A Musical Journey Back To 1103 A.D.

(Themes and Variations)

for pianoforte
(or organ)

Anthony Skilbeck

Programme note

Though not exact contemporaries, the work's dedicatee and I are alumni of the Royal College of Music, London. Also, we have both lived in the same town for many years and have a connection with Worksop Priory; Haydn sings in the choir, and I was Organist and Choirmaster there from 1977 to the end of 1983. It was only recently that I discovered that my paternal Great, Great Grandfather, George Taylor, was baptised in the Priory on Christmas Eve, 1822. I did not know this when I moved to Worksop, over 30 years ago. When Haydn, a pianist, hinted that he would appreciate having a composition written for him, it therefore seemed appropriate to involve some aspect of the Priory's history in the work.

It was in 1103 that a monastic establishment after the order of St Augustine was founded in Worksop. From this fact was born the concept of the composition - a theme and variations travelling musically back in time to that year. First, the theme is announced, after which comes a romantic "Album-leaf", a classical style movement, a baroque "Gigue" and a renaissance "Ricercare". Bar 153, beat 1, marks the point at which the journey reaches 1103 A.D. and here, the theme is used in a plainsong-like way, plainsong being the church music of the time. Four trope-like passages are interpolated leading to a section in the motet style of the Notre Dame School (circa 13th century), for this is how tropes developed. The work concludes with a 21st century passage in which the main theme is combined with that of the second trope, both rhythmically altered. As this final passage has a bell-like quality and the varied Theme 1 is repeated, I have called this section "Carillon." Throughout the work I have used my own harmonic language.

Whilst working on the composition, it occurred to me that arrival at the 1103 point could mark the Golden Section (in duration) of the work - bar 153. beat 1. Up to this point, the length of the piece should be 5'40" (340 seconds). Calculation showed that the remainder should be 3'50" long, making a total duration of 9'30". I remain unconvinced that listeners comprehend such a structure, but it is a useful compositional tool.

The work was finished in July, 2012.

Performance notes

Some panoforte pedalling signs are given; they are not indications concerning the use of organ pedals.

The term "ease" is an indication not to hurry or play in strict time; *pochissimo rit. / pochissimo rubato.*

If an electric piano is used, vary the sounds. For example, a harpsichord sound could be used for bars 90 to 112; a "choir" sound for bars 187 to 191 and a vibraphone sound from bar 192 to the end. A skilful organist could adapt the work for performance on that instrument, despite the occasional straying out of compass. Registration could be varied and the "motet" (bars 187 to 191) even played as an organ trio. The "motet" and "carillon" could be played together as a separate piece, during Communion, perhaps.

Bibliography

A History of Western Music (5th Edition) by Donald Jay Grout, published by W.W.Norton & Co.
Masterpieces of Music before 1750 by Carl Parrish & John F.Ohl, first published by Faber & Faber Ltd. in 1952.
An outline history of European Music by Michael Hurd published by Novello & Co. Ltd. in 1968.

For Haydn Robert Lee

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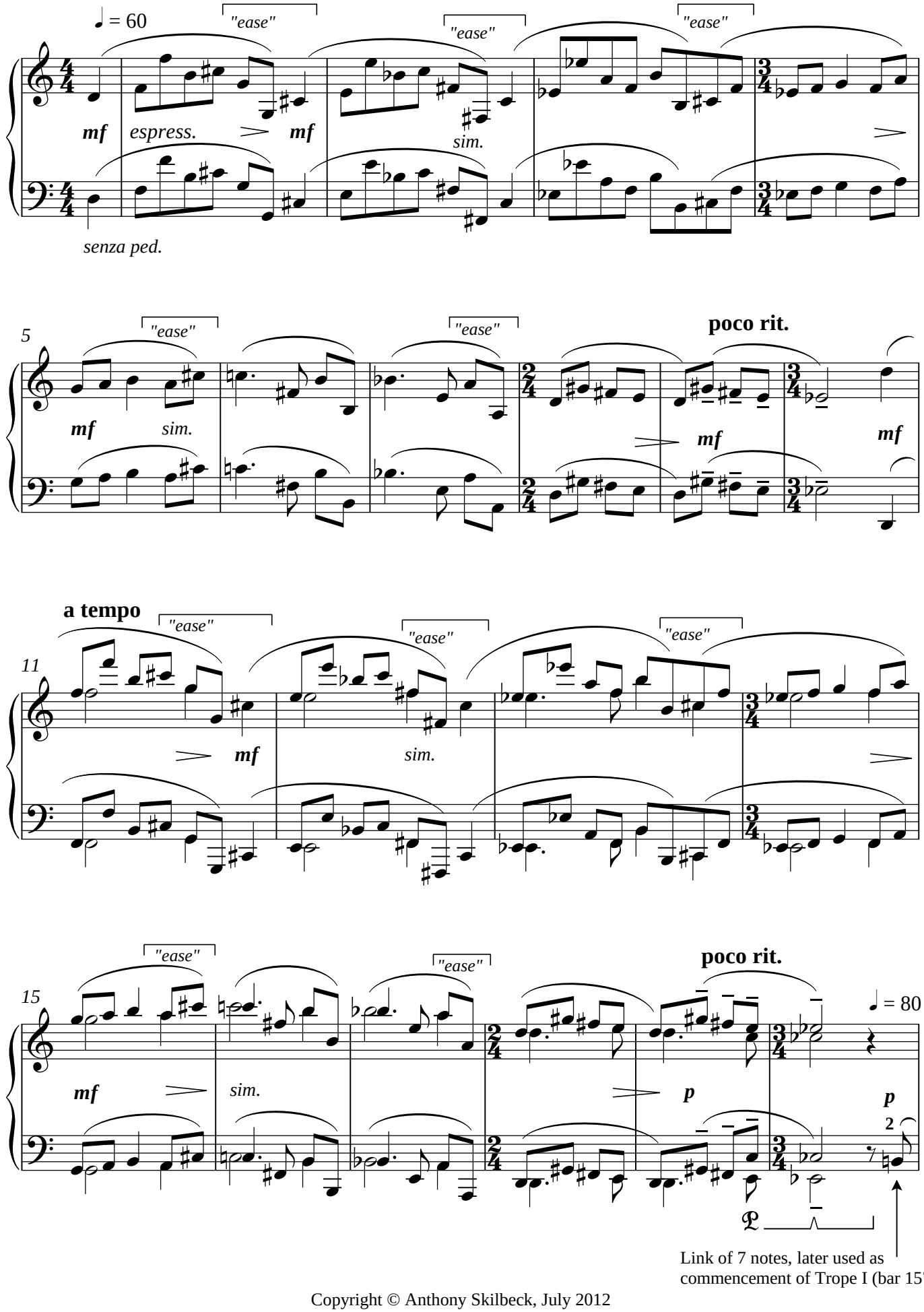

