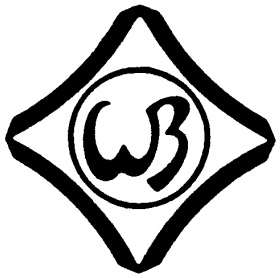
William Bolcom

12 NEW ETUDES for PIANO

• 1988 Pulitzer Prize in Music



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Dedication

These 12 New Etudes were written for Paul Jacobs; my hope of hearing him play them was thwarted by his death. I extend my dedication to include, in gratitude, John Musto, who premiered three of these Etudes in February 1986 in New York, and Marc-André Hamelin, who premiered the first nine that July in California. They inspired me to complete the set, which I had left unfinished after Etude 9.

WILLIAM BOLCOM
Sept. 2, 1986

William Bolcom's 12 NEW ETUDES FOR PIANO received the 1988 Pulitzer Prize in Music

Recorded by Marc-André Hamelin on New World Records
LP Album: NW 354-1 CD Album: NW 354-2

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Preface

The pedagogical and technical purpose of these New Etudes is similar to that of the first set (12 Etudes for Piano, 1959-66); as with the earlier volume of Etudes, the particular problem addressed is noted at the beginning of each Etude. As in the first set, however, the major goal is the creation and execution of pieces of music, which happen to be exercises of style.

The titles of the Etudes, in four books, are equally divided between English and French:

BOOK I
1. Fast, furious
2. Récitatif
3. Mirrors

BOOK II
4. Scène d'opéra
5. Butterflies, hummingbirds
6. Nocturne

BOOK III
7. Premonitions
8. Rag infernal (Syncopes apocalyptiques)
9. Invention

BOOK IV
10. Vers le silence
11. Hi-jinks
12. Hymne à l'amour

A piano with a suspension pedal is required. Provision is made for use of the extra minor sixth of bass notes on the Bösendorfer Imperial Grand, with *ossias* provided for normal piano performance. As with the first collection, these Etudes can be played singly, in selections, in books, as well as in toto.

WILLIAM BOLCOM

Glossary

= free-time signature. In Etude 3, a relative-time signature, , is used, denoting a basic tactus at barlines against which notes are placed.

= relative lengths of musical pauses from 5 or 6 seconds to ¼ second, depending on context. Used mostly in free time.

= note plucked inside piano

accel. rit.

Other notation explained in score.

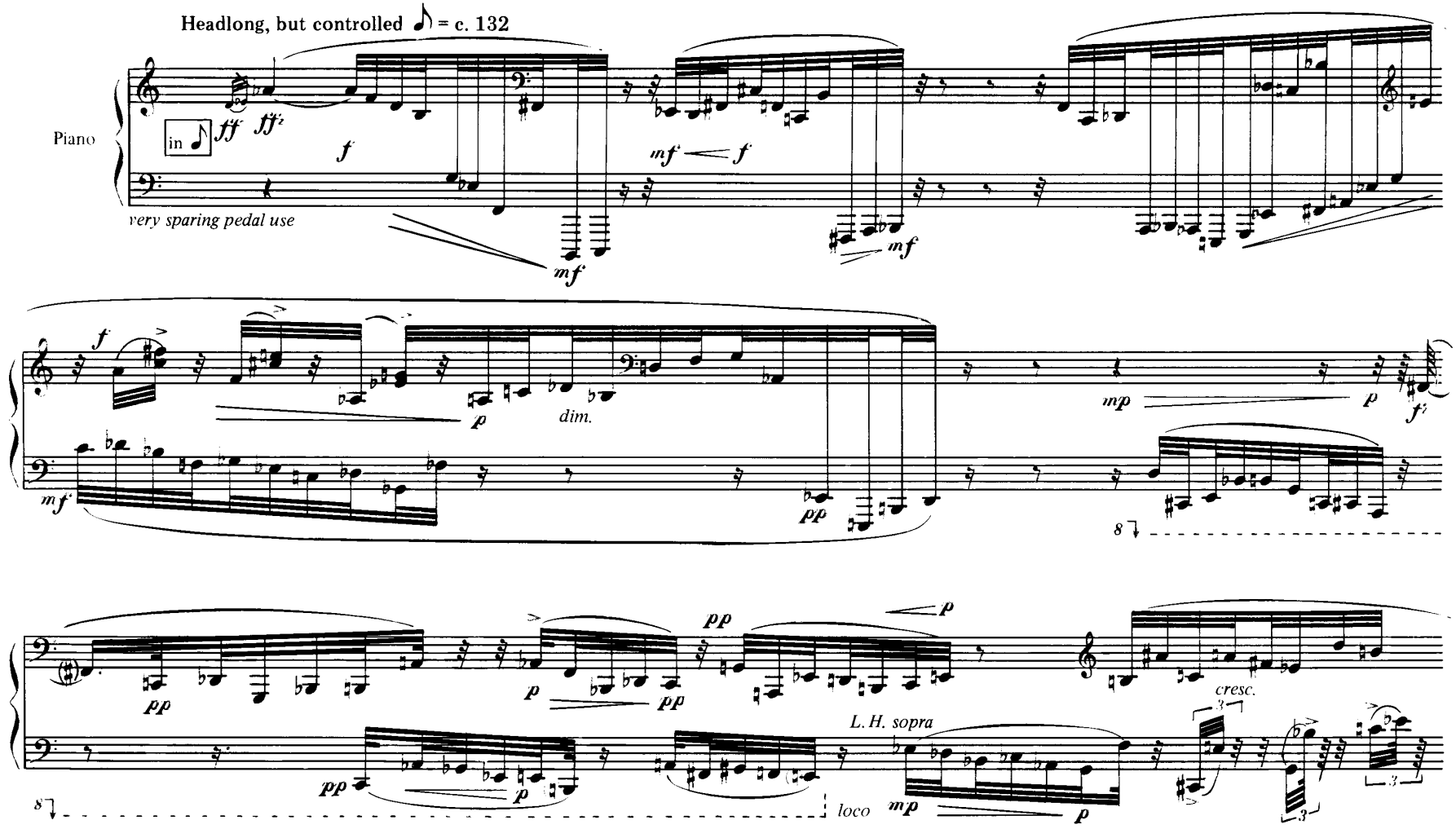
Accidentals retain force throughout a beamed group. In music with key signatures, traditional rules apply.

12 NEW ETUDES FOR PIANO
Book I

1. Fast, furious

William Bolcom

Sweeping gestures of hands, forearms, the body. Freedom of movement.



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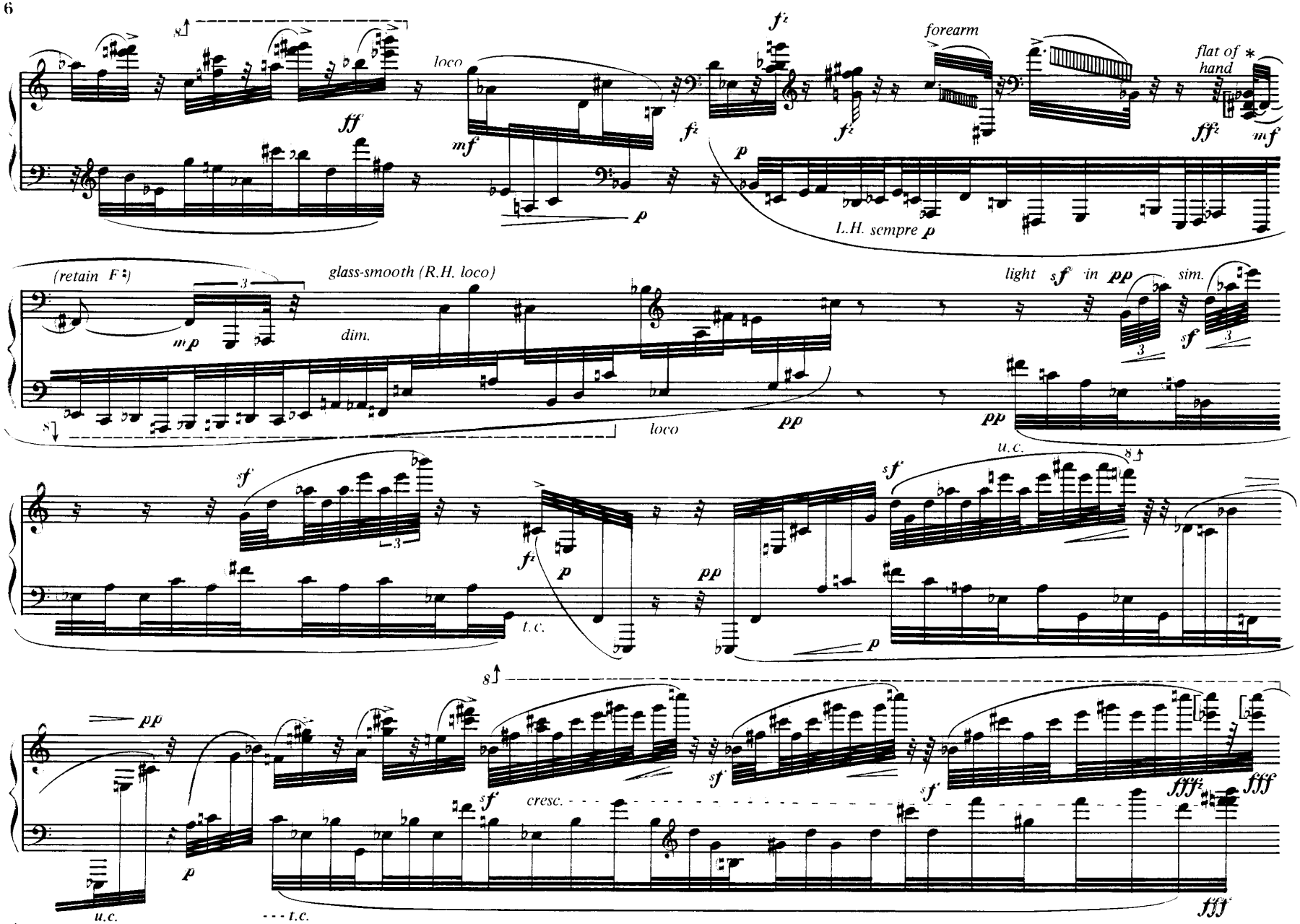
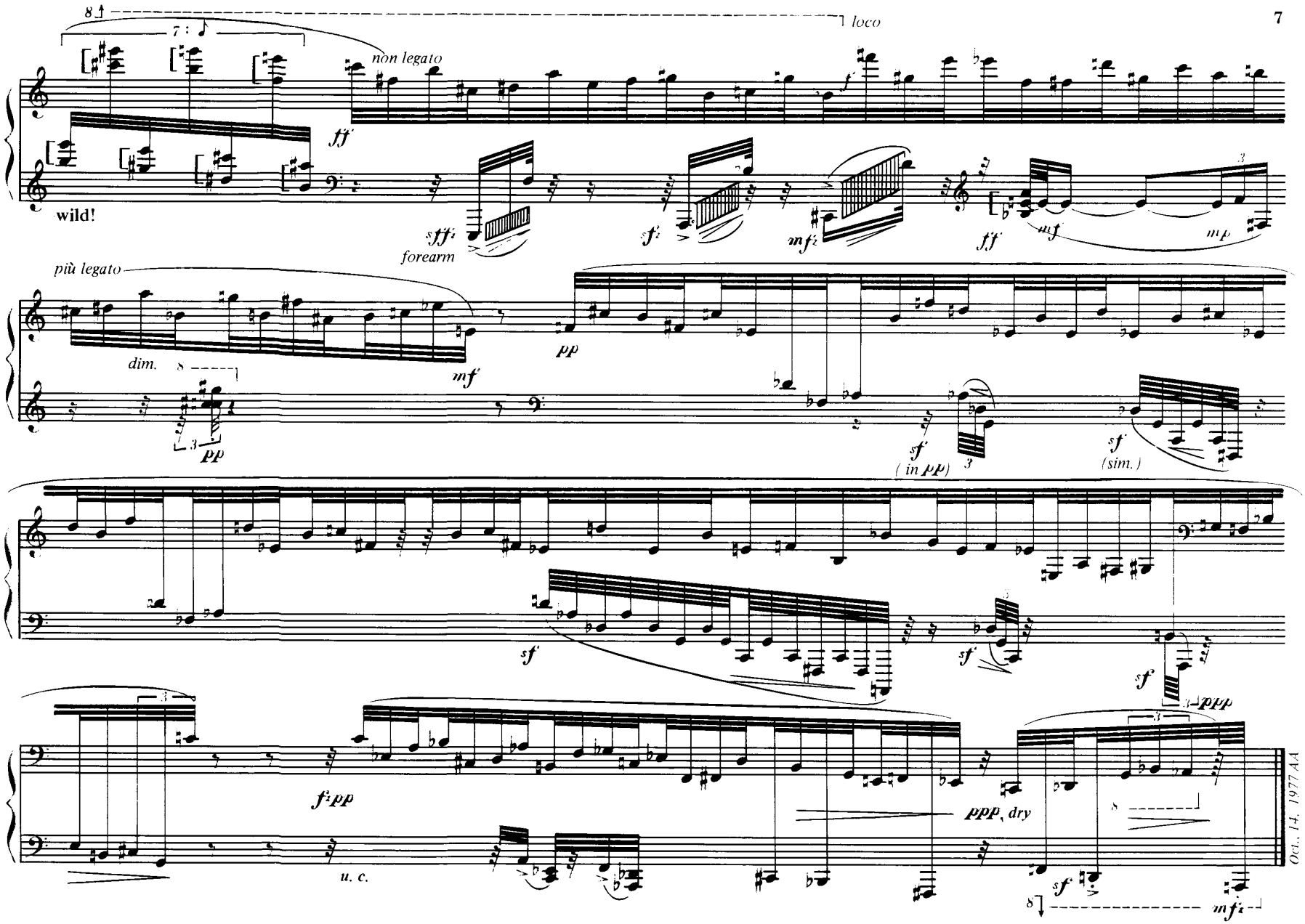
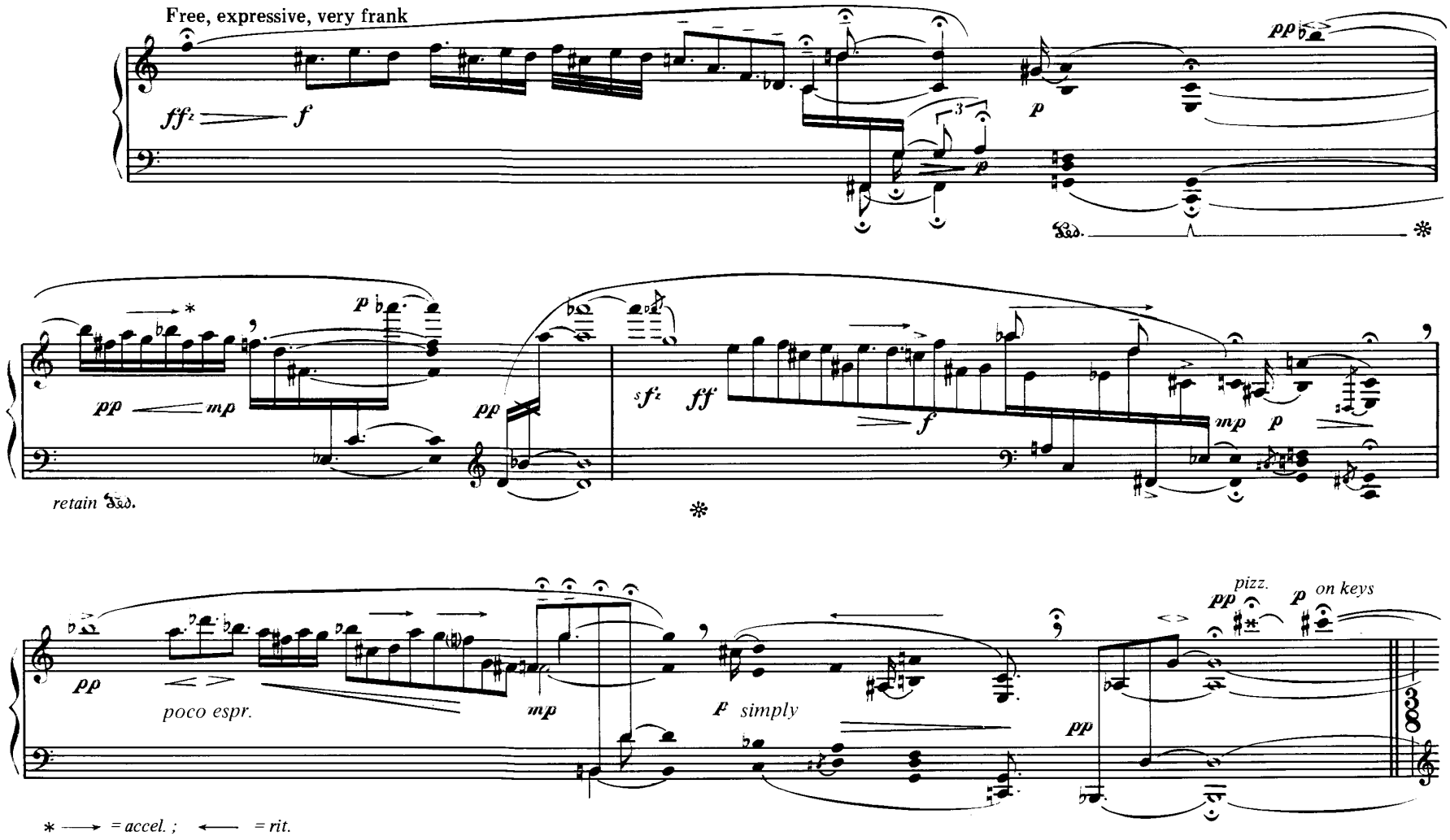


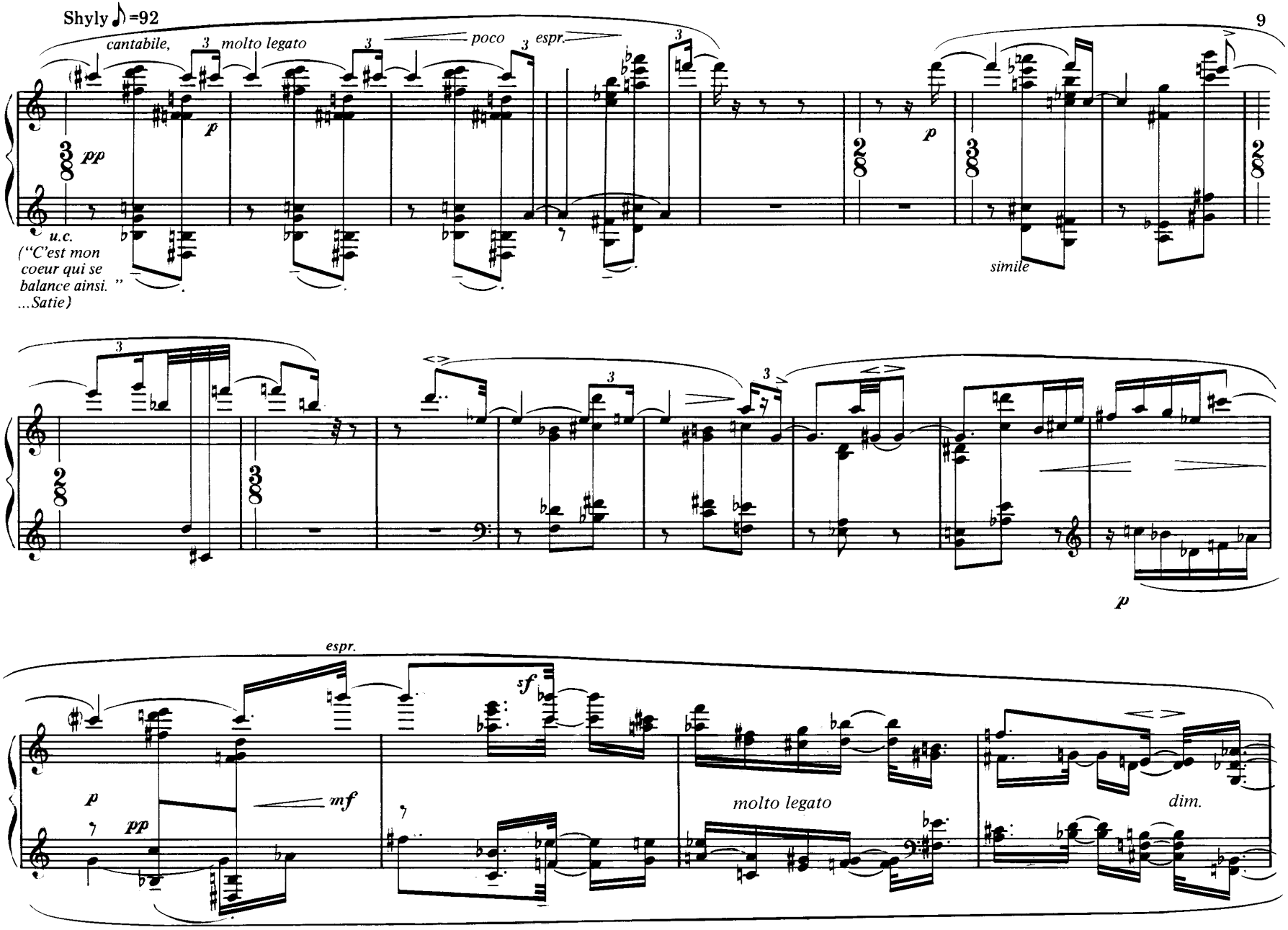
*Cluster, encompassing all chromatic notes within interval, unless preceded by a ♮ or ♯

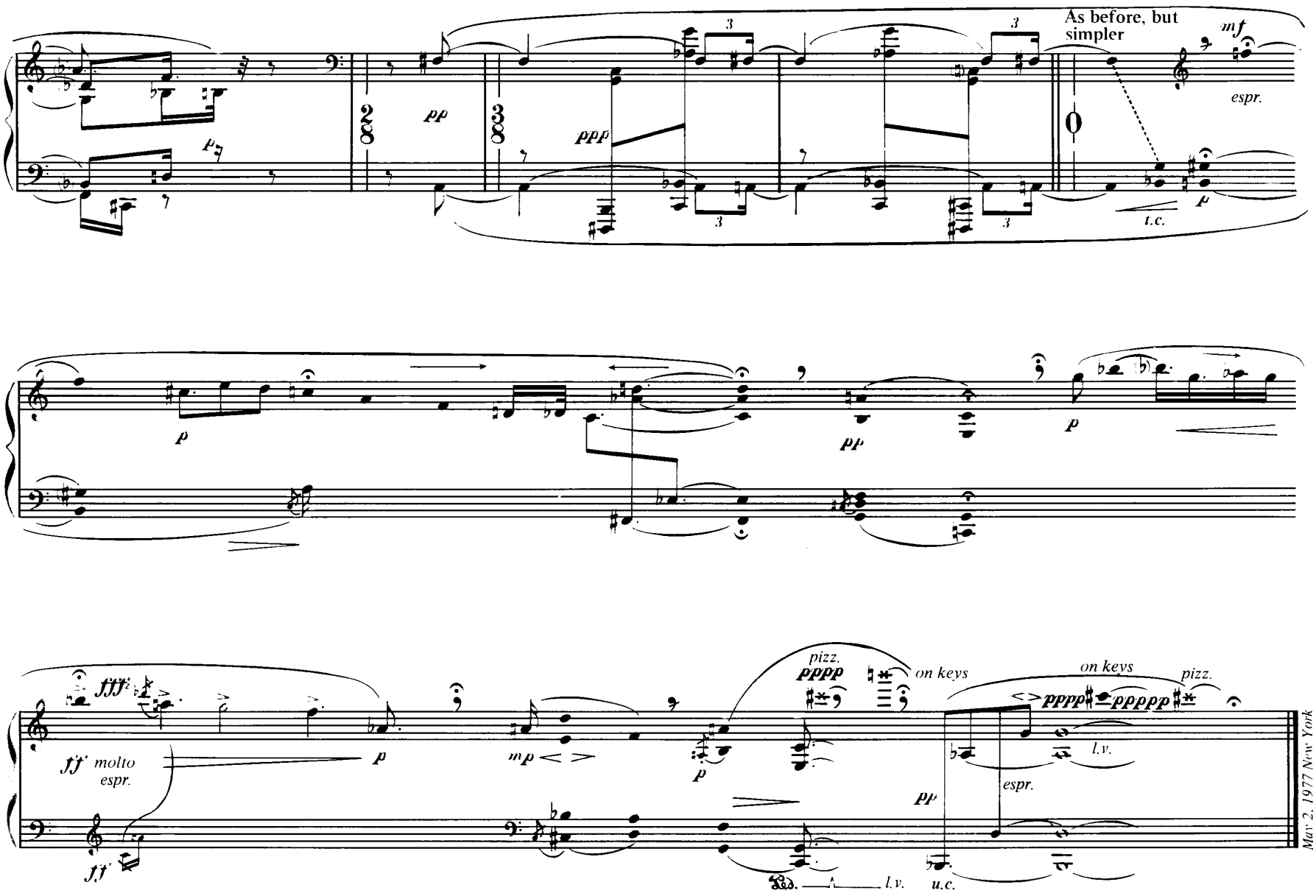

loco
non legato
wild!
forearm
più legato
dim.
(in pp)
(sim.)
u. c.
ppp, dry
Oct., 14, 1977 AA

2. Récitatif

Recitative style, rubato; finger-changes for smoothness' sake; smooth passage of line between hands.



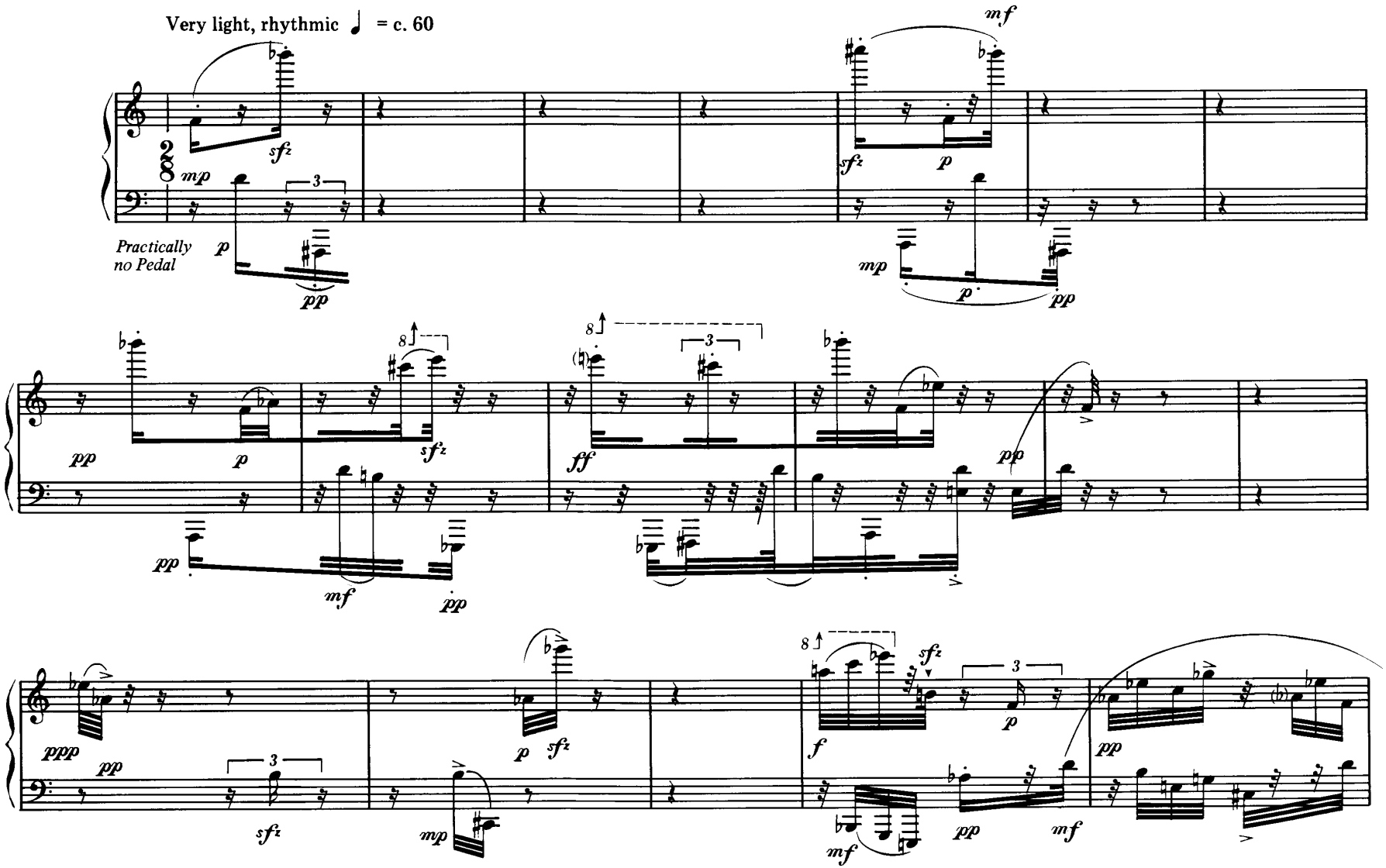

Shyly ♪=92
cantabile,
molto legato
poco
espr.
pp
p
u.c.
("C'est mon coeur qui se balance ainsi." ...Satie)
simile
p
espr.
sf
p
pp
mf
molto legato
dim.

