TRIO

· · · SWEETGRASS · · ·

for the new arts trio

1982

C. CURTIS-SMITH

C. Curtis-Smith (Curtis O.B. Curtis-Smith), b. 1941 in Walla Walla, Washington, studied at Whitman College with David Burge; Northwestern University; the University of Illinois with Ken Gaburo; and at Tanglewood with Bruno Maderna. He has taught composition at the University of Michigan and is currently Professor of Music at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo.

In 1994, Leon Fleisher performed his Concerto for Left Hand and Orchestra both on the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's subscription series, with Neemi Jarvi conducting, and again in Tokyo on the New Japan Philharmonic's subscription series, Chosei Komatsu conducting. Dennis Russell Davies will conduct the work in 1995 with the American Composers Orchestra in Carnegie Hall, Leon Fleisher, piano.

Dennis Russell Davies has performed his Great American Symphony (GAS!) on the "Great Performers Series" with the American Composers Orchestra, and also with the Stuttgart Opera Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

He has received some 75 grants, awards, and commissions, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, the Koussevitzky Prize at Tanglewood, the Medaglia d'Oro from the Concorso Internazionale di Musica e Danza, the Prix du Salabert, and various awards from ASCAP, the NEA, the Arts Foundation of Michigan, as well as the Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award from Western Michigan University.

As a pianist, C. Curtis-Smith has presented recitals at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., and Carnegie Recital Hall. Orchestra appearances include performances with the Indianapolis Symphony, the Spokane Symphony, and the Kalamazoo Symphony.

His music is published by Edward B. Marks Music Company, Editions Salabert, and Theodore Presser.

SWEETGRASS TRIO (1982)

I. Andante con moto
II. Allegretto Scherzando
III. Pesante

The Sweetgrass Trio alludes to various vernacular American idioms--from fiddle hoedowns to "laid-back" blues to rock. My intention was not the creation of a collage or pastiche on popular styles, but rather an organically expanding form, invigorated and renewed by contact with the vernacular--even the vulgar.

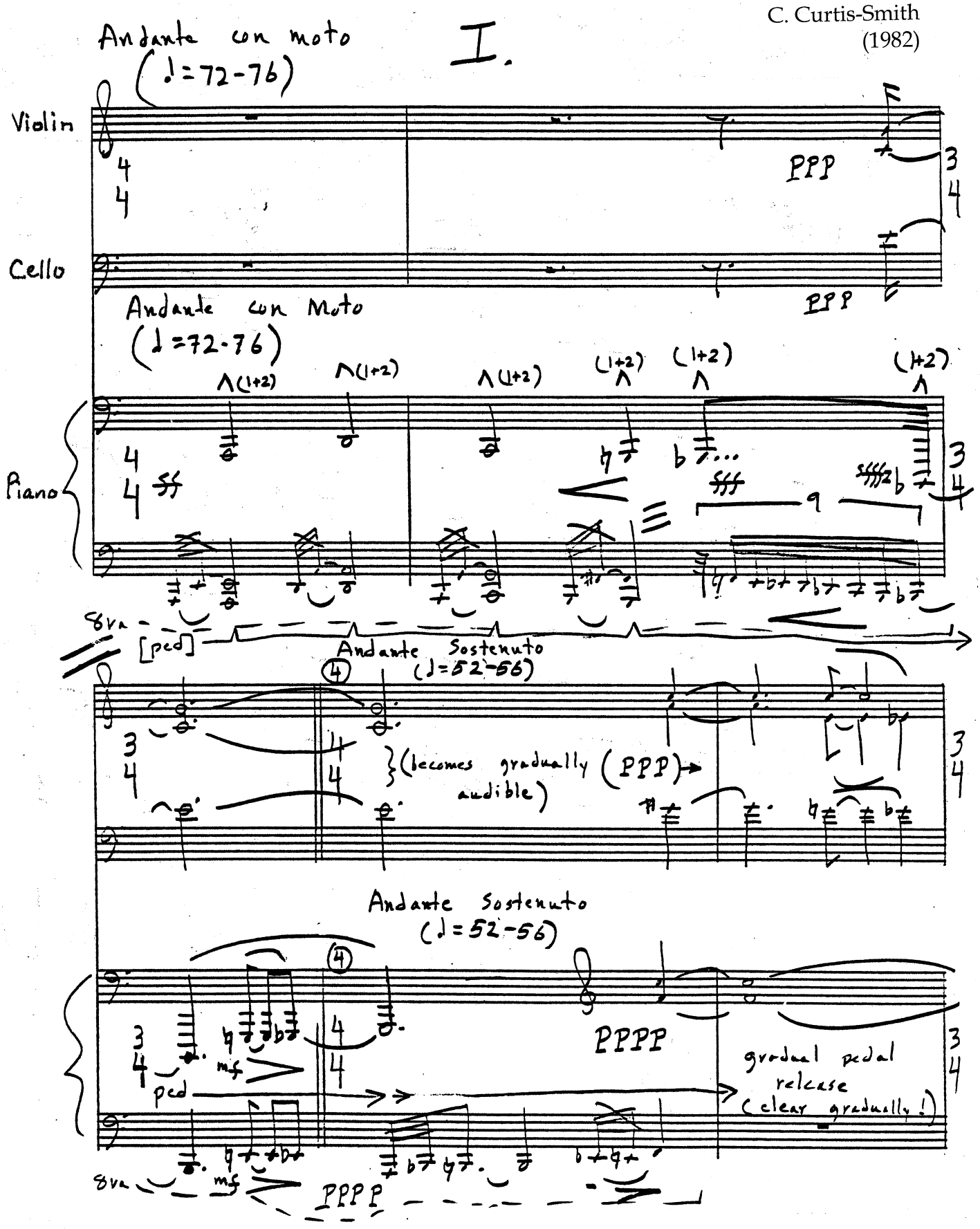
In the second movement, where scherzo = joke, the cello plays a "spoiler" role, akin to Charles Ives' "Rollo". Here, at every opportunity, the cello indulges in an insipid, leisurely turn, always centered around A 440, trying in vain to get the other players to join him on this note. Eventually the others do momentarily humor him in a light A major ragtime-y repast, only to return with a vengeance to an out-of-kilter chicken-dance, complete with mock funeral march (cf. "The Chicken Speaks" in the coda of the March movement, The Great American Symphony.)

