Comparison of the soloist's part

All three composer's manuscripts are now available from www.internetculturale.it

Free use for educational purposes - solo part digitalized without ammendments by Božo Paradžik

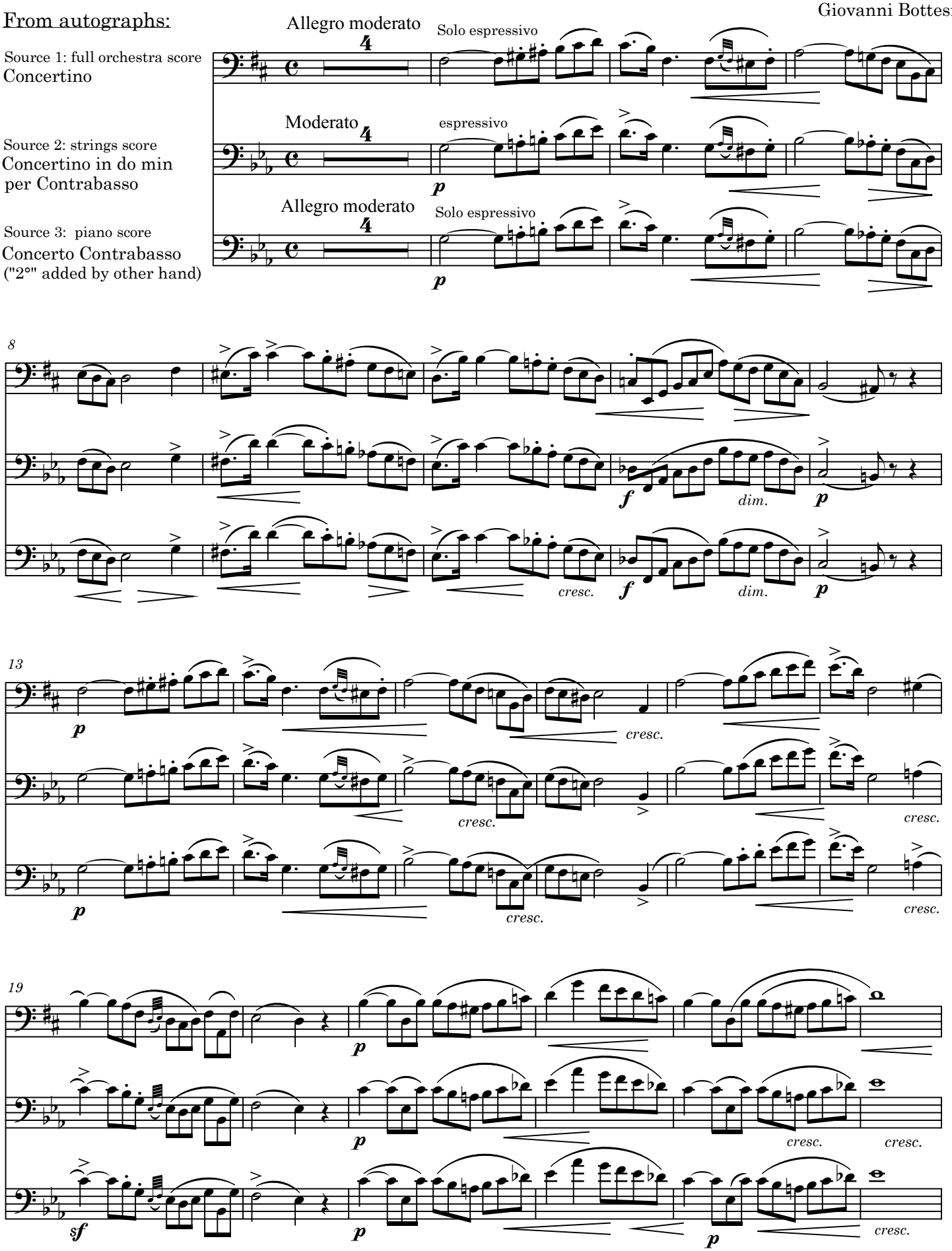
Giovanni Bottesini

From autographs:

Source 1: full orchestra score
Concertino

Source 2: strings score
Concertino in do min
per Contrabasso

Source 3: piano score
Concerto Contrabasso
("2°" added by other hand)



