Alexander SCRIABIN

VERS LA FLAMME

Opus 72

Piano Practical Editions
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Musical Health Warning : please be aware that these editions are definitely not urtext and should be consulted together with a traditional version. They have been devised purely to help solve musical and technical problems at the piano.

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Alexander SCRIABIN

1871 - 1915

VERS la FLAMME

Opus 72

The aesthetic aims of Scriabin were so expansive as to be hardly containable within the scope of the piano keyboard. As he advanced in years his mystical inclinations narrowed considerably the gap between solo sonata and sonic séance, with his last works showing him at his most manically grandiose. Left unfinished at his death in 1915, for example, is a work called Mysterium for mixed chorus and orchestra, intended to be enacted over the course of a week in the foothills of the Himalayas with the aid of dancers, a light show, and the release of appropriately apocalyptic scents into the air, after which the world was roundly expected to dissolve into a state of eternal bliss.

Meanwhile, back home at the keyboard, pianists attempting to sustain the legacy of his piano music (without the aid of sherpas) have had their hands full dealing with the equally ambitious textures of his late works, with their flamboyant arpeggiations down to the nether regions, eddying swirls of finger fodder in the mid-range, and luminous echoes up in the gods of the high register.

His 'piano poem' *Vers la Flamme* (Towards the Flame), composed in 1914, is precisely of this stamp. What constitutes 'melody' in the piece is virtually limited to the obsessively repeated semitone motif announced at the opening, and present throughout at the top of the texture. The composer's unique harmonic vocabulary of altered dominant 9th, 11th and 13th chords, spaced in 4ths for maximum resonance, ensures such an abundance of tritones (there seems to be one in virtually every chord) that in the end they all begin to sound like consonances.

According to Vladimir Horowitz, who played for the composer at the age of 11 and became one of the major proponents of his music, the title of the work relates to the composer's conviction that the world as a whole was edging 'towards the flame' and would gradually heat up until it erupted into a fiery cosmic conflagration.

"He was crazy, you know," Horowitz adds, dryly.

Prescient intimations of global warming aside, Scriabin's incendiary vision is communicated in this piece through a gradual increase in the complexity and animation of the keyboard texture. At its opening, time seems suspended as long-held chords interspersed with rhythmically uncertain phrase fragments obviate any sense of regular pulse. Soon the mid-range begins to oscillate with conspiratorial murmurings as an ominous 5-against-9 rhythm rumbles in the bass. A third and final stage is reached when tongues of flame, in the form of blurry double tremolos, begin to lick the sonic spaces around middle C, leading to a final burst of bright light at the extreme ends of the keyboard.

Donald G. Gíslason

French vocabulary translations :

avec une émotion naissante : with nascent emotion

avec une joie voilée : with muted joy

de plus en plus tumultueuse : more and more turbulent

éclatant, lumineux : radiant, luminous

comme une fanfare : trumpeted

An accompanying poem (in Russian) penned by the composer. Scriabin wrote poems for his late works from op 61 and this is his contribution for op 72.

In the dark and dark depths of matter
Time In heavy chains languished.
Pyramid Mountain
In a slow dream turned.
Magic signs
The power was dozing in the underground mysterious crypts.
But anxiety arose in the mysterious abysses,
Hidden joy radiance woke her
Sleeping matter clumps.
Consciousness and will
Born again and burning aspirations flows
From the depths rushed to the radiant light
What flared above the ground.
Inspiredly
In the dance circled the disembodied children of the universe.
Fire thoughts avalanche and sharp flashes
Lightning will pierce the planet through and through.
Stormy joy embraced the last Race -
God became an immortal earthly man!
In the bright light shone triumphantly
Disappearances and the origin of chords.
And embraces the universe clean flame
Transfiguration of the sacred - the new world
The image of the mysterious in eternity gently shines …

This edition contains a number of radical modifications:

- the simple time signature eliminates many ties
- for right-handed pianists, tremolos have been transferred to the stronger hand
- revision of some expression marks
- a few textual changes marked *

1 editorial numbers show phrase lengths

32 alto C♯minim removed

72 & 74 harmonic modifications

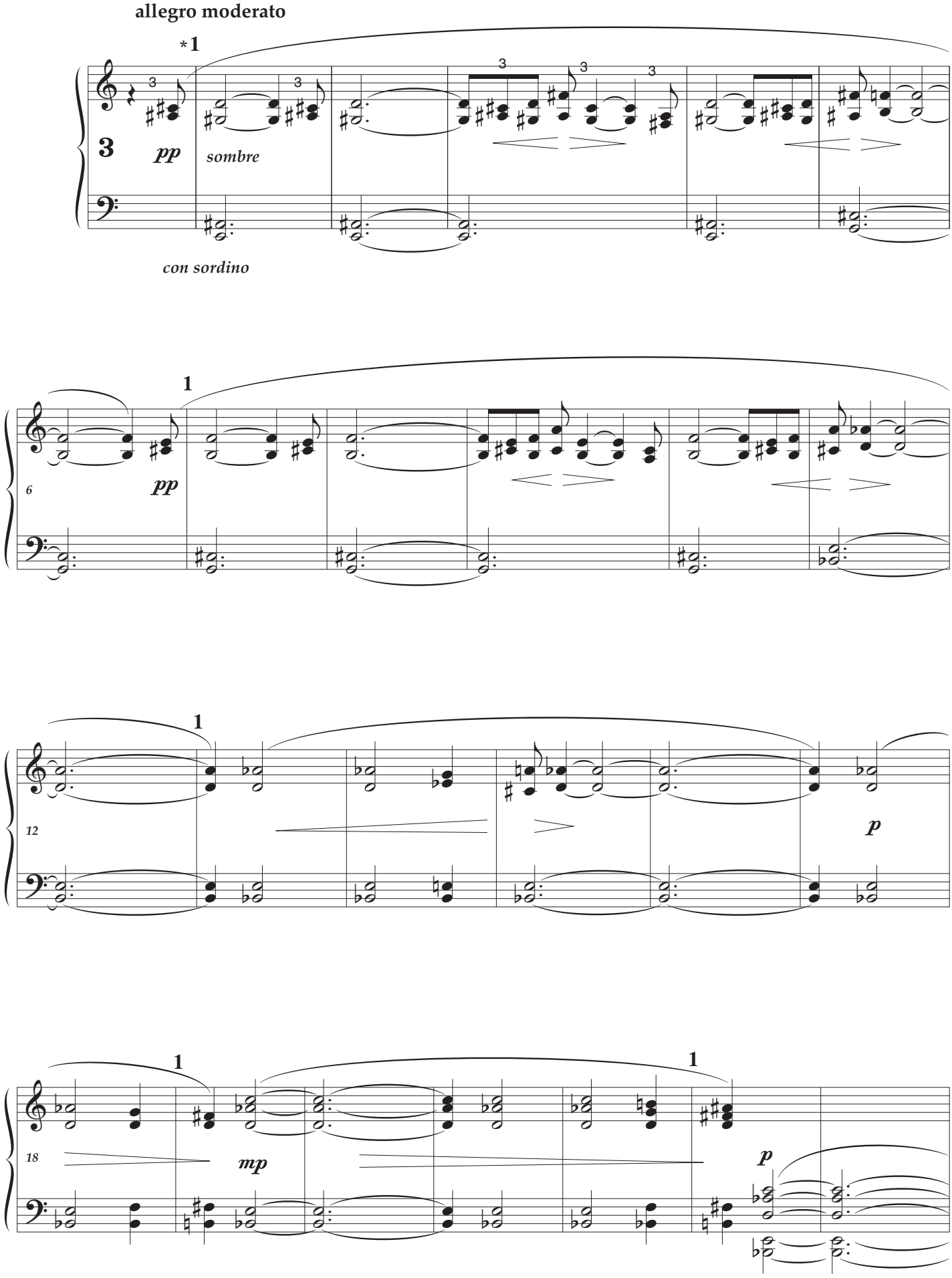
81-95 tremolos and dynamics have been heavily edited

