Variations on the Fourth Credo for Piano and Organ

Michael Andersen

VARIATIONS ON THE FOURTH CREDO

for

Piano & Organ

by

Michael Andersen

PROGRAM NOTES

The term, Fourth Credo, is a slang expression. Choir members and music directors in Roman Catholic churches once used it to denote the chant setting of the Creed usually sung during Advent and Lent. In Liber Usualis, the compilation of Gregorian chants, this Credo is found under the heading "IV." Hence, Fourth Credo.

The simple beauty of the chants can lure the believer and nonbeliever alike. In his Mass in B Minor Johann Sebastian Bach incorporated chant melodies several times, stamping them with his own unequaled style. Mozart used them on occasion. And hardly any composer since has been able to resist the "Dies Irae" from the Mass for the Dead.

My own association with the chants began when, as a boy of ten, I joined a newly formed boys' and men's choir. I joined it not out of any particular liking for music. All of my friends were auditioning and I didn't want to be left out.

I had no love at first for what I thought were dull and ponderous melodies. Our choir director insisted that we sing the chants in the medieval manner --not accompanied, not harmonized, and certainly not loudly. I preferred the Handelian blast of trumpets and drums on Christmas and Easter. No matter: at sixteen I traded the choir in on a car and the chants sank into the back of my memory and laid there.

Of the forty-or-so compositions I admit to, at least half reflect chant influences. This piece is my second set of variations on a chant theme in a secular work. The other was written ten years ago for violin and piano and is based on the Easter sequence, "Victimae Paschali Laudes." Why this preoccupation with chants?

Two answers are possible. First, no one can escape his experiences, try as he might. J.W.N. Sullivan in his study of Beethoven suggests that all art is a reordering of experience. Perhaps so. A second possibility comes closer to my thoughts. But, through some devious logic, it circles back to Sullivan's point.

The curse of our age is linguistic and musical pedestrianism. It is symbolized by monosyllabic slogans vomited continually by the television set to the noisy obligato of amplified guitars. Through our technical prowess poverty stricken ideas can gain currency overnight. Such was the state of language and music when the church fathers met for the second Vatican Council. The predictable result in the "renewed" liturgy was a Mass for everybody. "Qui tollis peccata mundi" from the Gloria was translated, "You who take away the sins of the world." If you-who is acceptable, why not "Yahoo y'all" in place of "Ossana in excelsis"?

The guitars soon joined the fun and a two-thousand year musical tradition was smashed in one blow. Anglican churchmen, forgetting that The Book of Common Prayer was translated just before Shakespeare's birth, plan soon to make that lordly book into a quaint --and unused-- anachronism. It will be replaced with such heart-tearing phrases as "Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal." To that I add, "Oh, my God." Reduction to the lowest common denominator is reductio ad absurdum, and it is indeed common.

Variations on the Fourth Credo carries no deliberate programmatic intent. When I wrote it, I thought only of musical problems and probably would have objected strongly if someone had suggested otherwise. Later, while proofreading the score in the quiet of the late night, some of the slow passages reminded me of the sonorities I remember from my days in the choir, the visual and auditory splendor, far surpassing Parsifal, in the Latin Mass, now proscribed and nearly forgotten. I lit my pipe, sat back in my chair, and thought about it all.

The chants developed as a tradition over a long period of time. Pope Gregory may have presided over their codification, but he didn't write them. No one did. They were handed down aurally, evolving from one generation to the next. They represent a synthesis of Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Arabic musical influences.

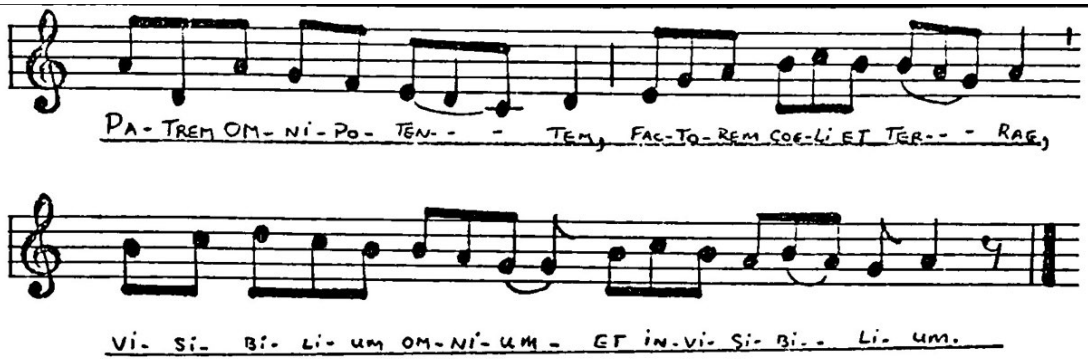
Can such a tradition be restored? After about six puffs on the pipe I concluded with some sadness that it can't. My dog, sleeping near the desk, exhaled loudly in agreement with her master. I went on proofreading.

This piece may be an unwitting attempt to pass along an experience, however reorganized --or disorganized-- the experience may be.

Analysis of the Music

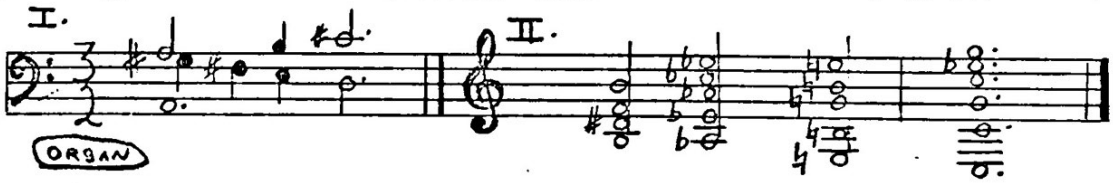
Igor Stravinsky once explained his concept of variations to a colleague by imitating a soldier at close order drill -- facing and pacing to the left, right, and rear. He concluded the exercise with a sharp salute and a smile. He showed that a composer is committed to a theme as a soldier is to his mission. The individual notes of the theme must appear. The theme becomes the skeleton which in part dictates the logic of the piece.

The theme here is the group of phrases from the creed first sung by the choir after the celebrant's intonation of "Credo in unum Deum."



At no point in these variations does the theme appear precisely as it does in Liber Usualis. Variation begins immediately with the theme trimmed down to bones, with most of the passing tones omitted and two harmonic figures superimposed. The harmonic implications of the theme are so simple that the addition of idiomatic harmony is a variation technique.

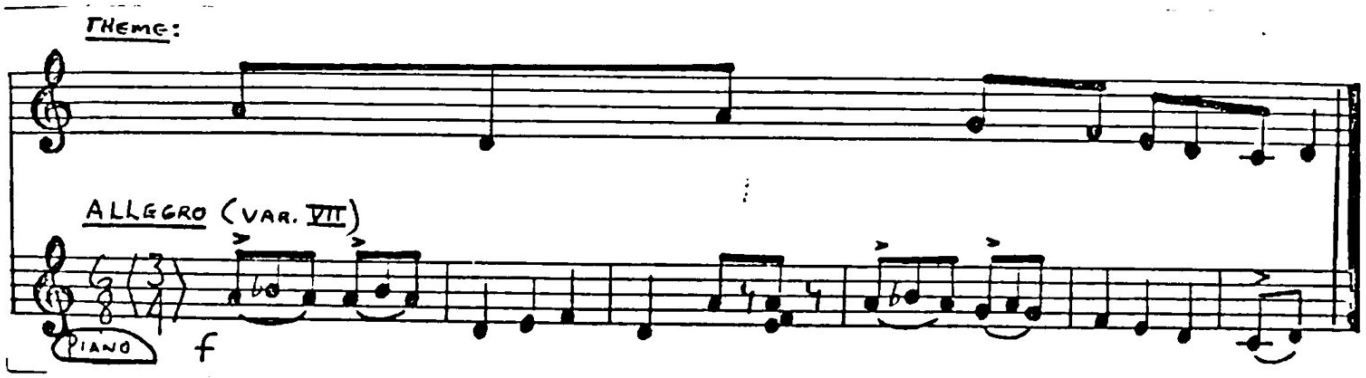
Harmonic Figures



These figures are the harmonic --as opposed to the melodic-- foundation of the entire piece. They are used to signify cadences and the ends of variations. There are twenty-eight variations in this single movement of twenty-one minutes length. They are grouped generally as slow/fast/slow/fast.

If some notes are omitted in the first variation, they must be put back later. This is accomplished mostly in the organ part in the third and fourth variations where the theme is disguised through the addition of passing tones and other melodic figures. This increases textural tension and gives an impression of added momentum without a change in tempo. At about four and a half minutes into the piece, the theme appears in the organ, slightly varied, but undisguised. The piano accompanies at first, but takes the theme in the next variation.

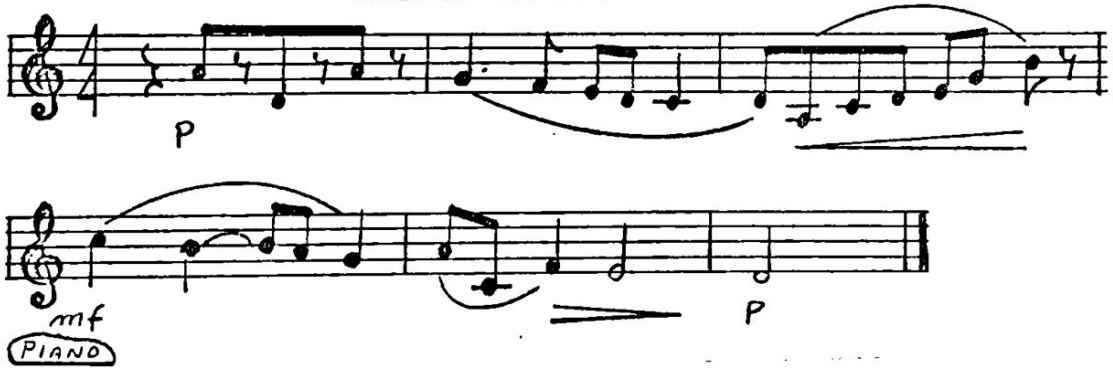
An Allegro section follows --Variations VII-XIV-- in which the theme takes on a vigorous character in alternating duple and triple meter. In the example below the theme is shown in relation to the variation. This will show the reader one form of variation technique.



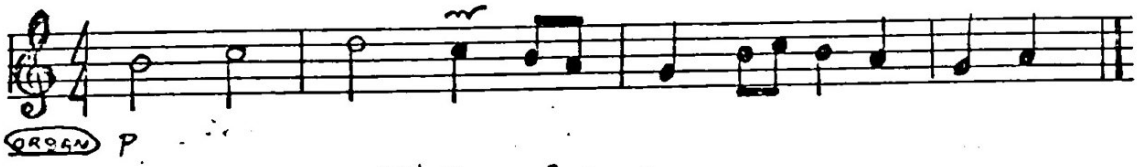
At ten minutes elapsed time the tempo slows to Adagio with most of the variation work in the organ part. This section is a set of three variations of which the last is the theme in retrograde, or reverse note order. This section closes at about thirteen minutes into the piece.

Variations XVII - XXVI form a double fugue. The piano states the first subject, based on the first two phrases of the theme, with a complete exposition in four voices. An episodic section follows, using free counterpoints to vary the theme further.

1st Fugue Subject



The organ announces the second subject, based on the final phrase of the theme. Again, there is a four voice exposition. The piano provides two additional counterpoints for a short time.



2nd Fugue Subject

Both subjects combine in a number of ways as the double fugue progresses. Occasionally, some deliberate reference to Baroque Period musical practice can be heard -- a tip of the hat to Old Sebastian from another who is in his debt. Just beyond midpoint in the double fugue the theme of the Fourth Credo is heard again, almost literally to remind listeners of where they have been. This variation also includes the retrograde of the theme.

The double fugue continues in a number of versions and thematic combinations. Both subjects combine with the common countersubject. Inversion, augmentation, diminution, and stretto are all used simultaneously among the six voices, forming the two harmonic progressions stated in the first variation.

The theme makes one more nearly literal appearance in the coda. The last variation is the only departure from a soldierly commitment to the theme. Although completely in character with the theme itself, the last variation is based on the "Amen" from the Fourth Credo. Purists will wail at this apparent literary consideration in the codetta. The organ announces this new element while the piano varies the theme. The piece closes with the "Amen" and fragments of the theme in juxtaposition.

* * *

I owe an overdue note of thanks to Maud Fluchère and Clarence Jones. They champion new music (rare); play it well (also rare); like it (very rare); and they play a new piece more than once (unheard of).

Agoura, California
15-VIII-75

Michael Andersen

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ASCAP.

MICHAEL ANDERSEN
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8 July, 1975

Dear Maud,

Under attached cover is a set of proofs for our piece. I still have to search for wrong notes yet, but at the very least you can get an idea of what it's all about.

I am very sorry about the many delays in preparing this score, and my excuse is as lame as the apology: there just isn't enough time.

The piece came out well, I think. Once the initial awkwardess of writing for two unequal instruments was overcome, it progressed fairly well. At the moment I would place this work among my better ones -- a belief I never held about the Concertino A Due.

On Friday I am leaving for Fort Leavenworth, Kansas to complete the Command and General Staff College. This is a two week tour with evenings free. I plan to proof my copy there. (This is a gentleman's school, conducted in air conditioned buildings, and not in the field as most of my army tours are.) You should receive both copies (bound) of the completed score not later than about 20-22 August.

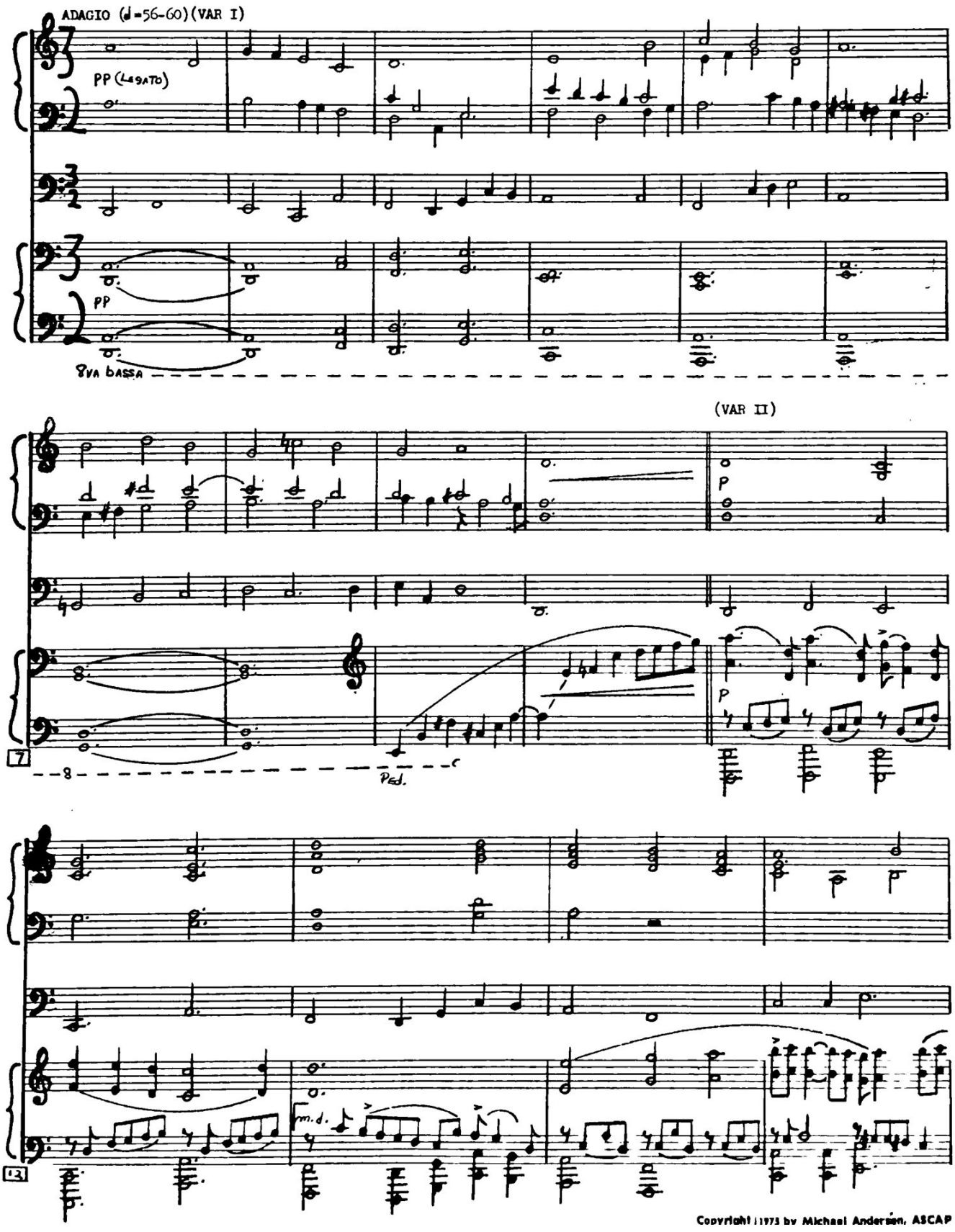
Here's a quick analysis: the first variation (mea 1) is the theme stripped of most of its passing tones and it appears in the organ. Var II has the theme varied in the piano. Var III sees the theme bounced around between Organ and Piano. Var IV has the theme mostly in the organ, but disguised with ornamental figures. Var V is the undisguised theme as it actually appears in the Credo, with a few rhythmic liberties. Var VI -- theme in piano as a transitional variation. Var VII - XIII is the Allegro section. Theme appears both as theme and as leit-motive. Take the 8th note as the rhythmic orientation point and it should be easy to play. Var XIV precurses the fugue with the theme reshaped considerably. The inversion also makes an appearance at mea. 249, piano m.s. and immediately following in m.d. Var XV is the inverse retrograde of the theme with ornaments in the organ. Same with XVII. Beginning on p. 20 is the fugue with a complete exposition and episodes. Organ enters on p. 22 (Var XIX) with the second fugue, based on the second and third phrase of the theme. Motives from the 1st fugue appear with the 2nd fugue exposition. Page 24 begins recombination of both fugues. (The counter-subject is constant, by the way.) Var XXIII serves to remind the listener of where he/she has been in the development of the theme by what appears to be a restatement of the original. It, too, is varied considerably. Var XXIV has all hell breaking loose. Fugue subjects appear in augmentation(mea 409 piano m.s.);diminution, piano right above augmentation; rectus, in organ m.s. mea 408 with the second fugue right above it. The second fugue is invert ed in an organ inner voice at mea 417. The Coda (Mea 440) is Var XXV and it sounds like the fugue continuing, but I feel the piece is definitely closing at that point. Theme appears again at mea. 453. Codetta at mea 464. (By the way, Var XXVIII is not the theme at all, but rather the "Amen" from the Credo. I'll bet you a country farm that some of the best musicians you know will mistake it for the theme! That's my mean and sadistic sense of humor at work.

