Rachmaninoff's *Etude Tableaux Op 33 No 8* is a humble and stylistic rejection of the traditional Austro-German form of classical music. Many of his radical counterparts completely abandon tonality, rhythmic loyalty and the sonata-allegro structure to create music that critics regarded as "as a mere intellectual exercise that could not be seriously regarded as music at all," Some examples of this are Terry Riley's *in C*, John Cages *4'33''* and Riechs *It's Gonna rain.* (Dawson, *class notes).* Rachmaninoff's protest, however, is much more subtle and astute.

The conventions that characterize the Austro-German form are strongly associated with the classical approach to cognitive sciences. As this paper unfolds we will see how Rachmaninoff's exploitation of these conventions is an insightful representation of the arguments the embodied discipline of cognitive sciences holds against the classical approach.

In 18th and 19th century Austro-German music, the audience is viewed as being independent to the message the music carries. Meaning that we are passive recipients of the musical content, a view that composers Arnold Schoenberg and Virgil Thompson strongly enforce (*class notes).* This belief is reminiscent of the notion of multiple realization. In classical cognitive sciences one adheres to a sense-think-act scheme. The "think" is characterized by representational states in which we manipulate symbols and carry out algorithms. The fact that the product does not depend on the type media we utilize to carry them out is the principle of multiple realization. Accordingly the semantics rely only on the syntax in the same manner the musical messages rely on the score and not the audience.

However Rachmaninoff "preferred to leave such interpretations to listener and performer... painting for themselves what it most suggests," (Wilson, 2012). The argument here is that musical symbols can have diverse and various meanings dependent on the person who is receiving them. This redirection of emphasis to the media as being an interpreter is essential to embodied cognitive sciences. We begin to see the score a vague template whereas how we interact with is what determines what message is elicited. The fact that he would "record a piece over and over again until he was satisfied," (Ravas, 2007 p.843) is not so much a testament to his perfectionistic nature as it is to the insufficiency of a score. Each time he played it, it was different. This demonstrates the value of embodiment and the employment of feedback. The performer's behaviour is manipulated directly by the product of his active engagement with the piano. To illustrate further, there is an interesting anecdote regarding the first time Rachmaninoff heard his music being played, he expresses "I stuck my fingers in my ears to prevent myself from hearing my own music, the discords of which absolutely tortured me" (Ravas, 2007). However, much unlike other composers, he did not blame the performer nor was he enraged with the ignorance of the crowd. He simply hated the sound of his music. If we are just passive receivers

of the musical message upon which we interpret using an infallible set of algorithms why would he suddenly become revolted by his own music? A point that begins to question the classical paradigm.

The exploitation of traditional techniques and conventions of classical music is abundant in Etudes Tableaux op 33 no 8. Note the presence of a strong melody and harmony and a clear distinction between them dynamically but the unconservative manner in which he pushes the boundaries of the typical melodic harmonic interface. There is no consistent, calculated manner in which the harmony traverses across hands, bars or the melody. It extends without notice from high to low notes, appears suddenly in the middle of bars or fades unexpectedly and is almost indistinguishable at times from the melody (in regard to tonality). A simple analogy can be made regarding this. That is, our behaviours do not coincide with a computational model that is consistent, effective and predicable rather we employ heuristics, cognitive blunders occur frequently, and behave and contradictory ways. All of the latter are artifacts of embodied cognition.

What is even more dissident however, is the simplicity and insignificance of the harmony. Many critics dismissed Rachmaninoff's works because in the Austro-German model the harmonic patterns drive the tension of the music, a quality not present in Rachmaninoff's repertoire. Instead it is the interplay between the melody and harmony and the "emotive power of specific motifs" that defines this piece (Ravas, 2007, 843). Specifically in bars 8 and 26-39 the sounds that emerge from integrating the melody and harmony together is not only impressive but elicits a quality that is much different than playing the melody or harmony separately. This is something not present in Austro-German pieces. Emergent behaviours are also observed in robots that are build with "well considered building block" but yet behave in novel ways. A field that has contributed much to developing embodied cognitive sciences' theory's (Dawson *et al,* 2010).

