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Cover illustration by Ricardo Forero
Edited by Kathryn Luciana
Music editing by Julia Peña

About The Transcriptions

It is a well-known fact that Stride Piano generally requires large hand spans. An "orchestral" way of playing the piano, it is based primarily on tenths, wide intervals and chords. "Ticklers" like Blake, Roberts, Johnson, Waller, and Wellstood easily reached tenths (or even twelfths and more) with both hands.

When necessary, small hands can try to reach tenths by means of "rolling" them. After all, the so-called "backward tenths" (that is, left hand rolled tenths in which the upper note is played immediately before the lower note) were defined by Johnson as "the keynote of our style"; they were "invented" as early as the 1910s by Fred "The Harmony King" Bryant from Brooklyn.

Another problem encountered in this music is the extremely fast tempos used by the Stride players. It must be remembered that maintaining a steady pulse is much more important than playing at breakneck speed. As Dick Wellstood once wrote, what matters is that the "momentum" of swing does not go out the window. With this in mind, these solos could also be played effectively at slower tempos than those indicated by the metronome markings. Metronome markings are to be considered flexible.

Even the best "ticklers" occasionally played wrong notes. In these instances, the incorrect note is followed immediately by a small note in parentheses that is the supposed "right" note.

Pedalling has been indicated only where strictly necessary. Generally the "loud" pedal is used in the Stride style, but one must always keep in mind that careless or confused pedalling destroys the music.

As in most early jazz, the rhythmic profile of the Stride phrasing is based on the so-called "swing eighths," that is, the figure must be played somewhat close to . "Even eighths" have been indicated in the passages where the figure must be played exactly as written. Of course, listening to the recordings is the best way to understand the stylistic aspects of Stride.

Finally, these solos are very enjoyable when played exactly as written. After all, the primary aim of this collection is to reintroduce a long-overlooked performing style, a style too often oversimplified or misunderstood over the years. It is my hope that music lovers will use this collection as a "library" of the original performing Stride style, from which to draw inspiration and enrichment.

As Time Goes By

as recorded by Donald Lambert on Lp Pumpkin 110; 1961.

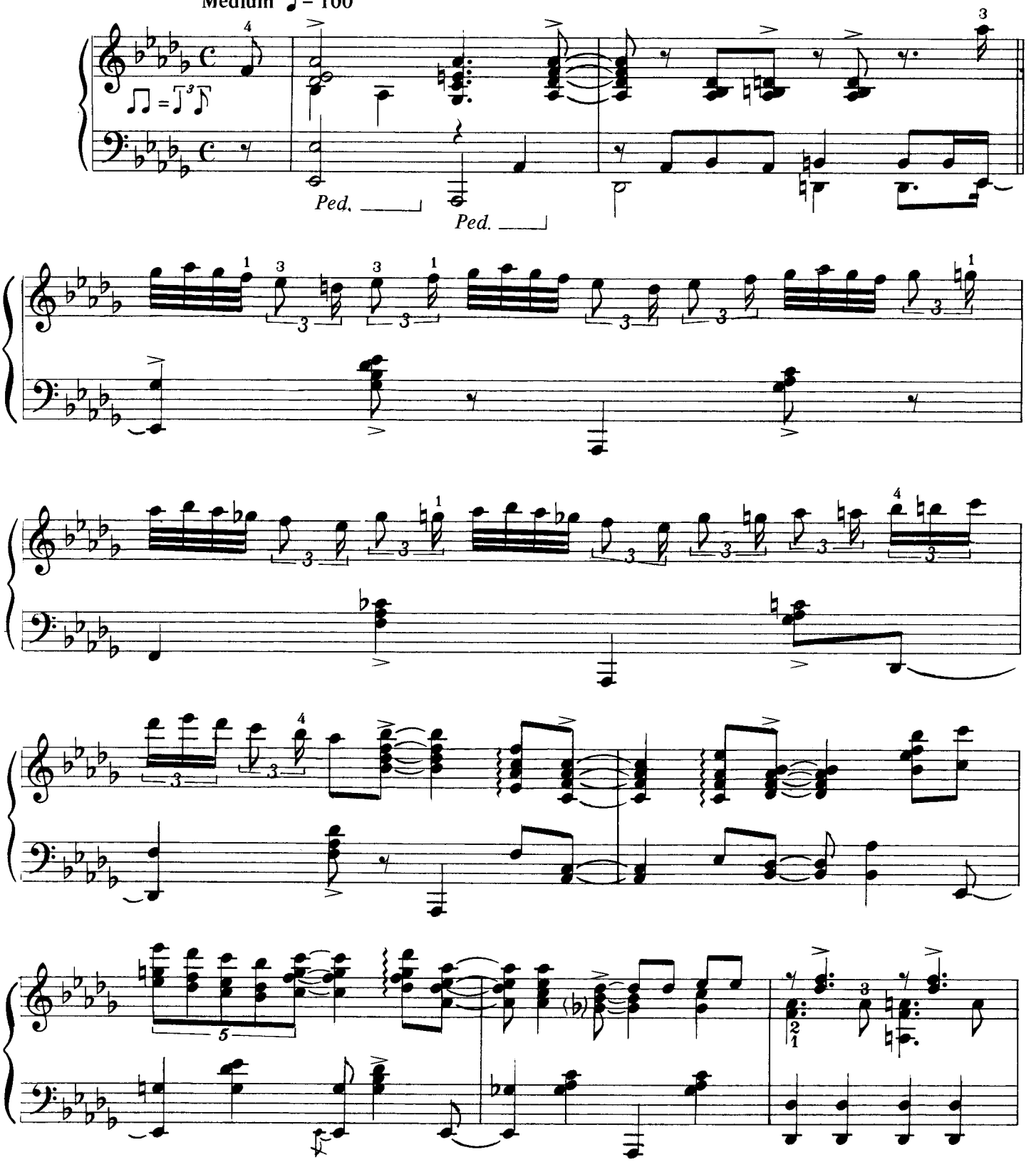
This is the second chorus of this solo (introduced by the last two bars of the first chorus) – the first chorus is mainly a simple statement of the tune.

It is a remarkable, carefully conceived arrangement. The opening melismatic pattern is very interesting and effective. The bridge is even more interesting. According to witnesses, Lambert was completely self-taught and, unlike most Stride pianists, had rather small hands. But in the bridge Lambert, the "illiterate" and "small handed," reaches "rolled" 12ths (and more) with his left hand (the upper notes of the 12ths resulting in an inner voice) and makes use of the full keyboard range, producing a very rich sonority. Beautiful and witty.

As Time Goes By

As Performed By Donald Lambert

Words and Music by Herman Hupfeld



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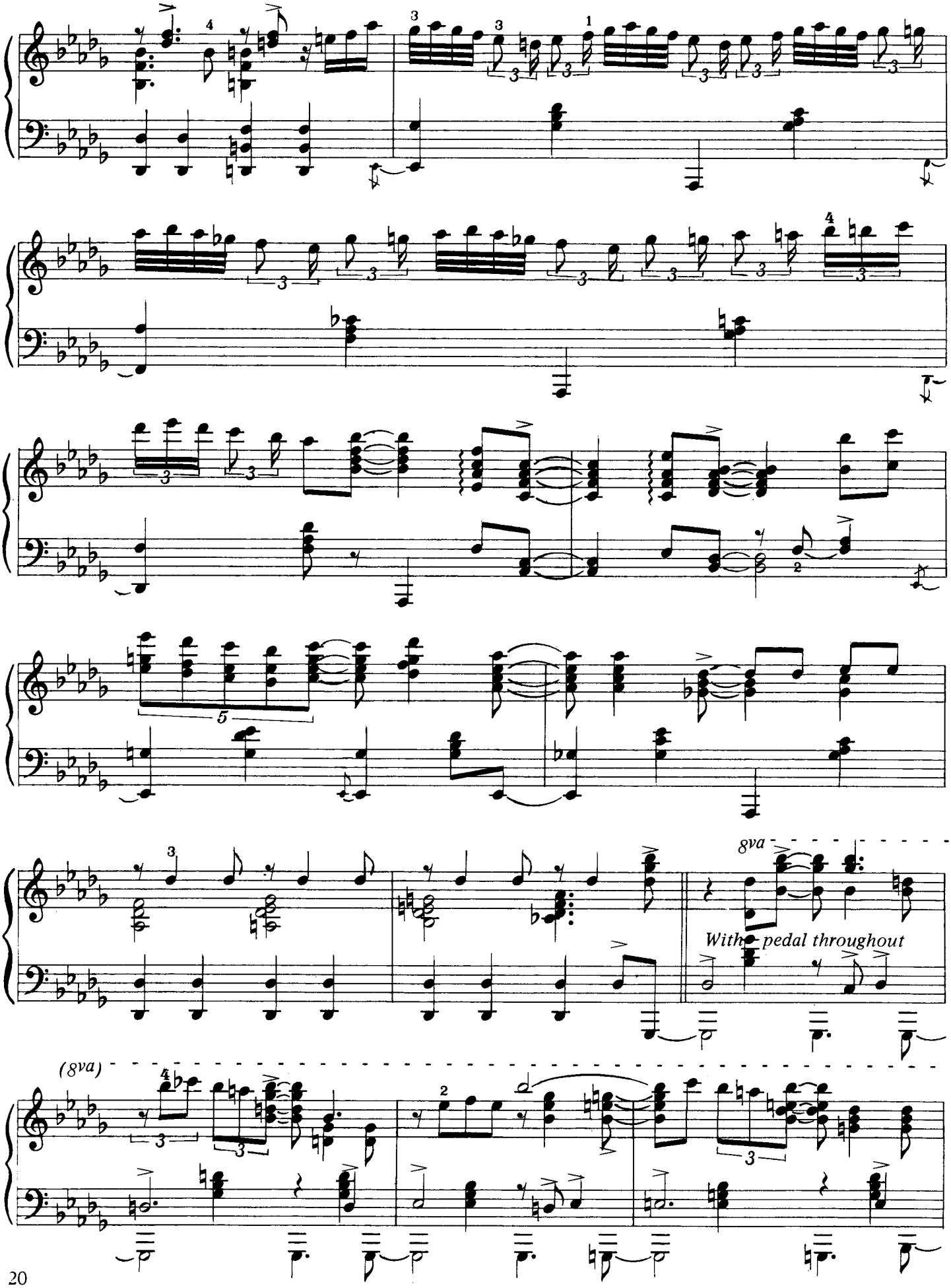
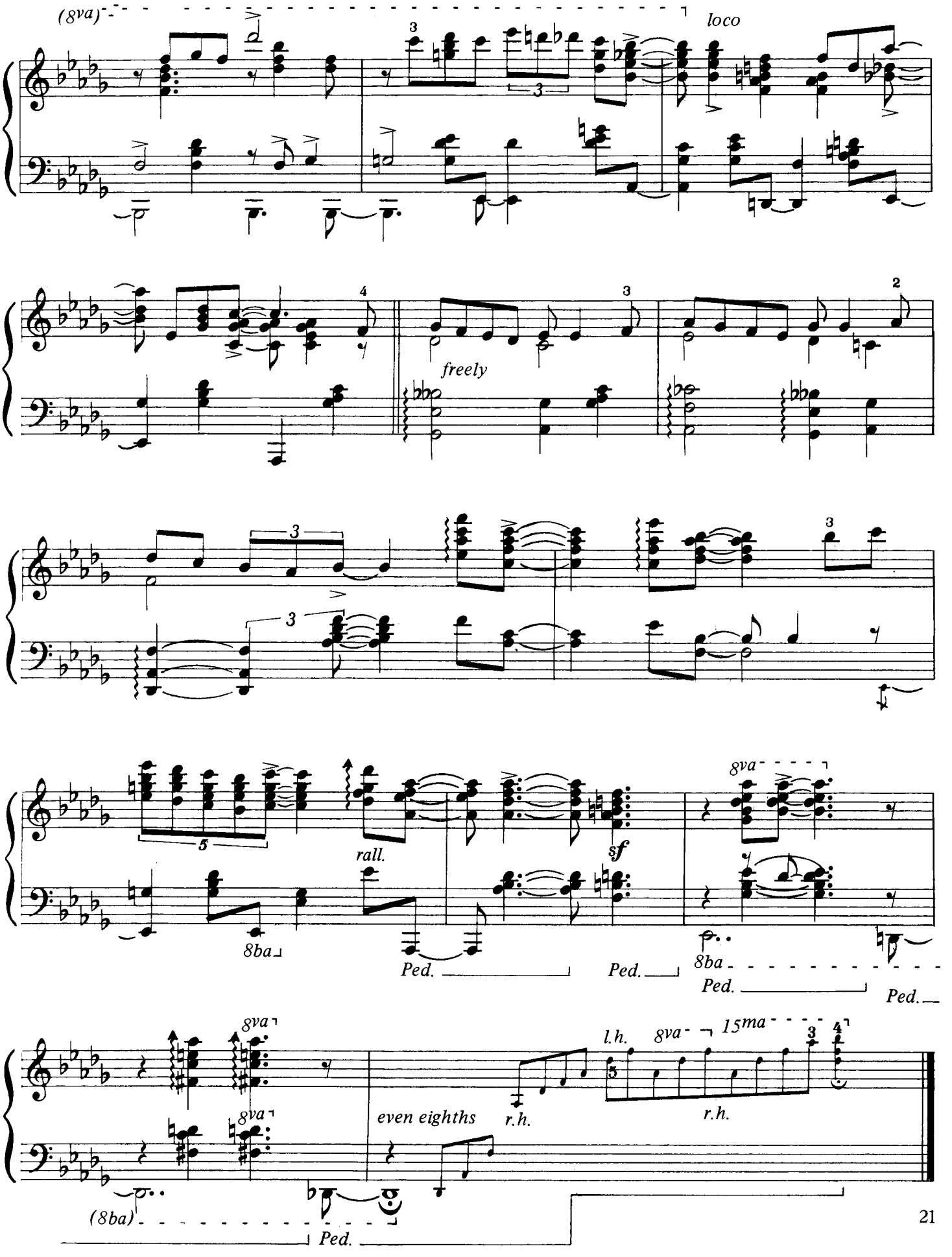

8va
With pedal throughout
(8va)


(8va)
loco
freely
rall.
sf
8va
8ba
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
8va
8va
(8ba)
Ped.
even eighths
r.h.
l.h.
8va
15ma
r.h.

Backwater Blues

as recorded by James P. Johnson on November 17, 1943; reissued on Lp Queen-disc Q 056 and Mosaic MR6-109.

It has often been said that the Stride pianists were not truly able to play the blues. They have been accused of a "lack of emotion," "formalism," and so on. This solo by Johnson proves the contrary (on this account see also *Late Evening Blues* in this collection).

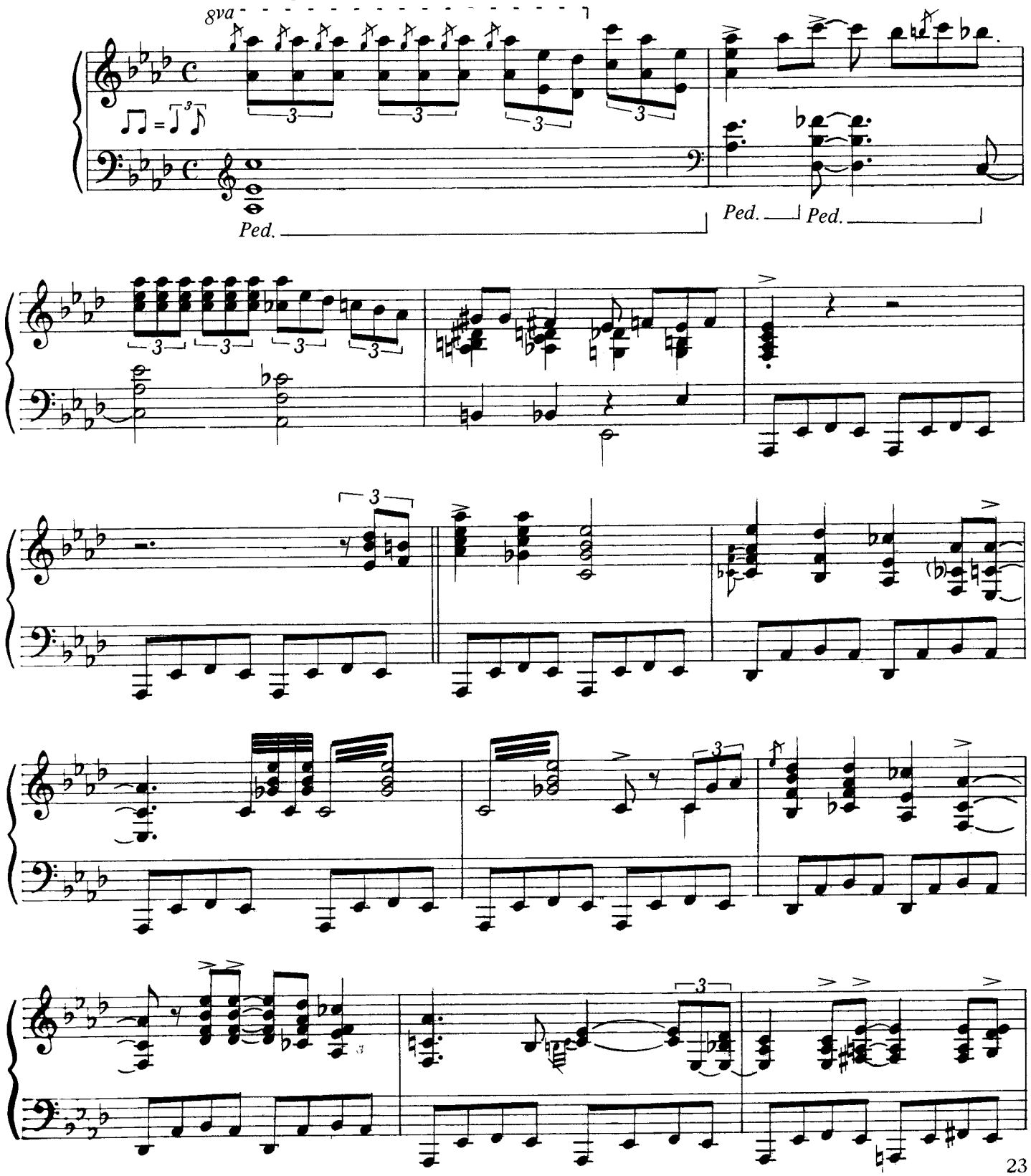
Backwater Blues is a very inspired recording of great emotional depth, and it typifies Johnson's blues style of the Forties: quiet, introspective, with beautiful phrasing. Also remarkable are the use of wide right hand chords in the first chorus, the broad opening of the third chorus, and the plethora of inner voices throughout the entire solo. In the last chorus Johnson creates a subtle rhythmic displacement between the right and the left hand, by contrasting "swing eighths" and "even eighths."

A longer, brooding and highly articulated rendition of *Backwater Blues,* recorded live by Johnson on May 3, 1947 (Lp Pumpkin 117), further reveals his masterful improvisation and the depth of his feeling for the blues. Johnson was Bessie Smith's favorite composer, and their 1927 duet of his Backwater Blues is one of the most celebrated blues recordings of all time.

Backwater Blues

As Performed By James P. Johnson

Words and Music by Lada-Williams



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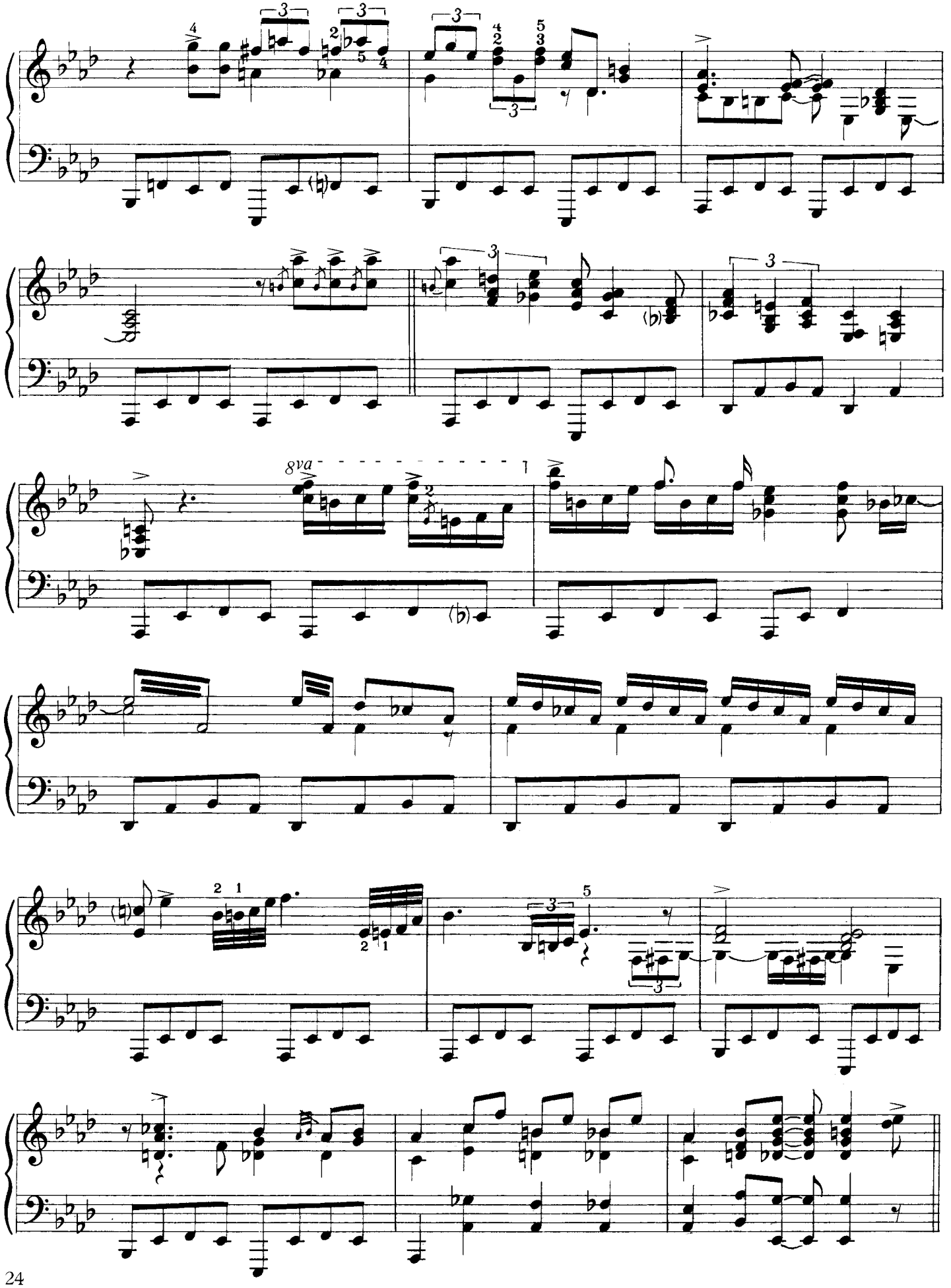
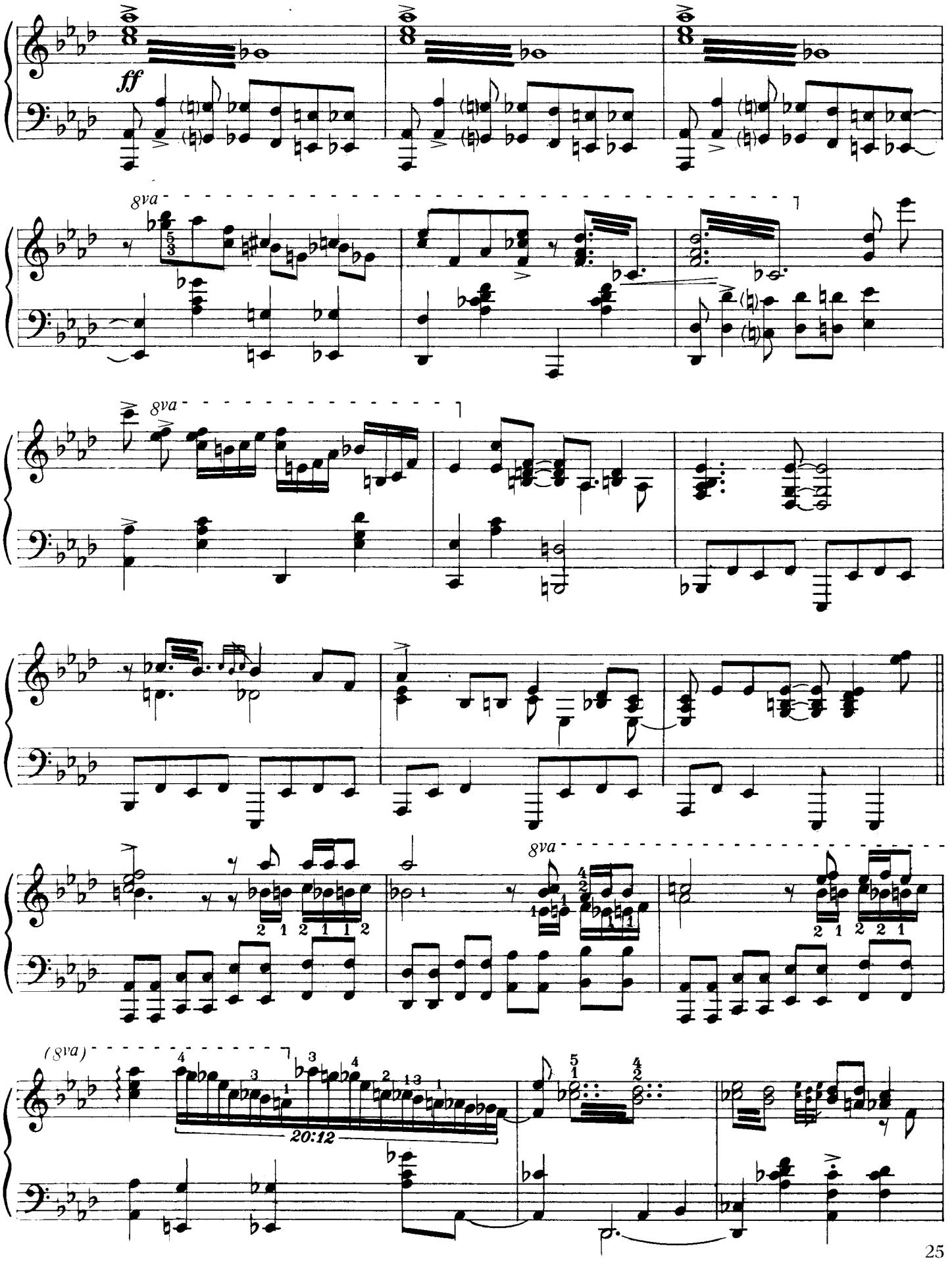
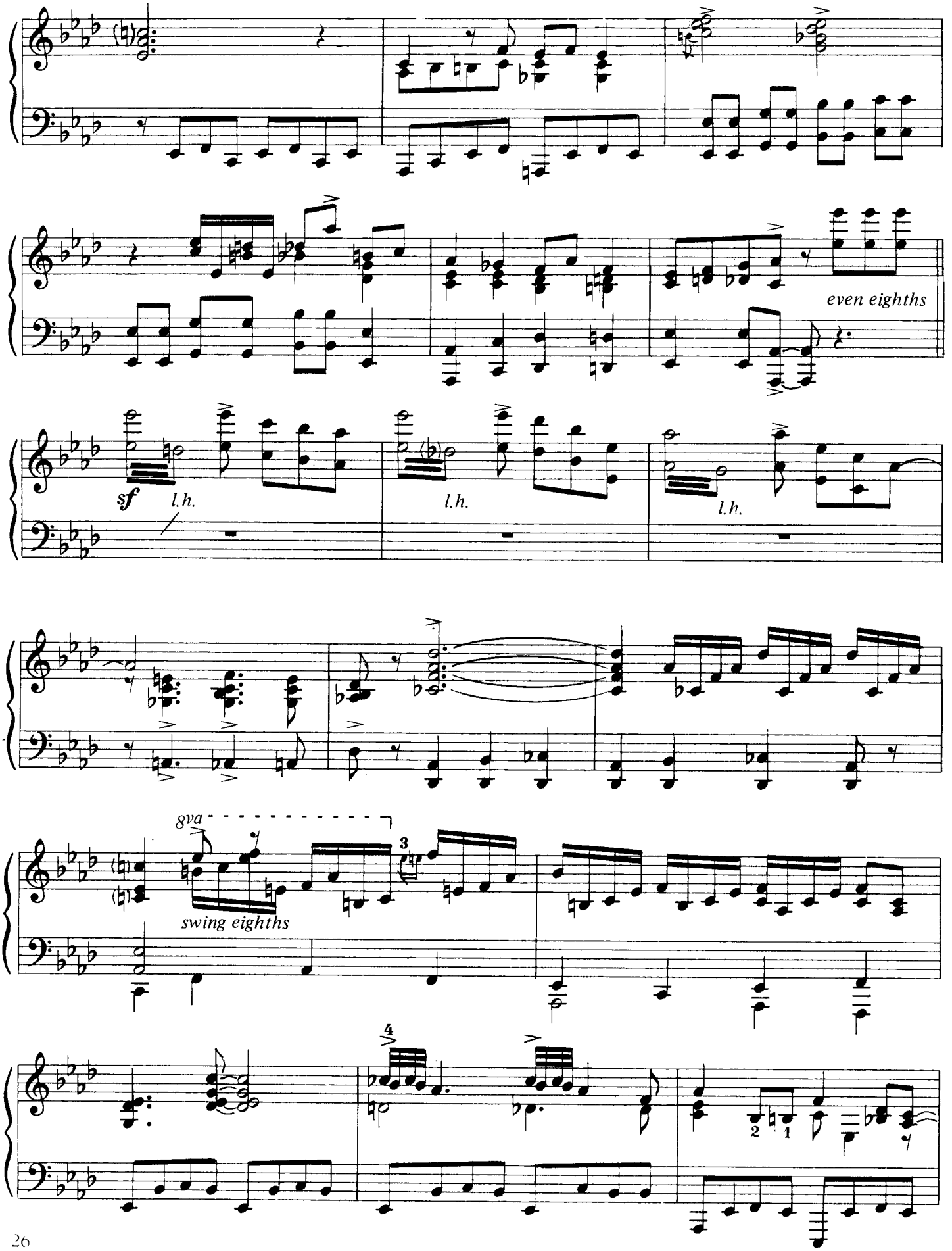
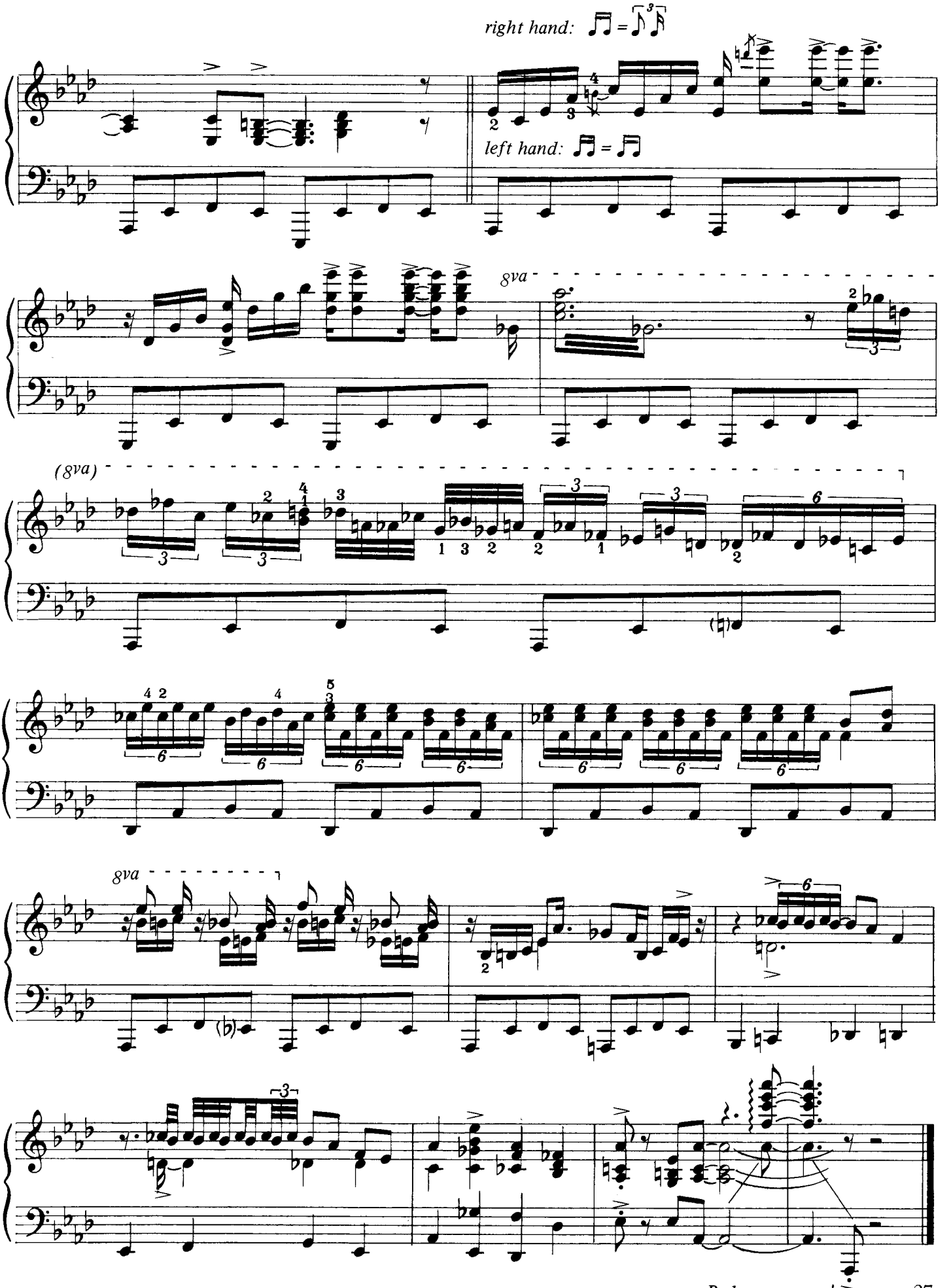

8va


ff
8va
8va
8va
(8va)
20:12


even eighths
sf
l.h.
l.h.
l.h.
8va
swing eighths


right hand:
left hand:
8va
(8va)
8va
Ped.

Blueberry Rhyme

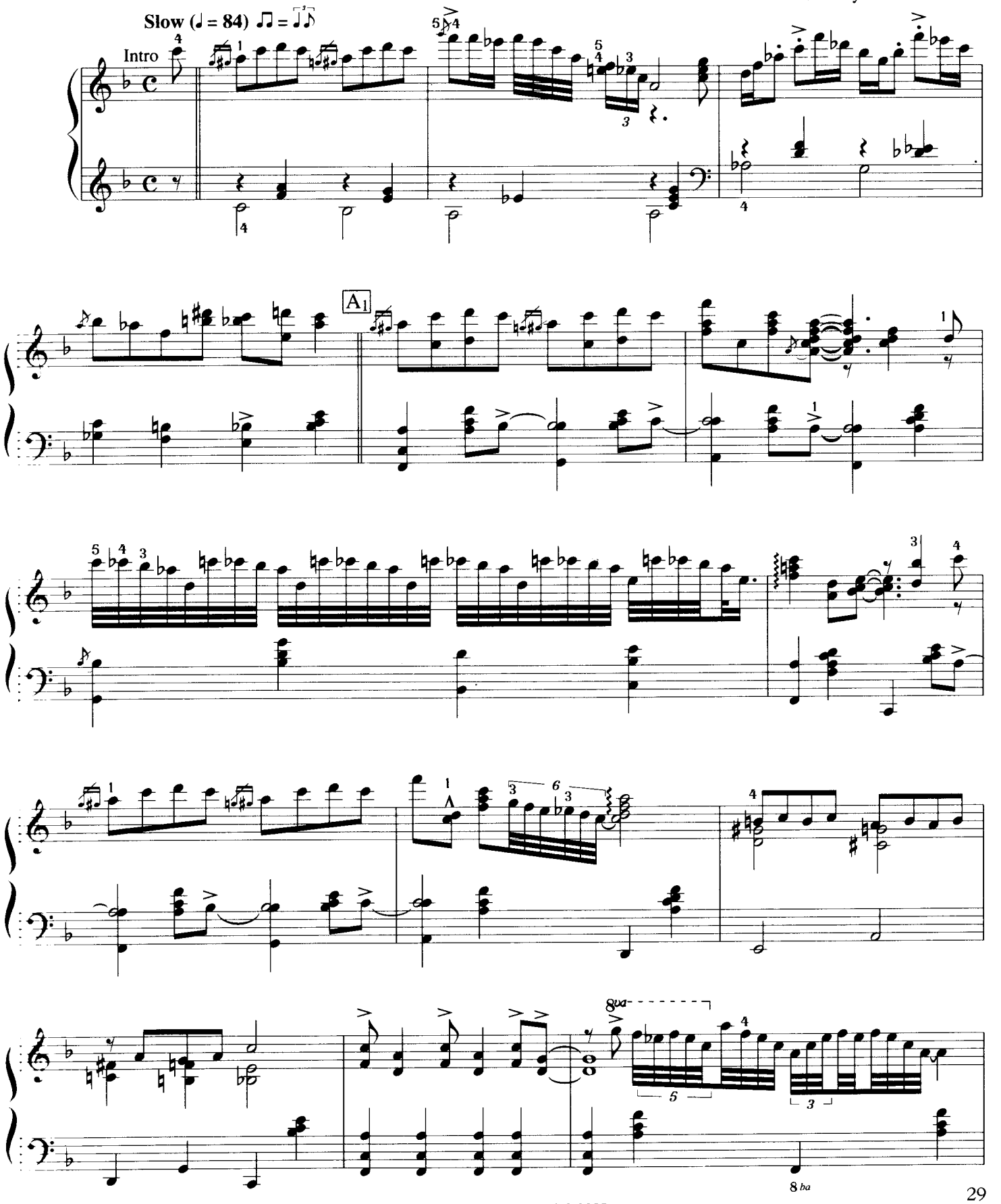
as recorded by James P. Johnson on Columbia CL 1780, June 14, 1939; reissued on Lp CBS 85387.

This beautiful solo shows Johnson's introspective side and his gift for decorating a melody and "telling a story." Probably composed in the Thirties, it also reflects his interest in "serious" forms at that time.

Blueberry Rhyme

As Performed By James P. Johnson

Words and Music by James P. Johnson



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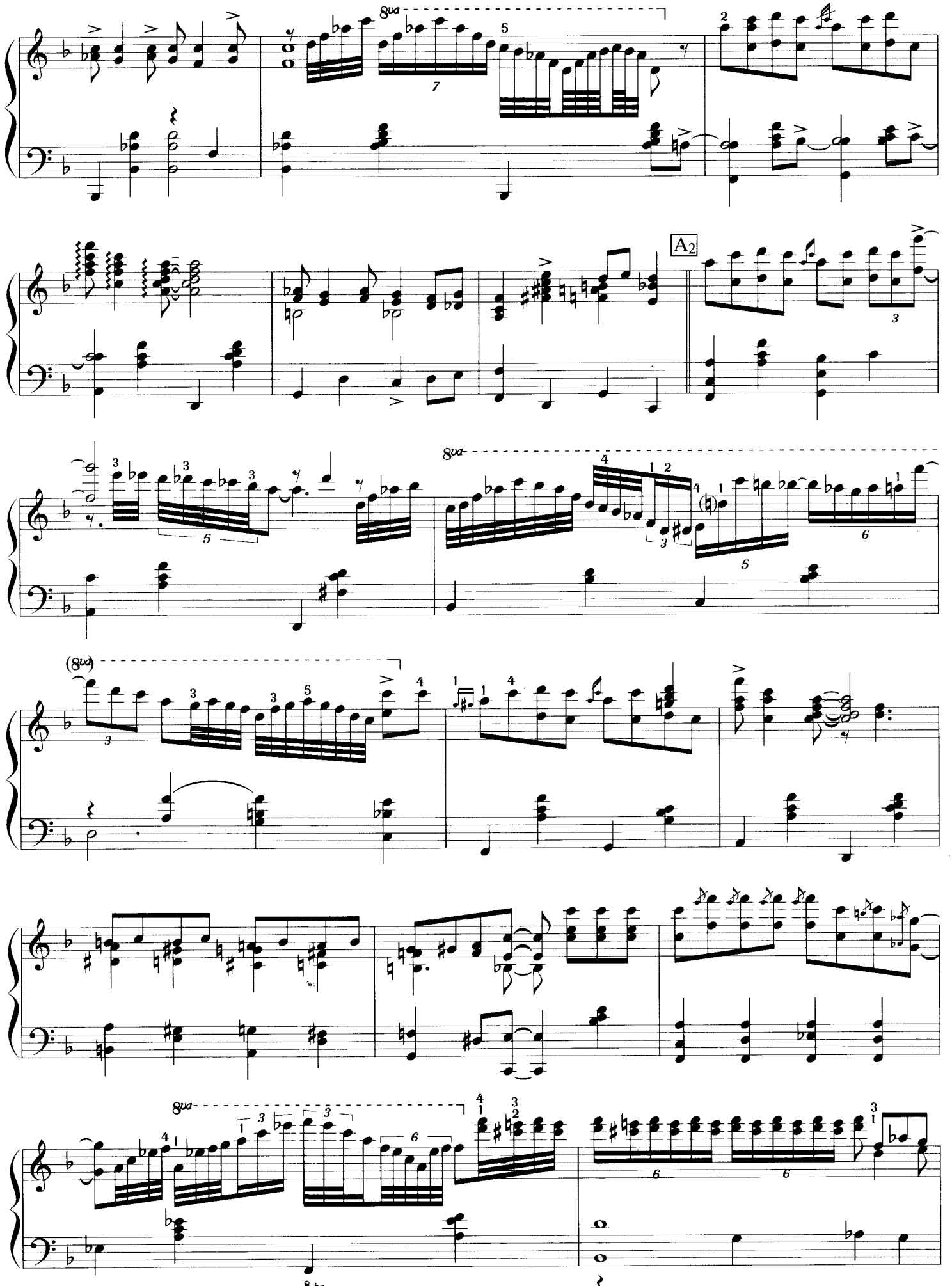
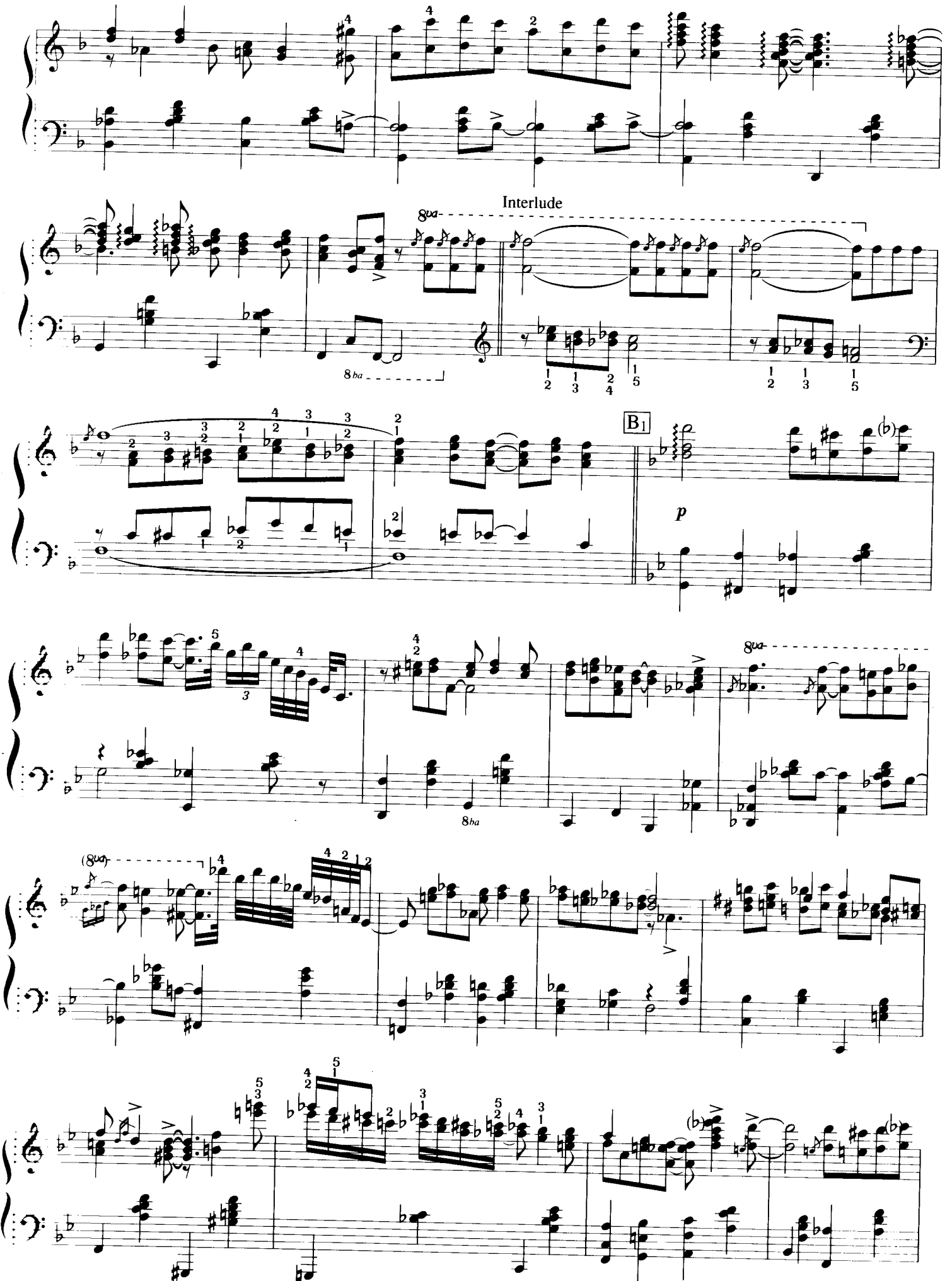
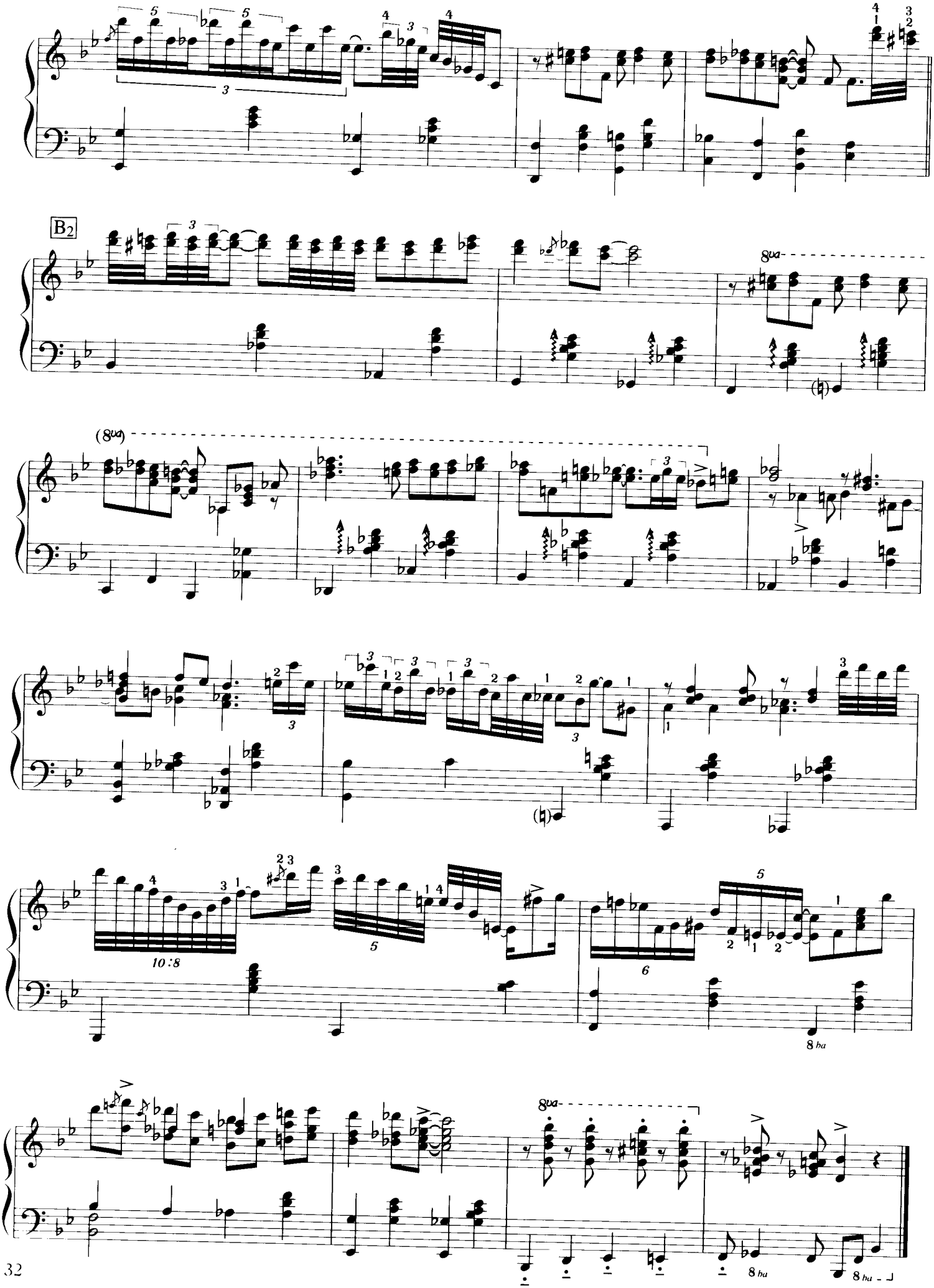

8va
A2
(8va)
8 ba


Interlude
8va
8ba
B1
p


B2
8va
(8va)
10:8
8ba

Carolina Shout

as recorded by James P. Johnson on August 15, 1944; reissued on Lp Swaggie S 1211. (Drum accompaniment by Eddie Dougherty.)

This was the ultimate "test-piece" for every aspiring Stride pianist. Johnson recorded it several times, first as piano rolls (1918 and 1921). Duke Ellington as well as Fats Waller, Cliff Jackson and Joe Turner (to name only a few) learned *Carolina Shout* note-for-note from the 1921 piano roll. Ellington also considered this piece as "the most solid foundation" for him, and recorded it as a solo in 1956. Johnson composed its basic themes while working at Jim Allan's in The Jungles (1914), and *Carolina Shout* reveals the influence of the various musical dimensions from which he drew inspiration.

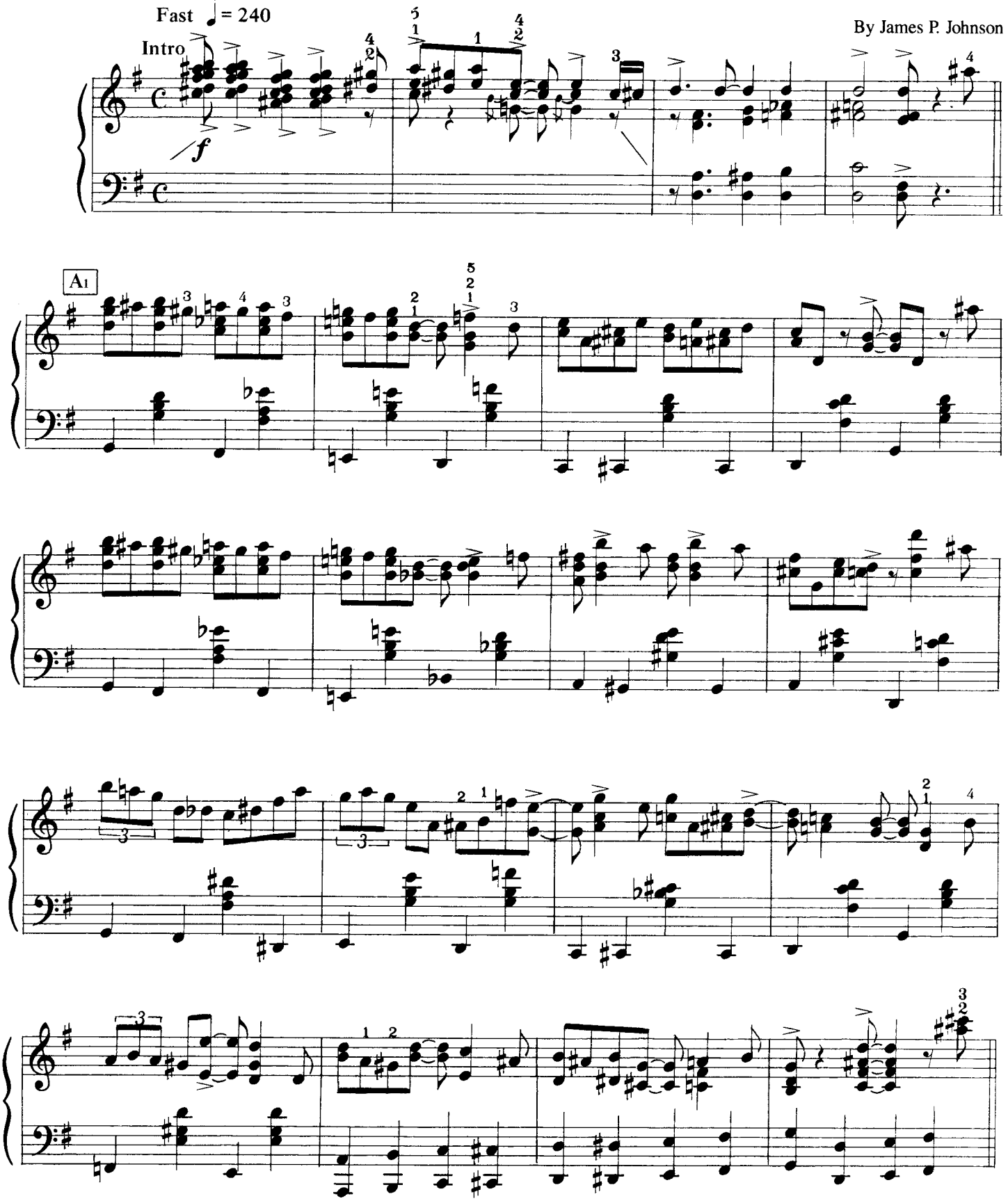
The theme of the A strain originates from a traditional ragtime motive freely picked up and elaborated by various early jazz musicians. The B and the D strains are very reminiscent of the fiddle or banjo music played at set dances. The C strain is built upon a call-and-response pattern and is clearly the pianistic transposition of black religious music, featuring the high and spirited "shout" of the preacher and the ecstatic response of the congregation. The E strain reiterates these concepts.

The story of Johnson's early recordings of *Carolina Shout* parallels the transition from the "fast-shout" style to the Stride style. *Carolina Shout* was cut on piano rolls in 1918 and in May, 1921 and then recorded on October 18, 1921 for the Okeh label. These three renditions are very dissimilar. Both the piano rolls retained some of the mechanical nature of ragtime and "fast-shout" (some of which is also due to the piano roll medium). The 1918 roll in particular has very few tenths and "back beats" in the accompaniment, it lacks the Coda, and features an odd 23-bar B strain never used again by Johnson. The 1921 roll is much more articulated both in phrasing and rhythm, featuring tenths, "back beats" and a Coda. It is very close to the 1921 Okeh recording, but does not feature the right hand variation on the A_2 strain. This variation, built on a double-third based phrasing, establishes the definitive Stride "sound," and is featured for the first time in the 1921 Okeh recording, which is the "final" version of *Carolina Shout*.

The 1944 rendition reported here is close to this version, with a fantastic drive added.