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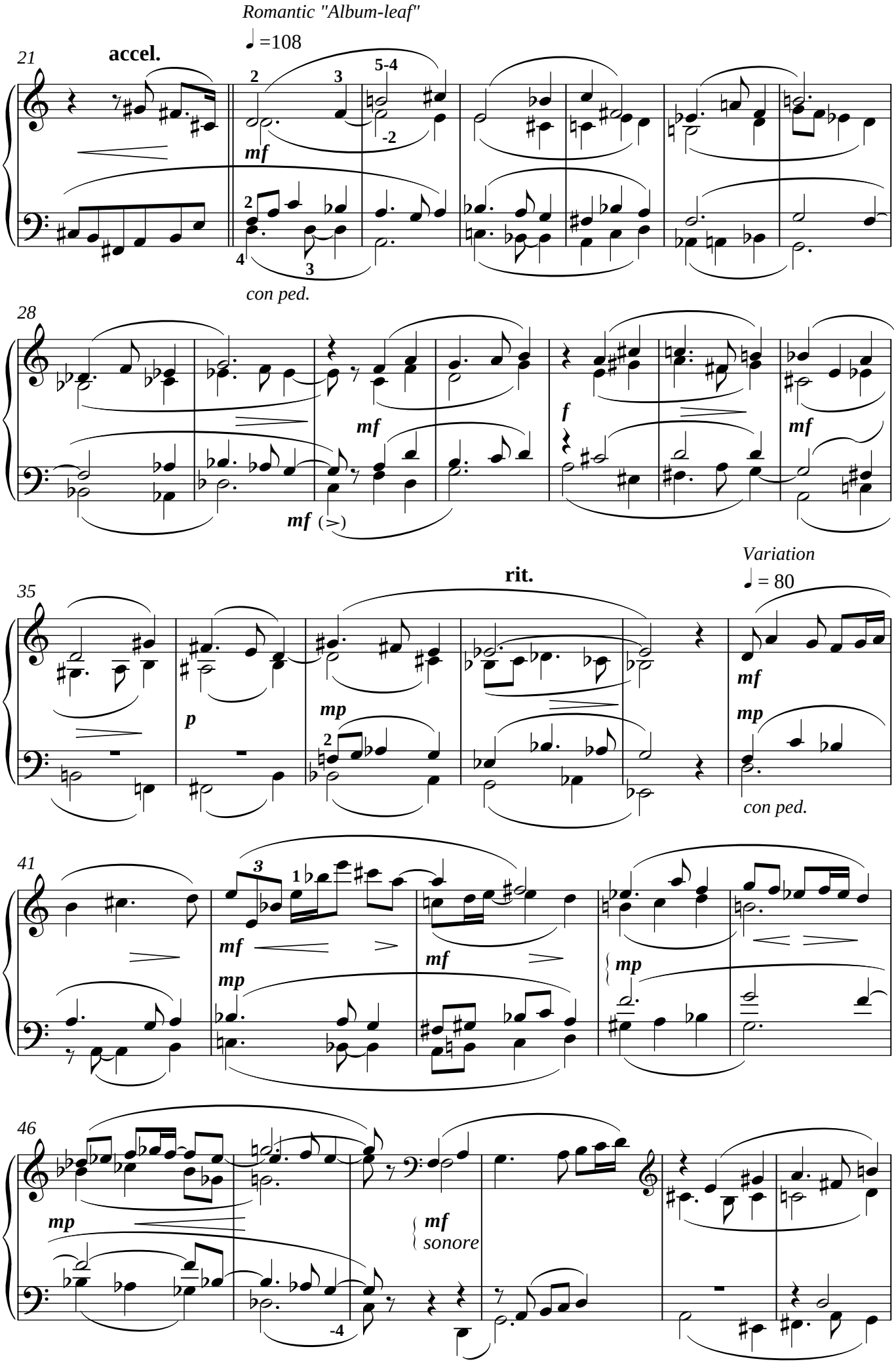
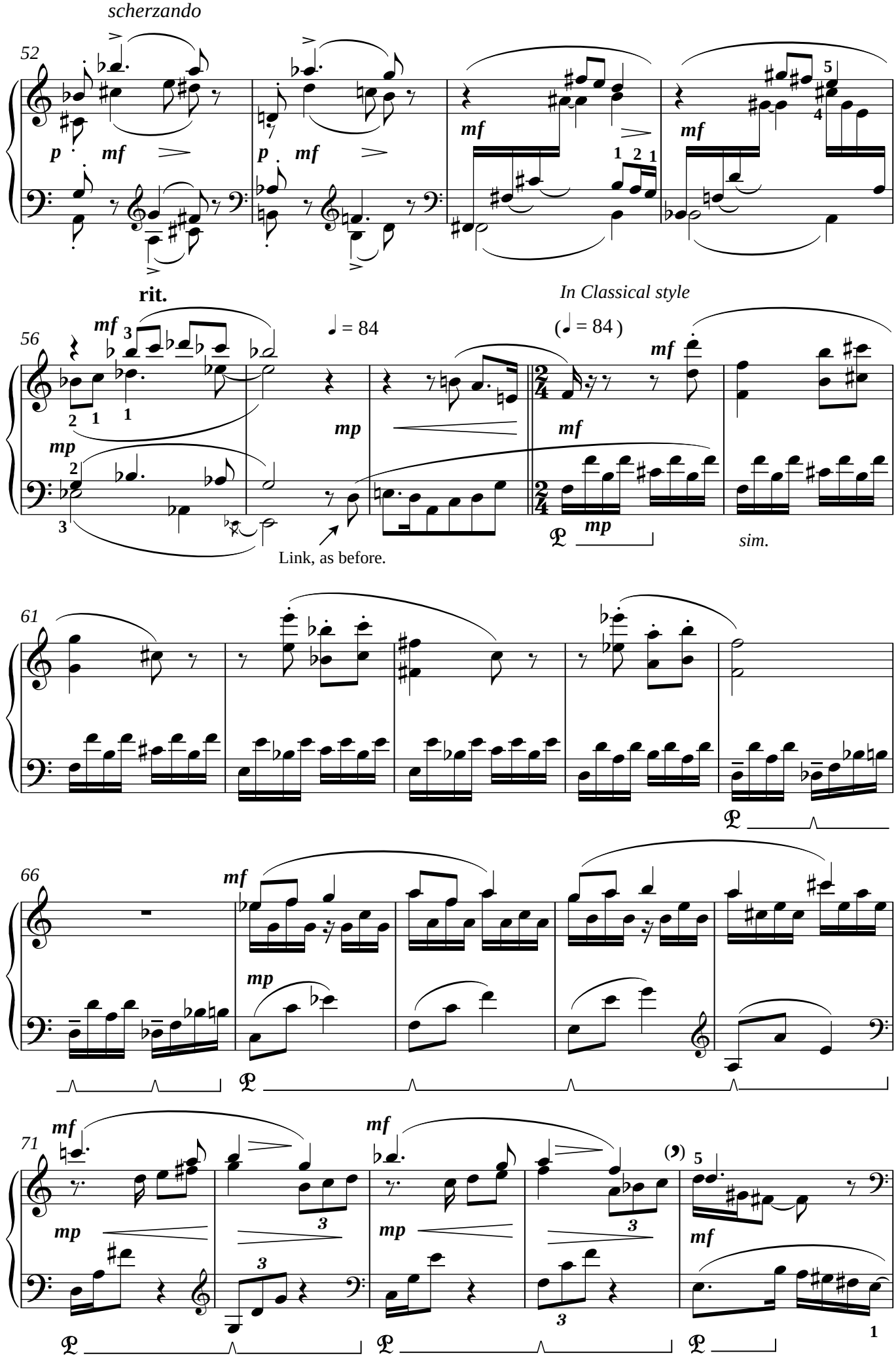
