The Family Piano

for solo piano

John Kennedy

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The Family Piano

It has been about three years since Sarah Cahill asked me for a piano piece related to my experiences of parenting – and of course, being a parent of small children, it has taken me longer than hoped to finish this.

There is in contemporary parenting the much-talked-about practice of sharing a "family bed" with young children. In my home, which I share with Wife/Mom Rozie and daughters Jasmine and Jade, another focal place for family togetherness is the piano. Both our real piano, and my synth attached to the computer, are magnets to our two girls. I am grateful that notation softwares have pretty reliable "un-do" and backup features for a Dad who leaves scores open on the desktop.

On the other hand, sometimes what the kids bestow upon my scores has pleasant surprises – when Jasmine was 5, she made a variation on a melodic line in my opera *The Language of Birds* with a fantastic turn – which I am proud to use. And to honor that, I have had both Jasmine and Jade record their improvisations into the computer since they were a few months old. It is from their pieces that *The Family Piano* draws almost all its raw material, which I have manipulated and formed into something of my own, but which comes from the bed of their material.

The piano is to a small child almost like a drum with many pitches, but it also becomes a great playground to explore all manner of musical elements, physical and digital (finger) possibility, and emotional waves and changes. The uninhibited instincts of children find music that study and technique cannot. Taking their chance operations, one gets some good stuff which could be mistaken for high modernism: the small intervals and cluster chords made by little fingers, rhythmic variation and angularity deriving from an unsteady and hiccupped pulse, and an intense drive to make variation upon what one just did. *The Family Piano* is not a collage of this, but takes as its form structures and elements derived from patterns found in this early musical impulse. I know there is something Cagean here – manipulating non-intention along the lines of laws found in the raw material – but there is also the element of giving permanent form to the will and spirit of little people making spontaneous music.

With gratitude to Jasmine and Jade.