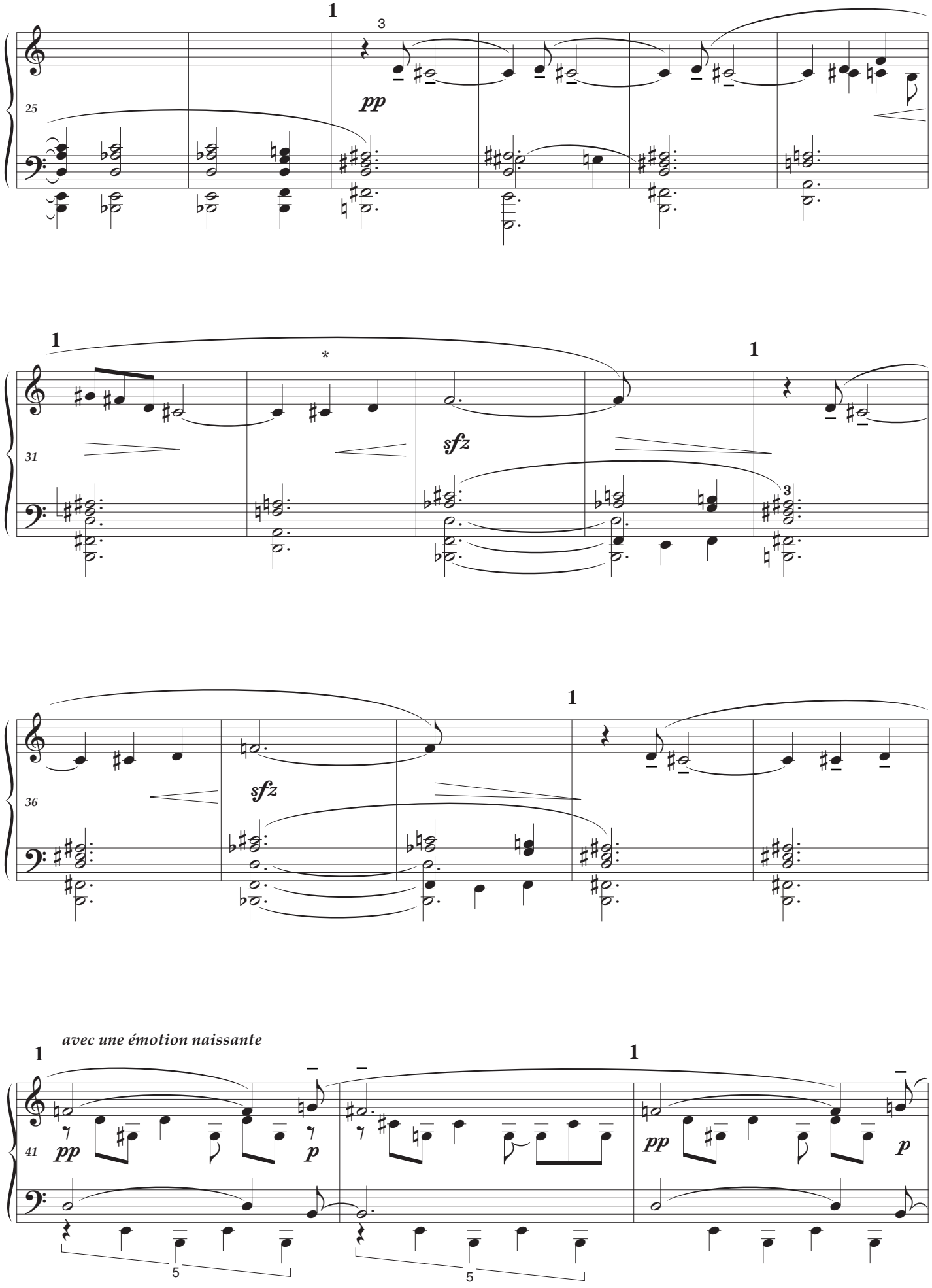
119-132 modifications and additions to the bass

