Five Studies in Black Minor Keys

by

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Nathan's E♭ minor Tango

Sarah's C♯ minor Waltz

Zi's G♯ minor Modernist Construction

Gregory's F♯ minor Jazz Waltz

Celia's B♭ minor Salsa

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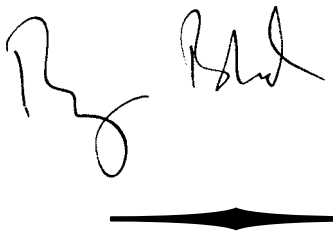
Why have I written these pieces? Because I found that too many of my students didn't have enough familiarity with playing in minor keys, particularly the black minors - C♯, E♭, F♯, G♯ and B♭ minors. The pieces were written for real players, and share some characteristics of the music they were playing at the time. All of them were post-Grade 5, and the studies reflect that level of skill and technique.

Thanks are due to all five players for learning this music so expertly. There are Learning Notes on the back cover.

I hope you enjoy playing them as well.



Nathan's E♭ minor Tango

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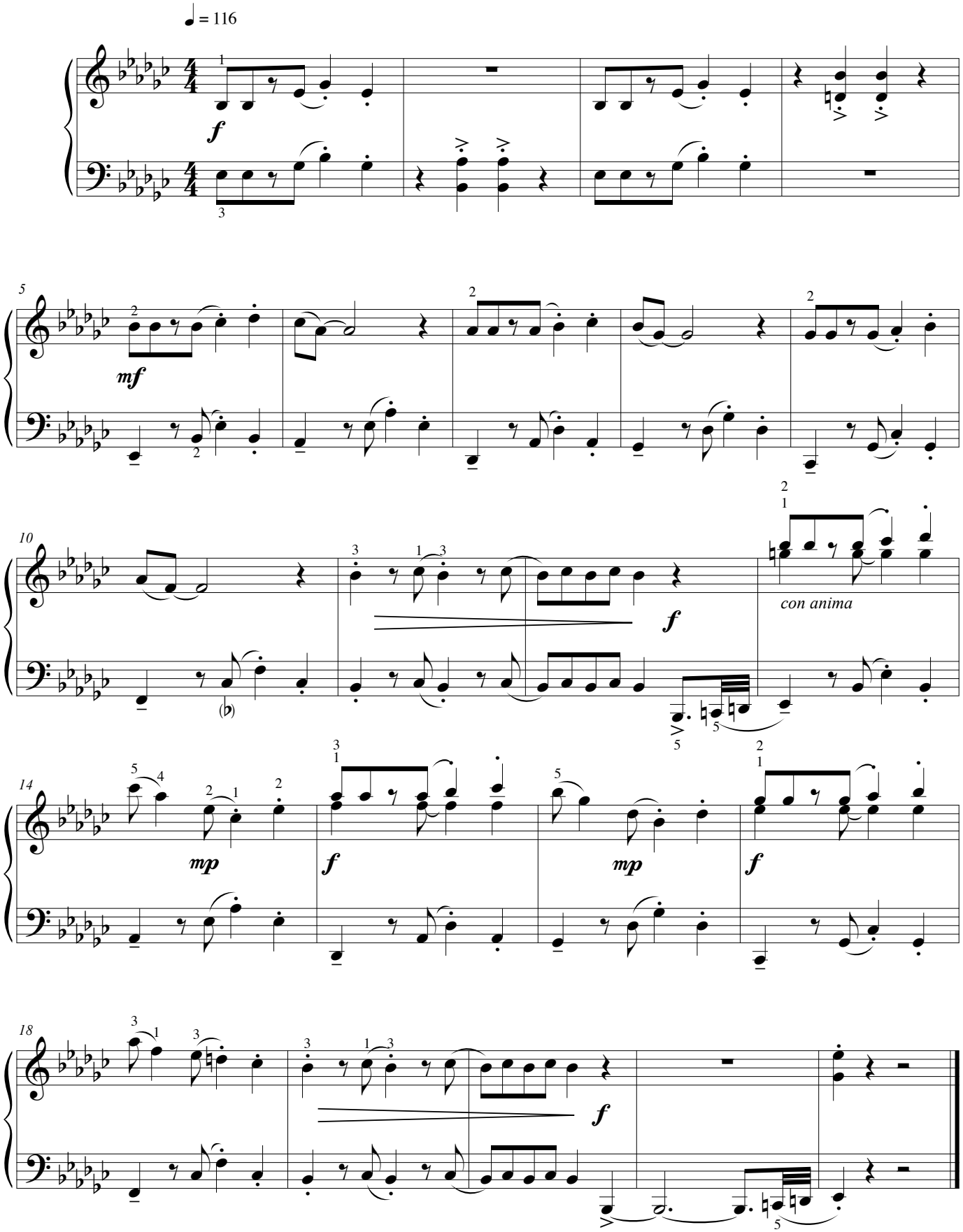

