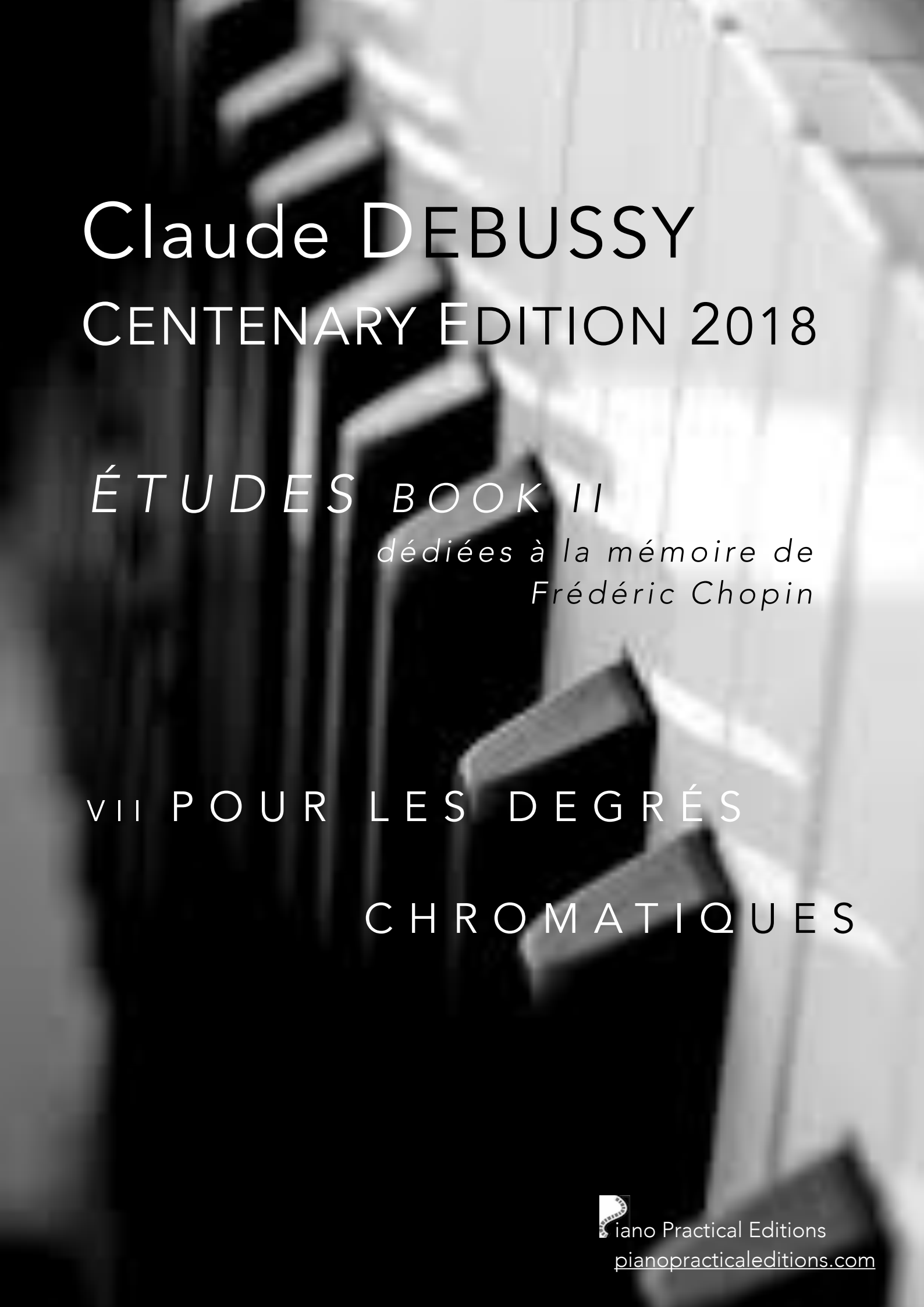

Claude DEBUSSY
CENTENARY EDITION 2018

ÉTUDES BOOK II

dédiées à la mémoire de
Frédéric Chopin

VII POUR LES DEGRÉS CHROMATIQUES

Piano Practical Editions
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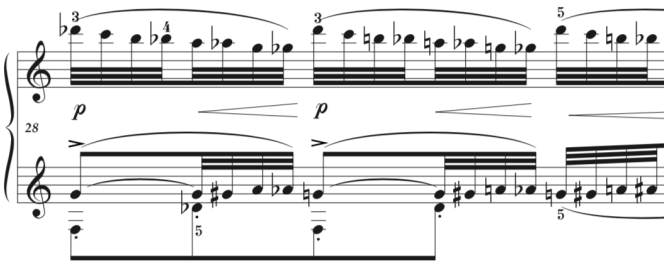
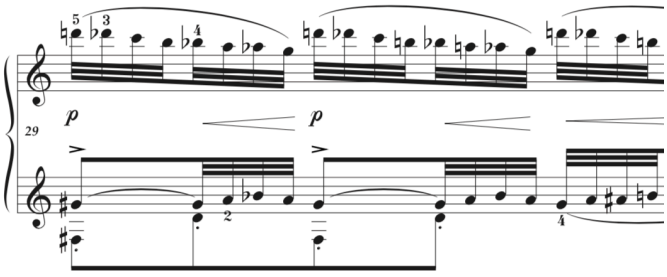
VII *pour les degrés chromatiques*

