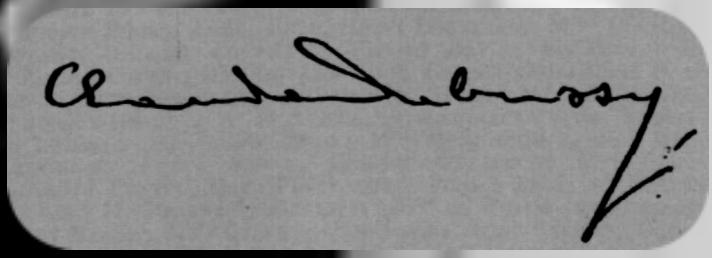
Claude DEBUSSY

CENTENARY EDITION 2018

PRÉLUDES

livre I



Piano Practical Editions
pianopracticaleditions.com

Musical Health Warning : please be aware that these editions are definitely not urtext and should be consulted together with a traditional version. They have been devised purely to help solve musical and technical problems at the piano.

Please send comments and error reports to
Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

Claude DEBUSSY 1862 - 1918

PRÉLUDES livre I

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Much has been written about the many sets of piano preludes which have appeared since the original and definitive works of Bach celebrating fine tuning and circular temperament. For the most part they form collections in multiples of 12* and often encompass all the major and minor keys. Debussy however formed a new genre offering diffident 'symbolist' clues to their character and content via delayed subtitles which appear bracketed at the final bars. Without the justification of tonality, the number twelve has no strict reason save almost certain deference to Chopin, whose preludes he was editing for Durand.

Before their publication, the bulk of the Debussy's output for piano featured descriptive, exotic or catchy titles, but in 1910 he chose the generic name of *Préludes* and worked rapidly on their completion; sketches show that the project may have begun as early as 1907. Sources of inspiration are very varied and reflect a wide range of 'world music'**; Greek antiquity, mortality, visual arts, dance, the natural world, folk music, poetry, Shakespeare, legends, Spain, Italy and the U.S.A.

« Il n'y a pas de théorie : il suffit d'entendre. Le plaisir est la règle » — There is no theory : you only need to listen. Pleasure is the rule.
— Debussy

In May 1910 Debussy himself gave a first performance of four preludes from this volume at the *Salle Érard* in Paris for the *Société Musicale Indépendante*: *danseuses de Delphes*, *Voiles*, *la cathédrale Engloutie* and *la danse de Puck*. They are often performed in small groups with a tonal relationship — i.e. numbers 1-3 which revolve around B flat, or alternatively *ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest*

sharing the same tonic with *la fille aux cheveux de lin* and then G flat accentuated at the opening of *la sérénade interrompue*. There are many juxtaposing contrasts: *ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* framed by *des pas sur la neige* and *la fille aux cheveux de lin*, or *la cathédrale engloutie* at the centre of *la sérénade interrompue* and *la danse de Puck*.

Like all great works of art these preludes invite a lifetime of discovery and exploration; they cover a wide range of musical and pianistic demands, not evident at first, but always rewarding the inquisitive. Rapid fingerwork, lightning jumps across the keyboard, the need to project several degrees of dynamics, particularly muted — these are the difficulties facing a serious musician.

Stephen Walsh : Just as with the *Images*, it seems that in contact with the piano Debussy could write freely, exploring the implications of his unique idiom in a completely uninhibited way, but that when it was a matter of composing for a more 'impersonal' medium and on a larger scale for orchestra, with or without voices, or for the stage — he was forced to think in a more linear, syntactical, perhaps objective manner, that raised issues of procedure he was increasingly reluctant to confront. When he had talked to Caplet about the twenty bars suffocated by tradition, he may well have meant the sort of music that, in every eighteenth- and nineteenth-century composer you could name, bore the structure along from one distinctive gesture to the next, that made sense of works that might otherwise disintegrate under the sheer weight of irrepressible, disconnected inventiveness: the musical details that information theorists describe with the charming term 'redundant'. It may go against the grain to think of anything in, say, Mozart or Schubert or even Brahms as redundant. But, purely in the sense that a lot of what happens in their music is predictable, the redundant is an important, if humble, part of their language. It looks as if, at least where the House of Usher was concerned, Claude Debussy, the lifelong enemy of rules was now in rebellion against redundancy.

Paul Roberts : More than 100 years after Debussy's death, such a view still needs stating and defending. Sound, atmosphere and 'fairy-tale' charm, so characteristic of Debussy, are not finally the reasons for playing and listening to this music, for being drawn to it and possessed by it. Just as the painters of his epoch saw what had been hitherto unseen, so Debussy heard what had been unheard. His images and allusions were, paradoxically, a means of provoking an intensity of listening. In a voice that was often subdued, he distilled and communicated the essence of the external world and touched the core of human experience.

Much of what happened to music — and to art in general — in the twentieth century marked a break, conscious or unconscious, with the nineteenth. The past was an orphan parent, rejected by its children, despised by its grandchildren. Debussy, too, found fault with his forebears and tried to do things differently from them. But while he questioned their methods, he never doubted their fundamental intention, which was to create beauty and to share sensibilities, to communicate wonder at the richness of the world around us and the various ways our senses give us of responding to it. His music is without ideology and without doctrine. Like the world, it simply is, take it or leave it.

Debussy: A Painter in Sound (2018)

by ***Stephen Walsh***

Lockspeiser & Halbreich : These preludes have a very different objective from those of Chopin, and there is no question of comparing them. For the Pole, these are striking reductions of moods, psychological snapshots suddenly illuminating the innermost self. For the Frenchman, on the other hand, they are evocations intended to express an impression, to create a state of sensitivity, awareness conducive to the identification of the listener with the chosen theme, landscape or character. From the poetic realism of the *Images*, we have moved to the more abstract plane of musical symbolism.

* Bach, Chopin, Scriabin, Messiaen, Shostakovich and Szymanowski, among others.

World Music — *Exposition Universelle***

In May 1889, a major cultural event was staged in the *Champ de Mars* in the vicinity of the recently completed Eiffel Tower. The celebrated Paris *Exposition Universelle* had already been running for three weeks by the time the 26-year-old composer attended, with countries from all over the world exhibiting the best of their art, culture and lifestyle. In the crucial weeks which followed, Debussy's experience of musical cultures from Java, Cambodia and Vietnam would make a lasting — indeed legendary — contribution to the development not just of the young composer himself, but to the history of Western music as a whole.

"I believe more and more that music in its essence is not a thing that can be poured into a rigorous and traditional mould. It is made of colours and rhythmical beats. Music is a mysterious mathematical process whose elements suggest infinity, capturing inexplicable relations between nature and the imagination" — Debussy

At this time, Debussy was no novice in what we now refer to as 'world music', and while in Russia, as a guest of Nadezhda von Meck he encountered the Russian nationalists' fascination with music of the East.

In 1895, Debussy wrote "Javanese music, which is able to express every shade of meaning, even unmentionable shades... which make our tonic and dominant seem like ghosts, for use by naughty little children". His music from 1889 onwards, and his piano works such as *Pagodes* in particular, began to develop unmistakeable traces of this new cultural influence.

— *Martin Buzacott*

Recommended reading:

- Debussy: The Quiet Revolutionary *Victor Lederer*
- The Piano Music of Claude Debussy *Alfred Cortot*
- Images: The Piano Music of Claude Debussy *Paul Roberts*
- Debussy: A Painter in Sound *Stephen Walsh*
- Debussy, sa vie et sa pensée *Edward Lockspeiser & Harry Halbreich*
- The Art of French piano music & Debussy in proportion — a musical analysis *Roy Howat*
- The Life of Debussy & Debussy Remembered *Roger Nichols*

In 2018, during the course of the centenary year ***Piano Practical Editions*** became a creative and critical working publication; in addition to suggestions of fingering, hand disposition and *sostenuto* pedal, you will find significant modifications to the general layout with alternative key signatures, staves, barlines, time- and key- signatures and varied fonts. I have also enjoyed the challenge of translating all the texts in French, and vocabularies may be found on pages **88 - 90**.

In this first book of Preludes, metronome speeds appear in brackets and are omitted in four — he once wrote: *"as a rose which might only last for one morning, a metronome speed might only work for one bar."* In the second book only one prelude has a metronome speed.

The strong influence of French piano music is surely identified with Chopin and Debussy who share a unique position as masters of an exceptional instrument; through an extensive affinity with the sustaining pedal they each created a personal language conceived to communicate their work with the greatest authenticity.

Ray Alston October 2023

I

Debussy was always searching for exotic stimuli, and this first prelude dating from December 1909 centres on Greek antiquity and the oracle at Delphi, the Temple of Apollo, patron of the arts and a god of music and dance. Some 15 years earlier this *caryatid** had been discovered by French archeologists during *la Grande Fouille* (the Great Excavation). Displayed at the Louvre, Debussy particularly admired *la colonne des danseuses de Delphes*, three priestesses clothed in *chitoniskos***, bare feet suspended and arms raised, and depicting dancers or participants in a religious ritual.

In 1894 Debussy had composed an *image oubliée* entitled *Souvenir du Louvre**** and I wonder whether its heading might have influenced the slow and dignified character of this first Prelude — *dans le mouvement d'une "Sarabande", c'est-à-dire avec une élégance grave et lente.*

Or could it be that the composer, always attracted to original and evocative ideas, just liked the catchy caption? Perhaps it is not useful to seek inspiration from the bracketed afterthought placed as always beneath the final bars.

With some gravitas this prelude, which feels like an introduction, brings to life stones from antiquity, an asymmetric Brahmsian sarabande of hypnotic and sombre sensuality. The style of composition seems well adapted for two pianos.

> *Solemn and silent, they move to the slow rhythm of harps, sistrums and flutes. And in the mysterious shadow of the temple, where hang heavy vapours of consecrated incense, lies, invisible and present, the meditative god who dreams of destinies.*
>
> — *Cortot*

> *The first prelude, Danseuses de Delphes, was inspired Debussy told an English admirer by the beautiful column of that name exhibited on the landing of the grand staircase of the Louvre, a plaster copy of a stone original recently excavated by the French archaeologist Théophile Homolle at Delphi. Perhaps the sculpture was rotated so that the three female figures appeared in succession, or perhaps one could walk round it.*
>
> *There is certainly some feeling in the prelude of a slow circling, as of stately dancers with linked arms. But the real miracle of this piece is its harmonic concentration, the alternation of music made of soft dissonance and music made of plain triads in irrational but perfectly poised sequence. If, as the autograph suggests, the piece was written in a single day (7 December 1909), one might picture Debussy at the piano - literally or metaphorically - carefully testing each chord, each sequence, listening to the spacing and balance, the resonances, the dynamic shadings, the effect of the two pedals (not indicated, as usual). At first glance, this is not difficult music to play, but to play it well, with attention to every nuance, every painstaking detail, is a serious exercise in mental and physical control. Hearing Debussy play it, his English friend reported "was like hearing a poet reciting some of his own delicate lyrics. He had a soft, deep touch which evoked full, rich, many-shaded sonorities… I have never heard more beautiful pianoforte playing."*
>
> — *Stephen Walsh*

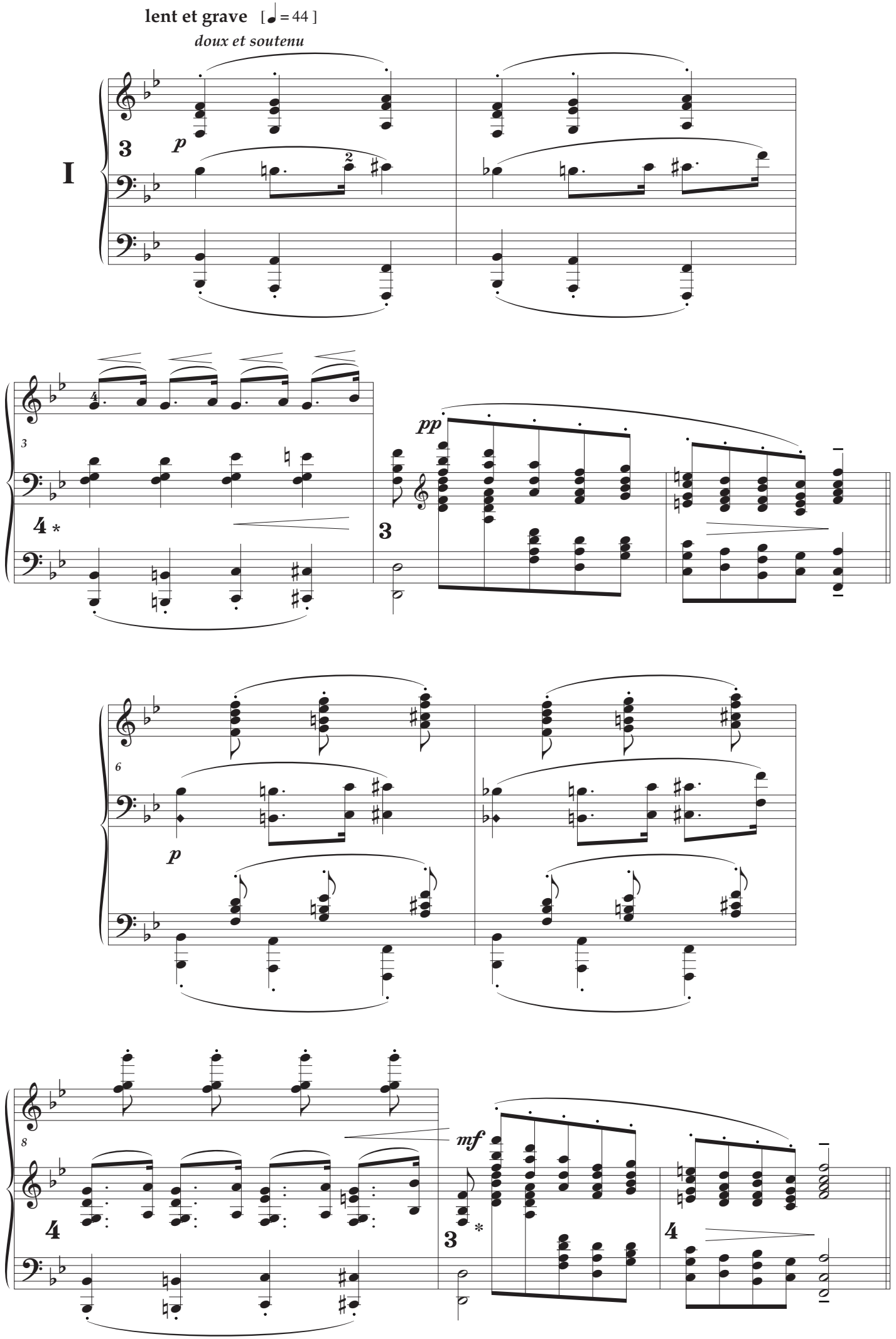
* a sculpted female figure acting as support of a much larger structure — the Akanthos Column standing at 1.95 metres — a monument probably from 330 BC.

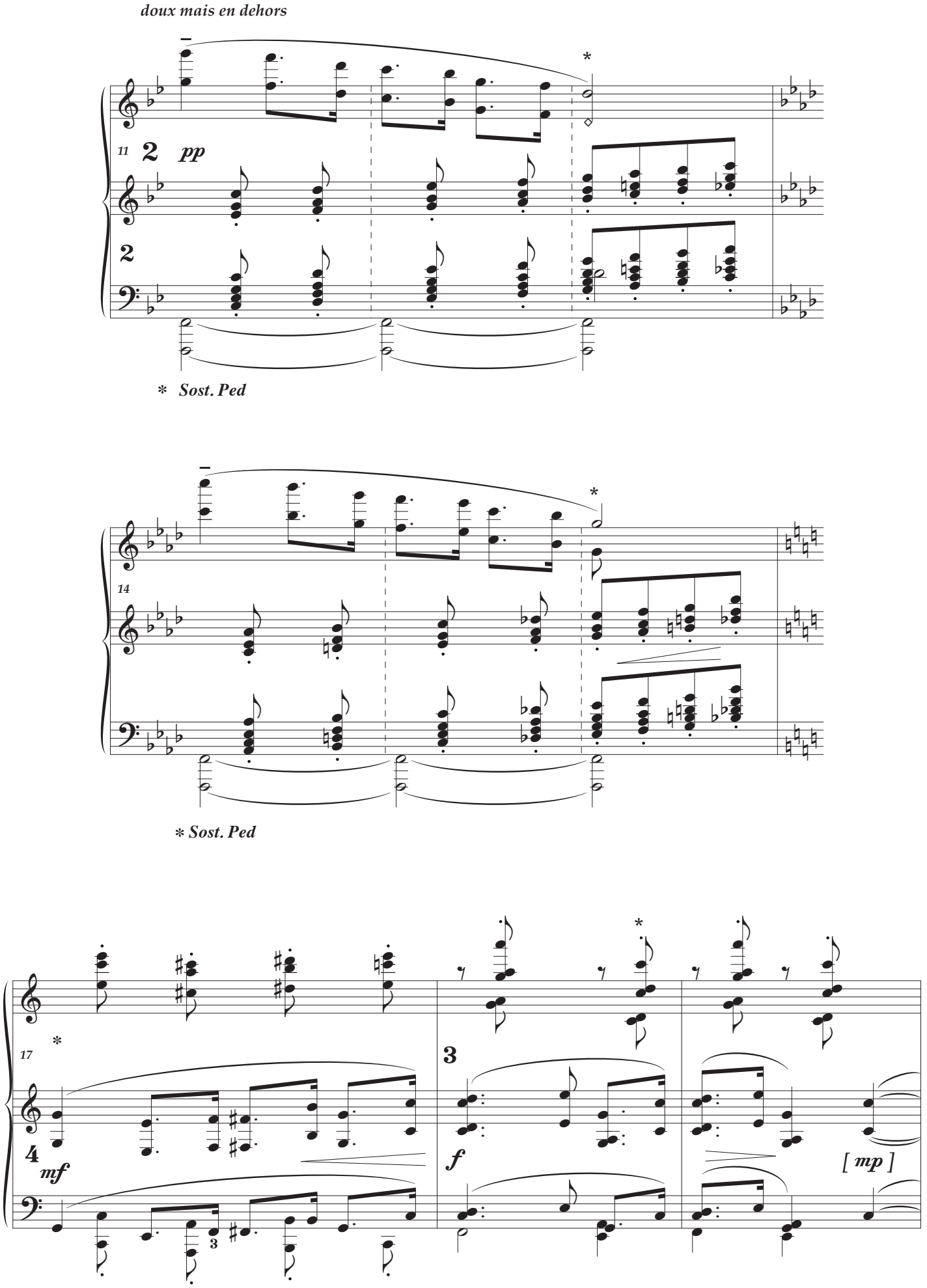
** short tunics — possibly worn by the three daughters of Cecrops I, the legendary first king of Attica

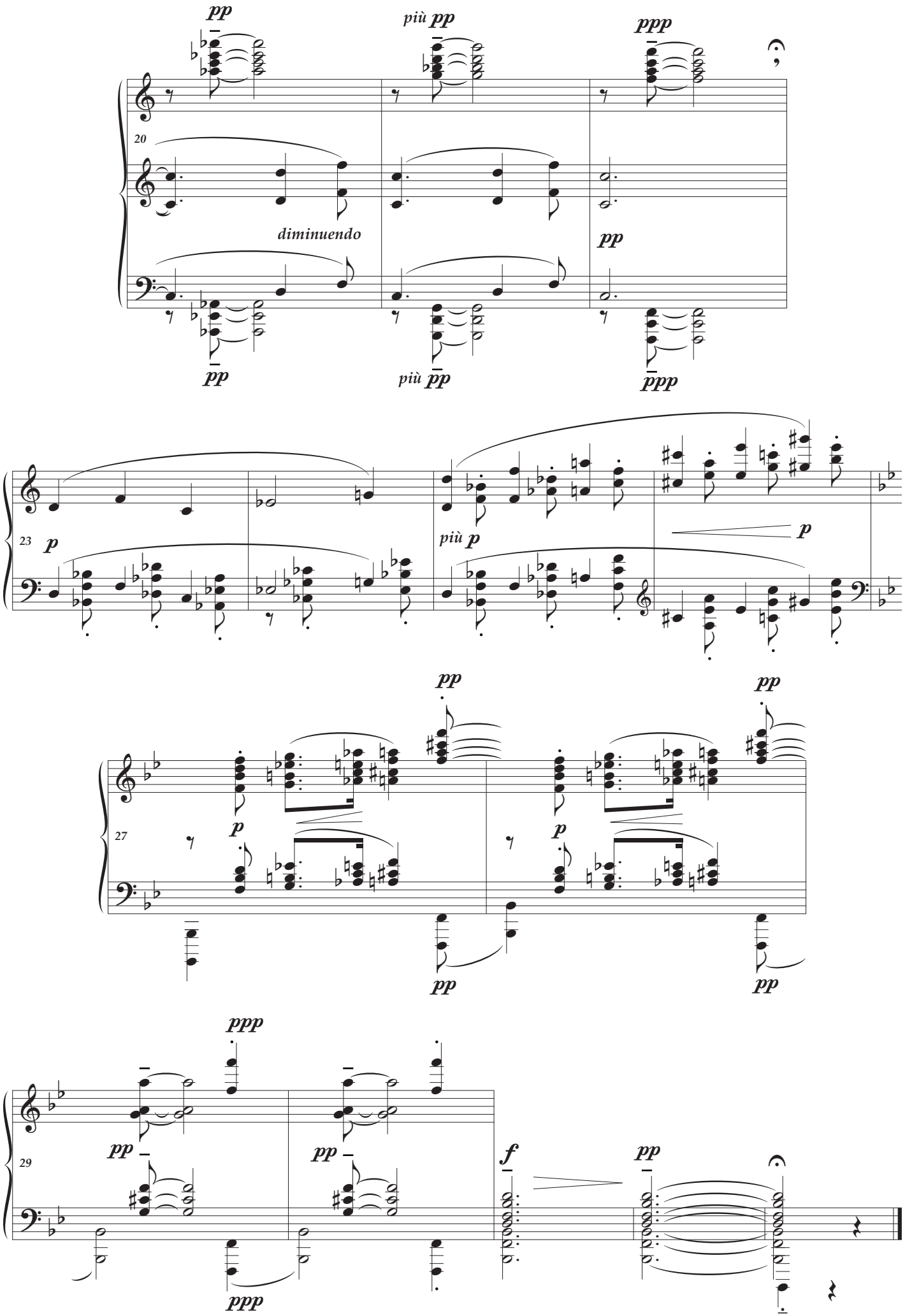
*** the second of three *Images Oubliées* dedicated to Yvonne Lerolle — later revised and published as the second movement of the suite *Pour le Piano* (1901)

Duration: 3 minutes

- a wonderful study in the control of dynamics which Debussy has detailed with great clarity
- **3 - 17** editorial modification of time-signatures
- **9** dynamics from the original edition… however ***pp*** subito (see **4)** might be more effective
- **11** & **14** editorial *sostenuto* pedal to be coupled with the sustaining pedal
- **13** & **16** this edition features a few practical 'arrangements' — it can be effective to project the melody notes (minims) as tied acciaccaturas
- **17 - 26** modification of portamento crotchets (syncopated chords) and key-signature
- **18** RH D missing, probably in error


lent et grave [♩ = 44]
doux et soutenu
I
p
pp
p
mf


doux mais en dehors
11
2
pp
2
* Sost. Ped
14
* Sost. Ped
17
4
mf
3
f
[mp]

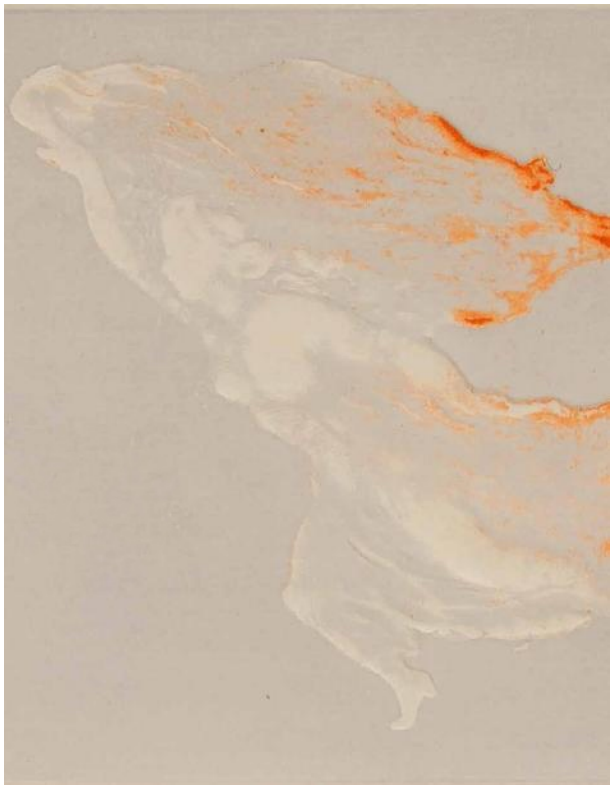


(... danseuses de Delphes)

II

Much has been said about the motif of descending thirds and the characteristic whole tone scale, so essential to Debussy's 'symbolist' music. This short quote from the composer seems particularly apt: *music begins when words are powerless to express; it is made for the inexpressible — I would like it to seem to emerge from the shadows and from time to time return there.* I personally love the the haunting oriental monastic theme, especially when it returns in the treble accompanied with *quasi-glissandi* over a B flat pedal point.

Here is a truly original work, full of character and ethereal mystery, ambiguous both in title and content. If the *voiles* are veils, they might have been inspired by an American dancer (Loïe Fuller), who used shrouds and unusual lighting to produce imaginative visual effects. But they might also be sails, moving us across calm waters into an atmospheric world which is difficult to describe with mere words.



PIERRE ROCHE LA LOÏE FULLER 1904
l'esprit art nouveau
estampes modelées — gypsographie

Liszt, Mussorgsky and Borodin occasionally included the whole-tone scale but in this composition Debussy obsessively uses it throughout, highlighting a short section in pentatonic contrast at **22-24**.

> *Justly famous as one of the first pieces to abjure tonality, the connotations of 'veils' or 'sails' (the very ambiguity is characteristic), focuses attention on the image of billowing, a gentle moving back and forth rooted to an immobile base. Debussy, therefore, sits the piece on a low B flat whose only activity is to propound irregular rhythms at irregular intervals and, on occasion, to rest quietly.*
>
> — *Irwin Freundlich*

> *Boats at rest in a luminous port. Their sails flap gently and the breeze which fills them blows towards the horizon and a setting sun — a white wing soars over the caressing sea.*
>
> — *Cortot*

> *Voiles, is a curiously doctrinaire piece, a pair of entirely whole-tone episodes framing a pentatonic middle section that could almost be a remnant of the gamelan music of Pagodes. The title might mean 'veils' (like the ones shed by Salome in Strauss's opera or deployed with coloured lighting by the American dancer Loïe Fuller). But the music has a sinister edge, provided by the bass ostinato B flats and the curious floating metre, that seems to contradict both meanings. The B flats are an echo of Danseuses de Delphes, which is in that key, and they continue into le Vent dans la Plaine, supporting the windy sextuplets that blow on and off throughout the prelude.*
>
> — *Stephen Walsh*

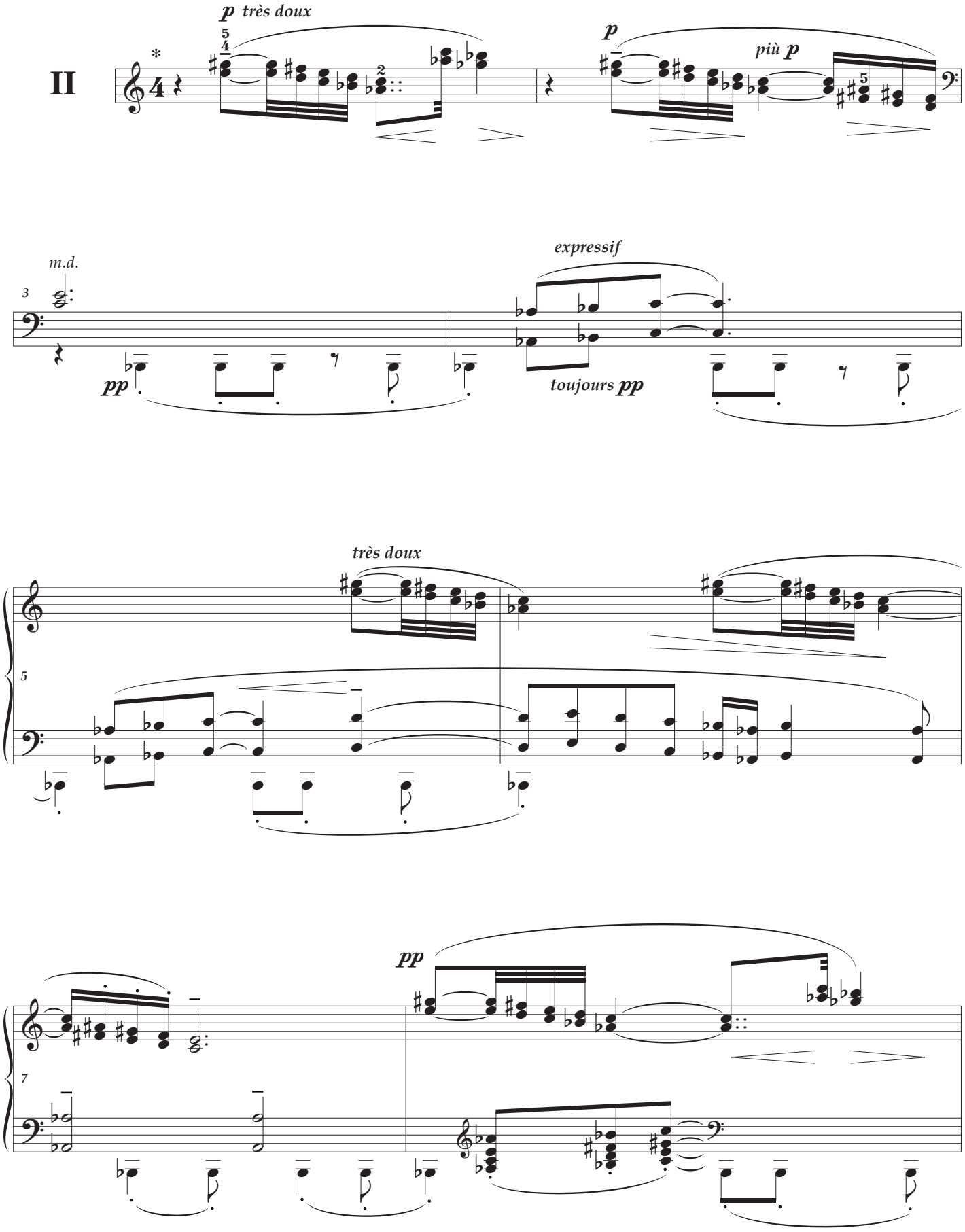
> *Voiles, with its blurring whole tones — especially in the final bars, where Debussy supplies a rare pedal marking that ensures a wash of harmony — could loosely be compared to an one of the countless Impressionist seascapes with sailing boats (perhaps Whistler or Degas), though the sinister undertow of low B flats suggests a more mysterious agenda while failing to identify it.*
>
> — *Paul Roberts*

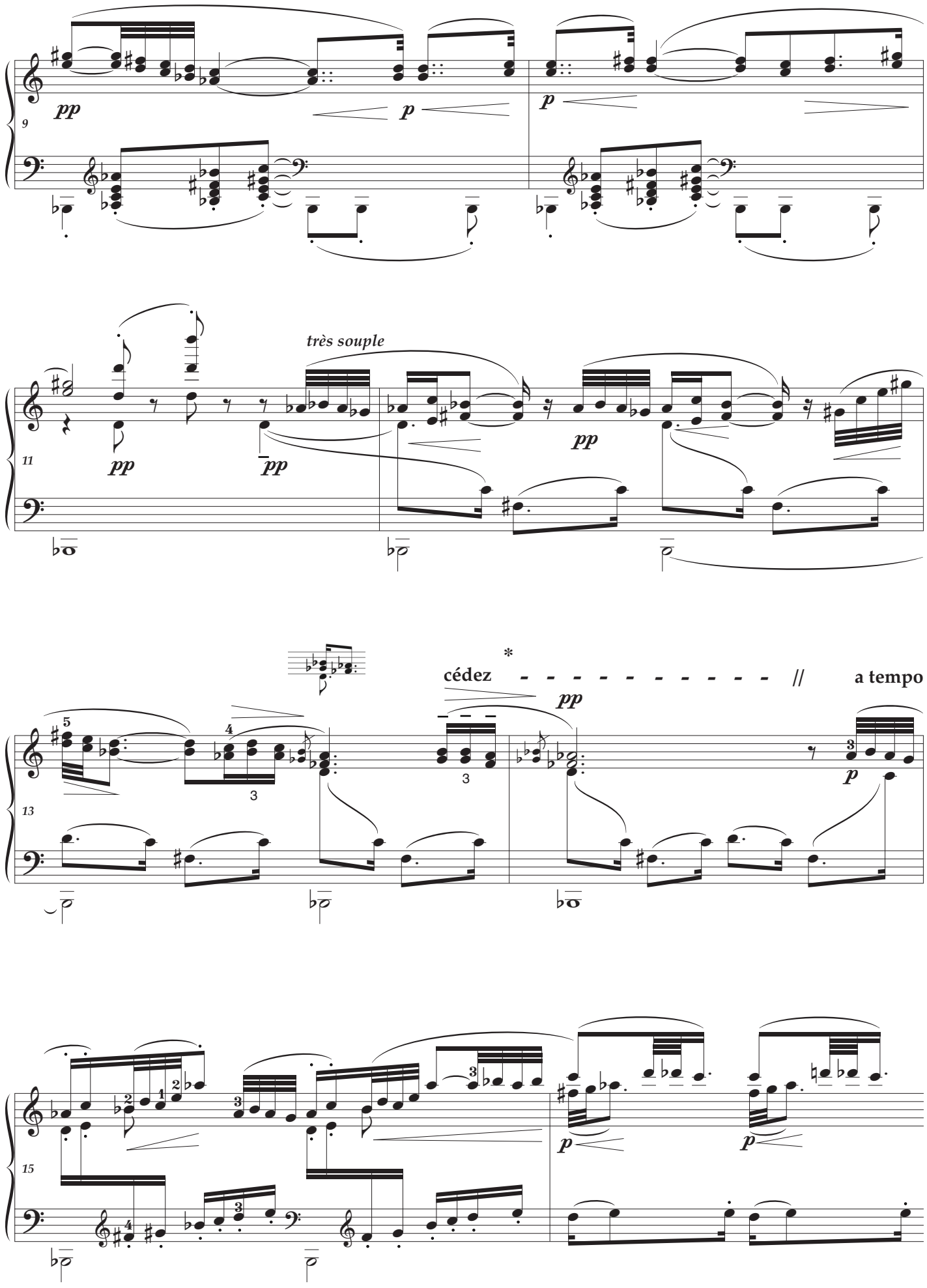
Duration: 4'25

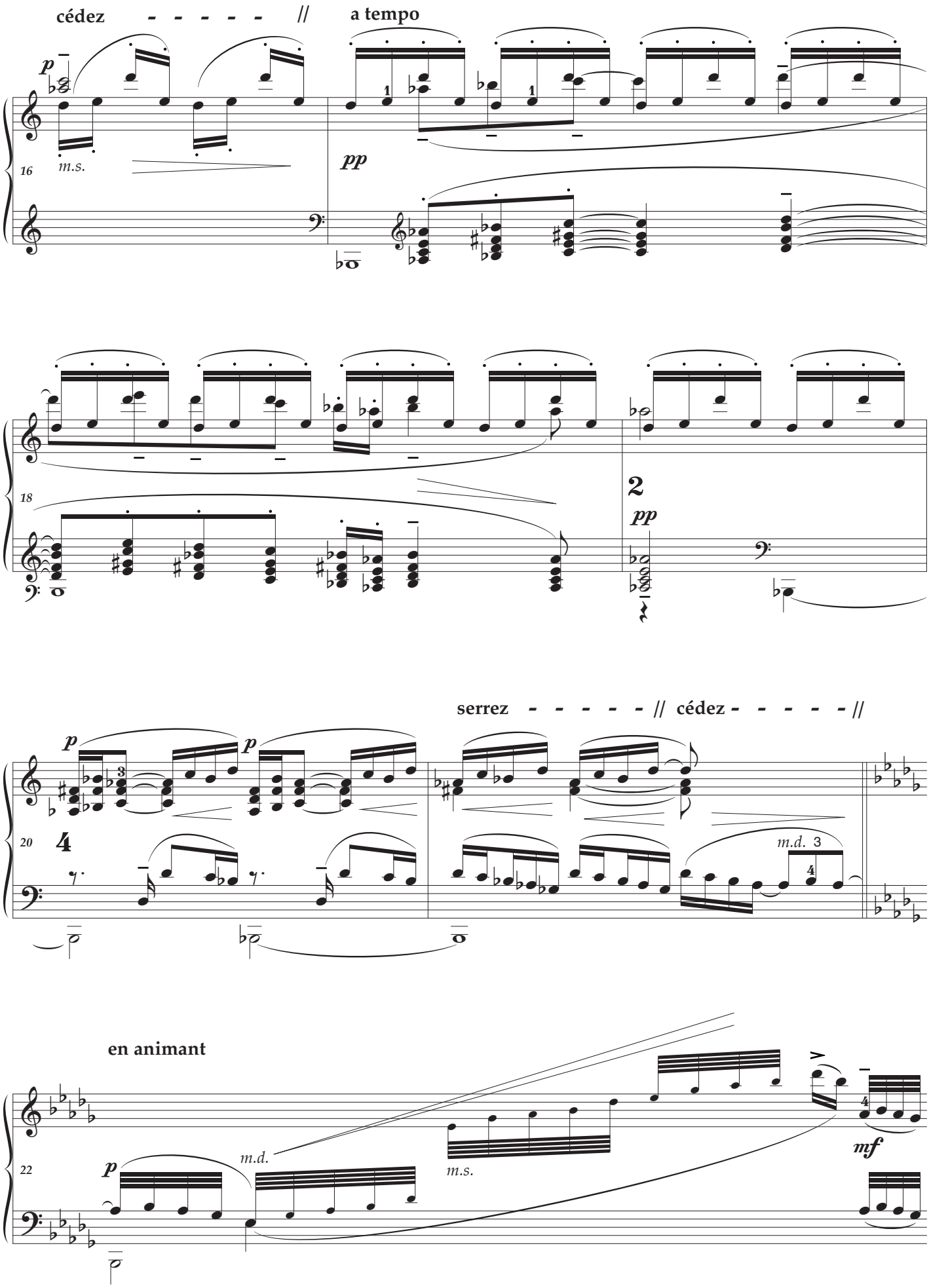
- originally 2/4 throughout
- **14** the exact placing of these tempo instructions has been modified
- **32-33** Debussy's original pedal indication

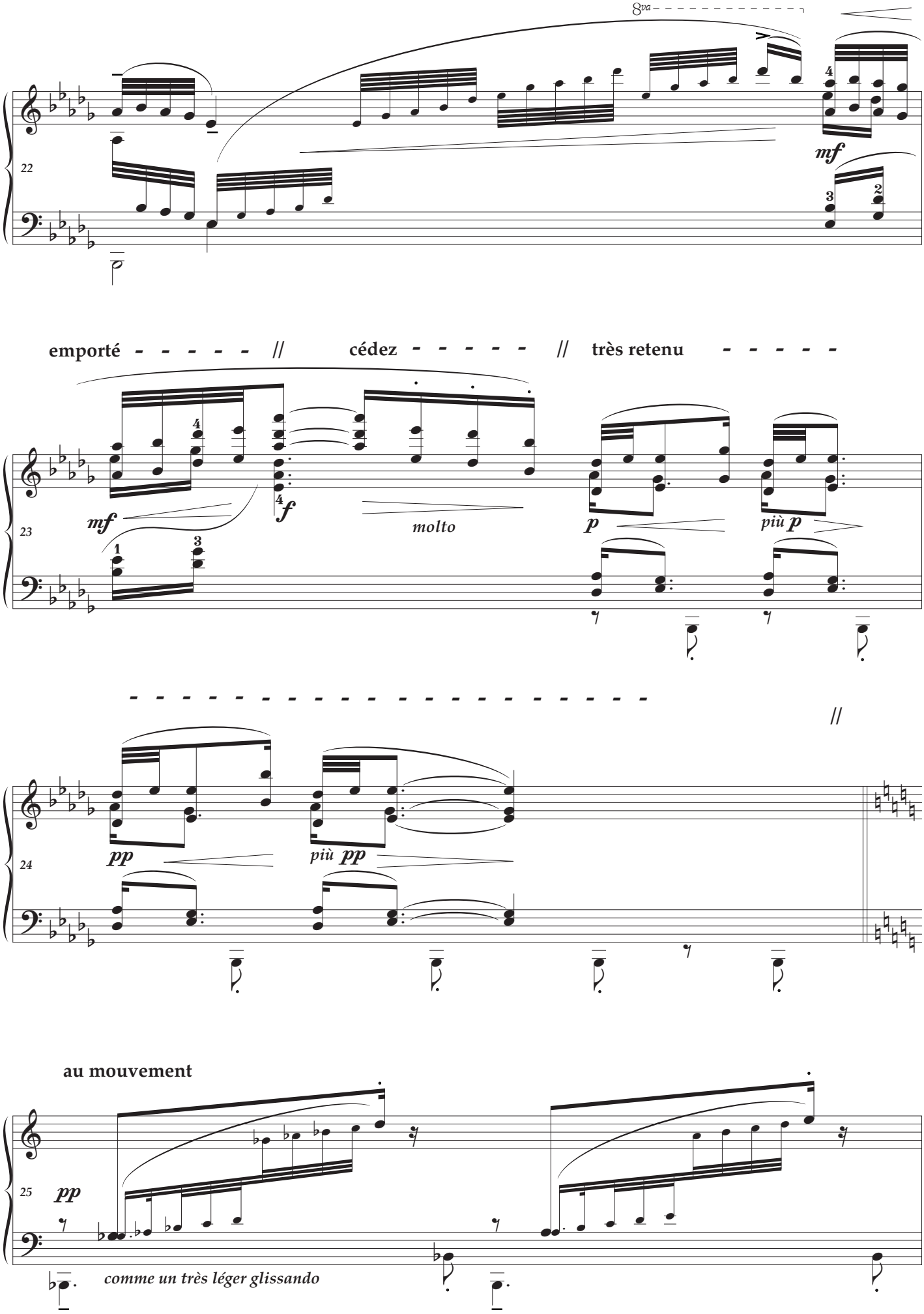
modéré [♪ = 88]

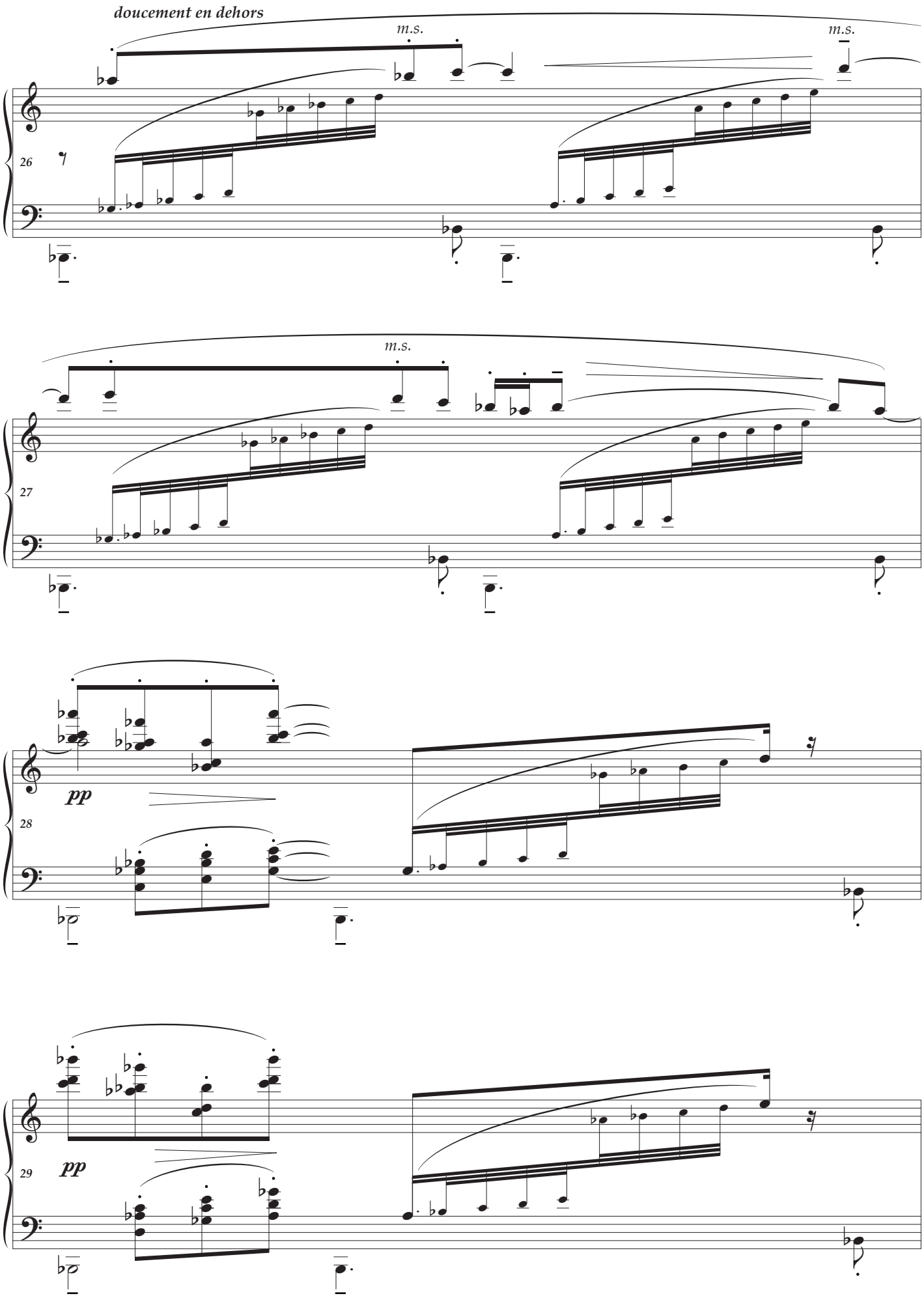
(dans un rythme sans rigueur et caressant)

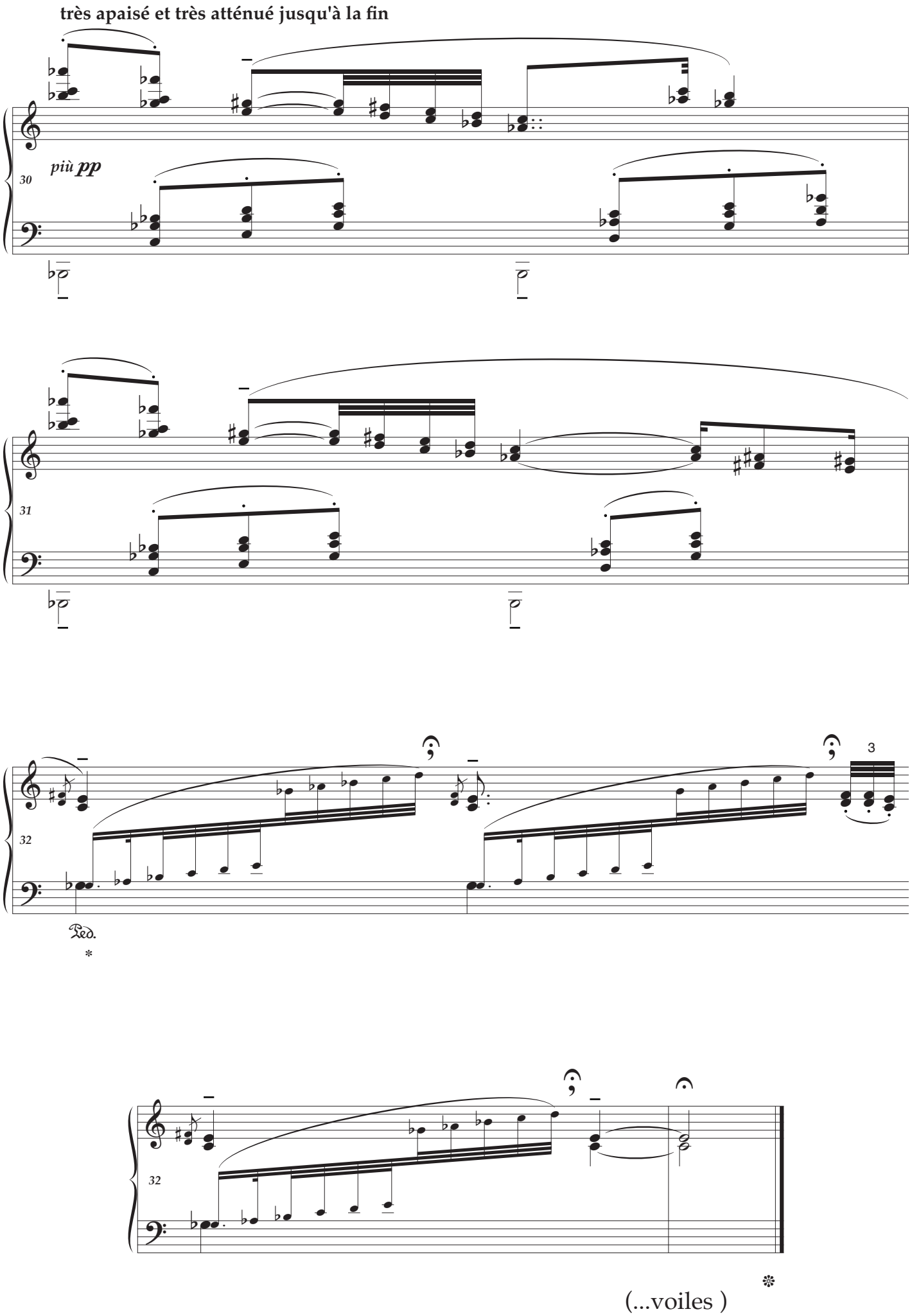



9
pp
p
p
11
très souple
pp
pp
pp
13
*
cédez
pp
//
a tempo
p
15
p
p


cédez - - - - - //
a tempo
p
pp
m.s.
16
18
2
pp
serrez - - - - - // cédez - - - - - //
p
p
20
4
m.d. 3
en animant
22
p
m.d.
m.s.
mf


8va
22
mf
emporté - - - - - // cédez - - - - - // très retenu - - - - -
23
mf
f
molto
p
più p
- - - - - -


doucement en dehors
m.s.
m.s.
26
m.s.
27
pp
28
pp
29


très apaisé et très atténué jusqu'à la fin
30
più pp
31
32
3
Ped.
*
32
(...voiles)

III

The first book of preludes has two wind-inspired pieces and of the two tone poems this is more of a fresh breeze than a gale. The hushed tenor voice, wailing a sinuous and mysterious chant, creates moments of tension and unease with a few short passages in the whole tone scale imitating *Voiles*. The stormy climax in chordal surge is most effective and poses quite a pianistic challenge (see **28-34** below).

