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John Steinmetz

SONATA

(1981)

For

Bassoon & Piano

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1506

Performance Notes

For this new edition of 2004, I have changed a few markings to clarify my intentions. In order to come alive, this music needs performers' musicality, taste, and heart. In the outer movements, you create the pacing. In the middle movement, you shape dynamics and phrasing. Throughout the piece the piano should play as an equal partner with the bassoon: not in the background, and often playing very loudly, pushing the bassoonist to play an extreme dynamic, for intense expressivity.

I. PRELUDE

Notes regarding performance of the glissandi are in the bassoon part.

II. BROWNING

Articulations and dynamics are largely up to the performers, as in early music. Most of the markings are just suggestions.

Begin trills on the upper notes.

Tempo: It works very well to begin this movement Adagio (quarter note = ca. 60). Around measure [65] begin a very gentle accelerando, so that [89] can really move (eighth note = 170+).

III. LAMENT

At [B] the bassoon's first two notes recall the Prelude.

There are two kinds of time here. The piano plods ever onward with steady, unceasing quarter notes; but the bassoon plays in a slower and more flexible tempo, rather like the way a jazz ballad-singer bends time by holding back here and rushing there to stretch a familiar song almost beyond recognition. The overall musical character is spacious and unhurried, yet brimming with emotion.

Program Notes

I finished the *Sonata* in 1981 for a tour. I had started working on it a year or two earlier, but when a planned concert fell through I had set the music aside. (I still find it difficult to finish a piece without a finish line.) At the first rehearsal I still wasn't sure about the order of the sections, but the pianist, Bill Moulton, a longtime friend and fellow composer, helped me to trust my intuition to end with a slow movement. Since then the piece has somehow found a place in the repertoire of teachers and players despite being, until now, hard to find.

I remember wanting to write a piece with strong emotions. I envied other musicians' repertoire: Schubert lieder, Mahler's arching string lines, the intensity of Romantic chamber music, free forms and shifting moods in early music. Other influences I hear in the *Sonata* are Japanese *shakuhachi* music, which had surprised me with the vast expressive space between two neighboring notes, and Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time*, with its beautiful slow solos over very spare piano accompaniments. These different musics inspired me and gave me courage to try similar things.

This *Sonata* is not in "sonata form." Like very early sonatas, it is music "to be sounded," music for invoking different emotional states. The first movement portrays the bassoon as a strong-voiced instrument exploring powerful feelings. The second movement is based on an English tune called "Browning" (or "The Leaves Be Green.") Several English Renaissance composers made consort settings of this tune; I was inspired by (and stole ideas from) the *Browning* for three viols by Elway Bevin, in which the 8-bar theme constantly repeats, moving to a different instrument each time. My version has four voices, with three played by the pianist. (After the very first performance of the *Sonata*, a man introduced himself as editor of Renaissance settings of "Browning." We were astonished to encounter an expert on this obscure melody, and he was amazed to hear a new setting.)

I often have trouble ending my compositions with a cheery finale; many of my pieces conclude with a slow movement: a lullaby, chorale, or lament. Who can say how much this has to do with my temperament or stage of life, and how much it has to do with the state of our world?

The Lament that ends this *Sonata* grew from some piano chords that captivated me. I sat at the piano for hours tinkering with them. I began the Prelude and the Lament with similar chords, but only much later did I realize that the "Browning" melody begins with the very same notes – even in other people's versions. Some of the best things in music happen in ways that remain mysterious (during the piece's gestation a songbook caught my attention in a music library and fell open to "Browning"), and that's just a way of saying that I understand only some of what went into this music. For the rest I am grateful.

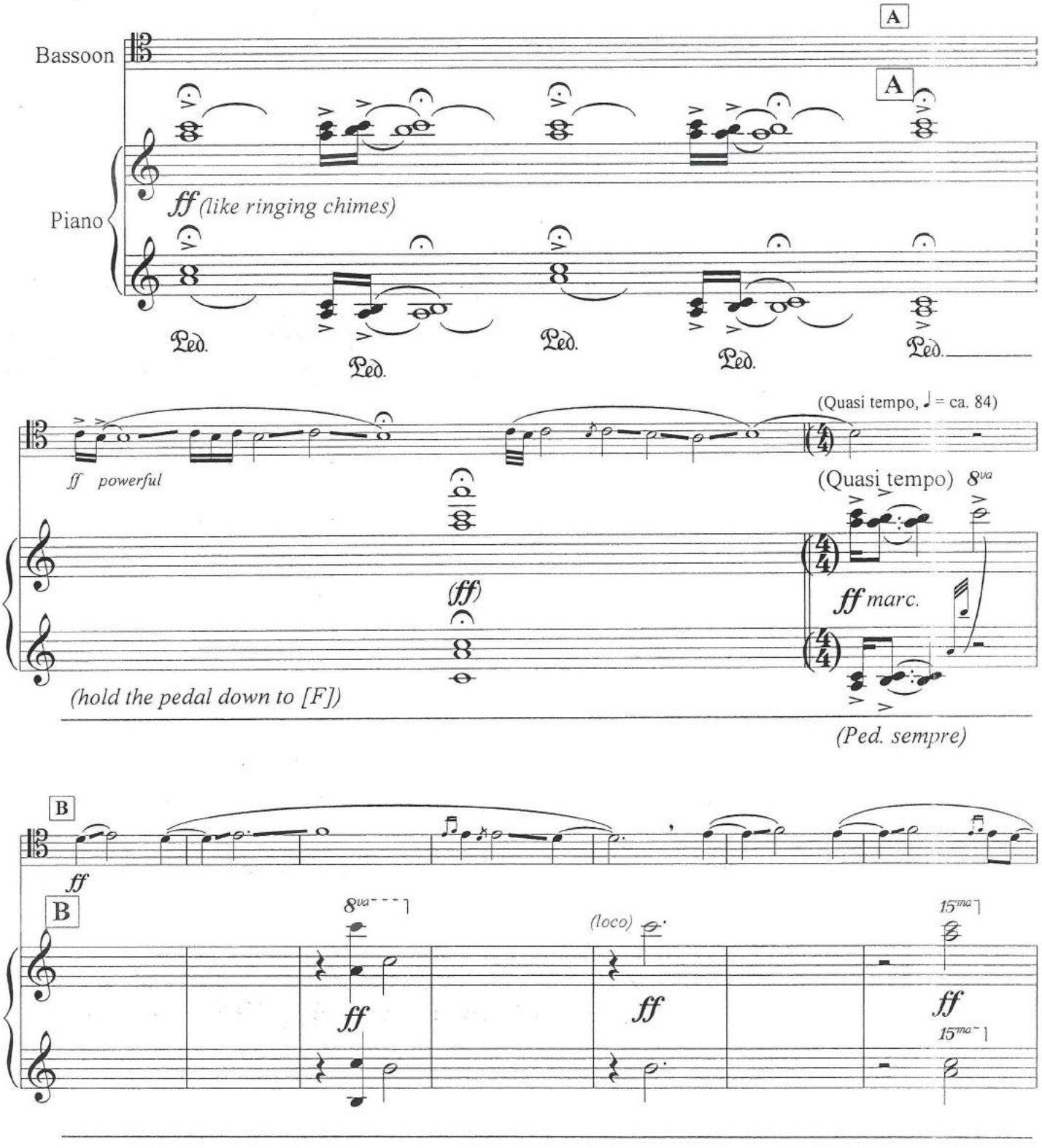
- John Steinmetz, Altadena, CA, February 2004

Sonata

for Bassoon and Piano

John Steinmetz
(b. 1951)

I. Prelude



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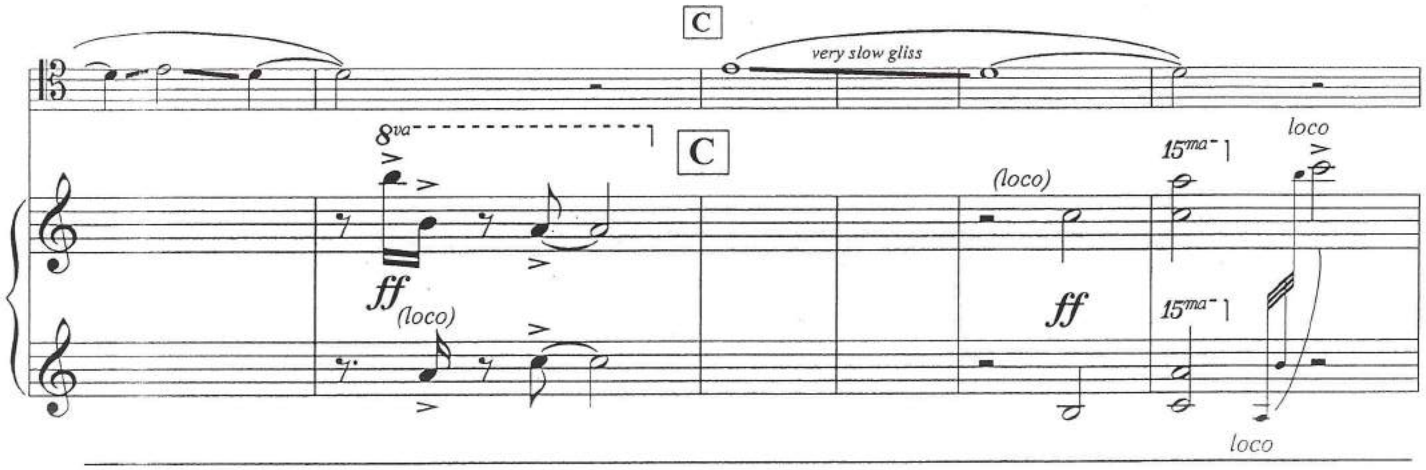
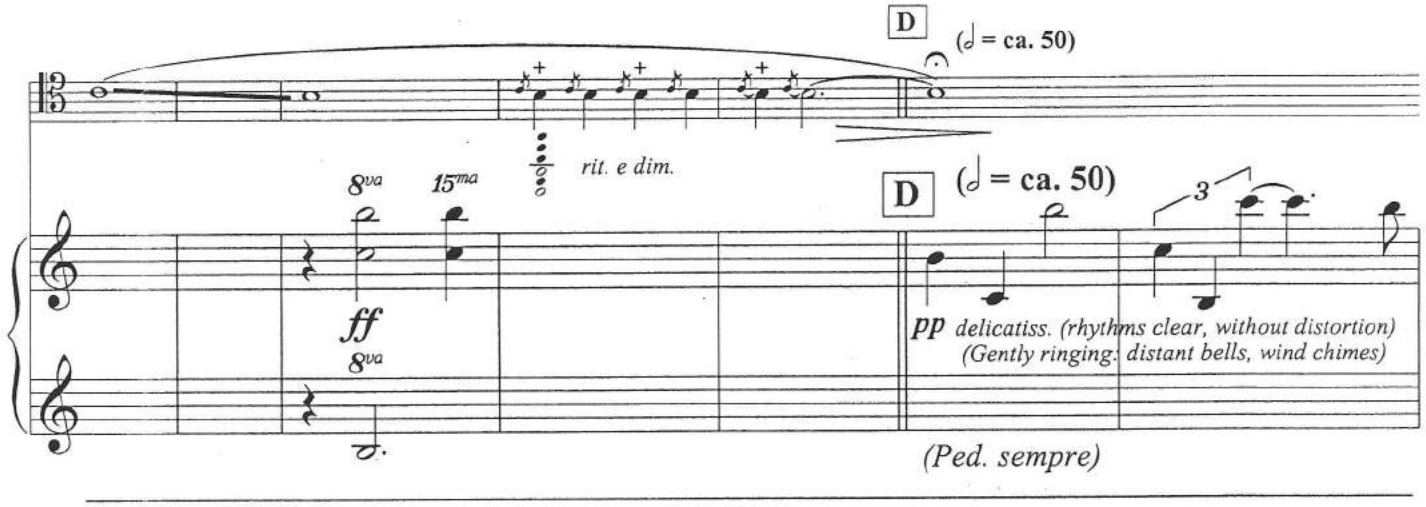
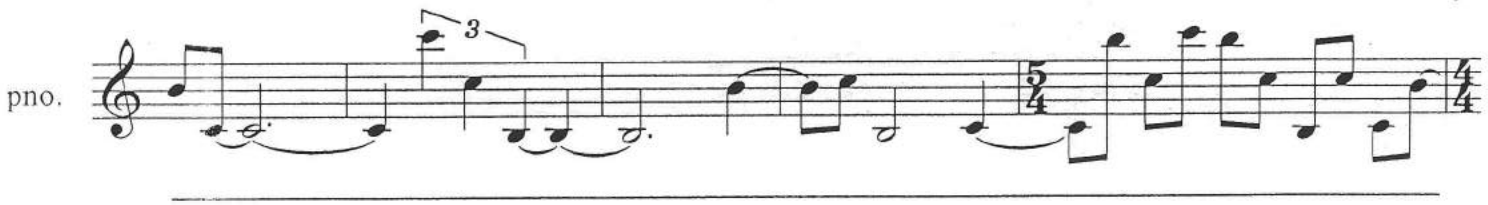
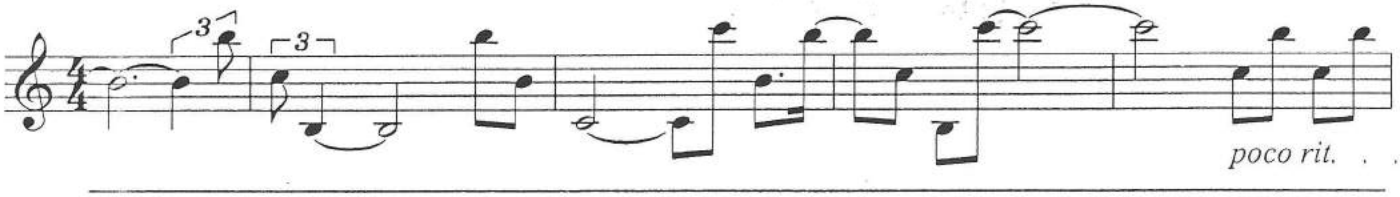
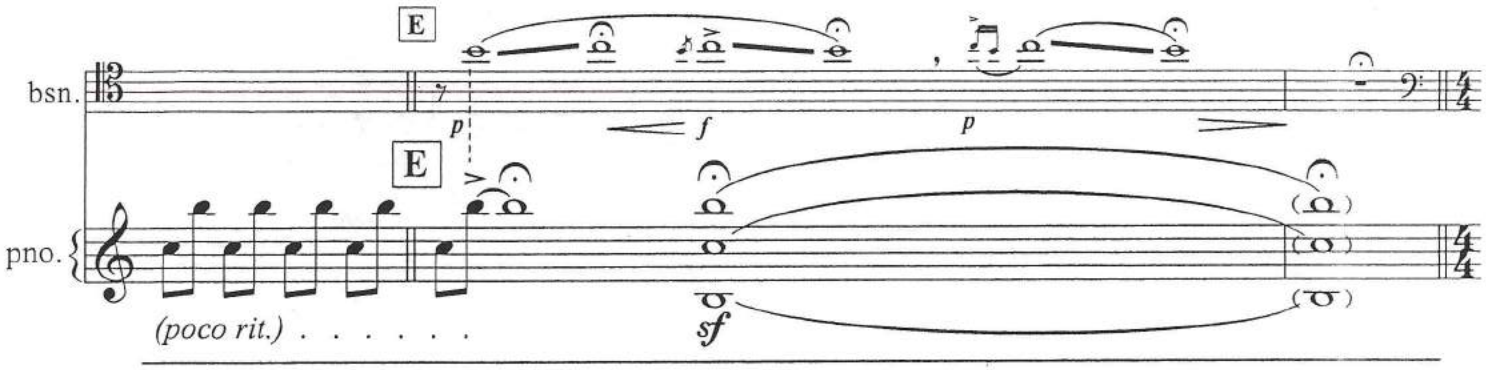
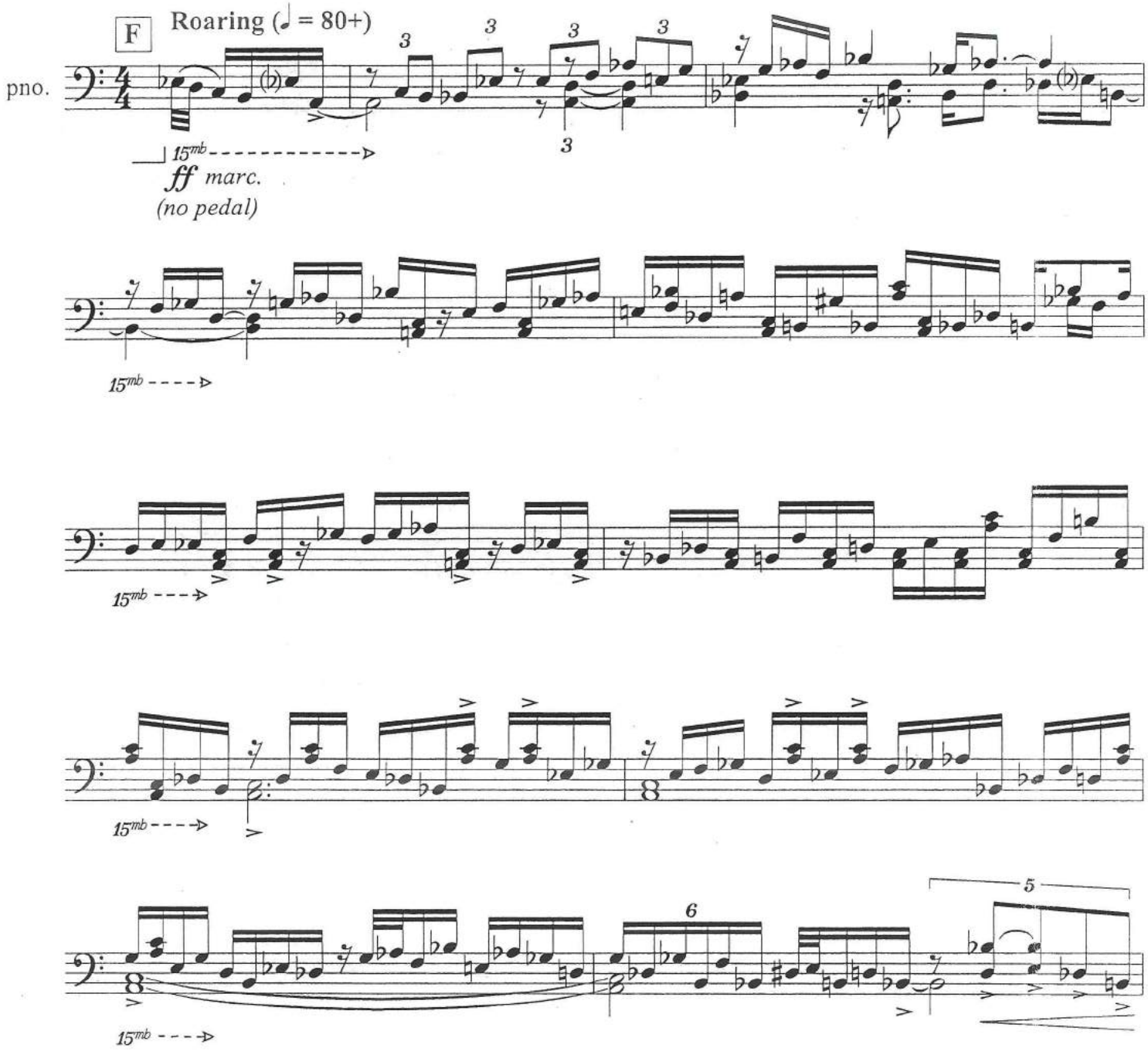

