# Sonata *for* Violin *and* Piano

Thomas Little

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# Program Notes & Analysis

The *Sonata* follows a formal principle that splits the difference between composition by intuition and composition by preplanned formal design. Various sections were composed by intuitive processes, which were then analyzed from all aspects with an eye towards figuring out what exactly made the section "work." The resulting information informed the process of the next section, with the result leading towards an end goal of a through-composed, yet formally cohesive musical fabric with everything hinging on what came before. In the most broad sense, the form was determined by the precompositional decision to have all previous material affect subsequent material, thereby posing the following question: in what way will the things we do affect us in the future, and what should our responses entail?

The first movement, "Coup de Foudre" (literally "stroke of lightning"), is my take on variation form. I don't find the standard theme and variation form inherently interesting, as historical examples are largely predictable. I wanted to take the form's economy of means and divorce it from its less interesting elements. The result is a movement with discrete sections, composed in such a way that every previous section exerts some level of influence on all subsequent sections. This is accomplished through the derivation, treatment, and elaboration of scales. In the opening section, a scale is derived from the opening two measures, with G#, A#, C, D, E, and F forming a series of "stable tones" and the remaining chromatic pitches forming a set of "unstable tones." These sets are not always utilized, but are untransposed when they are. The set of prepared tones (22 in all) are a subset of the 88 keys on a standard grand piano, generated by determining which pitches were not sounded in the piano throughout the course of the first section. (Information on the preparation and notation of these pitches can be found in the performance notes.)

The second section of the movement combines the prepared pitches (outside the uppermost octave, which are all prepared) into its own scale, which is octatonic without exhibiting the properties of a mode of limited transposition: G, A, A#, B, C#, D#, E#, F#. Eventually, these build up into block sonorities, after which the movement is never the same; the final variation juxtaposes long and short note values, with the longer values

pulled from one of the scales and the shorter values freely interruptive and derived by intuition (existing on a plane simultaneously inside and outside these scales).

"Cri de Cœur" ("cry of the heart") begins with the piano, which states a 21-note theme which is a combination of the scales derived in "Coup de Foudre" (and which is run in retrograde at the end). After the introduction, the violin line makes use of a background scalar fluctuation. The "stable" and "unstable" scales—six-note collections—were fashioned into seven-note scales by the addition of a new note exactly halfway between the largest interval in the original. A second set of scales was derived from these "prime" scales by splitting each of those intervals in half (thus creating seven- or eight-note collections that contained quarter-tones), and then taking each of these scales and transposing them so that they all centered on G, which had already emerged as a natural pitch center. The violin makes use of each of these: first the prime scales in order on the way up, and then the secondary, microtonally-derived scales on the way down, in reverse order of their prime counterparts. As the violin ascends, the piano has snippets of scales derived from transpositions of the violin's background scale to fit the bass (another iteration of the introductory 21-note row). When pianistic material runs into a stopped pitch, things temporarily grind to a halt—but just in the piano, as the violin continues unabated. The violin quarter-tones on the descent in the second half of the movement trigger the piano's fully-muted simultaneity, echoing the end of the first movement.

In "C'est la Vie" ("such is life") the initial violin cadenza takes material from the 21-note row from "Cri de Cœur" and freely interprets it, including *non vib.* snippets of future material before beginning the movement proper, where all rules of melodic motion are derived from measure 86 in "Coup de Foudre." The intervals are treated as a row, with each iteration adding one more interval to that row, and the violin line that exclusively expresses this row is predominantly off the beat, according to the rhythmic profile of its generating measure. The piano incorporates the prepared pitches into the musical texture by acknowledging their presence instead of letting them interfere with the flow of musical ideas, as had occurred in the previous movements. By the end of the movement (and thus piece), the prepared pitches have become accepted into the texture; the piano has broken free of precompositional shackles in order to best accommodate the intervallic limitations of the violin.

# Performance Notes

## General

• **A colon (:) appearing after a note** is a "quinary" augmentation dot, which adds one-quarter of a note's value onto the note upon which it is appended; i.e. a quinary half note lasts for an entire measure of 5/8, a quinary quarter note a measure of 5/16, etc.

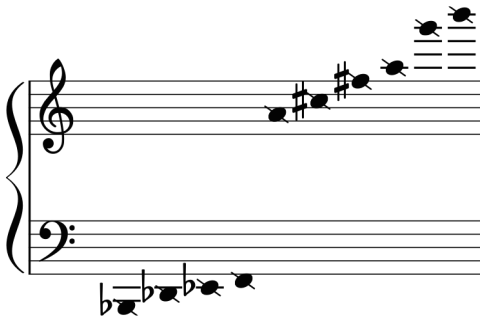
• **Bars of irregular meter** often feature dashed bar lines for coordination of the parts. These can occasionally appear only halfway through a staff if two voices are active on that staff at that time.

• **An "X" time signature** indicates free time.

• **Feathered beaming** indicates an *ad libitum* accelerando or rallentando through the beamed group.

## Piano

• **Prepared tones:** Prior to performance, mutes should be added to the following pitches to create a pitched, but distinctly muted and non-resonant color: Bb1, Db2, Eb2, F2, A4, C#5, F#5, A5, G6, *&* B6 (seen at right). In addition, all pitches in the uppermost octave of the keyboard (C7–C8) should have a subtly rattling sound created by placing small (preferably metal) items over the strings. All preparations remain for the duration of the piece and are marked with slashes through their note heads regardless of their preparation.



## Violin

• **Crescendi and diminuendi** from or to *niente* are indicated by circled hairpin tips.

• **Lines preceding notes,** either upwards or downwards (as in "C'est la Vie"), indicate a slide roughly equivalent to the length of the line. The note is held for its full value.

• **Noteless stems** indicate a ricochet bowing on the first note of the group, *ad libitum.*

*in memoriam Hunter Sawyers*

*for Michele*

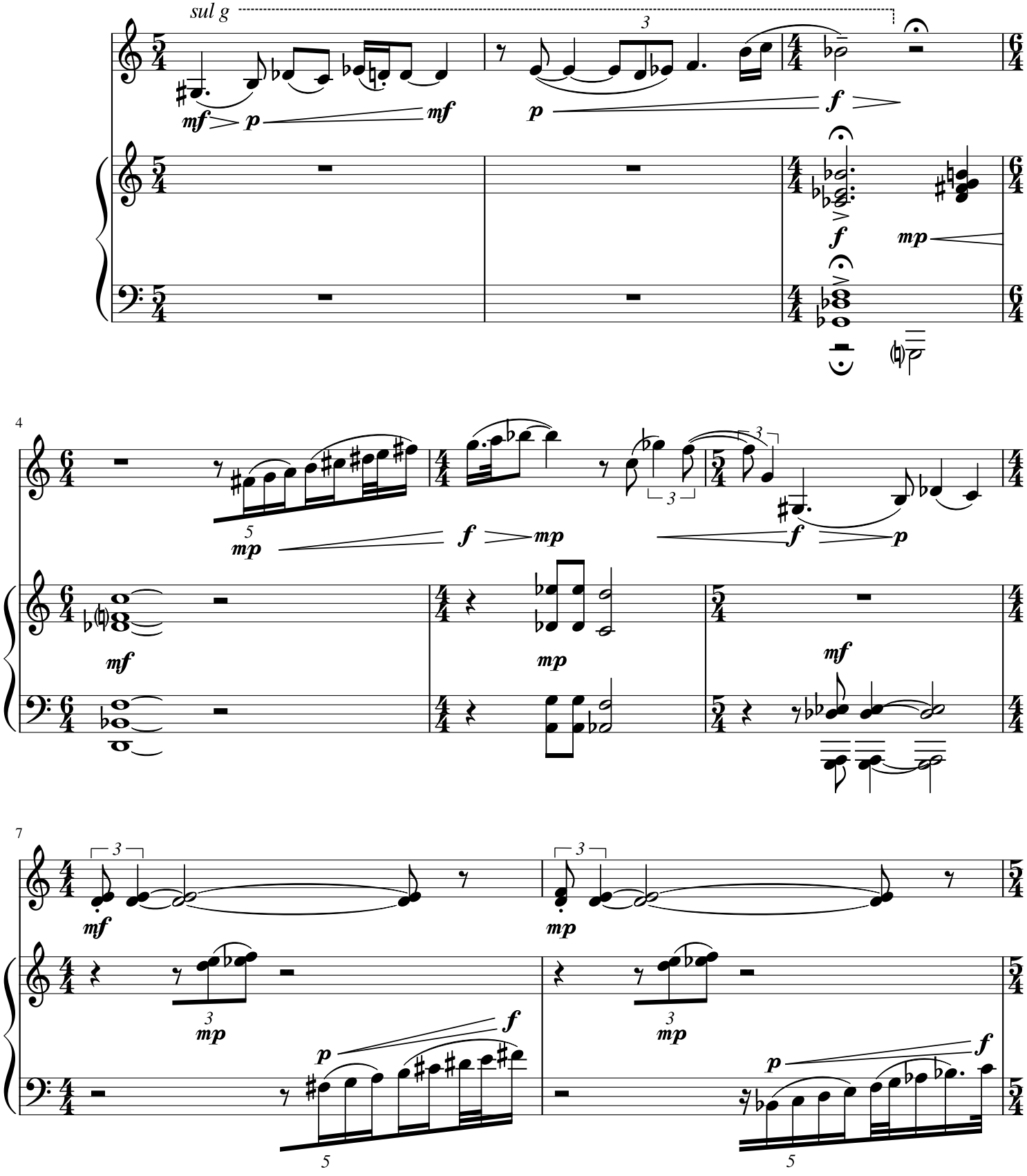
# Sonata *for* Violin *and* Piano

## I. Coup de Foudre

Thomas Little (*b. 1996*)

**Adagietto quasi con dolore (♩ = 65)**

*sul g*



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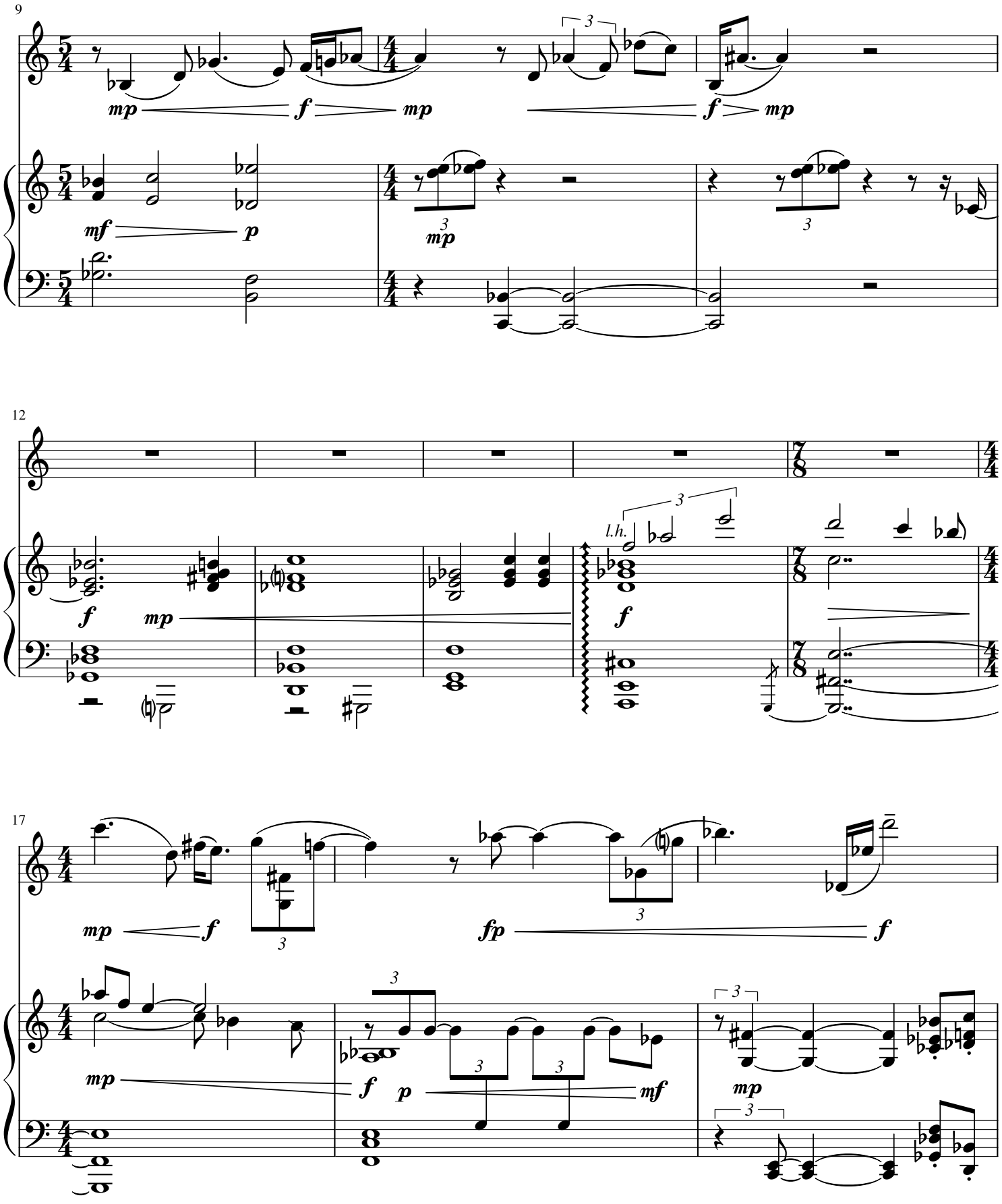


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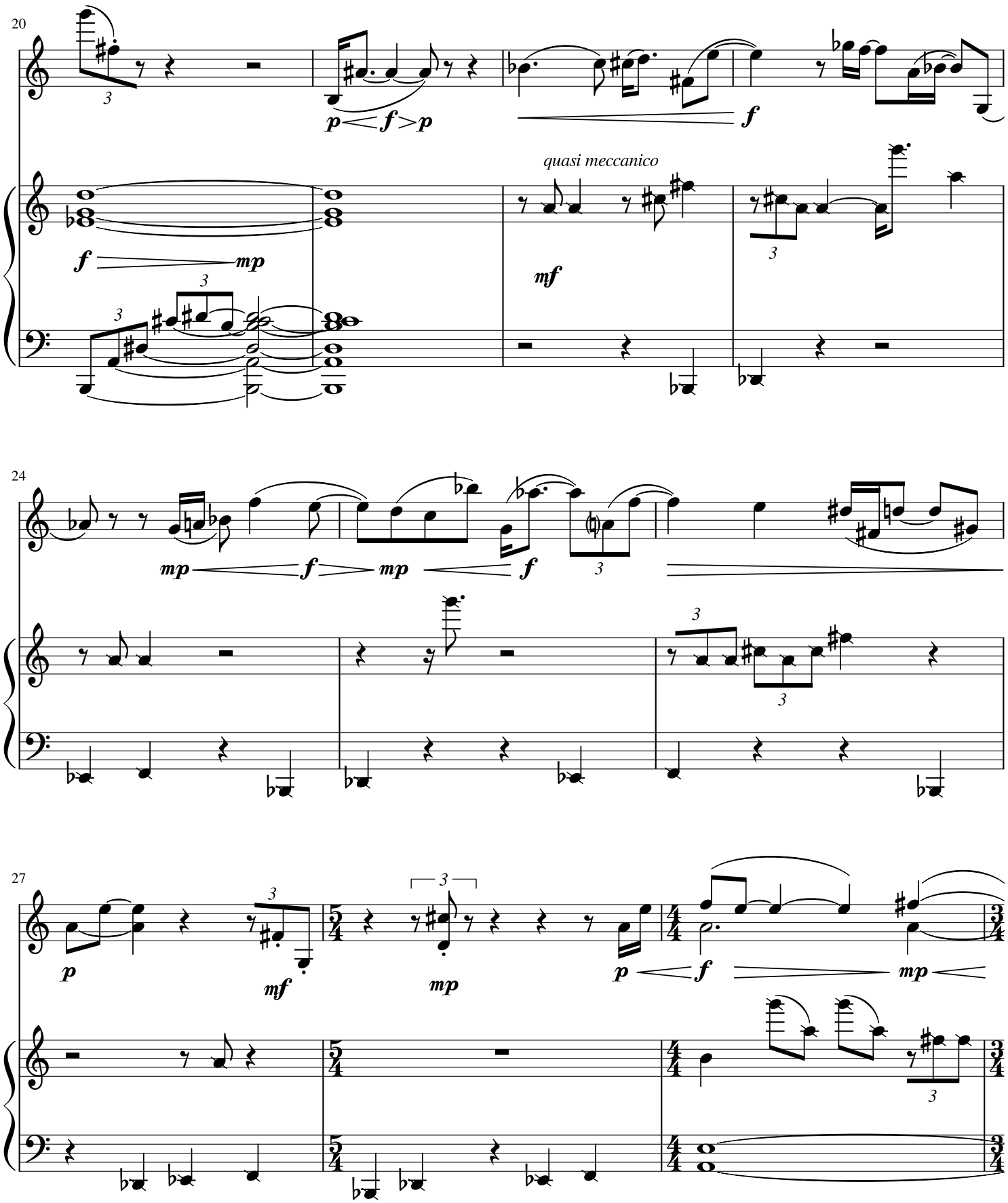



