ERIC EWAZEN

Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Brahms

for Trumpet (or Flugelhorn) and Piano

THEODORE PRESSER COMPANY

In the fall of 2010, I was approached by my great friend Chris Gekker about writing variations on an intermezzo by Brahms, which he wanted to commission as a tribute to his father. I have collaborated with Chris for over 30 years on many compositions and exciting musical performances. Having written some of my largest chamber works for trumpet for Chris, and appreciating so much the beauty and inspiration of his extraordinary playing, I was delighted for this opportunity.

In the program notes for the premiere performances in early 2011, at the Bargemusic Concert Series in NYC, and at the University of Maryland (performed with his wonderful pianist Rita Sloan), Chris wrote the following:

"My father was a fine amateur pianist – some of my earliest musical memories are of him playing his favorites: Schubert, Schumann, and Brahms. He passed away when I was 16. Years later, hearing this Brahms intermezzo brought back strong memories, and I decided that one day I would see if a piece like this might be commissioned. I'm very grateful and honored that Eric agreed."

I was also very pleased that Chris approached me to write this work. This was my first set of variations, and I was intrigued at the idea of exploring this musical structure. Also knowing Chris's incredibly colorful, musical, virtuosic, and lyrical playing, I wanted to capture his approach of a "singing trumpet sound" with this piece.

The work is based on Brahms's *Intermezzo, Op. 117, No. 1*. It is beautiful and serene, with a gently lilting, floating melody over slow moving harmonies. From this great and enduring theme, the work consists of a set of 5 variations and a concluding fugue.

In VARIATION 1, the melody in the trumpet still remains peaceful, but instead of the long lyrical line, the individual gestures of the theme become gently fragmented, as the piano's opening chordal gestures now also become broken up and somewhat arpeggiated.

In VARIATION 2, the trumpet begins to use intervallic expansion and contraction, keeping the basic contours of the main theme's gestures, but now altering them, stretching them, expanding them, becoming somewhat more dramatic, as the piano now has floating Impressionistic flourishes – still understated and pastorale, but growing evermore complex.

VARIATION 3 suddenly switches gears, and the main theme is now full of energetic playfulness in a compound 12/8 meter with the piano having an almost Schubertian ostinato accompaniment with lots of repeated gestures, sometimes jaunty and chordal, sometimes lilting and rolling.

VARIATION 4 has turned the main E♭ major theme to F minor, giving a sense of expressive grandeur to the melody. It is not tragic or somber, but very stately and serious, with the trumpet once again playing long phrases, and the piano slowing down the rhythmic momentum to allow lush, resonant chords to ring.

VARIATION 5 is a jaunty caprice, with the trumpet and piano collaborating, once again, in gigue-like compound rhythms, to turn the theme into a playful dance. This lively burst of energy leads to a joyful fugue.

The FUGUE, with its rhythmic energy and playfully fragmented motives, pays tribute to both Brahms and Bach. Brahms was a master at writing fugues – and I had one of his masterpieces, the *Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel,* with its great concluding fugue in mind as I was completing this set of variations. All stops are pulled out, with the trumpet proudly and stentoriously sounding the fugue theme, as the piano also plays the theme sometimes in resonant octaves, high, low, in stretto, inversion – all the devices negotiated so perfectly by Brahms and Bach.

But at the conclusion, the work goes right back to a repeat of the original Intermezzo theme. This was written at the inspired suggestion of Chris Gekker who wanted the piece, as a sincere, fond tribute and recollection of his father, to end gently, beautifully and sincerely, with fond memories lingering and disappearing quietly, peacefully away.

sample

Duration: c. 12'