C'est l'extase langoureuse**
Romances sans paroles 1902

Le vent dans la plaine
Suspend son haleine
— Favart

C'est l'extase langoureuse,
C'est la fatigue amoureuse,
C'est tous les frissons des bois
Parmi l'étreinte des brises,
C'est, vers les ramures grises,
Le chœur des petites voix.

Ô le frêle et frais murmure !
Cela gazouille et susurre,
Cela ressemble au cri doux
Que l'herbe agitée expire…
Tu dirais, sous l'eau qui vire,
Le roulis sourd des cailloux.

Cette âme qui se lamente
En cette plainte dormante,
C'est la nôtre, n'est-ce pas ?
La mienne, dis, et la tienne,
Dont s'exhale l'humble antienne
Par ce tiède soir, tout bas ?

Paul Verlaine

MONET *COUP DE VENT* 1881

A quotation from the eighteenth century playwright Favart inspired the full title* — *le vent dans la plaine suspend son haleine* (the wind in the plain is holding its breath). Debussy and Verlaine became inevitably entwined as one of the composer's early piano teachers was the poet's mother-in-law. *Languorous Ecstasy* was also set to music by the composer in 1888 and this prelude dates from about 1910 with a first performance in 1911.

> *"Stealthy and swift it glides over cropped grass, clings onto bushes, ruffles hedges, and sometimes with a sudden gust, in the fresh energy of the morning, bows the burgeoning wheat with a long quivering wave.*
>
> — *Cortot*

*an ariette from a comic opera *Ninette à la cour* 1755, used as a motto in Verlaine's poem, the first song in Debussy's *Ariettes oubliées* 1887

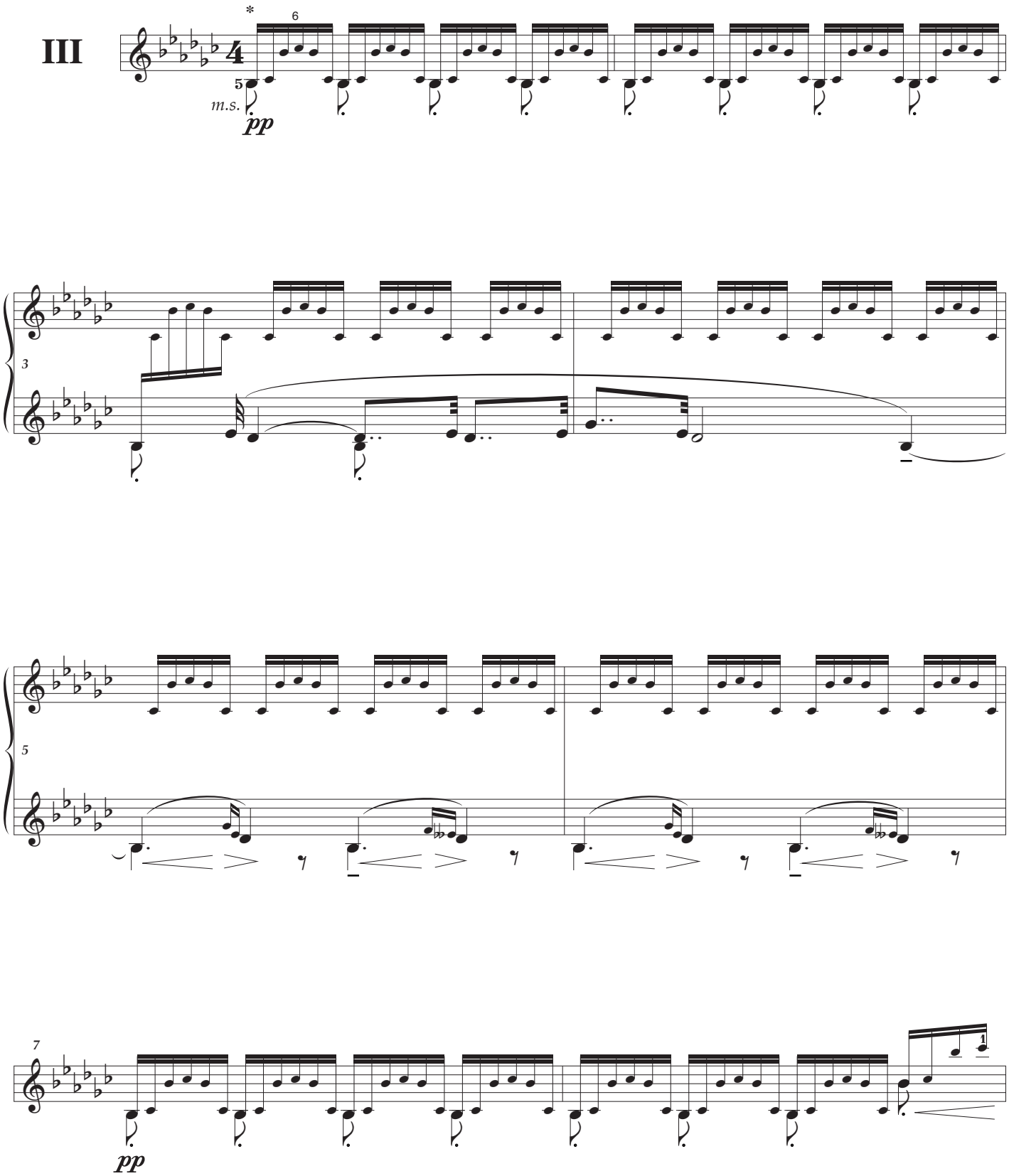
** website translation : https://www.lieder.net/lieder/get_text.html?TextId=16335

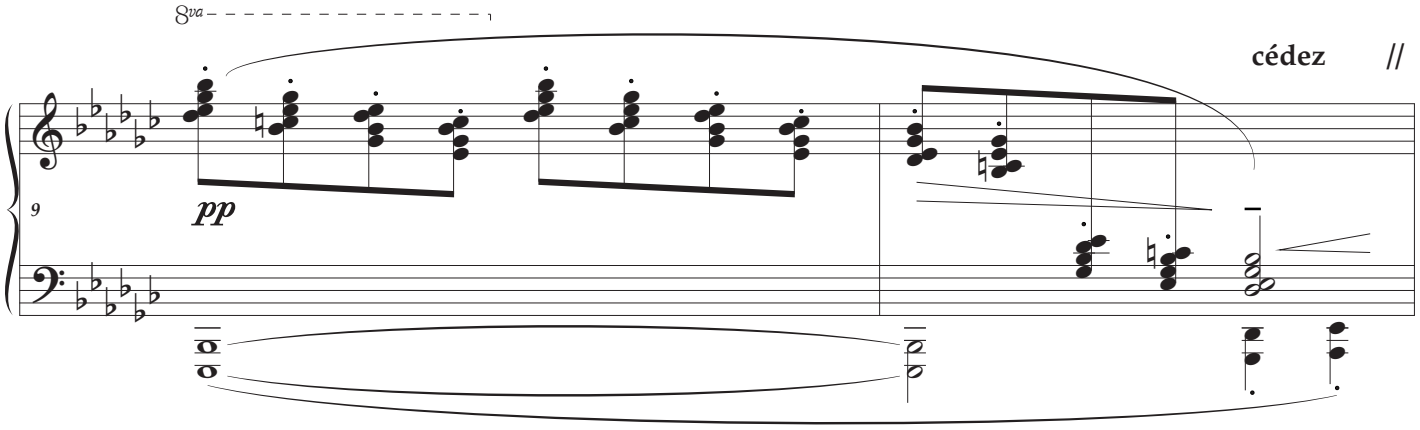
Duration: 2'20

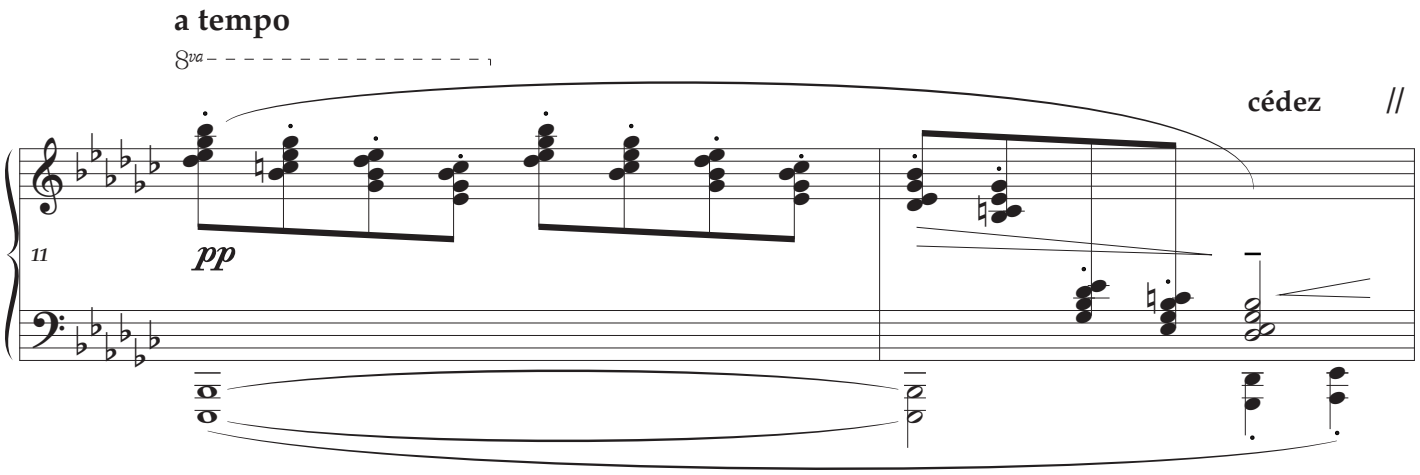
- editorial reduced notation
- **28-34** these large RH leaps are of course quite challenging, but become slightly more manageable with the bass modified as here
- **30** *subito* ***p*** can be effectively achieved by silently re-playing the diamond-headed fifths with a suitable change of pedal
- **43** ossia according to recordings by the composer

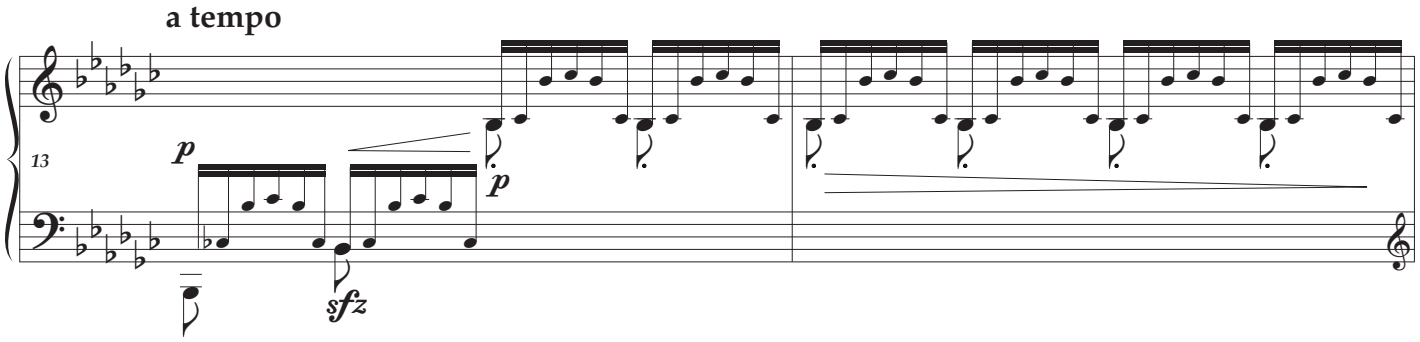
animé [♩ = 126]

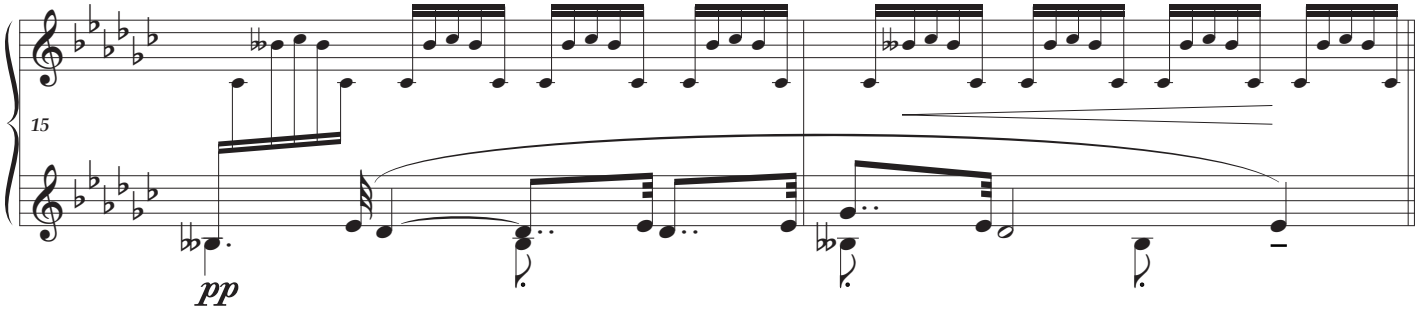
aussi légèrement que possible

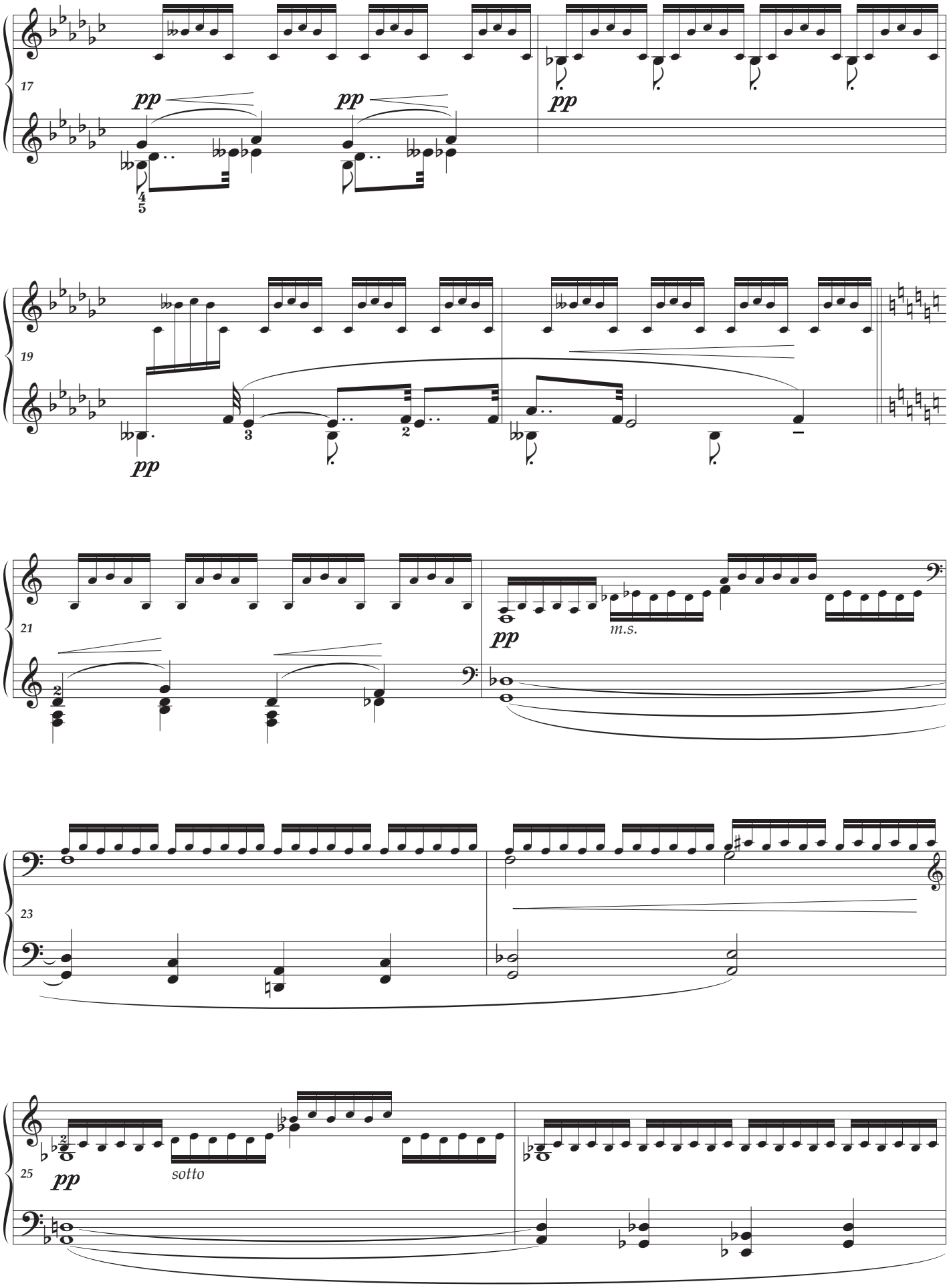


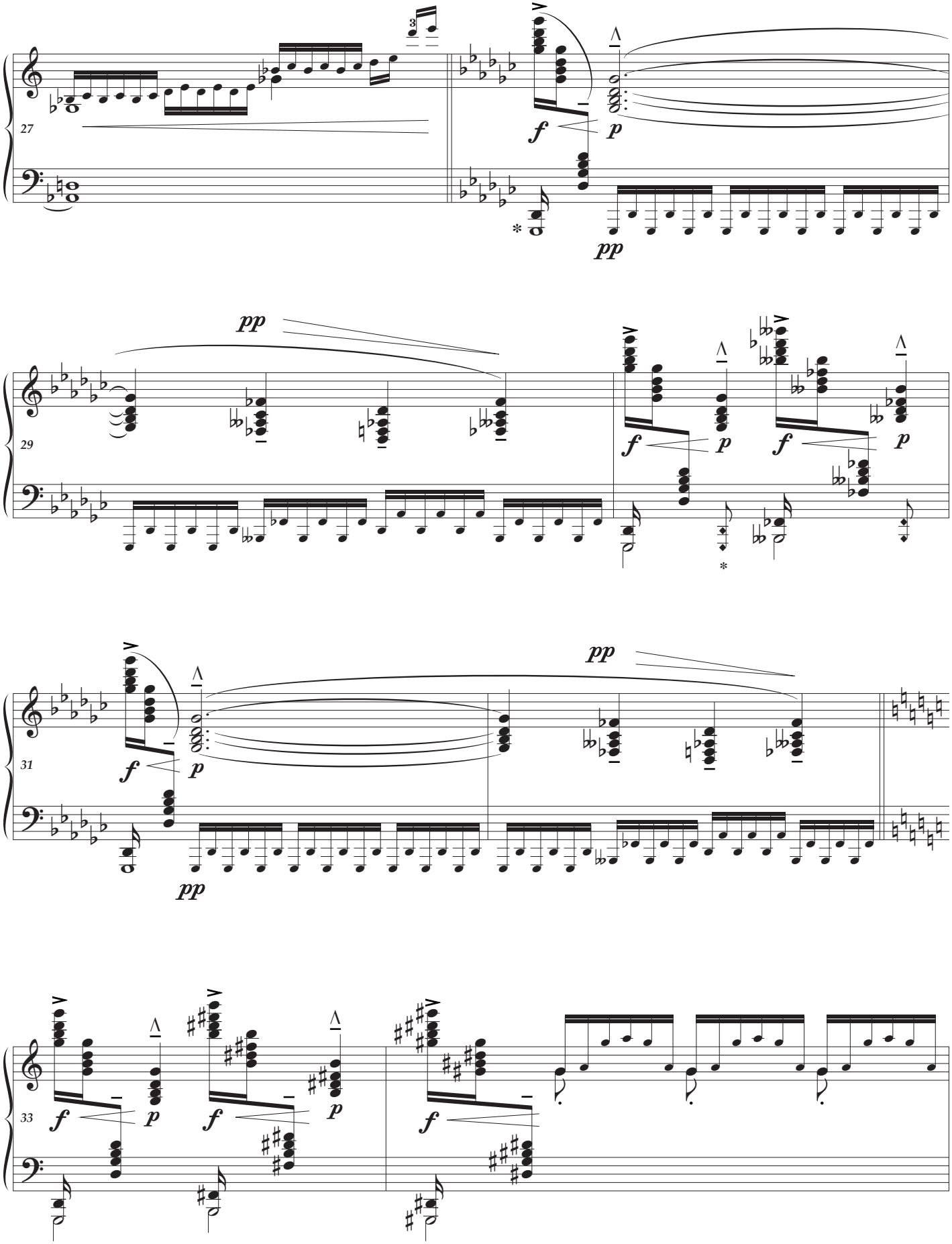

8va
cédez
//
9
pp

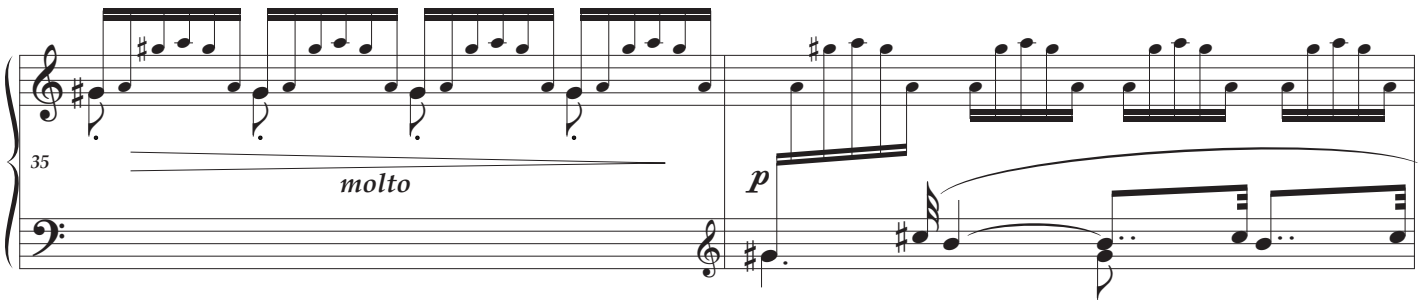

a tempo
8va
cédez
//
11
pp

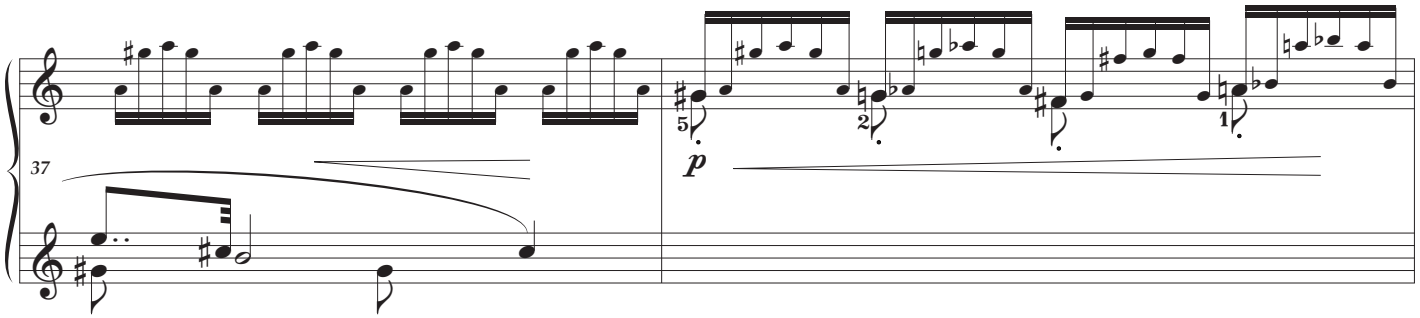

a tempo
13
p
p
sfz


15
pp


17
pp
pp
pp
19
pp
21
pp
m.s.
23
25
pp
sotto


27
f
p
pp
29
pp
f
p
f
p
31
f
p
pp
pp
33
f
p
f
p
f


35
molto
p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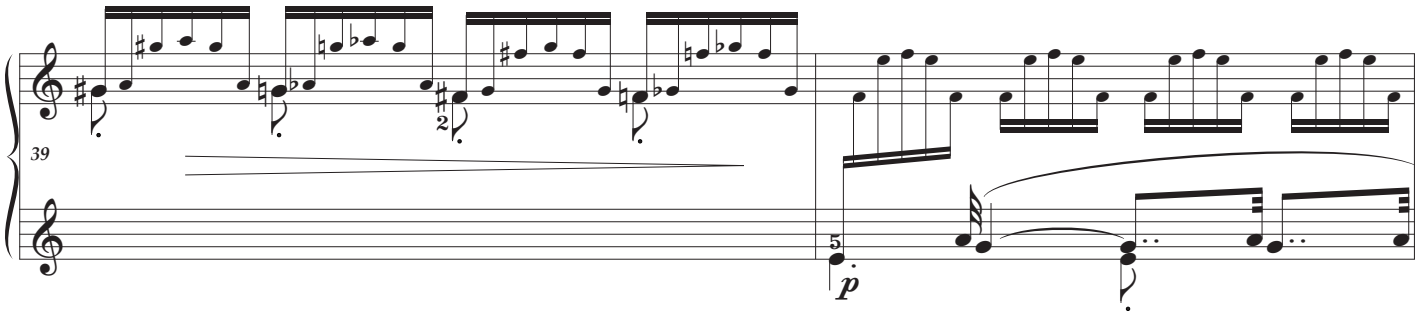
p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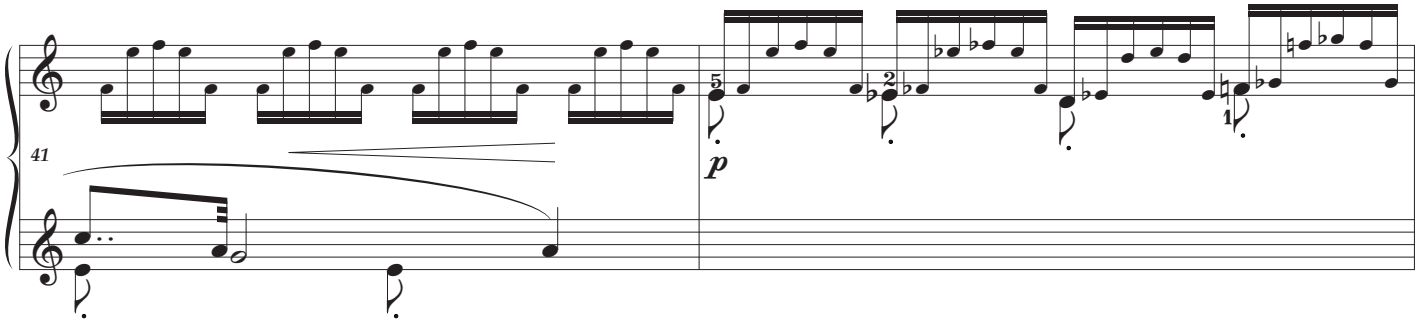
p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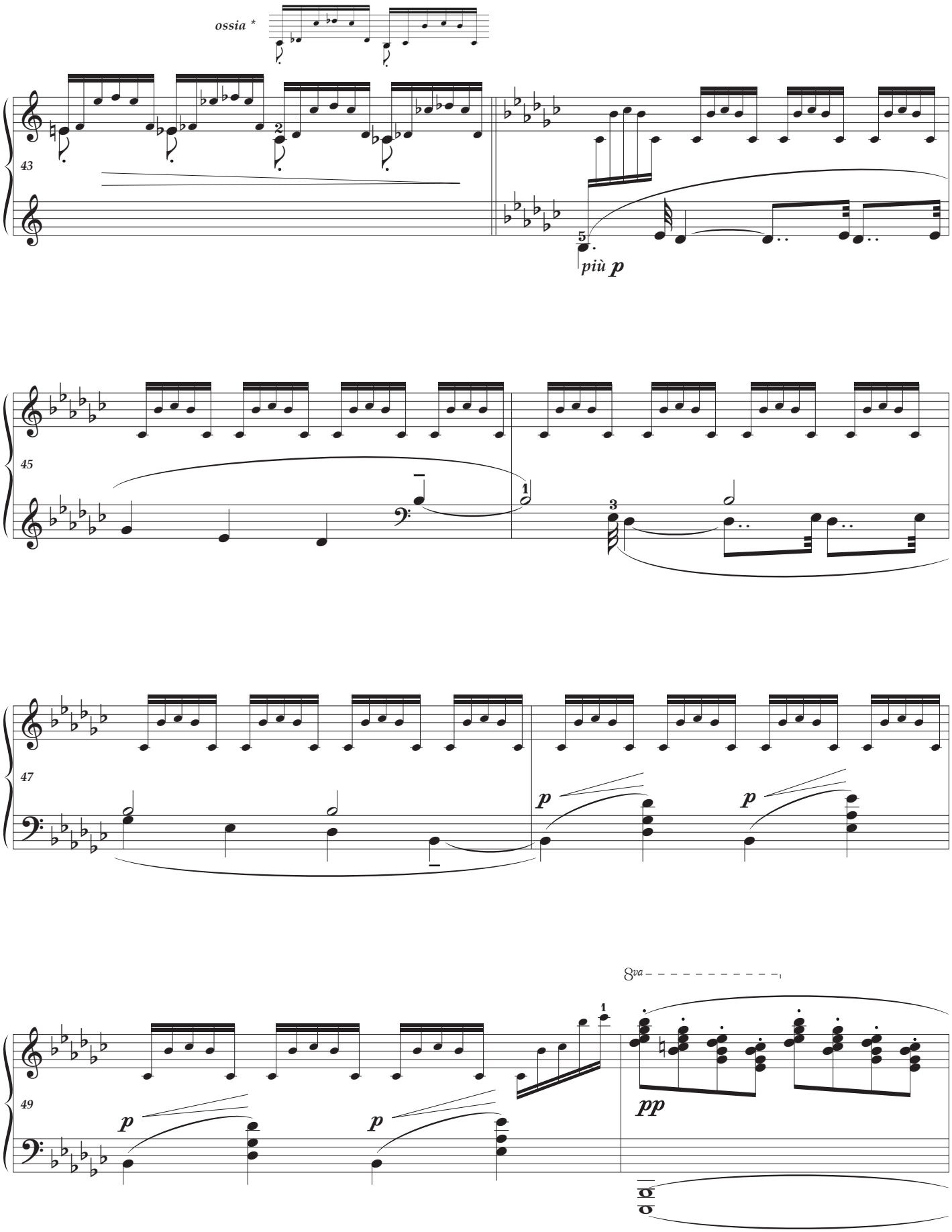
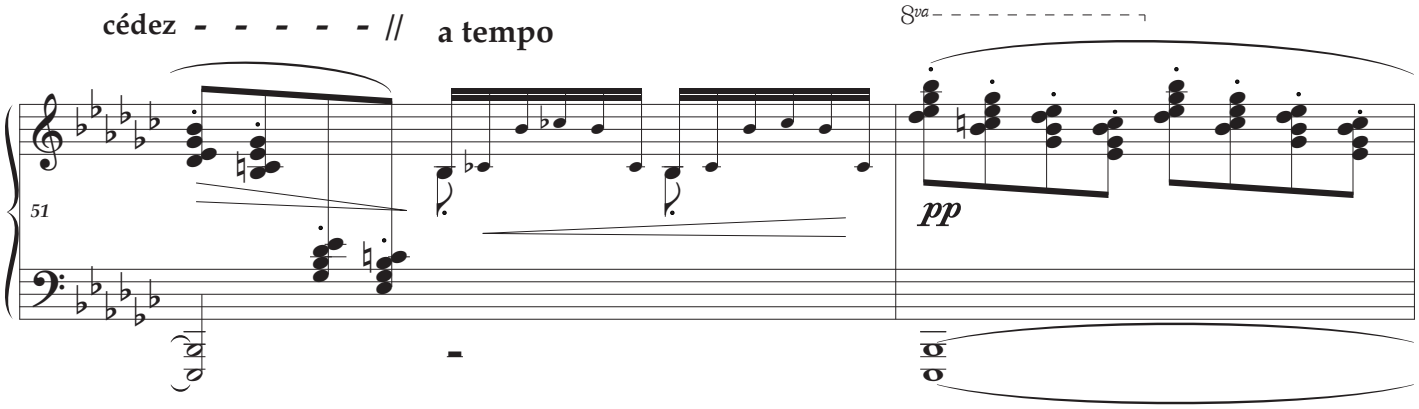
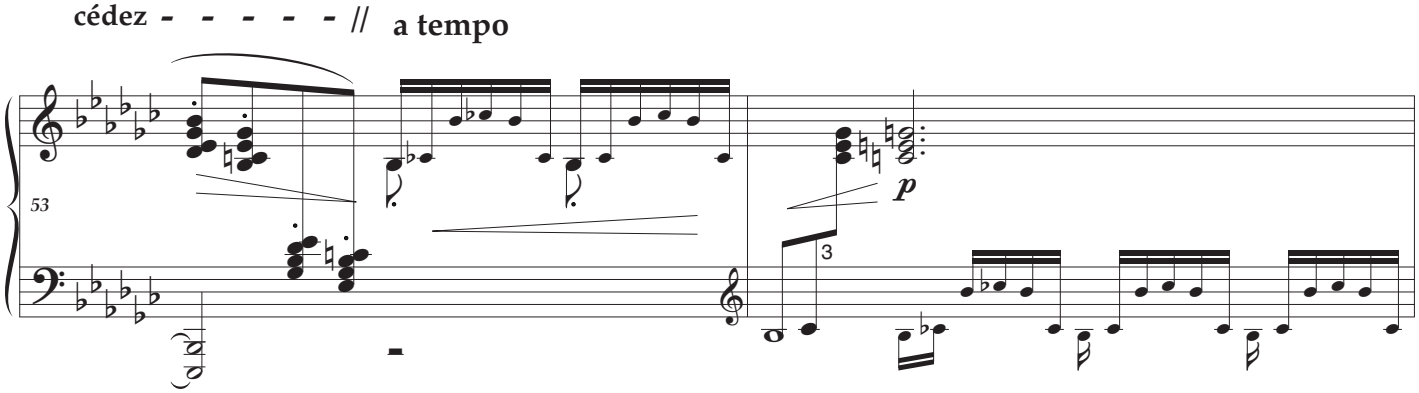
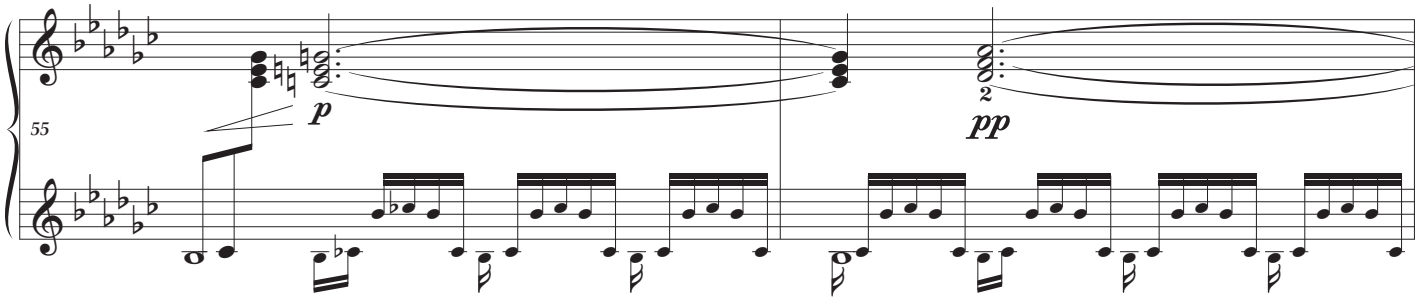
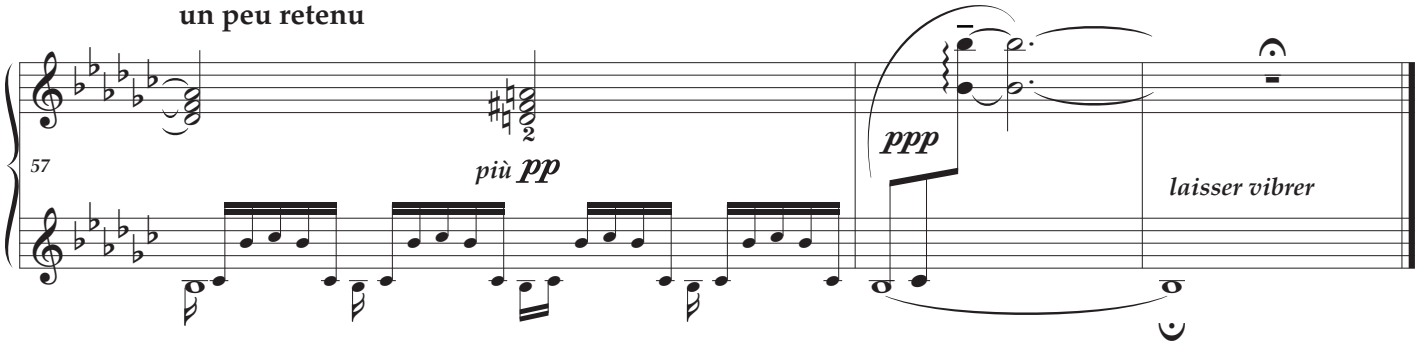

ossia *
43
più p
45
47
p
p
49
p
p
8va
pp









(... le vent dans la plaine)

IV

So much of Debussy's work is inspired by the written word and this prelude (possibly my favourite) — *sounds and scents fill the evening air* — takes its title from Baudelaire's pantoum* poem — *Evening Harmony*. The music truly evokes and reflects the sensuous text which talks of a melancholic waltz** and languorous elation, a repeated line along with another which describes a quivering emotive violin and a grieving heart.

First published in 1857, with themes relating to decadence and eroticism, *les fleurs du mal* (the flowers of evil) became fundamental to the symbolist and modernist movements, for which the author and publisher were prosecuted (just after *Madame Bovary* suffered similar accusations) — 'an insult to public decency'!

Indeed, this particular work is an outstanding example of the erotic, an inspired vision which Debussy has made his own: "It is necessary to abandon yourself completely, and let the music do as it will. All people come to music to seek oblivion".

The elusive evocation of Baudelaire is a nocturne dealing with the sensations aroused by a drowsy commingling of the senses, a theme close to the interests of the symbolist poets. The imagined fusion of sounds and scents is suggested by (or suggests) melodic fragments that attempt to rise, trail off into nothingness, or are caught in nostalgic webs of sound. The perfumed ambience of Baudelaire's Harmonie du Soir from Les Fleurs du Mal is further heightened by the distant horn calls at the final cadences.

— Irwin Freundlich

Harmonie du Soir ***

Voici venir les temps où vibrant sur sa tige
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir ;
Le violon frémit comme un coeur qu'on afflige ;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige,
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir !
Le ciel est triste et beau comme un grand reposoir ;
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le néant vaste et noir,
Du passé lumineux recueille tout vestige !
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son sang qui se fige...
Ton souvenir en moi luit comme un ostensoir !

Charles Baudelaire

The languid distress of an anxious day, perfumes which float in the air's caress, muffled vibrations perceived in the gently advancing night, and, to stay close to the sense of Baudelaire's quotation, vertiginous langour where a heart fails — without reason.

— Cortot

It is the intangible that rotates in the air and this has an impact on Debussy's harmony and, no less intriguingly, his form that takes us into new realms. Time and again the music is disorientated by the chromatic chord sequences (starting in bar 3) that effectively liquidate the harmony, and with it any clear, simple sense of form: magical sounds and scents that teach the brain new logics. The form breaks down into a kind of montage of brief images, at first apparently incoherent, then reconstructed through repetition and the forming of new connections. Risks are taken, assessed, listened to. At the piano he could bring this off; he was in his element. Impressionism or Symbolism? In this music the question is once again exposed as meaningless. The sounds are sounds and the perfumes are absent. Without the title, we could have no conception of the subject matter.

— Stephen Walsh

* A type of oriental poem with a set pattern of repetitive lines.

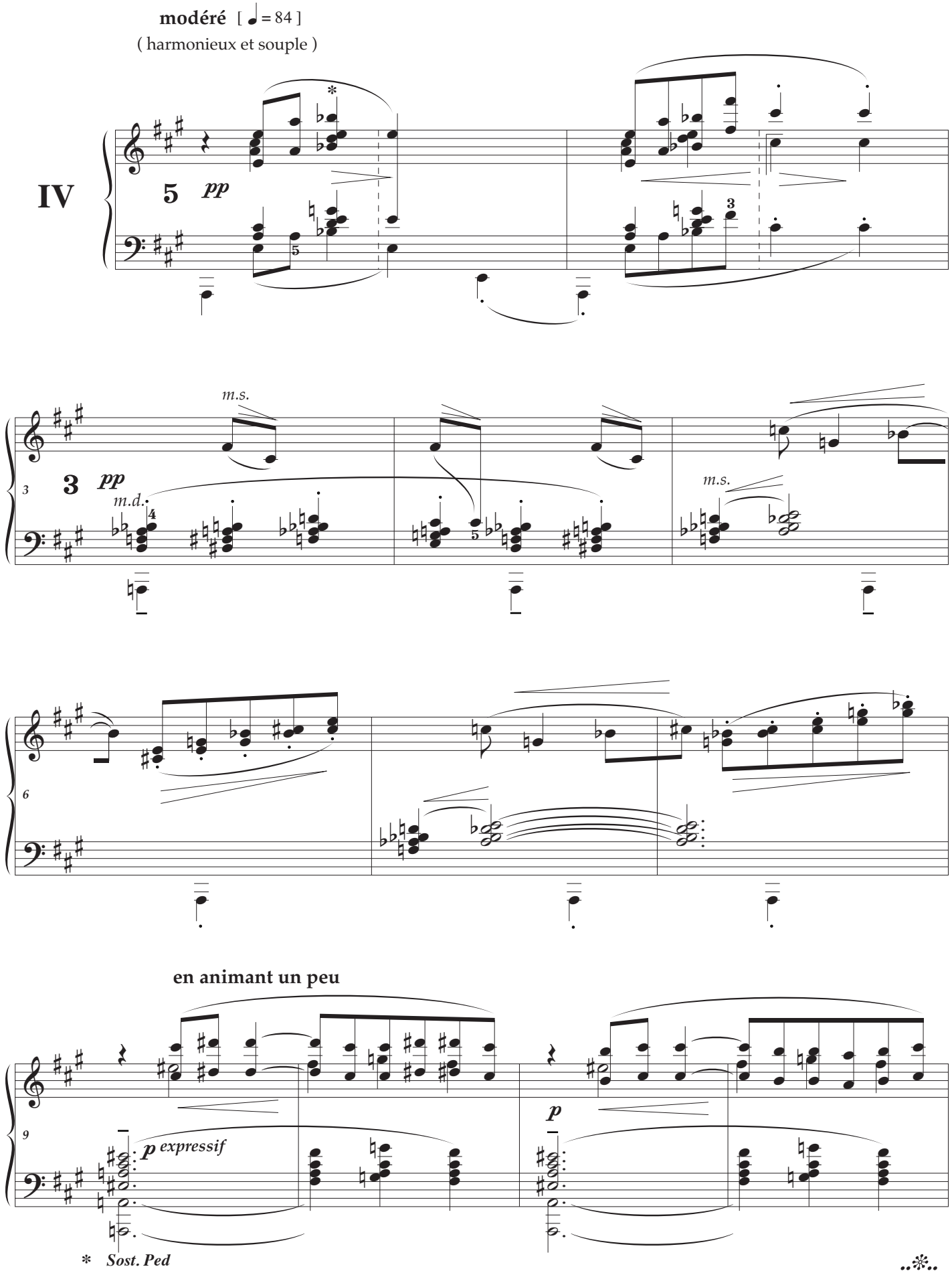
** The choice of waltz is significant, as at that time the waltz was still considered provocative with unusual physical proximity on the dance floor.