– John Kennedy
November, 2004

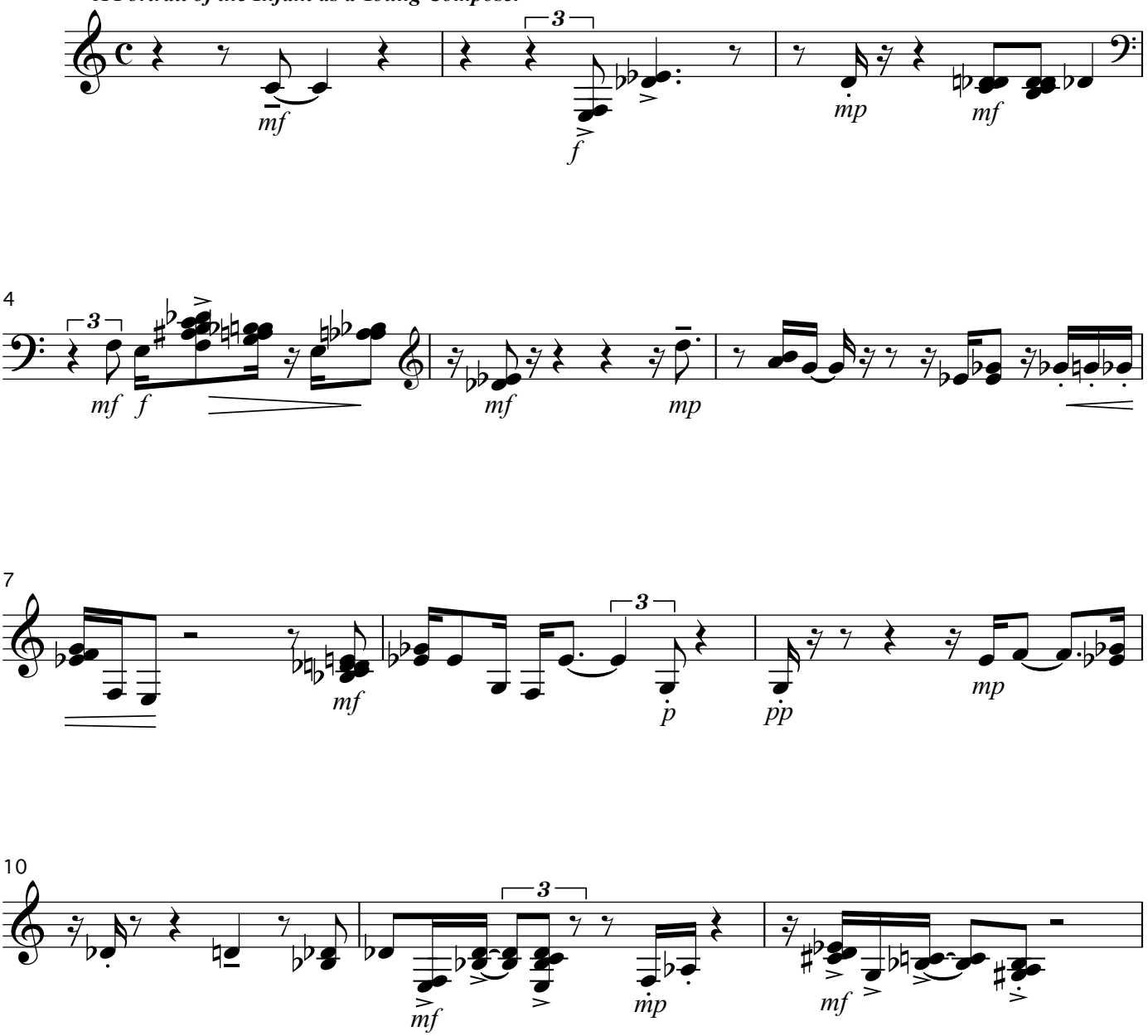
The Family Piano

for Sarah Cahill

John Kennedy

Moderato ♩ = 90

