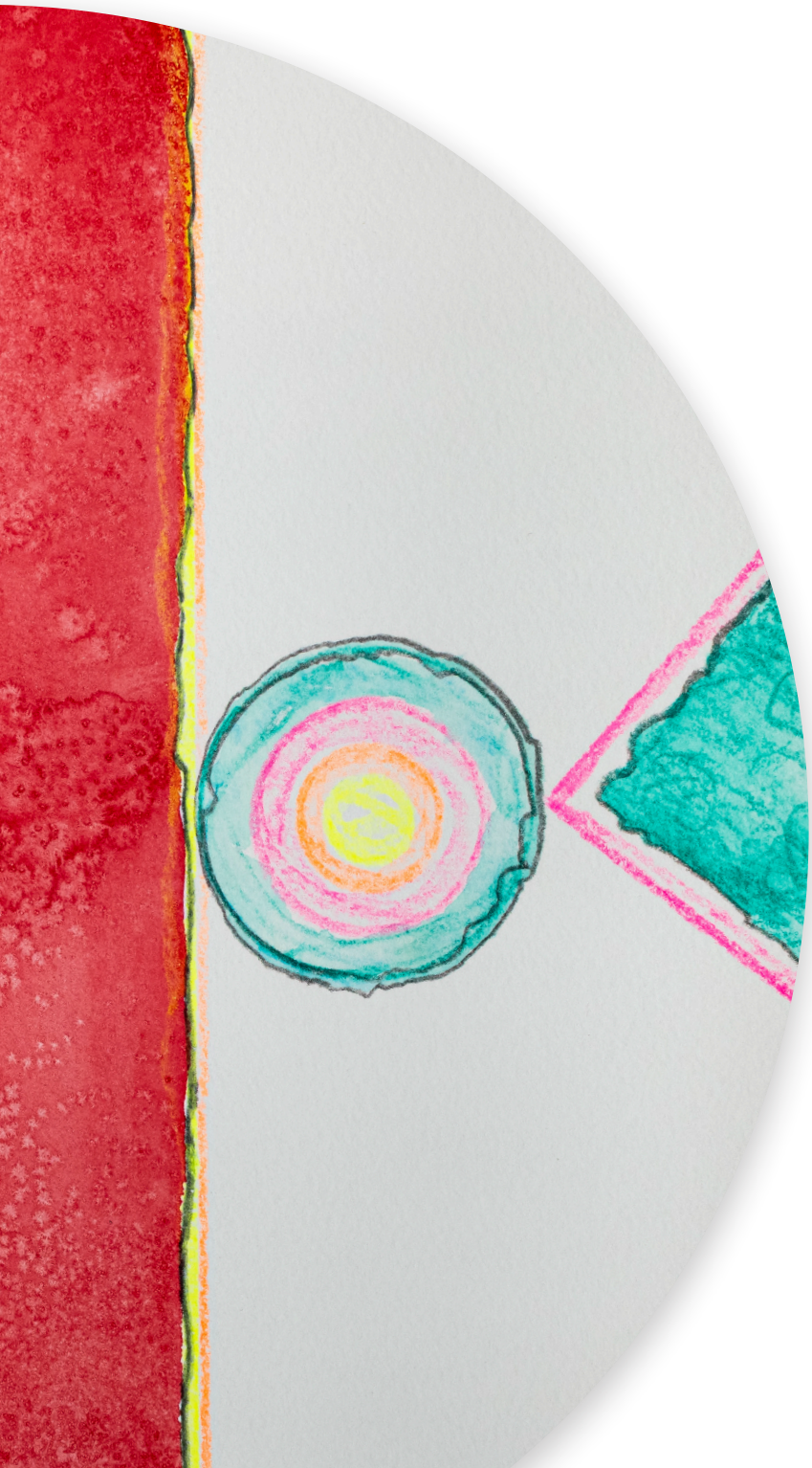

Patterns

Book II – Shapes

Solo Piano

LUKE CARLSON MUSIC

Patterns

Book II – Shapes

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Patterns

Book II – Shapes

Solo Piano

(2023)

