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GUSTAV HOLST

The Solo Piano Music

1924–1932

Faber Music Limited
London

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INTRODUCTION

These six pieces are the only piano music that Holst wrote, apart from his early works of the 1890s when he was training to be a pianist. (The training had to come to an end because of the neuritis in his right arm, but he never forgot the imagined feel of the keyboard.)

The following short works were written as presents for his friends and his family. The first four are founded on tunes from W. G. Whittaker's 'North Countrie Ballads, Songs and Pipe-Tunes'. The *Toccata* was written in 1924 for Mrs Norman O'Neill, to celebrate her silver wedding. It is founded on 'Newburn Lads' and Holst described the first time he heard the tune, played by 'an old man in Cheltenham with a hurdygurdy somewhere about 1879 and this was his only tune and each time he played it he had fewer notes than before and what notes were left were further from what they were when they were young.'

Chrissemas Day in the morning was a 1926 Christmas present for Vally Lasker. In the following year he wrote *O! I hae seen the roses blaw* and *The Shoemakker* and dedicated them to Nora Day. They were published in 1928 as 'Two Folk Song Fragments' and were reissued in 1970 with the title 'Two Northumbrian Folk Tunes'.

The *Nocturne* was written for me in 1930 as a belated twenty-first birthday present in answer to my request for some piano music without any folk tunes. He couldn't think of the right title for it, and it was first performed as 'An Un-named Piece'. The *Jig* was written in 1932. In a letter he wrote to me that summer he said:

> I realised that your next piano piece was long overdue so I set to work. I've done nothing else these two days and my idea was to get something down on paper and then ask you to rewrite it and make it sound more or less like music. But I've just crawled through it twice (Molto Adagio instead of Vivace) and it really isn't fit to be seen even by you. So I'll put it aside until I come back. It's a jig – probably. And I think the 'un-named' is a nocturne. Do you?

The *Nocturne* and *Jig* were published separately after his death in 1934 and were republished together, as *Two Pieces for Piano*, in 1965.

I am grateful to the original publishers for allowing all the six pieces to be gathered together under one cover. Details about first performances and the whereabouts of the manuscripts are given in *A Thematic Catalogue of Gustav Holst's Music* (Faber Music Ltd, 1974).

IMOGEN HOLST

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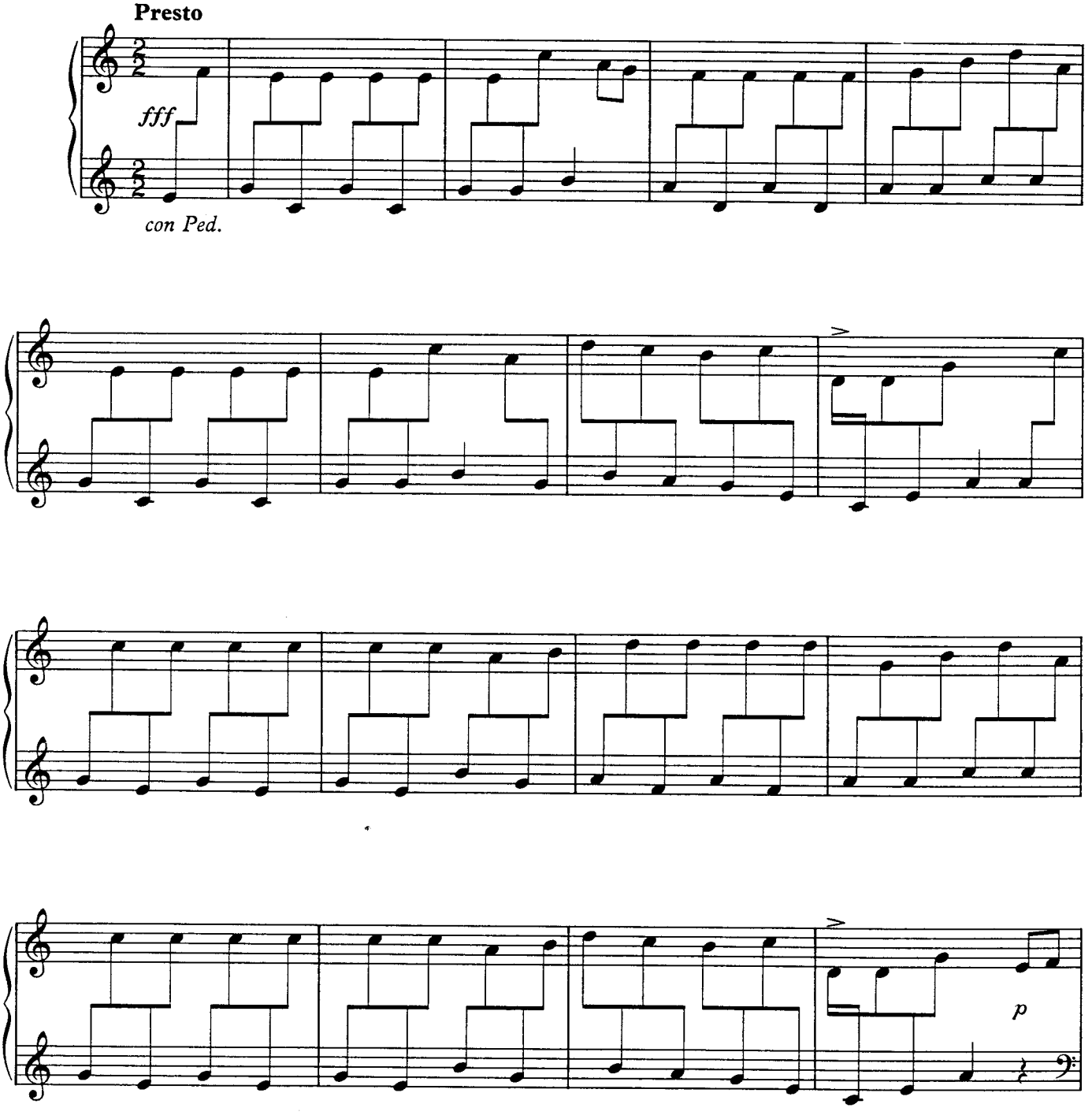
1924–1932