A Portrait of the Infant as a Young Composer



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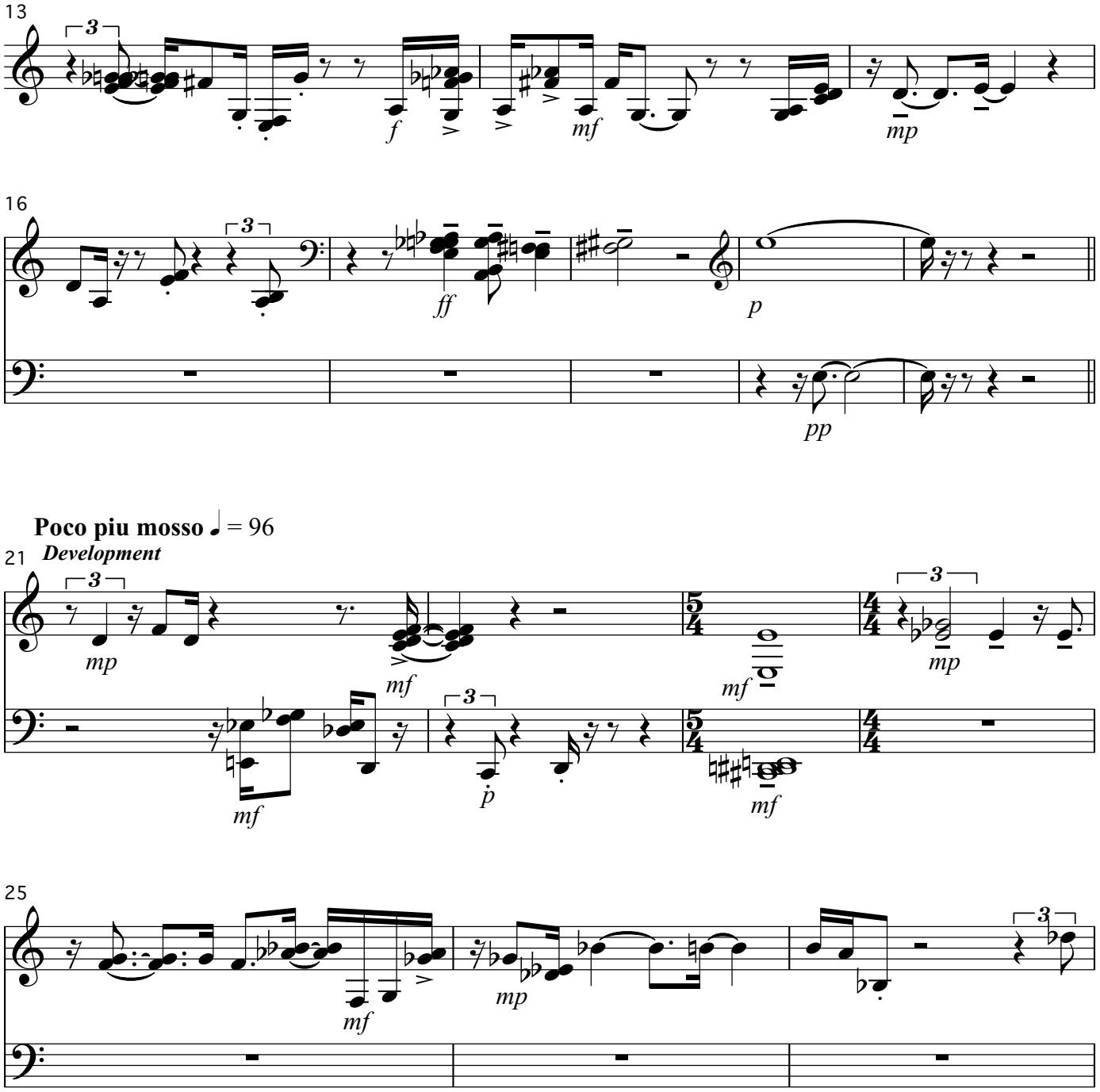
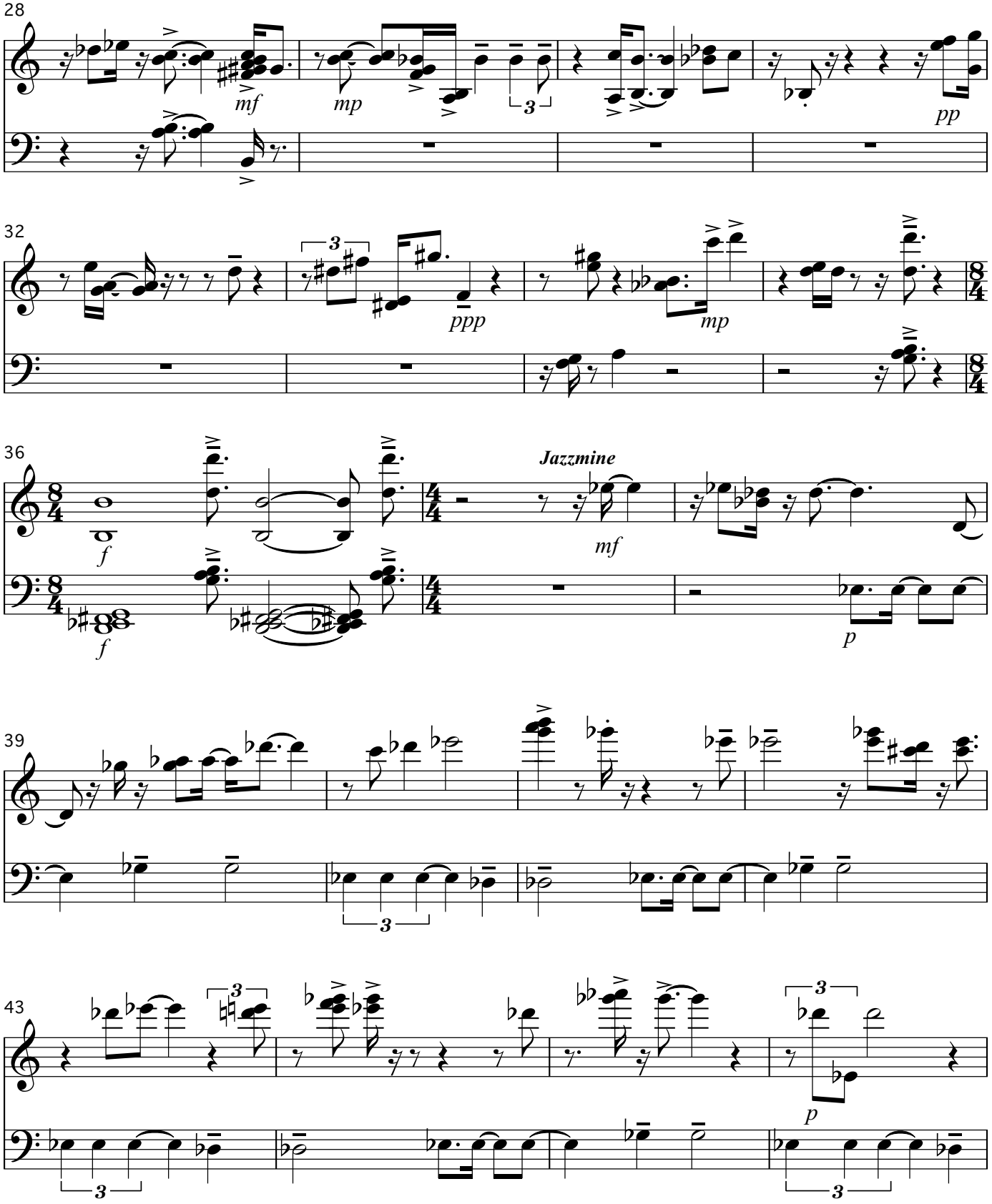
