chronology horizons

for piano

Chris Dench

chronology horizons

(2021)

from the **iso-études (#8)**

for solo piano

for Alex Raineri, Anya Alexeyev, Peter de Jager, and Tonya Lemoh

score engraved by Andrew Bernard

Time machines come in several varieties, all admittedly probably fictional, but the one thing most have in common is an inconceivably huge, spinning, source of antigravity. This causes the local space to change its character, splitting into two zones: a *chronal* zone, where time runs as normal, and a *non-chronal* zone, which consists entirely of *closed timelike curves* which traverse from future to past. In between these two zones there will always be a *chronology horizon*, which, like the event horizon of a black hole, is a region, not a thing. Near the chronology horizon, caught between chronal and non-chronal space, stuff gets stuck in almost-closed causal loops.

Duration: ~30'

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General Instructions:

1 Accidentals only apply to the notes they immediately precede. Some naturals have been added for clarity.

2 Metronomic tempi given in the score are abstract reflections of the architecture, and consequently *suggestions*. Play all sections idiomatically rather than slavishly—effect is more important than exactitude—with interpretative tempo choices and a judicious hint of *rubato*.

3 Pauses: Pauses in this piece are denoted by: . Commas are the shortest form of hiatus: less a pause than a barely perceptible, momentary hesitation before continuing.

4 Let it be immediately admitted: this piece has been written for a pianist with big hands (such as those of the composer); a good tenth in each is ideal. For those with lesser stretches, it is suggested that, rather than just uninterestingly arpeggiating each interval, a solution be found that incorporates the break into the surrounding texture. There are some places in the score where the composer has already done this; consider them as models. **Do not roll any chords**—all such tilted attacks are already fully notated.

5 Dynamics—there are ten degrees of dynamic in this piece:

pppp—ppp—pp—p—mf—f—ff—fff—ffff—fffff

- Dynamics should be not be treated as a simple linear soft→loud: they function as variations in the *local* context. Note that there is no *mp* dynamic: ***mf*** is considered midway between ***p*** and ***f***.
- *Sforzati* increase in loudness: ***mfz—fz—sfz***, etc.

6 Phrasing: occasionally, for reasons of limited space, a phrase slur is only put over pitches in the right hand, but applies equally to the left hand material. It should be fairly clear from the context whether such a slur applies to both hands or not.

7 Emphases [–] are used to indicate either slight stresses or a hint of *detaché*; context will be the guide. Hard attacks [>] are used to indicate pitches that need to be brought out whatever the prevailing dynamic—context will govern the extent to which these pitches need to be *martellato*. In lower dynamics the > attack will be quiet, and needs to be more a matter of tone-colour than volume.

8 In notating this piece no real attempt has been made to indicate the finer nuances of pedalling required to make the textures work. What has been provided is a bare-minimum pedal line that reflects the broad harmonic and structural changes; the player is

invited to use as subtle a range of pedal colours as they can. The shown pedaling is therefore not mandatory—it is more a guide to pedal purpose, which is primarily to give the effect of ringing-on sonorities and should therefore not be too 'clean'. U.C. indicates *Una Corda*, and appears *above* the normal pedal. **3P** flags the use of the middle, sostenuto, pedal, and has a dashed continuation line *beneath* the normal pedal line. Both **3P** and *Una Corda* are specified very sparingly; players are welcome to use them more if it is helpful in shaping the music.

9 Clefs: occasionally a treble or bass clef appears with an 8 at the top (treble)/bottom (bass). This simply means to perform all material in that stave an octave higher/lower.

Performance Instructions: Glossary

All performance instructions are to be regarded as slightly ironic.

Festinating	Accelerating as if involuntarily
Fleeting	From *flēotan*, "gliding rapidly"
Fragmentarily	Discontinuously, as if a sequence of cut strings floating in silence
Maliziosamente	Mischievously
Semper dolens	From "semper Dowland, semper dolens", a Philip K Dick reference
Skittishly	Nervously restless
Strangening	Allow the music to become stranger
Stride	The post-ragtime virtuoso jazz piano style
Transport de joie	Literally, "transport of joy"; an ironic Messiaen reference
Vastnessly	With a sense of huge scale
Vielle à roue	French hurdy-gurdy

A Message to the Pianist:

Dear performer,

This piece is primarily about greater and lesser degrees of repetition. Like all musical scores it binds time, but unlike most other pieces its main concern is temporal ambiguity—in this case as caused by metaphorical rotating gravity wells that function as time-machines. Or, more precisely, it offers types of musical behaviour that sometimes converge to loops: the textures encompass material that ranges from being completely without repetition, through inexact repetition that recapitulates shapes but not content, to exact, literal, repetition. There are numerous motivic/textural cells that inform not only their own immediate sections, but other related music in the piece; in that sense the musical meaning is non-local—and non-linear. Even seemingly banal gestures are distillations—or debris—of more complex material elsewhere (elsewhen). The levels of redundancy vary considerably.

The musical textures also have a built-in allusiveness, they indirectly but purposefully—and definitely nostalgically—recall other music from other eras. I think of **chronology horizons** as borrowing from the continuity of a set of Schubert Dances, the coherence of a Louis Couperin *Suite*, the skeletal concision of Marie Jäell's *Ce qu'on entend...* pieces, the harmonic textures of late Scriabin, the gestural expansiveness of *Ondine* and the melodies of *Oiseaux tristes*, and so on.

But if there is a work **chronology horizons** most directly alludes to, it is *le Festin d'Esope* from Alkan's *Douze Études dans tous les tons mineurs Op. 39*, one of my enduringly favourite piano works for nearly 60 years, and a piece that could usefully and illustratively be coupled with **chronology horizons** in performance.

Let your performance suggest these internal and external intimations, and try and achieve coherence. That's all I ask.

Respectfully yours,

the composer

Suggested Program Note:

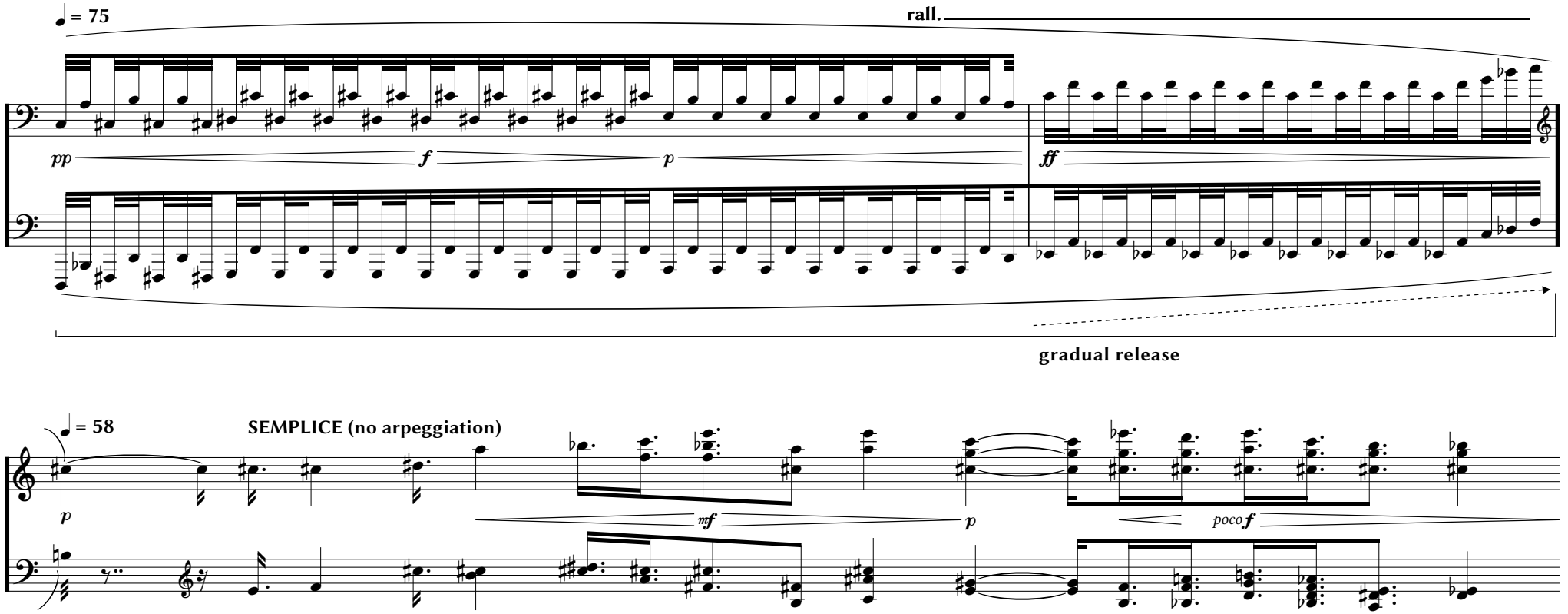
Time machines come in several varieties, all admittedly probably imaginary, but the one thing the majority have in common is an inconceivably massive, spinning, source of gravity—a black hole, or a cosmic string, or a wormhole, say. This causes the local space to change its character, splitting into two zones: a *chronal* zone, where time runs as normal, and a *non-chronal* zone, which consists entirely of *closed timelike curves* which traverse from future to past. In between these two zones there will always be a *chronology horizon*, which, like the event horizon of a black hole, is a region, not a thing. Near the *chronology horizon*, caught between chronal and non-chronal space, stuff gets stuck in almost-closed causal loops.

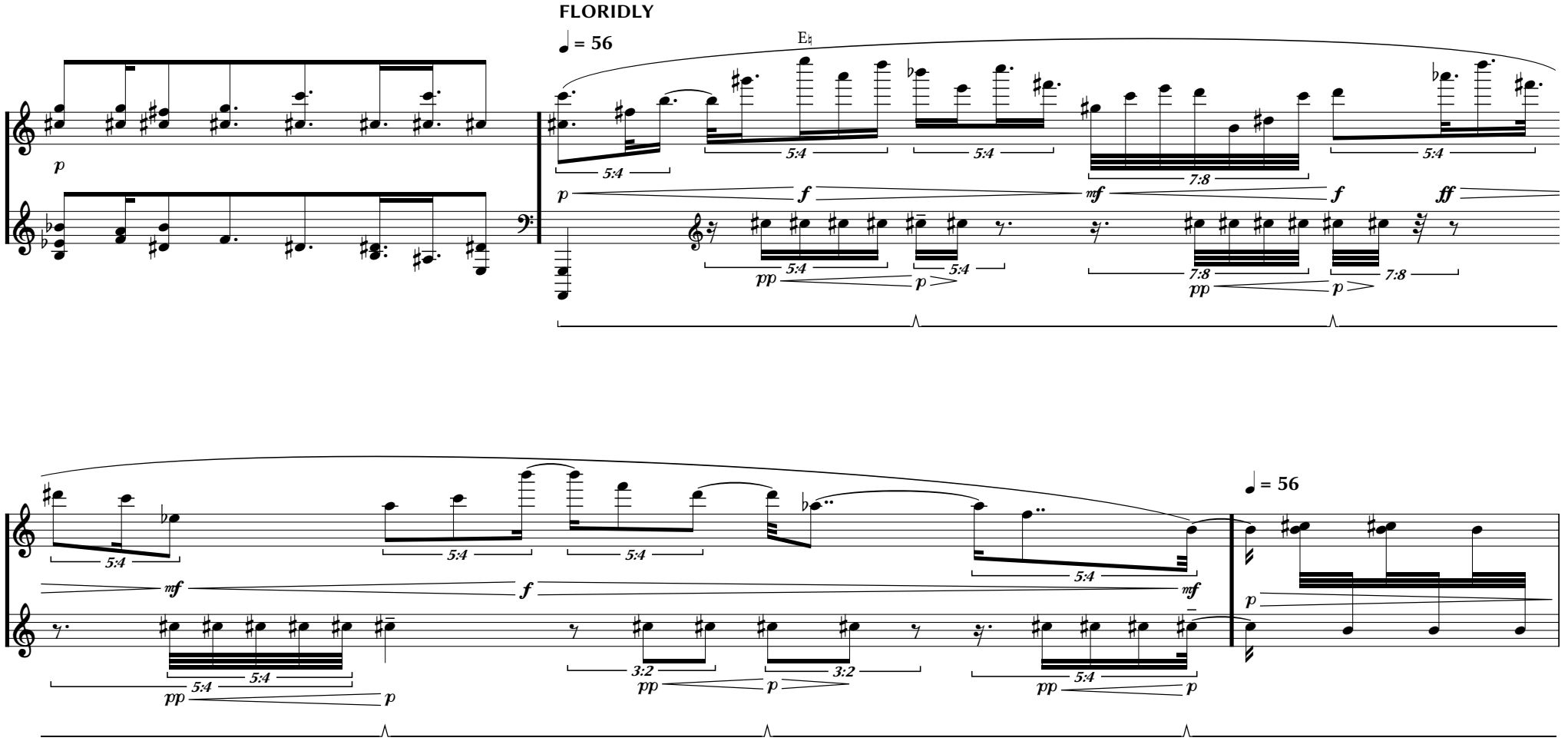
In this piece the listener travels through a landscape saturated with the effects of time machines, passing repeatedly from chronal to non-chronal regions by passing through **chronology horizons**—a couple of times the massive rotating objects themselves heave into view. Things repeat; exactly, and inexactly. Things are shredded to their bare substrate. As purportedly happens in the region of most types of time machine, space is frequently compacted ...or stretched. The end of the music is definitely *not* the beginning, *pace* Machaut, so the piece is not itself a time-machine, unfortunately—as proven by my not having got younger as I wrote it.

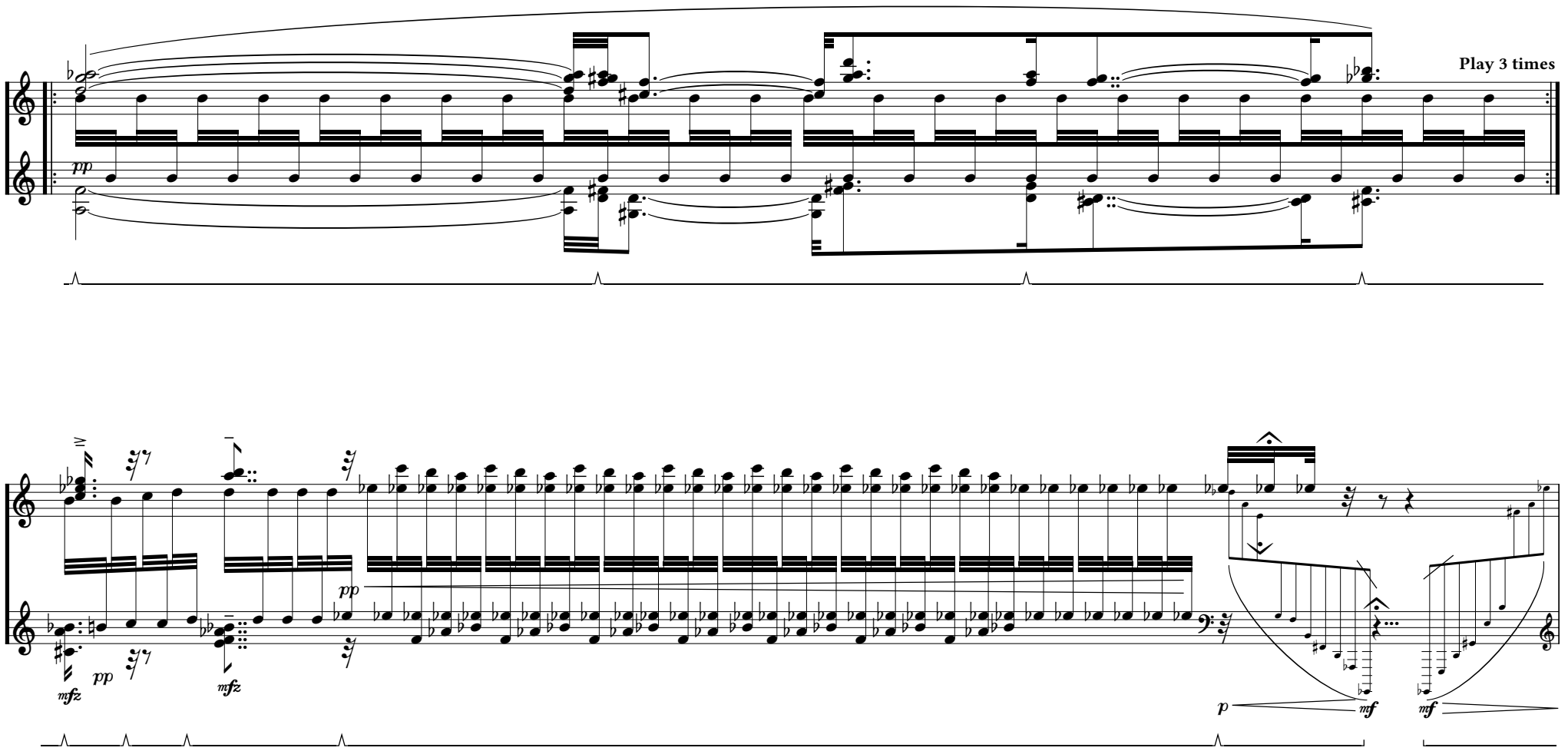
Space is not just empty, of course, it is occupied by stuff: events, and things, and people, and their sensations. The unfolding currents of the music are not just forcefields, but carry with them traces of self, of others, of other musics. The piece is, if you like, haunted. (By, at least, the late Luke Paulding and Ian Shanahan, my friends. May they RIP).