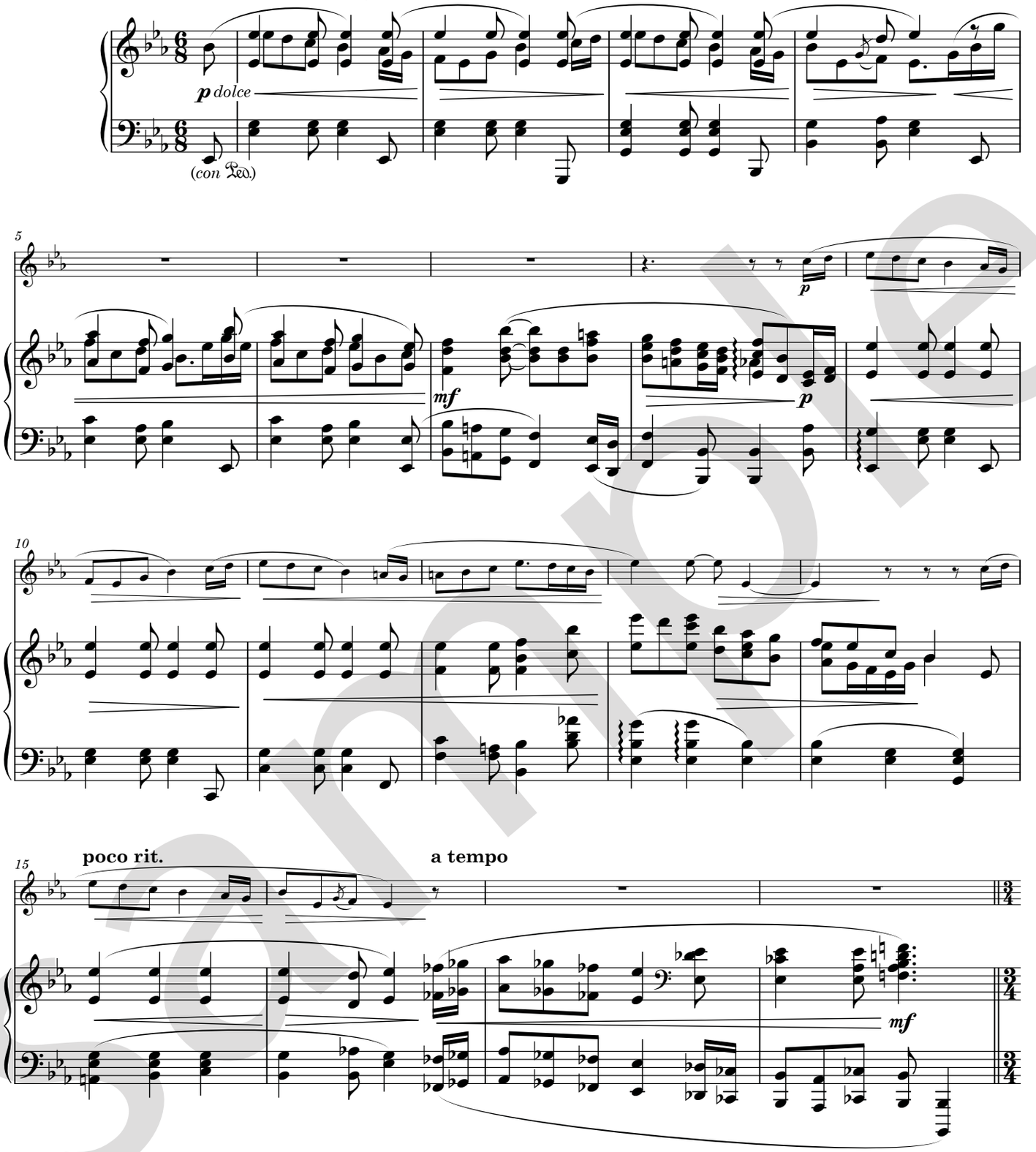
Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Brahms

for Trumpet (or Flugelhorn) and Piano

ERIC EWAZEN

TEMA DI BRAHMS

