the case of the two *In A Mists*

By Dick Hyman

I recently prepared a transcription for the Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation of a piece I've been playing in two different forms since I was a teenager. The back story, as journalists say, is complex and goes like this:

Bix Beiderbecke's only solo piano recording, *In A Mist*, took place in New York on September 9, 1927. The piece, his own composition, also released under the title *Bixology*, seems to have been in the making for several years; his friends described him as frequently extemporizing similar material on whatever piano was available. He was 24, already an experienced performer on cornet with the Jean Goldkette Orchestra, and had gigged around the Midwest since dropping out of school.

Although he had become known as a startlingly inventive soloist, both on cornet and piano, Bix's reading skill had always lagged behind, and to notate the new piece for publication, Bix sought the services of Bill Challis, a close associate who had arranged many of the scores for the Goldkette Orchestra. As printed the following year, *In A Mist* bears a credit for Challis for "editing."

The differences between the recorded and published versions of *In A Mist* are both great and small: great in that the recording entirely omits a pretty, slower section marked *Tranquilly* and substitutes a more rhythmic passage. The small differences are those variations an improvising jazz player tends to make when repeating material, offering equivalent but not identical figures (compare bars 7 and 81).

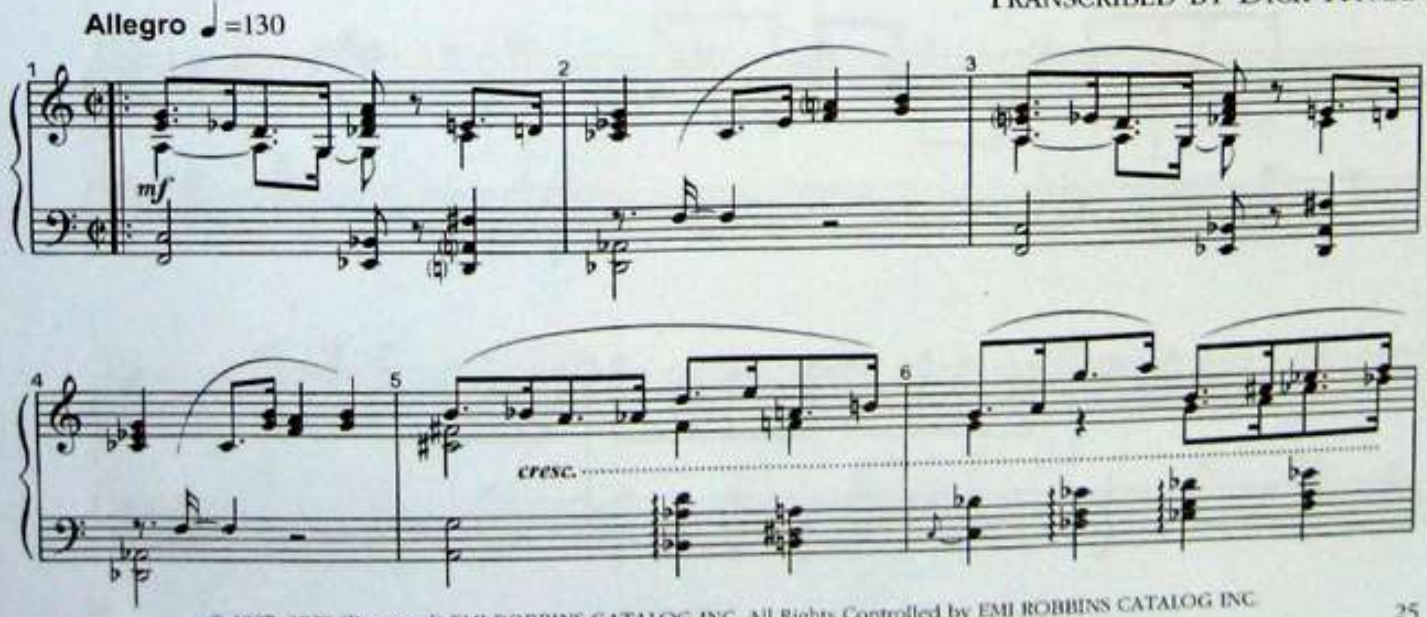
All of this proved to be important for a proposed dance series by the Twyla Tharpe Dancers back in 1979. Twyla had choreographed "The Bix Pieces," which included *In A Mist*, and had been performing it to a series of recordings. For the new season at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, an on-stage pianist and orchestra would perform the music live. I was called in to arrange and perform the whole sequence, and it was the first time I encountered the problem of the two *In A Mists*: the dancers were used to the recorded version, and it wouldn't do for the pianist to play the considerably different published version.

