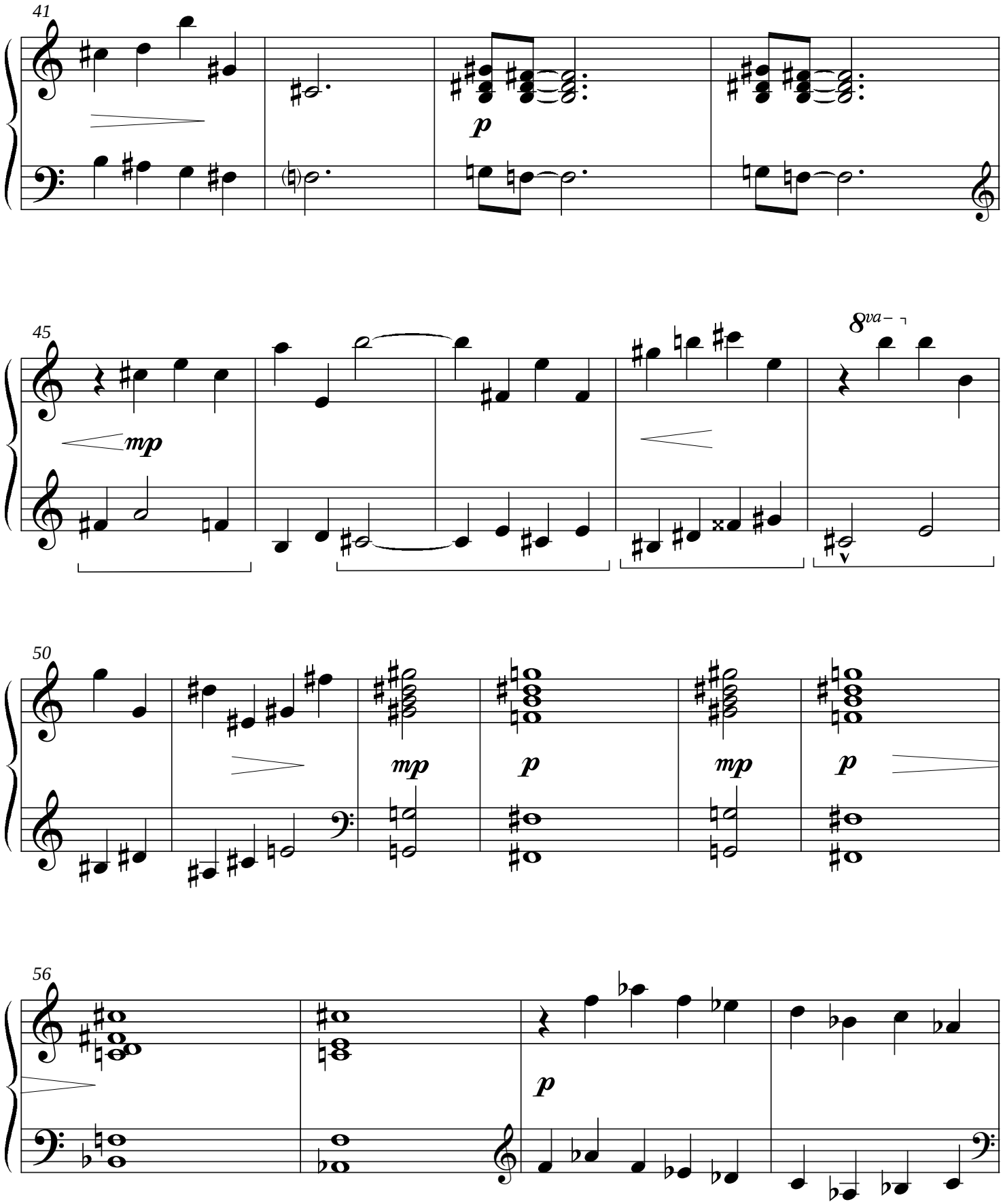
36
mf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