Carolina Shout

As Performed By James P. Johnson



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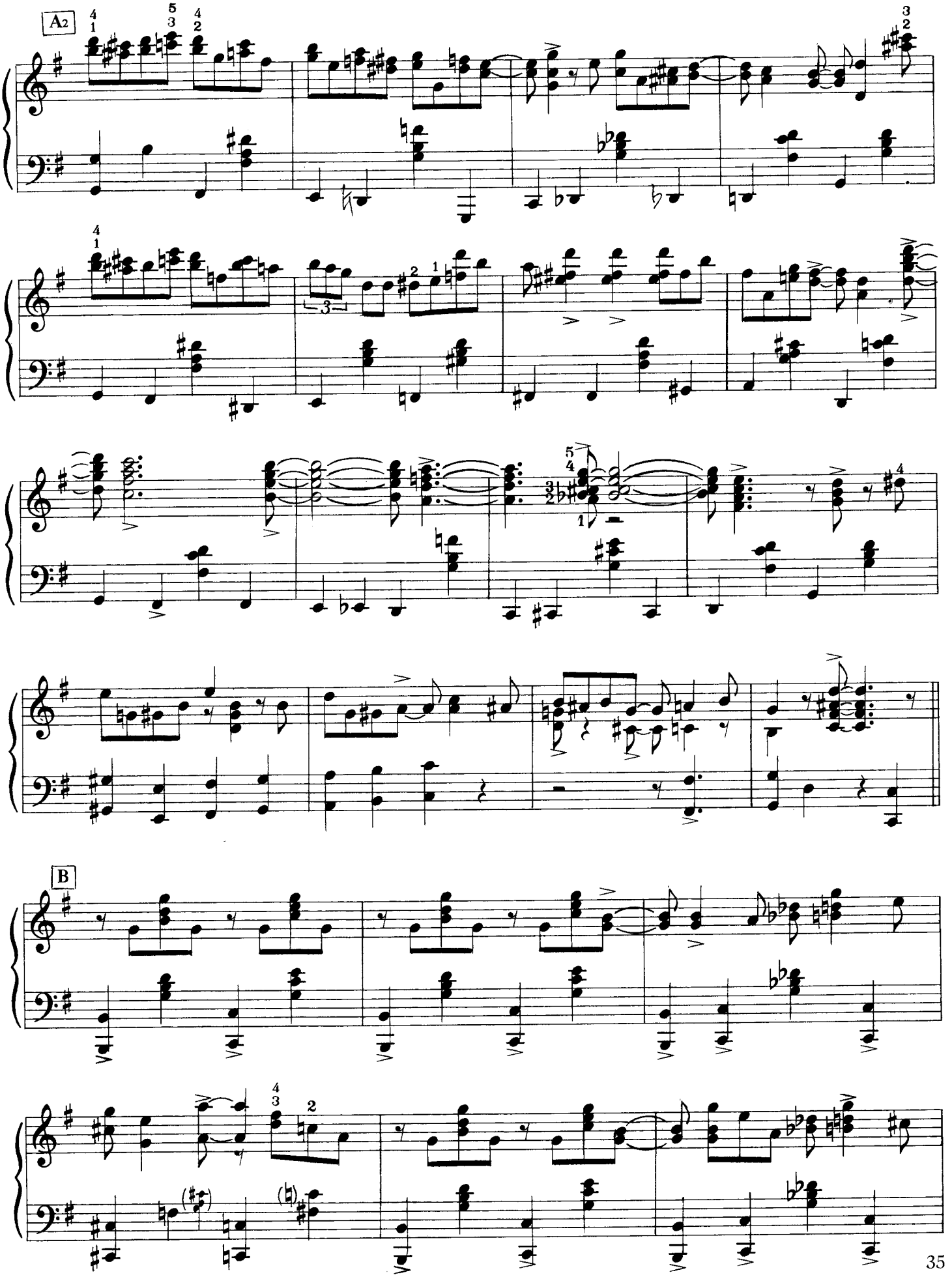
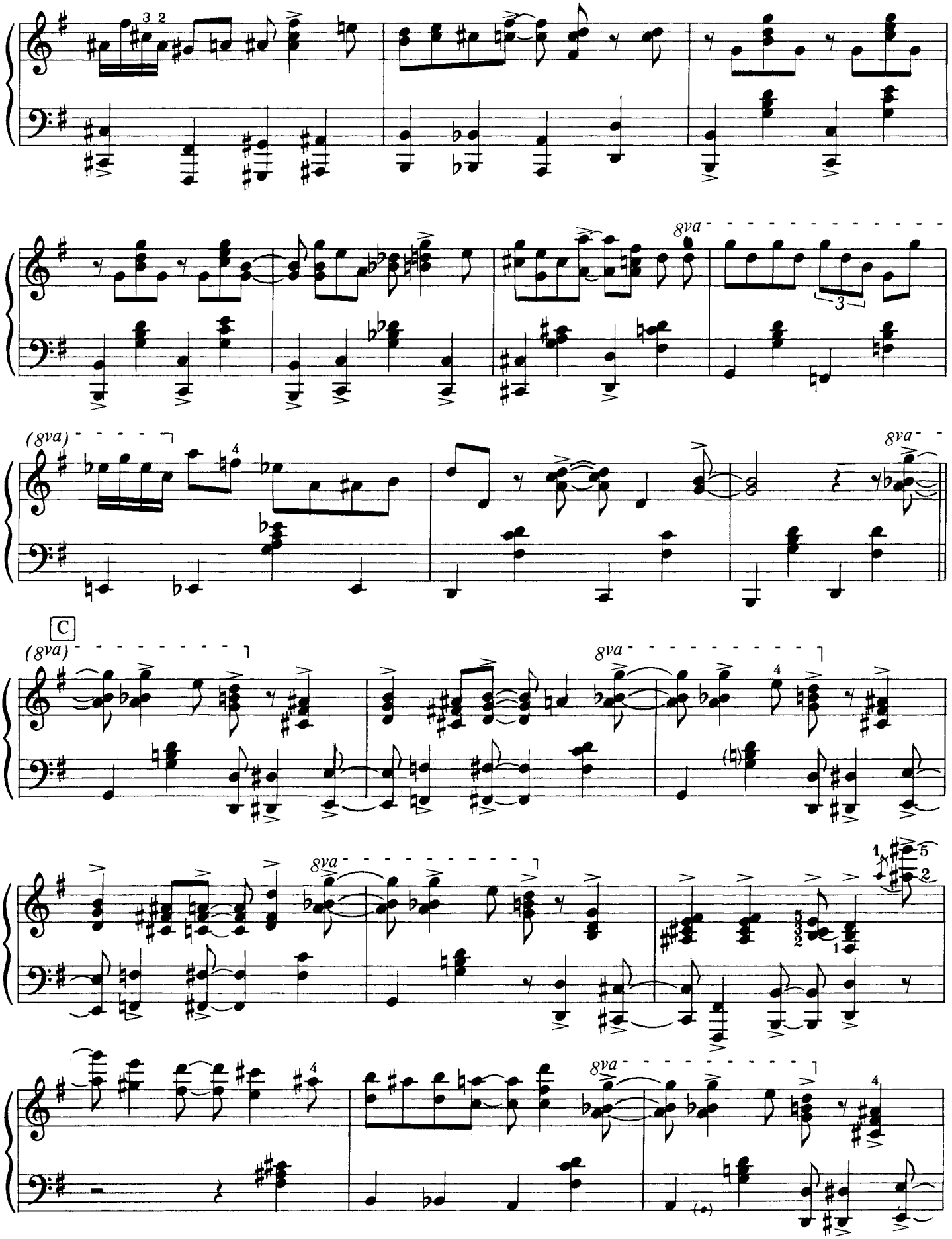
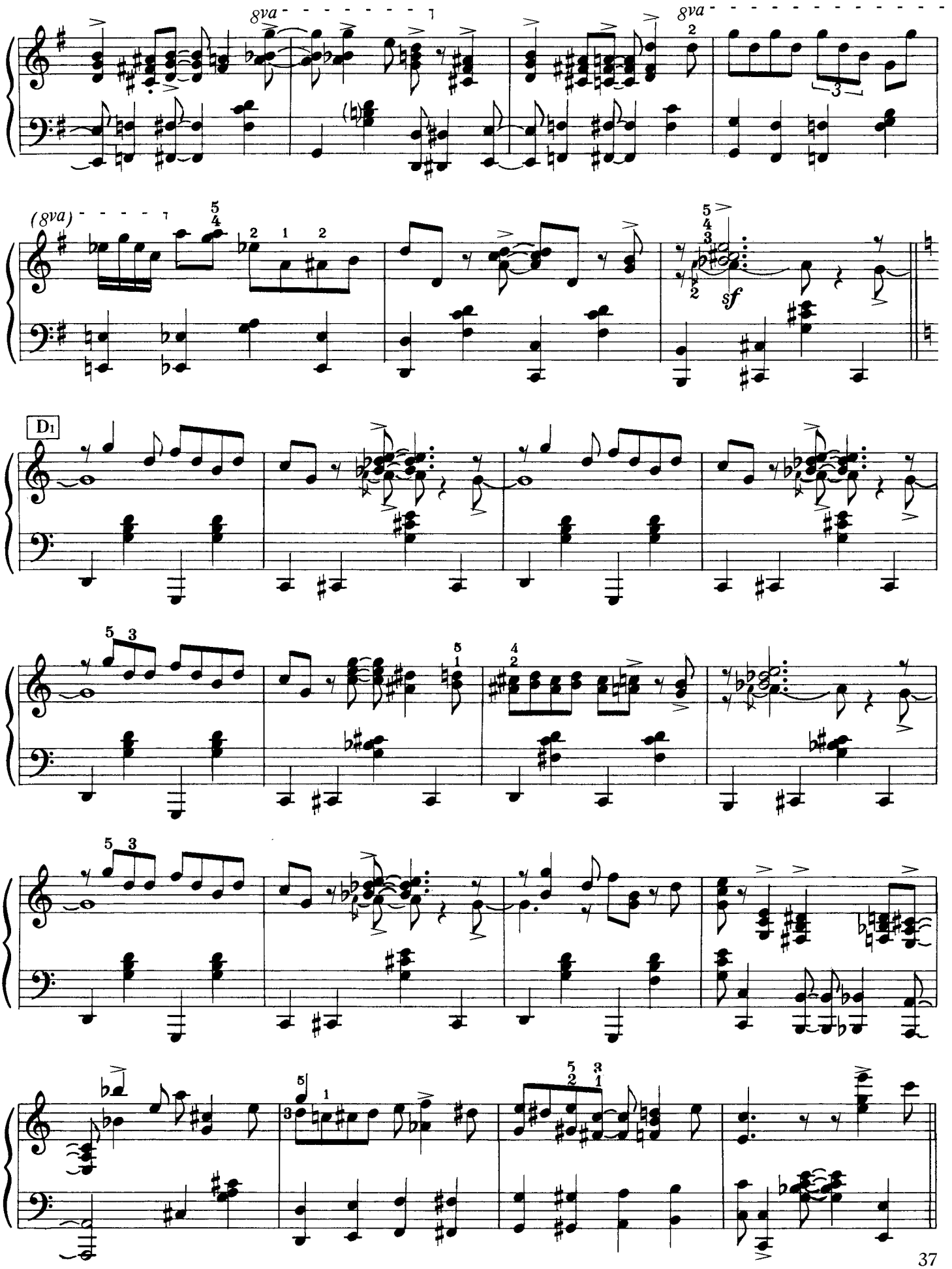
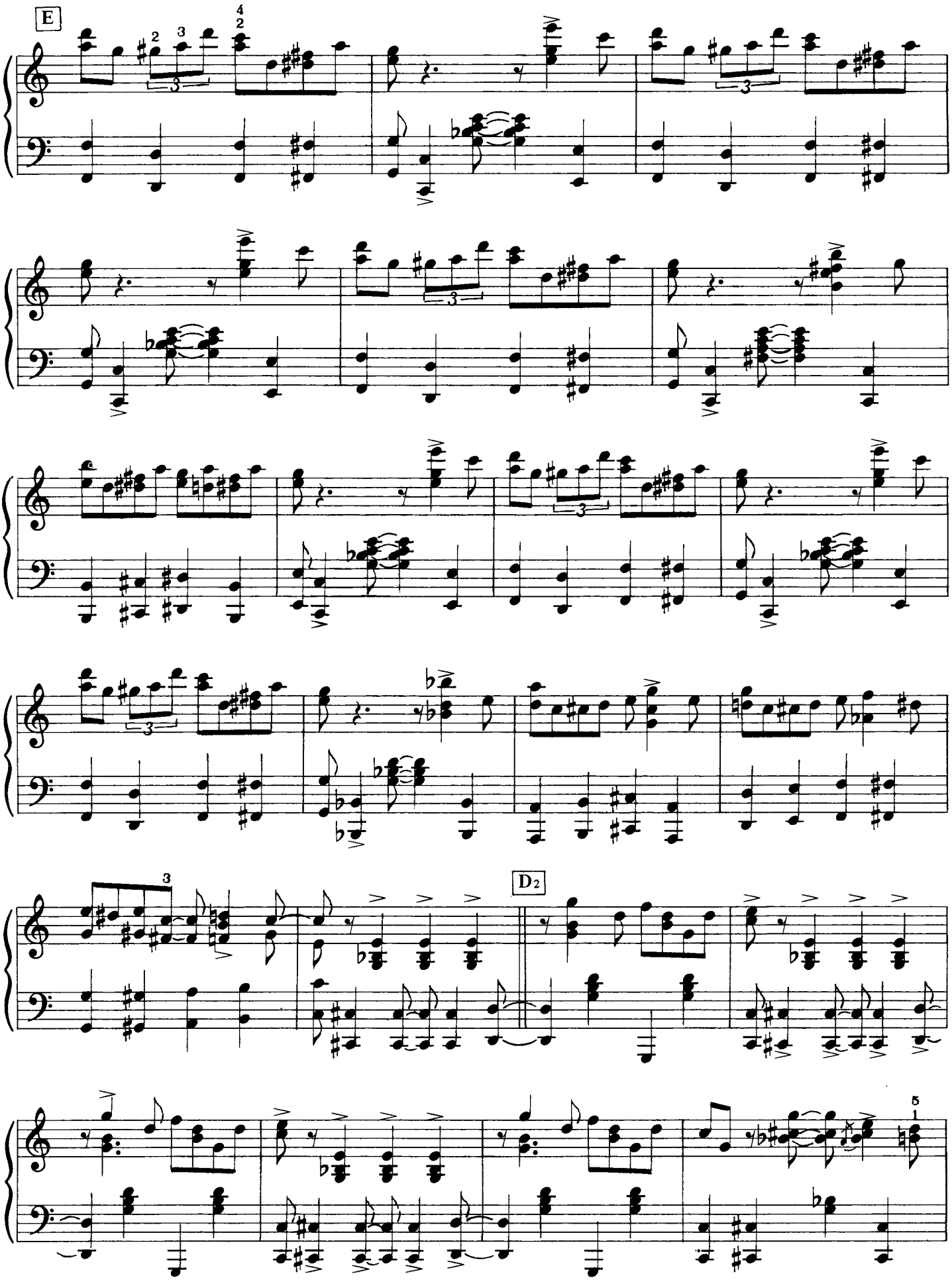
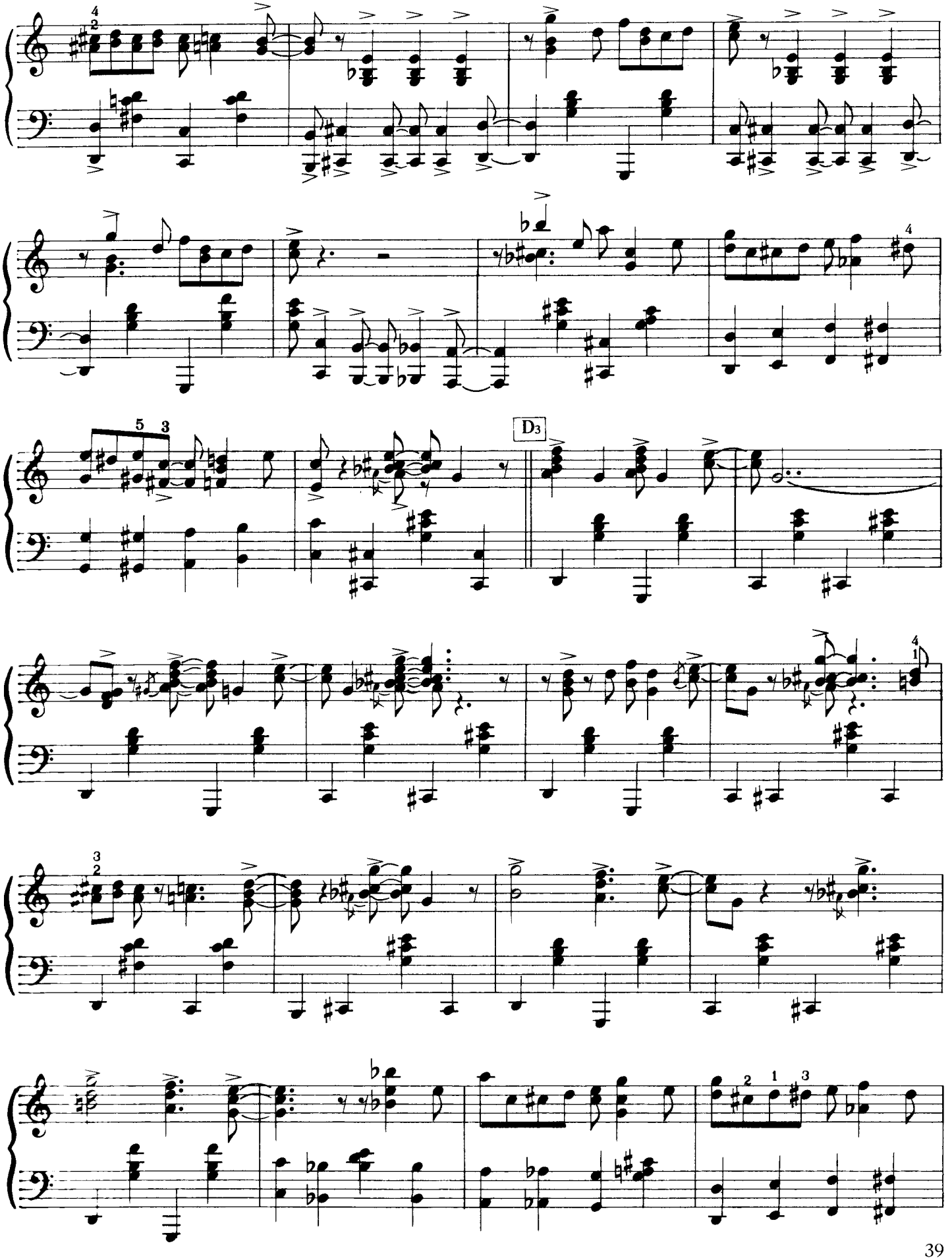
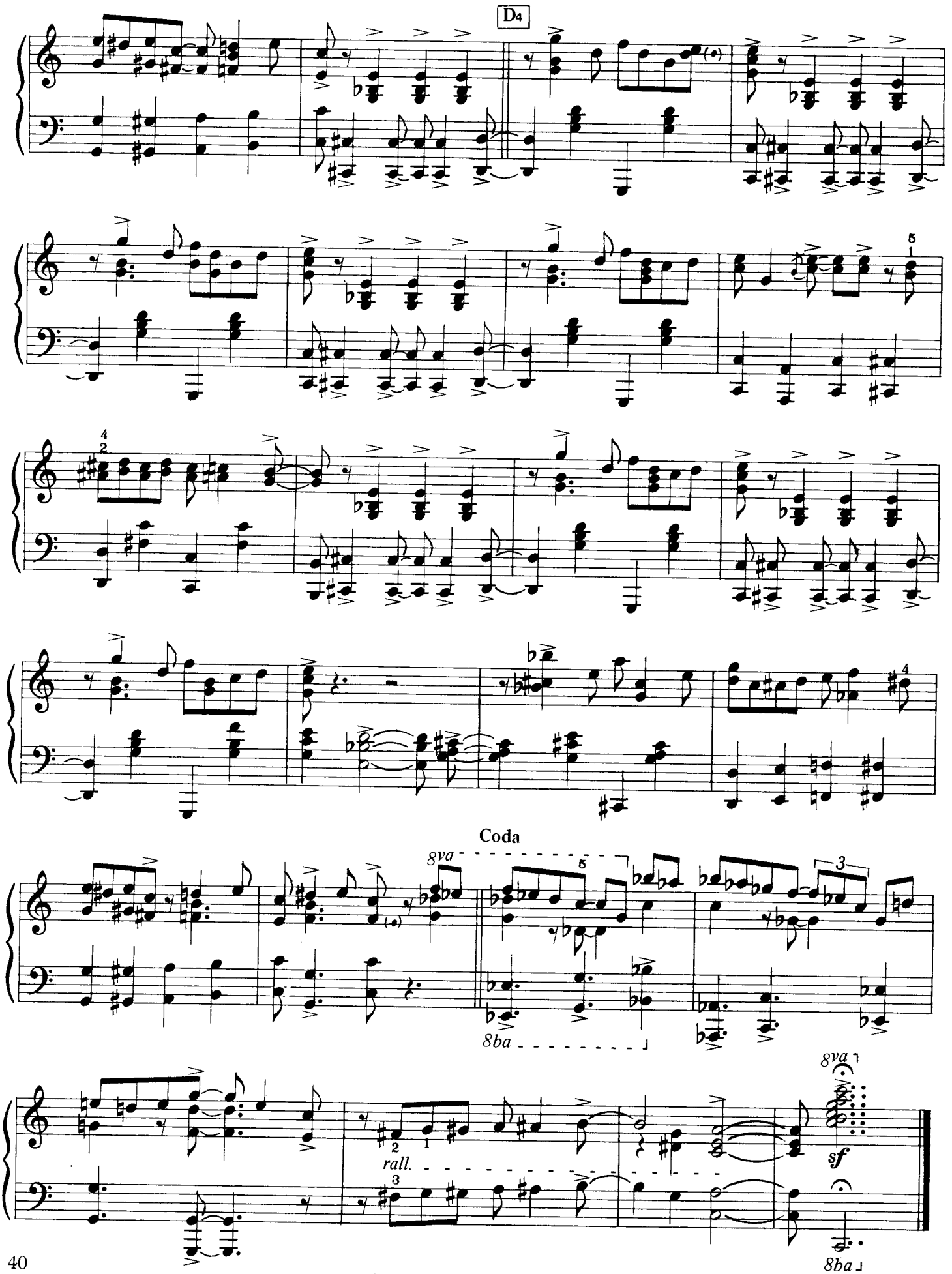

A2
B


8va
(8va)
8va
C
(8va)
8va
8va
8va


8va
8va
(8va)
sf
D1


E
D2


D3


D4
Coda
8va
8ba
rall.
sf
8va
8ba

Crazy Rhythm

as recorded by Cliff Jackson on Lp RI-DISC RD-5; July 23, 1965.

An exciting solo taken from a quartet recording (with Tommy Gwaltney, clarinet, Steve Jorden, guitar and Ketter Betts, bass). Played at a very fast tempo, with powerful drive and plenty of "back beats," this performance is very improvisational in character.

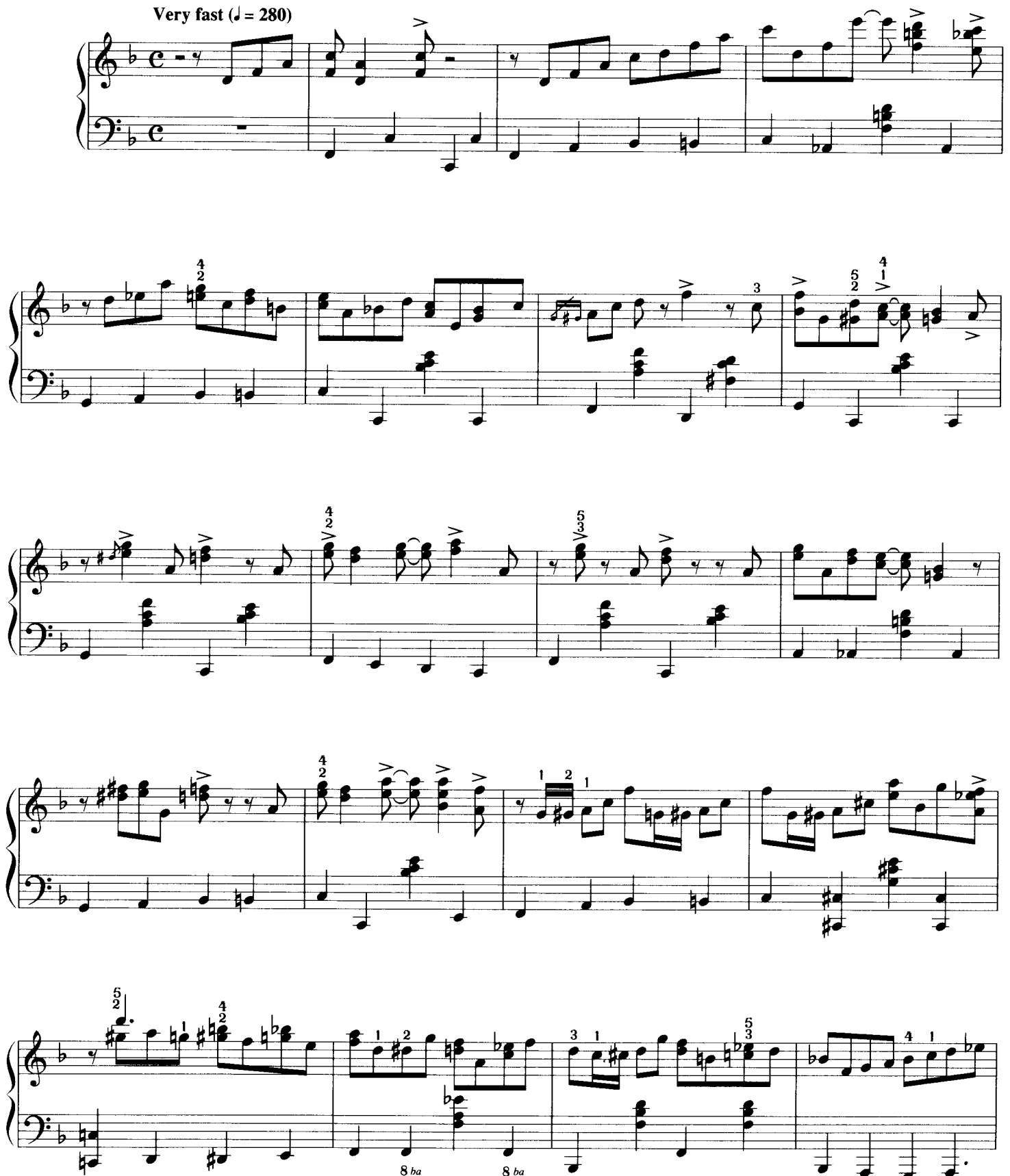
Jackson breaks away considerably from the original melody, making use of the whole keyboard range. He primarily uses arpeggiated figures and his adventurous double thirds-based phrasing. As usual, his left hand work almost resembles a "walking four beat" bass. Also note that in the ending the climax is reached by means of a Waller-like repeated figure.

Jackson did not consider himself a great improviser, and did not improvise several interesting choruses like his fellow musicians Johnson or Waller, so he would stop after two or three choruses. Luckily these two "brief" choruses on *Crazy Rhythm* have been preserved on record, much to our delight.

Crazy Rhythm

As Performed By Cliff Jackson

By Joseph Meyer, Roger Wolfe Kahn and Irving Caesar



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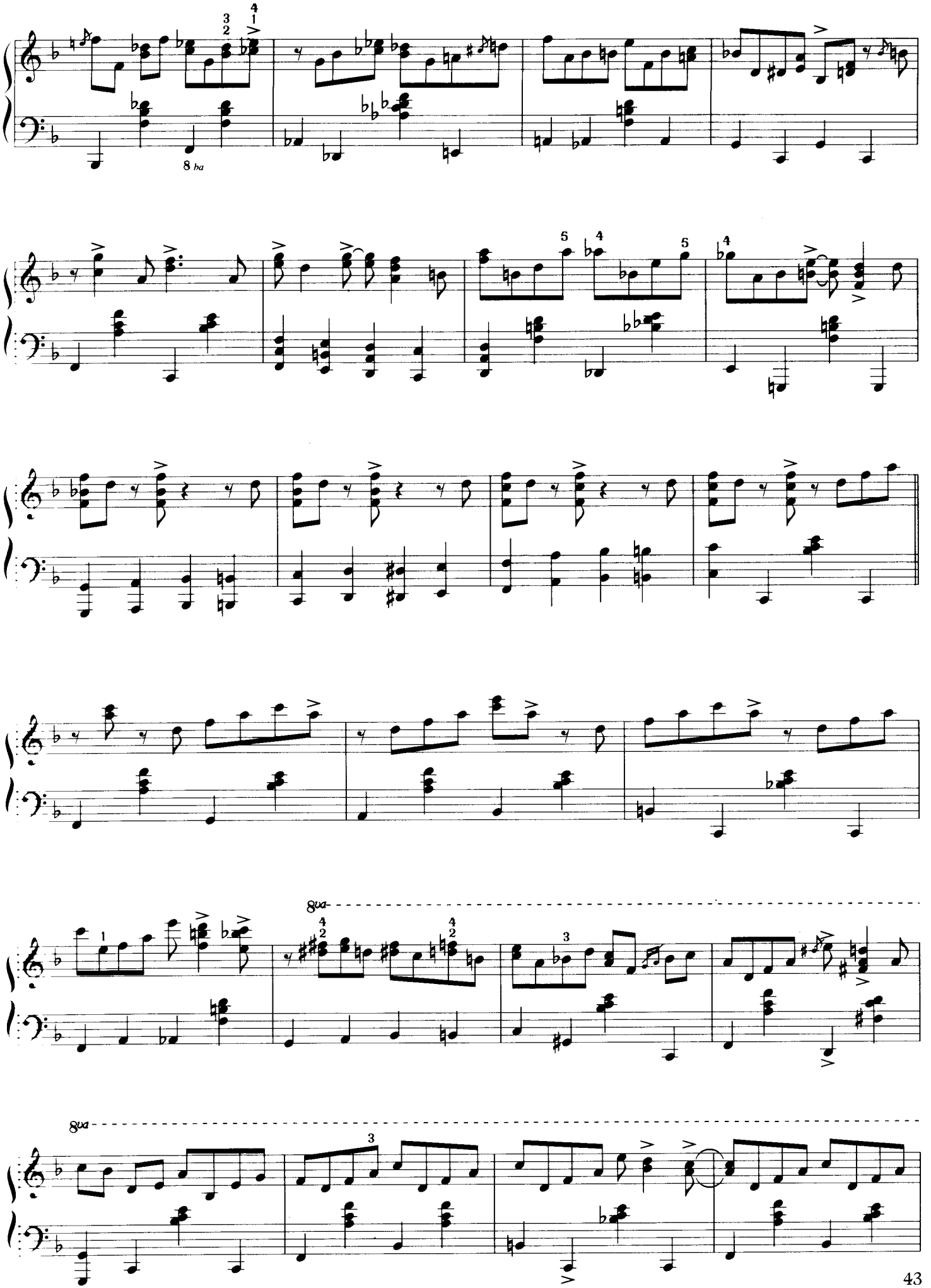
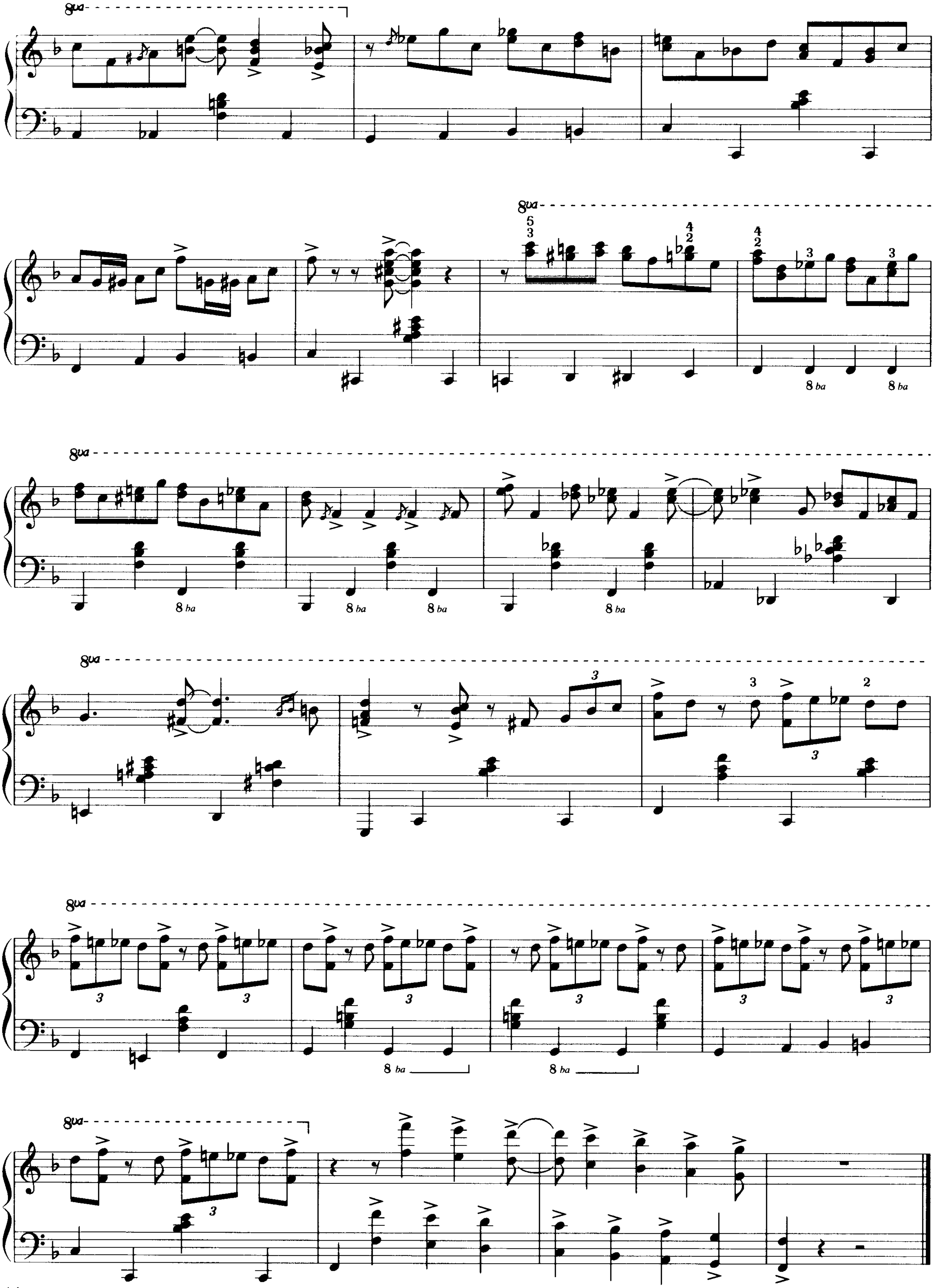

8 ba
8va
8va


8va
8 ba

Dream Rag

as recorded by Eubie Blake on Lp Columbia C2S 847; 1968.

This composition has never been published before.

Dream Rag is Eubie Blake's rendition of an old tune called *The Dream*. *The Dream* is a very important piece from a historical standpoint, as it is the first example we have of an Eastern ragtime composition. Its melody and bass prove that the so-called "Spanish tinge" was not exclusively confined to the New Orleans area.

It was almost certainly composed by Jesse Pickett (ca. mid-1800s–1922), a black itinerant pianist who played in Baltimore, in The Jungles section of New York and at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. Dedicated to lesbians, *The Dream* was a great favorite among Stride pianists, and it was variously titled *The Bull Dike's Dream, The Bowdiger's Dream, Ladies' Dream,* and *Digah's Dream*. Many "ticklers" had personal arrangements of this tune, a "hit" of The Jungles years (early 1910s).

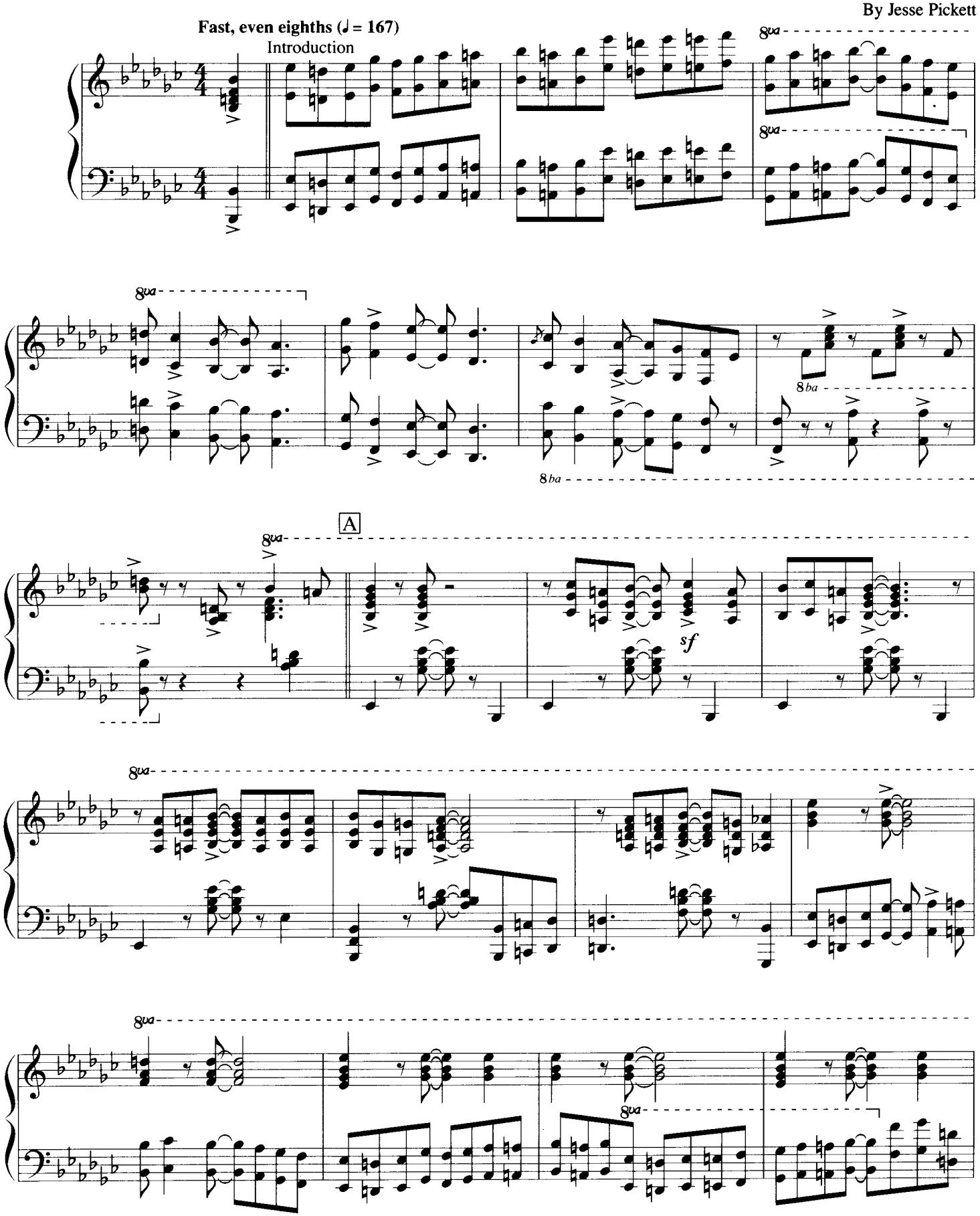
Here is Eubie Blake's rendition, entitled *Dream Rag*. Very forceful and tango-like, it typifies a "fast-shout" approach (the "fast-shout" was the Eastern style that immediately preceded Stride Piano). Blake claimed to have learned this piece directly from Pickett.

It is instructive to compare Blake's version to James P. Johnson's (see the next solo in this collection), which typifies the Stride style and is much more jazz-like and articulated. Blake's approach shows several points of interest, such as his very clean technique (at age 86!), an occasional but remarkable harmonic boldness, some unexpected rhythmic suspensions (with sparse "modern" voicings) and the beautiful Coda on a "growling" ostinato pedal point. As we can see, Blake was a "black keys player": Ebm and B were two of his favorite keys.

Dream Rag

As Performed By Eubie Blake

By Jesse Pickett



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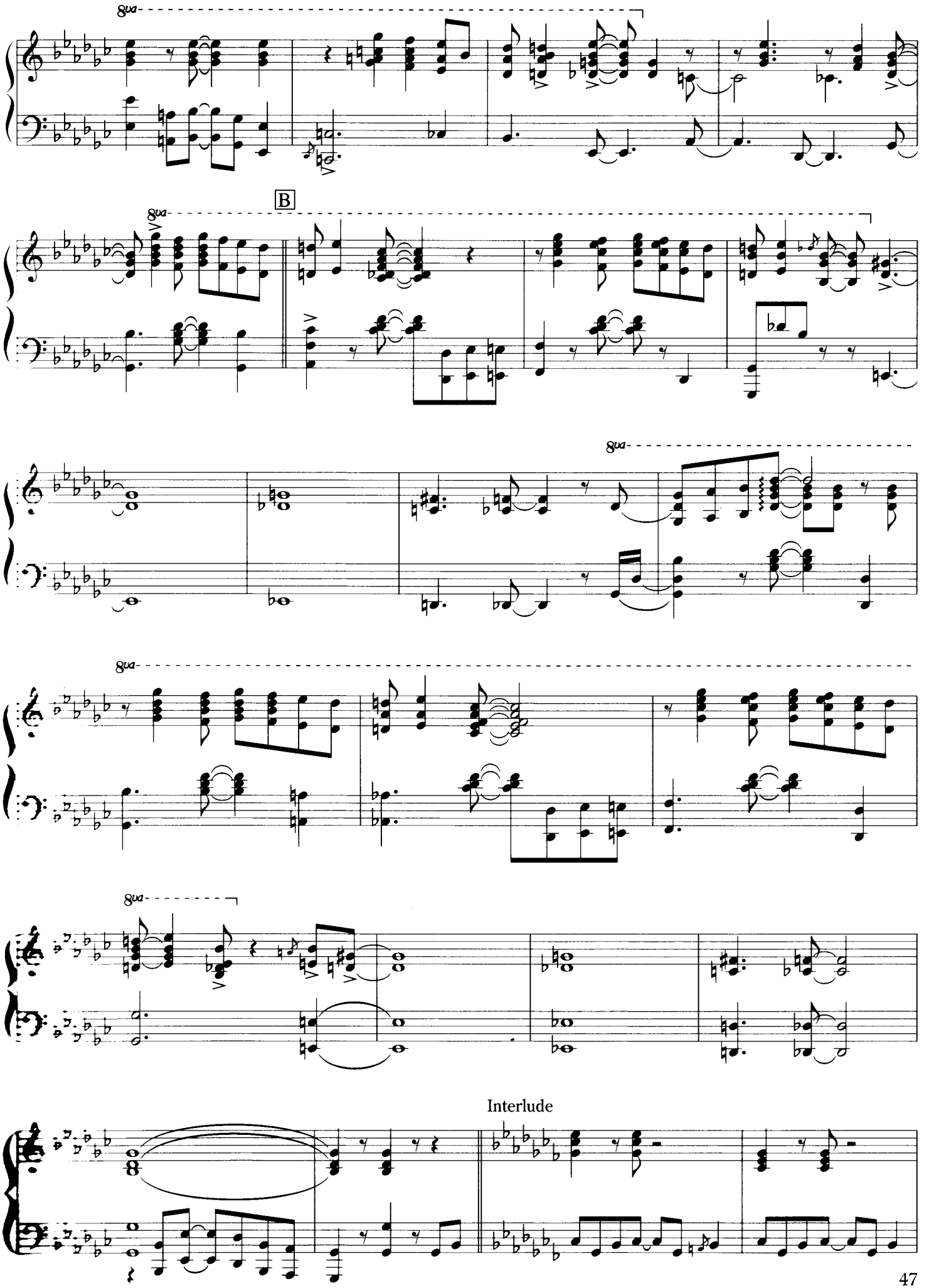
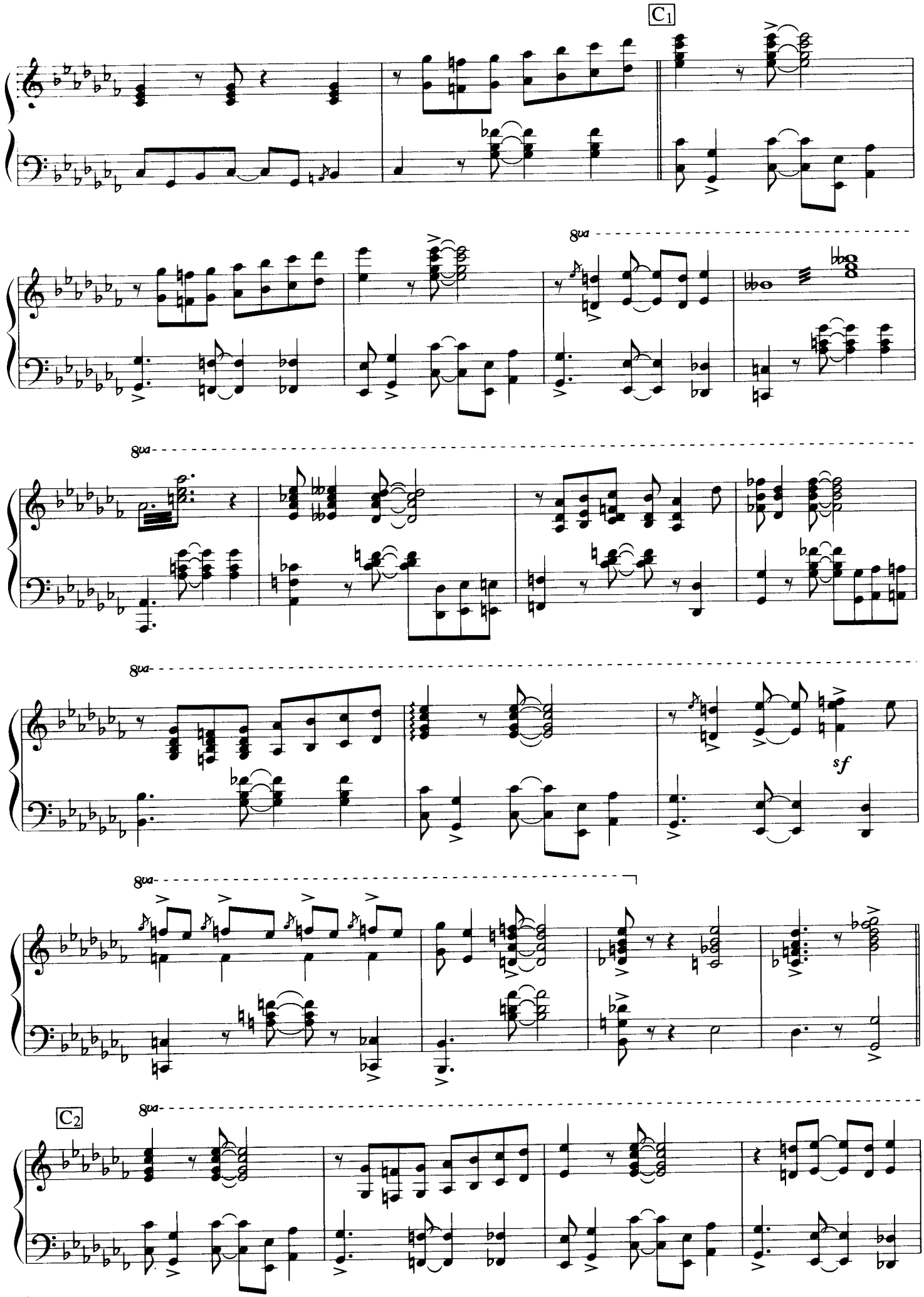
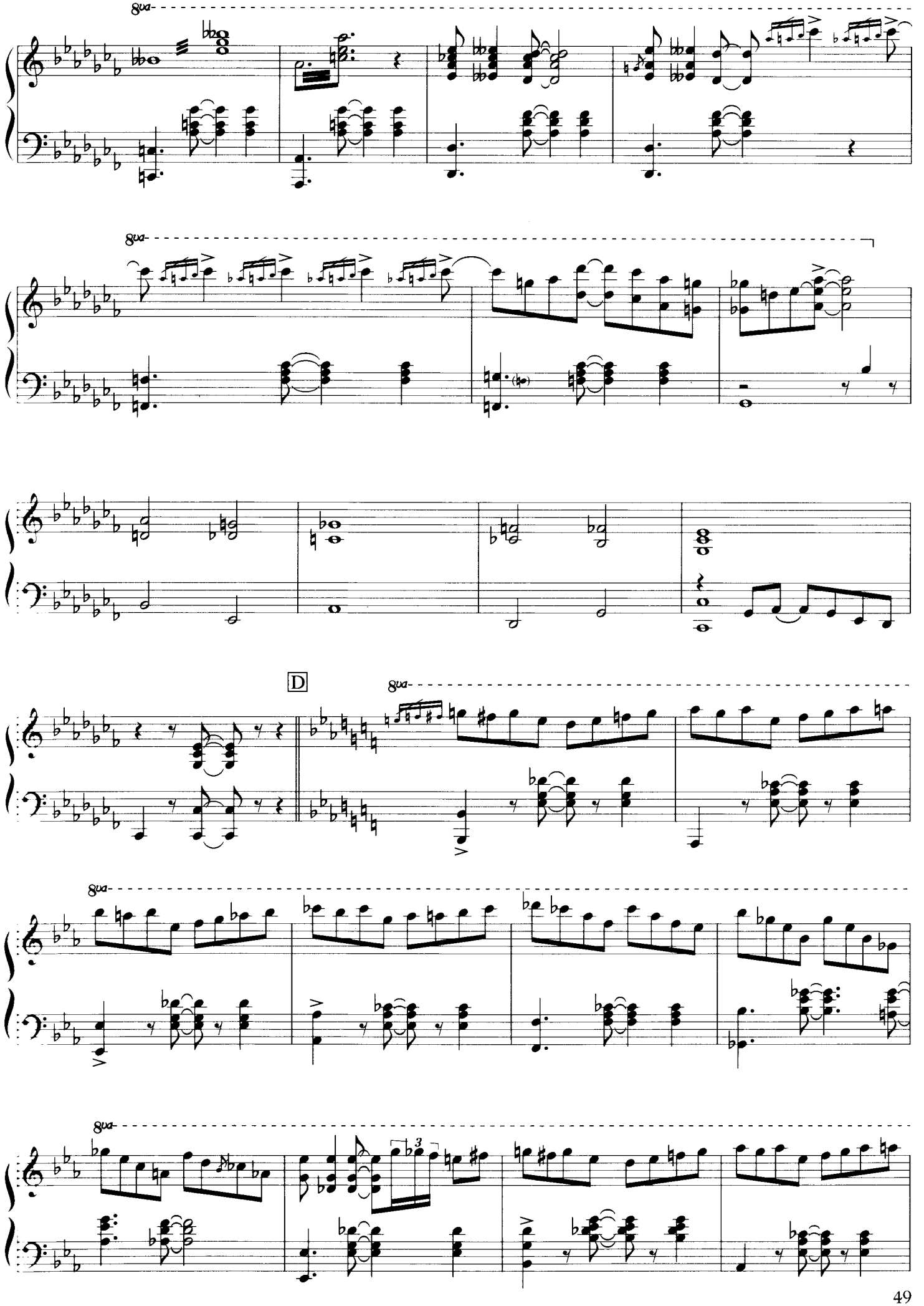
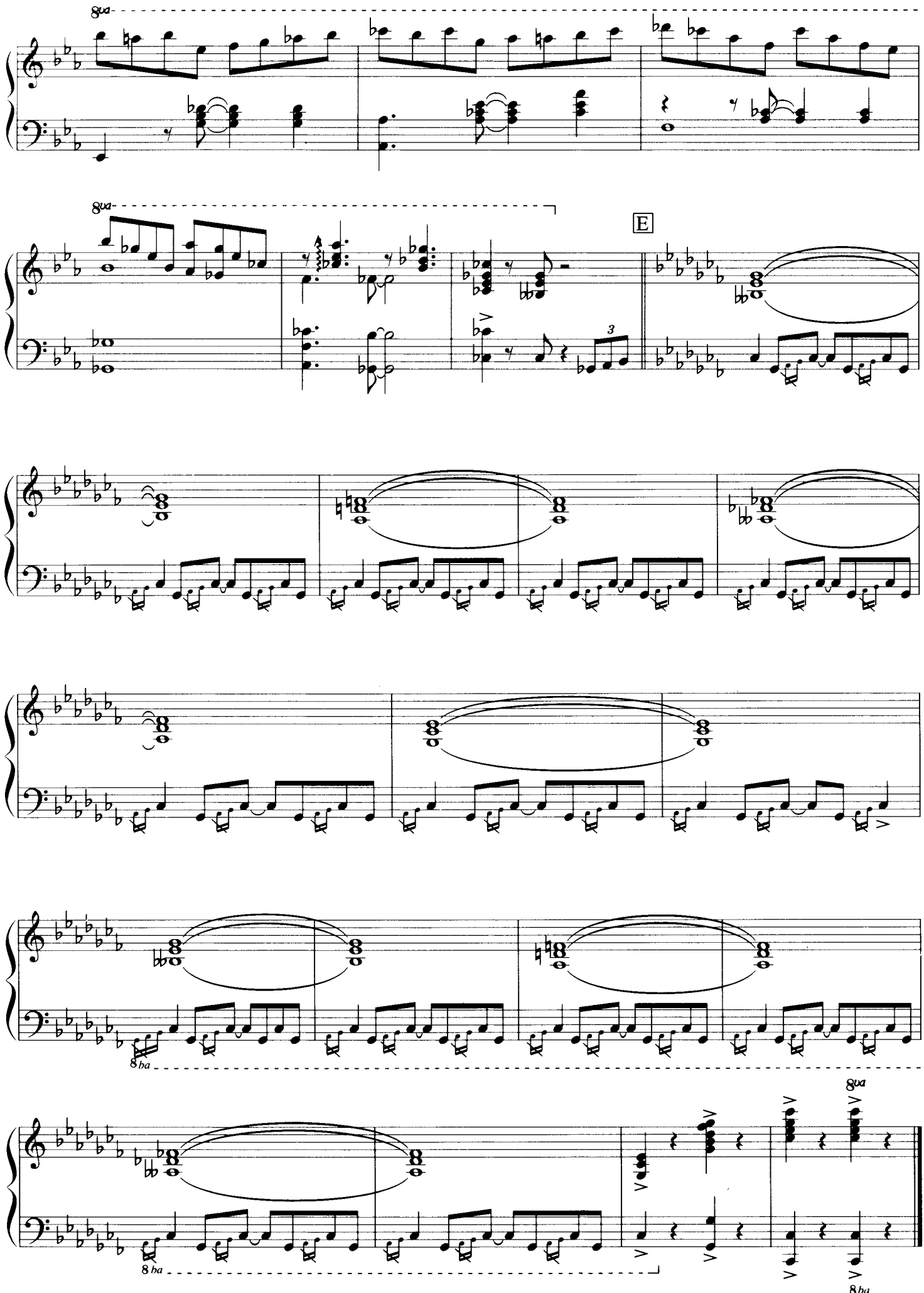

8va
B
Interlude


C1
8va
8va
8va
sf
8va
C2
8va


8va
8va
8va
D
8va
8va
8va


8va
8va
E
3
8ba
8ba
8va
8ba

The Dream

as recorded by James P. Johnson possibly in May, 1945; issued on Lp Folkways FJ 2850.

This composition has never been published before.

Johnson at his best, with a great finale. (See the introductory note to *Dream Rag.*)

Unlike Eubie Blake, Johnson credited this composition to John "Jack the Bear" Wilson, and probably learned it by listening to him. "Jack the Bear" was a pioneer figure of Eastern ragtime in its "fast-shout" stage. Born between 1860 and 1870, he probably came from Pennsylvania or Ohio, and played in both Baltimore (in the late 1890s) and in The Jungles section of New York. He earned his living not as a musician, but as a pimp and a gambler, and he was always dressed to kill. According to Eubie Blake, he was also a great piano player, with a lot of "tricks." Unfortunately, he wasted his talent when he became addicted to opium, a fate that befell many early ragtime musicians. Nevertheless, "Jack the Bear" was famous for his rendition of *The Dream,* at first fast, then "slow drag" with blues.

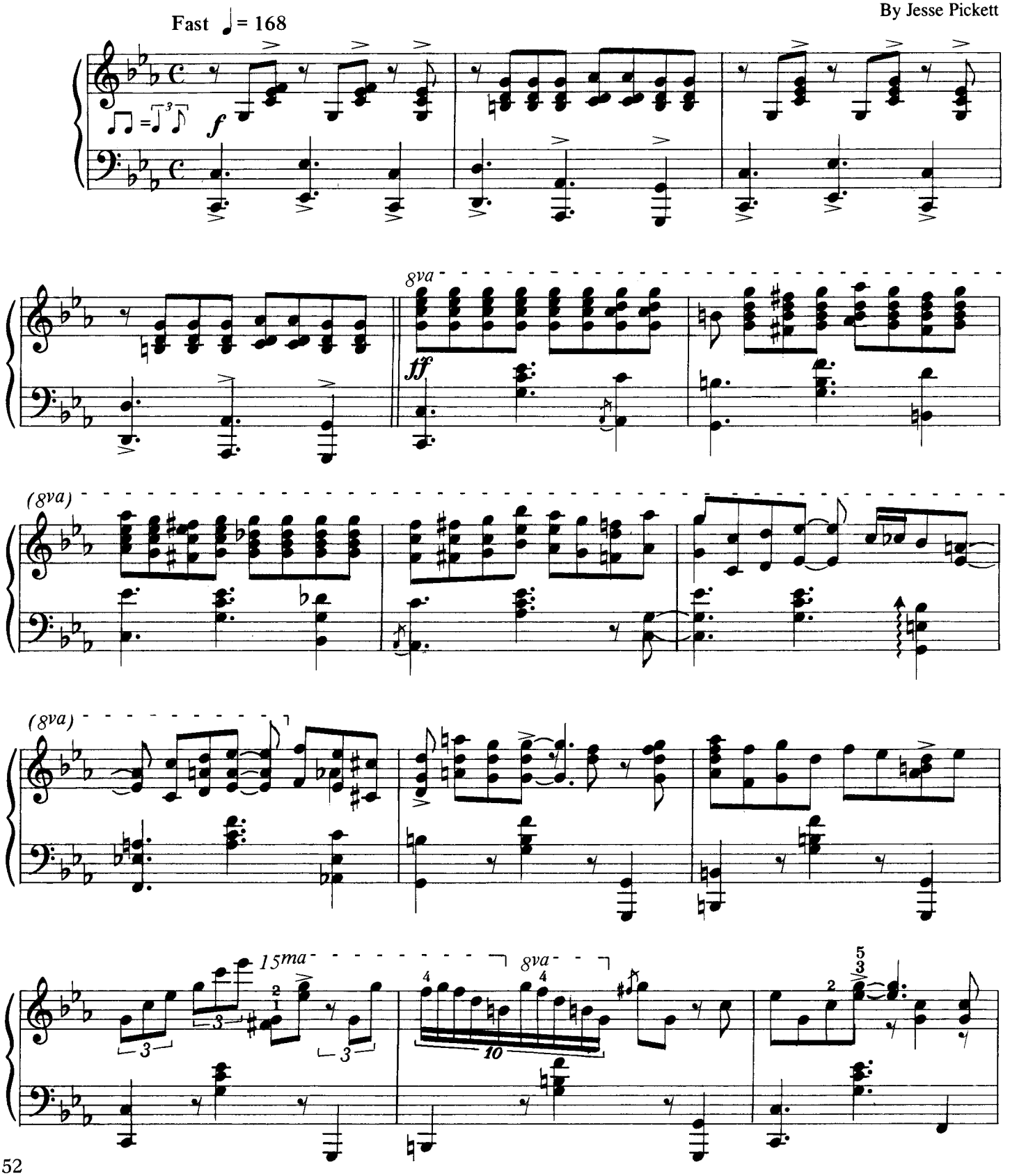
Johnson's rendition, very articulated and improvisational in character, is one of the most engaging solos in this collection.

According to Robert Hilbert's discography of James P. Johnson (see the Selected Bibliography), this recording has been issued on Lp Folkways FJ 2850, possibly in a faster version (total time 2:13) than the original recording (whose total time is 2:28). Assuming this, the entire solo must be transposed a step lower (key of Db) and played more slowly (= ca. 138).

The Dream

As Performed By James P. Johnson

By Jesse Pickett



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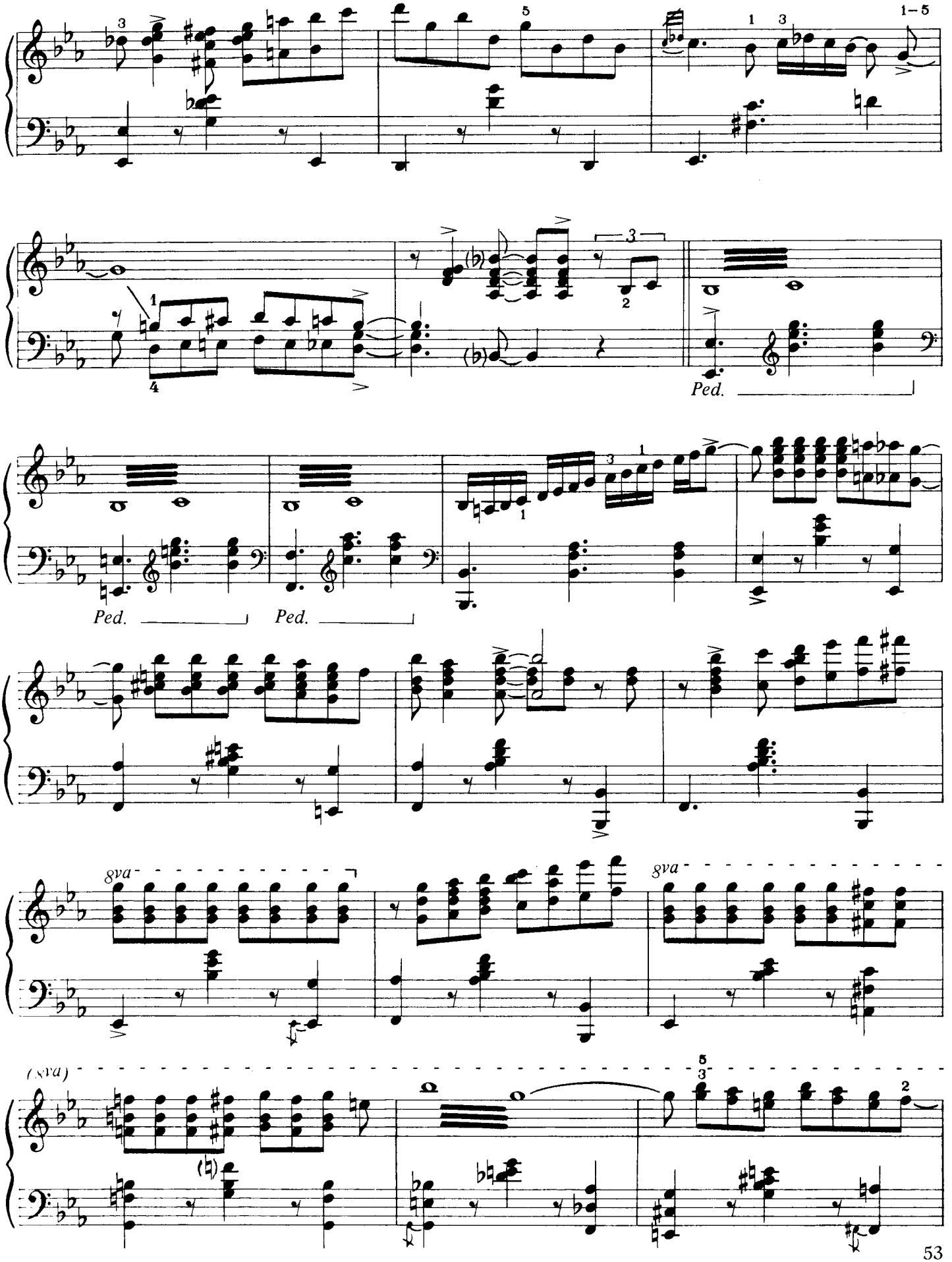
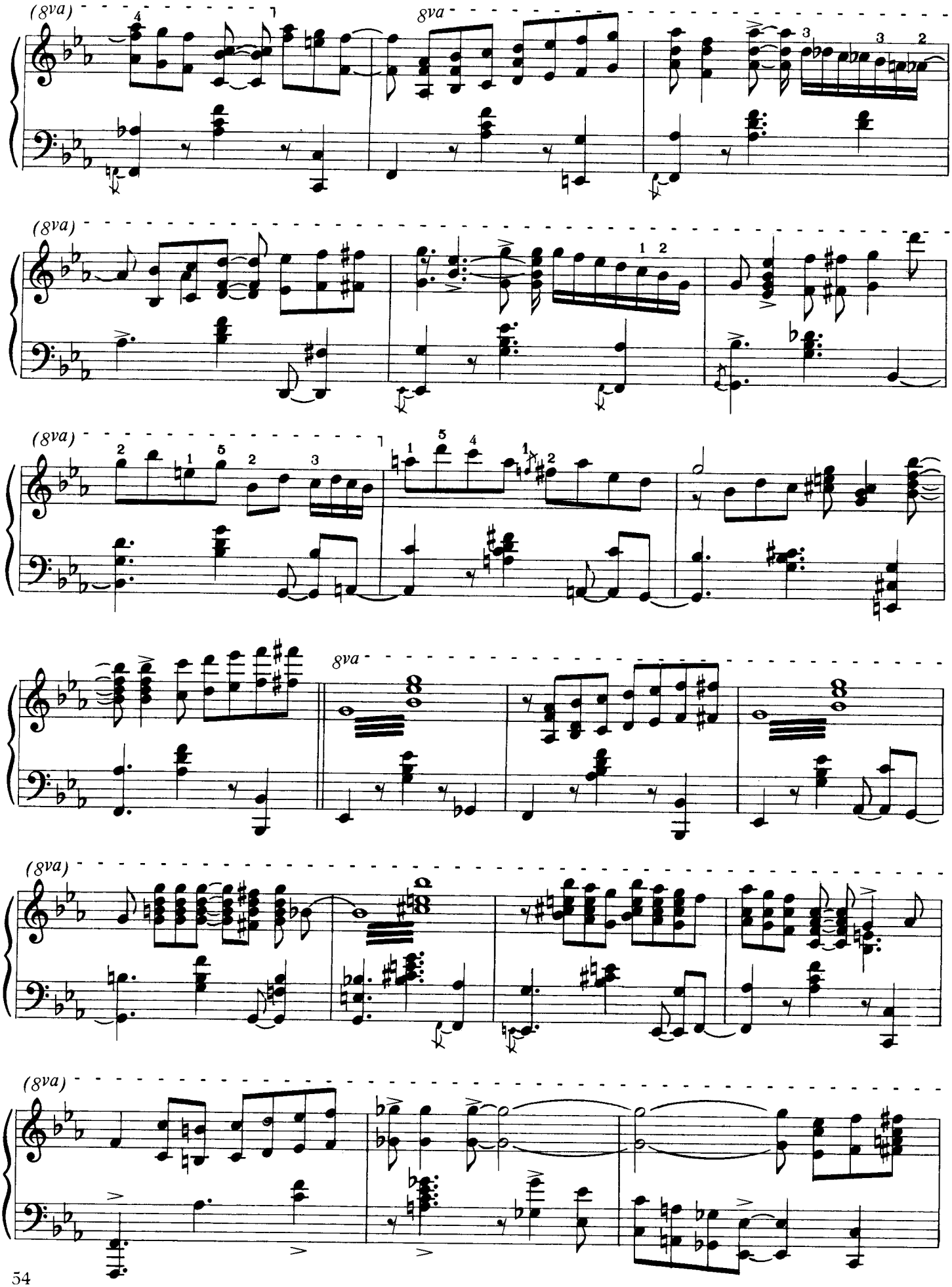
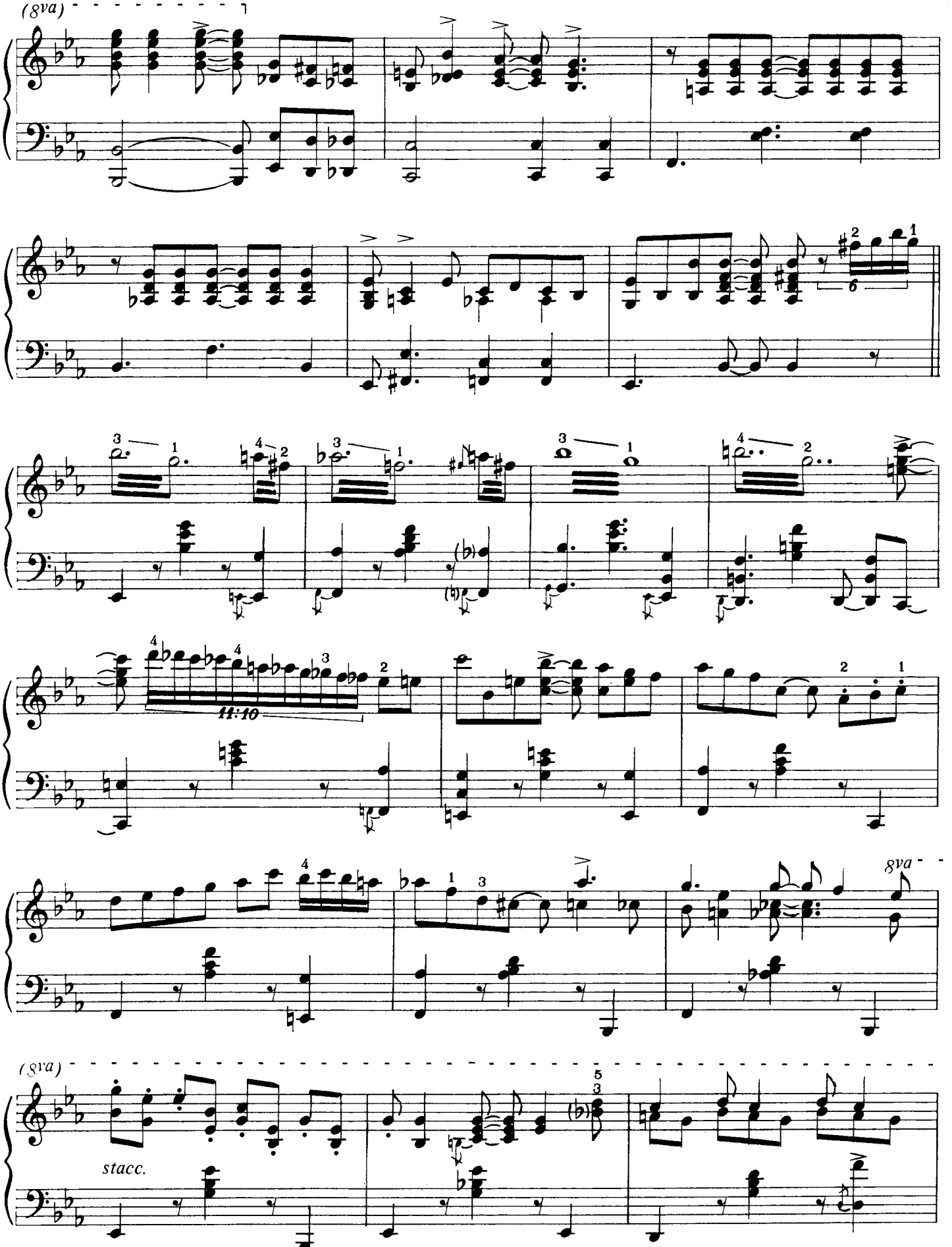
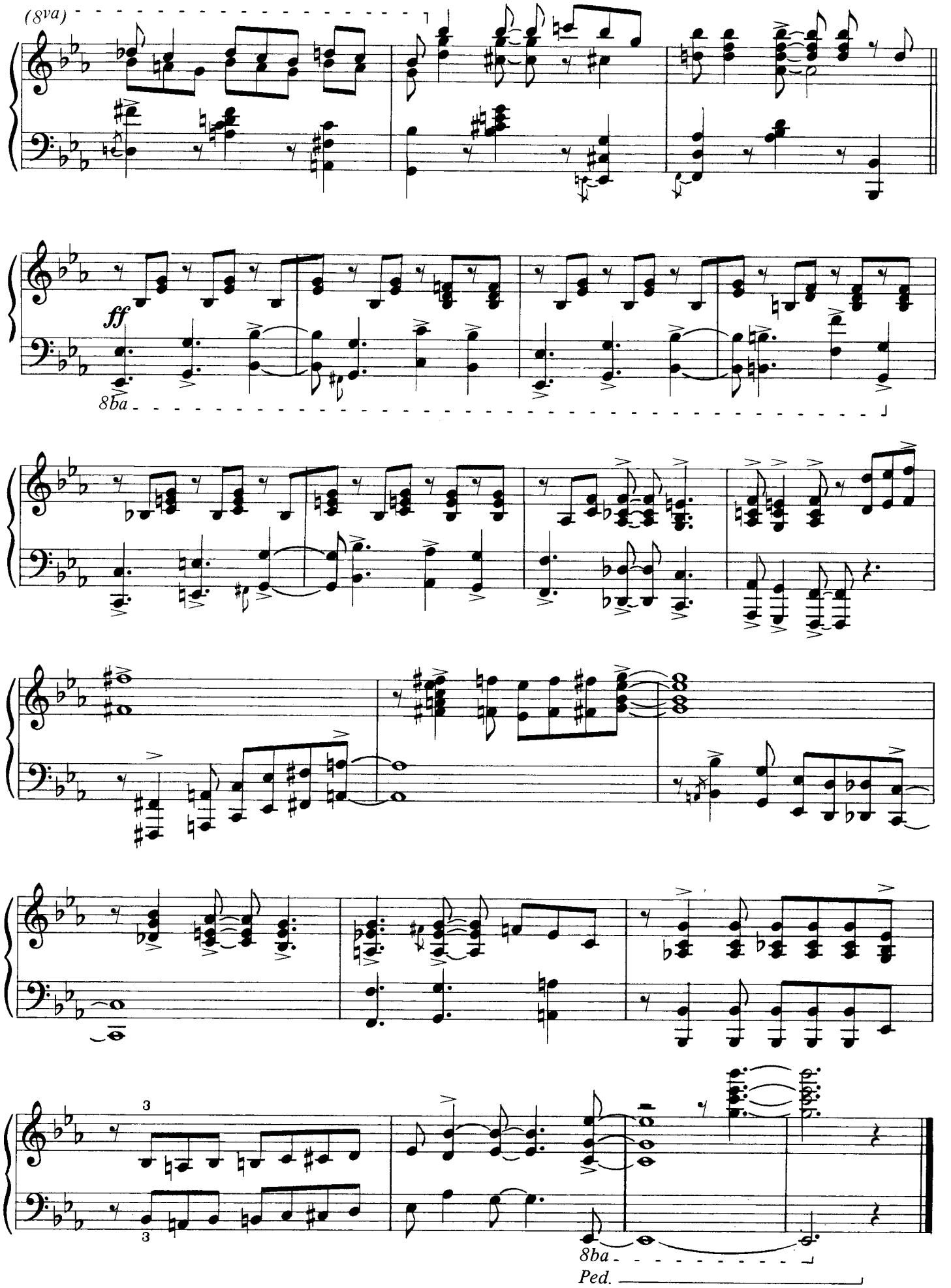

Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
8va
8va
(8va)


(8va)
8va
(8va)
(8va)
8va
(8va)
(8va)


(8va)
11:10
8va
(8va)
stacc.


