10

GRADED PIANO PIECES

BY MALTESE COMPOSERS

This publication introduces the contemporary style of Maltese composers to piano students from Grade 1 to Grade 6. **10 Graded Piano Pieces by Maltese Composers** is available as a free digital download and the album with the corresponding tracks is available on Spotify and all other major music streaming platforms.

Listen on Spotify

This project is organised by the **Malta Association for Contemporary Music (MACM)** - committed to establish new heights in its goal to promote the performance and understanding of contemporary music in Malta.

This project is supported by Arts Council Malta

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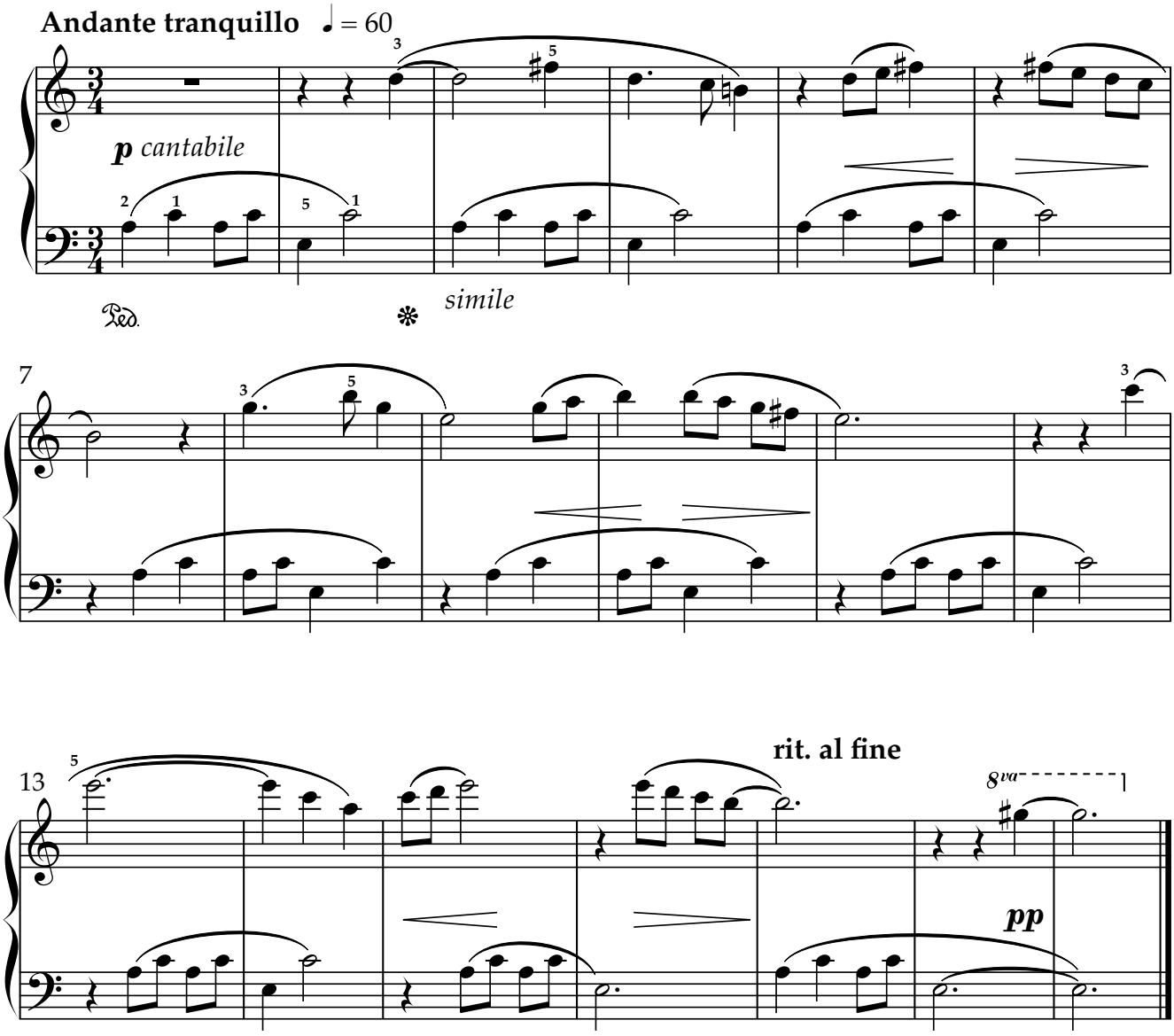
Alexander Vella Gregory

Taħnina

Taħnina (2021) is the Maltese word for 'lullaby' but also means 'fondling' or 'stroking'. The music uses an ostinato bass with slowly shifting rhythmic patterns, giving a sense of constant if somewhat irregular cradling. A mournful melody is heard above the bass. The melody is repeated three times, each time in a different key. The piece focuses on simple rhythmic shifts and long legato phrases, two very important musical elements for the young pianist to master.

Taħnina

Alexander Vella Gregory
b. 1984



© Alexander Vella Gregory 2021

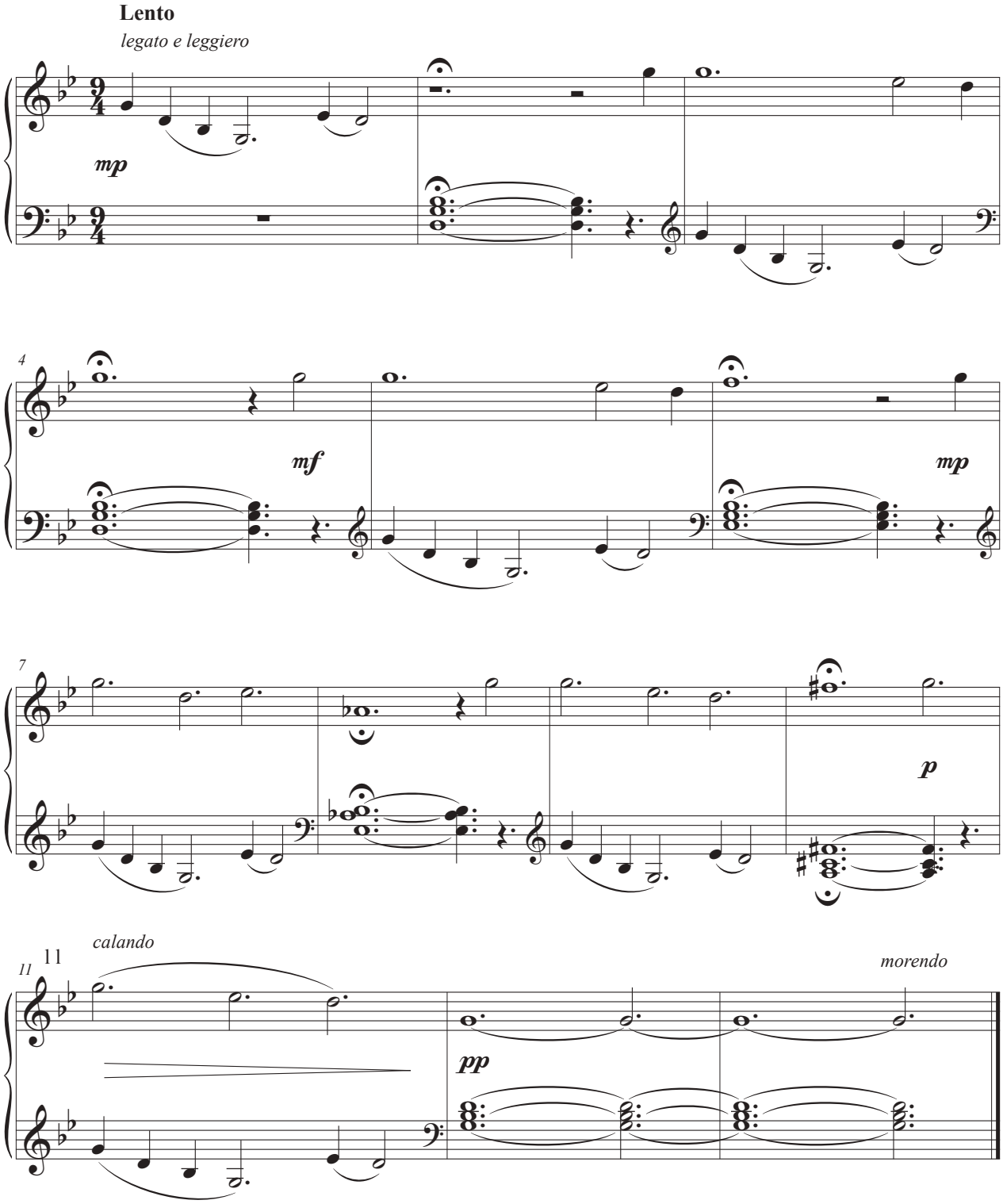
Reuben Pace

Sunset

This piece is inspired by the spectacular sunset over Dingli Cliffs, one of the composer's favourite spots for country walks. This piece belongs to a collection of pieces for children composed by Pace in 2006. *Sunset* consists of a slowly descending musical motif which pauses on a chord. The motif is repeated with slight variations, always ending on a different chord to represent the different hues of a sunset.