Sarah's C♯ minor Waltz

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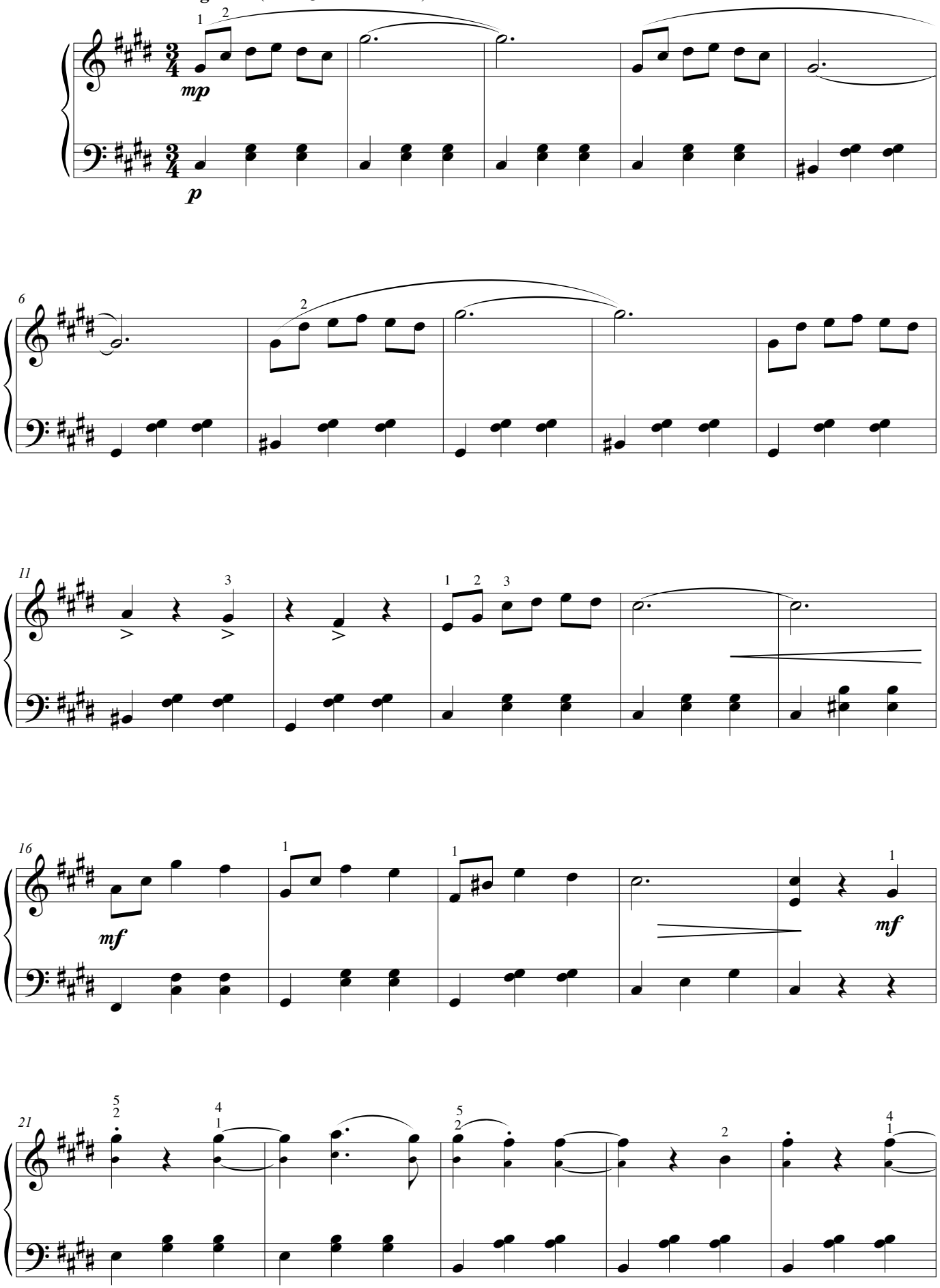
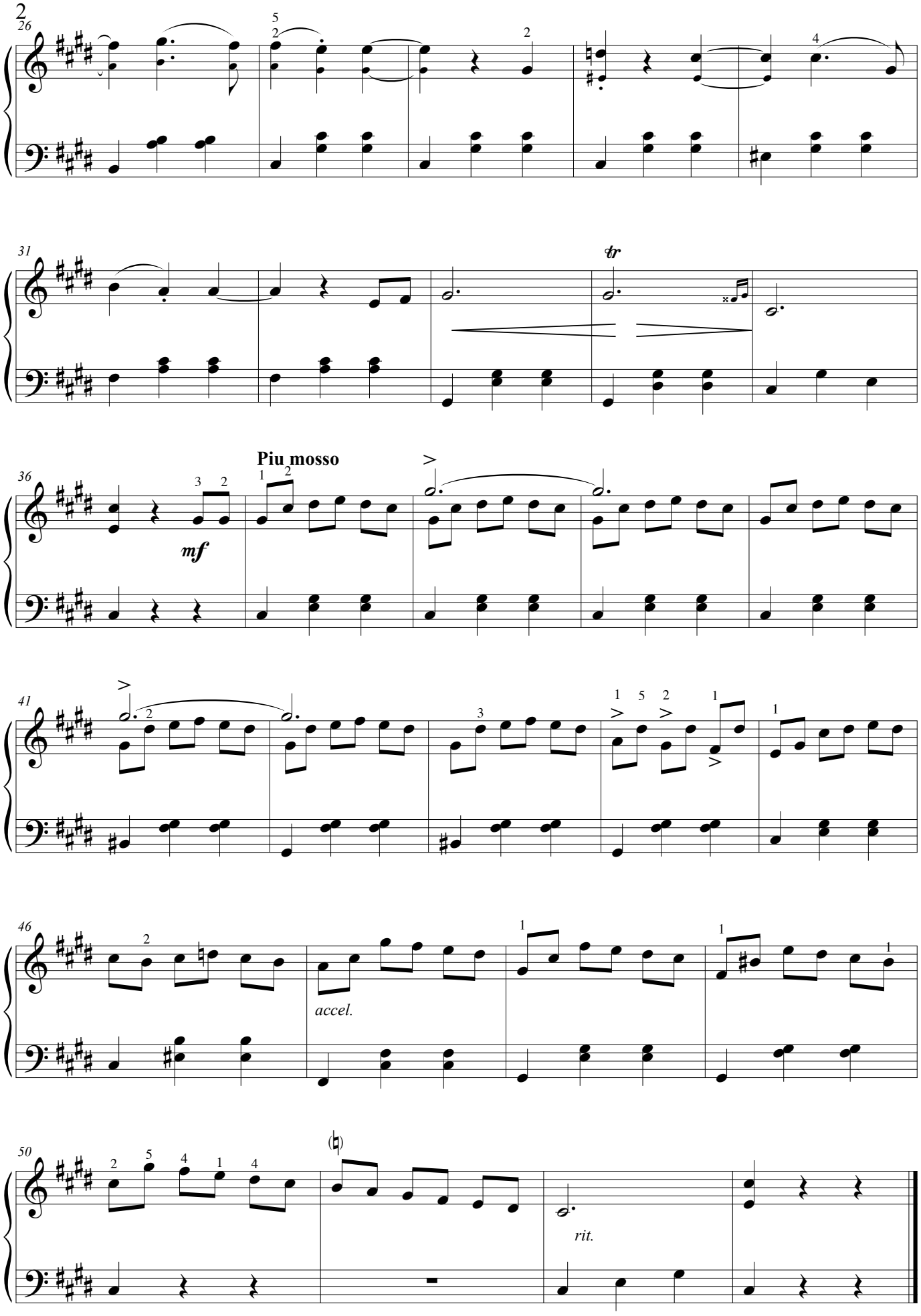
Allegretto (M.M. ♩ = 152 or faster)