Have Fun,

Kyle

Variations on the Fourth Credo

Michael Andersen



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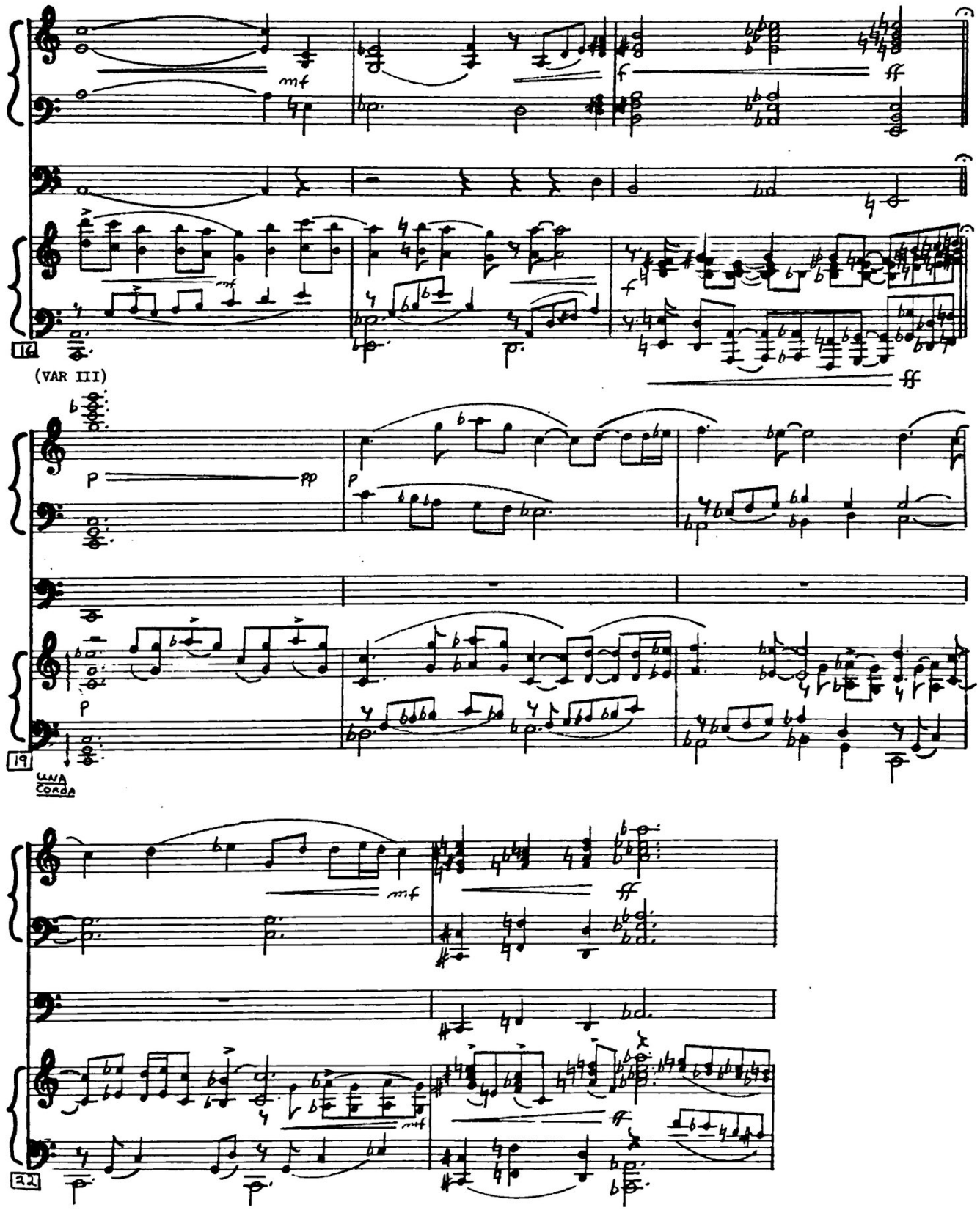
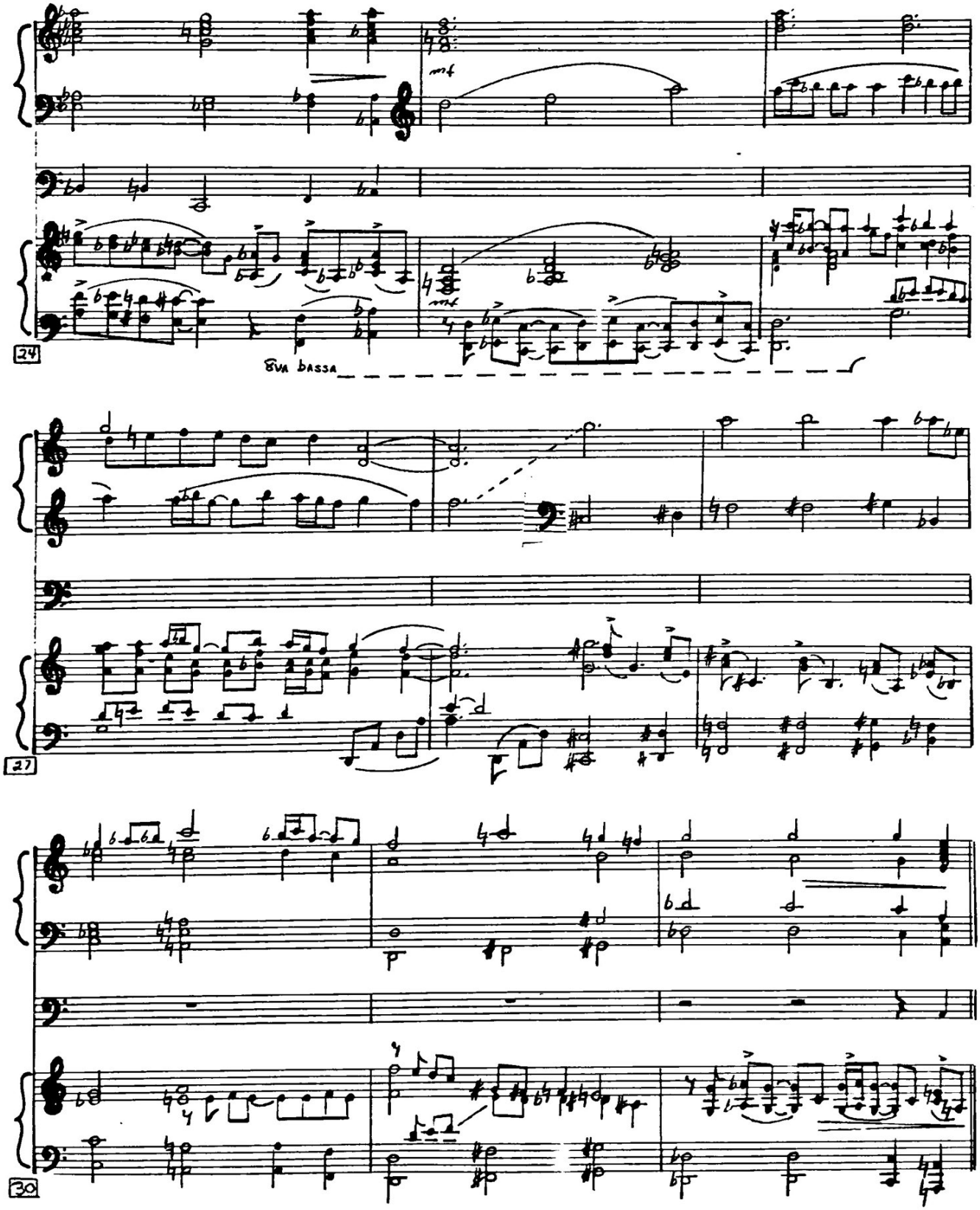
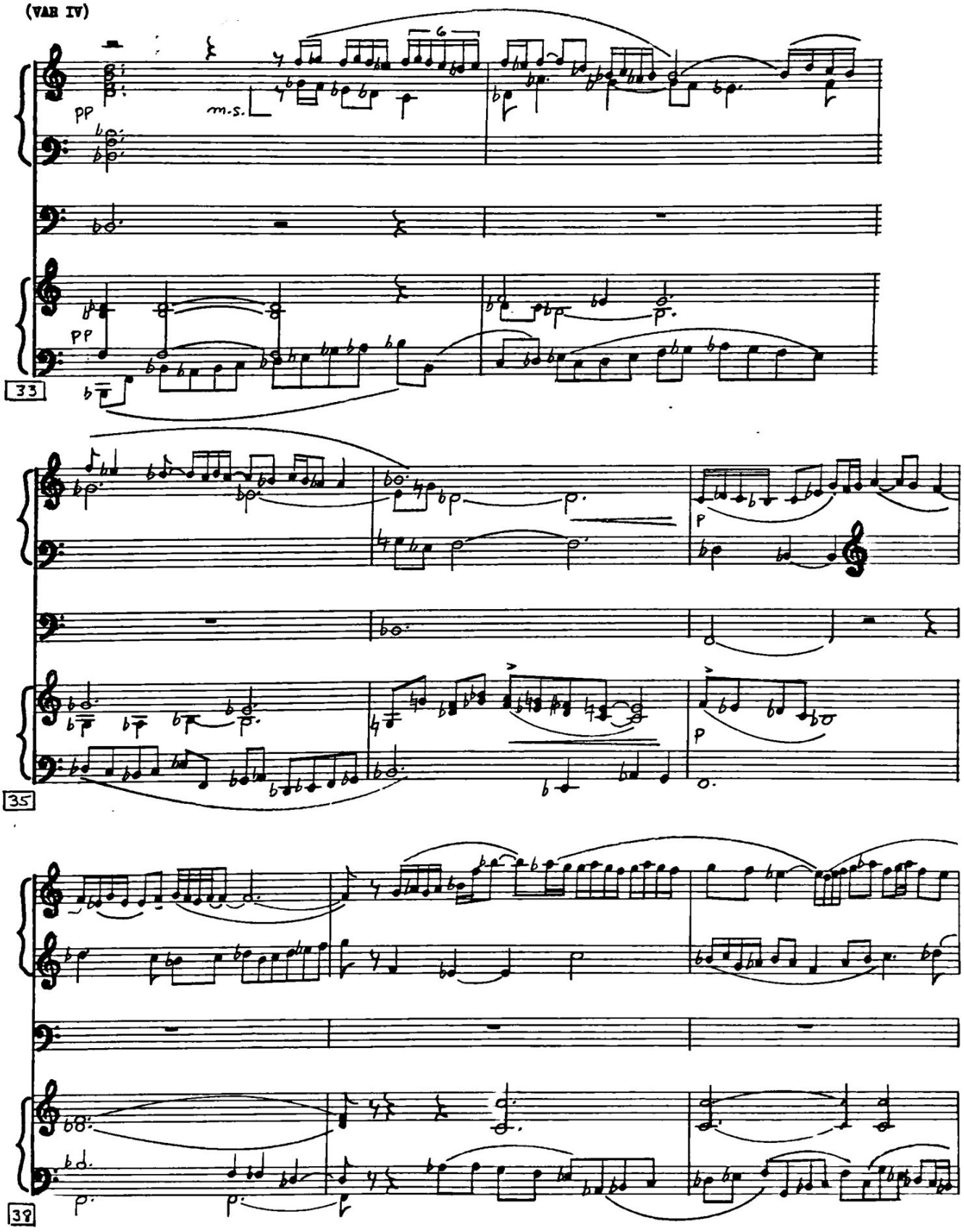
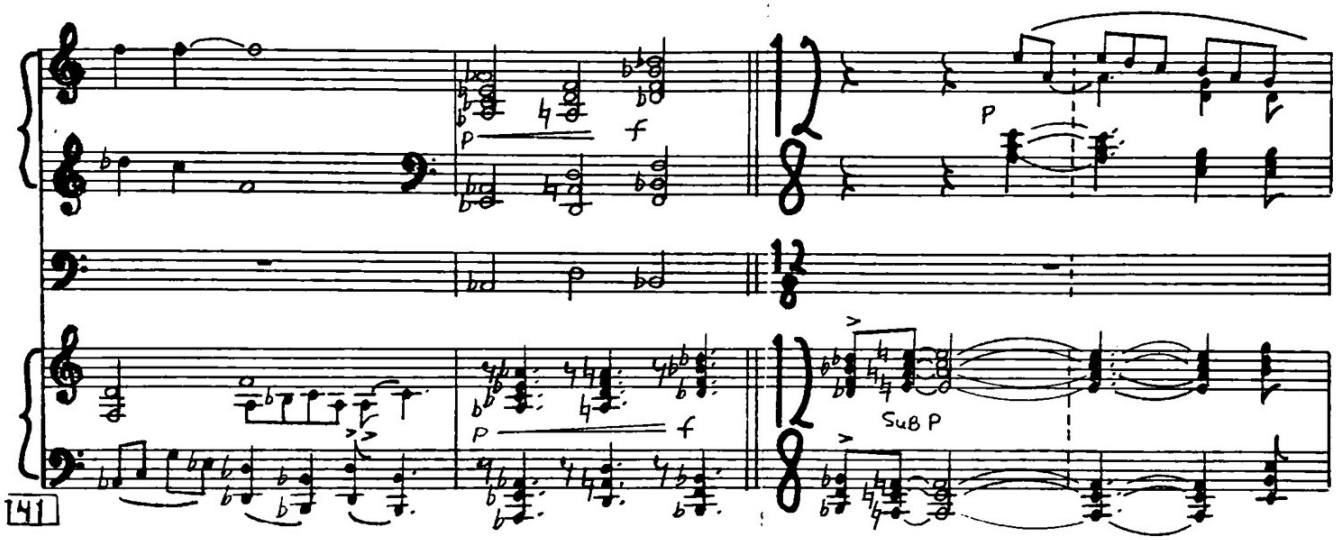

16
(VAR III)
19
UNA CORDA
22

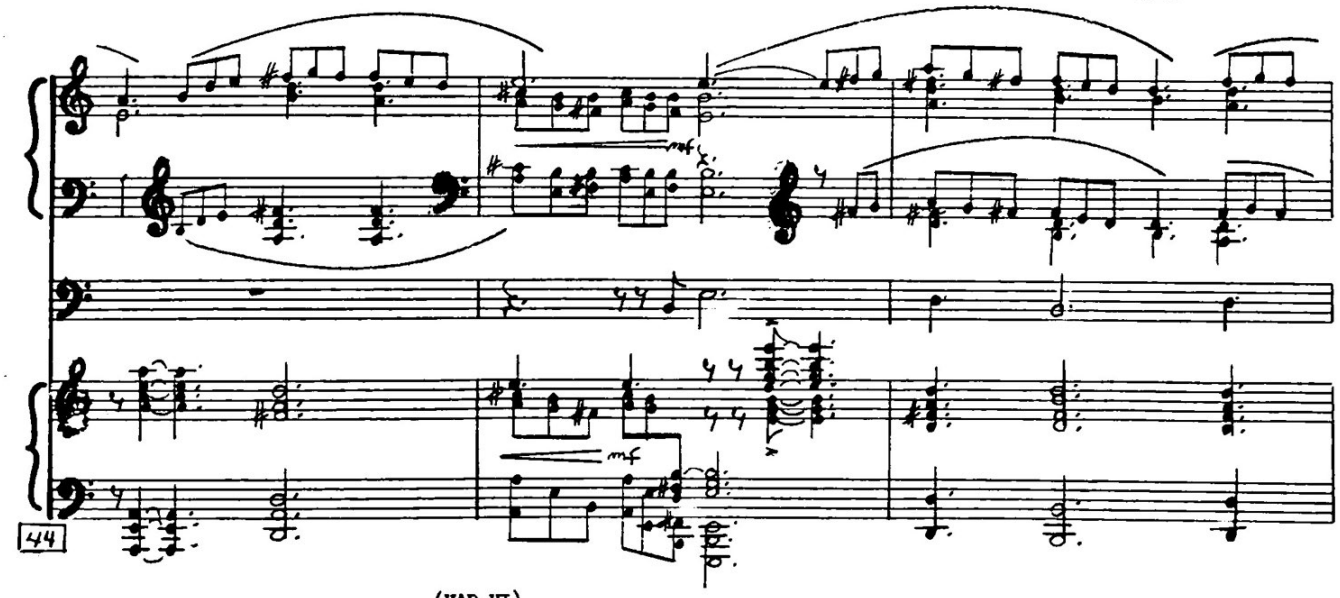

mf
24
8va bassa
27
30

(VAR IV)