(8va)
ff
8ba
3
3
8ba
Ped.

Happy Birthday To Pat

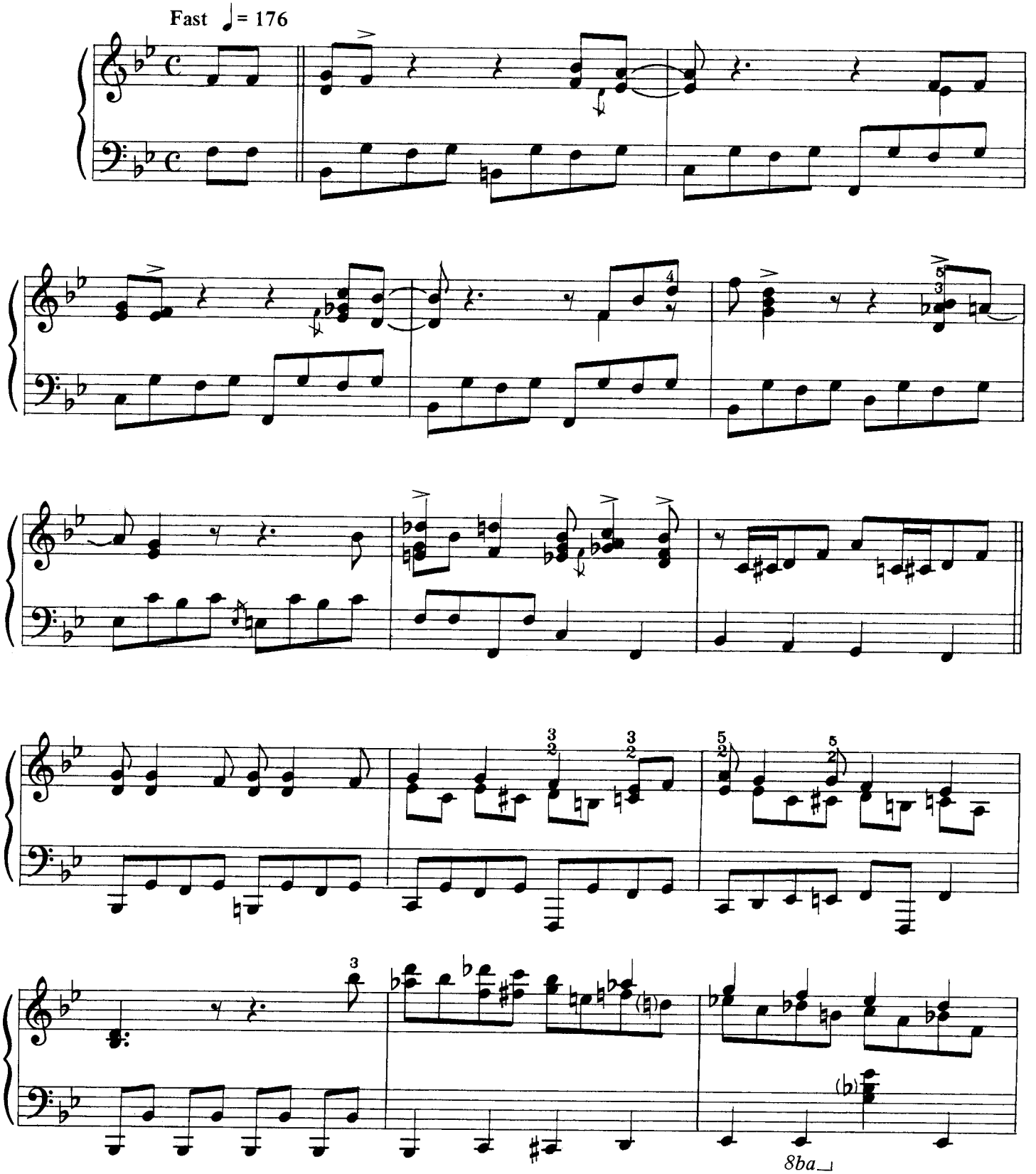
as recorded by Cliff Jackson on Lp RI-DISC RD-5, July 23, 1965.

A good introduction to Jackson's intricate style, with best wishes.

Happy Birthday To Pat

As Performed By Cliff Jackson

Words and Music by Patty Smith Hill and Mildred J. Hill



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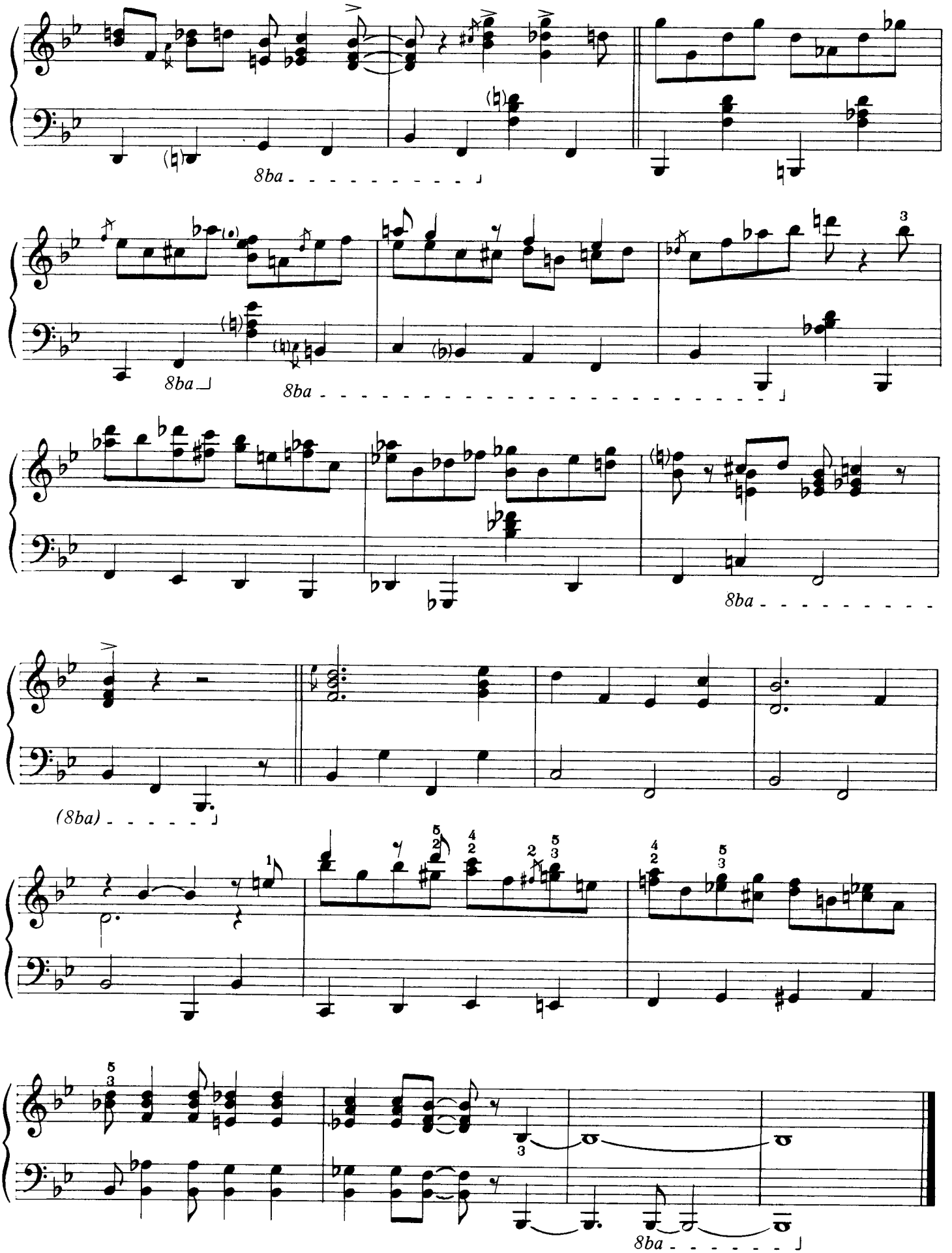

8ba
8ba
8ba
8ba
(8ba)
8ba

How Long Blues

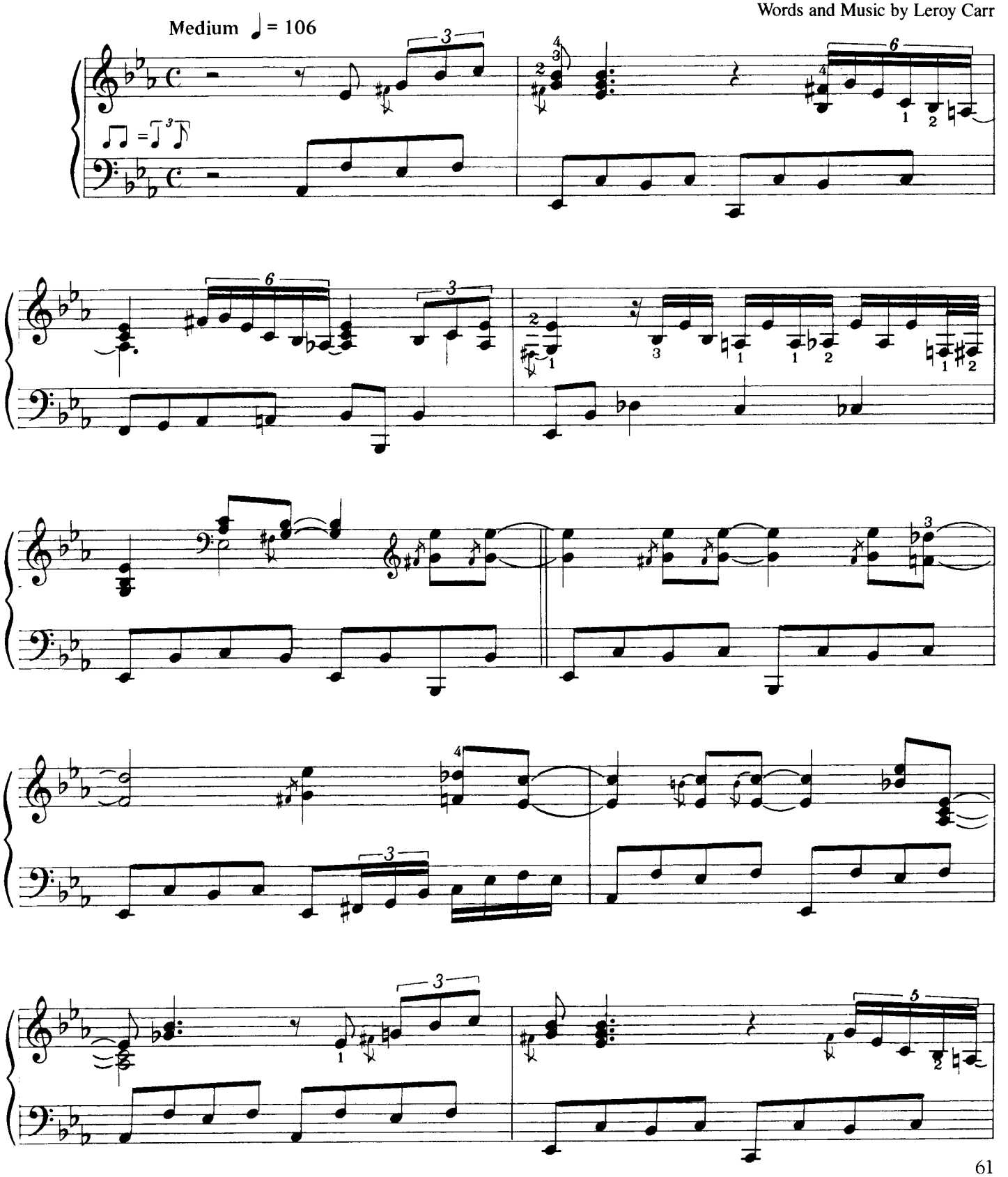
as recorded by Cliff Jackson on Lp RI-DISC RD-5, July 23, 1965.

Used by Jackson as his theme song on a date at Blues Alley Night Club, Washington, D.C., this brief solo features a typical Stride "rolling bass" foundation in a medium blues.

How Long Blues

As Performed By Cliff Jackson

Words and Music by Leroy Carr



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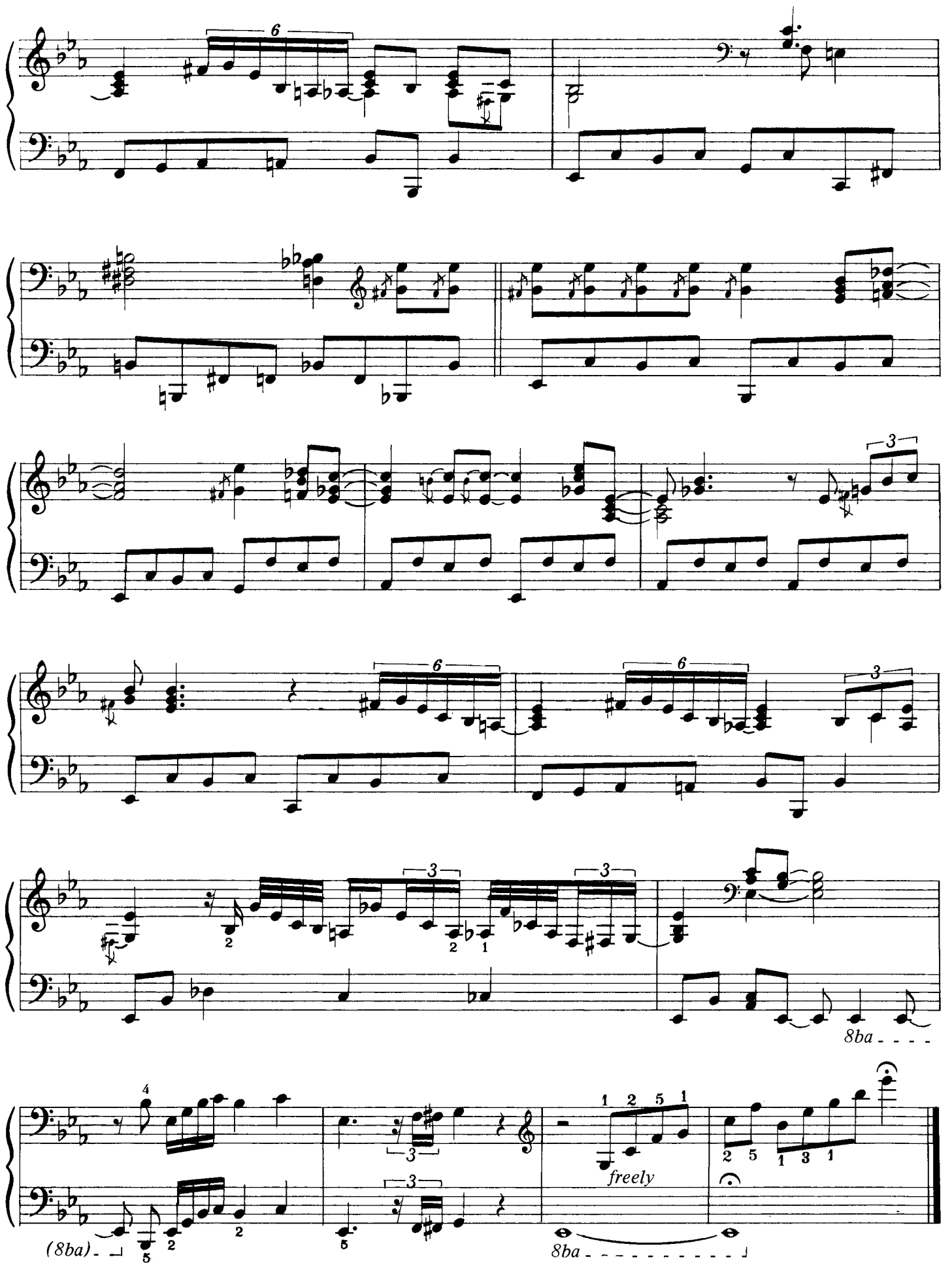

freely
8ba
(8ba)
8ba

Jingle Bells

as recorded by Dick Wellstood on May 29, 1985; Lp Unisson Records DDA-1003.

A great example of how to transform a children's ditty into a Stride masterwork, this solo is also a typical representation of Wellstood's creative approach to Stride.

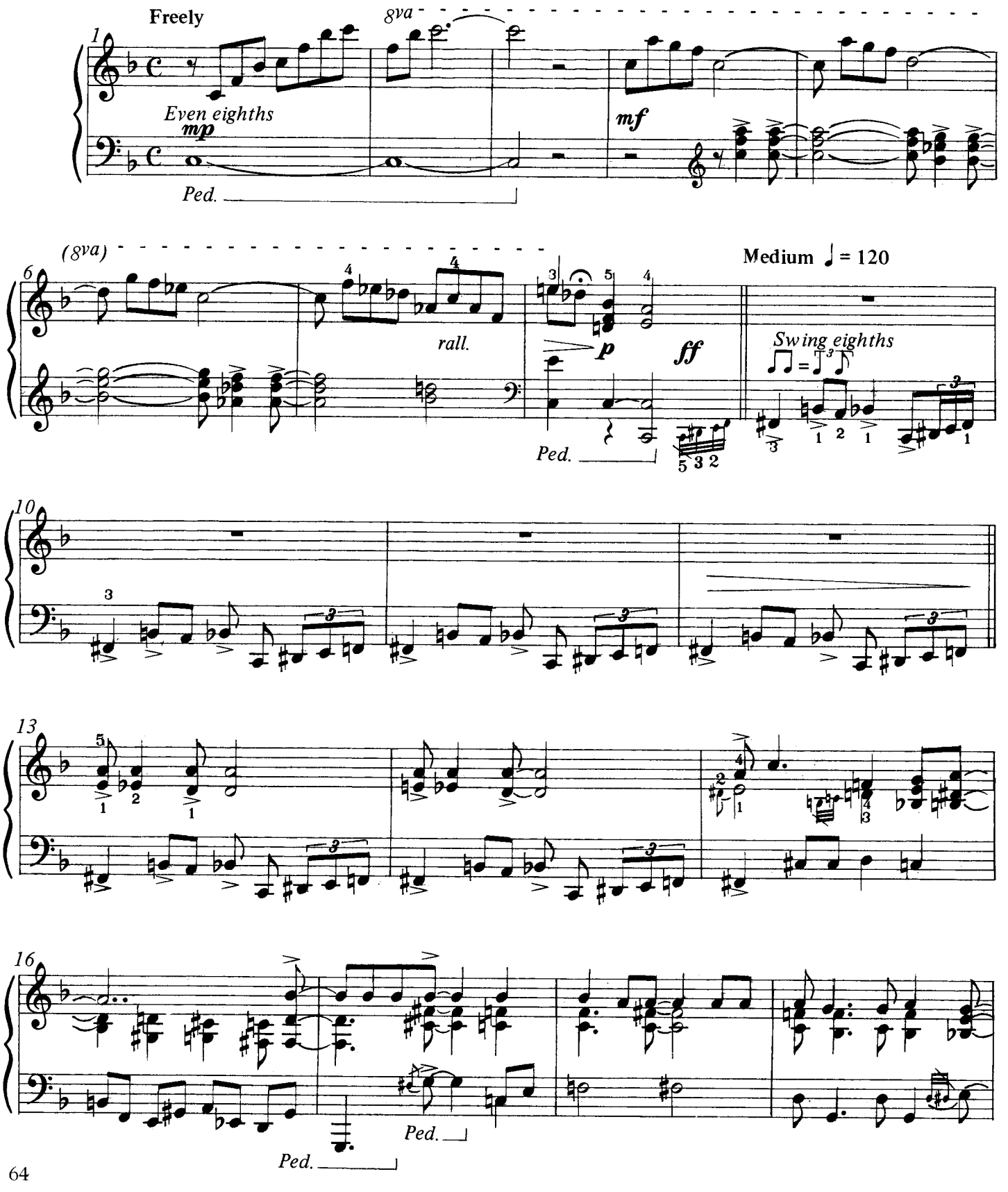
See, for instance, the "modern" introduction, the unexpected left hand *ostinato* which immediately follows it, and the remarkable (often unconventional) re-harmonizations throughout. As usual, Wellstood's deep blues feeling permeates the entire rendition. But this piece also features an episode in a jubilant, Waller-like vein, as well as many "backward tenths" (very effective) in the accompaniment.

The opening of the second chorus features one of Wellstood's typical "tricks": an outstanding re-harmonization (based on the circle-of-fifths), after which Dick strides at fantastic speed before the triumphant conclusion. Here, one experiences Wellstood's hallmark: the increasing and releasing of tension in his solos.

Jingle Bells

As Performed By Dick Wellstood

Words and Music by J.S. Pierpont



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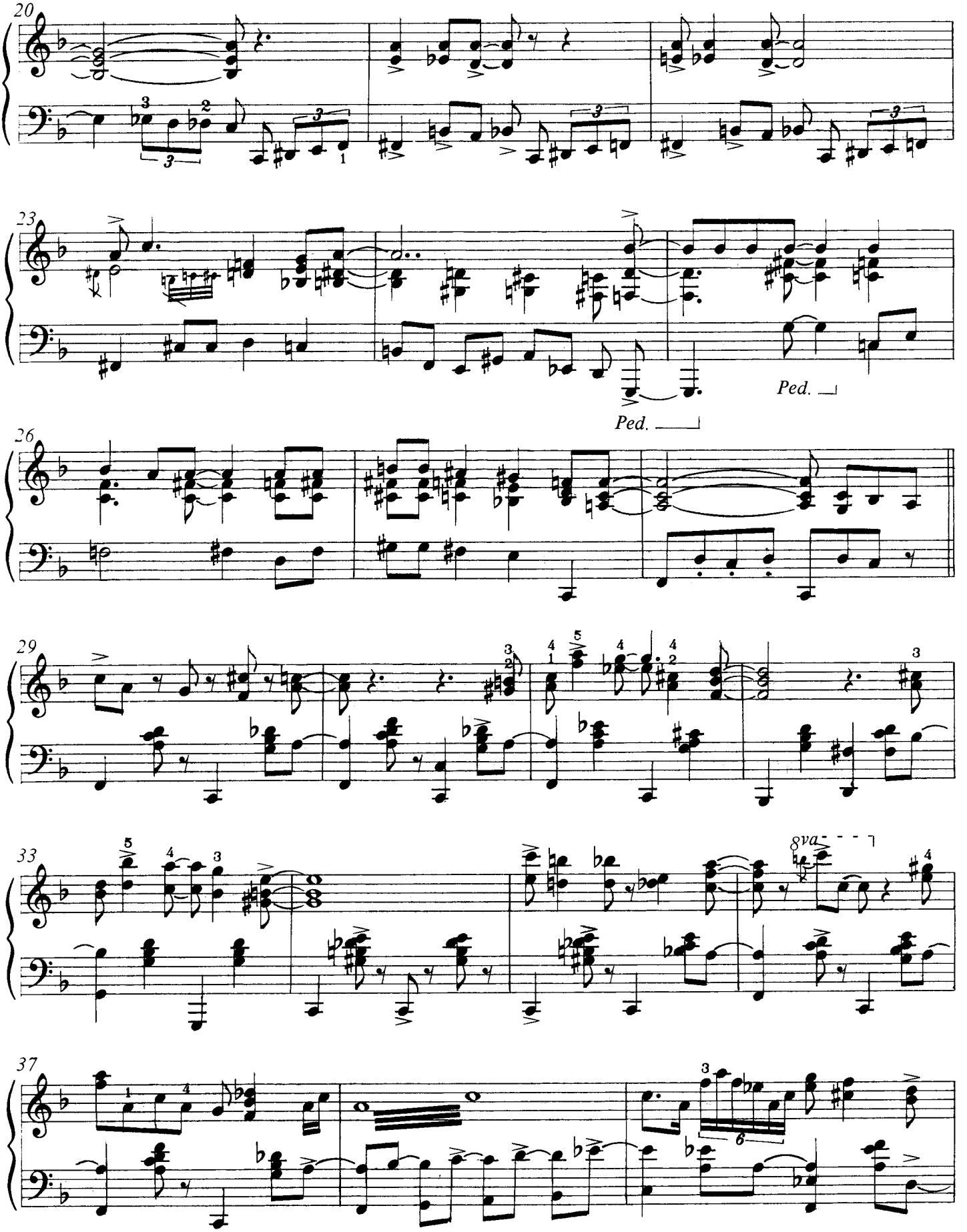
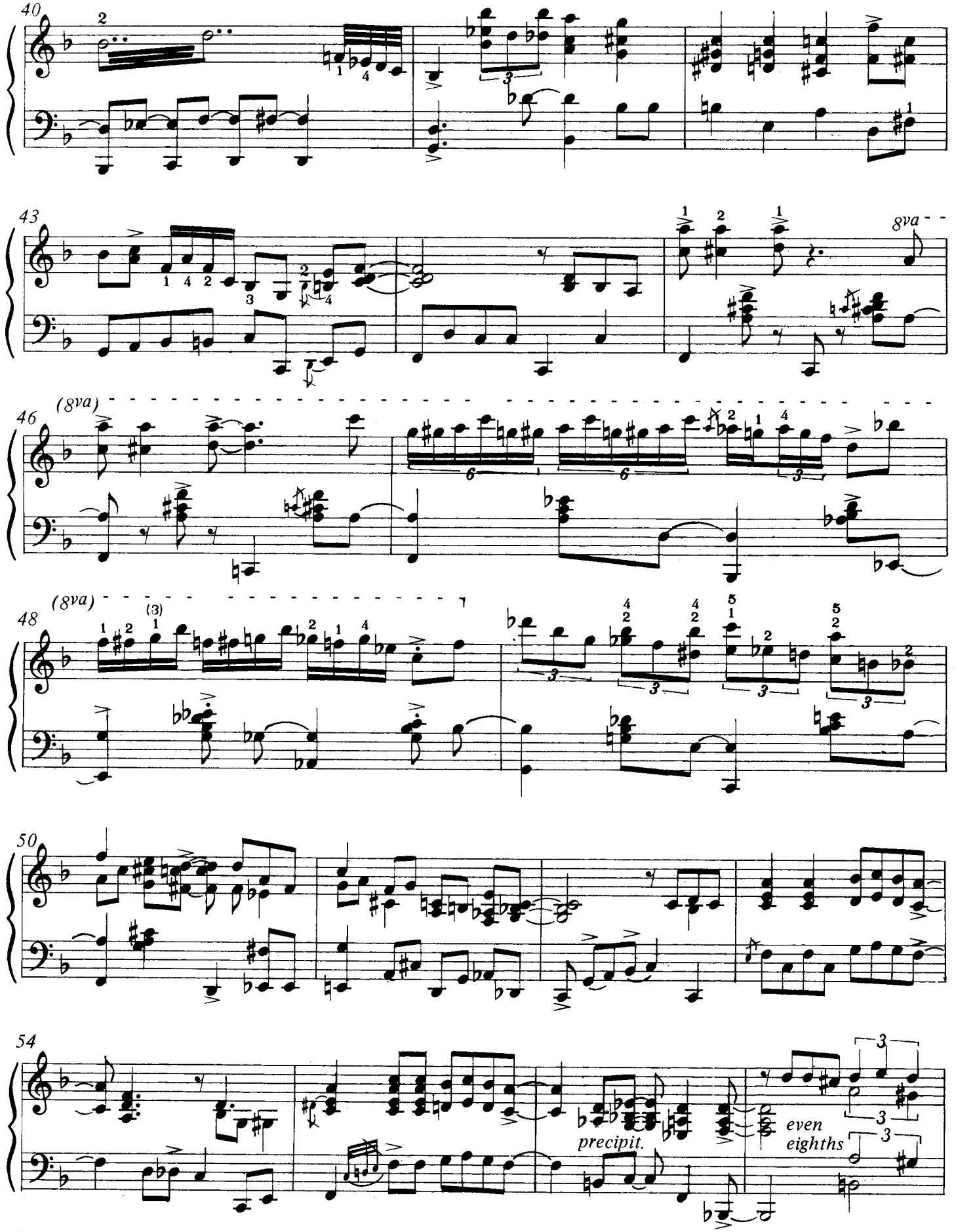
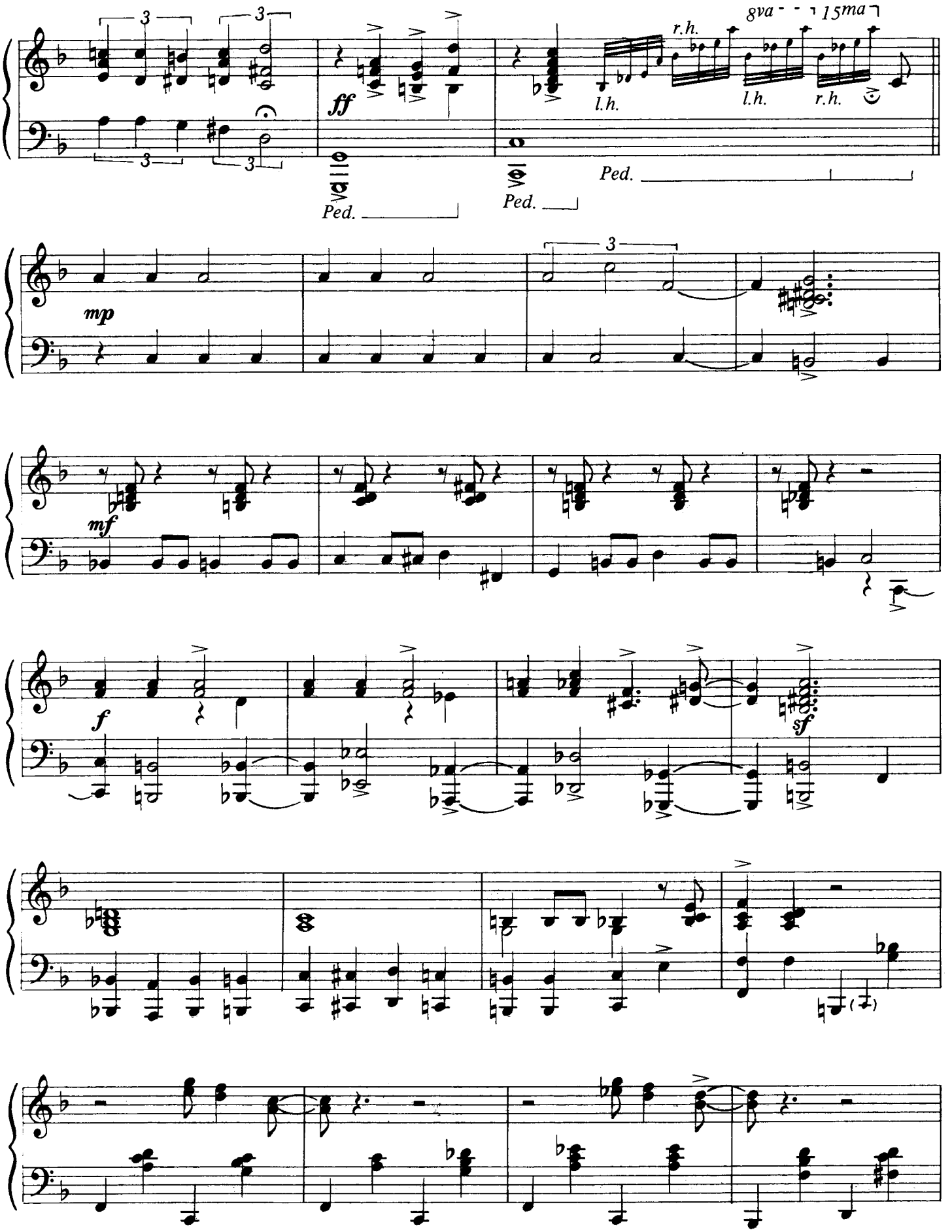
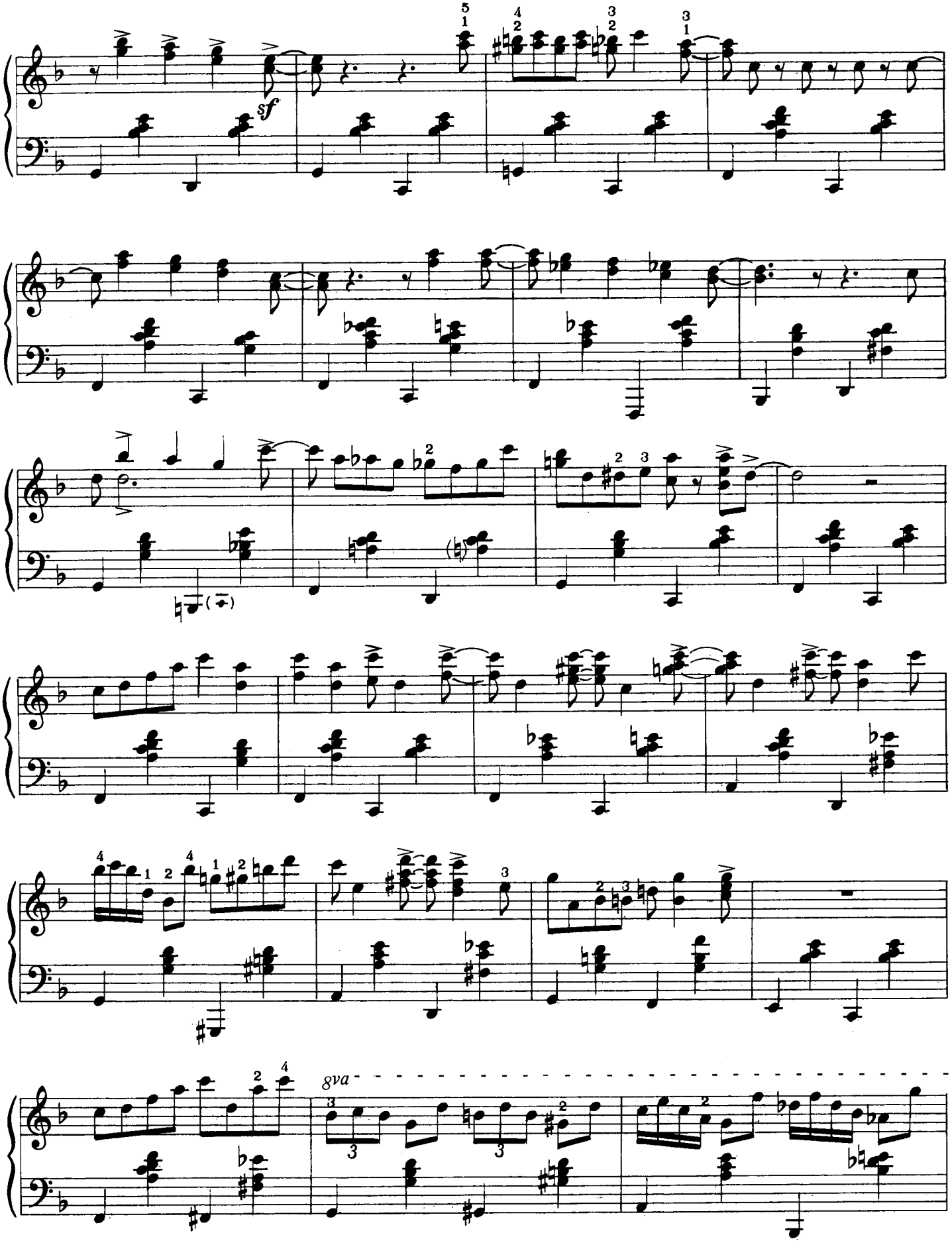
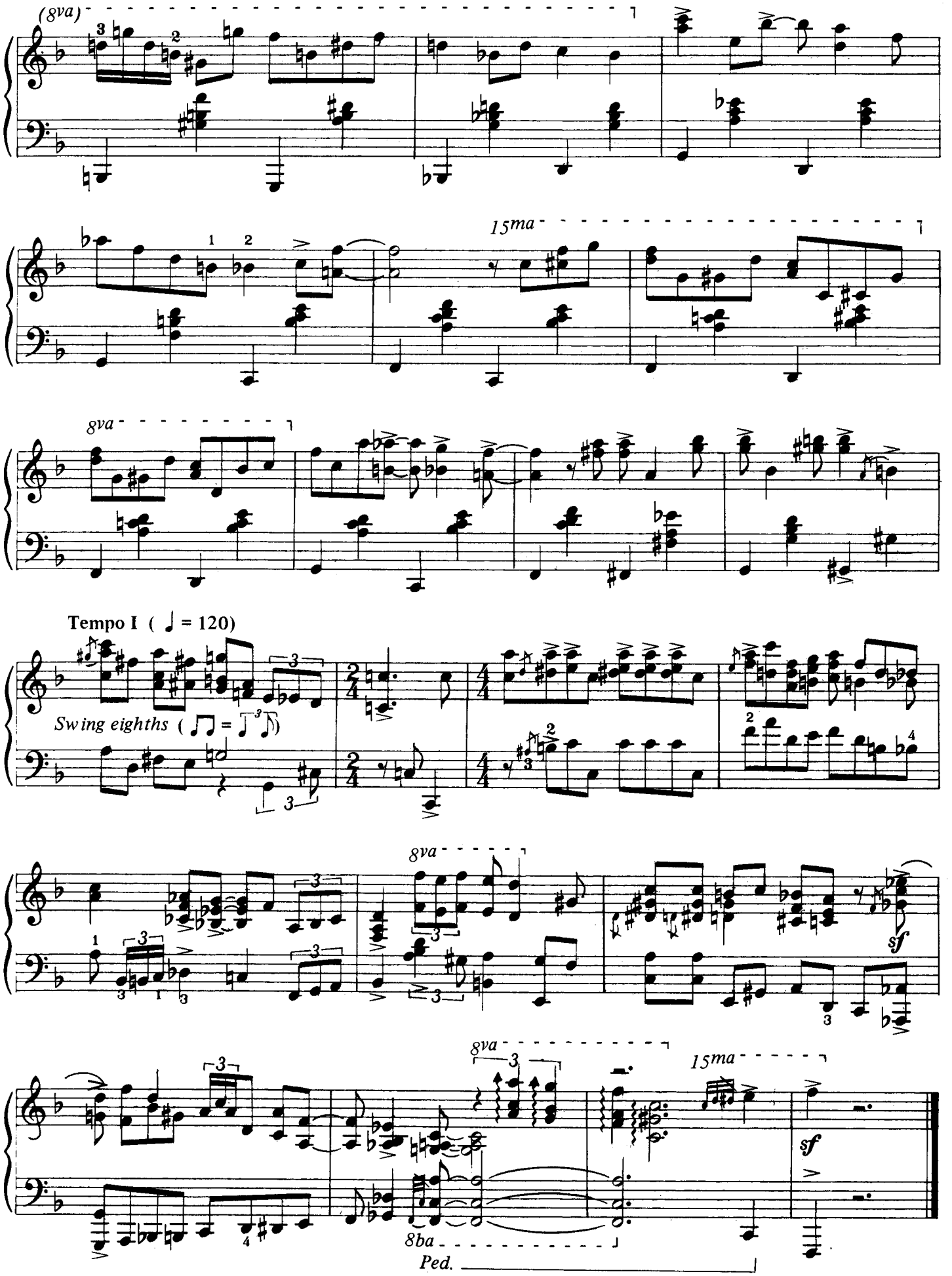

20
23
Ped.
Ped.
26
29
33
8va
37


40
43
8va
(8va)
46
(8va)
48
50
54
precipit.
even
eighths


3
3
ff
Ped.
Ped.
8va
15ma
r.h.
l.h.
l.h.
r.h.
Ped.
mp
3
mf
f
sf


sf
gva


(8va)
15ma
8va
Tempo I (♩ = 120)
Swing eighths (♫ = ♩³♪)
8va
sf
8va
15ma
sf
8ba
Ped.

Jungle Drums

as recorded by James P. Johnson possibly in April, 1945; issued on Lp Folkways FJ 2850.

James P. Johnson had a dream. He wanted to blend the great musical tradition of Black Americans with the European "serious" forms. Johnson shared this dream with other black musicians like Scott Joplin and the legendary "fast-shout" pianist "One Leg Willie" Joseph. Johnson in his turn paved the way to the later "symphonic suites" by Duke Ellington.

Johnson also shared his dream with George Gershwin, his admirer and good friend since 1921. It is suspected that Johnson helped Gershwin compose some songs. Certainly the two had a mutual exchange of musical ideas, though Gershwin (being white) probably had a greater chance of having his semi-classical works performed.

The "Negro Rhapsody" *Yamekraw* (1927) was Johnson's first effort in "serious" forms. In the 1930s he devoted himself almost exclusively to composing several large-scale orchestral works such as: *Harlem Symphony* (1932), *Jassamine Concerto (Piano Concerto in Ab)* (1934), *Symphony in Brown* (1935), *Spirit of America: String Quartet, Improvisations on "Deep River", City of Steel, American Symphonic Suite, Rhythm Drums.* Though these works were sometimes performed (both in the U.S.A. and abroad) during the 1930s and 1940s, at present it is practically impossible to give an evaluation of Johnson's achievements in this field, as most of these works were never published in any form. The original manuscripts of the scores seem to have mysteriously disappeared. We have only three solo piano recordings left by Johnson: *Yamekraw, Blues for Jimmy* (from the second movement of the *Jassamine Concerto*), and *Jungle Drums.* Unfortunately, they are not very representative of the orchestral works of Johnson, as they are probably "compressed" versions of the originals, and do not allow us to evaluate Johnson's skill as an orchestrator.

Nevertheless, *Jungle Drums* (featured here) almost surely comes from *Rhythm Drums (Drums – African Themes and Rhythms arranged for Orchestra),* composed in the early 1930s. It was structured in three movements, with some passages in four-part counterpoint, and was scored for English horns, oboes, bassoons, four horns, flutes, trombones, trumpets and many other instruments. It was performed by The Brooklyn Civic Orchestra in 1942.

Jungle Drums is an astounding and very interesting piece, wildly percussive in conception. Judging from it, Johnson's dream appears much less "melodic" and much more radical than Gershwin's.

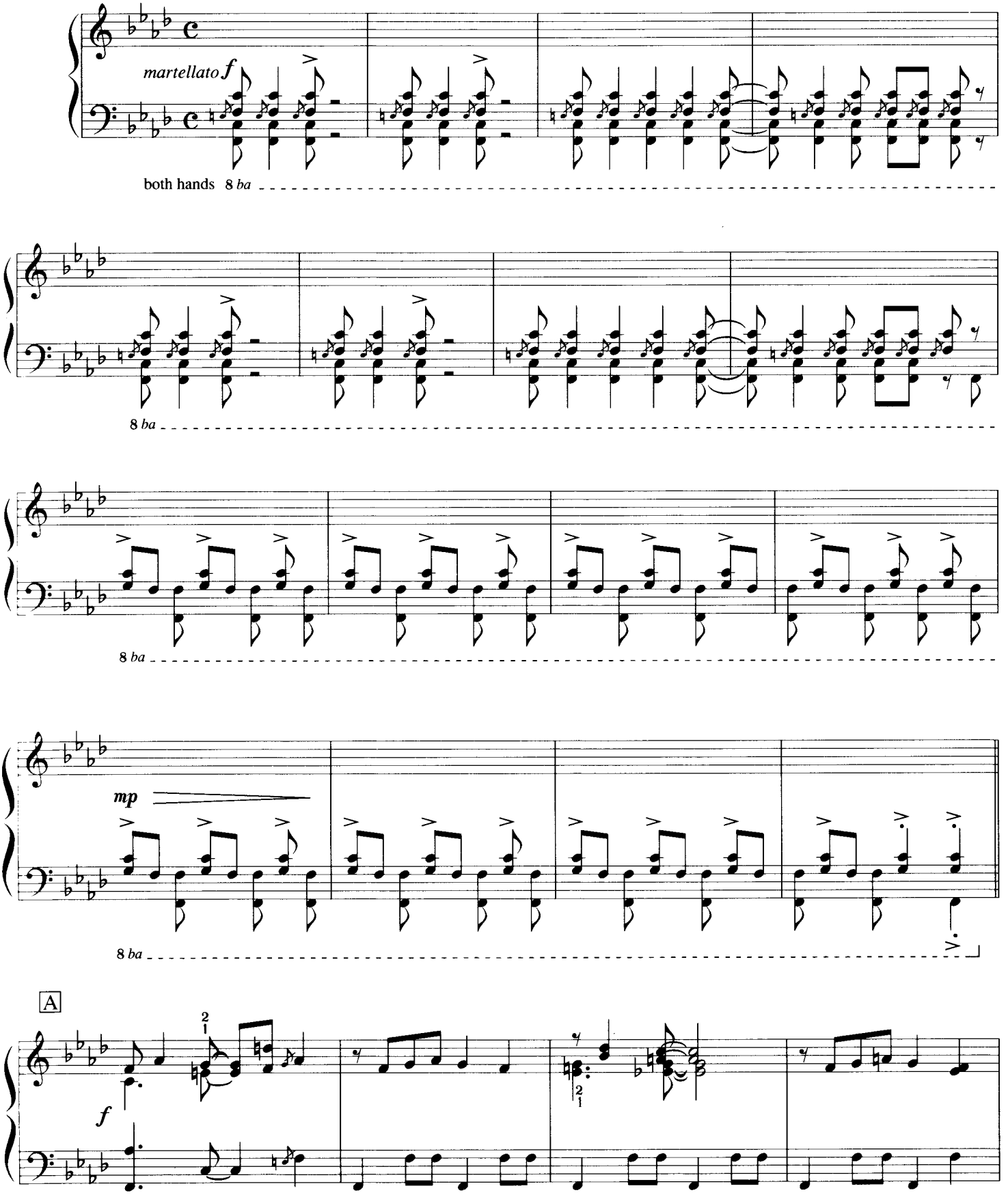
Jungle Drums

As Performed By James P. Johnson

Introduction

Fast (♩ = 224)

By James P. Johnson



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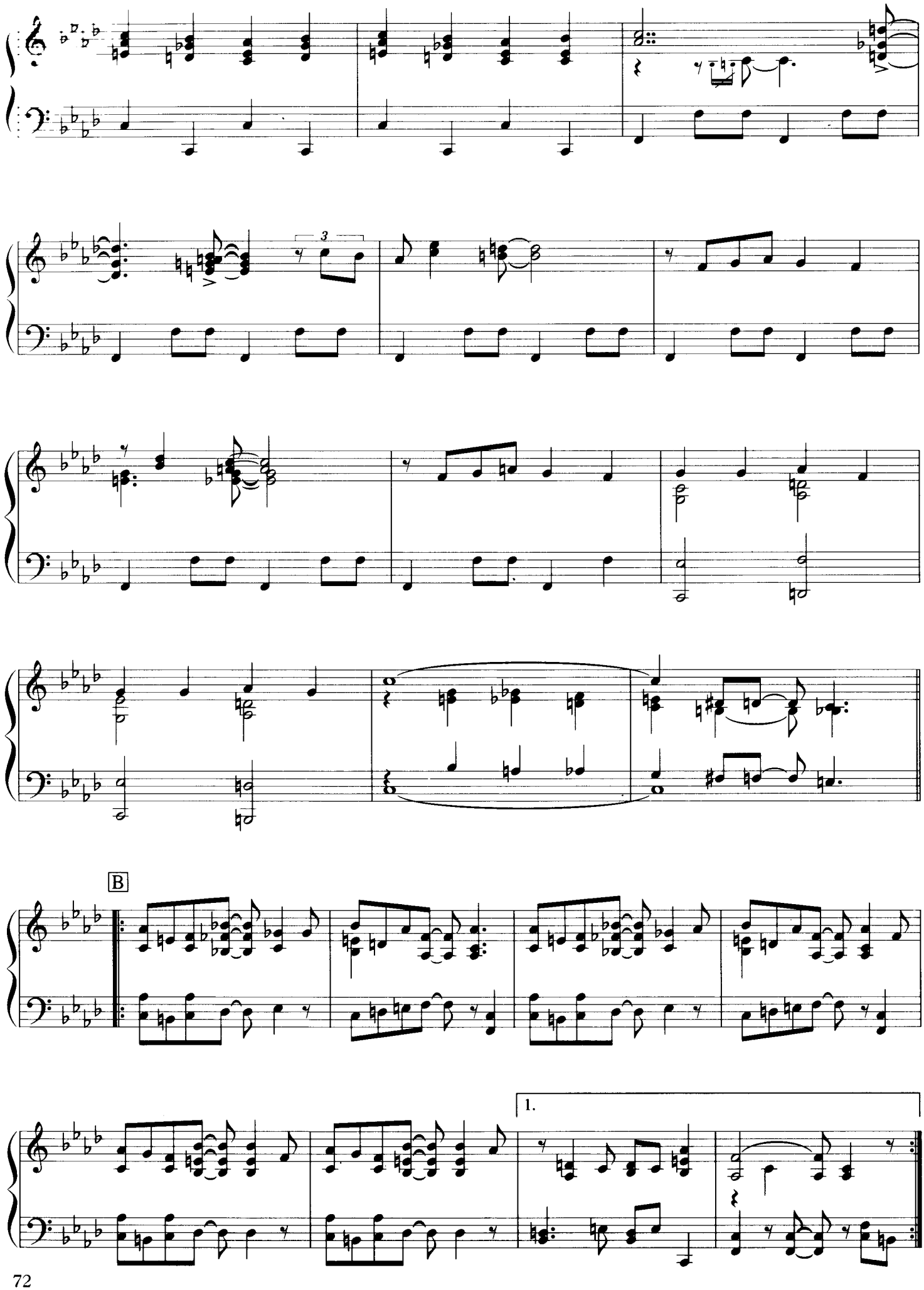
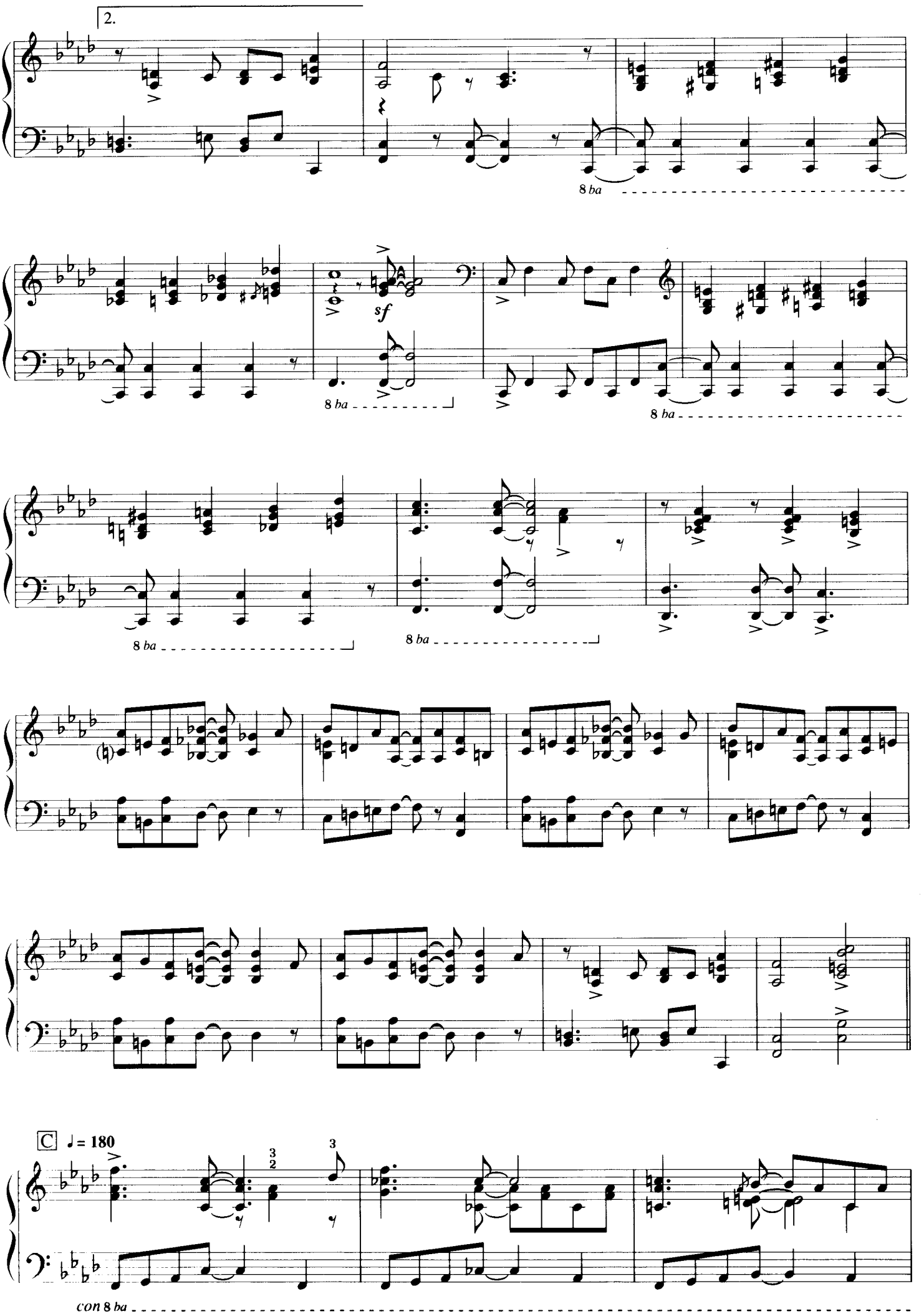
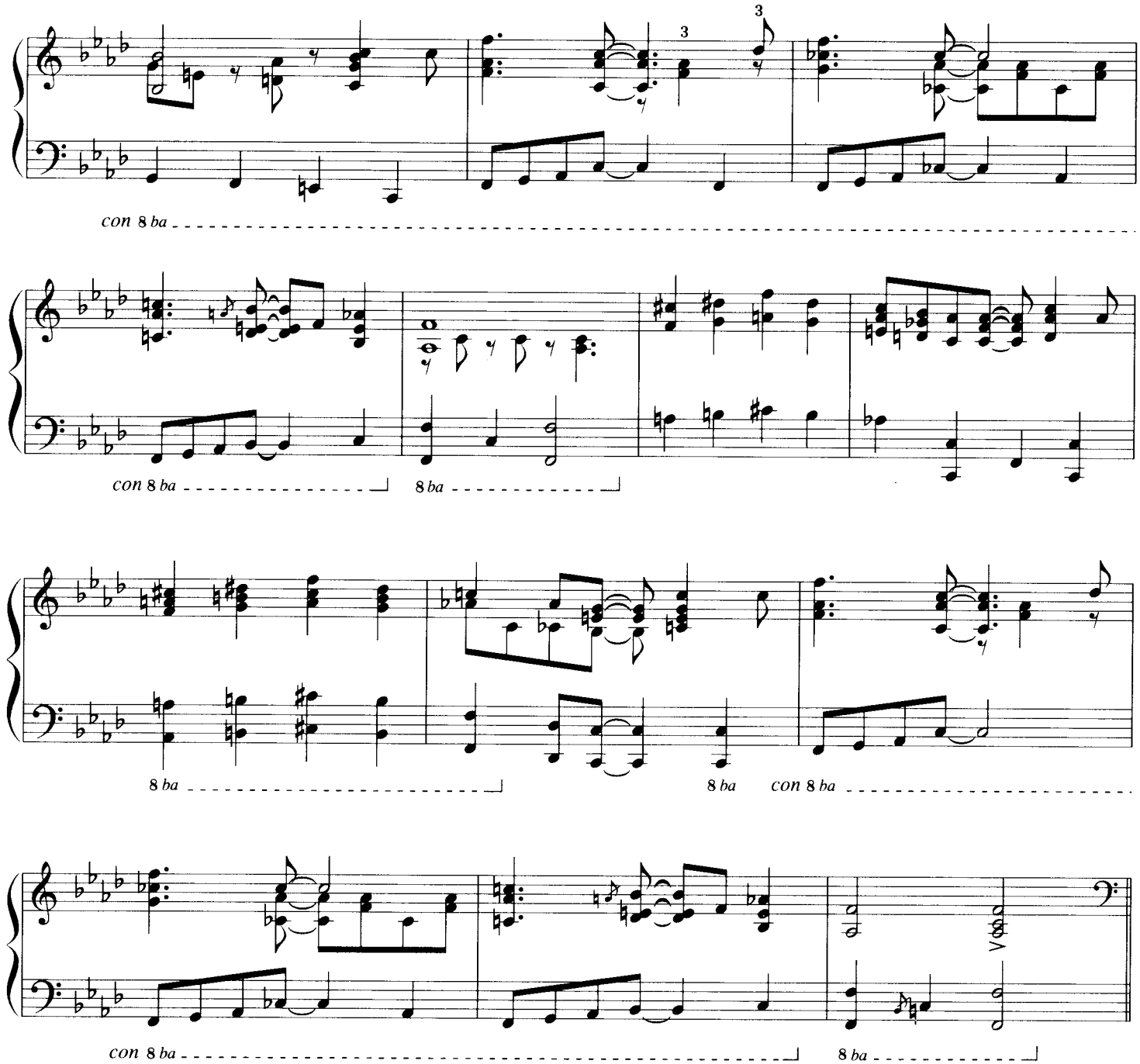
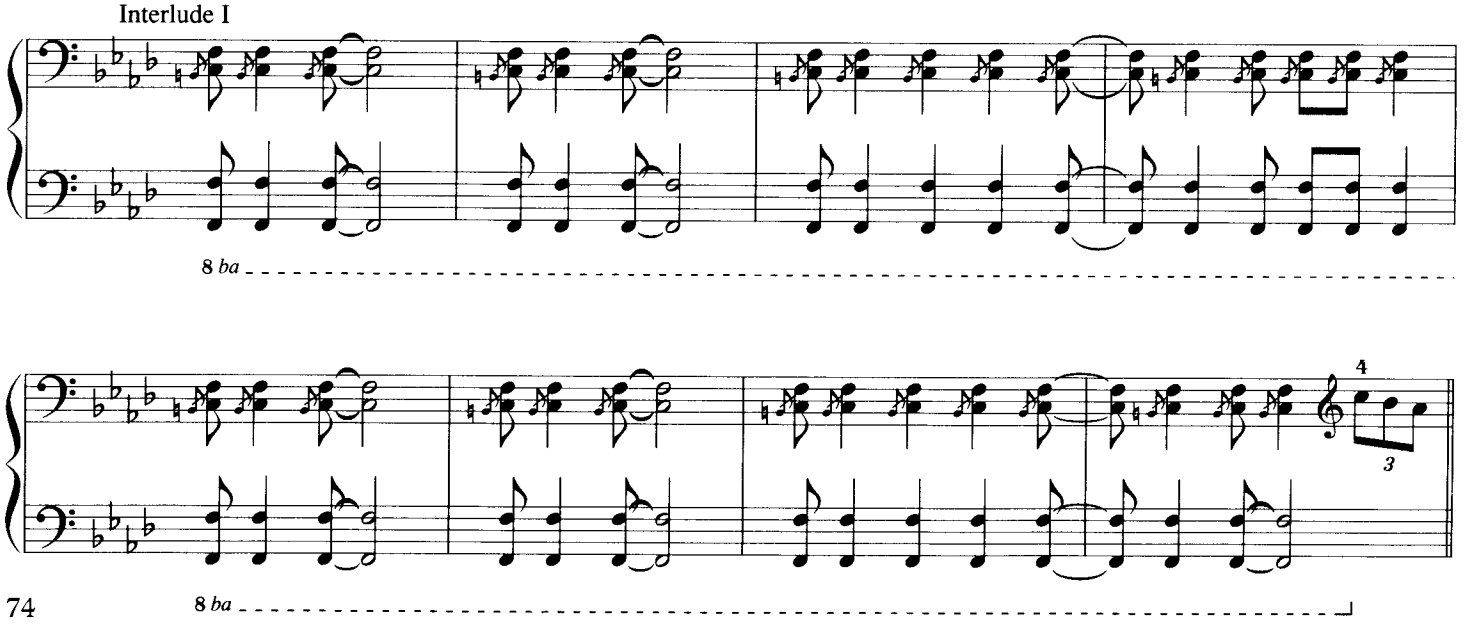

B
1.

