Halcyon Rag for oboe and piano, op. 26

This rag was composed in September of 1980, a few months after I returned from a trip to France. My luggage on my return home had included a short, concatenated suite for oboe and string quartet which I called Souvenir de Nantes (opus 25). Back in my own living room, I tried my hand at arranging its strings part for piano, with a view to giving Souvenir more currency. I got as far as the work's Ecossaise movement and broke down; Souvenir de Nantes would, alas!, simply have to stand on its own merits in the original oboe and string quartet *genre*.

But in the process of attempting the arrangement, I found my ear intrigued by the combined sonorities of oboe and piano. In place of the proposed arrangement, I ended up with something better, a new work, the present Halcyon Rag. Everyone remarks incidentally that the Souvenir has that sort of "Je ne sais quoi" French feeling about it. Halcyon Rag, *au contrair*e, sees Joplinesque syncopation yielding only to a sultry interlude that is all *tango argentino.* Clearly, my compositional focus had returned to present longitudes!

It opens with a recitative for the oboist, followed by an angular, jaunty theme that is quite idiomatic for the solo instrument. The strain with the Hispanic tinge follows in a distant key, but no lurch is involved in the process. We slip-slide into it effortlessly owing to the fact that the tango starts on the pitch sharp 4 (an expected pitch in the key we're leaving, and the sway of the successive melody takes care of the rest!). However, the return to tonic for a restatement of the main rag strain entails more elaborate procedures, of necessity. (This task is taken on by the pianist, with rolled-up sleeves.) There follows a coda which begins more agitato, but the rag's prevailing tempo returns for the pert, valedictory gesture, a chromatic scale on the oboe followed by a Broadway button from the piano. Back in the U.S.A. indeed!

I dedicated Halcyon Rag to my dear friend, the novelist Michael Chabon.

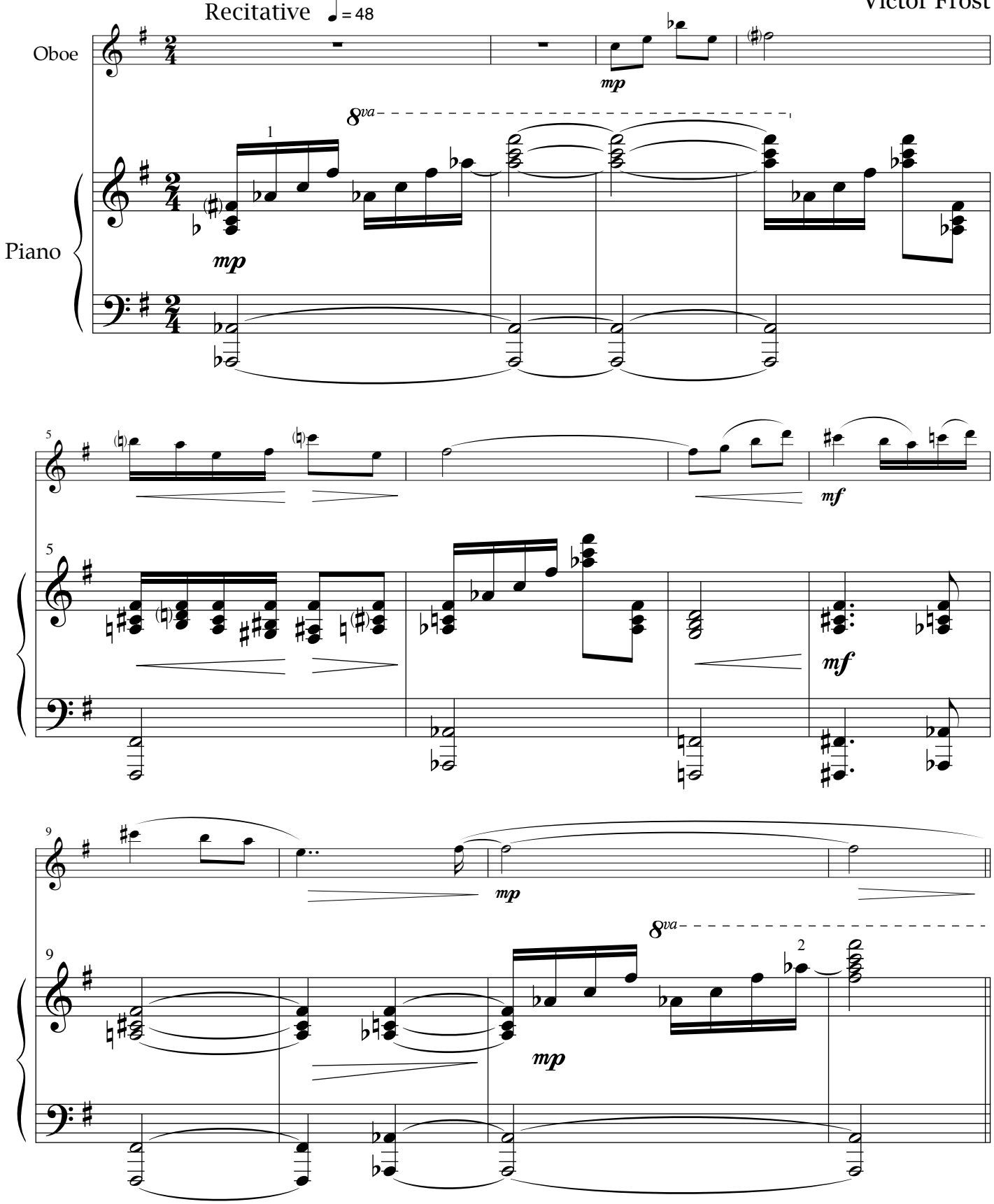
Victor Frost
13 XI 82
Weehawken, New Jersey