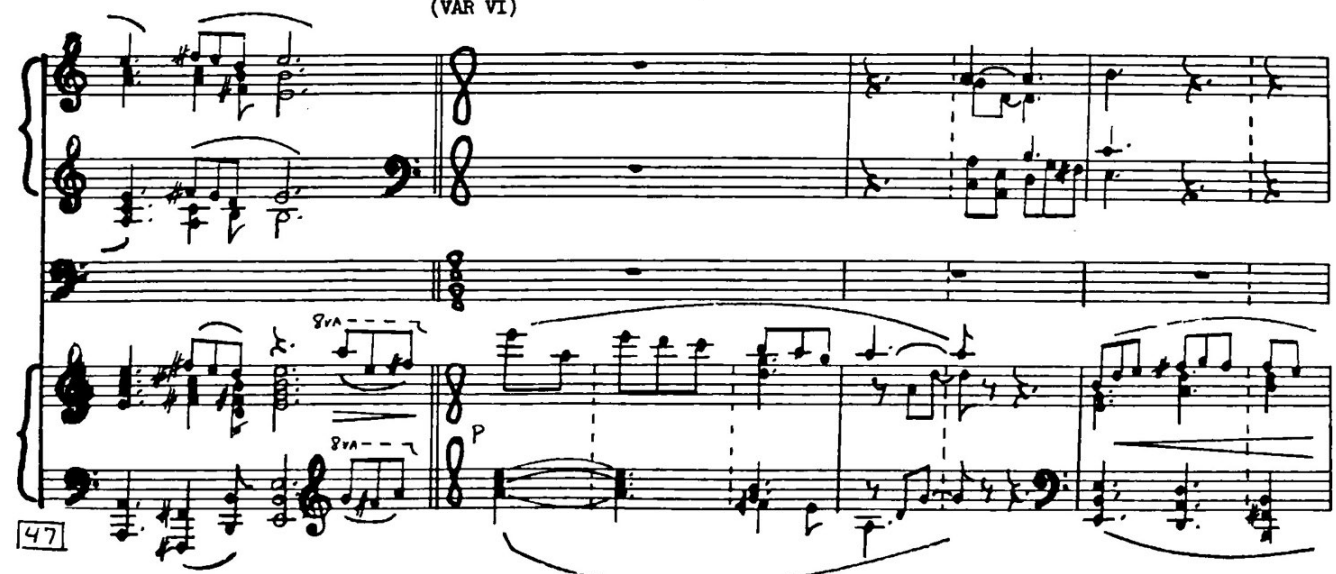


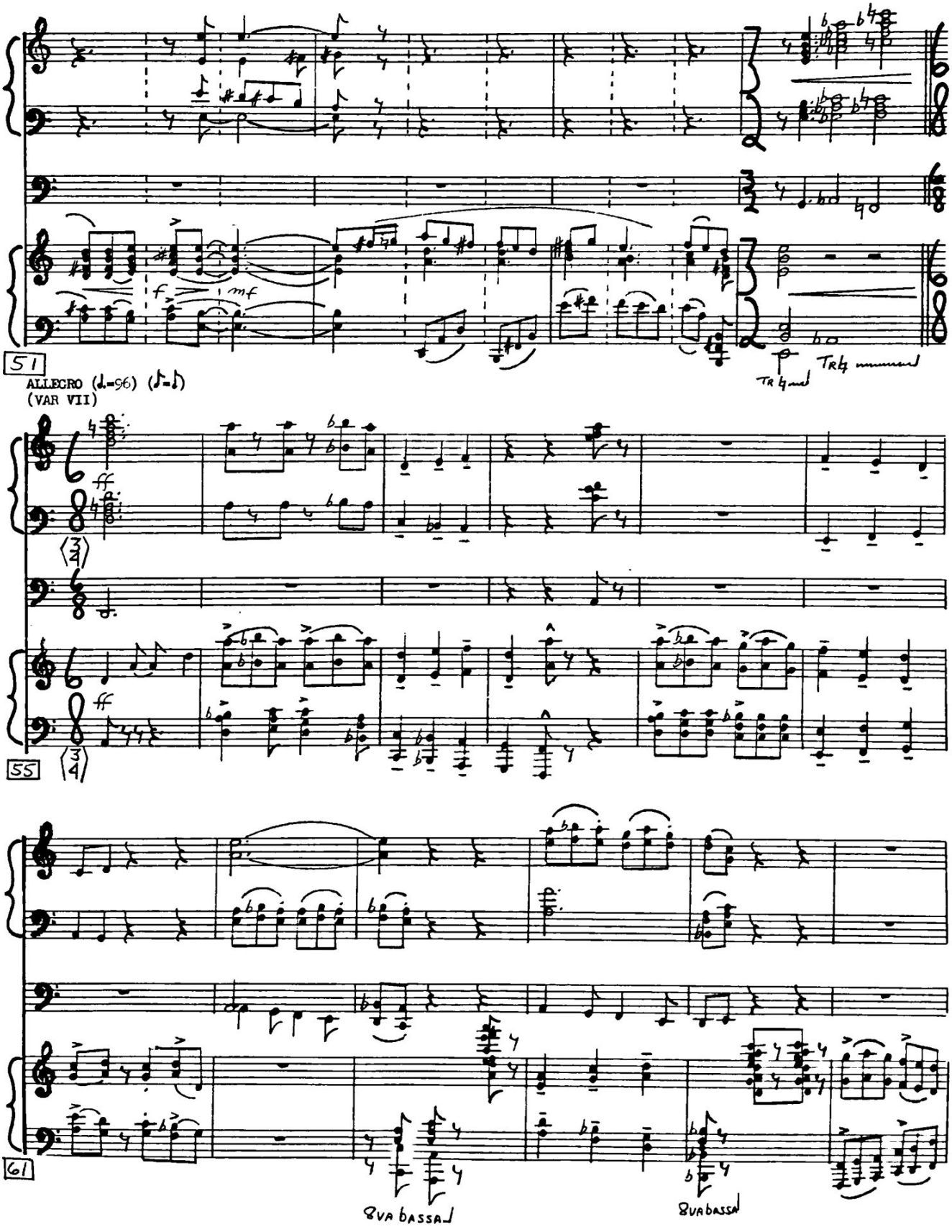
(VAR V) (THEME)
L'ISTESSO TEMPO (♪=♪)

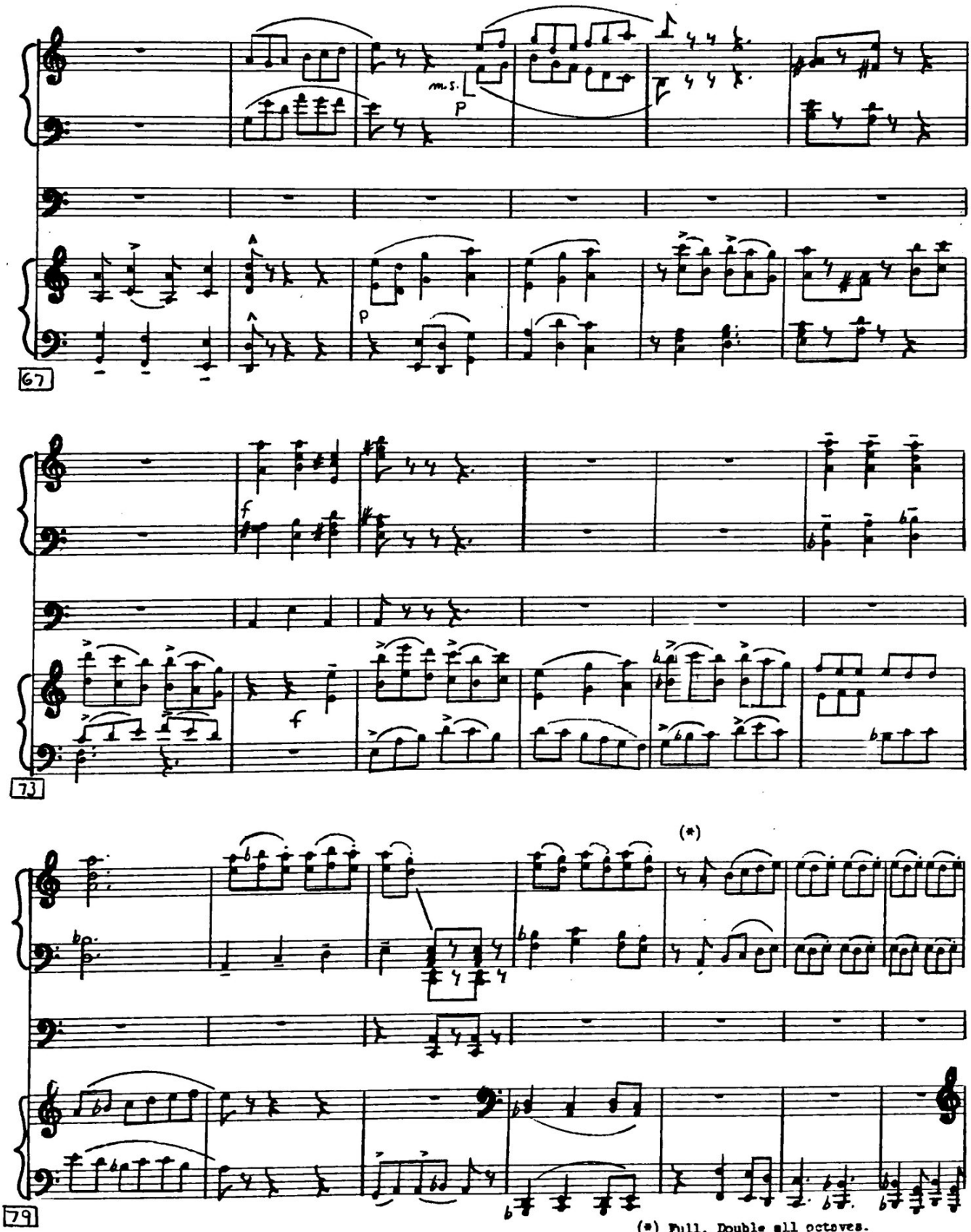




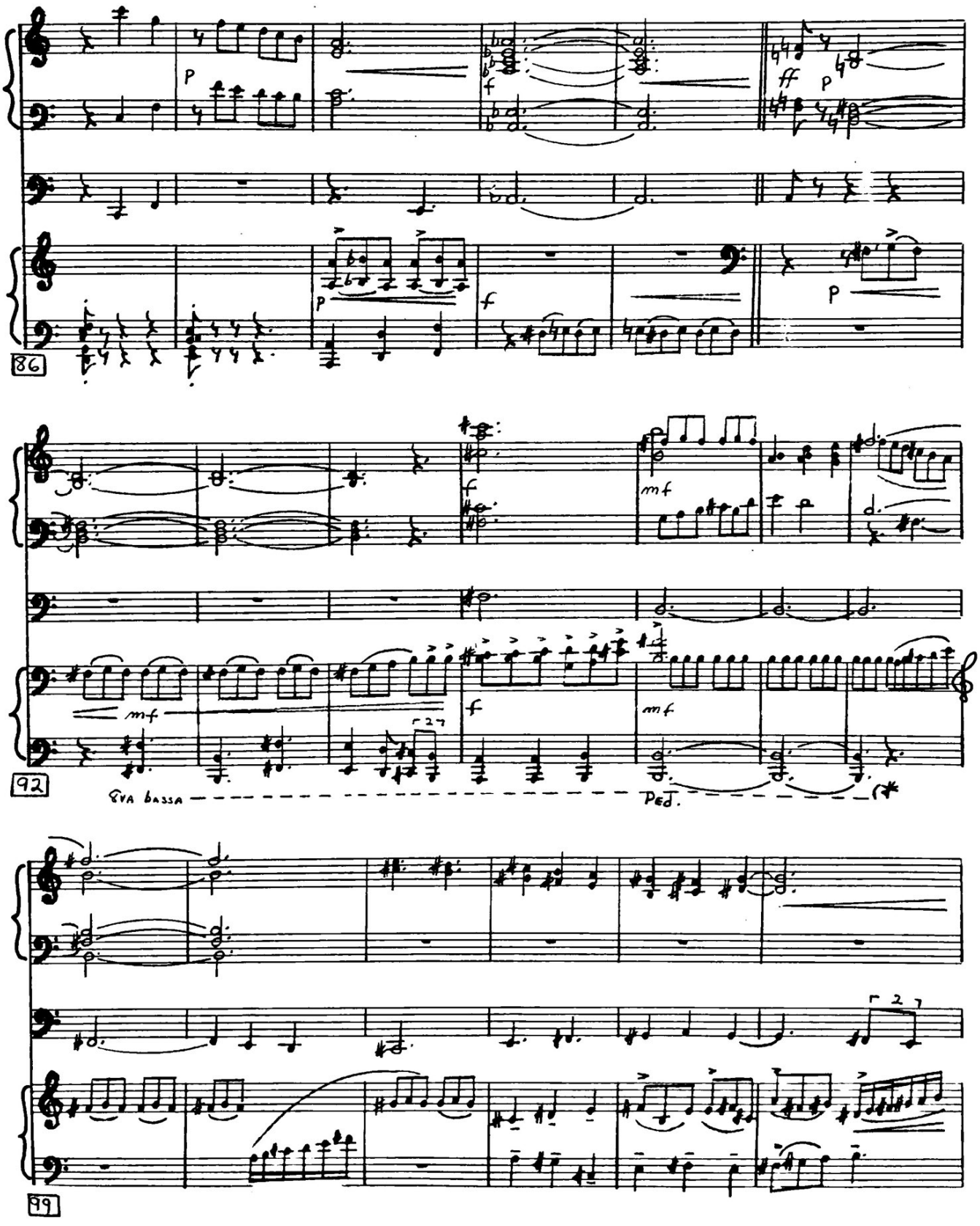
(VAR VI)