26
31
tr
36
Piu mosso
mf
41
46
accel.
50
rit.

Zi's G♯ minor Modernist Construction

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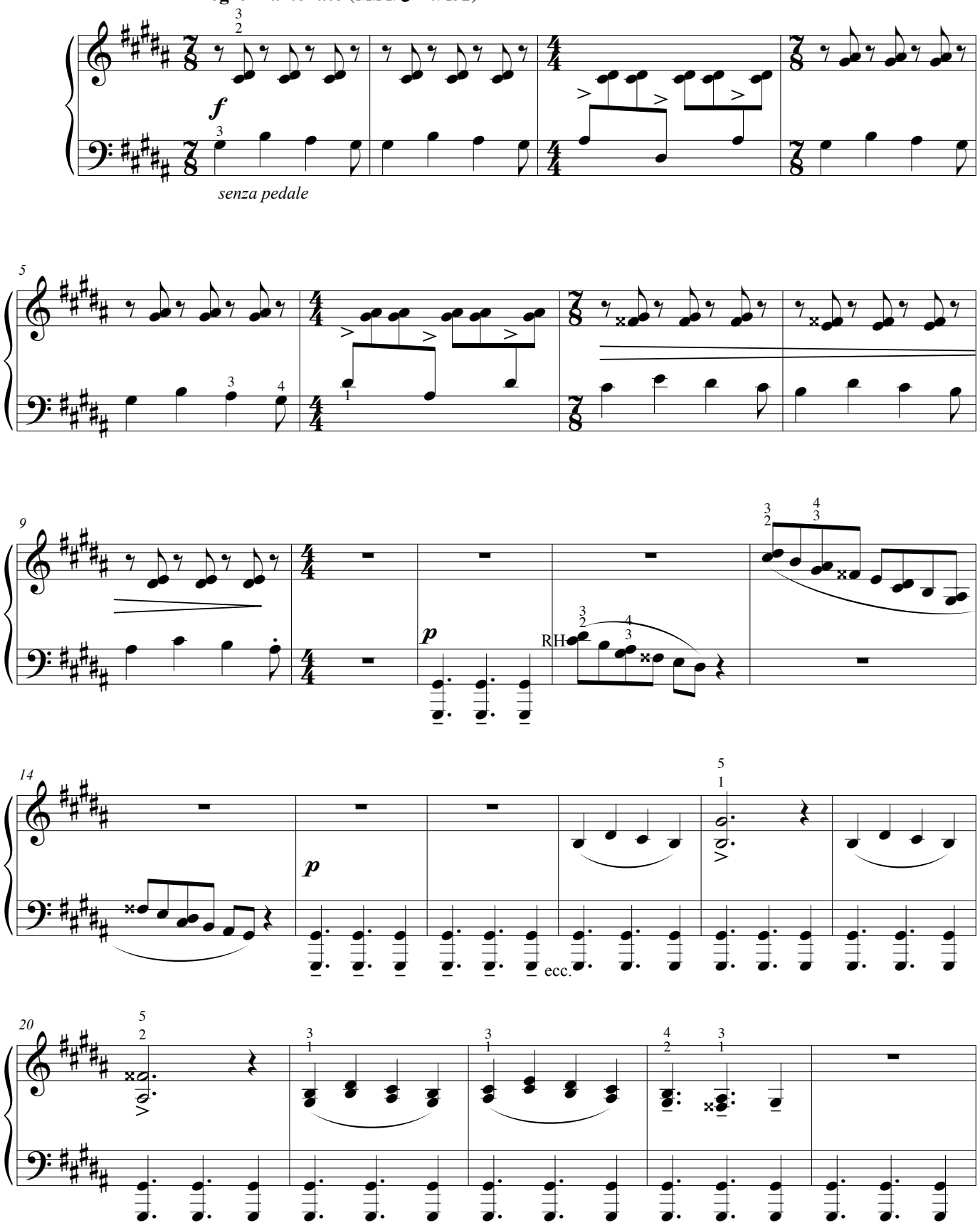
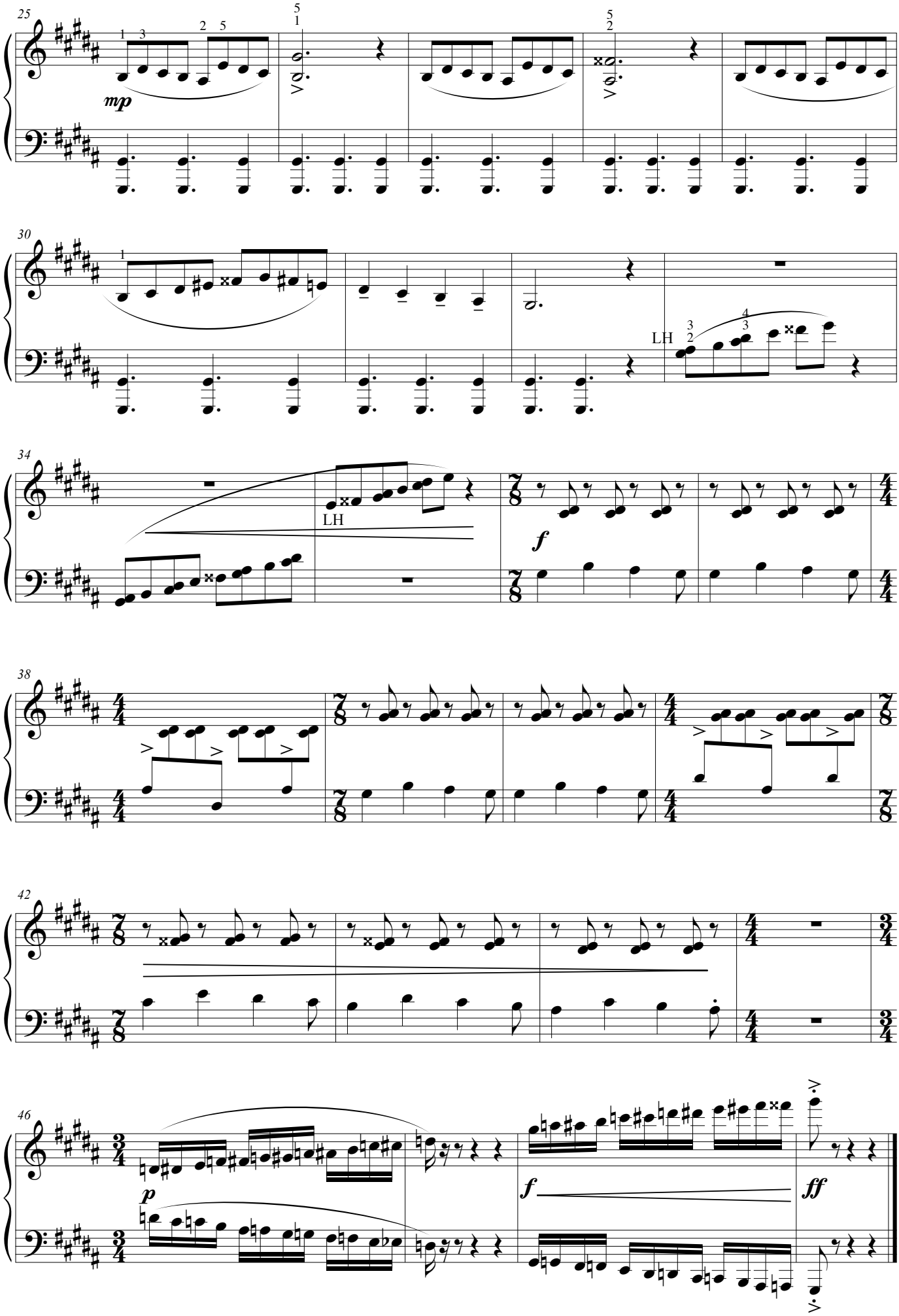
Allegro martellato (M.M. ♩ = c. 132)




