Five Sketches

for upright piano

Jake Berran

(2021)

Notes

For a while I thought only having an upright piano to play on was a disadvantage, which is true in some ways, but after being encouraged to explore new sounds instruments can produce at school, I started experimenting and discovered there are some strengths it has compared to grand pianos. For example, the easy access to the strings allows for convenient switching between playing techniques and timbres. I wrote these five sketches (which are pretty loosely notated) to be an exploration of the possibilities of an upright piano and groundwork for potential future compositions.

The piano I used was made by Grinnell Brothers, a Detroit-based manufacturer that's been out of business since 1981. All of the techniques work well on it but may need to be creatively adapted to other instruments. To set up, you mount a triangle above the F3 string, or whichever is the first of the mid-range group (it will need to be transposed if it's not F). Ideally the triangle will sound in the F harmonic series. Suspend a splash cymbal to the right of the keyboard. The tuning pegs and other parts of the piano are also used for percussive effects. For beaters, you'll want to have fingers, a chopstick, a triangle beater, a plastic mallet, a yarn mallet, and a hot rod/stick bundle/something similar. Unconventional notation will be explained where it occurs. Pedal a lot, but as you see fit; there are some pedal markings. Triangular noteheads are used for both triangle (will be indicated) and the strings of the piano.

My creative process consisted of coming up with a bunch of isolated musical ideas, then weaving them into a story. The first movement was about a child playing in a field of big and colorful mushrooms, the second symbolizes exploring around and a storm that makes them get lost, the third is when the storm clears and the child realizes they are in a forest far away and have no sense of direction; they ultimately reach a cave and go in after knocking down a wall. The fourth movement is supposed to have scary cave creatures marching with candles and torches throughout, which the child gets caught up in and escapes; the fifth movement is their journey back to home. Of course, music doesn't need to have a specific story or program associated with it because it's always more general and languages of art don't translate to each other perfectly. It's cool that my story goes with the music, but it is not necessary and you may have your own entirely different but equally valid interpretation.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MhljyvnVVM&t=229s

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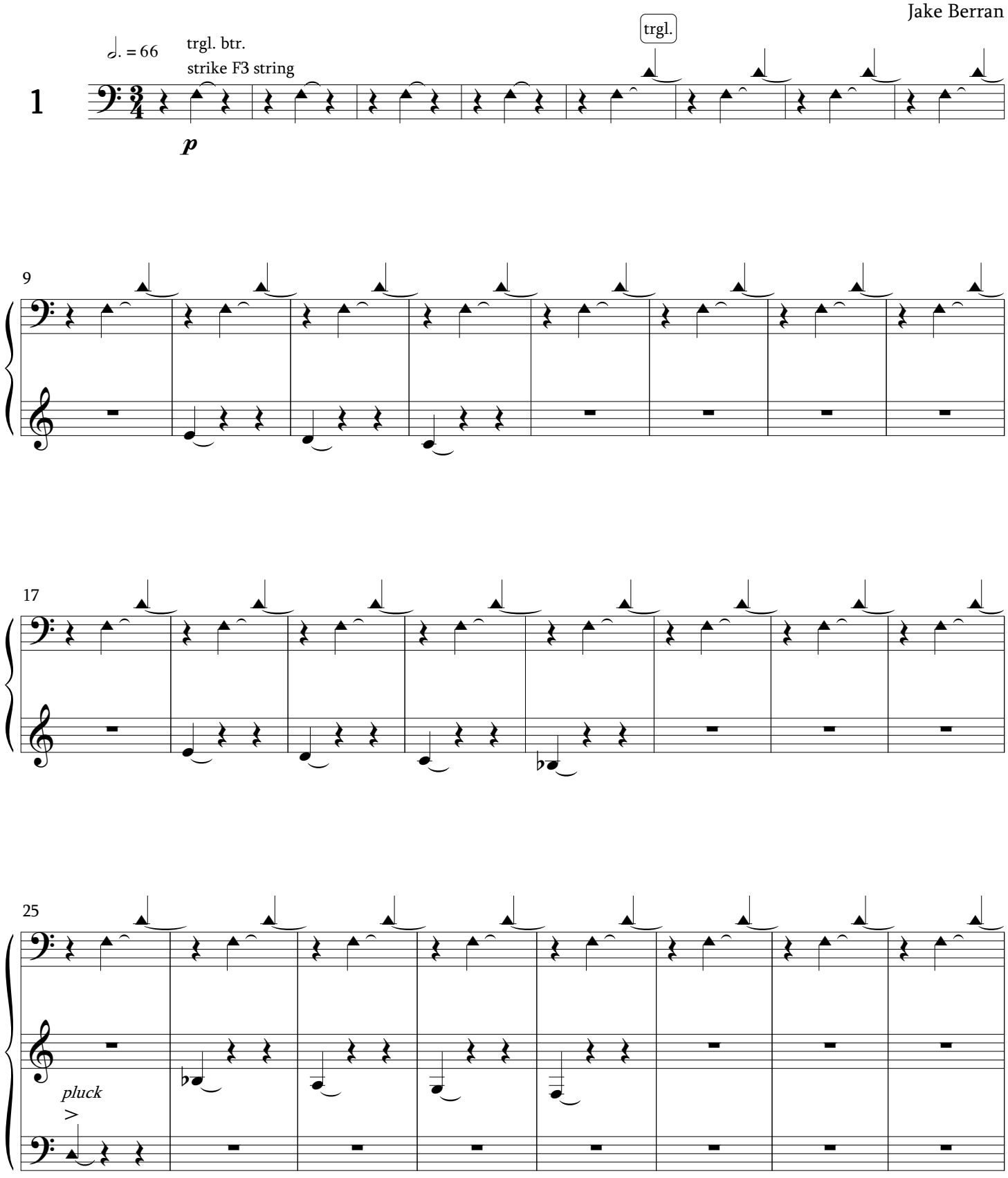