to Michael Chabon

Halcyon Rag

for oboe and piano, op. 26

Victor Frost



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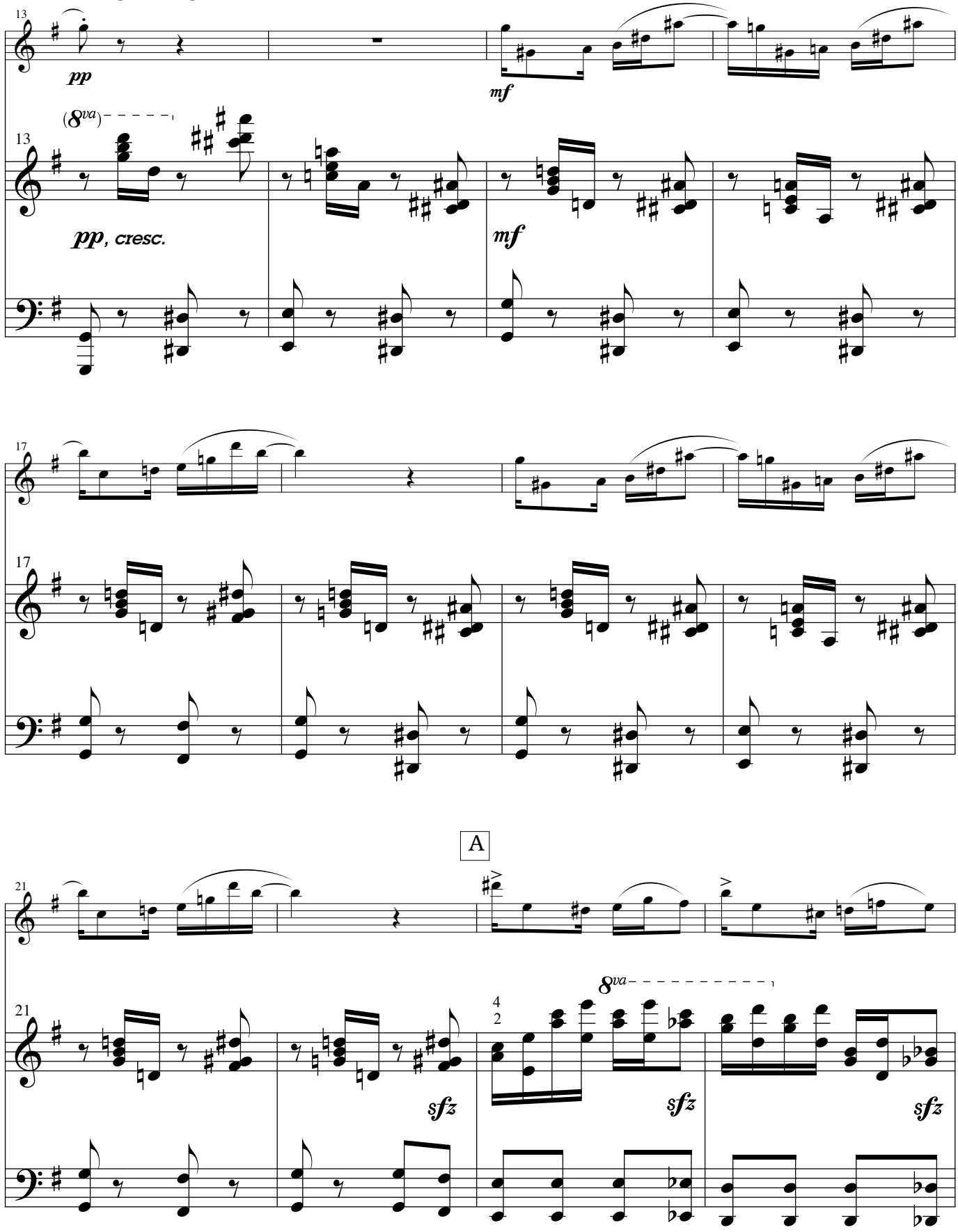