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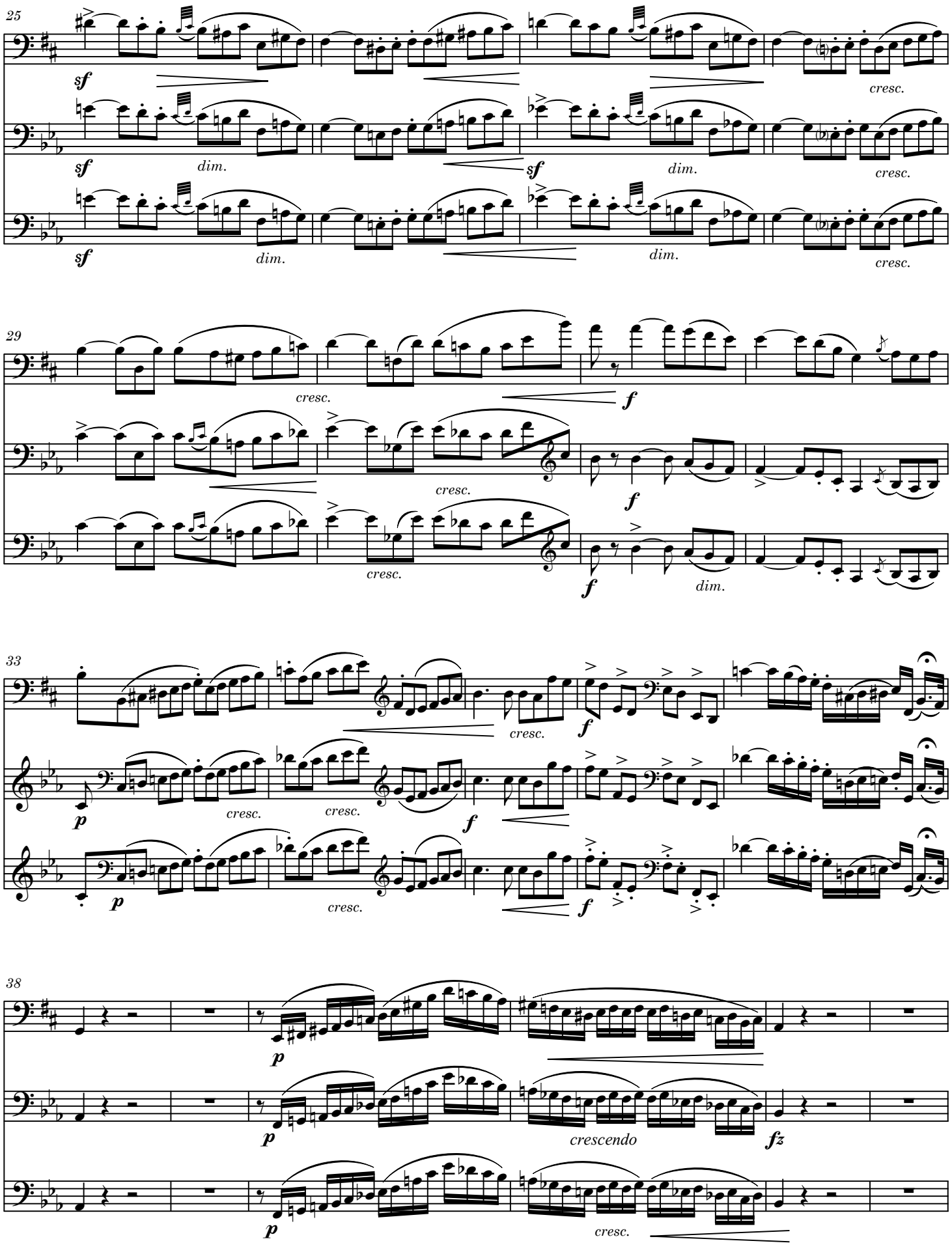

