2011 © Joseph Twist, *Context* 35/36 (2010/2011): 181–95.

Composition

I Dance Myself to Sleep

Joseph Twist

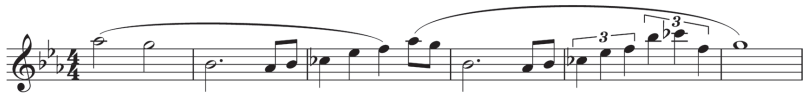
In the work I wanted to explore both sleep and innocence as general, extra-musical concepts. Sleeping has long been a fascinating and frustrating activity for me. I am a very light sleeper, if not a frequent insomniac and, when I do sleep, I often have bizarre and surreal dreams, which I assume most of us experience at some point. Sleeping is a mysterious activity: a strange altered state of consciousness that may involve sleepwalking, nightmares and fantasies, while also being an essential part of living that provides rejuvenation, relaxation, escape and peace. The power of sleep may go further. As Walt Whitman suggested, sleep is a democratising force: even murderers sleep like the rest of us, young and old, black and white.

I Dance Myself to Sleep explores the general idea of sleep but, more specifically, it relates to a perplexing recurring dream that involves the central 'female companion' characters from some of my favourite childhood movies, including *Superman*, the *Indiana Jones* films and the *Star Wars* saga. Representing this is a romantic melody (my Old Love Theme), written in homage to the enchanting love themes in film scores by John Williams, Jerry Goldsmith and Max Steiner. This recurring dream developed over several years, becoming less whimsical and naive, allegorically suggesting this loss of innocence. I chose, therefore, a very innocent title, 'I Dance Myself to Sleep,' taken from an adorable Sesame Street song sung by Ernie; it is one of my favourite childhood memories.

Appropriately, the genesis of this piece dates back to my childhood. In the end I'm really just a kid from the Gold Coast who was a bit obsessed with John Williams soundtracks, which were the impetus for studying music in the first place. When I was twelve, I wrote my own film-music-style 'love theme,' having been fascinated by the melodic and harmonic language associated with such characters as Princess Leia and Lois Lane in Williams's scores. Now, over a decade later, I decided to use the same melody I had composed at twelve because I thought it had a lot of potential. However, with greater musical knowledge and more years of experience behind me, I found myself dabbling with all sorts of alternative harmonies, various options for an obbligato counterpoint, unusual orchestrations and textures, and other more 'sophisticated' elements to combine and fuse with this melody, or I would chop it up and use it in a whole new context.

The original melody for *I Dance Myself to Sleep* draws on a particular idiosyncrasy of John Williams's love themes: they often begin with a rising major sixth. In fact, this interval is used for two different themes associated with Princess Lea and Han Solo in both *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*. Marion's theme from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* also begins with this rising motive, even though the overall melody is quite different. For my own work, I used a descending major sixth, preceded by a falling semitone to begin the melody (see Fig. 1).

Figure 1. *I Dance Myself to Sleep*, Old Love Theme



The overall compositional technique was one of variation, particularly with regard to harmony and rhythm. As mentioned, the central melody used in this work was composed at the age of twelve. The harmonisation of this melody that I wrote as a twelve-year-old was very simple compared with the harmonic language employed in *I Dance Myself to Sleep*, which is suffused with jazz-based 'extra-tertain' harmonic structures, as well as other elements of dissonance that shroud and taint the original unadorned melody. The use of this rich and subtly dissonant harmony is a musical reflection of a loss of innocence, or a disturbing nightmare, as explained above. Despite this, some elements of the core harmonic structures remain simple, often based on simple diatonic harmonic structures, particularly the ii –V–I harmonic progressions that permeate many styles of jazz.

However, combined with these simple harmonic structures is the use of added dissonances. Throughout the work a descending chromatic motive is used, usually featuring the pitches C♭ (sometimes spelled as B♮), B♭ and A♮. The melody appears for the first time in bar 22, beginning on the A♭ at the top of the chord on the second minim beat. Given that the melody appears here in E♭ major, the use of the chromatic motive featuring C♭, B♭ and A♮ throughout imbues this passage with elements of dissonance. As the harmonies change, the dissonances from these and other pitches sometimes result in jazz-based sonorities, such as the dominant chord with an added flattened ninth (B♮) and thirteenth in the final minim beat of bar 32. This chord is particularly striking because of the voicing of the flattened ninth (B♮) below the B♭ in the right hand. The voicing is also conceived bi-tonally, as the right hand plays a B♭-major triad over a

G-major triad in the left hand. The same voicing appears throughout the work, such as in the fortissimo chords in bar 115. As well, the juxtaposition of the chromatic C♭-B♭-A♮ figure creates some striking dissonances that do not relate directly to jazz-based harmonic structures. In bar 27, the figure is played softly above a simple C-minor-ninth chord, clashing with the B♭ which functions as the seventh of this chord. The addition of the A♮ from this chromatic figure creates further dissonance. This chromatic figure also creates dissonance over the tonic chord at both the beginning and the resolution of this passage. At this point in bar 34, the C♭-B♭-A♮ chromatic figure then features as a rising scale, portions of which had appeared previously throughout this passage, further blurring the otherwise simple, consonant, harmonic structure.

The analysis given in Figure 2 shows the general harmonic functions employed in this section of the work. The inversions of each chord are analysed according to traditional figured-bass models, however the added dissonances and 'extra-tertian' harmonic elements are considered separately and described in parentheses throughout. This highlights the juxtaposition of traditional harmonic procedures with the added dissonances employed throughout this section and the work as a whole.

Figure 2. Harmonic analysis of *I Dance Myself to Sleep*, Old Love Theme exposition