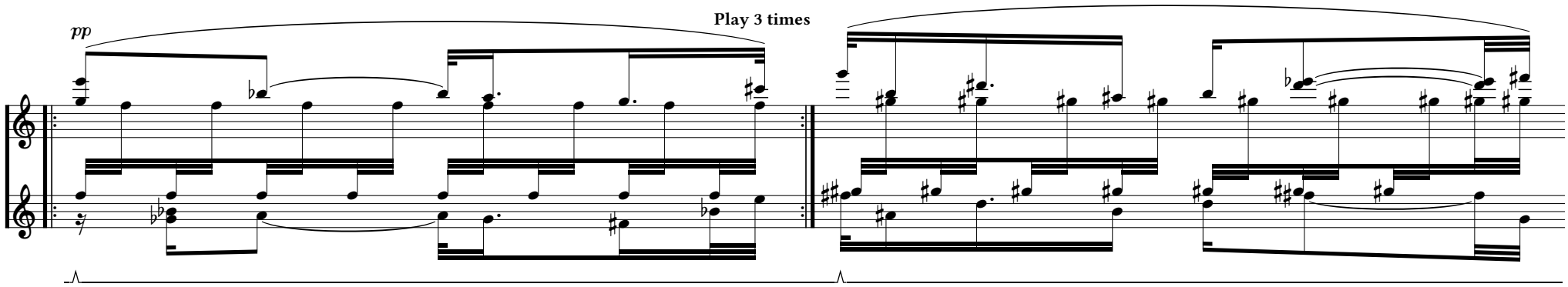
chronology horizons

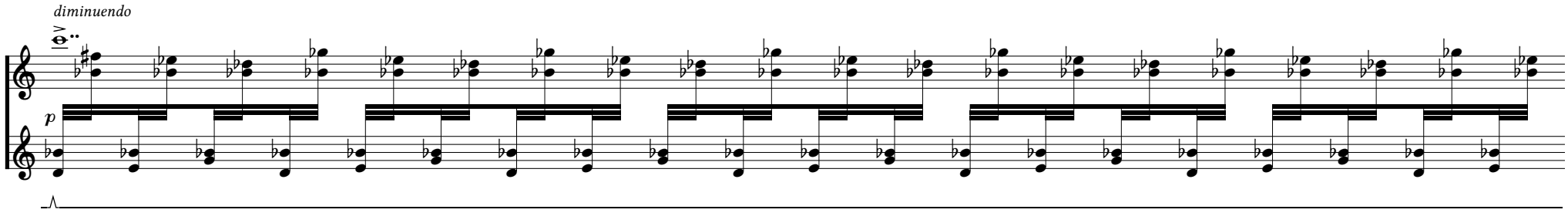
Chris Dench

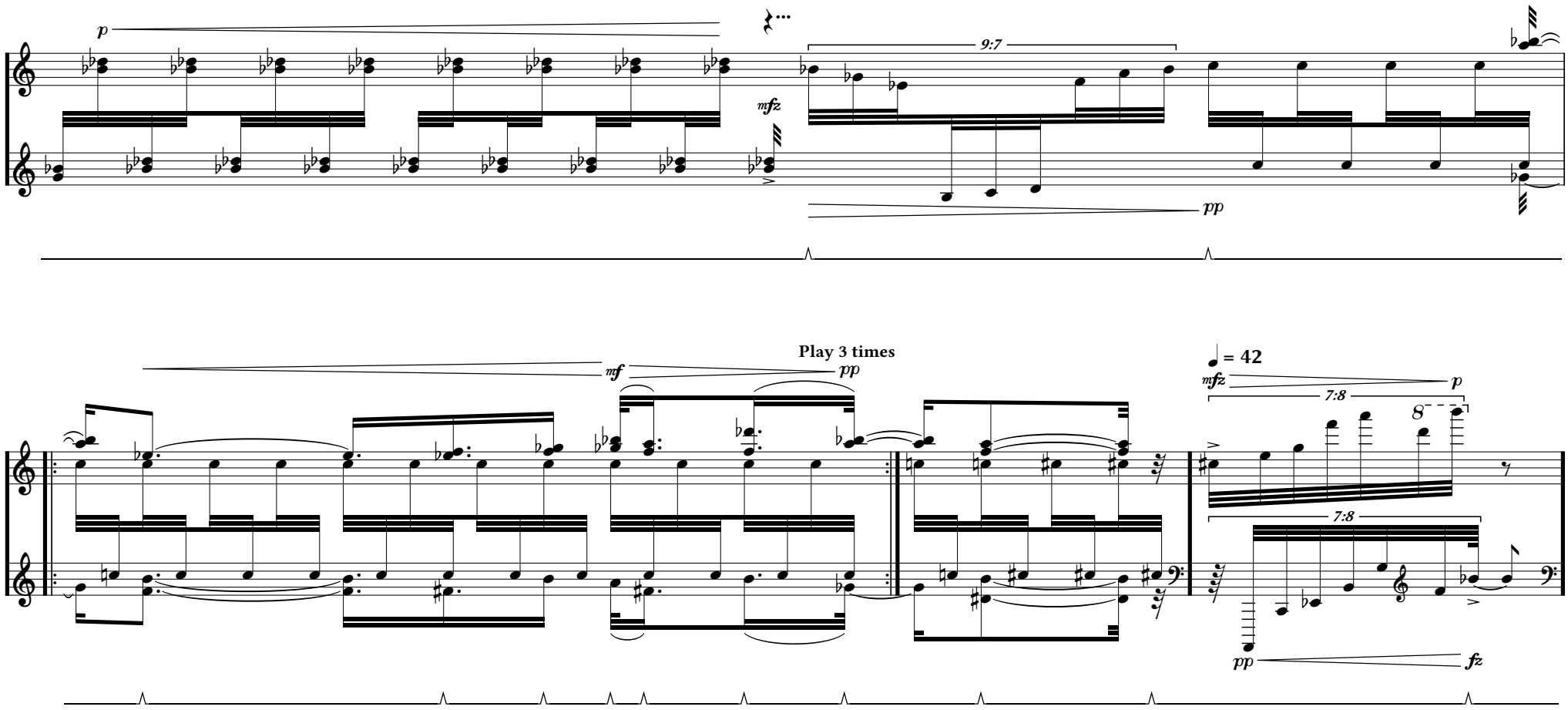



FLORIDLY
♩ = 56
E♮
5:4
7:8
3:2
p
f
mf
ff
pp
♩ = 56


Play 3 times
pp
pp
mfz
mfz
p
mf
mf

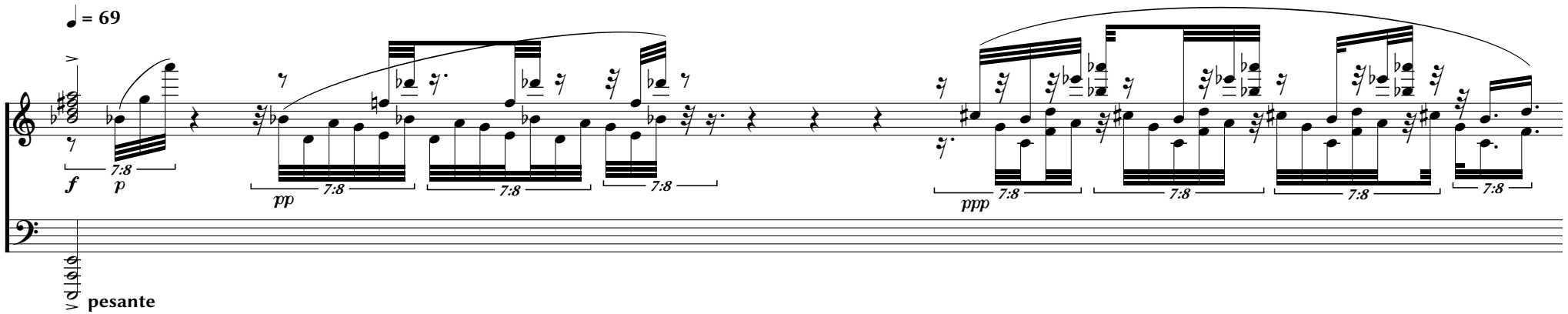

pp
Play 3 times

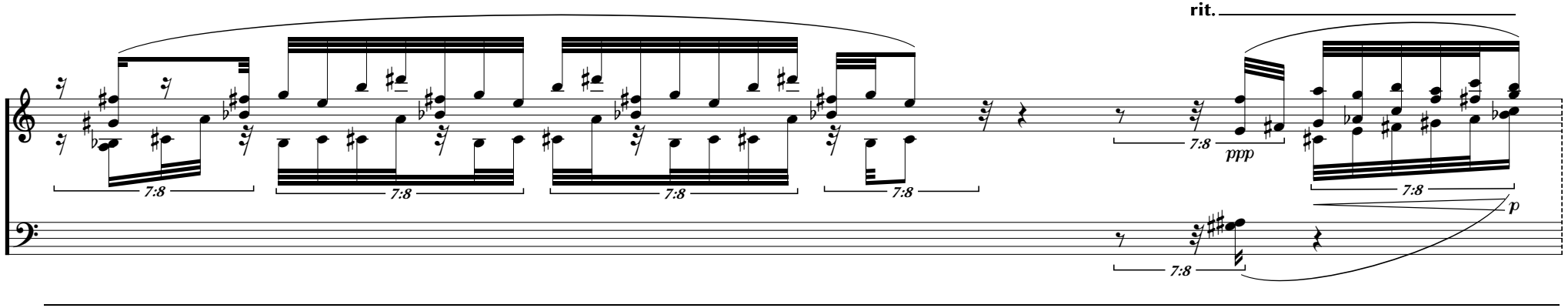

diminuendo
p

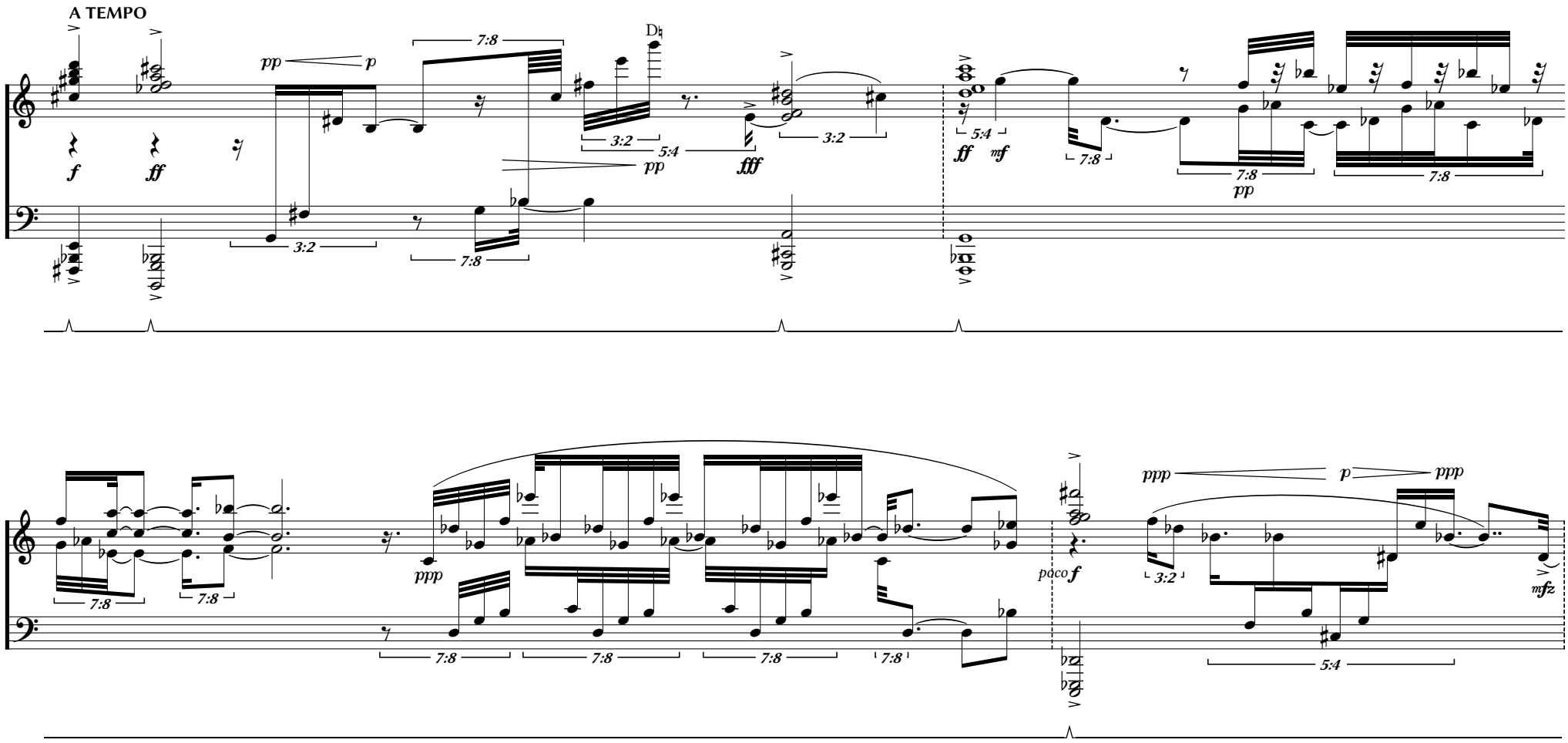

p
mfz
9:7
pp
Play 3 times
mf
pp
♩ = 42
mfz
p
7:8
8
7:8
pp
fz

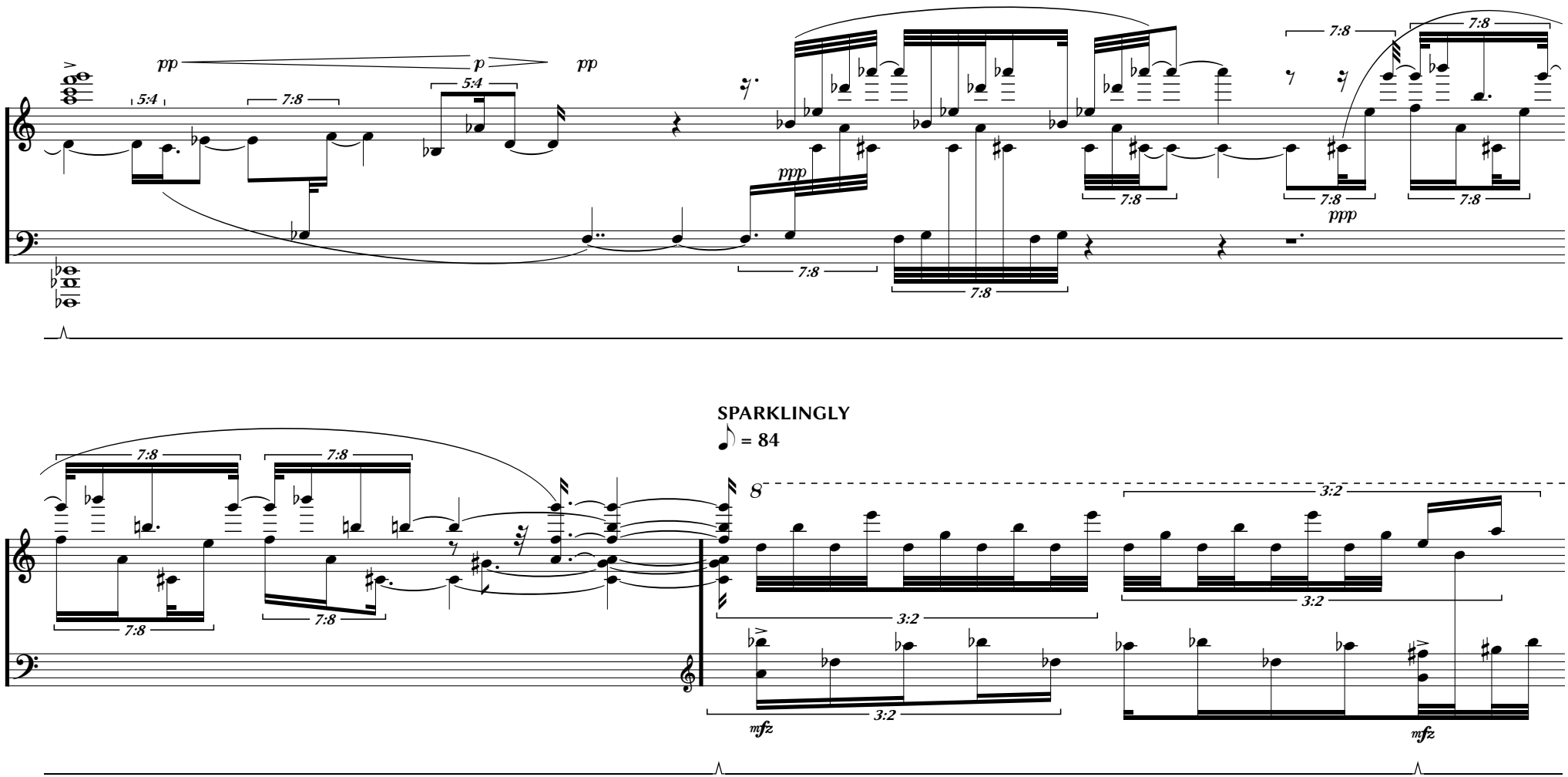
WITH A SENSE OF IMMENSE SPACE

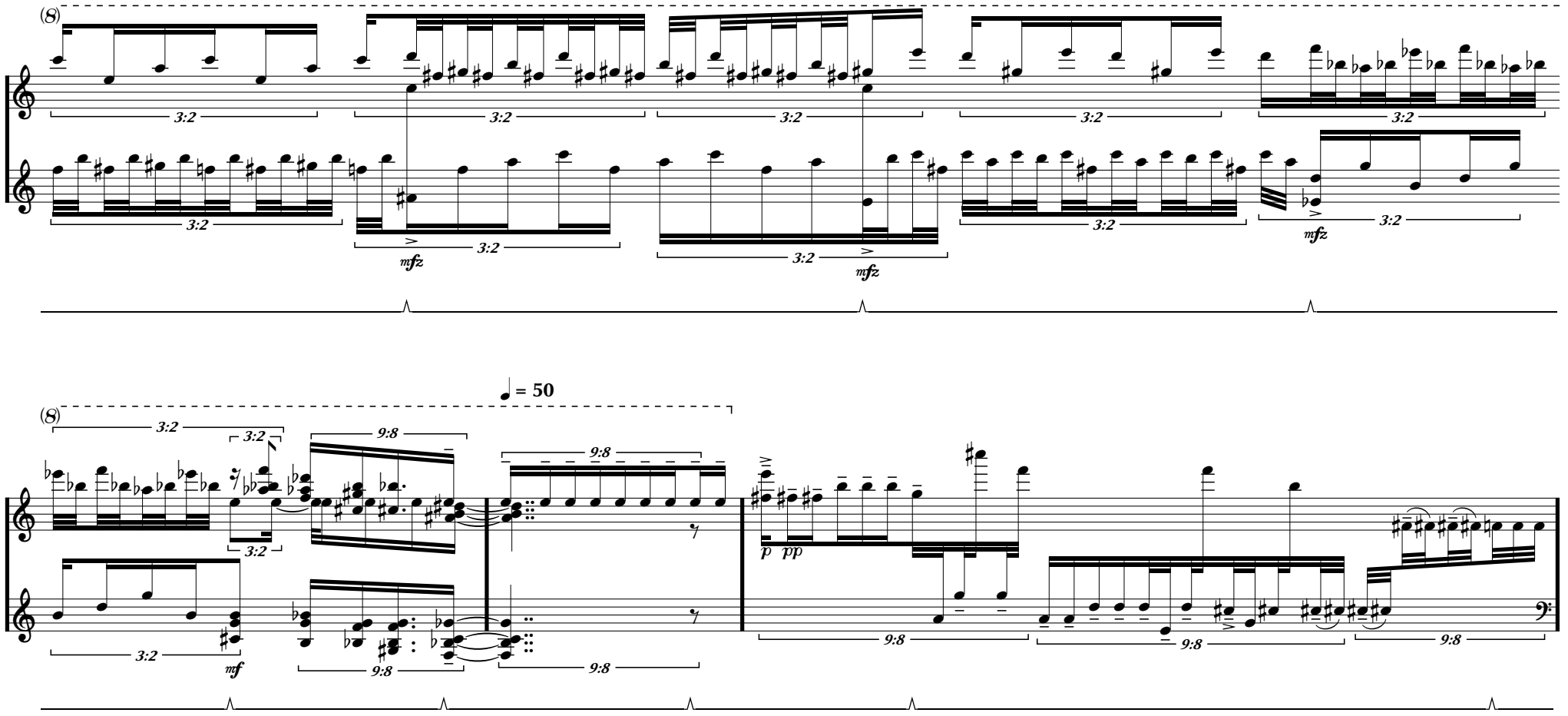
♩ = 69

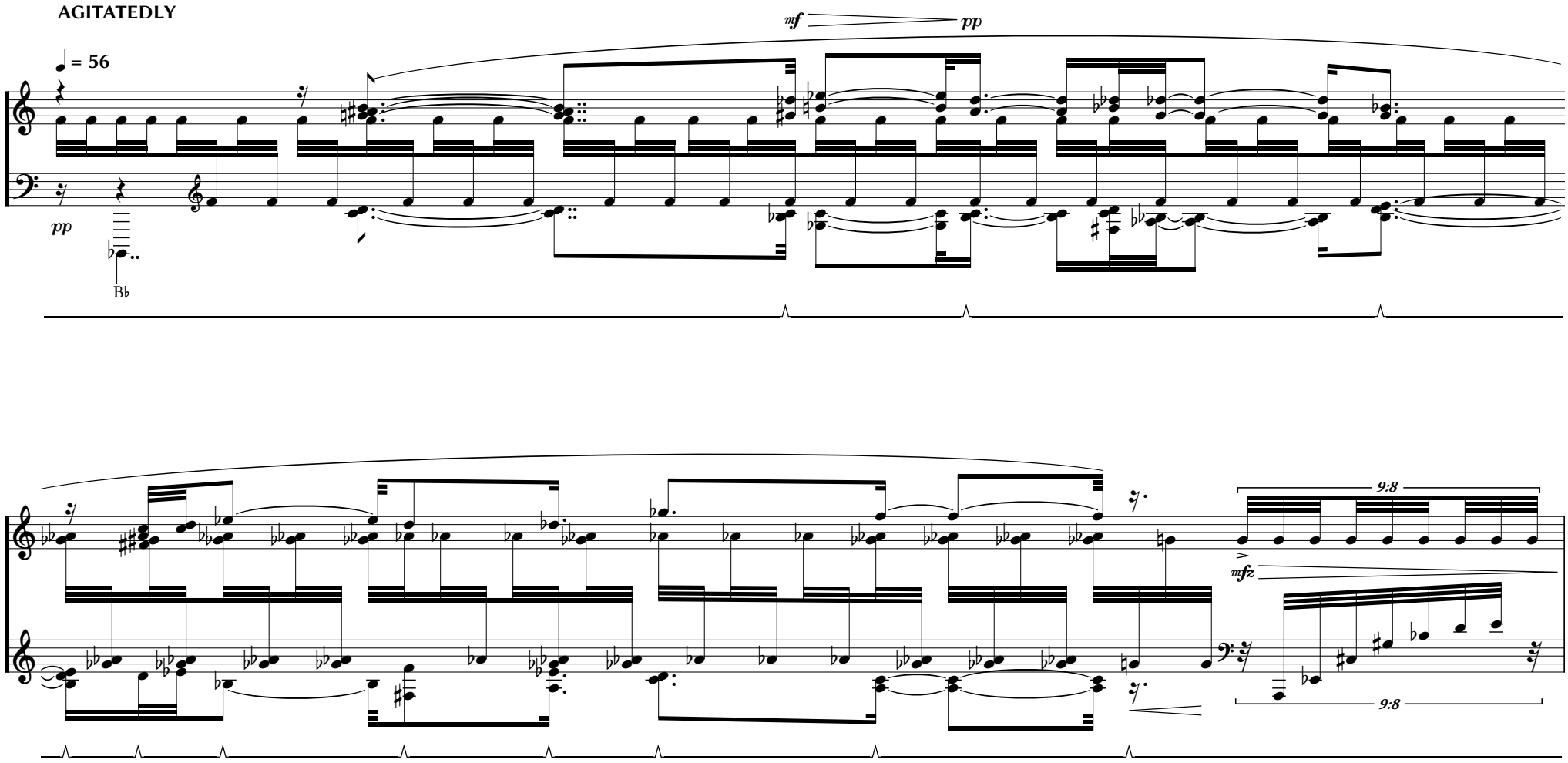


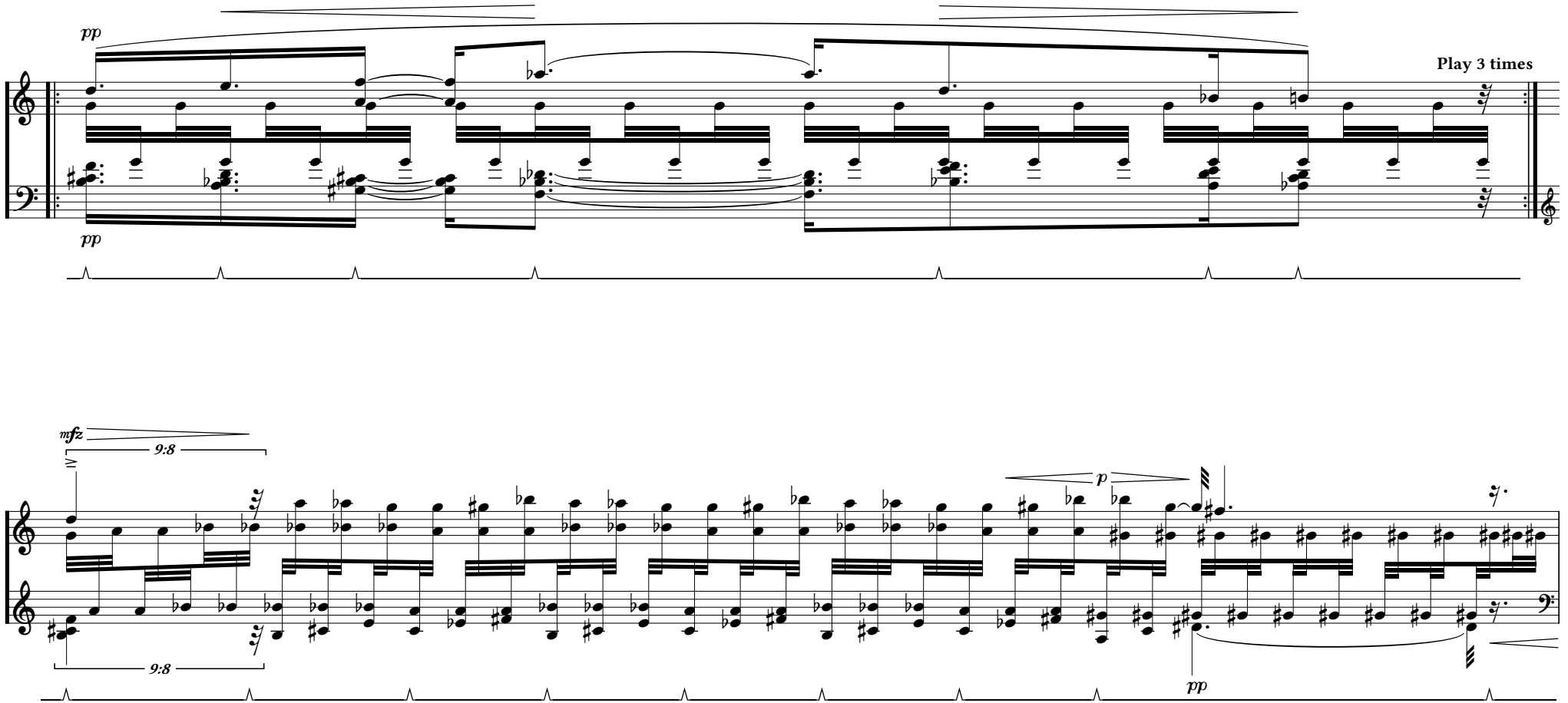


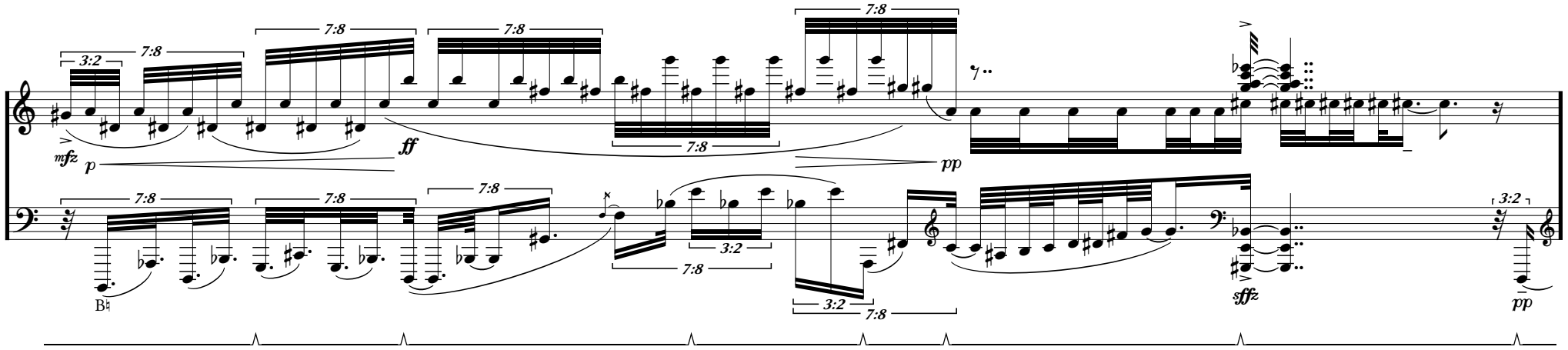

A TEMPO
pp
p
7:8
D♮
3:2
5:4
pp
fff
3:2
f
ff
3:2
7:8
5:4
ff
mf
7:8
7:8
pp
7:8
7:8
7:8
ppp
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
poco f
ppp
p
ppp
3:2
mfz
5:4


pp
p
pp
5:4
7:8
ppp
SPARKLINGLY
♪ = 84
8
3:2
mfz

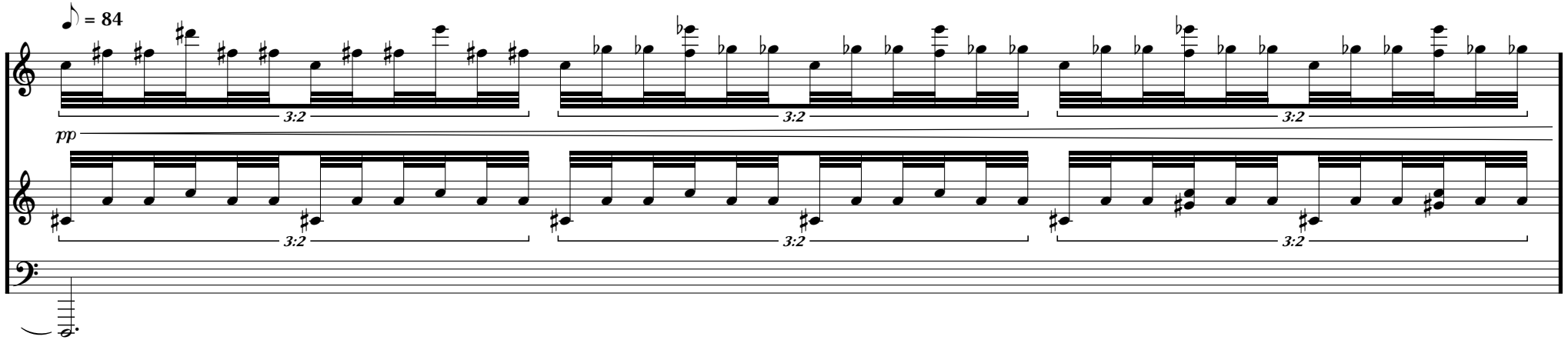

(8)
3:2
mfz
= 50
9:8
p
pp
mf

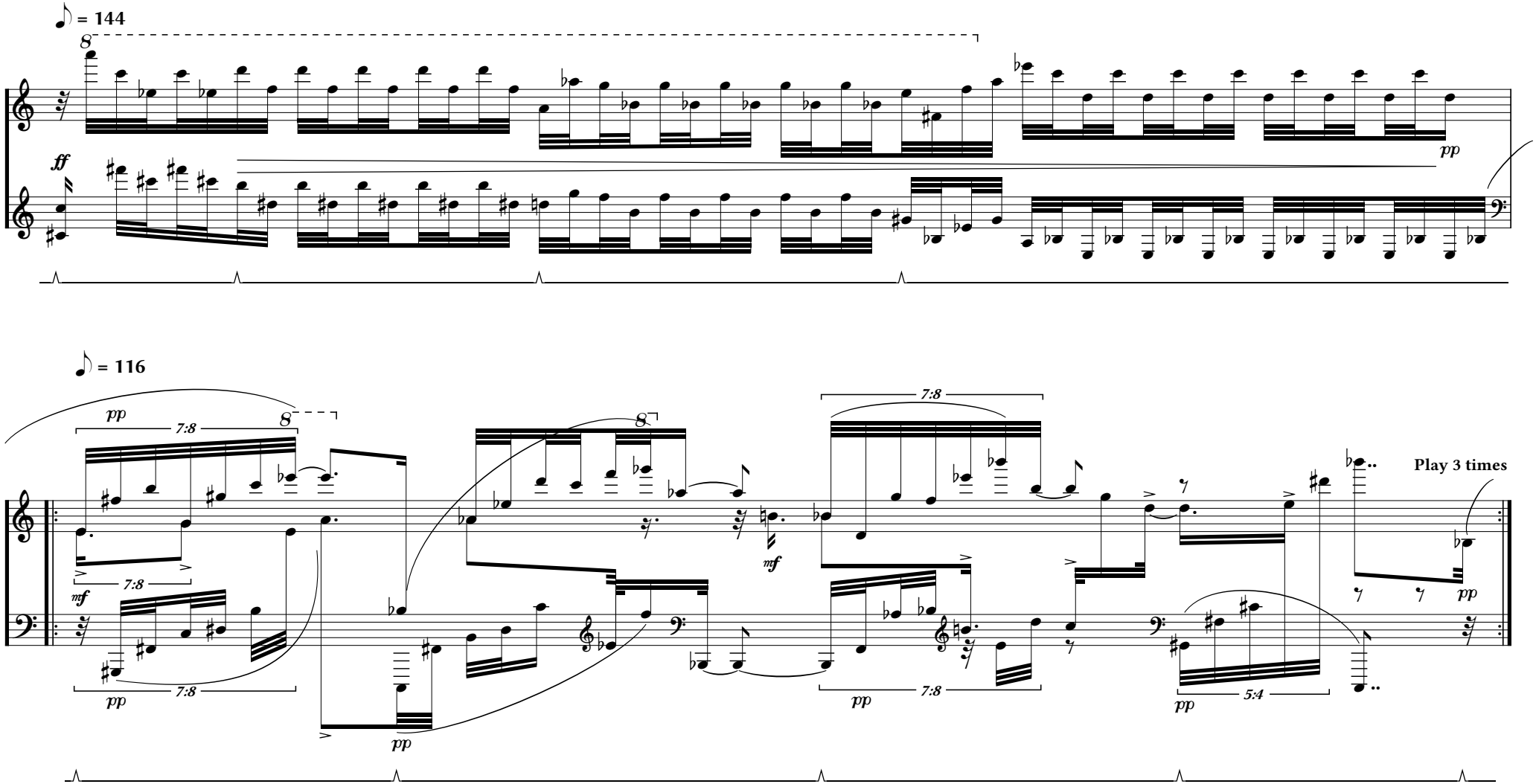

AGITATEDLY
♩ = 56
mf
pp
pp
B♭
9:8
mfz
9:8

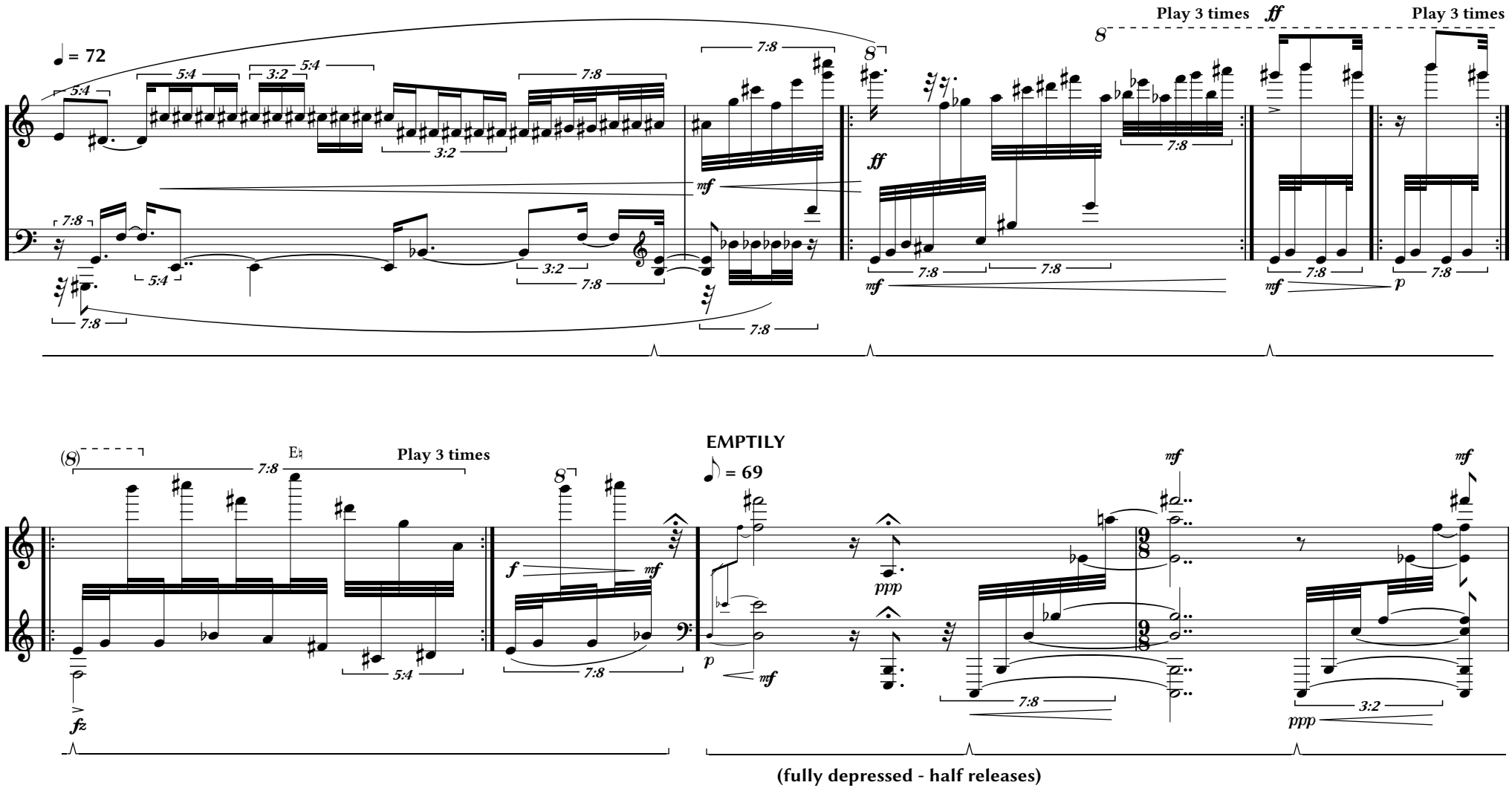

pp
pp
Play 3 times
mfz
9:8
9:8
p
pp

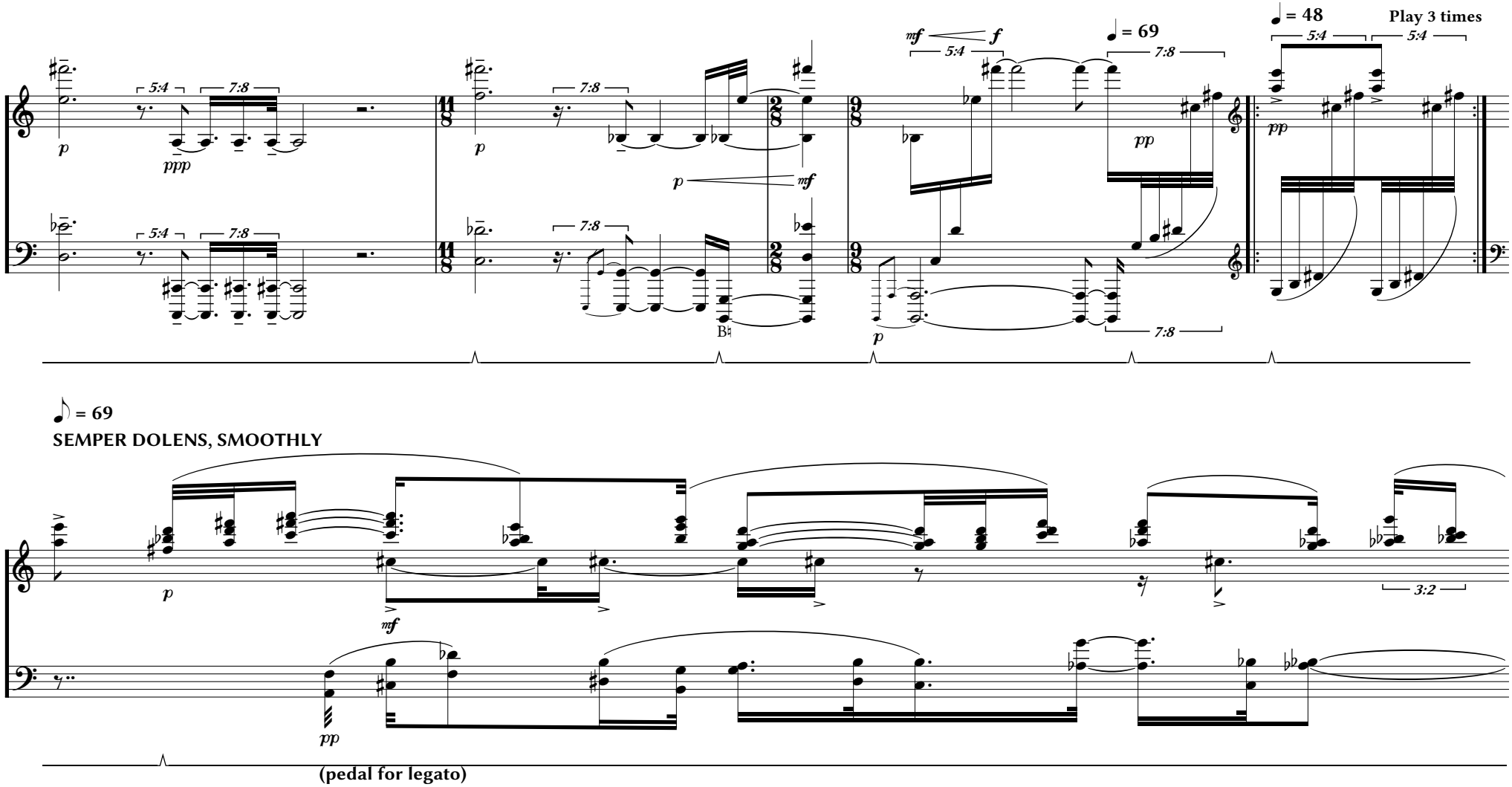


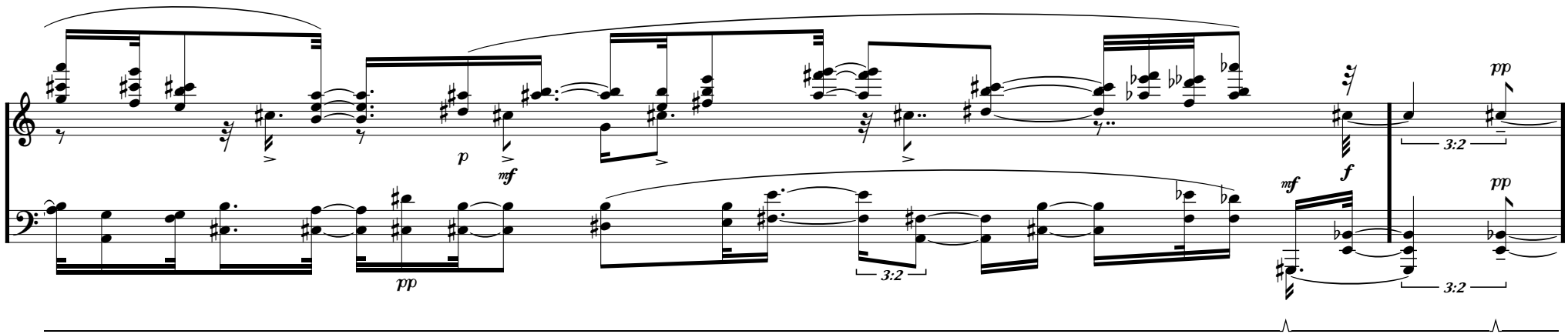
SMOOTH, MESMERICALLY




♪ = 144
8
ff
pp
♪ = 116
pp
7:8
8
mf
7:8
pp
7:8
pp
8
mf
7:8
pp
7:8
pp
5:4
Play 3 times
pp

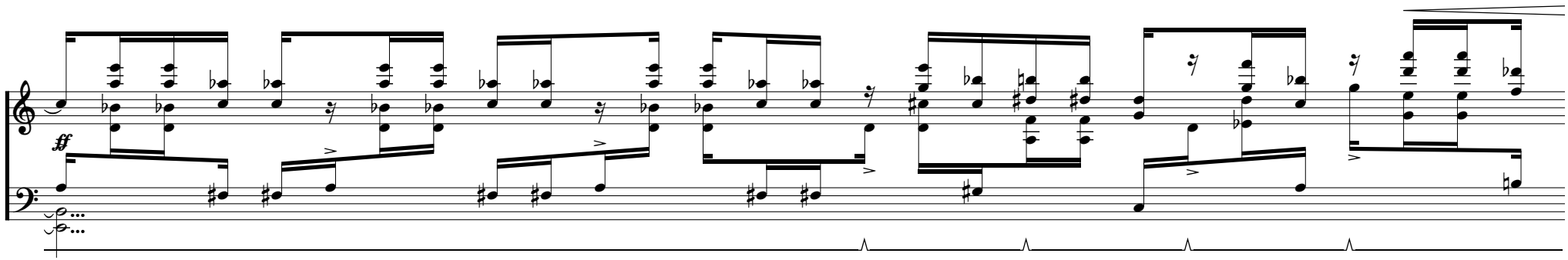

Play 3 times
ff
Play 3 times
♩ = 72
5:4
3:2
7:8
mf
ff
p
(8)
Play 3 times
EMPTILY
♪ = 69
fz
f
ppp
(fully depressed - half releases)

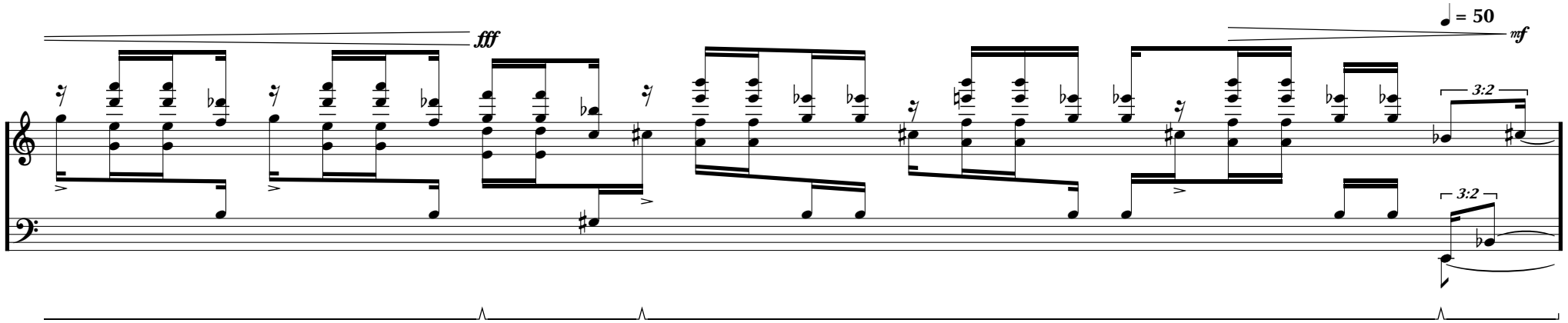

♩ = 48
Play 3 times
♩ = 69
SEMPER DOLENS, SMOOTHLY
(pedal for legato)



