STROIEN

FOR TWO PIANOS

TIMOTHY MCKENRY

***Stroien**: a destruction in four parts*

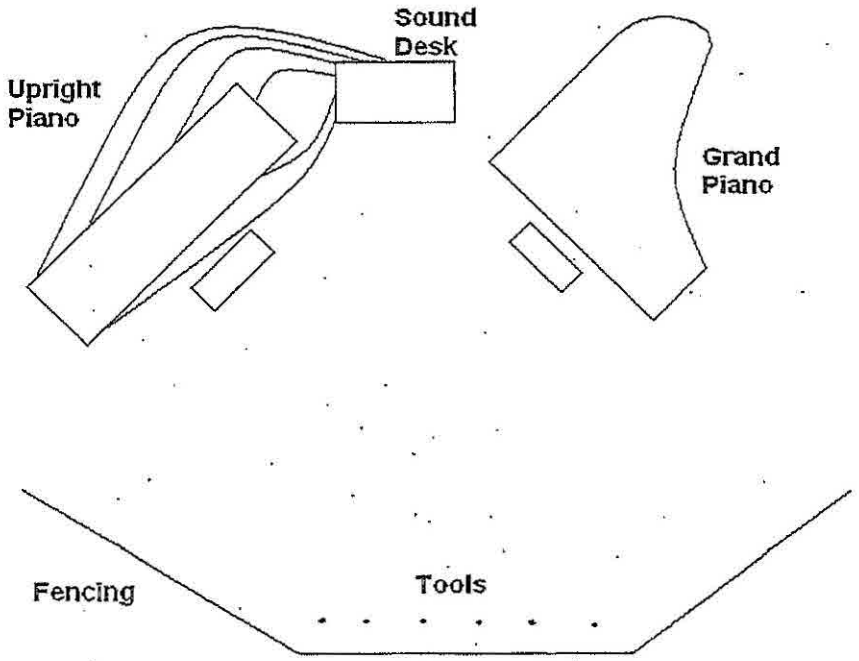
For two pianos, pianist and assistant.
Duration: approx 20 minutes

This piece was first performed in a concert series at the 2009 Melbourne Fringe Festival.

Upright pianos have a life span of between 50 and 100 years, depending on where they are stored and how they are maintained. Heatwaves and infestations such as borer beetle have the capacity to damage pianos beyond repair. In spite of this, old pianos often take on the mantle of a hallowed object – their destruction or disposal seen by some as a 'cultural blasphemy'. In January and February 2009, Melbourne experienced an unprecedented heatwave: sustained temperatures of up to 46 degrees Celsius over many days saw numerous pianos meet their end. These instruments could no longer be tuned, and, on the advice of a professional piano restorer, were beyond help. This piece works to both celebrate the life of the instrument to be destroyed and to create and arrange novel sounds resulting from the destruction process.

The following diagram outlines the set-up required for this piece. A grand piano (which is not to be damaged) sits alongside the upright piano facing at an angle. The upright piano should have its front panel removed. A sound desk sits between the two instruments. Construction fencing laced with netting surrounds the stage to protect the audience from debris. The tools for destructions are, at the commencement of the performance, lined up at the front of the stage. The following tools should be available:

1) Rubber Mallet
2) Hammer
3) Saw
4) Bastard file
5) bolt cutters
6) Crow bar
7) Sledge hammer (*2)



The upright piano is to be miked-up with six microphones. Three should be attached to the sound board at the rear of the instrument; two should be attached on the front of the instrument (potentially touching strings or dampers); and one must be placed against the string of the lowest note on the instrument. To avoid losing the microphones too early in the destruction process, the majority of the microphones, along with their leads, should be positioned away from the side panels of the instrument.

The feed from the microphones is sent through an effects module: effects such as delayed, variable-speed, repeating and transposed reverb should be available. The main signal from each microphone must be switched off – only the effects run through the house speakers. The assistant or pianists may, at any time during the performance, alter the effects through a controller on the sound desk.

The length of a performance of *Stroien* depends on the time taken to destroy the piano according to the script that follows. The notated music contained in this score can be used in part or in its entirety as required.

Care should be taken to ensure firstly that no debris can reach the audience and secondly that the risk to the performers is minimised. Goggles and leather gloves should be worn (when not playing one of the instruments) and the pianist and assistant should verbally communicate each destructive action taken.