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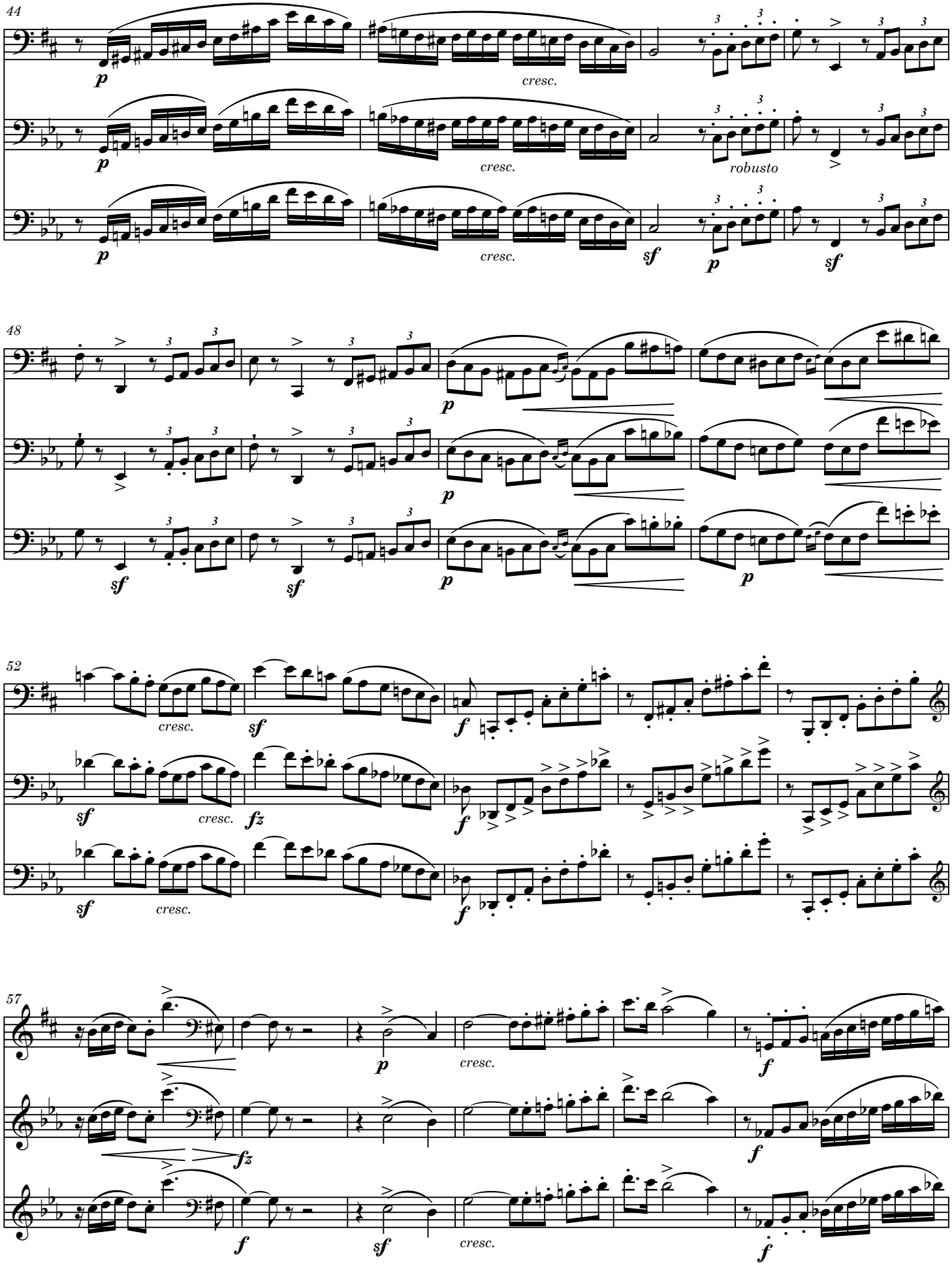

