Revenants

32 Variations for Piano in or around C Minor

1994, 2019

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This piece was first composed in 1994 in association with a talk that developed into the final chapter of my book *Musical Meaning* (2001). The chapter involved a critique of the rule of musical originality that dominated the second half of the twentieth century and still lingers on as a received idea: the rule that truly serious art music is defined by its capacity to break with the past. Among the many things wrong with this view its its failure to recognize how pervasive is the experience of things that return, that haunt, that revisit, that come again, all of which is summed up in my title: *Revenant*s. Being haunted is not exceptional; it's normal.

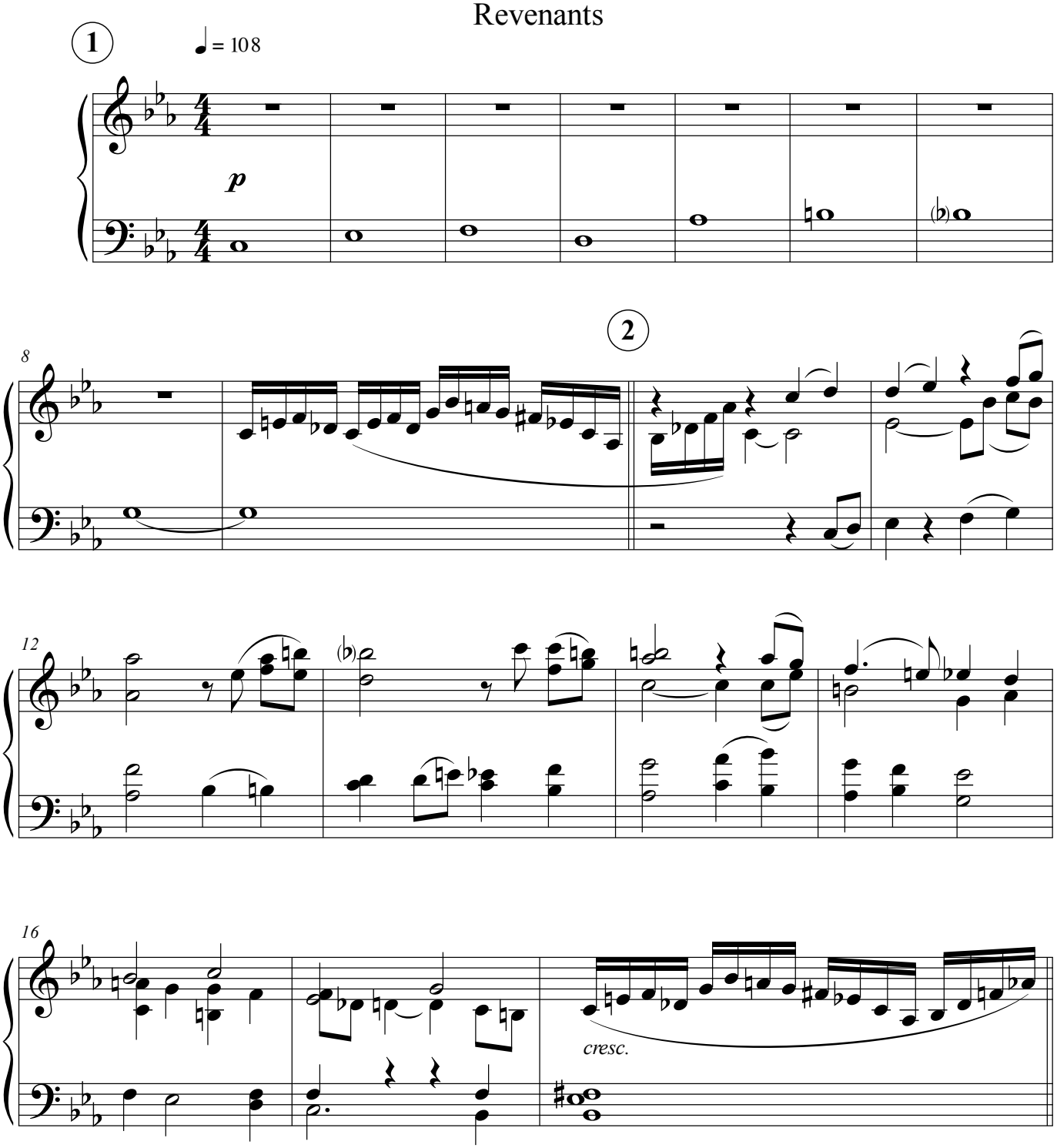
The chapter included a recording of the original version of the music, which sought to do expressively what the chapter did conceptually. Looking back after twenty-five years, I thought that the goal was still fine, but that the music--the only piece I wrote during a long hiatus in my composing career--was in serious need of revision. The result is the score in hand.

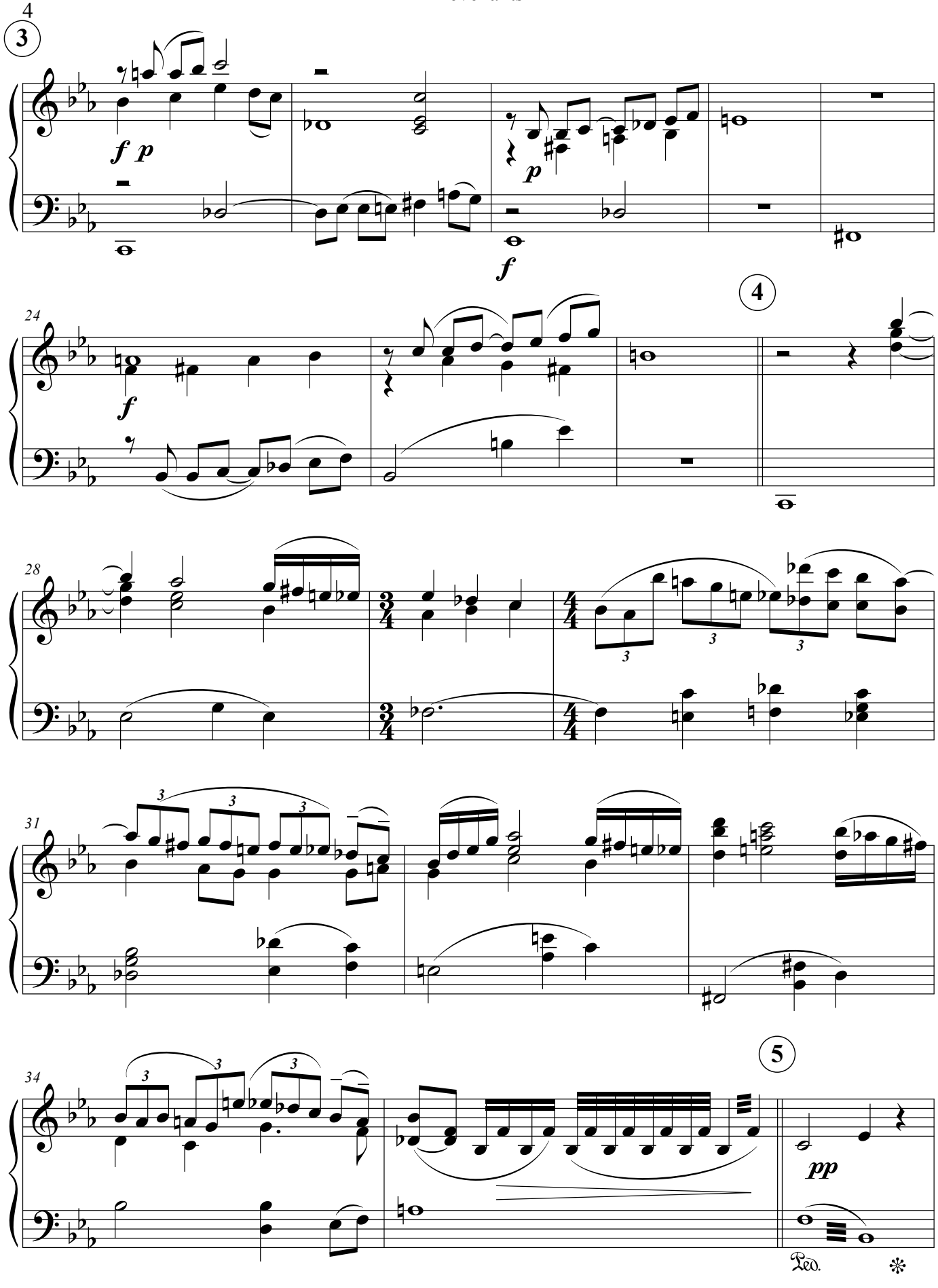
The music is in some sense "about" haunting or enlivening returns, which form a feature of its thirty-two variations. But as that number implies, the piece is also meant to *be* a revenant, a condition also implied by its full subtitle. Behind the music looms Beethoven's 32 *Variations in C Minor*, which my set resembles in tonality (though my C Minor is not Beethoven's), size, and continuity. Behind both Beethoven's piece and mine looms the much more imposing thirty-two of Bach's *Goldberg* set, which also becomes a revenant here.

