Claude DEBUSSY
CENTENARY EDITION 2018

M A S Q U E S

iano Practical Editions
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iano Practical Editions

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.

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Ray Alston : contact@pianopracticaleditions.com

Claude DEBUSSY 1862 - 1918

MASQUES

Published in 1904, *Masques* is generally accepted to be twinned with *l'Isle Joyeuse*, from the same year. Debussy once confided to Marguerite Long: « it is not the *comédie italienne*, but the tragic expression of existence. » Like Schumann, he was fired with enthusiasm for the masked players of the *Commedia dell'arte*. Masks occur throughout Debussy's *œuvre* with clowns, blackface minstrels and *voiles*, but most of all the mask permanently presented to hide our emotions. Or perhaps those which must be dropped to achieve true emotion. Like Schumann's journalistic alter egos *Eusebius*, *Florestan* and *Meister Raro*, Debussy wrote much criticism under the masked name of *Monsieur Croche, antidilettante* : « *L'art est le plus beau des mensonges…. Mais, sacristi, la musique ! c'est du rêve dont on écarte les voiles !*»*

The introductory open fifths remind me of *Fêtes* (the second nocturne for orchestra) which was written around the same time… and I must mention two wonderfully original and evocative passages : **236 - 269** and the final coda on page **20**.

Arlecchino e Colombina

By 1890 Debussy was deeply involved in the poetry of Verlaine — "*charmant masques et bergamasques quasi tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques"**, and *Masques* and *l'Isle Joyeuse* were almost certainly drafted at this time.

Roy Howat advances a plausible argument that by inserting *d'un Cahier d'Esquisses*, Debussy may have planned three pieces to form a suite similar to *Images* or *Estampes*; the first and third were performed as a pair by Ricardo Viñes in February 1905. They can be found, united in one volume possibly for the first time, under the title *3 morceaux 1903-1904*, on the Piano Practical Editions website, where their interconnection as a group can be readily appreciated.

"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 partake of infinity, capturing mysterious relations between nature and the imagination". — Claude Debussy

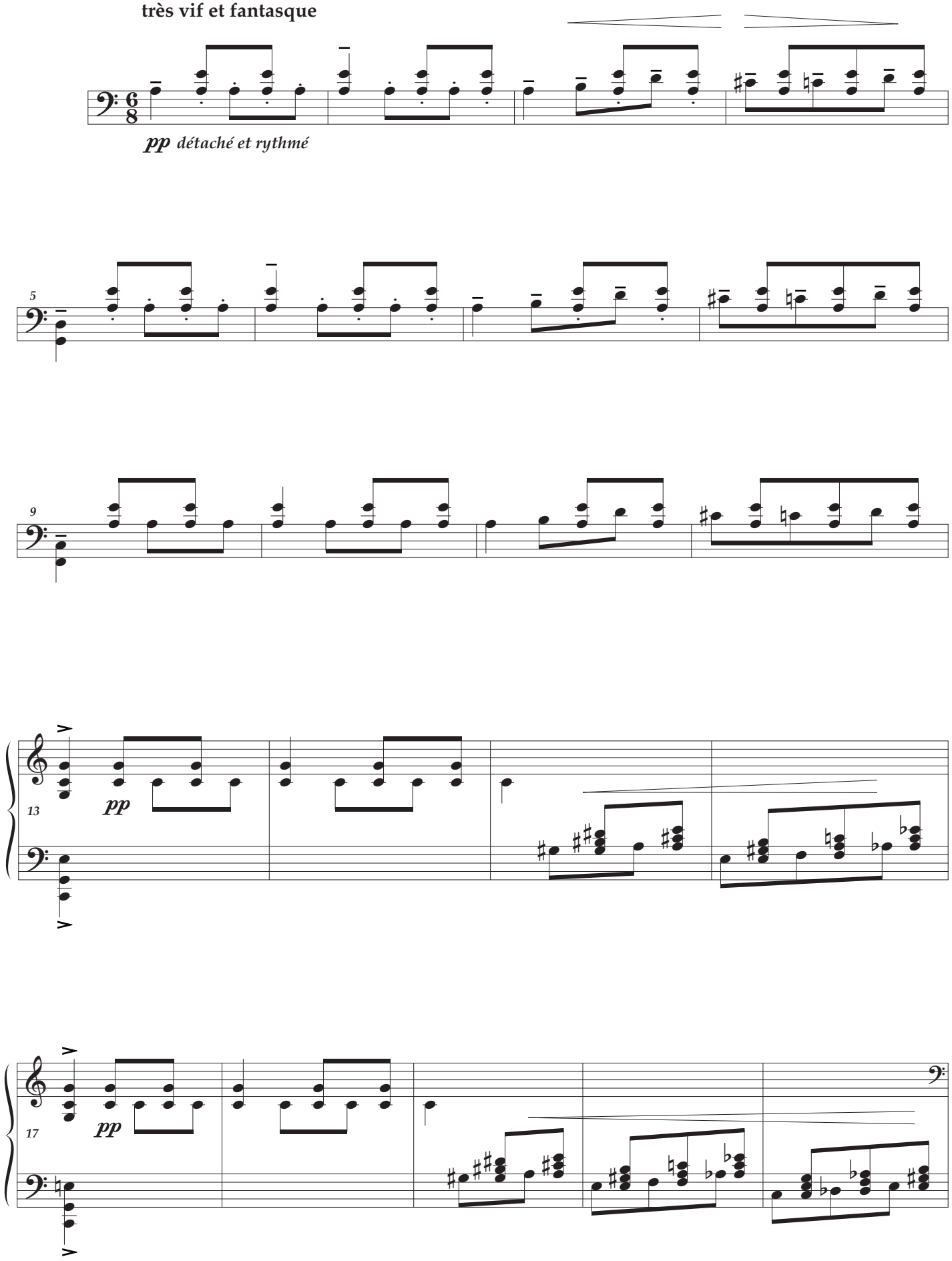
The strong influence of French piano music is surely identified with Chopin and Debussy who share a unique position as masters of an exceptional instrument; through an extensive affinity with the sustaining pedal they each created a personal language conceived to communicate their work with the greatest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

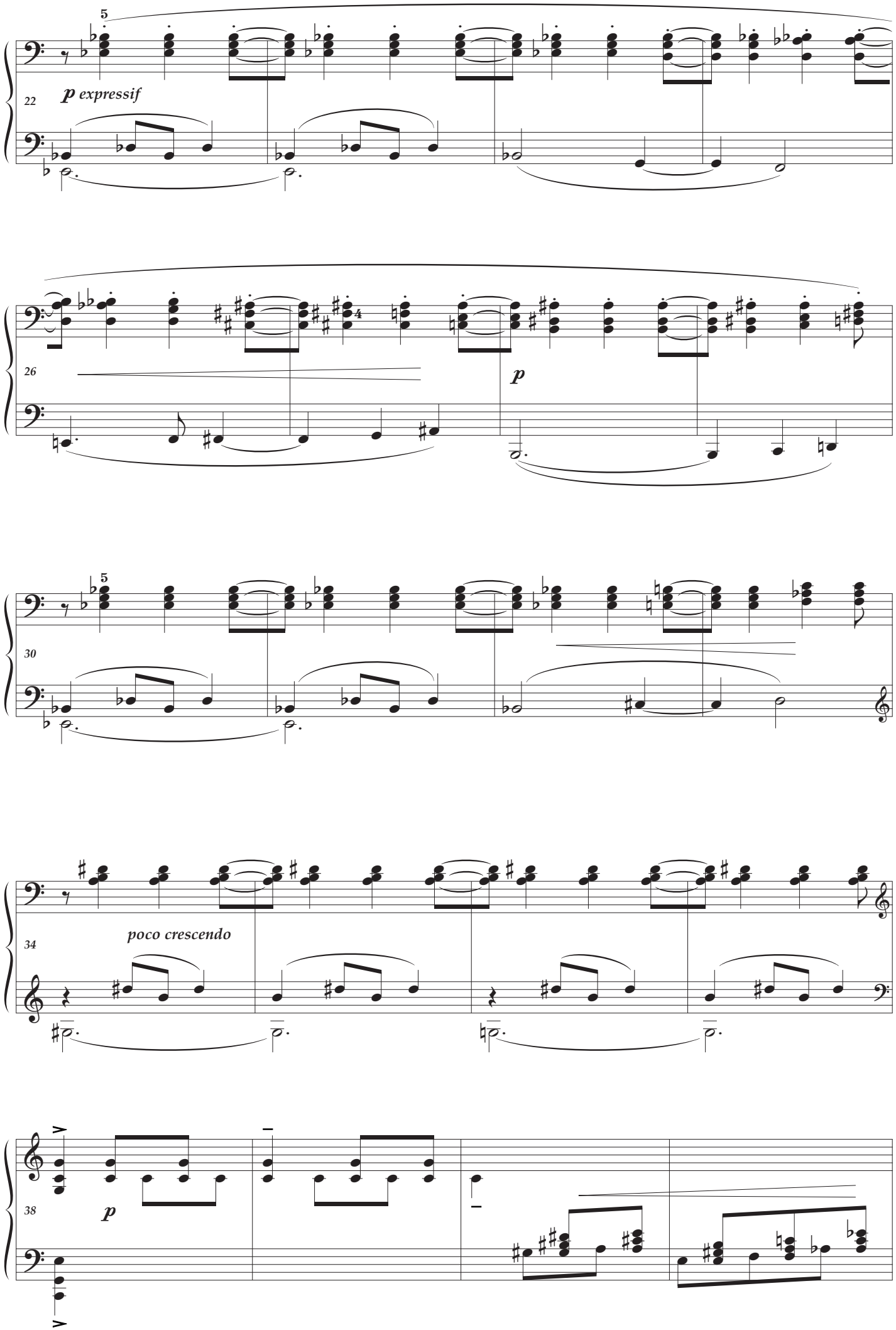
During the centenary year *Piano Practical Editions* became a creative and critical publication; minor modifications have been made (see the appendix page **21**) with a possible improvement in the text layout.

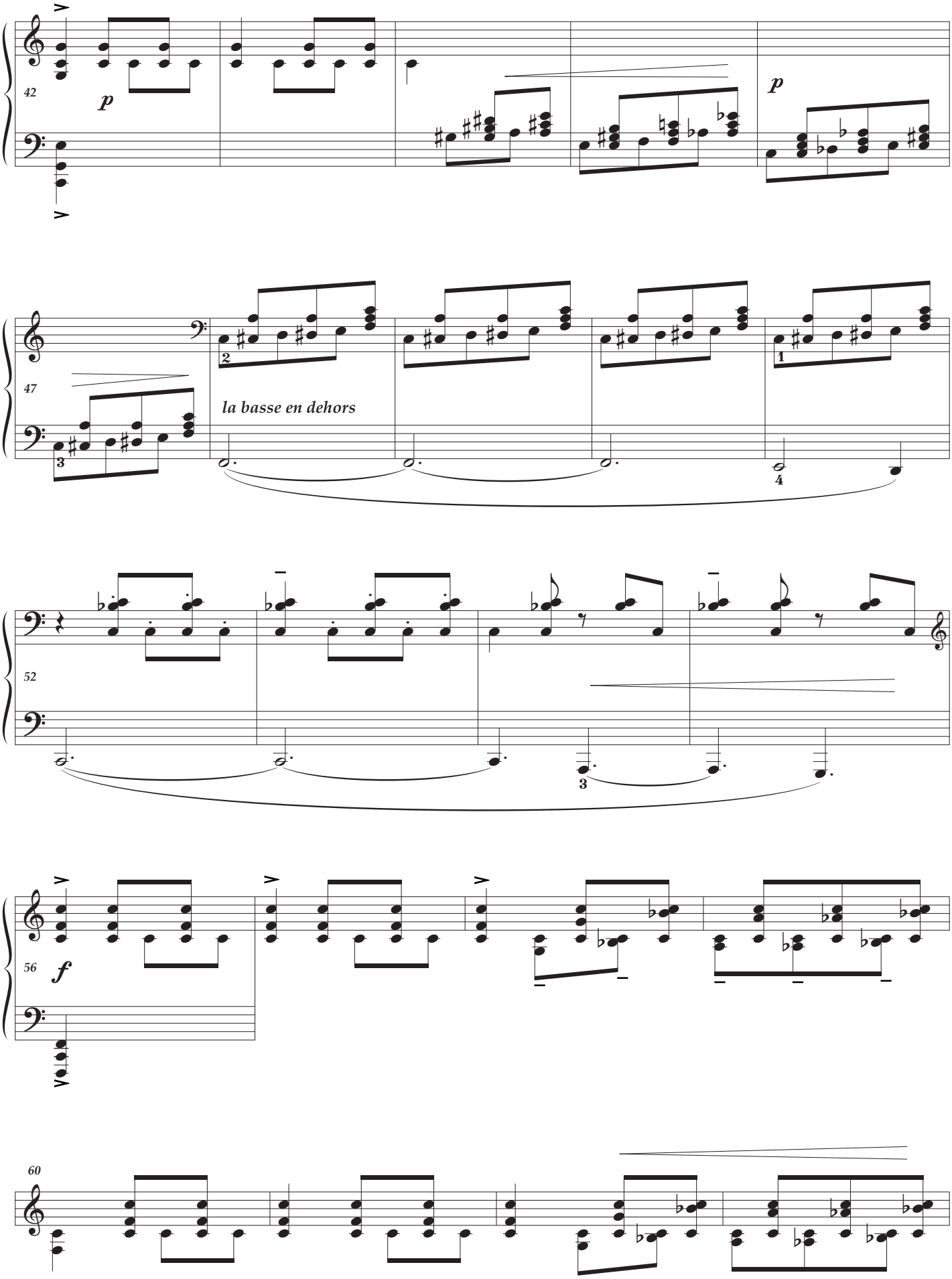
Here is an apt quotation by the composer : "Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians' perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer's (and editor's), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'. Let us seek our own fingering!"