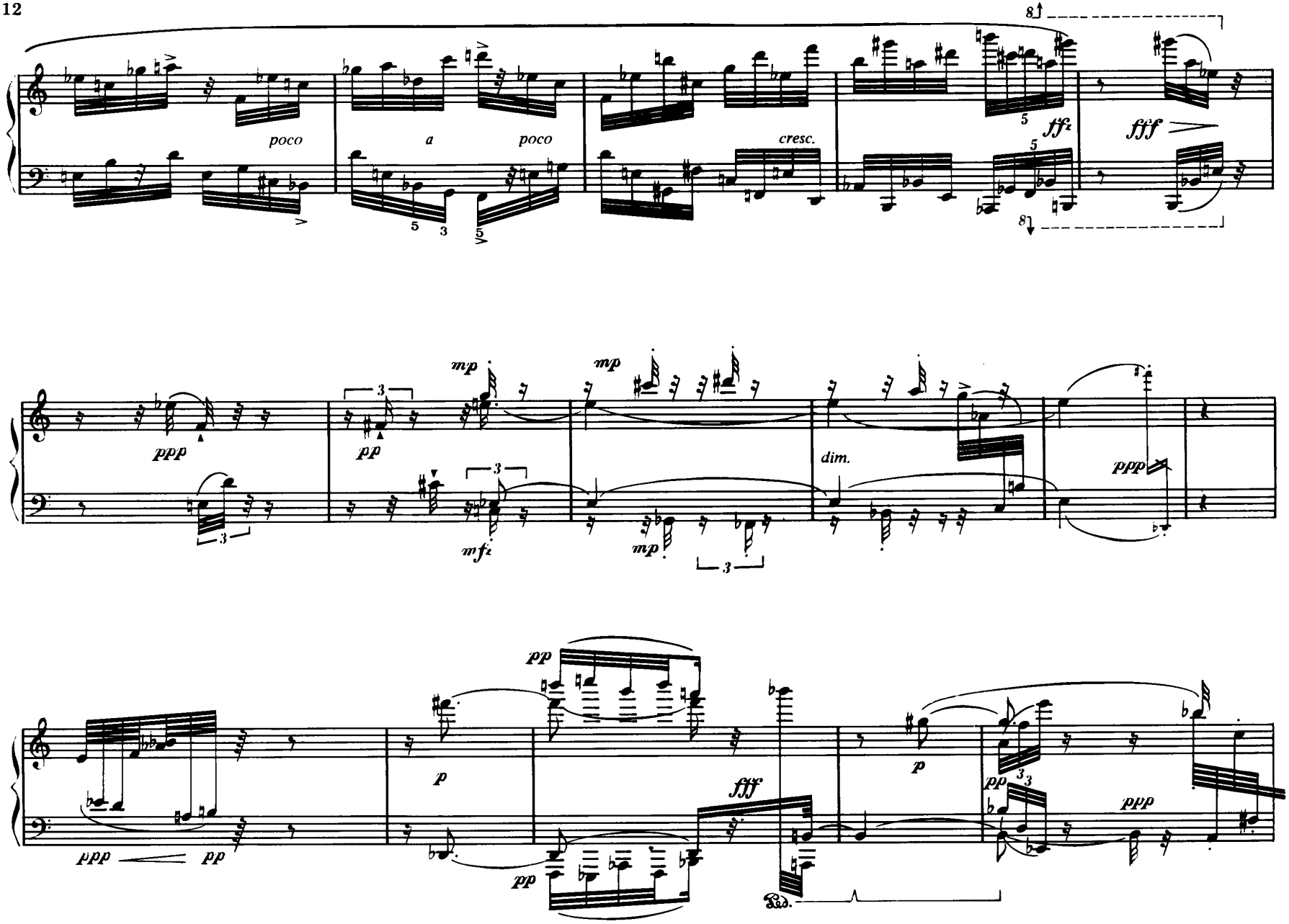


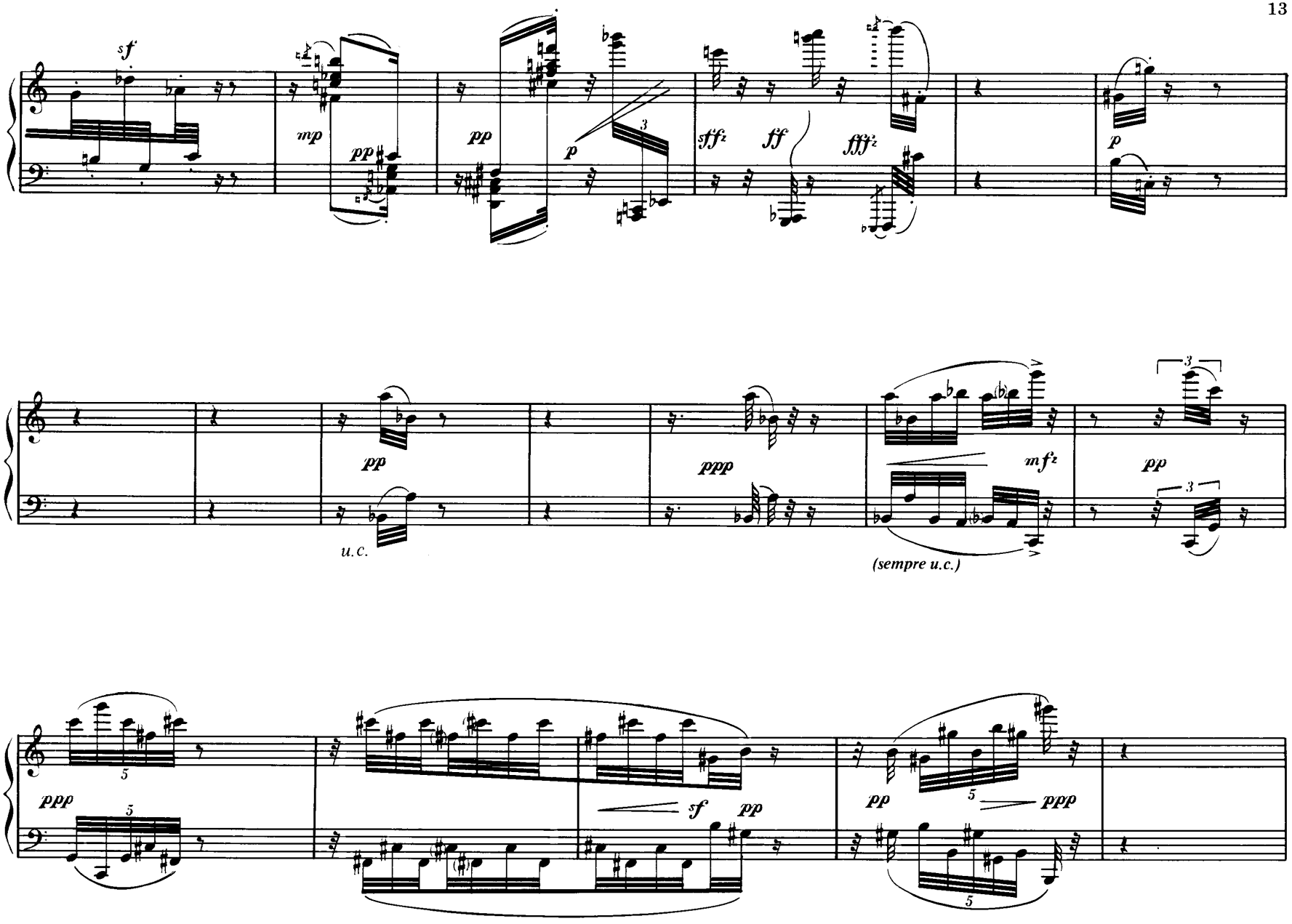
May 2, 1977 New York

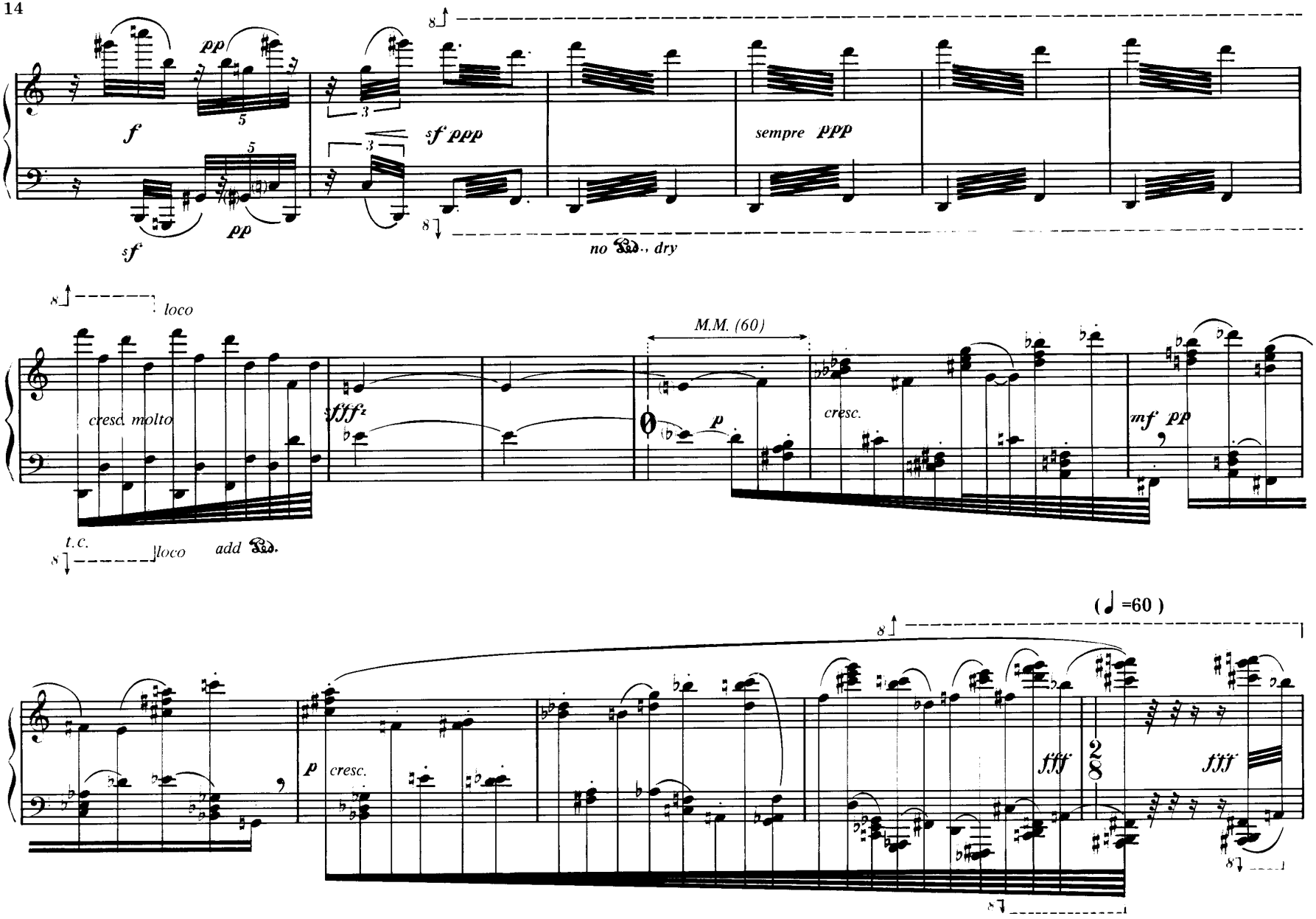
3. Mirrors

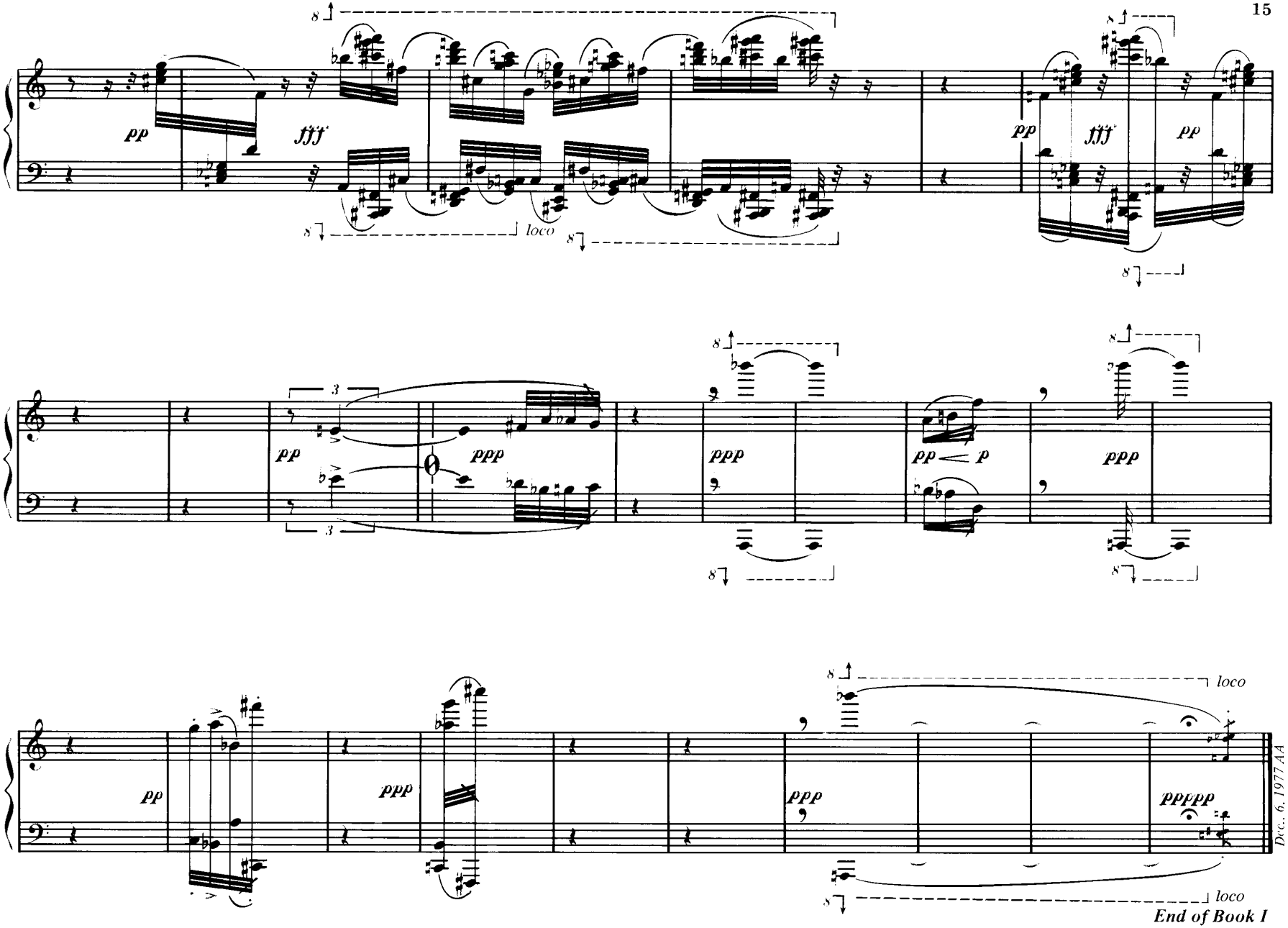
Leaps. Distorted mirrors. Lateral stretches between fingers.




poco
a
poco
cresc.
ffz
fff
ppp
pp
mp
mfz
dim.
p
fff
Ped.


sf
mp
pp
pp
p
sfffz
ff
fffz
p
pp
u.c.
ppp
mfz
(sempre u.c.)
pp
ppp
sf
pp
pp
ppp


pp
f
sf
pp
sf ppp
sempre ppp
no Ped., dry
loco
cresc. molto
sfffz
M.M. (60)
p
cresc.
mf pp
t.c.
loco
add Ped.
(♩=60)
p
cresc.
fff
fff



