Ginsberg—Heaney

for piano

Ben Livneh

2024

full score

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duration:

music alone, ca. 6’
with optional reading, ca. 8.5’

Program Note

This piece is a suite of four miniatures for piano. It is inspired by works of the two titular poets, Allen Ginsberg and Seamus Heaney. It is interesting to note that these two were contemporaries, and while their poetry, side-by-side, can seem contradictory, it also exemplifies the way in which shared truths can transcend boundaries of place and culture. There seems to be a broader thematic connection beyond their contrasting styles and chosen subject matters. Both poets are deeply concerned with identity (Heaney as a Catholic from Northern Ireland, Ginsberg as an Jewish-American gay man) spirituality (Ginsberg’s being rooted in Eastern mysticism, Heaney’s in Catholicism) and social issues (Heaney was an important public figure during the Troubles, and Ginsberg an icon of 1960s American counterculture). One interesting contrast in their respective work is the different ways the two poets choose to situate themselves within history. Where Heaney’s is deeply rooted in Irish literature and employs traditional poetic forms, Ginsberg seeks to radically innovate and reinvent the very meaning of poetry. Itself. One poet looks forward, and the other back.

Option for the addition of reading to the performance

A performance of the piece may include reading of the selected poems. Each text should be read, either by the pianist or an additional performer, before its corresponding movement. In movement i. b) the music ‘interrupts’ the reading before it is finished and in iii. the reading ‘interrupts’ the music. The exact places where this should happen are indicated by an asterisk (*). Additionally, IV. epilogue should be performed with reading and playing taking place at the same time. The final line should be read after the final chord is played, which is also indicated by an asterisk in the score.

Texts for reading, by movement:

i. a) *A Supermarket in California*, by Allen Ginsberg

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for I walked down the streets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!

What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the avocados, babies in the tomatoes!—and you, Garcia Lorca, what were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber, poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans following you, and followed in my imagination by the store detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

ii. *Oysters*, by Seamus Heaney

Our shells clacked on the plates.
My tongue was a filling estuary,
My palate hung with starlight:
As I tasted the salty Pleiades
Orion dipped his foot into the water.

Alive and violated,
They lay on their beds of ice:
Bivalves: the split bulb
And philandering sigh of ocean.
Millions of them ripped and shucked and scattered.

We had driven to that coast
Through flowers and limestone
And there we were, toasting friendship,
Laying down a perfect memory
In the cool of thatch and crockery.

Over the Alps, packed deep in hay and snow,
The Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome:
I saw damp panniers disgorge
The frond-lipped, brine-stung
Glut of privilege

And was angry that my trust could not repose
In the clear light, like poetry or freedom
Leaning in from sea. I ate the day
Deliberately, that its tang
Might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

i. b) *A Supermarket in California*, by Allen Ginsberg, cont.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be lonely.

* Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher, what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

iii. *Fosterling*, by Seamus Heaney

At school I loved one picture's heavy greenness –
Horizons rigged with windmills' arms and sails.
The millhouses' still outlines. Their in-placeness
Still more in place when mirrored in canals.
I can't remember not ever having known
The immanent hydraulics of a land
Of *glar* and *glit* and floods at *dailigone*.
My silting hope. My lowlands of the mind.

Heaviness of being. And poetry
Sluggish in the doldrums of what happens.
Me waiting until I was nearly fifty
To credit marvels. Like the tree-clock of tin cans
the tinkers made. So long for air to brighten,
Time to be dazzled and the heart to lighten.

iv. *Fourth Floor, Dawn, Up All Night Writing Letters*, by Allen Ginsberg

Pigeons shake their wings on the copper church roof
out my window across the street, a bird perched on the cross
surveys the city's blue-grey clouds. Larry Rivers'll
come at 10 AM and take my picture. I'm taking
your picture, pigeons. I'm writing you down, Dawn.
I'm immortalizing your exhaust, Avenue A bus.
* O Thought, now you'll have to think the same thing forever!

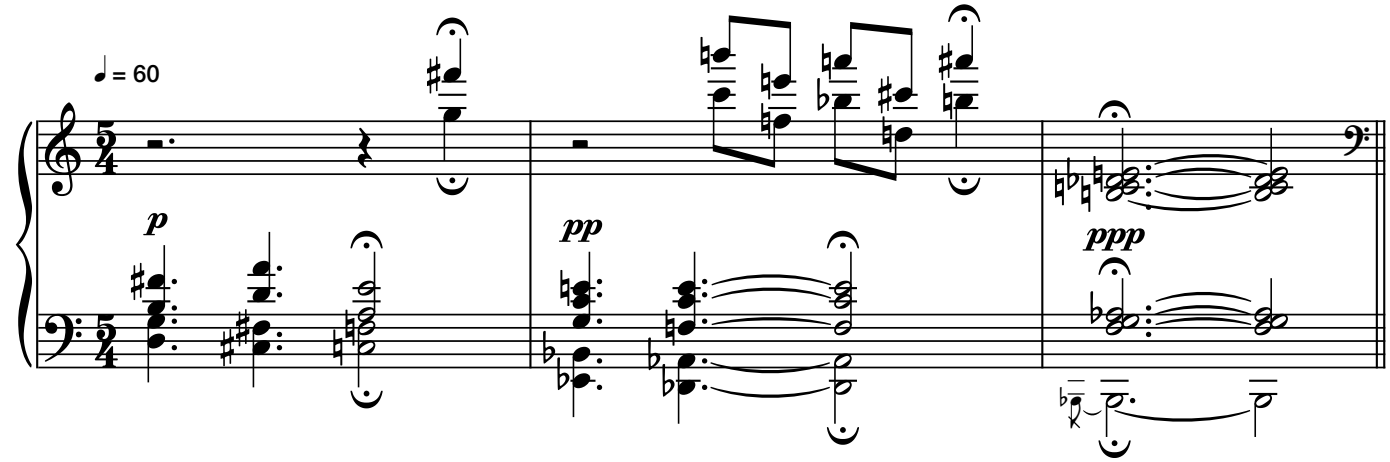
Ginsberg—Heaney

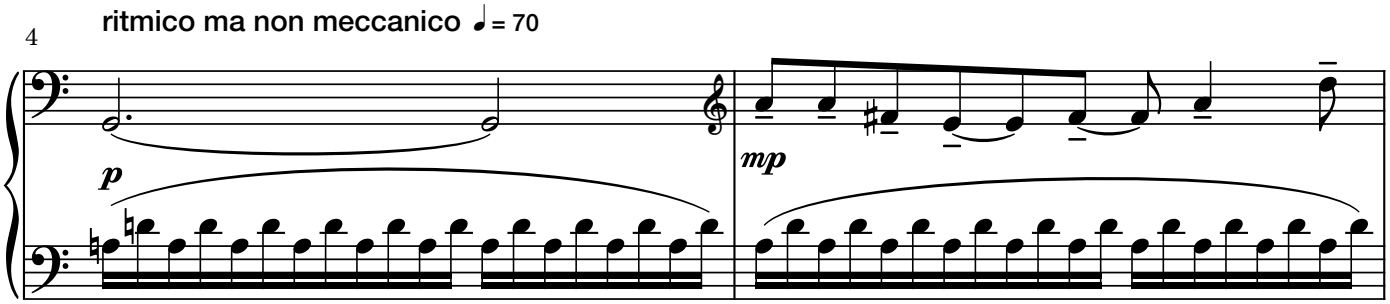
for piano
(2024)