GUSTAV HOLST

To Adine O'Neill and her pupils

TOCCATA

(1924)



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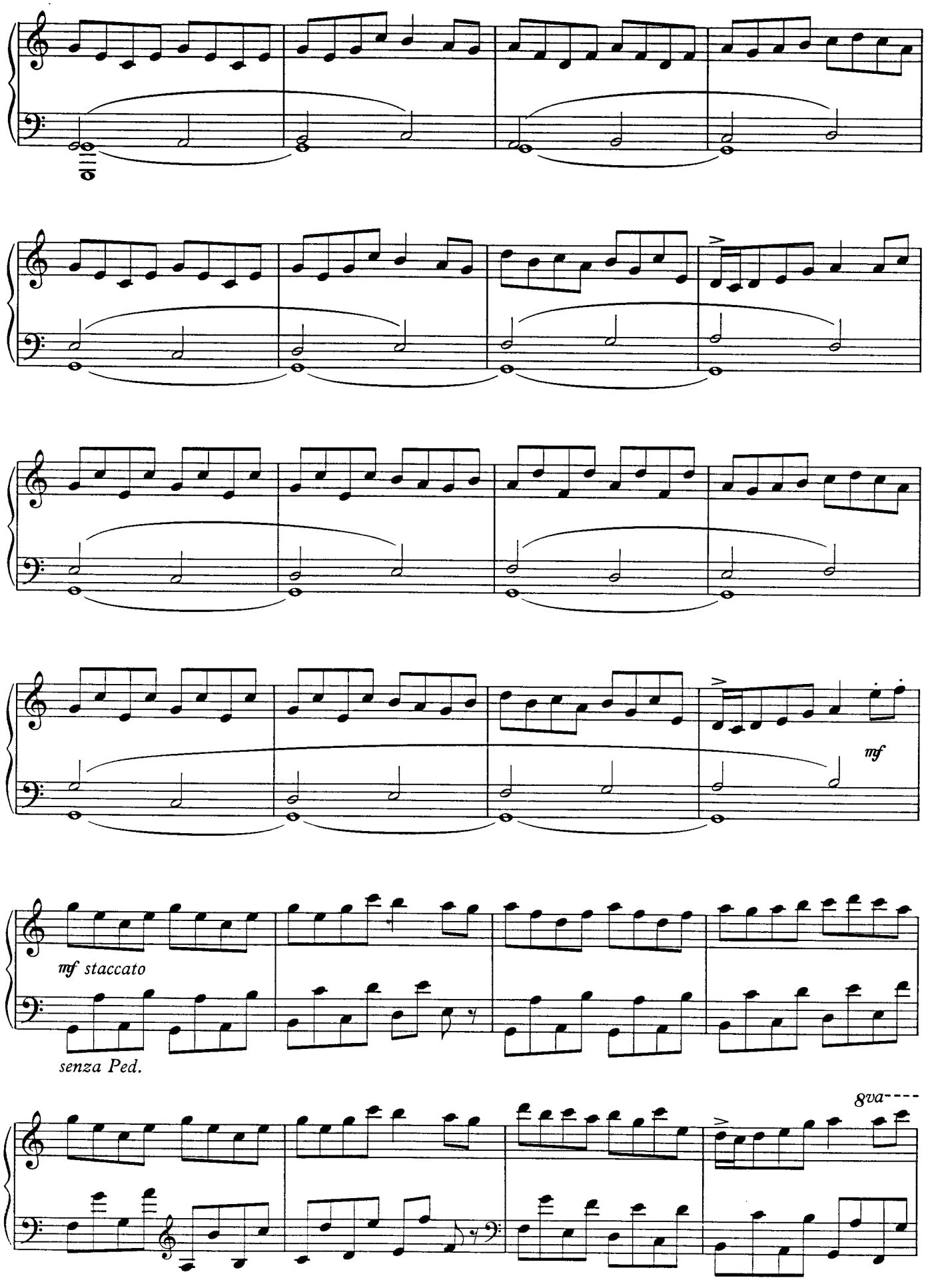

