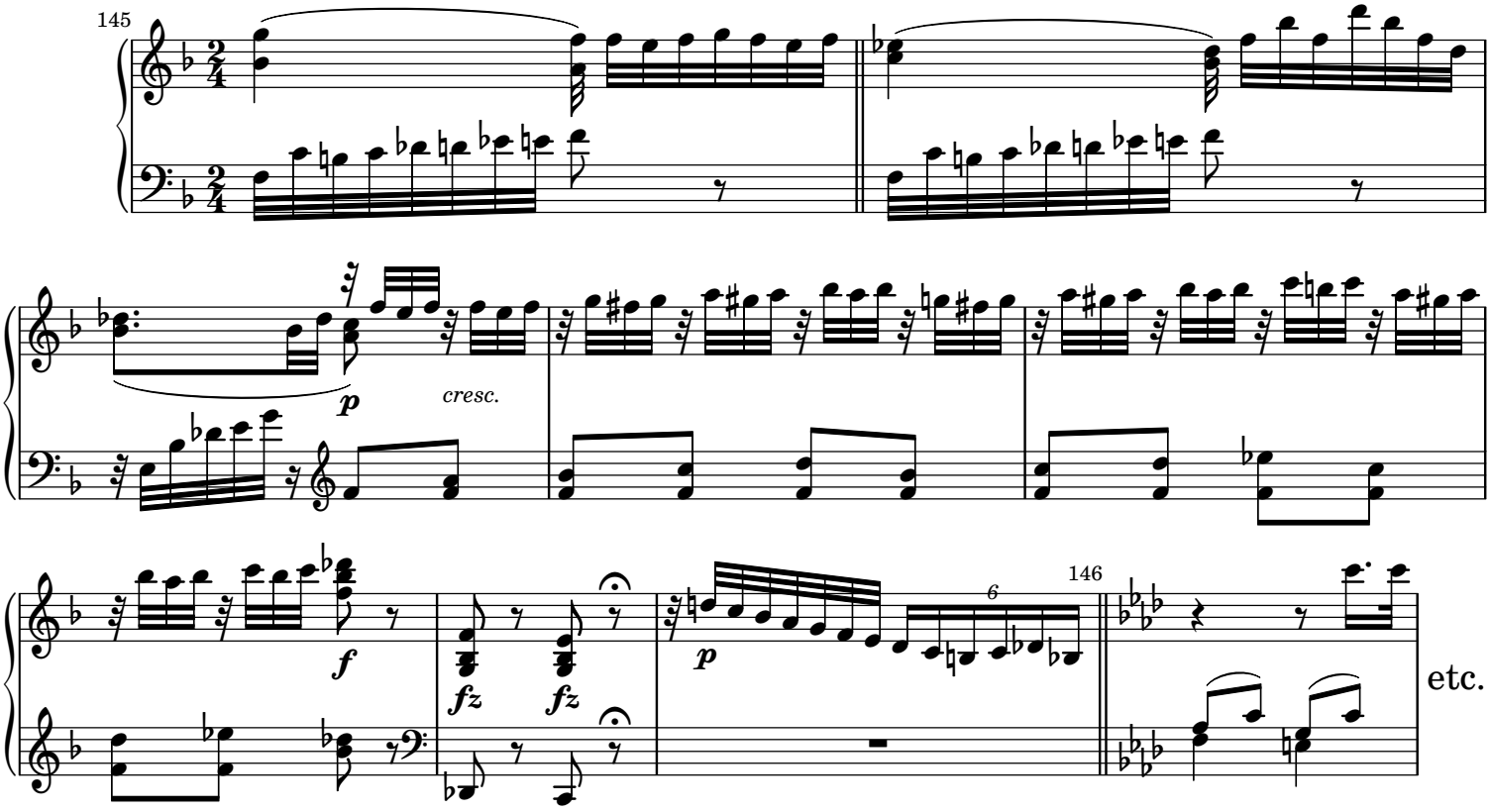
Cadenza

Franz Joseph Haydn: F minor Variations, Hob. XVII:6

Edward Neeman



Author's Note: Haydn's F minor variations is undoubtedly one of his masterpieces for piano. Yet the abrupt transition to the final minor variation (when the theme returns in its original form) always bothered me. What did Haydn mean by this?

The genesis of the work provides some clues. The original version, composed in 1793, does not reprise the minor theme at all. After the second major variation, this version finished with a five-measure coda. A year or so later, Haydn added the F minor coda to his unpublished composition during his trip to London in 1794–1795. He initially left in the extra five measures from the 1793 version, even though this coda felt out of place when followed by such an extended and glorious return to F minor. It was only just prior to the publication of the piece in 1799 that Haydn removed these measures.

While almost all modern performers follow Haydn's final version, I feel there is a gap where Haydn took out those five measures. And yet the five measures, originally written as a conclusion for a much shorter version of this piece, do not quite fit in anymore. My solution has been to insert a brief cadenza to provide a bridge between the last major variation and the final return to F minor. The printed version of this cadenza, slotting in between measures 145 and 146, should be used as the basis for improvisation. I typically replace the final measure of the cadenza with a more elaborate rumination that leads back to the F minor theme.

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