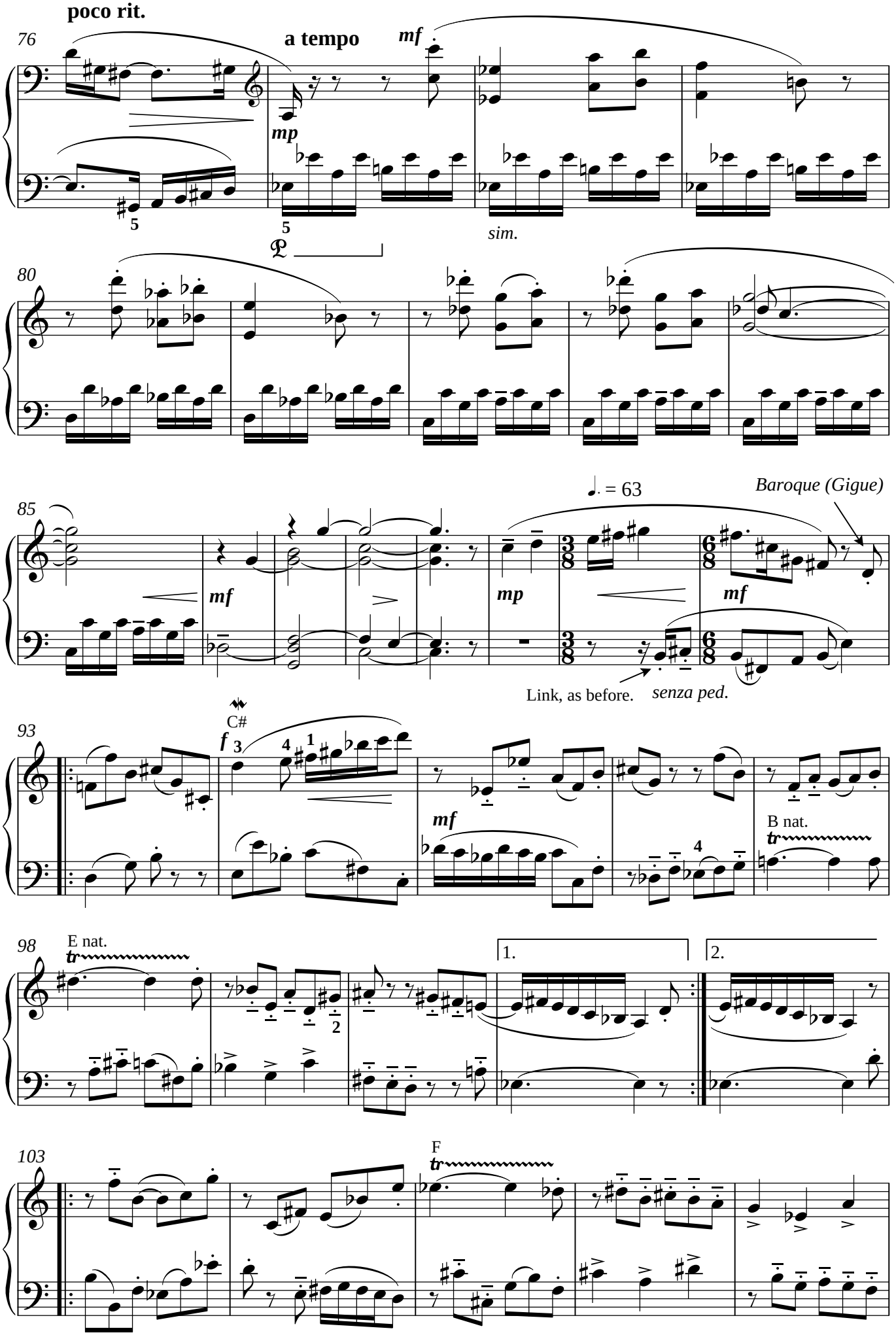
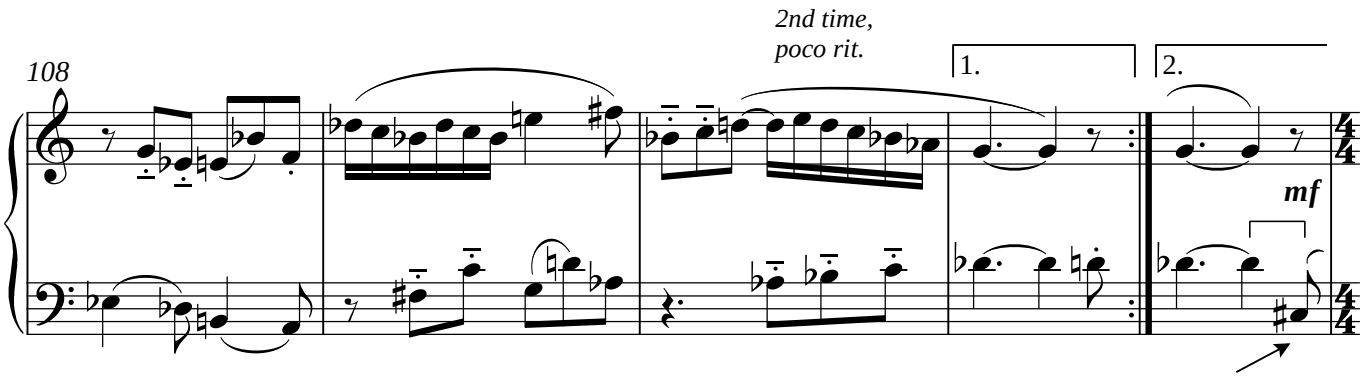
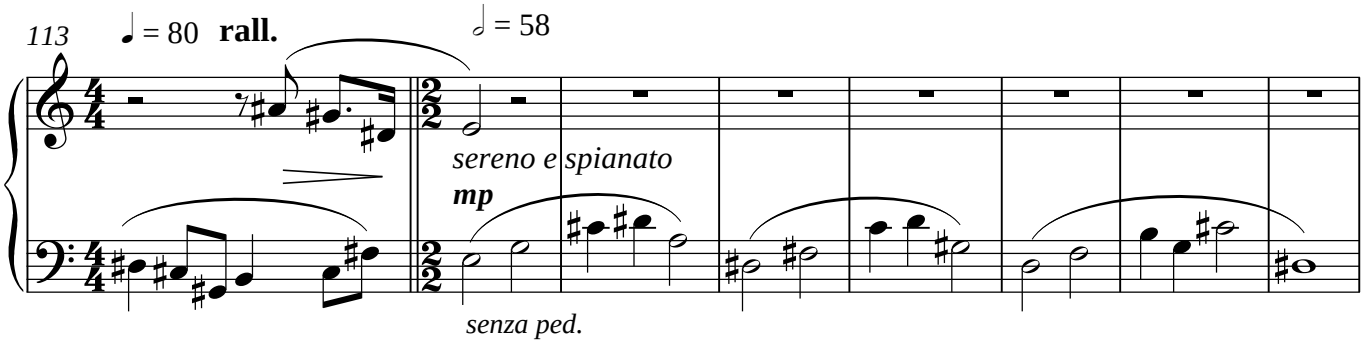

