William Brown

Three Rondos

Philadelphia, 1787

Urtext Edition

Edited and published by

John Zielinski

2020

On 23 January, 1787, a notice appeared in the Philadelphia Packet inviting subscriptions to the publication of "Three Favorite Rondos, adapted to the harpsichord, composed by William Brown." This would be the first secular keyboard music published in the United States. The subscribers were assured that the compositions would be, "…in an easy and pleasing style, and the work as neatly executed and at as cheap a rate as possible." It is astonishing to note that over 230 years after Mr. Brown's publication, an Urtext edition of these pieces is not readily available. (The Third Rondo is published in the *Anthology of Early American Keyboard Music, 1787-1830, Part I*; ed. J. Bunker Clark; A-R Editions; 1977.) Perhaps musicians and editors have felt that the music itself was not worthy of such consideration. Brown was no Mozart to be sure, but he did succeed in writing a trio of cheerful, entertaining pieces, and their historical significance alone merits a modern republication.

Almost nothing is known of William Brown's life, neither the years of his birth nor death, where and with whom he studied, whether he married or sired any progeny. We do know that he emigrated to the United States from Germany, and that he may have been the "Braun" who was a flautist associated with the Hofkapelle at Cassel from 1770 to 1780. He performed a recital in New York in 1783, followed by concerts in Baltimore and Charleston. By 1786 he was one of the managers of the Philadelphia City Concerts. The *Three Rondos* are his only known compositions. They were dedicated to Francis Hopkinson, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and an avid amateur musician himself.

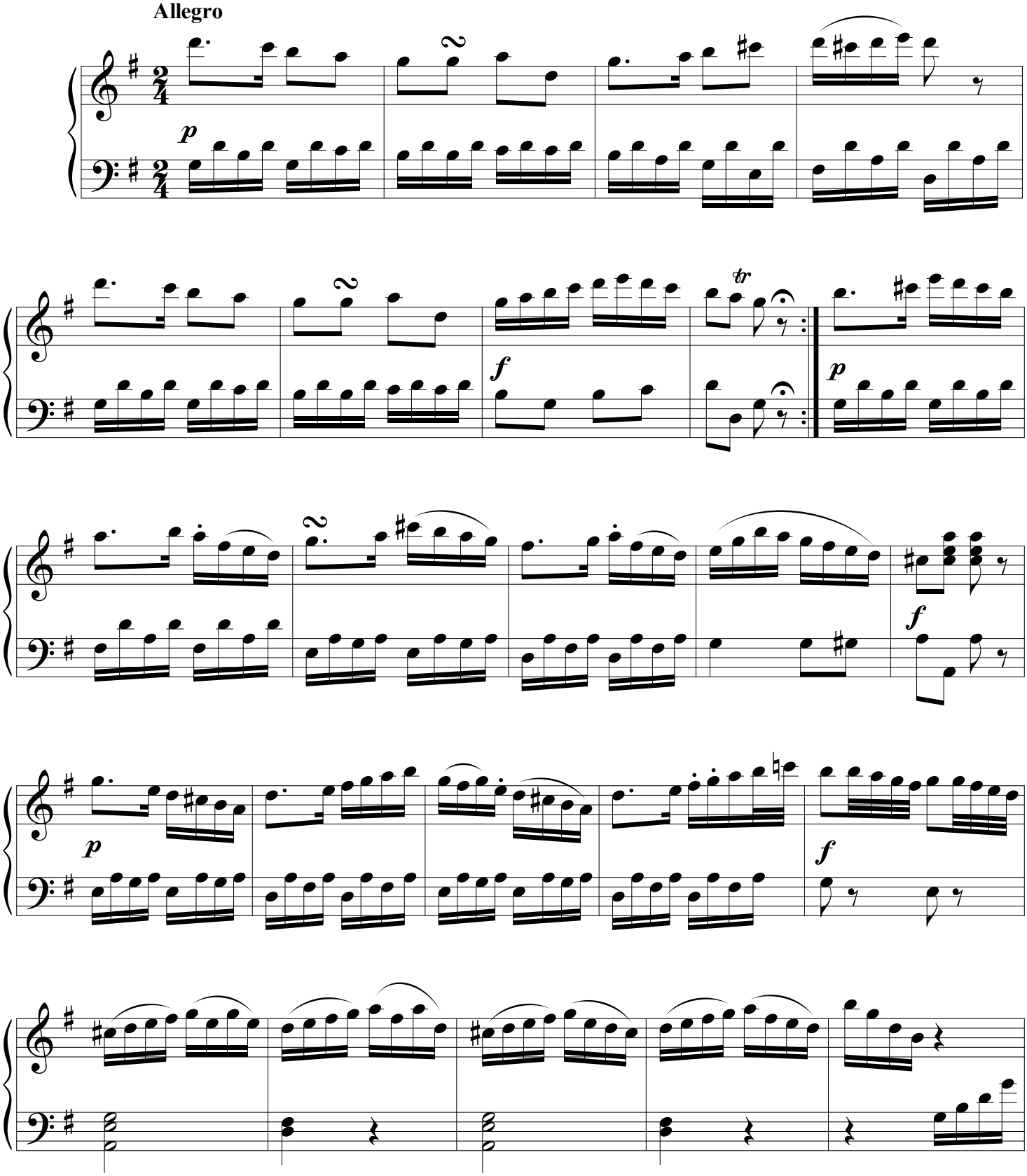
All three pieces are in G major, in the form ABACADA, sans coda. The B and D couplets are in the tonic, while the C couplet is in the parallel minor. The refrains are short, 8 to 16 measures, while the couplets range from 24 to 55 measures. The right hand consistently plays the melody while the left accompanies. The music features simple harmonies, transparent textures, engaging ideas juxtaposed with mundane ones, sometimes elegant turns of phrase, sometimes clumsy and downright erroneous voice leading (parallel fifths are the favored transgression). Brown does not rise to the heights of Haydn, or even Clementi, but we should not judge a log cabin by the yardstick used to measure the Sistine Chapel. This is American Folk Art. It should be appreciated in the same manner that we appreciate the rustic furniture, metalwork, and quilting of our pioneering forebears. Brown unequivocally achieved his goal of writing pieces, "…in an easy and pleasing style," and no doubt his subscribers were pleased with the results, subscribers that included prominent politicians, foreign dignitaries, and accomplished musicians.

This is an urtext edition of the Three Rondos. The corrections are all bracketed, and occasionally receive a footnote. Most of the errors consist of omitted accidentals. There has been no attempt to correct or modify any of the voice-leading, articulation, or dynamics. Much of the original cross-staff notation has been removed, as have the da capo repeats of the refrains - the refrains have been written out in full after every couplet.