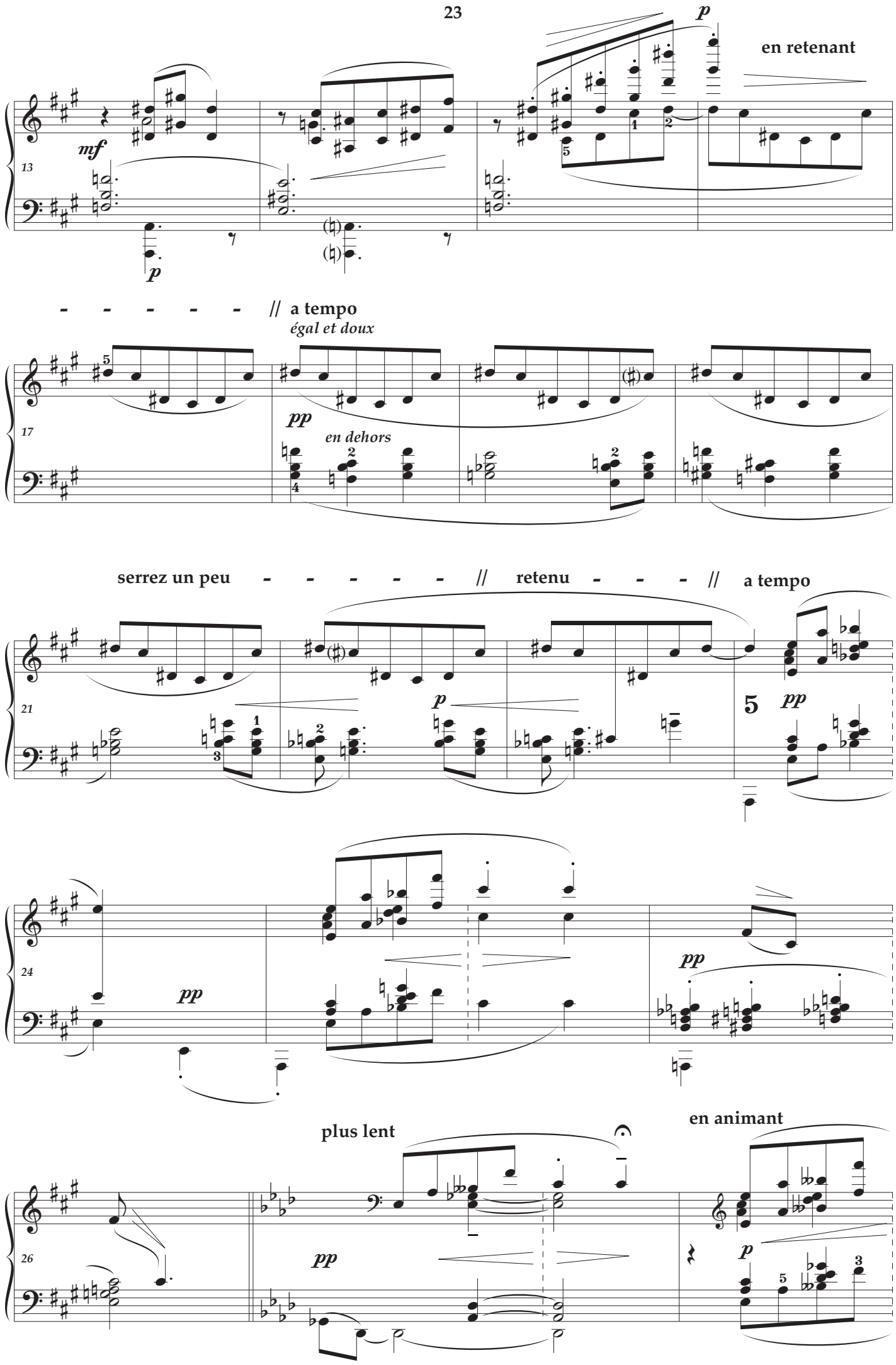
*** website translation

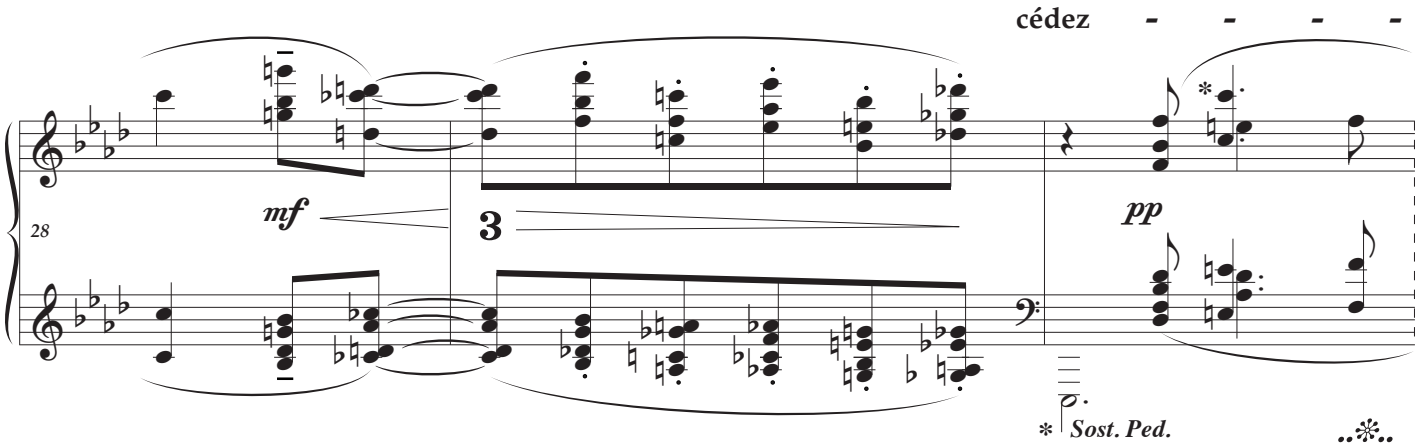
Duration: 3′45

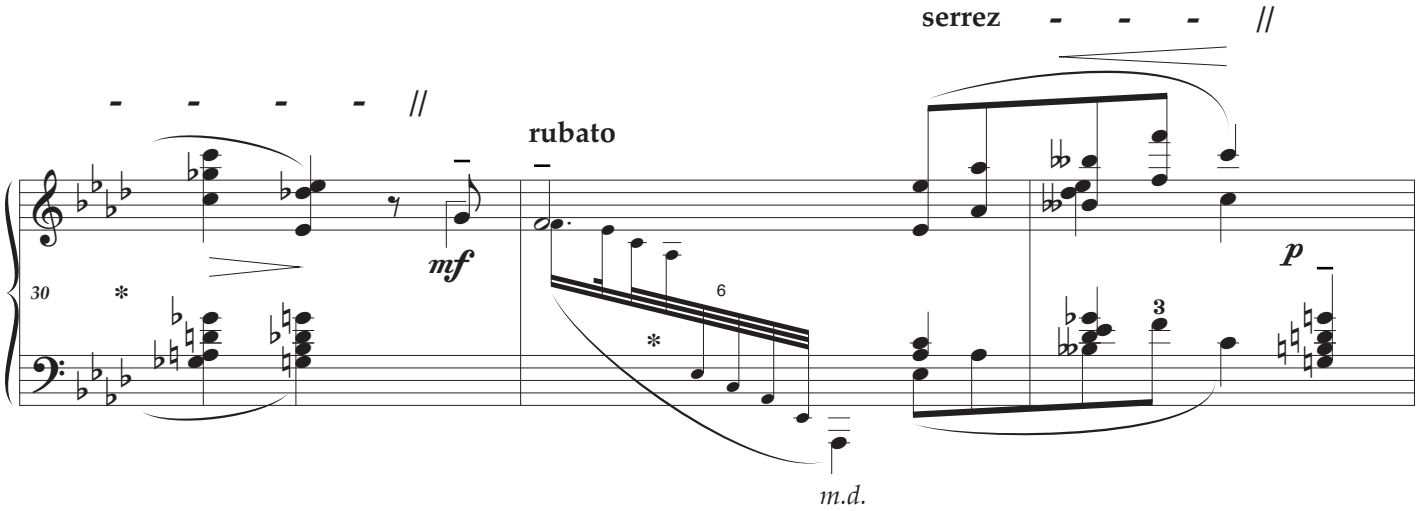
- **1** bars with 5 beats are sometimes easier to interpret by lightly accentuating as 2 + 3 (see **44**)
- **9-12** editorial *sostenuto* pedal to be coupled with the sustaining pedal
- **30** editorial *sostenuto* pedal suggestion
- **30** 2nd beat RH C octave the ties are missing in the original — probably an oversight
- **30-31** modification of time-signature
- **31-32** there are minor differences of rhythm in the original Durand edition
- **34-36** two bars reminiscent of another sensual poem — *La fille aux cheveux de lin*
- **38-39** there are confusing tenor dotted crotchets in the original
- **44** LH 4th beat and **45** 3rd beat — be careful to differentiate between the E♯ and E♮. Several recordings contain a misreading of the first particularly irresistible chord.
- **50 & 52** playing the acciaccaturas with the right hand makes it easier to synchronise these horn-like chords which evoke a quatrain from Baudelaire's *Les Phares (Les Fleurs du Mal) — Un appel de chasseurs perdus dans les grands bois !*

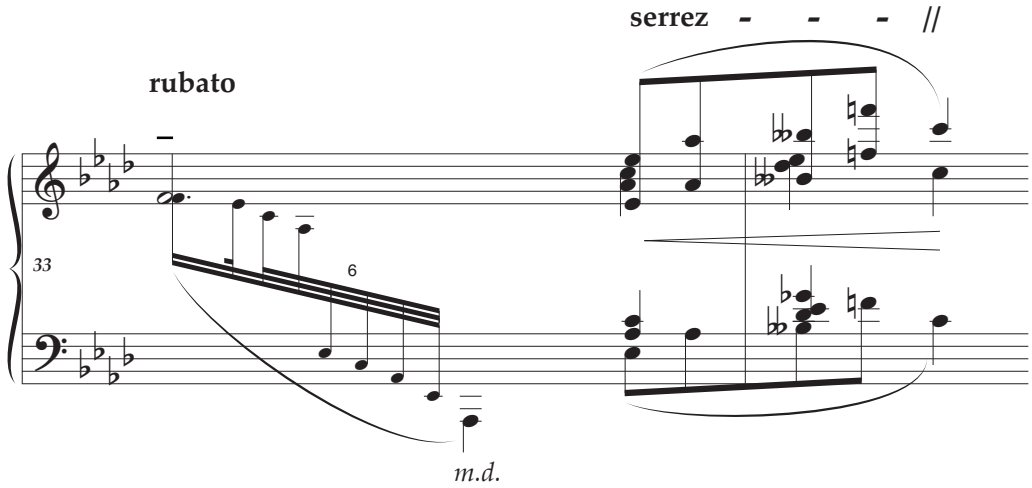
MONET *NYMPHÉAS, EFFET DU SOIR* 1902

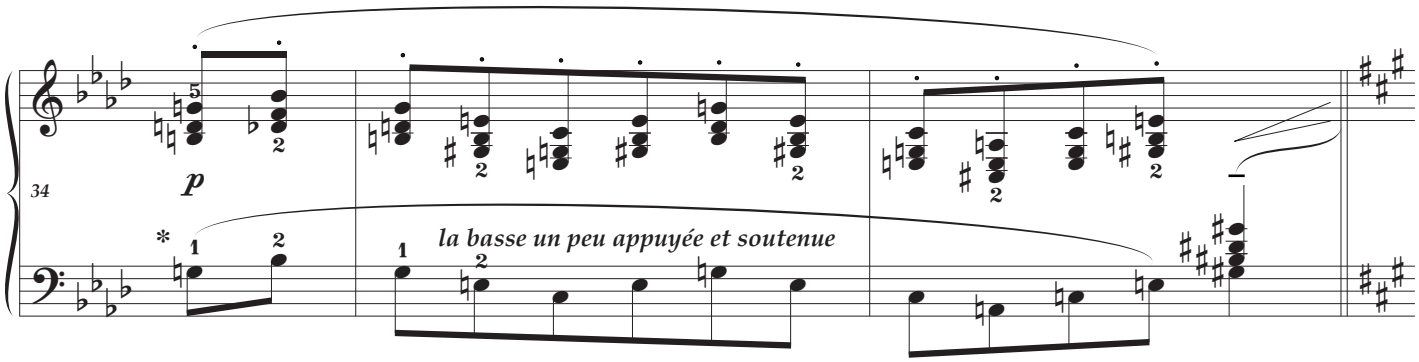

modéré [♩ = 84]
(harmonieux et souple)
IV
pp
m.s.
m.d.
en animant un peu
p expressif
p
* Sost. Ped

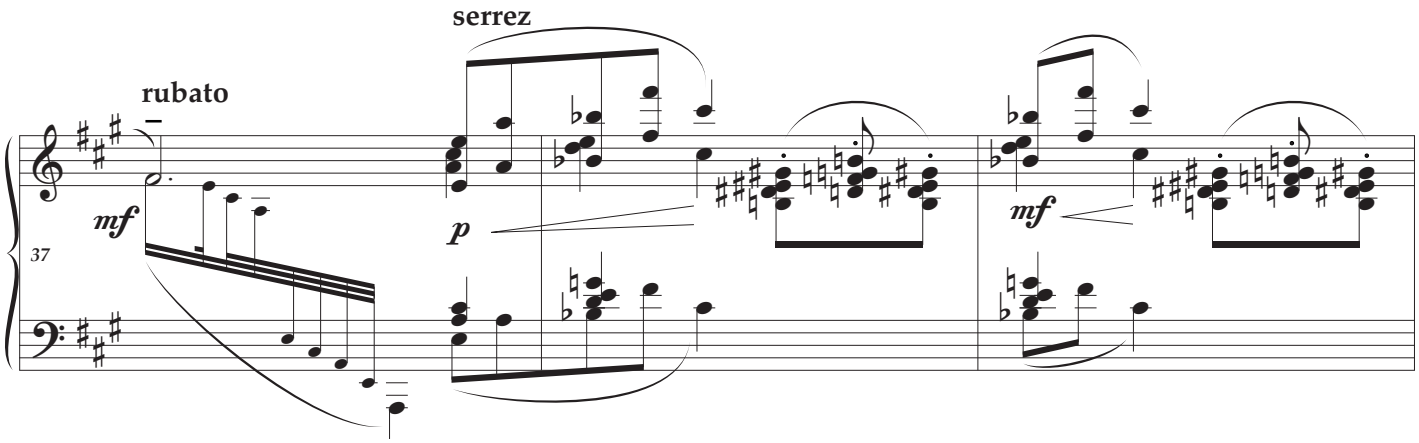

13
mf
p
p
en retenant
- - - - - - // a tempo
égal et doux
17
pp
en dehors
serrez un peu - - - - - - // retenu - - - // a tempo
21
p
5
pp
24
pp
pp
plus lent
en animant
26
pp
p

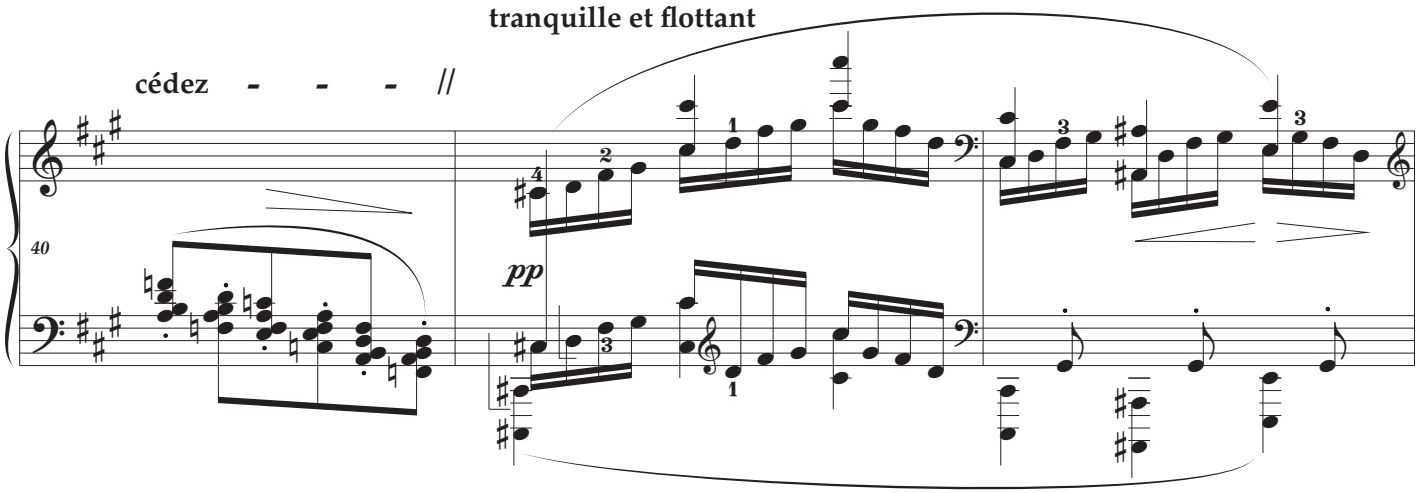

cédez - - - -
28
mf
3
pp
Sost. Ped.

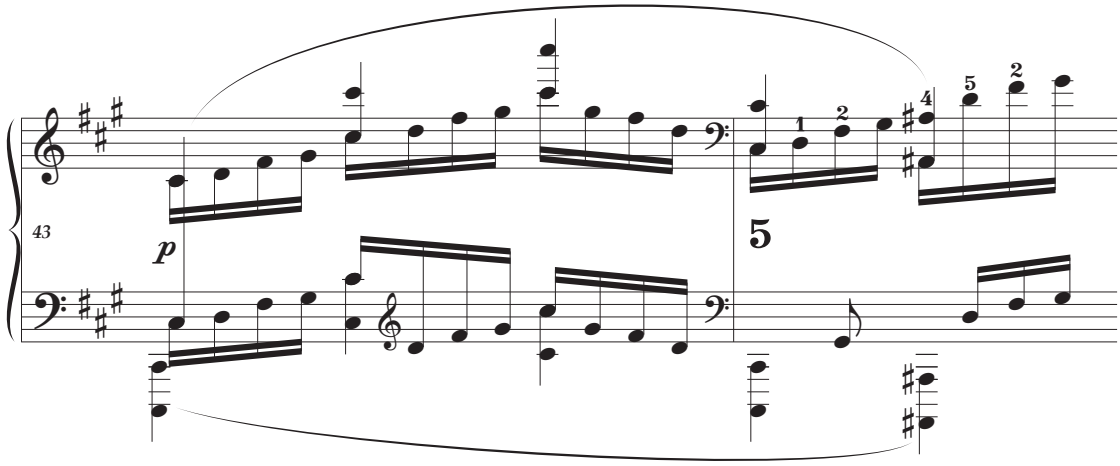

serrez - - - //
- - - - //
rubato
30
mf
6
p
3
m.d.

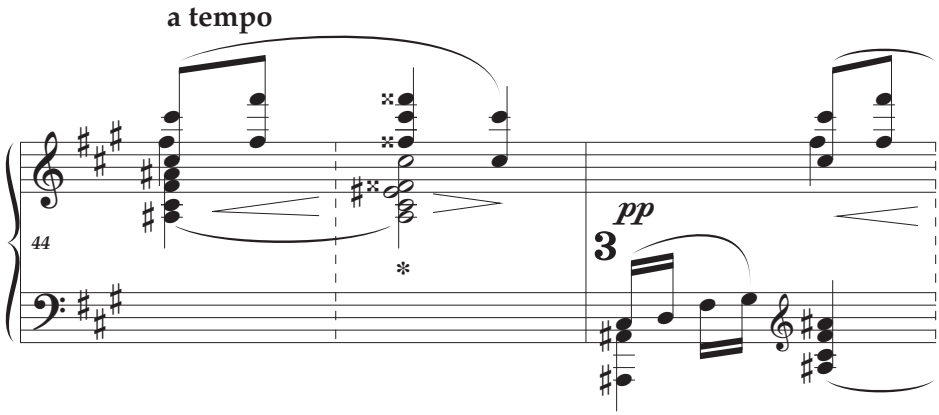

serrez - - - //
rubato
33
6
m.d.

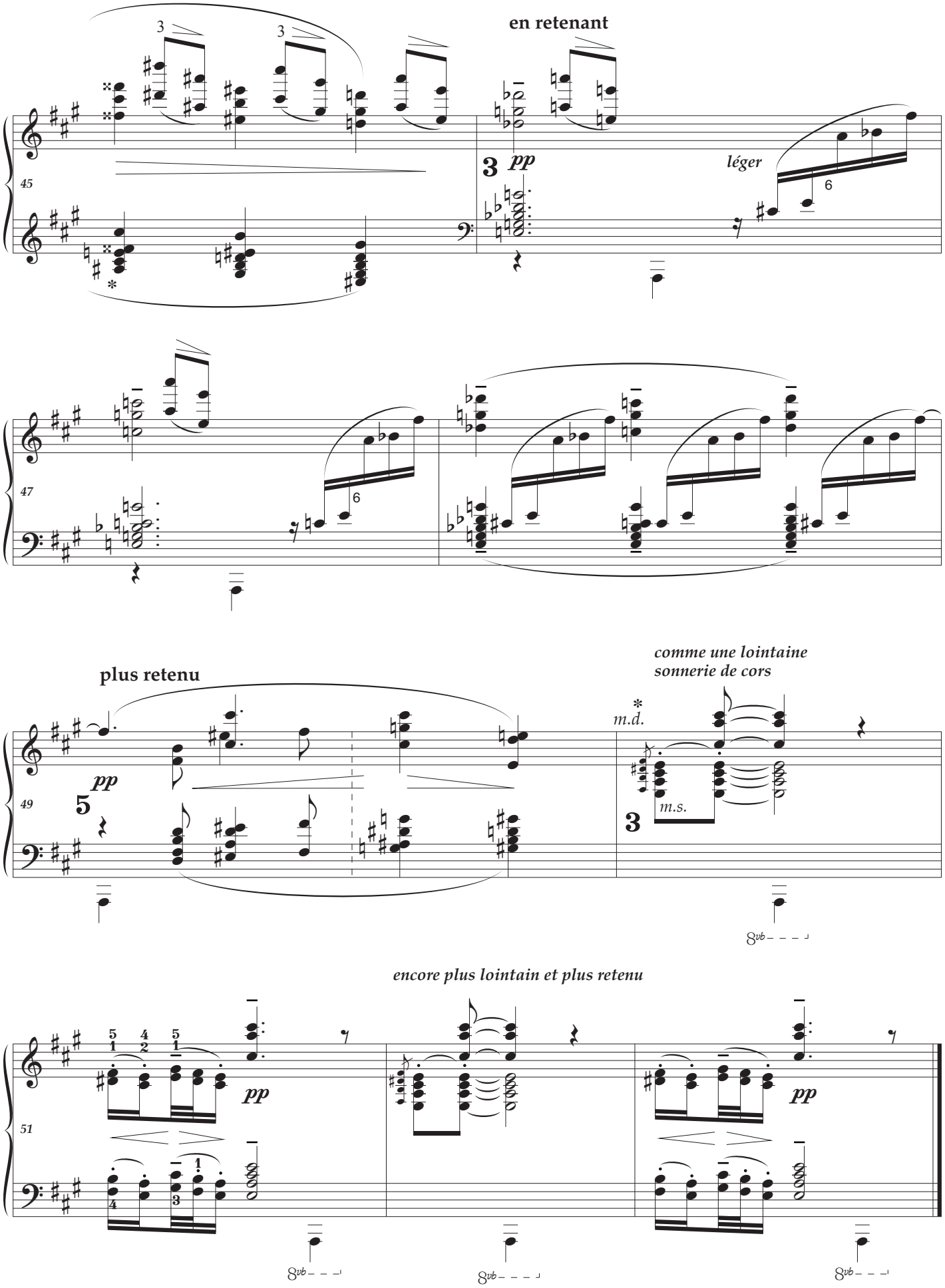

34
p
la basse un peu appuyée et soutenue


rubato
serrez
mf
p
mf
37


tranquille et flottant
cédez - - - //
pp
40


p
5
43


a tempo
pp
3
44



(... "les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir")

V

The bay of Naples sets the scene for the fifth prelude, *the hills of Anacapri*. By drawing in equal measure upon its rhythm and the brightness of the scenery, Debussy has redefined tonality in this splendid programme music, succeeding in fully capturing the exotic character of the mediterranean Italian island. A quasi-scherzo featuring pentatonic bells, a folksong and a tarantella bring forth vivid colours and views bathed in dazzling sunlight. The central Neapolitan love song could easily be mistaken for Albeniz.

* *Peindre non la chose mais son effet — la peinture est une poésie muette et la poésie une peinture parlante.*

Movement in light, a sunny vision of the hills of Naples; a lively tarantella rhythm merges with the nonchalance of a popular refrain, an amorous melody of delectable and banal nostalgia intensely mingling with the palpitations of a vivid blue sky, interrupted by the untiring and penetrating vitality of a rapid flute.

— Cortot

Possibly an impression of part of the island of Capri which Debussy probably never visited. One theory, offered guardedly by no less an authority than Roy Howat in the Foreword to the Collected Edition, is that the piece was inspired by the label on a bottle of Anacapri wine (presumably with a picture of the landscape). It includes bells, two popular songs, a tarantella and, unexpectedly, a habanera, and has the vividness and colouristic brilliance of a Derain or Matisse painting of the seaside village of Collioure.

— Stephen Walsh

We breathe thyme, cistus and the scent of the maquis. Let the cicadas rasp until the radiant fireworks at the finale! In Debussy's œuvre for piano, an equal intensity of light vibration can only be found at the conclusion of l'Isle Joyeuse.

— Harry Halbreich

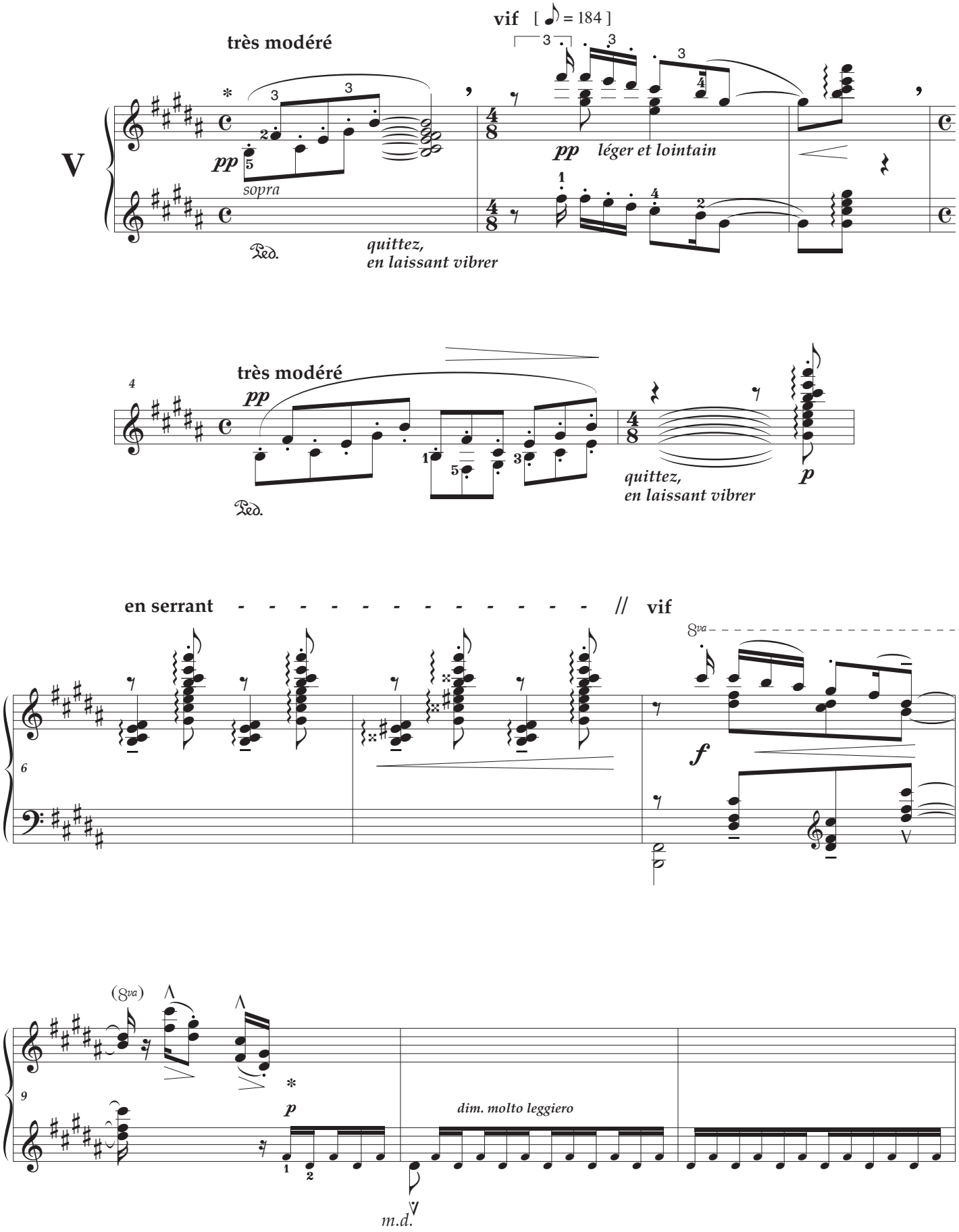
* Paint not the object but its effect — painting is mute poetry and poetry an eloquent picture

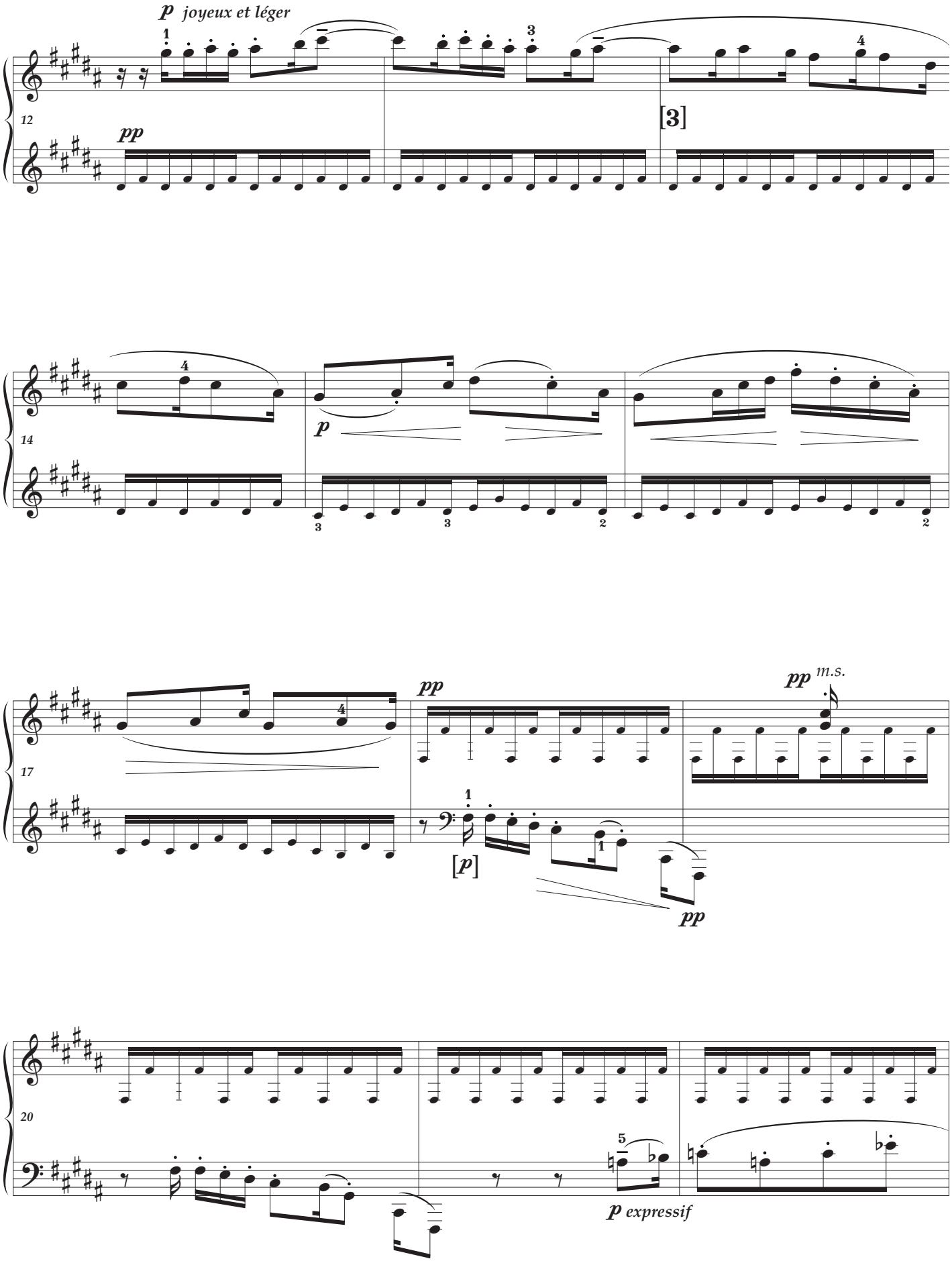
Duration: 3'45

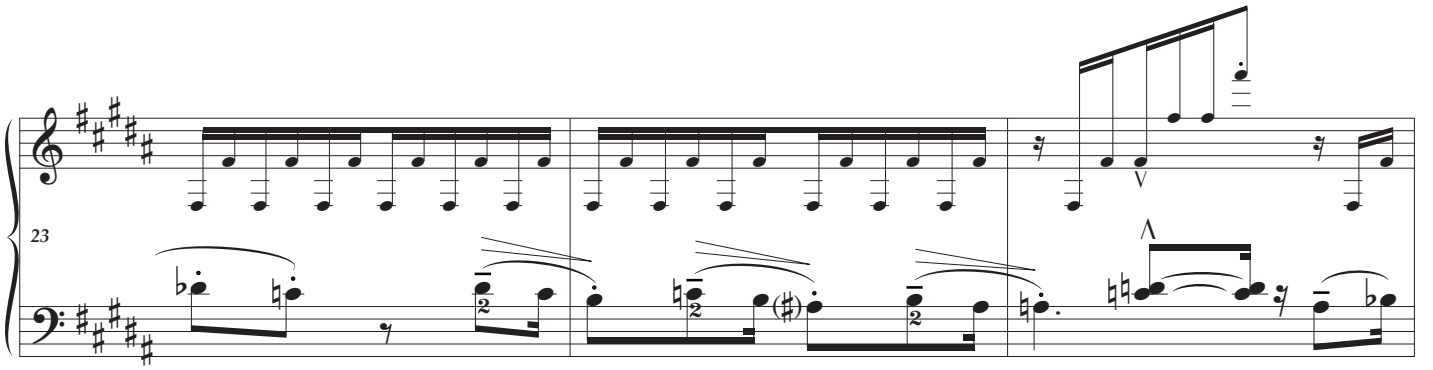
- editorial reduced notation
- **1-45** modified time-signatures — and editorial pedal interpretations

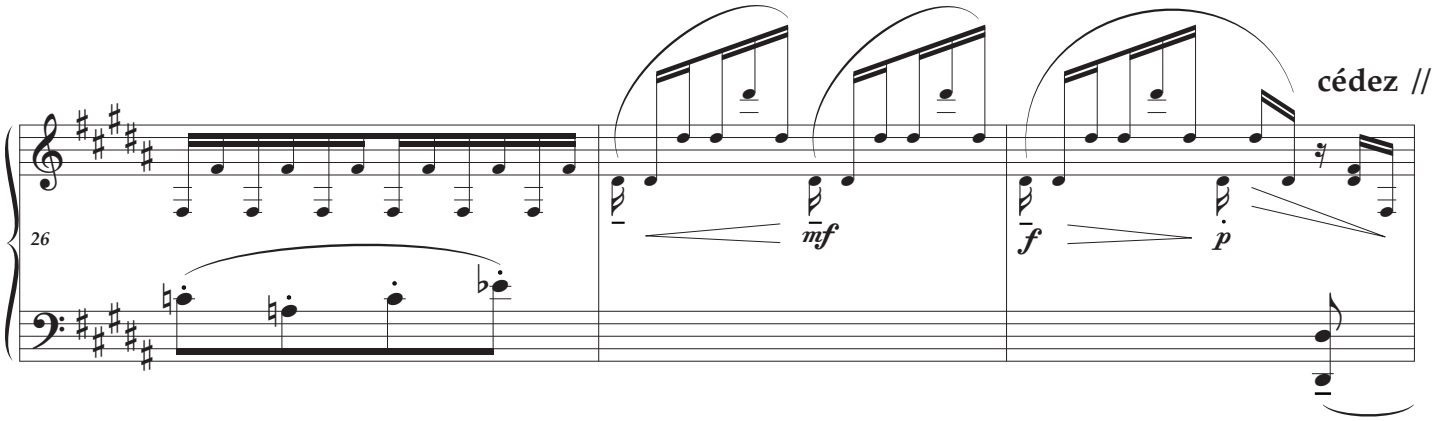
ASCAN LUTTEROTH *MONTE SOLARO* 1923

- **29** RH accompaniment slightly modified to match **33**
- **54** & **58** the original layout is somewhat confusing and can only be respected by arpeggiating the wider chords… an unlikely solution
- **67-68** modified time-signature
- **90-92** the rhythm in the original Durand edition is somewhat confusing — here is a possible solution. The pedal suggestion is editorial.


V
très modéré
vif [♪ = 184]
pp
sopra
Ped.
quittez,
en laissant vibrer
pp
léger et lointain
très modéré
pp
Ped.
quittez,
en laissant vibrer
p
en serrant - - - - - - - - - - - - - - // vif
8va
f
(8va)
p
dim. molto leggiero
m.d.

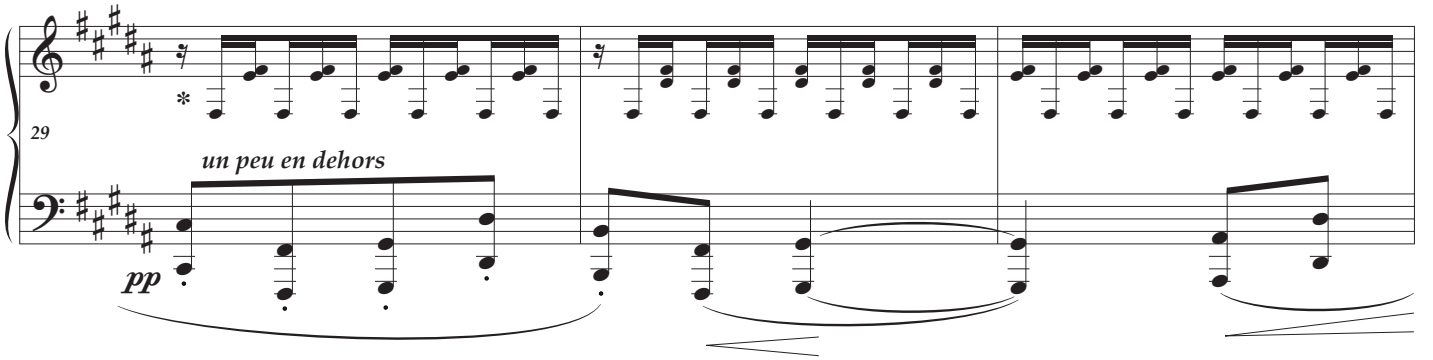

p joyeux et léger
pp
[3]
p
pp
[p]
pp
pp m.s.
p expressif



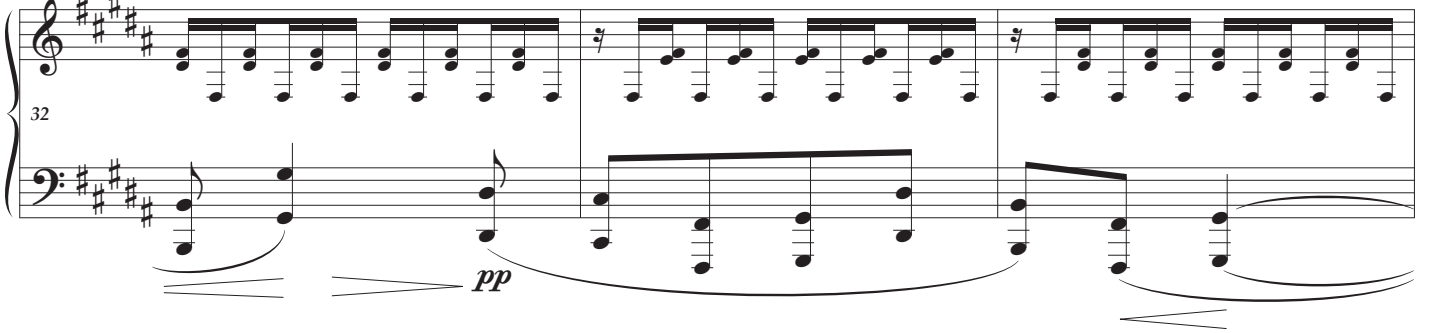


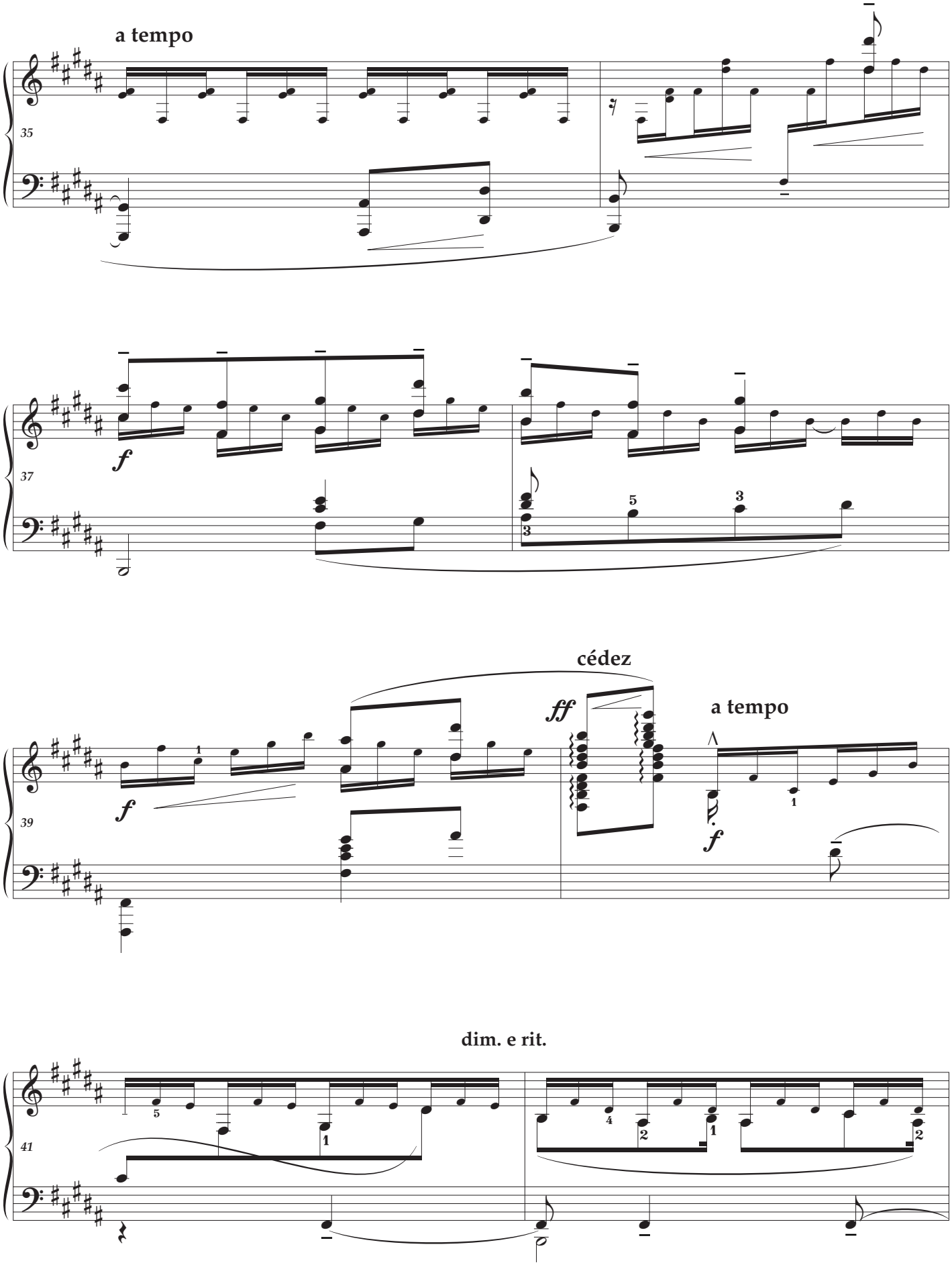
a tempo

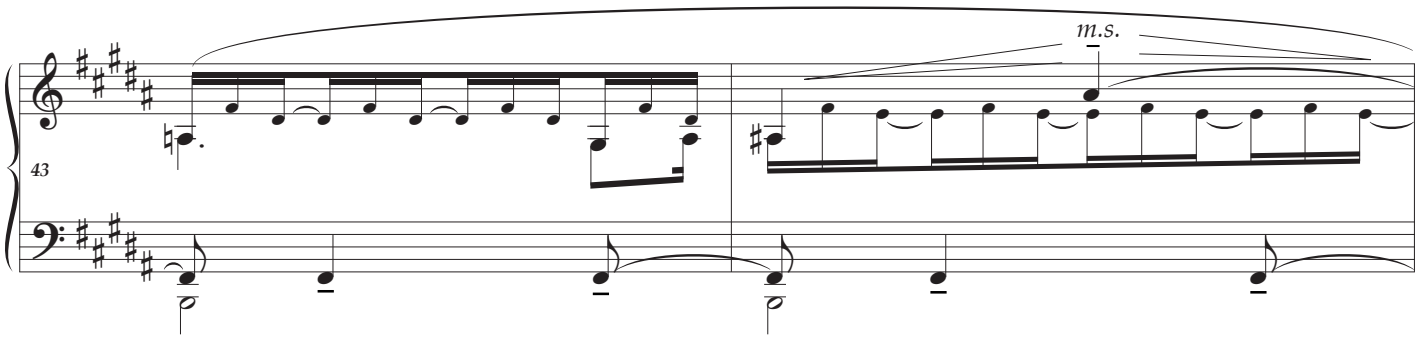
(avec la liberté d'une chanson populaire) **cédez - - - - - // a tempo**

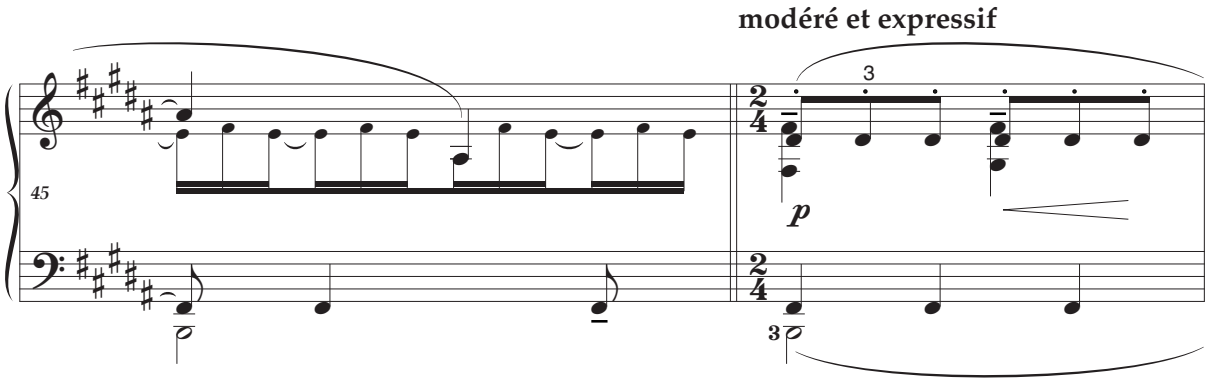


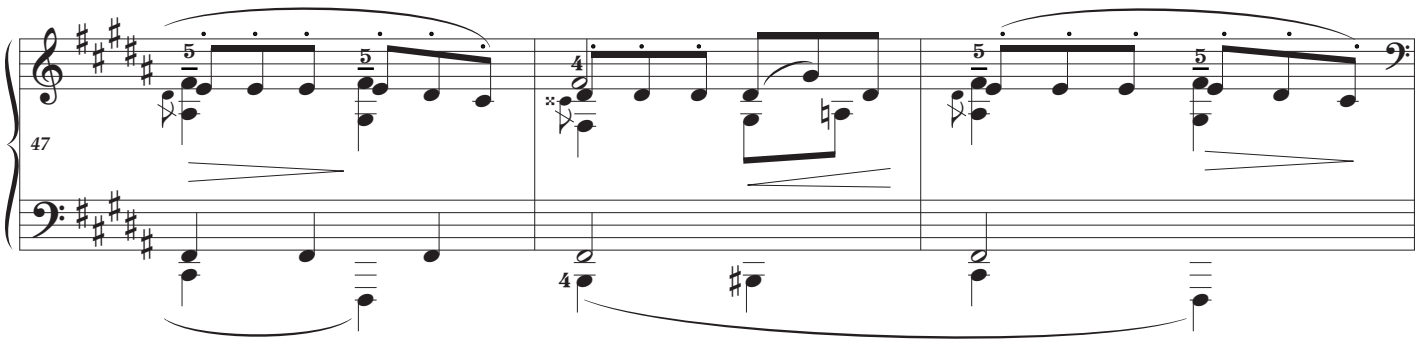
cédez - - - - - //




a tempo
35
37
f
5
3
3
cédez
ff
a tempo
39
f
1
1
f
dim. e rit.
41
5
1
4
2
1
2


43
m.s.


