Cat Impressions.

7 late-elementary to intermediate piano solos

Alexander Zhu

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About the cover artist:

Ruth Murillo is a contemporary visual and mixed media artist working in the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles. She holds a BA in Fine Arts from California State University, Northridge. Founder of the Raven Collection, Murillo's work has been exhibited in galleries and art spaces across L.A.

Murillo blends contemporary and classical themes of portraiture to explore permanence, memory and identity - an intentional counterpoint to an age of disposability. She seeks to open quiet, contemplative spaces where viewers may encounter craftsmanship, emotional nuance and visual storytelling.

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Cat Impressions

7 late-elementary to intermediate piano solos

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I have always had cats, an almost universal constant in my life. I do not need to say much about how great they are, how entertaining, funny, and sweet they can be, or how fascinating they are to many of us. I wrote these pieces over the course of a week. Cats are so interesting that it was very easy work.

sunbeam nap

A gentle, slow waltz. Cats sleep upward of 20–22 hours per day, but not always very deeply. The first 20 measures imitate the first few minutes of a cat nap. At measure 21, our musical cat falls into a deeper sleep and starts purring. Focus on creating a smooth, resonant sound in the last eight bars.

midnight prowl

A sneaky, slightly jazzy piece. Cats are nocturnal, and most of us have experienced them prowling around late at night, stalking enemies both imaginary and occasionally real. This piece switches between lurking, stalking eighth notes in the bass and curious investigations and pounces in the higher registers. Make sure to create a smooth legato in the left-hand eighth notes.

making biscuits

Cats make an adorable motion with their paws when they are comfortable and happy. This piece uses alternating chord clusters to imitate this. Aim for a soft, calming sound while managing all the extra notes.

purring

Most people find a cat's purr peaceful and soothing. Here, low left-hand notes imitate the vibrations of a purr. I used to play in a Balinese gamelan ensemble, and cats are a meaningful part of Balinese culture. At measure 17, I use a Balinese pentatonic scale (pélog) to show our cat drifting into deeper sleep, perhaps dreaming of a time when they were worshiped even more than they are now. This scale can be tricky to learn but very rewarding to improvise with. You are encouraged to continue the piece after the last bar, improvising with the pélog provided.

laser pointer

Cats are obsessed with laser pointers, perhaps too much so. I used small chord clusters and active rhythms to imitate a cat's excitement when they see the little red dot. Feel free to play this piece faster than the printed tempo.

box inspector

Cats are also obsessed with empty boxes. One of my cats, Jinx, will march over every time I open a box, sniff and examine it thoroughly, then proudly sit in it. This piece is a pompous march lightly inspired by Debussy's prelude Hommage à S. Pickwick Esq. P.P.M.P.C.

the zoomies

We have all seen the contrast between a cat's sleepy moods and their zoomies, when they run around in an absolutely chaotic frenzy. This piece uses rapid alternating seconds and the full range of the keyboard. Make the crescendos and diminuendos as dramatic as possible to imitate a cat uncontrollably zooming around your home.

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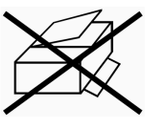

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sunbeam nap

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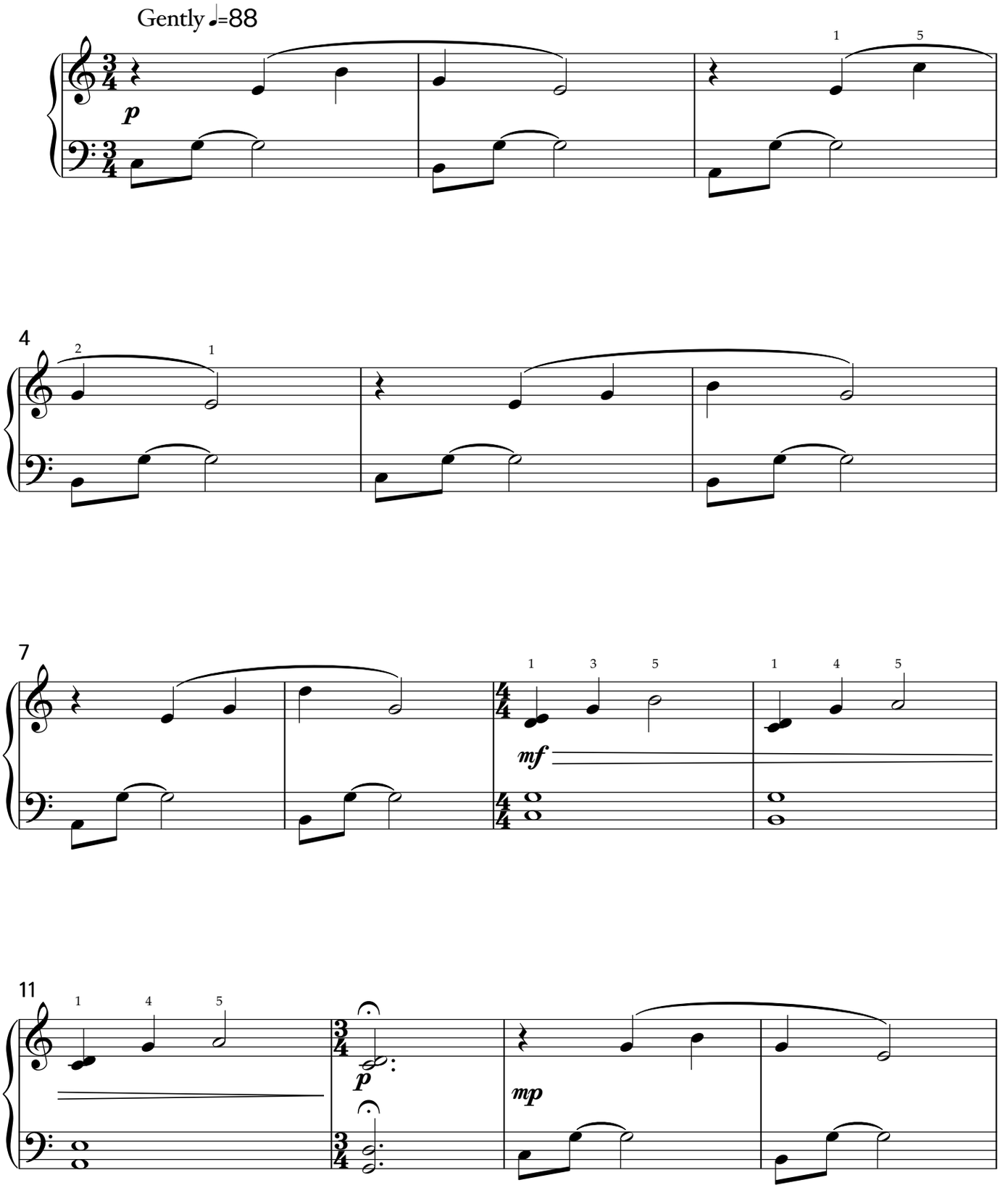

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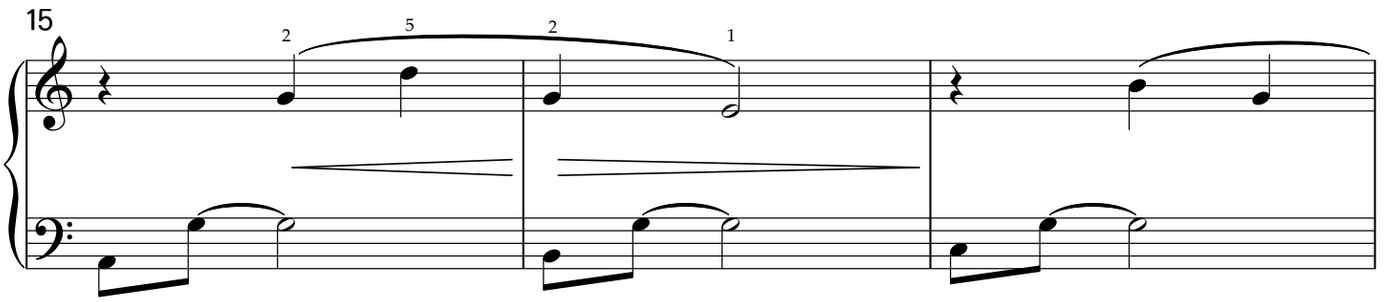

