CHARLES SHADLE

CHOCTAW ANIMALS

Four Not-Too-Difficult Pieces
for
Piano

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FOUR NOT-TOO-DIFFICULT PIECES FOR PIANO

In recent years I have written a number of pieces that explore aspects of my Choctaw heritage. These works have tended to be rather difficult, requiring numerous highly accomplished players. Since this naturally limits the number of people, and particularly Choctaw people, who can experience my music, I recently decided to compose a set of much more accessible piano pieces. My **Choctaw Animals**, composed in July of 2019 was the result.

I had two goals in composing **Choctaw Animals**. Firstly, I hoped to create interesting and enjoyable music in the tradition of the Schumann **Album for the Young**, or Bartok's **Mikrokosmos**; music that meets a clear pedagogical need, while also providing repertoire for interested pianists of all ages and varied abilities. I also wanted to make sure that the pieces represented my personal musical language, perhaps best described as "contemporary classical music", while highlighting elements that I think of as innately Choctaw. Surviving traditional Choctaw music has generally been understood as belonging to two streams, one a hauntingly beautiful tradition of Christian hymns, and the other an older repertory of social dance music. The music of these dances is essentially vocal, following a call and response pattern, and features a single melodic line with the dancer's feet and simple percussion instrument keeping the pulse. Many Choctaws who are involved in the performance of this repertoire understand it as essentially unchanging and unchangeable, so when composing music, in **Choctaw Animals,** that engages with this tradition, I focused on using melodic patterns and rhythmic configurations that are inspired by it, without ever quoting any of the actual dance songs. In addition I have allowed these ideas to mingle with my own interests in juxtaposing melodic lines and creating interesting and evocative harmonies.

I also wanted to celebrate the vibrant culture of modern Choctaws, and particularly the extraordinarily successful efforts to sustain and foster the language. While I grew up in a family that no longer spoke their ancestral language, modern tribal members now have ample opportunities to learn and practice it. I thought it would be important to use Choctaw words for the titles of the pieces in my **Choctaw Animals**, and as I reclaim bits of ancestral language, I hope that fellow Choctaws, and their neighbors, will as well.

About **CHOCTAW ANIMALS**

Though **Choctaw Animals** may be performed as a suite, or set of pieces, any of the movements may be performed separately or in smaller groupings. I do think that if you play all of them, it is probably best to play them in the order in which they appear in the score. The tempo indications provide a general framework, and pianists may want to play the pieces slightly slower, or slightly faster. What is important is that the mood or character of the music is clearly expressed. I have marked the use of the pedal only when essential. Otherwise, players are free to use the pedal as they see fit, though in general the

music should feel clean and clear. Players may want to use the “una corda” or “soft pedal” occasionally, and especially in the third piece.

1. ***Chulhkvn*** (Spider)—pronounced “choth-kan”. In this piece two similar musical lines suggest the artful weaving of the spider.
2. ***Nvni*** (Fish)—rhymes with “honey”. The movements of the fish, as it darts through murky water provided the inspiration for this piece.
3. ***Nashoba*** (Wolf). The stealthy and mysterious nature of the elusive wolf is expressed in this piece. Imagine a dark wood, where you have a sense of being watched by unseen eyes.
4. ***Issuba*** (Pony). A rare and historically important breed of pony, that is actively being brought back from near extinction, has come to symbolize the qualities of resilience and strength that characterize the Choctaw people. The music of this piece reflects the rhythm of hoof-beats, and is joyful and optimistic.

The composer freely grants the right to print, play and perform **Choctaw Animals** to anyone, free of charge, for non-commercial use. However the copyright remains the property of the composer, who hopes that performers will remember to give him credit for his work.

About **Charles Shadle**
(born 1960 Ardmore, Oklahoma; enrolled Oklahoma Choctaw)

Charles Shadle has received commissions from institutions including SUNY, Buffalo, Longwood Opera, The Lake George Opera Festival, Lontano, the Handel and Haydn Society, the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, the Newton Choral society, Dinosaur Annex, Intermezzo, and the Rockport Chamber Music Festival. In addition his music features in the repertoire of such distinguished performers as Carlos Archuleta, the Daedalus String Quartet, Joel Fan, Paula Fan, Jason MacStoots, Marcus Thompson, Jeremy Huw Williams, and the Schola Cantorum of St Stephen’s Providence. For the National Film Preservation Foundation he has composed six film scores, all of which are available on DVD. Collaborations with MIT colleague and librettist Michael Ouellette resulted in three critically acclaimed operas, ***Coyote’s Dinner, A Question of Love,*** and ***A Last Goodbye***, as well as the cantata ***A New England Seasonal***. Dr. Shadle received his early training from Eloise Ristad, and holds degrees from the University of Colorado, Tulane, and Brandeis where he was a student of Cecil Effinger, Richard Toensing, Barbara Jazwinsky, Harold Shapero, Edward Cohen, Martin Boykin, and Yehudi Wyner. He has taught for many years at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he serves as Theory Coordinator.

