PETER JAMES LEARN

THREE (G)-LASSITUDES

For Piano Solo

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ARGUMENT

"Thank you, Mr. Glass"

When I began the somewhat jarring transition in my musical world from playing punk-rock and producing electronica to my undergrad conservatory training in the composition of "capital-C" modern classical music, I was often at a loss when my teachers asked me what "system" I had used to devise a piece, why I'd used an octave or fifth rather than a minor ninth or tritone, or to "justify" a note. Melodies, if present, were treated as suspect, regular rhythms eschewed, extended techniques for their own sake were lauded, and god help you if you even suggested a triad or dominant-tonic relationship. Or, if you did, that first violinist better be doing something ridiculous other than playing their instrument to indicate that it was ironic and post-modern.

I was being educated in the historical canon of my profession over the previous hundred years and being taught to emulate it, from Bartok, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Cage, through Stockhausen, Partch, Crumb, Babbitt, Xenakis, and Boulez. And this wasn't necessarily a bad thing; I think that all artists and musicians benefit from a knowledge of the tradition of their craft. I was being exposed to a wide palette of musical techniques and sounds that I still find useful at various times - it's just that it was strongly implied that these were "better" techniques and sounds than those of earlier or other music, perhaps because of the artistic misconception that novelty is synonymous with progress towards a more "advanced" form of musical expression. But the bottom line was that I was being encouraged to compose music that I could appreciate on an intellectual level, but left me unmoved and, ultimately, artistically unfulfilled. Given the choice, I would not have willingly listened to many of the early concert works I produced, even if they were technically proficient.

Philip Glass was one of the first modern "classical" composers that I discovered whose music elicited an actual emotional response in me. He was my first introduction to "new tonal" music (no one except the music critics liked to use the term minimalism - not the genre's composers or their detractors). His works led me quickly to Reich, Adams, Riley, Gorecki, Part, Vasks, Oliveros, and many other composers whose names had been assigned to lesser plinths in the pantheon of "modern" music by many of my teachers and peers. I voraciously consumed the genre over a Winter recess and afterwards I remember showing my teacher new sketches for one of the earliest piano works I still admit to (albeit with a few muted notes, string harmonics, and chance elements to appease the gods). He chuckled and said, "Oh, I see you've discovered Philip Glass."

If classical music in the first half of the 20th century belongs to Bartok, Stravinsky, the Second Viennese School and Cage, the last fifty years are begotten of Glass, Reich, and Adams. Whether you call it minimalism, neo-tonality, pattern-pulse music, post-minimalism, or, in Glass's words, "music with repetitive structures," no other style of concert music has had such a profound influence on my own compositional voice and musical taste. Whether it recalls for me the rock music I played or the electronica I produced before my formal training as a composer, reclaims the harmonic-emotional associations of the music of the past, or is merely more transparently comprehensible, making it a better vehicle for delivering poetic meaning, this music speaks to me on a far more visceral and emotional level than that of many other "canonized" 20th-century masters.

I'm a percussionist by training and didn't start studying piano until my twenties, but the first piece I ever learned that wasn't assigned by a teacher was "Metamorphosis." To this day, if I sit down idly at a piano with no particular piece in mind, one of Glass's works often finds its way into my fingers. His music always calms and centers my spirit. And I will forever be grateful to him and his fellow musical travelers for laying the aesthetic groundwork that lends "legitimacy" (and perhaps even "permission") to composers of my and future generations to create works that speak not only the mind, but to the soul. So, you know, thanks Phil. That's all.

IN TEMPORE PESTUM ET SOLITUDINAS
— Peter James Learn

I. CALM/COLLECTED
II. FREE/CLEAR
III. THE MORE THINGS/THE SAME

"If you don't know what to do, there's actually a chance of doing something new.
As long as you know what you're doing, nothing much of interest is going to happen."
— Philip Glass

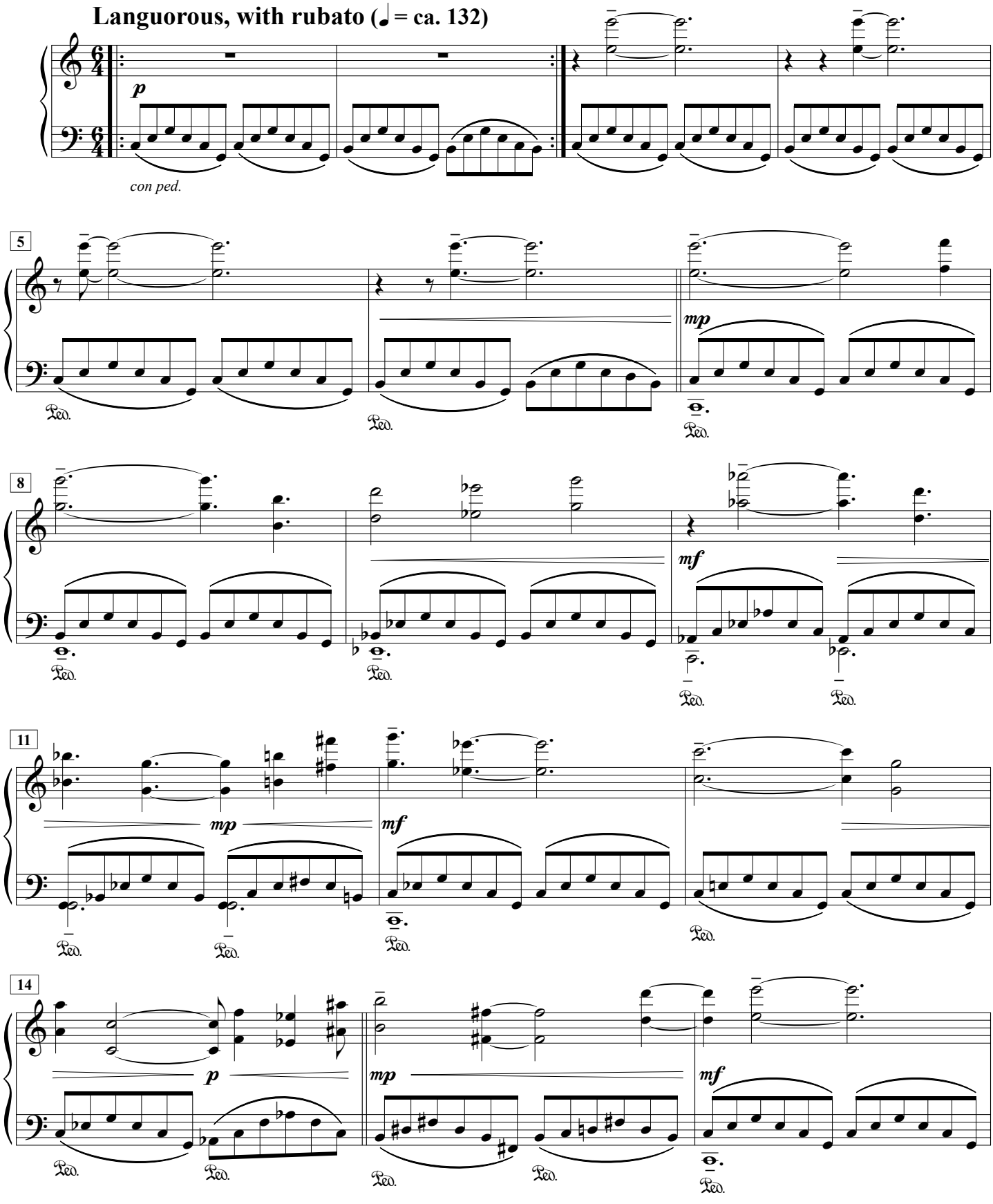
For Philip Glass

THREE (G)-LASSITUDES

PETER JAMES LEARN (b.1982)
BMI

I. CALM/COLLECTED

Languorous, with rubato (♩ = ca. 132)