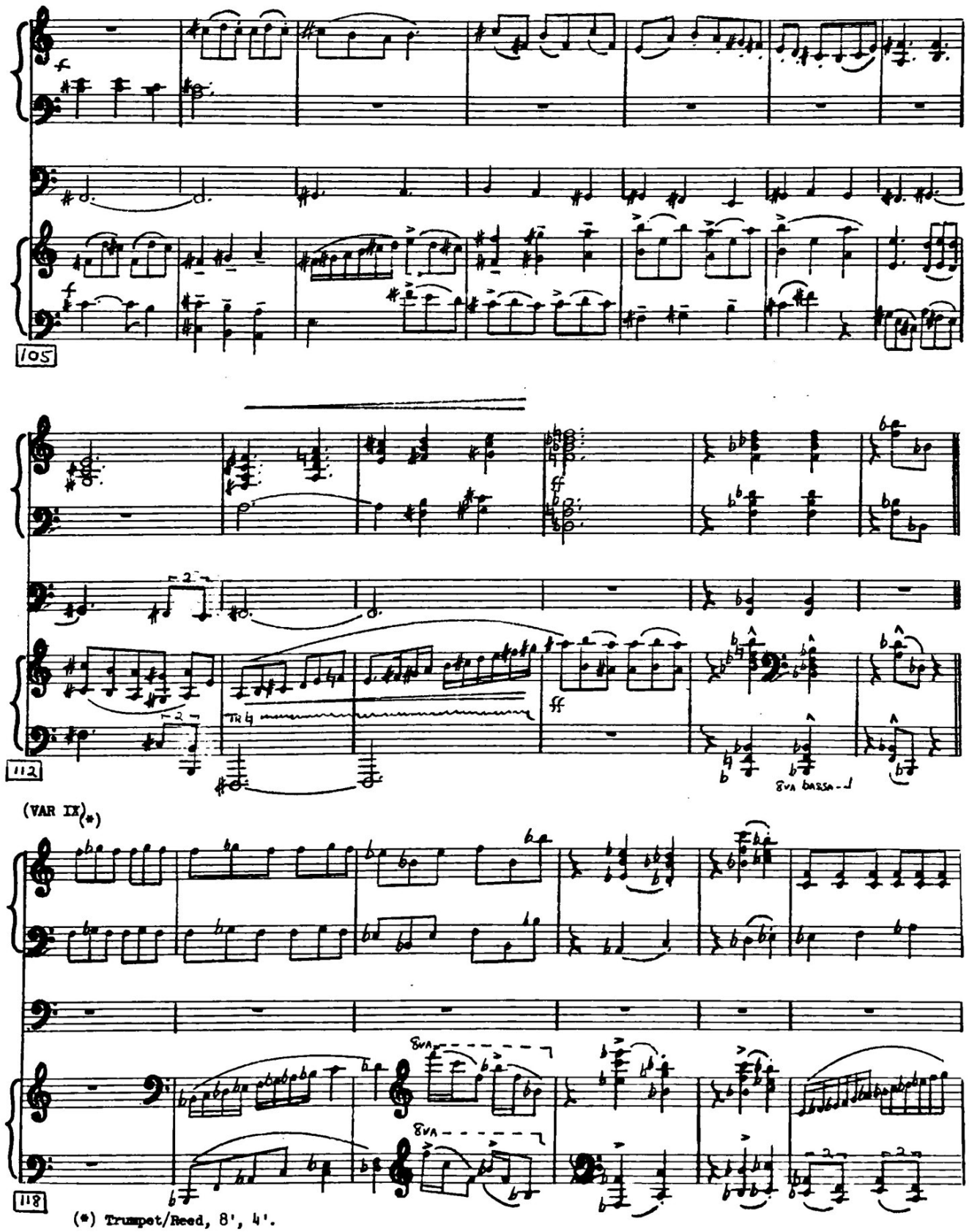



51
ALLEGRO (♩.=96) (♪=♪)
(VAR VII)
55
61
8va bassa
8va bassa

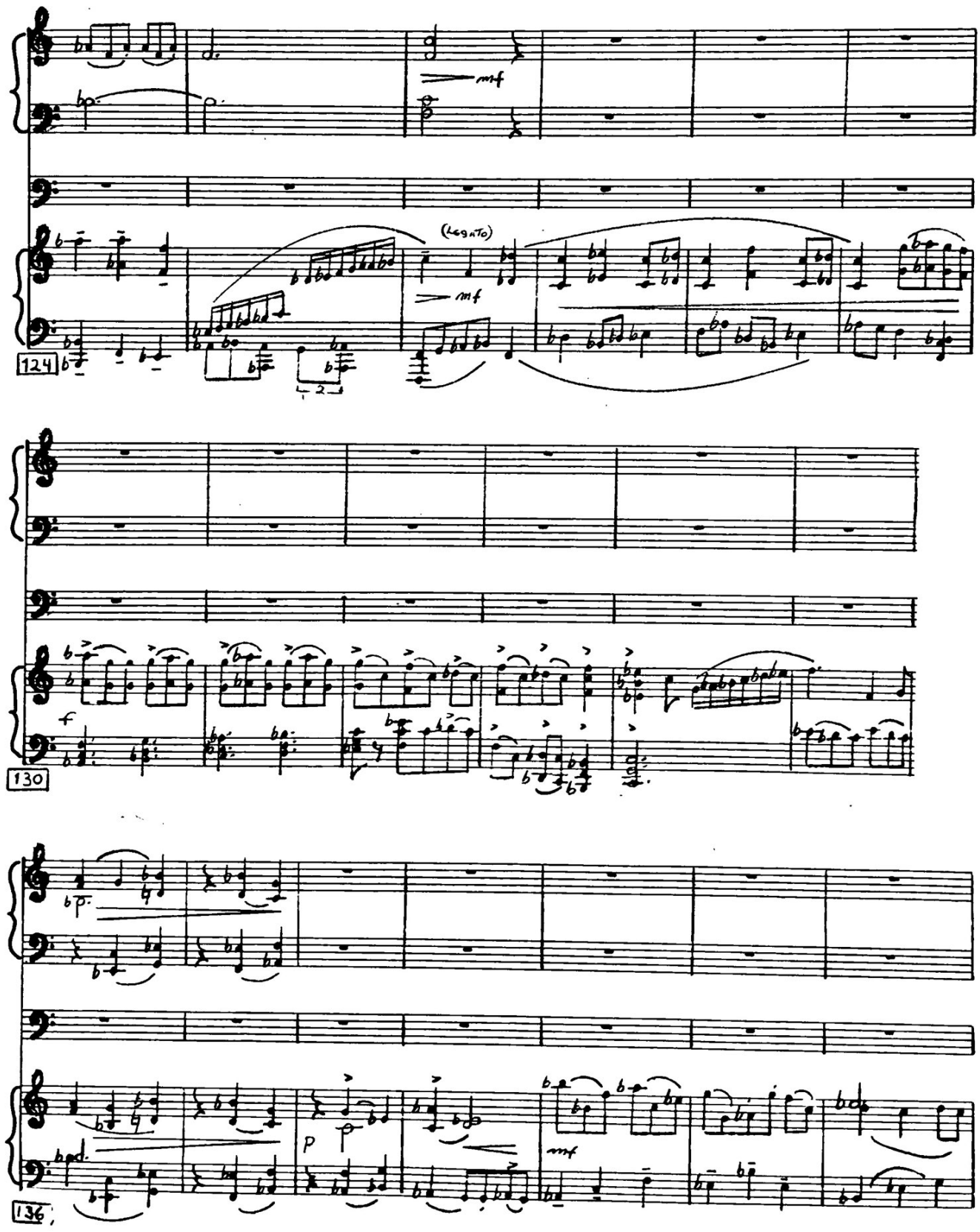

m.s.
P
p
67
f
f
73
(*)
79
(*) Full. Double all octaves.
(2', 4', 8', 16', + mixtures)

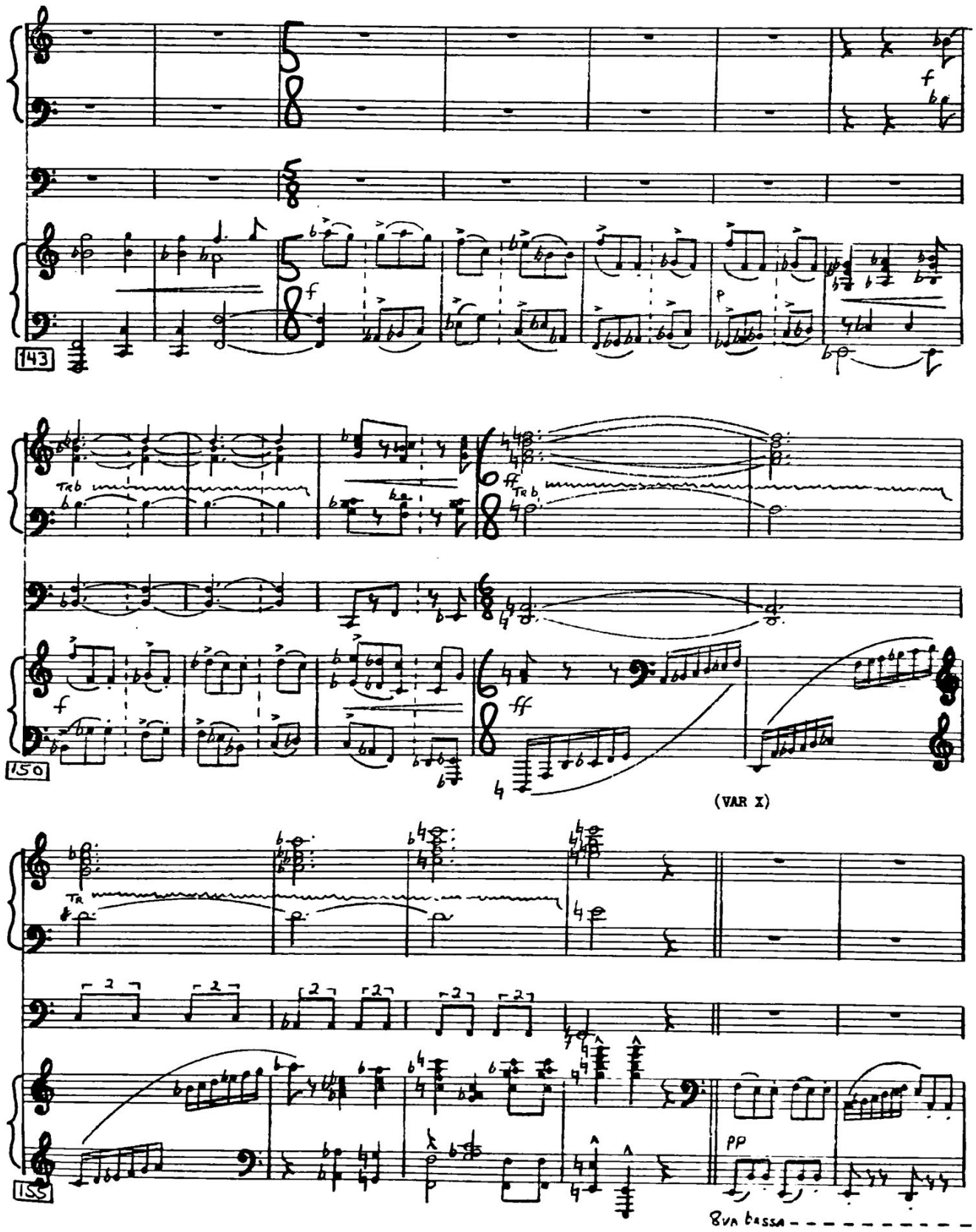
(VAR VIII)