C
very slow gliss
C
8va
ff
(loco)
(loco)
ff
15ma
15ma
loco
loco

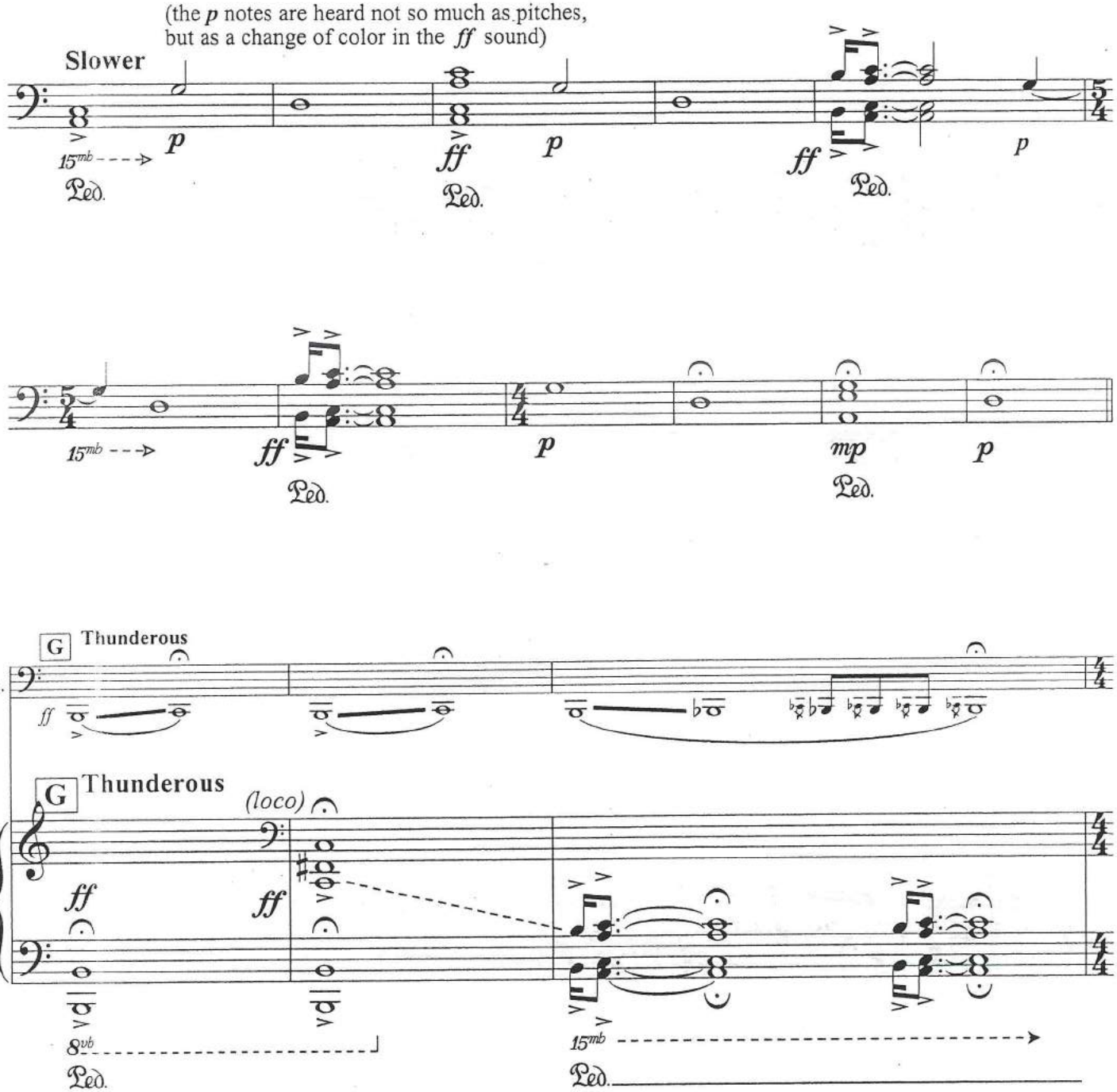

D
(♩ = ca. 50)
rit. e dim.
8va
15ma
ff
8va
D
(♩ = ca. 50)
3
pp delicatiss. (rhythms clear, without distortion)
(Gently ringing: distant bells, wind chimes)
(Ped. sempre)

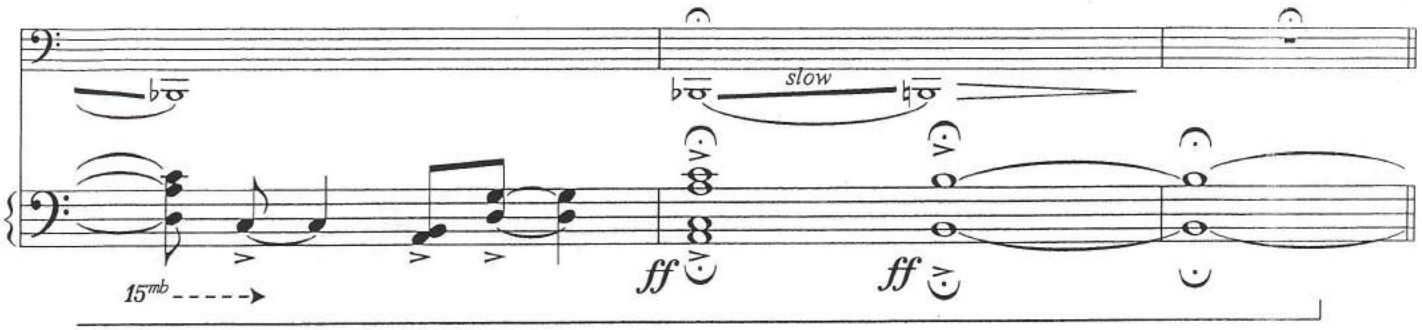

pno.
3
5/4
4/4


4/4
3
3
poco rit. . .


E
bsn.
p
f
p
E
pno.
(poco rit.) . . . . . .
sf


F
Roaring (♩ = 80+)
pno.
3
3
3
3
3
15mb
ff marc.
(no pedal)
15mb
15mb
15mb
15mb
6
5


(the p notes are heard not so much as pitches,
but as a change of color in the ff sound)
Slower
p
ff
p
ff
p
15mb
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
ff
p
mp
p
15mb
Ped.
Ped.
G Thunderous
bsn.
ff
G Thunderous
(loco)
pno.
ff
ff
8vb
15mb
Ped.
Ped.
H
bsn.
ff marc.
H
pno.
ff marc.
15mb
ff
(Ped. sempre)



(Ped. sempre)

(Wait until bassoon B♮ is absolutely clear.)

Release pedal slowly, holding the Bs out and into the beginning of the Browning.

II. Browning

Andante*

Piano

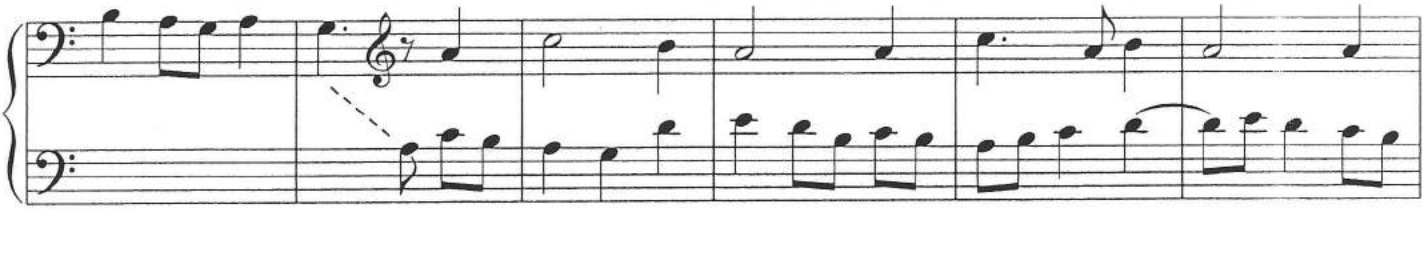
p dolce, cantabile

etc.

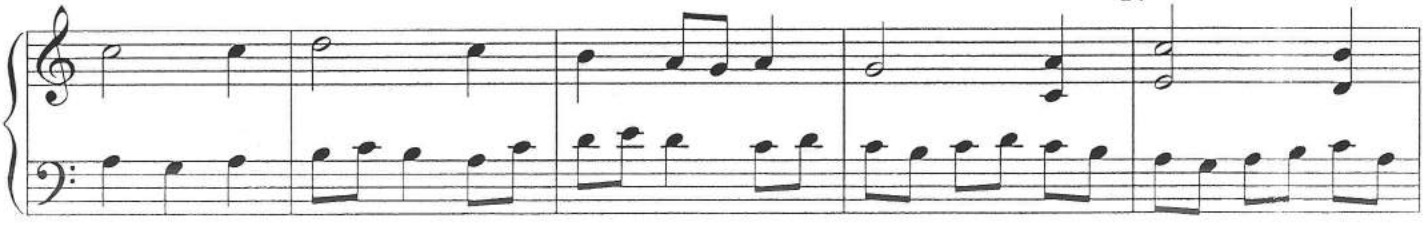
from 1st mvt. (15mb)

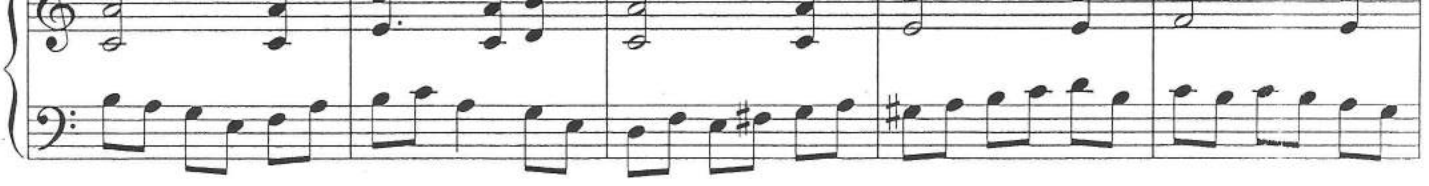
* Please see the Performance Notes about the tempo of this movement.

