OXFORD

Michael Finnissy

History of photography in sound

Solo piano

MICHAEL FINNISSY

THE HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN SOUND (1995-2001)

for Piano Solo

Volume 1

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Programme note: *The History of Photography in Sound* (1995-2001)

I am about eight years old, standing in the darkroom at my father's office in County Hall. A countdown is in progress. A piece of paper is floating in the pungent-smelling liquid of the developing-tray. As the seconds tick by, an image begins to form on the paper. If extracted too quickly from the liquid this image will not be fully and clearly visible, if left too long it will be spoiled – obliterated by a relentlessly creeping chemical twilight. These moments have an urgency and mystery that I cannot locate in the too speedy, too limited, and appallingly irrevocable click of the shutter across the lens.

Fifty or so years on, and I am looking at the vacant paper on my desk. The clocks tick, my hand moves, sounds appear. Eye to 'eidos'.

Photographs have generally been most valued, or perhaps de-valued, as documentation. They are treated as memoranda, relics, anecdotes, supposedly objective evidence, emblematic of singular arrested moments in time. In most photography, unlike painting or drawing, the view is disconcertingly blinkered, directly ahead. Everything is completely still. The camera and its lens (its eye) do not move. This fixed-perspective immobility is haunting and unnatural. In writing music, both my ears, and their accompanying brain and hand, have to remain mobile, alive. Acknowledging the fluidity, movement and characteristics of sound, discovering and exploring, getting the hands dirty and relishing it. Not putting 'already musical' sounds on a pedestal, and admiring them from a safe or discreet distance. Teaching my inner ear to newly recognise and listen.

The ear is not a camera, nor is my music-writing hand neutrally mechanical. My title uses the word 'photography', and its plethora of associations, to convey a certain kind of musical material: documentary – snipped out from different periods in the past, and different locations across the world – a collection of exterior facts. These refugee facts are then situated, more or less provocatively, in the eventual composition. They are exchanged for, disrupted, and transformed by composing (imagining, transcribing, analytically mis-reading) into other facts. The whole piece is outlining a type of musical composition using the analogue of an idealised 'photography' instead of painting, sculpting, writing novels or poems. Although I have lifted phrases from Roland Barthes for the opening two sections of the work, my feeling is that the emphasis he places on implied or covert 'narratives' is excessively literary. Many other writers interpret photographs this way. One can, as in a still rarer than 'normal' cinema, witness a more fluid and active camera and non-figurative photography. In the wildly cavorting camcorder of some of Chris Newman's videos, in the weaving and dripping trails of light across Maarten Vanvolsem's panoramic photographs, in the 'joiners' and collages of David Hockney. Teaching our eyes to look more closely.

'History' in the title conveys 'remembered or invented past and present'; or 'a chronological continuum'; or 'the appearance and stylistic attributes of previous and current eras'.

'Sound' is the raw magma of music, before what Baudrillard calls 'obscene formulae' intrude.

The musical 'documents' (= photographs) or materials used in this piece are:

(i) A 'motivo fondamentale' – the plainsong *Te Deum laudamus*, or the Lutheran version harmonised by J.S.Bach, *Herr Gott, dich loben wir* (BWV 328). This is, in effect, a pitch reservoir, a 'grundgestalt' (alternate minor thirds and whole tones). It functions as the Aristotelian unifying factor, subsuming the following 'variations'...

(ii) A reference to Wagner's *Gotterdämmerung* 2.i. Hagen's question "Der ewige Macht, wer erbte sie?" - a rhythmic and harmonic leitmotif including rhetorical silence. Offset by...

(iii) A reference to Berlioz's *Romeo et Juliette* Scene d'amour, a melodic and textural idée fixe. And then, more localised...

(iv) Short quotations from, or allusions to, canonical musical personalities: most prominently Beethoven and Busoni, also Alkan, Mozart, Paganini, Grieg, and...

(v) Short quotations from, or allusions to, musical genres: fugal (diatonic/harmonically directional or functional) counterpoint, minuets, 18th and 19th century hymnody, ragtime, 'exotic' or 'primitive' folkmusics (African and Black American, Sicilian, Inuit, Norwegian hardanger-fiddle etc.), popular dance-band music of the 1930s and 1940s.

The piece, lasting around five and a half hours, is divided into eleven sections. The fifth and ninth are quite short in duration (between 10 and 15 minutes), the eighth is long (between 75 and 80 minutes) the others average half an hour. The composition was begun in 1995 and completed in 2001. Ian Pace gave the first complete (recital) performance at the Royal Academy of Music in London, on 28th January 2001. The eleventh section of the cycle (first performed by Nicolas Hodges with slide projections by Ken Scott and Steyning Camera Club) was commissioned by Steyning Music Society. The Academic Board of the Royal Academy of Music generously supported the writing of the later stages of the composition (the *Bachsche Nachdichtungen* suggested by Carlo Grante, sections 9, 2 and finally 1). *'The History...'* was designed to be performed, in whole or part, either as a solo piano 'recital' or as an 'installation' with video, slides and film.

1. Le démon de l'analogie (for Carlo Grante)

2. Le réveil de l'intraitable réalité (for Marc Couroux)
(1) Analogy – (Copy) – Homology. "No sooner is a form seen than it must resemble something." (2) Reality – (Image) – Illusion. "We translate...as if the universalised image were producing a world that is without difference."

3. North American Spirituals (for Marilyn Nonken)
Billings – Ives – Cowell – Nancarrow. Confronting Afro-American spiritual responses to slavery: *Nobody knows the trouble I see*; *By and by*; *Go down, Moses*; *Steal away*. Appropriated by Michael Tippett in *A Child of our Time* to signify the voices of defiance and hope everywhere and at any period of history.

4. My parents' generation thought War meant something (for my mother April 1922-October 2000)
Six verses, each introduced by increasingly brief fragments of the opening bars of Debussy's *Berceuse Héroïque*, drawing on vernacular sources between Arthur Sullivan (his hymn-tune *Gertrude* (Onward Christian Soldiers), also more pervasively *Whatever you are* from the operetta *Utopia Limited*) and the Soviet song (by Blanter) *Sacred War*.

5. Alkan – Paganini (for, and commissioned by, Nicolas Hodges)
Virtuosic pan-demonium (another set of analogues to No.1). *Jean qui rit* – Alkan re-composes Mozart, Paganini's Capriccio Op.1 No.12, copied by Schumann (Op.10 No.1).