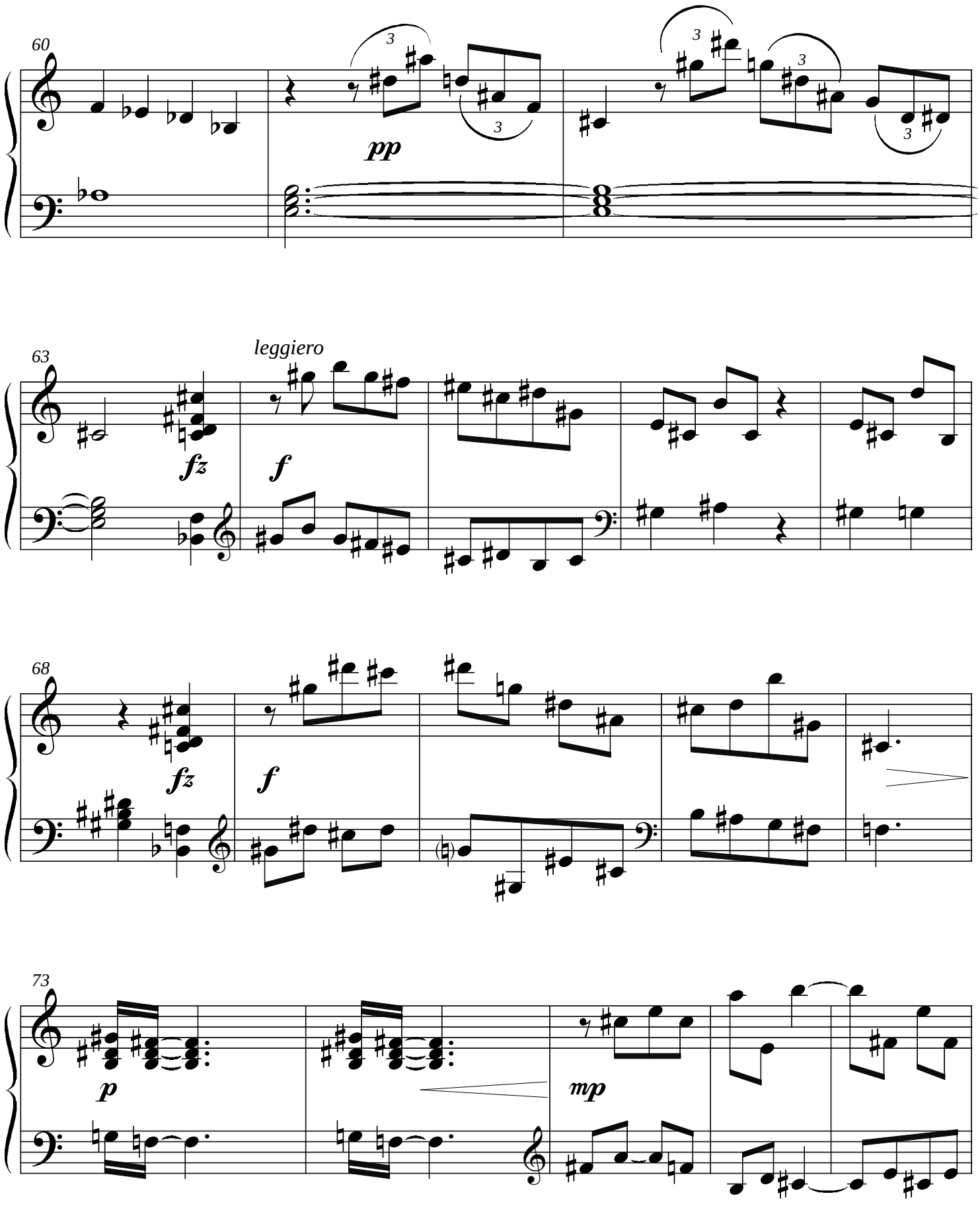
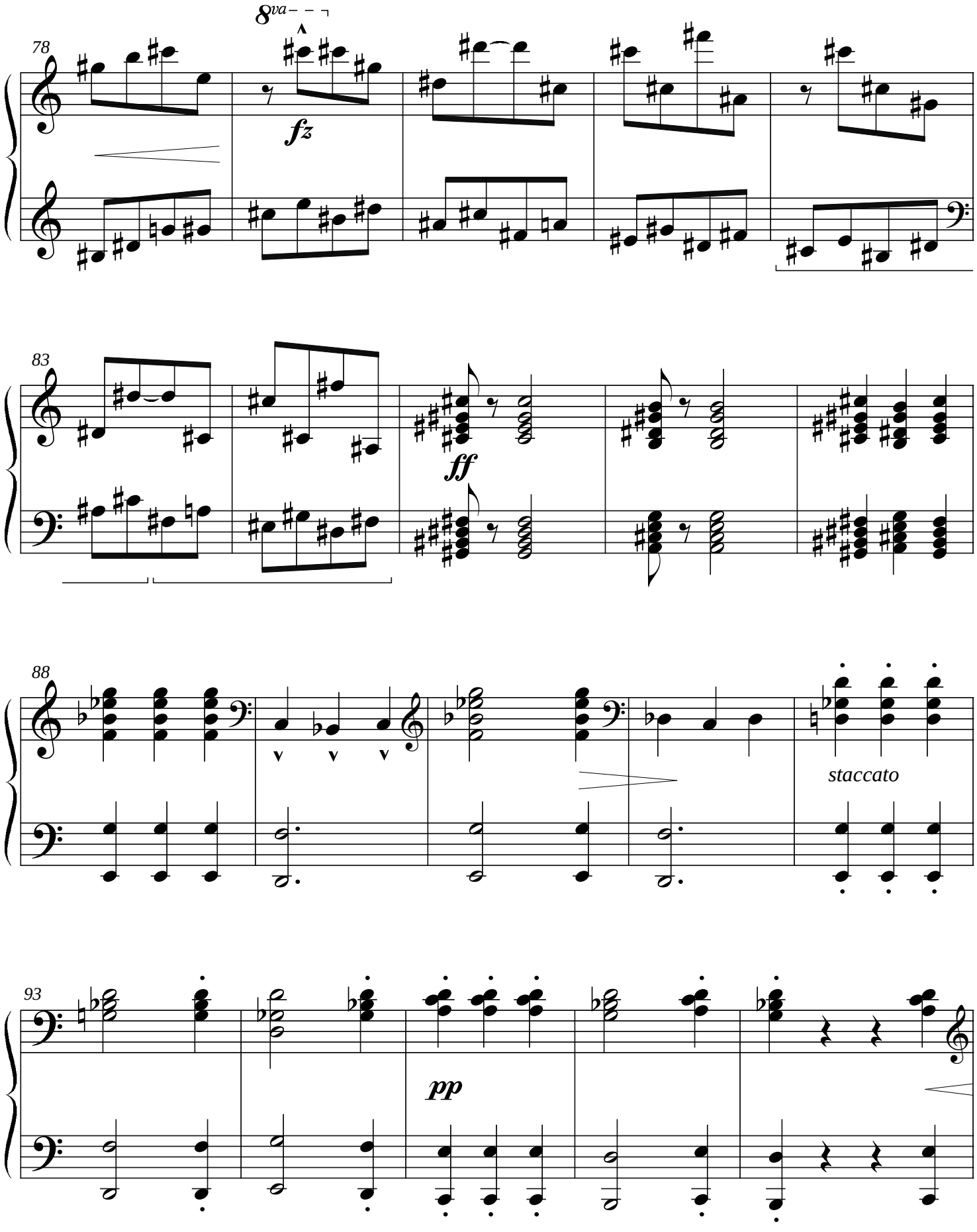
