st184.1.61

sumtone

:

michael edwards

for Magda Cordell, if she'll have it

for piano and computer or piano solo

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programme note

for Magda Cordell, if she'll have it was created with algorithmic composition software I've been developing since 2000. In particular this piece uses a looping technique designed for processing digital audio but now adapted to looping notated rhythms.

Magda Cordell's *Figure (Woman)* is a hugely energetic painting that manages to create recognisable forms from techniques we usually associate with abstract expressionism, something analogous to the conscious yet non-reactionary use of tonal (even jazz-like) structures in the cascade of notes that pour forth in my piece.

performance requirements

essential equipment for performances with computer:

Microphones for the piano connected to the sound card either directly or via a mixing desk. An extra microphone placed over the keyboard should also be available. If a mixing desk is used all microphone signals should mixed at the desk into one (aux) send to the computer.

Sound system: 8 loudspeakers are preferred (the computer should send 8 balanced line out signals, one for each loudspeaker). They are to be placed around the audience as follows:

1 2
3 4
5 6
7 8

Performances with less loudspeakers are possible by combining two channels onto one speaker on the mixing desk or in software (the outputs of Max/MSP or the sound card configuration).

computer/electronics

This work may also be performed without computer, i.e. as a solo piano piece. If performed with the computer then the piece begins with a directed improvisation (see following directions).

The computer part is not notated in the score as it is a prepared improvisation using custom-designed Max/MSP software. At present, only the composer is able to perform this (though consideration would be given to other performers if desired: email info@sumtone.com for details).

Level control for the piano and electronics is performed at the computer but may be adjusted by the sound engineer as deemed necessary.

performance directions

Accidentals carry throughout the bar but only apply to a single octave/staff, and are repeated for clarification as deemed necessary.

Except where otherwise indicated, meter changes necessitate rhythmic units to retain the same temporal duration, i.e., when changing from 2/4 to 5/8, an eighth note is equal in both meters.

For more details about the performance of this piece, please send email to info@sumtone.com or write to the address at the front of the score.

opening improvisation

If the piece is to be performed with computer then it begins with a directed improvisation.

Quiet sound files with very high frequencies begin the piece before the pianist comes on stage.

Ideally in advance of the performance, a cymbal or other metal disk (e.g. pan lid) is placed on the middle to low strings of the piano.

The opening is extremely quiet and events are very sparse to begin with (i.e. widely spaced with long pauses inbetween). There is a tendency to become more dense but a predicatable and clichéd crescendo/thickening of texture should be avoided by irregularities and unpredictable events.

The pianist and computer performer should endeavour to create coincidences: eye contact should be established, the pianist should wait for several seconds, then, when s/he moves to create an event, the computer performer should trigger something clearly related to or derived from the piano event.

The improvisation begins inside the piano. Events proceed in the following order:

1. turn cymbal on strings (with or without pedal)
2. tap metal/hard object (e.g. stone, triangle beater) on cymbal (pedal)
3. pizz ordinario (especially on strings under cymbal)
4. finger tapping on strings (especially on bass strings) and sounding board
5. flat of hand slap on bass strings and those under the cymbal
6. tap metal object on strings, metal strut, or metal plate/support at string peg furthest from keyboard.

As each new event is introduced it is combined with preceding events, i.e. the new events are not used exclusively and alone before introducing the next event but rather mixed with the others that preceded.

After all events have been introduced and a satisfying, energetic dialogue/texture has been established, one hand (probably the right) should move to the keyboard and start very fast runs *without striking a note*: the over-keyboard microphone picks up fingernail-taps only. The other (left) hand continues inside the piano as before but also now removes the cymbal/pan lid.

As this takes place, the overall level, especially of the electronics, should be reduced (if necessary) so that the relatively quiet fingernail-taps are clearly audible.

Now the pianist starts following the pitch contours of the opening of the (notated) piece, occasionally tapping a key hard enough to elicit a normal struck note (only occasionally at first, but becoming more frequent). The other (left) hand moves from the inside of the piano also onto the keyboard and joins the first hand in the fast fingernail-taps and occasional notes.

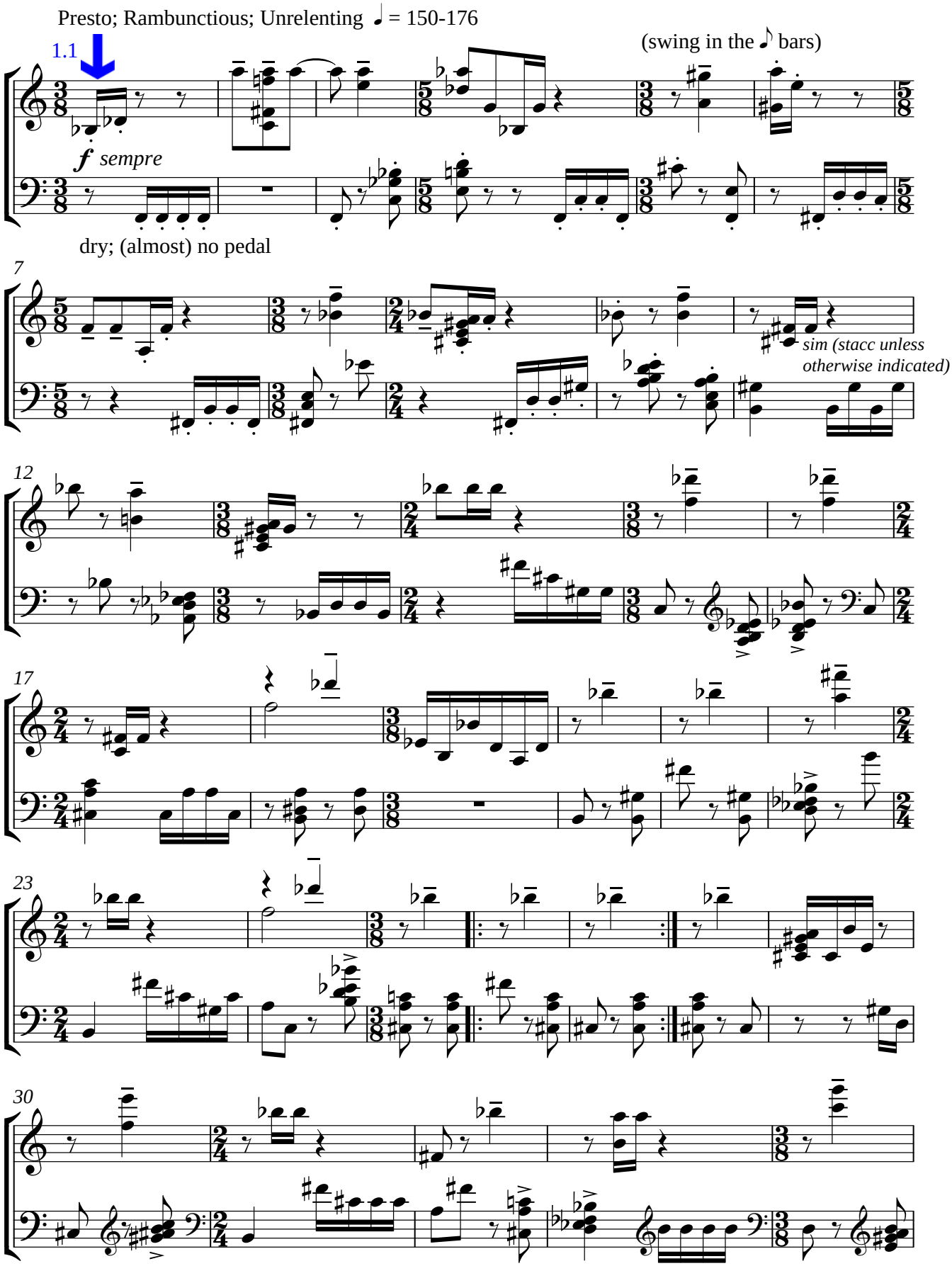
Gradually the texture of the opening of the notated piece begins to dominate: more and more struck notes (use especially those of the opening bars), the rhythmic urgency, even the chords begin to appear, until at last the pianist launches seemlessly into the opening bars and the notated piece is underway. The electronics continue, improvised.

for Sarah Nicolls and the Huddersfield Festival, 19th November 2007

for Magda Cordell, if she'll have it

duration 10:30–18 mins.