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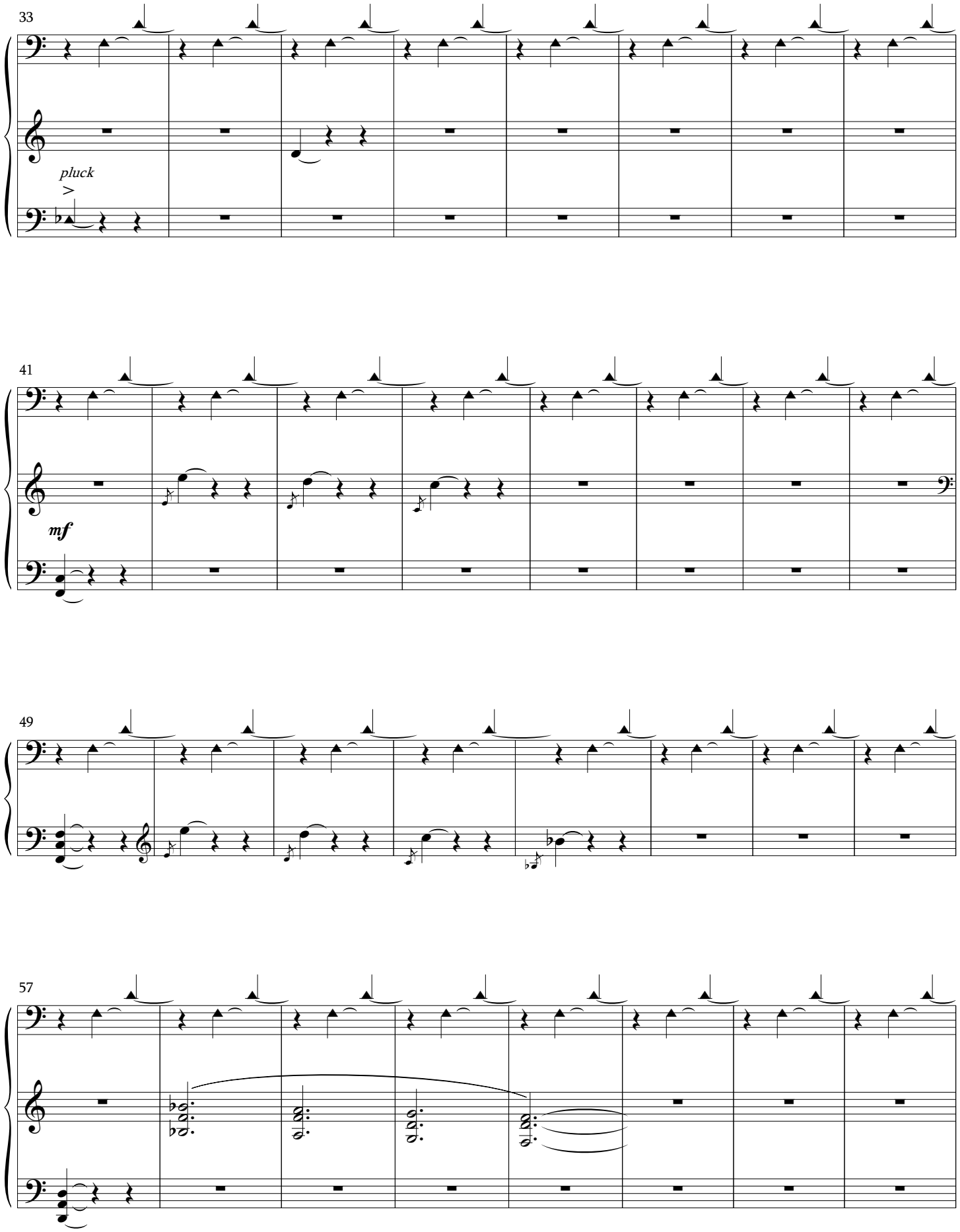
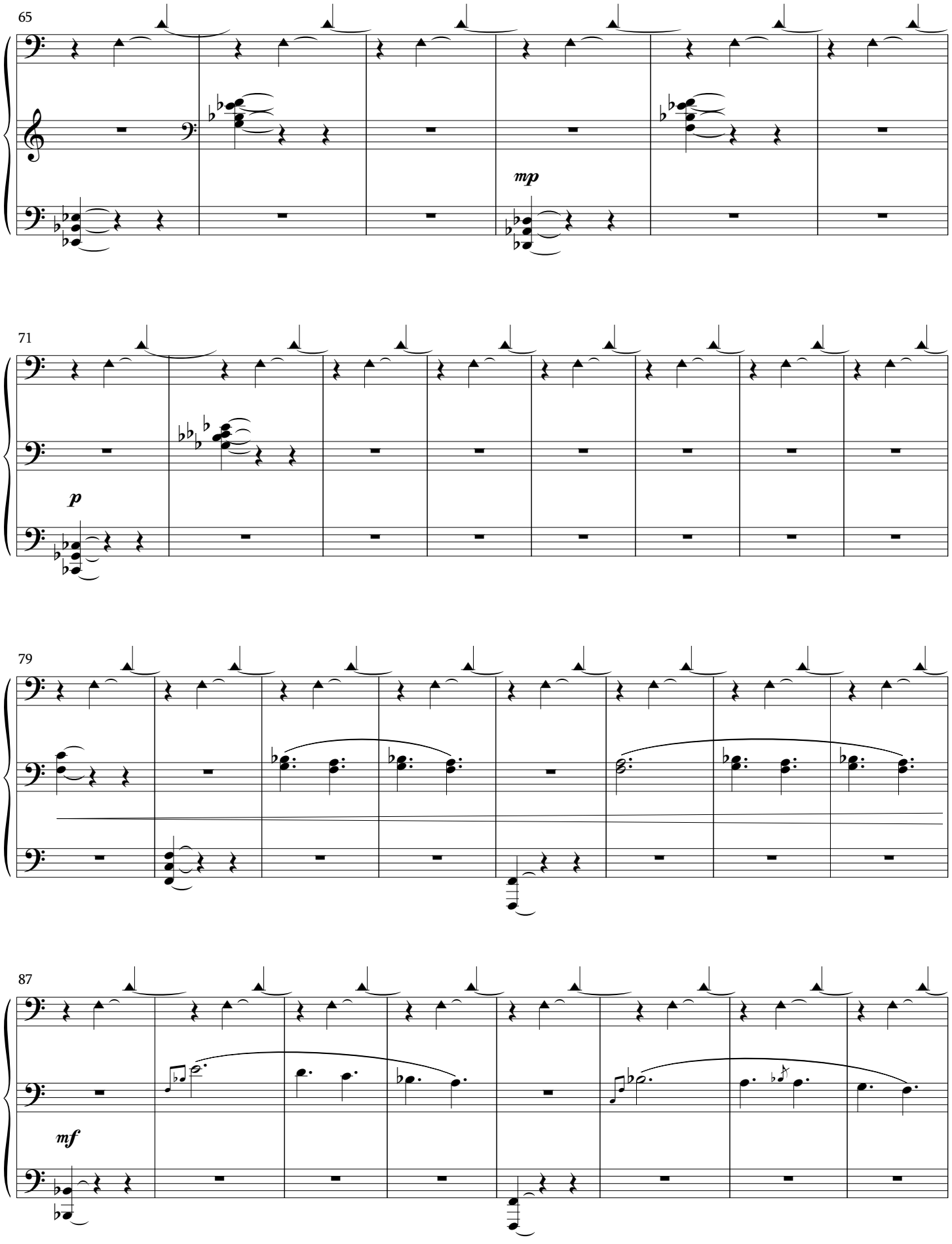
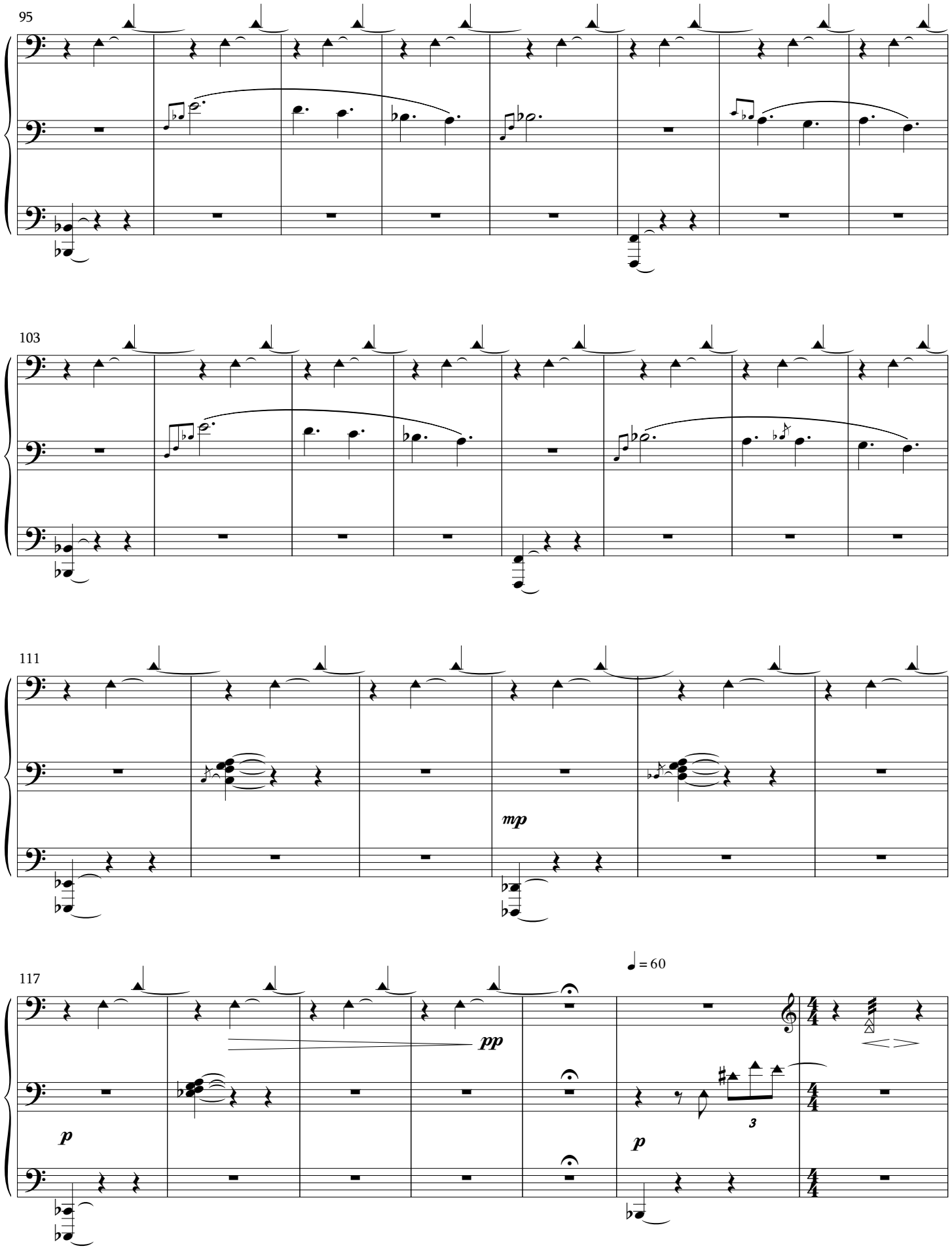
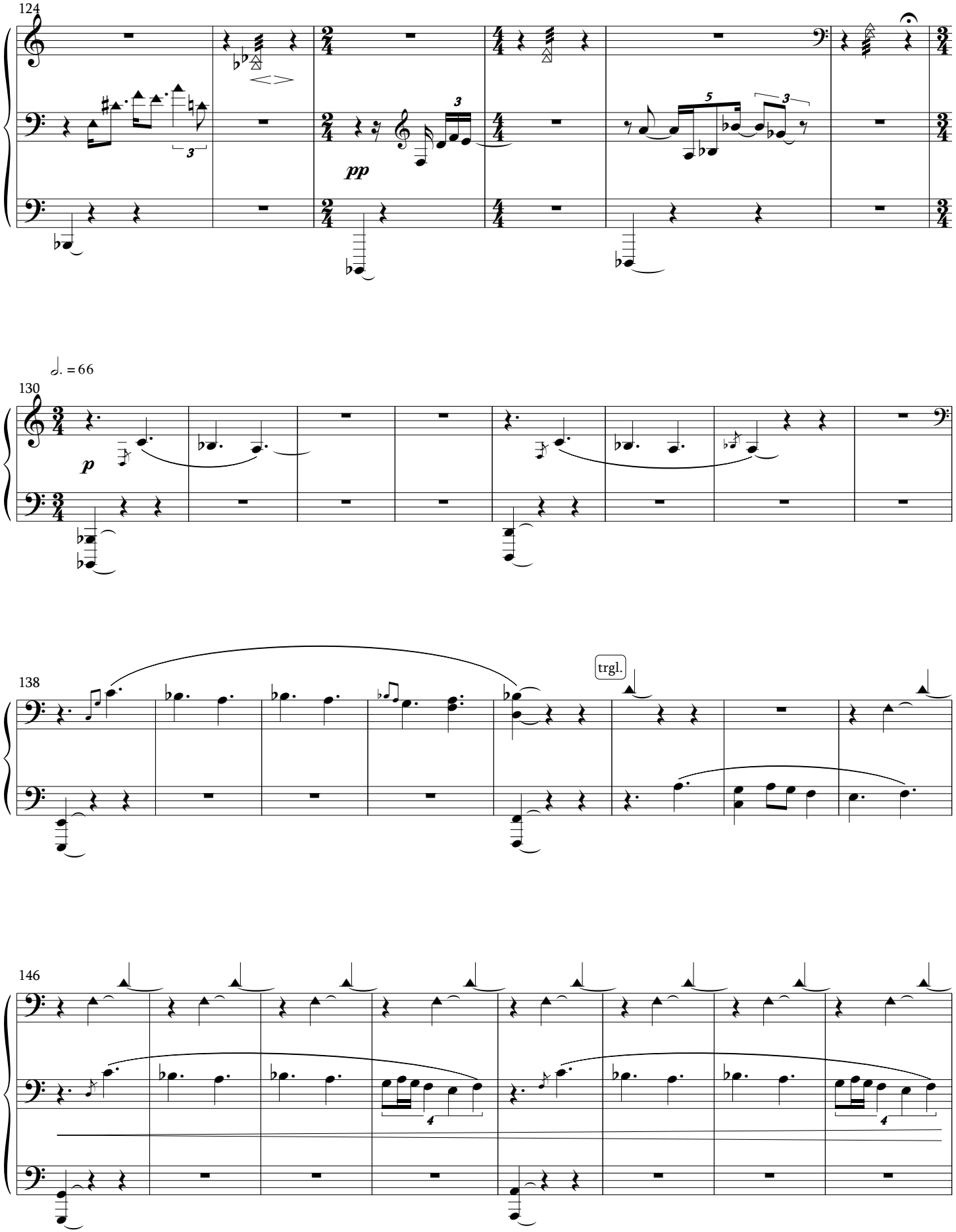
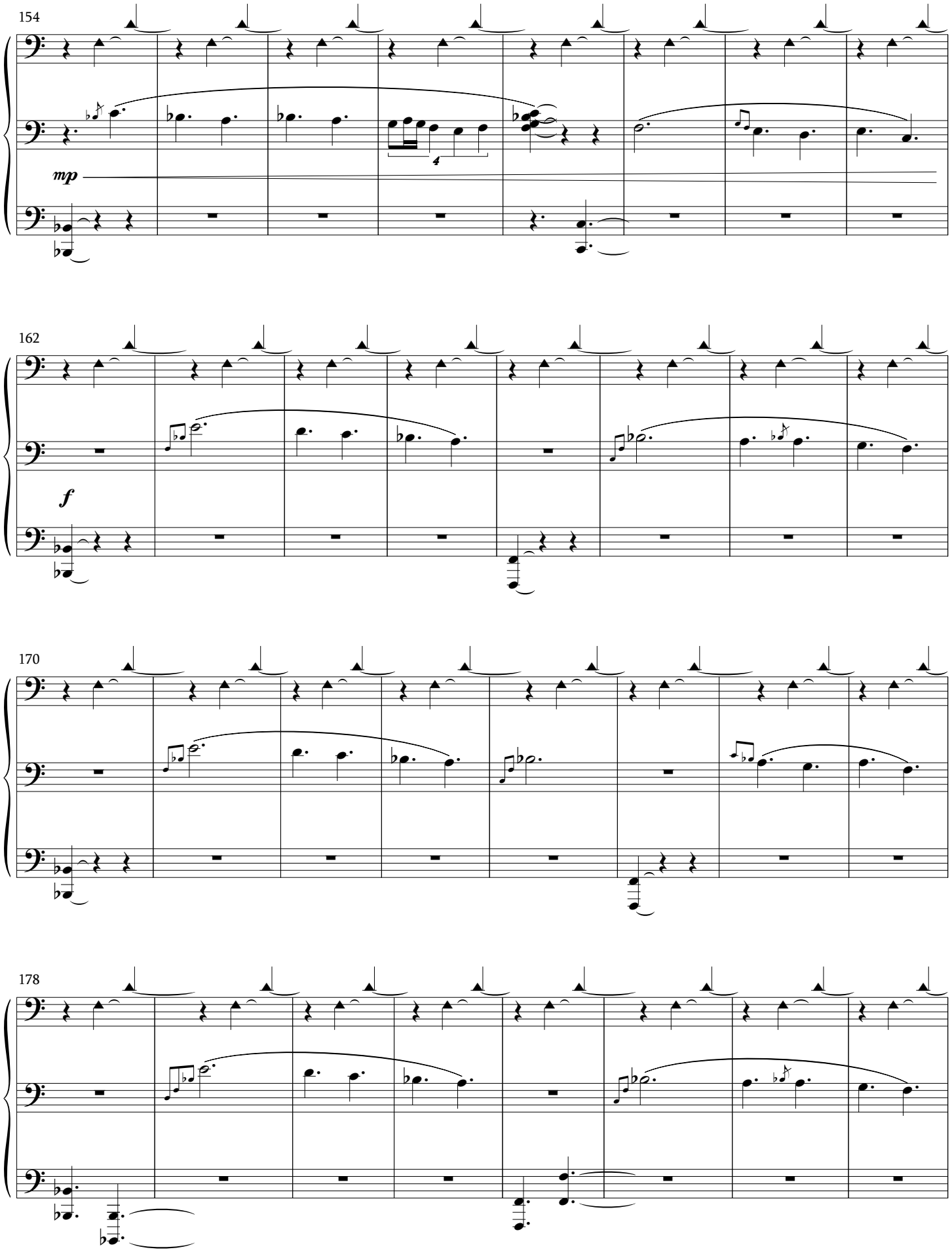