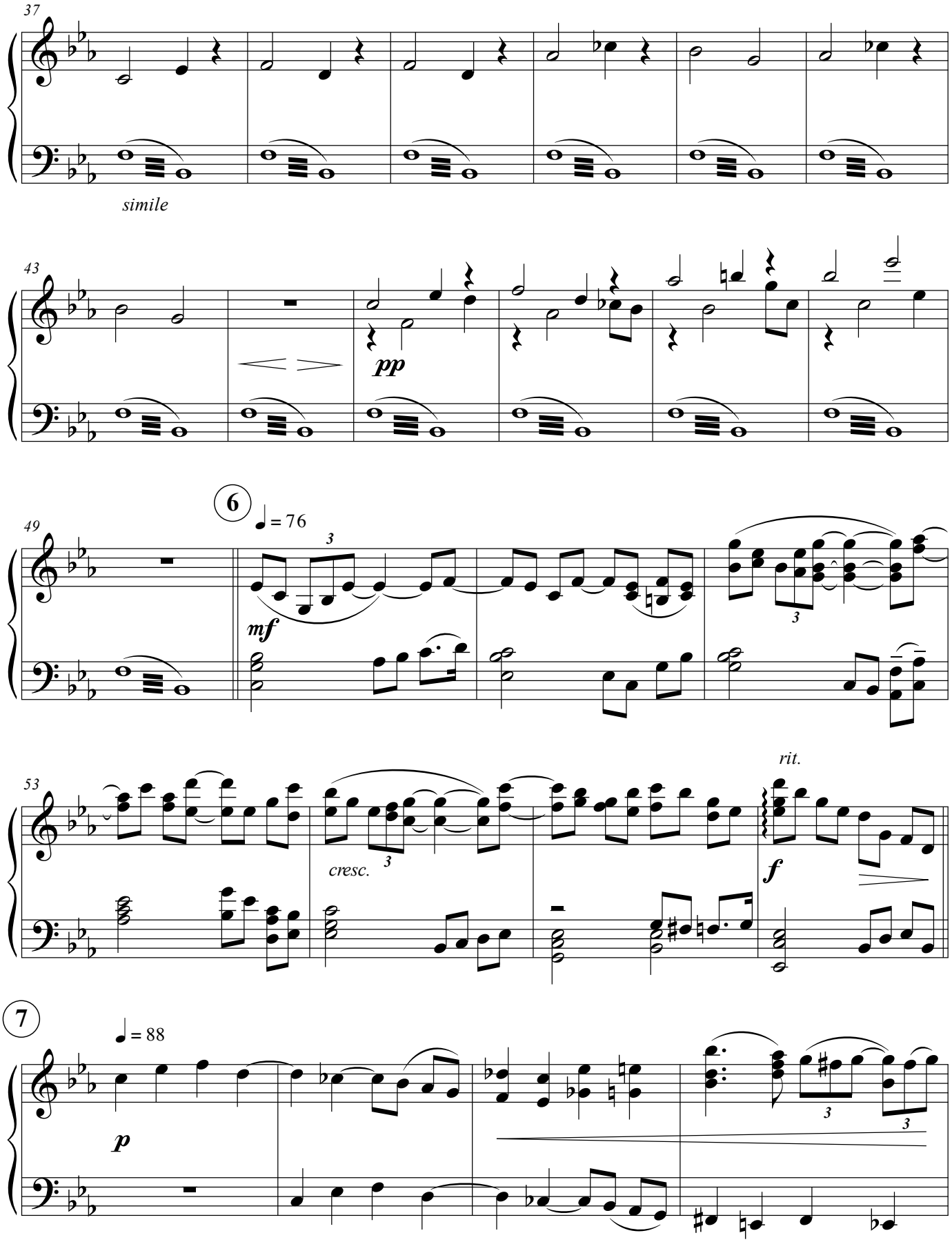
There is, I think, nothing nostalgic in my entry in this series, but only an impulse to acknowledge that "originality," properly speaking, is just the name we apply to those revenants that haunt us most effectively.

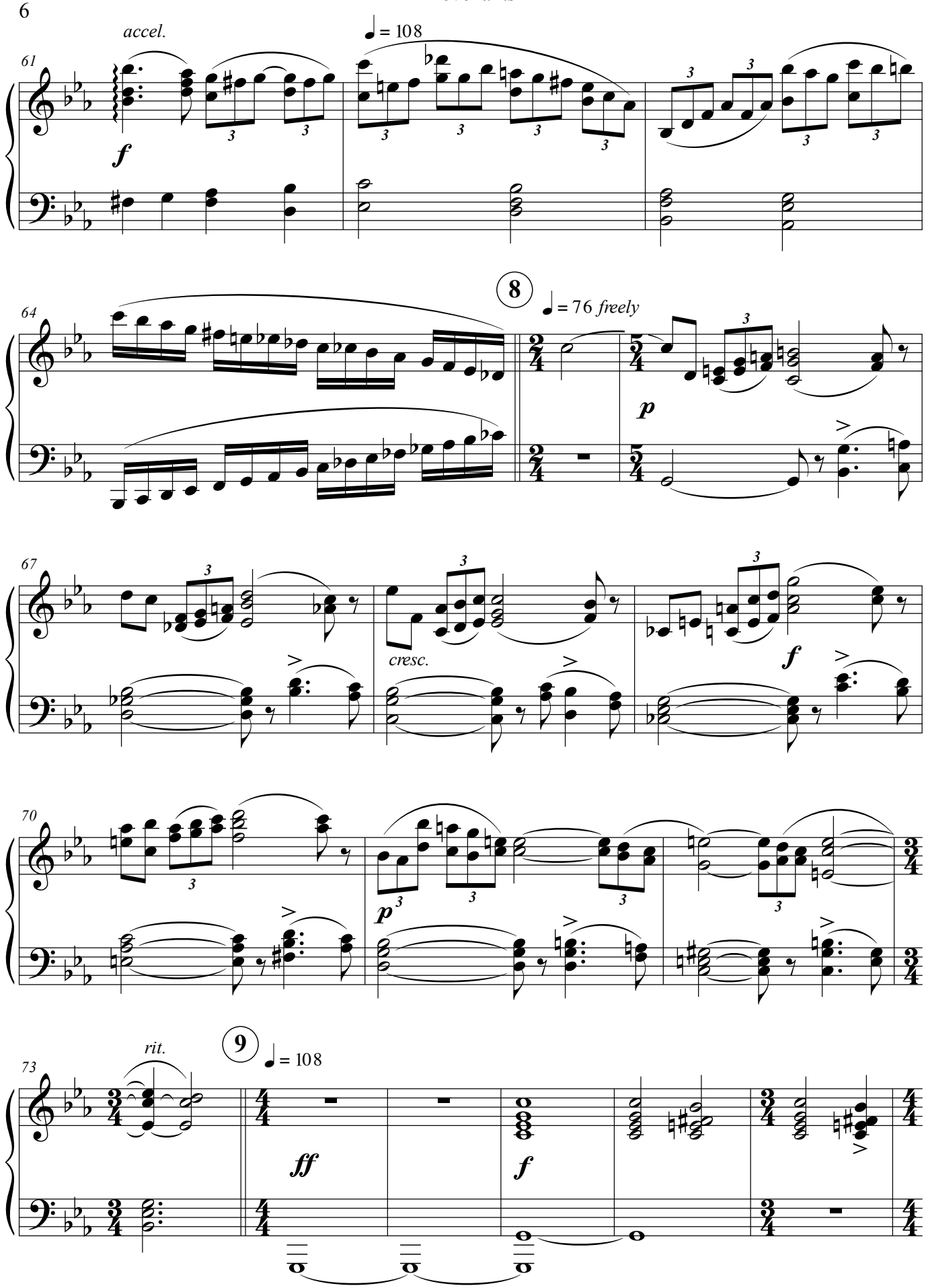
Duration: 15 minutes.

