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JS James Stephenson

Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra

by James M. Stephenson (b. 1969)

for Charles Vernon, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Riccardo Muti

CHAPTER I performance time: approx. 10'
CHAPTER II (no pause) - EPILOGUE performance time: approx. 12'30"

Piano Reduction created by Maddie Stephenson

Program Notes - by the composer:

When Charlie Vernon first told me in November of 2015 that I would be writing a new bass trombone concerto for him, he highlighted two things:

1) that it be the "most profound, beautiful and lasting musical event to be played on the bass trombone" (thanks, Charlie, I'll do my best...) and:
2) that it would be "a great story, like a book you can't stop reading."

As I thought about these requirements, I began to think about something I consider pretty profound: life itself. Perhaps this is because at the time of the world premiere I will be 50 years old, when one starts thinking about such heavy subjects; but suffice it to say that it seemed a good time to write something that heeded the significance of life. In thinking about life, I kept coming back to the rhythms of life, and its ups and downs. This idea spurred on my initial inspiration, and I begin to feel a pulse that would inspire the entire work. A pulse, of course, fits nicely into both worlds: life and music. I coupled this early on with a rising note-motif of A-B-C, which serendipitously couples nicely with Charlie's idea of this piece being like the reading of a book.

And so the piece evolves, with the main A-B-C motif generally revealed in rising fashion in Chapter I, and in falling fashion in Chapter II. Ups and downs. The first movement is that of a bass trombone coming of age. It enters the world boldly, but then goes through moments of confusion, nervousness, development, and finally, confidence and fun (the latter with jazz references, in honor of one of Charlie's favorite mediums), as the movement ends with the protagonist at its height. The concerto has travelled from A minor to A Major. Life is good.

The second movement ("Chapter II") picks up right where the first left off. It is audacious music brimming with pomposity, and with resolute puffed chest. As it continues, the motif reverses, and lyrical music rides on top of contrapuntal orchestral scoring, as if wisdom has taken the place of hustling angst. The music builds, pulses, and grows, and portrays heart-wrenching "life-moments", before finally beginning to subside back to a period of much reflection and thought. There is a direct segue (no pause) into the Epilogue, now back in A minor, which, for a while, remains almost still. But life is re-affirmed, and the music continues to pulse, and ends rapturously in A Major, with the bass trombone still at the top of its game.

I grew up going to Chicago Symphony concerts as a child. Then, as a young trumpeter, I often dreamt of some day sitting and performing on the stage at Symphony Center in Chicago. Even though that dream won't happen, I am thrilled to have a world premiere of my music with my favorite orchestra, on that very stage, and under the direction of Maestro Riccardo Muti. I have Charlie Vernon to thank for this, and I can only hope that my music will serve the bass trombone and music world well, and come as close as possible to Charlie's vision of a "profound, beautiful, and lasting" creation.