33
pluck
41
mf
49
57


65
mp
71
p
79
87
mf


95
103
111
mp
117
♩ = 60
pp
p
p
3


124
pp
130
𝅗𝅥. = 66
p
138
trgl.
146


154
mp
4
162
f
170
178

186

194

mf

Freely

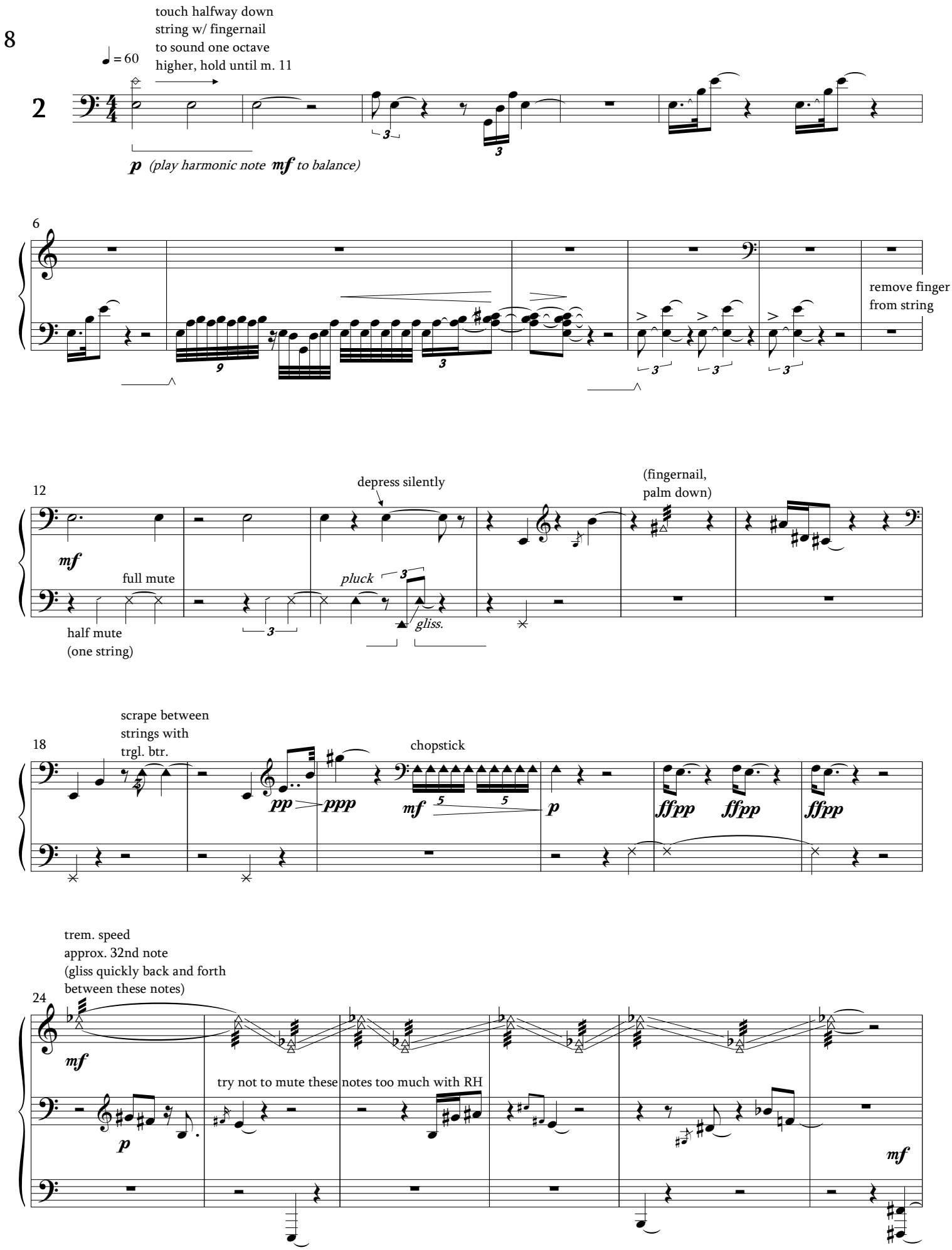
200

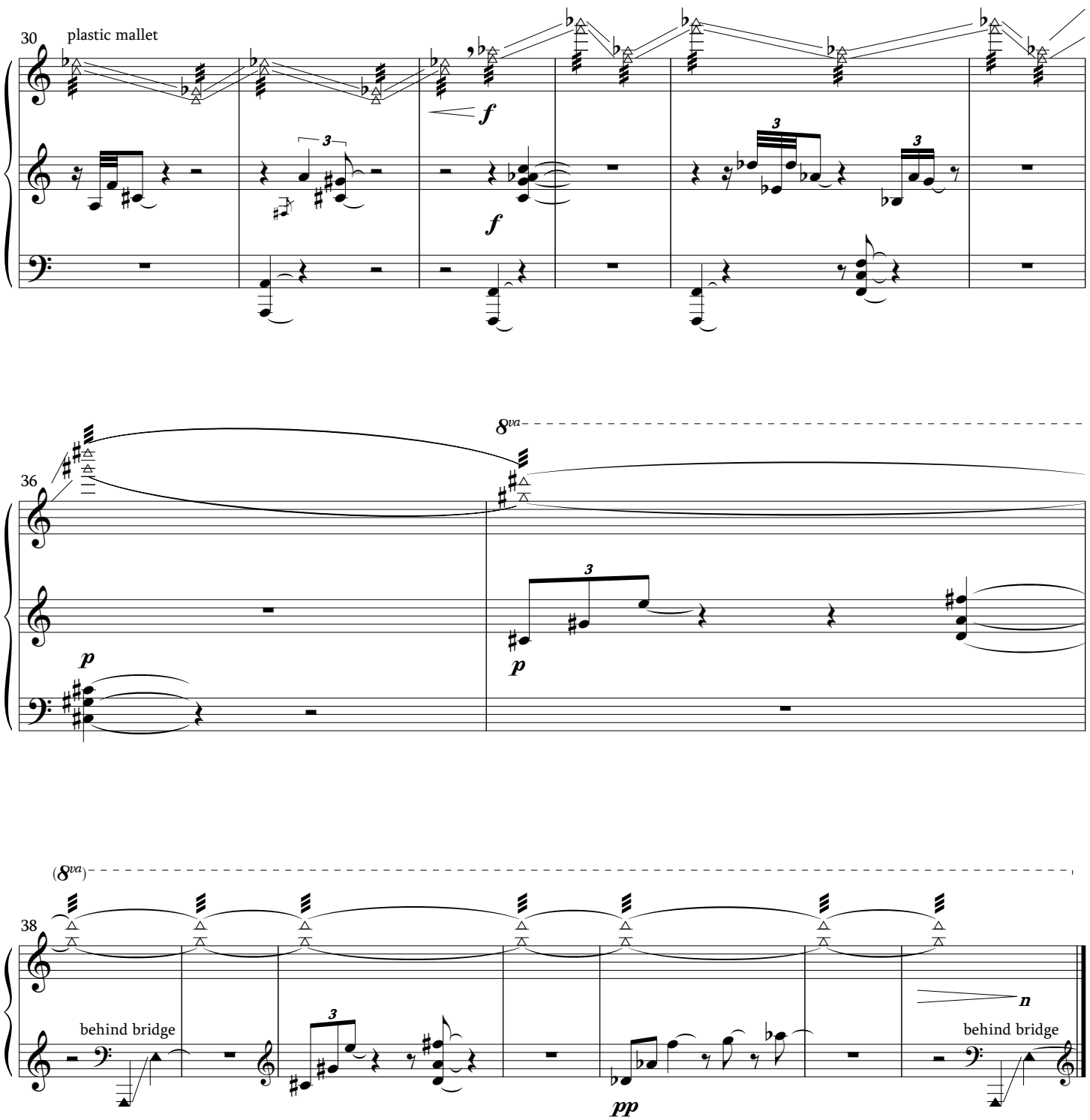
by the tuning pegs

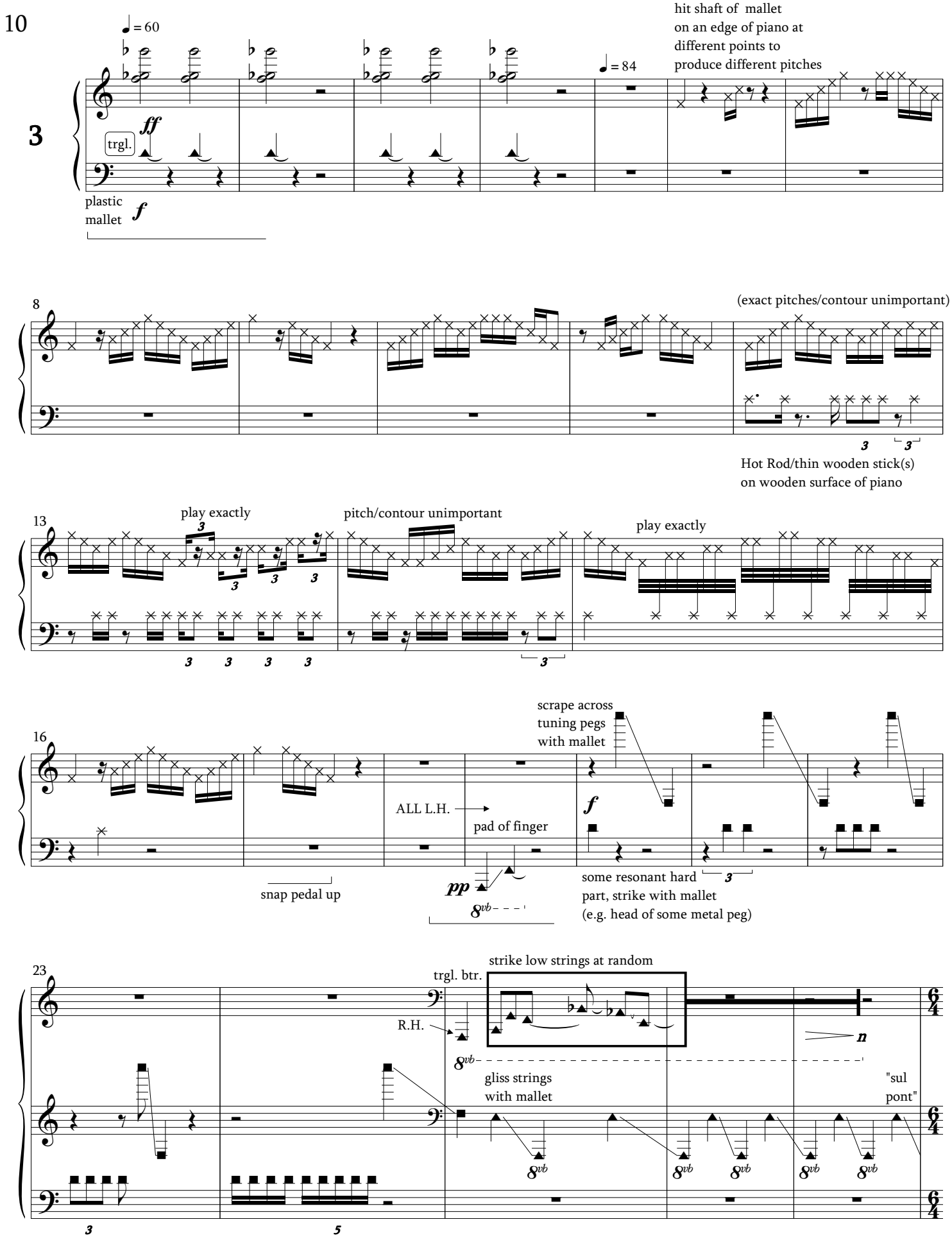
gliss.