Sunset

Reuben Pace
b. 1974



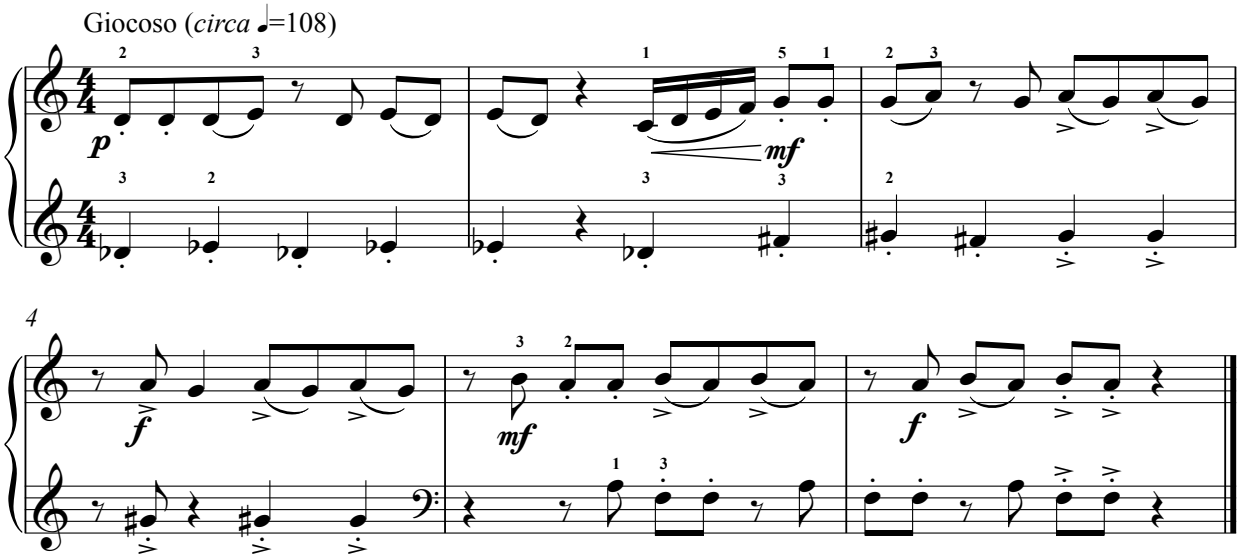
© Reuben Pace 2006

Paul Portelli

Knock Knock ...

This short piano composition is intended to portray the jovial mood associated with the verses sung during the Maltese traditional children's game *Bum Bum il-Bieb*. The theme is present throughout, and the composer employs a variety of techniques to modify the original motif and portray it in a more contemporary idiom. The piece begins with a rhythmic introduction before moving on to the main theme. It is then coloured bitonally and developed through rhythmic syncopation leading to an accented dissonant chord. This leads back to the tune, this time in a more playful style, with the left hand playing an ostinato from the introduction. Finally, another motif from the tune appears in a *fortissimo* unison ending on a G Major 7th chord.

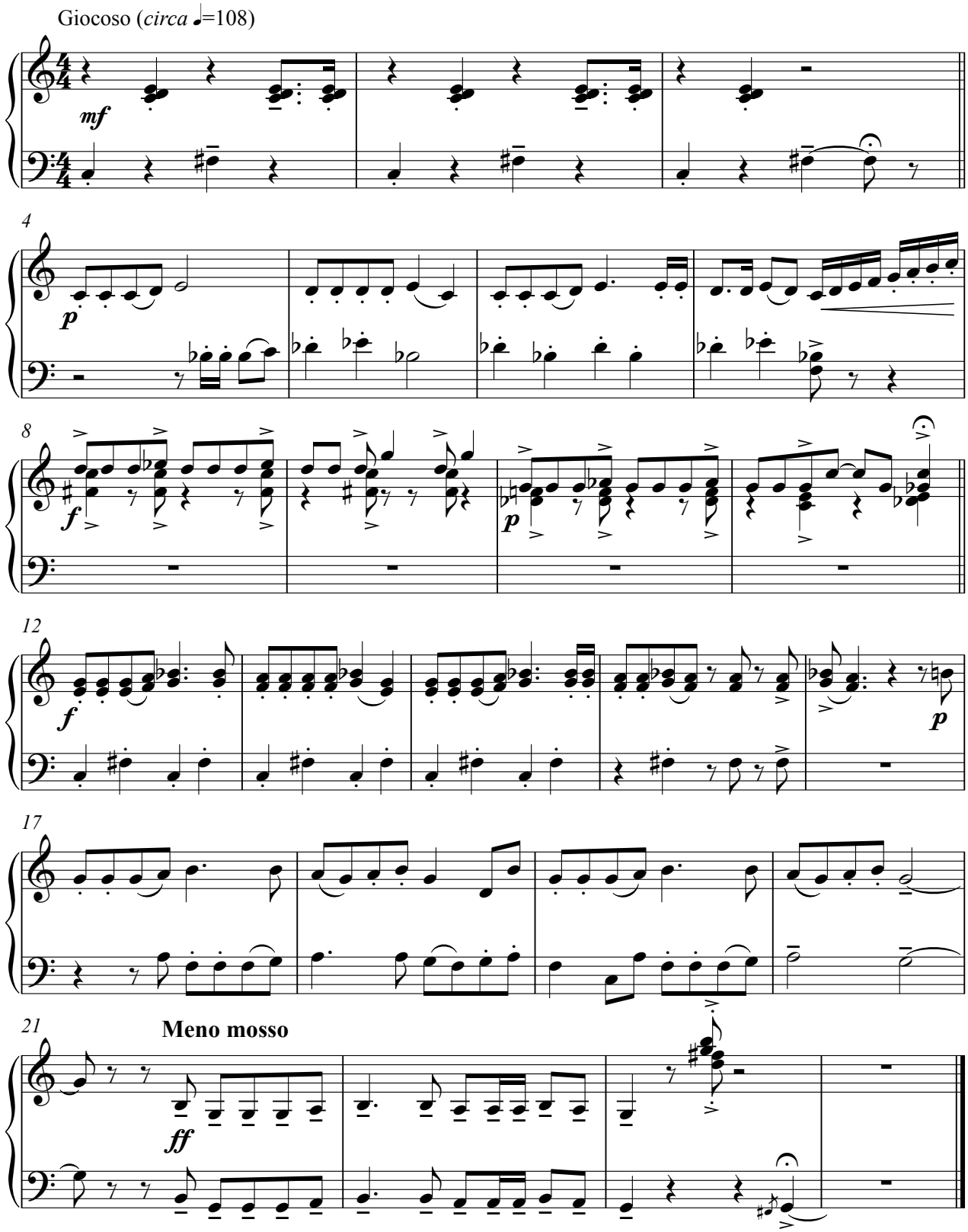
Exercise



© Paul Portelli 2011

Knock Knock ...

Paul Portellli
b. 1973



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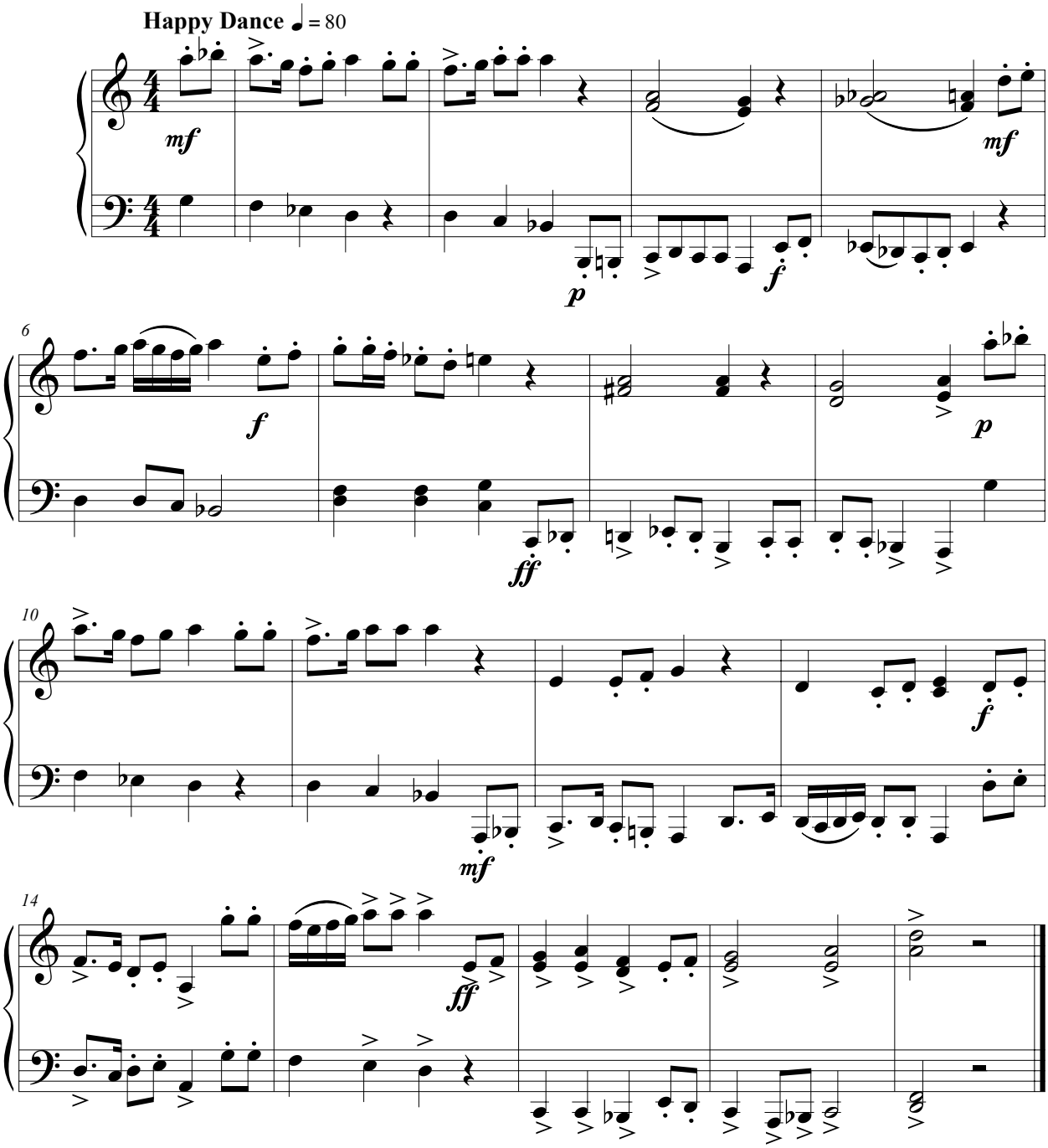
André Paul Huber

The Dwarf and the Giant

This piece is inspired by a melodic dialogue taking place between the two characters. The high-pitched melody of the jolly dwarf and the grumpy giant in the bass. The stark contrast between the two characters is highlighted by the resulting dissonance between the two themes as well as the different registers on the keyboard. As the ‘dialogue’ proceeds, both themes shift closer to one another till they are sounding merely one octave apart where they end up reaching an agreement and settling their differences.