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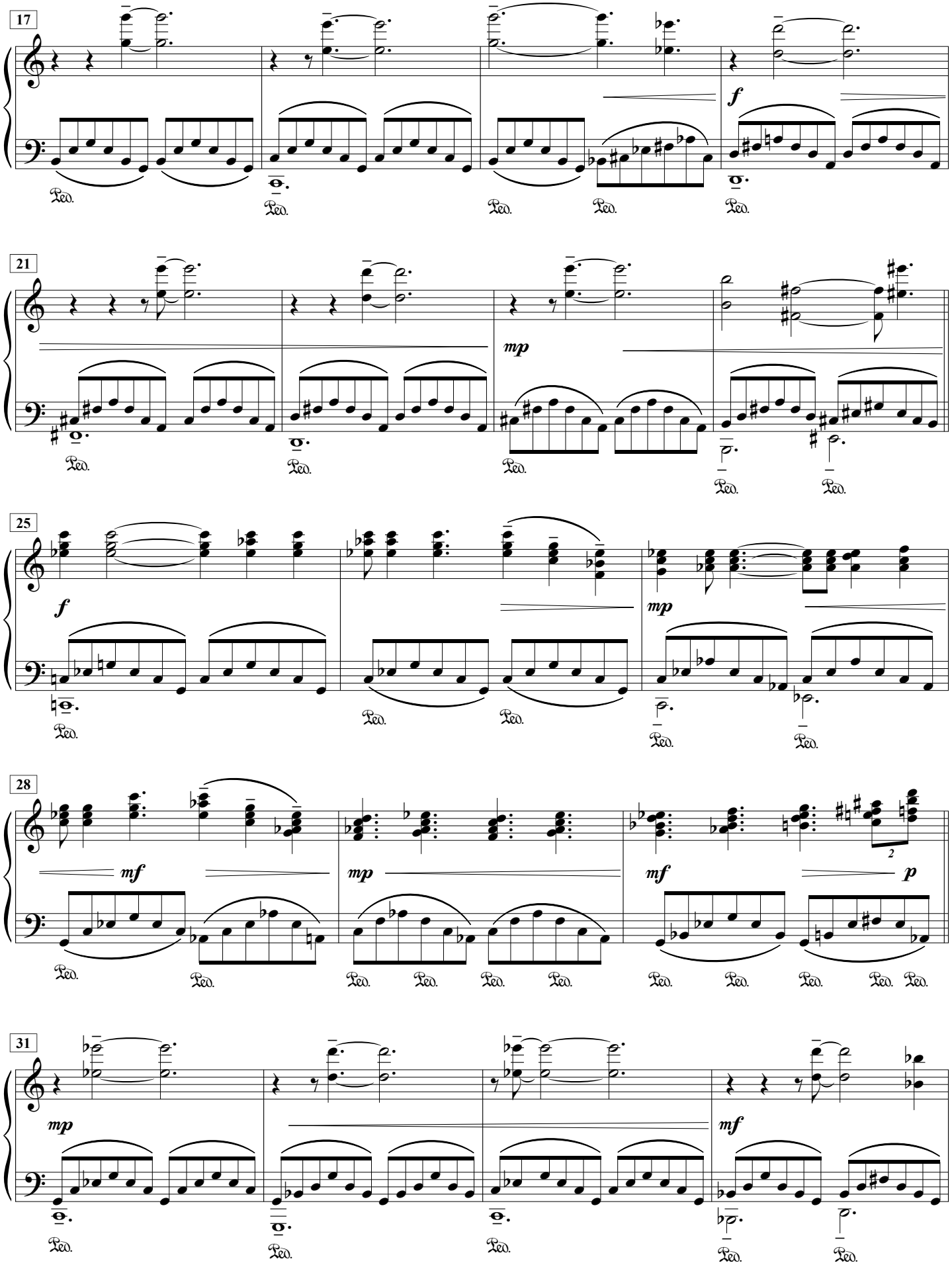
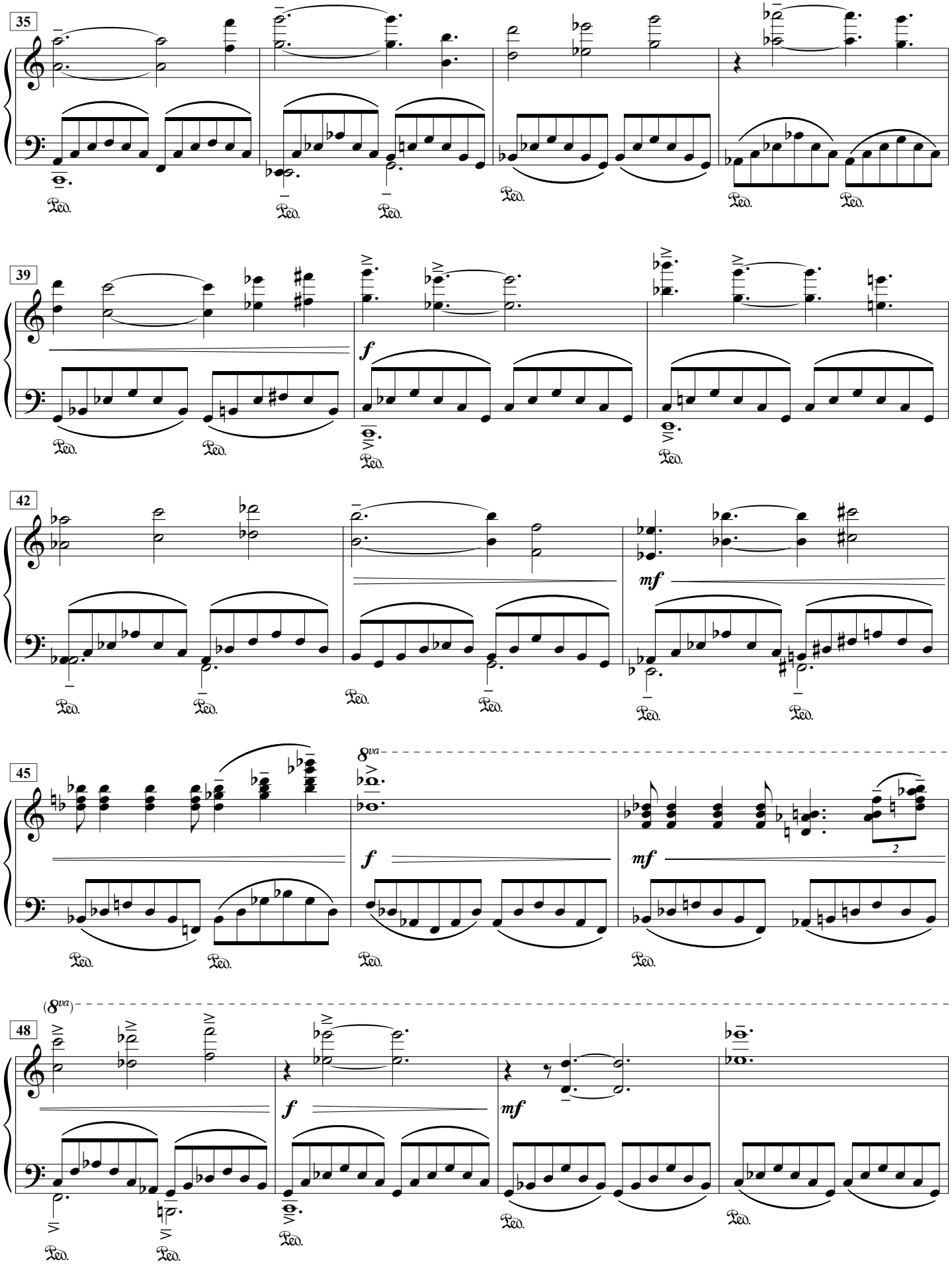