6. Seventeen Immortal Homosexual Poets (for Ian Pace)
The central axis of the cycle and the first section to be completed and performed. The title recalls various albums of Japanese classical writing – wakashu – assembled between the tenth and nineteenth centuries. The poets appear in reverse chronological order: Gregory Woods (born in 1953), then Mutsuo Takahashi, Thom Gunn, Allen Ginsberg, Frank O'Hara, Harold Norse, Pier Paolo Pasolini, James Kirkup, Jean Genet, Stephen Spender,

Federico Garcia Lorca, Ralph Chubb, Jean Cocteau, Konstantinos Kavafis, Oscar Wilde, Edward Carpenter, and John Addington Symonds (born in 1840).

7. Eadweard Muybridge – Edvard Munch (for James Clapperton)
Balances and contradicts No.5. Abstract structuralism (scientific rationality) – Metaphysical expressionism (emotive irrationality).

8. Kapitalistisch Realisme (met Sizilianische Männerakte en Bachsche Nachdichtungen) (for Colin Symes)
Three Bs. (i) Beethoven (grundgestalt thirds in Op.67, Op.18 No.5, Op.10 No.1). (ii) Bach (*Allein Gott in der Hoh' sei Ehr'* BWV 717, 716, 662, 667). (iii) Busoni (retrograde of the *Pezzo serioso* from Op.39 with an overlay of Sicilian folktunes collected by Meyerbeer). Counterpart to No.4.

9. Wachtend op de volgende uitbarsting van repressie en censuur (for Andrew Infanti)
Opening almost identical to No.1. Thereafter the first half is loosely modelled on the Sarabande from Busoni's *Doktor Faust* (linked to material from No.8). The second half is a disordered atomising (censoring) of the first.

10. Unsere Afrikareise (for Dr. Franz Eckert)
Title from Peter Kubelka's film. Meditating on occidentalised 'African' materials (also finally from No.3). Most obviously Victor Masse's operatic version of Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's *Paul et Virginie*, and Felicien David's *Le Desert*. Sectionalised montage including 'ritornelli' (as No.2 but mostly less hectic).

11. Etched bright with sunlight (for Dr. Mark Signy)
Title from Derek Jarman's unfilmed project *Sod 'em*. Reiterations of previous material, bringing chaos into order (Adorno's 'minima moralia'). Opening with Bach (BWV 328), then Wagner, North African folk music (related to No.10) and an excerpt from Kavafis (in No.6), Berlioz,... eventually 'disappearing' in 'mid-sentence'.

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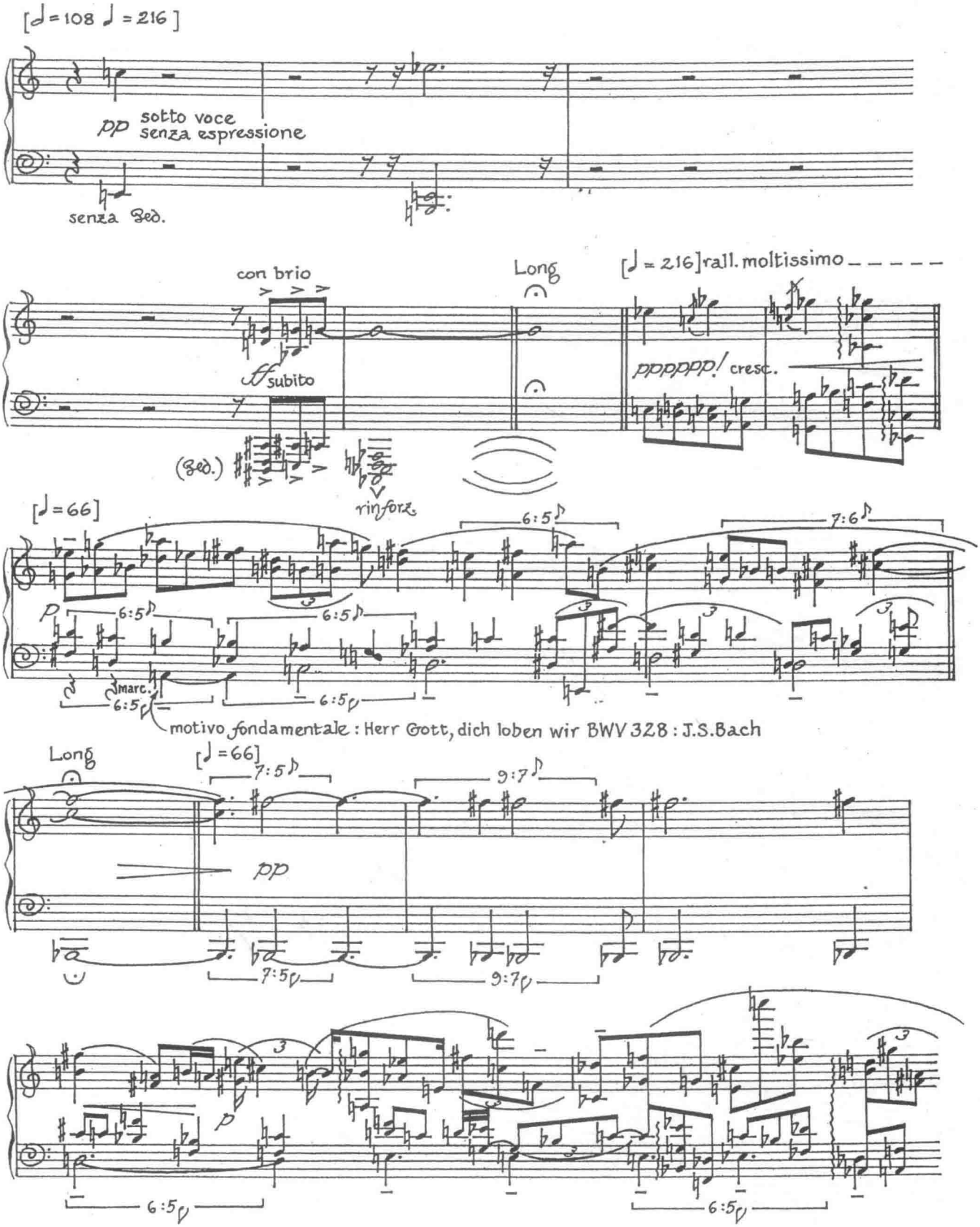
DURATION OF SECTIONS