The Dwarf and the Giant

André Paul Huber
b. 1989



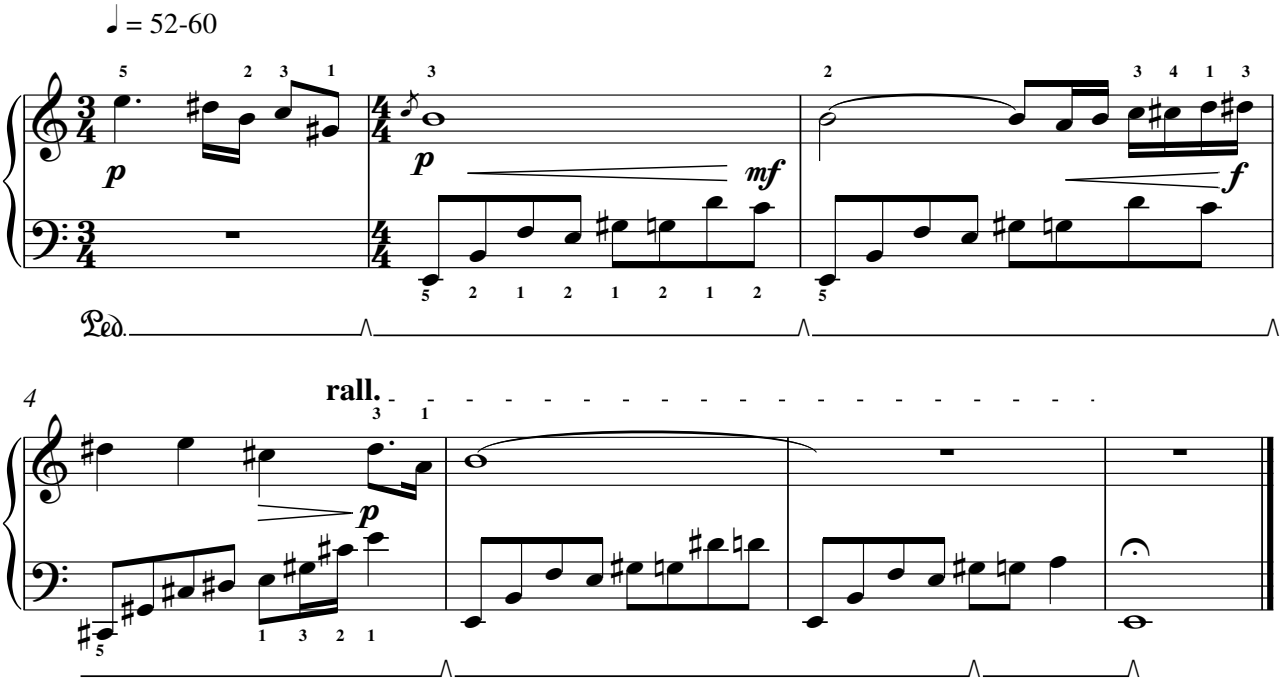
© André Paul Huber 2011

Steven Joseph Psaila

Silhouette

Silhouette is a short piano composition written with the intent to provide the listener with a simple and pleasant theme contrasted by an obscured background that is brought out by the use of the pedal and dissonance in the left hand. As it unwinds, the listener will identify the magical but also mystical illusion brought out by a silhouette. In fact this piano composition was inspired by the haunting imagery of the outer shapes of a chain of mountains seen from afar.

Exercise



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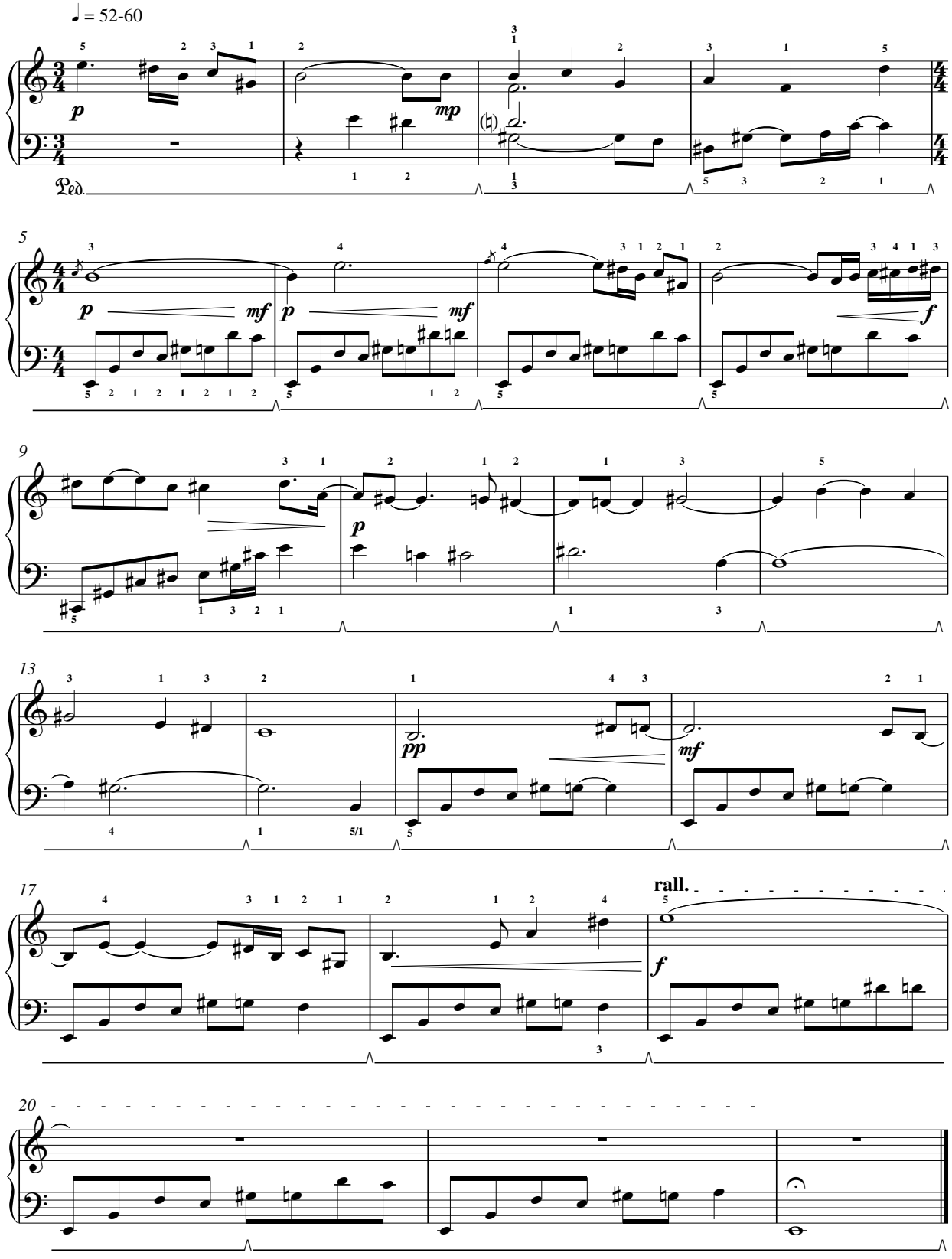
Silhouette

