PEMOENGKAH

"OVERTURE" TO THE SHADOW-PLAY

Perhaps the highest, and certainly the most sensitive form of musical expression existing in Bali is revealed in the music which accompanies the shadow-play. This performance, in which puppets cut from buffalo-hide are thrown in silhouette against an illuminated screen, still enjoys great popularity among the Balinese.

The many speculations regarding the inner significance of the shadow-play seem to agree to an origin which was partly religious ceremony and partly entertainment, involving the invocation and representation of deified ancestors and the enacting of their heroic deeds. With the advent of Hinduism, these ancestor-gods gradually became identified with the newer pantheon, and their deeds interwoven with those of the Hindu epics. The legends enacted at present in Bali are drawn for the most part from the two great Hindu epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

The *pemoengkah* (opening music) is the termination of a long overture which is played while the puppets are being set up. A quartet of *gendér* is used, ten-keyed metallophones with resonators, two of which double the others an octave higher. The instruments are played with both hands, each holding a light hammer, whose head is a disk of wood, loosely between the second and third fingers.

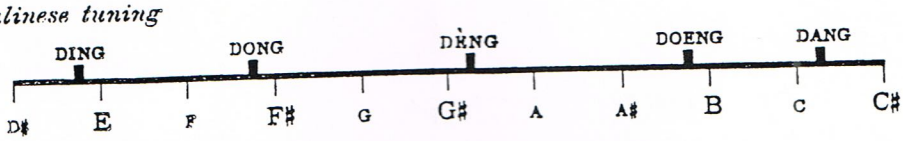
It is difficult to convey by words an impression of the strange beauty of the sound from these instruments. Sweet, yet acid, soft, yet metallic, the four *gendér* are in perfect accord with the nature of the performance. The clear-cut design of the music and the delicate arabesques are reflected in the transparent lacework of the puppets, whose gestures, miniature and heroic, nervous and menacing, are in turn retranslated into sound by the sensitive and, at times, vaguely sinister nature of the music.

The music must be played lightly and transparently, *not expressively*, with just enough pedal to attain a good legato.

The *pemoengkah*, played by native musicians on native instruments, has been recorded by Odéon. It is from the actual playing of these musicians (and not merely from their record) that this transcription has been made.

Naturally, the tuning of a Balinese scale differs from our own tempered system. The diagram below shows the approximate difference between the two.

Balinese tuning — BALINESE SOLFEGGIO



Western tuning

GENDÉR PLAYERS

GAMBANGAN

GAMBANG MELODY

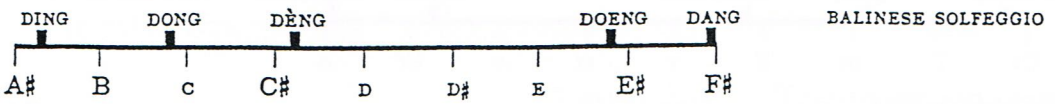
Gambang is the name of an ancient musical instrument with fourteen wooden keys. The *gamelan gambang* consists of four *gambang* and one (sometimes two) *saron*, an instrument with seven thick metal keys. This *gamelan* is now used in Bali only during the ceremonies attending the cremation of the dead. The *gambang* play the figuration, while the *saron* plays the melody.

Sometimes these melodies are transformed, and given a different instrumentation. This arrangement is an exact transcription of a modern Balinese version, arranged by a certain Balinese musician for the *gamelan gong*, a large orchestra with gongs and some thirty players. The melody is played by a group of *gangsa* (metal-keyed instruments), while the figuration is played by four men (two doubling the others an octave higher) on the *réjong* (prounounced *rayong*), a series of twelve small gongs mounted horizontally upon a stand. The figuration is composed of an elaborately syncopated two-part "counterpoint", so constructed as to give a continuous pattern of sixteenth-notes. The technic of the two lower players is as follows:

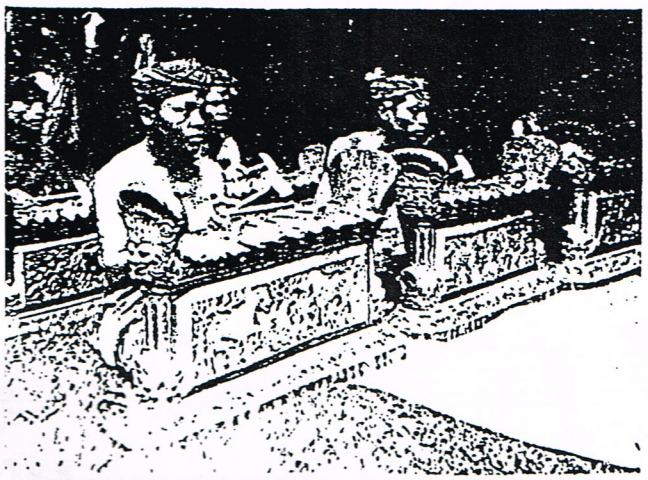
The tone of the *gamelan gong* is noble and robust, the sonority metallic, sweet, aerial. The pianos must always be played as percussion instruments. *Legato* must be achieved through pedal. The phrasing is arbitrary, since the Balinese do not stress important notes, but take their dynamics from the drum, which supplies a throbbing rhythmic undercurrent. Unfortunately, it is impossible to interpret the drum-playing on the piano. The arrangement must be considered as a recording only of all the instruments with definite pitch.

Naturally, the tuning of a Balinese scale differs from our own tempered system. The diagram below shows the approximate difference between the two.

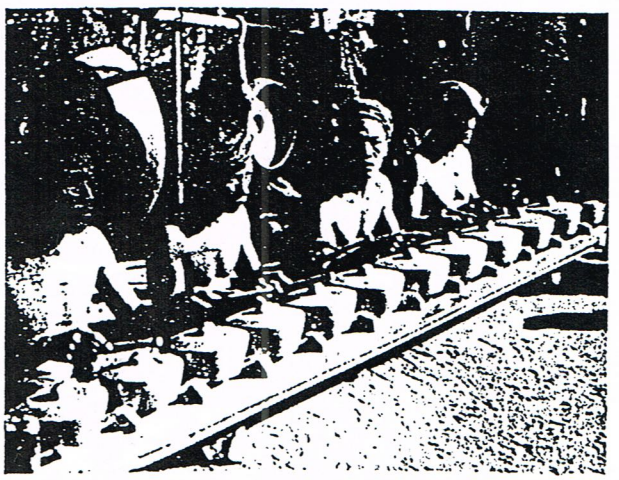
Balinese tuning



Western tuning



THE GANGSA



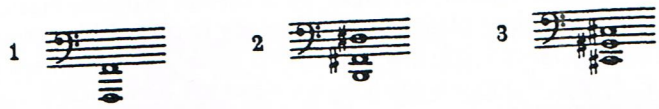
THE RÉJONG

TABOEH TELOE

This music is the first to be played at any large ceremony in Bali, such as a cremation or a temple feast. It is purely instrumental (*not dance-music*), and is played by the *Gamelan Gong Gedé*, the gamelan with the great gongs, which comprises many metal-keyed instruments, three large gongs, and many small gongs.

The melody (assigned in this transcription to the first piano) is played by a single musician on the *trompong*, a series of ten small gongs mounted horizontally. The accompaniment (here assigned to the second piano) is played by four men on a similar instrument, called the *réjong*. The figuration in the second part of the piece is played on metal-keyed instruments.

The gongs are represented thus



The fact that these notes often sound dissonant with the melody must be ignored, for the gongs aim not to harmonize but to *punctuate* the melody. They should always be played comparatively softly.

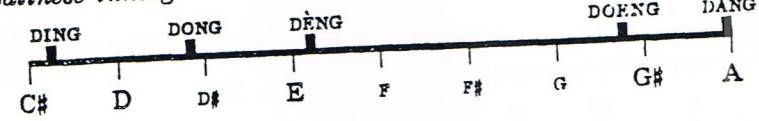
The melody for the first piano must ring out clearly, the syncopations sounding as liberations rather than rhythmic intensifications. The accompaniment must always be rhythmic, precise. Plenty of pedal must be used, for the gamelan is never dry in sound, but rich in echoes and overtones. On the repetition of each section, gong 1 should be played in the place of gong 2 and vice versa, to maintain the systematic alternation of these two.

The whole piece should project a mood of noble tranquillity, definitely established at the very outset in the free, meditative introduction for the *trompong*.

Taboeh Teloe, in its original form, has been recorded by Odéon. This transcription, however, has been taken from the actual playing of the musicians themselves who made the record.

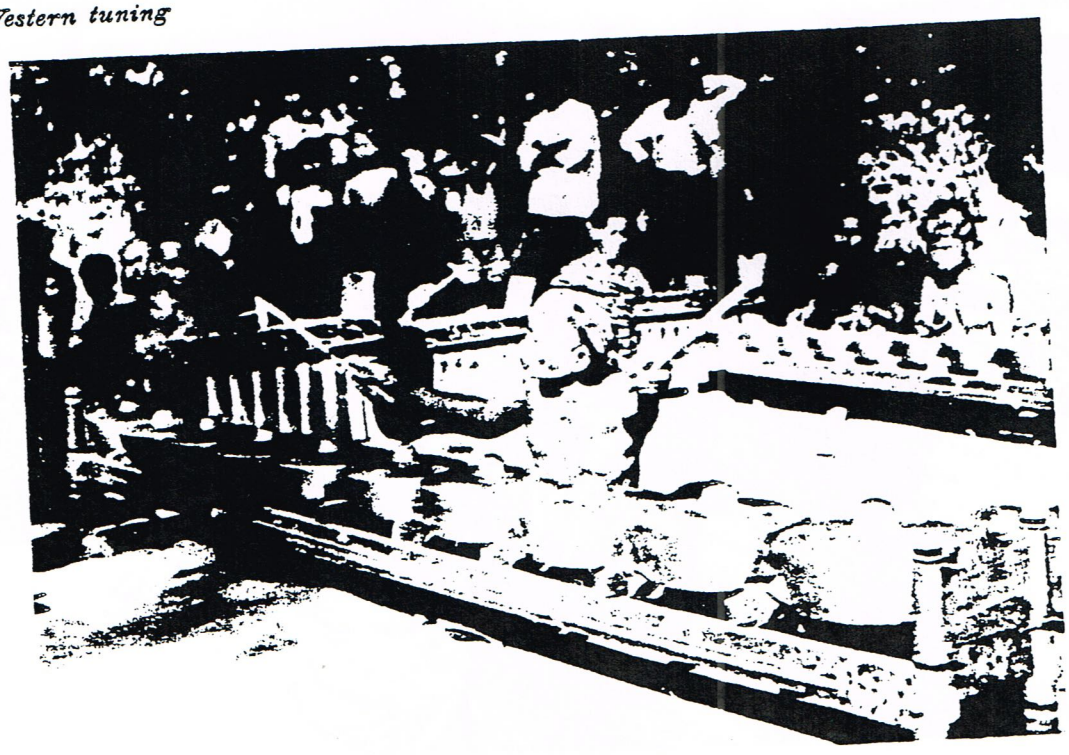
Naturally, the tuning of a Balinese scale differs from our own tempered system. The diagram below shows the approximate difference between the two.