michael edwards 2007



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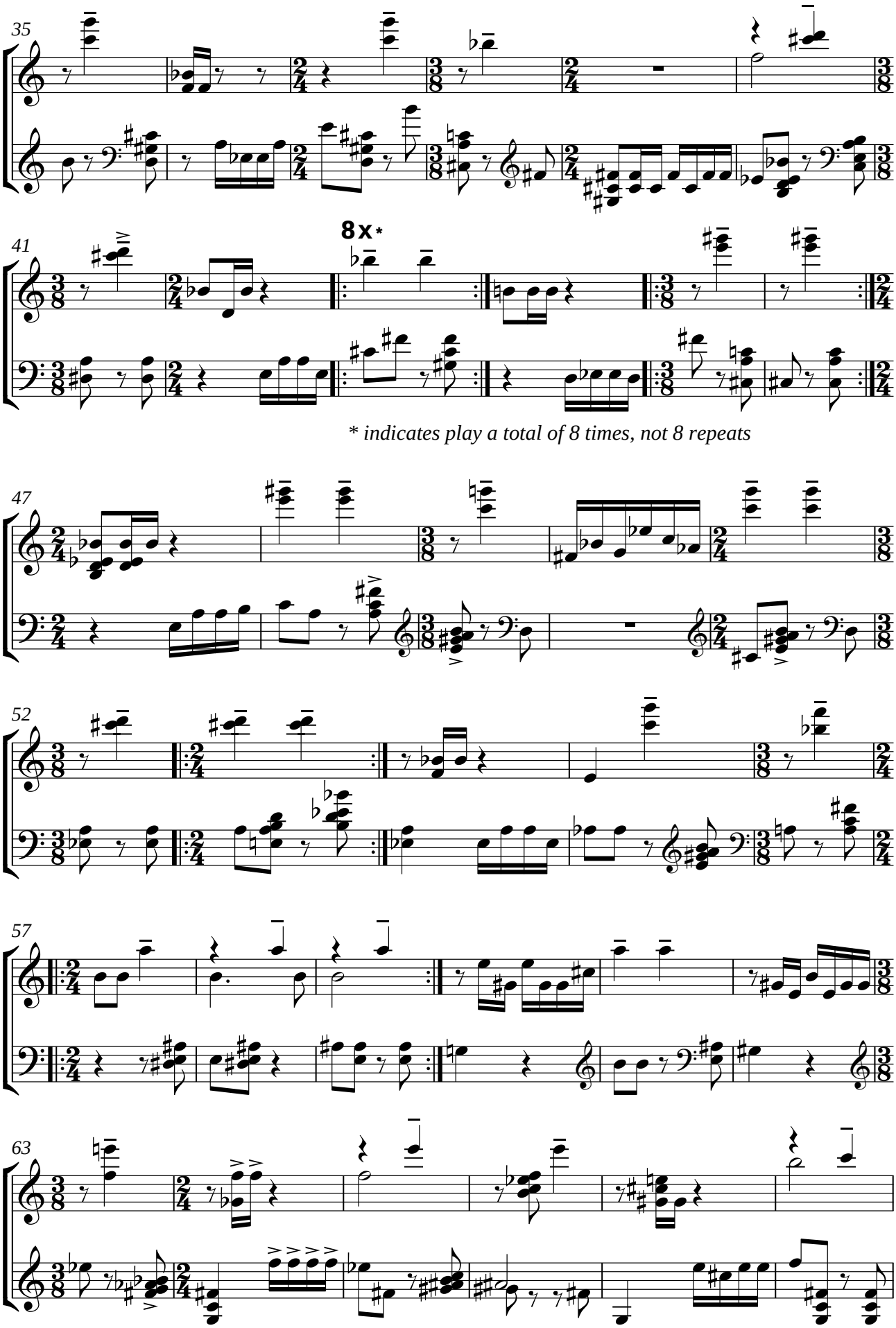
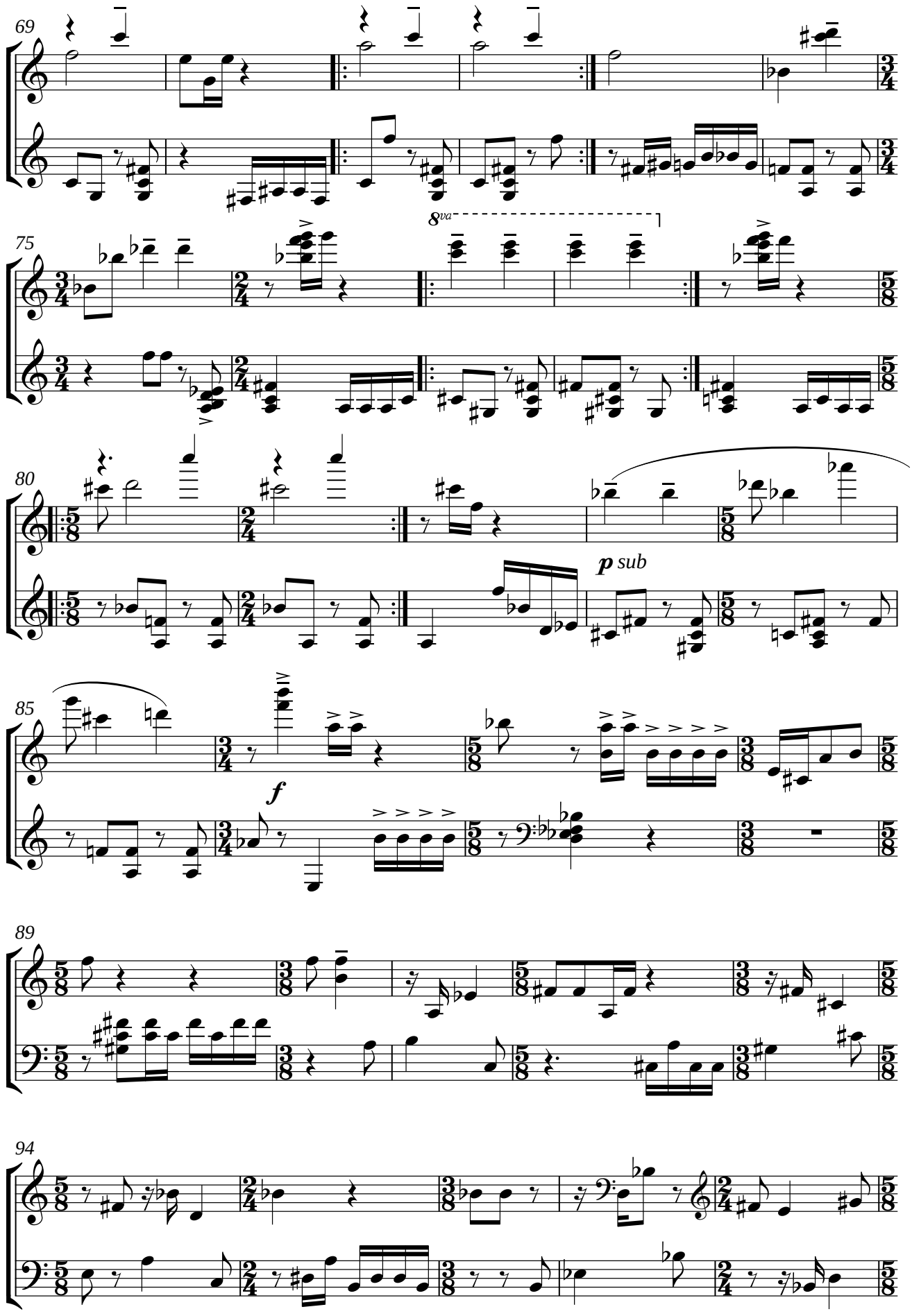
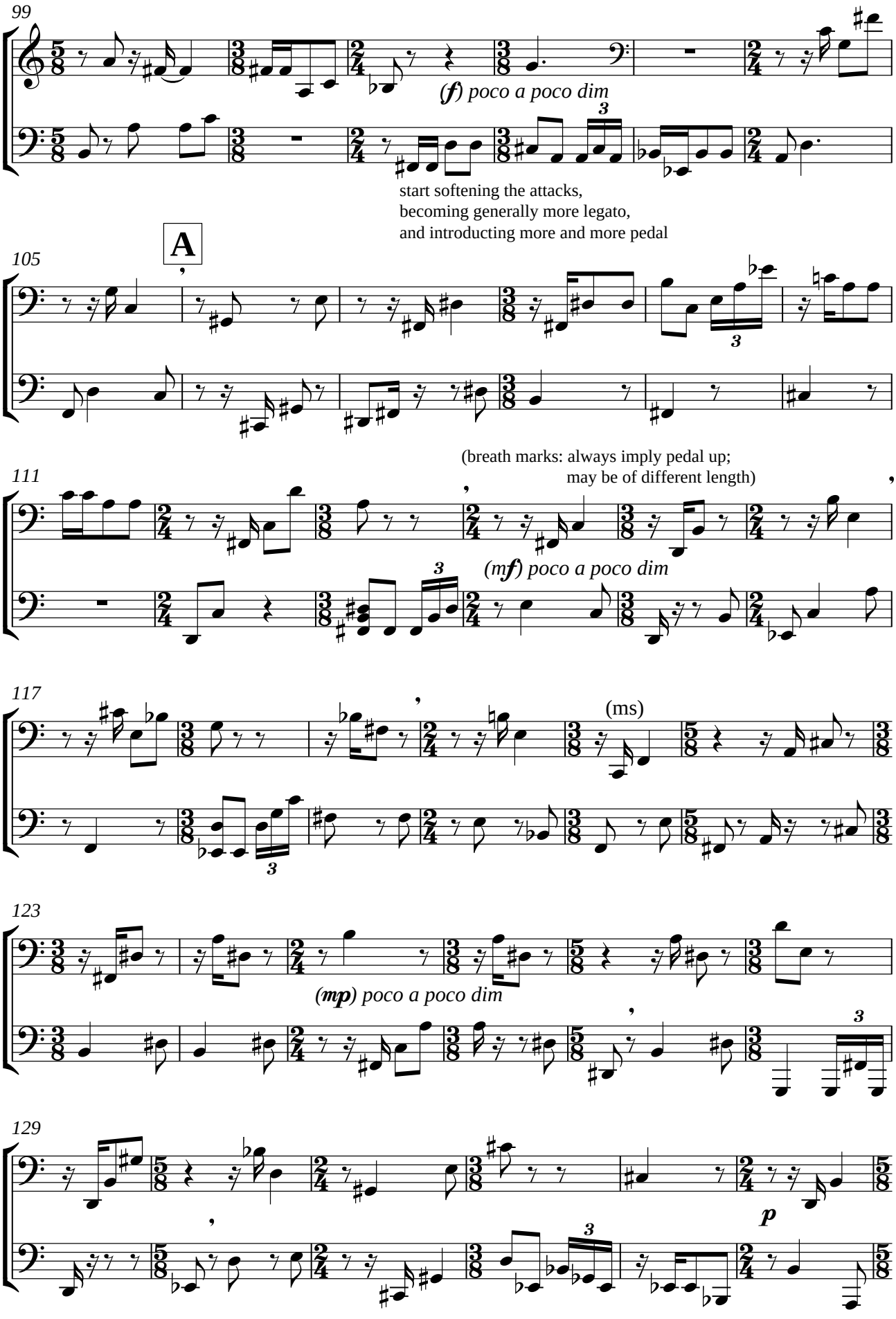
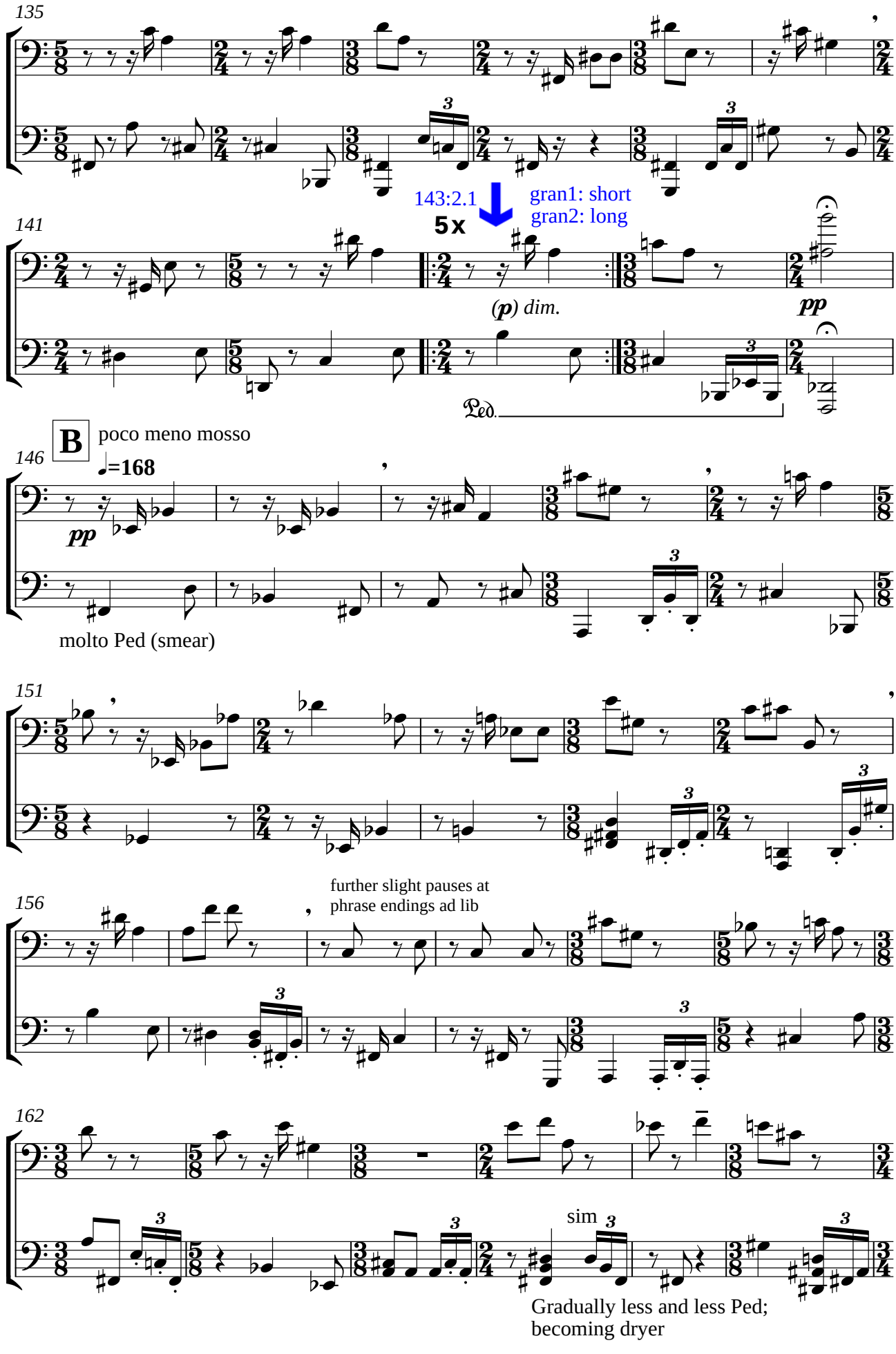
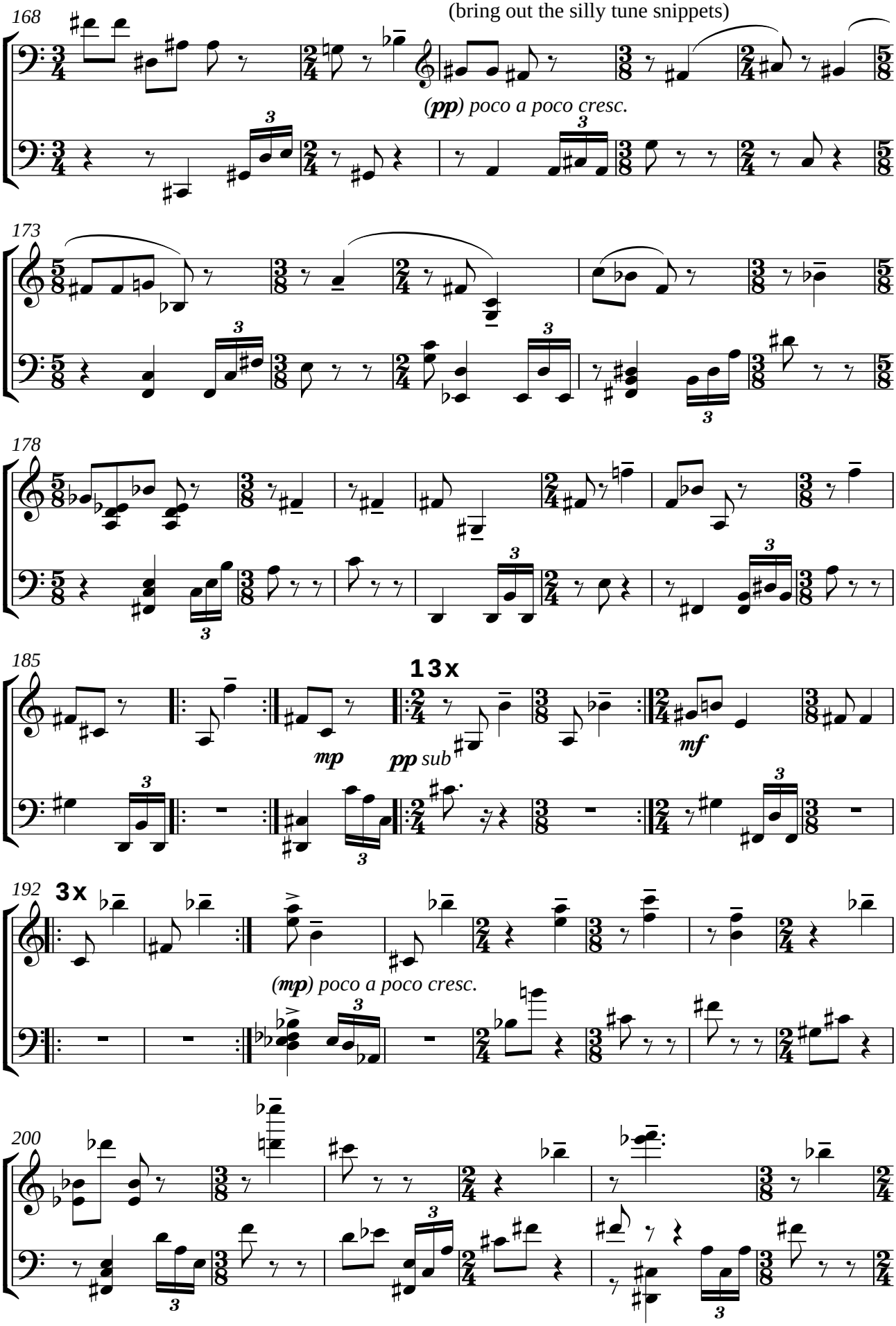