Choctaw Animals

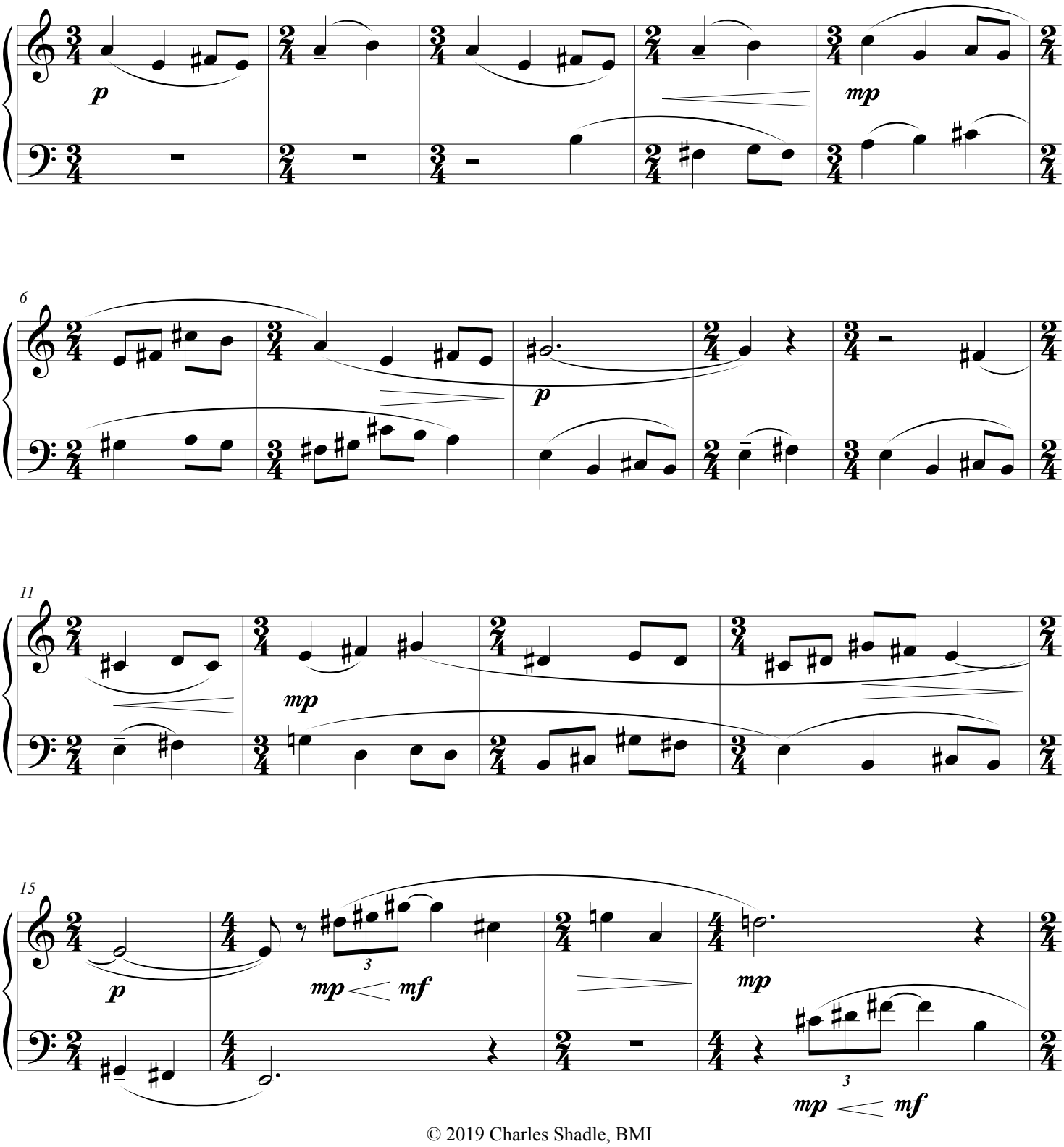
four not-too-difficult pieces for piano

1. Chulhkvn (Spider)

for Jerod Impichchaachaaha' Tate

Charles Shadle (b. 1960)