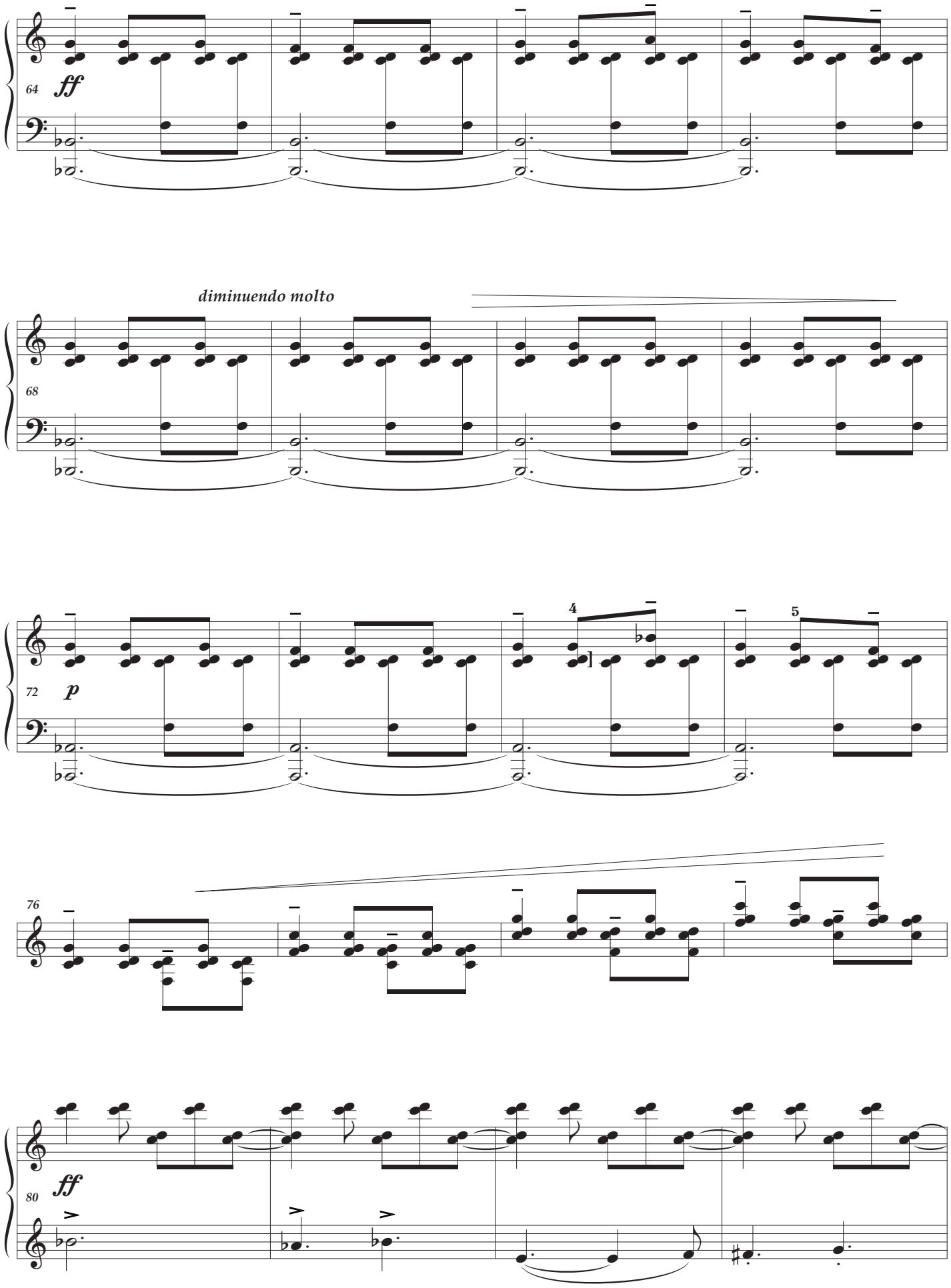
« Il n'y a pas de théorie, le plaisir est la règle. » — There is no such thing as theory, pleasure is the only rule" — Claude Debussy

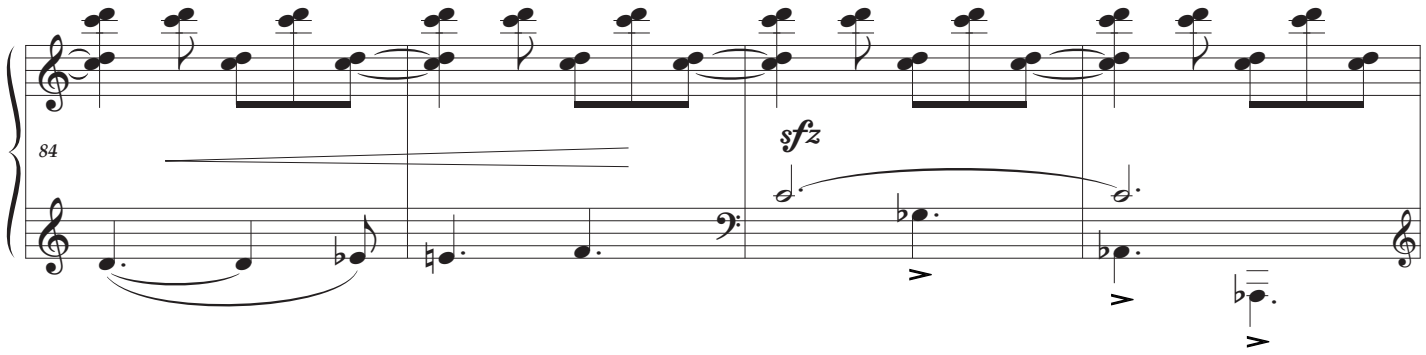
* beguiling masks and bergamasks imitating sorrow beneath their whimsical disguises
* art is the most beautiful falsehood
* But good grief, music is the dream from which the veil is lifted!

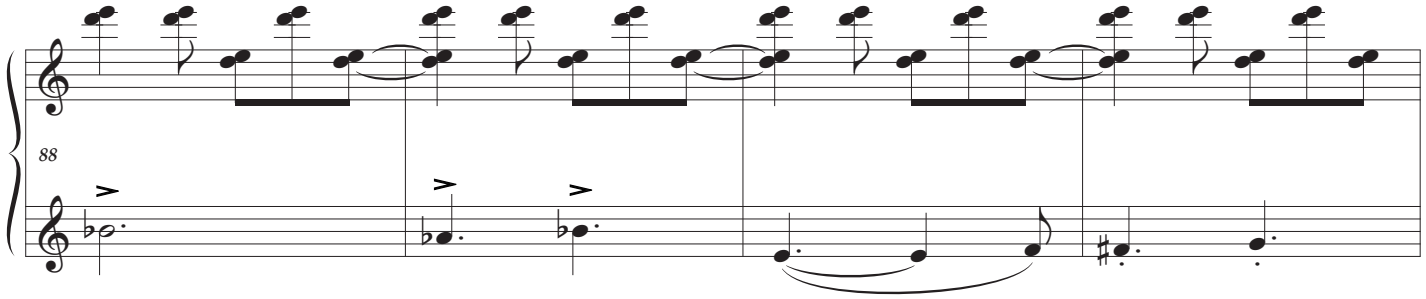

très vif et fantasque
pp détaché et rythmé
5
9
13
pp
17
pp


22
p expressif
26
p
30
34
poco crescendo
38
p


42
p
p
47
la basse en dehors
52
56
f
60


64
ff
diminuendo molto
68
72
p
4
5
76
80
ff


84
sfz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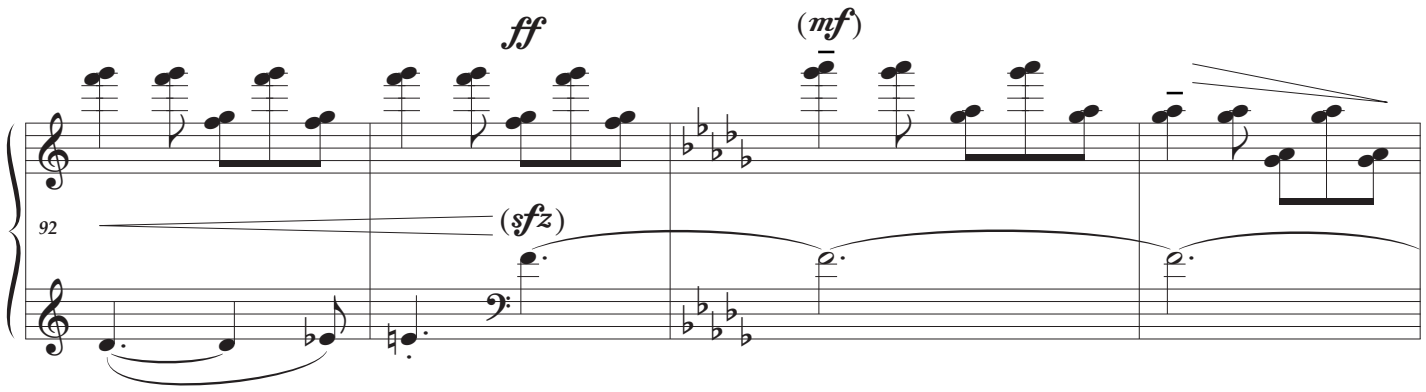
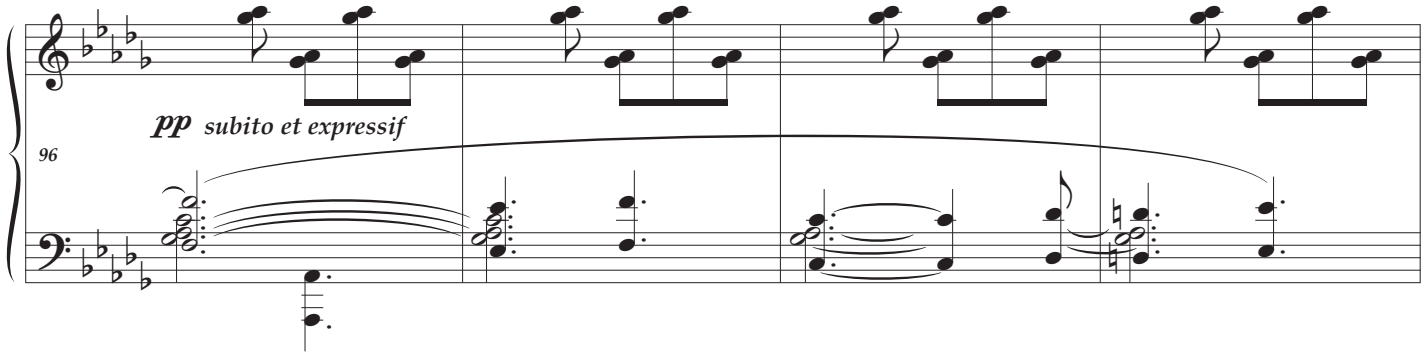
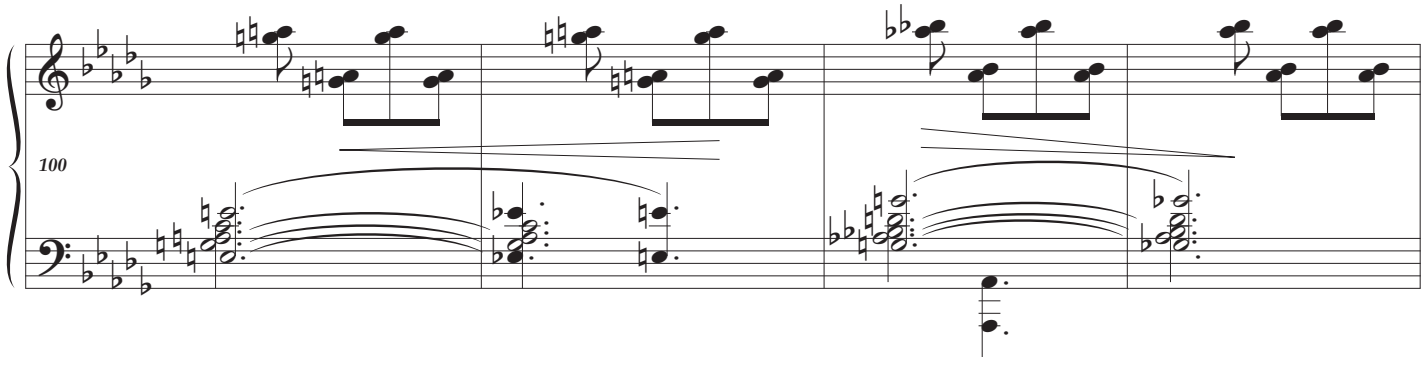

92
ff
(sfz)
(mf)


