Shady Grove

and Other Songs from the Appalachian Mountains

GWYNETH WALKER

for Piano Solo

Commissioned by the Engle Family Foundation for pianist Richard Steinbach

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Duration: 14 minutes

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PROGRAM NOTES

This set of short pieces for piano solo is based on folksongs from the Appalachian Mountains. This music originated in the British Isles as unaccompanied ballads. The tunes were brought to the United States. As time passed, instruments were added—zither, banjo, and eventually, guitar. The guitar versions have become well-known standards of the American folk repertoire. Common traits of these songs are the modal/diatonic harmonies. The "refinement" of European chromaticism is absent. Root-position chords and consonant sonorities are prevalent. A special challenge in creating piano arrangements has been to inject occasional "appropriate" dissonances to enliven the harmonies. In addition, the strophic, ballad style of the songs, which relies upon storytelling to maintain the dramatic interest, must now be replaced by musical variation and development. The intent has been to create new piano repertoire within the folk spirit—rough-hewn, straightforward, energetic, and beautiful.

Shady Grove is a popular 18th-century American folksong with many versions of the lyrics. The title may refer to a beloved woman, or to a place where the speaker is traveling: "Going to Shade Grove." However, the energetic music itself is well-defined and memorable. This new interpretation for piano includes a slowly unfolding introduction before the arrival of the theme, and a contrasting, ascending interlude section. The third verse is presented in a slow, rhapsodic manner to allow time for reflection. The lively theme then returns, ending with strumming the strings inside the piano in Appalachian zither-playing style.

Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies is a woman's lament for her lost lover. To escape her sorrow, she sings, "I wish I were a tiny swallow, and I had wings, and I could fly." Thus, the swallow becomes a central image in this song. The listener may hear the fluttering of wings in the accompaniment motives. Near the end, a free section features bird call patterns "calling from afar" above a rippling undercurrent. The song ends with a final bird in flight.

Three Ravens tells the story of a slain knight lying in a field. Three ravens, watching from their perch in a tree, plan to devour the knight. But he is protected by his loyal hounds. There is kindness and honor in this ballad. However, the focus of this new musical depiction is on the ravens, rather than on the knight. With the three ravens in mind, the music shifts to a triple meter (3/8). Chord clusters of three notes introduce the music and return throughout. Staccato notes represent the ravens "chattering" among themselves. A special interlude, the "Ravens' Dance," is inserted between verses of the song. One *might picture the ravens daintily performing a minuet on their tree limb while nodding to one another! Three knocks on the piano (pecks on the tree) end the song.*

A brief, newly-composed *Interlude* has been inserted into the suite. This music speaks in the composer's own voice—in a language derived from the American folk idiom. The intent of this movement is to provide the listener with a peaceful break between the lively surrounding songs.

House Carpenter is a song of betrayal and tragedy. A young woman, married to a house carpenter, is lured away from her husband and baby by her former suitor, now a wealthy sailor. A life of adventure and romance is promised. The lovers run off together and drown at sea. The piano interpretation is influenced by the traditional guitar accompaniment often associated with this ballad. Grace notes approximate the "hammer-on" effect. Rapid arpeggios simulate guitar picking. The texture is fairly sparse. The rhythmic energy drives through this music to the deep (sunken) ending.

—Gwyneth Walker

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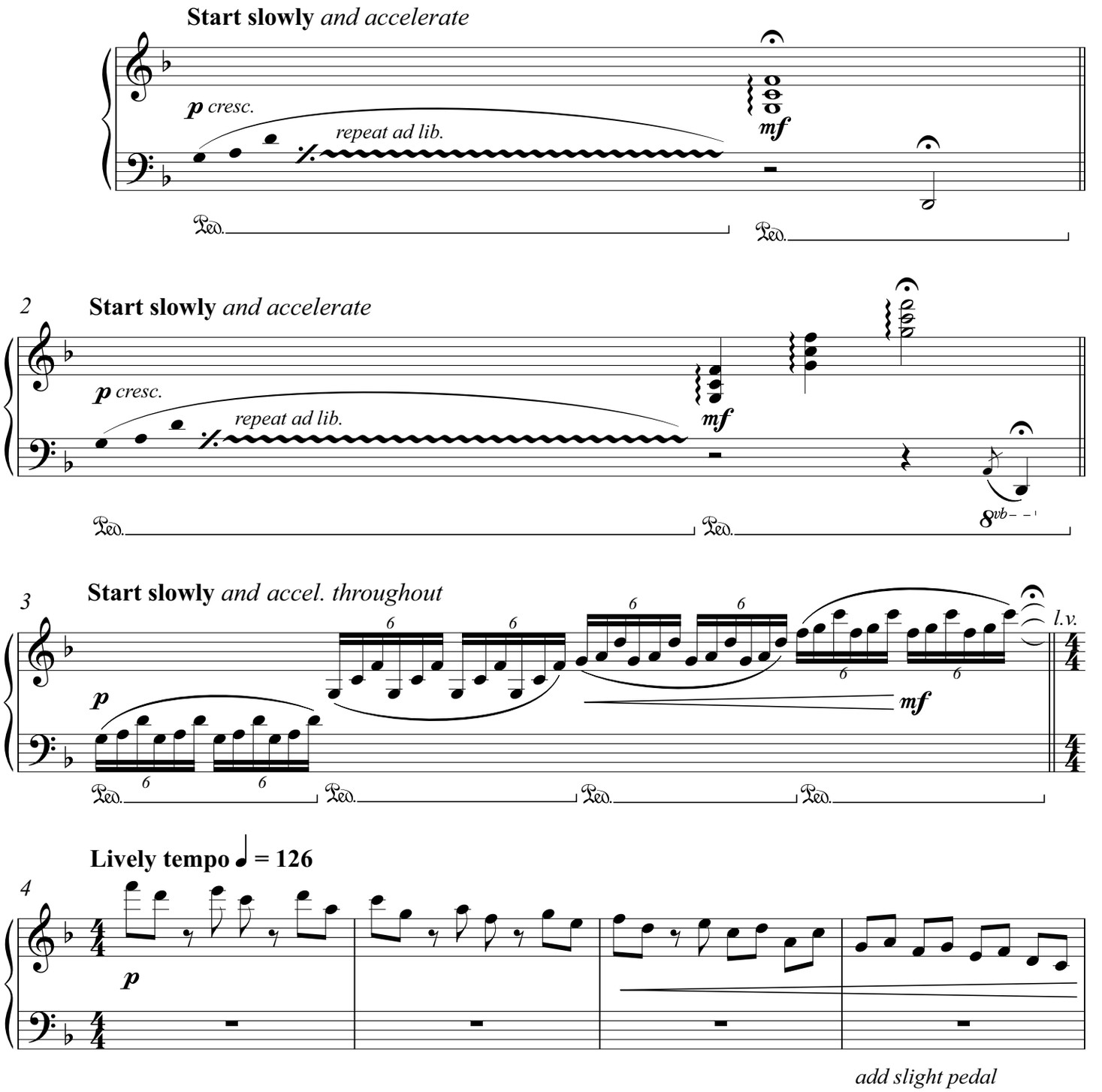
for Solo Piano