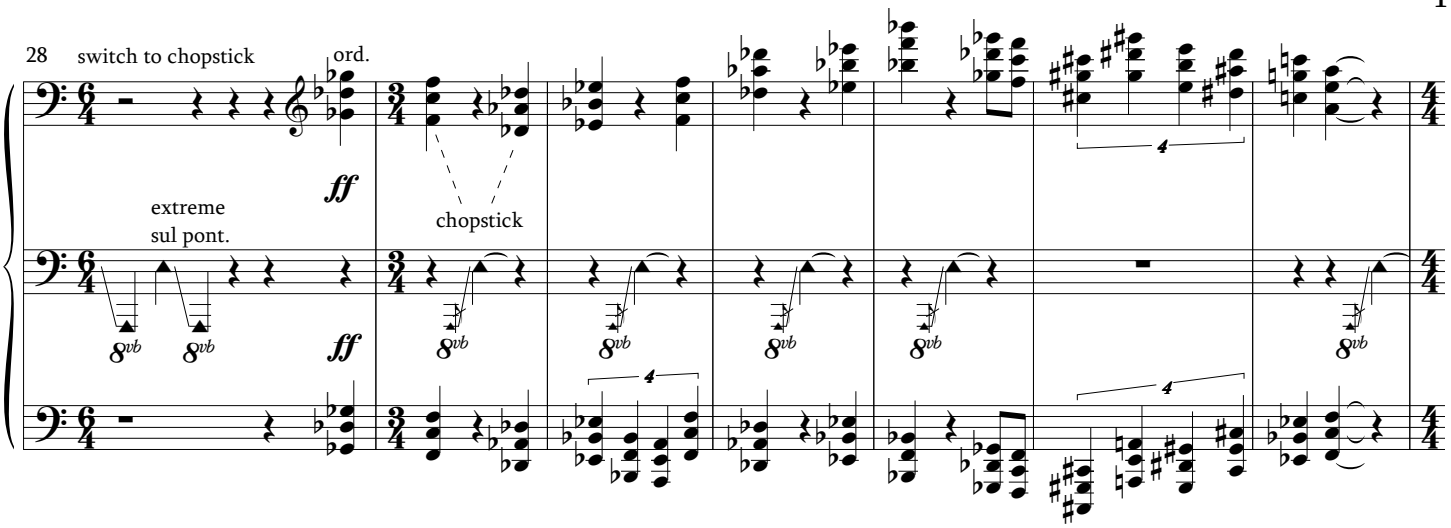
mp

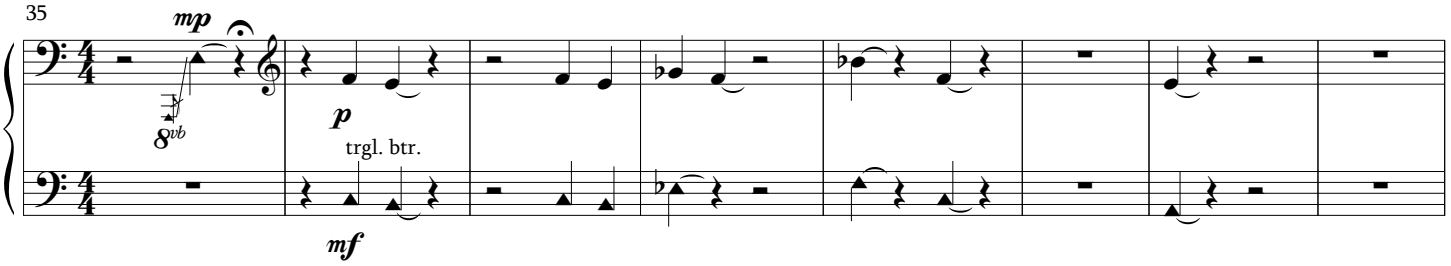
p

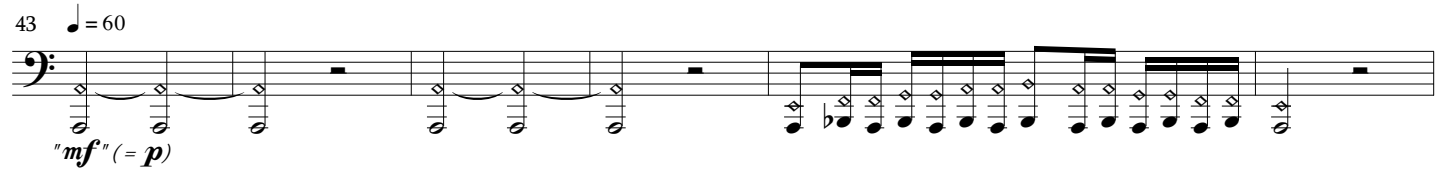

touch halfway down
string w/ fingernail
to sound one octave
higher, hold until m. 11
♩ = 60
2
p (play harmonic note mf to balance)
6
remove finger
from string
12
depress silently
(fingernail,
palm down)
mf
full mute
half mute
(one string)
pluck
gliss.
18
scrape between
strings with
trgl. btr.
chopstick
pp
ppp
mf
p
ffpp
ffpp
ffpp
24
trem. speed
approx. 32nd note
(gliss quickly back and forth
between these notes)
mf
try not to mute these notes too much with RH
p
mf


30
plastic mallet
f
f
36
8va
p
p
(8va)
38
behind bridge
pp
n
behind bridge

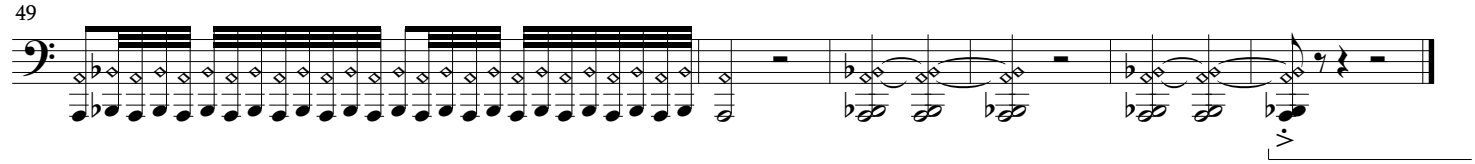

3
♩ = 60
ff
trgl.
plastic
mallet
f
♩ = 84
hit shaft of mallet
on an edge of piano at
different points to
produce different pitches
8
(exact pitches/contour unimportant)
Hot Rod/thin wooden stick(s)
on wooden surface of piano
13
play exactly
pitch/contour unimportant
play exactly
16
scrape across
tuning pegs
with mallet
ALL L.H.
pad of finger
pp
8vb
snap pedal up
f
some resonant hard
part, strike with mallet
(e.g. head of some metal peg)
23
trgl. btr.
strike low strings at random
R.H.
8vb
gliss strings
with mallet
n
"sul
pont"