As in other works from this period, such as The Great American Symphony (GAS!), I have combined rock-like bass lines and harmonies with the Baroque passacaglia and chaconne. The bass at the beginning of the last movement is a derivation, not a quotation, from a well-known Beatles song. This passacaglia figure gradually moves into the soprano register, there to become the melodic basis for the hoedown and blues variations, which are transformations of earlier thematic material.

The Sweetgrass Trio was commissioned by, and is dedicated to the New Arts Trio, who premiered the work at the Eastman School of Music in 1983.

SWEETGRASS TRIO

C. Curtis-Smith
(1982)



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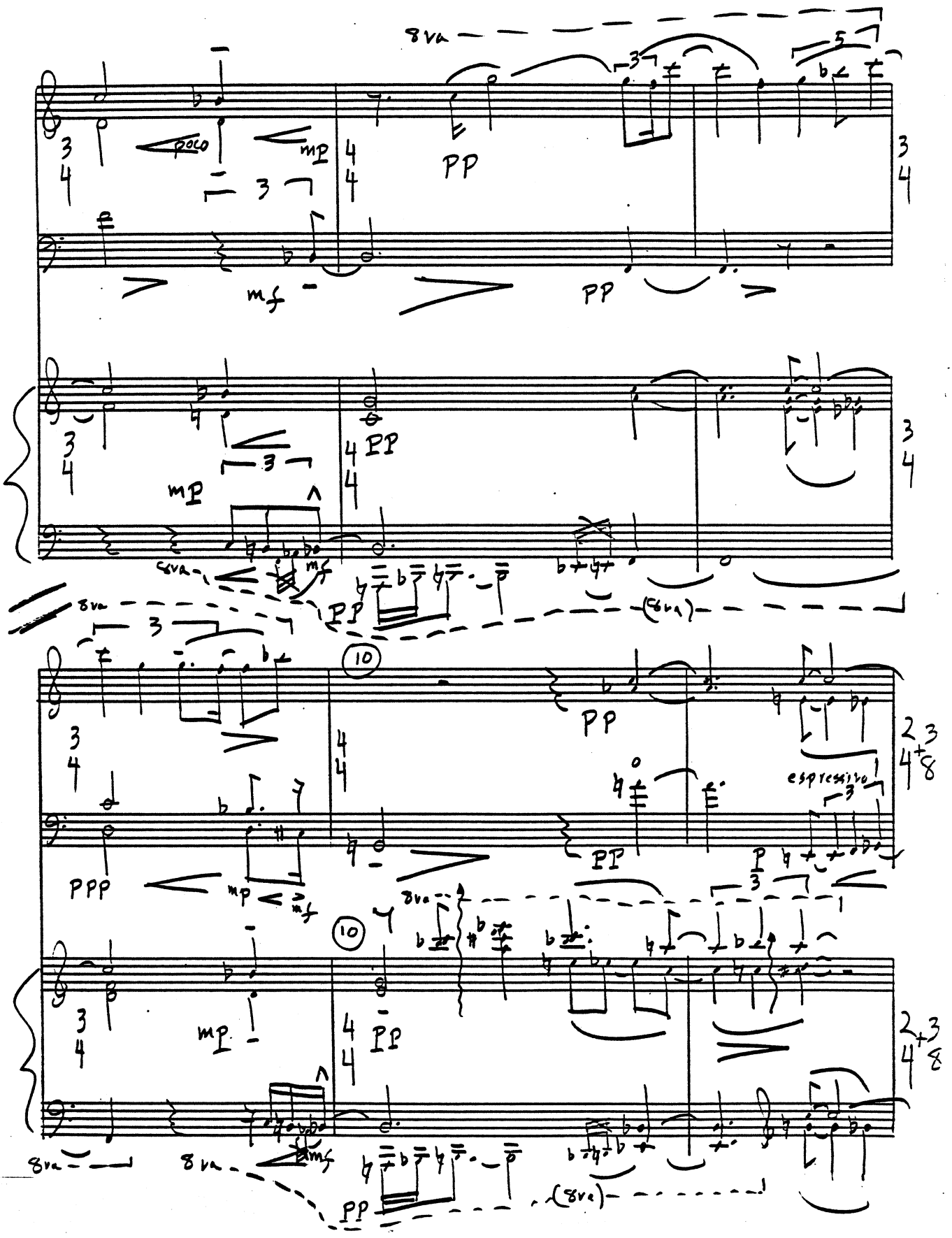
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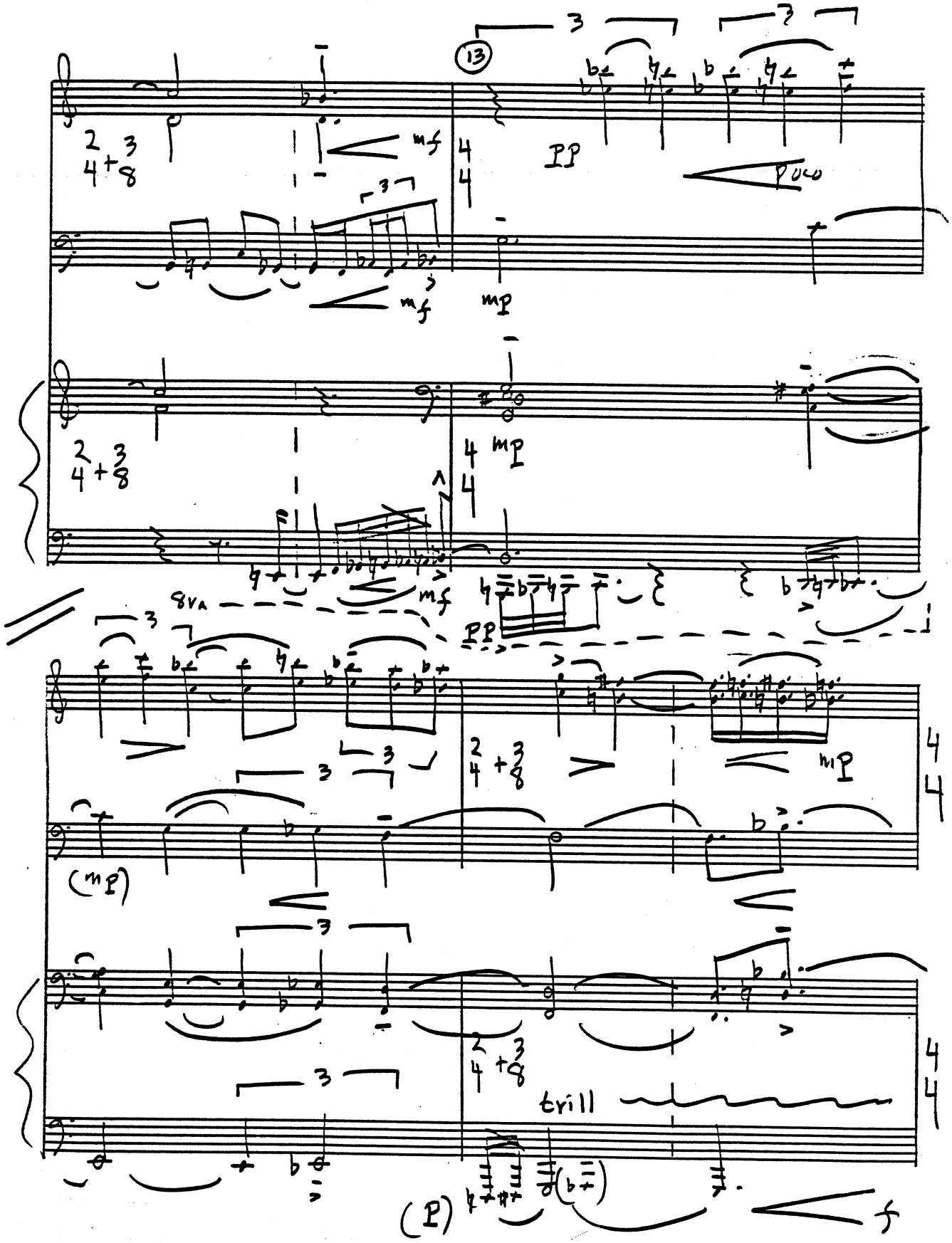