Since I was familiar with the piece at that time, I made an approximate version of the recording for my own use, a little more detailed than a lead sheet but not altogether exact, and we performed "The Bix Pieces" live a number of times. I don't believe the dance has been done with piano and orchestra since that time. Recently, however, the possibility of another live performance has come up, not necessarily by Twyla Tharpe's dancers nor with me as the pianist, so I was commissioned to get the recorded version on paper so that it might be accurately read by another player. This is the result of those efforts. ■

IN A MIST

As recorded by the composer in 1927

Bix Beiderbecke
Transcribed by Dick Hyman



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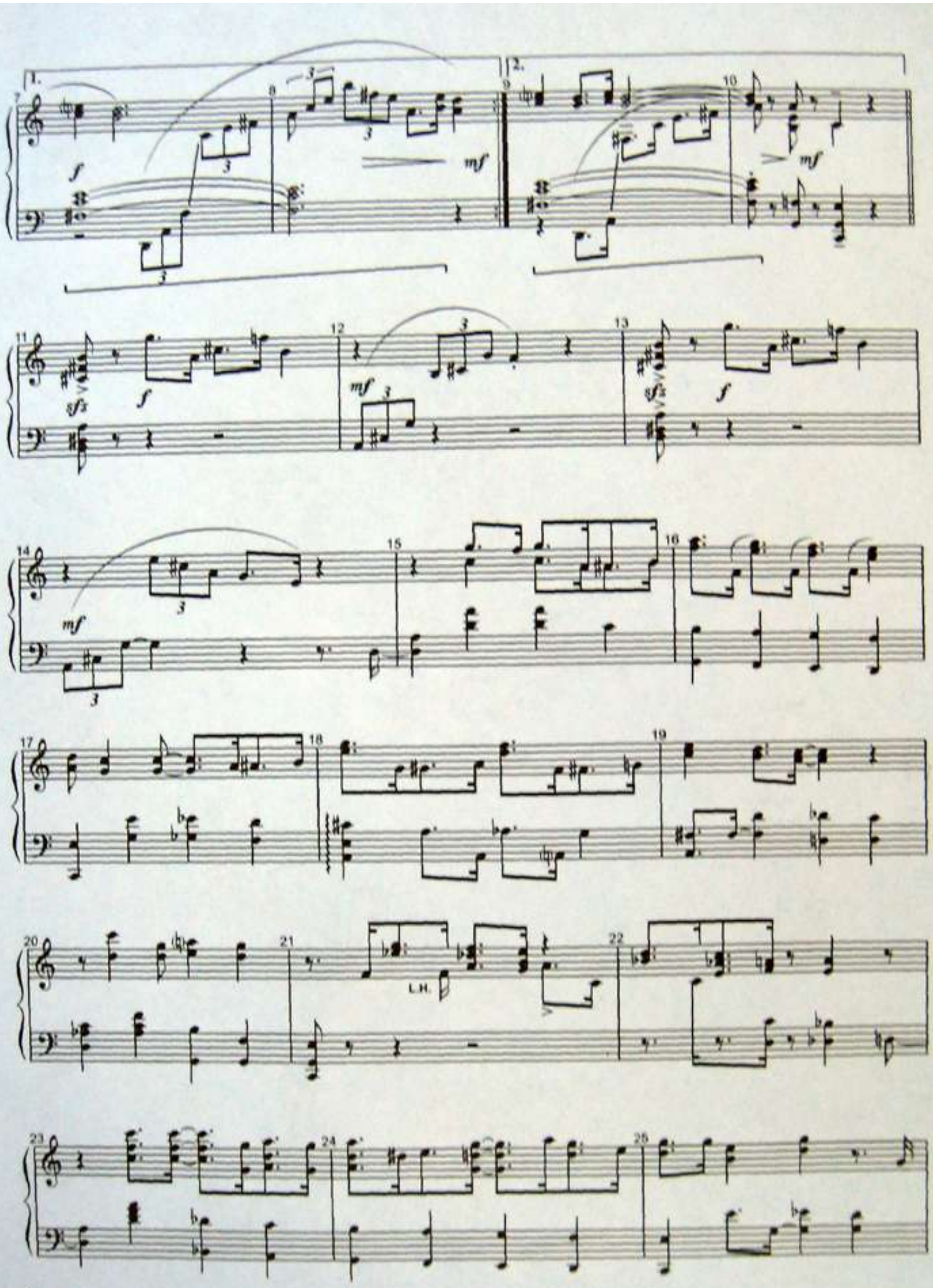
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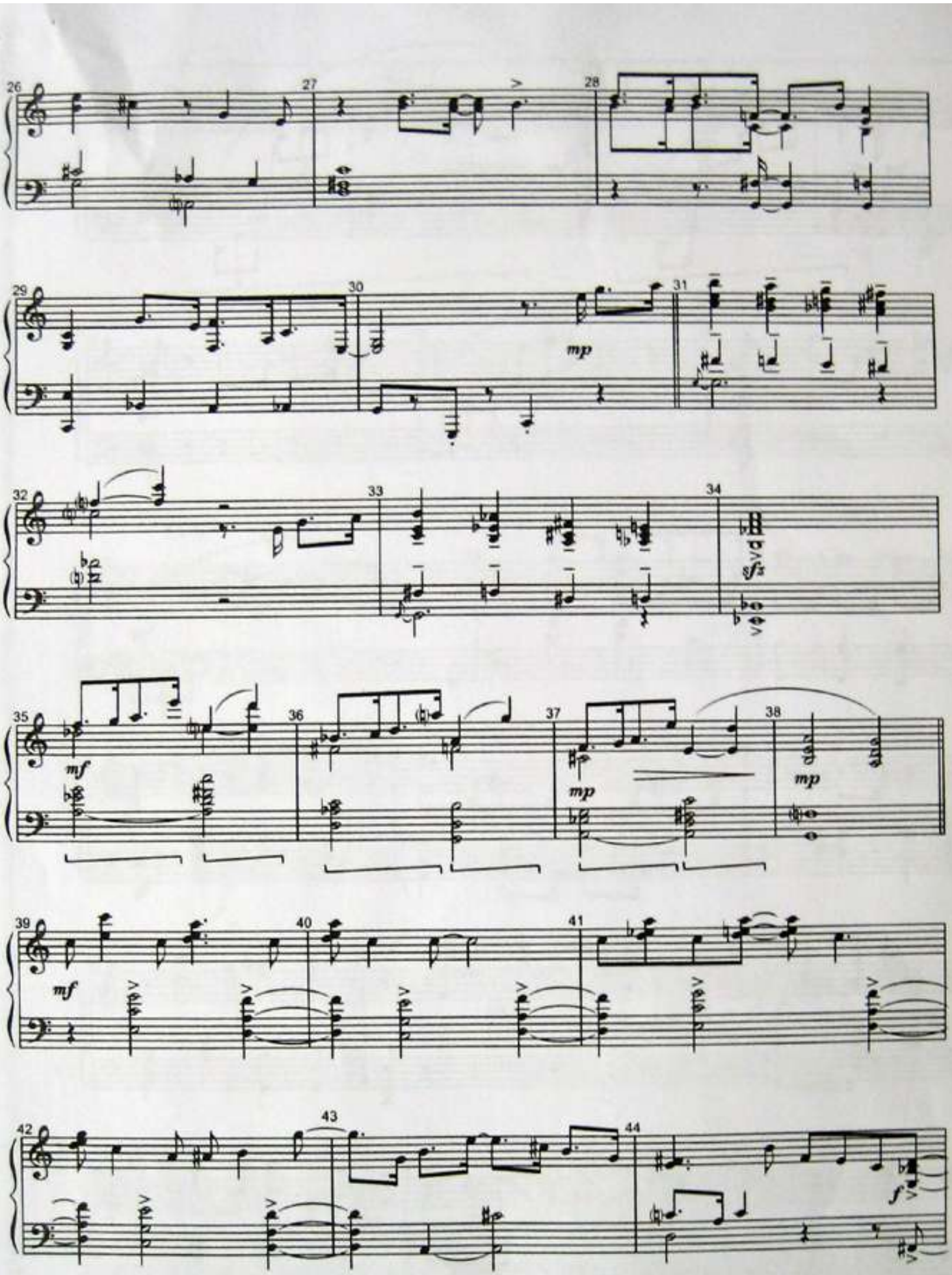
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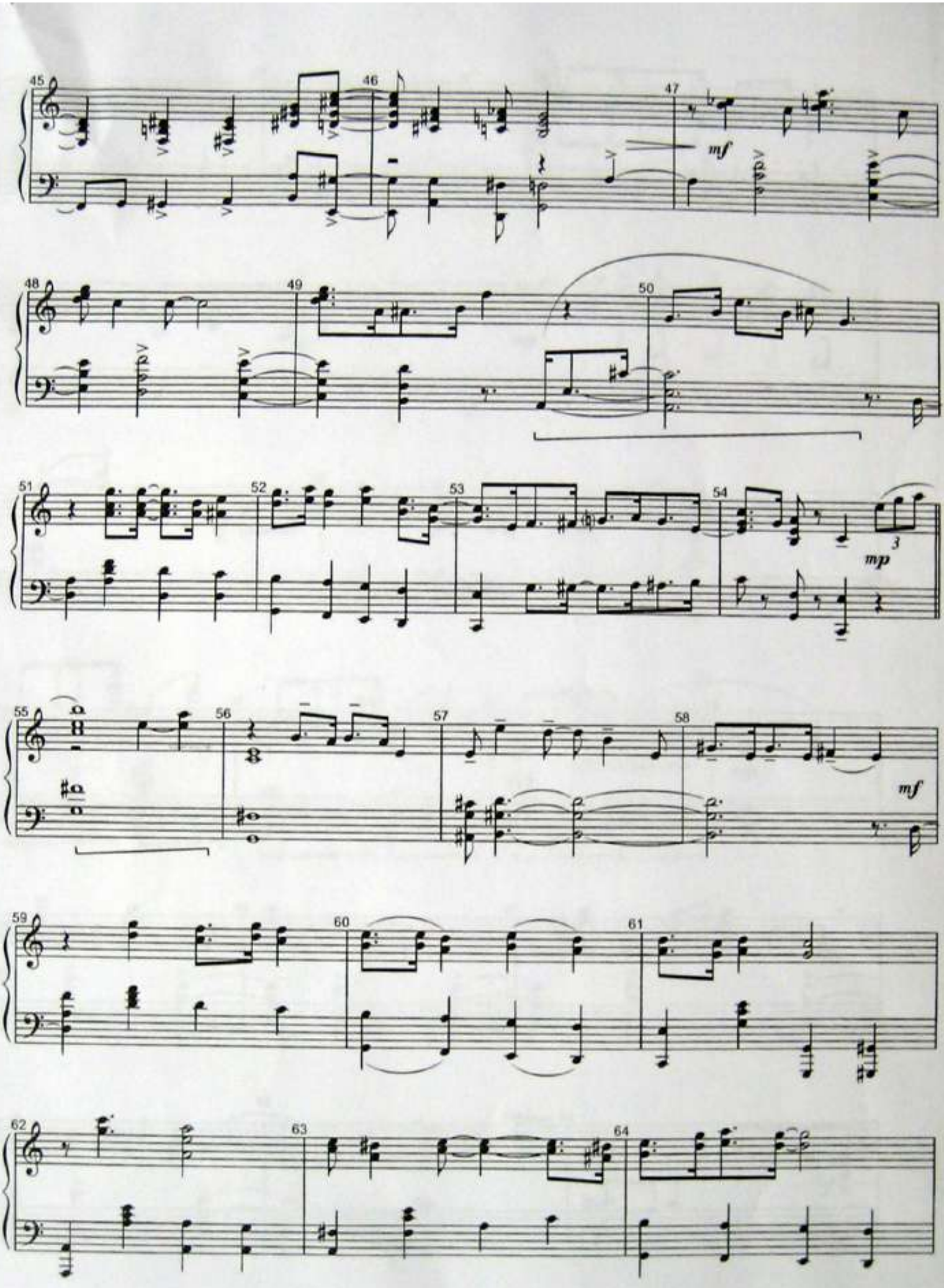