Slowly and persistantly ♩ = 76



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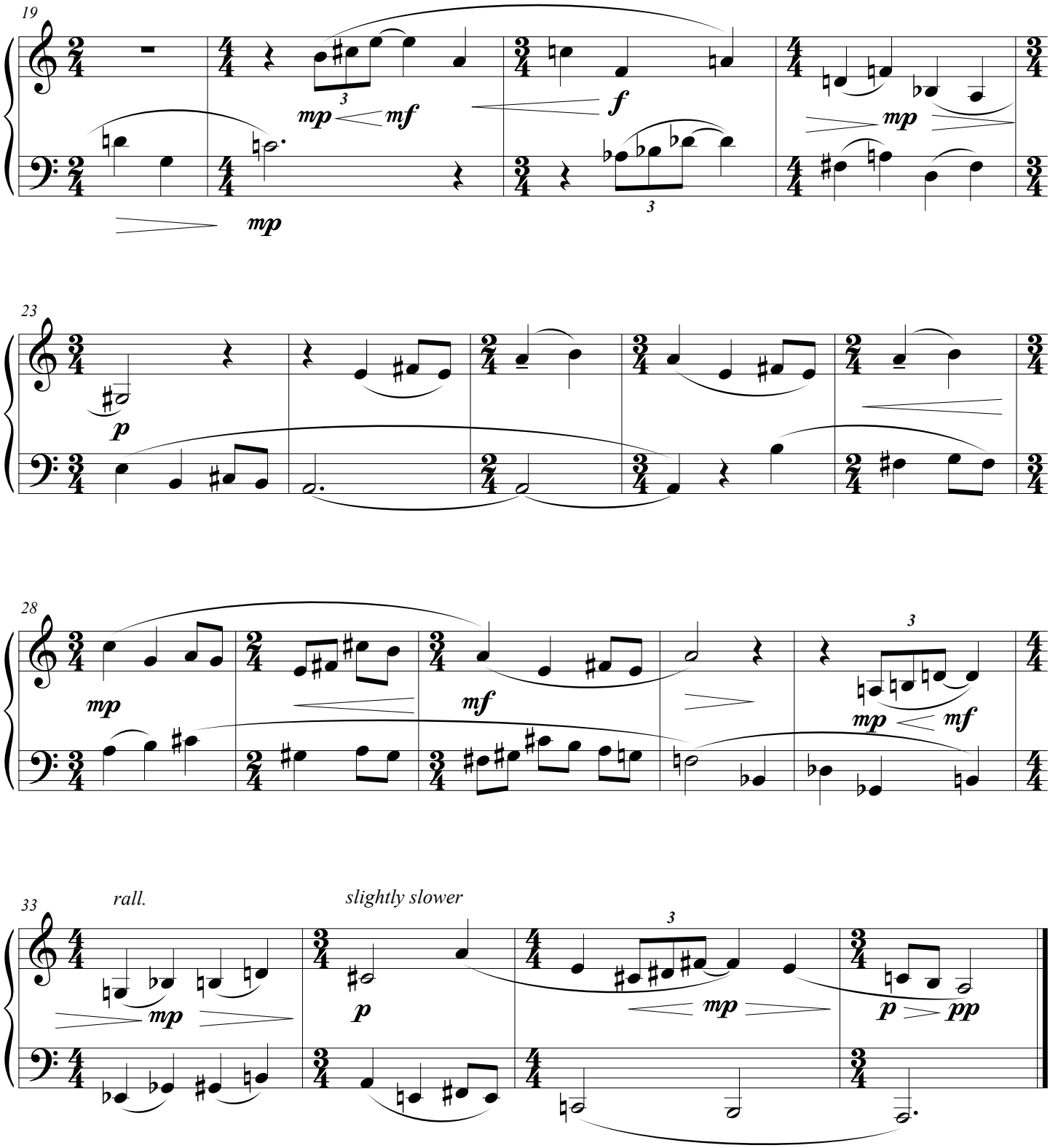
19
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mf
f
mp
mp
23
p
28