96
pp subito et expressif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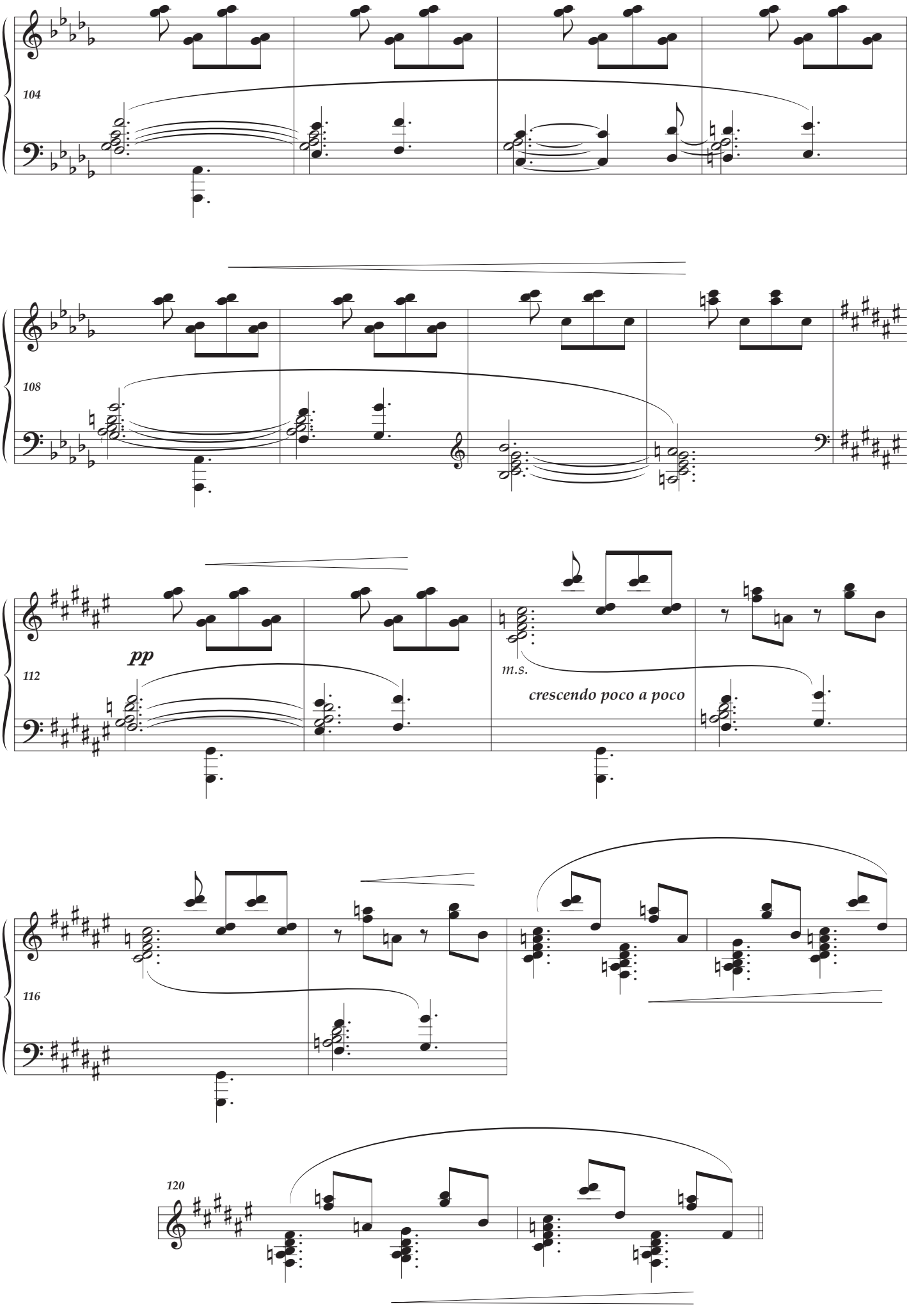
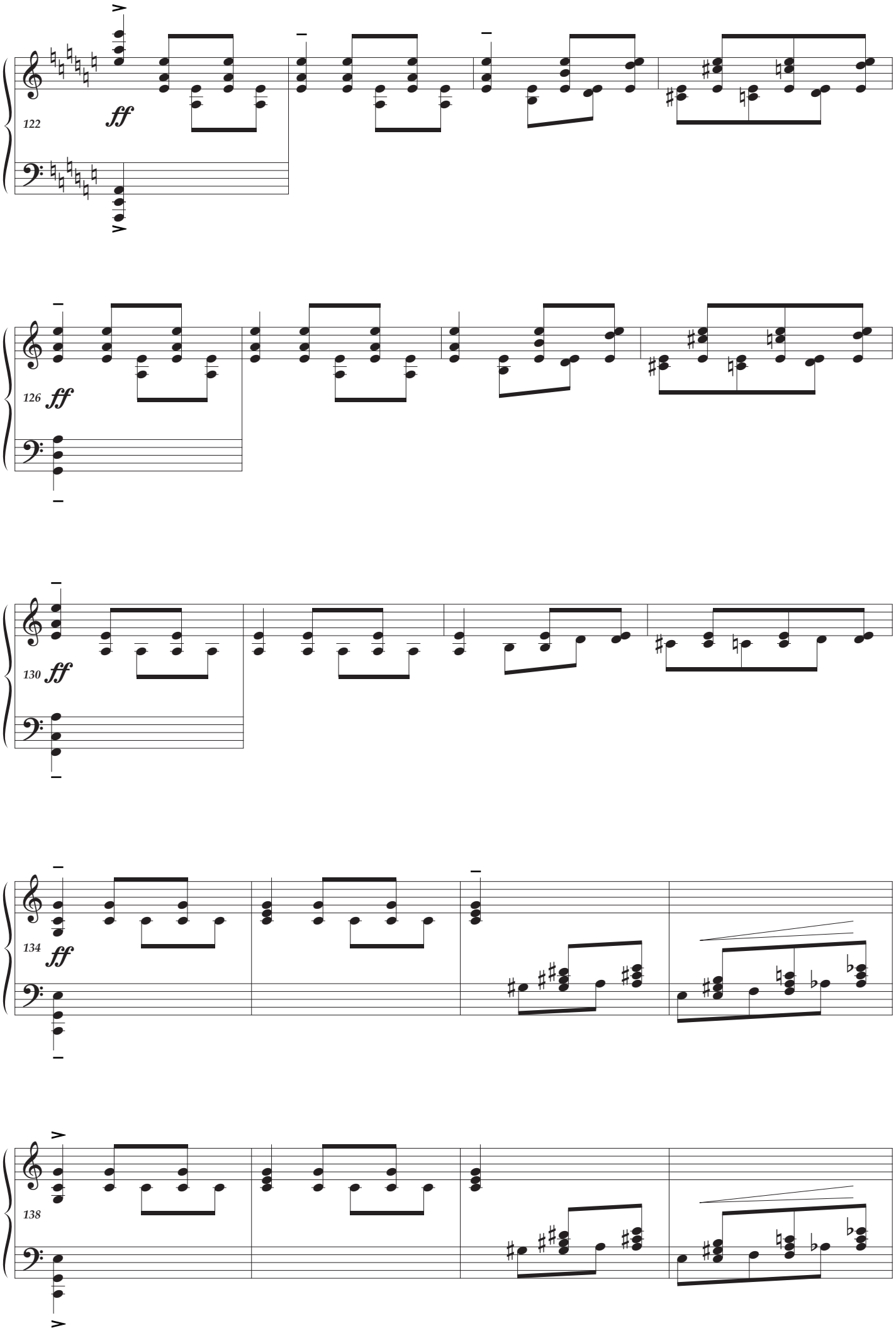
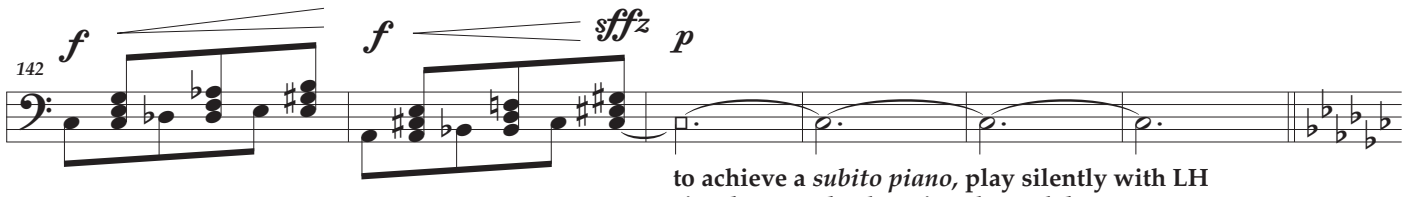
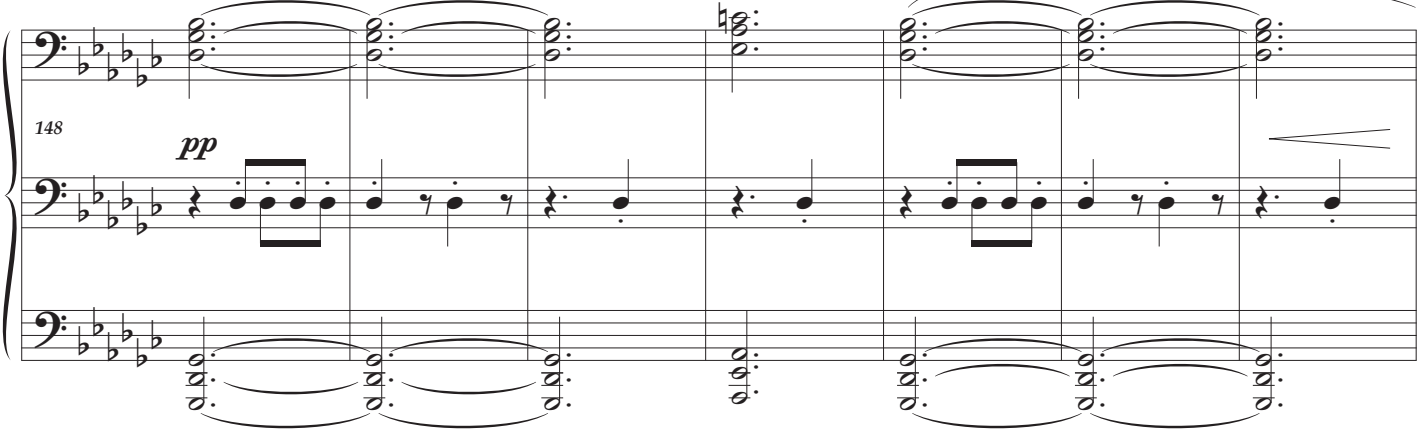