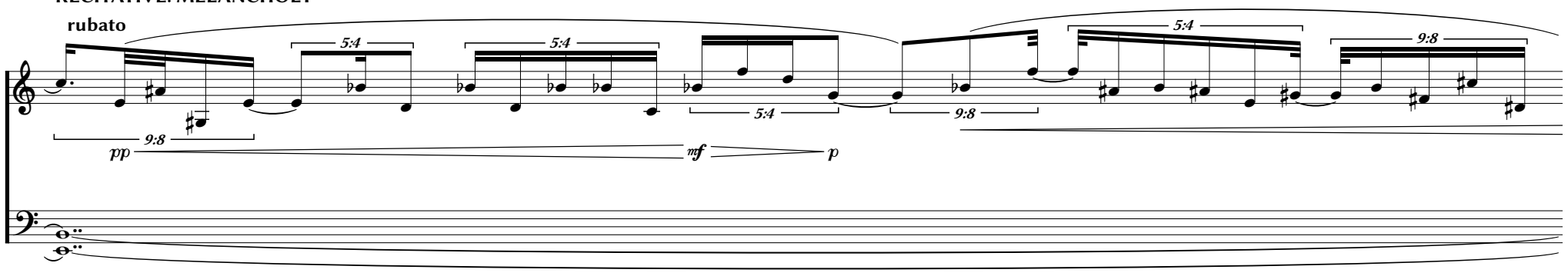
EXCITABLY

♩ = 120

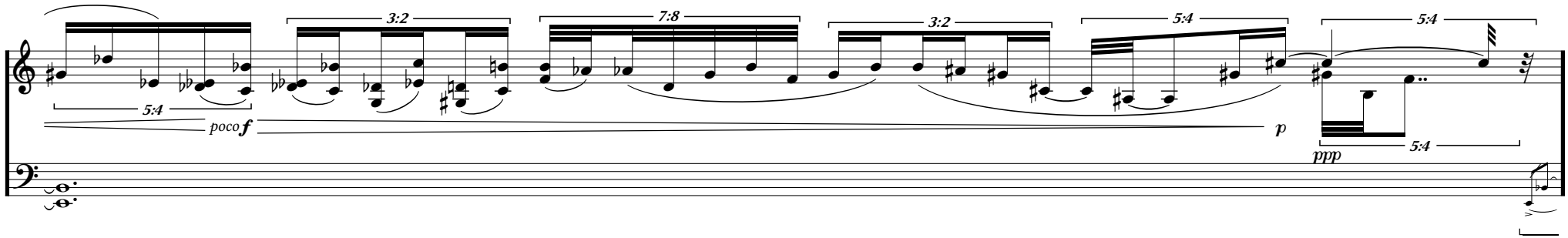




RECITATIVE: MELANCHOLY

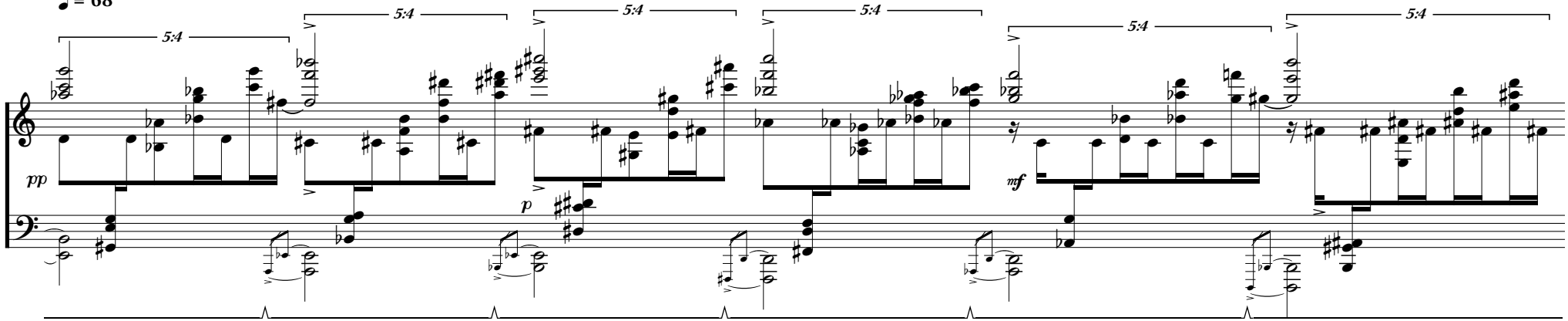


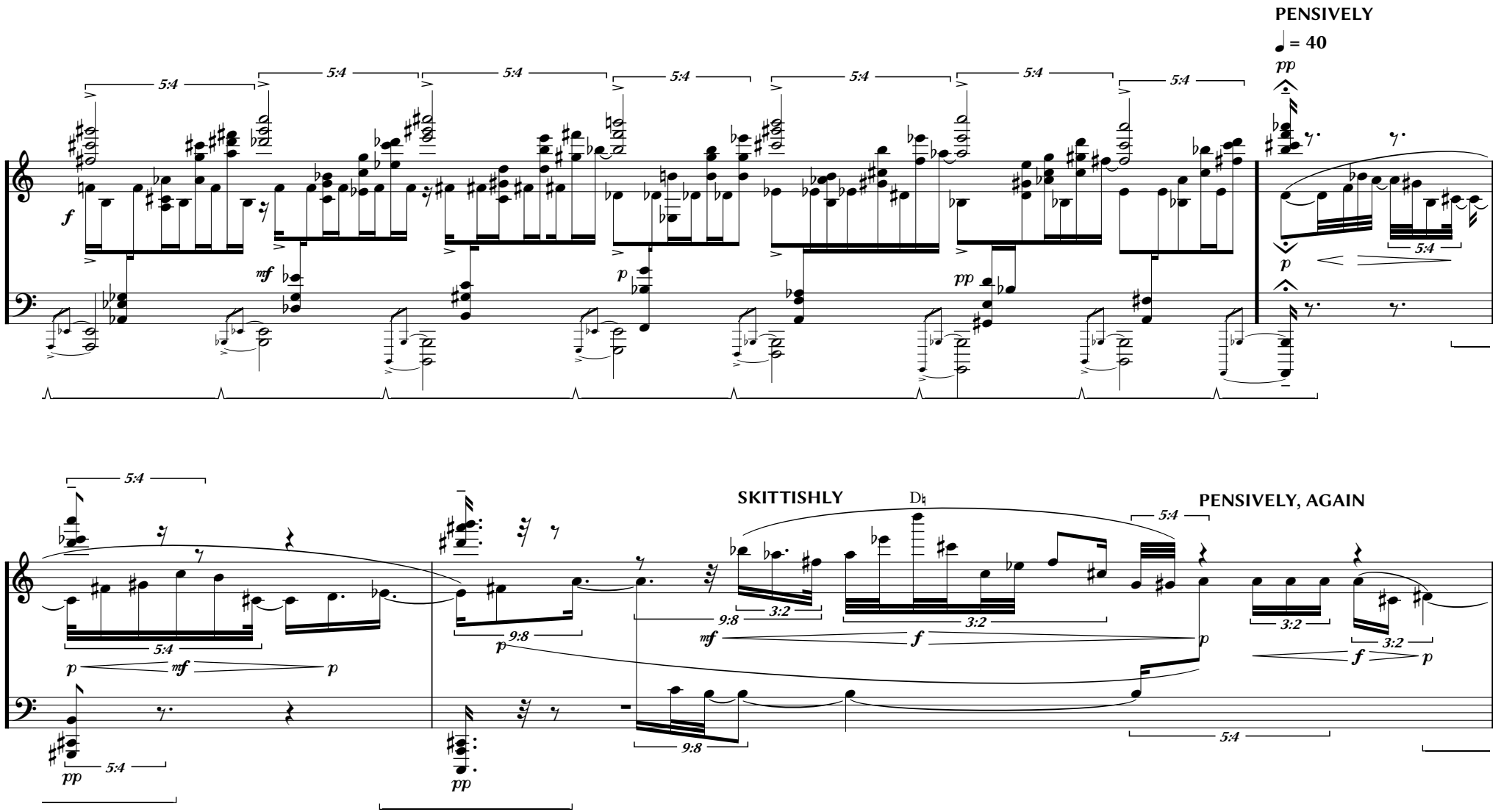
(LH hold through)

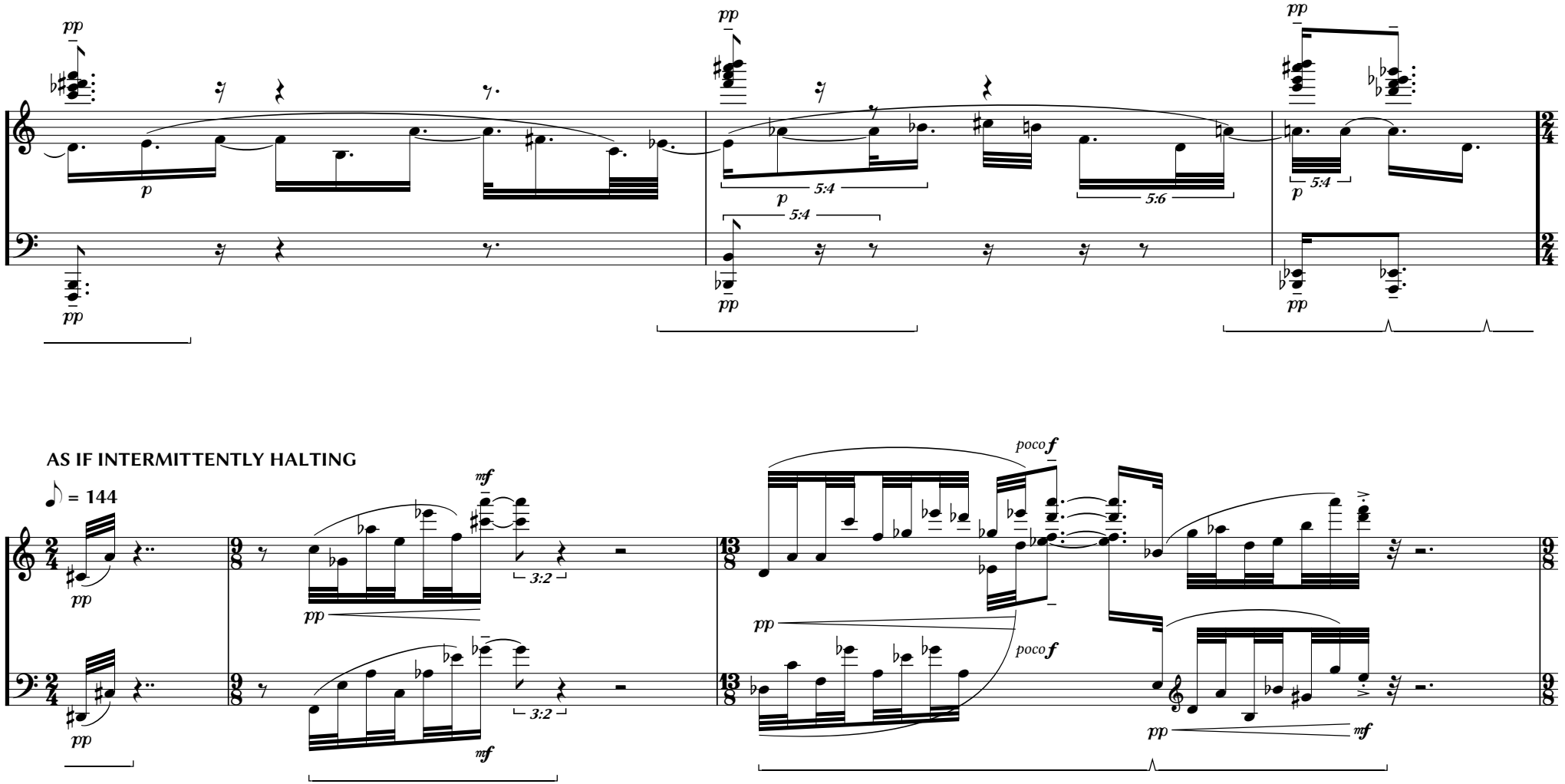


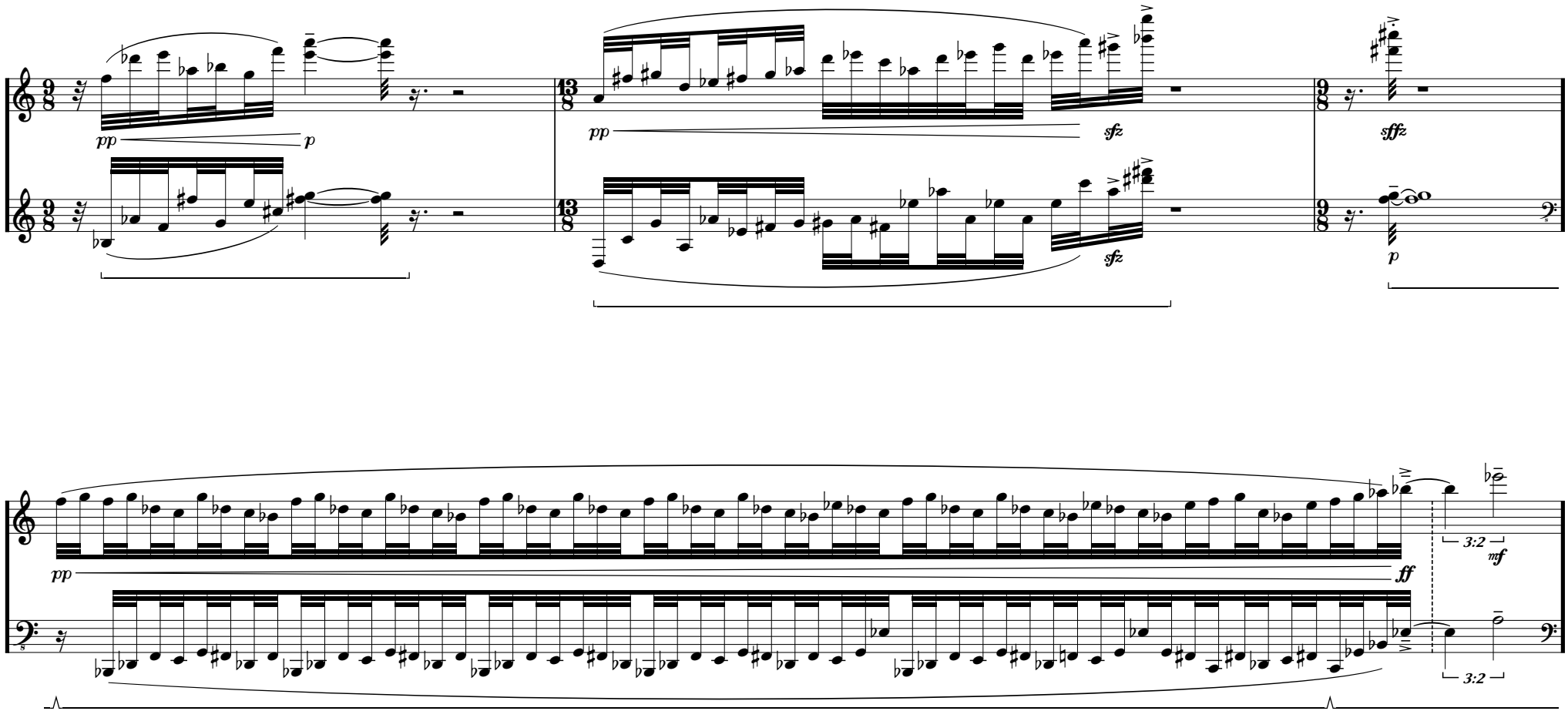
HAUNTINGLY, SUSPENDED

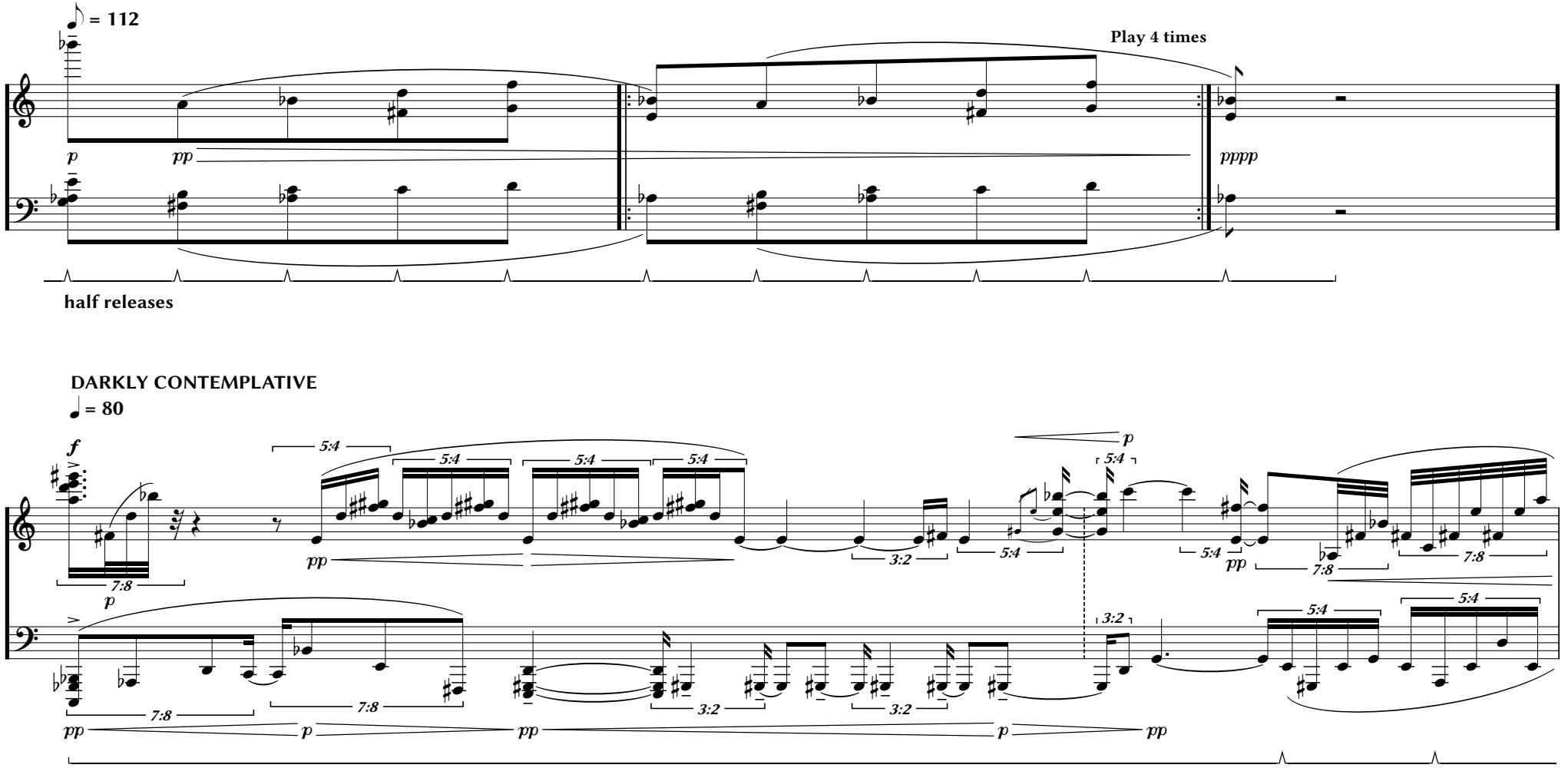
♩ = 68

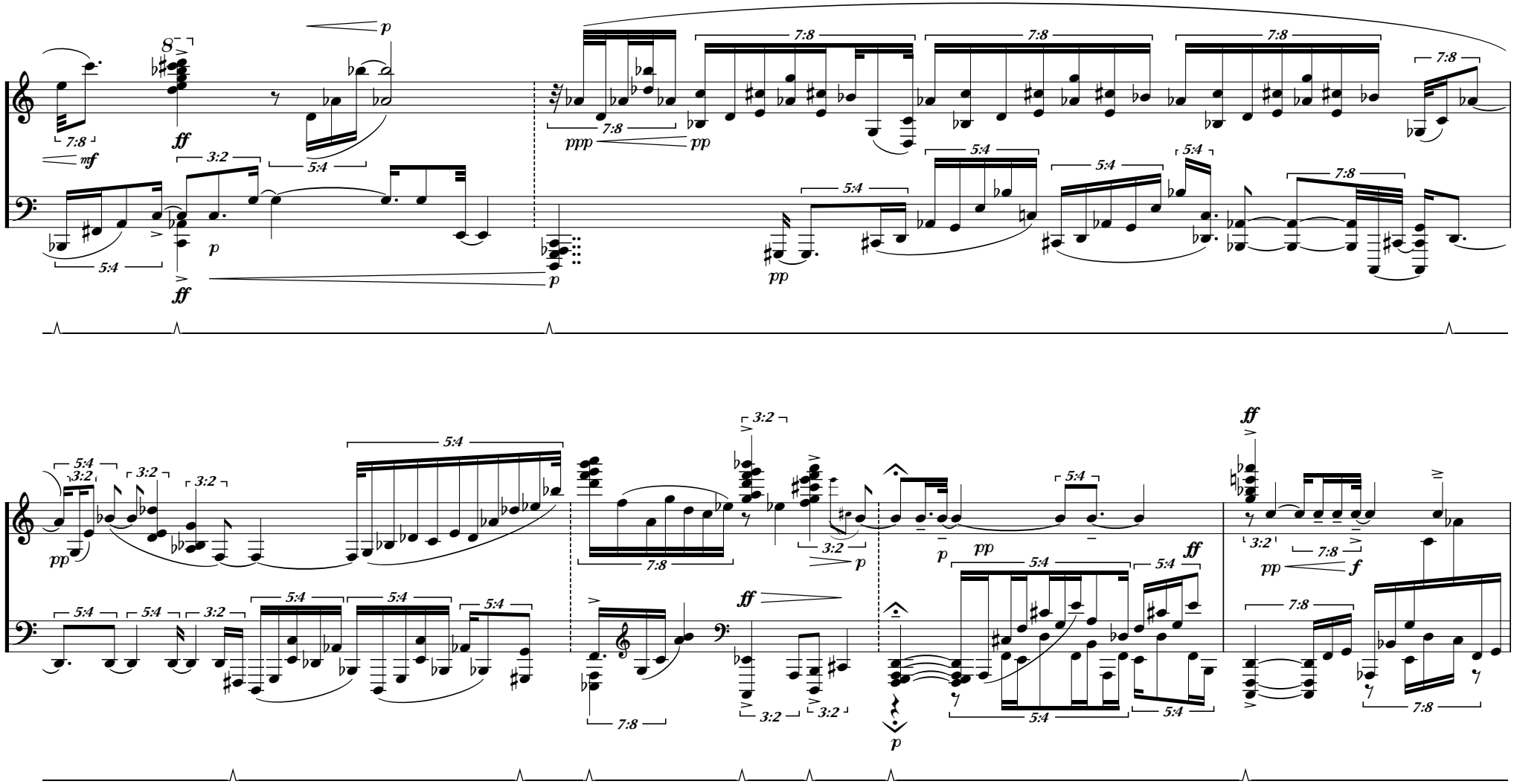


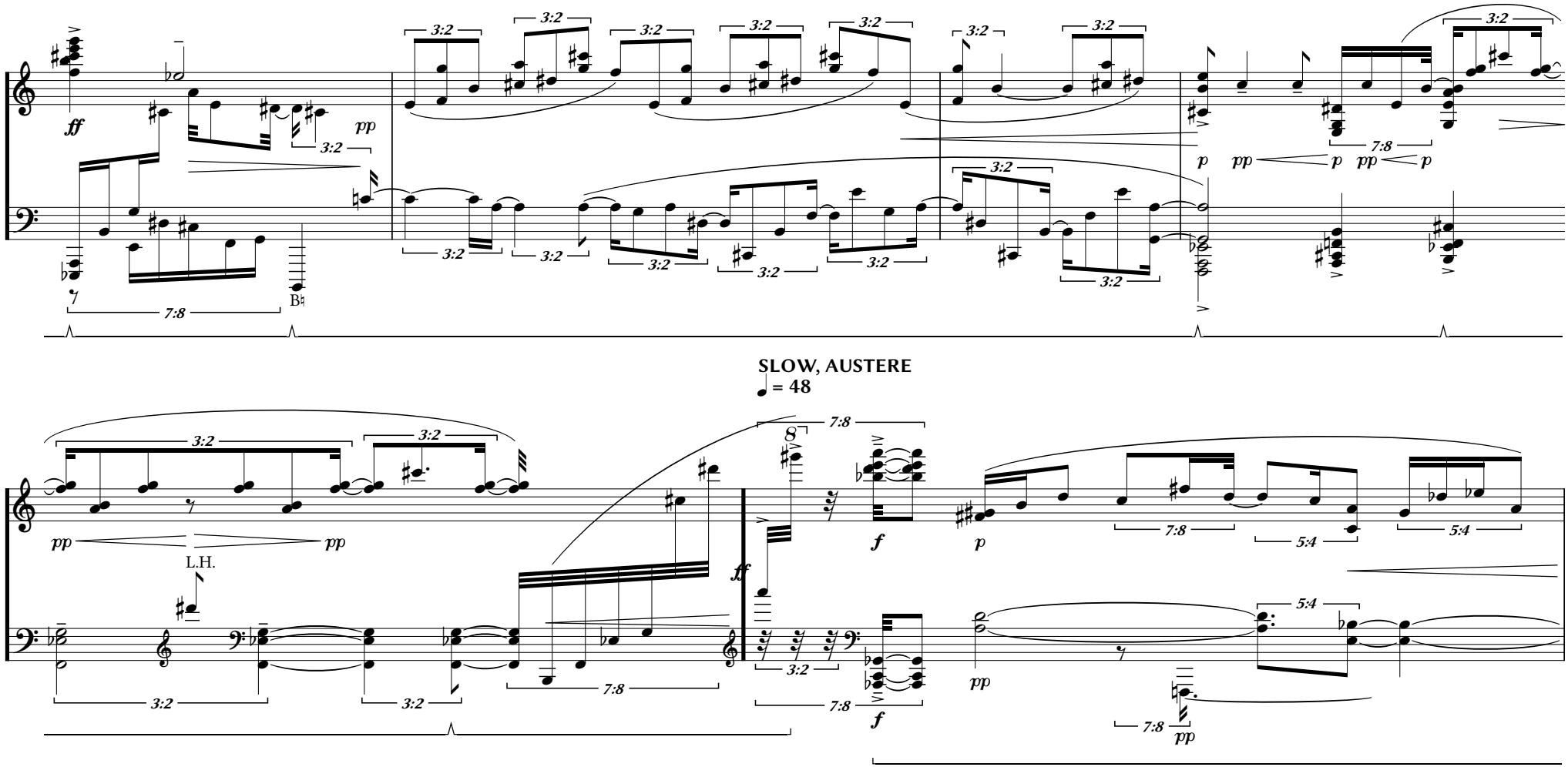

PENSIVELY
♩ = 40
SKITTISHLY
PENSIVELY, AGAIN

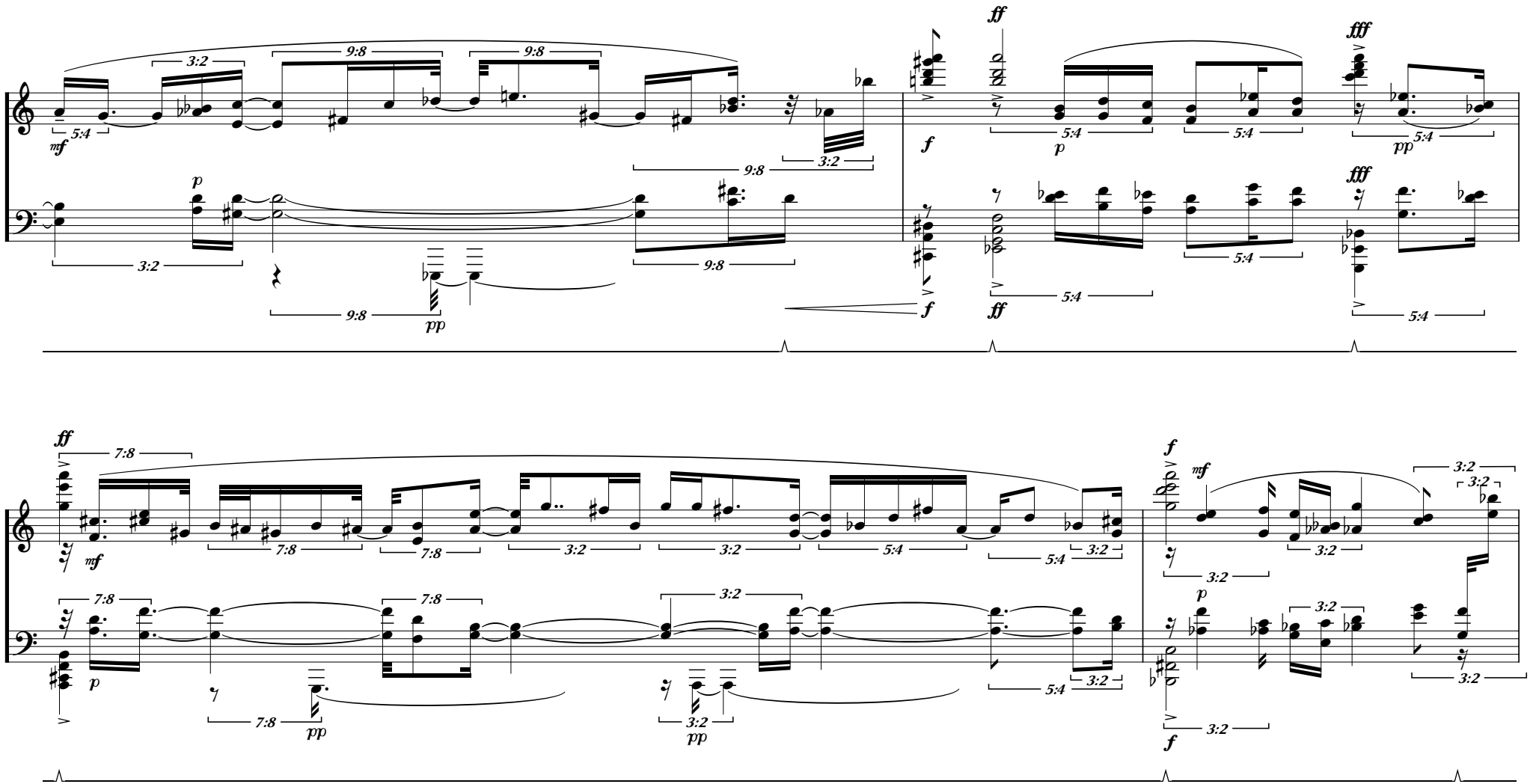

pp
p
5:4
5:6
AS IF INTERMITTENTLY HALTING
♪ = 144
mf
3:2
poco f

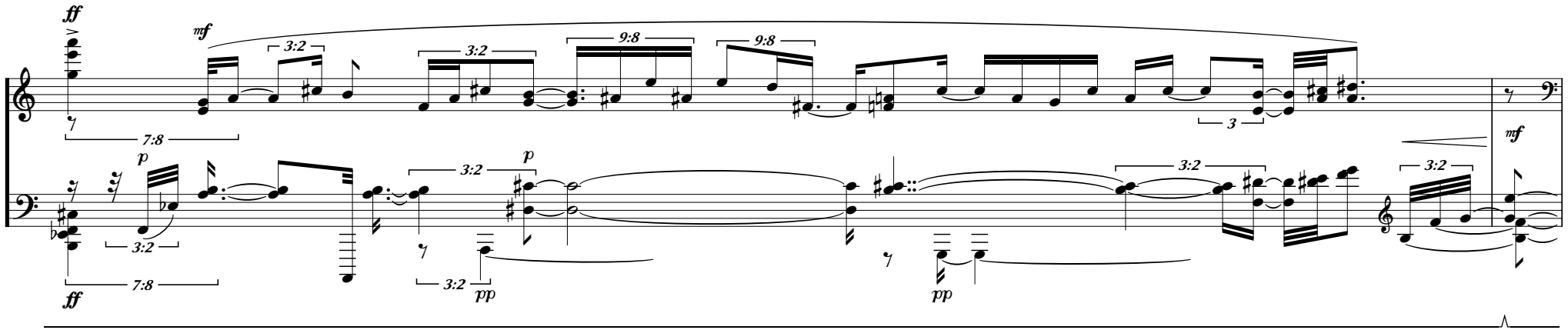

pp
p
pp
sfz
sfz
sffz
p
pp
ff
3:2
mf
3:2


= 112
Play 4 times
p
pp
pppp
half releases
DARKLY CONTEMPLATIVE
= 80
f
5:4
7:8
3:2
pp
p