Gwyneth Walker

1. Shady Grove



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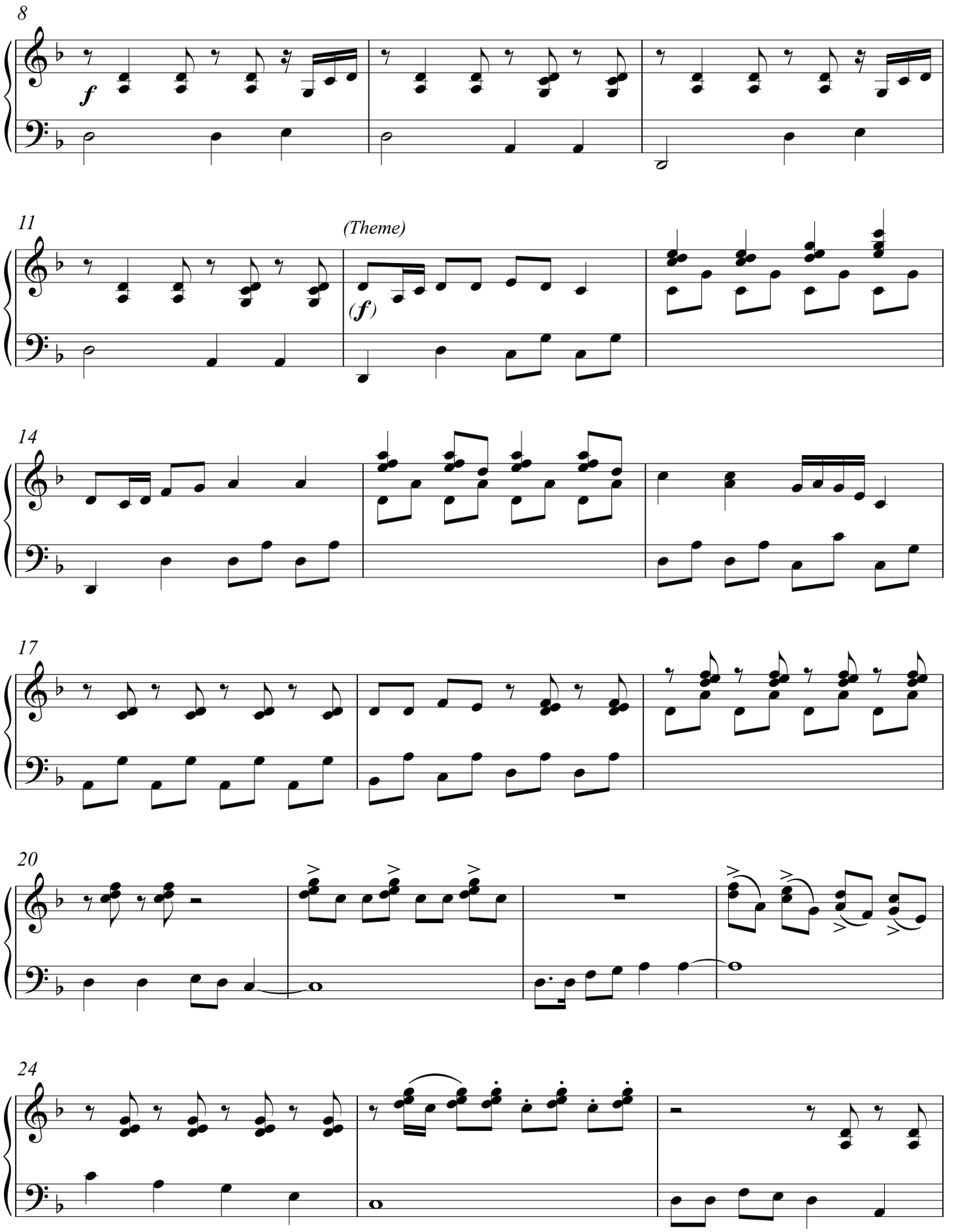
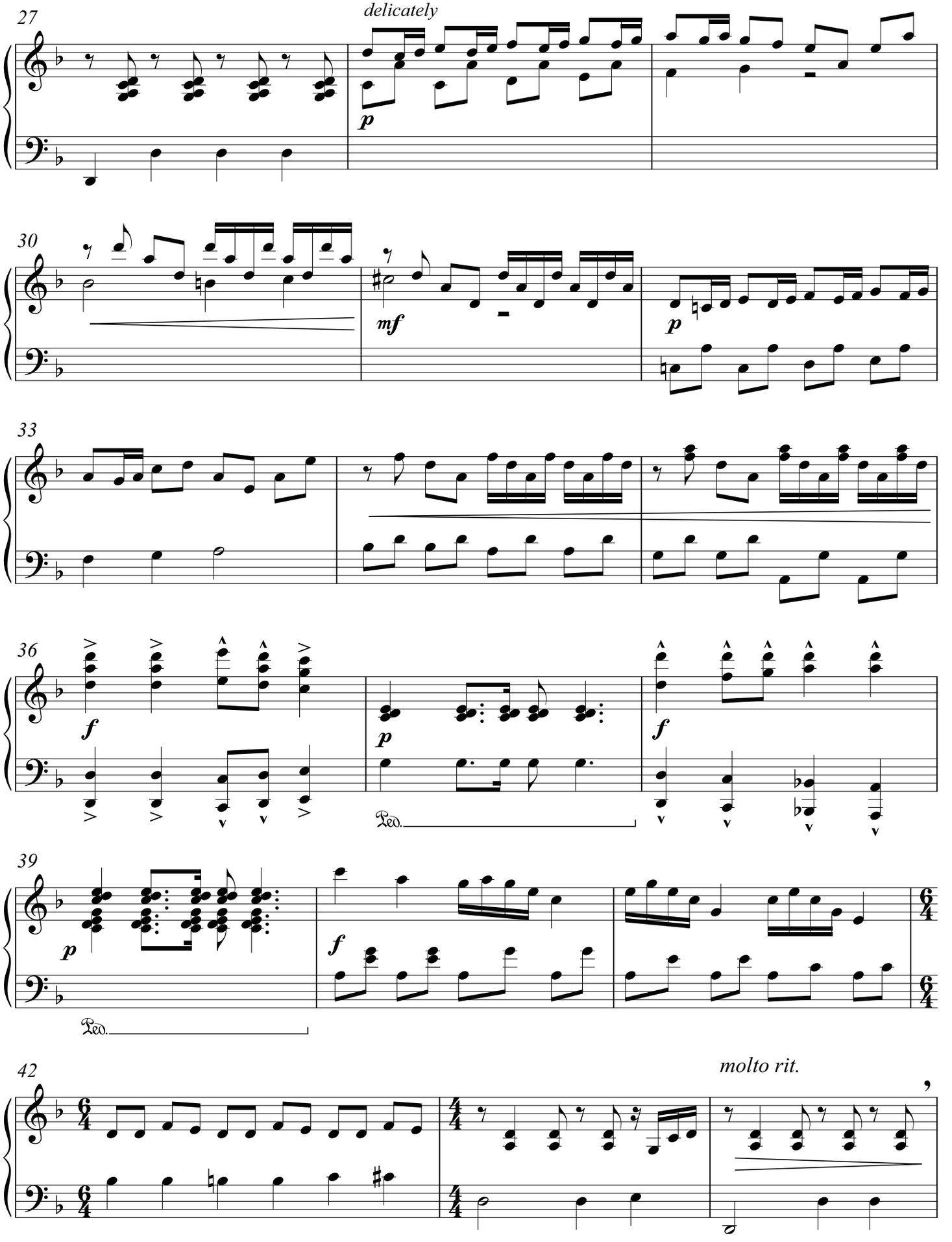
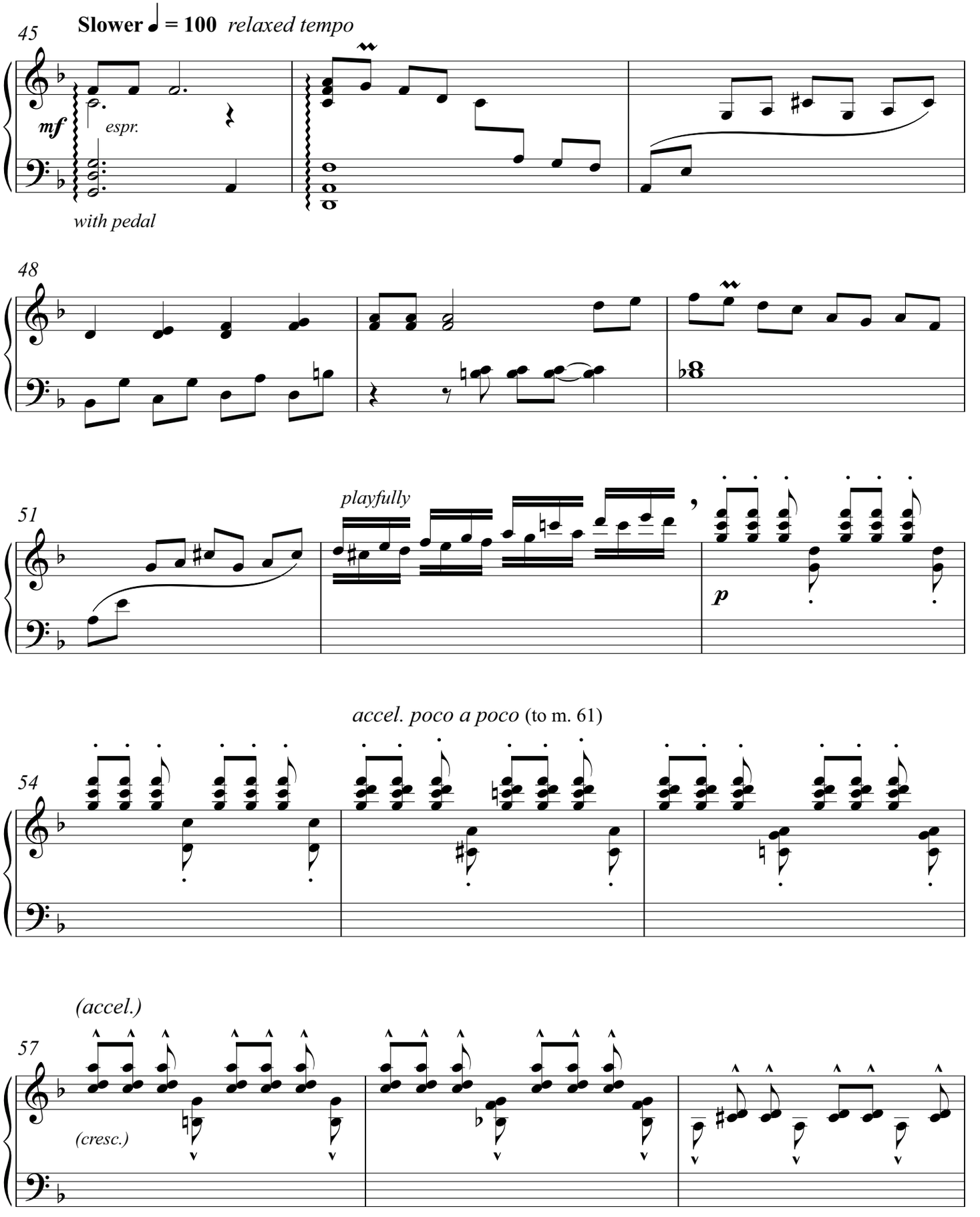
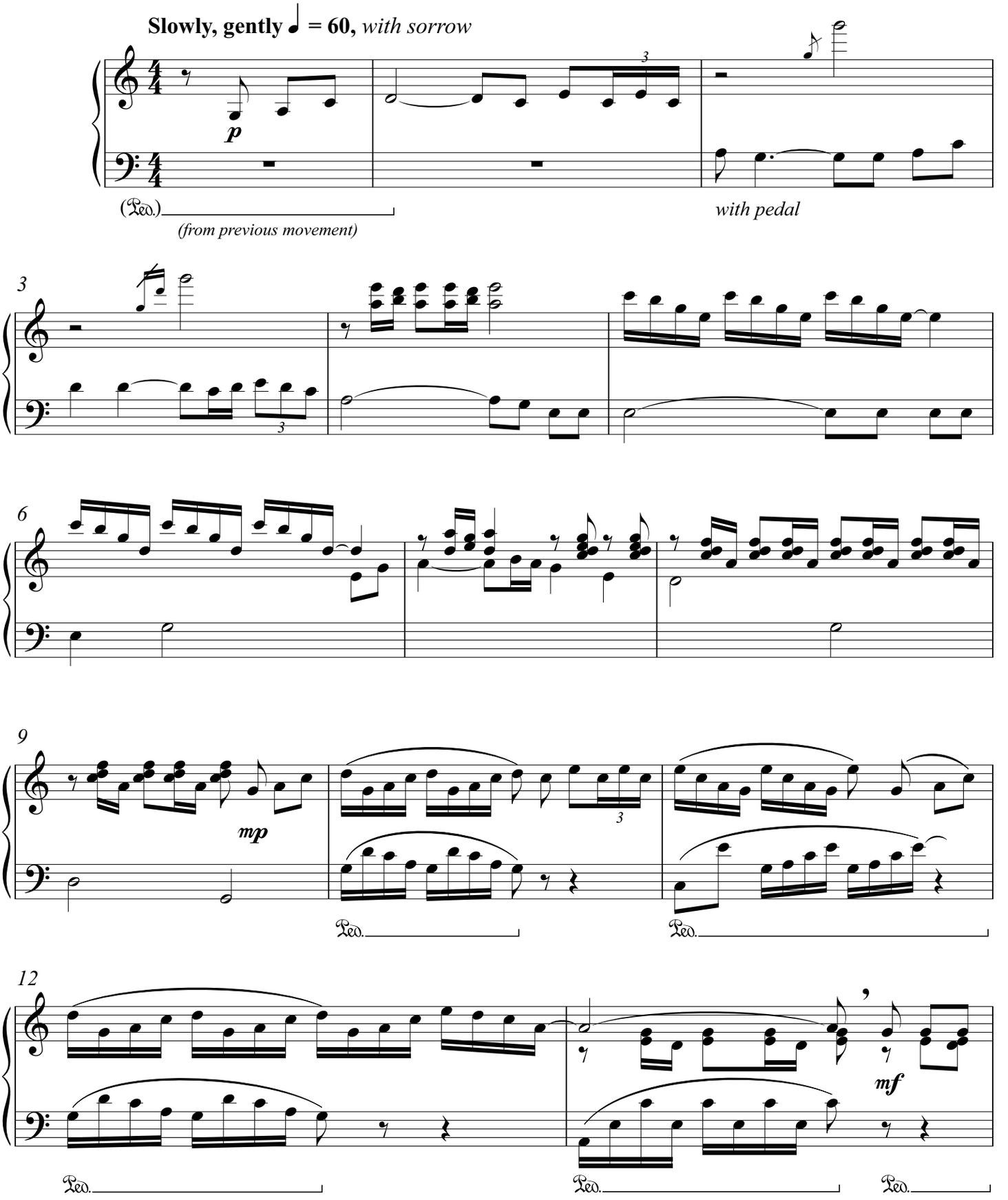