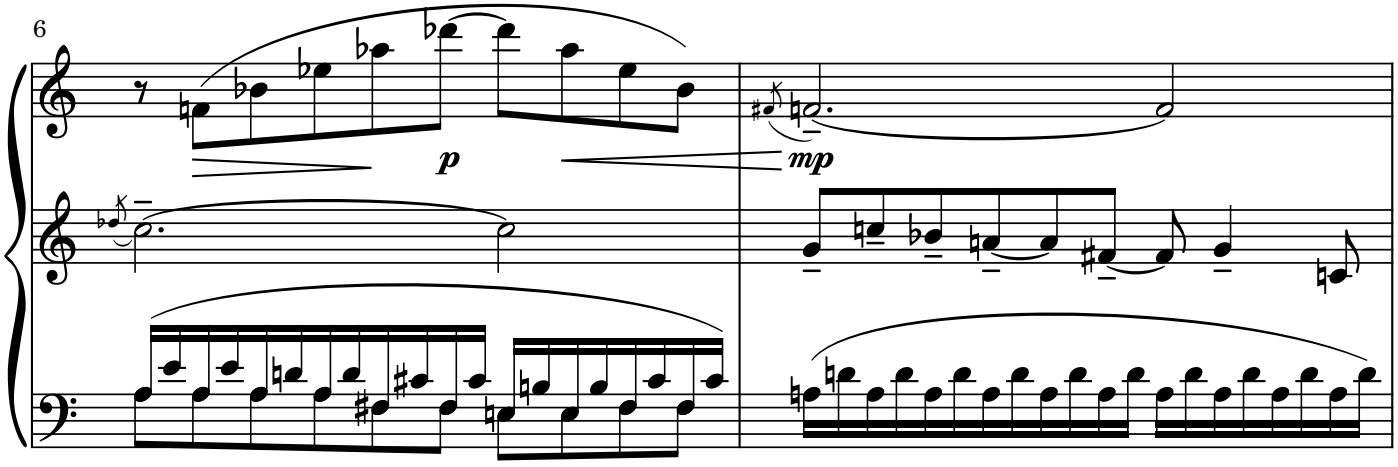
Ben Livneh

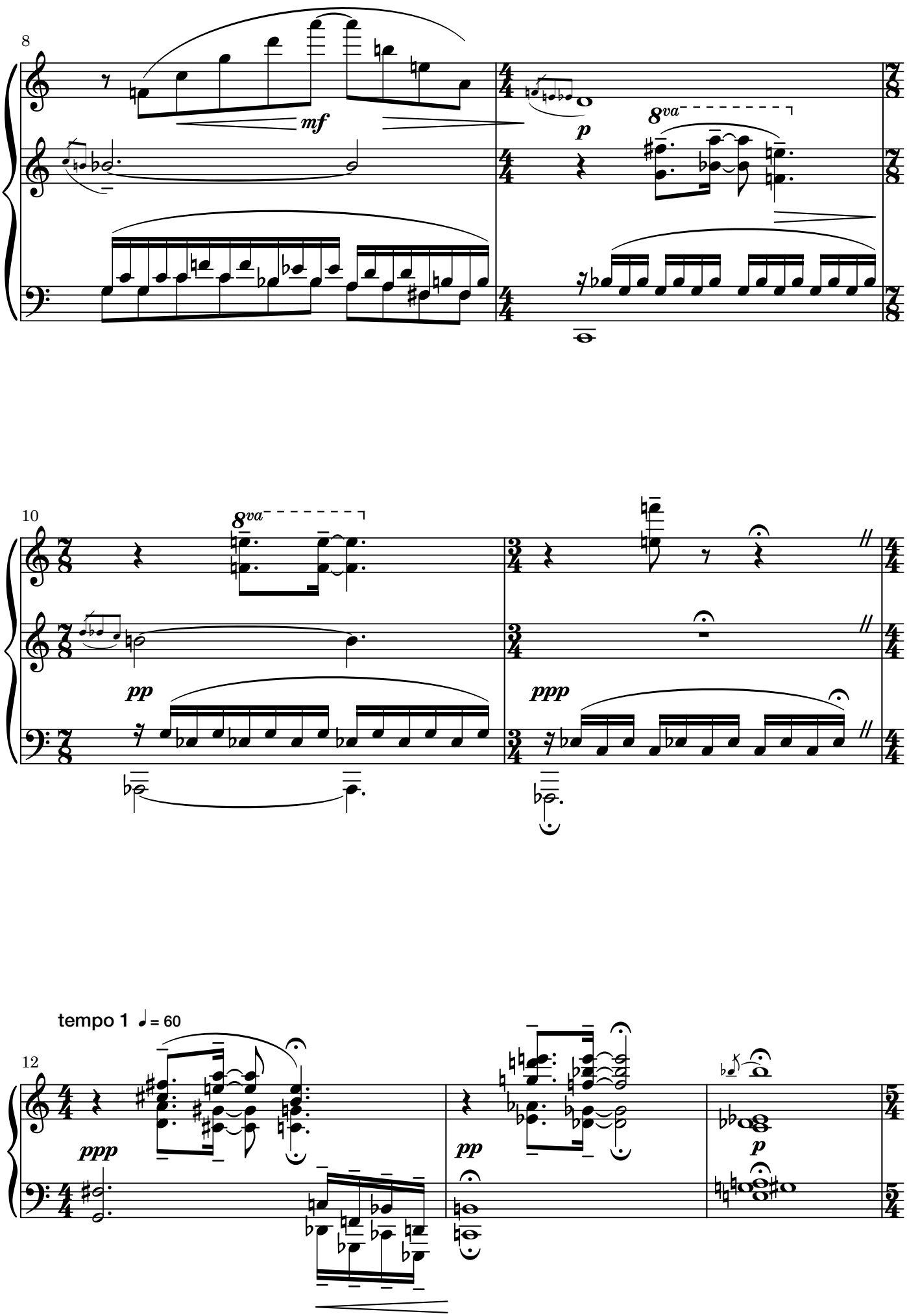
i. A Supermarket in California

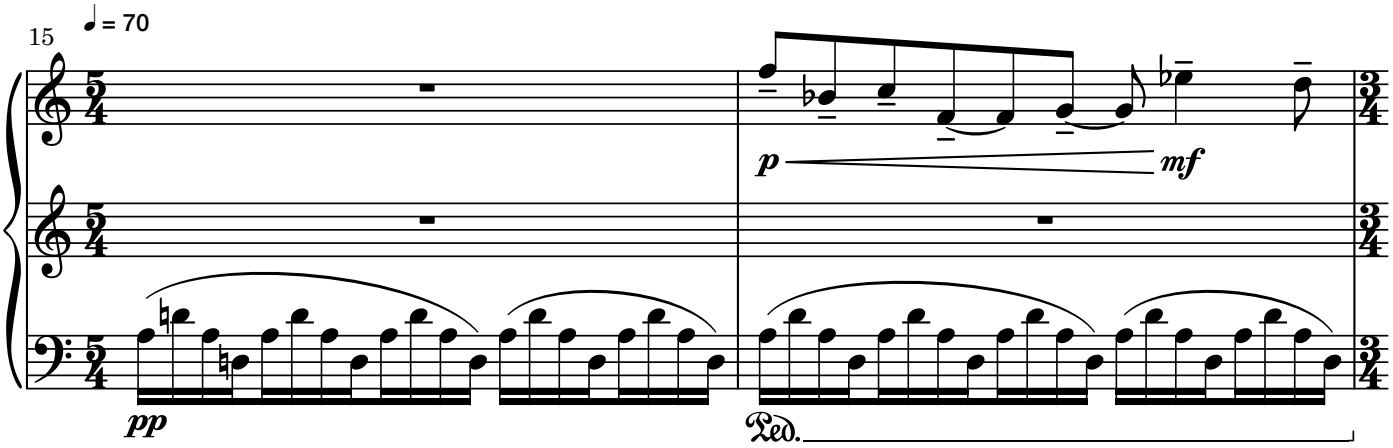
a)