Script for *Stroien*

Part 1: Celebration

The pianist begins the performance by briefly telling the history of the upright piano to the audience. Included in this history is

1) The date of manufacture and country of origin
2) The ownership and function of the piano over its life (or those details that are known)
3) The reason why the instrument is now defunct

At the conclusion of the verbal history of the instrument, the pianist moves to the upright and performs part of the notated music for *Stroien*. On the basis of a) the specific history of the instrument and b) the audience reaction the play will begin the notated music from either bar 1 or bar 24. (Approx. 2 minutes).

Part 2: Harm

At a point determined by the assistant, the initial phases of destruction begin. Using a hammer, the assistant should damage the upper notes of the instrument, including the hammers. This continues until the pianist elects to stop playing. Both pianist and assistant should then damage the casing and upper strings of the instrument. The following activities should take place:

1) Bolt cutters used to cut several strings on upper range of the piano
2) Saw used on scroll work and casing
3) Hammer used to remove elements of the action on the upper range of the piano.

Ideally, the lower range of the piano will still be playable and the microphones will remain intact throughout this section. (Approx. 8 minutes)

Part 3: Destruction

This section is demarked either by the assistant playing a brief passage of notated music on either instrument or by the pianist adjusting the effects settings. The destruction of the instrument gathers pace and must involve:

1) Extensive damage to the entire action of the instrument;
2) the removal of the pedal action;
3) the cracking of the sound board and the 'running through' of the instrument with a crowbar;
4) the complete removal of the keys and action.

By the conclusion of this section, the piano should be as damaged as possible. This includes the removal of side and top panels; all scroll work; and all parts of the instrument that can be removed without power tools.

Through the course of this section, the assistant will remove microphone as the surrounding sections are damaged. The section ends with coordinated blows using the sledgehammers, knocking the instrument to the ground. (Approx 8 minutes)

Part 4: Elegy

The pianist now moves to the grand piano and performs the notated music for Stroien bars 1 to 23, beat 3. (Approx 2 minutes)