7:8
mf
ff
3:2
5:4
p
ppp
pp
f

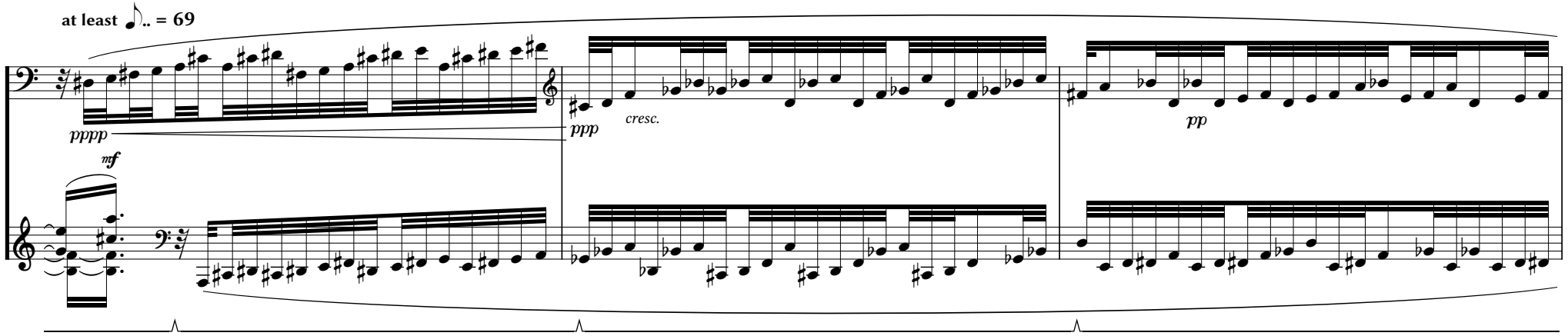

ff
pp
3:2
7:8
B♮
p
pp
SLOW, AUSTERE
♩ = 48
L.H.
f
5:4

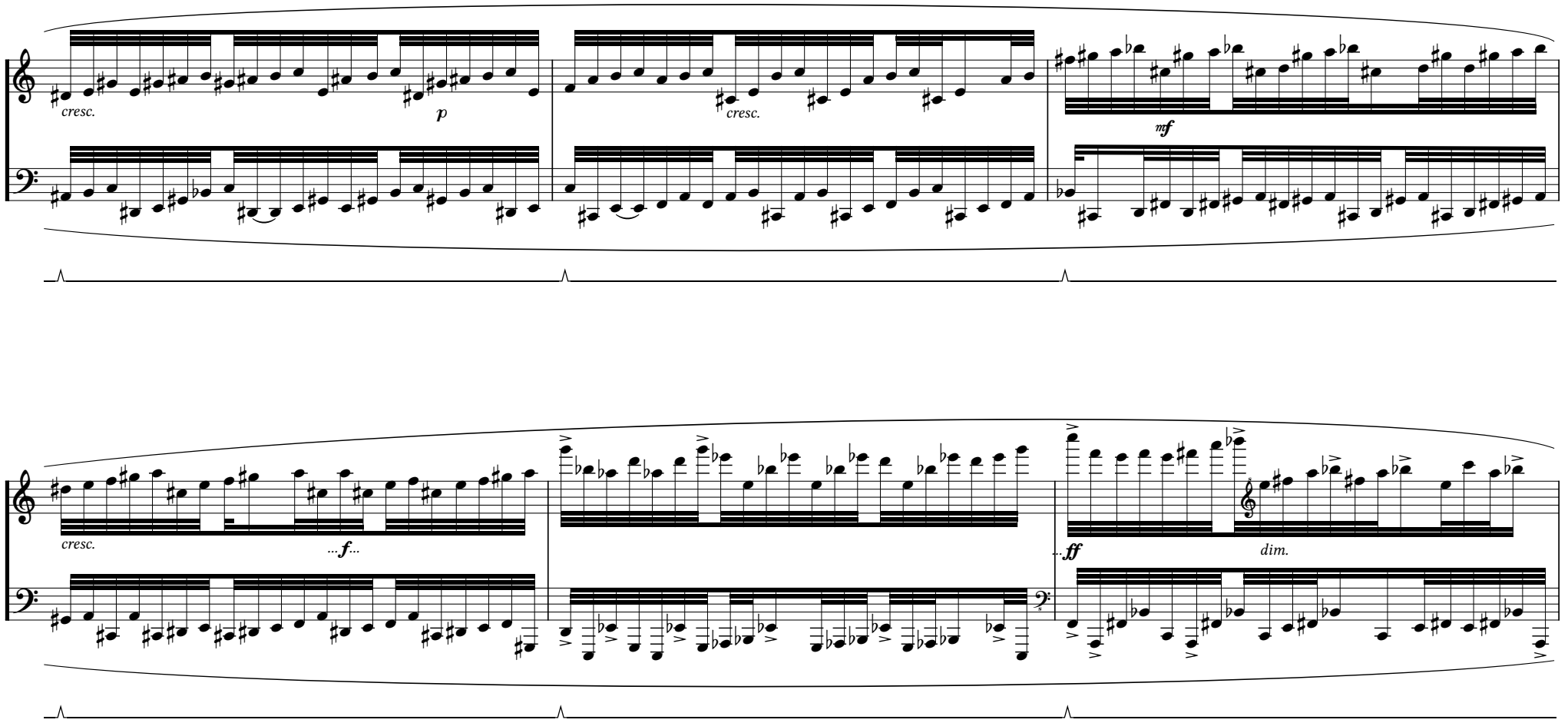

mf
3:2
9:8
5:4
p
pp
f
ff
fff
7:8
3:2
5:4

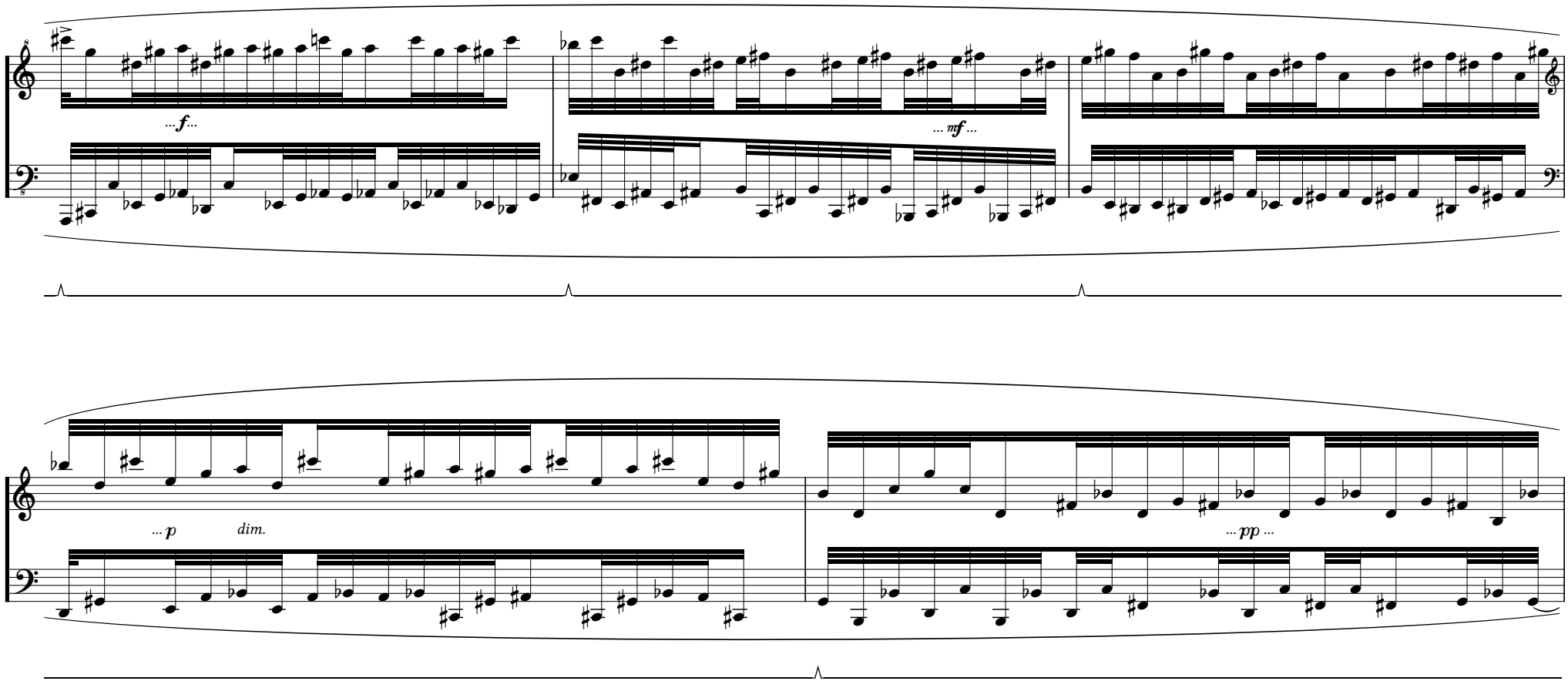


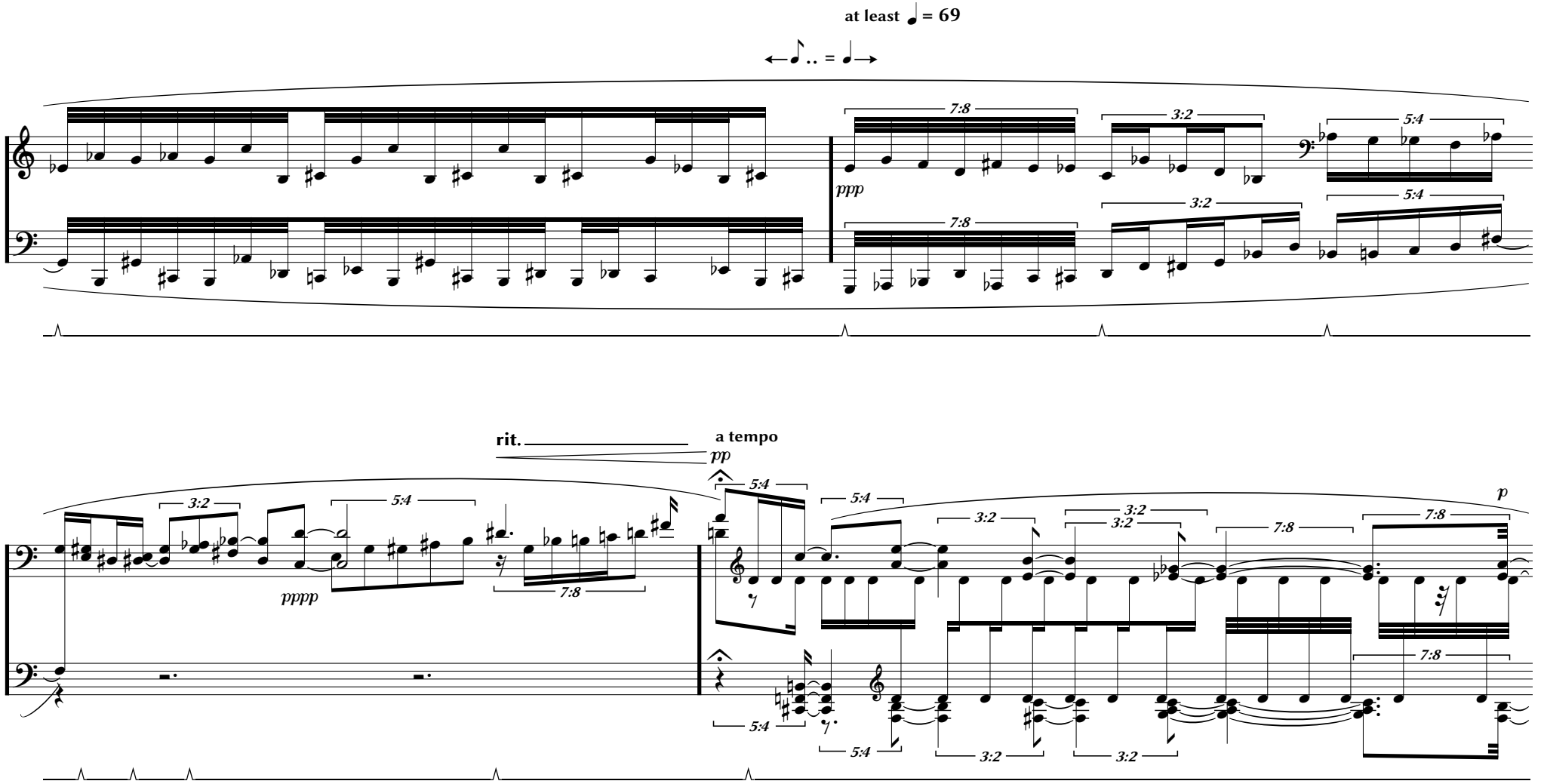
MASSIVE BUT FLEETING - MESMERIC

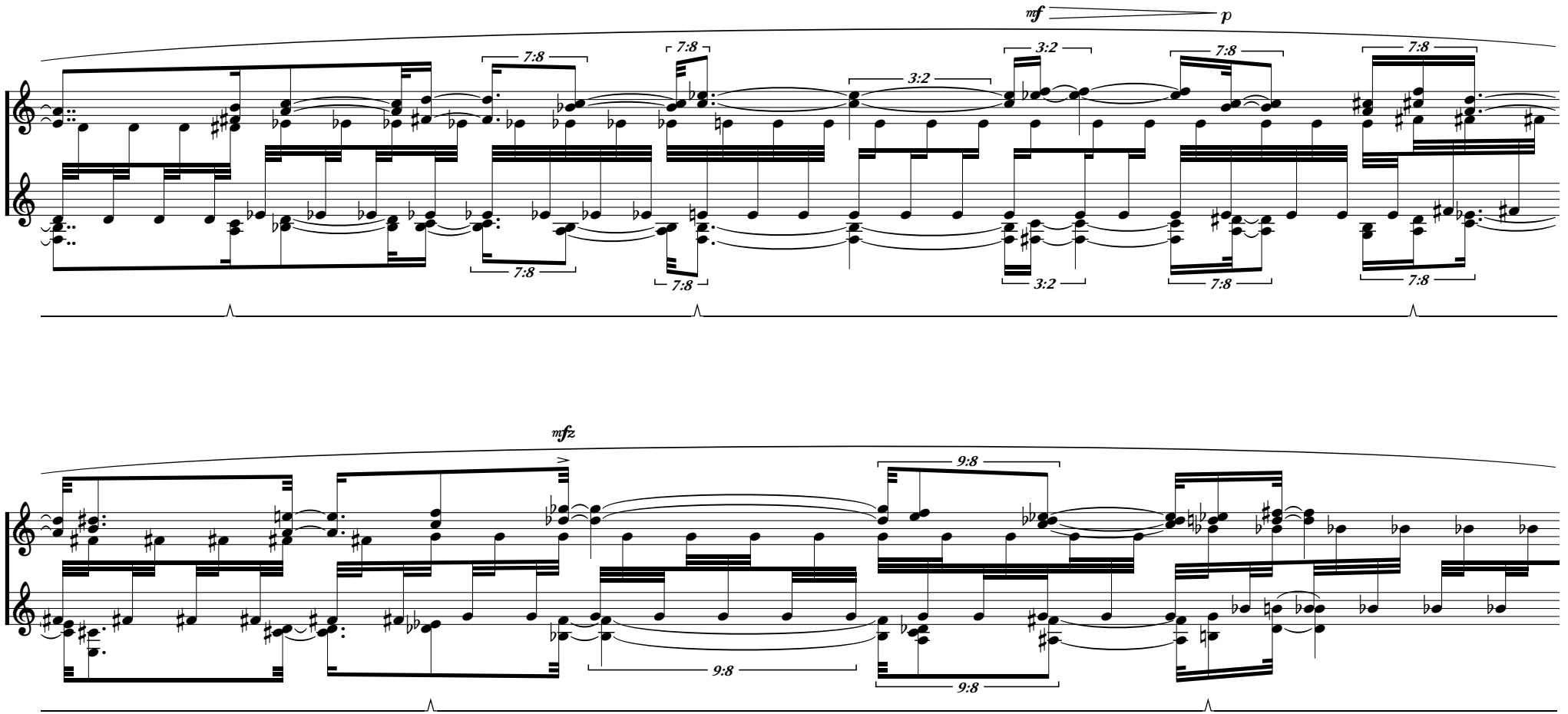
at least ♪.. = 69

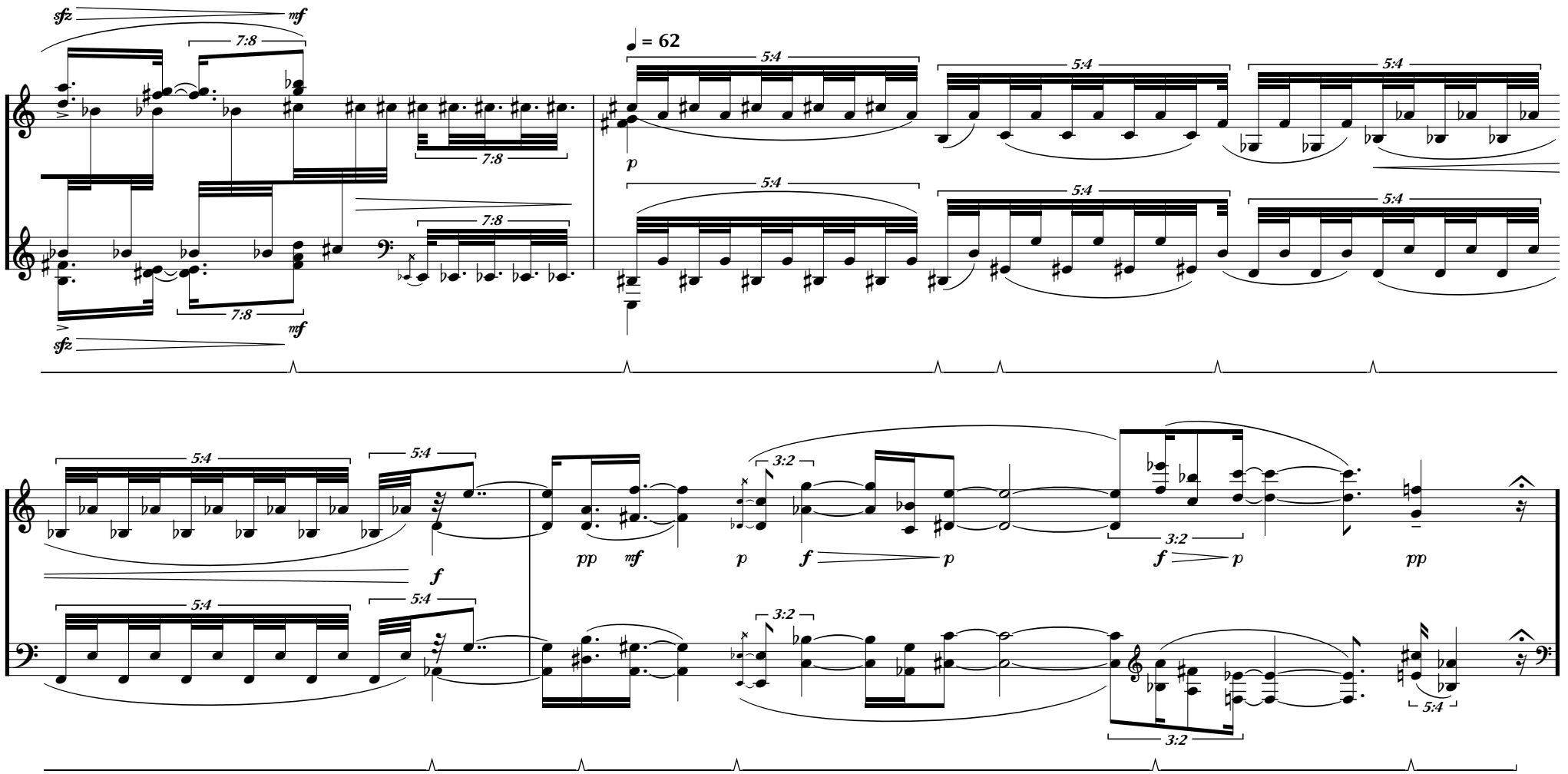


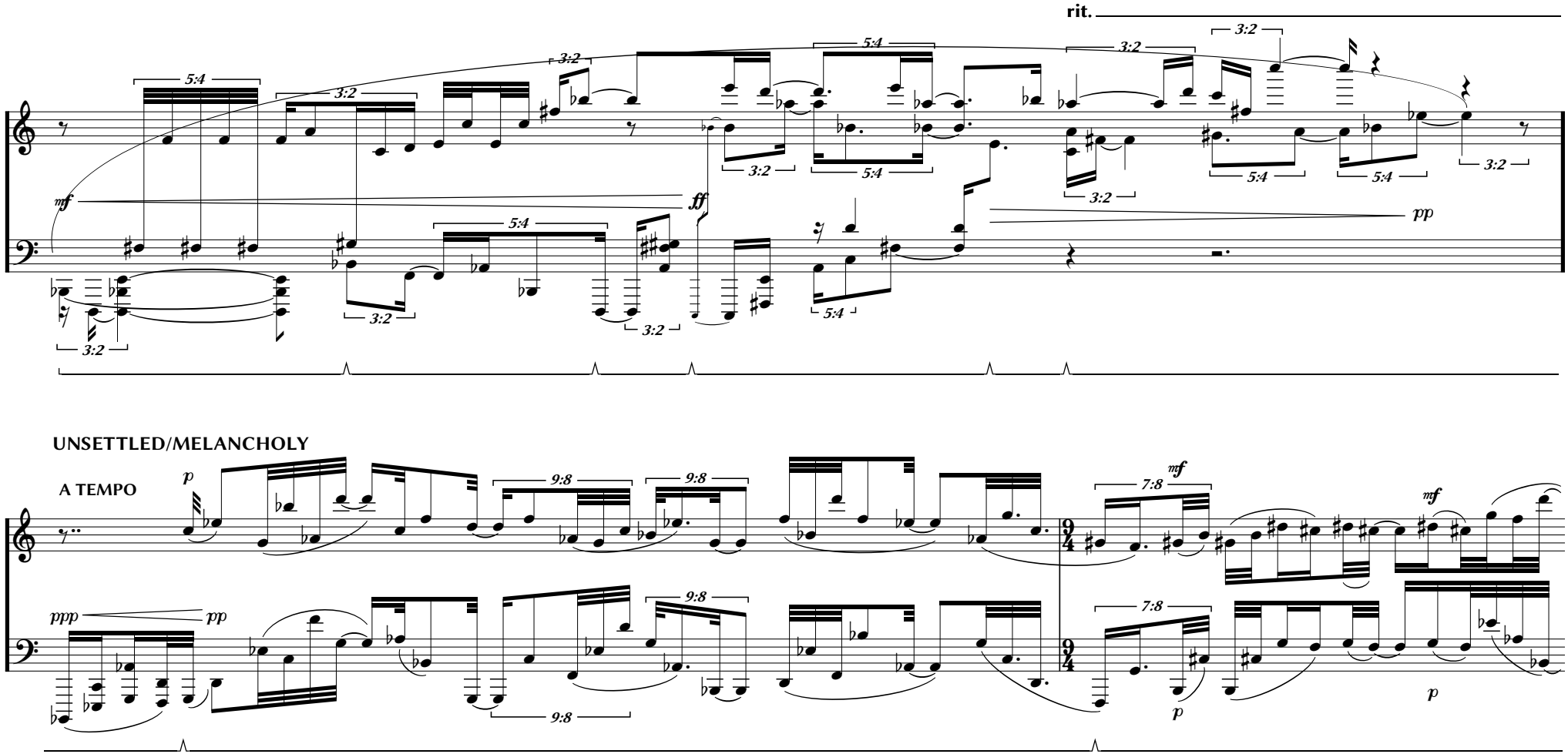

cresc.
p
cresc.
mf
cresc.
...f...
...ff
dim.

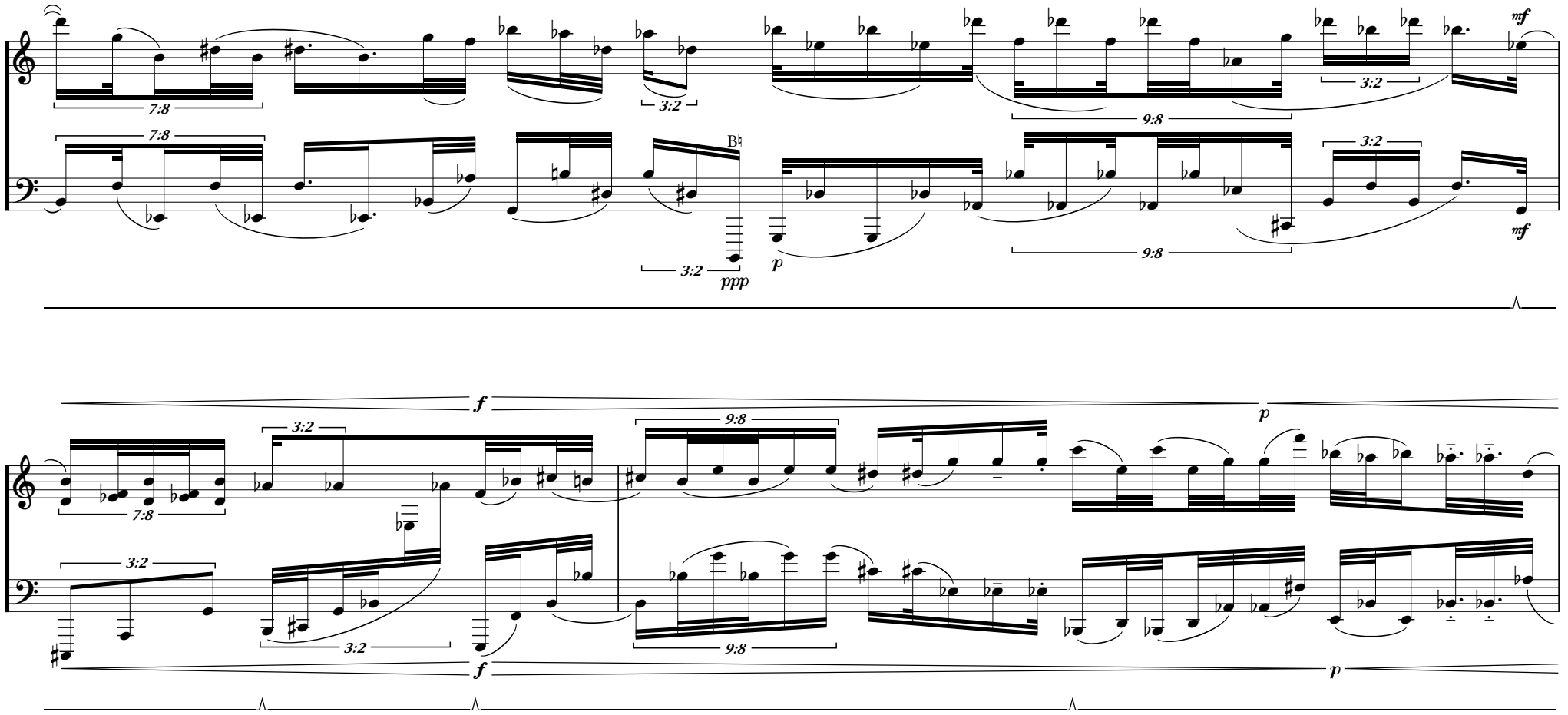

...f...
... mf ...
... p
dim.
... pp ...

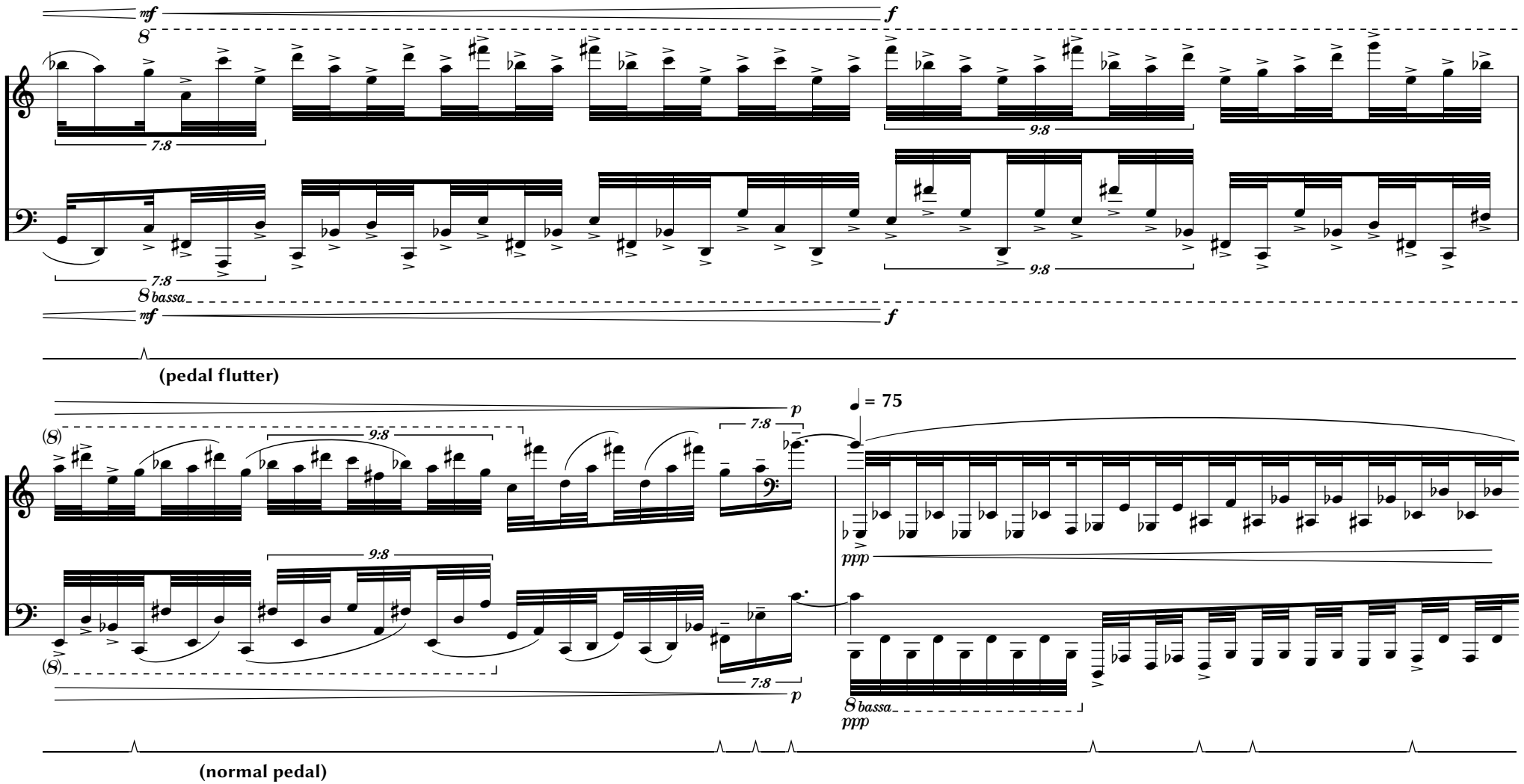

at least ♩ = 69
ppp
pppp
rit.
a tempo
pp
p

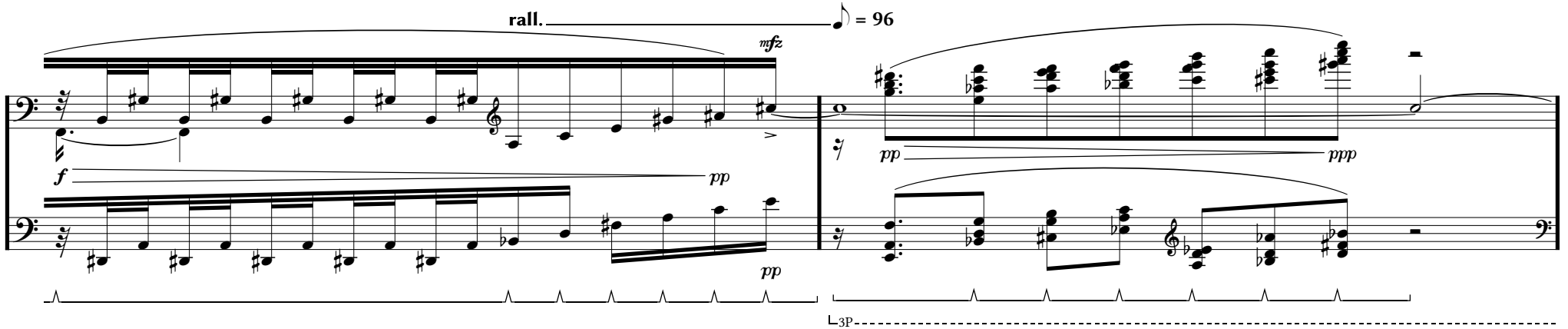

mf
p
7:8
3:2
mfz
9:8

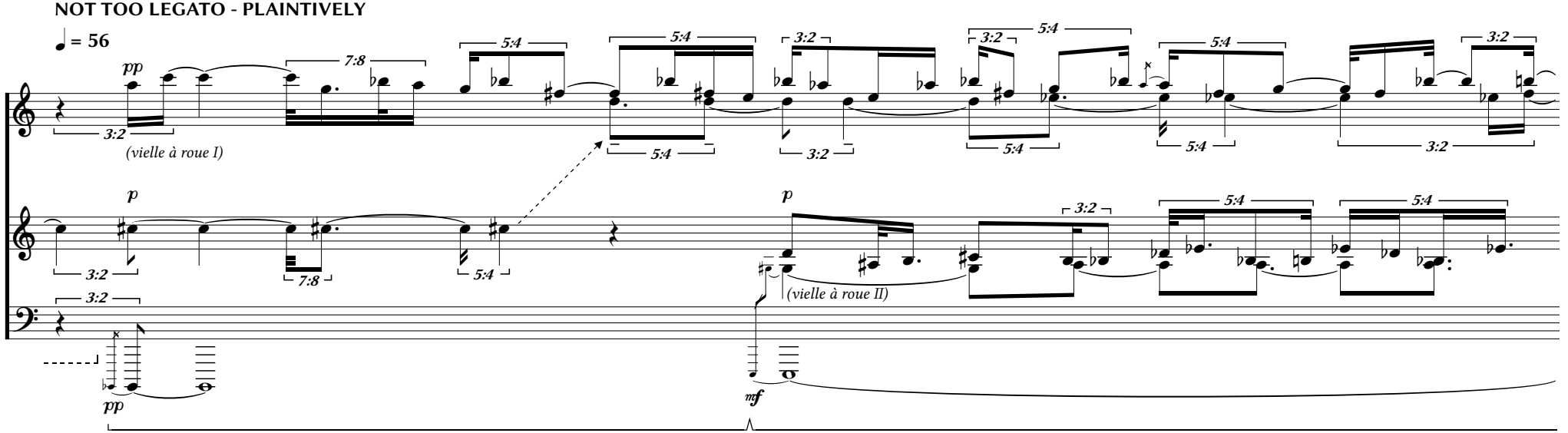

sfz
mf
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
mf
sfz
♩ = 62
5:4
5:4
5:4
p
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
f
pp
mf
3:2
p
f
p
3:2
f
p
pp
5:4
3:2
3:2
5:4

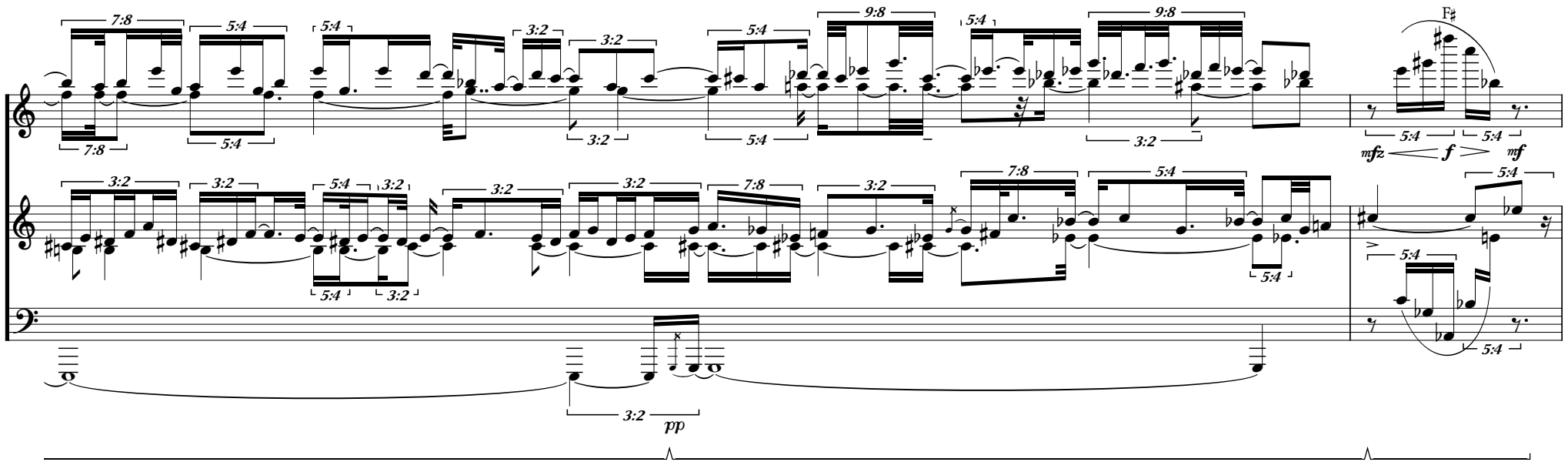

rit.
mf
ff
pp
UNSETTLED/MELANCHOLY
A TEMPO
p
ppp
pp
mf
p


7:8
3:2
9:8
mf
ppp
p
f


mf
f
8
7:8
9:8
8 bassa
(pedal flutter)
p
(8)
= 75
ppp
(normal pedal)