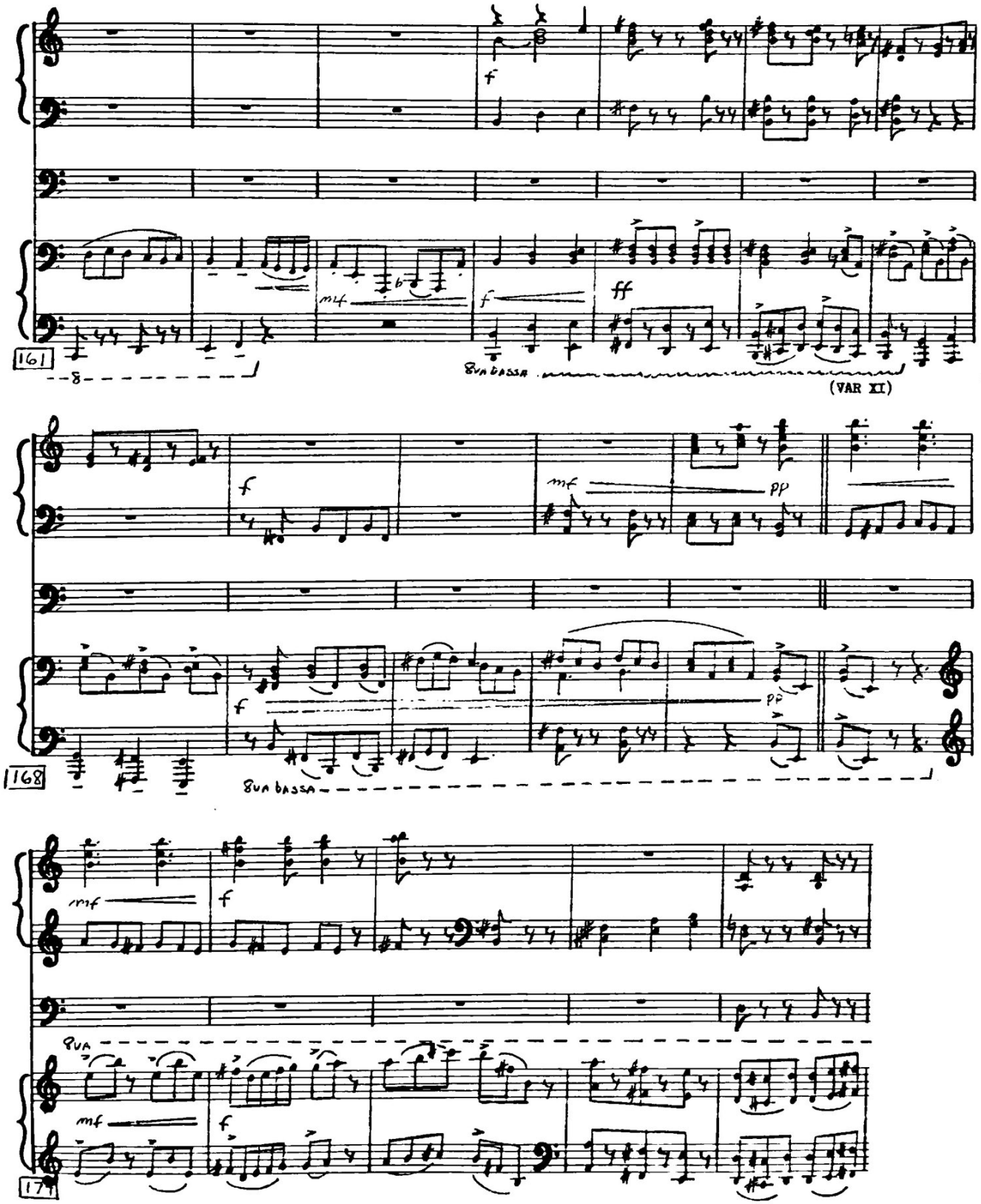


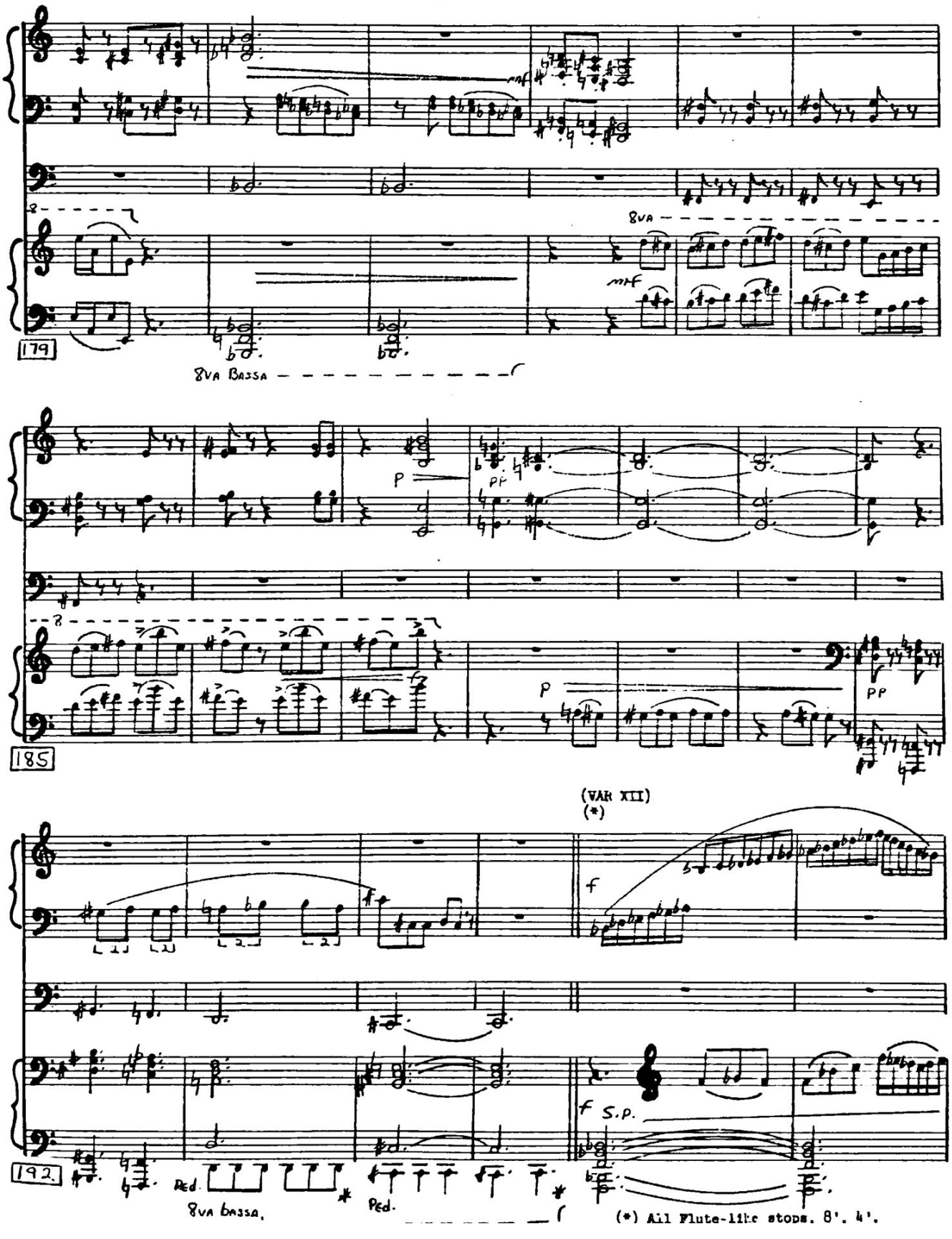


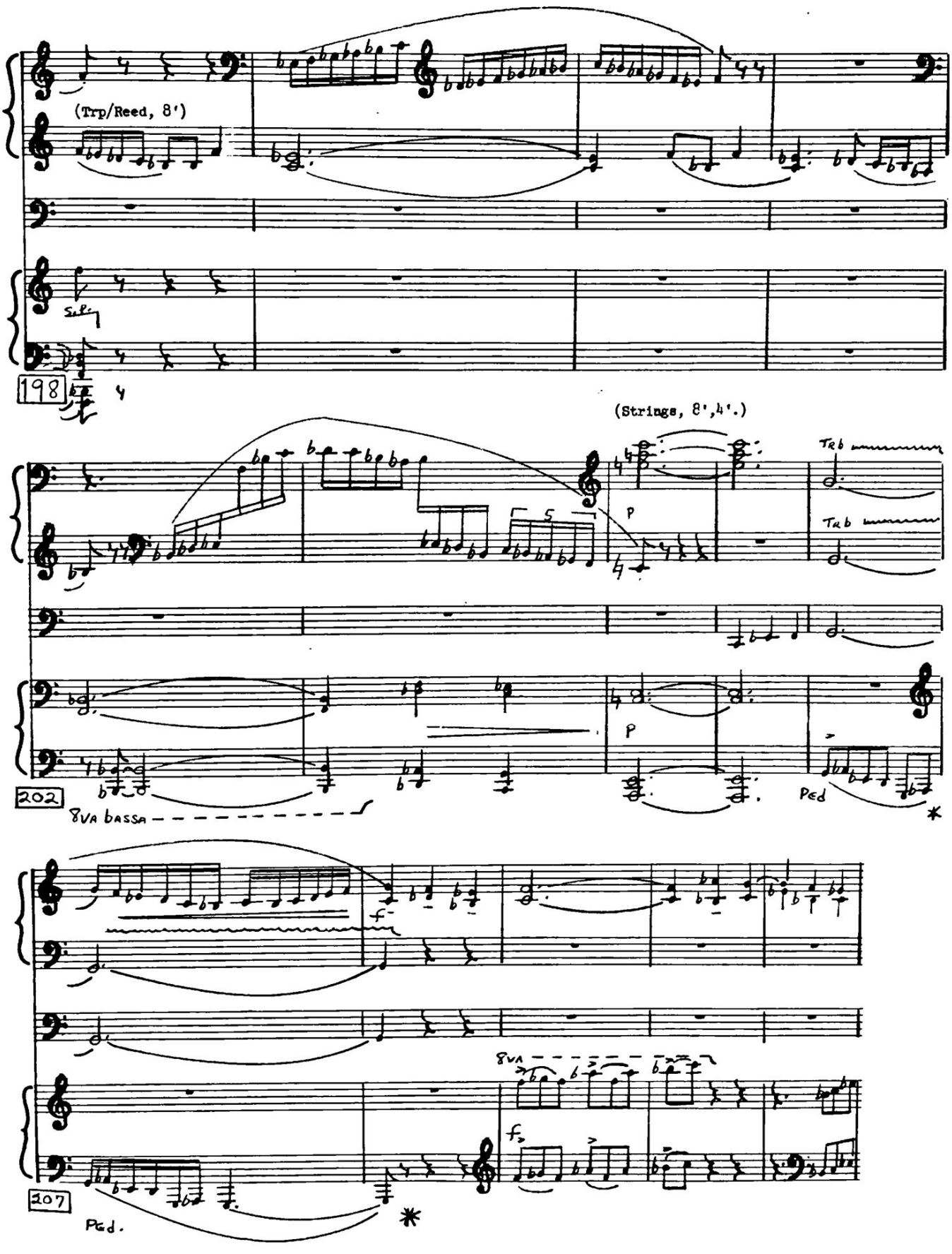
(*) Trumpet/Reed, 8', 4'.

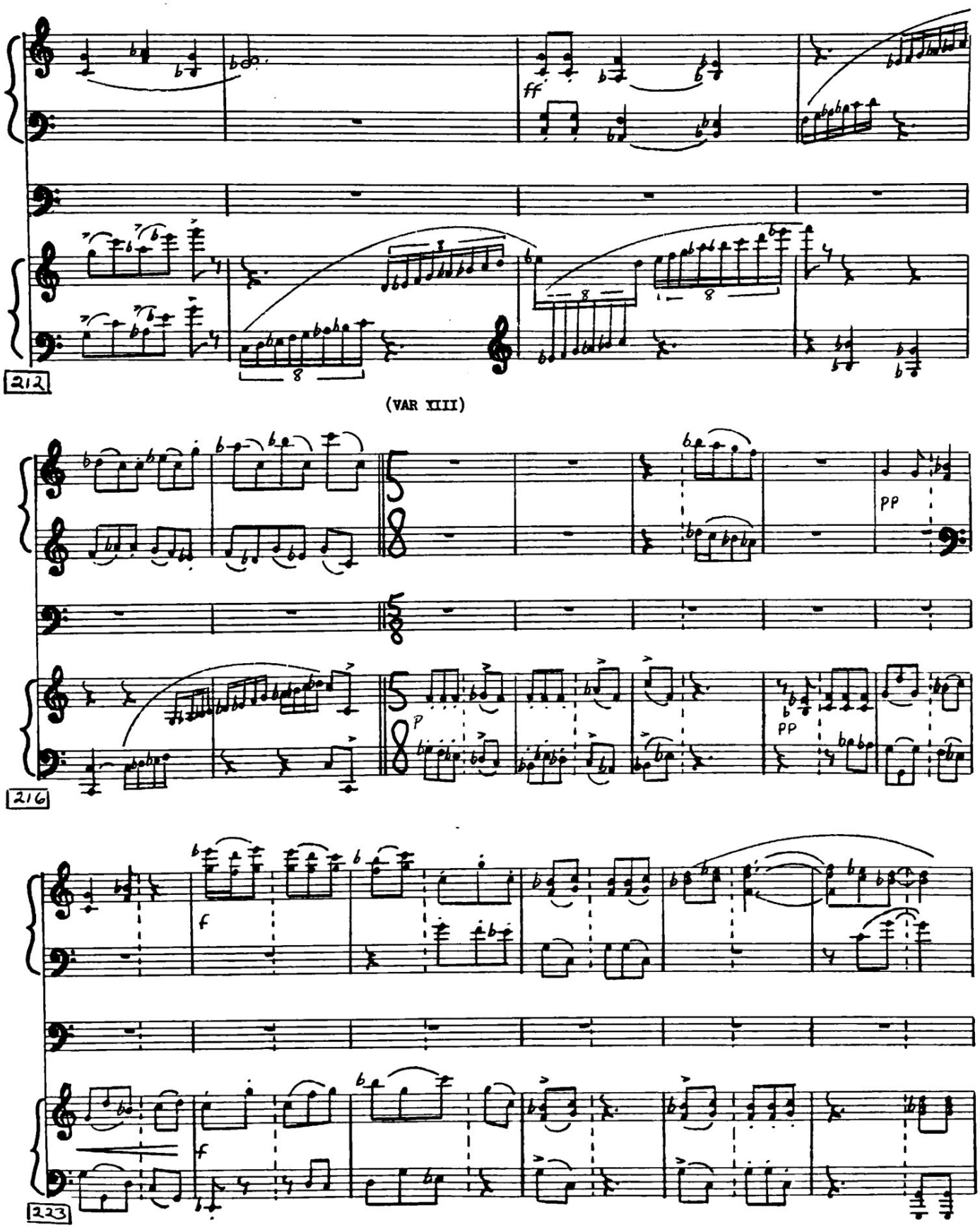

mf
(Legato)
mf
124
2
f
130
p
mf
136

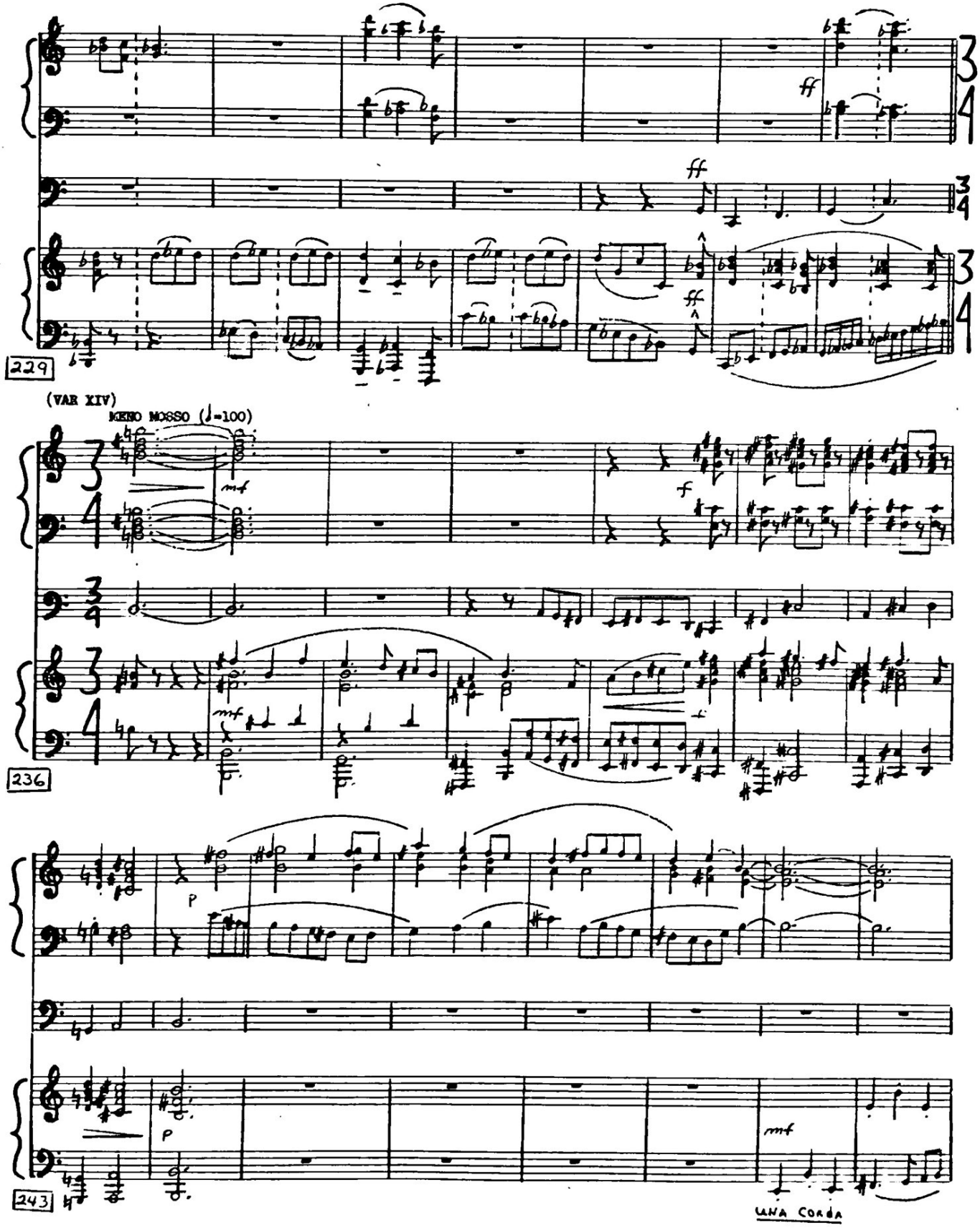

143
150
(VAR X)
155
8va bassa

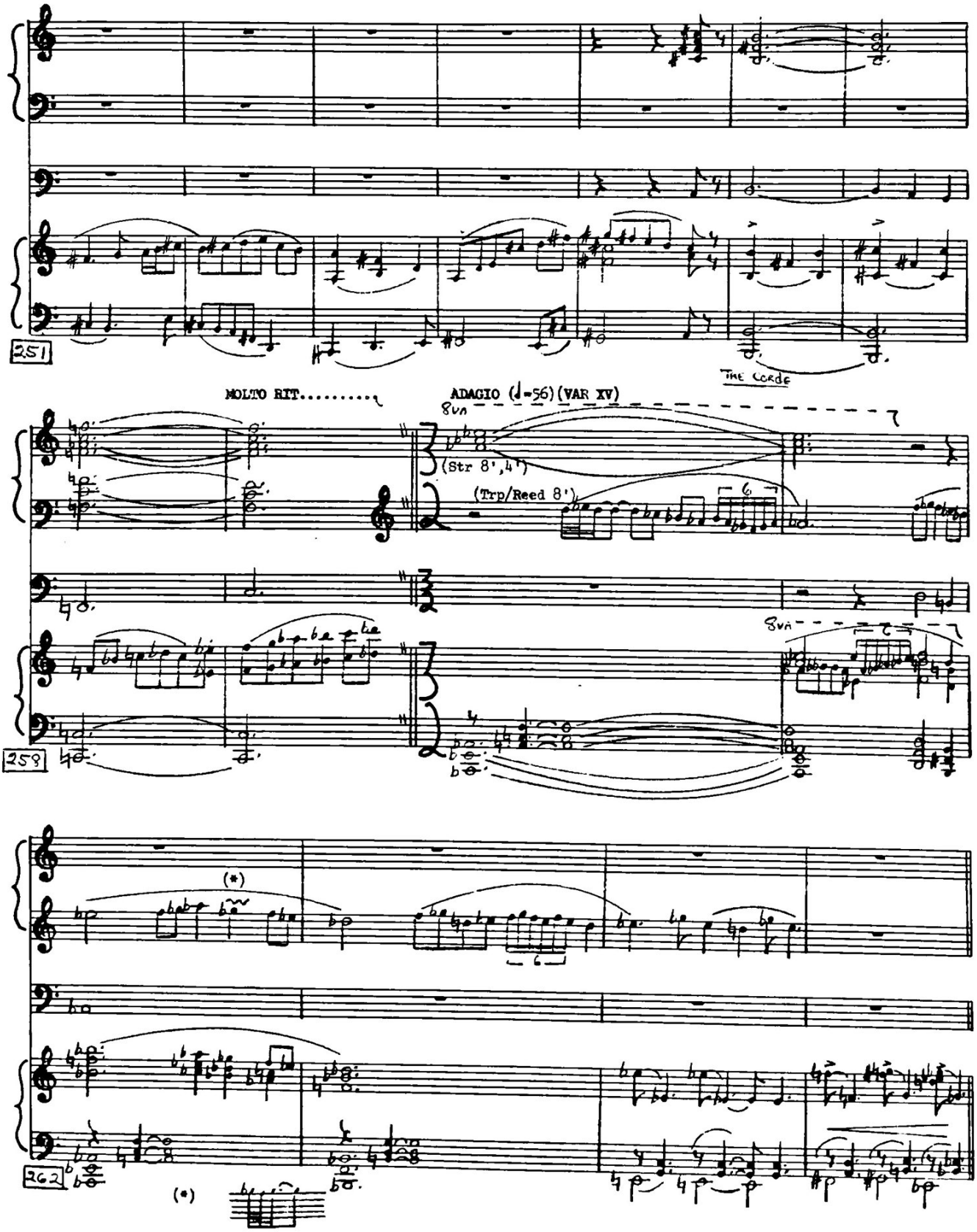

f
mf
f
ff
161
8va bassa
(VAR XI)
f
mf
pp
f
pp
168
8va bassa
mf
f
8va
mf
f
174

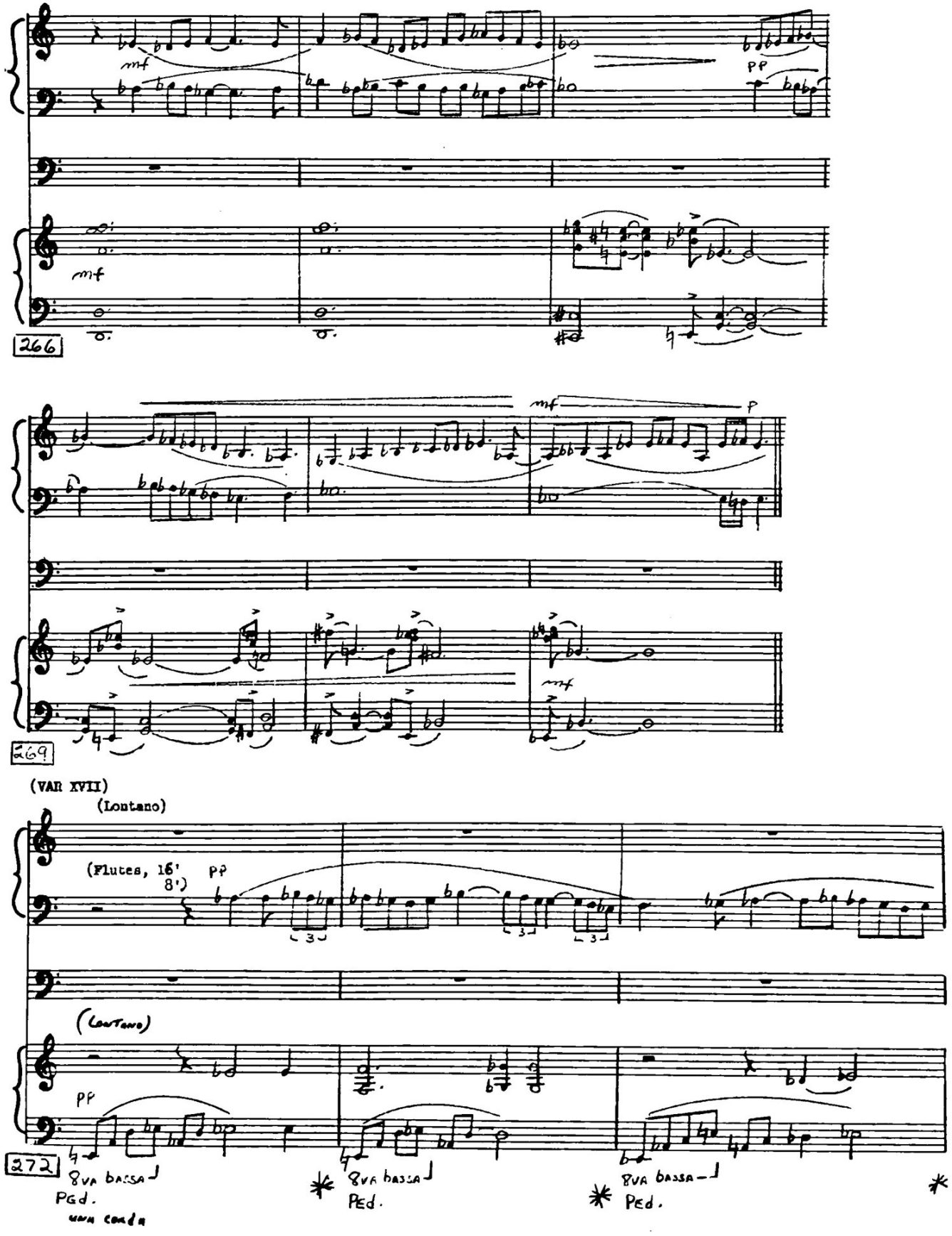

8va
mf
179
8va bassa
p
pp
185
(Var XII)
(*)
f
f s.p.
192
Ped.
8va bassa.
Ped.
(*) All Flute-like stops. 8'. 4'.