45
modéré et expressif
p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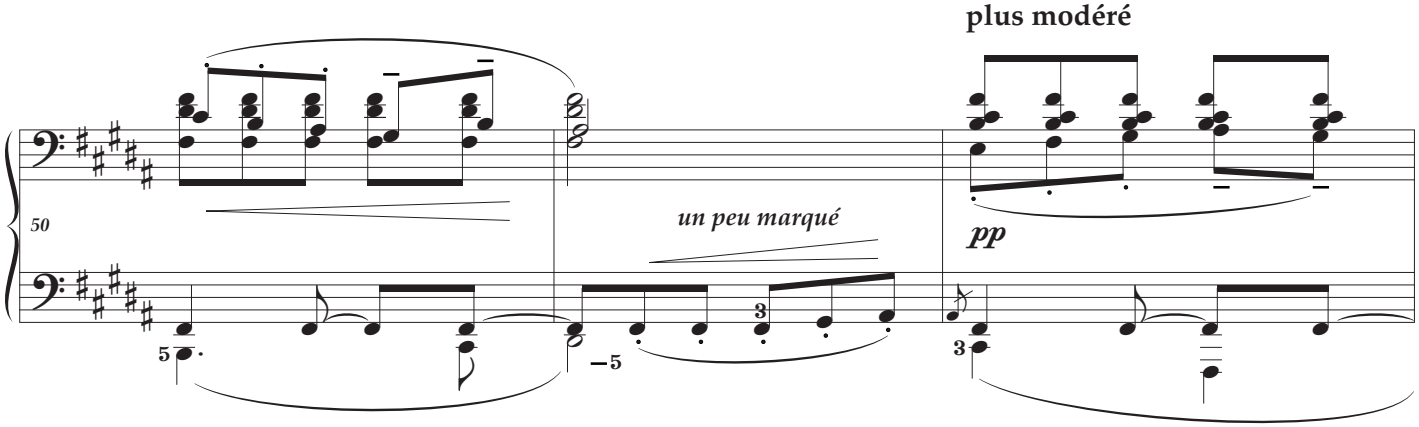
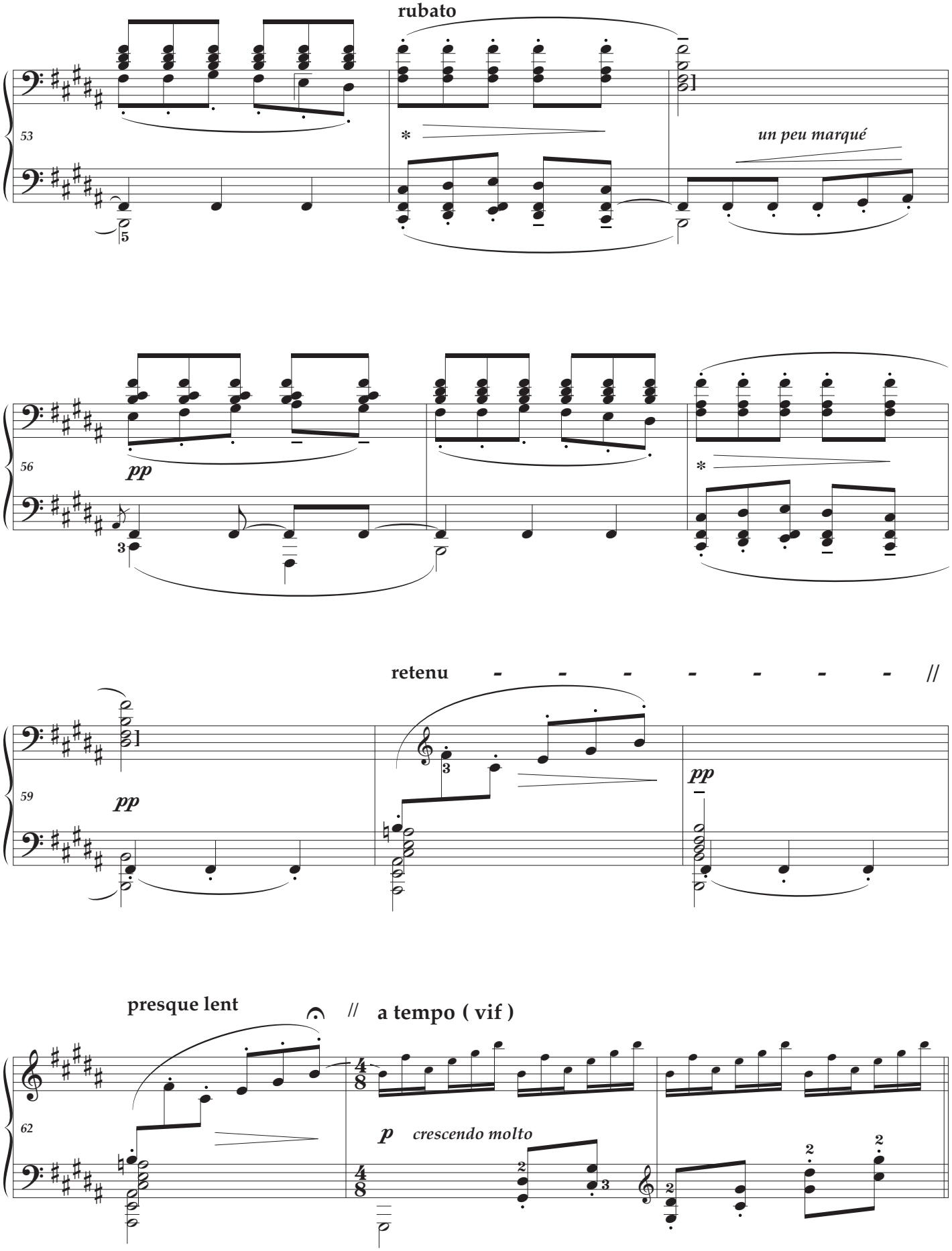
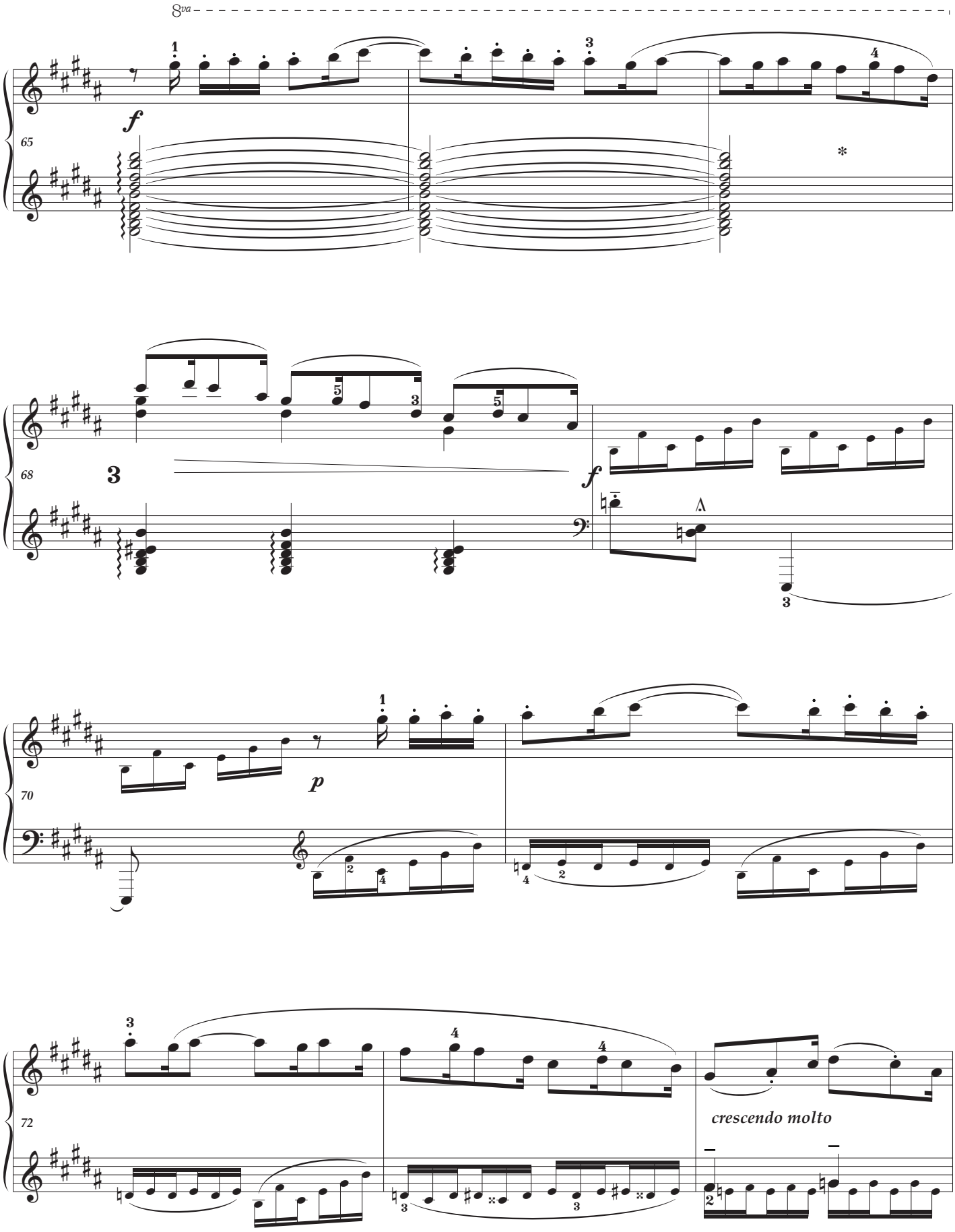
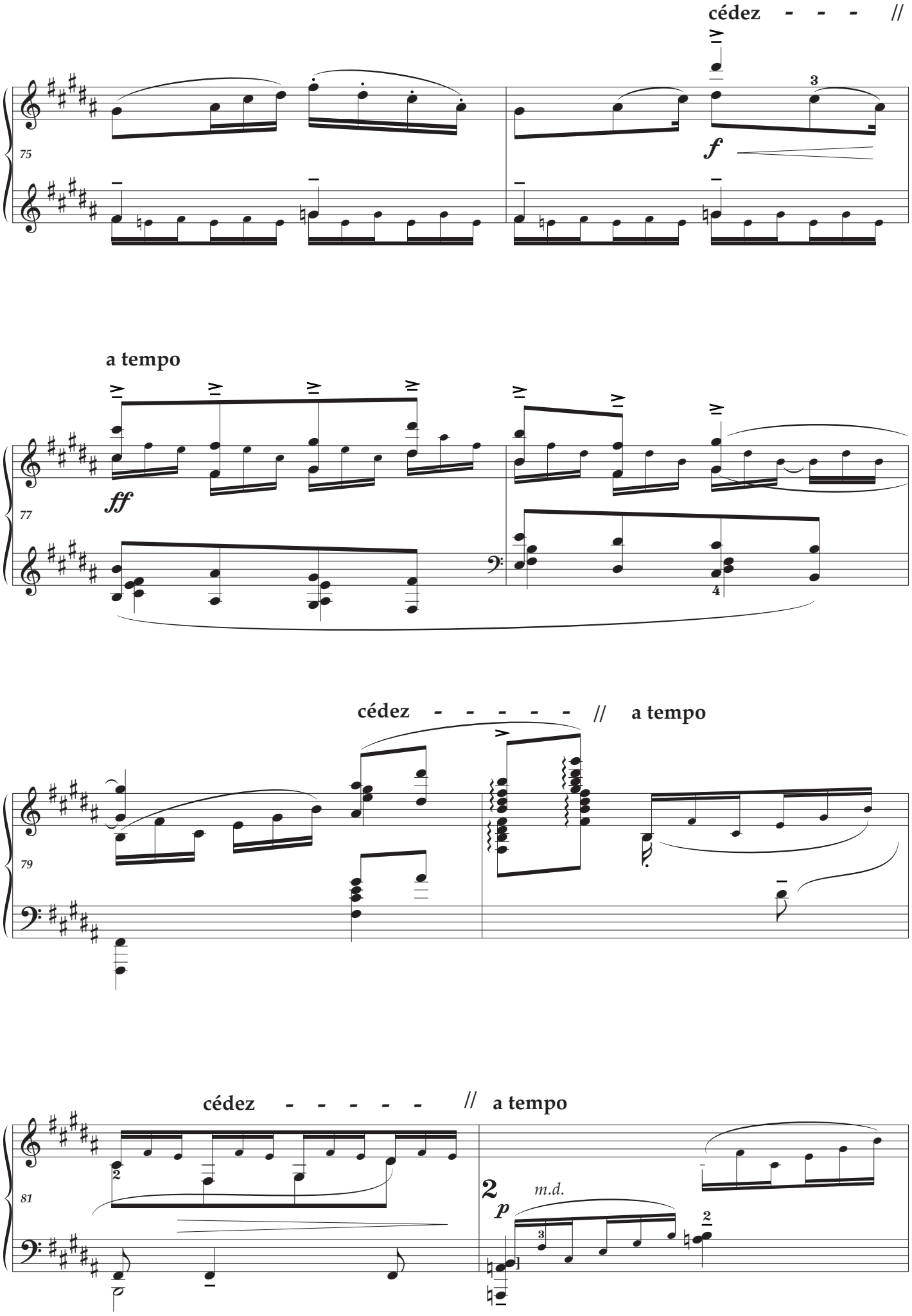
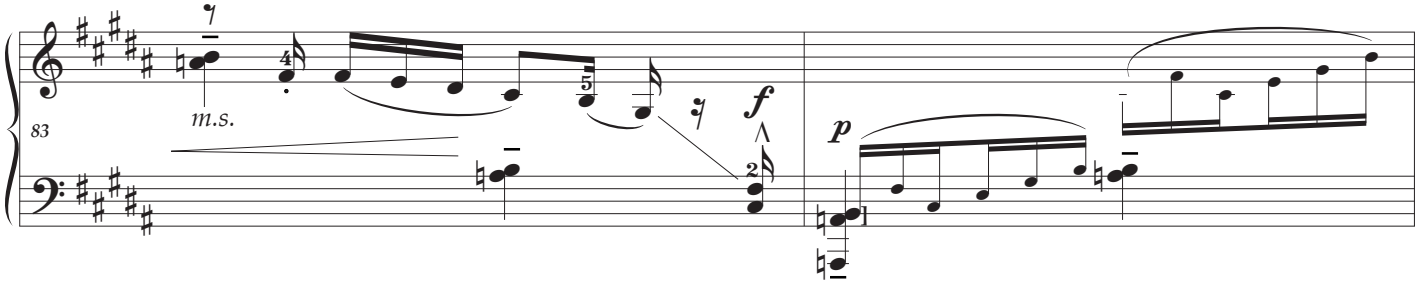
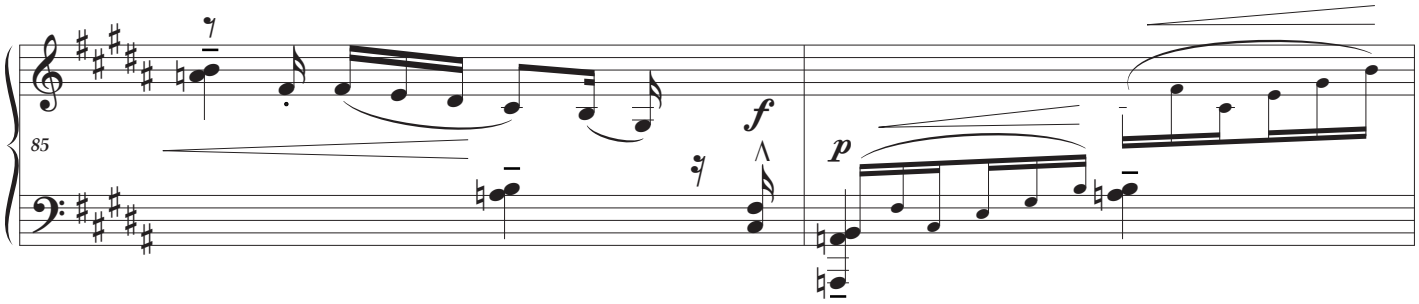

50
un peu marqué
plus modéré
pp

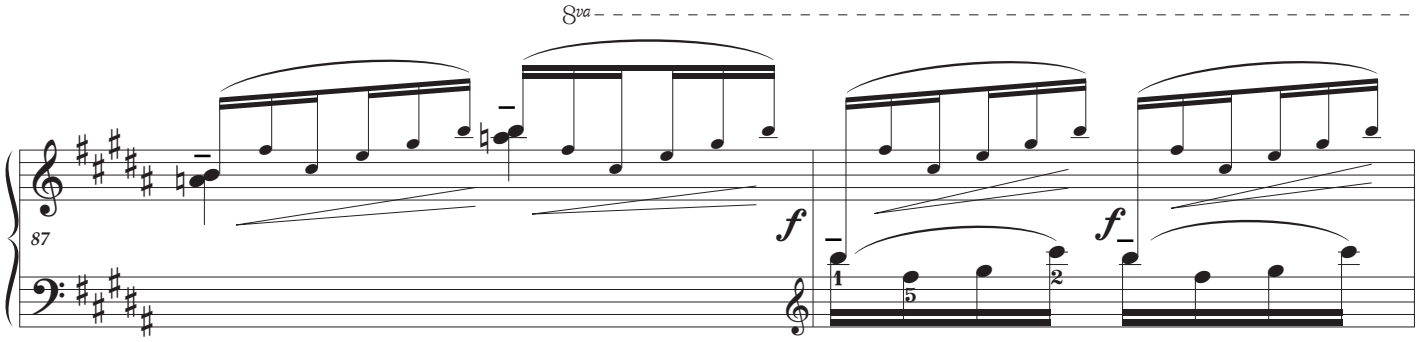

rubato
53
un peu marqué
56
pp
retenu
59
pp
pp
presque lent
a tempo (vif)
62
p
crescendo molto


8va
65
f
68
3
f
70
p
72
crescendo molto

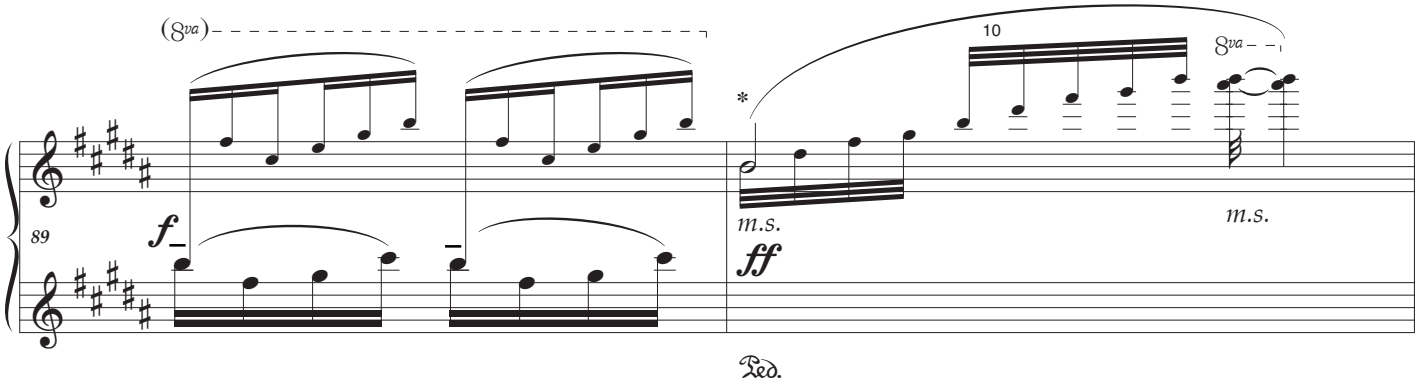

cédez - - - //
75
f
a tempo
77
ff
cédez - - - - - // a tempo
79
cédez - - - - - // a tempo
81
p
m.d.



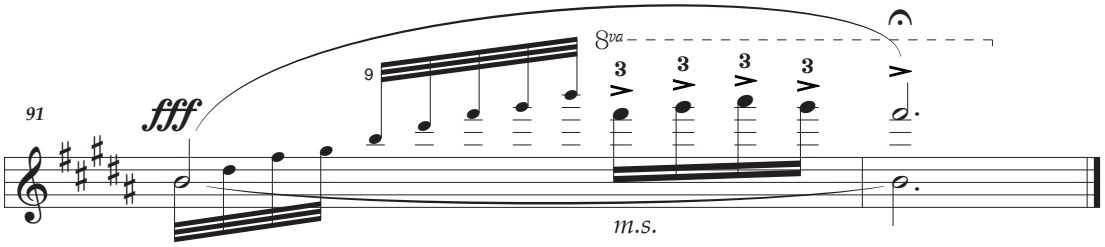




lumineux



très retenu



(... les collines d'Anacapri)

VI

The years 1909 and 1910 were terribly distressing for the composer — he was diagnosed with a particularly painful cancer and his father Manuel-Achille was close to death*. Now approaching the winter of his life, these two events must have weighed heavily, and this depressing and desolate image of silence and isolation, surely corresponded to thoughts of mortality. **Edward Lockspeiser**: *those solitary footsteps marked out in the desolate snowscape — where do they lead?*

Unlike many of the more approachable preludes in Book I, this hypnotic work must be one of the most profound from his œuvre. In spite of, or perhaps because of its despondency, I love playing this evocative work — the dragging rhythm, the hypnotic ostinato — melancholic throughout except for two illuminated, almost exalted passages in G flat (**22** and **29**). Like a sad and tender lament, the image fades into nothingness with untold emotion.

Regarding the incessant appoggiaturas, Debussy indicated "*ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé*" (this rhythm should reflect the sounds of a desolate and frozen landscape).

It was composed on 27th December 1909 and published in 1910, with a first performance in 1911 by Debussy himself.

With an anguished tone poem Debussy summons a sorrowful and frozen winter landscape; the absent beloved, faint imprints of her departure, each one painfully reliving a serene memory that is no more.

— *Cortot*

*le tombeau des Naïades***

Le long du bois couvert de givre, je marchais ; mes cheveux devant ma bouche se fleurissaient de petits glaçons, et mes sandales étaient lourdes de neige fangeuse et tassée…

Through the frosty wood, I walked; my hair covering my mouth where flourished icy crystals, and my sandals were heavy of dense sodden snow…

Pierre Louÿs

Like Monet, Debussy here found solace, working with a winter scene. Music is a matter of colours and rhythmicised time, and in 'des Pas sur la Neige', the idea of time being stretched out and probed for its hidden content is almost palpable. In a sense, the music gets nowhere; it is a time capsule in which we experience extension, then step out, like the soldier in Stravinsky's L'Histoire du soldat, exactly as and where we were when we stepped in, but with knowledge that was not previously ours.

— *Stephen Walsh*

Debussy was a fiercely independent composer, who like Beethoven learned from past masters only to blaze ahead on his own path, always the seeker. For like Beethoven, Debussy knew that the burden of the explorer is that the promised land is never reached, and that each discovery, miraculous as it may be, is yet another of music's imperishable illusions. He was a part of no group and left no school behind him.

— *Edward Lockspeiser*

** an appropriate frozen opening verse from the final song of *trois chansons de Bilitis*

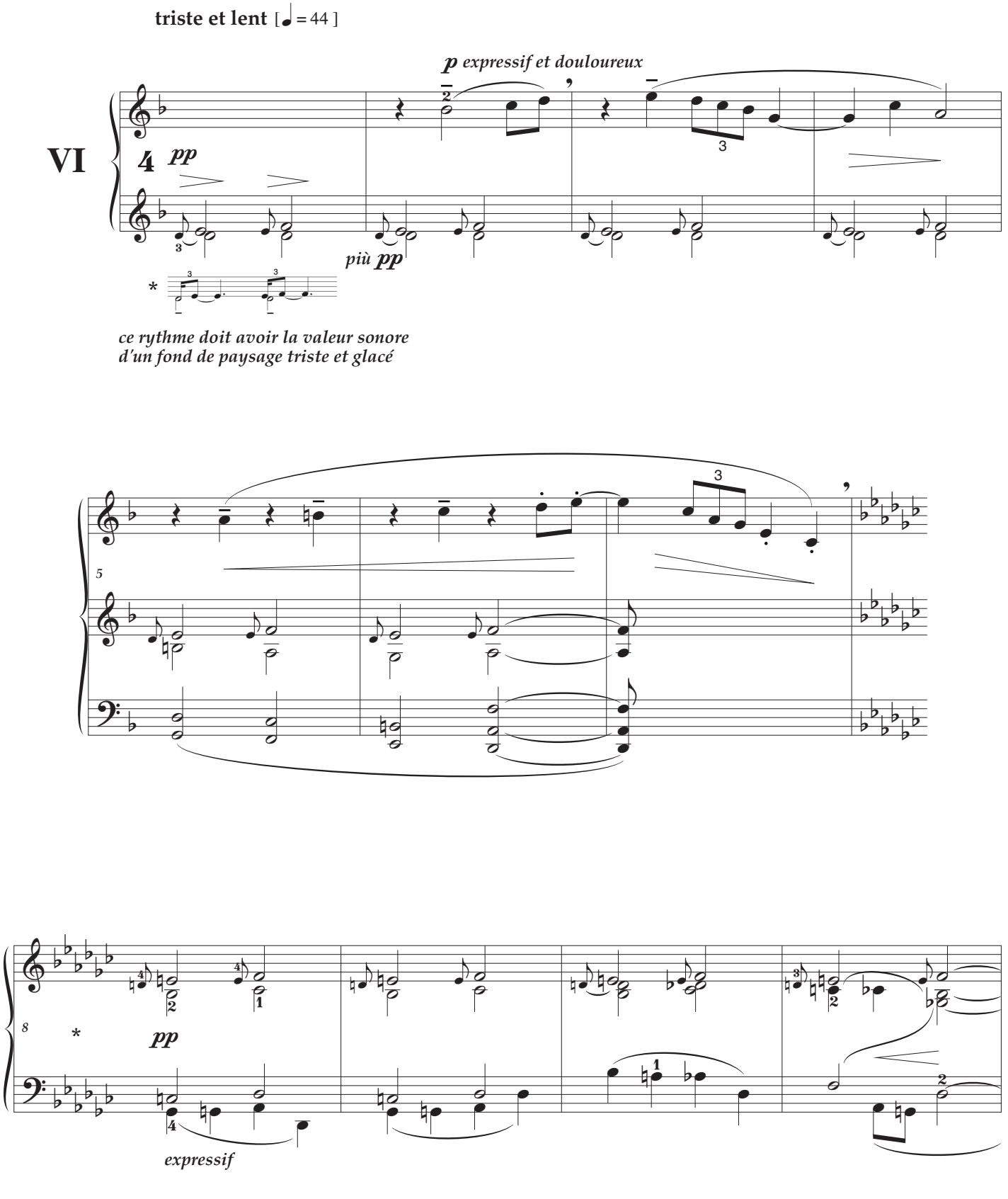
Duration: 4 minutes

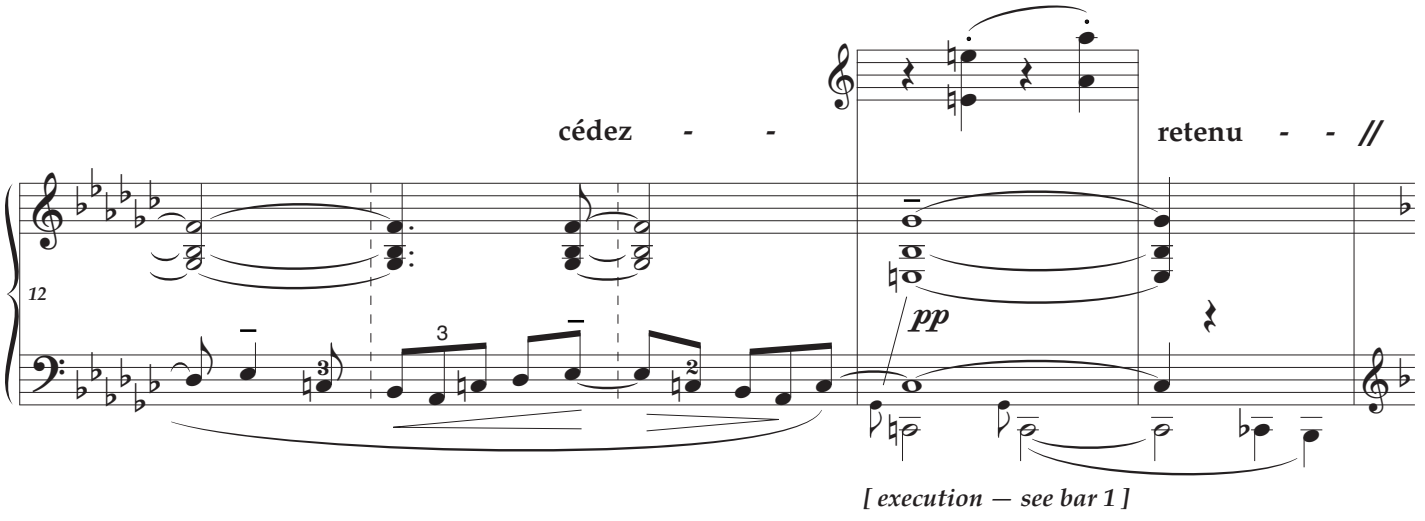
- this edition features hand swapping and a quite few practical 'arrangements'
- beware of starting too slowly, keeping something in reserve for the slower tempi beyond **33**
- **1** appoggiaturas should be executed thus throughout
- **8** & **22** editorial modifications of key-signature
- **12-14** editorial modifications of time-signature and dashed barlines
- **22** editorial *sostenuto* pedal

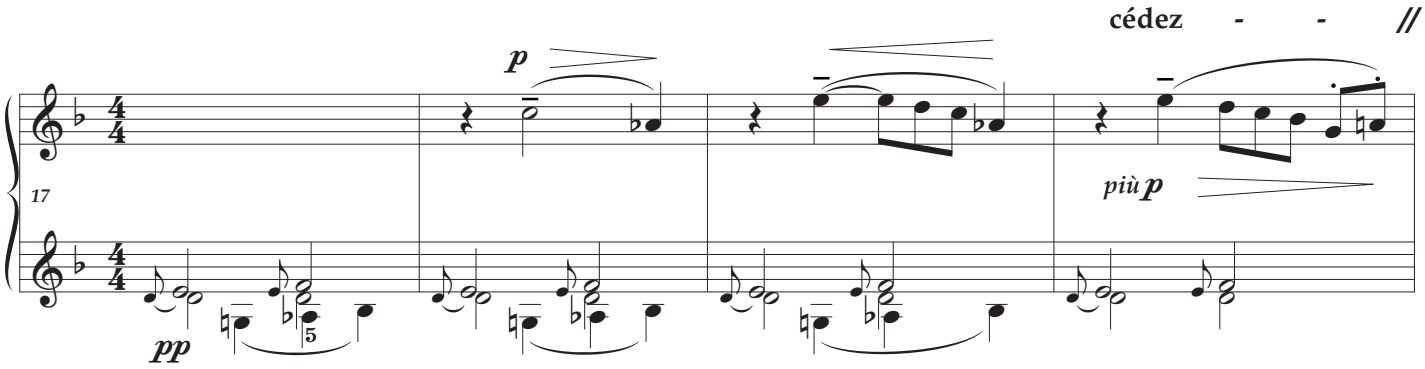
MONET *GLAÇONS, EFFET BLANC* 1893

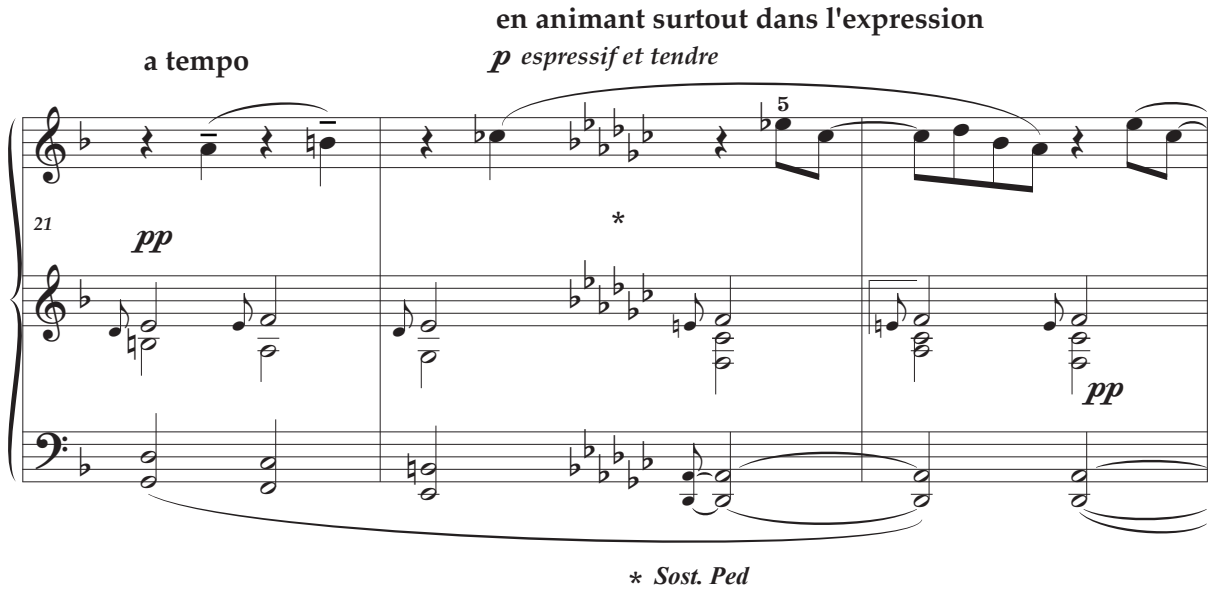
** A late photograph of Debussy together with his parents in 1909 suggests the warmth and mutuality of a suburban homecoming. Debussy was sincerely distressed by his father's death; "although we practically never had an idea in common," he wrote, "it's a loss I feel more deeply each passing day."*

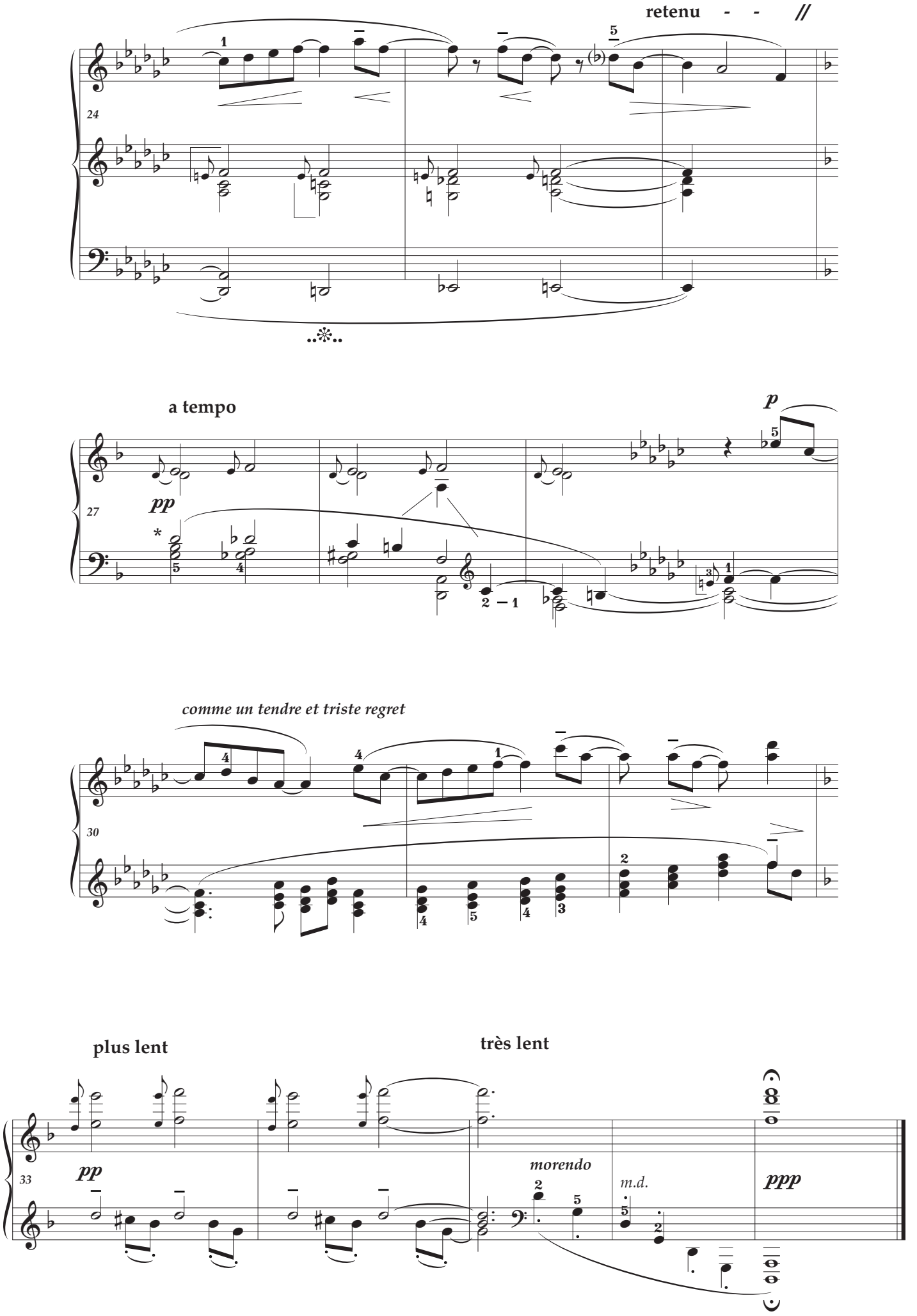
— Stephen Walsh


triste et lent [♩ = 44]
VI
pp
p expressif et douloureux
più pp
*
ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore
d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé
5
8
*
pp
expressif


cédez - -
retenu - - //
12
pp
[execution — see bar 1]


cédez - - //
p
17
più p
pp


en animant surtout dans l'expression
a tempo
p espressif et tendre
21
pp
*
pp
* Sost. Ped



(... des pas sur la neige)

VII

With unusually violent adjectives — *strident, angoissé, incisif, furieux* — *What the West Wind Saw* was composed at about the same time as Bartók's *Allegro barbaro* and Prokofiev's *Toccata*. Much of Debussy's output is inspired by the wind, and while it is true that the titles appear at the end of each work, they must have been influential in the choice of subject. Simultaneously, *The Garden of Paradise**, a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, was translated into French; a young prince finds the cavern of the four winds and a woman identified as their mother. However, given the extreme dissonance, the most likely source is Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, penned in 1819 (2 short extracts**). This prelude and *l'Isle Joyeuse* are the composer's most pianistically impressive pieces, their virtuosity so beloved of the public at large. In extreme contrast with the two adjacent preludes it evokes the turbulence of nature, which Victor Lederer describes as 'cathartic violence'. Whatever its inspiration, gusts storm under a leaden sky and we encounter a challenging and effective romantic work, highly charged emotionally and very satisfying to study.

> *Through the pallid glow of dawn, or in the terror of the night, this is the dreadful vision of a tempest where, in the howling of an unchained sea, there pass cries of agony rejected by the waves.*
>
> — *Cortot*

> *A more or less candid parody of Liszt, especially 'Orage', from the first set of Années de pèlerinage, with which Paul Roberts has found clear thematic connections. But Roberts also points out that Debussy's prelude, though frightening in its violence and virtuosity, is devoid of the pathos in Liszt's parallel between the wild elements and human suffering. "Debussy's West Wind," he notes "never sees the valley of despair experienced by Liszt's Obermann".*
>
> — *Stephen Walsh*

** "I have rushed wildly across the savannahs; I have stroked the wild horses, and shaken the coconuts from the trees. Yes, I have many stories to relate; but I need not tell everything I know. You know it all very well, don't you, old lady?" And he kissed his mother so roughly, that she nearly fell backwards. Oh, he was, indeed, a wild fellow.*

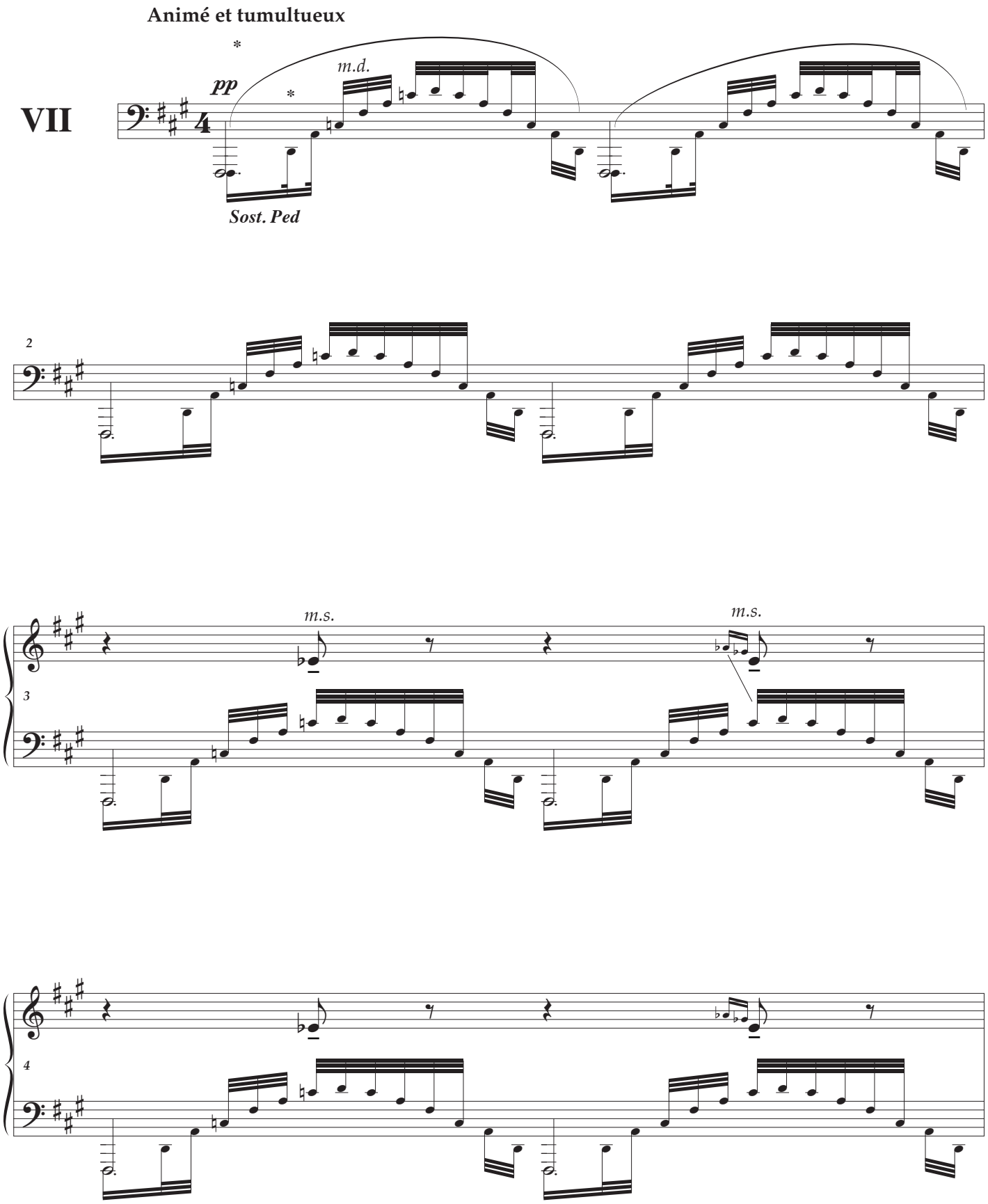
*** Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:*
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies.