125 editorial alto octave

VERS la FLAMME

POÈME

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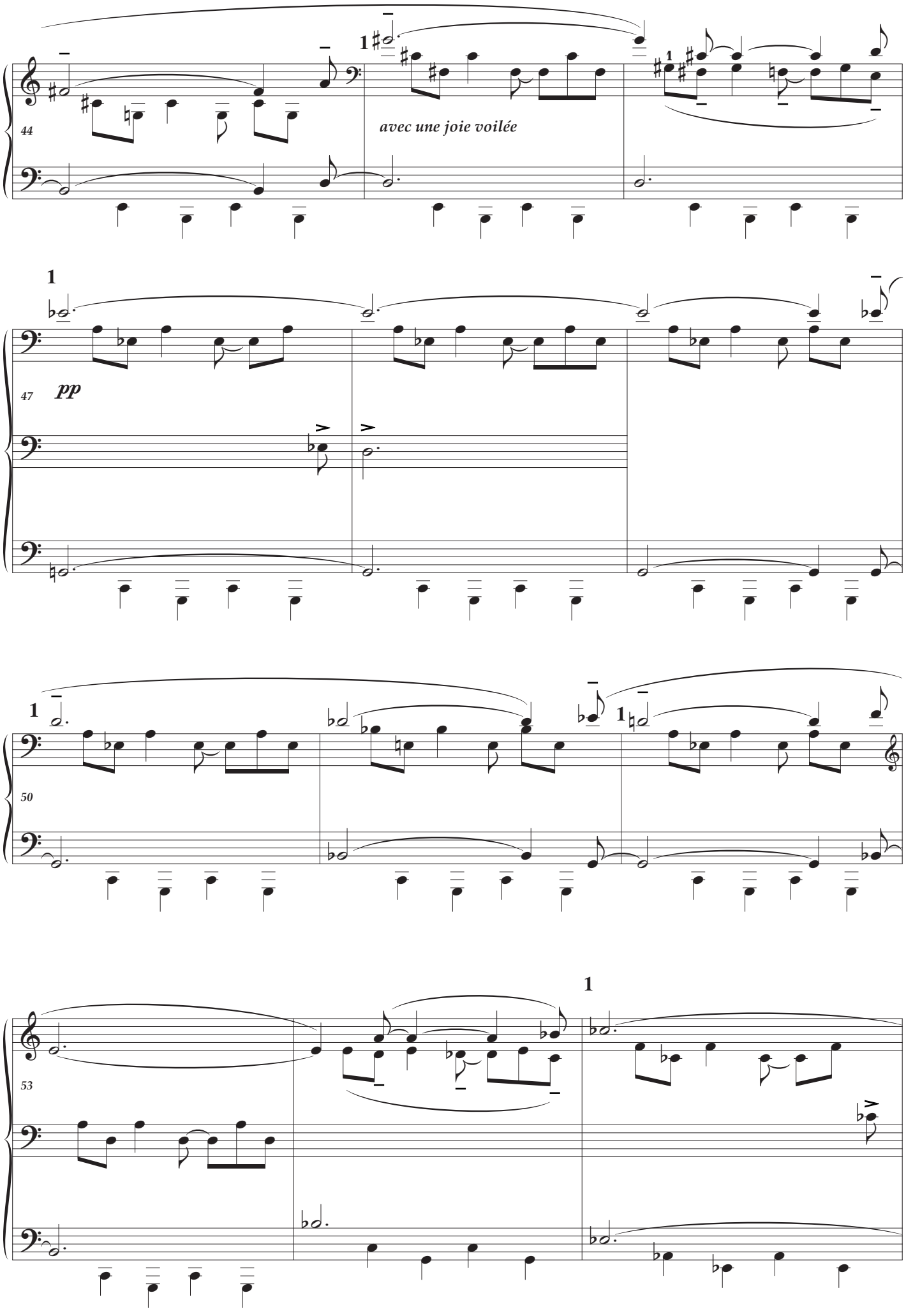
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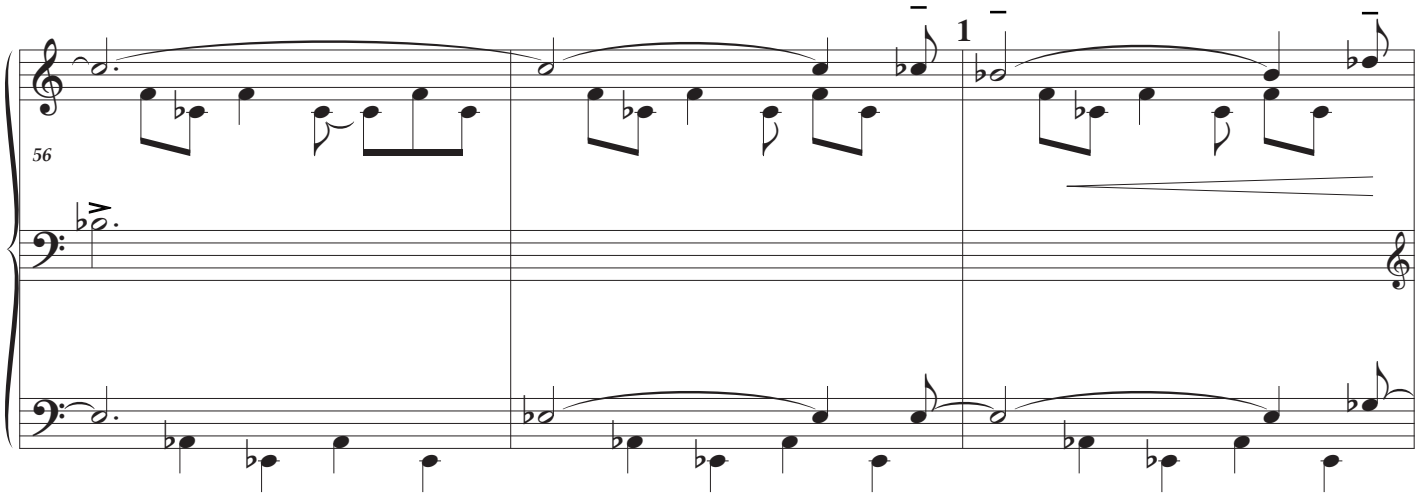
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