Duration: ca. 25 minutes

Commissioned by and dedicated to Matthew Bengtson

LUKE CARLSON MUSIC

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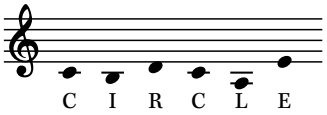
Program Notes

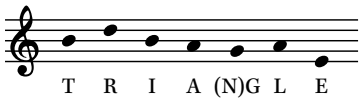
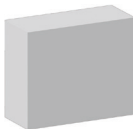
Each of the nine movements draw inspiration from their respective shape in one or more of these three ways: a musical cryptogram (i.e., using letters to represent musical pitches), extra-musical ideas associated with some aspect of the shape, or numerical qualities of the shape itself.

These pieces are a continuation of *Patterns: Book I,* a three-movement work that explores broader associations with pattern and color. Returning to a fundamental conception of geometry, the shapes in *Patterns: Book II* include a collection of basic two-dimensional shapes, and more complex polyhedrons.

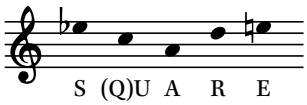
All of the movements, in one way or another, use the criteria mentioned above to develop some kind of pattern. Whether a cycle of rhythms, an ostinato, scalar material, or a sequence of intervals, each movement establishes a distinct character, similar to a prelude, etude, or character piece.

I. Circle

Somewhat ceremoniously, the first piece opens with the word "circle" represented by a musical cryptogram: C = C, I (from "Ti" in solfège) = B, R (from "Re" in solfège) = D, C = C, L (from "La" in solfège) = A, and E = E. A similar approach is used in the other movements to translate the letters of each shape into musical pitches. This six-note figure forms an ostinato in the left hand. The right hand rhythmically imitates the pattern, increasing the interval of imitation (i.e., unison, second, third, etc.) for each repetition. The music accelerates and then blossoms into a flurry of circular-shaped scales before ending with superimposed statements of the "circle" cryptogram.

II. Triangle

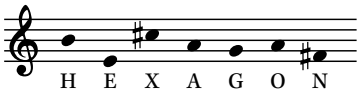
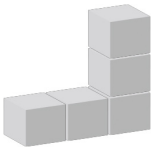
The triangle's three sides and sharp points inspire three-note chords (i.e., triads) and sharply articulated three-note rhythmic figures. Threes also form the basis for grouping phrases, delineating meter, etc. The pitch material originates from a cryptogram, but the order and presentation of the pitches is not strict. Throughout the movement, the articulated gestures sparkle over the ghostly resonance of a silently (i.e., sostenuto pedal) sustained triad.



III. Square

A slow, steady, and somewhat hypnotic rhythmic pattern, like the four equal sides of a square, dominates the texture of this movement. The harmonies, register, and rate of the rhythms change slightly in each bar, adding some interest to the intentionally "square" metrical pulse. The musical cryptogram is used in the top note of the inner voice, later in the bass line, and then highlighted by stopped notes at the end.

IV. Rhombus

Also called a "diamond," the word rhombus comes from ancient Greek and means "something that spins" or "to turn round and round." The circle of fifths seemed a fitting harmonic device to employ throughout. The music is rhythmic, bouncy, and boisterous. The right hand leads melodically; the left hand punctuates with off-kilter rhythms. The four sections represent the four equilateral sides of the rhombus.

V. Hexagon

The right-hand melody, spelling out the musical cryptogram, is supported by rapid, staccato pulsations in the lower two voices. The perpetual motion of clock-like patterning hearkens to baroque, "Bach-like" textures.