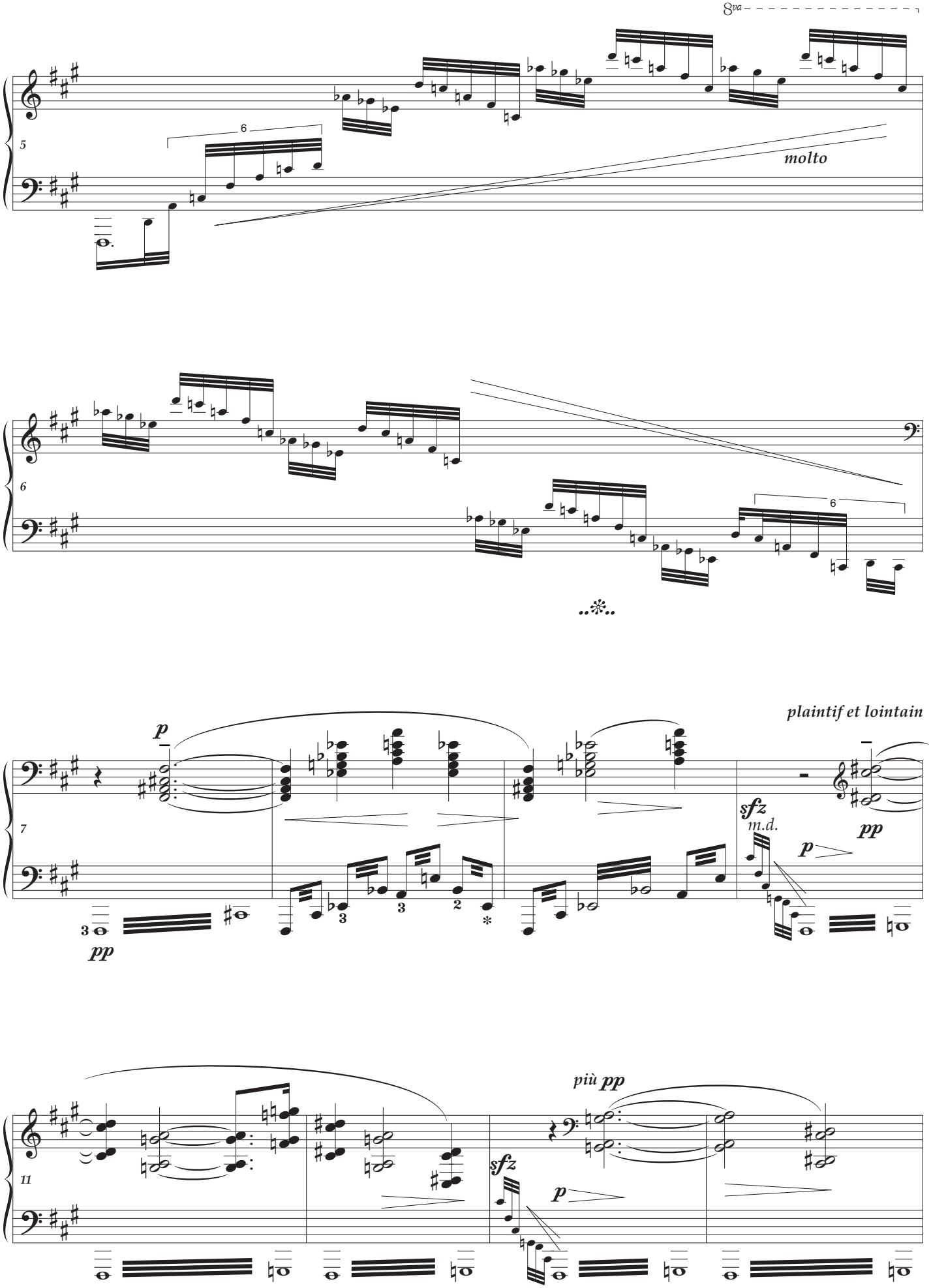
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Duration 4'45

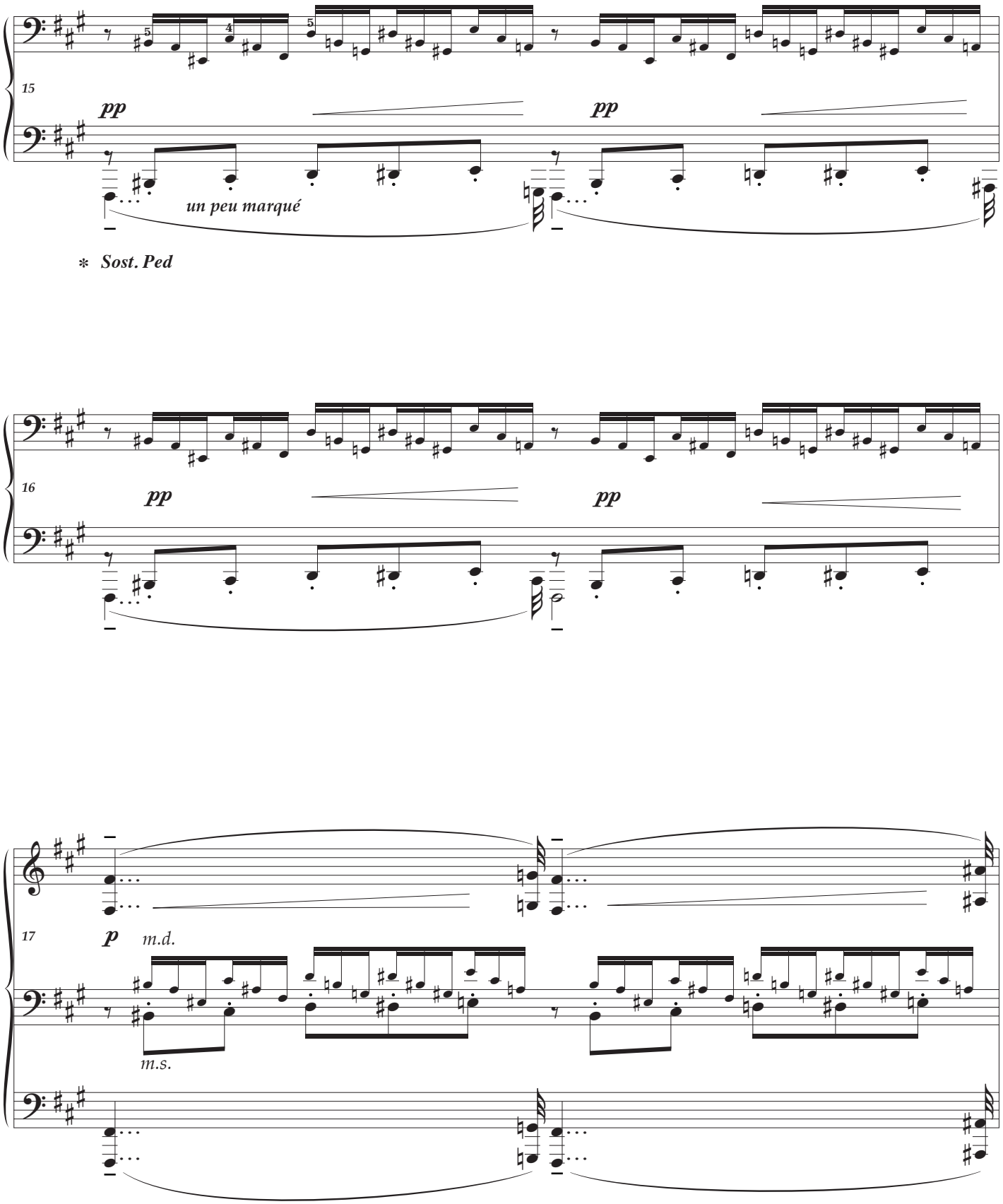
- editorial reduced notation
- metronome speed omitted in the original
- **1-6** sostenuto pedal (to be coupled with the damper pedal) editorial suggestion
- **8** it is sensible to omit the final E♭
- **15** for private enjoyment, or possibly even in performance, the *sostenuto* pedal can be effectively held until **24**
- **19-20** rhythmic presentation of the accompanying whole tone scale has been slightly modified
- **20** (2nd & 4th beats) LH final semiquaver chords are mysteriously missing in the original
- **21** rhythmic presentation of the accompanying RH broken chord has been slightly modified — the diamond-headed notes may be omitted
- **37** the bass (B octave) does not appear in the original repeat of this section
- **57** editorial accents
- **63** sostenuto pedal editorial suggestion

TURNER *WAVES BREAKING AGAINST THE WIND* 1840

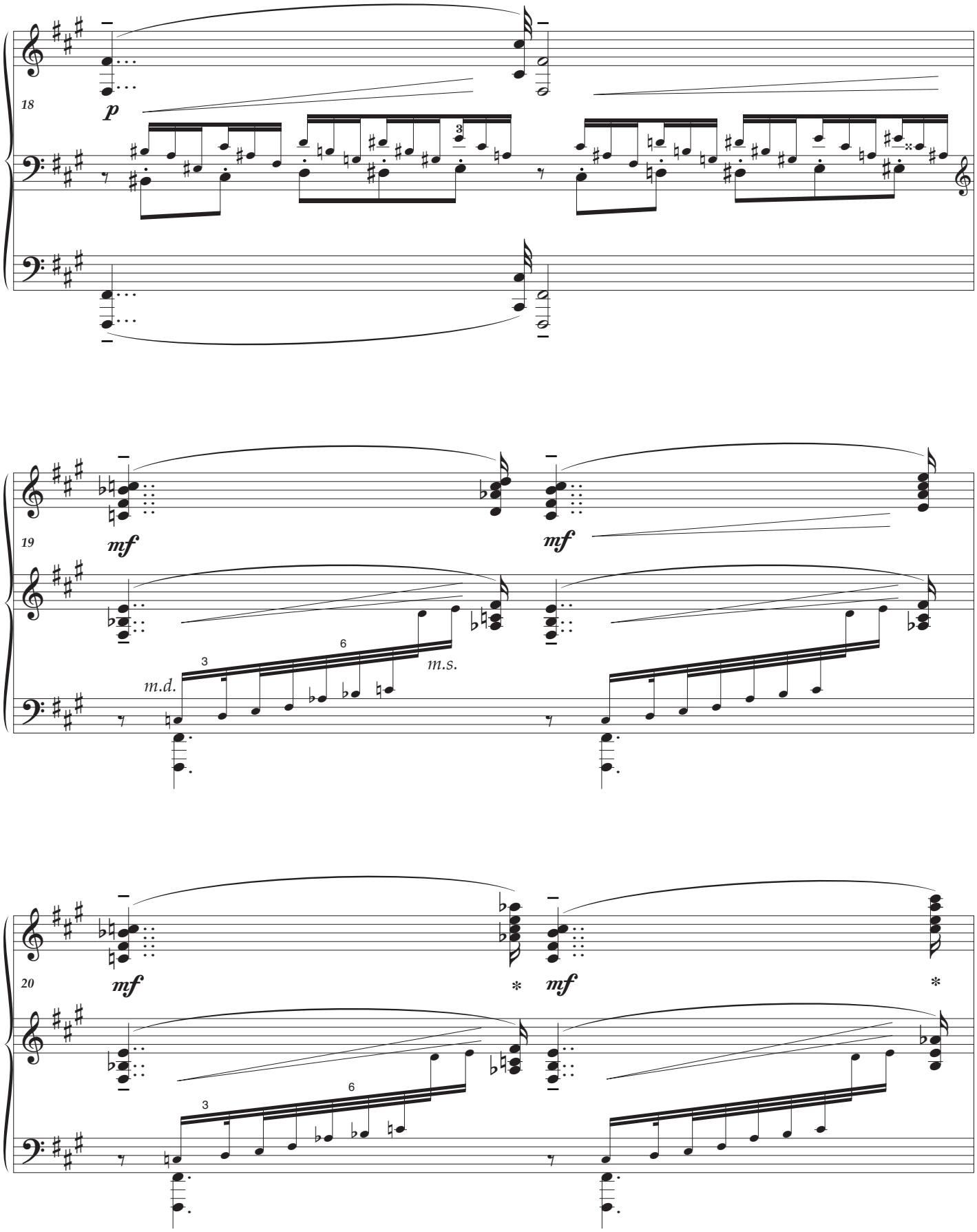

Animé et tumultueux
VII
pp
m.d.
Sost. Ped
m.s.
m.s.

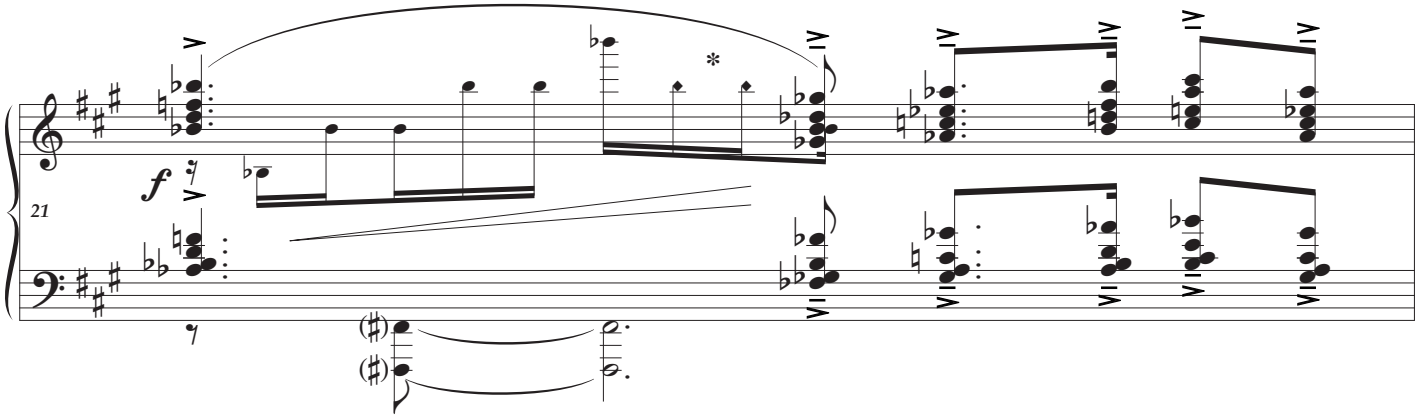

8va
5
6
molto
6
6
..❊..
plaintif et lointain
p
7
sfz
m.d.
pp
p
pp
3
3
2
*
11
più pp
sfz
p

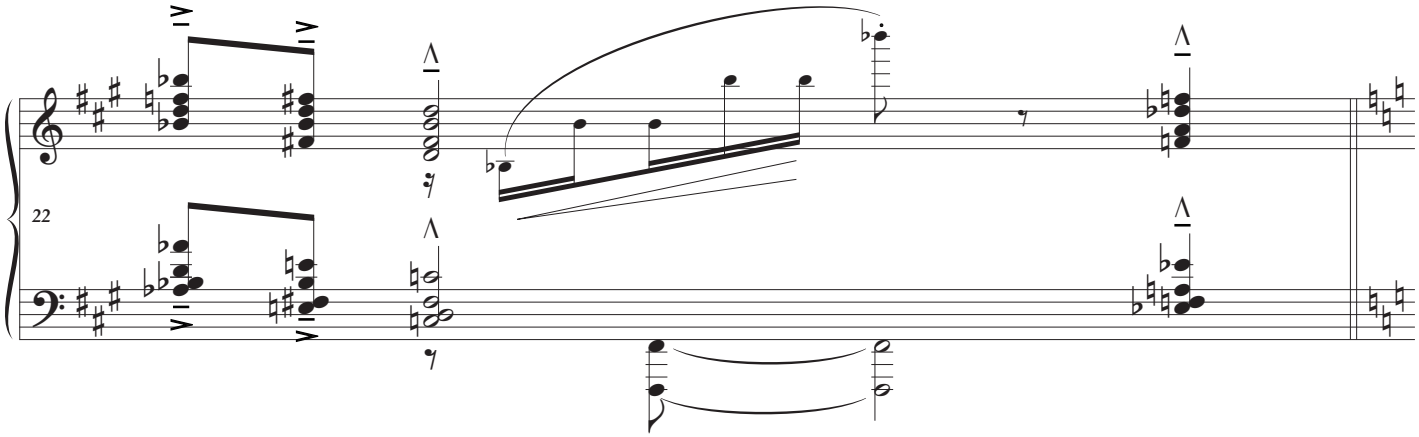
commencer un peu au-dessous du mouvement

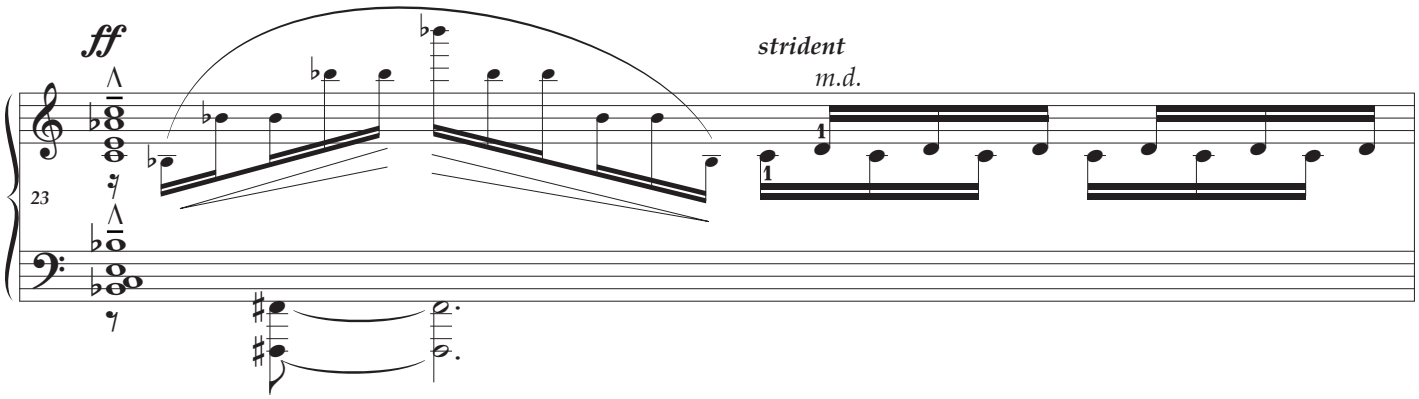


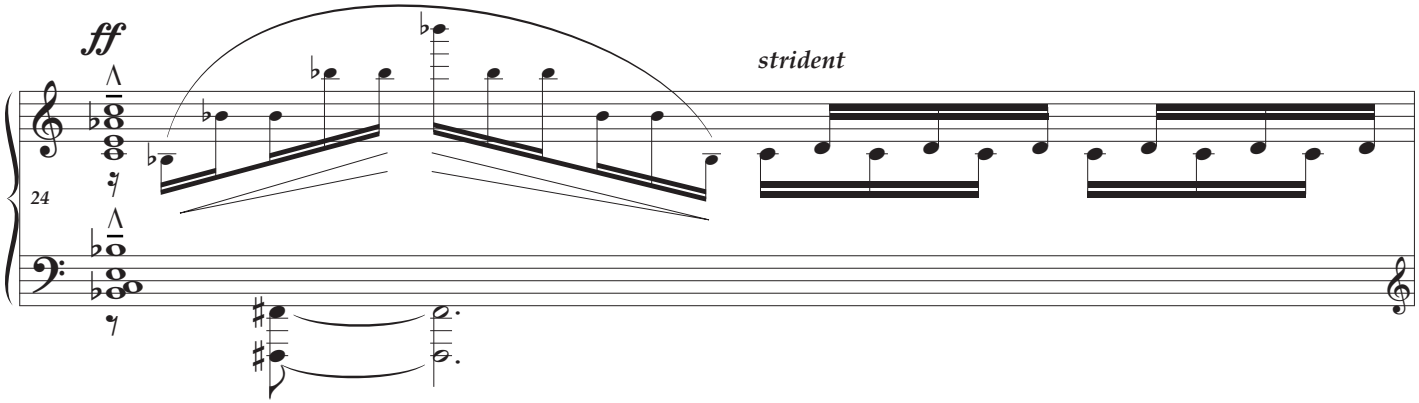
revenir progressivement au mouvement animé

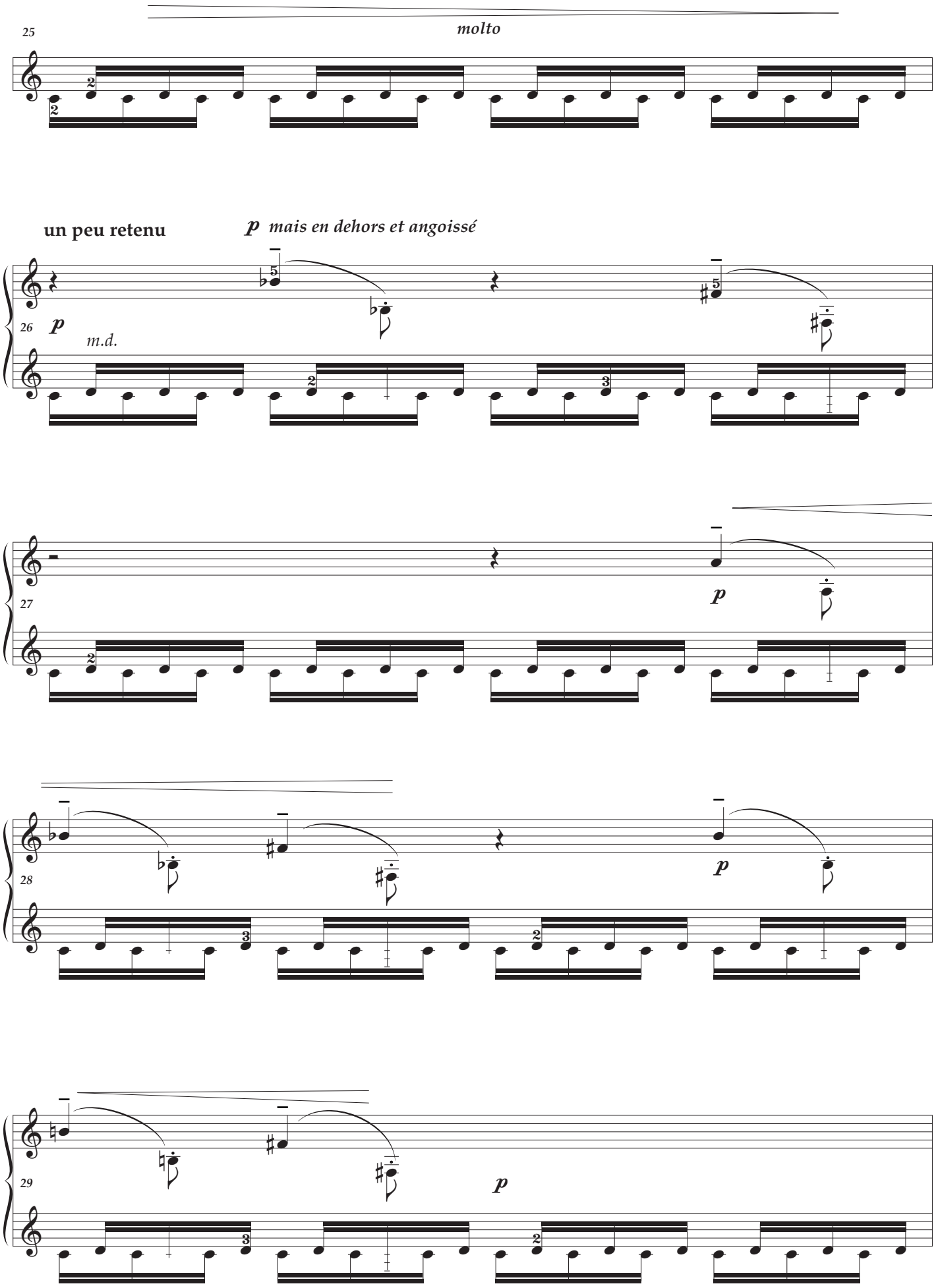


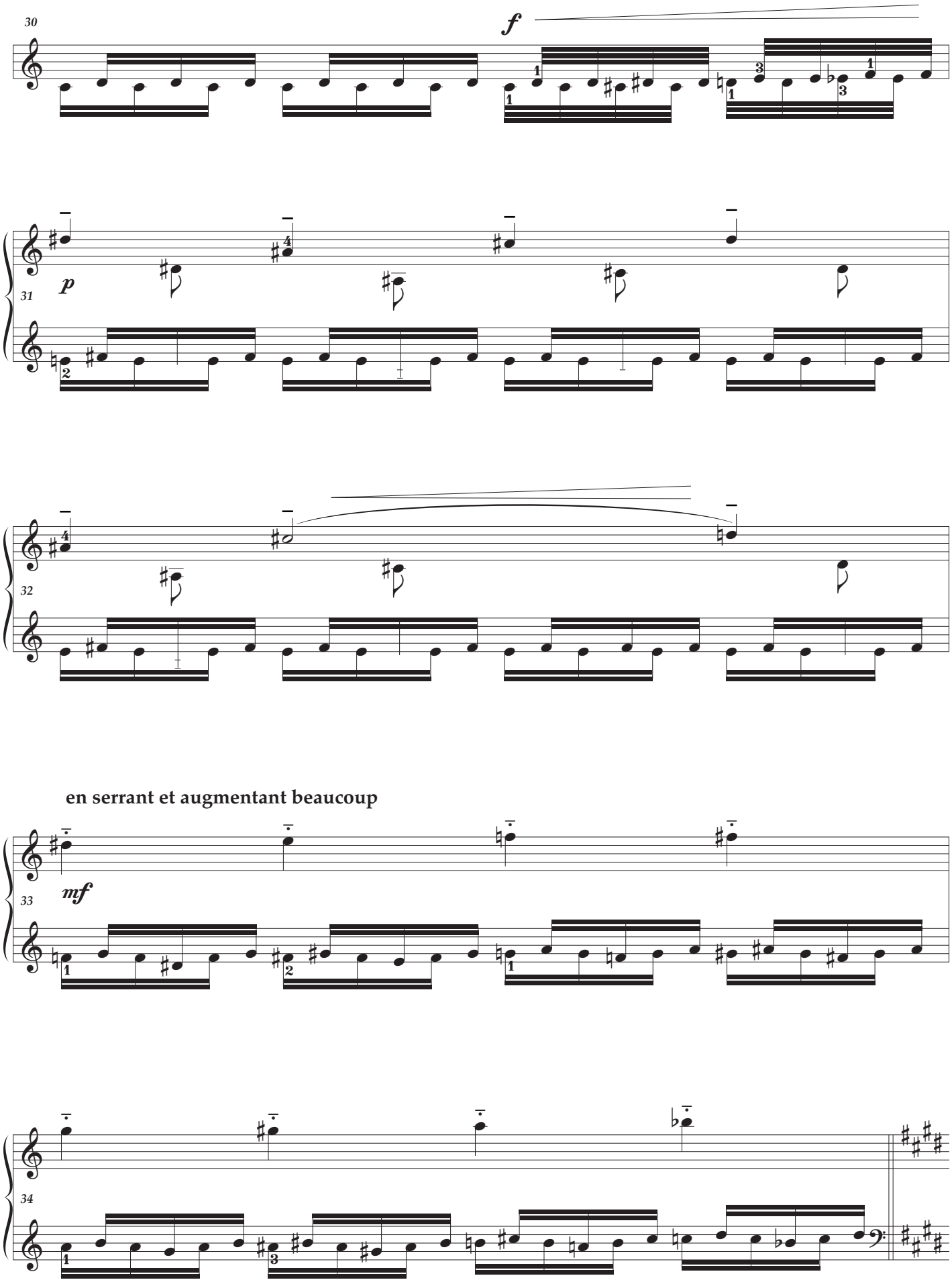

21
f
*

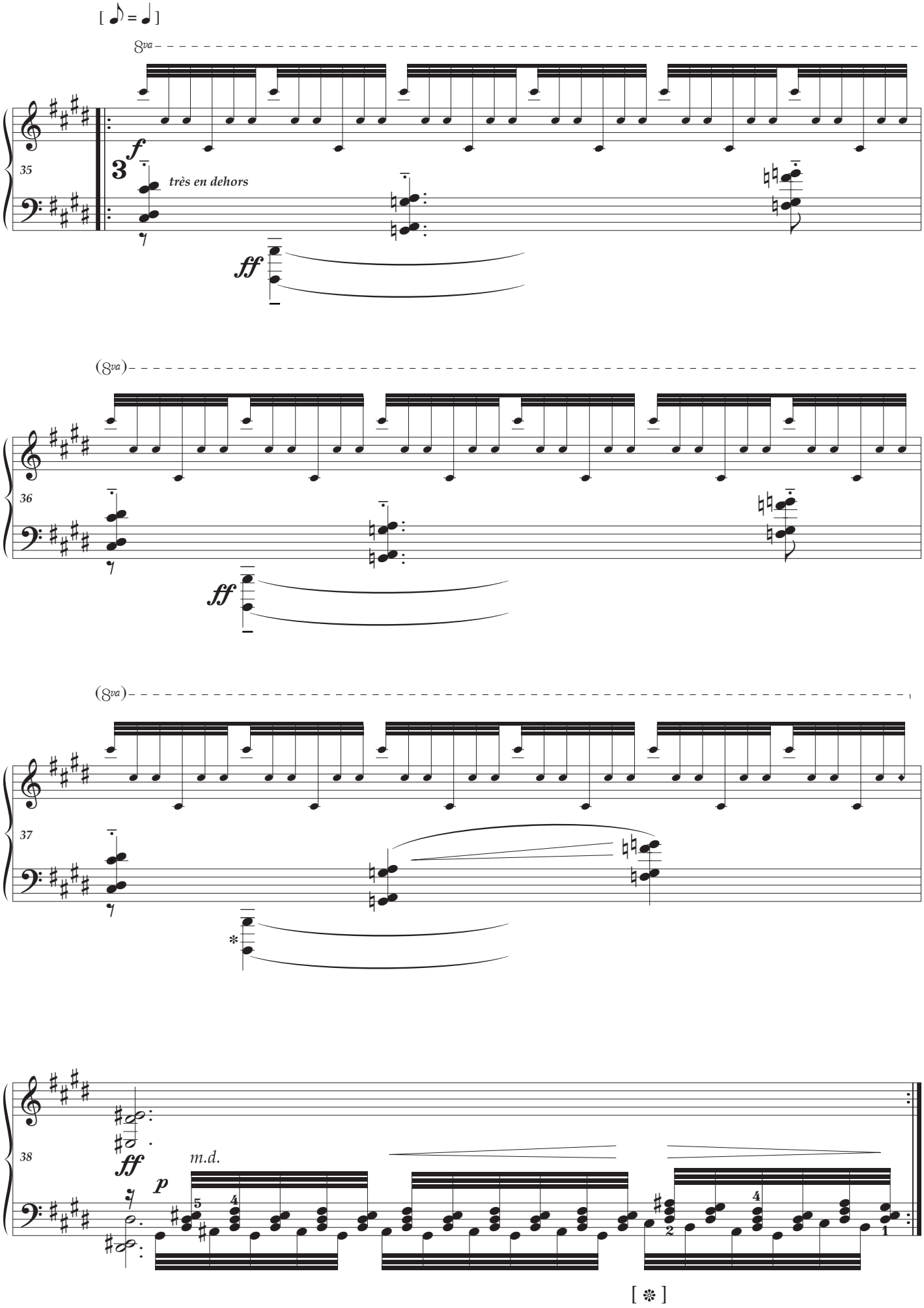

22

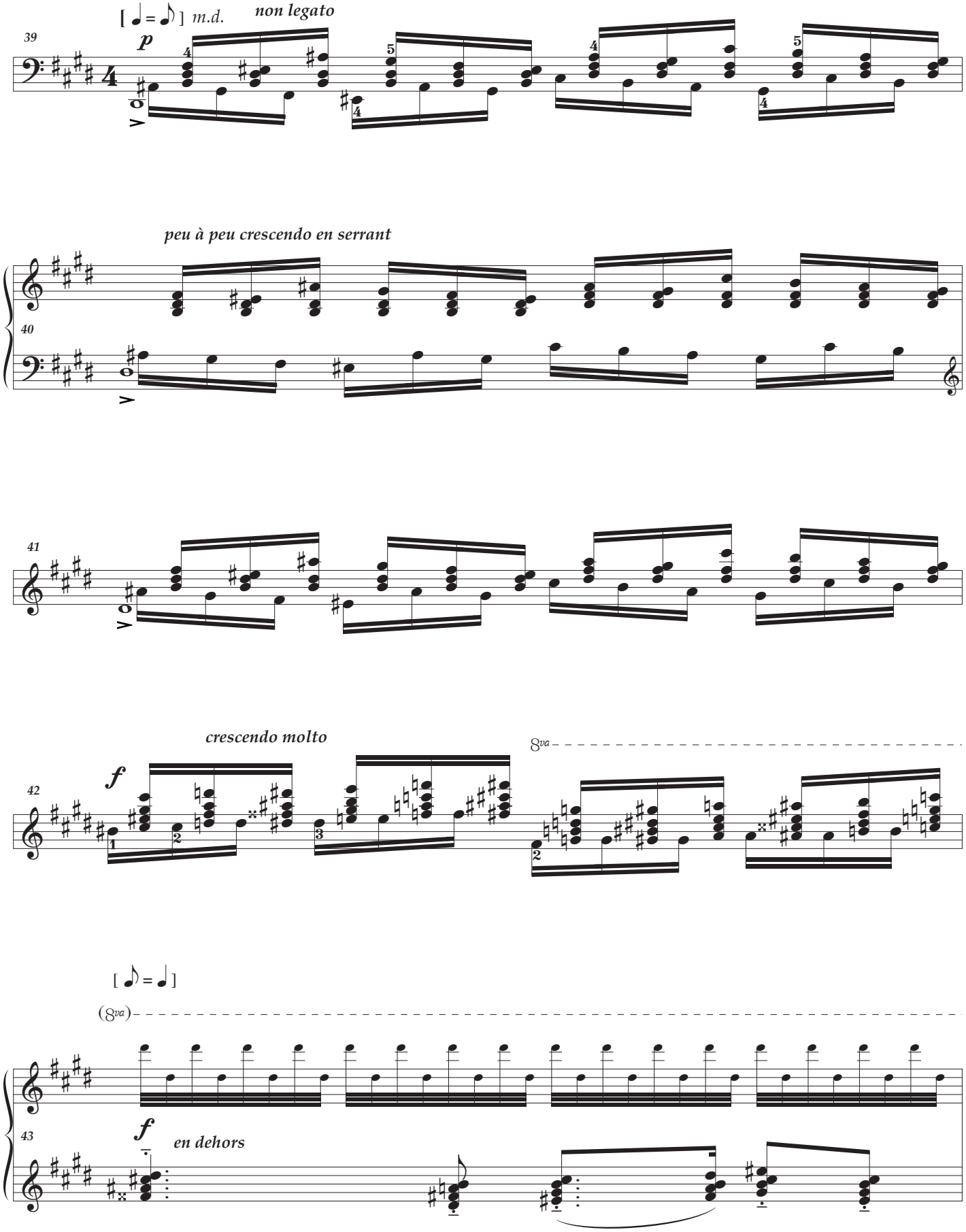

23
ff
strident
m.d.

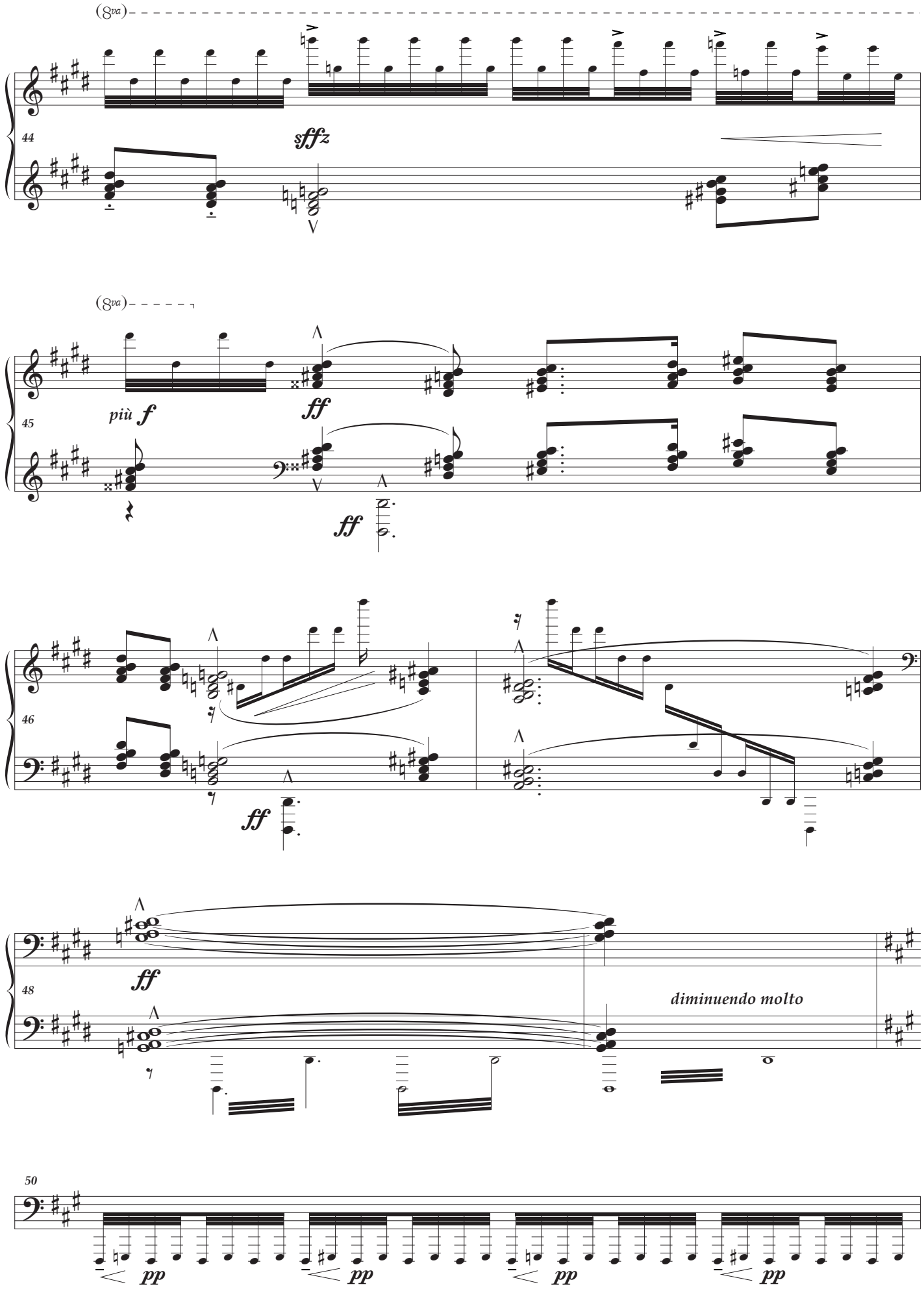

24
ff
strident

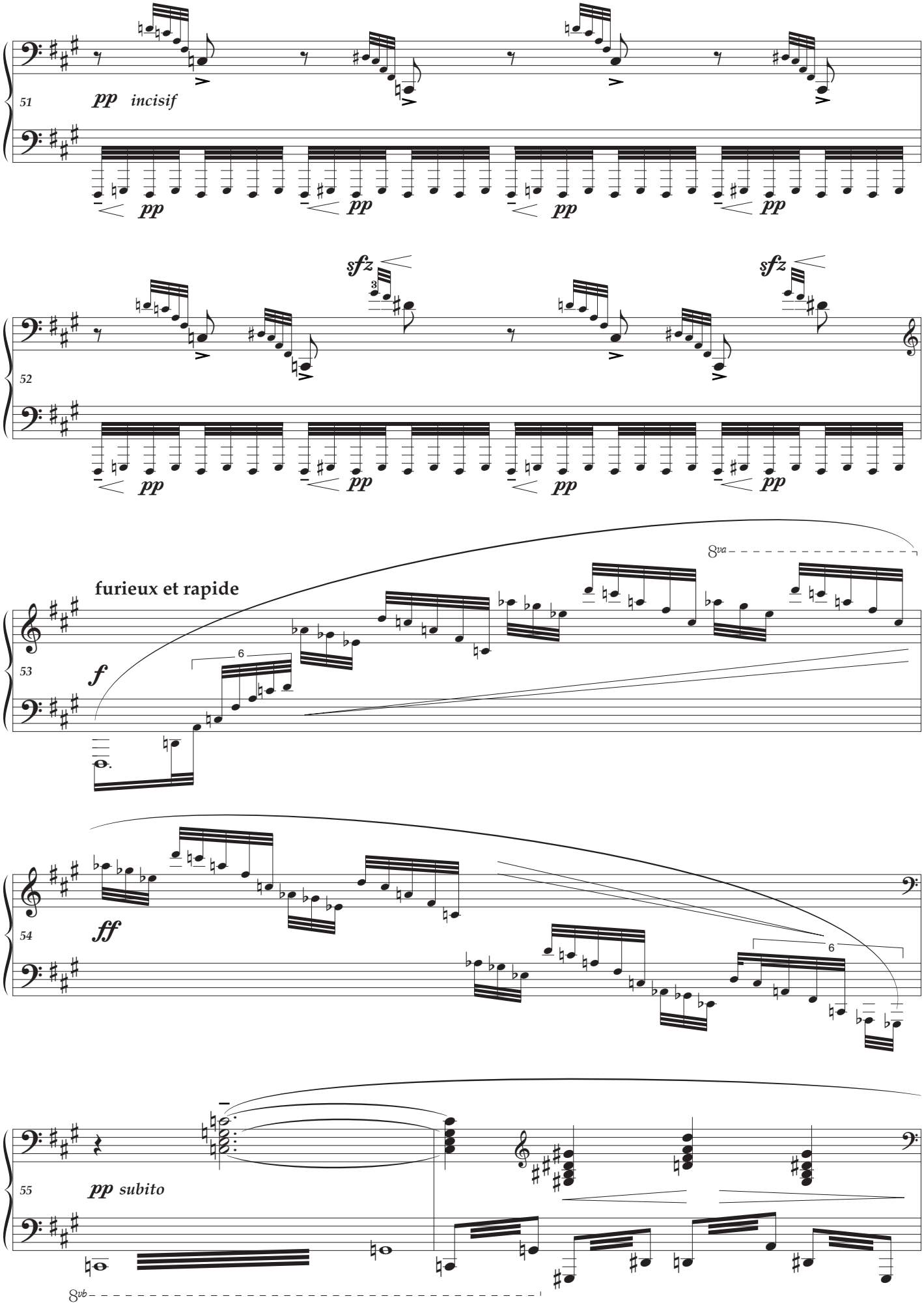

25
molto
un peu retenu
p mais en dehors et angoissé
26
p
m.d.
27
p
28
p
29
p

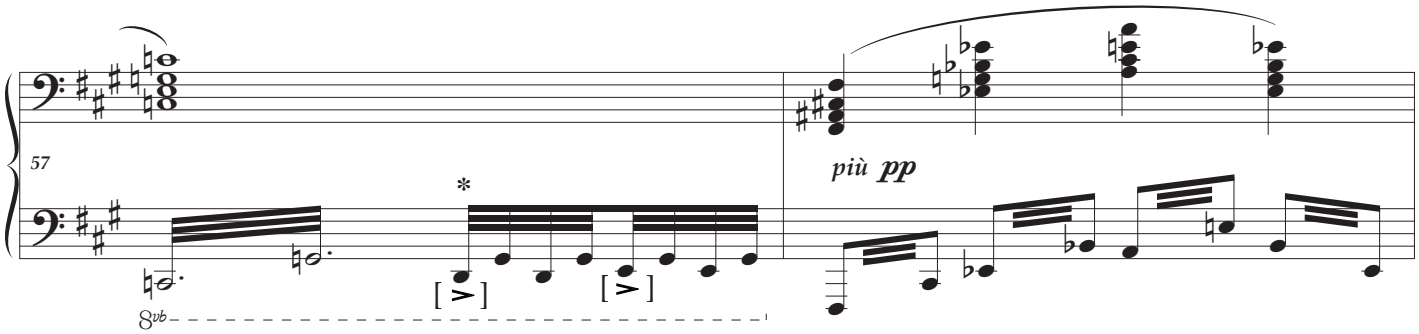

30
f
31
p
32
en serrant et augmentant beaucoup
33
mf
34

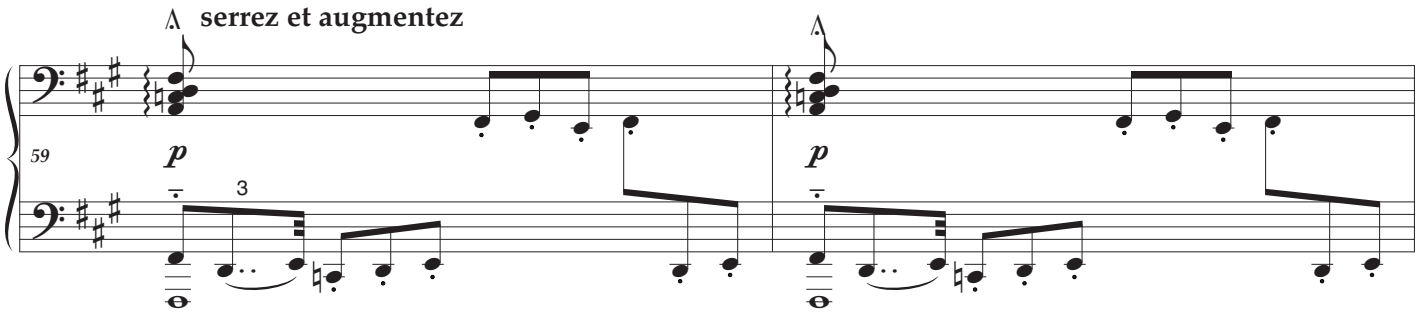

[♪ = ♩]
8va
35
f
très en dehors
ff
(8va)
36
ff
(8va)
37
*
38
ff
p
m.d.
[❊]

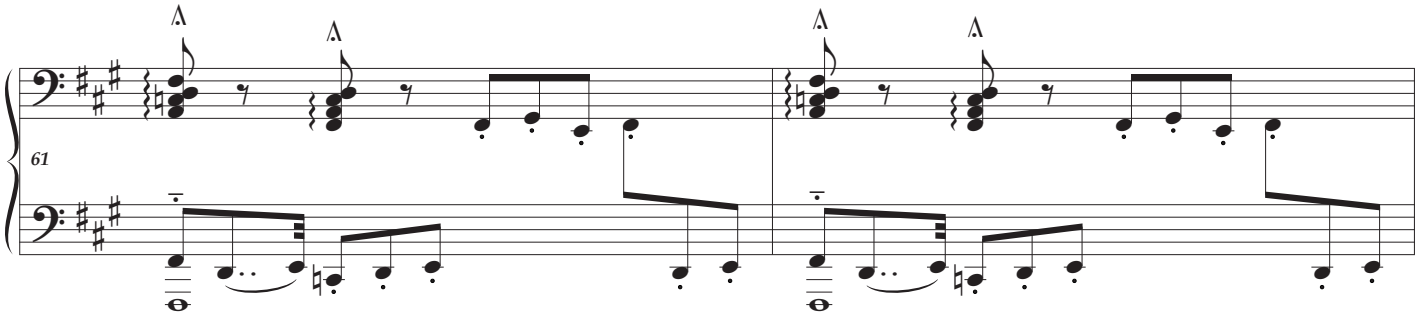

[♩ = ♪] m.d.
non legato
p
39
peu à peu crescendo en serrant
40
41
crescendo molto
f
42
8va
[♪ = ♩]
(8va)
f
en dehors
43

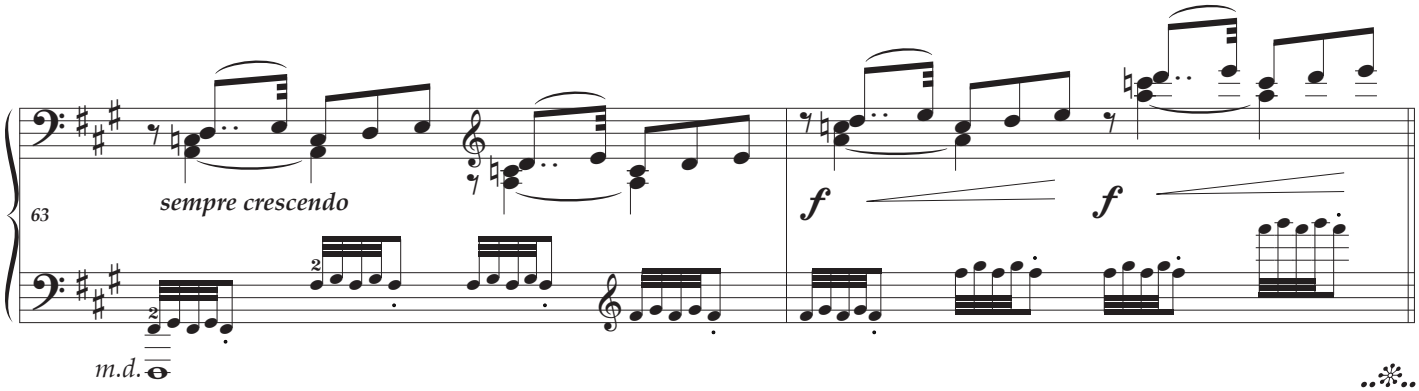

(8va)
44
sffz
(8va)
45
più f
ff
ff
46
ff
48
ff
diminuendo molto
50
pp
pp
pp
pp


51
pp incisif
pp
pp
pp
pp
52
sfz
sfz
pp
pp
pp
pp
furieux et rapide
53
f
8va
6
54
ff
6
55
pp subito
8vb

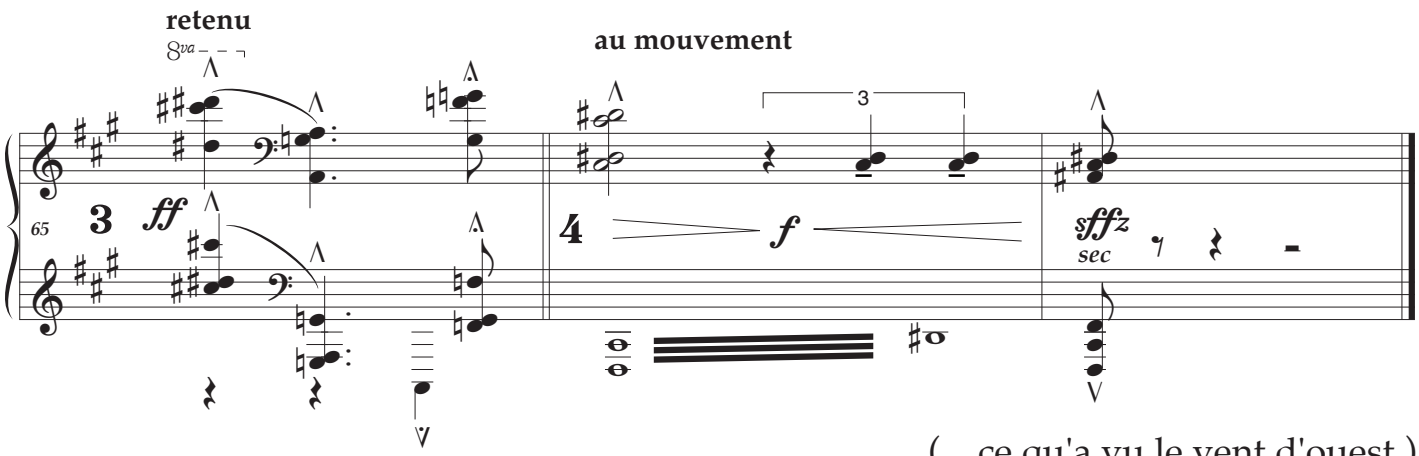








* *Sost. Ped*



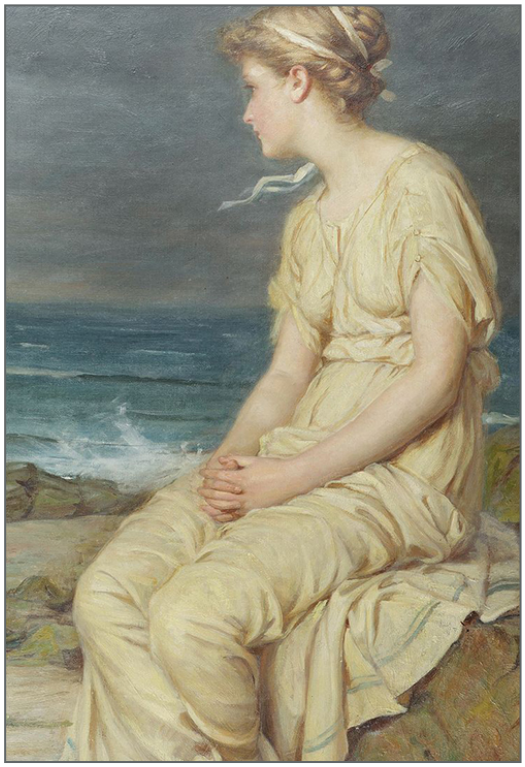
(... ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest)

VIII

It is difficult to conceive of a greater contrast to the previous prelude. Inspiration from another erotic poem (IV *les sons et les parfums…*) relocated from Baudelaire to De Lisle and geographically northwards to Scotland. A golden-haired beauty sings with the lark, her lips changing from cherry to pink, culminating in the poet's desire to kiss her flaxen hair and to press her purple lips with his own. The music of haunting simplicity reflects one of the poet's four Scottish beauties, girls who represent an unsophisticated and gentle demeanour. In this gorgeous and ever-popular prelude, we discover three pages of delicate, perfectly composed music, as charming and serene as one could wish, and demanding a combination of sensuality, delicacy and depth. Either the lark or the girl must have adored broken chords and a variety of cadences. The title had appeared once before, as early as 1882, for a song dedicated to Marie-Blanche Vasnier, with whom Debussy had an affair.