Furthermore, the manner in which Rachmaninoff's emulates the sonata-allegro form and tonality in Etude Tableaux op 33 no 8 is creatively facetious in nature, as if taunting the Austro-German conservatism instead of rejecting it. He begins with dominant (as opposed to tonic) notes but in the tonic key, at rare times introducing the dominant key accidentals. Rather than progressing to the dominant key for part b of the exposition he just makes the melody into a 2nd inversion tonic chord. These techniques are so clever without looking at the notation the audience could be fooled into believing he is following the traditional form. To continue, he makes an amusing entry into the development by repeating a simple string of notes faster and faster until the speed cannot even be notated by typical conventions (bar 25). The development is

defined as a section where the composer invents an array of new ideas utilizing thematic material. Rachmaninoff's takes this notion of innovation to an entire different level. His development abandons the theme and litters the page with accidentals to create a one breathe spectacle of 32nd notes. The grandiose style is an emotive incongruity to the solemn beginning. After a dramatic ascending chromatic interlude he begins the recapitulation, exactly the same as the beginning... provoking a feeling of 'as if nothing had happened', even though he has just done something completely shocking to what would be expected by an audience accustomed to traditional music. This manipulating of expectations is a prominent theme in this piece and is most obvious at bar 43 when he brings the piece to a close, but then inserts a whimsical chromatic scale. Lastly he makes use of a cadence to say "okay, now I'm really done," again as if mocking the traditional form.

Rachmaninoff challenging the Sonata-Allegro form can be related to the reaction of embodied cognitive sciences to classical cognitive sciences and the new principles the embodied approach brings forth. For example, rather than the musical conventions or rules dictating to him how he writes his music, he manipulates form, rhythm, emotions, tonality and expectations to create music. In a sense he is directly manipulating what these steadfast rules (or algorithms) are intended to produce, ultimately abolishing the need for representation at all. The score can be considered as a scaffold, an external tool used to preserve the music as well as a sketchboard used to create the music, offering credence to the "leaky mind" attribute of embodied sciences. A concept that allocates thinking to the external rather than internal (Dawson, 2010).

Despite the fact that Rachmaninoff's accepts the audience interpreters, presents radical innovation and protests against the original format his music remains appealing, profound and coherent. This is illustrated particularly well *Etudes-Tableux Op 33 No 8*. His lavish motifs are not only both a concrete and abstract representation of freeing from traditional constraints but it also embodies the movement from cognition as internal symbol manipulation to cognition as the relationship between ones affordances and manipulation of the environment. The picture I paint is one that begins as a solemn requiem for the classical way of thinking and progresses into a wealth of schemes for a new embodied approach.

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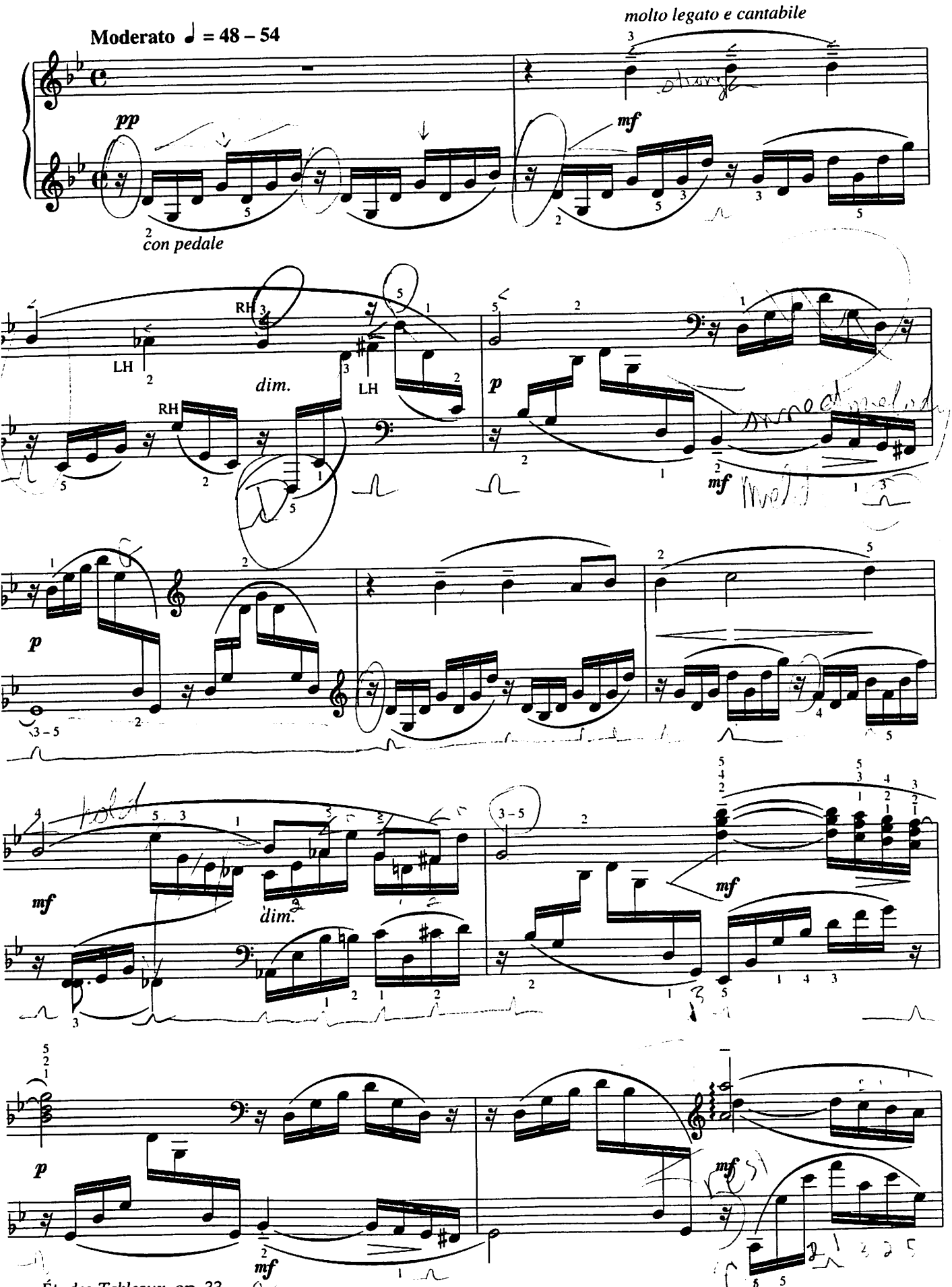
Etude-Tableau