VI. Polyomino

Polyominoes, formed by joining one or more equal squares edge to edge, are found in games and puzzles throughout history. The music picks up on this "playful" quality with relentless, driving rhythms, as if the "player" is running out of time in a race to win. The melodic backbone of the piece draws from a source that should be very familiar to gamers…

VII. Tetrahemihexahedron

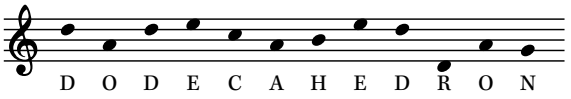
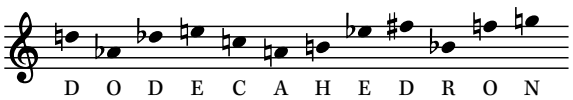
The last three movements take inspiration from three-dimensional polygons. The tetrahemihexahedron is a uniform star polyhedron—the only non-prismatic uniform polyhedron with an odd number of faces—seven, to be precise. These seven faces consist of four triangles and three squares. The numbers seven and three feature prominently in this movement. Using intervalic sevenths, the right hand weaves a delicate, flickering pattern, like lights on the surface of undulating water. The left hand carries the melodic and harmonic material, drawing on the idea of "threes" to make thirds and triads.

VIII. Octahedron

With an asymmetrical meter of eight-eight (3+3+2), Octahedron features an eight-note scale: E, F, G, A, B, C♯, D, E (the Phrygian mode with a raised sixth scale degree). The pitches spread across the full range of the keyboard; the pianist's hands must frequently cross over and under each other as the scale ascends and descends. This hand crossing takes inspiration from the mirrored pyramid-like structure of the polyhedron. The middle section features staccato running eighth-notes inflected with syncopated attacks.

IX. Dodecahedron

As a polyhedron with *twelve* faces, the dodecahedron presents an irresistible opportunity to incorporate some form of dodecaphony. However, there is no strict use of twelve-tone writing in this piece—except for the presentation of tone rows in the upper register at the end of the piece. Instead, a twelve-note cryptogram—conveniently, the word dodecahedron has twelve letters—forms the melody, a "theme" in a set of variations. This twelve-note theme repeats twelve times, each time transposed by a perfect fifth. The circle-of-fifths quality fits nicely; the dodecahedron is spherical in shape (i.e., circular) and each of the twelve faces is a pentagon (i.e., five-sided).

The movement begins and ends with the theme presented as a stoic, medieval-sounding three-voice chorale. The rest of the piece is boisterous, drawing on numerous romantic-era tropes and figurations that are etude- or toccata-like. The second-to-last statement of the theme features delicately glittering notes in the high register. These "true" twelve-tone rows are derived from the same twelve-letter cryptogram as the tonal version, inflecting subtle shades of modernist color above the old-world sonorities. In a way, then, these disparate musical styles could be seen as various facets of the same, interconnected musical shape.

Tonal

Twelve-Tone

Performance Notes

= Mute string inside piano with finger (as close to the end of the string as possible, near the pins)

= Short fermata

= Long fermata

for Matthew Bengtson

Patterns

Book II – Shapes

I. Circle

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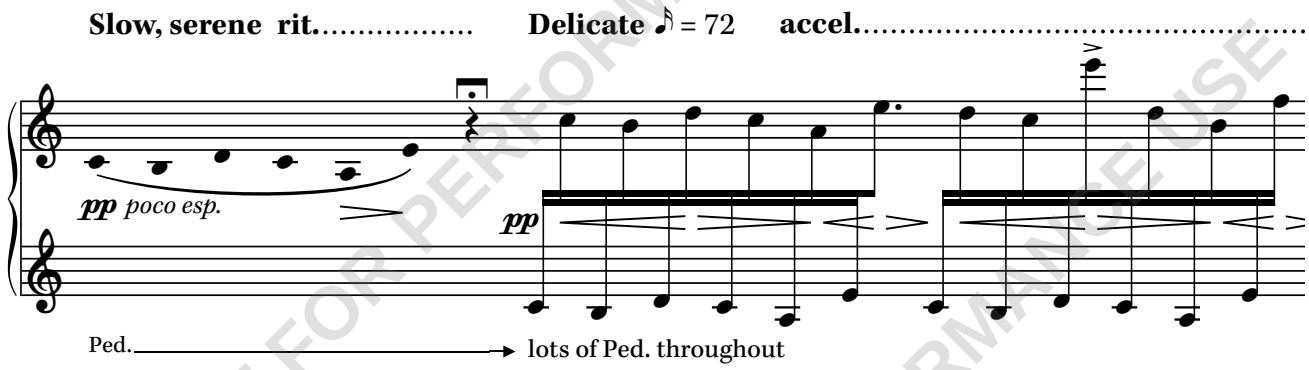