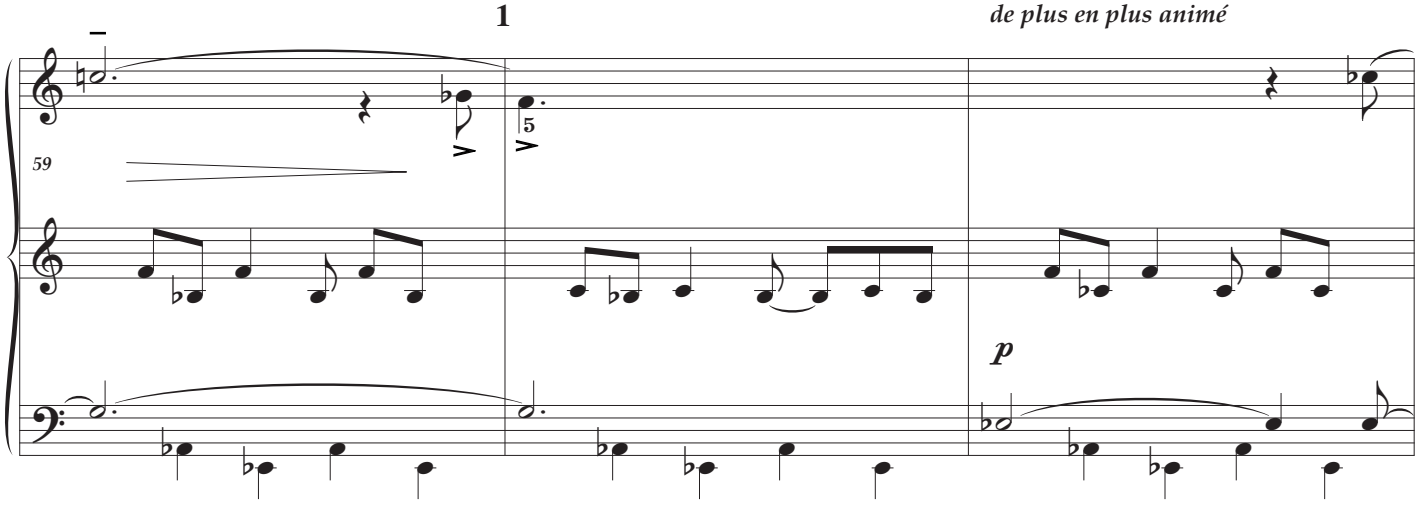
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de plus en plus animé
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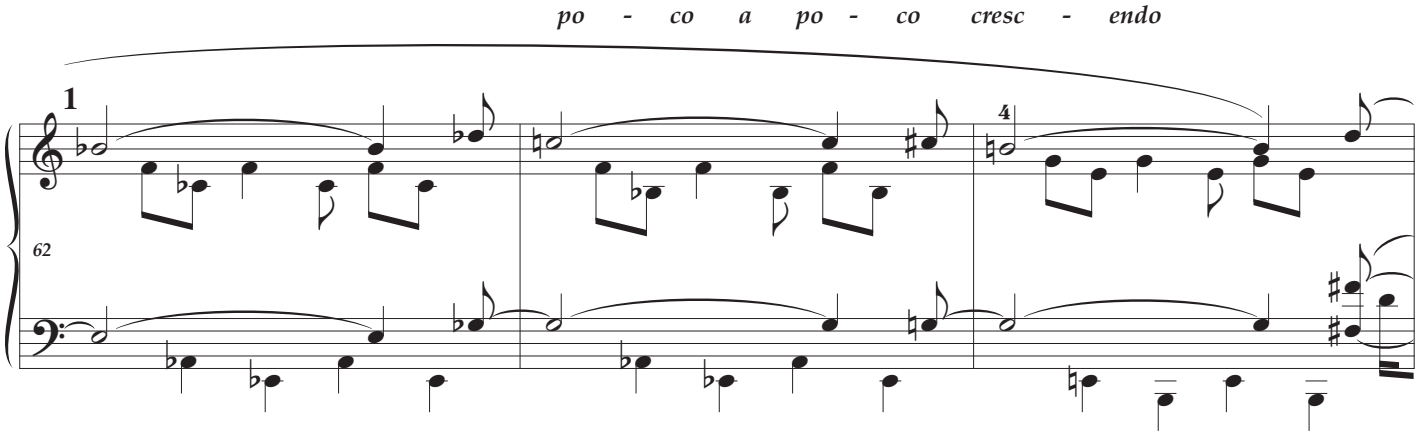
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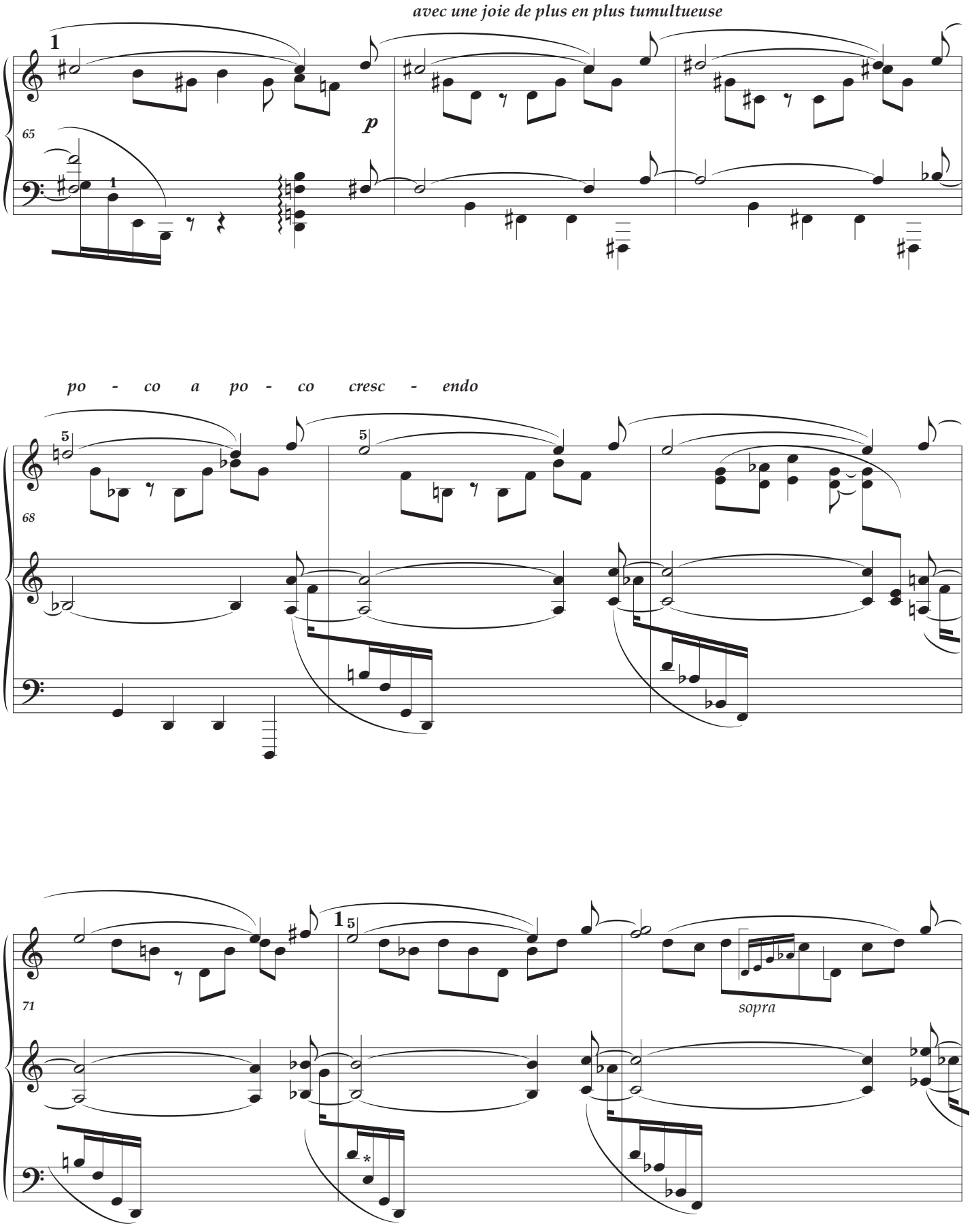