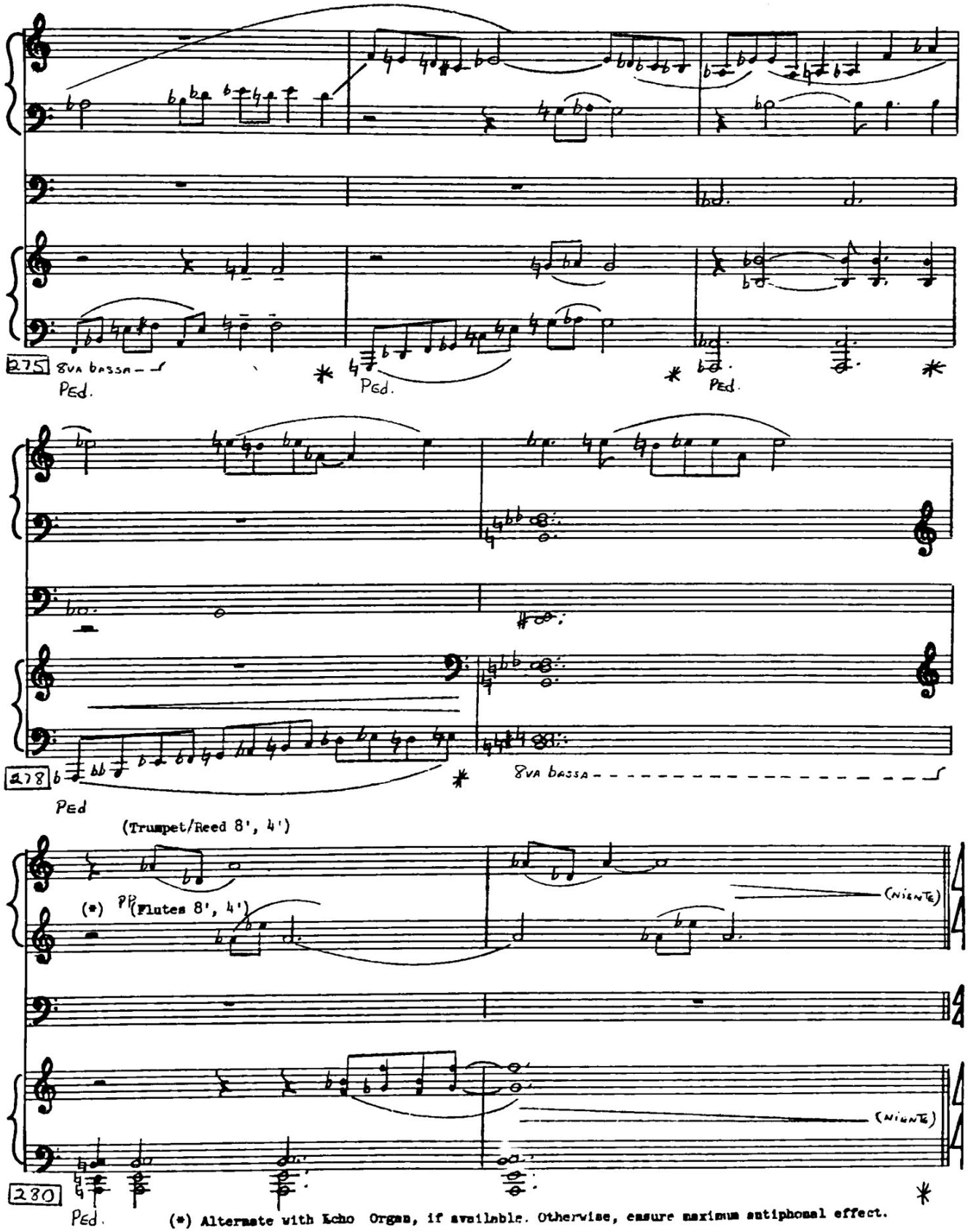

(Trp/Reed, 8')
198
(Strings, 8',4'.)
Trb
Trb
P
P
202
8va bassa
Ped
*
f
8va
f
207
Ped.
*


212
(VAR XIII)
216
223


229
(VAR XIV)
MENO MOSSO (♩=100)
236
243
UNA CORDA

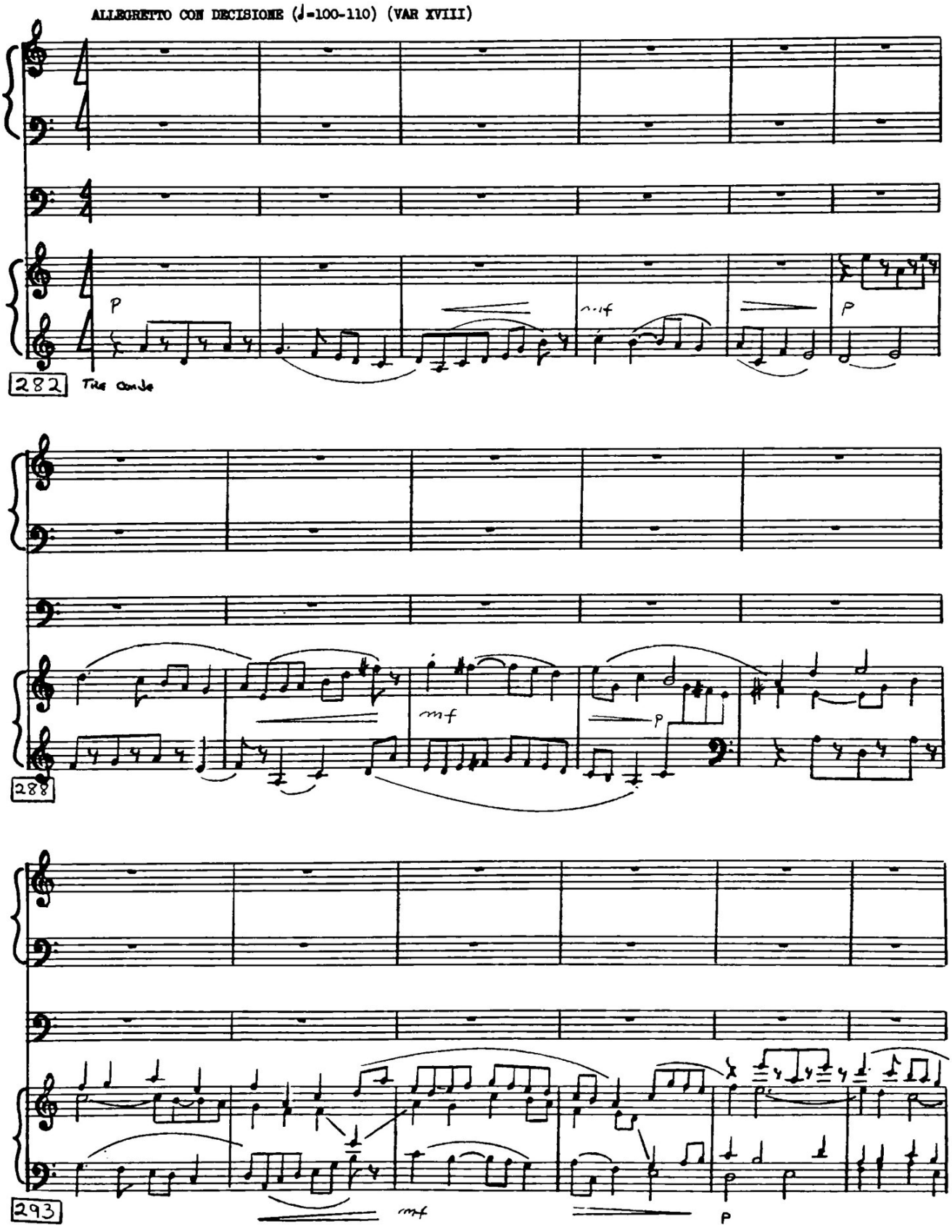

251
THE Corde
MOLTO RIT.....
ADAGIO (♩=56) (VAR XV)
8va
(Str 8',4')
(Trp/Reed 8')
6
8va
259
(*)
262
(*)

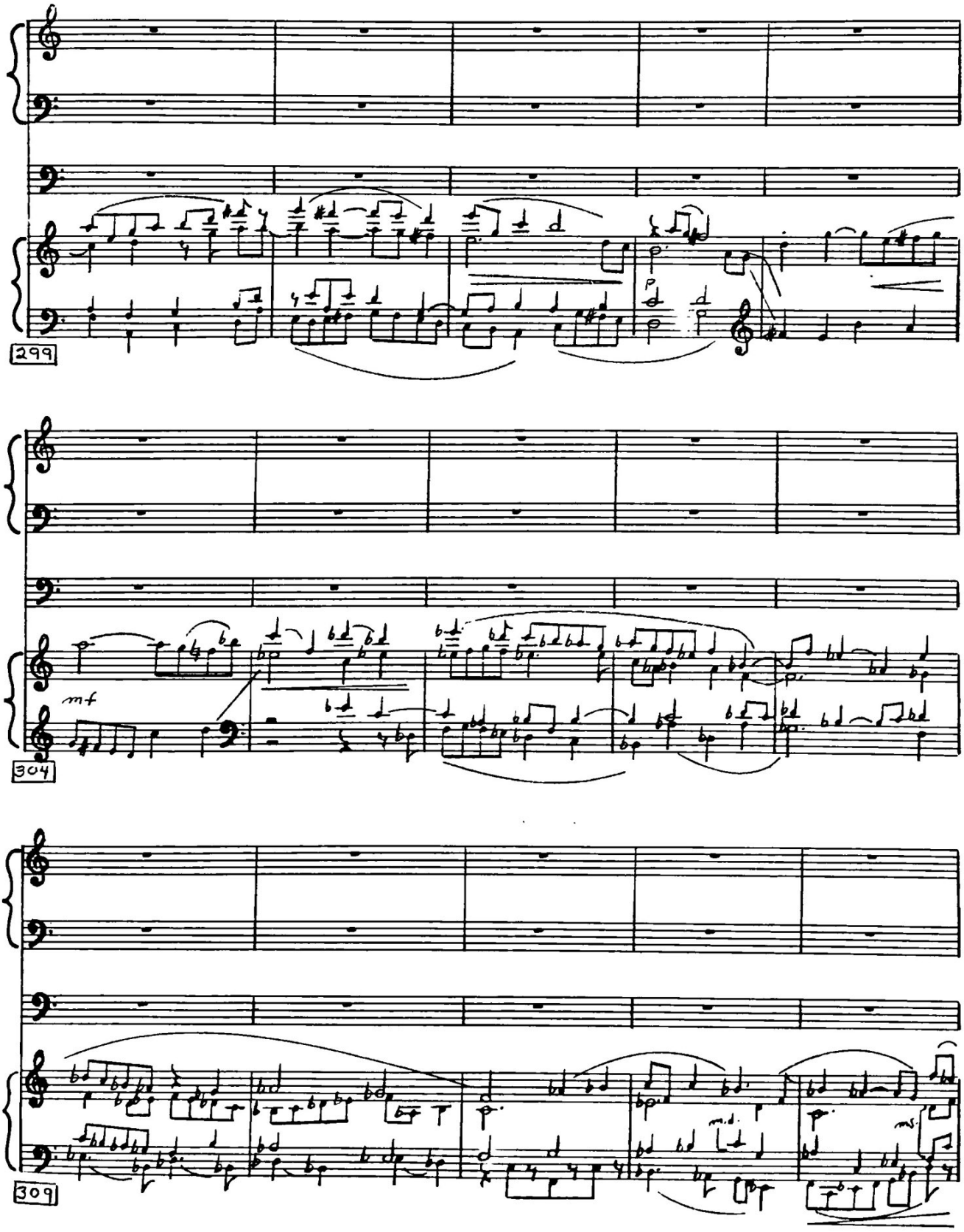

mf
pp
mf
266
mf
p
mf
269
(VAR XVII)
(Lontano)
(Flutes, 16' 8')
pp
(Lontano)
pp
272
8va bassa
Ped.
una corda
8va bassa
Ped.
8va bassa
Ped.

