Clara Schumann: Piano Trio in G minor Op. 17, Movement I

CD 1 track 13

Clara Schumann (1819–1896) was a composer, concert pianist and teacher. She was born in Leipzig, the daughter of two musicians. Her father Friedrich Wieck was a renowned piano teacher and through him she received a thorough music education. A child prodigy, she soon began giving concerts throughout Europe. As a respected composer-pianist she regularly performed her own works for piano including her Piano Concerto in A minor, a three-movement work completed when she was only 15.

The composer Robert Schumann was also one of Friedrich Wieck's pupils. Clara married him in 1840, much against her father's wishes. She continued to perform in public and her career as an international concert pianist lasted for most of her life; she was often referred to as the 'Queen of the Piano'. She was highly influential in the way that concert programmes developed and was one of the first pianists to give solo recitals and to perform from memory.

In 1853 she met the young composer Johannes Brahms. They were to become lifelong friends. Clara Schumann was well-respected as a composer during her lifetime and Brahms confided in her about his work, often rewriting passages if he agreed with her criticisms.

She wrote a body of works including **Lieder**, many solo piano pieces, choral pieces and Three Romances for violin and piano. Many of her compositions were published and received positive reviews. One of her most famous works is her Op.17 Piano Trio in G minor, which she completed in 1846. As with most piano trios, the work is scored for violin, cello and piano. The three instruments are well-balanced and each receives its own prominent passages. The piano trio was written during what is often described as the **Romantic period** (roughly 1820–1910).

Following the score

The two string instruments, violin and cello, are placed above the piano part. The violin part is in the treble clef whereas most of the cello part is in the bass clef. It will help you to familiarise yourself with the piece if you listen to the music whilst following each of the three instruments in turn.

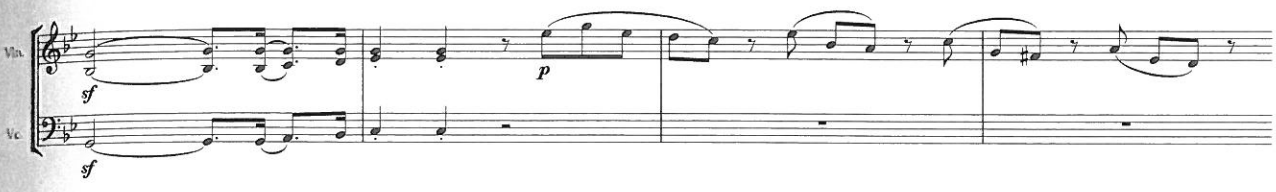
The Piano Trio is a substantial work in four movements:

1. Allegro moderato
2. Scherzo and trio
3. Andante
4. Allegretto

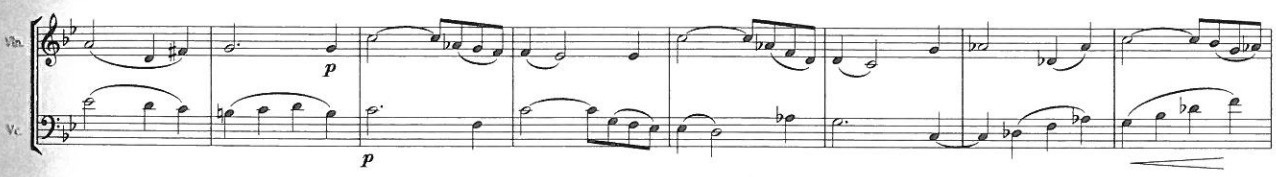
The melancholic opening movement has much lyrical melodic material and often rich, **chromatic** harmony. It is in **sonata form** and falls into three sections – the **exposition**, **development** and **recapitulation**. Here is the opening theme.

This theme is the beginning of the first **subject**. It is played by the violin and then taken up by the piano. Notice how this theme includes many of the **motifs** (short ideas) which are then manipulated throughout the movement.

The lyrical first subject leads to a contrasting theme which starts in the tonic key of G minor, but leads into the relative major, B flat, just after the end of the quotation below. This contrasting theme is the start of a **bridge passage** that leads from the first subject to the second subject (in the relative major) at bar 45.



During the 1840s Clara studied counterpoint and **fugue**. This is evident in the music of her piano trio, which includes many **contrapuntal** passages, particularly in the development section.



Notice the way that this passage uses motivic material derived from the first theme.

The development section moves into the recapitulation, which, as is usual for sonata form, is marked by the return of the first theme in the tonic key.

What to listen for

- Listen to the opening theme. Which short fragments are used later on in this movement?
- How would you describe the theme that opens the bridge passage?
- How would you describe the mood of the piece? Which aspects of the composition contribute to this mood?

Wider listening

Listen to further examples of chamber music and Romantic music. You could listen to movements 3 and 4 of Beethoven's String Quartet in C, Op. 59 No. 3 (1808). Notice the various ways the instruments are used in the quartet and look out for examples of **motivic development**. Notice the different approach to piano writing found in Chopin's *Ballade* No. 4 in F minor, Op. 52.