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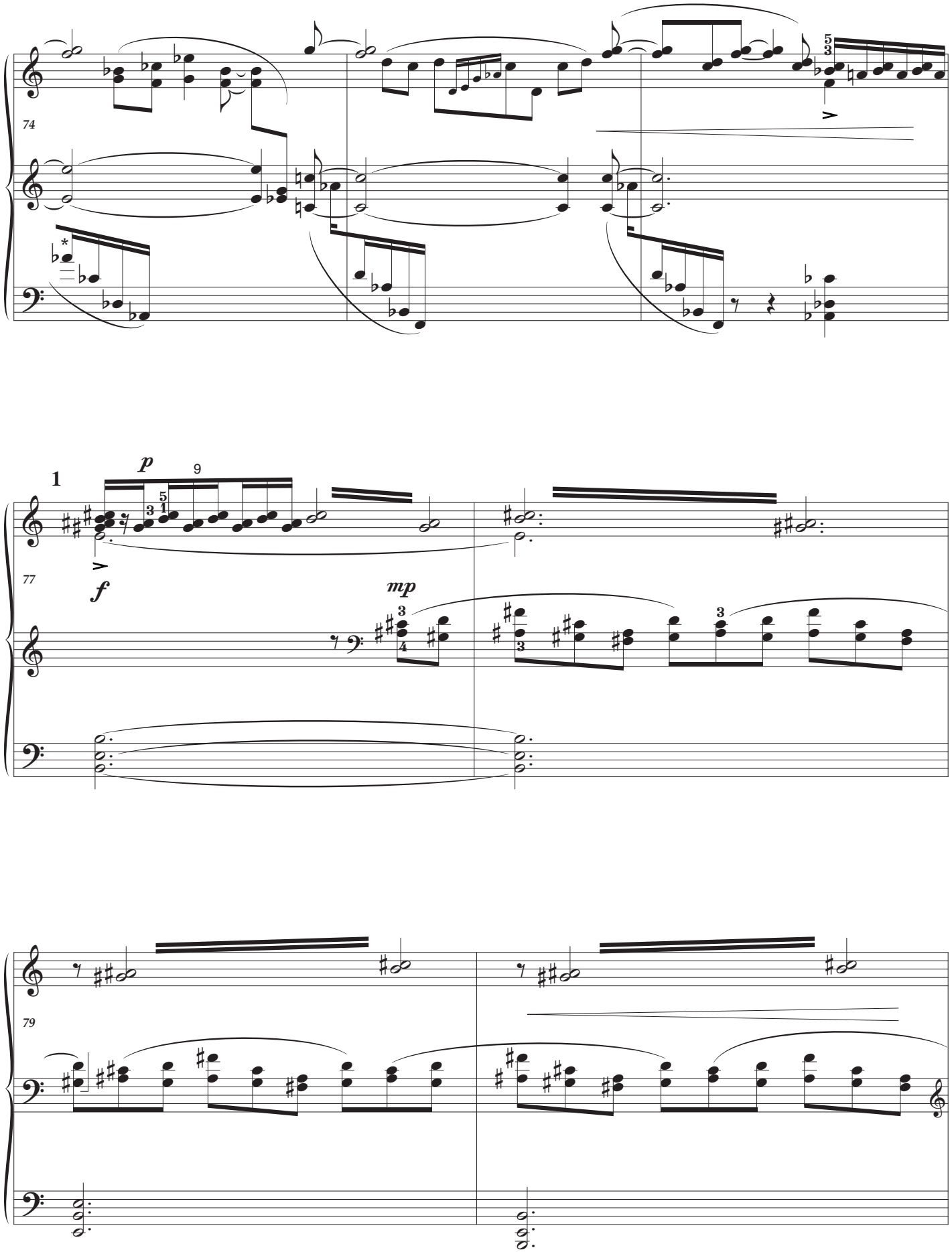
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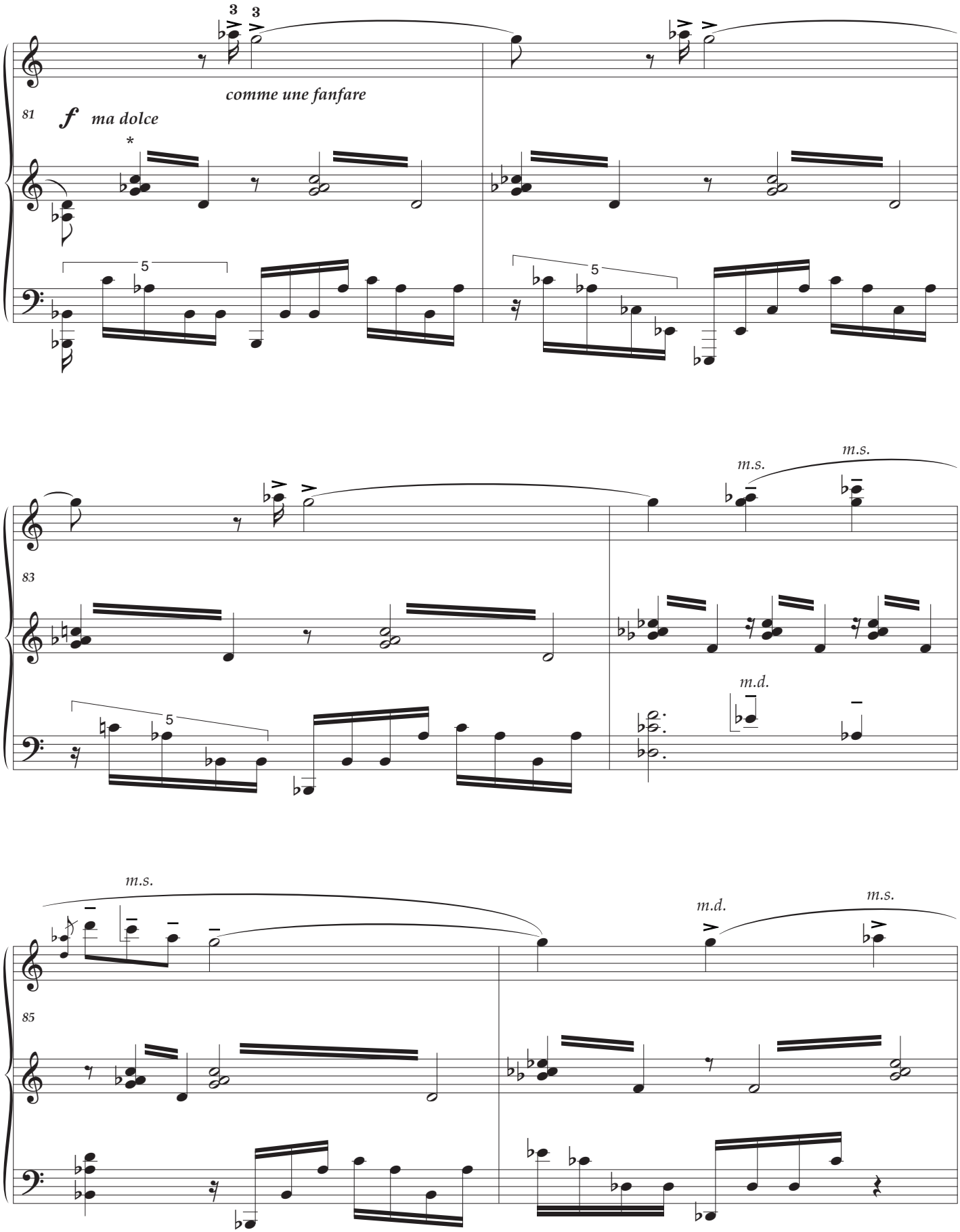
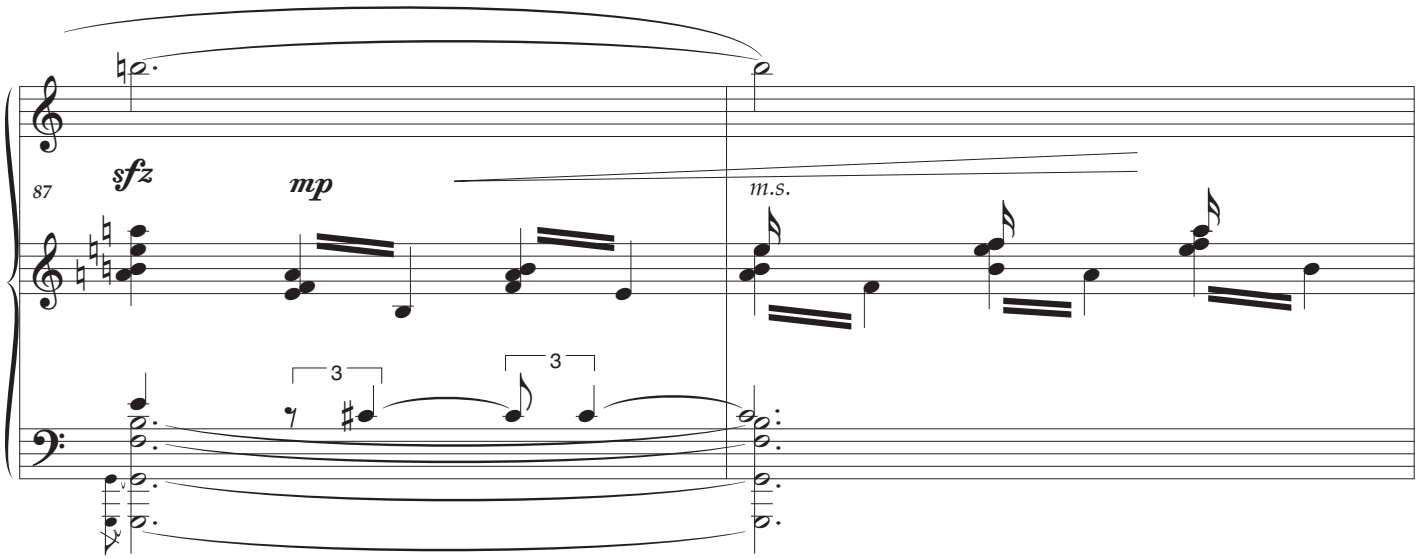
éclatant, lumineux