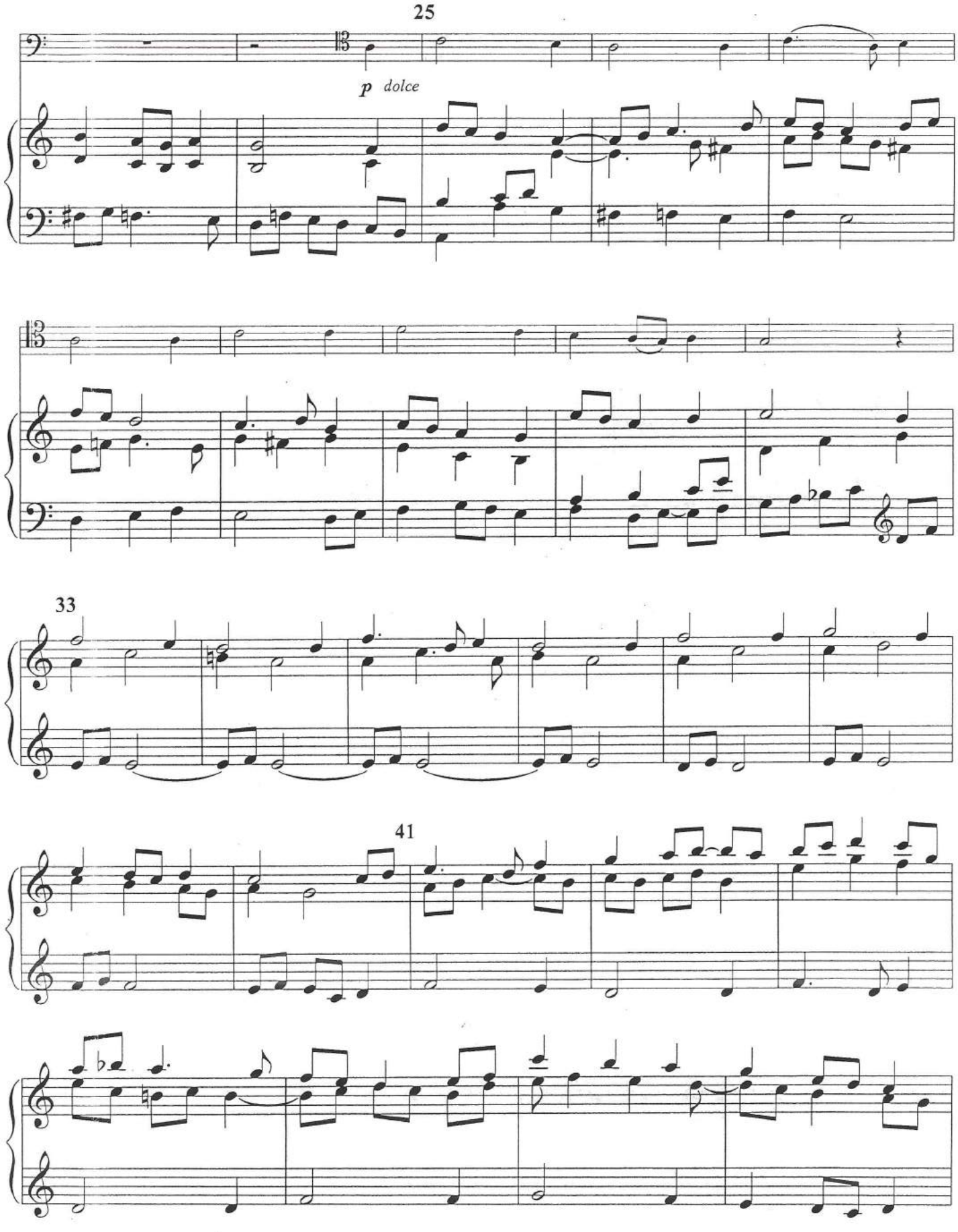
9

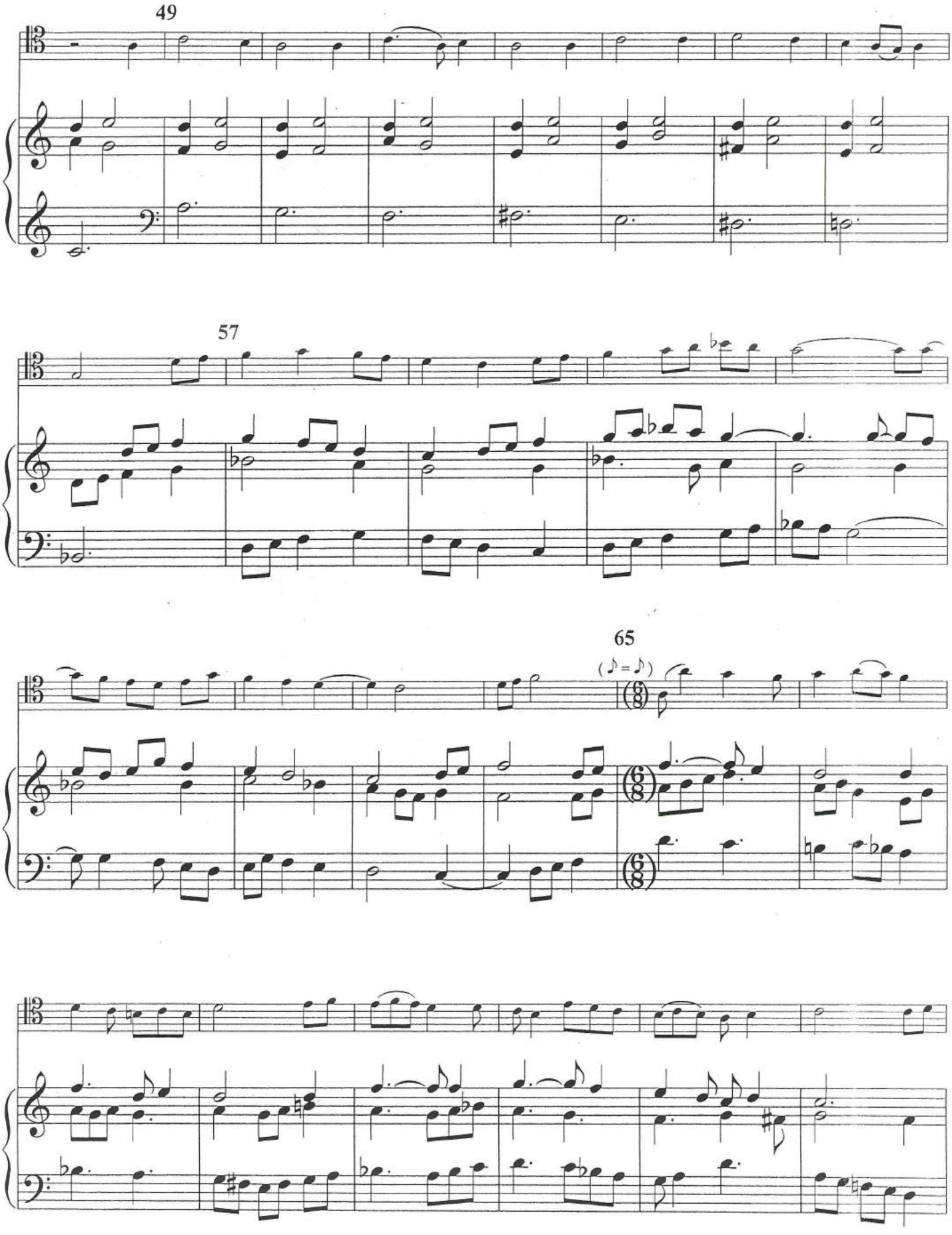


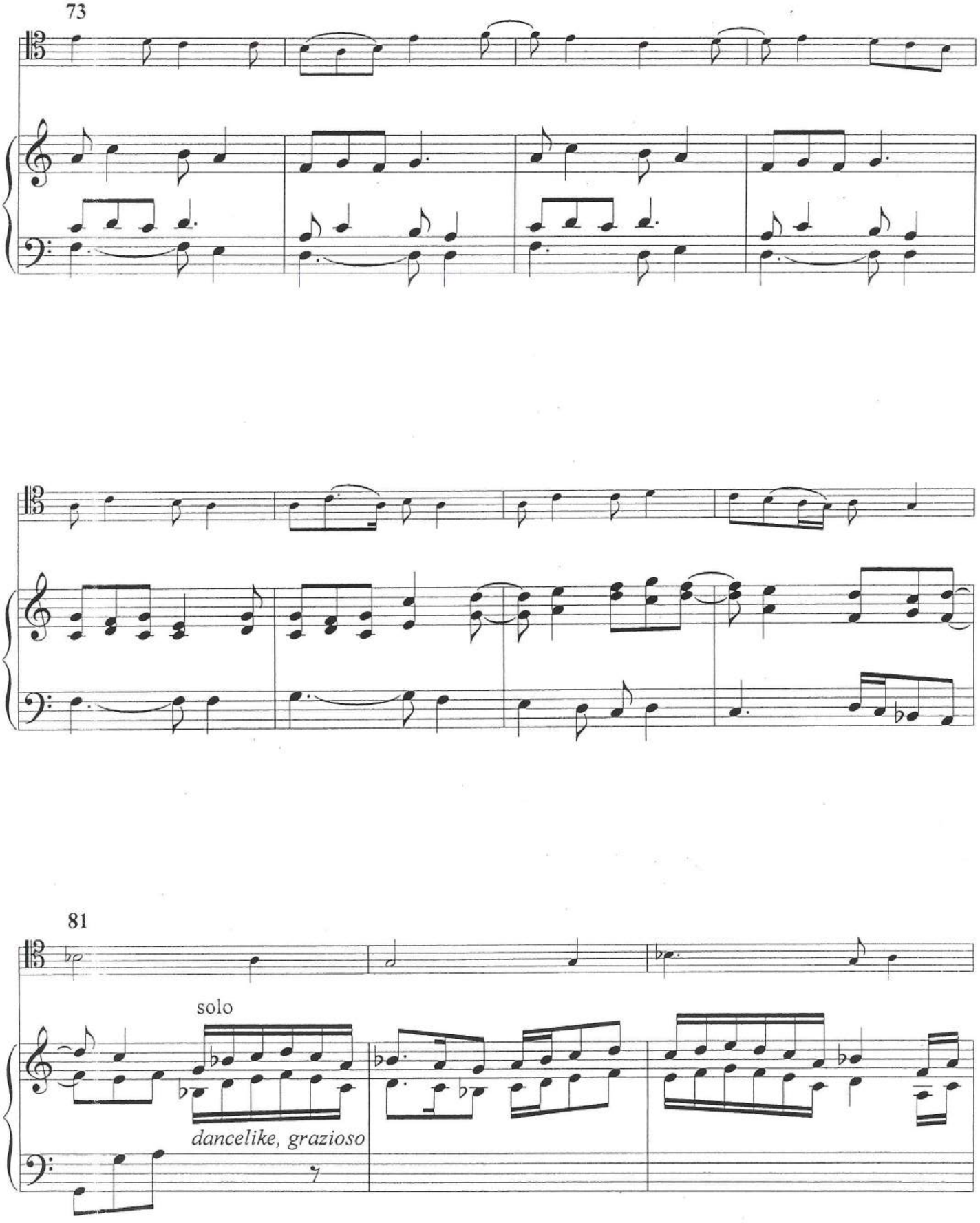
17

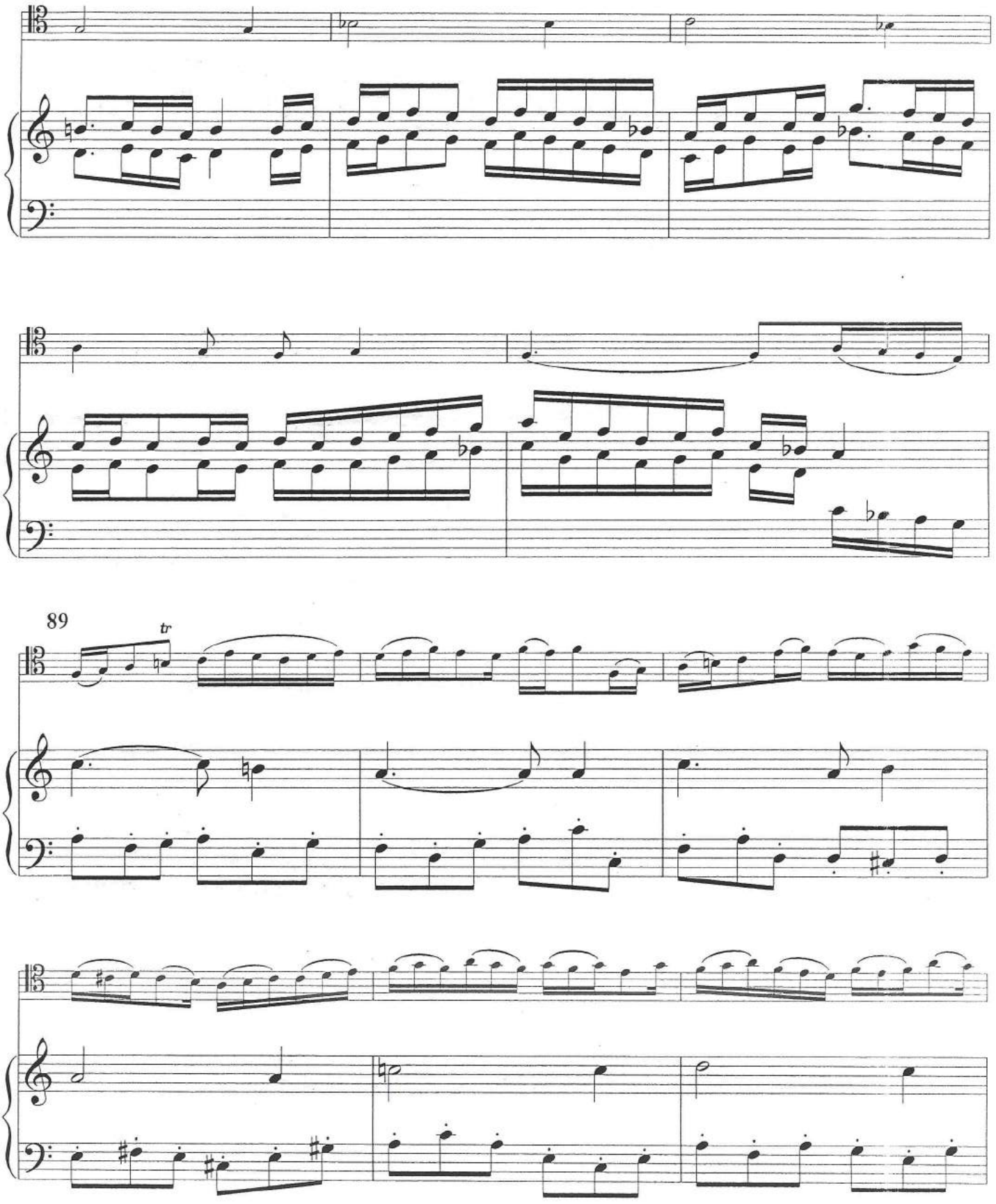


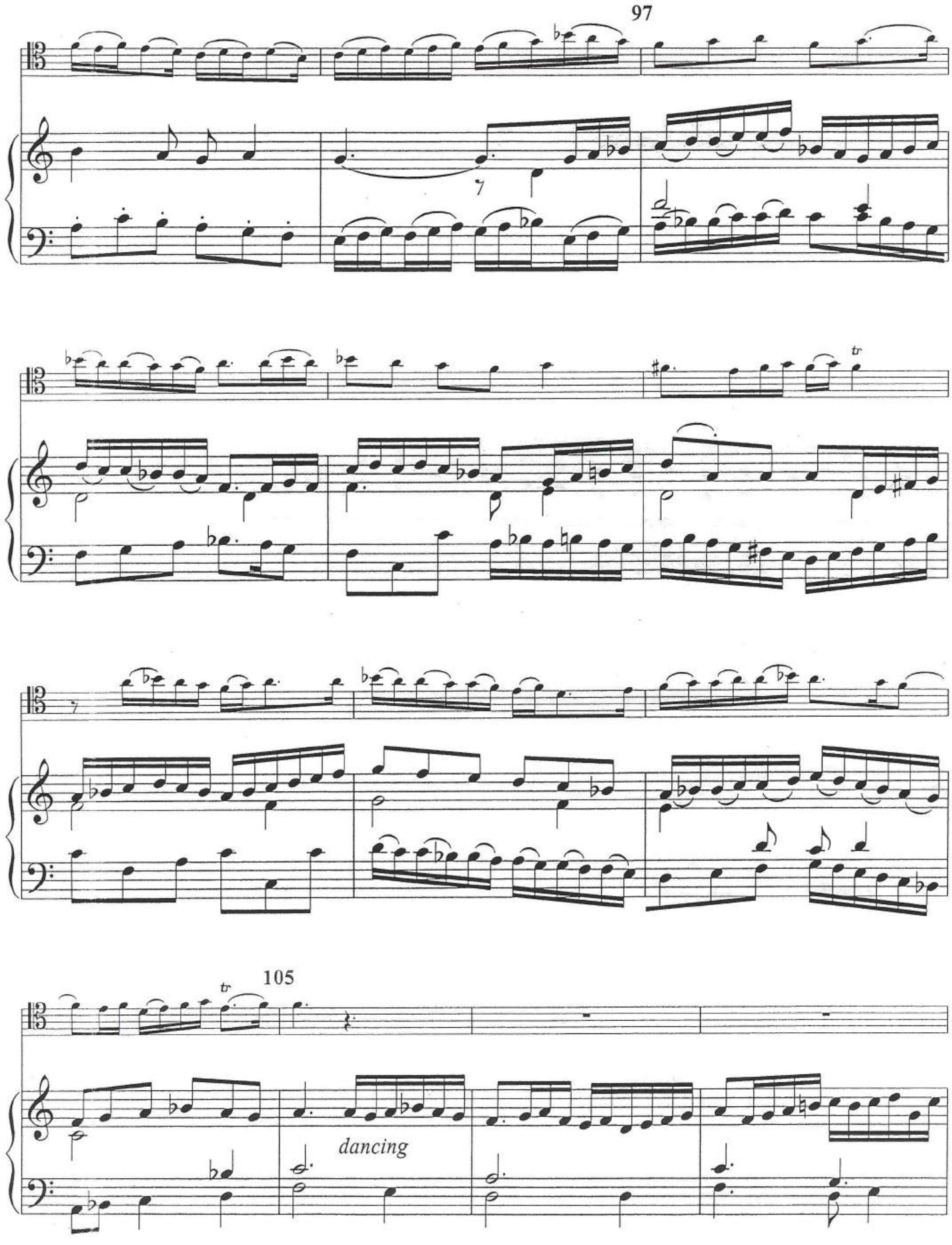


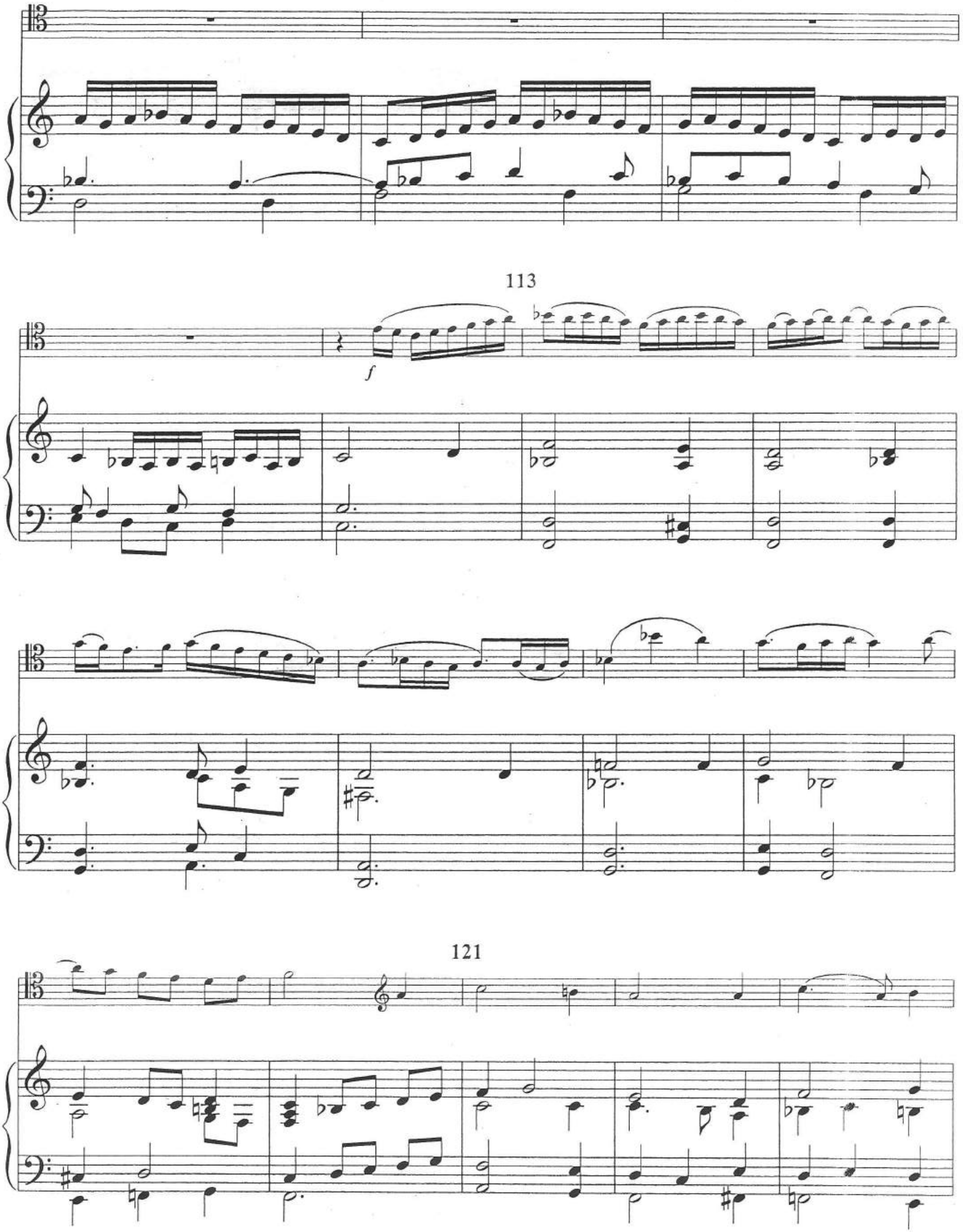

25
p dolce
33
41

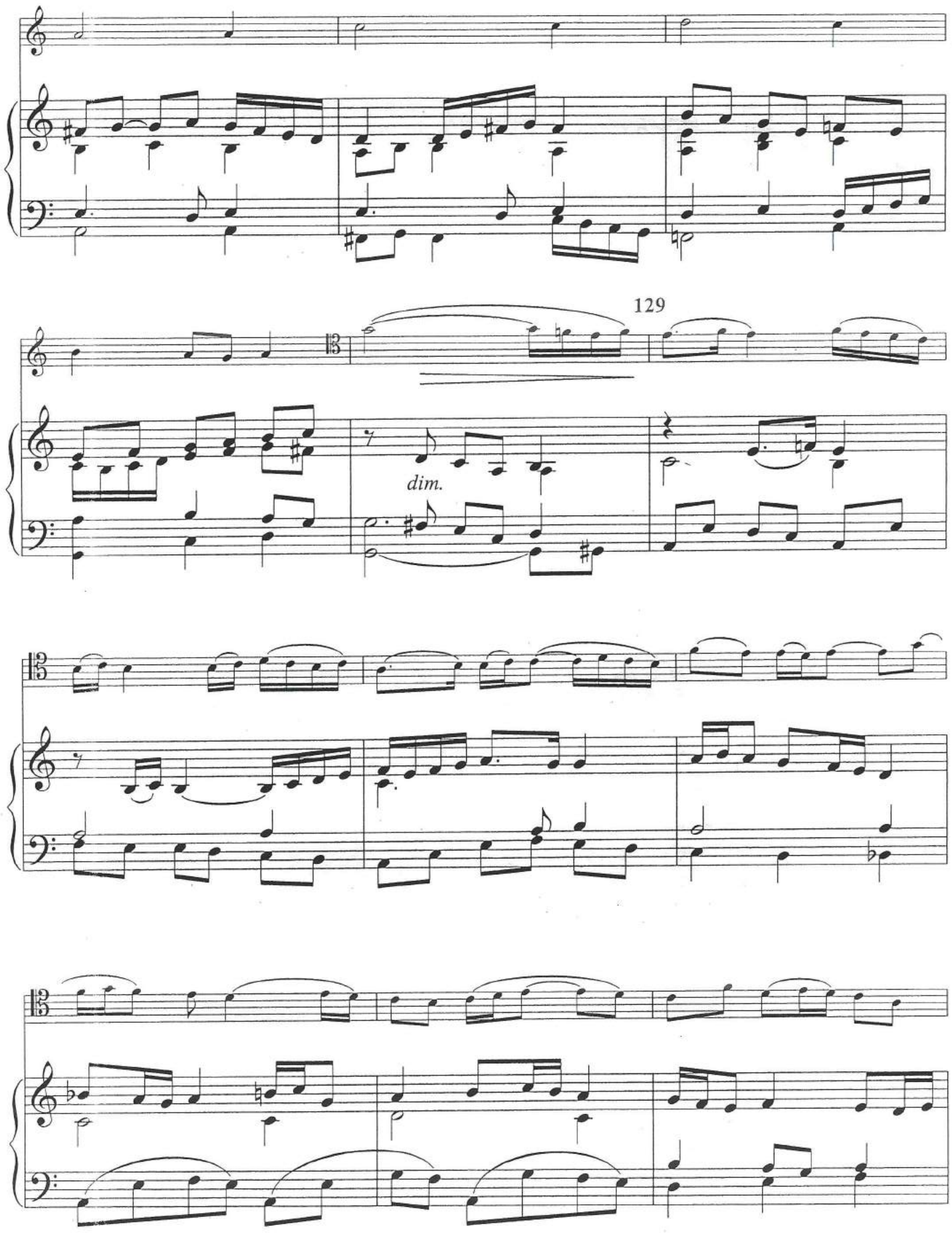

49
57
65
(♪ = ♪)

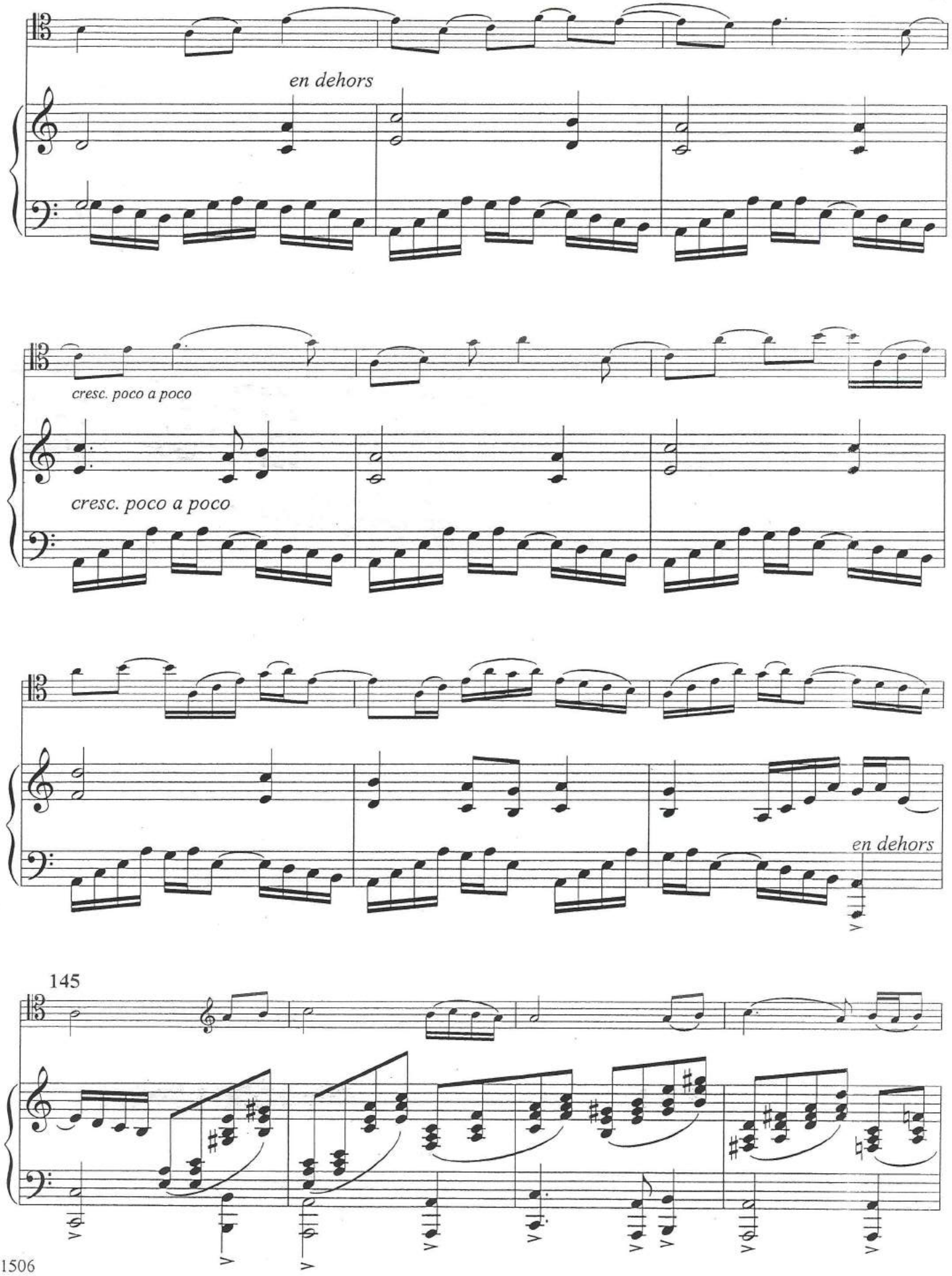

73
81
solo
dancelike, grazioso