---John Zielinski, 9/29/2020

Rondo I

William Brown
ed. John Zielinski



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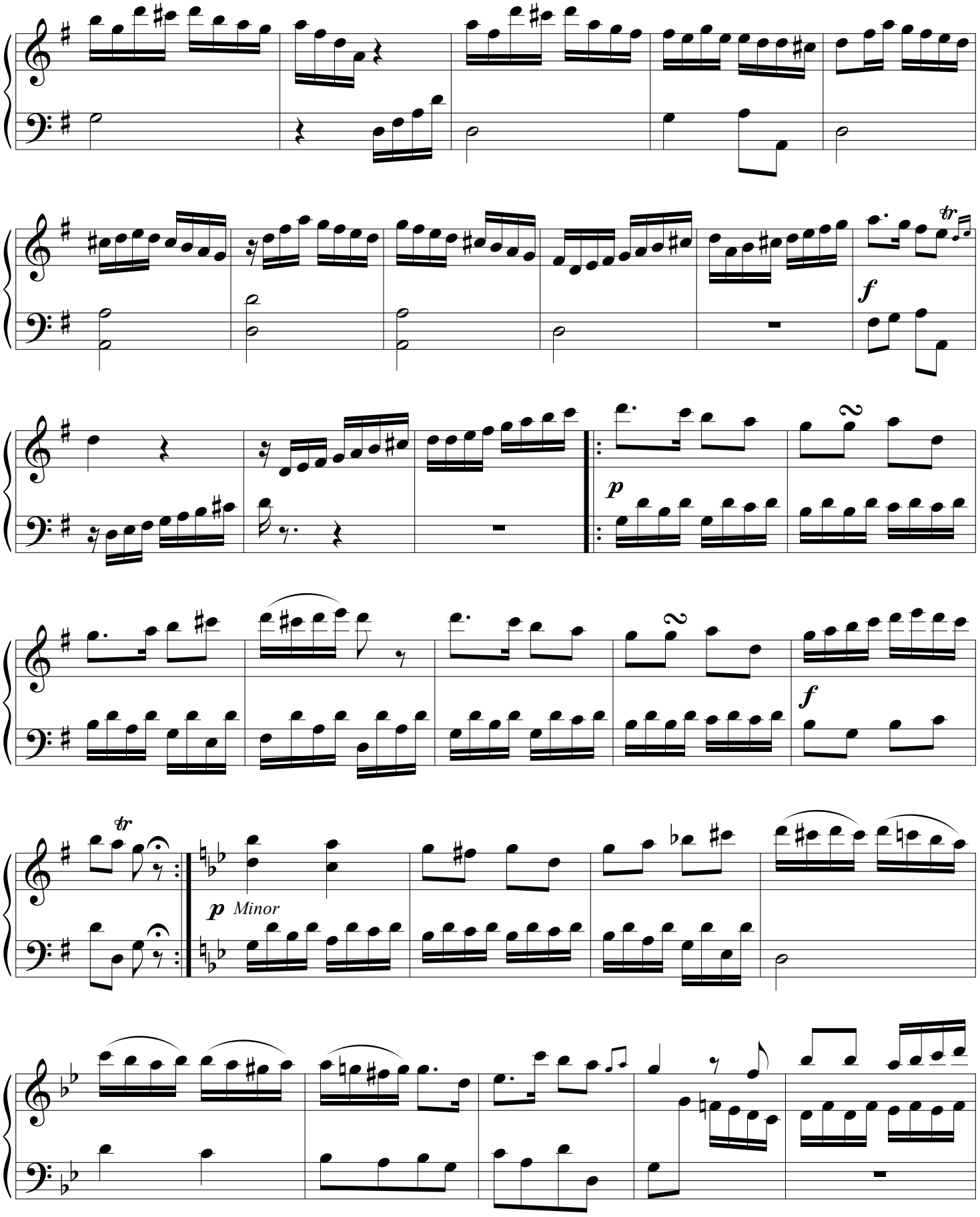
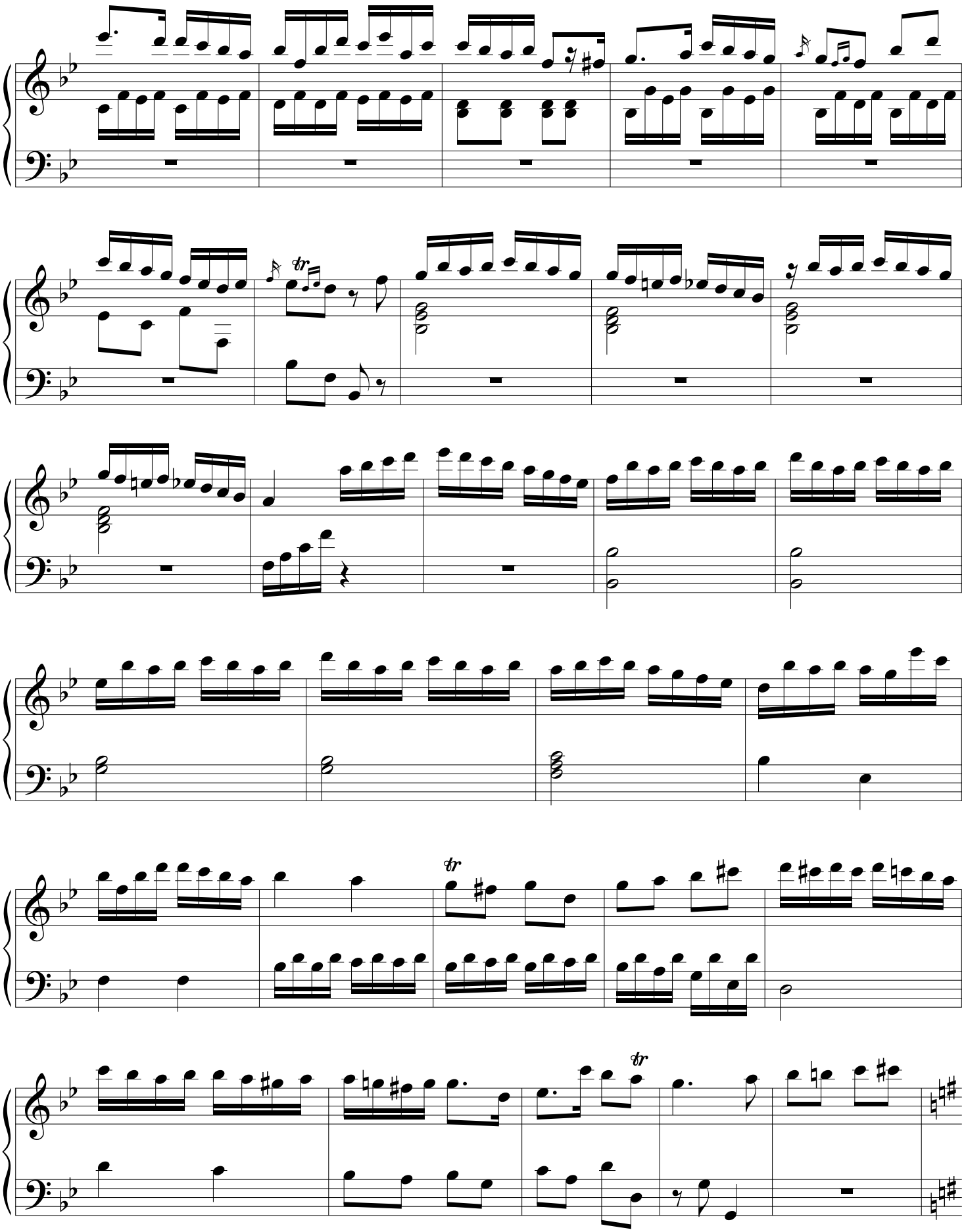
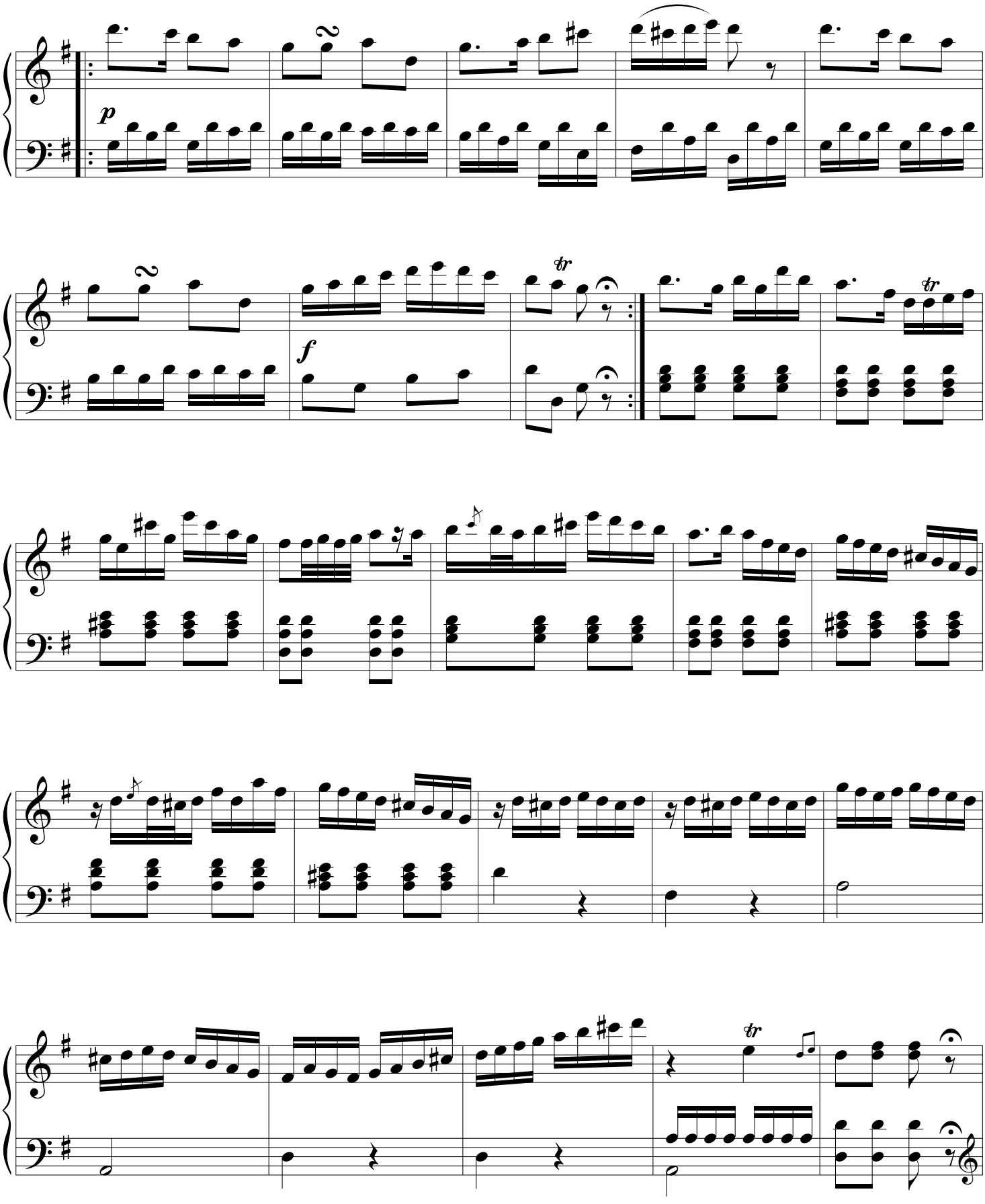
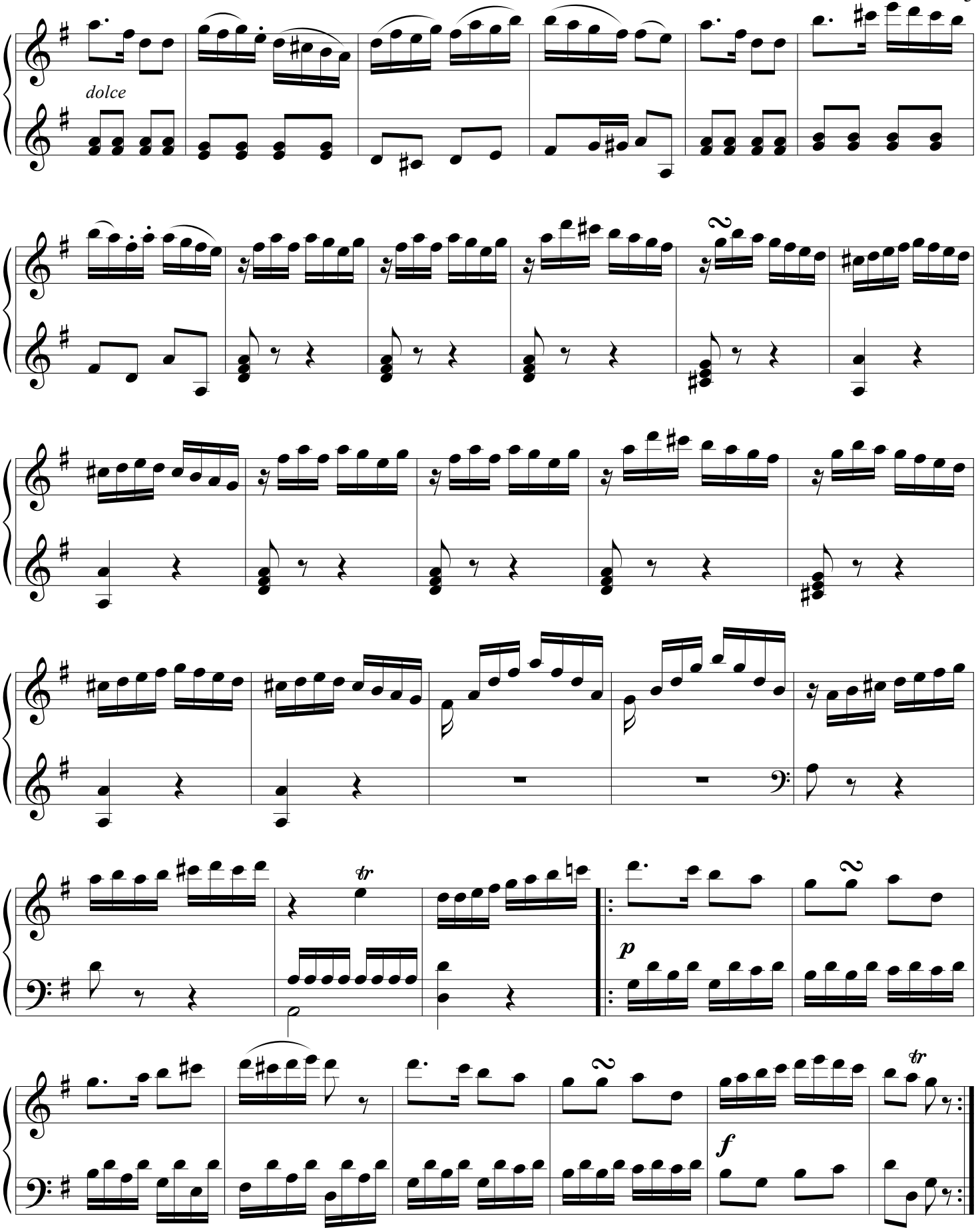