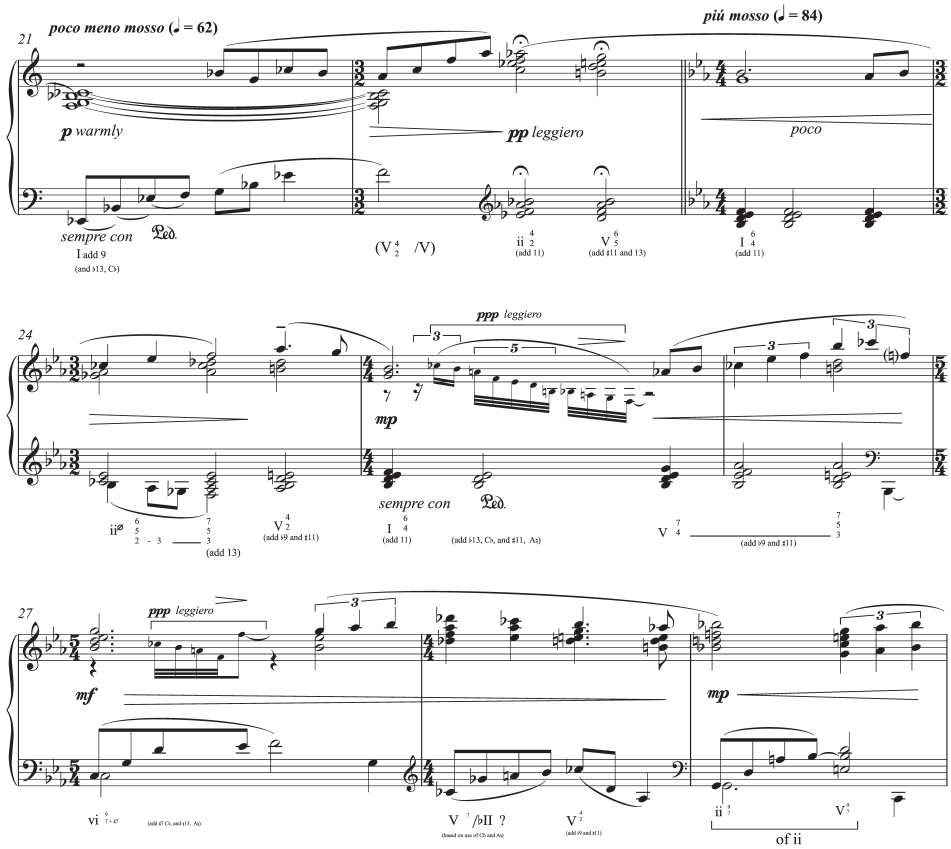
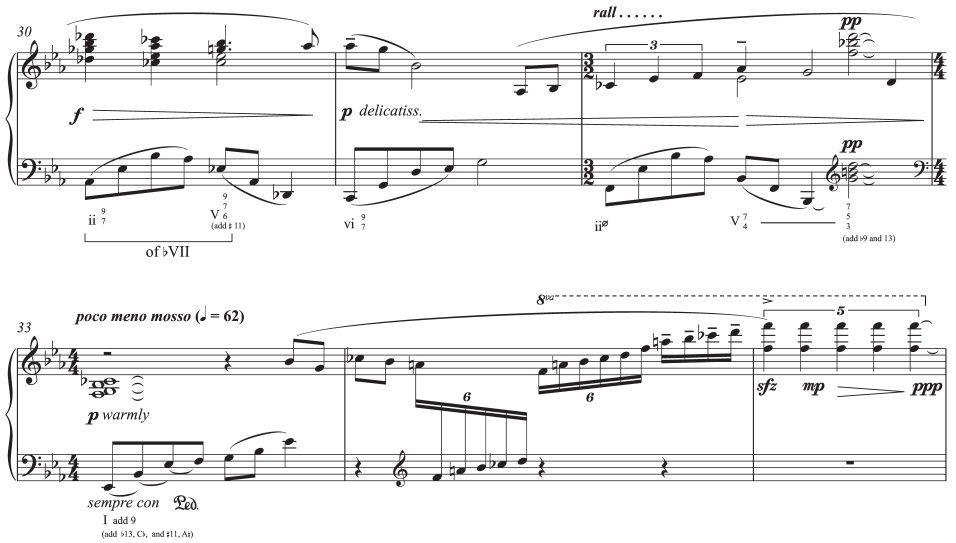
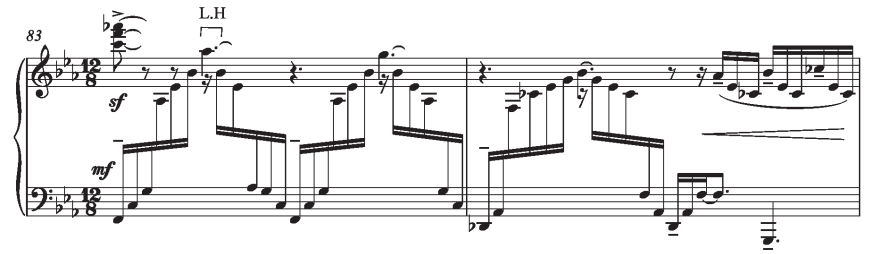


Figure 2 (cont.)



Later in the work, rhythmic variation of the original melody is employed, particularly in bars 67 to 88. Throughout this dancing, rhythmic passage, the contour of the original melody is retained, despite the constantly changing time signatures and rapid arpeggio textures, with the motive of a descending semitone and falling major sixth heard frequently in the upper register (see Fig. 3).

Figure 3. *I Dance Myself to Sleep*, bb. 83–84



The development and performance of this work by the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra was certainly one of my greatest musical experiences. I am extremely grateful for such wonderful performances of my work by the orchestra conducted by Brett Kelly, and later by Brett Dean in his Metropolis series. I first sketched the work as a piano piece, which I dedicated for performance by the astounding, ARIA Award-winning pianist Sally Whitwell, and I orchestrated the work later. My hope is that, following the example of many works by Ravel, *I Dance Myself to Sleep* works just as well as a solo piano piece as it does for chamber orchestra.