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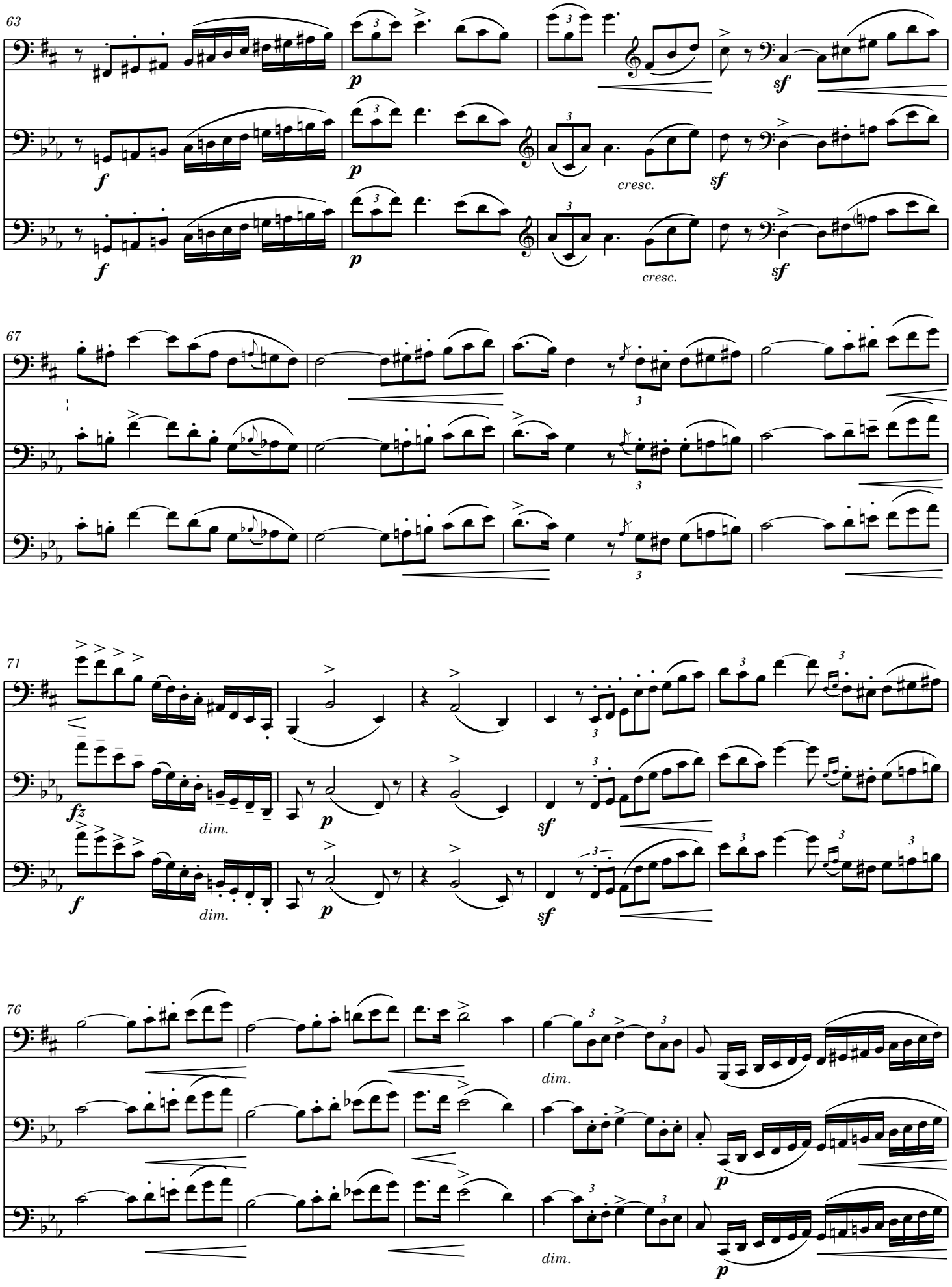