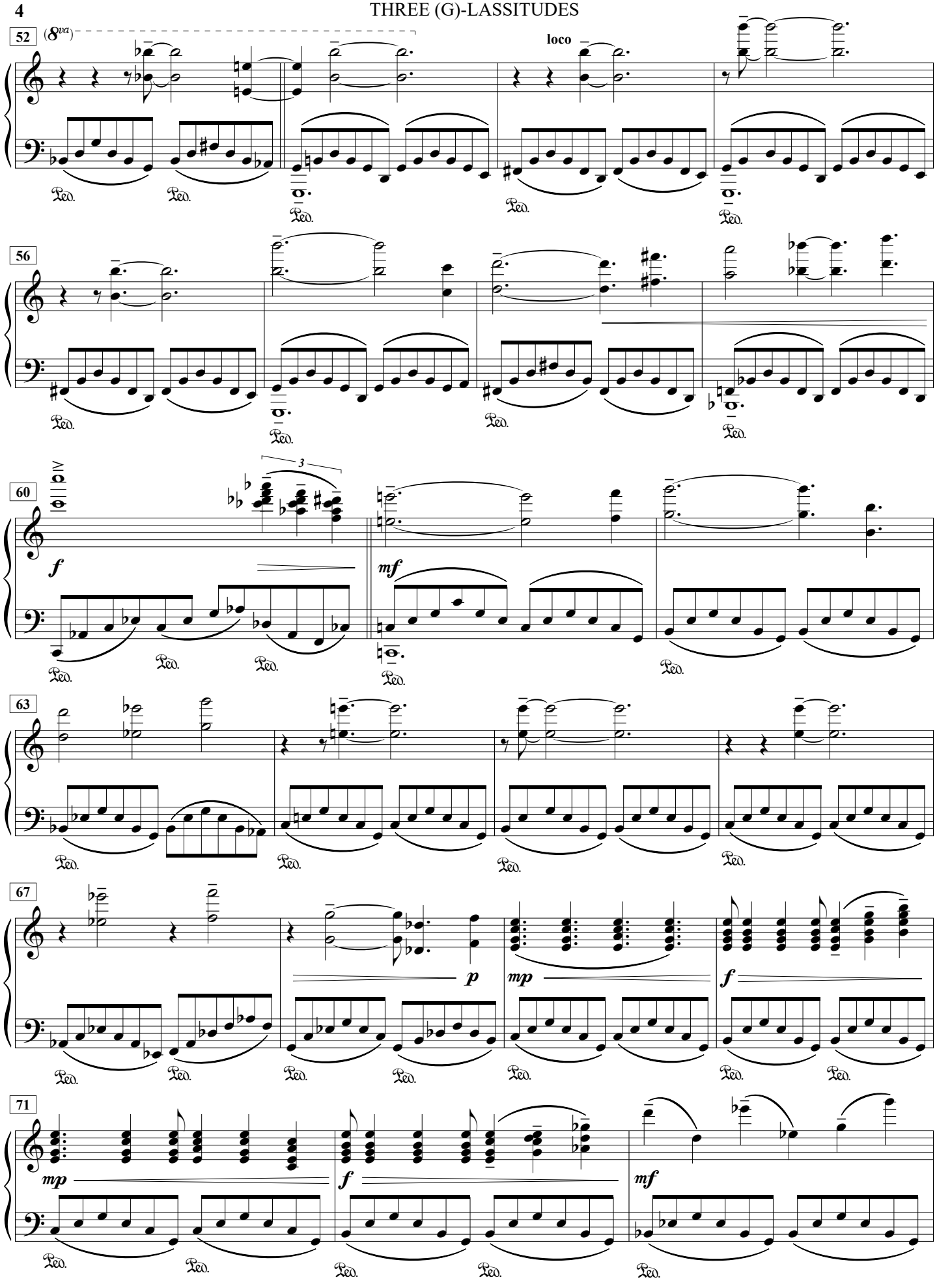
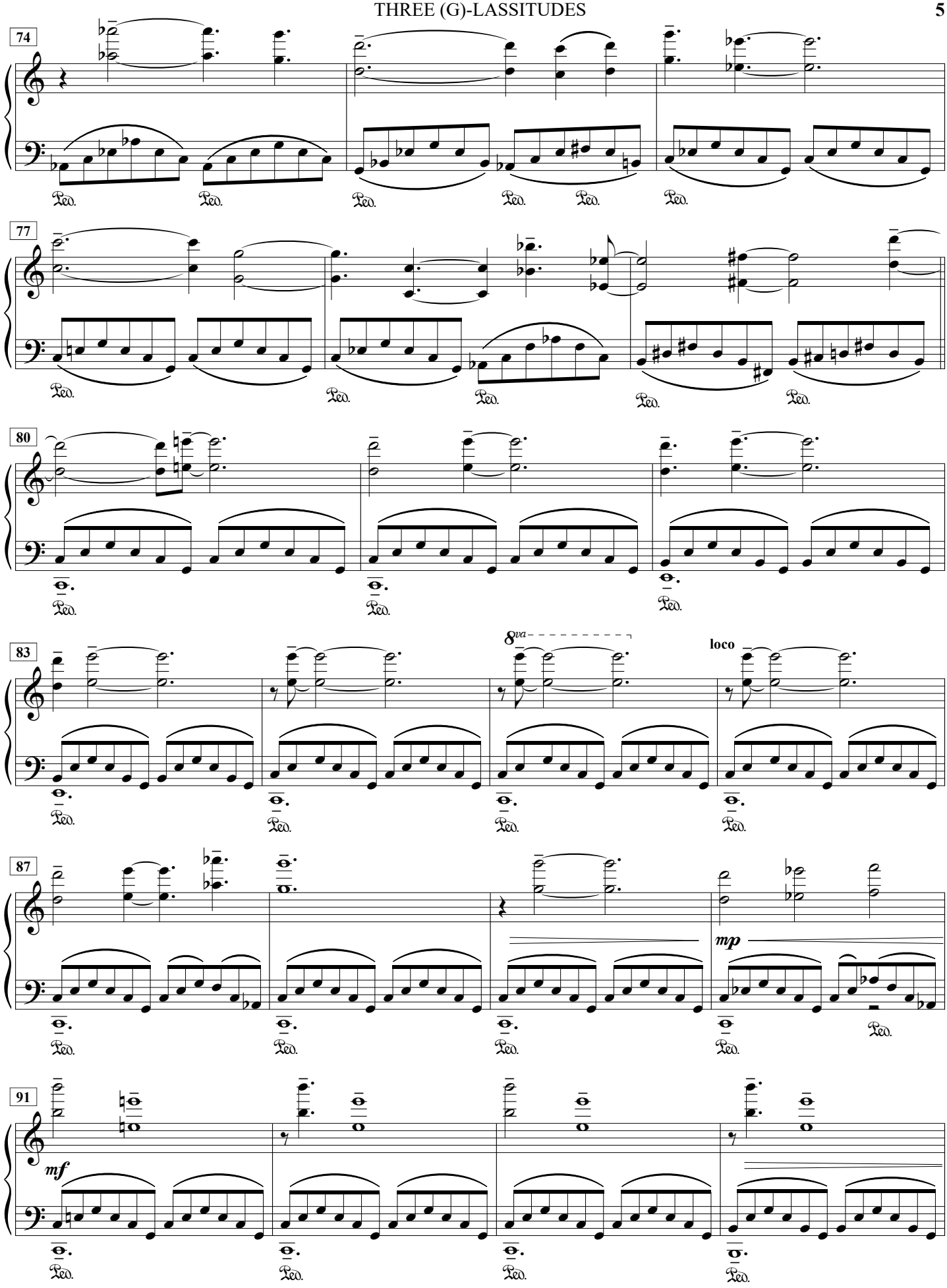
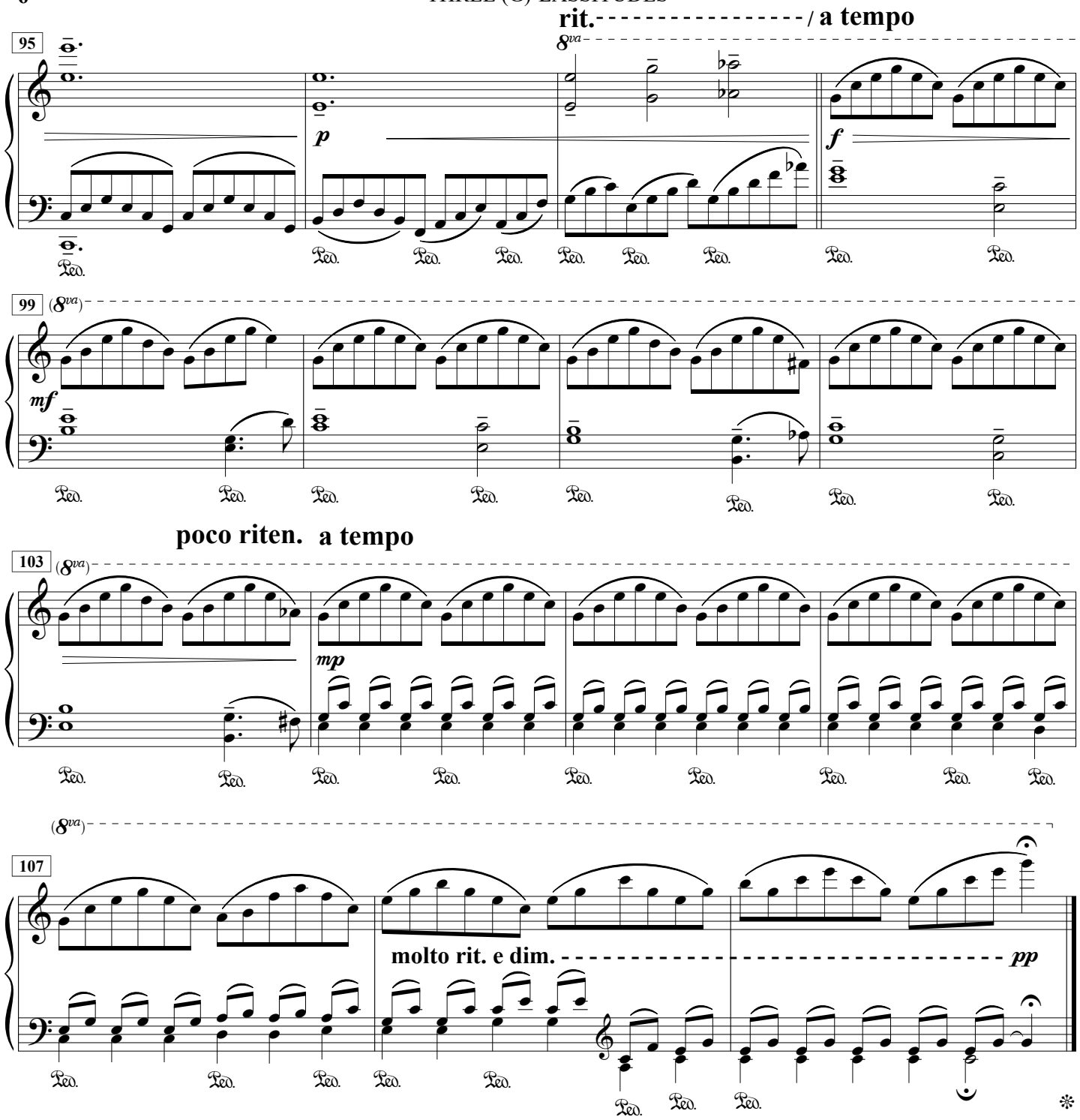