1.	**Le démon de l'analogie** (2000)	25'
2.	**Le réveil de l'intraitable réalité** (1999)	15'
3.	**North American Spirituals** (1997-8) *first performance, Merkin Hall, New York, USA, 15 April 1998, Marilyn Nonken*	20'
4.	**My parents' generation thought War meant something** (1999) *first performance, St. Mary de Haura, Shoreham, 2 October 1999, Michael Finnissy*	40'
5.	**Alkan - Paganini** (1997) *first performance, Oxford Festival of Contemporary Music, 15 May 1998, Nicolas Hodges*	12'
6.	**Seventeen Immortal Homosexual Poets** (1997) *first performance, Conway Hall, London, 21 March 1997, Ian Pace*	40'
7.	**Eadweard Muybridge - Edvard Munch** (1997) *first performance, Festival "antasten", Germany, 20 September 1997, James Clapperton*	25'
8.	**Kapitalistisch Realisme (met Sizilianische Männerakte en Bachsche Nachdichtungen)** (1999-2000) *first performance of* Kapitalistisch Realisme, *Grieghallen, Bergen, Norway, 27 May 1999, Michael Finnissy* *first performance of* Bachsche Nachdichtungen, *Newport Festival, USA, 20 July 2000, Carlo Grante*	75'
9.	**Wachtend op de volgende uitbarsting van repressie en censuur** (2000)	12'
10.	**Unsere Afrikareise** (1998) *first performance, Cheltenham, 16 November 1998, Ian Pace*	30'
11.	**Etched bright with sunlight** (1999-2000) *first performance 6 May 2000, Steyning Music Club, Sussex, Nicolas Hodges*	25'

NB – I think the titles without information were first performed at the world première of the whole work.

Le démon de l'analogie



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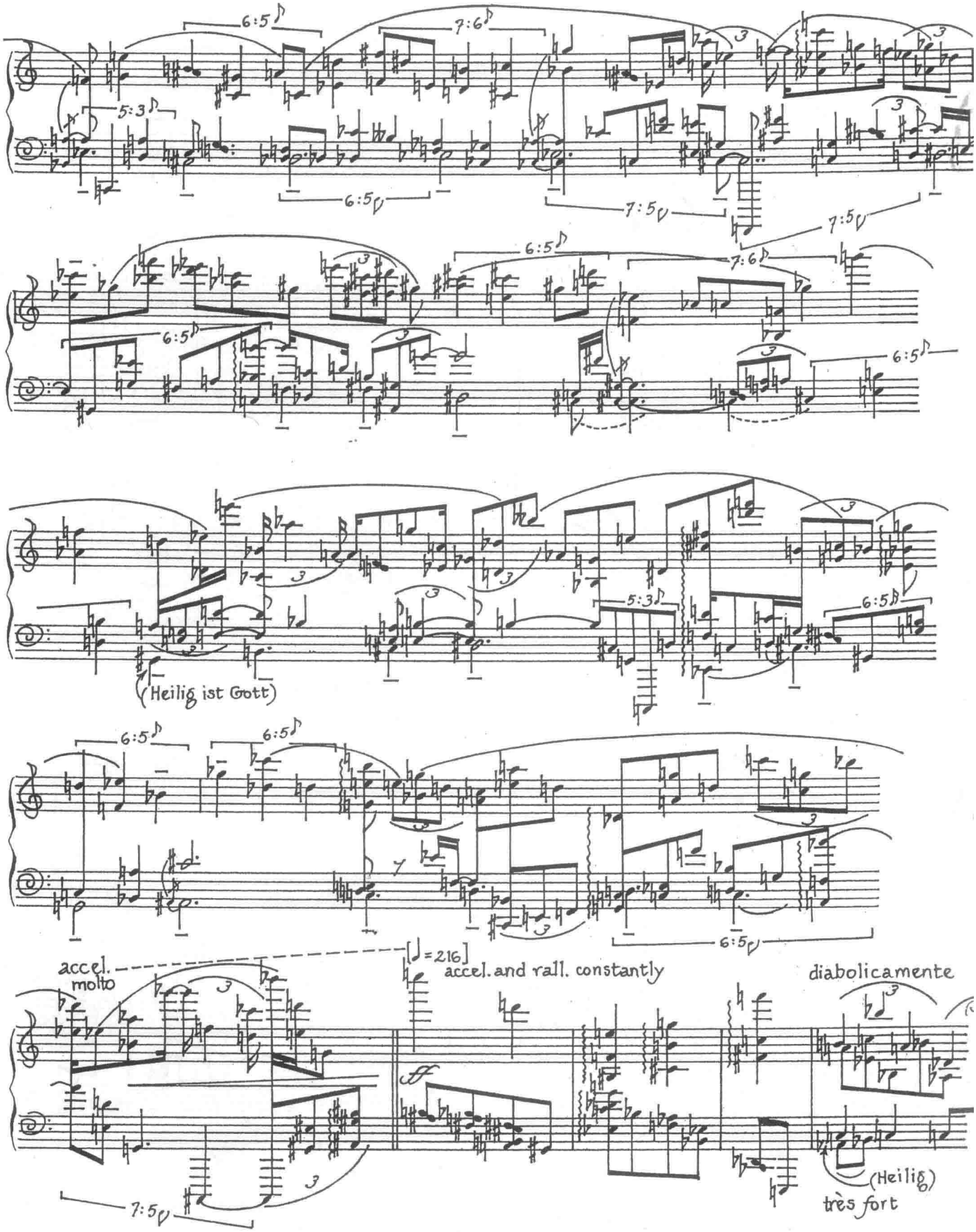
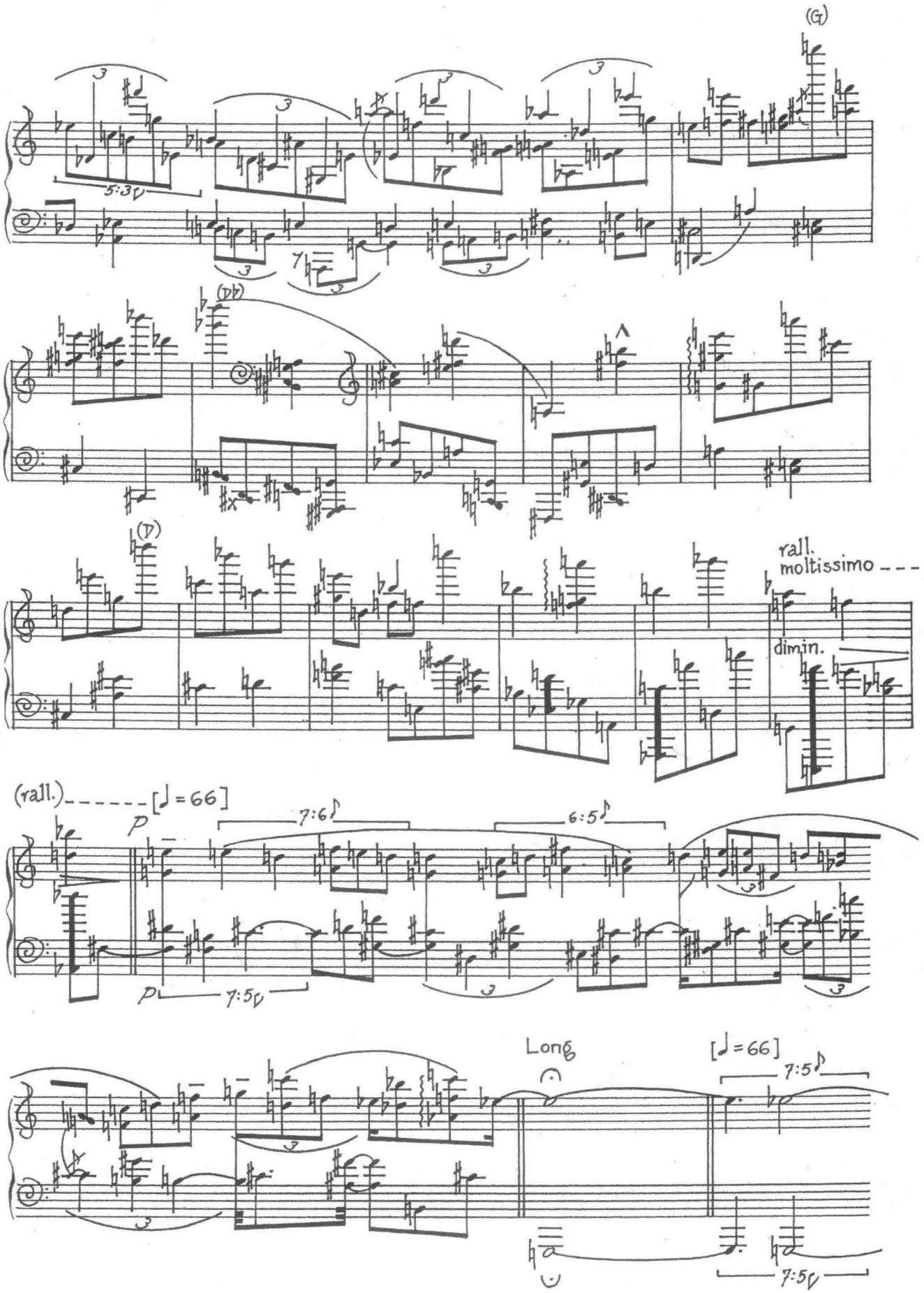

