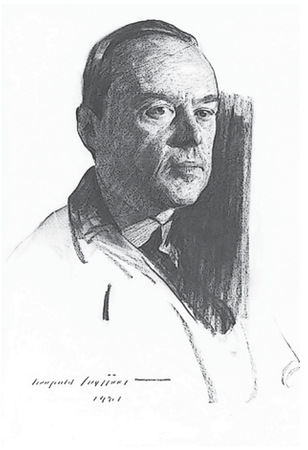
john alden carpenter



John Alden Carpenter (1876–1951) was born in the suburbs of Chicago to a well-to-do family. His natural ability allowed him to study composition at Harvard, with additional private studies in Rome and in Chicago. His native Chicago is the city where he settled and found his permanent home until death. His primary composition teachers included John Knowles Paine, Edward Elgar, and Bernhard Ziehn. Ultimately, Carpenter found a secure living as vice president of the family business, thus entering the ranks of American composers like Philip Glass and Charles Ives who worked non-musical jobs while composing on the side.

Carpenter wrote in a variety of genres, spanning from the earlier piano works found in this volume to larger orchestral pieces like ballets and symphonies. As can be observed from his birth and death years, Carpenter lived in interesting times; born in the bleeding heart of Romanticism, Carpenter's coming of age aligns more closely with the music of Impressionism, while he also lived to see the dissonant experimentalism before and after the World Wars. As a result, his music contains a diversity of influences. Readers of the music in this volume can expect to find atmospheric textures, extended tertian harmonies, and a prominent jazz influence that may remind listeners of Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, and Igor Stravinsky.

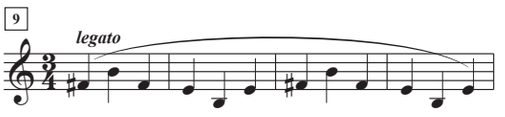
Although Carpenter has not enjoyed the same level of fame as other Americans of his era like Aaron Copland, George Gershwin, and Charles Ives, his high-quality piano music calls out for greater attention.

practice & performance

Diversion I

Lento, Key of B Minor

Carpenter's *Diversions* were composed in 1923. The dreamy first movement of this set is reminiscent of the simpler pieces of Debussy and has the great benefit of making the instrument sound good with ease. This piece is an apt starting point for the study of reading three staves at once, balancing diverse textures, and hemiola. Both the greatest challenge and reward of this movement lies in variety of sound. Following an eight-measure introduction, the main theme in m. 9 features a melody with long rhythms and an accompaniment with quicker rhythms. Students should take care to play the top notes of the RH with weight and intensity (supported by the composer's marking ***espressivo***) while maintaining a floating left arm to play the accompaniment rather soft. Long pedals and the light touch of a floating arm go together well, whereas such light key pressure without pedal would lack sufficient core to the sound. The pianist should not back away from the semitone clash in m. 17, as the harmony's beauty lies in this unapologetic dissonance. The RH figure of m. 20 should be grouped as a series of falling 4ths rather than ascending 3rds, as the interval of the fourth is an essential musical idea for this movement (witness the accompaniment mm. 9–28, for example).



Balancing the texture mm. 25–36 provides a teachable moment in alternating between arm weight and finger attacks; the dotted half notes re-attacked every two measures sound best played with a slow, yet heavy drop of the arm, while all other notes in those two measures are to be played with finger weight alone. Measures 25–40 provide teachers an excellent opportunity to teach about hemiola. The metric dissonance of this passage contributes to the piece's