104
108
112
pp
m.s.
crescendo poco a poco
116
120

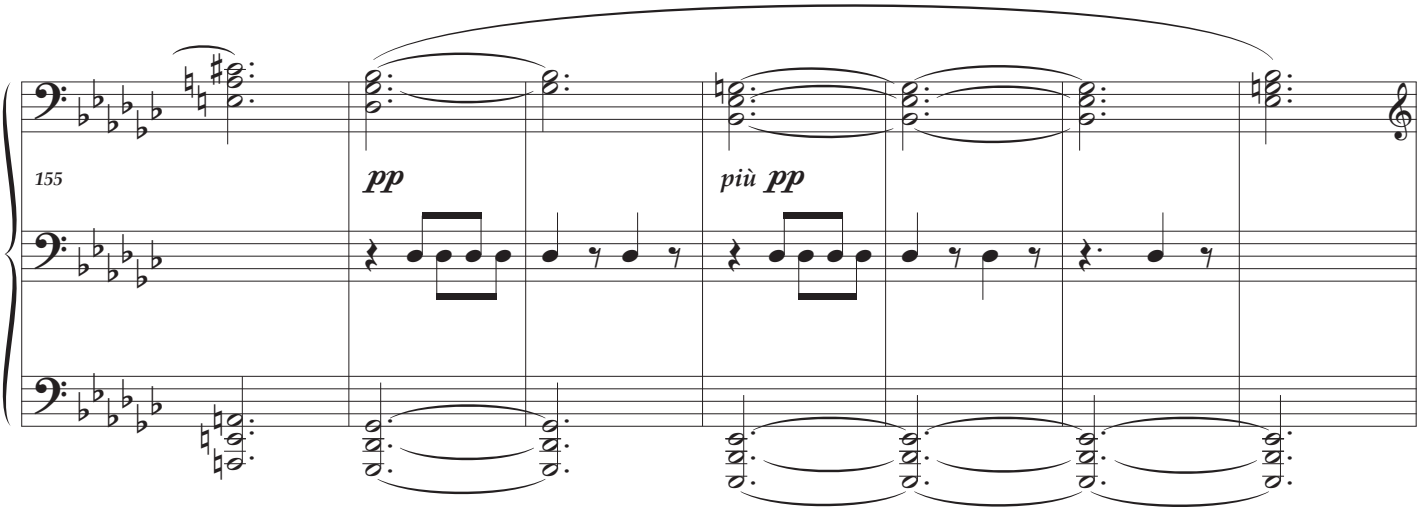

122
ff
126
ff
130
ff
134
ff
138

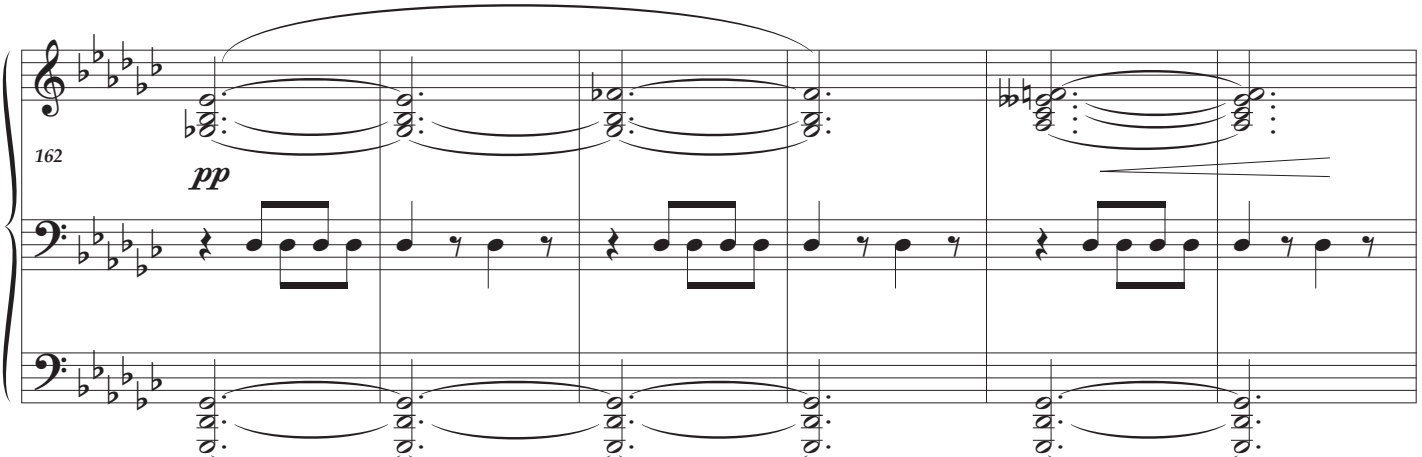


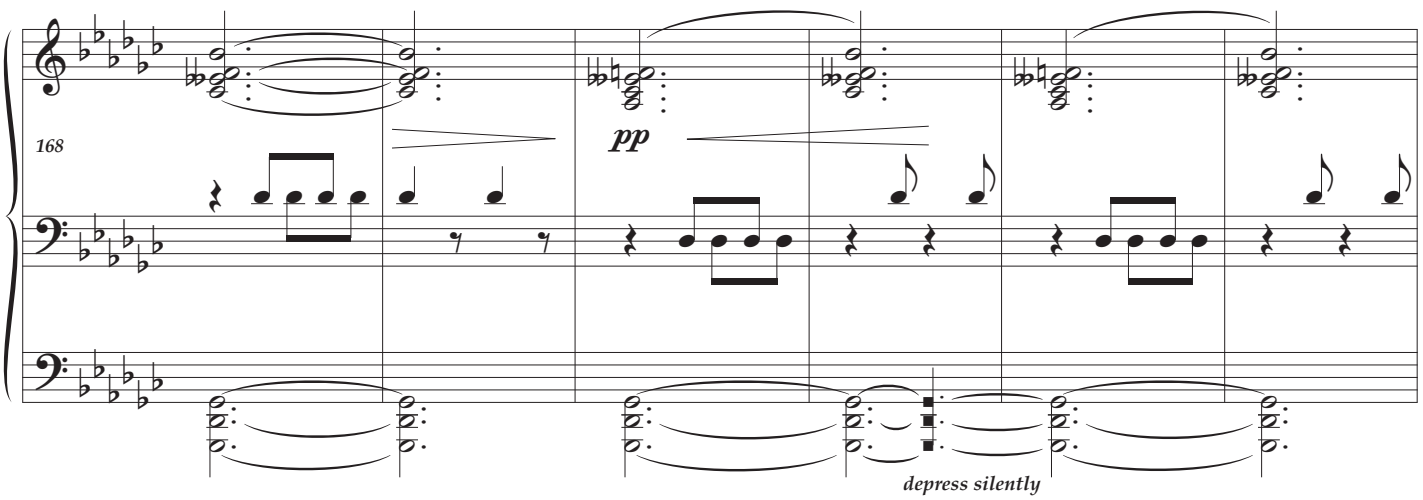
to achieve a *subito piano,* play silently with LH simultaneously changing the pedal