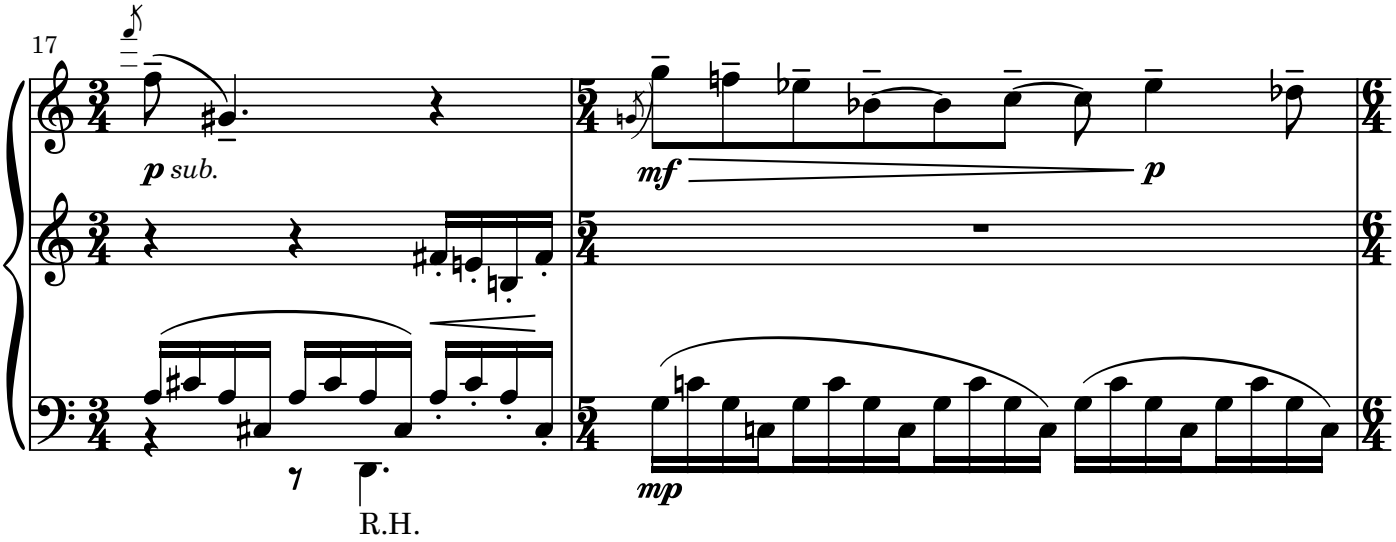


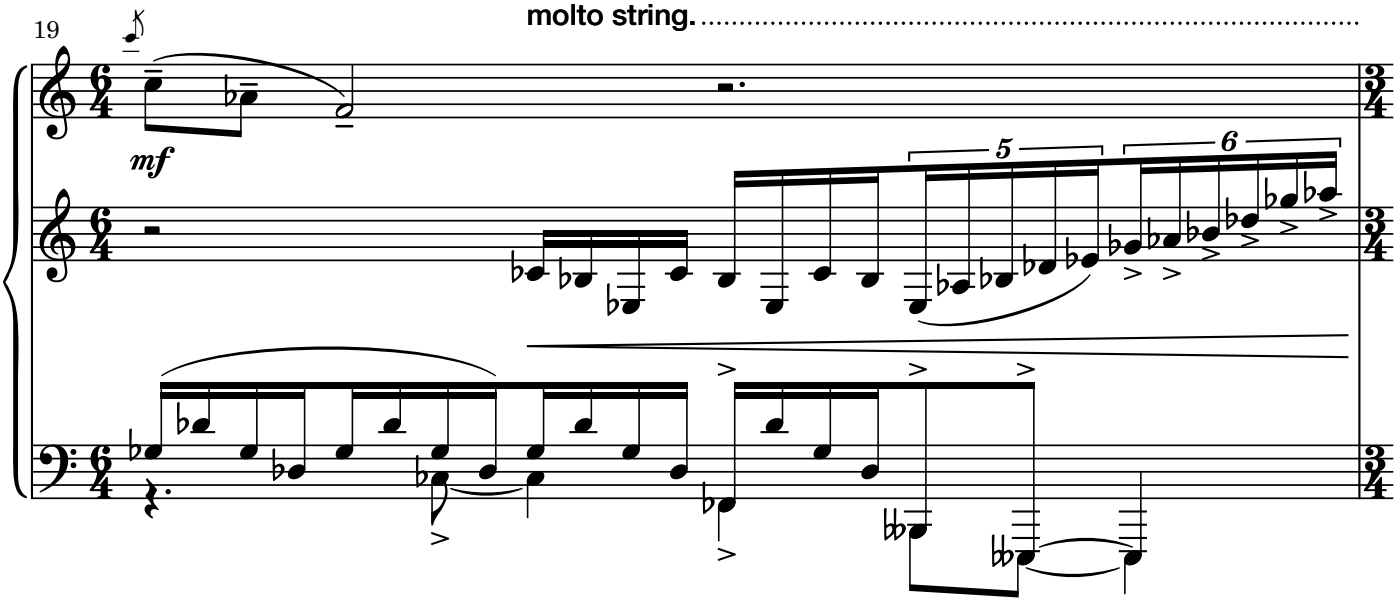


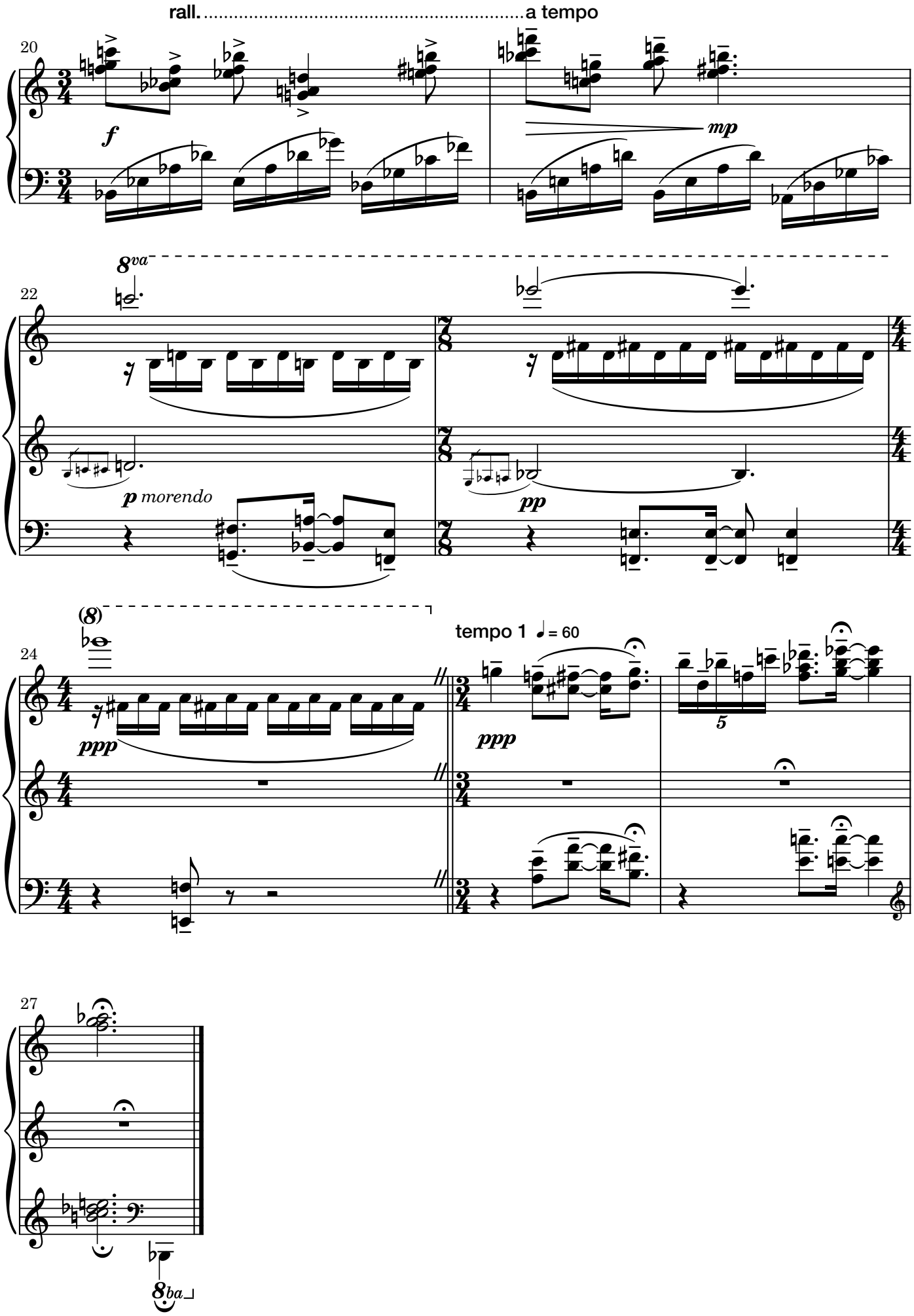



8
mf
p
8va
10
8va
pp
ppp
tempo 1 ♩= 60
12
ppp
pp
p


15
♩ = 70
p
mf
pp
Ped.


17
p sub.
mf
p
mp
R.H.

