Clarinet in Bb

Three Fugues and a Dirge for Richard III

for woodwind quintet

Christopher Coleman

I. Fugue a4:
"Now is the winter of our discontent"

II. Permutation Fugue a5:
"Within the guilty closure of thy walls"

III. Prelude: Distant Fanfares;
Double Fugue:
"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!";
Dirge for Richard III

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duration ca. 20 minutes (4 + 8 + 8)

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Three Fugues and a Dirge for Richard III began as a mere amusement. While waiting for my Baroque counterpoint students to correct their work, I had the curious idea to attempt a fugal subject in the style of J. S. Bach both requiring a tonal answer and working in stretto but in 7/8 meter. The challenge was surprisingly simple. I quite liked the subject and wanted to continue it, but it needed a context. My son suggested that because of the limping rhythm I call it "Fugue for Richard III"; and suddenly the shape of the entire piece came to me.

Known to the world through William Shakespeare's play, Richard III is reviled as one of history's great villains; a man who deliberately kills relatives and friends for mere amusement, whose vile and bloodthirsty reign caused his people to rise against him, and who was so deliberately evil that even his physique was twisted by his amorality. But as another English leader, Winston Churchill, noted, "History is written by the victors." Shakespeare's portrait, however dramatic, has been proven false; it should be remembered that Shakespeare's monarch was a Tudor, and it was the first Tudor king who vanquished Richard III. More recent research shows that Richard was innocent of most of the murders claimed to him, and those that he did have killed were guilty of treason. He was no coward, and his final defeat was certainly caused by his betrayal at the hands of two of his closest allies.

Three Fugues and a Dirge for Richard III celebrates this dichotomy between the historical and fictional Richards. Each of the three fugues is titled with a quotation from Shakespeare's play, and over the course of the three movements the music becomes increasingly dissonant and twisted in its melodic shape, mirroring the descent of the fictional Richard's soul. But following the final climax the music becomes a lament for the man himself. Perhaps the real tragedy of Richard III is that a man who tried to be a good and decent king has been cast as one of the most amoral men of all time.

Christopher Coleman (b. 1958, Atlanta, GA) composer, conductor, trombonist, is currently Composition Coordinator of the Hong Kong Baptist University Department of Music. He has also taught at the University of Chicago, DePaul University, Columbia College, and in the Interlochen Center for the Arts summer program. He earned his Ph. D. from the University of Chicago where he studied composition with Ralph Shapey and Shulamit Ran. While at the University of Pennsylvania, where he earned the M.A. in composition, he studied with George Crumb, George Rochberg, and Richard Wernick.

While most of Coleman's works are scored for traditional forces, recent efforts at Hong Kong Baptist University have resulted in two large scale multimedia/improvisation pieces: September Variations and Prophecies for a New Millennium. He has received commissions from the Hong Kong Wind Philharmonia, the Hong Kong Bach Choir and Orchestra, the Hong Kong Composers' Guild, the DuPage Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago-area chapter of the American String Teachers' Association, and the University of Georgia Trombone Choir, among others. He has been awarded first place in the Percussive Arts Society Percussion Ensemble Composition Contest and the ASUC/SESAC Composition Contest. His music is published by Maecenas Music, Theodore Presser, Ensemble Publications, C. Alan Publications and Crown Music Press. As a trans-media artist interested in the creative process, Coleman has worked in sculpture and computer graphics, and performs stand-up comedy. He is a founding member of People's Liberation Improv, Hong Kong's first and only regularly performing comedy improv troupe.