Piano Trio in G minor, Op. 17
Movement I

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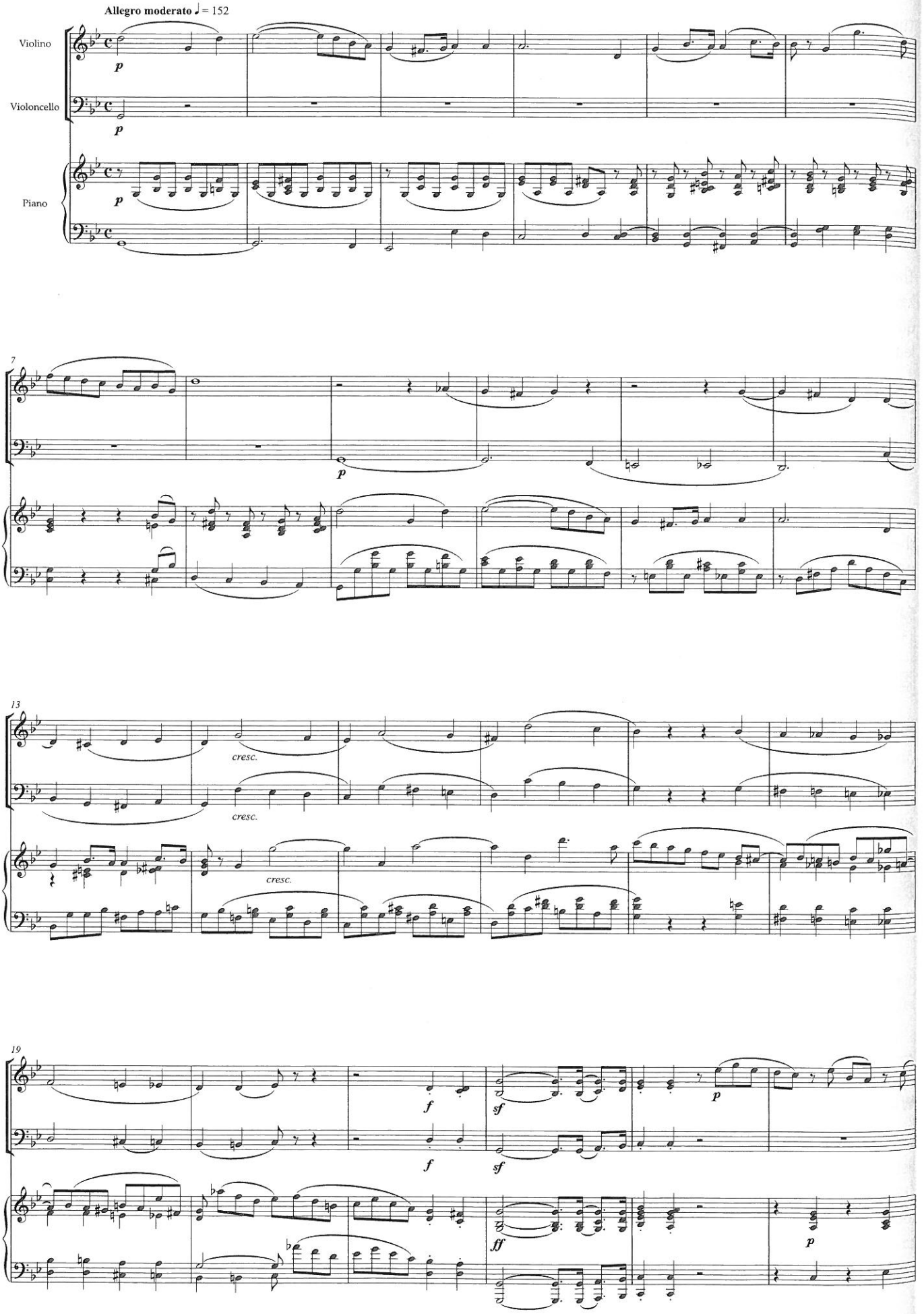
Clara Schumann