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slightly slower
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p
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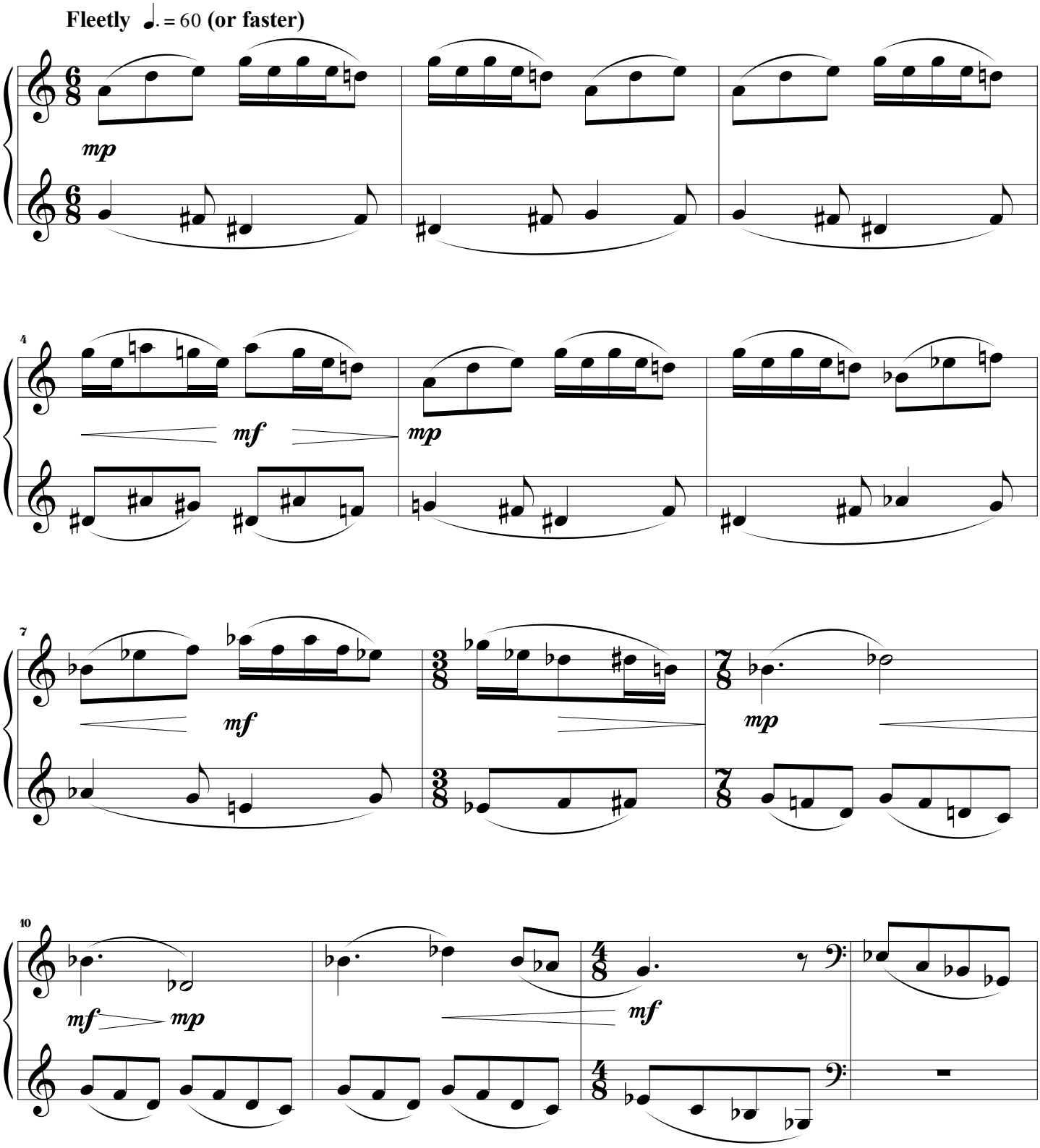
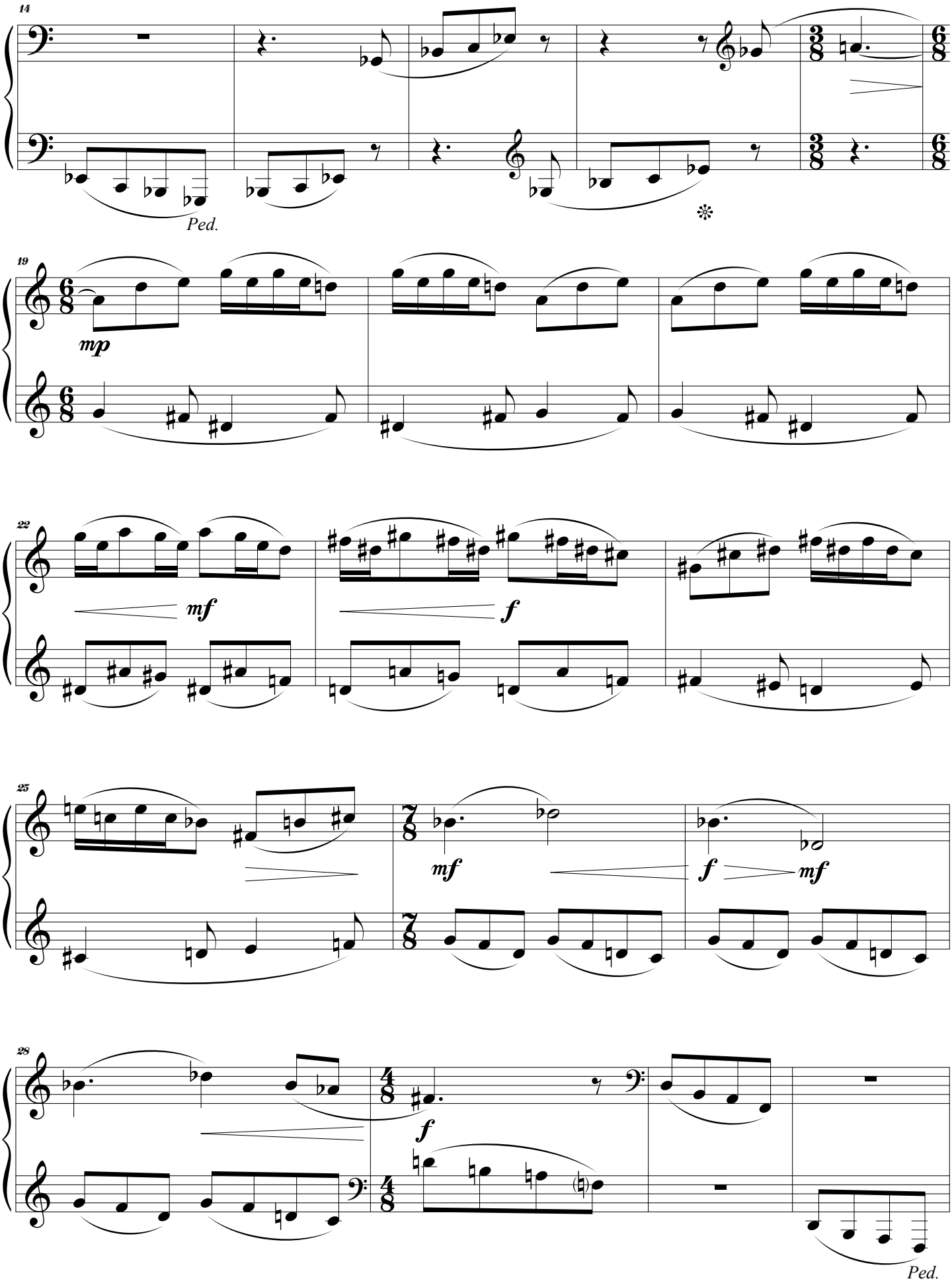
p
pp