17
f
21
mp
25
f
mp
28
mf
mp
mf
p
31
mp
mf


35
39
f
42
mf
45
8va
f
mf
2
(8va)
48
f
mf


52
(8va)
loco
56
60
f
mf
3
63
67
p
mp
f
71
mp
f
mf
Ped.


74
77
80
83
8va
loco
87
mp
91
mf
Ped.


rit.
a tempo
95
8va
p
f
99
(8va)
mf
poco riten.
a tempo
103
(8va)
mp
(8va)
107
molto rit. e dim.
pp
Ped.

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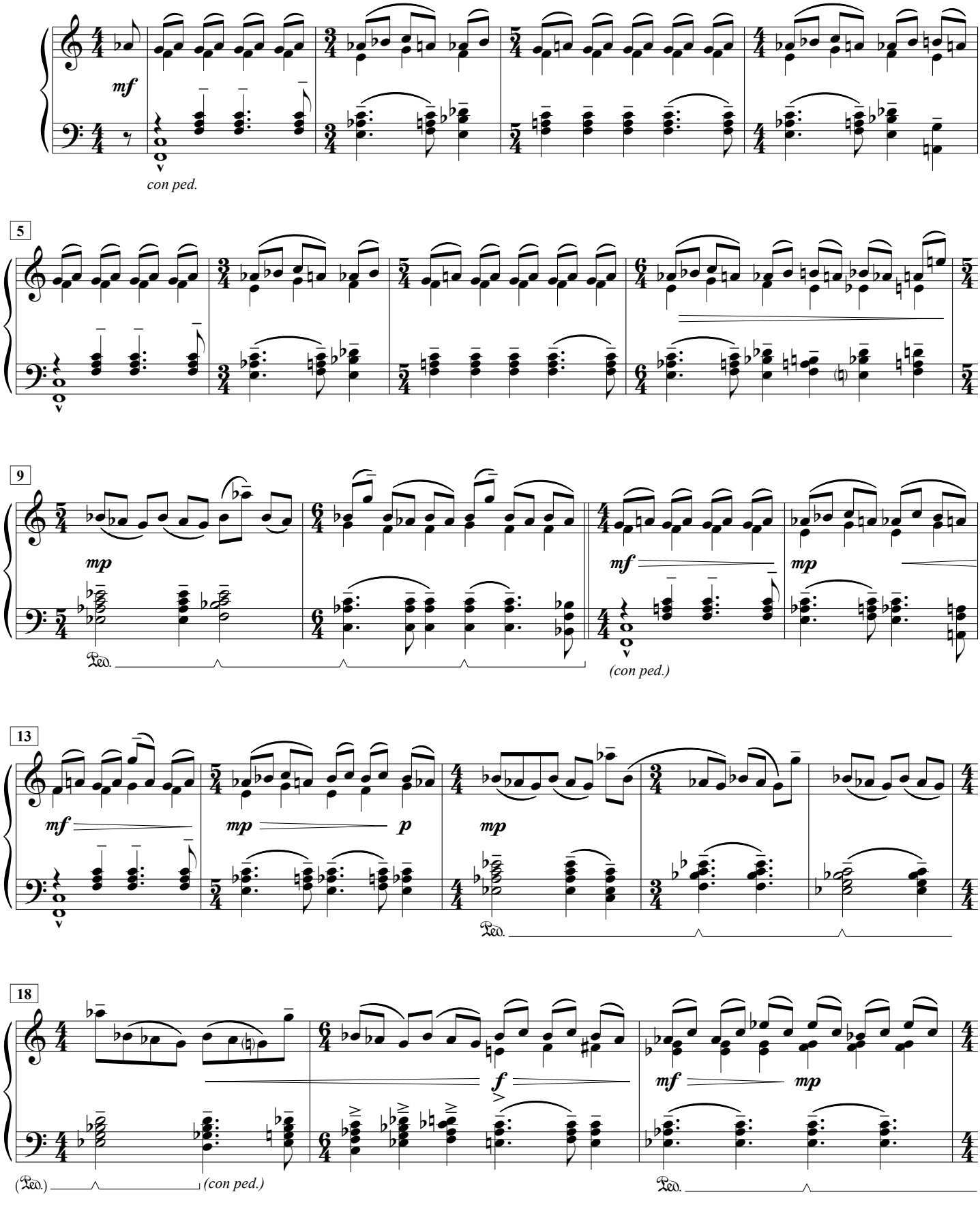
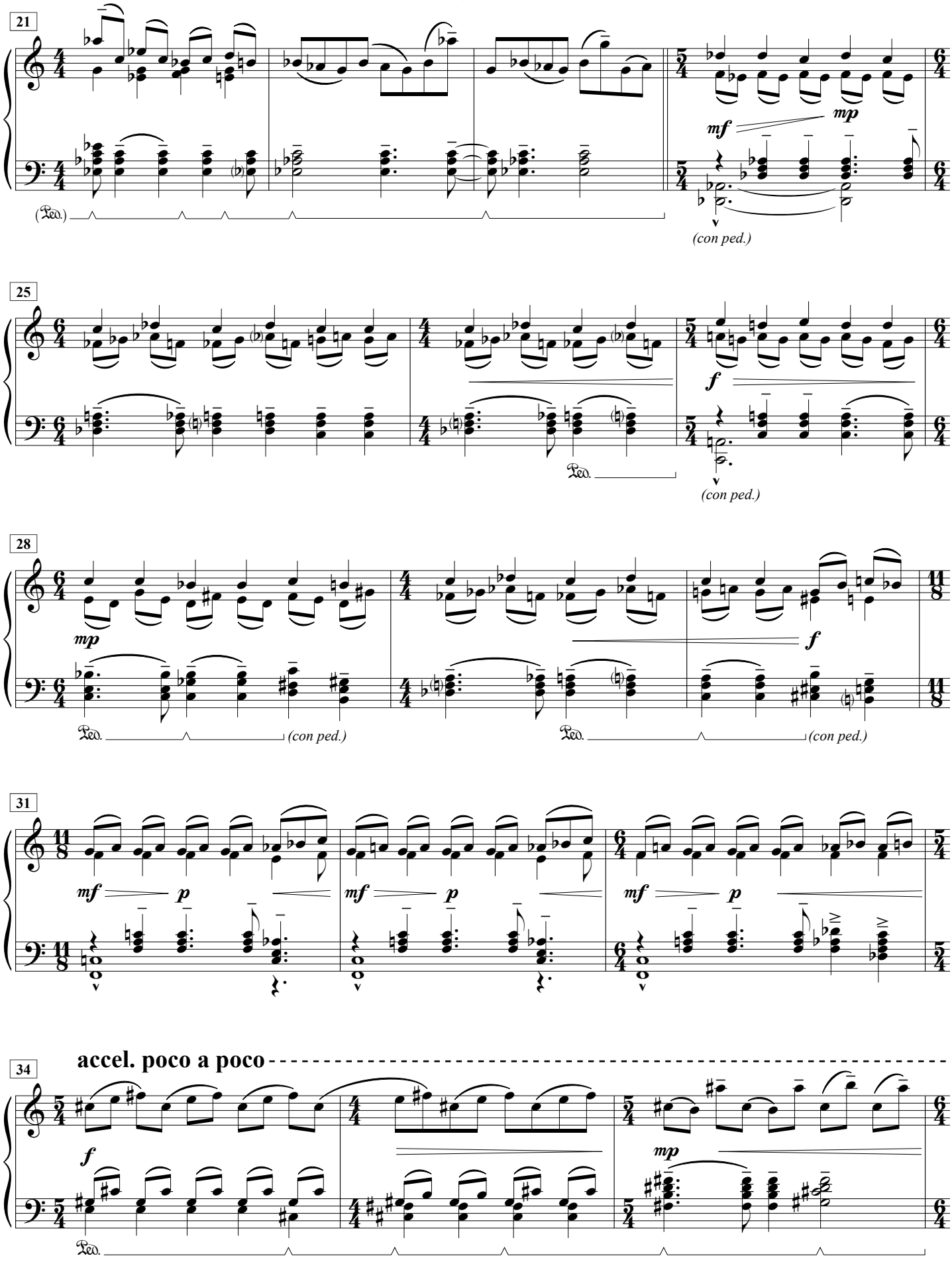
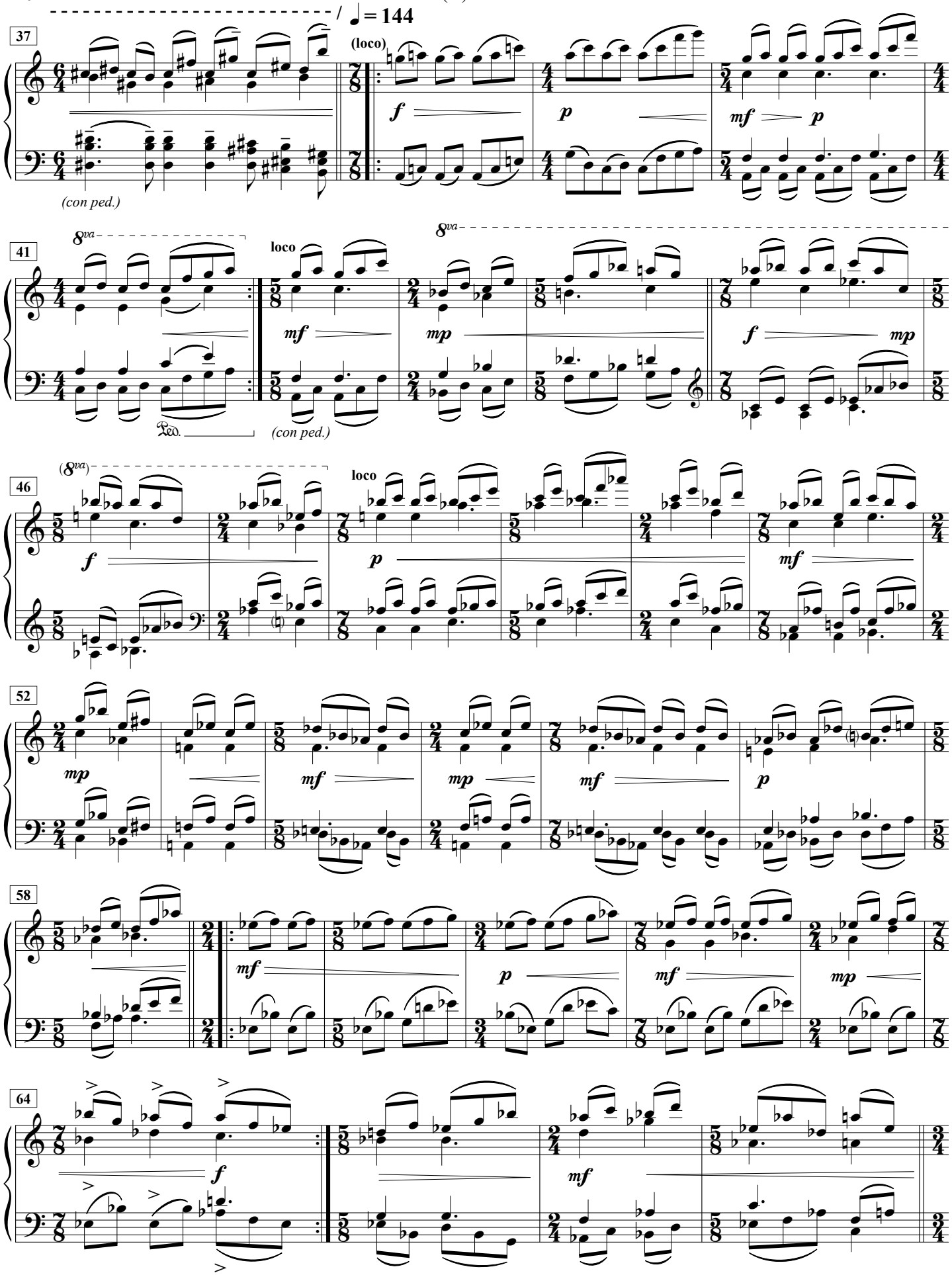
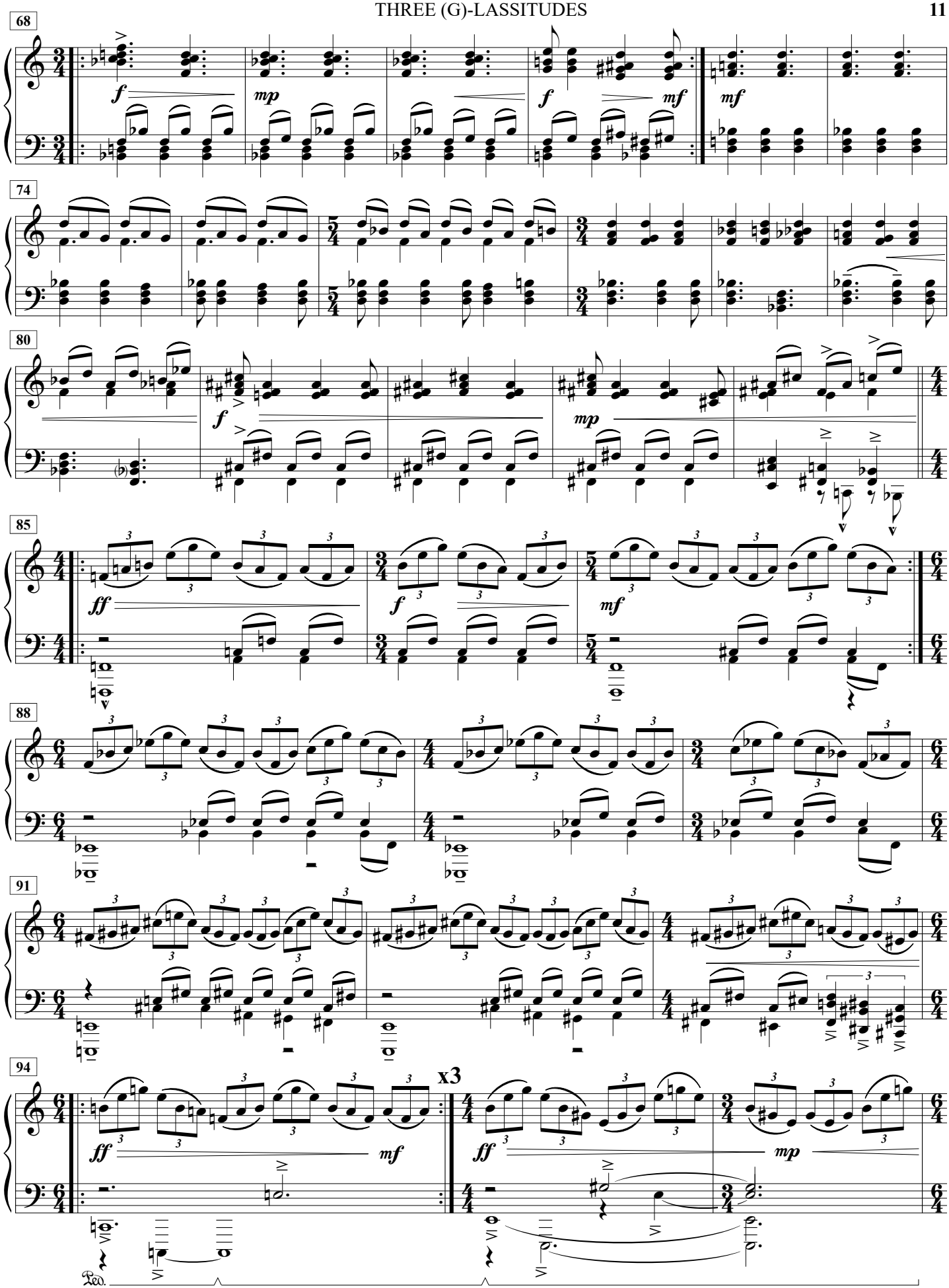
II. FREE/CLEAR