Balinese tuning



BALINESE SOLFEGGIO

Western tuning

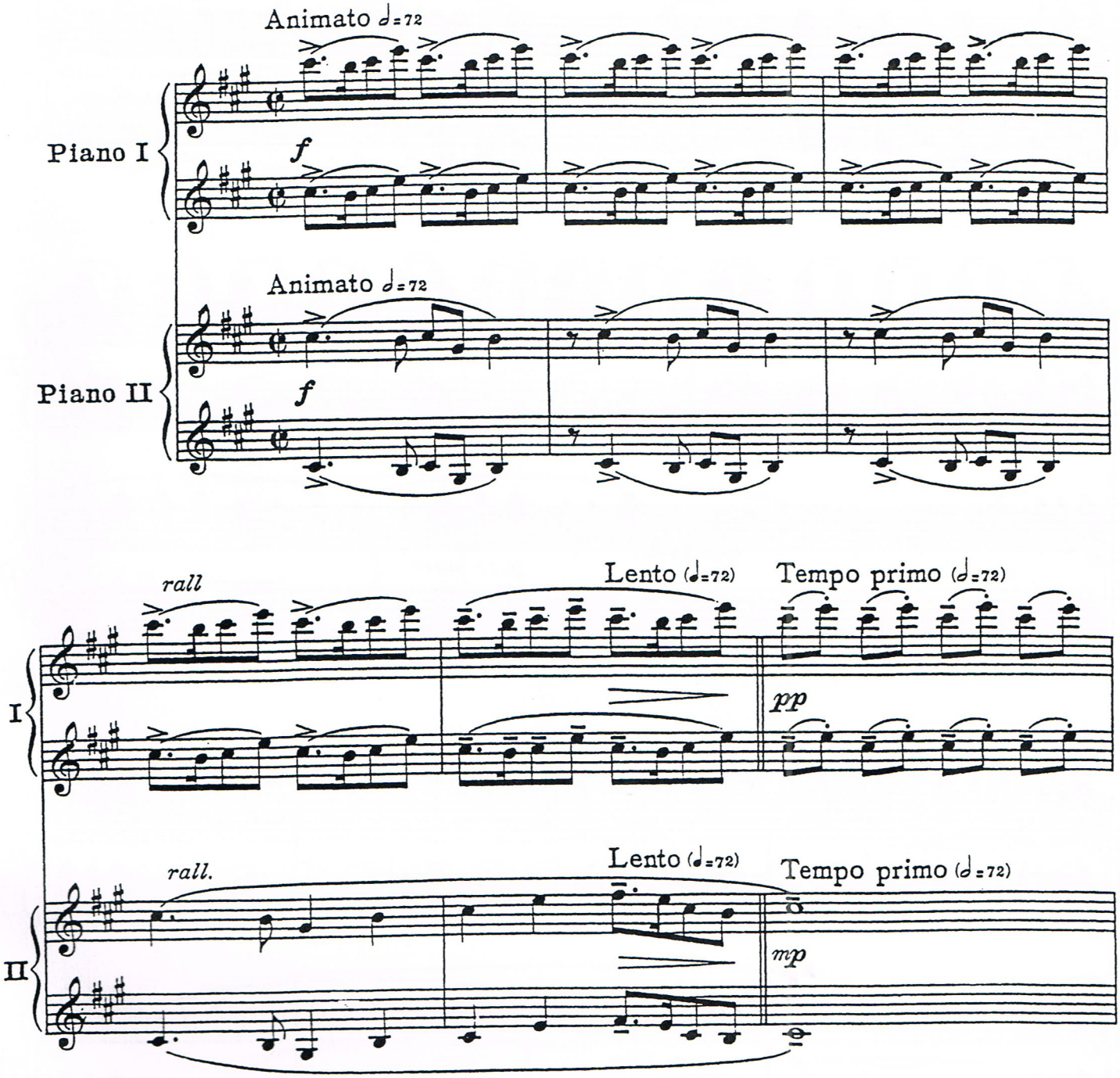


THE TROMPONG

Balinese Ceremonial Music

Transcribed for two pianos, four hands, by
Colin McPhee

1. Pemoengkah



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