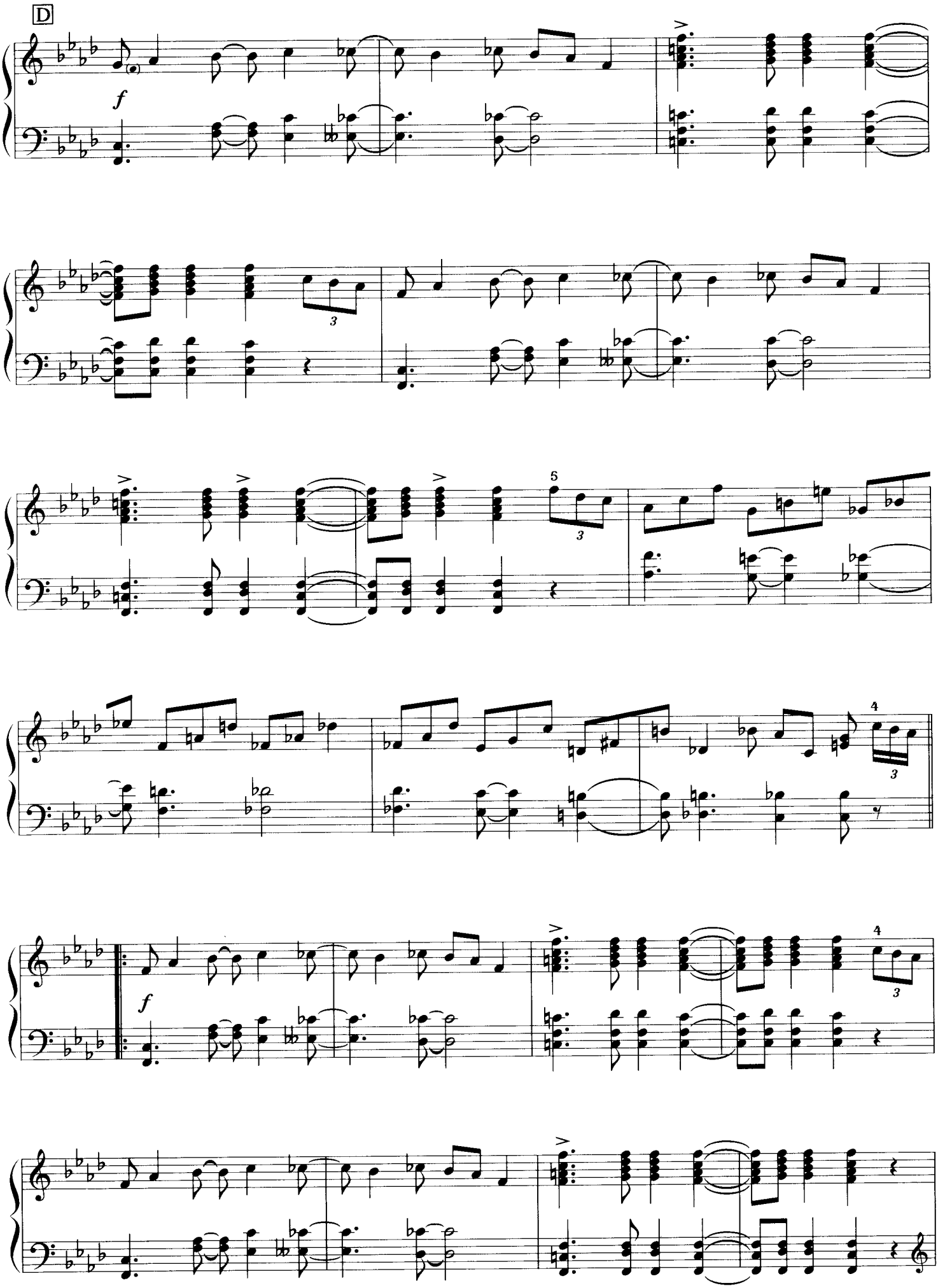

2.
8 ba
sf
8 ba
8 ba
8 ba
8 ba
C ♩= 180
con 8 ba

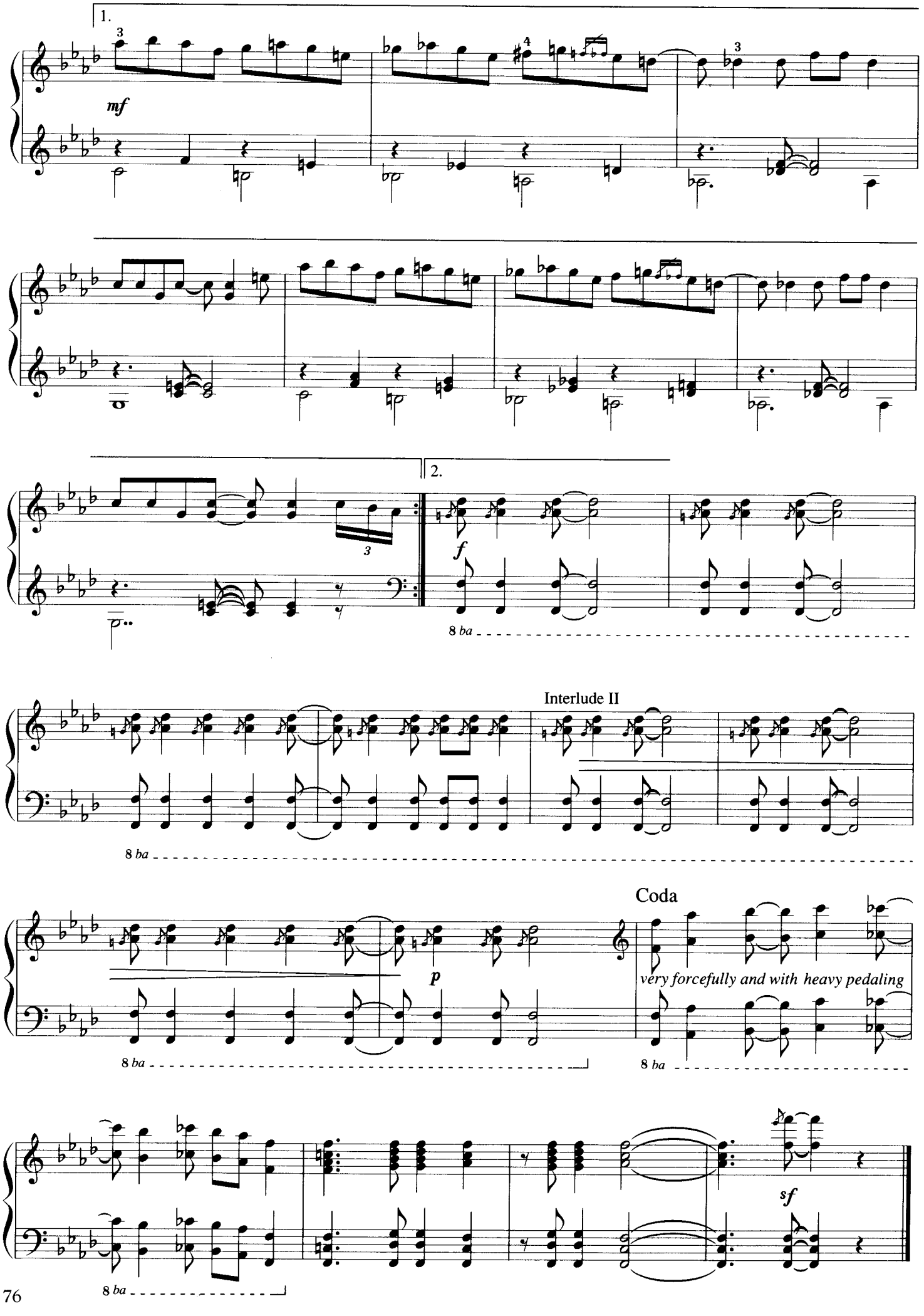


Tempo I (♩ = 224)

Interlude I




D
f
3
5
3
4
3
f
4
3


1.
mf
2.
f
8 ba
Interlude II
8 ba
Coda
p
very forcefully and with heavy pedaling
8 ba
8 ba
sf
8 ba

Late Evening Blues

as recorded by Claude Hopkins on Lp Chiaroscuro CR 114; 1973.

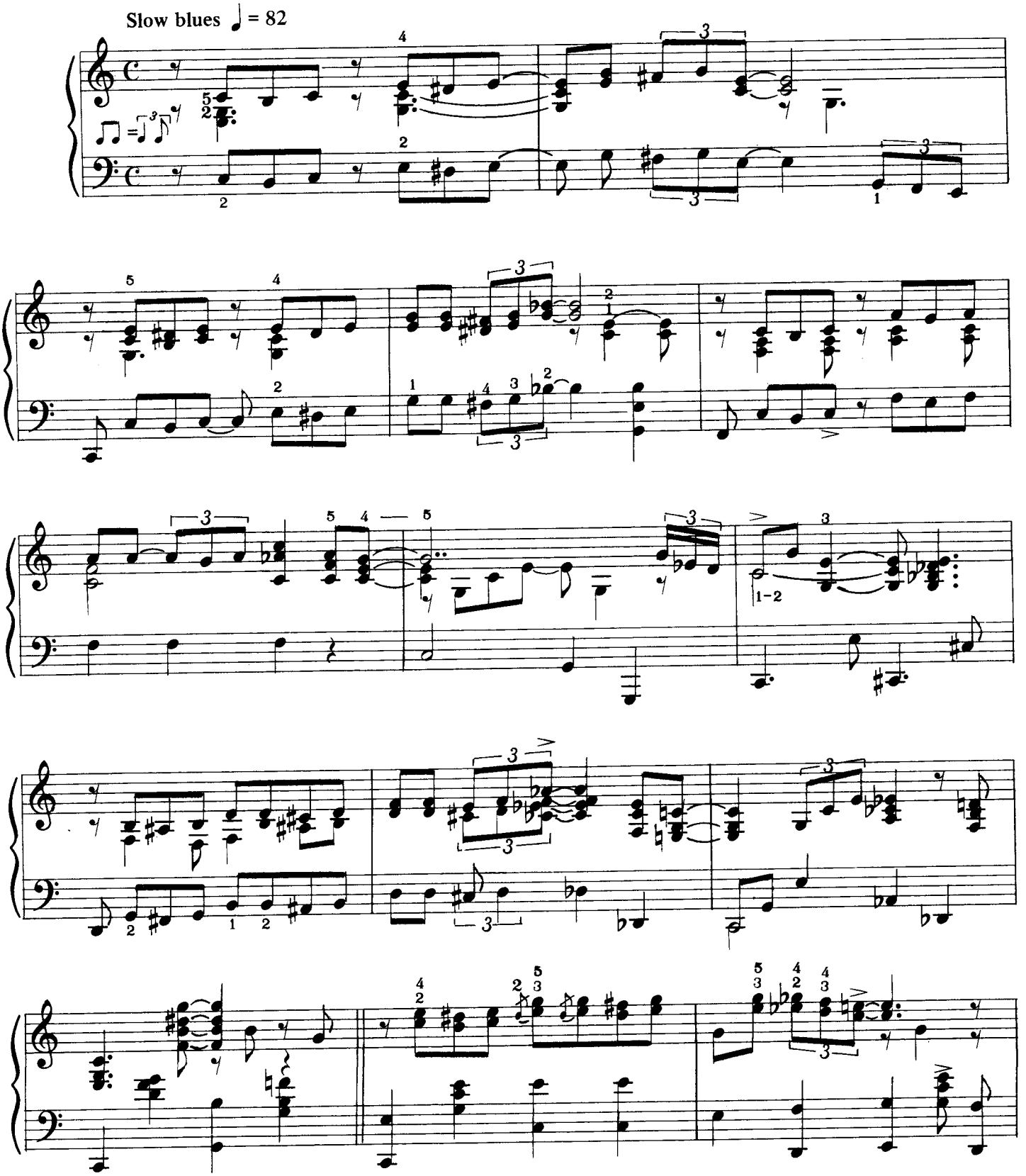
Hopkins' piano style can be romping, exciting and very forceful, but his favorite mood is soft and introspective. He has a deep blues feeling, and certainly is one of the best-versed "ticklers" in this genre. *Late Evening Blues* is a good example. In it, harmonies are rich, and phrasing is well articulated and delightful to listen to.

It must be pointed out that another Hopkins' rendition of this tune, recorded 1972 on Lp, *Soliloquy* (Sackville 3004), is very different from the one reported here. Besides showing Hopkins' improvisational skill, it further reveals that the ticklers' approach to the blues was not a mere "formal" affair.

Late Evening Blues

As Performed By Claude Hopkins

By Claude Hopkins



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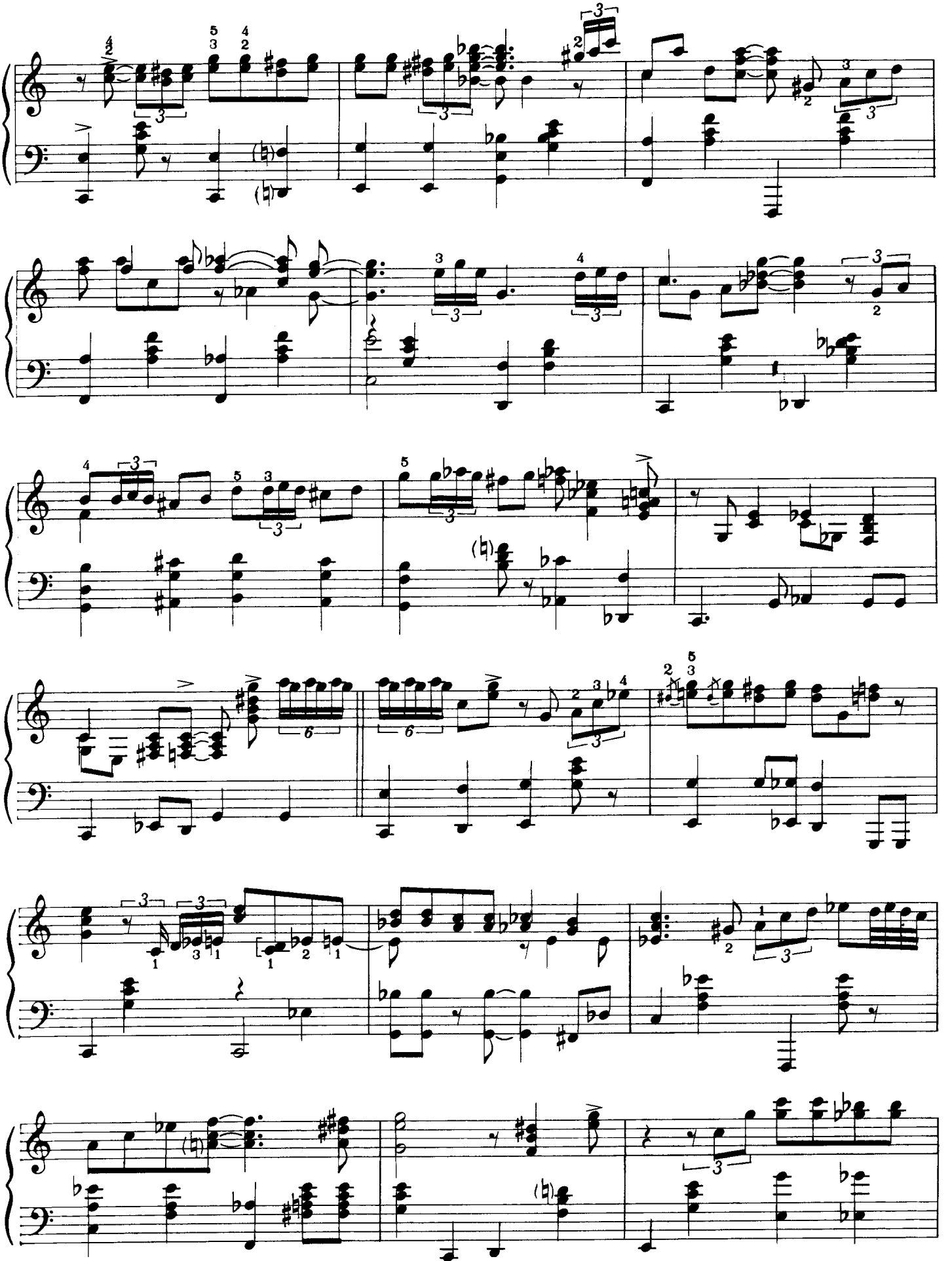
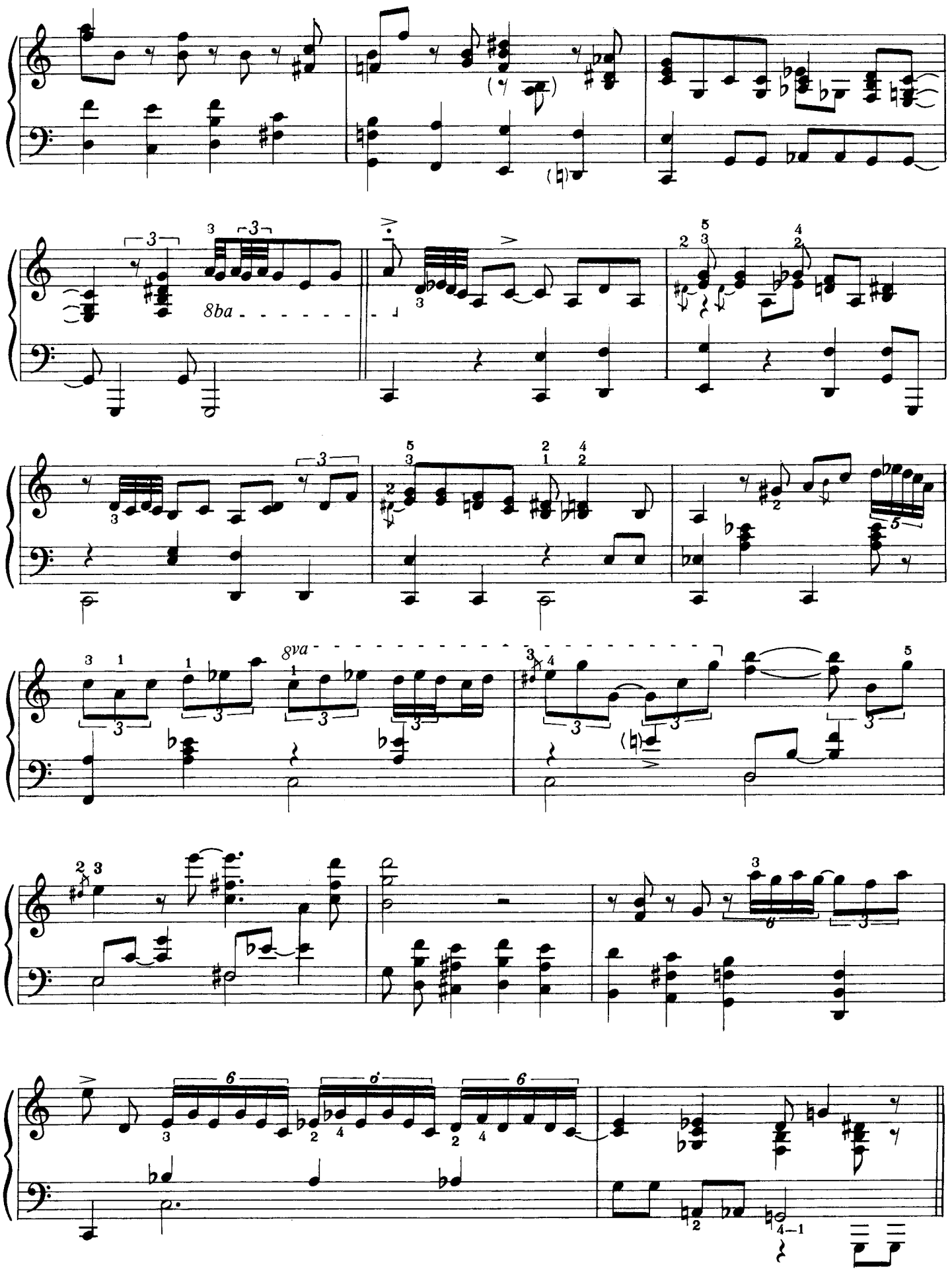
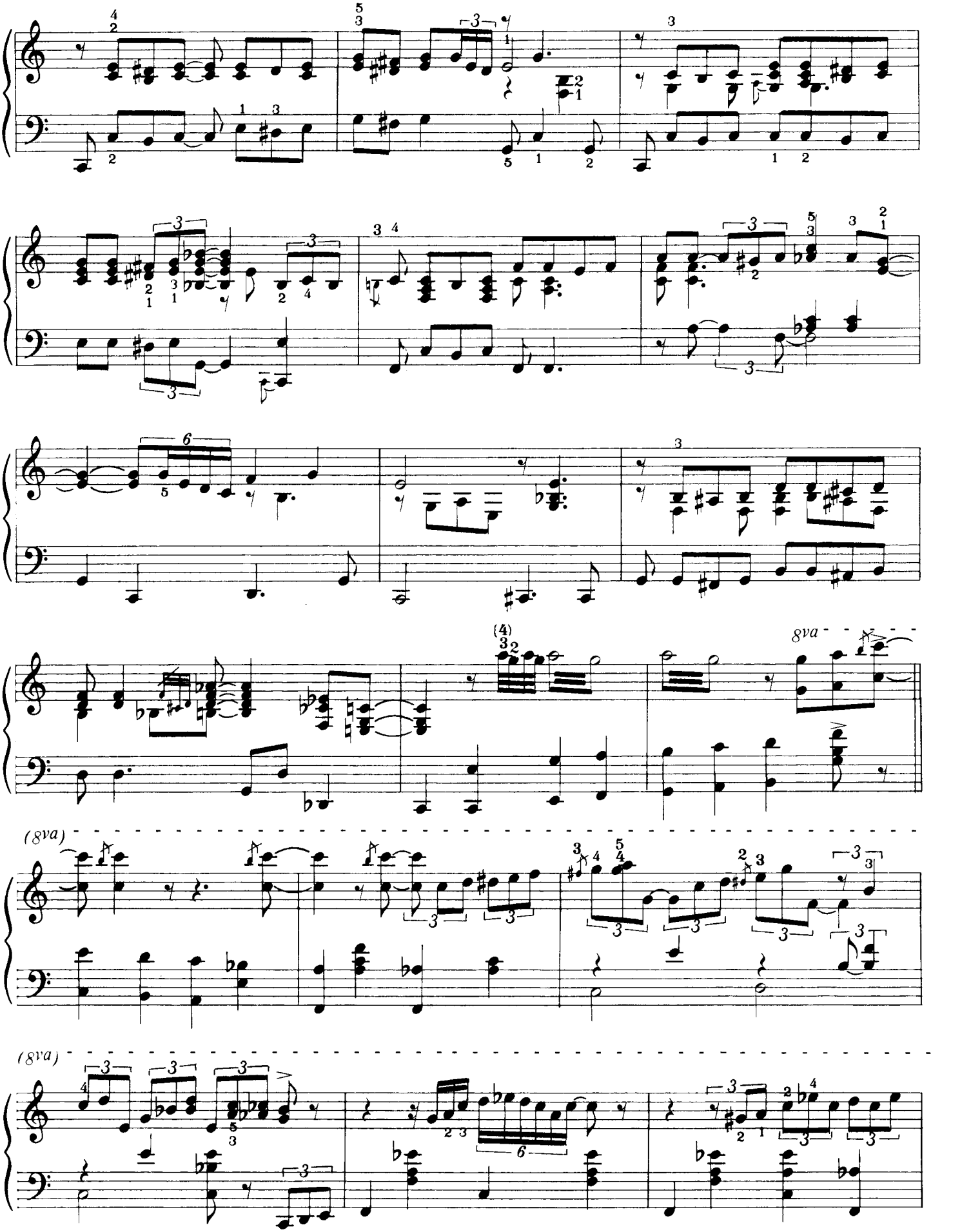
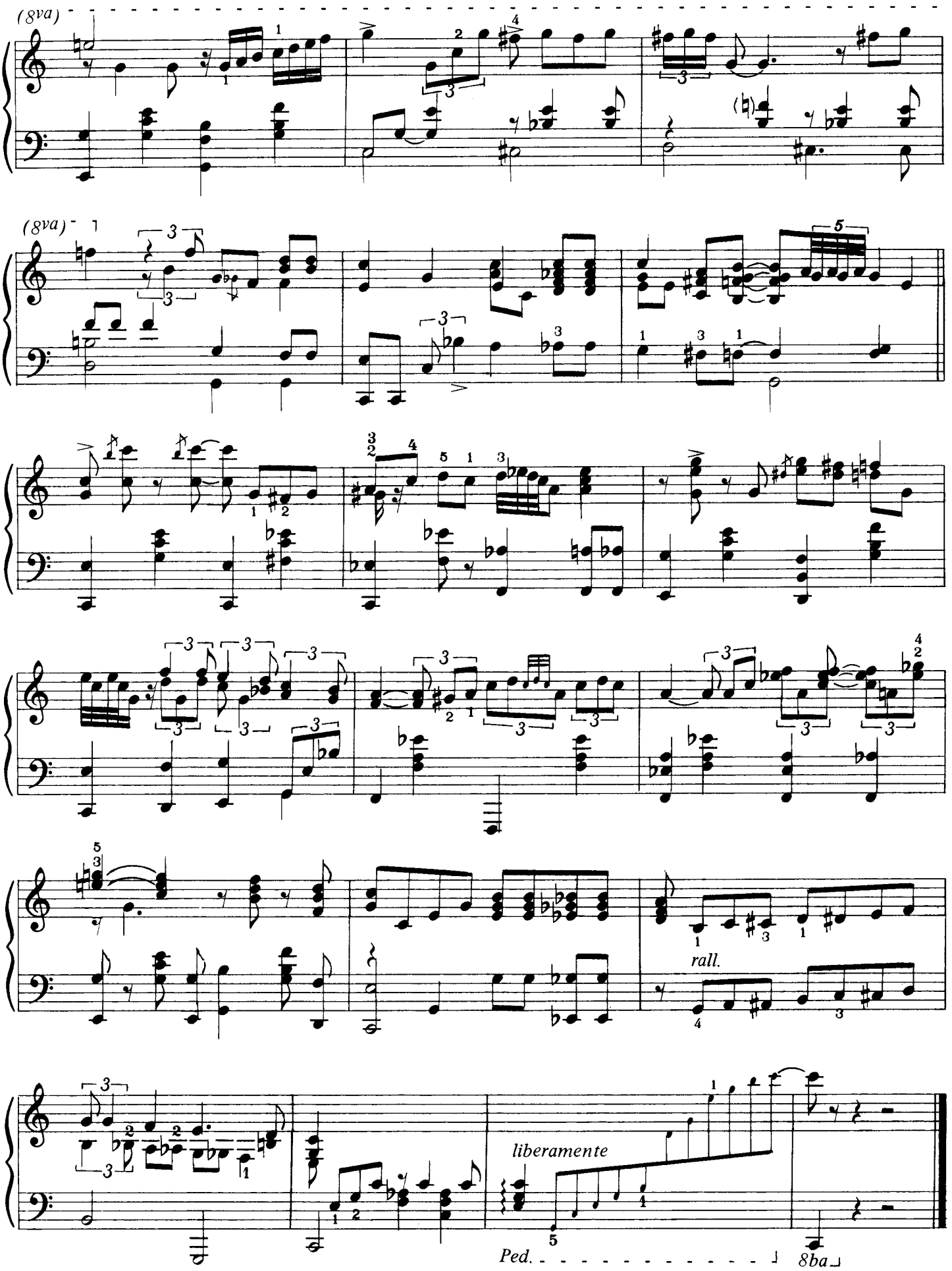



8ba
8va


8va
(8va)
(8va)


(8va)
(8va)
rall.
liberamente
Ped.
8ba

Lonesome Reverie

as recorded by James P. Johnson on Columbia CL 1780; June 14, 1939; reissued on Lp CBS 85387.

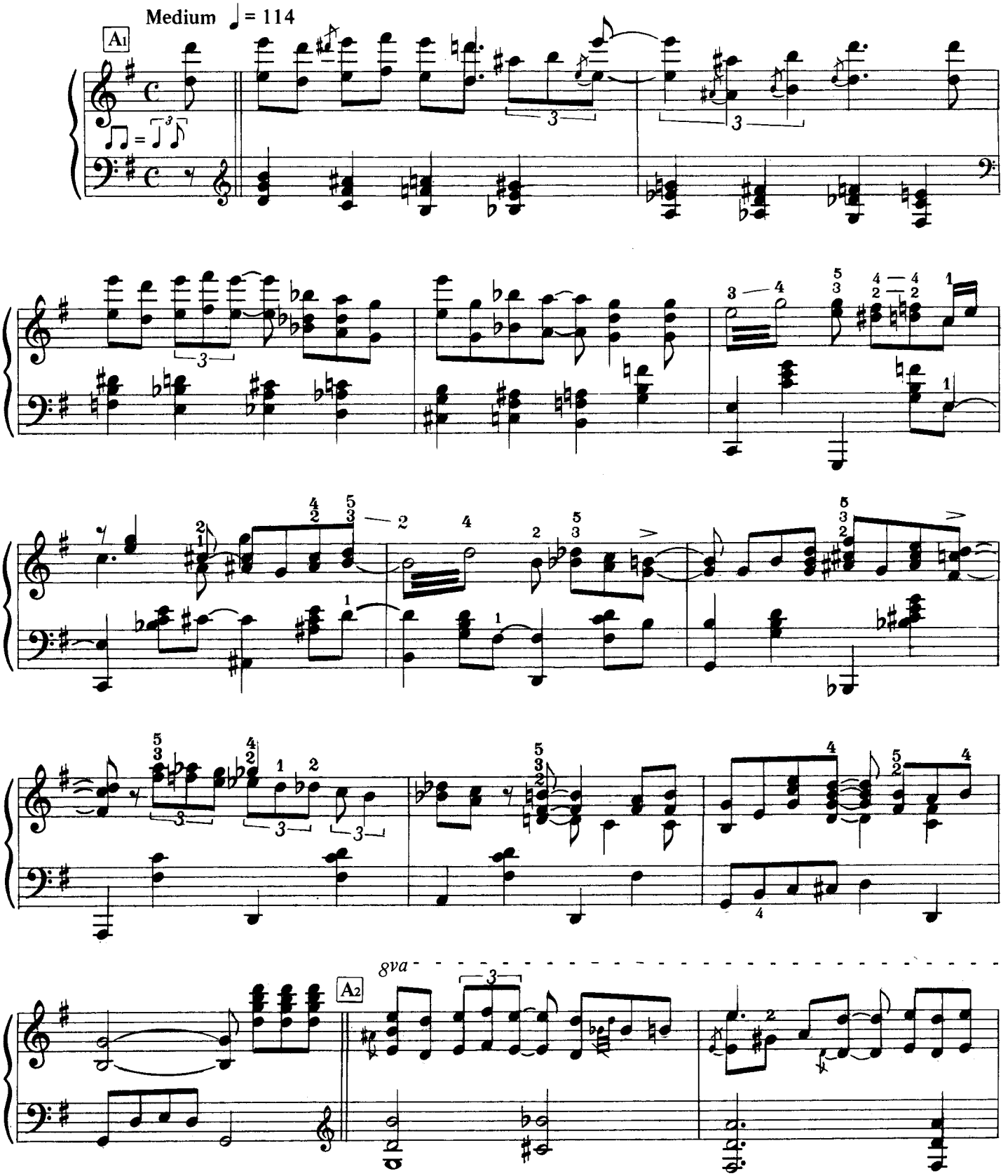
Similar in conception to *Blueberry Rhyme* (see transcription and introductory note), *Lonesome Reverie* is a solo of great emotional depth. It is structured in three strains (A, B and C). The first is repeated twice (A_1 and A_2) and is in 12-bar blues form. Strains B and C are both in 32-bar song form (aaba). C strain has beautiful harmonies and delightful right hand phrasing.

Johnson probably borrowed the interesting harmonization of the first four bars of the A_1 strain from the B strain of one of Waller's compositions, *African Ripples*, recorded by Fats in 1934.

Lonesome Reverie

As Performed By James P. Johnson

By James P. Johnson



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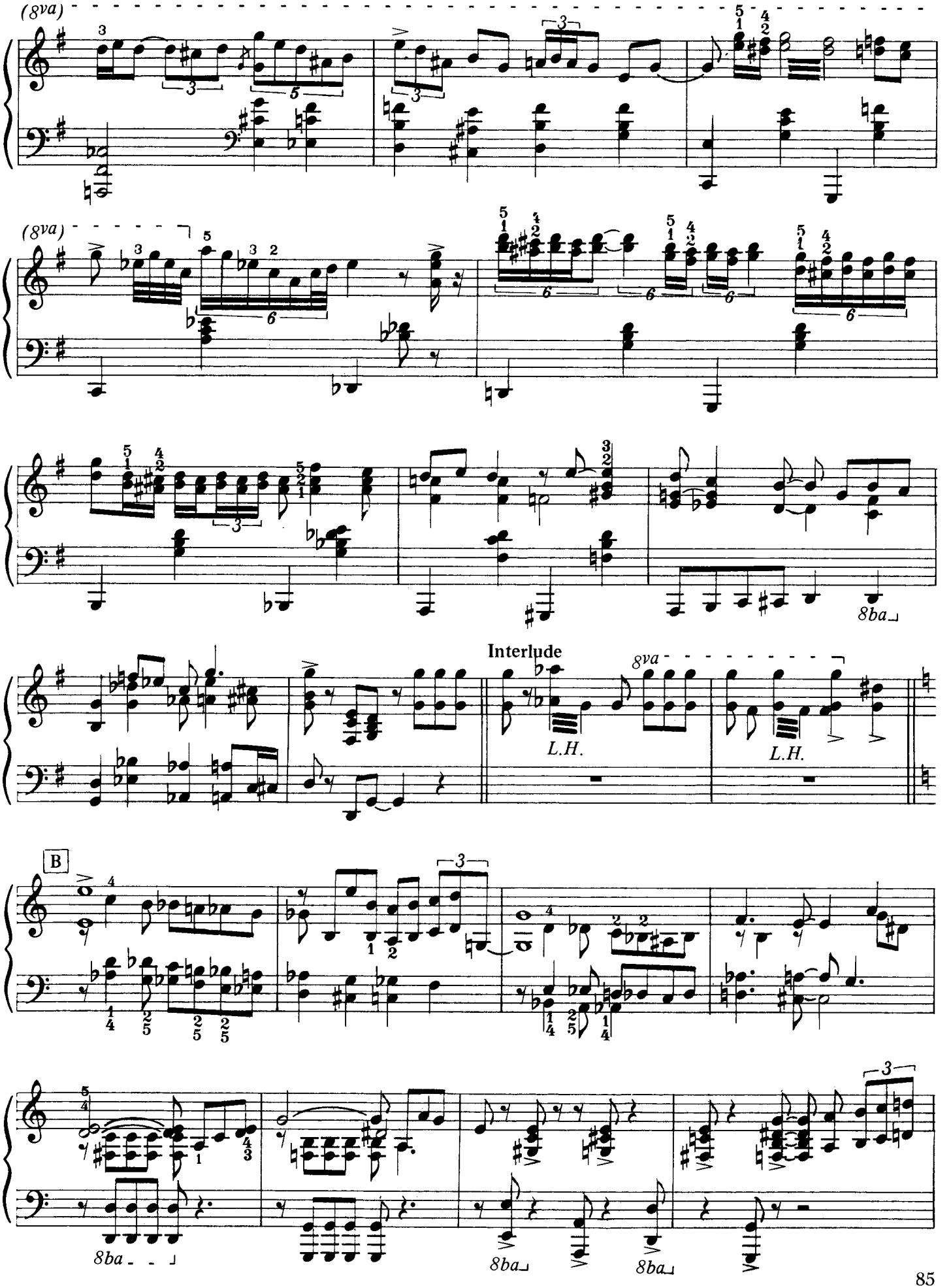
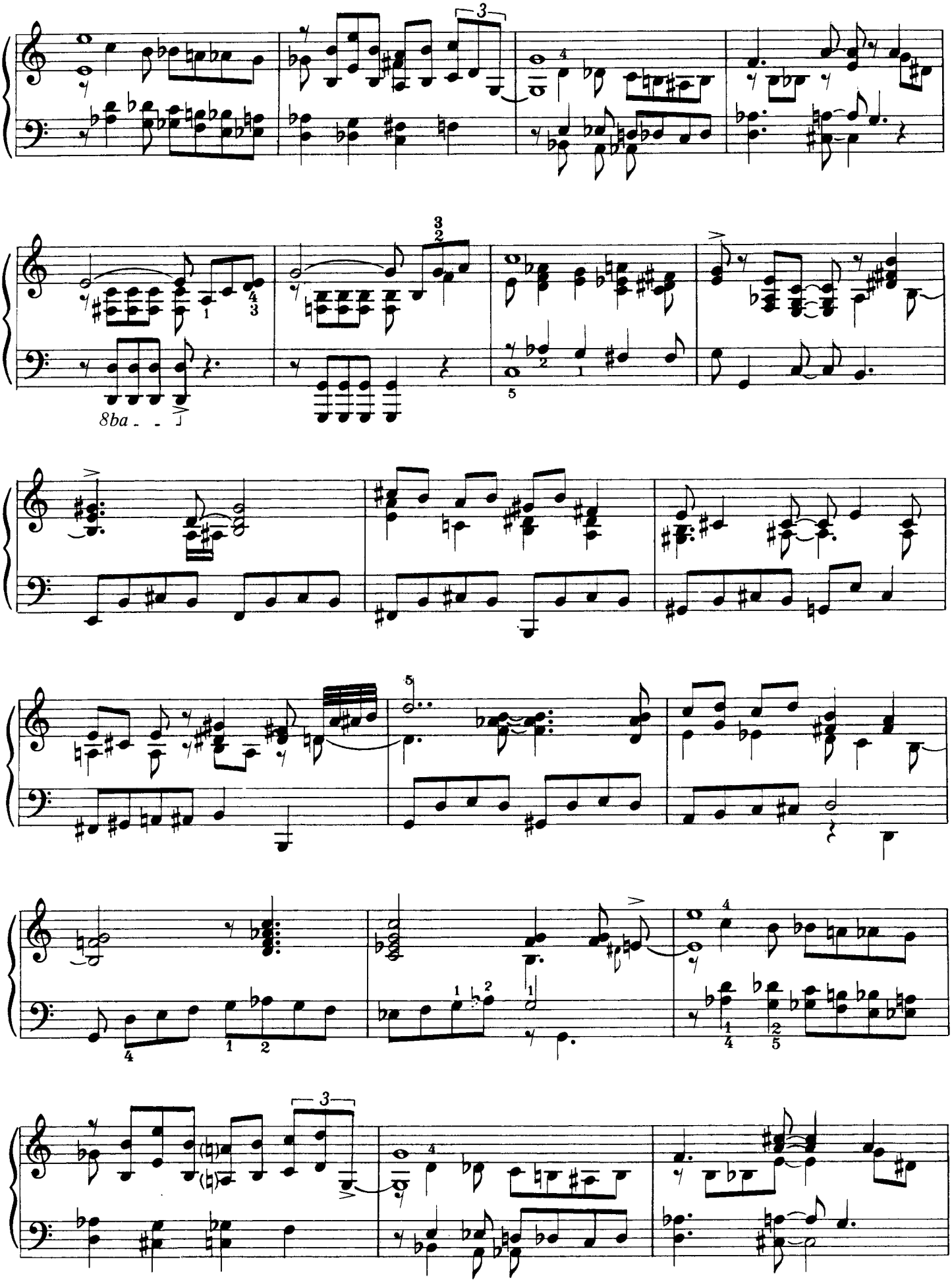
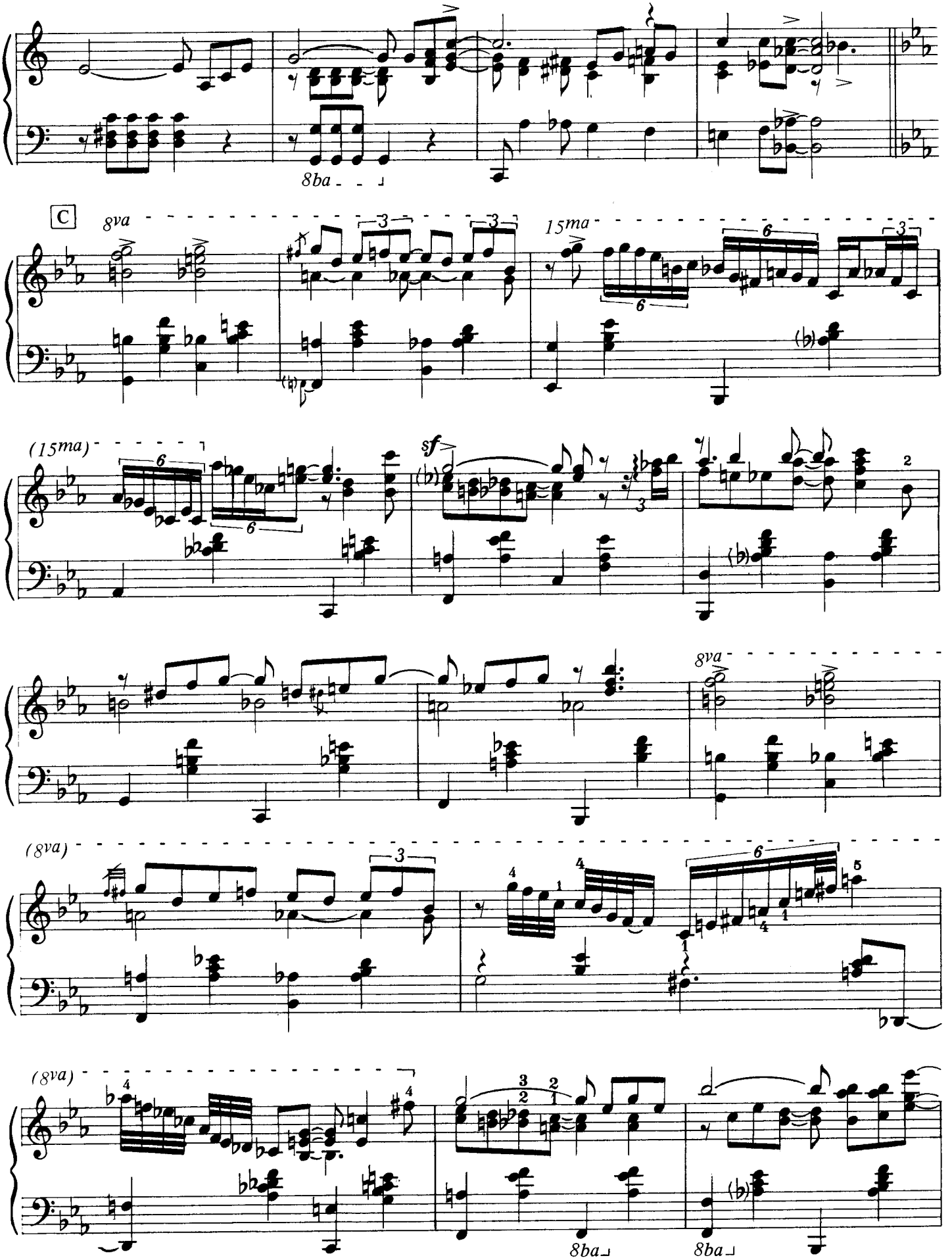
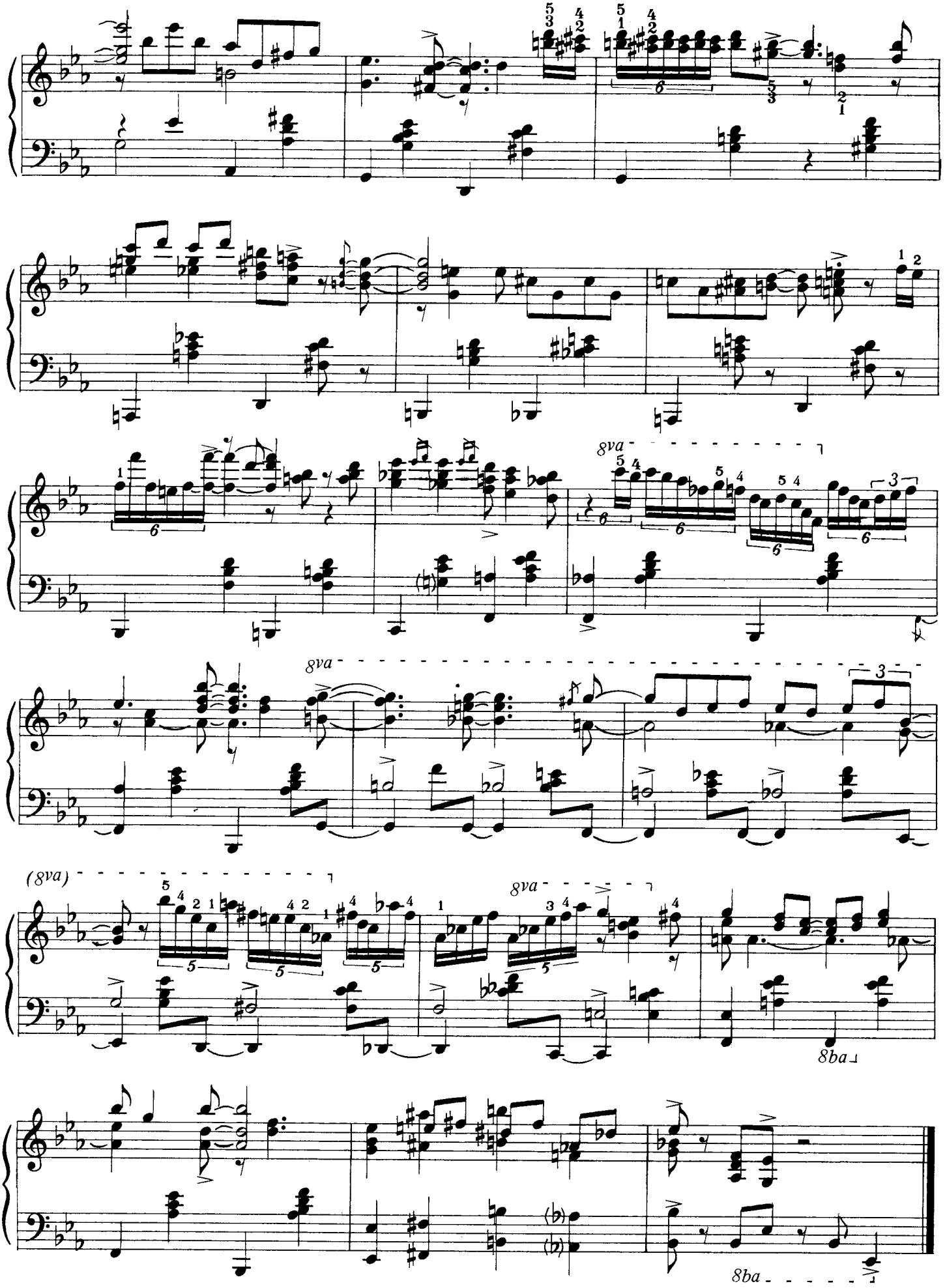

(8va)
(8va)
8ba
Interlude
8va
L.H.
L.H.
B
8ba
8ba
8ba


8ba


8ba
C
8va
15ma
(15ma)
sf
8va
(8va)
(8va)
8ba
8ba


8va
8va
(8va)
8va
8ba
8ba

Martinique

This transcription has been freely based on two Waller recordings: 1) V-Disc 74-A (VP 157), September 16, 1943; reissued on Lp RCA PM 43261, 2) a recording, not reported in the discographies, but issued on Lp Trip TLP-5819.

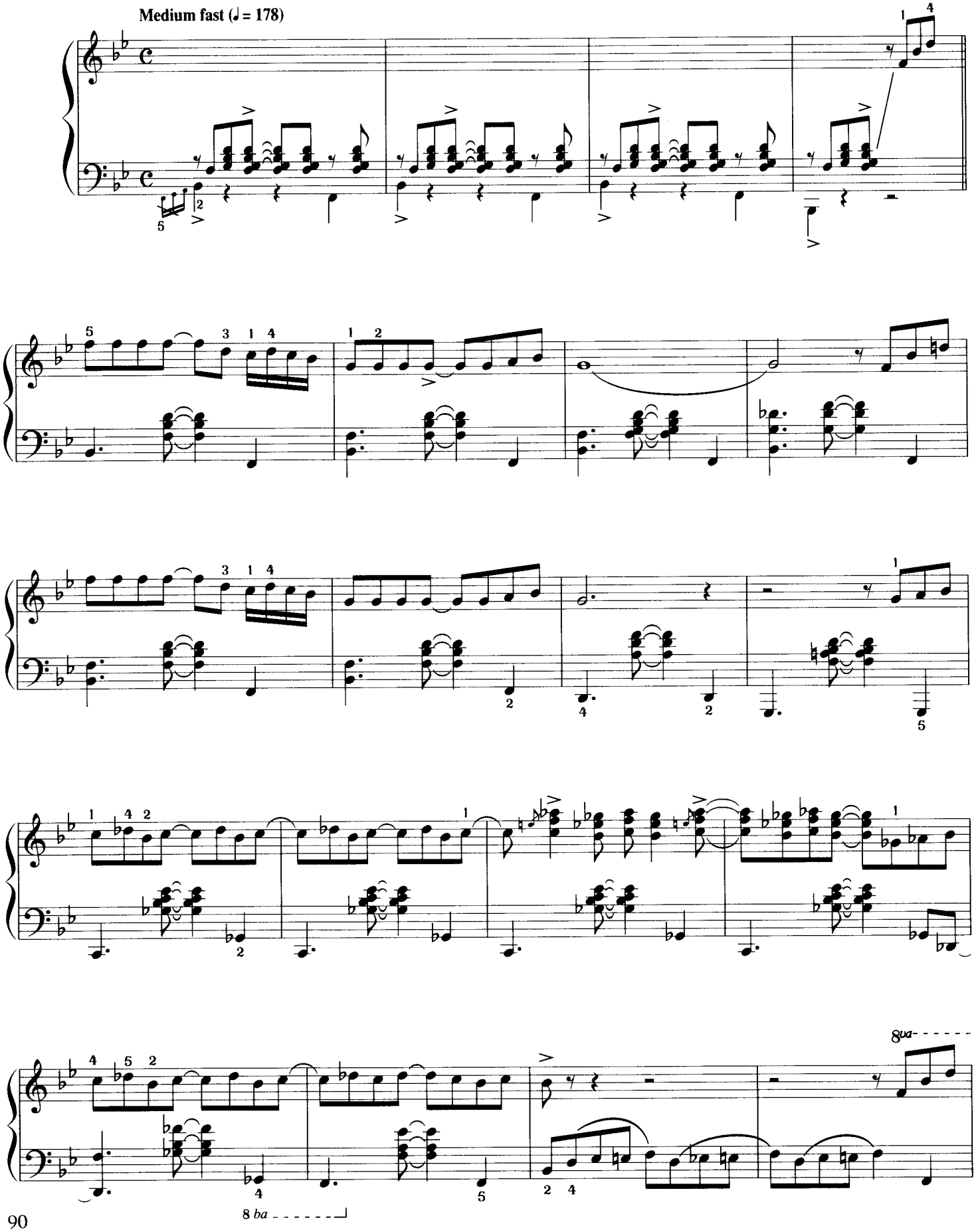
According to Richard Hadlock (*Jazz Masters of the Twenties*), *Martinique* is a rehash of an earlier Waller piece called *Mamacita*. It is a simple but quite effective solo, structured in two strains with a "habanera" accompaniment. The first strain is in 32-bar song form (aaba) and is repeated twice on V-Disc 74-A. The second strain is a chordal episode featured only in the Trip TLP-5819 recording.

It should be noted that the "habanera bass" (usually associated with the so-called "Spanish tinge") was generally used by early black pianists (notably Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll Morton, Jimmy Yancey) to set down an introspective or dramatic mood. (See *Dream Rag* and *The Dream* in this collection.) Waller used this technique in the second section of *Martinique*. In contrast, in the first section, "habanera bass" is the vehicle for pure joy and an exultant mood.

Martinique

A transcription freely based on two Thomas "Fats" Waller recordings

By Thomas "Fats" Waller



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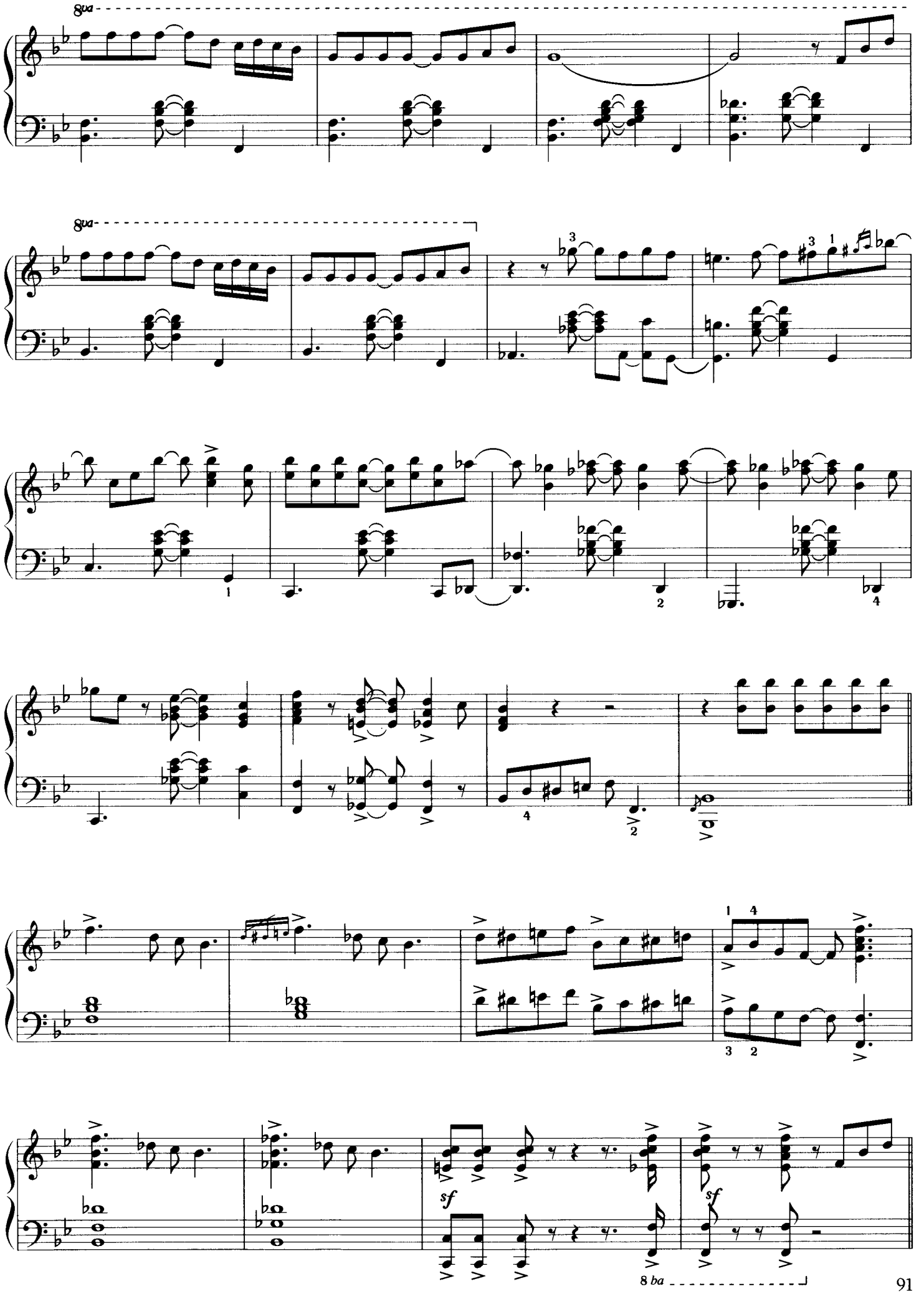
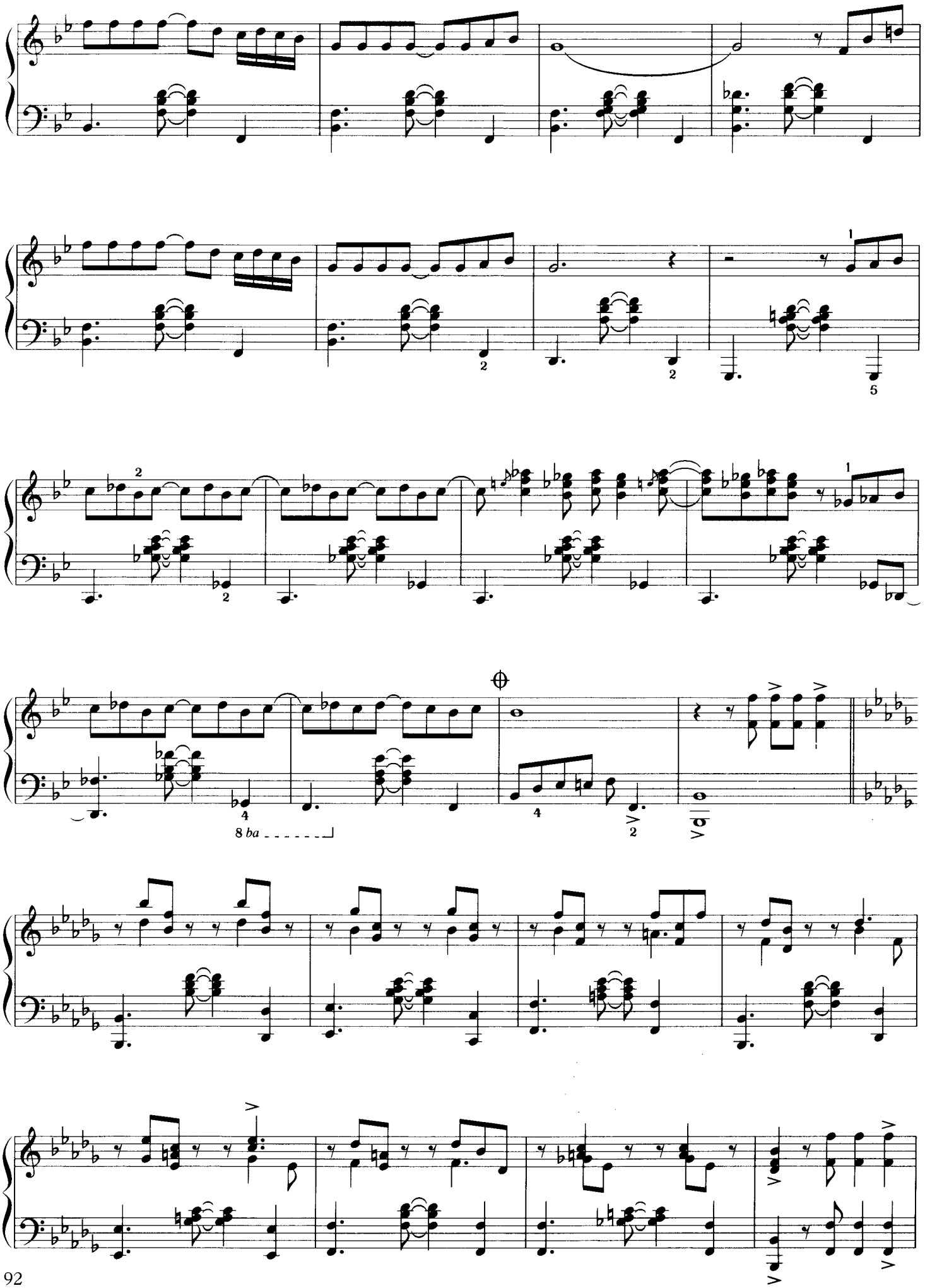
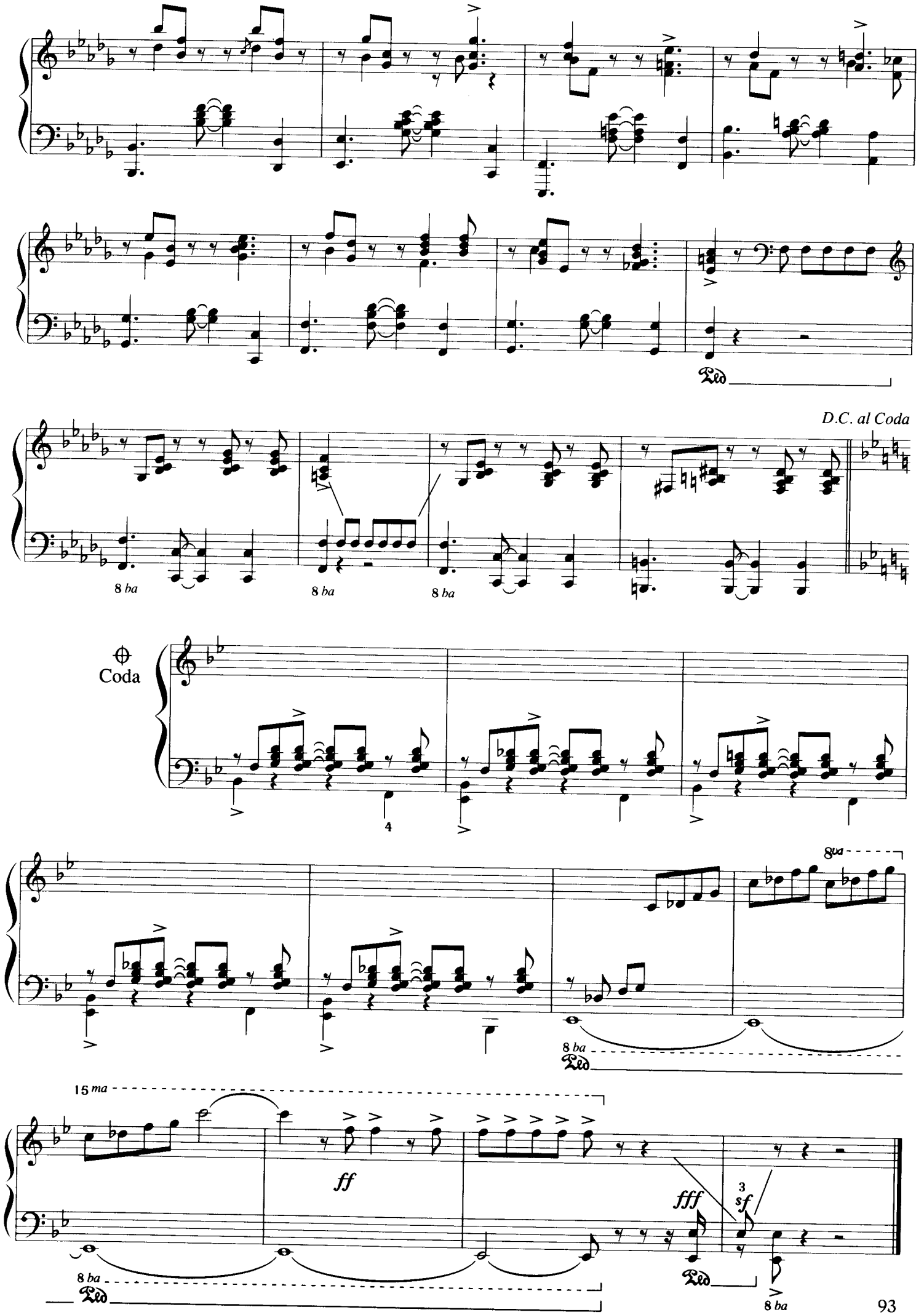

8va
8va
sf
sf
8 ba


8 ba


D.C. al Coda
8 ba
8 ba
8 ba
Coda
4
8va
8 ba
15 ma
ff
fff
3
sf
8 ba
8 ba

The Mule Walk

as recorded by James P. Johnson on Columbia CL 1780, June 14, 1939; reissued on Lp CBS 85387.