Jim Stephenson; November 6, 2018

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Piano reduction

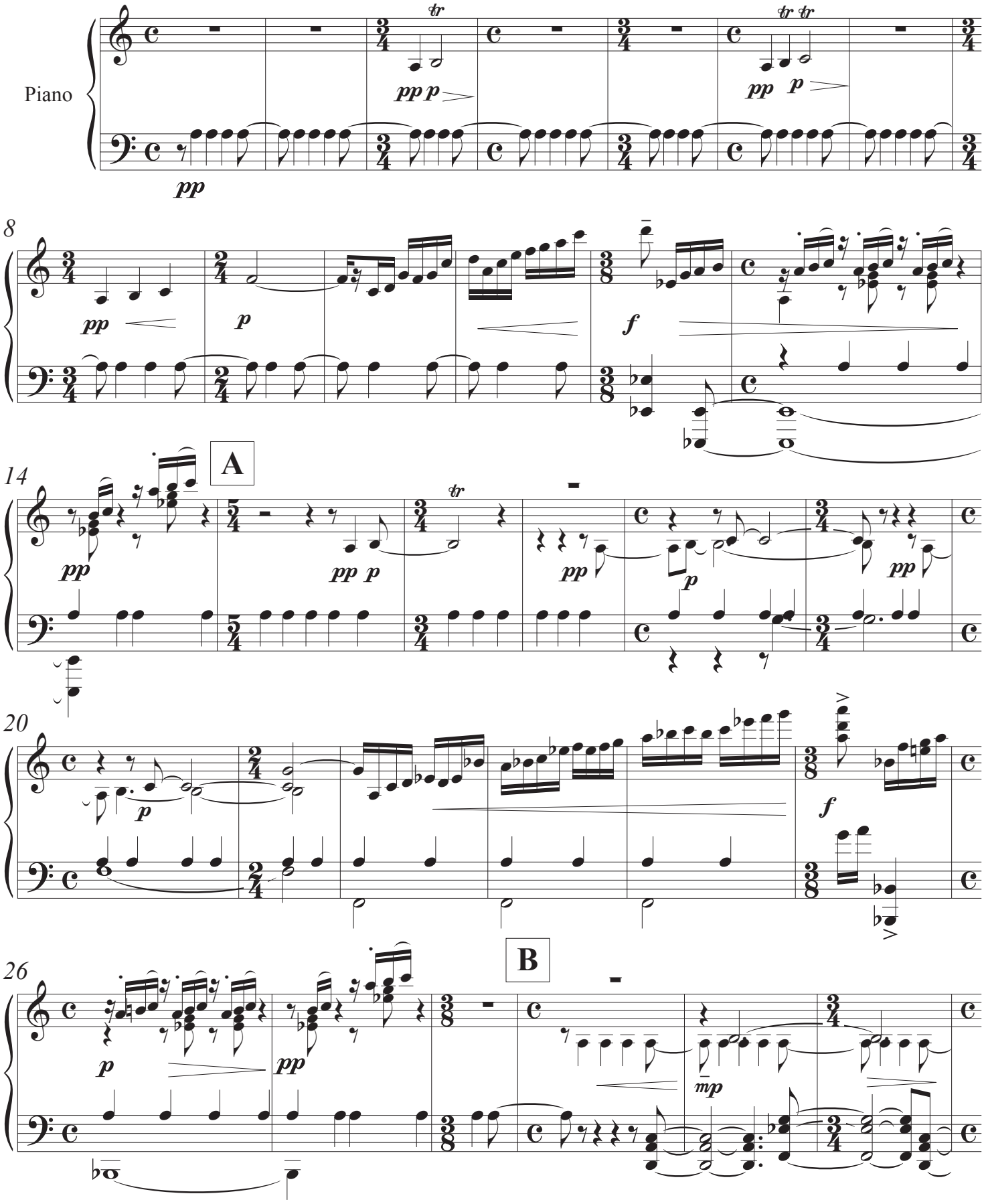