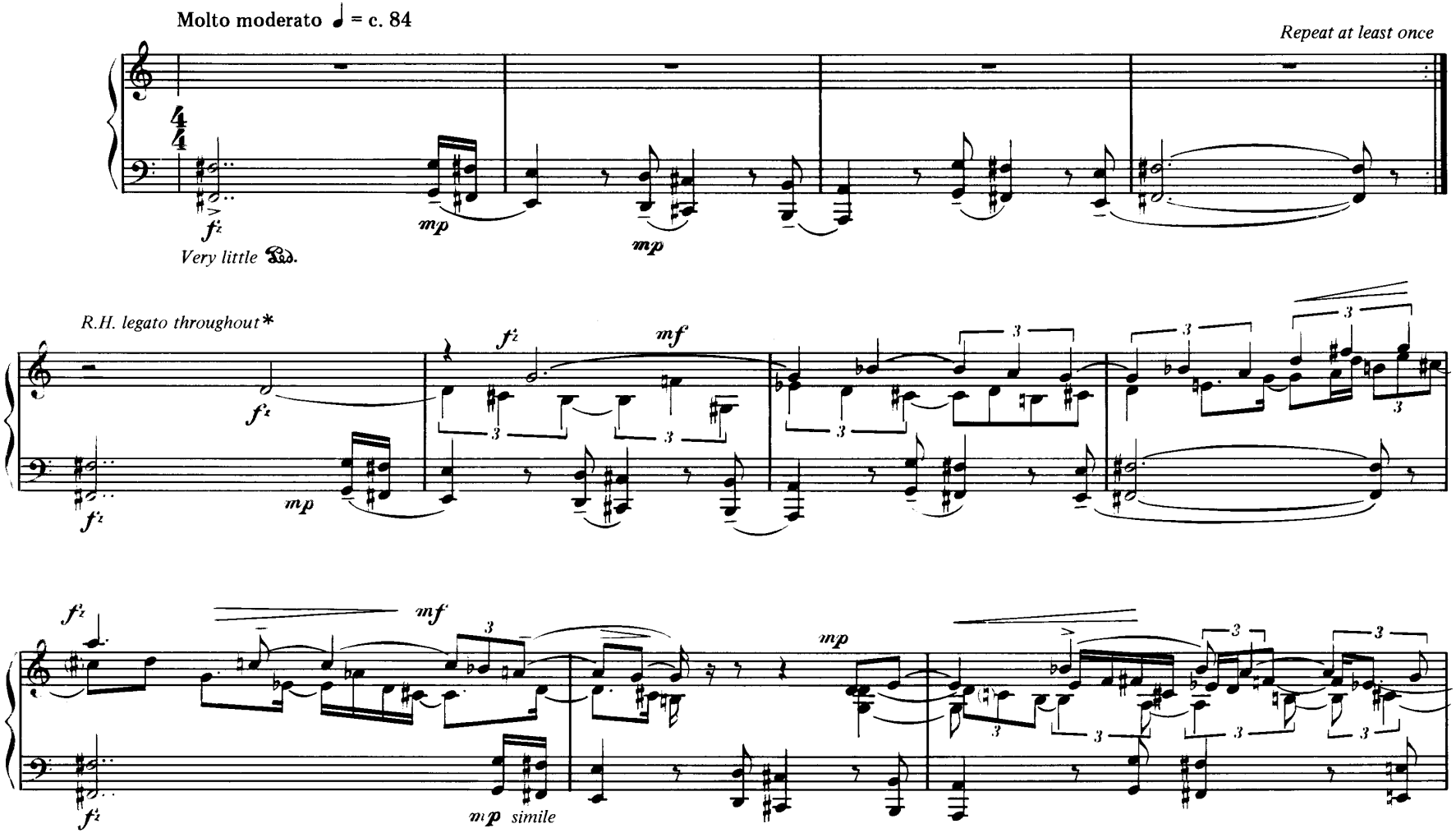
Dec. 6, 1977 AA

End of Book I

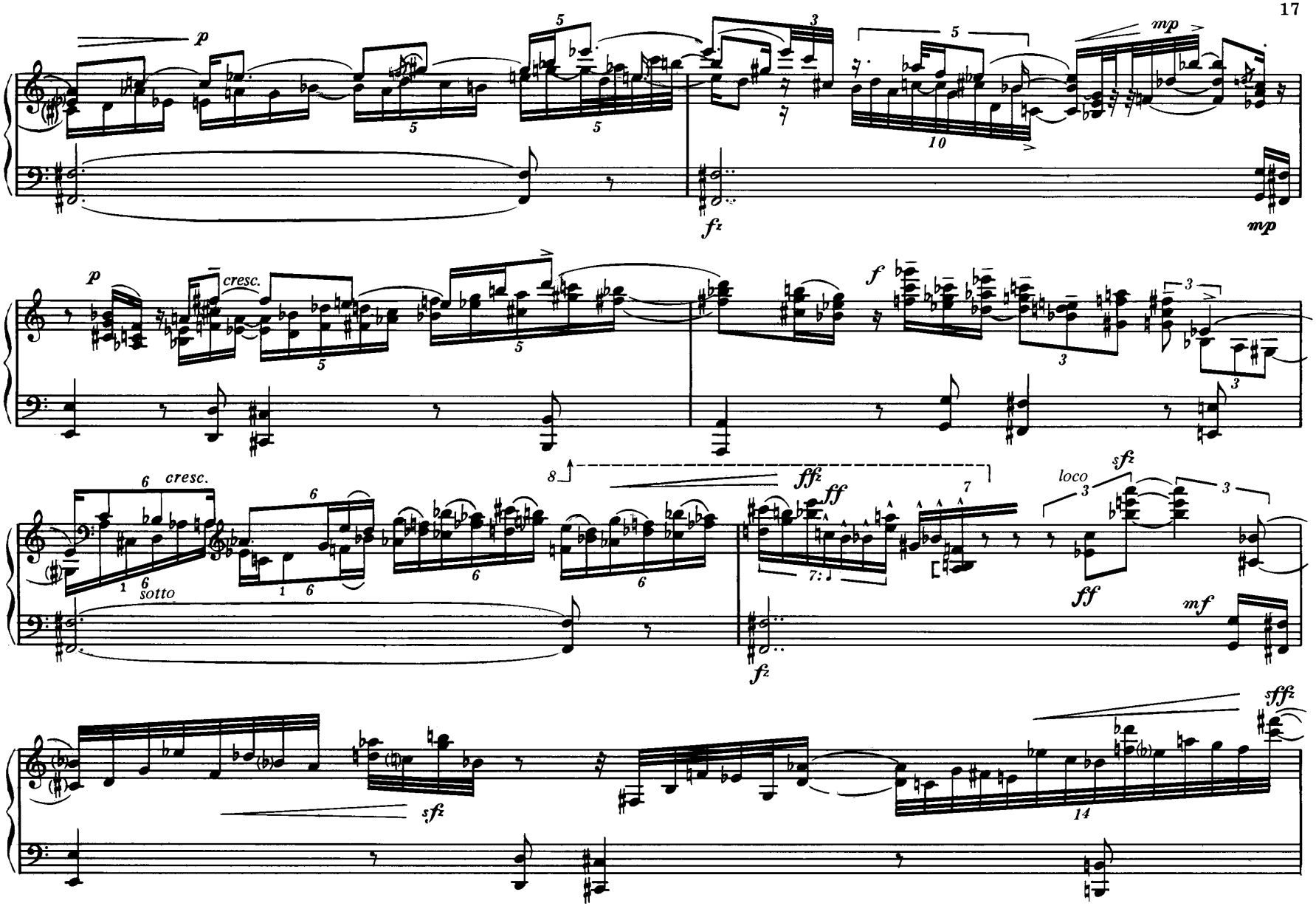
Book II

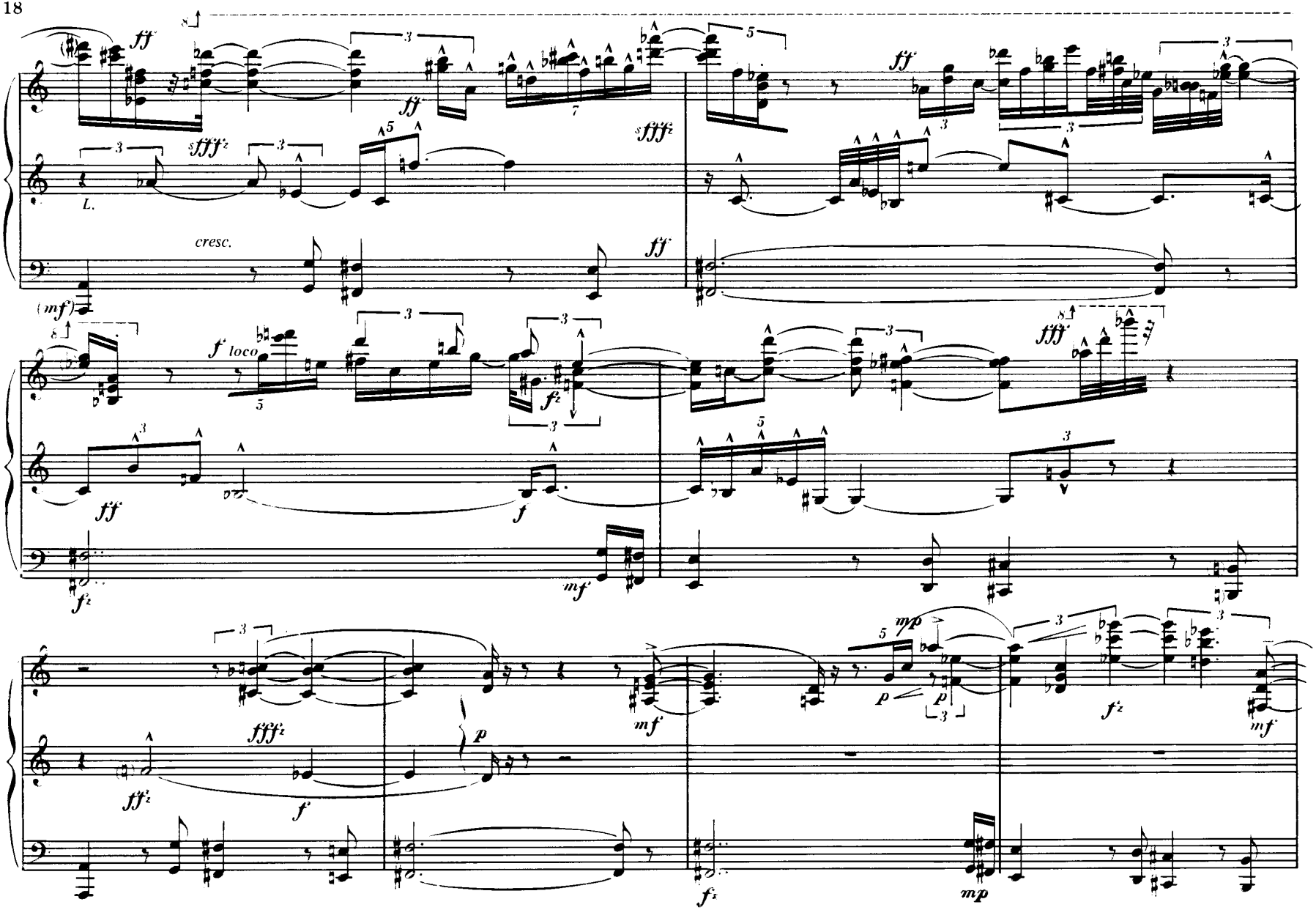
4. Scène d'opéra

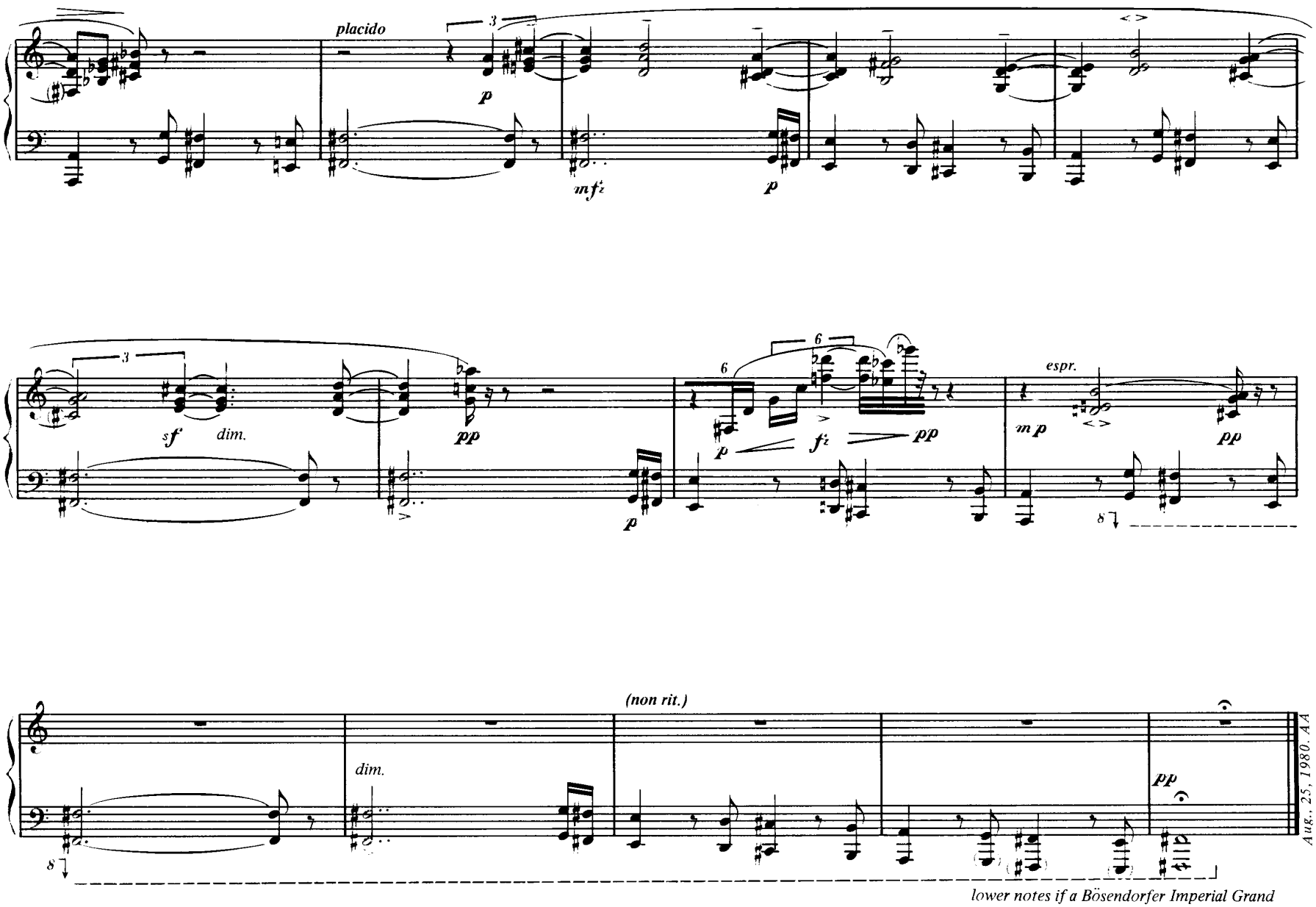
A steady, rhythmic ostinato vs. varied irrational rhythms.



* Except where otherwise indicated. Play entire passage intensely, deep into the keys.


p
mp
fz
mp
p
cresc.
f
sotto
cresc.
ffz
ff
loco
sfz
ff
mf
fz
sfz
sfffz

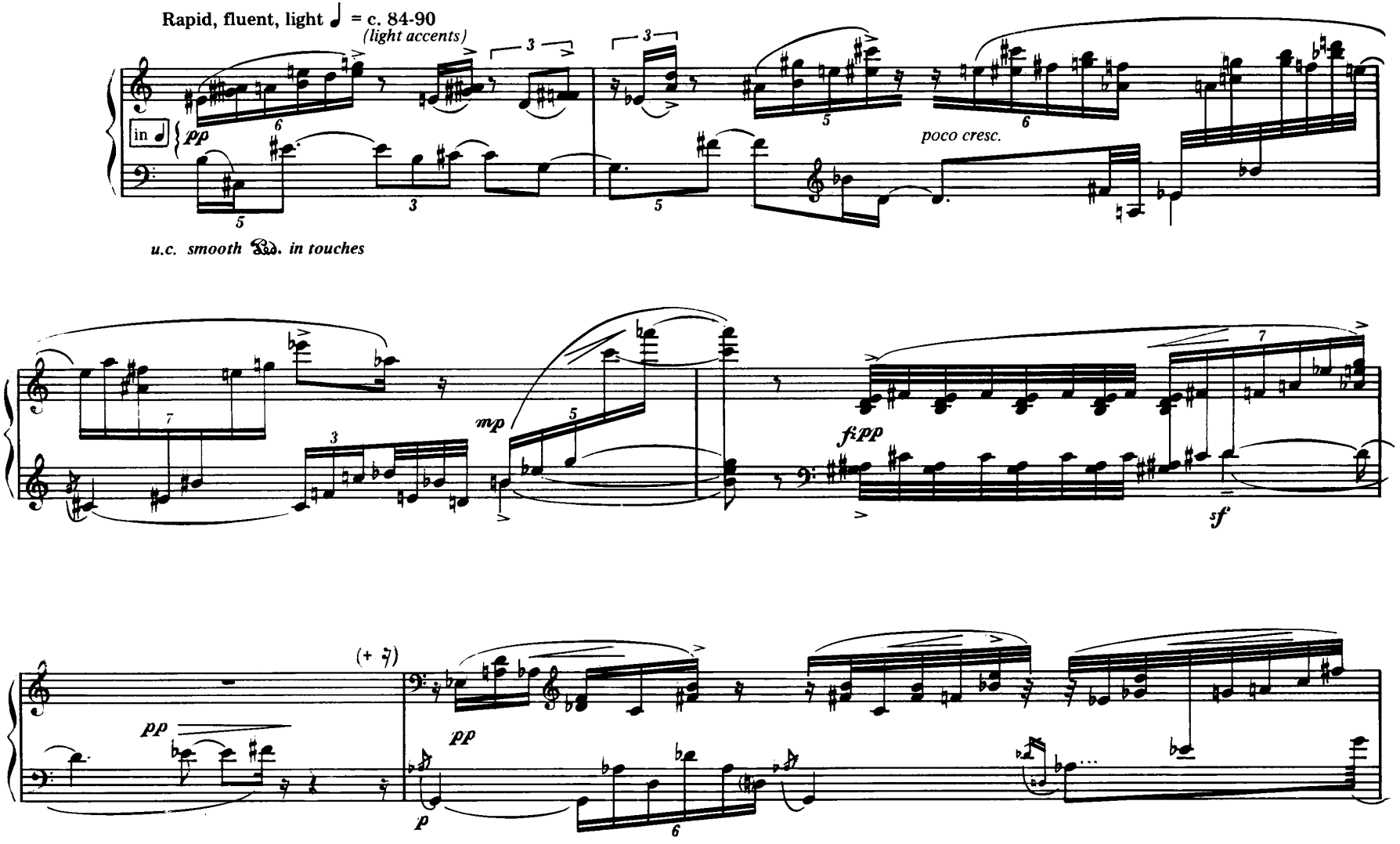

ff
sfffz
L.
cresc.
(mf)
f loco
fz
mf
fff
fffz
p
mp

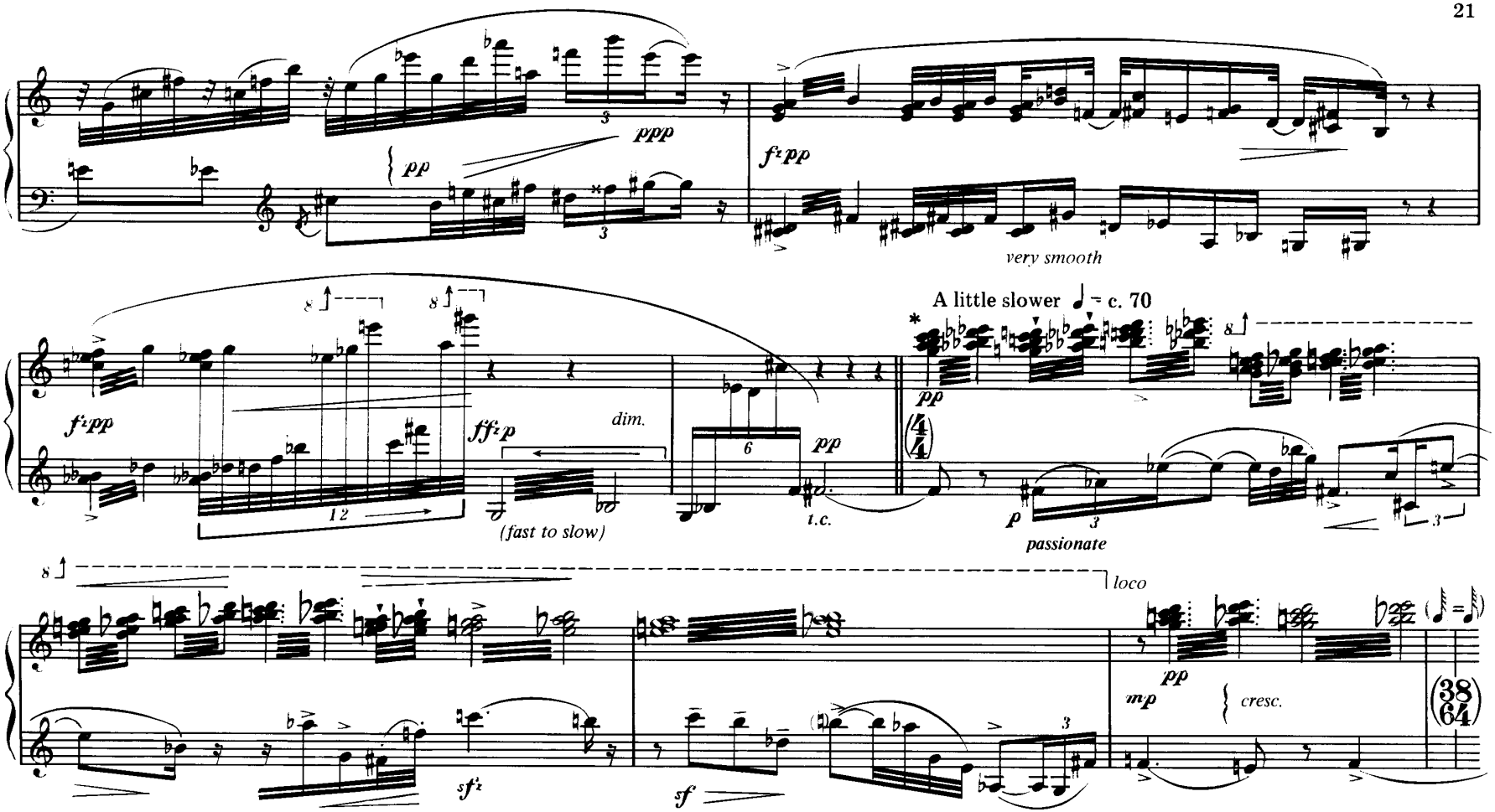


Aug., 25, 1980. AA
rev. Nov., 25, 1982

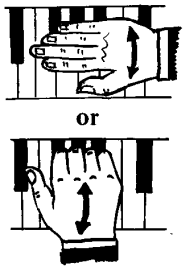
5. Butterflies, hummingbirds

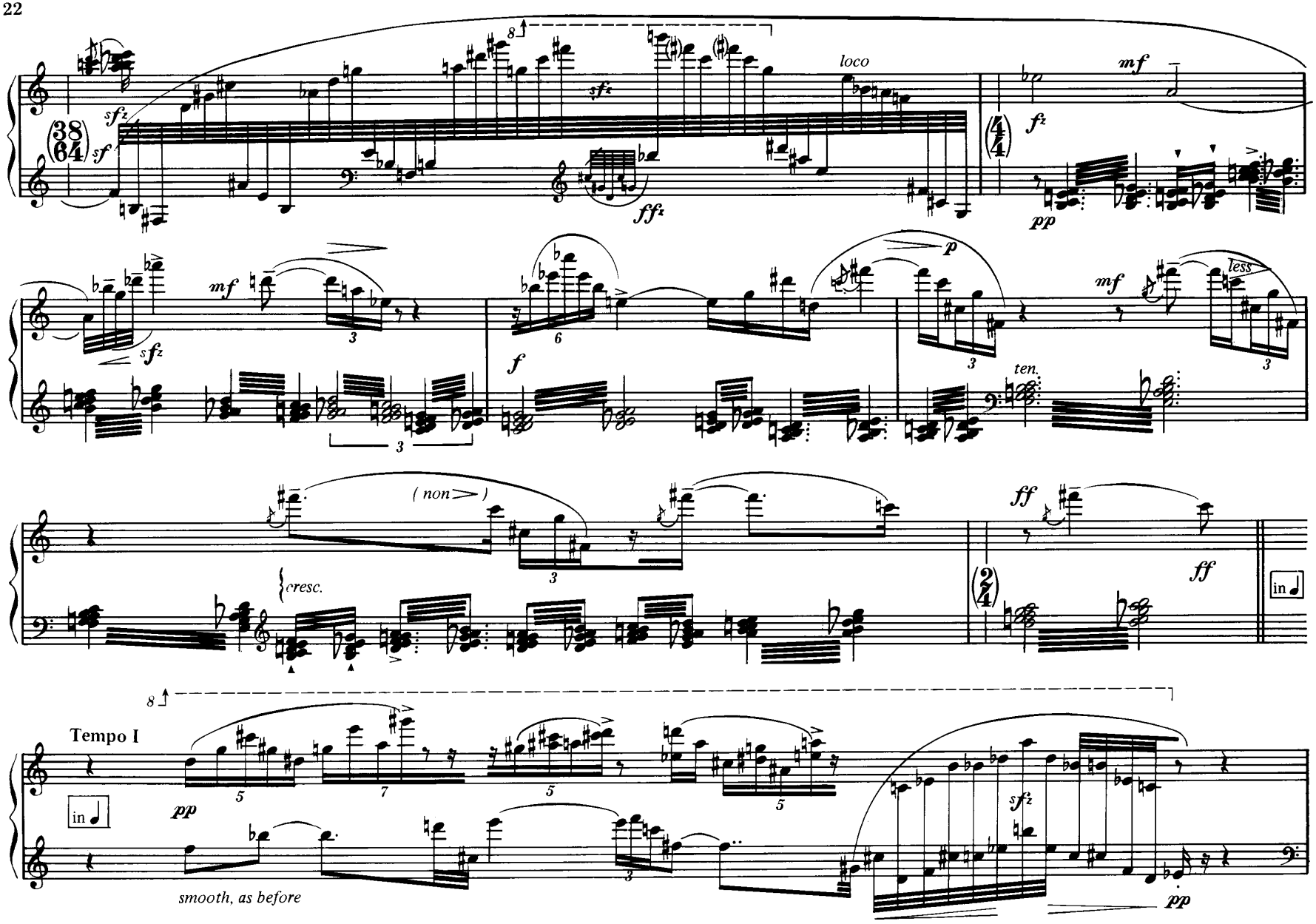
The lateral tremolo. Mercurial changes in color, attack and rhythm.

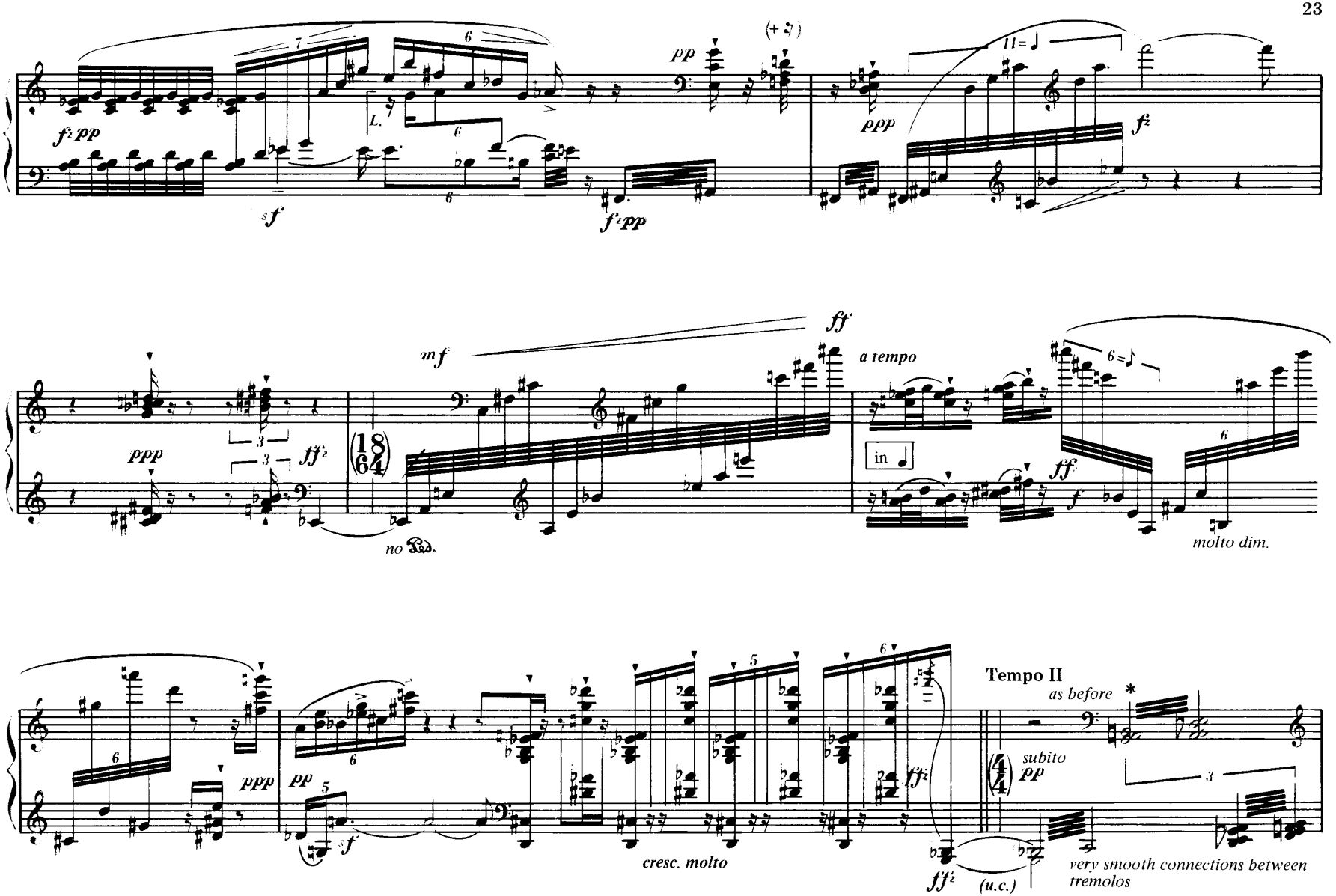




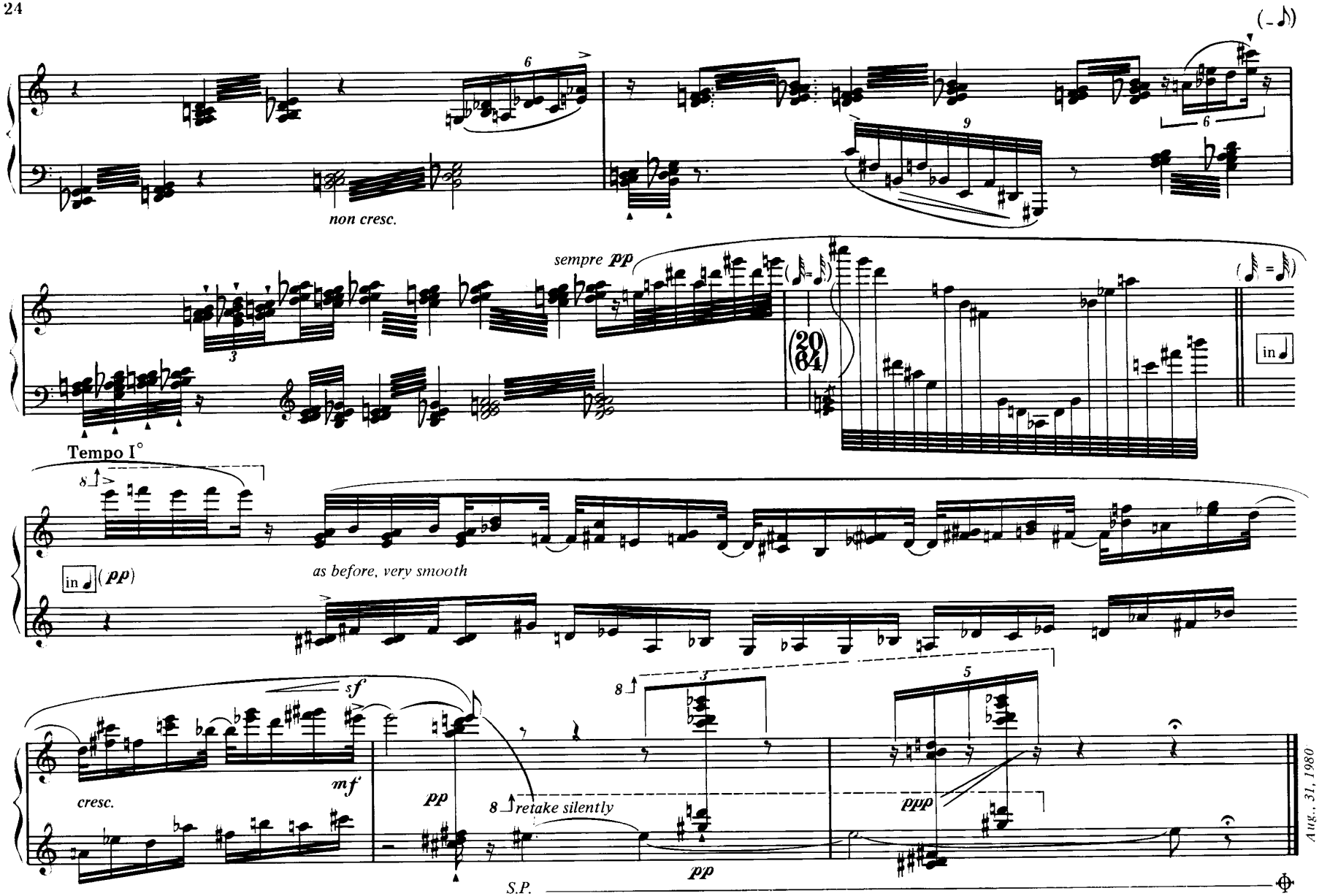
* Place hand laterally across keys. White keys are played by the length of thumb and the meat of the lower thumb; the black ones by the remaining fingers,also on their sides. It is also possible to double the first knuckles on the four fingers and play straightaway, oscillating between the knuckles and the meat of the palm.




loco
mf
sfz
sf
ffz
fz
pp
p
f
less
ten.
(non)
cresc.
ff
in
Tempo I
smooth, as before



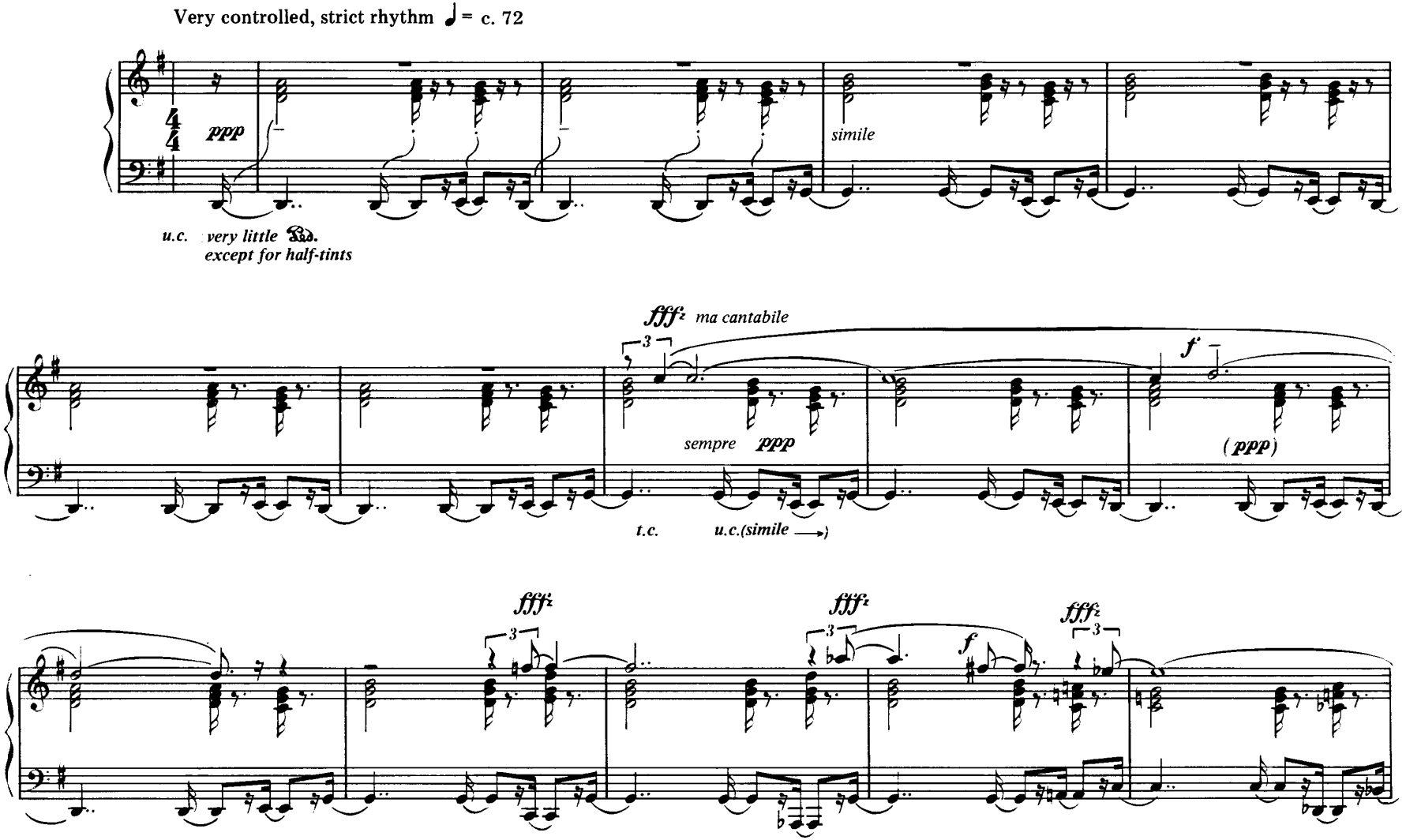
* See page 21. If hands are sometimes too small for certain tremolos, always retain outer notes of clusters (i.e. those played by fifth fingers of each hand.)