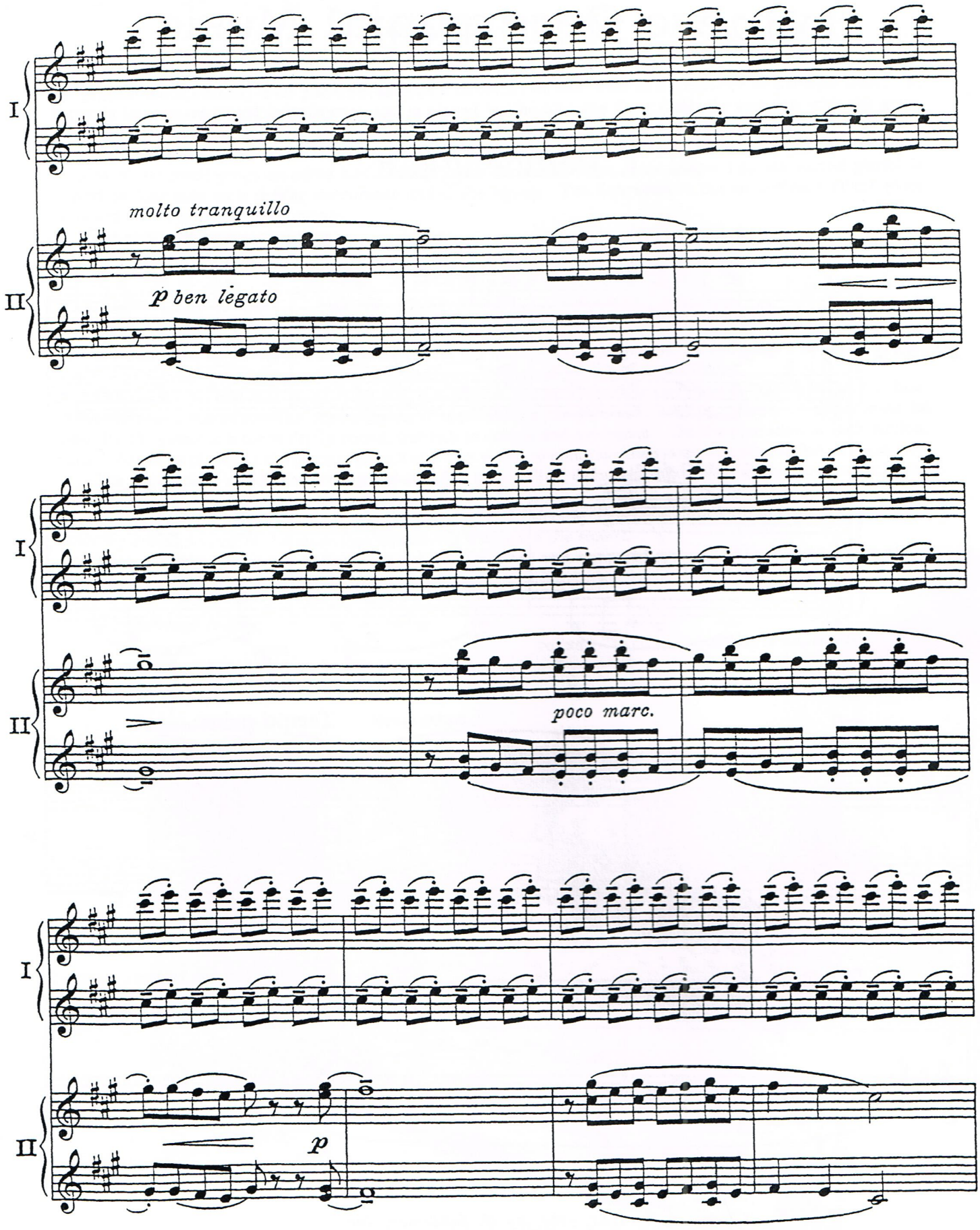
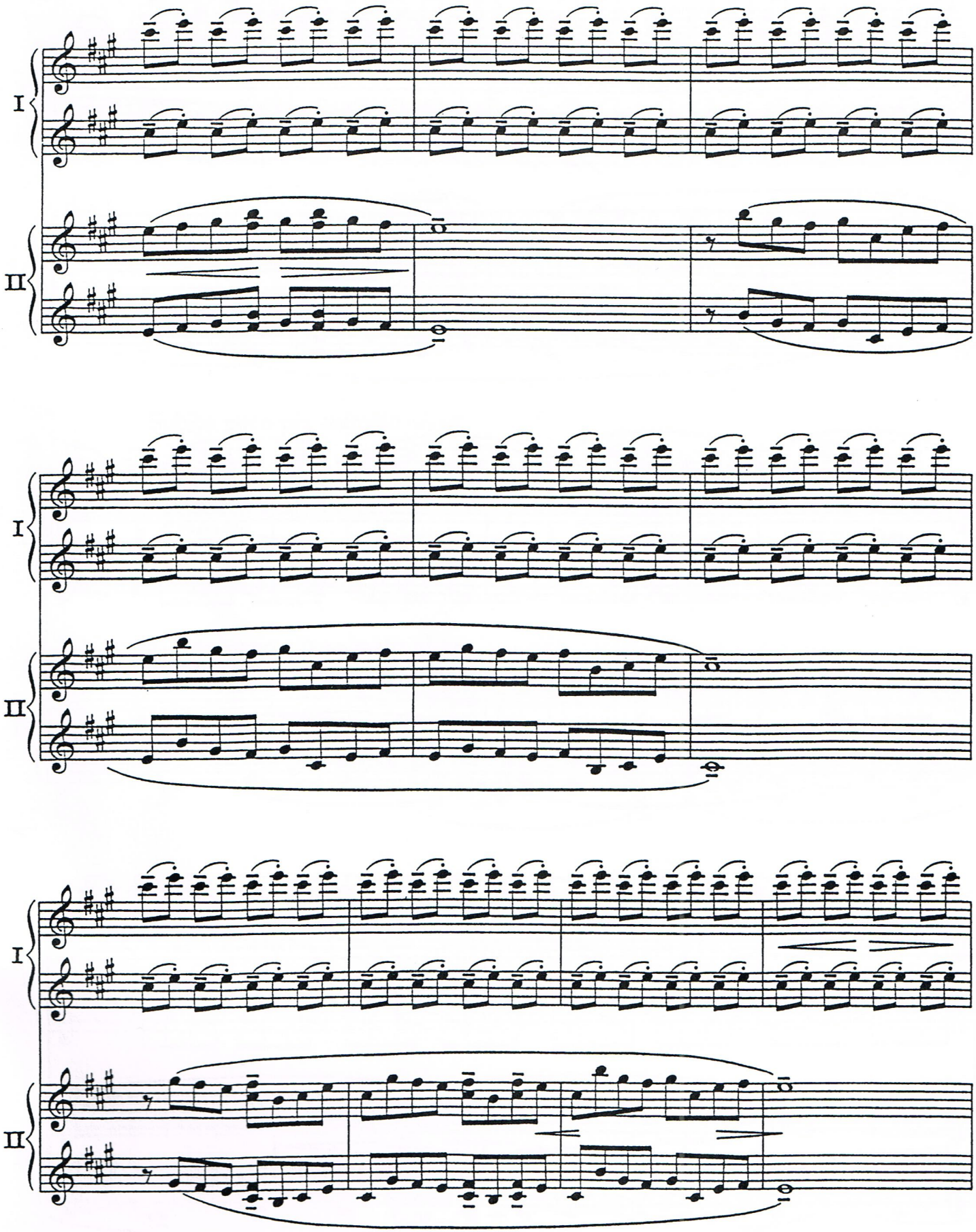
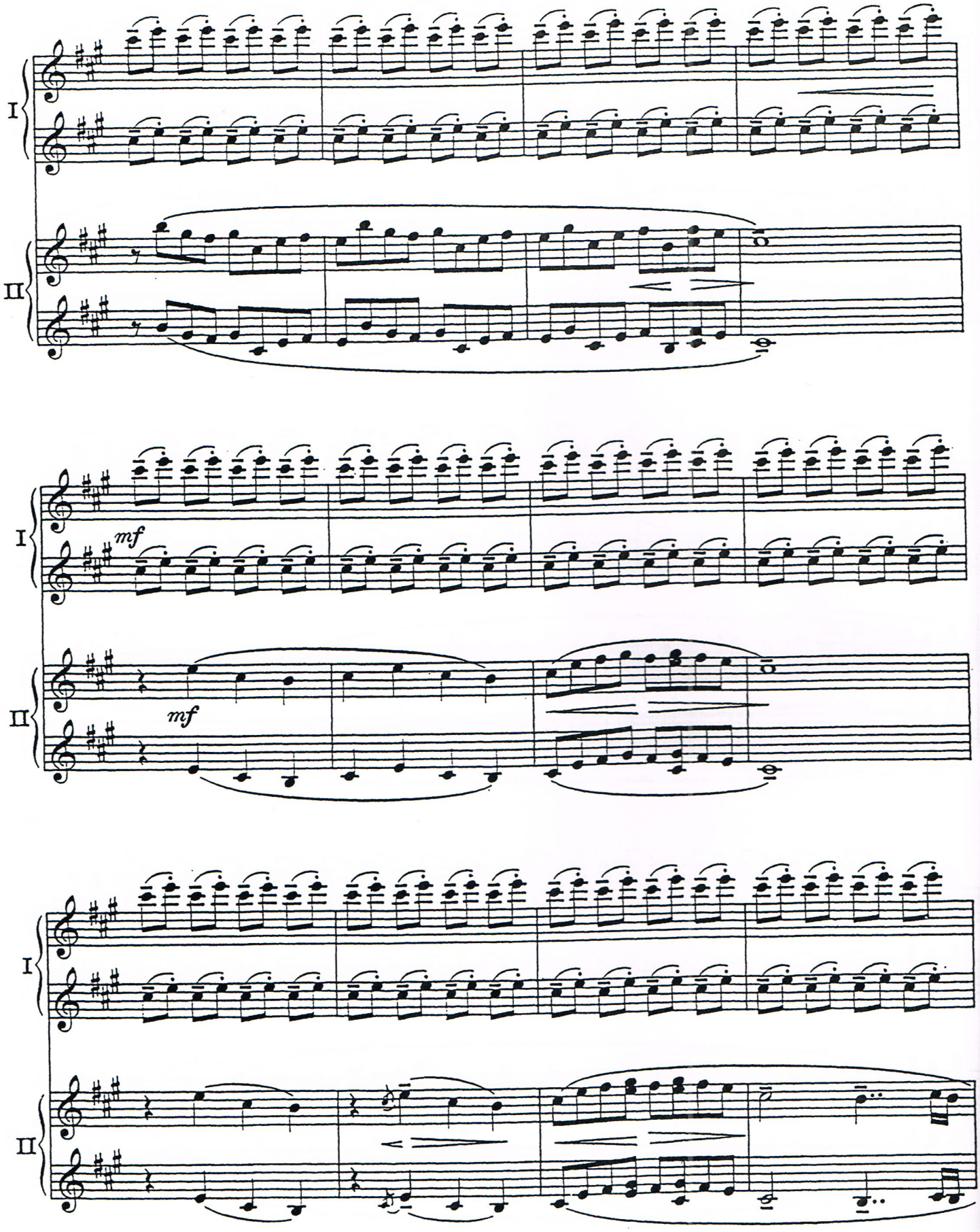
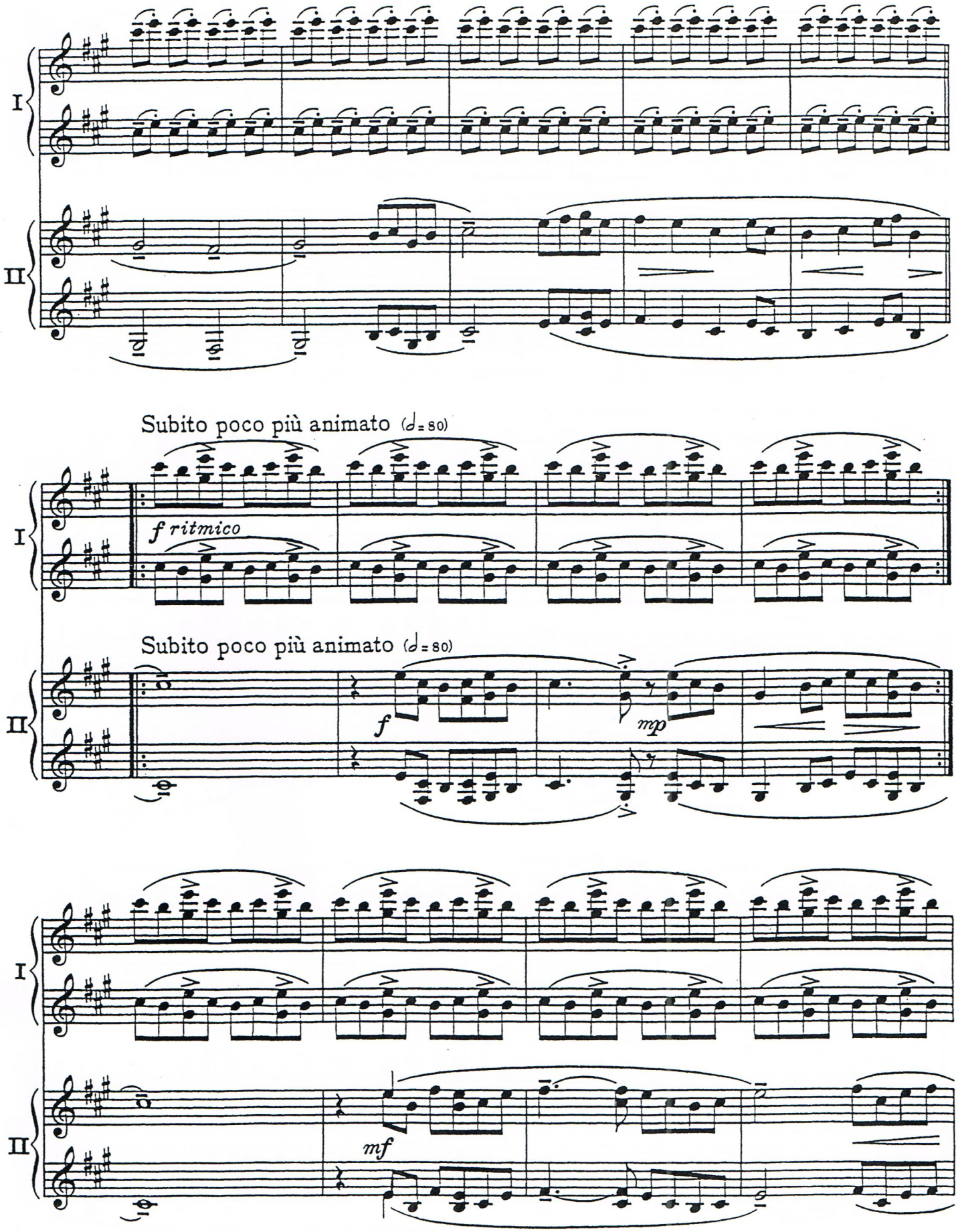
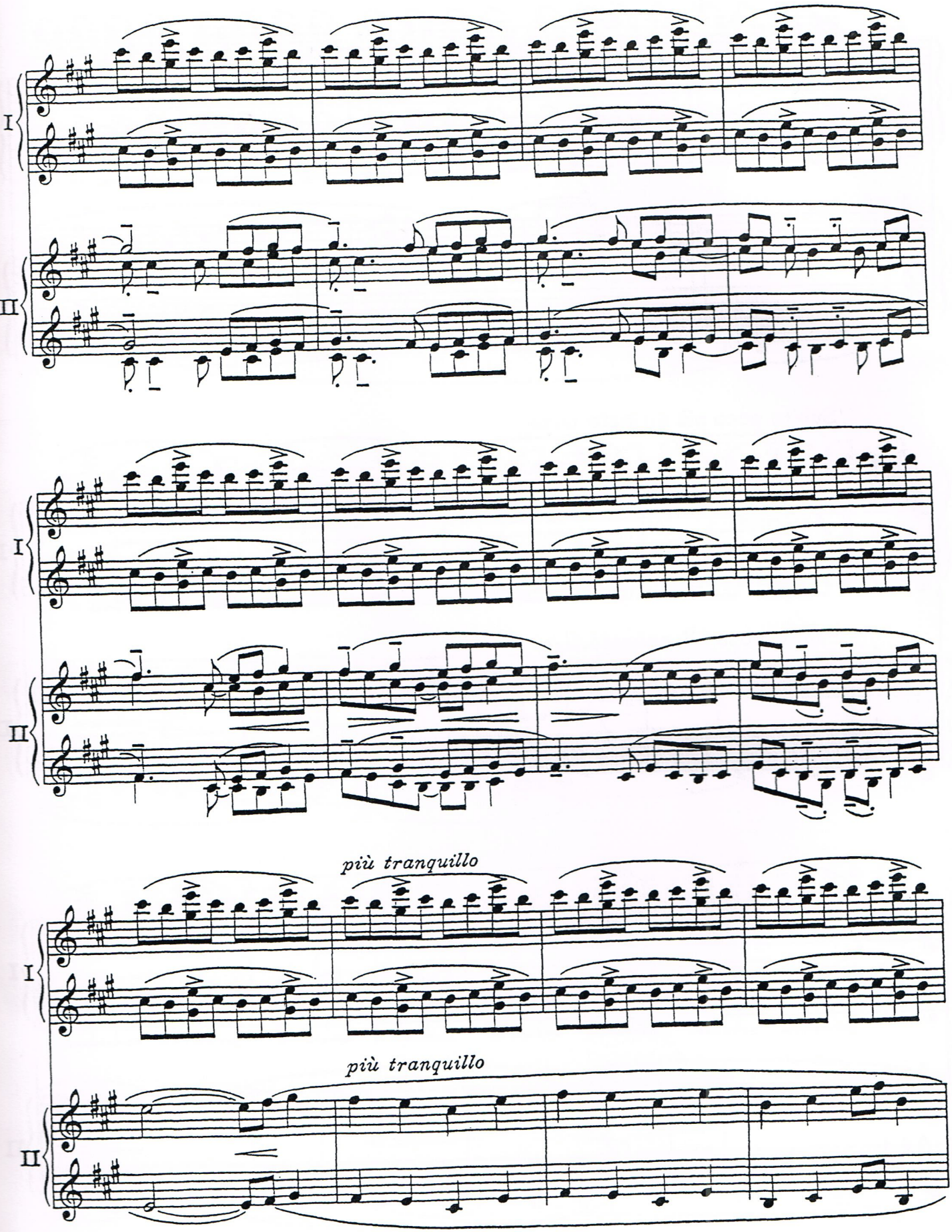
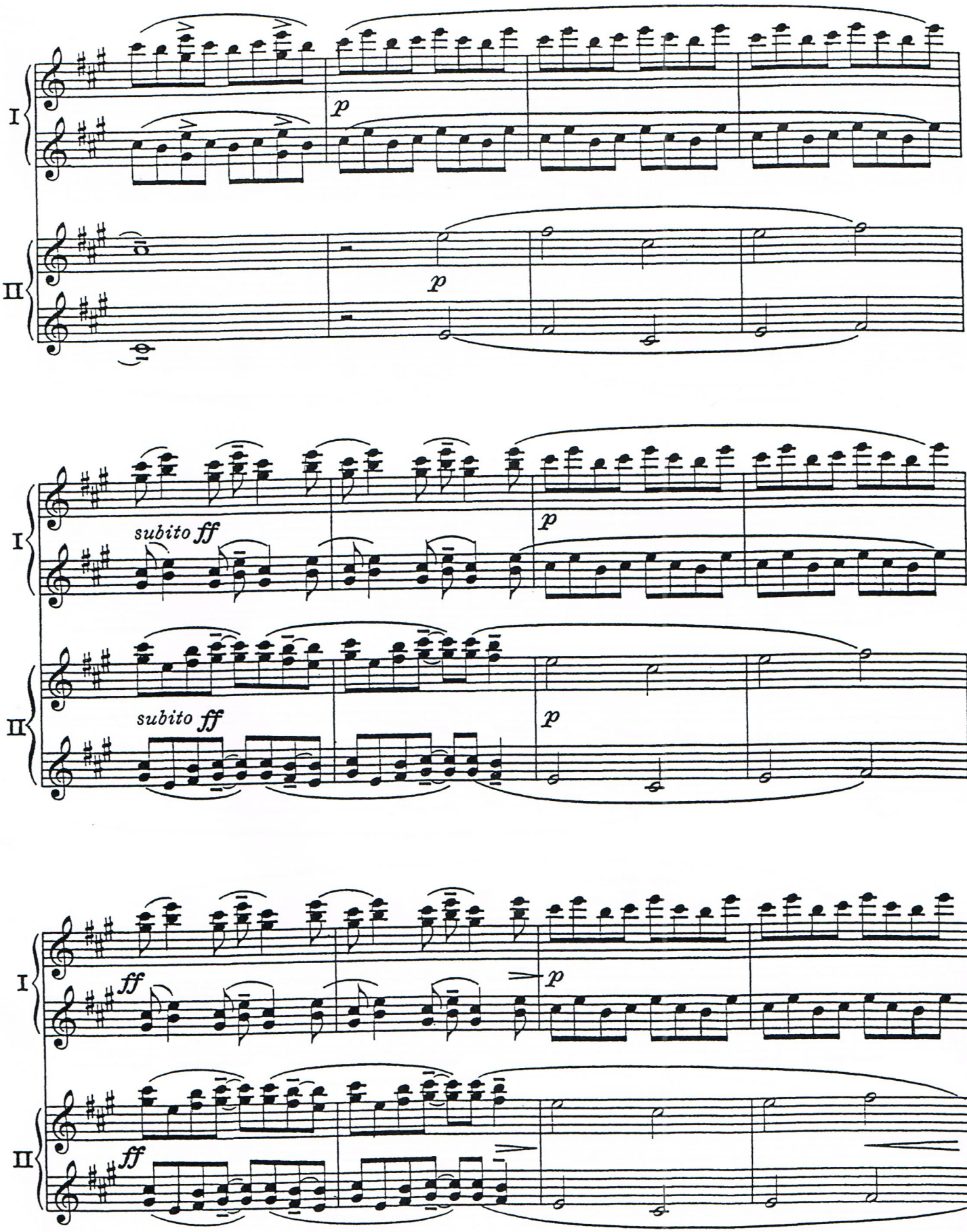