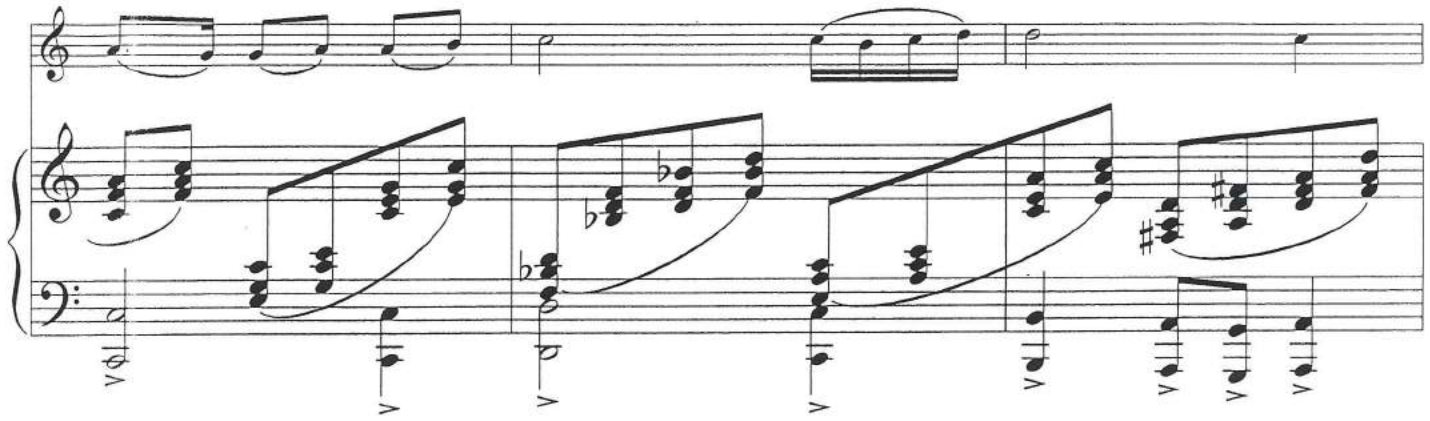

89
tr


97
tr
105
tr
dancing


113
f
121


129
dim.


en dehors
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
en dehors
145



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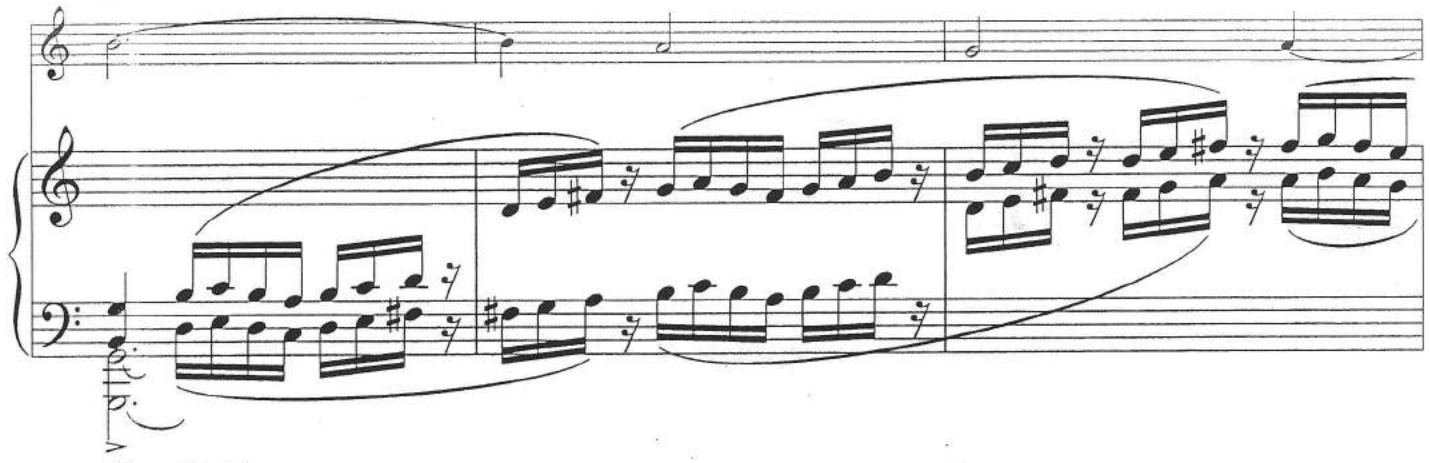
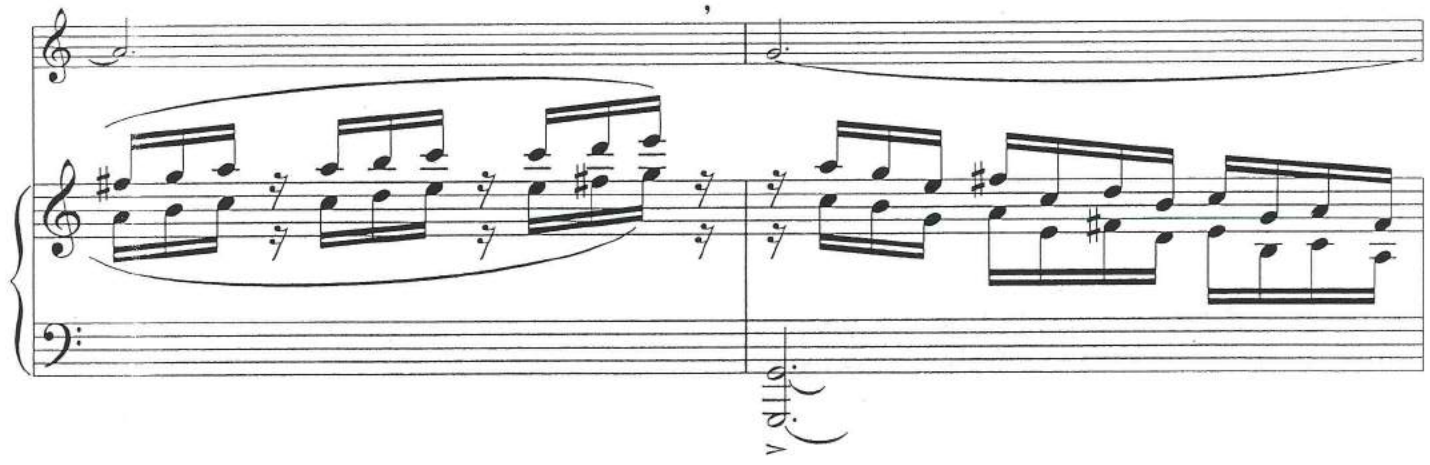
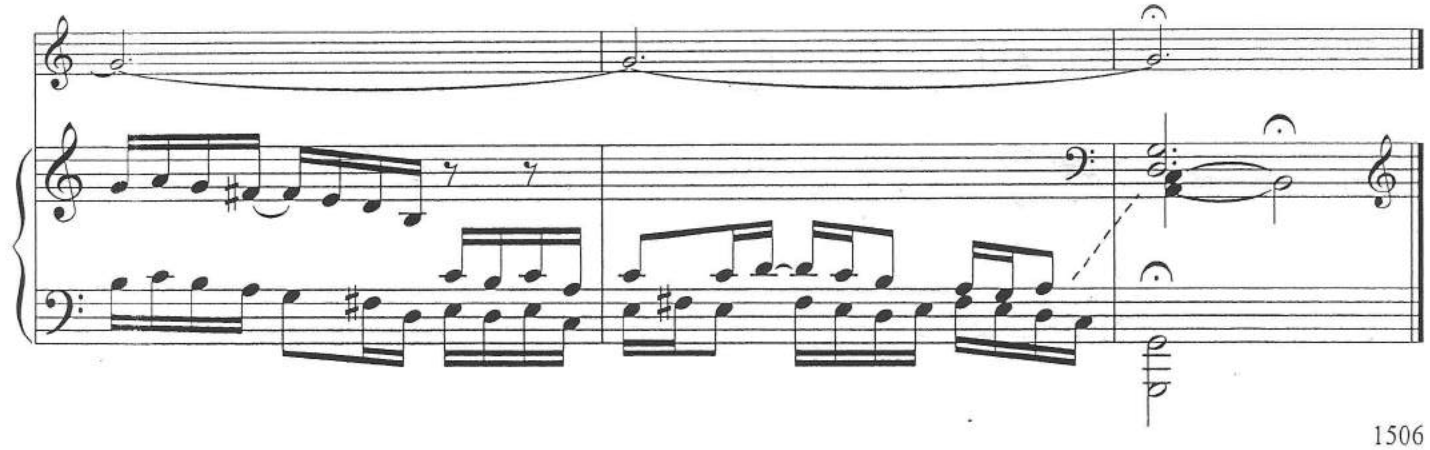
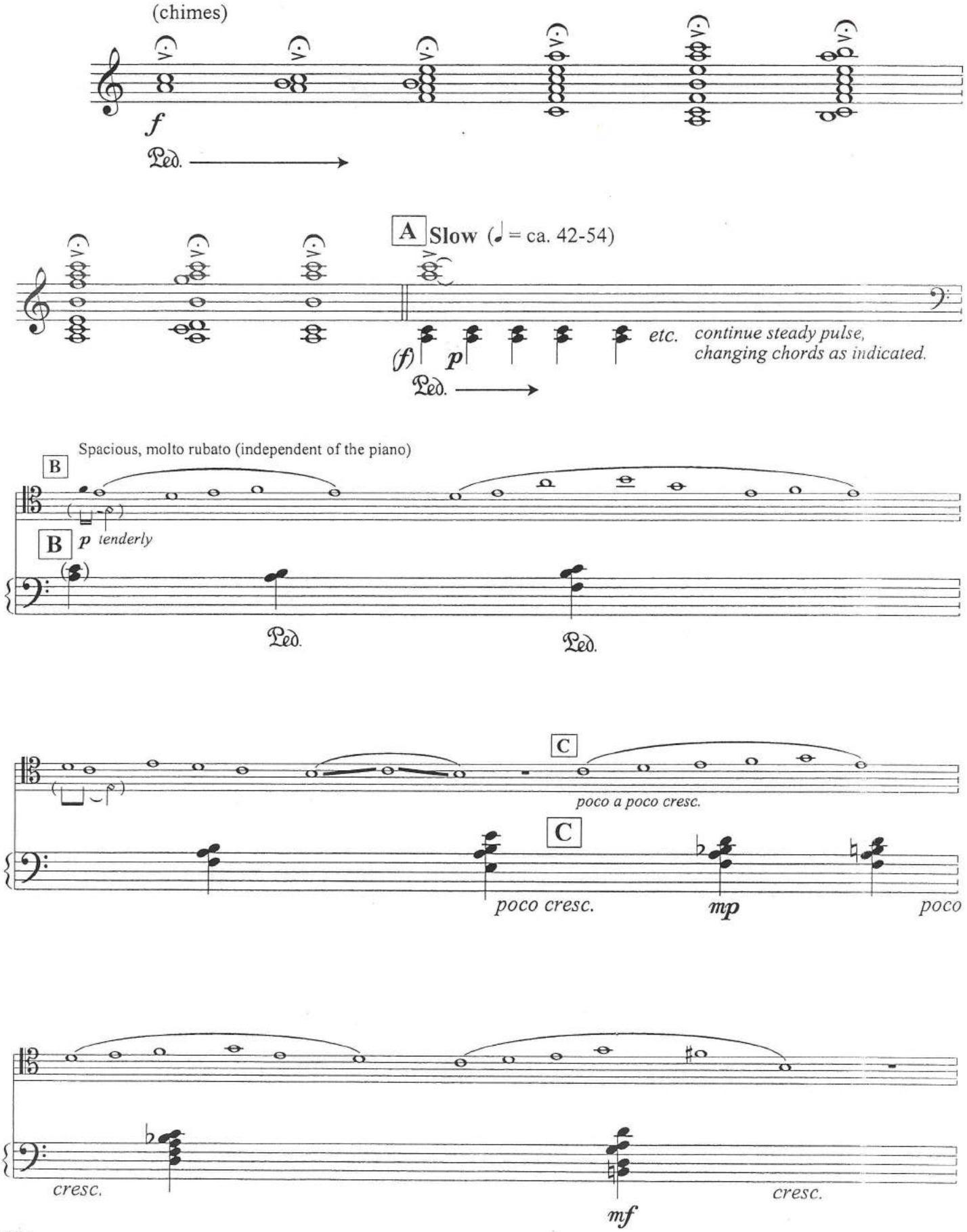