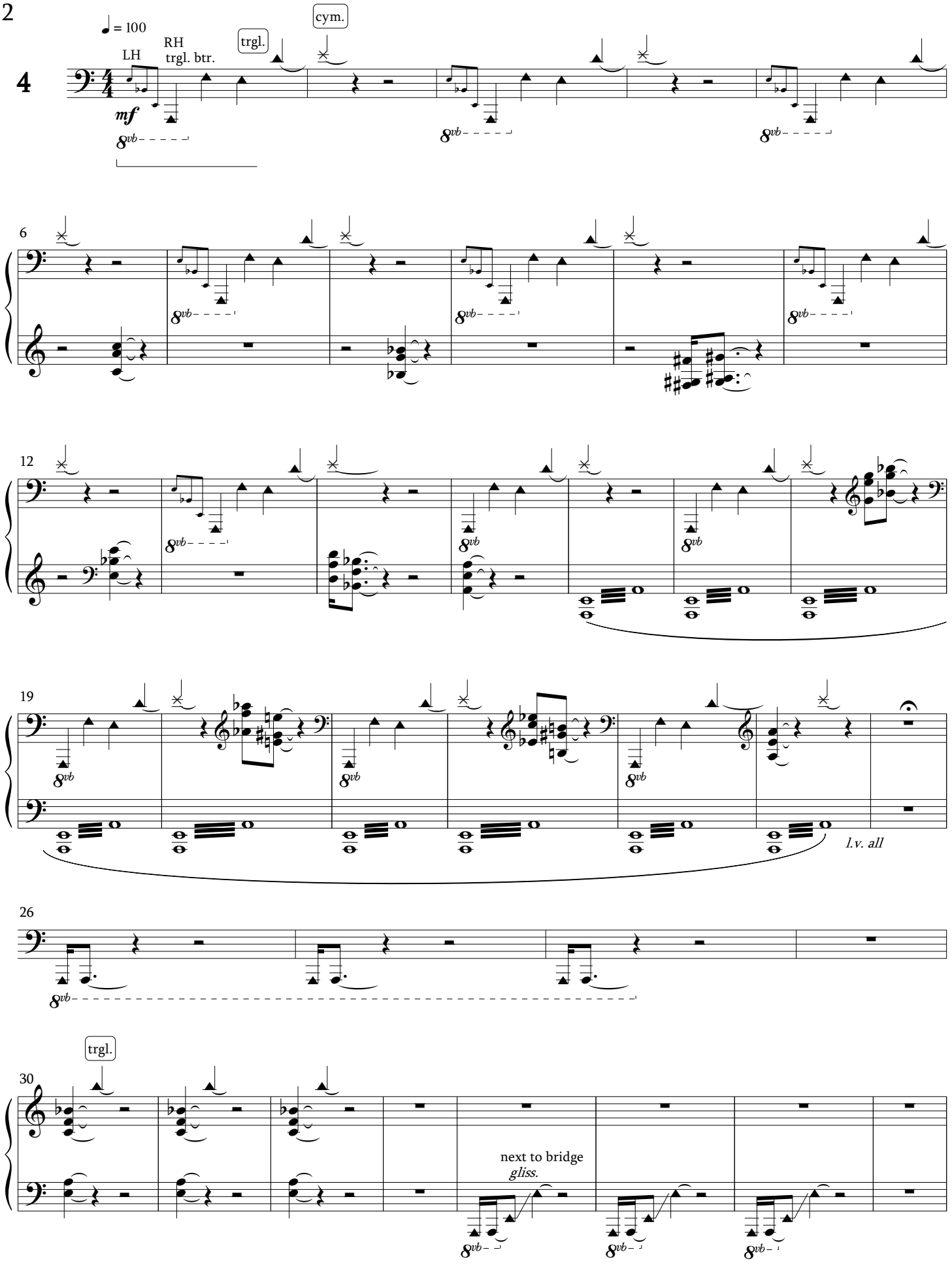


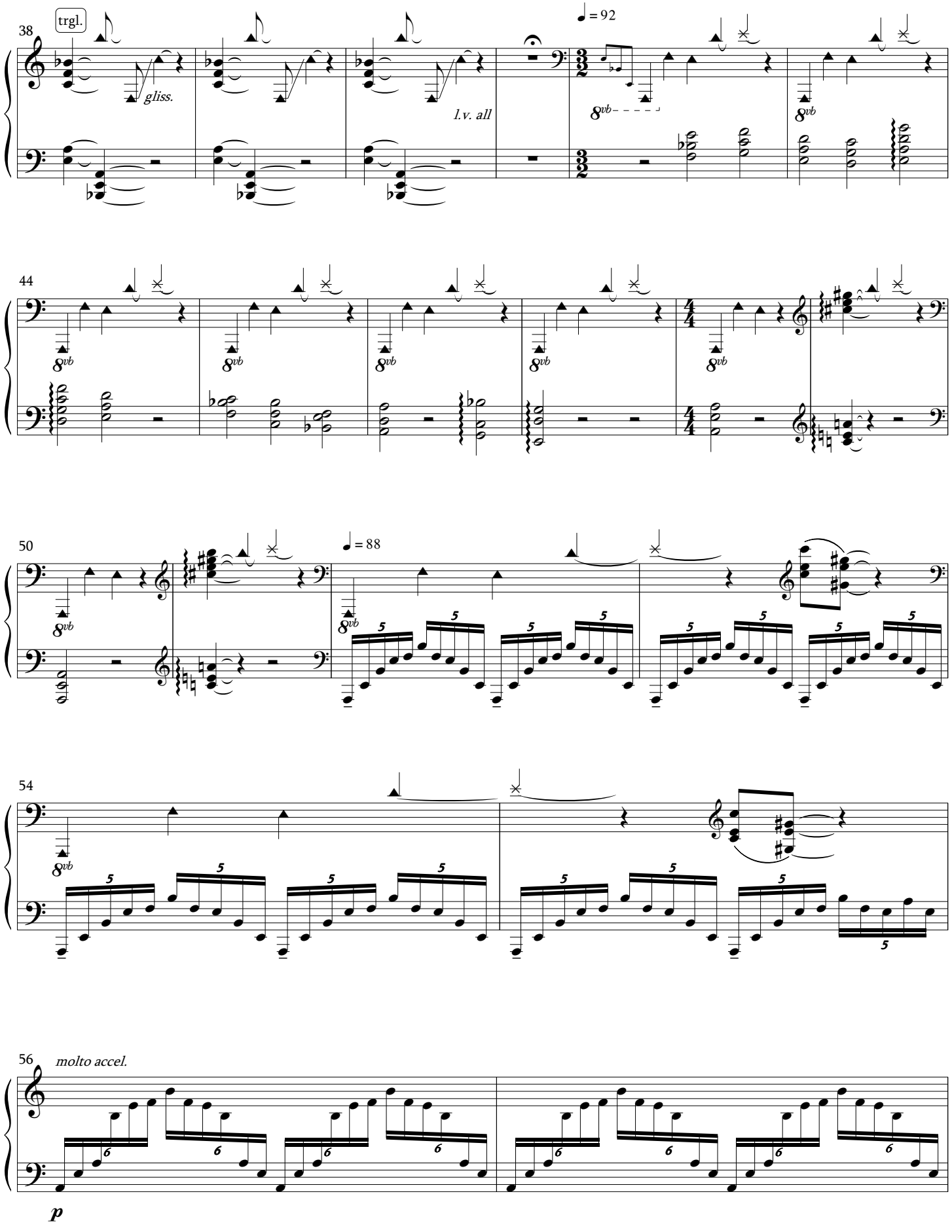


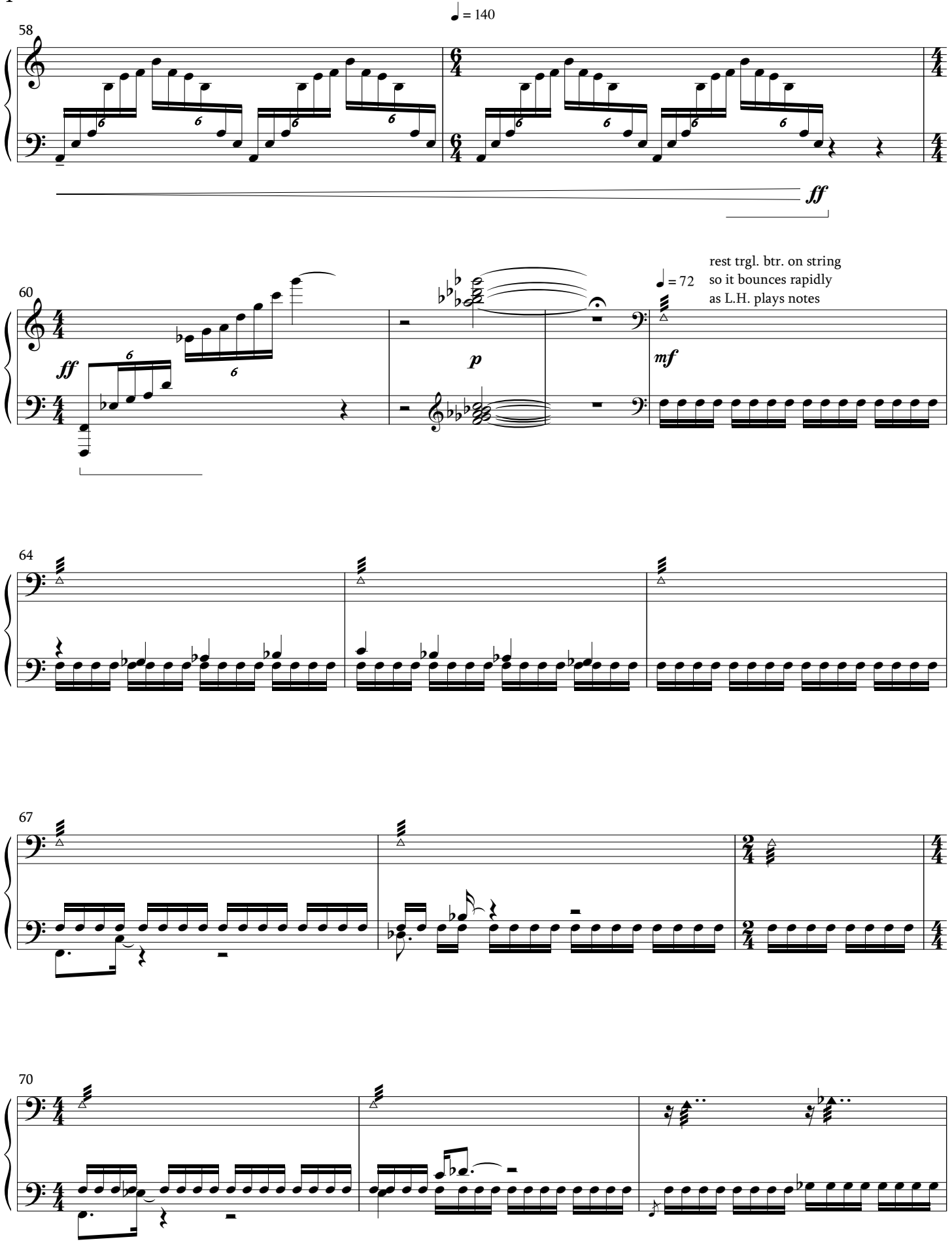


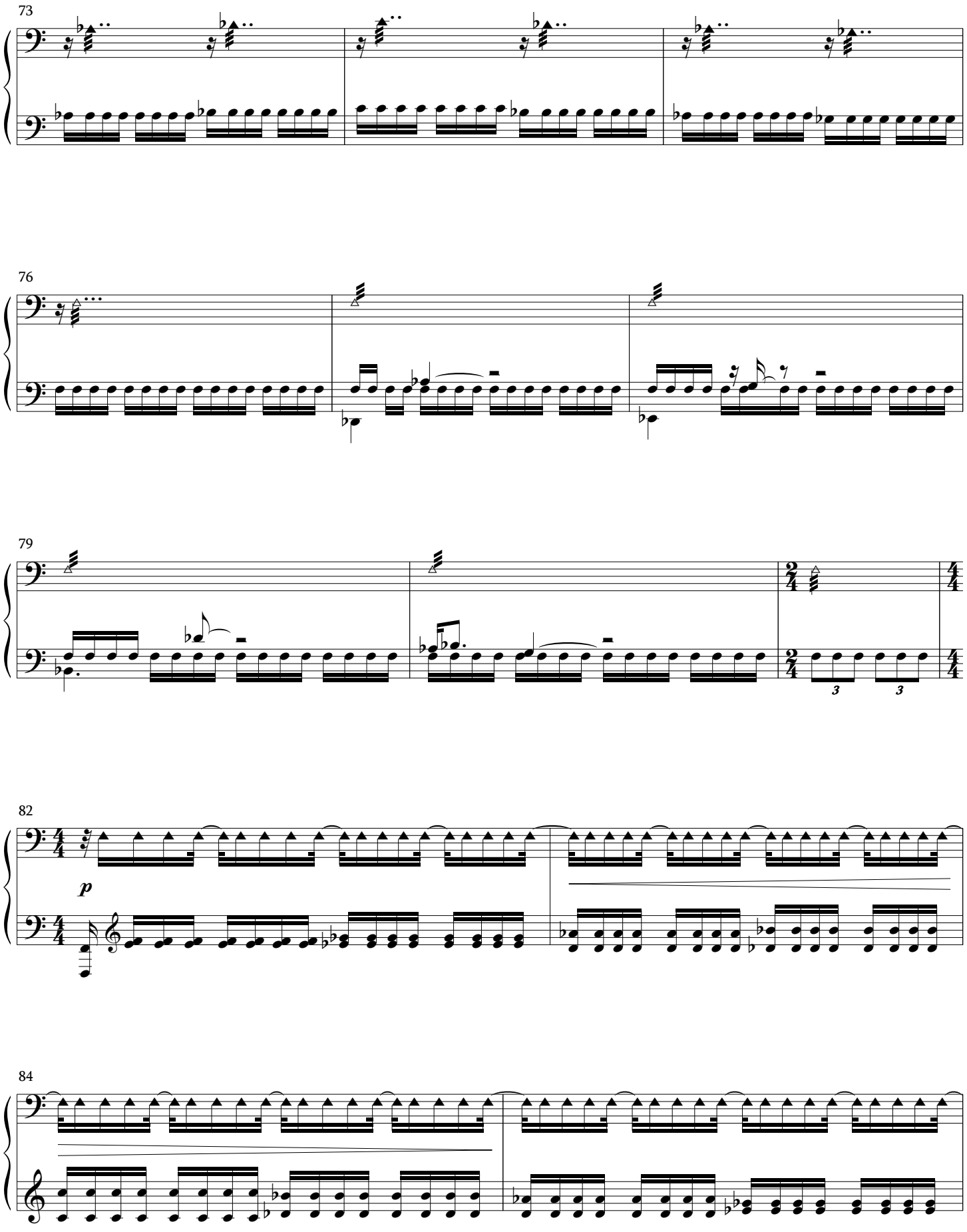
touch string under keyboard if possible
(whatever sounds interesting)
otherwise skip to movement 4