8
f
11
(Theme)
(f)
14
17
20
24

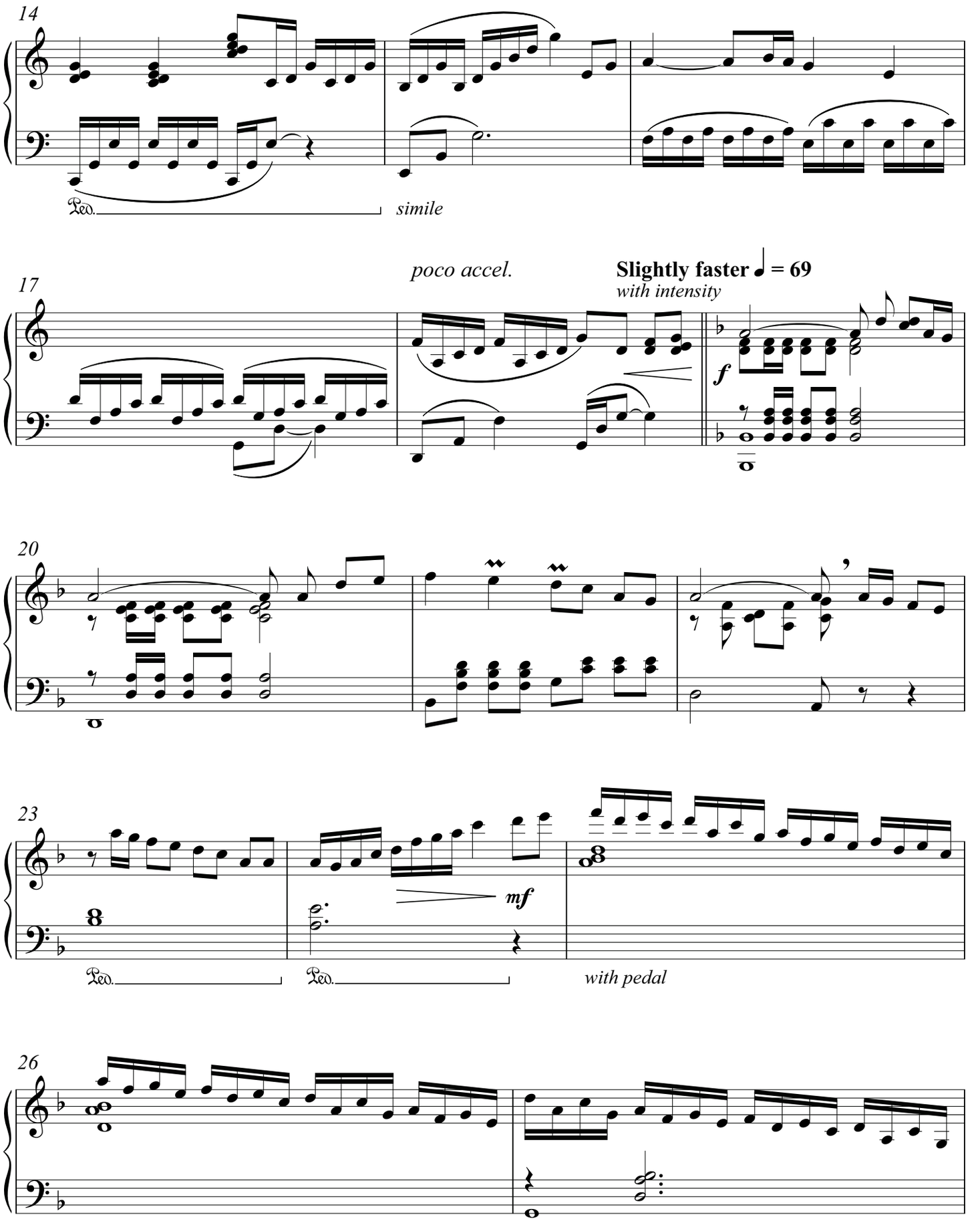

27
delicately
p
30
mf
p
33
36
f
p
f
Ped.
39
p
f
Ped.
42
molto rit.