Romantic "Album-leaf"
♩=108
21
accel.
mf
con ped.
28
mf
mf (>)
f
mf
35
rit.
Variation
♩= 80
p
mp
mf
mp
con ped.
41
mf
mp
mf
mp
46
mp
mf
sonore


scherzando
52
p
mf
rit.
56
mf
mp
♩ = 84
Link, as before.
In Classical style
(♩ = 84)
sim.
61
66
71

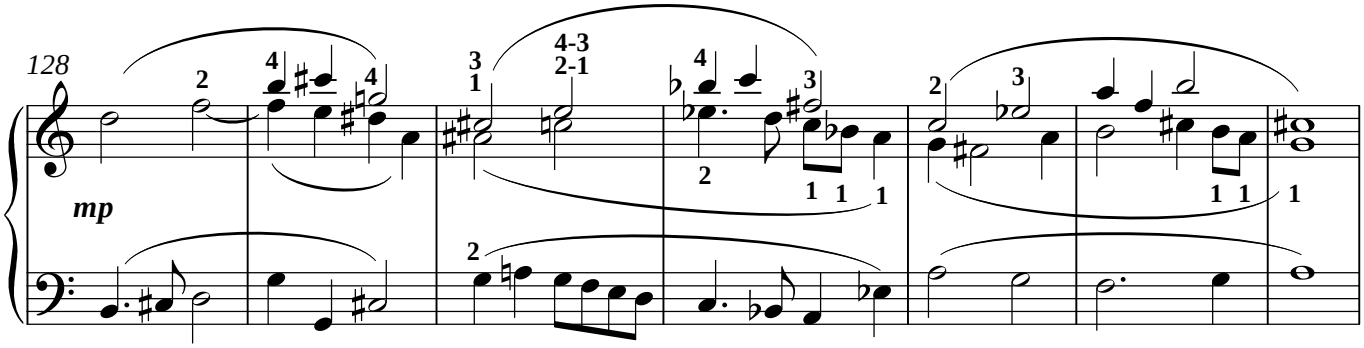

poco rit.
76
a tempo
mf
mp
sim.
80
85
♩. = 63
Baroque (Gigue)
mf
mp
mf
Link, as before.
senza ped.
93
C#
f
mf
B nat.
98
E nat.
1.
2.
103
F