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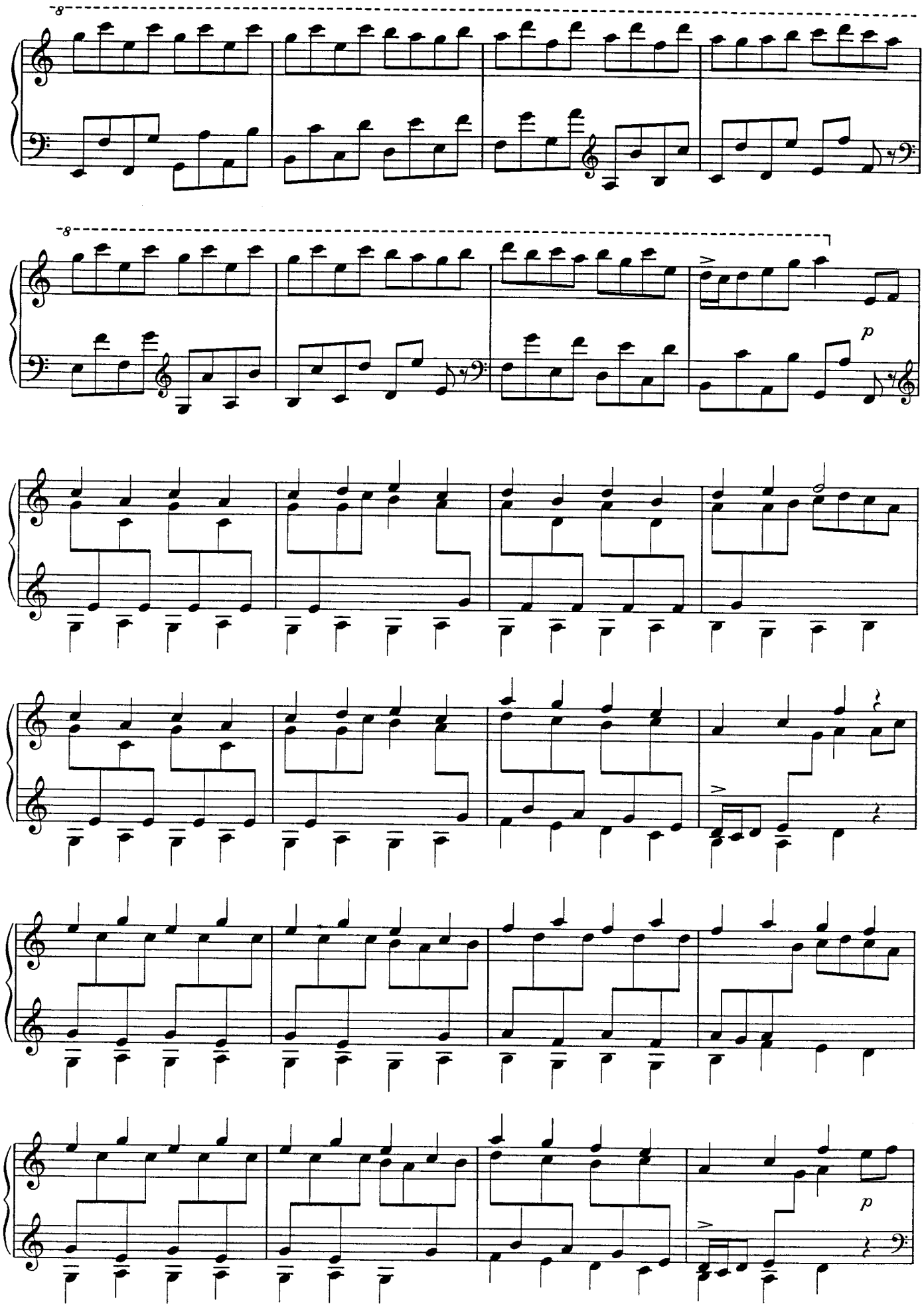