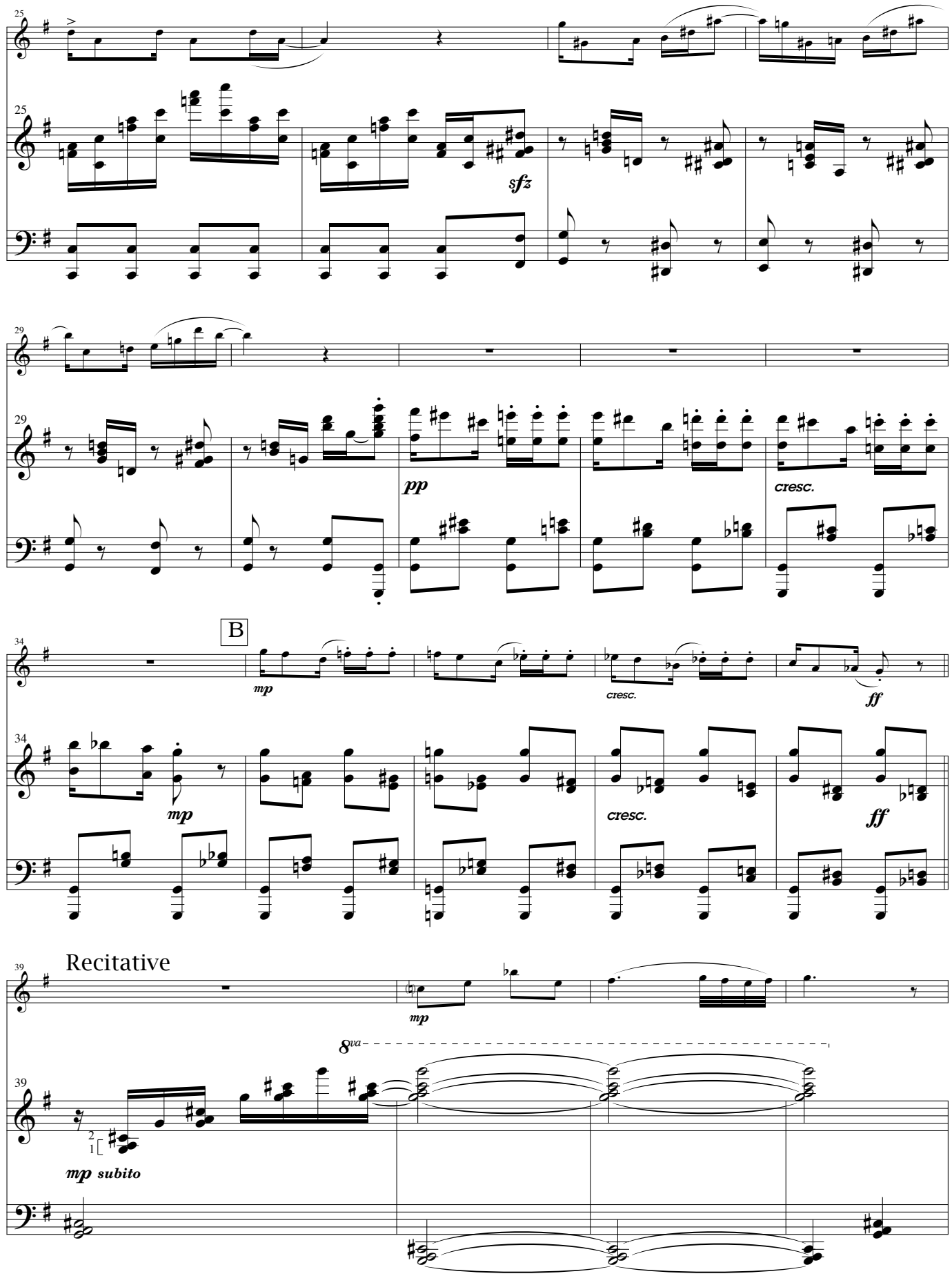
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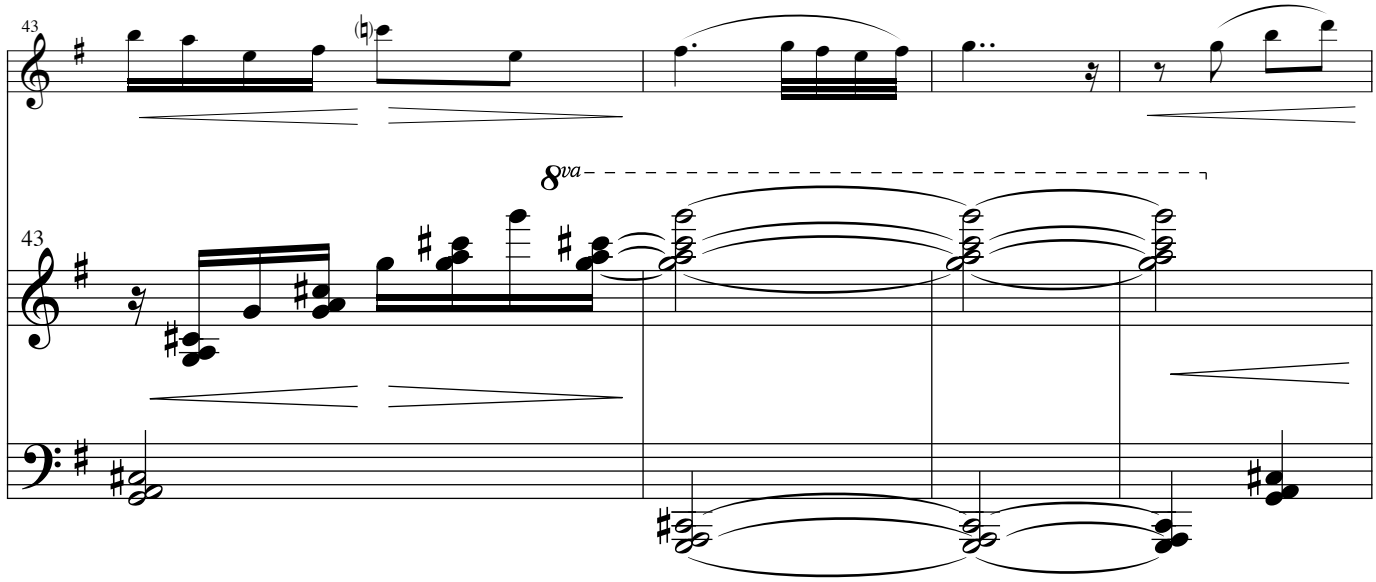