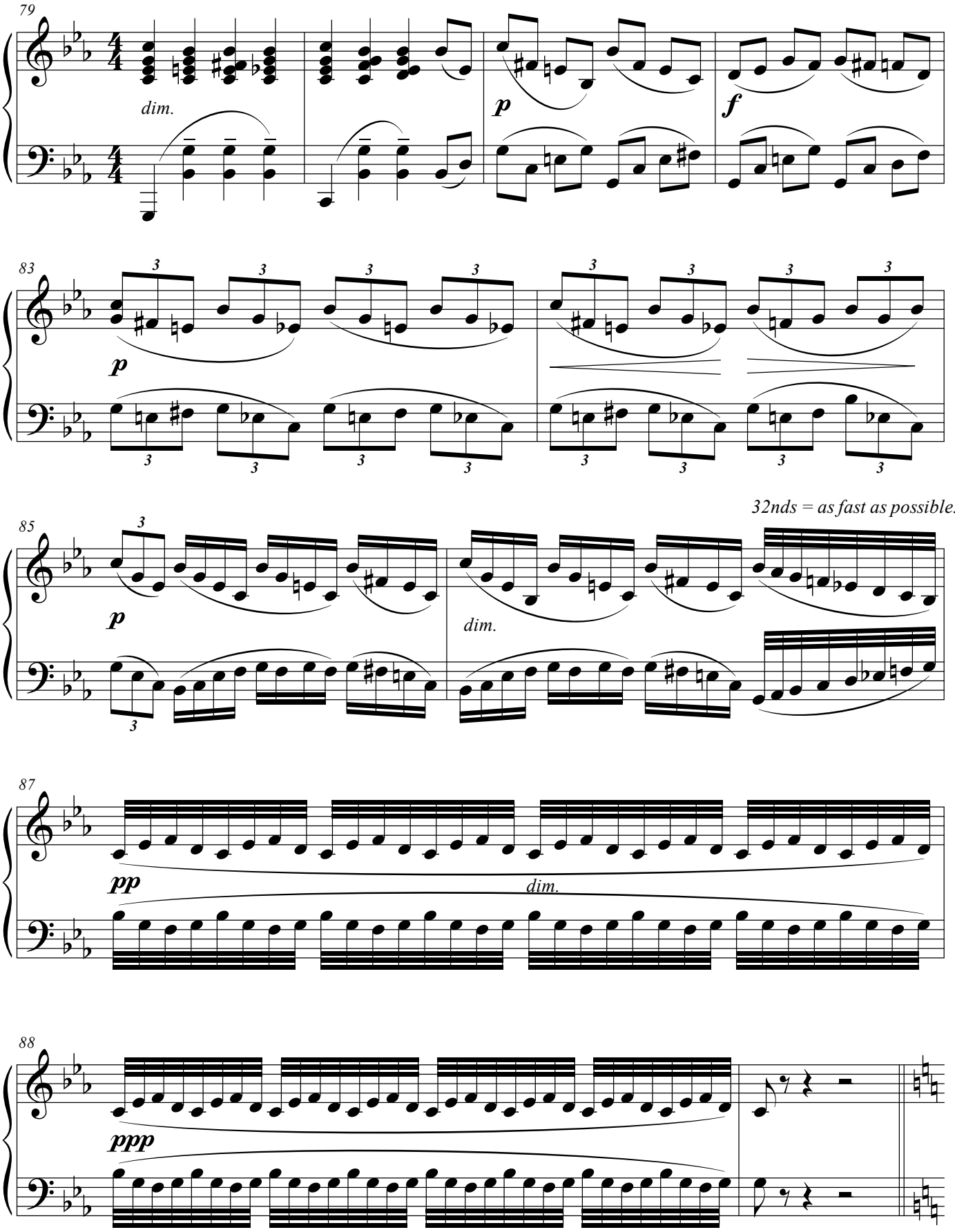
Revenants




3
f p
p
f
24
f
4
28
3
31
3
34
3
5
pp
Ped.