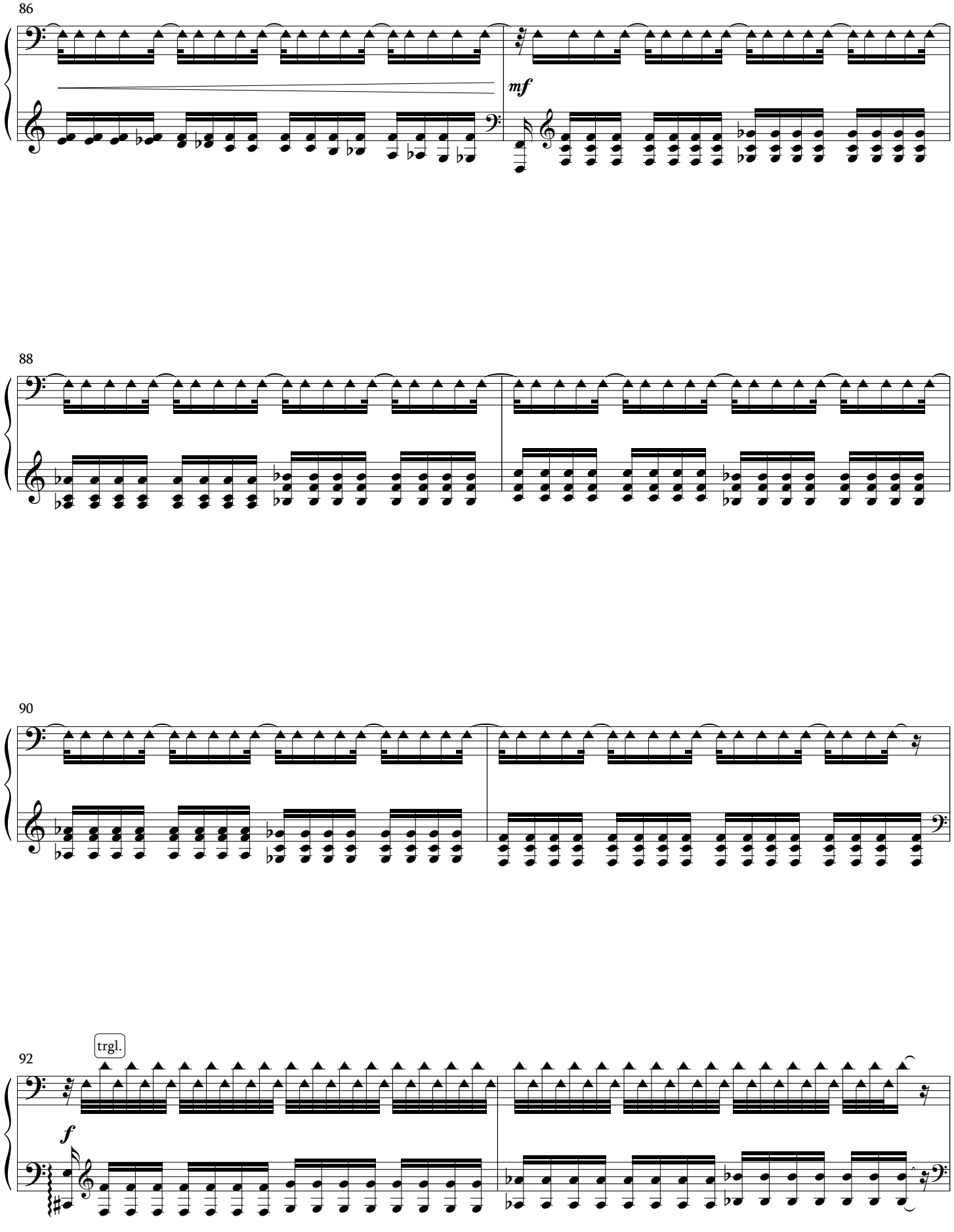


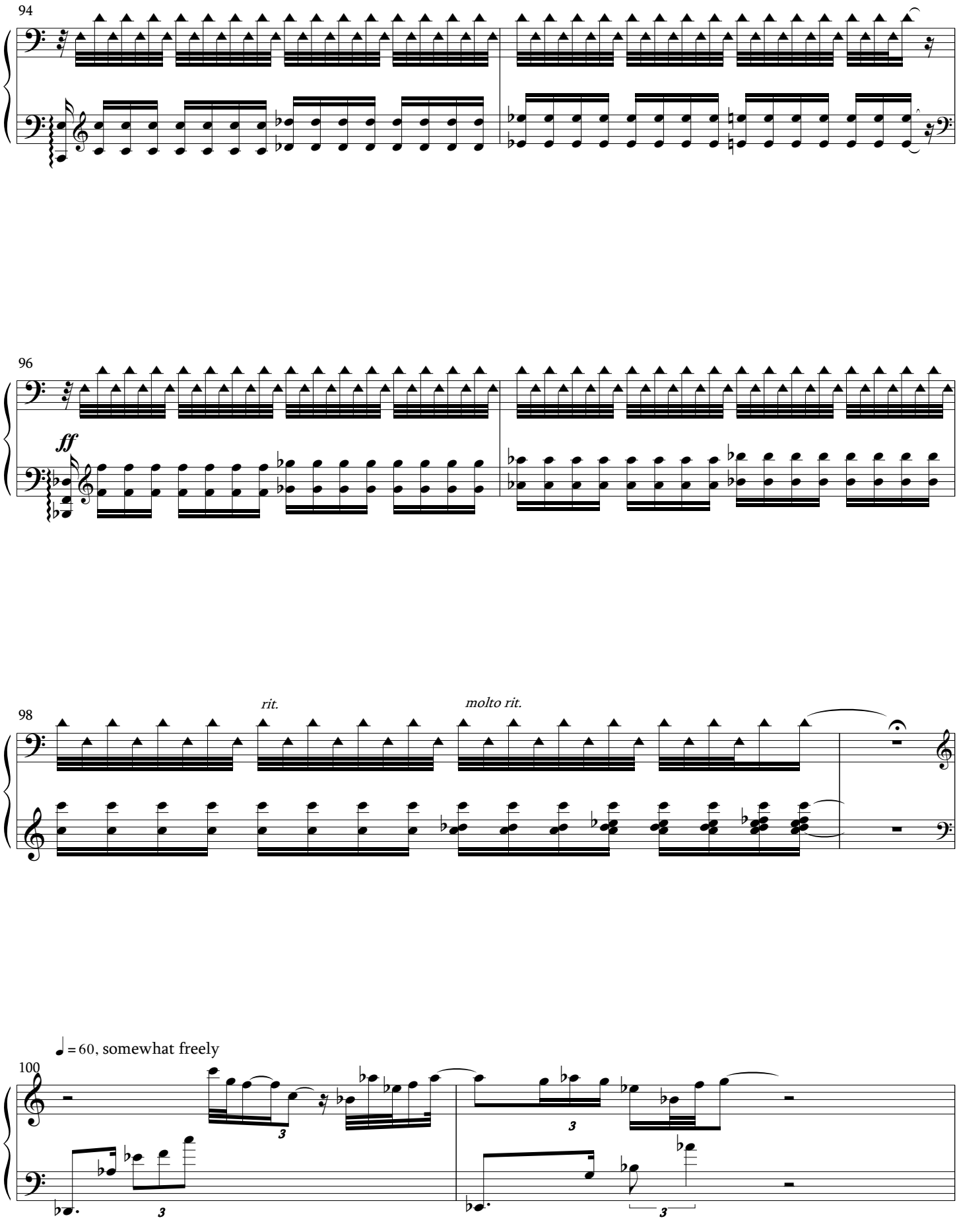

♩ = 100
LH
RH
trgl. btr.
trgl.
cym.
4
mf
8vb
6
12
19
l.v. all
26
30
trgl.
next to bridge
gliss.