6:5
7:6
5:3
6:5
7:5
7:5
6:5
7:6
6:5
6:5
(Heilig ist Gott)
5:3
6:5
6:5
6:5
6:5
accel.
molto
[♩=216]
accel. and rall. constantly
diabolicamente
7:5
(Heilig)
très fort


(G)
5:3
(pp)
(p)
rall.
moltissimo
dimin.
(rall.)
[♩=66]
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7:6
6:5
p
7:5
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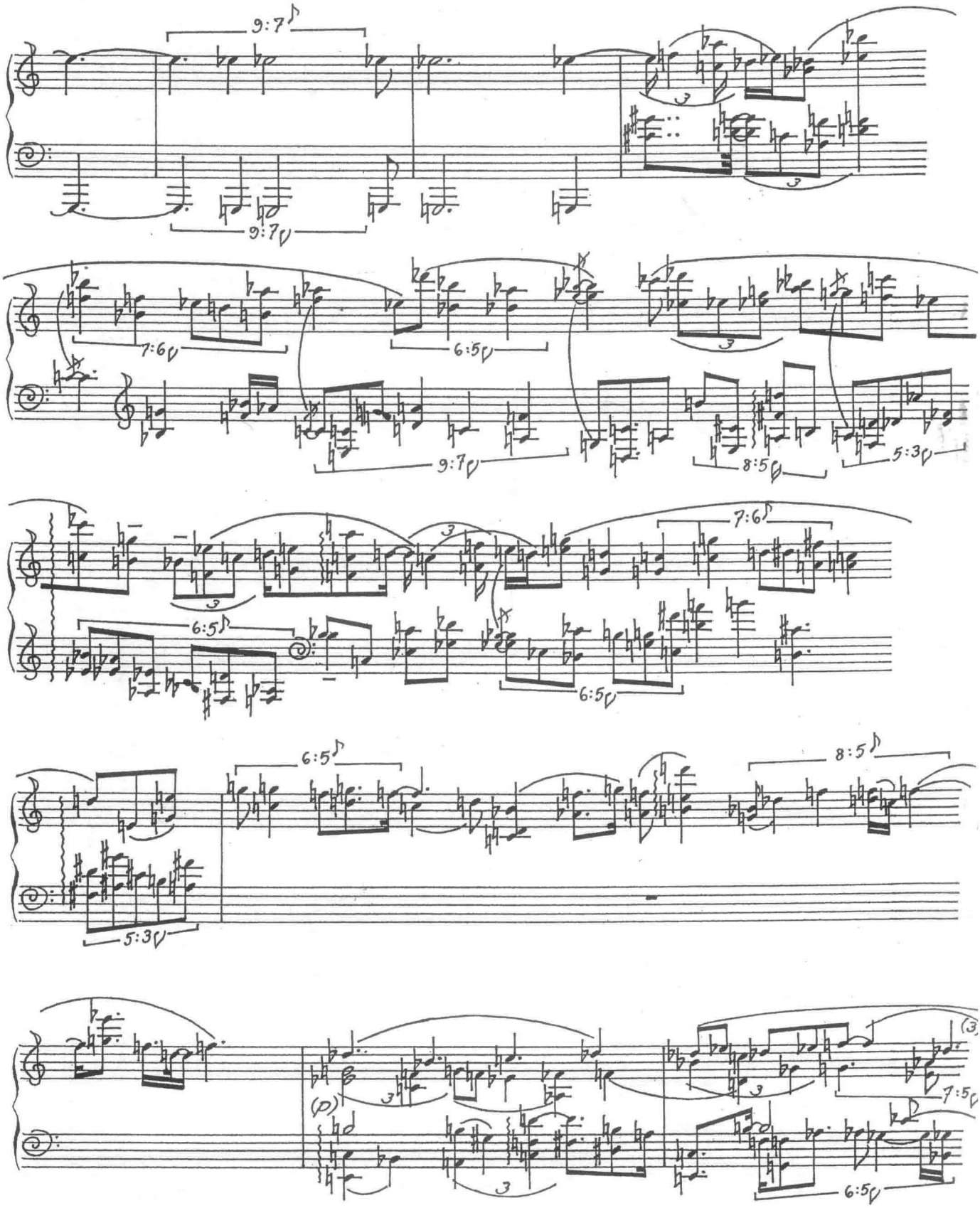
[♩=66]
7:5
7:5