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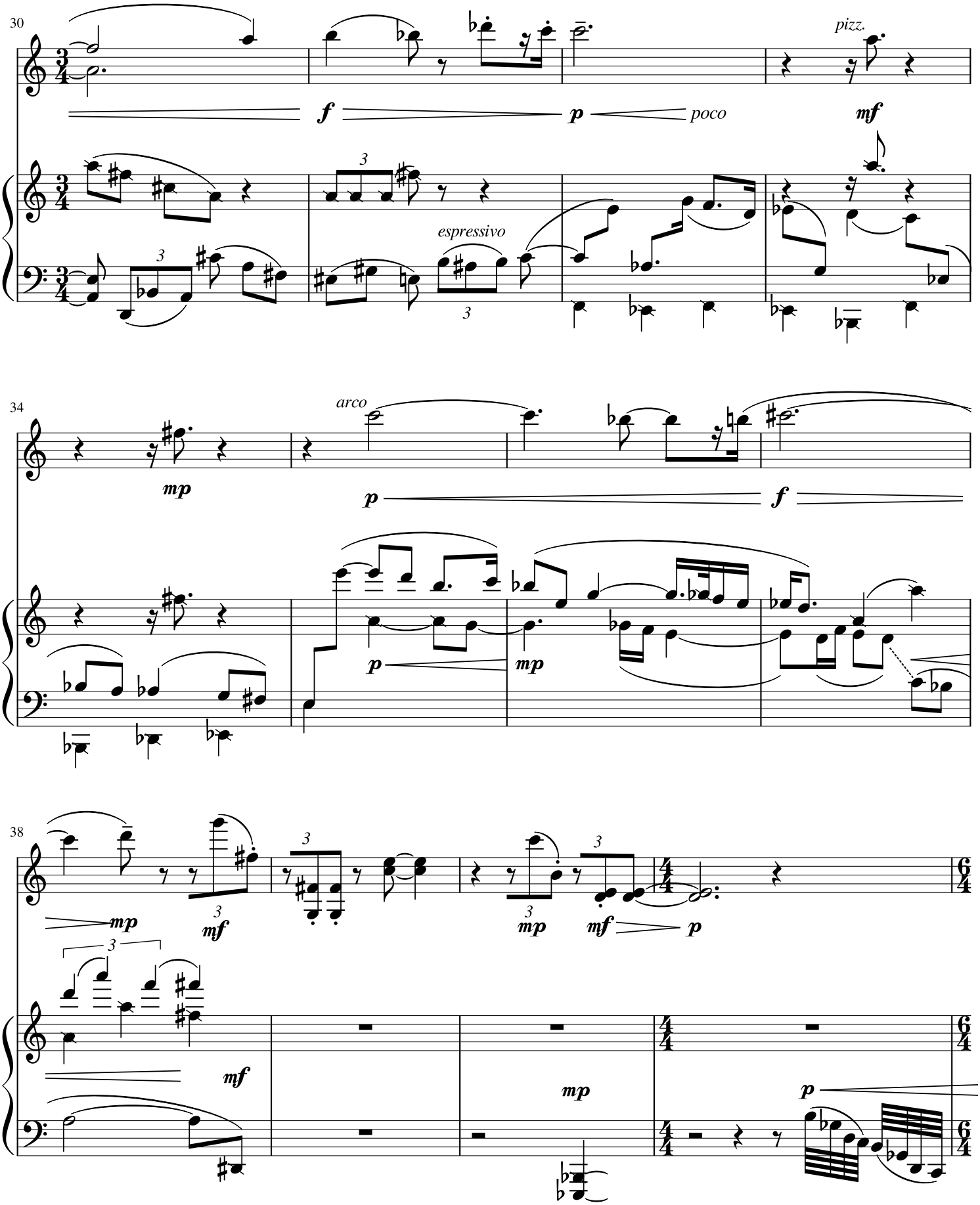


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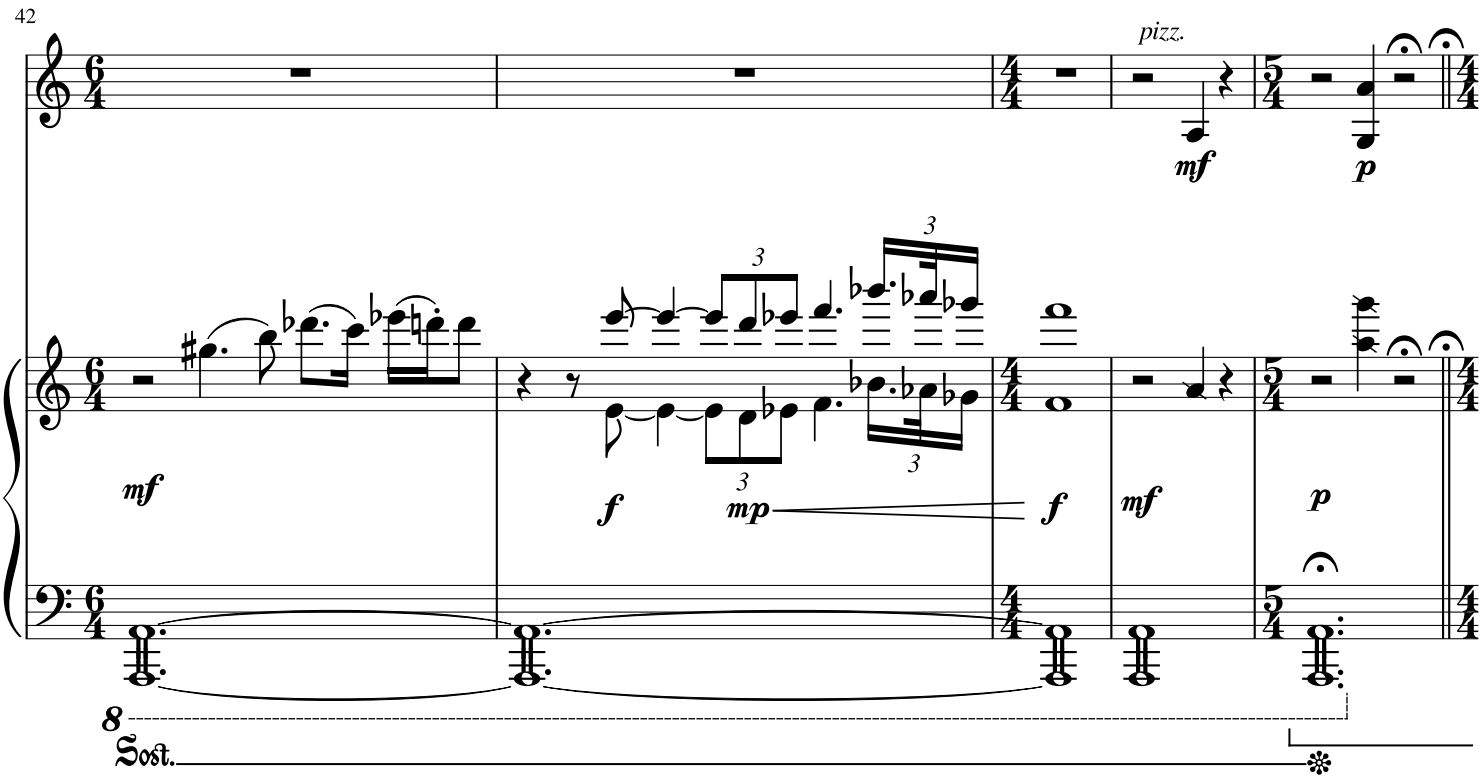


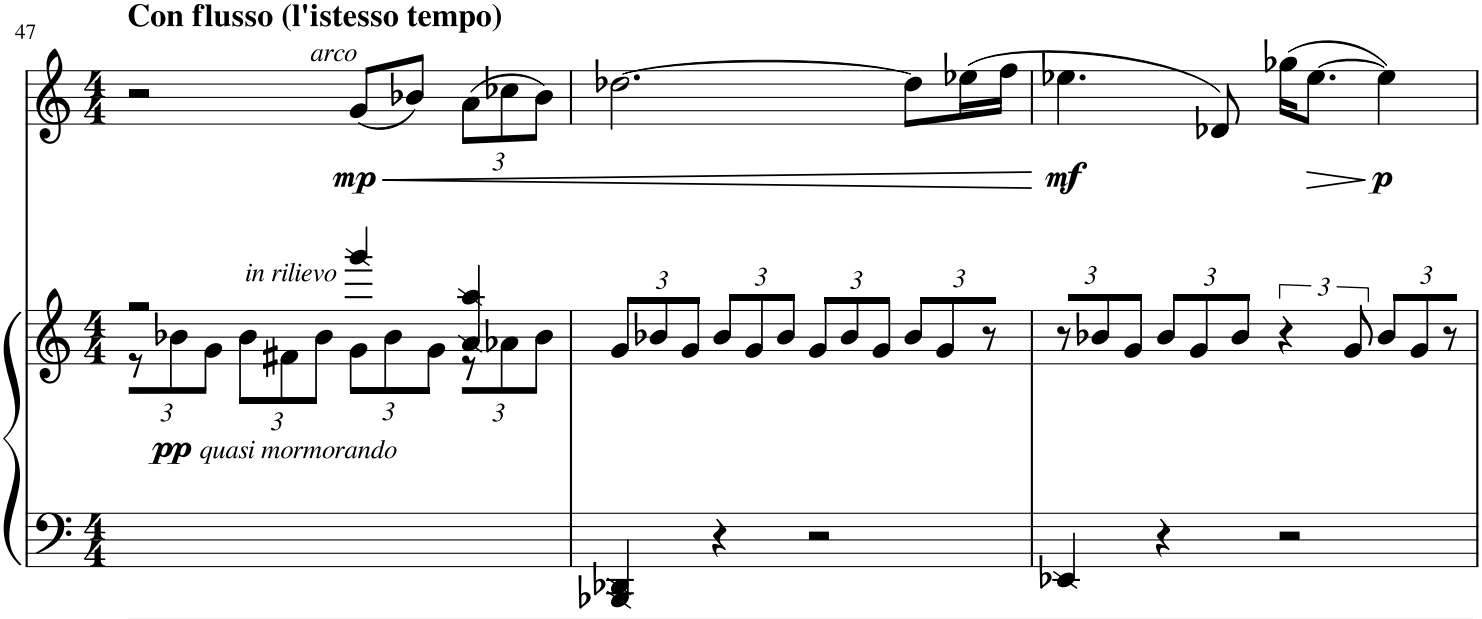



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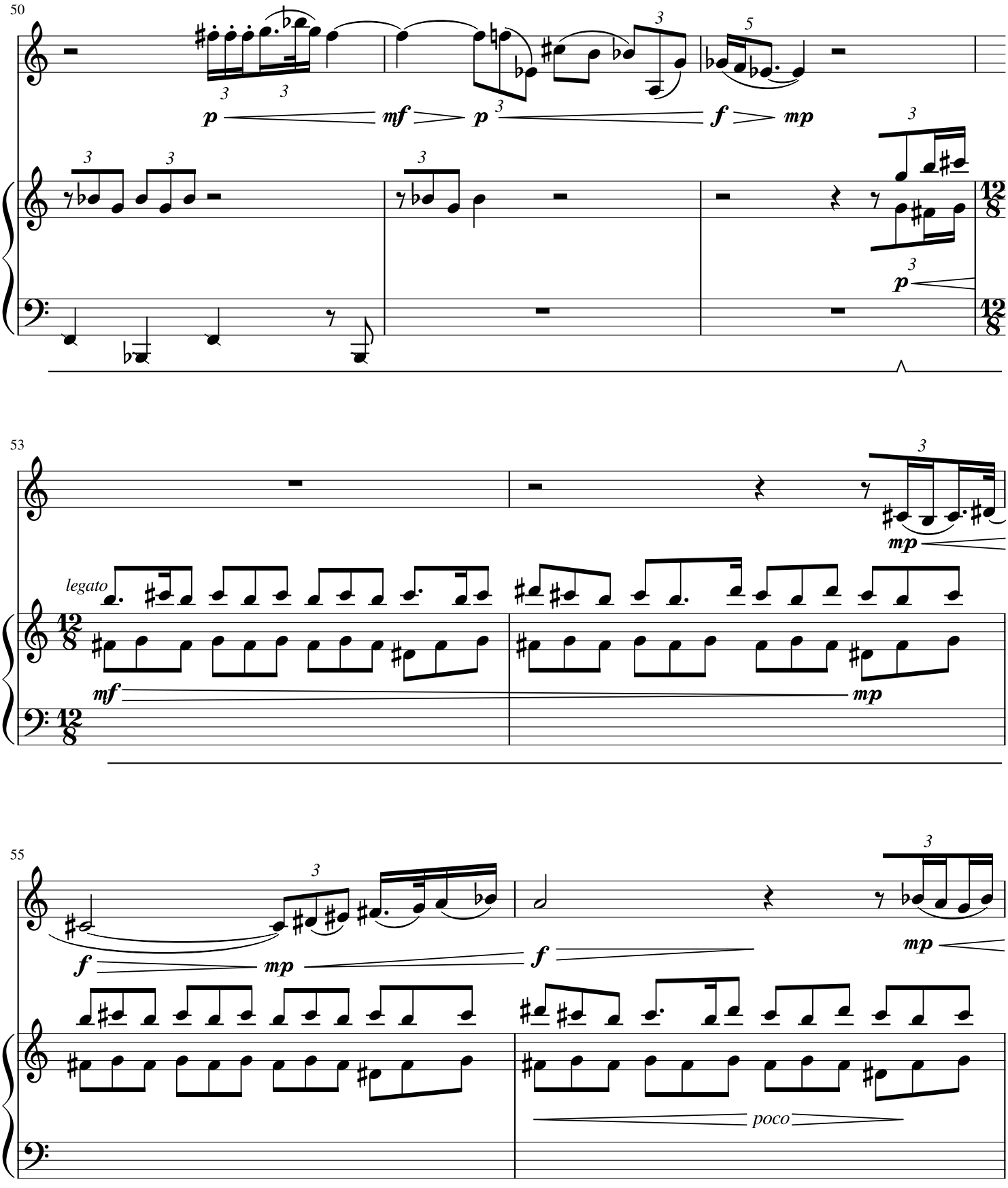


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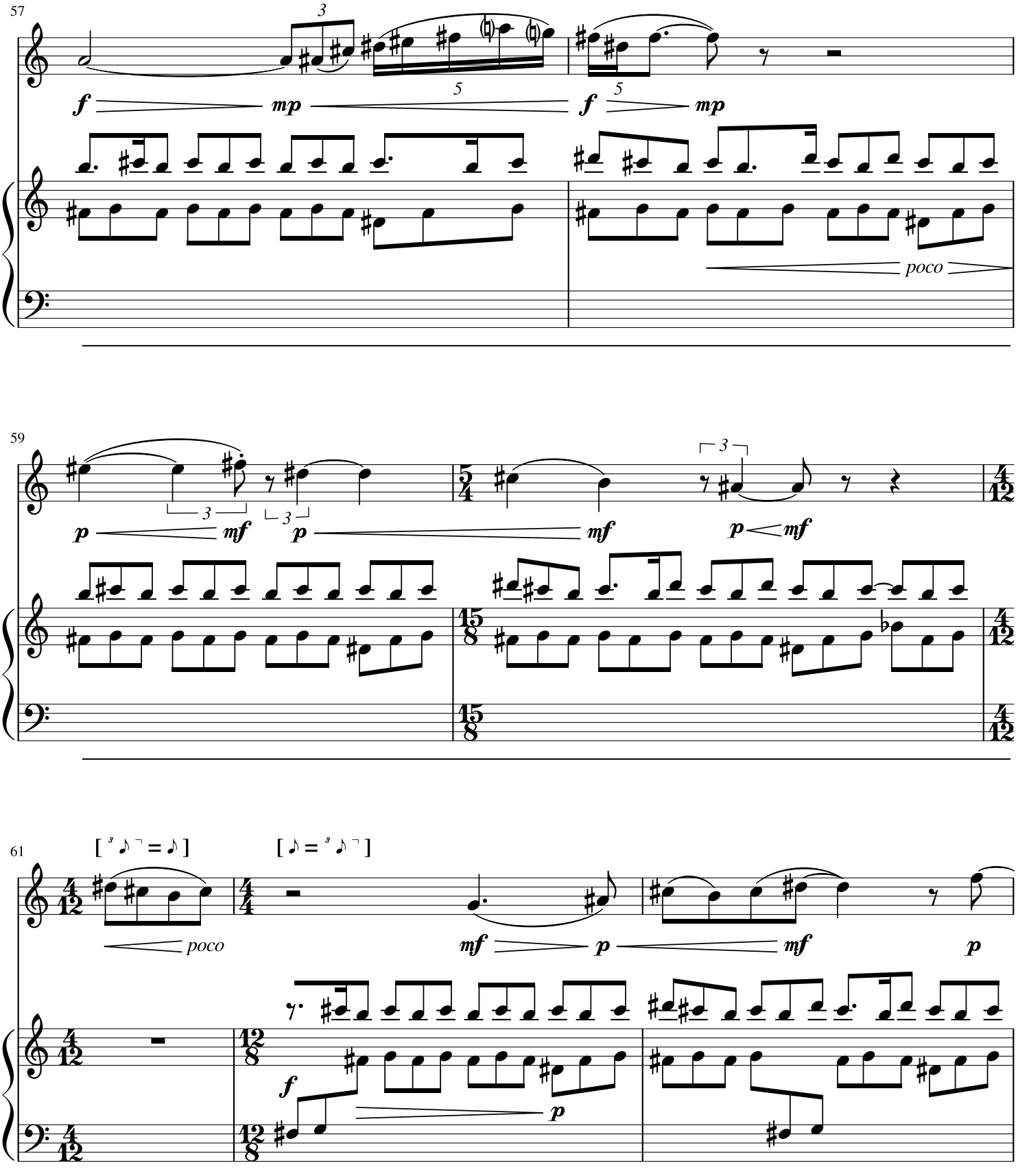