2. Nvni (Fish)

for Alice Ouellette

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28
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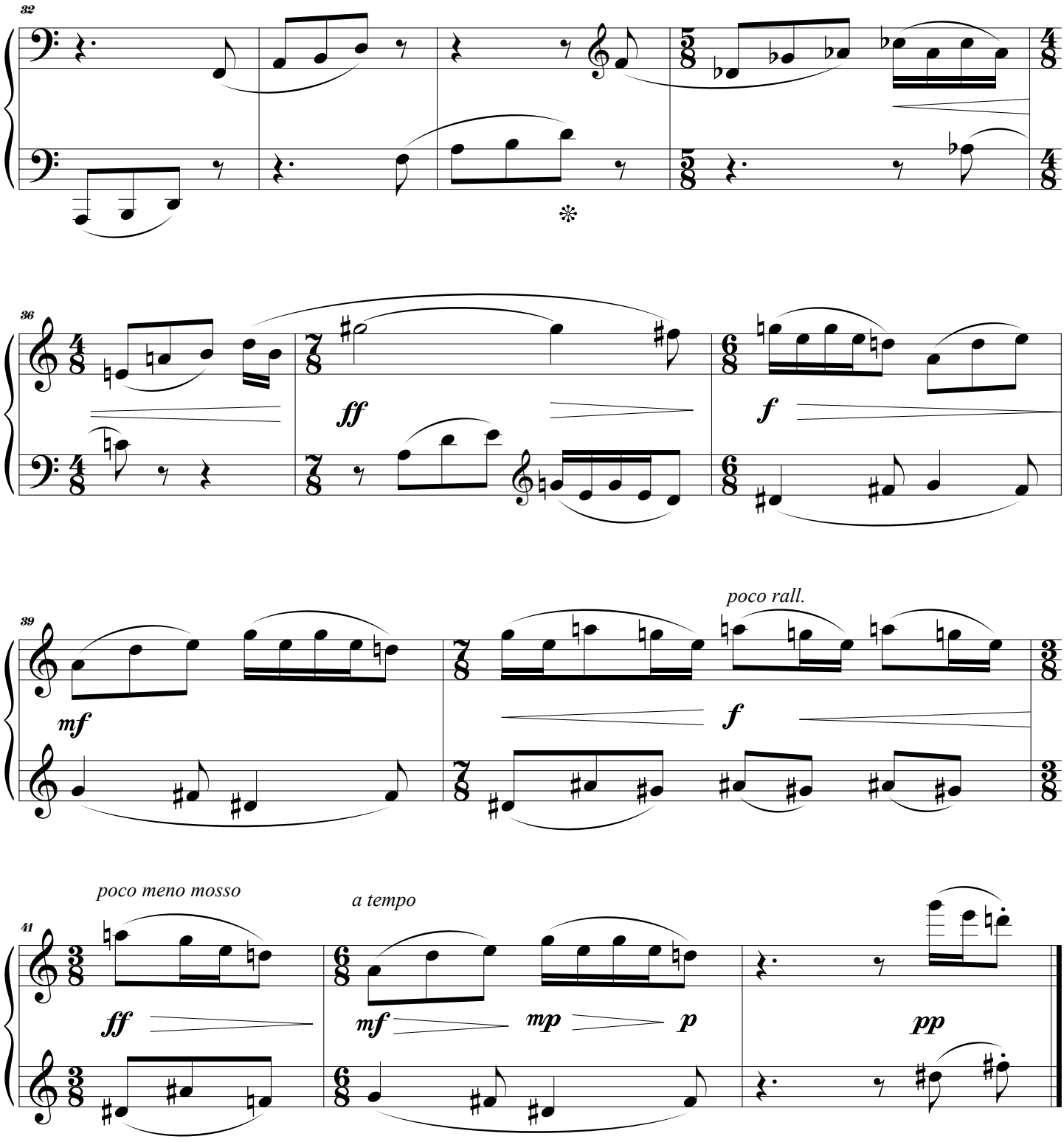
32
36
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39