45
Slower ♩ = 100 relaxed tempo
mf
espr.
with pedal
48
51
playfully
p
accel. poco a poco (to m. 61)
54
(accel.)
57
(cresc.)

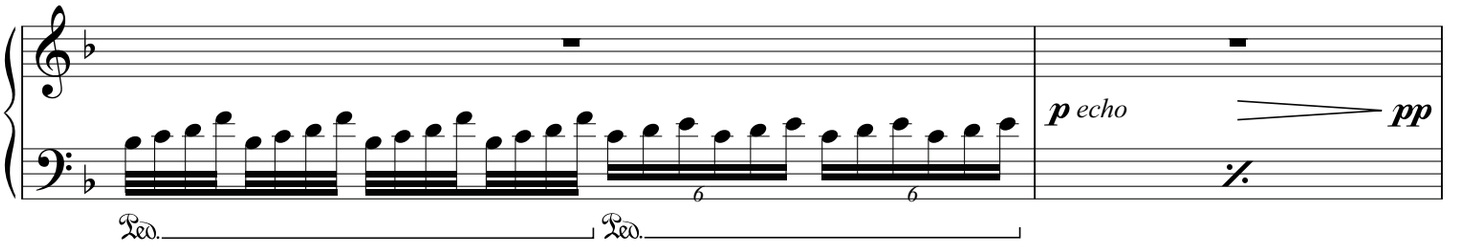
2. Come All Ye Fair and Tender Ladies

(A Tiny Swallow)




14
Ped.
simile
17
poco accel.
Slightly faster ♩ = 69
with intensity
f
20
23
mf
Ped.
Ped.
with pedal
26

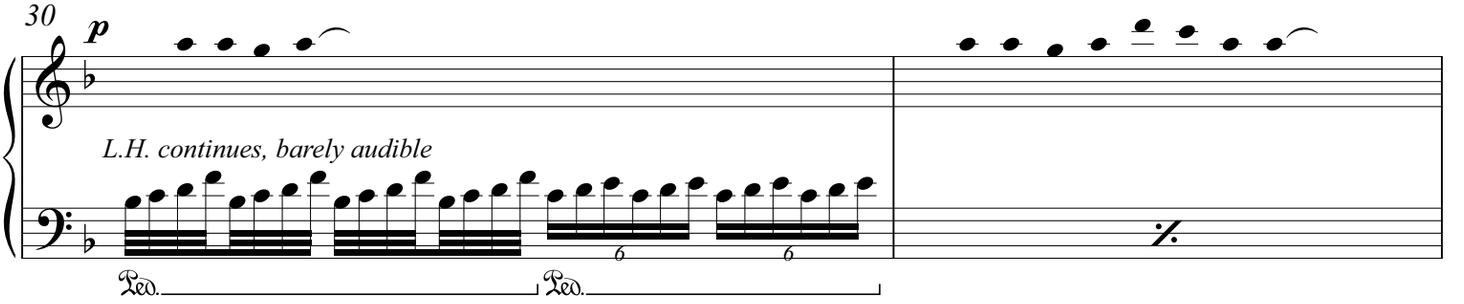
28



"Bird Call" section

(right hand light, free rhythm, as a tiny swallow calling from afar)

30



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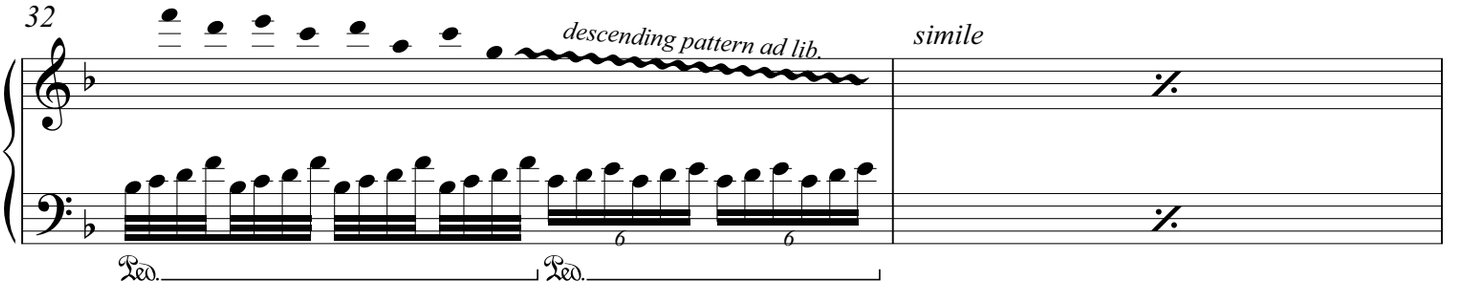

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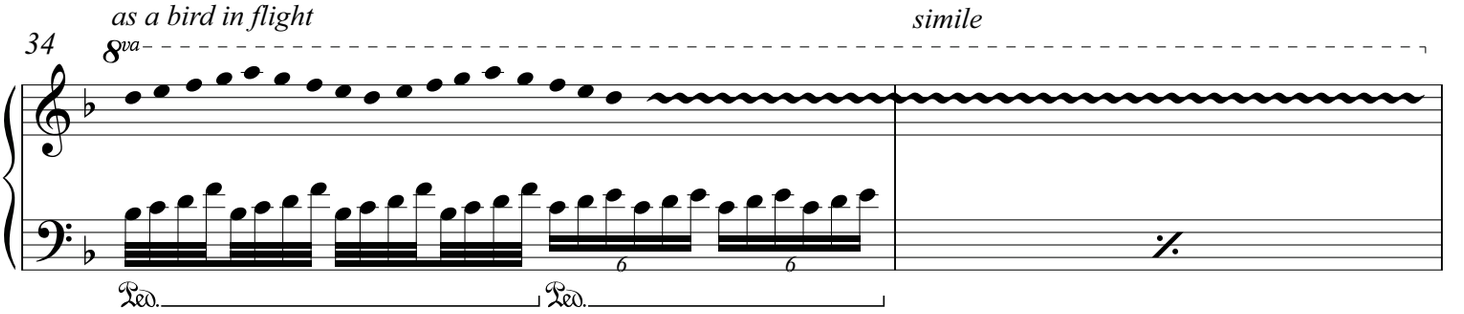