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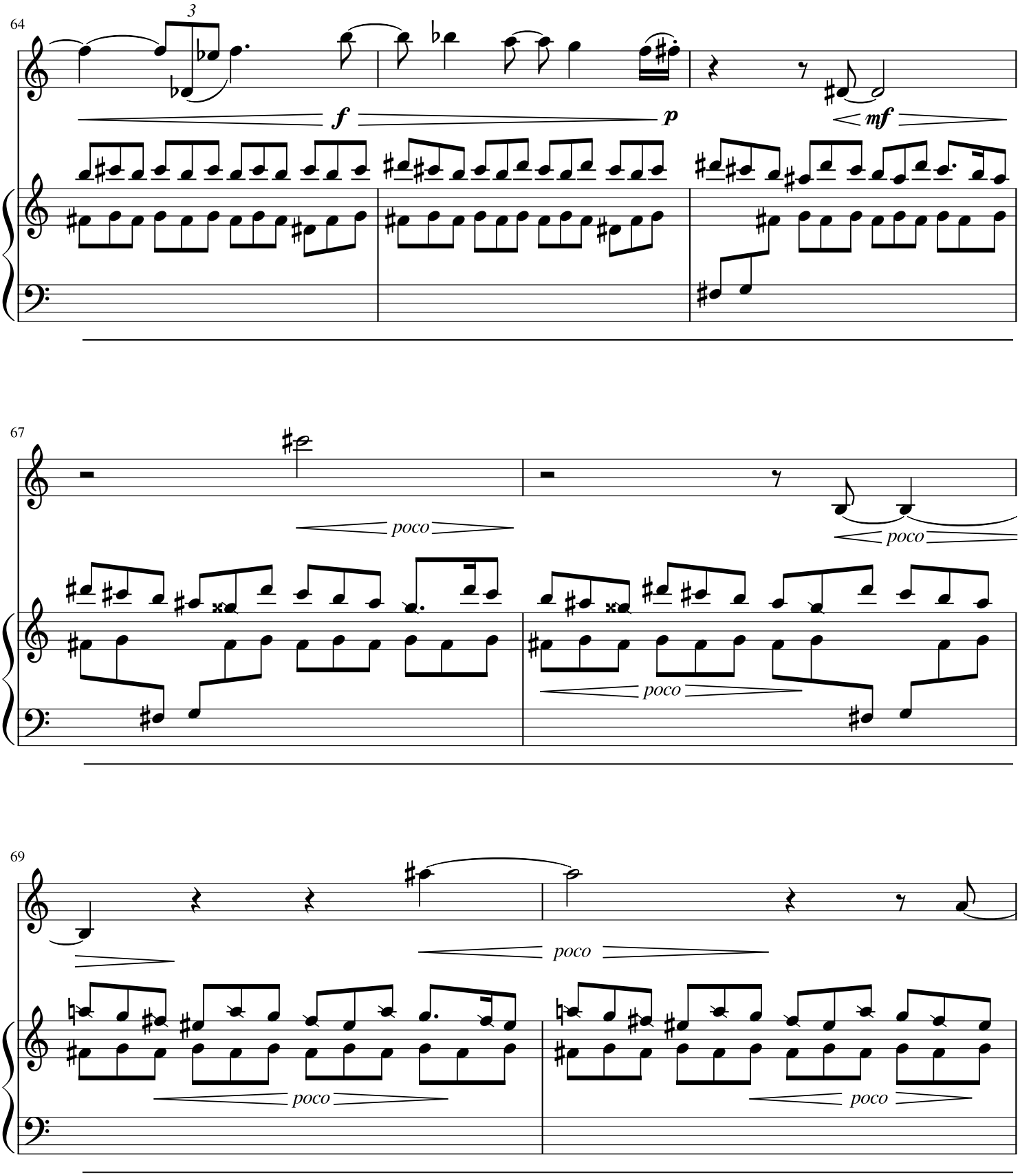


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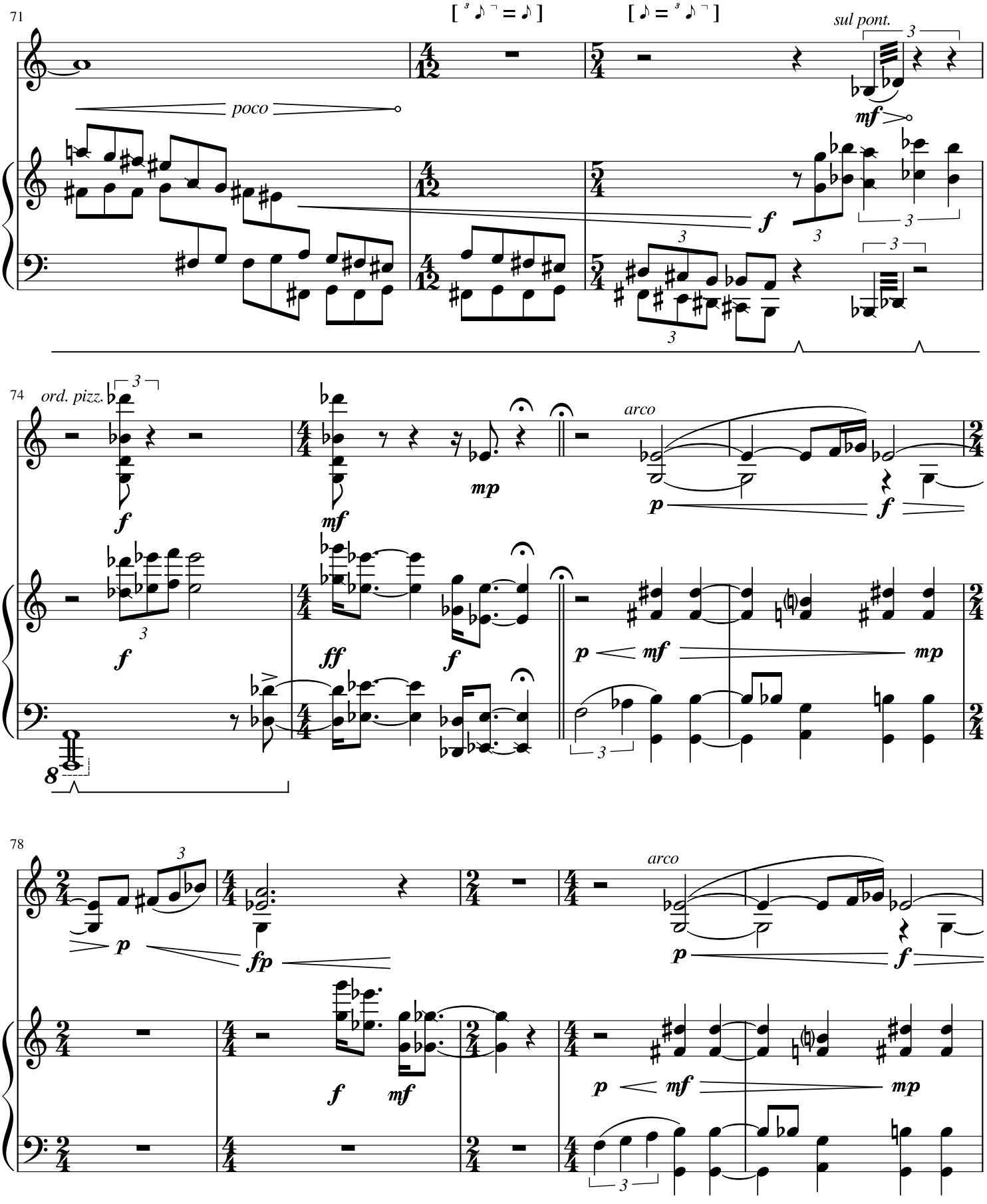



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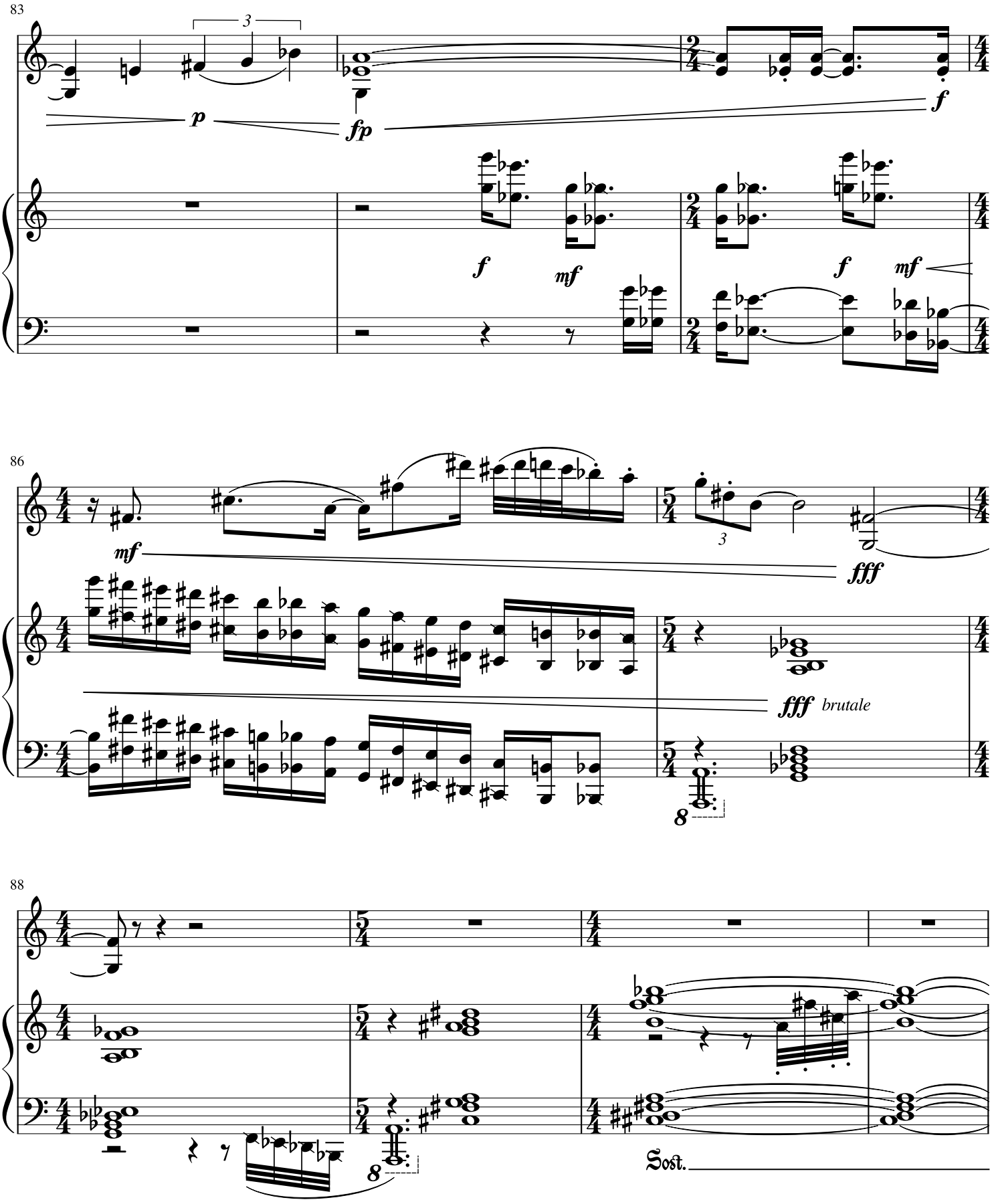


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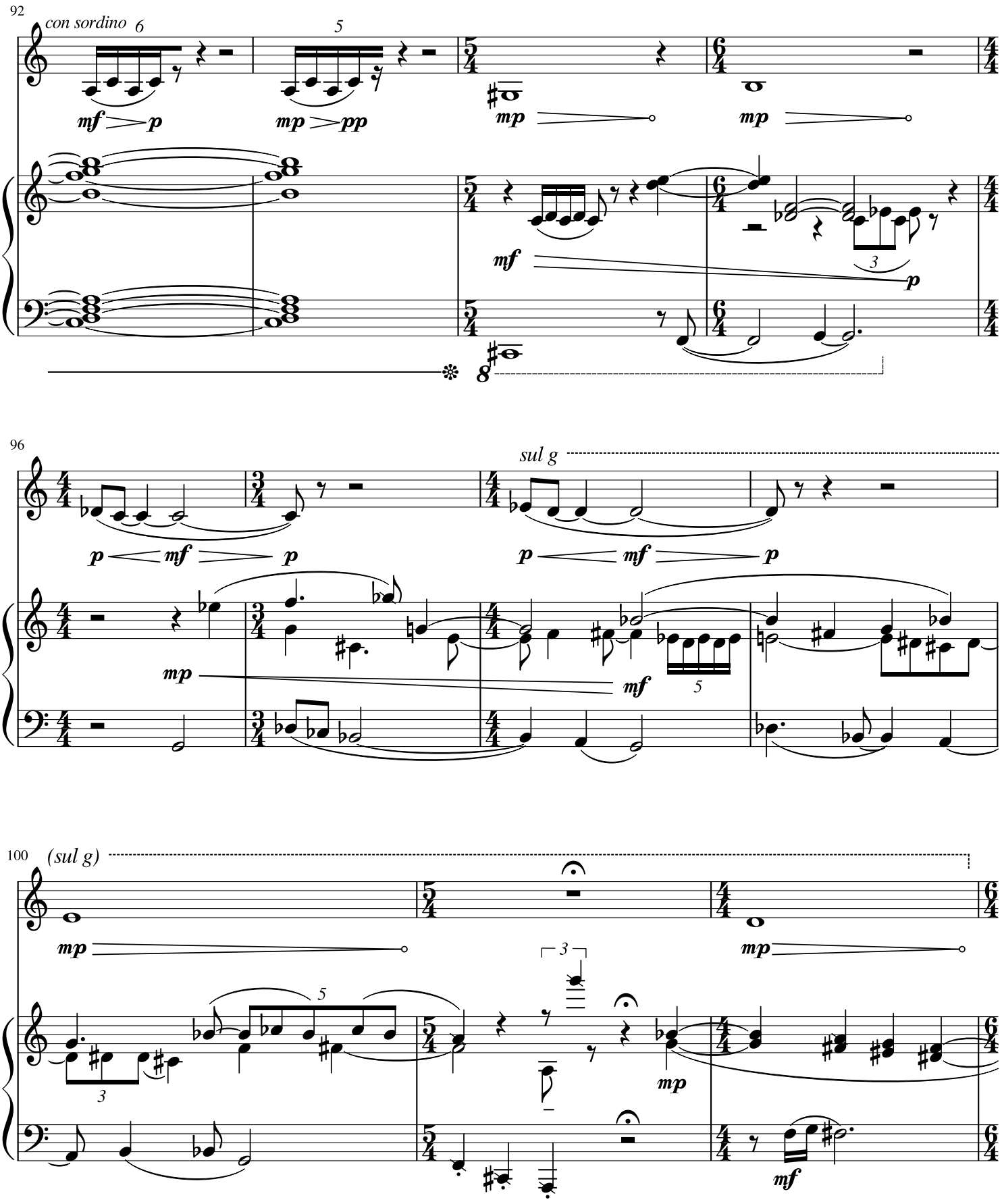



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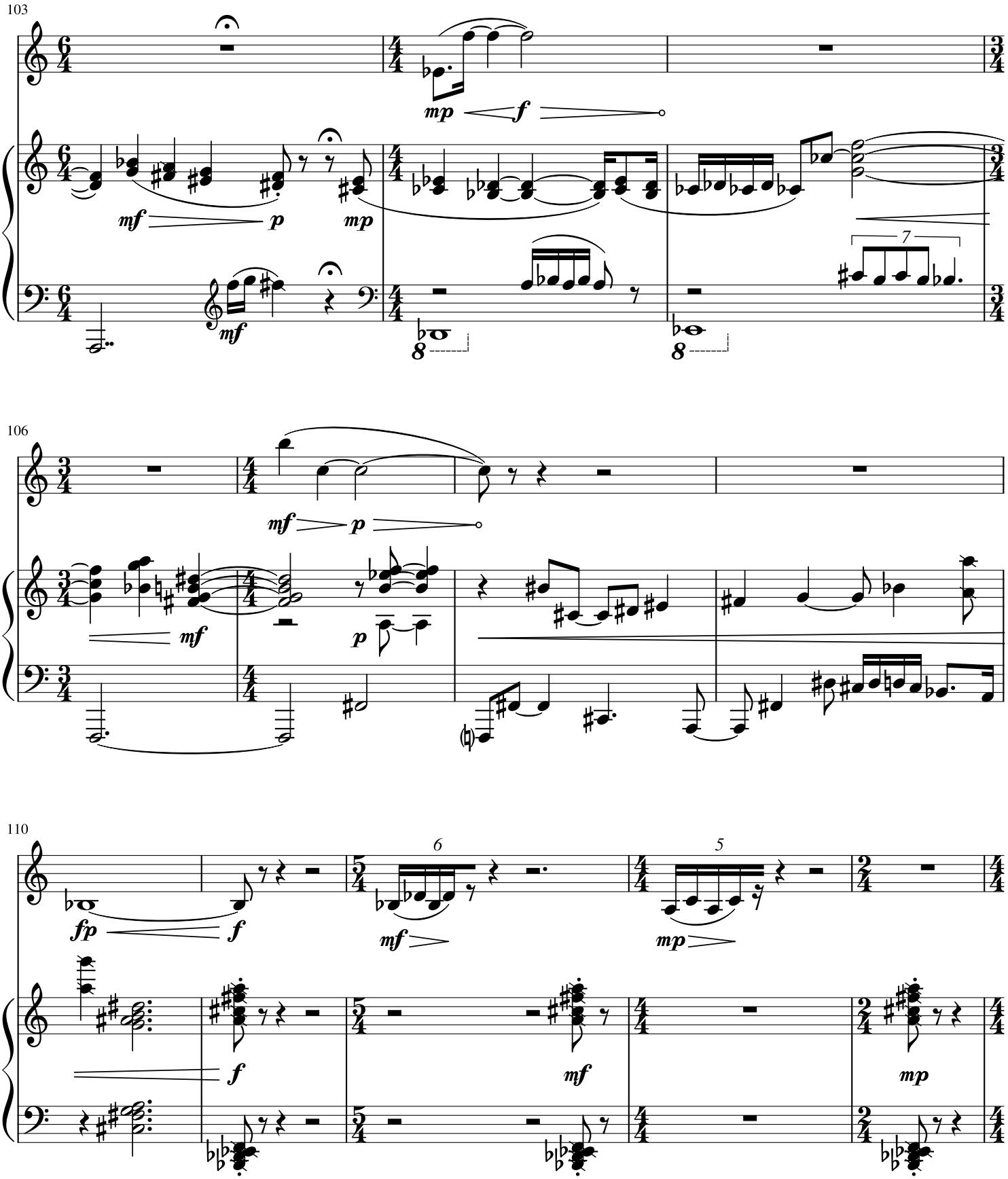