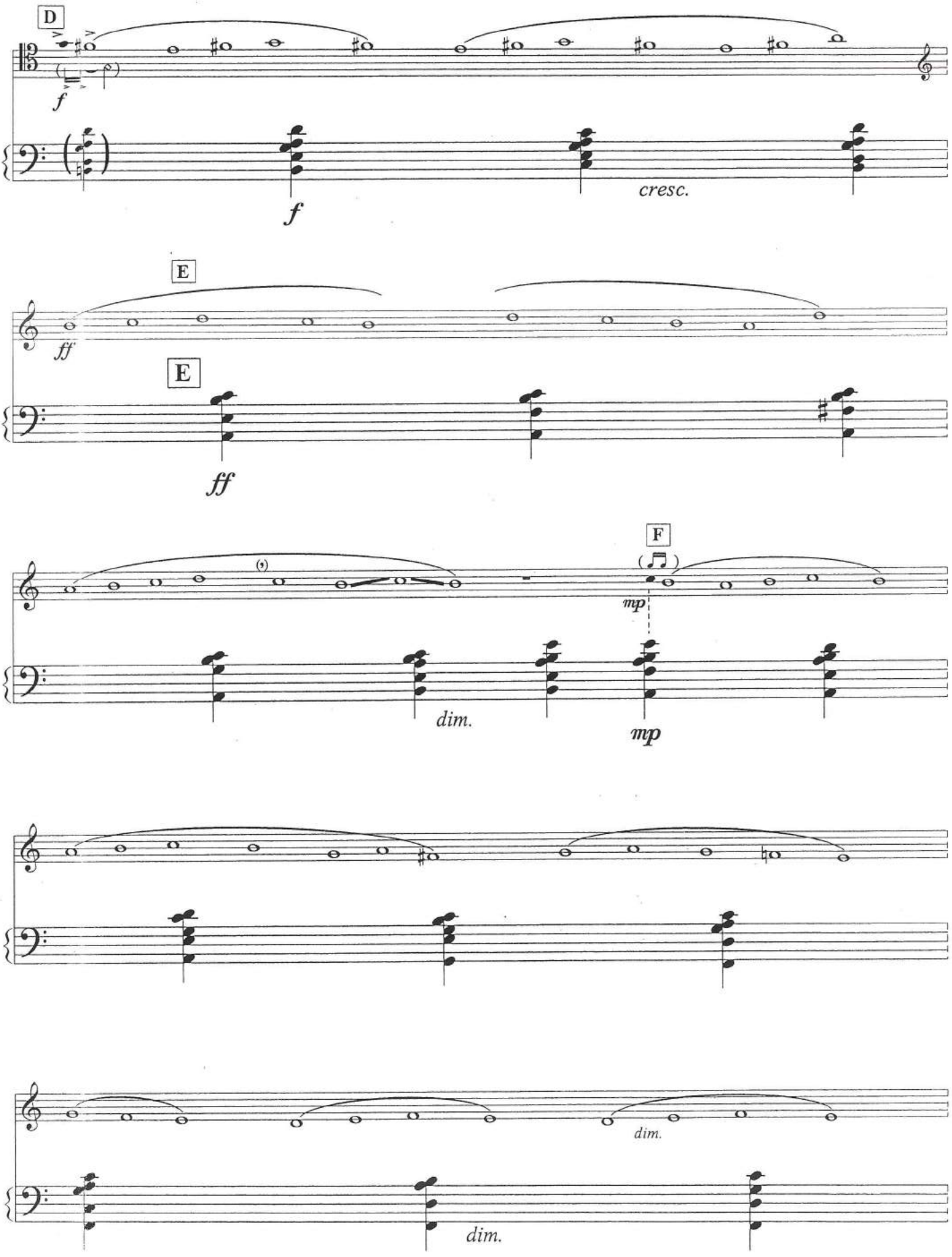
(Sost. Ped.)

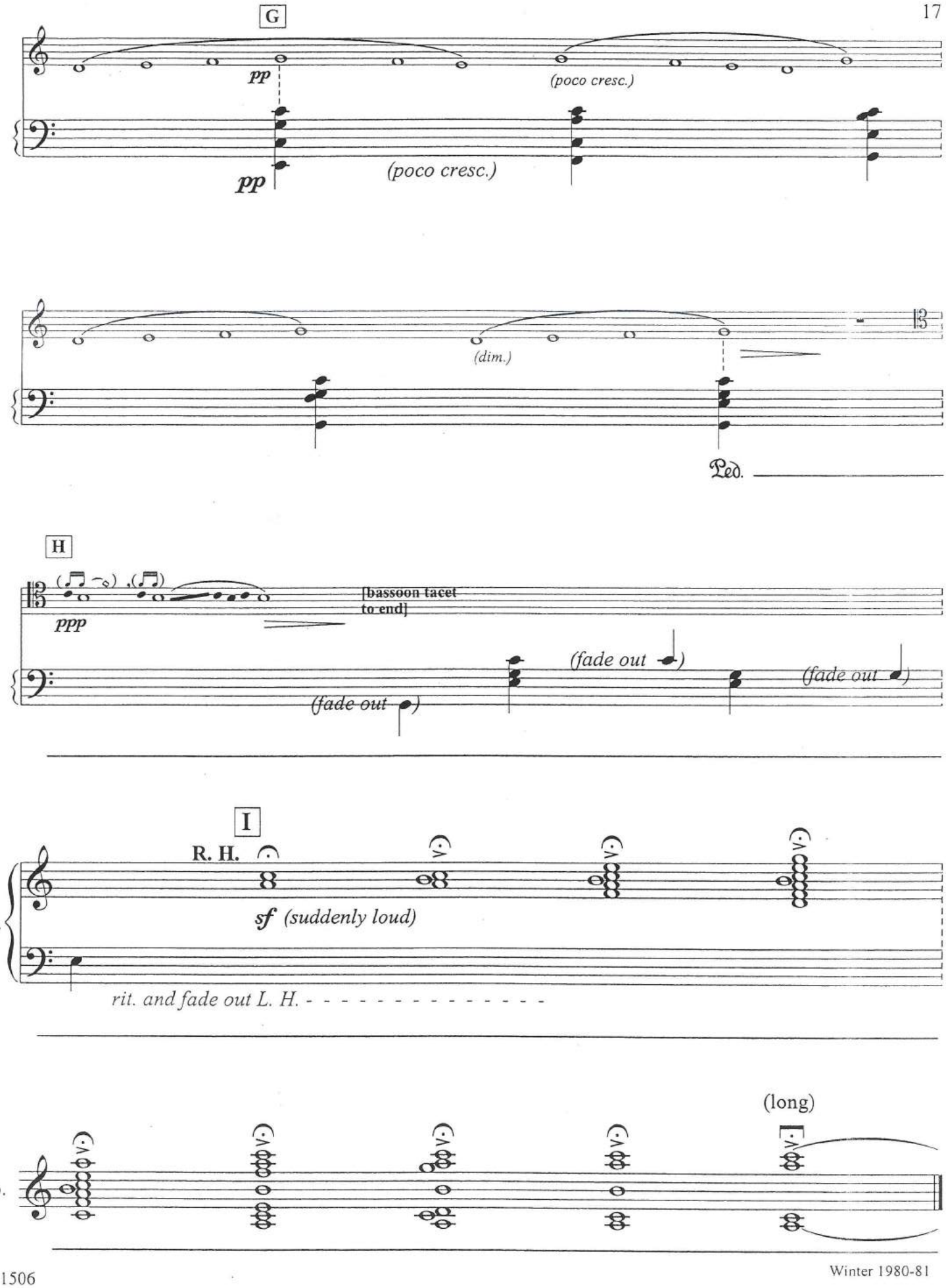




III. Lament


(chimes)
f
Ped.
A Slow (♩ = ca. 42-54)
(f)
p
etc.
continue steady pulse,
changing chords as indicated.
Ped.
Spacious, molto rubato (independent of the piano)
B
B
p tenderly
Ped.
Ped.
C
poco a poco cresc.
C
poco cresc.
mp
poco
cresc.
mf
cresc.


D
f
f
cresc.
E
ff
E
ff
F
mp
dim.
mp
dim.
dim.


G
pp
(poco cresc.)
pp
(poco cresc.)
(dim.)
Ped.
H
ppp
[bassoon tacet to end]
(fade out)
(fade out)
(fade out)
I
R. H.
sf (suddenly loud)
pno.
rit. and fade out L. H.
(long)
pno.

John Steinmetz

Sonata

(1981)

for

Bassoon & Piano

BASSOON

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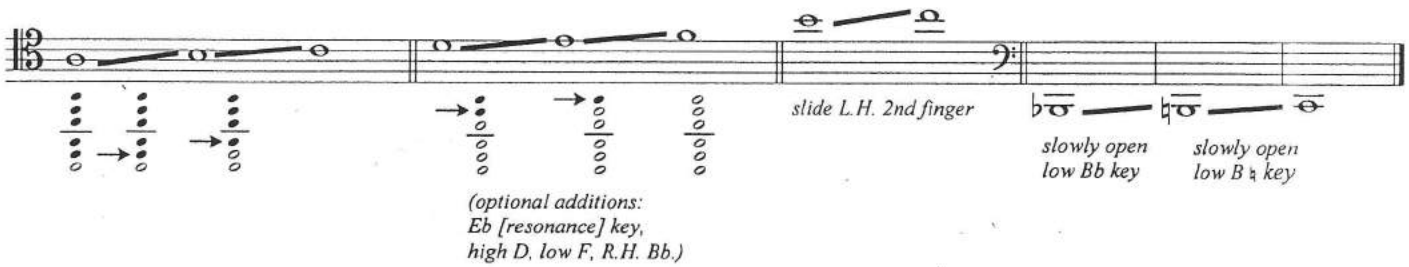
In order to come alive, this music needs performers' musicality, taste, and heart. In the outer movements, you create the pacing. In the middle movement, you shape dynamics and phrasing.

Throughout the piece the piano should play as an equal partner with the bassoon: not in the background, and often playing very loudly, pushing the bassoonist to play an extreme dynamic, for intense expressivity.

I. PRELUDE

Glissandi: Slowly slide the finger on or off the indicated hole. Imitate as closely as possible the unbroken glissando of a voice, hearing all of that musical space between the "real" notes.



II. BROWNING

Articulations and dynamics are largely up to the performers, as in early music. Most of the markings are just suggestions.

Begin trills on the upper notes.

Tempo: It works very well to begin this movement Adagio (quarter note = ca. 60). Around measure [65] begin a very gentle accelerando, so that [89] can really move (eighth note = 170+).

III. LAMENT

At [B] the bassoon's first two notes recall the **Prelude**.