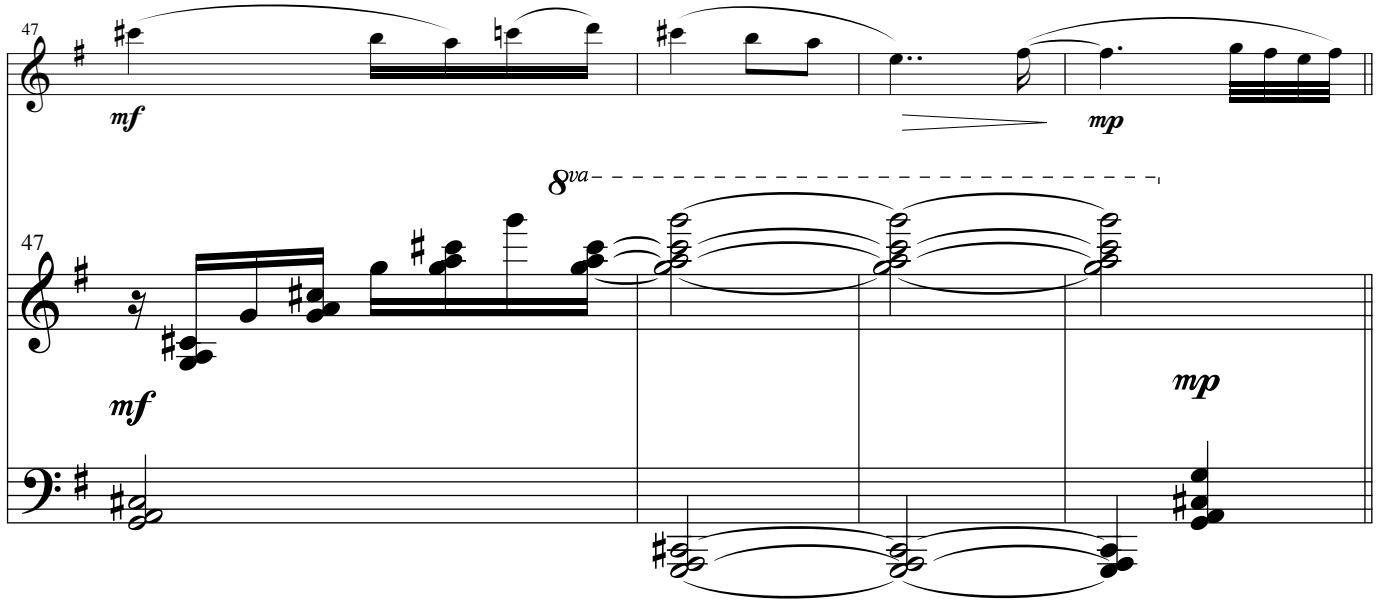

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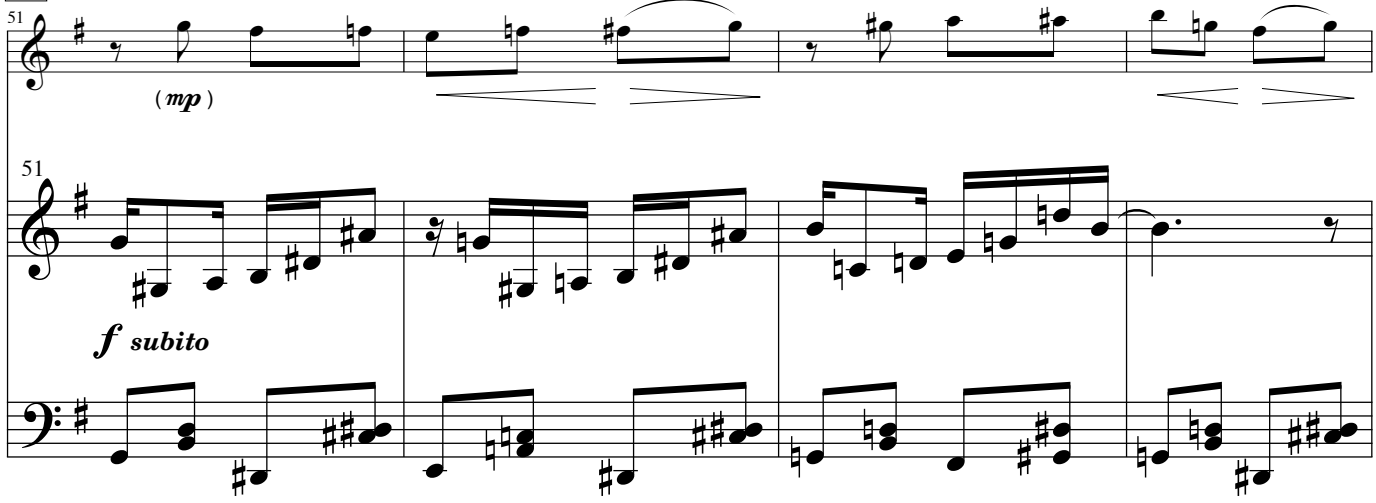