op. 33, no. 8

Sergei Rachmaninoff
(1873–1943)



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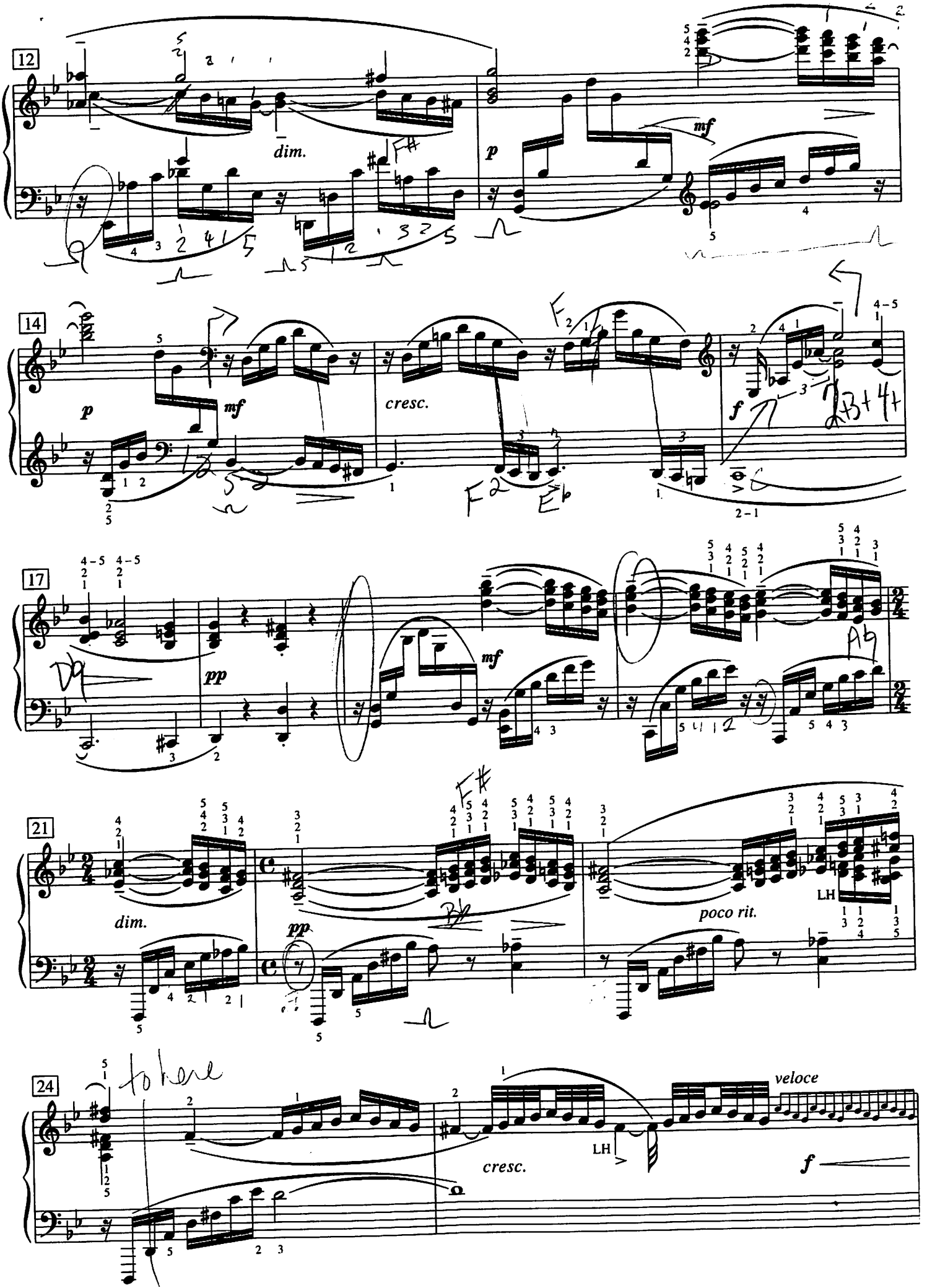