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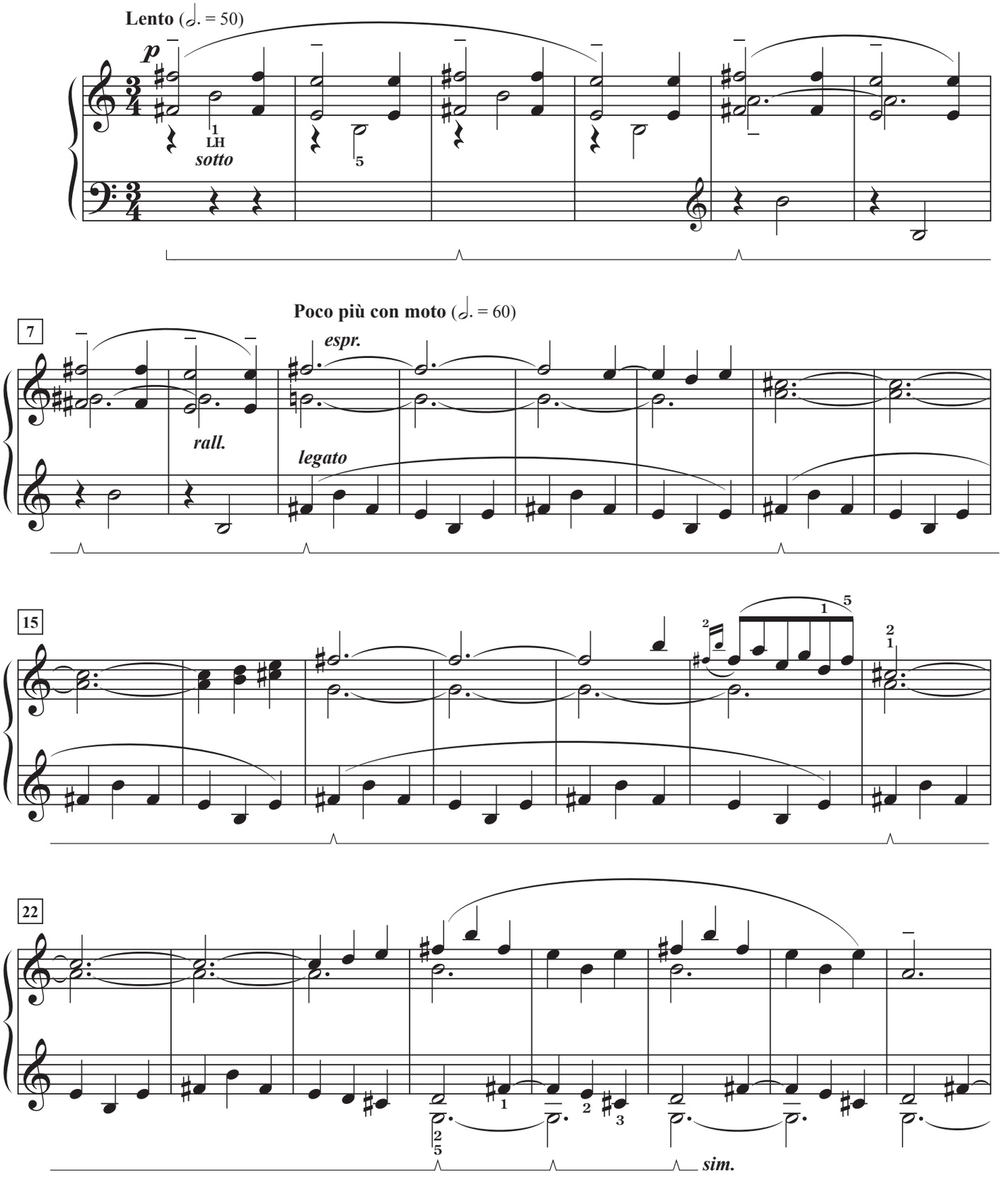
Diversions

I.