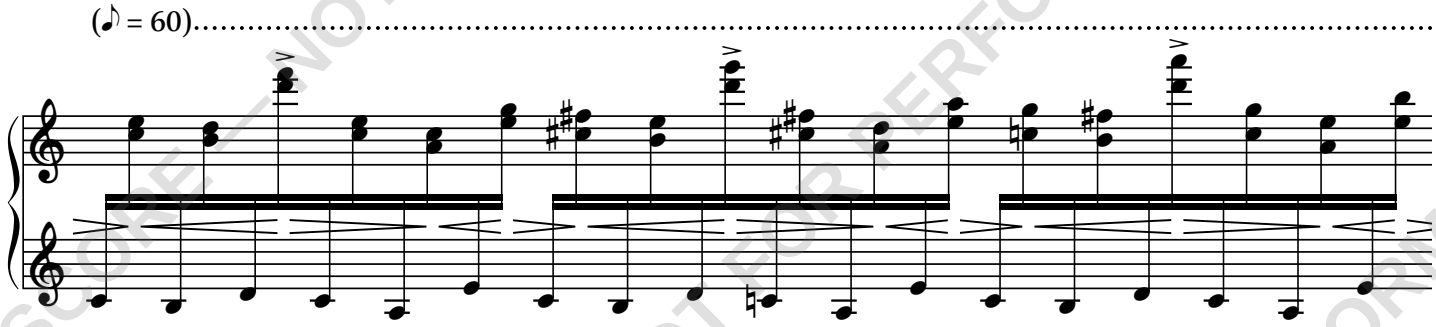

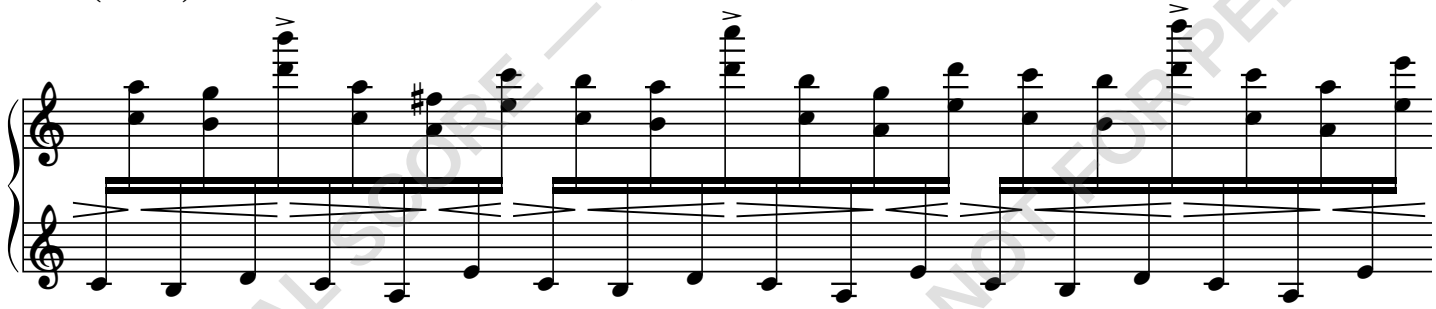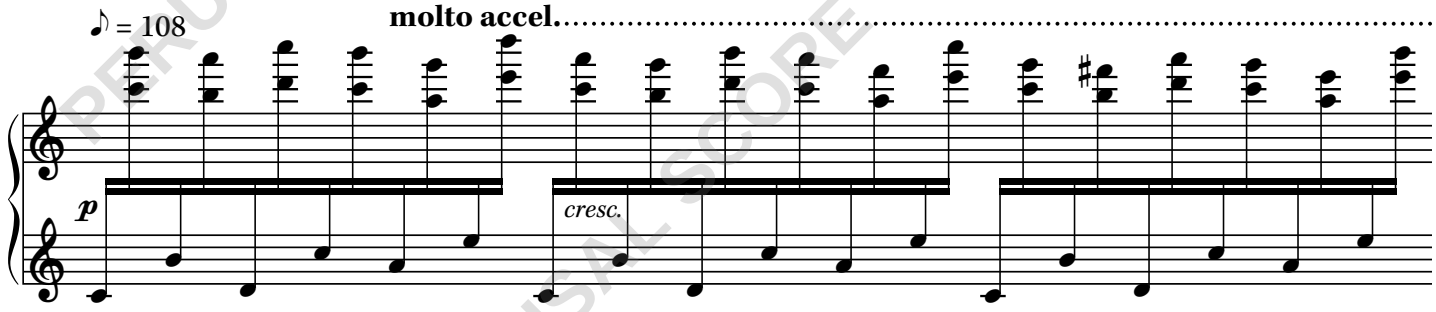