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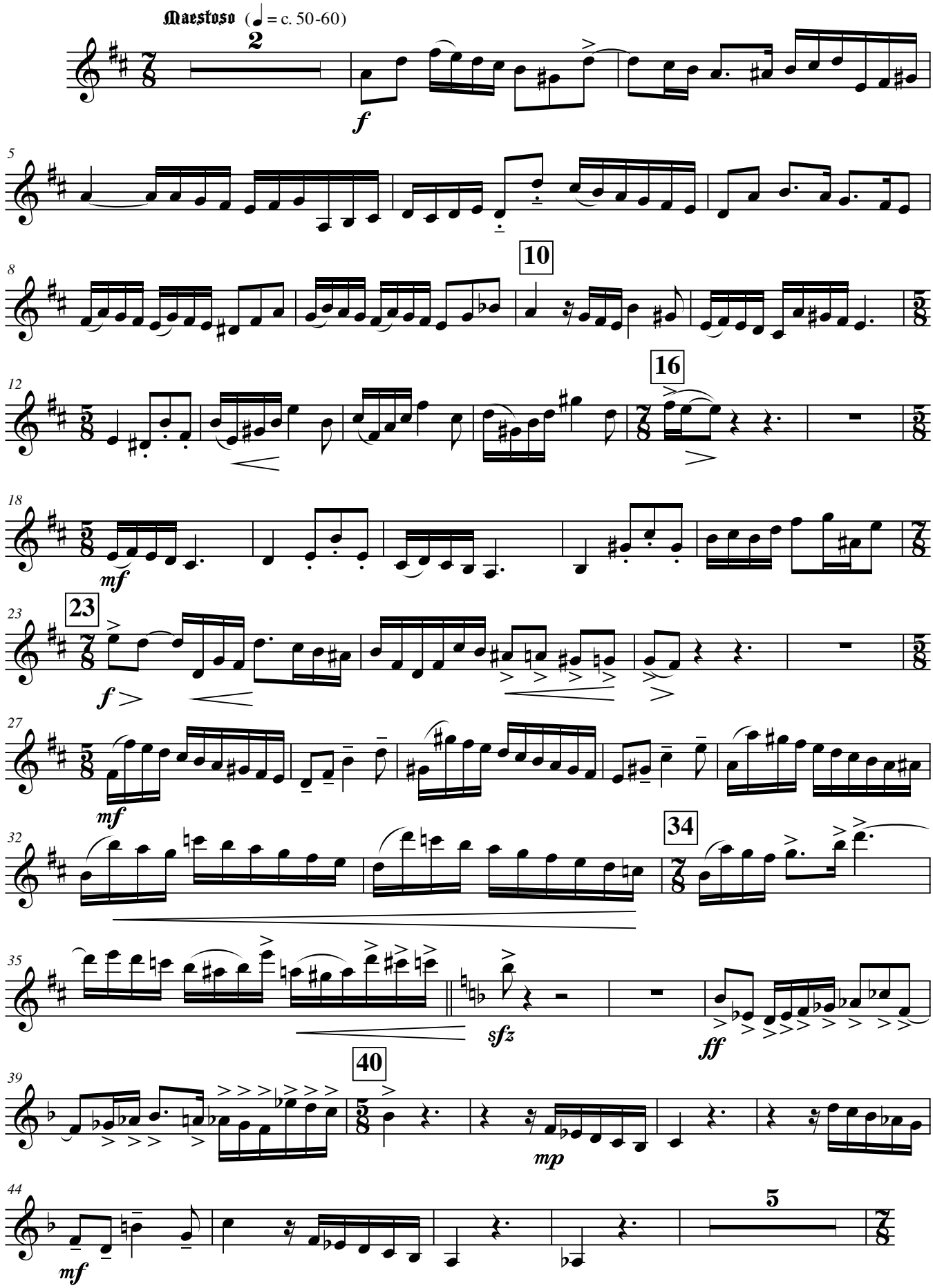
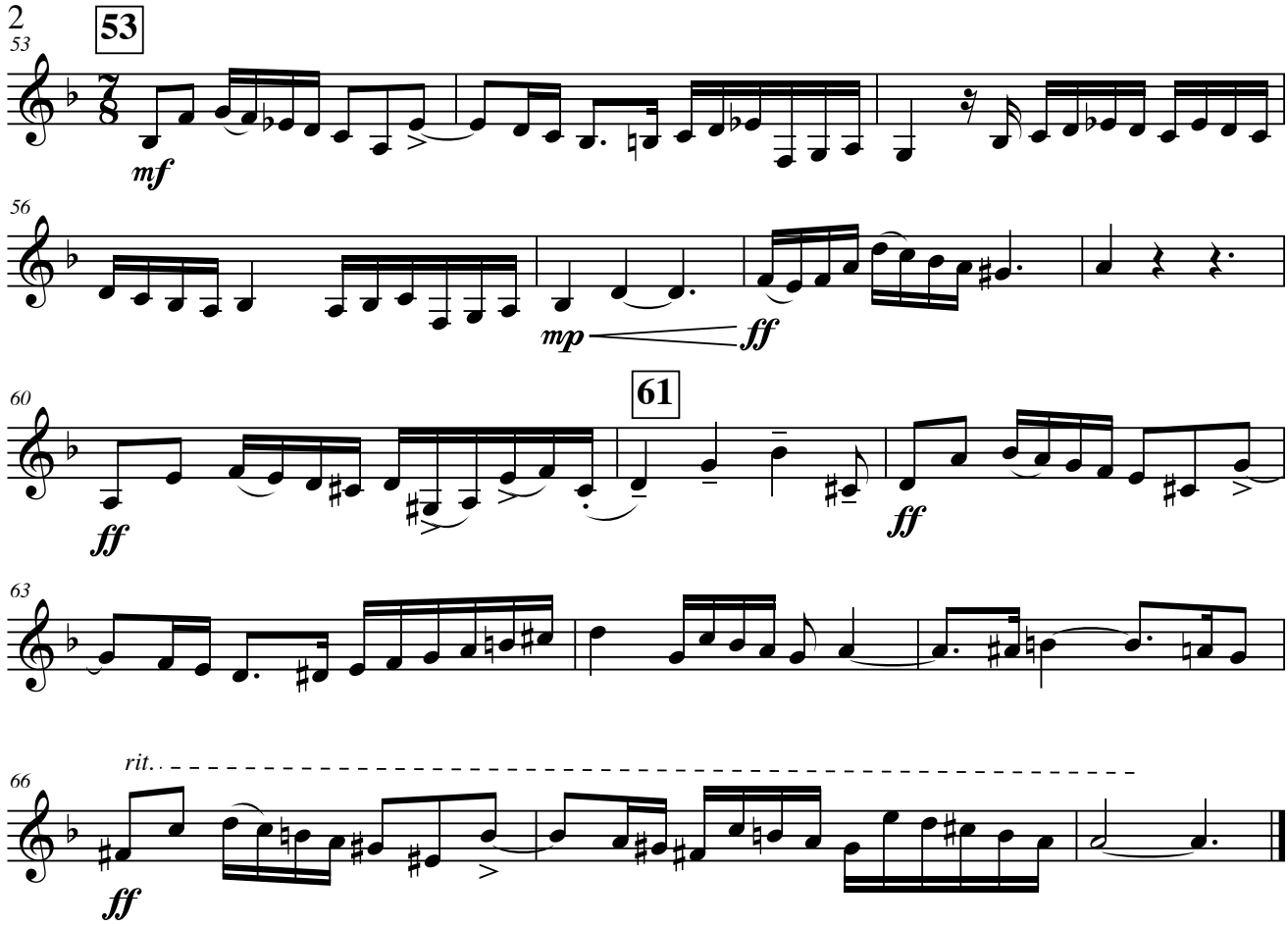
Clarinet in B♭