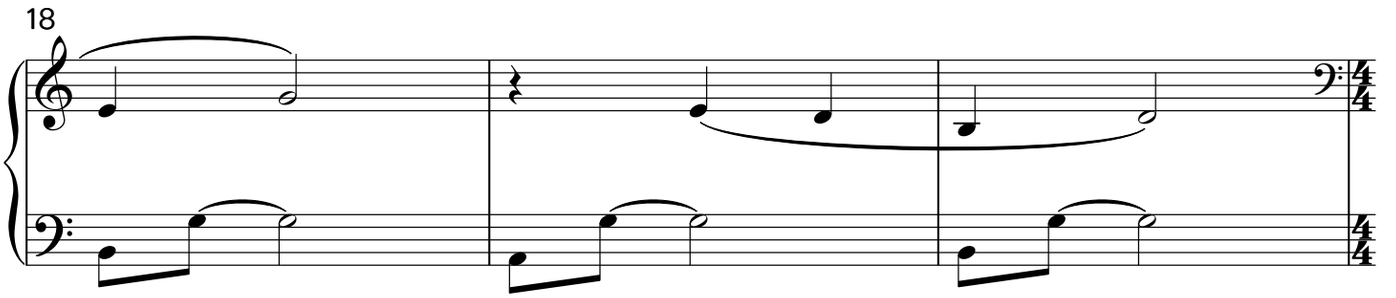

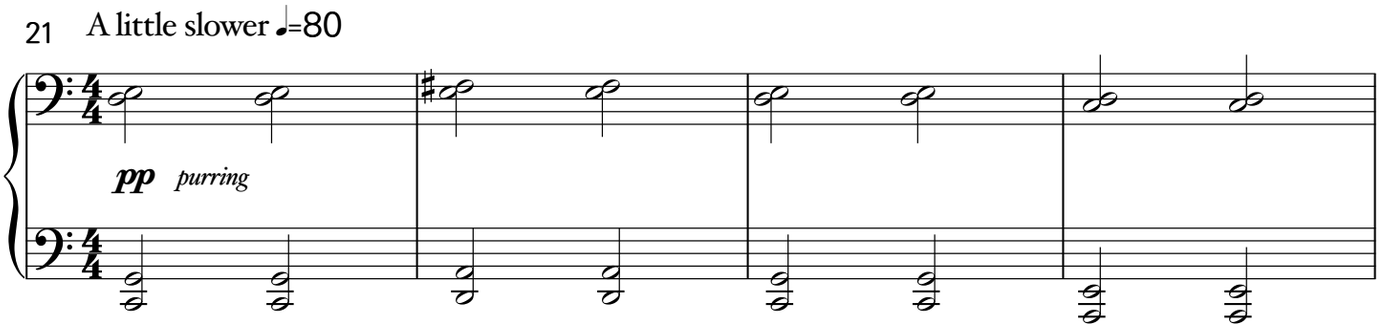

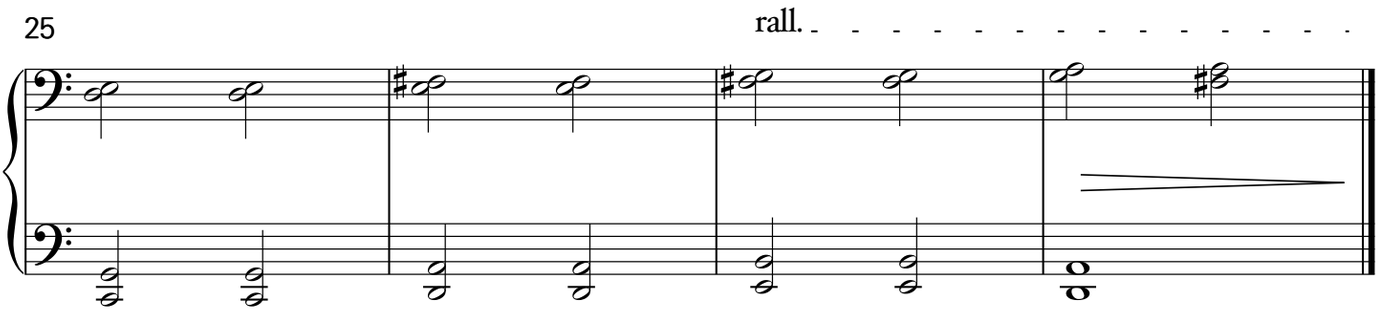

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midnight prowl

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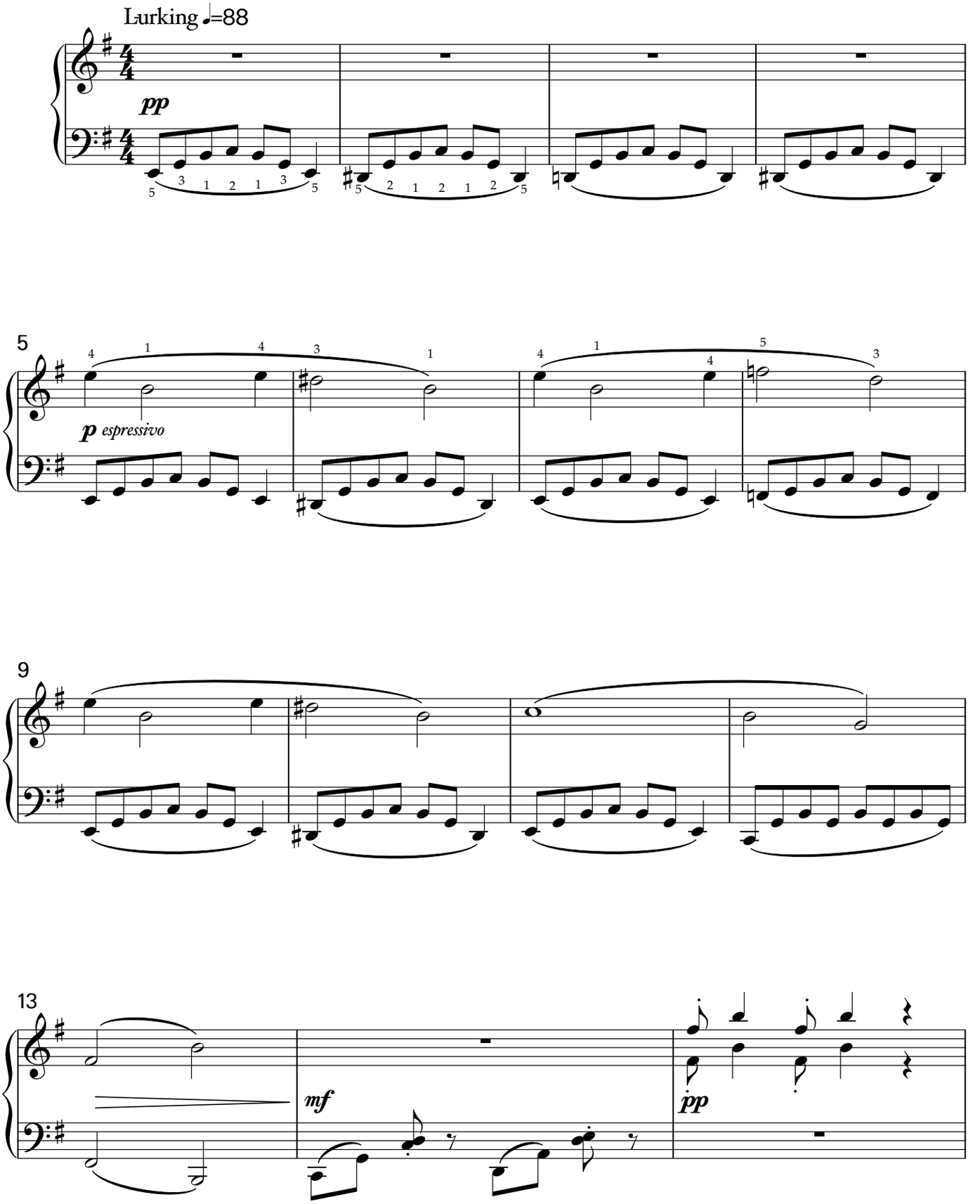