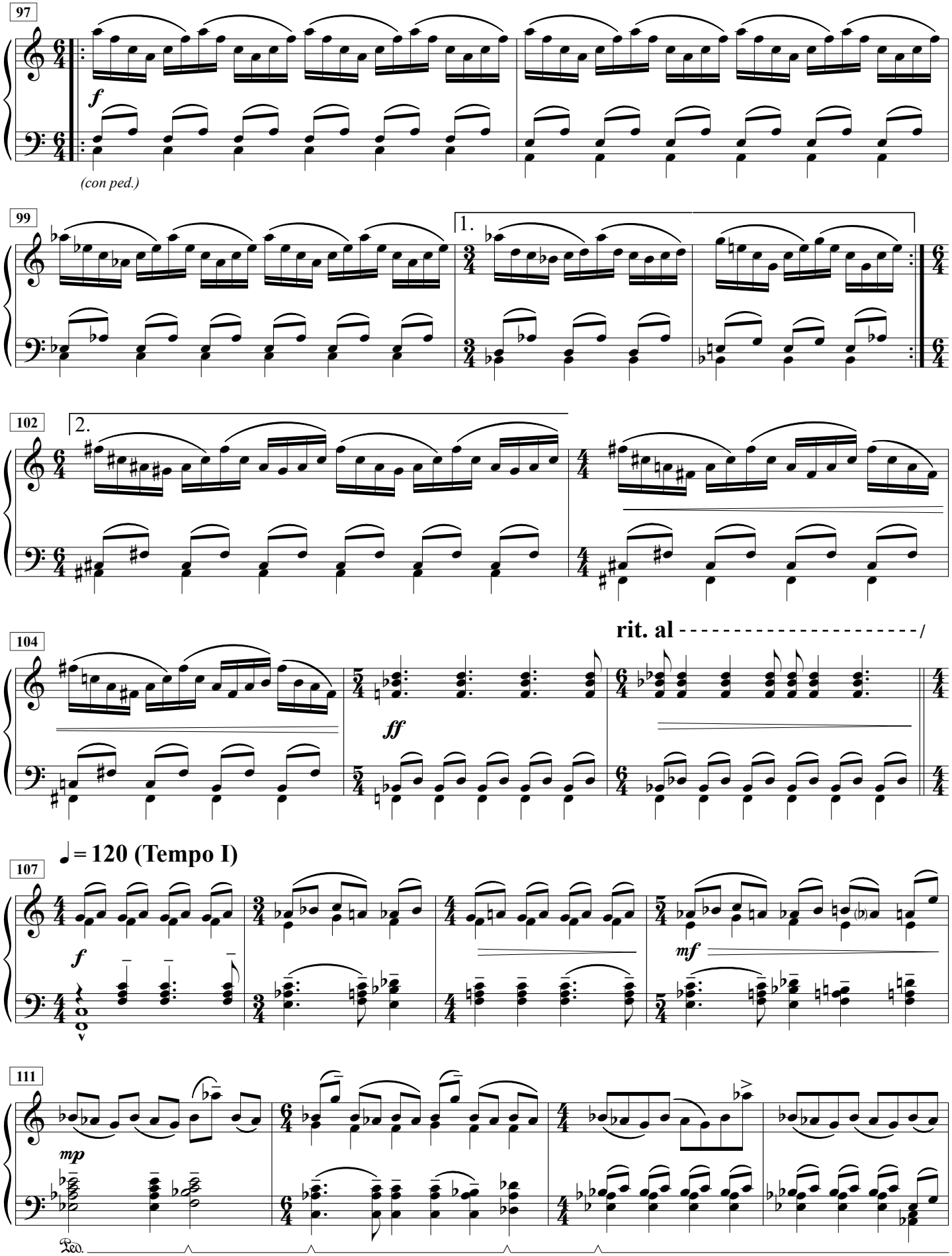
Steady, pulsing (♩ = 120)