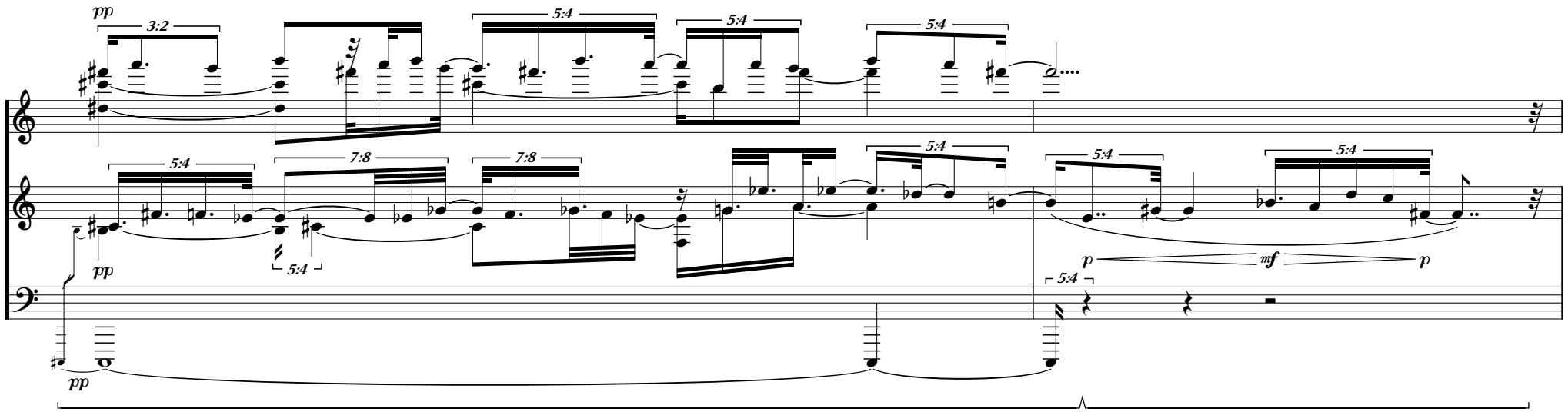

rall.
♪ = 96
mfz
f
pp
pp
pp
ppp
3P

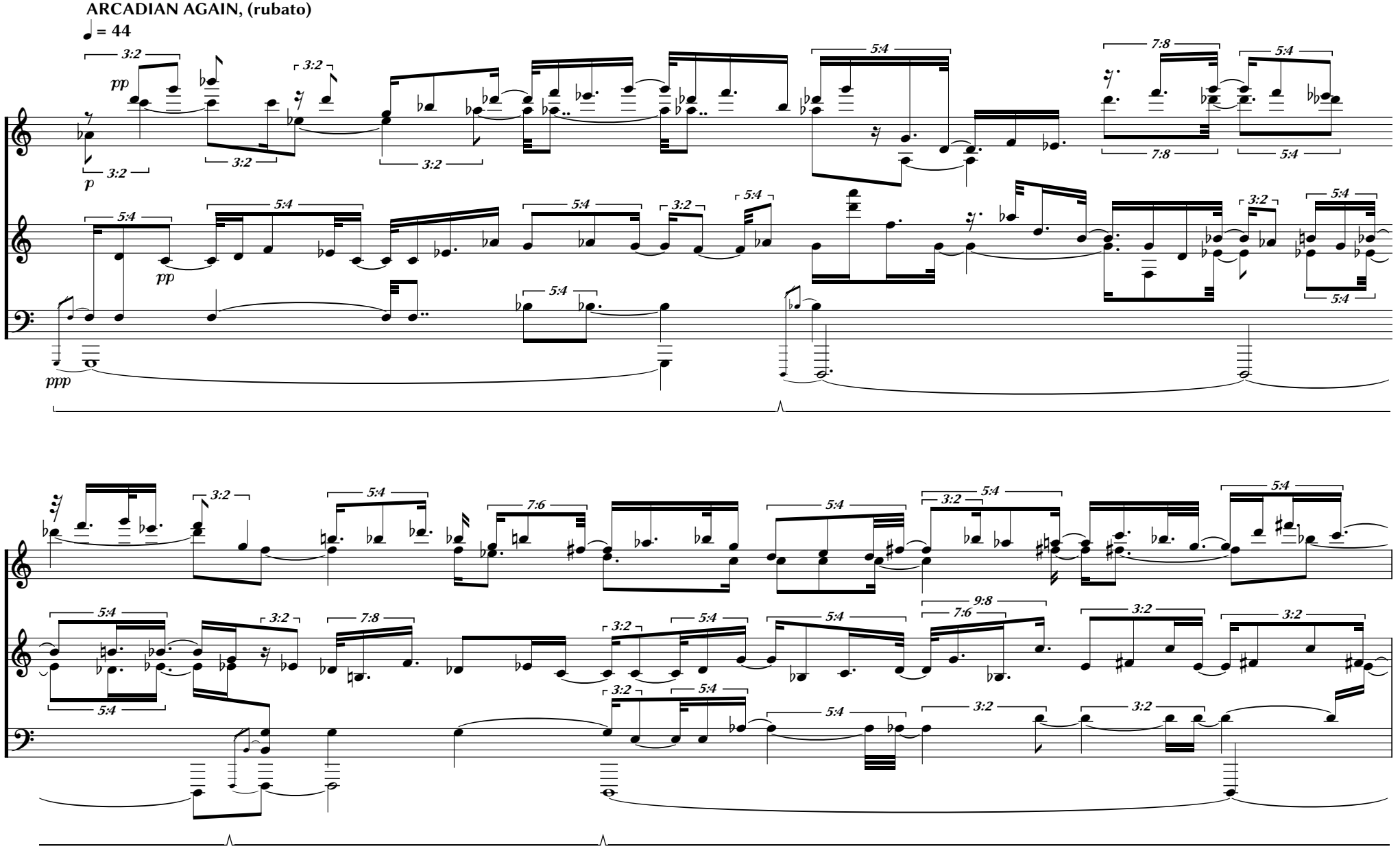

NOT TOO LEGATO - PLAINTIVELY
♩ = 56
pp
(vielle à roue I)
p
pp
p
(vielle à roue II)
mf
3:2
7:8
5:4

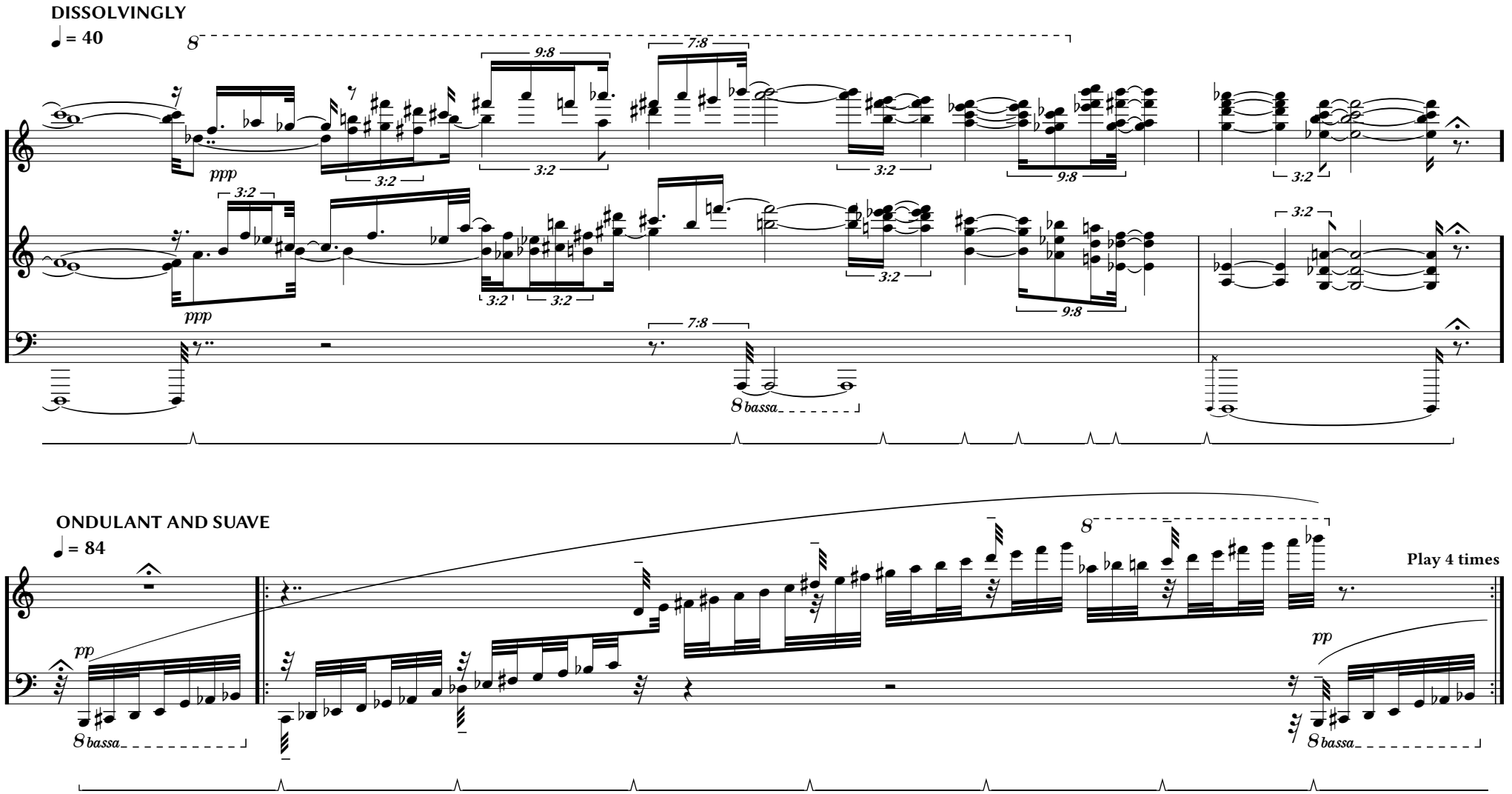


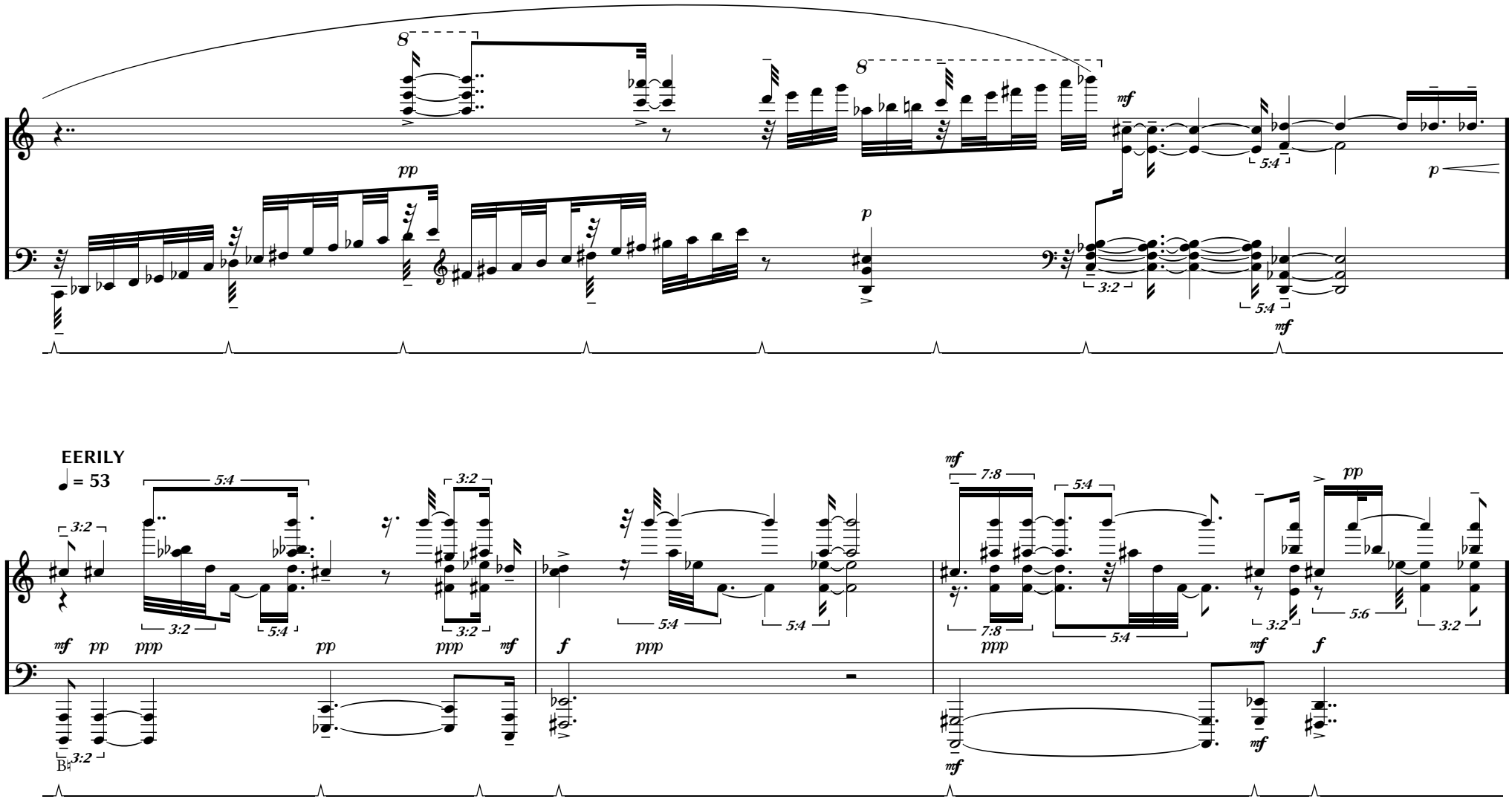
SUDDENLY ARCADIAN
much slower (rubato)

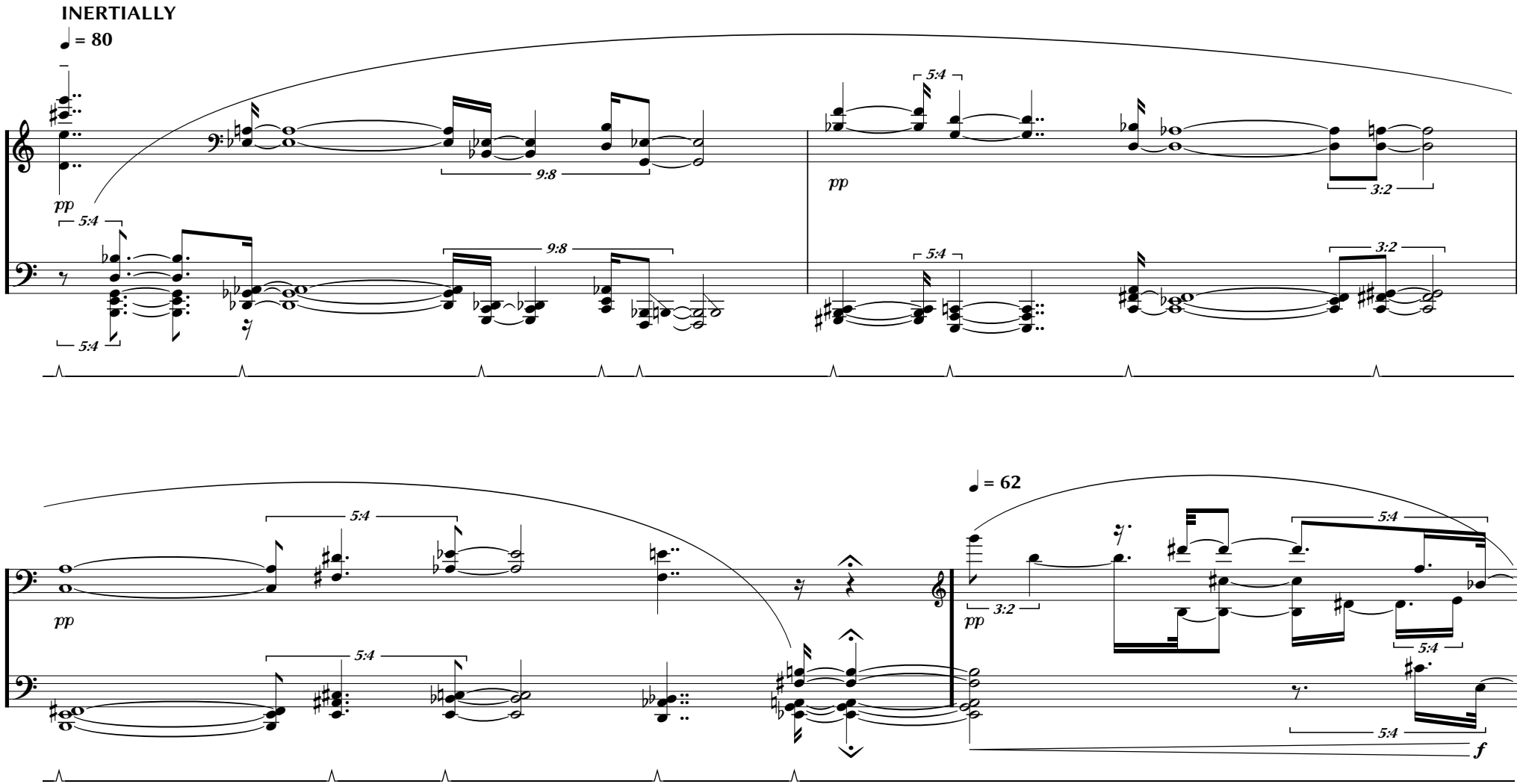
♩ = 50

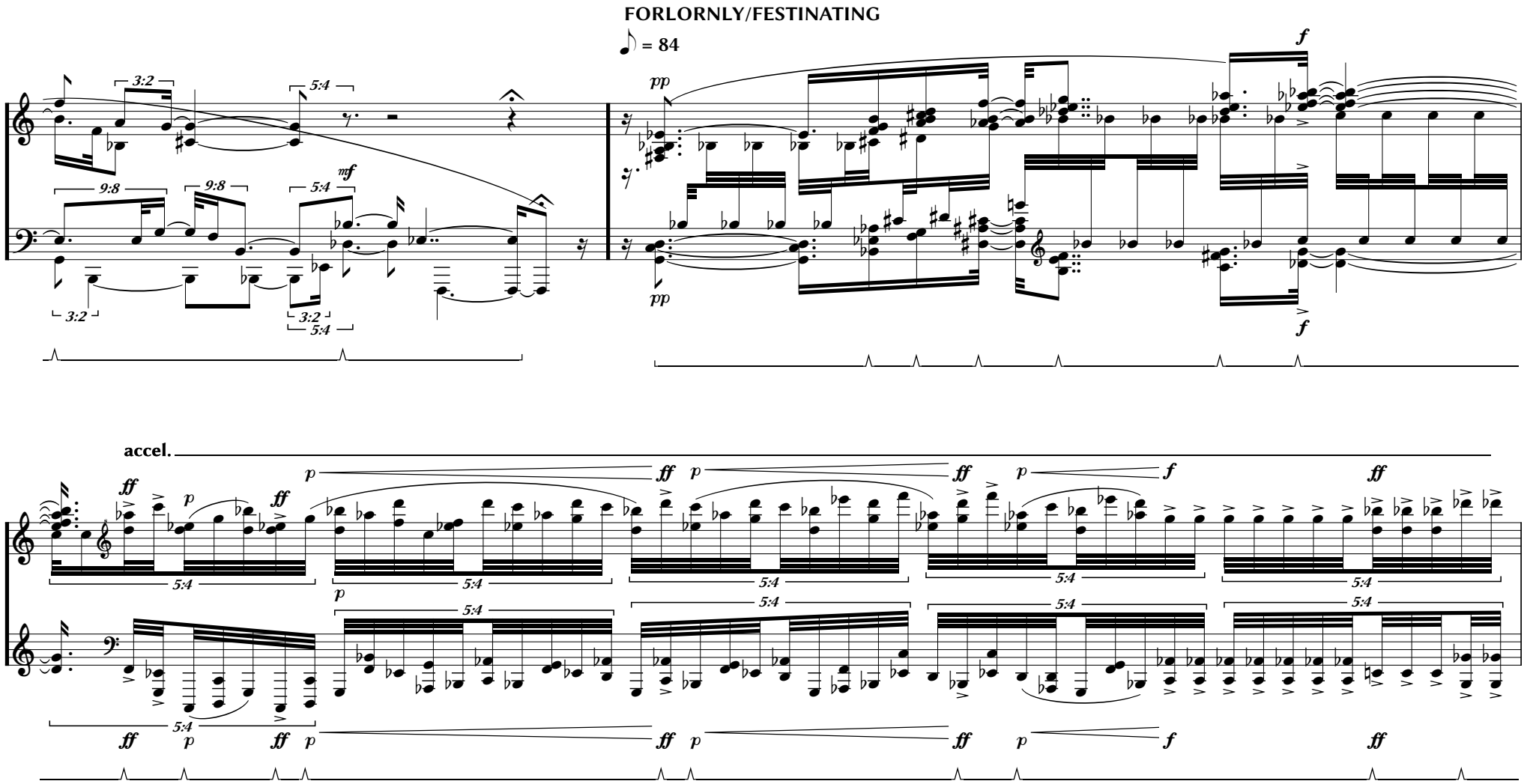


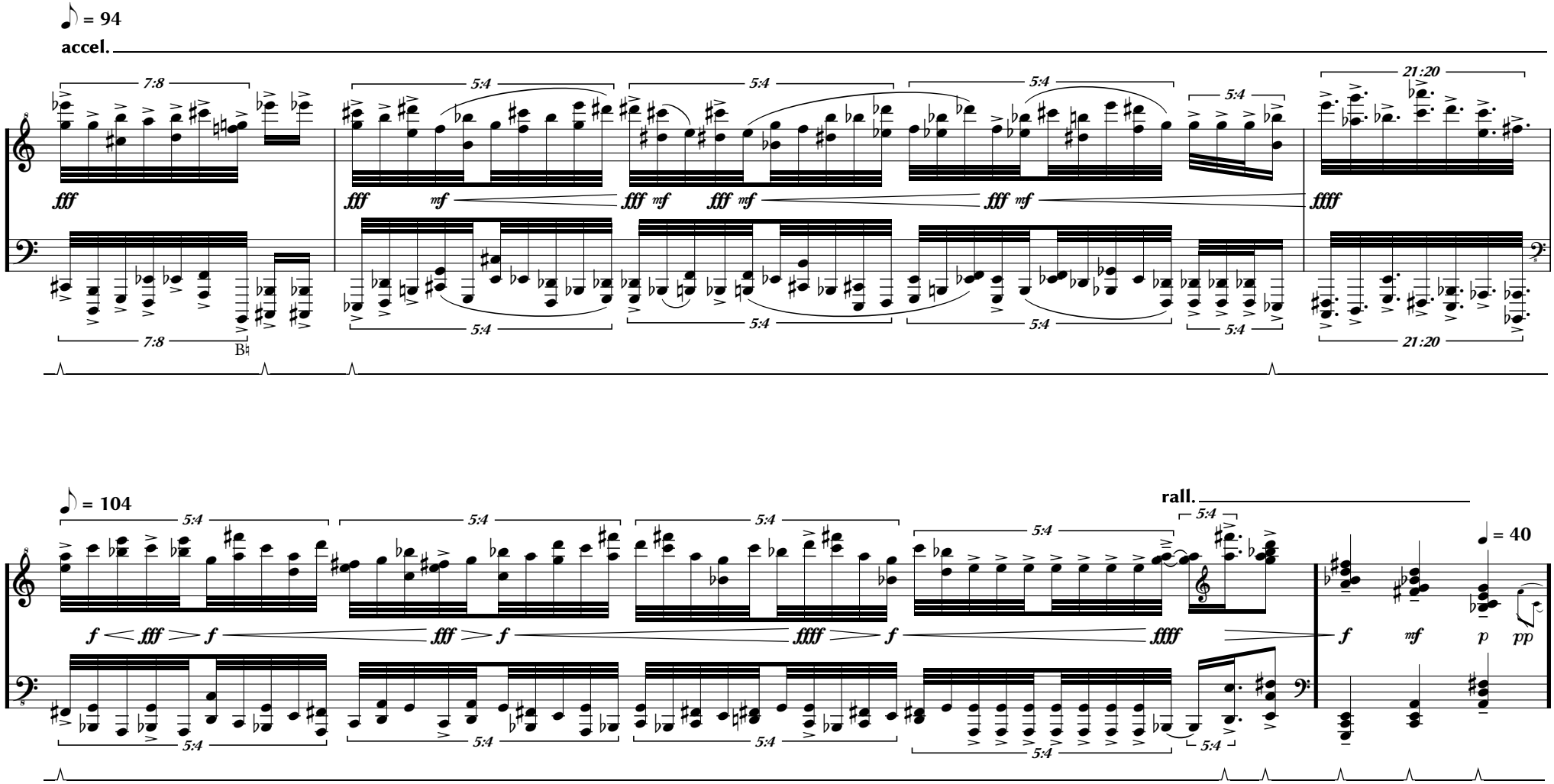

ARCADIAN AGAIN, (rubato)
♩ = 44

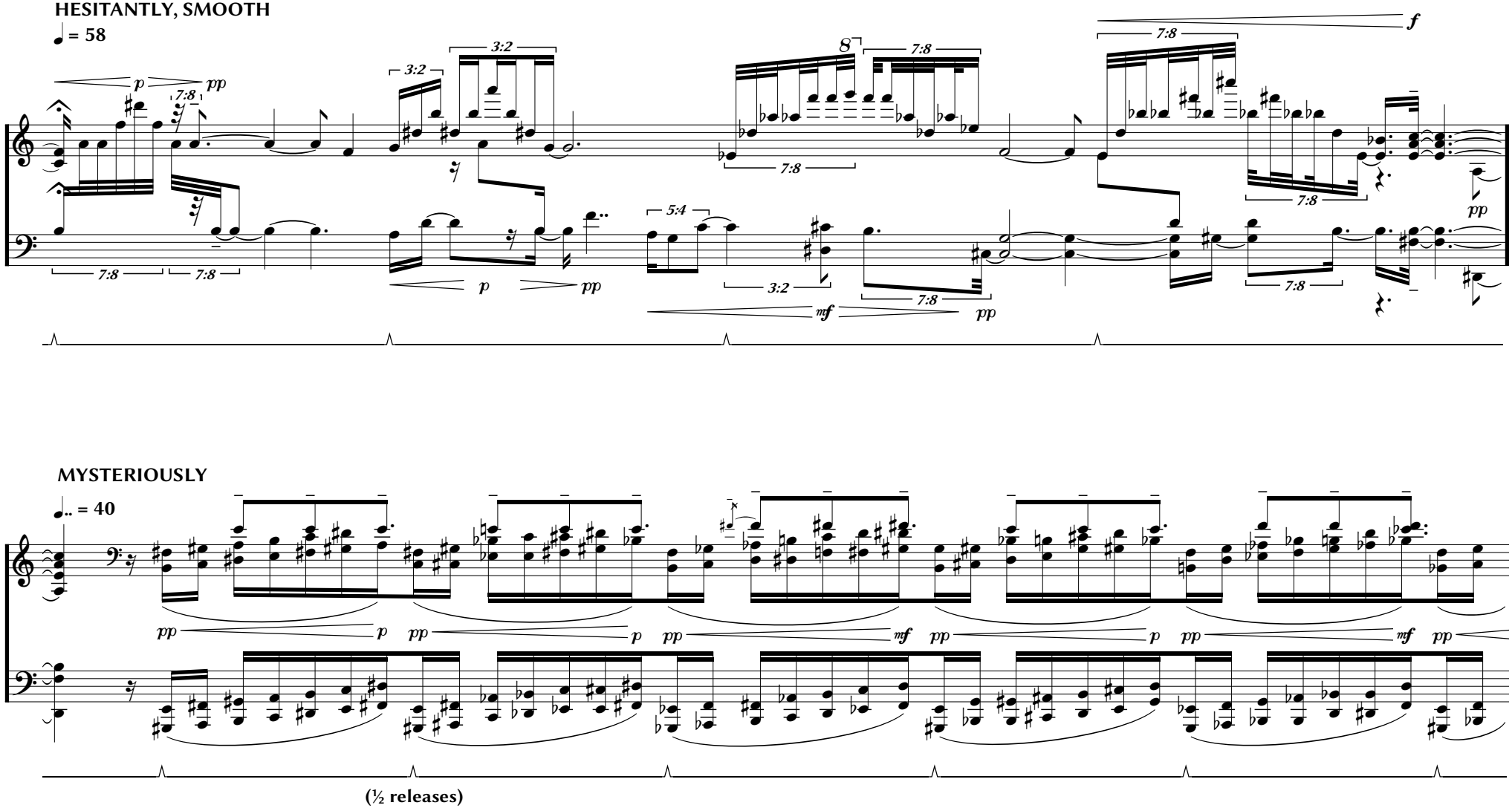

DISSOLVINGLY
♩ = 40
ppp
ppp
8bassa
ONDULANT AND SUAVE
♩ = 84
pp
8bassa
8
pp
8bassa
Play 4 times

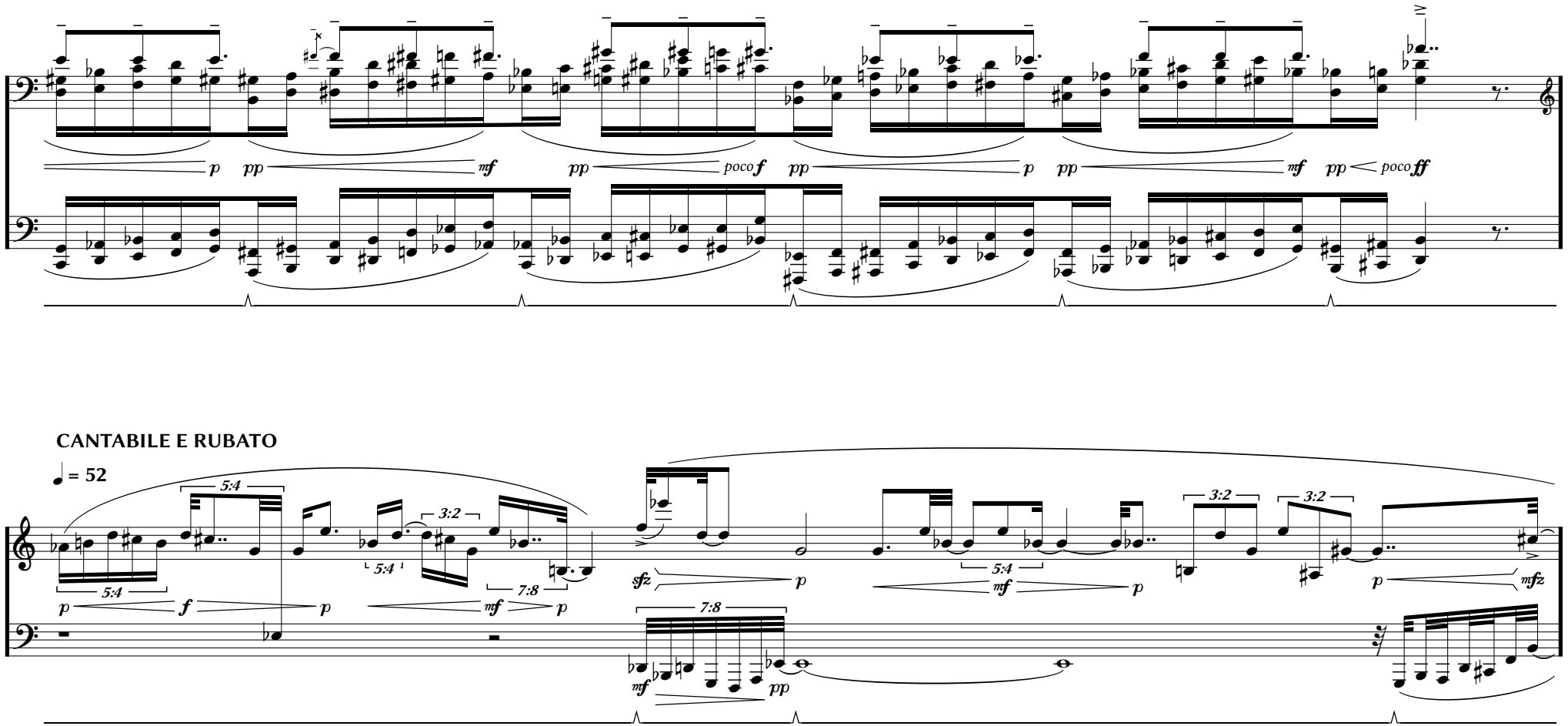

8
8
pp
p
mf
5:4
p
3:2
5:4
mf
EERILY
♩ = 53
5:4
3:2
3:2
5:4
3:2
mf pp ppp pp ppp mf
f
ppp
5:4
5:4
mf
7:8
5:4
7:8
ppp
5:4
pp
3:2
5:6
3:2
mf f
mf
mf
3:2