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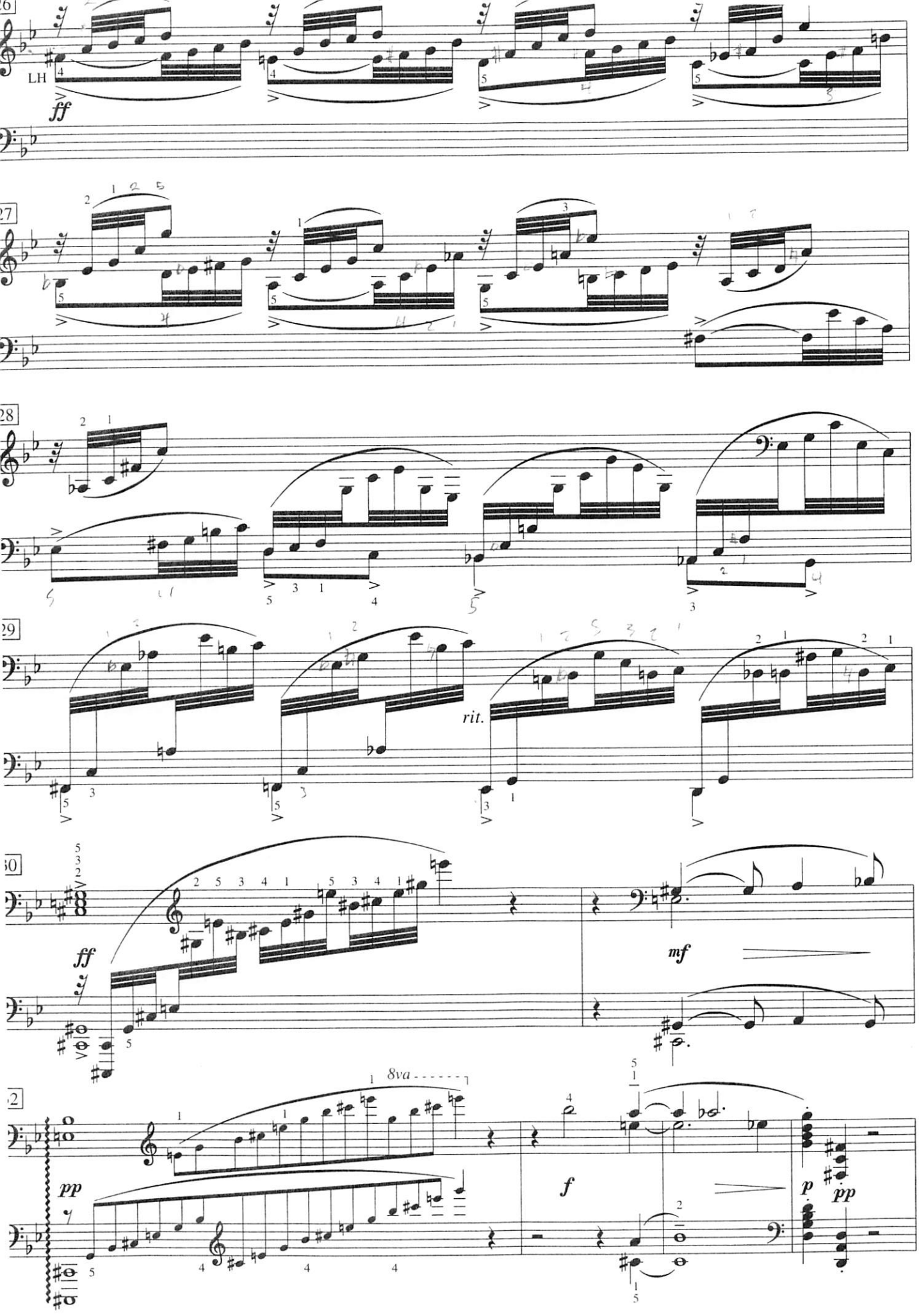