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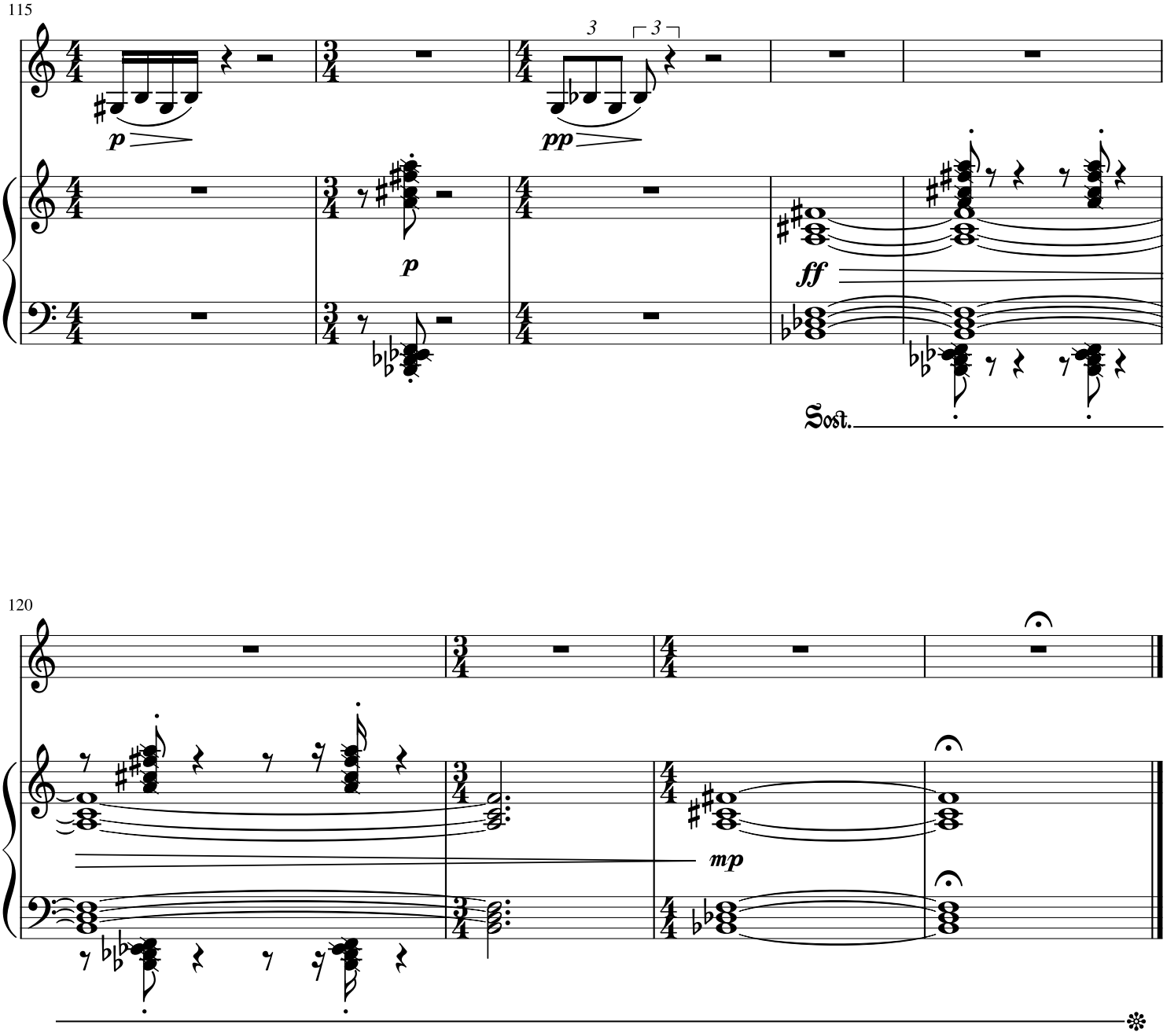



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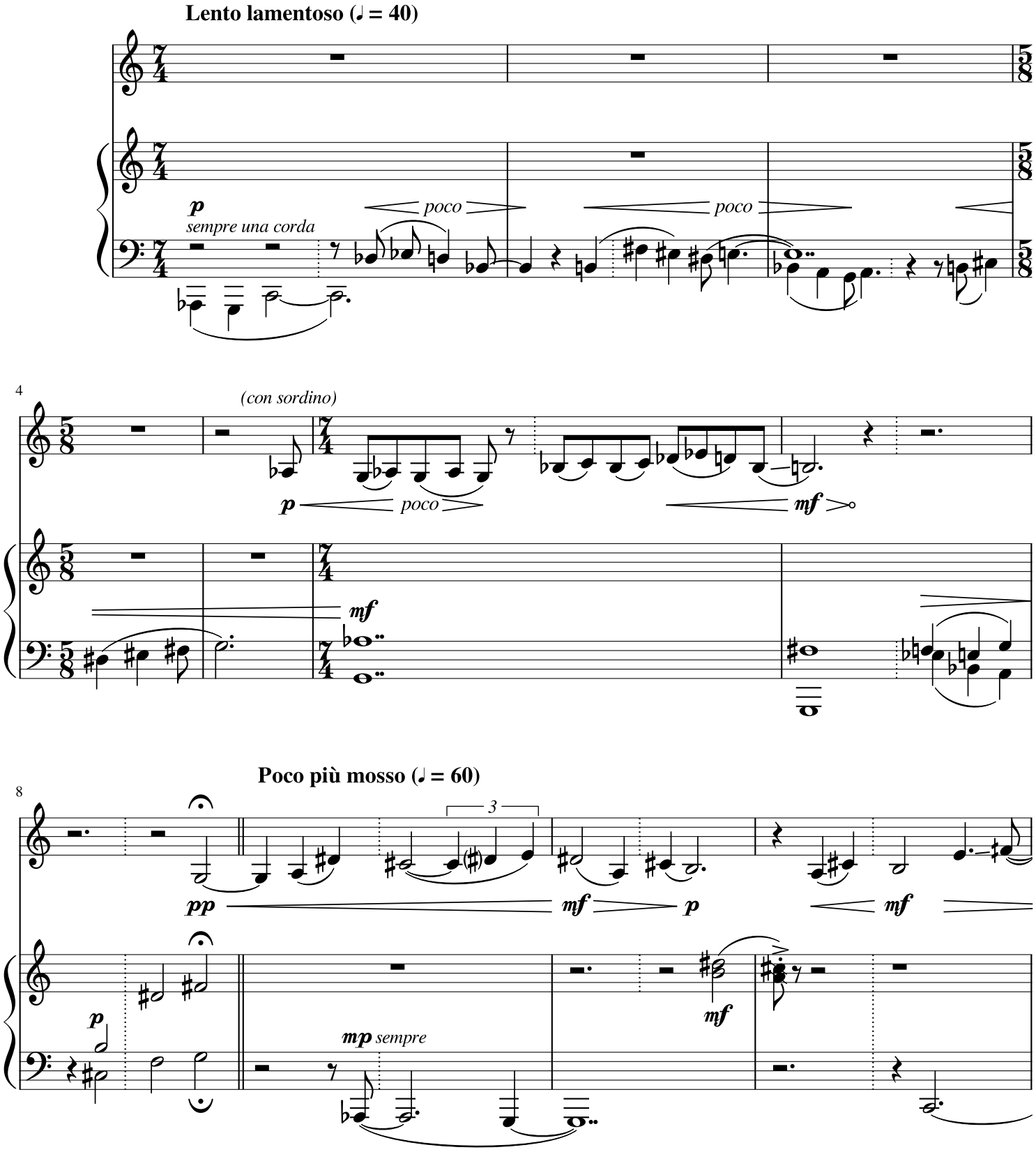


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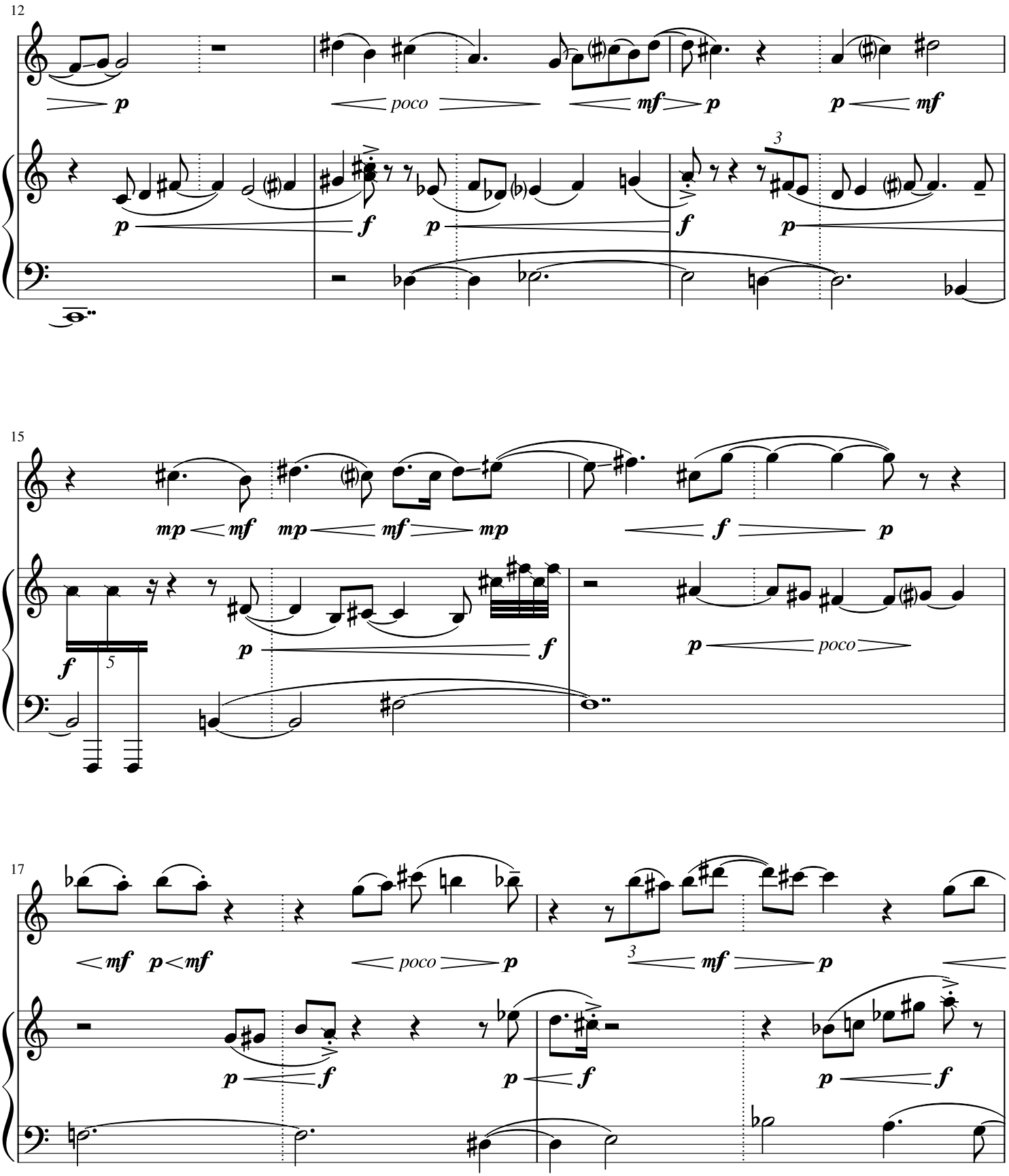



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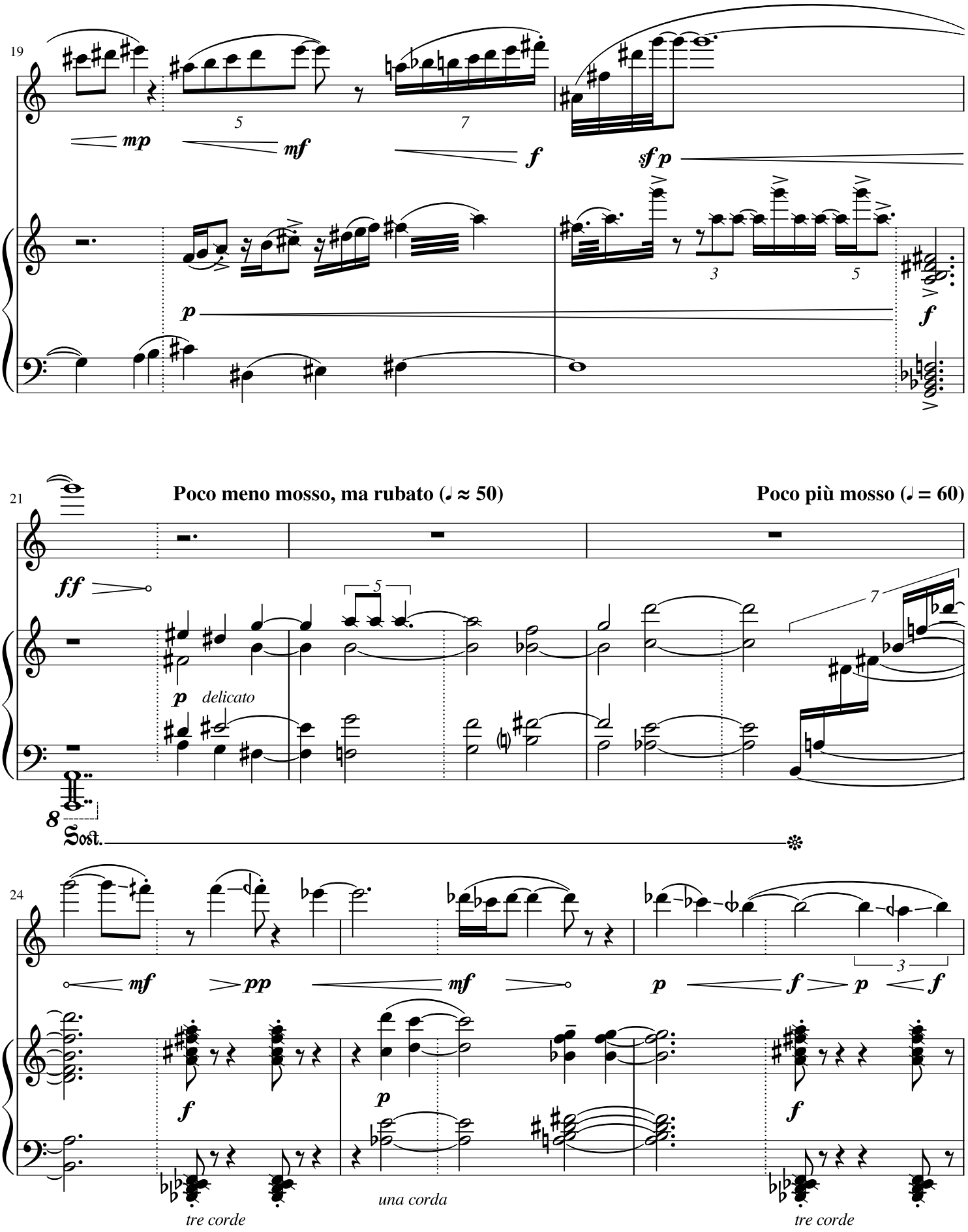


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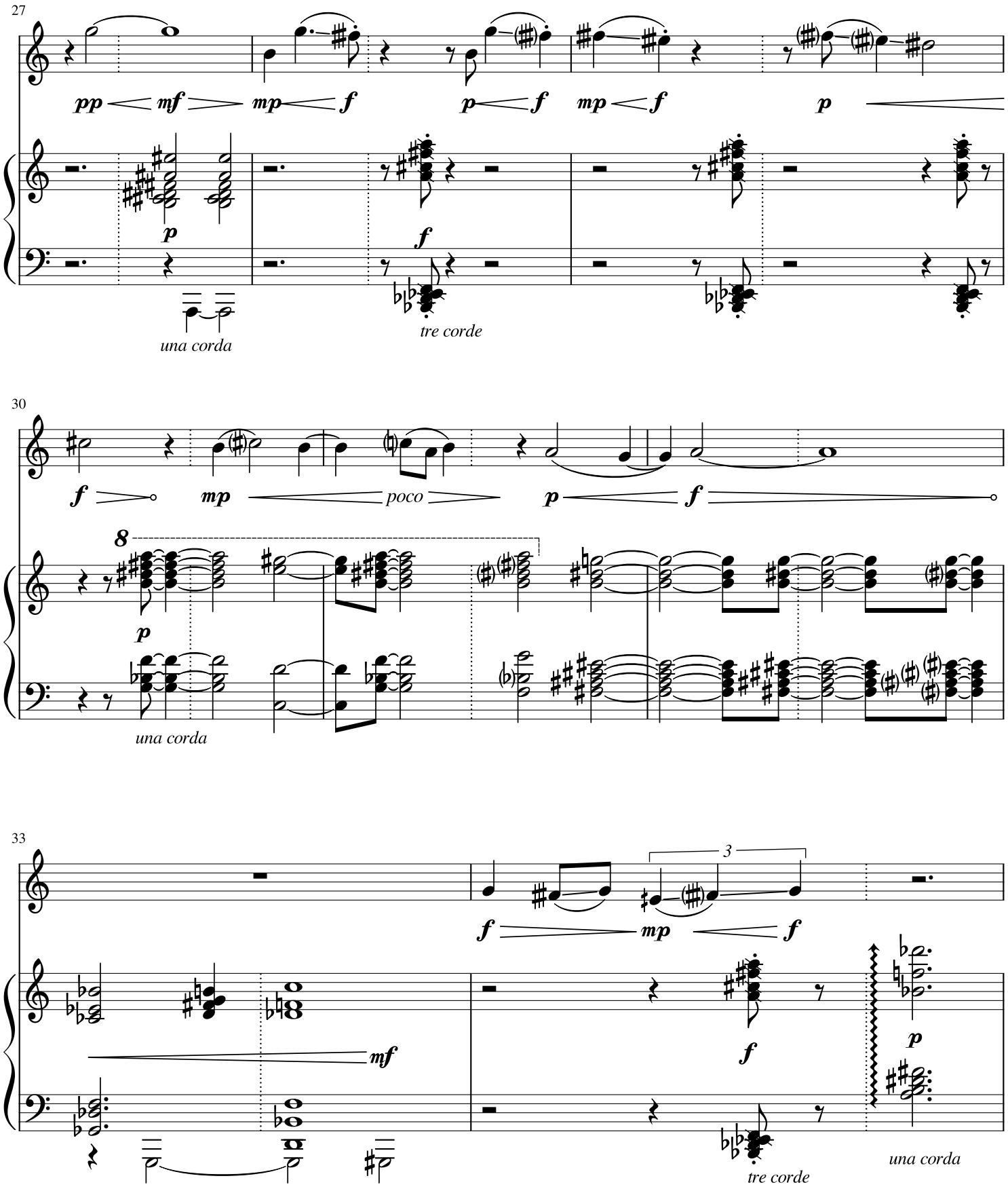