Steven Joseph Psaila
b. 1989



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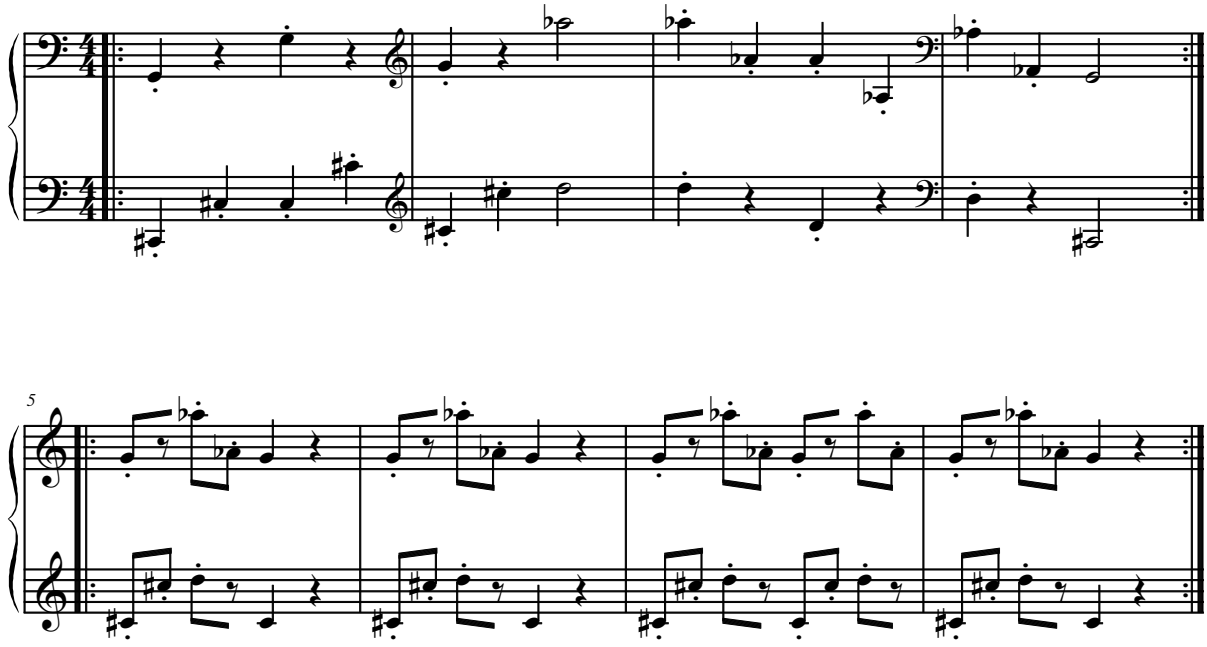
Ruben Zahra

Passju

Passju is a children's game, better known as "hopscotch" and traditionally played by girls rather than boys. The girls hop across the 9 sections of a pattern which is usually marked on the ground with chalk. In the music, the hands of the pianist "hop" over each other, just like in the game of *Passju*. The rhythmic pattern shifts across different registers up and down the keyboard, which makes it an ideal piece to learn from memory.

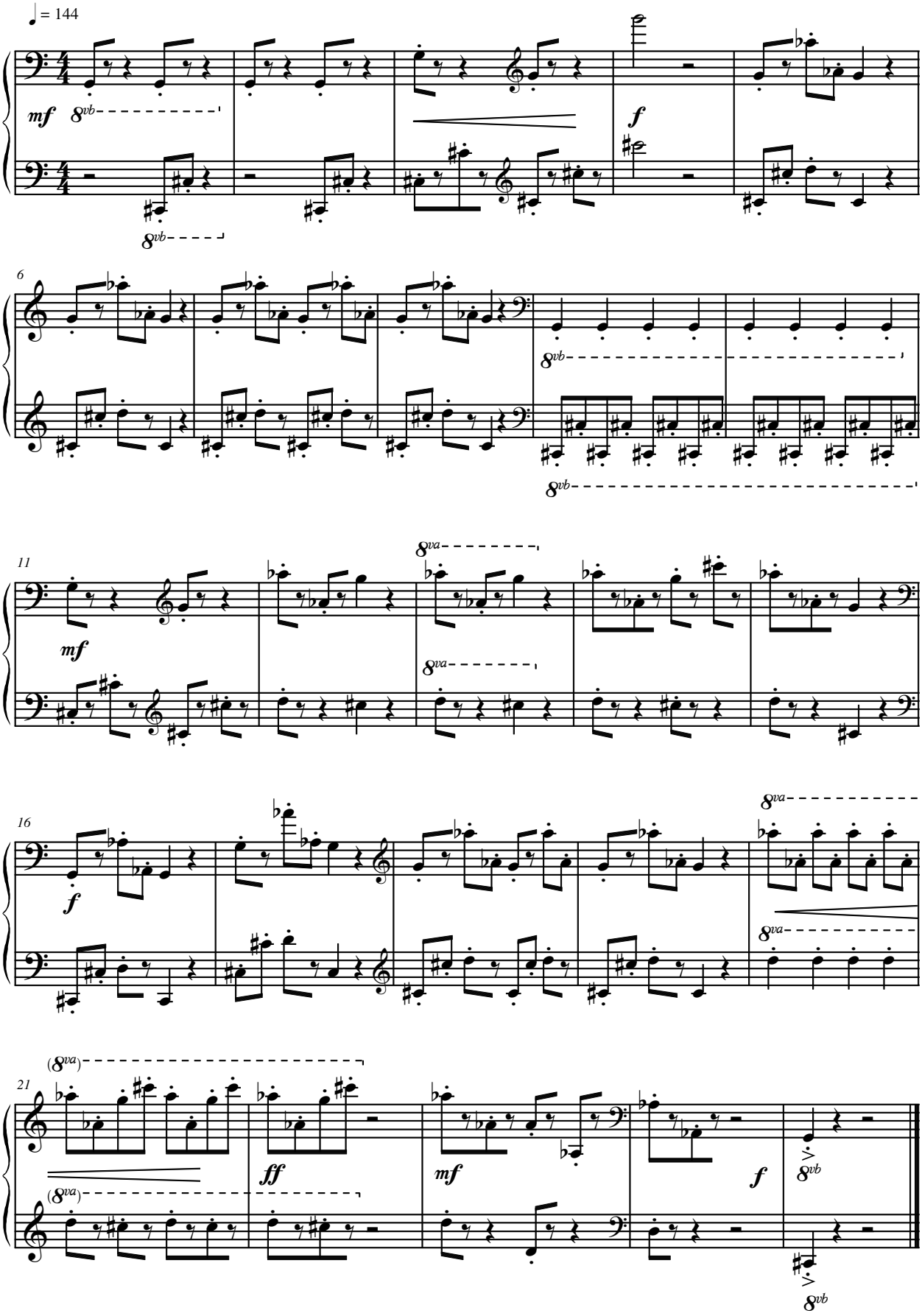
Exercise



© Ruben Zahra 2008

Passju

Ruben Zahra
b. 1972



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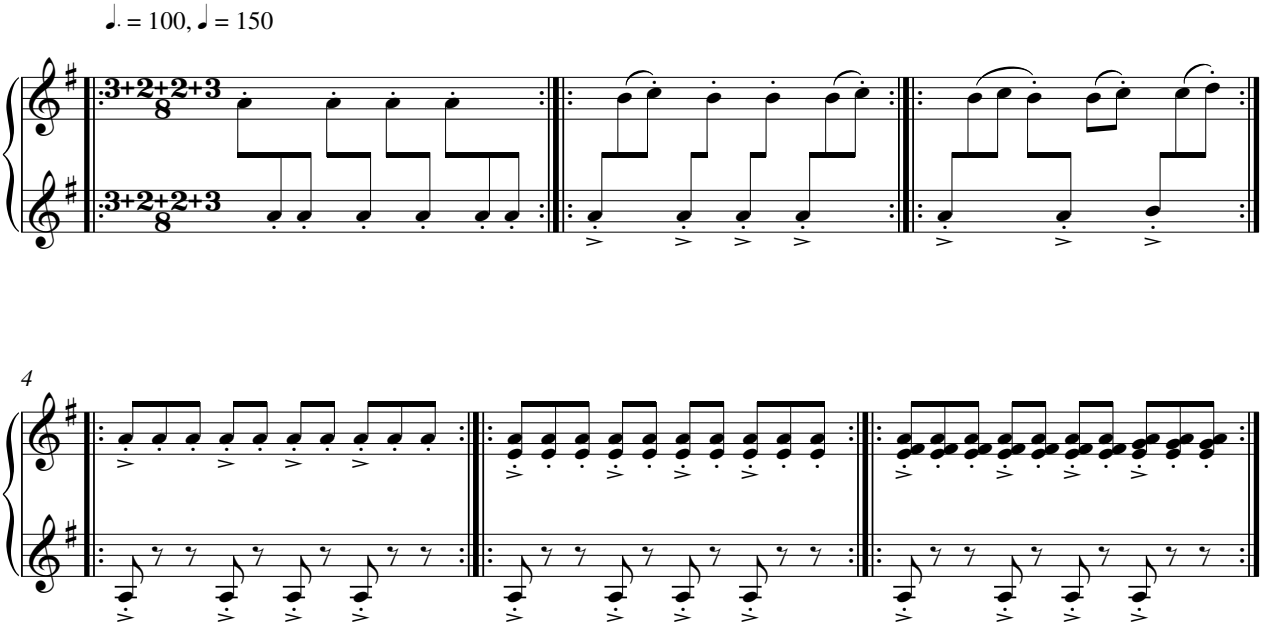
Christopher Muscat

Homage to Béla Bartók

Homage to Béla Bartók is a short prelude from a set of six (collectively referred to as *Album for the Young*) composed by Christopher Muscat as a tribute to six important composers who were of determining importance in the development of the music throughout the twentieth century. The irregularly grouped time signature (3+2+2+3) is a clear reference to Bartók's interest in the folk music of his native Hungary and the neighbouring Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Serbia. This short work is similar to a *moto perpetuo* (a piece of fast-moving music consisting mainly of notes of equal length) with constantly shifting accents. The suggested study is intended to help the student understand the concept of shifting accents.