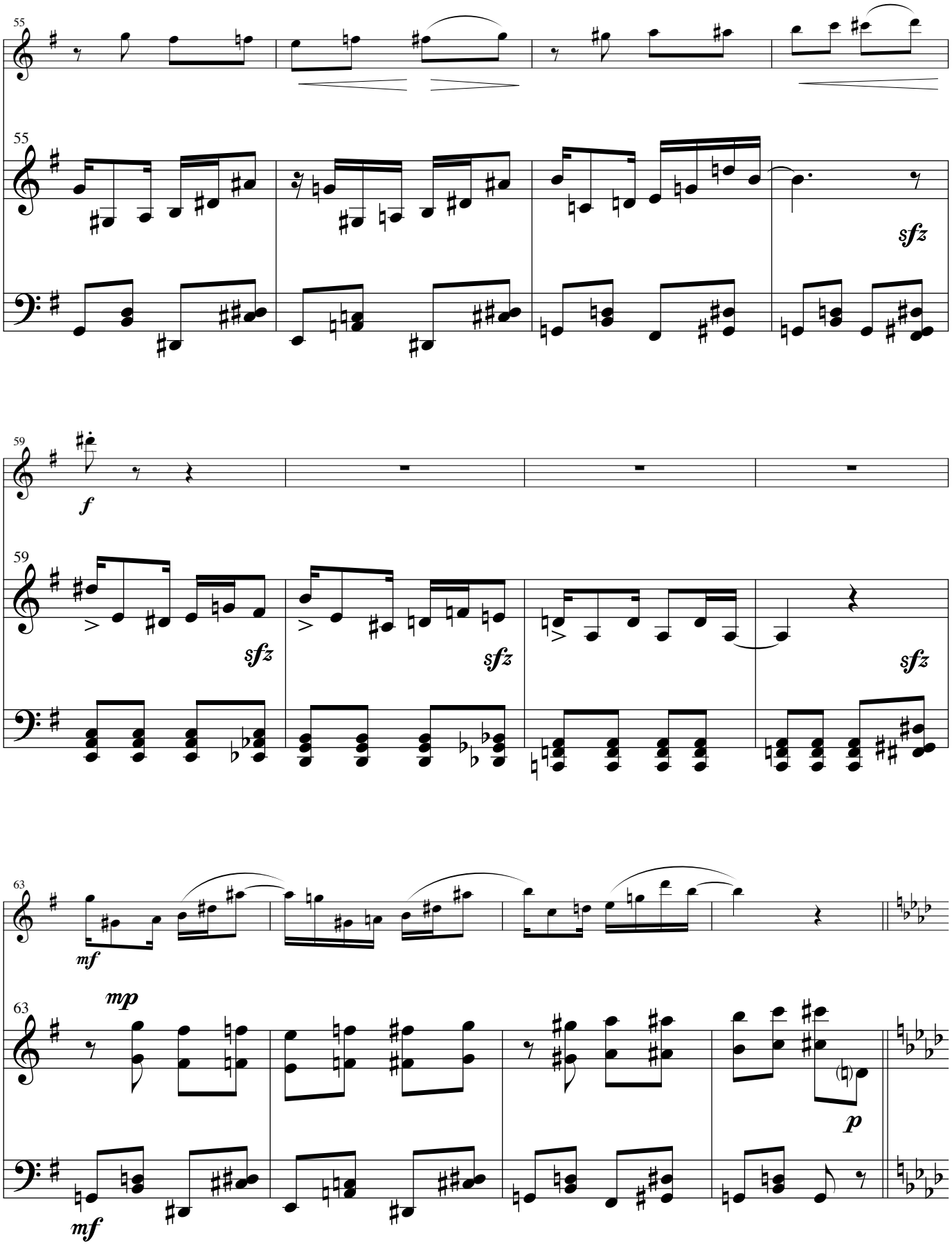
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