Andante moderato (♪ = c. 88)



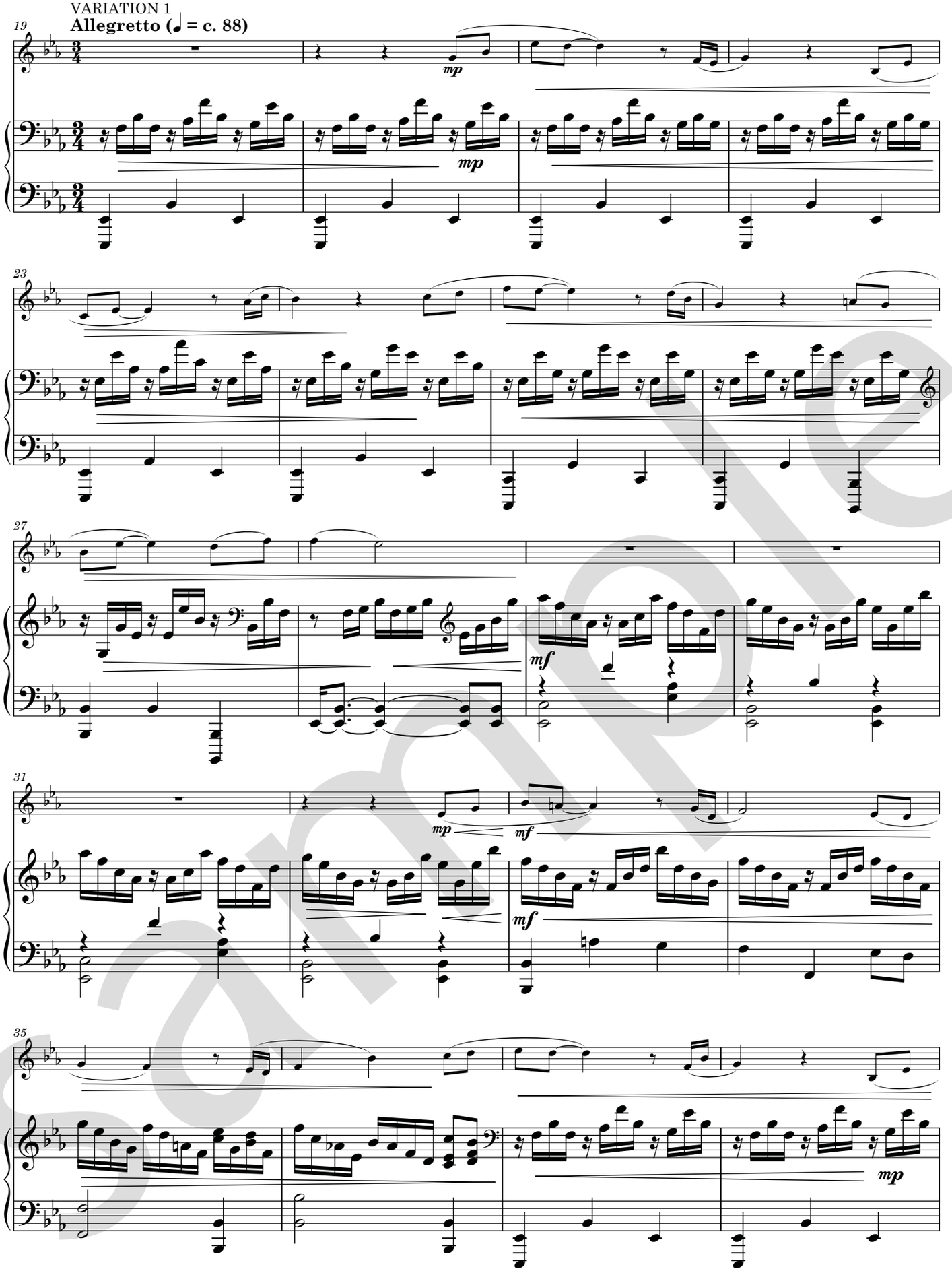
© 2012, 2014 by Theodore Presser Company
All Rights Reserved
International Copyright Secured
114-41495
Printed in U.S.A.