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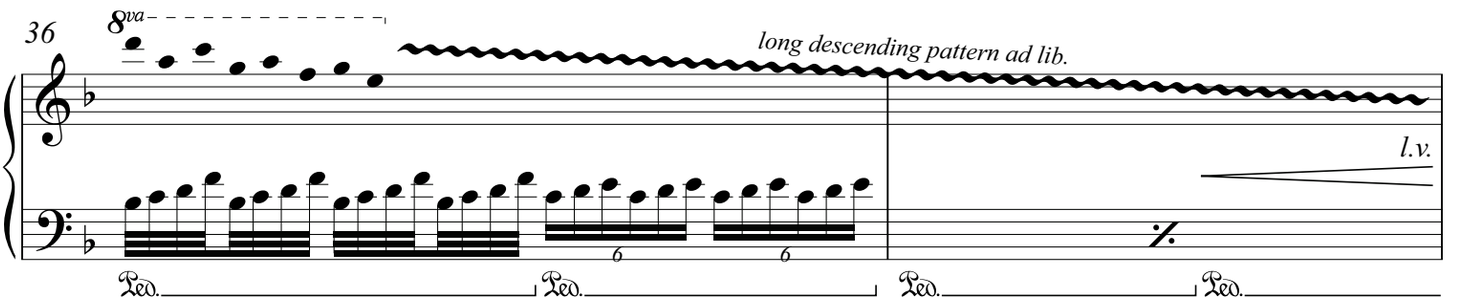
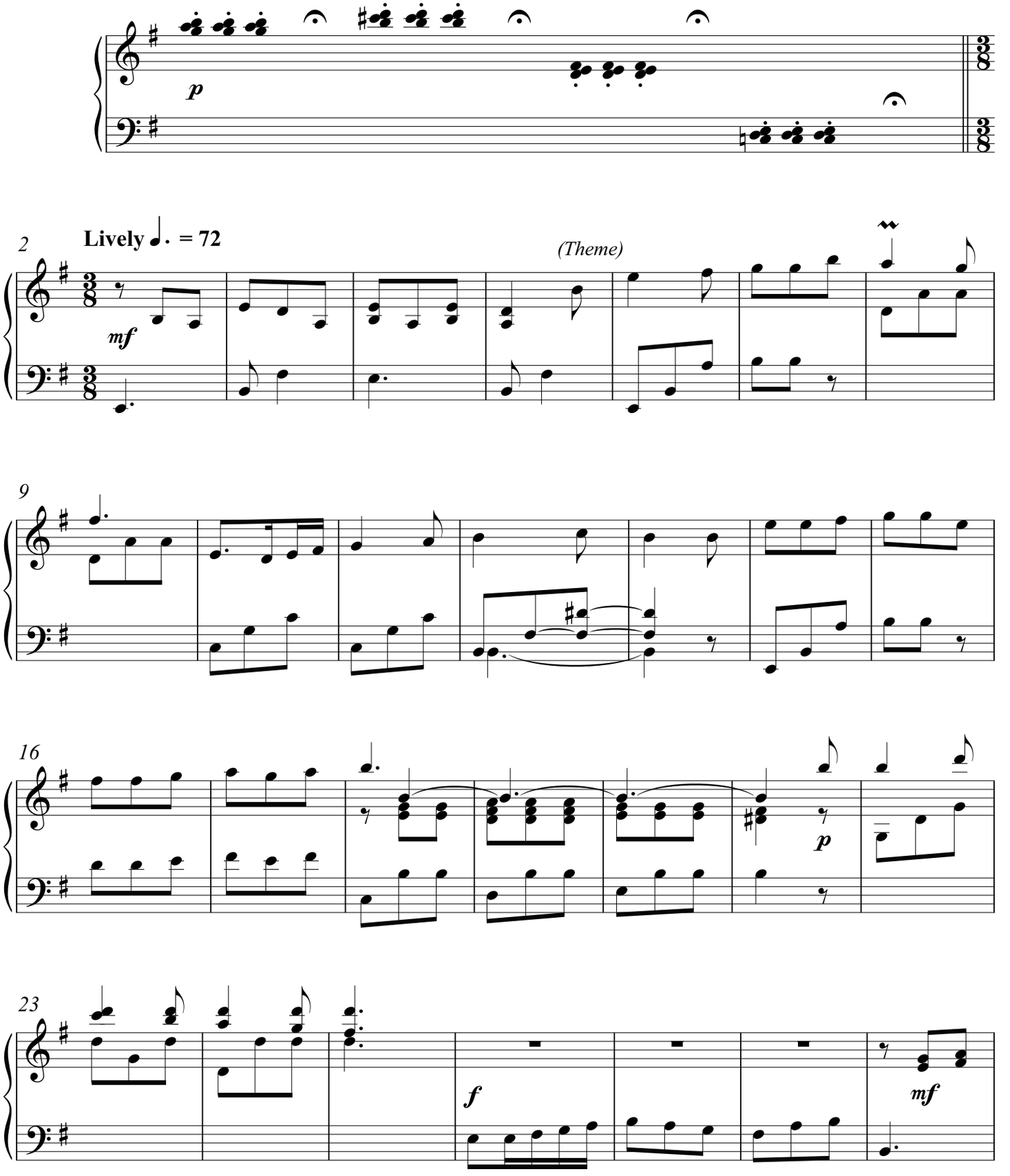


3. Three Ravens

Quickly
as three ravens chattering while perched in a tree



30

The Ravens' Dance

38

pp *very daintily*

p

44

mp

50

mf

rit.

Ped.

Slower, *freely*

56

p

, *a tempo* (♩. = 72)

mf

VERSE 2

gruffly

8vb

62

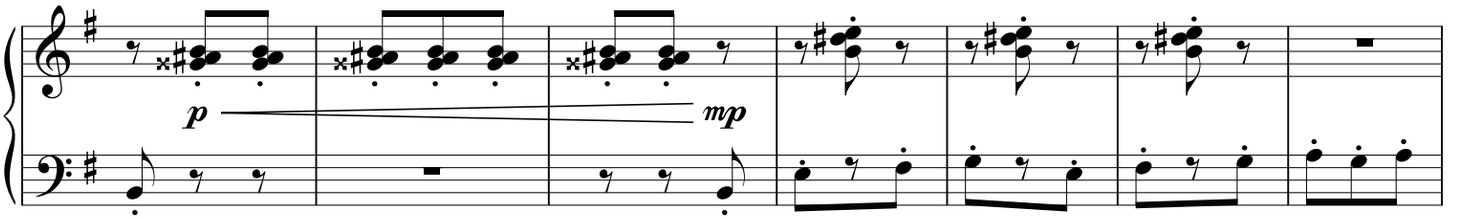
p

(8vb)

mf

loco

69



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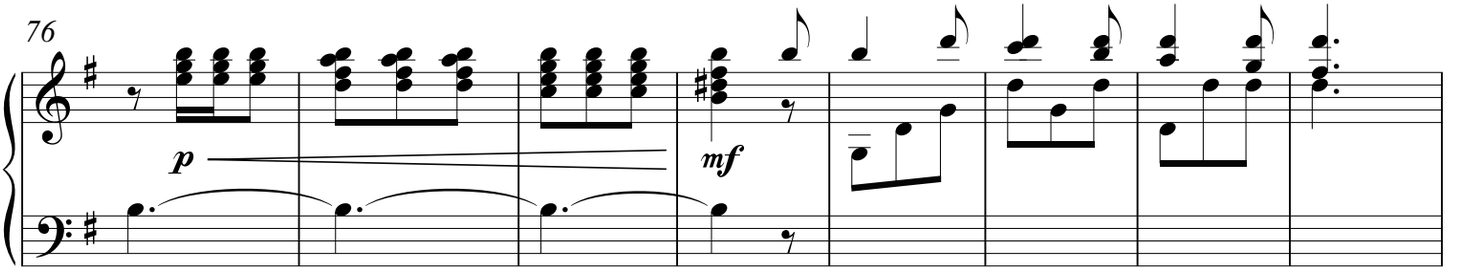

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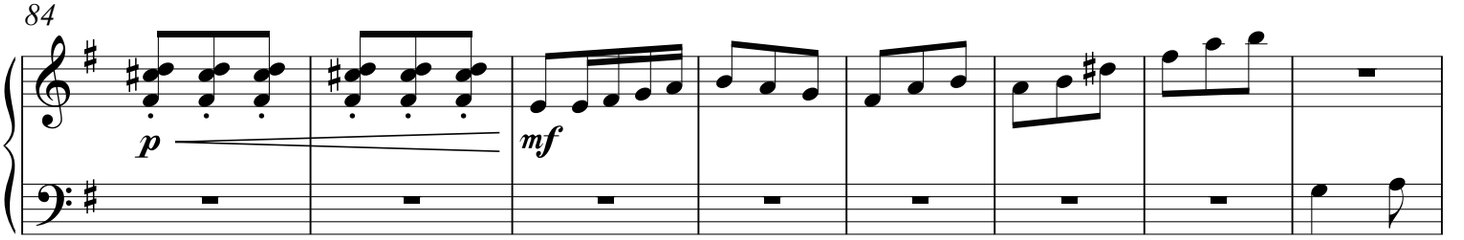

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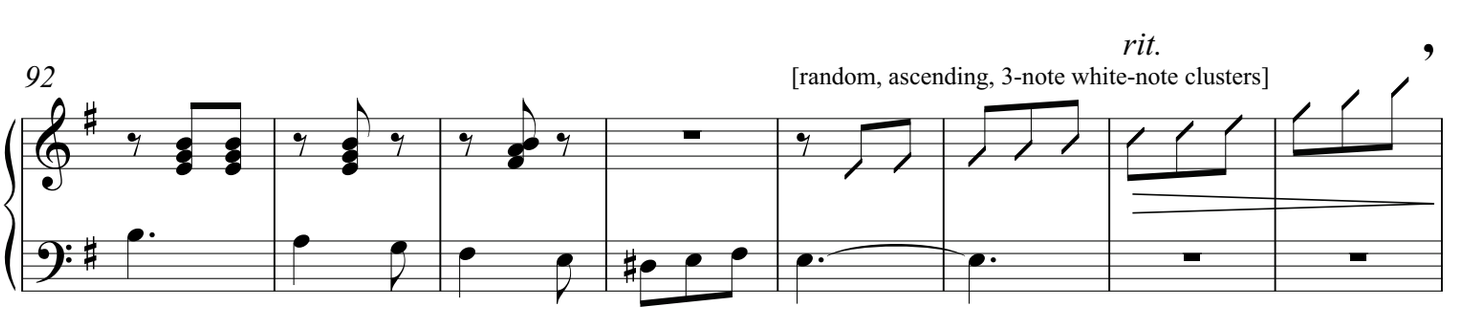
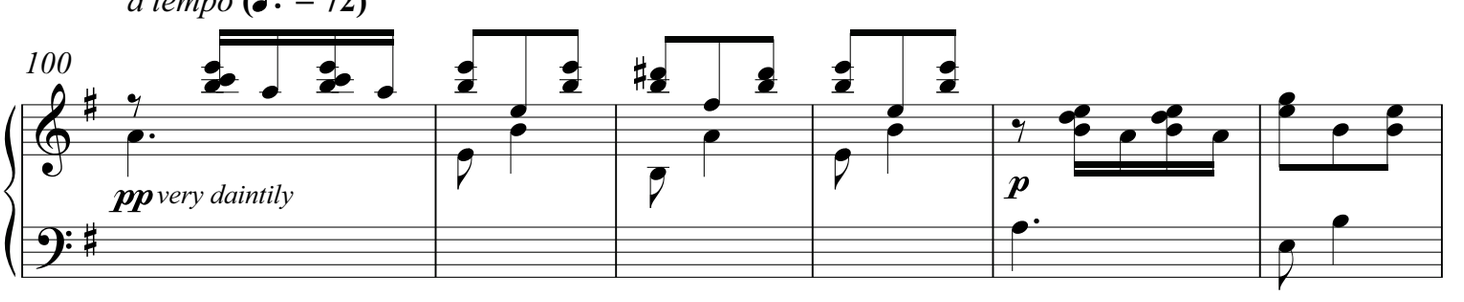