37
simile
43
pp
6
49
= 76
mf
53
cresc.
rit.
f
7
= 88
p


accel.
♩ = 108
61
f
64
8
♩ = 76 freely
p
67
cresc.
f
70
p
73
rit.
9
♩ = 108
ff
f


79
dim.
p
f
83
p
32nds = as fast as possible.
85
p
dim.
87
pp
dim.
88
ppp

10

pp *p*

95

cresc. *p*

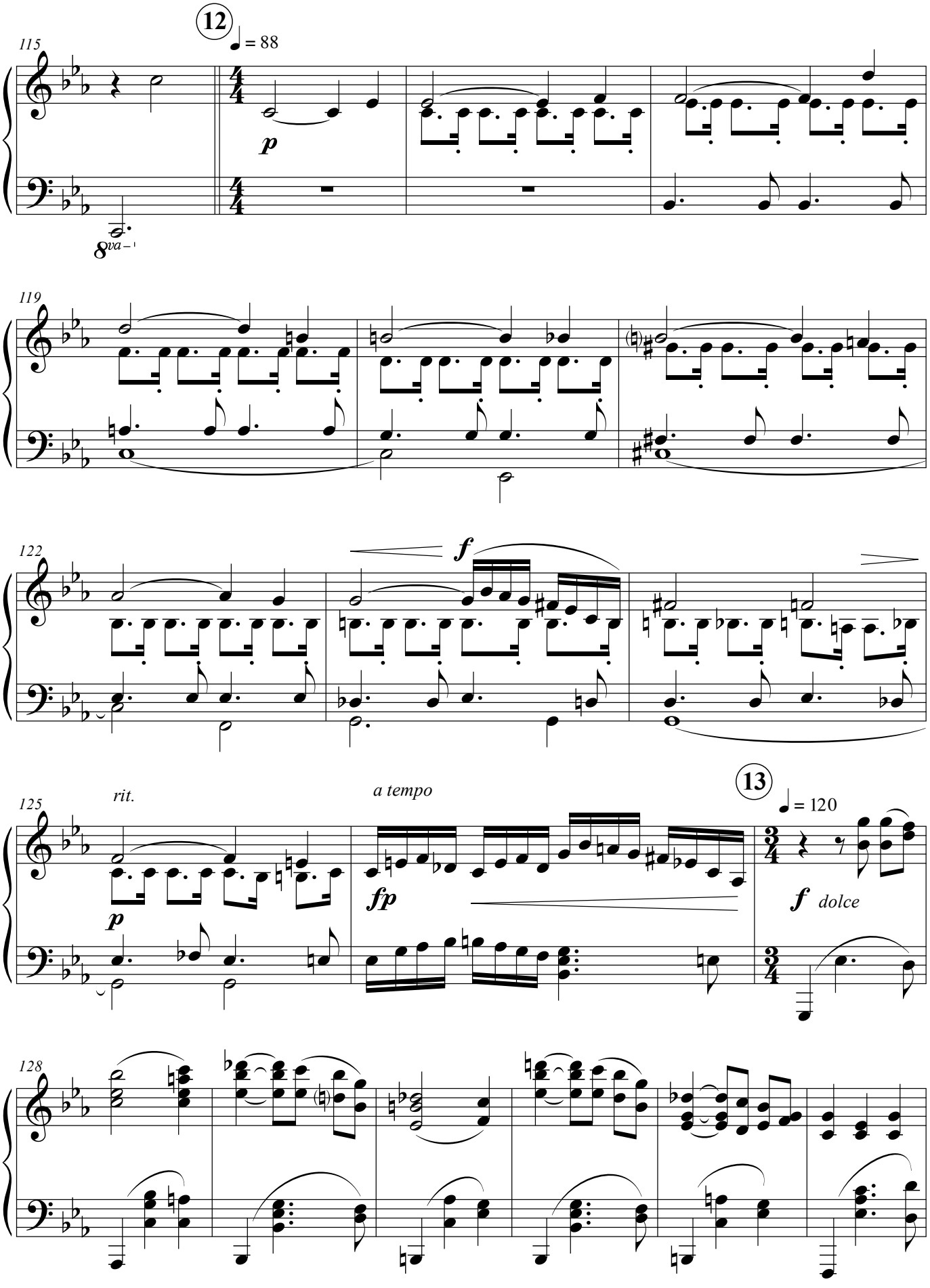
100 *rit.* *a tempo*