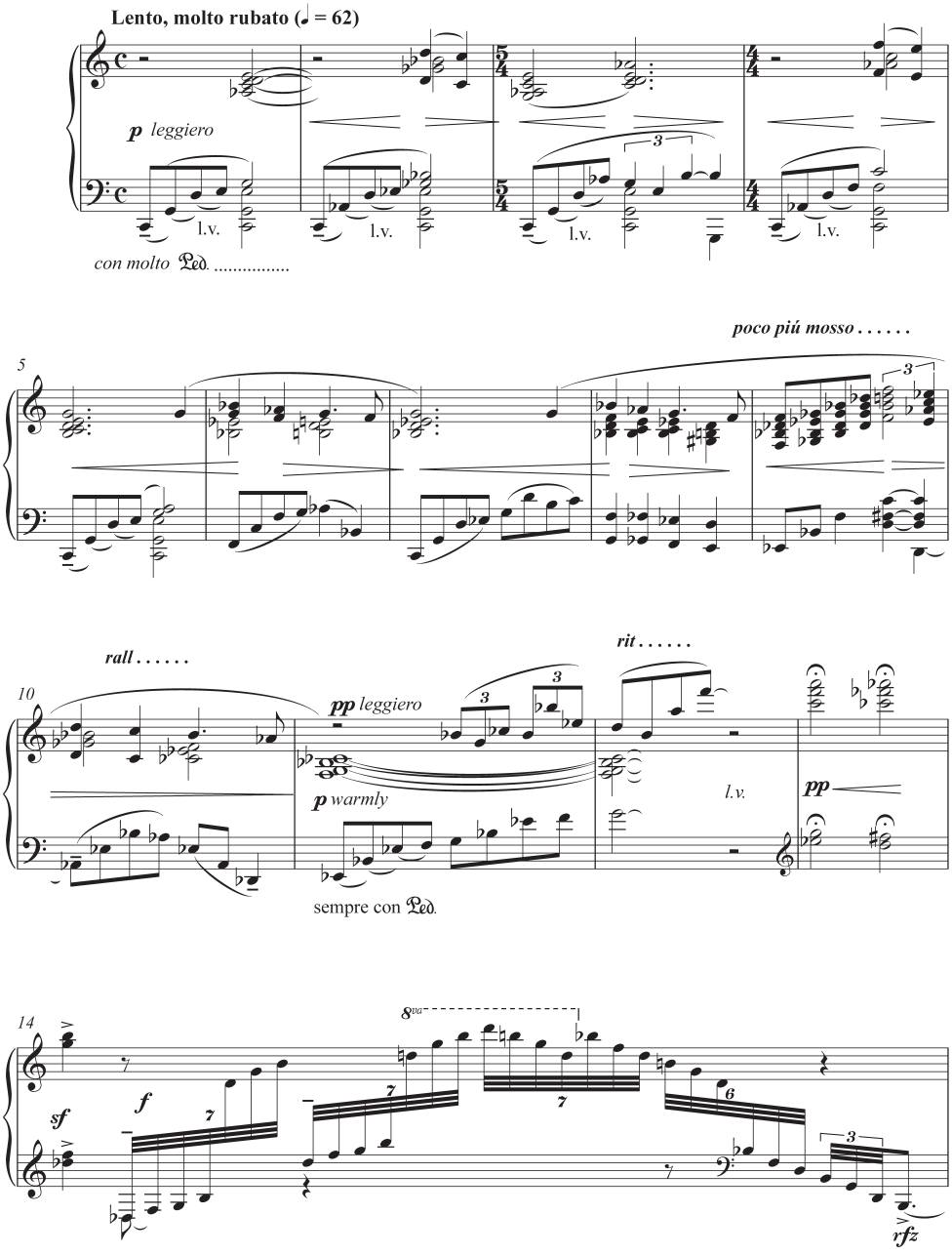
for Sally Whitwell

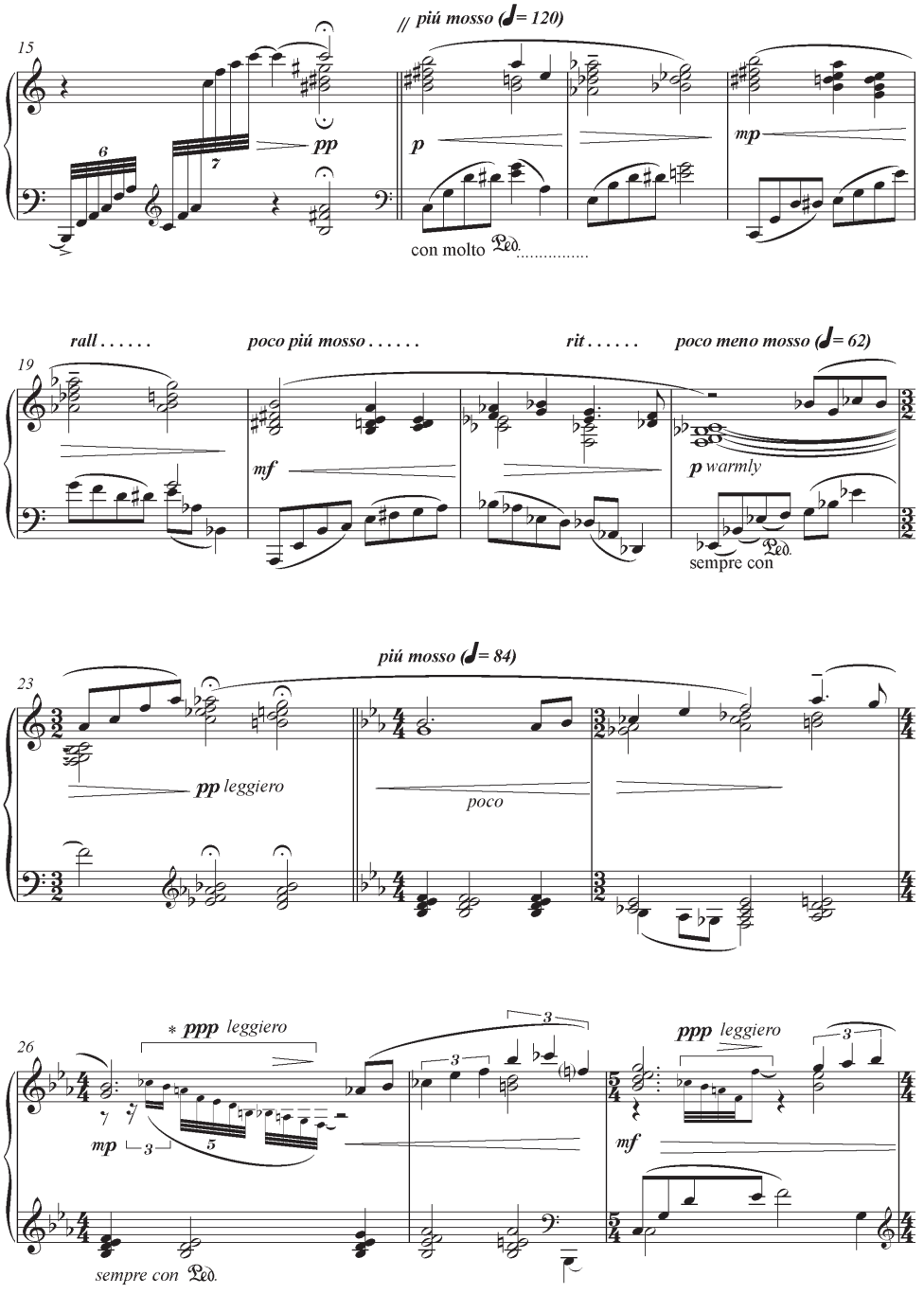
I Dance Myself to Sleep...