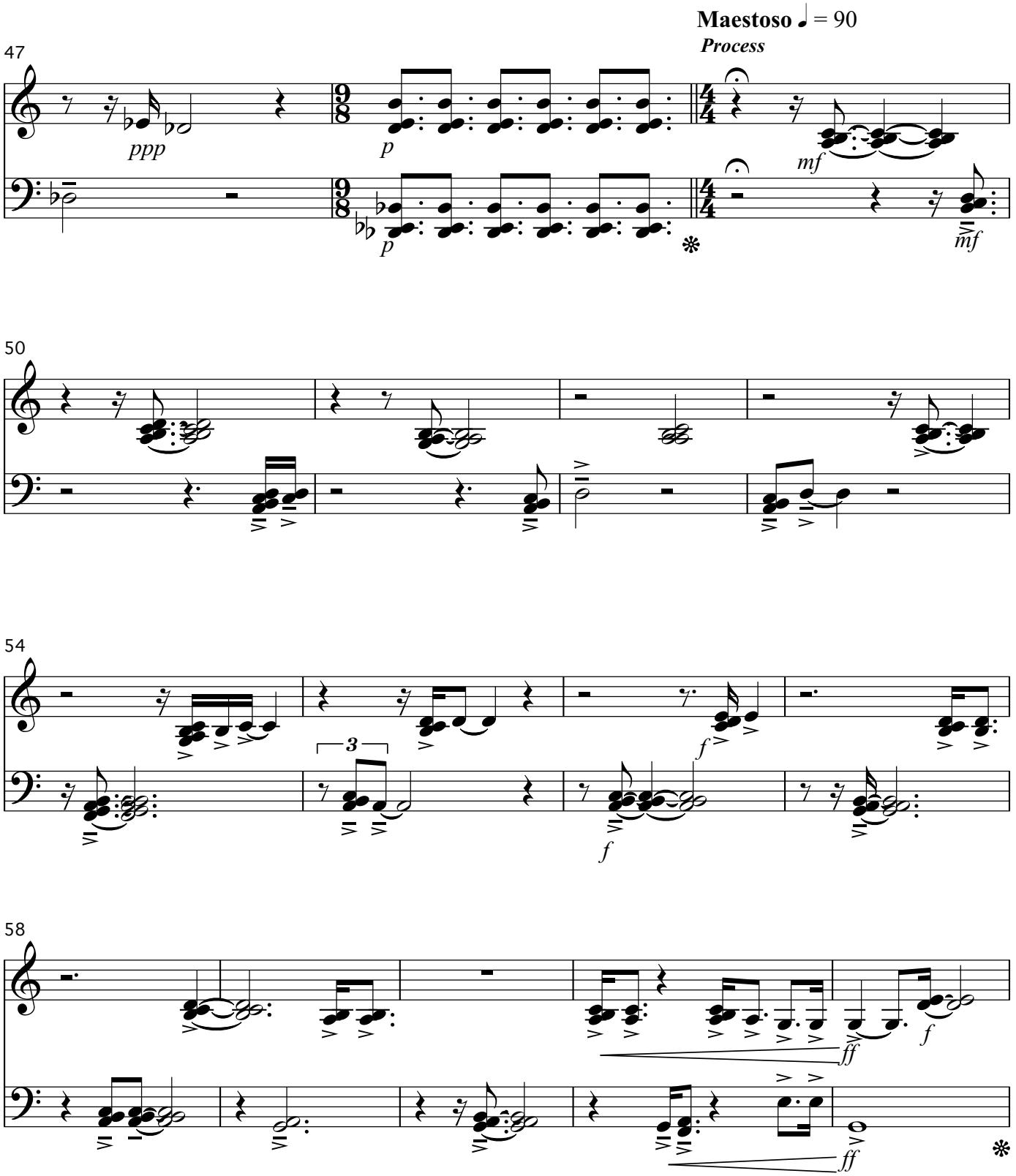
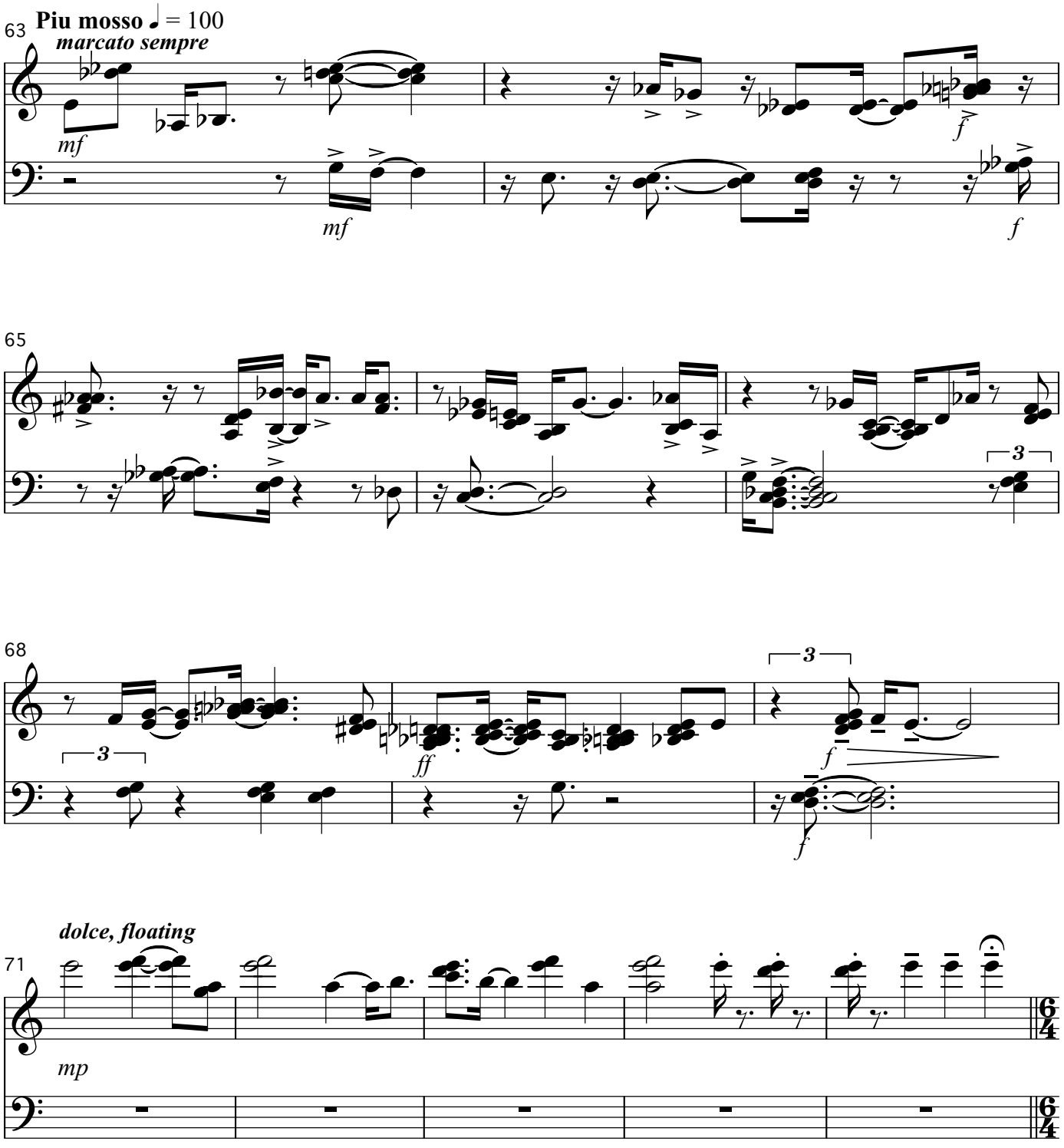
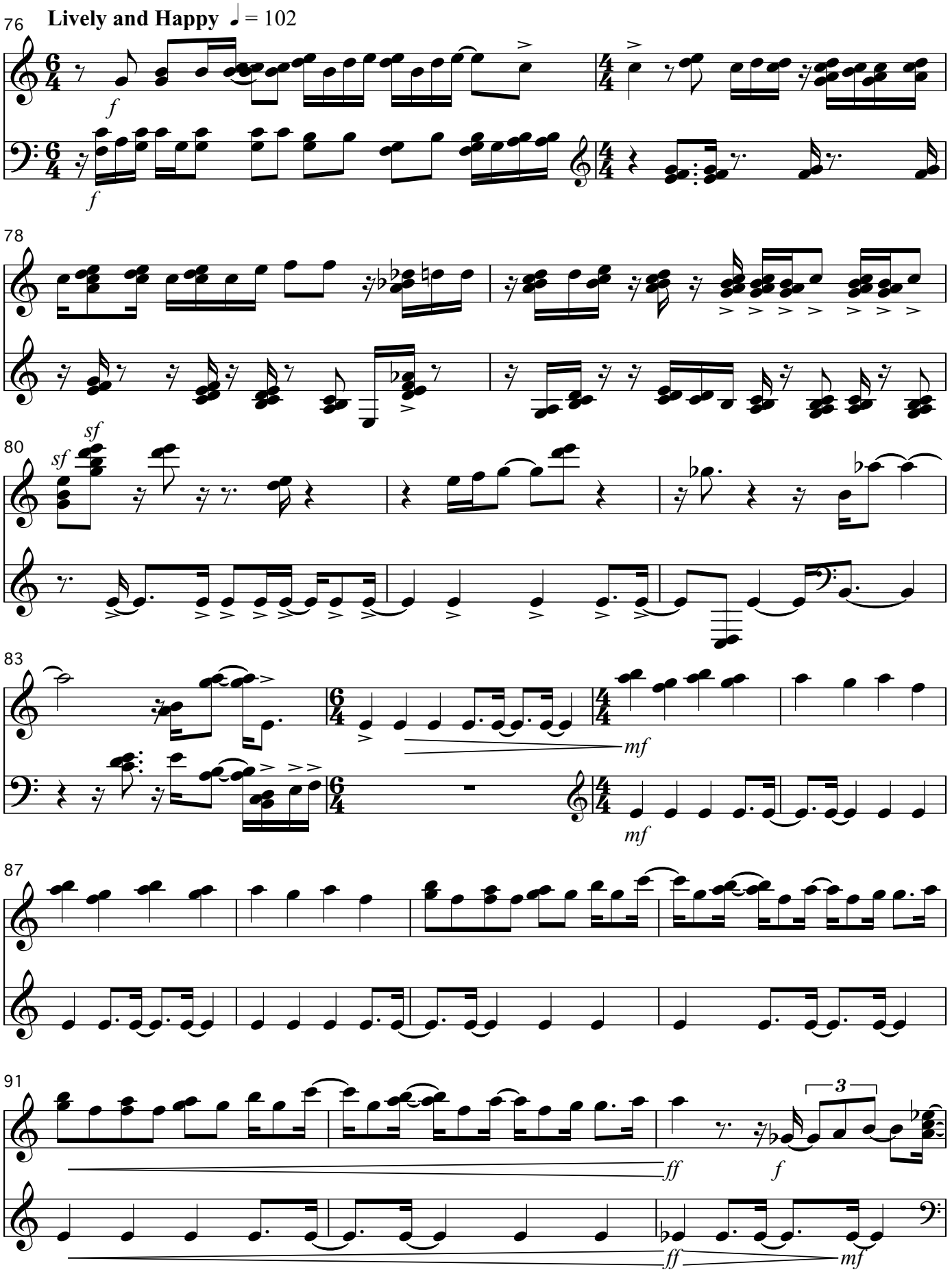
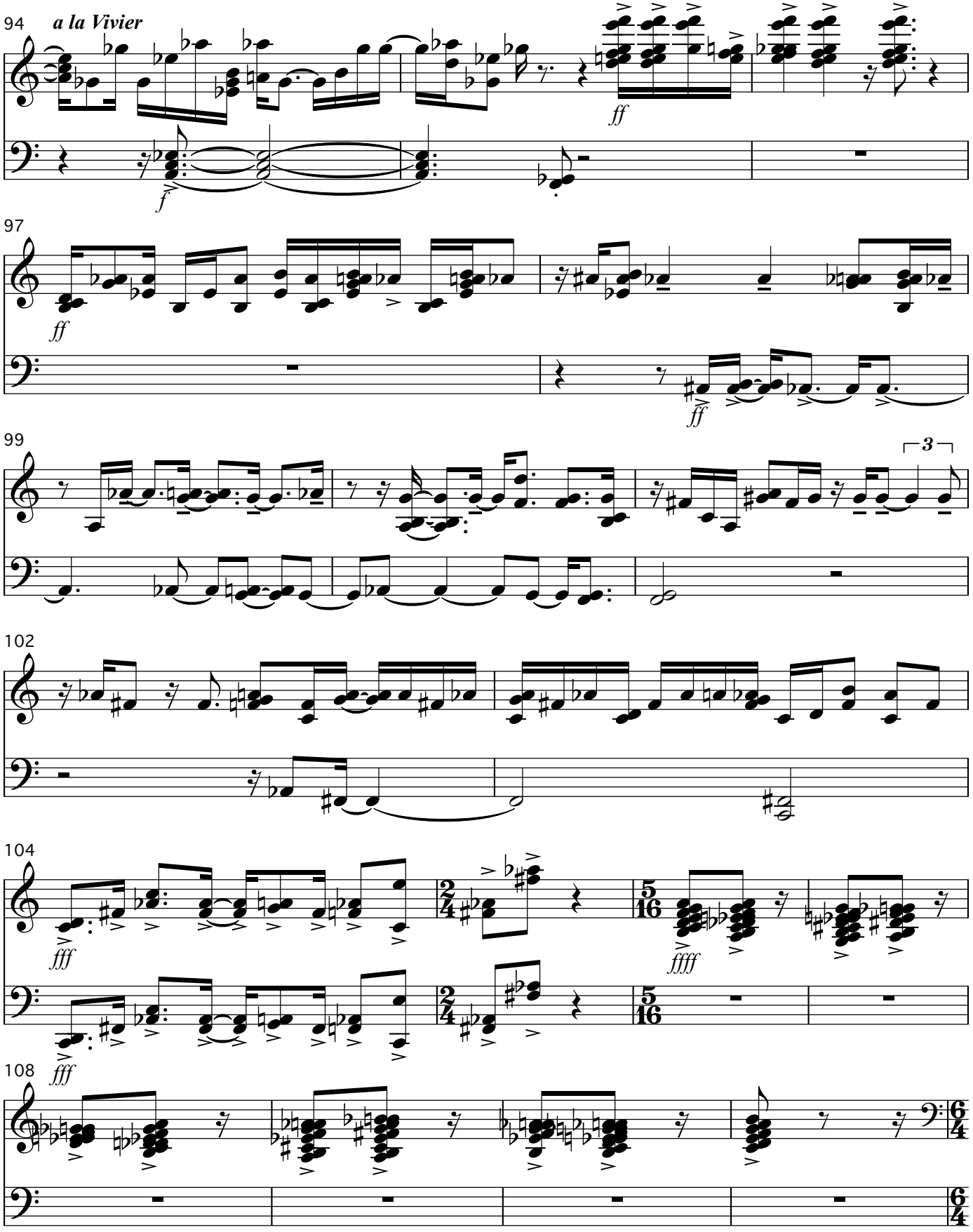