I
II
molto tranquillo
p ben legato
poco marc.
p

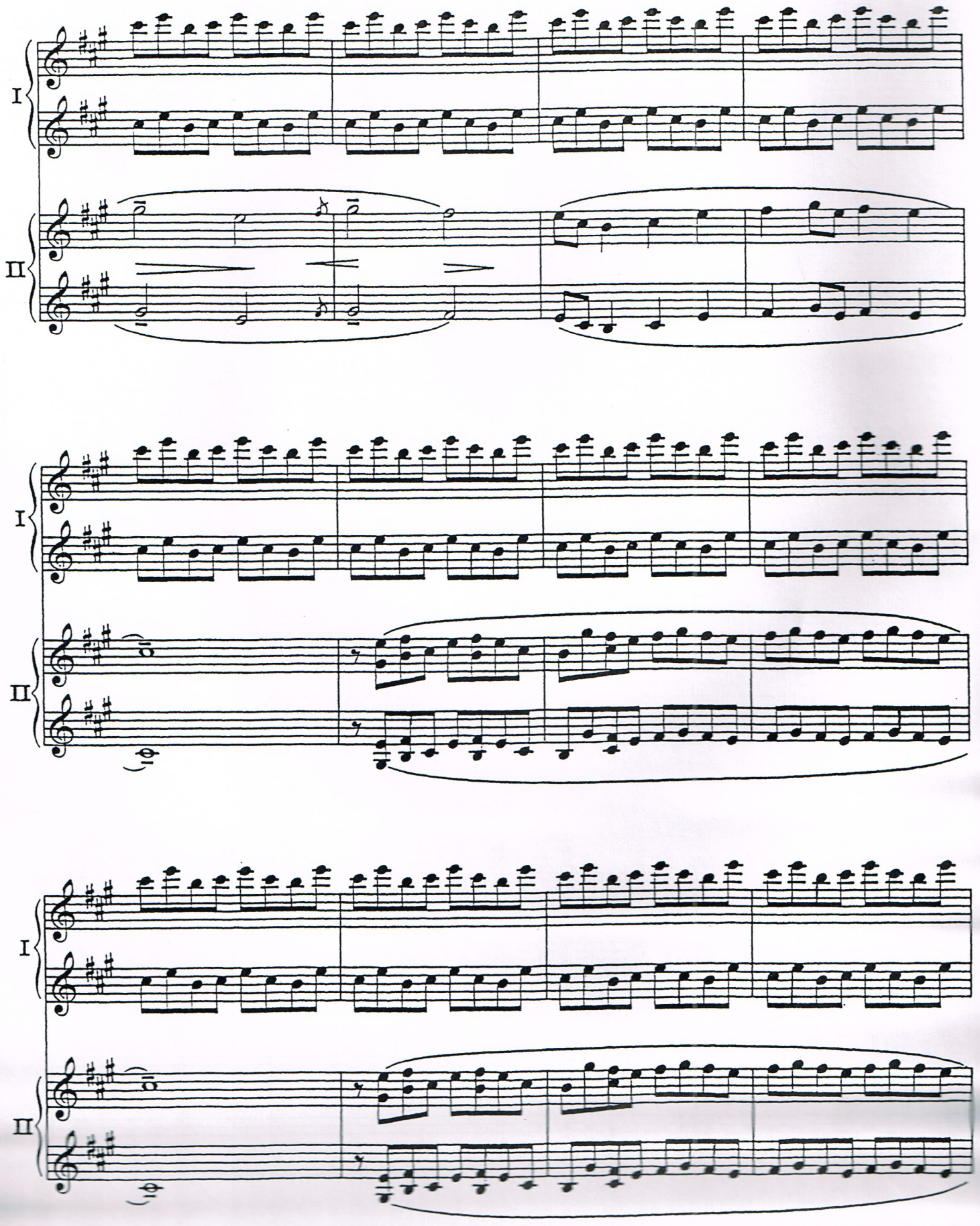

I
II
I
II
I
II

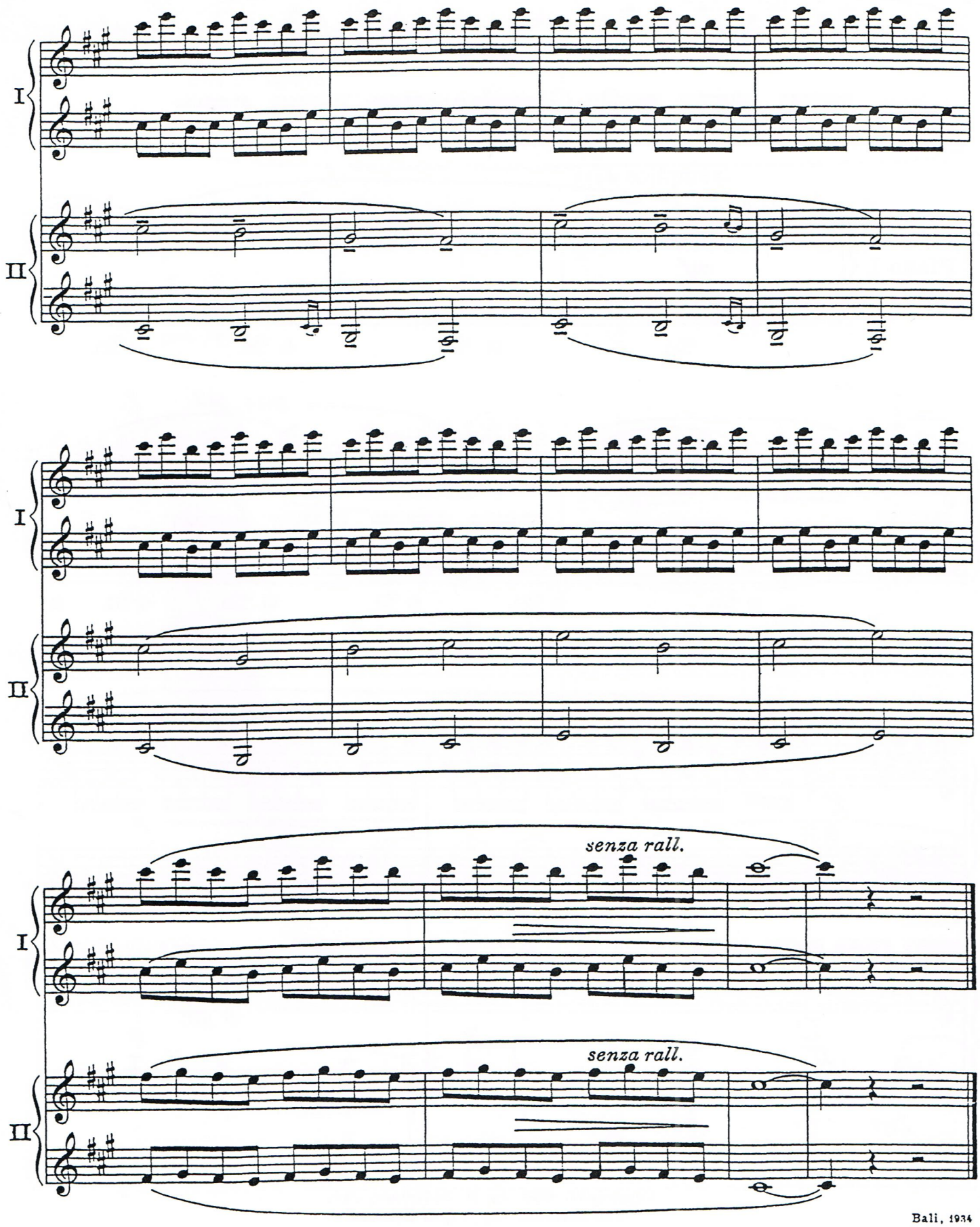

I
II
mf
mf
I
II
I
II


I
II
Subito poco più animato (♩= 80)
f ritmico
Subito poco più animato (♩= 80)
f
mp
mf