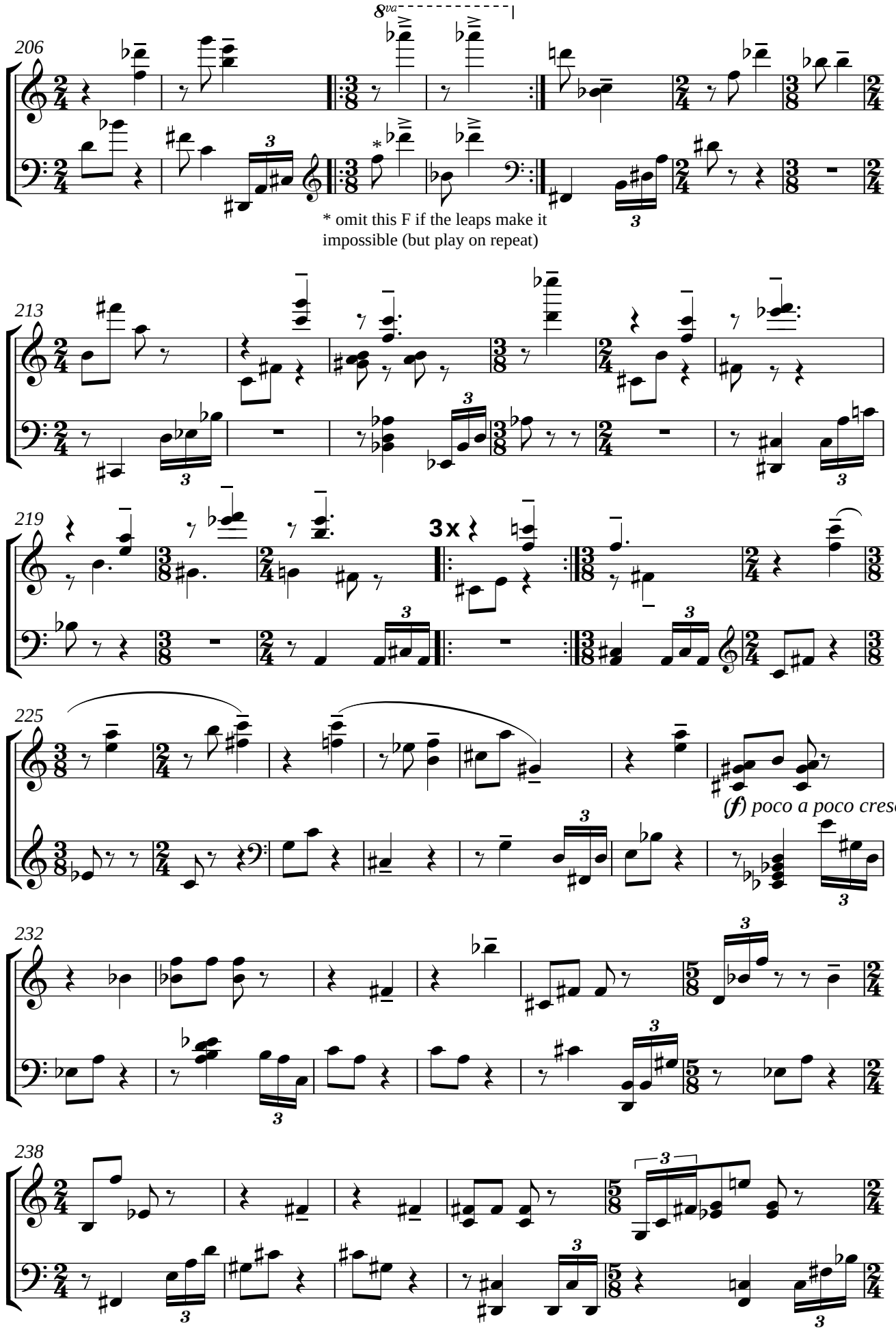
* indicates play a total of 8 times, not 8 repeats

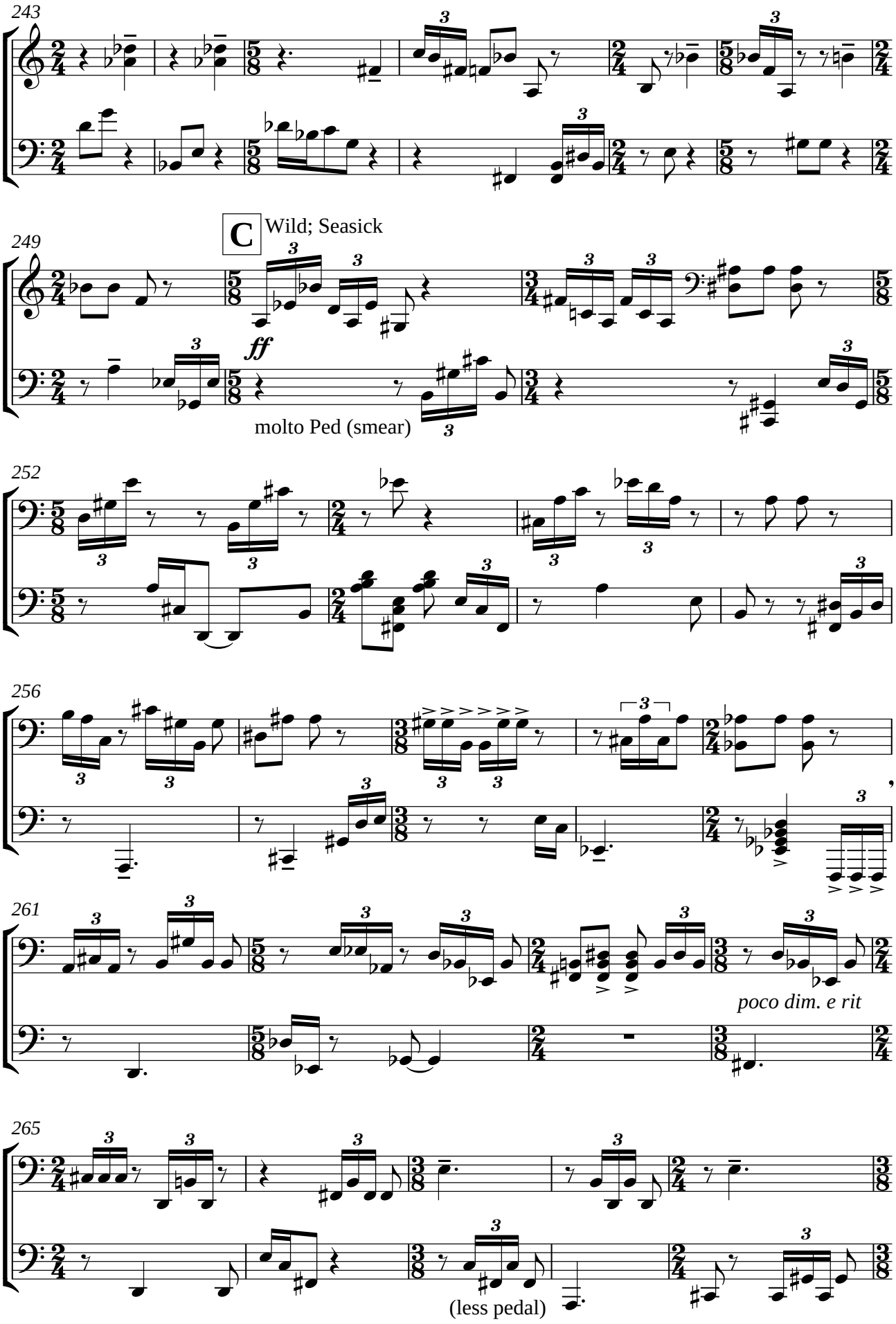

69
75
8va
80
p sub
85
f
89
94

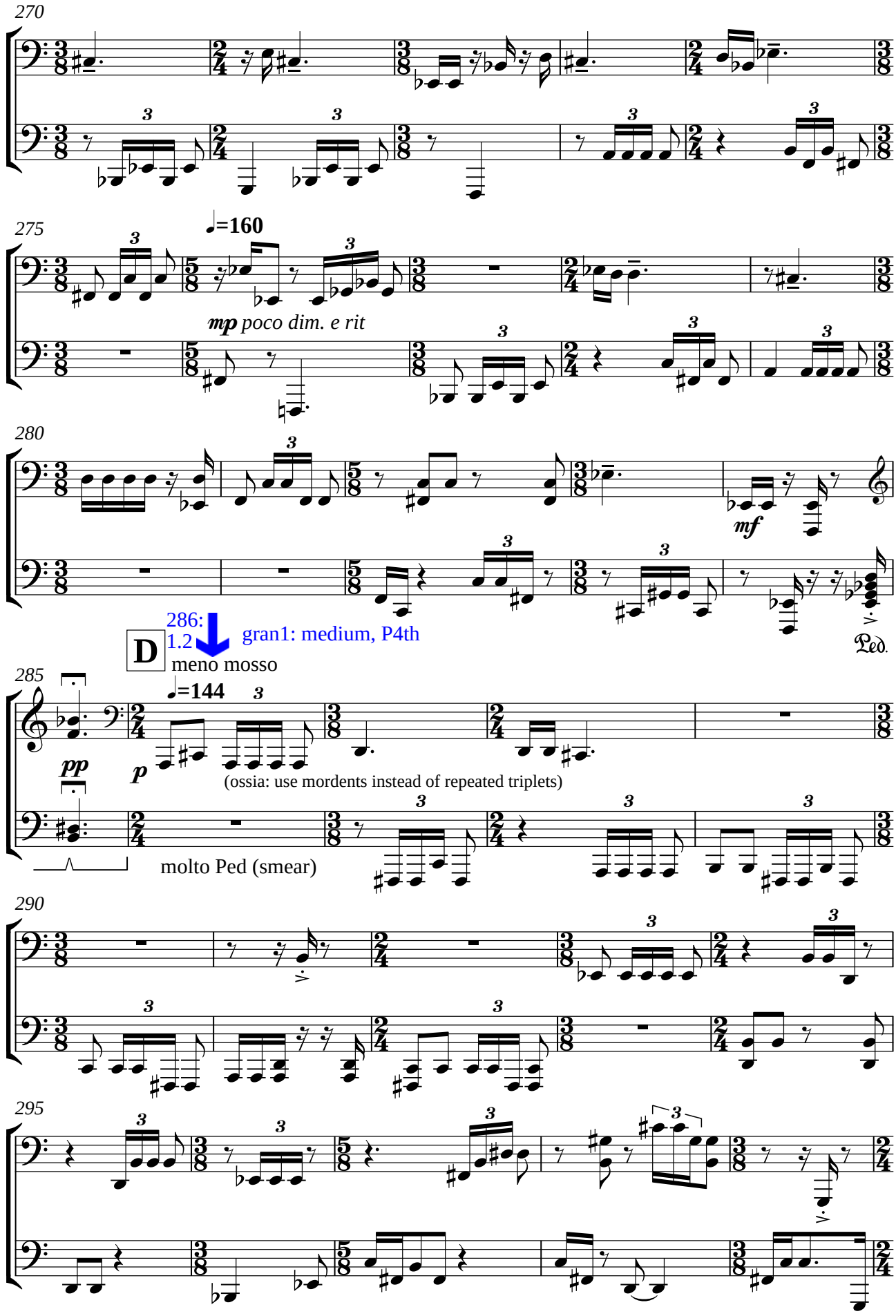

99
(f) poco a poco dim
start softening the attacks,
becoming generally more legato,
and introducting more and more pedal
A
105
(breath marks: always imply pedal up;
may be of different length)
111
(mf) poco a poco dim
117
(ms)
123
(mp) poco a poco dim
129
p