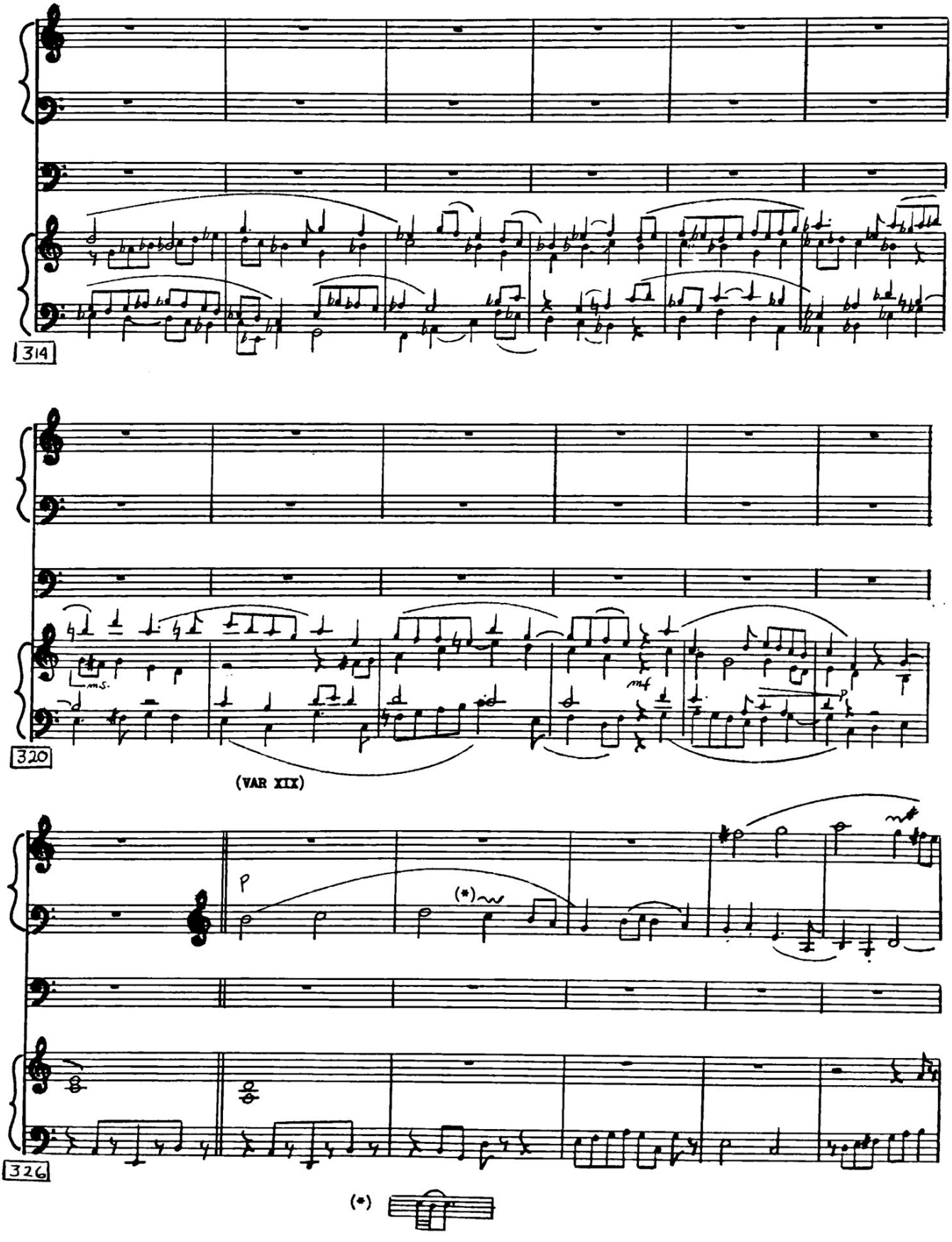


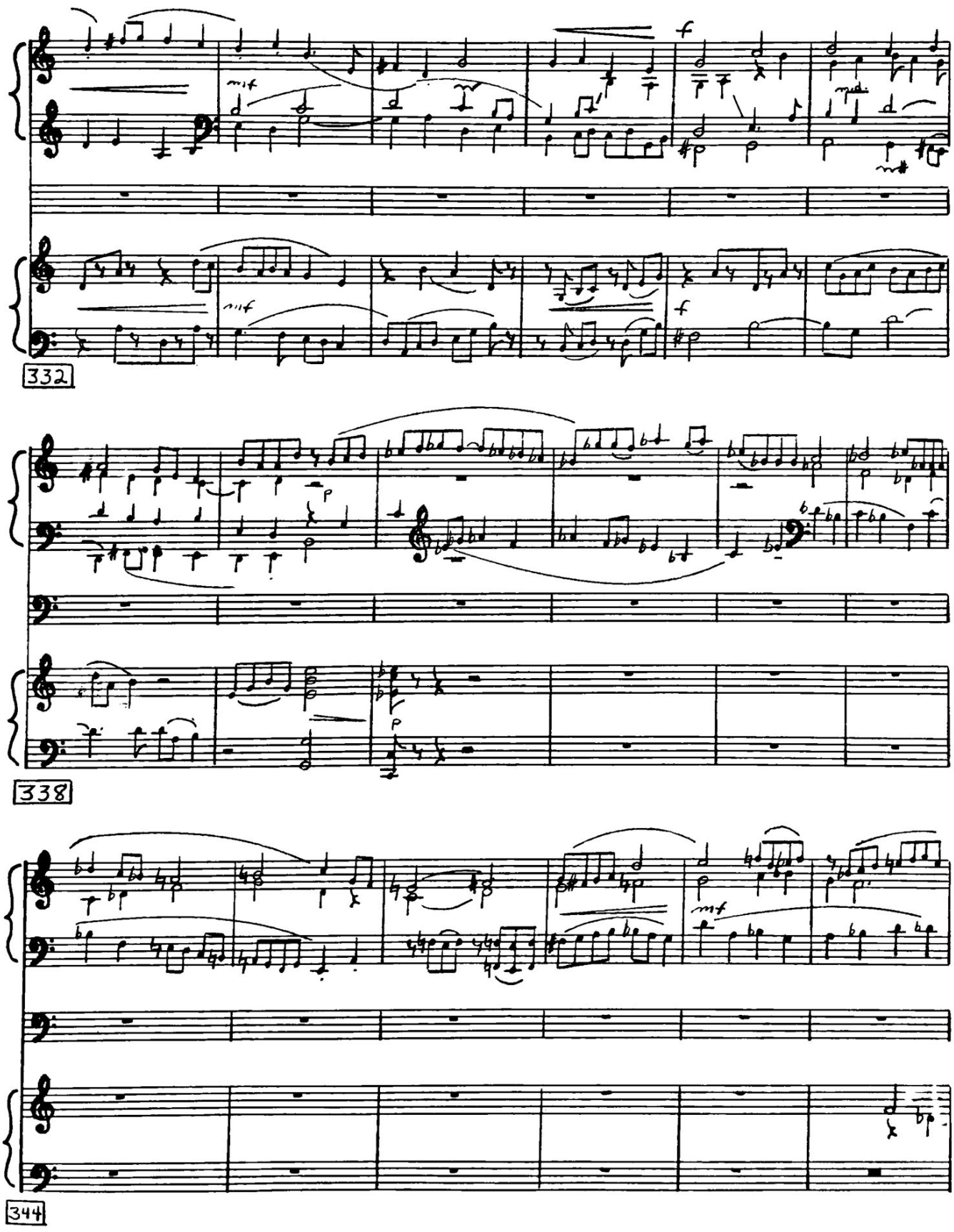
(*) Alternate with Echo Organ, if available. Otherwise, ensure maximum antiphonal effect.

ALLEGRETTO CON DECISIONE (♩=100-110) (VAR XVIII)

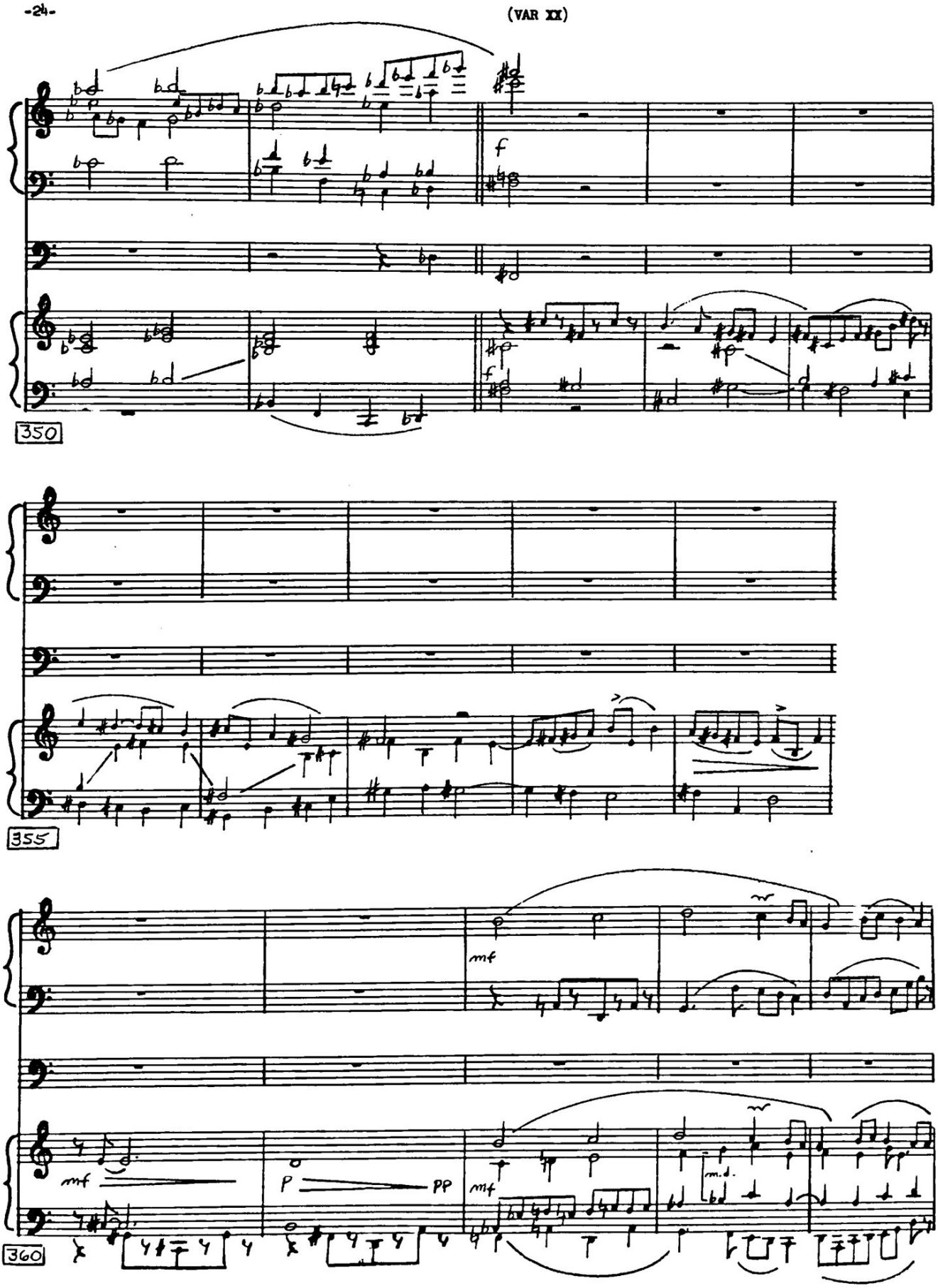


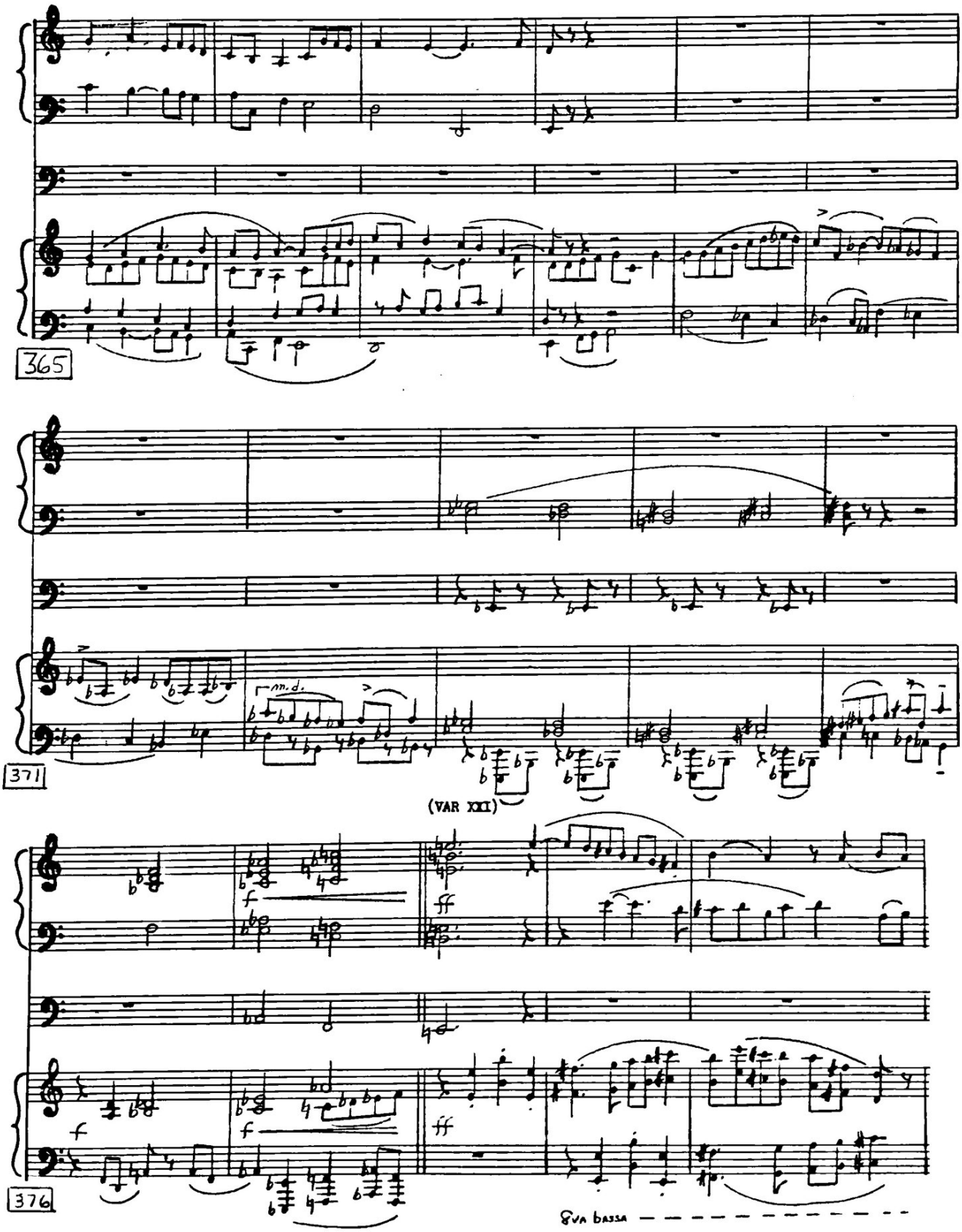

299
304
mf
309

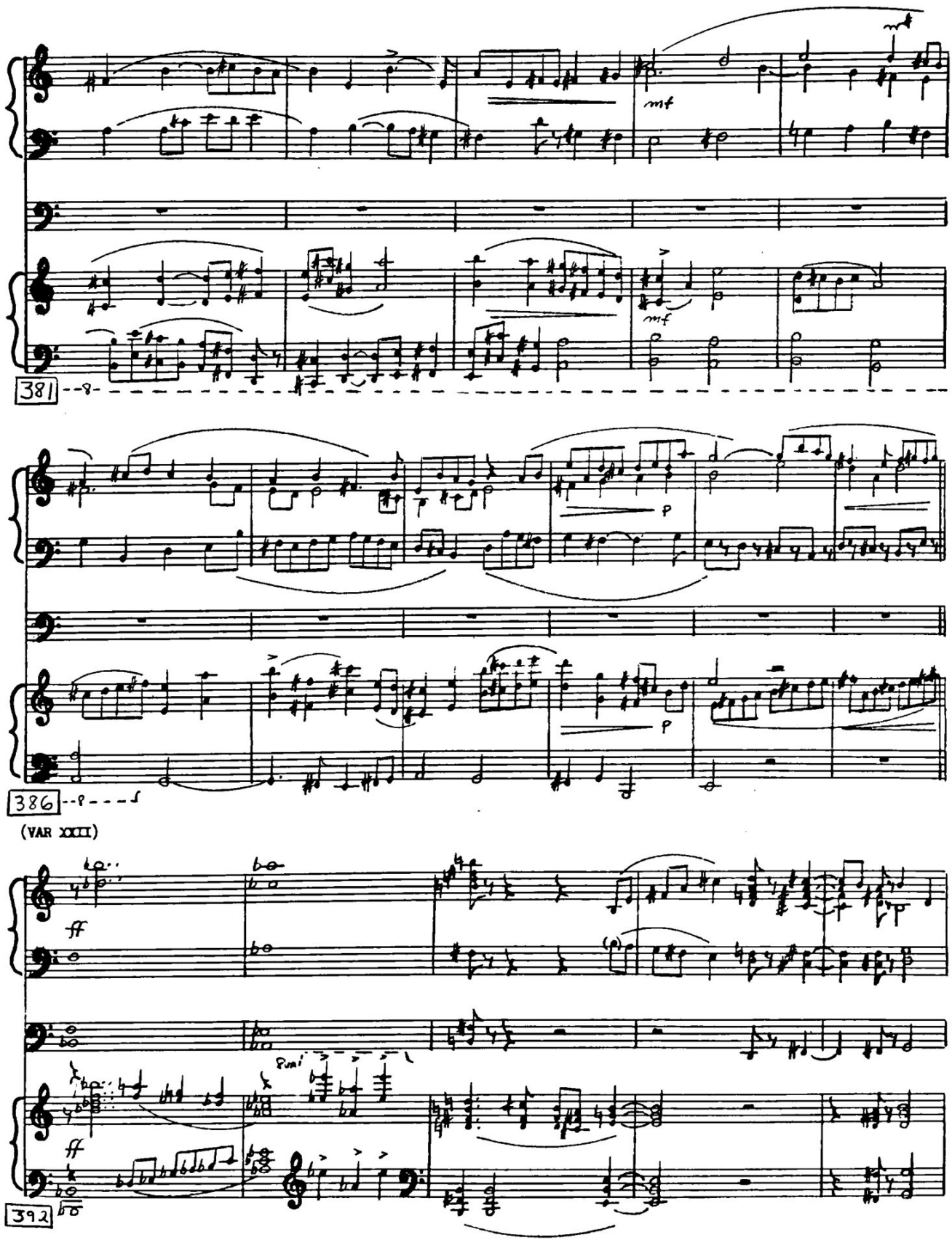

314
320
(VAR XIX)
326
(*)


332
338
344

(VAR XX)