John Alden Carpenter



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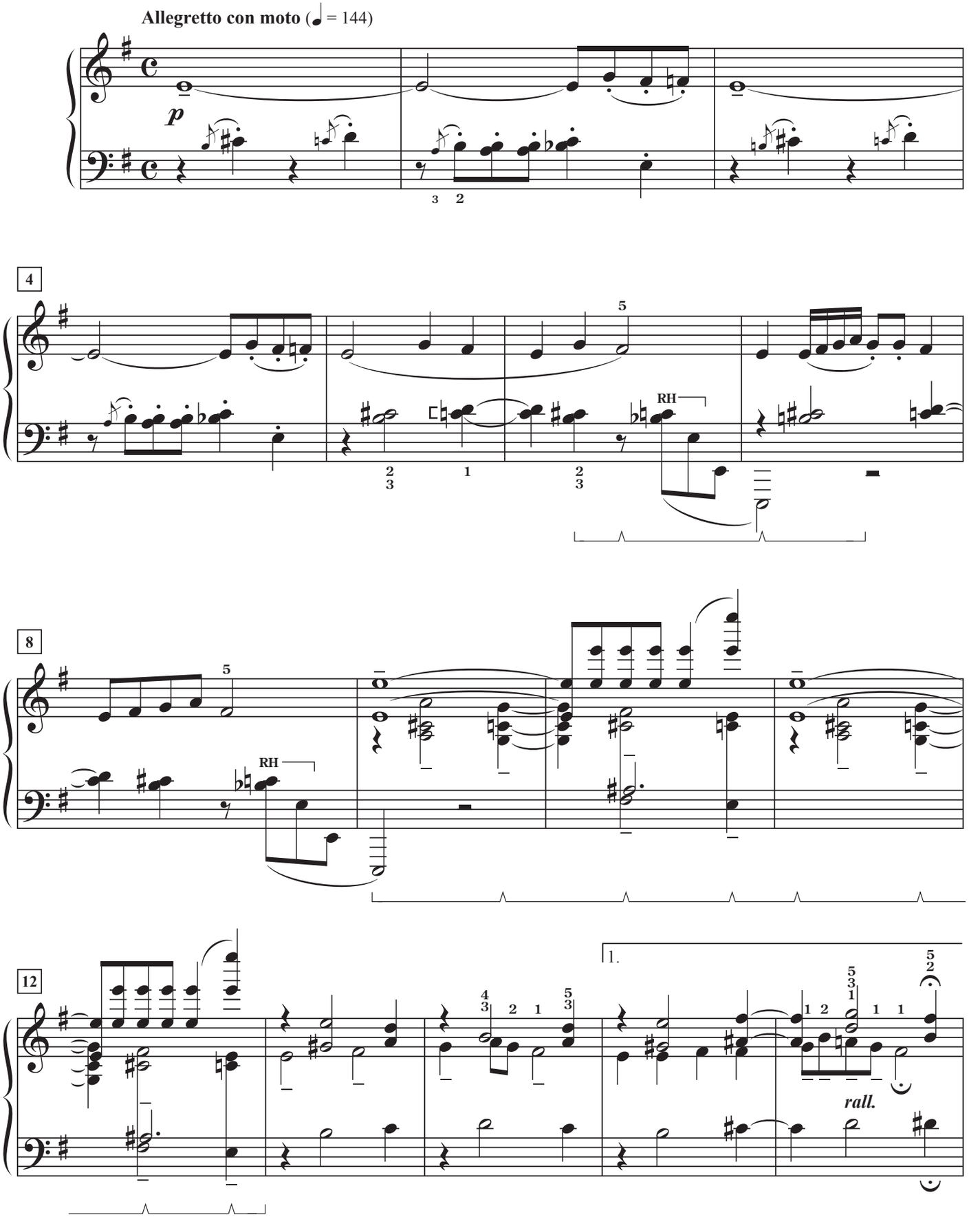
II.