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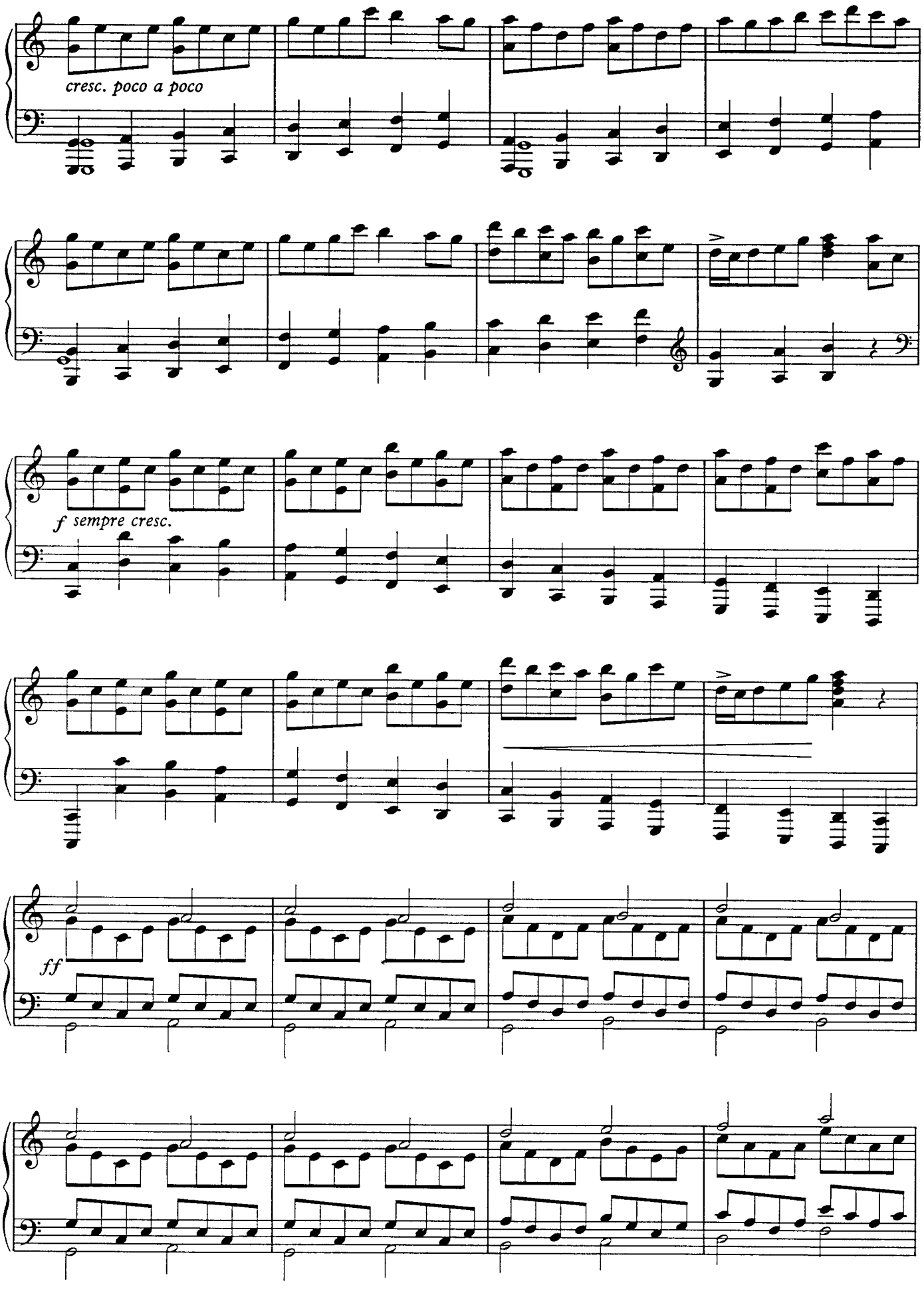