I
II
I
II
più tranquillo
I
più tranquillo
II


I
II
p
p
subito ff
subito ff
p
p
ff
ff
p


I
II
I
II
I
II



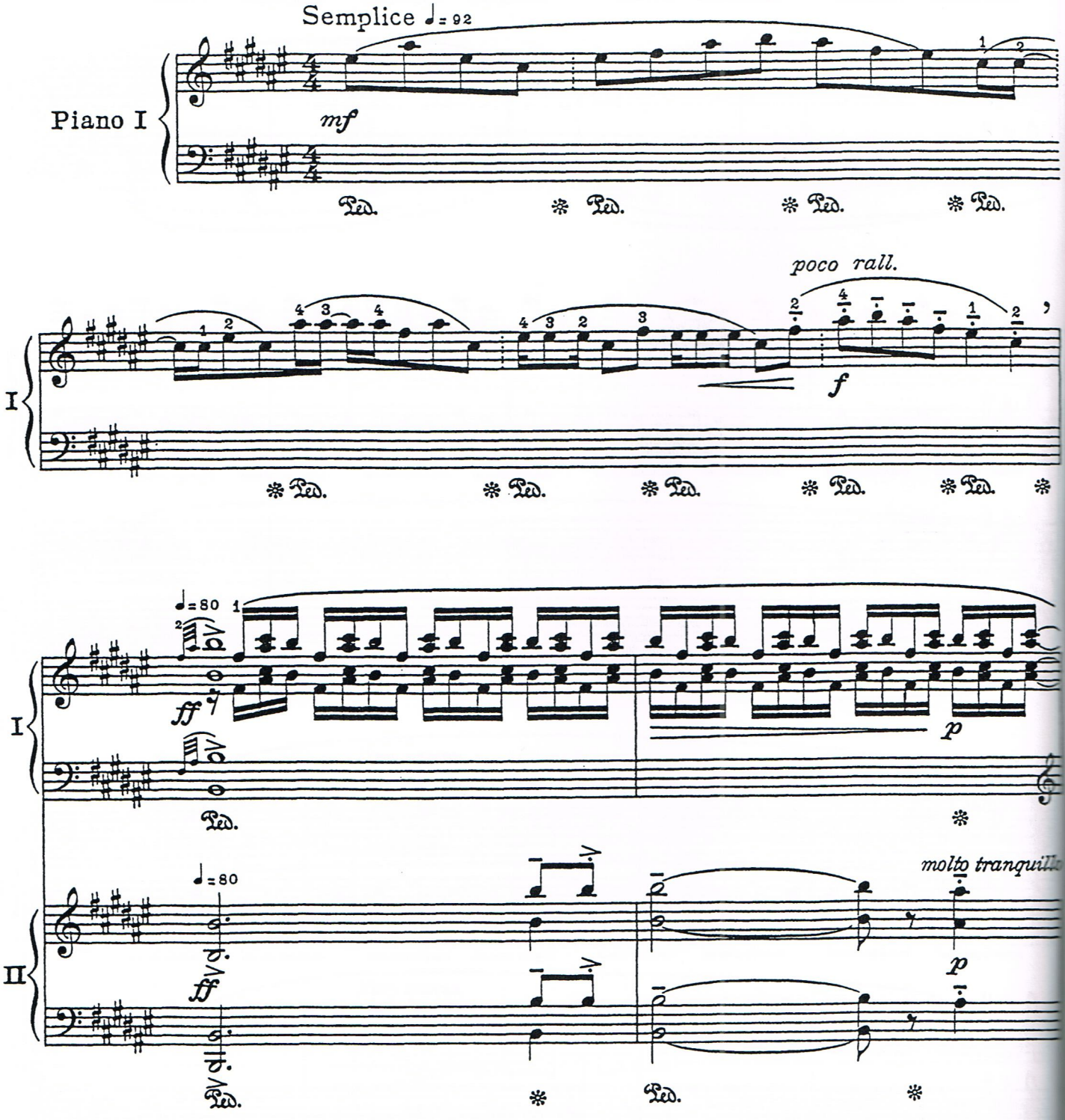
Bali, 1934

For Margaret Mead

Balinese Ceremonial Music

Transcribed for two pianos, four hands, by
Colin McPhee

2. Gambangan



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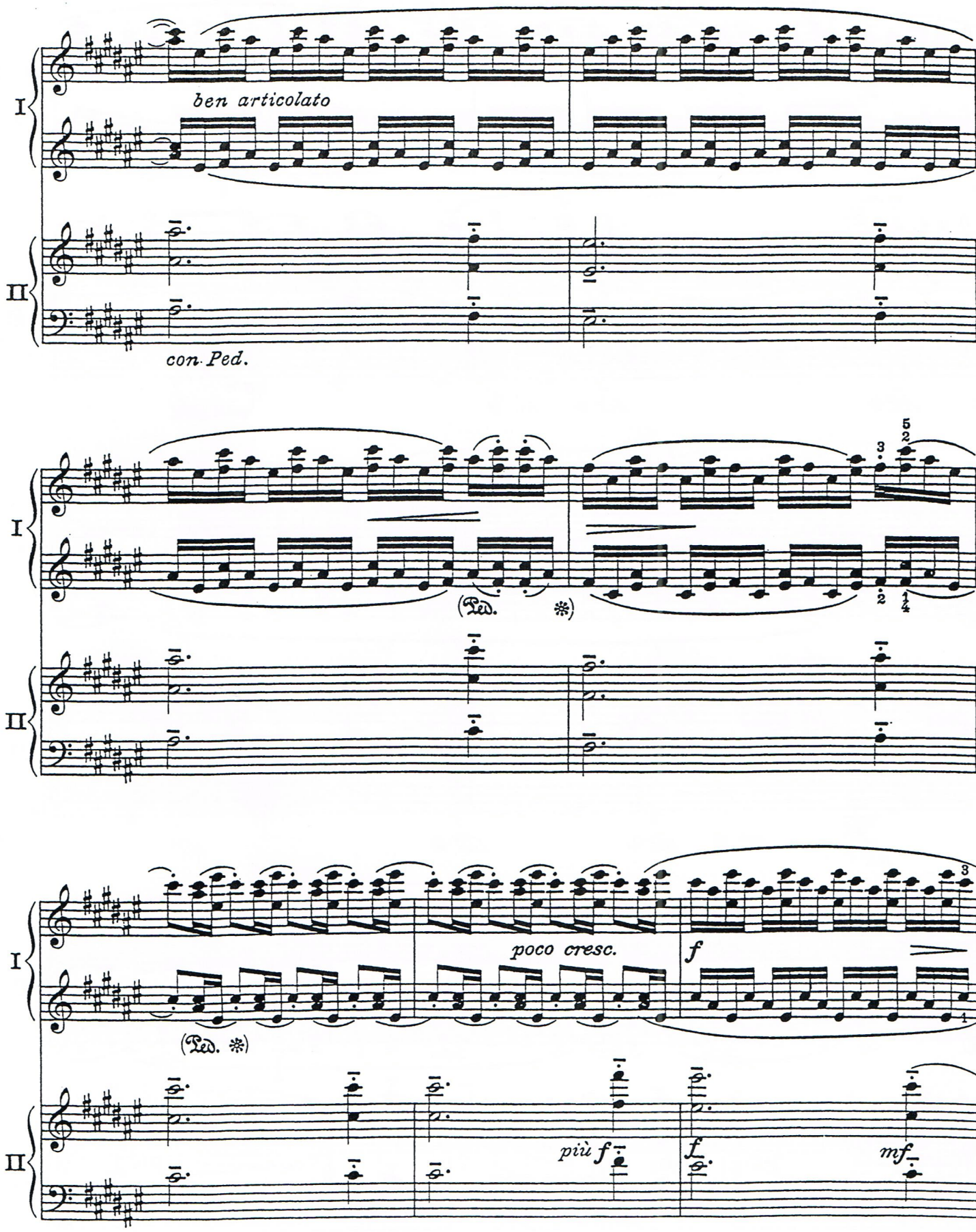
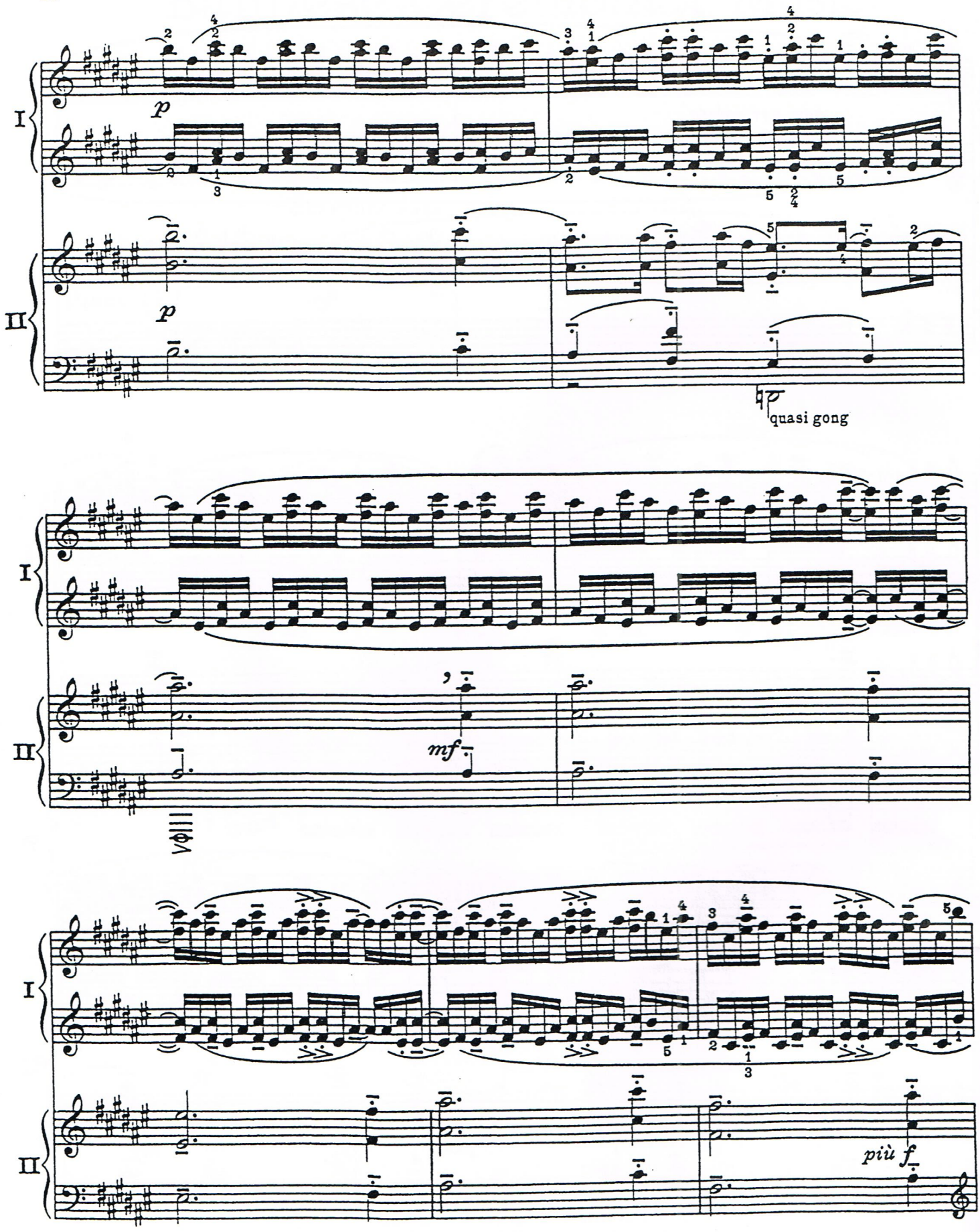
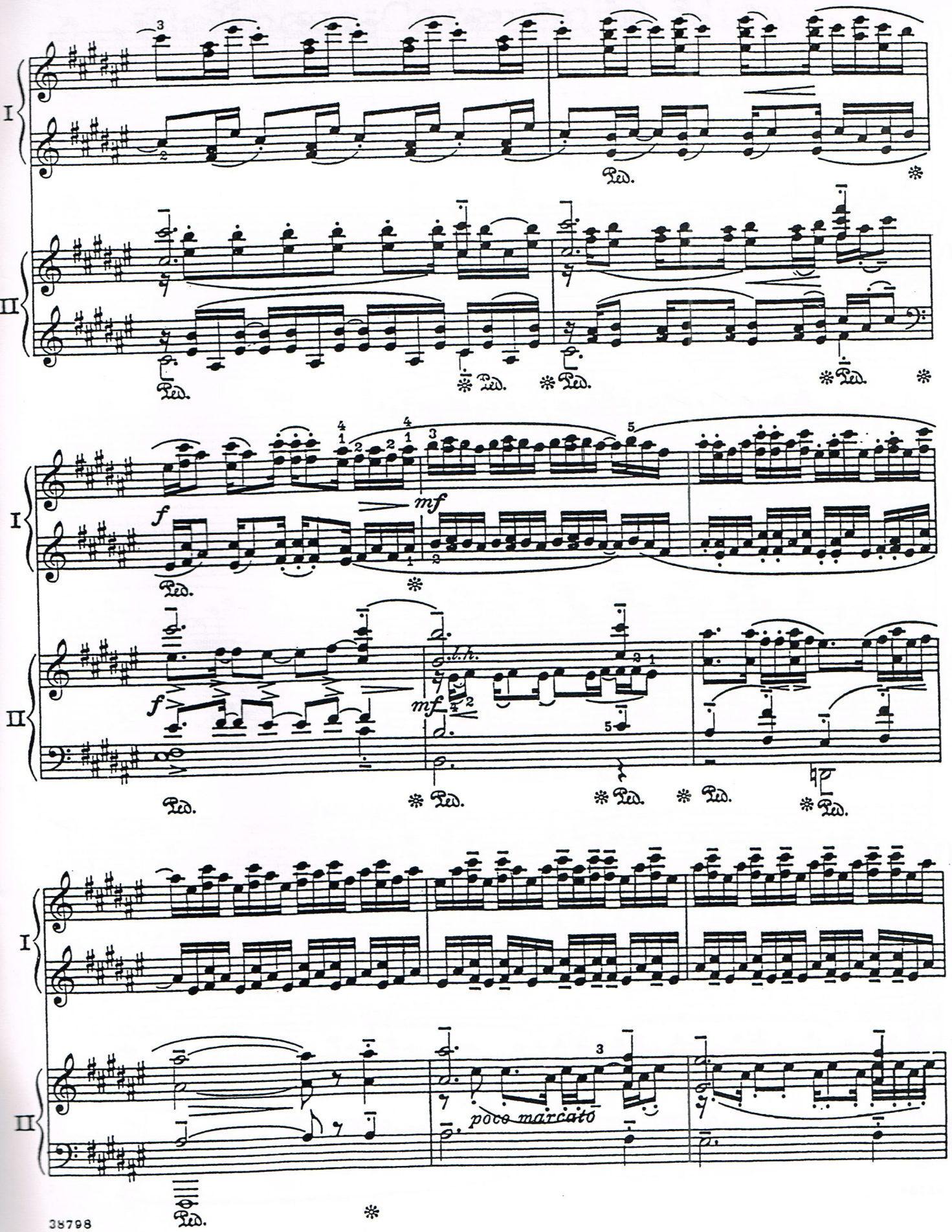
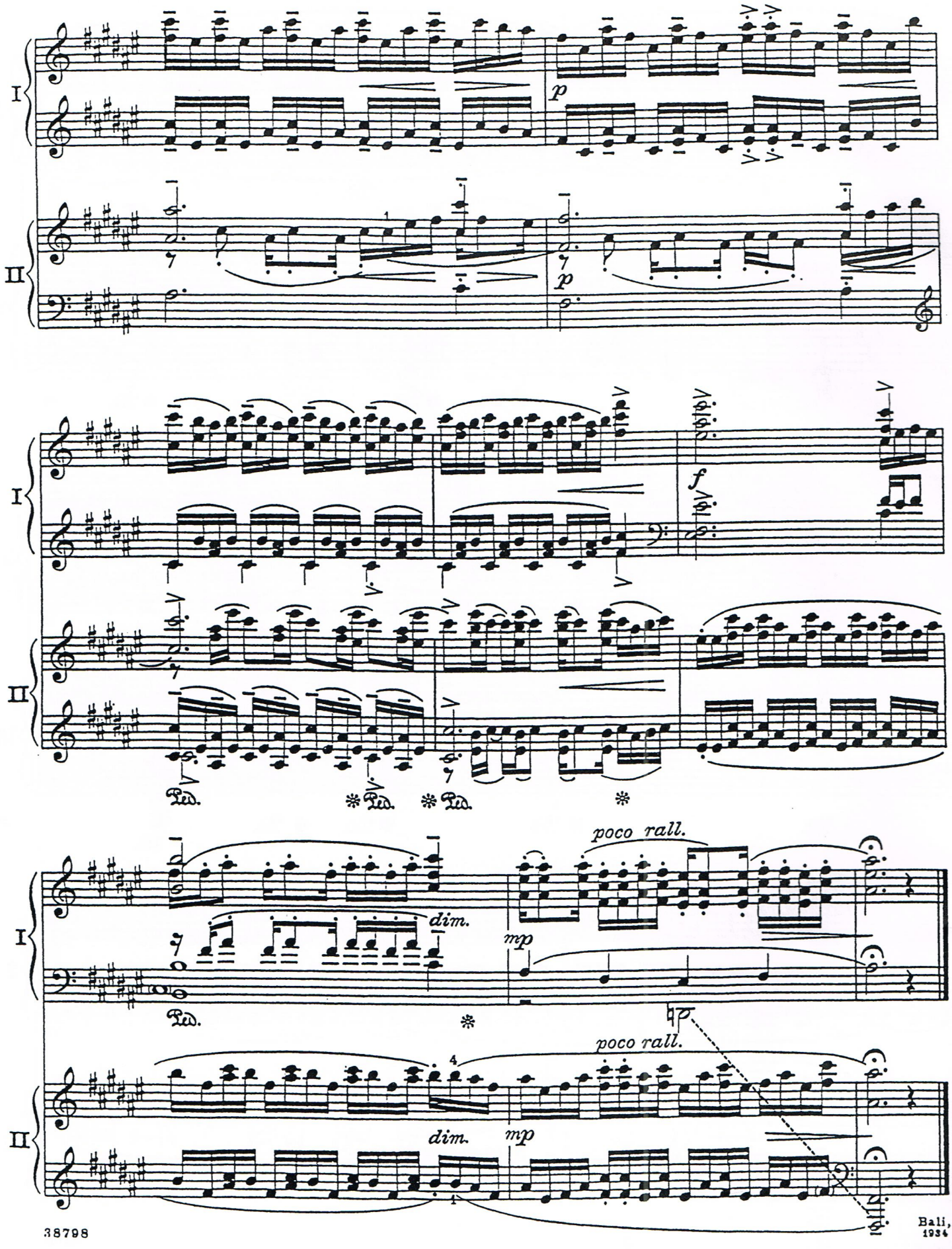