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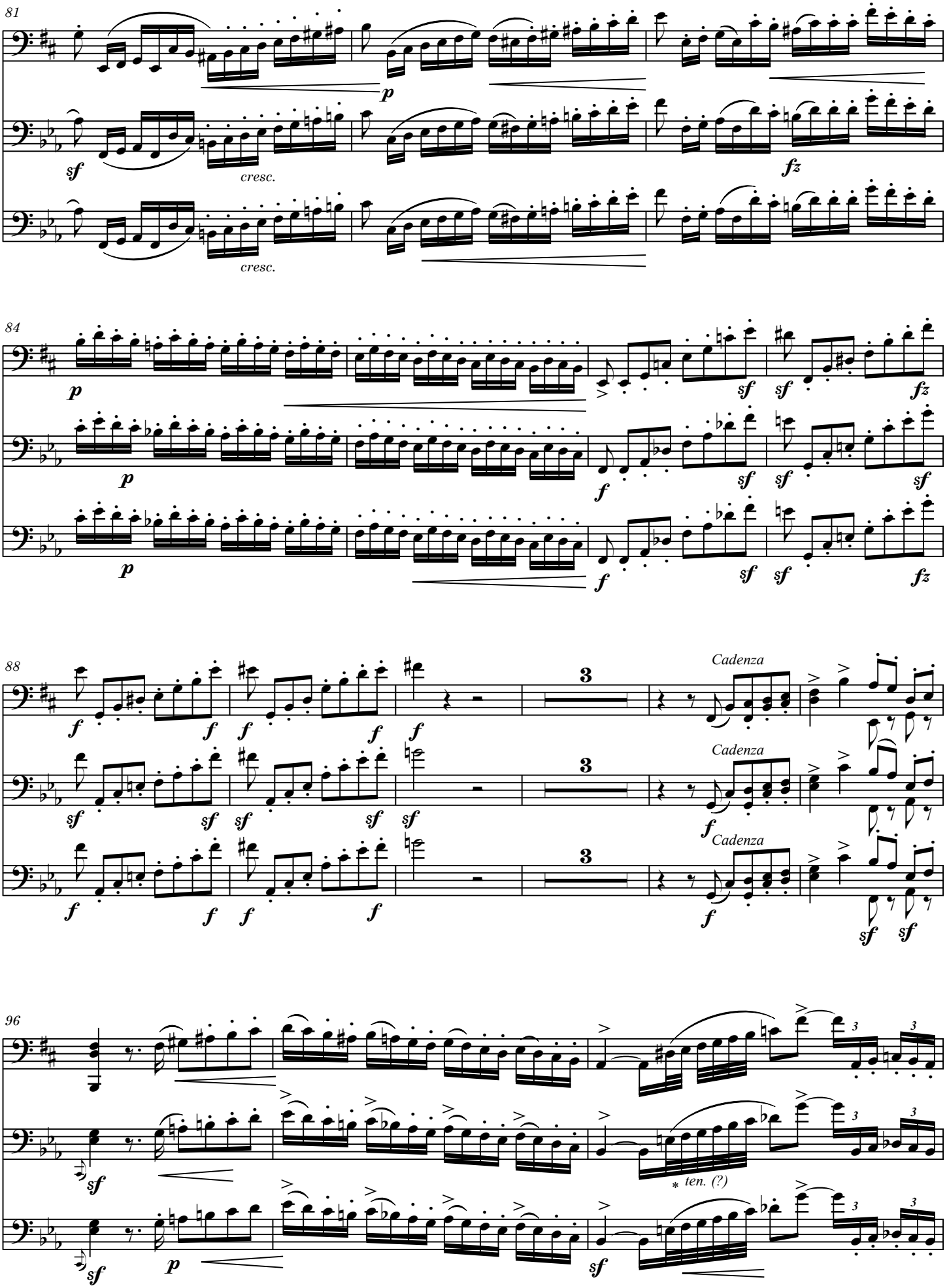