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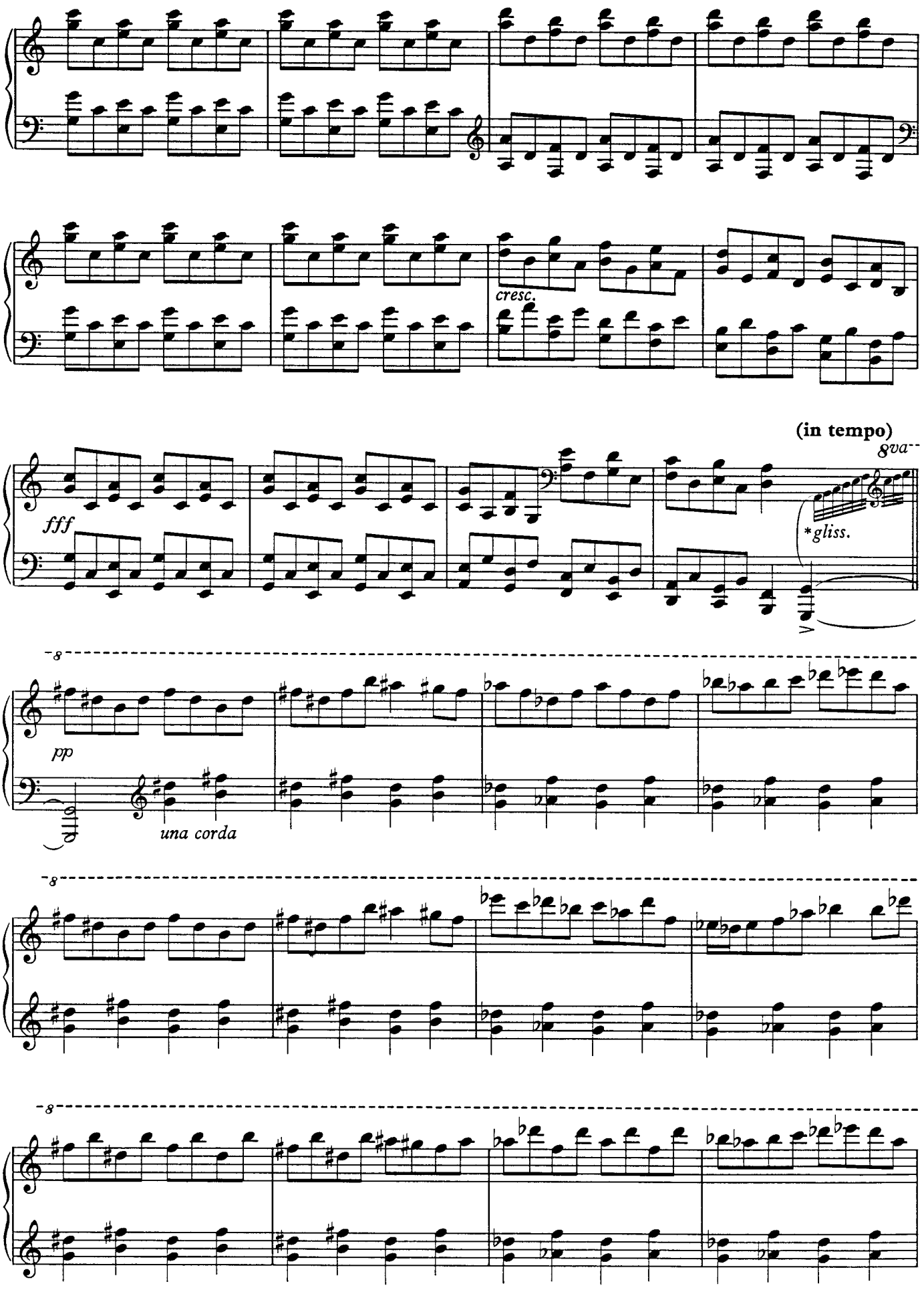