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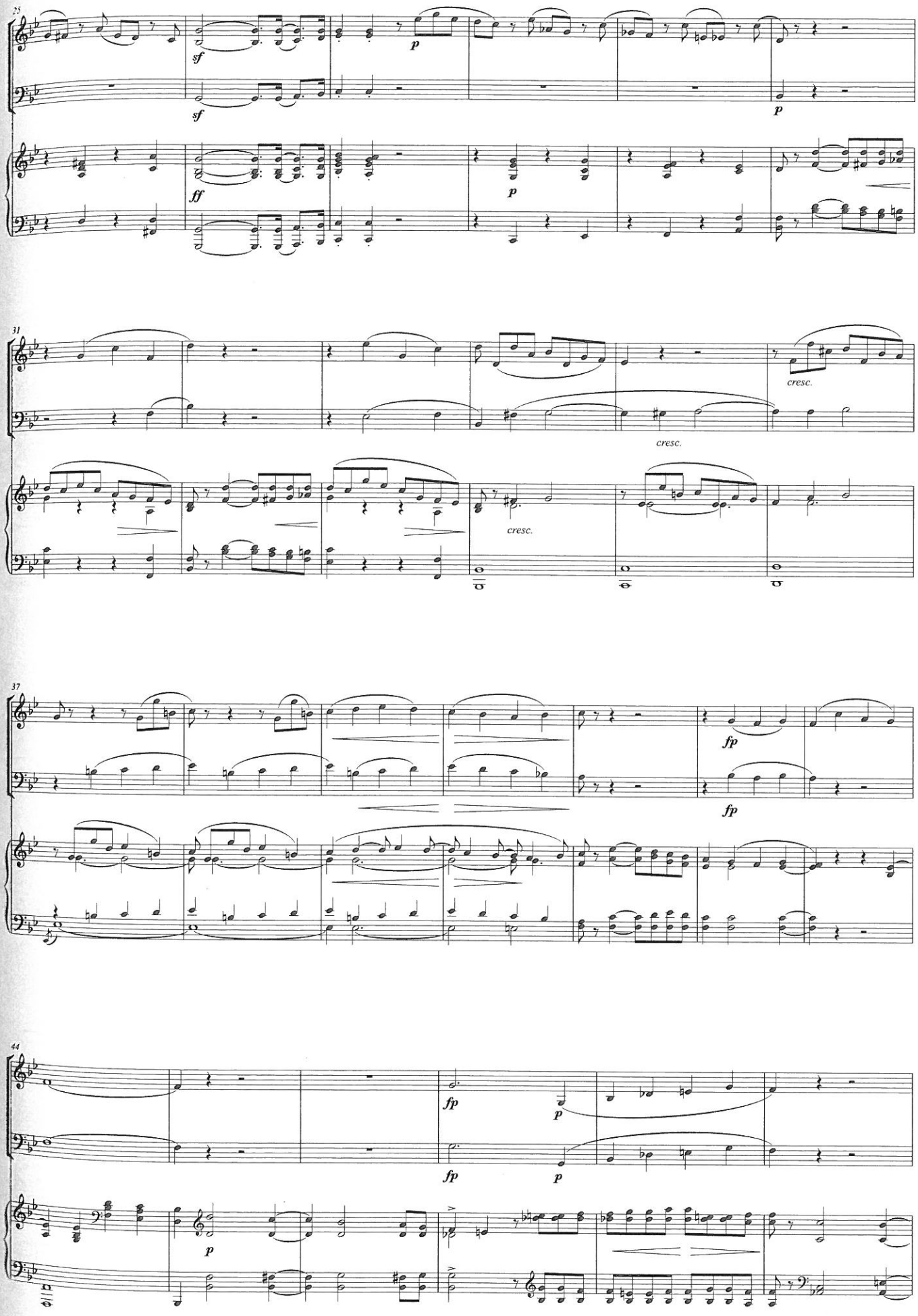