Exercise



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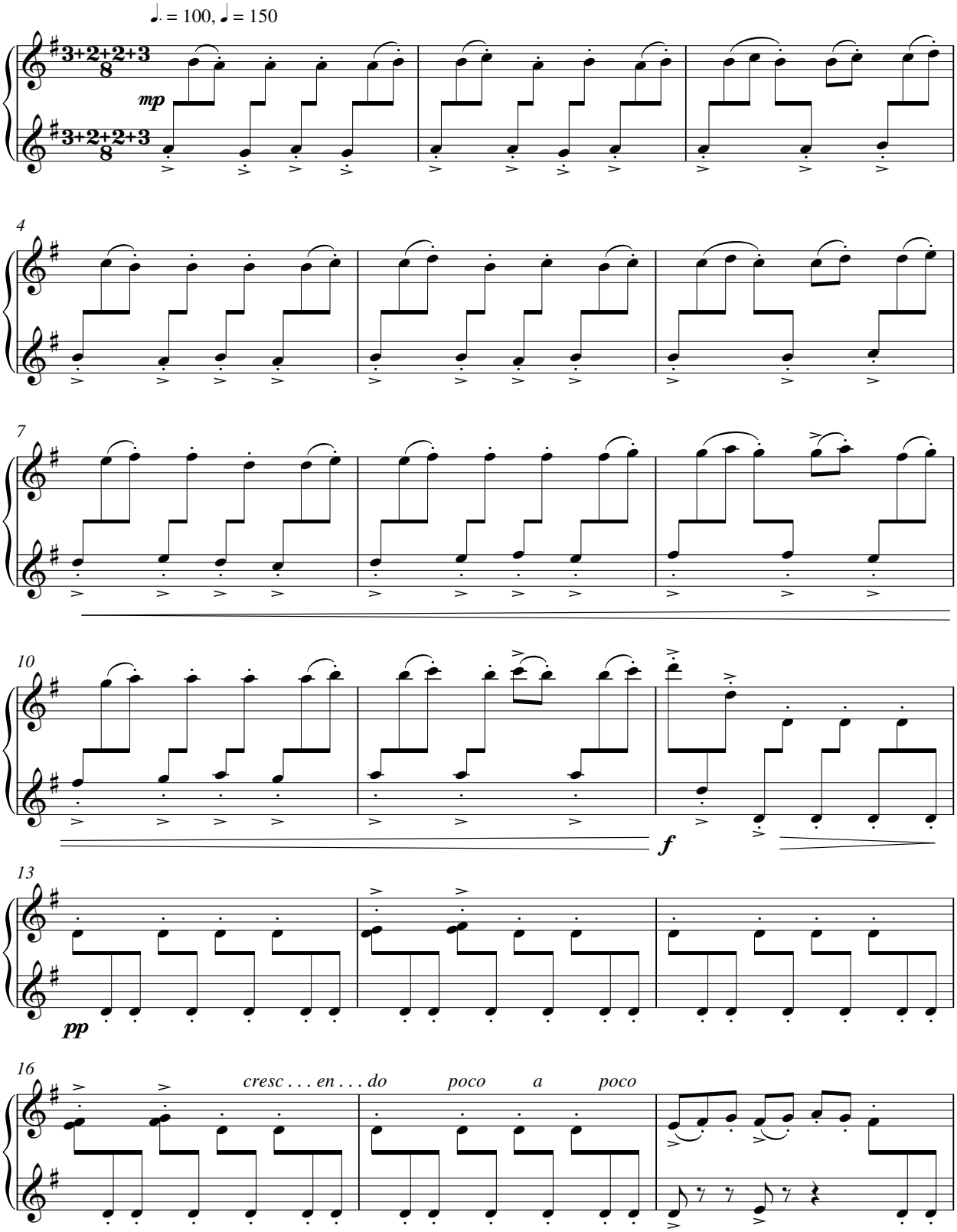
Homage to Béla Bartók

Christopher Muscat
b. 1977



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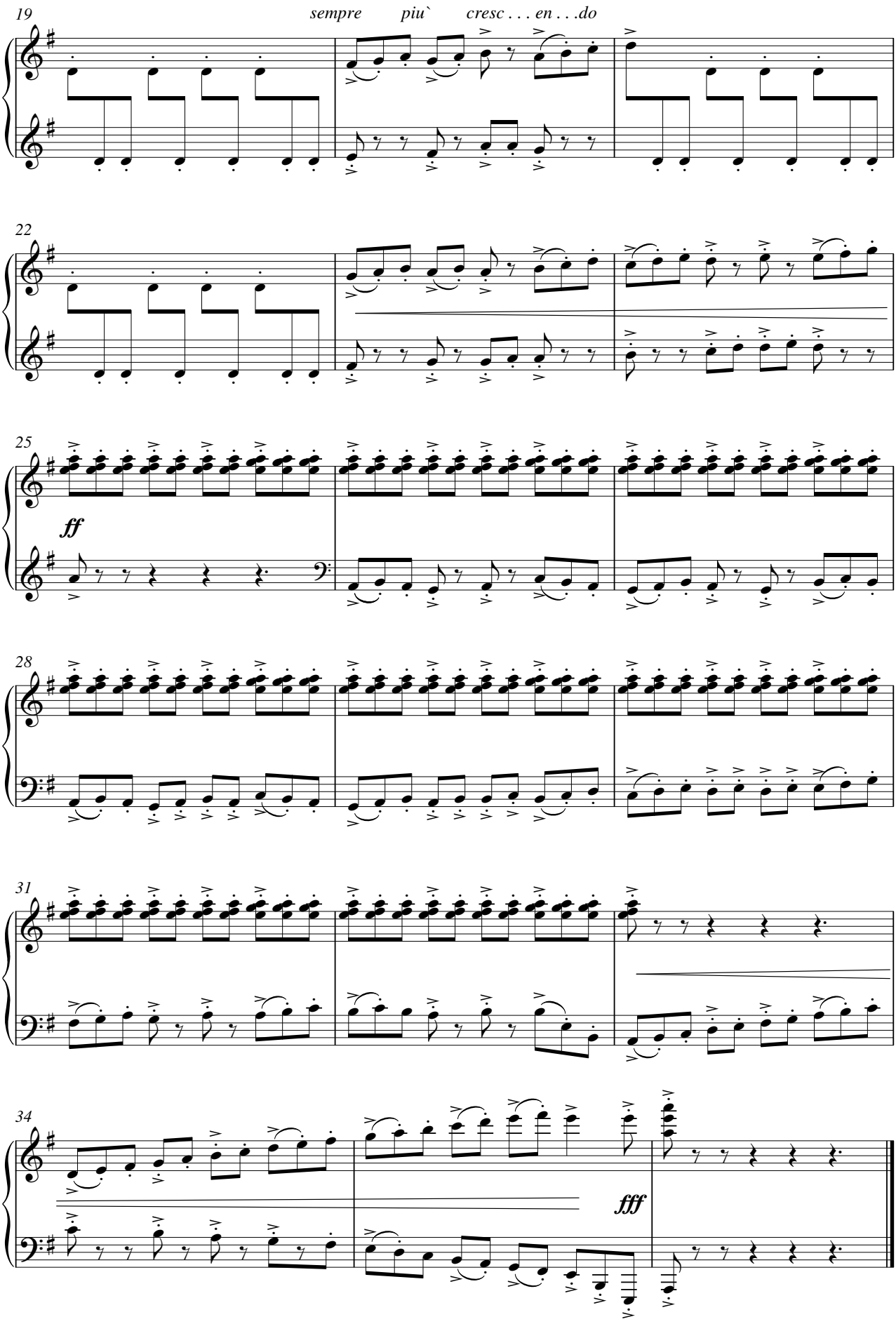

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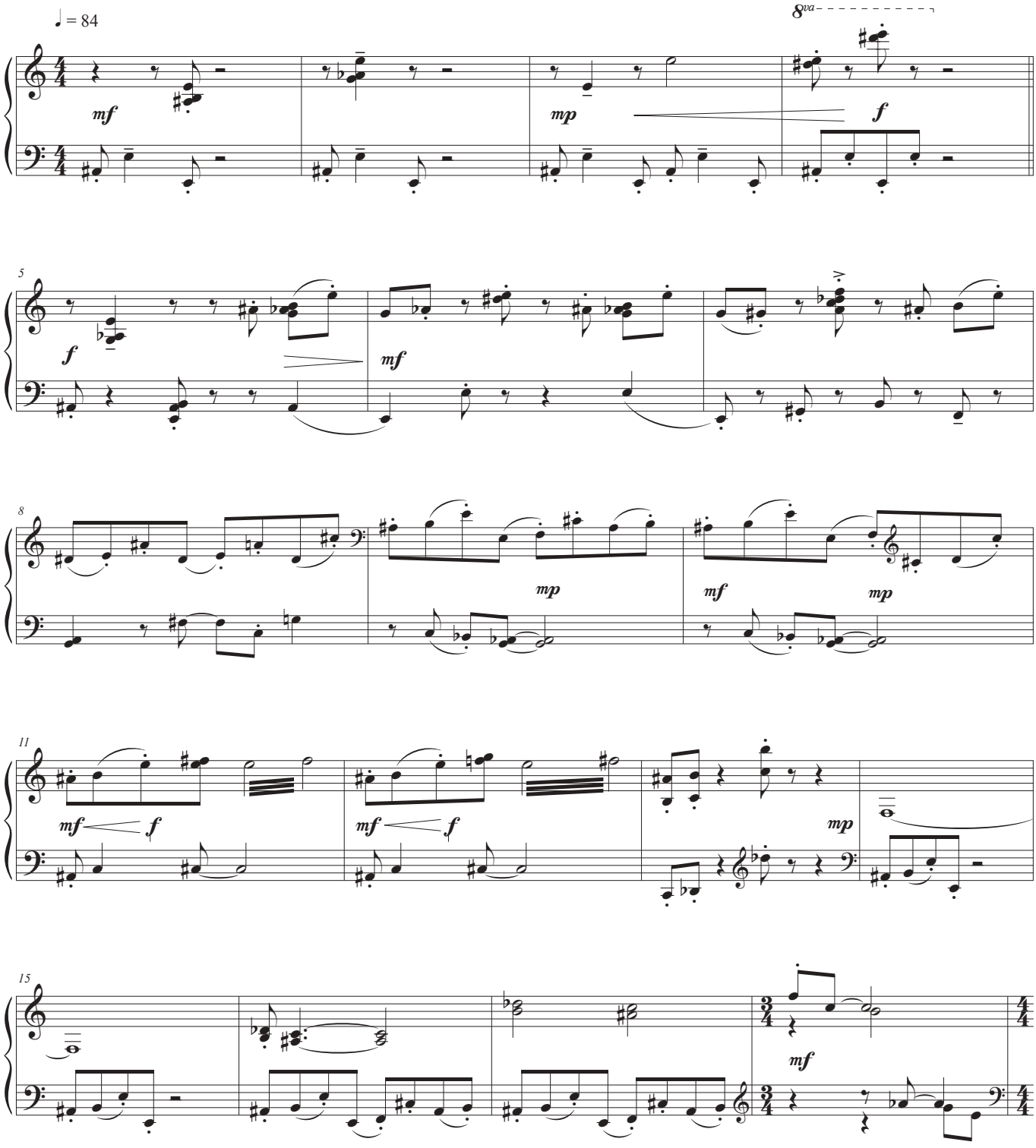
Albert Garzia