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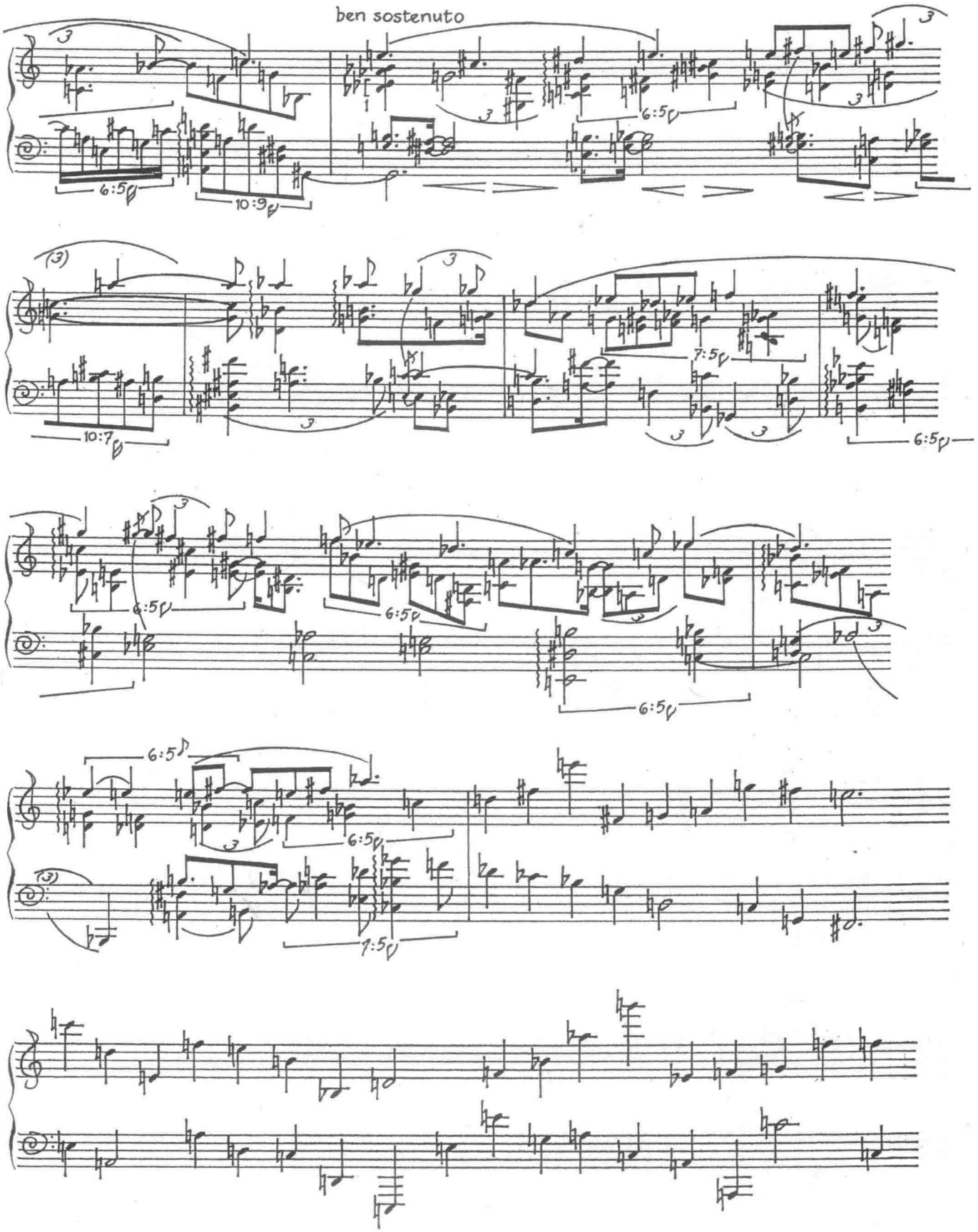