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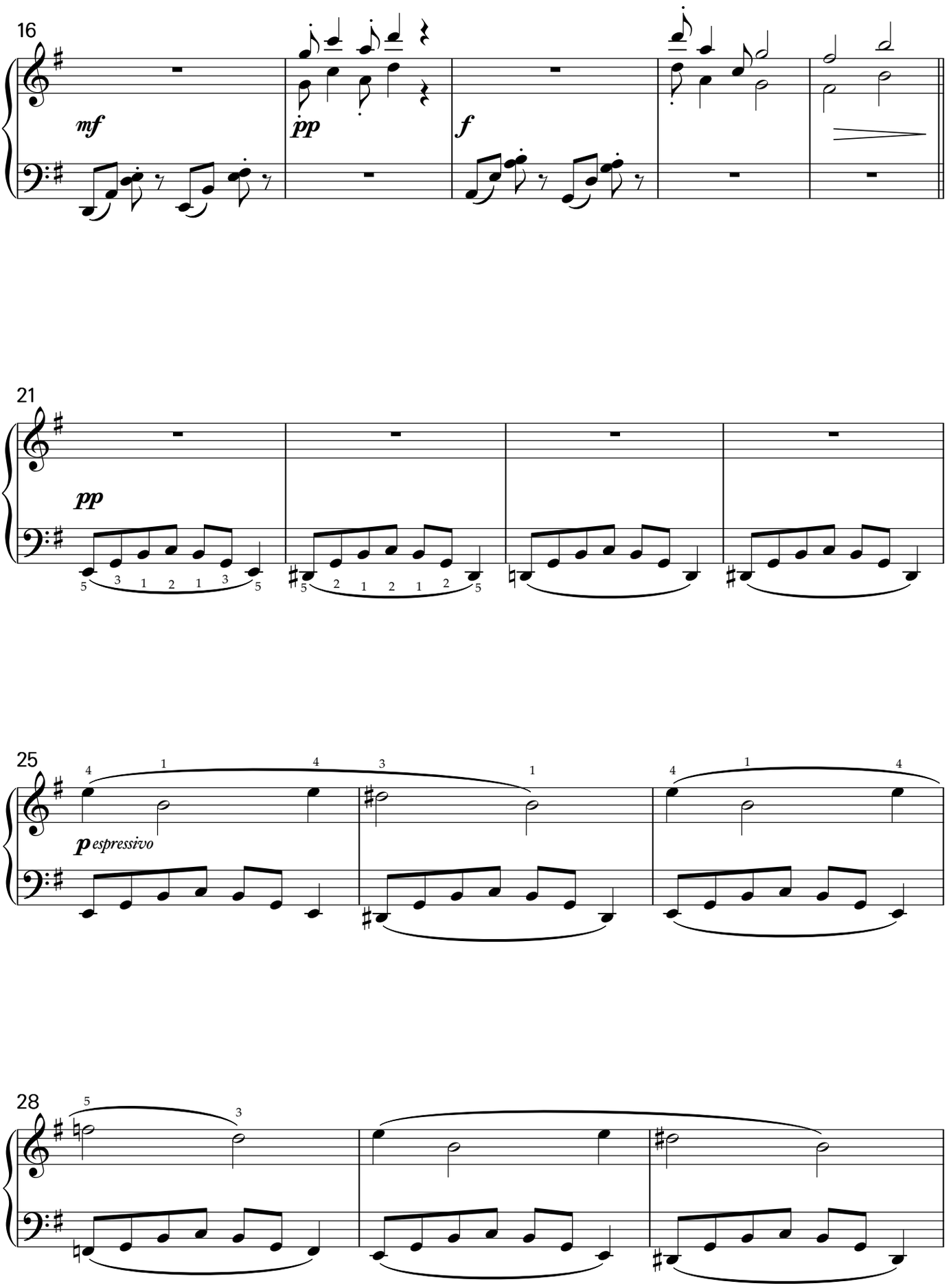

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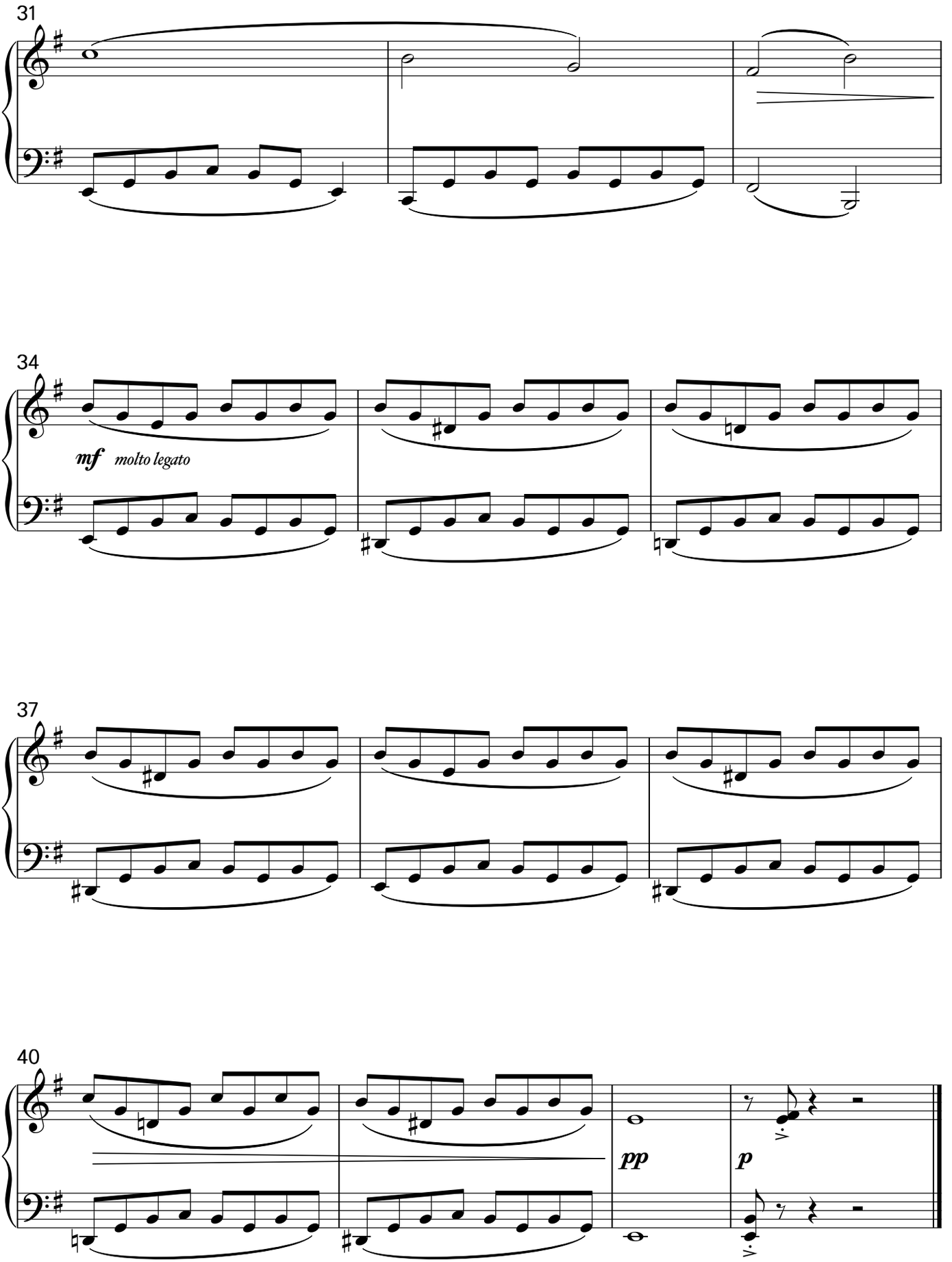