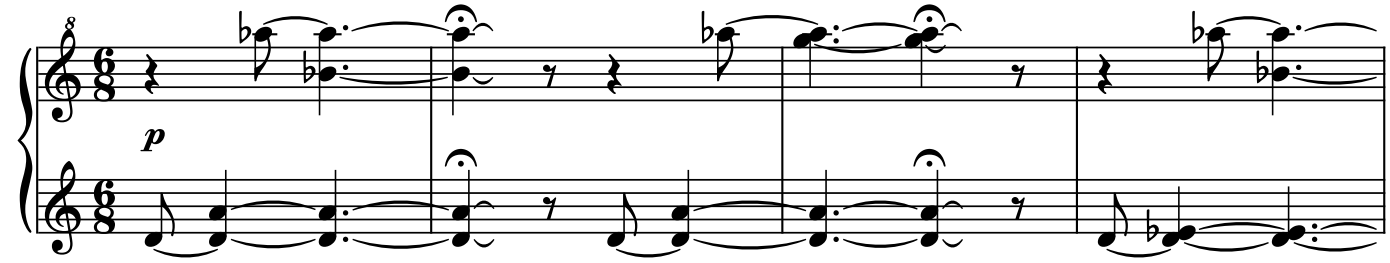

19
molto string.
mf
5
6


rall.
a tempo
20
f
mp
8va
22
p morendo
pp
(8)
24
ppp
tempo 1 ♩= 60
ppp
5
27
8ba

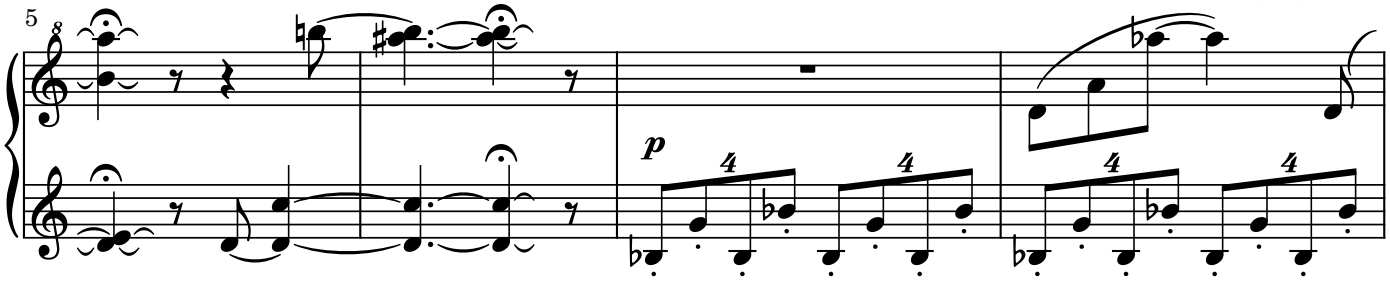
ii. Oysters

♩ = 66

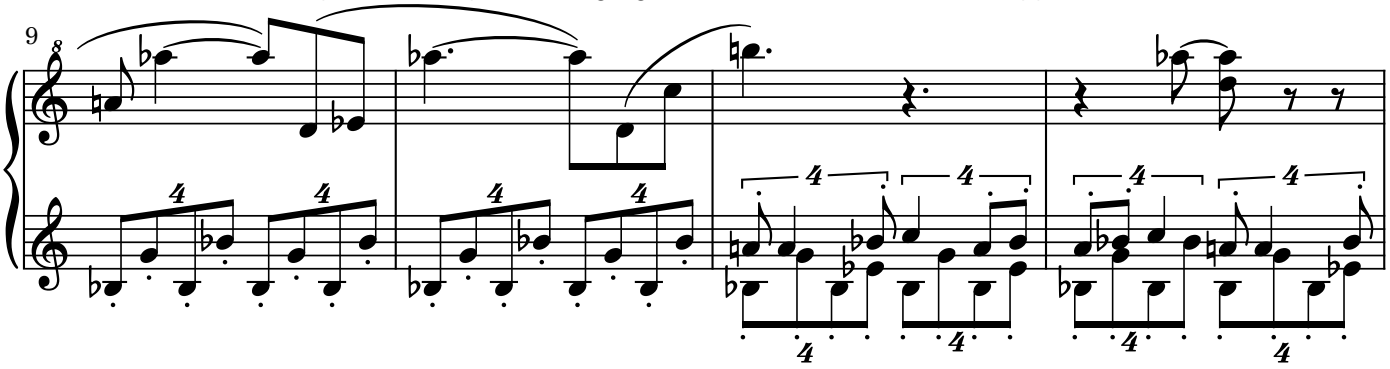
Our shells clacked on the plates. My tongue was a filling estuary. My palate hung with Starlight: As I tasted



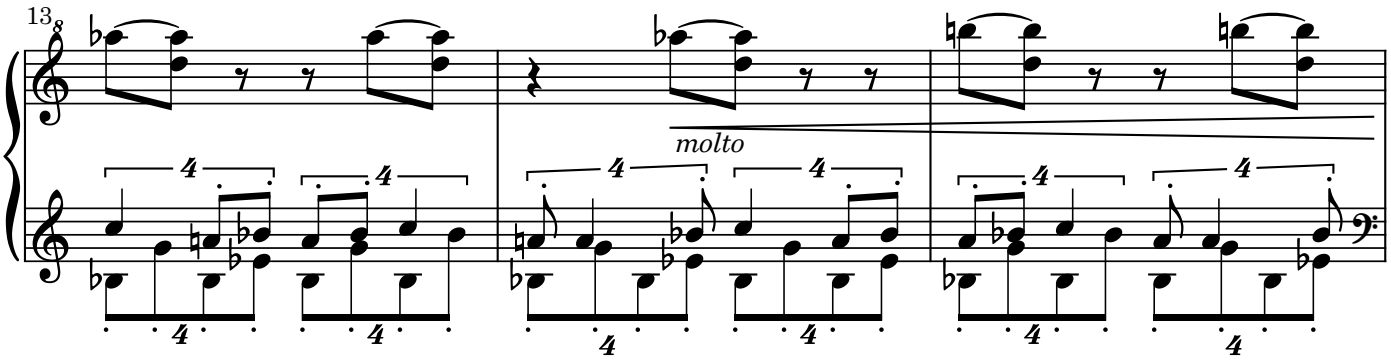
the salty pleiades, Orion dipped his foot into the water. Alive and violated, They lay on their



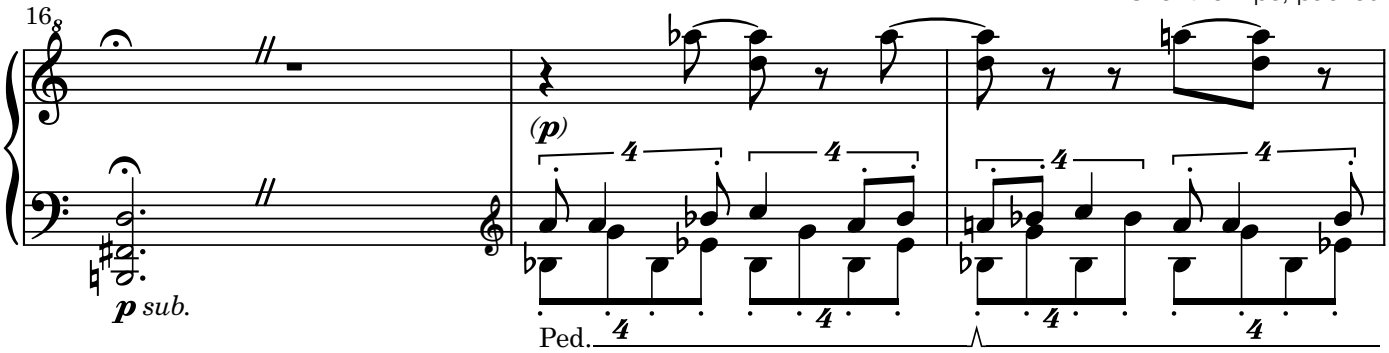
bed of ice: Bivalves: the split bulb and philandering sigh of ocean. Millions of them ripped and shucked and scattered.



We had driven to that coast through flowers and limestone. And there we were, toasting friendship, Laying down a

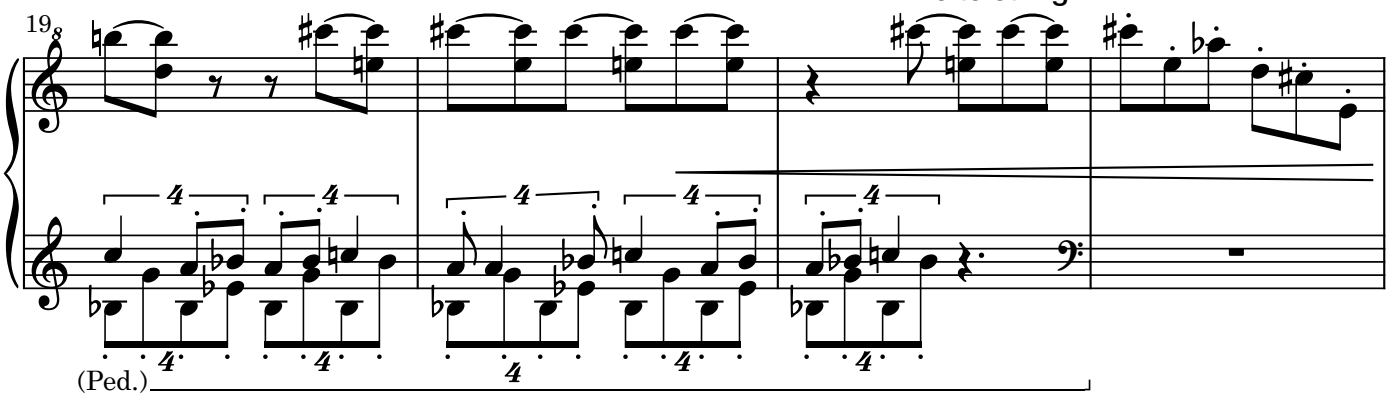


perfect memory in the cool of thatch and crockery. Over the Alps, packed deep



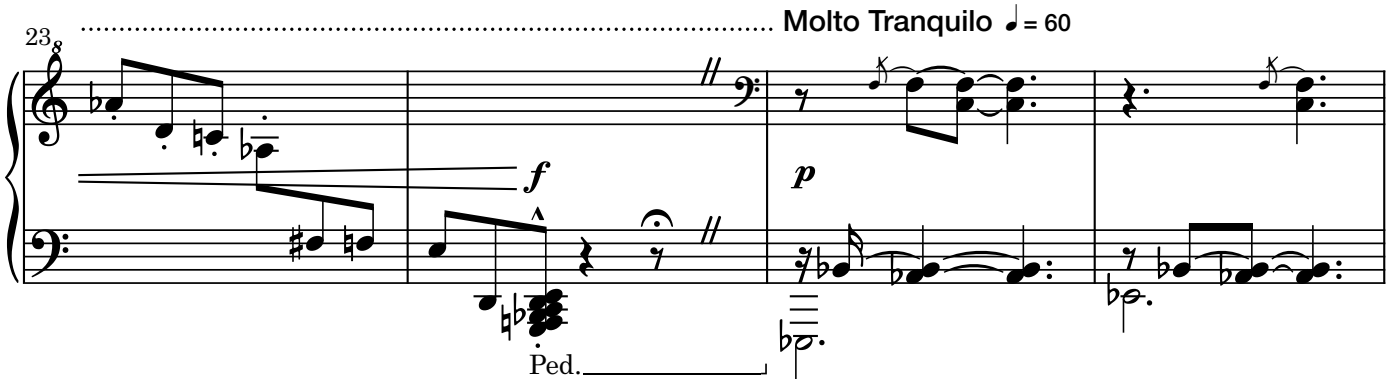
in hay and snow, the Romans hauled their oysters south to Rome: I saw damp panniers disgorge the

molto string.