Three Fugues for Richard III

Christopher Coleman

I. Fugue a4: *"Now is the winter of our discontent"*

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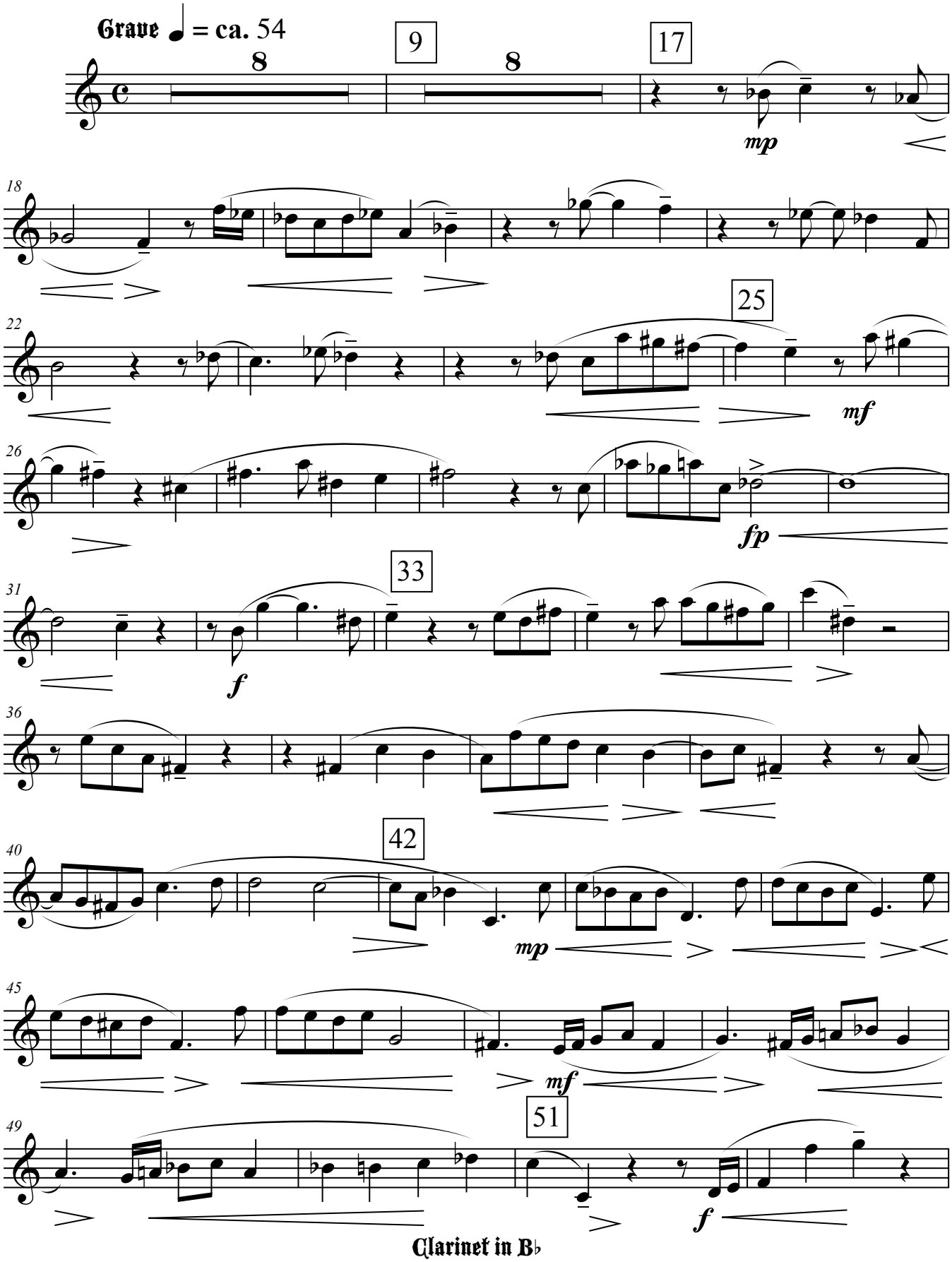
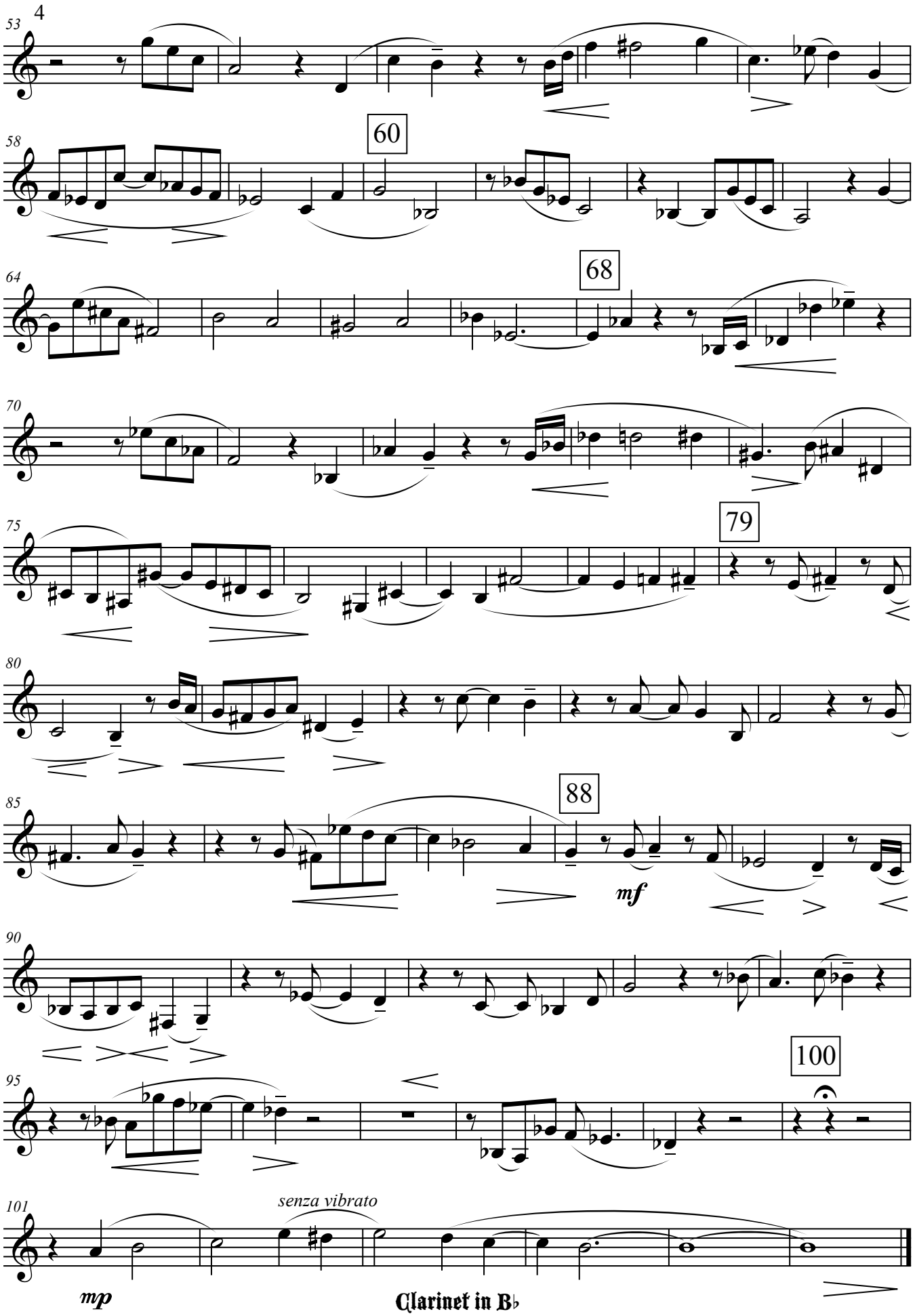
II. Permutation Fugue a5:

"Within the guilty closure of thy walls"

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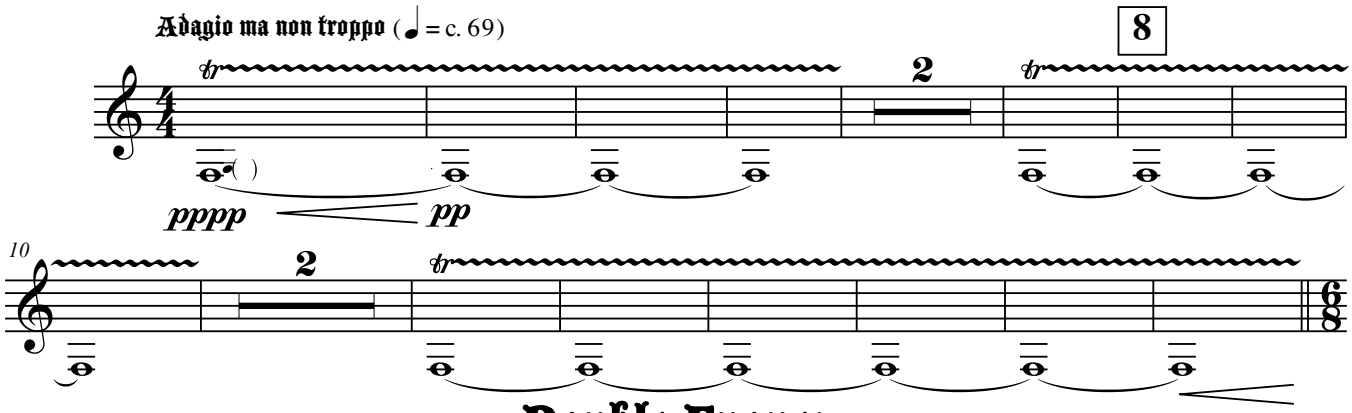
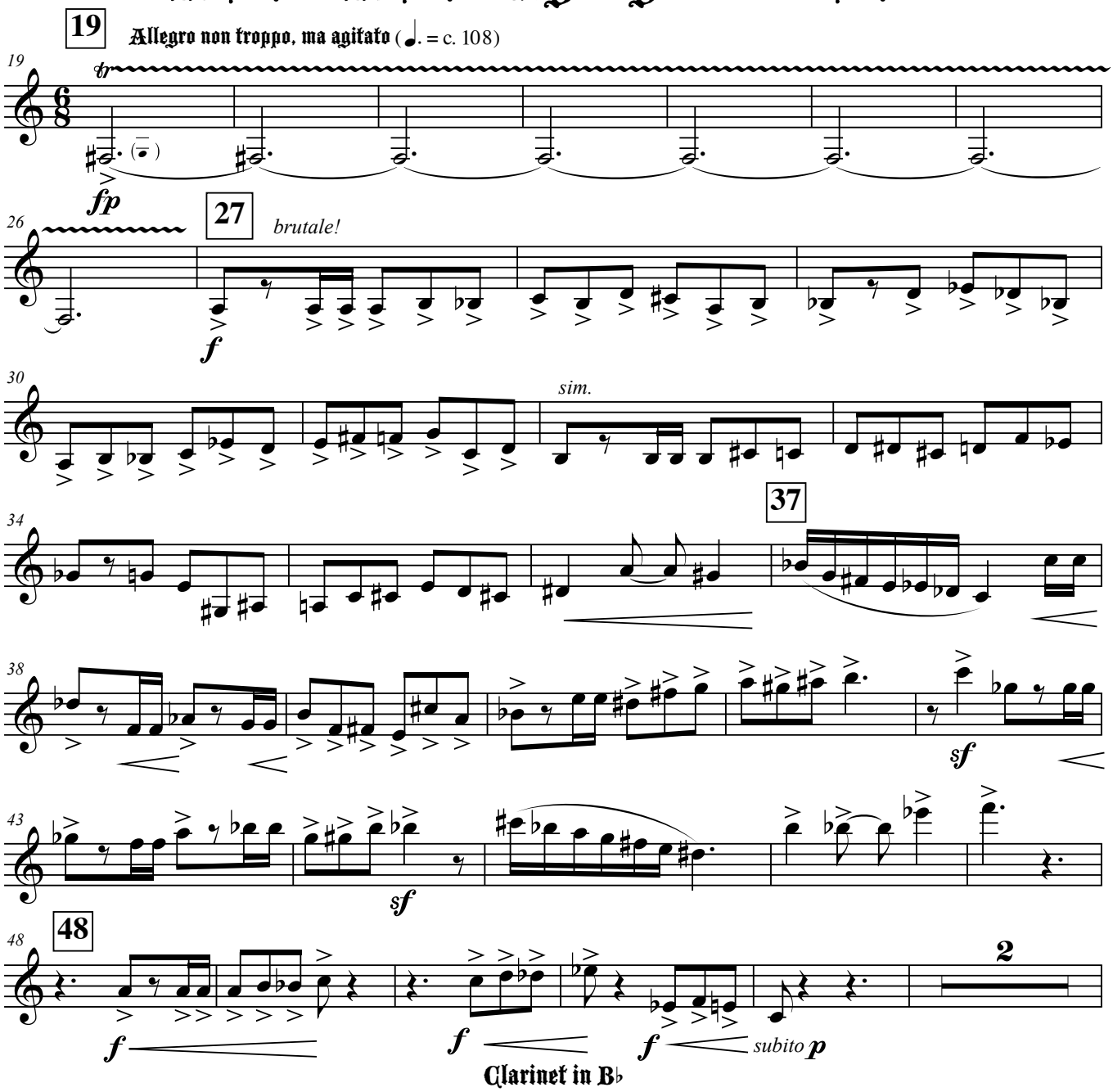
Clarinet in B♭

III. Prelude: Distant Fanfares



Double Fugue:

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"