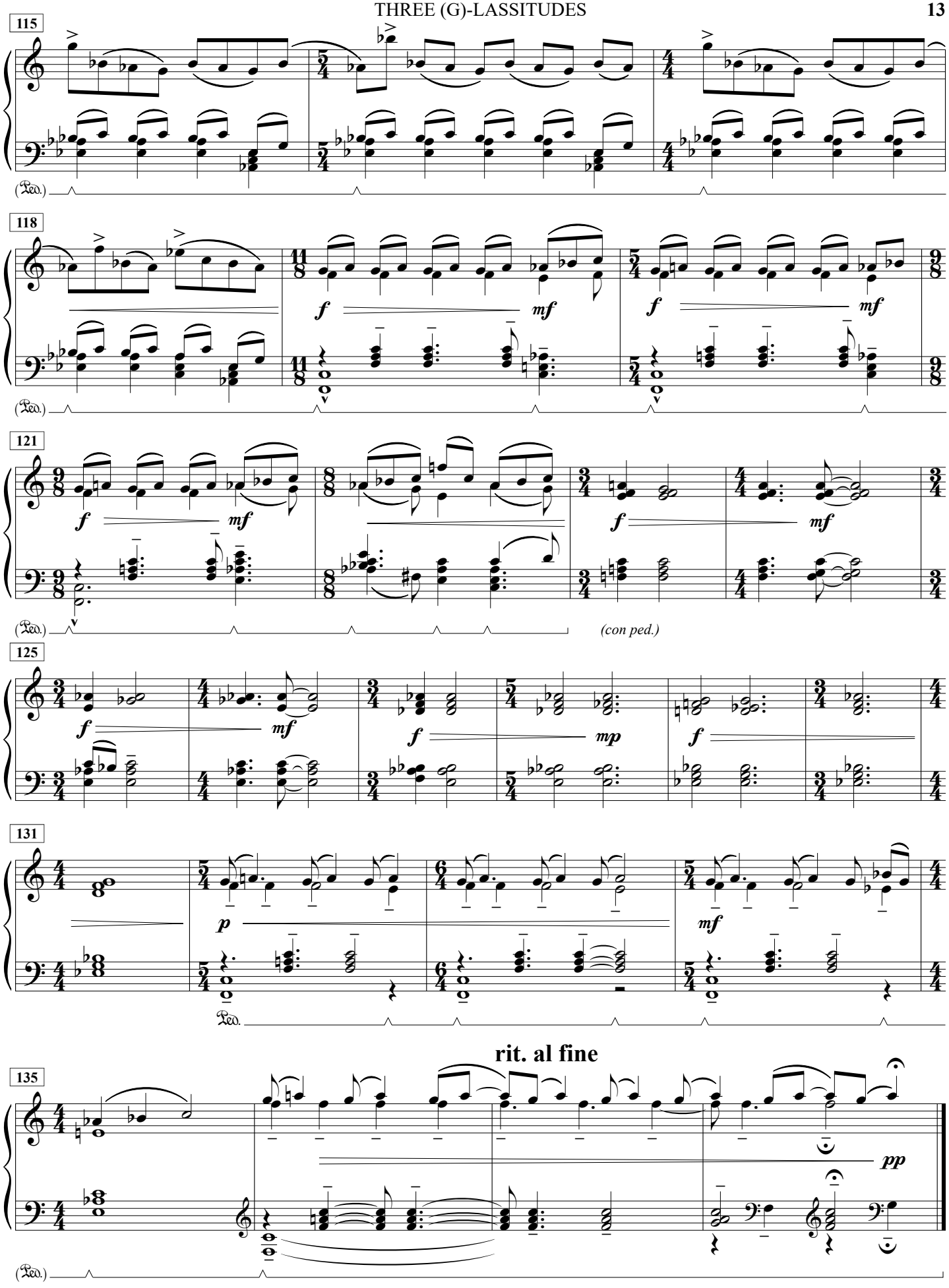



21
mf
mp
(con ped.)
25
f
(con ped.)
28
mp
f
(con ped.)
(con ped.)
31
mf
p
mf
p
mf
p
34
accel. poco a poco
f
mp