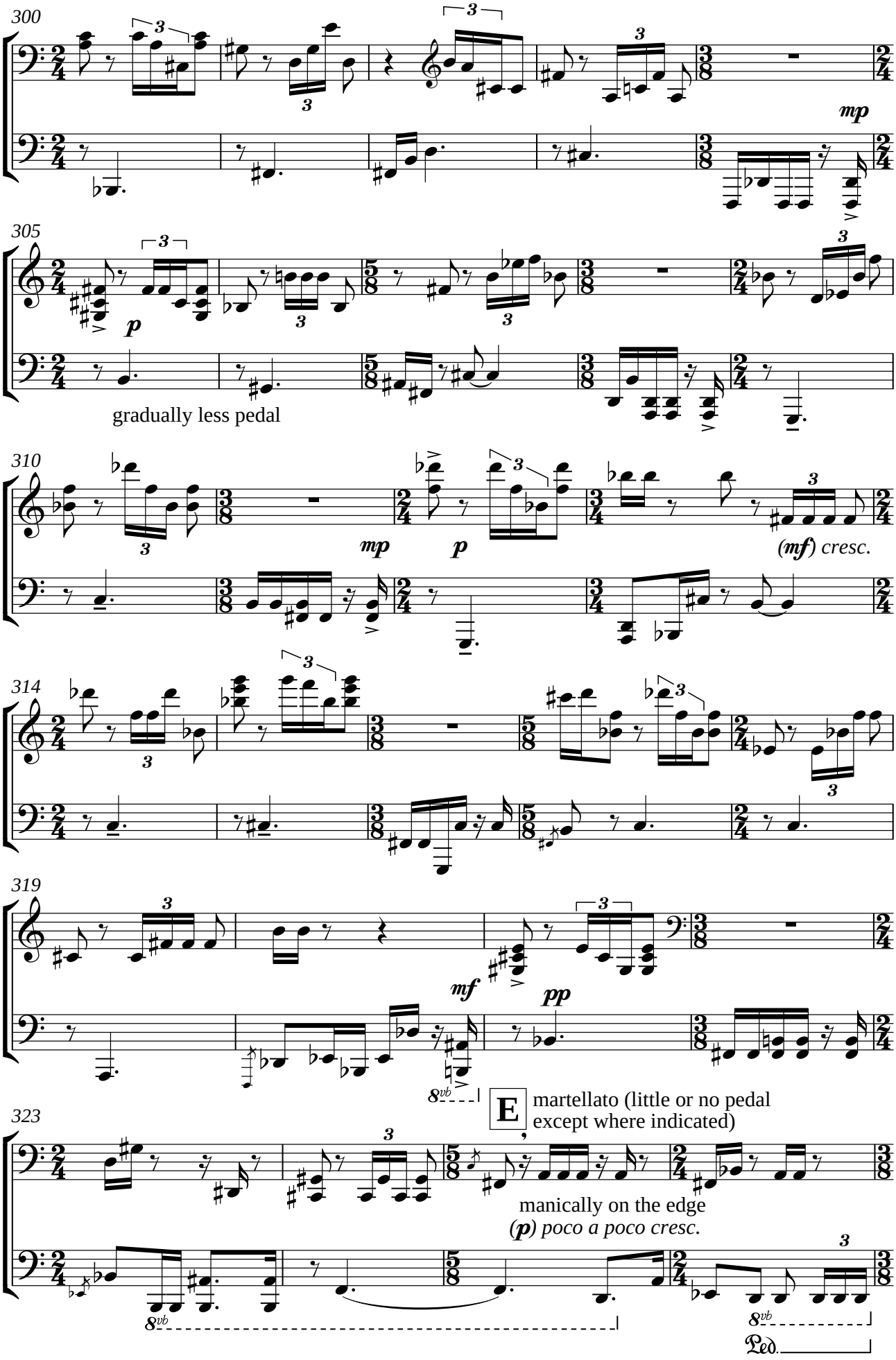

135
143:2.1
5x
gran1: short
gran2: long
141
(p) dim.
pp
Ped.
B
poco meno mosso
146
♩=168
pp
molto Ped (smear)
151
further slight pauses at
phrase endings ad lib
156
162
sim
Gradually less and less Ped;
becoming dryer

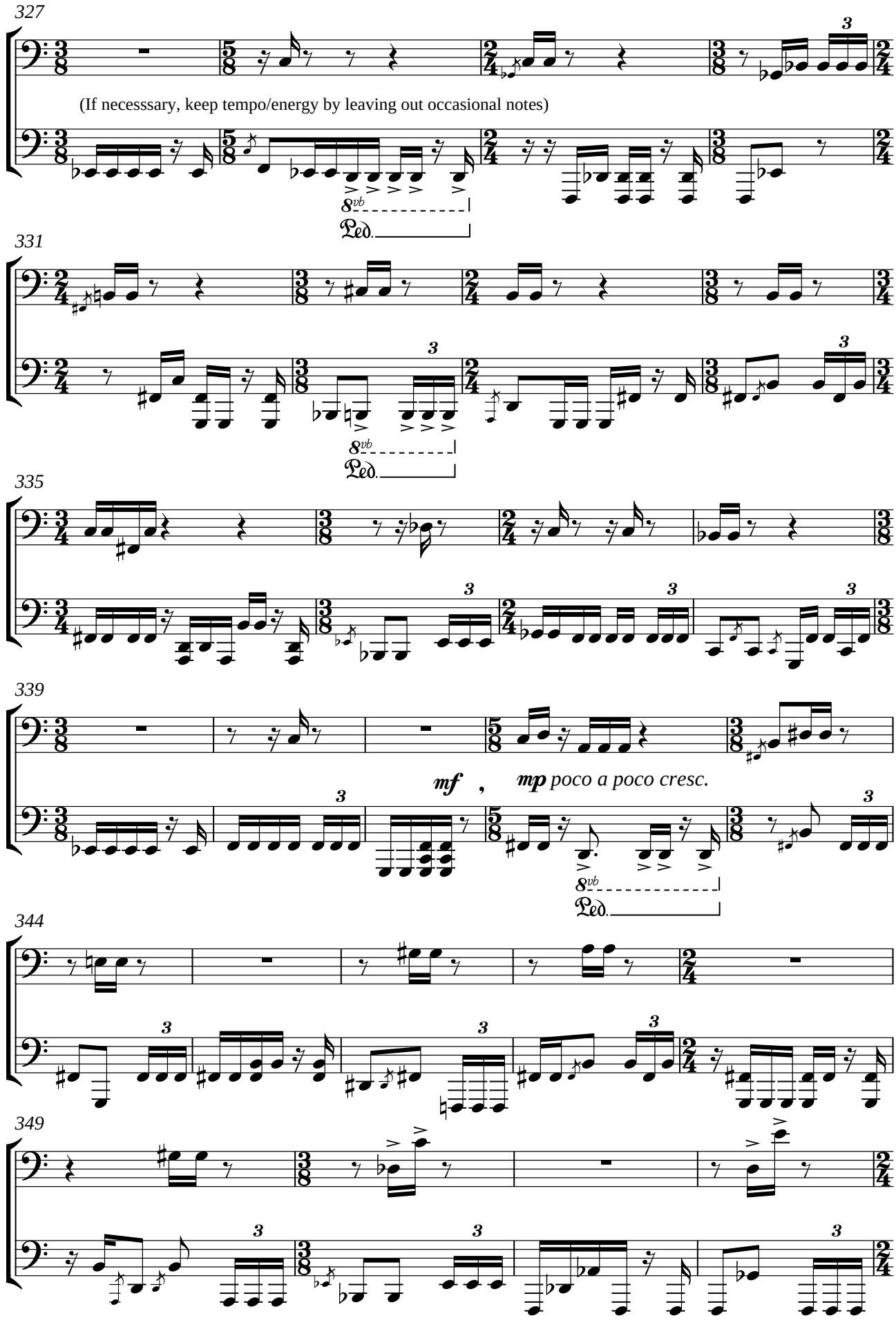

168
(bring out the silly tune snippets)
(pp) poco a poco cresc.
173
178
185
13x
mp
pp sub
mf
192
3x
(mp) poco a poco cresc.
200

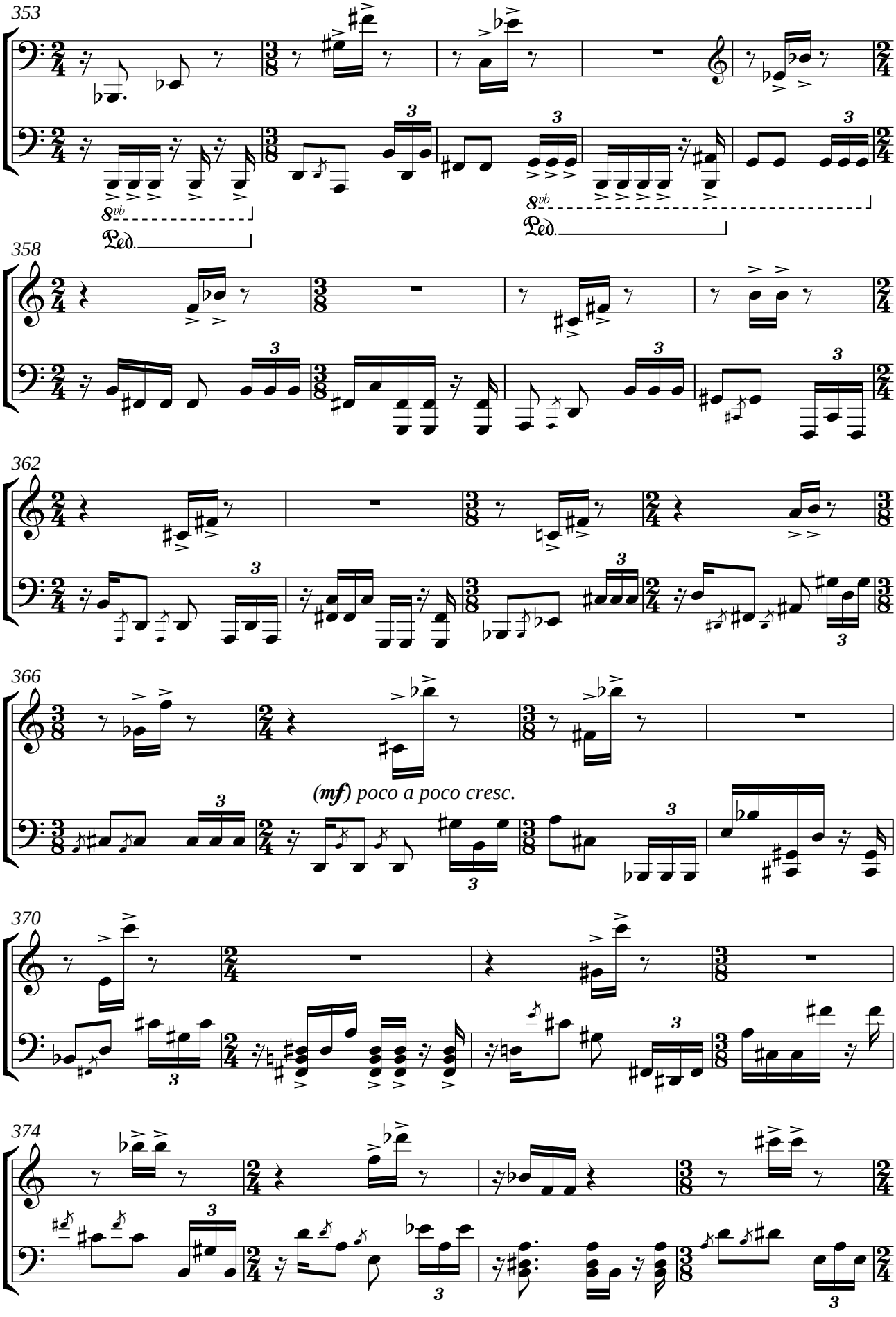

206
8va
* omit this F if the leaps make it impossible (but play on repeat)
213
219
3x
225
(f) poco a poco cresc.
232
238