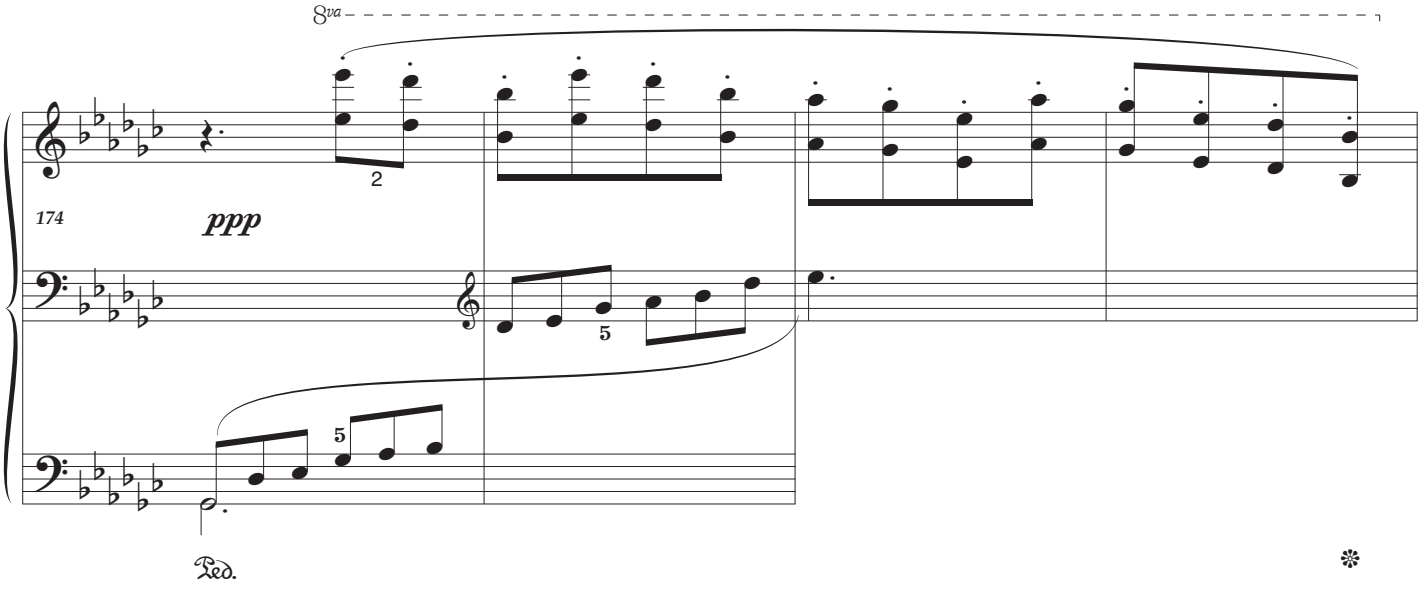
cédez un peu

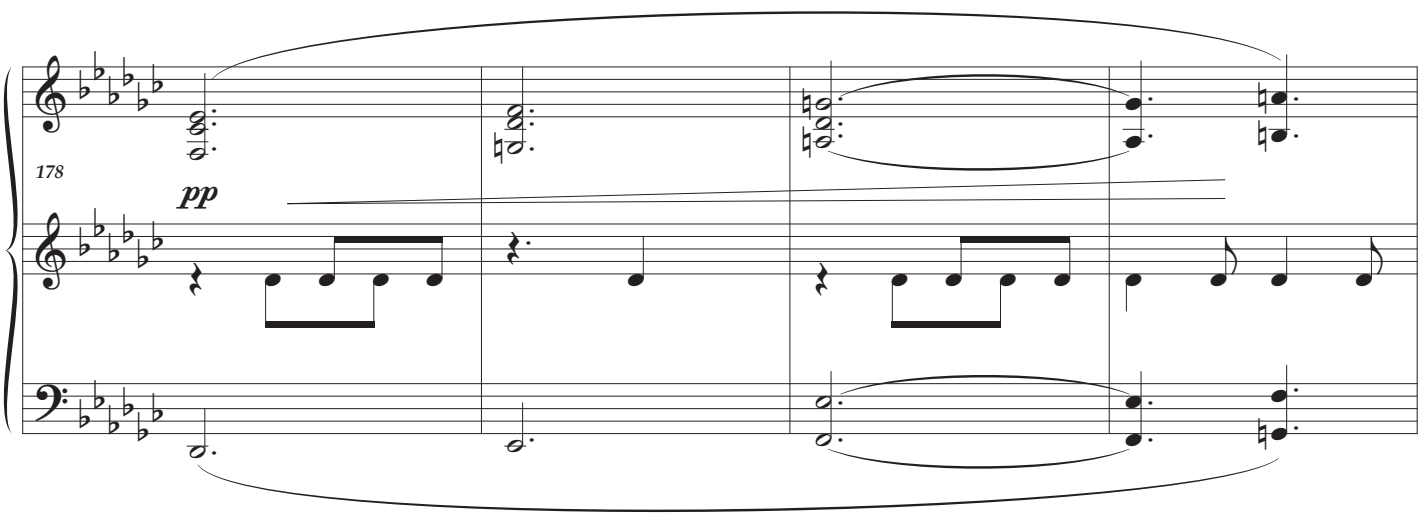


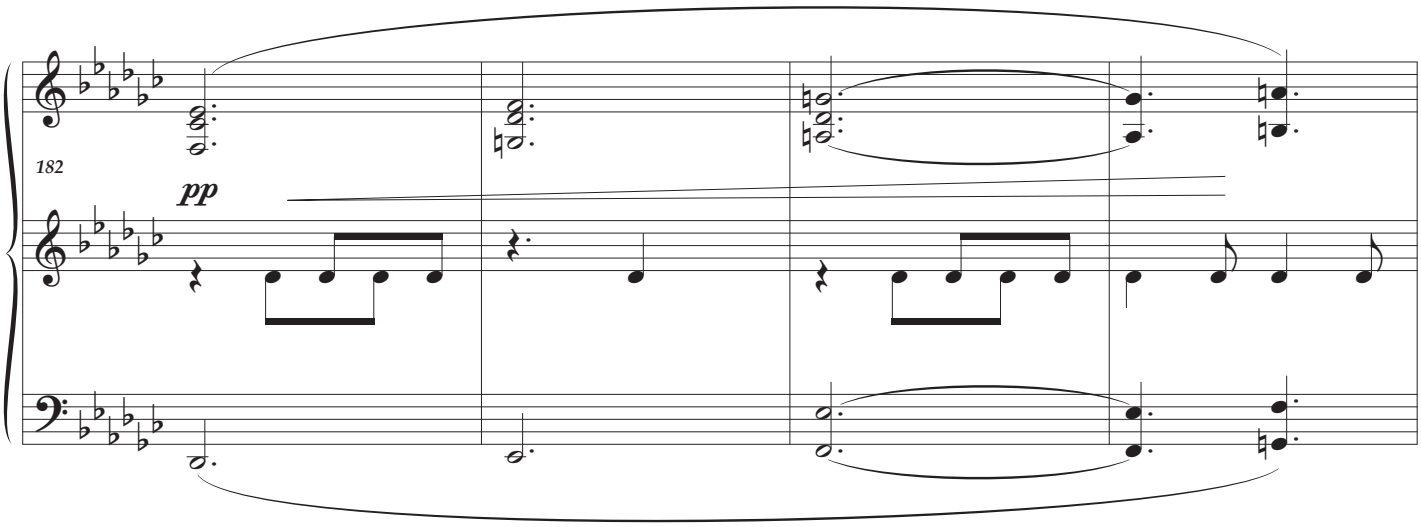


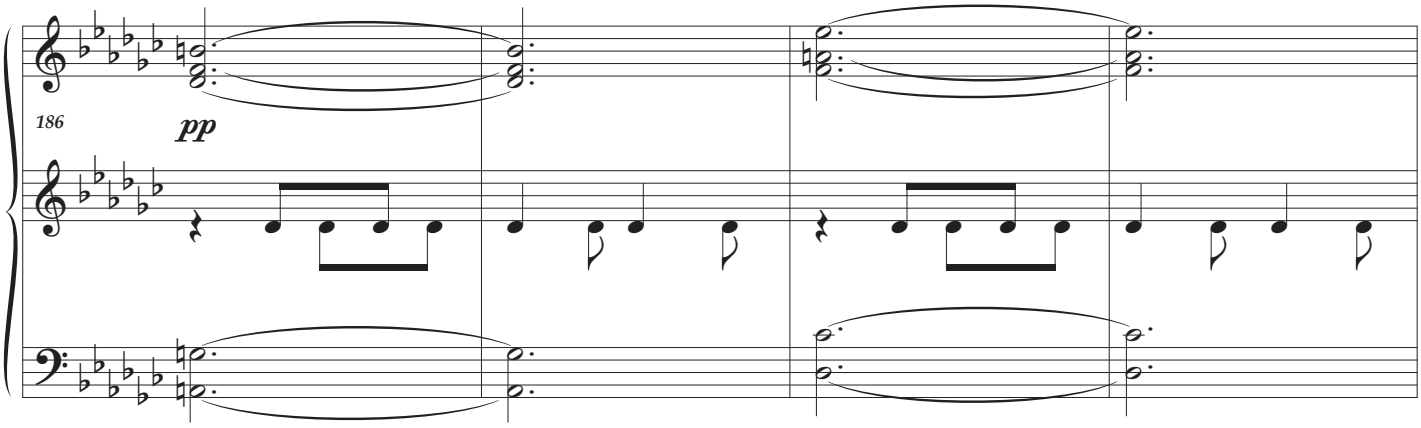


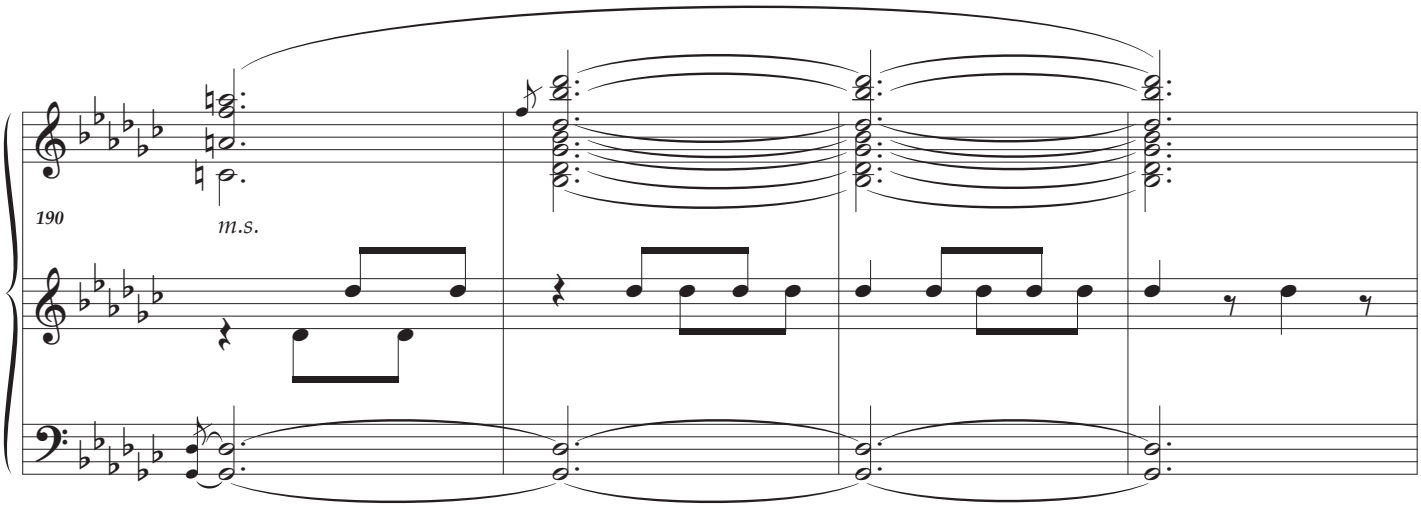

168
pp
depress silently


8va
174
ppp
2
5
5
Ped.

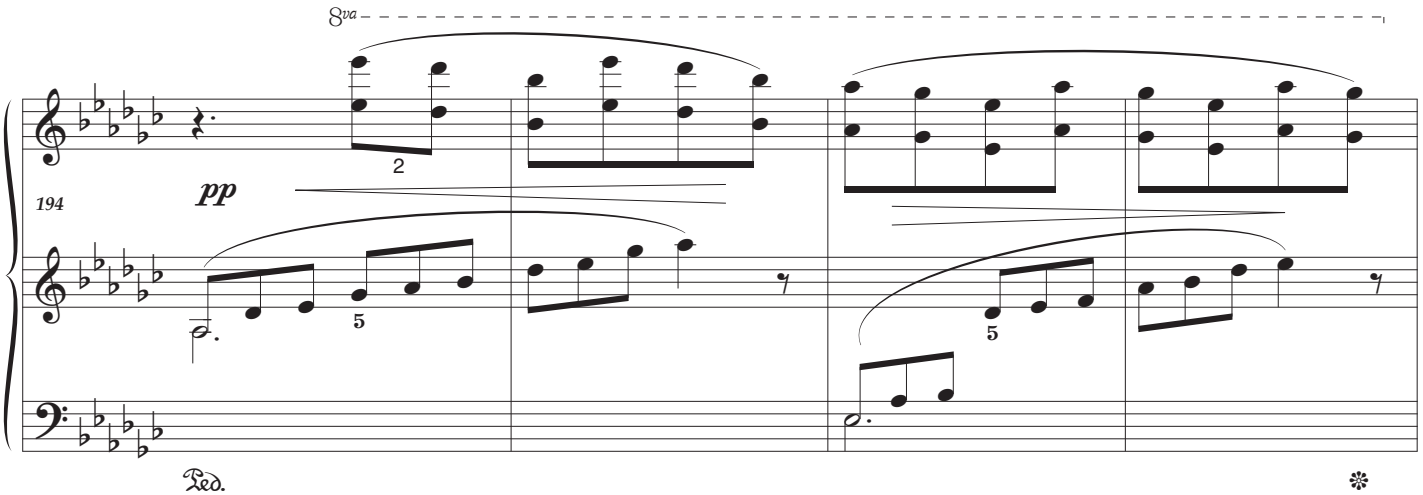

178
pp

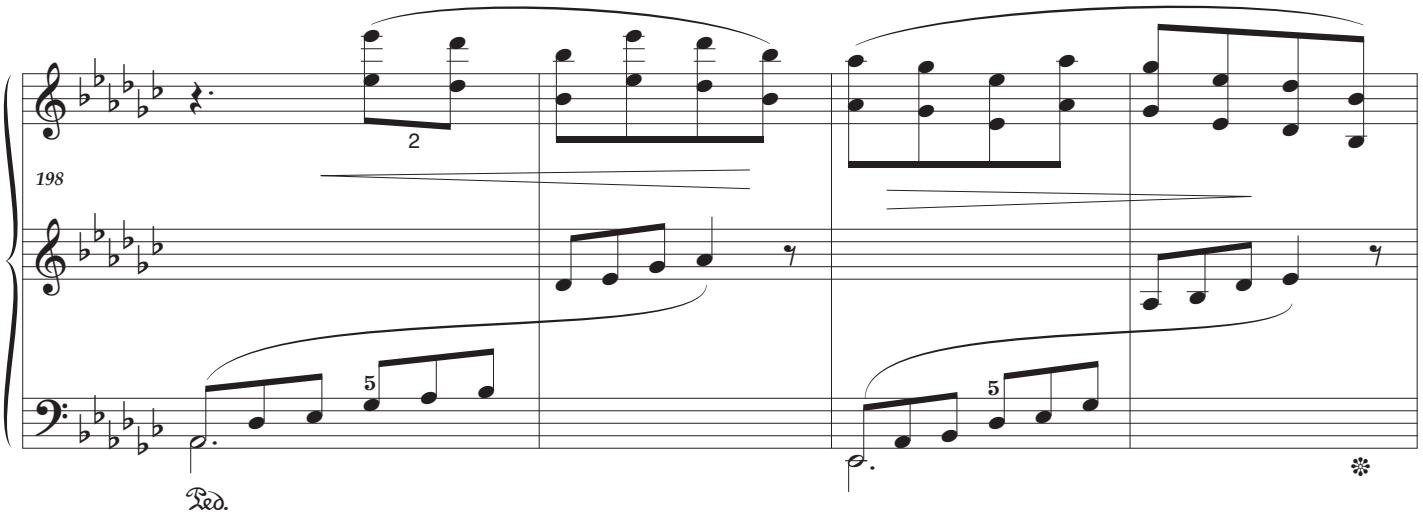


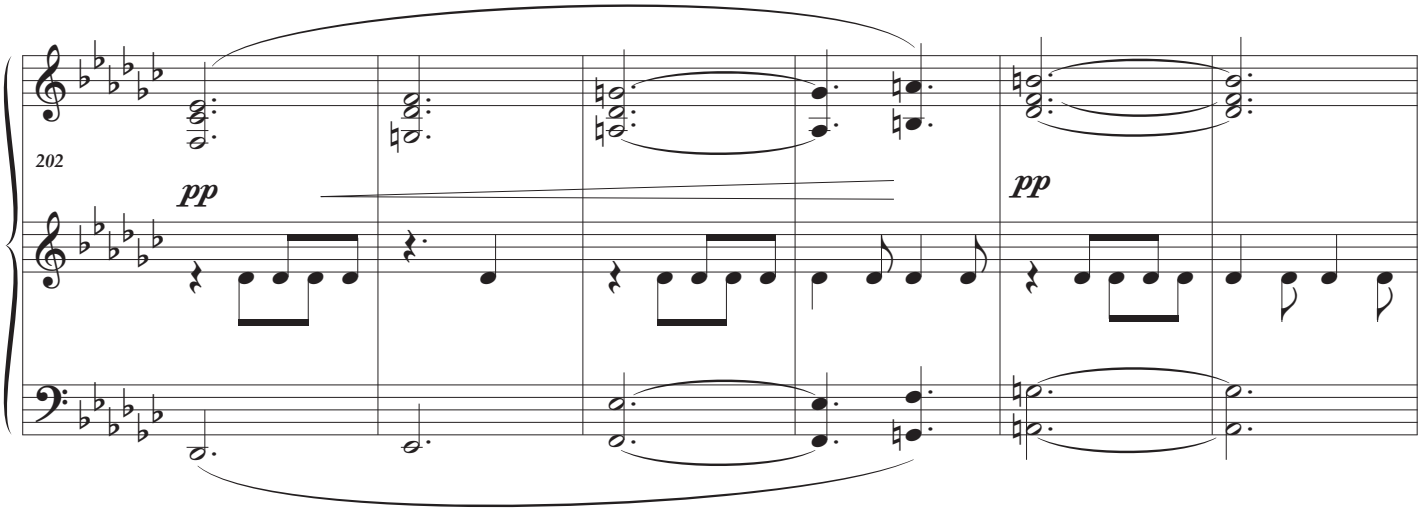


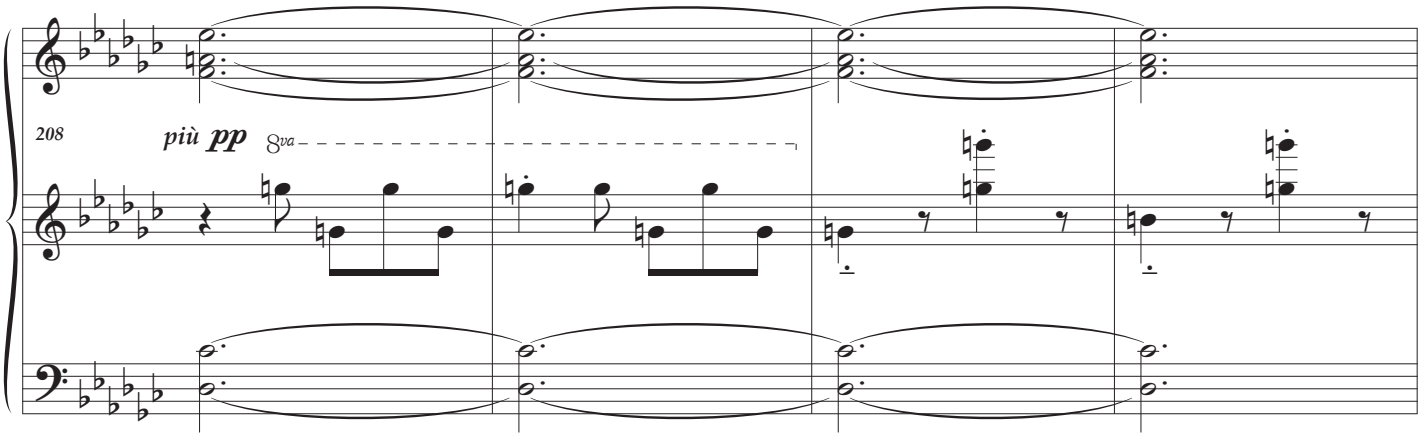


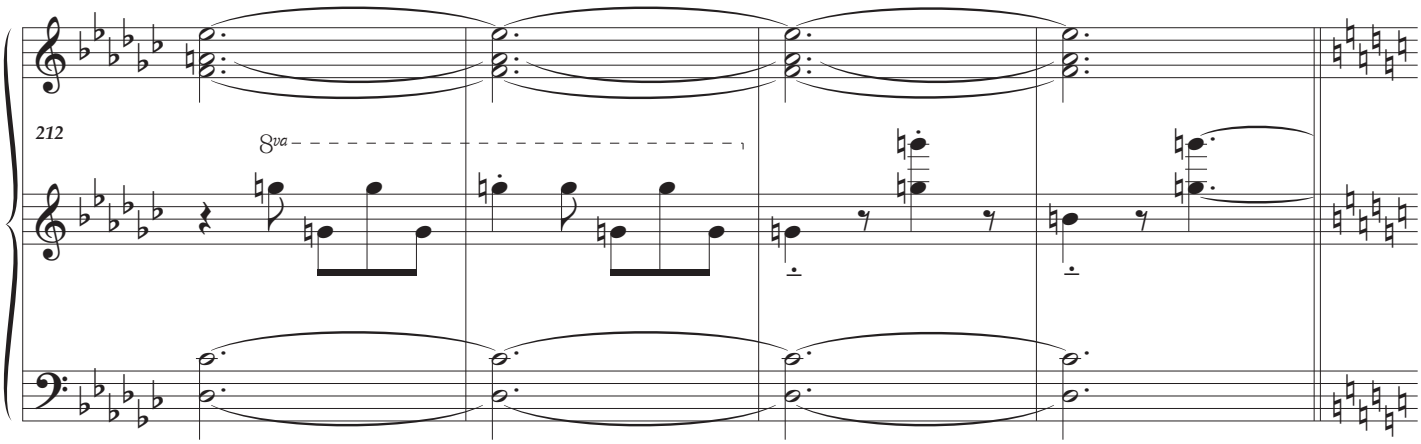
Sost. Ped


8va
194
pp
2
5
5
Ped.