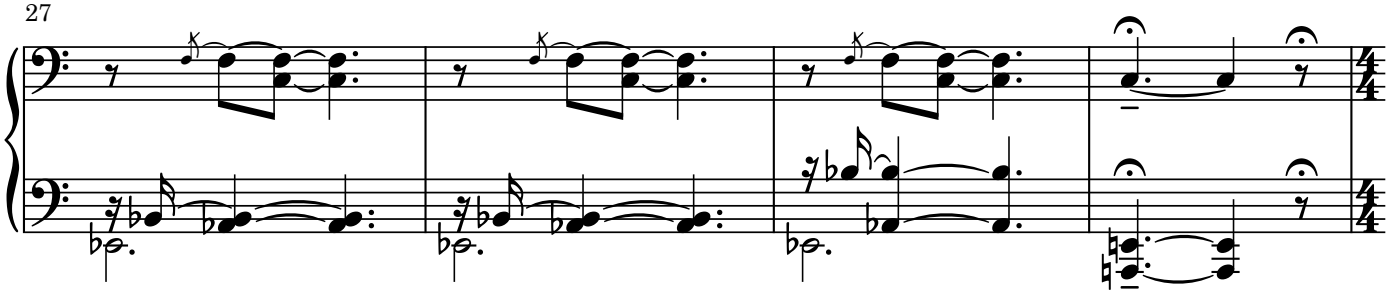


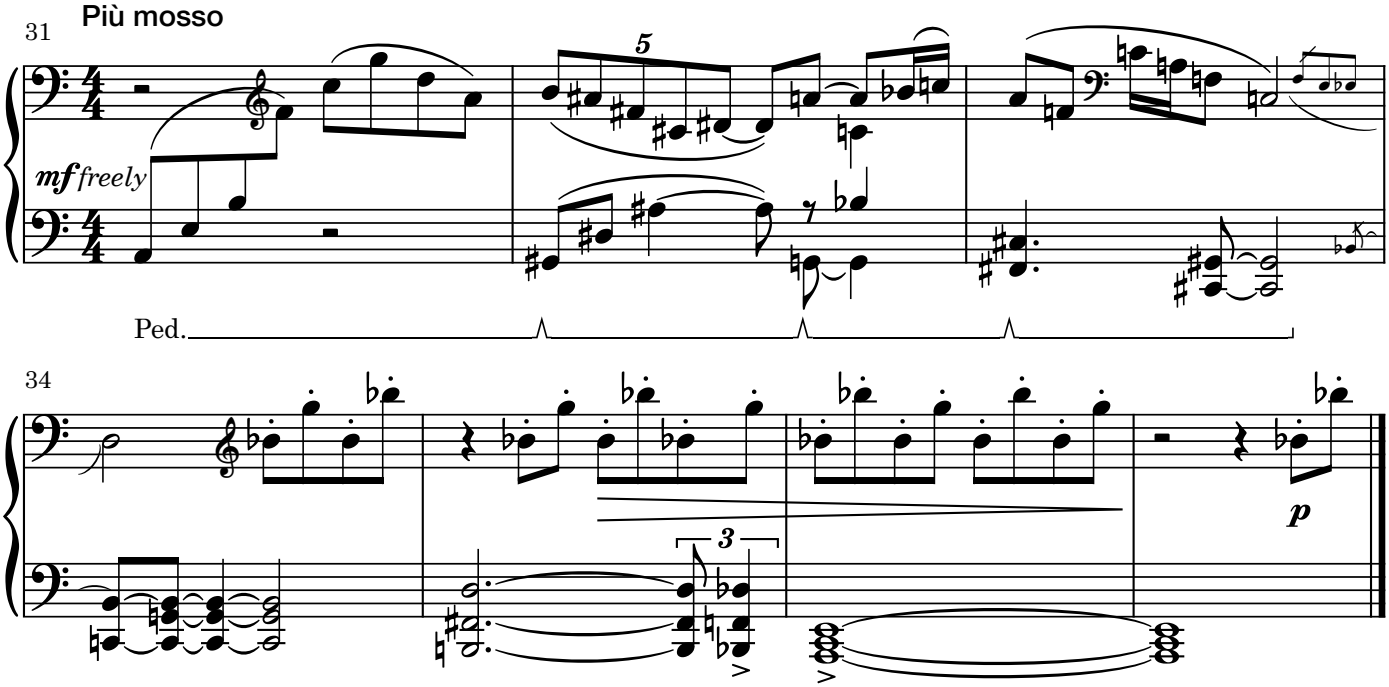
frond-lipped, brine-stung glut of privilege And was angry that my trust could not repose in he clear light,

Molto Tranquilo ♩= 60

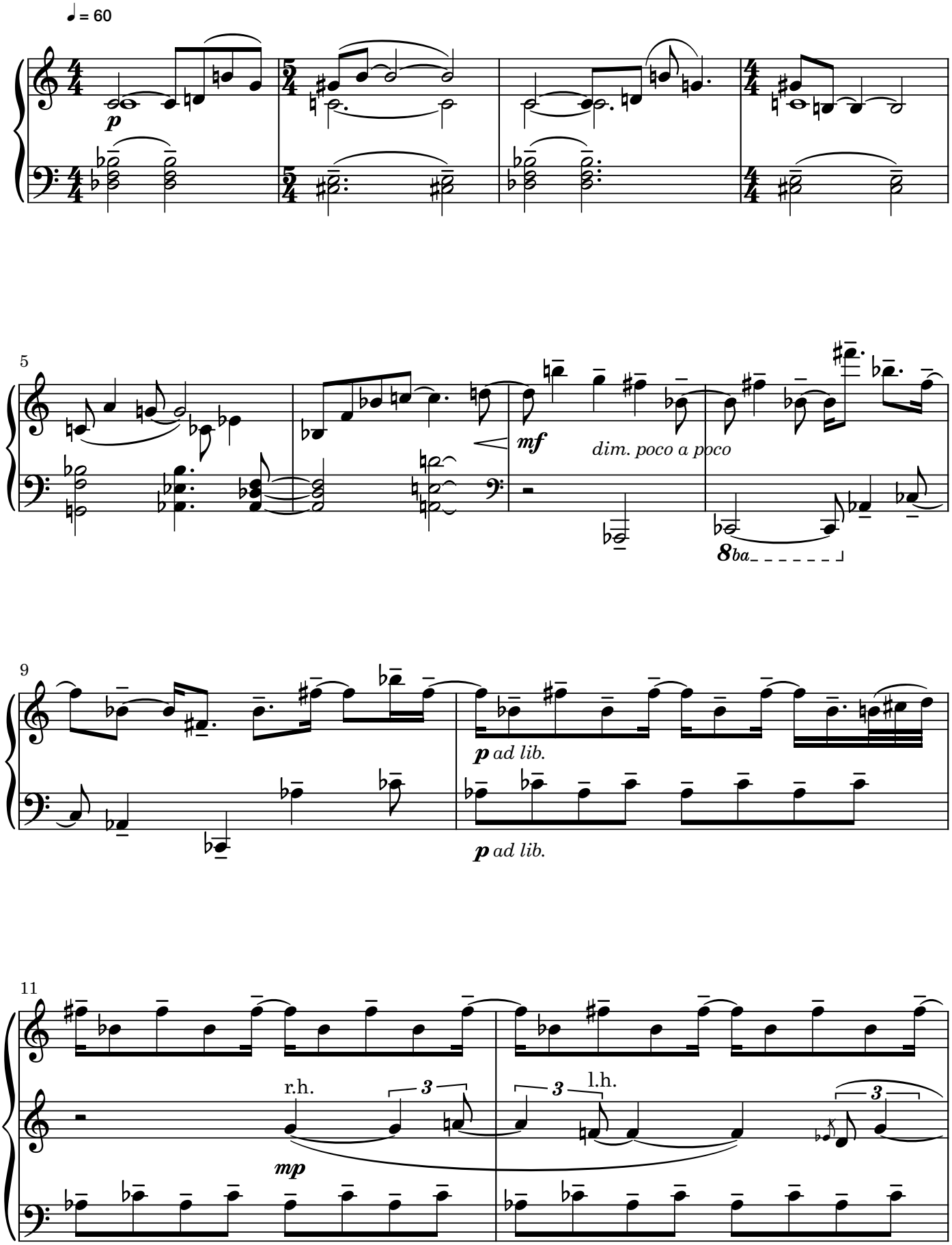


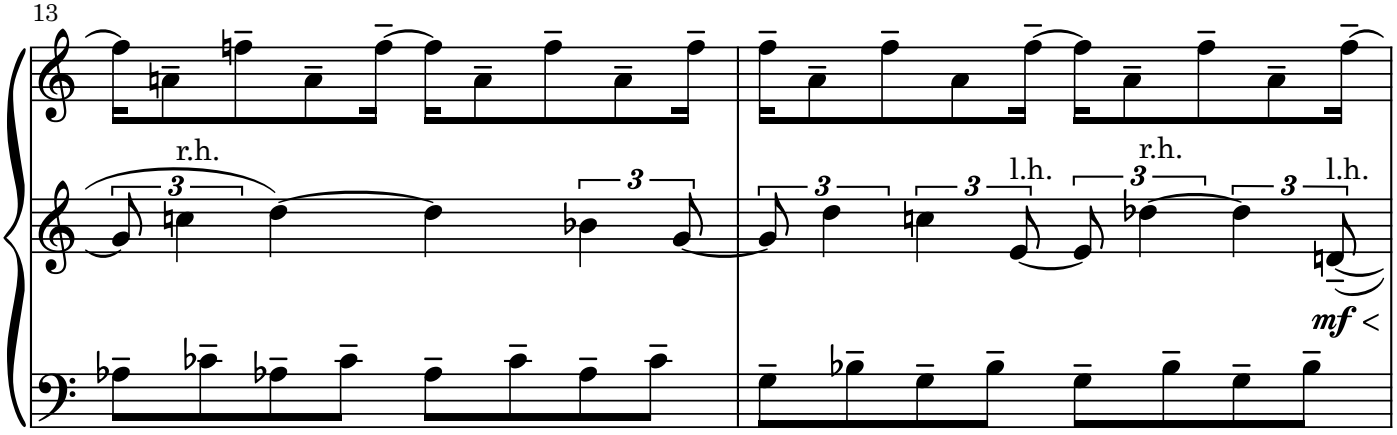
like poetry or freedom Leaning in from sea. I ate the day Deliberately, that its tang might quicken me all into verb, pure verb.