> *This long modal melody evokes a peaceful sister to Mélisande, to whom the predominance of the pentaphonic range makes it possible to attribute Celtic origins. This is one of Debussy's strongest musical reversions, which is also to be found in Bruyères: both works consist of a single large melodic arabesque.*
>
> *— Harry Halbreich*

> *An affectionate adaptation of the Scottish song by Leconte de Lisle, describing the charm and gentleness of the distant beloved, 'seated in the flowering lucerne'.*
>
> *— Cortot*



JOHN WILLIAM WATERHOUSE 1875

Duration: 2'35

- ♩ = 60 is perhaps more realistic
- **6-7** modification of time signatures
- **7 & 32** LH acciaccatura editorial suggestion
- **13** LH tied thumb octave editorial suggestion
- **21-23** modification of time signatures
- **29-31** editorial pedalling

La fille aux cheveux de lin*

Sur la luzerne en fleur assise,
Qui chante dès le frais matin ?
C'est la fille aux cheveux de lin,
La belle aux lèvres de cerise.

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Ta bouche a des couleurs divines,
Ma chère, et tente le baiser !
Sur l'herbe en fleur veux-tu causer,
Fille aux cils longs, aux boucles fines ?

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Ne dis pas non, fille cruelle !
Ne dis pas oui ! J'entendrai mieux
Le long regard de tes grands yeux
Et ta lèvre rose, ô ma belle !

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Adieu les daims, adieu les lièvres
Et les rouges perdrix ! Je veux
Baiser le lin de tes cheveux,
Presser la pourpre de tes lèvres !

L'amour, au clair soleil d'été,
Avec l'alouette a chanté.

Charles-Marie Leconte de Lisle

*translation : https://oxfordsong.org/song/la-fille-aux-cheveux-de-lin

très calme et doucement expressif [♩ = 66] *

VIII

p *sans rigueur*

4

7

p

cédez - - - - - // mouvement

10

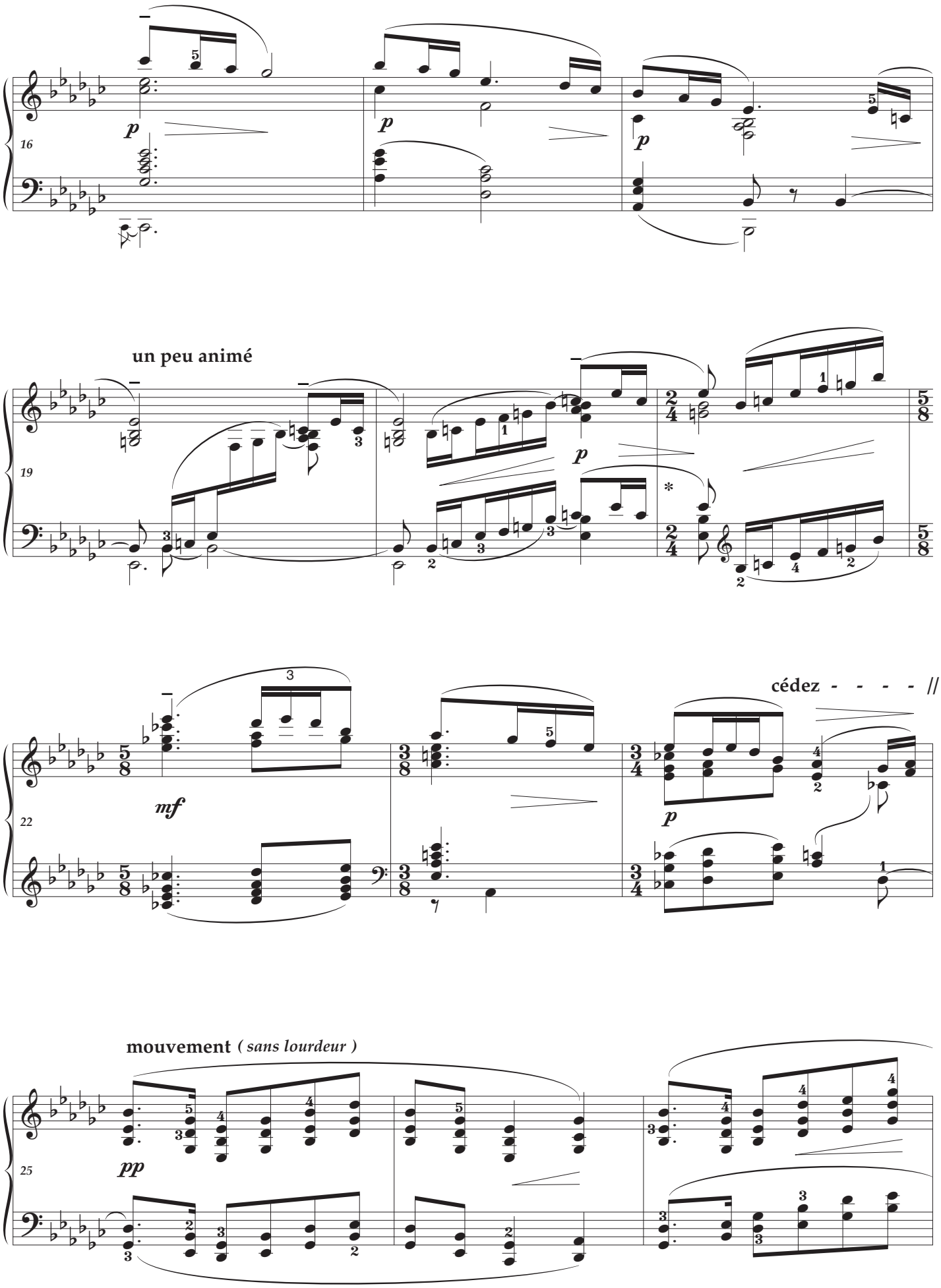
Ped.

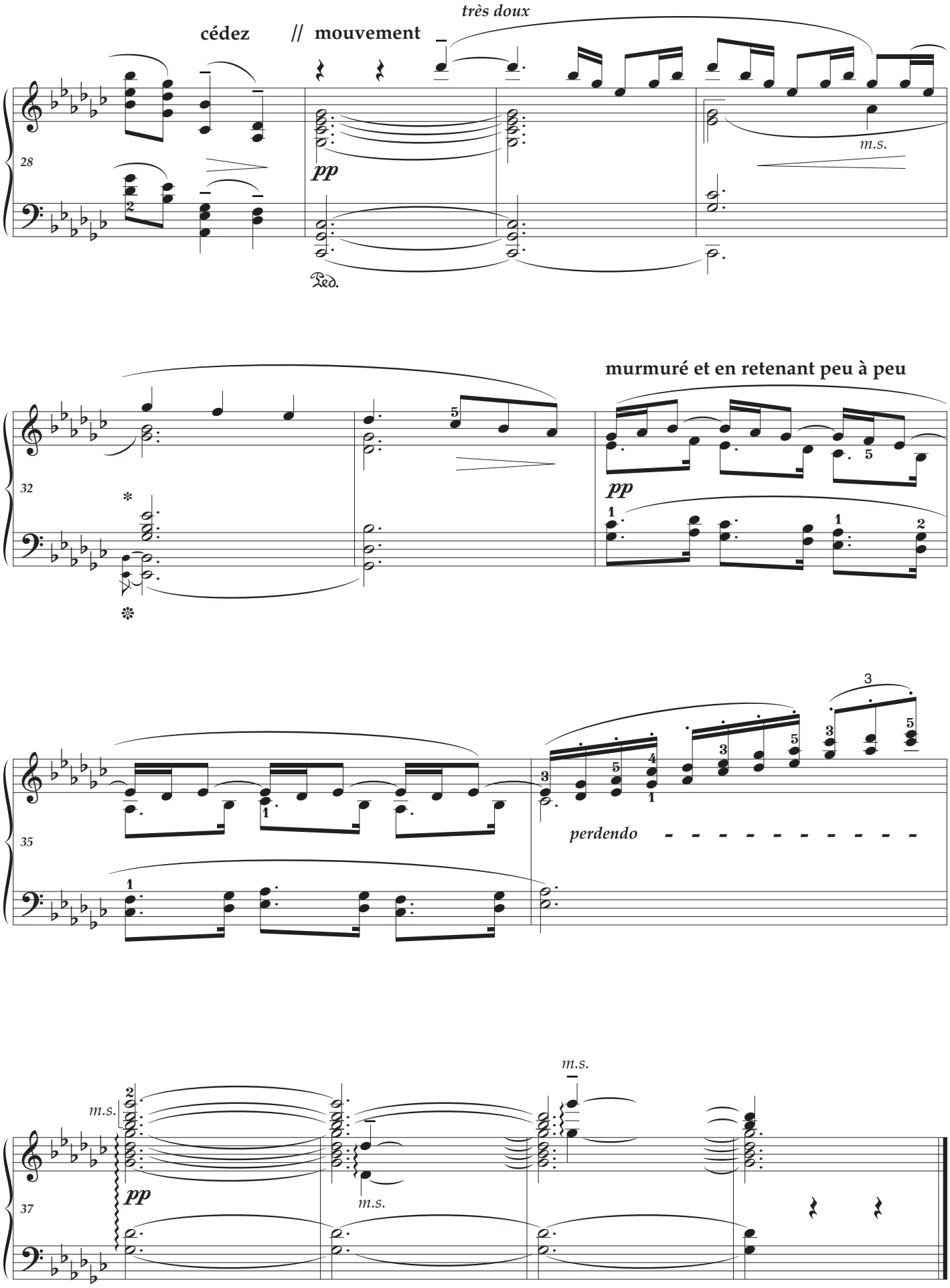
13

p

più p

(très peu)


16
p
p
p
un peu animé
19
p
*
mf
22
p
cédez - - - - //
mouvement (sans lourdeur)
25
pp



(... la fille aux cheveux de lin)

IX

Spanish culture and music thrived in Paris at the turn of the century and both the Conservatoire and the Schola Cantorum encouraged the creation of innovative and experimental ideas. Although Debussy never travelled to Andalusia, he again* expressed his admiration for flamenco. Five years after Ravel's *Alborada del Gracioso* (1905), he created a similar torrid scenario with a frustrated guitarist and his inamorata.

The staccato rhythm possibly evokes a jota or fandango and at **19** it recalls the typical strummed rasgueado** chords of a flamenco guitar. Although in B flat minor, the guitarist flattens the supertonic C, which creates a typical tableau for Andalusia — the Phrygian mode is characteristic of flamenco.

EMILIO PETTORUTI *EL IMPROVISADOR*

Now and then he would make an ironic comment on his own idiosyncratic way of working. Our hero solemnly tunes up, practises a few appropriate riffs, then begins a lament in the raw, guttural flamenco style (cante jondo) around just two notes, only for the object of his affections to slam her shutters closed! Undismayed, at 54 he recommences, this time a truly heart-wrenching chant of four notes, again interrupted, this time by another, distant singer, and later the town band playing jour de fête, from Ibéria (a reference that would have been lost on anyone looking over Debussy's shoulder in January 1910 as it did not appear until February). The serenader resumes, crossly at first, but then wanders off, mildly disgruntled.

— *Stephen Walsh*

A nocturnal and malicious fantasy à la Goya, transposing the timid passion of an inamorato, his love songs beneath a closed window; with alarmed or angry reactions to strange noises and to a student band passing nearby — with the rhythm of nervous guitars, already to be found in Iberia.

— *Cortot*

Two serenaders are fighting for the favours of a lady who, hidden behind the flower-adorned lattice of her window railing, observes the gallant contestants.

— *de Falla*

* Debussy wrote three piano works with strong references to Andalusia — *La Soirée dans Grenade*, *La Sérénade Interrompue*, and *La Puerta del Vino*.

** a guitar finger strumming technique commonly associated with flamenco

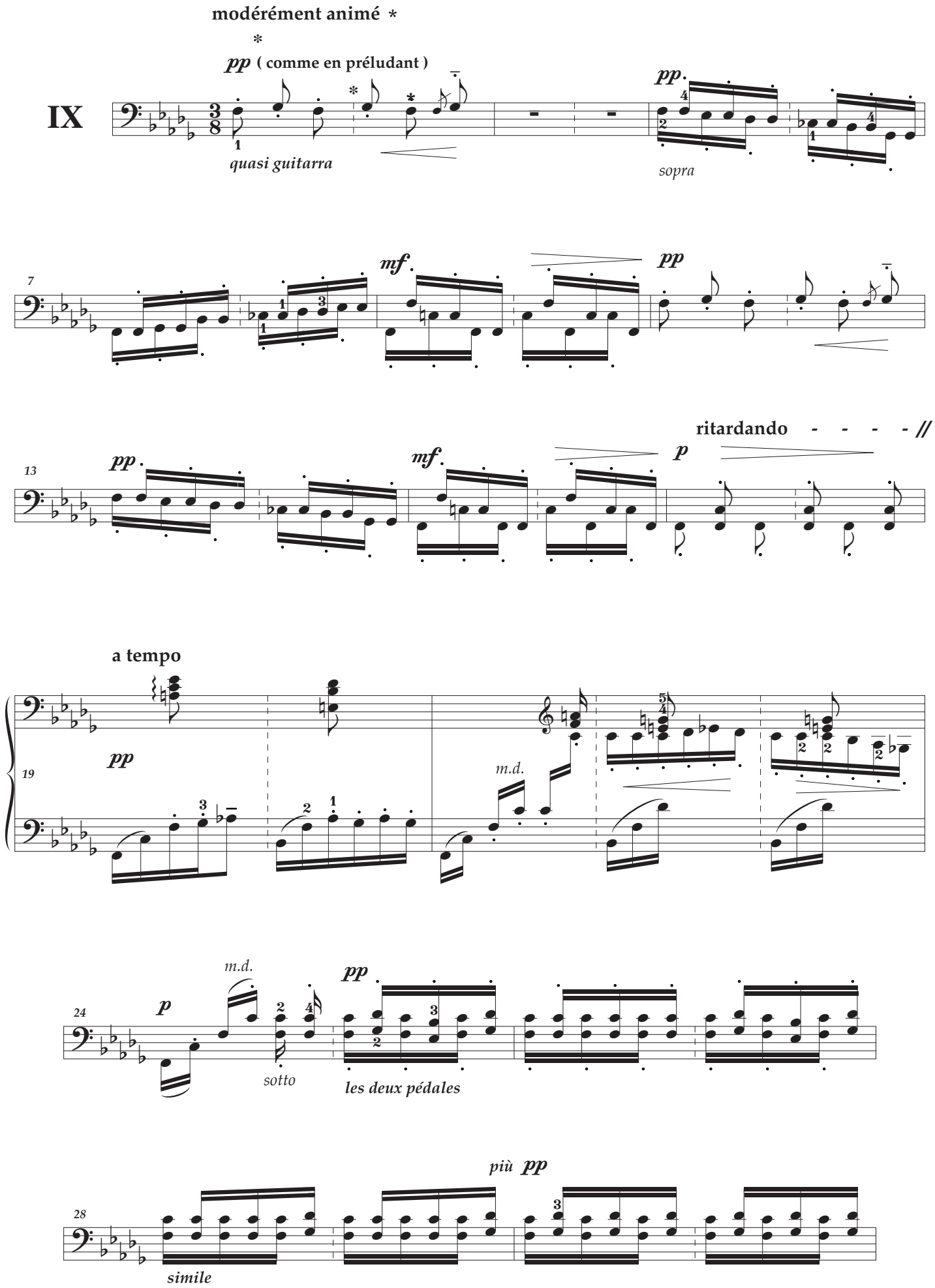
Duration: 2'30

• this edition features hand swapping and a few practical 'arrangements'

• metronome speed omitted in the original

• to create contrast between solo guitar and vocal passages I suggest virtually no pedal for the former and pedals (*estompé*) for the latter, as suggested by the composer

- to help perceive phrase lengths, dotted barlines are entirely editorial
- acciaccaturas should be well crushed to twang like a guitar
- one of the real challenges in this work is the timing of those interruptions and the varying tempi required to underline their character
- start with **125** to establish an appropriate tempo
- **42** C tied dotted crotchet, possibly an error
- **46-47** resist the temptation to play too fast and too loud and enjoy the dynamic harmonies
- **74** B double flat semiquaver in the original Durand edition
- **80** crotchet, possibly an error


modérément animé *
*
pp (comme en préludant)
IX
quasi guitarra
pp
sopra
7
mf
pp
13
pp
mf
ritardando - - - - //
p
a tempo
19
pp
m.d.
24
p
m.d.
sotto
pp
les deux pédales
28
più pp
simile

expressif et un peu suppliant

32

(estompé et en suivant l'expression)

cédez - - - - //

37

a tempo

41

très vif

f

sffz

retenu - - - -

m.d.

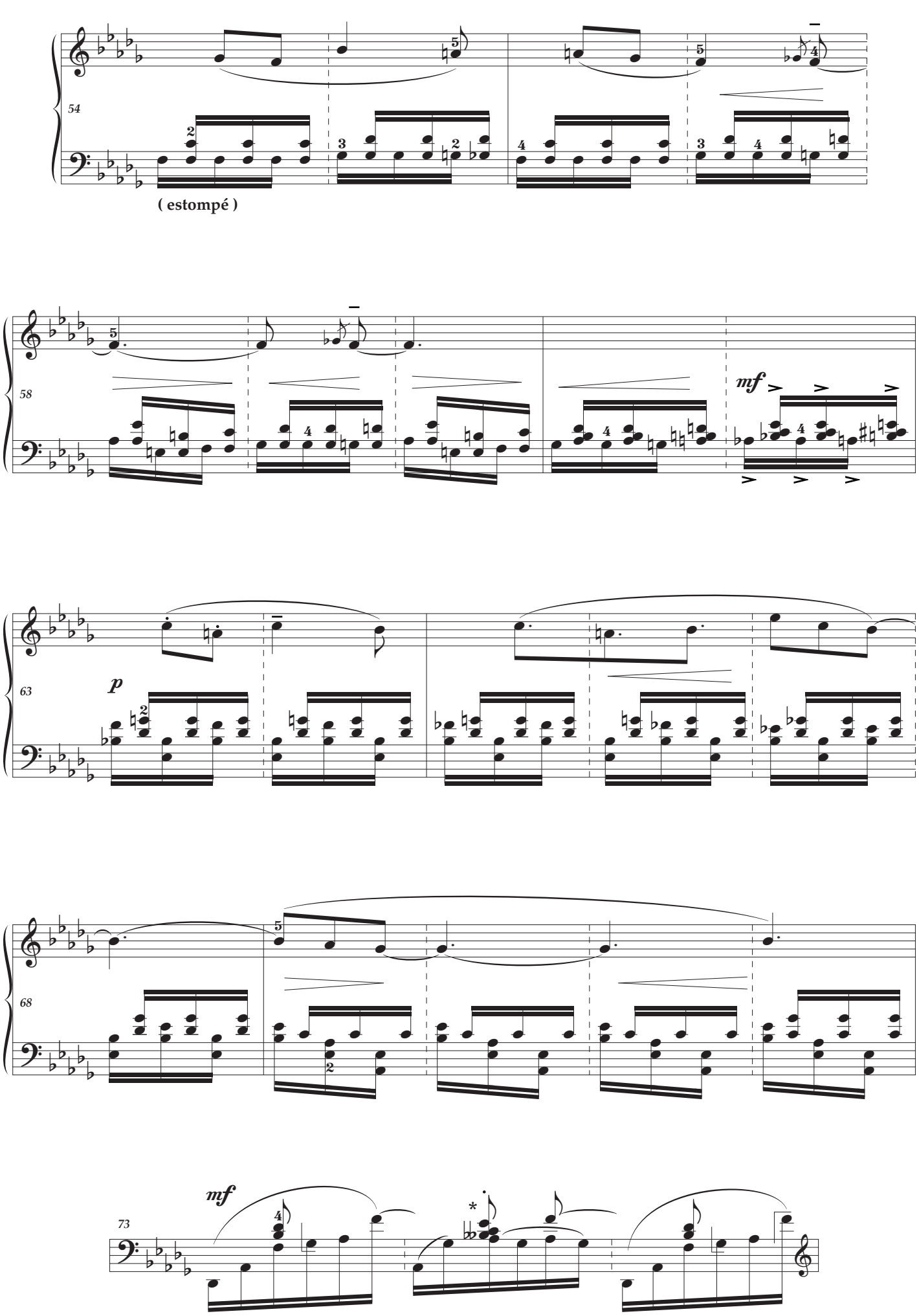
p

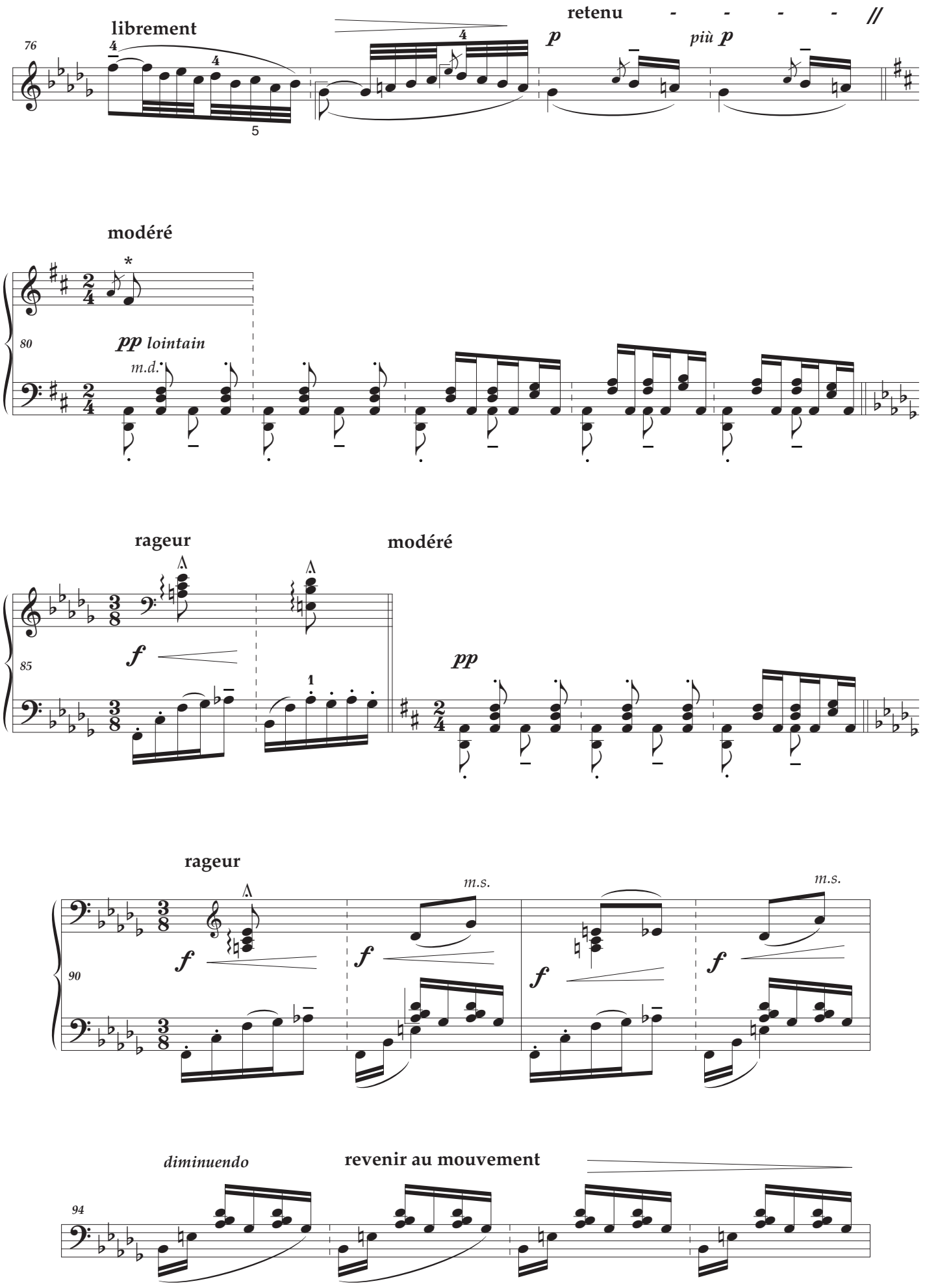
46

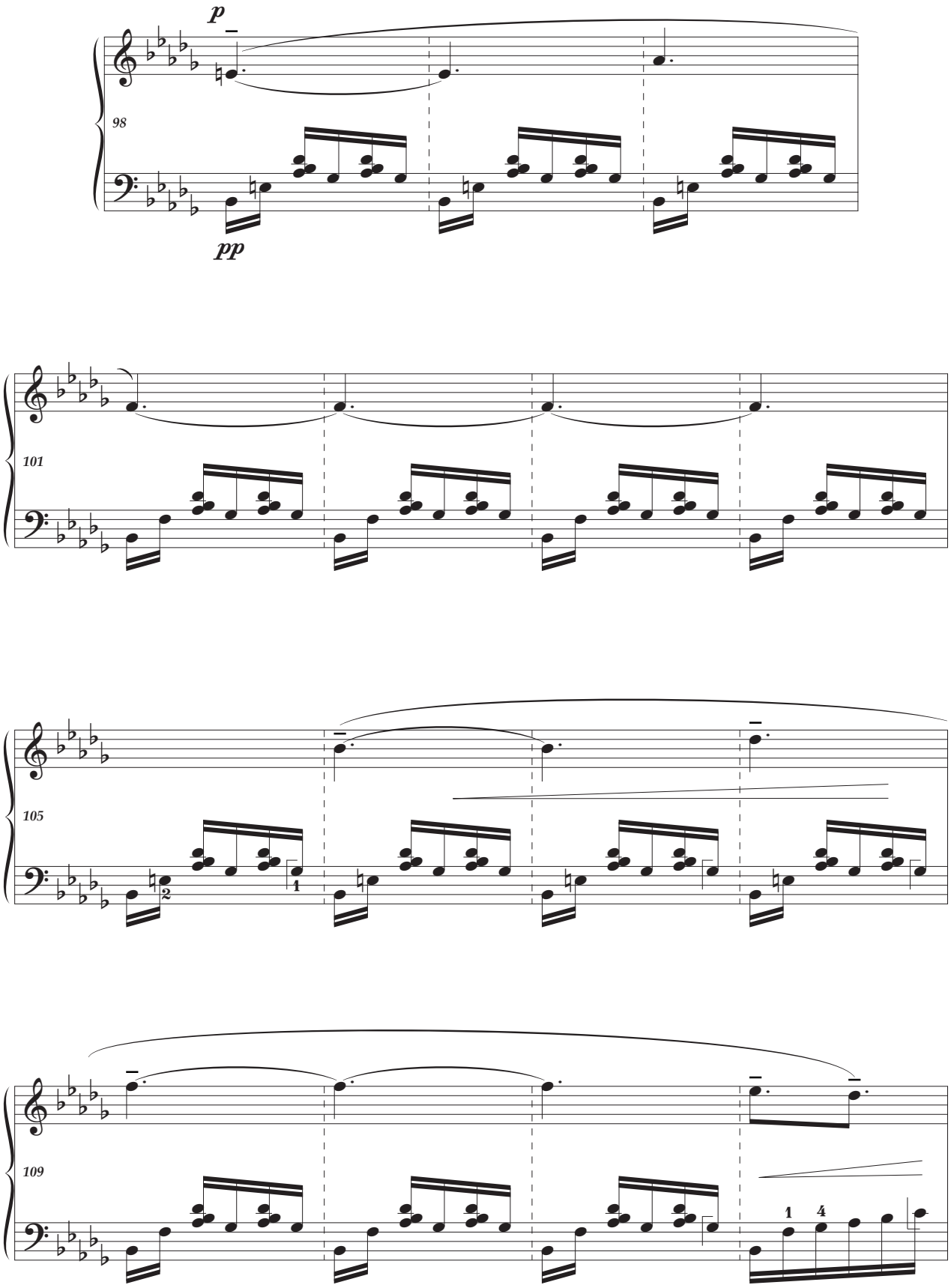
a tempo

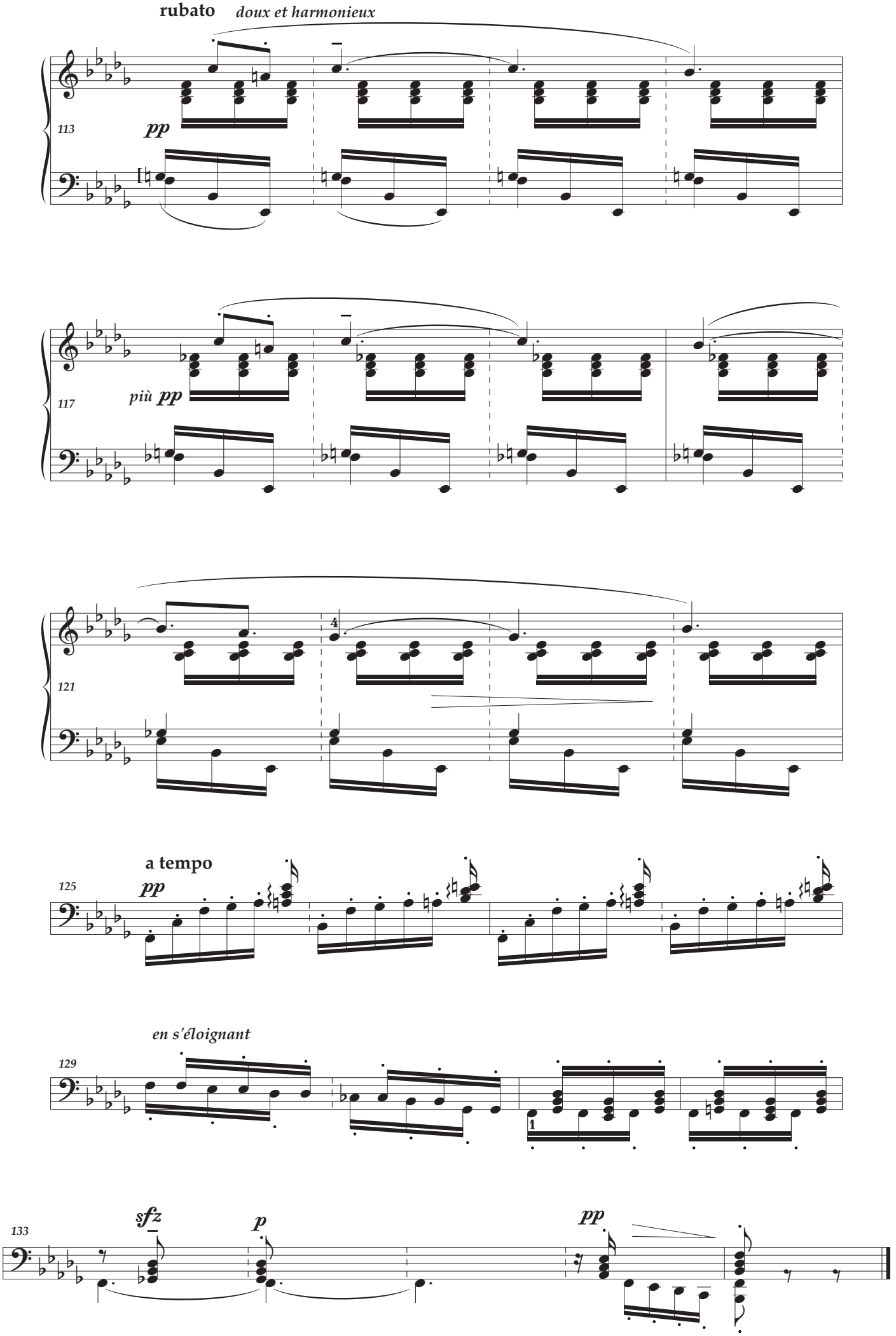
pp

50


54
(estompé)
58
mf
63
p
68
73
mf


76
librement
retenu - - - - //
p
più p
80
modéré
pp lointain
m.d.
85
rageur
f
modéré
pp
90
rageur
f
m.s.
f
f
m.s.
f
94
diminuendo
revenir au mouvement


p
98
pp
101
105
109



(... la sérénade interrompue)

X

The legend of Ys* is a dream scenario for an 'impressionist' artist; with bells, water and religious overtones, Debussy could not have invented a more appropriate setting for this prelude. Completed in 1910, Roger Nichols plausibly suggests that the composer might also have been inspired by the great flood of Paris at the end of January, when the Seine rose a massive eight metres above the average. It was only in March that the river finally returned to normal.

The scene pertinently begins with 'a gently resonant mist' and ghostly bells perceived from afar. Then the cathedral organ with gradually increasing volume rises from the depths, finally sinking back into the sea with a matching diminuendo, leaving only pianissimo bells to disappear at closure. Rather like *ce qu'a vu le vent d'ouest* Debussy presents unusually widely spaced chords to great effect.

> *In concept, the piece could hardly be more basic, but its effect, oddly enough, depends on certain advanced aspects of Debussy's style. For instance, though coloured for much of its length by big, full-handed chords, it contains very little harmony in the conventional sense. The chords are mainly parallel triads, as if Captain Nemo were seated at the underwater organ with all the stops out and doubling the melody with rigid hands. The bells likewise start as parallel chords, but with open fifths, which lends them a colour similar to that at the start of Les Collines d'Anacapri, but fuller because the chords are sounded rather than merely an effect of pedalling. Later the bells are enriched by dissonance, like real bells with their rogue overtones. At bottom, the whole prelude is a majestic study in the synaesthesia of water and reverberation, the swell of the ocean as seen and heard, the boom of waves on rock, and the hidden mysteries of the sea itself.*
>
> — *Stephen Walsh*

Breton legend has it that on clear mornings when the sea is transparent, the Cathedral of Ys, which lies slumbering and accursed under the waves, slowly emerges from the depths of the ocean and of the ages. Bells toll and the chanting of priests is heard. Then the vision disappears once more under the indolent sea.

— *Cortot*

A performer might imagine 'La cathédrale engloutie' as heard from the farthest point of a concert hall, where its softest resonances and its evocations of space and timelessness must seem to gain in concentration and distinctness. The visual analogy is inescapable, whether it is with the paintings of Monet or with an imaginary cathedral arising from the sunken city of Ys on the Brittany coast; and we are invited to make such associations, both by the title and by Debussy's instructions on the score. The first, dans une brume doucement sonore (in a gently resonant mist), at the head of the score, characteristically fuses sound and sight; the second, peu à peu sortant de la brume (gradually coming out of the mist), at ***16****, dispenses with sound altogether.*

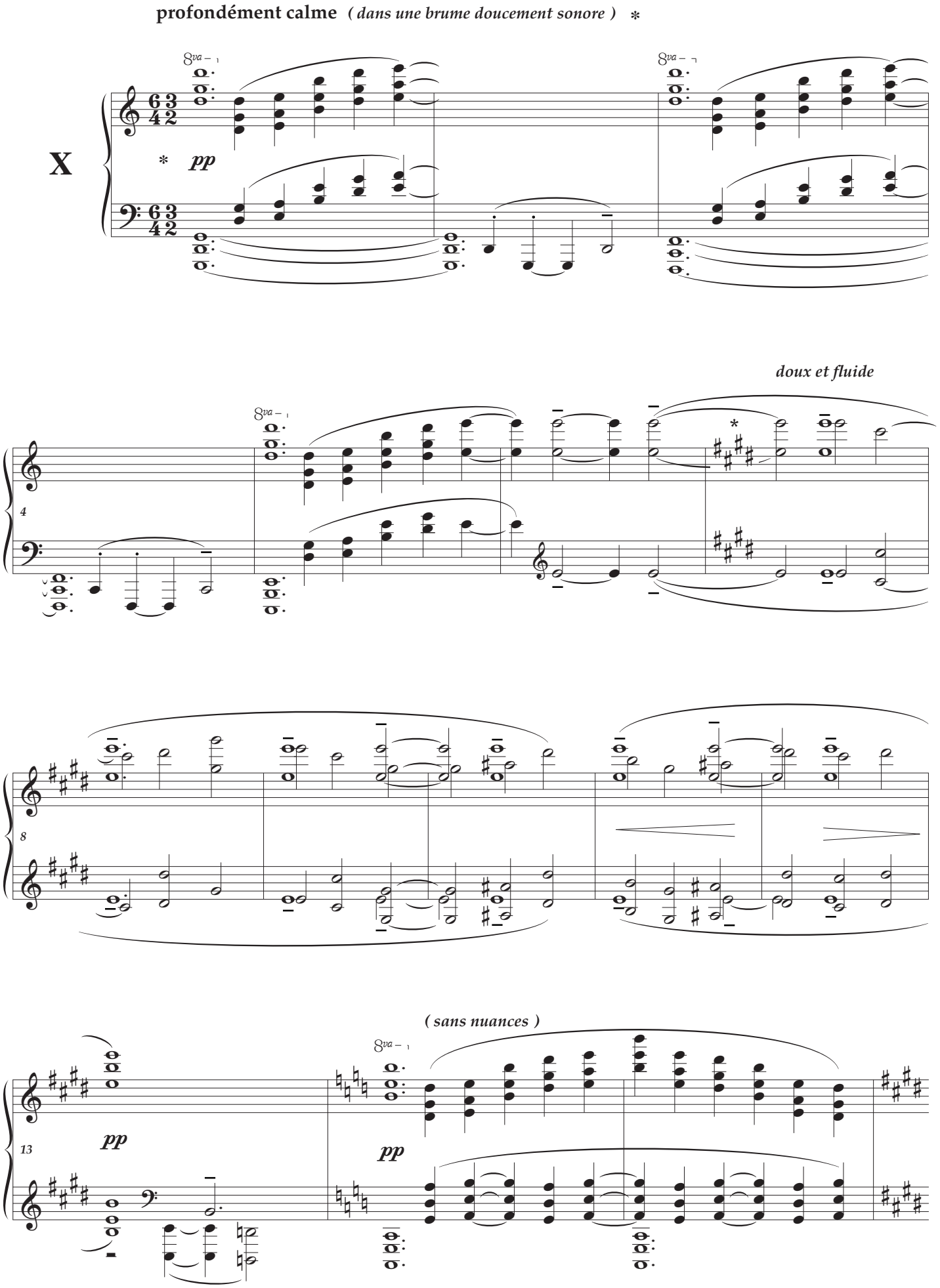
It is impossible to say whether Debussy admired Monet's series paintings of the 1890s, but he could not have failed to know them. The paintings of Rouen Cathedral, in particular, established Monet once and for all as among the greatest of French painters. "You do me a great honour by calling me a pupil of Claude Monet," Debussy wrote to the critic Emile Vuillermoz in 1916 (by which time Monet had reached the venerable age of seventy-six). The comparison between the composer and the painter, especially in regard to la cathédrale engloutie, would have been the obvious one to make for Debussy's audience, always eager to relate music and painting. When Vuillermoz linked Monet and Debussy, it is likely that he had this prelude in mind.

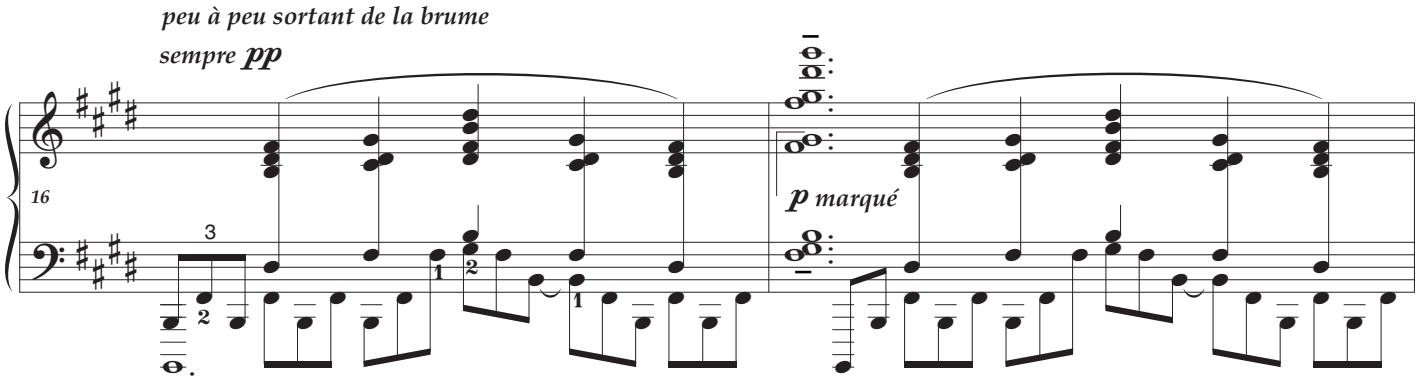
— *Paul Roberts*

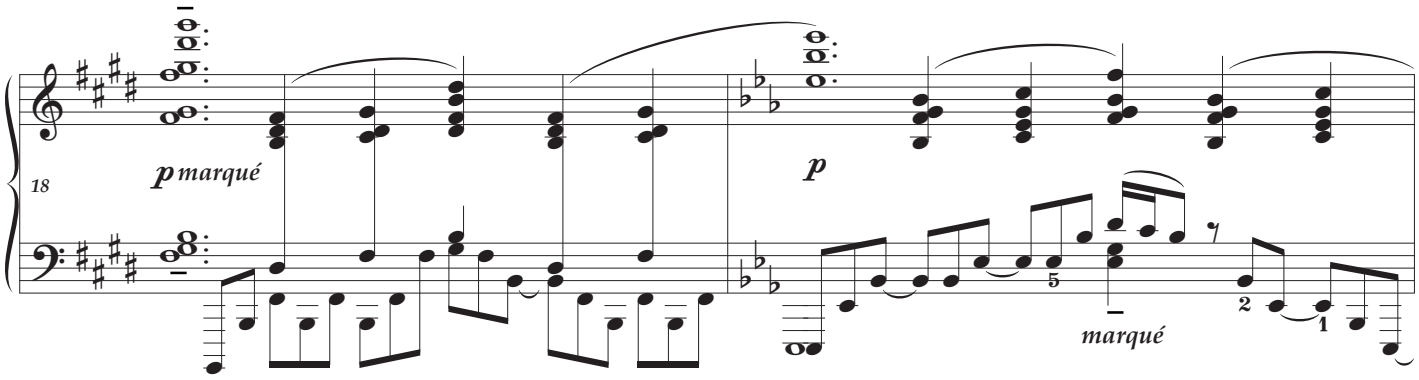
*Ys was a mythical island in the Bay of Douarnenez, Brittany, famous throughout the region for its beautiful gardens and buildings. A king named Gralon who lived in a palace of marble, cedar, and gold, which was also rich in commerce and the arts. Debussy may have discovered this legend in the opera *Le Roi d'Ys* by Édouard Lalo.