25
mp
30
LH
34
LH
f
38
42
46
p
f
ff

Gregory's F♯ minor Jazz Waltz

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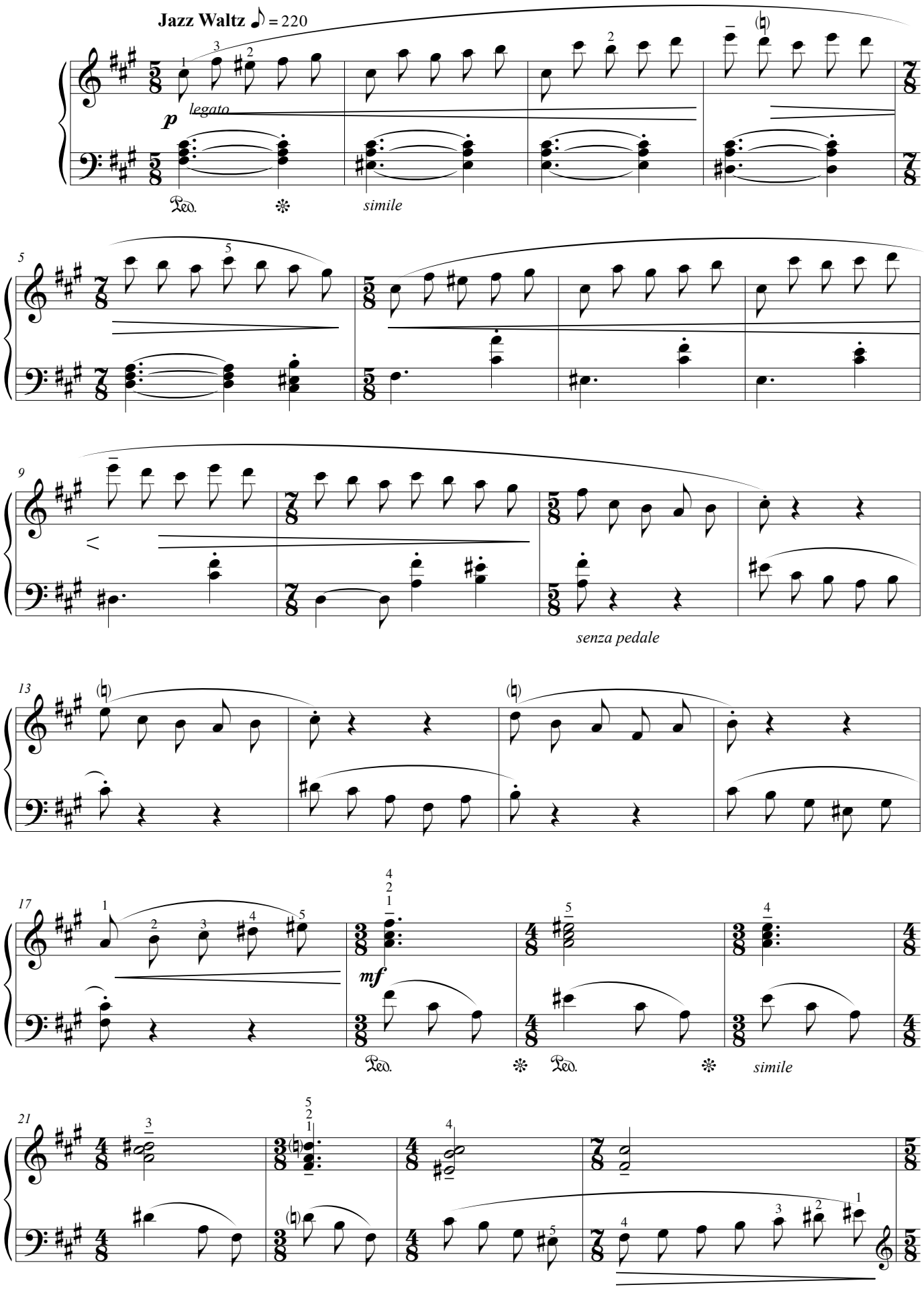
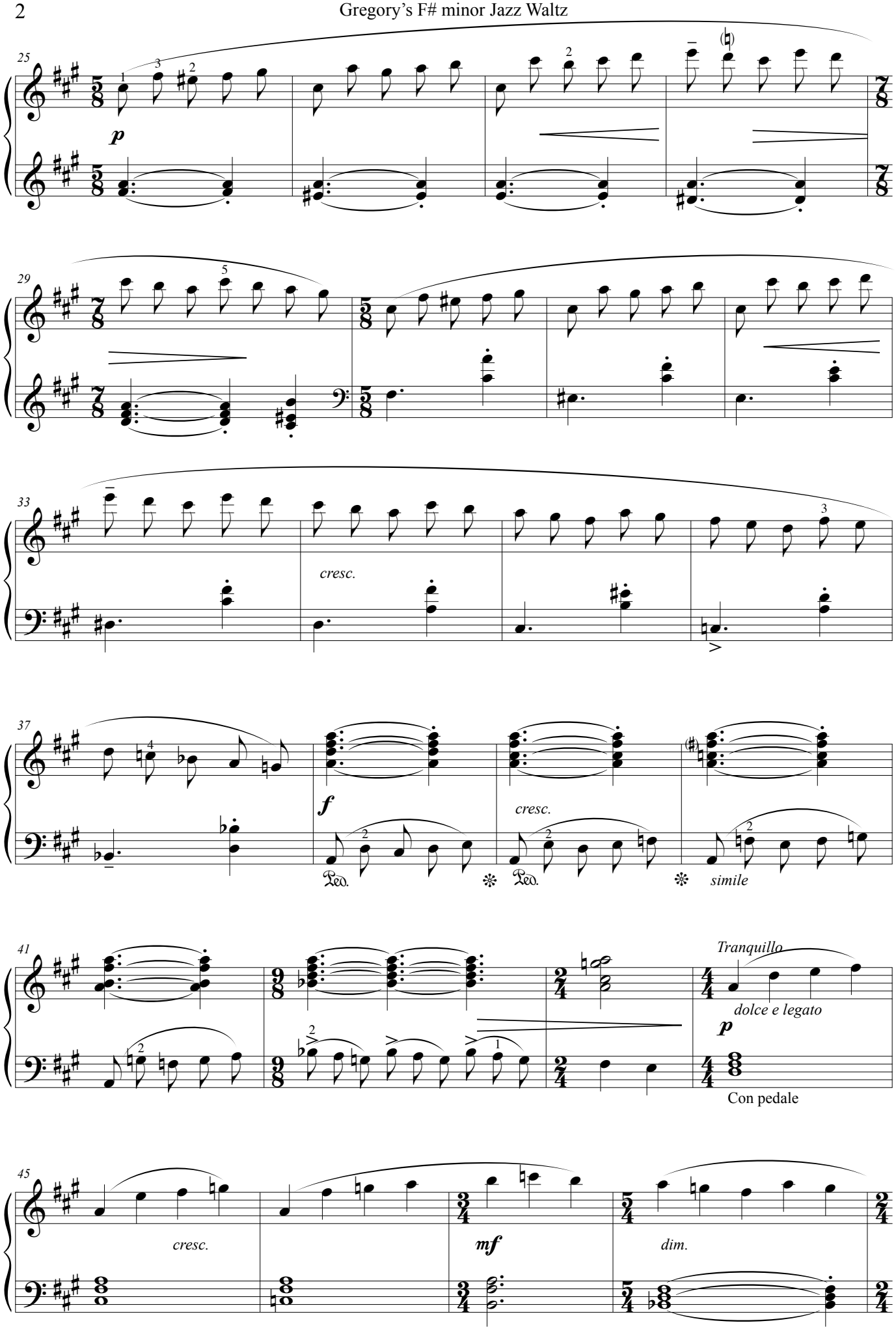
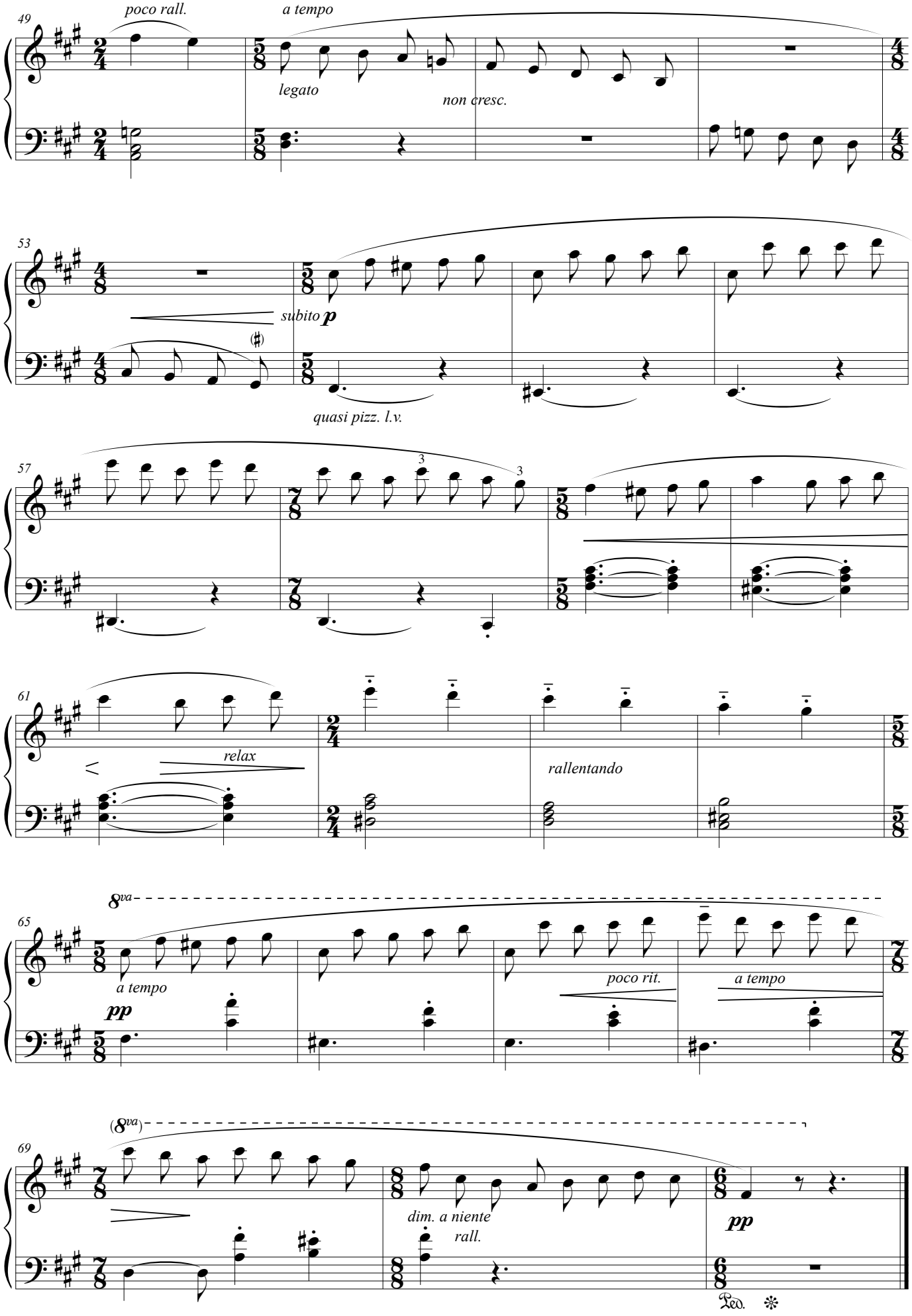