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poco rall.
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poco meno mosso
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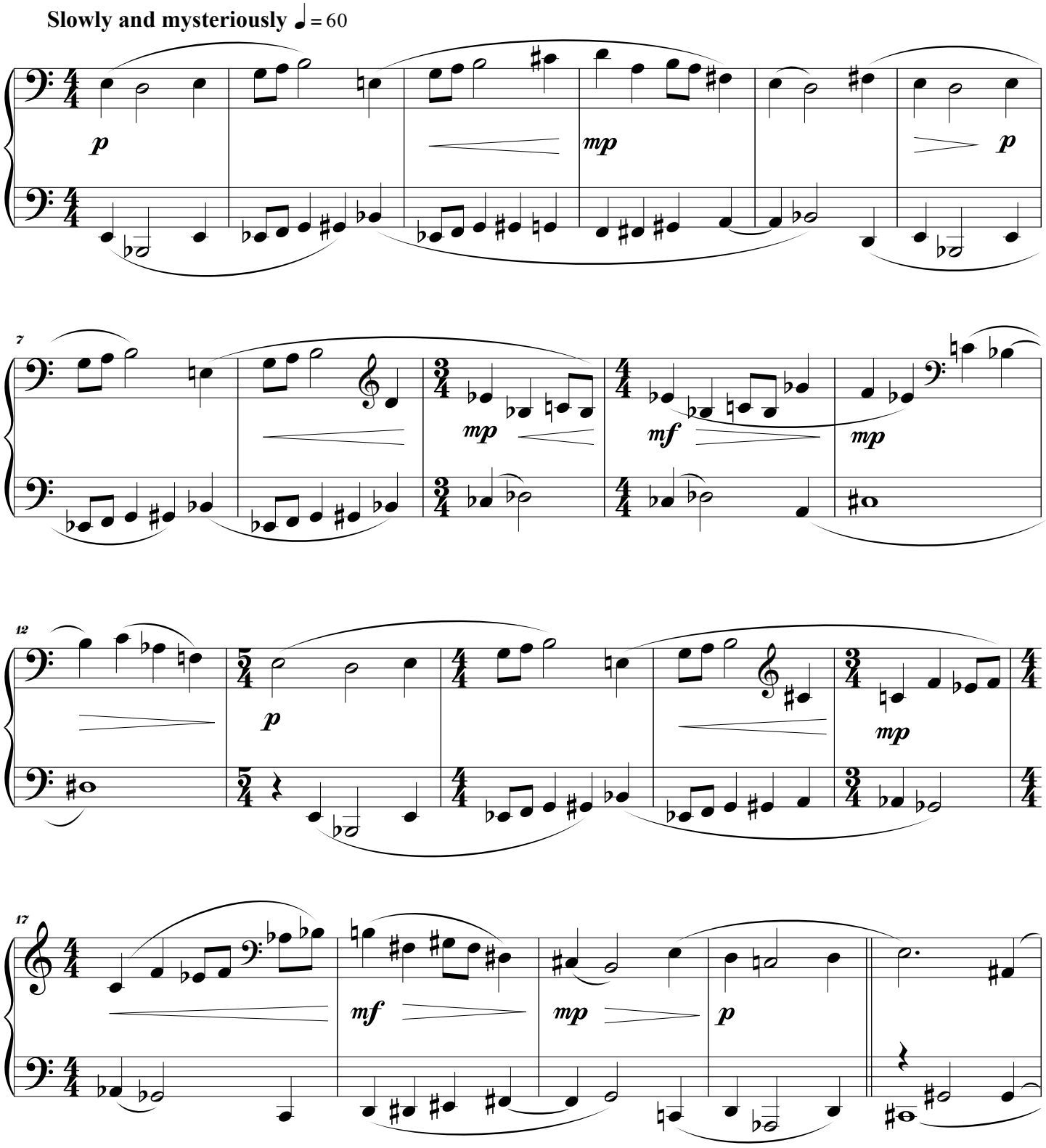
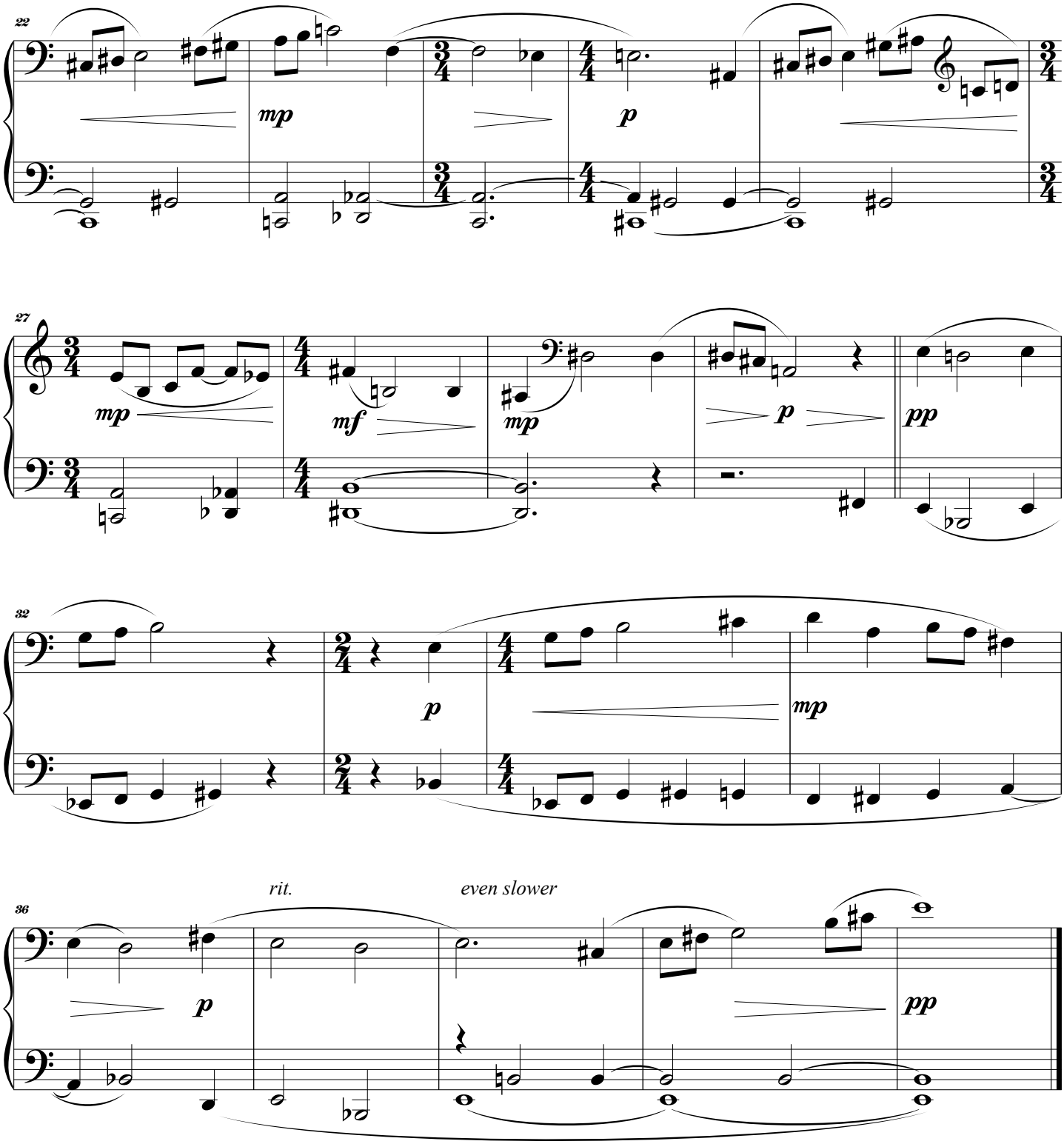
3. Nashoba (Wolf)