Composed about 1913, *The Mule Walk* is the pianistic version of an old set dance. The music of set dances (i.e. country and square dances) was one of the many musical expressions assimilated by James P. Johnson in his formulation of the Stride style. In this sense *The Mule Walk* (along with *Carolina Shout*) must be considered a prototype of Stride Piano, and an important piece in its repertory.

It consists of three strains (A, B and C) structured as follows:

Intro $A_1\ A_2\ B_1\ B_2\ A_3\ C_1\ C_2\ C_3$.

This is the most common formal structure used in "fast-shout" and early Stride compositions. In live performances or extended recordings the Stride pianists would play several improvised variations on the C strain. For example, in his great December 1943 Blue Note recording of *Caprice Rag* Johnson played a total of nine variations on the C strain. At the same recording session Johnson also recorded a highly improvised rendition of *The Mule Walk*, labeled *Mule Walk (Stomp)*, structured as follows:

Intro, $A_1\ A_2\ B_1\ B_2\ A_3\ C_1\ C_2\ A_4\ A_5\ B_3\ B_4\ C_3\ C_4\ C_5\ C_6\ C_7$.

Again the stress on the C strain is evident.

The Mule Walk has an infectious rhythm, and indeed Johnson composed it while working at The Jungles Casino to accompany the "wild and comical dances" (as he defined them) of the New York blacks who had immigrated from the South (mainly from Georgia and South Carolina). The Jungles Casino was just a small cellar situated in The Jungles (San Juan Hill), a tough New York district which, between 1910-1920, preceded Harlem as the major New York black community. The Jungles also offered great working opportunities for the "fast-shout" and early Stride players.

The C strain of this rendition of *The Mule Walk* also features Johnson's penchant for dissonances. Note the harmonic clash of minor seconds played simultaneously, and the augmented fourth-based voicings.

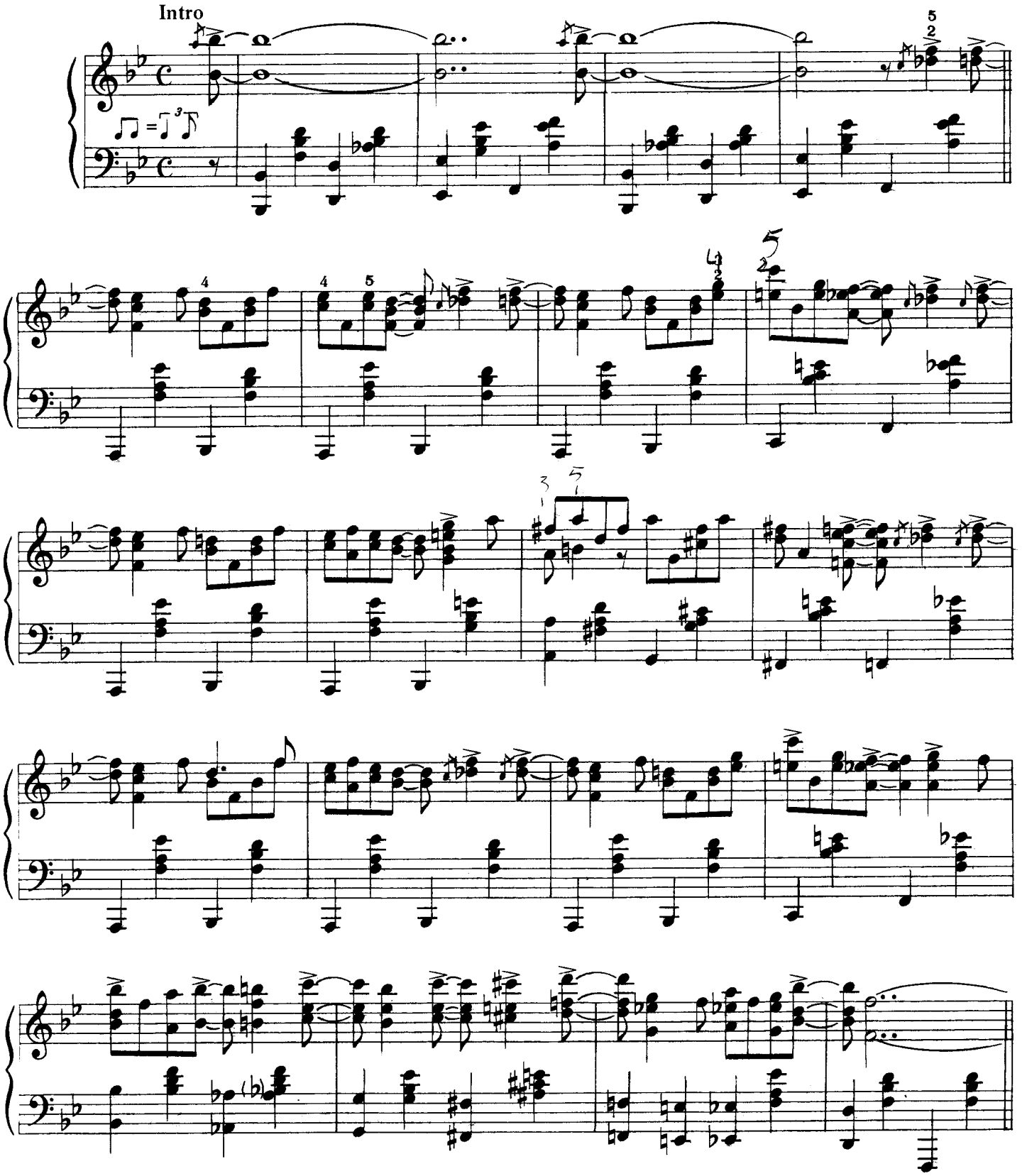
The Mule Walk

As Performed By James P. Johnson

Fast ♩ = 216

By James P. Johnson

Intro



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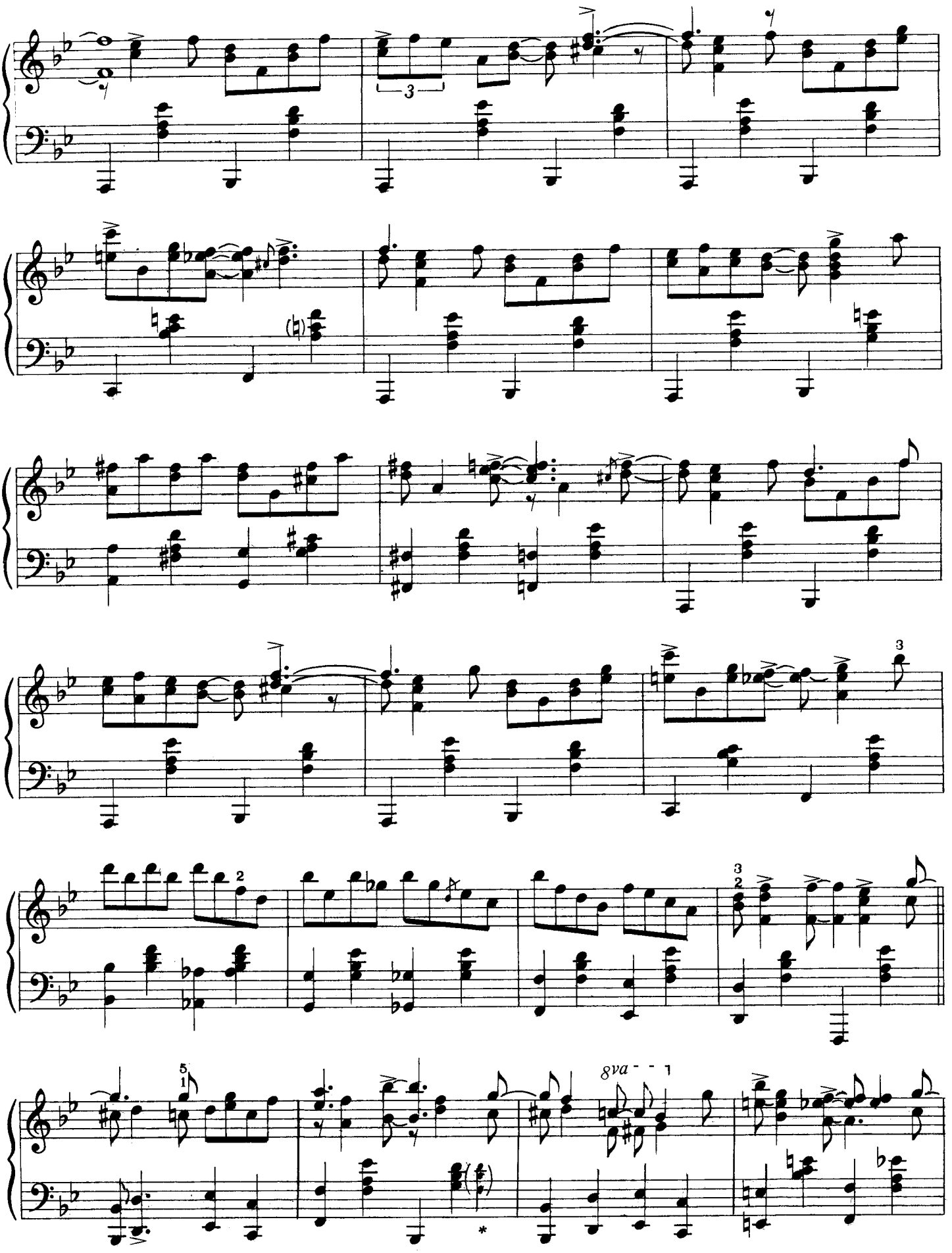
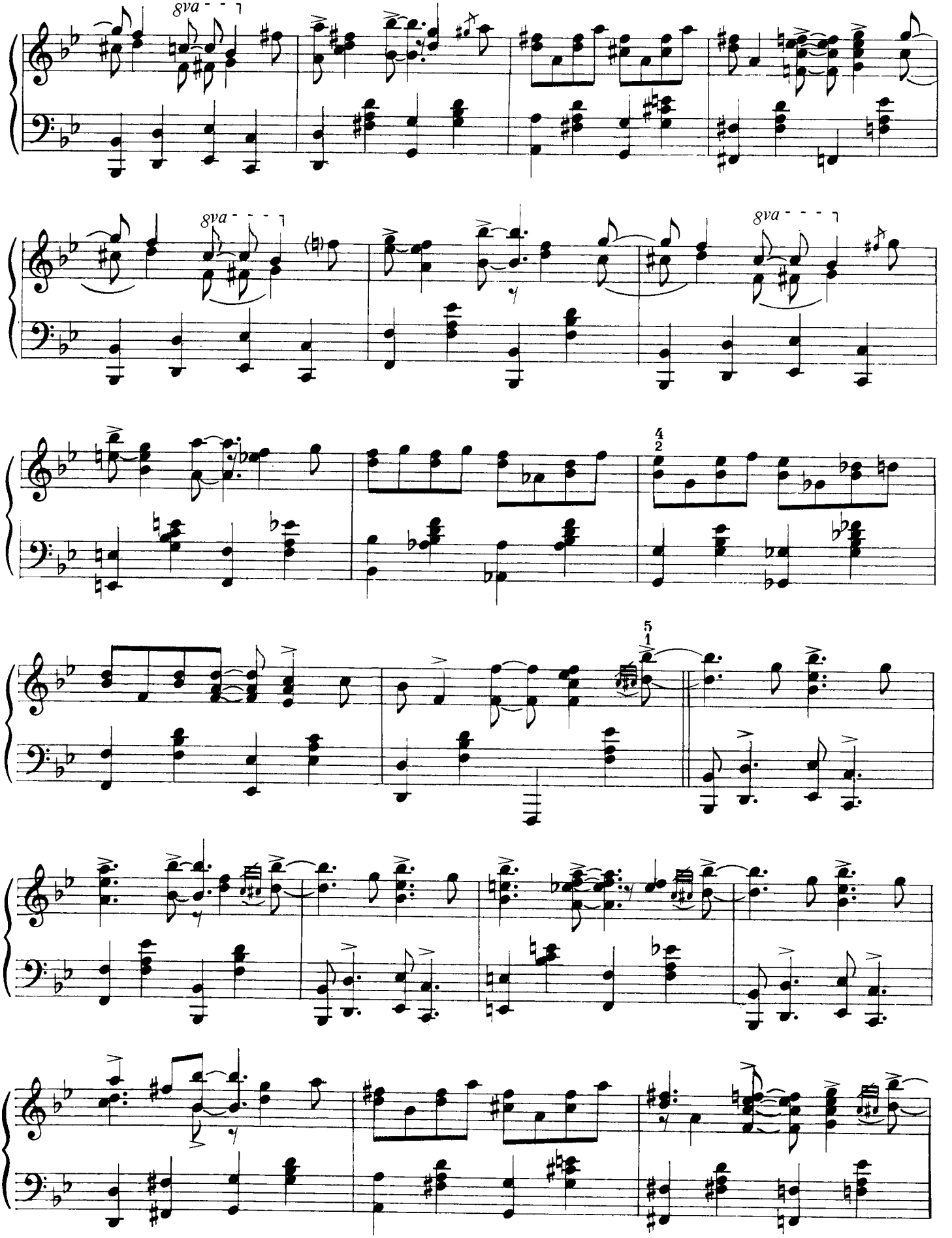
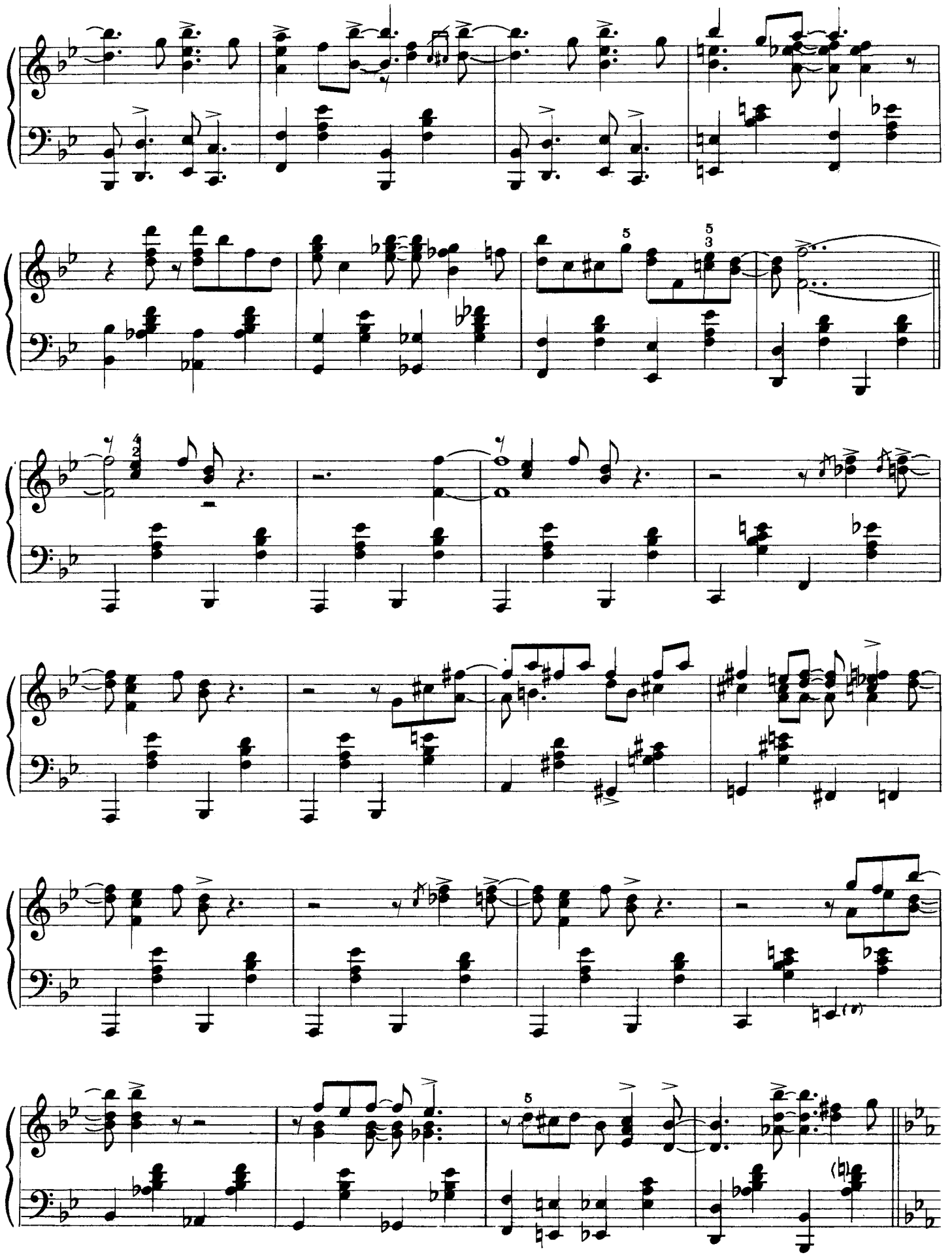
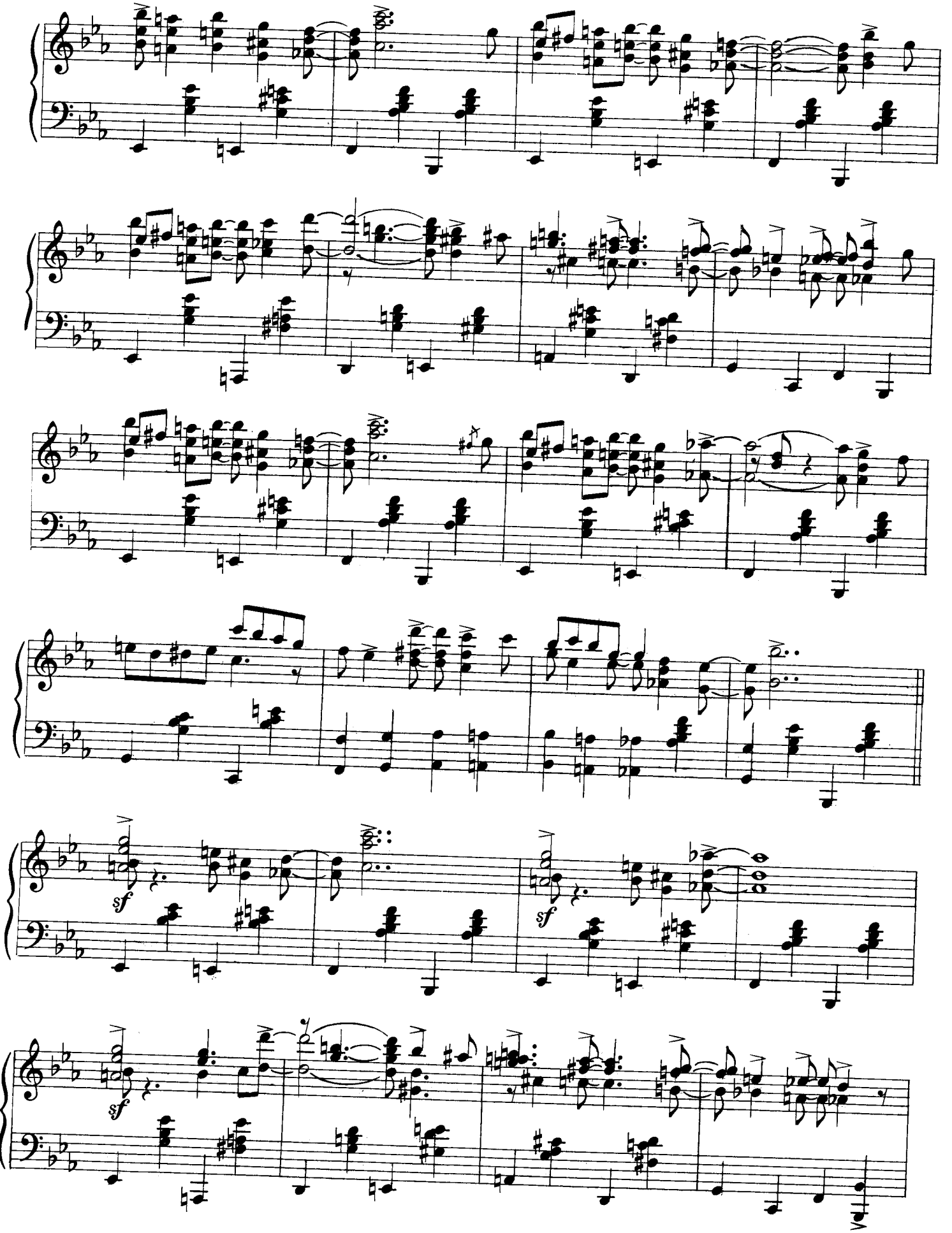
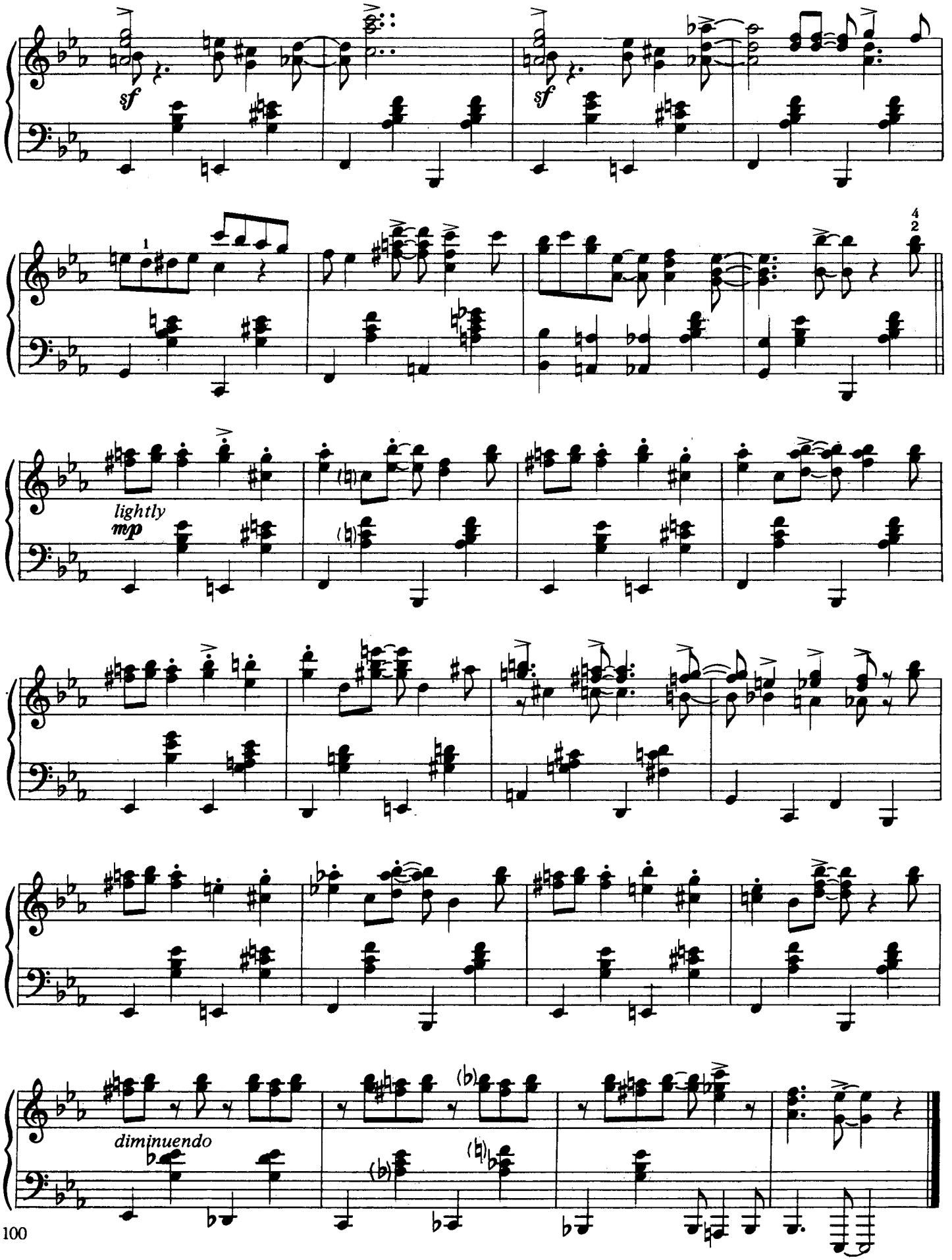

3
8va
* Alternative


8va
8va
8va
4
2
5
1




sf
sf
sf


sf
sf
1
4
2
lightly
mp
diminuendo

Numb Fumblin'

as recorded by Fats Waller on March 1, 1929; reissued on Lp French RCA PM 43270.

A masterpiece of Stride and blues piano, this solo was recorded by Waller seemingly without any rehearsal, as if at the end of a recording session there was some tape left and he decided to continue playing.

In each of the six choruses Waller develops a coherent musical idea, revealing a more advanced concept of the blues than his contemporaries. His personality shines clearly in the introduction. It is imbued with a blues feeling very unlike his contemporaries' heavy "low down" renditions of the blues. In addition, the long series of "walking" tenth triads in the left hand (first and second choruses) proves that this technique was not the exclusive invention of Earl Hines and Teddy Wilson as it has often been said. Indeed, the "walking" tenth triads had been used by Eubie Blake and James P. Johnson as early as the late 1910s and early 1920s (as demonstrated in their piano rolls and recordings). But it was Waller who used them systematically as a trademark of his style.

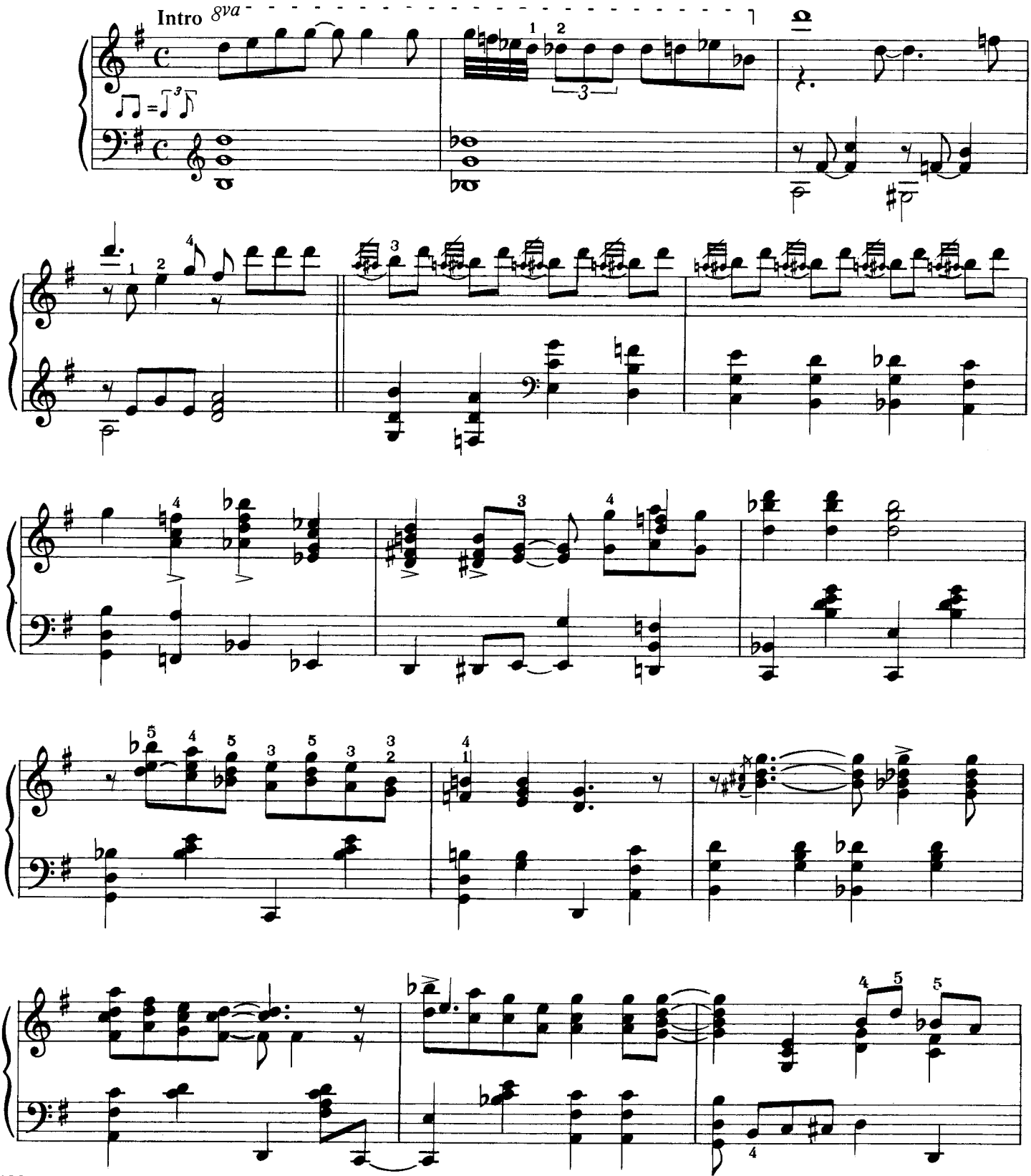
Throughout this solo Waller's melodic gift is unmistakable in his characteristic use of repeated figures (which sometimes fall irregularly on the beats). The third chorus is a delightfully ironic episode. Upon hearing the pentatonic-based waterfall in the last chorus we understand why Art Tatum often quoted Waller as his major source of inspiration.

Numb Fumblin'

As Performed By Thomas "Fats" Waller

Medium blues ♩= 108

Words and Music by Thomas "Fats" Waller



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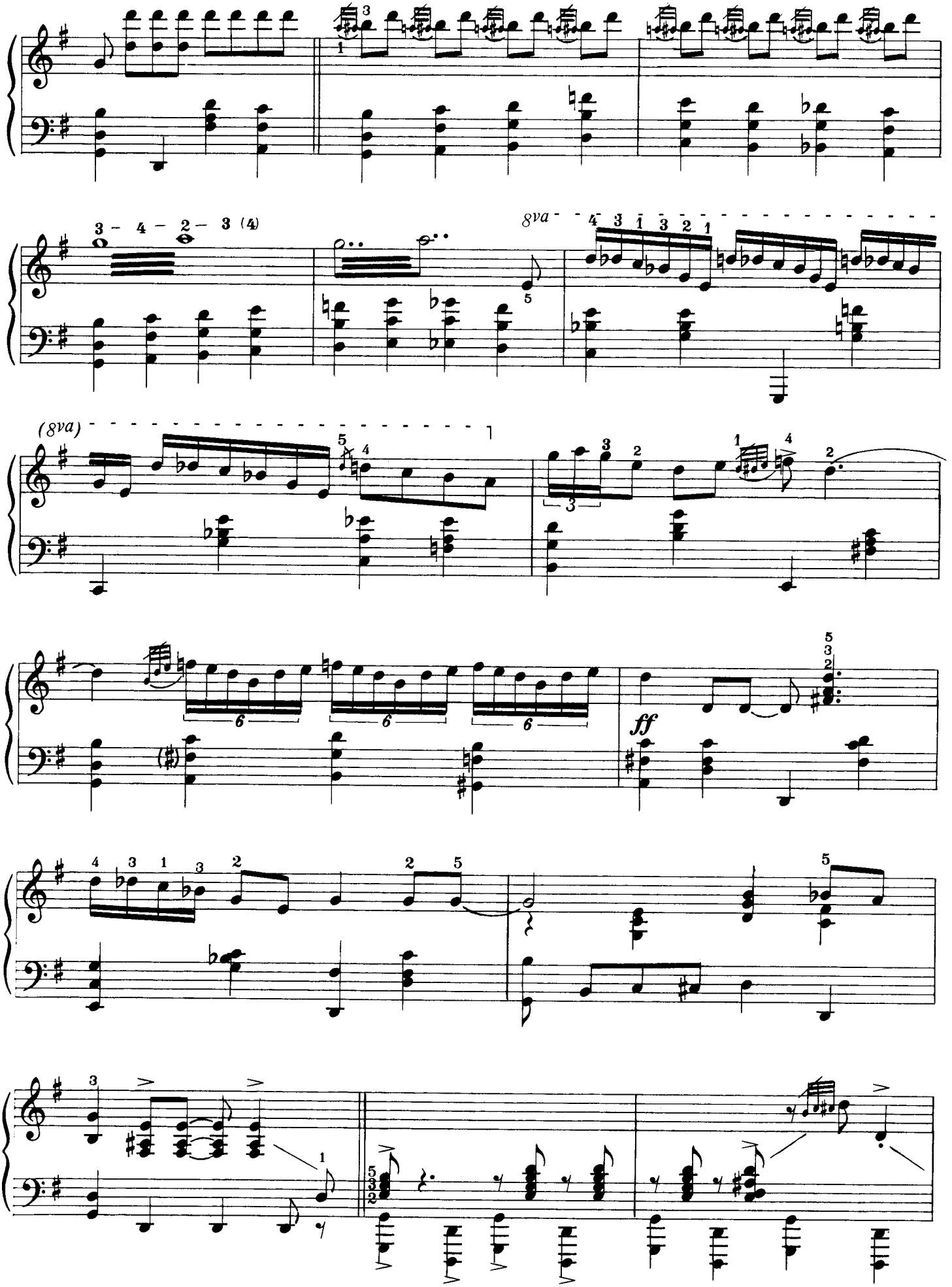
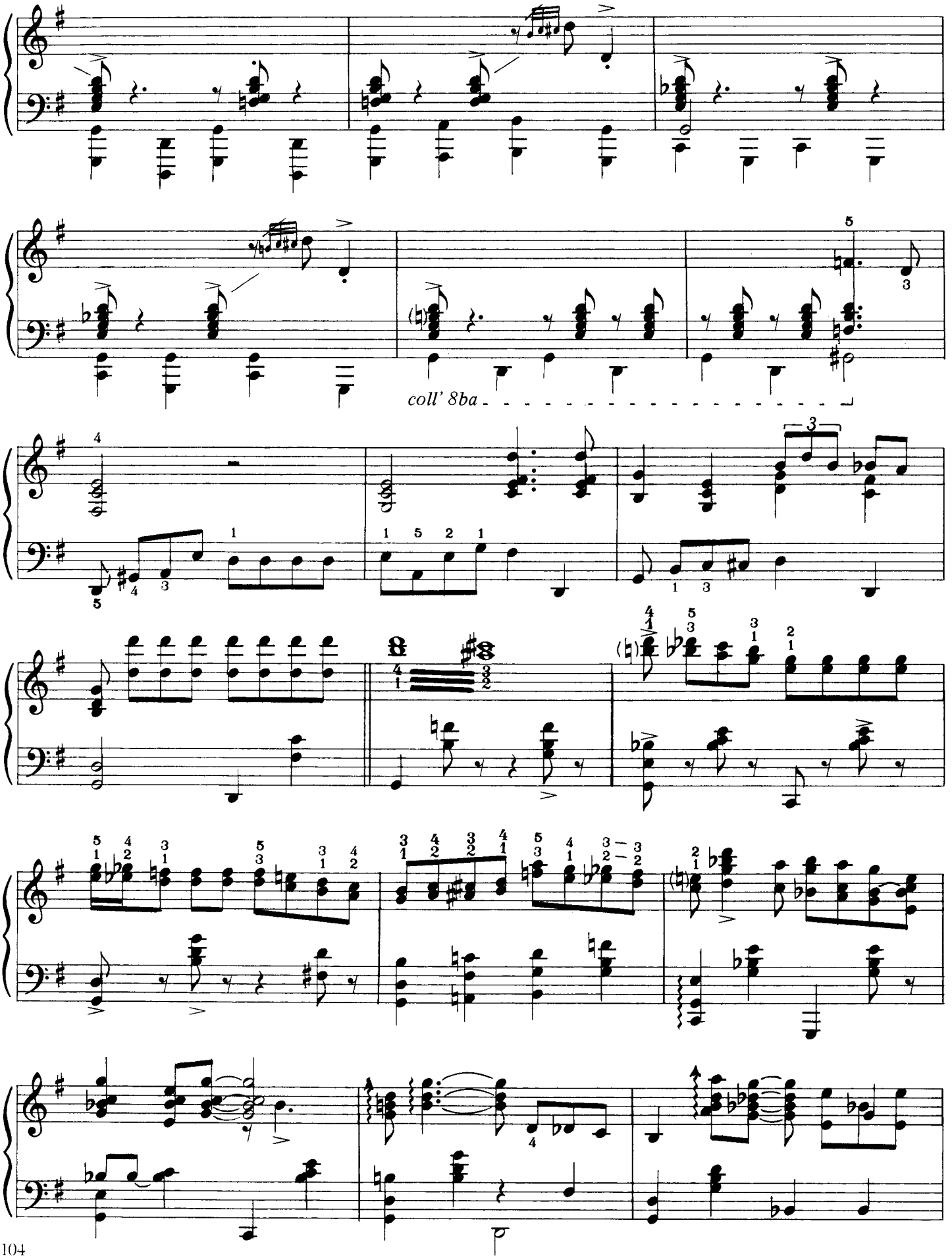
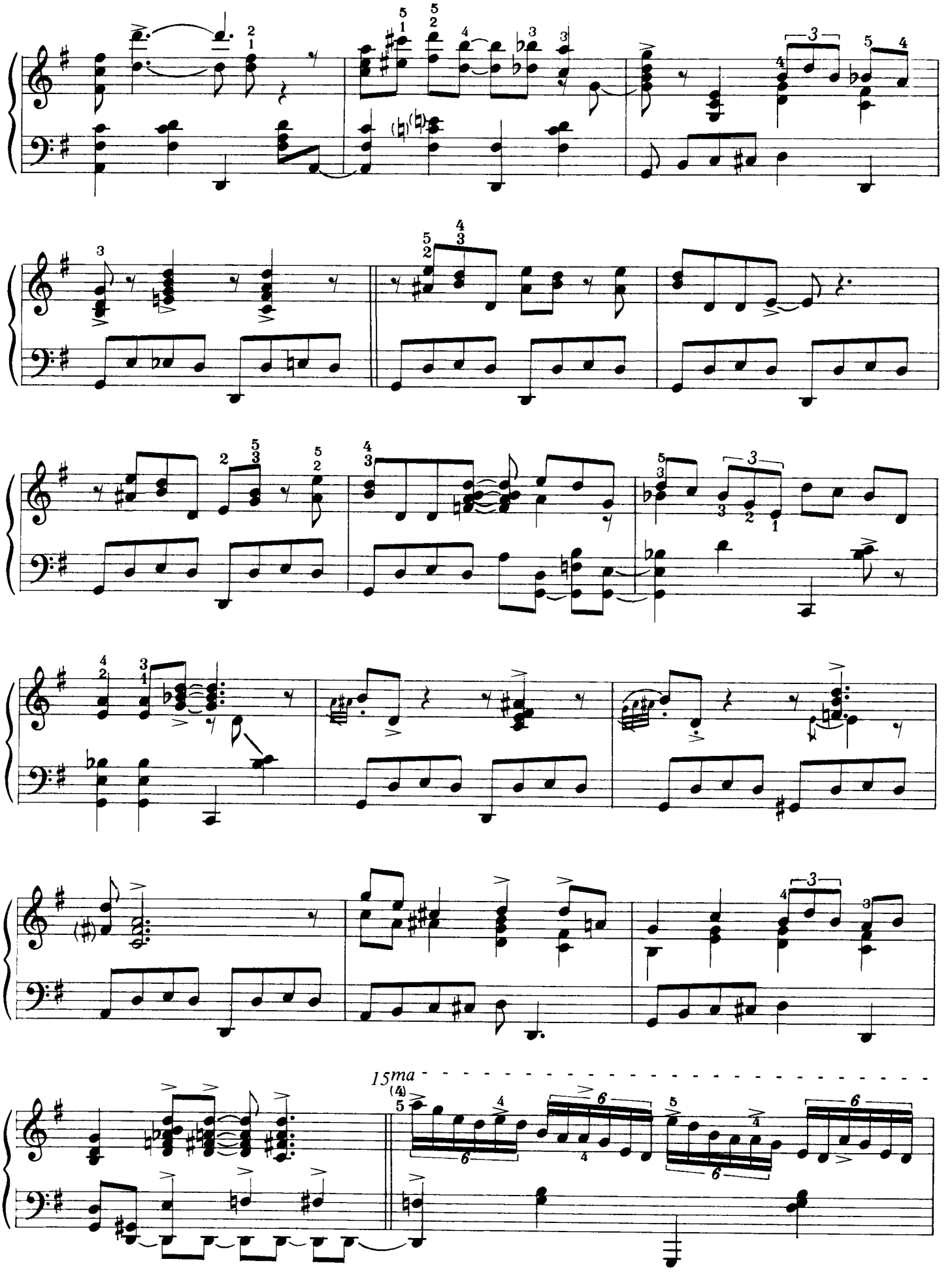
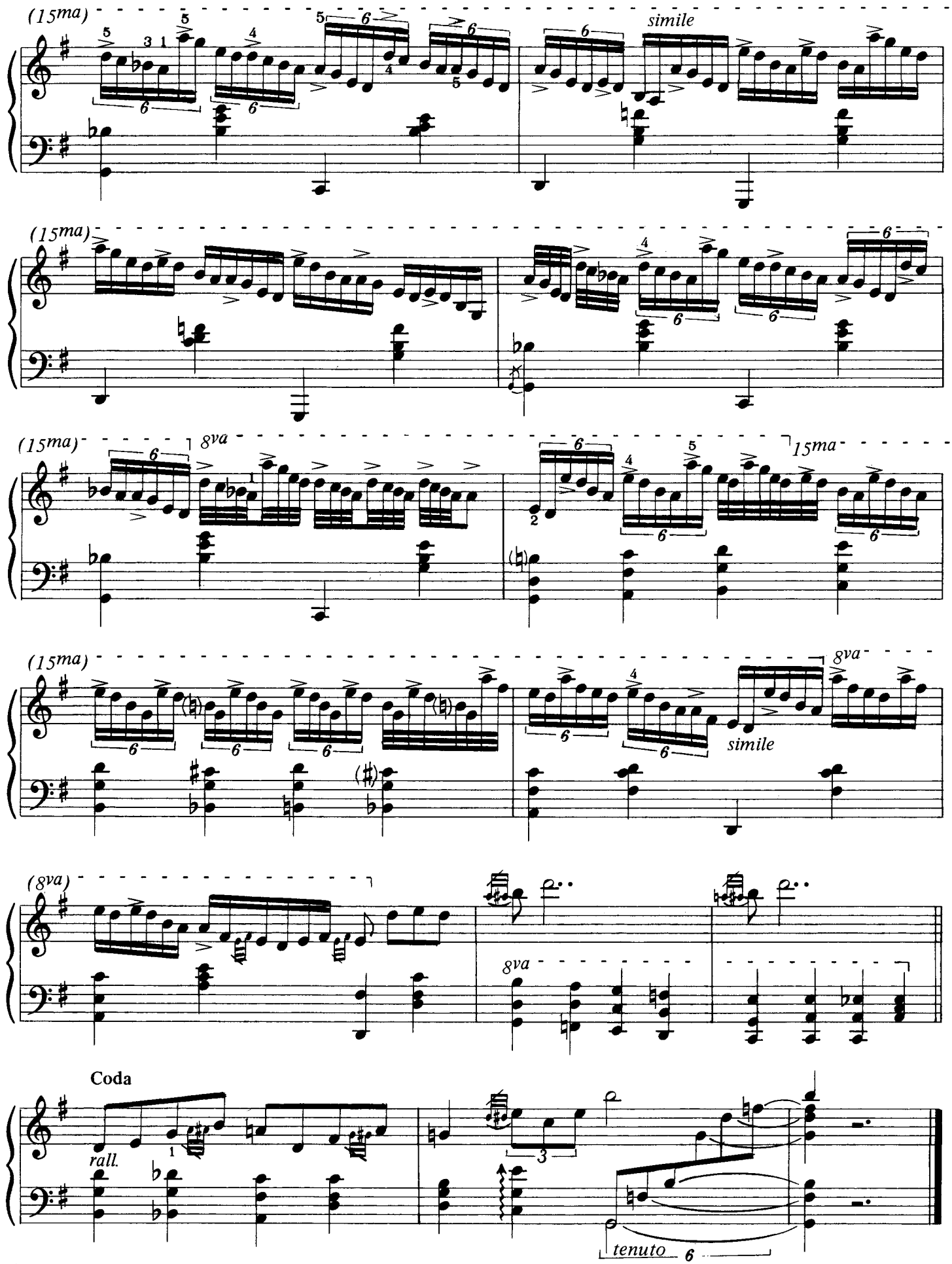

8va
(8va)
ff


coll' 8ba


15ma


(15ma)
simile
(15ma)
(15ma)
8va
15ma
(15ma)
simile
8va
(8va)
8va
Coda
rall.
tenuto

Outer Space

as recorded by Luckey Roberts on Lp Good Time Jazz S 10035; March 18, 1958.

According to the liner notes to Lp Good Time Jazz S 10035, the theme of *Outer Space* is derived from the ending of Robert's tune, *Exclusively With You.*

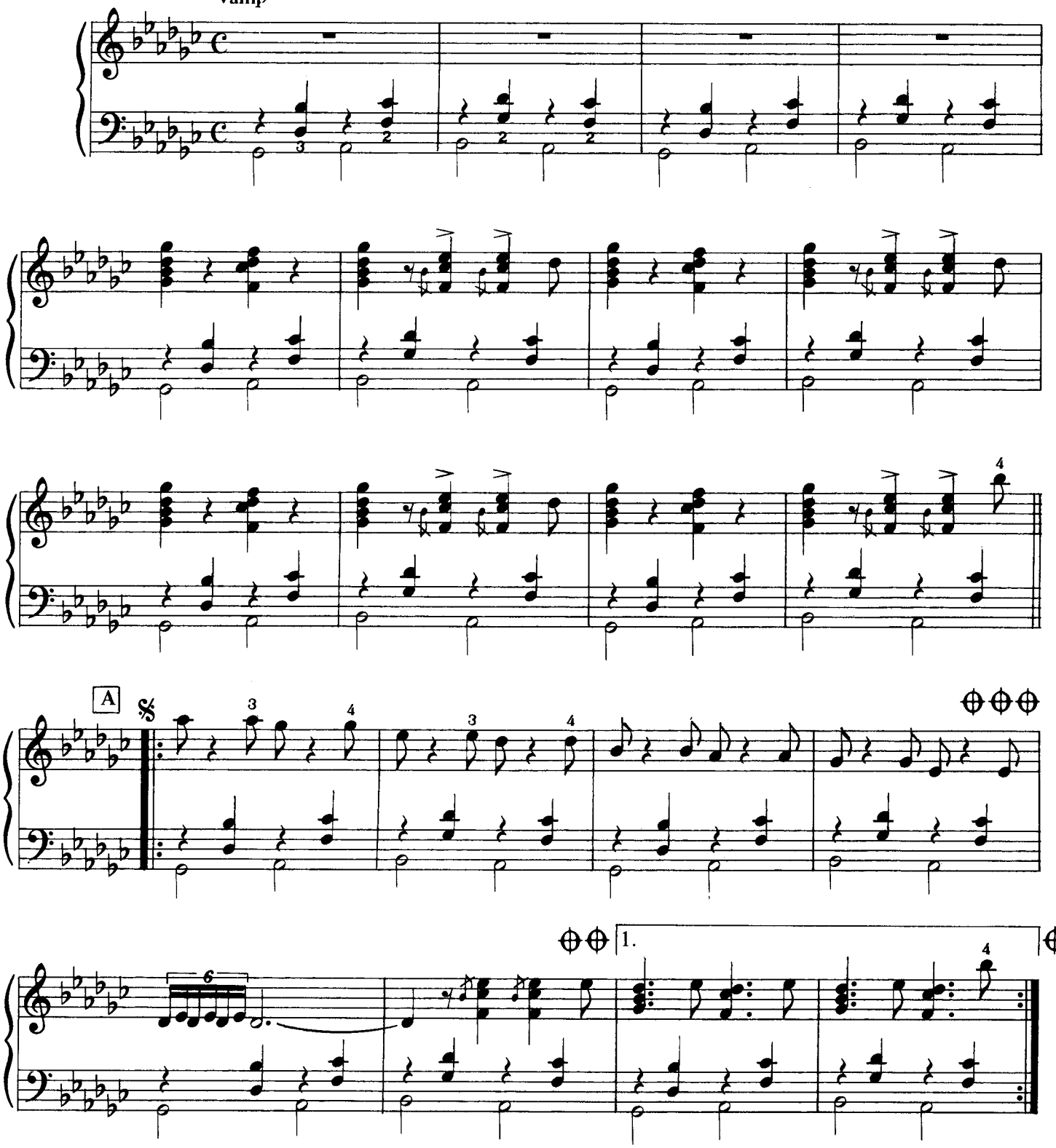
Based almost exclusively on tonic and dominant chords, *Outer Space* is not Luckey's major effort on record nor is it fully representative of his frantic, very difficult style. Nevertheless, it is a good exercise in left hand tenths, with an exciting B strain very reminiscent of the "shouted" black church music. Gb was Luckey's favorite key.

Outer Space

As Performed By Luckey Roberts

Fast ♩ = 240
Vamp

By Luckey Roberts



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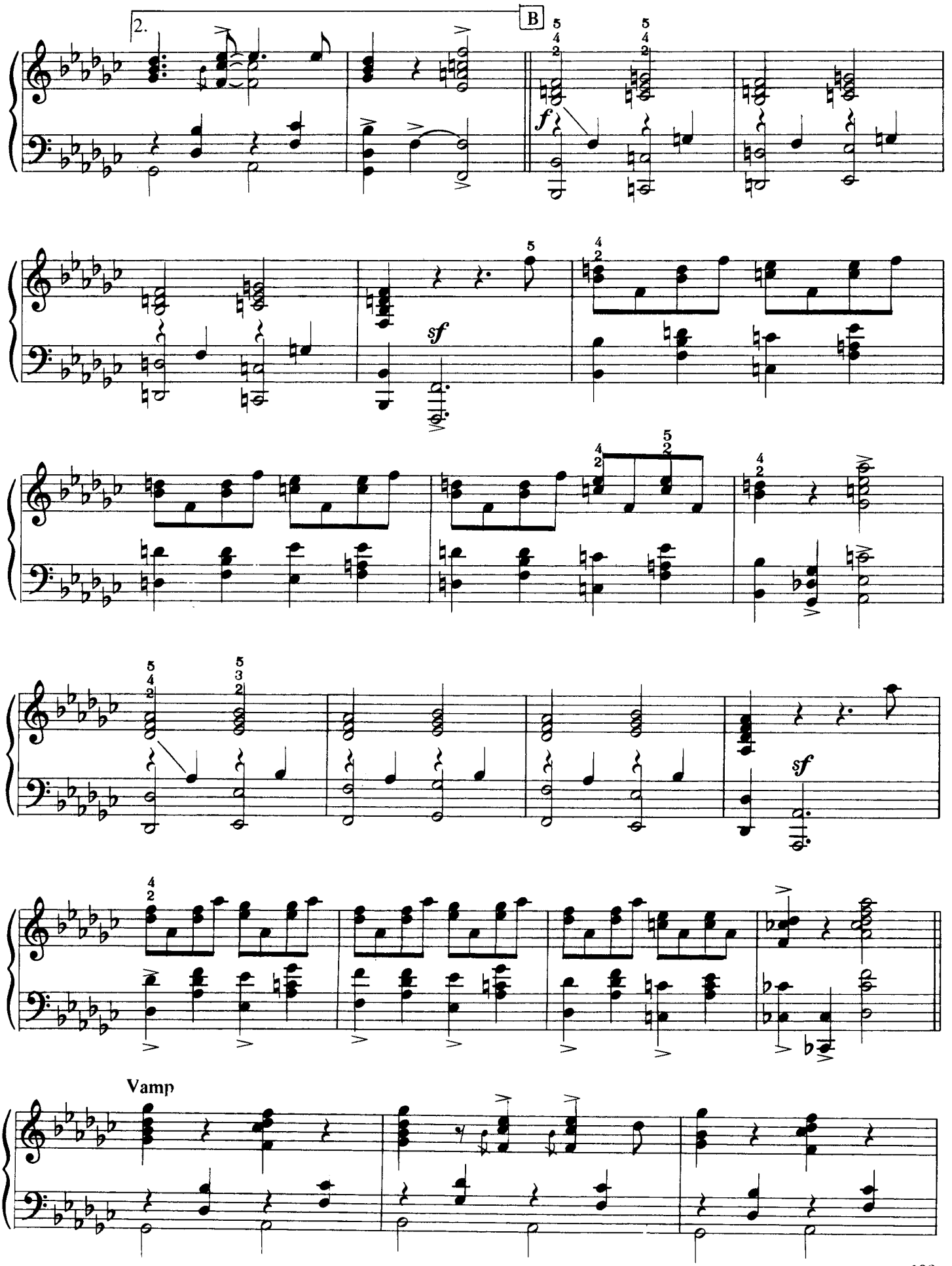
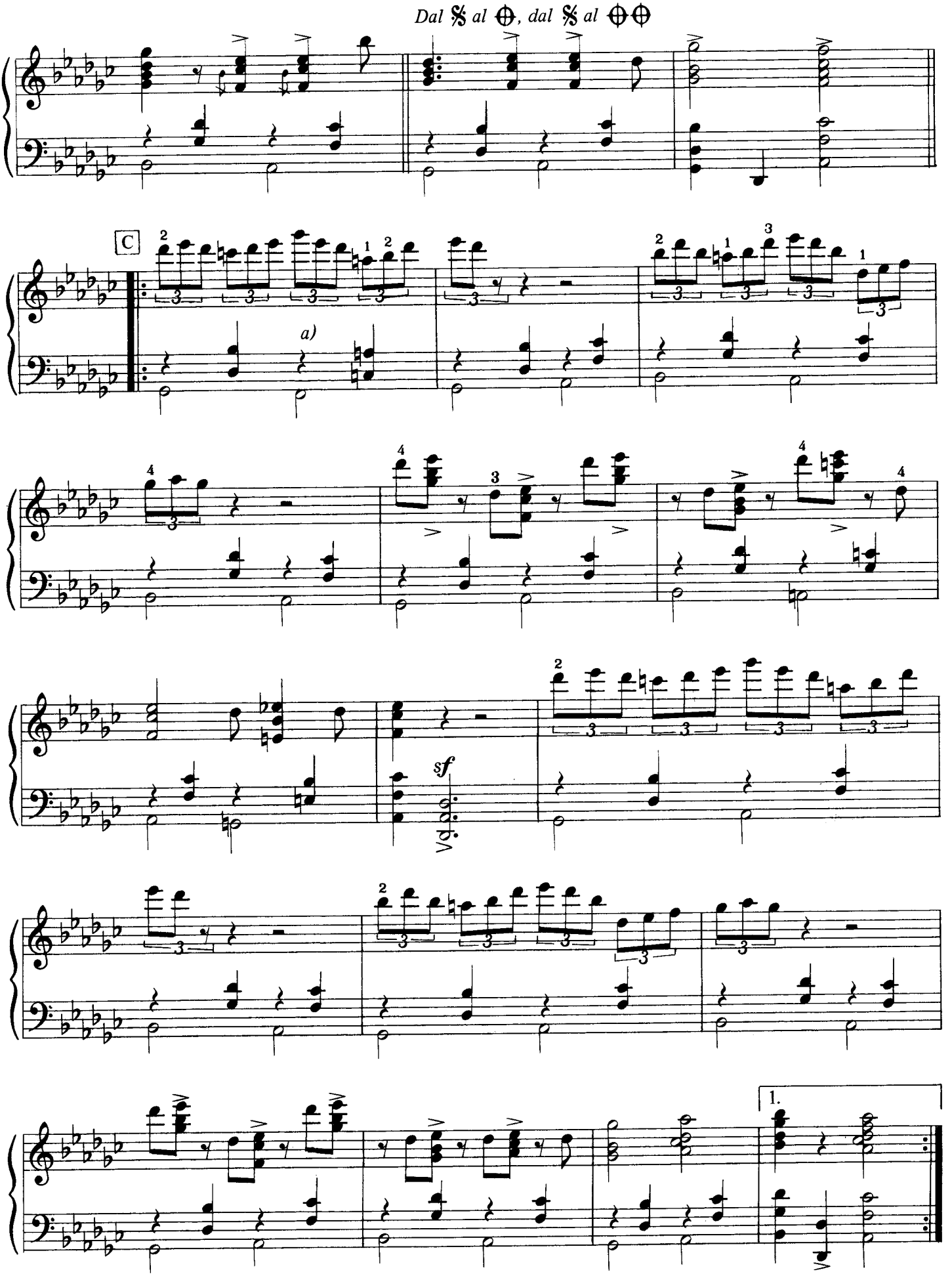
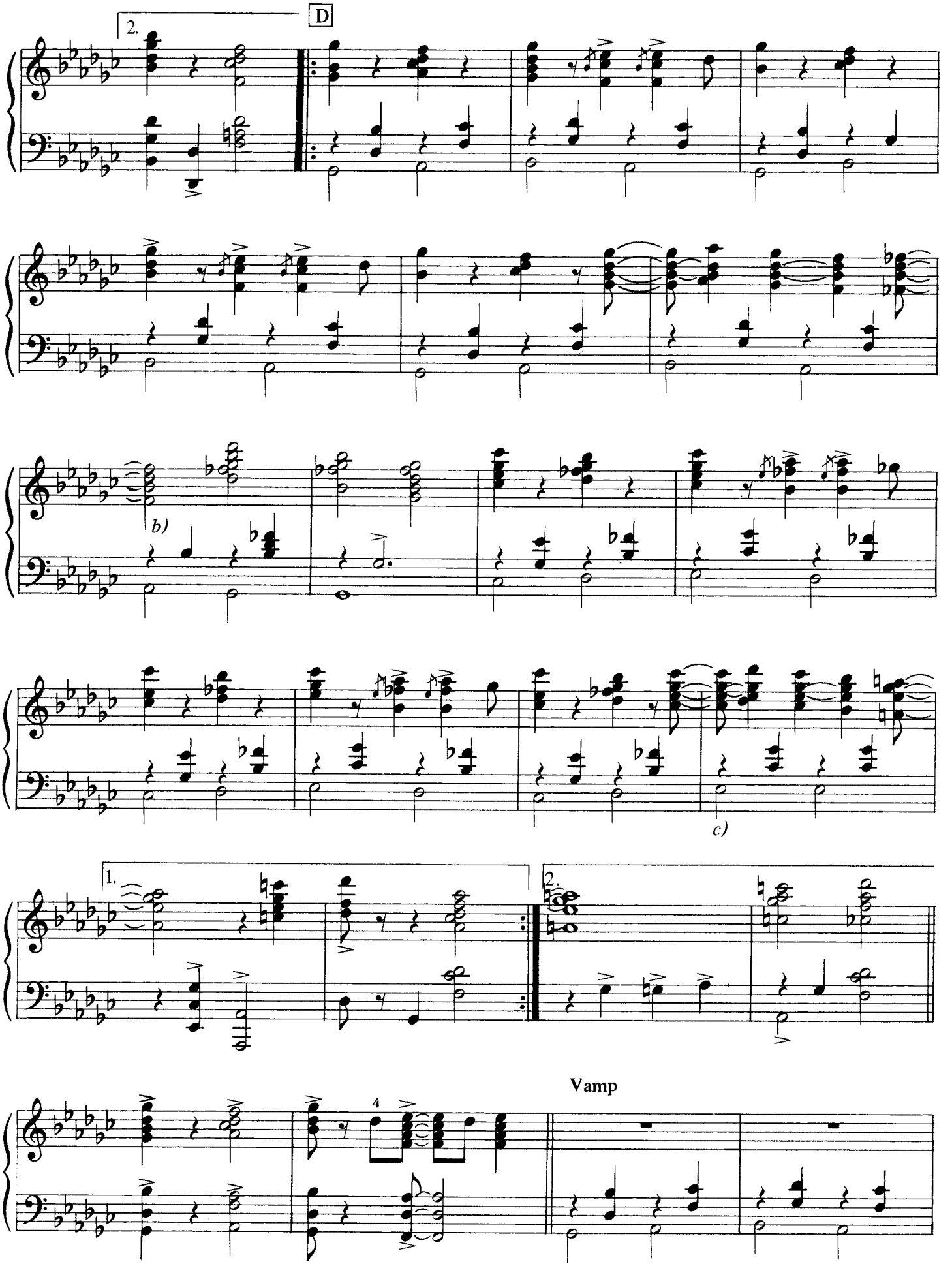
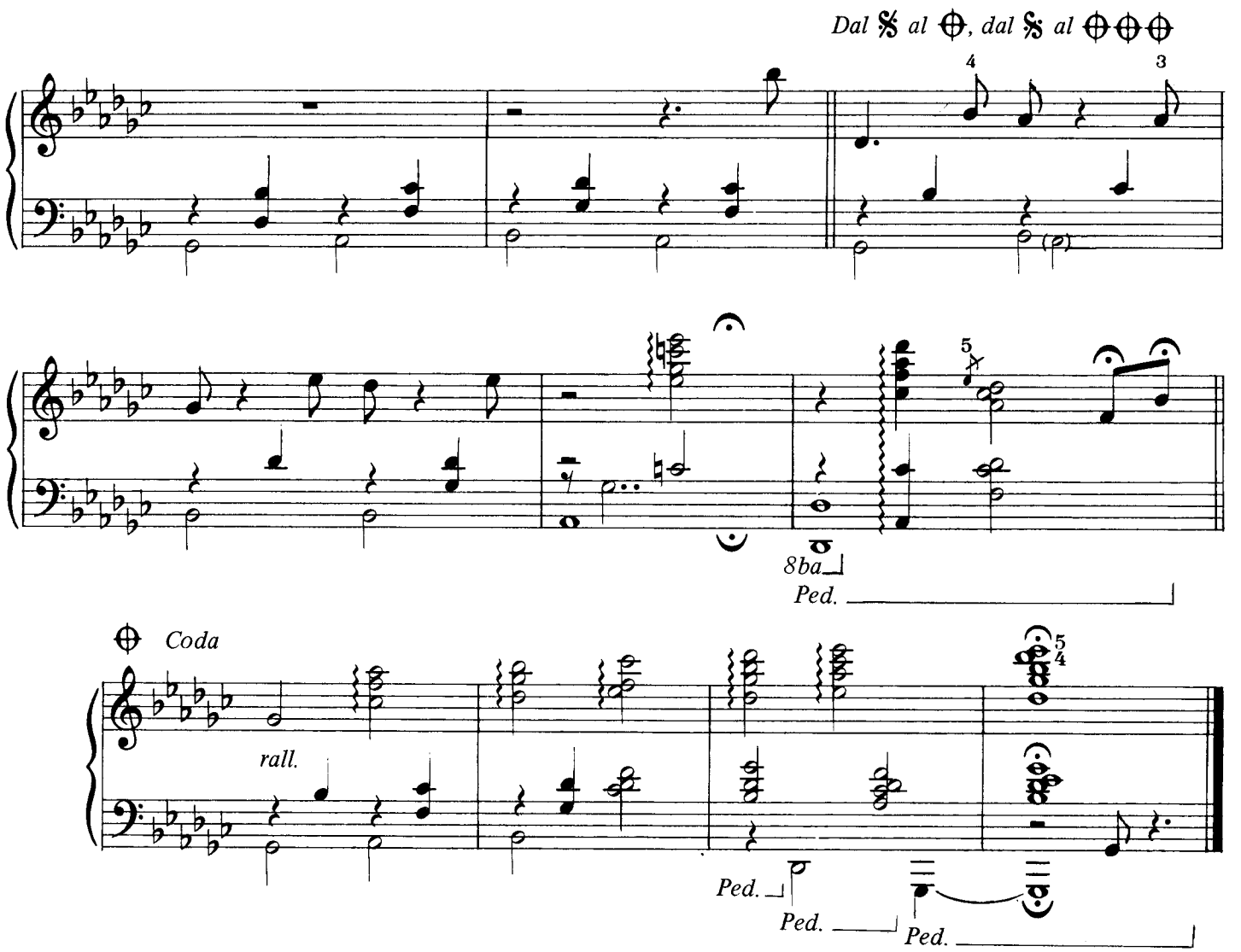
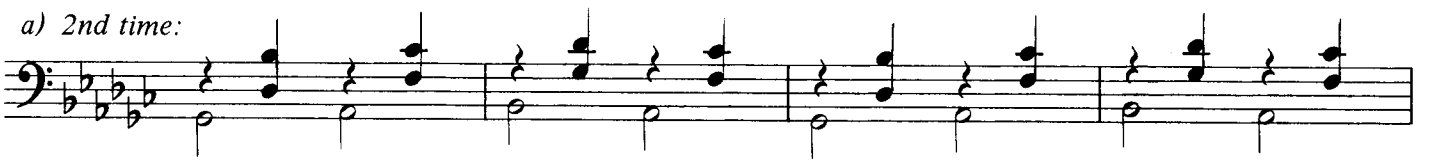

2.
B
f
sf
sf
Vamp


Dal 𝄋 al ⊕, dal 𝄋 al ⊕⊕
C
a)
sf
1.