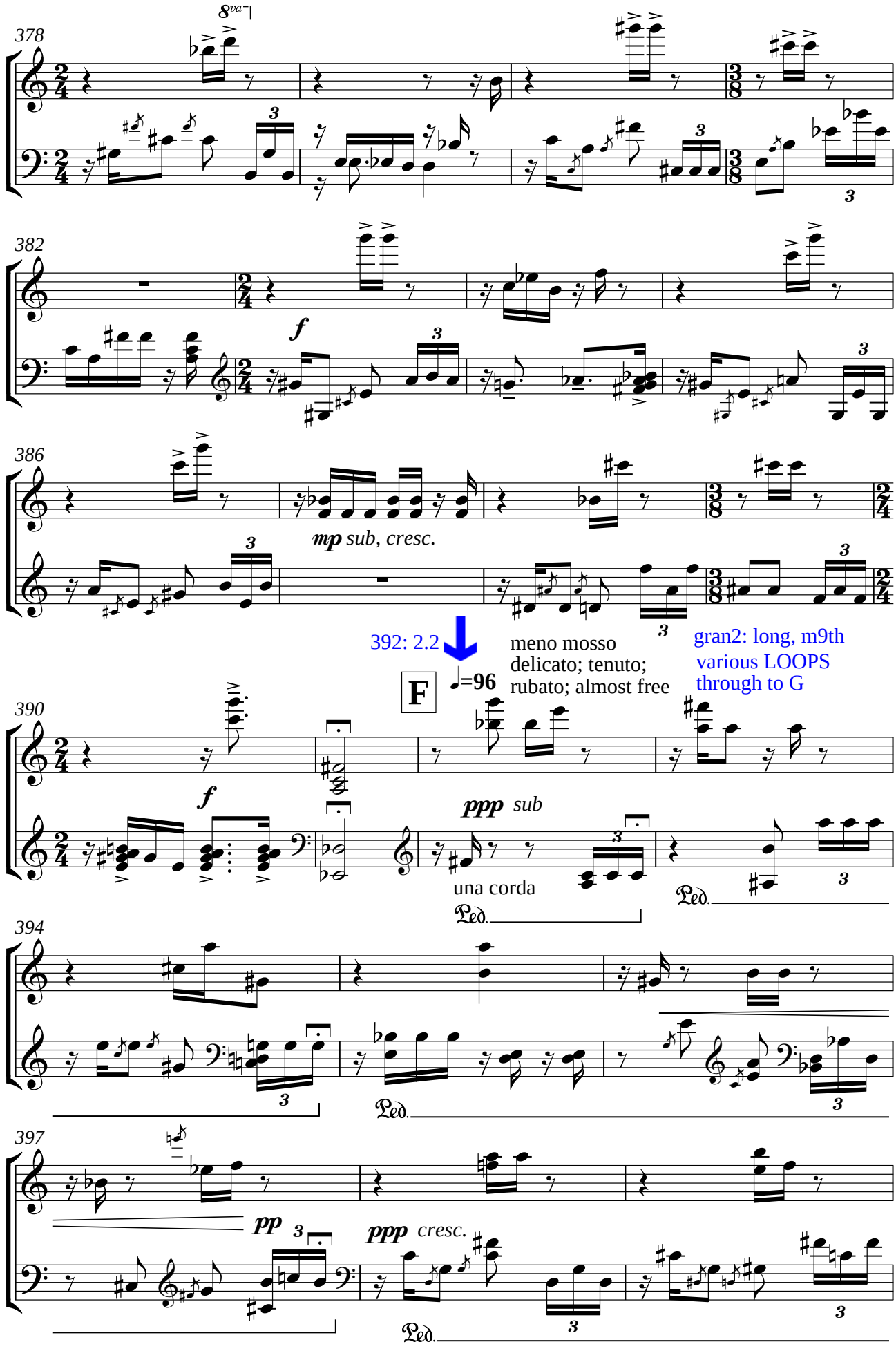

243
C
Wild; Seasick
249
ff
molto Ped (smear)
252
256
261
poco dim. e rit
265
(less pedal)

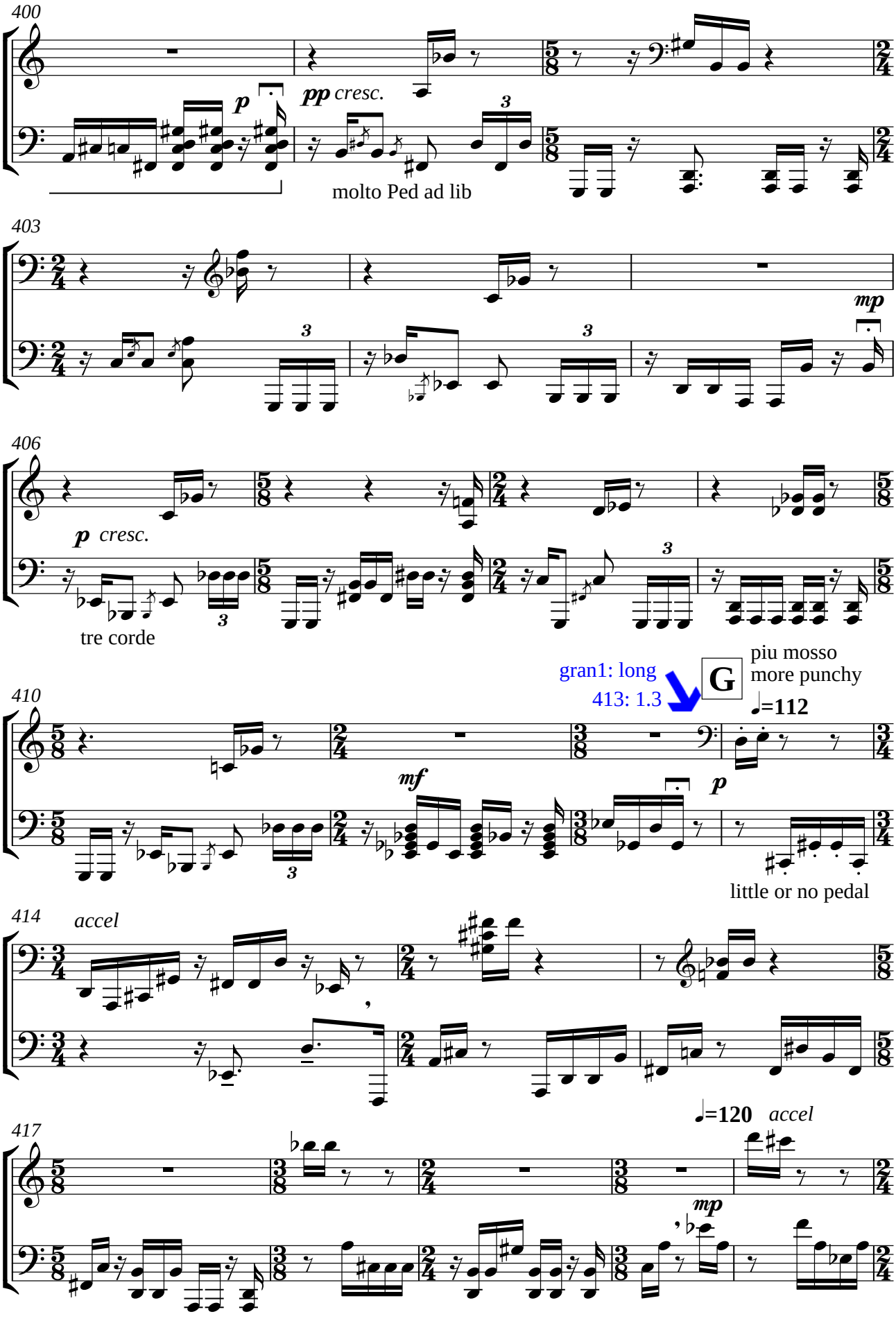

270
275
♩=160
mp poco dim. e rit
280
mf
286:
1.2
gran1: medium, P4th
D
meno mosso
285
♩=144
pp
p
(ossia: use mordents instead of repeated triplets)
molto Ped (smear)
290
295

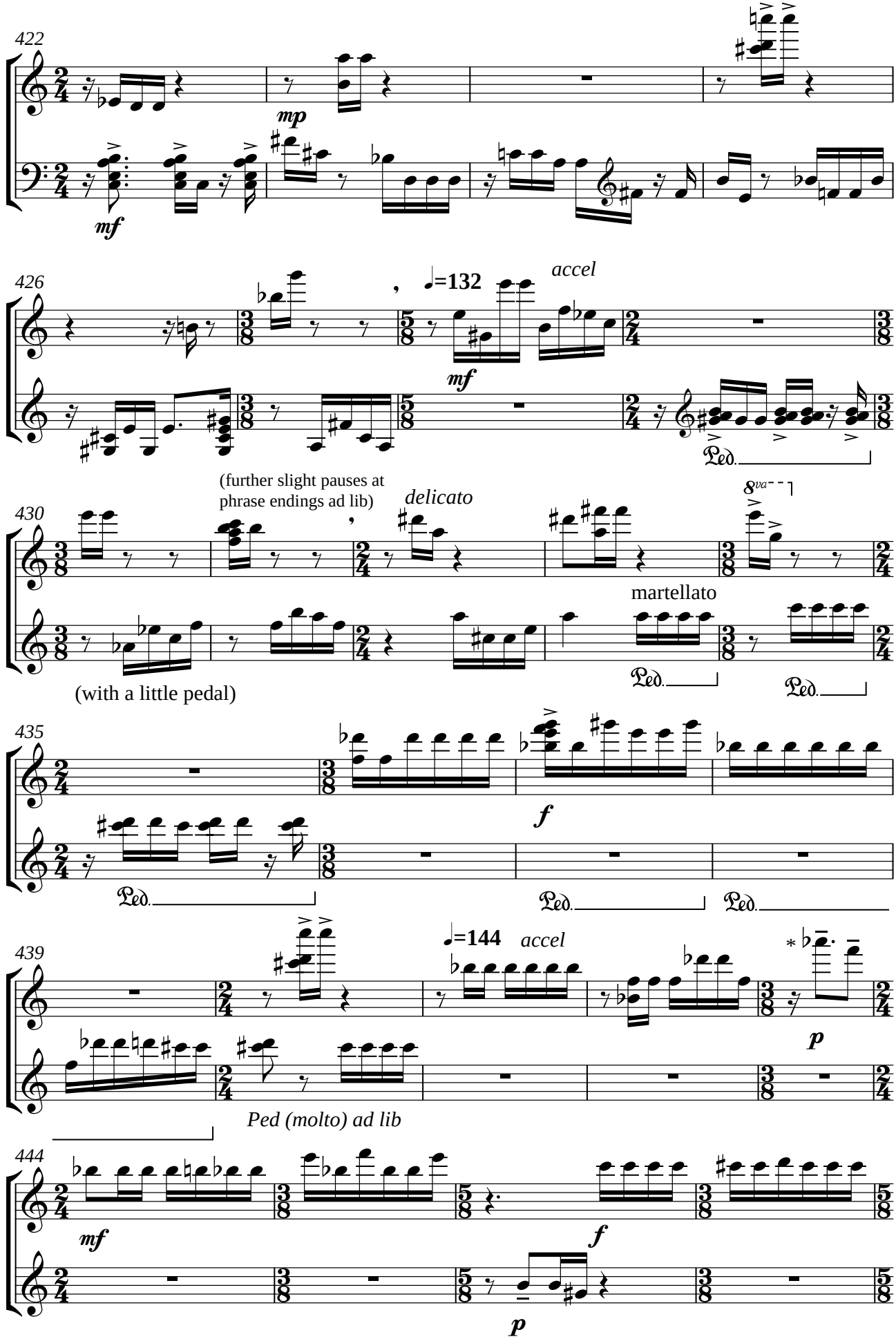

300
mp
305
p
gradually less pedal
310
mp
p
(mf) cresc.
314
319
mf
pp
8vb
E
martellato (little or no pedal except where indicated)
323
manically on the edge
(p) poco a poco cresc.
8vb
8vb
Ped.