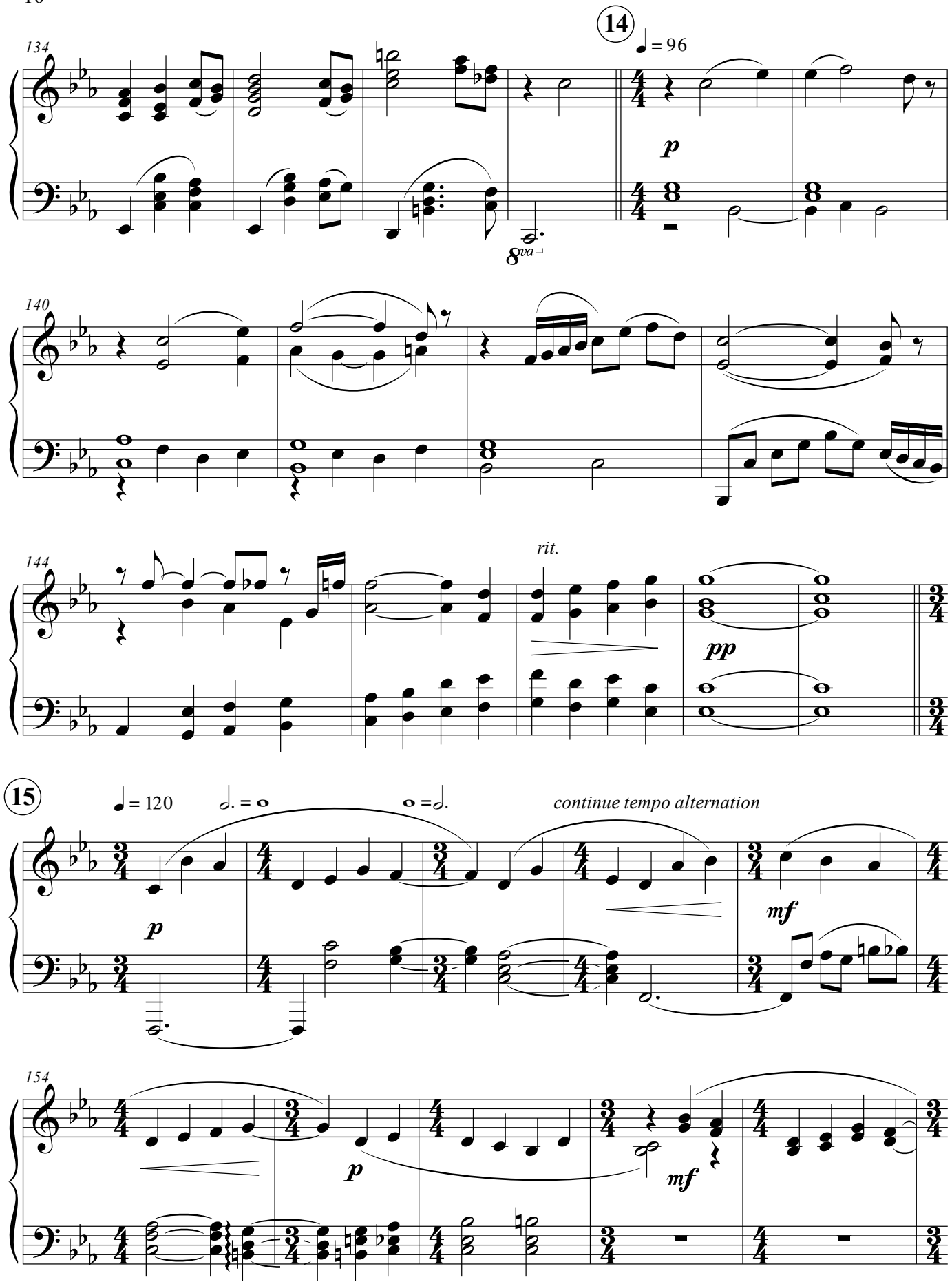
f *p* *mf* *p* *pp*

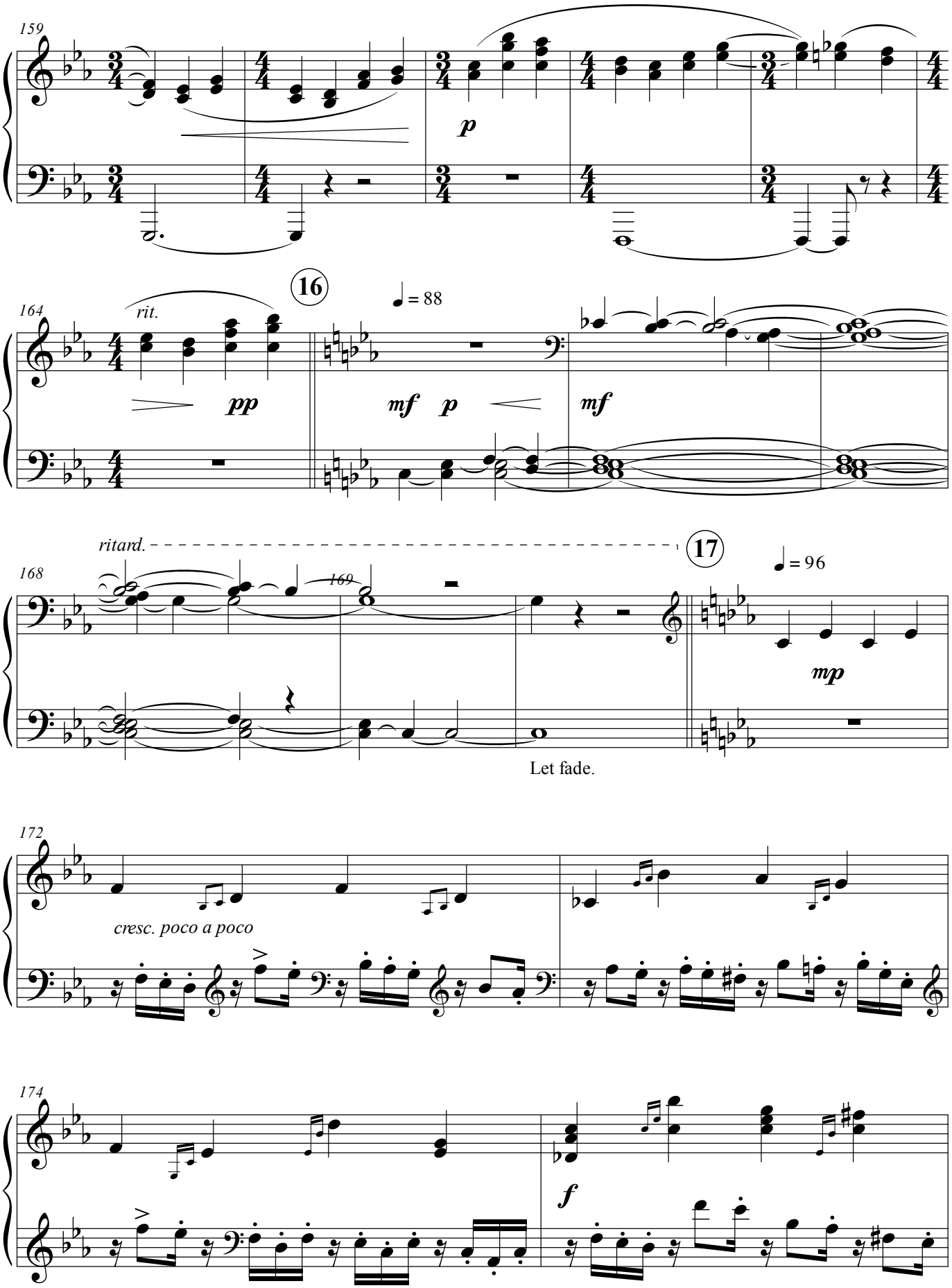
104 *rit.* *a tempo* **11**

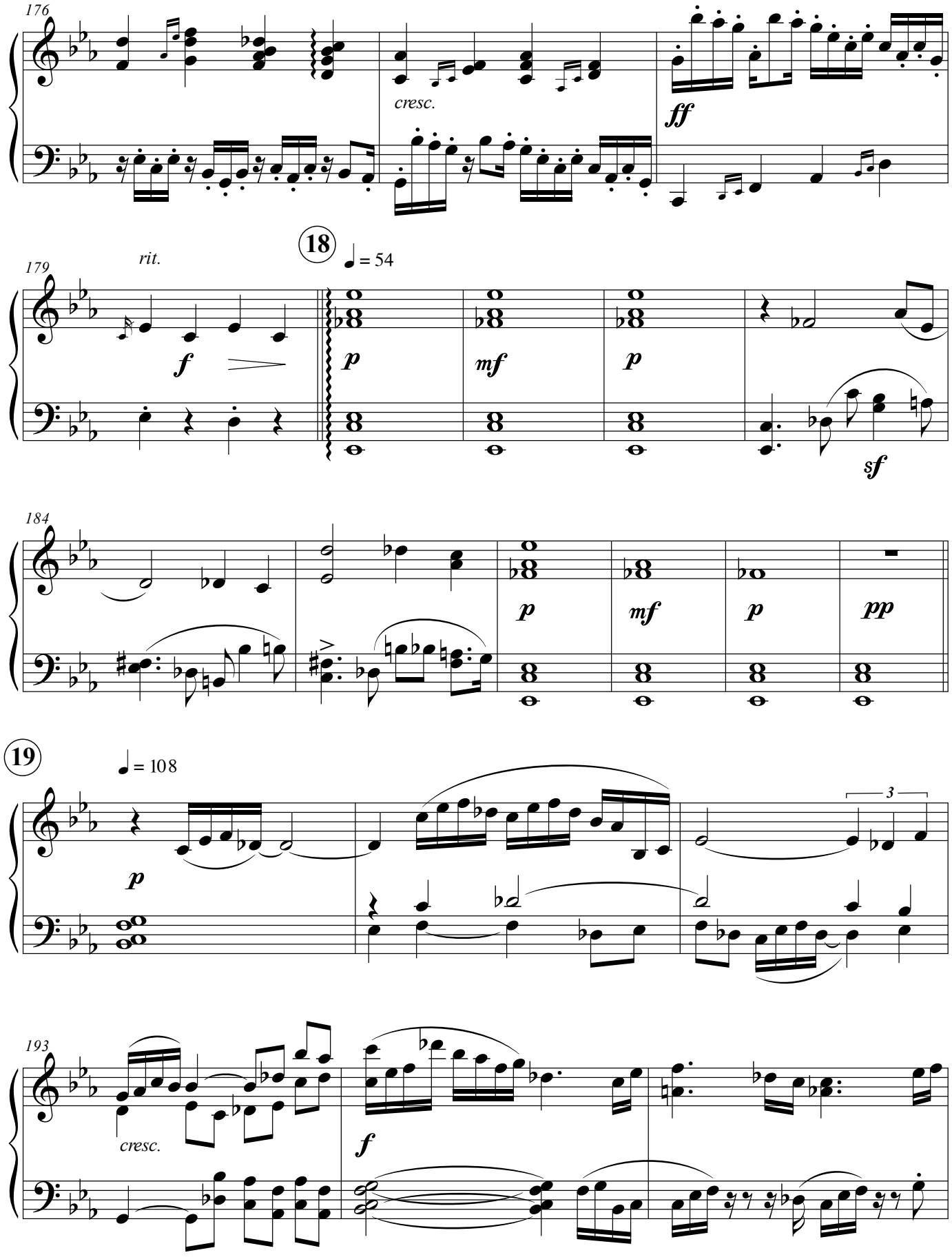
pp

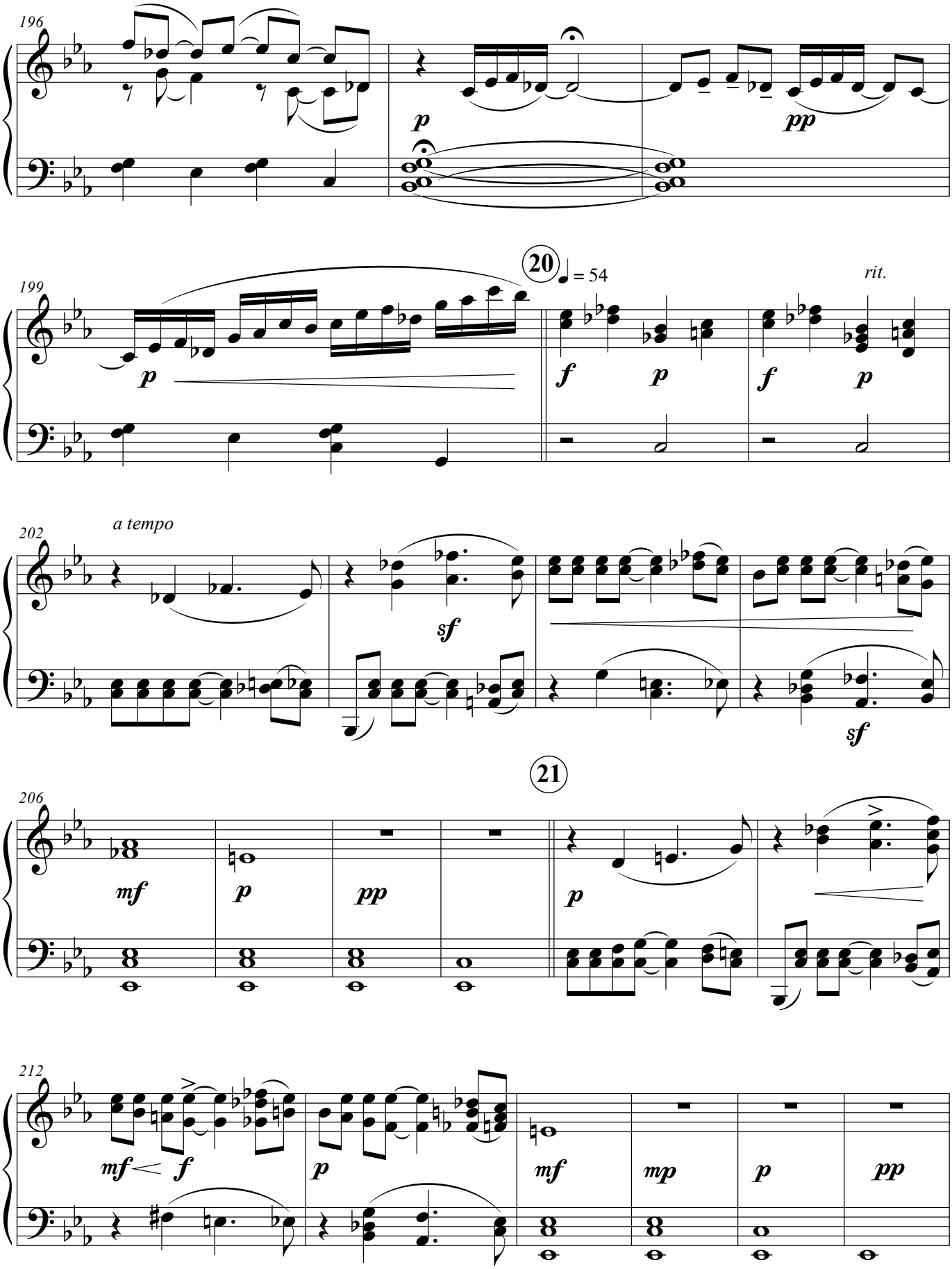
109

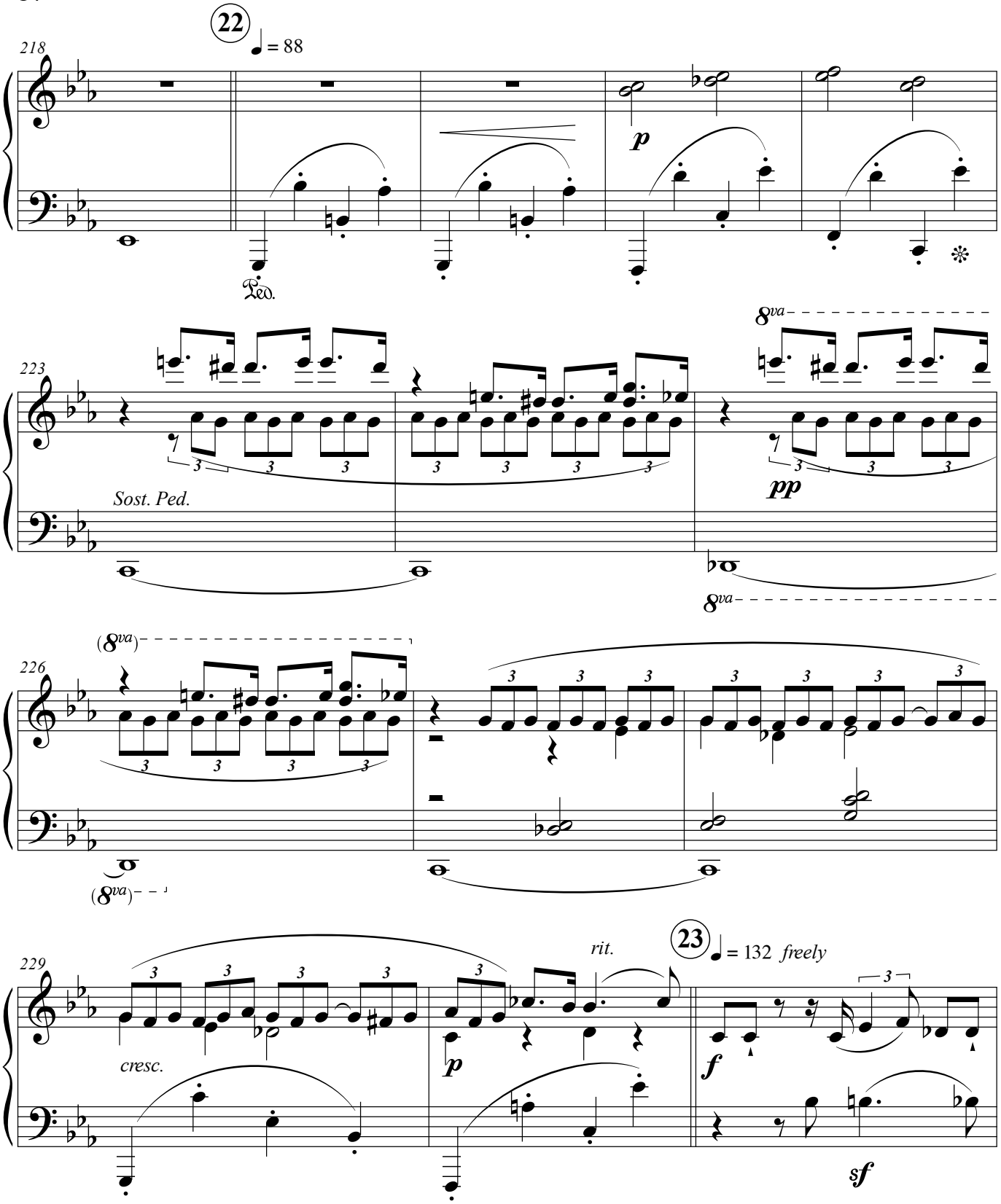

12
♩ = 88
115
p
8va
119
122
f
125
rit.
a tempo
13
♩ = 120