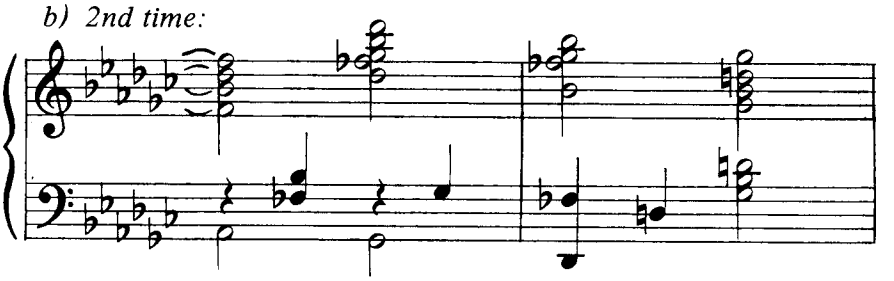

2.
D
b)
c)
1.
2.
Vamp
4



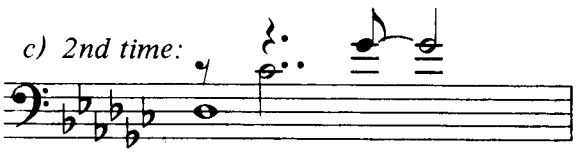
a) 2nd time:



b) 2nd time:



c) 2nd time:



Relaxin'

as recorded by Willie "The Lion" Smith on Lp Good Time Jazz S 10035; March 18, 1958.

This is the "theme song" used by "The Lion" when he played in clubs and solo recitals. He recorded it several times.

The basic theme of *Relaxin'* is found in the first section (in 32-bar song form – aaba), after which "The Lion" would generally improvise and freely interpolate other themes. In this rendition, for instance, he inserted a beautiful 16-bar episode (which is not always featured in other recordings of *Relaxin'*).

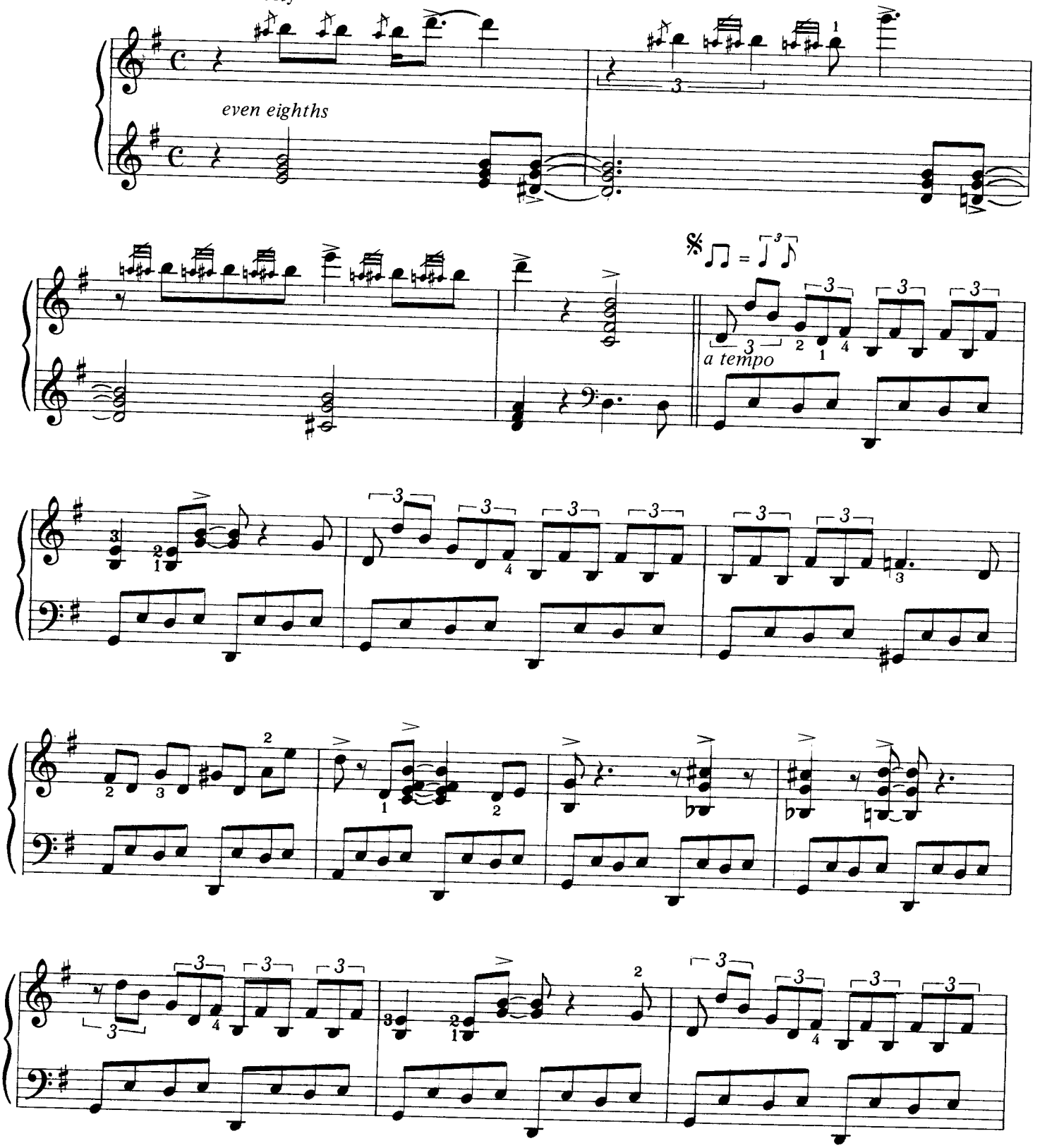
With its arabesque-like triplet figures, *Relaxin'* is quite representative of The Lion's compositional spirit. Effective but technically not too challenging, it is also a good exercise for "rolling bass" accompaniment patterns. About *Relaxin'*, "The Lion" once said: "I wanted to show that you could get a blues feeling without hitting people on the head."

Relaxin'

As Performed By Willie "The Lion" Smith

Medium bounce ♩ = 138
Intro – freely

By Willie "The Lion" Smith



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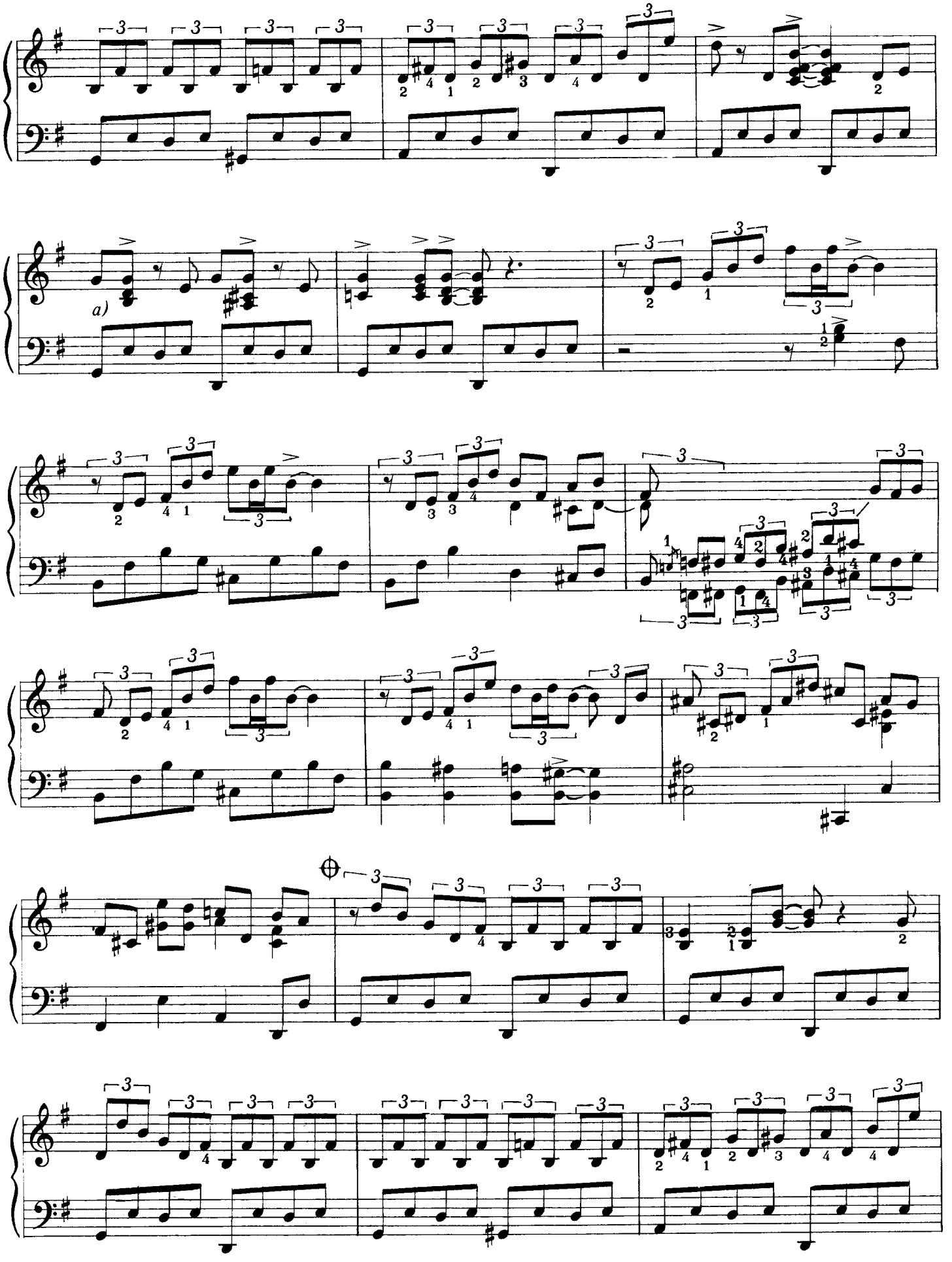
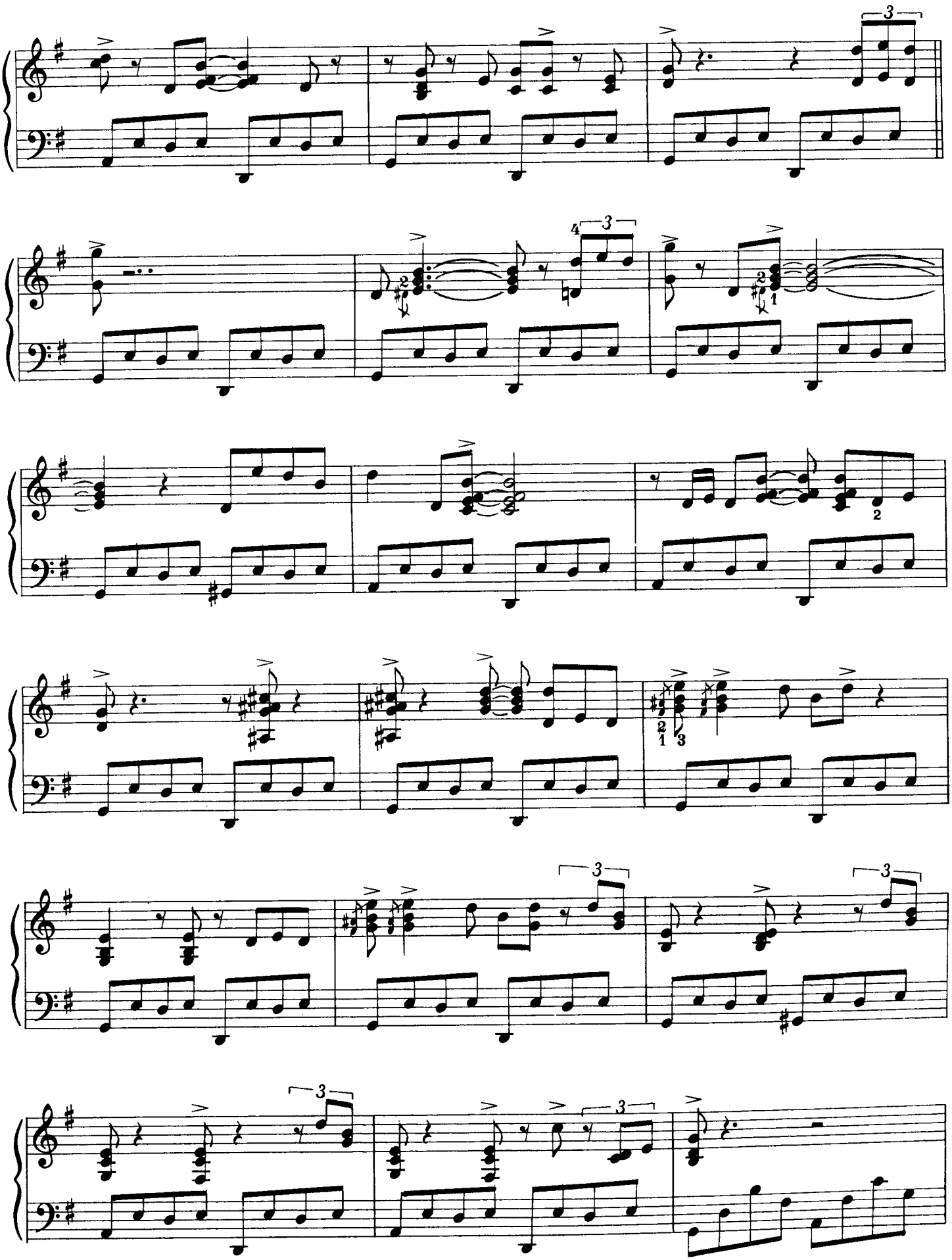
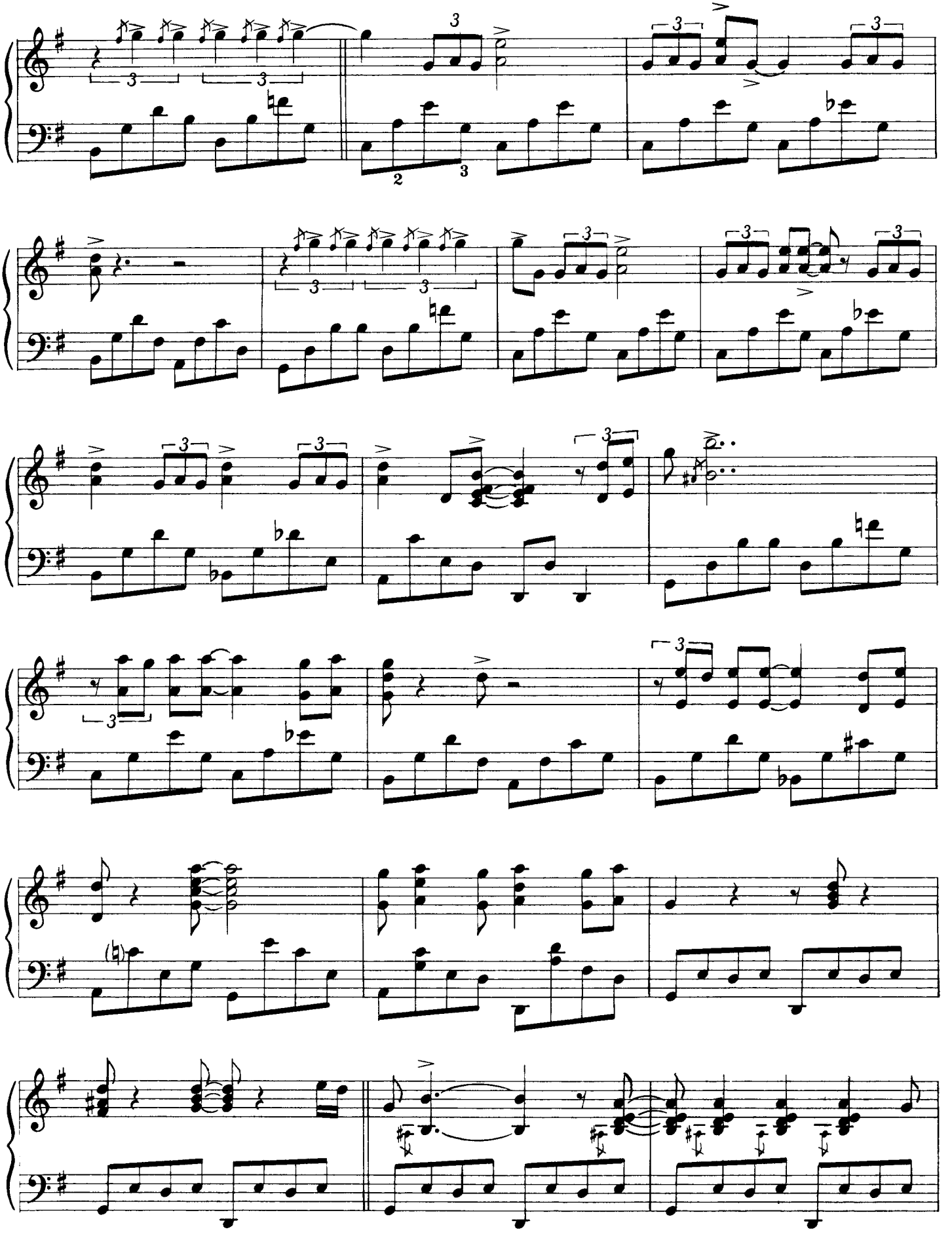
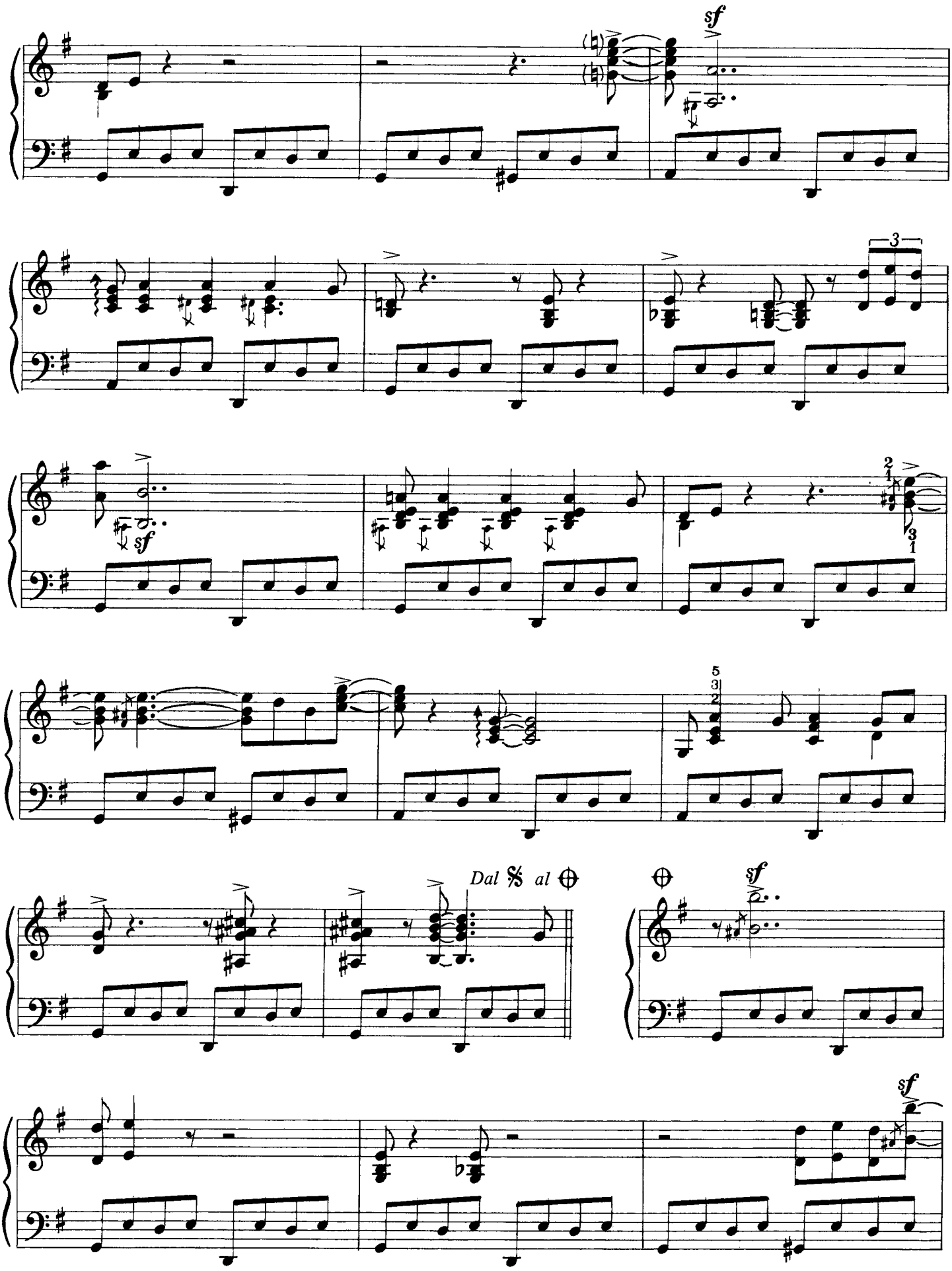
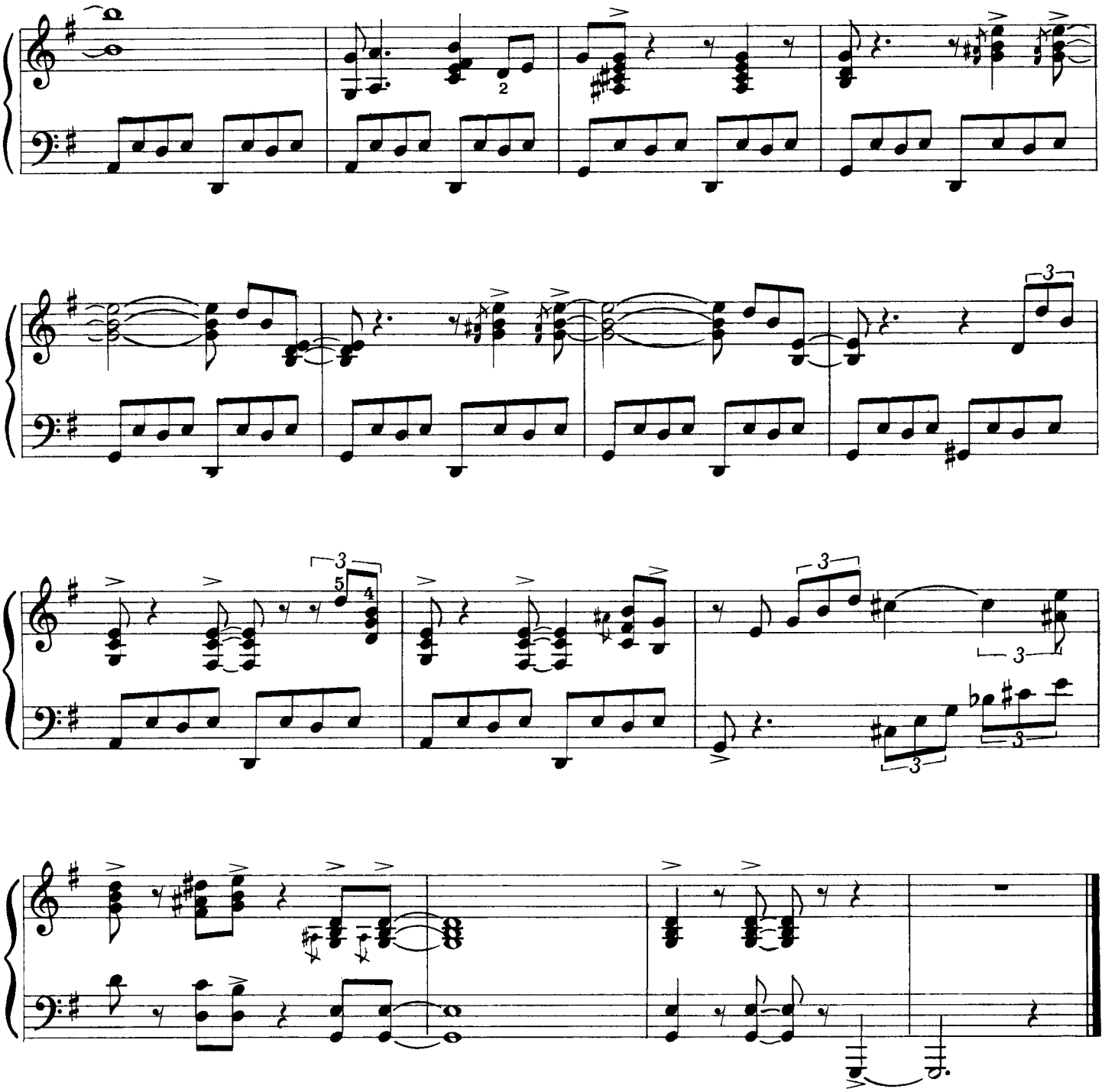

a)

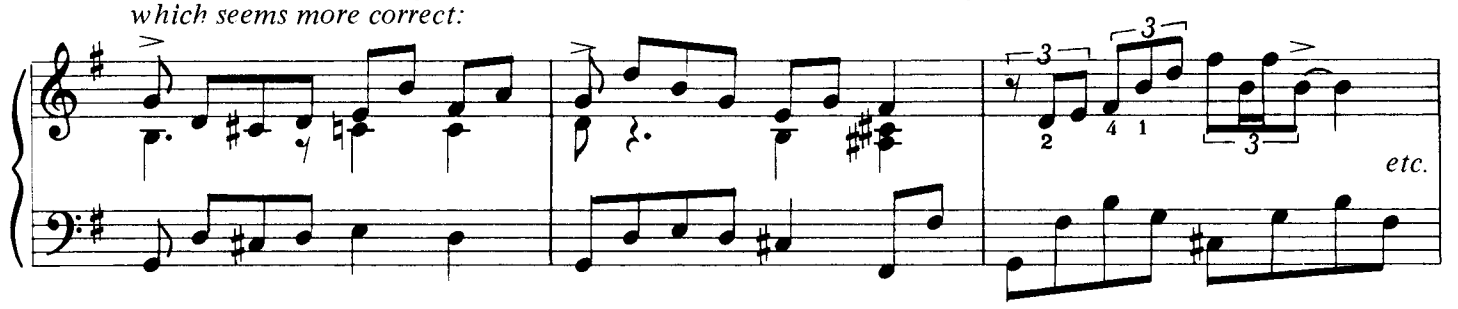





sf
sf
3
sf
2
1
3
1
5
3
2
Dal 𝄋 al ⊕
⊕
sf
sf



a) In most other recordings of Relaxin', *from this bar on "The Lion" played in this way, which seems more correct:*



Royal Garden Blues

as recorded by Cliff Jackson on Lp Classic Jazz Masters CJM 26; July 15, 1944.

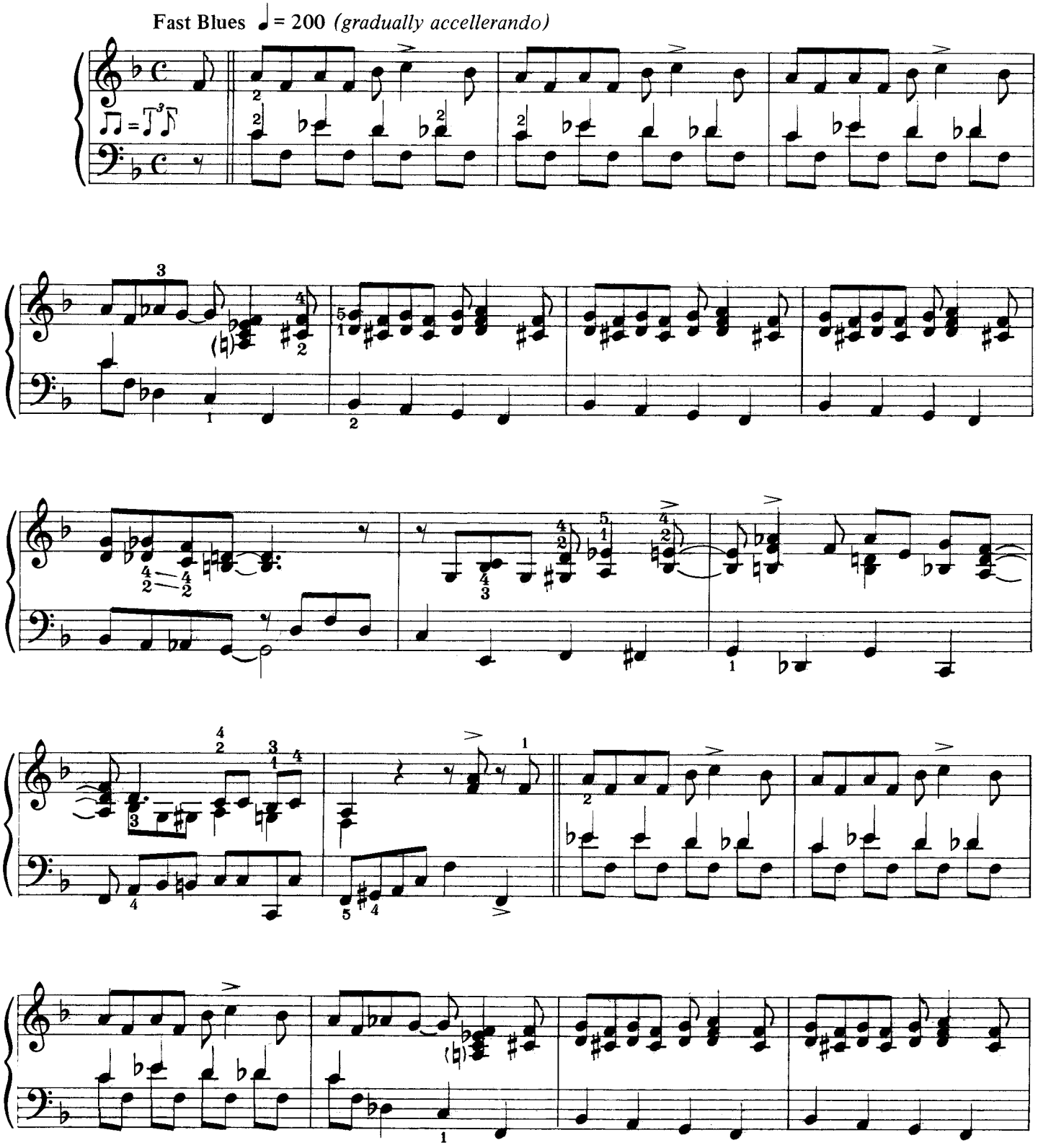
Cliff Jackson's style is one of the most difficult and interesting among Stride pianists. This solo displays the way Jackson develops a tune. He begins with an interplay between the left and right hands, gradually creating a more and more exciting melody on a "rolling bass" foundation. Finally the accompaniment turns to complicated "back beats" (with heavy bass notes), and the right hand turns to an intricate double thirds-based phrasing. Usually Jackson, nicknamed "The Menace," quickened the tempo in the middle of the performance, gradually increasing it to a bursting finale.

In this respect, his recordings probably reflect, better than any of his peers, the performing style of the Stride pianists at the legendary "cutting-contests" during rent parties.

Royal Garden Blues

As Performed By Cliff Jackson

Words and Music by Clarence Williams and Spencer Williams



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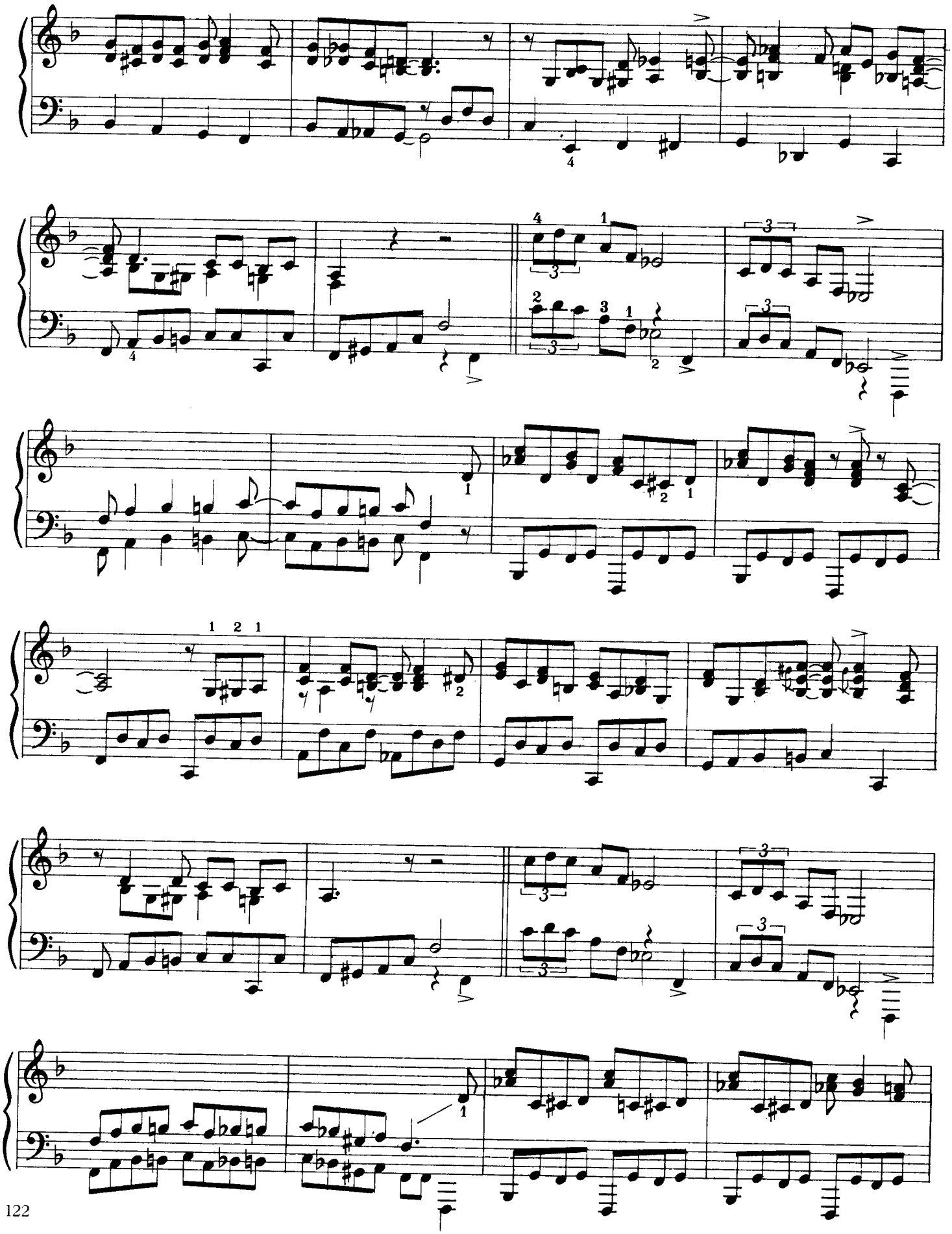
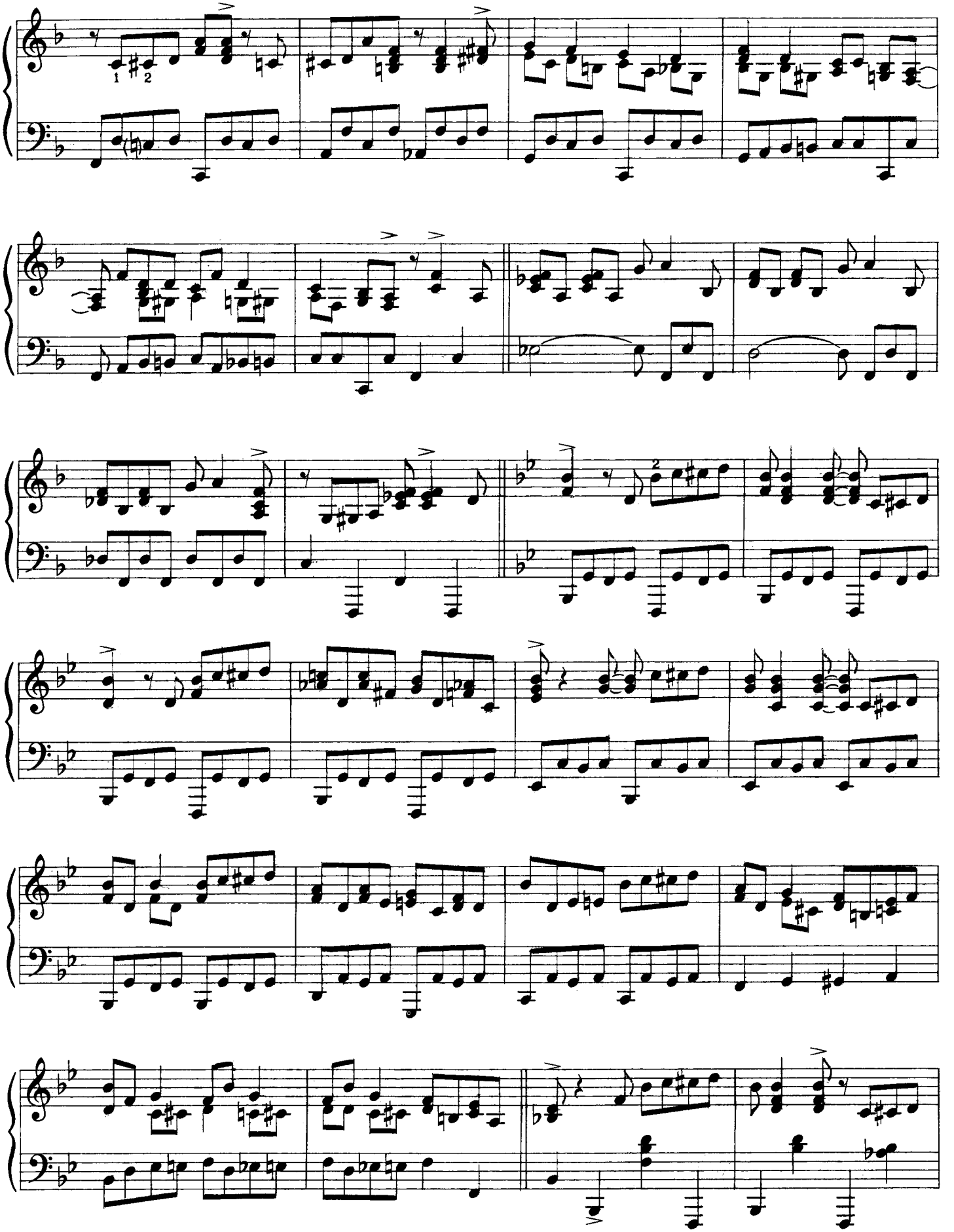
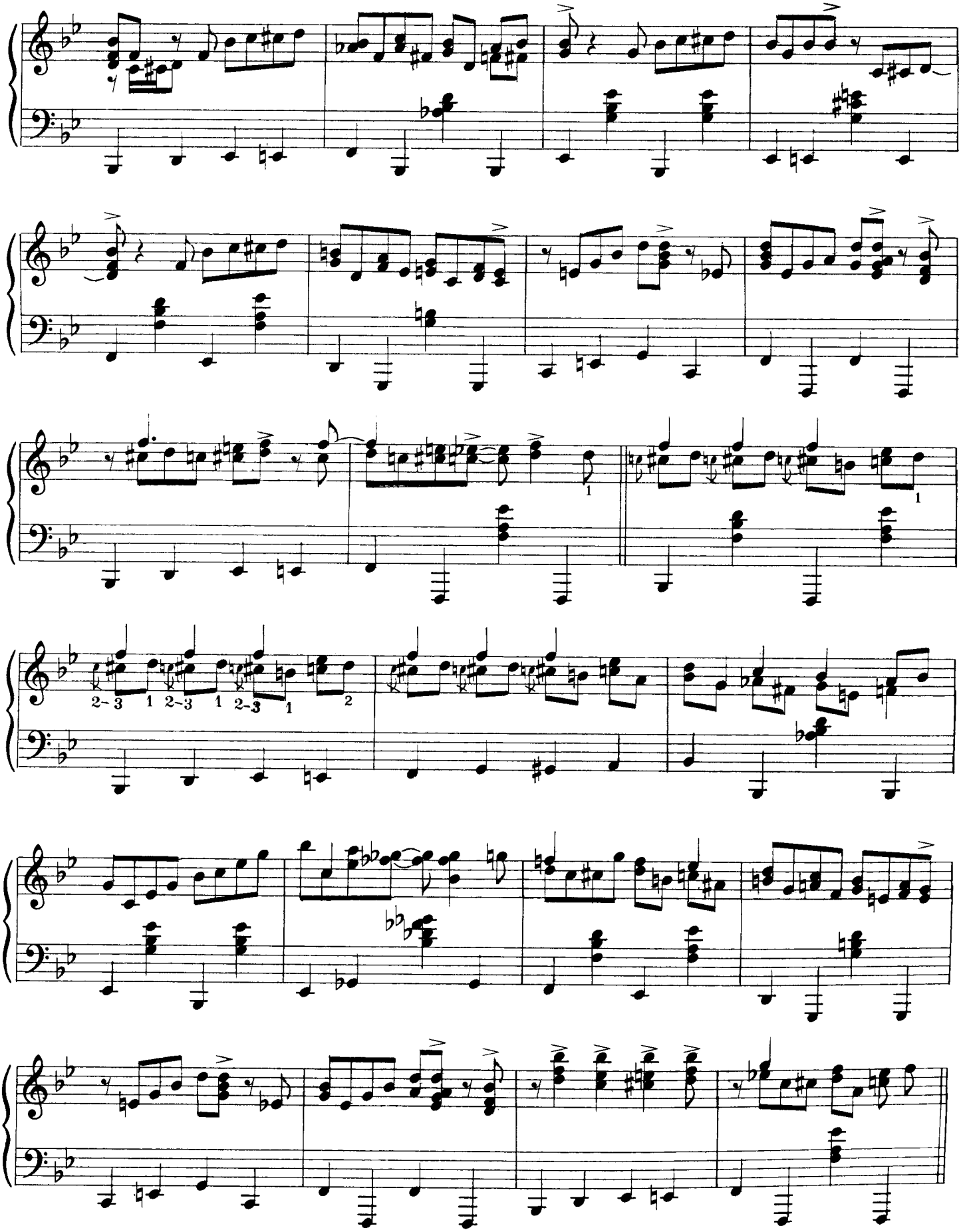
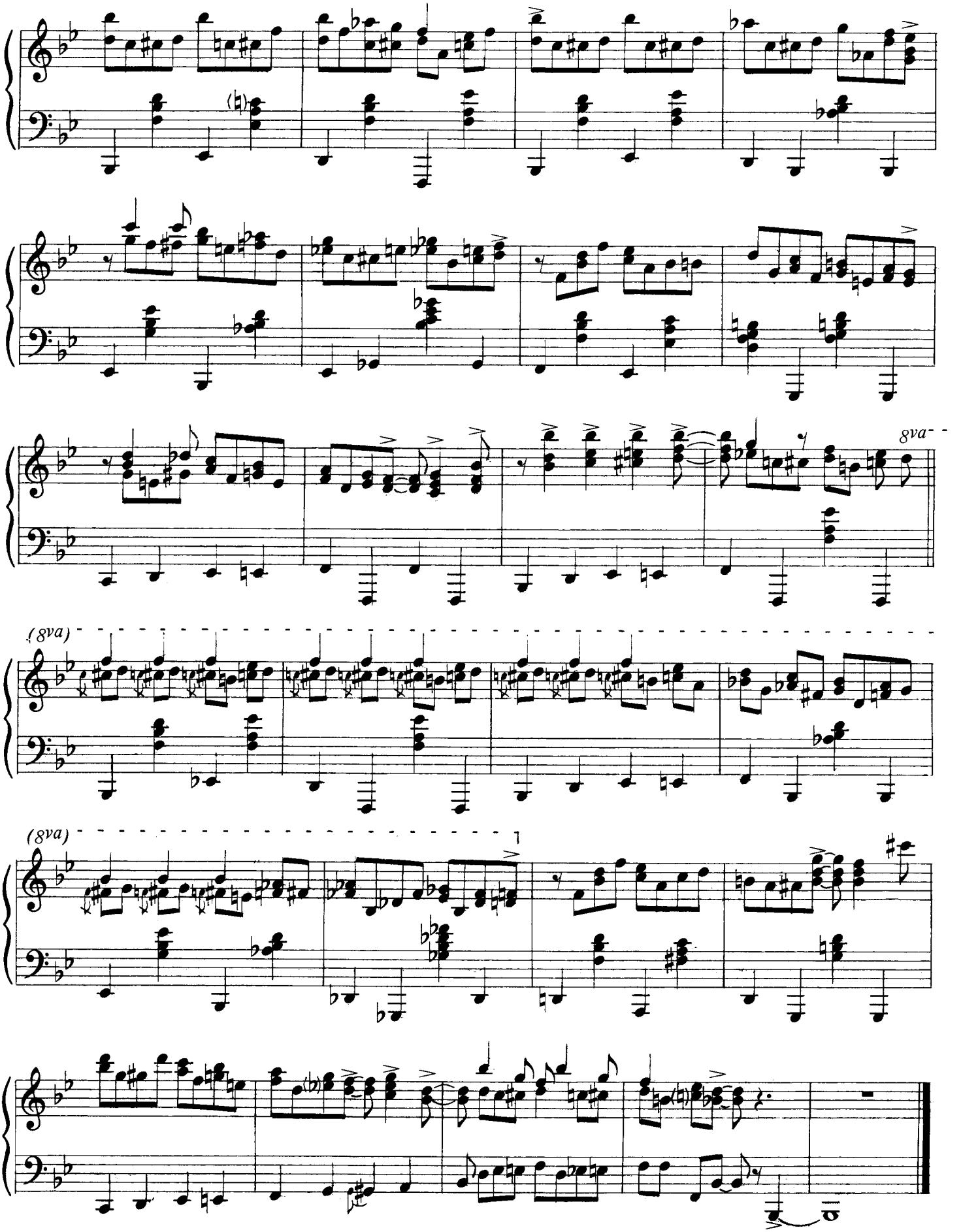







8va
(8va)
(8va)

Smashing Thirds

as recorded by Fats Waller on September 24, 1929; reissued on Lp French RCA PM 43270.

Waller's expertise as a performer is evident in this solo, which is perhaps his best original in the pure "shout" compositional idiom (even better than his most celebrated "cutting contest piece," *Handful of Keys*).

This 1929 recording displays Waller's first stage of maturity as a stylist. At that time, he was finally free from the influence of James P. Johnson, which is conspicuous in all his previous recordings. In 1929 Waller brought to perfection that characteristic blend of technique, swing, extroversion and humor which would make him popular worldwide (though this was only one facet of his art).

Smashing Thirds is structured in three strains (A, B and C). The accompaniment figure which opens the A strain is a re-working of a favorite blues-oriented Stride device, generally used to set a "low down" mood: a triad (the root in the bass) with the upper note moving up and down from the 5th degree of the scale to the minor 7th (passing through the 6th degree). Here, however, Waller turns the minor 7th into a major 7th.

In the first four measures of both B strains, Waller has a good time within the 12-bar blues form. He avoids establishing a blues mood, mocking the listener by playing a happy chord run. At this point, a blues chorus is totally unexpected, but it comes with typical Waller humor.

In the B strain, the tension created by repeated "shout" figures in the right hand over "back beat" tenths in the accompaniment results in an exciting and very effective rhythm.

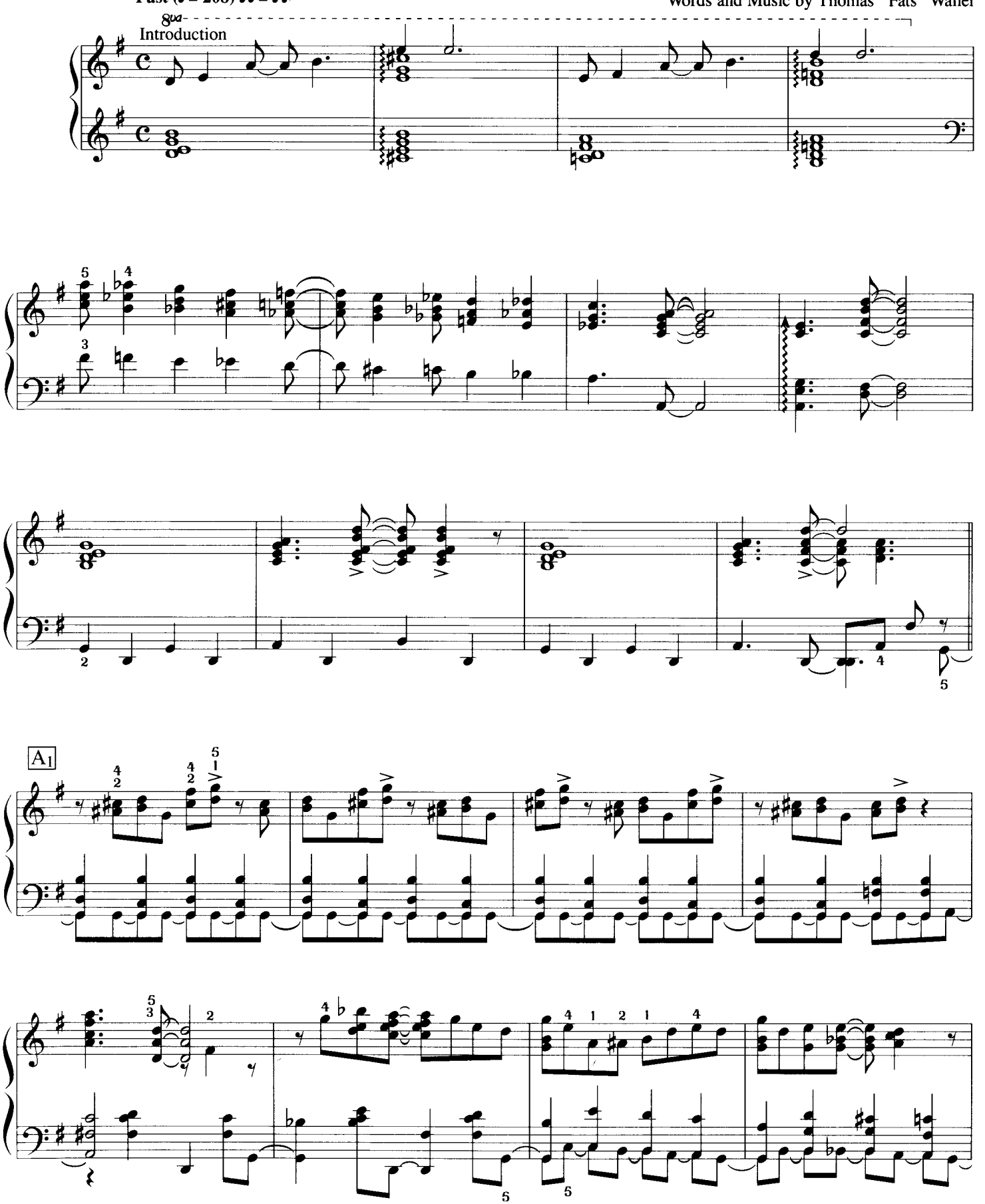
The A_3 variation is exceptional, absolutely one of the best episodes in Stride music.

Smashing Thirds

As Performed By Thomas "Fats" Waller

Fast (♩ = 208) ♫ = ♫♪

Words and Music by Thomas "Fats" Waller



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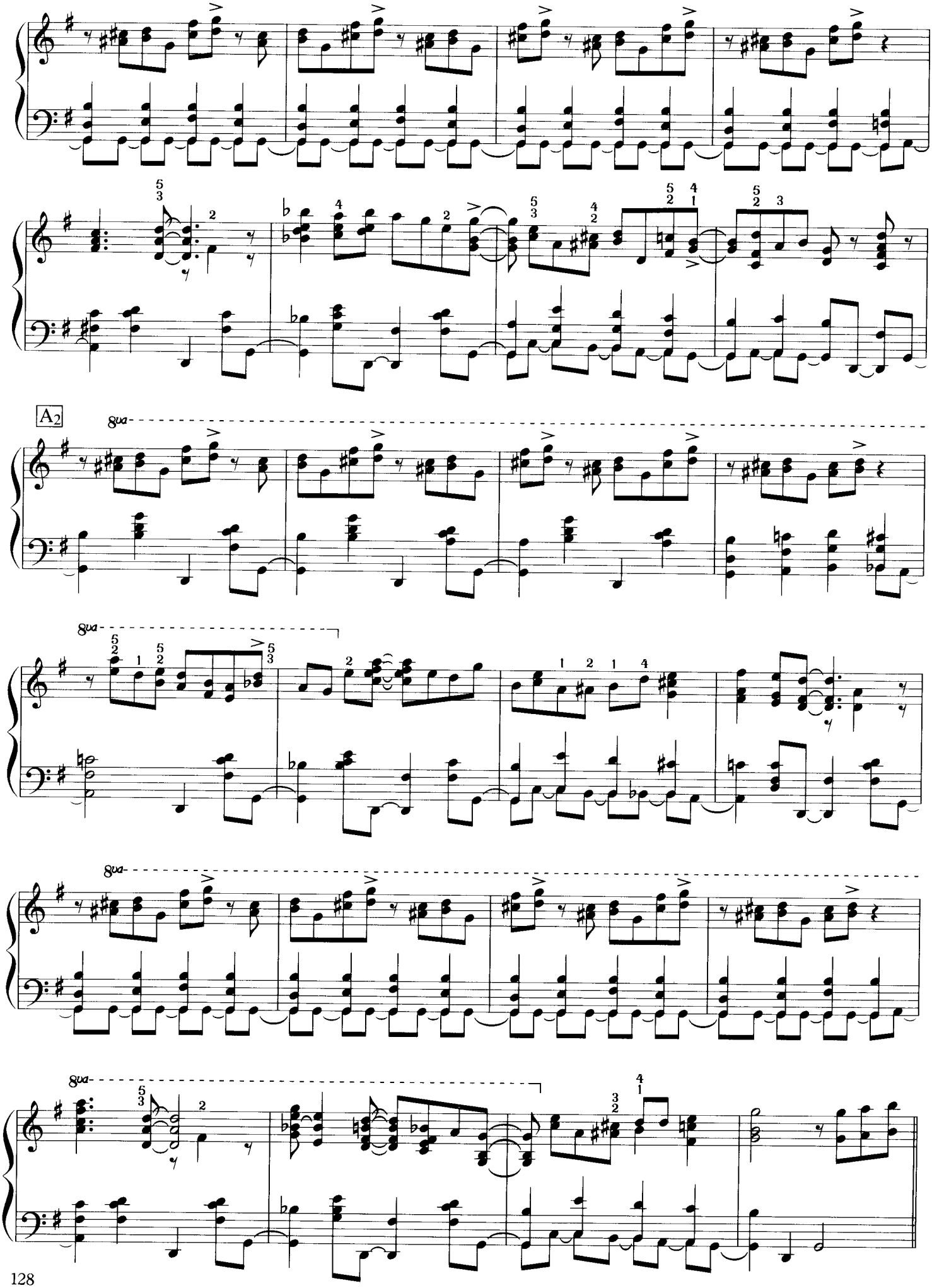
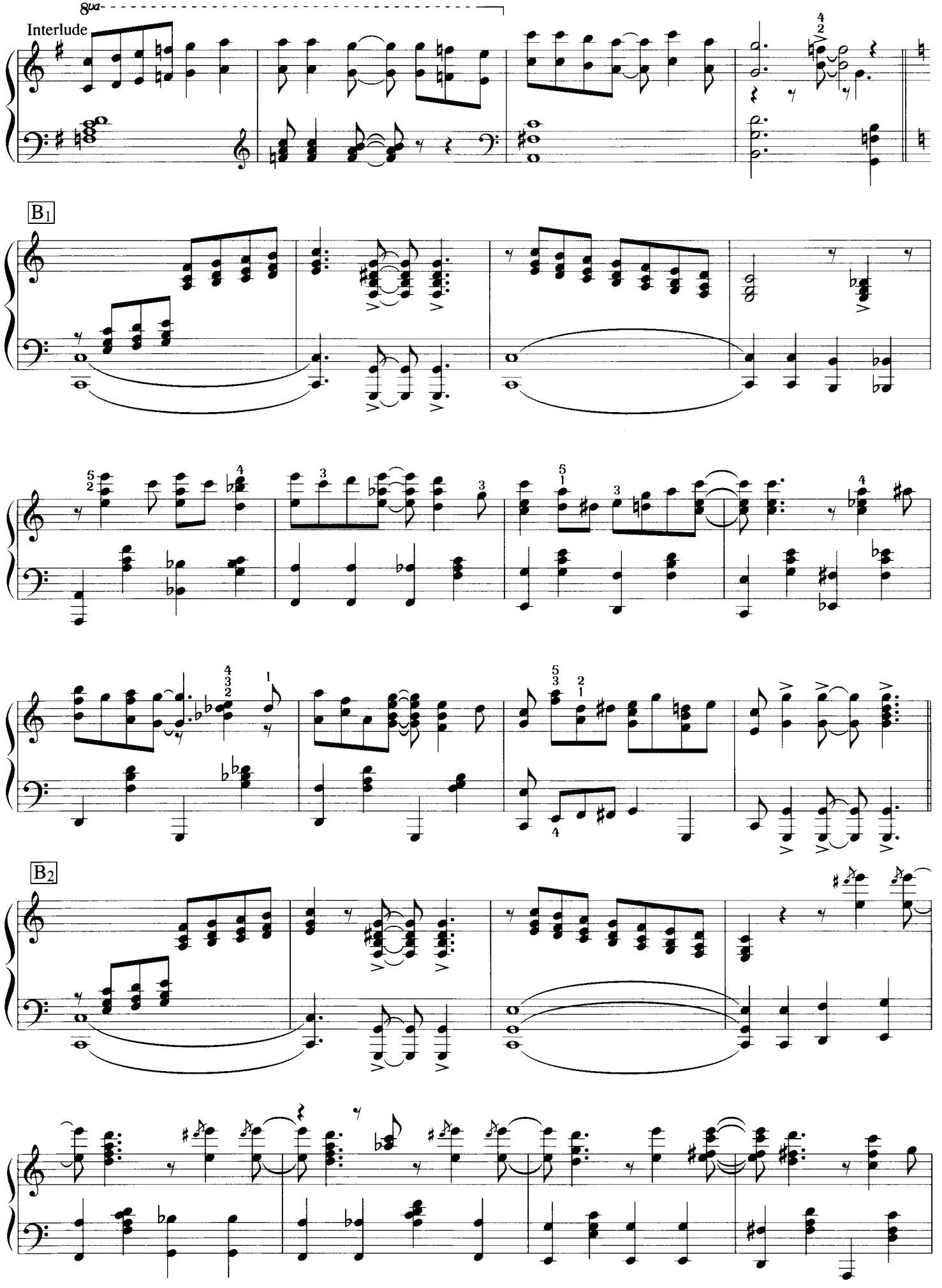
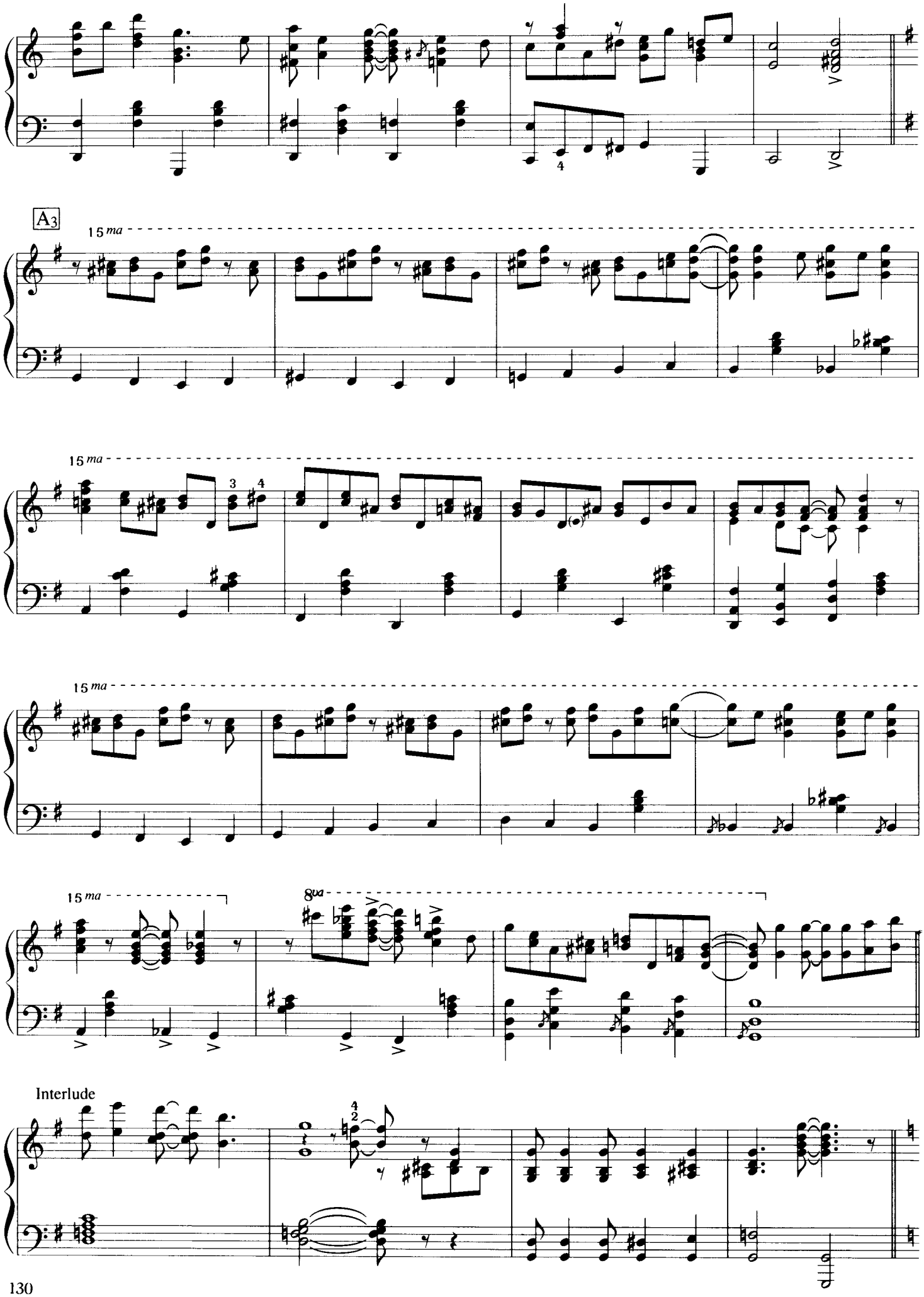
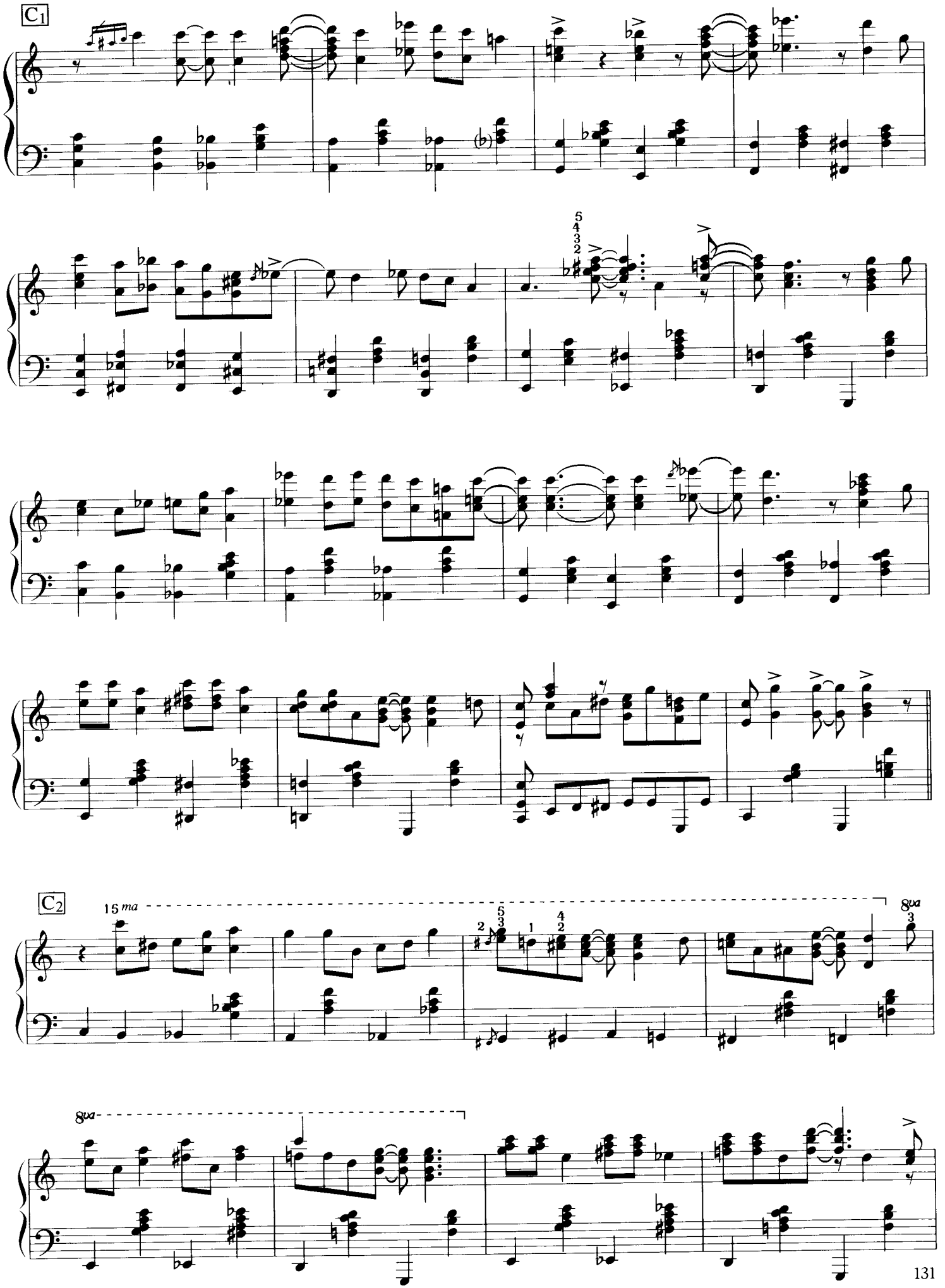
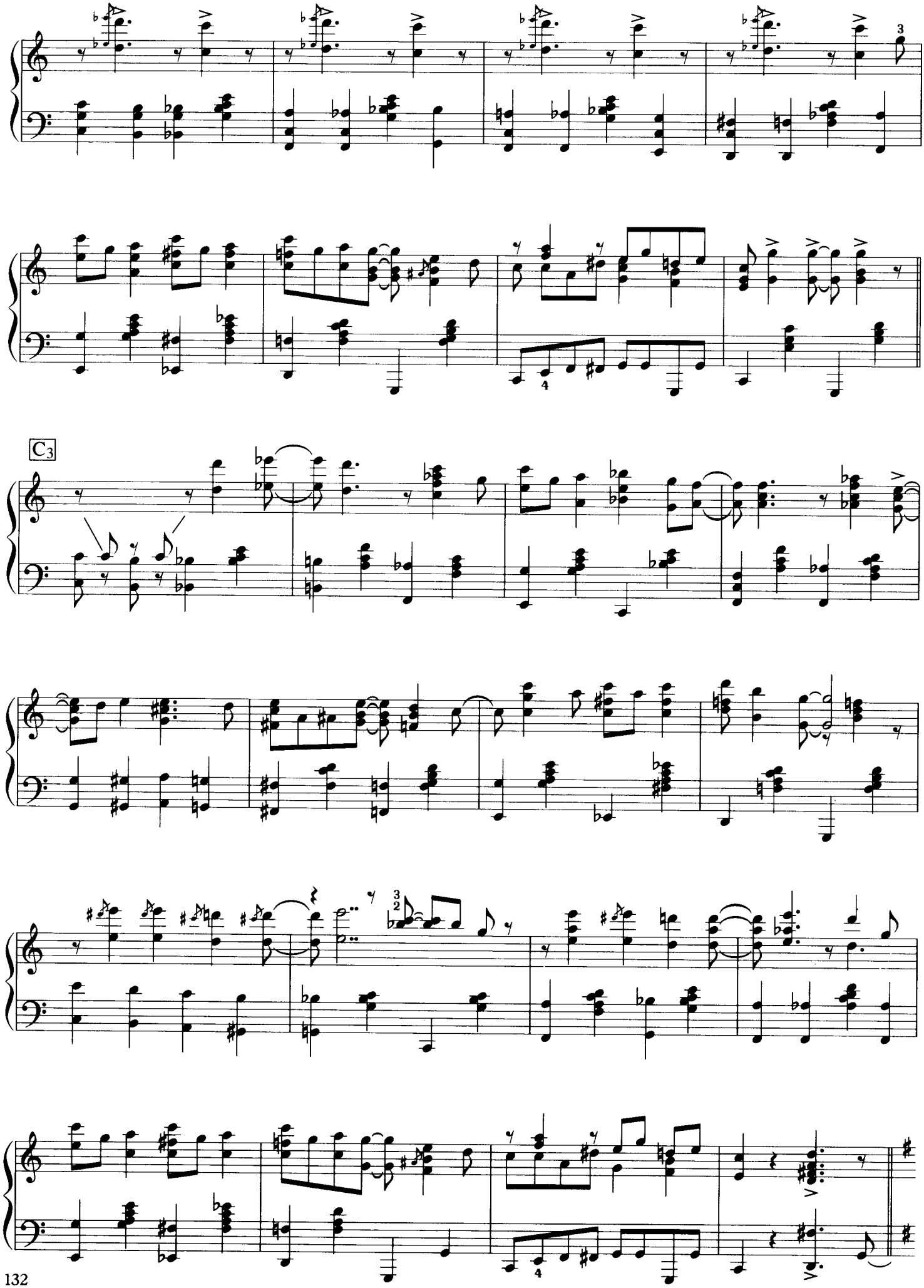
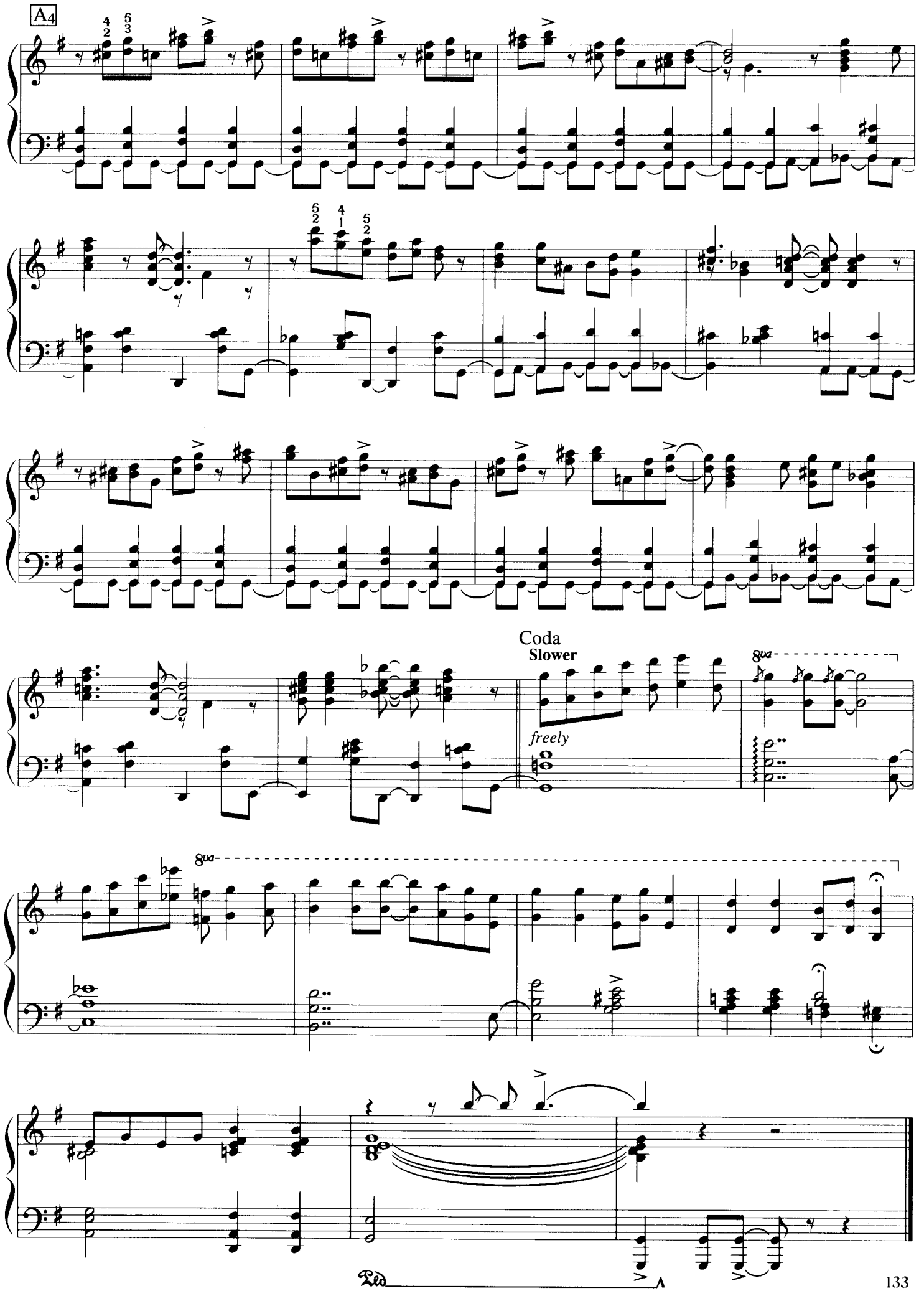