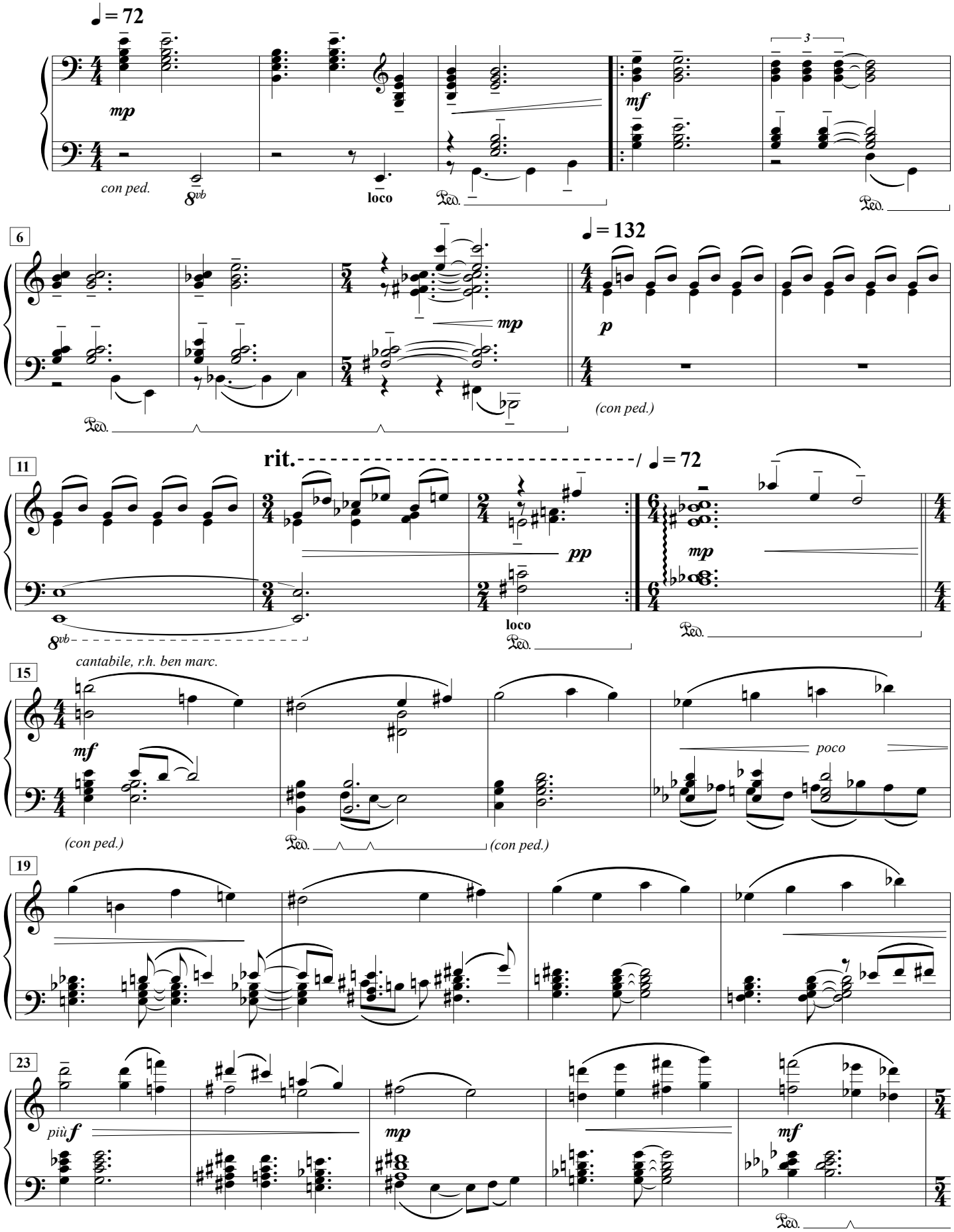

♩ = 144
37
(loco)
(con ped.)
41
8va
loco
(con ped.)
46
(8va)
loco
52
58
64

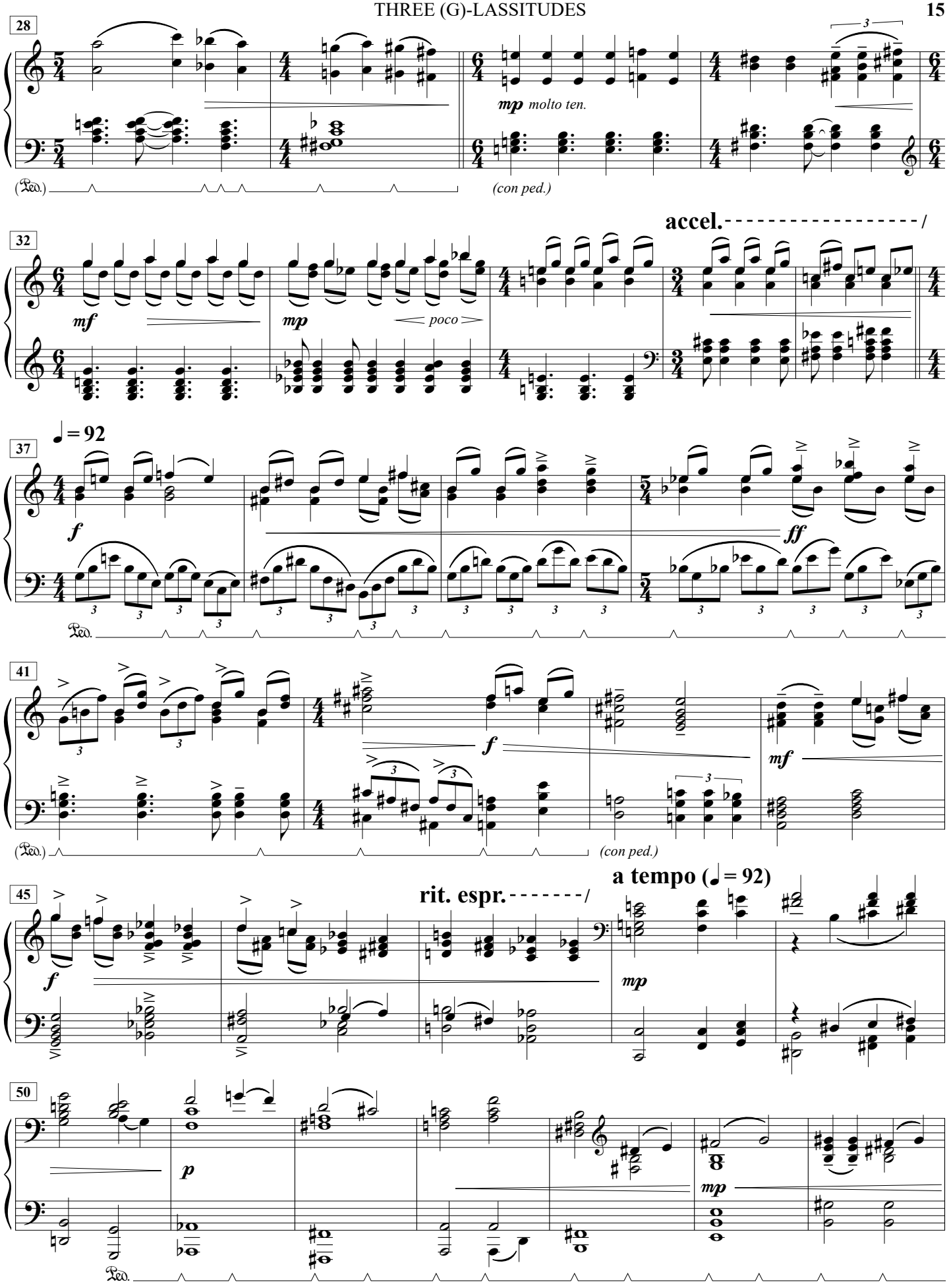

68
74
80
85
88
91
94
x3
Ped.

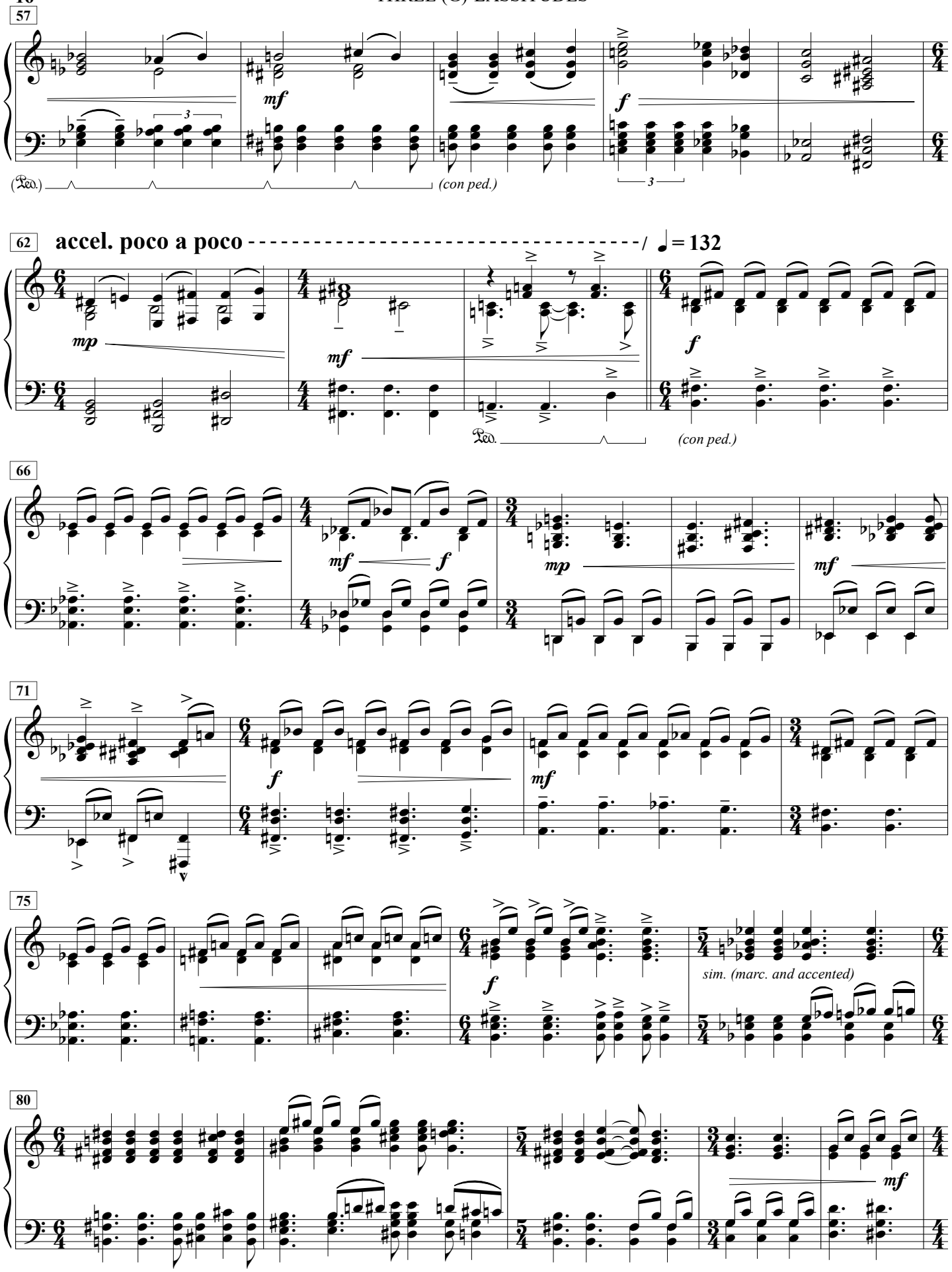

97
f
(con ped.)
99
1.
102
2.
104
rit. al
ff
♩ = 120 (Tempo I)
107
f
mf
111
mp
Ped.