f
p
f
p Minor



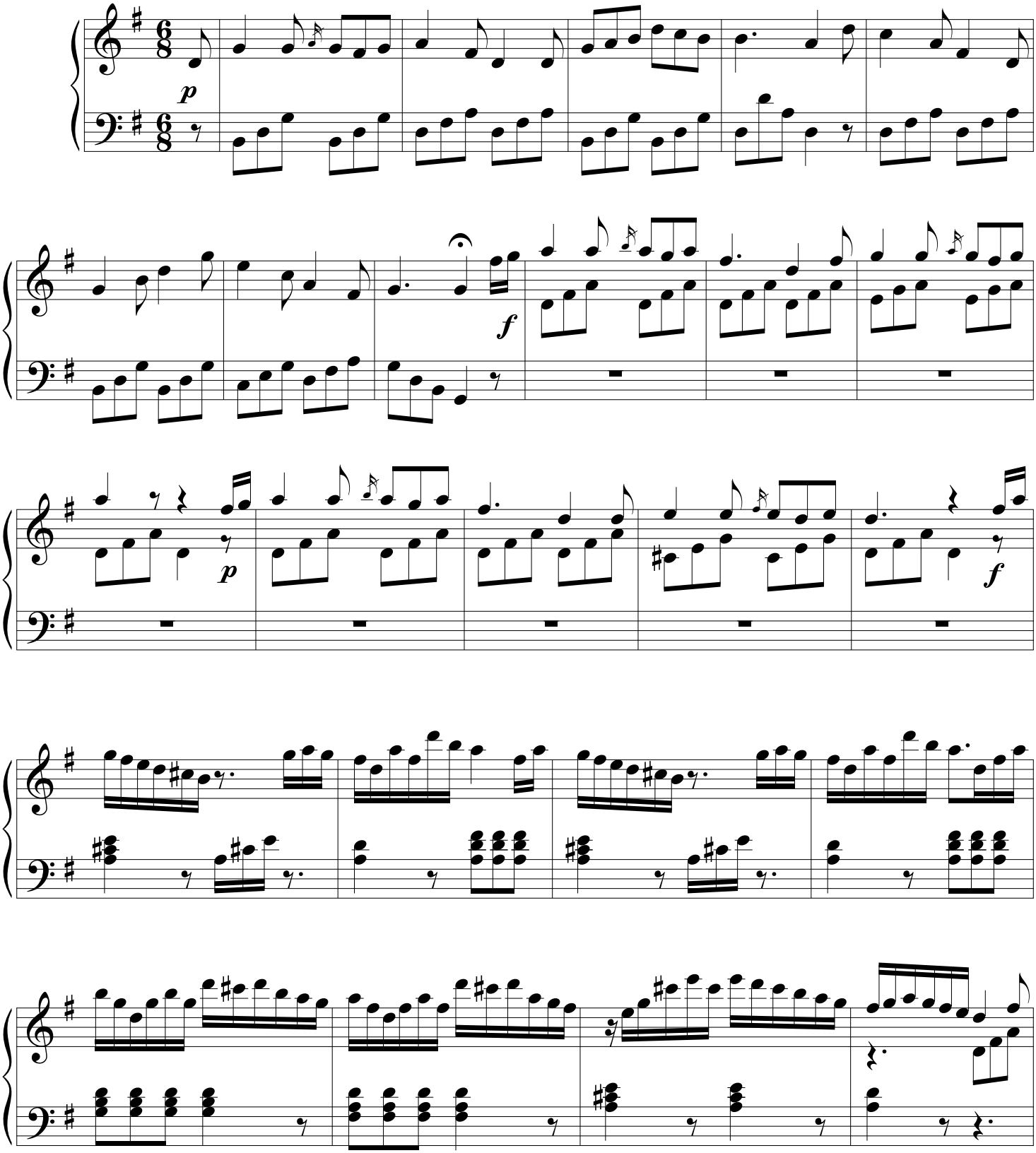

p
f
tr
tr
tr

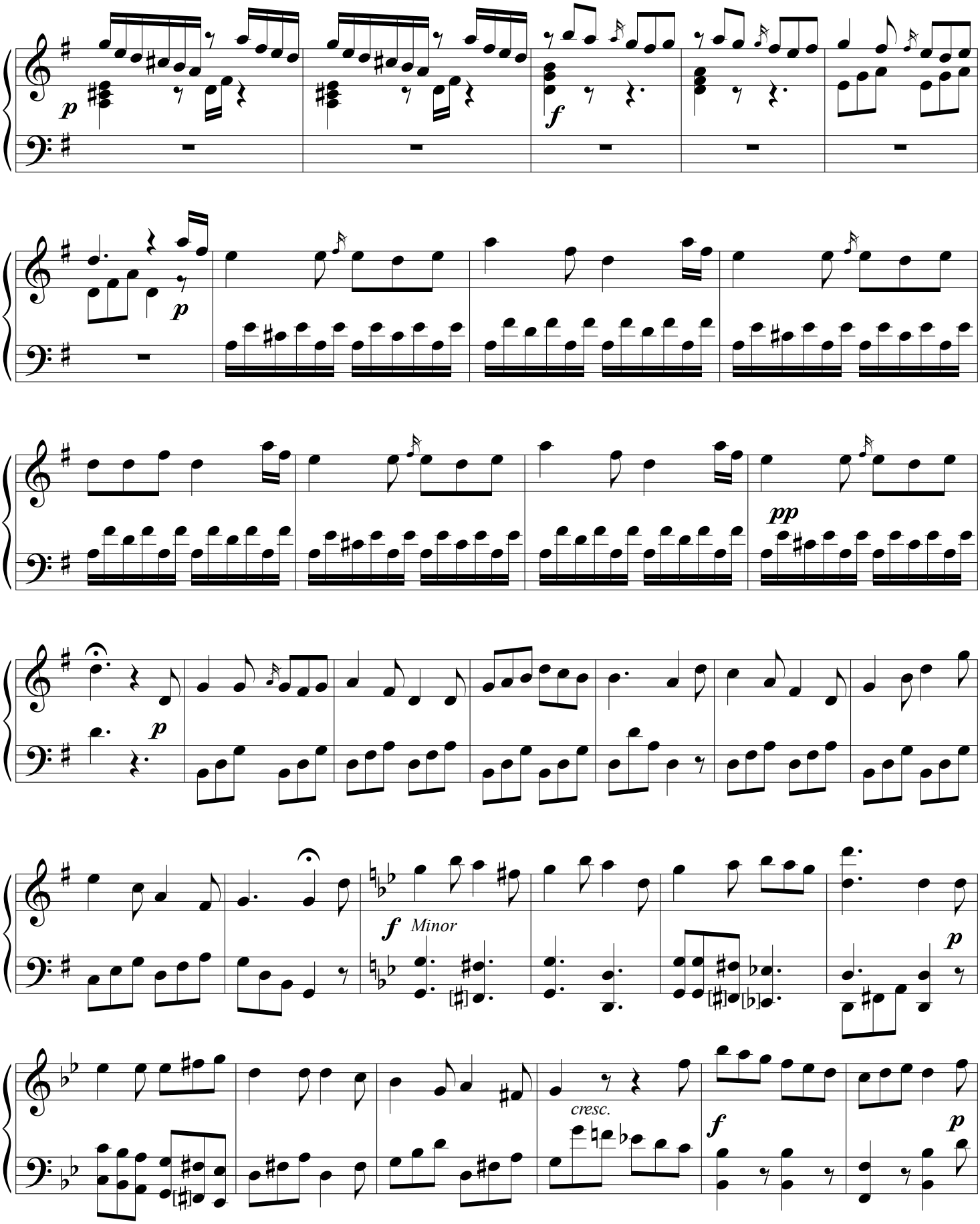

dolce
tr
p
f
tr

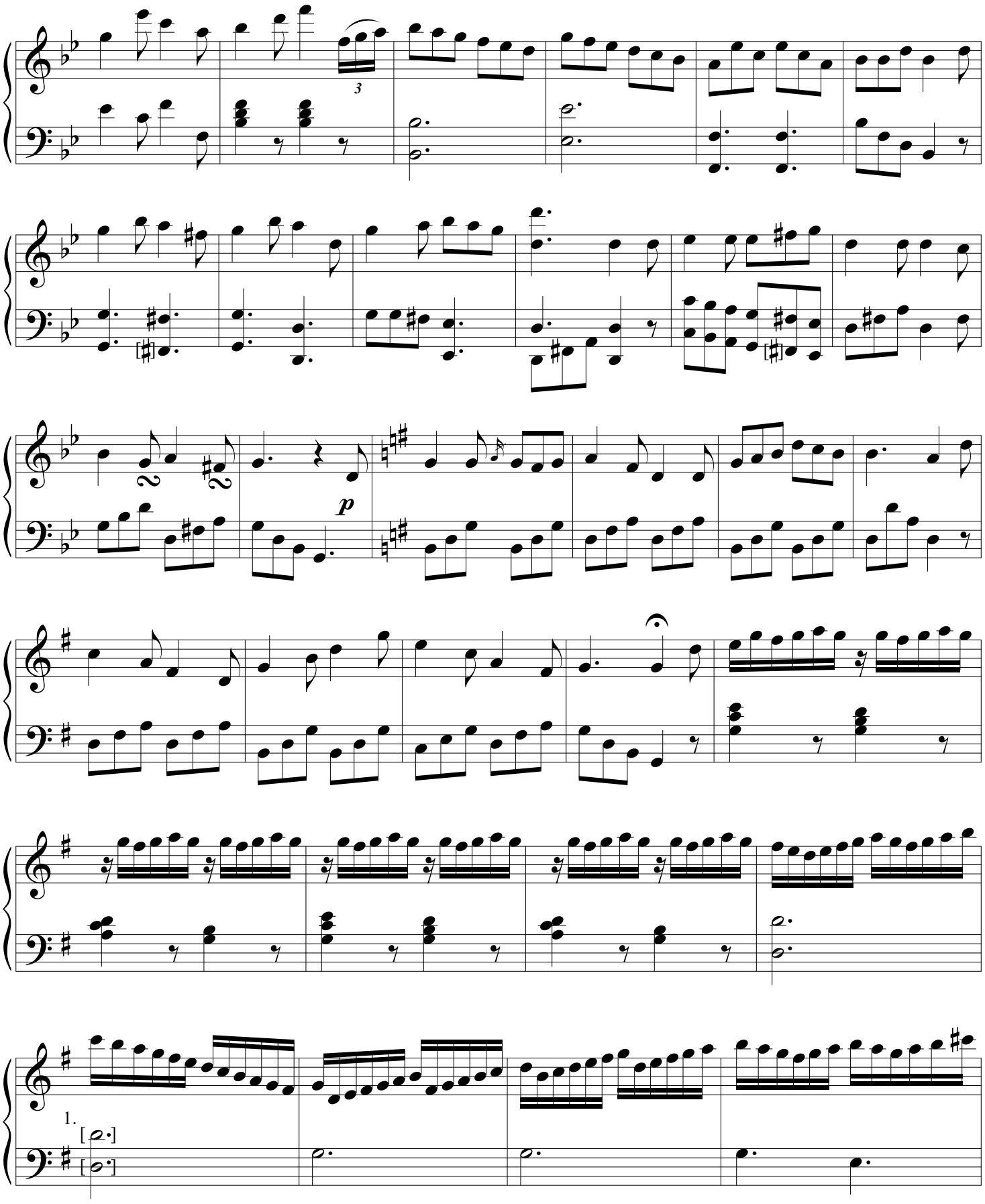
Rondo II

William Brown
ed. John Zielinski

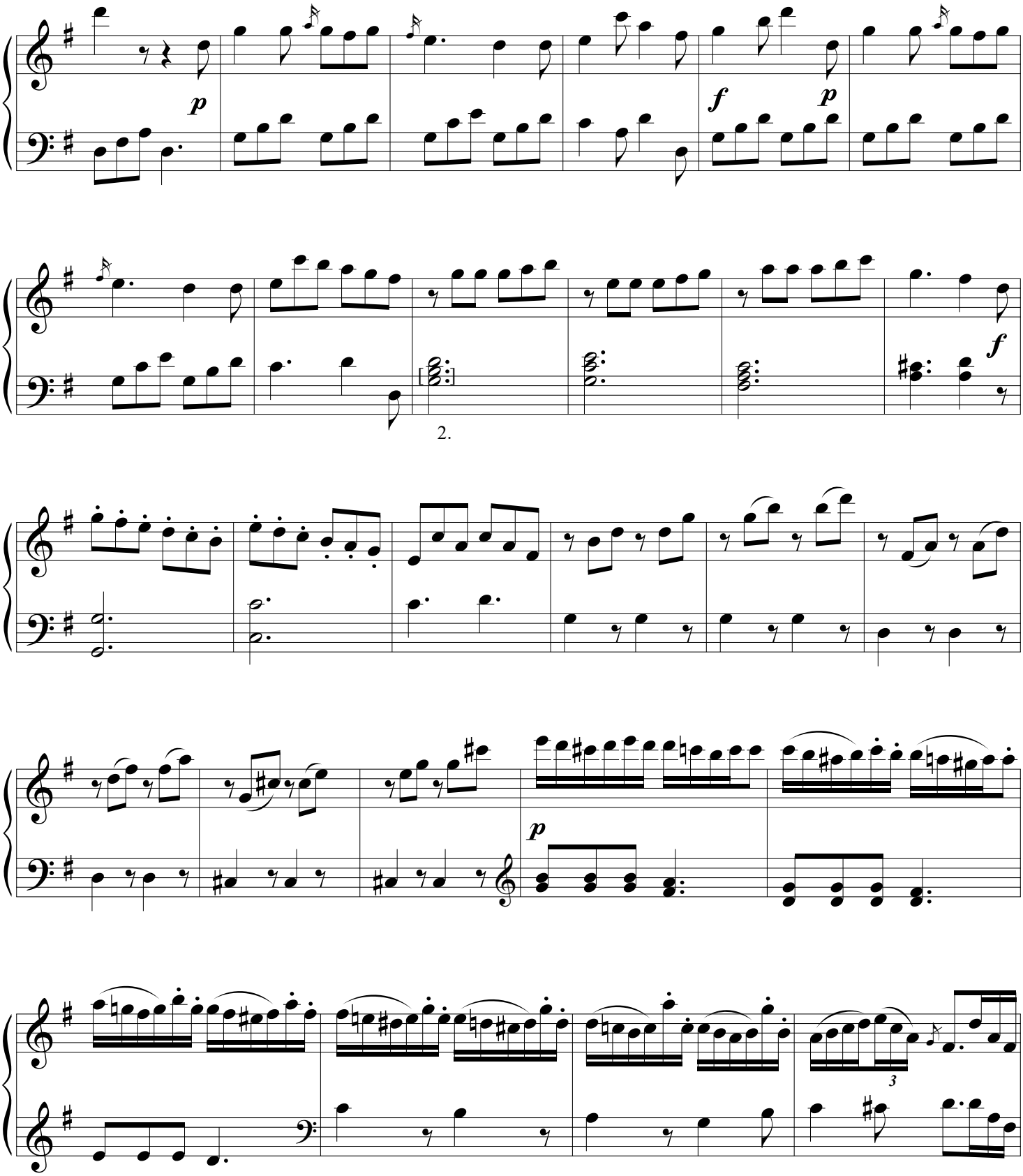