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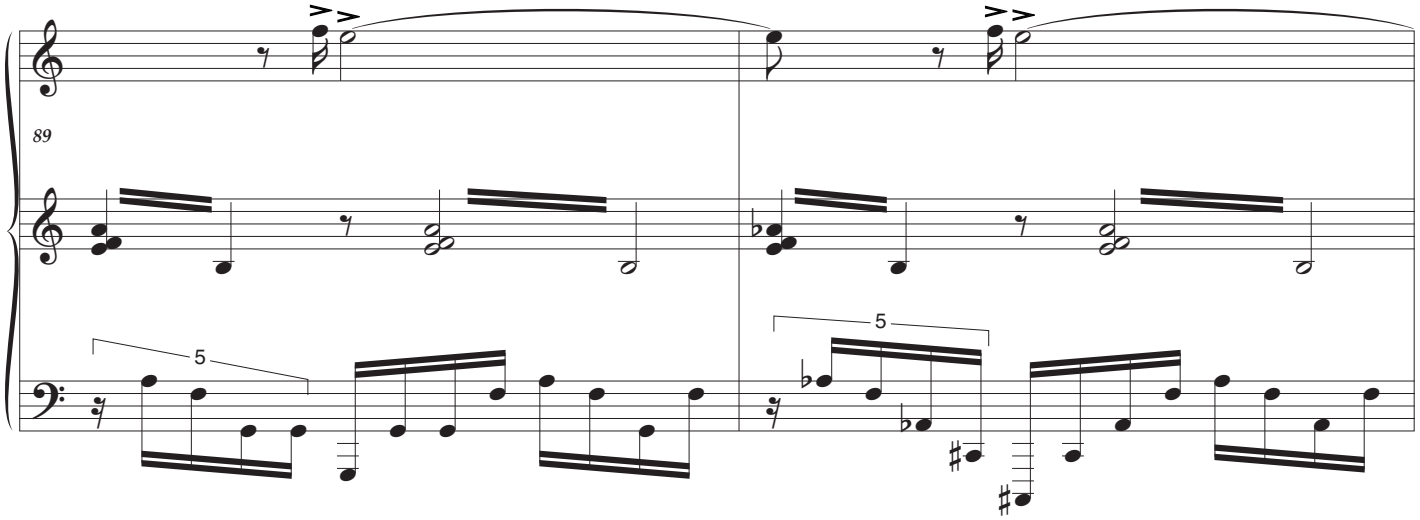
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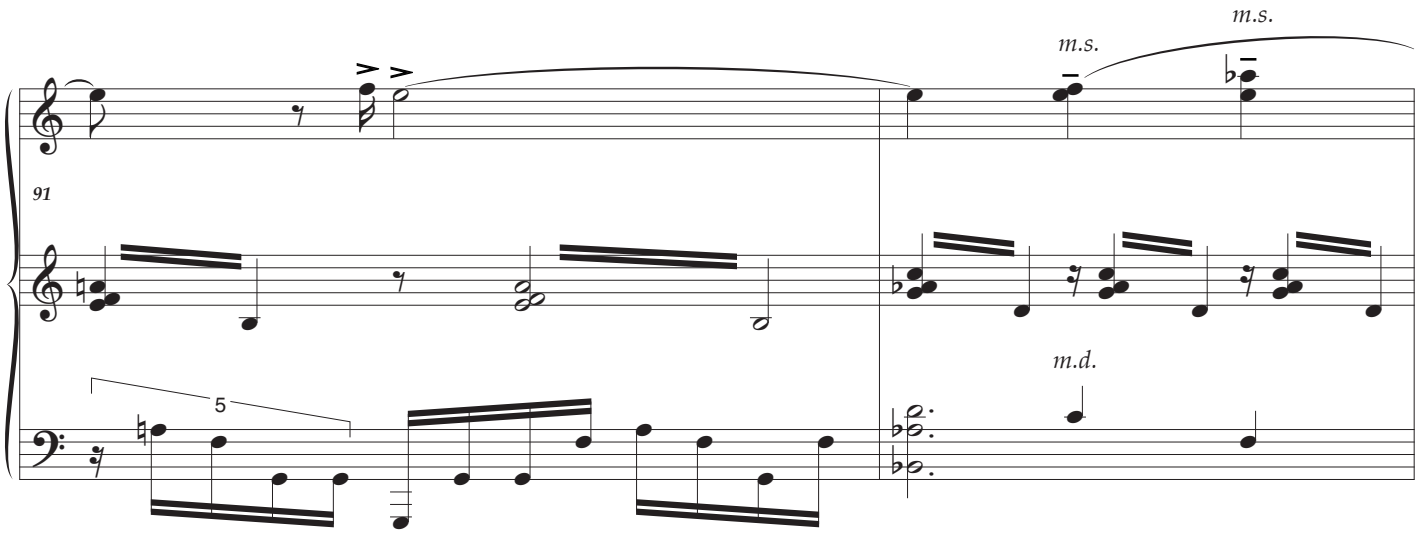
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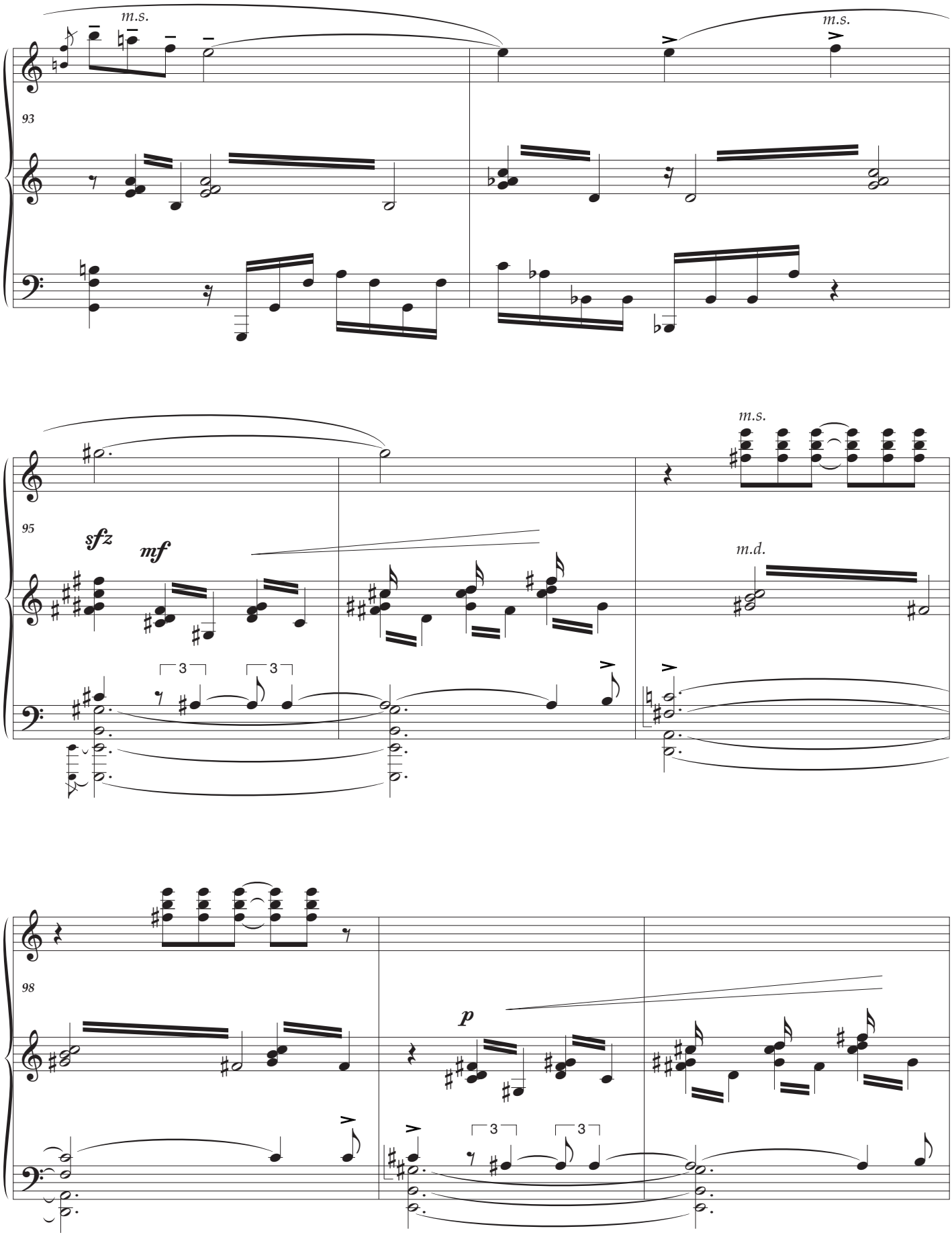