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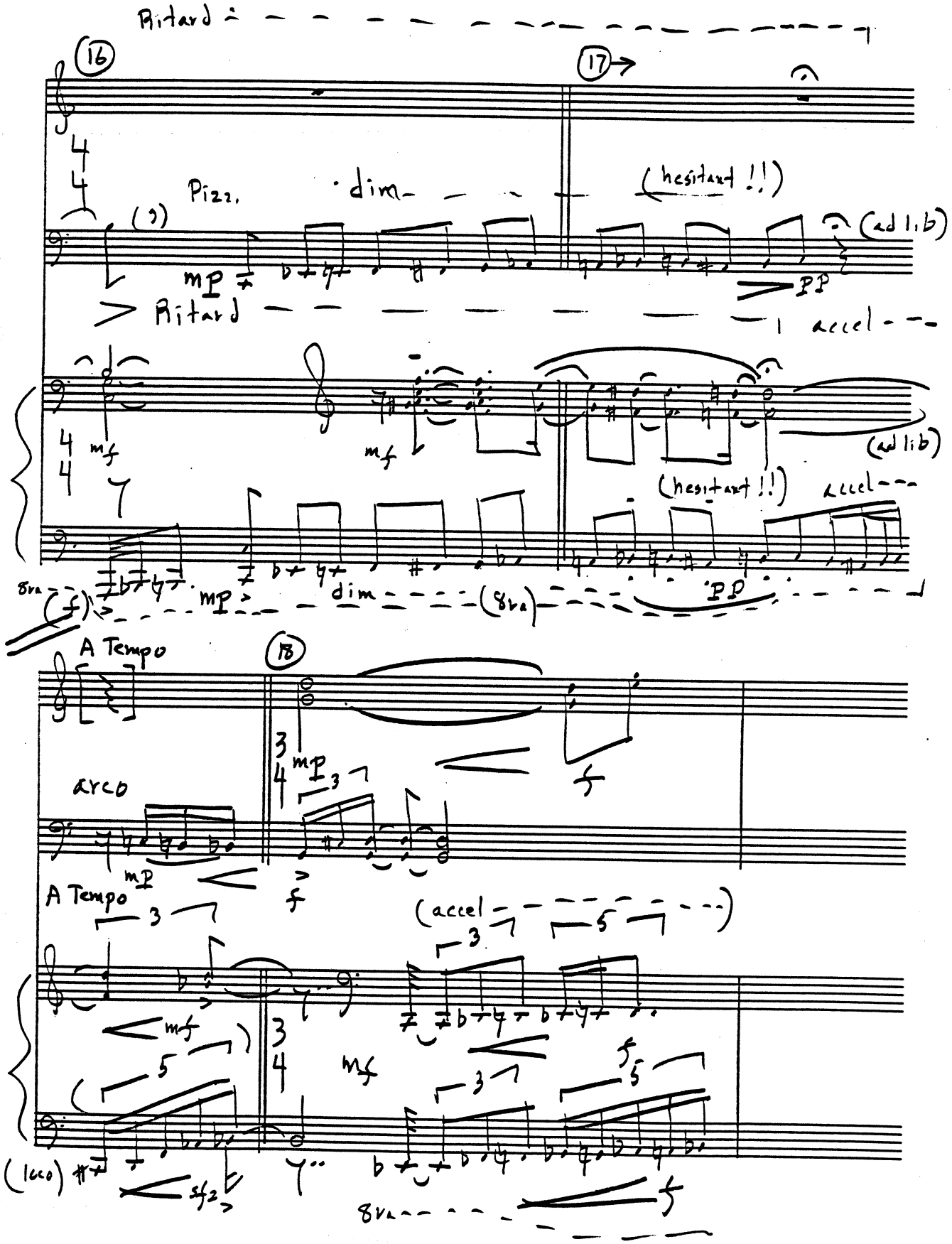
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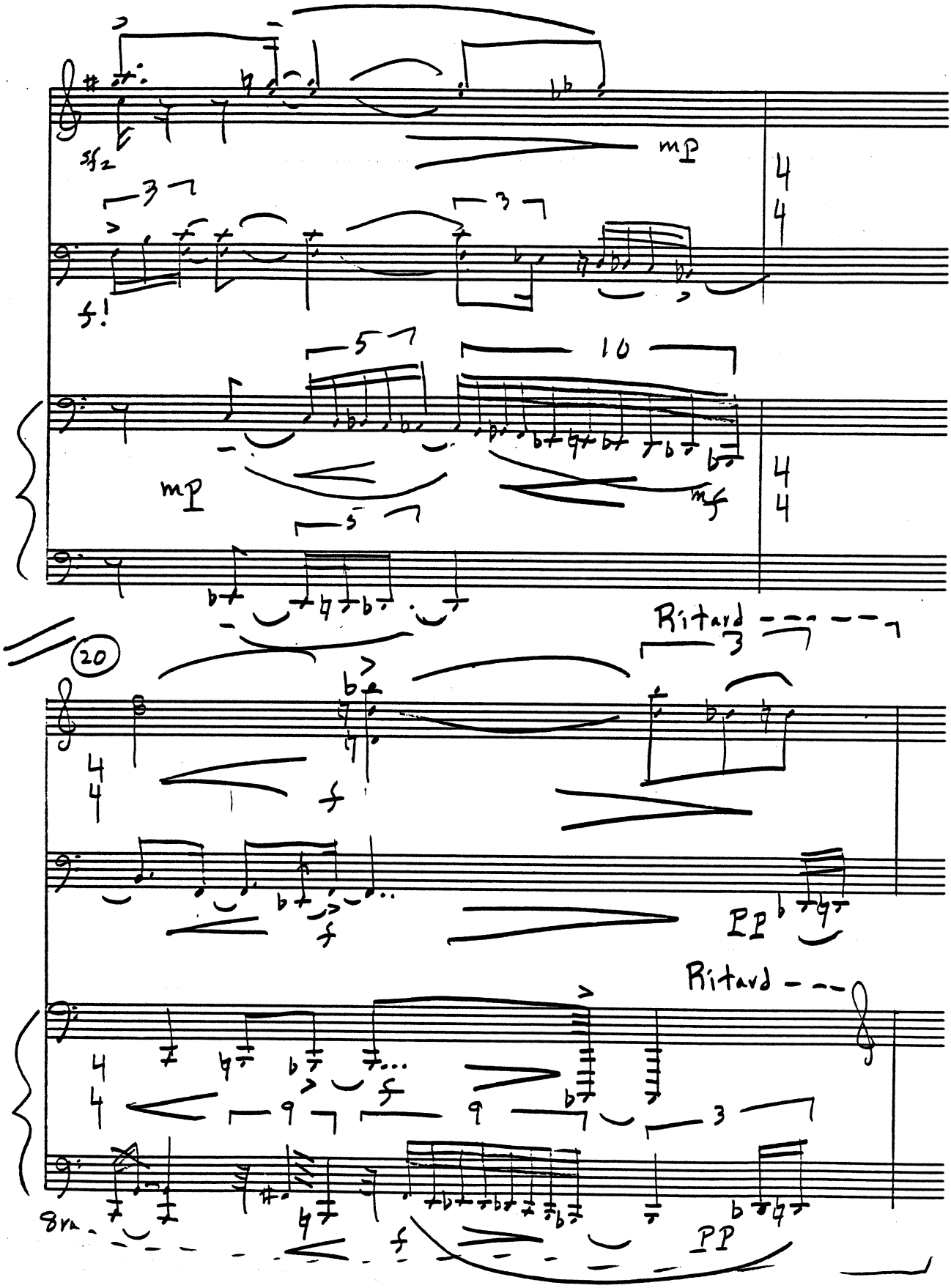
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