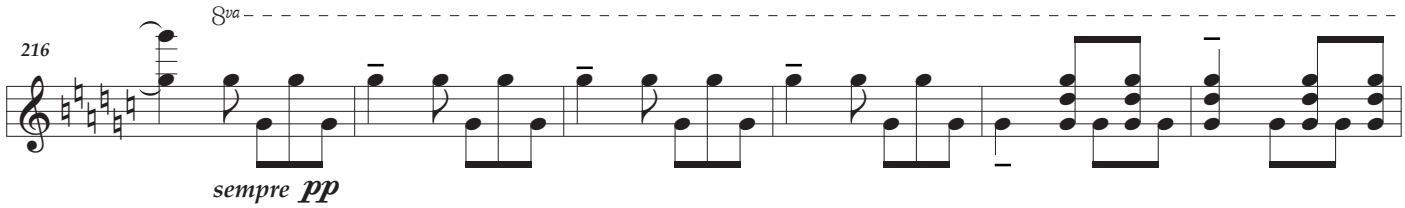

198
2
5
5
Ped.

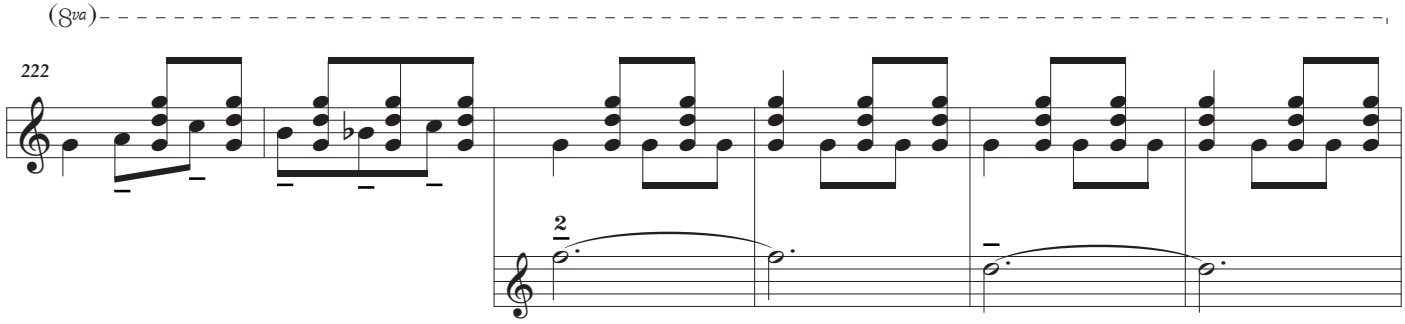

202
pp
pp

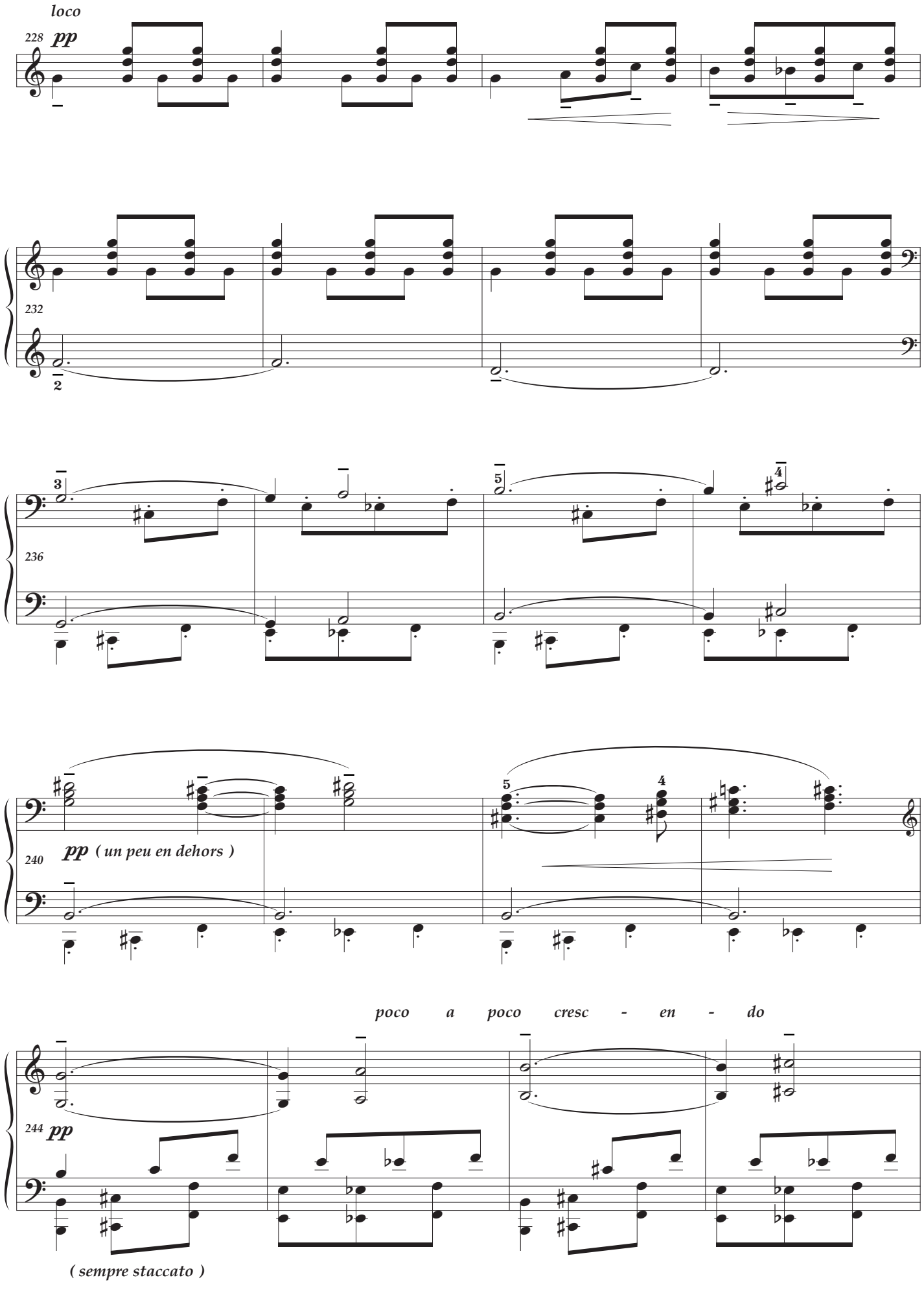


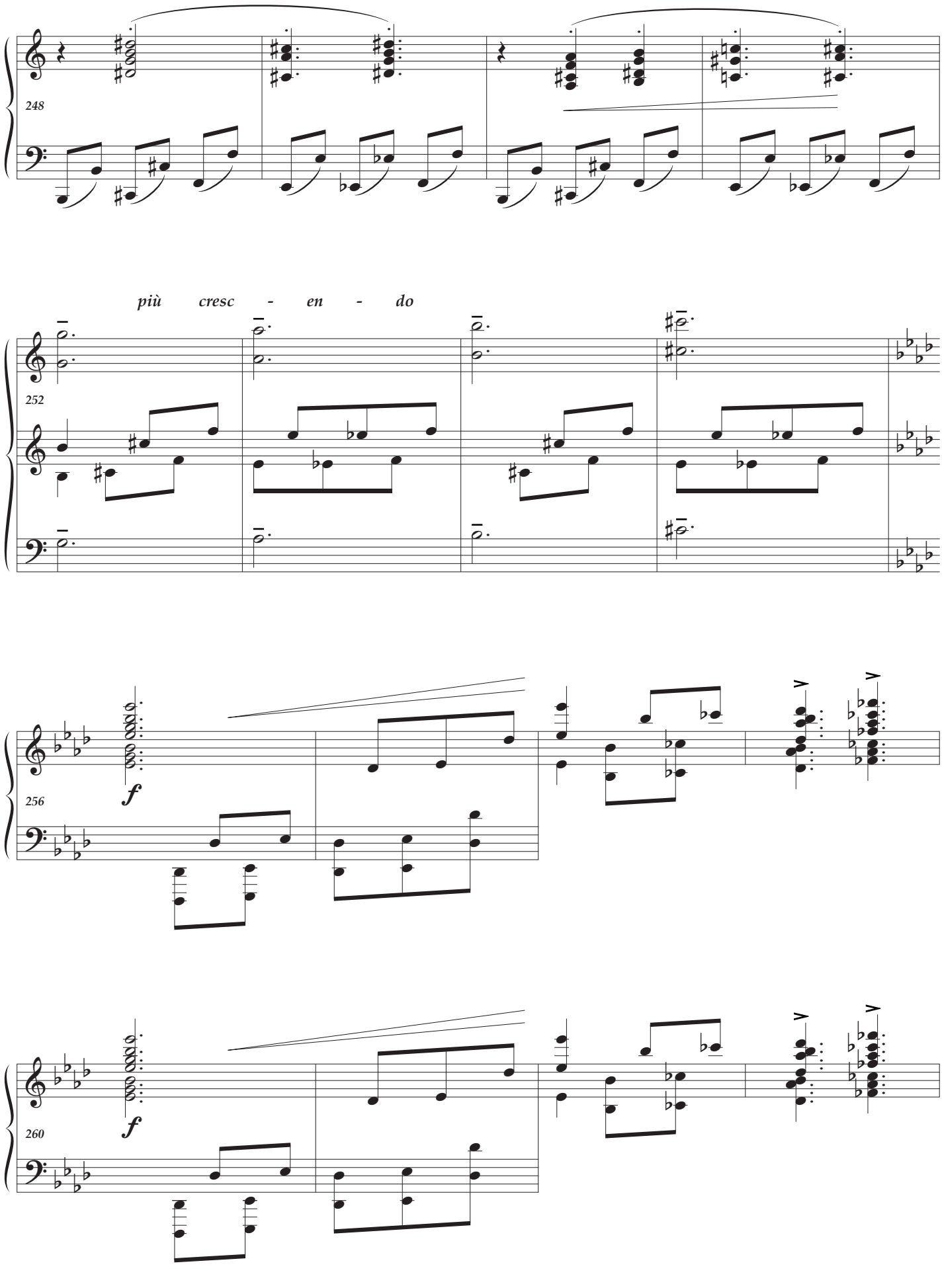


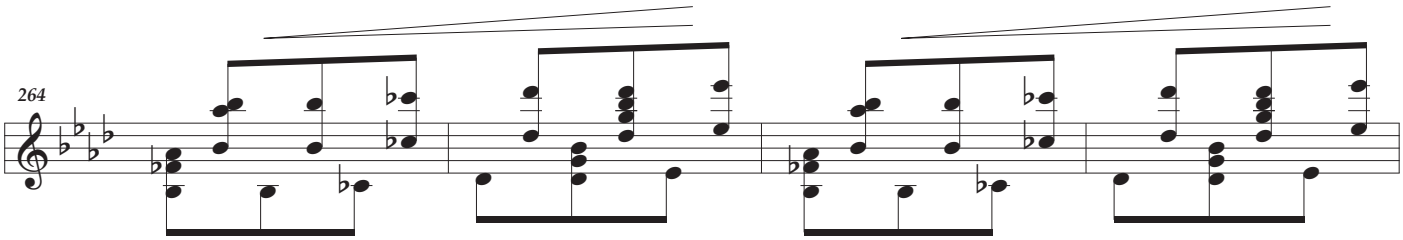
tempo primo






loco
228
pp
232
236
240
pp (un peu en dehors)
poco a poco cresc - en - do
244
pp
(sempre staccato)


248
più cresc - en - do
252
f
256
f
260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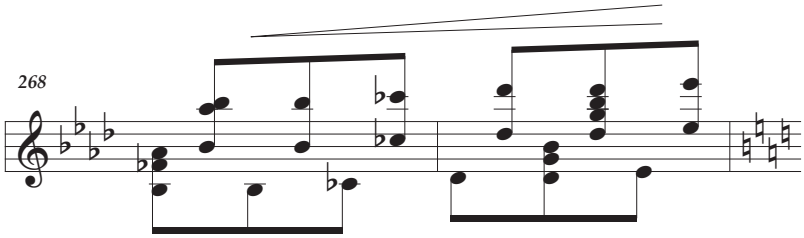
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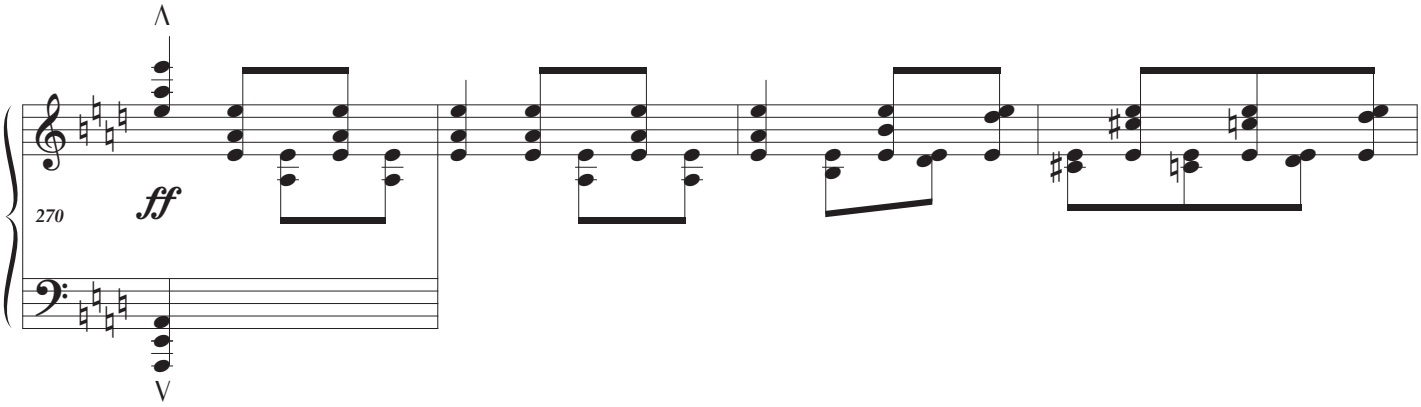
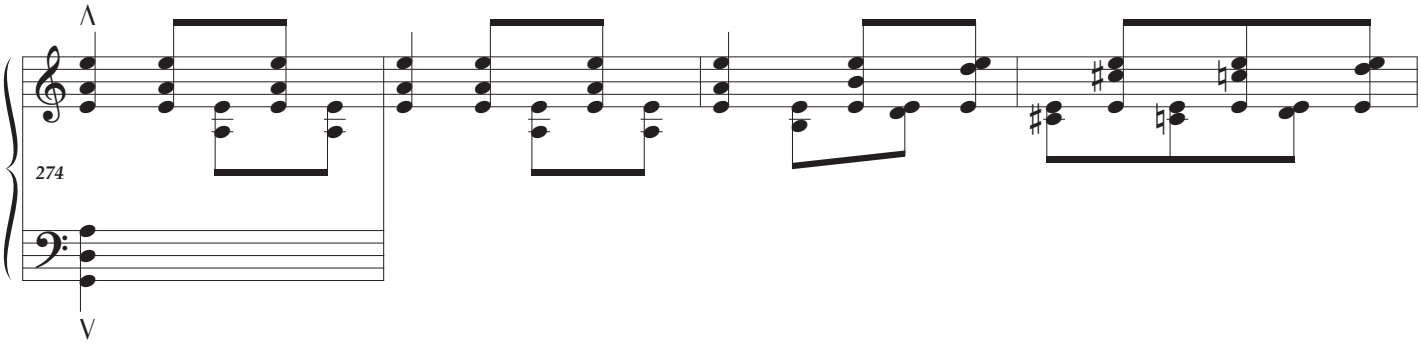