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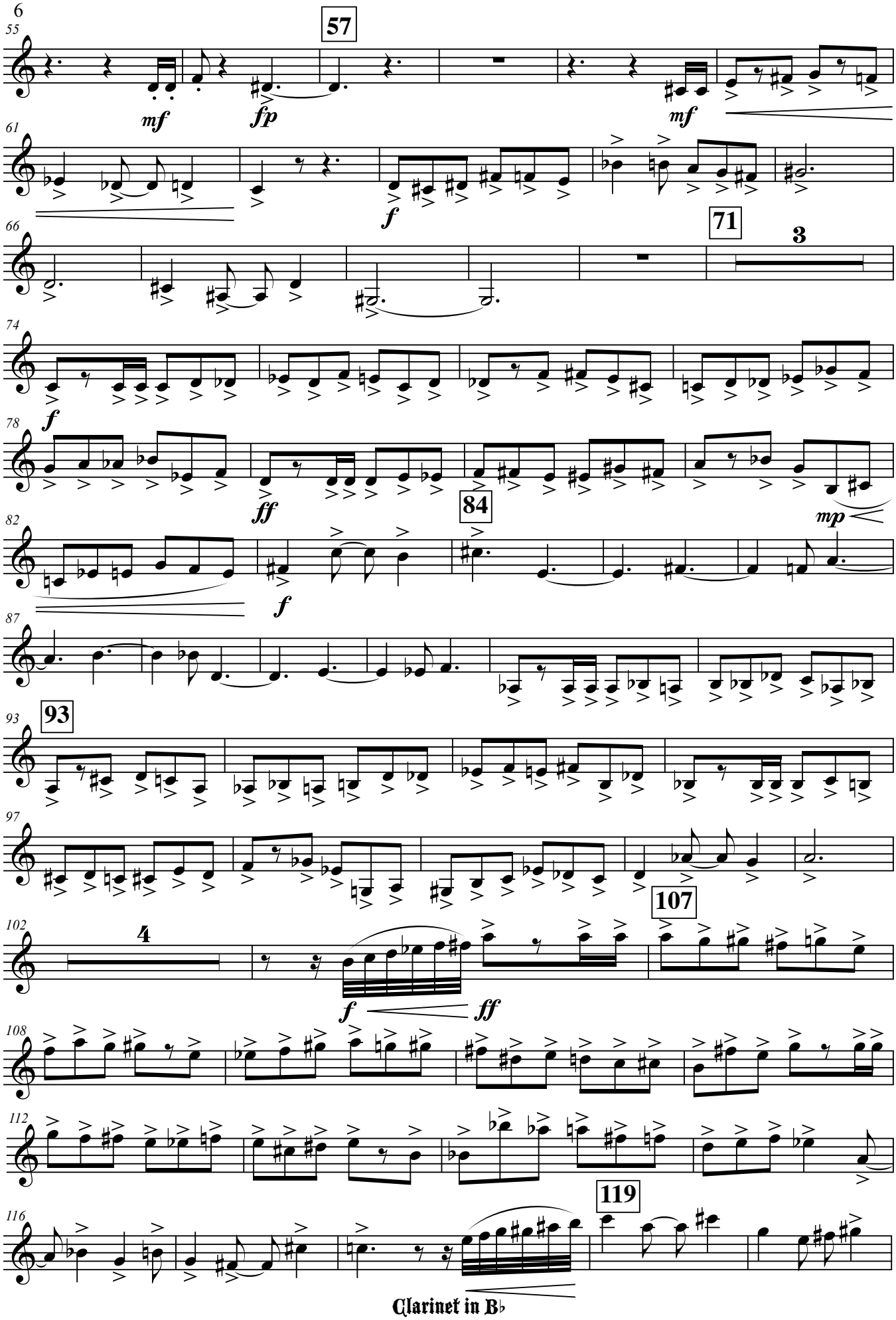