— for chromatic intervals — is evidently a study in this close-woven scale and displays a virtuosity in both composition and pianism. The LH is responsible for the unique repeated short melody and there is plenty of playful and creepy apian accompaniment.

Three years before his death in 1918, and in spite of failing health and the anguish of World War I, these 12 studies in two books were the last significant piano pieces to be written by Debussy — intense, ingenious and unorthodox. Edward Lockspeiser observed that the Études are *"perhaps the greatest of his piano works...representing a summary of the composer's entire pianistic creation."*





At the same time he was working on a new edition of the Chopin studies, and these are dedicated appropriately to the memory of Chopin, being similar in scope — challenging technical problems skilfully hidden in pieces of harmonic innovation and sensual charm. In a letter to his editor, he added that these works will ultimately prepare pianists and help them realise that the wealth of piano music demands formidable hands.

Debussy revolutionised the meaning of pianistic sound and how we listen to music, defining our perception of his surreal world. He was also a sensitive pianist, enriching the tradition of Chopin and advancing the integral soul of the sustaining pedal; he apparently played with penetrating softness and a flexible, caressing depth of touch, creating extraordinary expressive power.

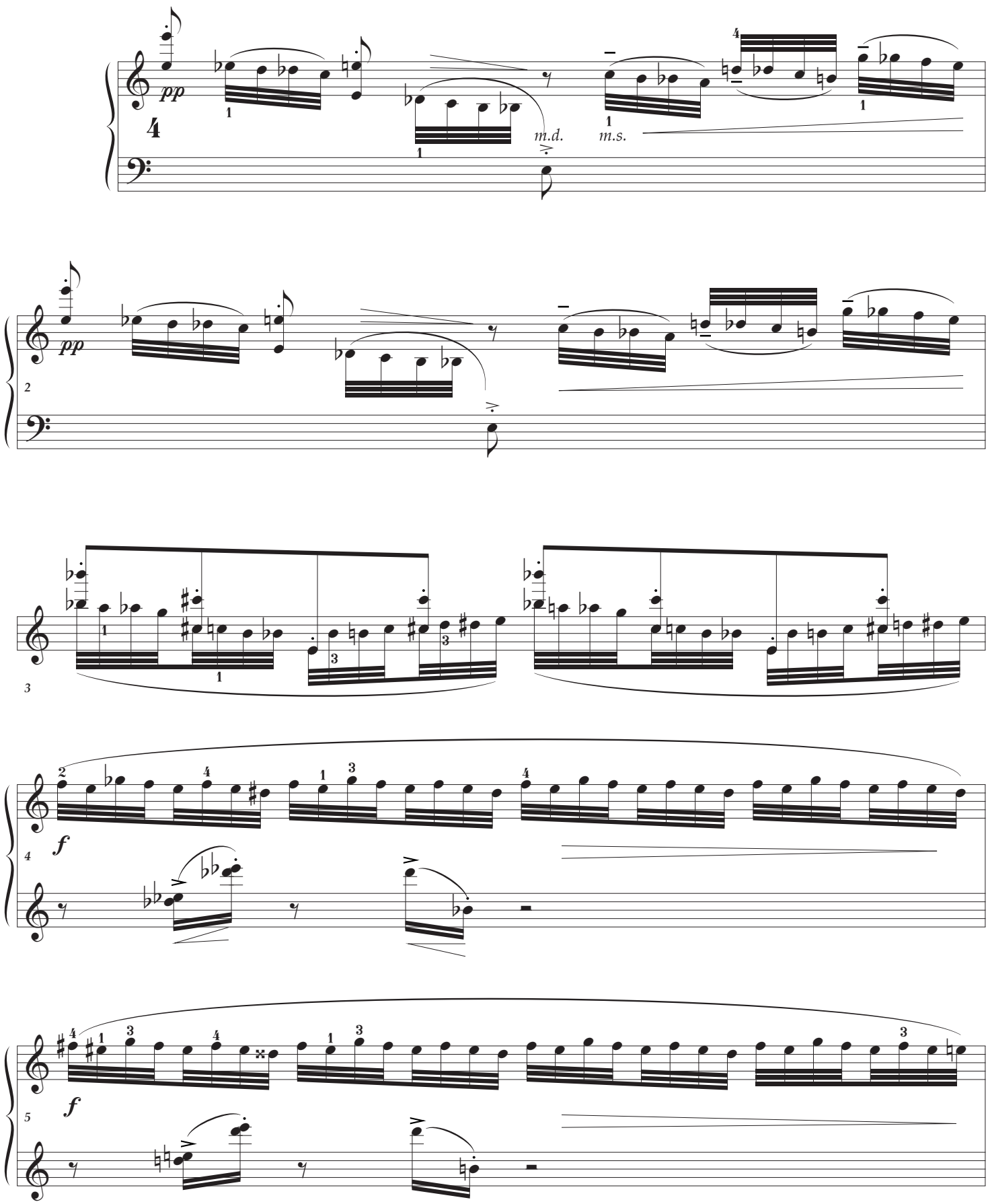
Here is a witty extract from Debussy's own introduction to his fingering-free etudes:

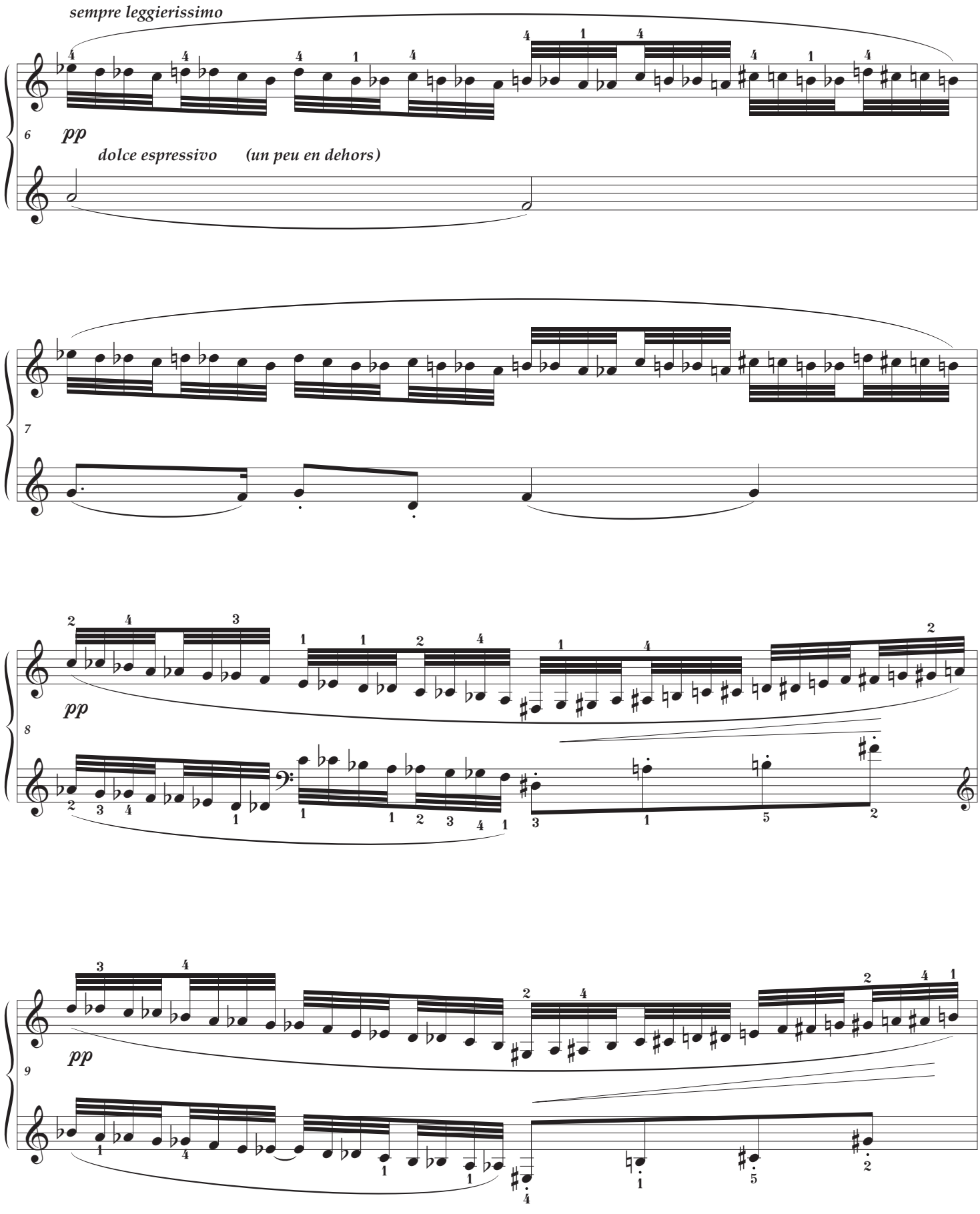
"Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians' perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer's (and editor's), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'. Let us devise our own fingering!"