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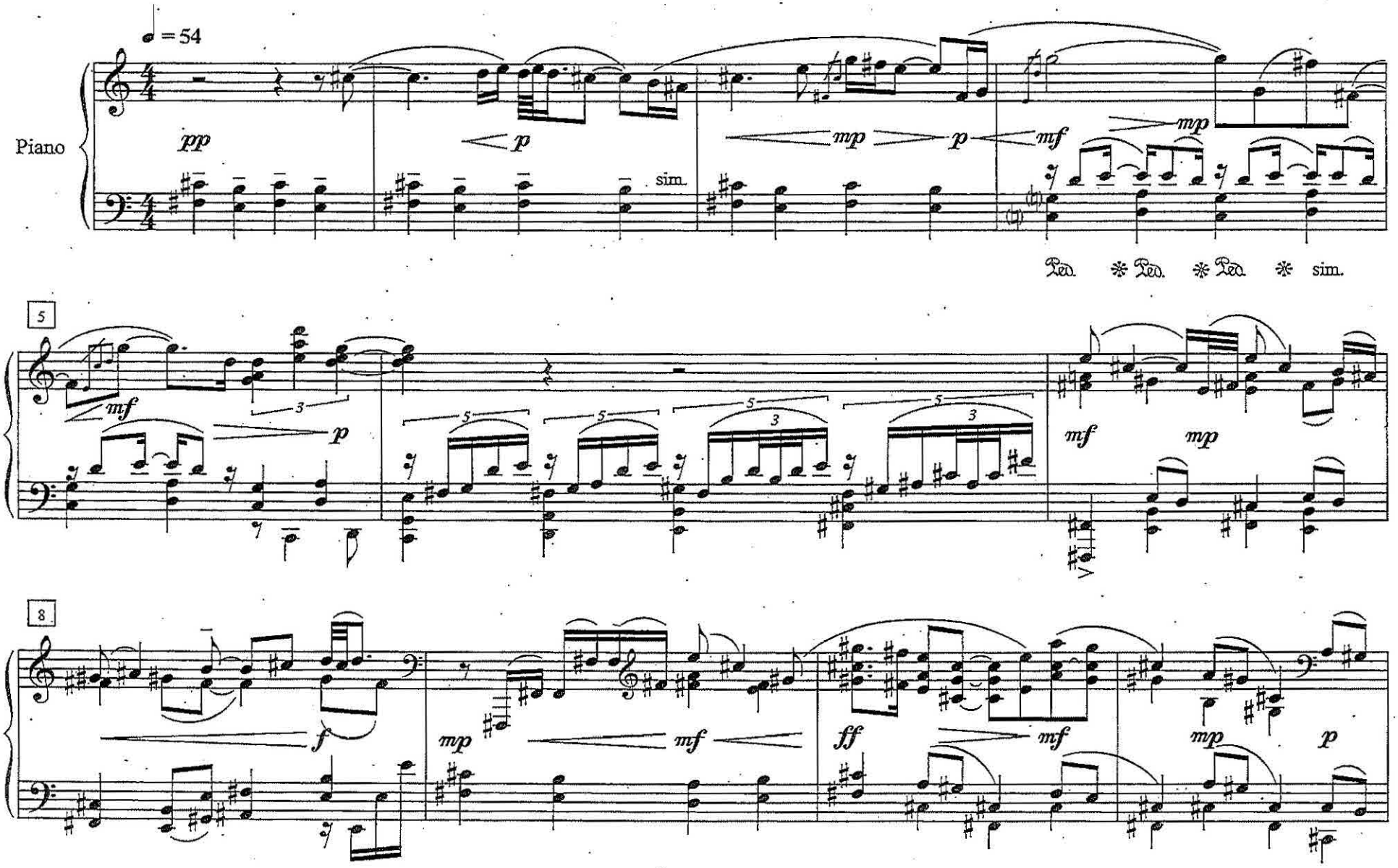
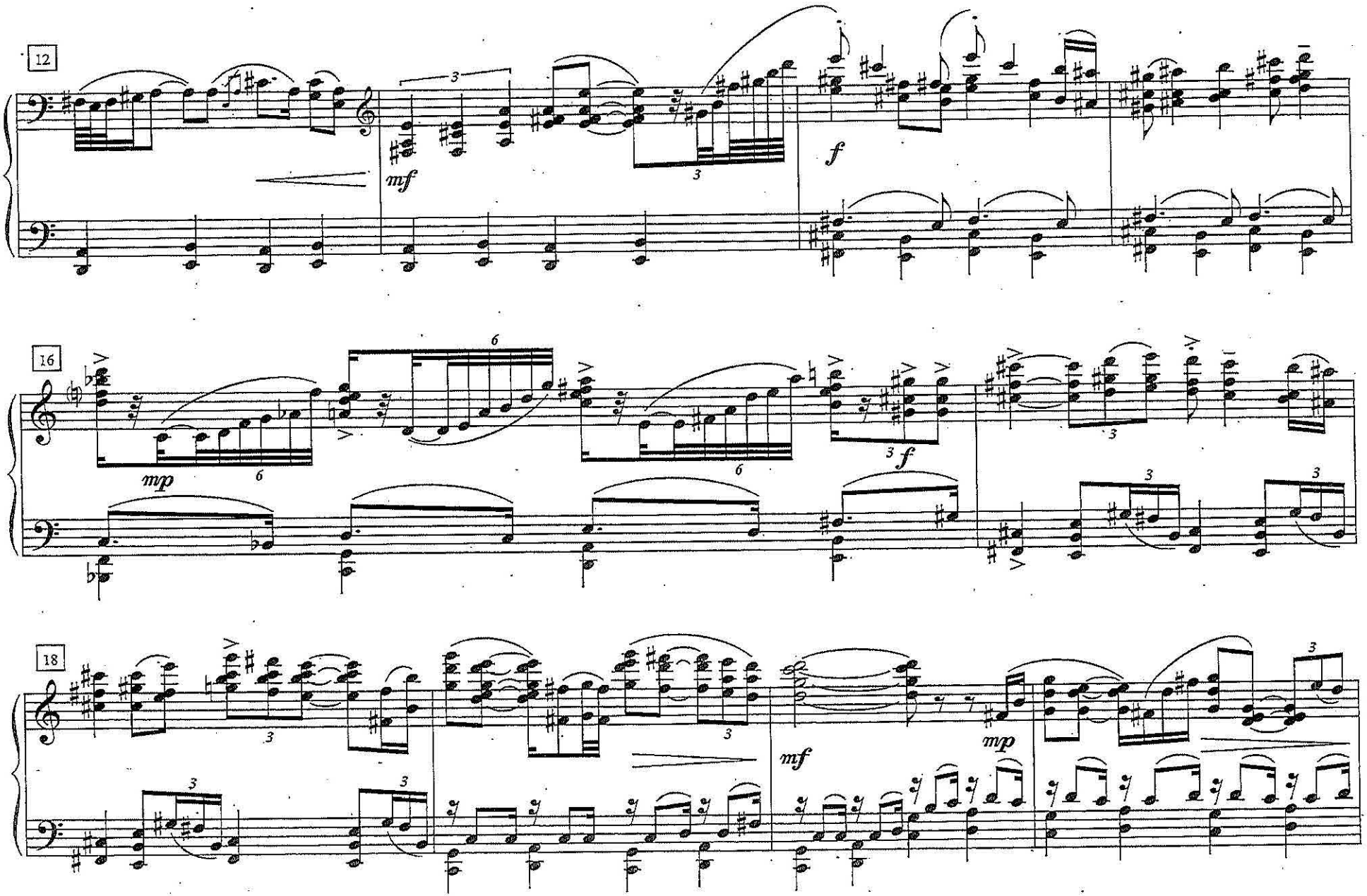
Stroien