327
(If necesssary, keep tempo/energy by leaving out occasional notes)
8vb
Ped.
331
8vb
Ped.
335
339
mf , mp poco a poco cresc.
8vb
Ped.
344
349

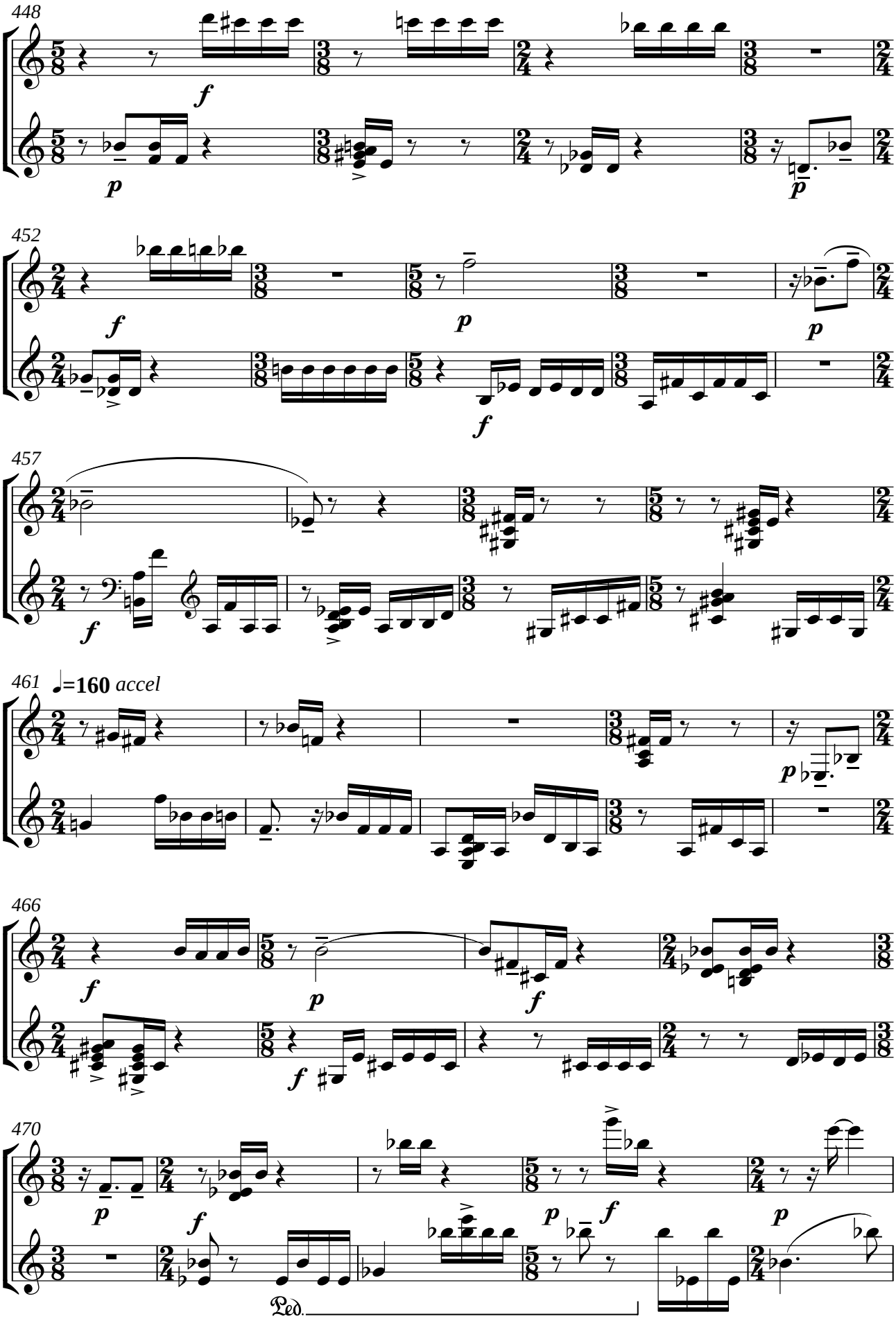

353
8vb
Ped.
8vb
Ped.
358
362
366
(mf) poco a poco cresc.
370
374

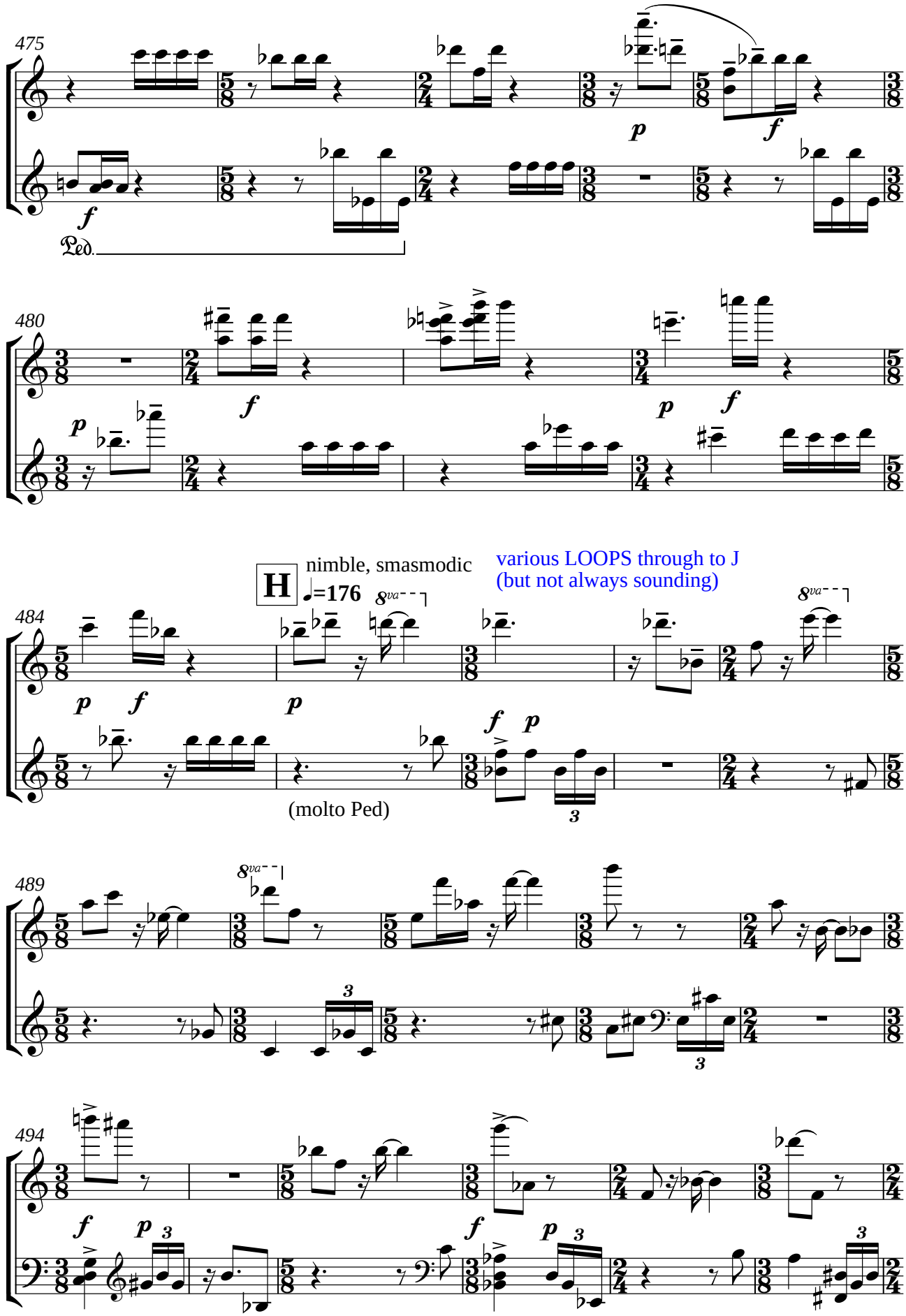

8va
378
382
f
386
mp sub, cresc.
392: 2.2
meno mosso
delicato; tenuto;
rubato; almost free
F
♩=96
gran2: long, m9th
various LOOPS
through to G
390
f
ppp sub
una corda
Ped.
394
Ped.
397
pp
ppp cresc.
Ped.

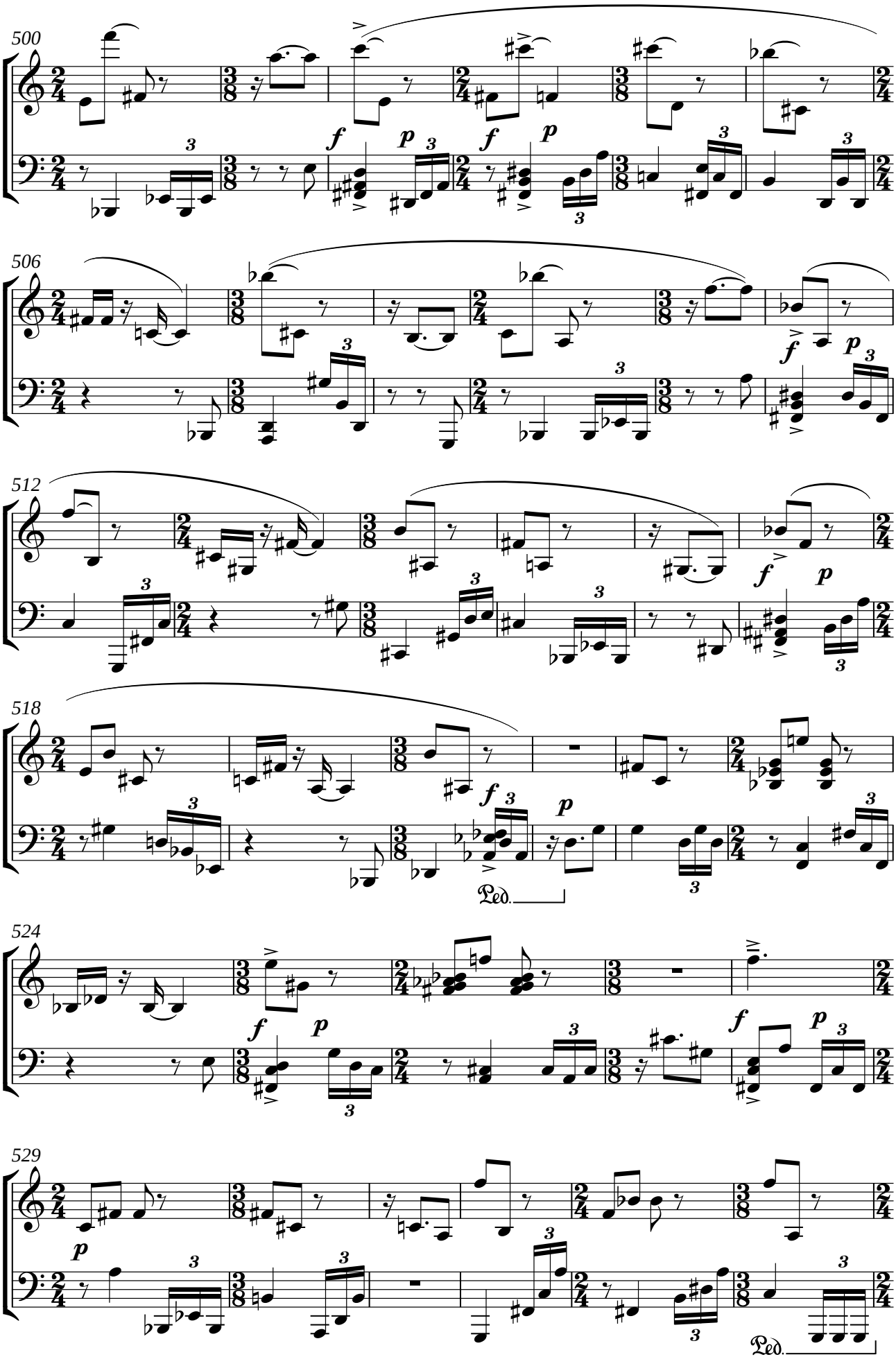

400
p
pp cresc.
molto Ped ad lib
403
mp
406
p cresc.
tre corde
gran1: long
413: 1.3
G
piu mosso
more punchy
♩=112
410
mf
p
little or no pedal
414
accel
417
♩=120
accel
mp