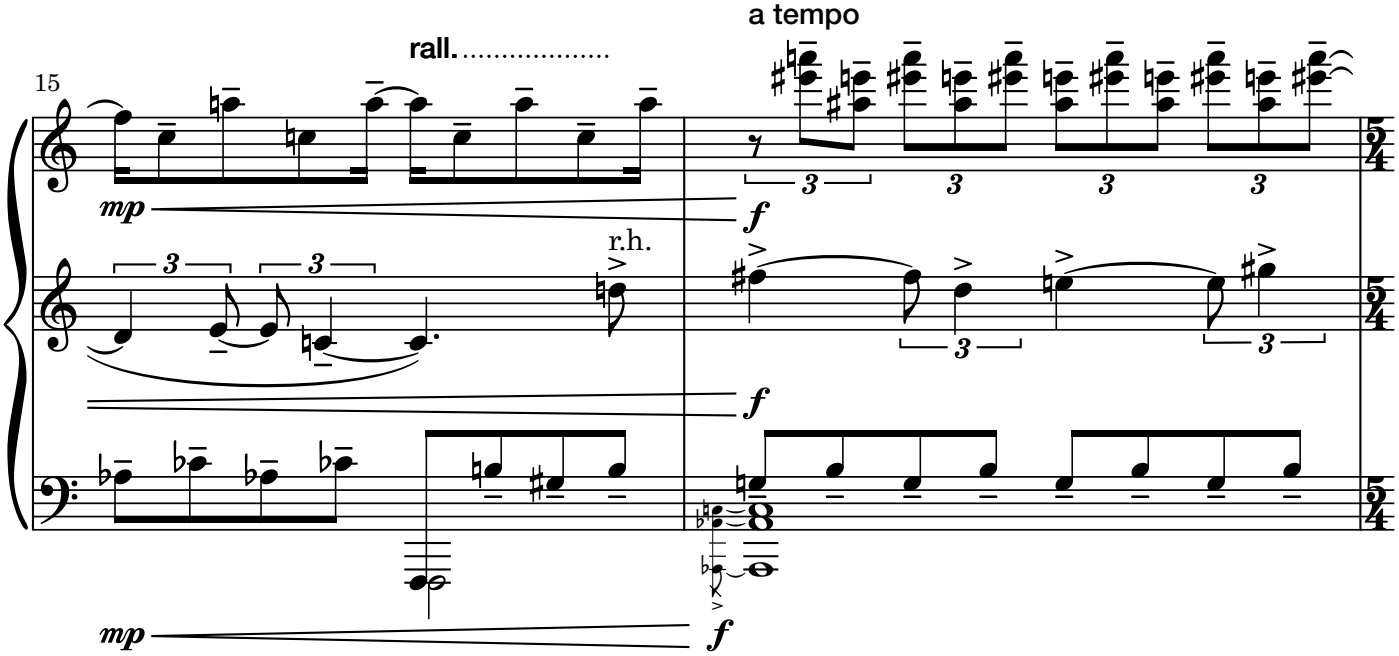


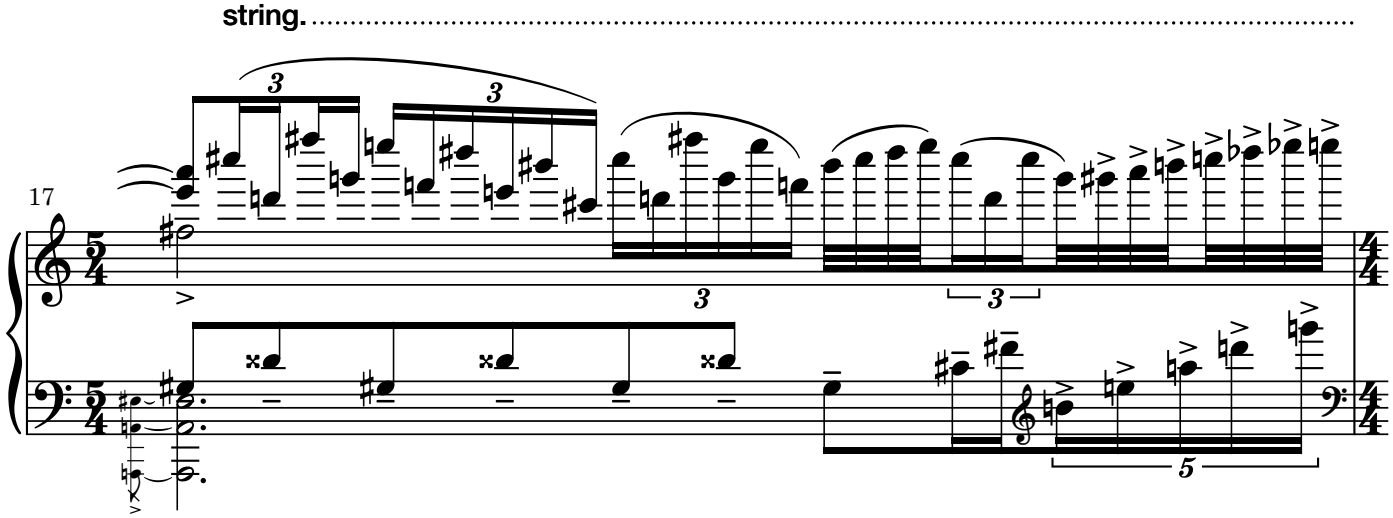

31
Più mosso
mf freely
5
Ped.
34
3
p

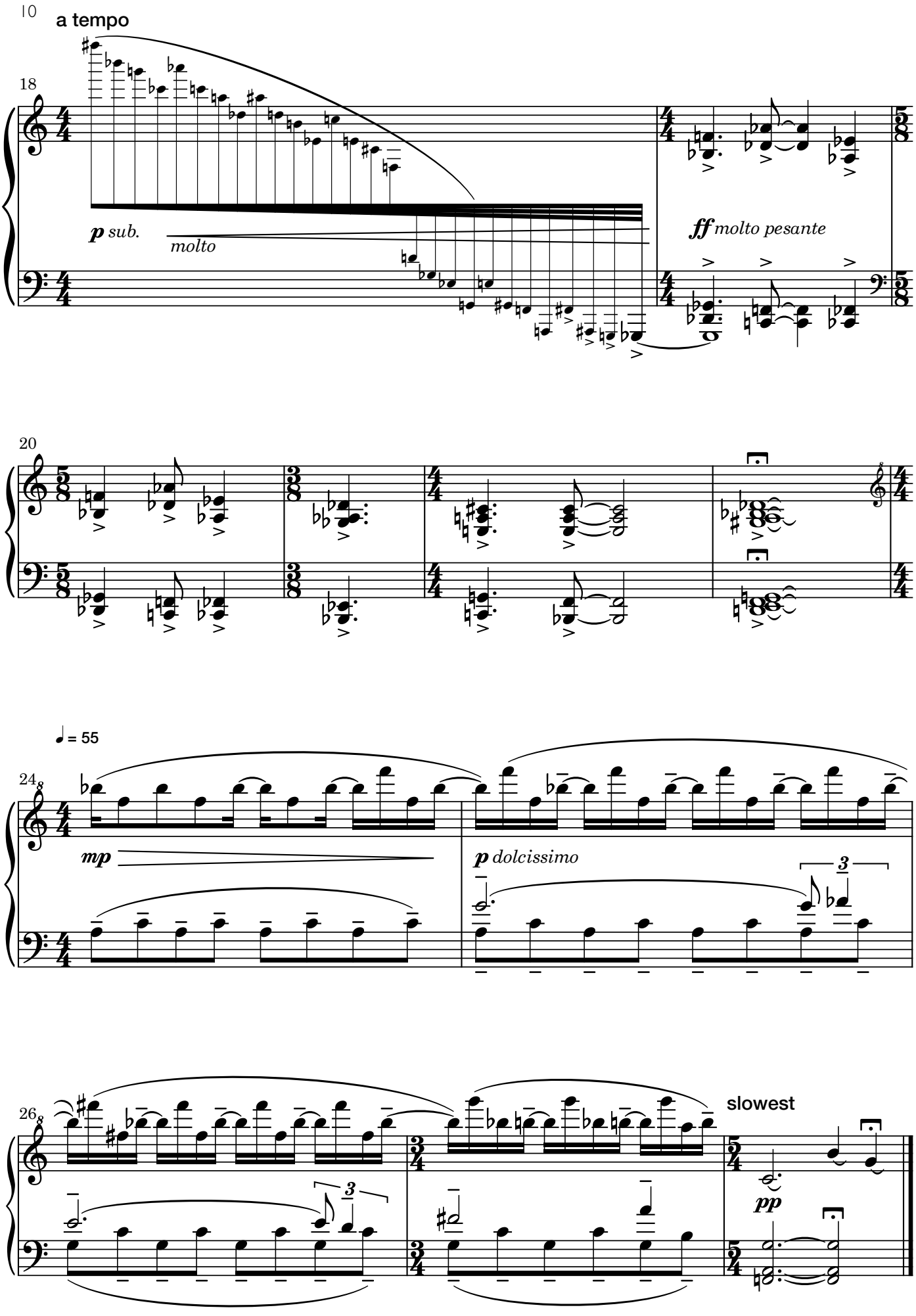
i. b)