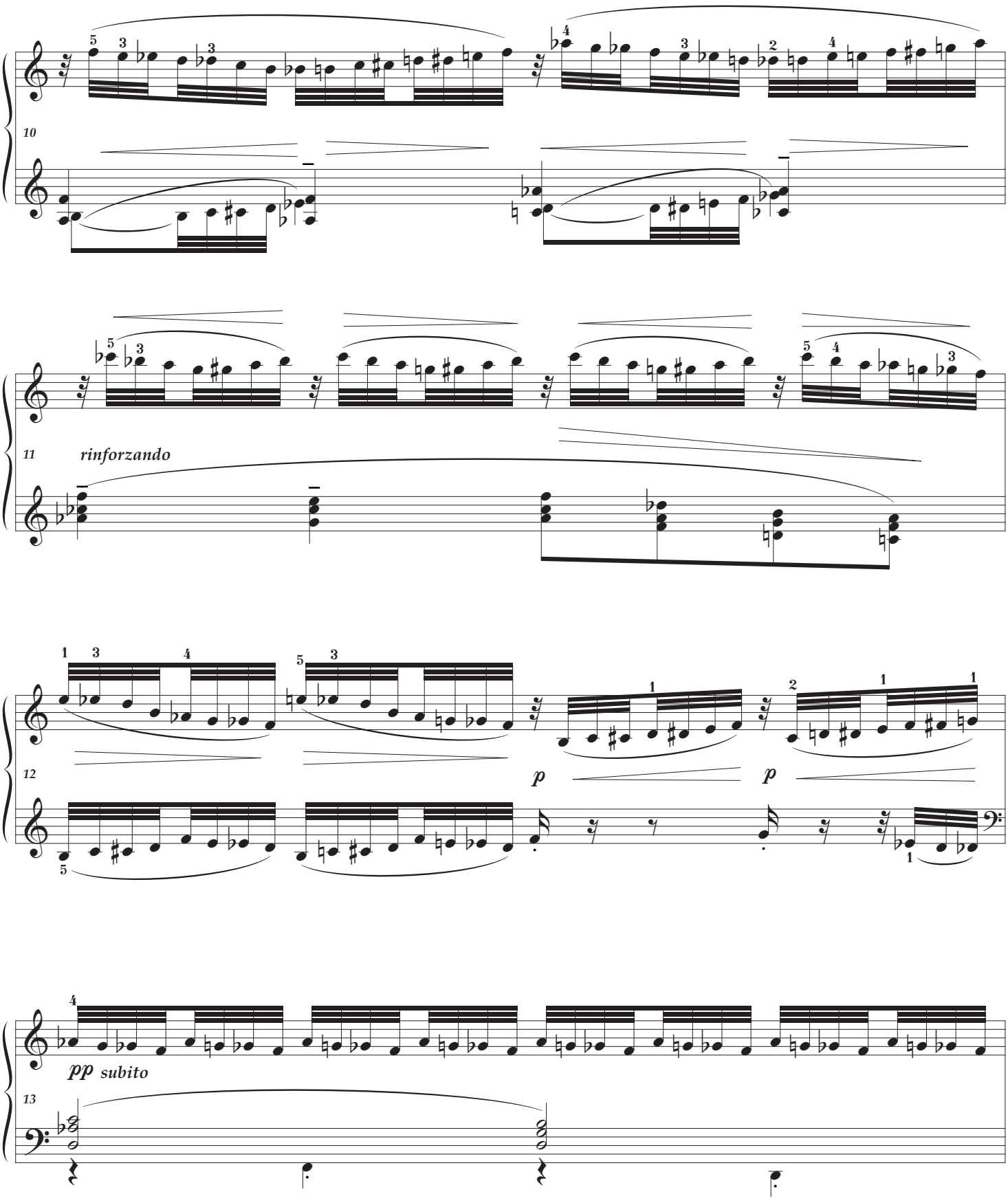
In this edition just three studies have been initially selected as being possibly the most approachable.