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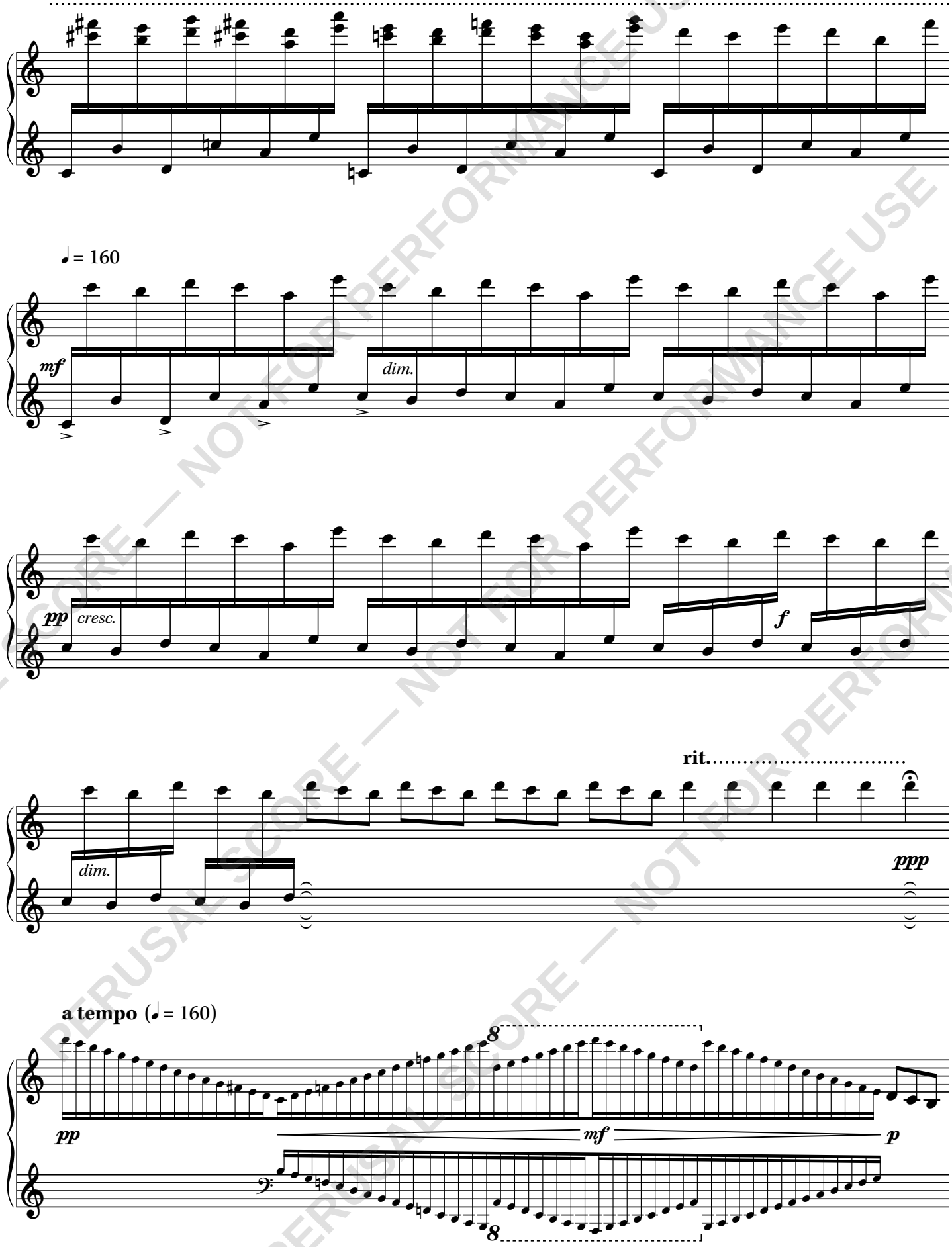