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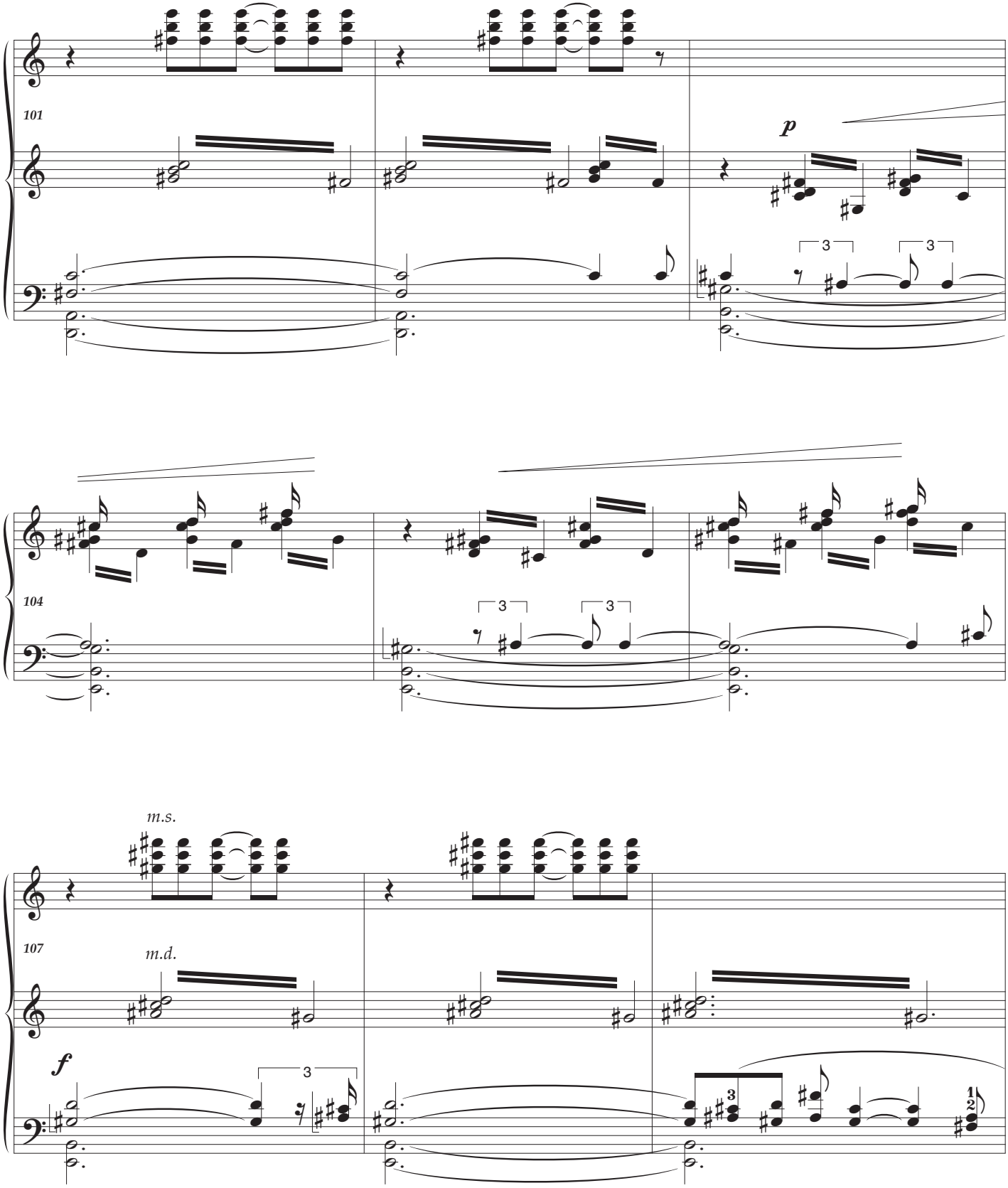
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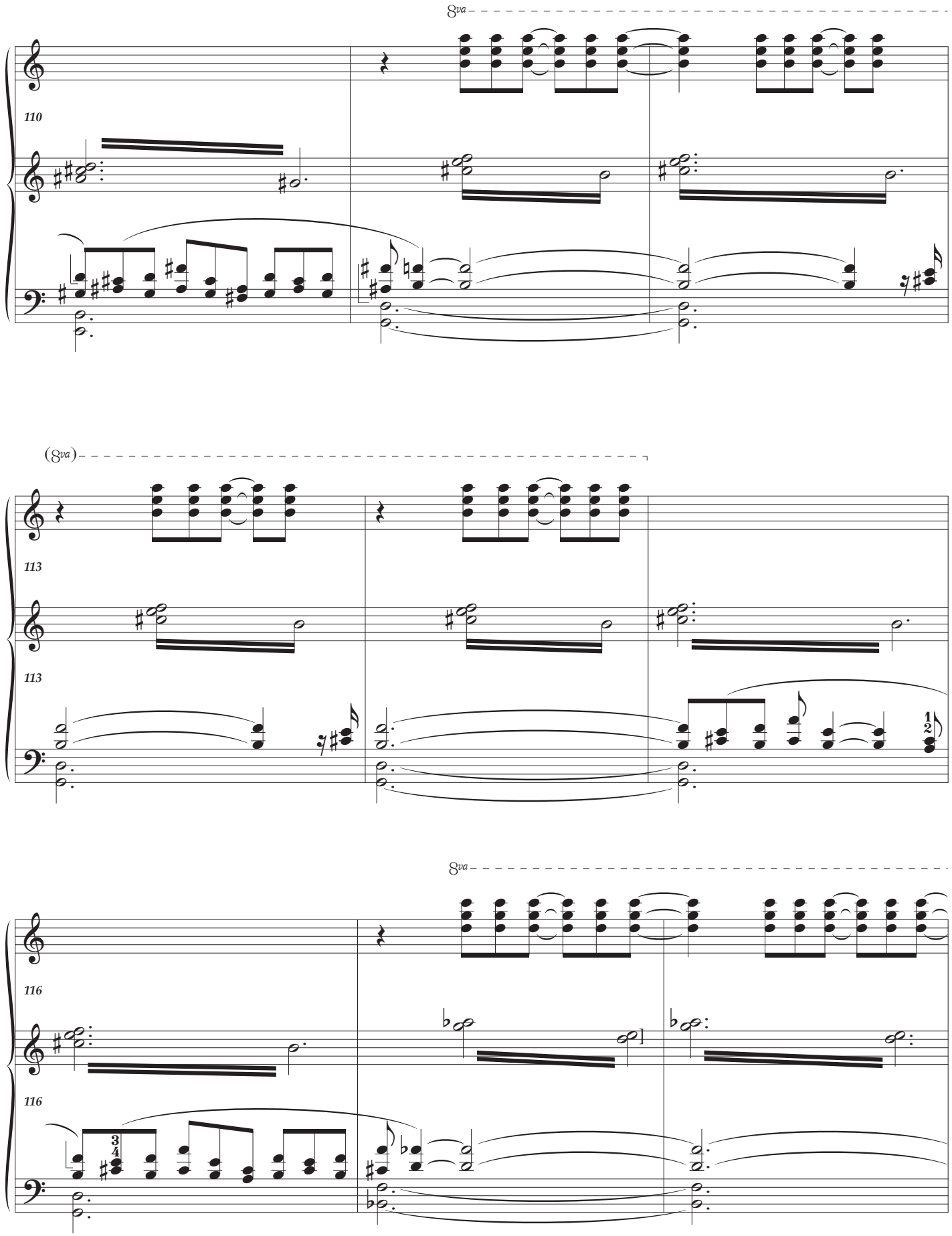
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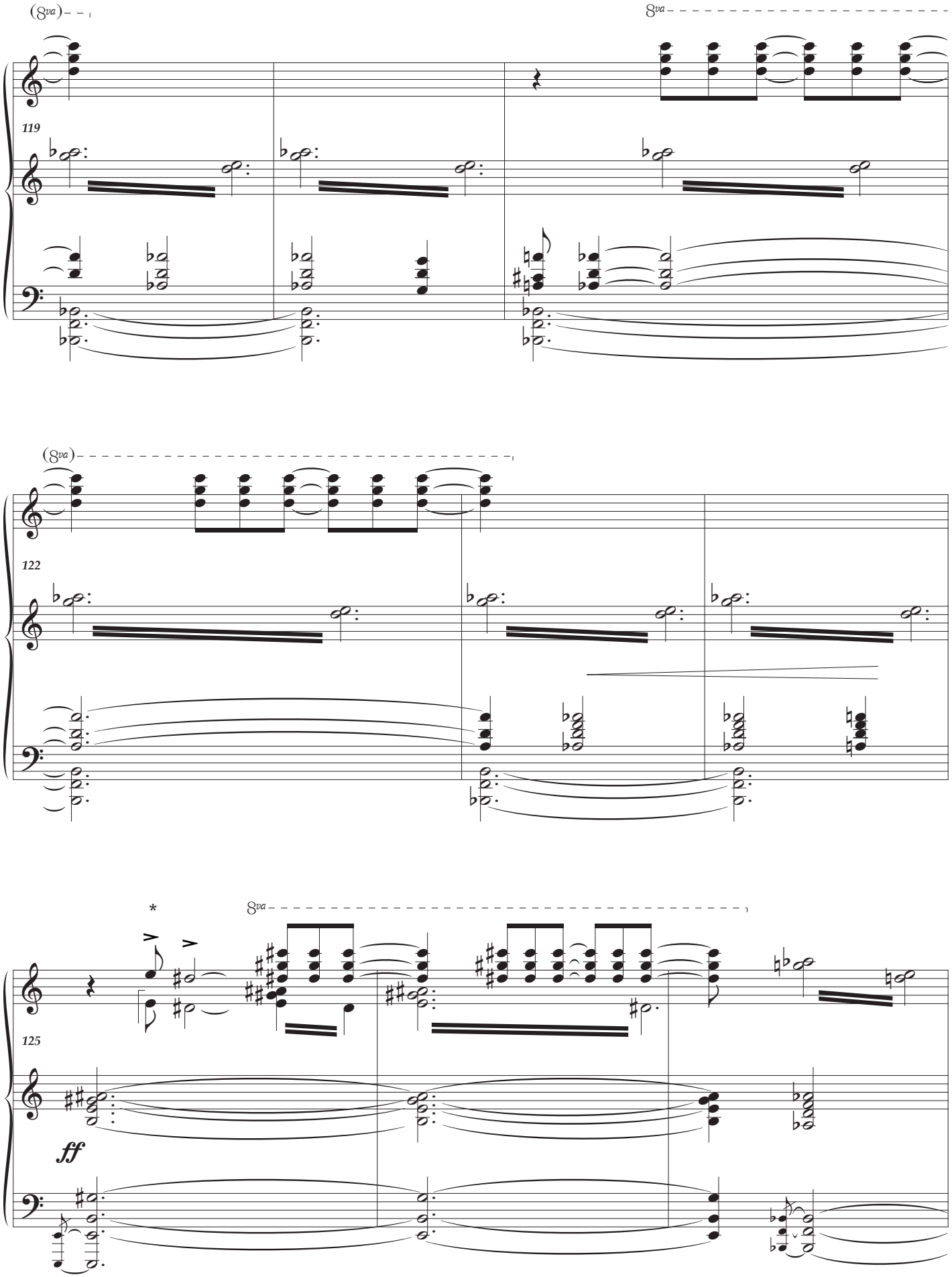