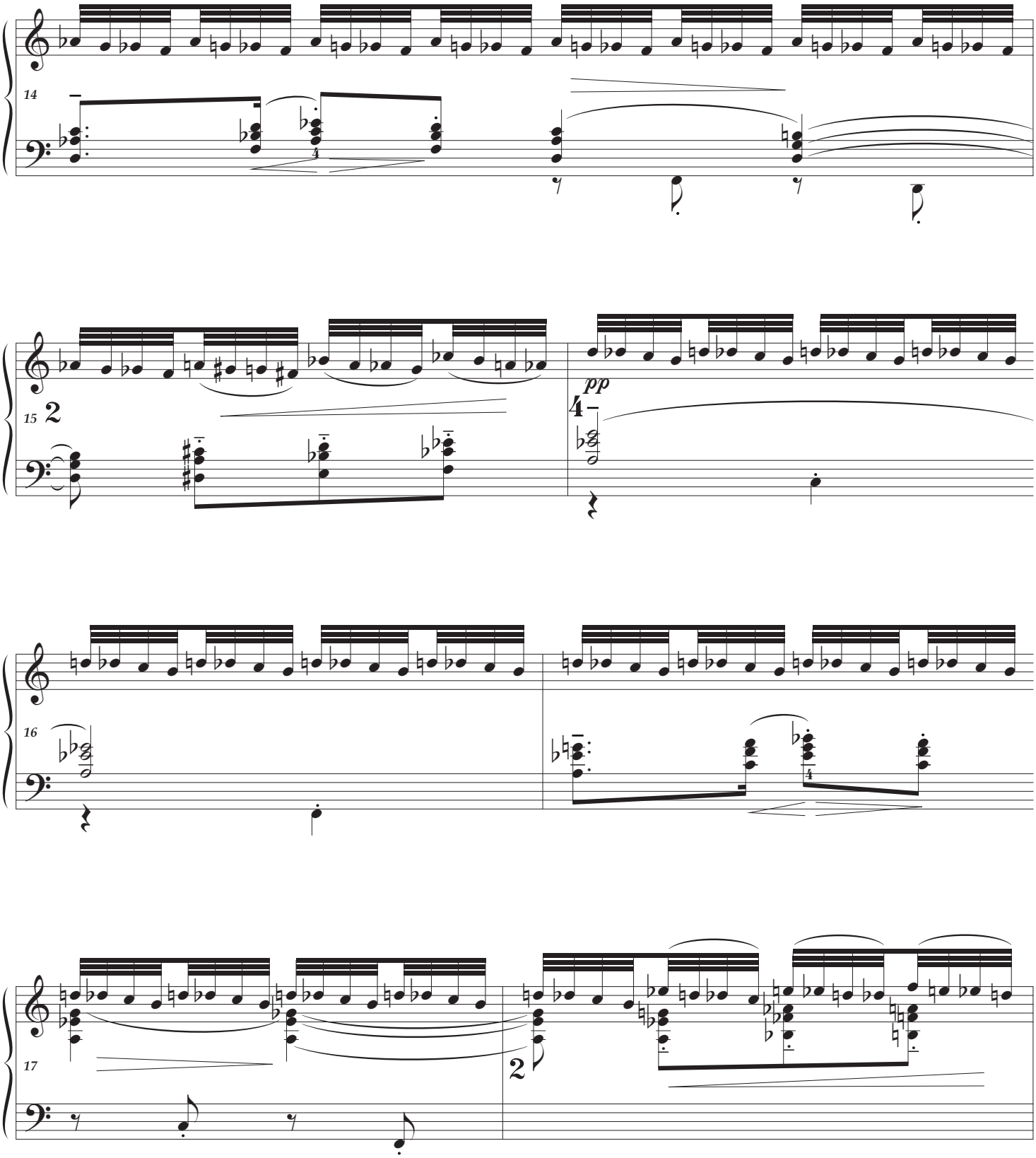
Pour les degrés chromatiques

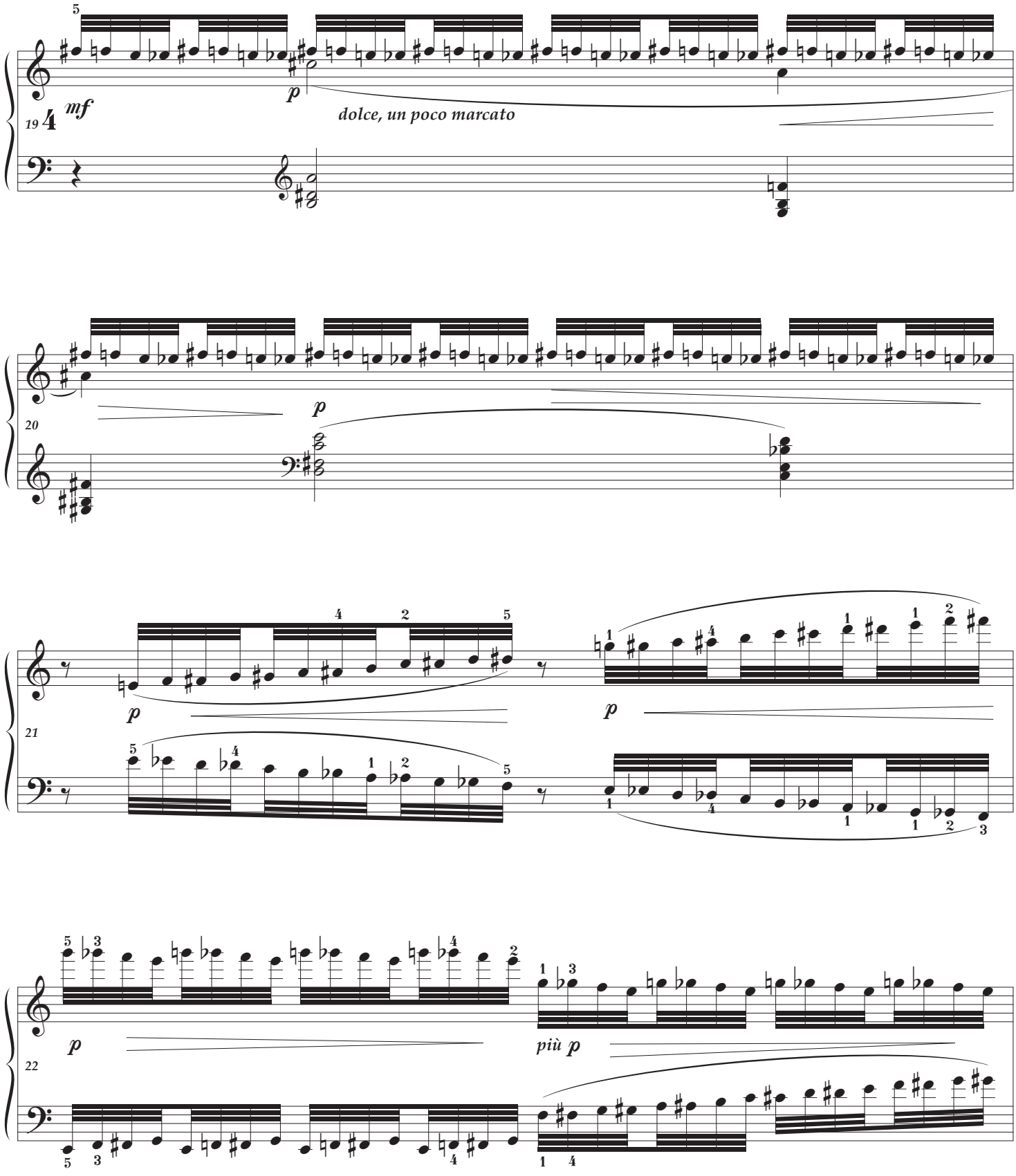