fp
p
f dolce
128

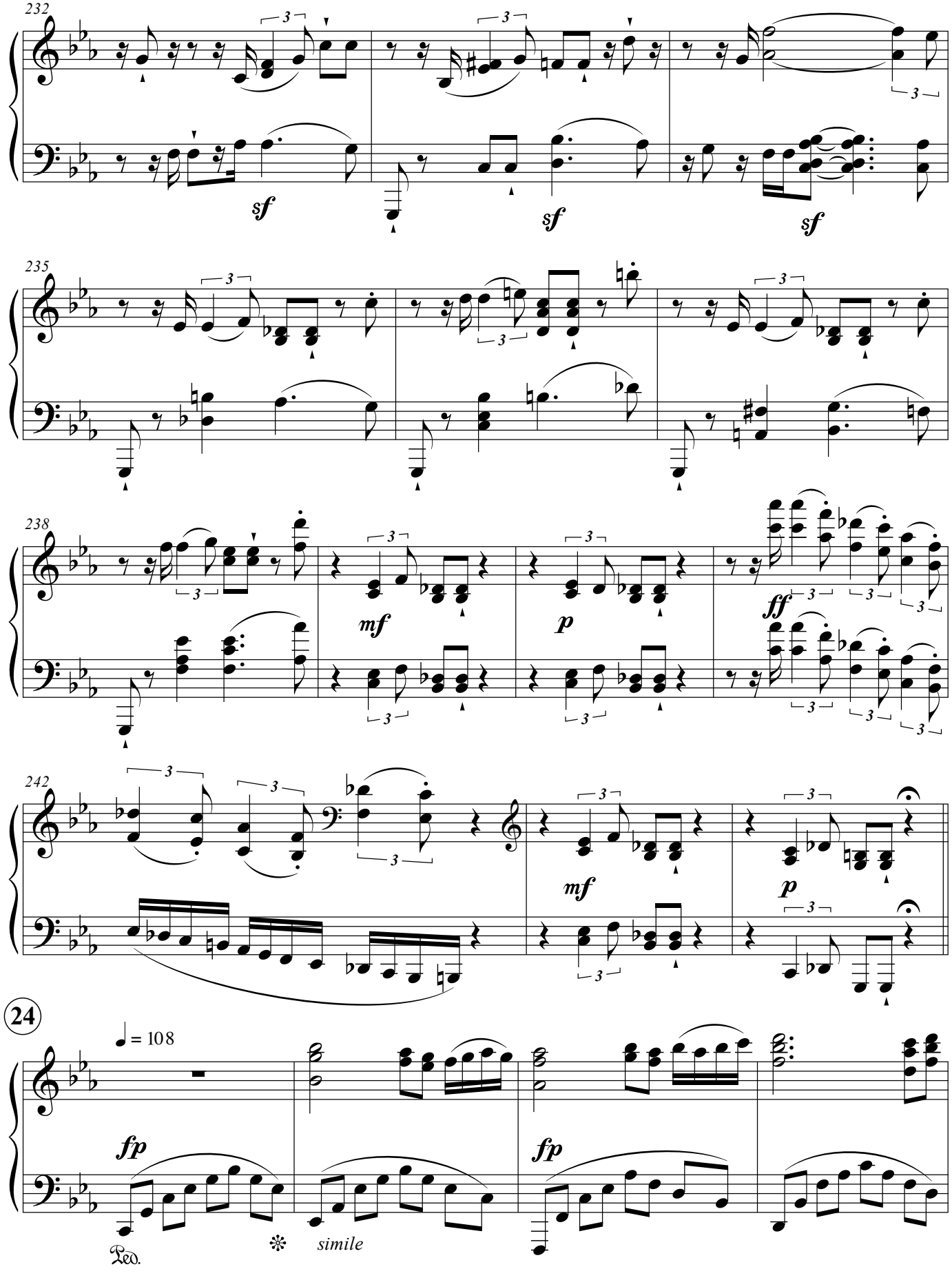

134
14
♩ = 96
p
8va
140
144
rit.
pp
15
♩ = 120
𝅗𝅥. = 𝅝
𝅝 = 𝅗𝅥.
continue tempo alternation
p
mf
154
p
mf

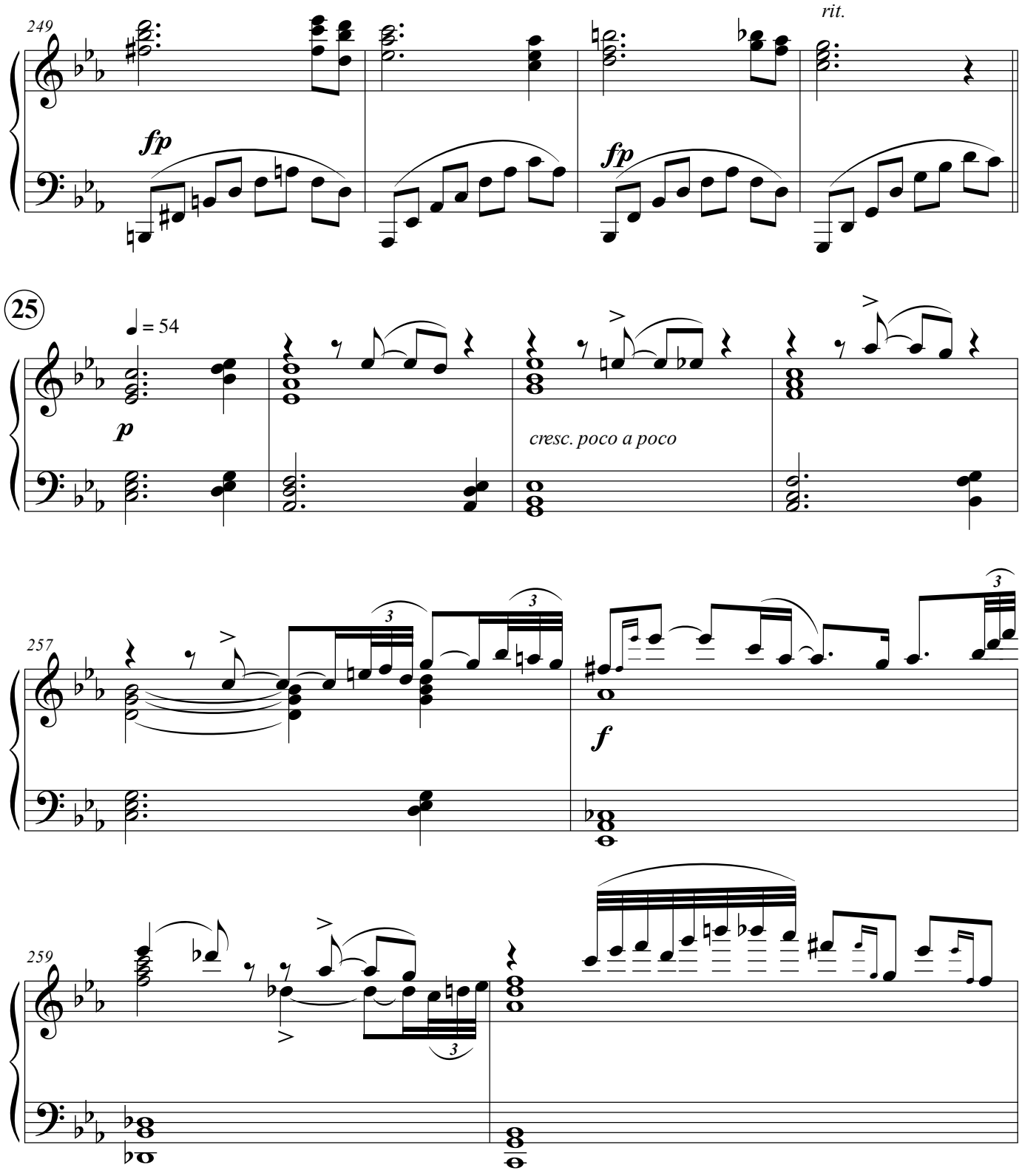

159
p
164
rit.
16
♩ = 88
pp
mf p
mf
ritard.
17
♩ = 96
168
169
mp
Let fade.
172
cresc. poco a poco
174
f