Allegretto



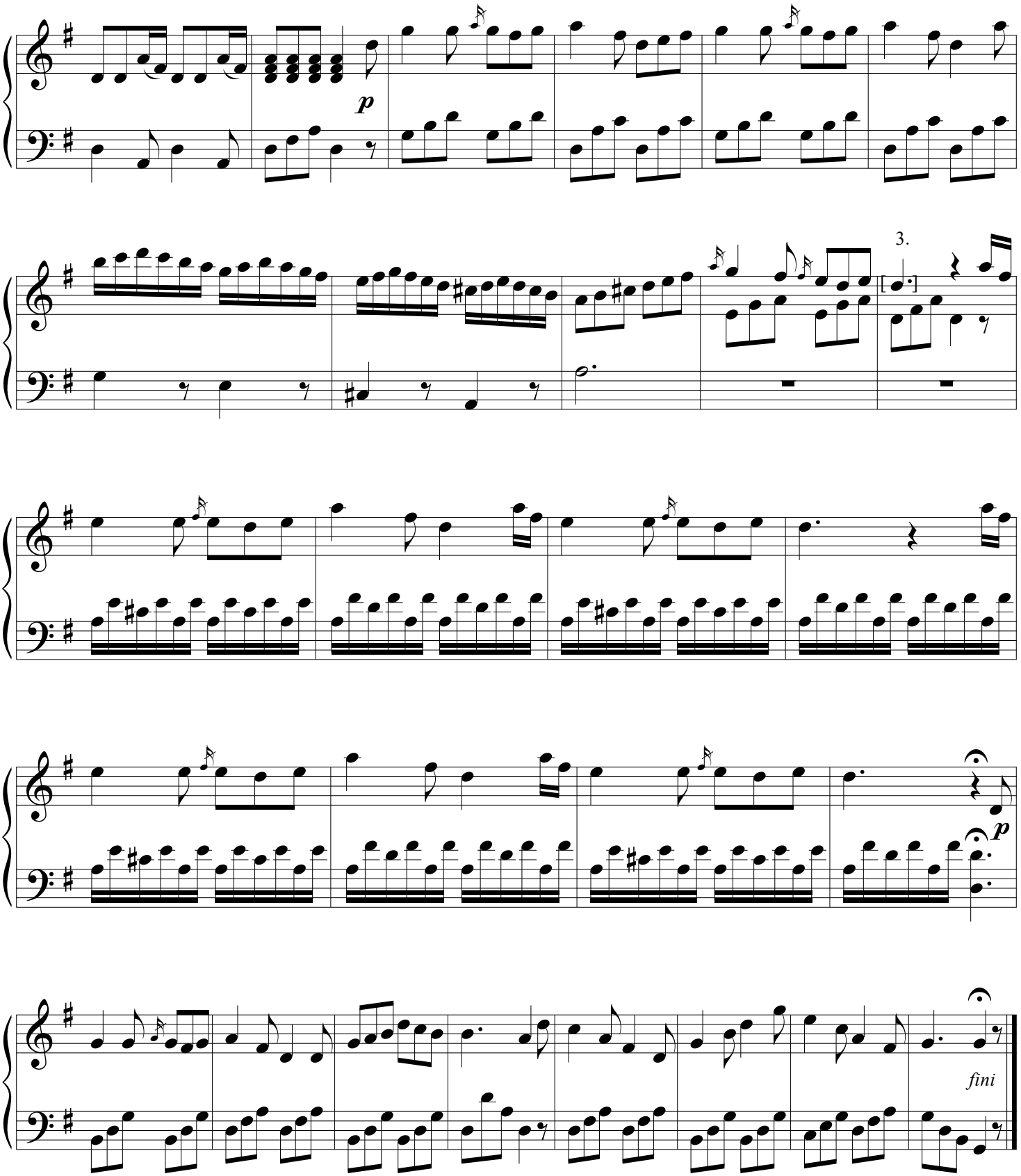

p
f
p
pp
p
f
Minor
p
cresc.
f
p



1. Originally G3. It's obvious that the composer meant to repeat the D octave from the prior measure here, and resolve to the tonic in the next.