Scherzando, animato assai

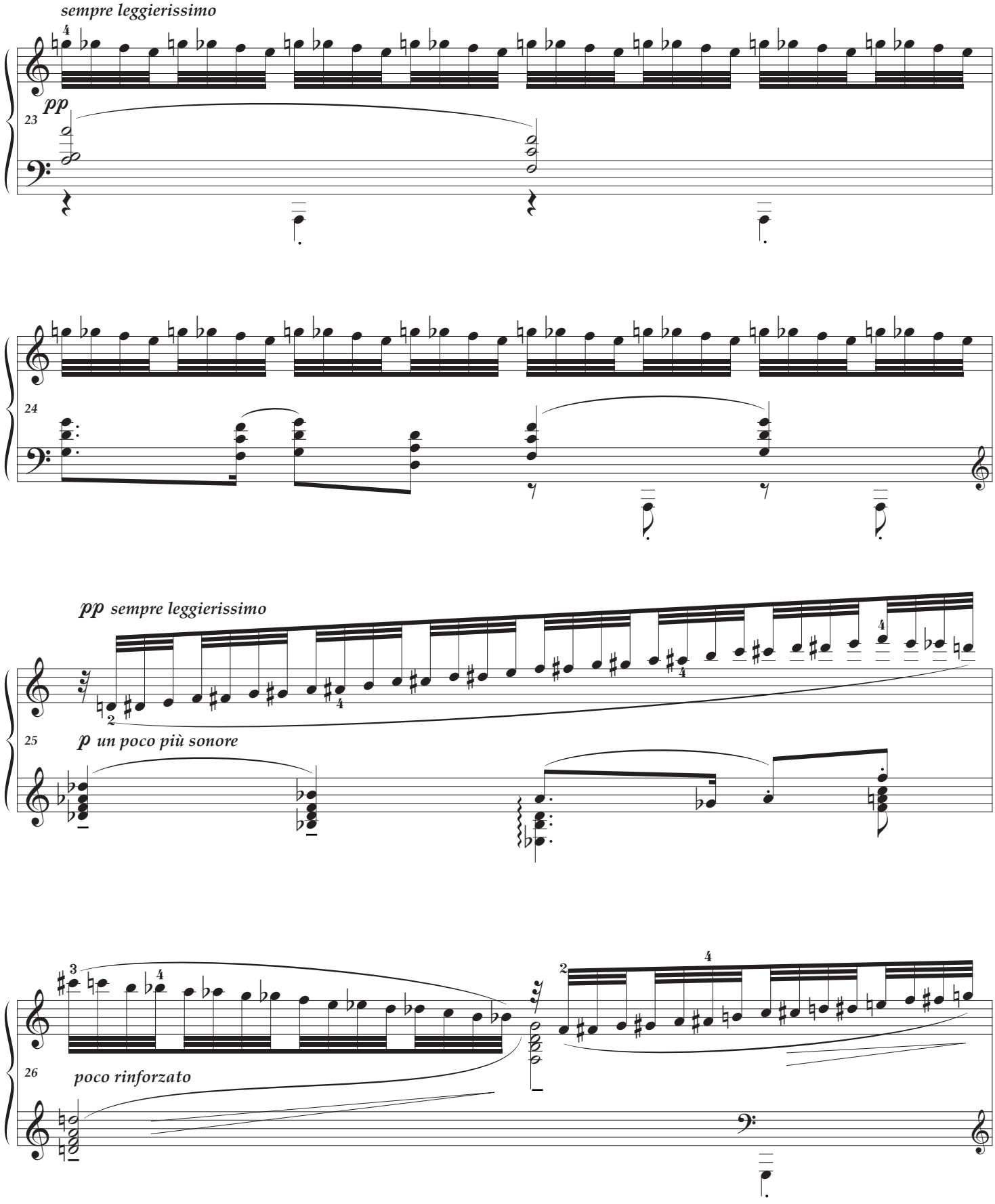