for Charles Vernon

Concerto for Bass Trombone and Orchestra

Chapter I

James M. Stephenson

Andante gentile ♩ = 92



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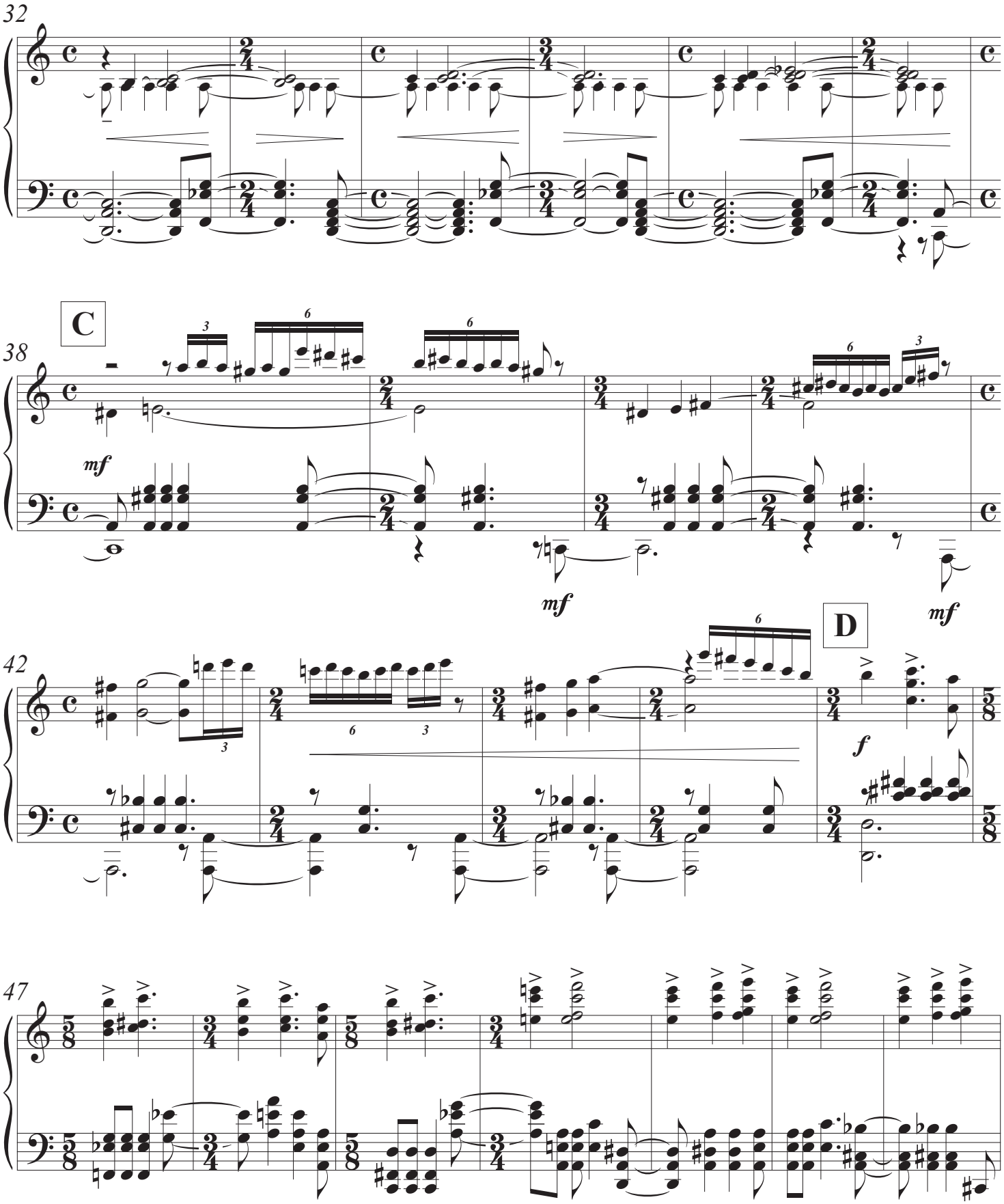
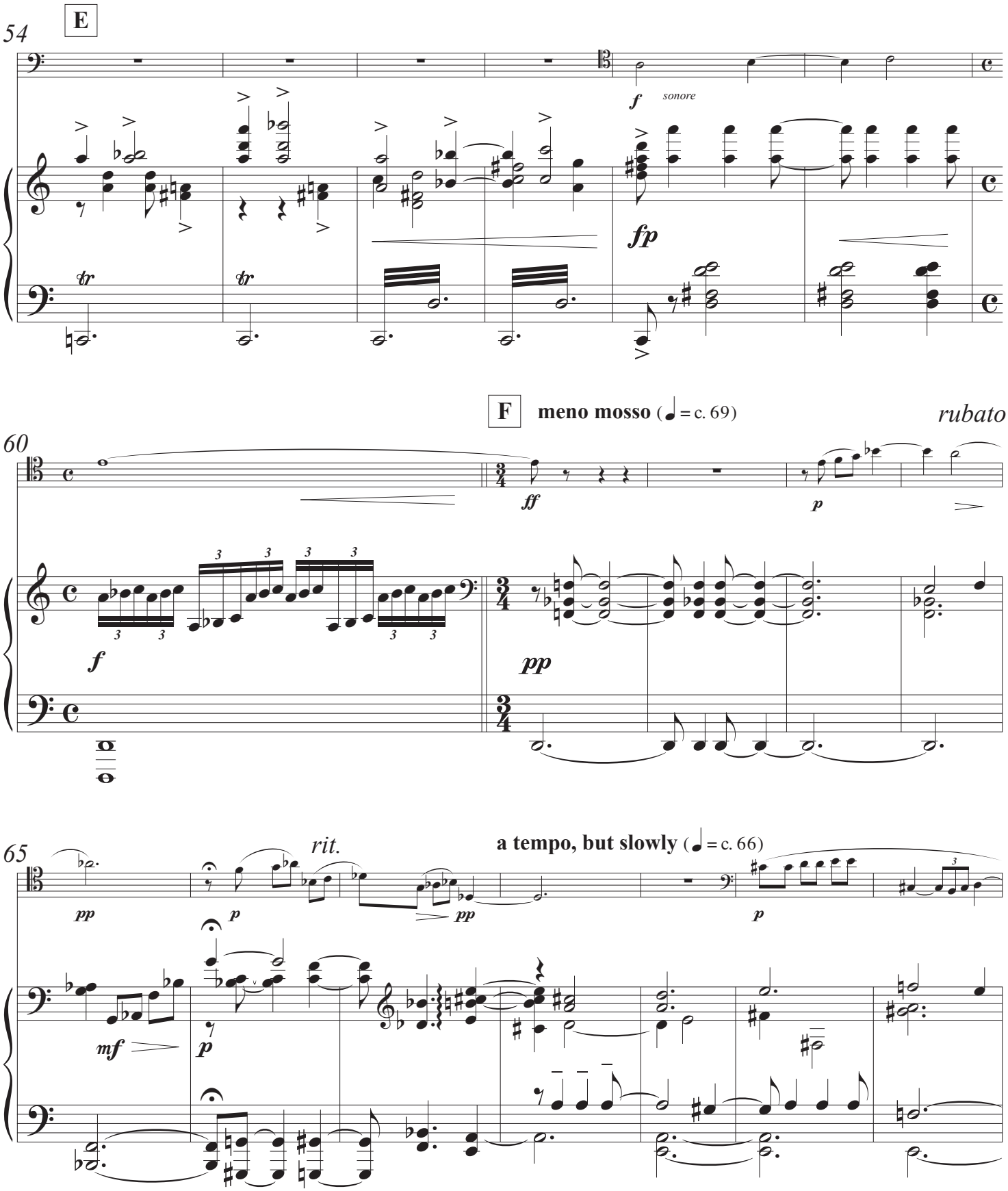