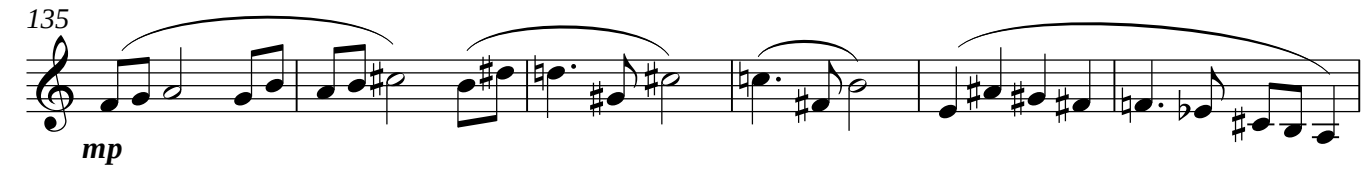


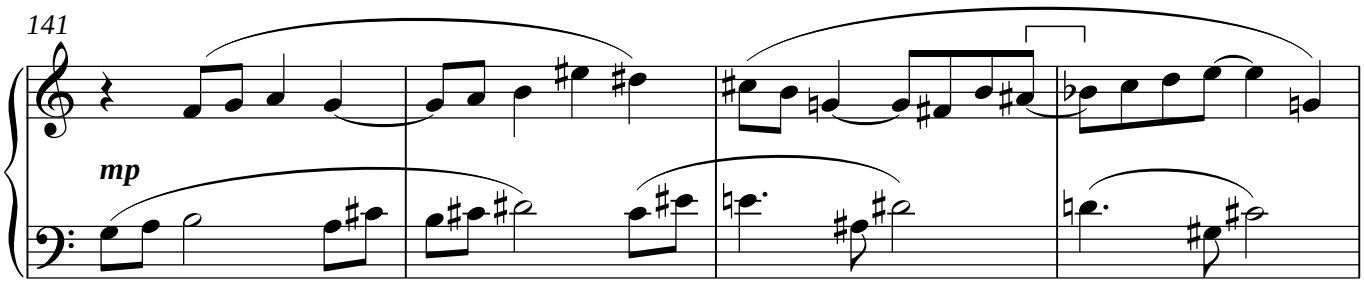
Renaissance (Ricercare)

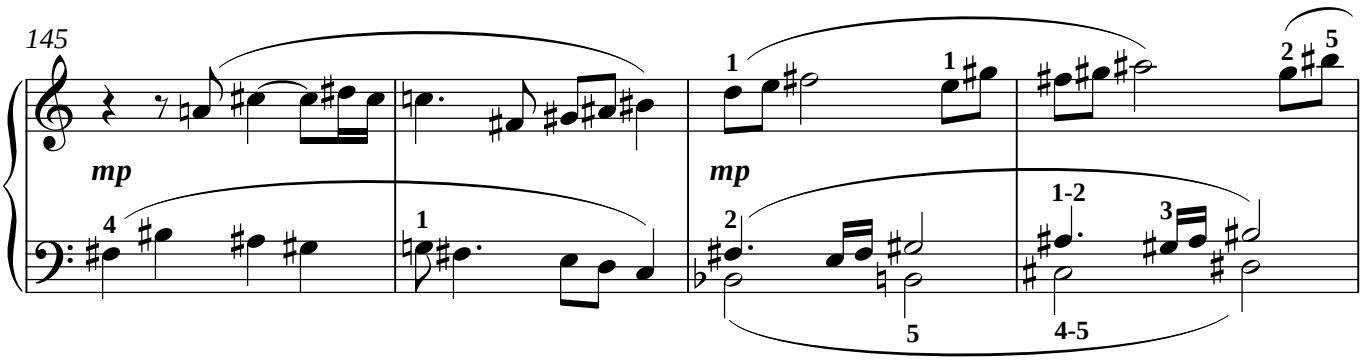


Reminiscent of the Ricercare in my "Variations on Three Original Themes" for organ.