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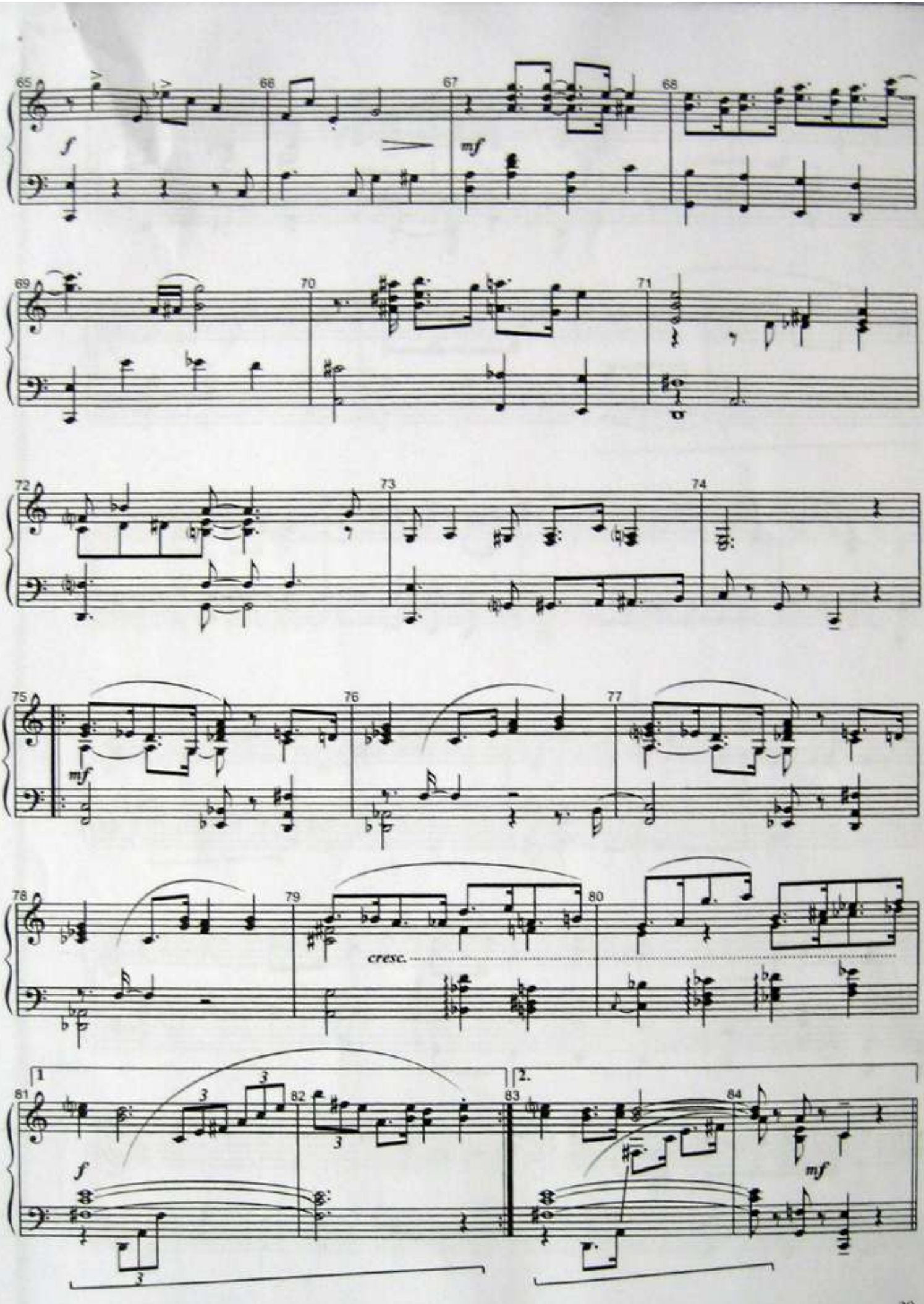
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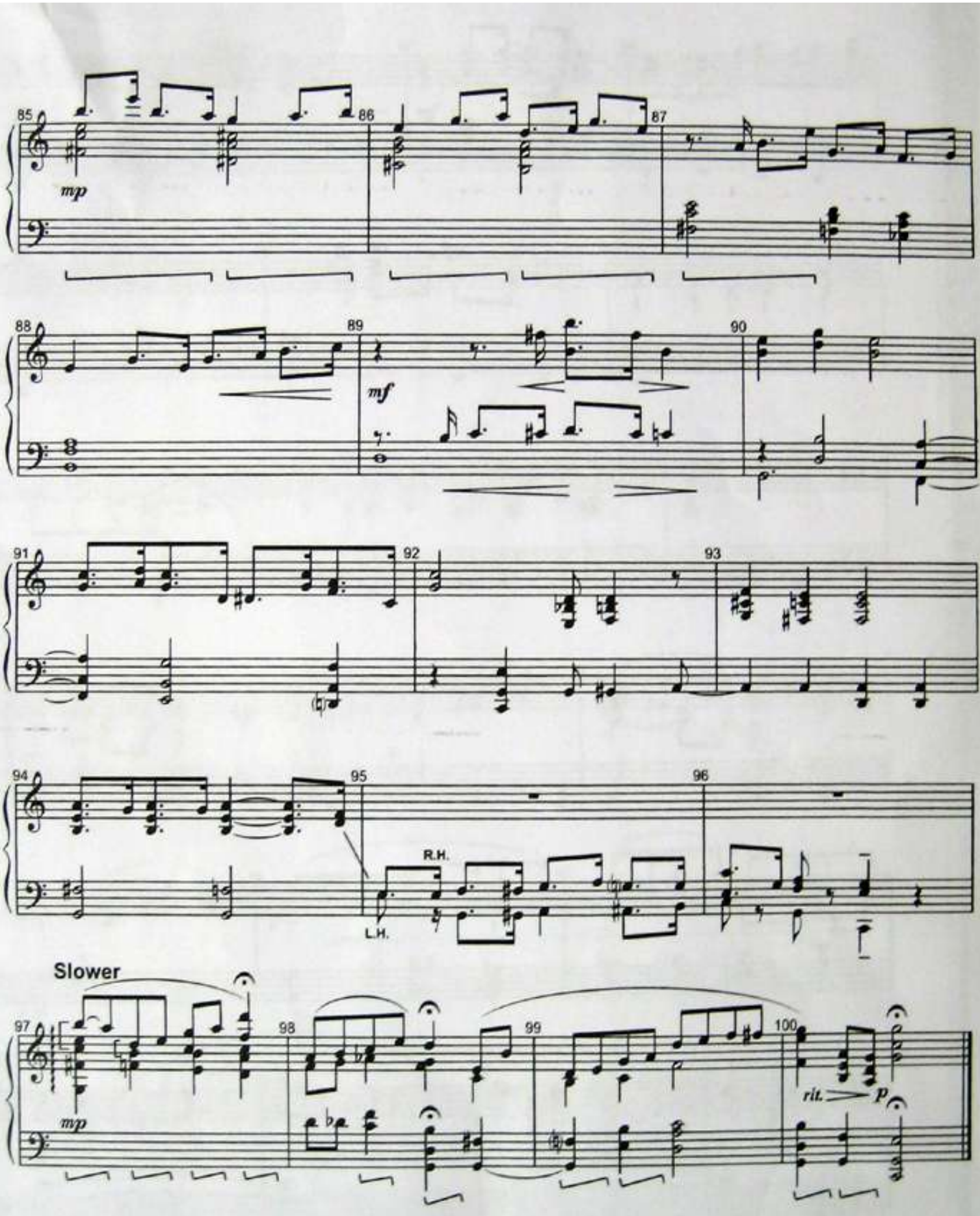
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