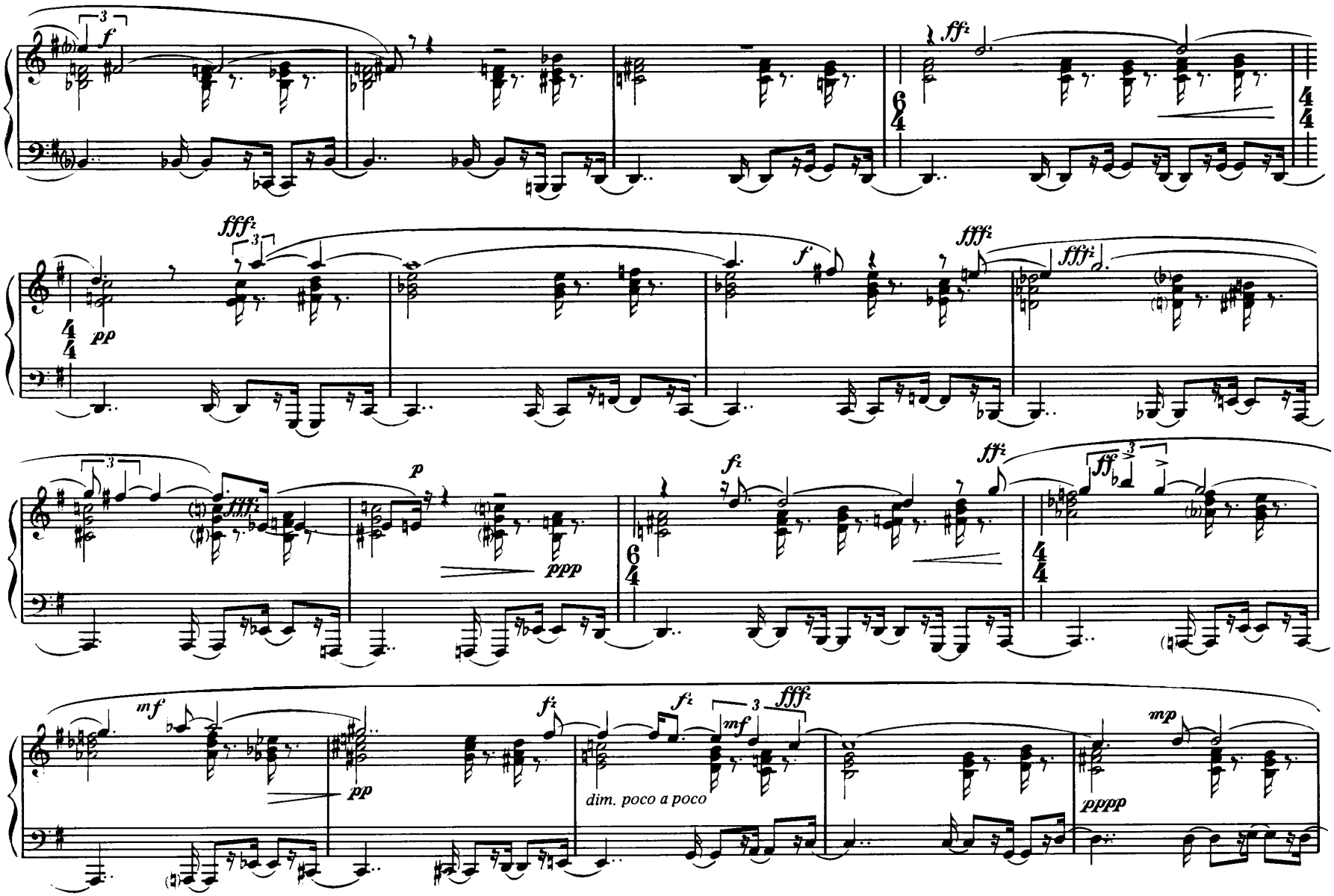


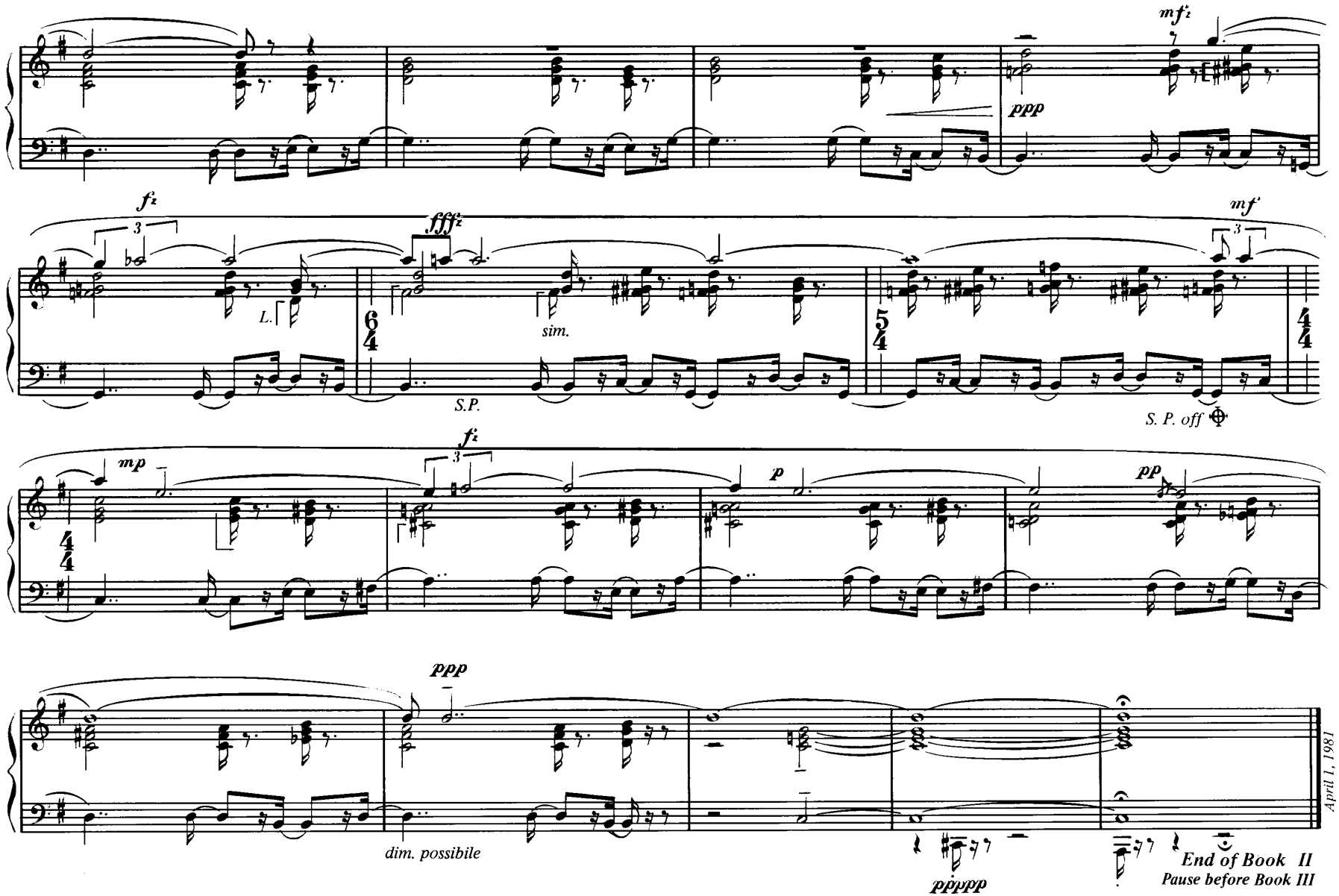
Aug., 31, 1980
(Rev. Aug., 31, 1986 AA)

6. Nocturne

Absolute contrast in dynamics and tone.



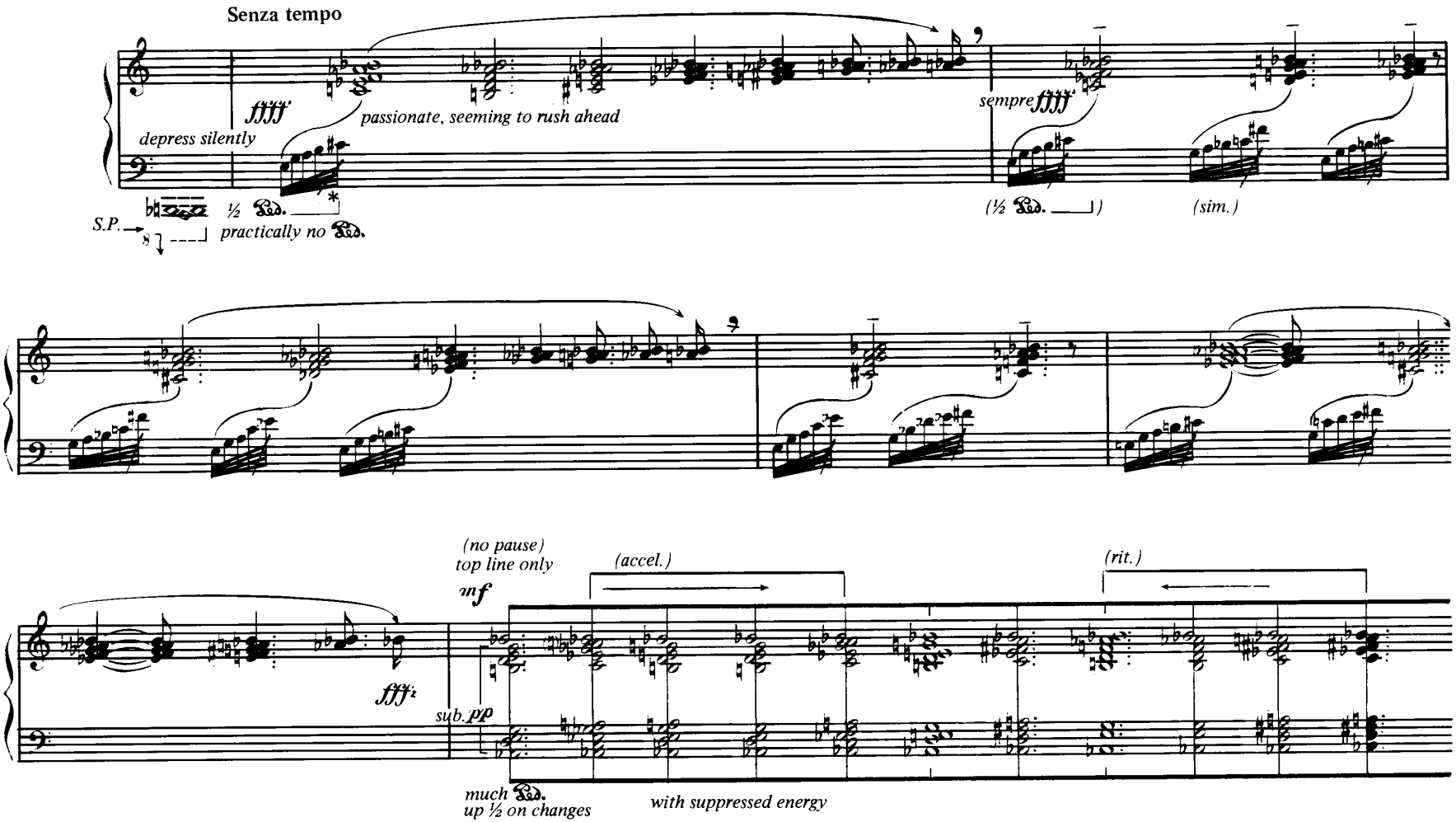

dim. poco a poco


mfz
ppp
fz
fffz
mf
L.
sim.
S.P.
S. P. off
mp
fz
p
pp
ppp
dim. possibile
ppppp
April 1, 1981
End of Book II
Pause before Book III

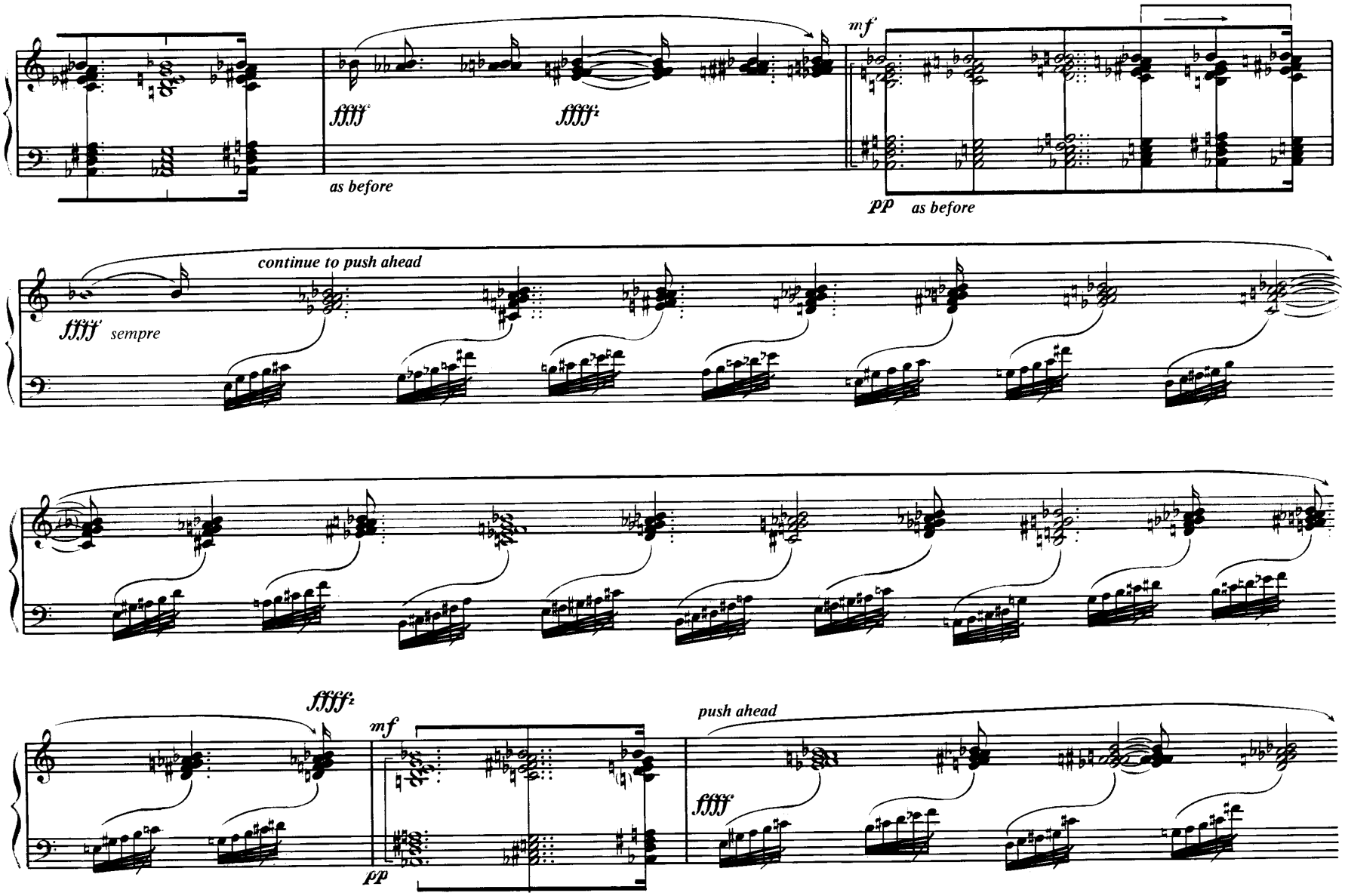
Book III

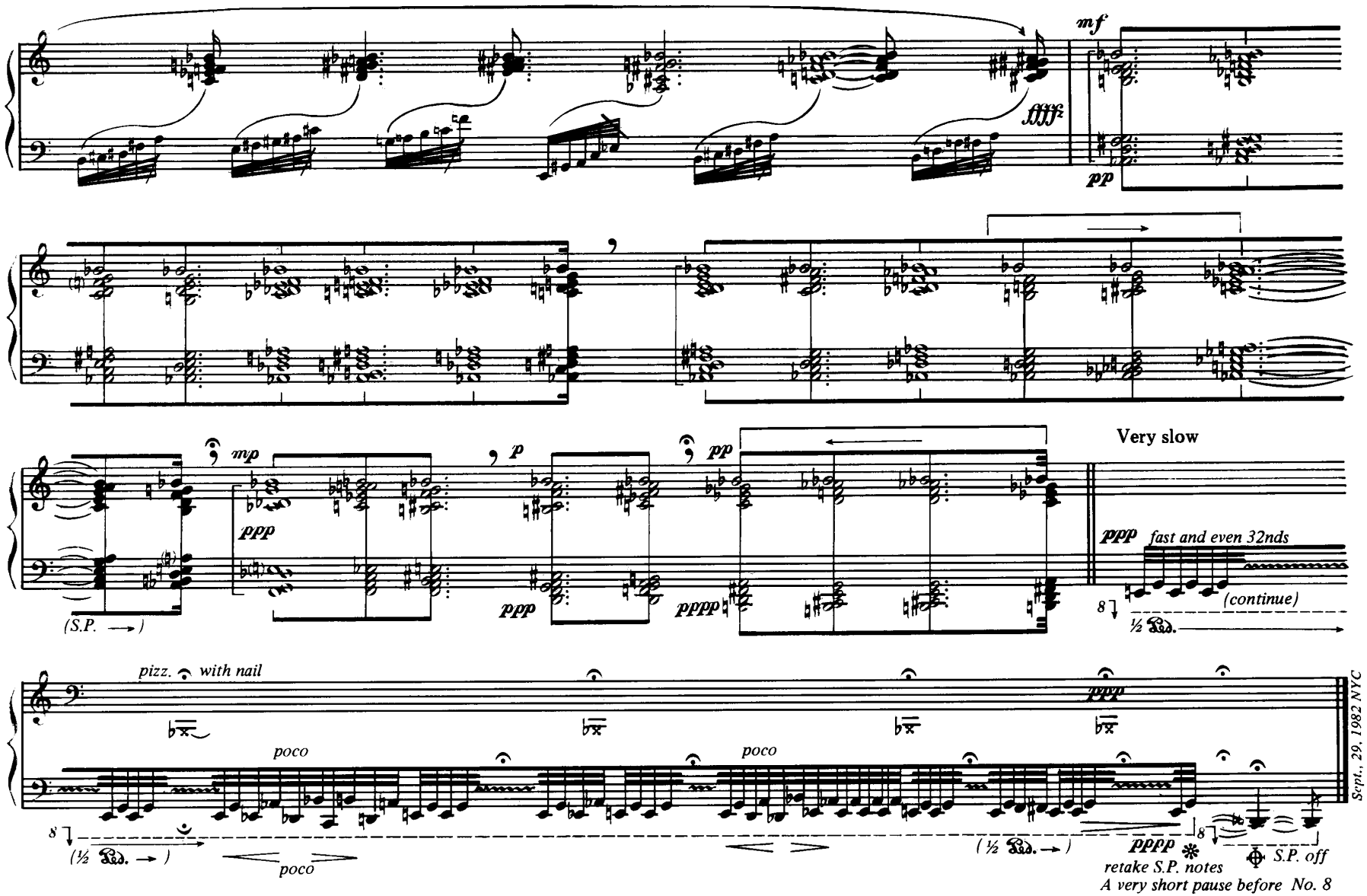
7. Premonitions

"Free-falls" into piano keys; size of tone, without banging. (Inside-piano plucking).



* all these groups are accelerando:


mf
ffff
ffff
as before
pp as before
continue to push ahead
ffff sempre
ffff
mf
pp
push ahead
ffff



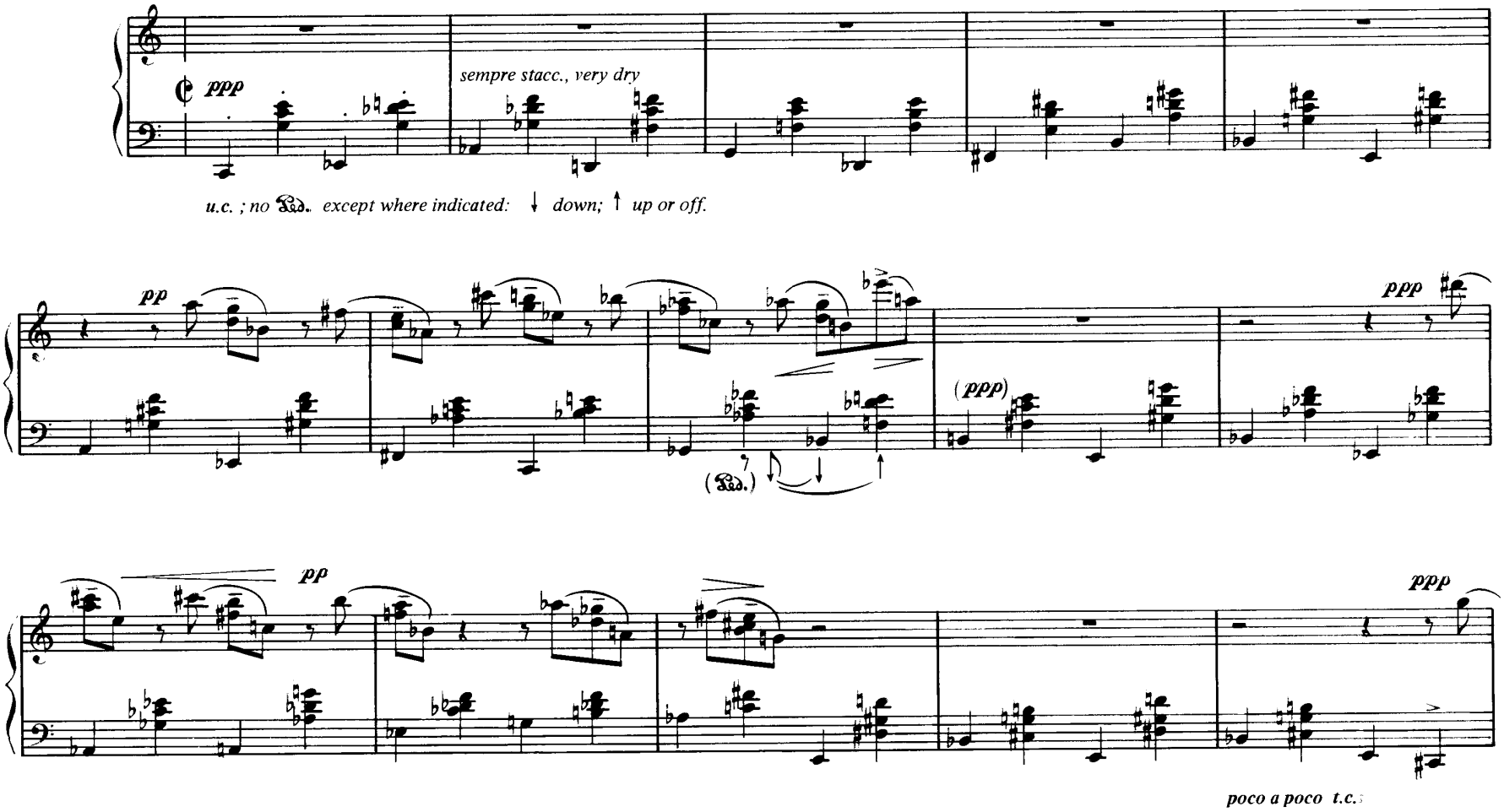
[... tuba mirum spargens sonum]

8. Rag infernal

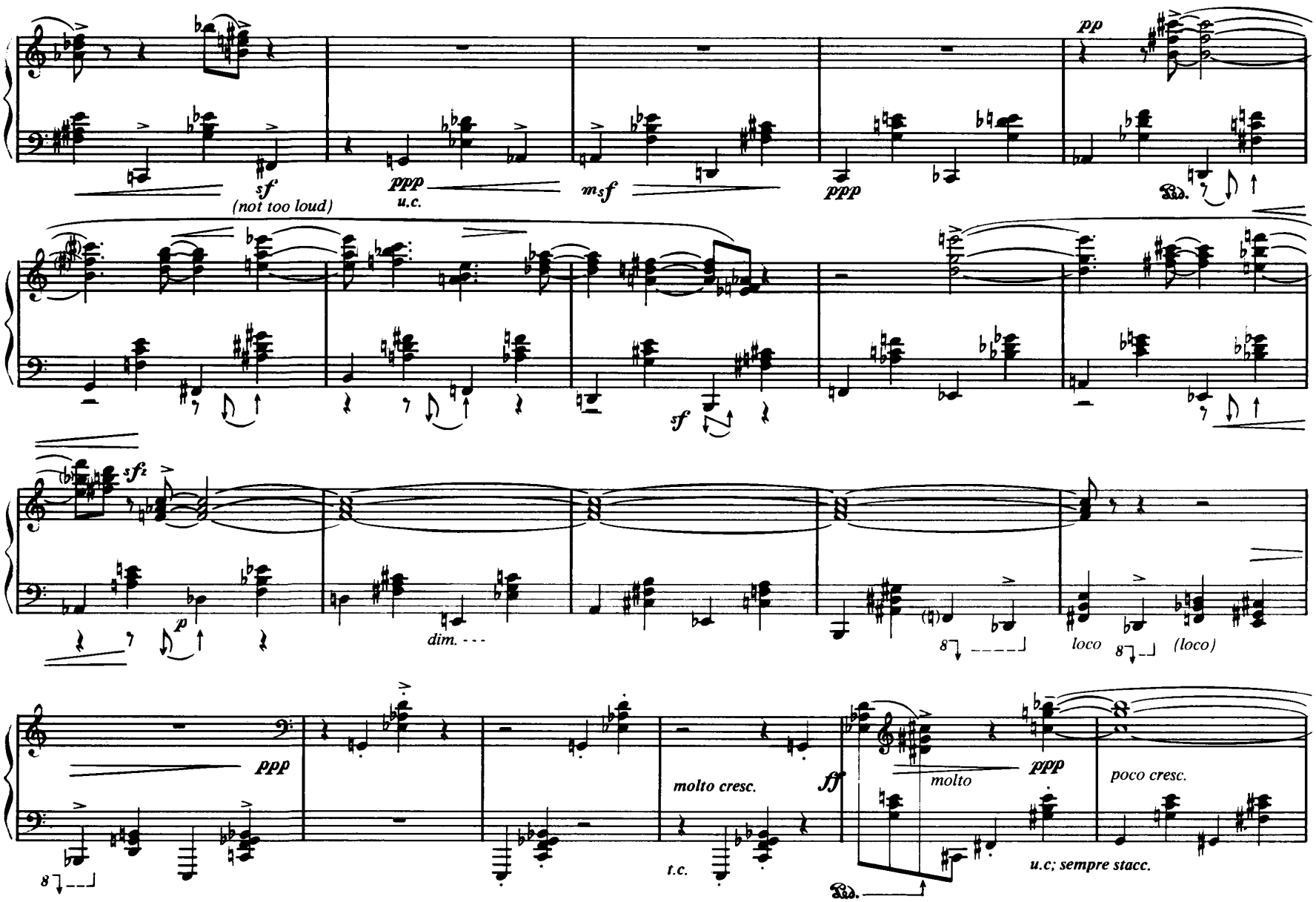
(Syncopes apocalyptiques)

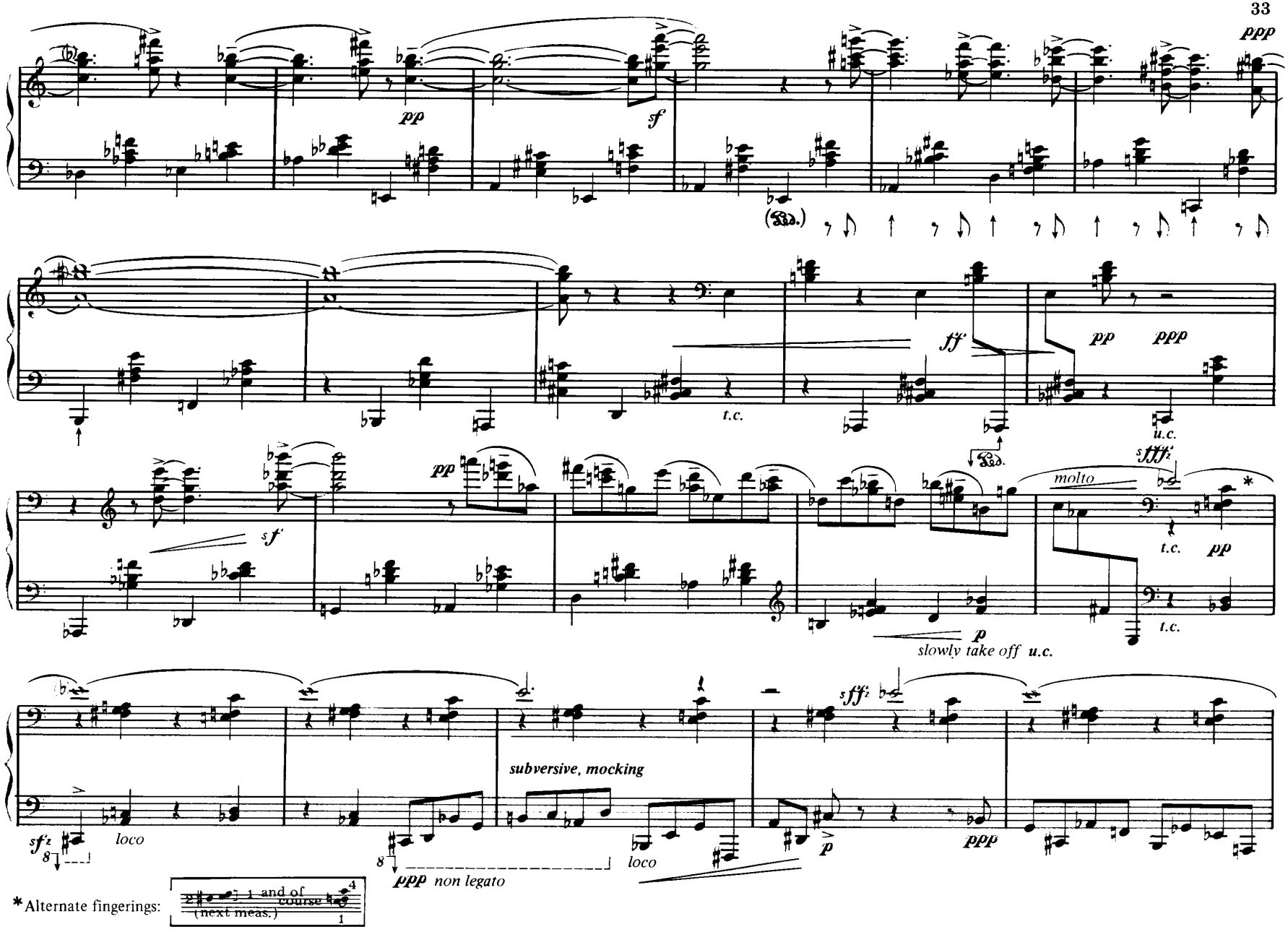
Lateral hand-jumps and stretches. Use of practically no pedal.