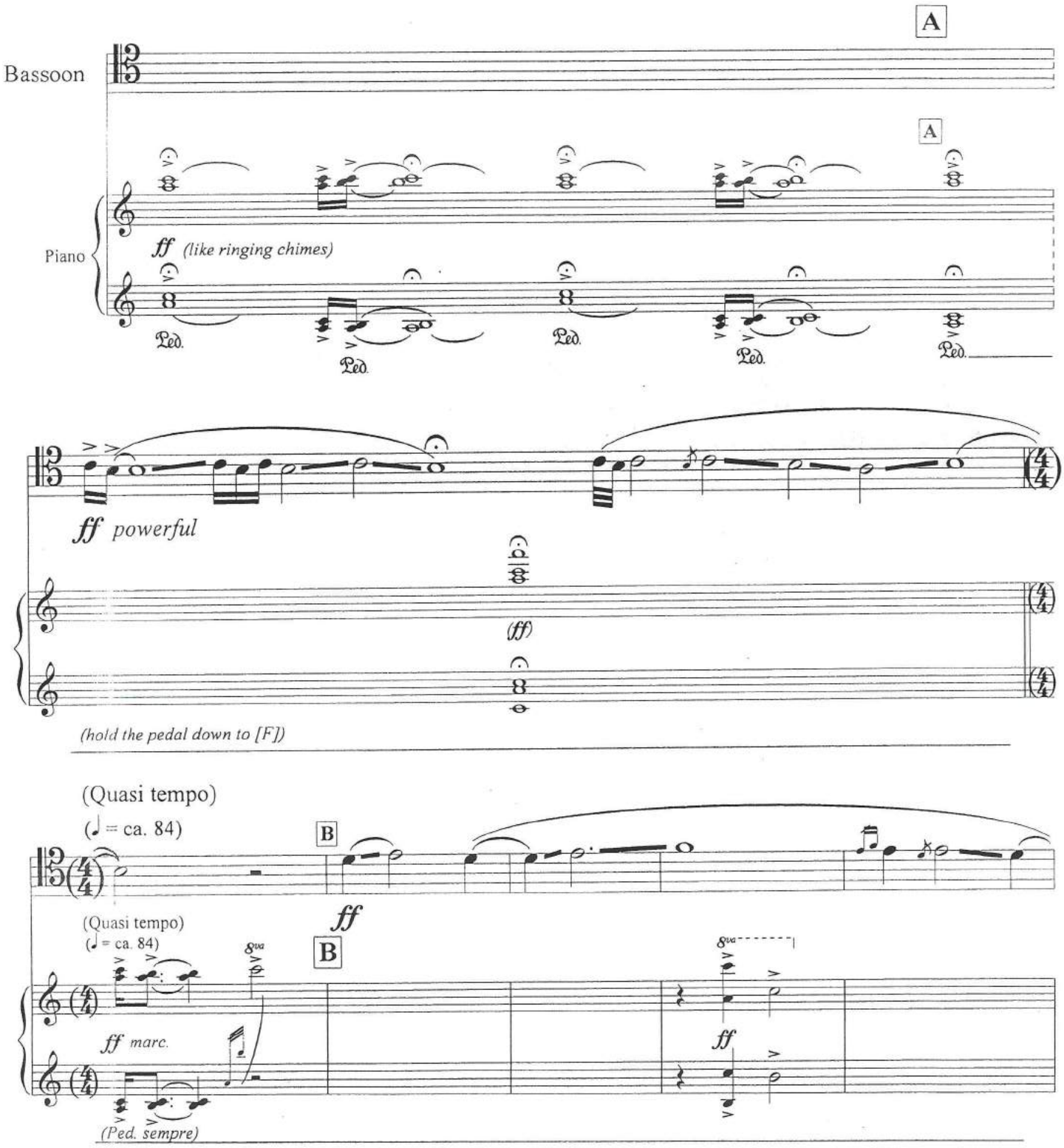
There are two kinds of time here. The piano plods ever onward with steady, unceasing quarter notes, but the bassoon plays in a slower and more flexible tempo, rather like the way a jazz ballad-singer bends time by holding back here and rushing there to stretch a familiar song almost beyond recognition. The overall musical character is spacious and unhurried, yet brimming with emotion.

Sonata

for Bassoon and Piano

I. Prelude

John Steinmetz
(1981)



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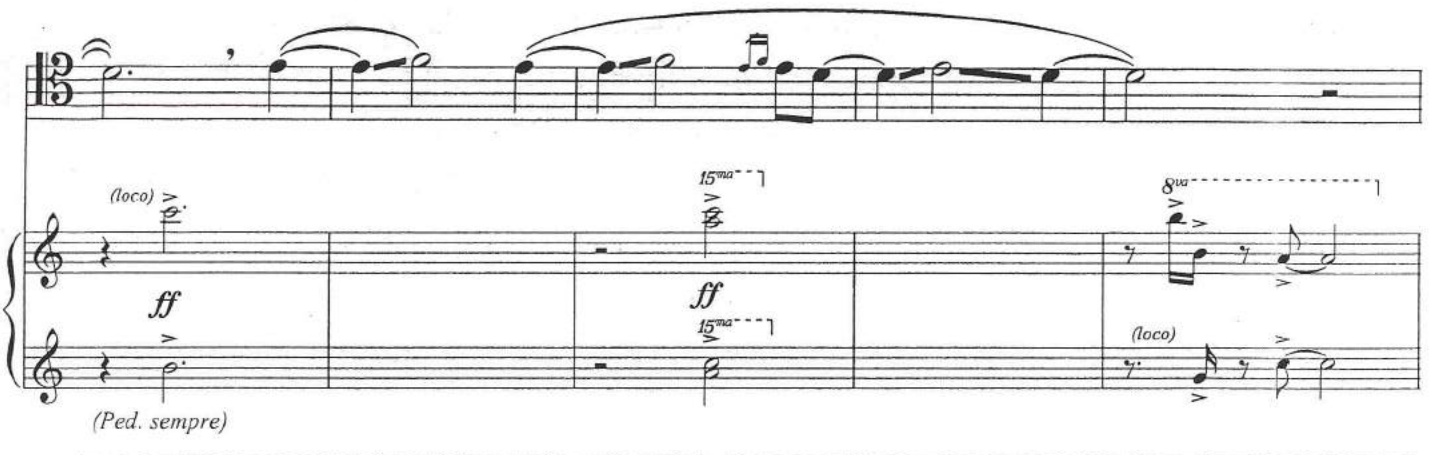
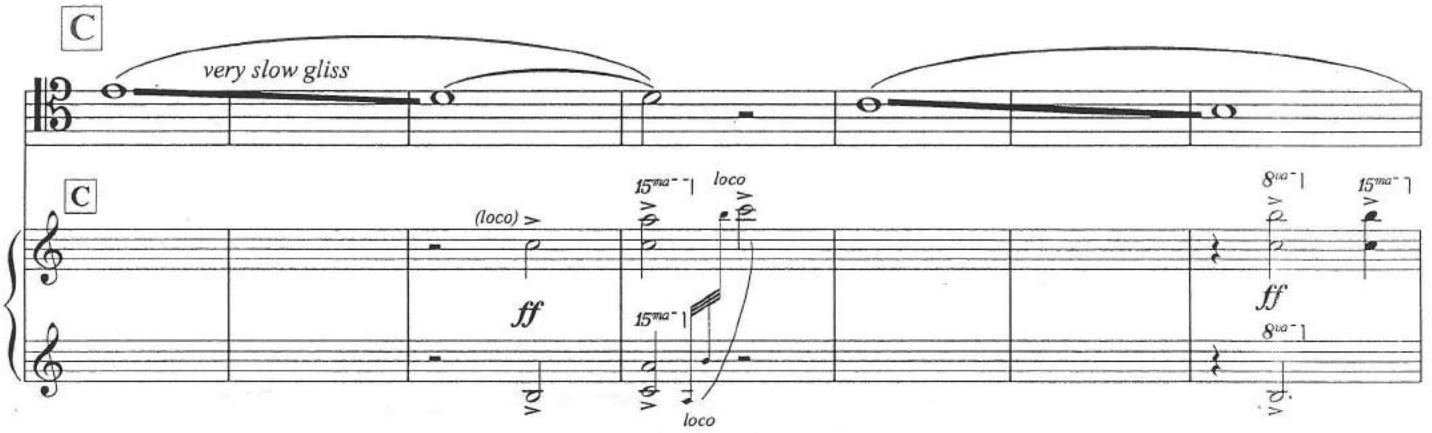
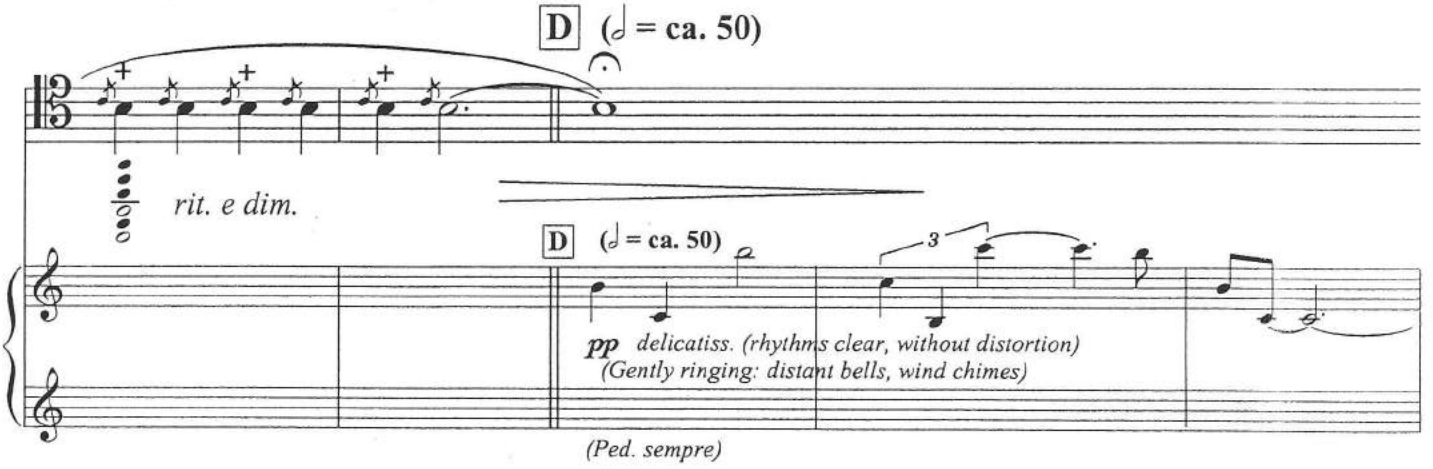
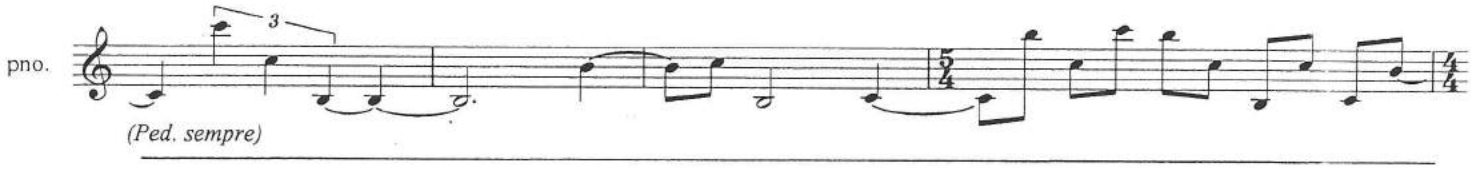
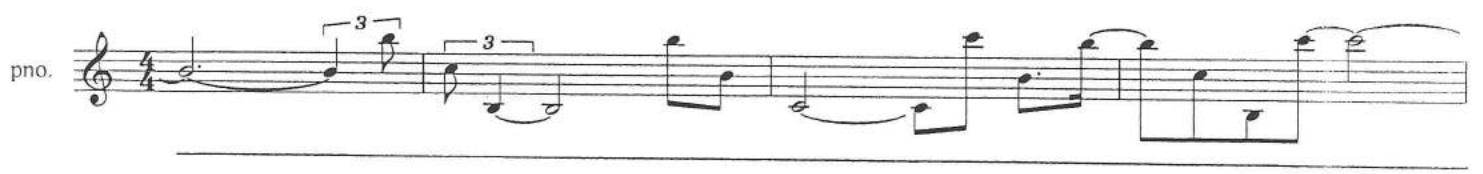
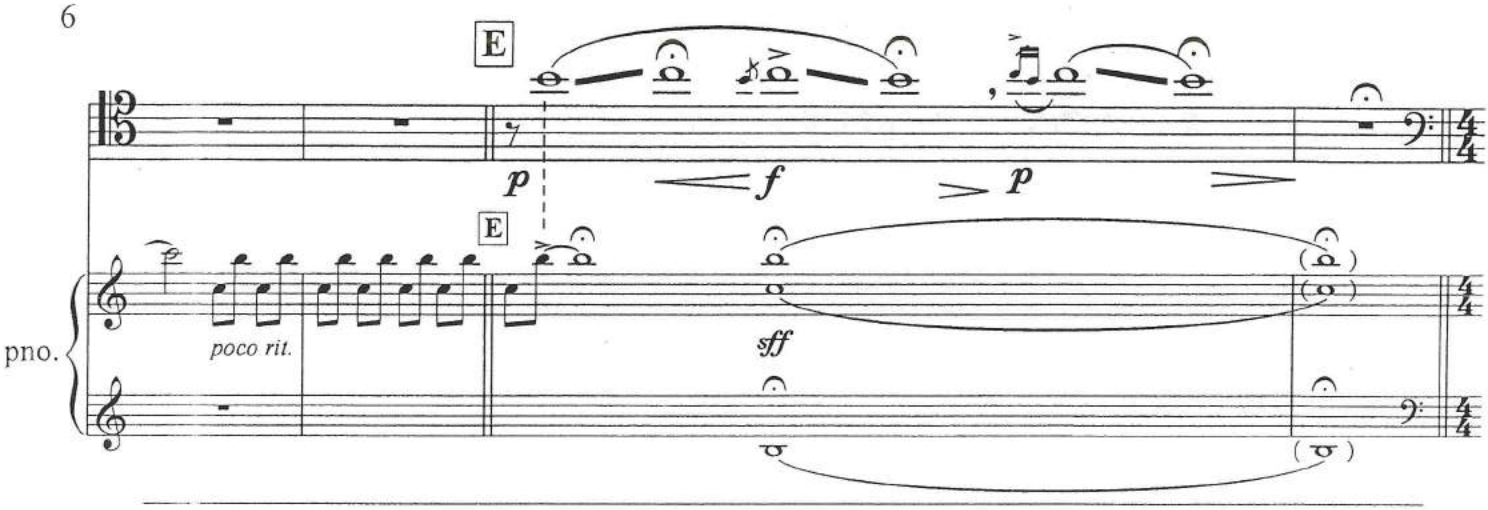

(loco)
ff
15ma
8va
(Ped. sempre)