13
16
Poco piu mosso ♩ = 96
Development
21
25

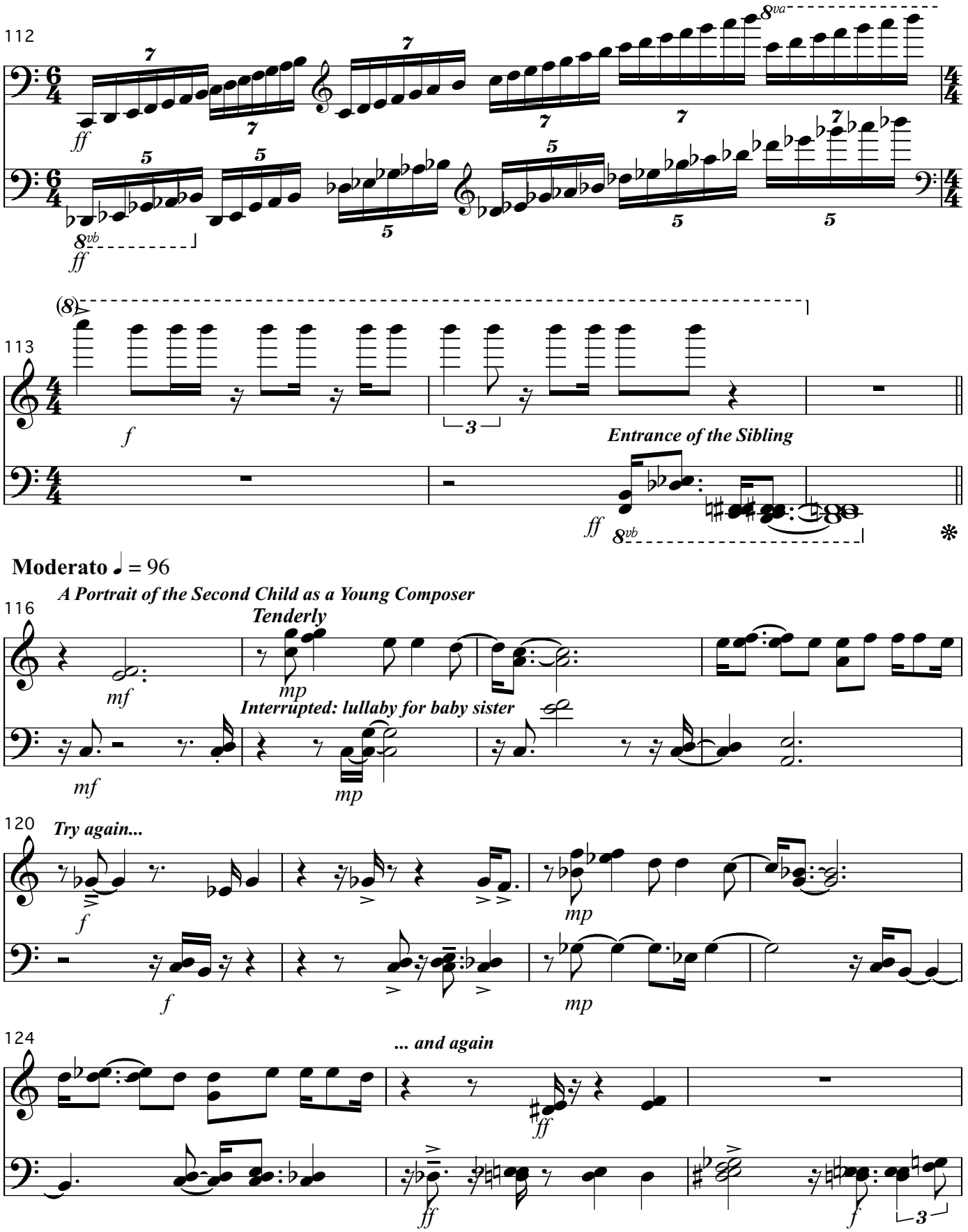

28
mf
mp
3
pp
32
3
ppp
mp
36
f
Jazzmine
mf
f
p
39
3
43
3
p
3
3

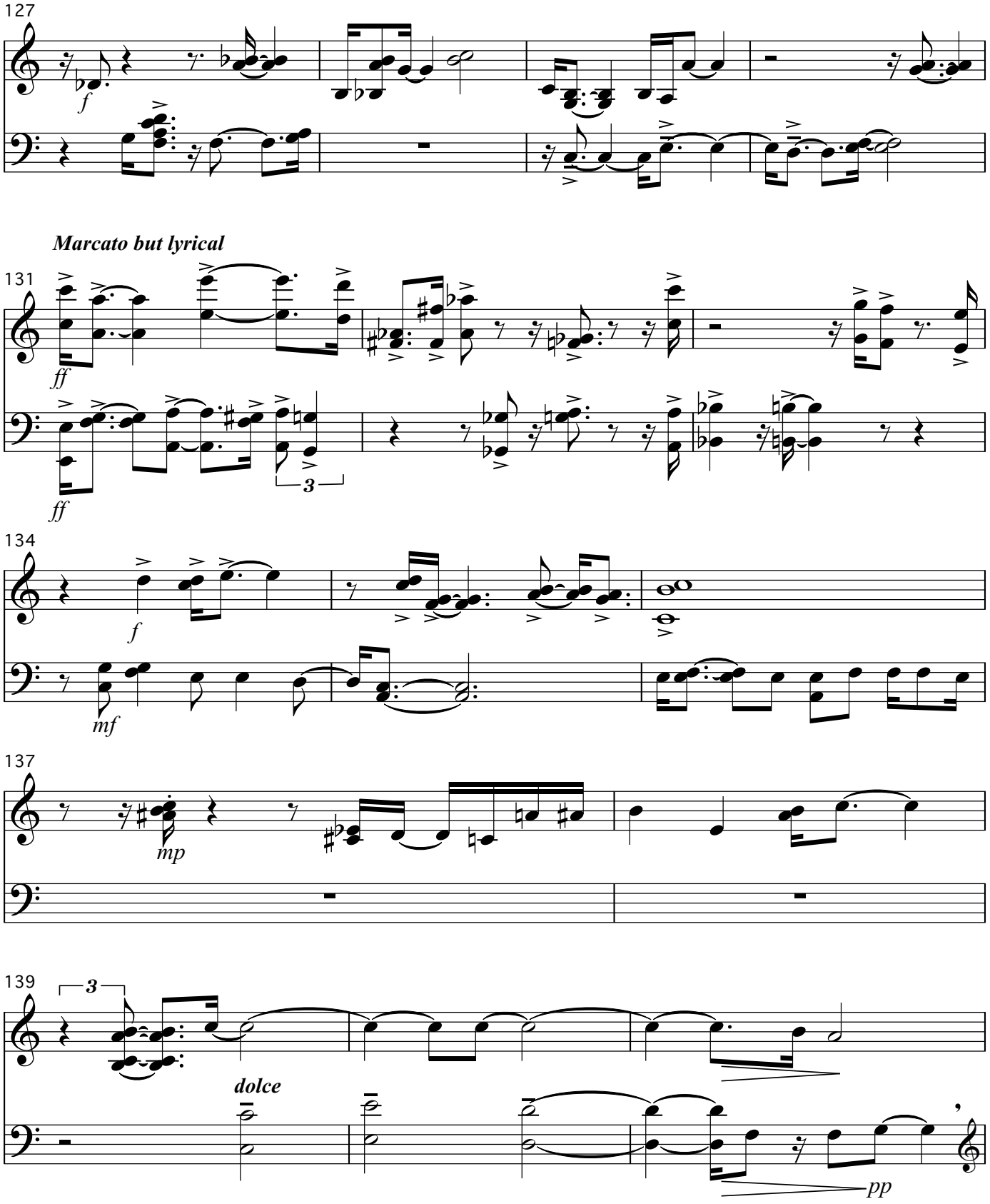

Maestoso ♩ = 90
Process
47
ppp
p
mf
50
54
3
f
58
ff

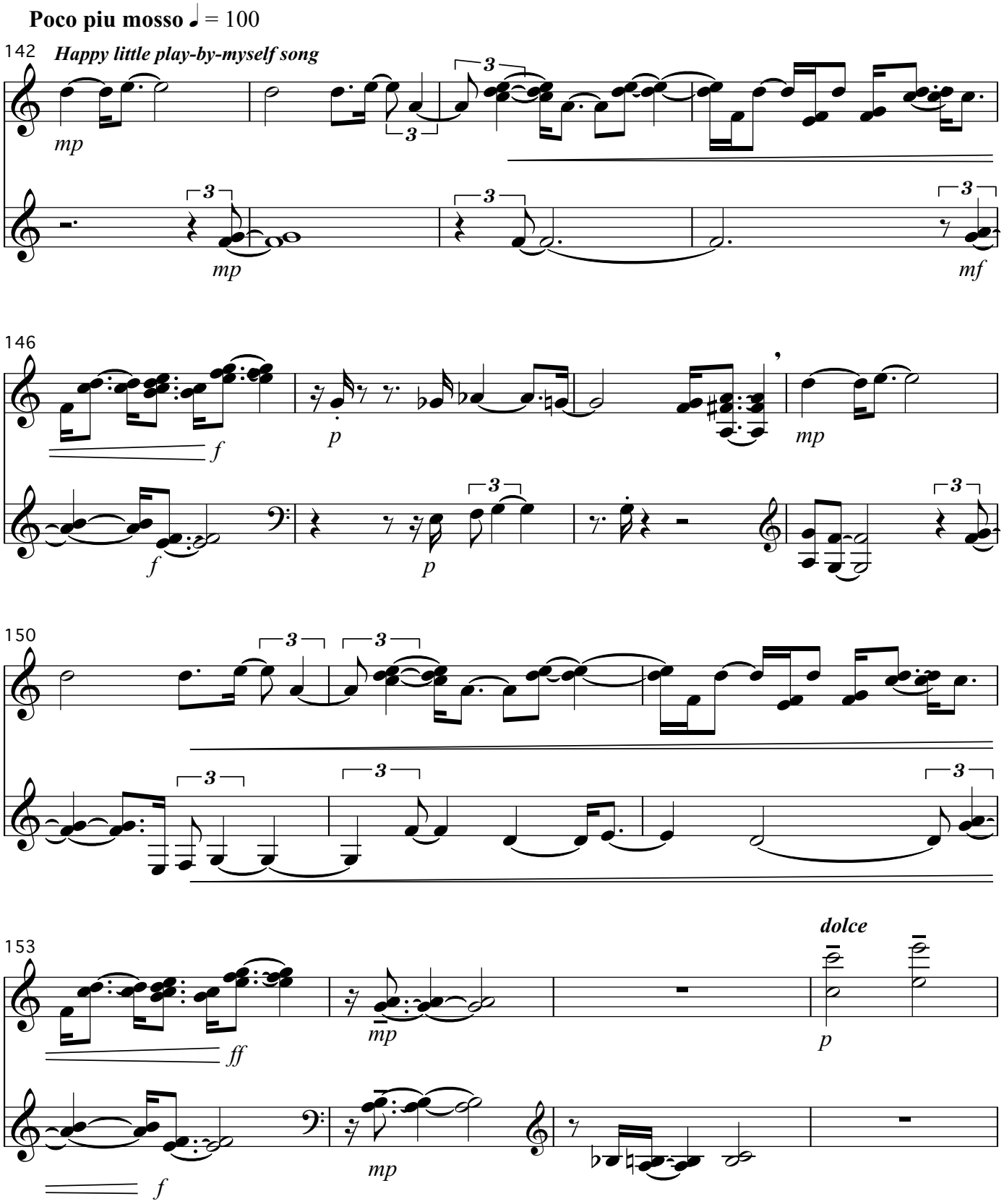

63
Piu mosso ♩ = 100
marcato sempre
mf
mf
f
f
65
3
68
3
ff
3
f
f
dolce, floating
71
mp
6/4
6/4

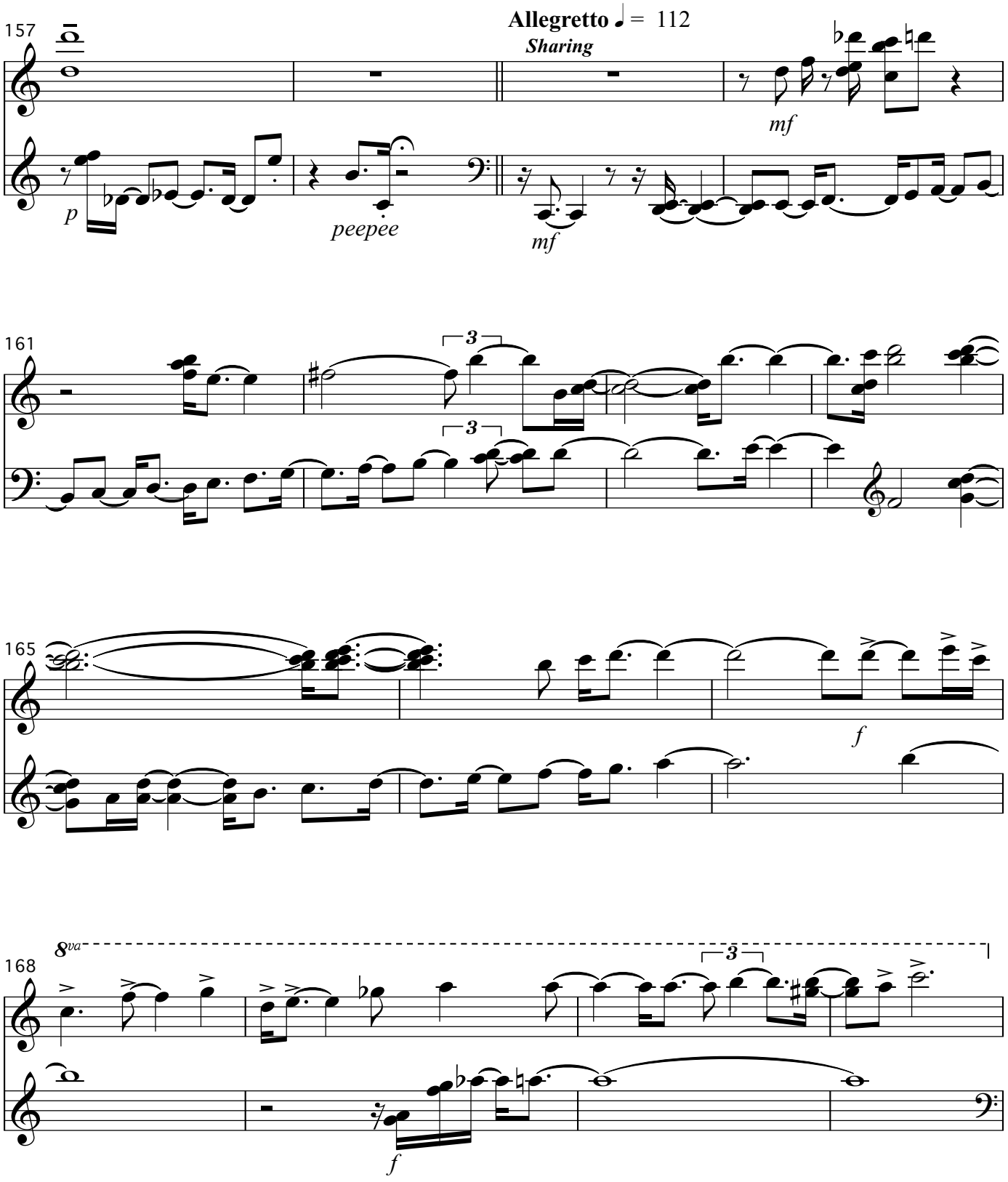

76
Lively and Happy ♩ = 102