270
ff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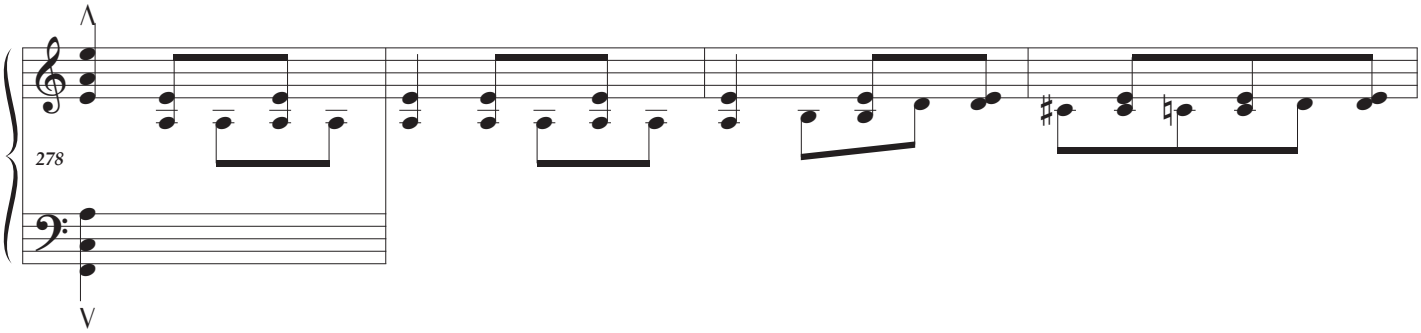
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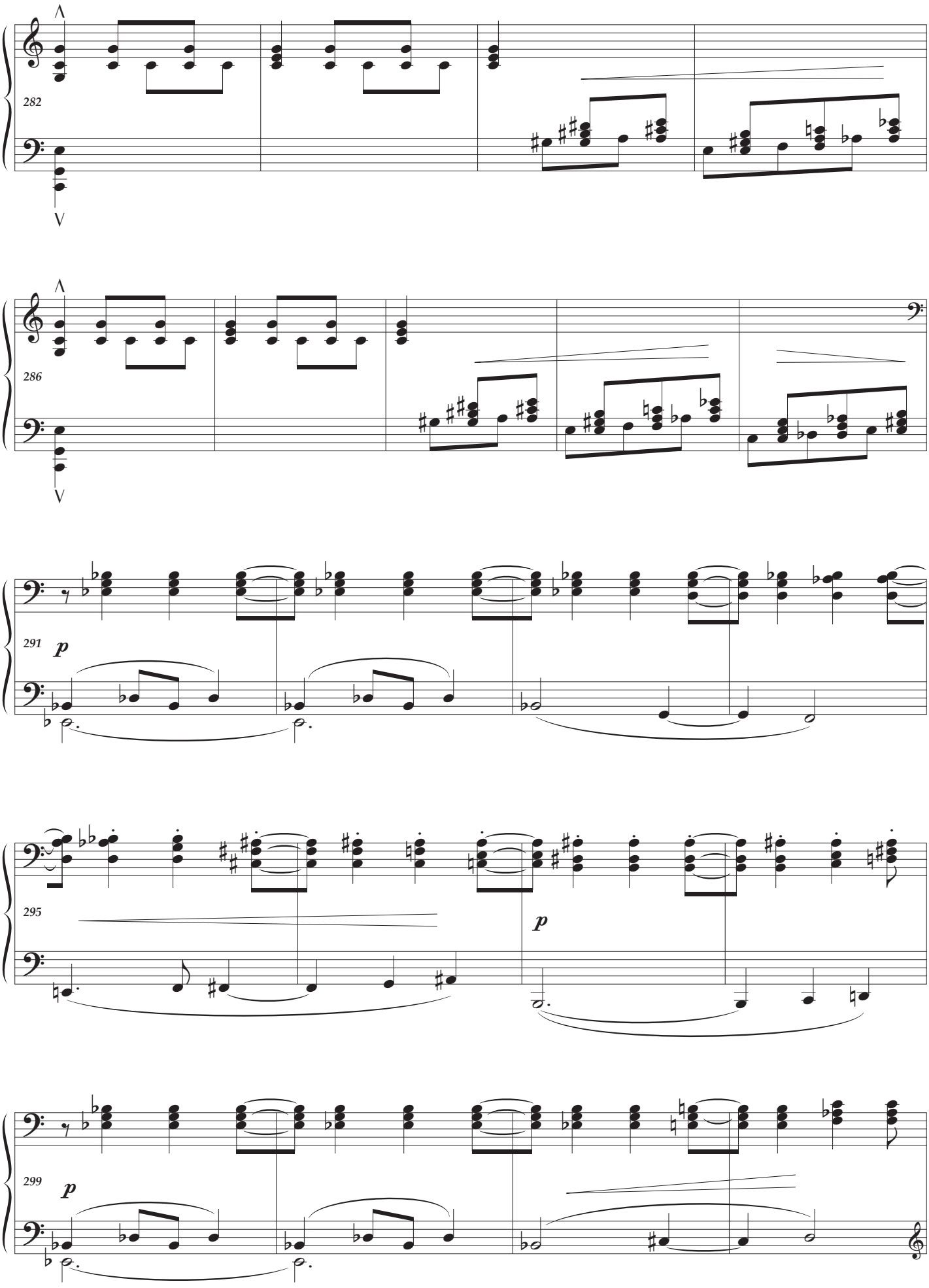
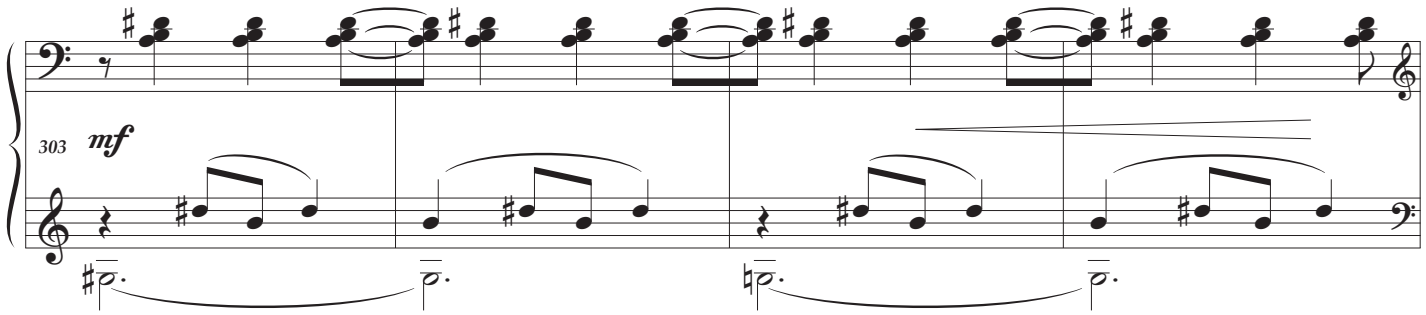
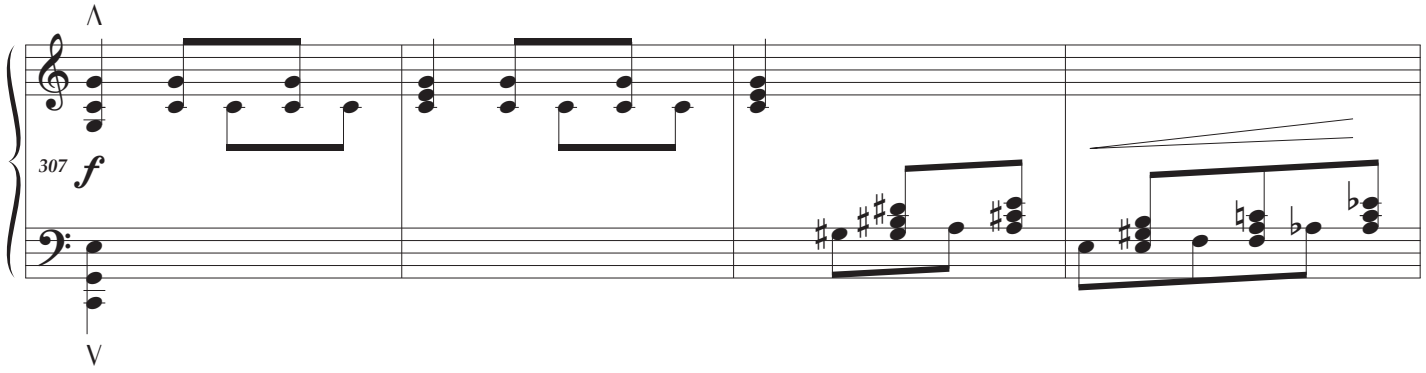
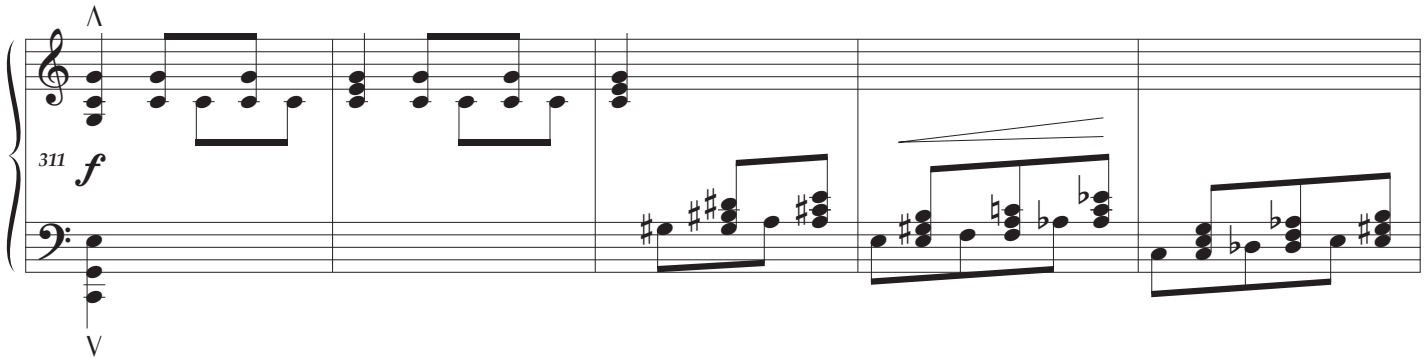