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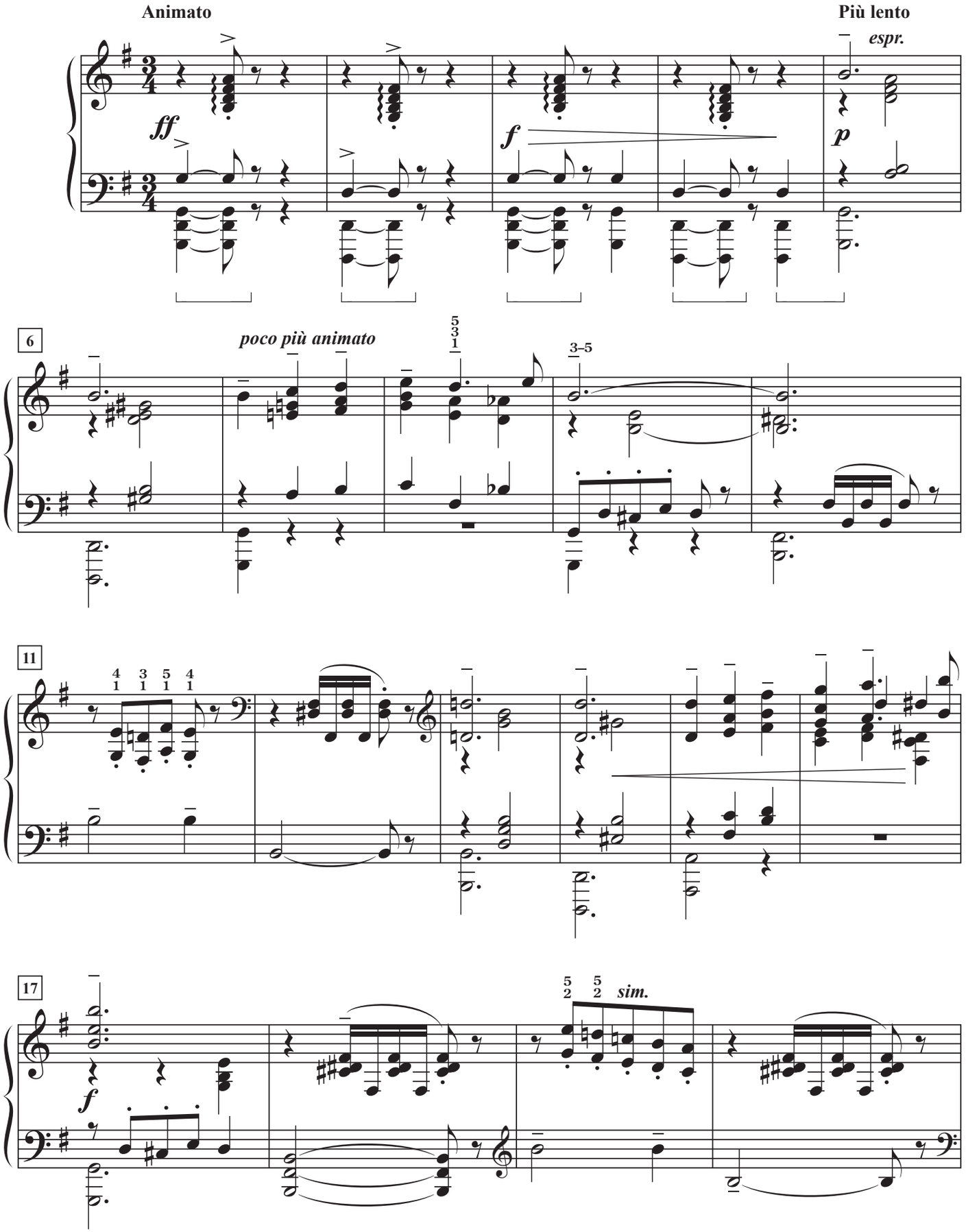
III.