Fast; steady tempo; as fast as is practical* ♩ = c. 126 - 160

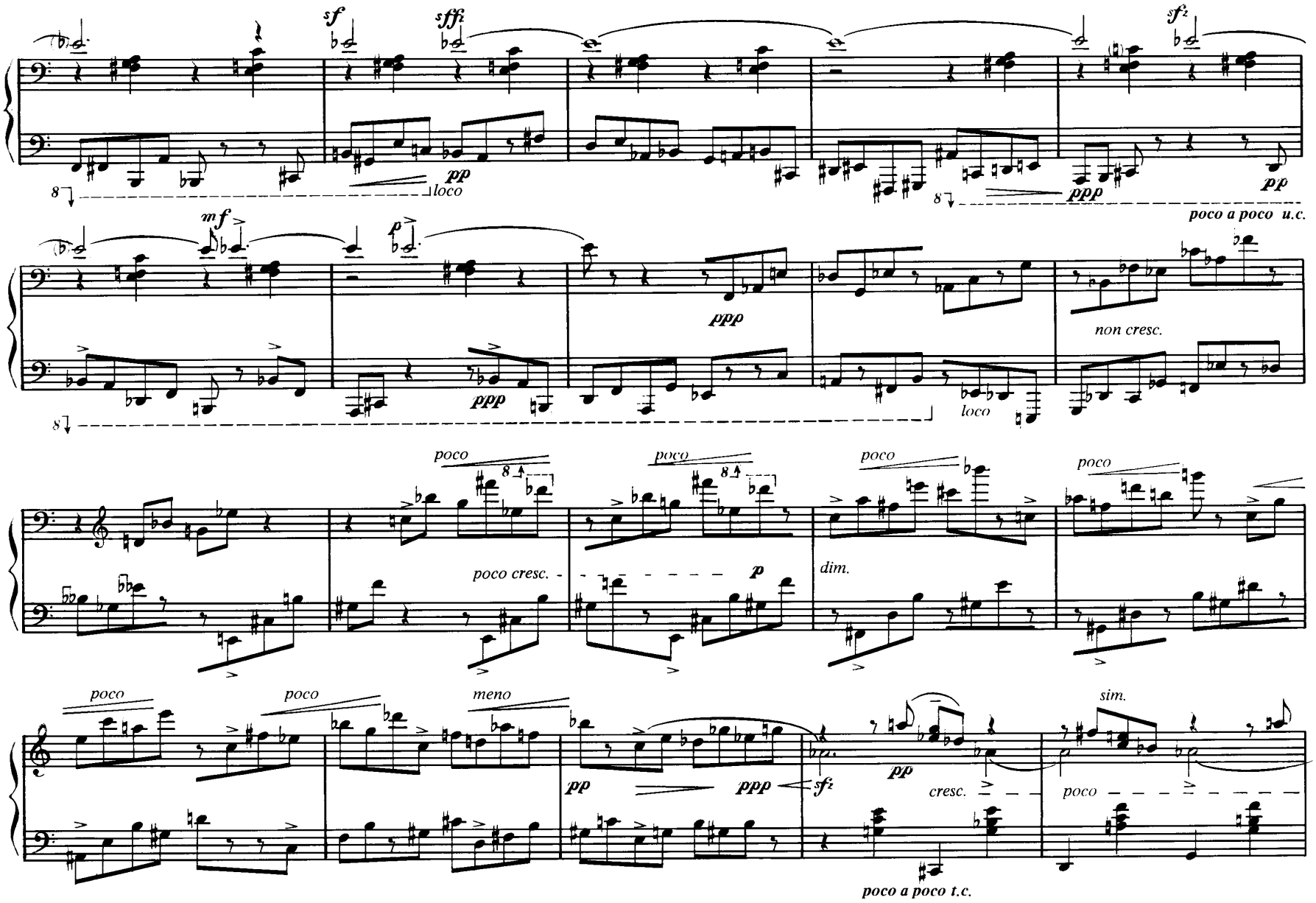


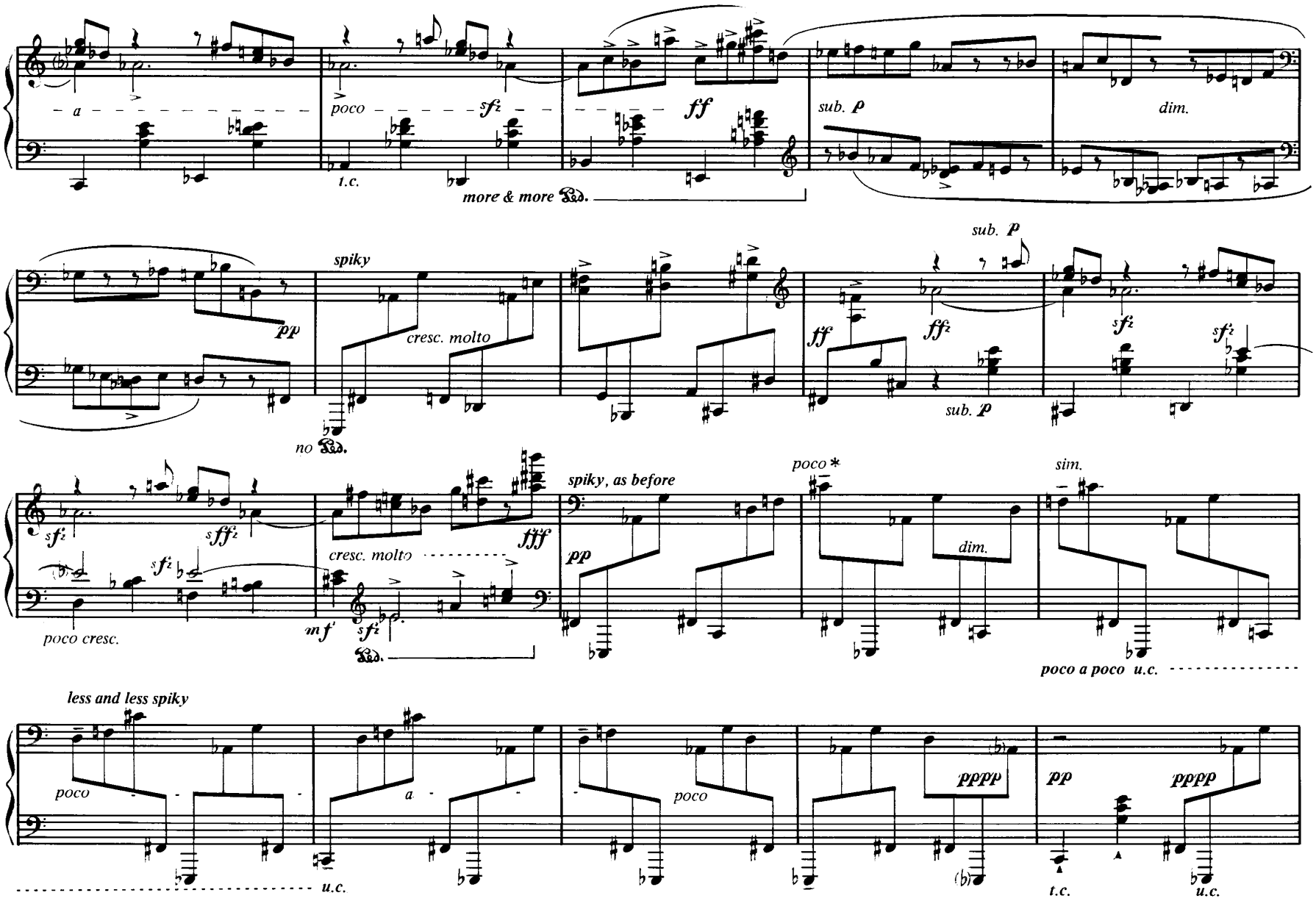
* This piece should feel ruthlessly driven, but never allow tempo to accelerate.


sf
(not too loud)
ppp
u.c.
msf
ppp
pp
sf
p
dim.
loco
(loco)
ppp
molto cresc.
t.c.
ff
molto
ppp
poco cresc.
u.c; sempre stacc.

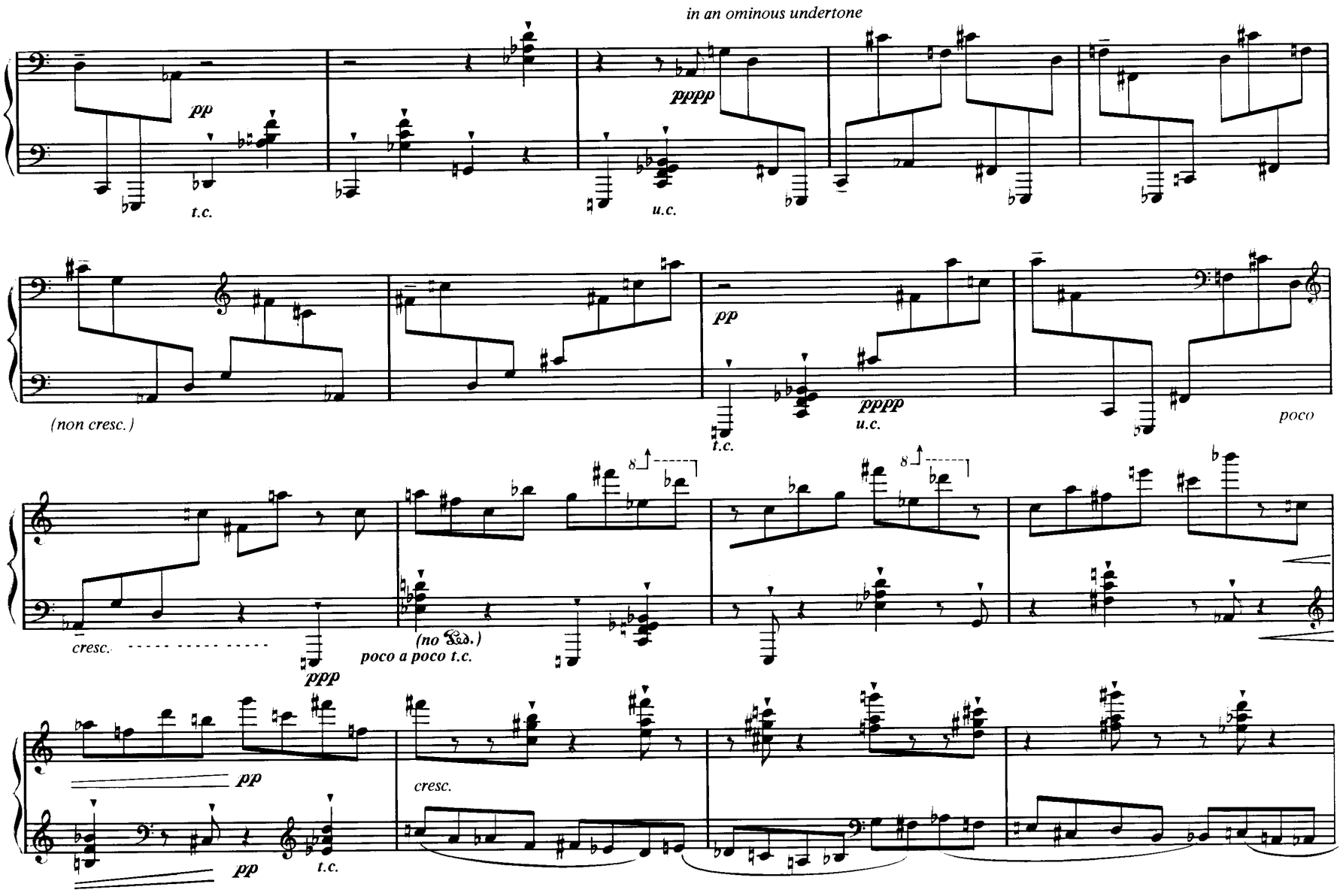


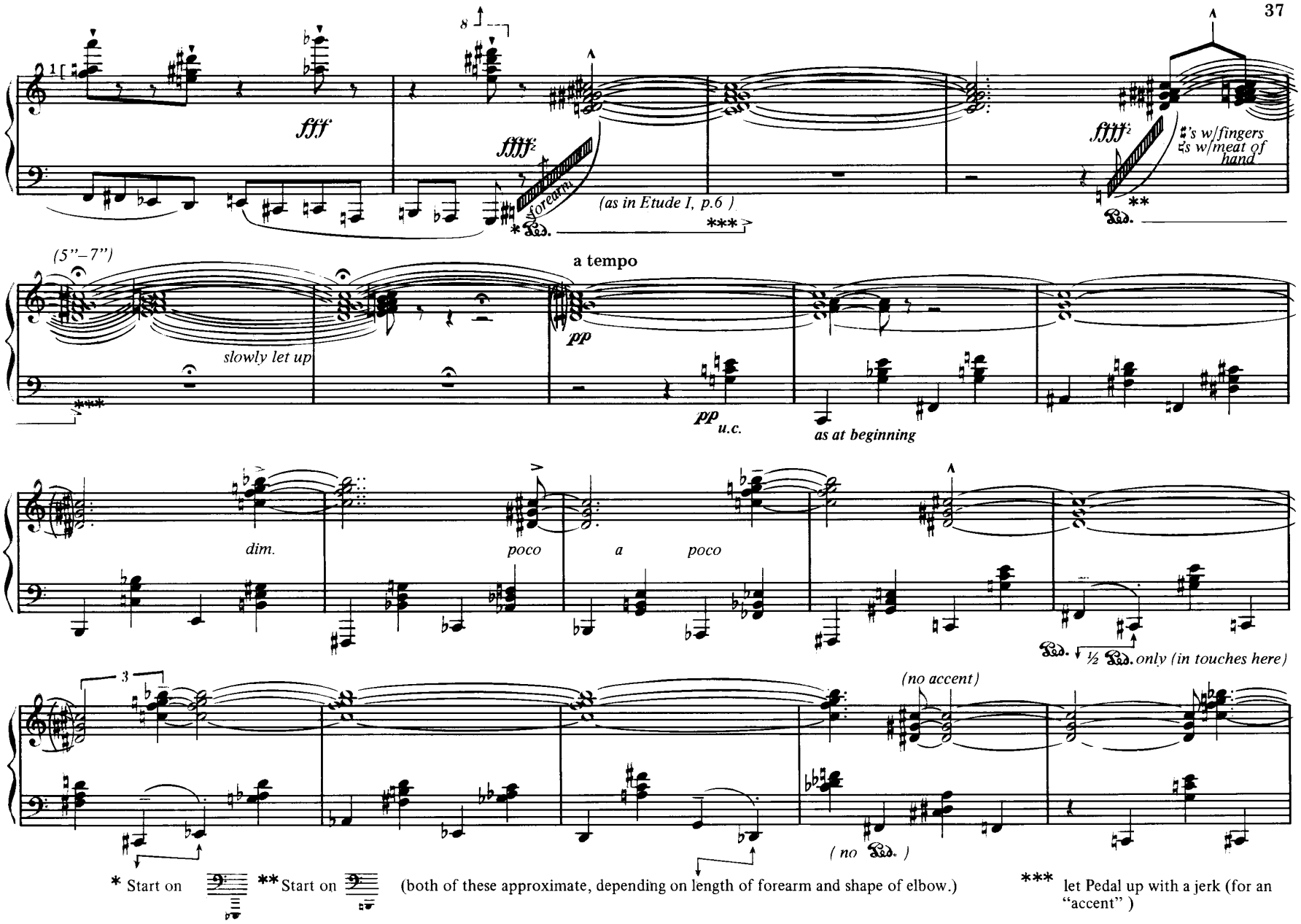
*Alternate fingerings:

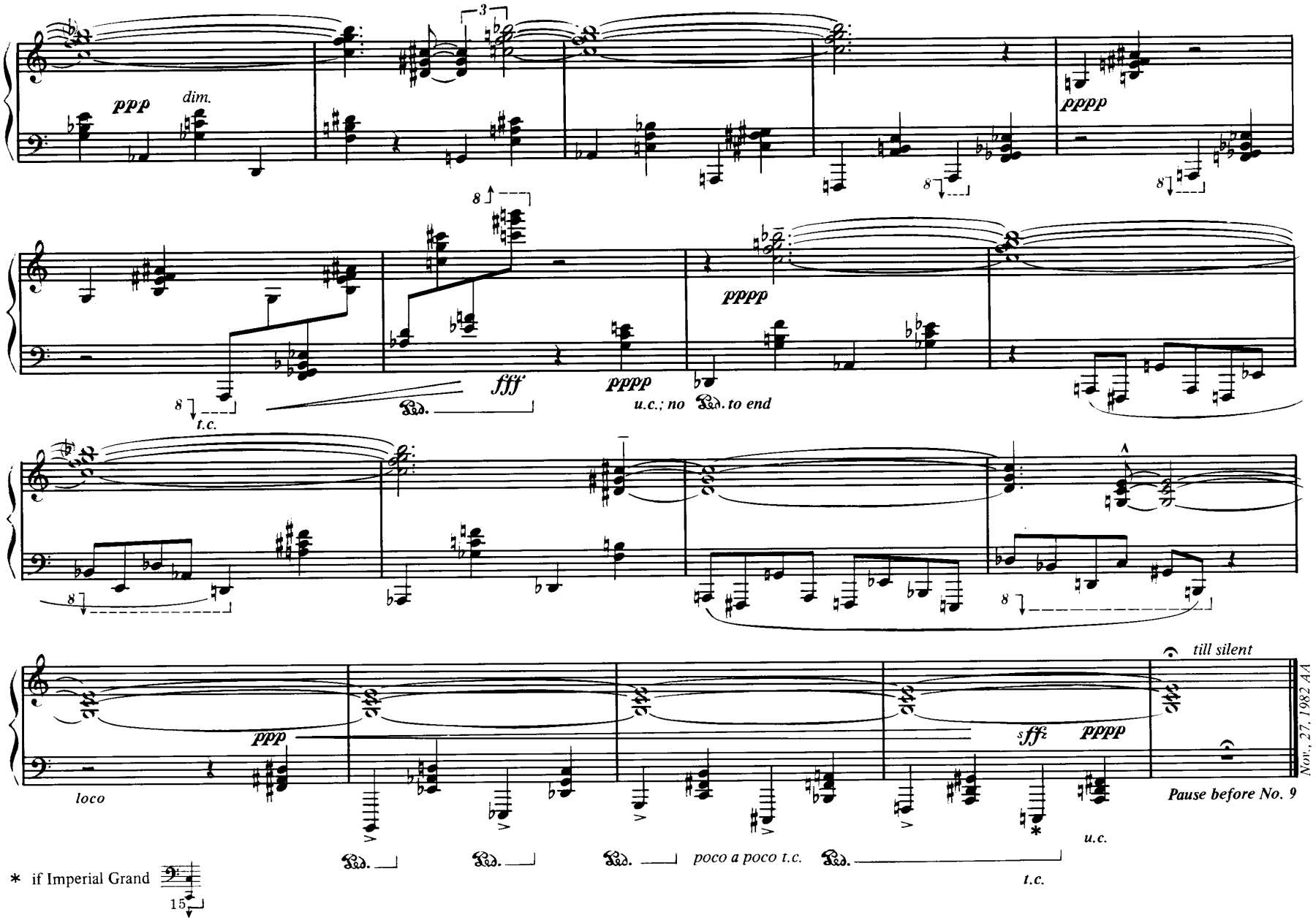

sf
sffz
sfz
pp
loco
ppp
poco a poco u.c.
mf
p
non cresc.
poco
poco cresc.
dim.
meno
sim.
sfz
cresc.
poco a poco t.c.



* here means very light touches of

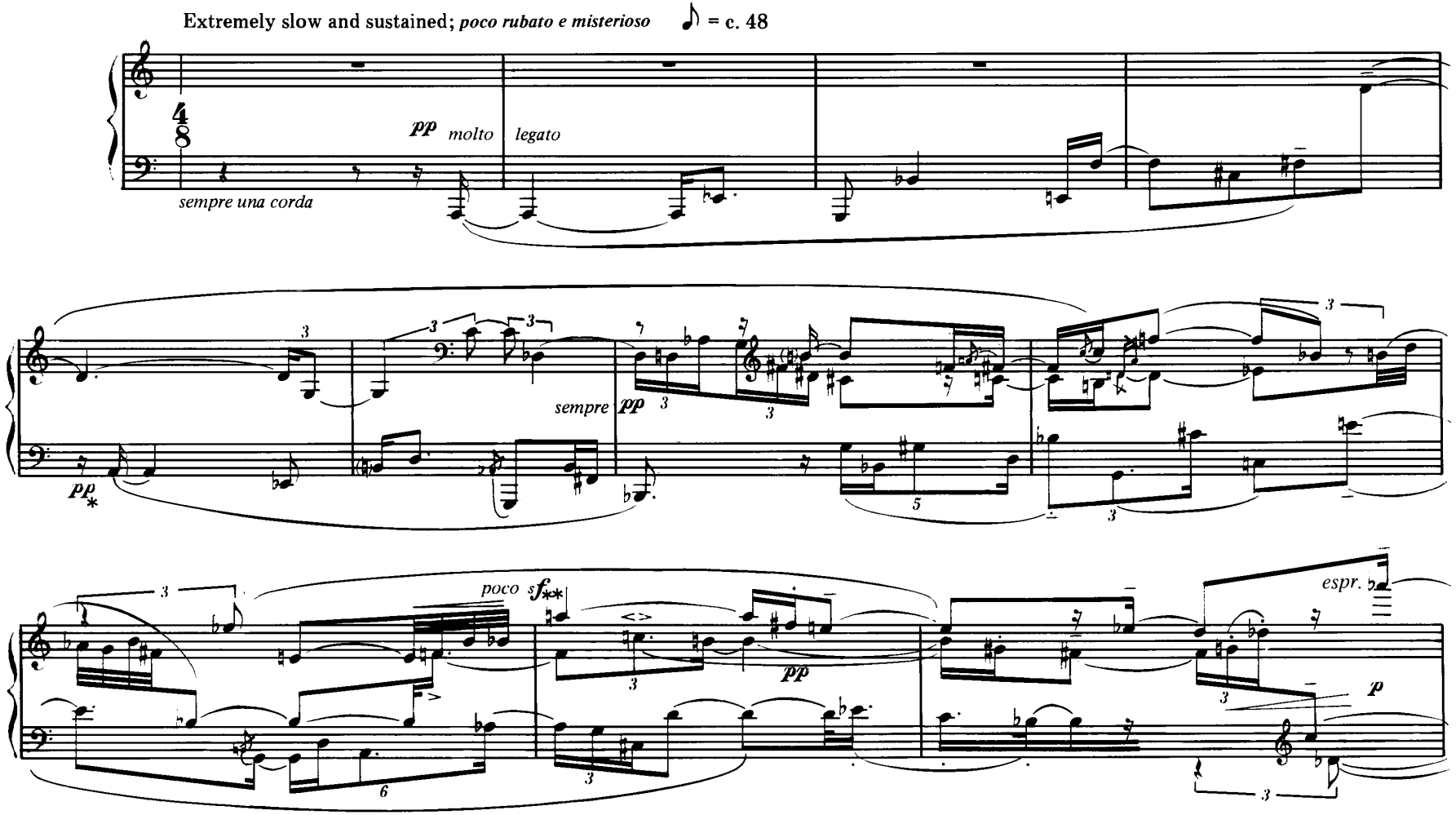

in an ominous undertone
pp
t.c.
pppp
u.c.
(non cresc.)
pp
t.c.
pppp
u.c.
poco
cresc.
ppp
(no Ped.)
poco a poco t.c.
pp
pp
t.c.
cresc.


fff
ffff
forearm
(as in Etude I, p.6)
ffff
♯'s w/fingers
♮s w/meat of hand
(5"–7")
slowly let up
a tempo
pp
pp u.c.
as at beginning
dim.
poco
a
poco
½ only (in touches here)
(no accent)
(no)
* Start on
** Start on
(both of these approximate, depending on length of forearm and shape of elbow.)
*** let Pedal up with a jerk (for an "accent")


ppp
dim.
pppp
fff
pppp
u.c.; no Ped. to end
t.c.
ppp
loco
sffz
pppp
till silent
Pause before No. 9
u.c.
poco a poco t.c.
t.c.
* if Imperial Grand
15
Nov., 27, 1982 AA