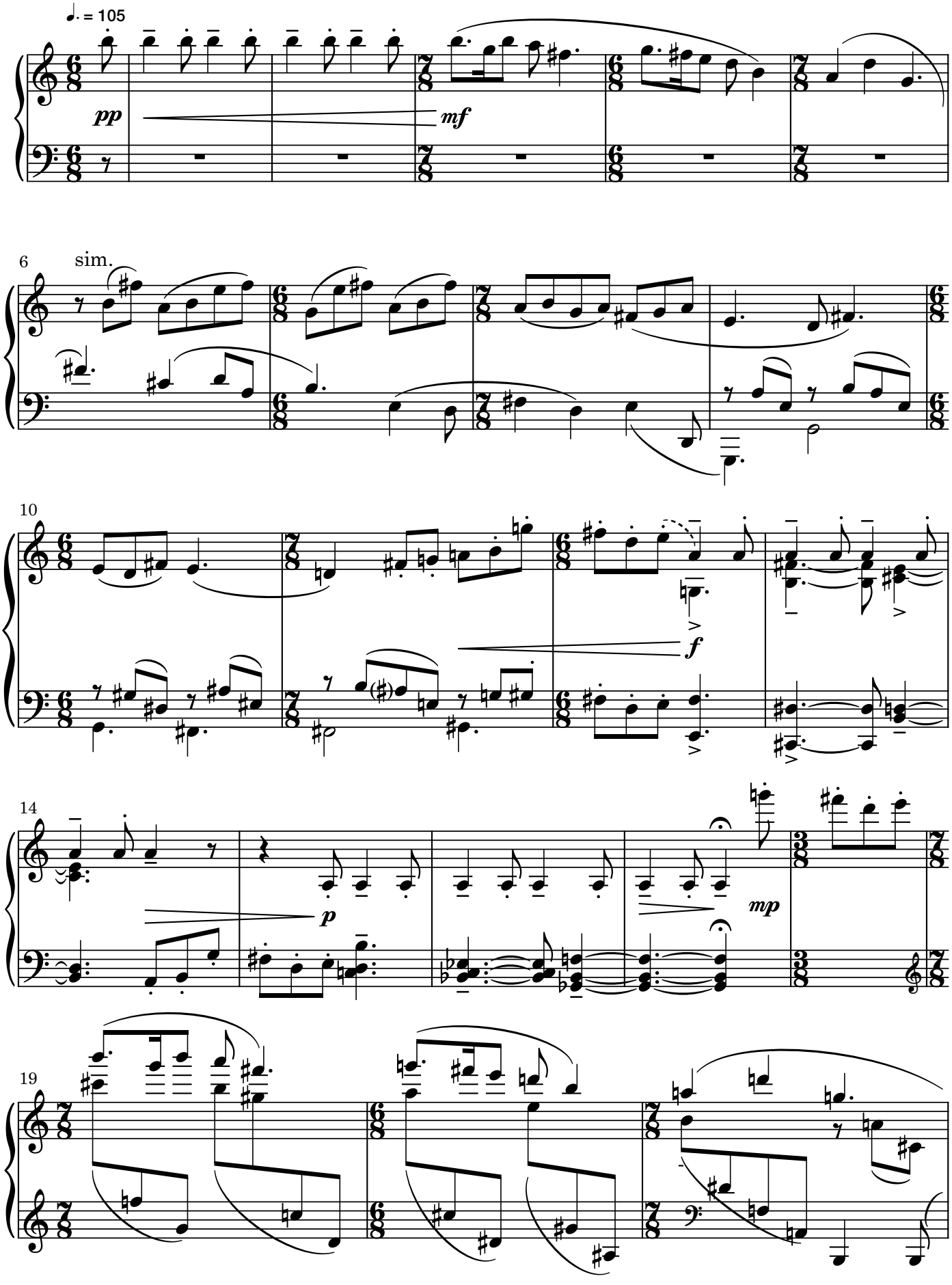

13
r.h.
l.h.
r.h.
l.h.
mf

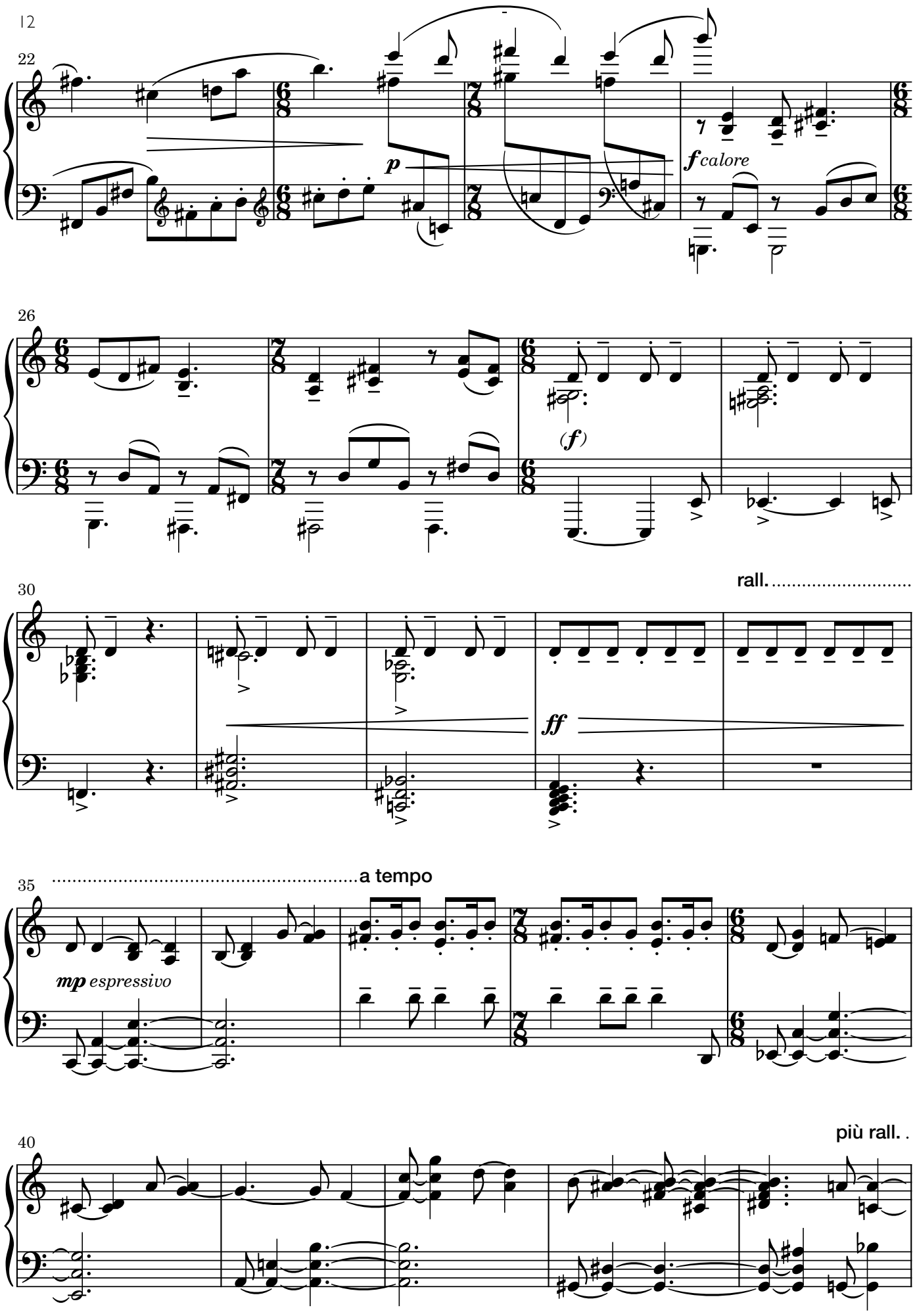

rall.
a tempo
15
mp
f
r.h.
f
mp
f

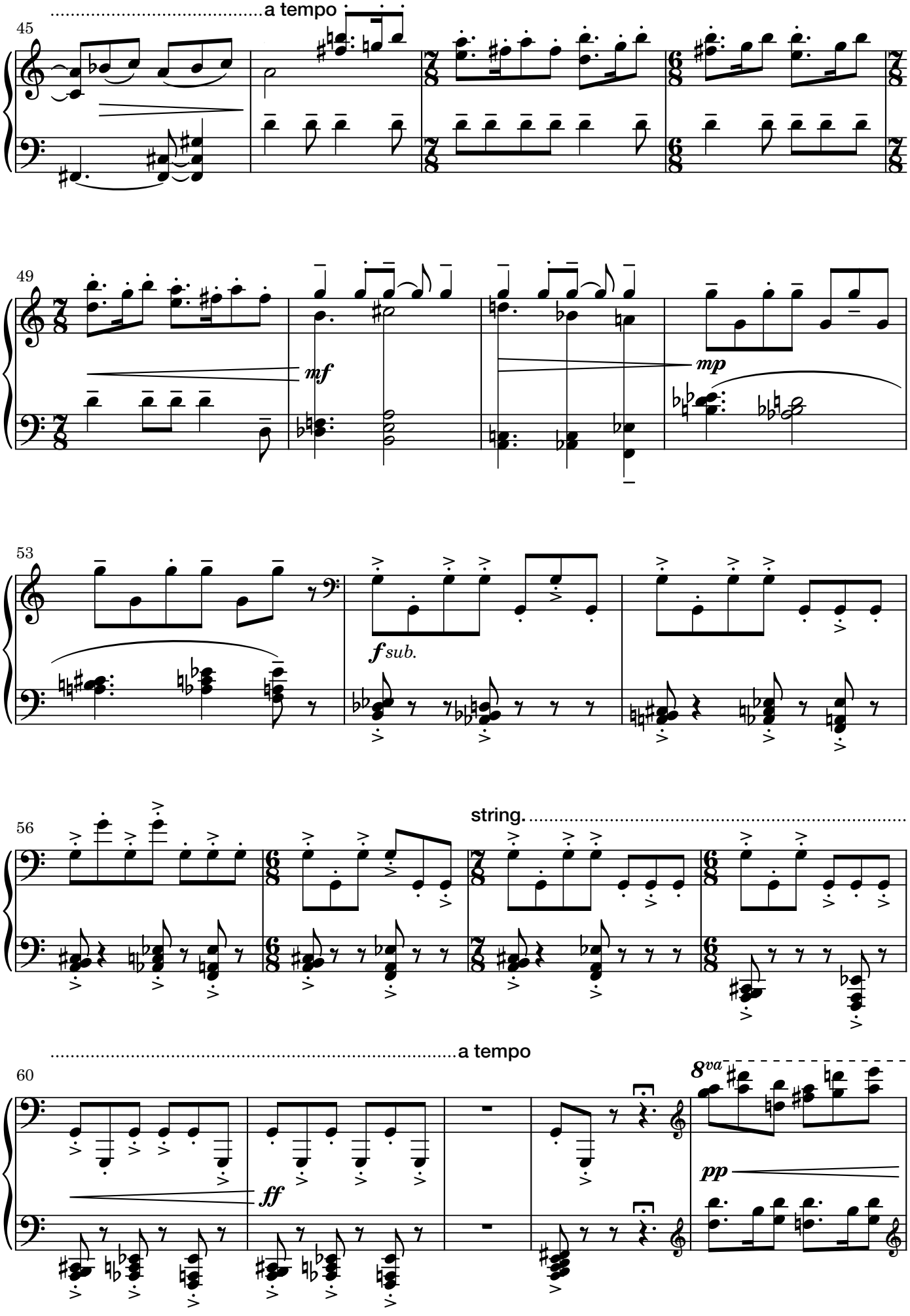

string.
17

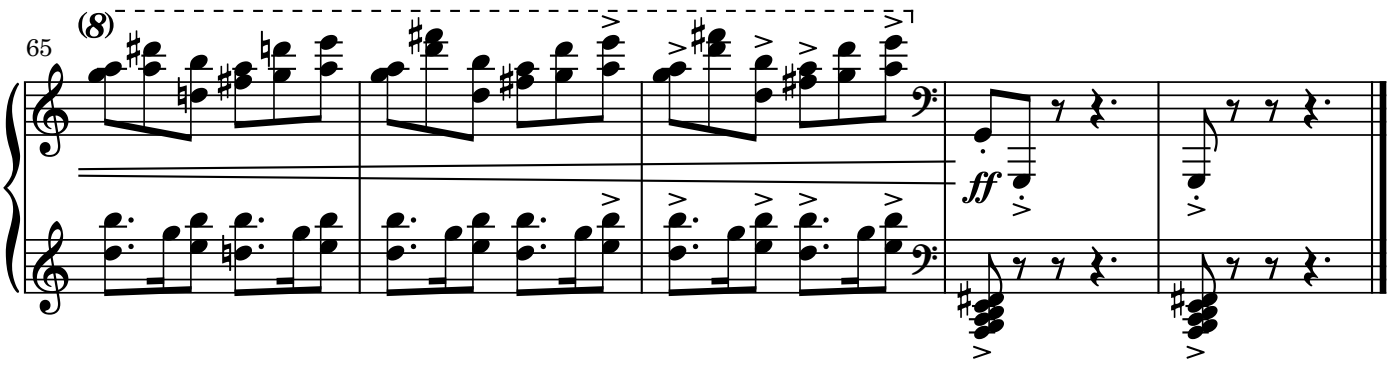

10
a tempo
18
p sub.
molto
ff molto pesante
20
♩ = 55
24
8
mp