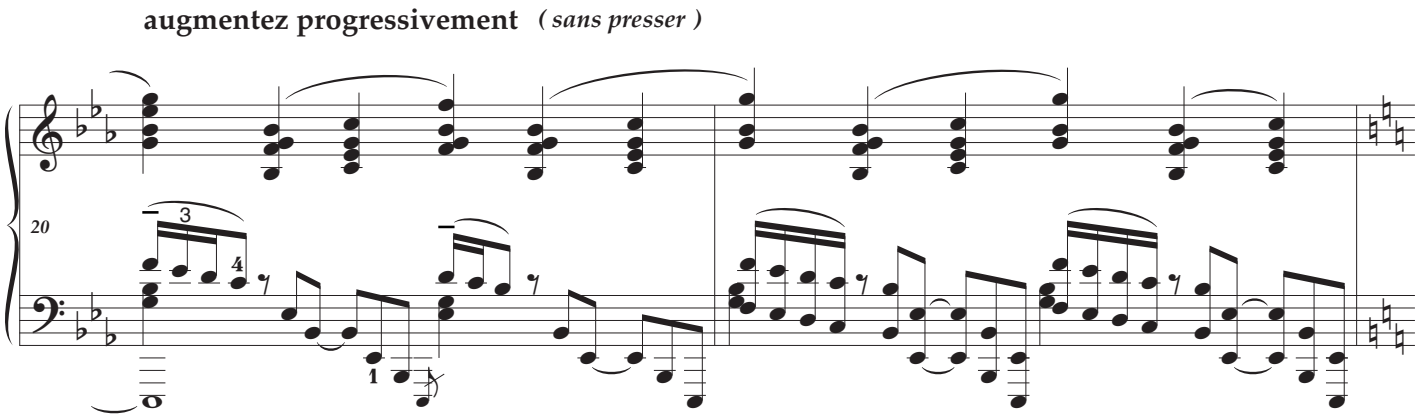
Duration: 5'45

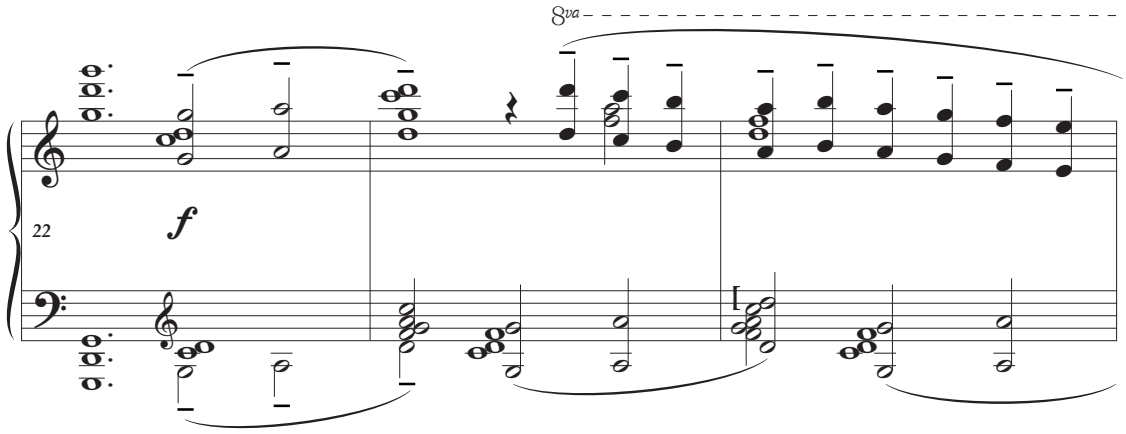
- metronome speed omitted in the original
- it is important to be aware of whether we are in duple or triple time — always clear from the content — while maintaining a steady crotchet pulse
- **7/16/19** editorial key-signatures
- **28** & **46** *sostenuto* pedal (to be coupled with the damper pedal) editorial suggestion

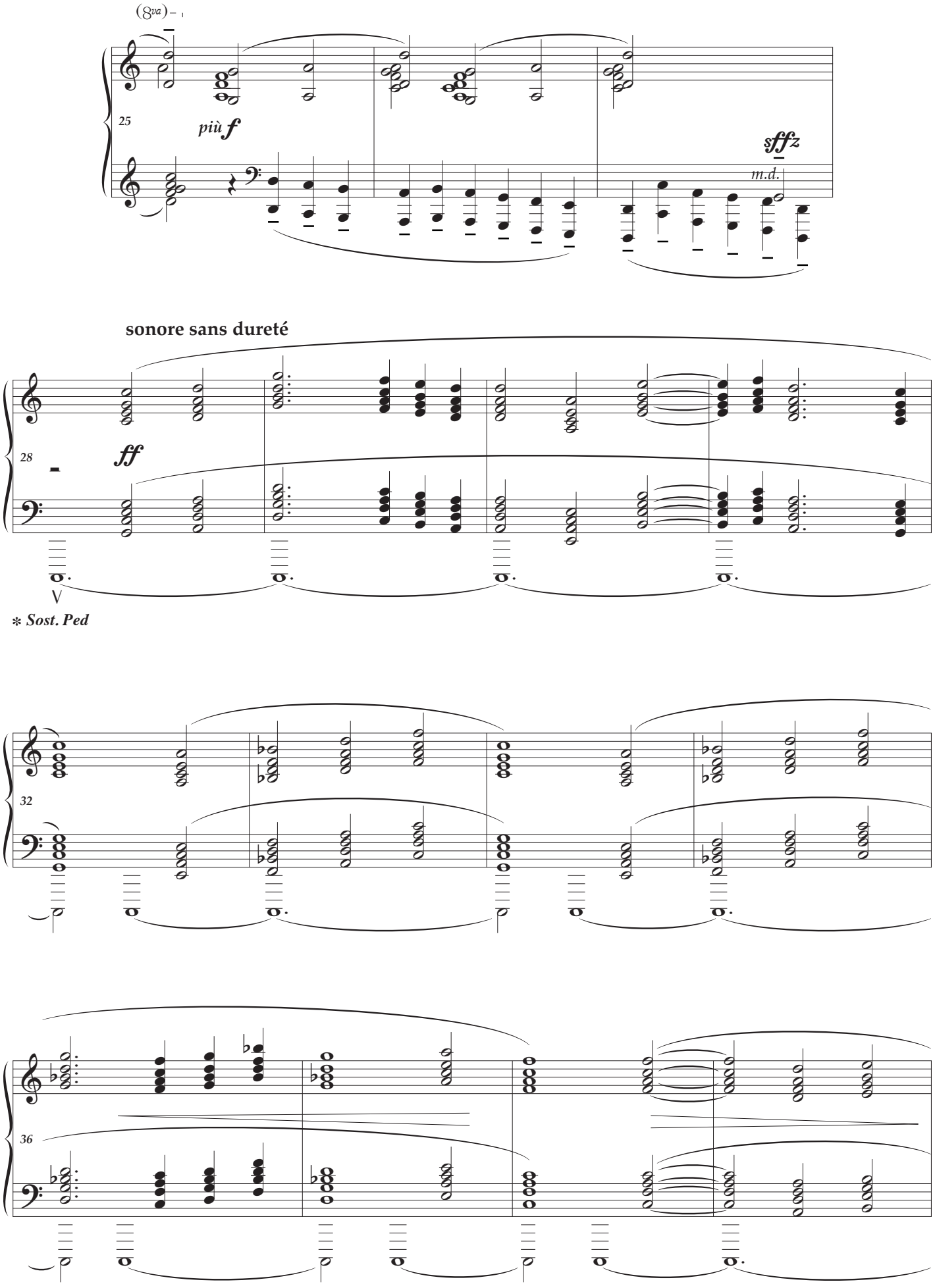

profondément calme (dans une brume doucement sonore) *
X
pp
doux et fluide
(sans nuances)
pp
pp

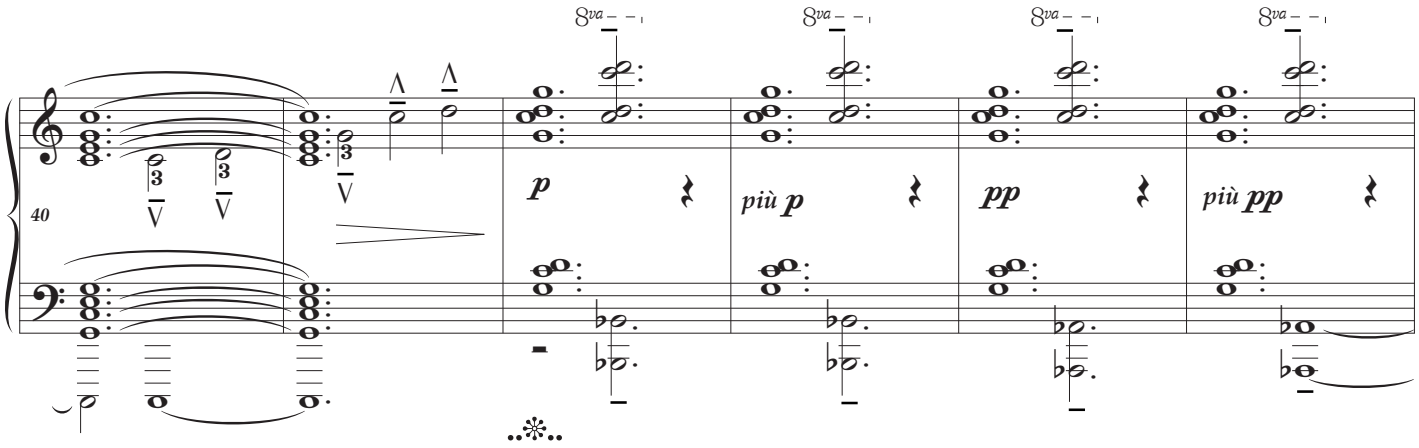

peu à peu sortant de la brume
sempre pp
16
p marqué


18
p marqué
p
marqué

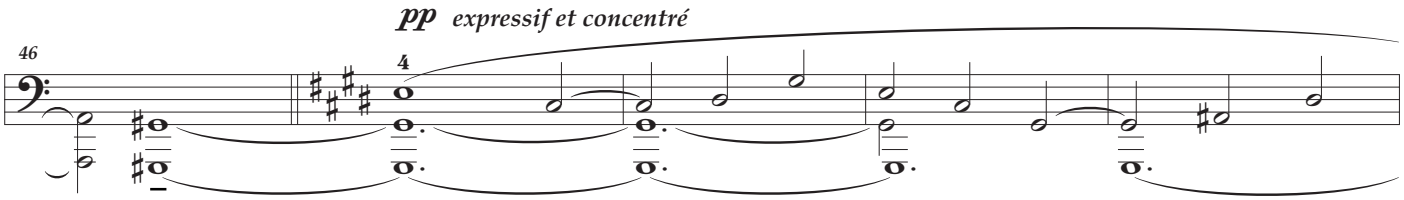

augmentez progressivement (sans presser)
20


8va
22
f

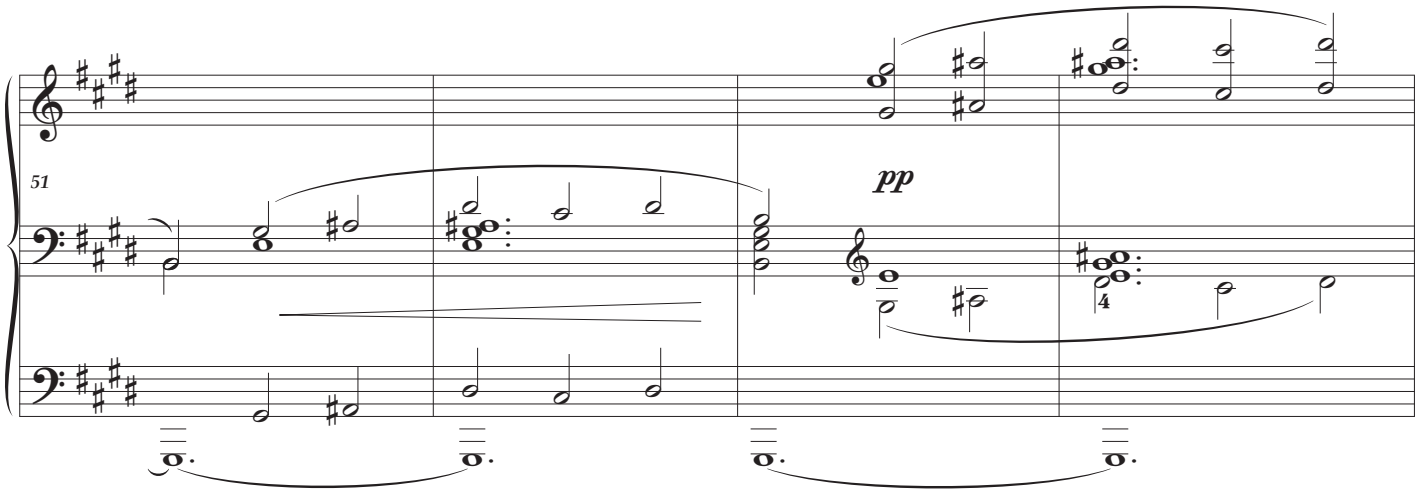

(8va)
25
più f
sffz
m.d.
sonore sans dureté
28
ff
* Sost. Ped
32
36

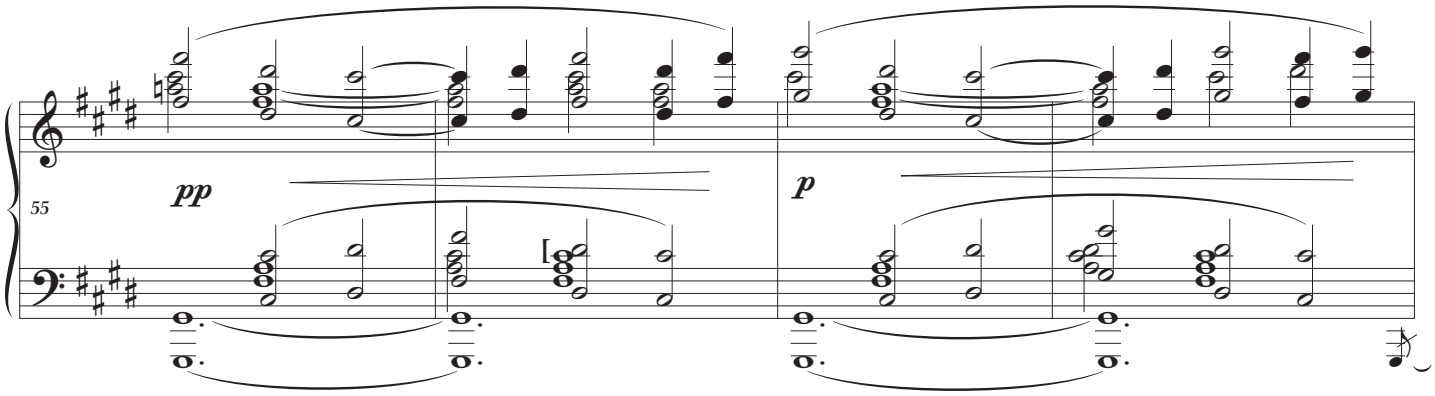


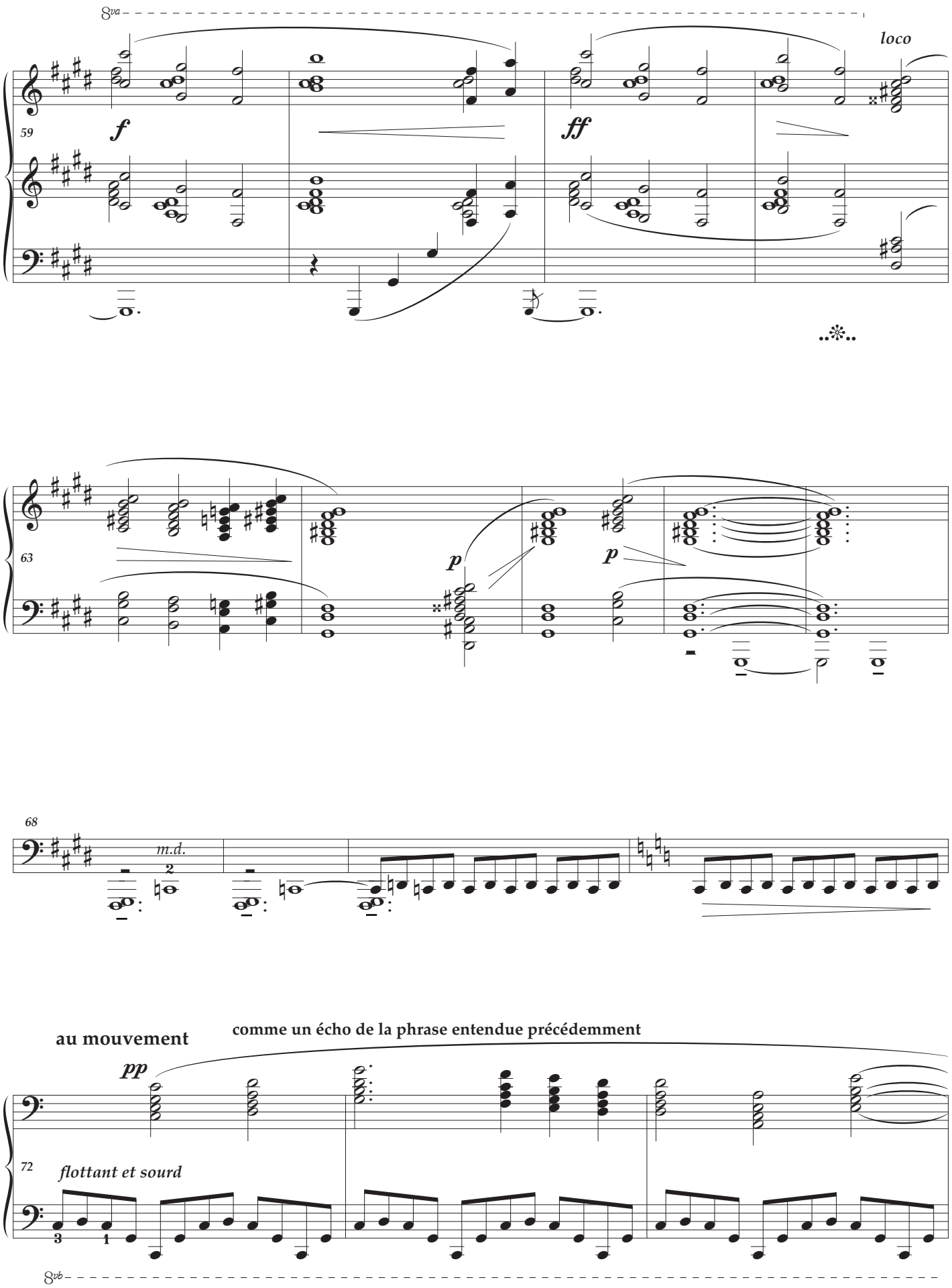
un peu moins lent *(dans une expression allant grandissant)*

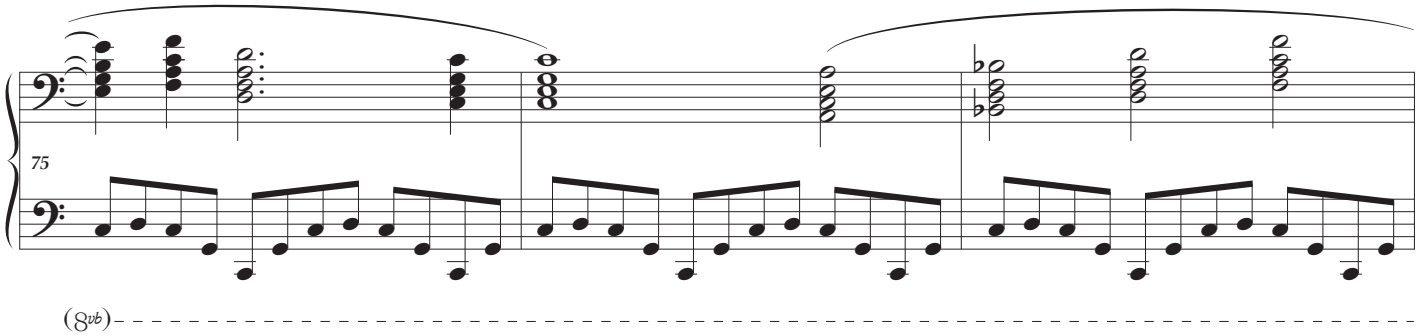


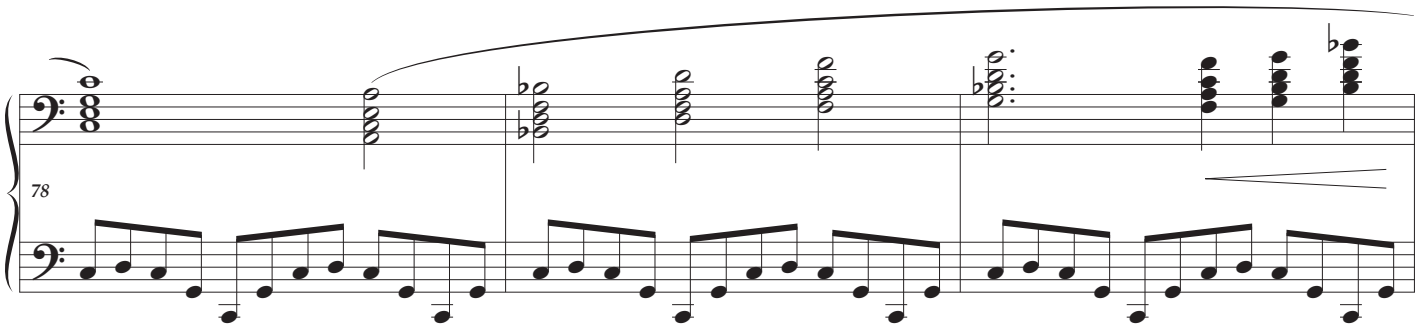
* *Sost. Ped*

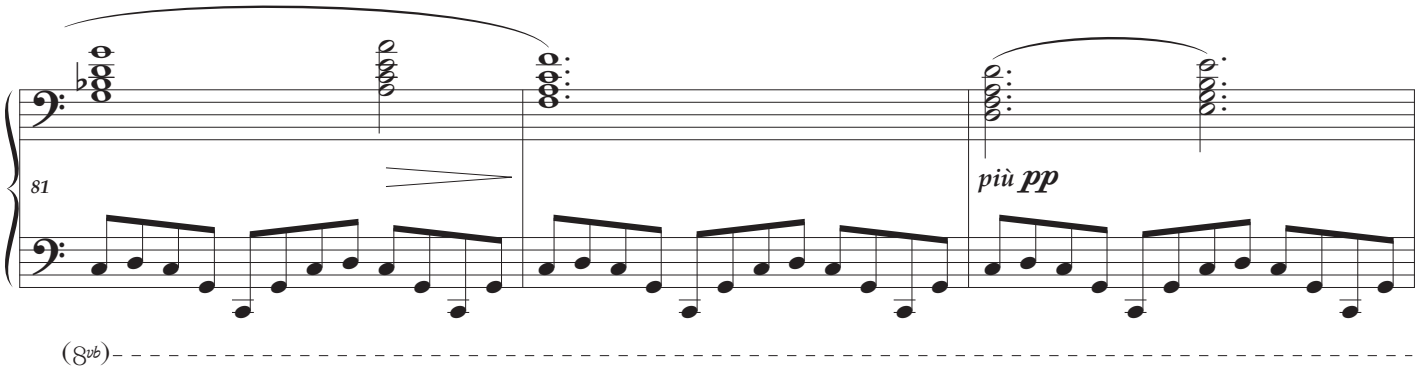


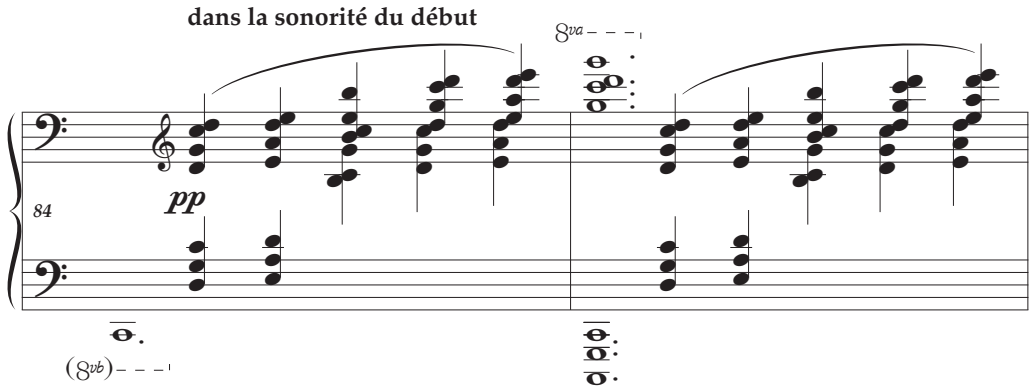


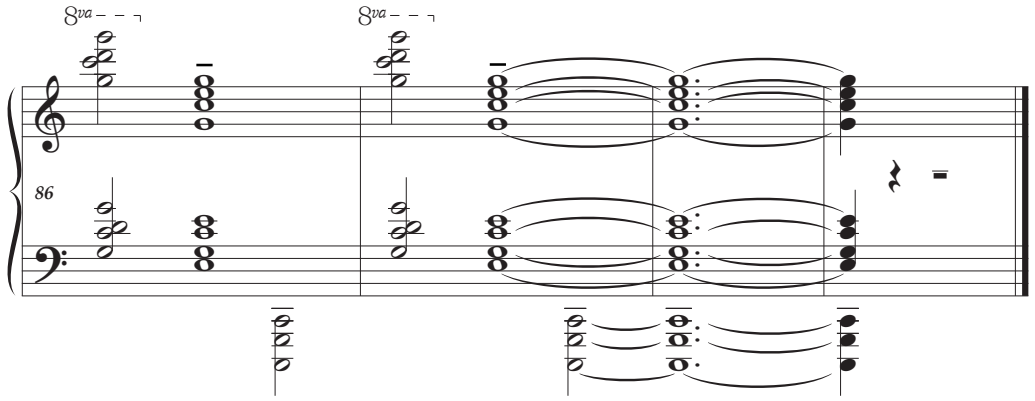

8va
loco
59
f
ff
63
p
p
68
m.d.
au mouvement
comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment
pp
72
flottant et sourd
8vb











(... la cathédrale engloutie)

XI

Inspired by the clever and mischievous sprite in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, much of this piece is suitably delicate and wistful, admirably capturing his impish character; a jaunty dorian theme with a Celtic rhythm that darts about, alternating with a gently sustained melody. A dramatic and quirky prelude which appropriately embraces abrupt changes of mood — from the unearthly to the beguiling, and there are quite a few horn calls from Oberon, trills and tremolos to interrupt the proceedings. Finally Puck suddenly exits stage right — *rapide et fuyant.*

*The dotted, jerky rhythms characterise the image of Robin Goodfellow — Puck of Midsummer Night's Dream. The capricious musical outbursts flow from the nature of the poetic subject at hand down to the haunting horn calls (**69-70**), at which point Puck seems to pause and listen as the musical activity holds back. The disappearing scale passage at the close is pure vaudeville as Puck flees the stage.*

— Irwin Freundlich

ARTHUR RACKHAM 1906

Capricious, nimble, ironic, ethereal, the adept Shakespearian spirit flies, scampers, returns, makes fun of a rustic whom he deceives, and a couple whom he insults — then swiftly disappears.

— Cortot

After these solemnities, the last two preludes are lighter character sketches. La Danse de Puck is a deft portrait of Shakespeare's 'merry wanderer of the night' perhaps inspired, as Howat suggests, by Arthur Rackham's illustration of Puck as a naughty little boy with a sparkler, though Debussy had himself described the character more vividly, some years earlier in connection with Weber's Oberon, as 'equally adept at suddenly descending to the ground as in vanishing into space with a flap of his wings,' an image that suggests Ravel's more dangerous and brilliant Scarbo, the final movement of Gaspard de la Nuit. Debussy's piece opens with seventeen straight bars of highly ornamented melodic arabesque, unaccompanied, then continues, mainly, as a series of accompanied variants on this idea.

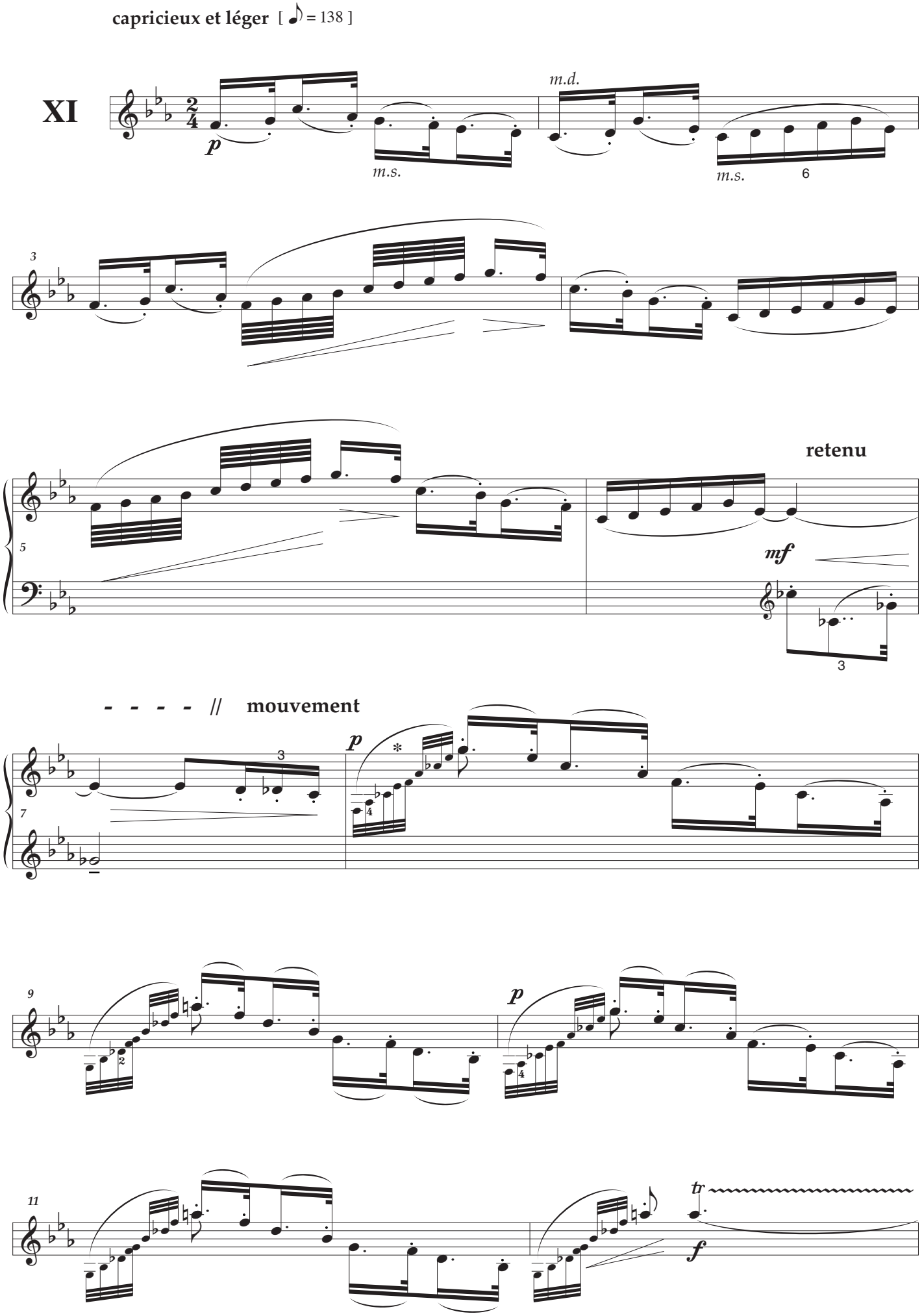
— Stephen Walsh

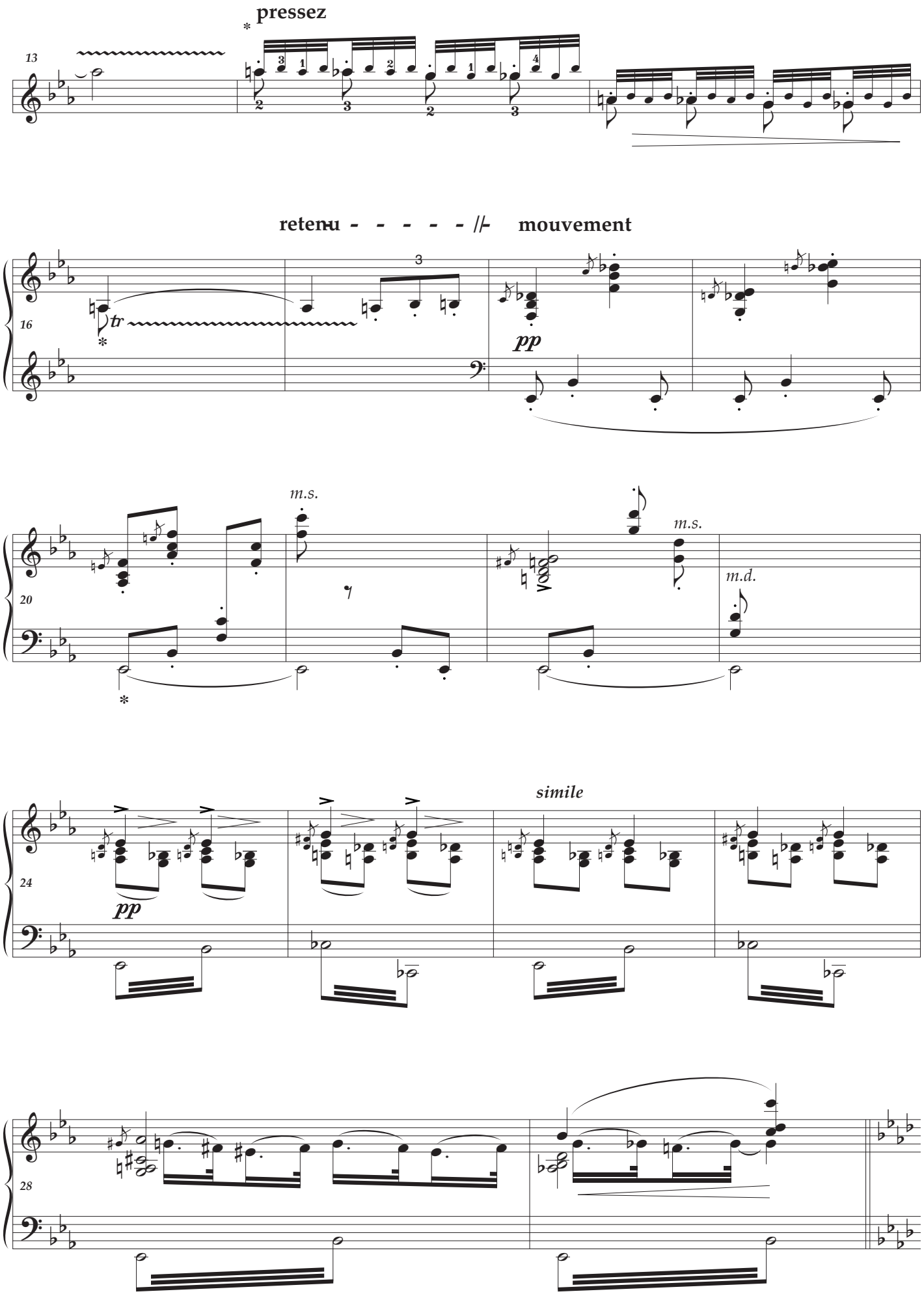
Puck has further mischief up his sleeve, and he flees in a mist of polytonality: the final scale twice alternates A-flat major and E major, switching at the last fleeting moment (rapide et fuyant) to C minor. We are left in the air, spellbound, and are not even brought back to earth by the terminating bass E-fat, which resolves nothing.

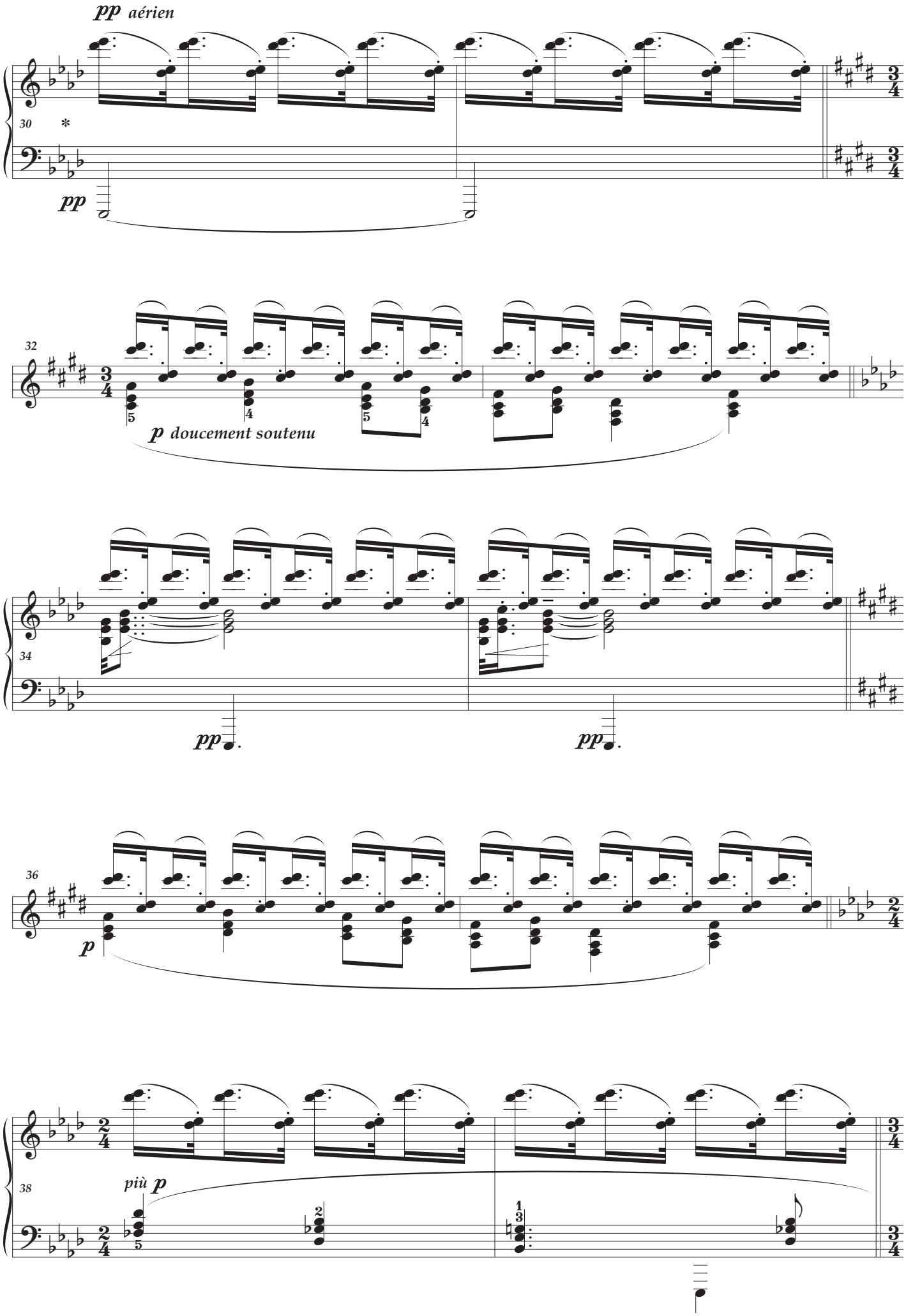
— Paul Roberts

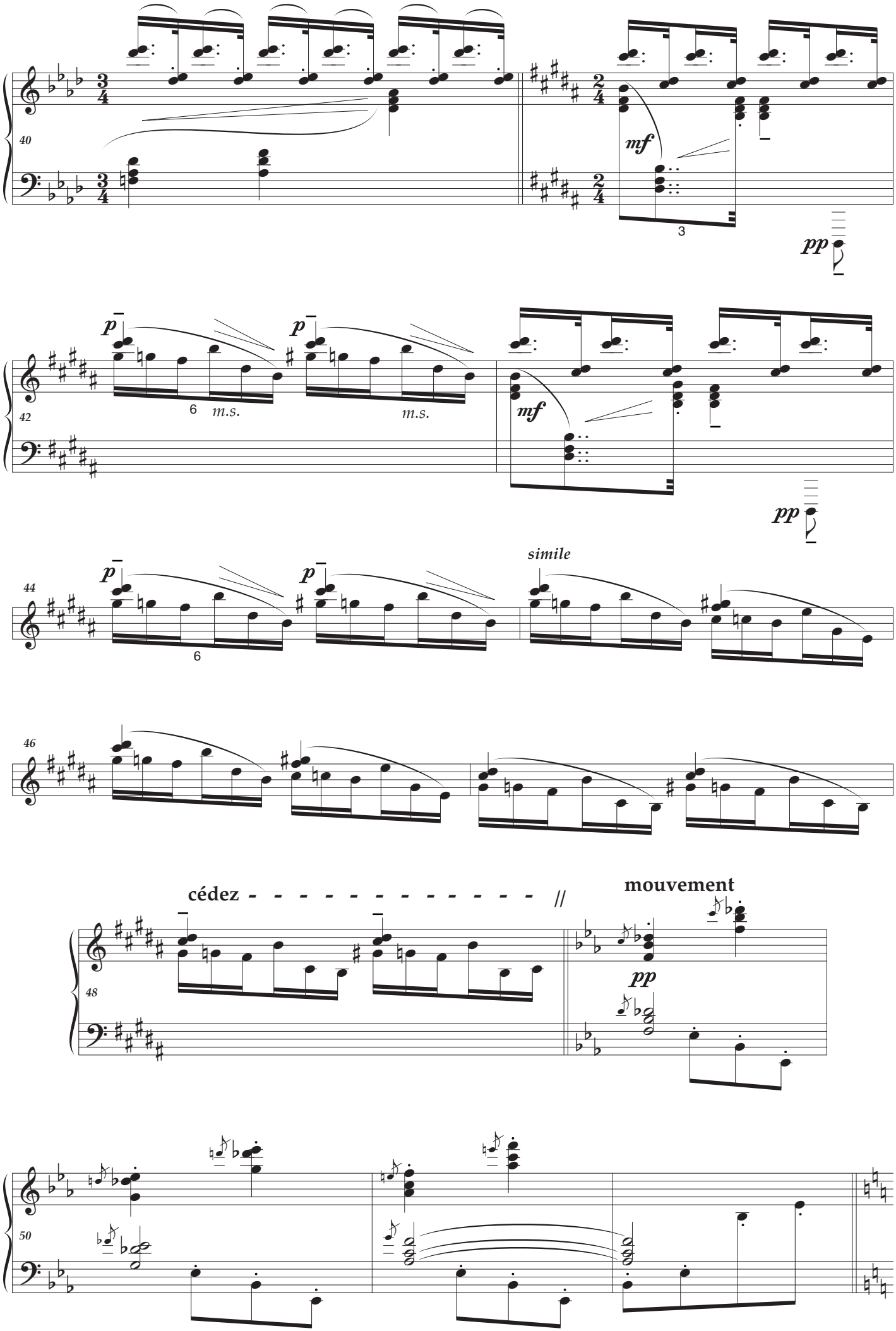
Duration: 3'25

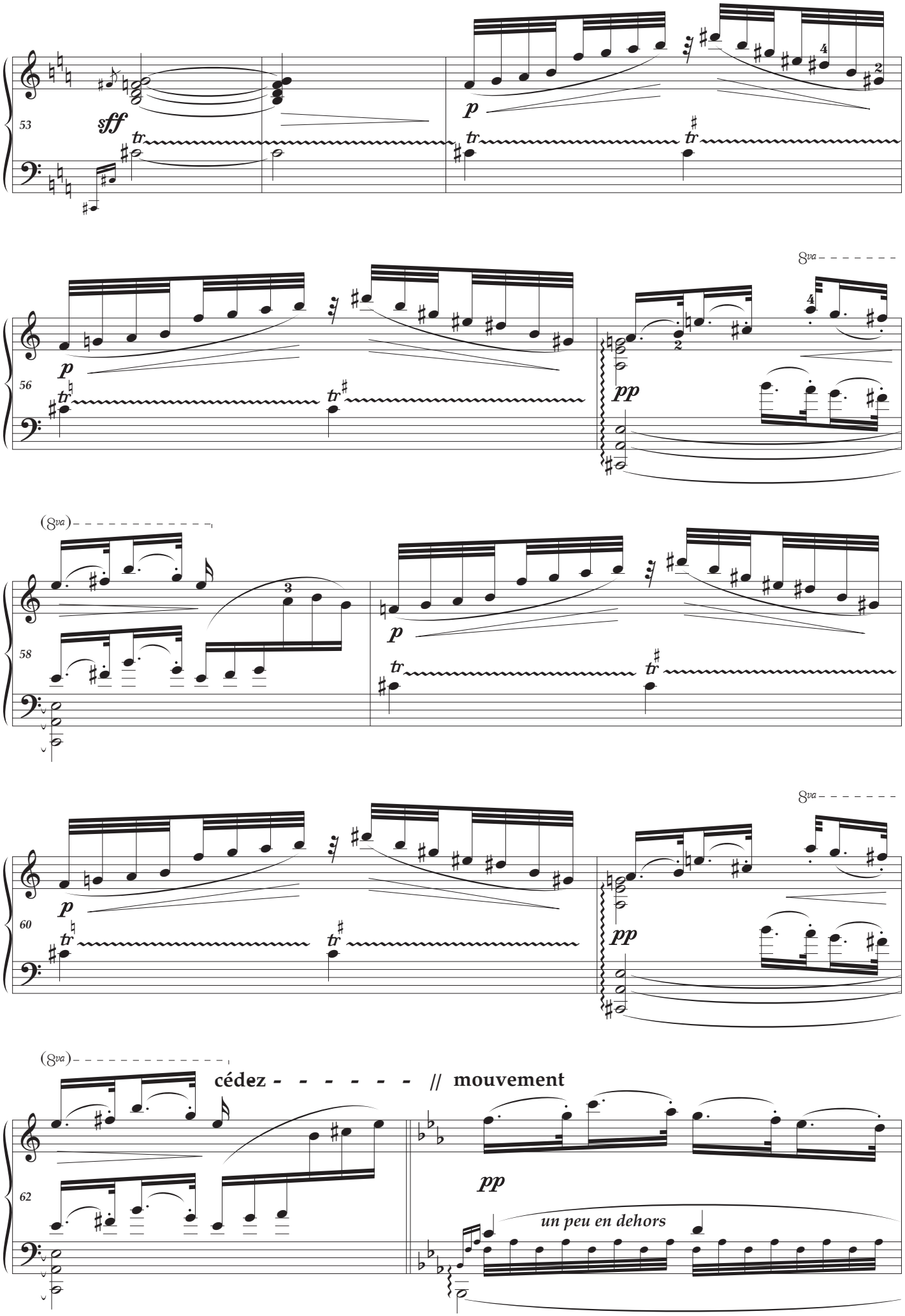
- editorial reduced notation
- **8-12** arpeggiated chords slightly "rearranged"
- **16** commence the trill with LH
- **20** bass E♭ tie missing in the original
- **30-48** editorial changes of key-signatures
- **63-68** sostenuto pedal editorial suggestion
- **65** the diamond-headed note may be omitted
- **93-95** pedal editorial suggestion