f
f
78
sf
sf
80
83
mf
mf
87
91
3
ff
f
ff
mf

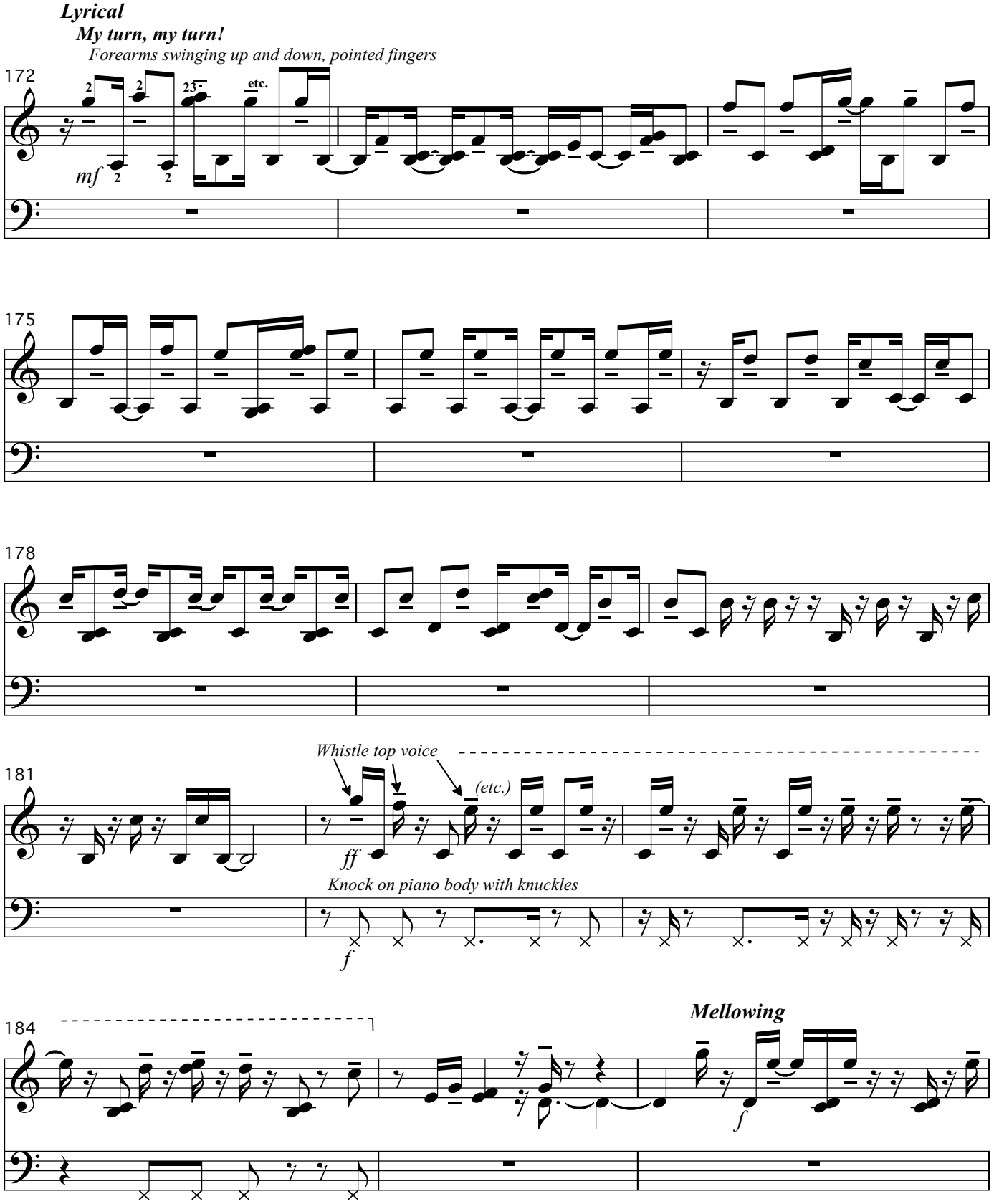

94
a la Vivier
ff
f
97
ff
ff
99
3
102
104
fff
ffff
108
fff

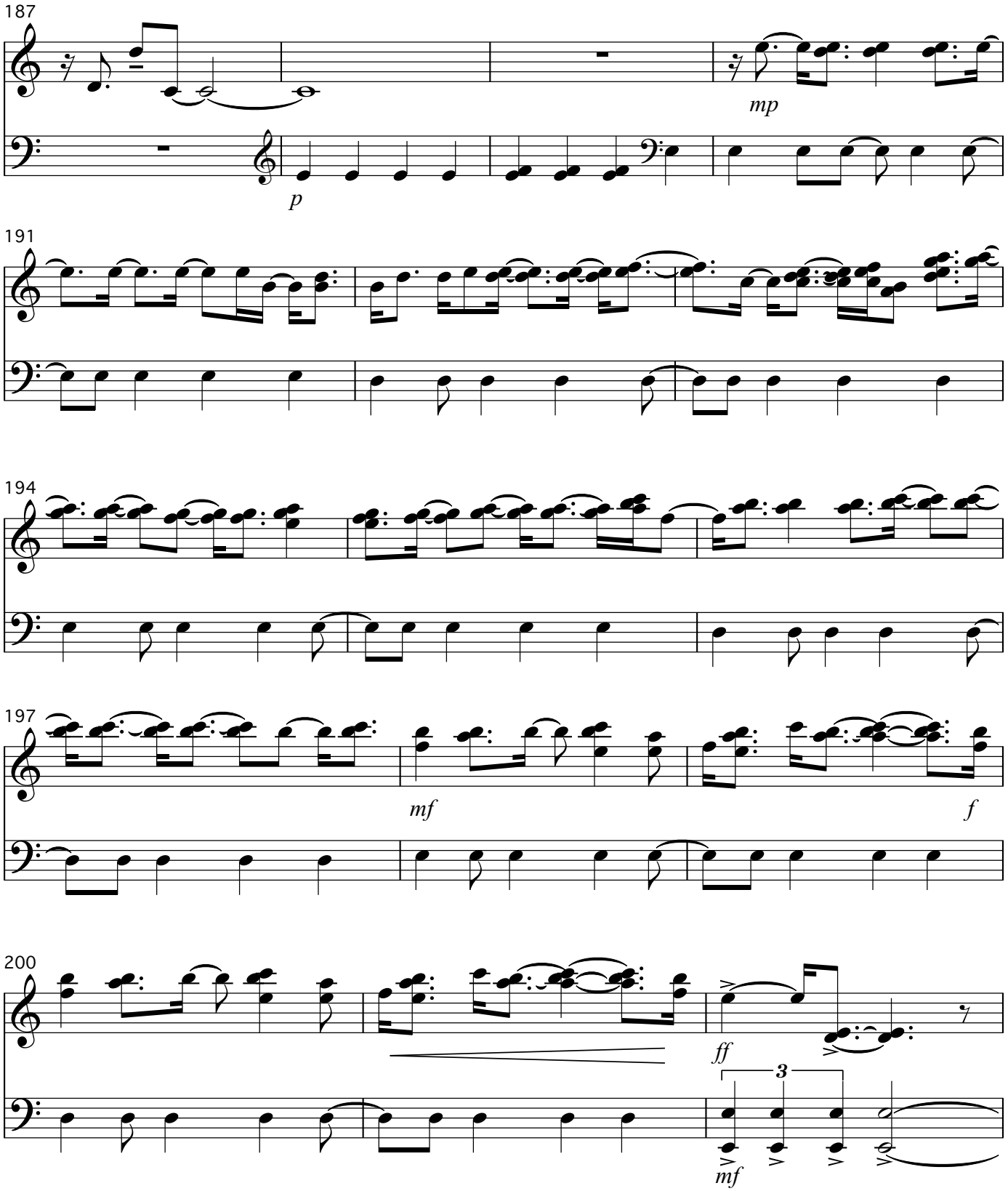

112
8va
ff
8vb
ff
(8)
113
f
3
Entrance of the Sibling
ff
8vb
Moderato ♩ = 96
A Portrait of the Second Child as a Young Composer
116
Tenderly
mf
mp
Interrupted: lullaby for baby sister
mf
mp
120
Try again...
f
mp
f
mp
124
... and again
ff
ff
f
3