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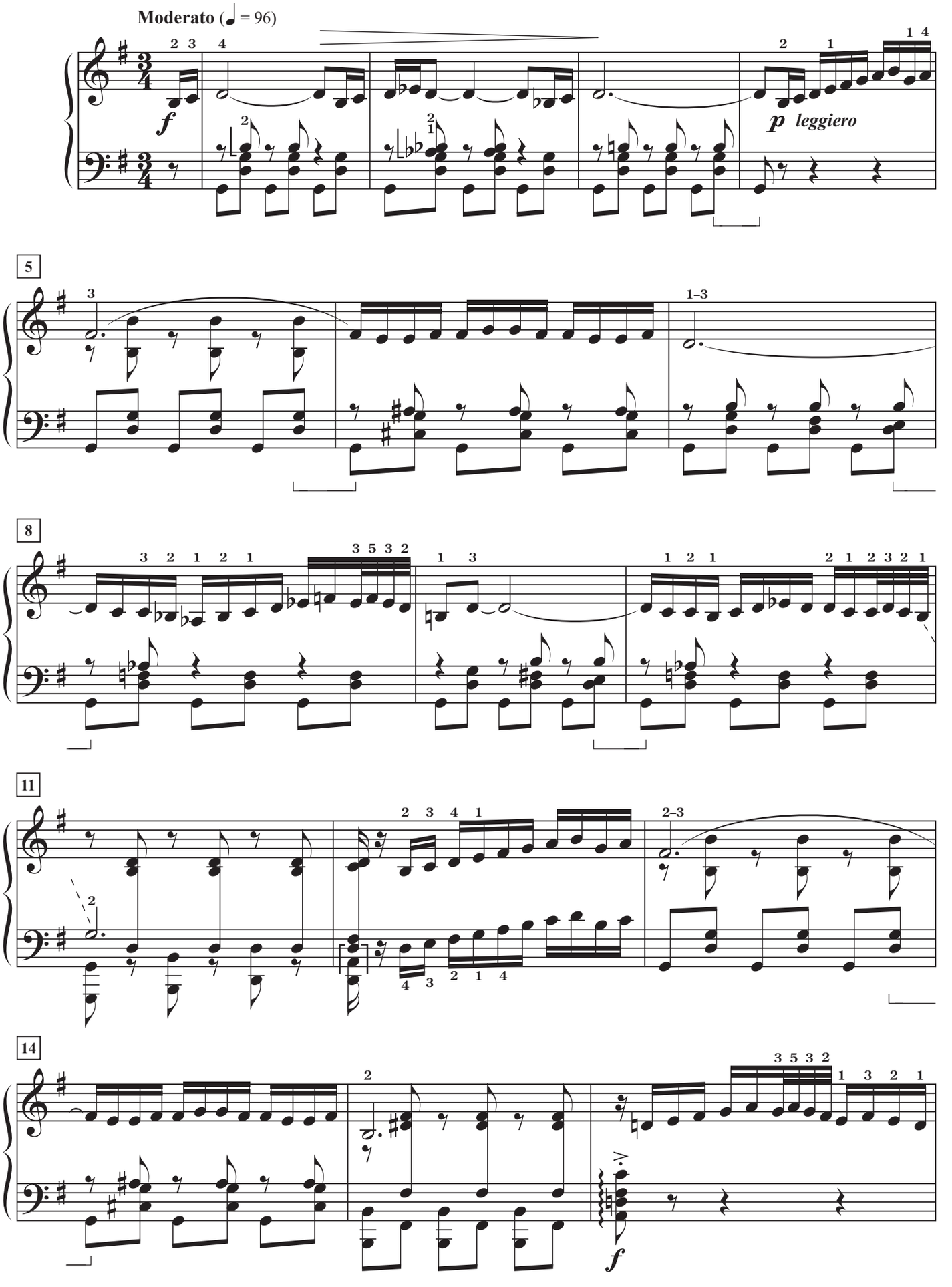
IV.