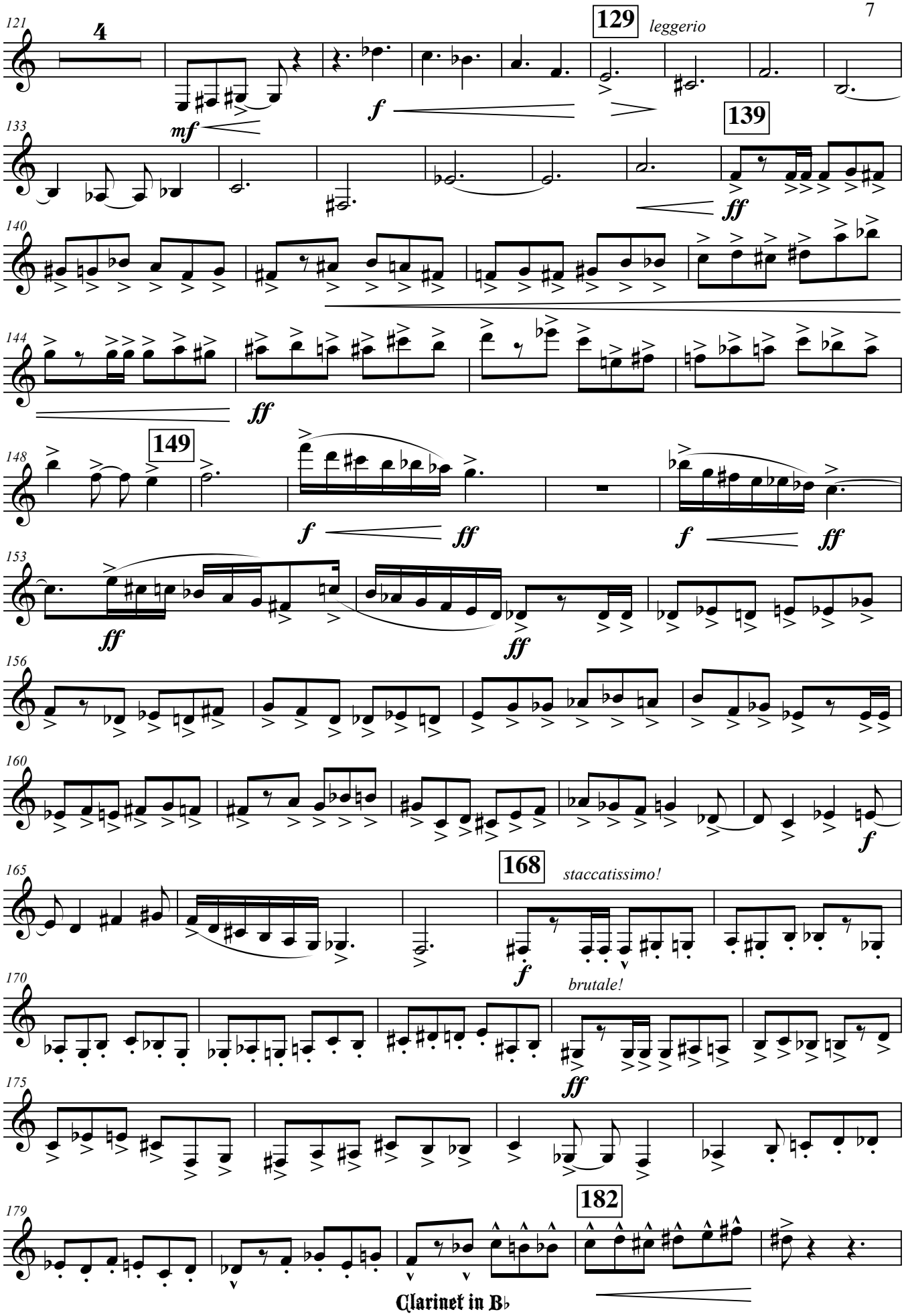
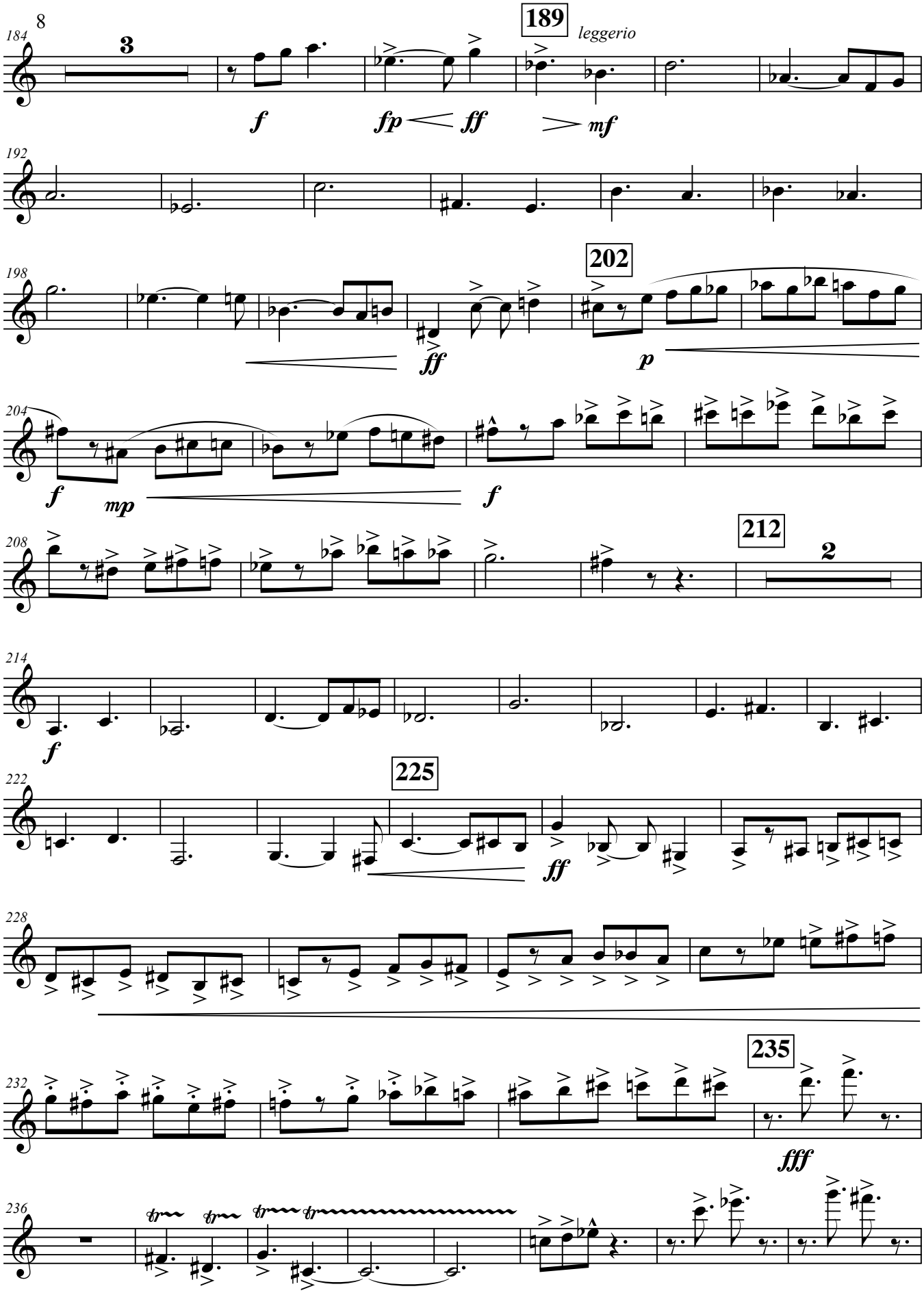