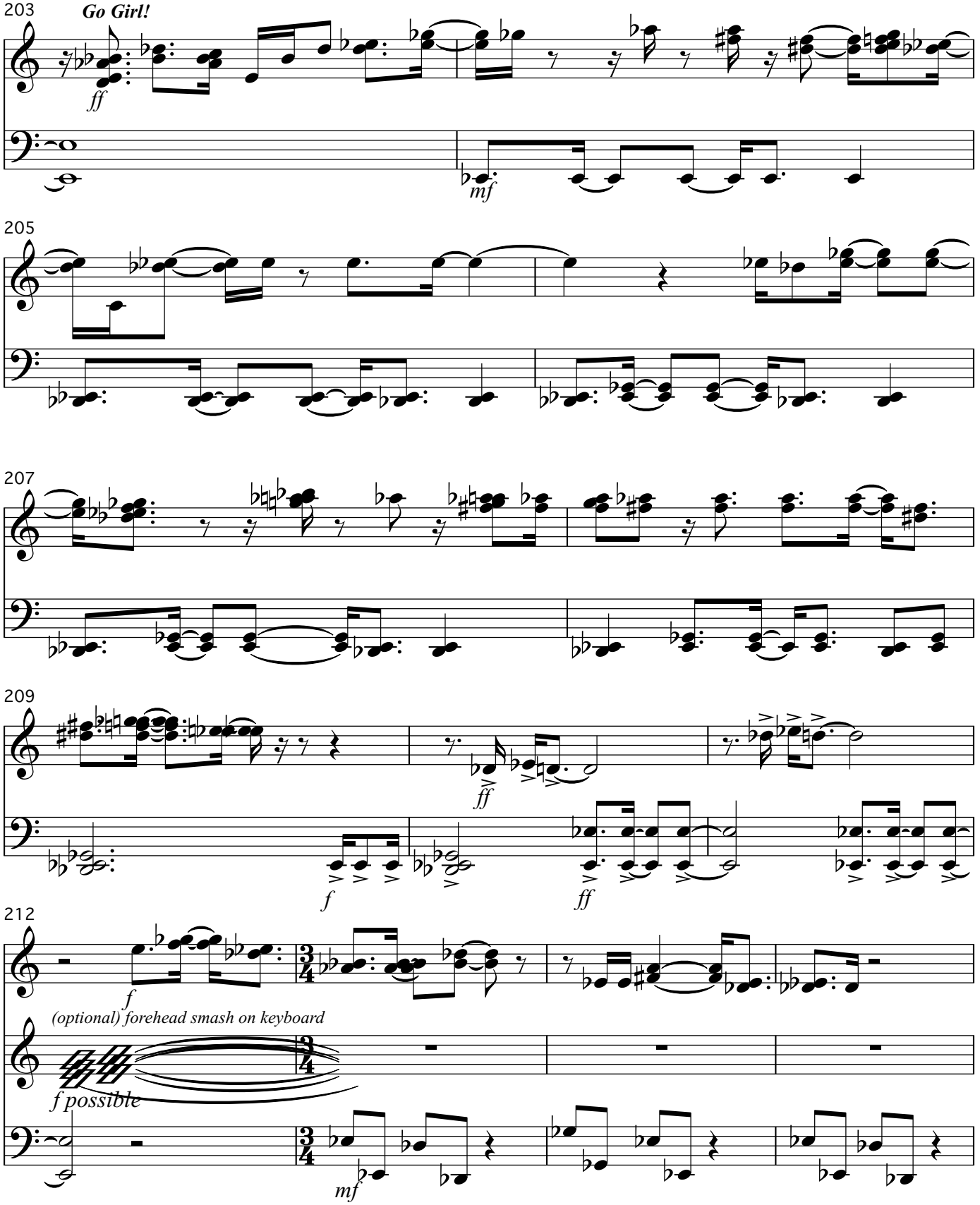

127
f
Marcato but lyrical
131
ff
ff
3
134
f
mf
137
mp
139
3
dolce
pp

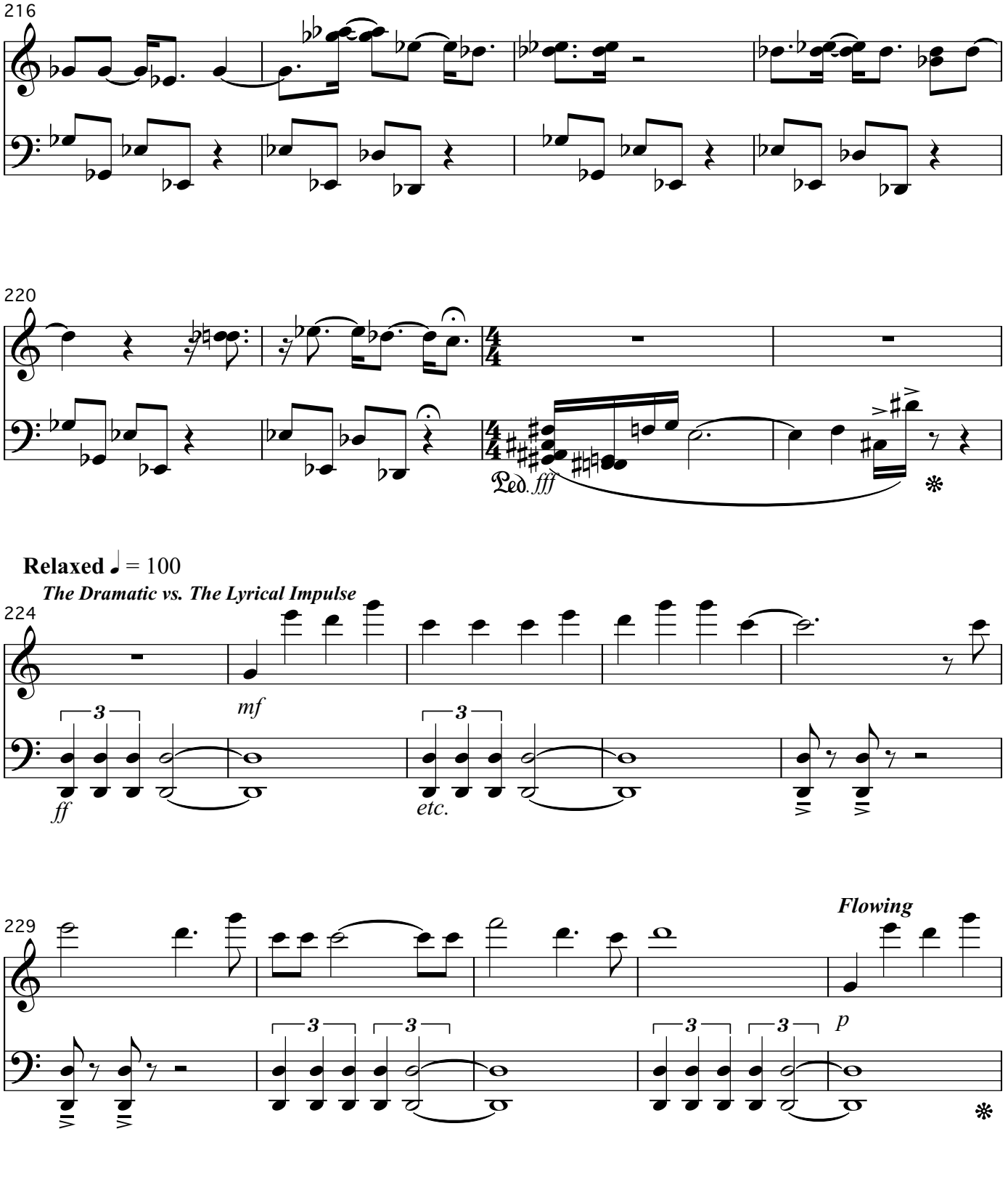

Poco piu mosso ♩ = 100
142
Happy little play-by-myself song
mp
mp
mf
146
f
p
mp
f
p
150
153
dolce
ff
mp
p
mp
f