Moderato (♩ = 96)

f

p leggiero



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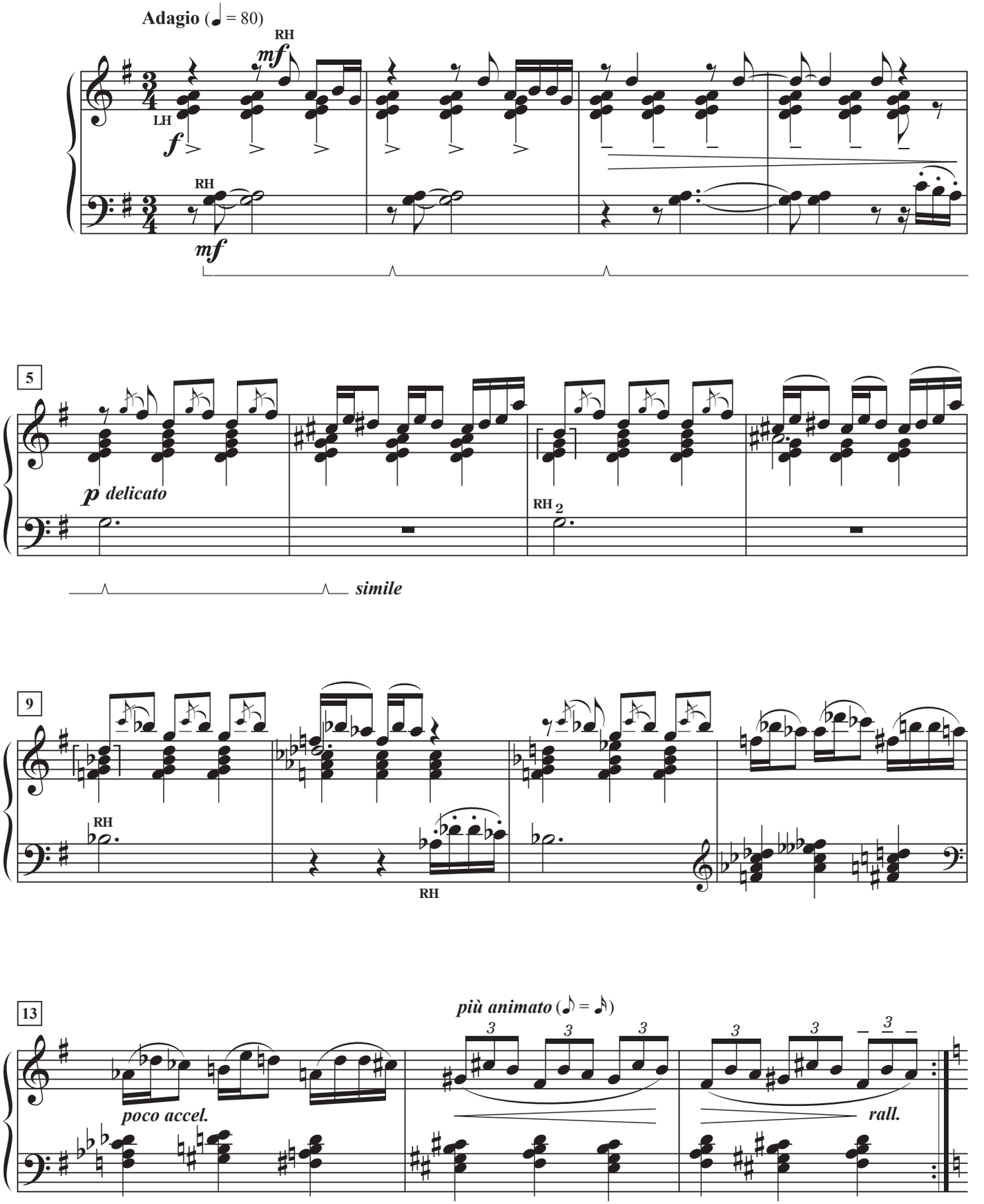
V.