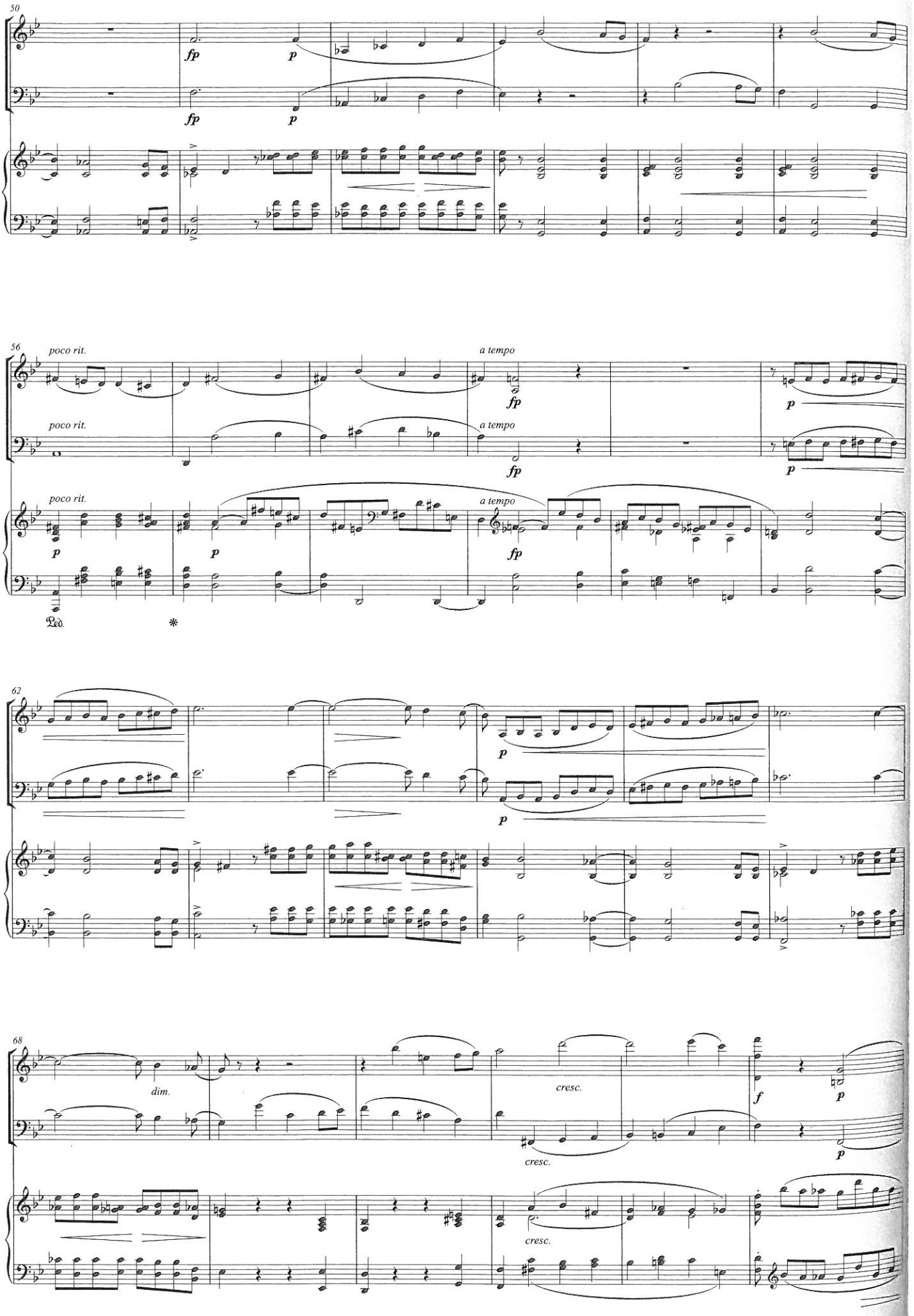
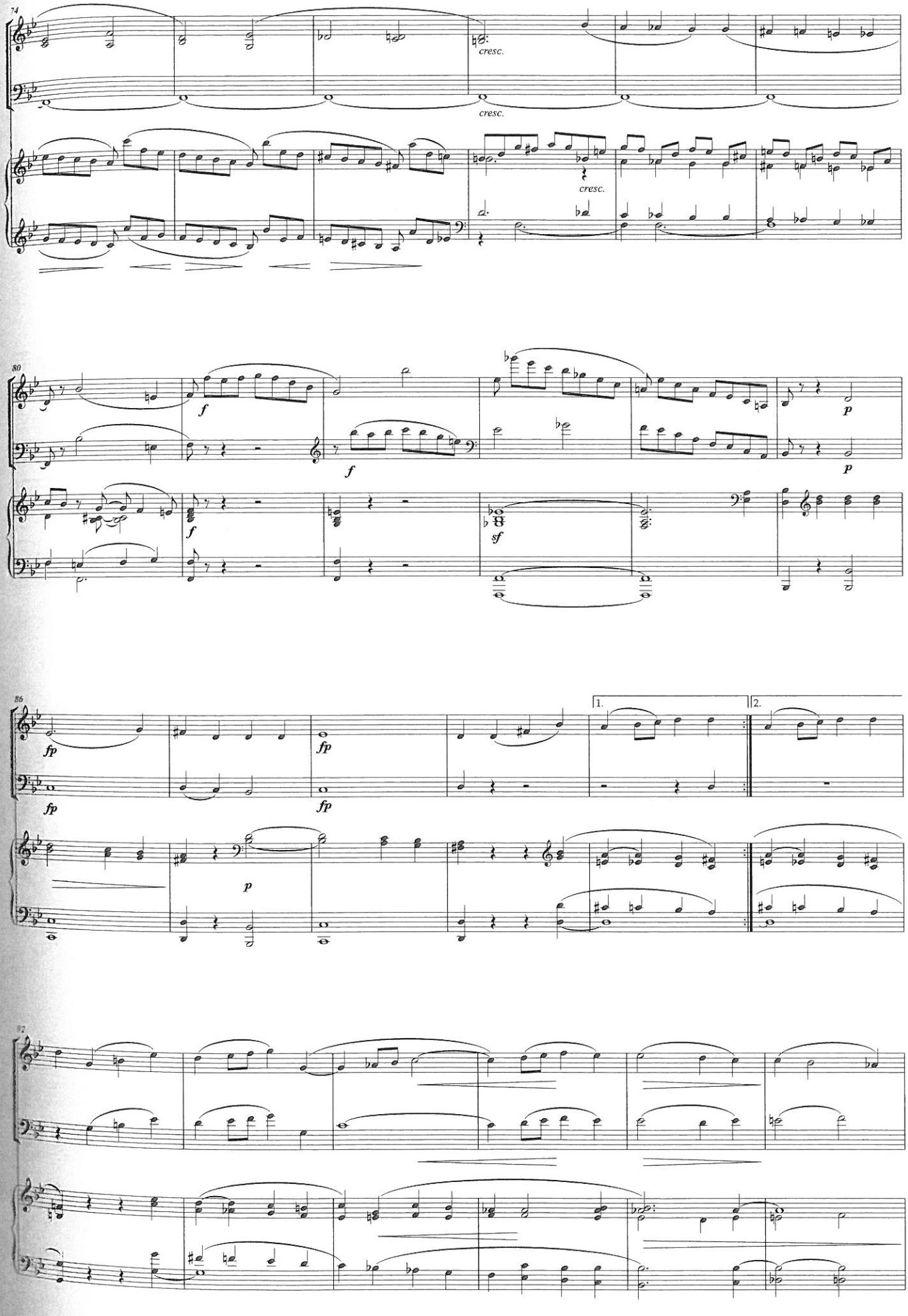
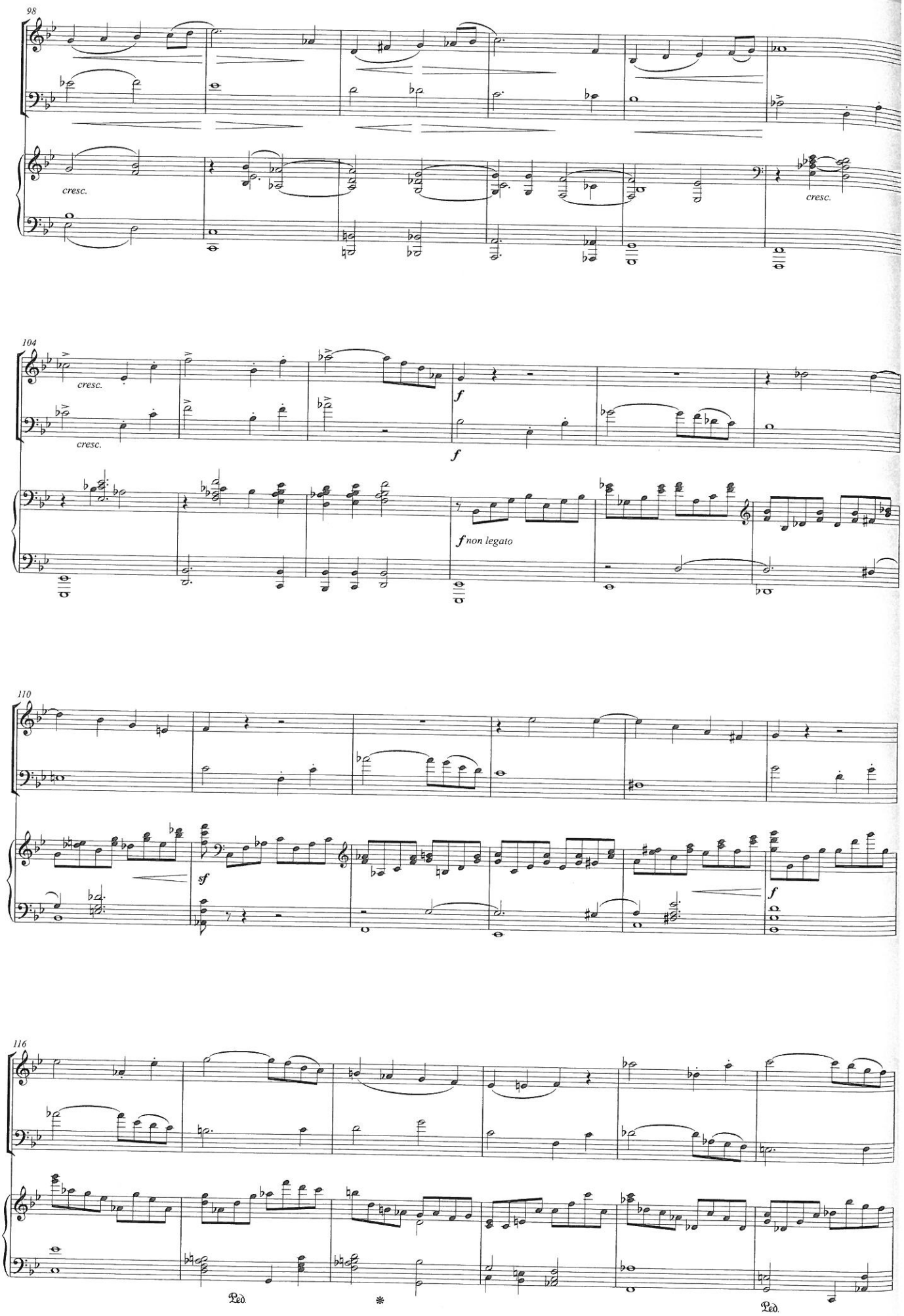