25
p
29
33
cresc.
37
f
Ped.
cresc.
Ped.
simile
41
Tranquillo
dolce e legato
p
Con pedale
45
cresc.
mf
dim.


49
poco rall.
a tempo
legato
non cresc.
53
subito p
quasi pizz. l.v.
57
relax
61
rallentando
65
8va
a tempo
pp
poco rit.
a tempo
(8va)
69
dim. a niente
rall.
pp
Ped.

Celia's B♭ minor Salsa

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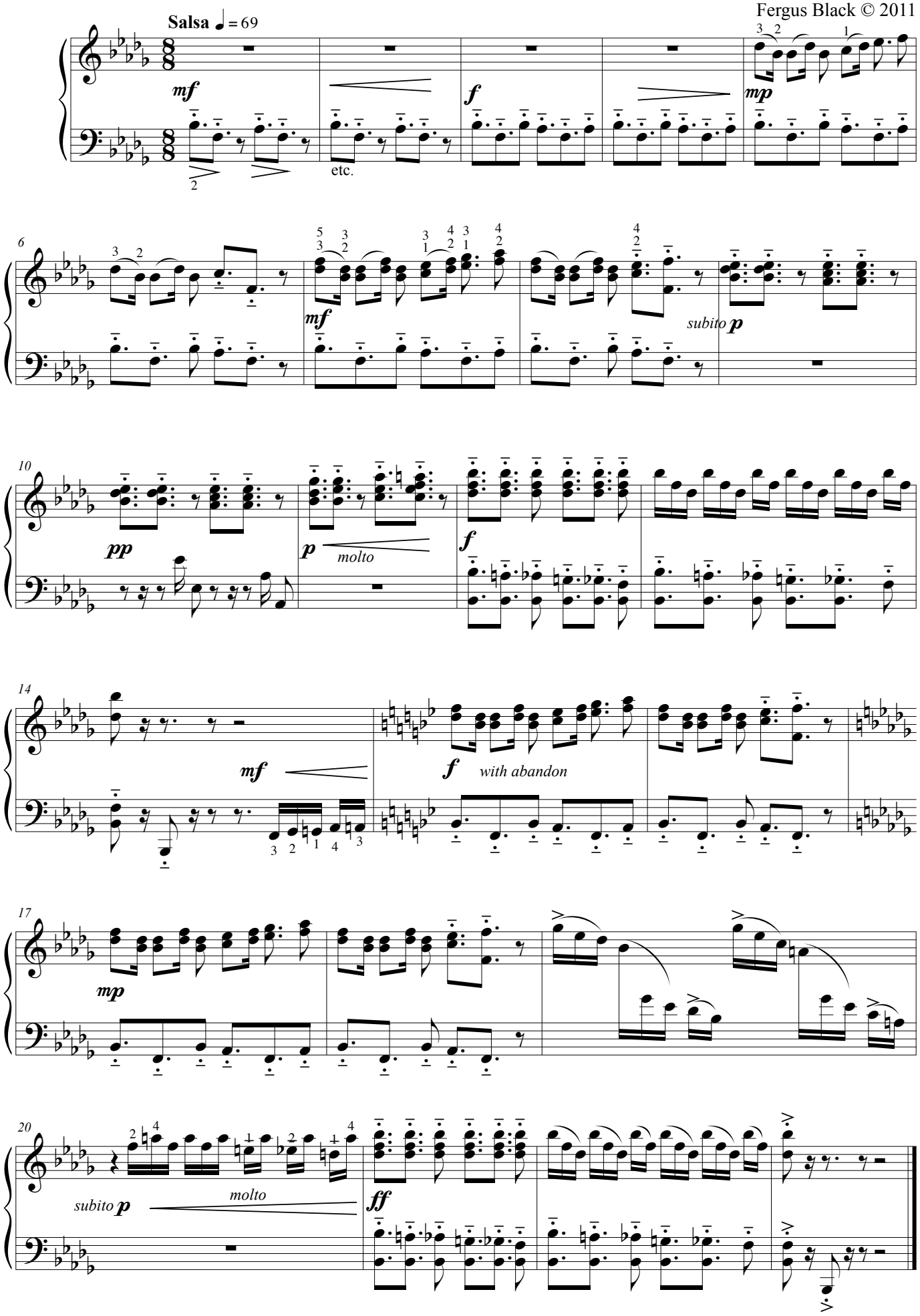