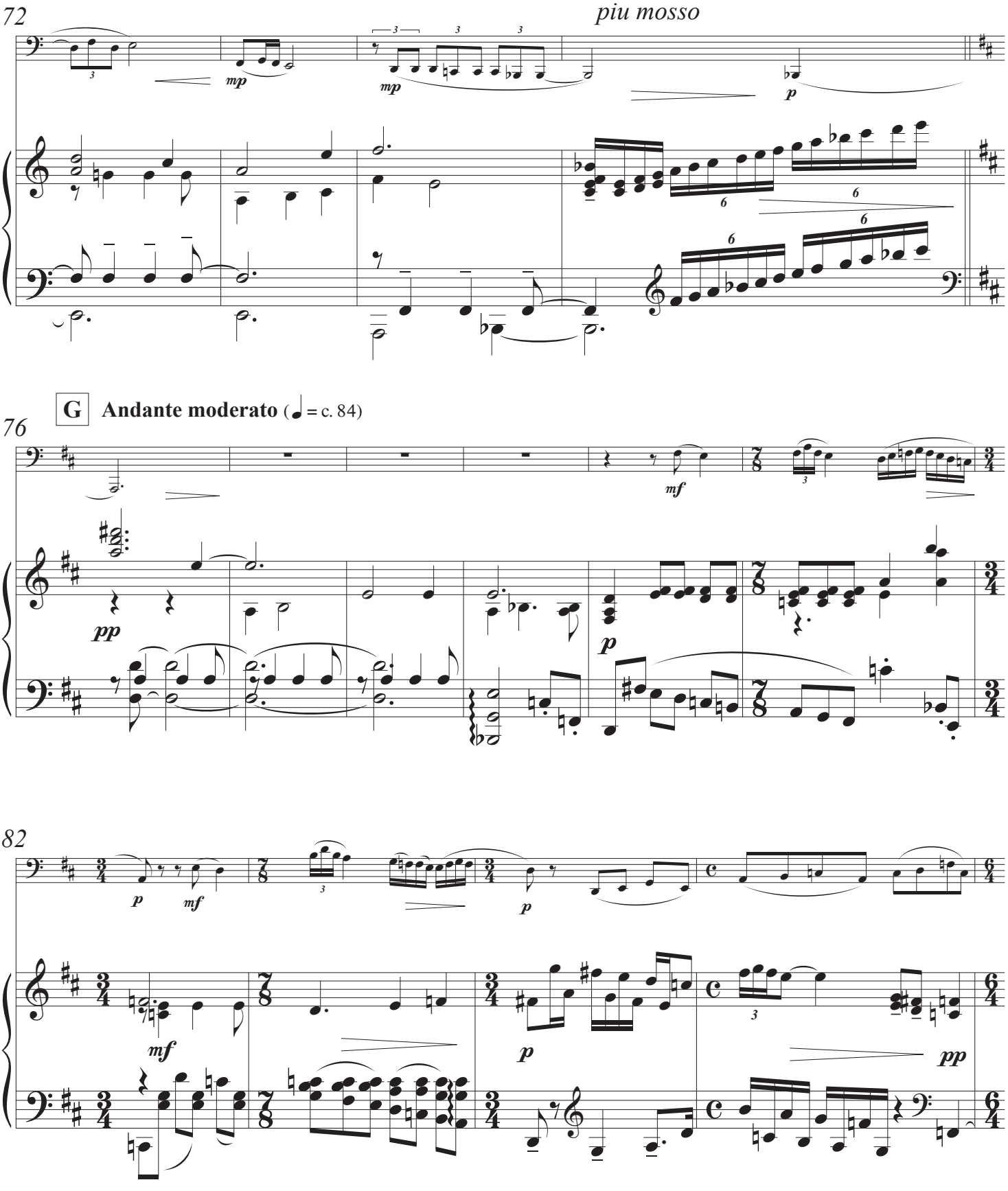
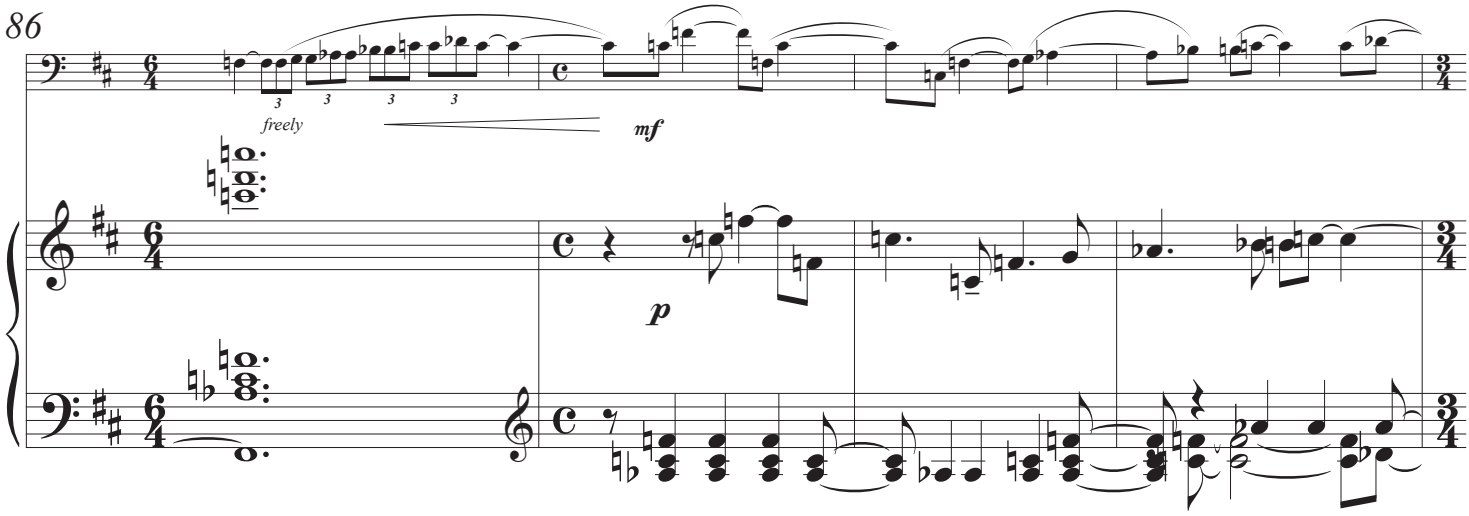
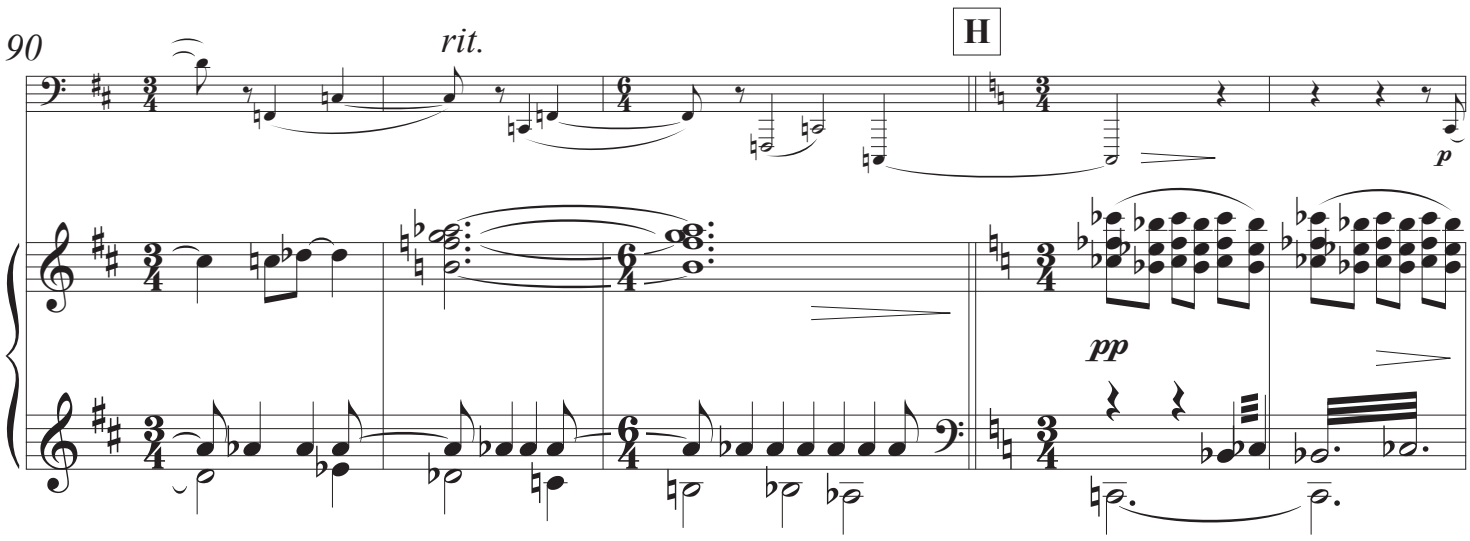