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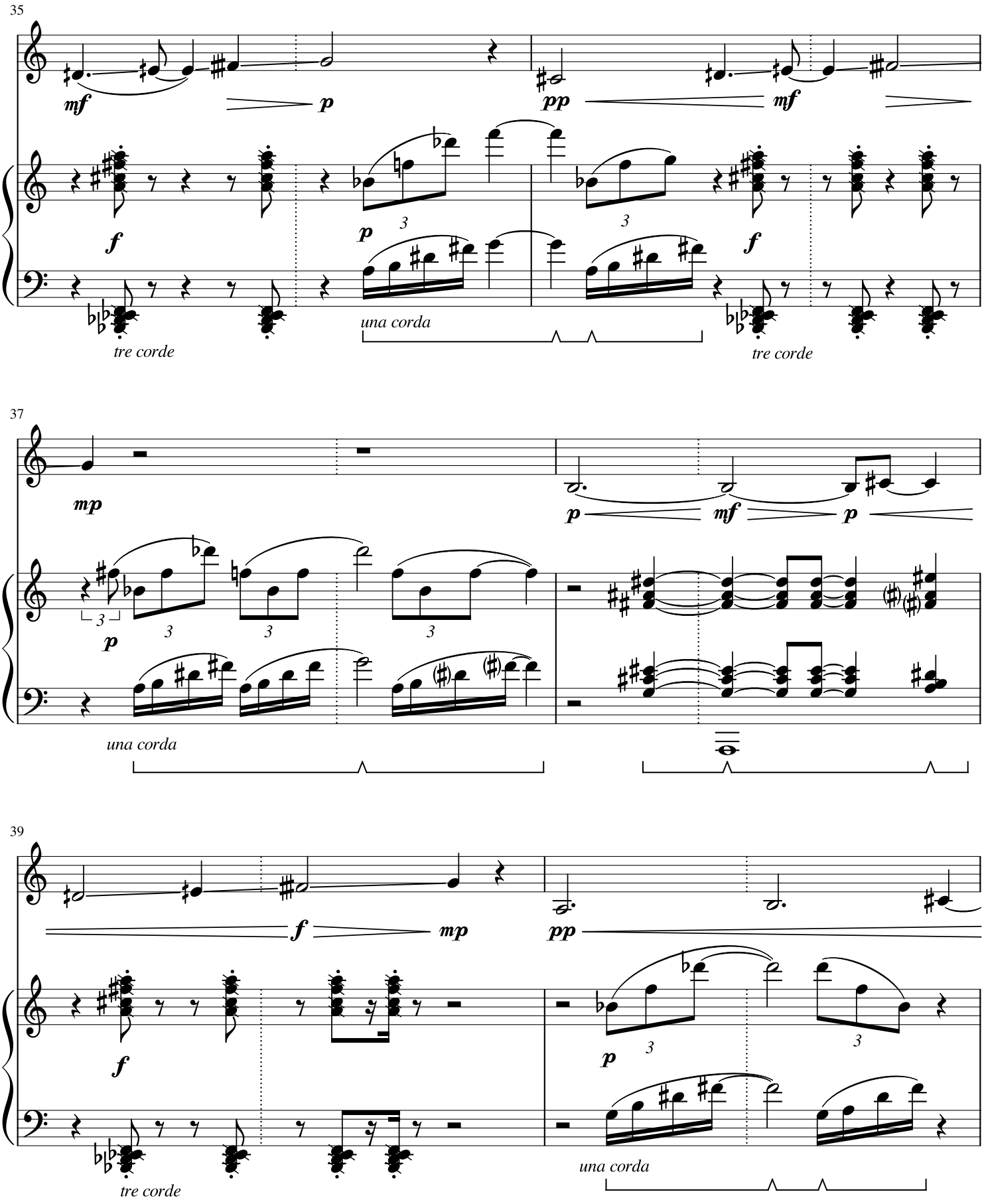


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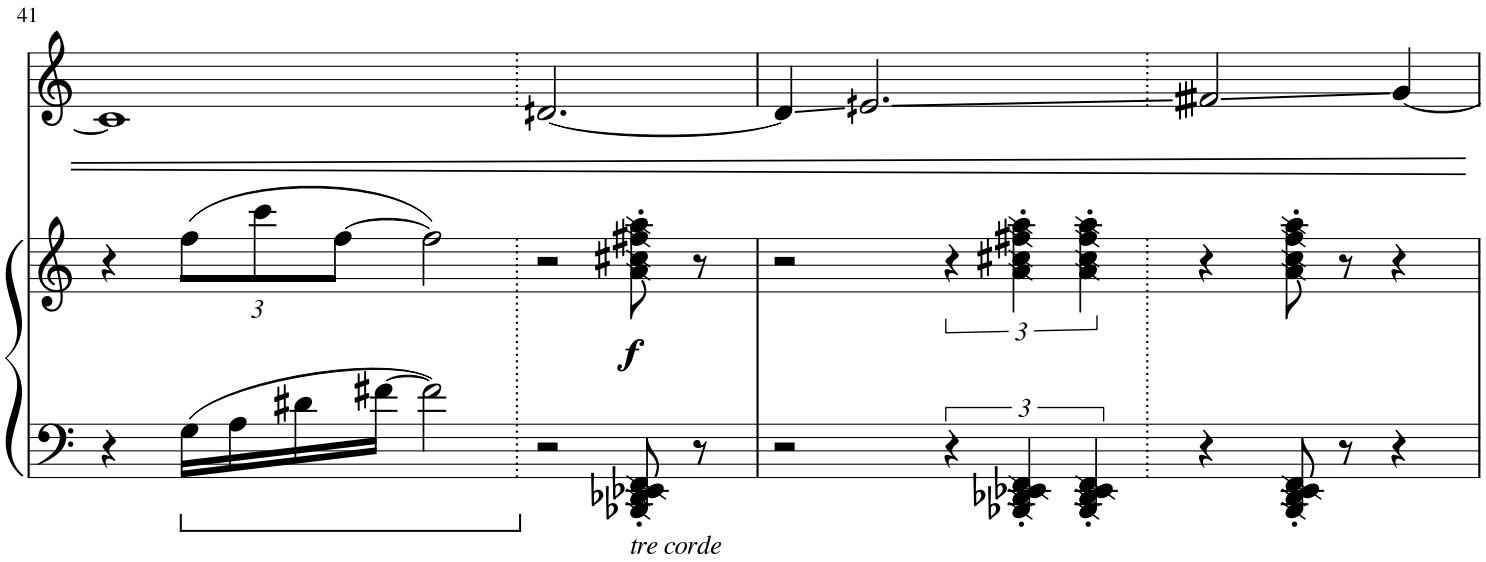


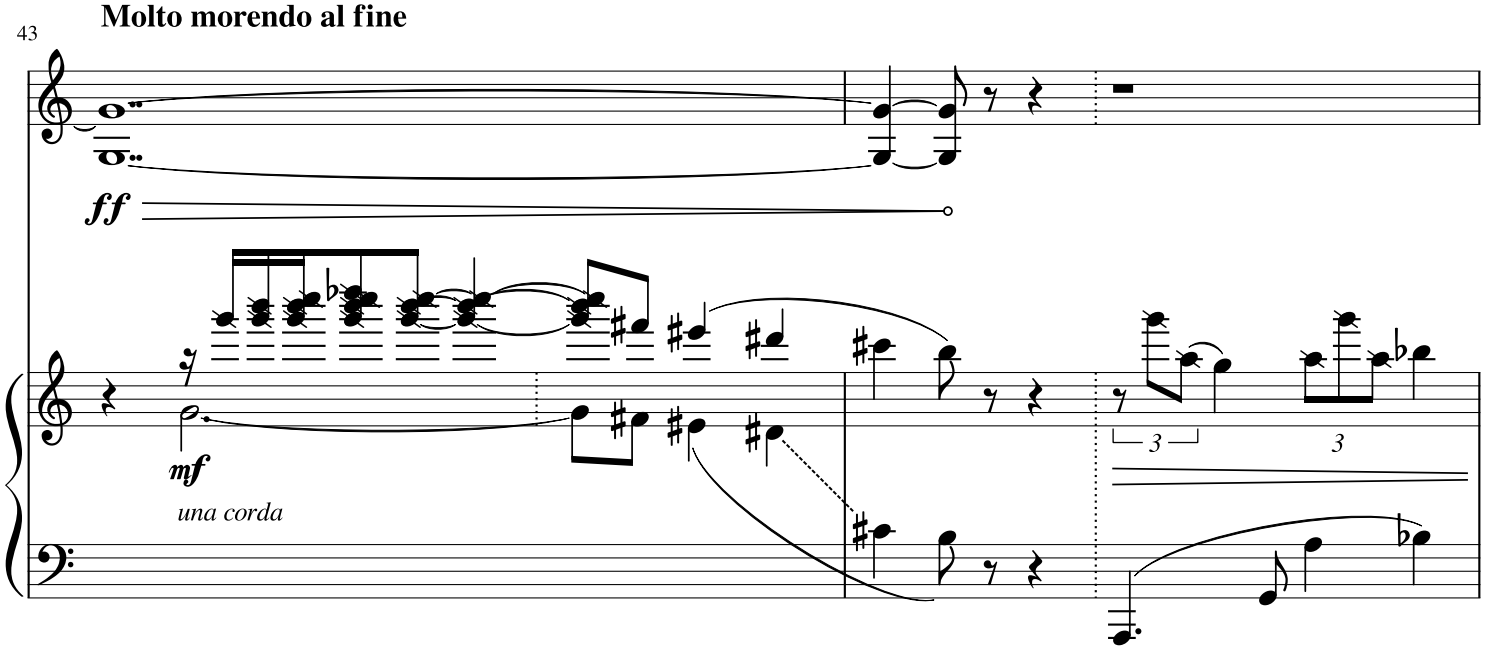


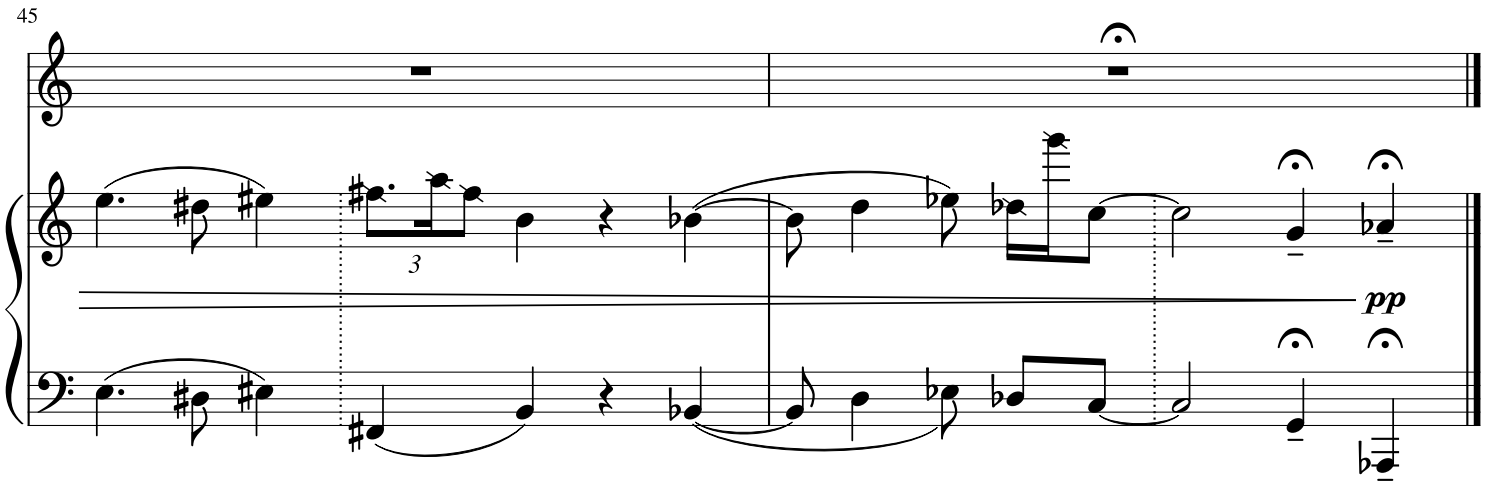



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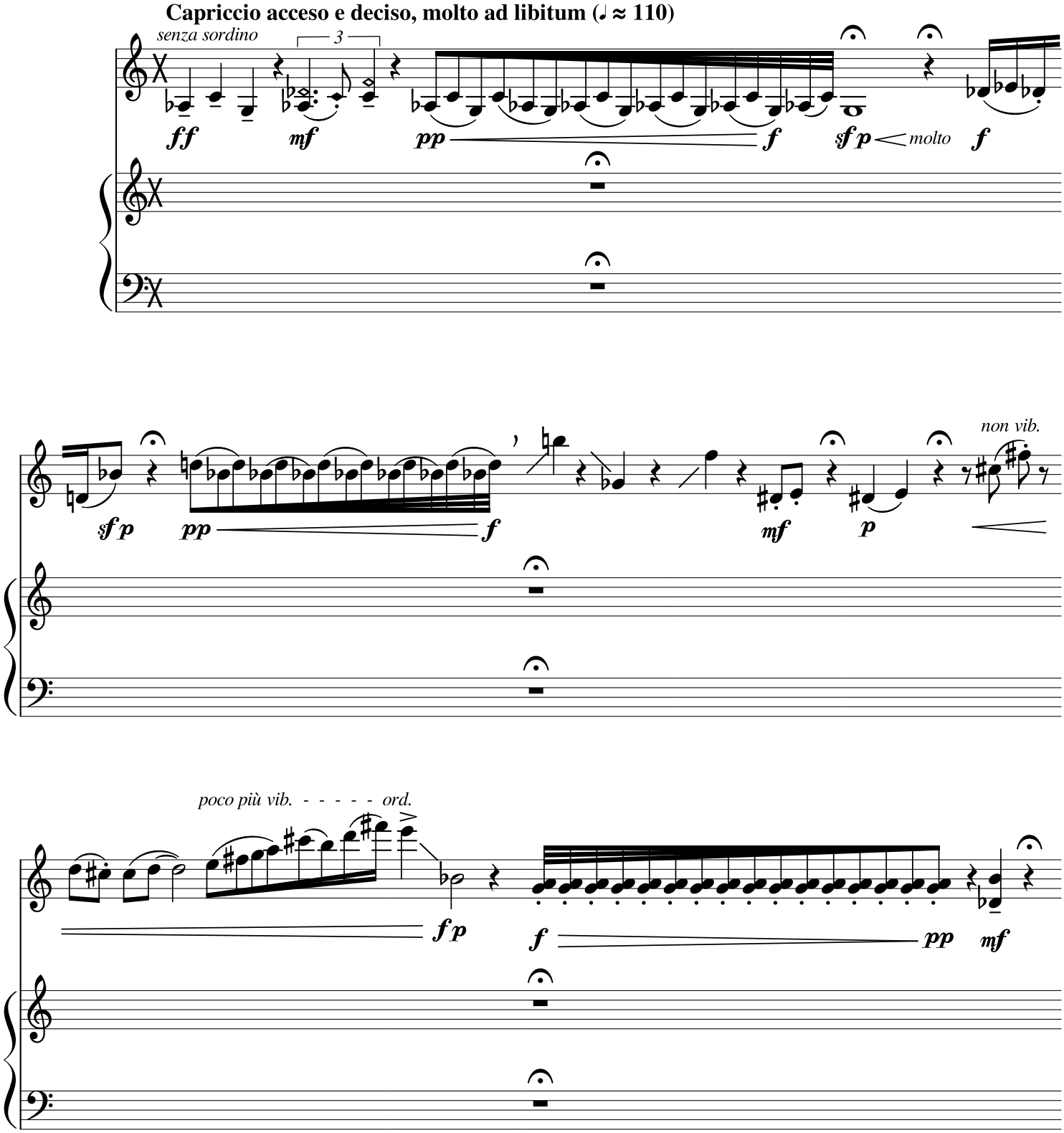


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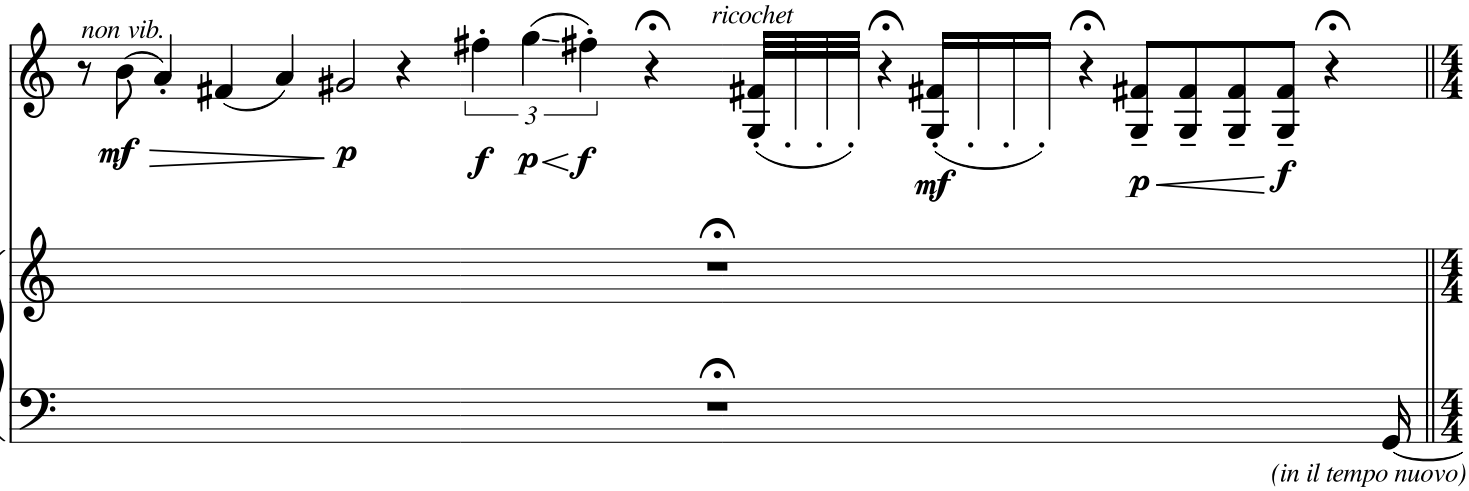