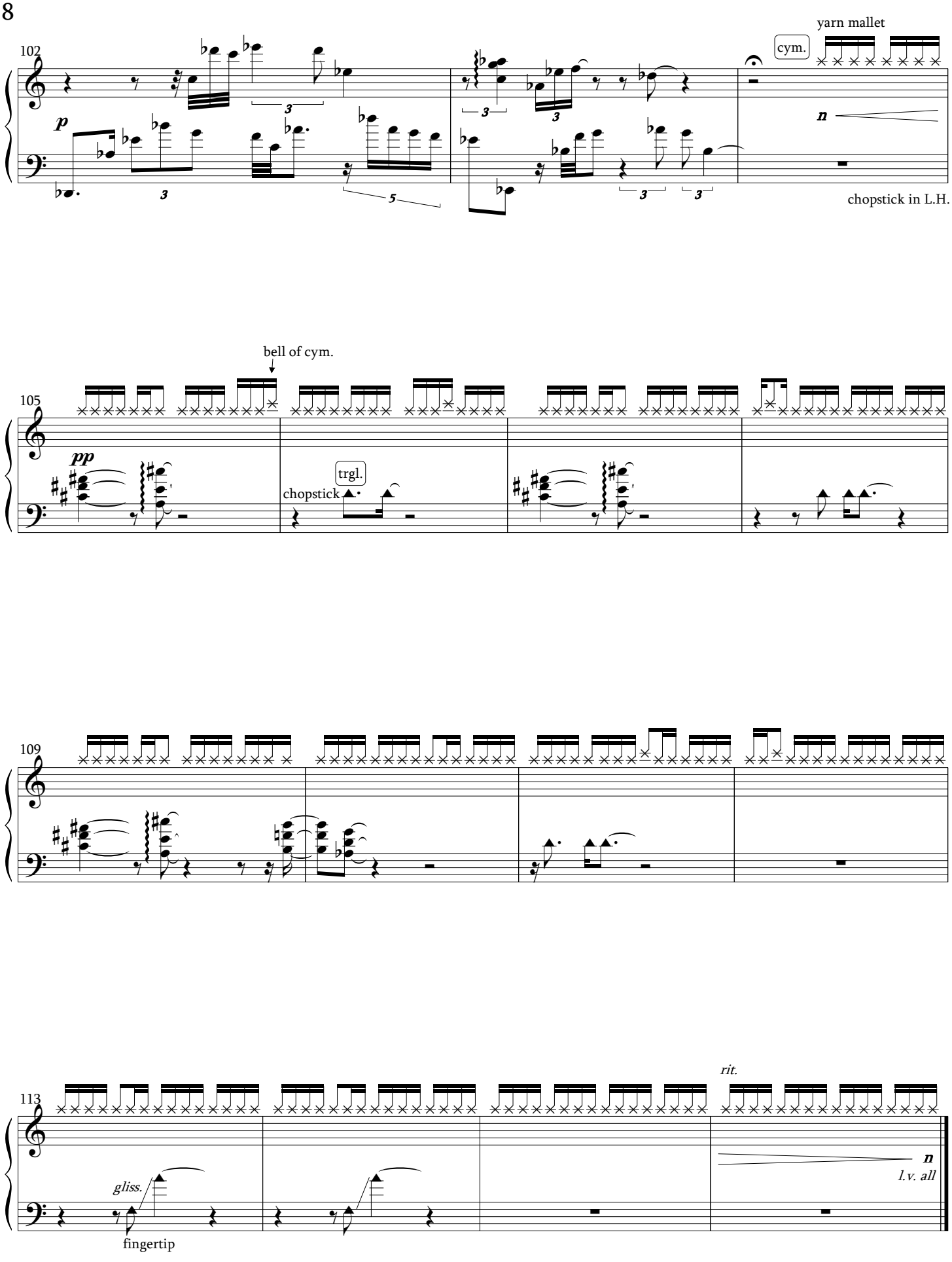

38
trgl.
gliss.
l.v. all
♩ = 92
8vb
44
50
♩ = 88
54
56
molto accel.
p

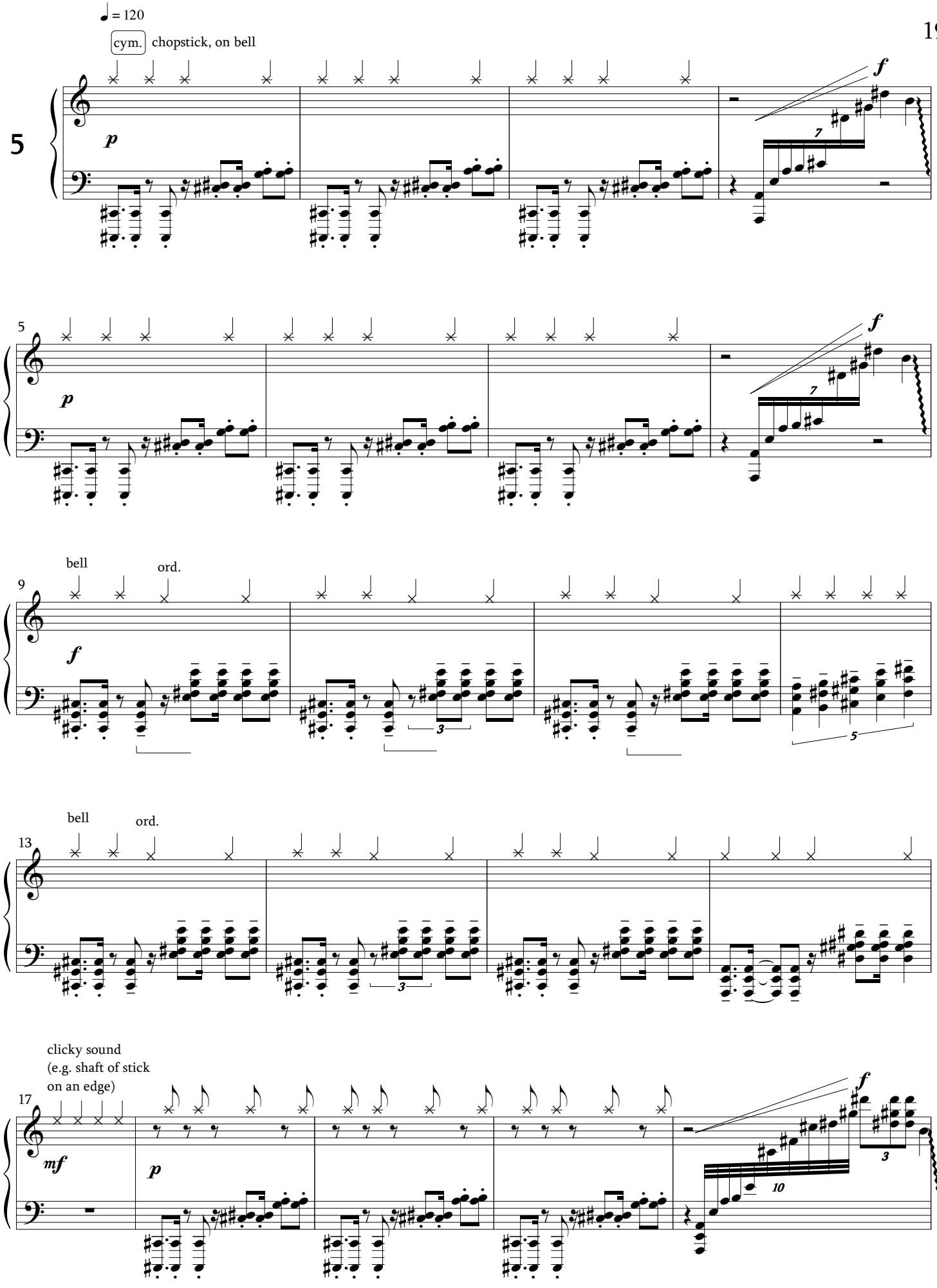

♩ = 140
58
ff
60
ff
p
♩ = 72
rest trgl. btr. on string
so it bounces rapidly
as L.H. plays notes
mf
64
67
70