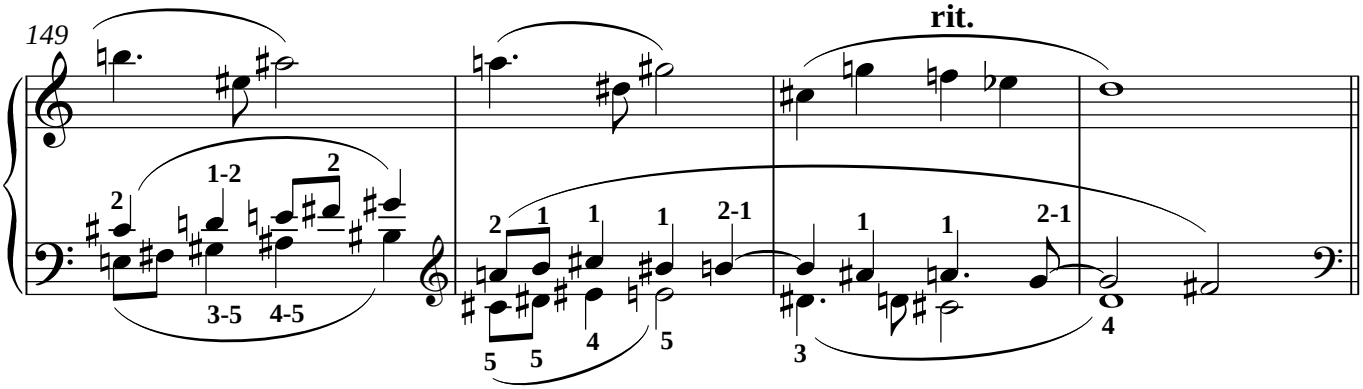






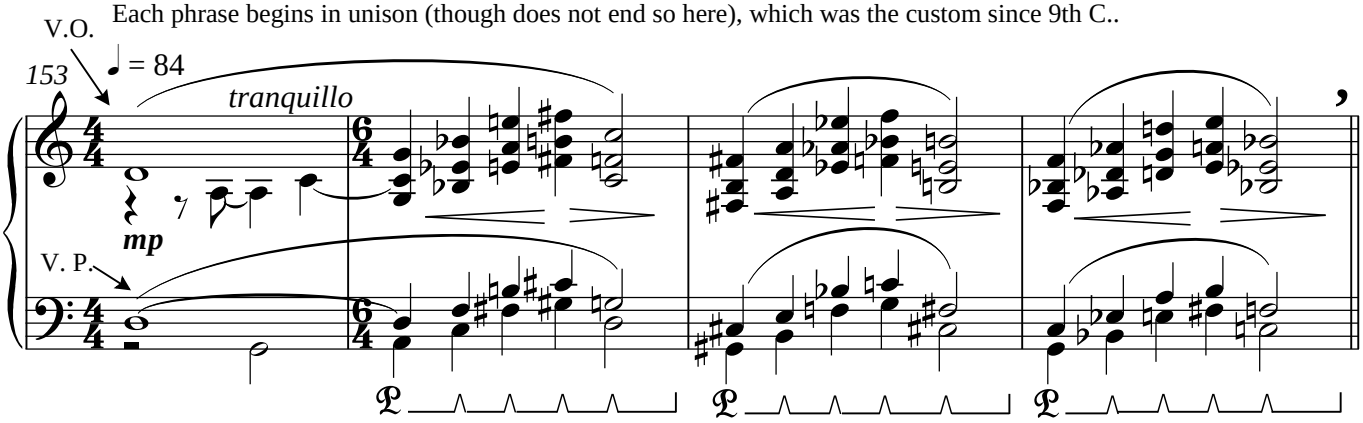


A discreet use of the sustaining pedal may be used in bars 147-152.



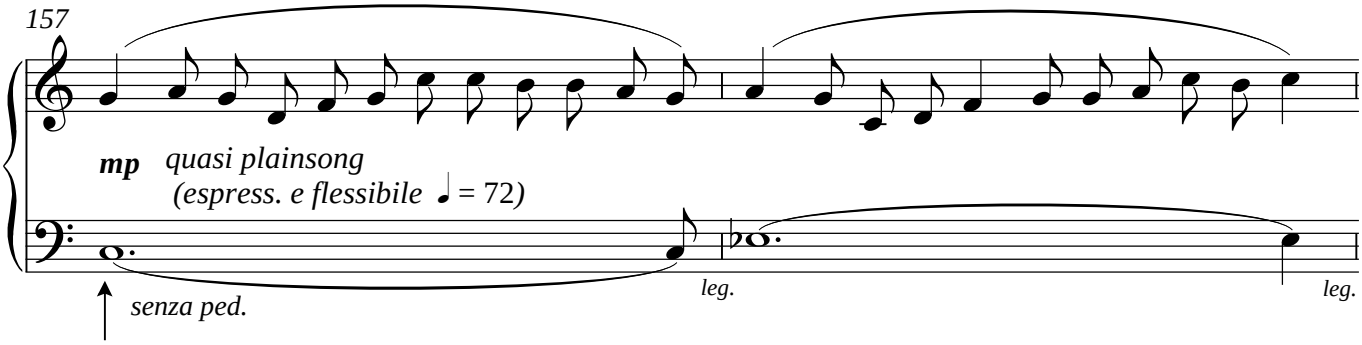
Circa 1103 / Golden Section (see notes).

Vox Organalis (V.O. - bass clef lowest notes and treble clef notes).
Each phrase begins in unison (though does not end so here), which was the custom since 9th C..