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making biscuits

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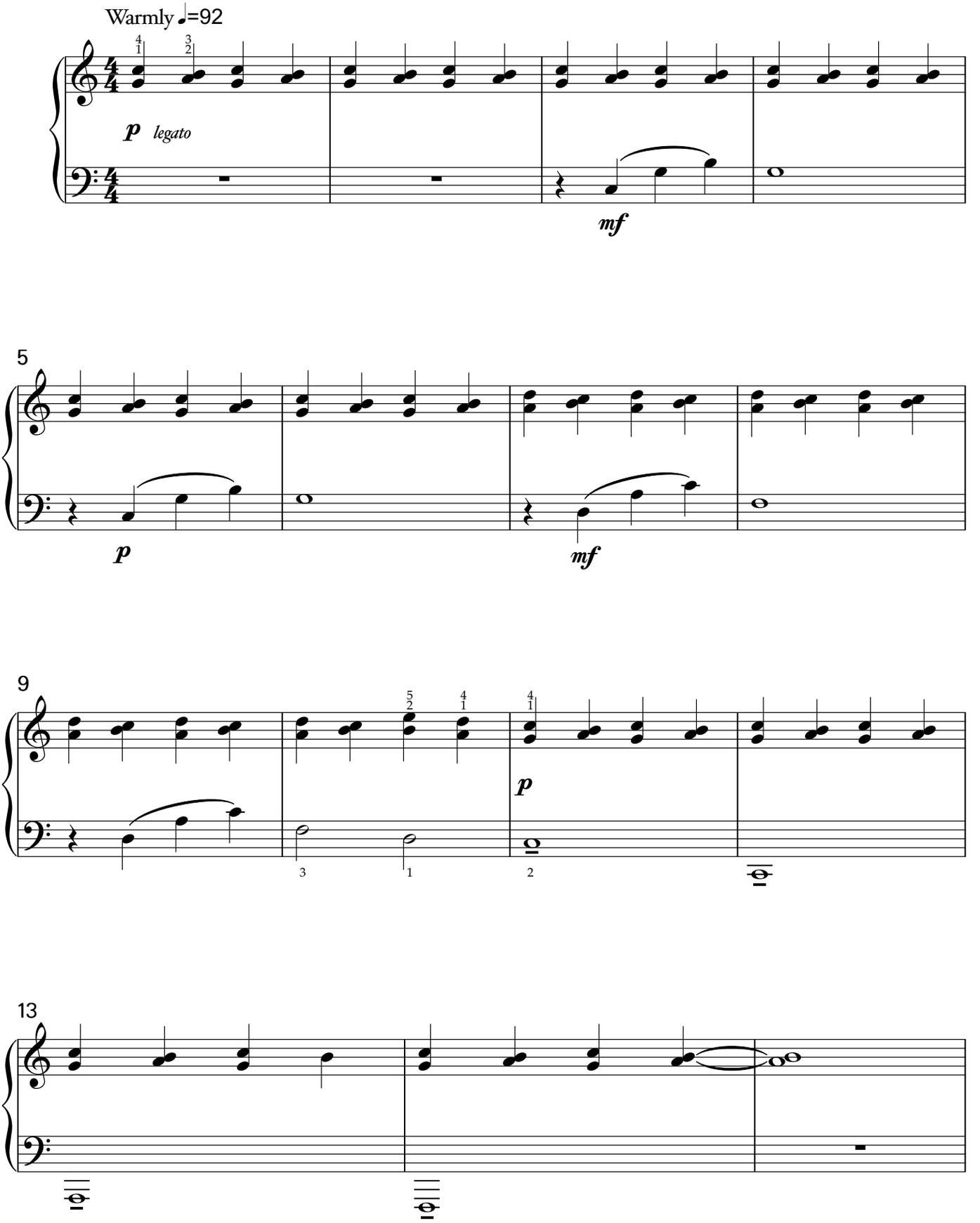

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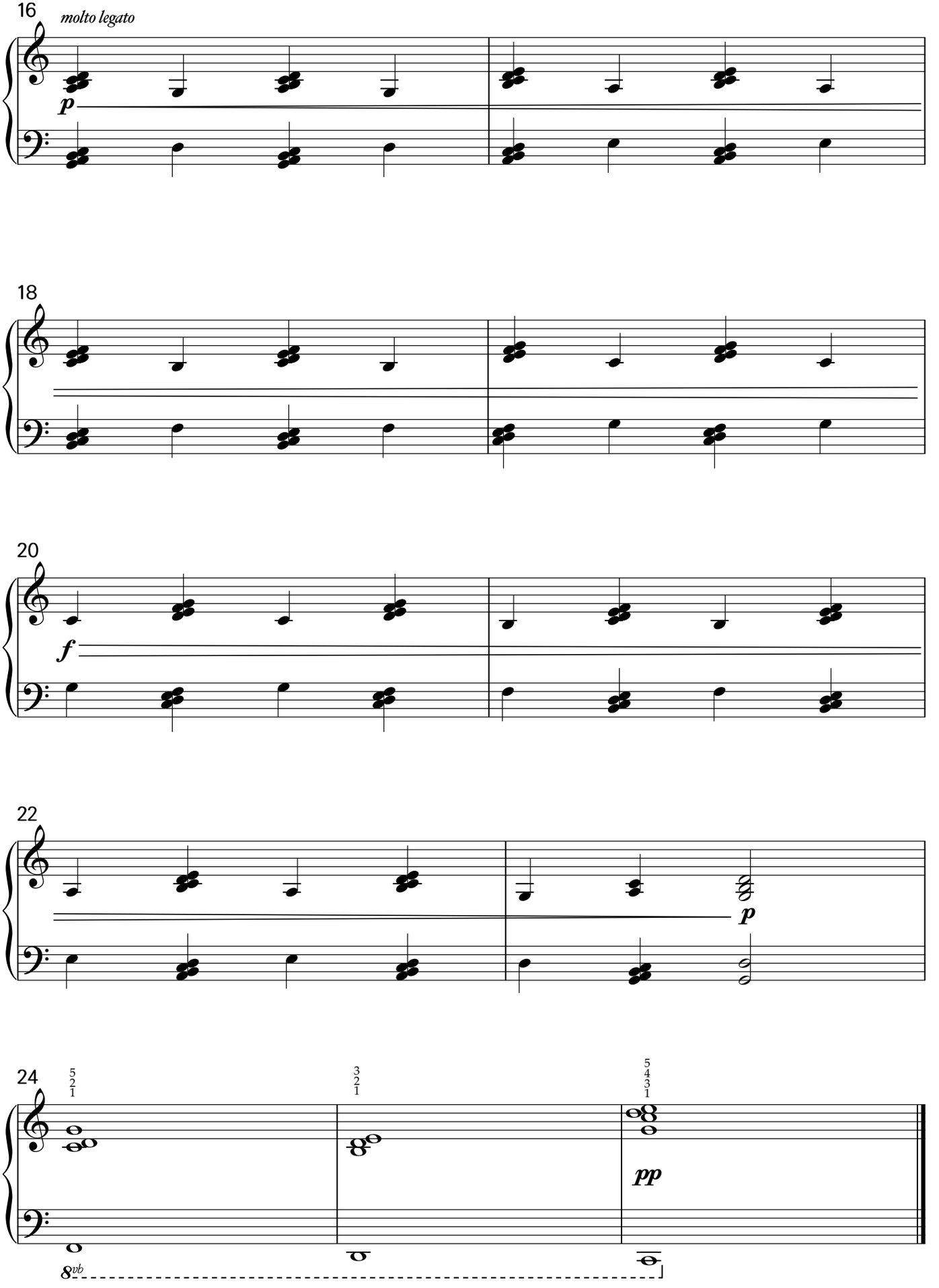

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purring

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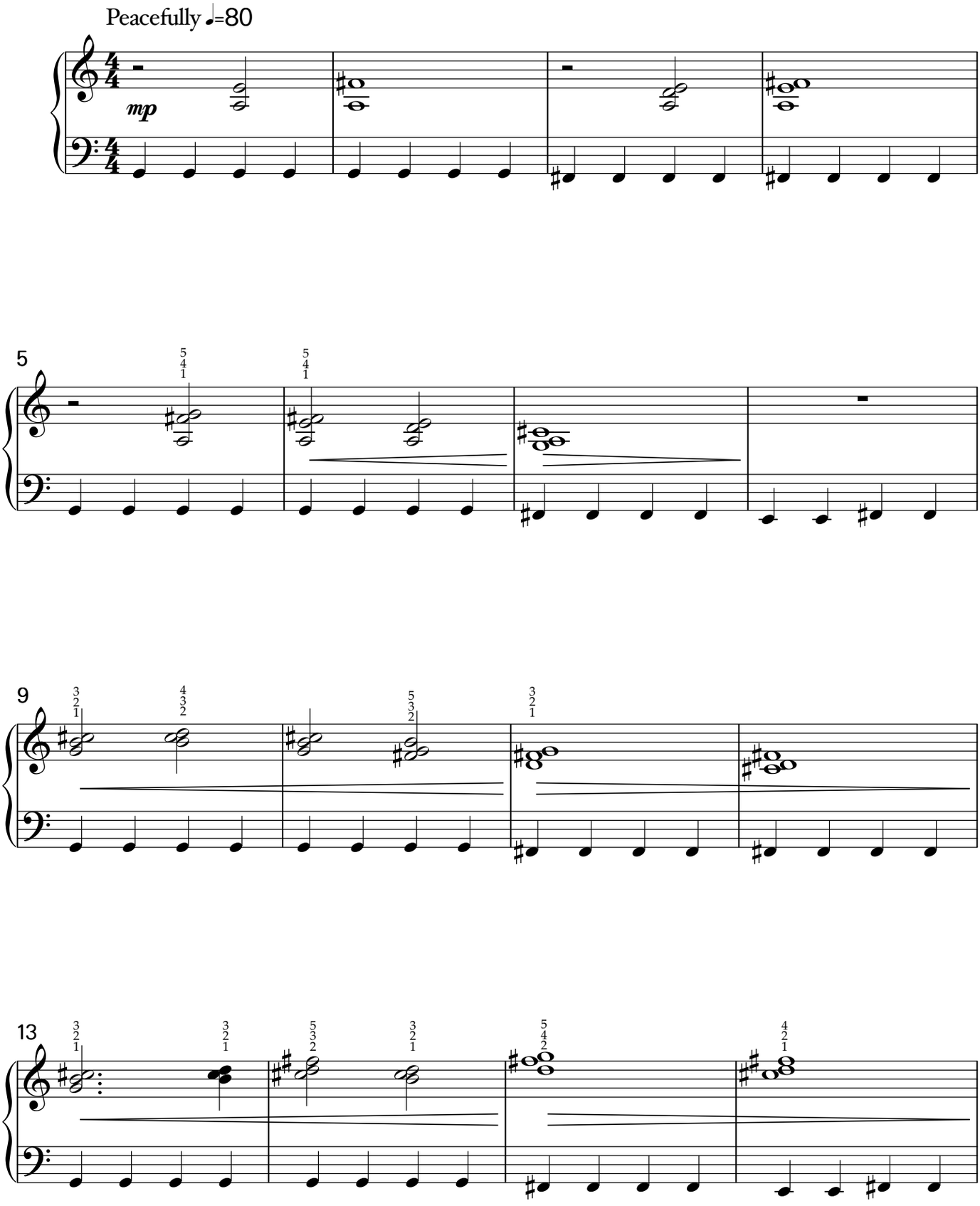