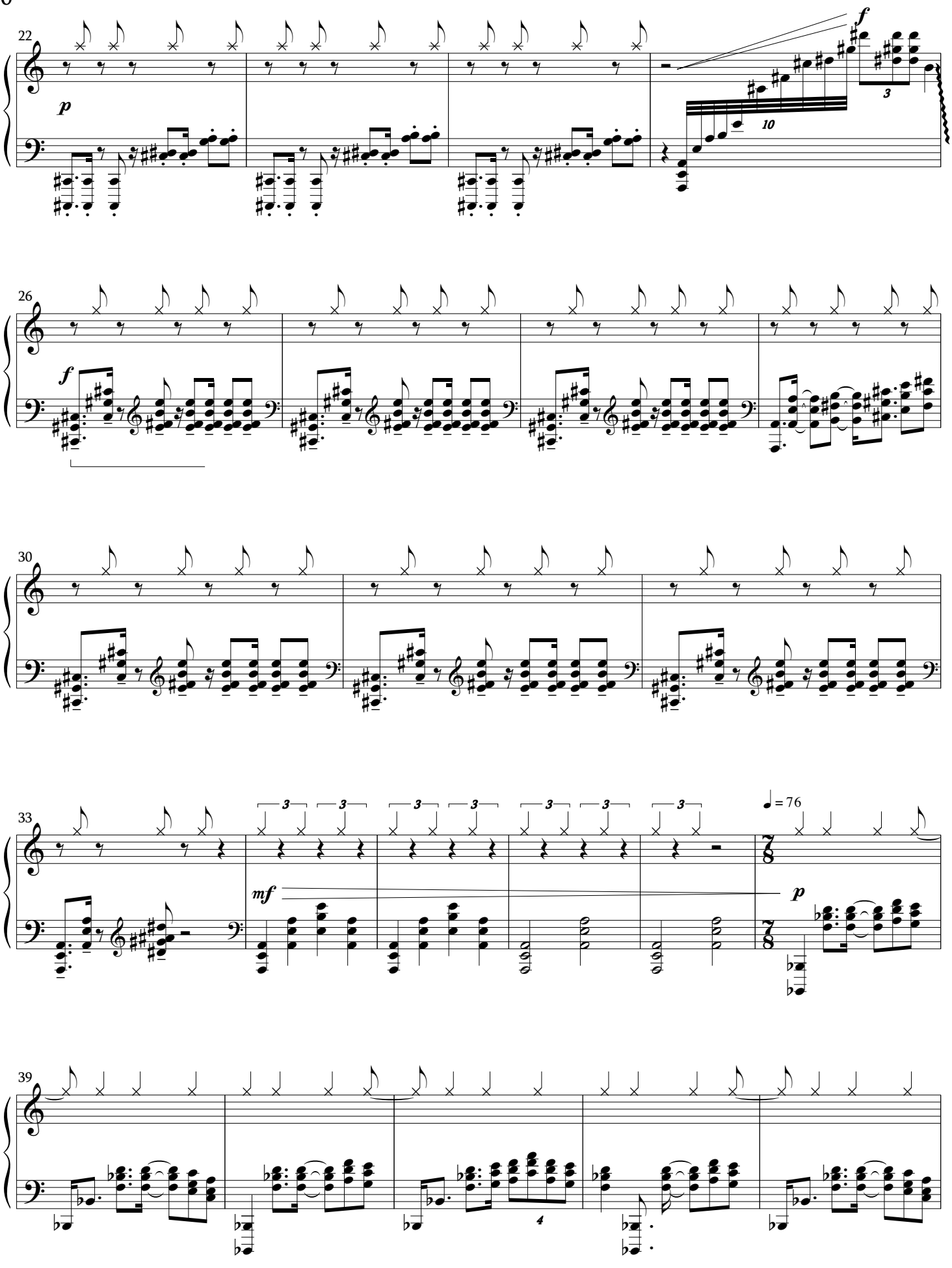

73
76
79
82
84
p

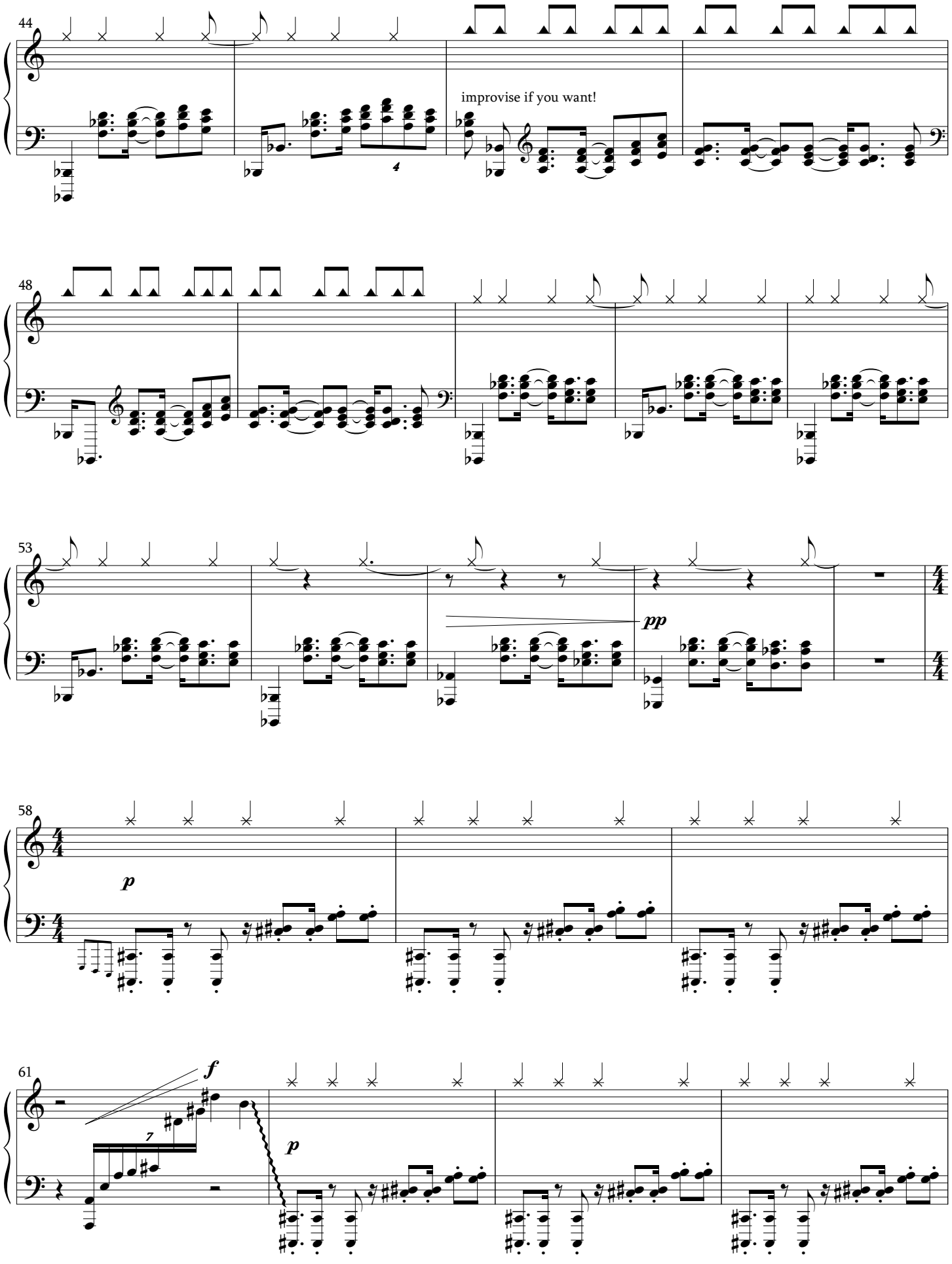

86
mf
88
90
92
trgl.
f

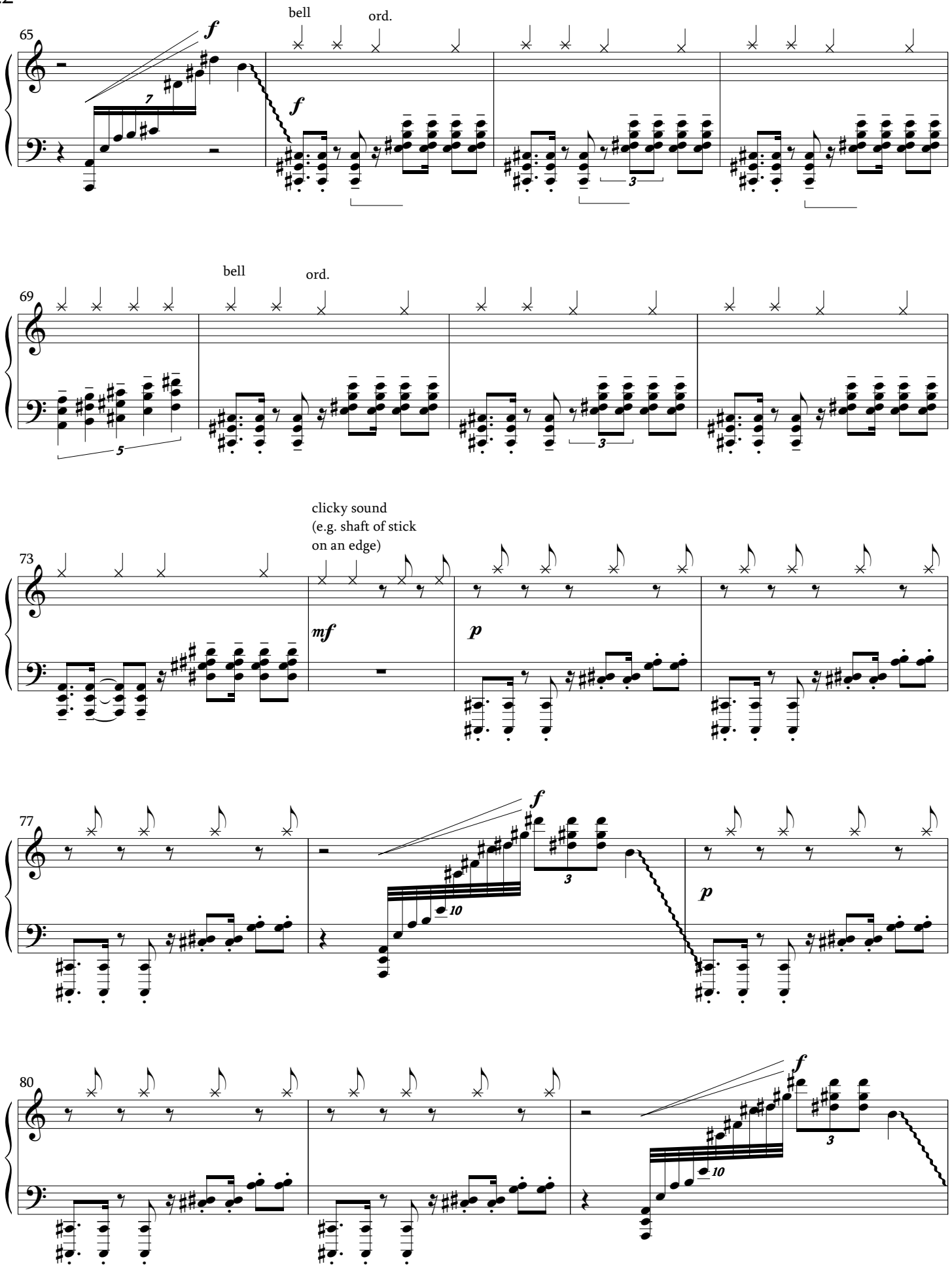

94
96
ff
98
rit.
molto rit.
♩ = 60, somewhat freely
100

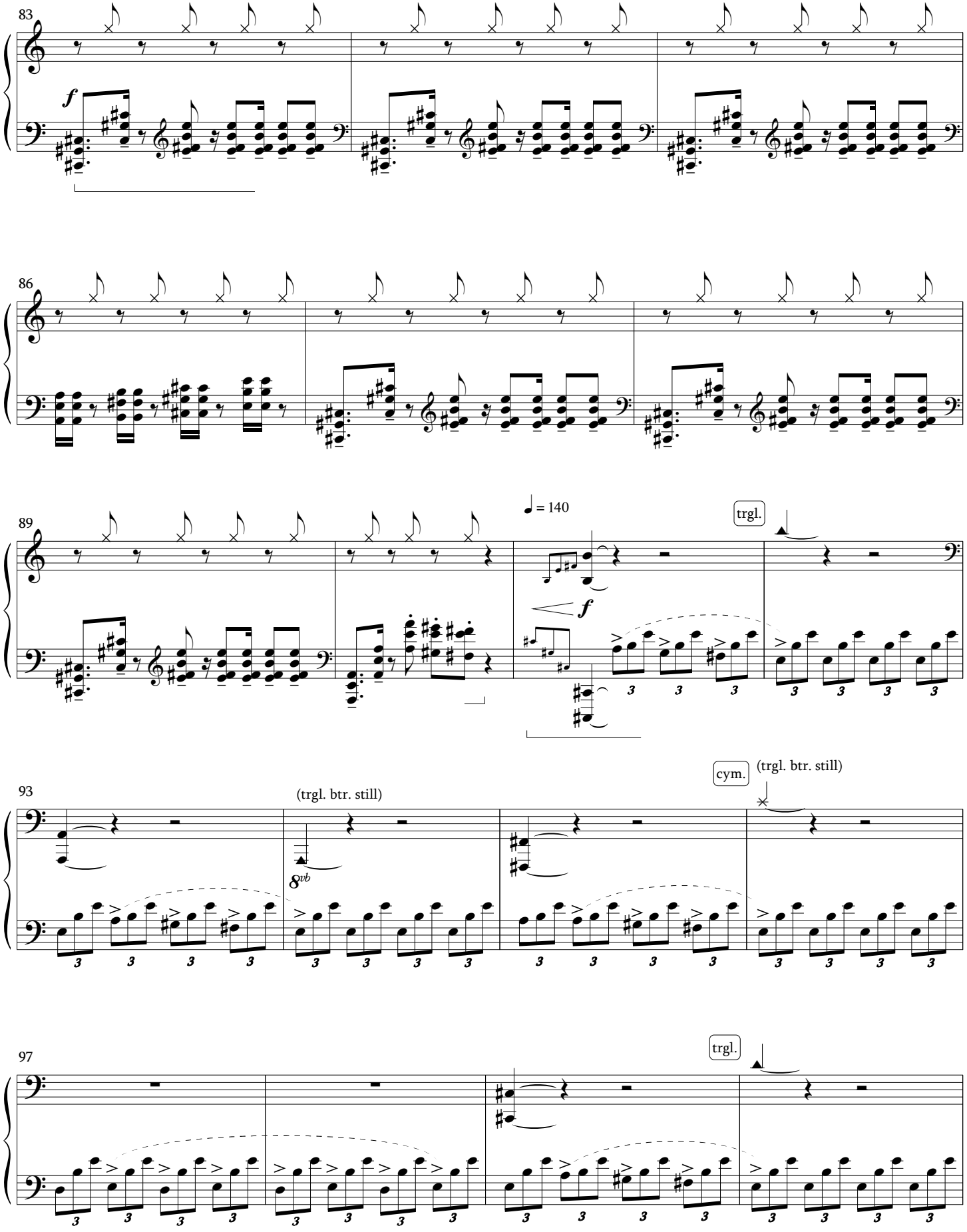

yarn mallet
cym.
102
p
n
chopstick in L.H.
bell of cym.
105
pp
trgl.
chopstick
109
113
rit.
gliss.
fingertip
n
l.v. all

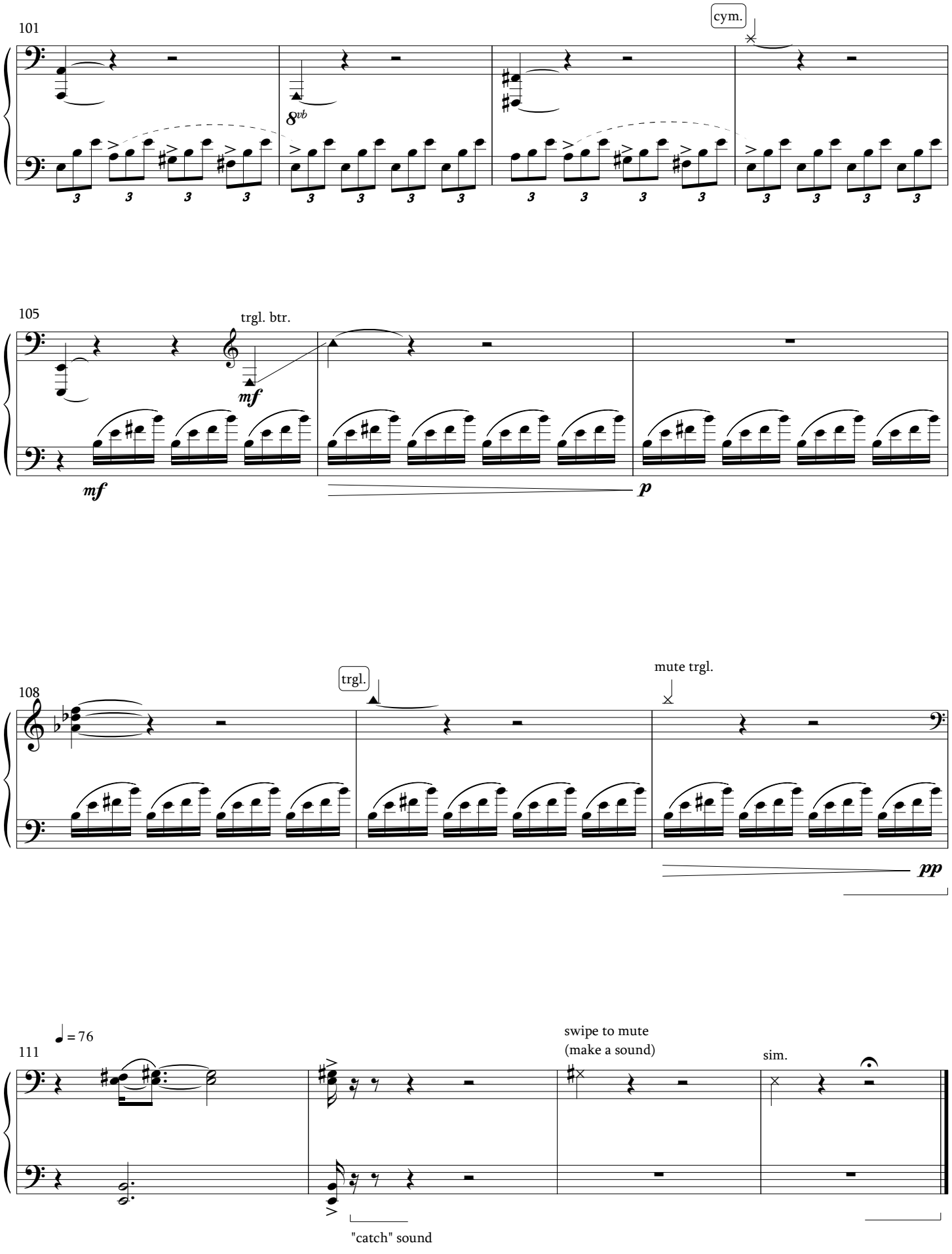

♩ = 120
cym.
chopstick, on bell
5
p
f
7
5
p
f
7
bell
ord.
9
f
3
5
bell
ord.
13
3
clicky sound
(e.g. shaft of stick
on an edge)
17
mf
p
f
3
10


22
p
f
10
3
26
f
30
33
3
mf
♩ = 76
7/8
p
39
4


44
improvise if you want!
48
53
pp
4/4
58
p
4/4
61
f
7
p


65
bell
ord.
69
bell
ord.
73
clicky sound
(e.g. shaft of stick
on an edge)
77
80


83
f
86
89
♩ = 140
trgl.
f
93
(trgl. btr. still)
8vb
cym.
(trgl. btr. still)
97
trgl.


101
cym.
8vb
105
trgl. btr.
mf
mf
p
108
trgl.
mute trgl.
pp
111
♩ = 76
swipe to mute
(make a sound)
sim.
"catch" sound