Unauthorized copying, arranging, adapting, recording, or digital storage or transmission is an infringement of copyright. Infringers are liable under the law.

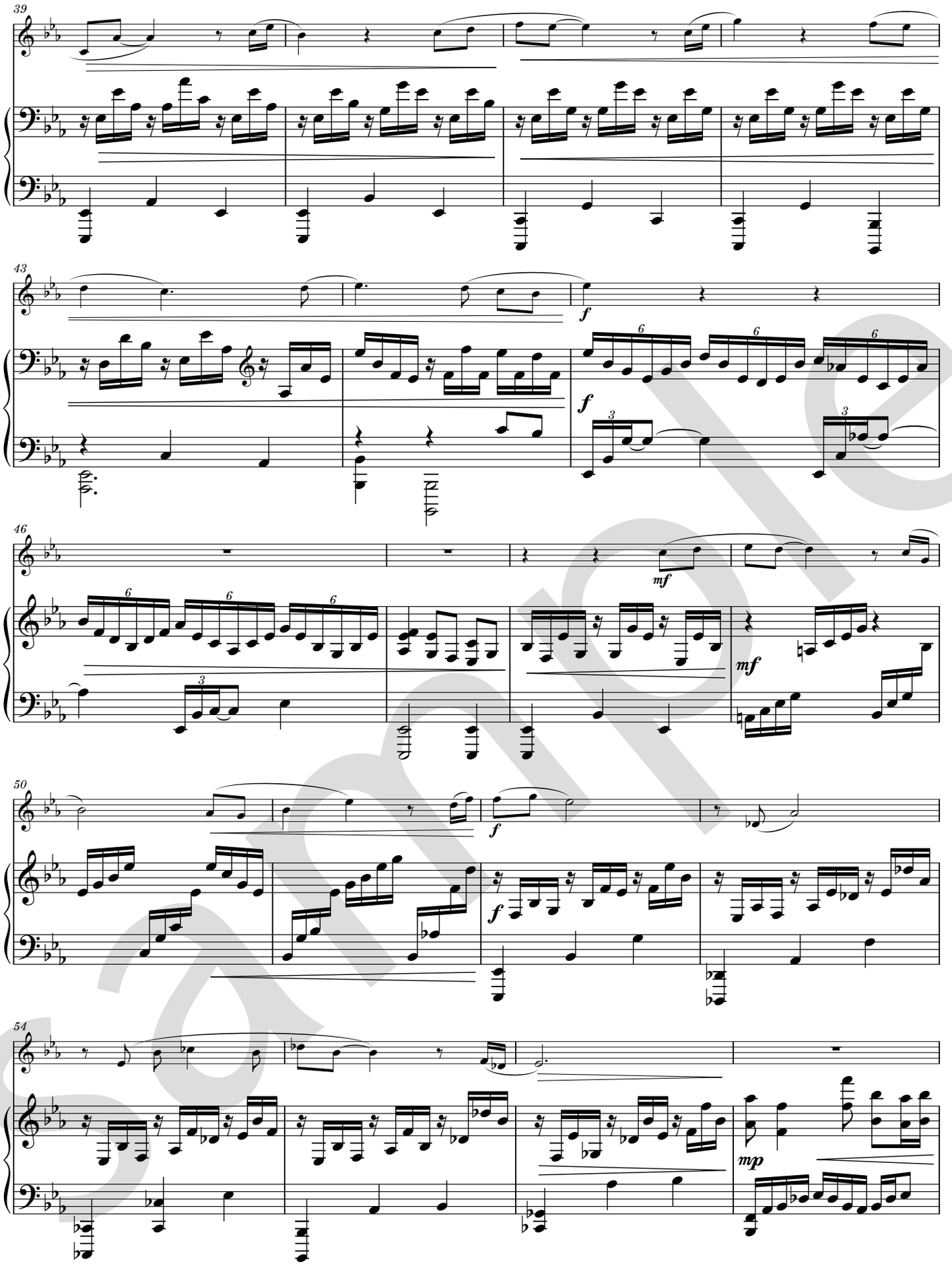
sample

VARIATION 1

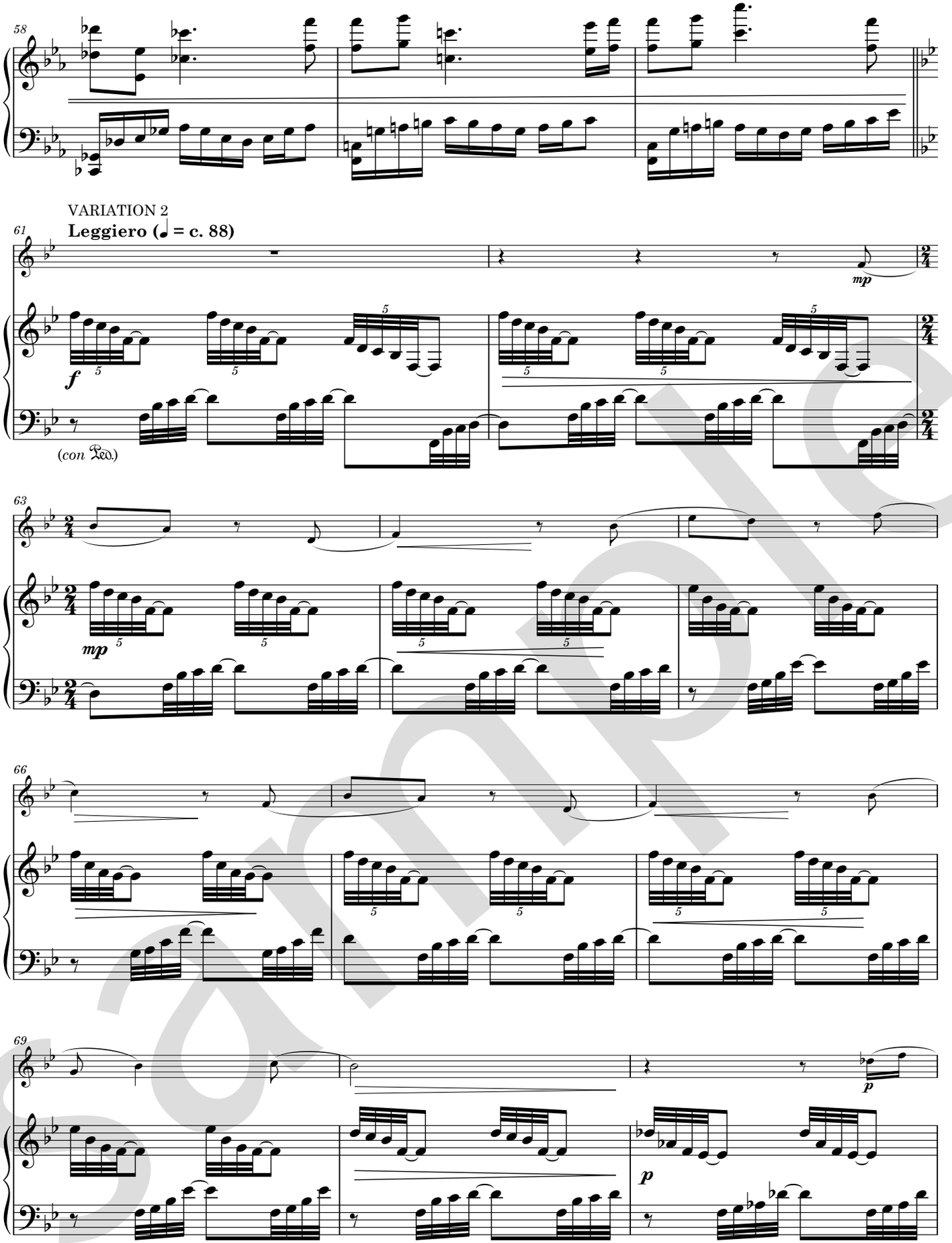
Allegretto (♩ = c. 88)