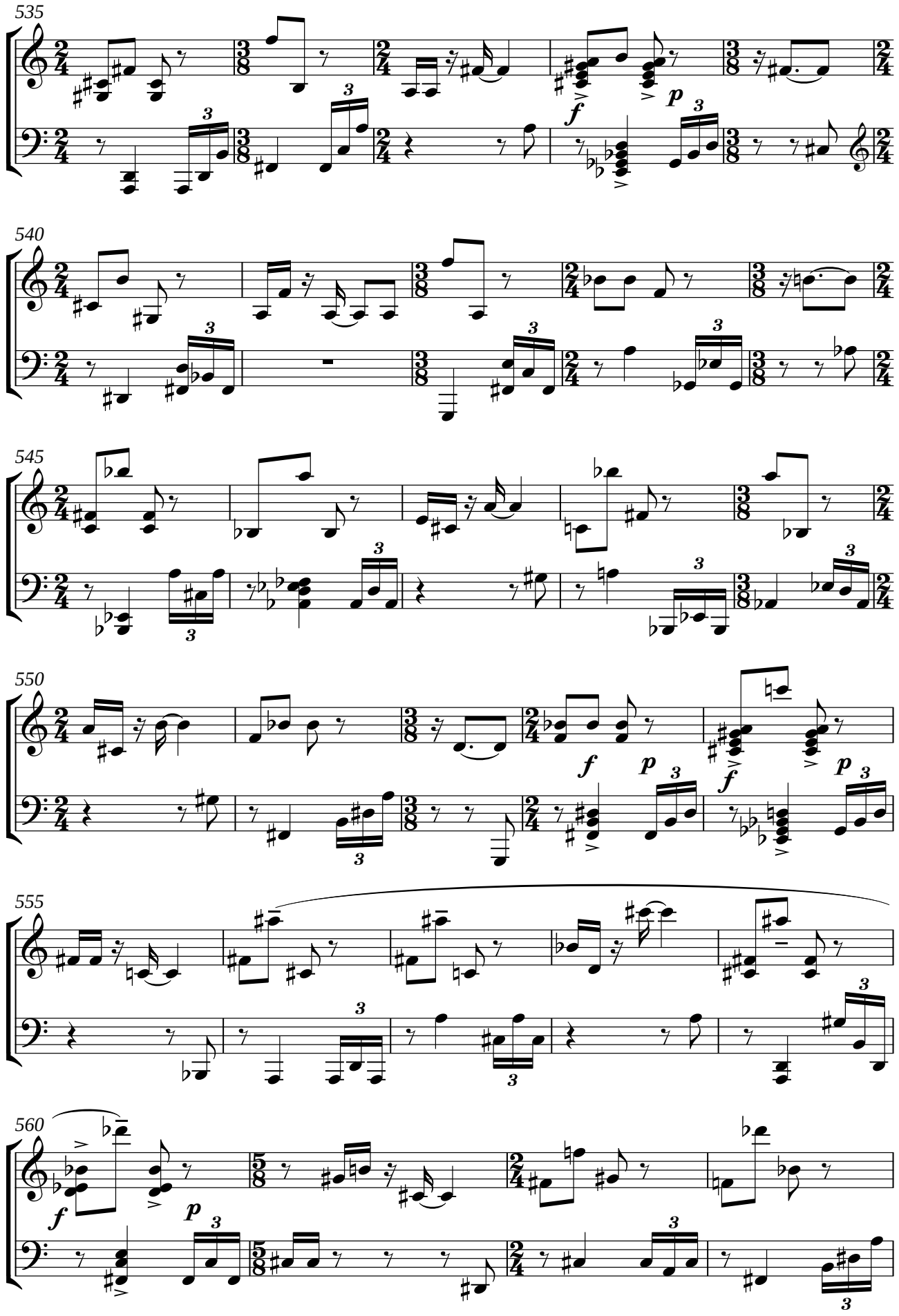


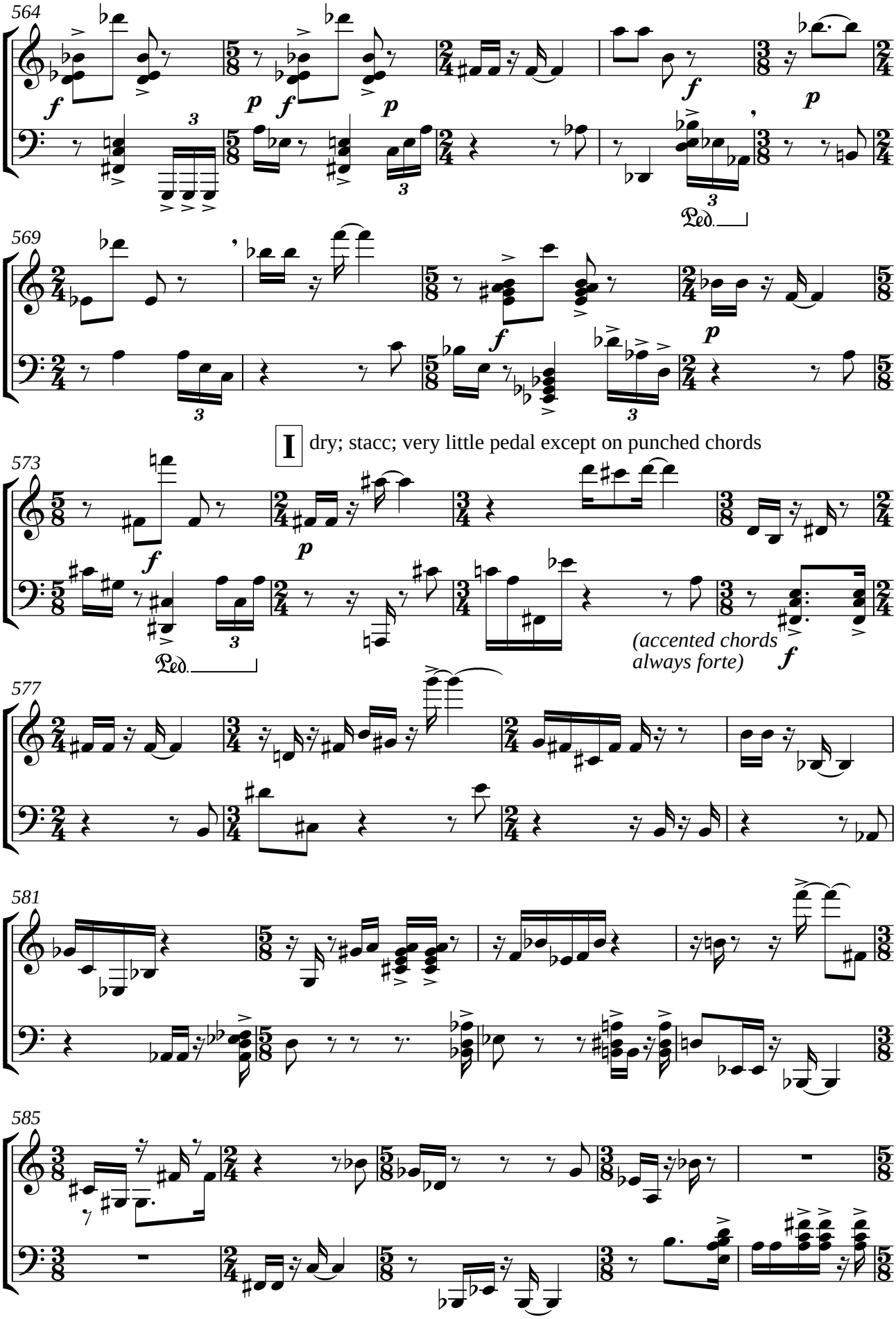
* These less active, quiet bars should be like inserts or splices from another musical world; quite slow in comparison.

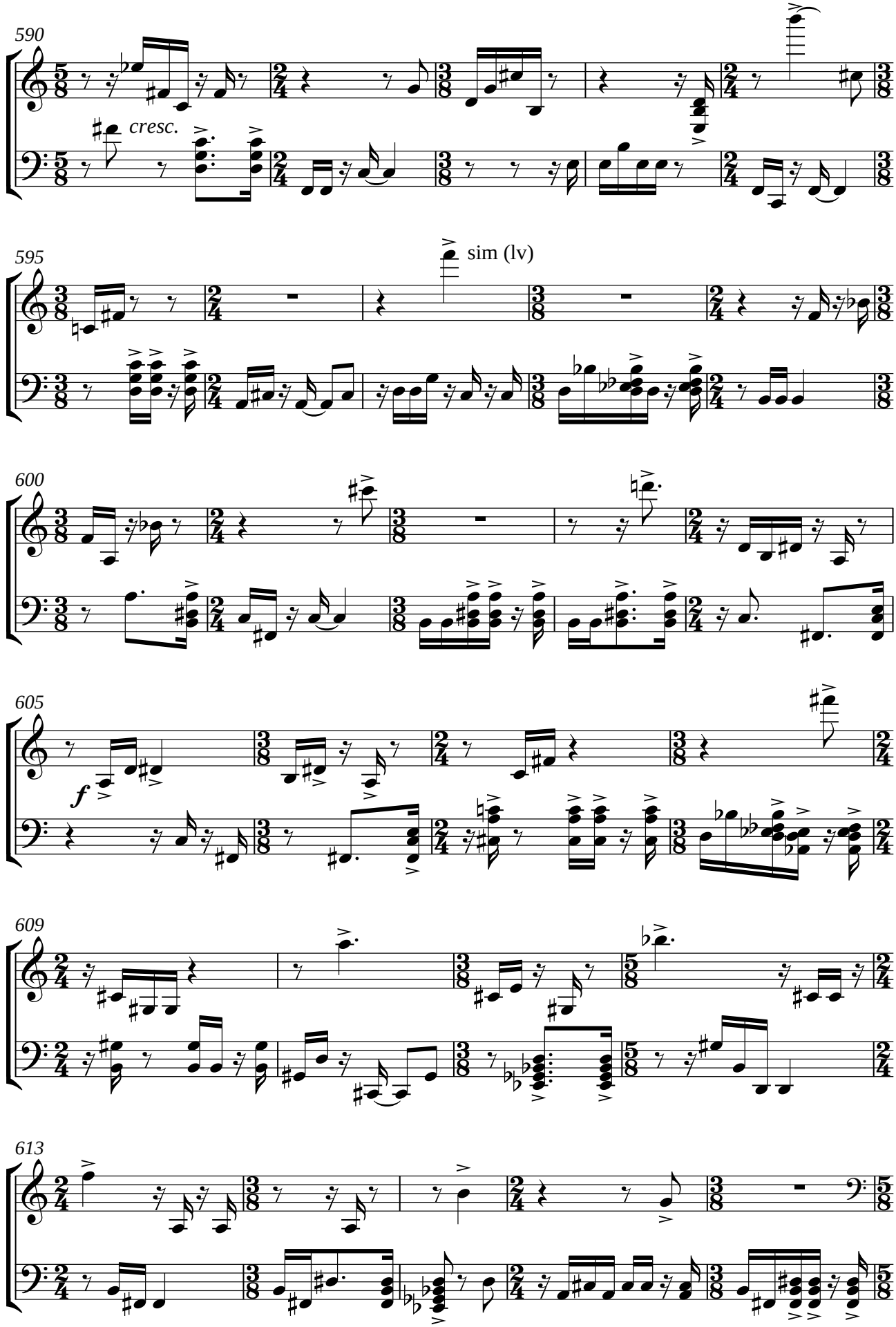

448
452
457
461
♩=160 accel
466
470
Ped.


475
Ped.
480
H
nimble, smasmodic
=176
various LOOPS through to J
(but not always sounding)
484
(molto Ped)
489
494


500
506
512
518
524
529
Ped.
Ped.


535
540
545
550
555
560


564
569
I
dry; stacc; very little pedal except on punched chords
573
(accented chords always forte)
577
581
585


590
cresc.
595
sim (lv)
600
605
f
609
613

(bring out the melody of the RH accented notes)

618

622

626

cresc.