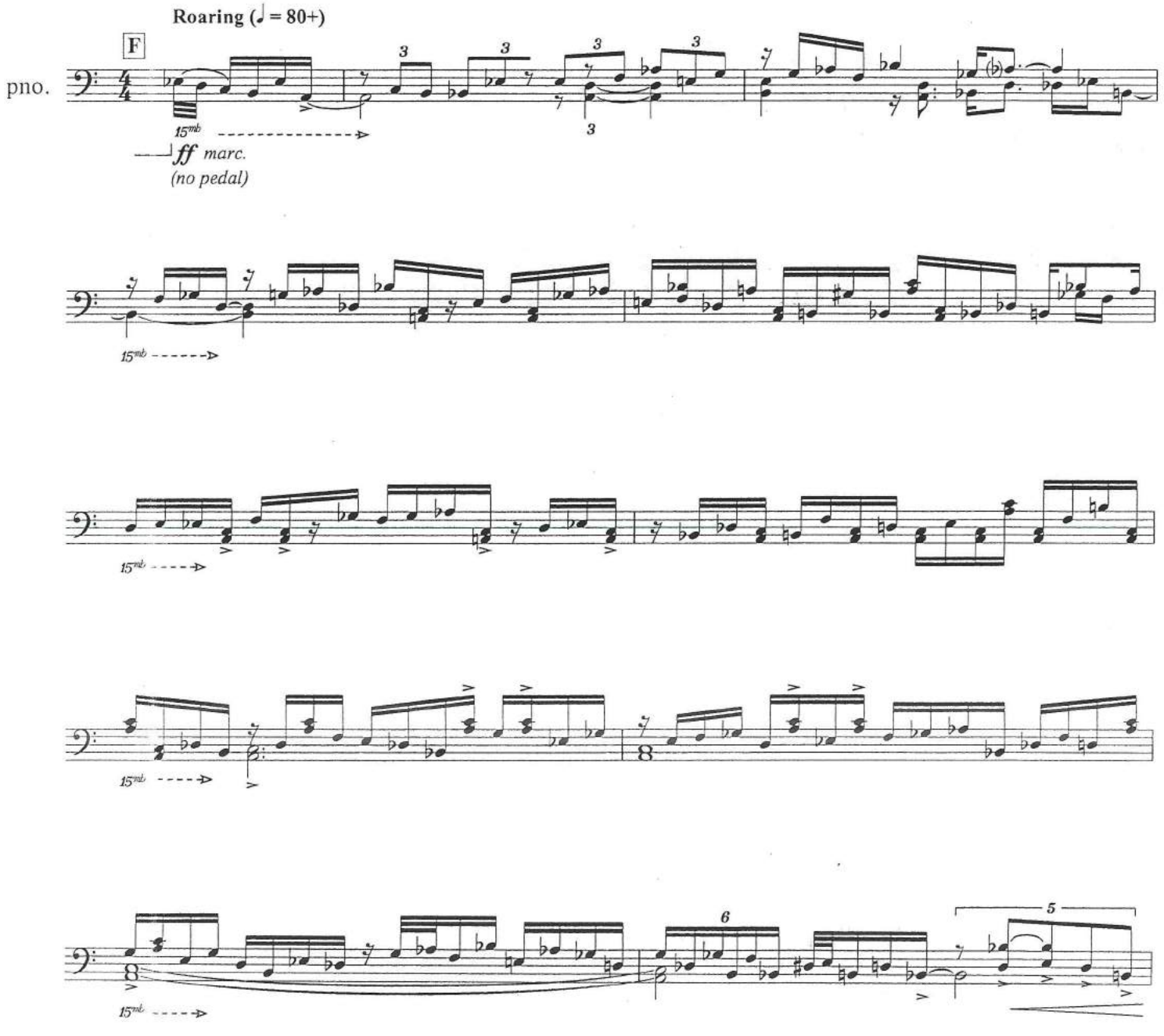

C
very slow gliss
(loco)
ff
loco

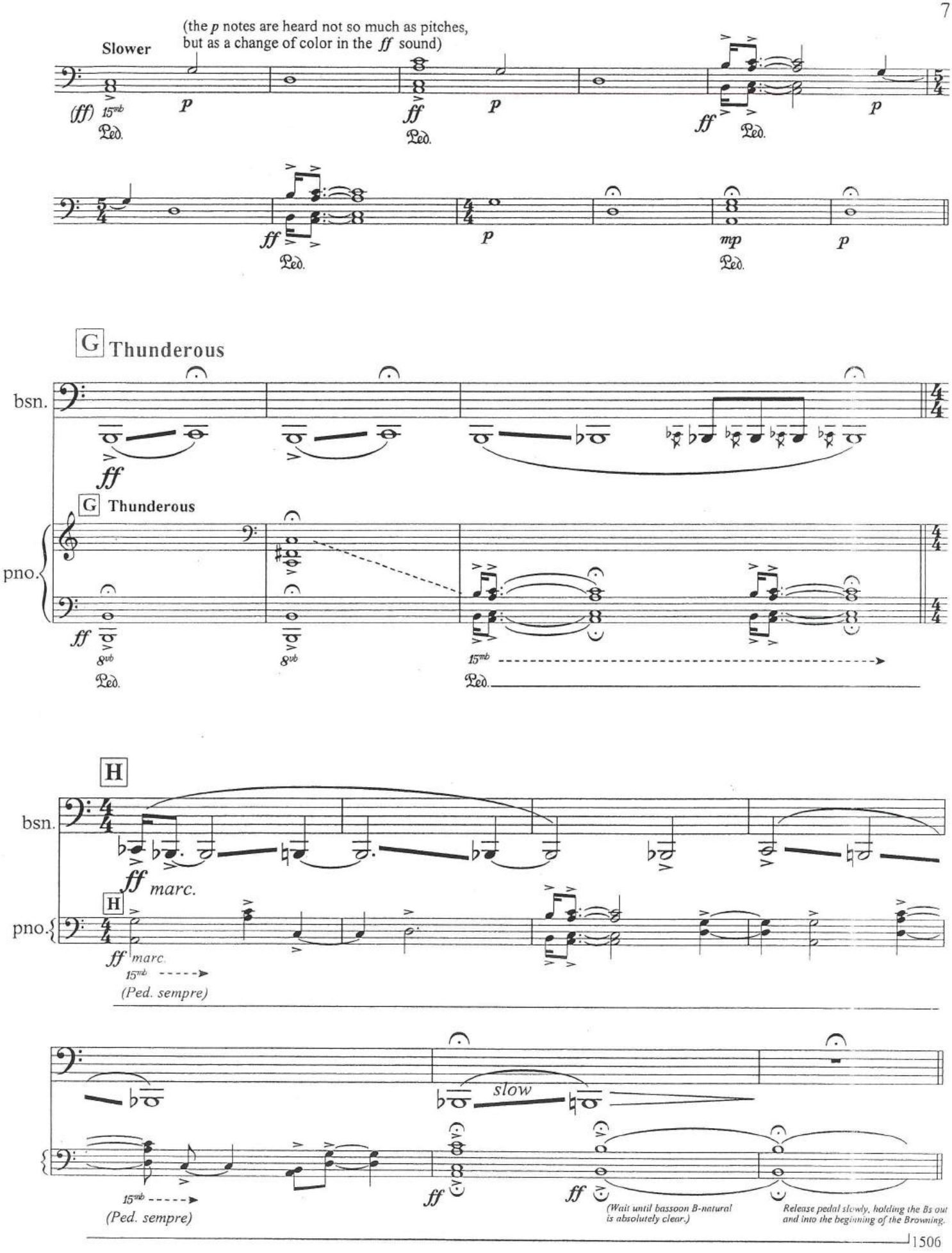

D (♩ = ca. 50)
rit. e dim.
pp delicatiss. (rhythms clear, without distortion)
(Gently ringing: distant bells, wind chimes)
(Ped. sempre)


pno.
(Ped. sempre)


pno.


E
p
f
p
E
pno.
poco rit.
sff


Roaring (♩ = 80+)
F
pno.
15mb
ff marc.
(no pedal)
15mb
15mb
15mb
15mb
6
5


Slower
(the p notes are heard not so much as pitches, but as a change of color in the ff sound)
(ff)
15mb
Ped.
p
ff
mp
G Thunderous
bsn.
pno.
8vb
(Ped. sempre)
H
marc.
slow
(Wait until bassoon B-natural is absolutely clear.)
Release pedal slowly, holding the Bs out and into the beginning of the Browning.

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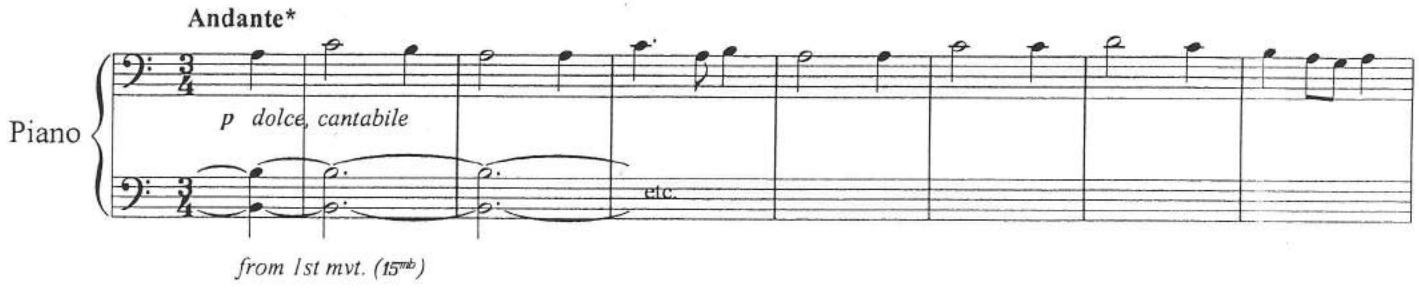
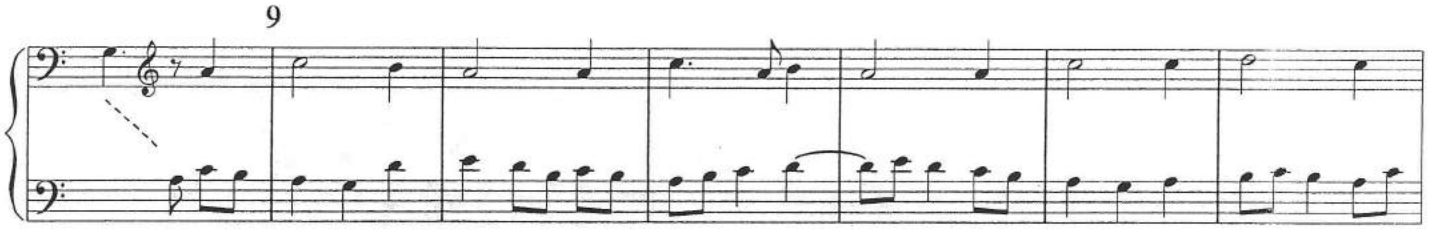
for page turn

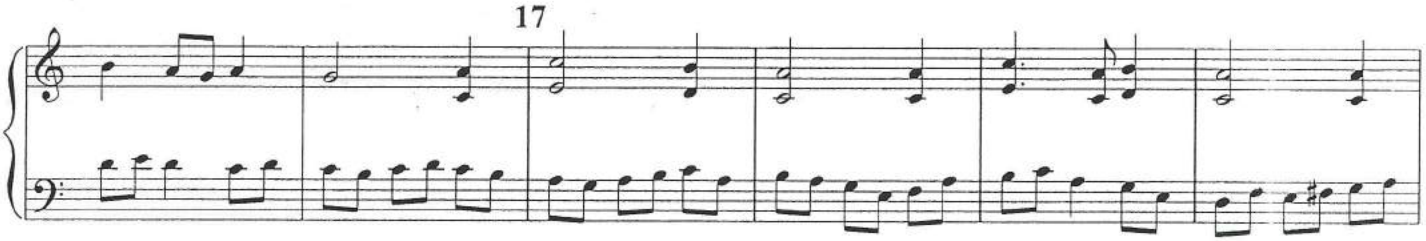
II. Browning

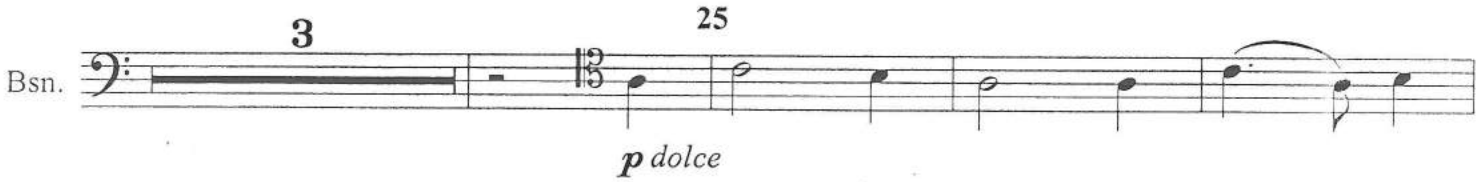


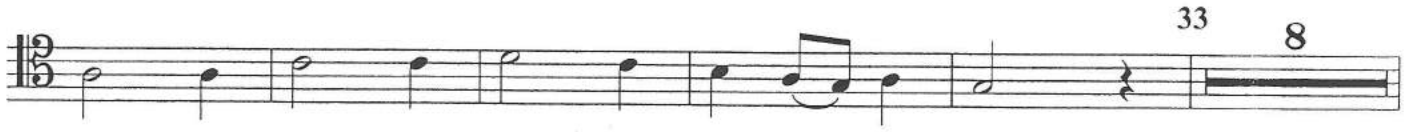
from 1st mvt. (15mb)