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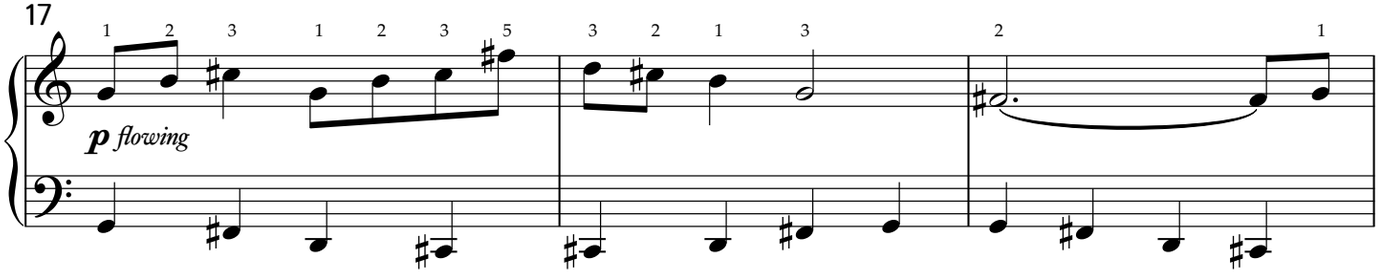

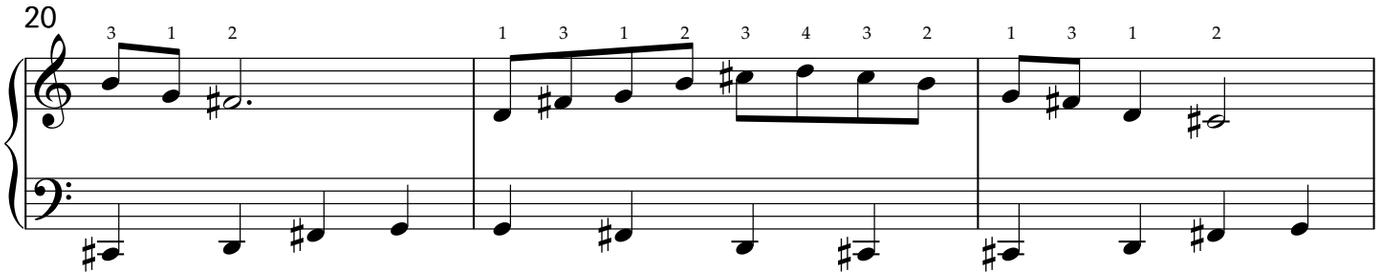

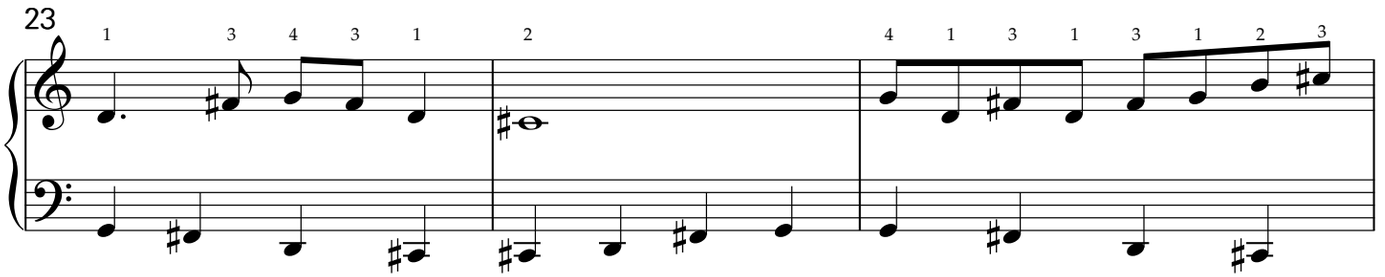

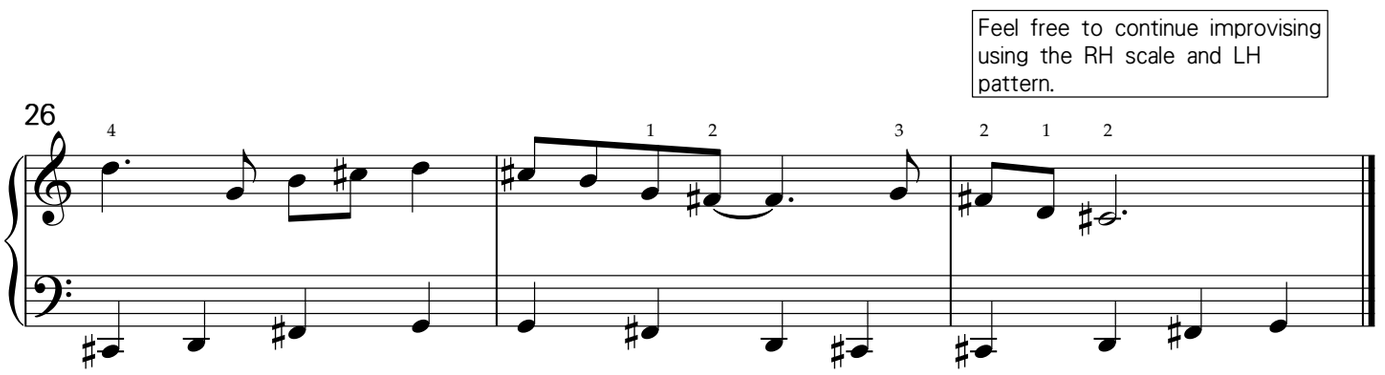

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laser pointer