Timothy McKenry

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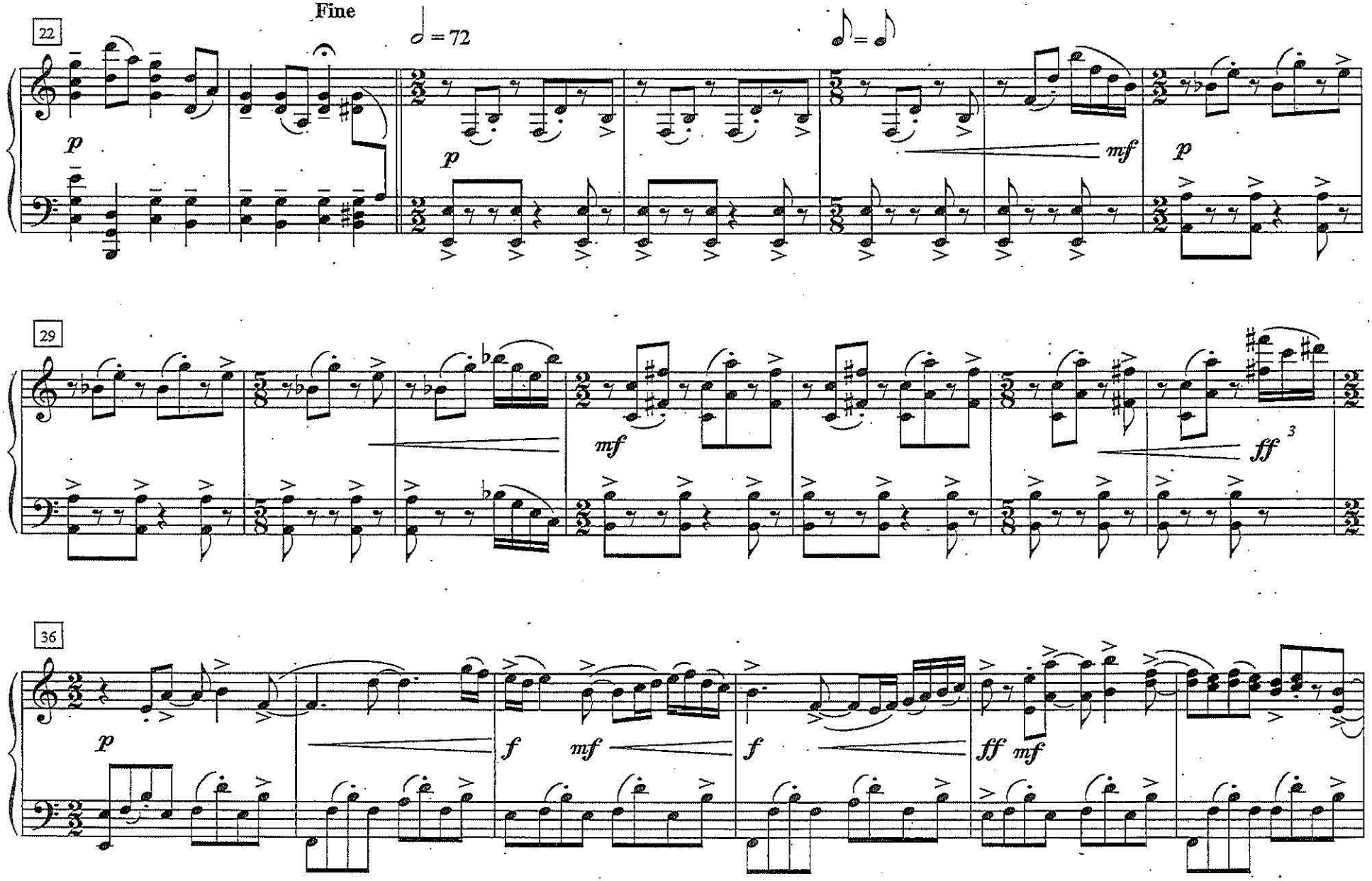