2. Originally F#3 and A3. A D-major chord is clearly a mistake here.



3. Originally B4, a typo.

Rondo III

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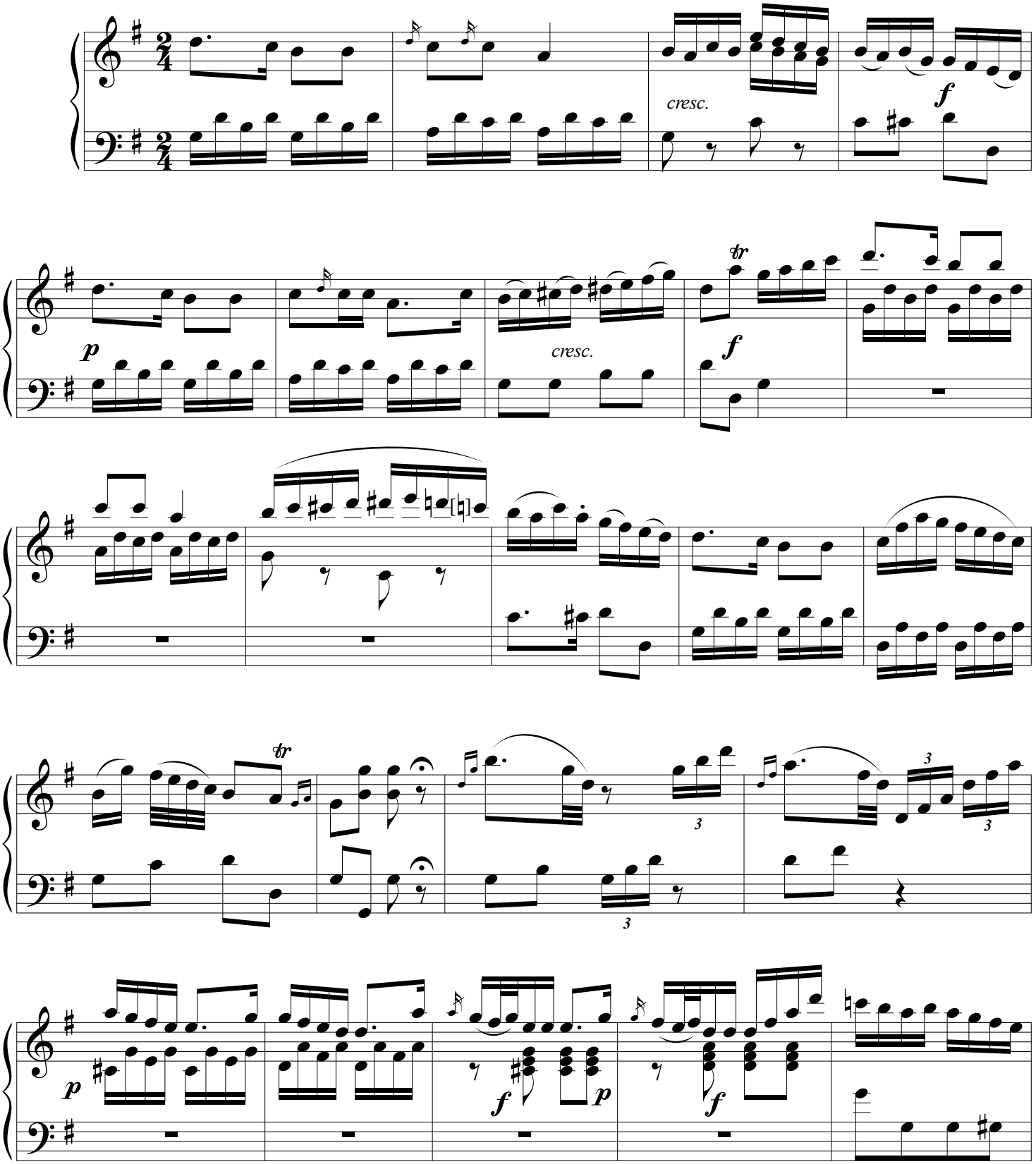
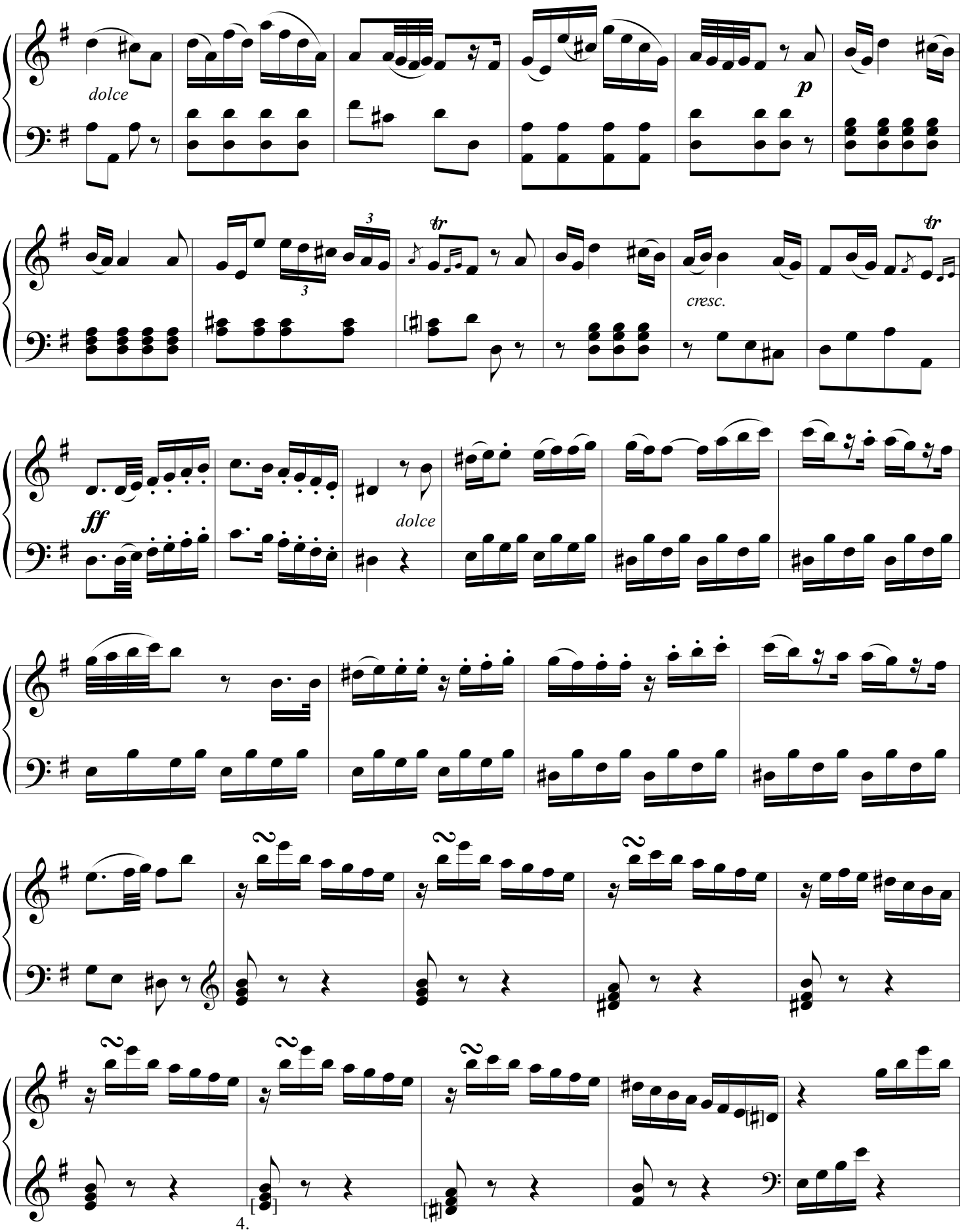
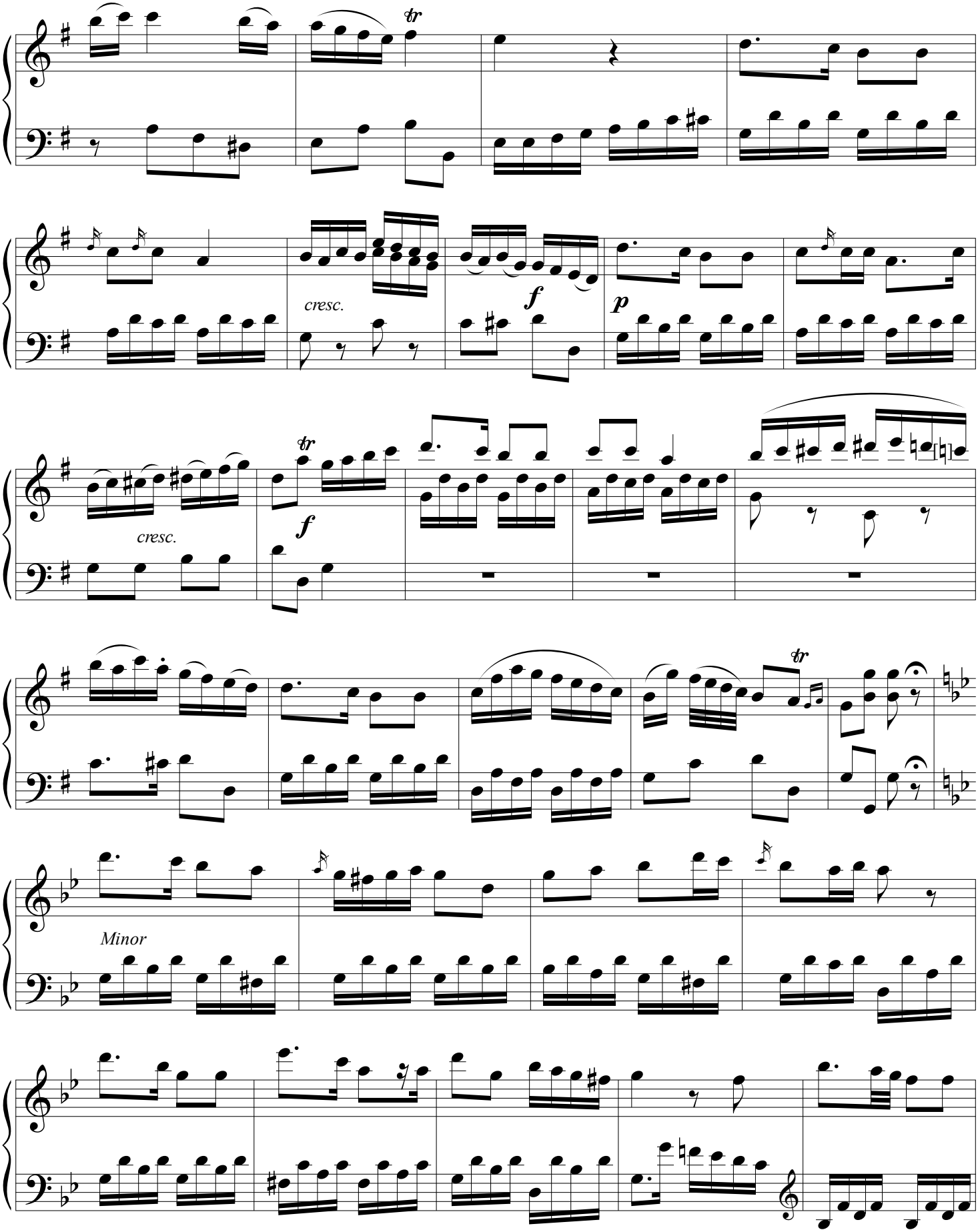
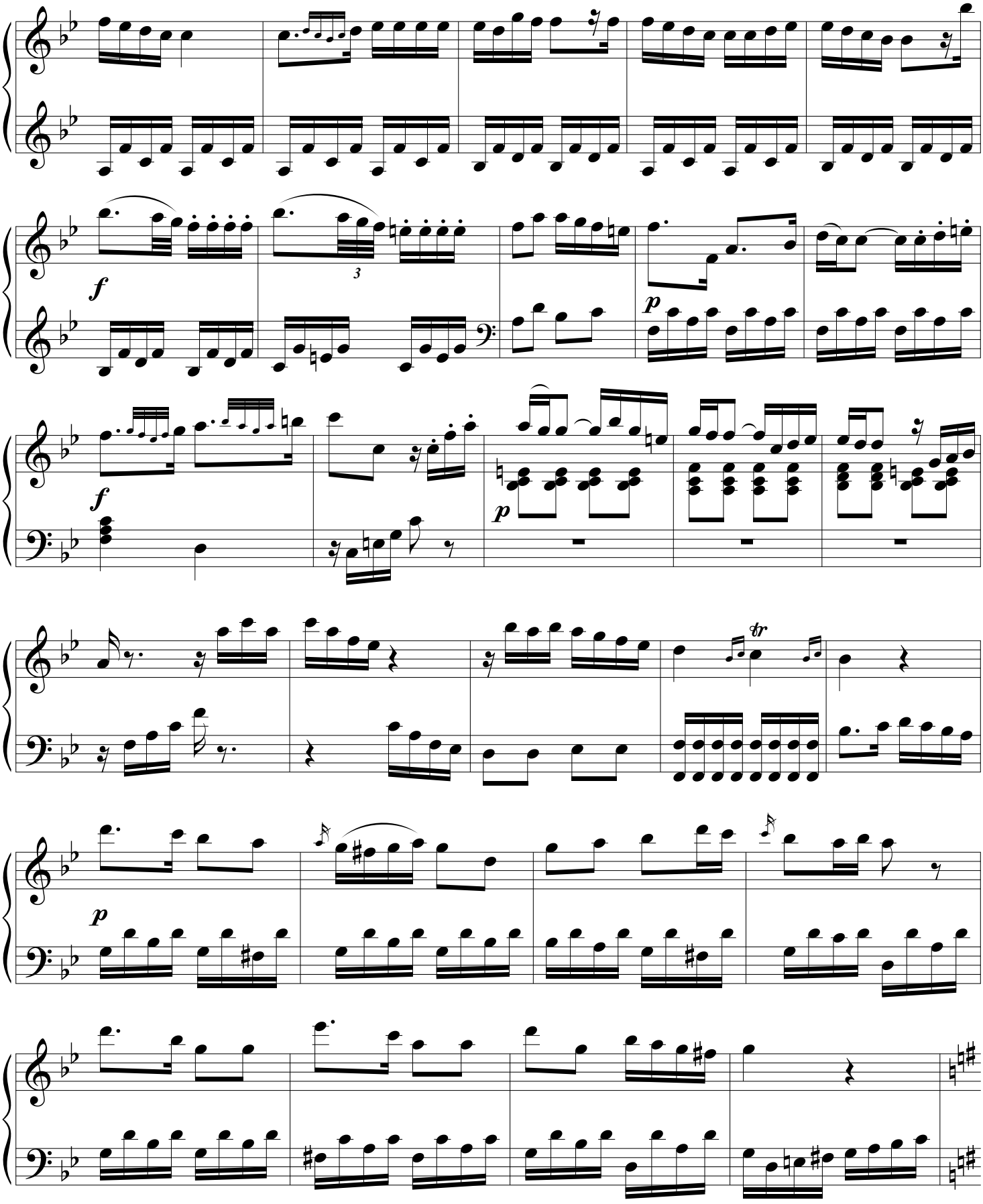
Allegretto