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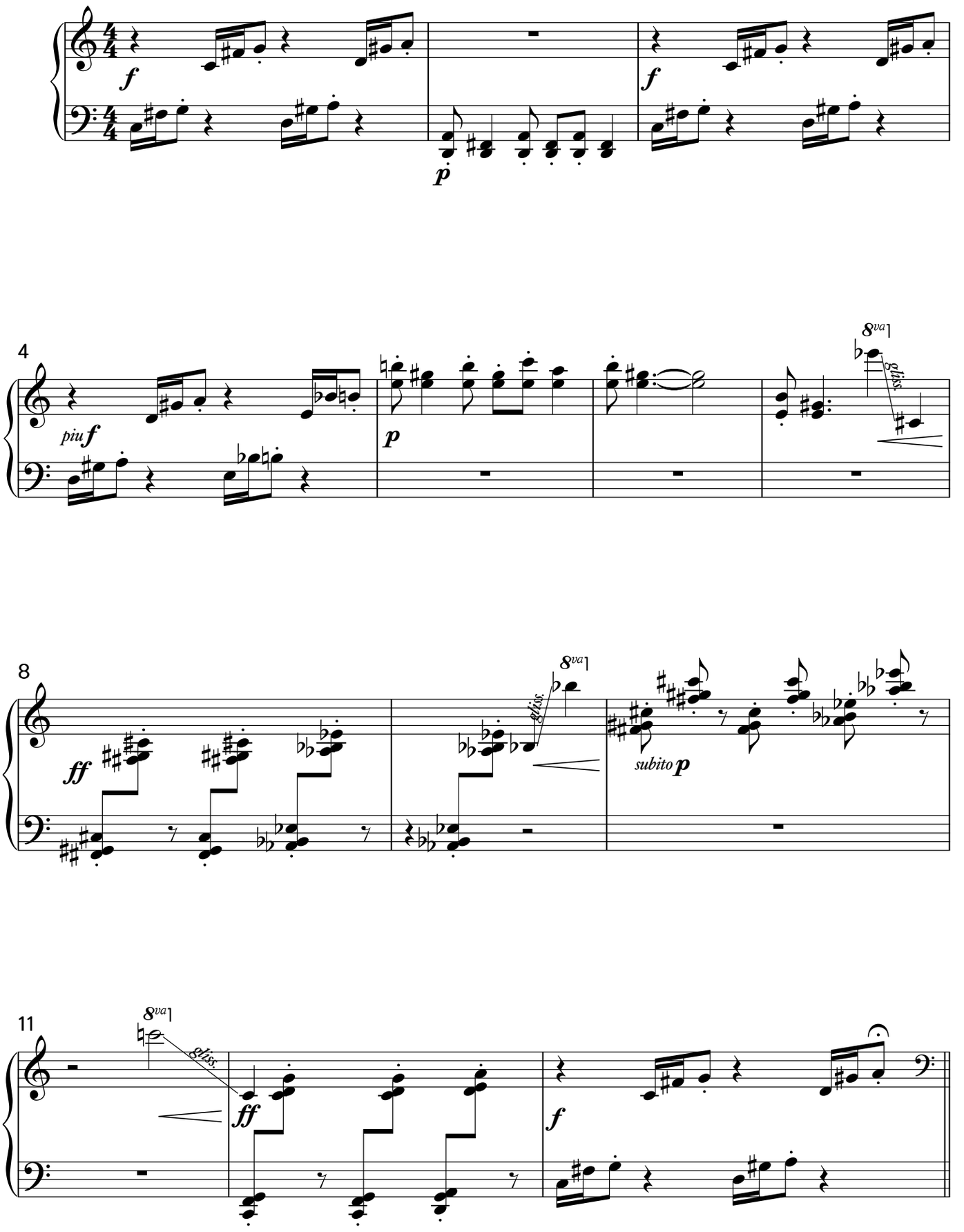
With extreme focus ♩=112



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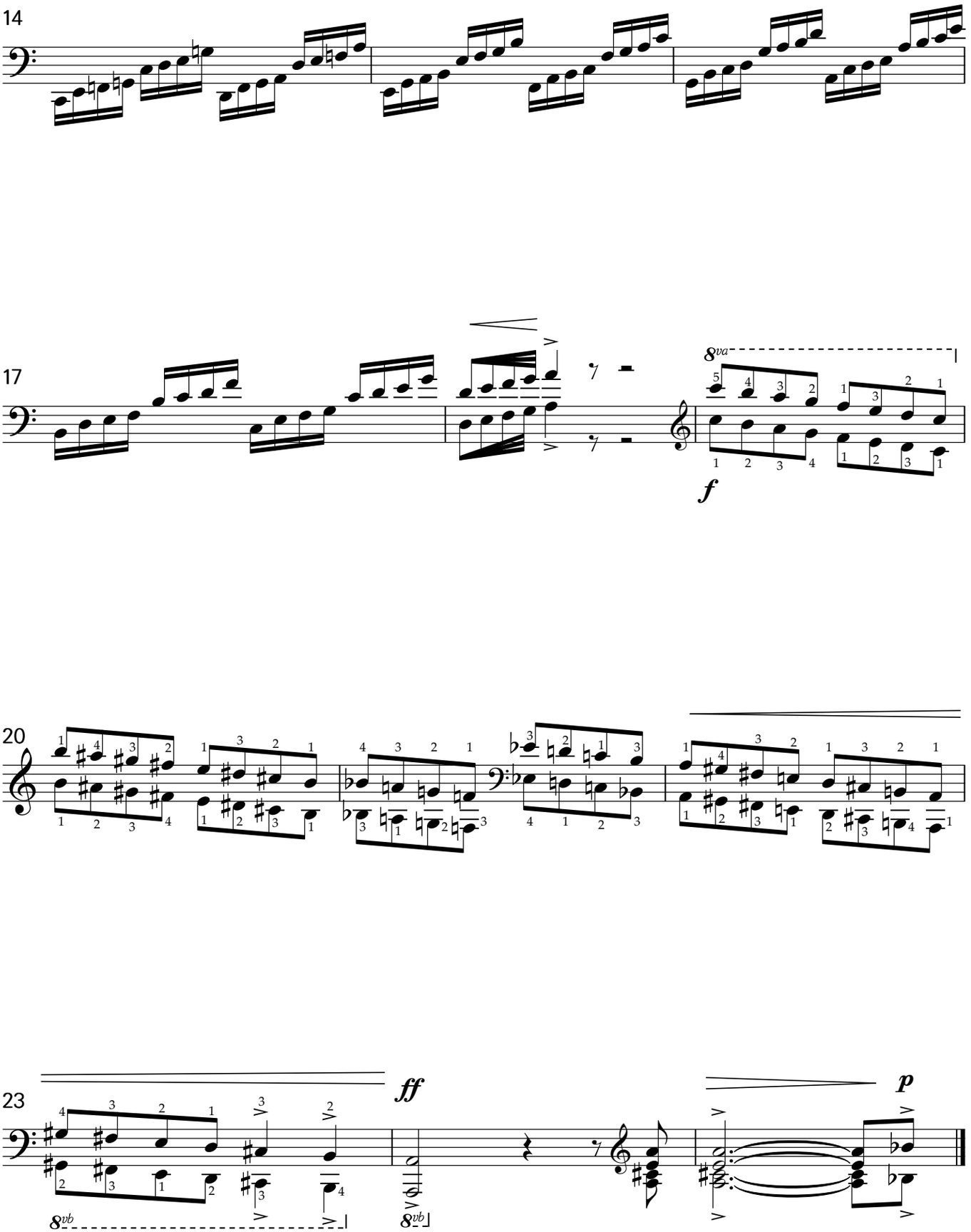

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box inspector

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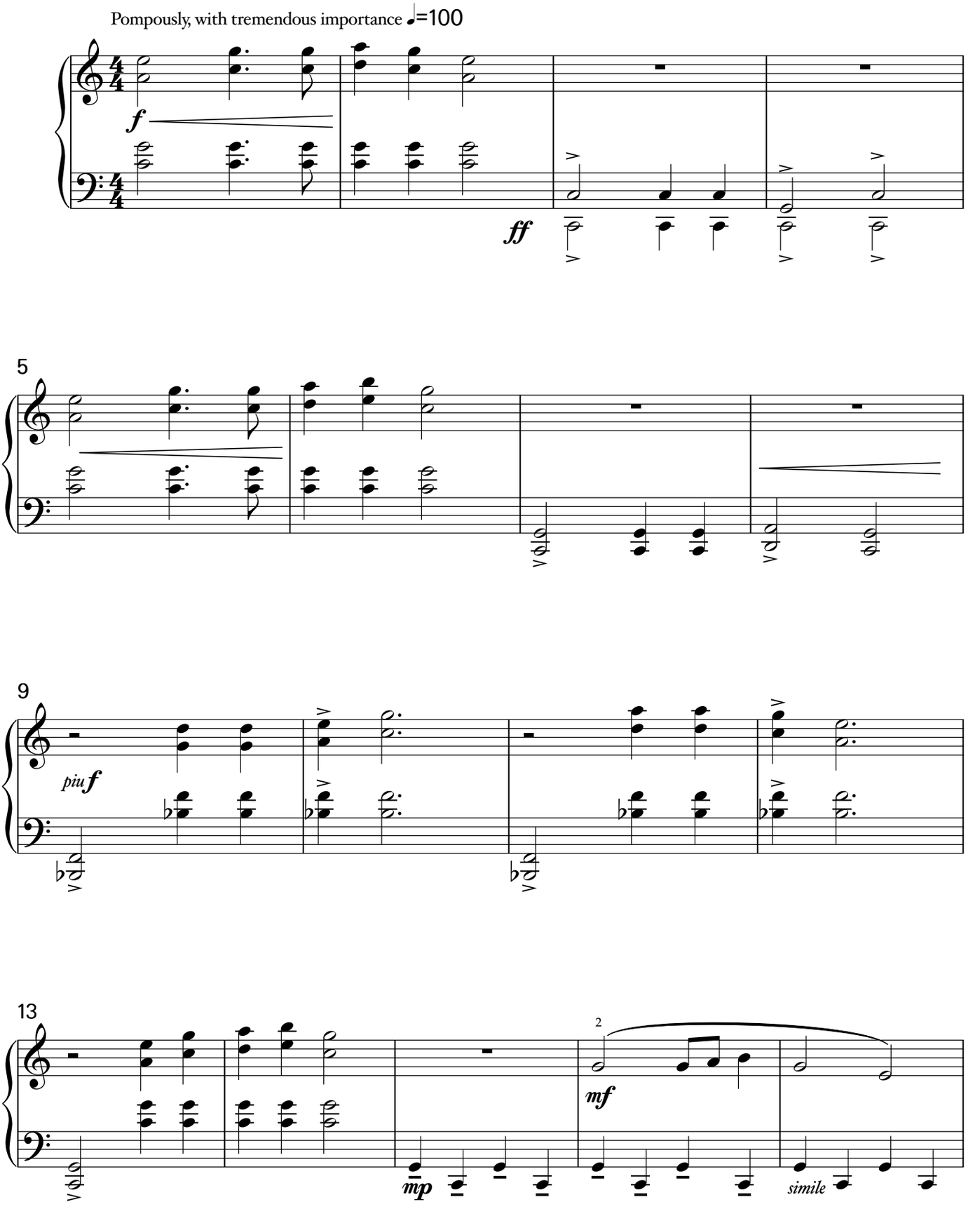