FOR PIANO

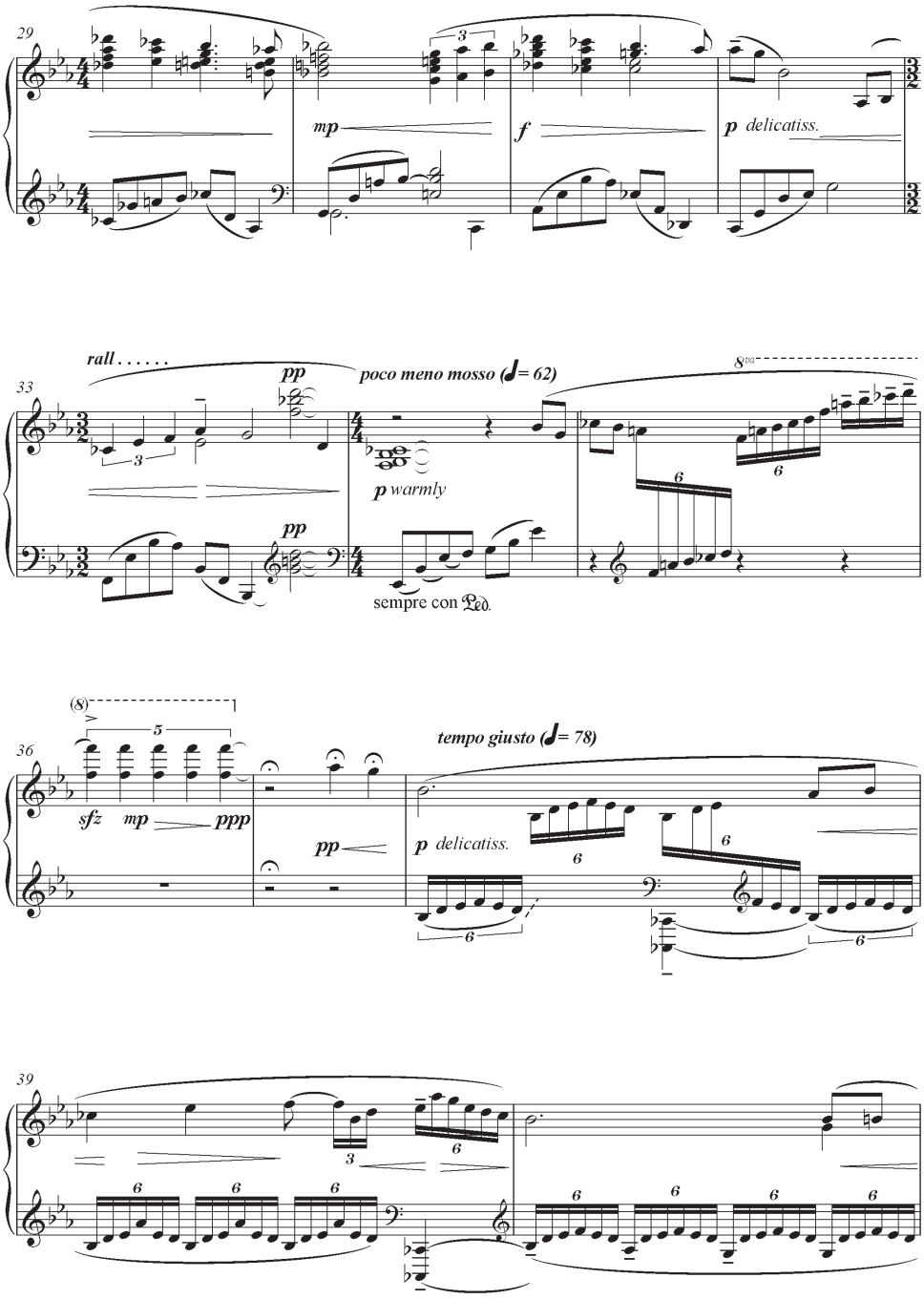
(Variations on an Old Love Theme)