The Ravens' Dance

a tempo (♩. = 72)

100



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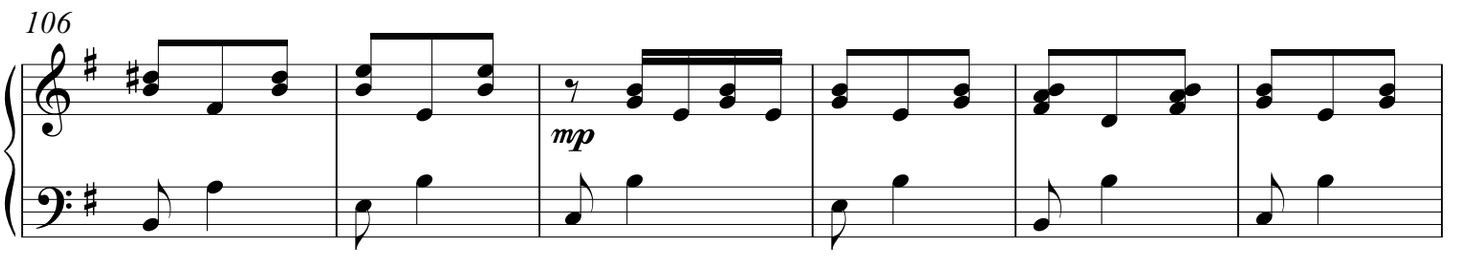
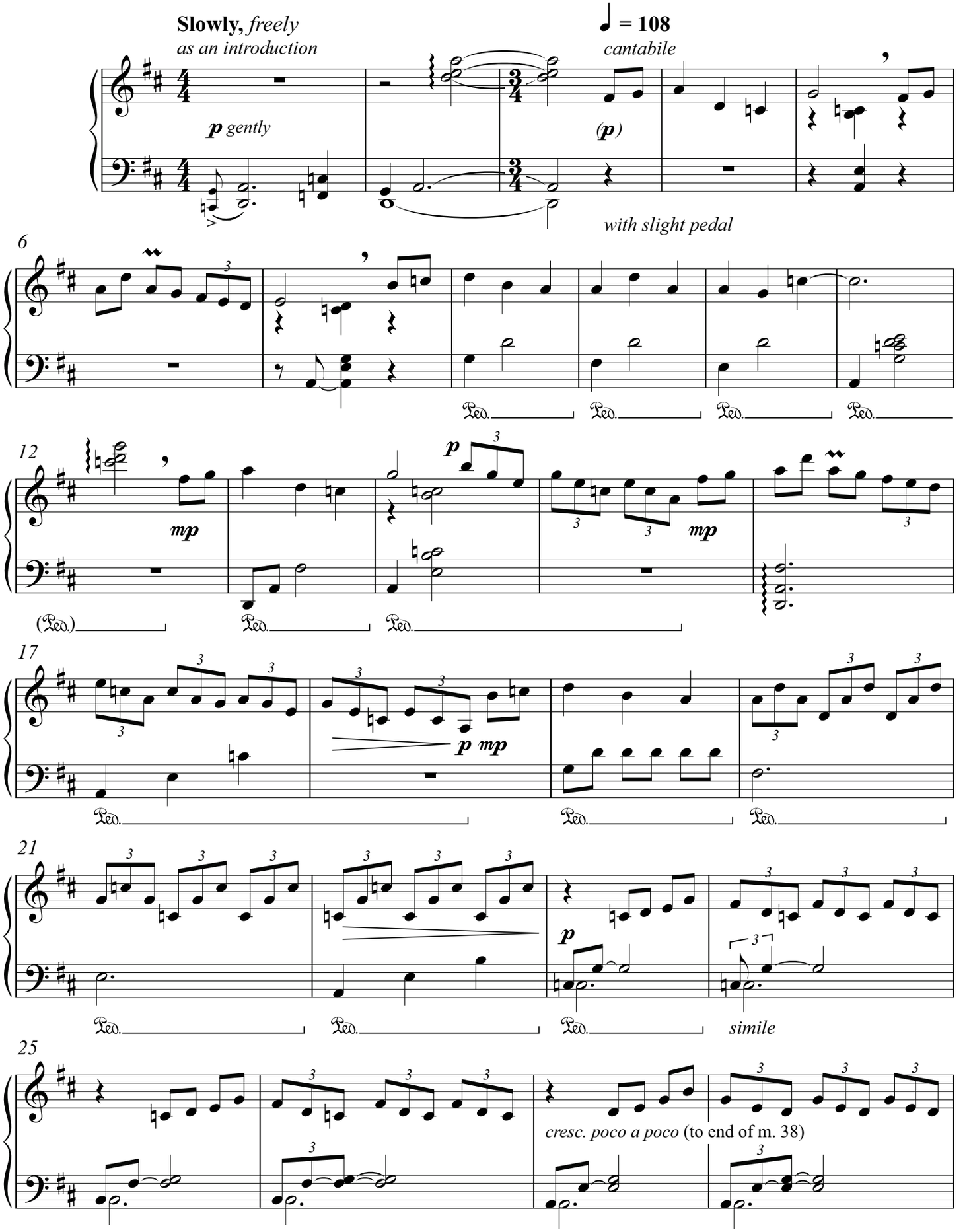
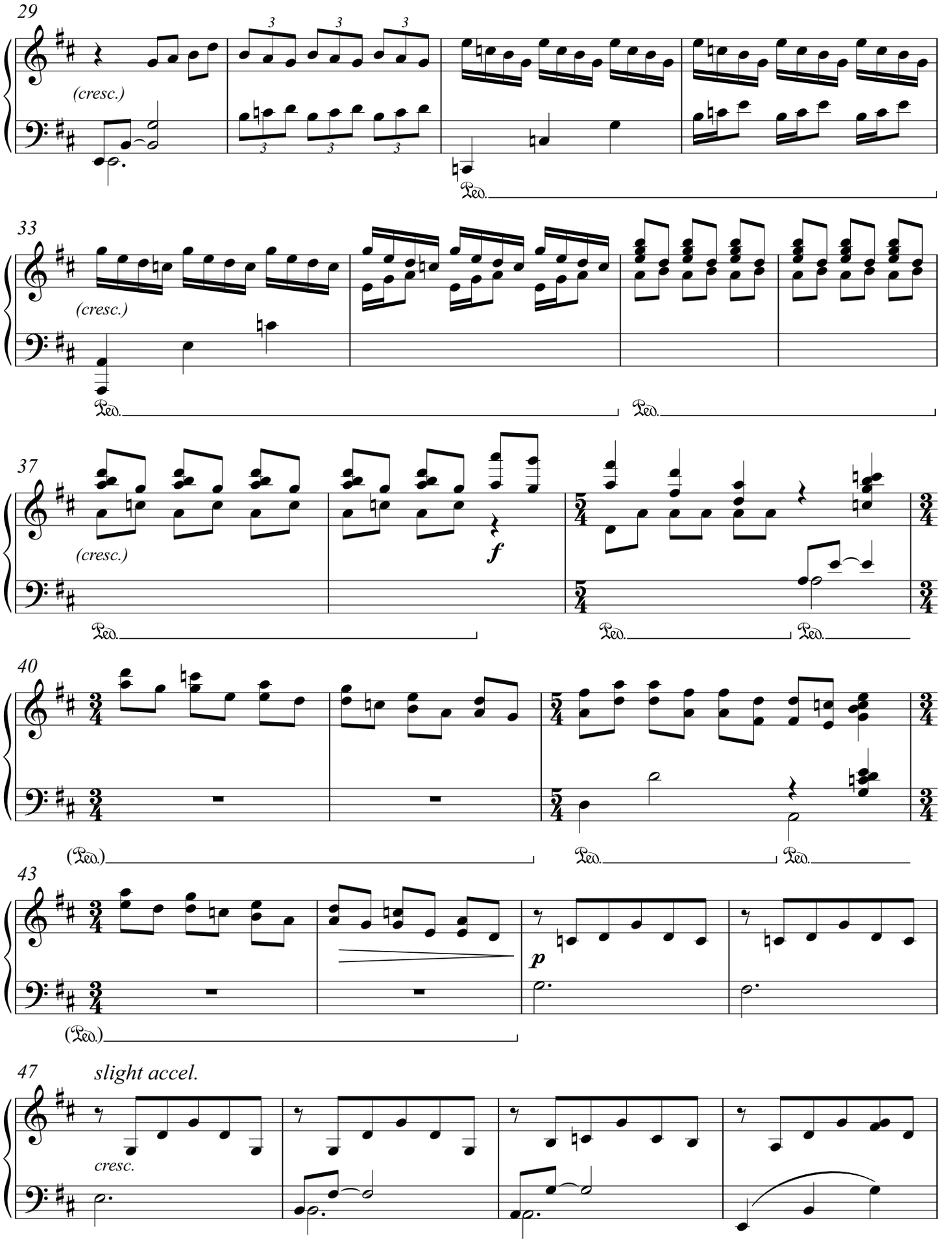