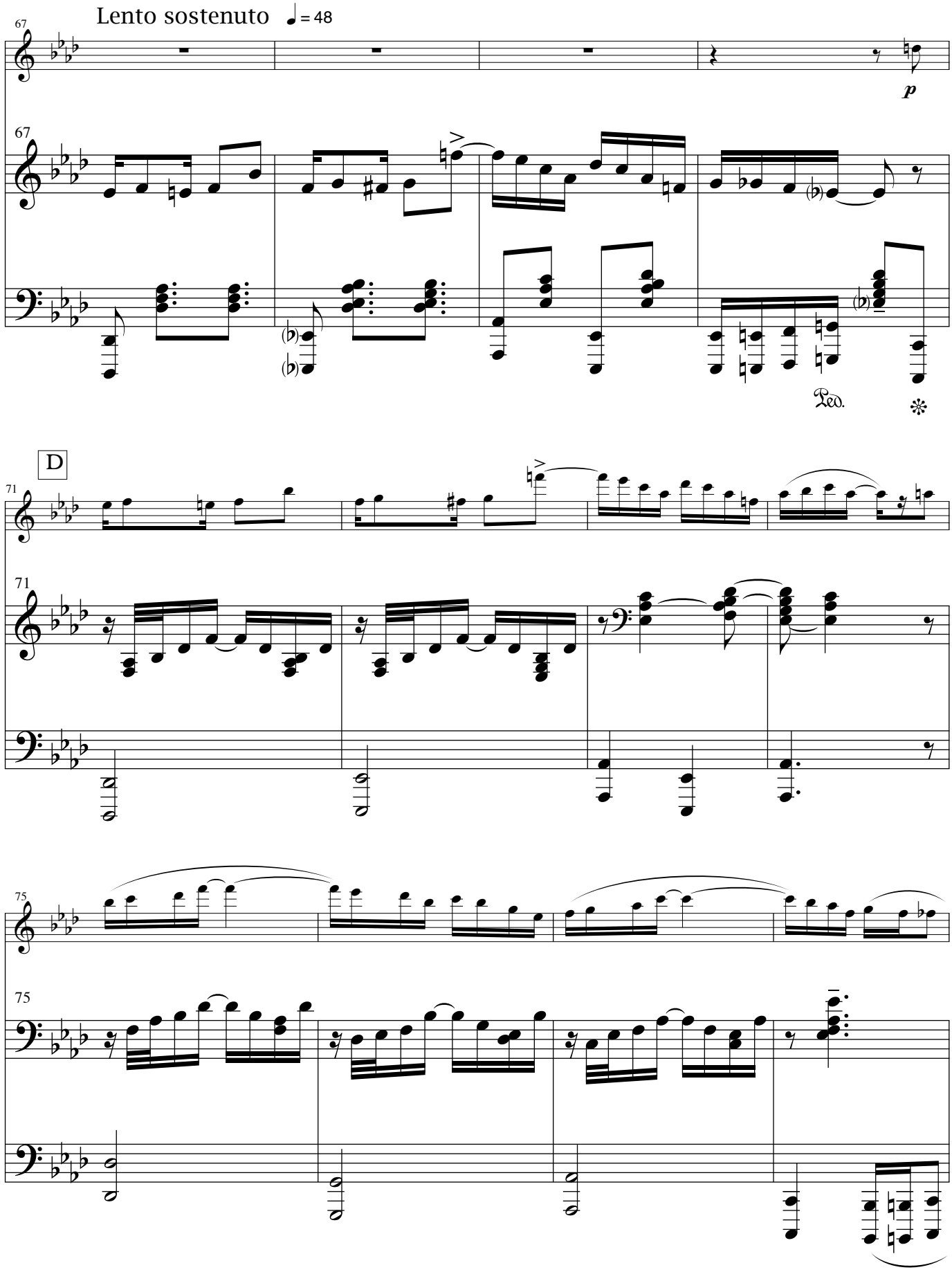
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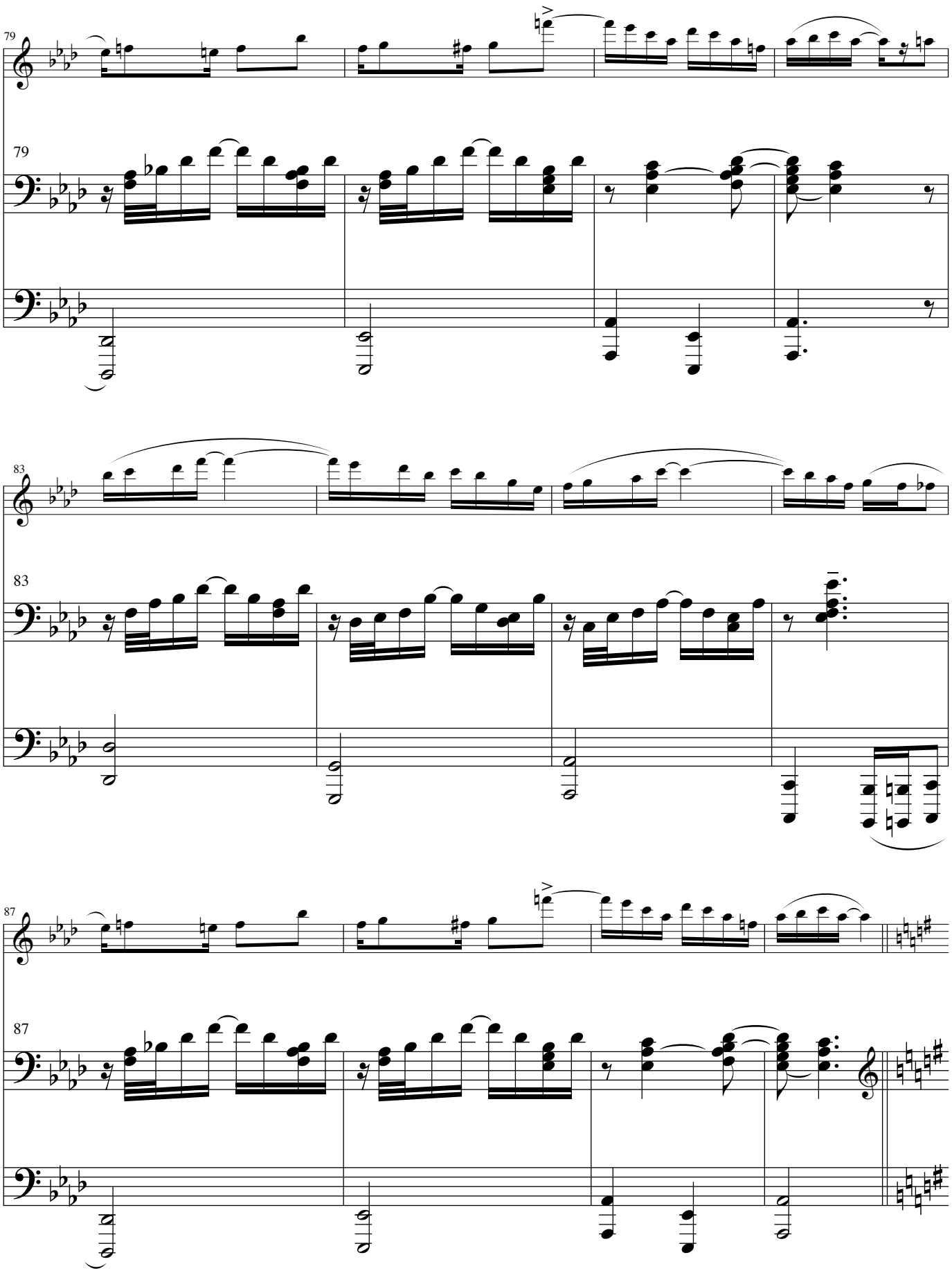