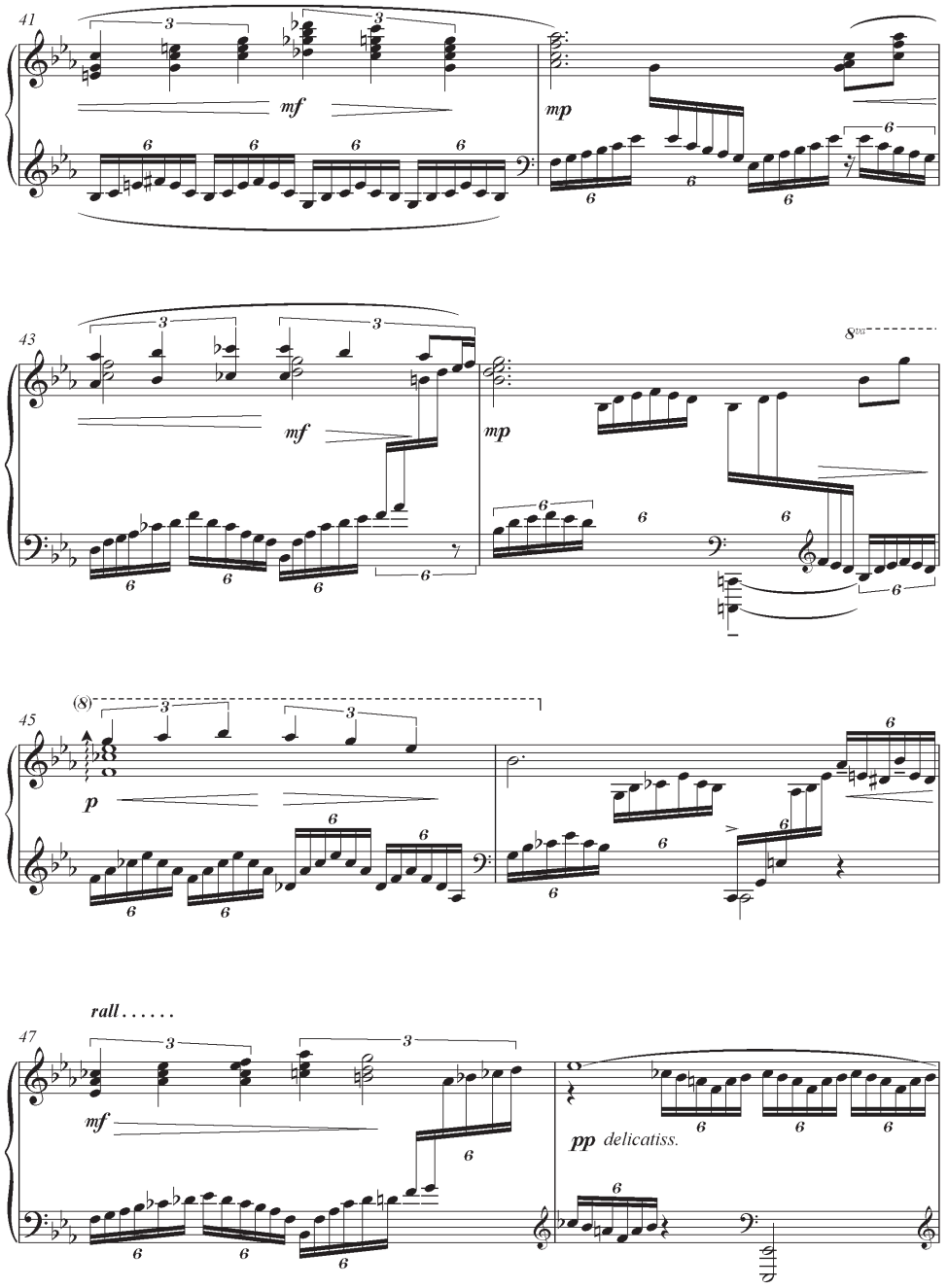
JOSEPH TWIST

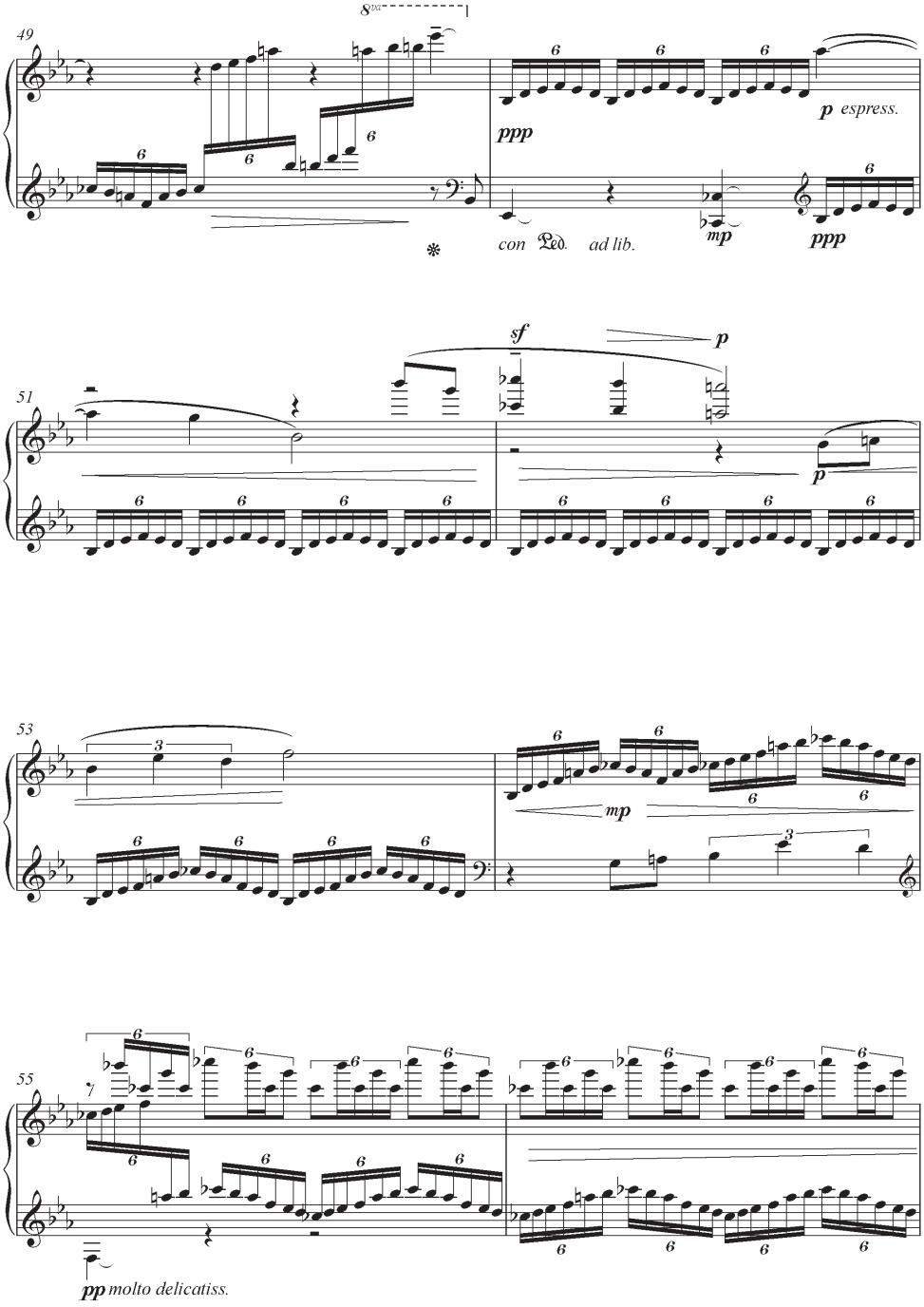


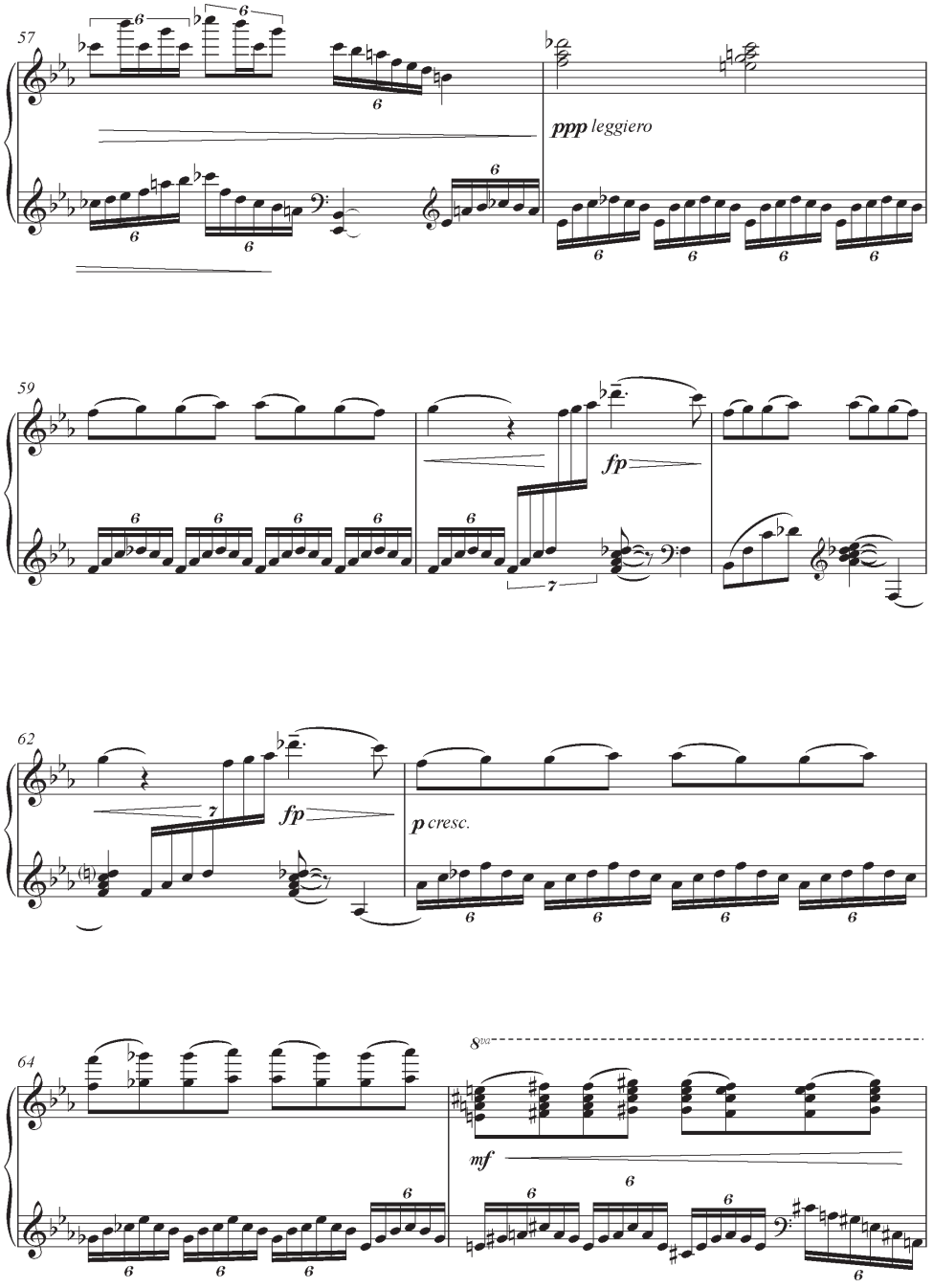


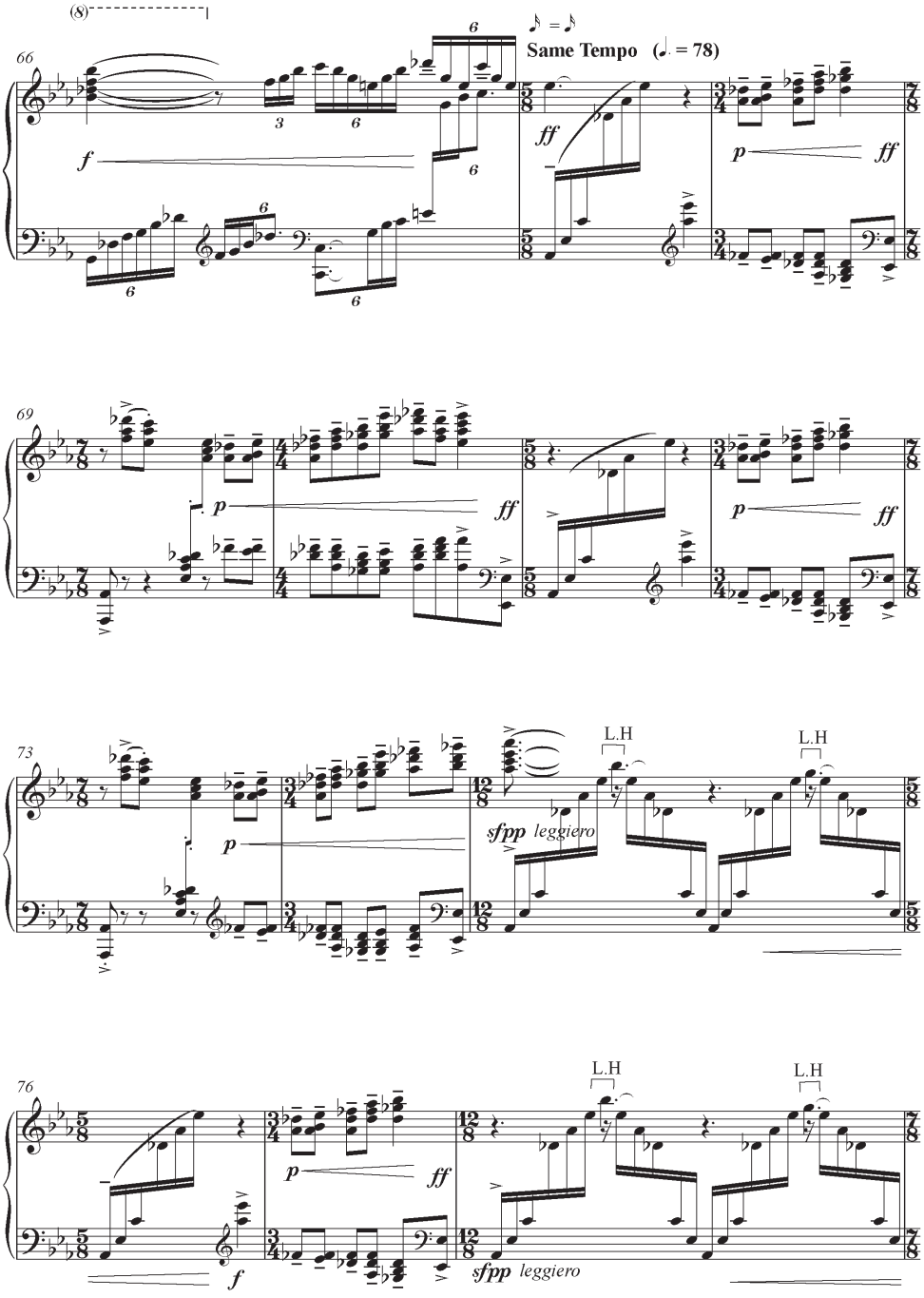
* play small notes very lightly and at about half the volume