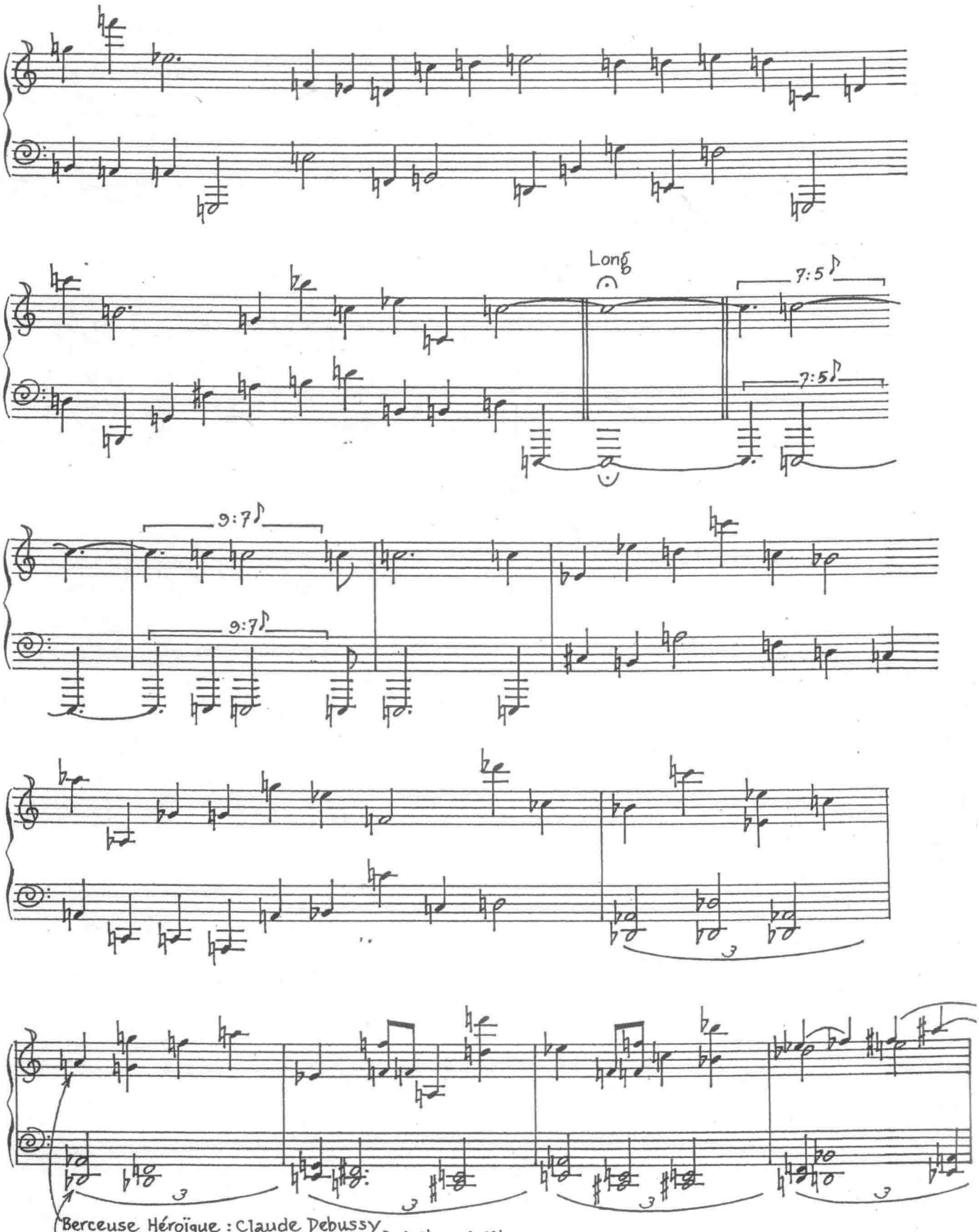
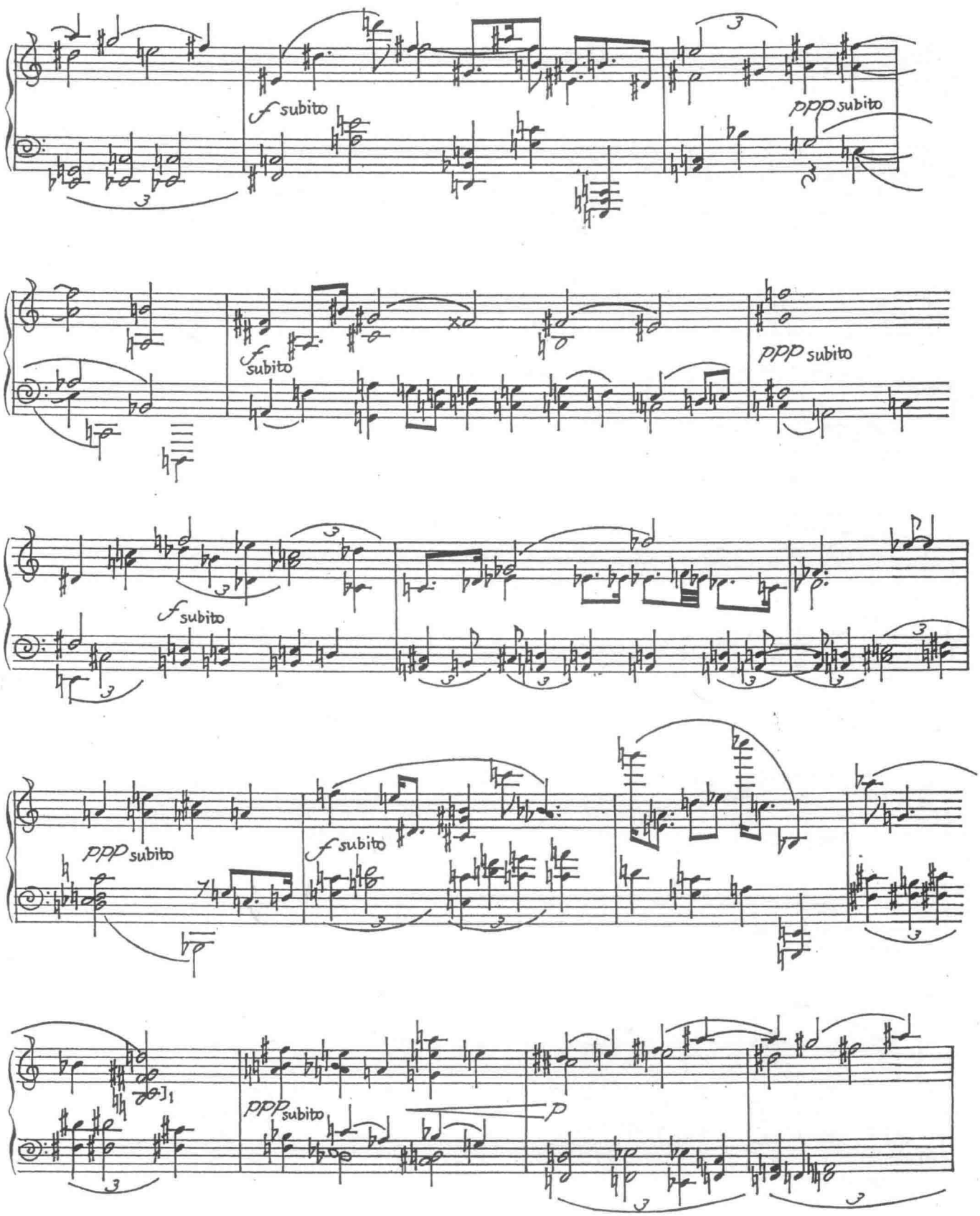