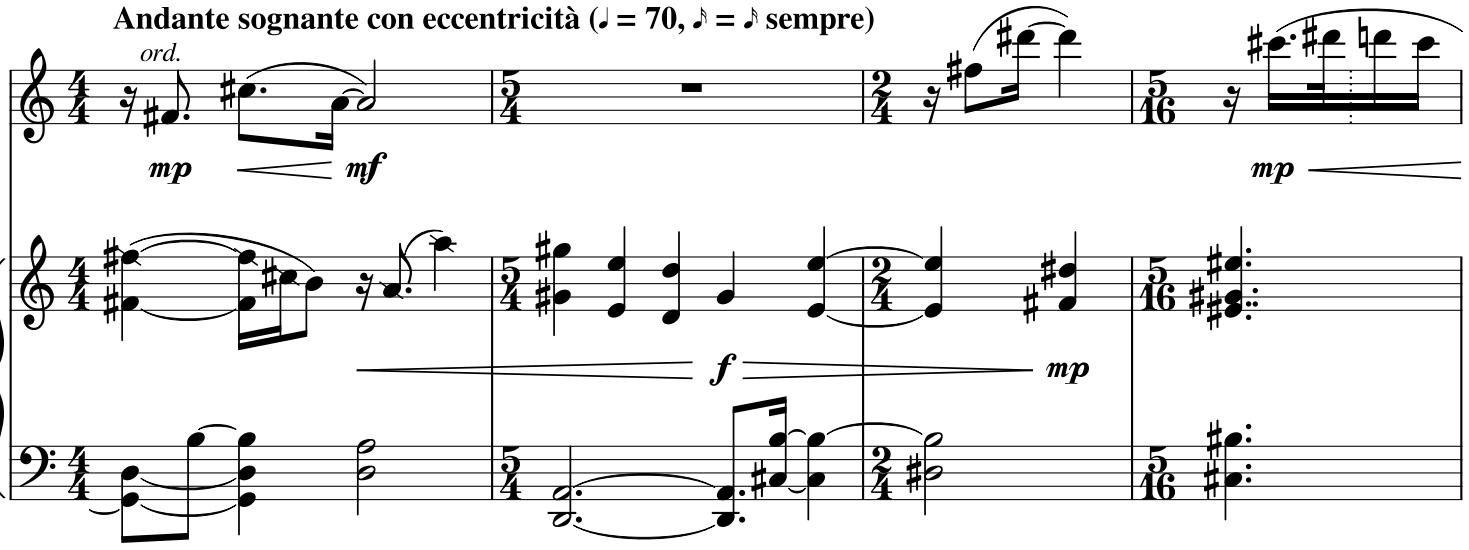


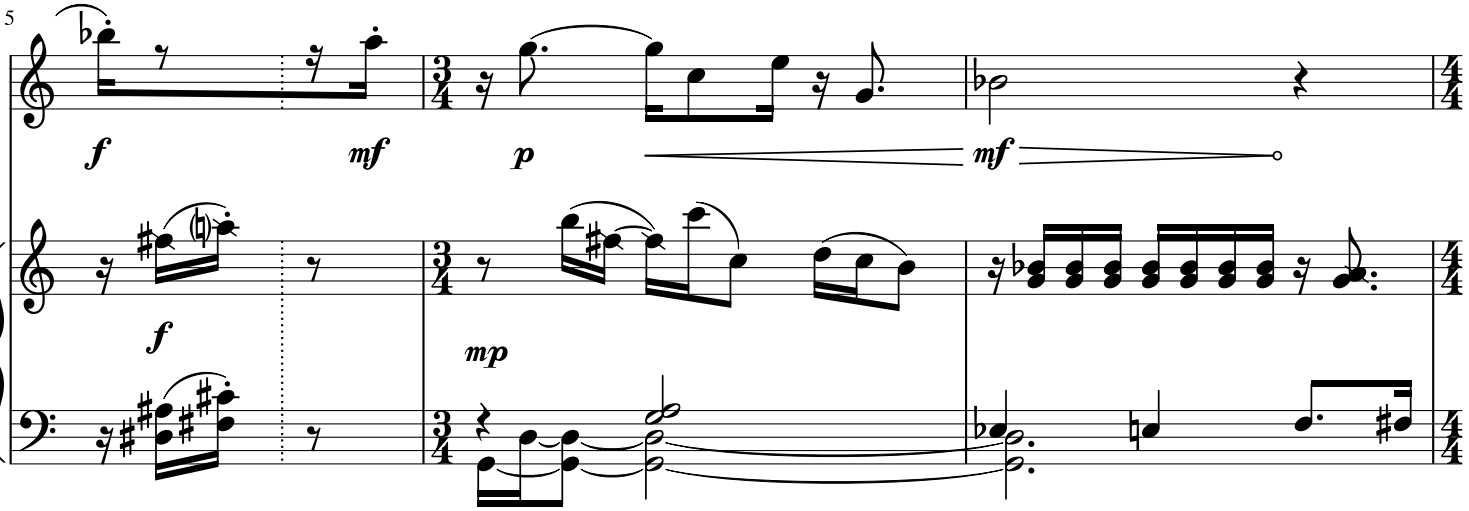



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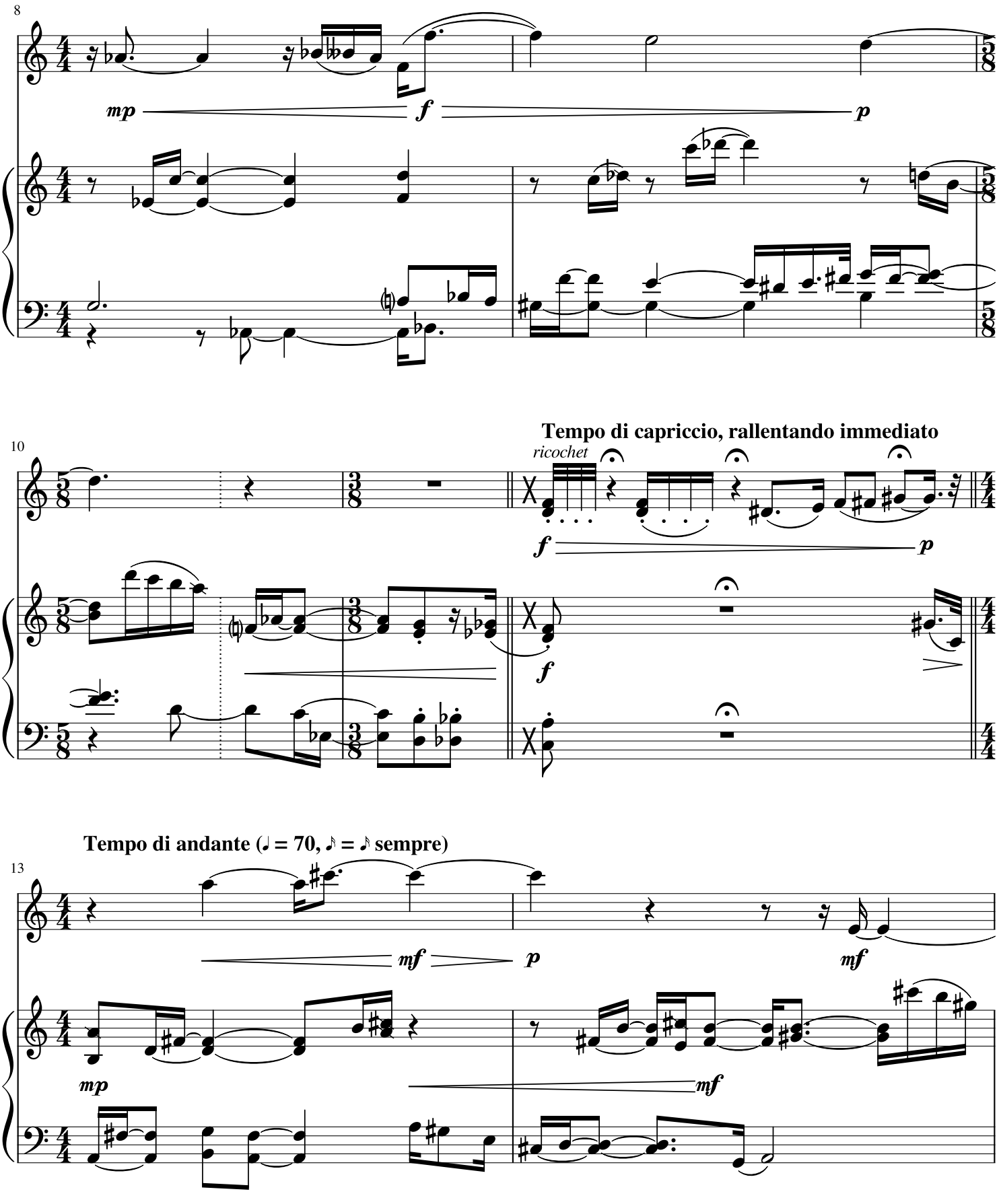


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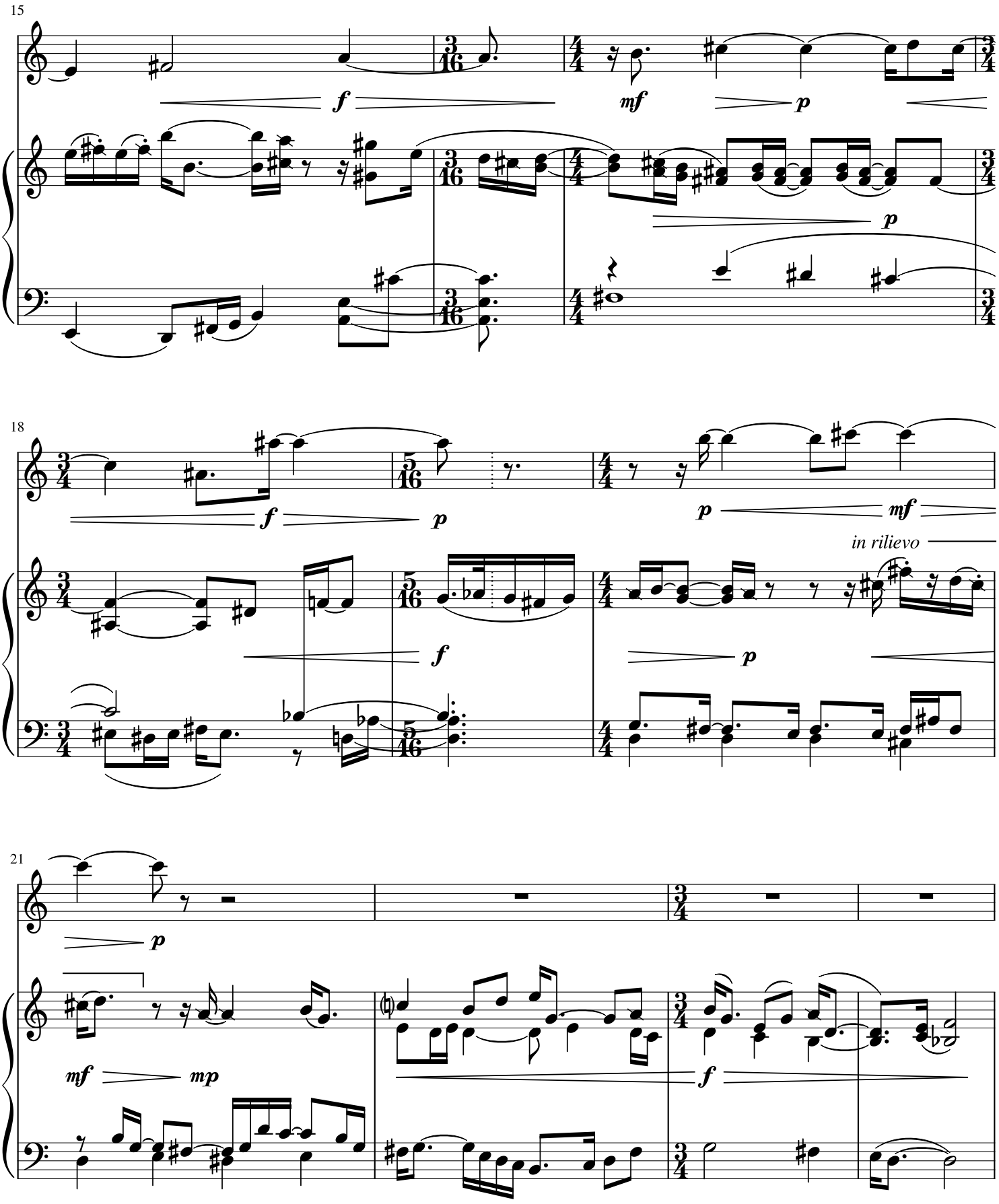



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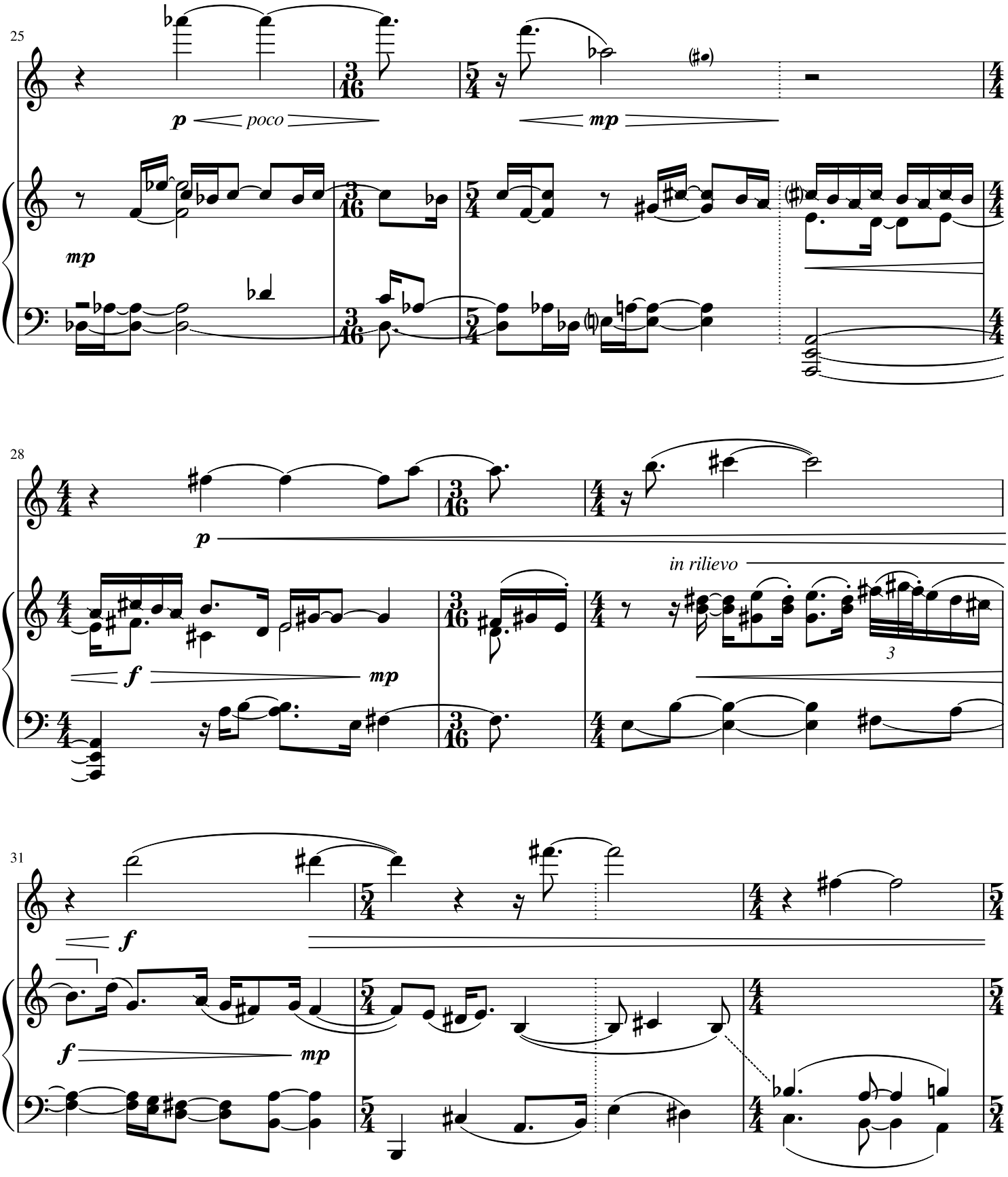