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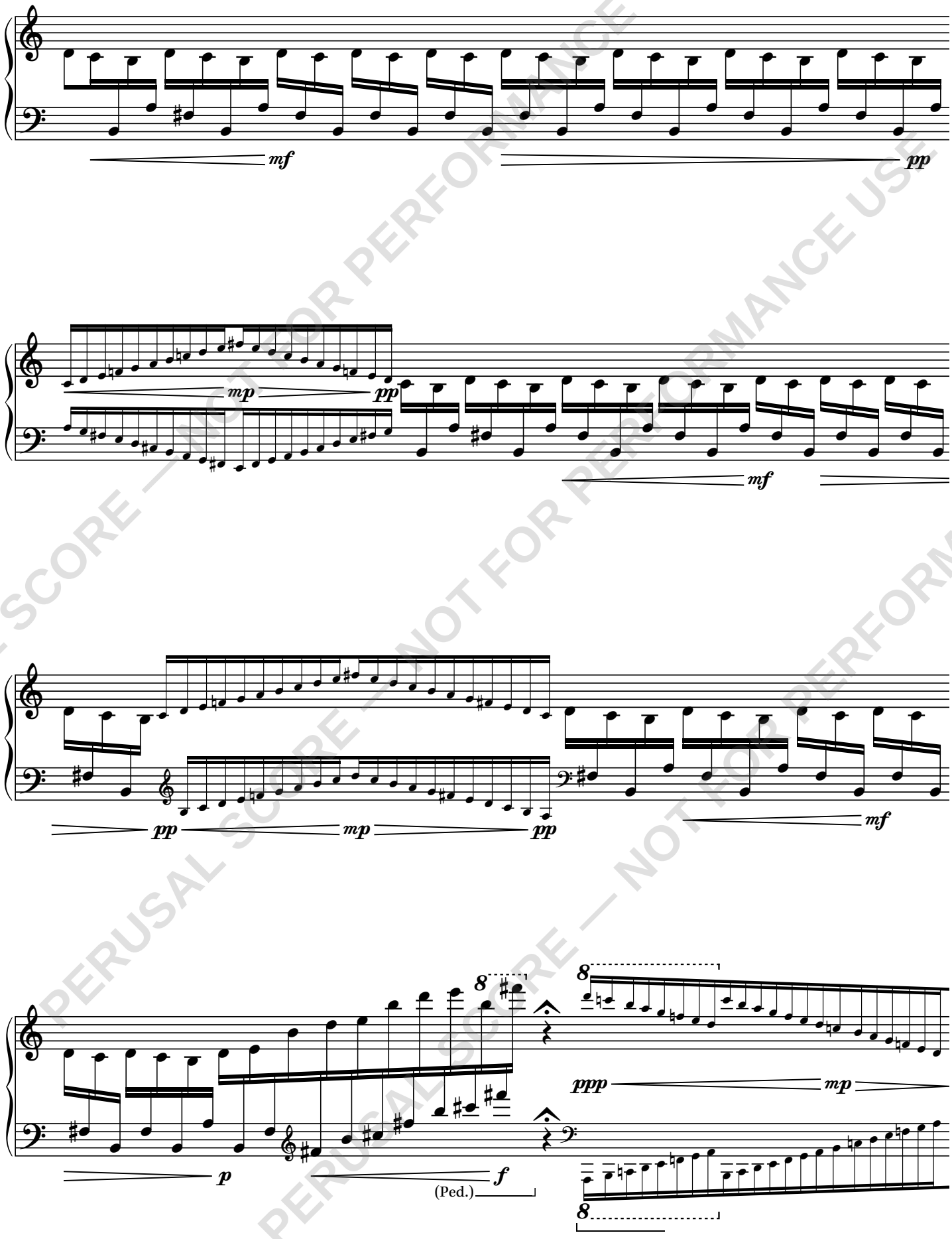
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