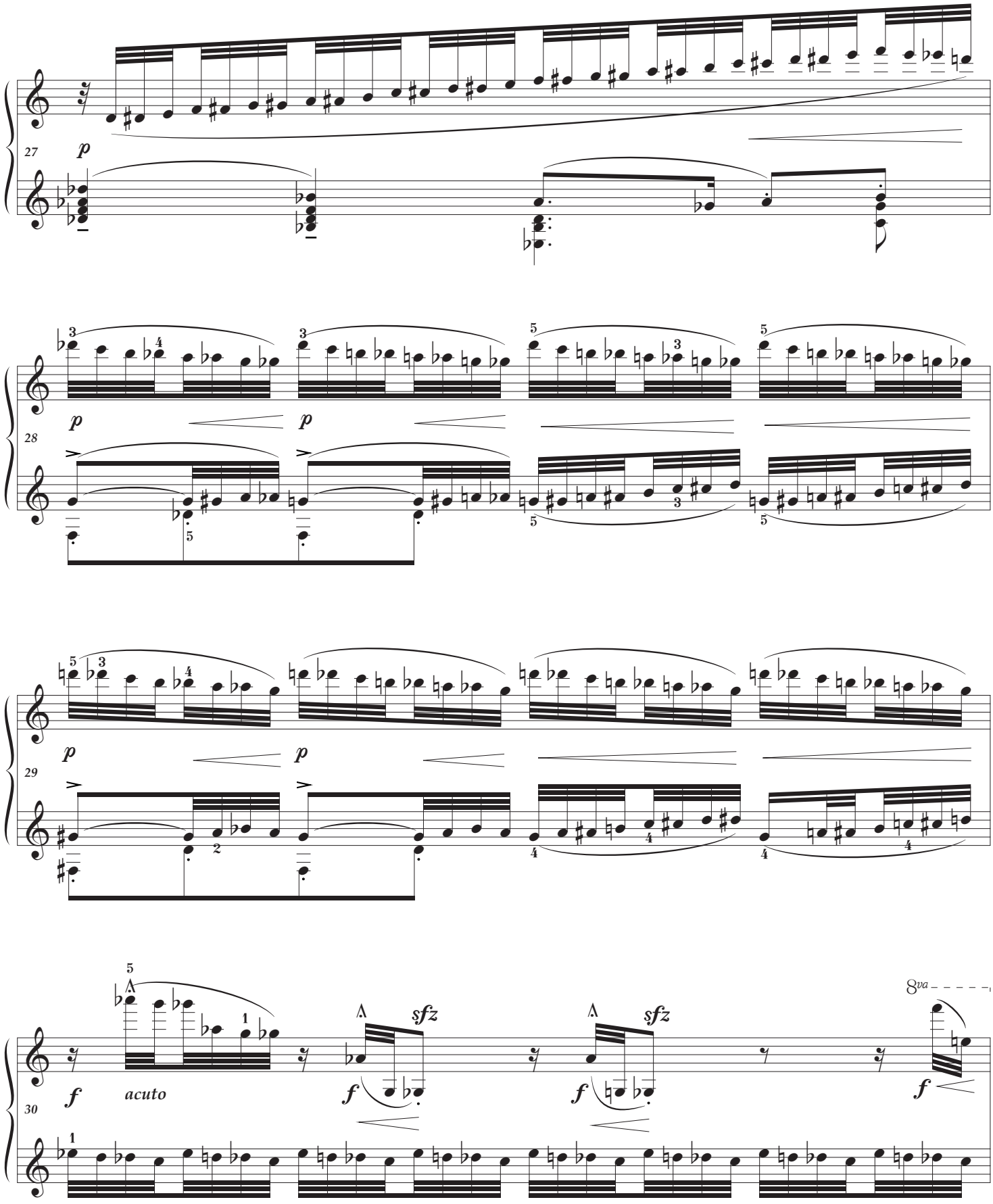

sempre leggierissimo
6
pp
dolce espressivo (un peu en dehors)