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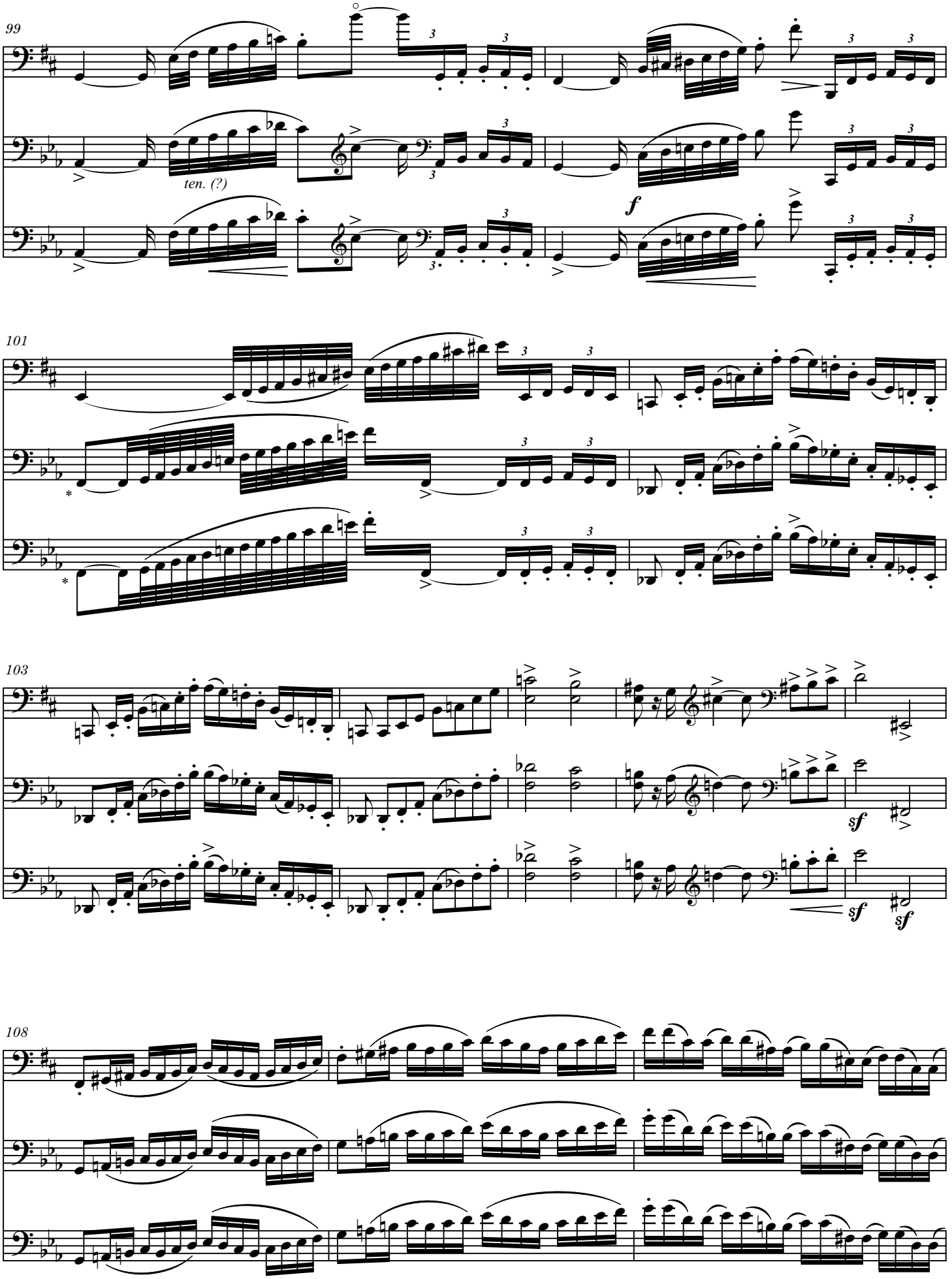