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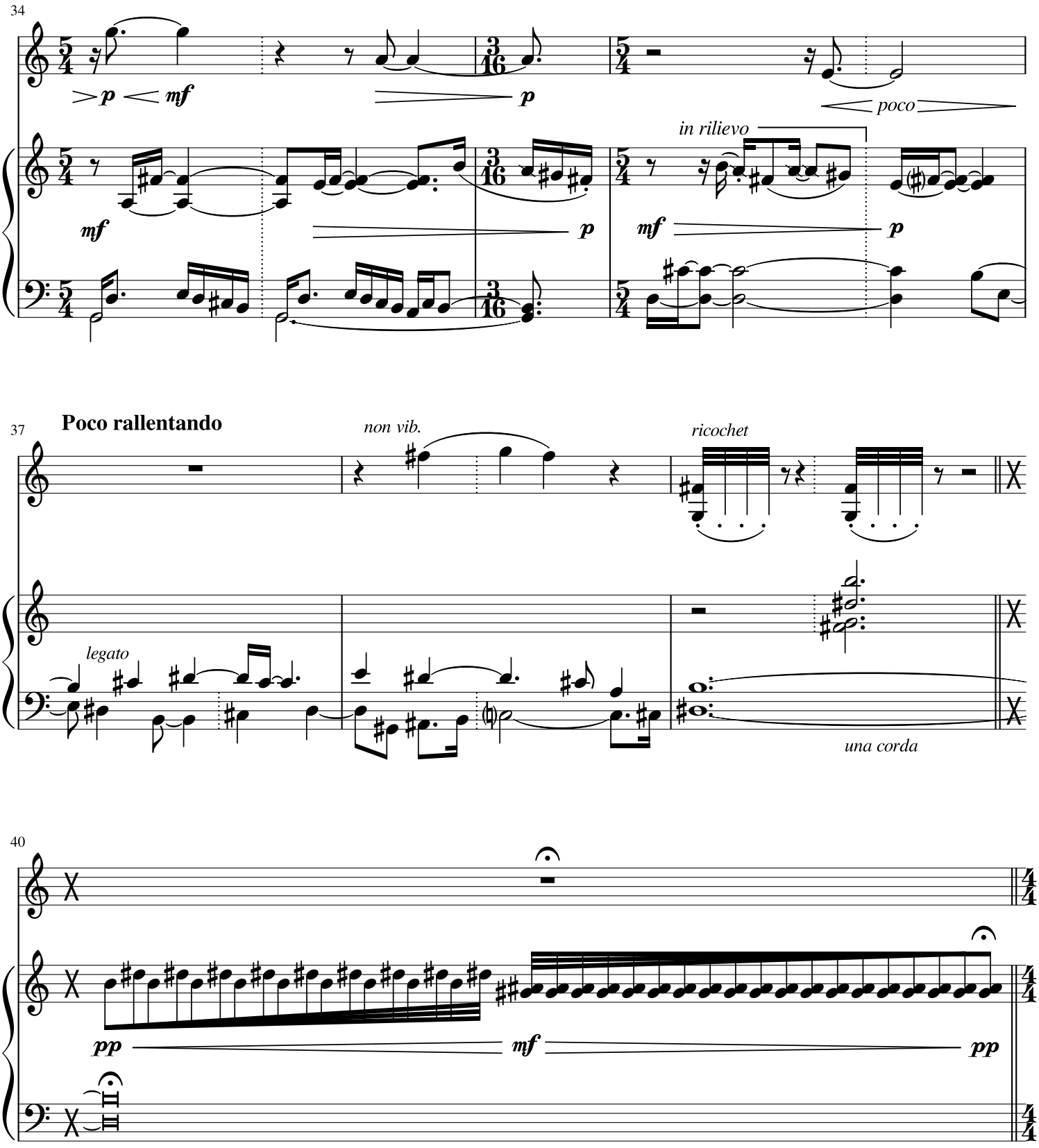



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41

**A tempo**

*p*

*tre corde*

44

*mf*

48

*p*

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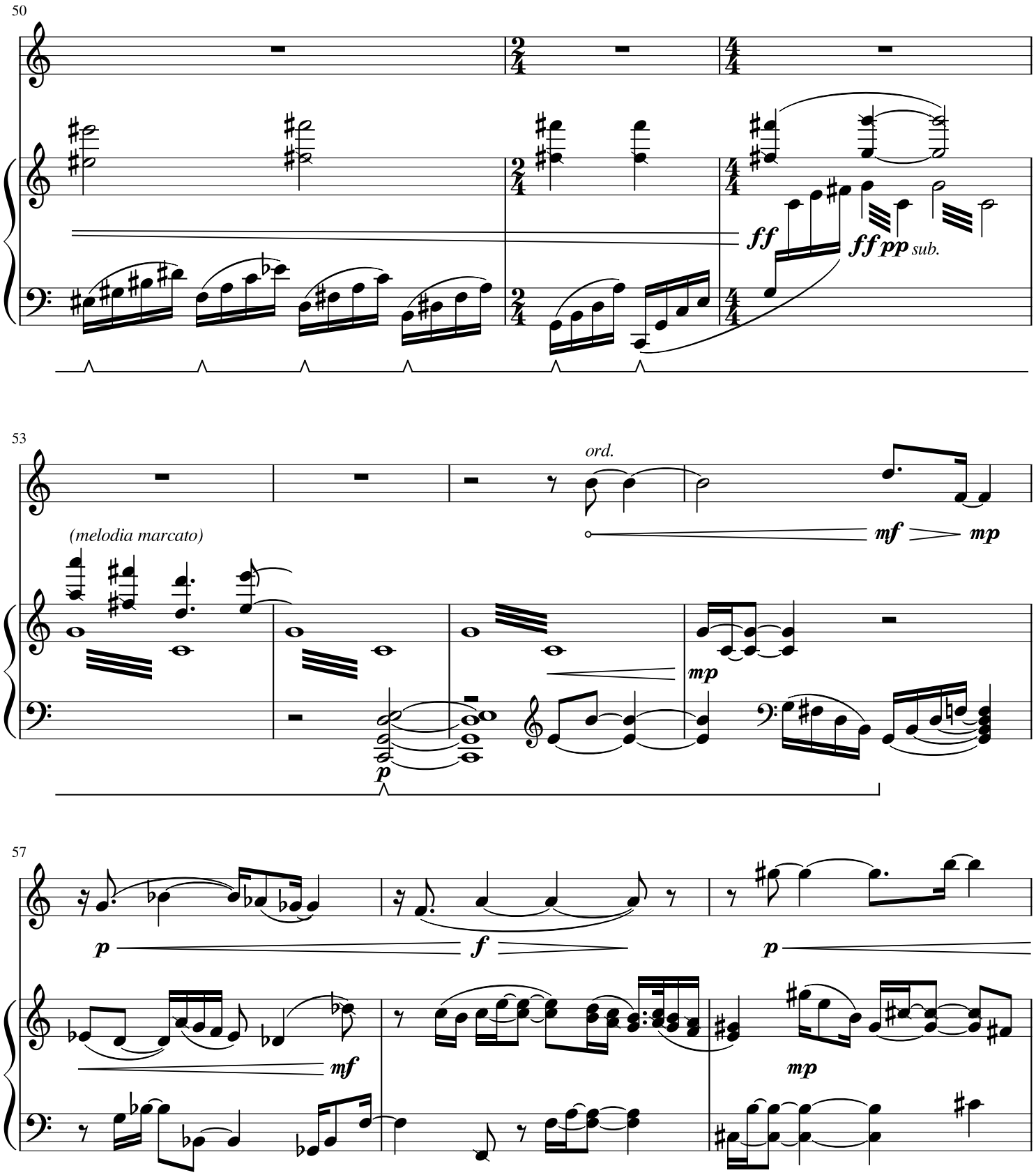



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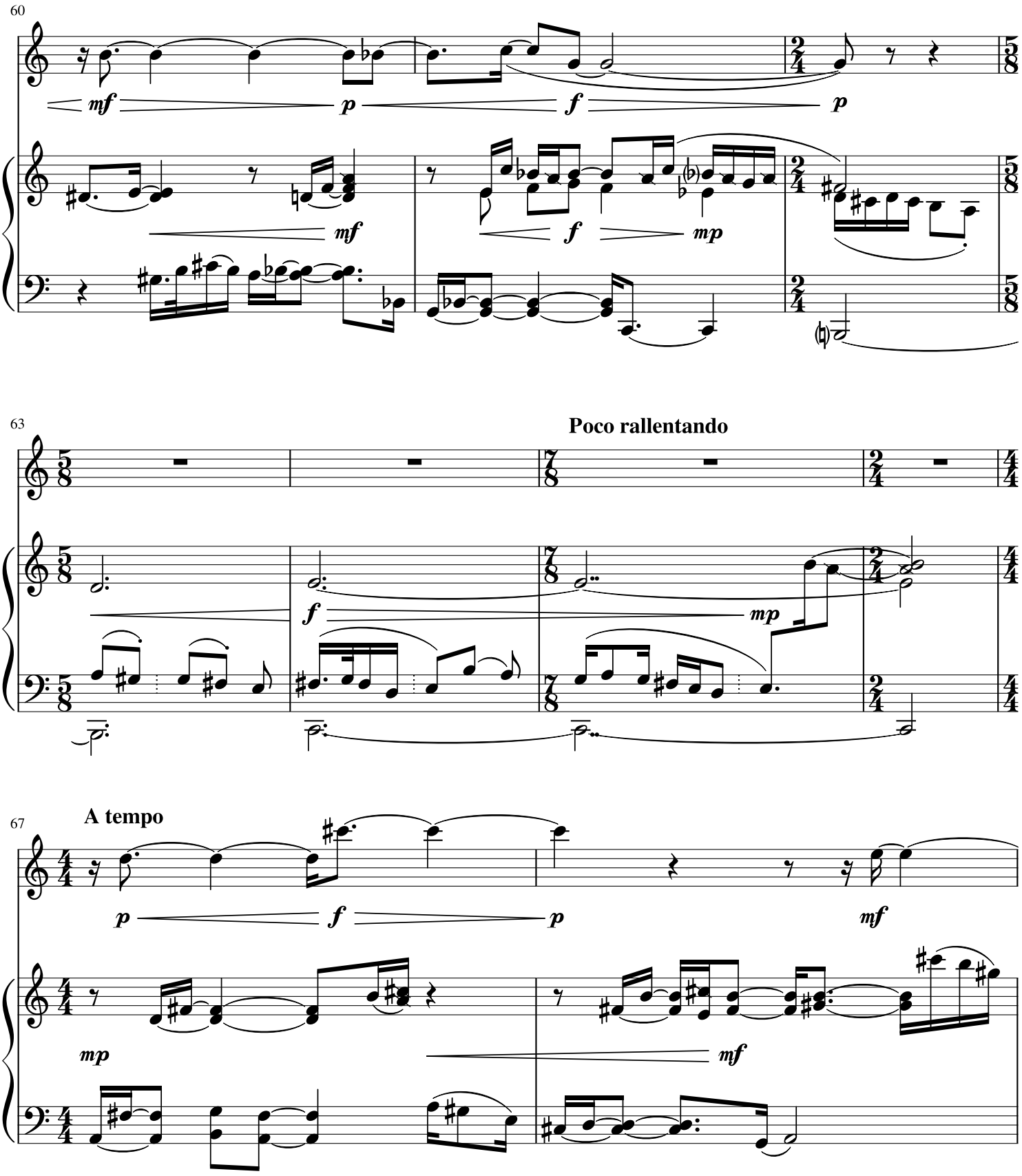


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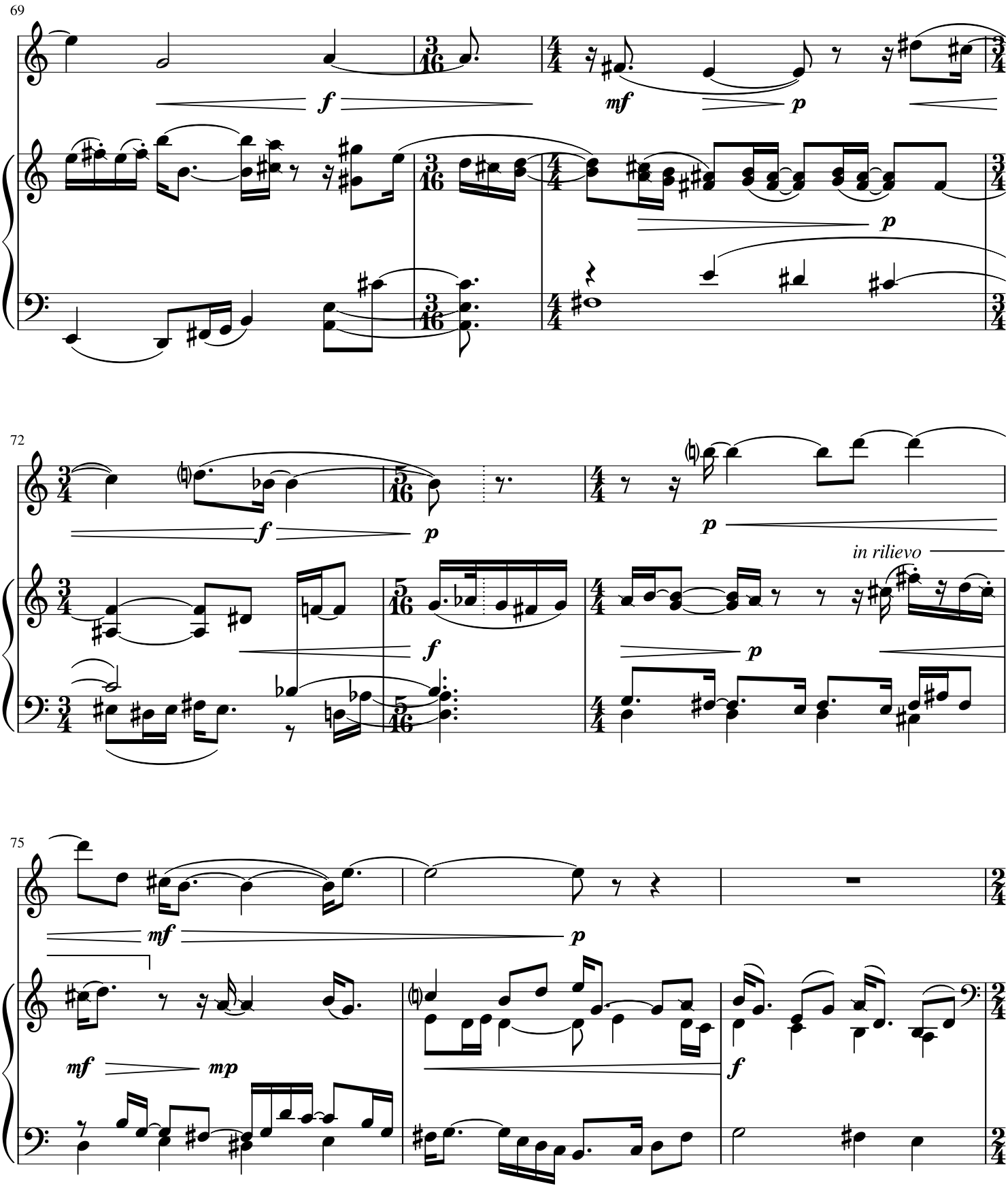



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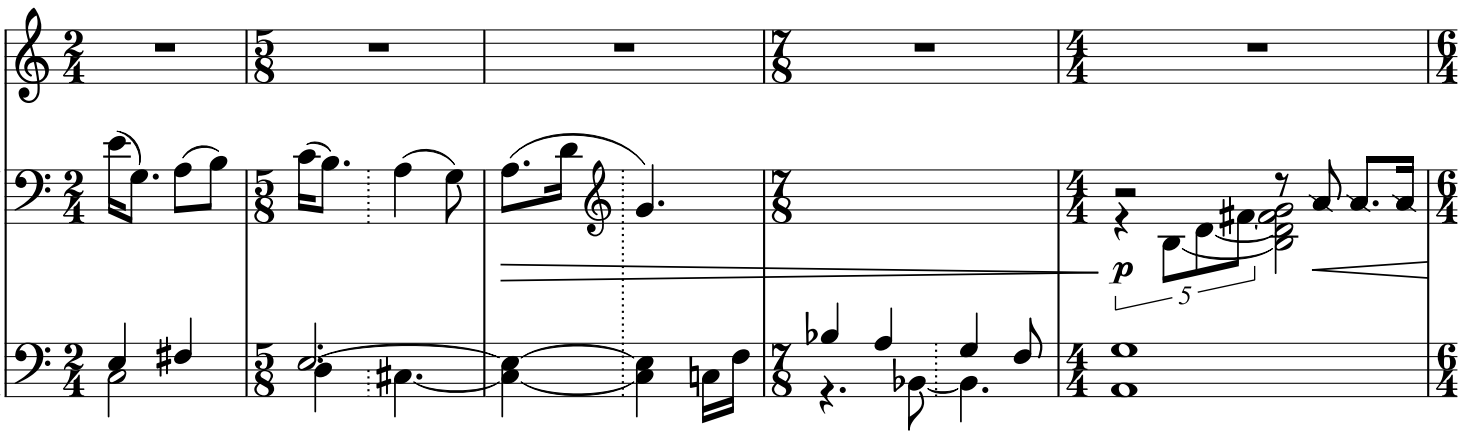
78