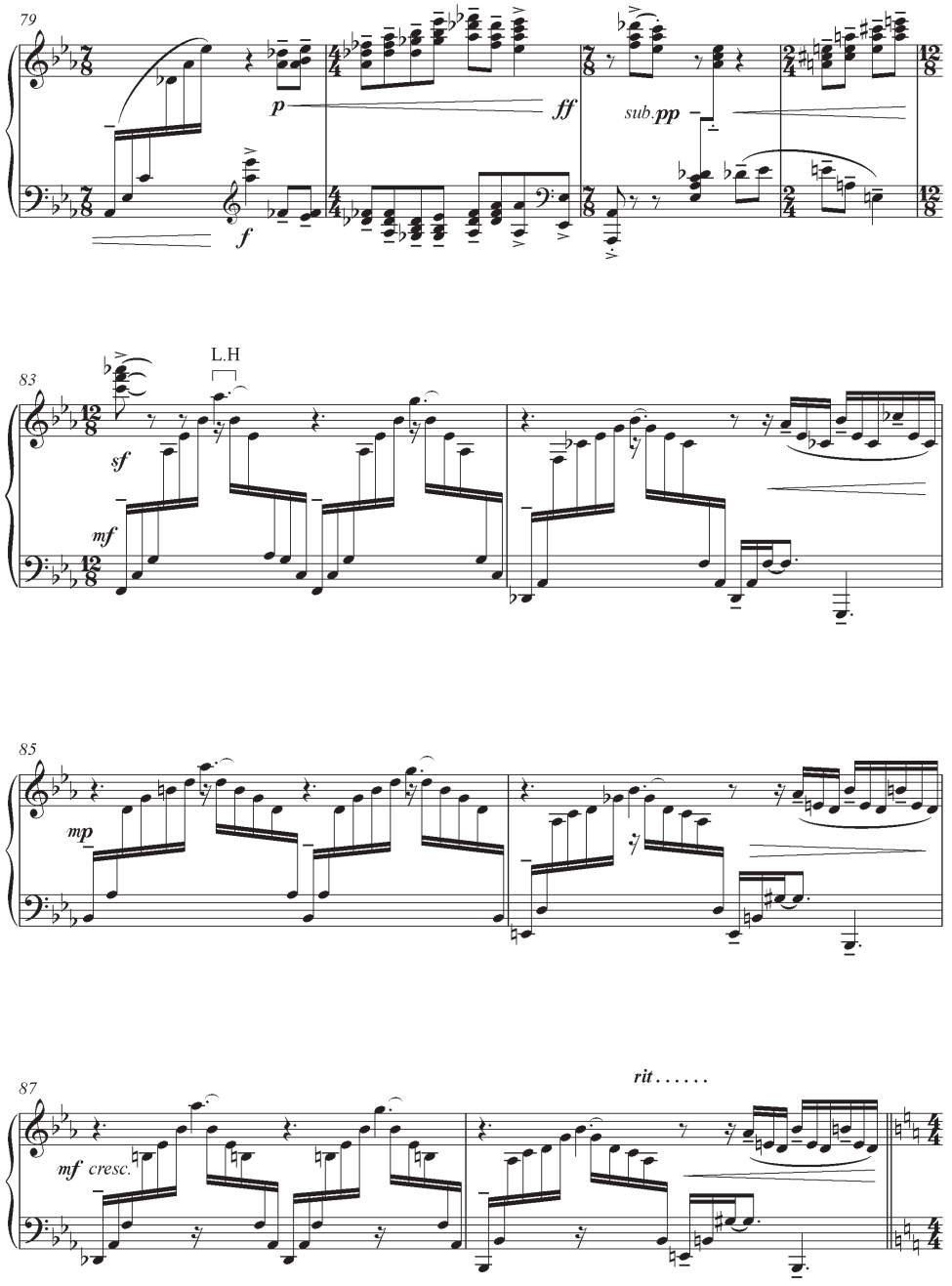

29
mp
f
p delicatiss.
rall . . . . . .
pp
poco meno mosso (♩= 62)
33
p warmly
pp
sempre con Ped.
8va
(8)
sfz
mp
ppp
36
pp
tempo giusto (♩= 78)
p delicatiss.
39