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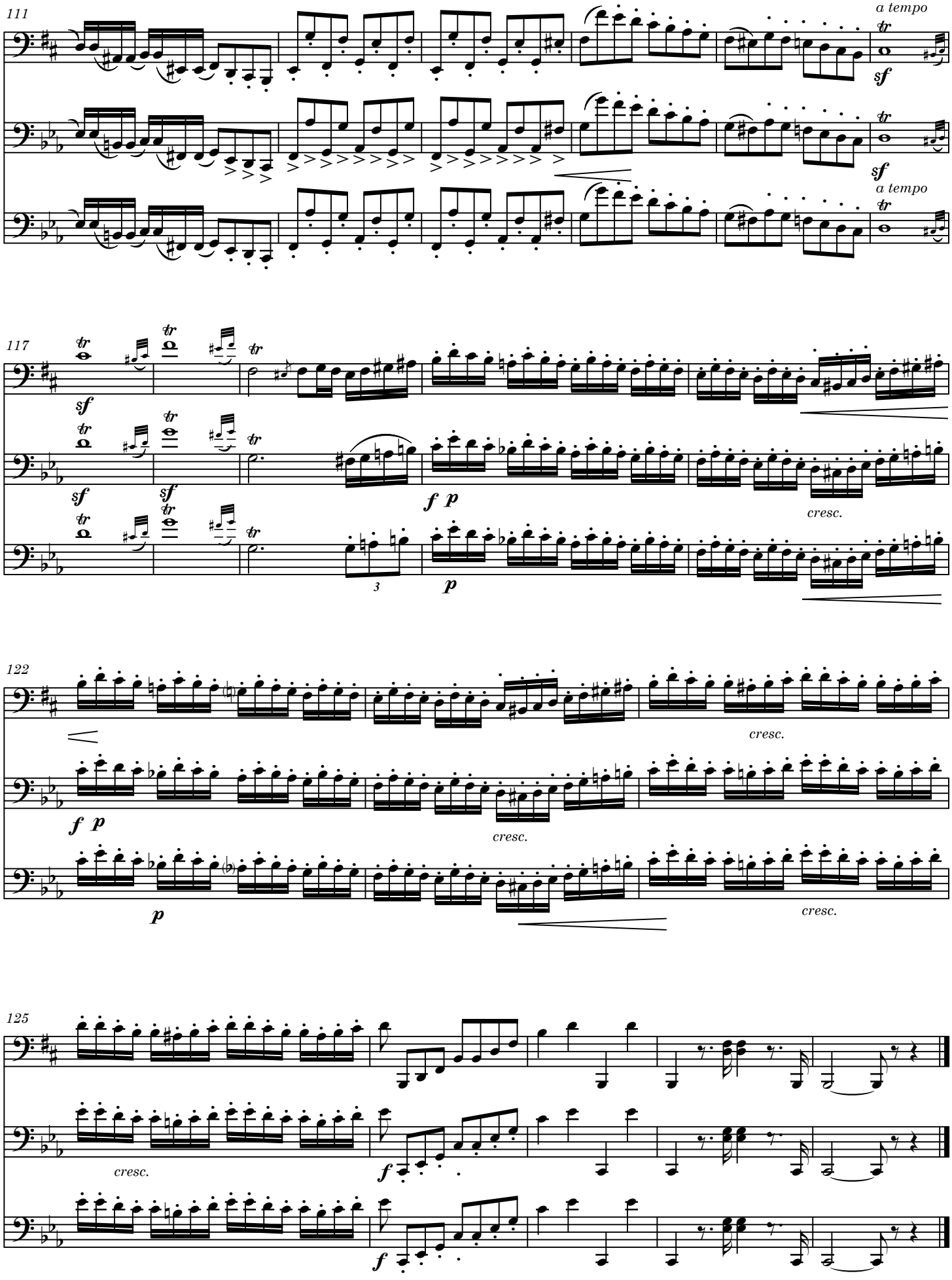

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Performance practice notes

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From the early 20th century onward, training musicians in historically informed interpretation was largely neglected. The consequences of this neglect are still strongly felt today, as much of the notational practice used in earlier centuries has been forgotten. Thanks to the tireless work of leading musicologists of our time, who have carefully examined and compiled historical sources, many details of 18th- and 19th-century performance practice have been rediscovered and brought together into an increasingly complete picture.

Urtext editions such as this one, which faithfully reproduce 19th-century autograph scores, should not be approached solely through a modern interpretive lens. Performers are encouraged to consider the performance practices of Bottesini's time, which were deeply shaped by the Italian *bel canto* tradition. This aesthetic favored a beautiful, singing tone, seamless legato, and vocal-like articulation on all instruments.

Dynamics in this repertoire should be understood as expressive shaping rather than fixed volume levels. Markings such as ***p***, ***f***, and crescendo often imply a flexible range of nuance, frequently connected to harmonic tension, melodic direction, or rhetorical emphasis. Sudden contrasts may be intended more as changes of color and intensity than as purely loud or soft effects.

Articulation likewise reflects vocal models. Slurs generally indicate phrasing and breath-like continuity rather than mere technical grouping, while detached markings often suggest lightness and clarity rather than sharp separation. Bow strokes and finger articulation should aim to preserve a sense of line and cantabile flow, even in passages that appear technically demanding.

Tempo should also be treated with expressive flexibility. Indications such as Andante, Allegro, or Adagio describe character as much as speed, and performers are encouraged to allow subtle rubato, particularly at cadential points, in melodic climaxes, or in transitions between contrasting ideas. Such flexibility should remain organic and stylistically grounded, never disrupting the underlying pulse.