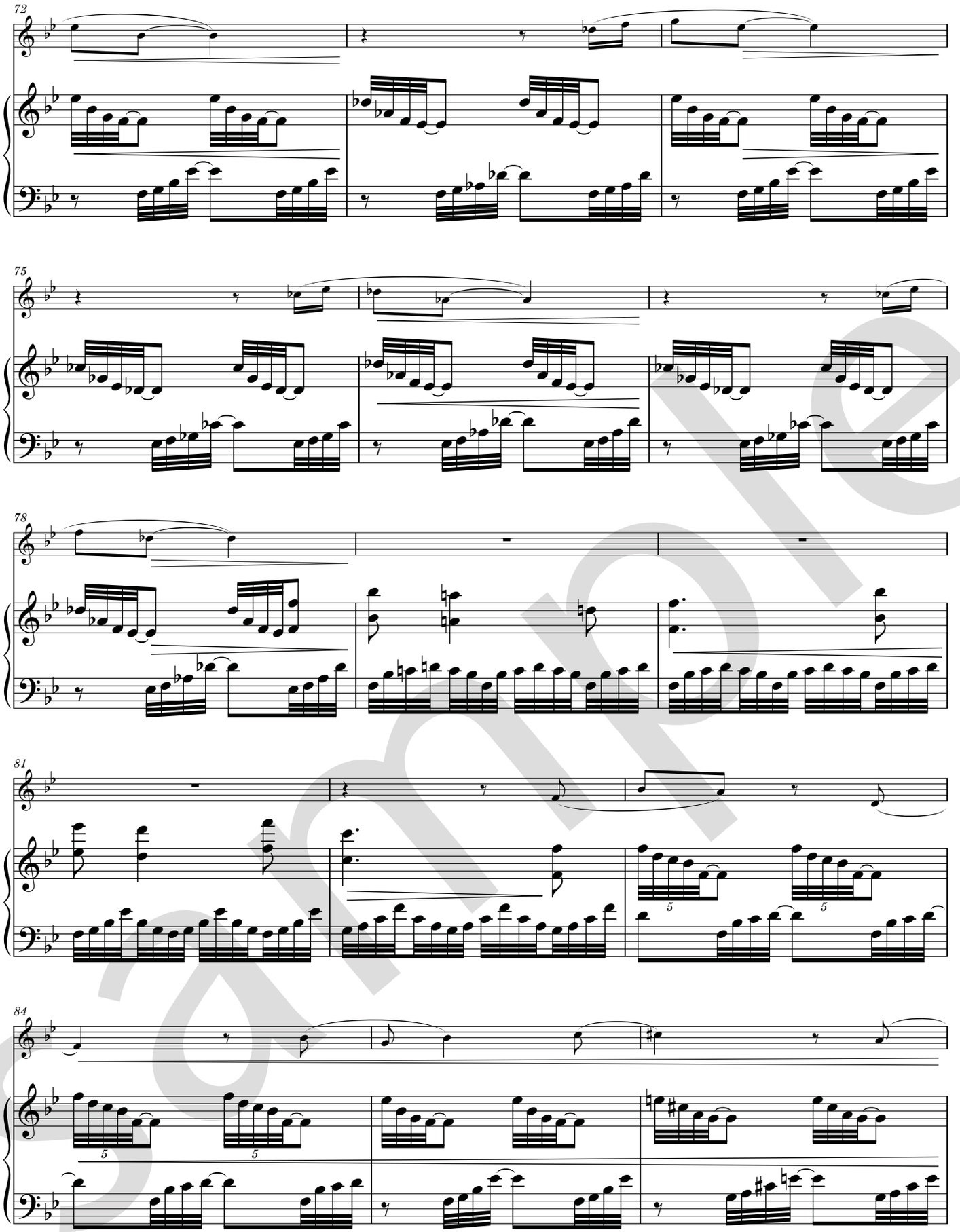
sample



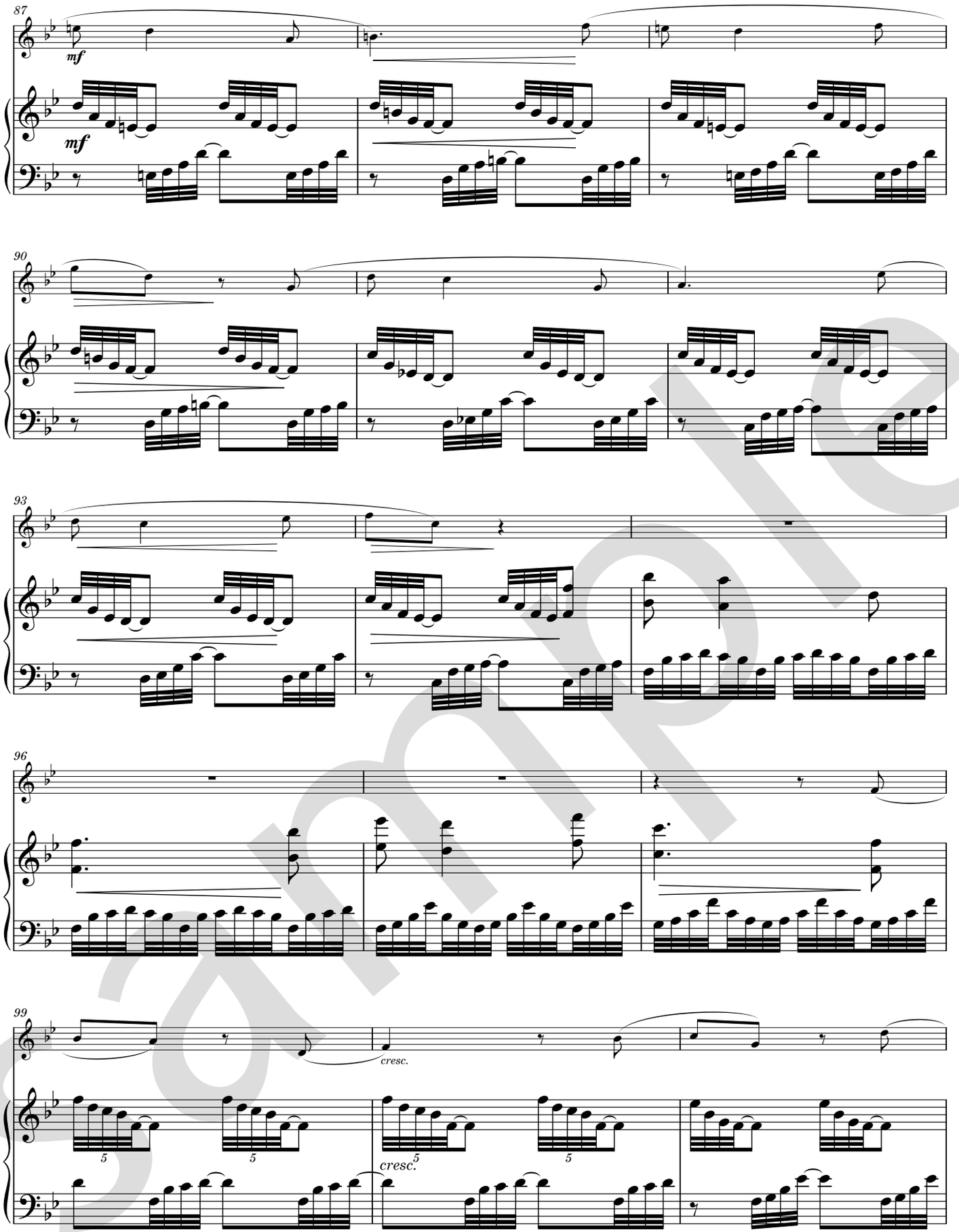
sample



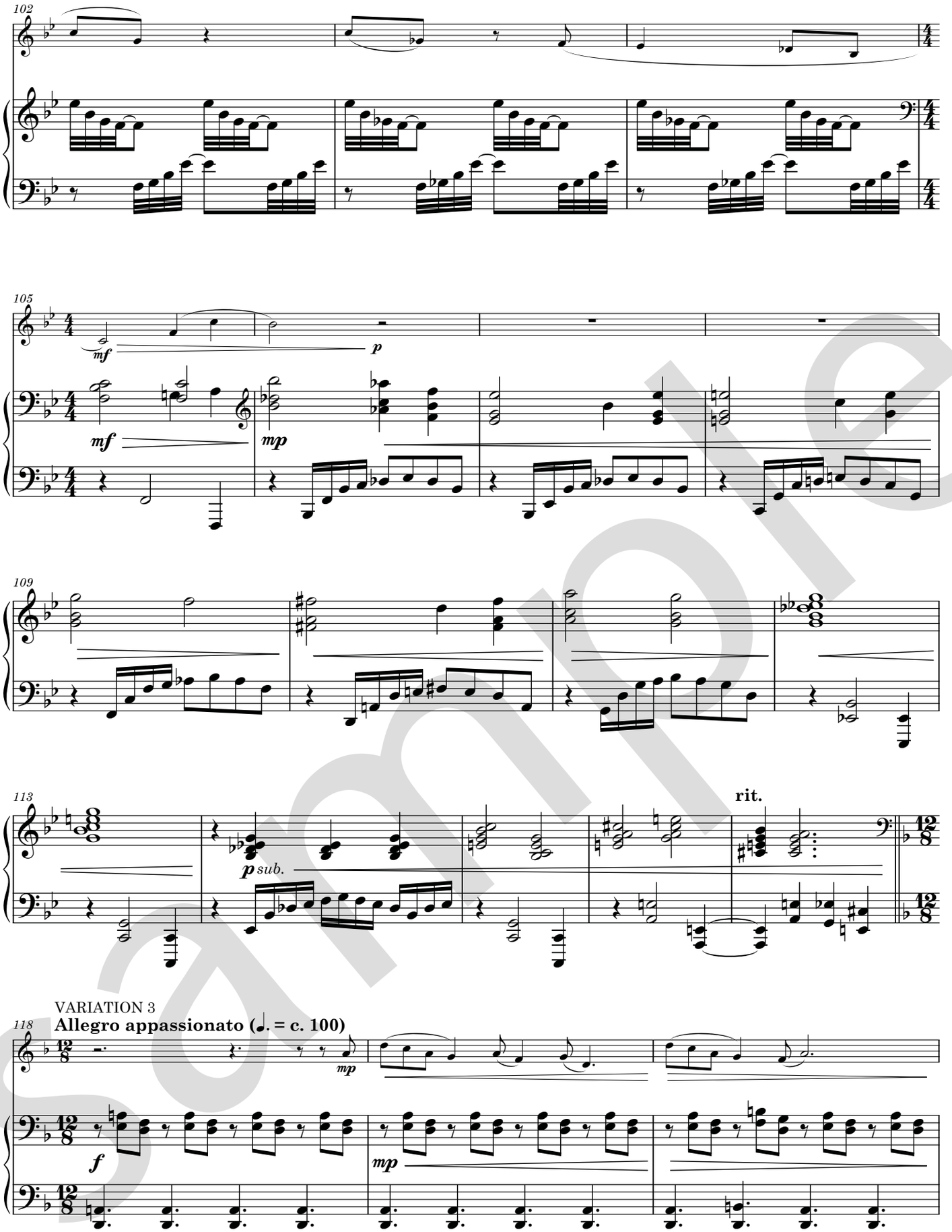