* The *gliss.* should commence immediately *after* the G is struck; not *with* it.

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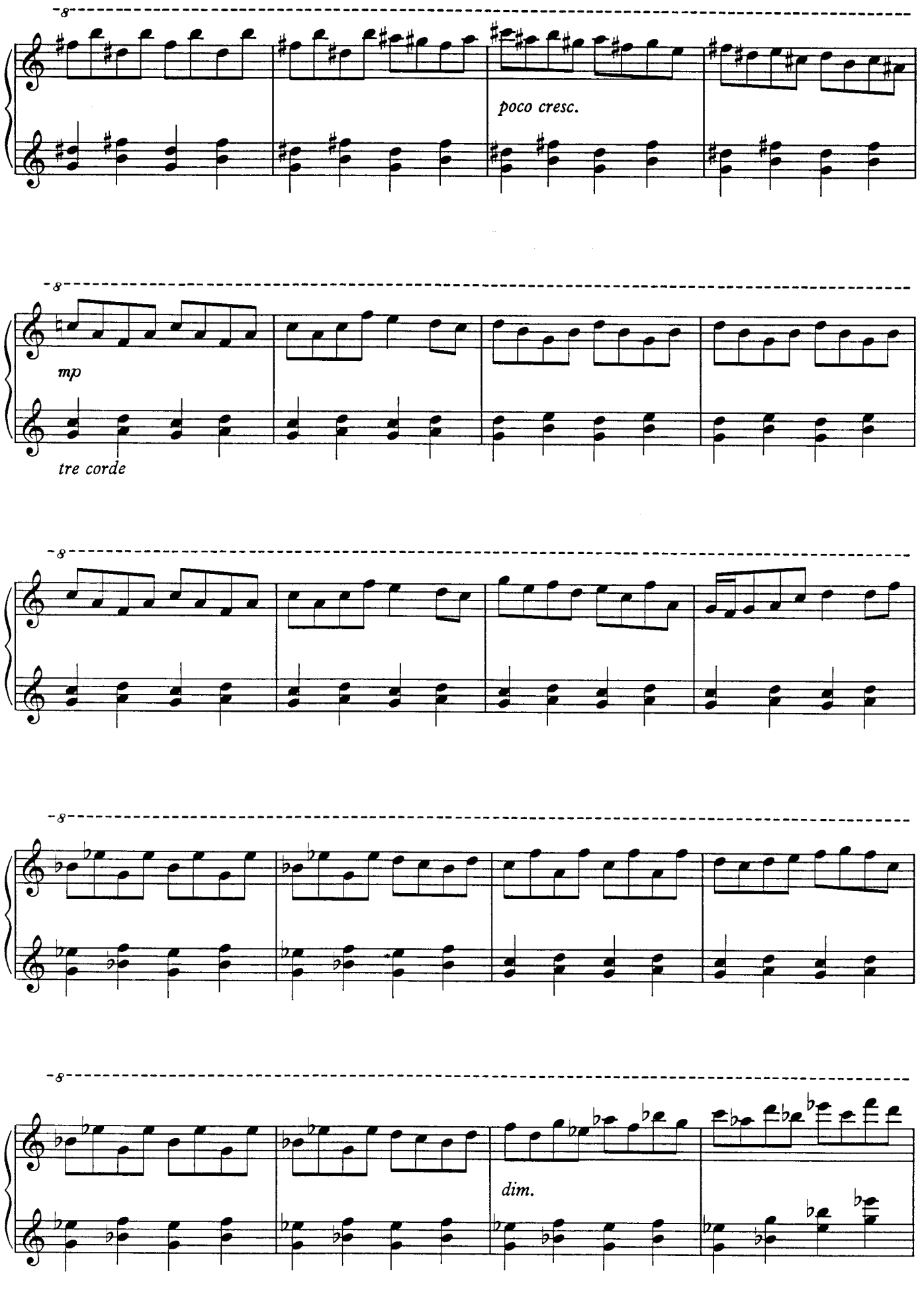
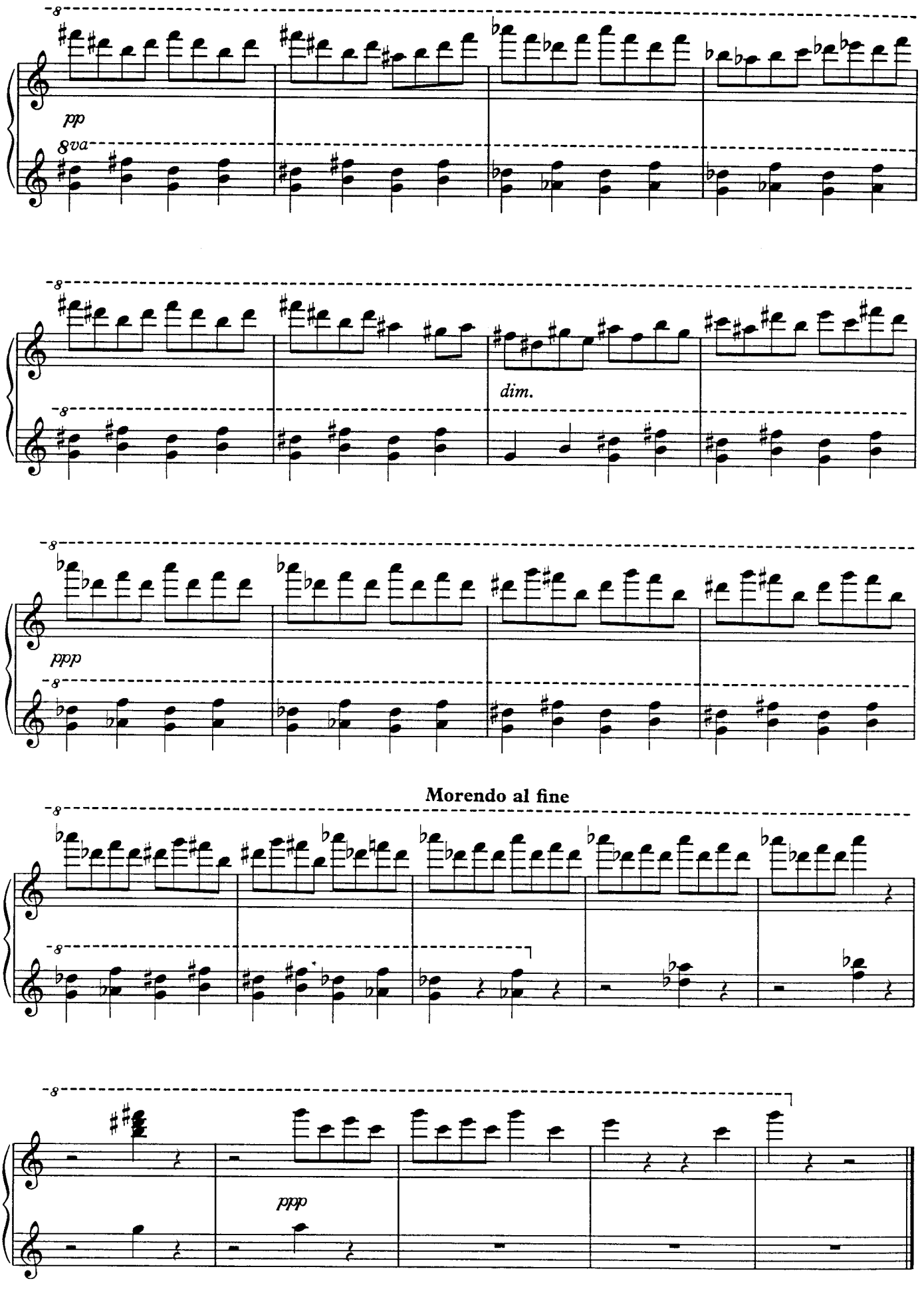
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