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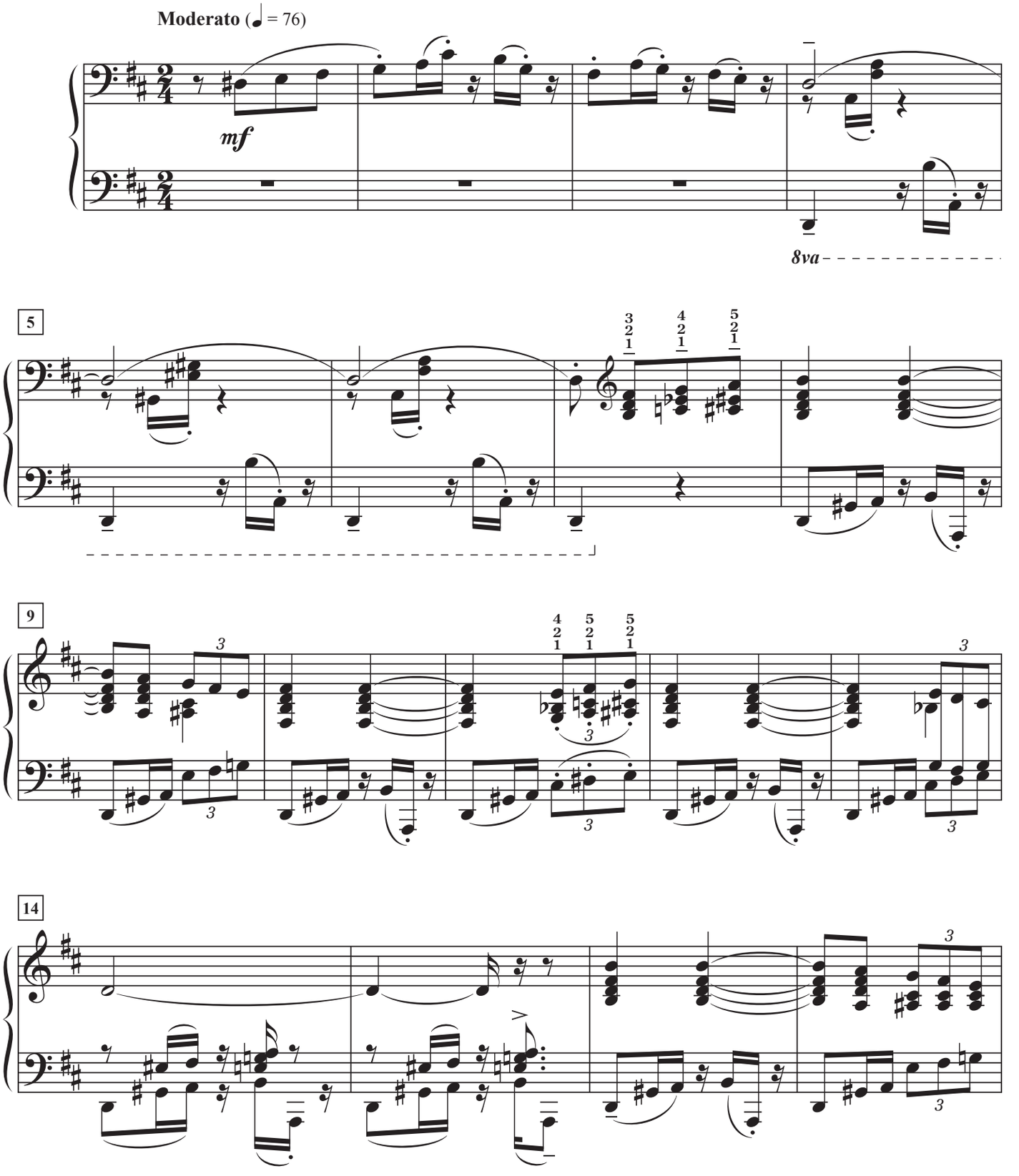
Tango Américaine

John Alden Carpenter