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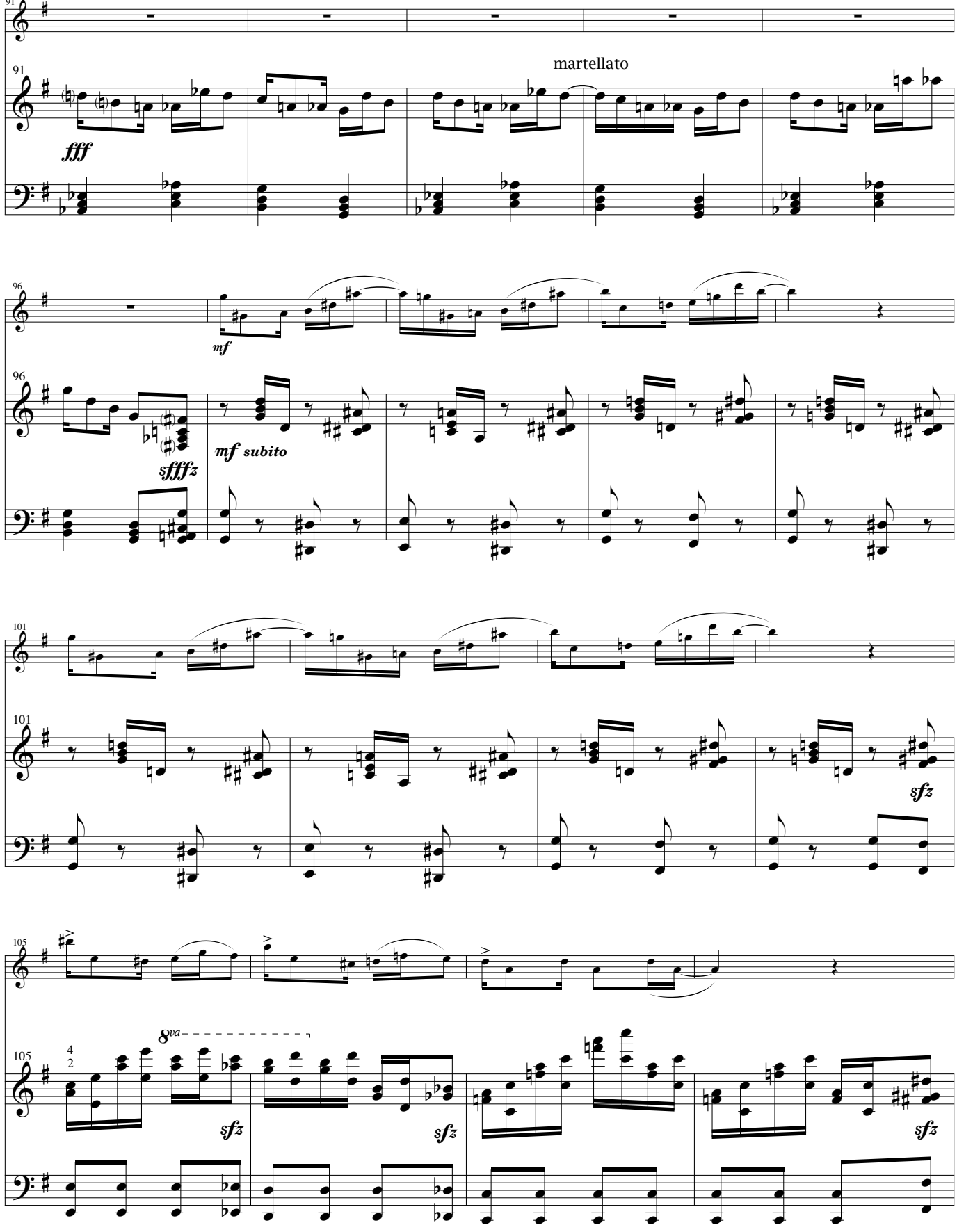