... and don’t forget to smile!

The name *and don’t forget to smile!* is a sort of catchphrase that came up while composing the piece (some passages require a certain level of “concentration”). This is not to say that the piece is about seriousness at all. Although mechanical in gesture, the music is meant to be playful in character somehow reminiscent of a half-broken toy. Rhythm and attitude are particularly important in the performance of the piece nevertheless, a smile would certainly make the ultimate topping.

... and don’t forget to smile!

Albert Garzia
b. 1977



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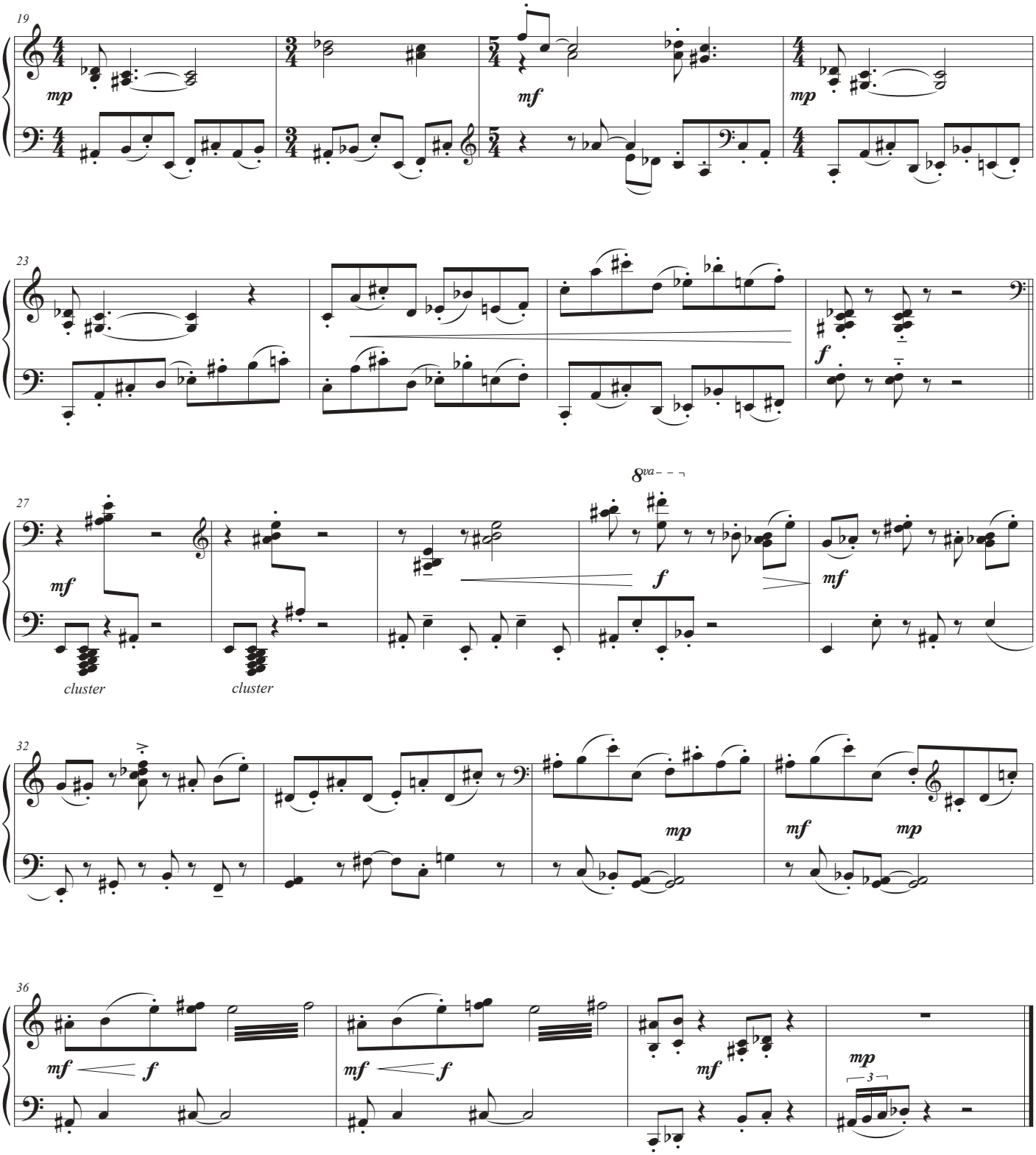

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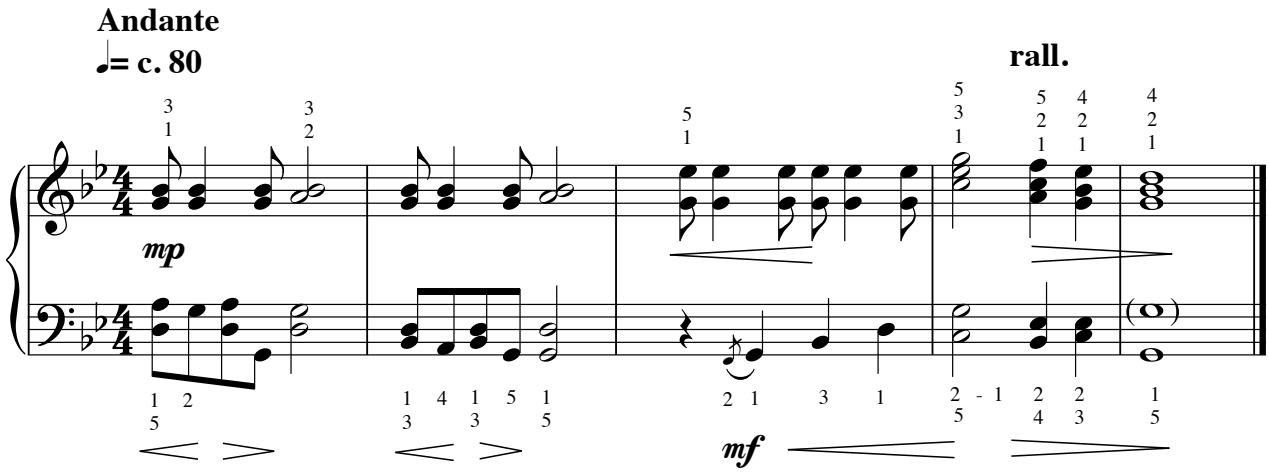
Mariella Cassar-Cordina

One Day in November

One Day in November is a piece for piano that gives the pianist the lead way to share personal reflections of a typical winter day, revolving around a pre-set narrative. The introduction sets the basis of the story line; starting on an agitated semi-quaver scalic pattern, resolving into a calmer and smoother, almost ethereally section. This suggests that even in a stormy day one can find peace and serenity through one's own space and self-reflection. In the following section thunder strikes again, paving the way to the end section, leading the listener to delve into a tranquil, almost dreamy ending.