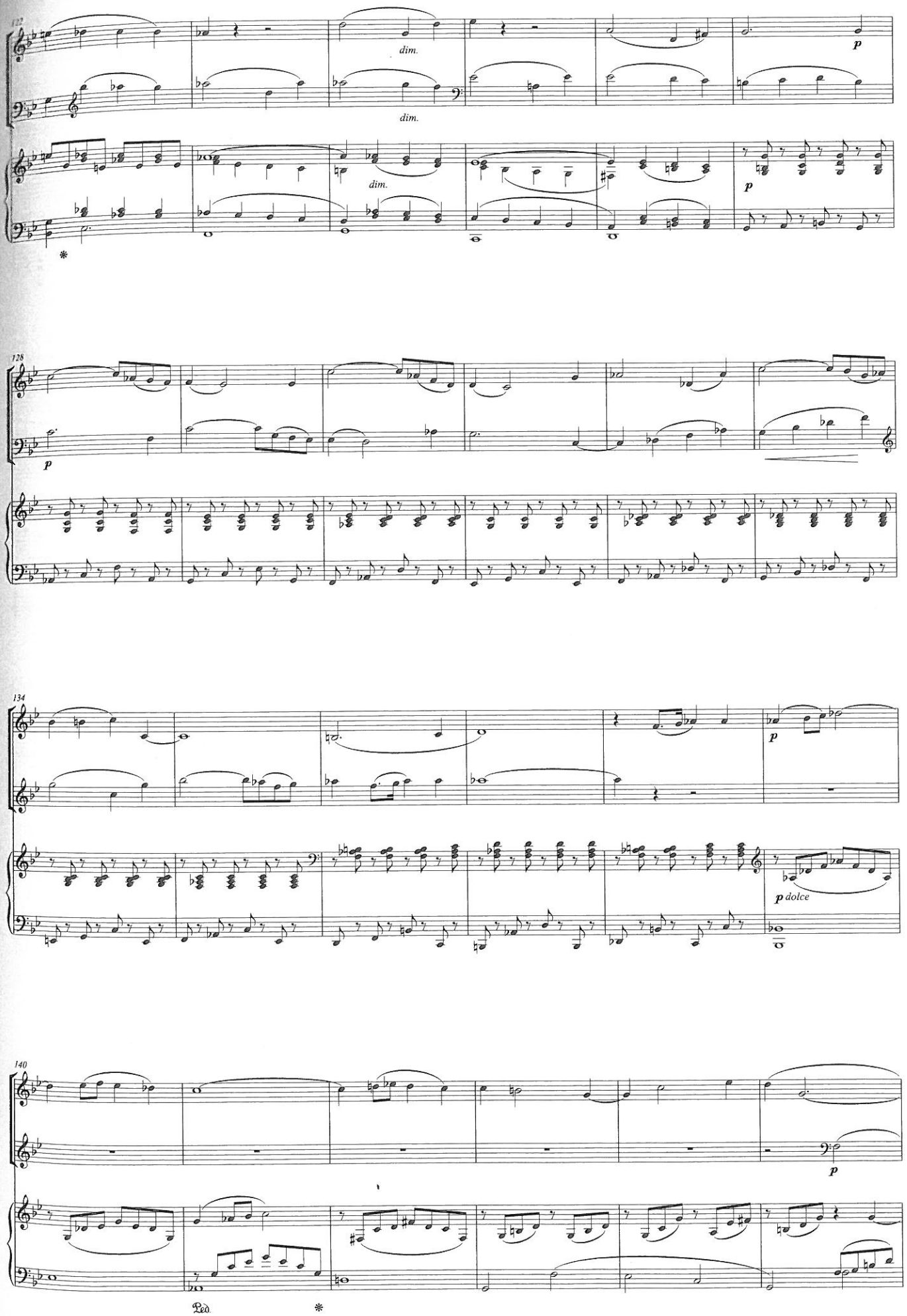
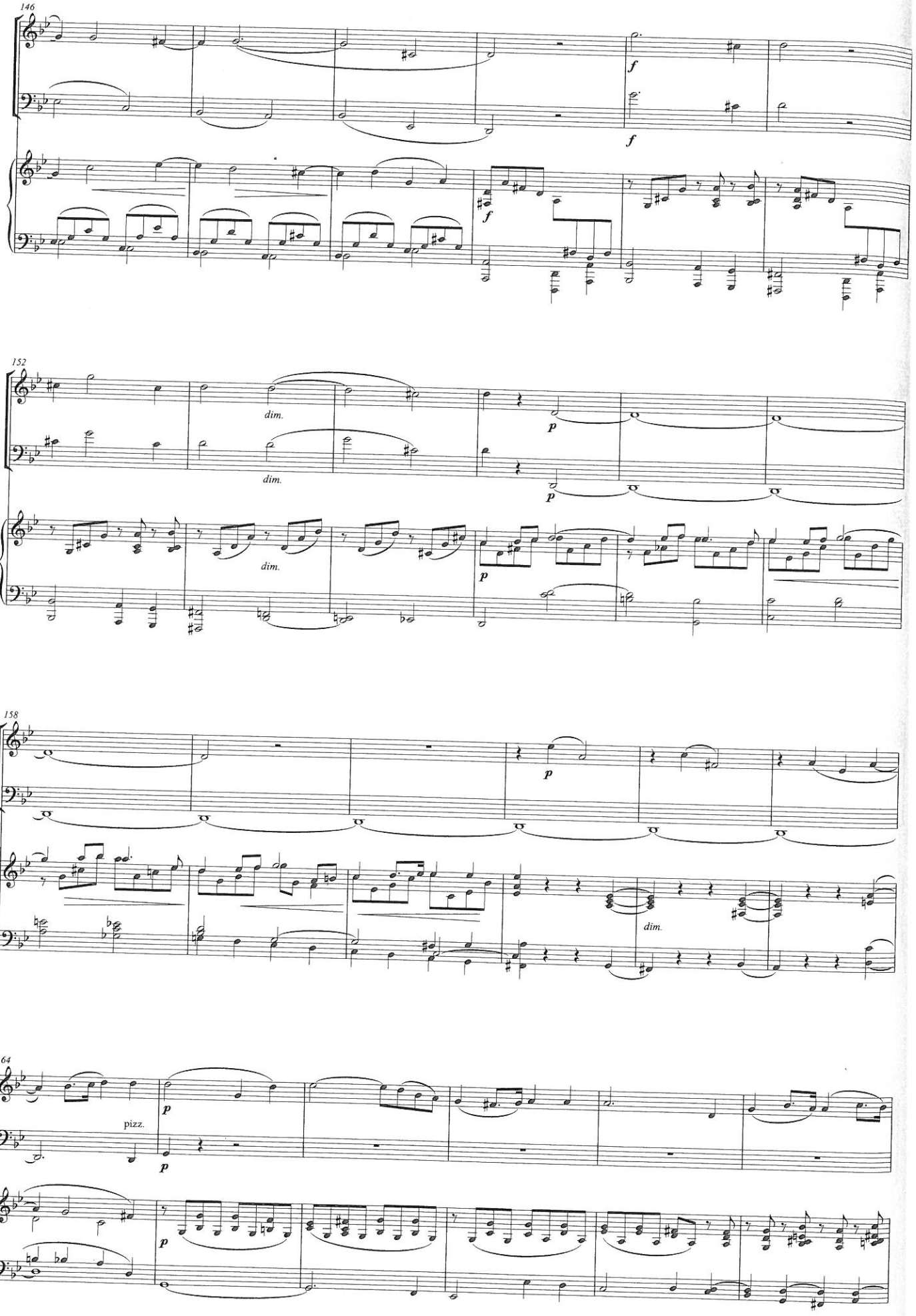