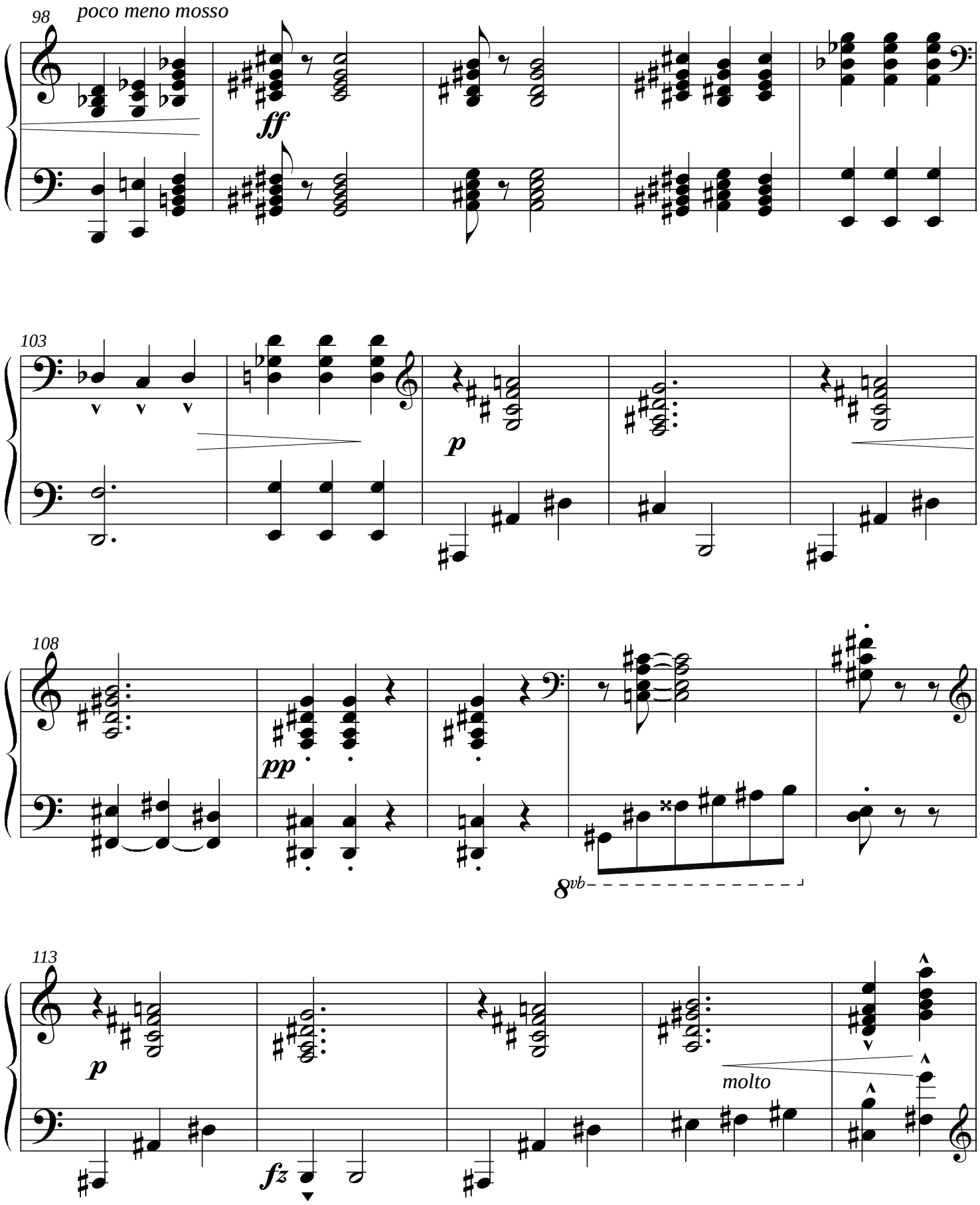
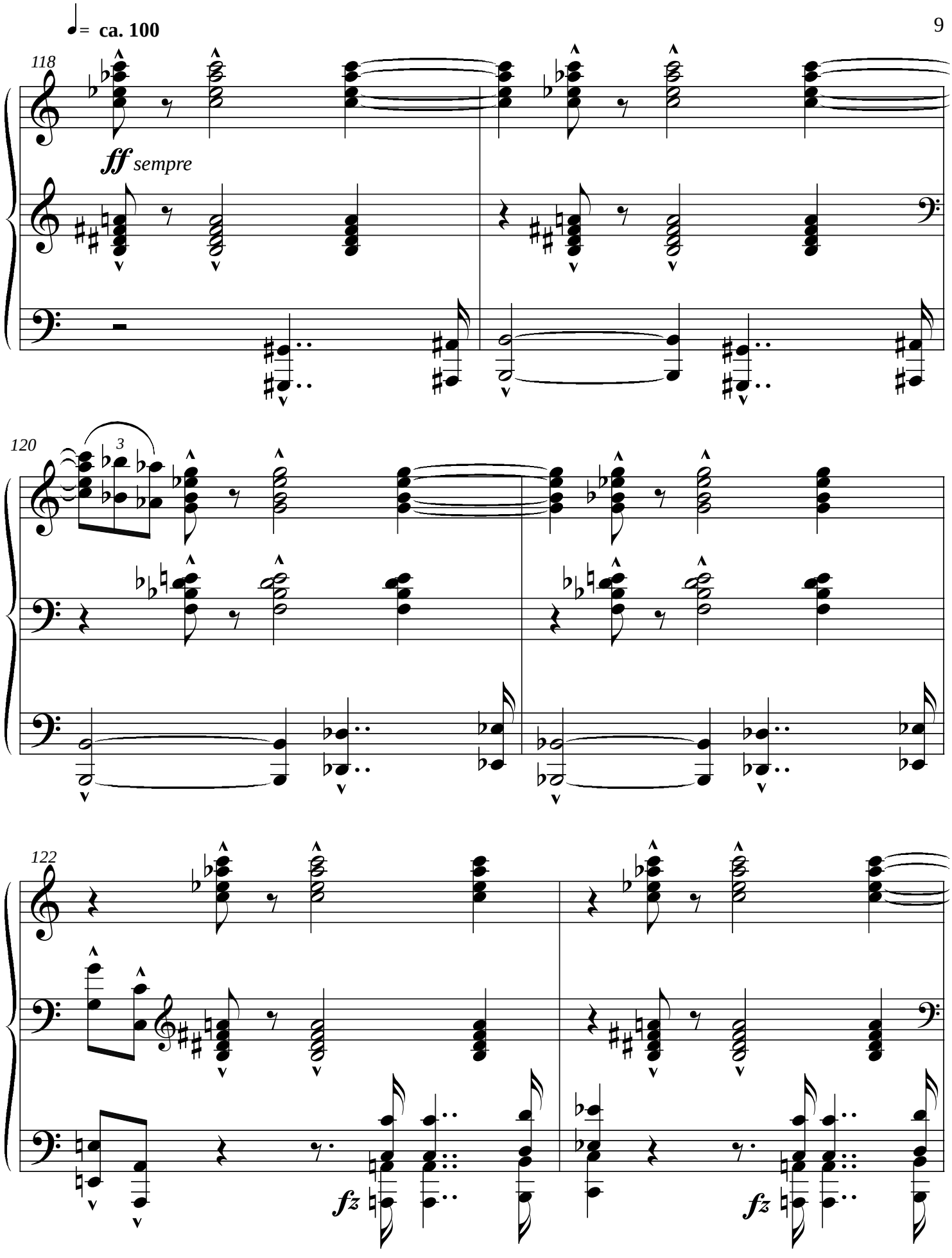