Interlude


Slowly, freely
as an introduction
p gently
♩ = 108
cantabile
(p)
with slight pedal
6
12
mp
p
mp
(Ped.)
17
p mp
21
p
simile
25
cresc. poco a poco (to end of m. 38)


29
(cresc.)
Ped.
33
(cresc.)
Ped.
Ped.
37
(cresc.)
f
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
40
(Ped.)
Ped.
Ped.
43
p
(Ped.)
47
slight accel.
cresc.

51 **Faster** ♩ = 120

f

Ped. Ped. Ped.

55

(Ped.)

59

(f)

(Ped.) *with ped. ad lib.*

63

67

p

Ped.

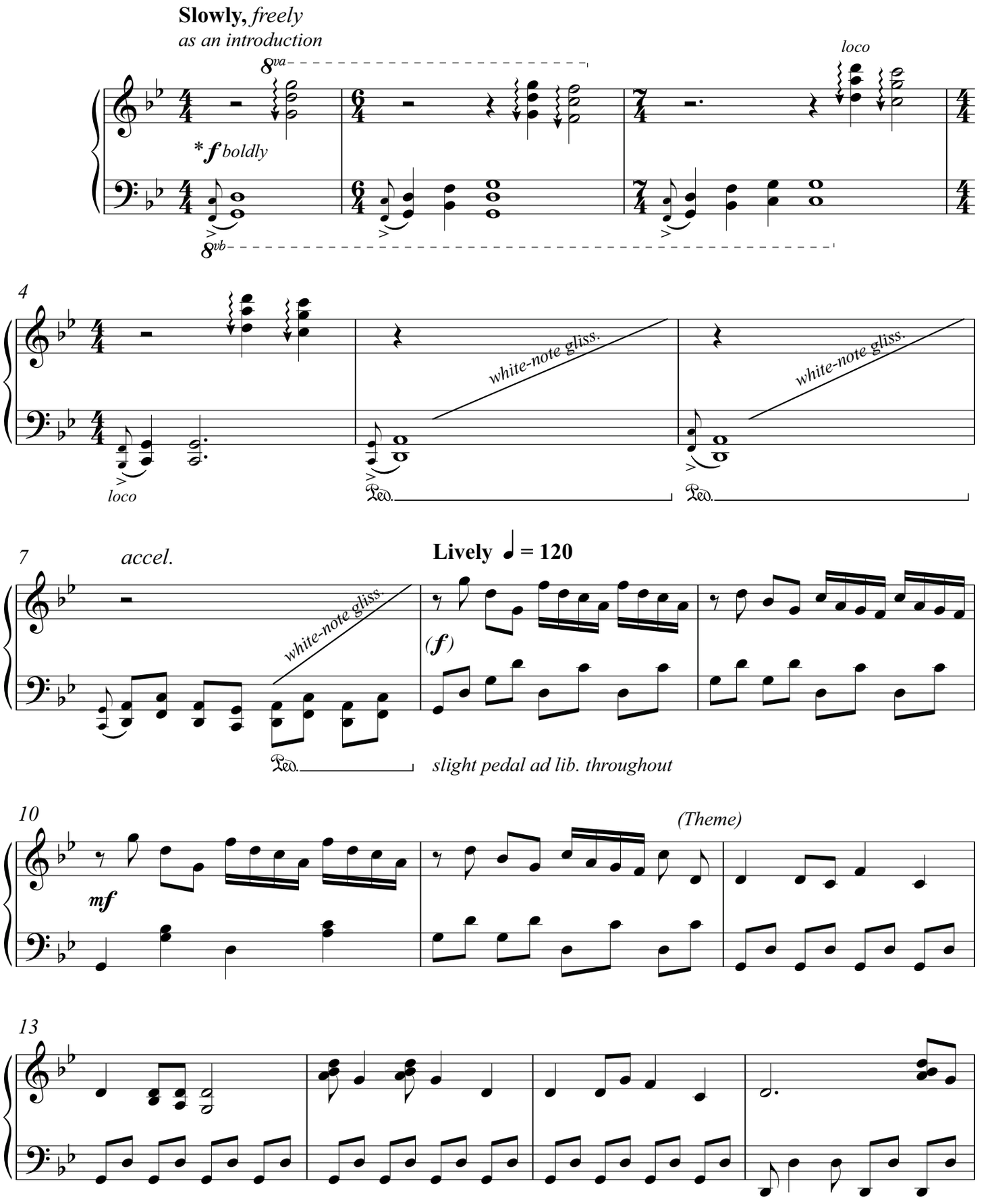
rit. to end

71

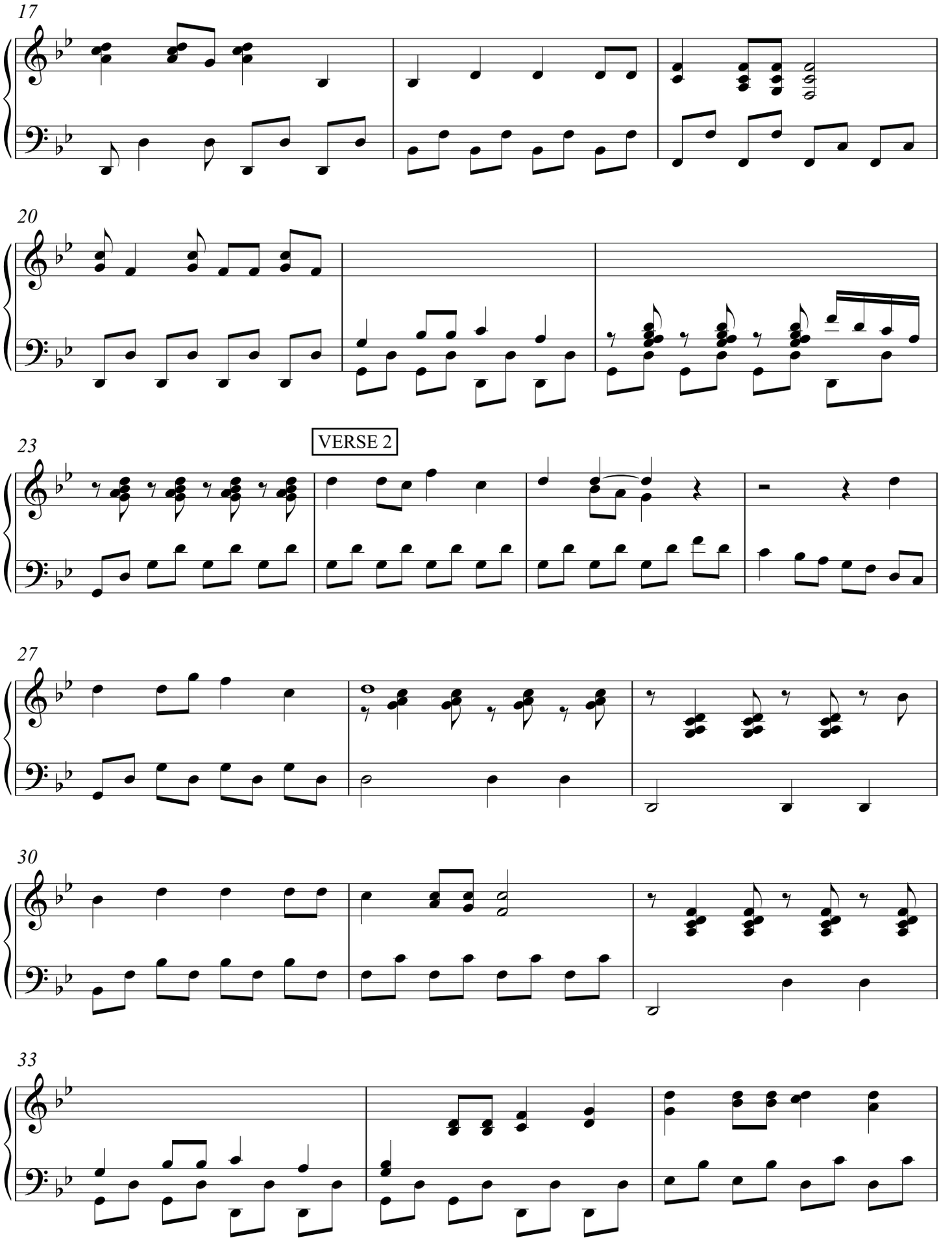
pp

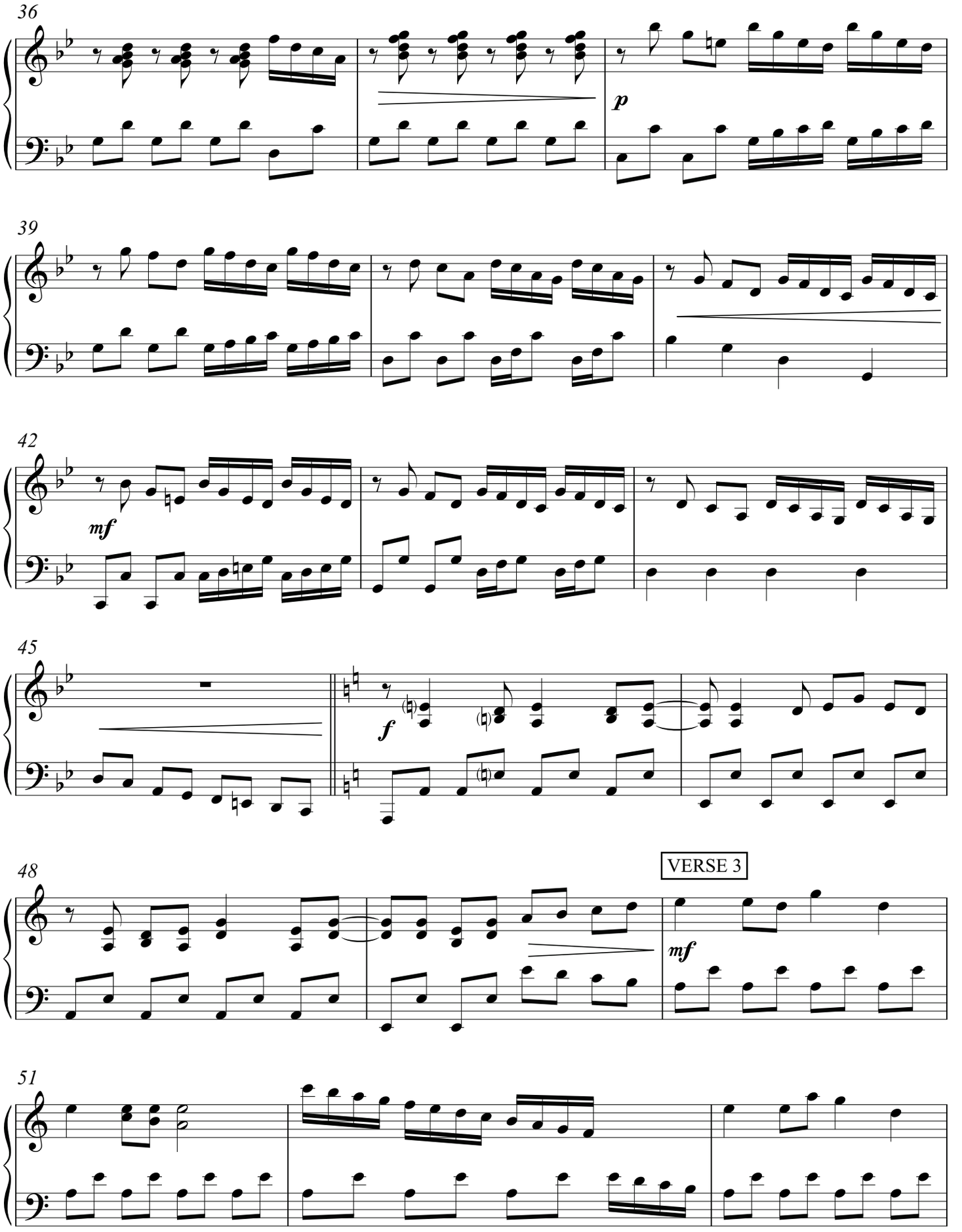
Ped. Ped.

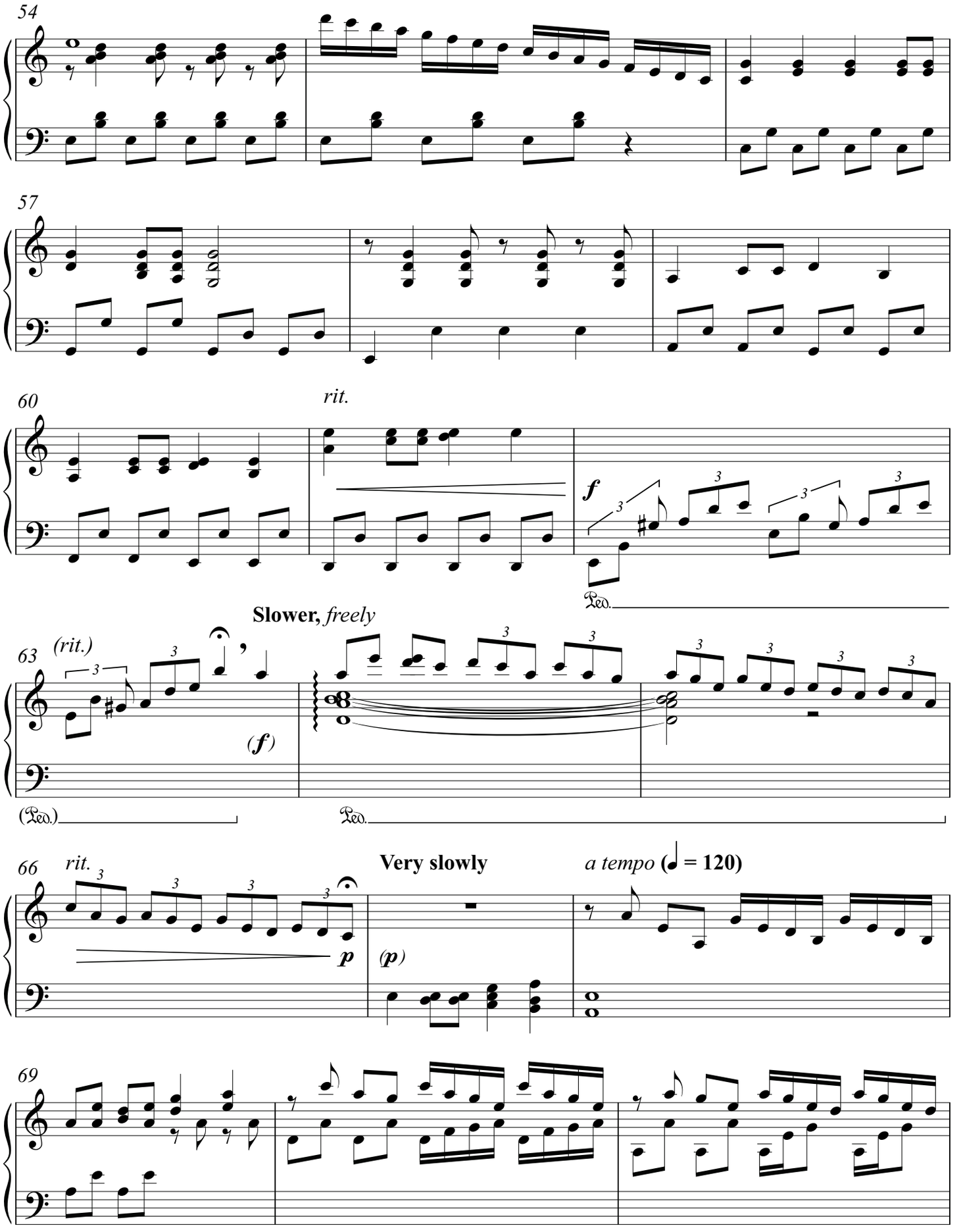
4. House Carpenter



*Similar to a guitar “hammer-on” effect


17
20
23
VERSE 2
27
30
33


36
p
39
42
mf
45
f
48
VERSE 3
mf
51


54
57
60
rit.
f
Slower, freely
63
(rit.)
(f)
Very slowly
66
rit.
p
(p)
a tempo (♩ = 120)
69