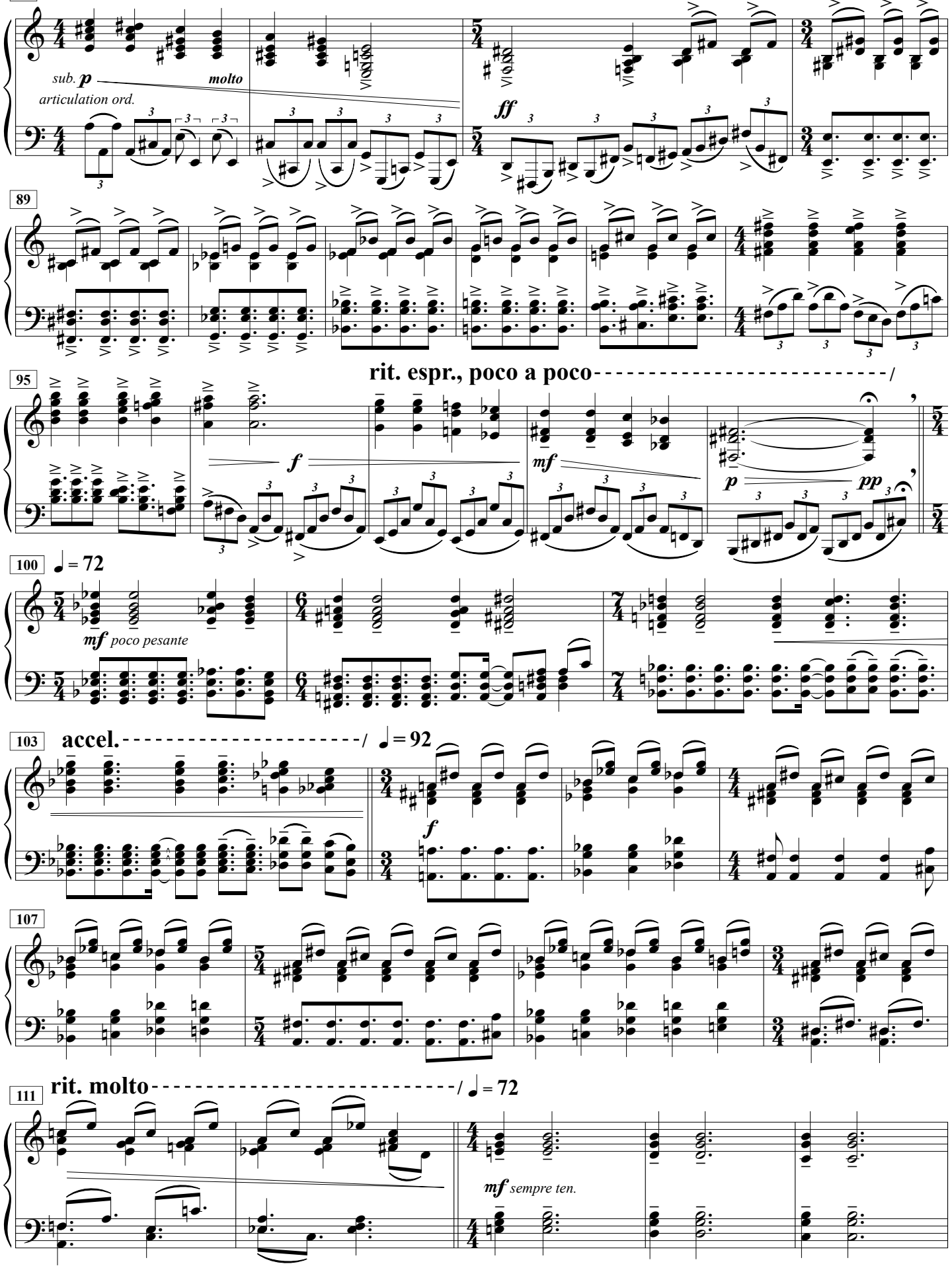

115
118
121
125
131
135
(Ped.)
f
mf
mp
pp
(con ped.)
rit. al fine

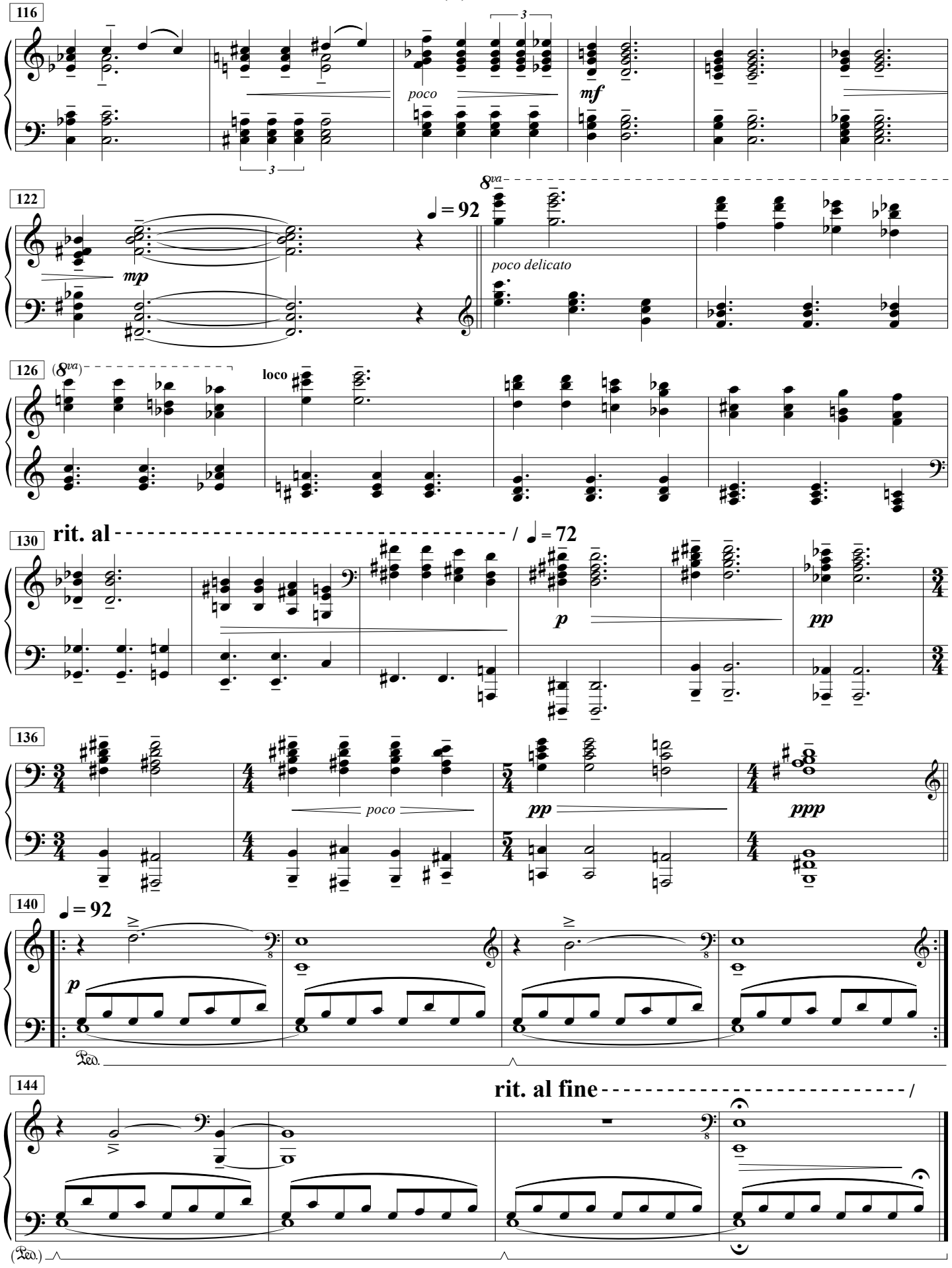
III. THE MORE THINGS/THE SAME




28
mp molto ten.
(con ped.)
accel.
32
mf
mp
poco
37
♩ = 92
f
ff
41
f
mf
(con ped.)
45
rit. espr.
a tempo (♩ = 92)
f
mp
50
p
mp


57
mf
f
(con ped.)
62
accel. poco a poco
♩ = 132
mp
mf
f
(con ped.)
66
mf
f
mp
mf
71
f
mf
75
f
sim. (marc. and accented)
80
mf


85
sub. p
molto
articulation ord.
ff
89
95
rit. espr., poco a poco
f
mf
p
pp
100
♩ = 72
mf poco pesante
103
accel.
♩ = 92
f
107
111
rit. molto
♩ = 72
mf sempre ten.


116
poco
mf
122
mp
♩ = 92
8va
poco delicato
126
(8va)
loco
130
rit. al
♩ = 72
p
pp
136
poco
pp
ppp
140
♩ = 92
p
Ped.
144
rit. al fine
(Ped.)