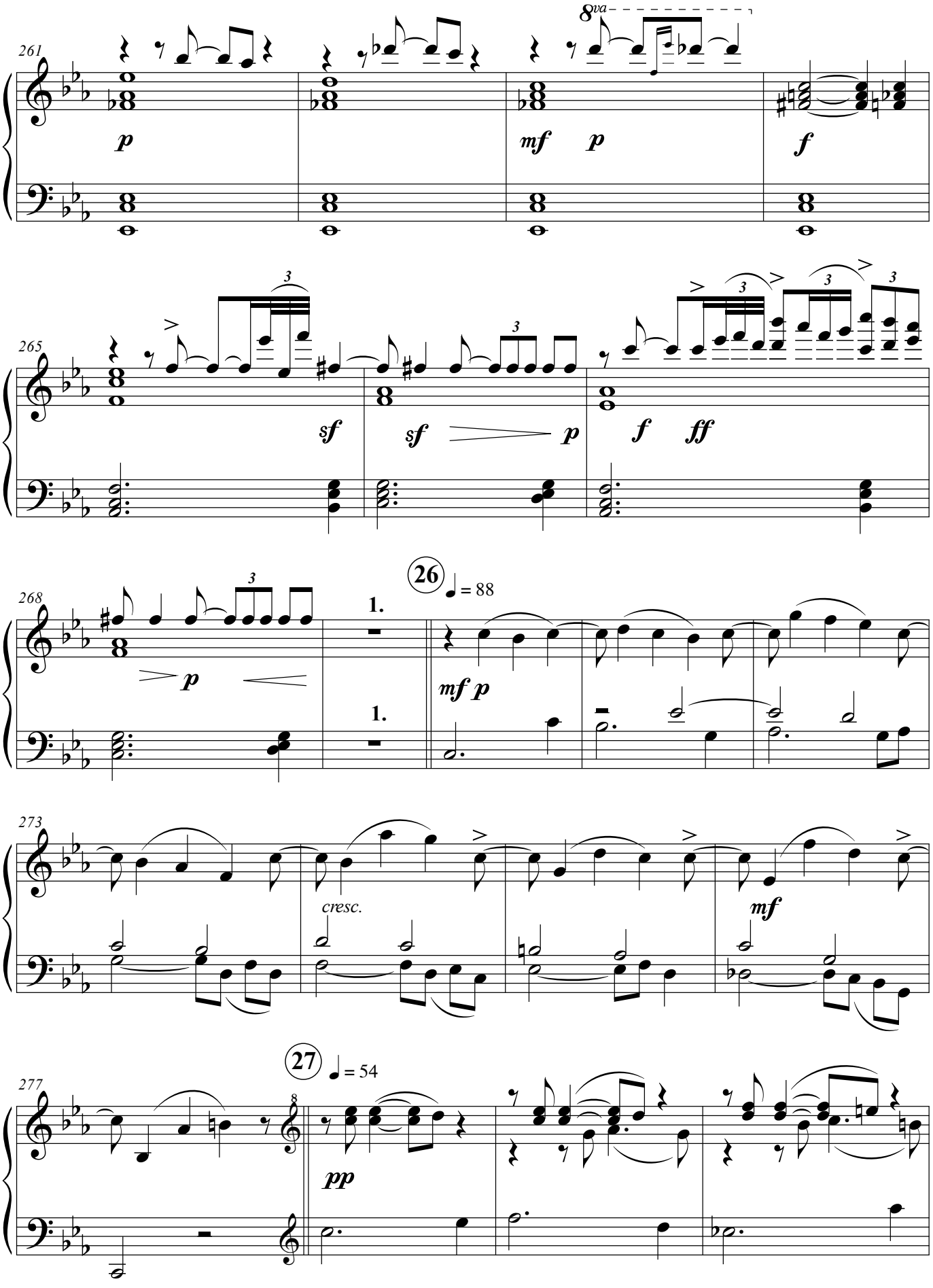

176
cresc.
ff
179
rit.
18
♩ = 54
f
p
mf
p
sf
184
p
mf
p
pp
19
♩ = 108
p
3
193
cresc.
f

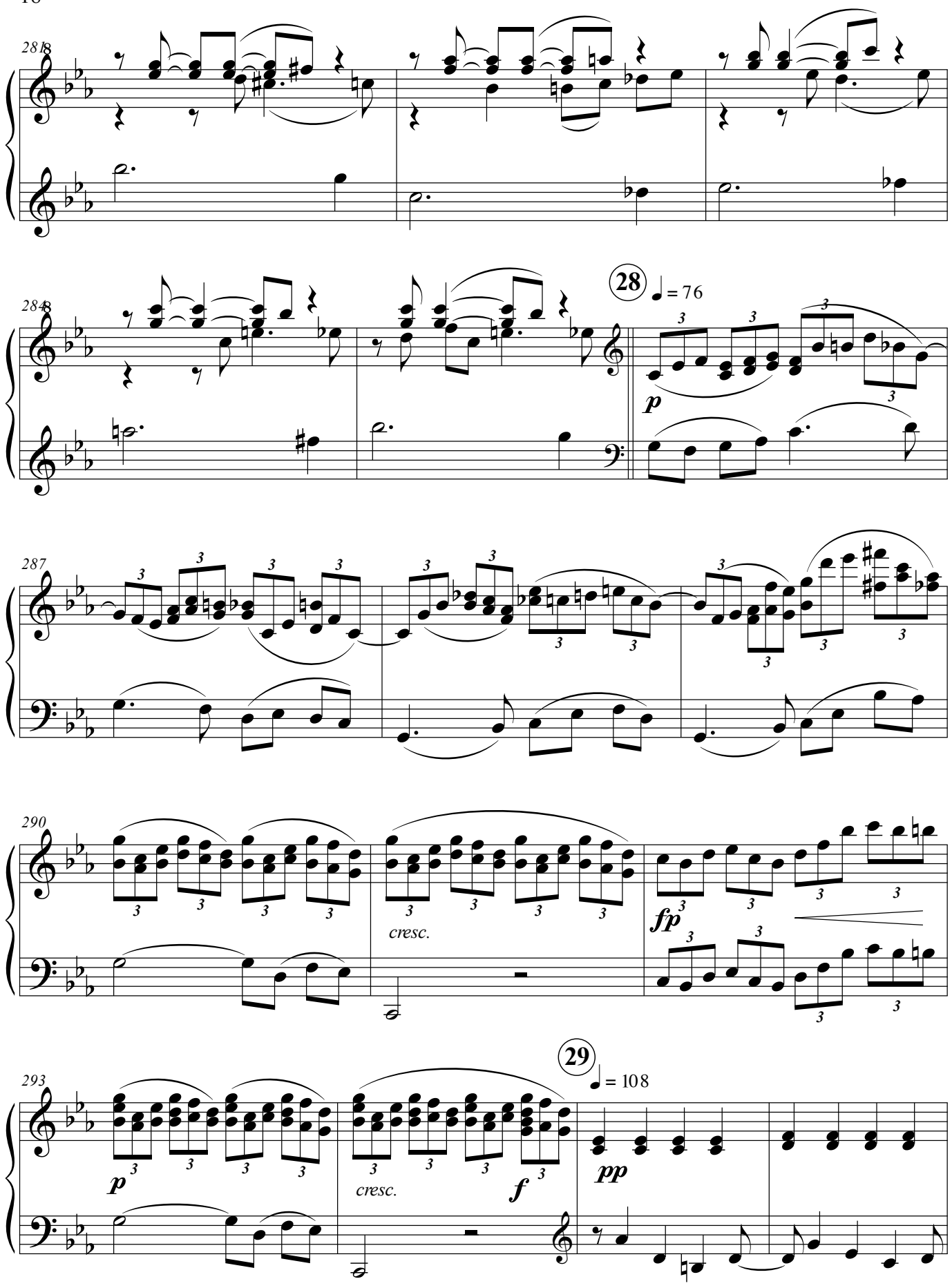

196
p
pp
199
20
♩ = 54
rit.
p
f
p
f
p
202
a tempo
sf
sf
21
206
mf
p
pp
p
212
mf
f
p
mf
mp
p
pp

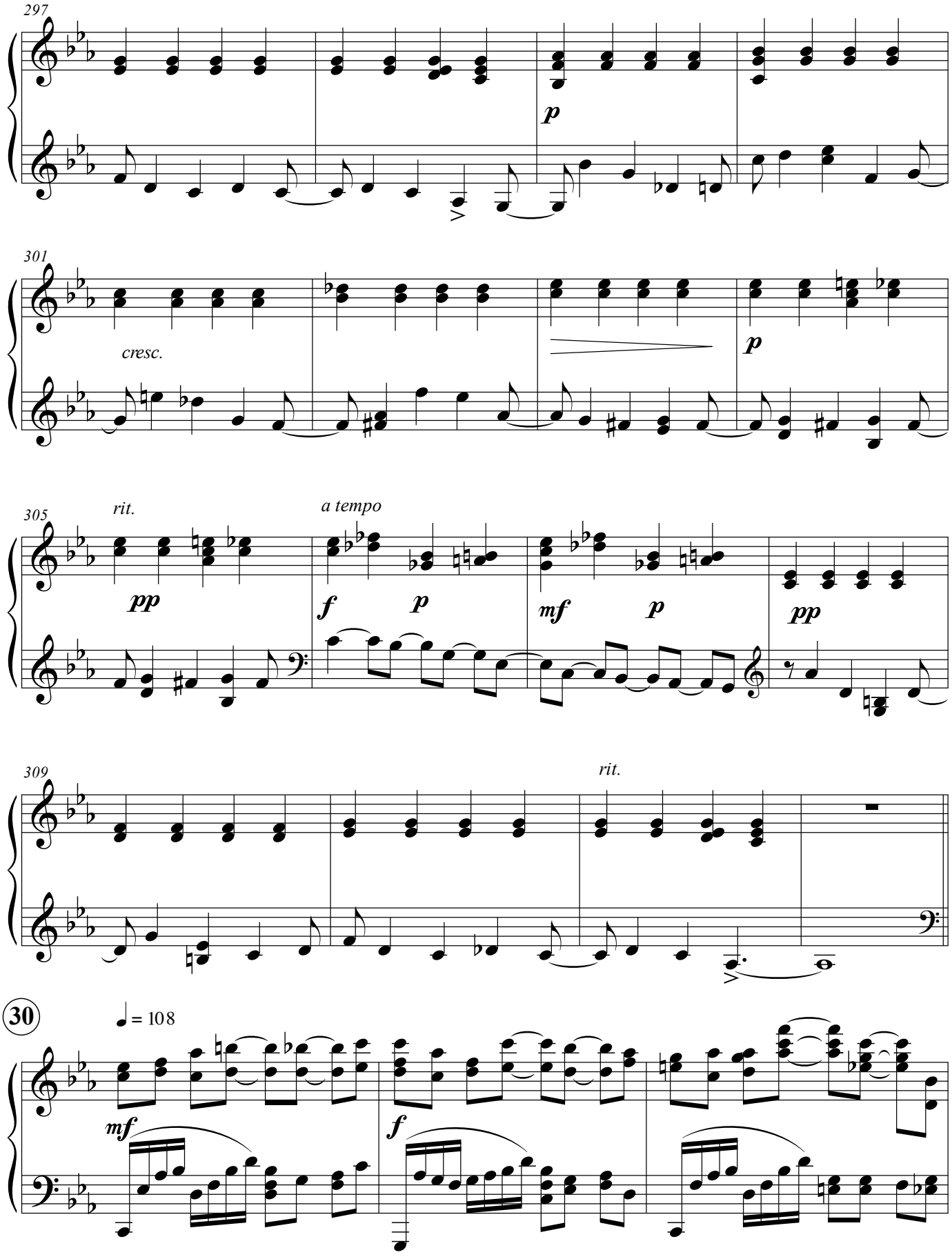

22
= 88
218
p
Ped.
223
8va
Sost. Ped.
pp
8va
(8va)
226
(8va)
229
rit.
23
= 132 freely
cresc.
p
f
sf