Exercise



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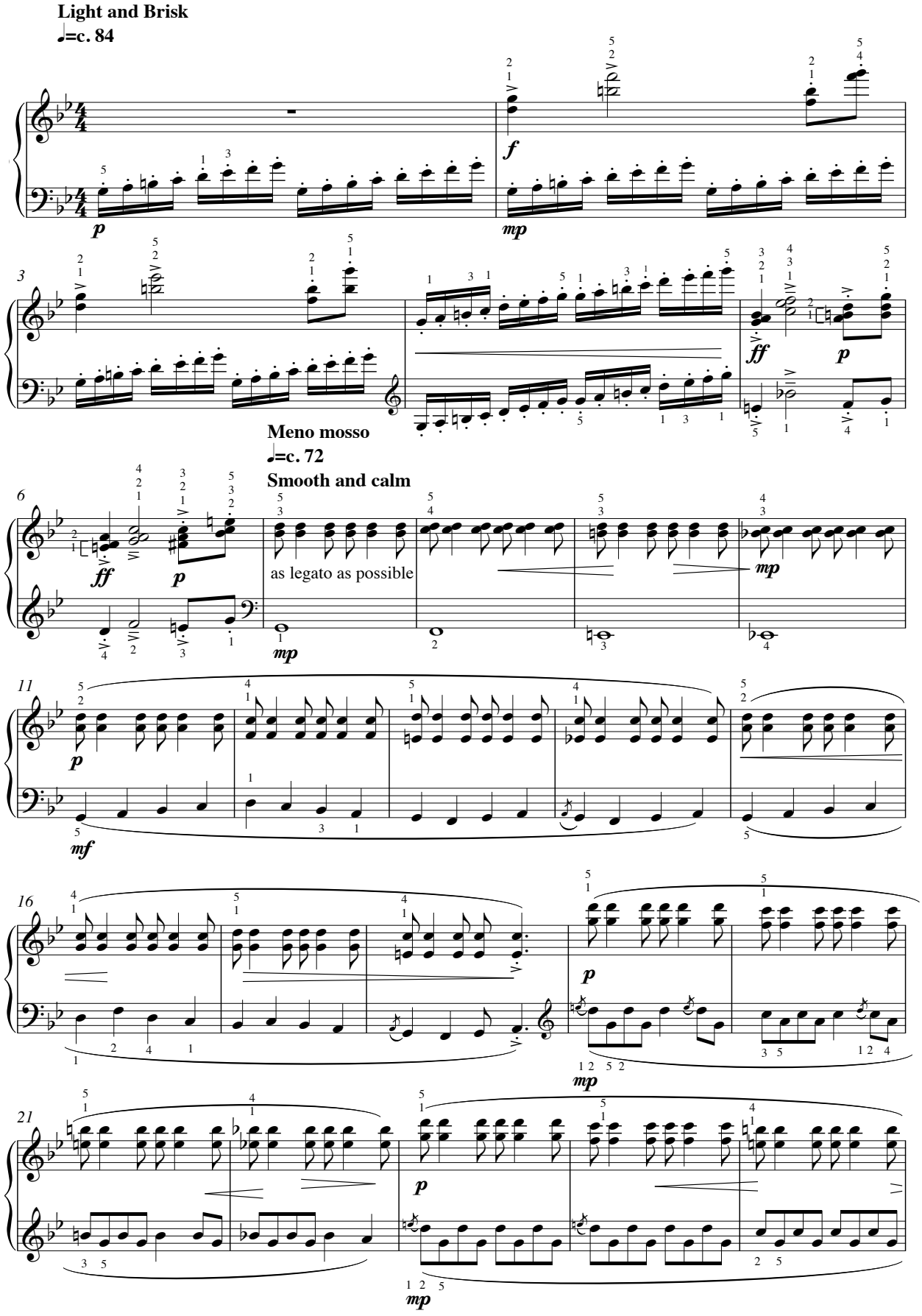
One Day in November

Mariella Cassar
b. 1972



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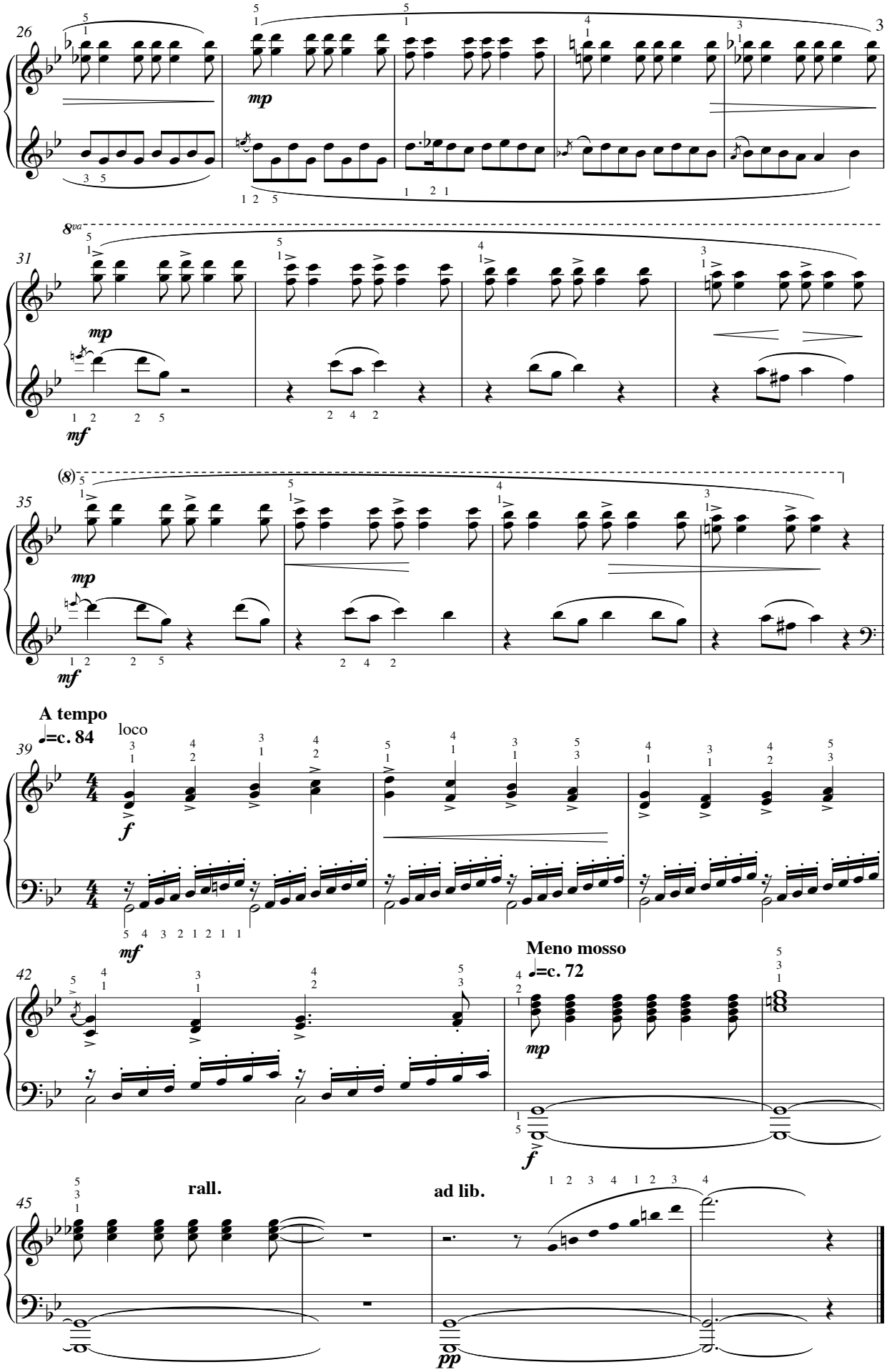

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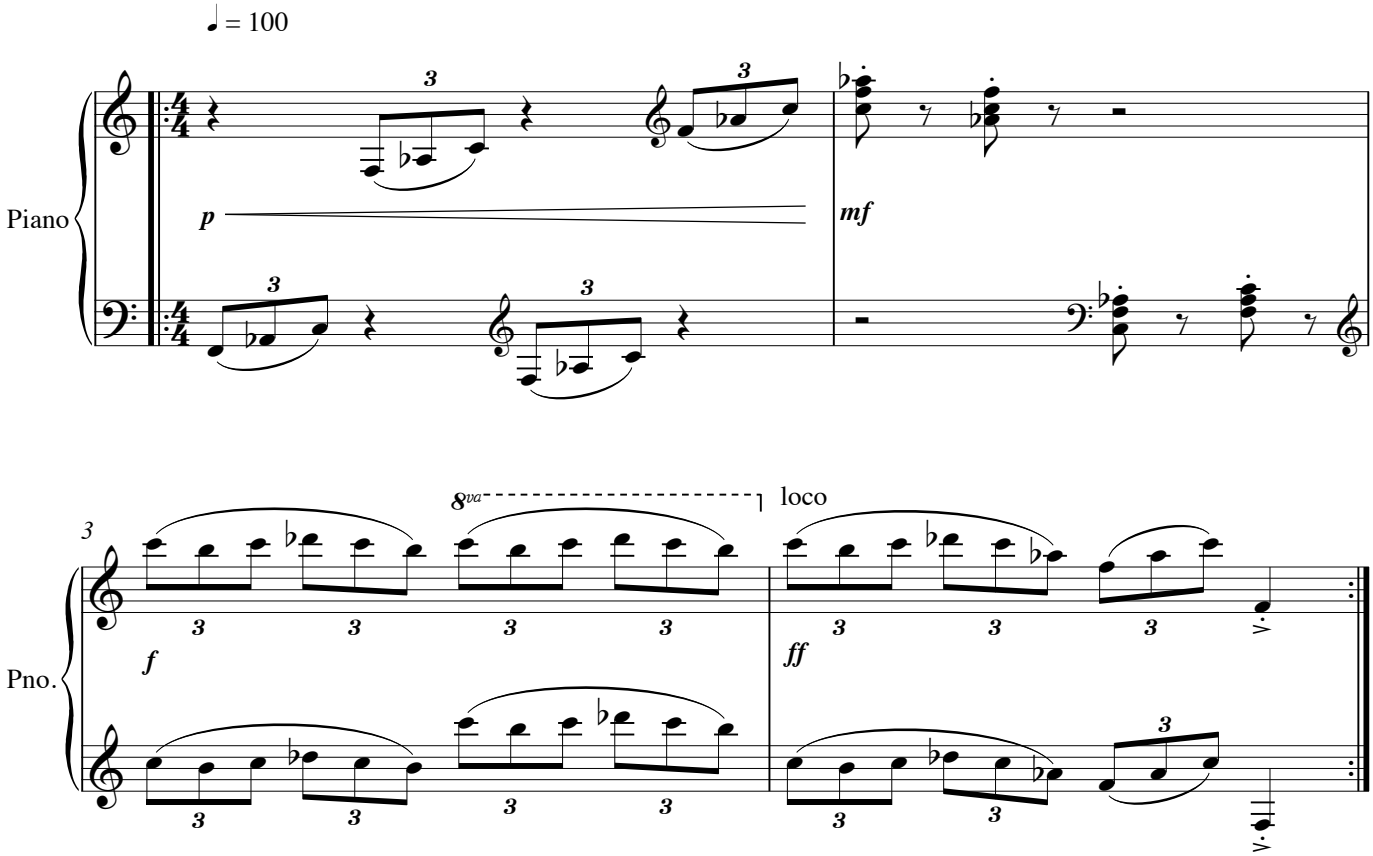
Véronique Vella