This interpretive approach shaped instrumentalists as much as singers, who consciously sought to emulate the expressive qualities of the human voice. Historical sources suggest that the prevailing sound ideal of Bottesini's contemporaries favored a lyrical, soft, and sweet tone. Composers' notational conventions reflect this aesthetic; many markings and indications found in the score assume this sound world and may therefore be misunderstood or applied too literally when interpreted from a purely modern perspective.

In the early 20th century, performance practice changed rapidly. The flexible, vocal-inspired phrasing of the 19th century gave way to greater precision, clarity, and structural awareness. Romantic expressiveness and free *rubato* were replaced by stricter tempos, clearer articulation, and closer attention to the composer's intentions. Innovations in instrument design and recording technology further influenced playing styles, ushering in a new era of technical brilliance and stylistic diversity.

This contemporary approach differs markedly from what a musician of Bottesini's time would have considered logical. To avoid misunderstandings when performing mid-19th-century notation, this short guide provides general hints for reading and interpreting the music of that period, based on insights from leading modern musicologists, and aims to support historically informed performance. In Bottesini's notation style, the most potentially misleading elements from a modern perspective are the articulation symbols. Therefore, the following table presents intensity grades from strongest to weakest, and indicates how they are presumed to be performed:

sfz	This articulation symbol / dynamic grade appears very rarely in Bottesini's works. He seems to have used it for the highest level of intensity.
fz	Applied to notes of elevated intensity and serves, within Bottesini's notational practice, a role comparable to the modern *sforzando*. However, its execution was presumably smoother in character and imbued with a considerable degree of *espressivo*.
sf	This symbol is applied to exposed notes, yet its initial articulation should be executed considerably more softly than is customary in contemporary performance practice. Bottesini employed it frequently and across all dynamic levels. Notes marked in this way may appropriately be performed at approximately one dynamic degree above the written indication for the respective passage.
>	This articulation symbol is applied to notes of particular importance - whether harmonically, melodically, or for other musical reasons. Such notes should be rendered with a degree of prominence, yet in a smoother manner than contemporary accent symbols, resembling more an espressivo emphasis than a pronounced attack. This emphasis should presumably remain within the same dynamic range as the surrounding passage.

The following observations are intended not as commentary only on Bottesini's individual compositional style, but as guidance regarding the broader performance practices of the 19th century. Given the substantial evolution of musical interpretation since that time, these conventions may easily be misread from a contemporary perspective and thus warrant careful consideration:

- and
  Throughout the 19th century, hairpins were primarily used to indicate subtle changes in tempo rather than dynamics, as is commonly assumed today. Nevertheless, they could also imply a corresponding increase or decrease in loudness.
- Tempo markings at the beginning of a movement, according to the musical conventions of the 18th and 19th centuries, generally applied only to the first theme. Subsequent sections or themes could adopt their own tempo, which did not necessarily correspond to strict metronomic accuracy.
- Dots placed above or below notes generally indicate shorter, detached articulation; however, their precise meaning—ranging from slightly detached to very short—varied considerably between composers and was often combined with other markings such as accents or marcato. This resulted in complex and inconsistent usage prior to standardization. Because the interpretation of such symbols remained composer-specific, they present a particular challenge for modern performers. In Bottesini's works, a light detachment of the notes is generally recommended, in accordance with the broader principles of *bel canto*, rather than performing them as very short staccato. There is no historical evidence indicating how Bottesini himself approached such situations, nor does his method provide instructions regarding the execution of dotted notes.

As a soloist, Bottesini often employed a scordatura on the double bass that was tuned approximately a whole tone higher than the tuning commonly used in orchestras today. Because concert pitch had not yet been standardized in the 19th century, a variety of pitch levels coexisted. In addition to the frequently used pitch of A ≈ 435–440 Hz, the older Baroque pitch of A ≈ 415 Hz remained widespread, particularly in Great Britain. This resulted in a difference of almost exactly a semitone. For this reason, the accompaniments to many of Bottesini's compositions exist in two versions: one at the notated pitch, and another transposed a semitone higher, the latter intended for use with lower-pitched keyboard instruments or orchestras. Bottesini often wrote stronger dynamics and clearer articulations for lower-pitched instruments—whose sound is naturally softer—in order to balance the ensemble.