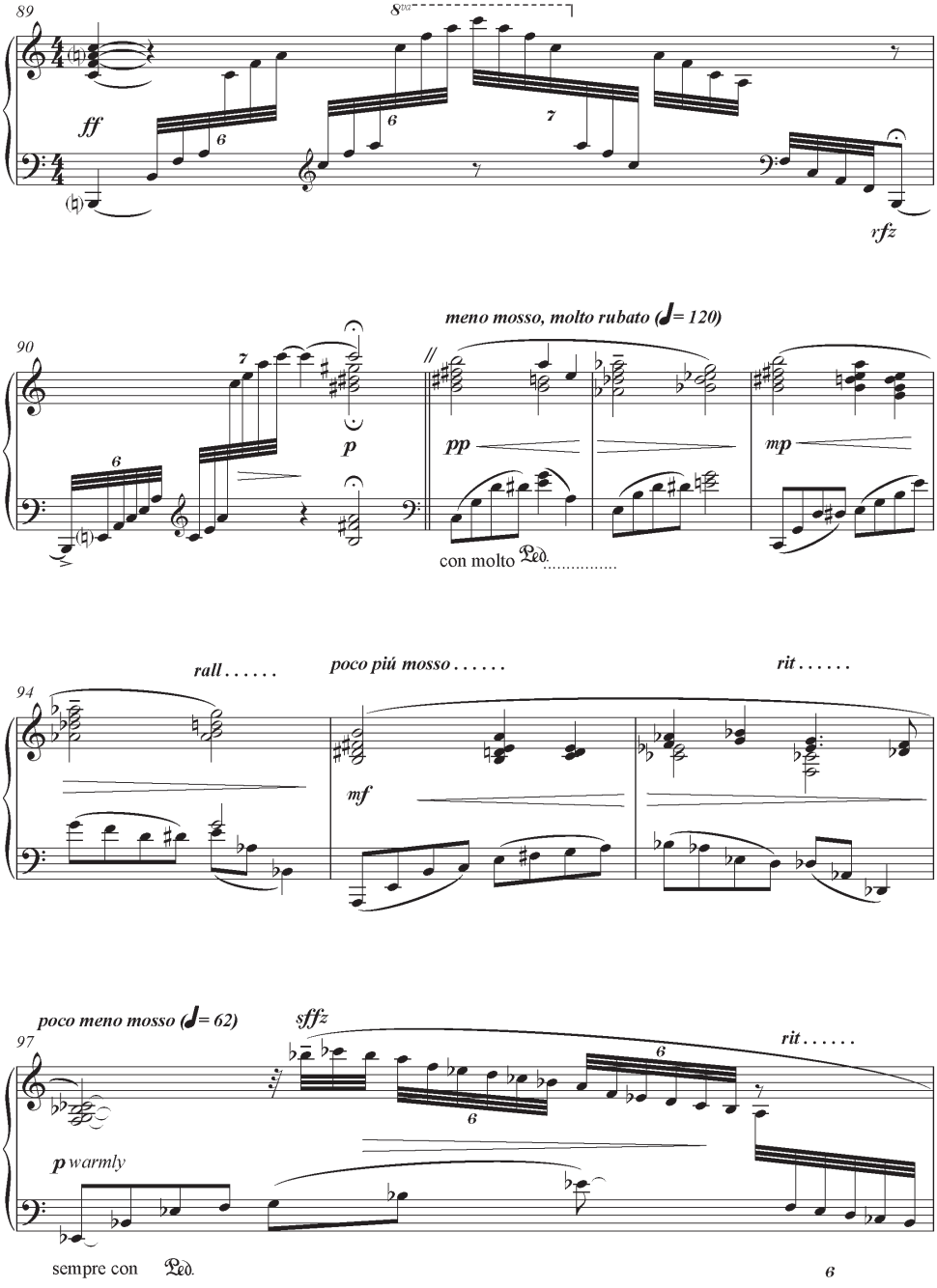

41
mf
mp
43
mf
mp
8va
45
(8)
p
rall. . . . . .
47
mf
pp delicatiss.