sample



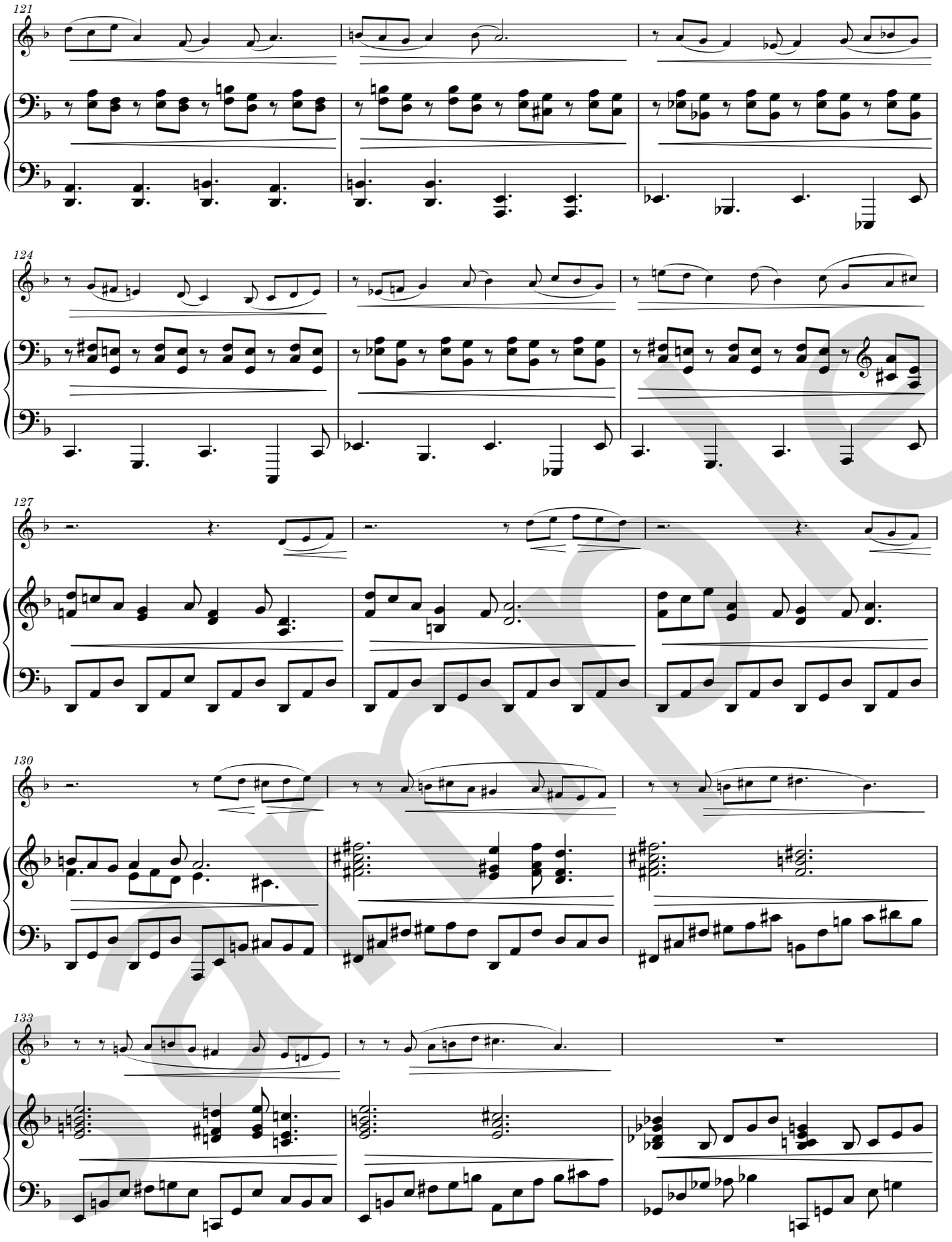
sample



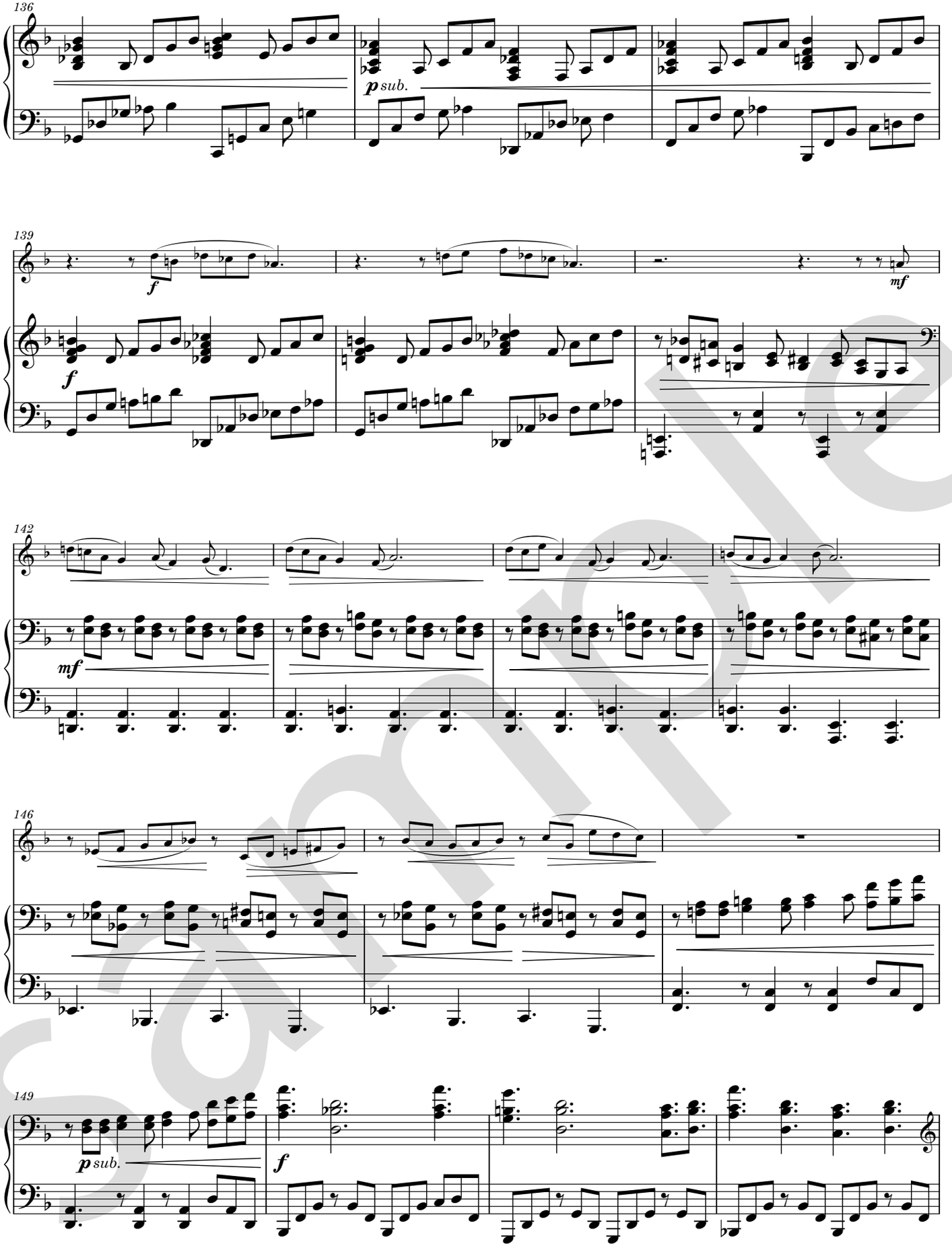
sample