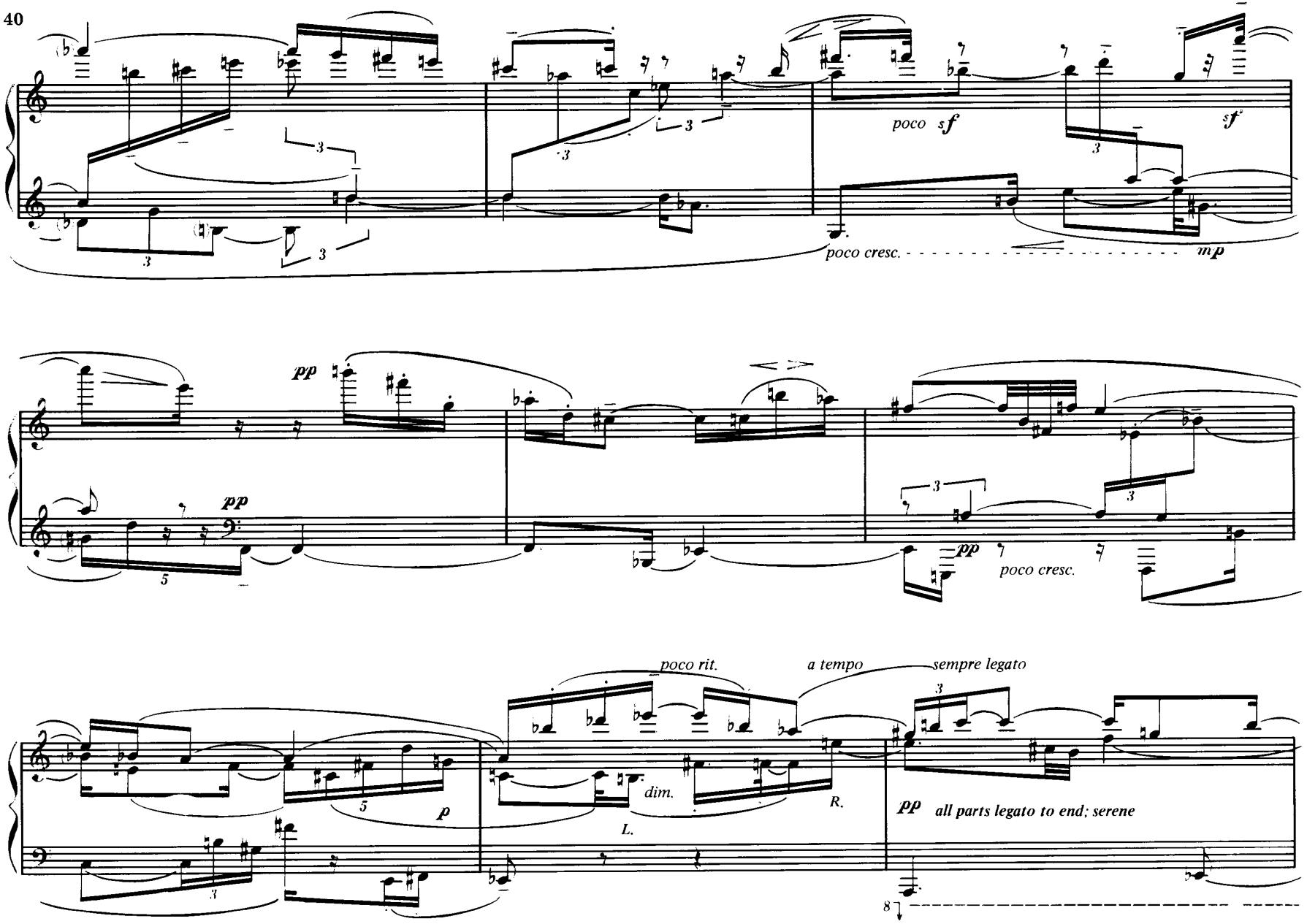
9. Invention

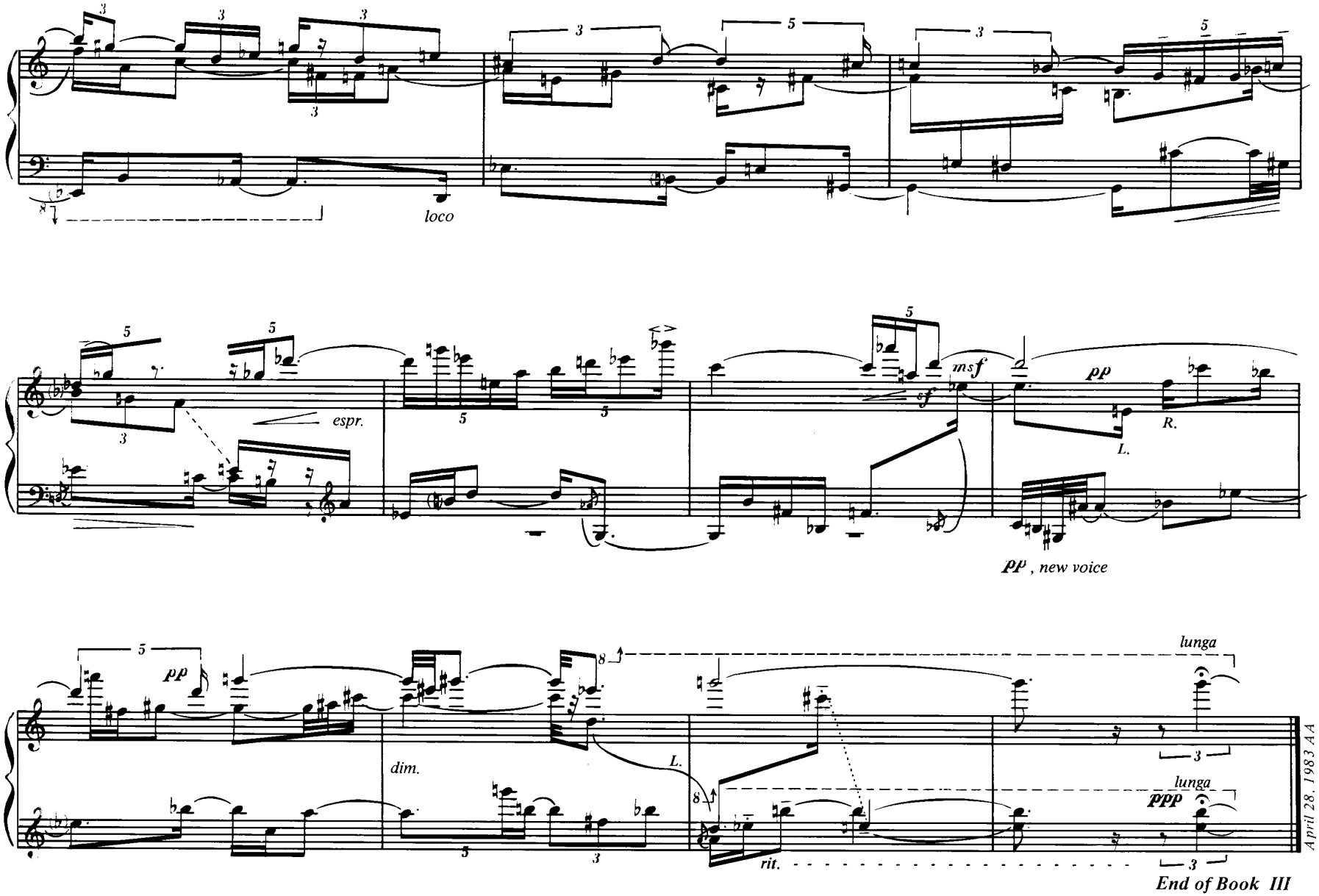
Controlled legato lines with minimal pedal. Clear delineation of voices.



* All three voices usually *pp*, but distinguished by color and style.

** *sf* is in context of dynamic.

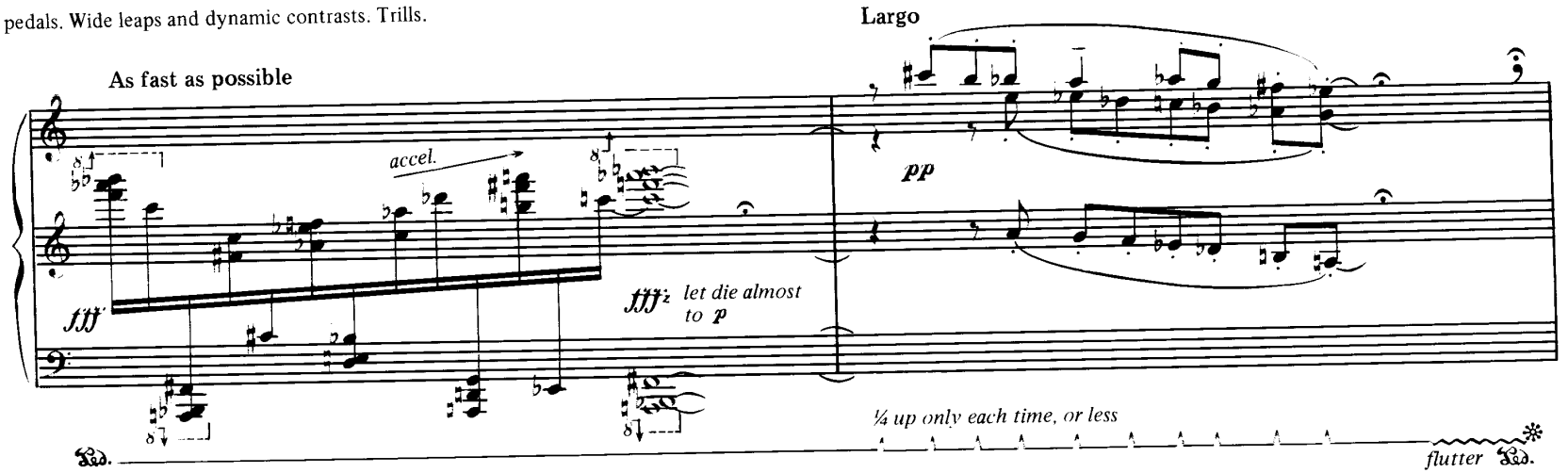

poco sf
sf
poco cresc.
mp
pp
pp
pp
poco cresc.
poco rit.
a tempo
sempre legato
p
dim.
L.
R.
pp all parts legato to end; serene

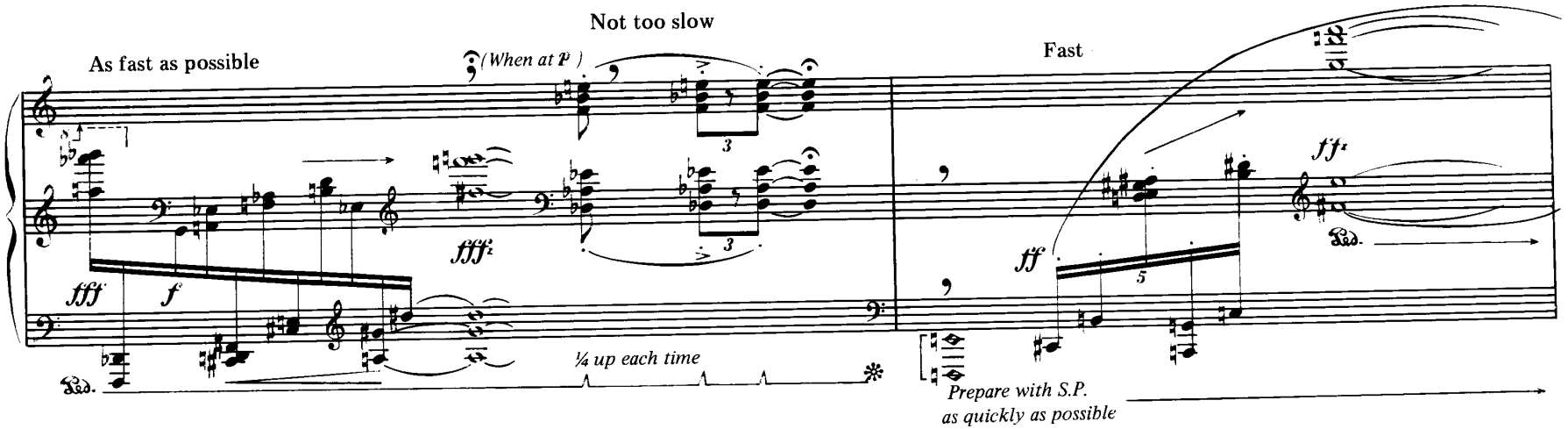

loco
espr.
msf
pp
R.
L.
pp , new voice
pp
dim.
L.
lunga
lunga
ppp
rit.
End of Book III
April 28, 1983 AA

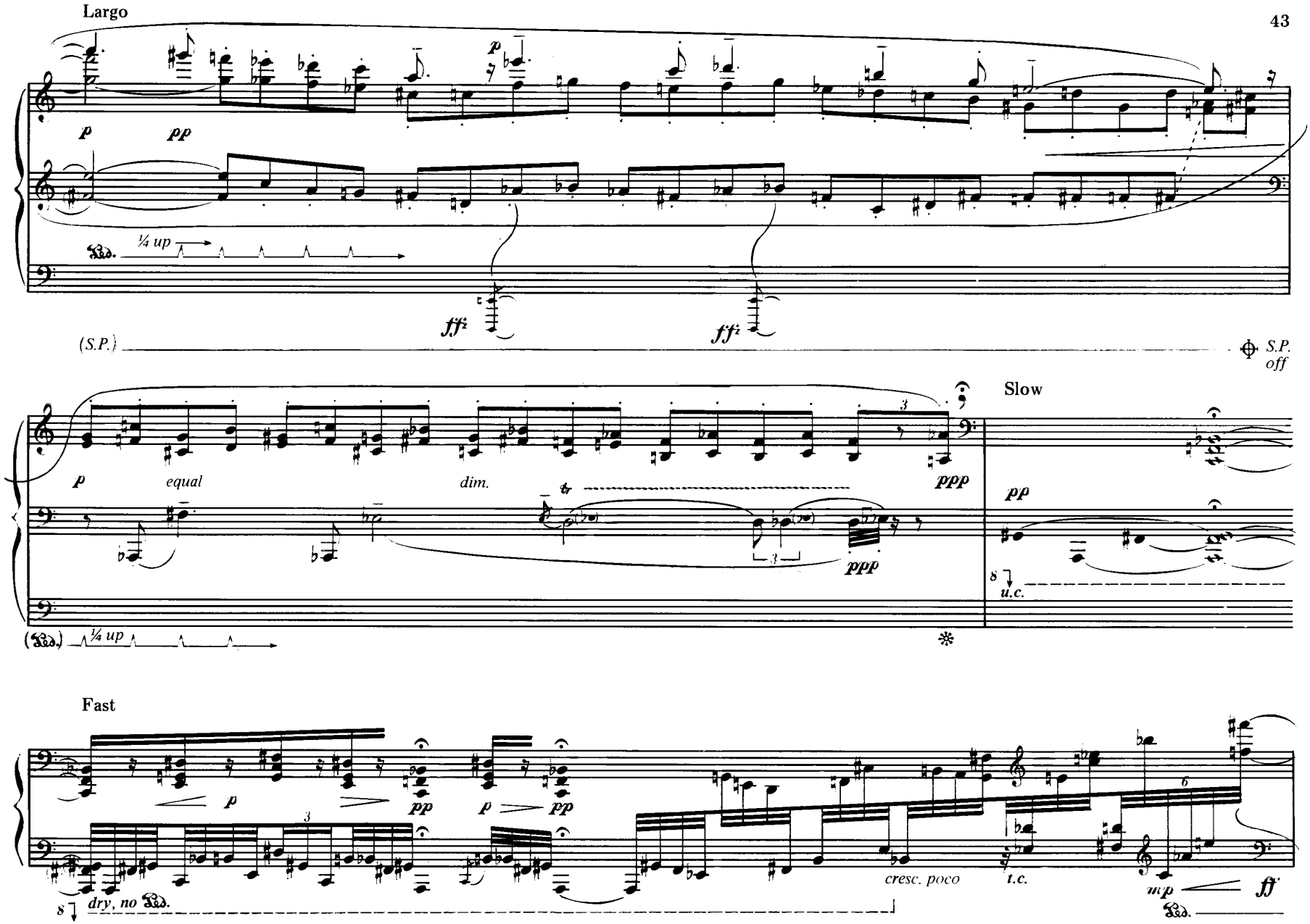
Book IV

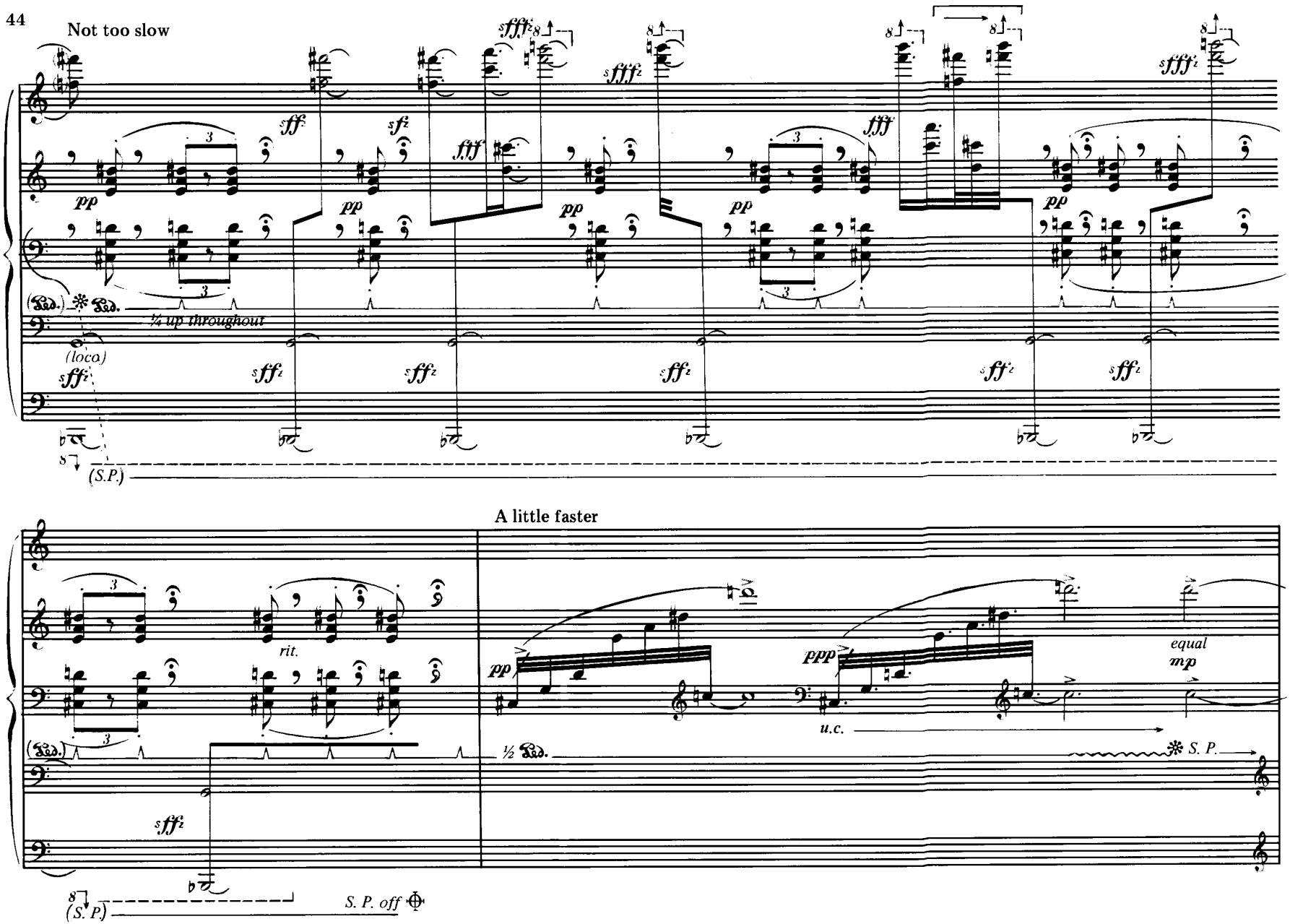
10. Vers le silence

Use of the pedals. Wide leaps and dynamic contrasts. Trills.

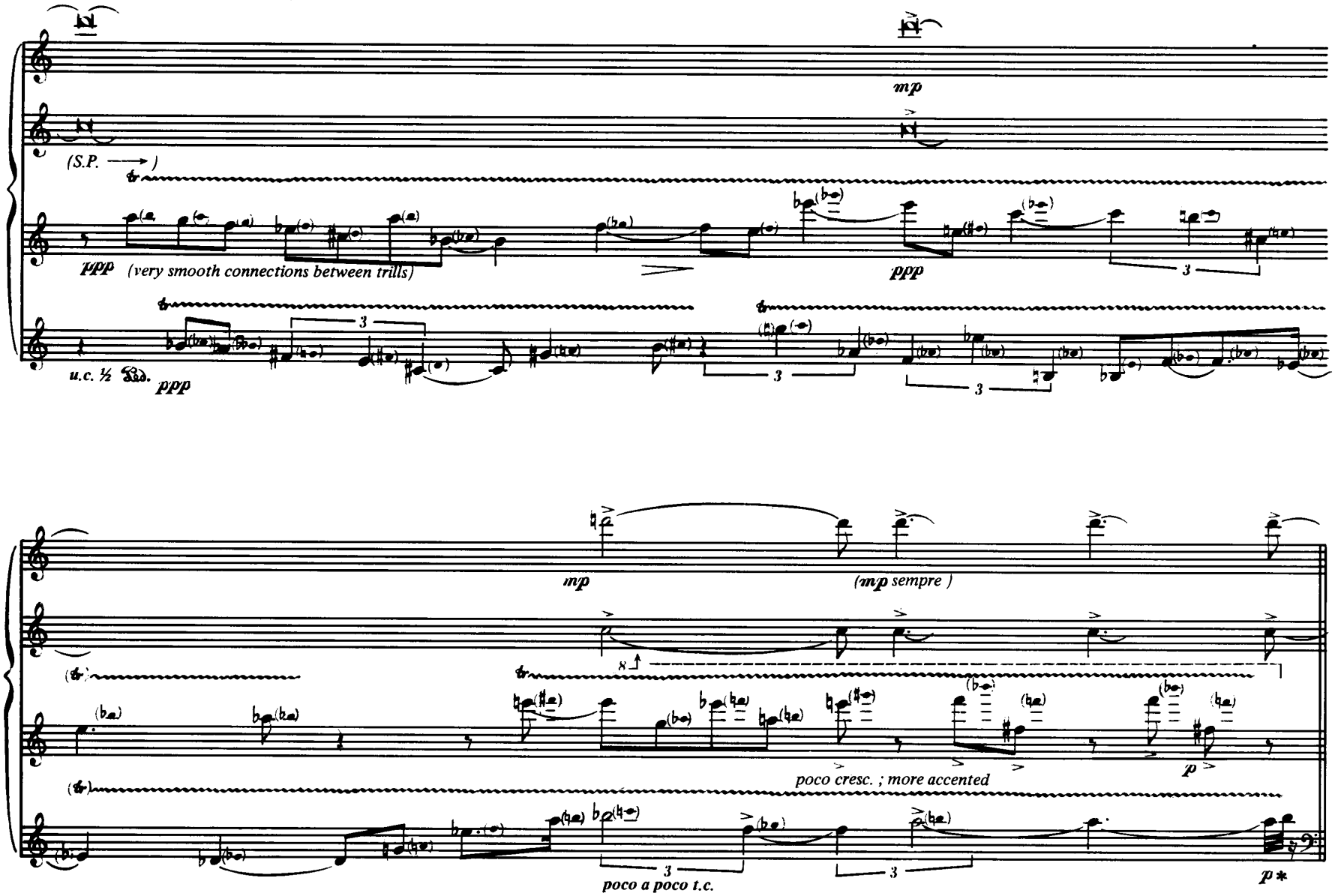


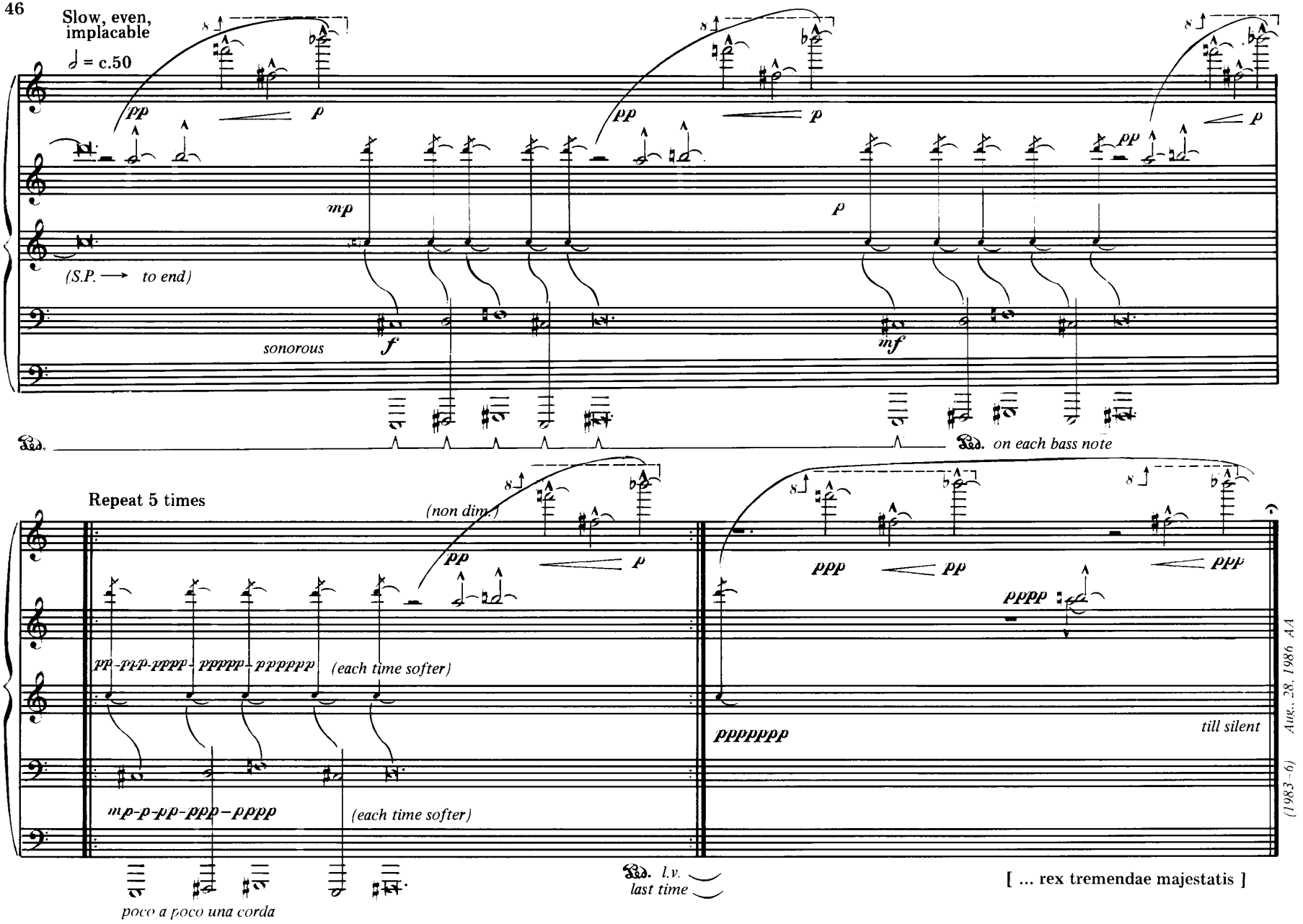



Largo
p
pp
Ped.
¼ up
ff
(S.P.)
S.P. off
Slow
equal
dim.
ppp
u.c.
Fast
dry, no Ped.
cresc. poco
t.c.
mp
ff


Not too slow
pp
sff
sf
fff
sfff
(Ped.)
Ped.
¼ up throughout
(loco)
(S.P.)
A little faster
rit.
ppp
u.c.
equal
mp
½ Ped.
S. P.
S. P. off

Largo (same tempo as p. 43)