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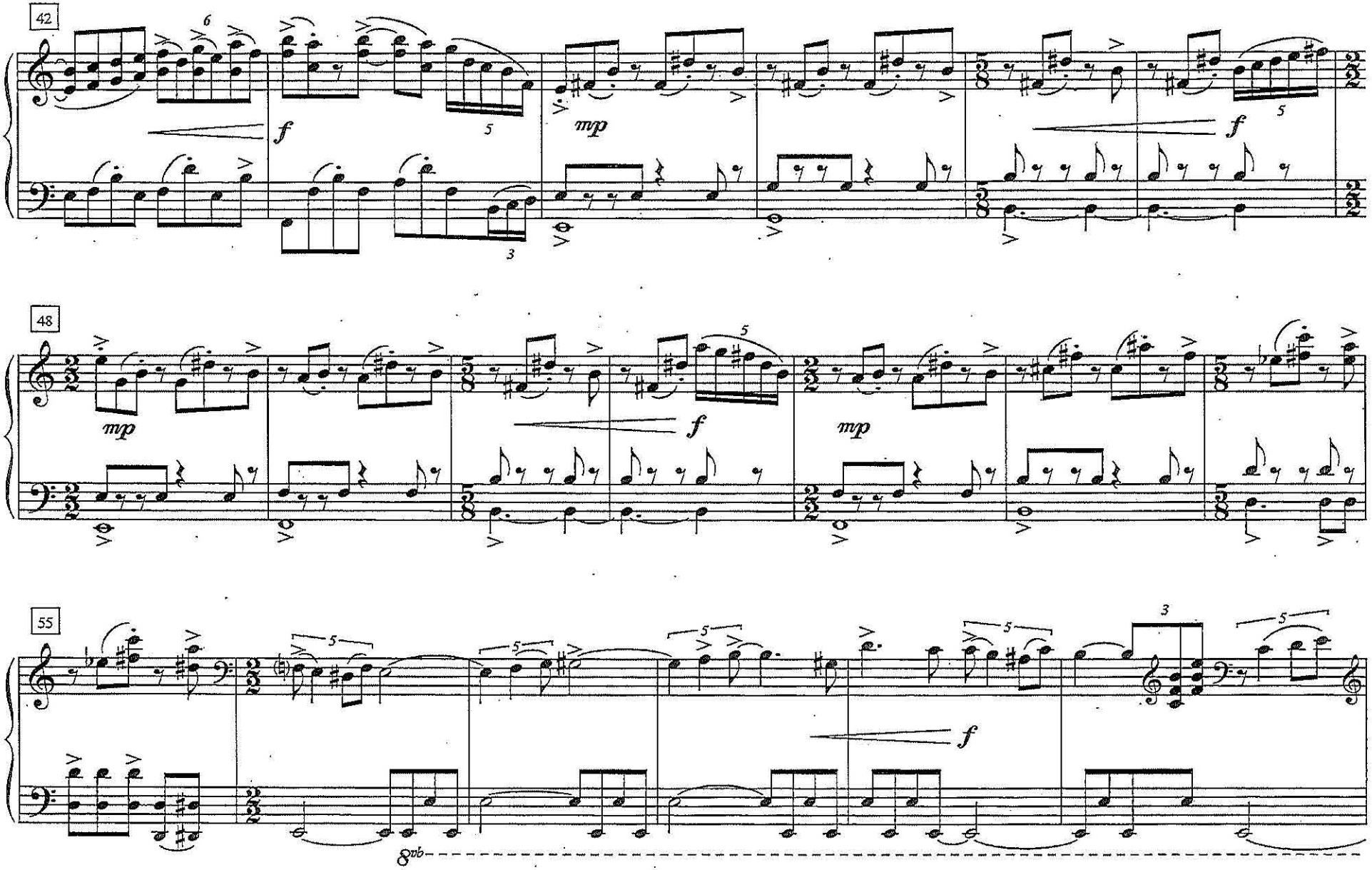
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