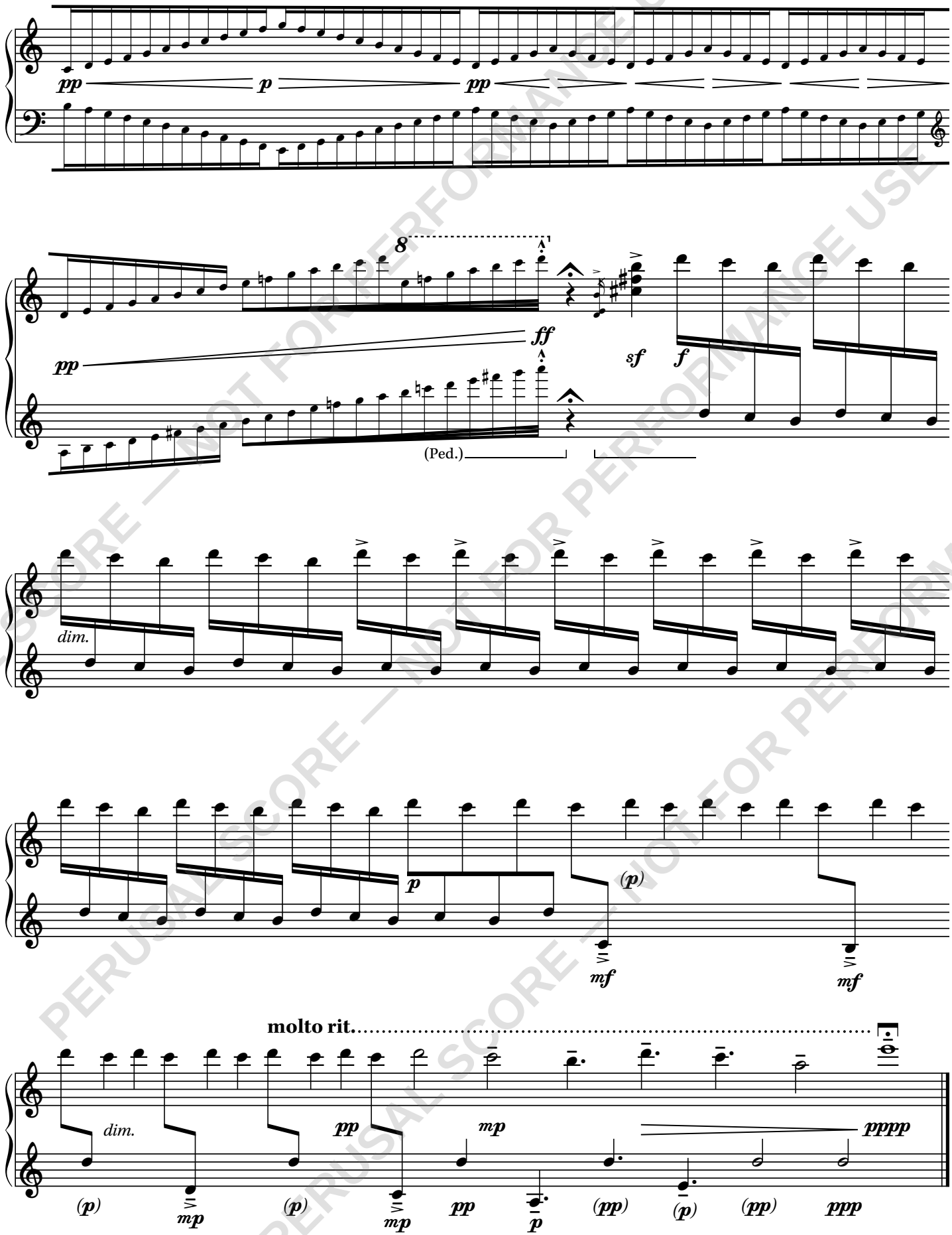
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