I
ben articolato
II
con Ped.
I
(Ped. *)
II
I
poco cresc.
f
(Ped. *)
II
più f
f
mf


I
II
p
p
quasi gong
mf
più f

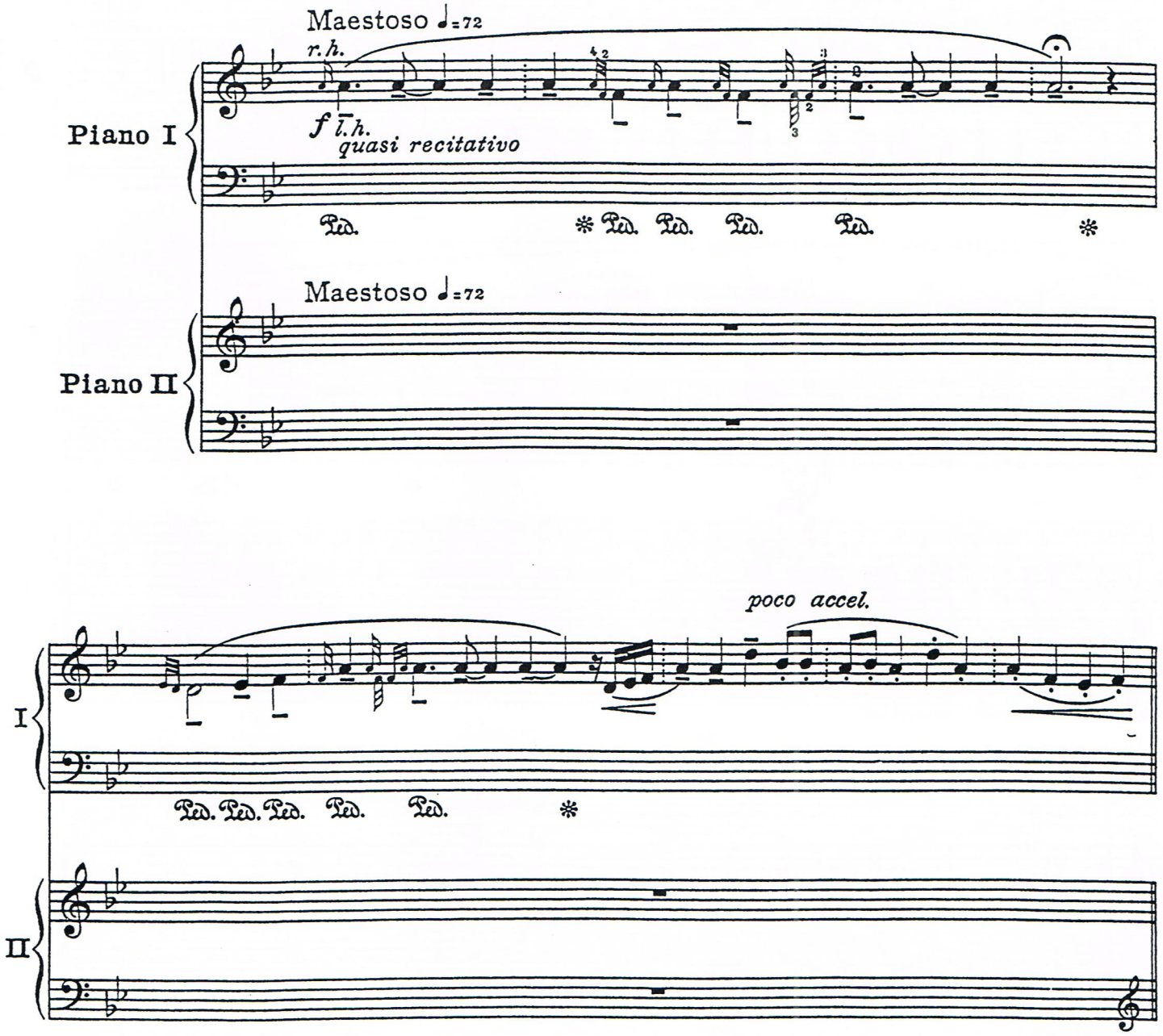

I
II
Ped.
f
mf
l.h.
poco marcato


I
II
p
p
f
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
poco rall.
dim.
mp
poco rall.
dim.
mp