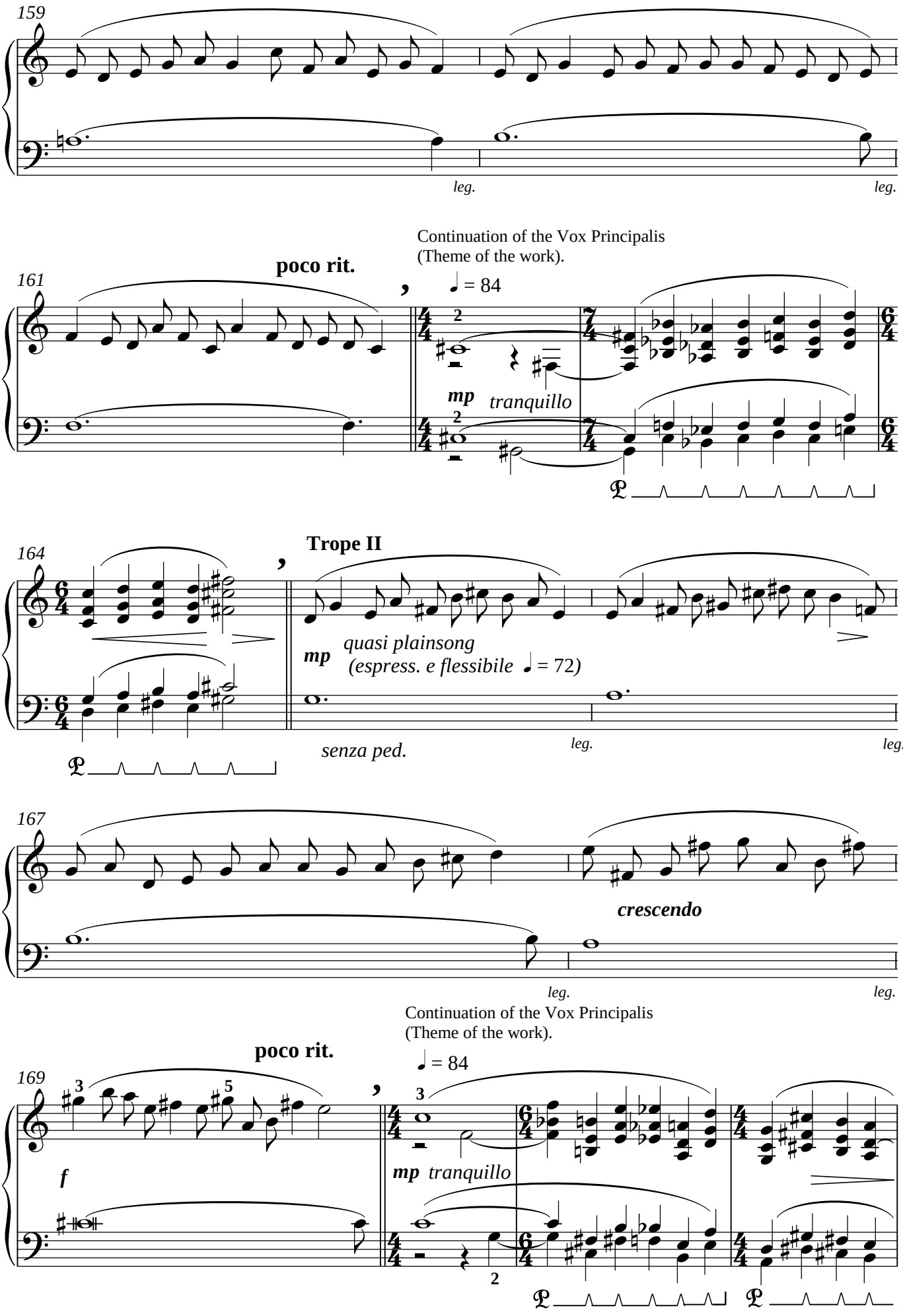


Vox Principalis (V.P.) in the tenor: first three phrases of the theme of the work with changed phrasing and no anacrusis.
The V.P. is harmonised by means of organum (parallel intervals).

Trope I New material. The first 7 treble notes have been used as a link between previous sections.



The trope tenors (bass notes) comprise those of the last-heard phrases of the V.P..
In most cases. at the point the where each tenor note begins, the two voices form intervals of a unison, 4th, 5th, or octave, as was the custom of the time. I permit the interval of an augmented 4th (bar 158) as it is a prominent interval in my harmonic language.


159
leg.
leg.
Continuation of the Vox Principalis
(Theme of the work).
poco rit.
161
♩ = 84
mp
tranquillo
Trope II
164
mp
quasi plainsong
(espress. e flessibile ♩ = 72)
senza ped.
leg.
leg.
167
crescendo
leg.
leg.
Continuation of the Vox Principalis
(Theme of the work).
poco rit.
169
♩ = 84
f
mp
tranquillo

Trope III "Notre Dame School" (ca. 1180)
using the six Rhythmic Modes. 3 parts. Dance-like.

♩. = 80

173

f *energico*

con ped. *leg.* *leg.*

176

leg. *leg.*

poco rit.

178

Final phrase of the Vox Principalis
(Theme of the work).

Trope IV "Notre Dame School" (ca. 1180)
using the six Rhythmic Modes.
3 parts. Dance-like.