282
286
291
p
295
p
299
p


303
mf


307
f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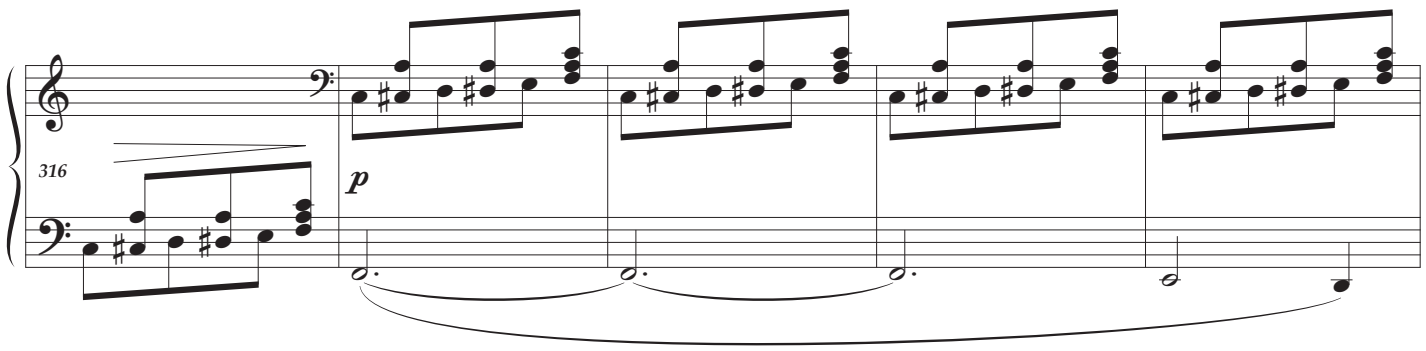
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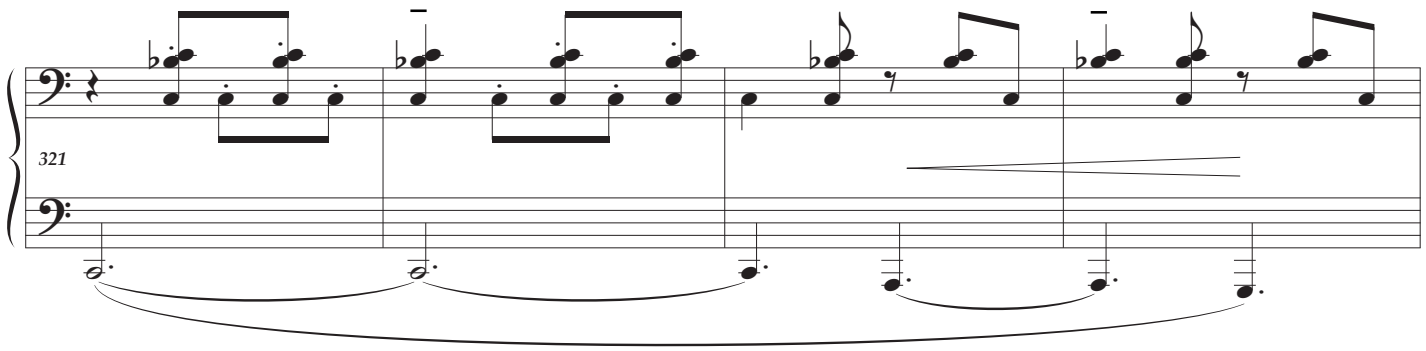
p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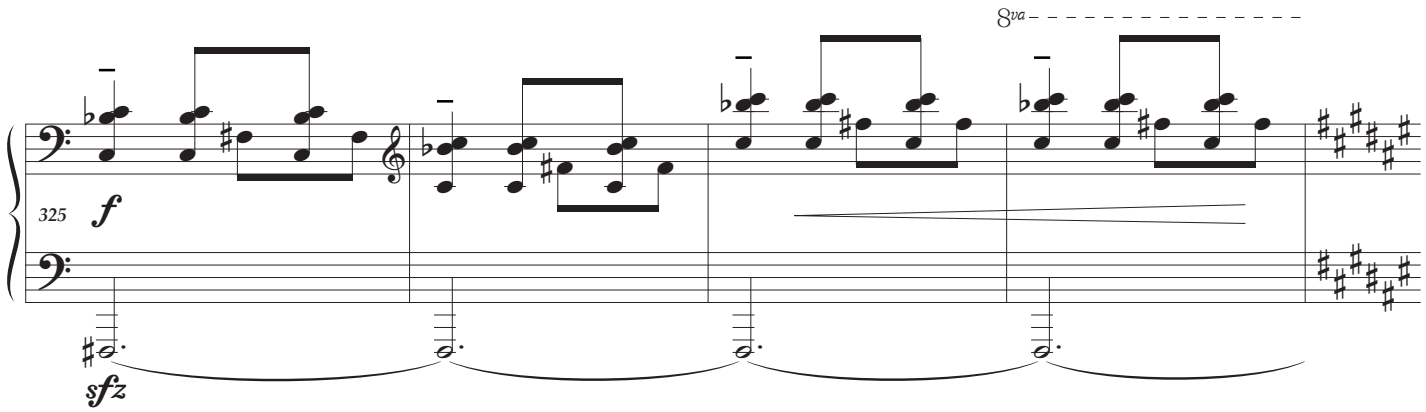
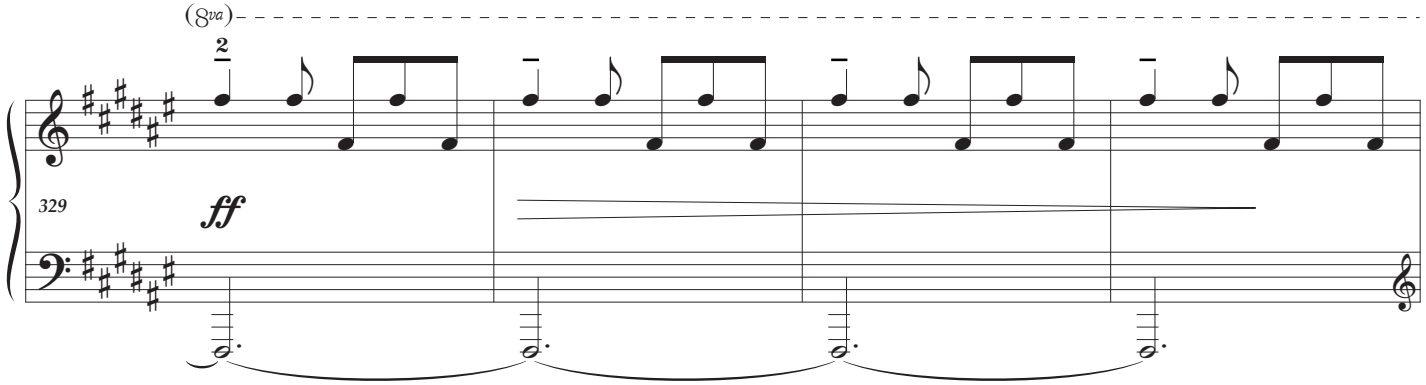
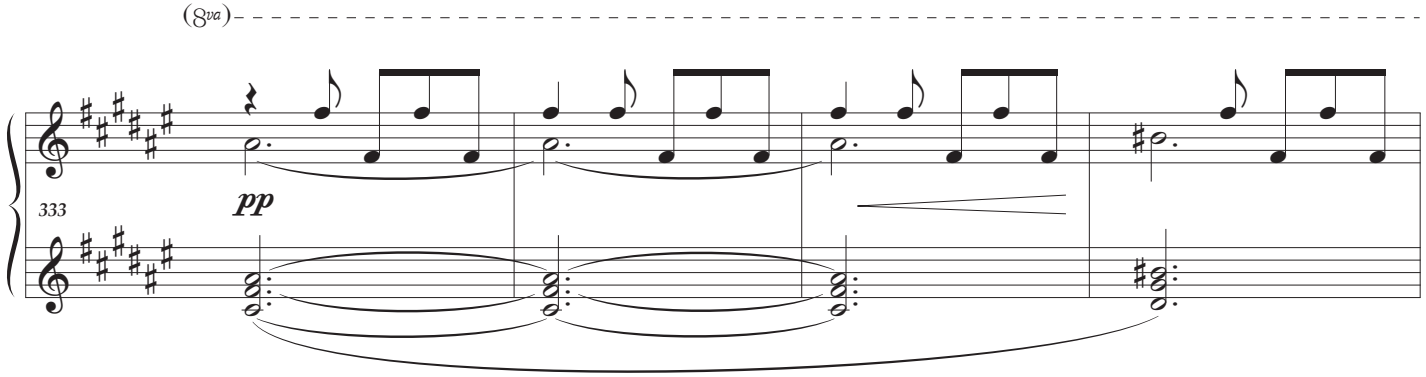
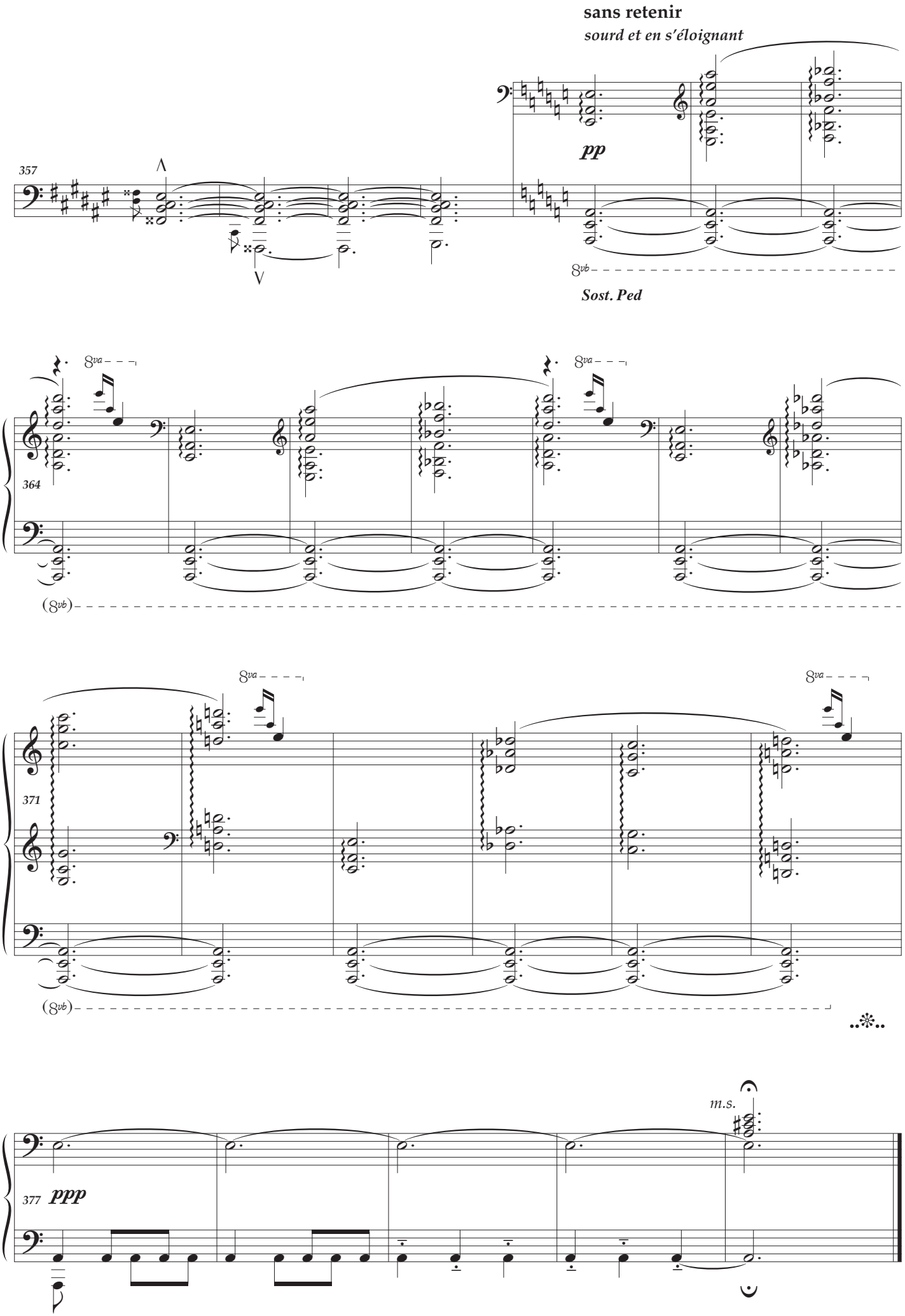

8va
325
f
sfz


(8va)
2
329
ff


(8va)
333
pp


sans retenir
sourd et en s'éloignant
357
pp
8vb
Sost. Ped
364
8va
(8vb)
371
8va
(8vb)
377
ppp
m.s.

Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & French vocabulary

- In the first book of Preludes, the composer indicated some metronome speeds in brackets, and once wrote: *"as a rose which might only last for one morning, a metronome speed might only work for one bar."* This explains why there are so few metronome speeds in Debussy's music
- "*Pedalling cannot be written down*", Debussy explained — *"It varies from one instrument to another, from one room, or one hall, to another"*. Combined with the sustaining pedal, it is possible, even desirable, to use the sostenuto* pedal effectively, although this is entirely editorial.

Masques Duration : **5'15**

- According to Roy Howat, an erroneous metronome speed was indicated in some editions and many pianists play this piece extremely fast. The final page marked *sans retenir* can provide a sensible tempo to establish rhythmic stability.
- **80-91** RH editorial ties
- **99** & **107** LH ties omitted, possibly in error
- **120-121** editorial addition LH & RH chords to match **118-119**
- **171** editorial *subito* 𝆏 — silently replay the LH tied C♯ allowing a pedal change
- **337** RH editorial modification to match **333**

très vif et fantasque	*very lively and capricious*
détaché et rythmé	*detached and rhythmic*
expressif	*expressive*
la basse en dehors	*bring out the bass*
sans rigueur	*with rhythmic freedom*
sans retenir	*without slowing down*
sourd et en s'éloignant	*muted and moving away*

* The sostenuto pedal was first shown in Paris at the Industrial Exposition of 1844. The idea was not immediately taken up by piano builders, but in 1874, is was perfected and patented by Steinway, soon to be fitted on all their grands and better uprights. One obvious commercial reason for not including the sostenuto pedal in musical scores must have been the thought of excluding buyers whose pianos didn't provide it. Debussy and Ravel certainly played a Steinway sostenuto grand *chez* Madame de Saint Marceaux and another bought by Winnaretta de Polignac in 1906. One could say that it took over 100 years for it to become commonplace.