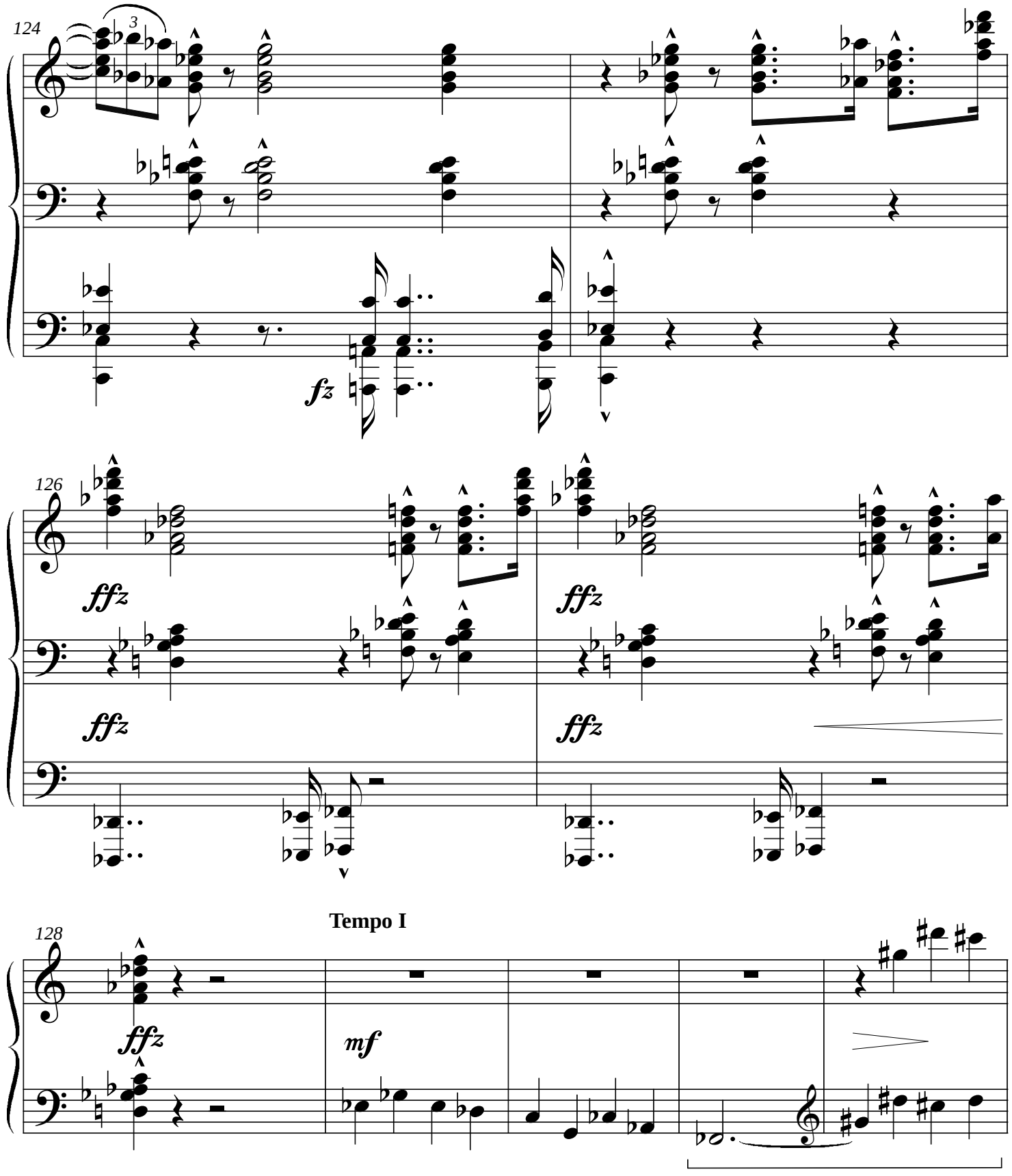
p
45
mp
8va
50
mp
p
mp
p
56
p

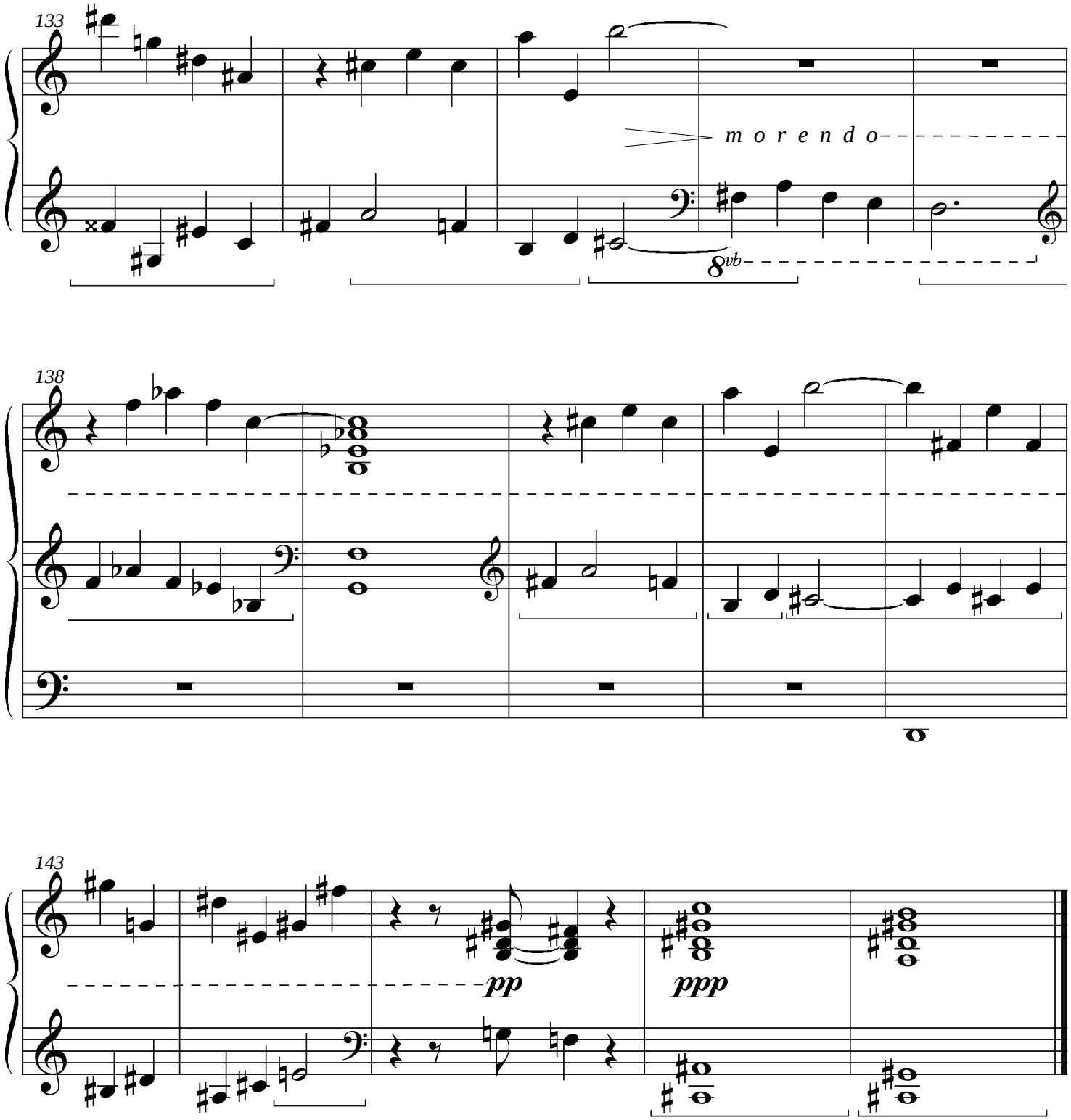

60
pp
63
leggiero
fz
f
68
fz
f
73
p
mp


8va
78
fz
83
ff
88
staccato
93
pp


98
poco meno mosso
ff
103
p
108
pp
8vb
113
p
fz
molto


♩= ca. 100
118
ff sempre
120
3
122
fz
fz


124
3
fz
126
ffz
ffz
ffz
ffz
Tempo I
128
ffz
mf



Tanger
Aug. 1931–Apr. 1933