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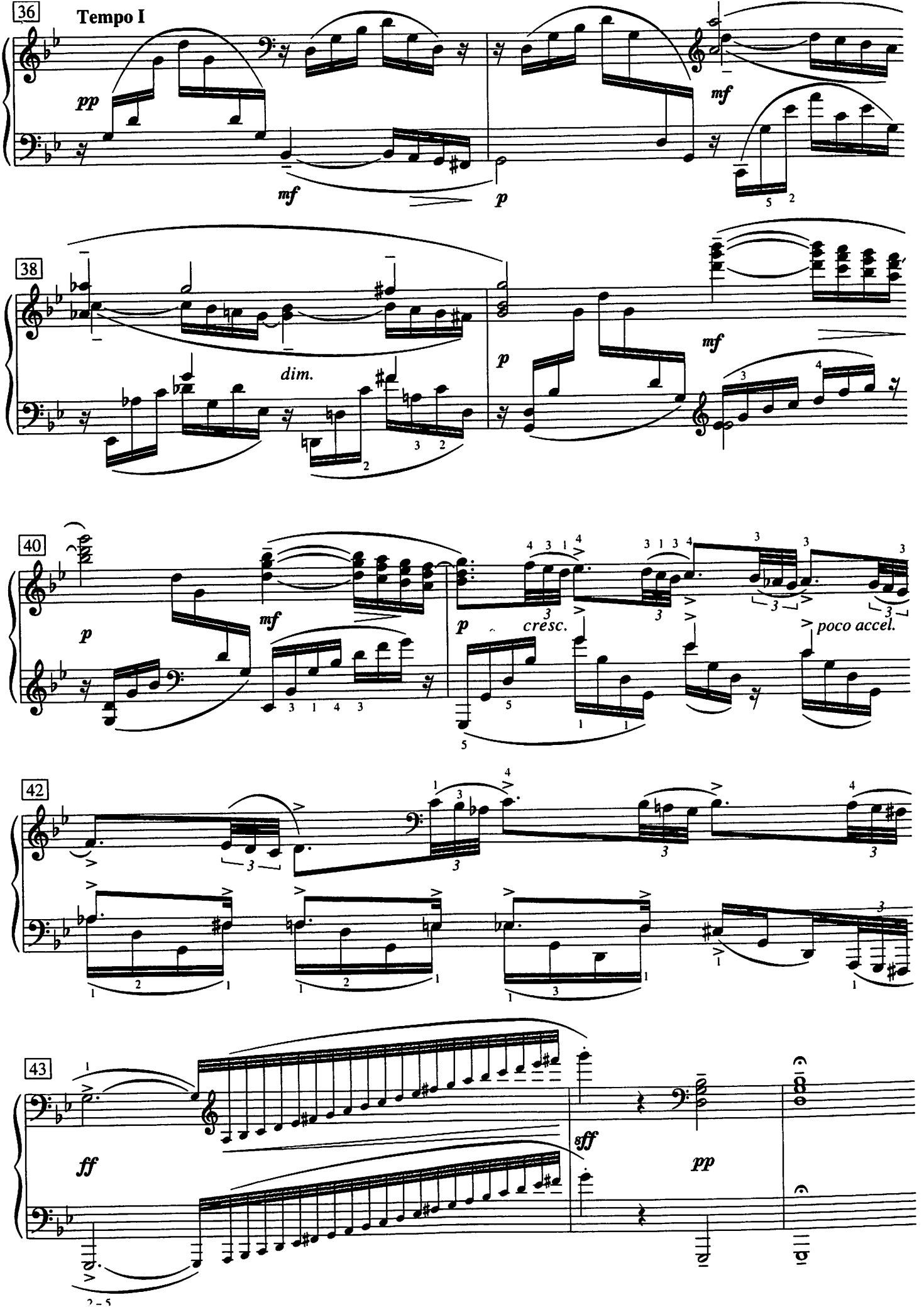
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