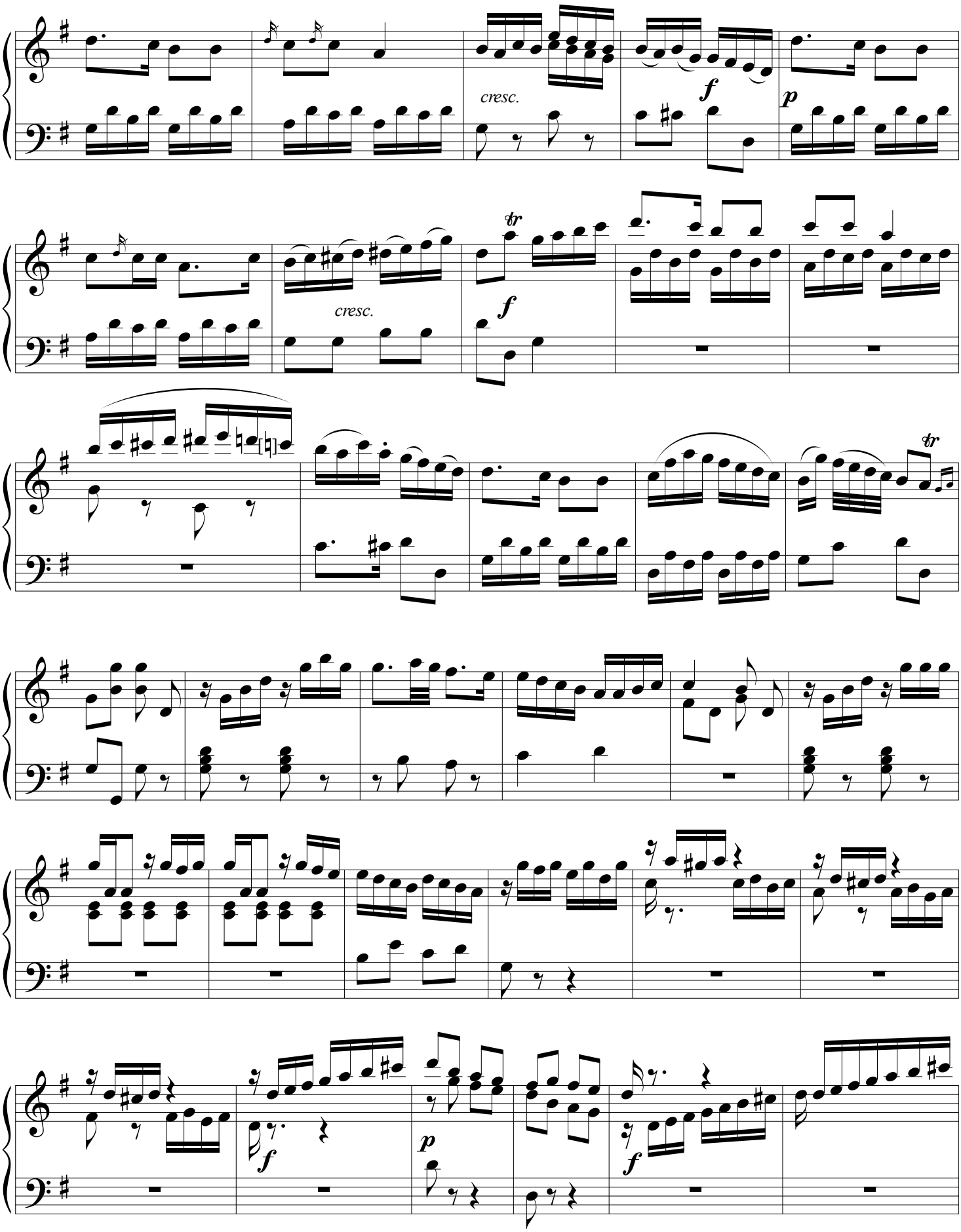


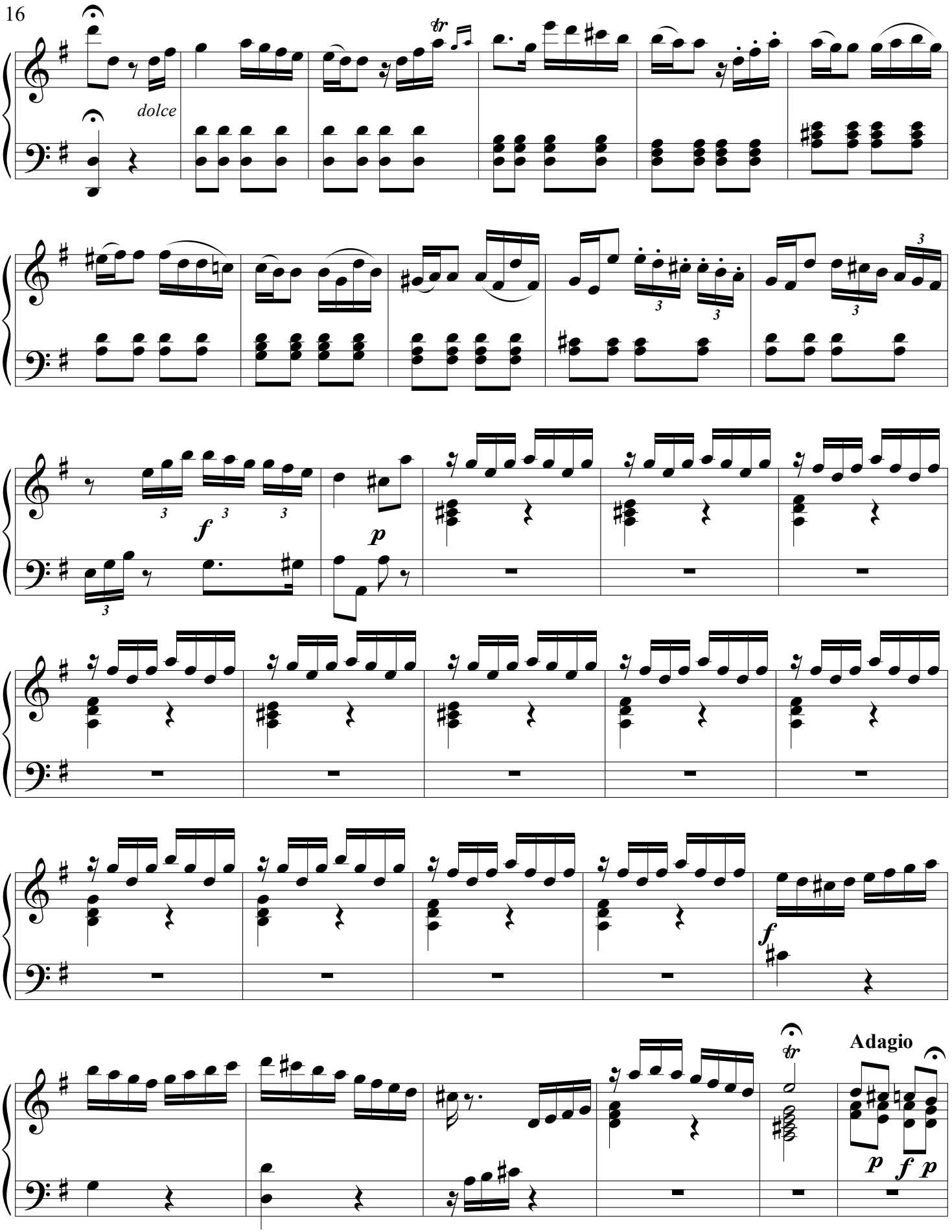


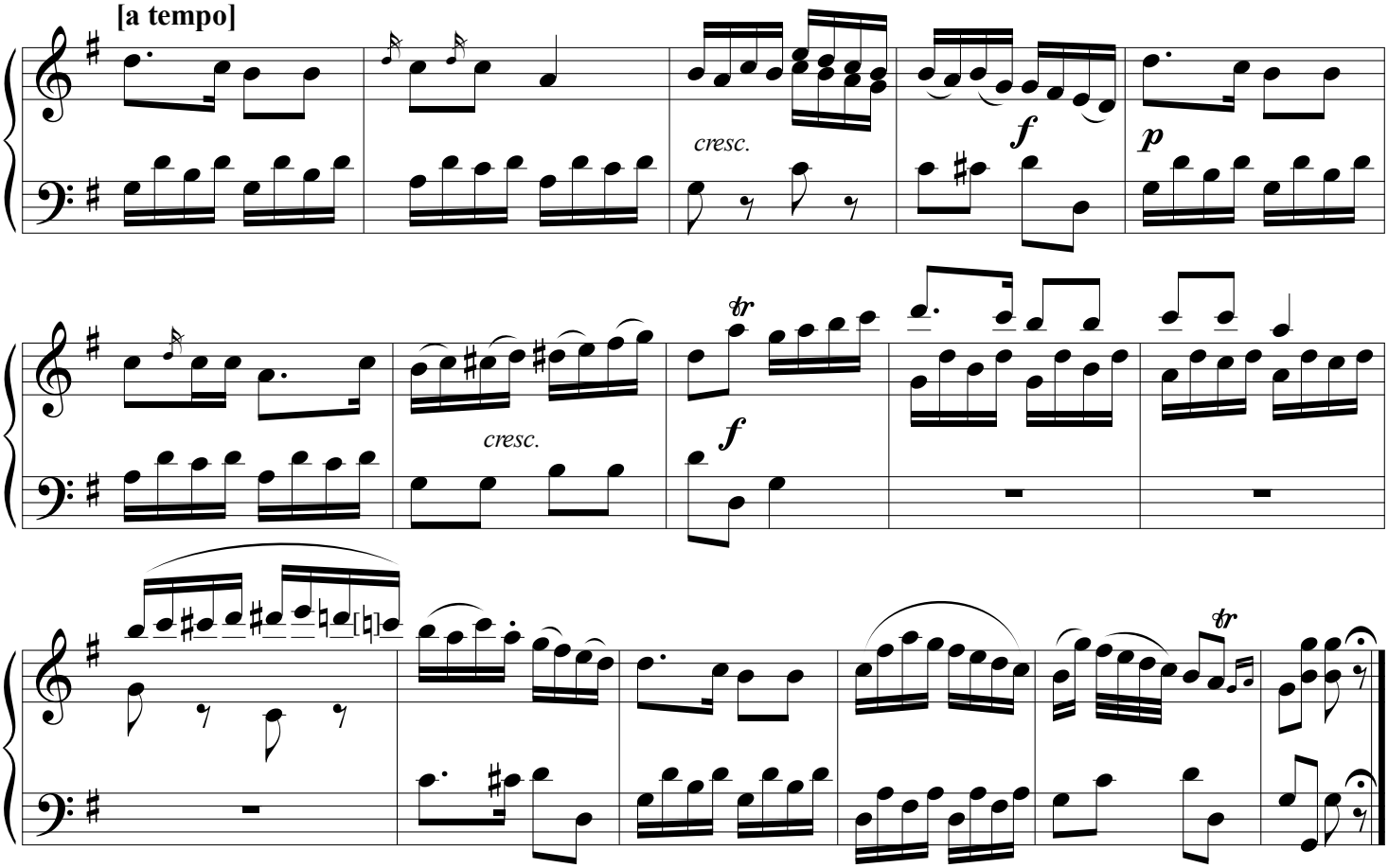
4. Originally D4.


cresc.
f
p
cresc.
f
Minor


f
3
p
f
p
tr
p


cresc.
f
p
cresc.
f
tr
tr
f
p
f


dolce
tr
f
p
f
tr
Adagio
p
f p


[a tempo]
cresc.
f
p
cresc.
f