102
105
mf
p
mf
mp
109
113
p sub.
rit.
VARIATION 3
118
Allegro appassionato (♩. = c. 100)
mp
f
mp

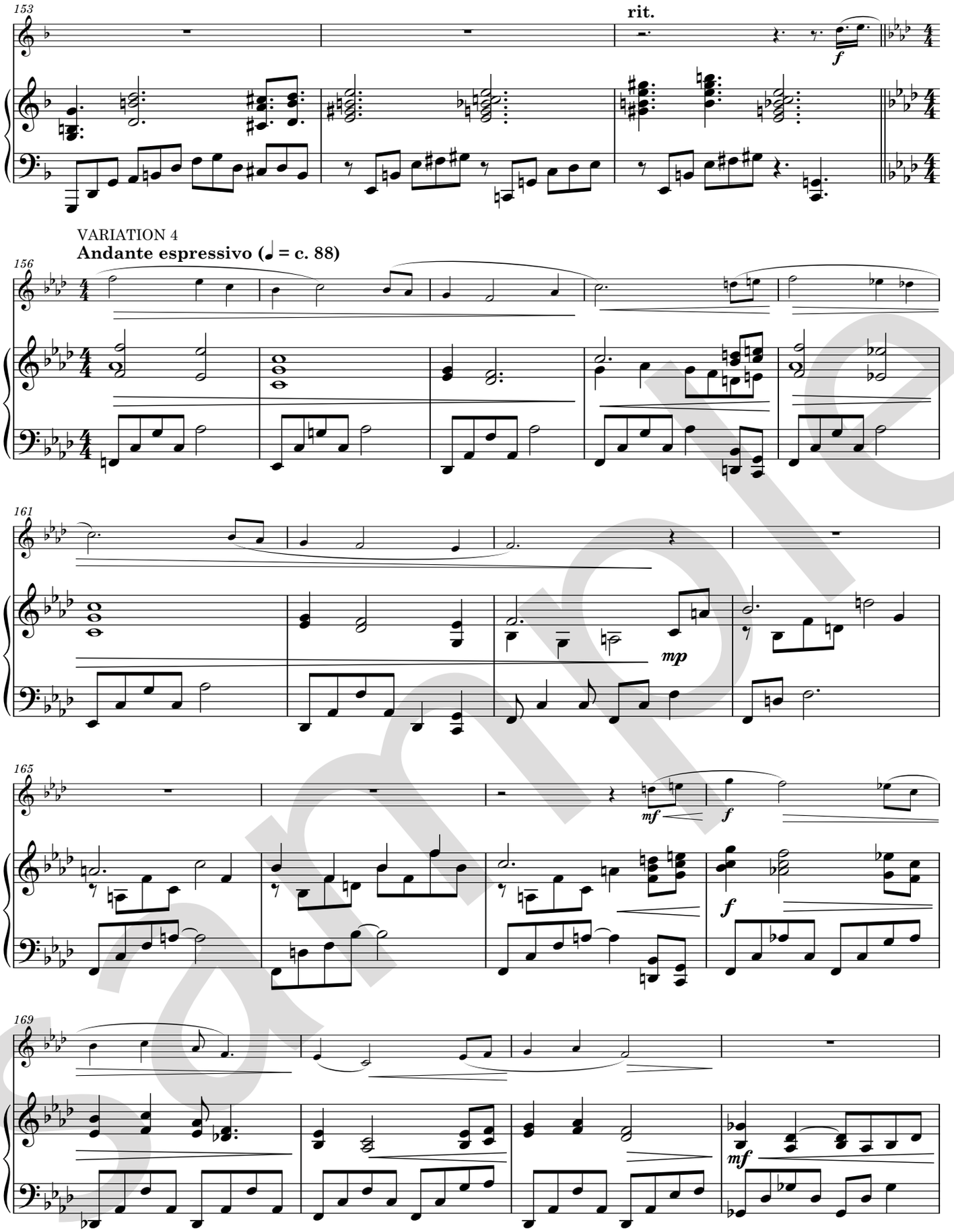
sample



Sample



sample


153
rit.
f
VARIATION 4
Andante espressivo (♩ = c. 88)
156
161
mp
165
mf
f
169
mf

sample