32
C
38
mf
mf
mf
D
42
f
47

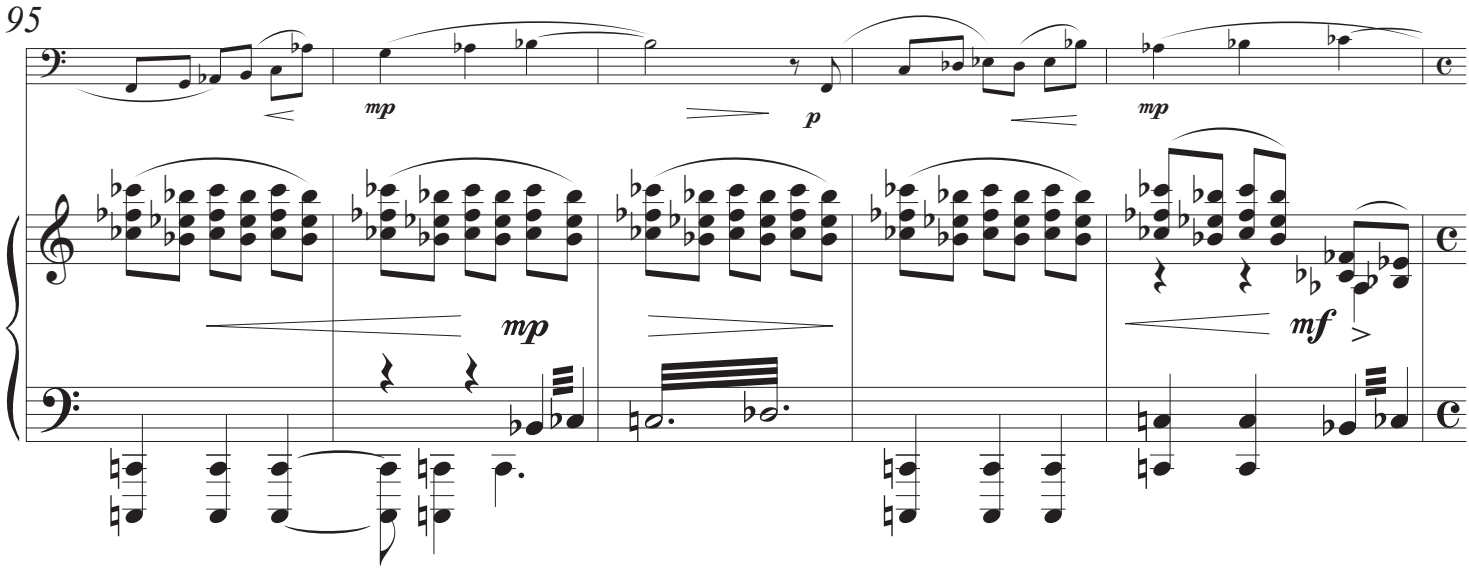

54
E
f
sonore
fp
tr
tr
60
F
meno mosso (♩ = c. 69)
rubato
ff
p
f
pp
65
rit.
a tempo, but slowly (♩ = c. 66)
pp
p
pp
p
mf
p