630

634

(make eye contact with computer performer)

ff *cresc.*

638

fff

642:
2.3

gran1+2 & loopers to 0

J meno mosso

♩=144

642

mp

lightly pedalled

649

655

(jazzy)

(*mp*)

8vb

662

8vb

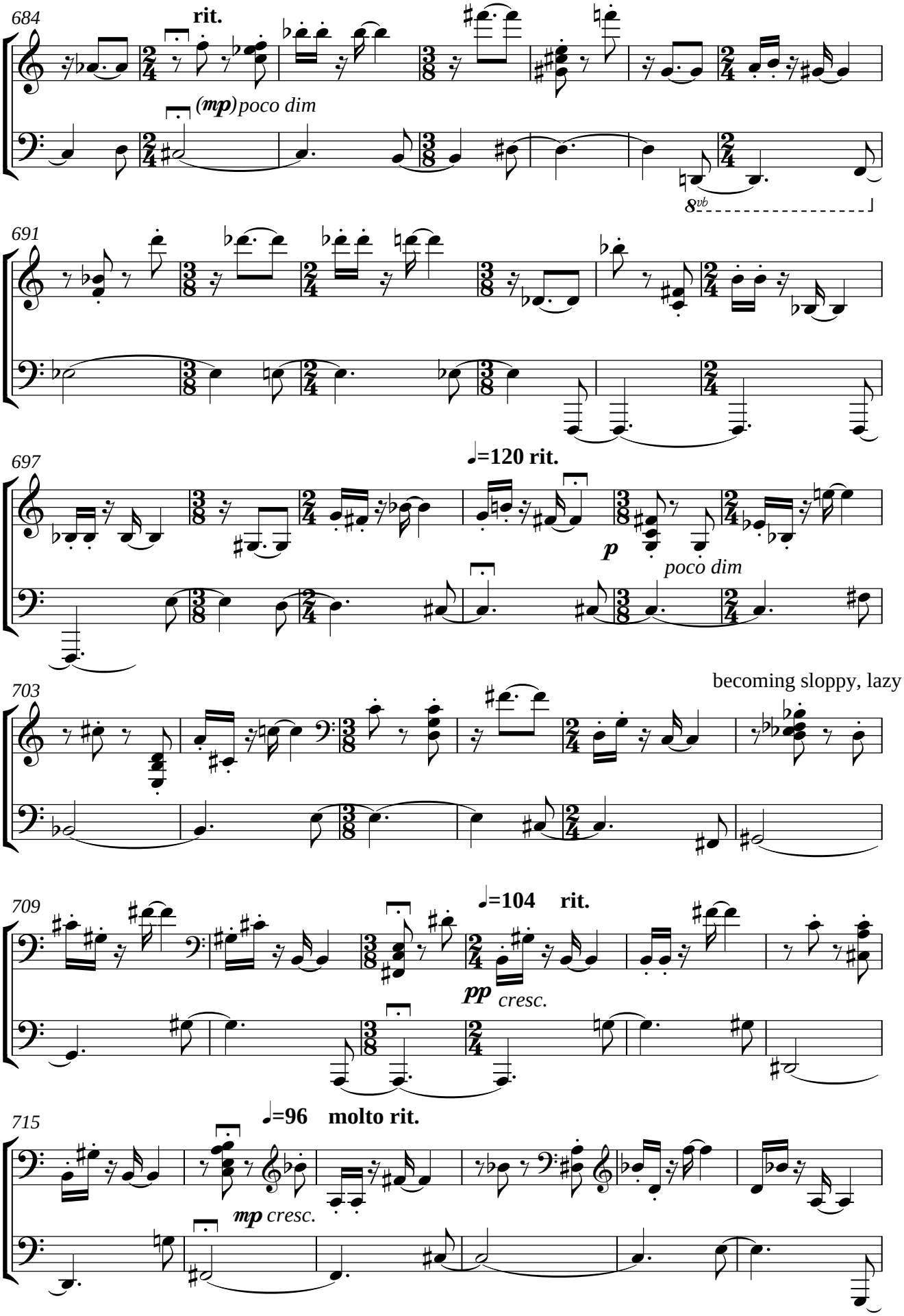
670

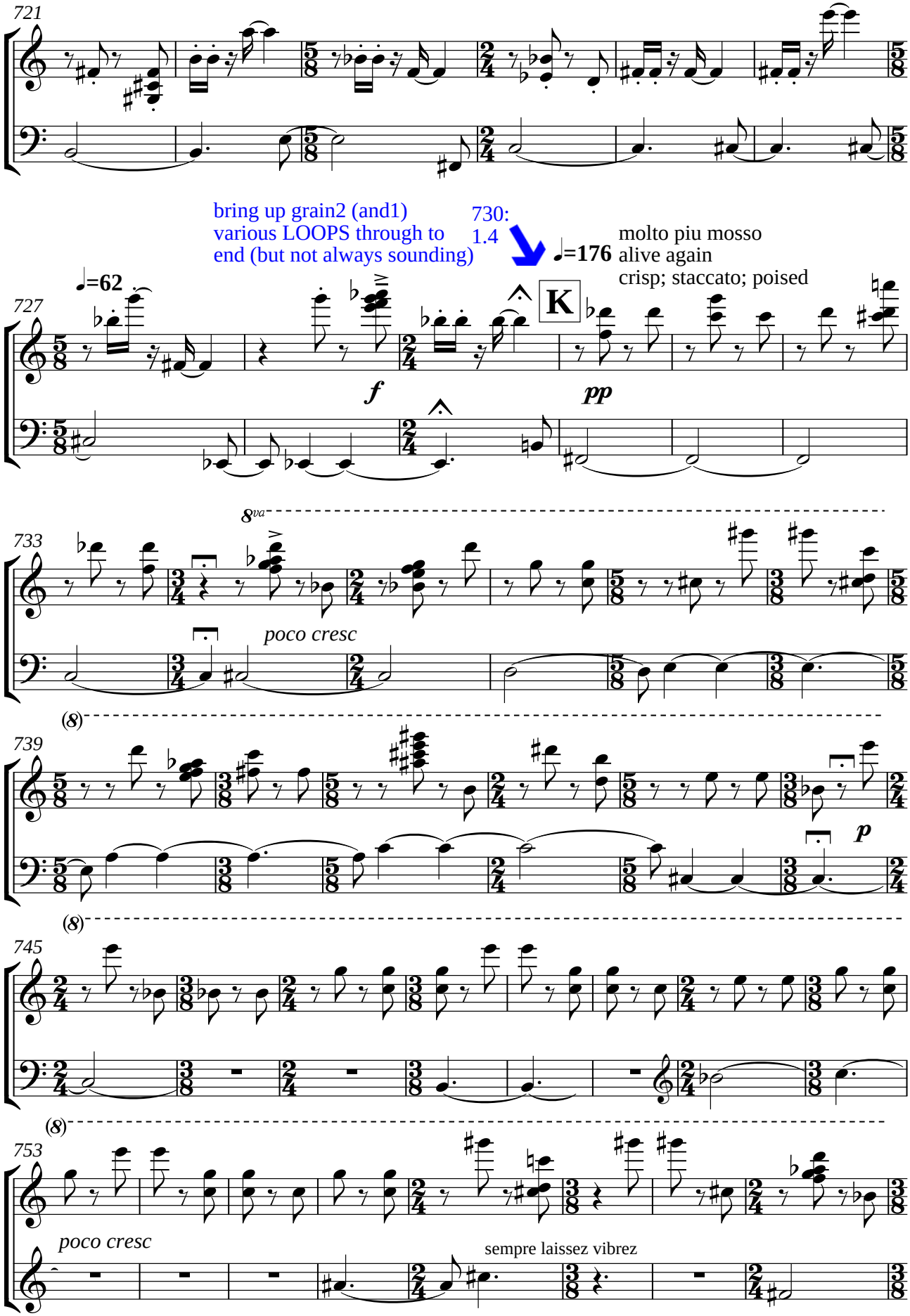
(broken jazz)

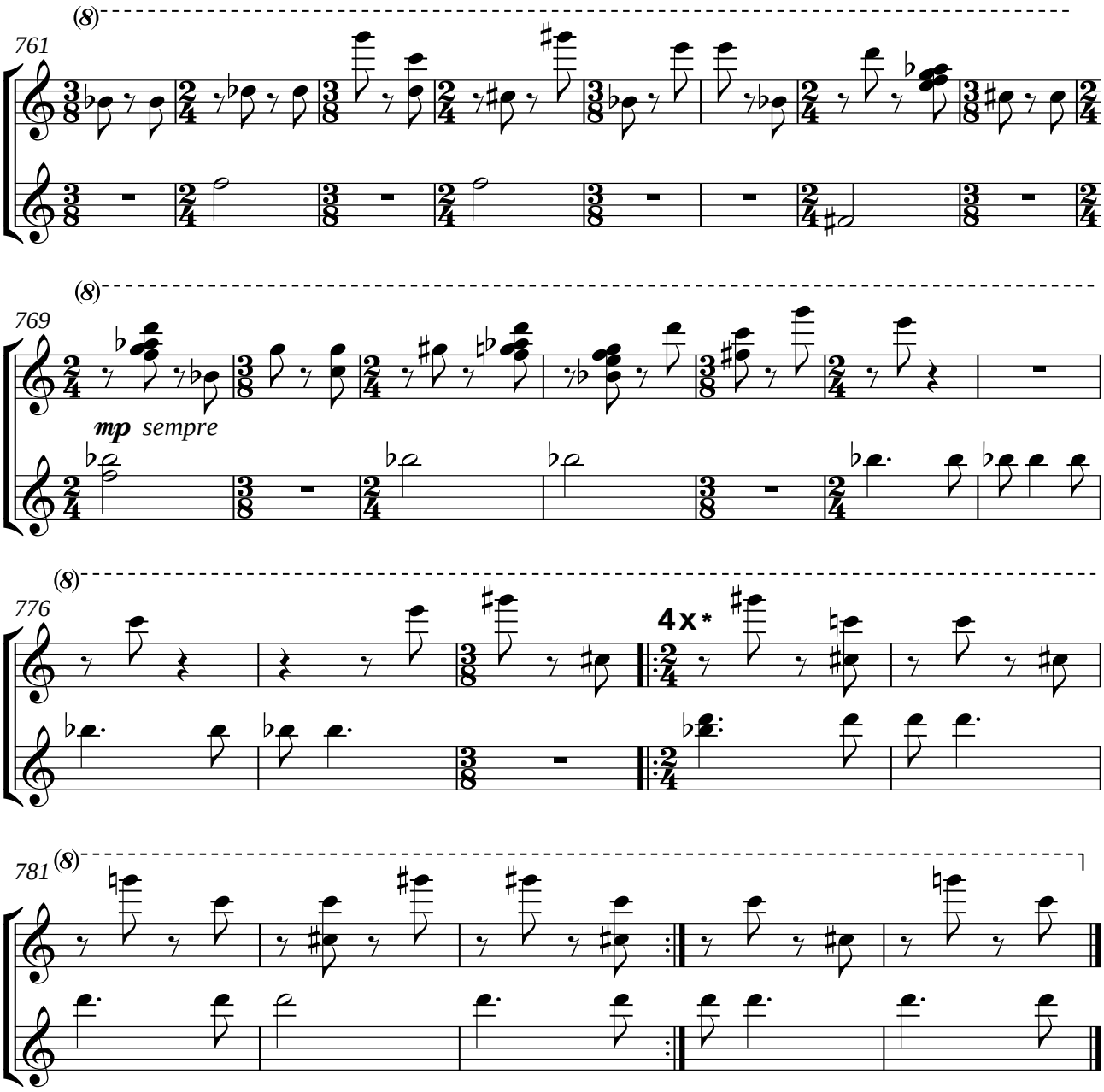
(8)

8vb

677


684
rit.
(mp) poco dim
8vb
691
697
♩=120 rit.
p
poco dim
703
becoming sloppy, lazy
709
♩=104 rit.
pp cresc.
715
♩=96 molto rit.
mp cresc.


721
bring up grain2 (and1)
various LOOPS through to
end (but not always sounding)
730:
1.4
molto piu mosso
alive again
crisp; staccato; poised
♩=62
♩=176
727
K
f
pp
8va
733
poco cresc
(8)
739
p
(8)
745
(8)
753
poco cresc
sempre laissez vibrez



* increase/decrease number of repeats to time last note with final splintering sound from computer