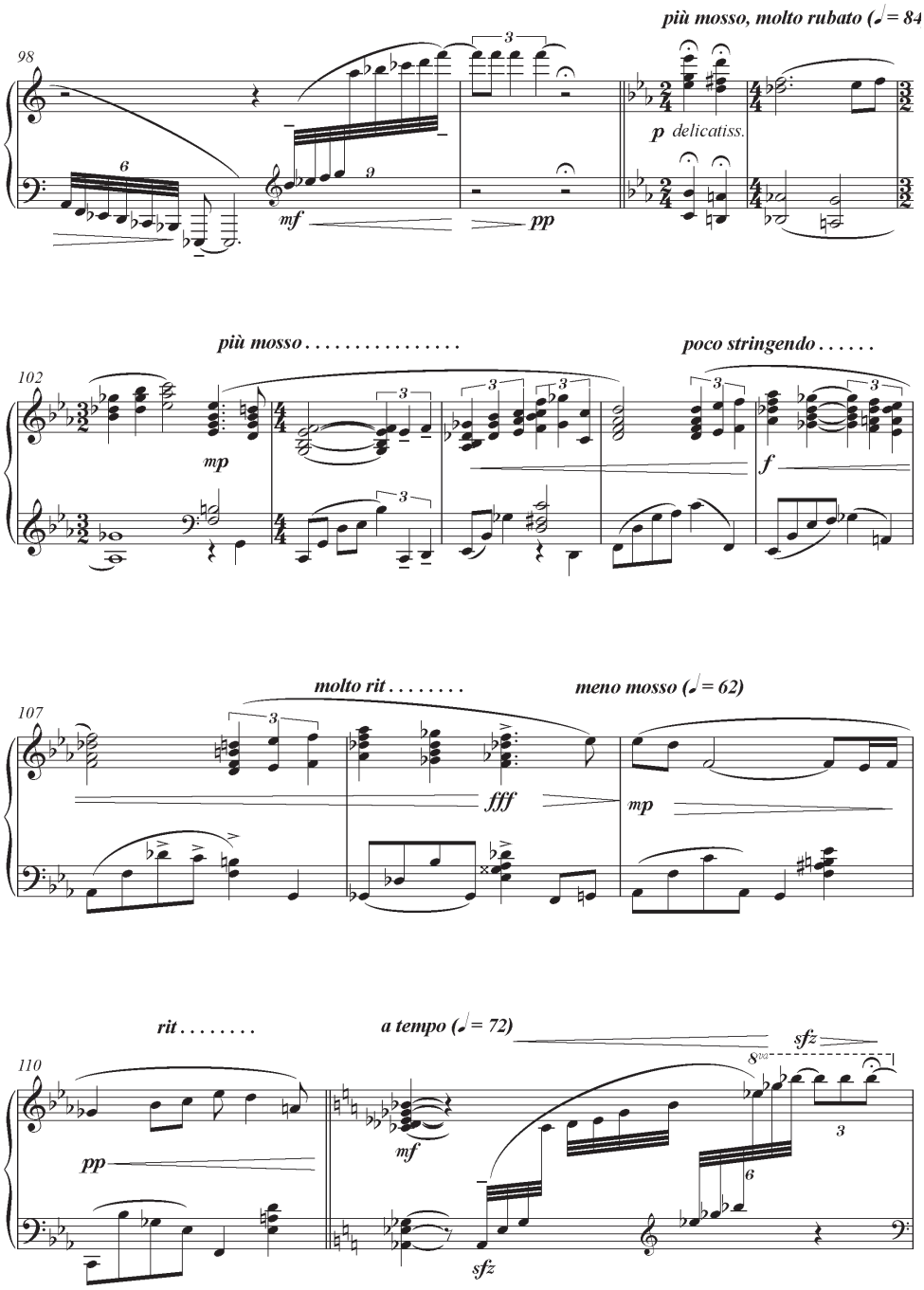

49
8va
ppp
p espress.
con Ped. ad lib.
mp
ppp
51
sf
p
p
53
mp
55
pp molto delicatiss.

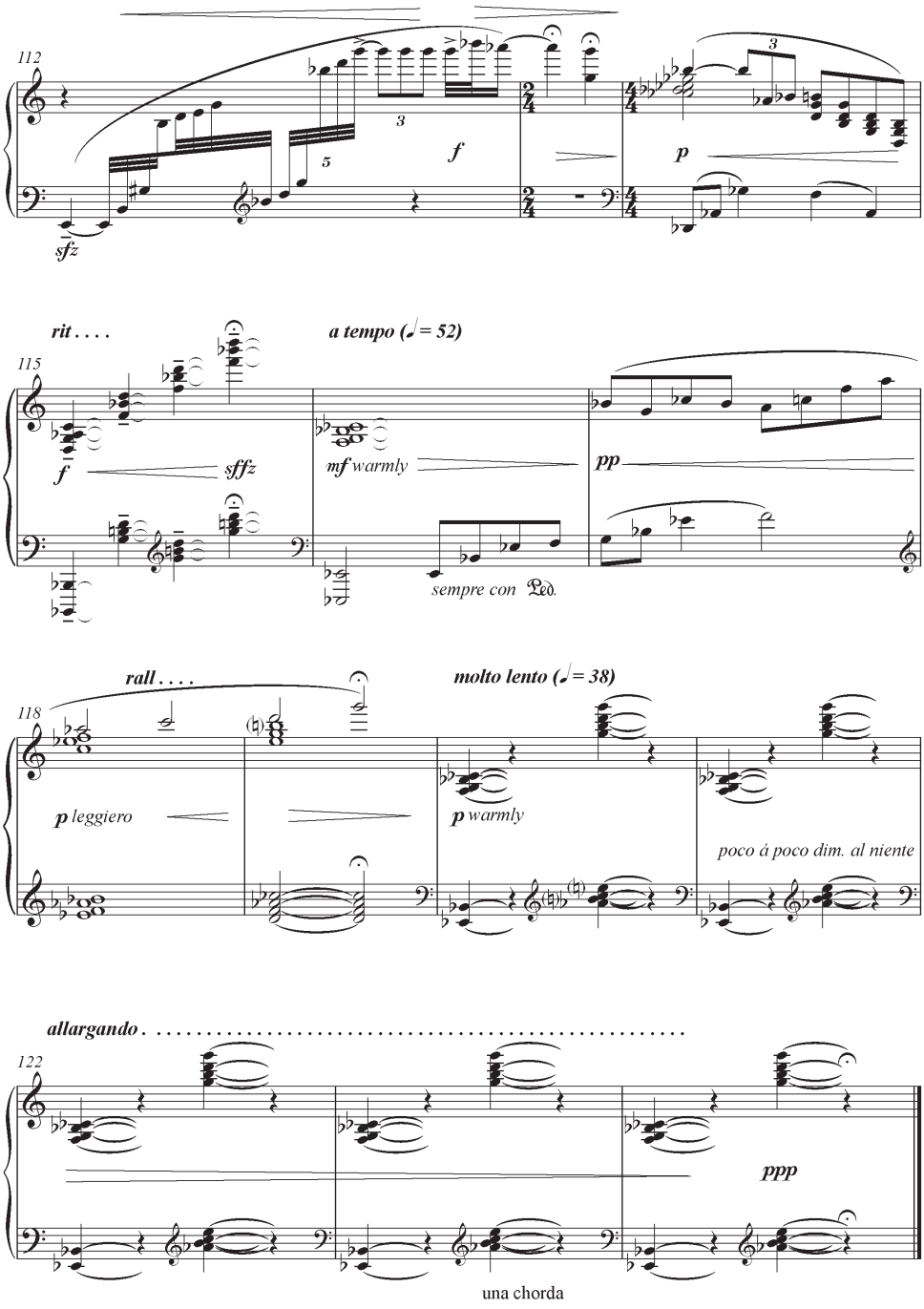

57
ppp leggiero
59
fp
62
fp
p cresc.
64
8va
mf


(8)
66
Same Tempo (♩. = 78)
f
ff
p
69
73
L.H
sfpp leggiero
76


79
p
ff
sub. pp
f
83
L.H
sf
mf
85
mp
87
mf cresc.
rit . . . . . .


89
8va
ff
rfz
meno mosso, molto rubato (♩= 120)
90
p
pp
mp
con molto Ped.
rall . . . . . .
poco piú mosso . . . . . .
rit . . . . . .
94
mf
poco meno mosso (♩= 62)
sffz
rit . . . . . .
97
p warmly
sempre con Ped.


più mosso, molto rubato (♩= 84
98
mf
pp
p delicatiss.
più mosso . . . . . .
poco stringendo . . . . . .
102
mp
f
molto rit . . . . . .
meno mosso (♩= 62)
107
fff
mp
rit . . . . . .
a tempo (♩= 72)
sfz
110
pp
mf
sfz


112
sfz
f
p
rit . . . .
a tempo (♩= 52)
115
f
sffz
mf warmly
pp
sempre con Ped.
rall . . . .
molto lento (♩= 38)
118
p leggiero
p warmly
poco á poco dim. al niente
allargando . . . . . .
122
ppp
una chorda