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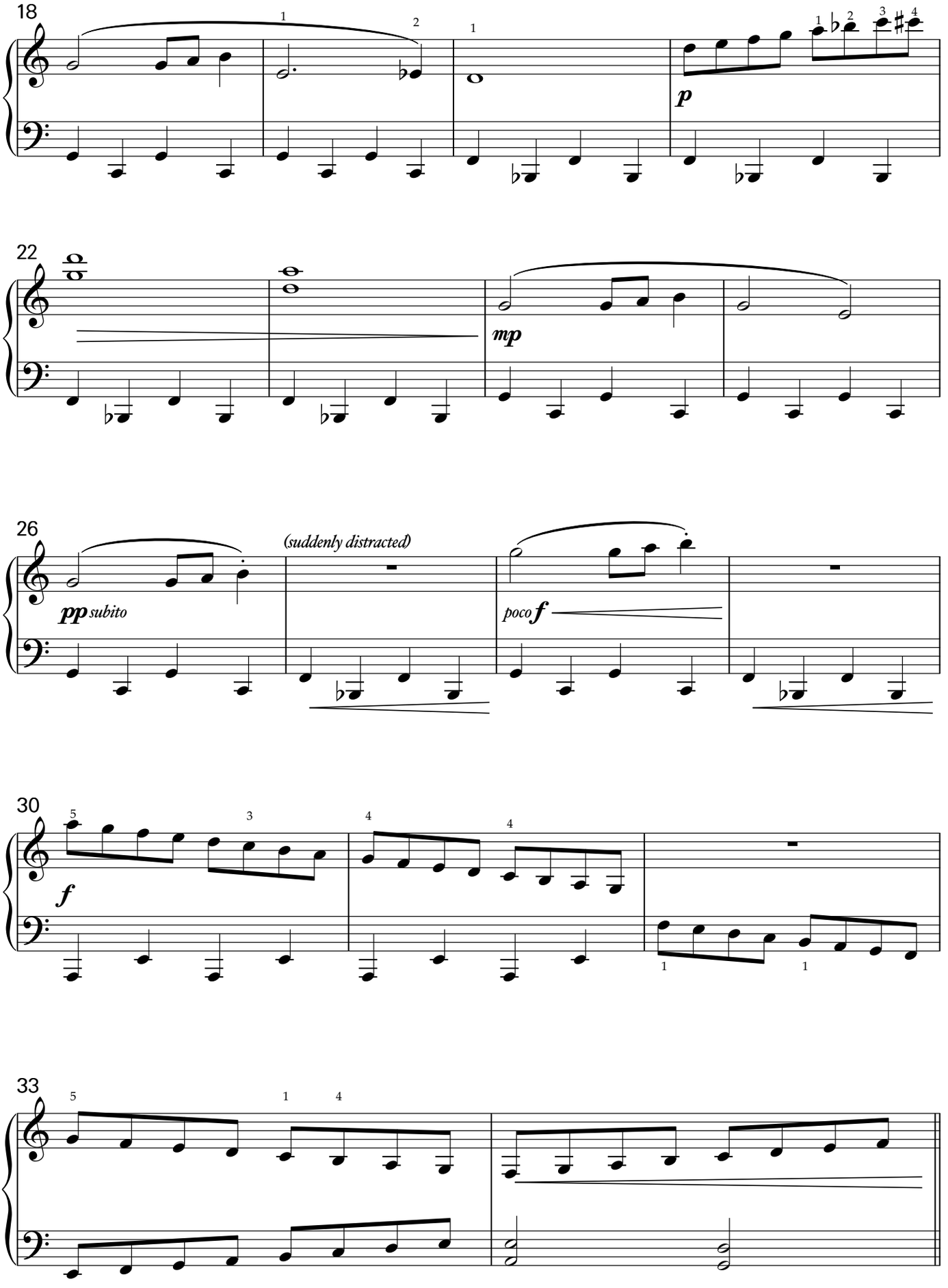

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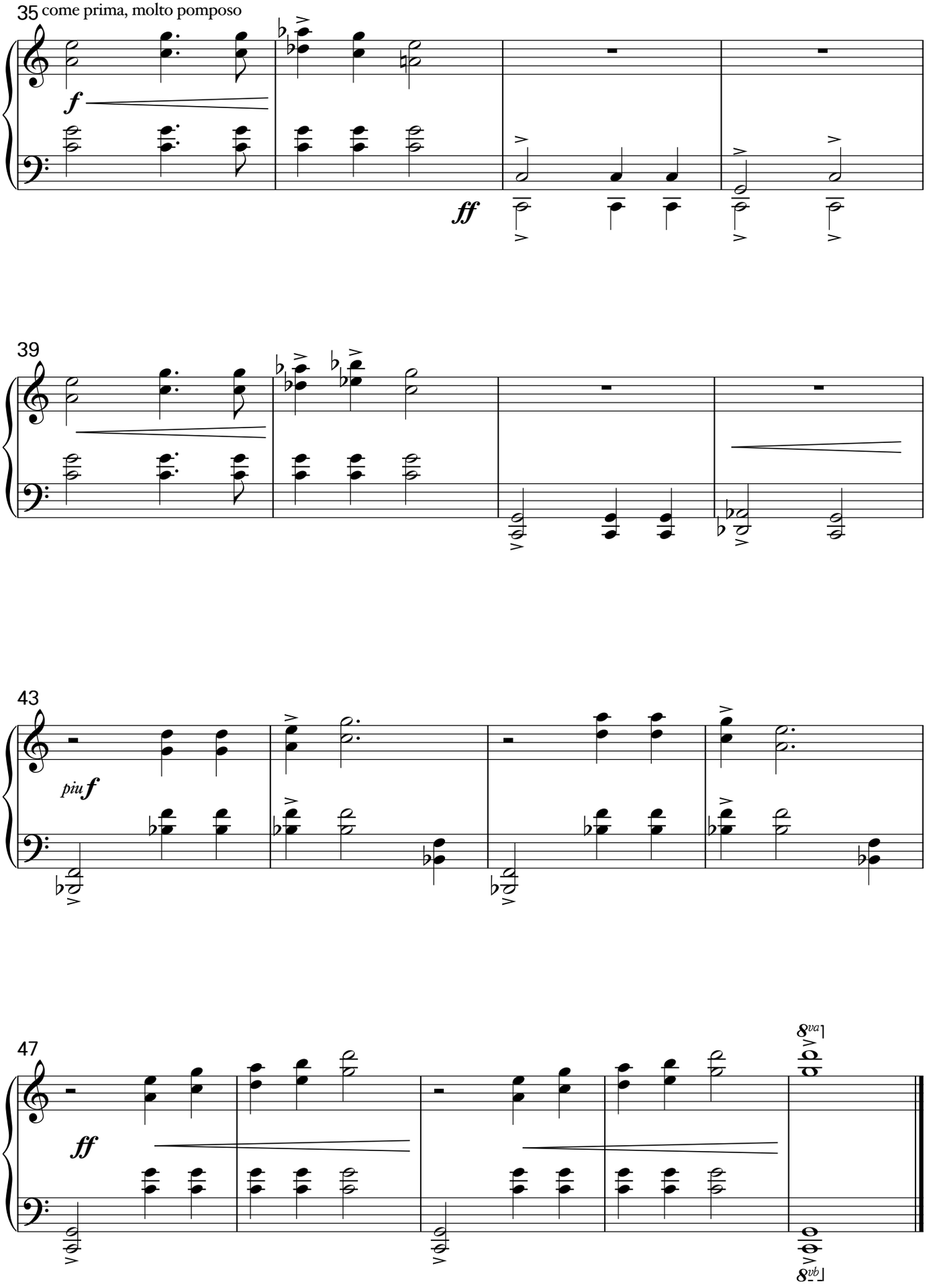