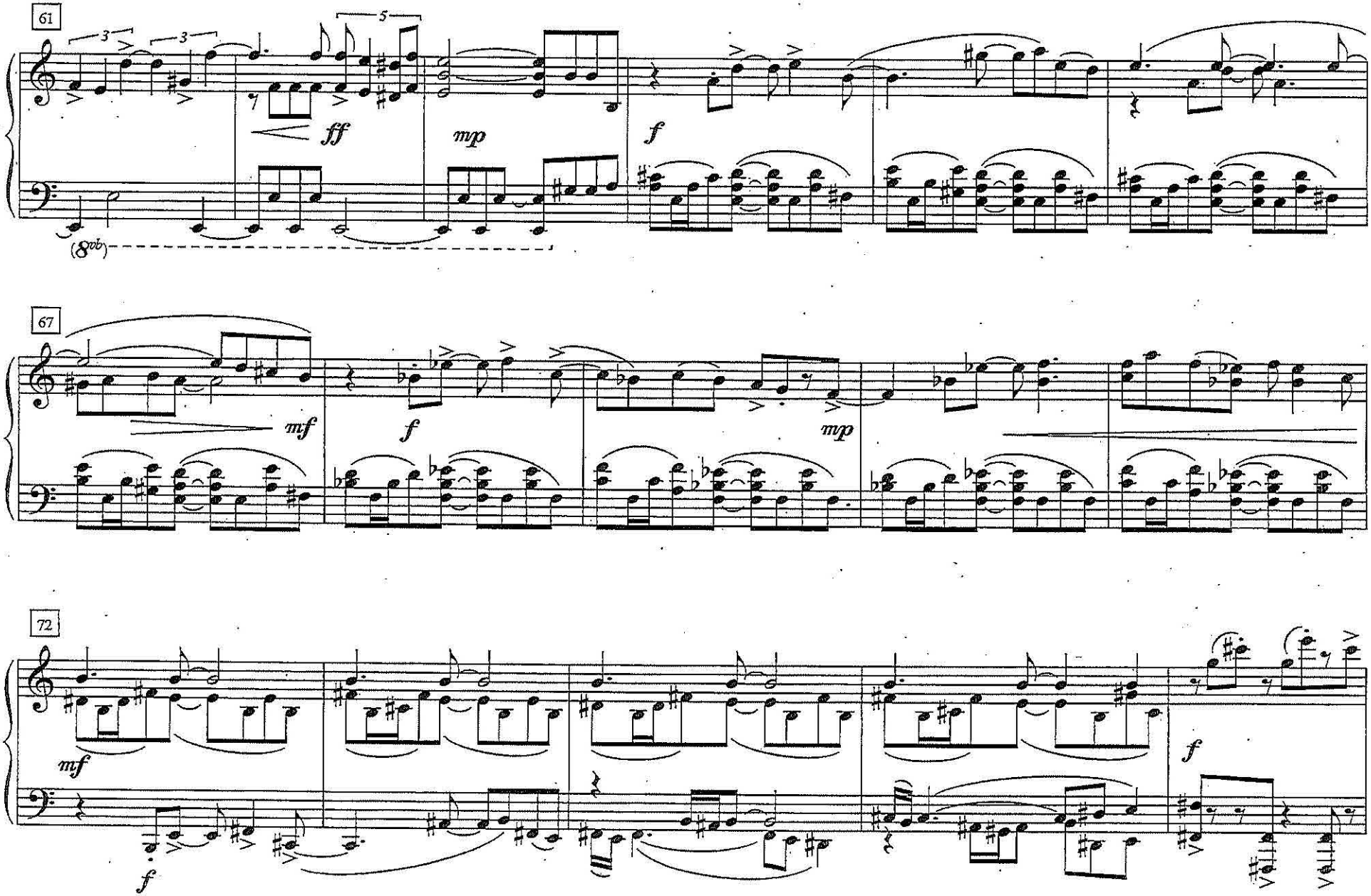
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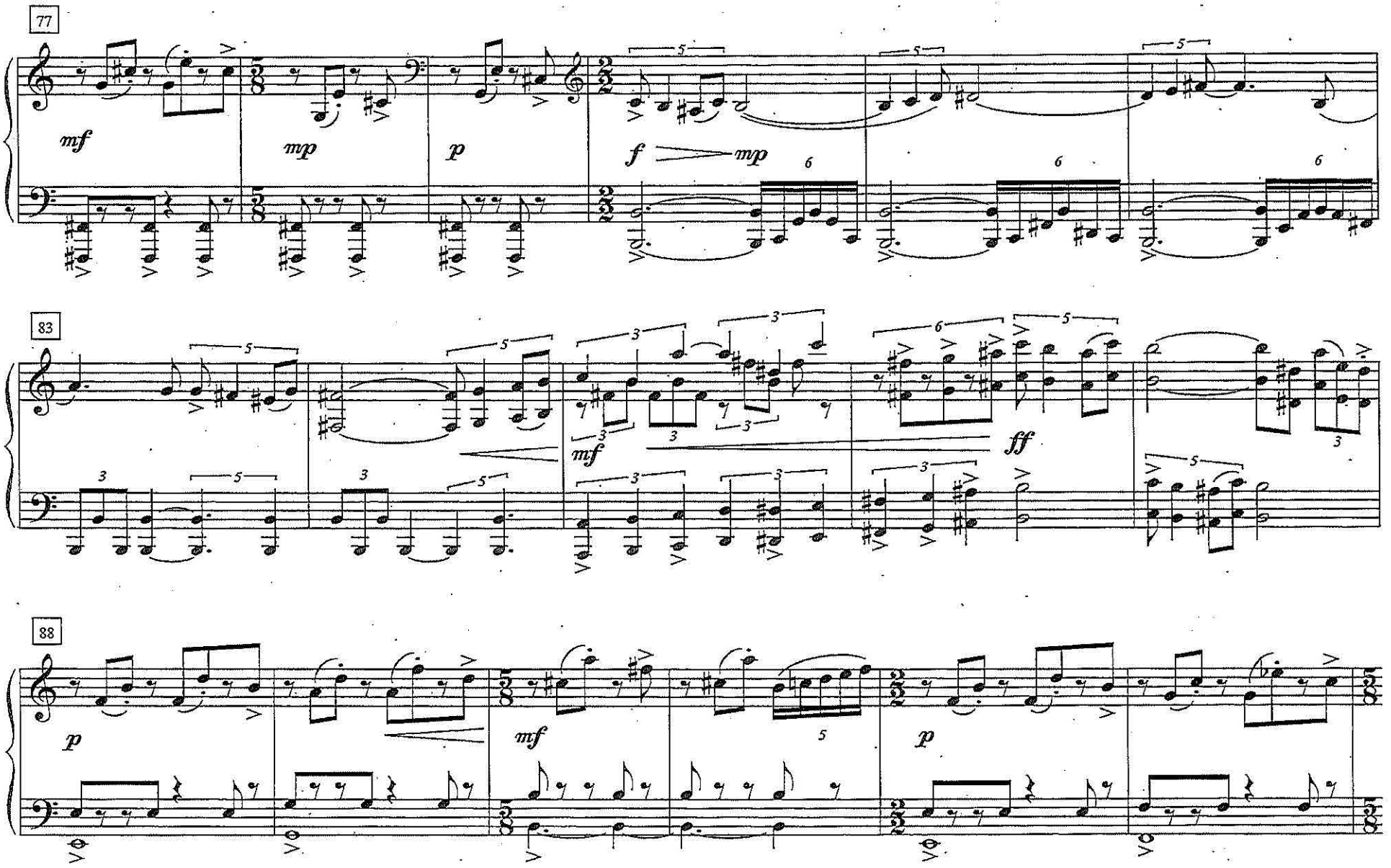