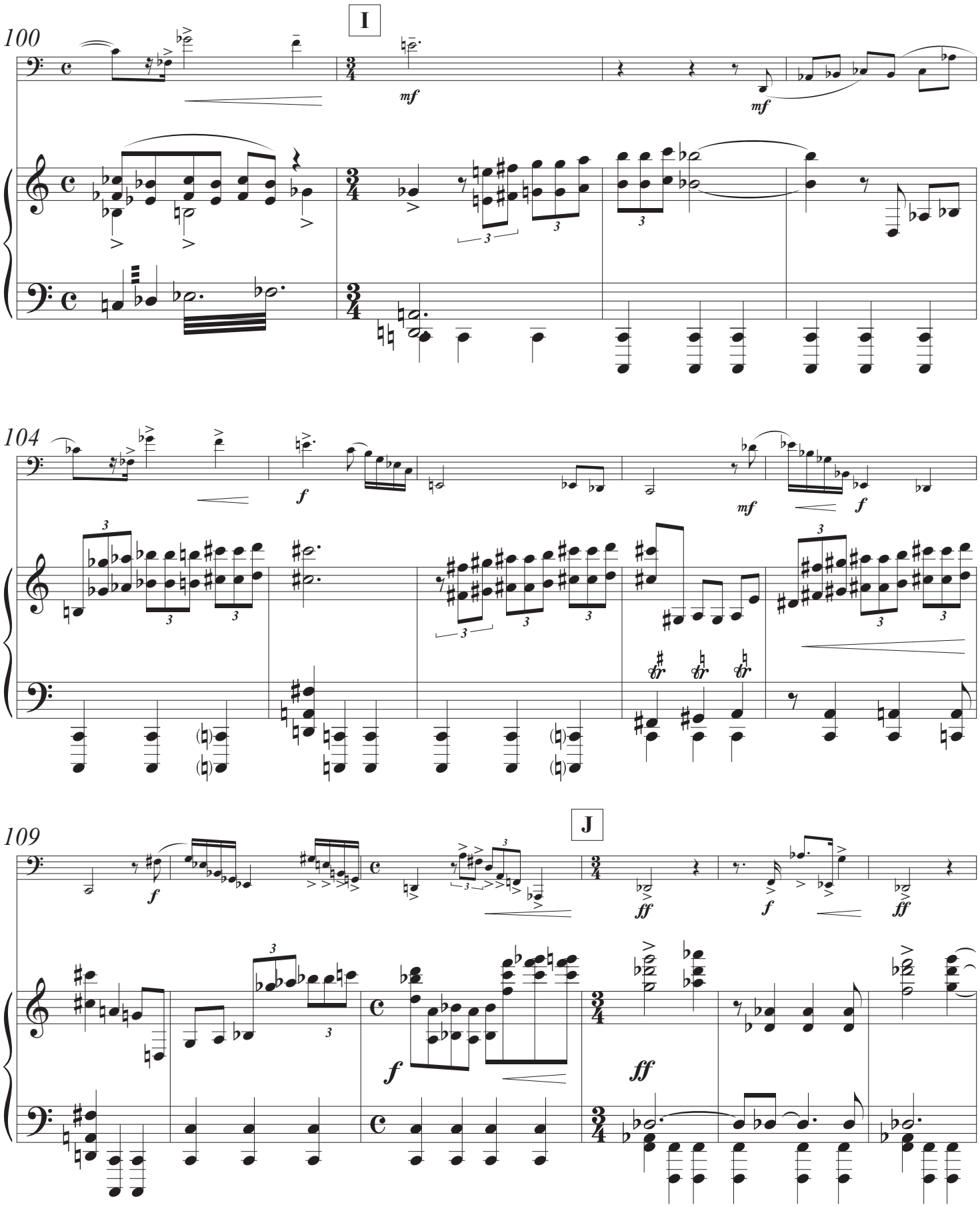

72
piu mosso
mp
mp
p
G
Andante moderato (♩ = c. 84)
76
mf
pp
p
82
p
mf
p
mf
p
pp

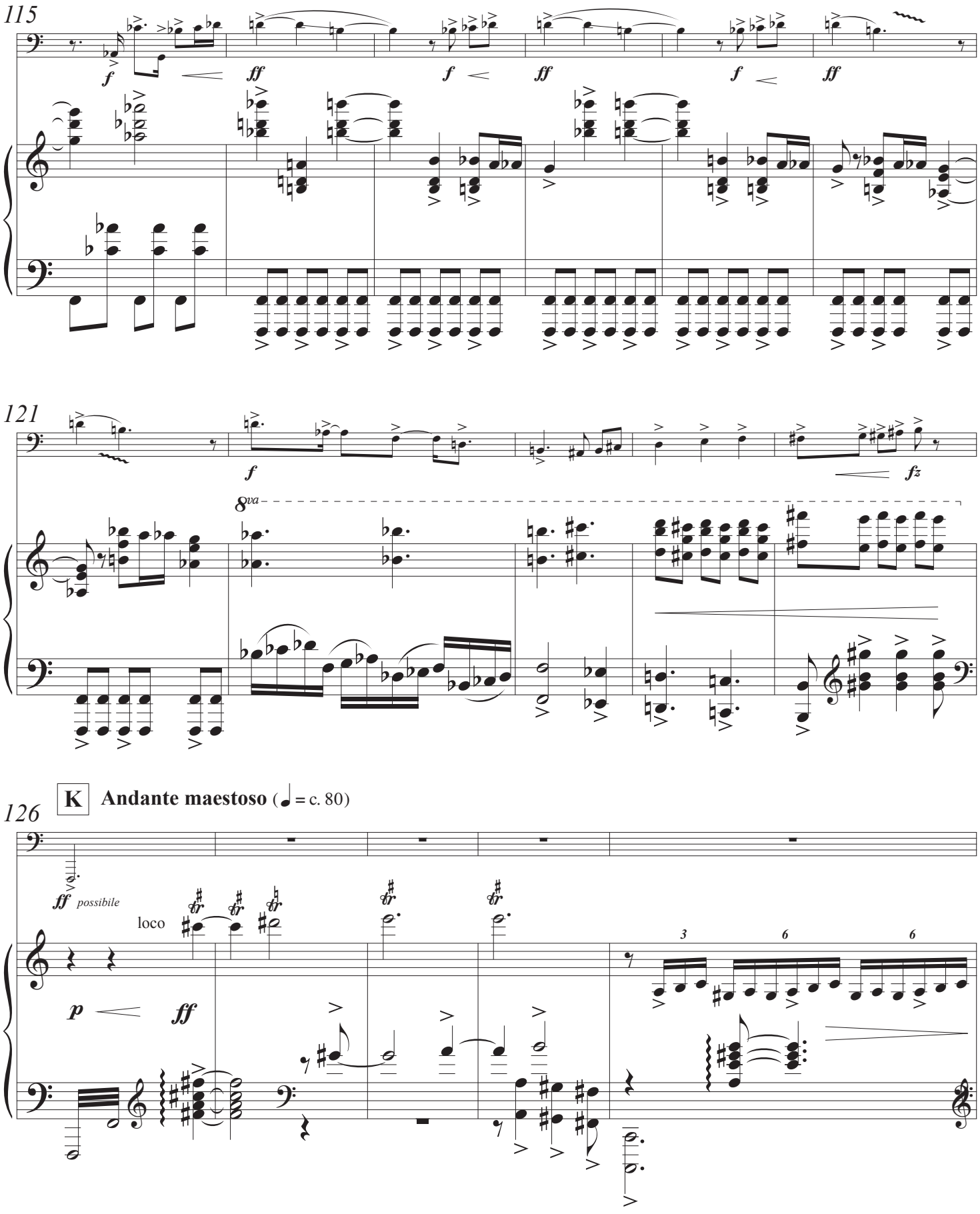


Andante nobile (♩ = 69) ***e poco a poco accel...***






I
100
mf
mf
104
f
mf
f
J
109
f
ff
f
ff
f
ff


115
f
ff
f
ff
f
ff
121
f
fz
8va
126
K
Andante maestoso (♩ = c. 80)
ff possibile
loco
p
ff
3
6
6