A2
8va
8va
8va
8va


8va
Interlude
B1
B2


A3
15ma
15ma
15ma
15ma
8va
Interlude


C1
C2
15 ma
8va
8va


C3


A4
Coda
Slower
freely
8va
8va
Ped

Snowy Morning Blues

as recorded by James P. Johnson, possibly in July, 1943; issued on Lp Folkways FJ 2850.

This is one of the most popular compositions in the Stride repertory. Discussing Johnson's first recording of it (February 25, 1927), the Chicago pianist Art Hodes once claimed: ". . . as old as I've been become, and as far as I've traveled, there's something Jimmy did on that recording that I'd still like to arrive at." And John Hammond always named this recording as one of his favorites.

Johnson was particularly fond of this piece, and he recorded it several times between 1927 and 1947. Despite the title, this is not a 12-bar blues (but the blues feeling is present, as usual with Johnson). It is a Stride composition structured in two 16-bar strains, following the scheme: Intro; $A_1\ A_2\ B_1\ B_2\ A_3$Coda.

In the present rendition, however, Johnson omits the A_3 strain, playing in its place three 12-bar blues choruses before the Coda. This is probably the best and most articulated version of Johnson's recordings of this piece, displaying his rich style, his bent for dissonances, and his skill in improvisation. In fact, because of its various recordings, *Snowy Morning Blues* is a tune that allows us to appreciate Johnson's improvisational qualities at their best. The B_2 strain, for instance, is completely reshaped in every recording, reflecting Johnson's "compositional" approach to improvisation. Also included here is a transcription of another rendition of the B_2 strain (taken from Johnson's February 25, 1927 recording of *Snowy Morning Blues*), that is in direct contrast to the July 1943 rendition.

One of the most complex episodes in all of Stride music, the July 1943 B_2 strain is very thick in texture and harmonically rich, with plenty of "back beats" and "rolled" tenths in the bass range of the keyboard. The right hand work is also rich. Conversely, the February 25, 1927 B_2 strain starts in a seemingly "suspended" atmosphere created by the "empty space" that exists between the single-note bass line (always on "back beats") and the simple statement of the melody played in the very high register. In the last eight bars Johnson turns to a more "solid" accompaniment. As we can see, Johnson's improvisation was not exclusively confined to right hand variations; he often intended it to be a "two handed" affair.

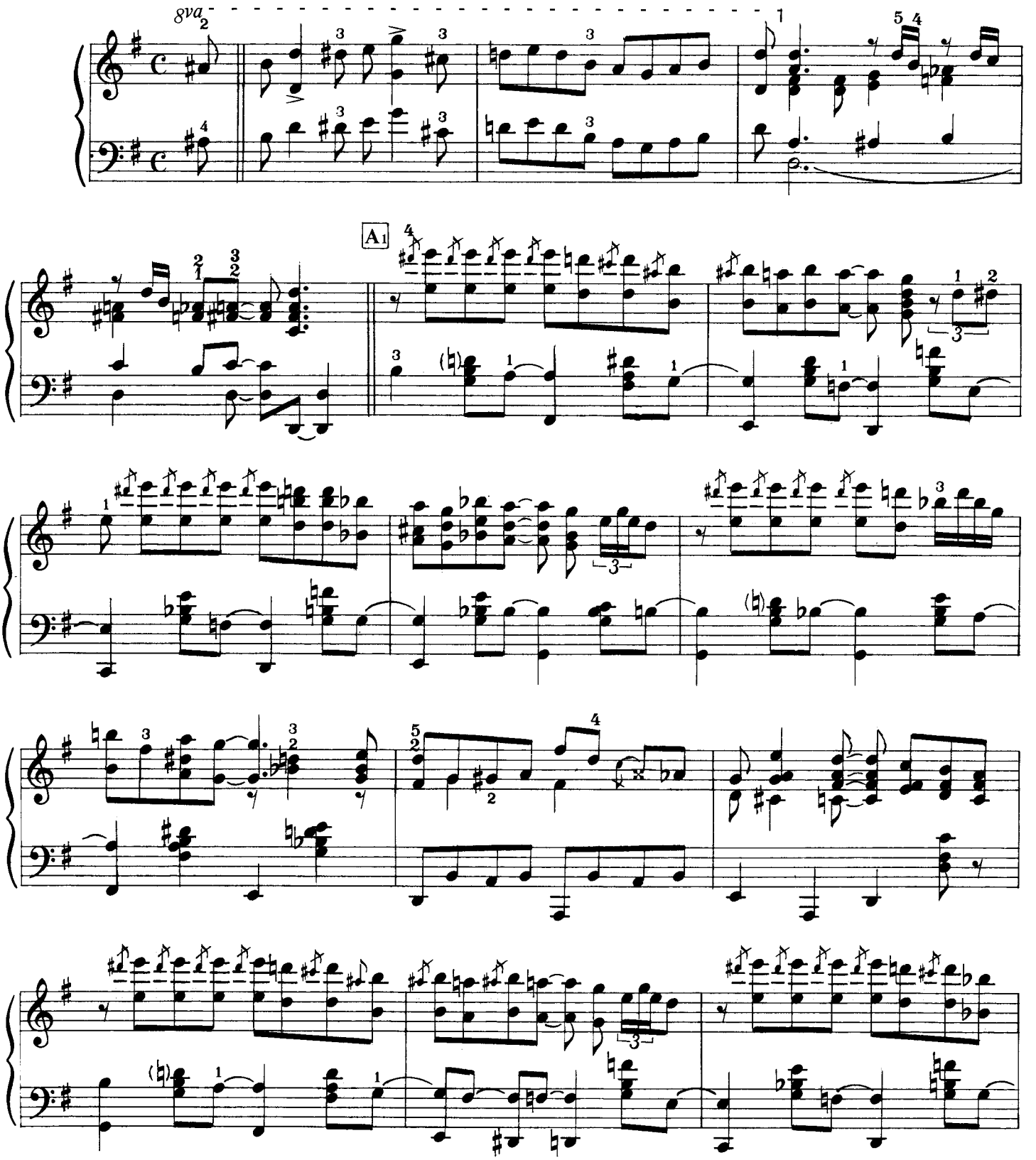
Snowy Morning Blues

As Performed By James P. Johnson

Words and Music by James P. Johnson

Medium ♩ = 126

Intro



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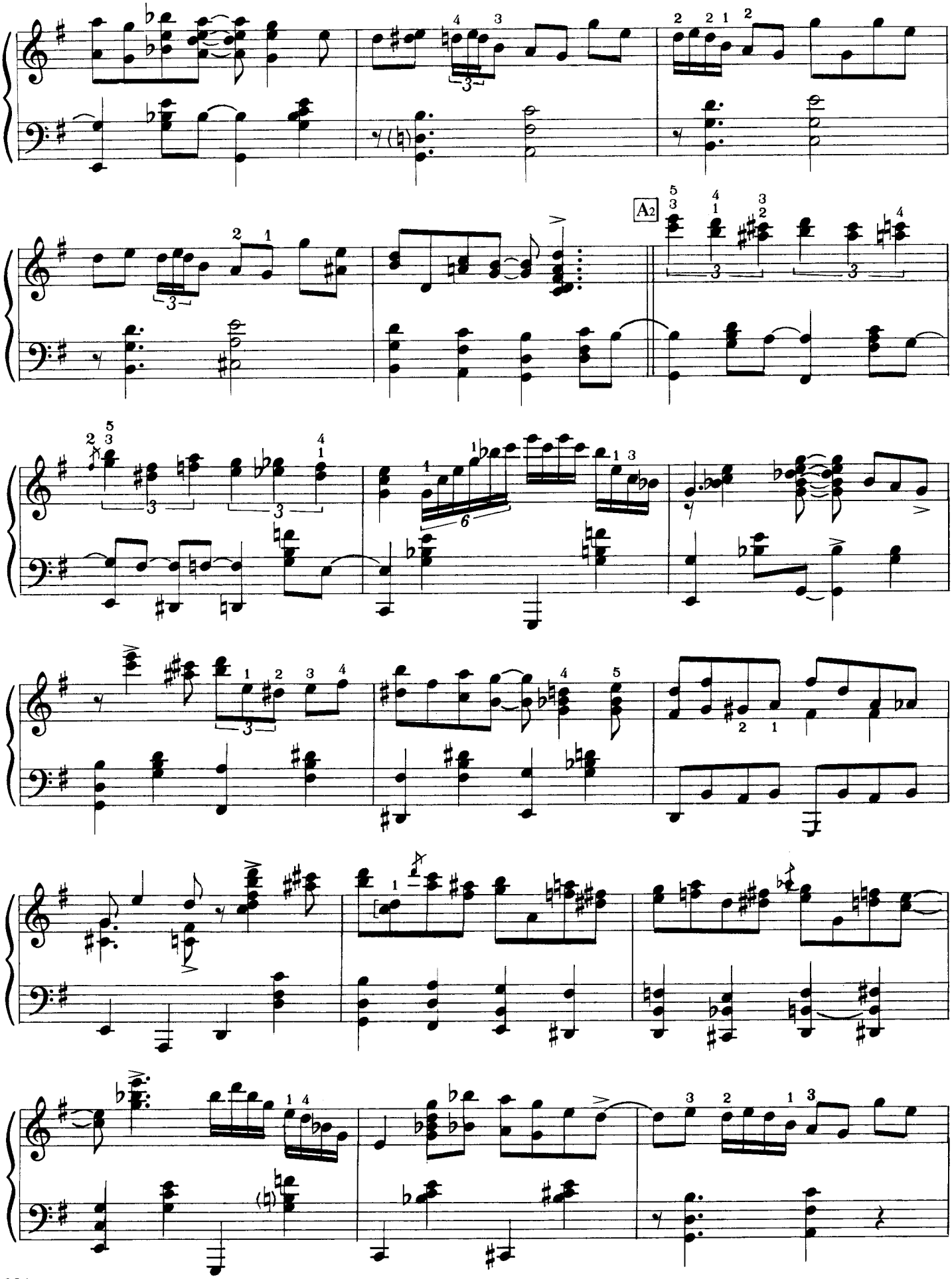
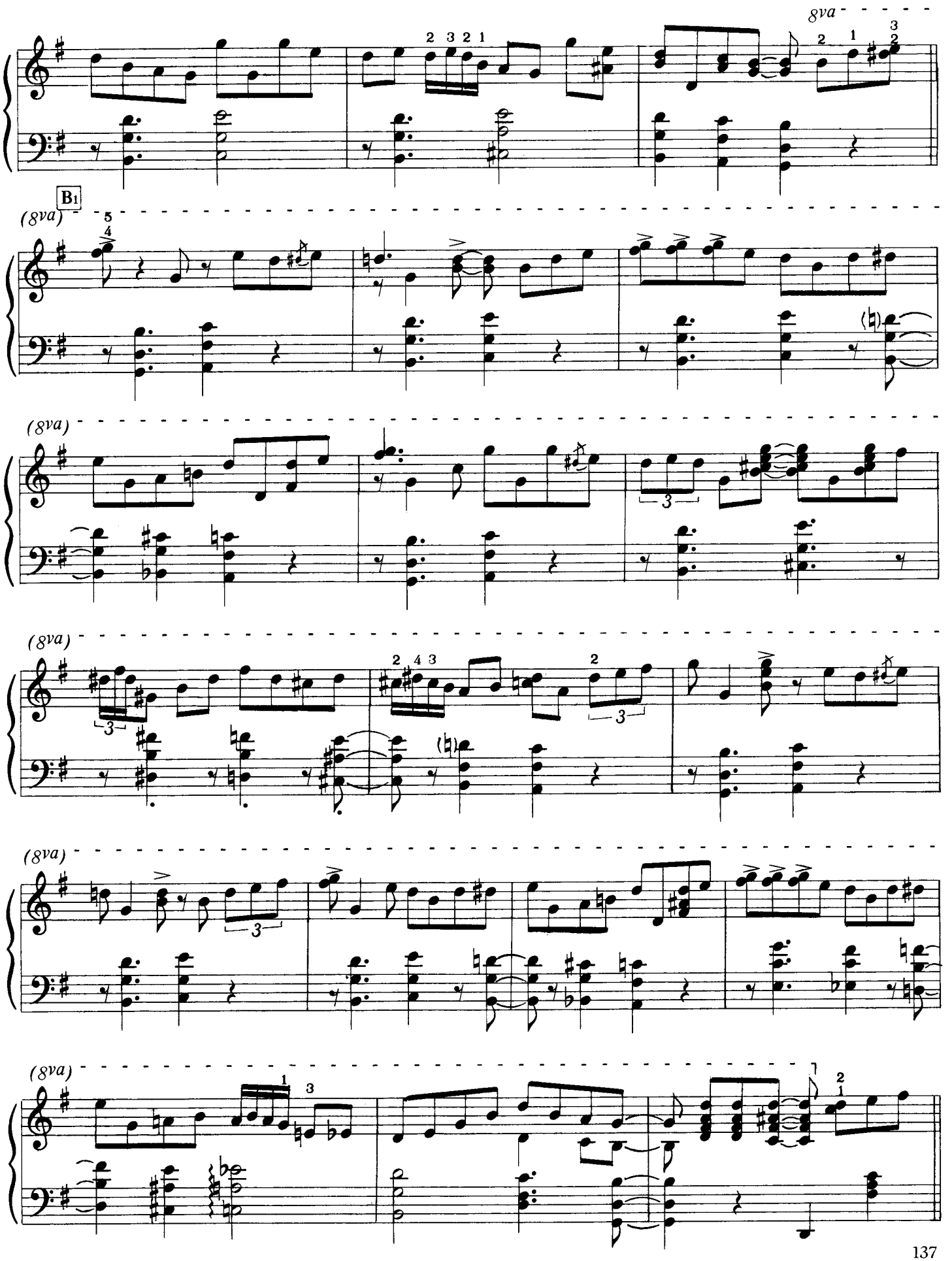
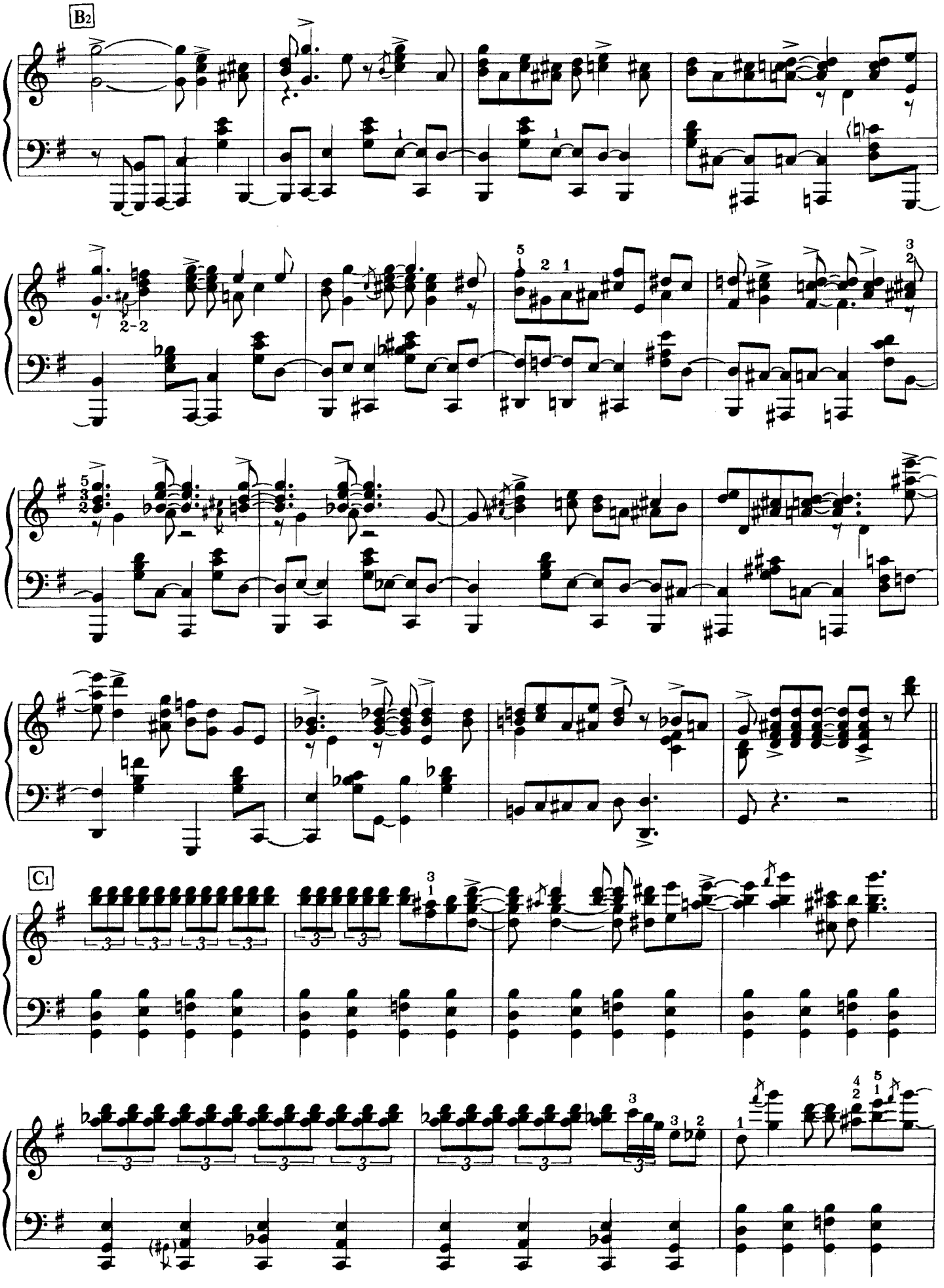
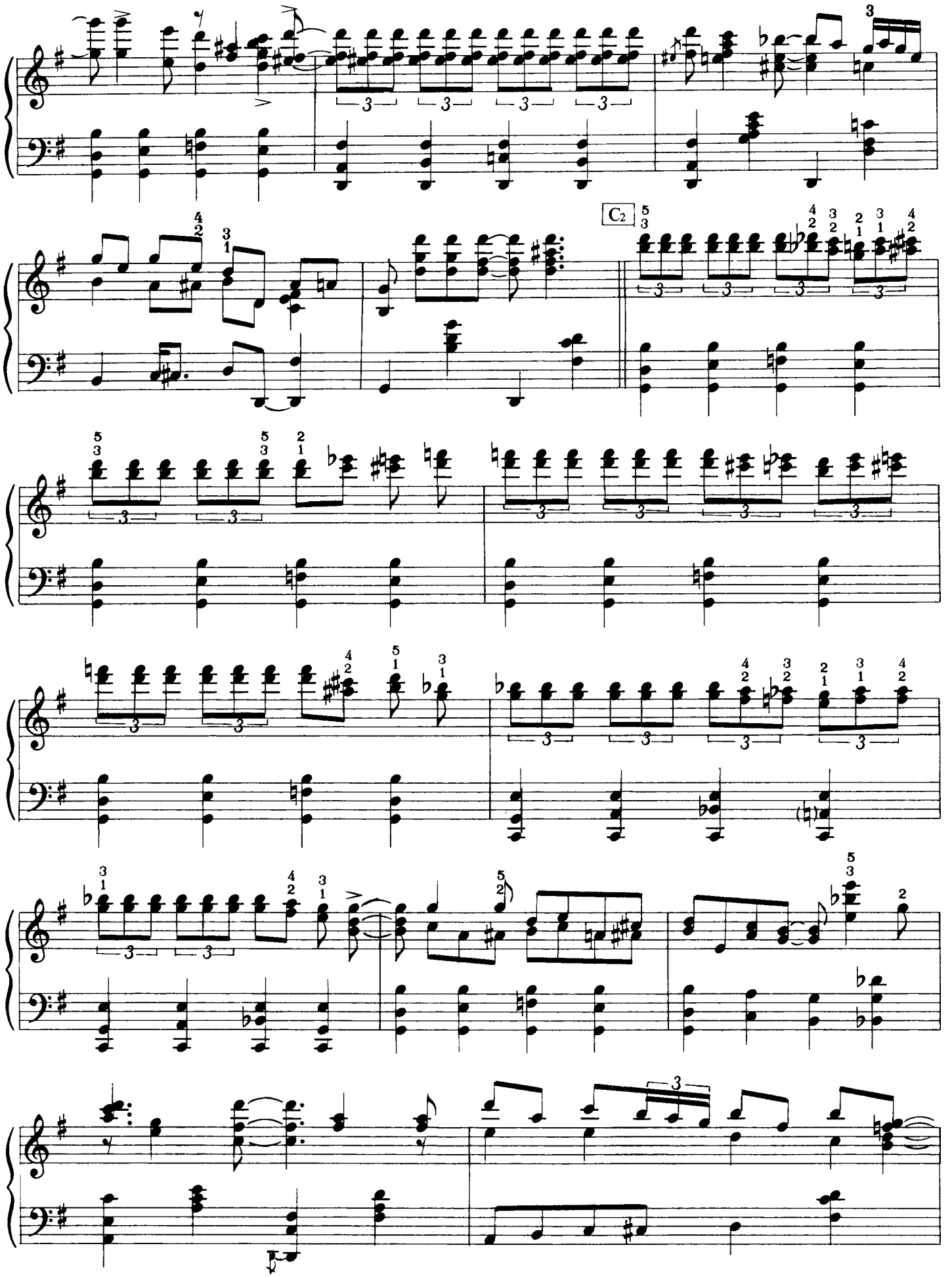
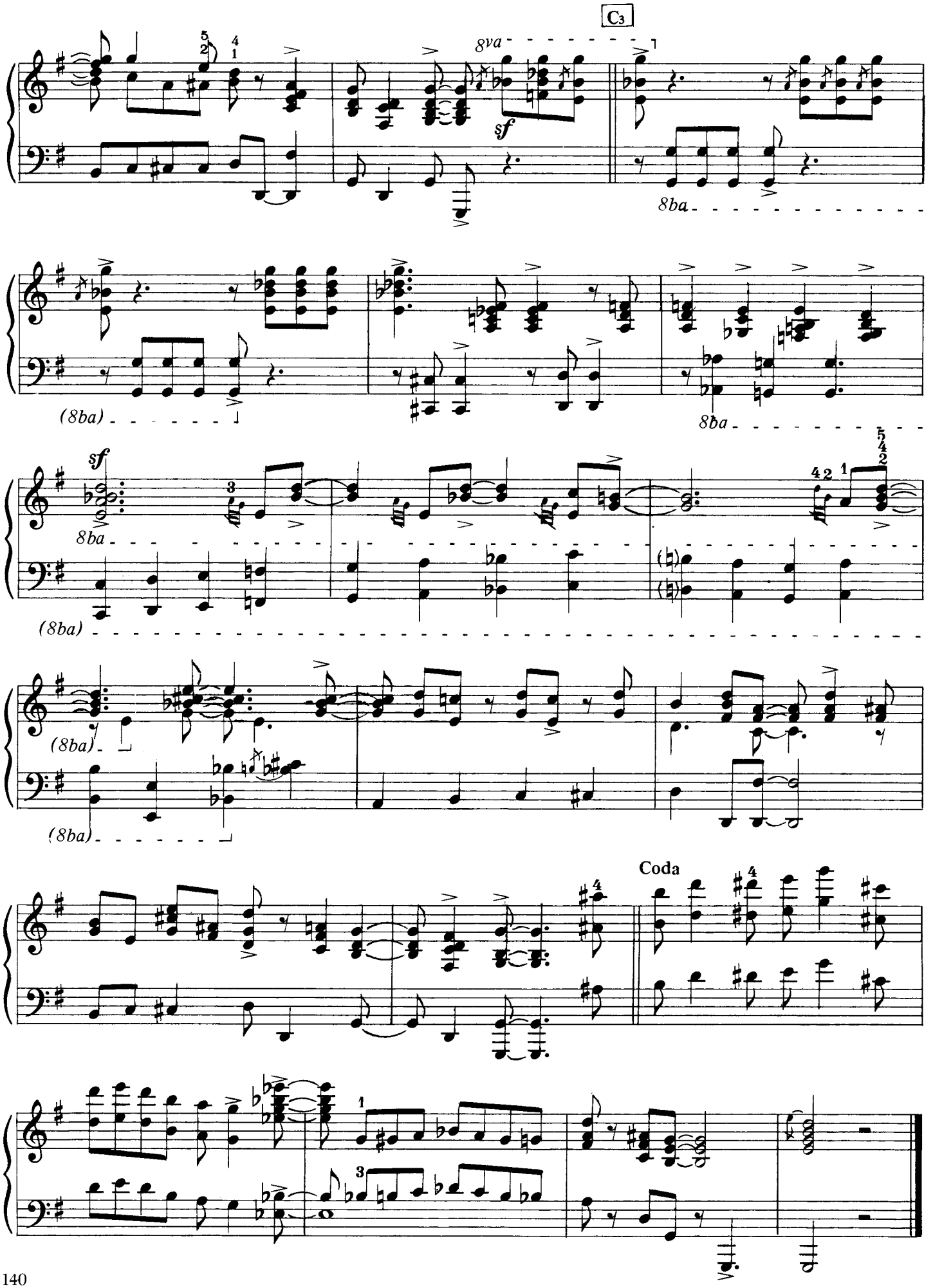

A2


8va
B1
(8va)
(8va)
(8va)
(8va)
(8va)


B2
C1


C2


C3
8va
sf
8ba
(8ba)
sf
Coda

Solitude

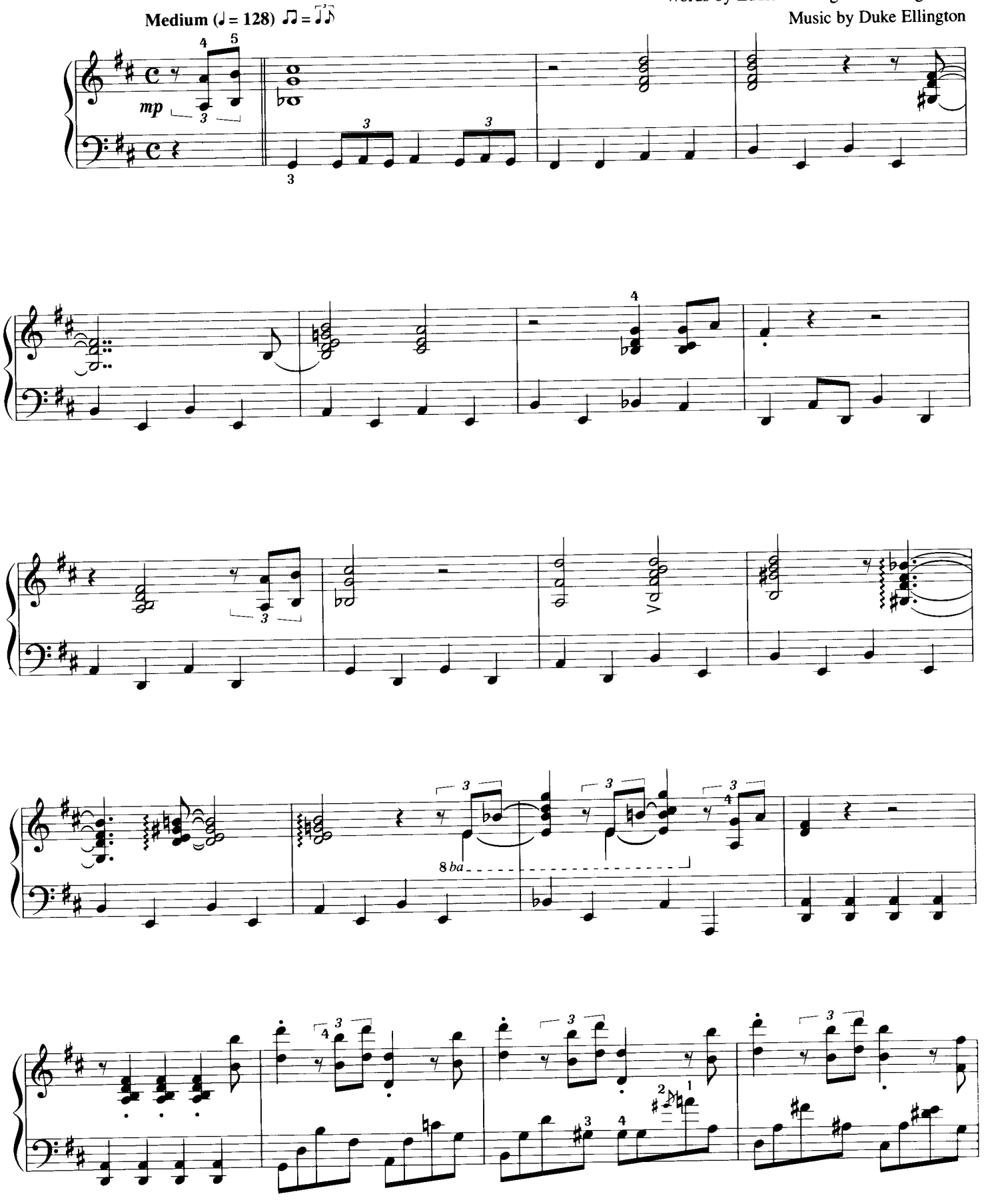
as recorded by Willie "The Lion" Smith on Lp CRM MPS 628, November 8, 1966.

As usual, the harmonic approach of "The Lion" is subtle and very pertinent to the song. See, for instance, his use of half-diminished chords, the very effective tenth chords in the right hand and the hypnotic bass line, which enhance the introspective mood of this arrangement.

Solitude

As Performed By Willie "The Lion" Smith

Words by Eddie DeLange and Irving Mills
Music by Duke Ellington



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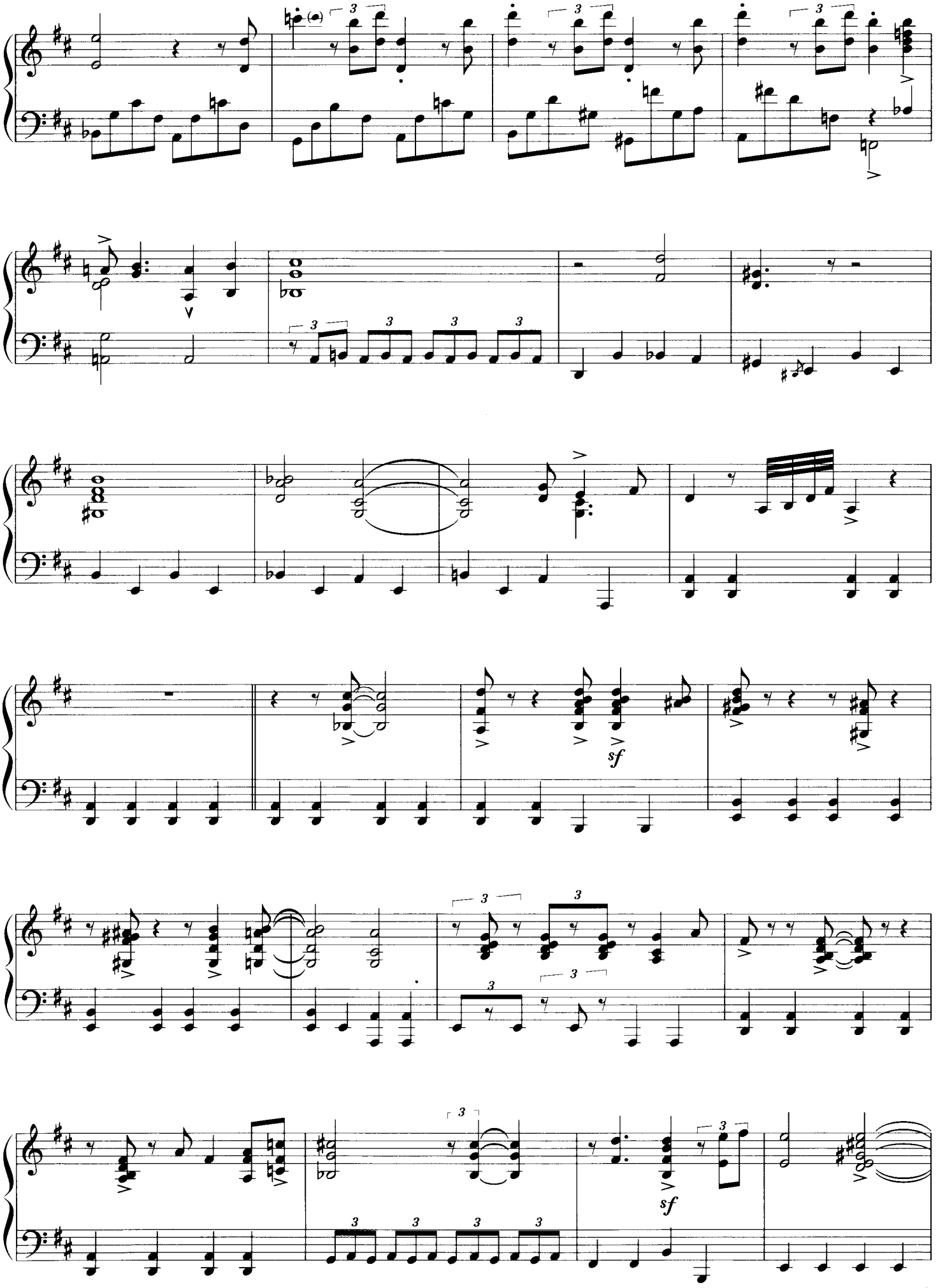
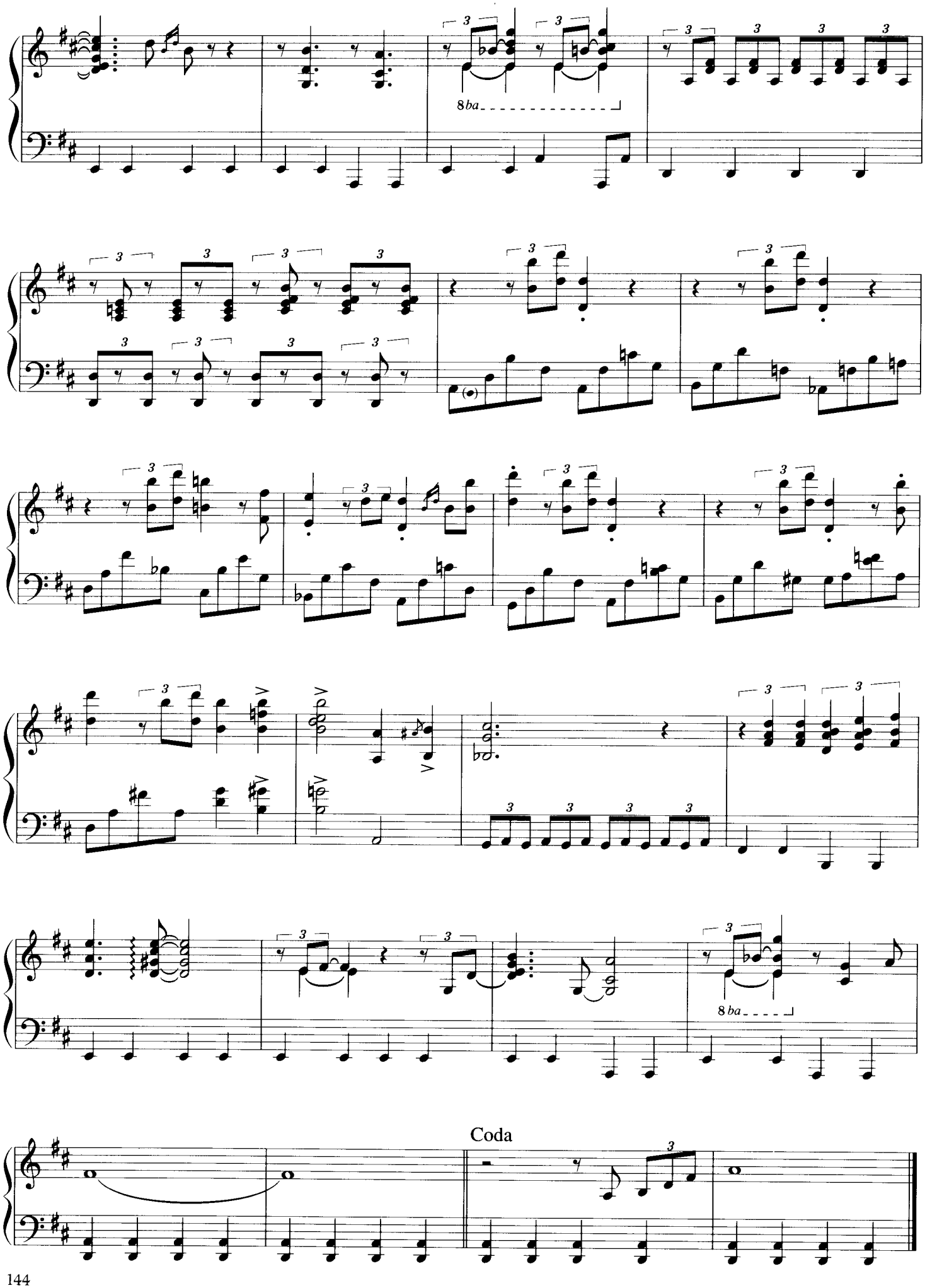

sf
sf


8ba
8ba
Coda

Squeeze Me (The Boy In The Boat)

as recorded by Willie "The Lion" Smith on January 10, 1939; reissued on Lp Commodore Classics 6.25491 AG.

One of The Lion's best recordings, very different from other renditions of this familiar tune (composed by Fats Waller and based on a bawdy ballad that was very popular at rent parties).

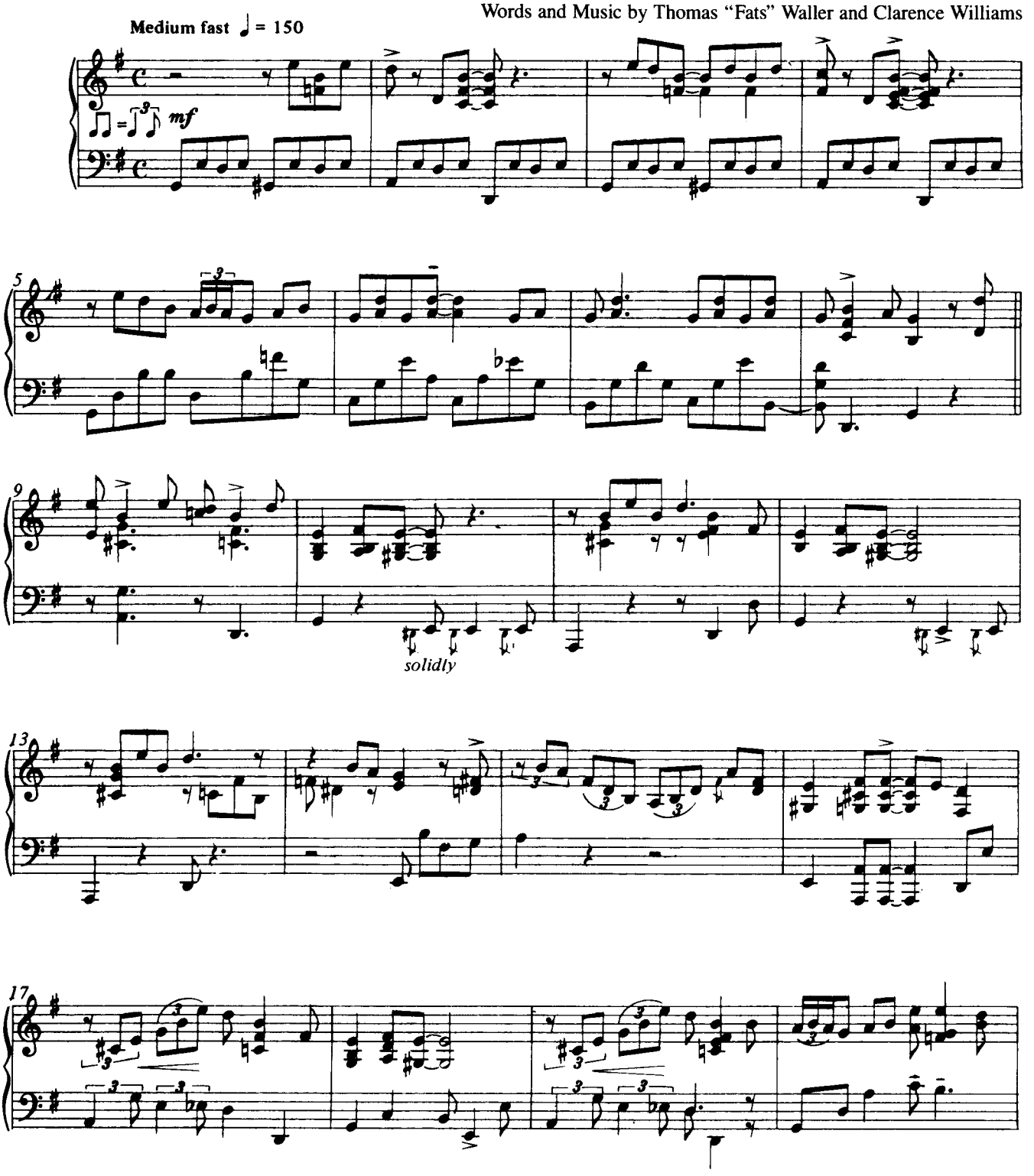
Here "The Lion" once more avoids the customary Stride bass, and in its place employs isolated bass figures, brief counterpoint-like passages, some melodic and rhythmic exchanges between right and left hand, and an adventurous and exciting accompaniment pattern (see second and third choruses).

Also remarkable are the many harmonic deviations and substitutions (i.e., altered and expanded chords) throughout the solo, revealing an advanced harmonic conception which made "The Lion" famous among his contemporaries (and a source of inspiration for musicians like Duke Ellington and Art Tatum).

Squeeze Me (The Boy In The Boat)

As Performed By Willie "The Lion" Smith

Words and Music by Thomas "Fats" Waller and Clarence Williams



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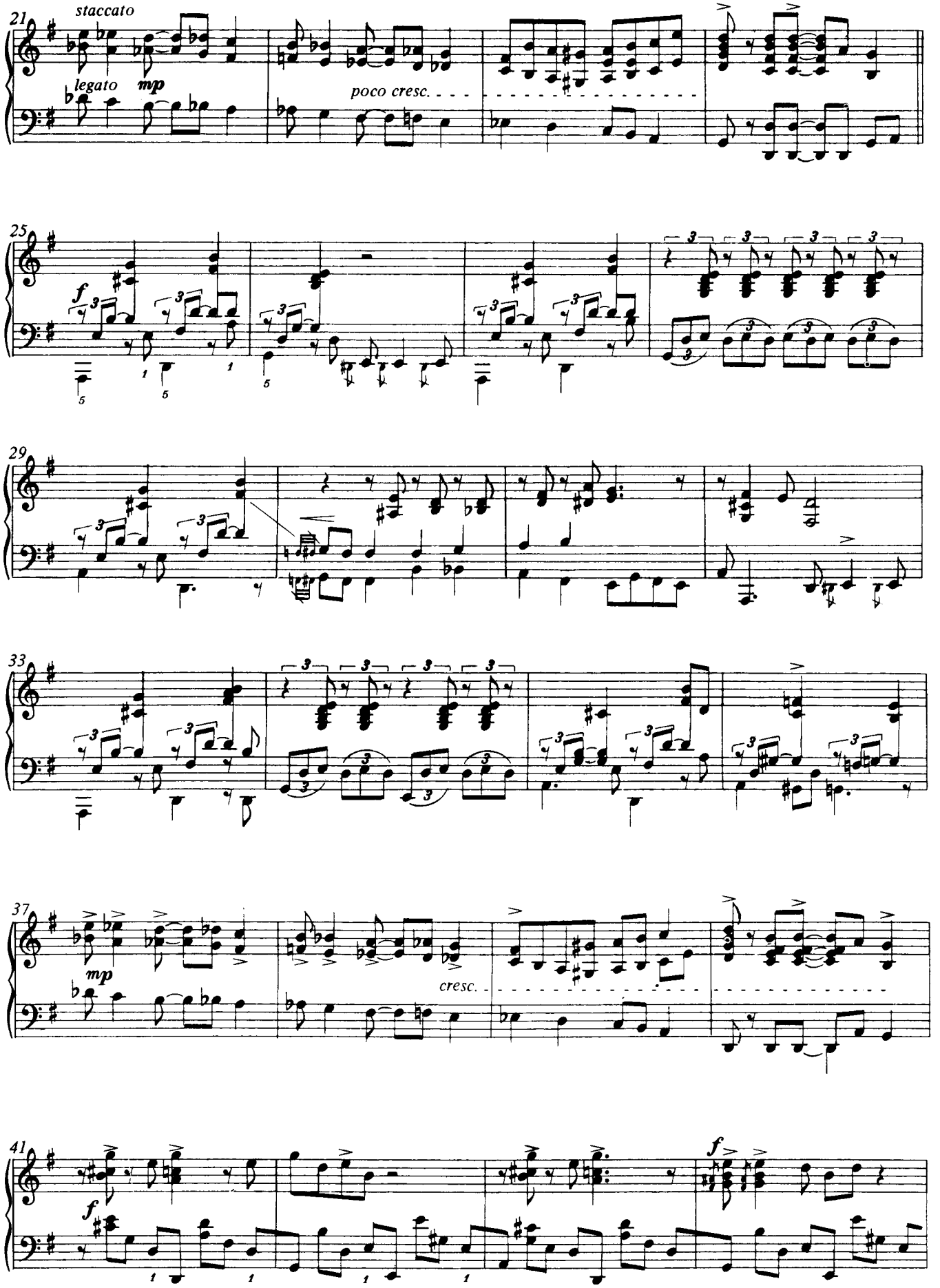
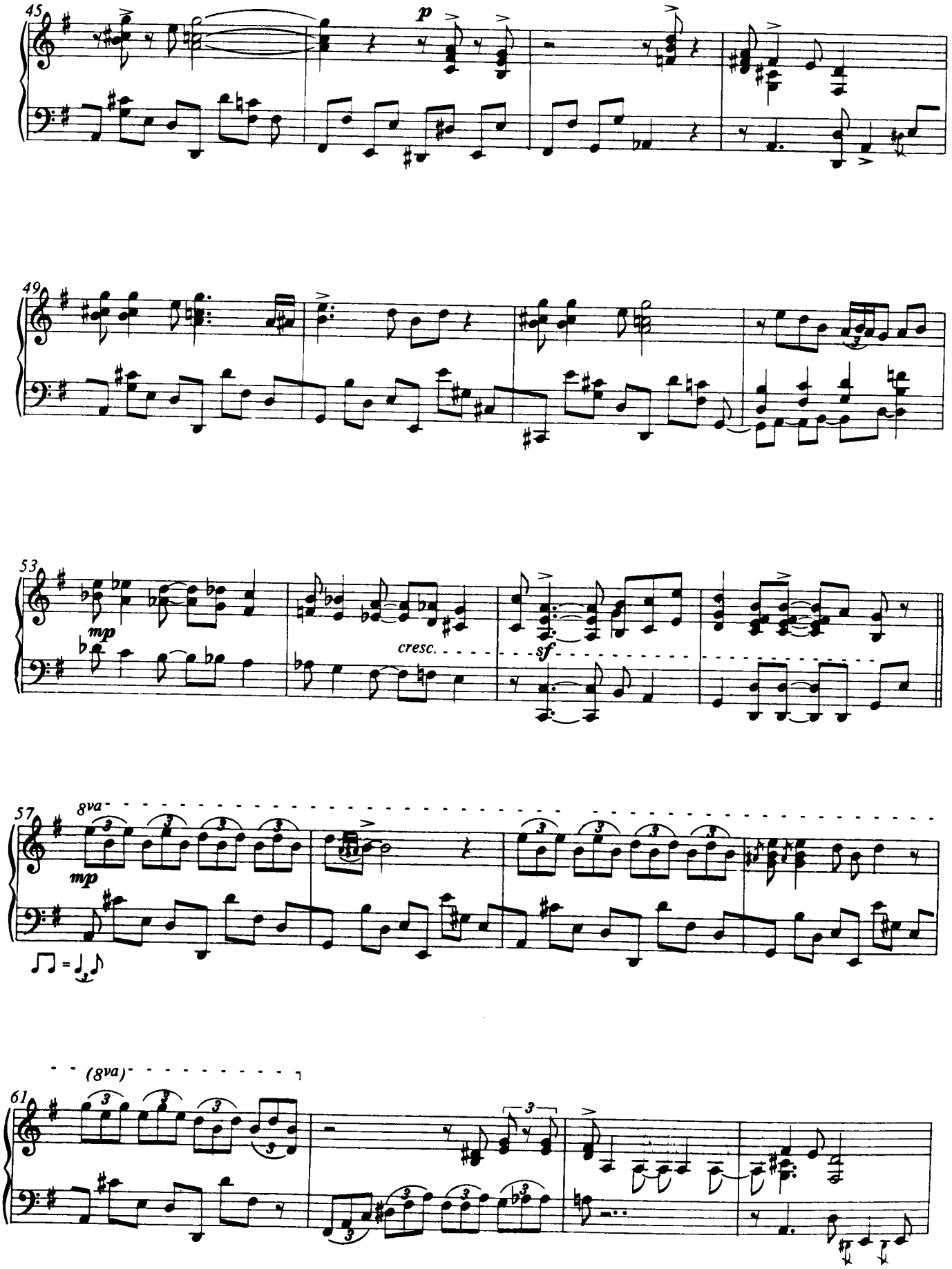
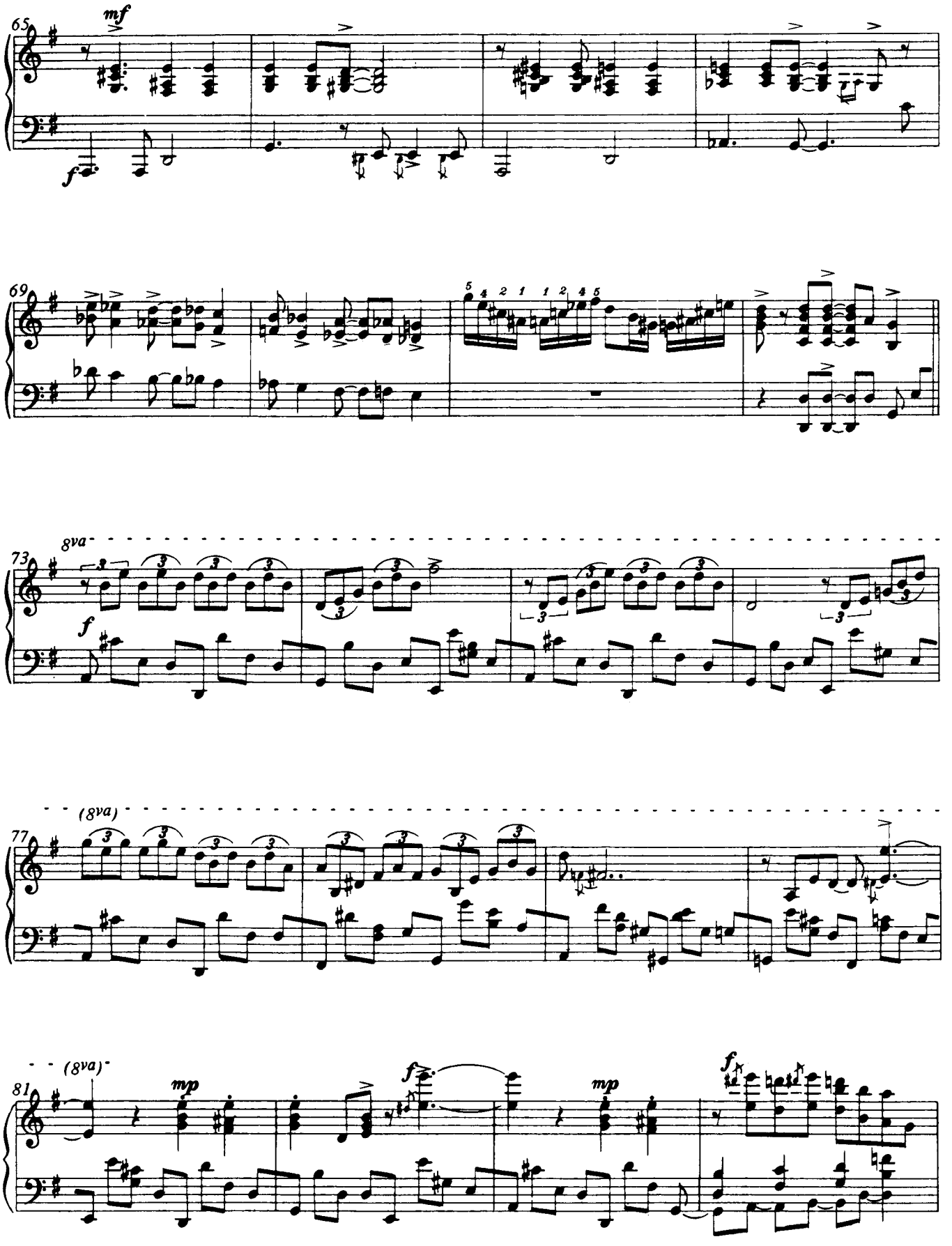
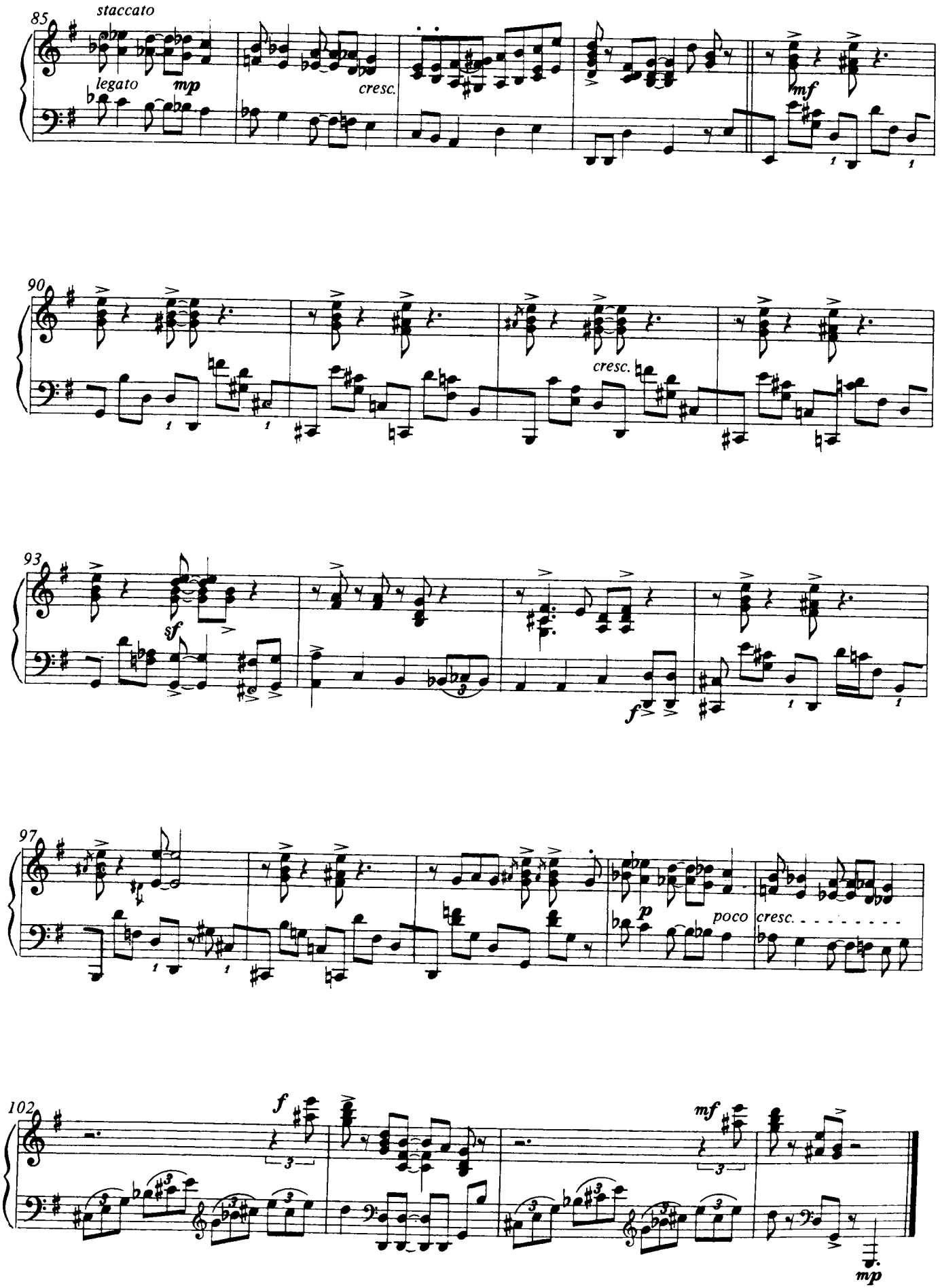

21
staccato
legato
mp
poco cresc.
25
f
29
33
37
mp
cresc.
41
f
f


45
p
49
53
mp
cresc.
sf
57
8va
mp
(8va)
61


65
mf
f
69
73
8va
f
(8va)
77
(8va)
81
mp
f
mp
f


85
staccato
legato
mp
cresc.
mf
90
cresc.
93
sf
f
97
p
poco
cresc.
102
f
mf
mp

St. Louis Blues

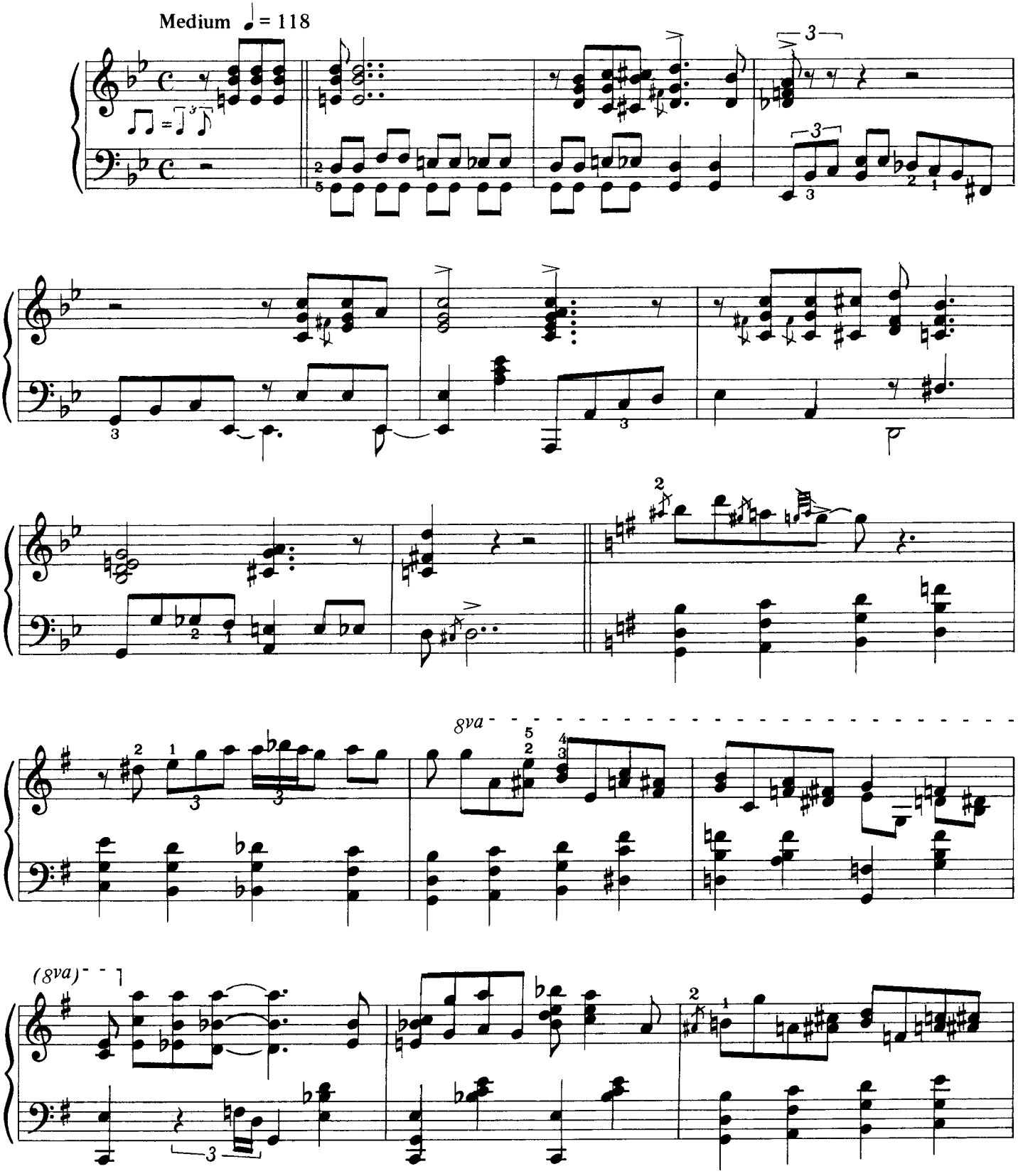
as recorded by Hank Duncan on Lp RI-DISC RD-4; late 1940s (exact date unknown).