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the zoomies

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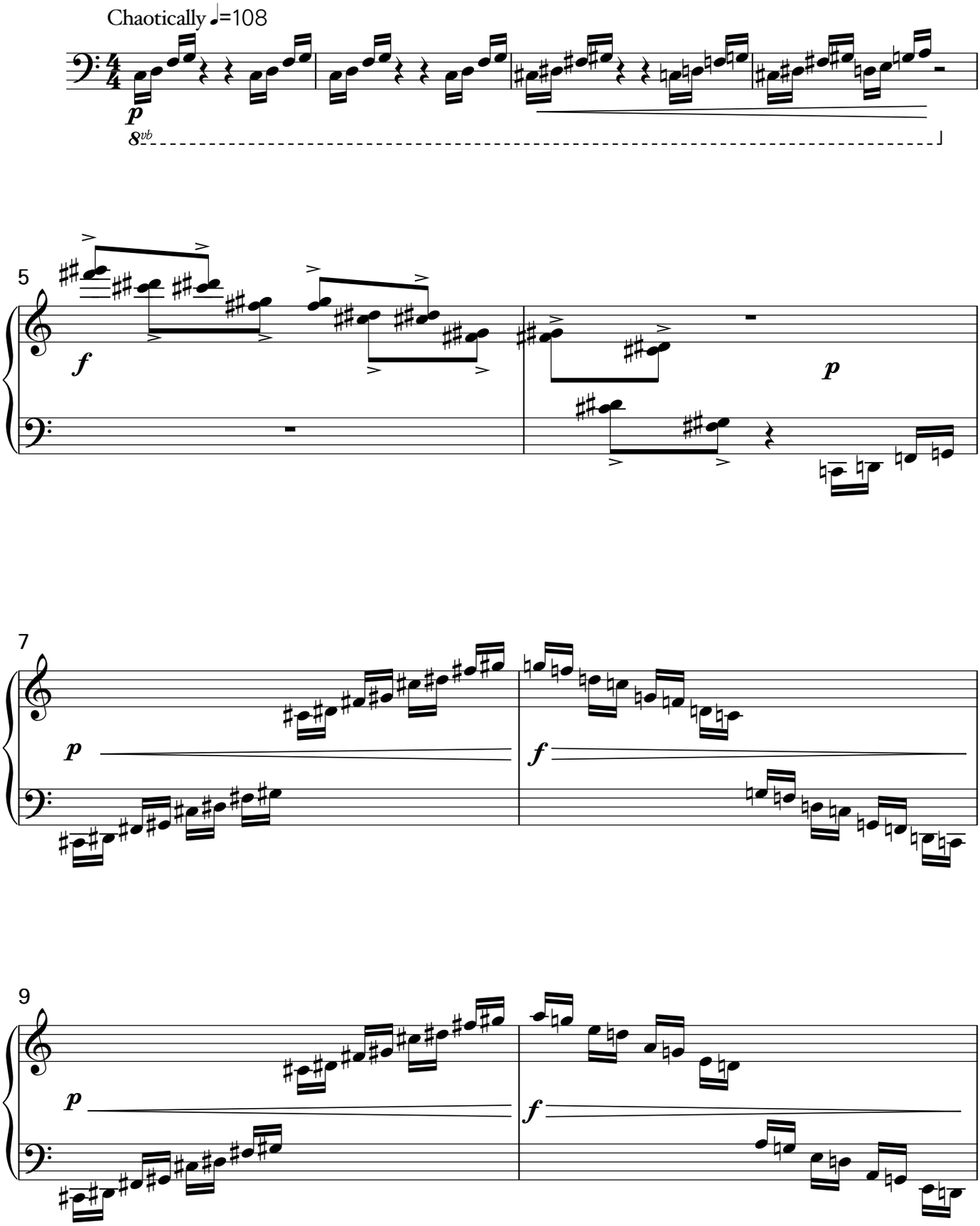

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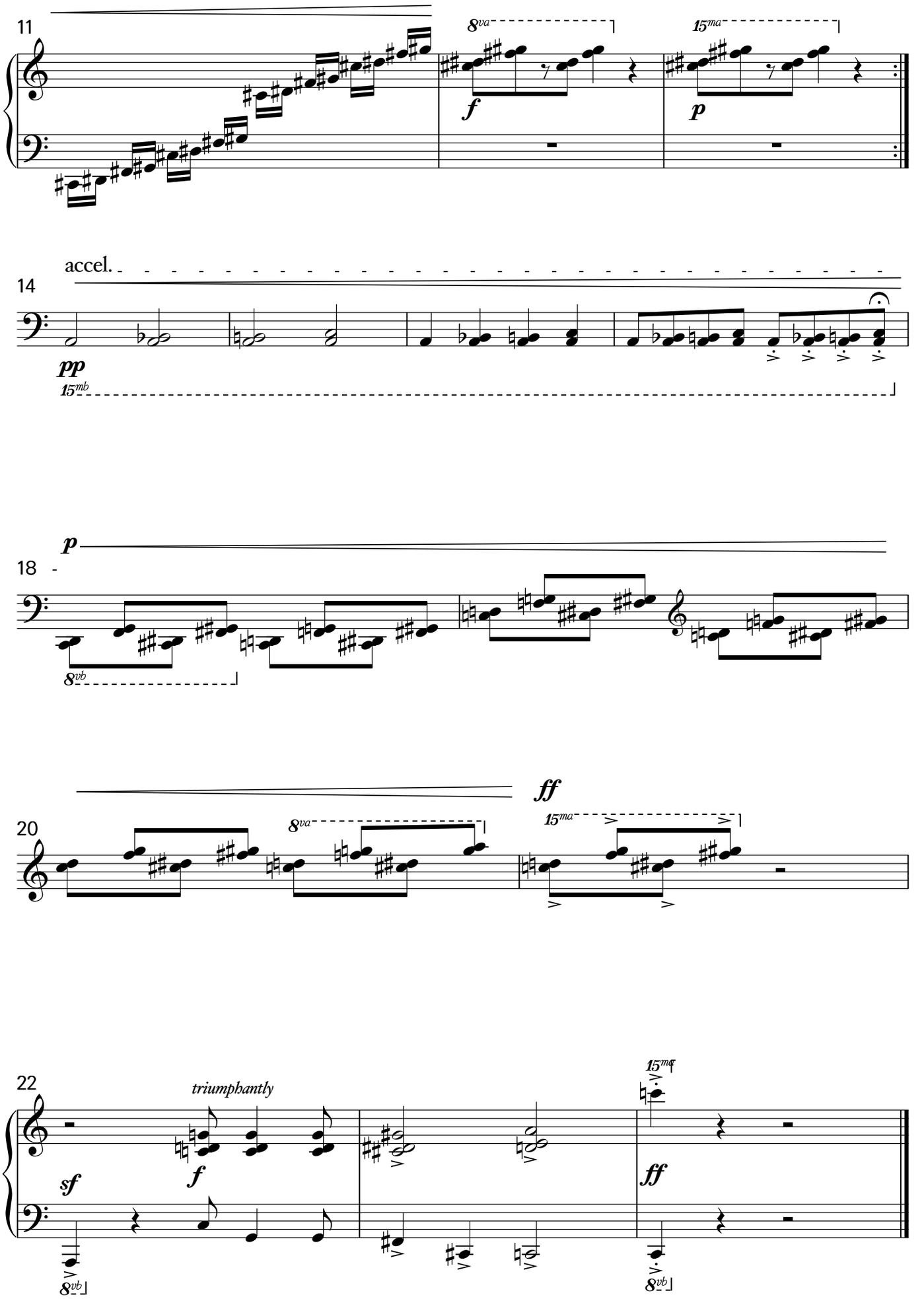

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Alexander Zhu is a composer, pianist and producer whose work has been showcased in film festivals across the US and Europe, and can be heard on Disney+, Netflix and TF1. His pedagogical piano music is published by Hal-Leonard and Red Leaf Pianoworks. As a concert artist, he has performed solo recitals, concerti and chamber, orchestral, pop, fusion and film music coast to coast in the United States, and across Europe and China. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Southern California, and earned a Bachelor of Music degree from New England Conservatory.

Dr. Zhu lives in Los Angeles and is the chair of the Music Production, Theory, and Composition Department at the Pasadena Conservatory of Music. He is a Professor of Music at Occidental College and Pierce College.

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