25
sf
sf
p
ff
p
p
31
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
37
fp
fp
44
fp
p
fp
p
p

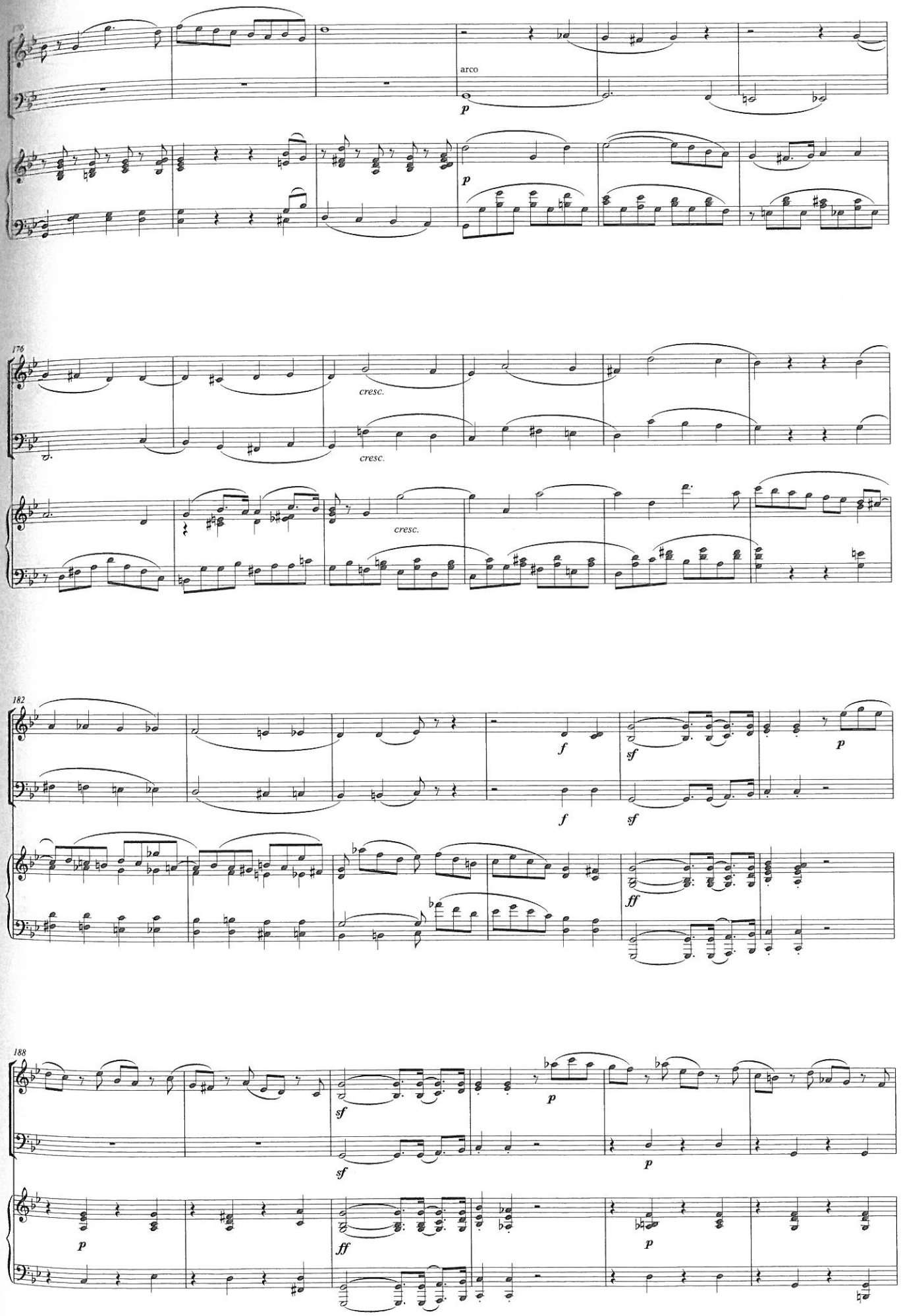

50
fp
p
fp
p
56
poco rit.
poco rit.
poco rit.
a tempo
a tempo
a tempo
fp
fp
fp
p
p
p
p
p
Ped.
*
62
p
p
68
dim.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
f
p
p

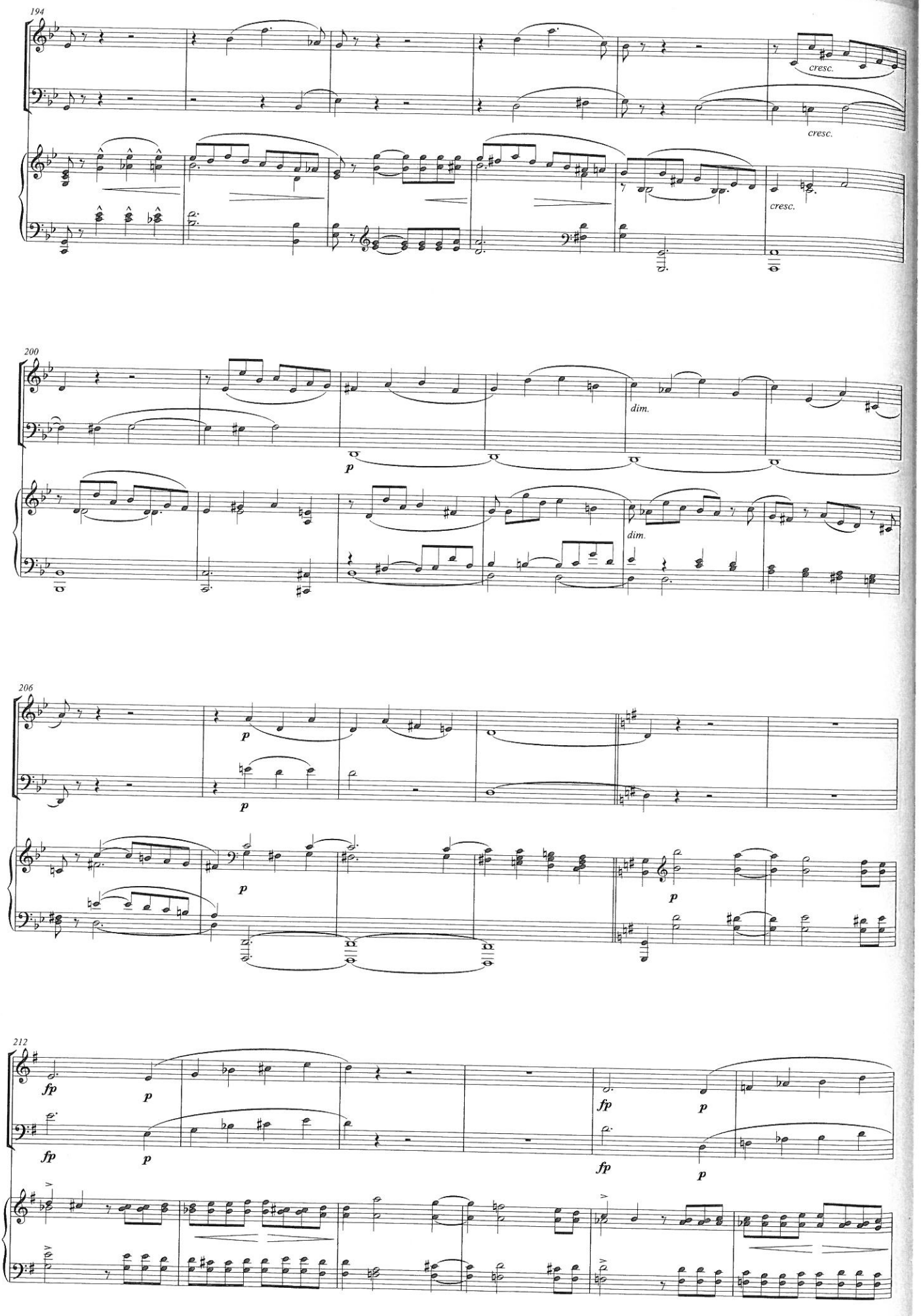

74
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
80
f
f
f
sf
p
p
86
fp
fp
fp
fp
p
1.
2.
92