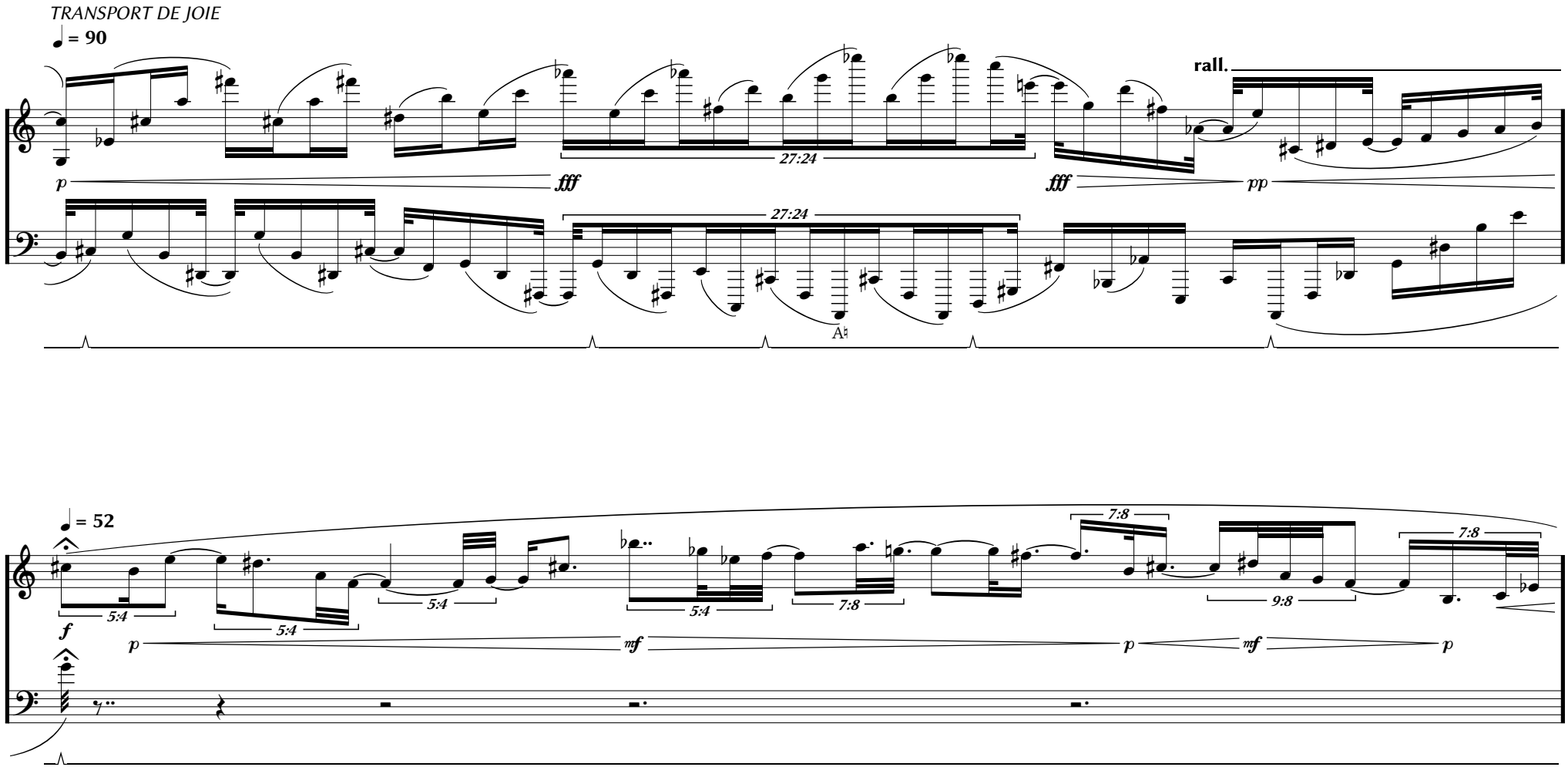

INERTIALLY
♩ = 80
pp
5:4
9:8
3:2
♩ = 62
f

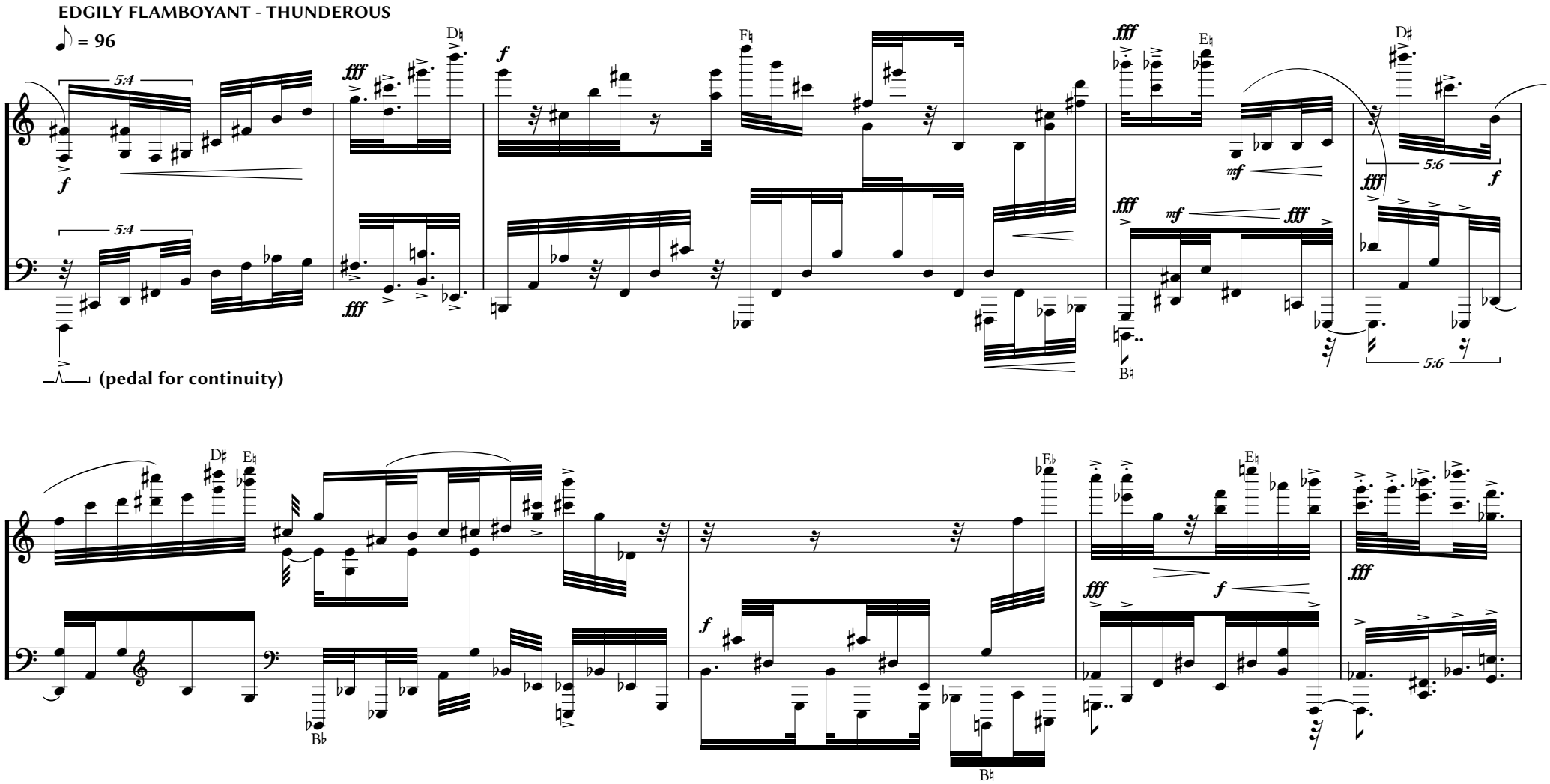

FORLORNLY/FESTINATING
♪ = 84
accel.

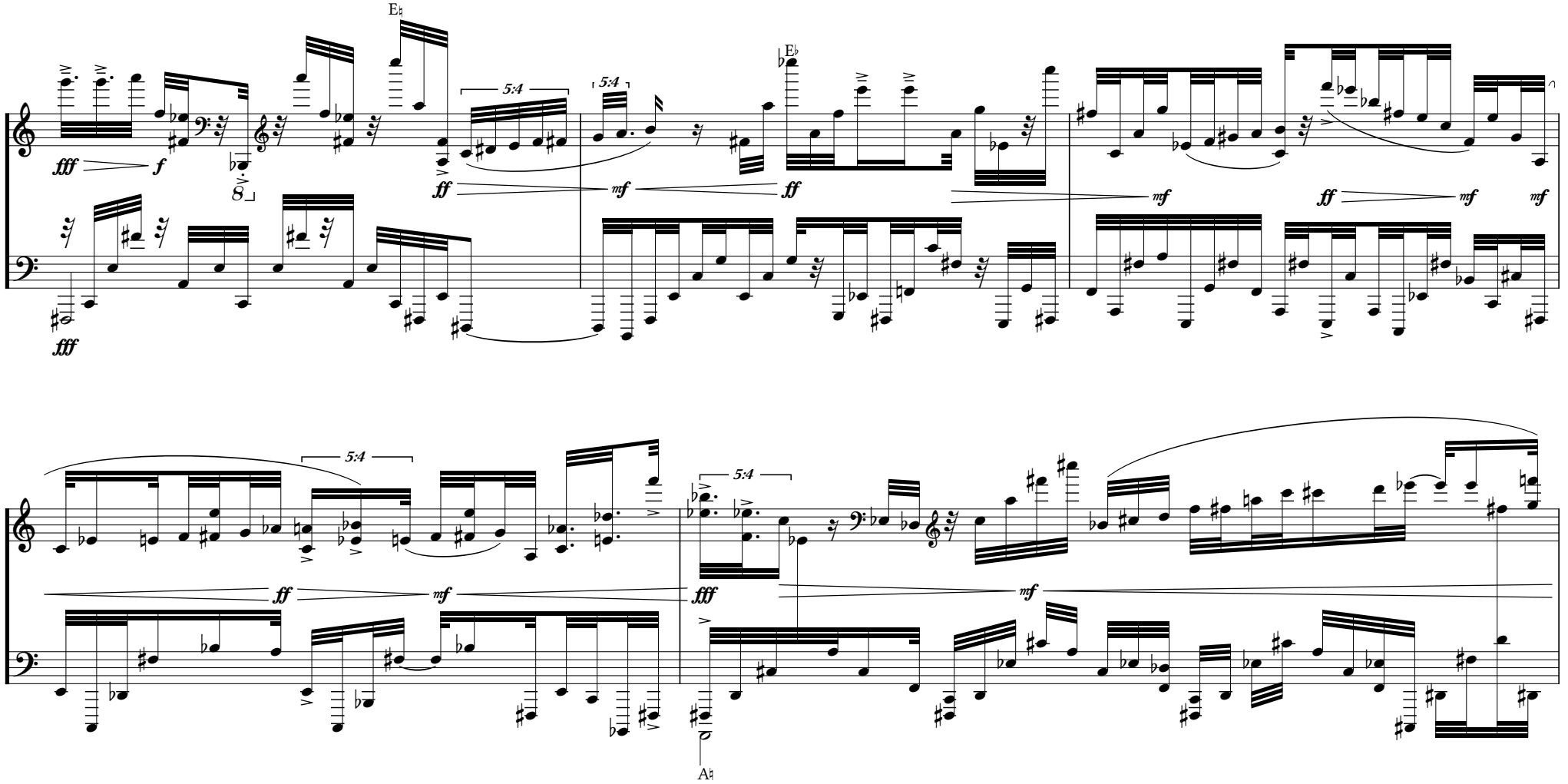

♪ = 94
accel.
7:8
5:4
21:20
fff
mf
ffff
♪ = 104
rall.
♩ = 40
f
mf
p
pp

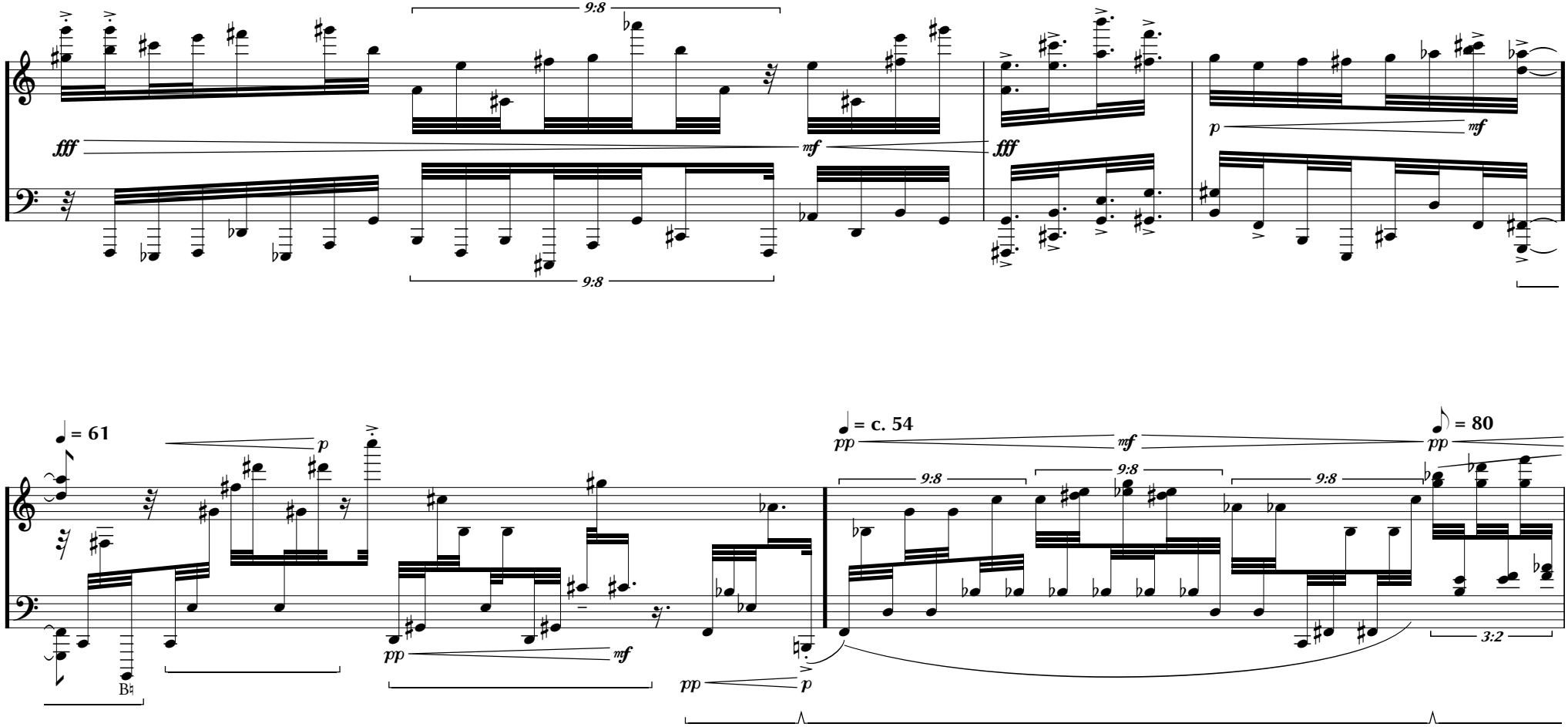

HESITANTLY, SMOOTH
♩ = 58
MYSTERIOUSLY
♩.. = 40
(½ releases)

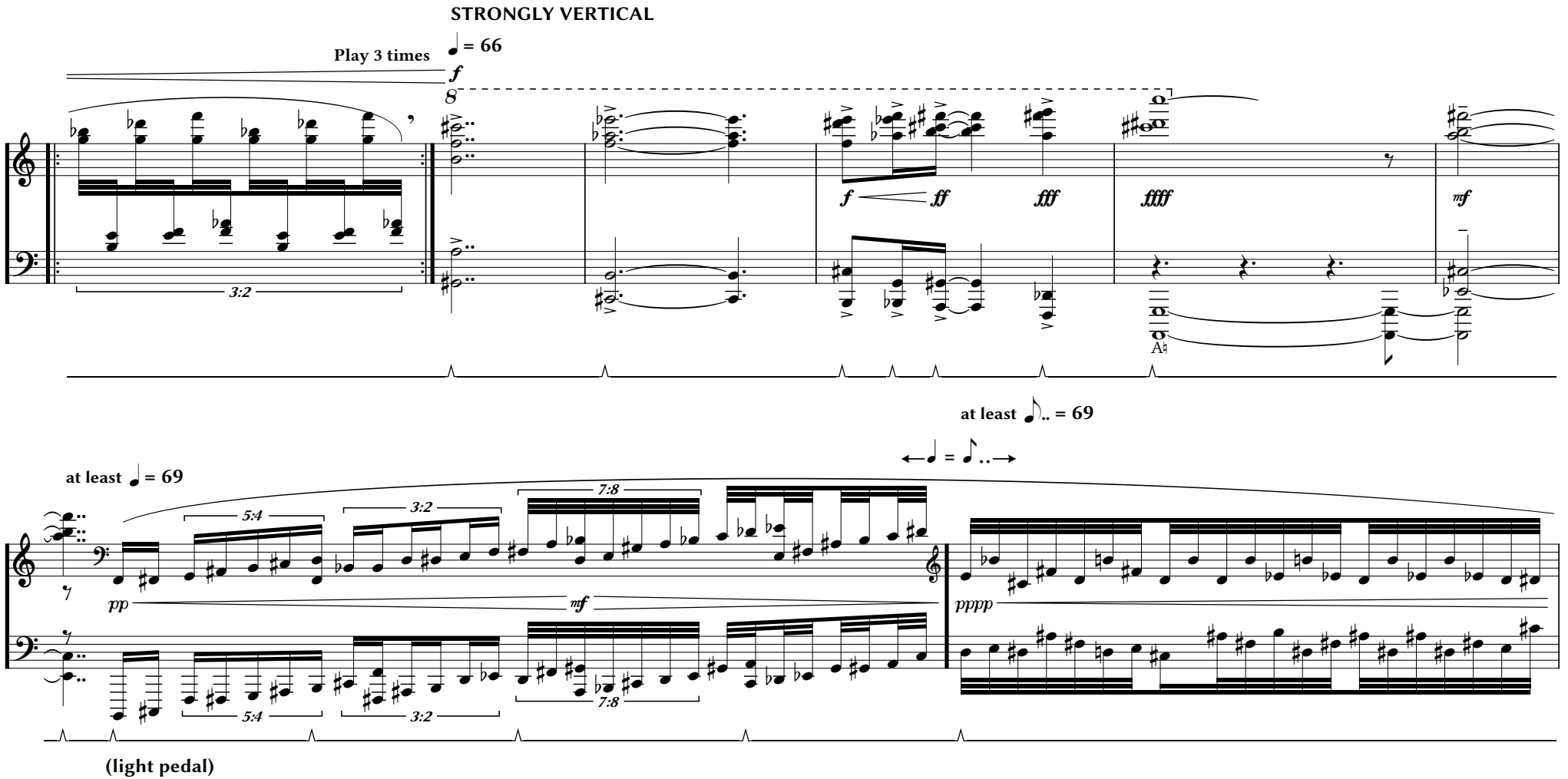

p
pp
mf
pp
poco f
pp
p
pp
mf
pp
poco ff
CANTABILE E RUBATO
♩ = 52
5:4
3:2
5:4
7:8
p
f
p
mf
p
sfz
p
5:4
mf
p
3:2
3:2
p
mfz
7:8
mf
pp

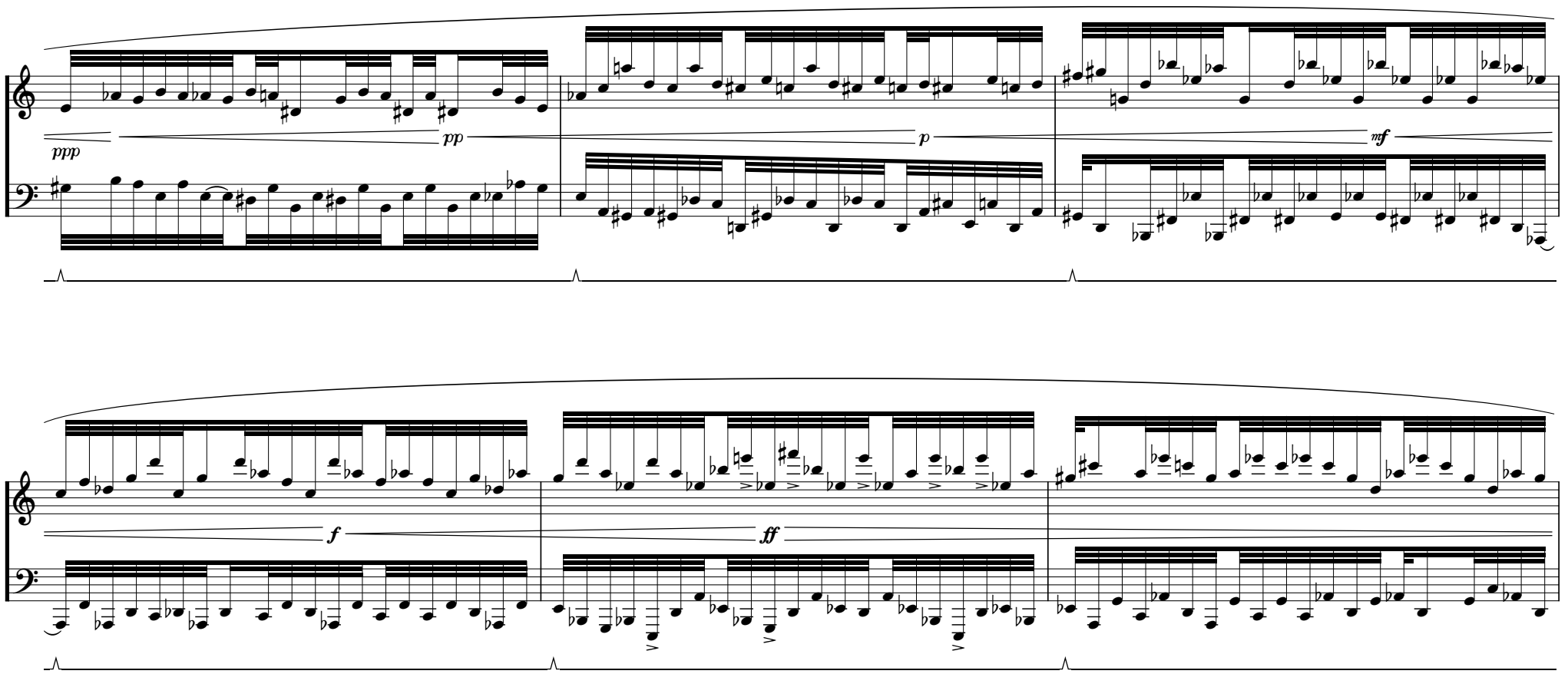

TRANSPORT DE JOIE
♩ = 90
rall.
27:24
27:24
A♮
♩ = 52
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
7:8
7:8
9:8
7:8

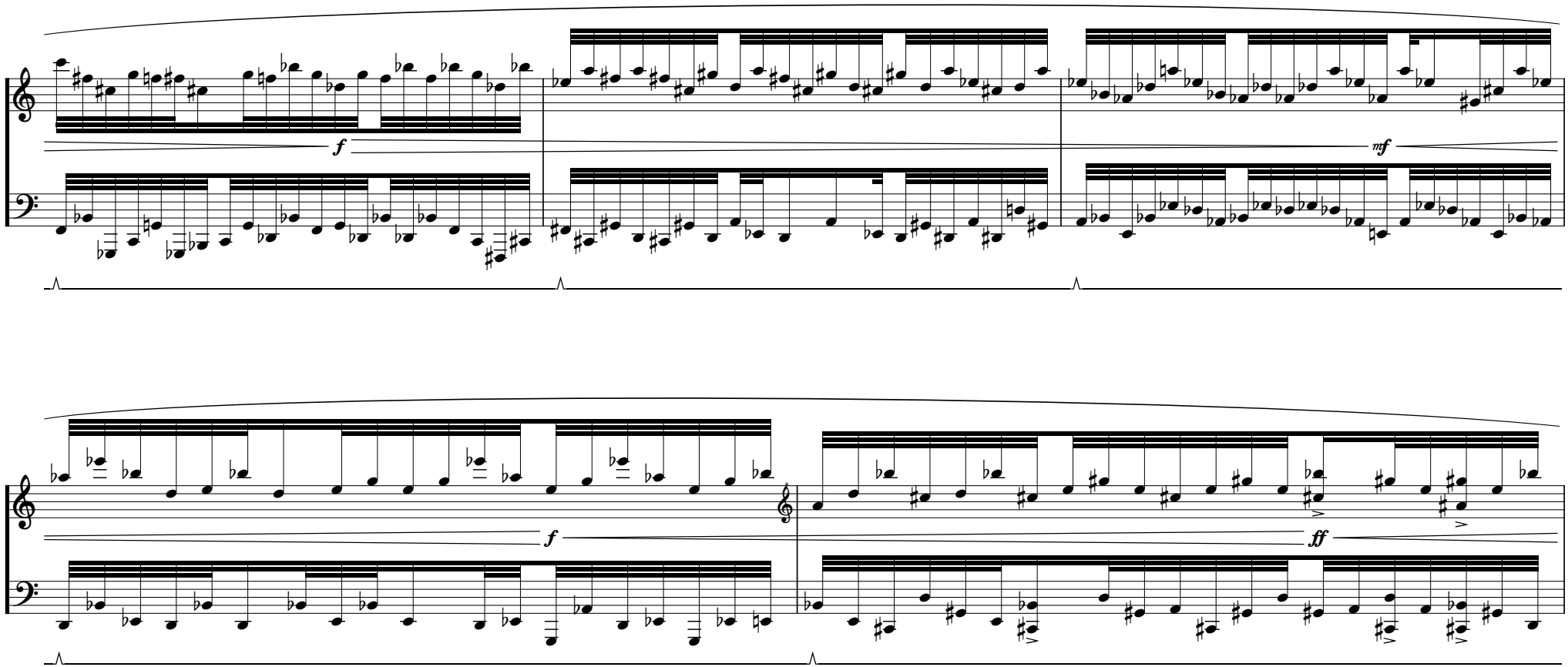

EDGILY FLAMBOYANT - THUNDEROUS
♪ = 96
5:4
5:4
(pedal for continuity)
5:6
5:6

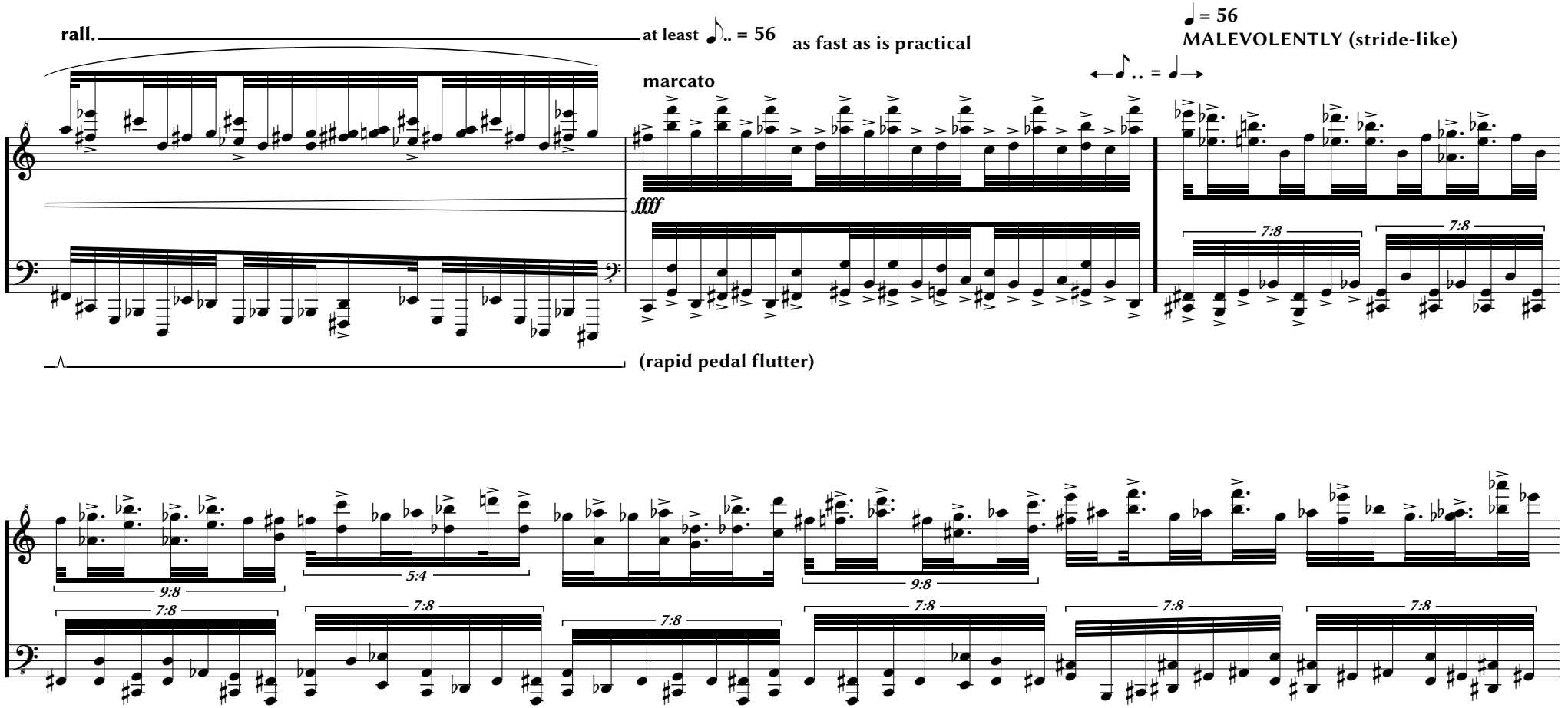

fff
f
ff
mf
5:4
E♮
E♭
A♮

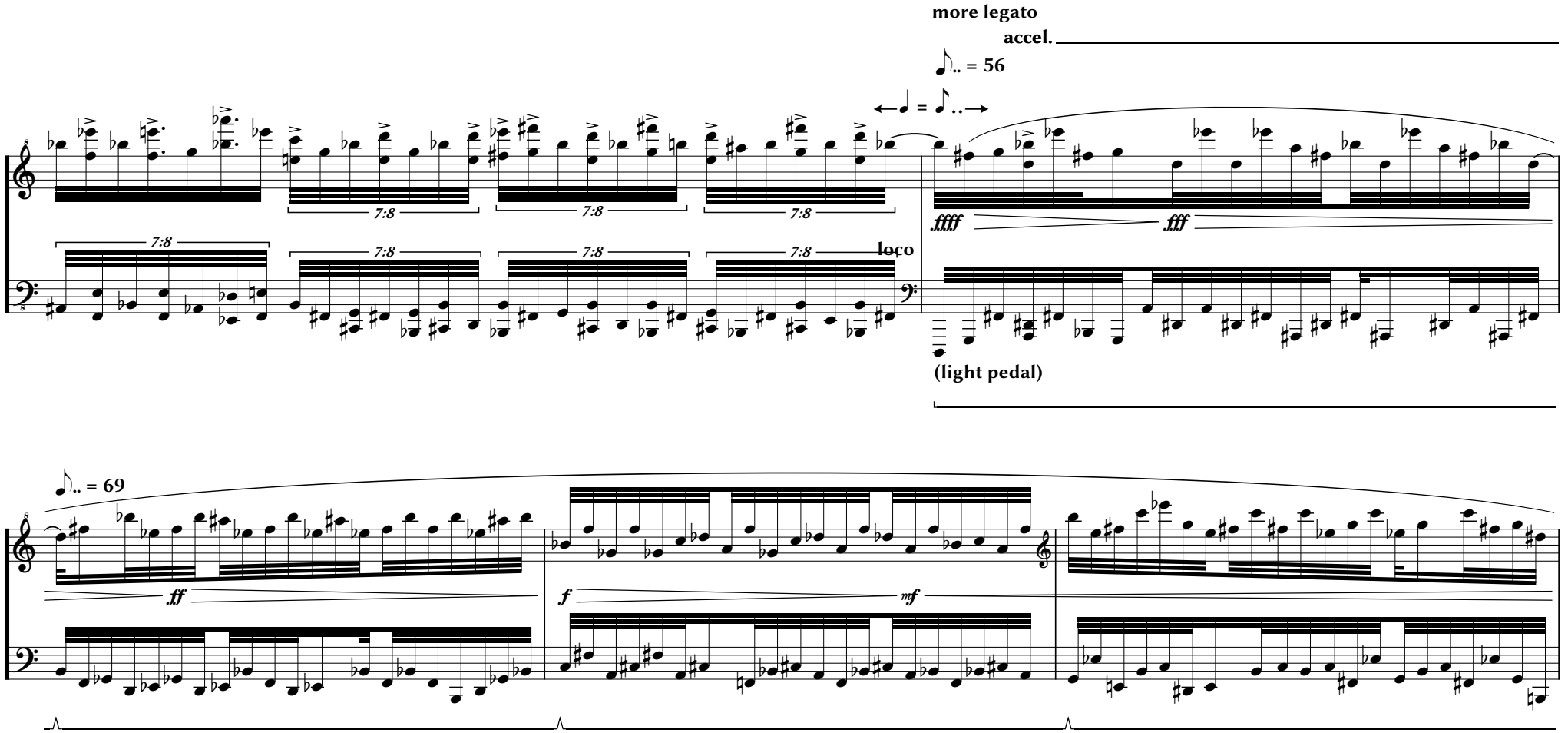

9:8
fff
mf
9:8
fff
p
mf
♩ = 61
p
pp
mf
pp
p
♩ = c. 54
pp
mf
9:8
9:8
9:8
♪ = 80
pp
3:2

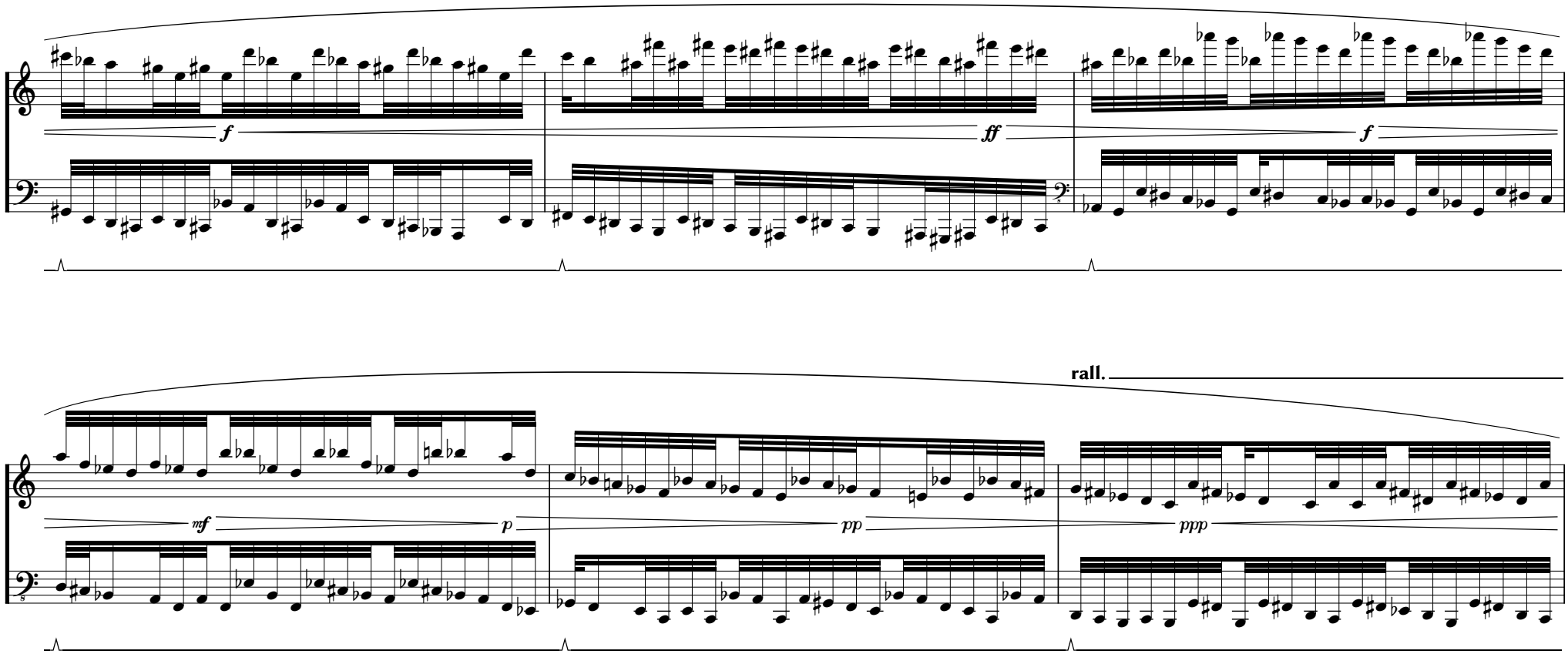

STRONGLY VERTICAL
Play 3 times
♩ = 66
f
8
3:2
f
ff
fff
fffff
mf
at least ♩ = 69
at least ♪.. = 69
←♩ = ♪..→
5:4
3:2
7:8
pp
mf
pppp
(light pedal)