Duncan was the favorite pupil of Fats Waller. Though influenced by the master (see, for instance, the abundance of "walking" tenth triads in the accompaniment), his personal style is interesting in its rhythmic drive and in the freedom of the right hand phrasing.

St. Louis Blues

As Performed By Hank Duncan

Words and Music by W.C. Handy



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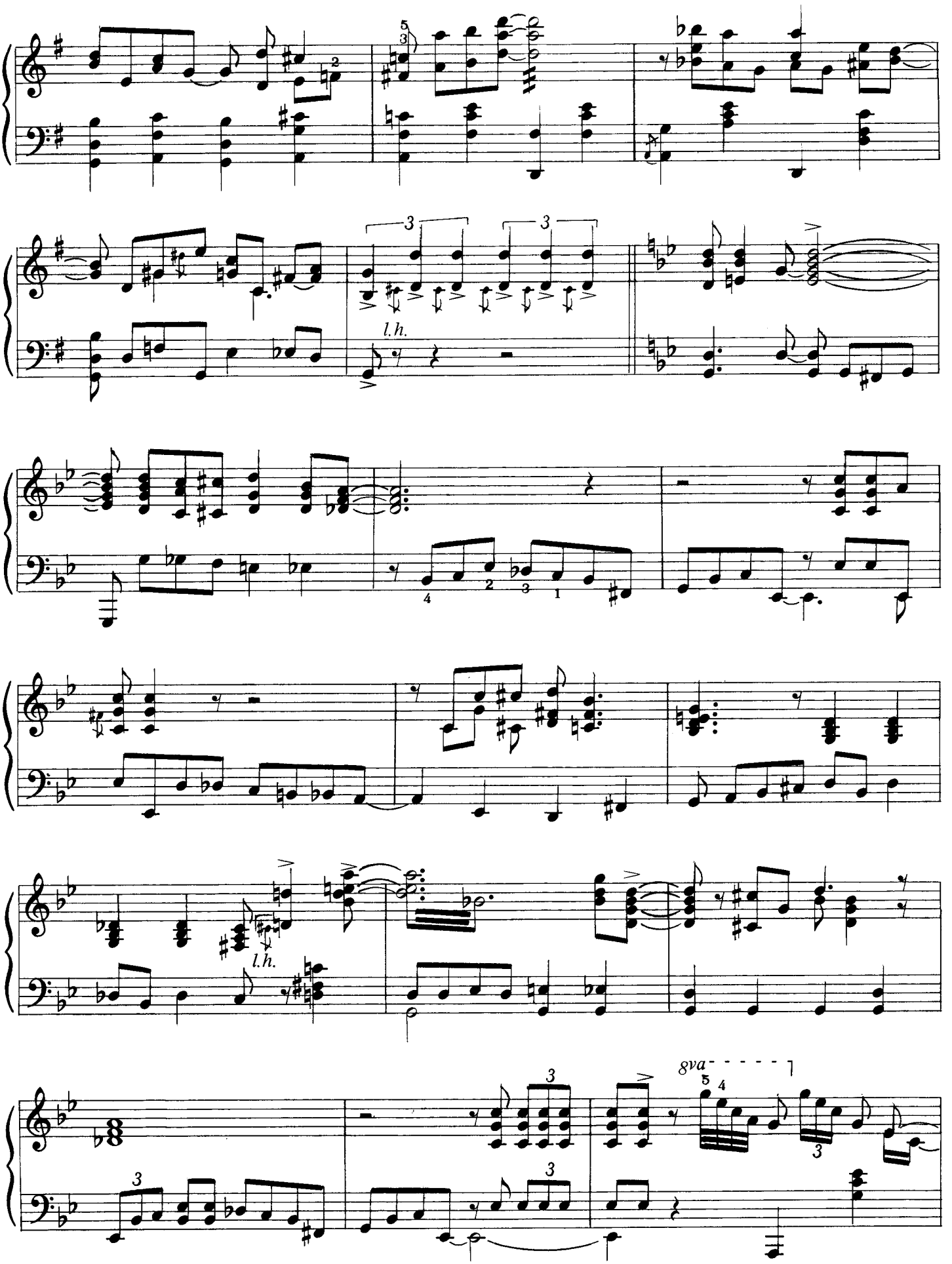
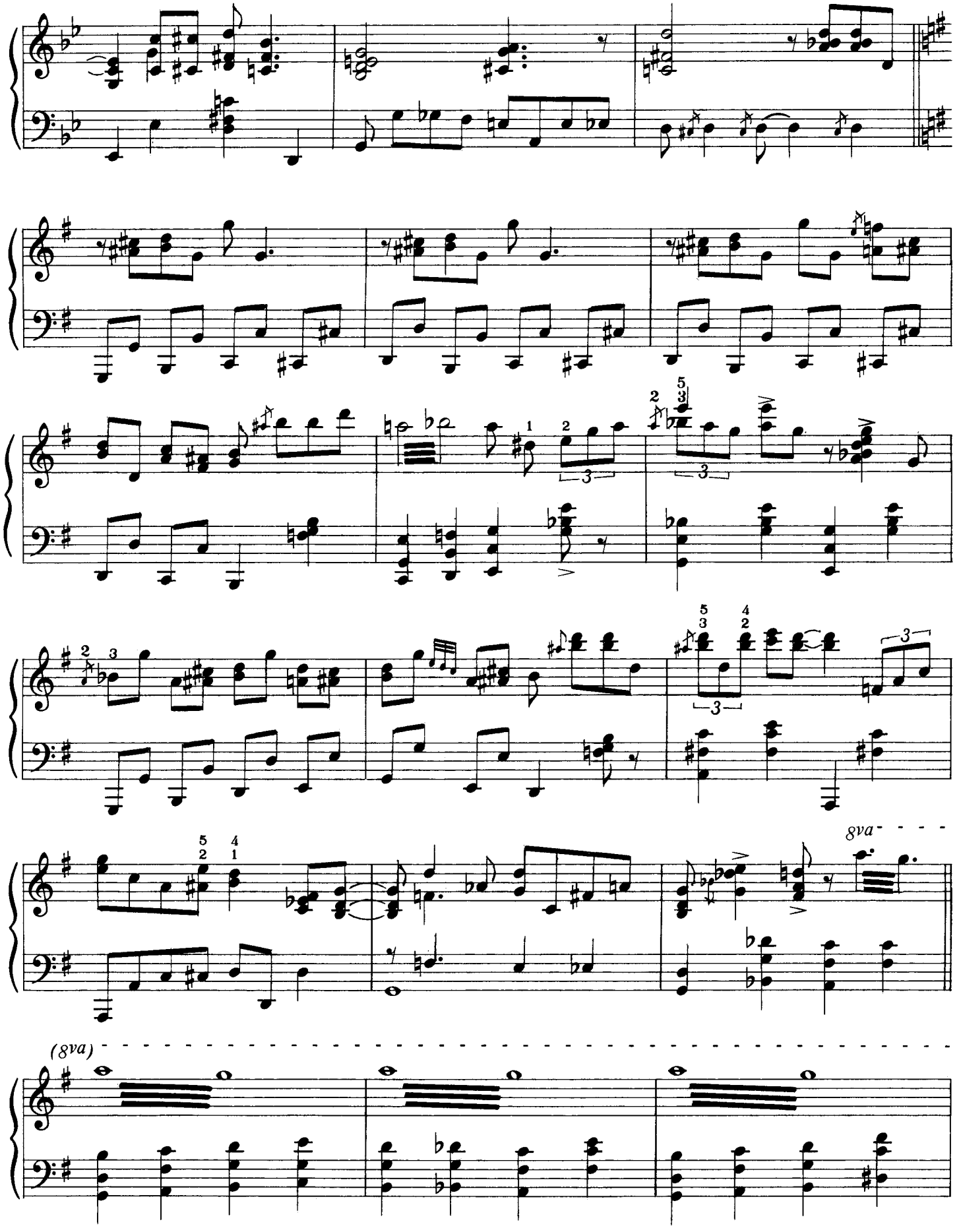
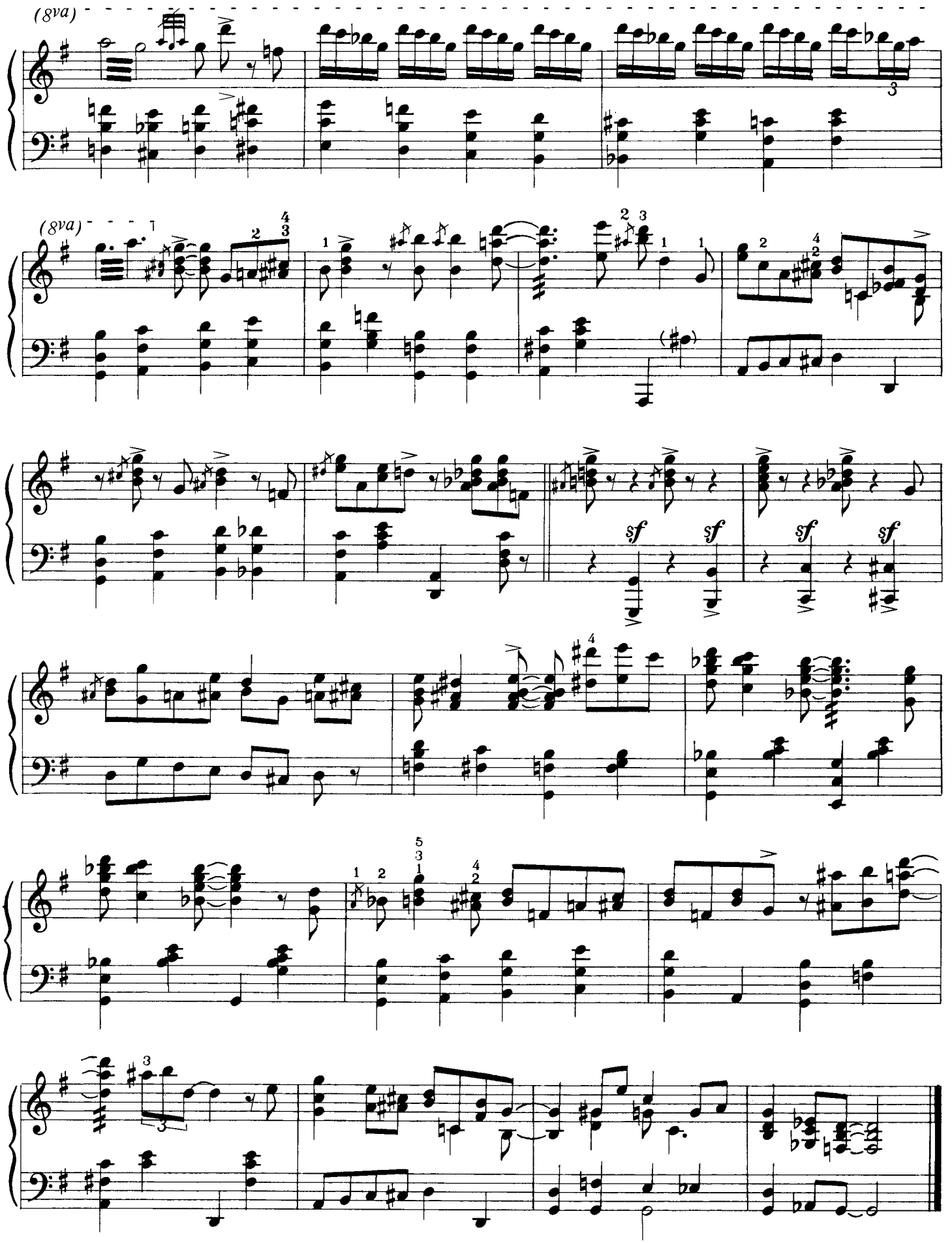

l.h.
l.h.
8va


8va
(8va)


(8va)
(8va)
sf
sf
sf
sf

Tea For Two

as recorded by Willie "The Lion" Smith on January 10, 1939; reissued on Lp Commodore Classics 6.25491 AG.

During his formative gigs in Atlantic City clubs (about 1915), "The Lion" often had to face a musical dilemma – the so-called "whiskey tenors" – drunken customers in the mood for some good singing. Decidedly not too interested in the musical problems of the pianist who had the disagreeable task of accompanying them, the "whiskey tenors" were generally not in tune. Usually they sang in the wrong key or worse, they changed keys many times in the same song.

Using his wits, "The Lion" soon learned to master all the keys and, more important, he began to incorporate the "trick" of sudden flashy transitory modulations.

The outstanding second chorus of *Tea for Two* is a good example of his unique harmonic attitude that certainly had some influence on Art Tatum (see, for instance, the famous Tatum recordings of *Tea for Two*, that feature plenty of transitory modulations).

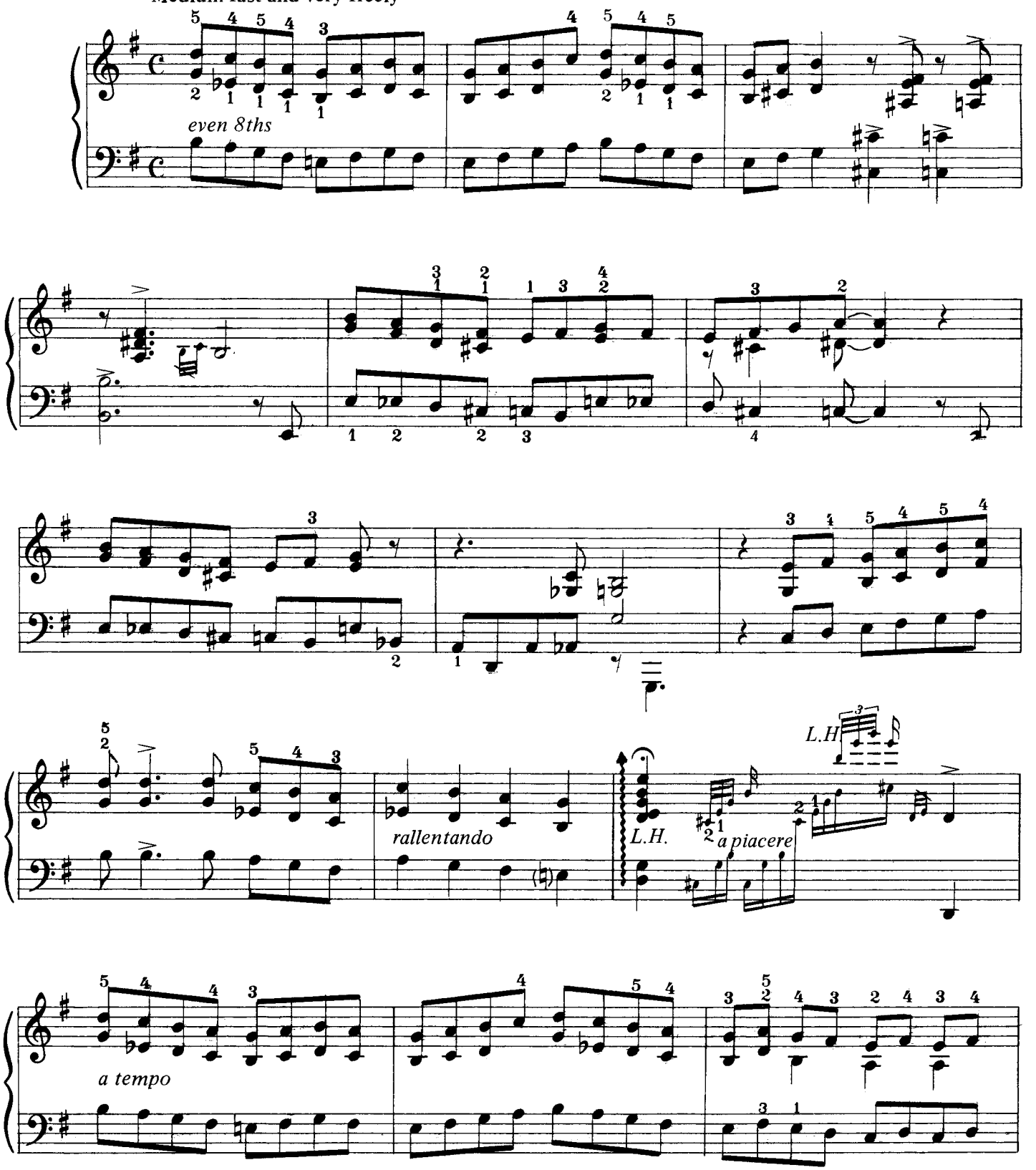
In this solo one can also appreciate The Lion's absolutely unconventional rendering of the verse, and his use of *rubato* and arabesque-like triplets. Also noteworthy is his complete reshaping of the rhythmic profile of the original melody, which clearly was too steady for his ebullient musical attitude.

Tea For Two

As Performed By Willie "The Lion" Smith

Words by Irving Caesar

Music by Vincent Youmans



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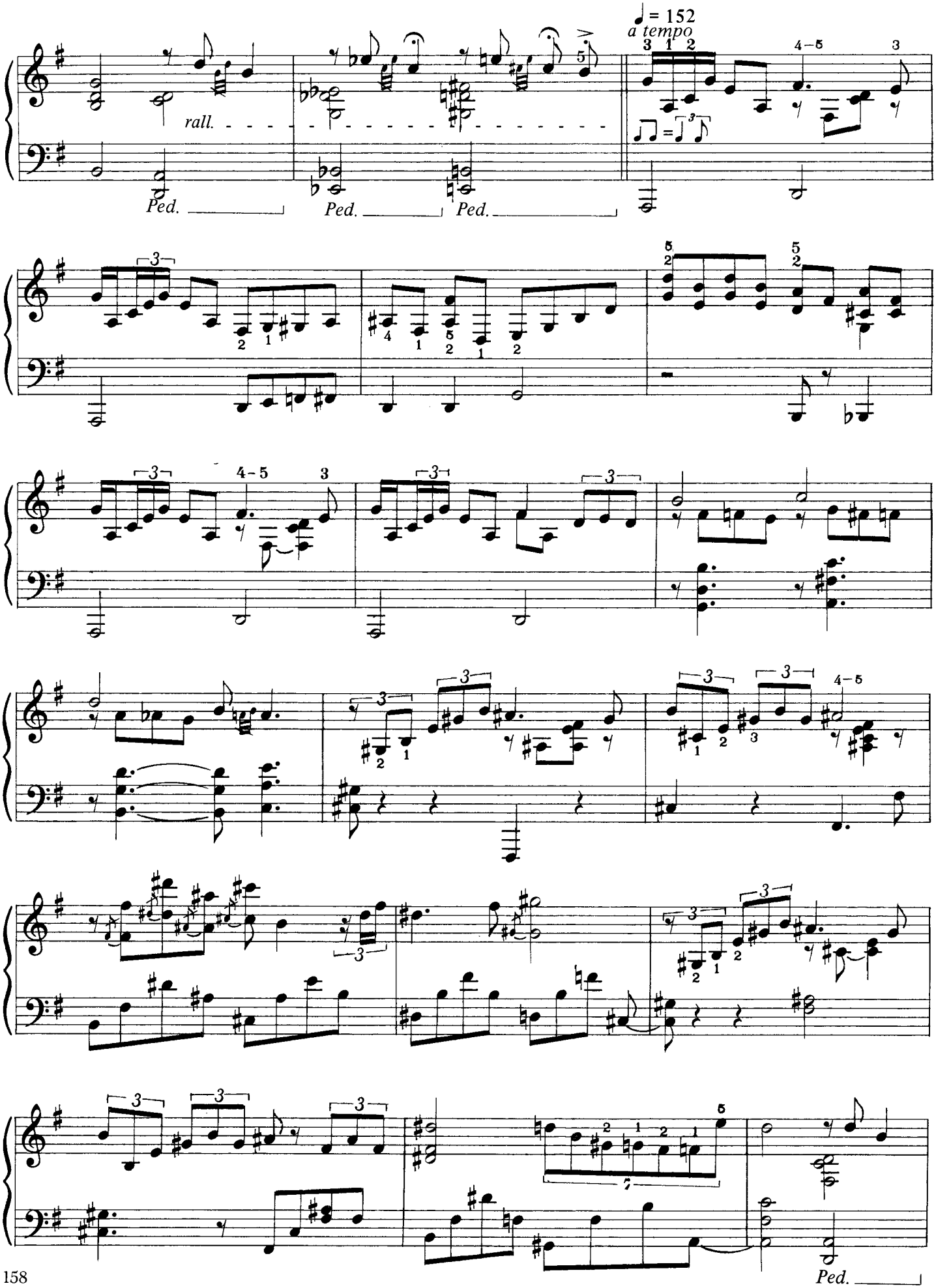
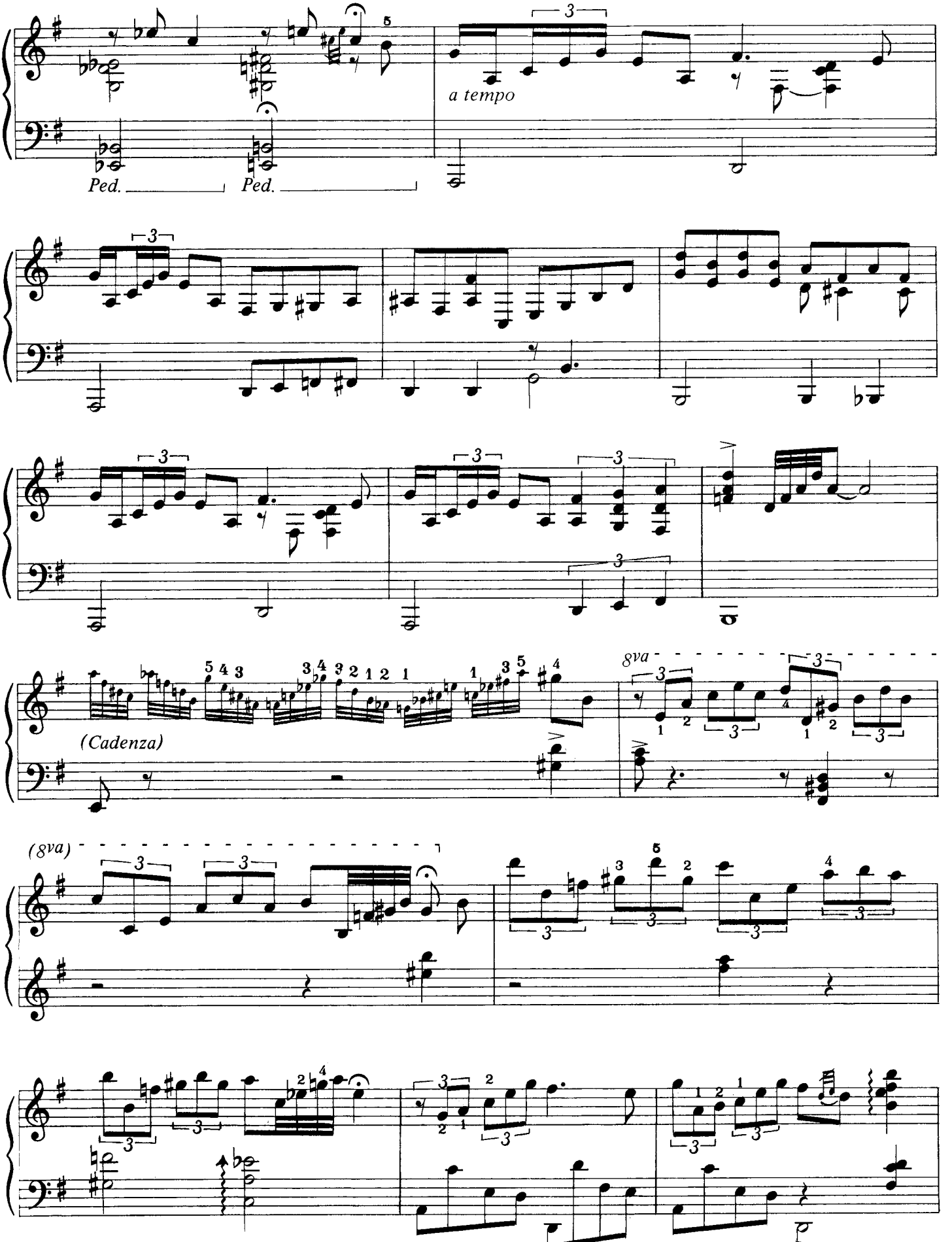
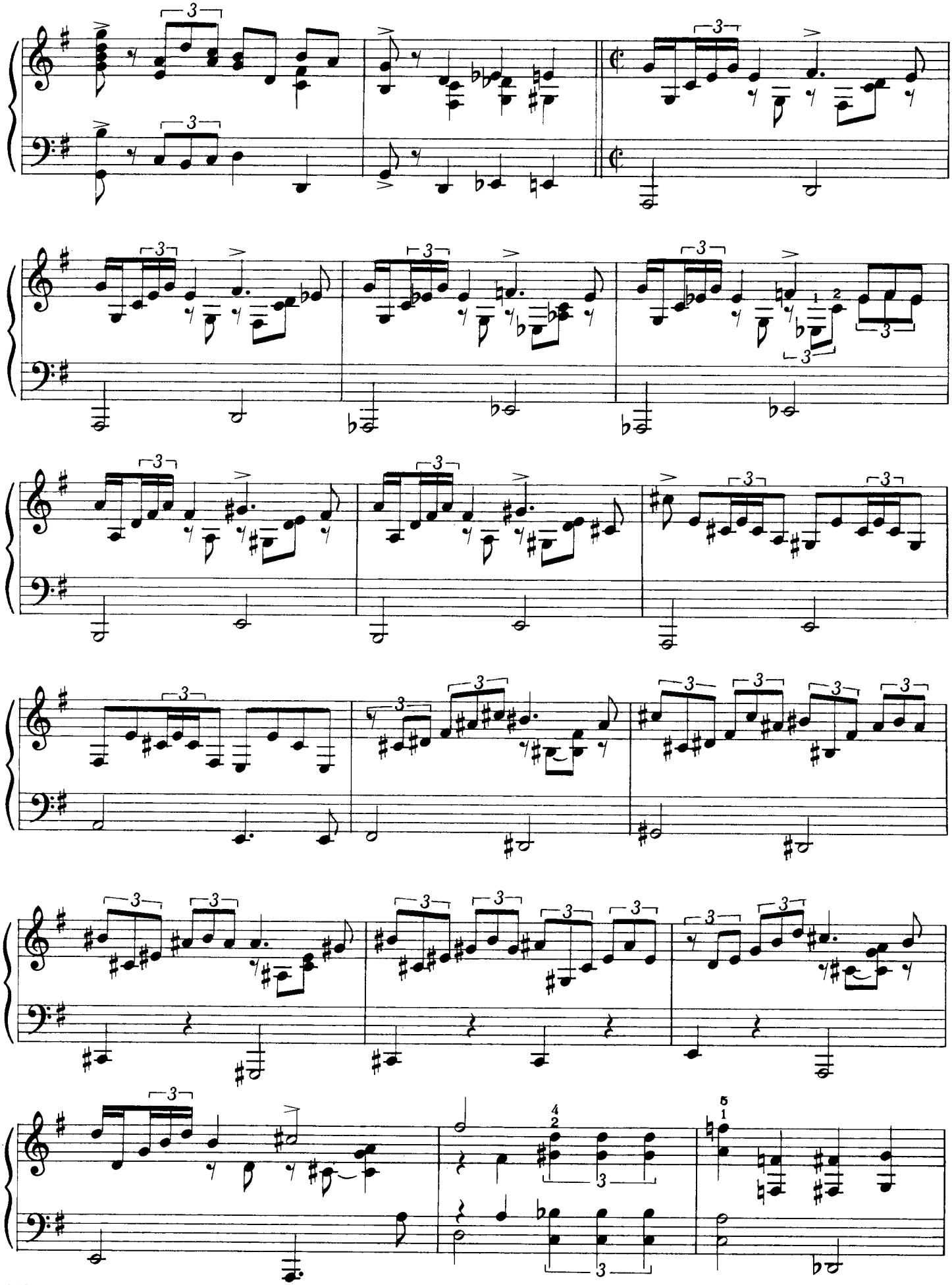
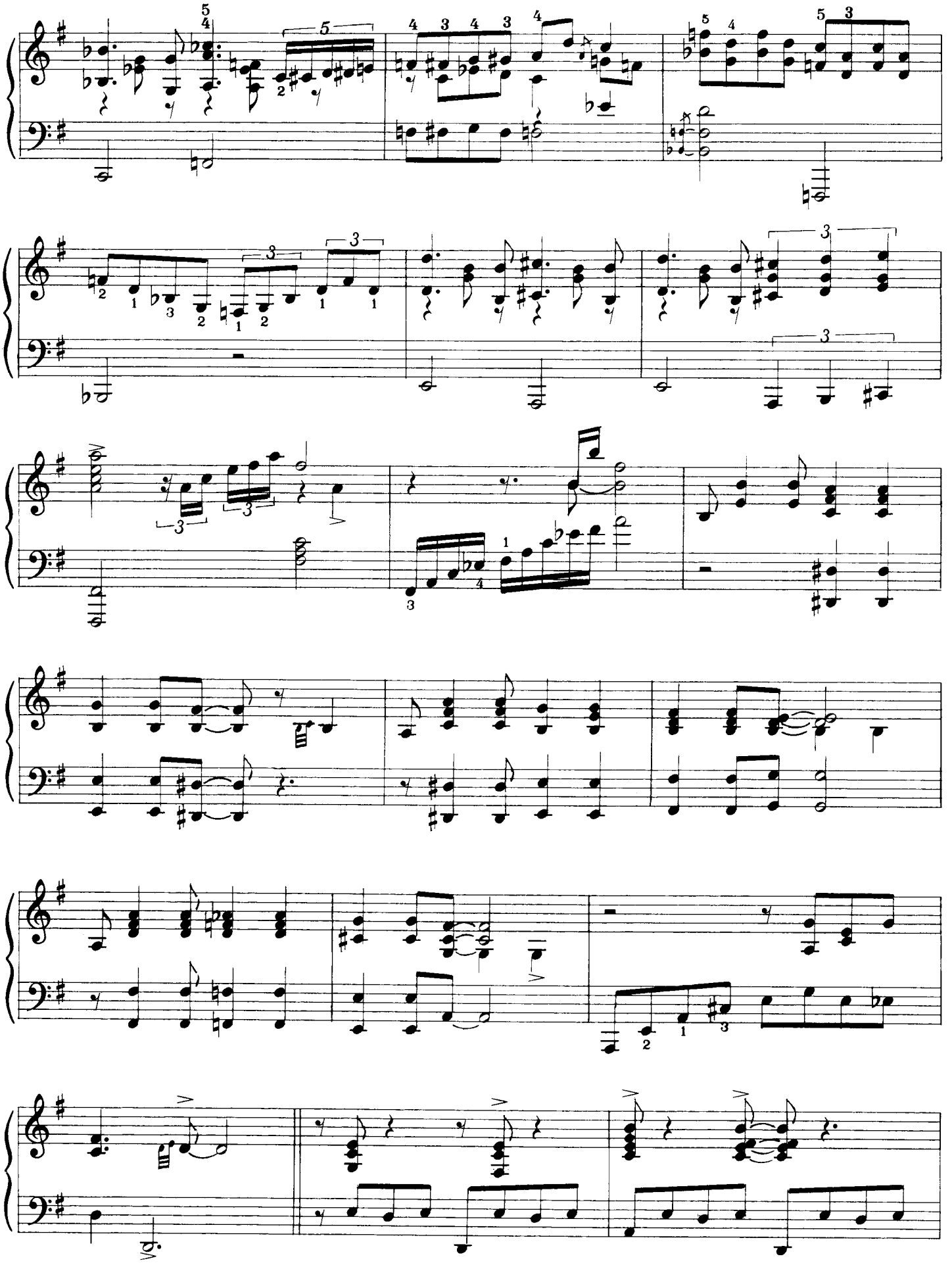
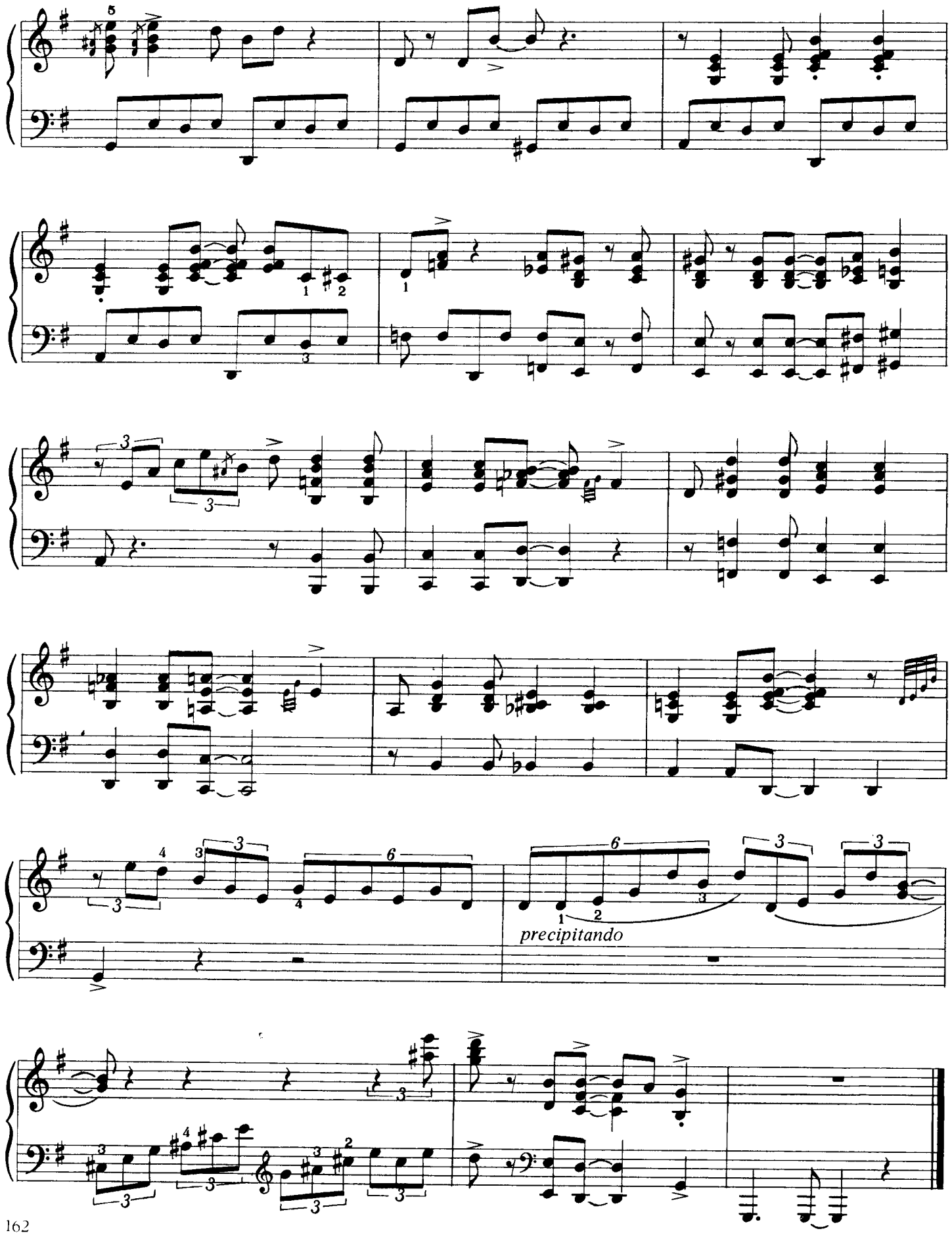

♩ = 152
a tempo
rall.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


Ped.
Ped.
a tempo
(Cadenza)
8va
(8va)






precipitando

Willow Weep For Me

as recorded by Joe Turner on February 6, 1976; Lp Pablo 2310-763.

A great arrangement for a great tune, this solo displays Mr. Turner's distinctive approach to song-ballad material.

His intent unfolds in the introduction, with its ebullient glissandos in the bass and dissonant chords. The original mood of this song (quiet, lullaby-like) is completely revised. See his diversification of rhythmic phrasing, which breaks the uniformity of the original melody. Of note are his left hand work and the use of "extended" chords (i.e. thirteenth chords and the recurrent G-D7/#9 passage).

In the carefully worked-out rendition of the bridge one can also appreciate Turner's highly articulated right hand work (see the use of tremolo and connecting grace notes – here the piano really sings!) plus an occasional 3/4 feeling in the third and seventh bar.

In the first sixteen bars of the second chorus, Turner enhances the blues quality of this ballad, running into some intricate, freely executed phrasings and glissandos, which are practically impossible to notate exactly in their rhythmic profile (for better reference, listen to the recording).

The Coda features one of the distinctive Willie "The Lion" Smith's fancy ending formulas, taken from his 1939 recording of *Passionette*.

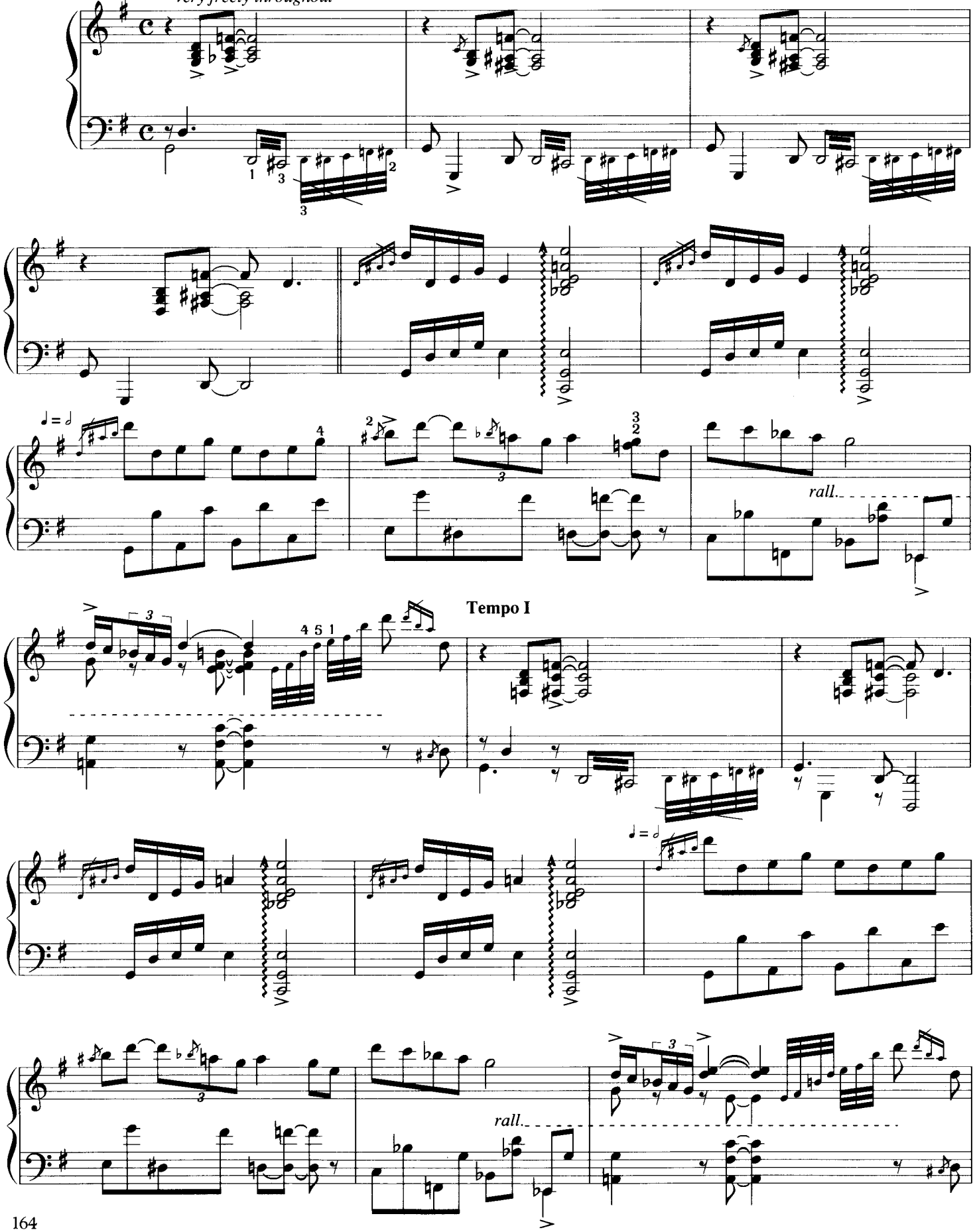
This transcription has been kindly revised by Mr. Turner himself.

Willow Weep For Me

As Performed By Joe Turner

Slow (♩ = 84) , even eighths
very freely throughout

Words and Music by Ann Ronell



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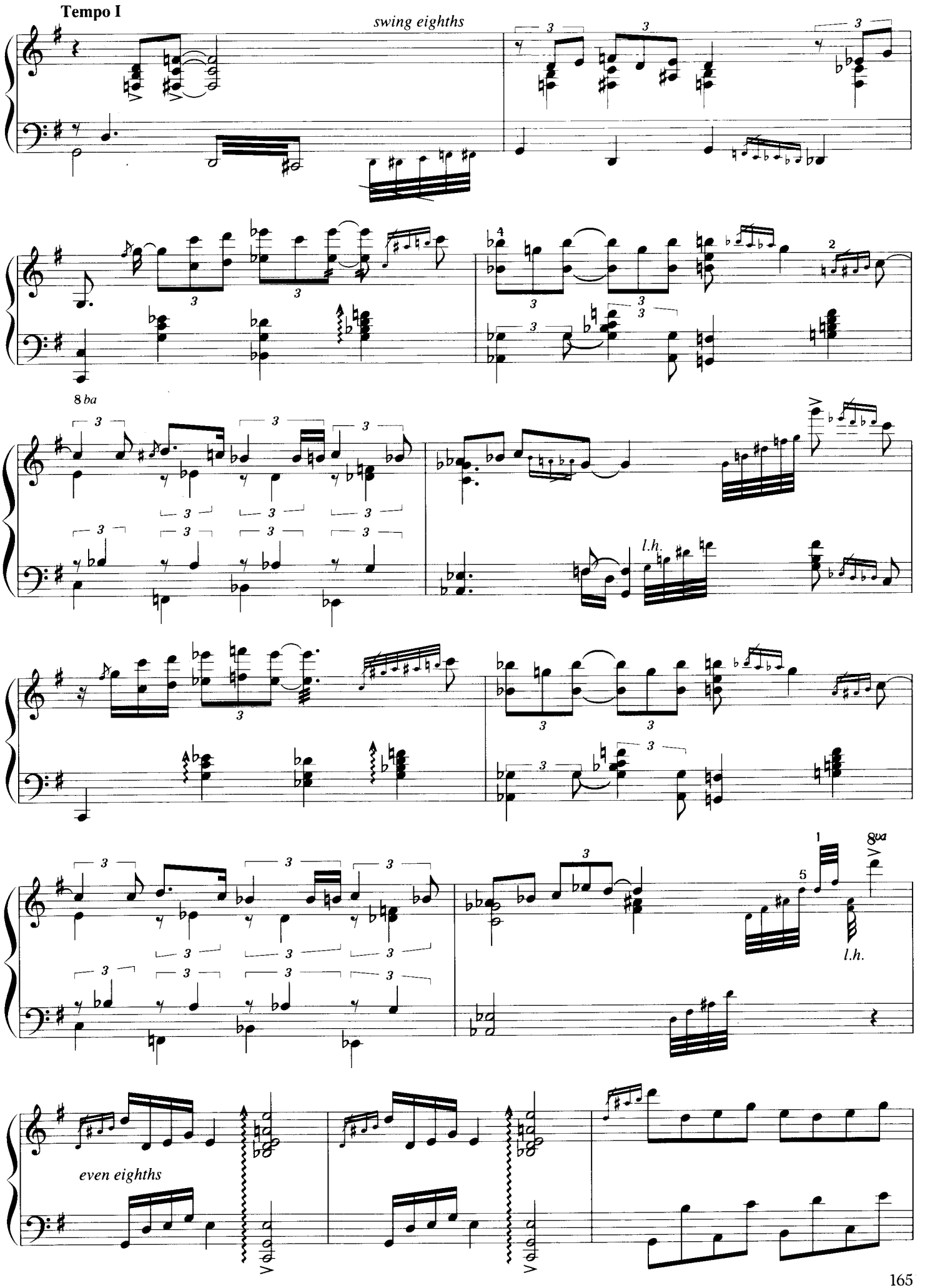
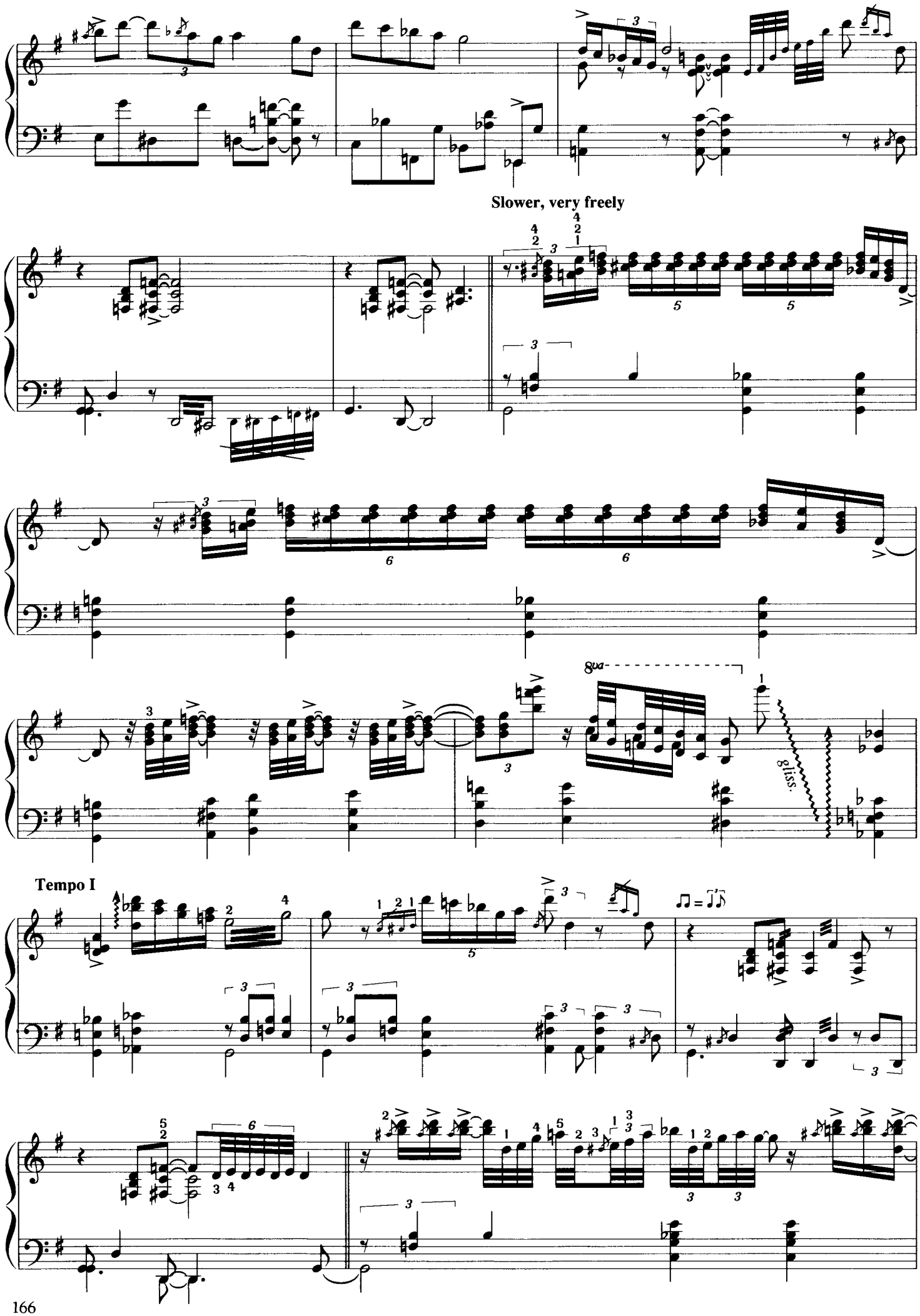
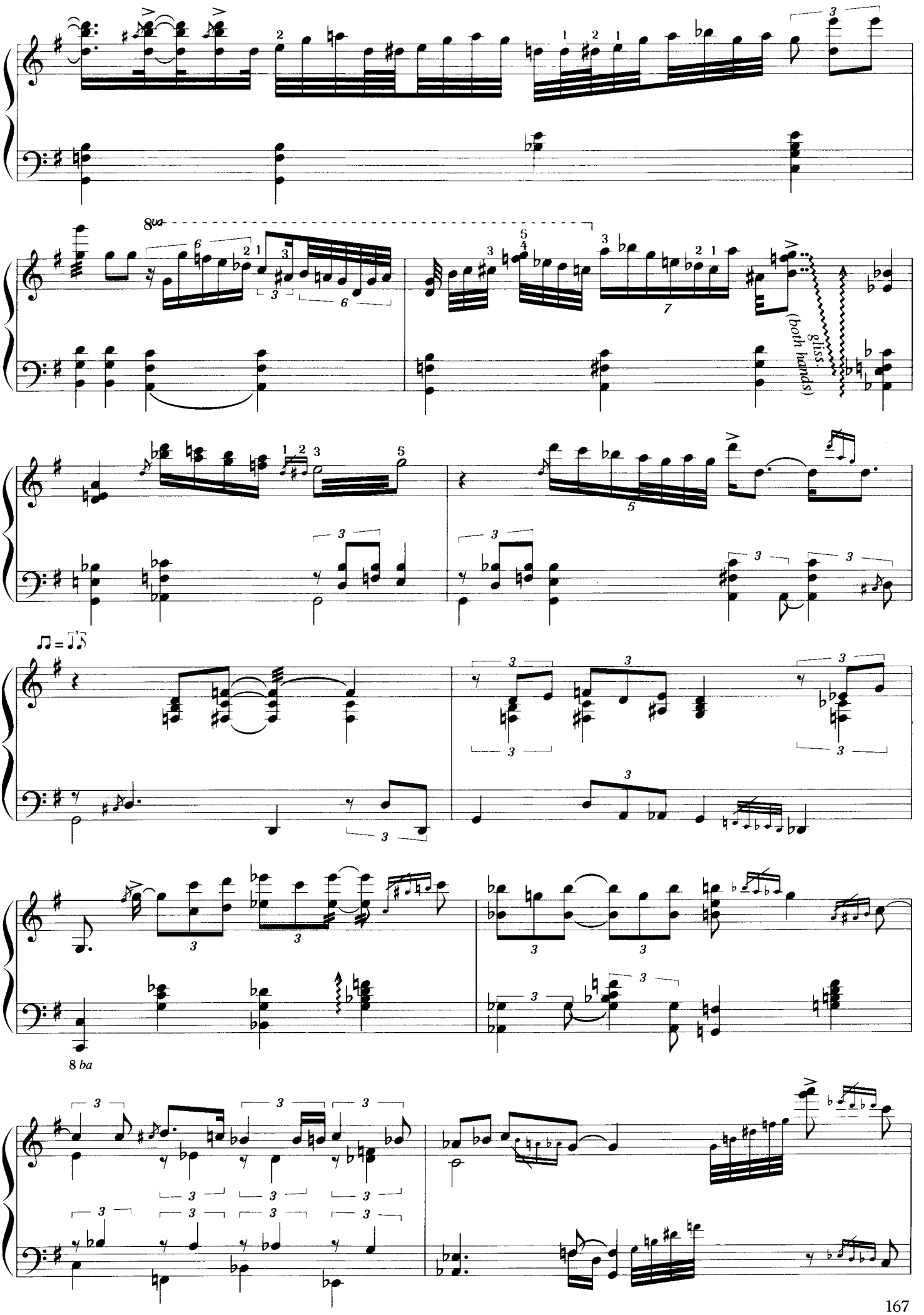
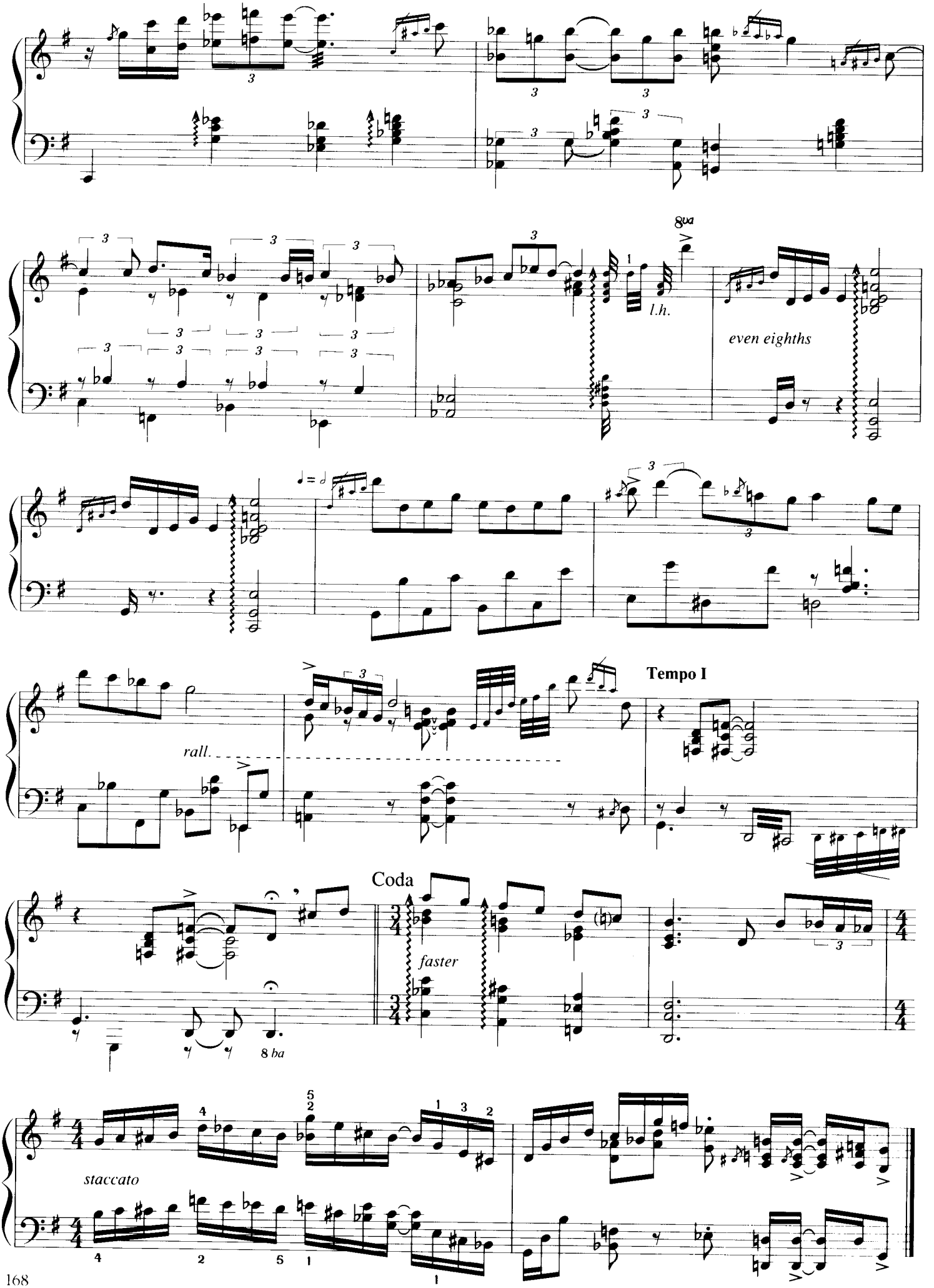

Tempo I
swing eighths
8 ba
l.h.
8va
l.h.
even eighths


Slower, very freely
8va
gliss.
Tempo I


8va
gliss.
(both hands)
8 ba


8va
l.h.
even eighths
rall.
Tempo I
Coda
faster
8 ba
staccato