Balinese Ceremonial Music

Transcribed for two pianos, four hands, by
Colin McPhee

3. Taboeh Teloe



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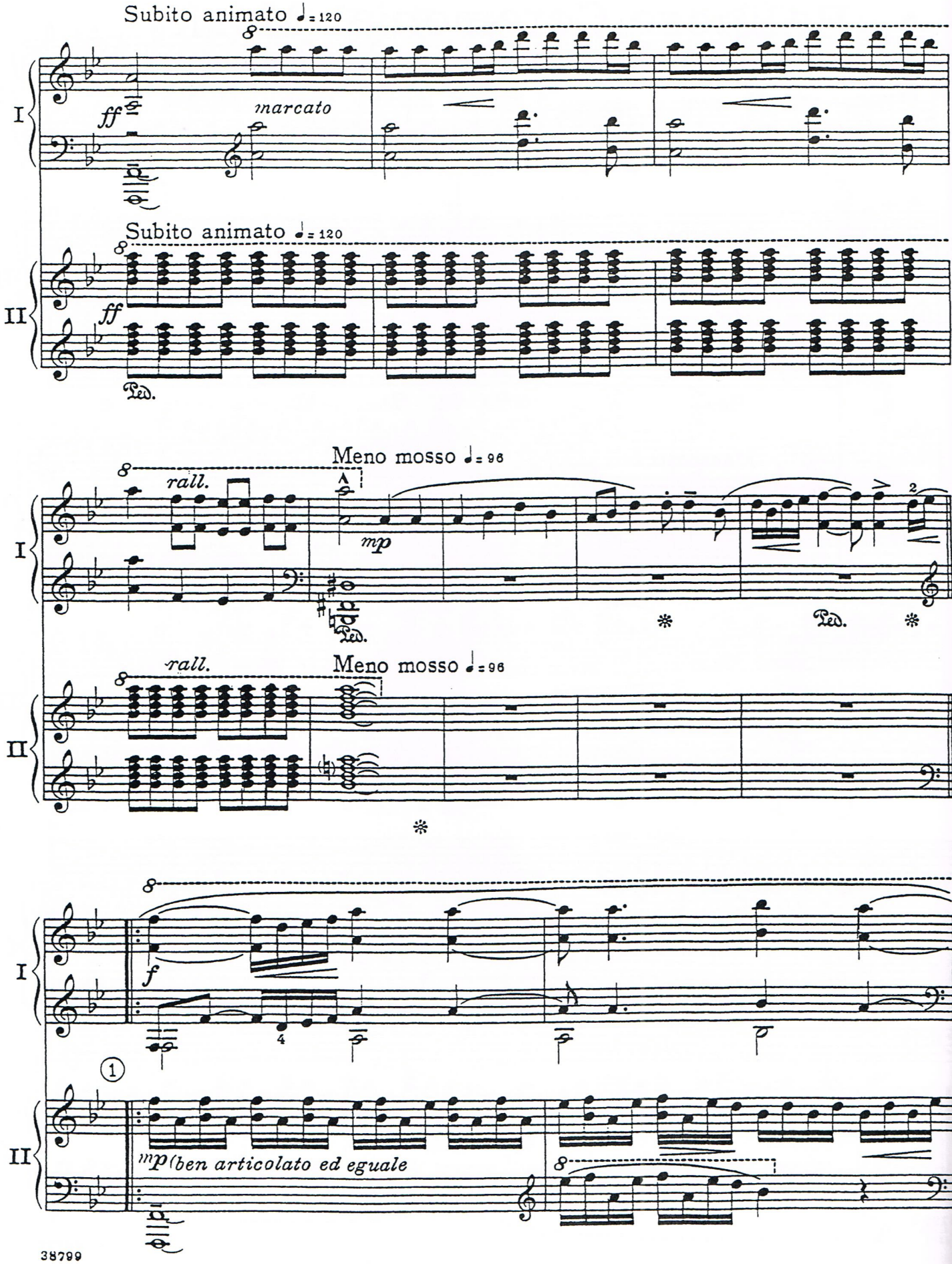
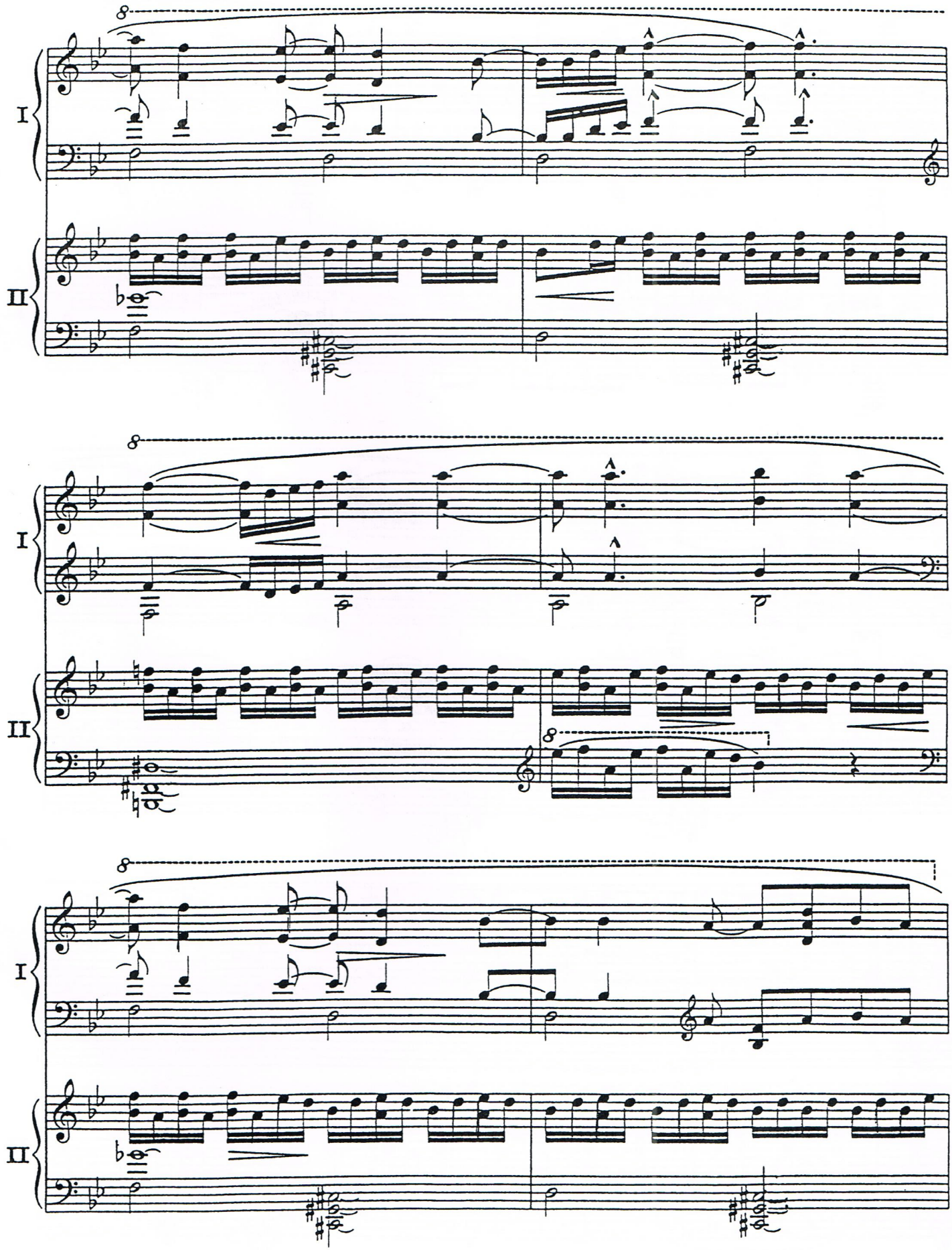
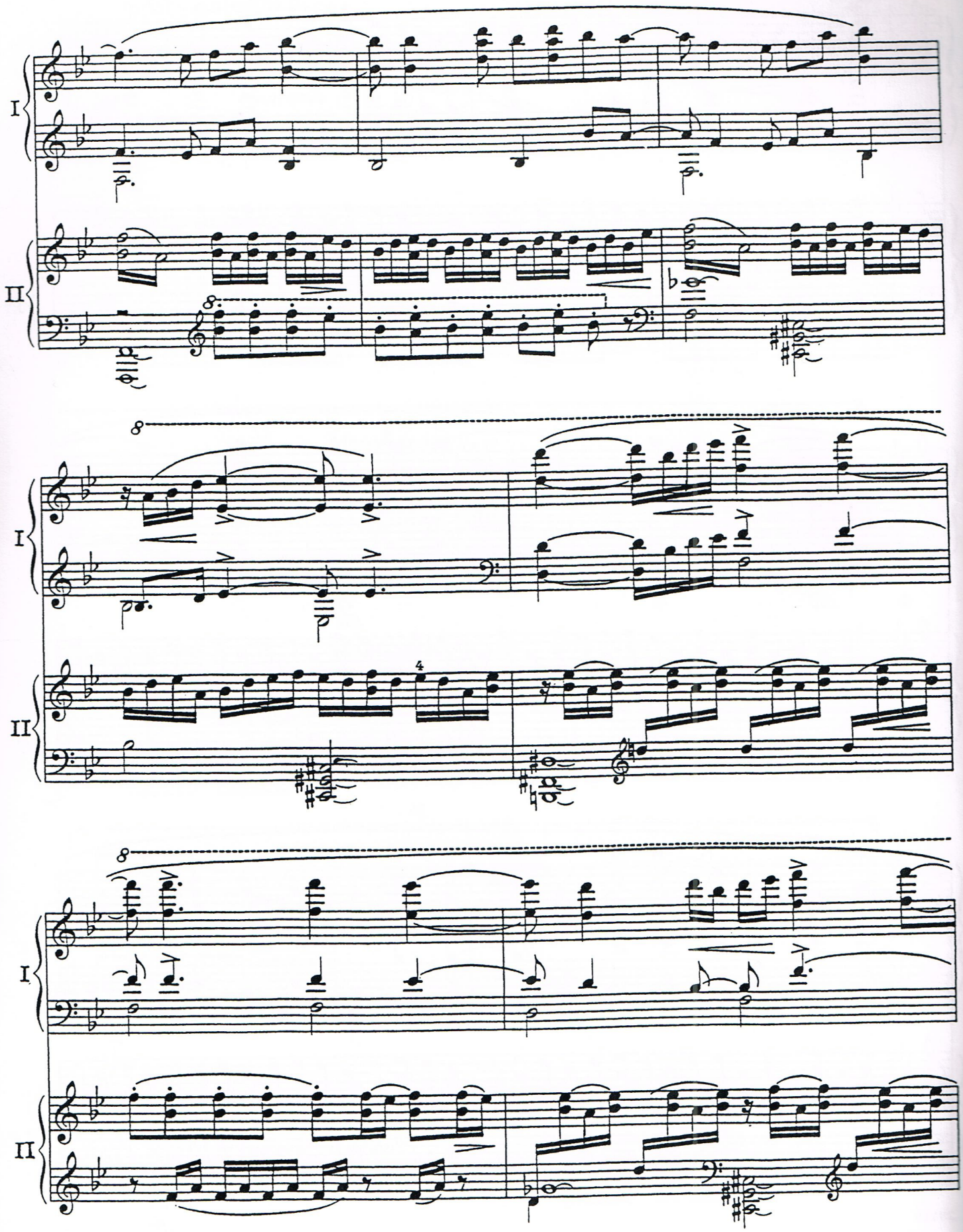
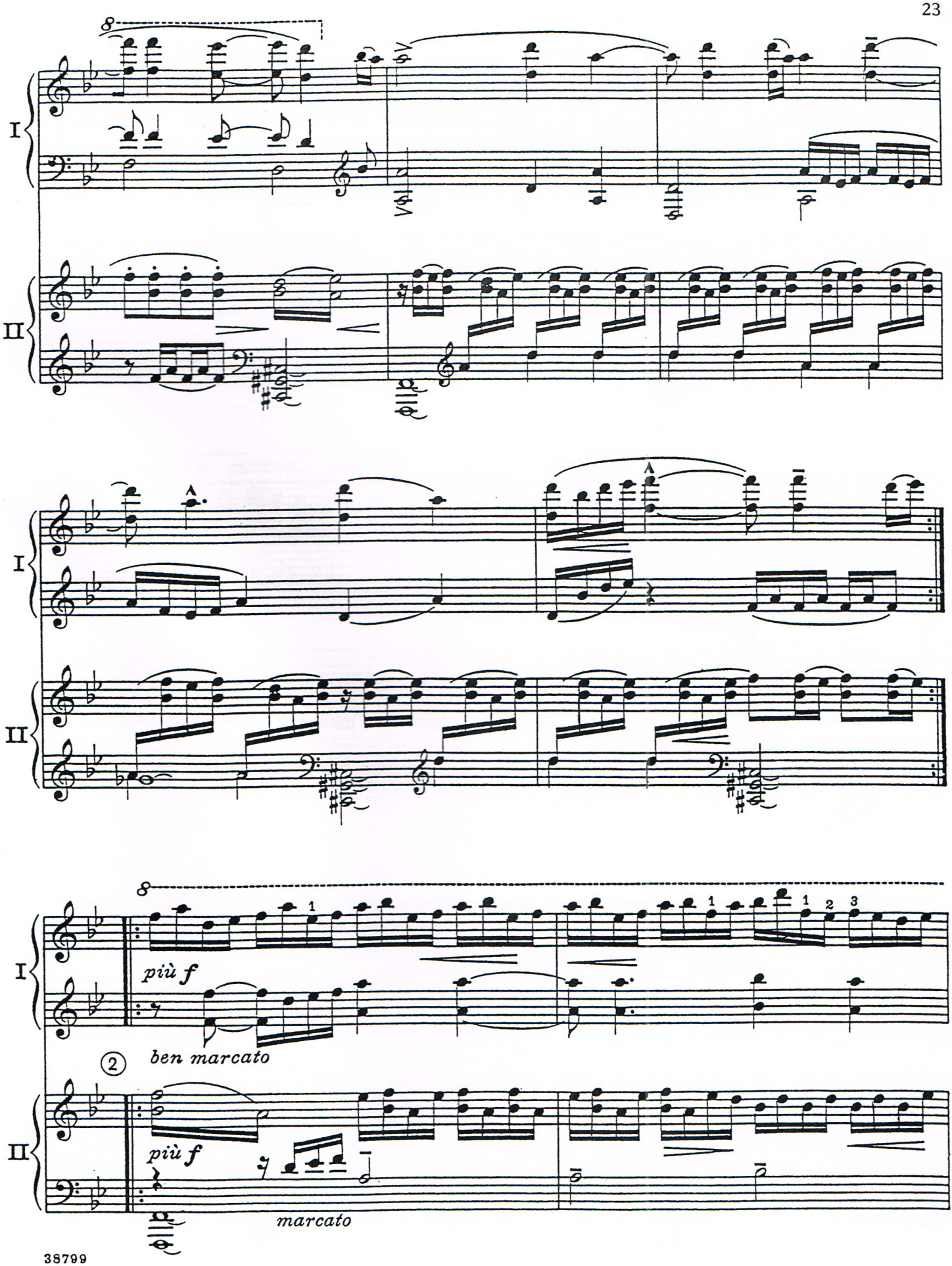
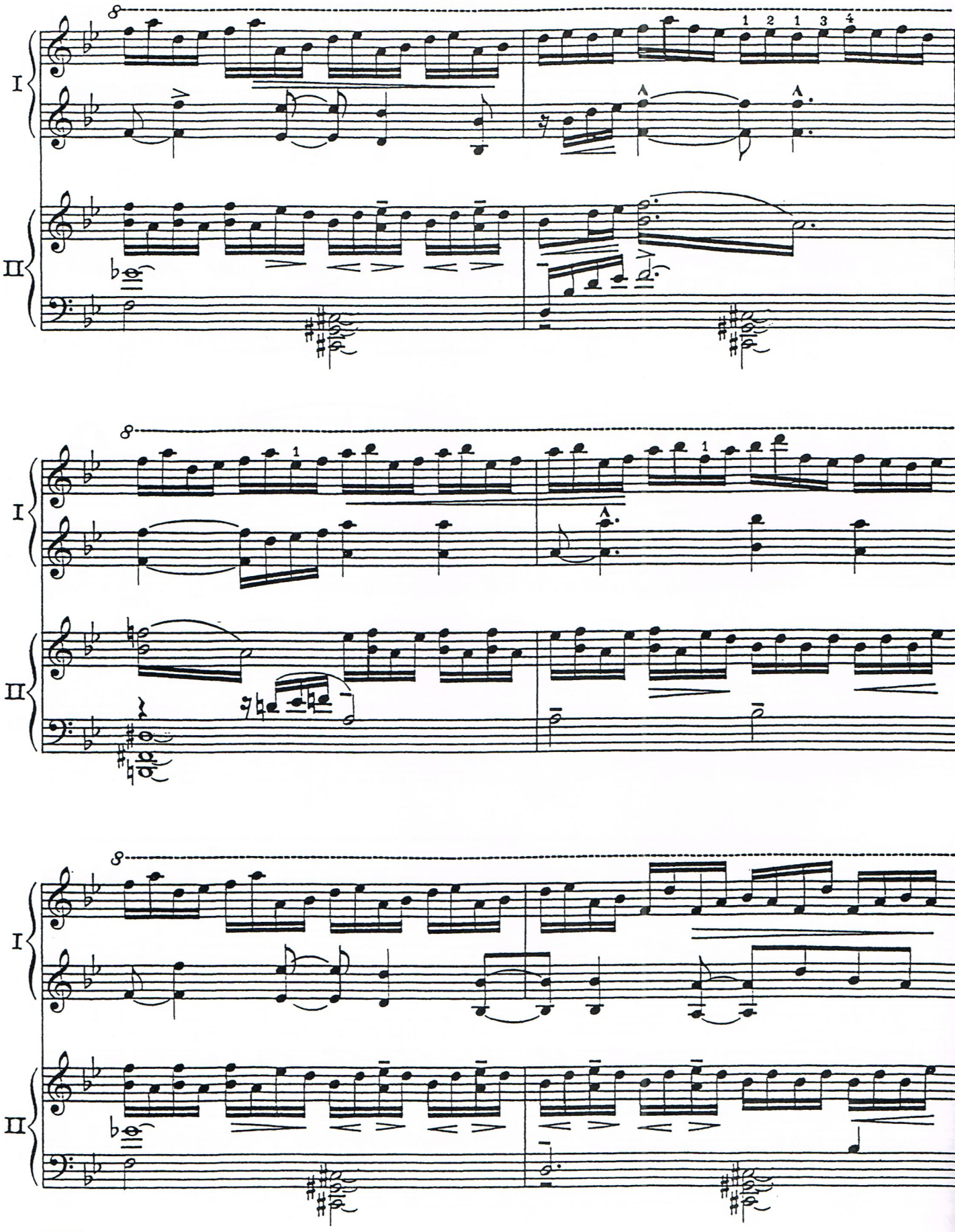
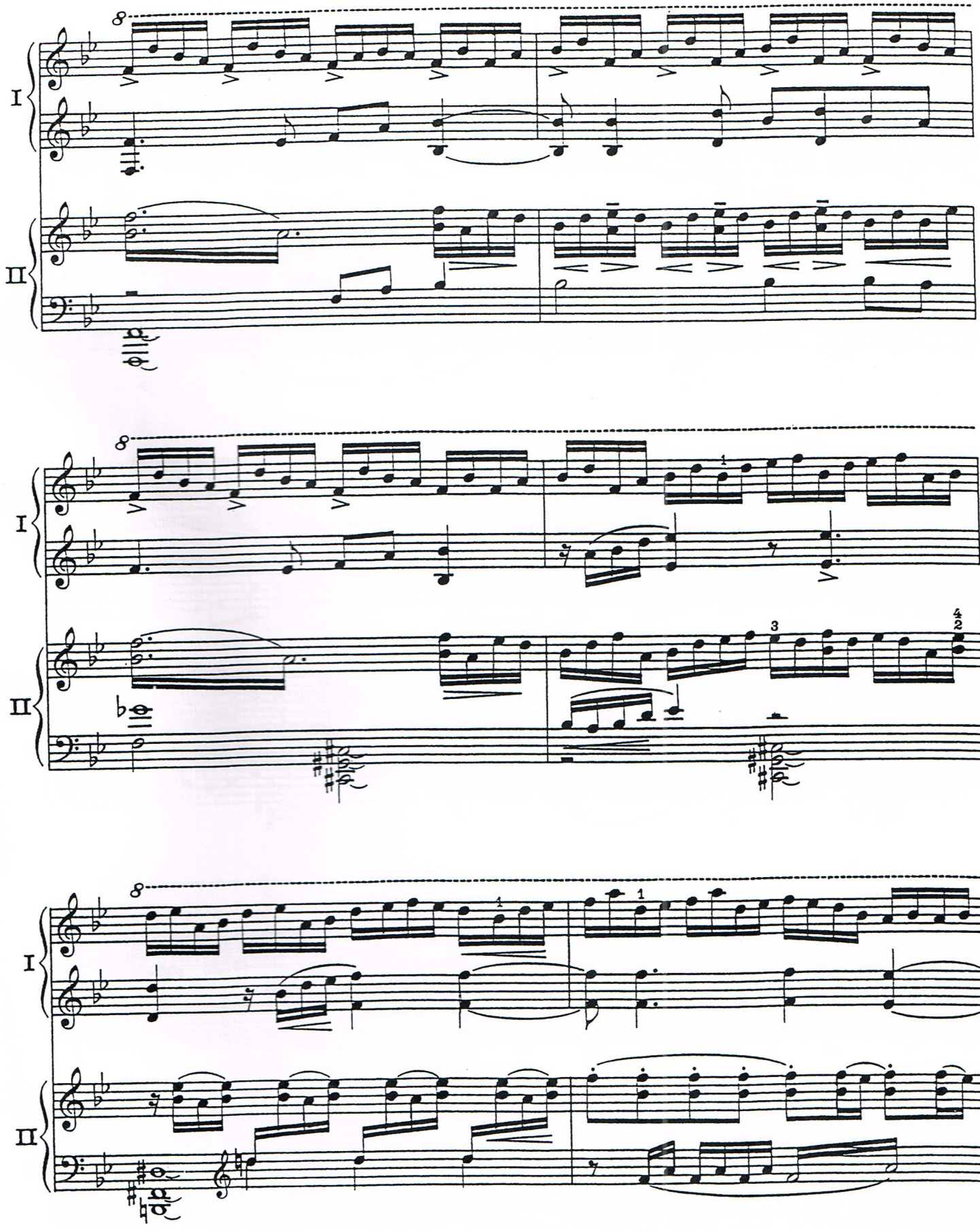