Five Studies in Black Minor Keys

Learning Notes

Nathan's E♭ minor Tango

Bars 1 is a good place to start - it uses the notes of the chord of E flat minor. Bar 3 is the same.

Play the left hand of line 2 - each bar has the same outline. Use the second finger for the second note each time.

Each bar needs a strong first beat;

Staccato means staccato - which is a 'lift' action on the piano - think "bounce";

Slurs are important! Don't miss them out. It is largely the articulation that gives this style its character.

Don't be afraid to put your thumb on a black note (you might not do this in scales, but ever since Bach wrote the '48', pianists have had to).

In bar 14, the right hand has a new hand position - try and 'cover' all four notes with a spread hand.

Throughout, watch those C flats: it seems wrong somehow, doesn't it, that a flat sign should designate a white note.

Sarah's C♯ minor Waltz

Think Chopin for style, light and fluid (Sarah was playing the Valse KK IVb no.11 by Chopin at the time): it is important to keep the left hand chords quiet, right from the beginning: imagine there are three layers, not two: the right hand should be in the foreground, supported by the bass notes (the first note of the left hand in each bar), with the left hand chords lightly in the background. It's like painting: you need foreground and background.

bar 7 is NOT the same as bar 1 - you need to play nearer the fingerboard.

bar 11 – watch the hemiola doesn't catch you out.

bar 13 – don't let the bridge of the hand collapse, or the quavers will be uneven.

bar 21 is an episode in the relative major (E). The lower notes in the right hand from bars 21 to 30 are optional.

bar 37 is an ornamented return of the opening, but shortened.

from bar 47, the music should get even faster, but never out of control.

Zi's G♯ minor Modernist Construction

Zi was playing Khachaturian's Pictures Of Childhood when I wrote this: hence the slightly odd title and the dissonant style. It is the hardest of the set at first sight, and isn't easily sightreadable. However, there is a lot of repetition, and the awkward scale sections (for example at bar 12) becomes easy with very little practice.

The first thing to practice are the seconds in the treble clef, then the 7/8 bits in the left hand.

Note that bar 4 is the same as bar 1.

Now, with the right hand play a scale of G# harmonic minor descending. N.B. 3rd finger on D# - this doesn't feel natural. Now do this taking the pairs of black note together, as in bars 12 - 14. (bars 13-14 are all in the right hand).

bar 17 - practise RH alone, then patsch the cross rhythms (right hand on right knee, left hand on left knee).

The fingering in bar 21 is the same as bar 22; you'll need to lift your hand between the bars!

bar 25 is an ornamented version of bar 17.

bar 30 is a scale of g# melodic minor.

bars 46 to the end are easy, just very fast - in the chromatic scales on D and G sharp, the two hands mirror each other.

Gregory's F♯ minor Jazz Waltz

Formally, this is a rondo, over a chromatic ground bass. This needs to be fast and light.

Begin by playing the right hand alone, but feel the left hand rhythm ♩. ♩ (in 7/8 bars, the feel is ♩.♩.♩).

There are five bars in a phrase - try and see the whole phrase as one unit. Play the first five bars of the right hand as one phrase, with a sense of line.

Treat each bar as a little wave, falling away from the first note, the last note being very light.

After you have learnt the left hand, you may find putting them together is rhythmically awkward. Take your time: try to get the rhythm by patching (playing the rhythm of the two hands on the knees), and when you do put both hands on the keyboard, play slowly. Aim for two beats in a bar. (3 beats in the 7/8 bars!).

bar 19 interrupts the quaver flow: there is a crotchet!

in bar 34, you expect a diminuendo, but there is a crescendo.

Celia's B♭ minor Salsa

Start with the rhythm: patsch right hand with left from bar 5, making sure you can shift focus from one hand to the other:

right hand:

left hand:

If you find this difficult, play slowly and count semi-quavers at first.

Be strong and assertive right from the off, with detached articulation.

bar 6 – you need to feel the silence in the rest.

bar 7 has awkward fingering, feel free to change it, but stick to whatever you decide.

bar 15 is in B flat major, by way of a contrast. Watch the A natural (in both hands!).

bars 14 and 20 - you must count the rests.