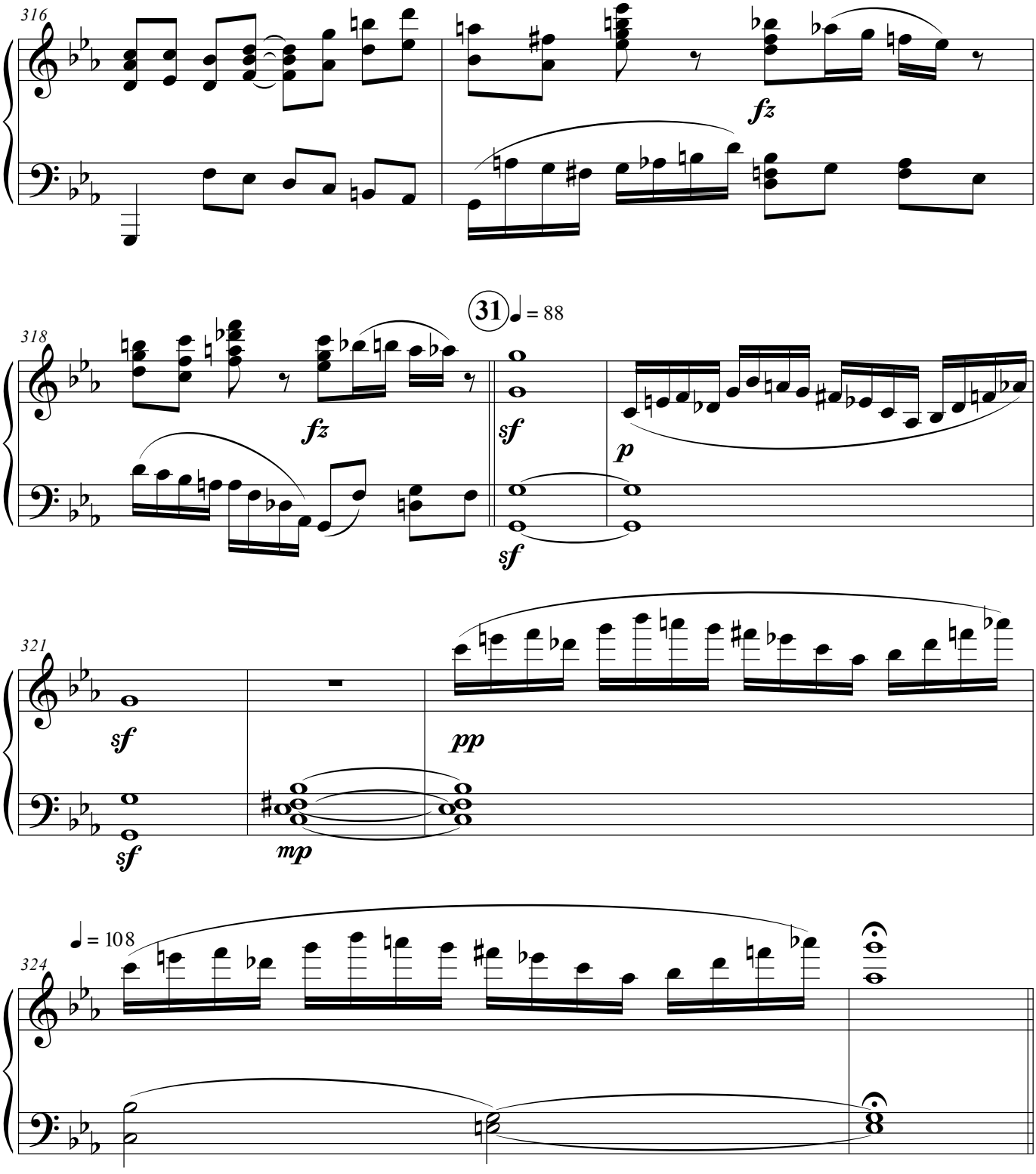

232
sf
sf
sf
235
238
mf
p
ff
242
mf
p
24
♩ = 108
fp
fp
Ped.
simile

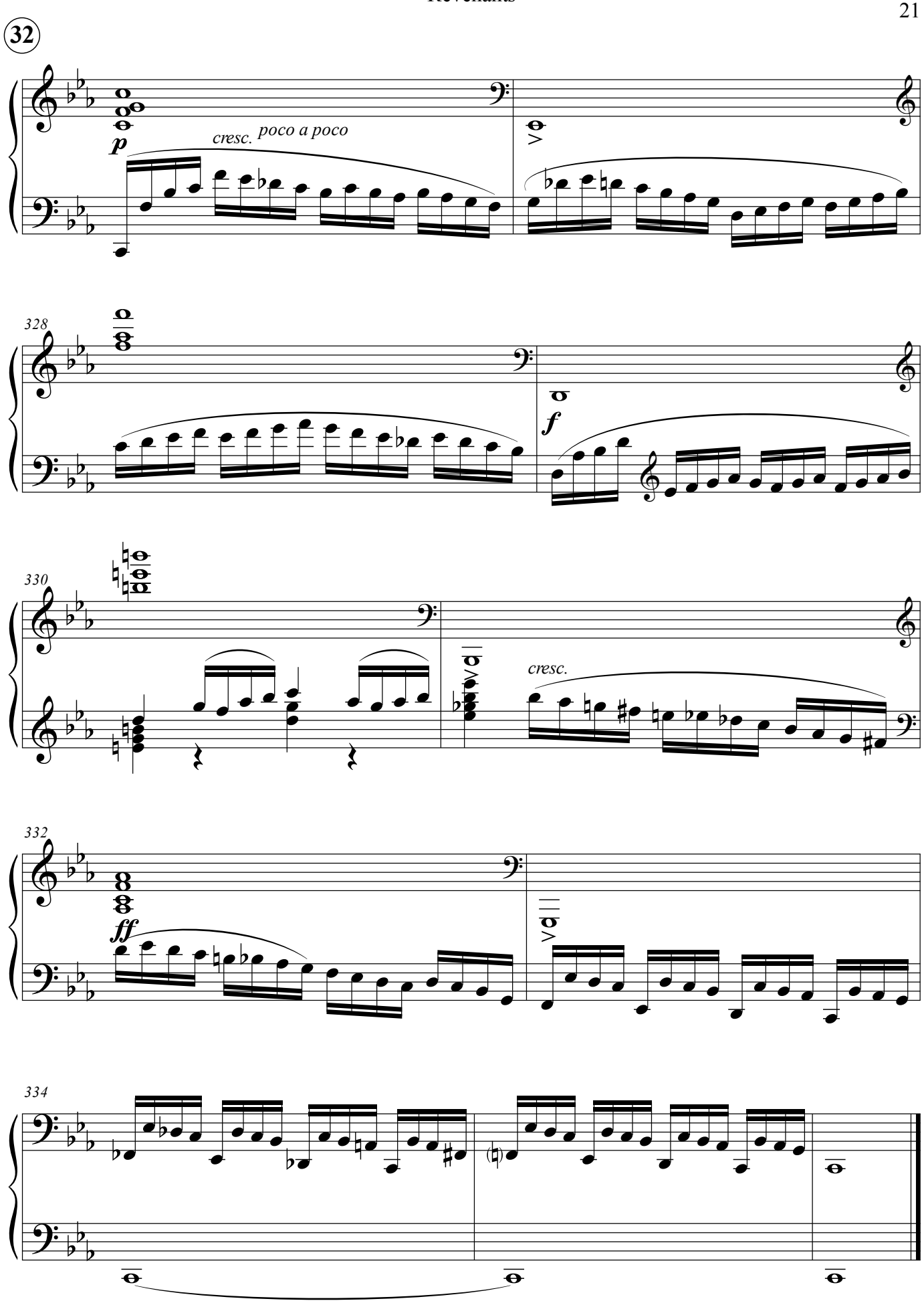

249
rit.
fp
fp
25
= 54
p
cresc. poco a poco
257
3
3
3
f
259
3


261
8va
p
mf p
f
265
3
sf
sf p
f ff
268
1.
1.
26
♩ = 88
p
mf p
273
cresc.
mf
277
27
♩ = 54
pp


281
284
28
♩ = 76
p
287
290
cresc.
fp
293
p
cresc.
f
29
♩ = 108
pp


297
p
301
cresc.
p
305
rit.
a tempo
pp
f
p
mf
p
pp
309
rit.
30
♩ = 108
mf
f


316
fz
31
♩ = 88
318
fz
sf
p
sf
321
sf
pp
sf
mp
♩ = 108
324


32
p
cresc. poco a poco
328
f
330
cresc.
332
ff
334