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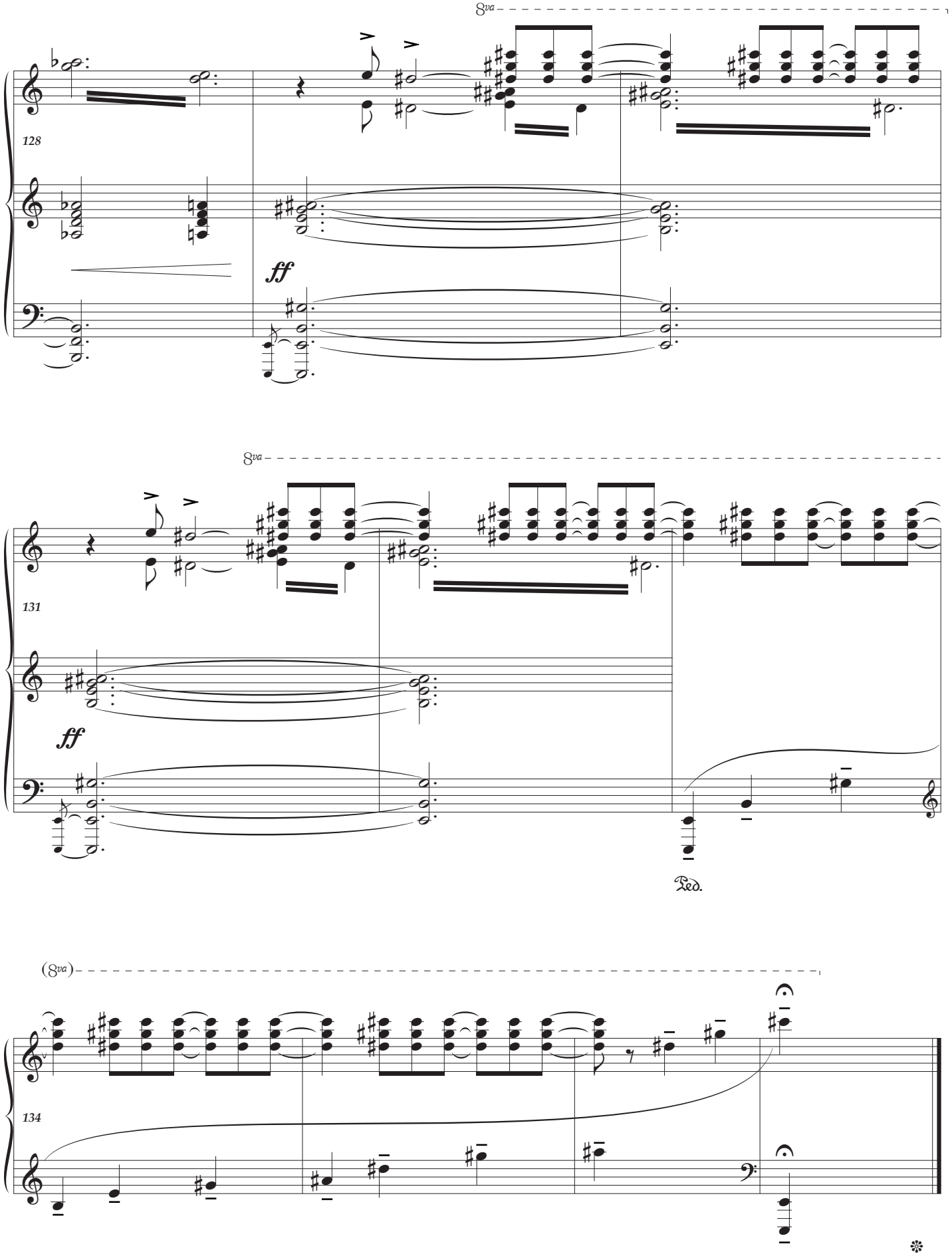
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S C R I A B I N

V E R S l a F L A M M E

Opus 72

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