p dolcissimo
3
26
8
3
slowest
pp

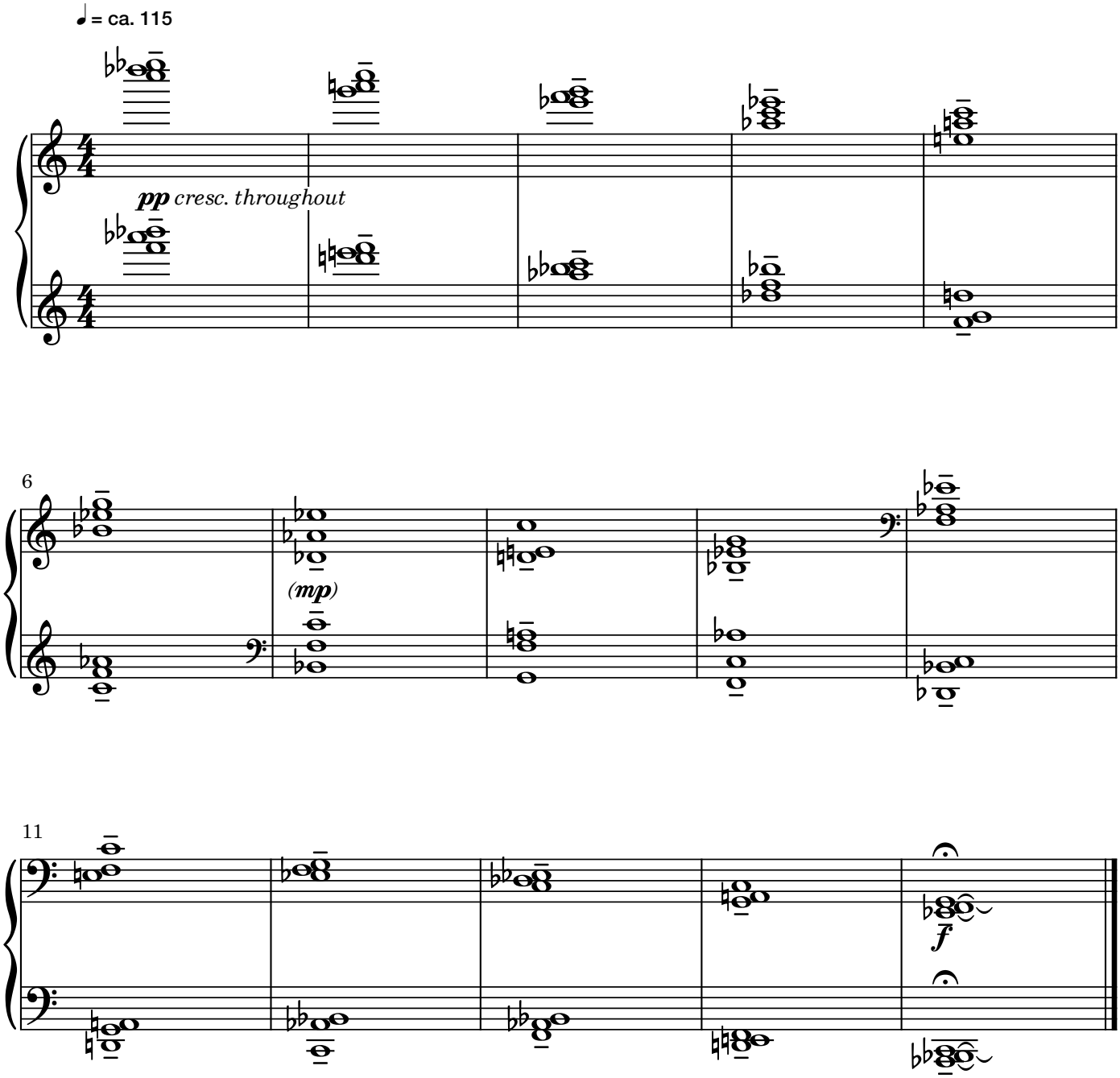
iii. Fosterling




22
p
f calore
26
(f)
30
rall.
ff
35
a tempo
mp espressivo
40
più rall.


a tempo
45
49
mf
mp
53
f sub.
56
string.
a tempo
60
8va
ff
pp


65
(8)
ff

iv. Epilogue

Fourth Floor, Dawn, Up All Night Writing Letters