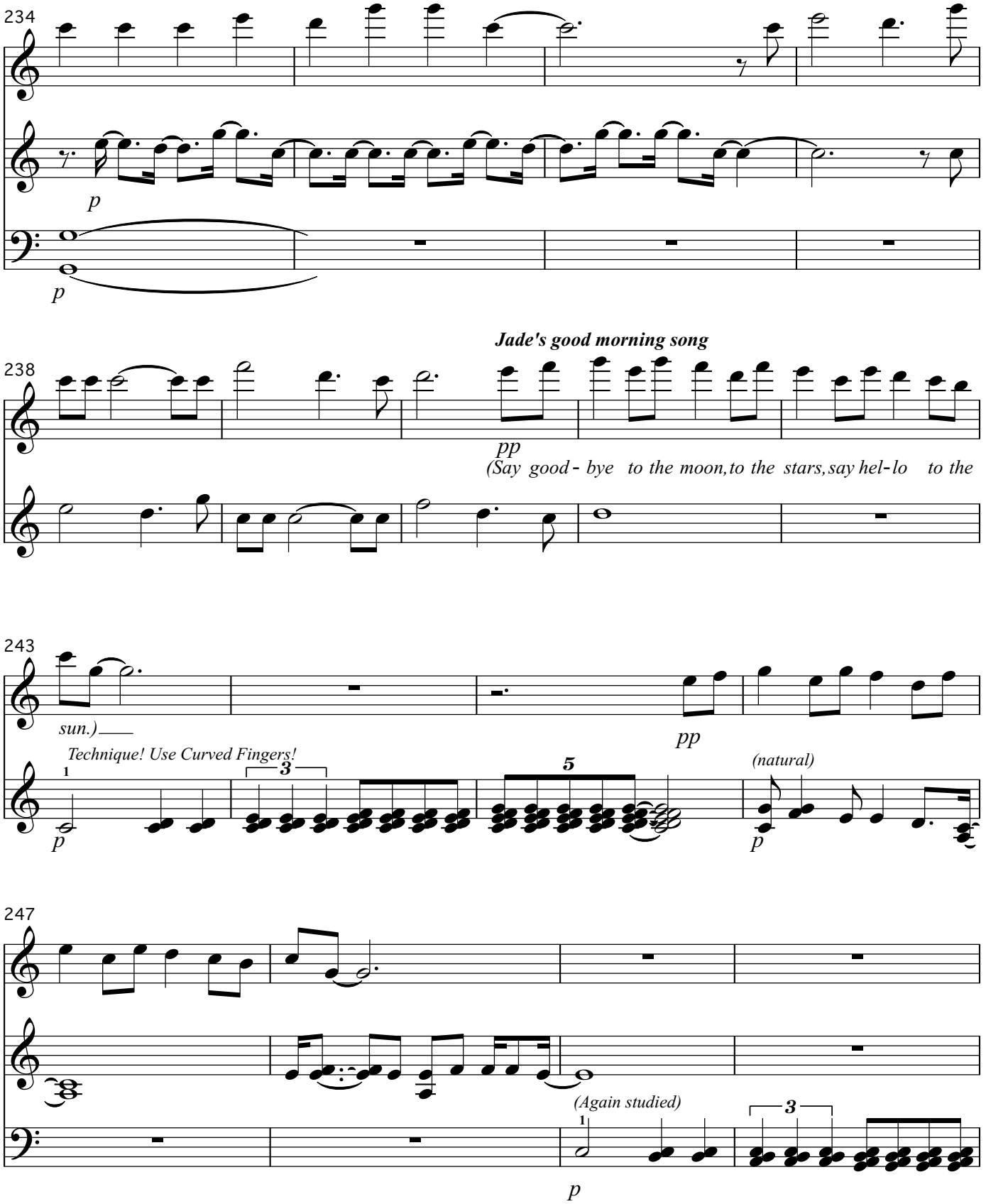

157
Allegretto ♩= 112
Sharing
p
peepee
mf
mf
161
3
3
165
f
168
8va
3
f

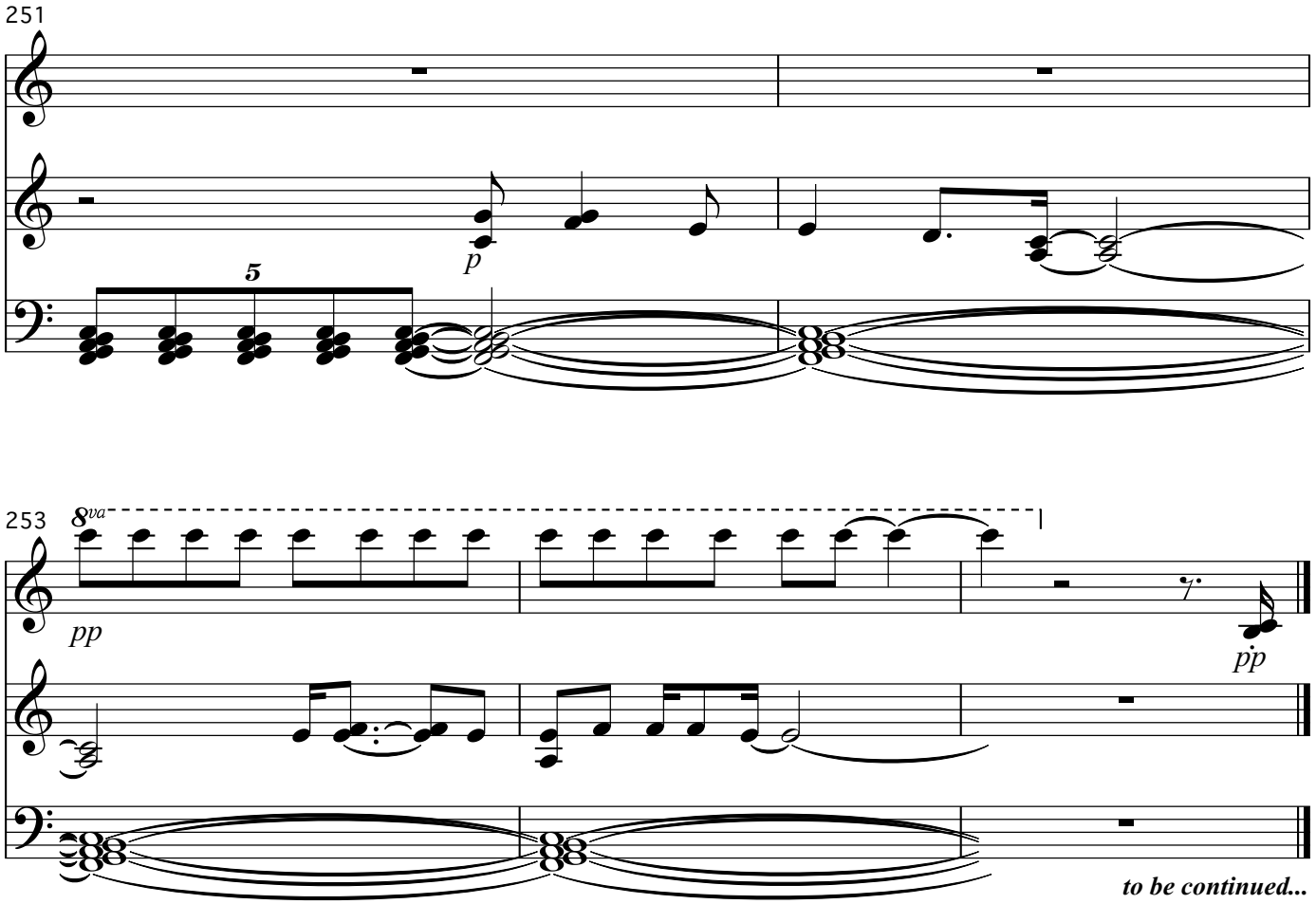

Lyrical
My turn, my turn!
Forearms swinging up and down, pointed fingers
172
mf
etc.
175
178
181
Whistle top voice
(etc.)
ff
Knock on piano body with knuckles
f
184
Mellowing
f


187
mp
p
191
194
197
mf
f
200
ff
3
mf


203
Go Girl!
ff
mf
205
207
209
ff
f
ff
212
f
(optional) forehead smash on keyboard
f possible
mf


216
220
Ped. fff
Relaxed ♩ = 100
The Dramatic vs. The Lyrical Impulse
224
mf
ff
etc.
229
Flowing
p


234
p
p
Jade's good morning song
238
pp
(Say good - bye to the moon, to the stars, say hel - lo to the
243
sun.)
pp
Technique! Use Curved Fingers!
1
3
5
(natural)
p
p
247
(Again studied)
1
3
p



to be continued...

Santa Fe, November, 2004