Clarinet in B♭



Clarinet in B♭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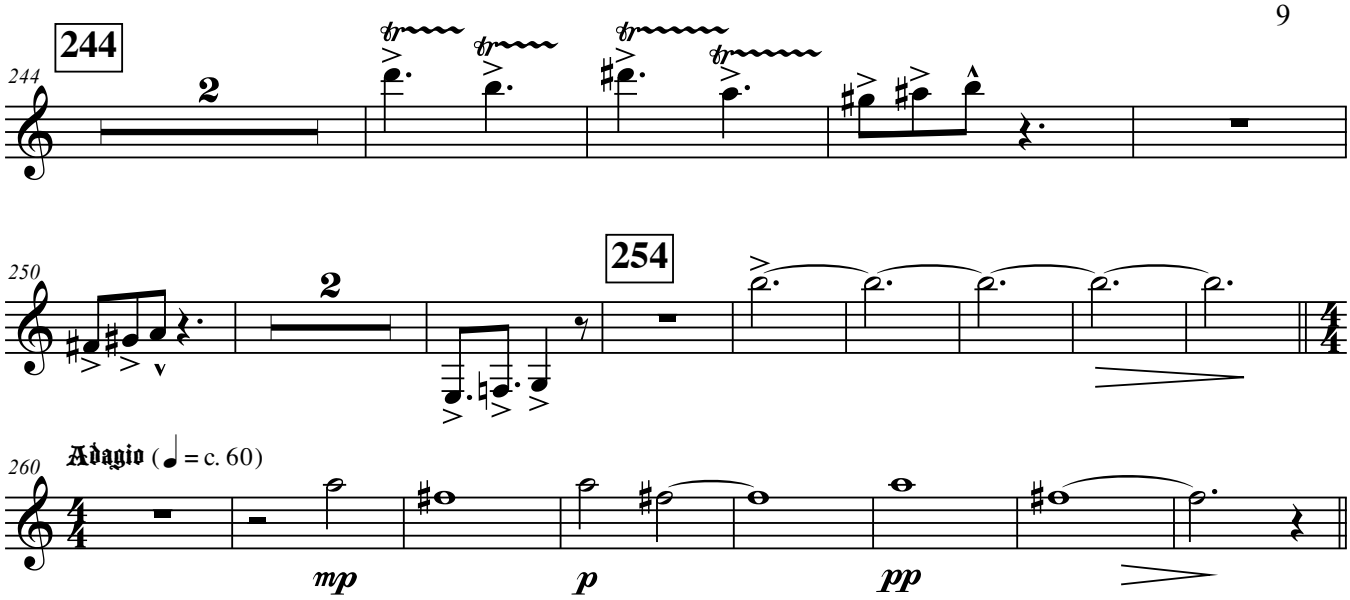
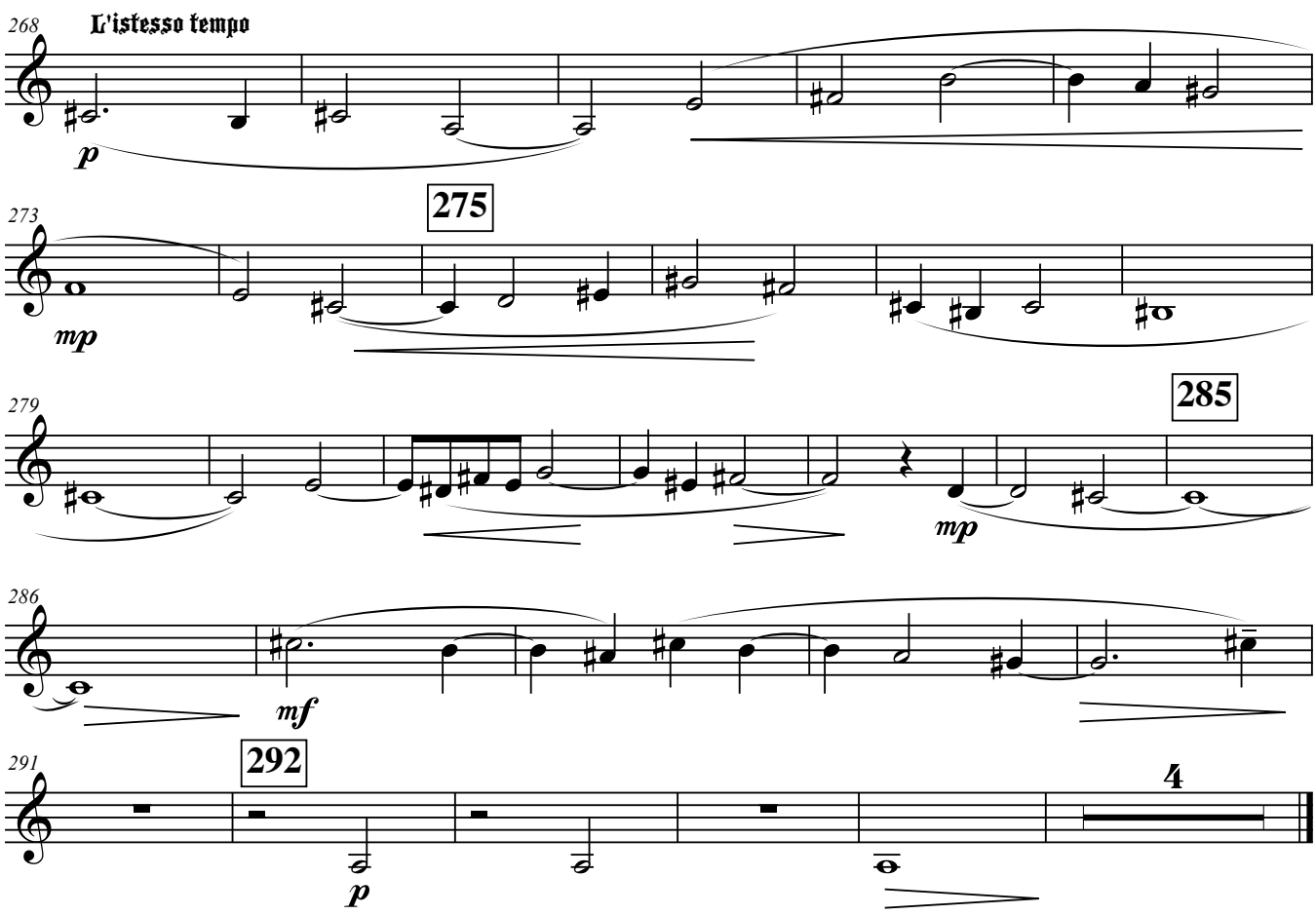


Dirge for Richard III



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