♩. = 80

179

♩ = 84

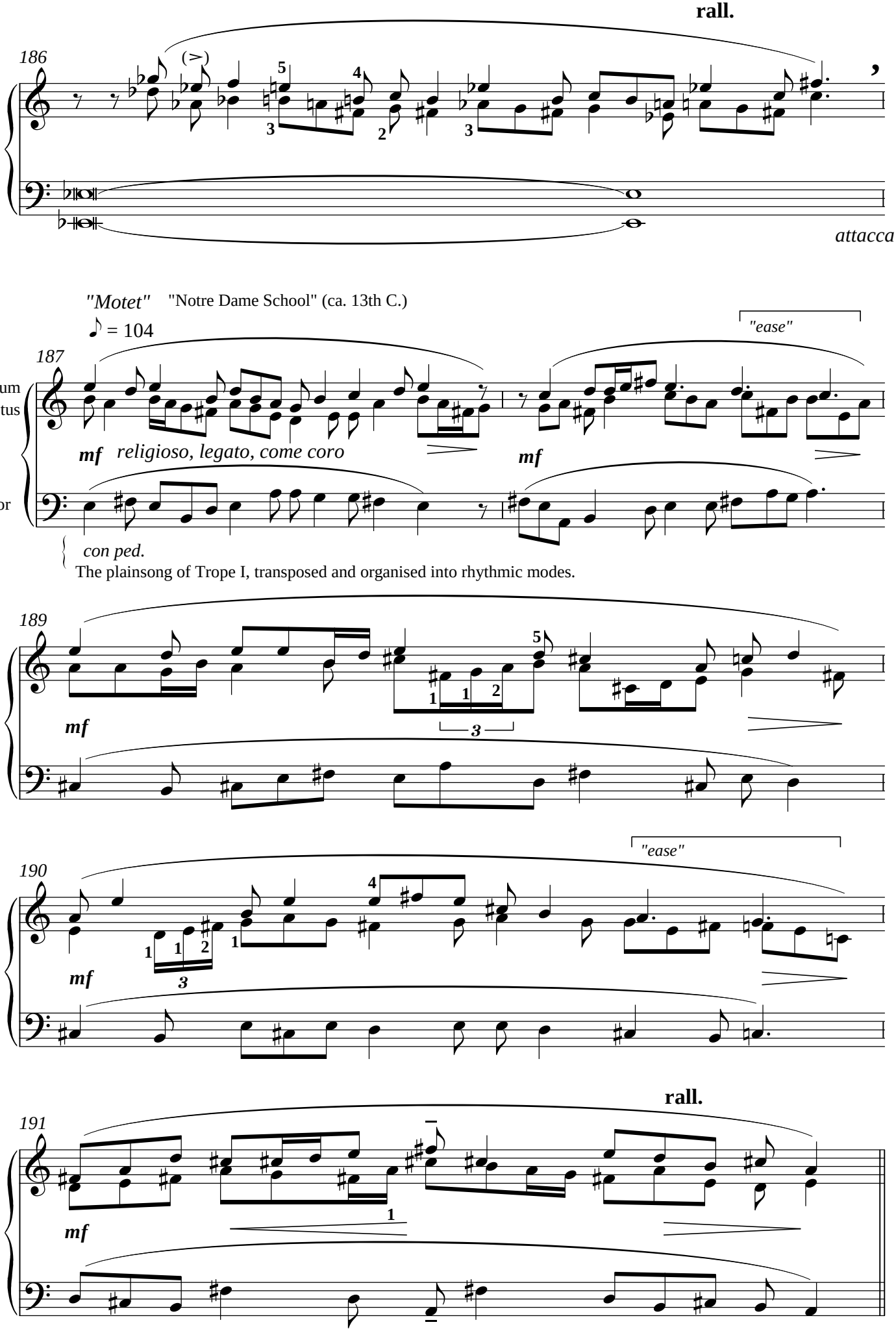
mp *tranquillo*

f *energico*

con ped. *leg.*

184

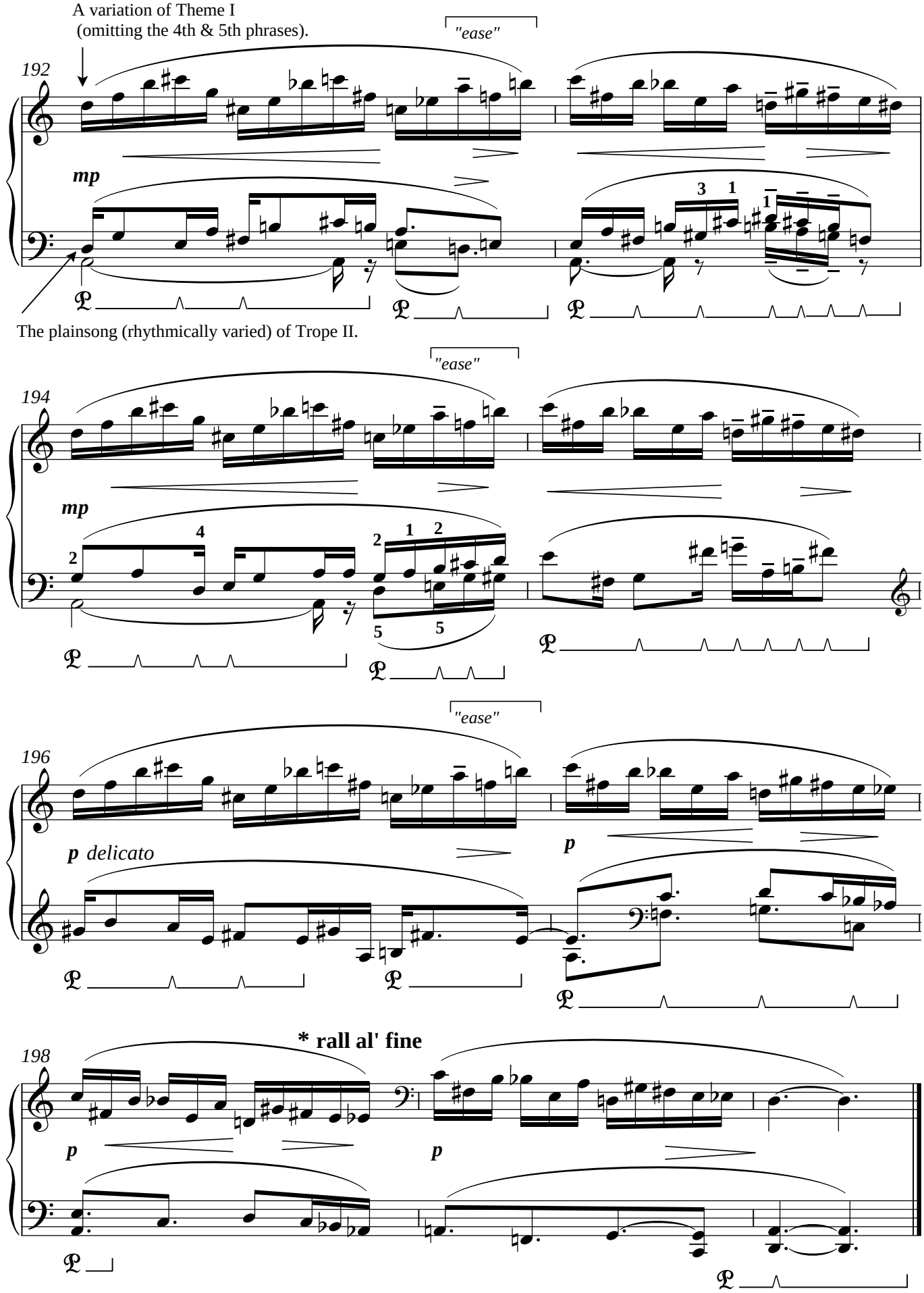
leg. *leg.*


rall.
186
attacca
"Motet" "Notre Dame School" (ca. 13th C.)
♪ = 104
"ease"
187
Triplum
Motetus
Tenor
mf religioso, legato, come coro
mf
con ped.
The plainsong of Trope I, transposed and organised into rhythmic modes.
189
mf
"ease"
190
mf
rall.
191
mf

Coda: "Carillon"

♪ = 80

A variation of Theme I
(omitting the 4th & 5th phrases).



The plainsong (rhythmically varied) of Trope II.

***** As if a clockwork musical box "winding down" - similar to the carillon movement in my "Seven Jewels" for flute and cello (1976).

This section has the same character as the "Pastorale Variations" (Comunio) in my "Barzago Pieces" for organ (2006) and "The Budding Tree" movement in my chamber work "Harthill Moor" (2007).