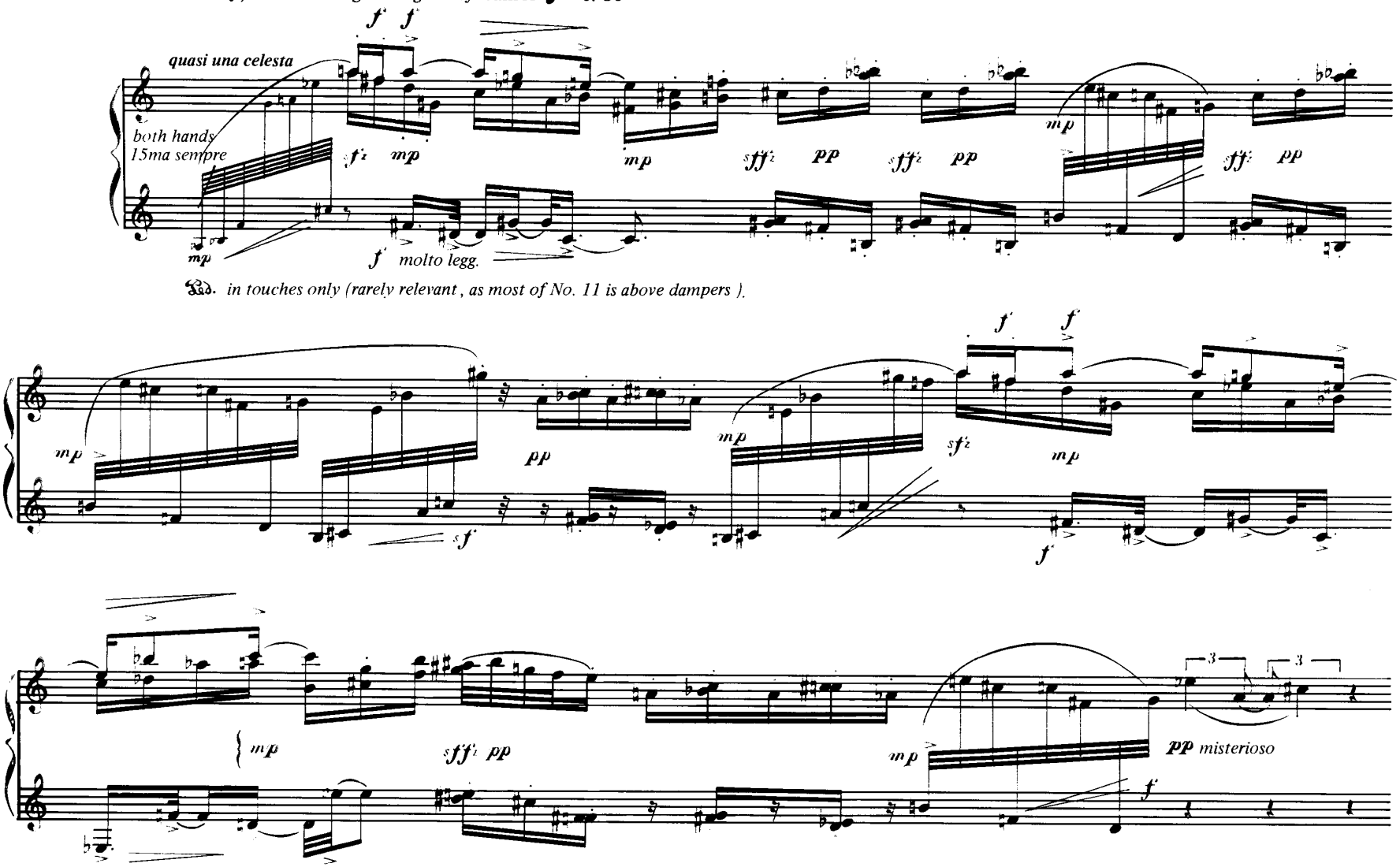


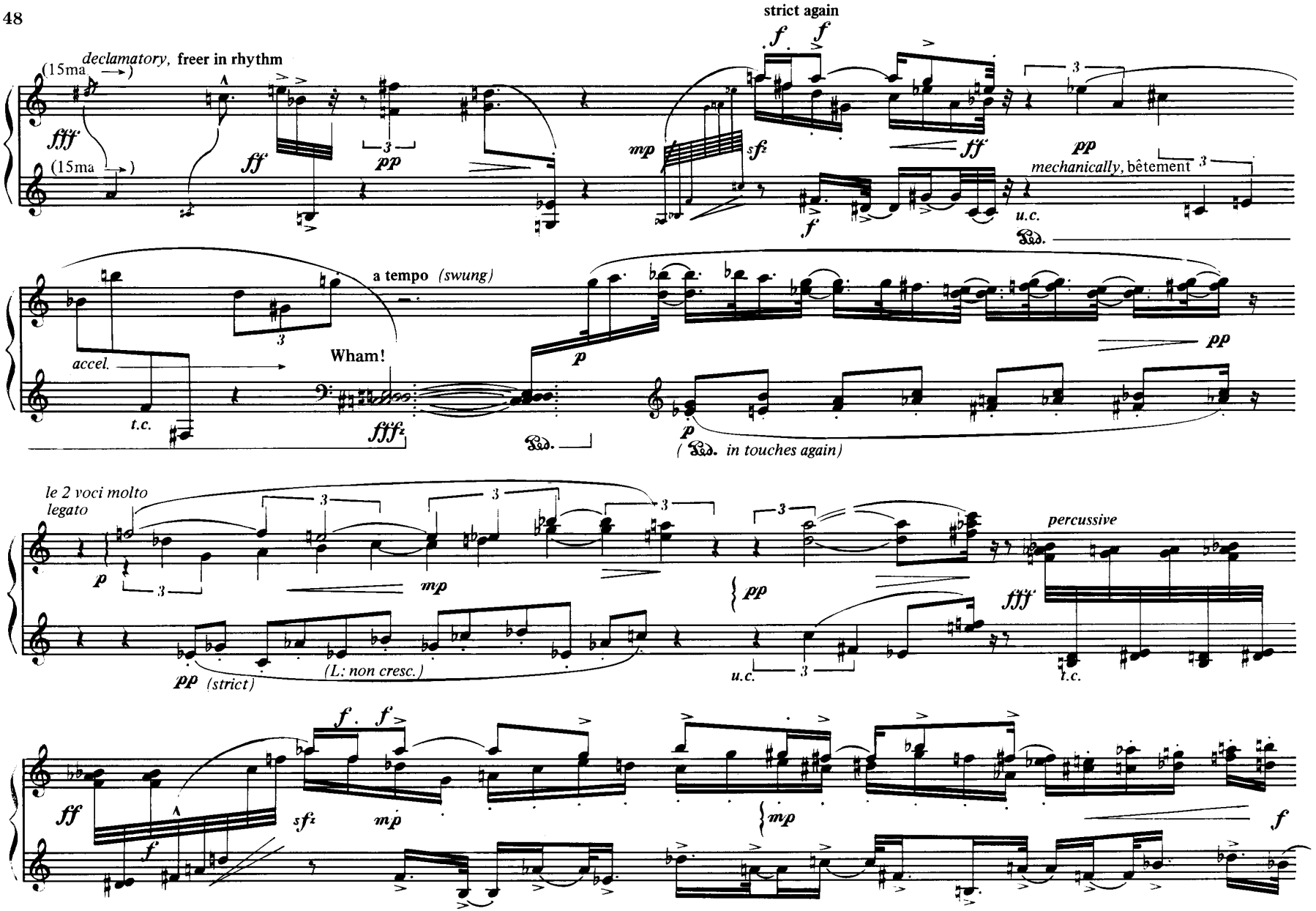
(1983-6) Aue., 28. 1986 AA

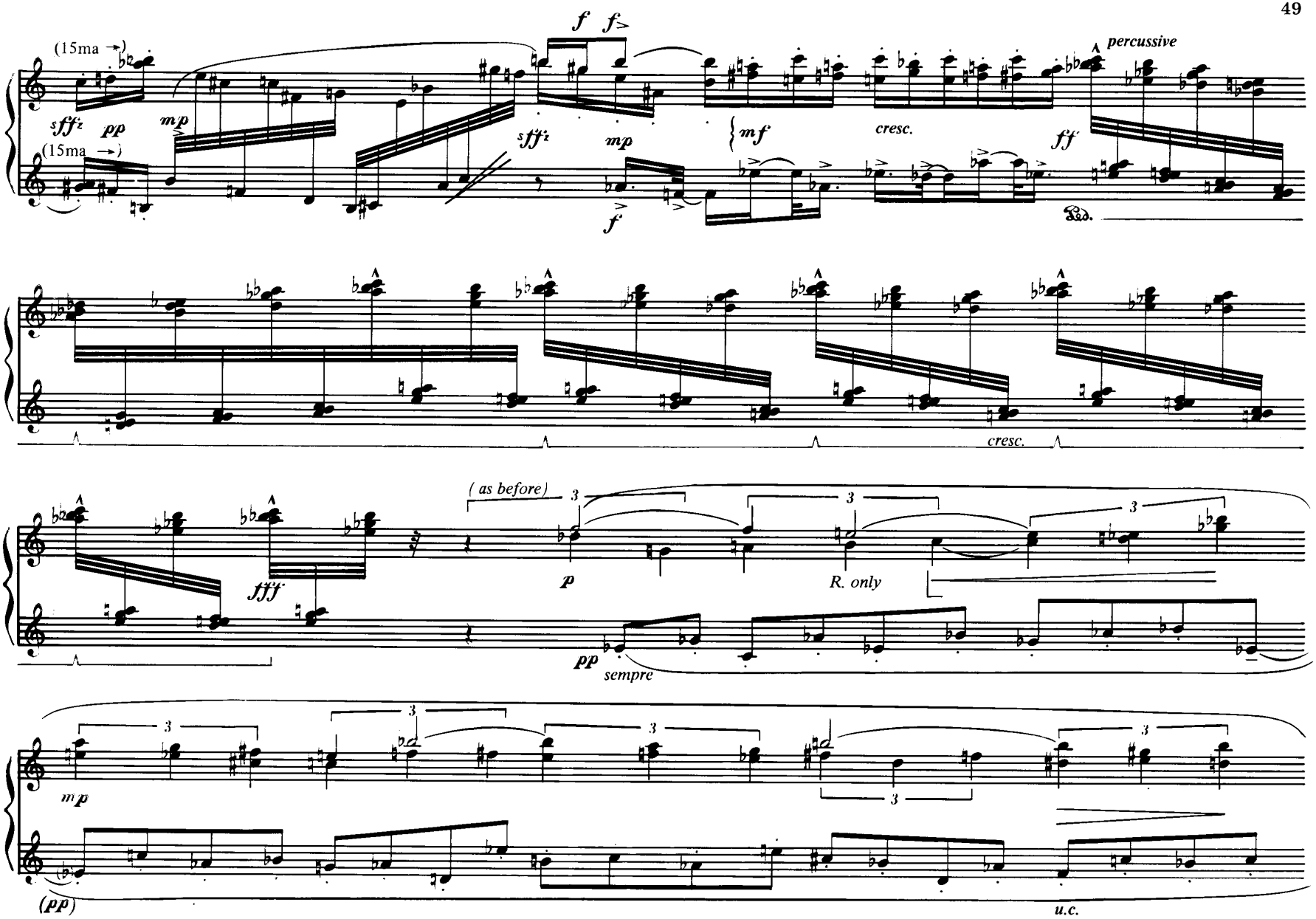
11. Hi-jinks

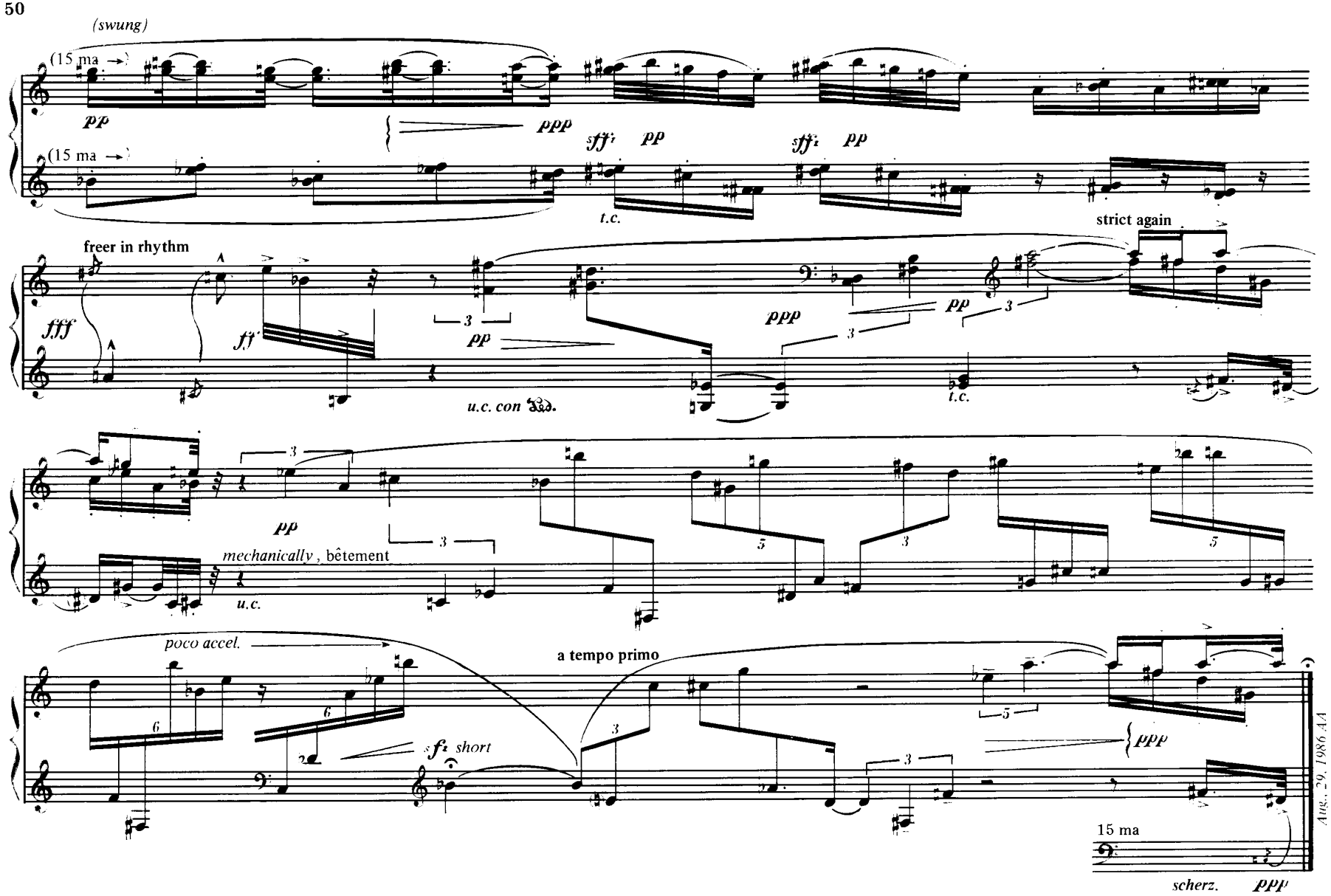
Dynamic contrast (in the piano-section least naturally apt).

Lively, with a strange and ghostly humor ♩ = c. 80



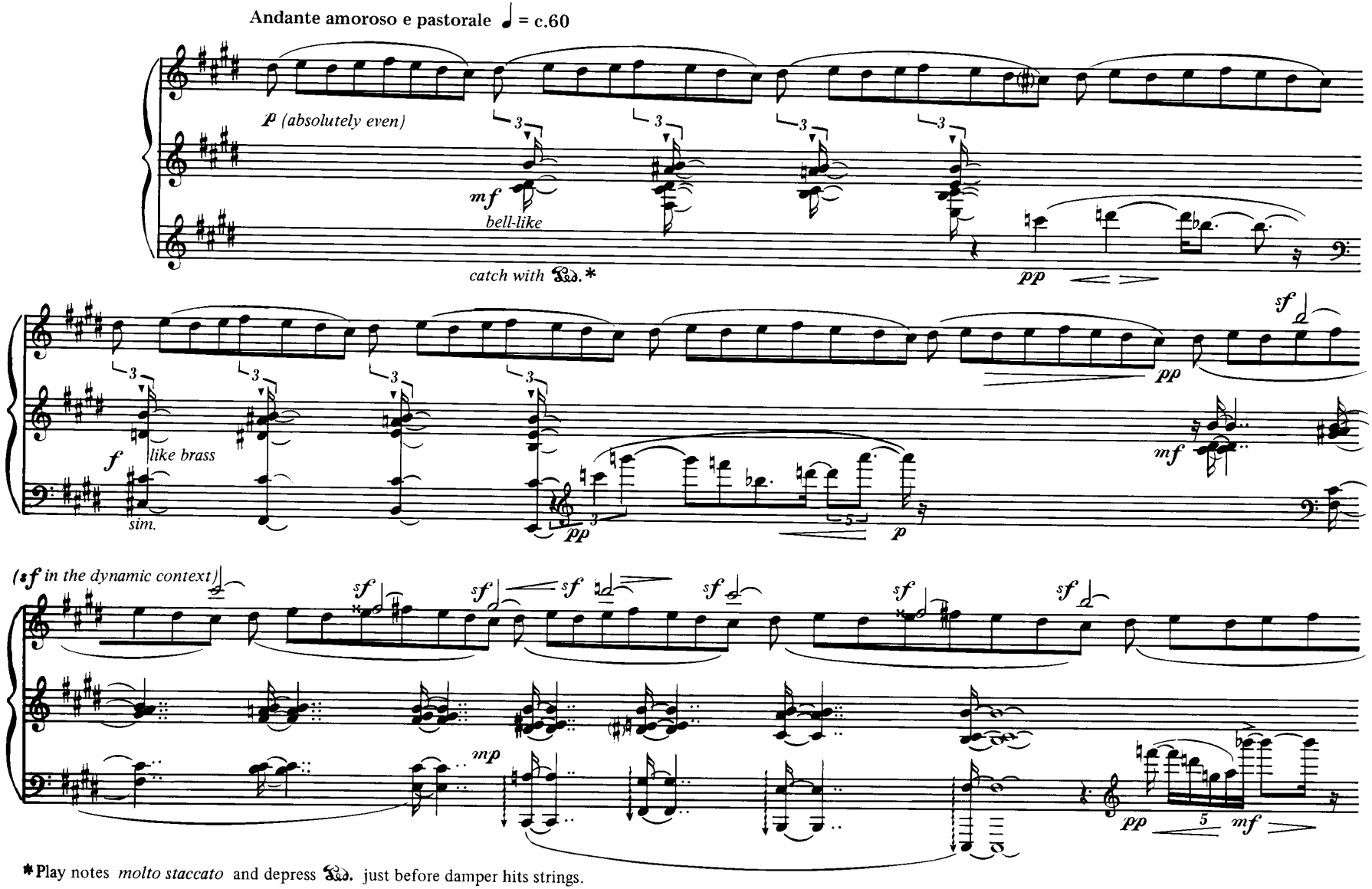

strict again
declamatory, freer in rhythm
(15ma)
(15ma)
fff
ff
pp
mp
sfz
f
ff
pp
mechanically, bêtement
u.c.
Ped.
a tempo (swung)
accel.
Wham!
t.c.
fffz
p
pp
Ped.
p
(Ped. in touches again)
le 2 voci molto legato
p
mp
pp
percussive
fff
pp (strict)
(L: non cresc.)
u.c.
t.c.
ff
sfz
mp
mp
f


(15ma →)
sfffz
pp
mp
(15ma →)
f
f
sfffz
mp
f
mf
cresc.
ff
percussive
cresc.
(as before)
3
3
3
fff
p
R. only
pp
sempre
3
3
3
3
3
mp
(pp)
u.c.

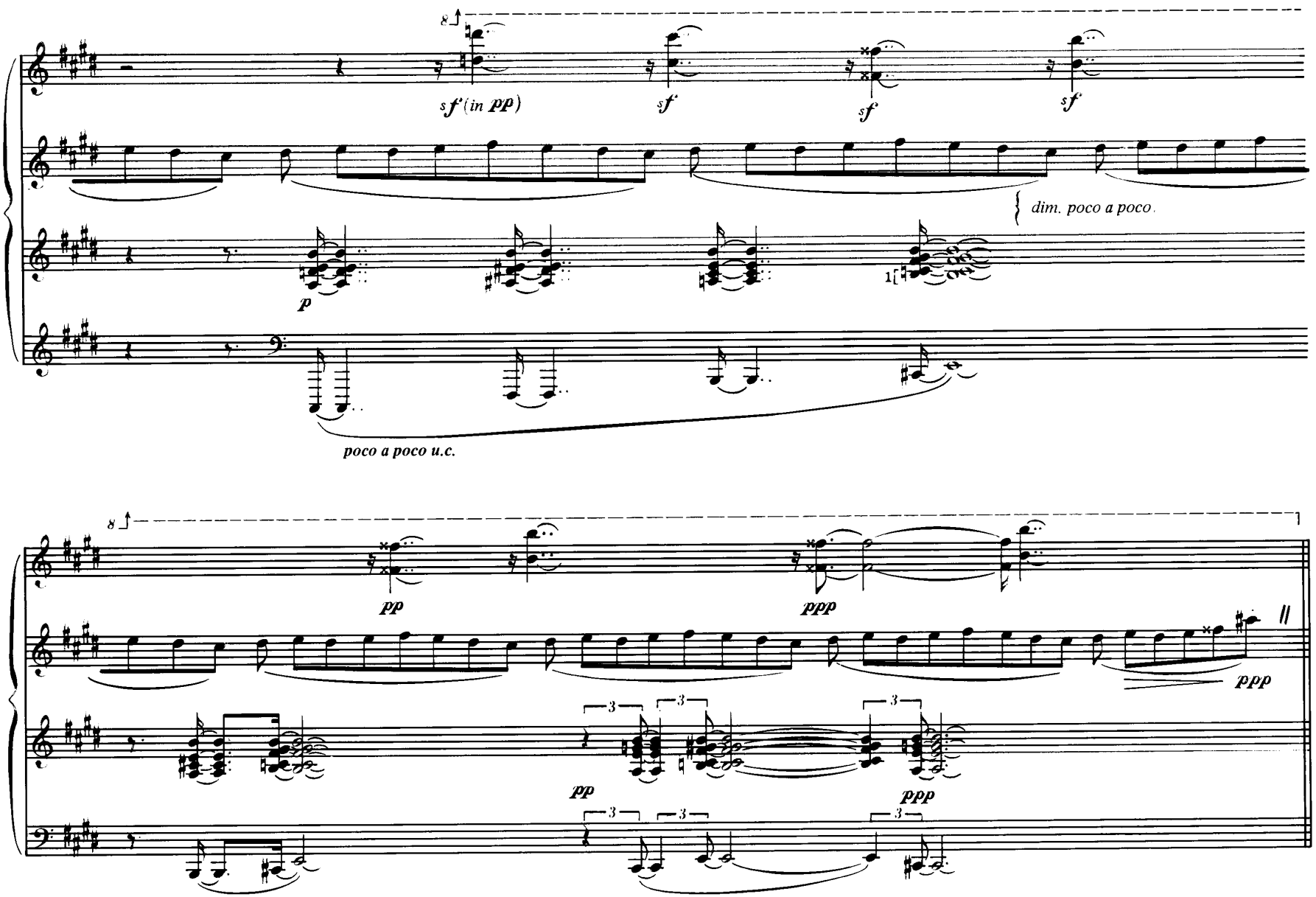

(swung)
(15 ma →)
pp
ppp
sff
pp
sff
pp
(15 ma →)
t.c.
freer in rhythm
strict again
fff
ff
3
pp
ppp
3
pp
3
u.c. con sord.
t.c.
3
pp
3
mechanically, bêtement
3
5
3
5
u.c.
poco accel.
a tempo primo
6
6
sf
short
3
3
5
ppp
15 ma
scherz.
ppp
Aug., 29, 1986 AA

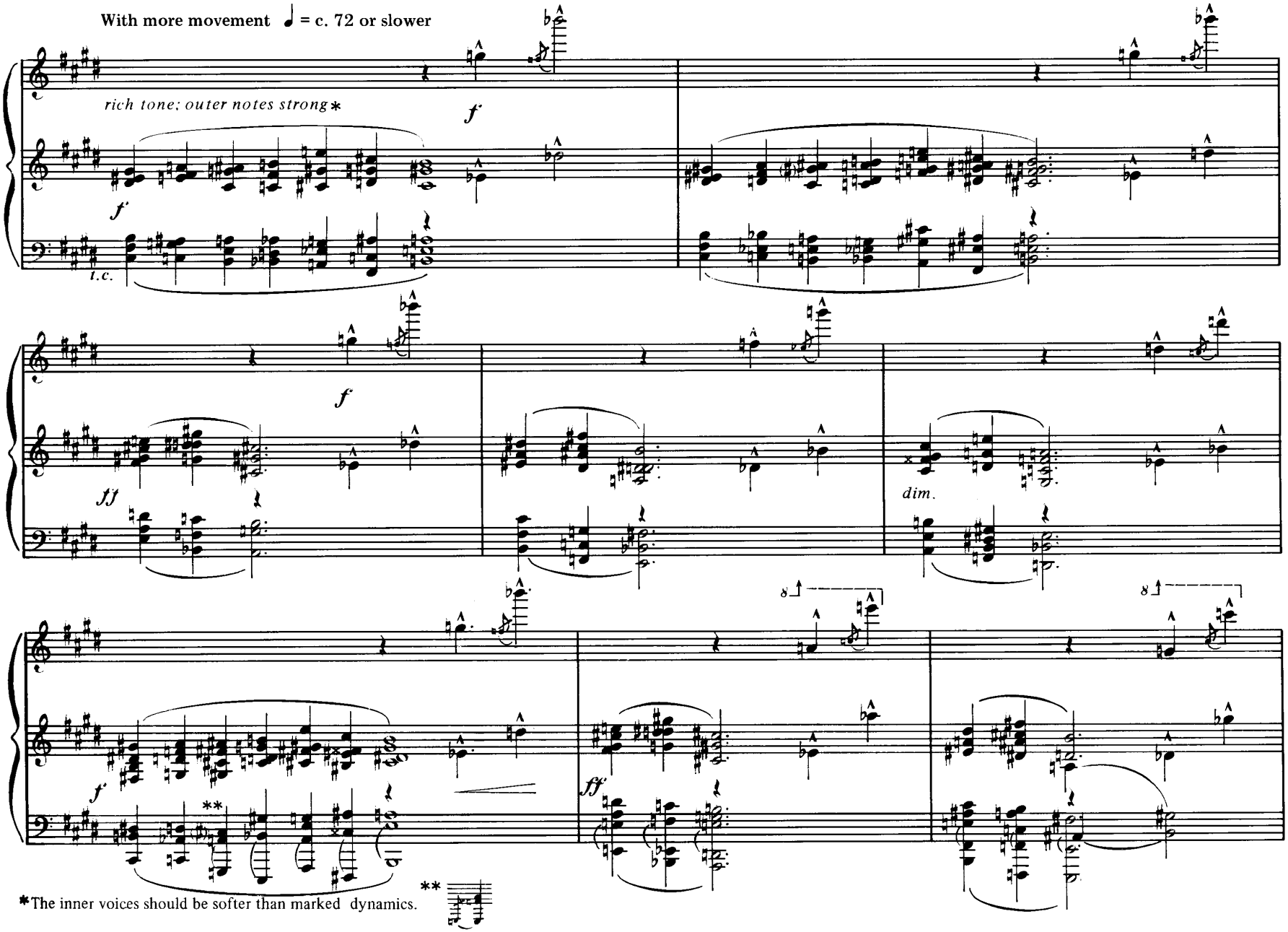
12. Hymne à l'amour

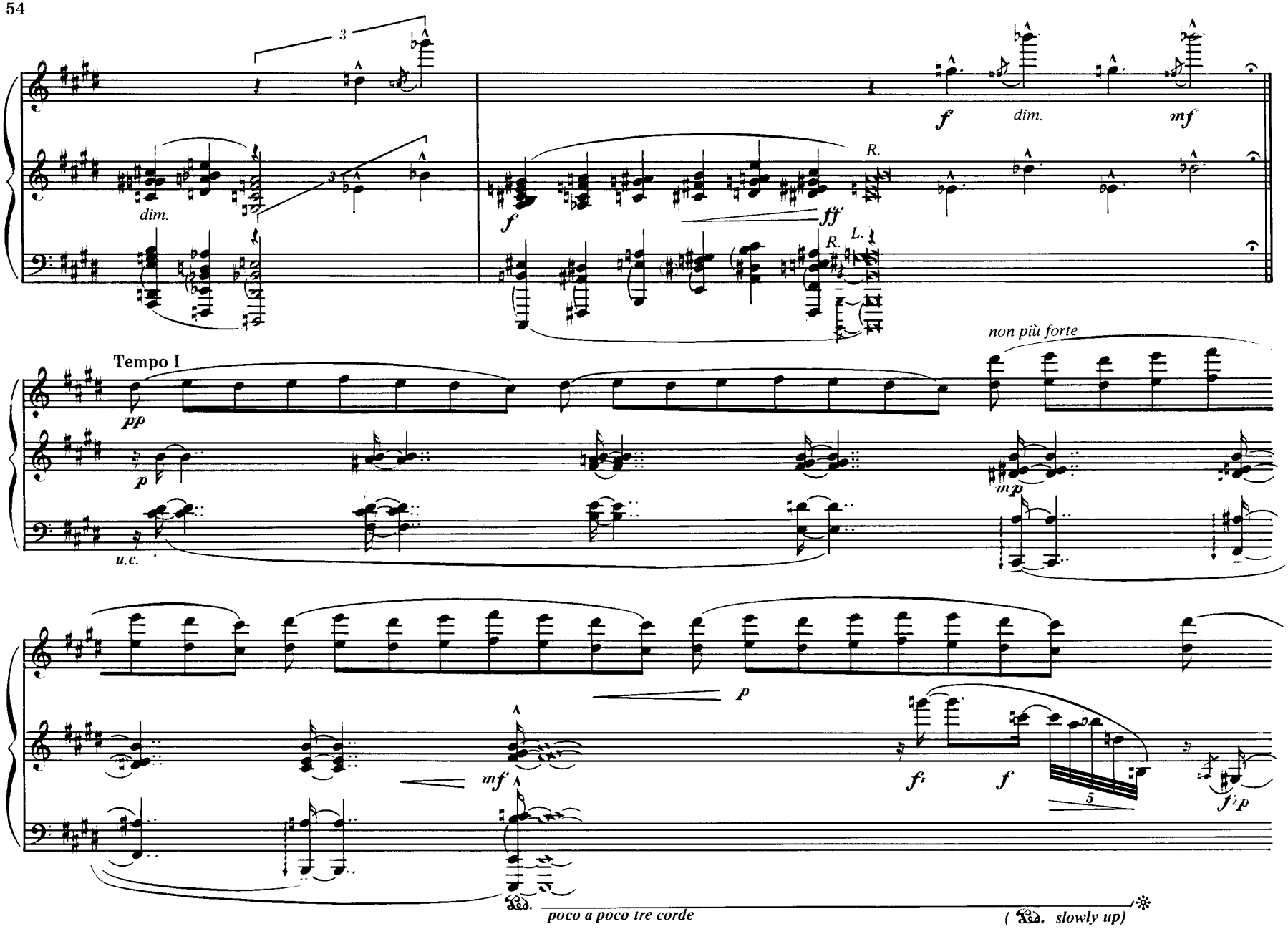
Contrast of timbres, mostly by means of pedal. "Orchestral" sonorities.