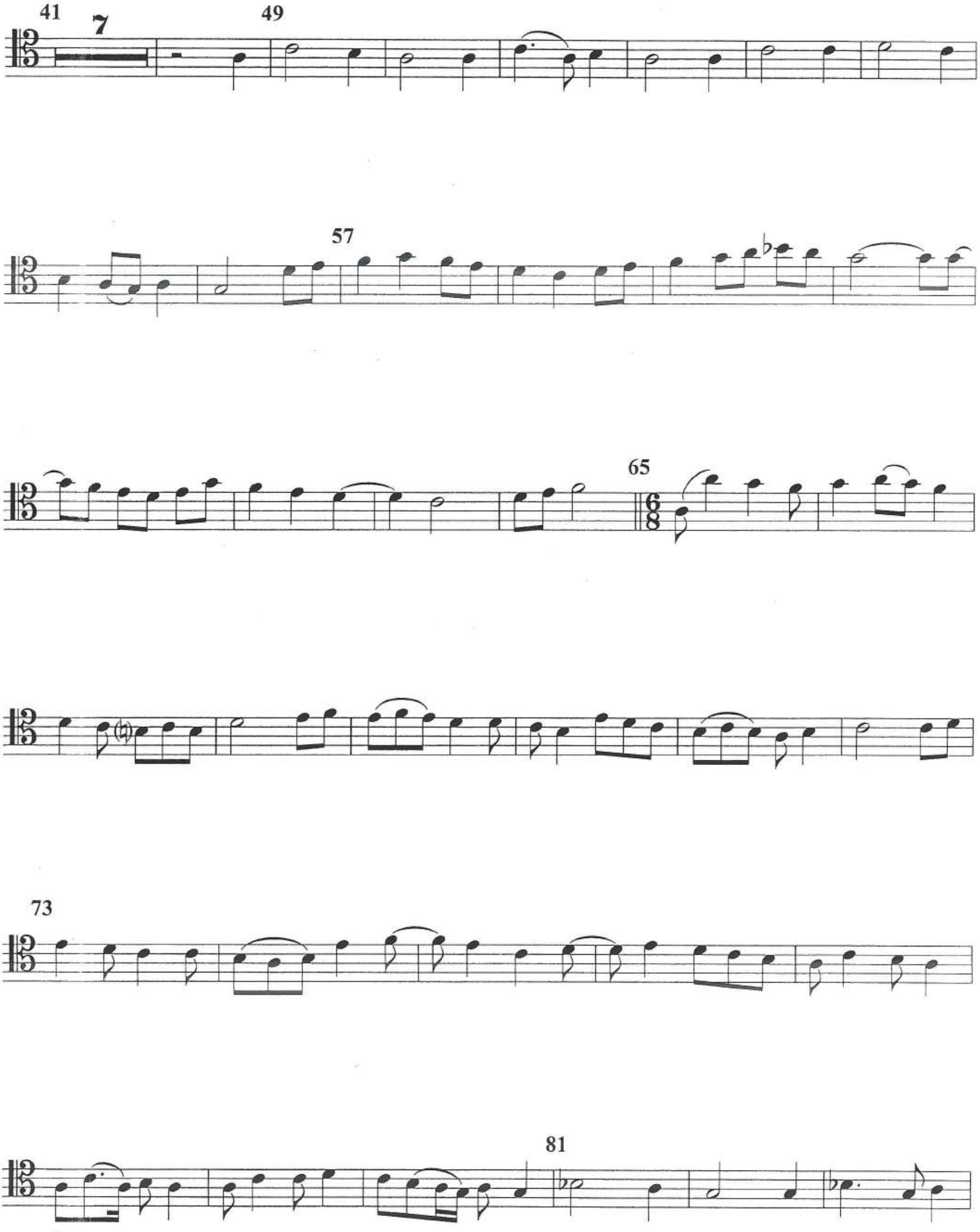
*see Performance Notes

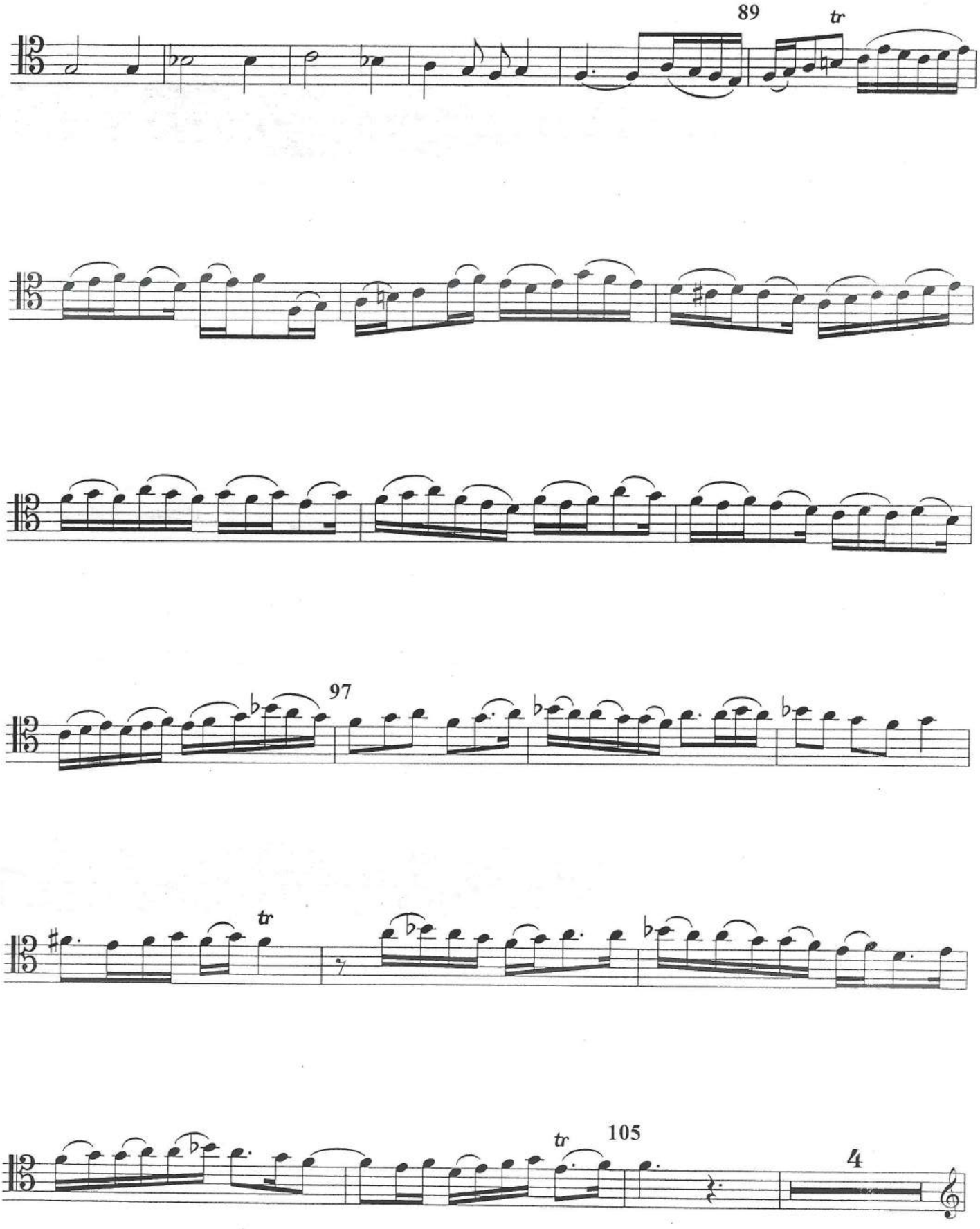


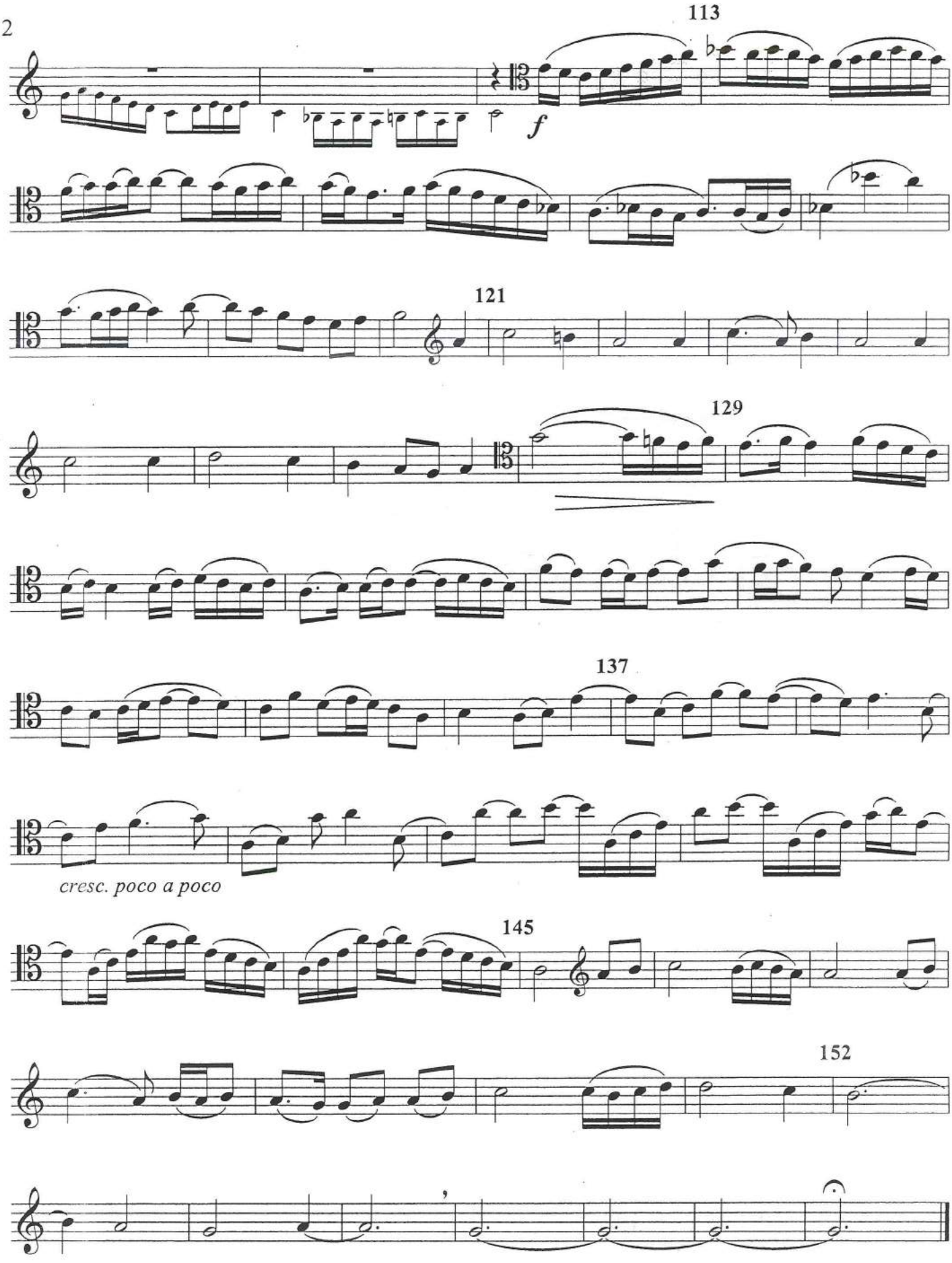




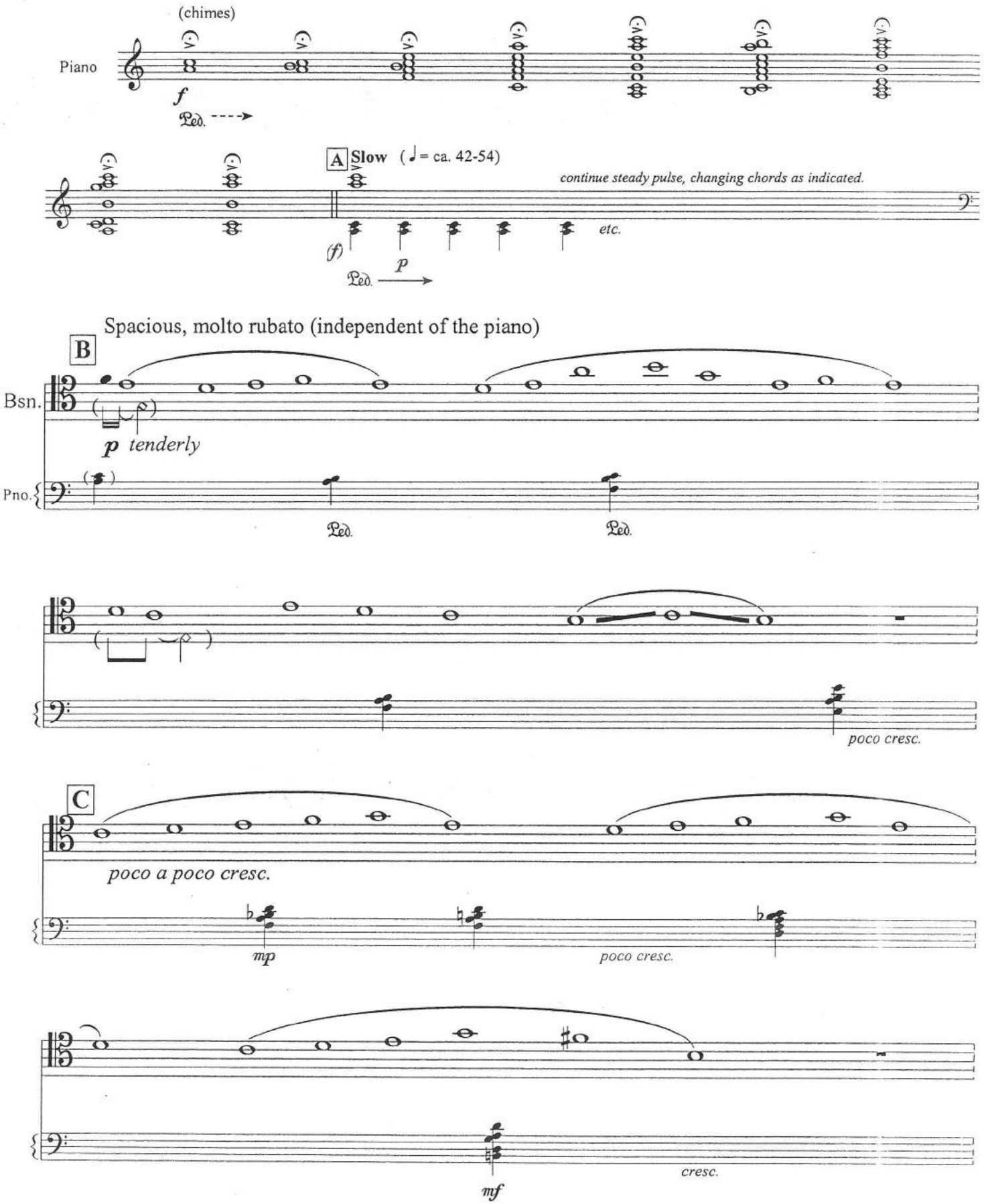


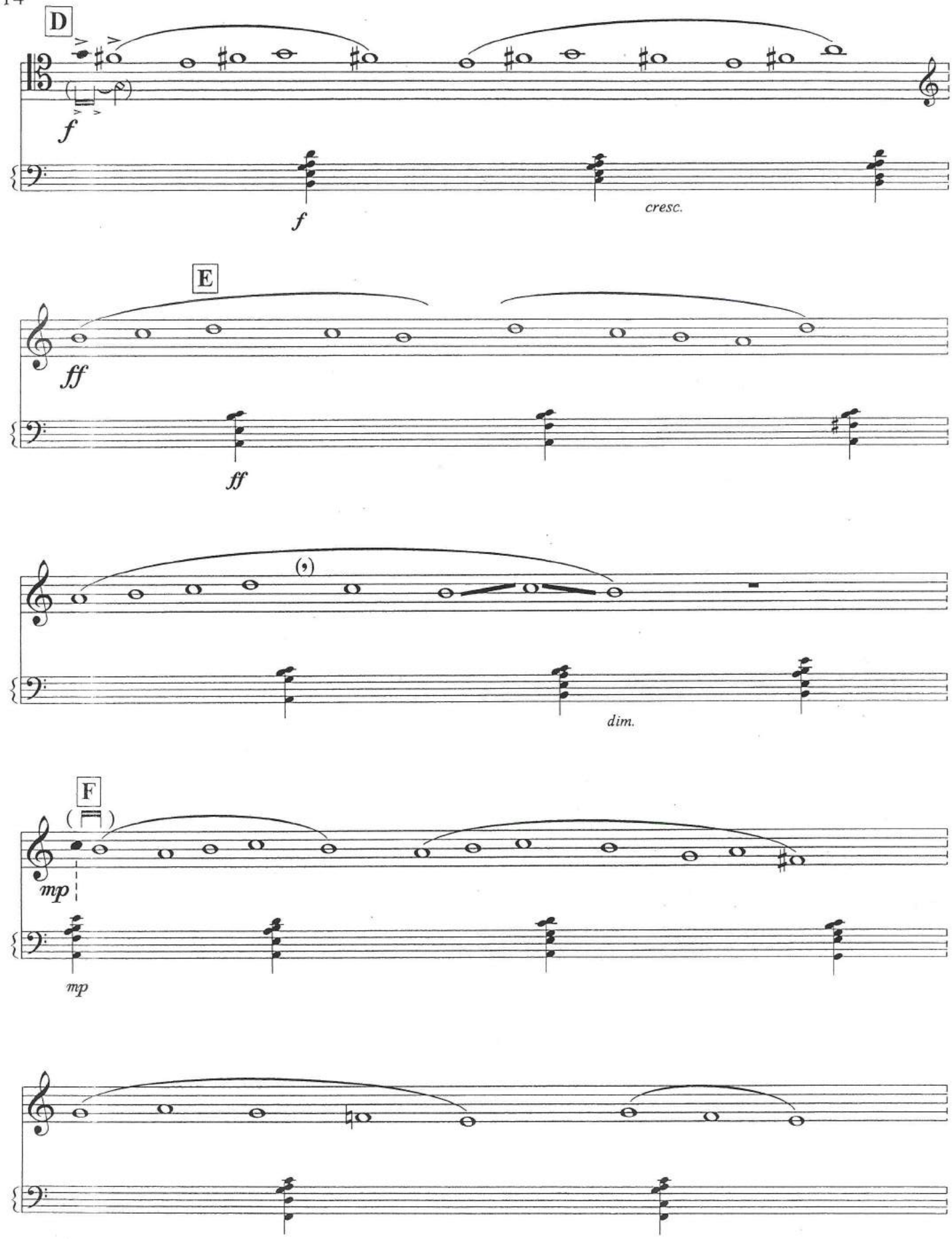

41
7
49
57
65
73
81

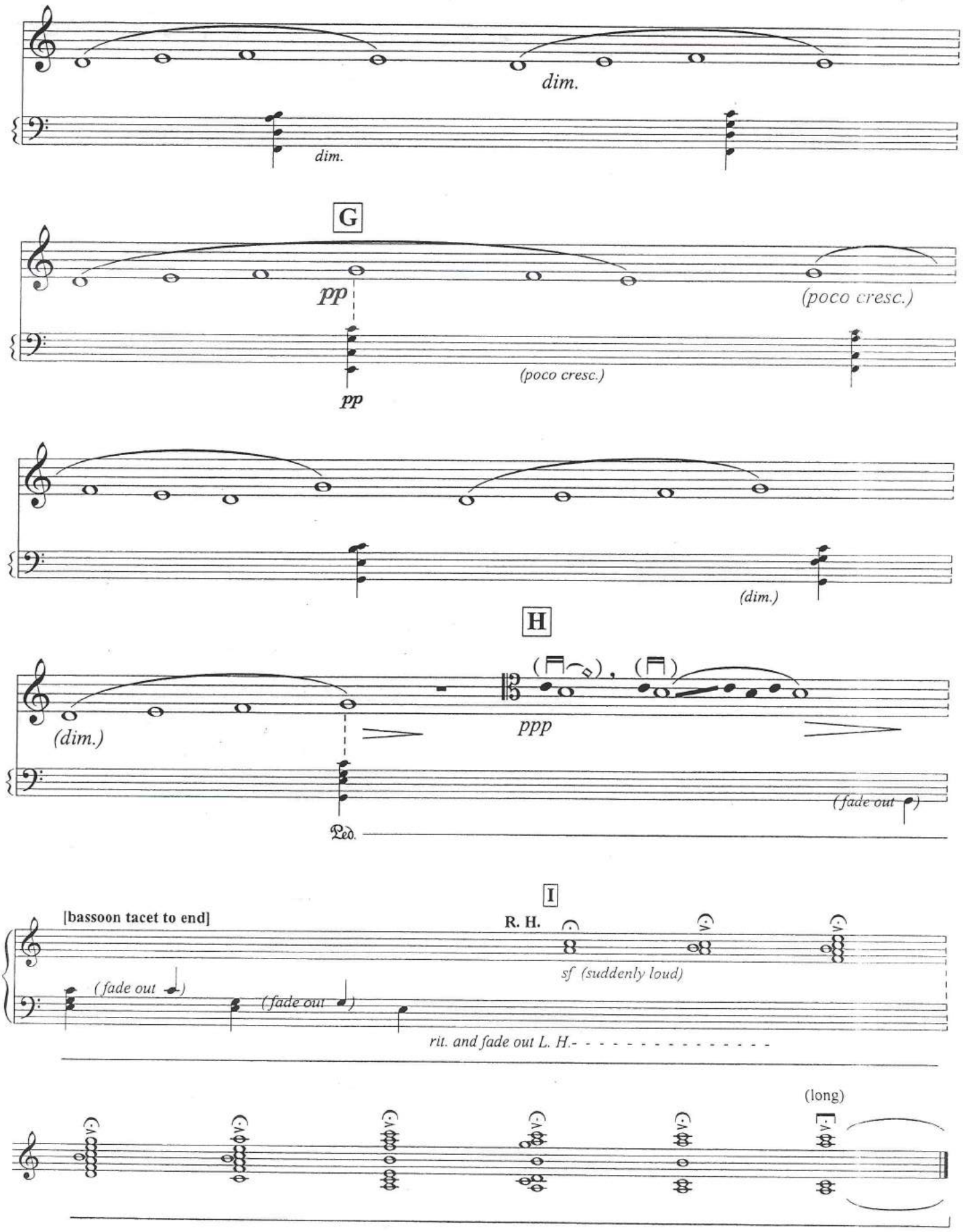

89
tr
97
tr
tr
105
4


113
f
121
129
137
cresc. poco a poco
145
152

III. Lament


(chimes)
Piano
f
Ped.
A Slow (♩ = ca. 42-54)
continue steady pulse, changing chords as indicated.
(f)
p
Ped.
etc.
Spacious, molto rubato (independent of the piano)
B
Bsn.
p tenderly
Pno.
Ped.
Ped.
poco cresc.
C
poco a poco cresc.
mp
poco cresc.
cresc.
mf


D
f
f
cresc.
E
ff
ff
dim.
F
mp
mp



Winter 1980-81
1506