ben sostenuto



Berceuse Héroïque : Claude Debussy
S.Gertrude (Onward Christian Soldiers):Arthur Sullivan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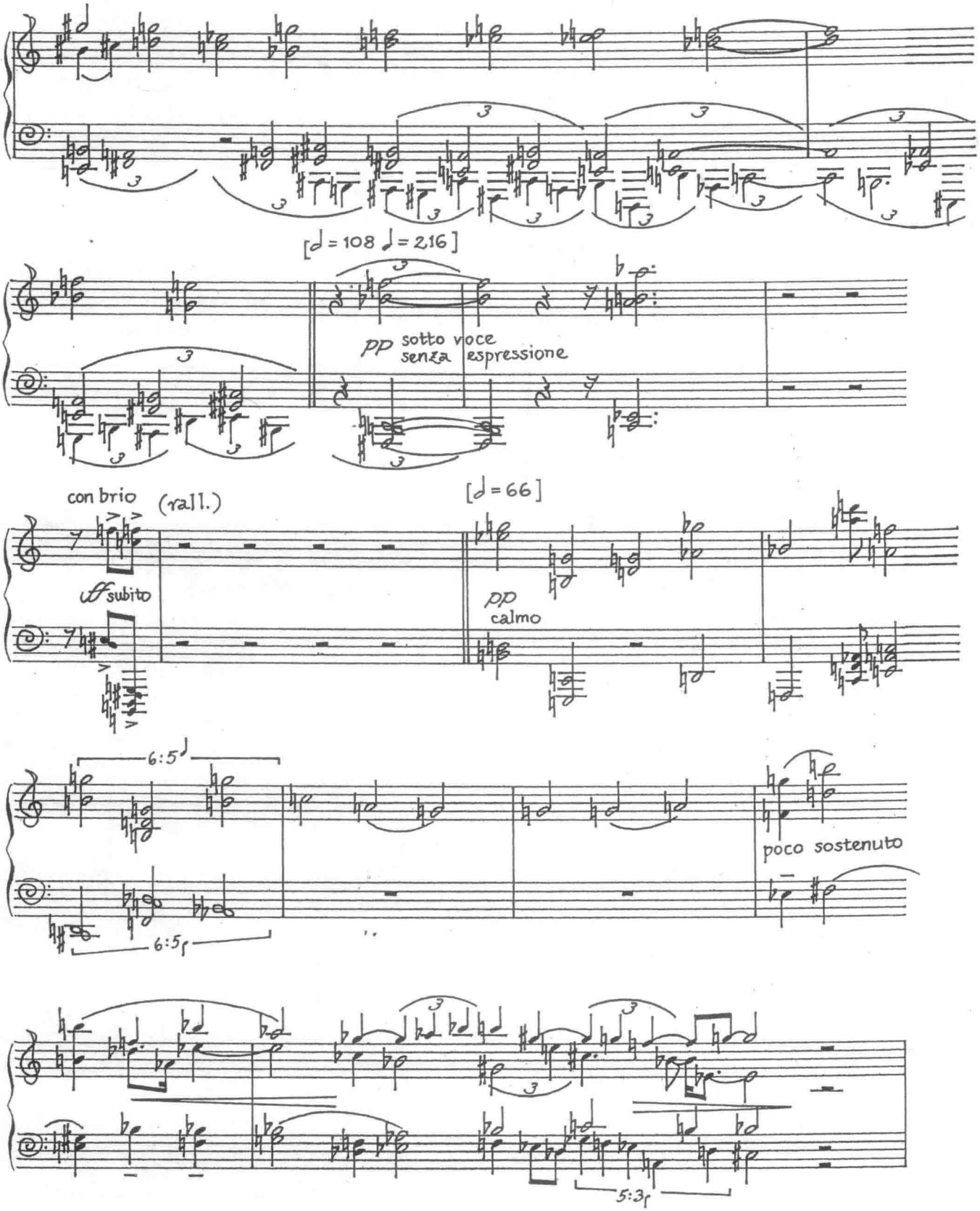
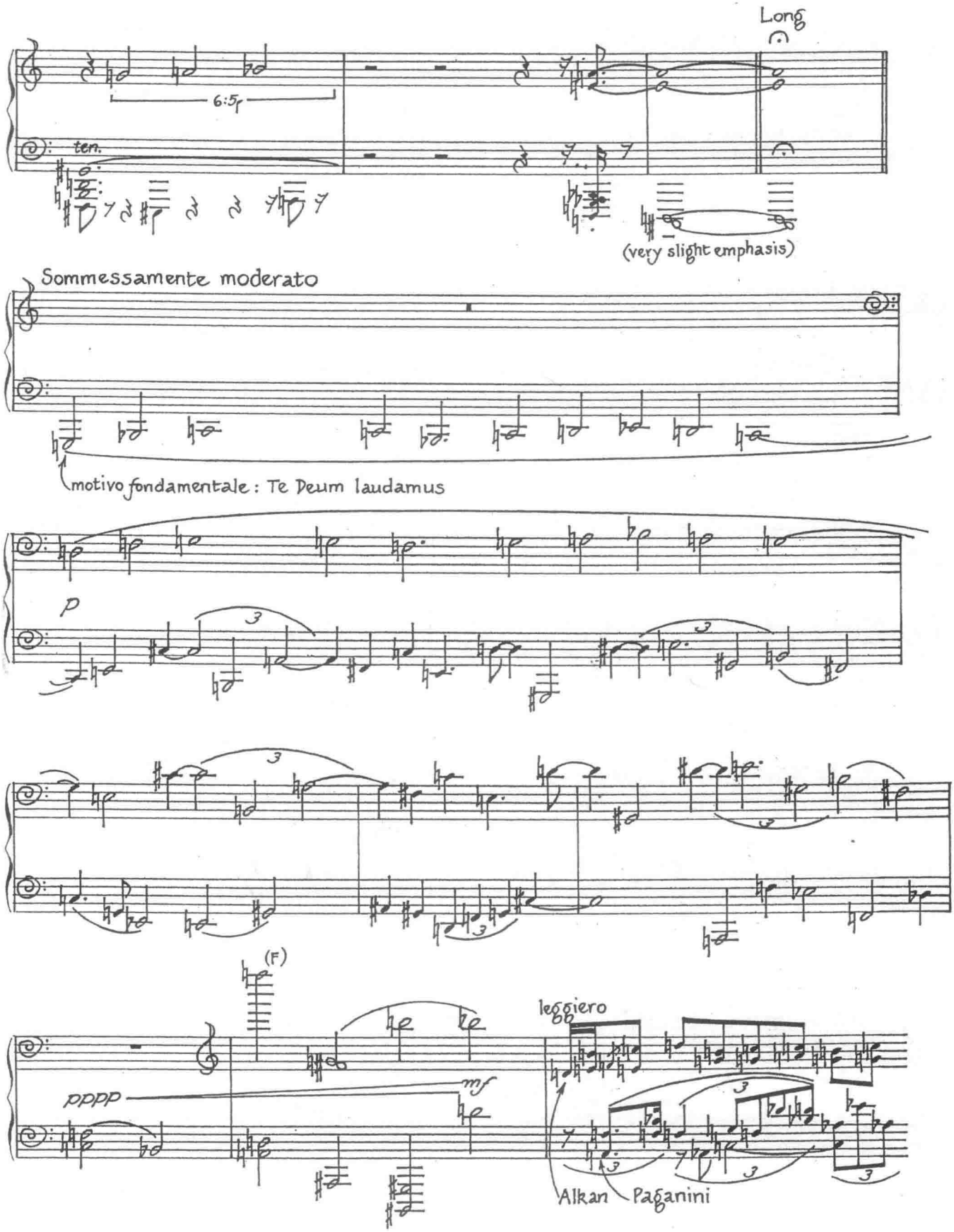
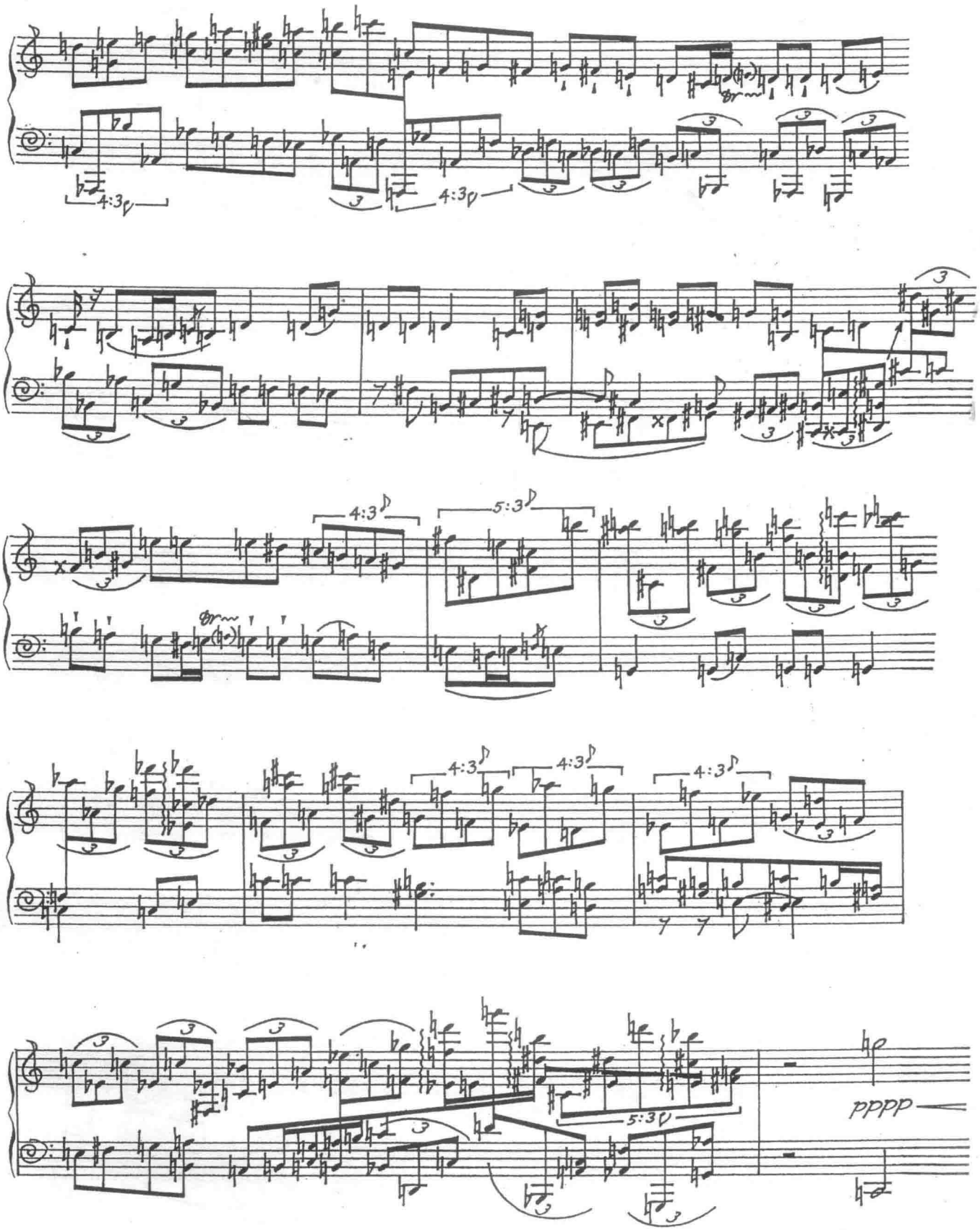

[♩ = 108 ♩ = 216]
pp sotto voce
senza espressione
con brio
(rall.)
ff subito
[♩ = 66]
pp
calmo
6:5
6:5
poco sostenuto
5:3


Long
6:5
ten.
(very slight emphasis)
Sommessamente moderato
motivo fondamentale : Te Deum laudamus
p
(F)
pppp
mf
leggiero
Alkan
Paganini



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