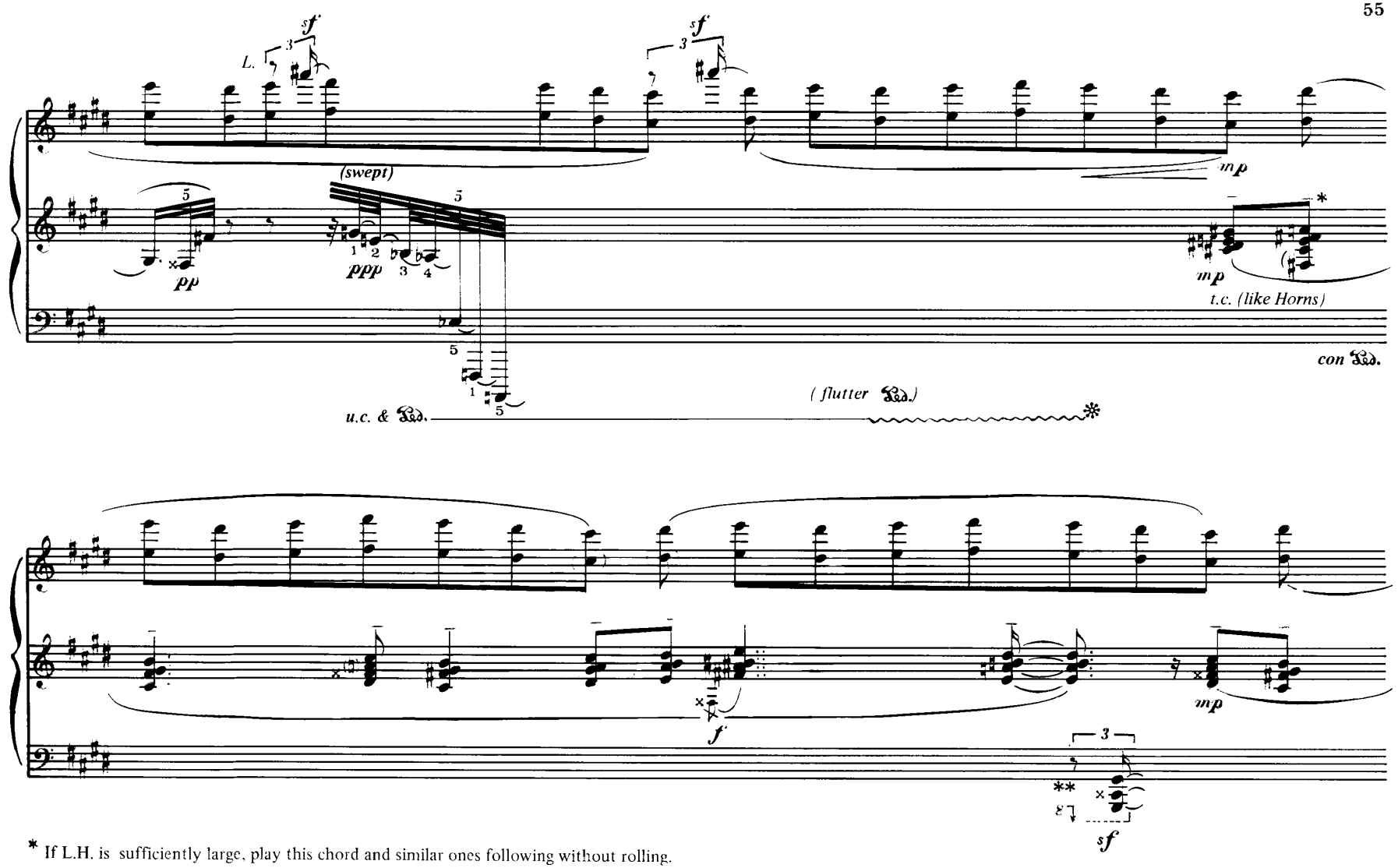


*Play notes *molto staccato* and depress Ped. just before damper hits strings.


8
sf (in pp)
sf
sf
sf
dim. poco a poco
p
poco a poco u.c.
8
pp
ppp
ppp
pp
ppp

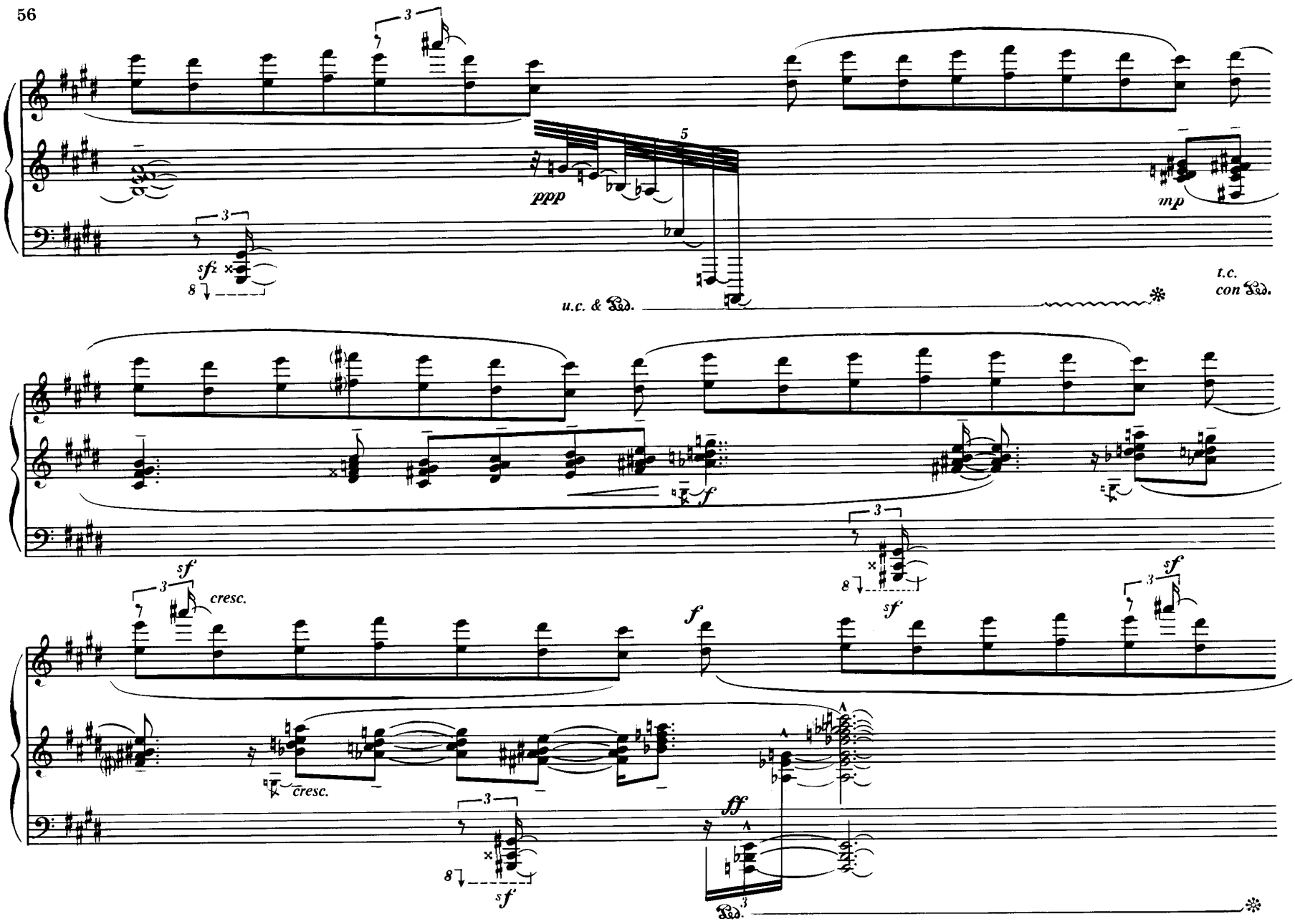

With more movement ♩ = c. 72 or slower
rich tone; outer notes strong*
f
t.c.
ff
dim.
8
ff
**
*The inner voices should be softer than marked dynamics.

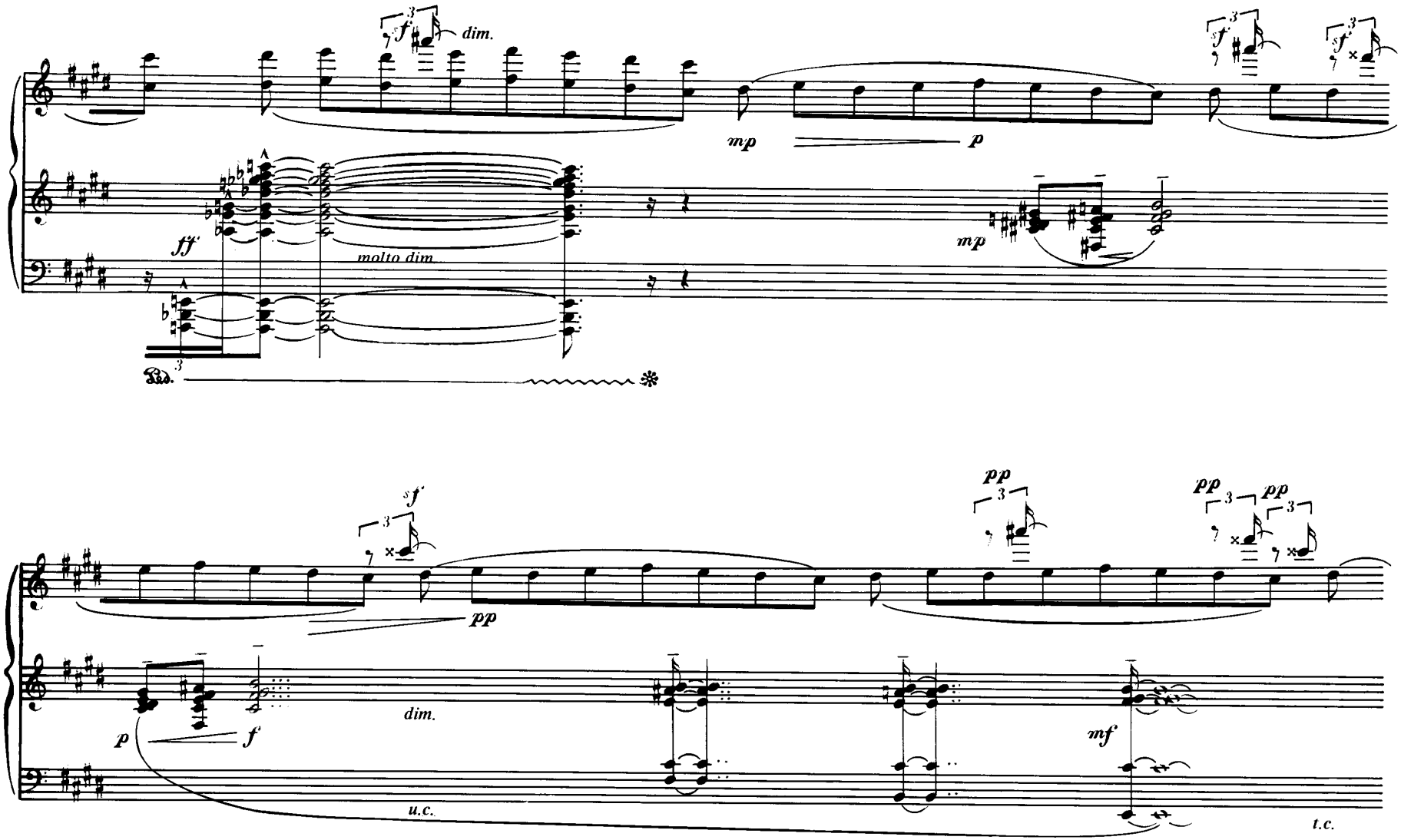

3
dim.
f
dim.
mf
R.
ff
R.
L.
Tempo I
pp
non più forte
p
mp
u.c.
p
mf
fz
f
5
fzp
poco a poco tre corde
(slowly up)

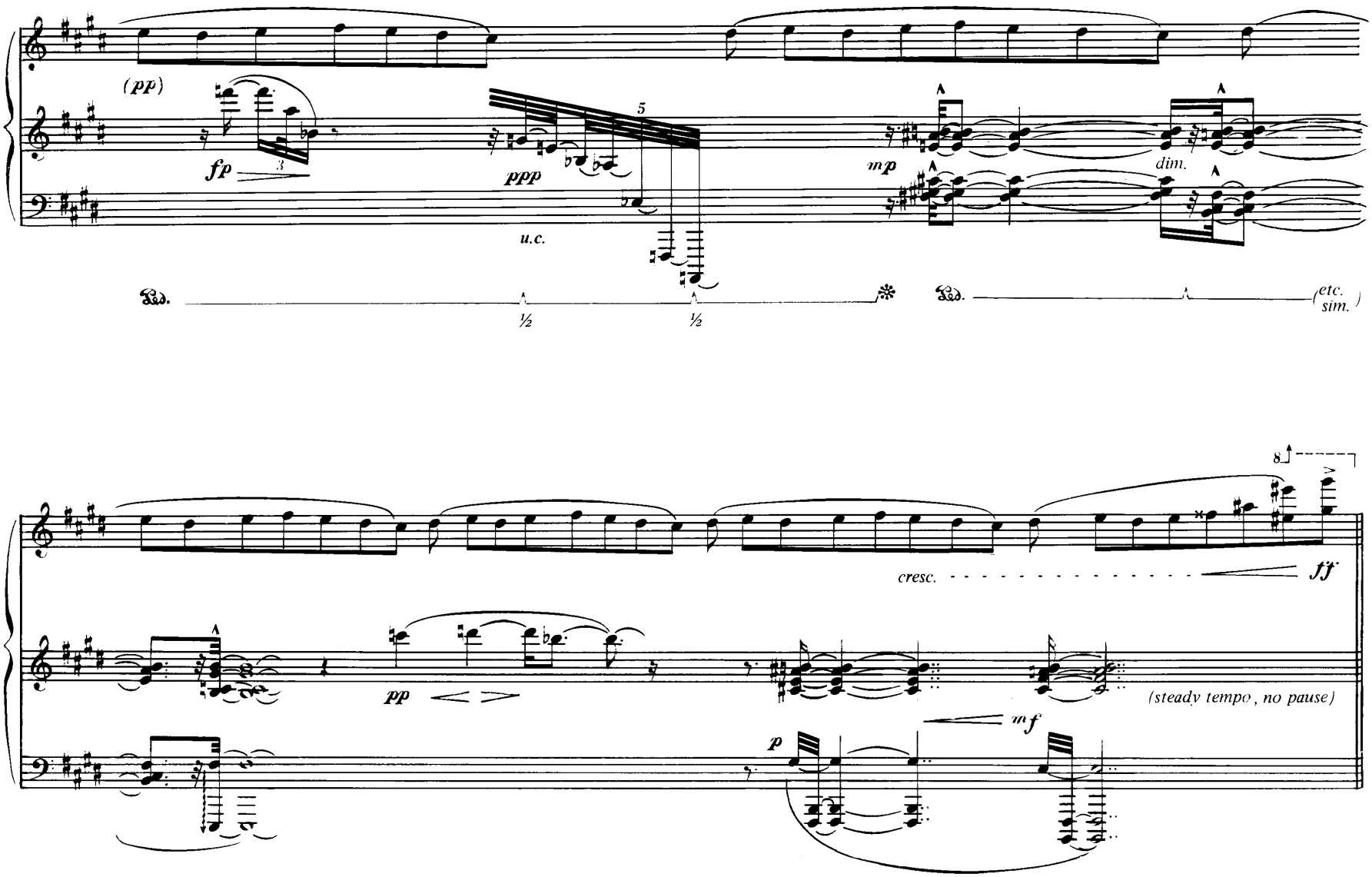


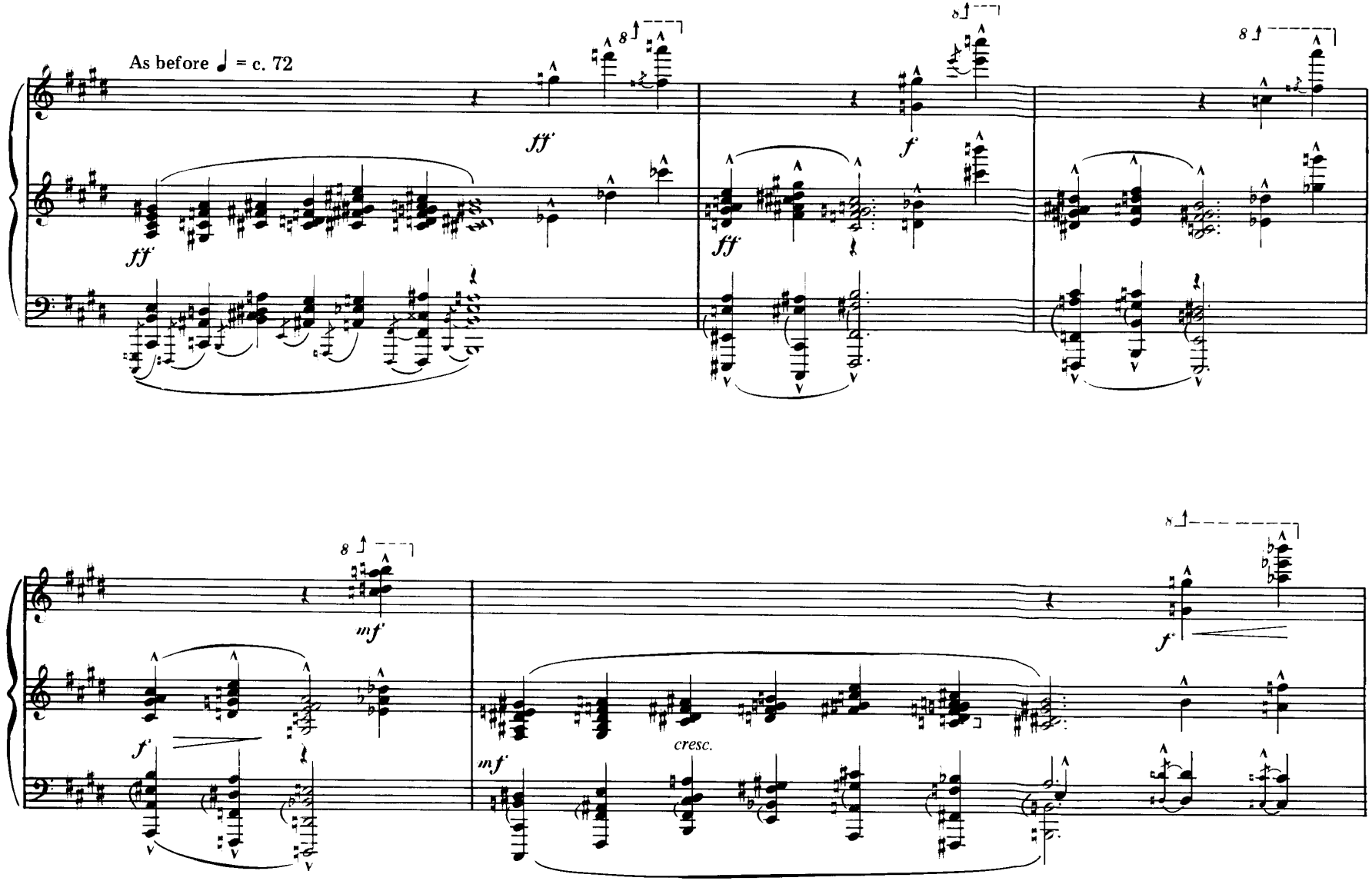
* If L.H. is sufficiently large, play this chord and similar ones following without rolling.

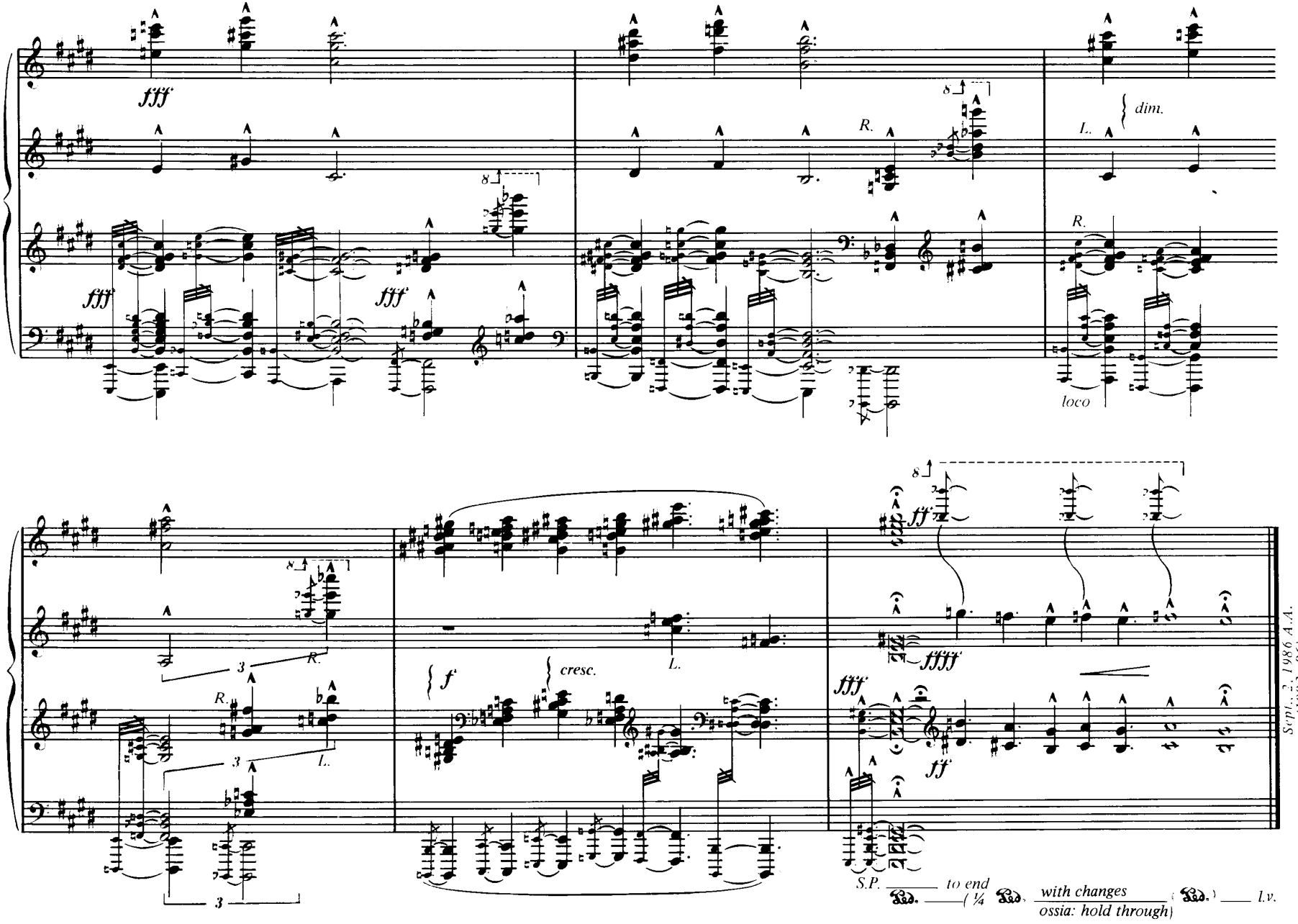
** Here and later with this chord, if piano does not possess a low G♯ , use the bottom A instead.


ppp
mp
sfz
u.c. & Ped.
t.c.
con Ped.
f
sf
cresc.
ff
Ped.


dim.
ff
molto dim.
mp
p
mp
pp
pp
pp
p
f
dim.
mf
u.c.
t.c.


(pp)
fp
ppp
u.c.
mp
dim.
½
½
(etc. sim.)
cresc.
ff
pp
mf
p
(steady tempo, no pause)


As before ♩ = c. 72
ff
ff
ff
f
mf
f
cresc.
mf
f



Sept. 2, 1986 A.A.
(1983 - 86)

William Bolcom: 12 NEW ETUDES for PIANO

Durations will vary with each pianist. However, for your information, we are listing the durations found on the Marc-André Hamelin recording:

1. (:54)
2. (3:29)
3. (1:46)
4. (2:47)
5. (2:02)
6. (3:30)
7. (3:12)
8. (2:04)
9. (3:00)
10. (6:10)
11. (2:00)
12. (6:59)

Total Duration: *ca* 38 minutes.