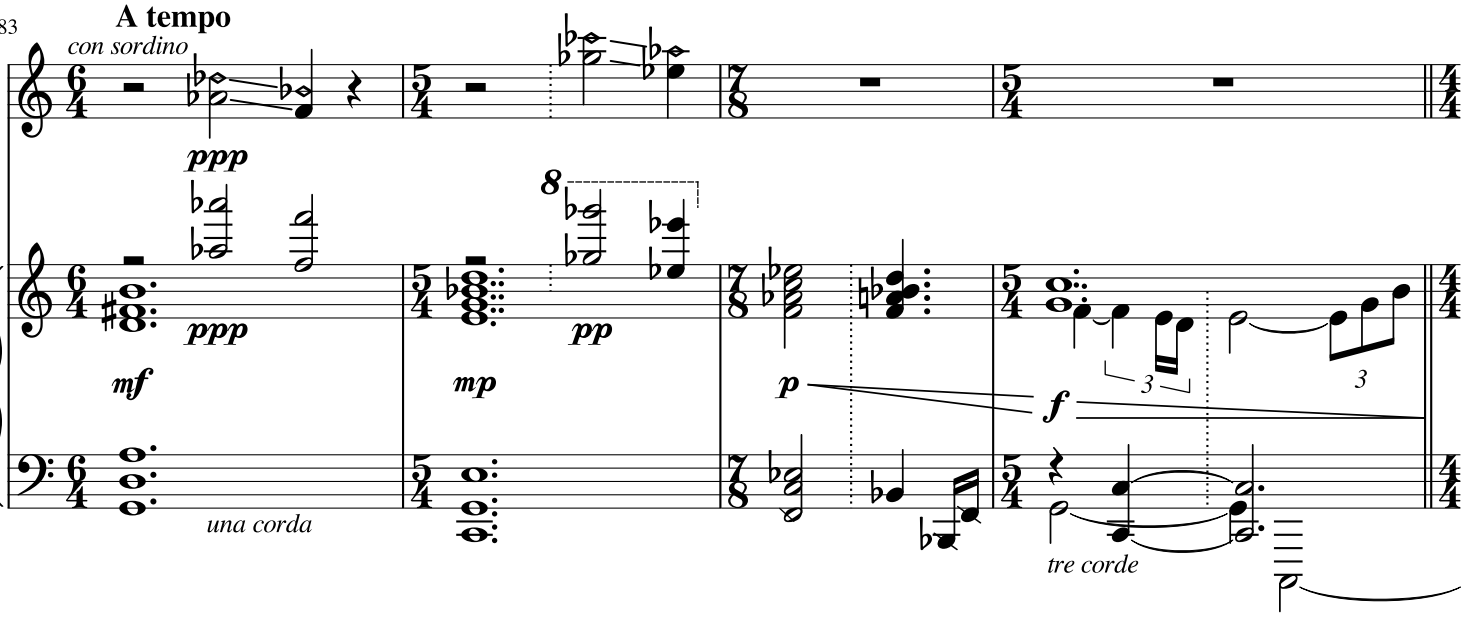
**Poco rallentando**




83

**A tempo**

*con sordino*

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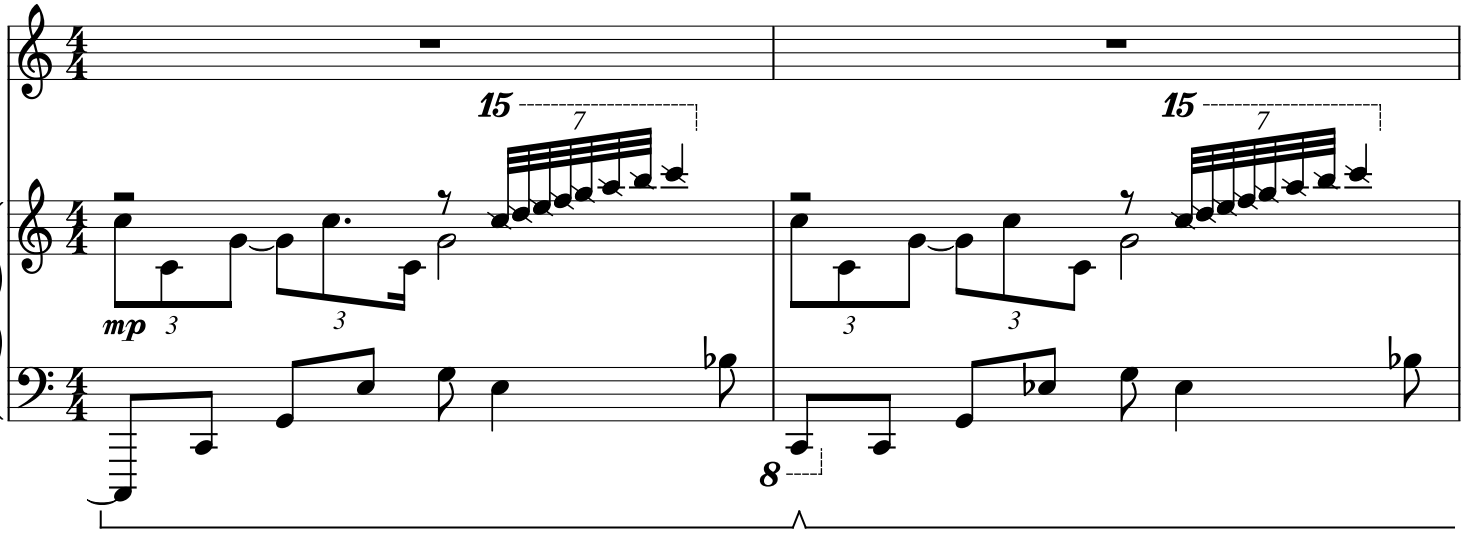


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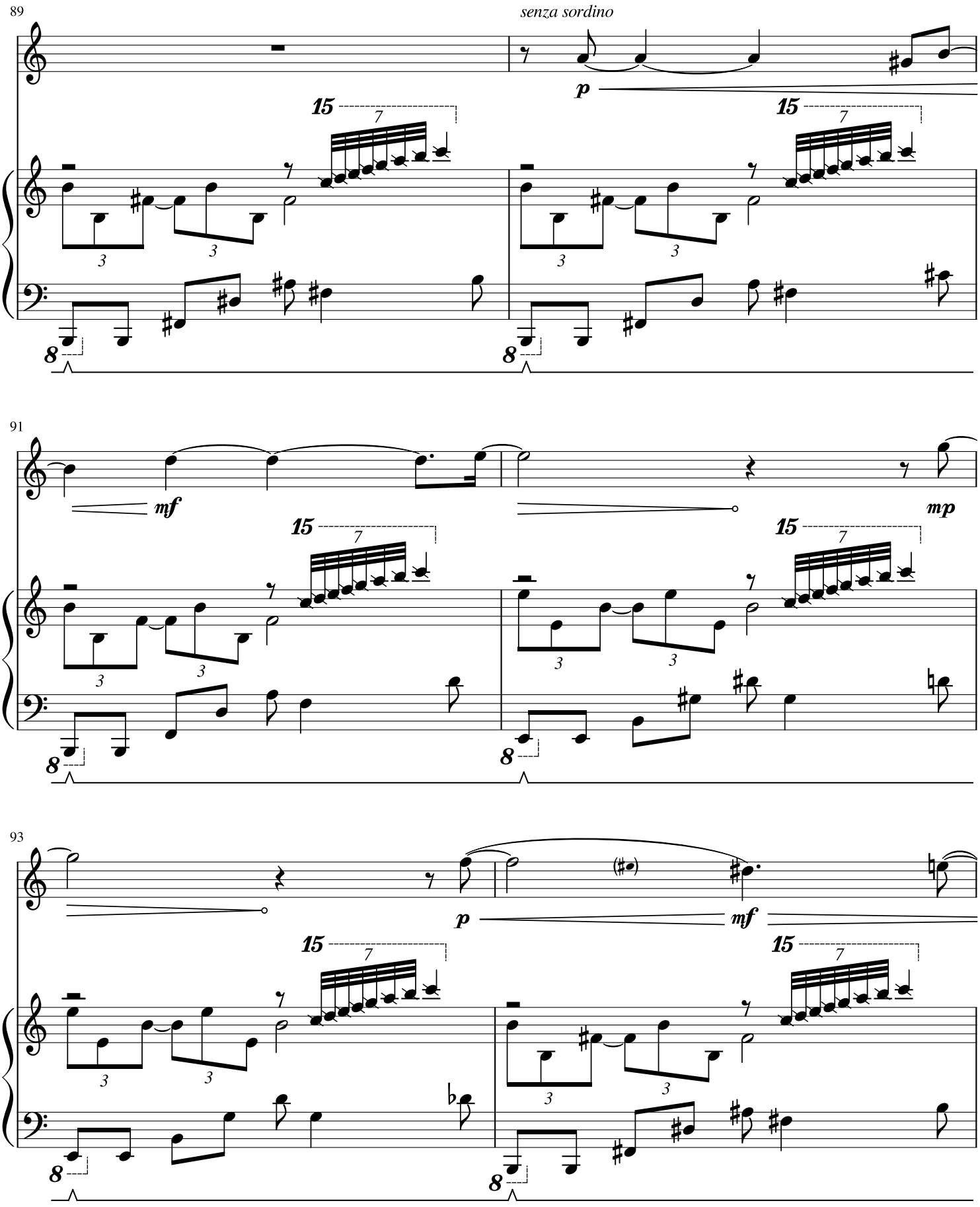



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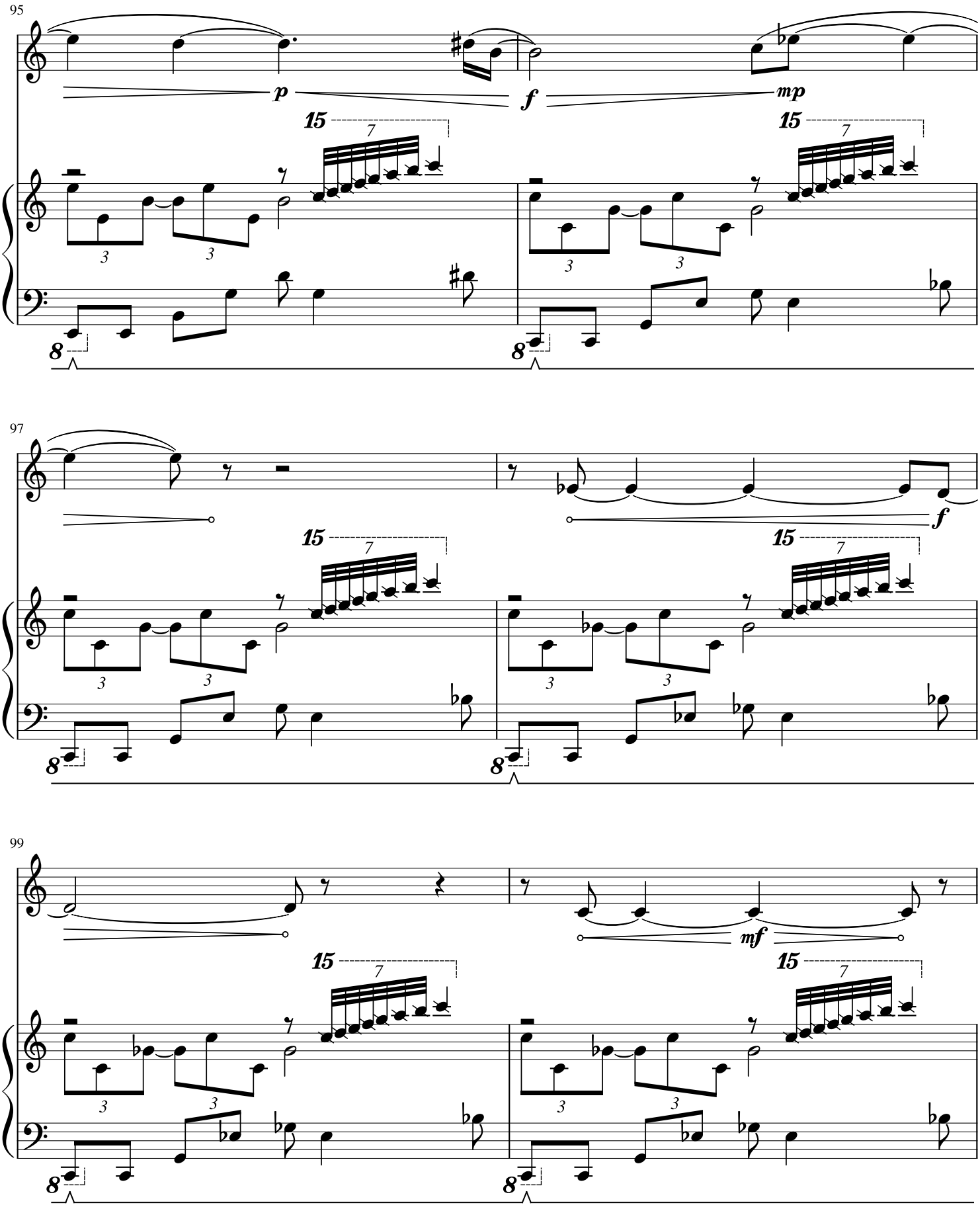


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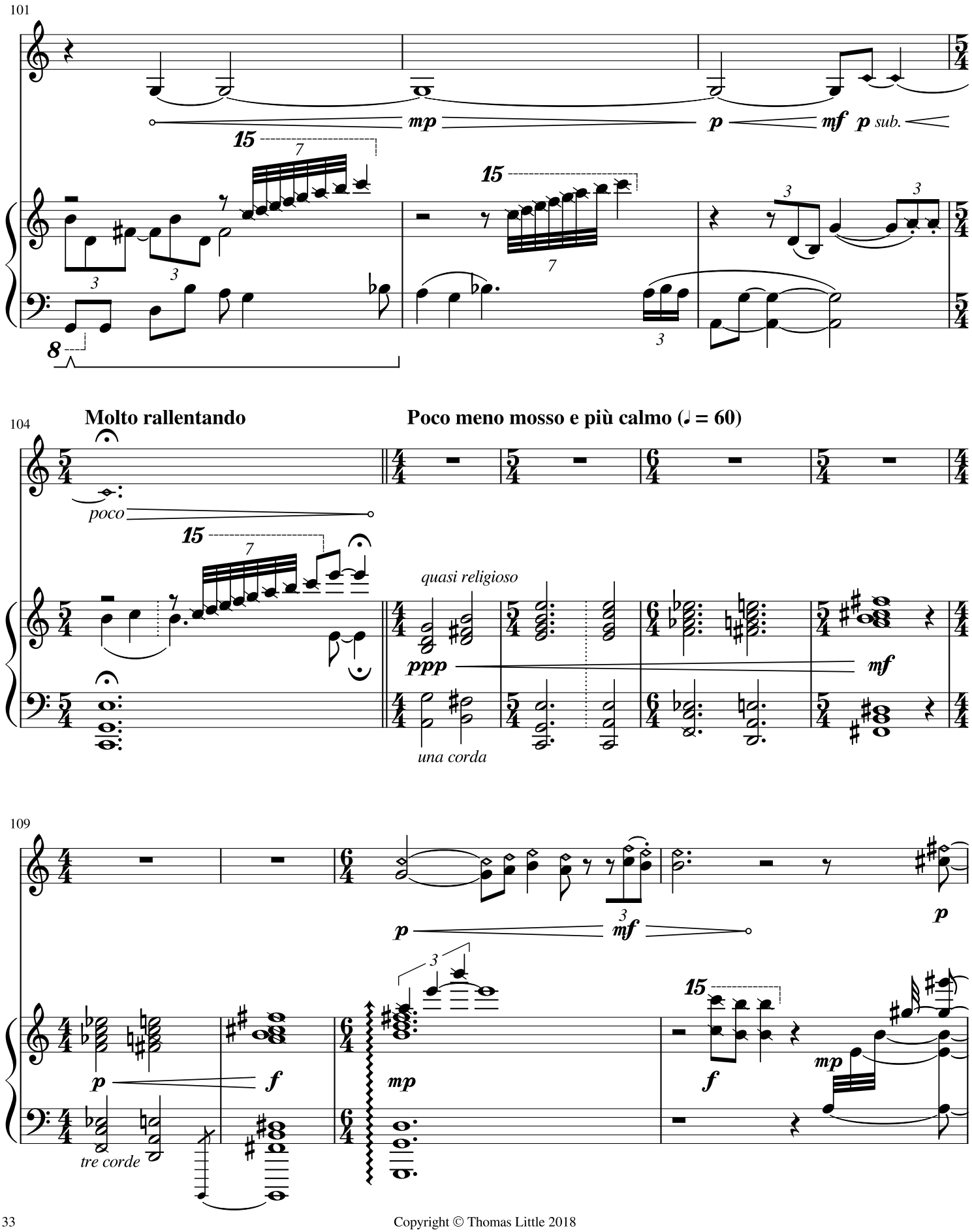



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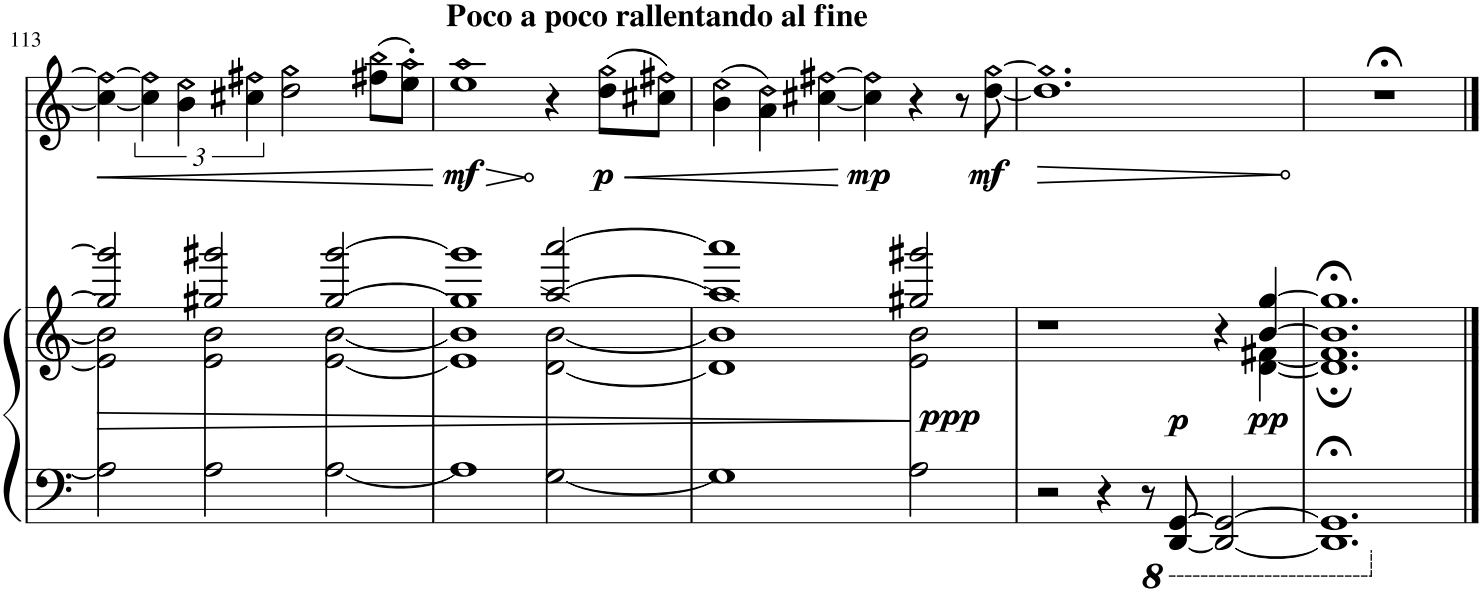


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