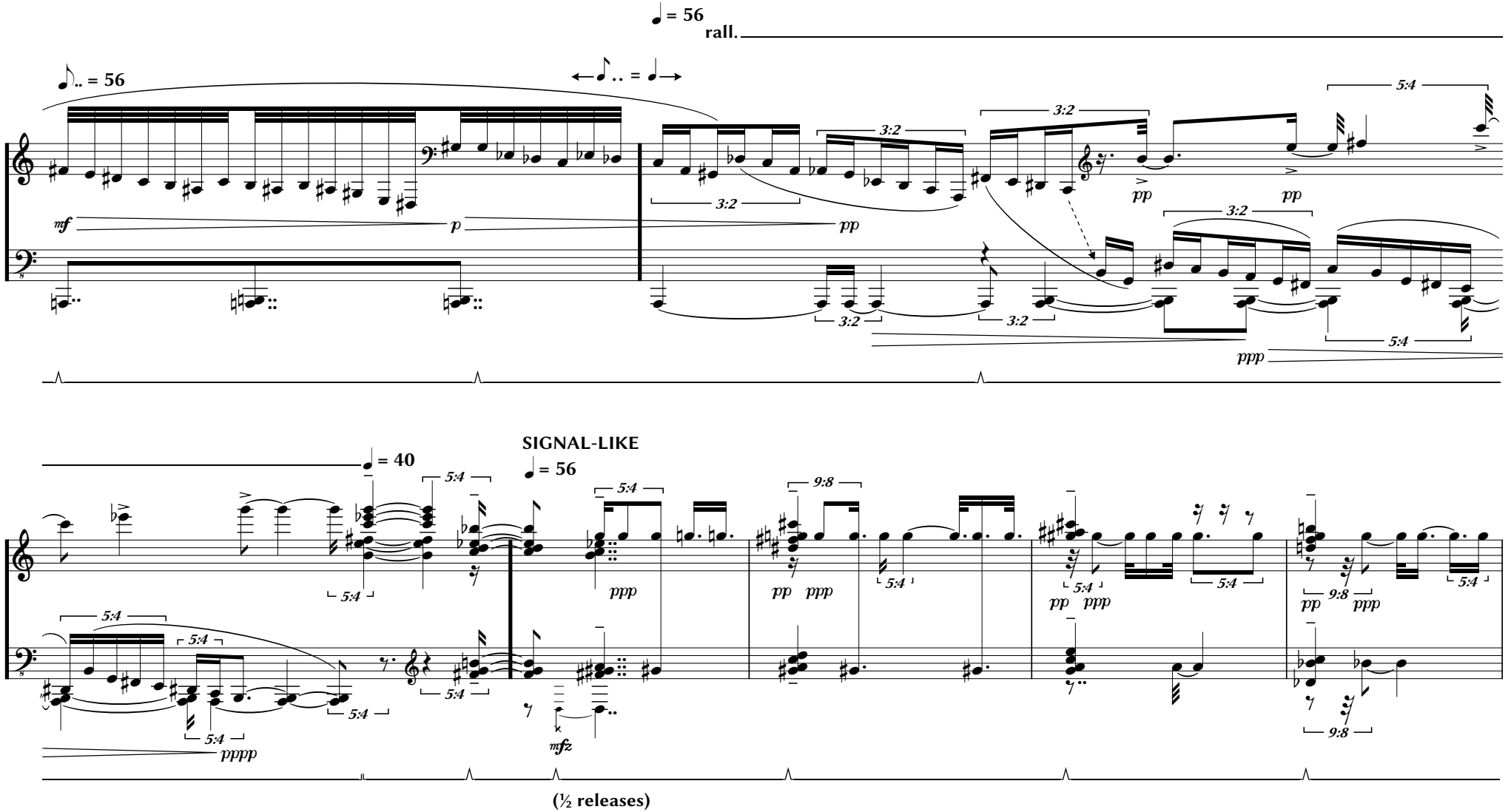

ppp
pp
p
mf
f
ff


f
mf
f
ff

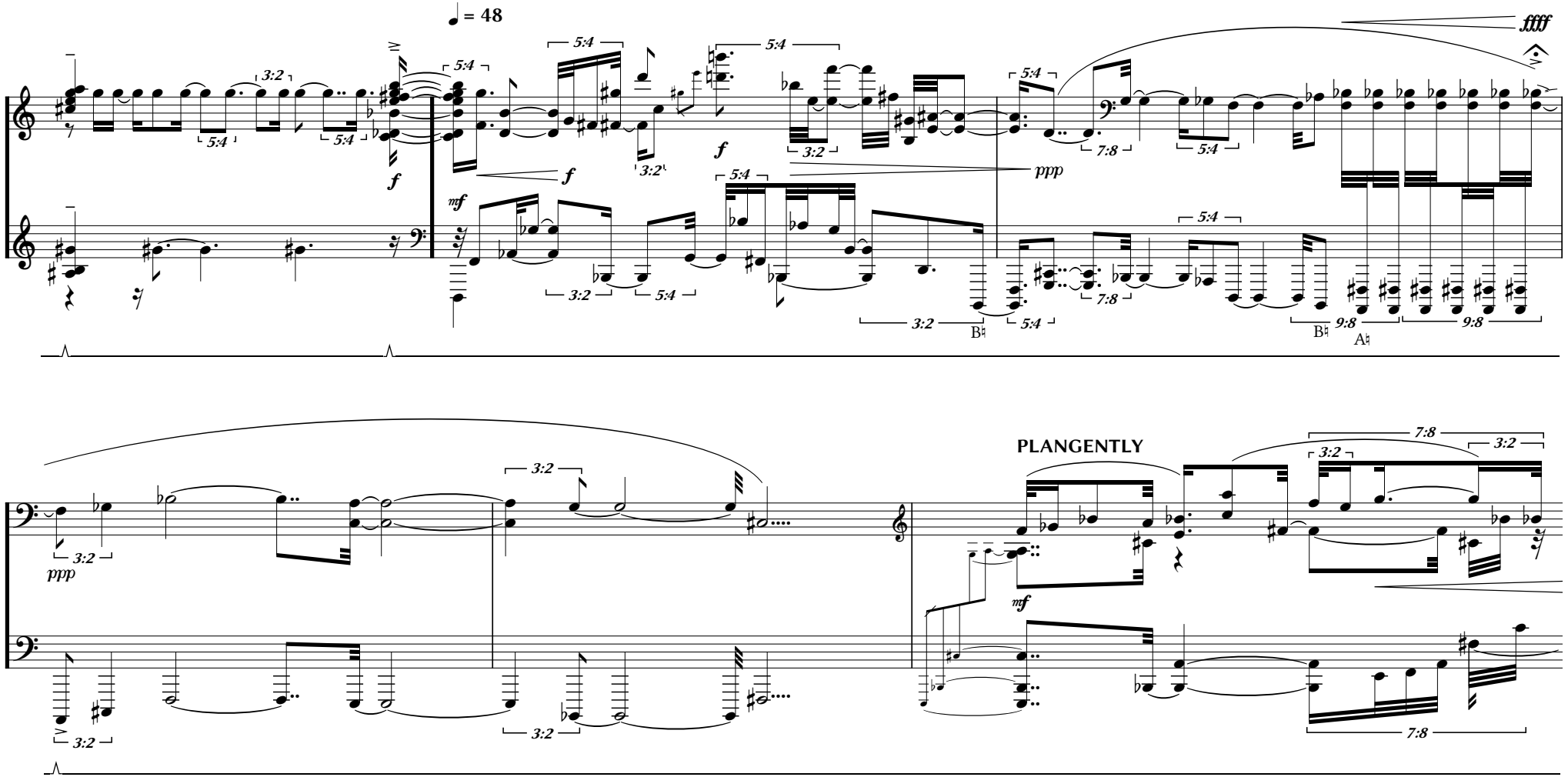

rall.
at least ♪.. = 56
as fast as is practical
♩ = 56
MALEVOLENTLY (stride-like)
marcato
fffff
(rapid pedal flutter)
9:8
5:4
7:8

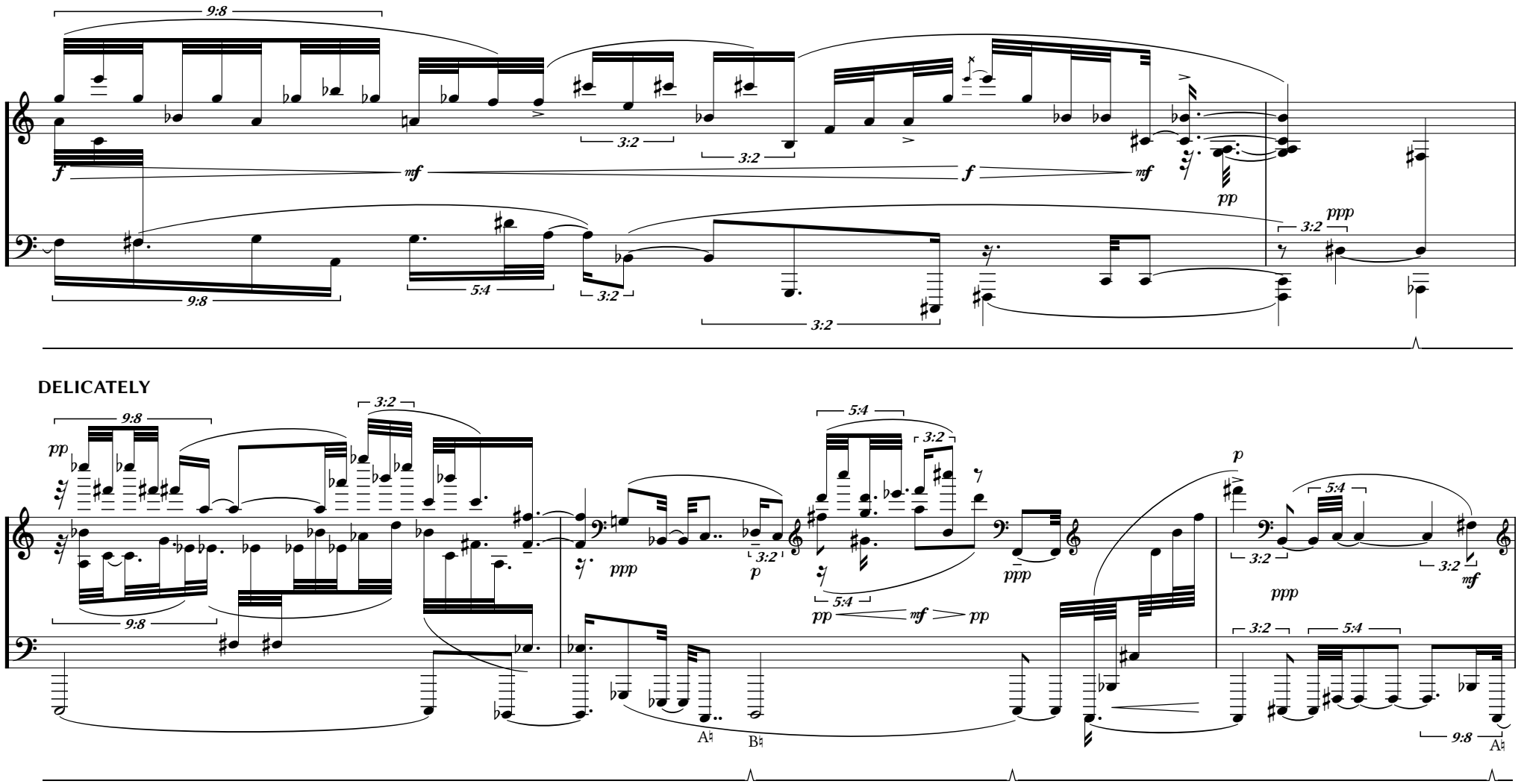

more legato
accel.
♪.. = 56
←♩ = ♪..→
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
loco
ffff
fff
(light pedal)
♪.. = 69
ff
f
mf

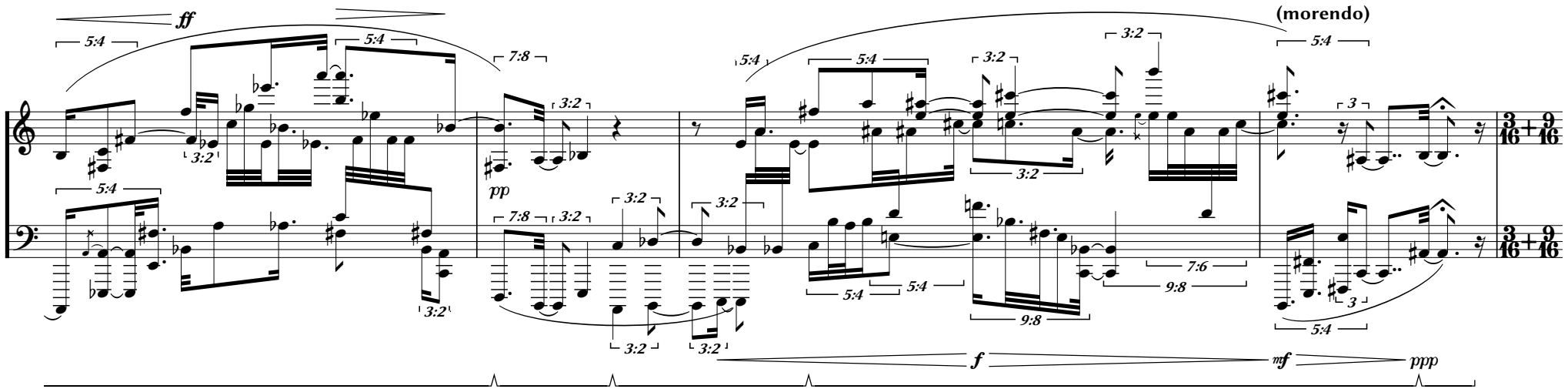

f
ff
f
rall.
mf
p
pp
ppp


♩ = 56
rall.
♪.. = 56
♪.. = ♩
mf
p
pp
3:2
5:4
pp
ppp
♩ = 40
SIGNAL-LIKE
♩ = 56
9:8
pppp
mfz
(½ releases)

STELE I: IN MEMORIAM LUKE PAULDING

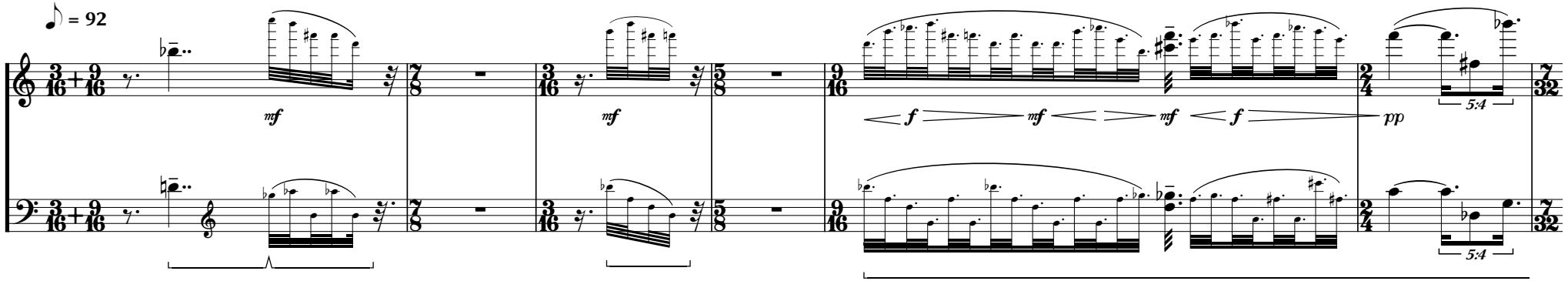


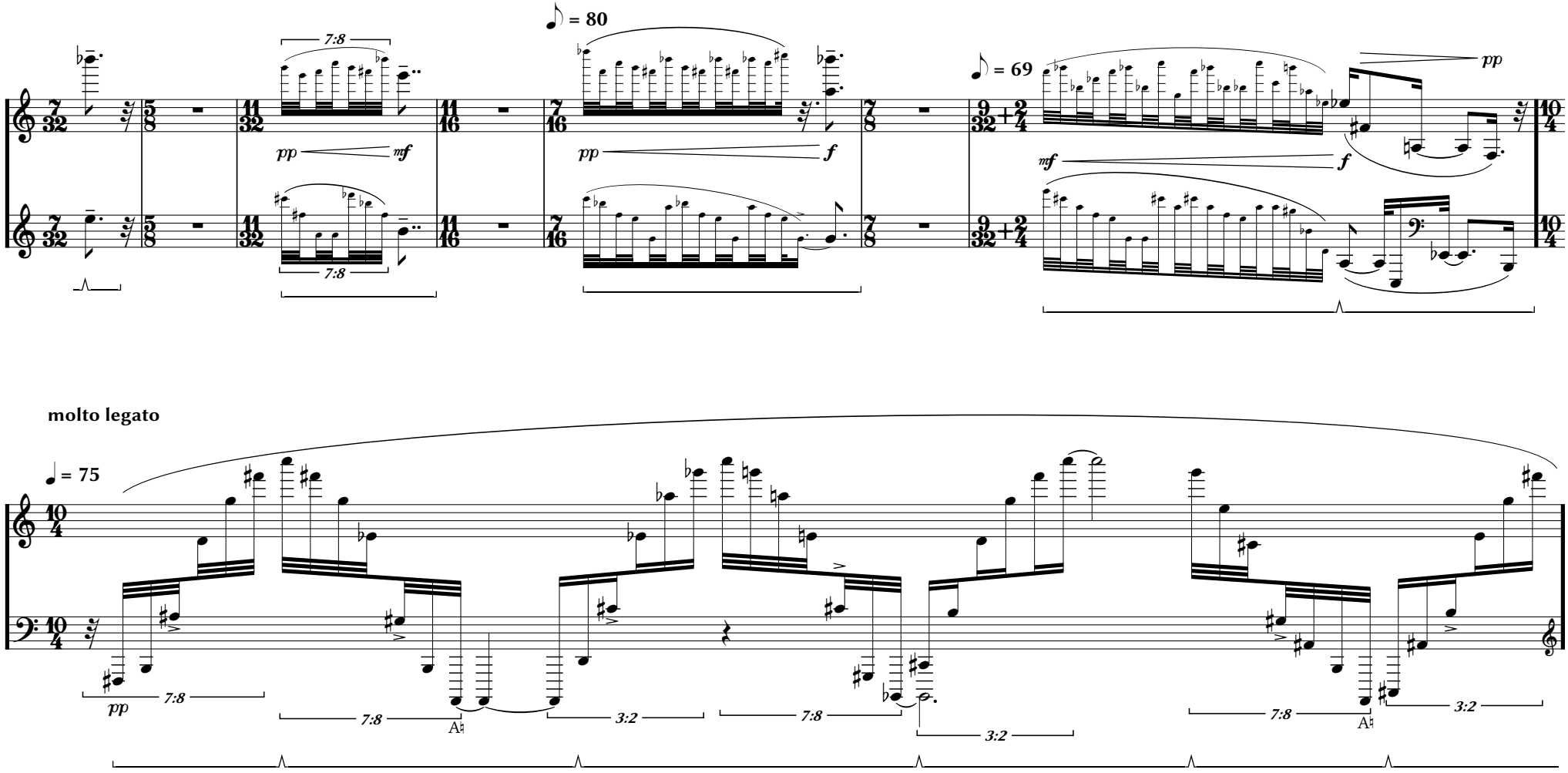

9:8
3:2
3:2
f
mf
f
mf
pp
ppp
3:2
9:8
5:4
3:2
3:2
DELICATELY
9:8
3:2
pp
ppp
p
5:4
3:2
5:4
pp
mf
pp
ppp
p
5:4
3:2
3:2
mf
ppp
3:2
5:4
9:8
A♮
B♮
A♮

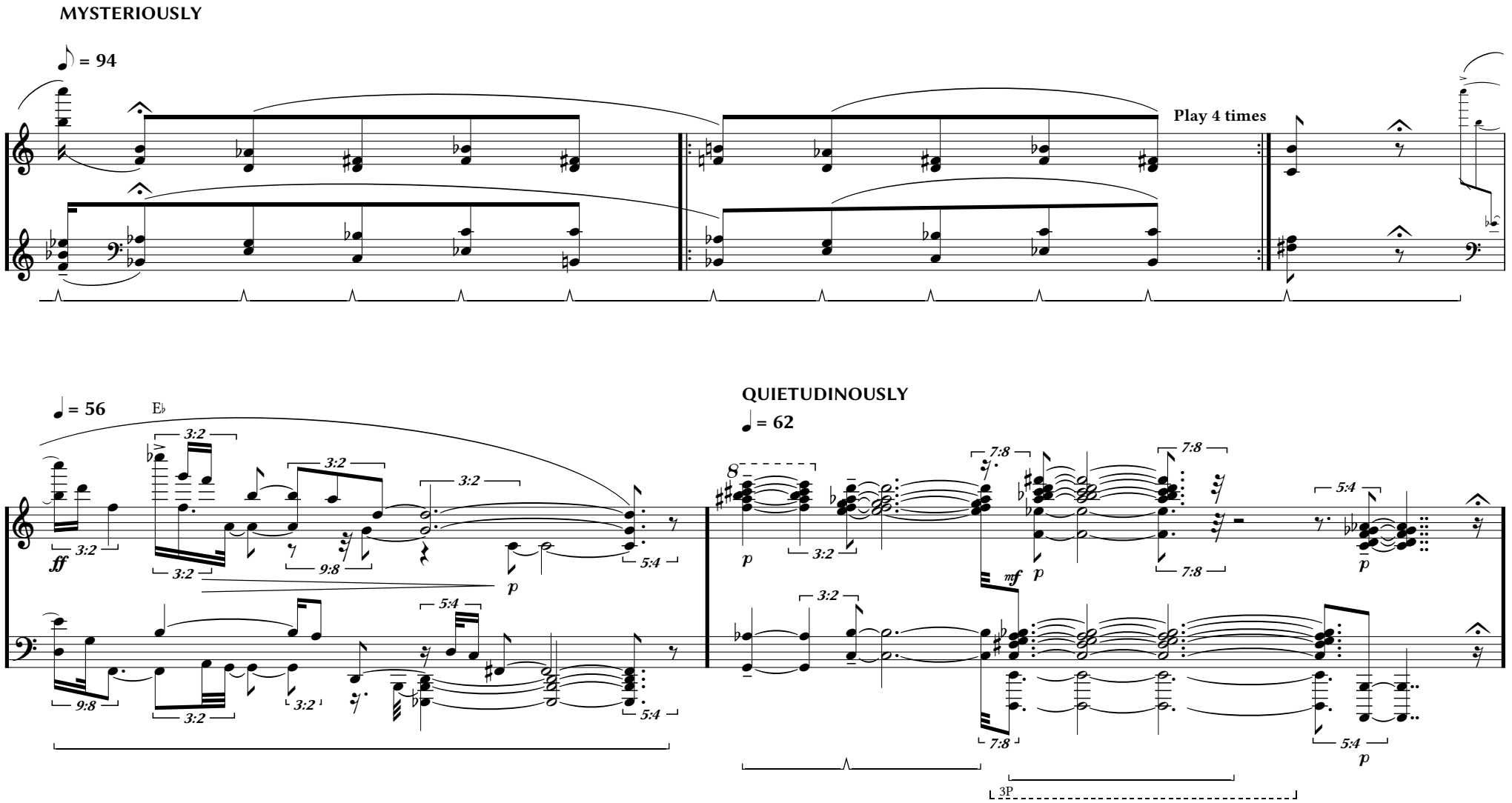


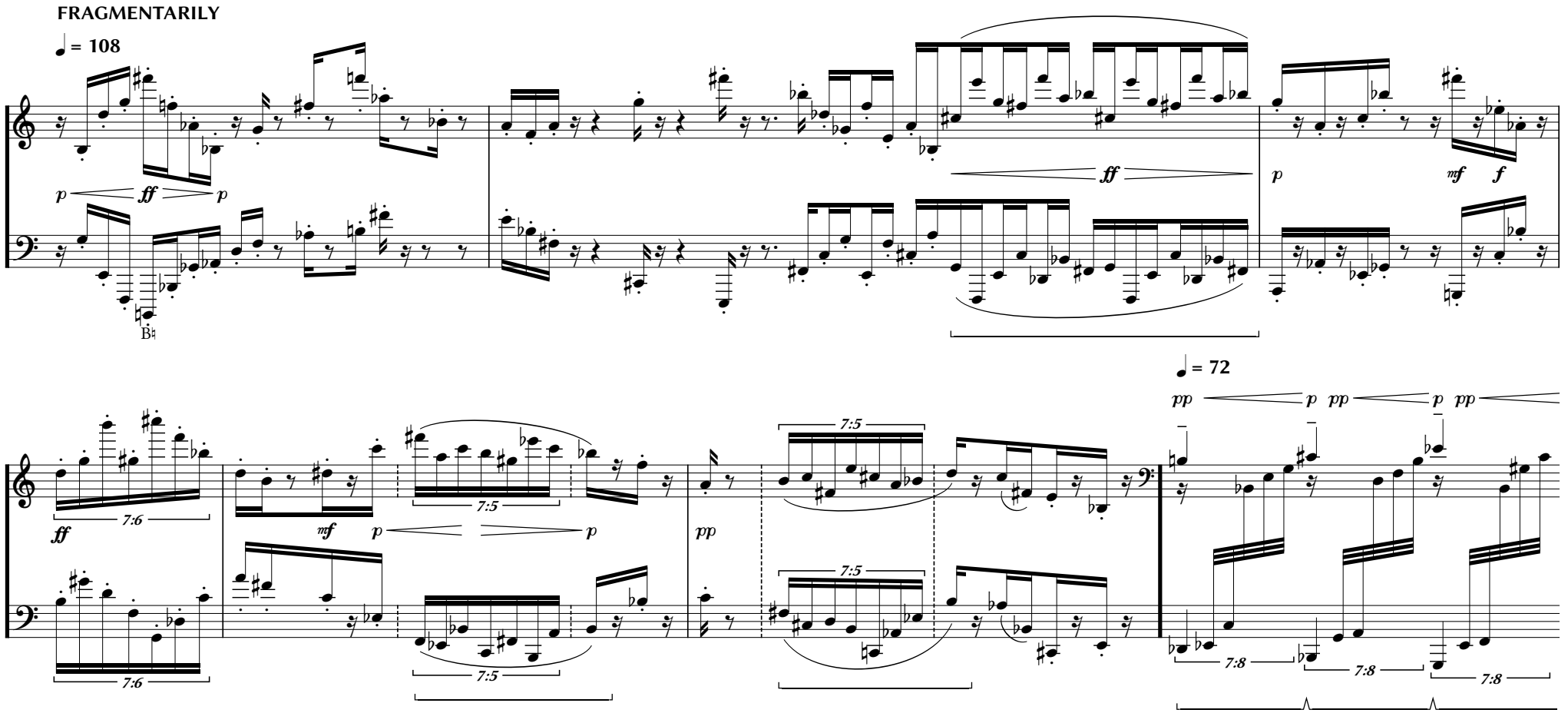
AS IF INTERMITTENTLY FREEZING

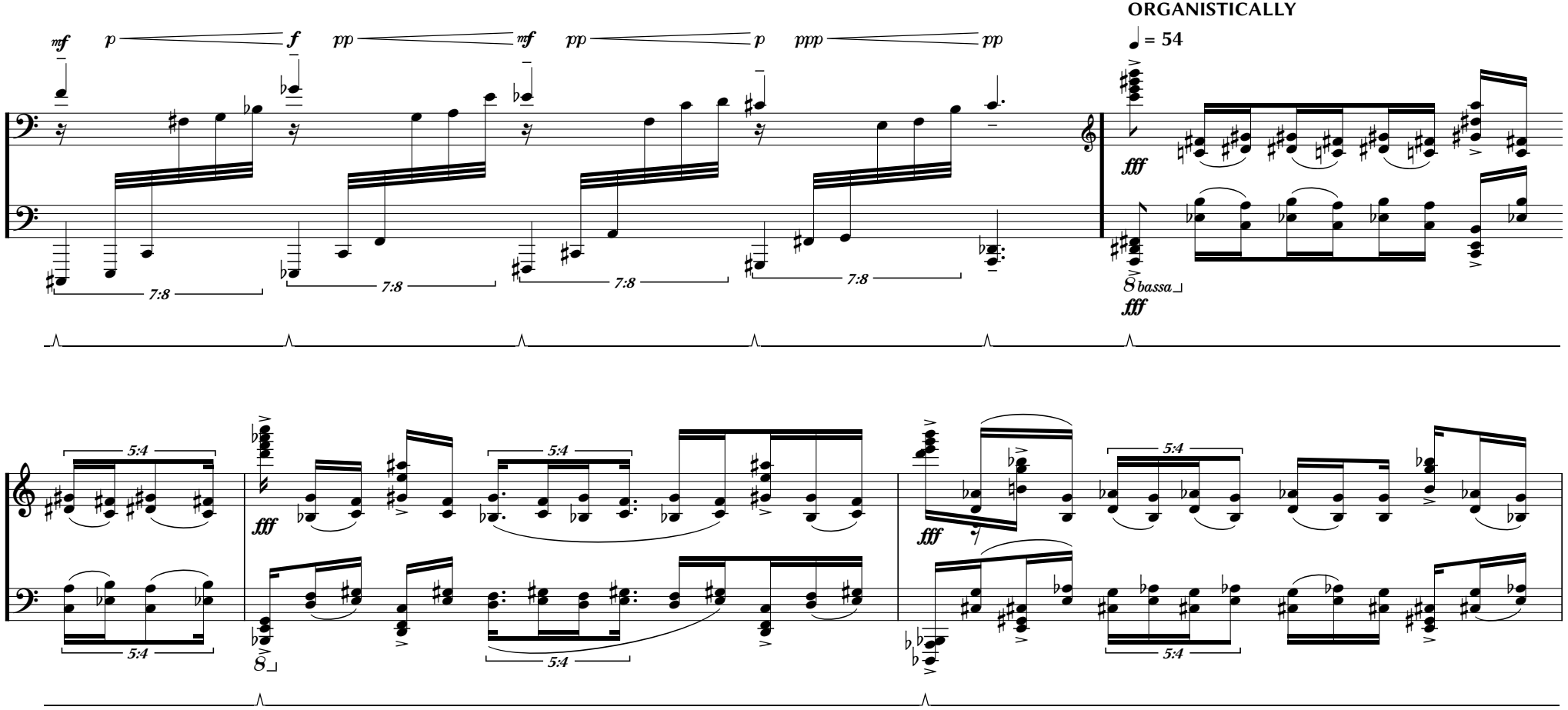
♪ = 92

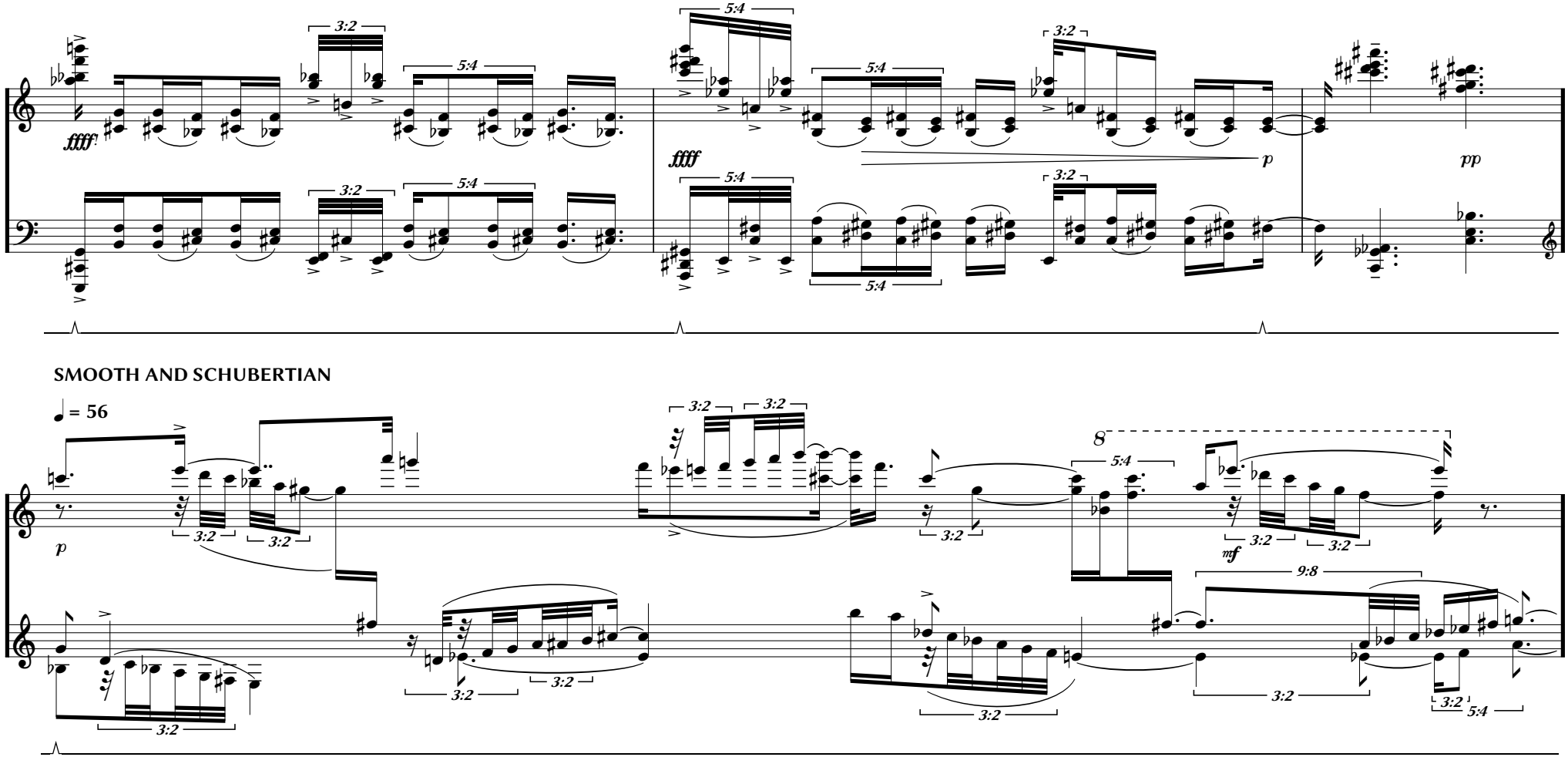


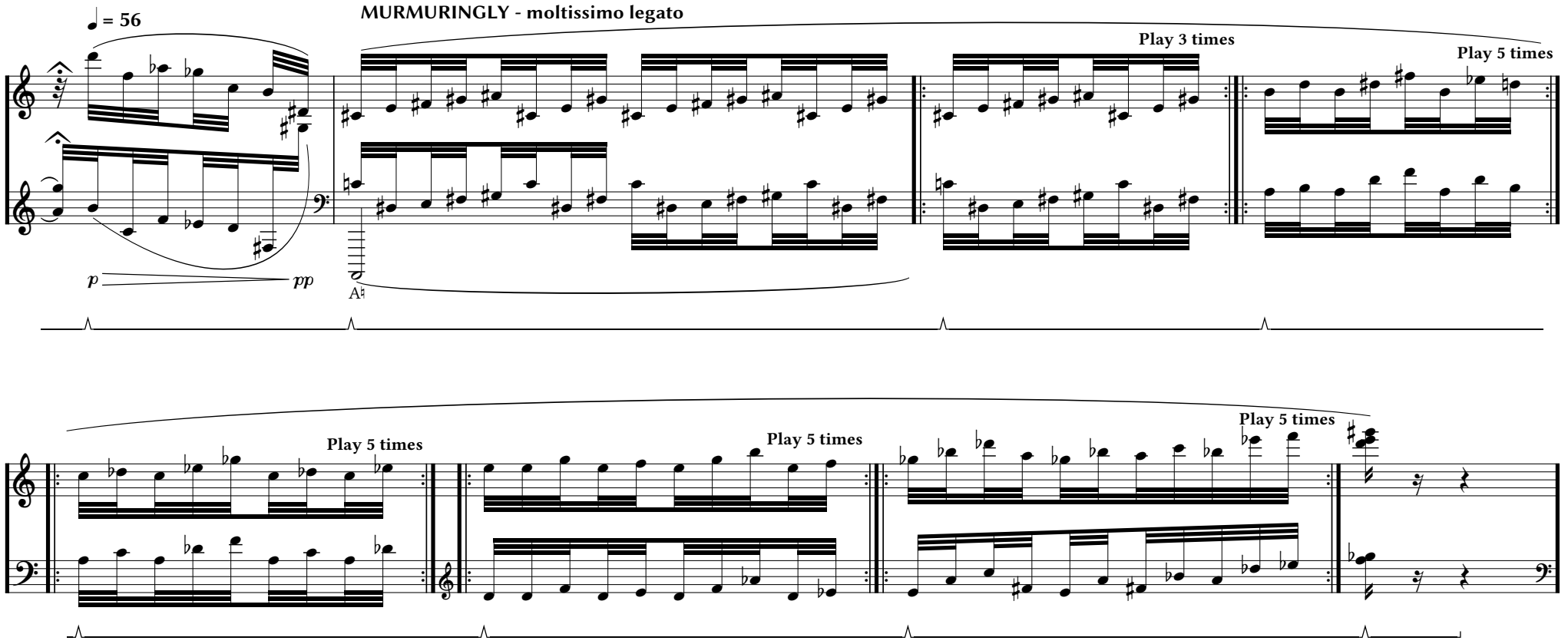

♪ = 80
♩ = 69
pp
mf
f
7:8
molto legato
♩ = 75
3:2
A♮


MYSTERIOUSLY
♪ = 94
Play 4 times
♩ = 56
E♭
QUIETUDINOUSLY
♩ = 62
3P


FRAGMENTARILY
♩ = 108
p
ff
p
B♮
ff
p
mf
f
ff
7:6
7:6
mf
p
p
7:5
7:5
pp
7:5
7:5
♩ = 72
pp
p
pp
p
pp
7:8
7:8
7:8