Jagged Jig

Jagged Jig is a quirky, little piece having many accented notes, syncopated chords, and quick octave leaps. The piece is split up into four sections and shifts quite happily between major and minor chords. A descending chromatic motif brings the first section to a close at bar 10. We then have a variation of the initial theme in E minor which is rudely interrupted giving way to a contrasting section in the Dorian mode. With its legato melody line and meandering left hand accompaniment, we are briefly transported to a sparkling, dreamy place ... but not before long, we are shaken back to reality when the 'jagged motif' we heard in the opening returns! The piece ends with growling left hand notes at the lower register of the piano.

Exercise



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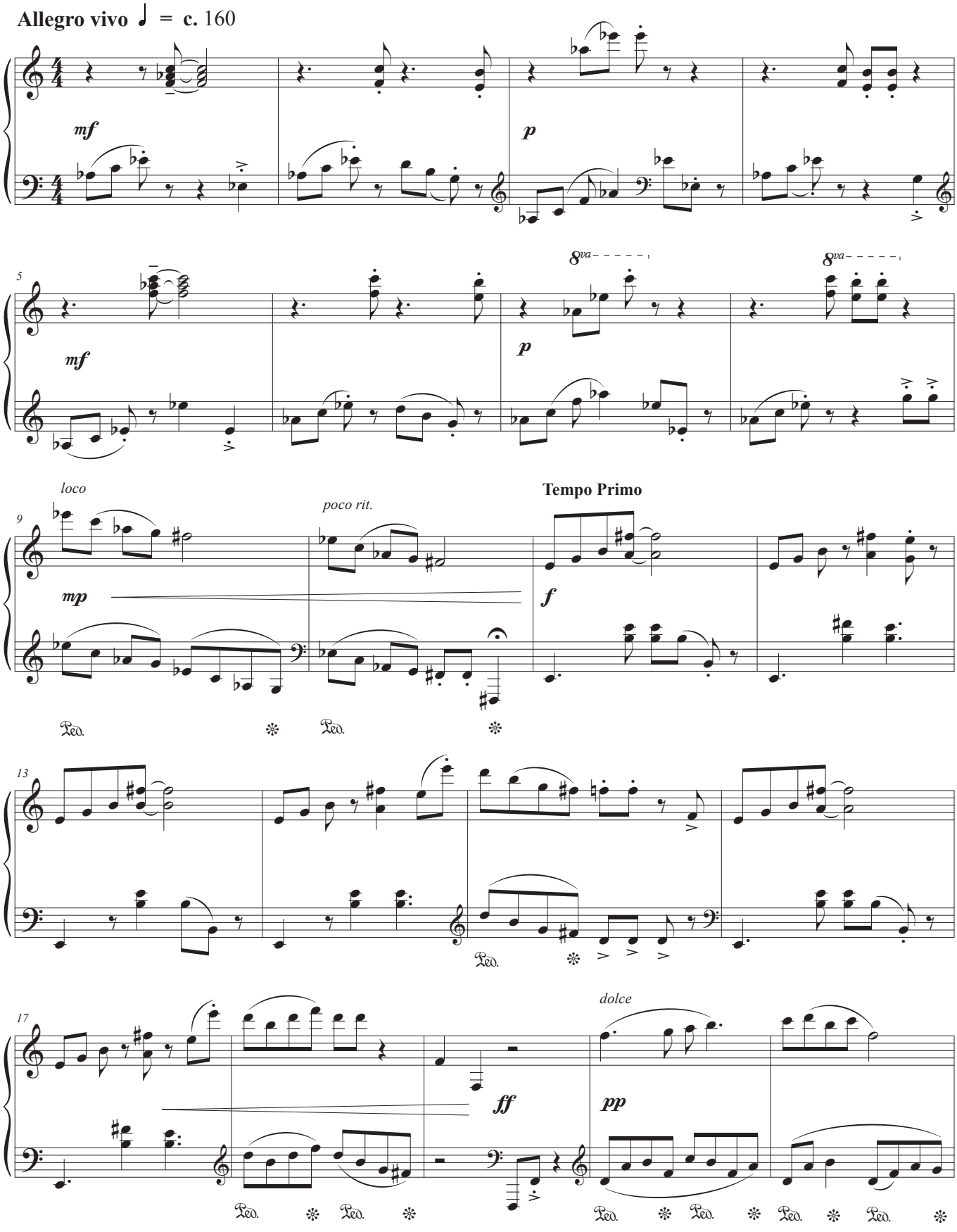
Jagged Jig

Véronique Vella
b. 1979



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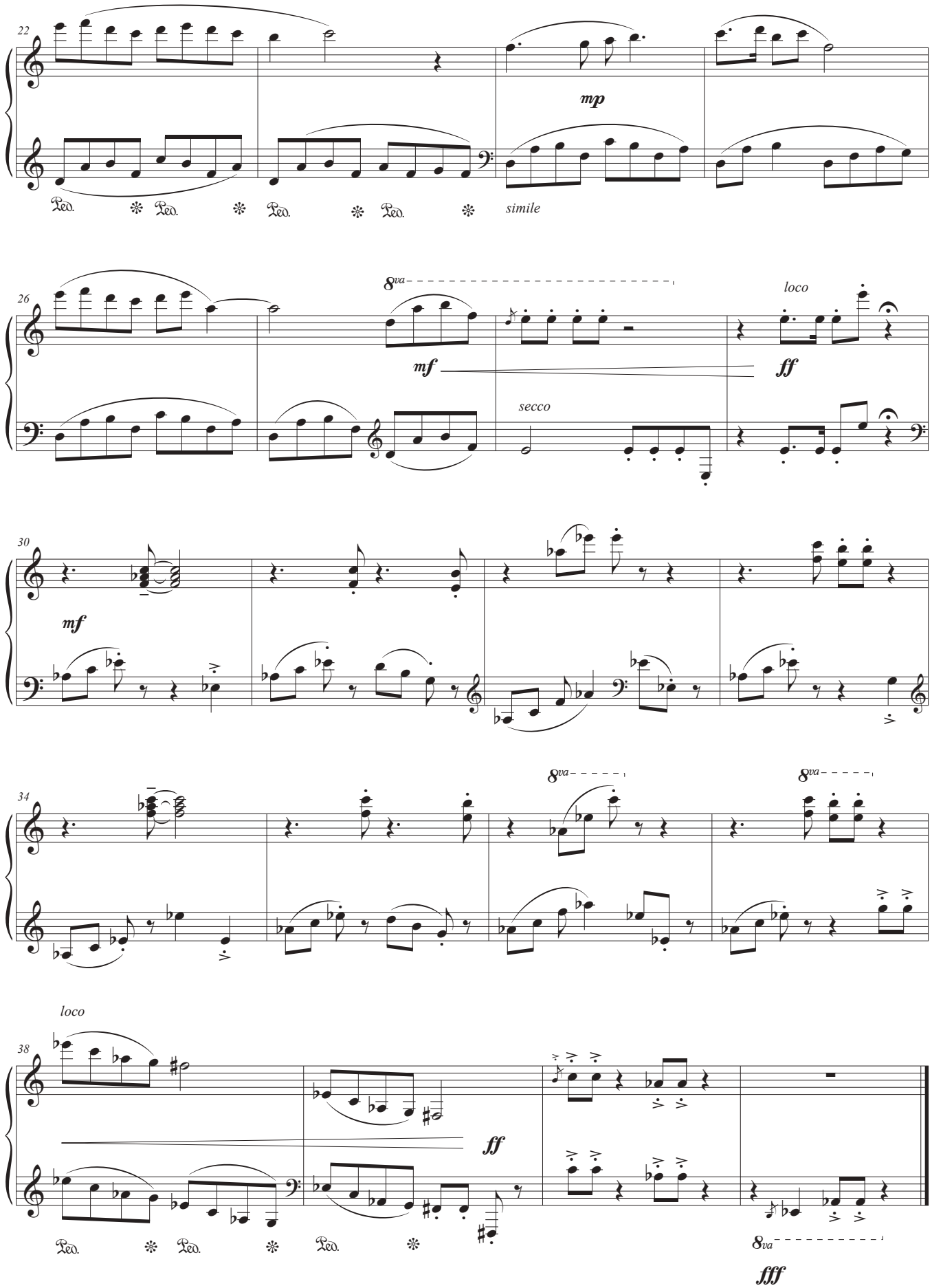

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