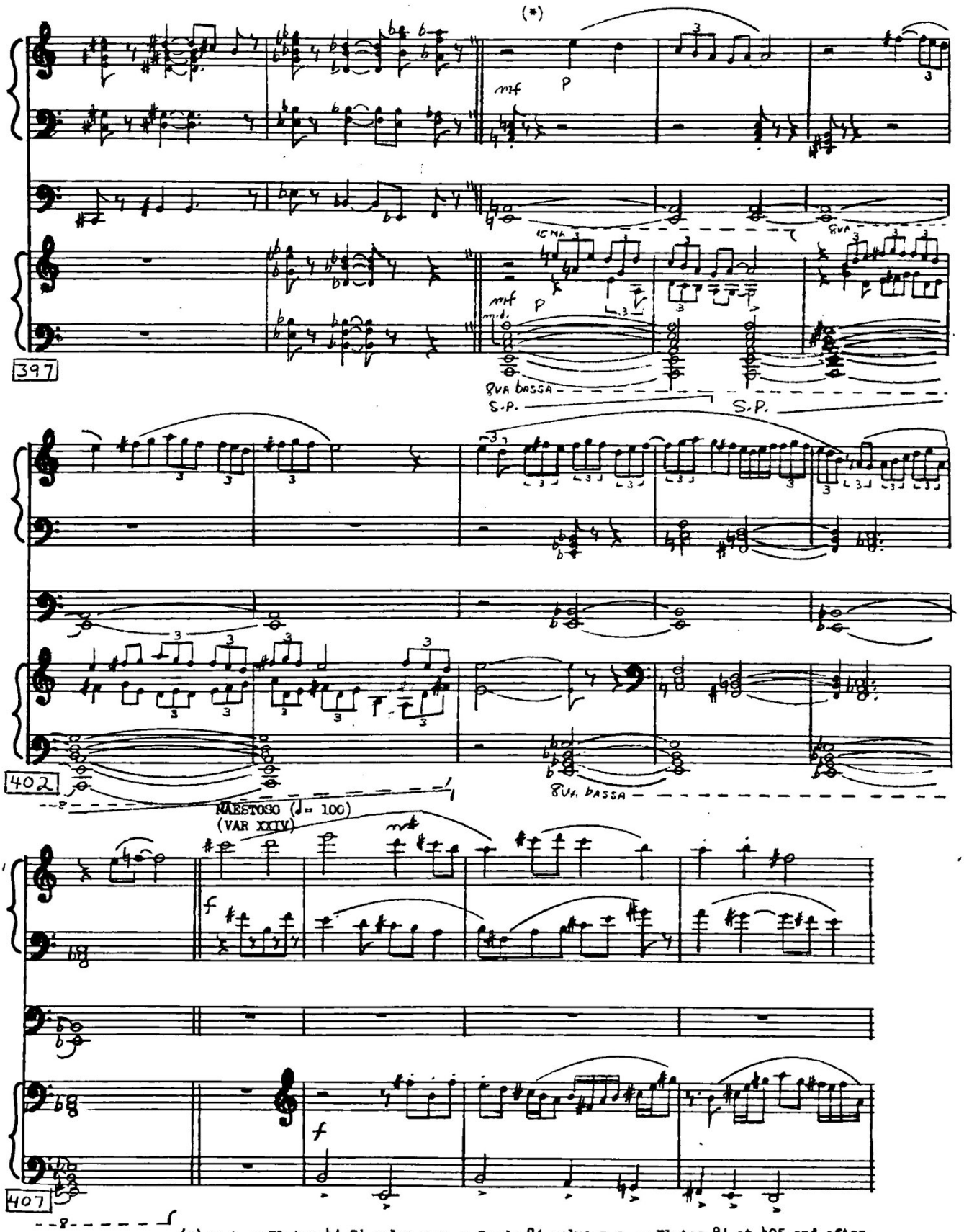

365
371
m.d.
(VAR XXI)
376
8va bassa


mf
mf
381
p
p
386
(VAR XXIII)
ff
Pmi
ff
392

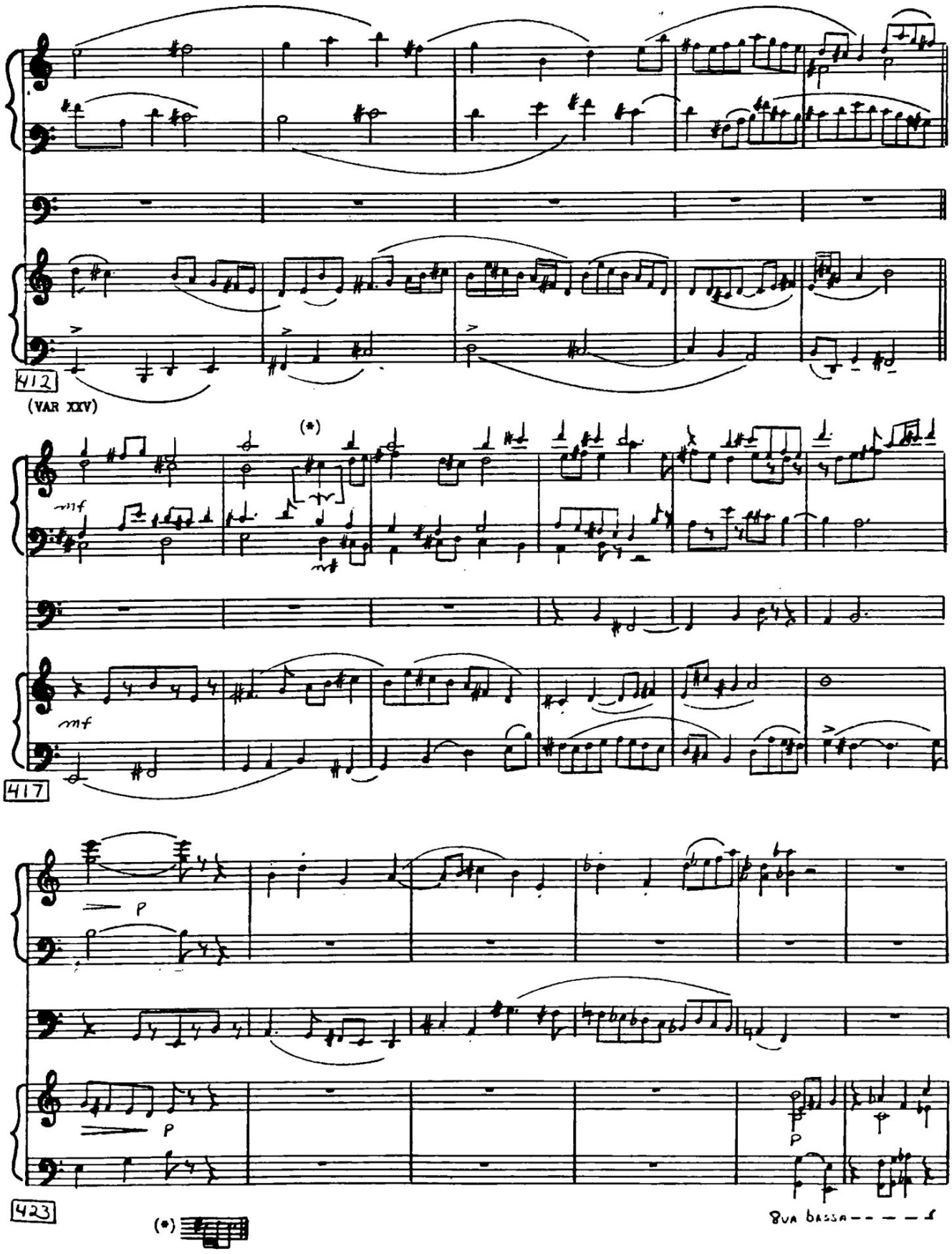
Doppia VALORE (J = J)

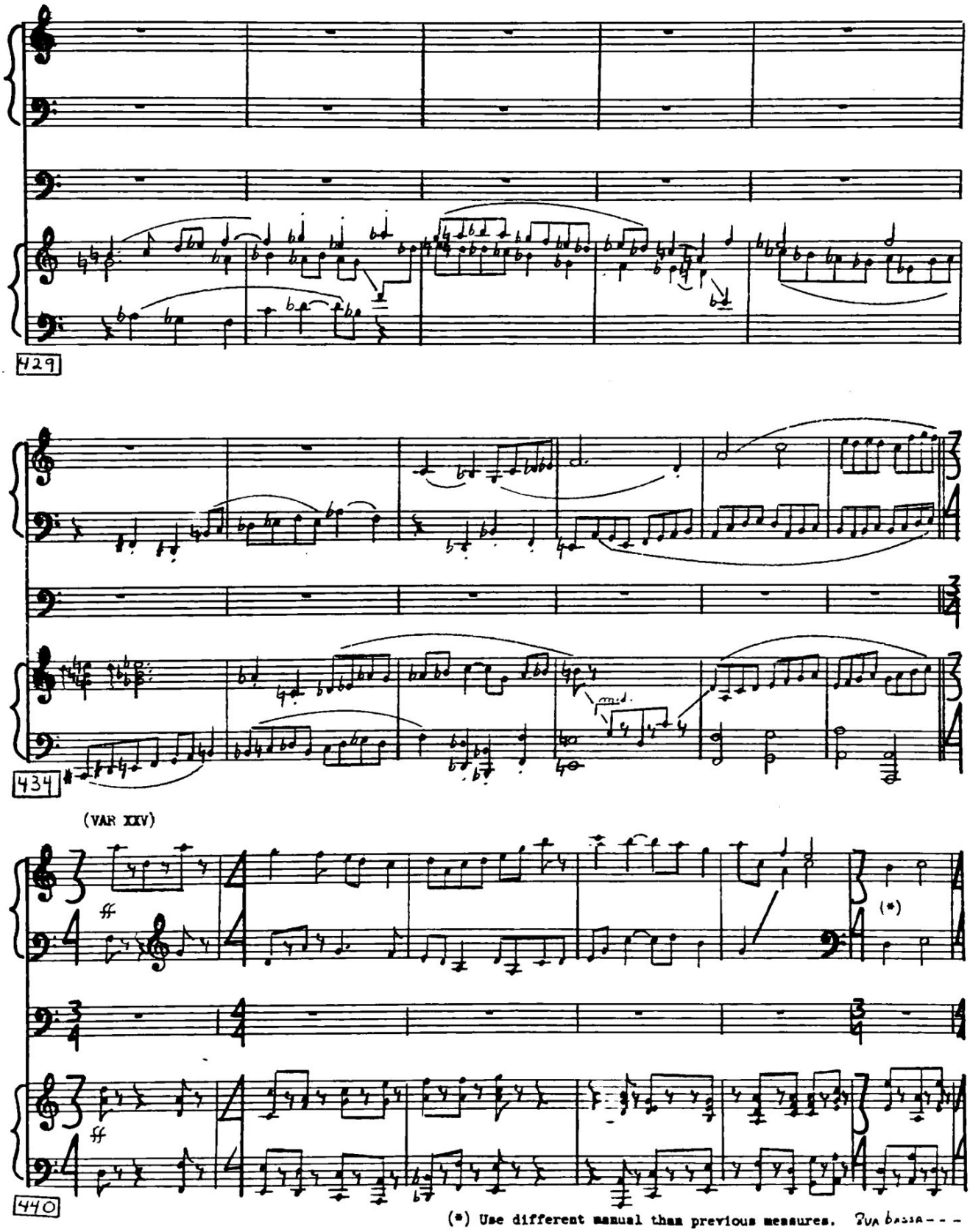
(VAR XXIII)

(*)

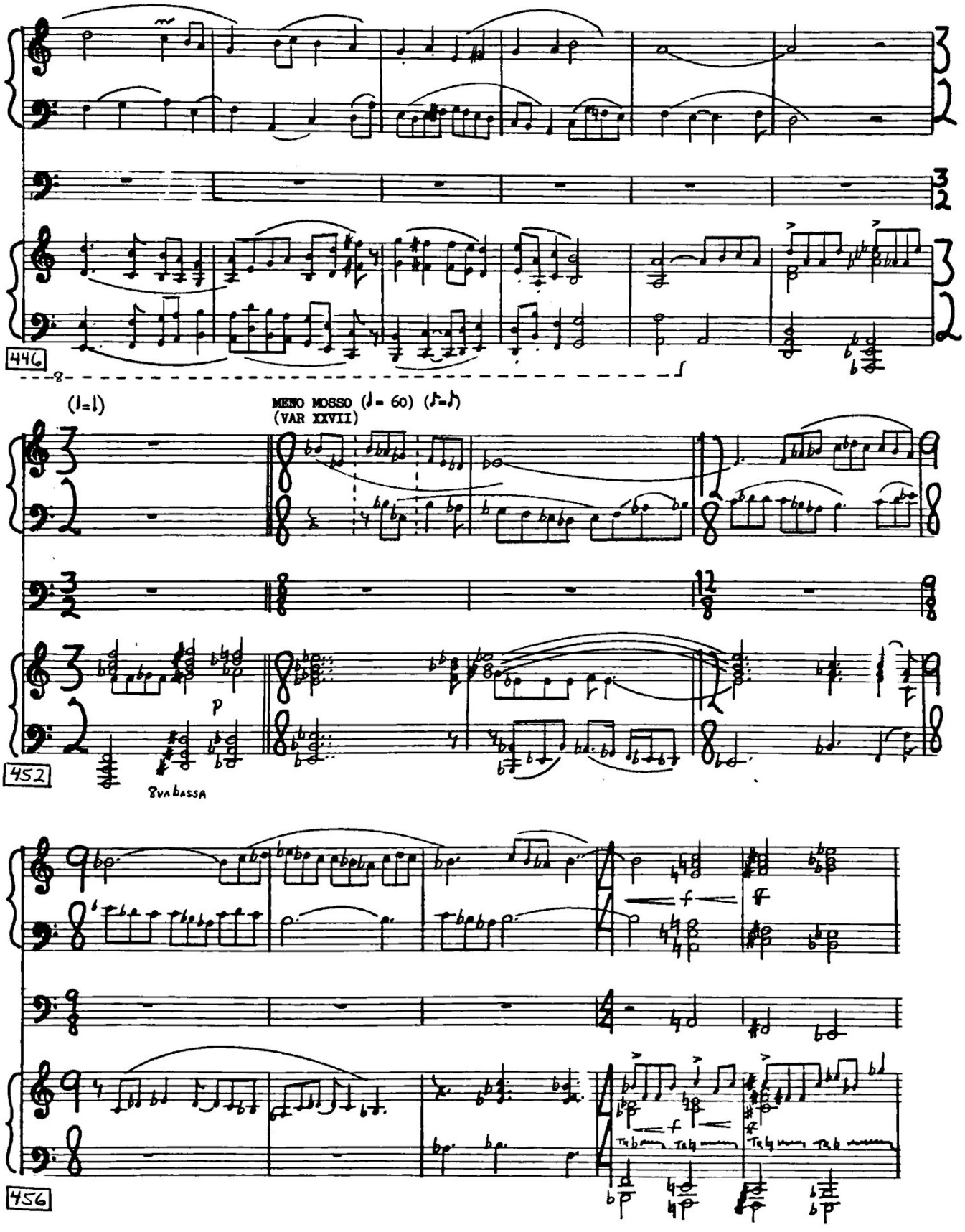


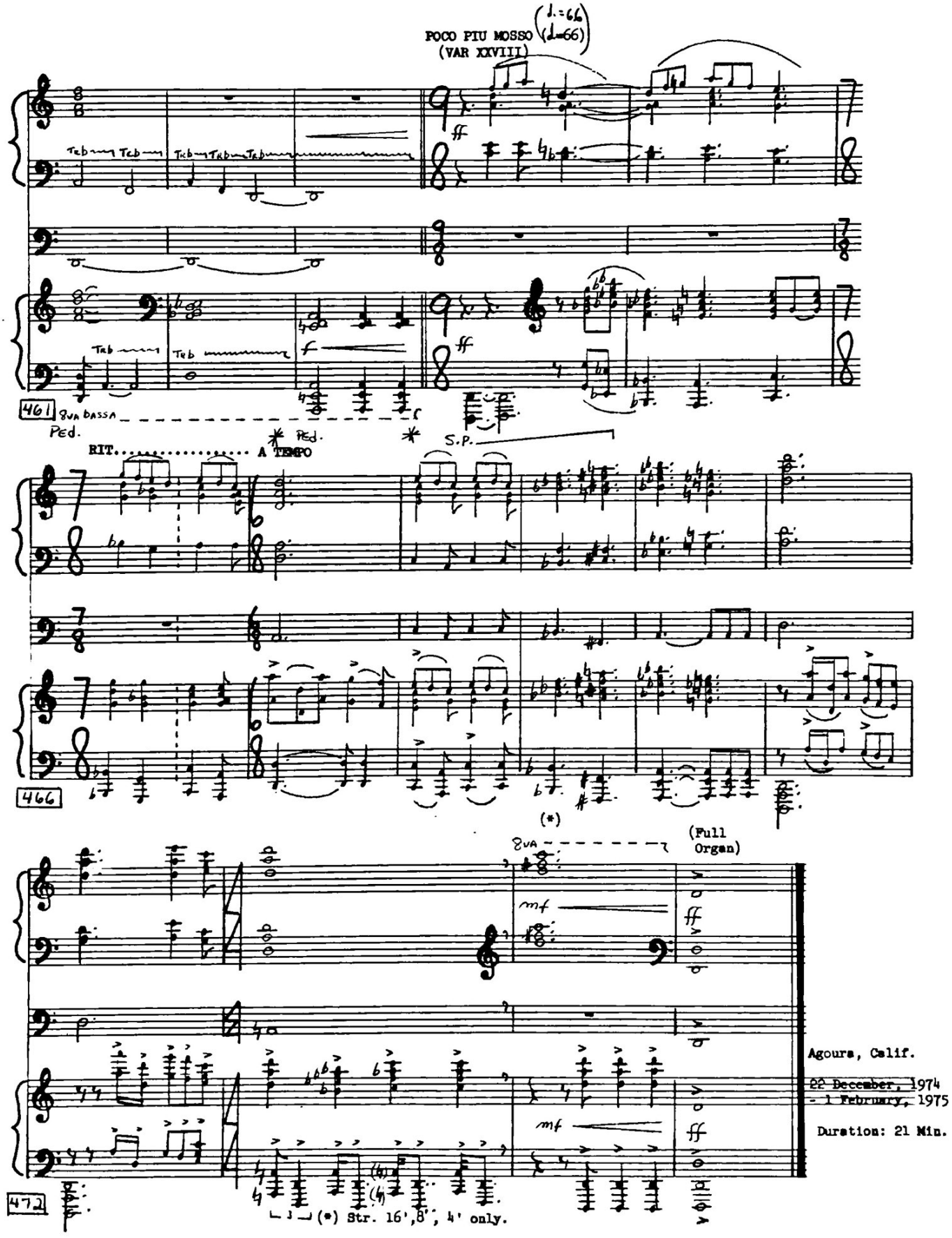
(*) m.d. = Flutes 4' 2' only; m.s. = Reeds 8' only; m.s. = Flutes 8' at 405 and after.


412
(VAR XXV)
(*)
mf
mf
417
P
P
P
423
(*)
8va bassa



(*) Use different manual than previous measures. 8va bassa - - -


446
MENO MOSSO (♩= 60)
(VAR XXVII)
452
8va bassa
456



Agoura, Calif.

~~22 December~~, 1974
- ~~1 February~~, 1975

Duration: 21 Min.