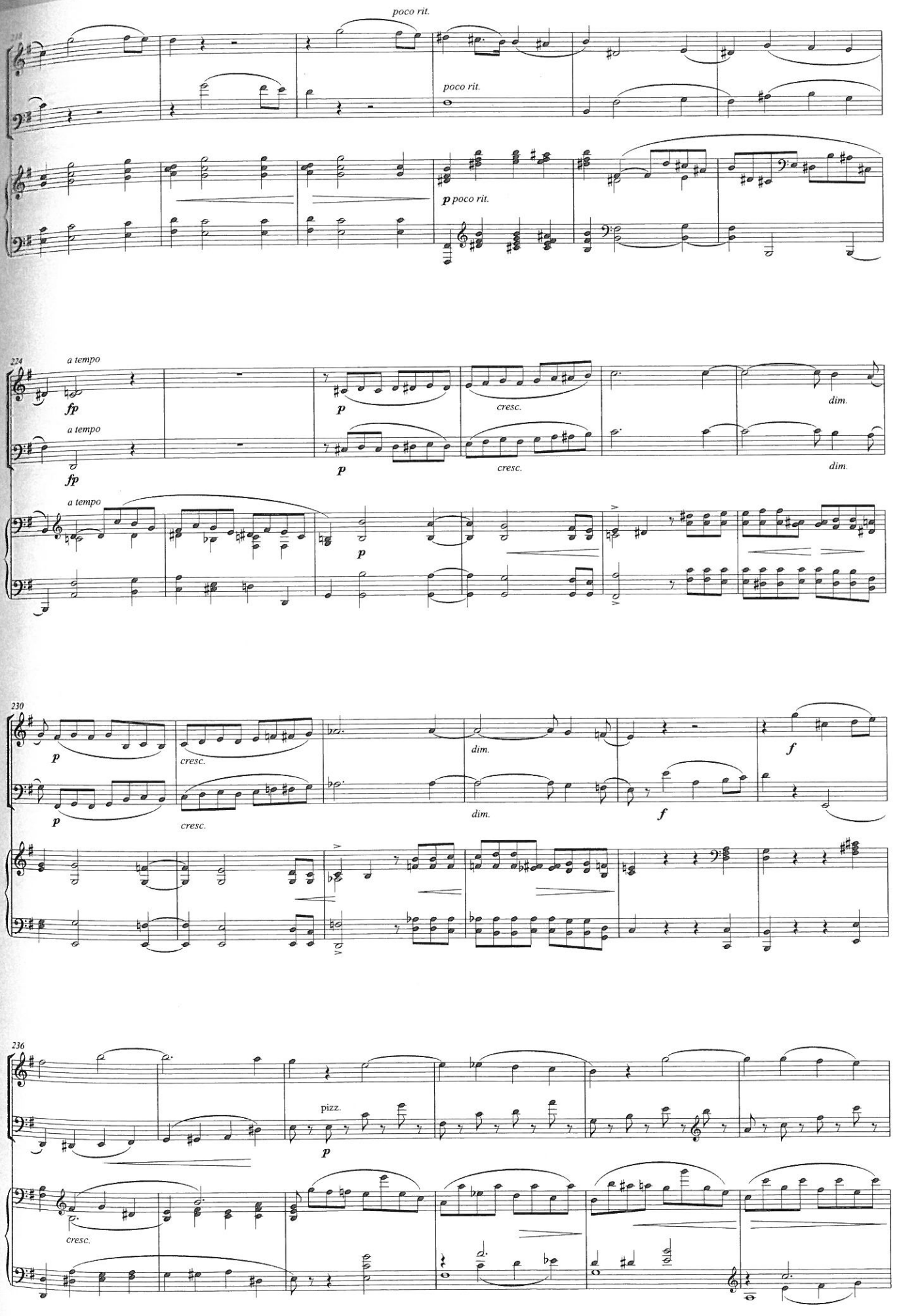

98
cresc.
cresc.
104
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f non legato
110
sf
f
116
Ped.
*
Ped.