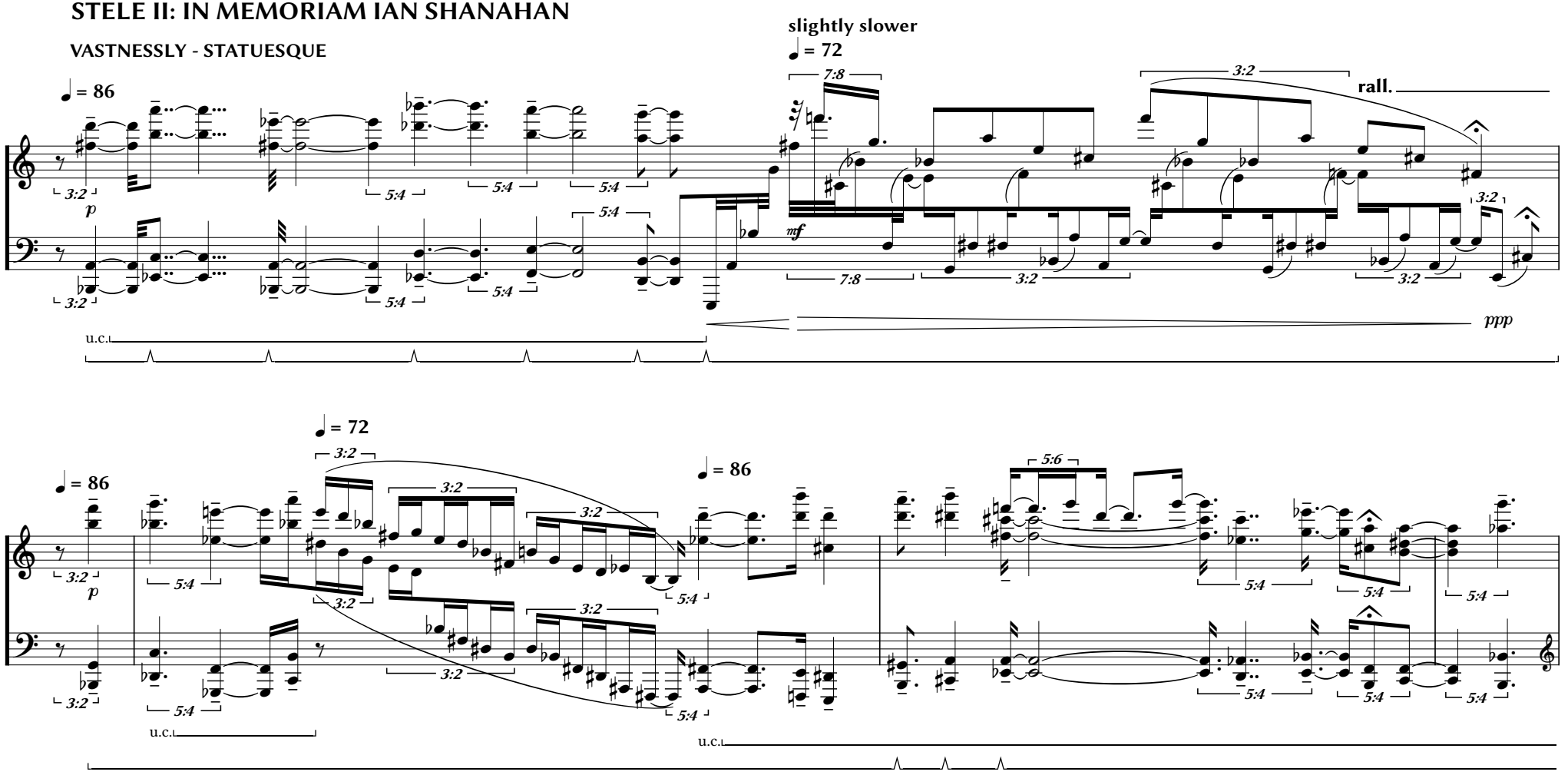

ORGANISTICALLY
= 54
mf
p
f
pp
mf
pp
p
ppp
pp
7:8
7:8
7:8
7:8
fff
fff
bassa
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
fff
fff

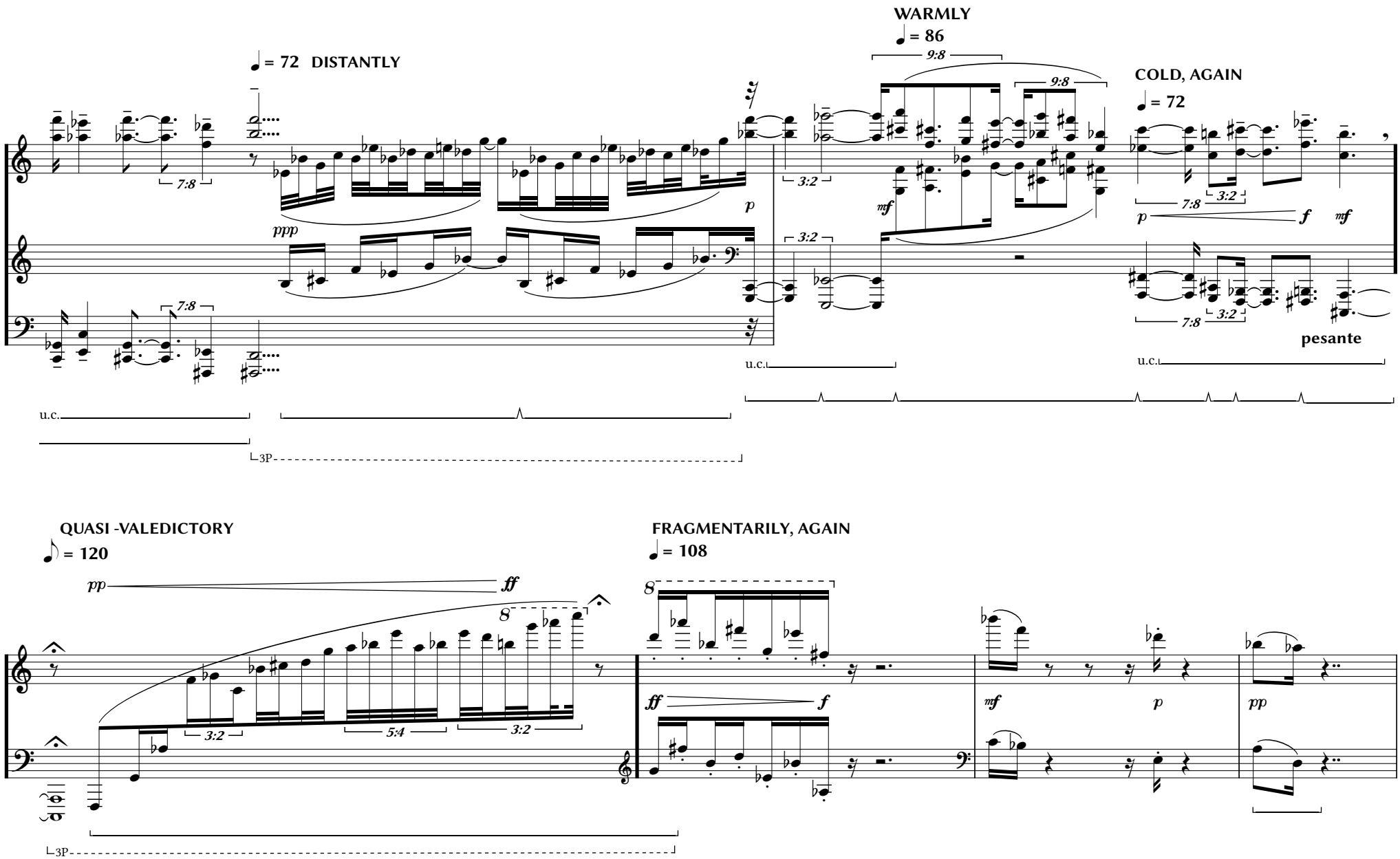

fffff
3:2
5:4
fffff
p
pp
SMOOTH AND SCHUBERTIAN
♩ = 56
p
8
mf
9:8

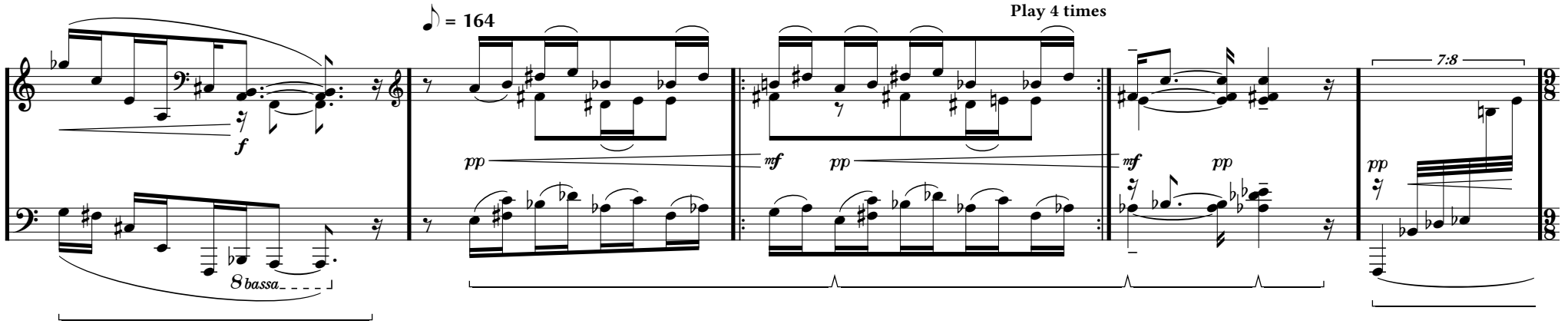

♩ = 56
MURMURINGLY - moltissimo legato
Play 3 times
Play 5 times
p
pp
Play 5 times
Play 5 times
Play 5 times

STELE II: IN MEMORIAM IAN SHANAHAN

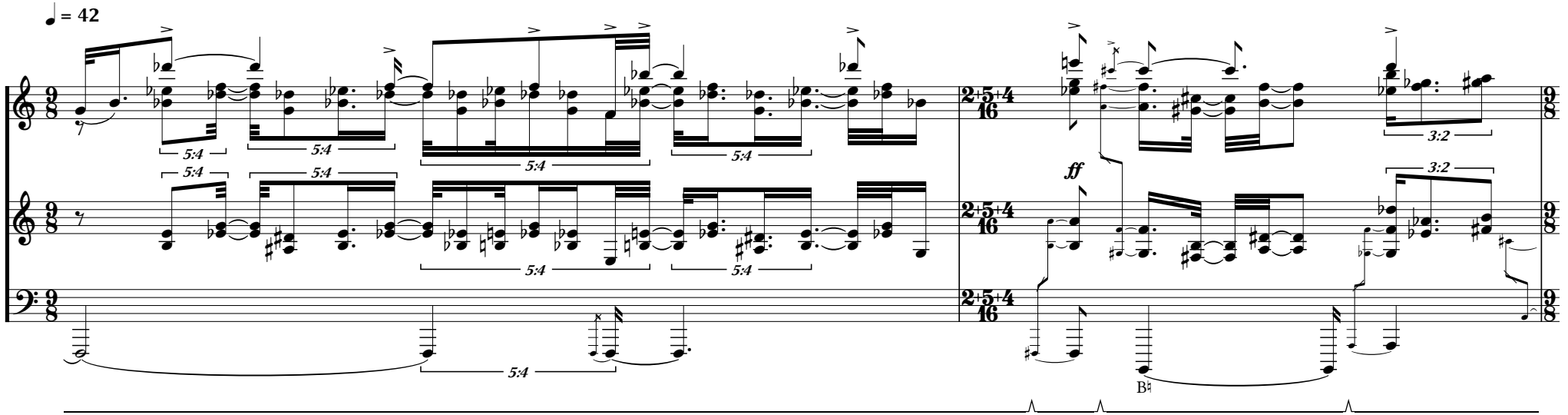
VASTNESSLY - STATUESQUE

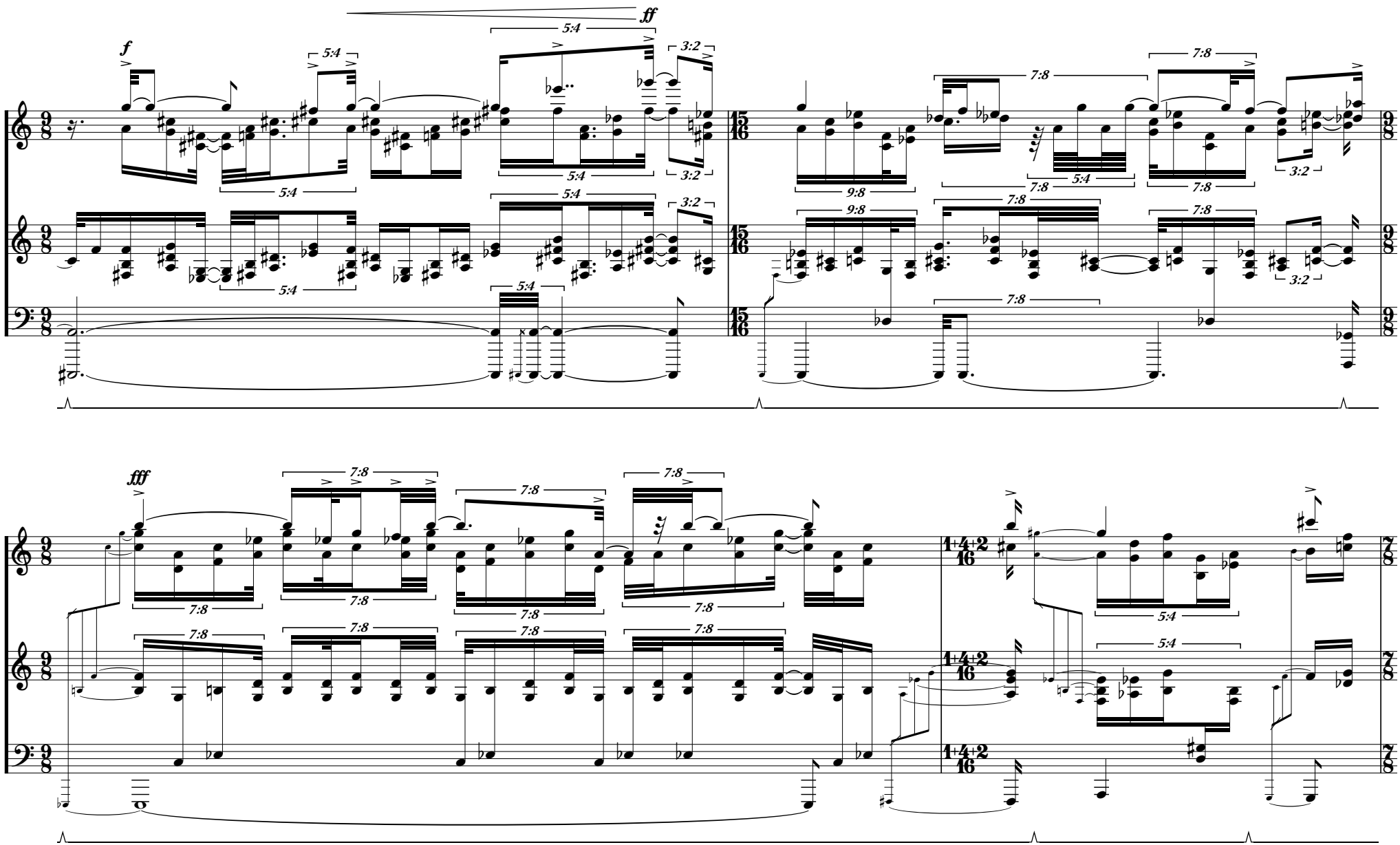


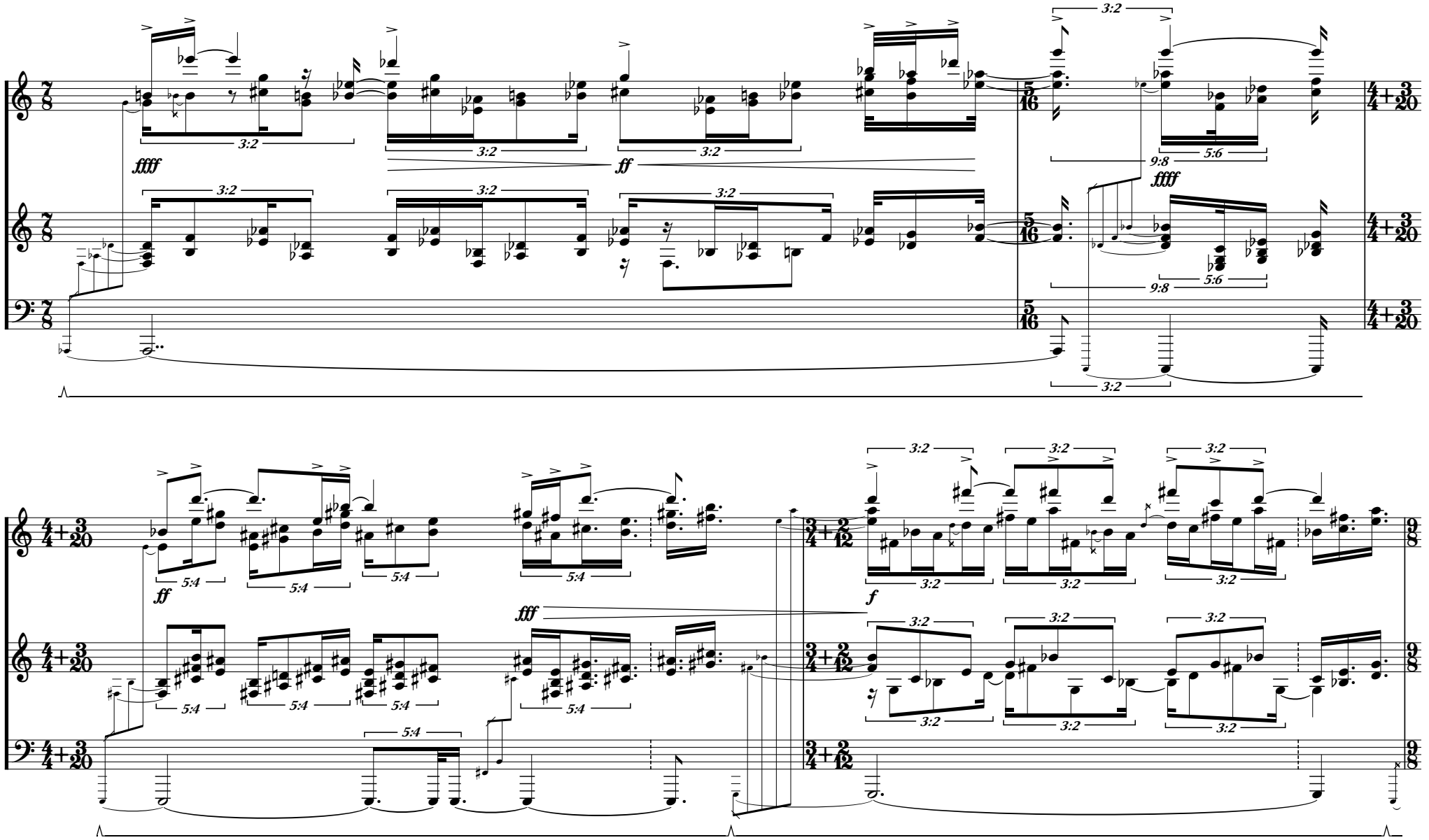

♩ = 72 DISTANTLY
WARMLY
♩ = 86
COLD, AGAIN
♩ = 72
pesante
u.c.
3P
QUASI -VALEDICTORY
♪ = 120
FRAGMENTARILY, AGAIN
♩ = 108

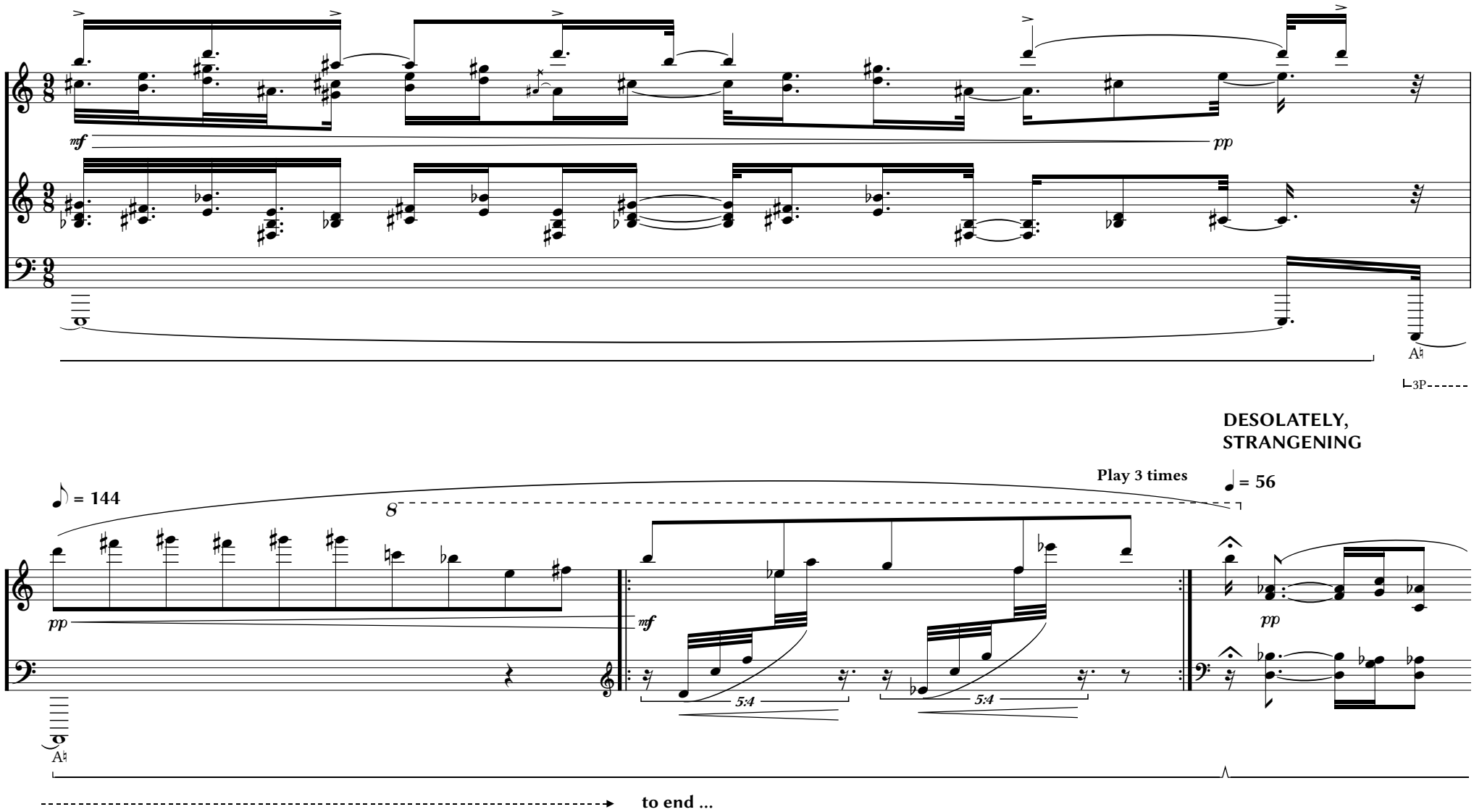


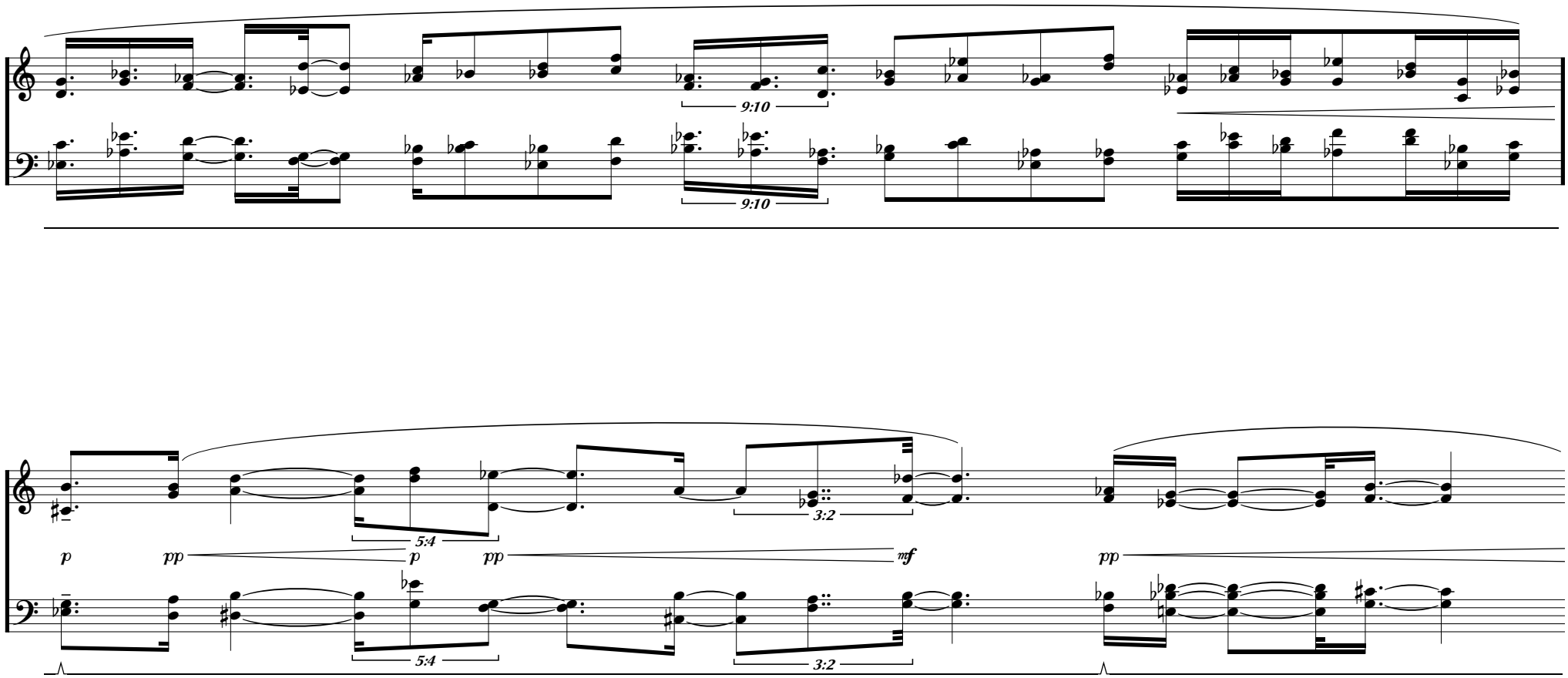
ORGANISTICALLY, AGAIN - slowly, rubato
(bring out top voice)




f
ff
fff
5:4
3:2
7:8
9:8

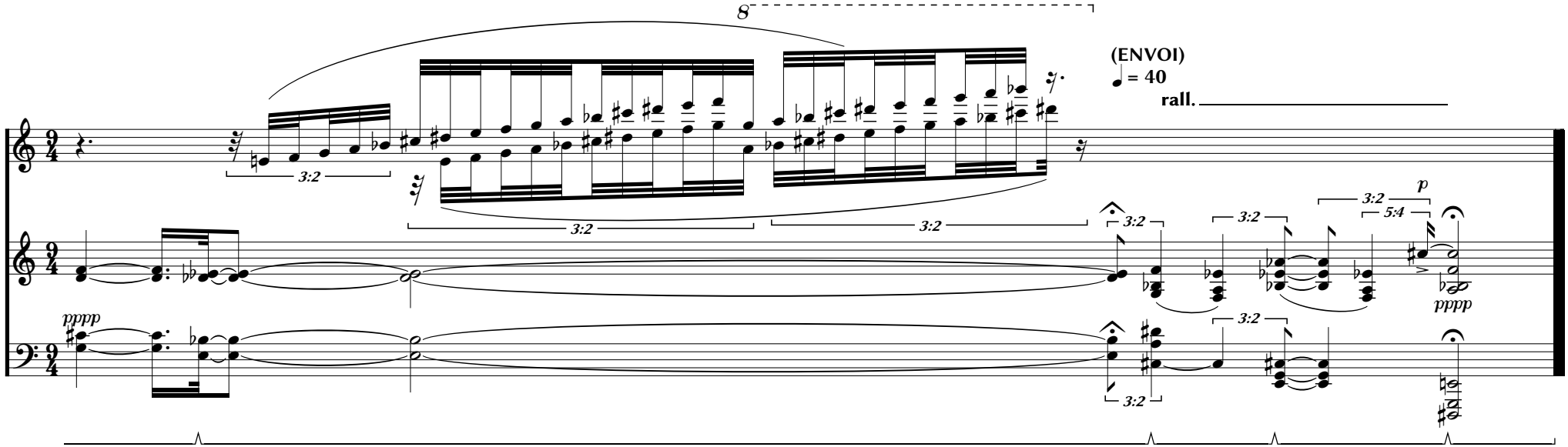

ffff
ff
ffff
fff
f
3:2
5:4
9:8
5:6


mf
pp
A♮
3P
DESOLATELY,
STRANGENING
Play 3 times
♪ = 144
♩ = 56
8
pp
mf
5:4
5:4
pp
A♮
to end ...


9:10
9:10
5:4
3:2
p
pp
p
pp
mf
pp
5:4
3:2

7:8
p
pp
mf
pp
p
mf
poco f
p
5:4
mf
pp

p
pp
ppp
p
ppp
pp
ppp
pppp
ppp
3:2
9/4



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