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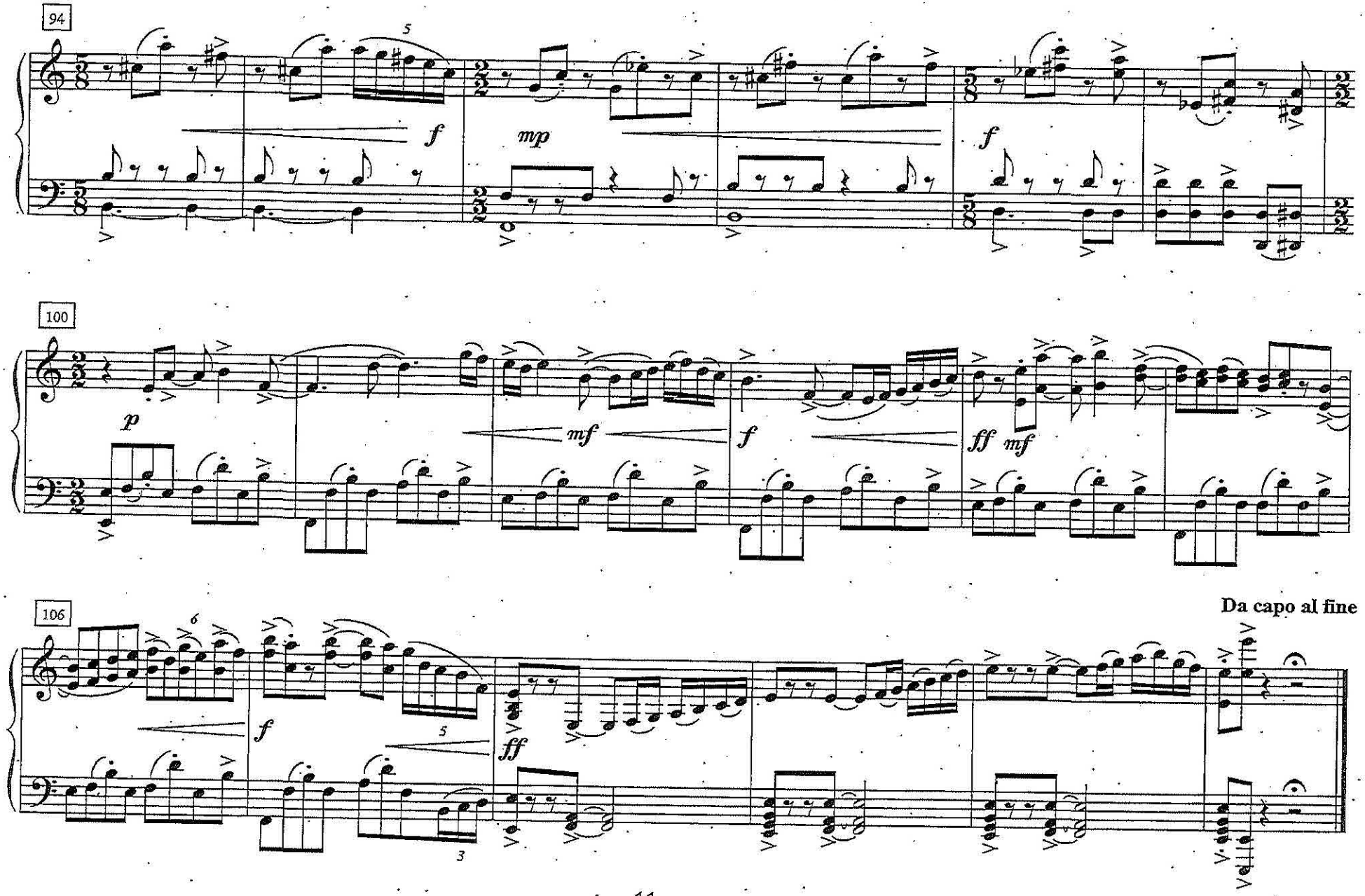
94
100
106
Da capo al fine