Subito animato ♩= 120
I
ff
marcato
Subito animato ♩= 120
II
ff
Ped.
Meno mosso ♩= 96
rall.
mp
Ped.
Ped.
rall.
Meno mosso ♩= 96
II
I
f
II
mp (ben articolato ed eguale

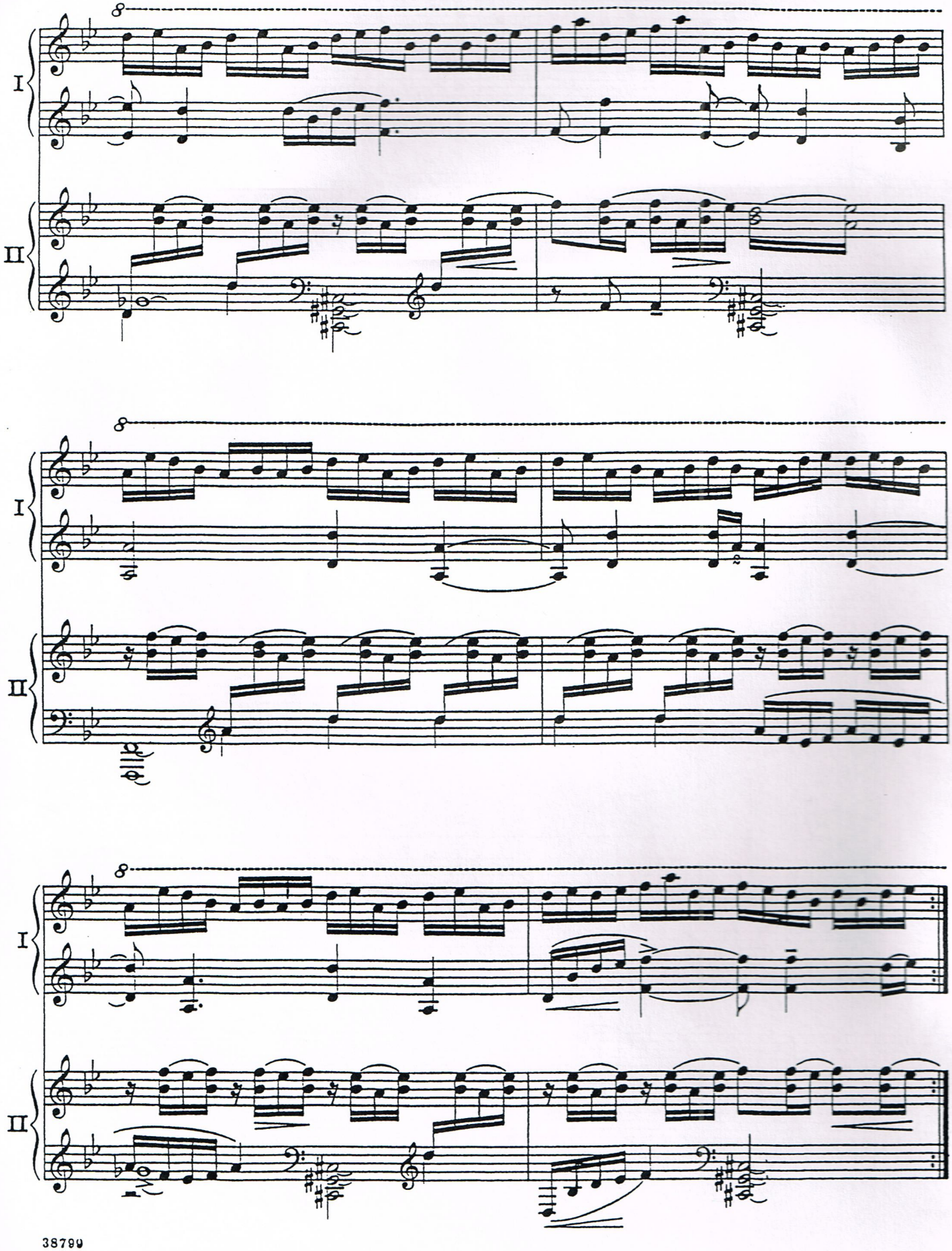

I
II
I
II
I
II

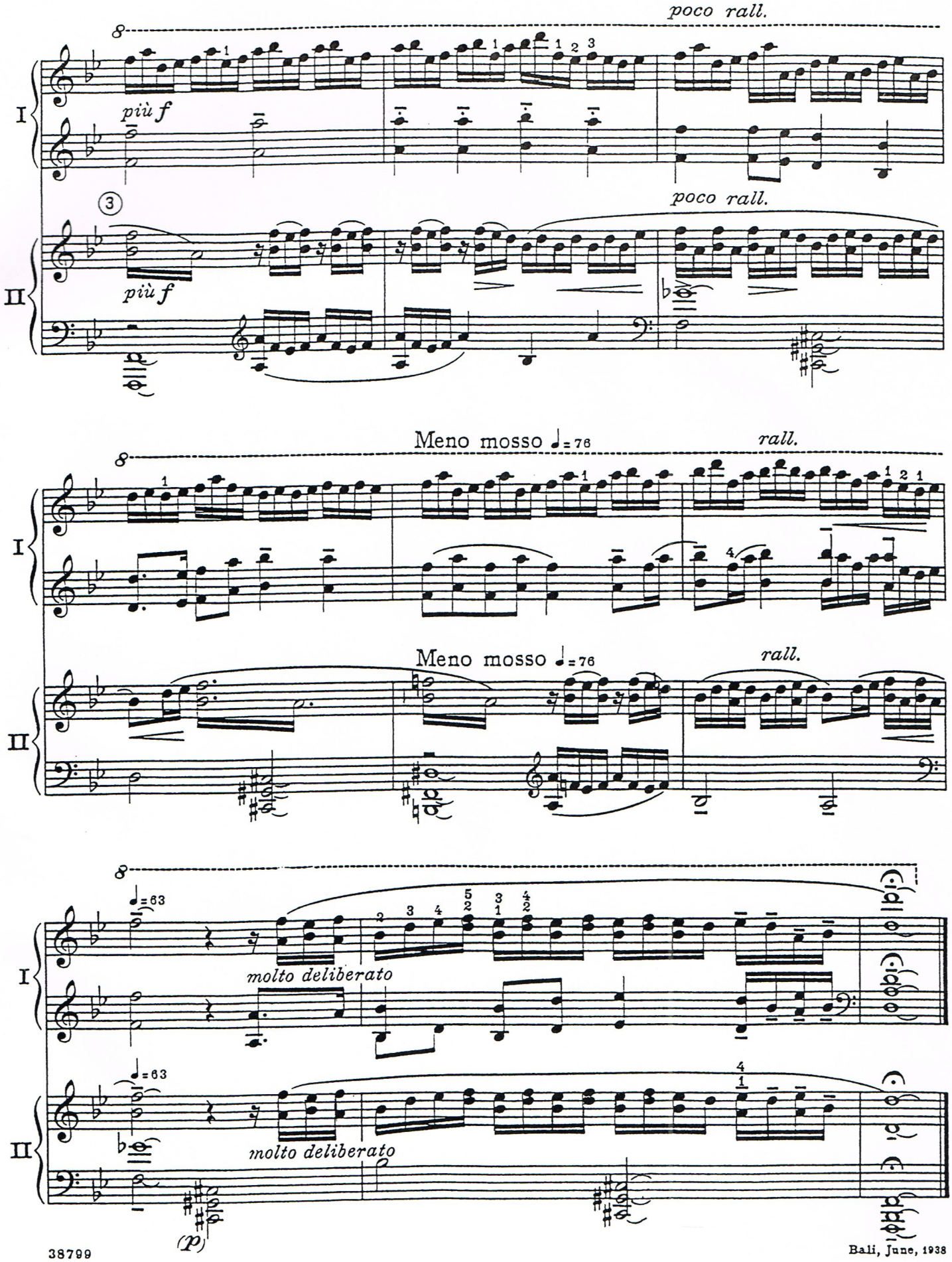

I
II
8
4


8
I
II
I
II
8
I
più f
ben marcato
2
II
più f
marcato


I
II
1 2 1 3 4
I
II
I
II


I
II
8
I
II
8
I
II
8


8
I
II
8
I
II
8
I
II



Bali, June, 1938