for Lesley Tilley




22
mp
p
27
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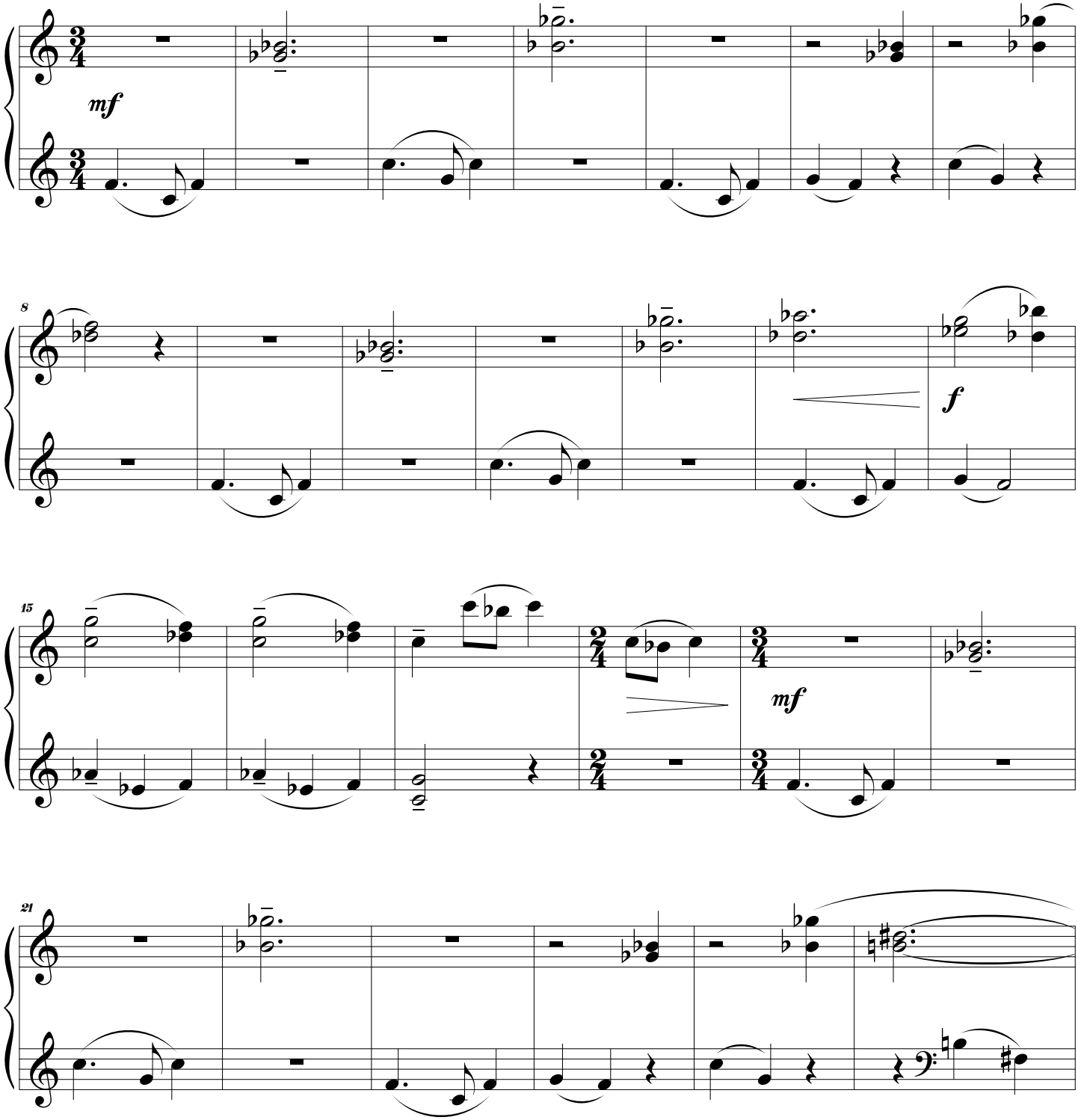
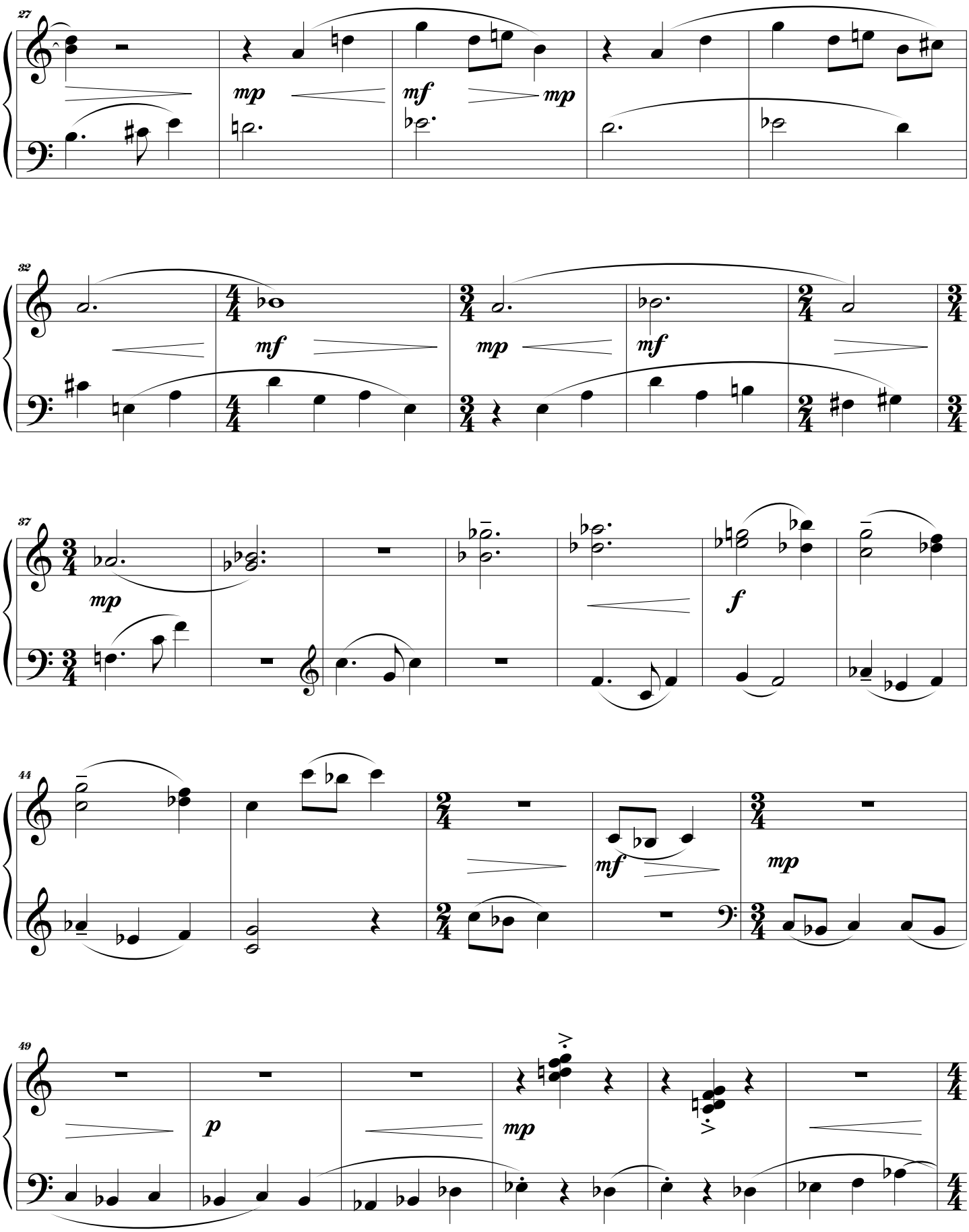
pp
32
p
mp
36
rit.
even slower
p
pp