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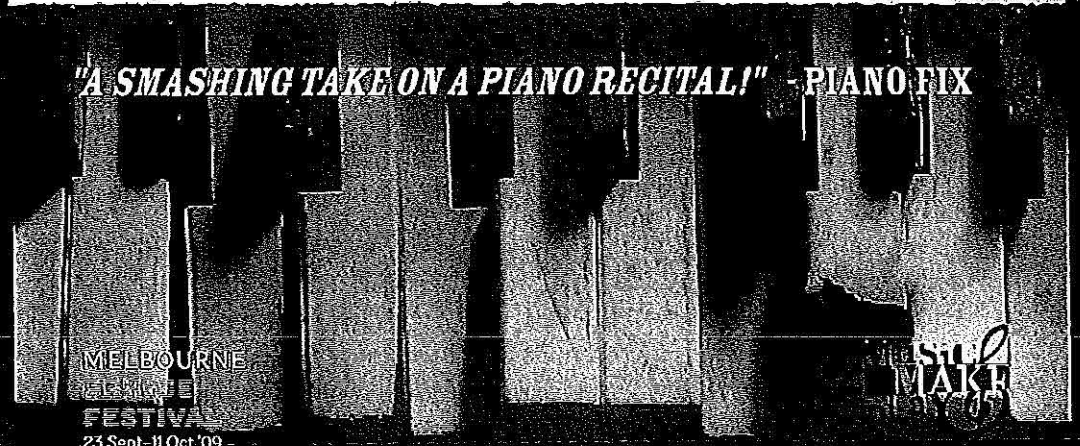

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