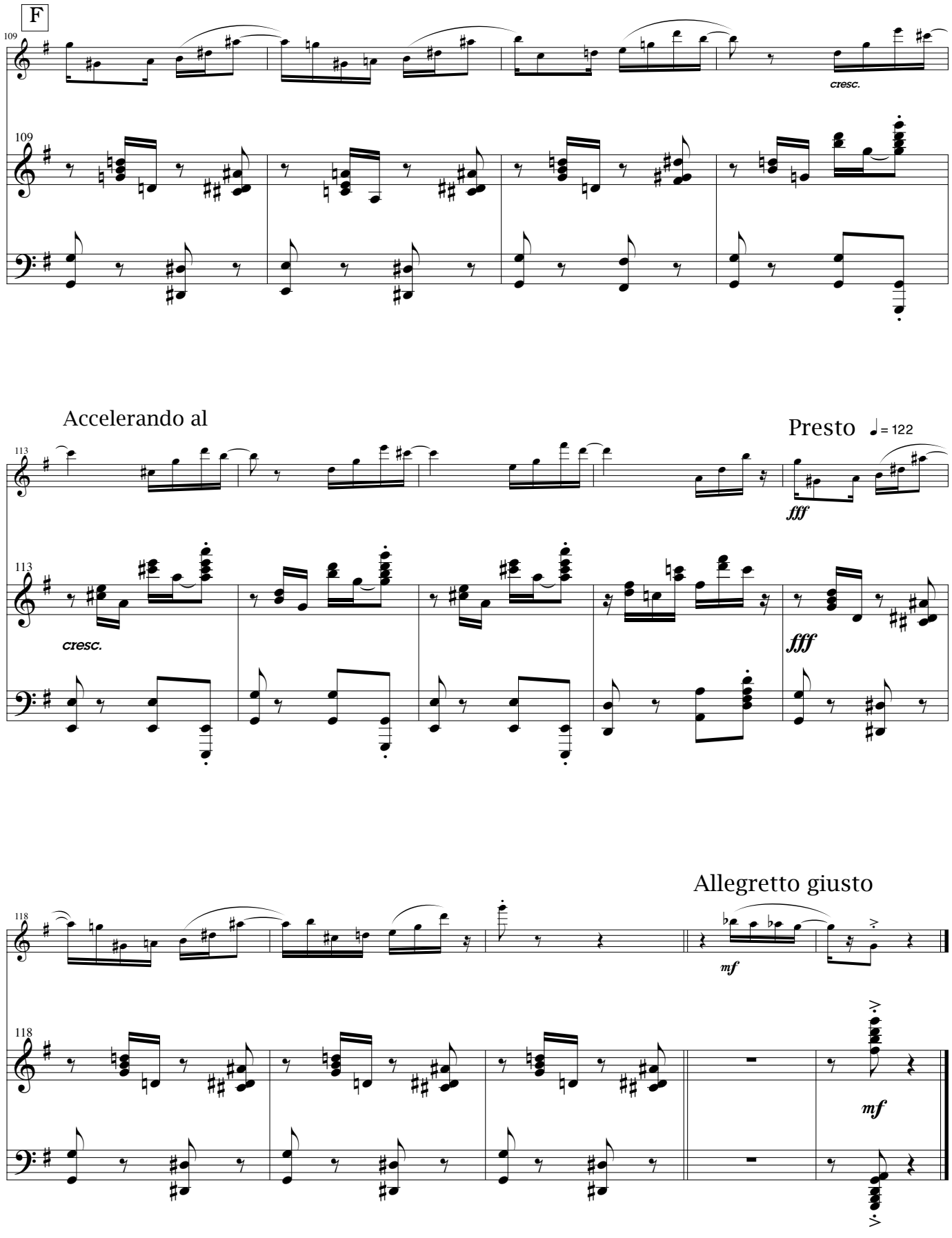
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