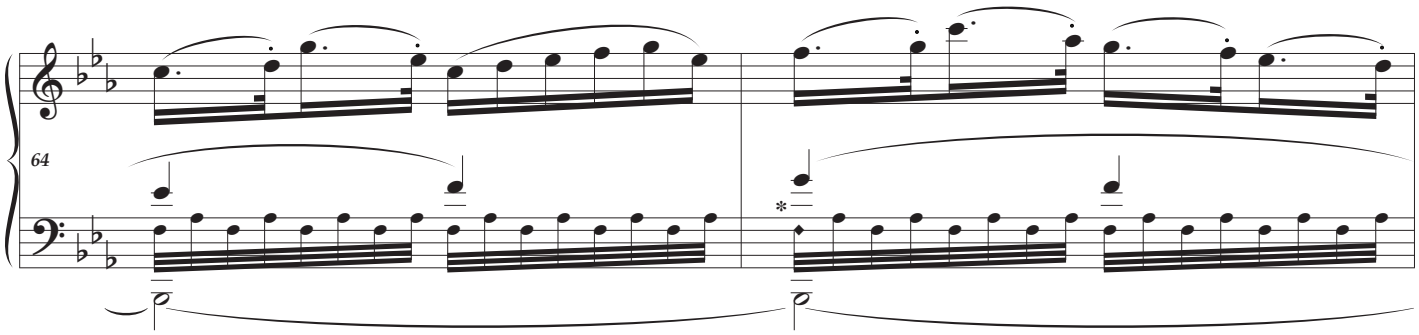

capricieux et léger [♪ = 138]
XI
p
m.s.
m.d.
m.s.
6
3
5
retenu
mf
3
- - - - // mouvement
7
p
*
4
3
9
2
p
4
11
tr
f

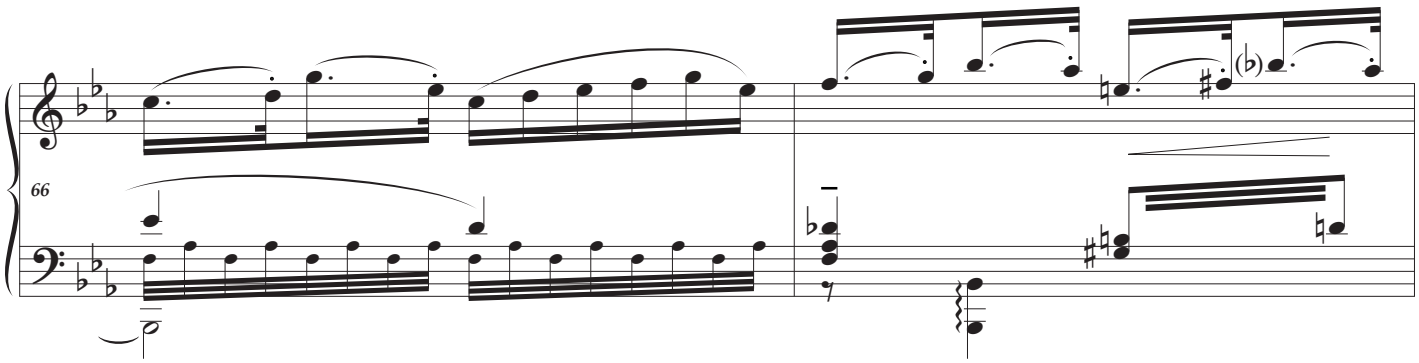

pressez
13
retenu - - - - - //- mouvement
16
tr
pp
20
m.s.
m.s.
m.d.
24
pp
simile
28

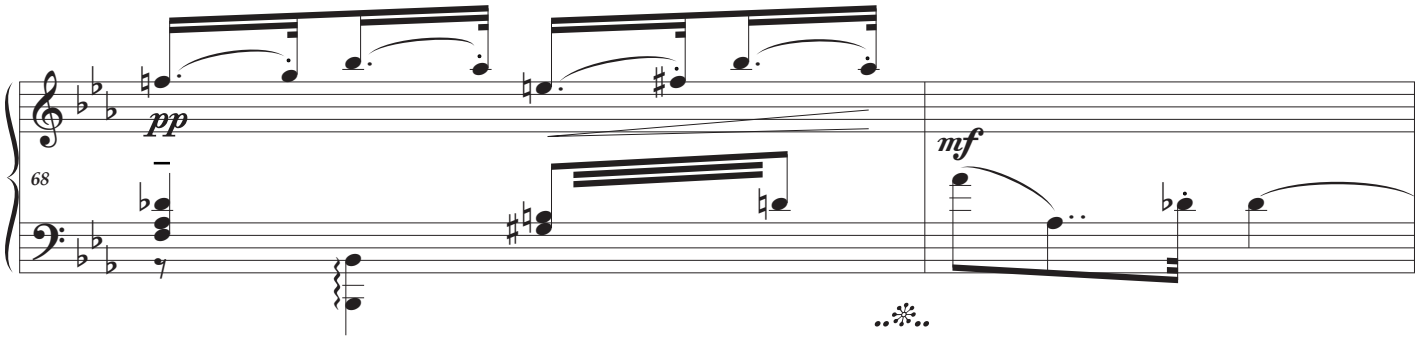

pp aérien
30
*
pp
32
p doucement soutenu
34
pp
pp
36
p
38
più p

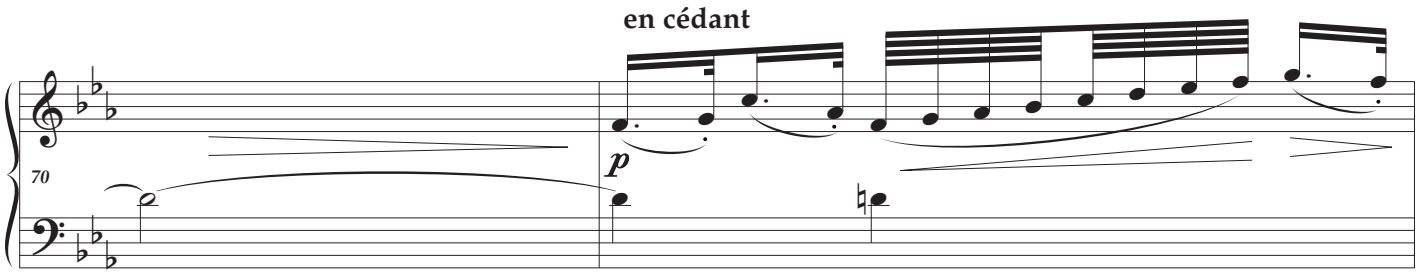

40
mf
3
pp
42
p
6
m.s.
p
m.s.
mf
pp
44
p
6
p
simile
46
cédez
//
mouvement
48
pp
50

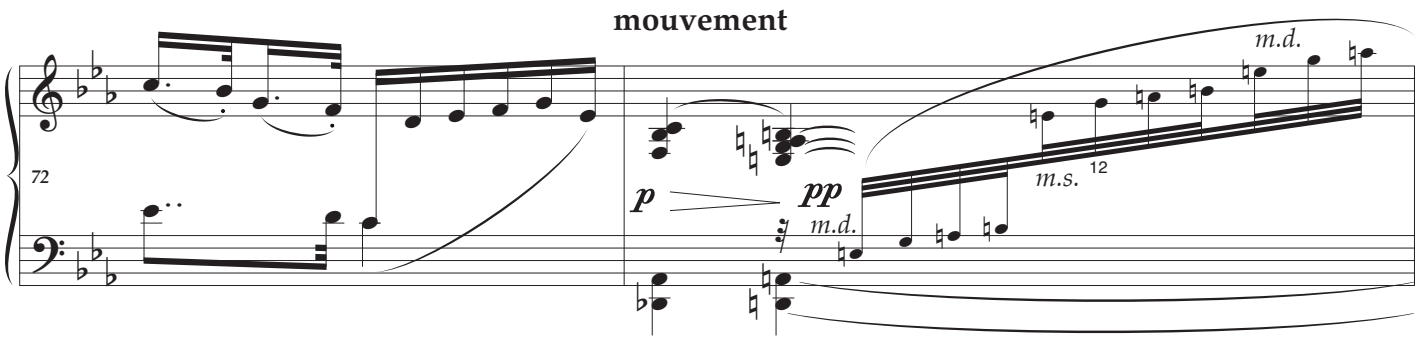

53
sff
tr
p
56
pp
8va
58
(8va)
60
62
cédez - - - - - - // mouvement
un peu en dehors
* Sost. Ped.

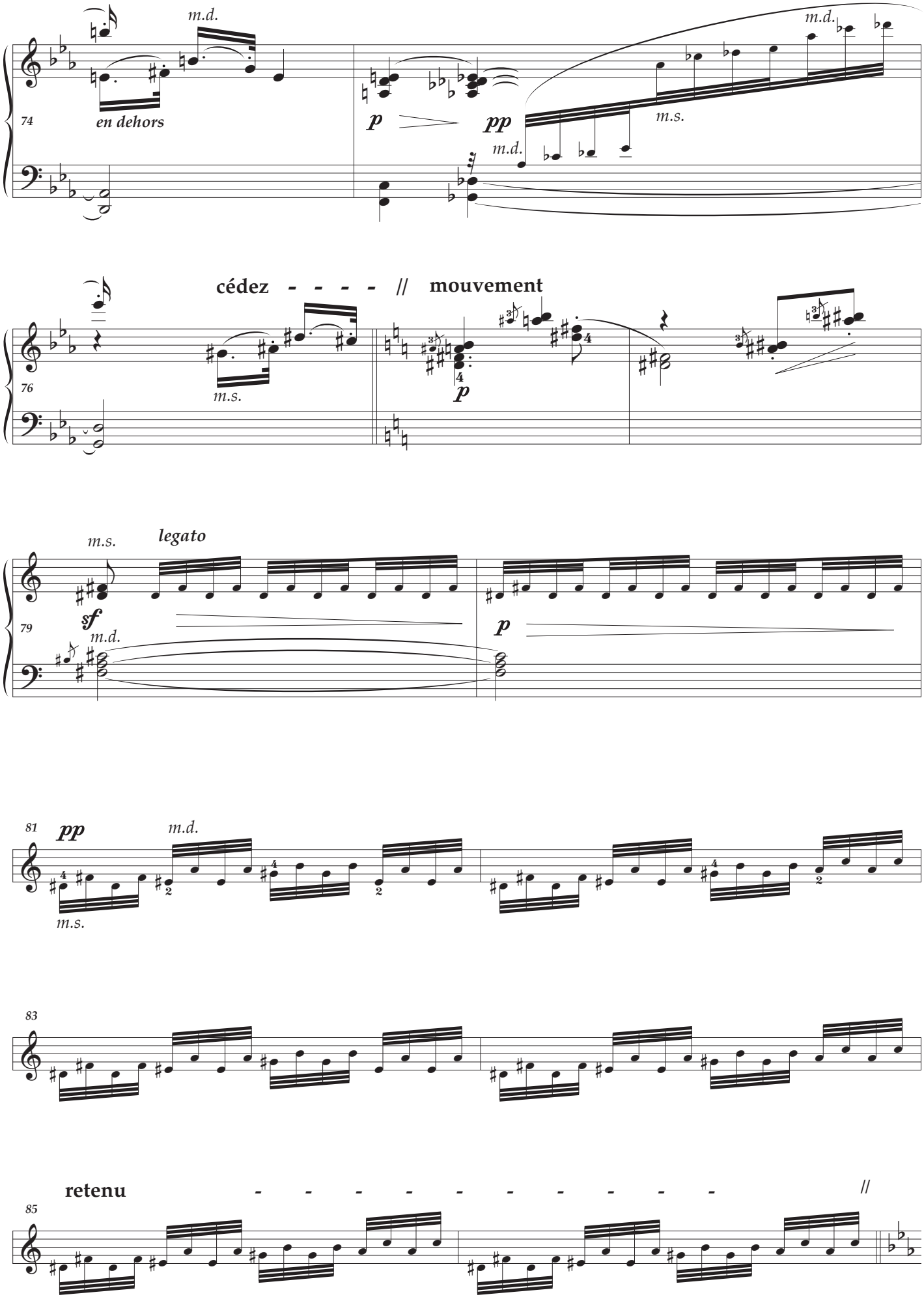

64

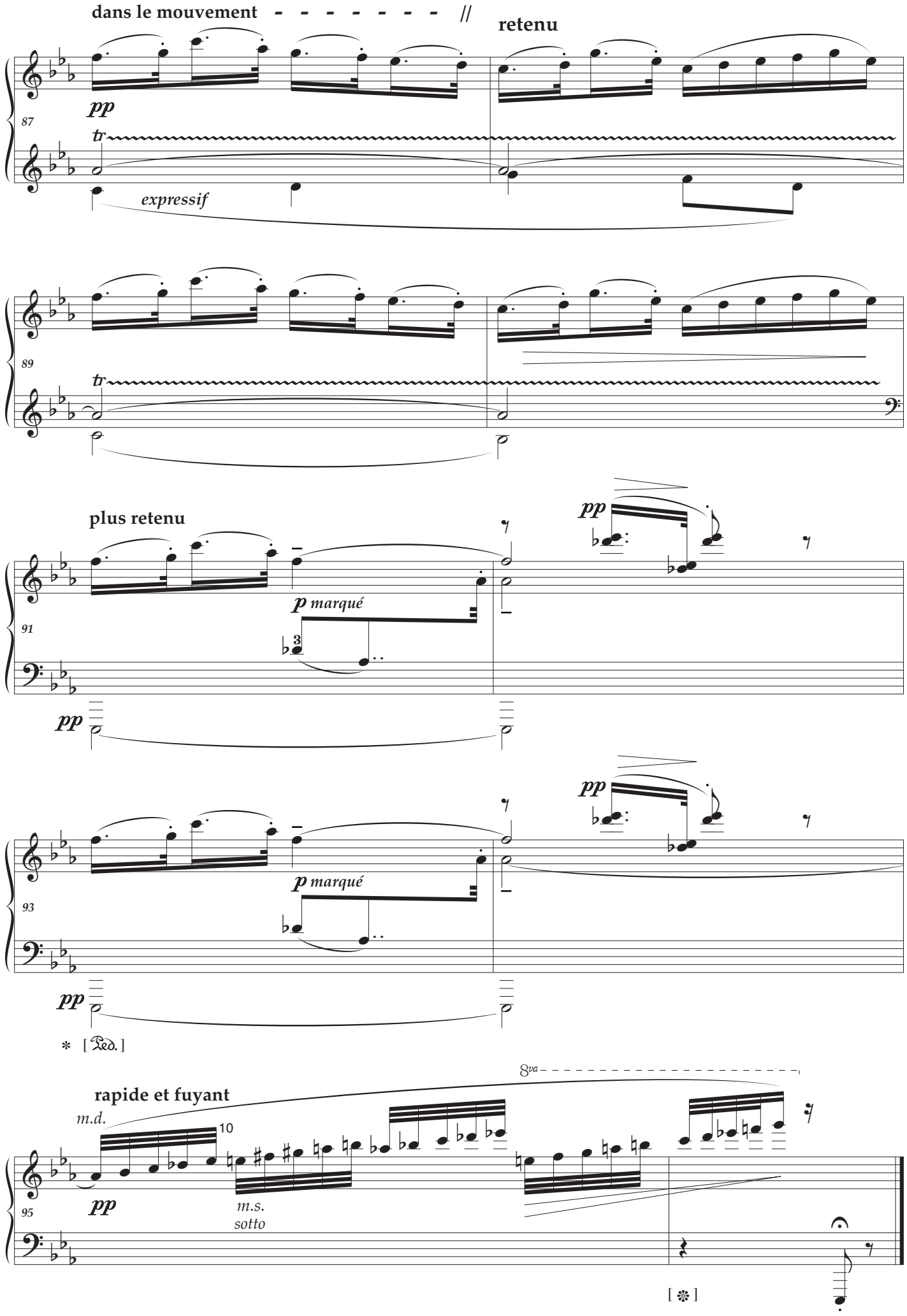

66


68
pp
mf


en cédant
70
p


mouvement
72
p
pp
m.d.
m.s.
12
m.d.


74
m.d.
en dehors
p
pp
m.d.
m.s.
m.d.
76
cédez - - - - // mouvement
m.s.
p
79
m.s.
legato
sf
m.d.
p
81
pp
m.d.
m.s.
83
85
retenu - - - - - - - - - //



(... la danse de Puck)

XII

To avoid the impending scandal and complications of their liaison, Debussy and Emma Bardac* stayed for over a month at the Grand Hotel Eastbourne In 1905. Crowds on the promenade were entertained every evening by minstrels**, pierrots and military bands, and similar American shows were all the rage in Parisian cafés and theatres. This final prelude from book 1 captures their exuberance, often imitating banjo, cornet and drums — a sympathetic tableau of exotic art from the USA. At **35** there is some troubled taunting taking place, perhaps backstage, and I love the final bars with clowns running off the stage in a mock chaotic exit. With 'alternative' rhythm, harmony and cutting dissonance Debussy has transformed their music into an ironic caricature, a style which certainly influenced Stravinsky, Hindemith and Poulenc.

The final prelude of the twelve reflects from a slightly different angle the circus and music-hall obsessions of French art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the clown as counter-image of the self-absorption of Romanticism, with a certain tinge of Baudelaire's 'nostalgie de la boue'. The piece is a skilful montage of musical tricks, like a song-and-dance routine by a cabaret artiste or the blacked-up clowns that Debussy is supposed to have watched performing outside his hotel in Eastbourne in 1905. As with his other montage pieces, and no doubt like the clowns, Debussy binds everything together by repetition and skilful timing. The art of the entertainer, he seems to tell us, is brevity and surprise, and Minstrels is a perfect throwaway ending to this wonderfully varied procession of musical landscapes, portraits and vignettes.

— Stephen Walsh

A humorous and brilliant portrayal of the music-hall. On the stage English jesters nonchalantly indulge in frantic pirouettes, whilst a fragment of sensual music suggests the facile charm of a haunt of pleasure.

— Cortot

LES MARIONNETTES MINSTRELS c1890

Stylised and exaggerated, ridiculous and yet humane, this musical sketch reveals Debussy's acute observation, shrewd humour, and discreet compassion.

E. Robert Schmitz

A collage of comic character sketches, dancing, singing, and acrobatic tricks from mid-19th century America. The 'gruppetti' show an imaginary clown centre stage chuckling to himself and then a brass band suddenly appears in the spotlight. As I play Minstrels and listen to the surprising changes from one skit to another, my senses are delighted. The abrupt switches of characters and moods mirror the frivolities of life and laugh with good humour and compassion.

Jennifer Yu

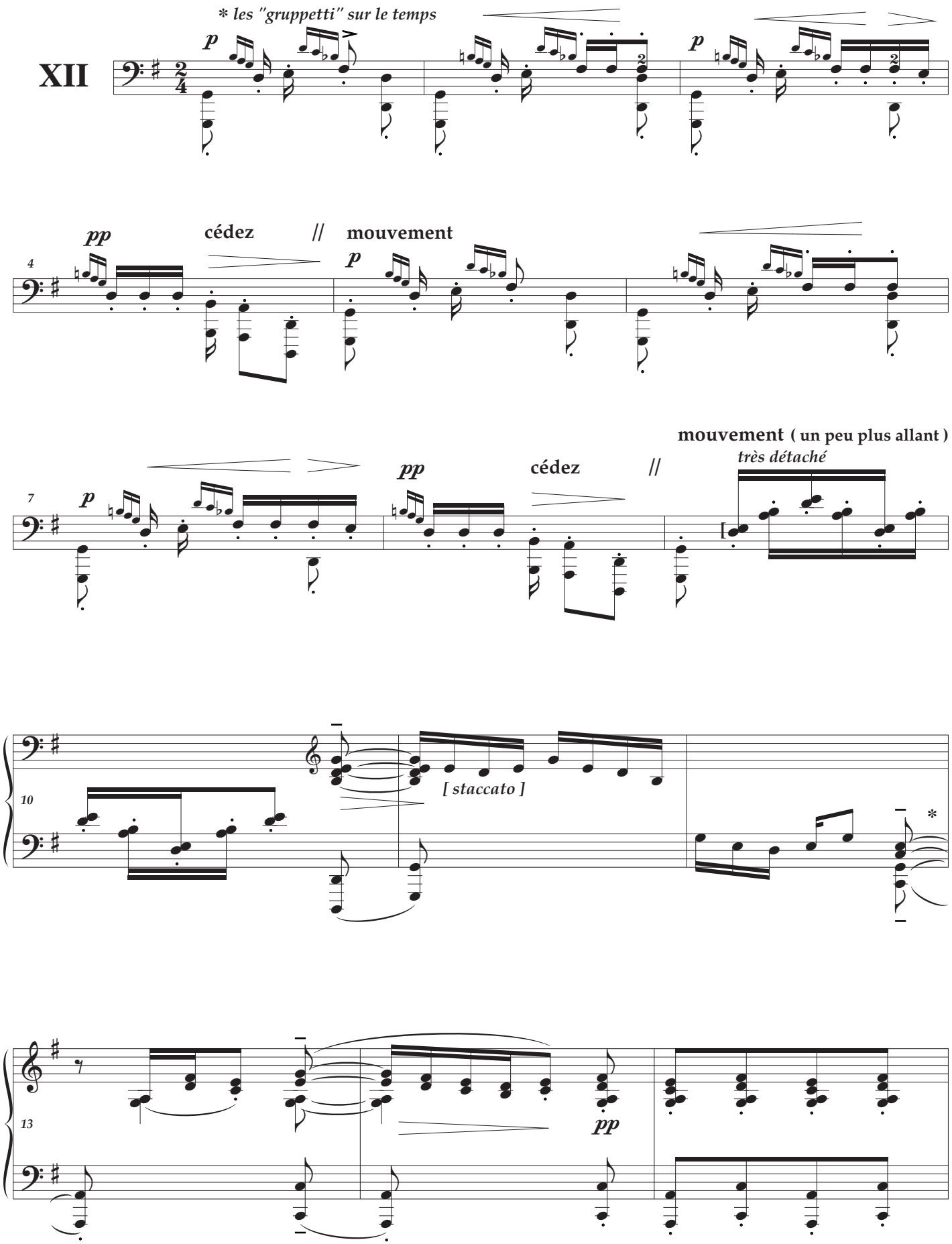
* An accomplished soprano and former partner of Gabriel Fauré. Their daughter Claude-Emma (Chouchou) was born in 1905 and they were married in 1908.

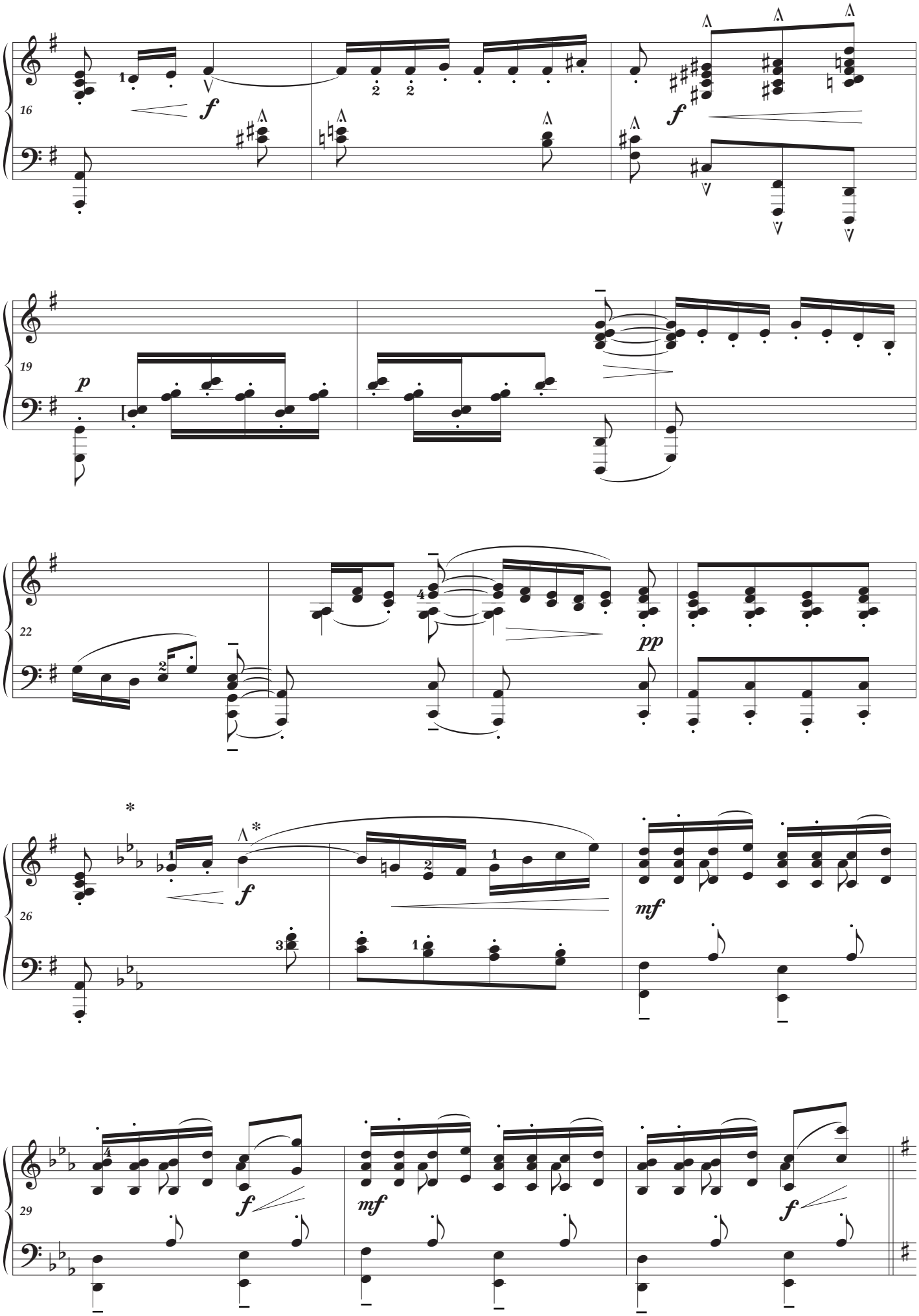
** American entertainers who exotically performed in blackface, wearing tails, top hats and bow ties, featuring quirky dance steps such as the cake-walk, burlesque, slapstick and comedy sketches, including vaudeville acts such as tap dancing, acrobatics and juggling.

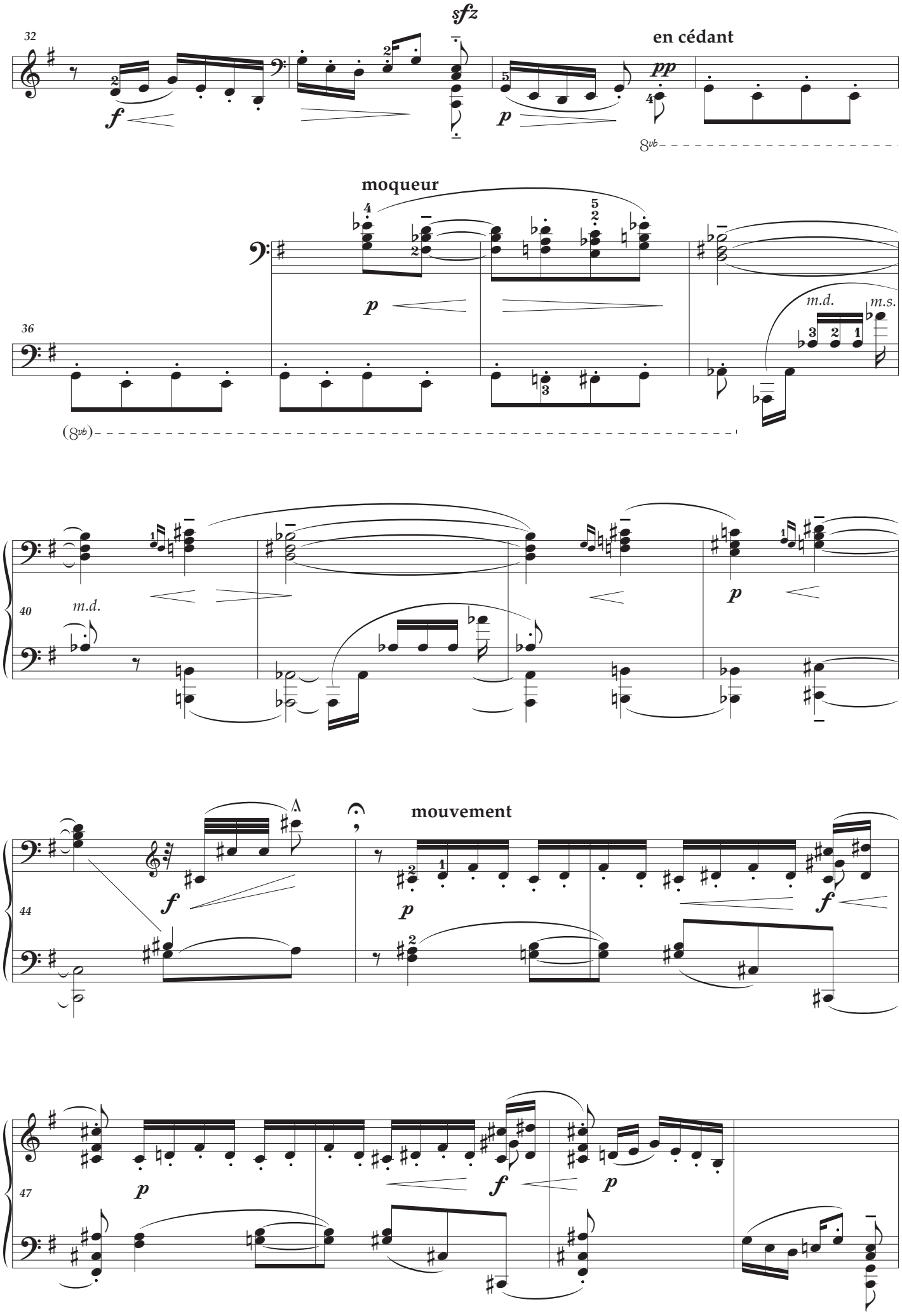
Duration: 2'30

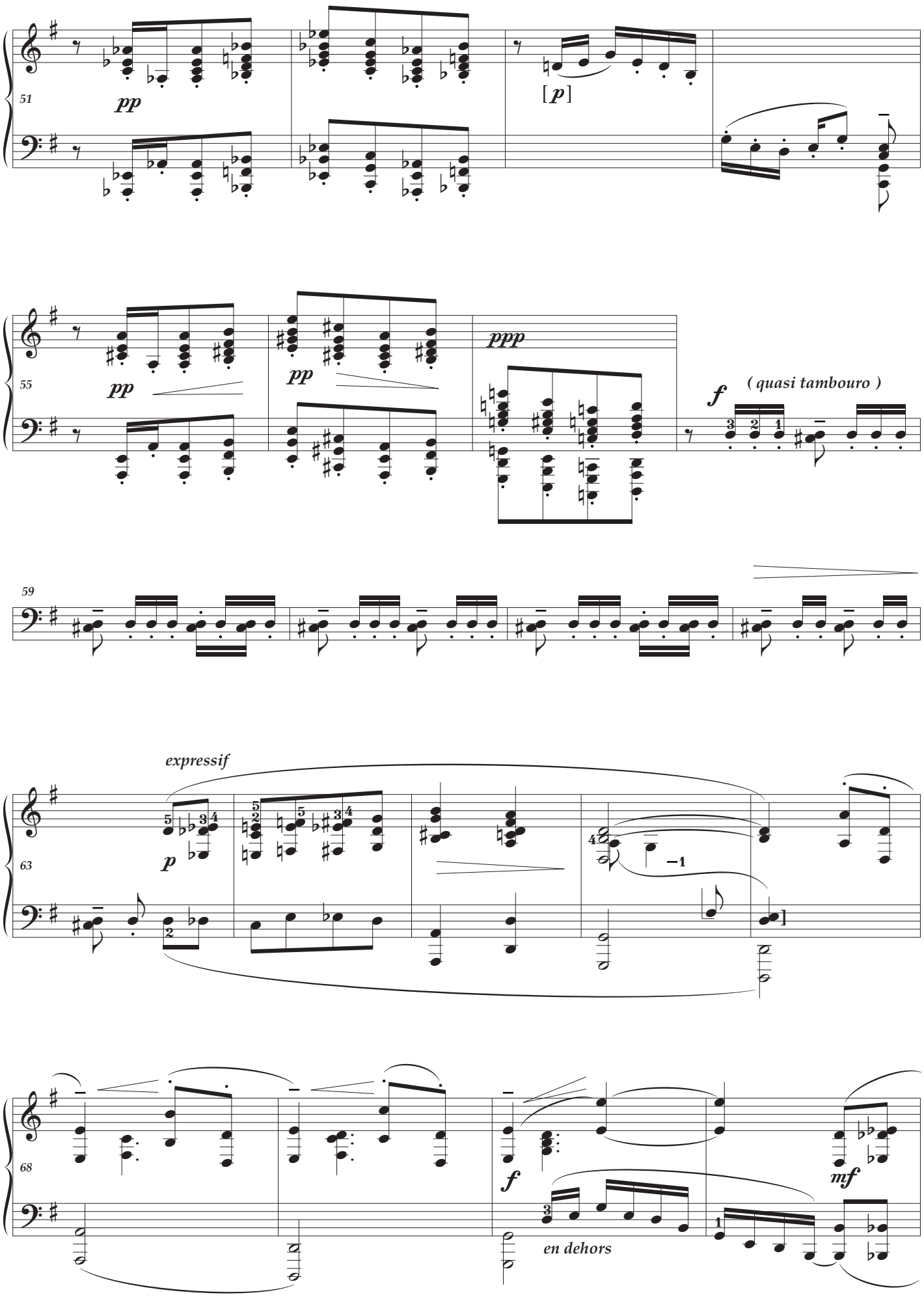
- **grace notes :** playing these on the beat will inevitably make this witty and sarcastic music sound out of time, thus furthering the wishes of the composer
- this edition features hand swapping and a few practical 'arrangements' — RH stems up LH stems down
- metronome speed omitted in the original
- **12** the lingering tie is missing (see **22**)
- **26-31** presented in E♭
- **26-27** editorial slur

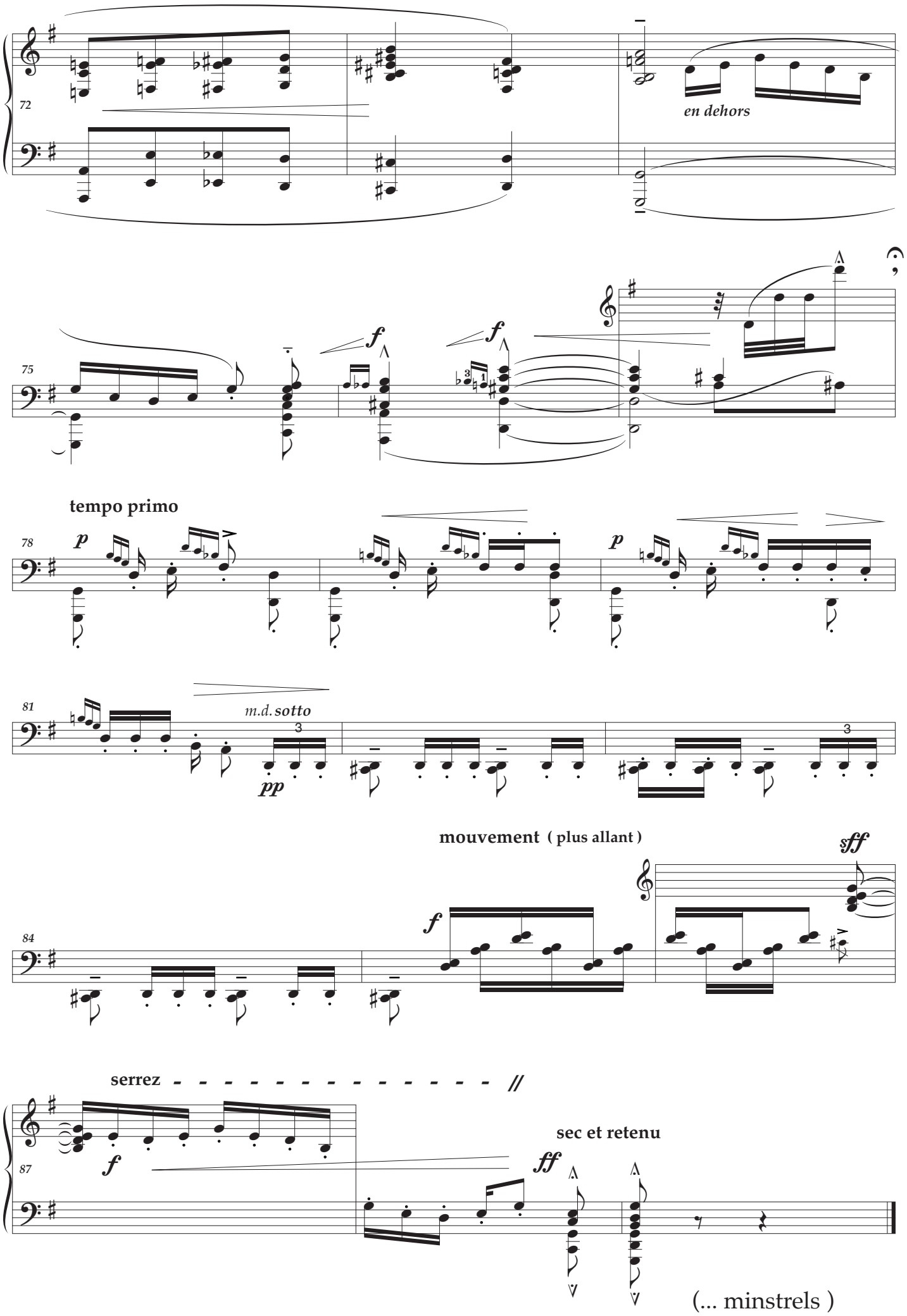
modéré *(nerveux et avec humour)* *




16
f
f
19
p
22
pp
26
f
mf
29
f
mf
f


32
sfz
en cédant
f
p
pp
8vb
moqueur
36
p
m.d.
m.s.
(8vb)
40
m.d.
p
44
f
mouvement
p
f
47
p
f
p

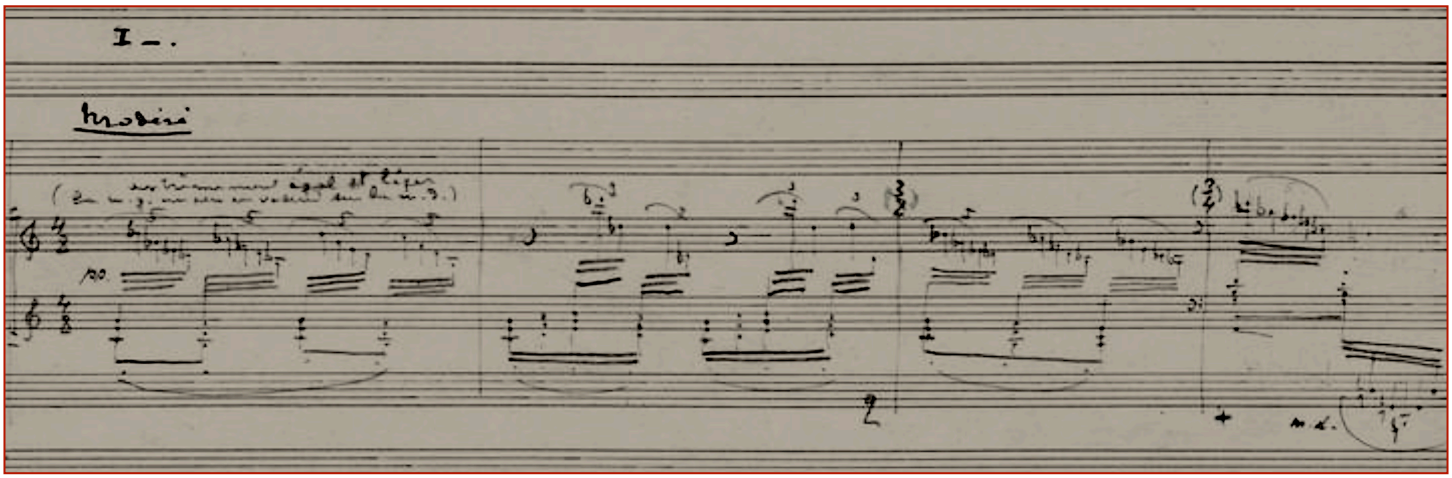

51
pp
[p]
55
pp
pp
ppp
f
(quasi tambouro)
59
expressif
63
p
−1
68
f
en dehors
mf


72
en dehors
75
f
f
tempo primo
78
p
p
81
m.d. sotto
pp
mouvement (plus allant)
84
f
sff
serrez
87
f
ff
sec et retenu

(... minstrels)

Préludes 1-4 Vocabulary

I	doux et soutenu	*gentle and sustained*
	mais en dehors	*but in relief*
II	dans un rythme sans rigeur et caressant	*with a yielding and caressing pulse*
	très doux	*very gentle*
	très souple	*very flexible*
	cédez	*slow down*
	serrez	*accelerate*
	en animant	*animating*
	emporté	*exalted*
	retenu	*held back*
	comme un très léger glissando	*like a very light glissando*
	doucement en dehors	*gently in relief*
	très apaisé et très atténtué jusqu'à la fin	*very calm and very muted until the end*
III	aussi légèrement que possible	*as light as possible*
	cédez	*slow down*
	un peu retenu	*held back a little*
	laisser vibrer	*hold the pedal*
IV	harmonieux et souple	*harmonious and flexible*
	en animant un peu	*a little more animated*
	en retenant	*holding back*
	égal et doux	*even and gentle*
	serrez un peu	*accelerate a little*
	cédez	*slow down*
	la basse un peu appuyée et soutenue	*emphasise and sustain the bass a little*
	tranquille et flottant	*calm and floating*
	comme une lointaine sonnerie de cors	*like distant hunting horns*
	encore plus lointain et plus retenu	*even more distant and ever slowing down*



BROUILLARDS PRÉLUDES LIVRE II AUTOGRAPH

Préludes 5-8 Vocabulary

V

vif	*lively*
léger et lointain	*light and from afar*
quittez en laissant vibrer	*release and hold the pedal*
en serrant	*accelerate*
joyeux et léger	*joyous and light*
cédez	*slow down*
avec la liberté d'une chanson populaire	*with the freedom of a popular song*
un peu en dehors	*a little in relief*
un peu marqué	*a little marked*
très retenu	*tempo seriously held back*
lumineux	*radiant*

VI

presque lent	*almost slow*
triste et lent	*sorrowful and slow*
expressif et douloureux	*expressive and distressing*
ce rythme doit avoir la valeur sonore	*this rhythm should reflect the sounds*
d'un fond de paysage triste et glacé	*of a desolate and frozen landscape*
cédez	*slow down*
en animant surtout dans l'expression	*more animated especially in expression*
tendre	*tender*
comme un tendre et triste regret	*like a tender and sad lament*

VII

animé et tumultueux	*animated and tempestuous*
plaintif et lointain	*mournful and distant*
commencer un peu au dessous du mouvement	*commence with a slightly slower tempo*
un peu marqué	*a little marked*
revenir progressivement au mouvement animé	*gradually back to the animated tempo*
strident	*dissonant*
un peu retenu	*a little held back*
… mais en dehors et angoissé	*… but in relief and tormented*
en serrant et augmentant beaucoup	*seriously accelerating and increasing tone*
très en dehors	*very prominent*
peu à peu crescendo en serrant	*little by little increase tone while accelerating*
incisif	*cutting*
furieux et rapide	*frenzied and fast*
au mouvement	*a tempo*

VIII

très calme et doucement expressif	*very calm and gently expressive*
sans rigueur	*with a flexible pulse*
cédez	*holding back*
très peu	*very little*
un peu animé	*a little animated*
sans lourdeur	*without heaviness*
très doux	*very gentle*
murmuré en retenant peu à peu	*whispered while gradually holding back the tempo*

Préludes 9-12 Vocabulary

IX

comme en préludant	*like an introduction*
les deux pédales	*both pedals*
expressif et un peu suppliant	*expressive and pleading a little*
estompé et en suivant l'expression	*muted and following the melody*
cédez	*slow down*
très vif	*very lively*
retenu	*held back*
librement	*not in strict time*
lointain	*from afar*
rageur	*enraged*
doux et harmonieux	*dulcet and harmonious*
en s'éloignant	*moving further away*

X

profondément calme	*profoundly calm*
dans une brume doucement sonore	*in a gently resonant mist*
doux et fluide	*gentle and fluid*
sans nuances	*without nuances*
peu à peu sortant de la brume	*gradually emerging from the mist*
marqué	*marked*
augmentez progressivement	*gradually amplify*
sans presser	*do not rush*
sonore sans dureté	*resonant without forcing the tone*
un peu moins lent	*a little less slow*
dans une expression allant grandissant	*expressive, moving forward, growing*
expressif et concentré	*expressive and concentrated*
comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment	*like an echo of the phrase heard previously*
flottant et sourd	*floating and muted*
dans la sonorité du début	*match the sound of the opening*

XI

capricieux et léger	*capricious and light*
retenu	*held back*
pressez	*rush*
aérien	*etherial*
doucement soutenu	*gently sustained*
cédez	*holding back*
en cédant	*gradually holding back*
dans le mouvement	*in tempo*
rapide et fuyant	*swift and fleeting*

XII

nerveux et avec humour	*lively (capricious) and with humour*
les "gruppetti" sur le temps	*grace notes start on the beat*
cédez	*holding back*
un peu plus allant	*a little quicker*
très détaché	*molto staccato*
en cédant	*holding back*
moqueur	*ironic*
quasi tambouro	*like a side-drum*
en dehors	*in relief*
serrez	*accelerate*
sec et retenu	*crisp and held back*

DEBUSSY

PRÉLUDES livre I

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