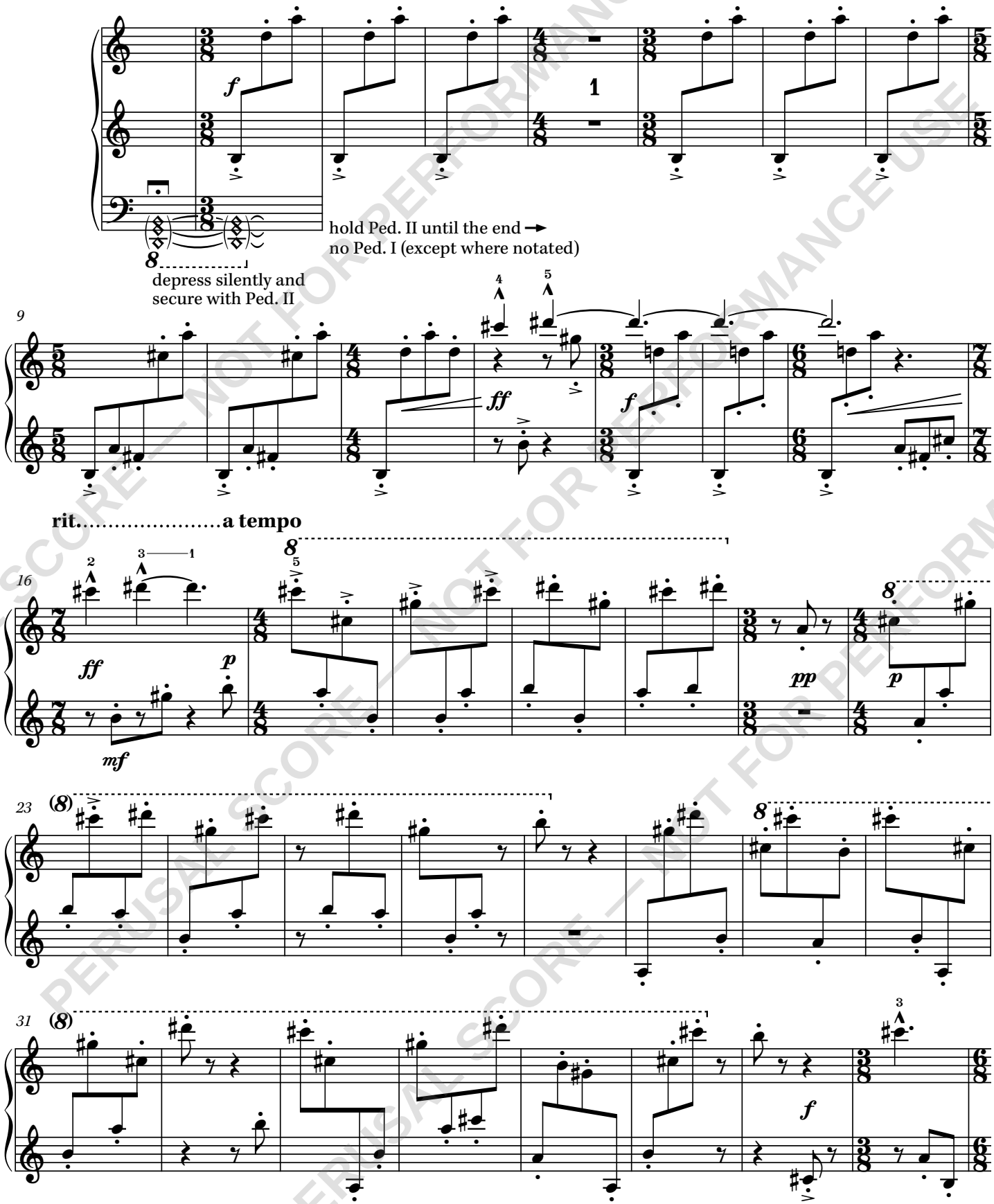
II. Triangle

Spiky, angular, playful ♩. = 116

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