4. Issuba (Pony)

for the people of the Choctaw Nation

Quickly and Forcefully 𝅗𝅥.= 66

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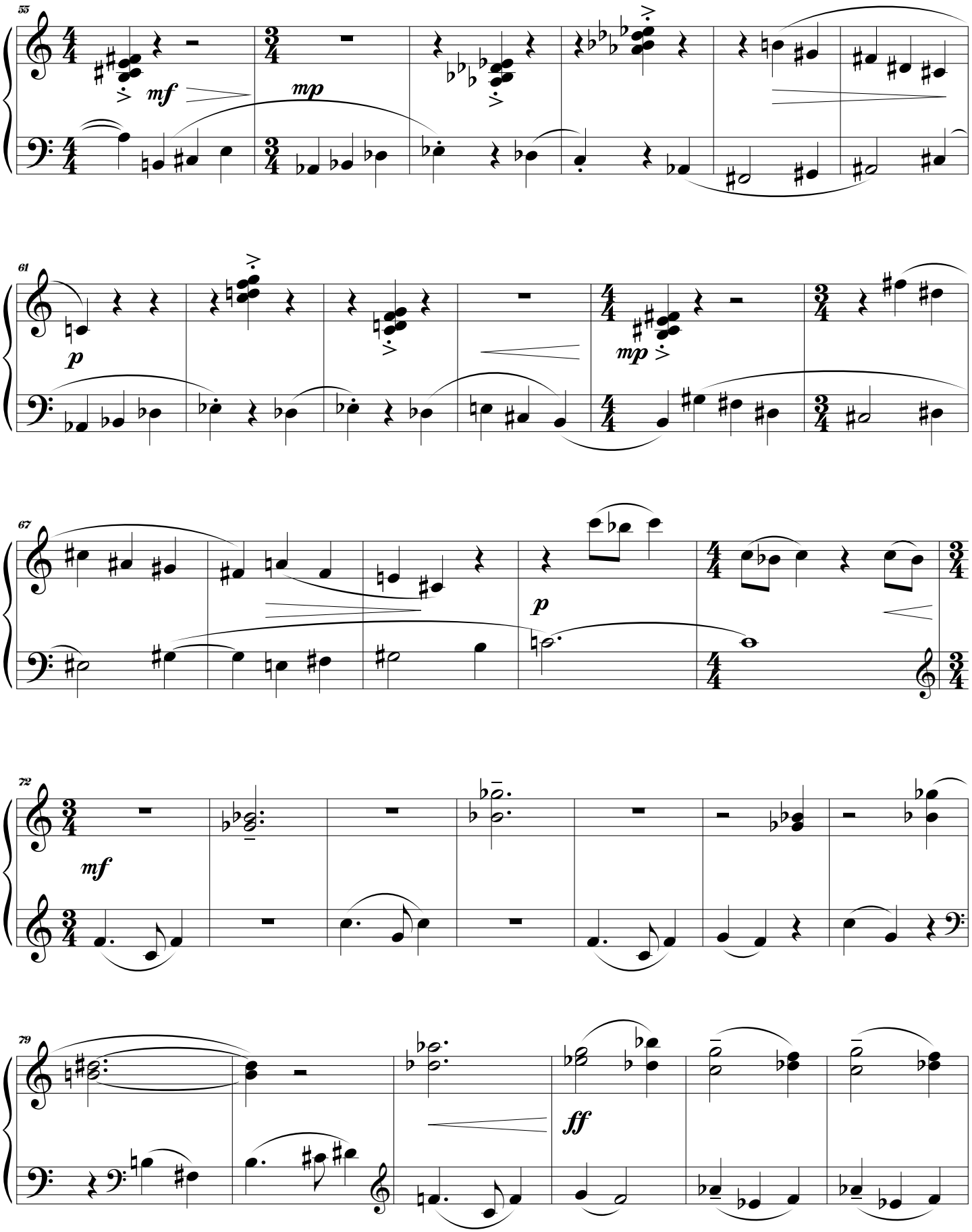
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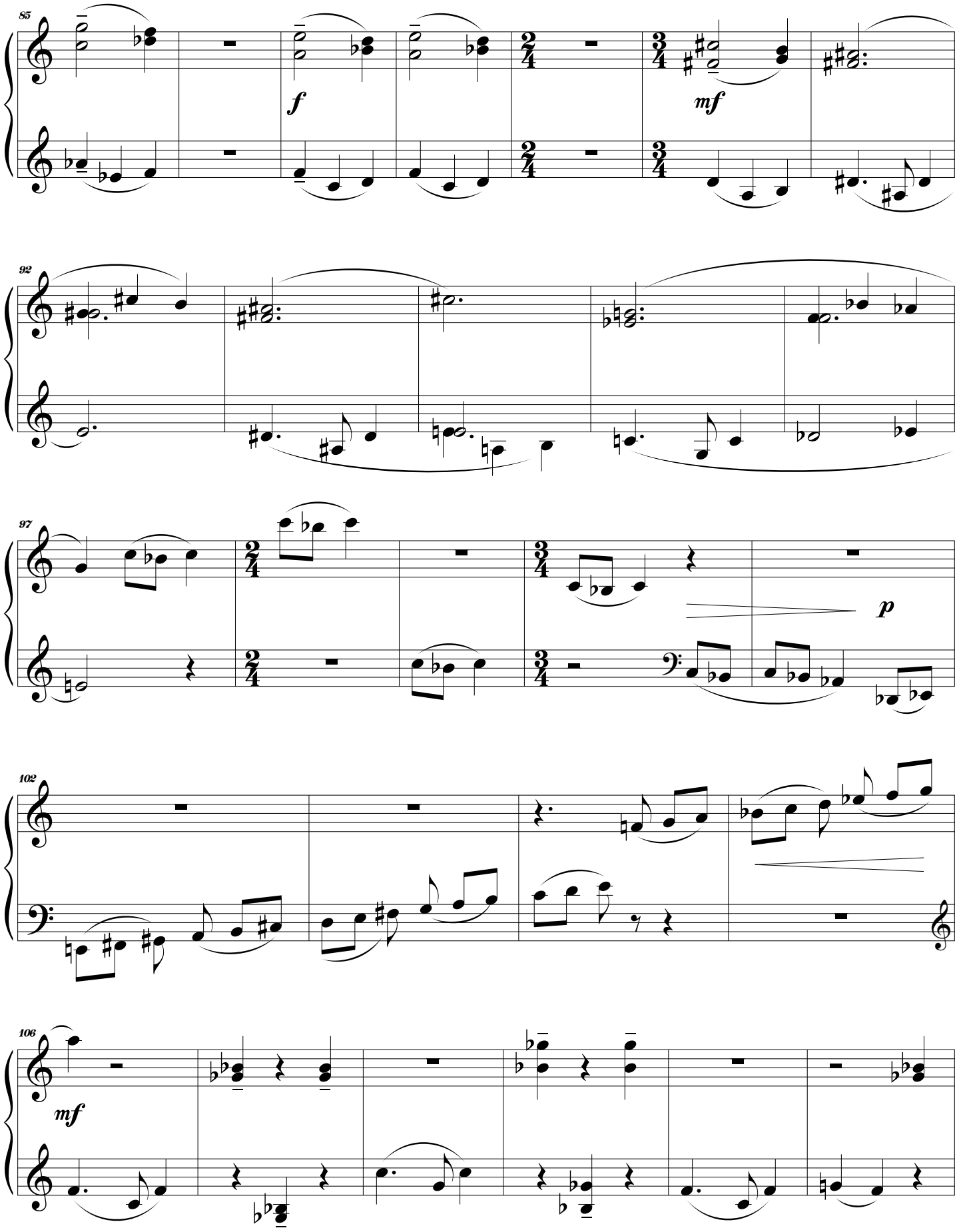
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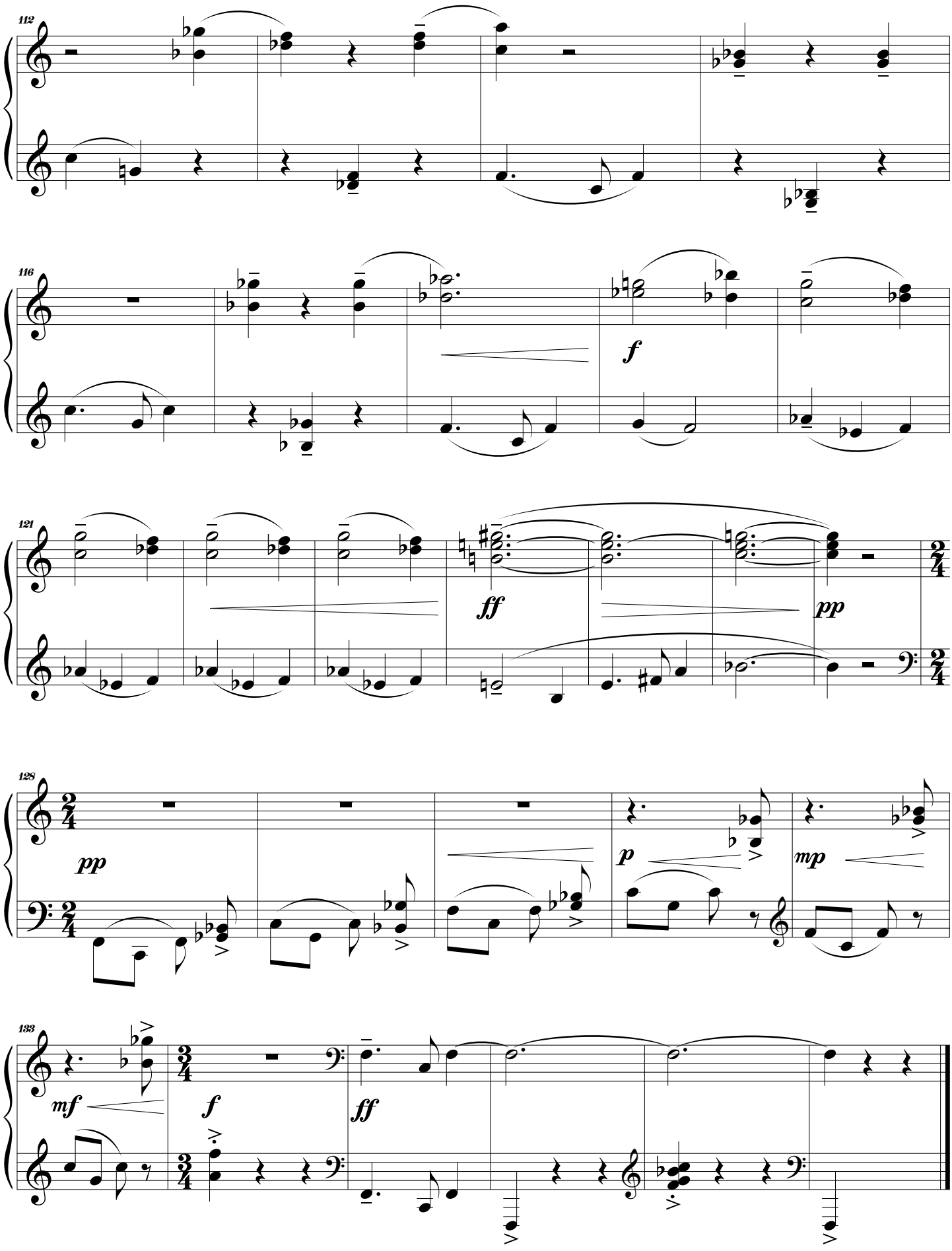
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