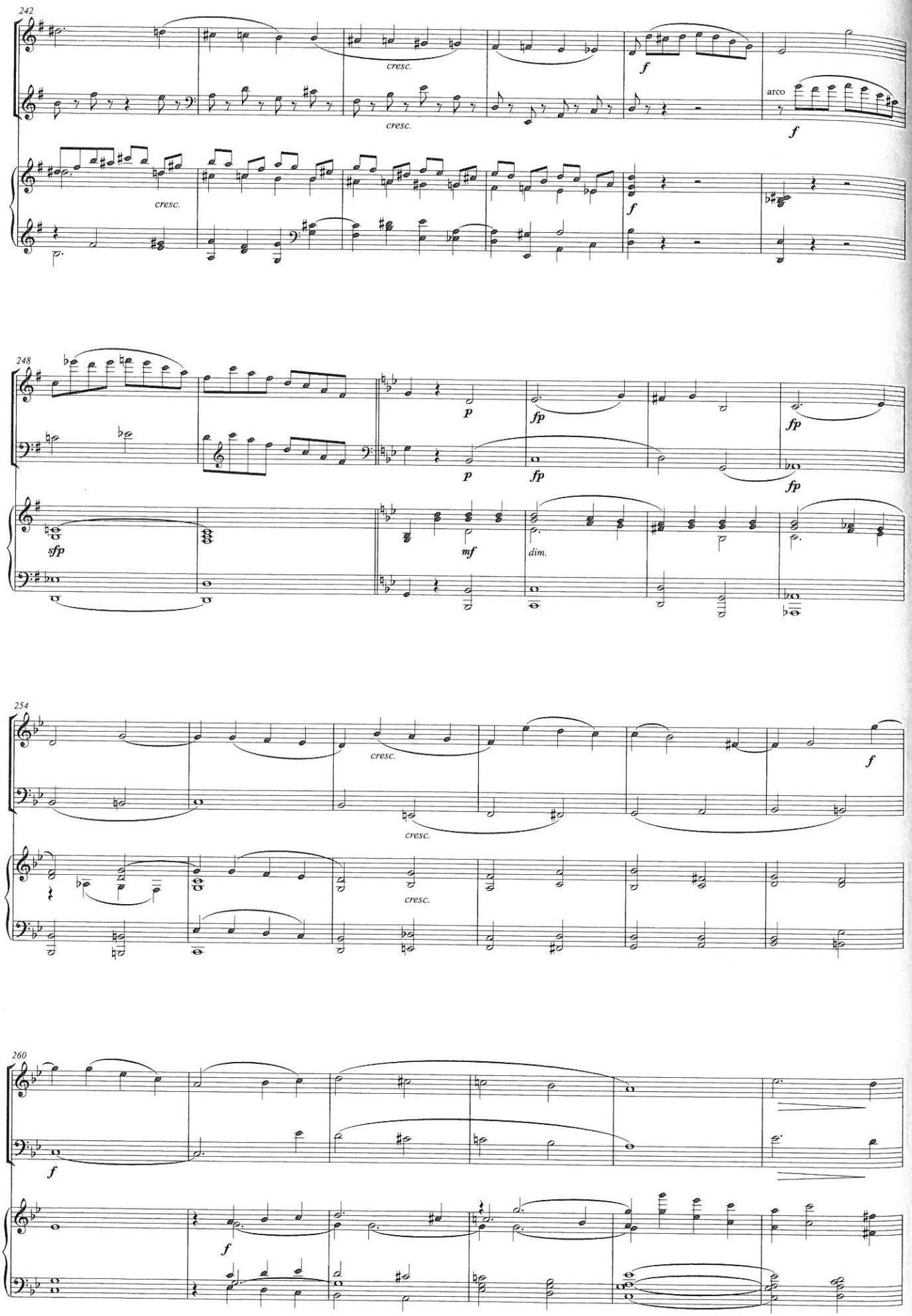

122
dim.
dim.
dim.
p
p
*
128
p
134
p
p dolce
140
p
Ped.
*

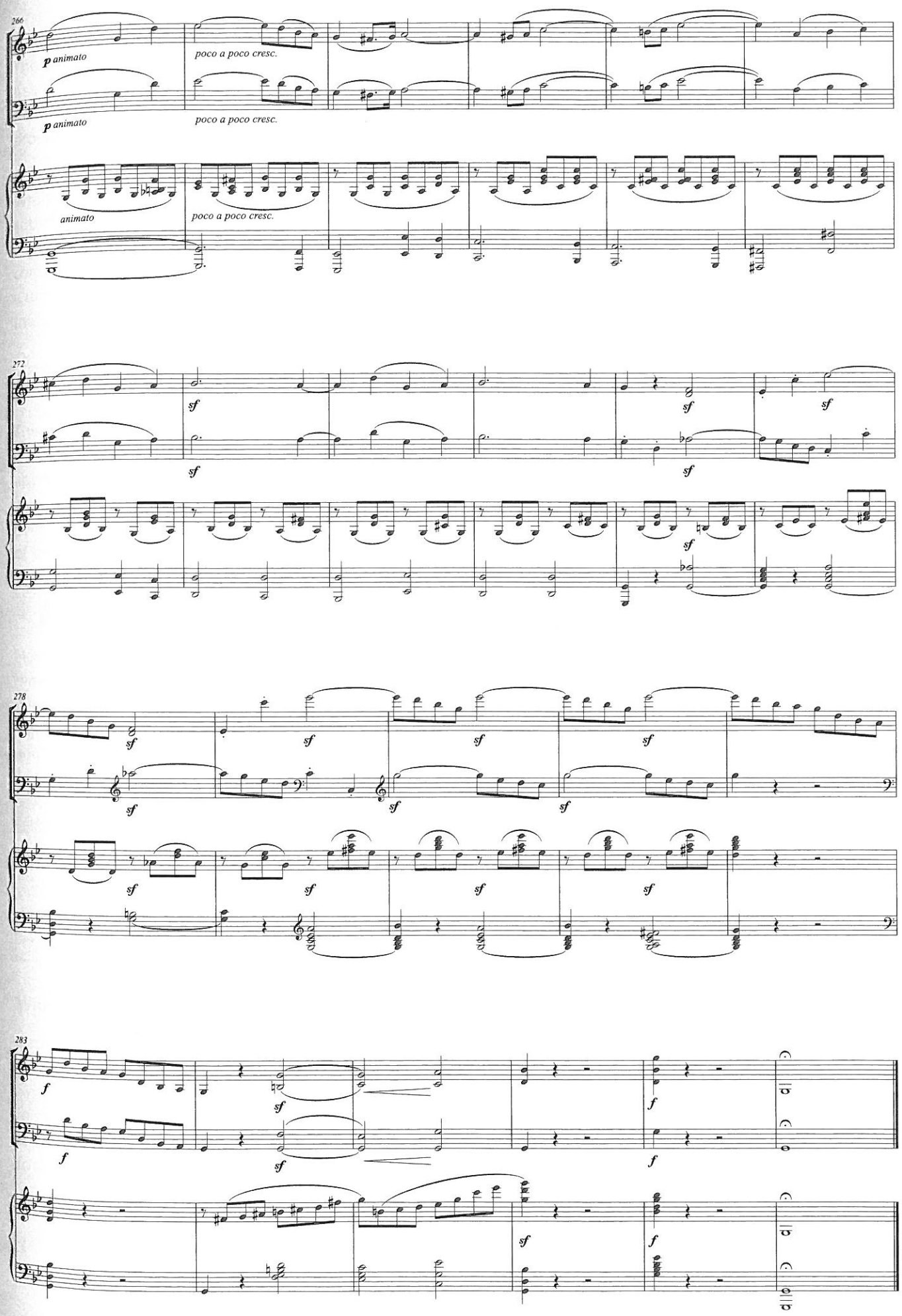

146
f
f
f
152
dim.
dim.
dim.
p
p
p
158
p
dim.
164
pizz.
p
p
p


arco
p
176
cresc.
182
f
sf
ff
188


194
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
200
dim.
p
dim.
206
p
p
p
p
212
fp
p
fp
p
fp
p
fp
p


poco rit.
poco rit.
p poco rit.
224
a tempo
fp
a tempo
fp
a tempo
p
p
cresc.
cresc.
dim.
dim.
230
p
p
cresc.
cresc.
dim.
dim.
f
f
236
pizz.
p
cresc.


242
cresc.
cresc.
f
arco
f
cresc.
f
248
p
fp
fp
p
fp
fp
sfp
mf
dim.
254
cresc.
f
cresc.
cresc.
260
f
f


266
p animato
poco a poco cresc.
p animato
poco a poco cresc.
animato
poco a poco cresc.
272
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
278
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
sf
283
f
sf
f
f
sf
f
sf
f