7
8
pp
9
pp

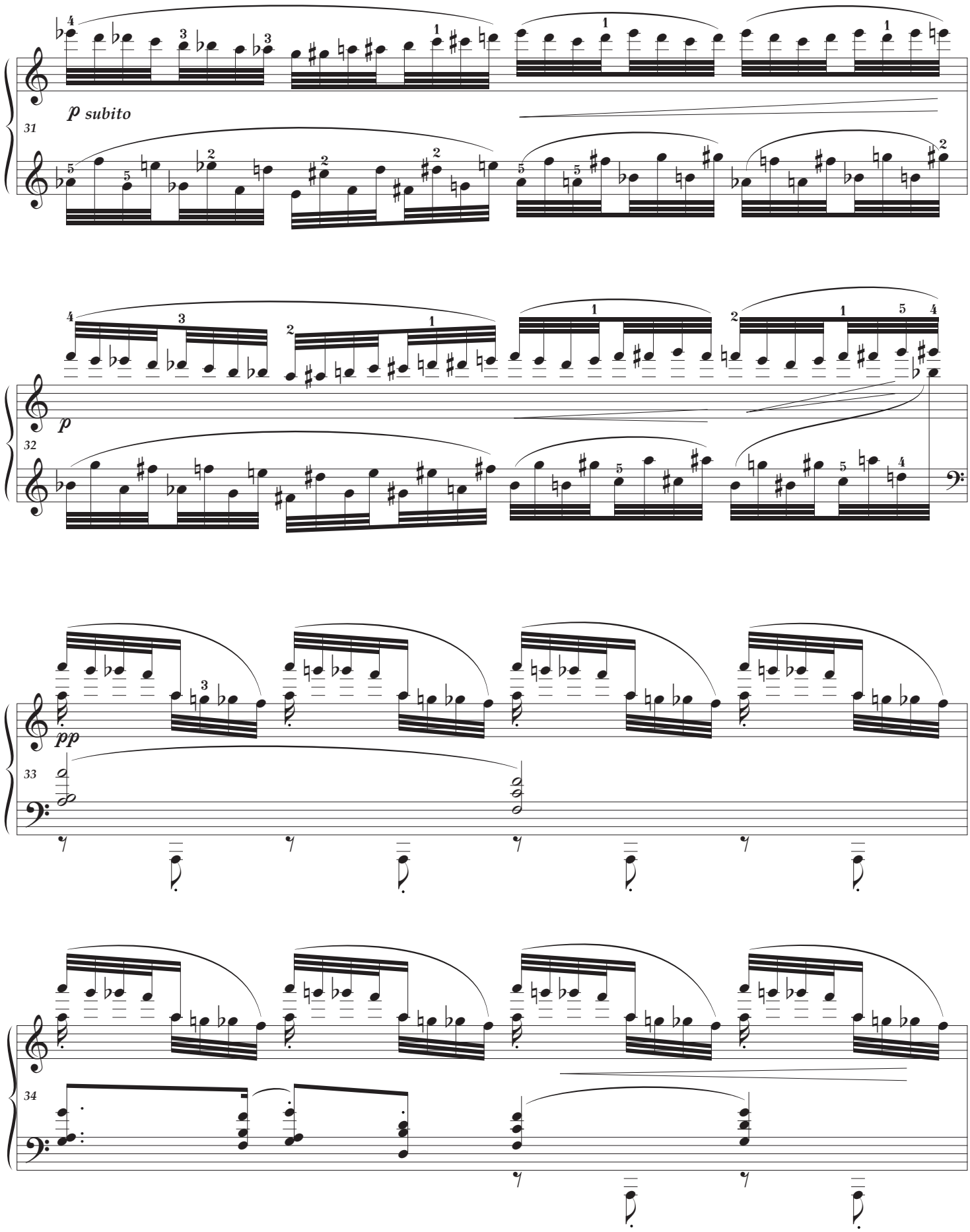

10
11
rinforzando
12
p
p
13
pp subito

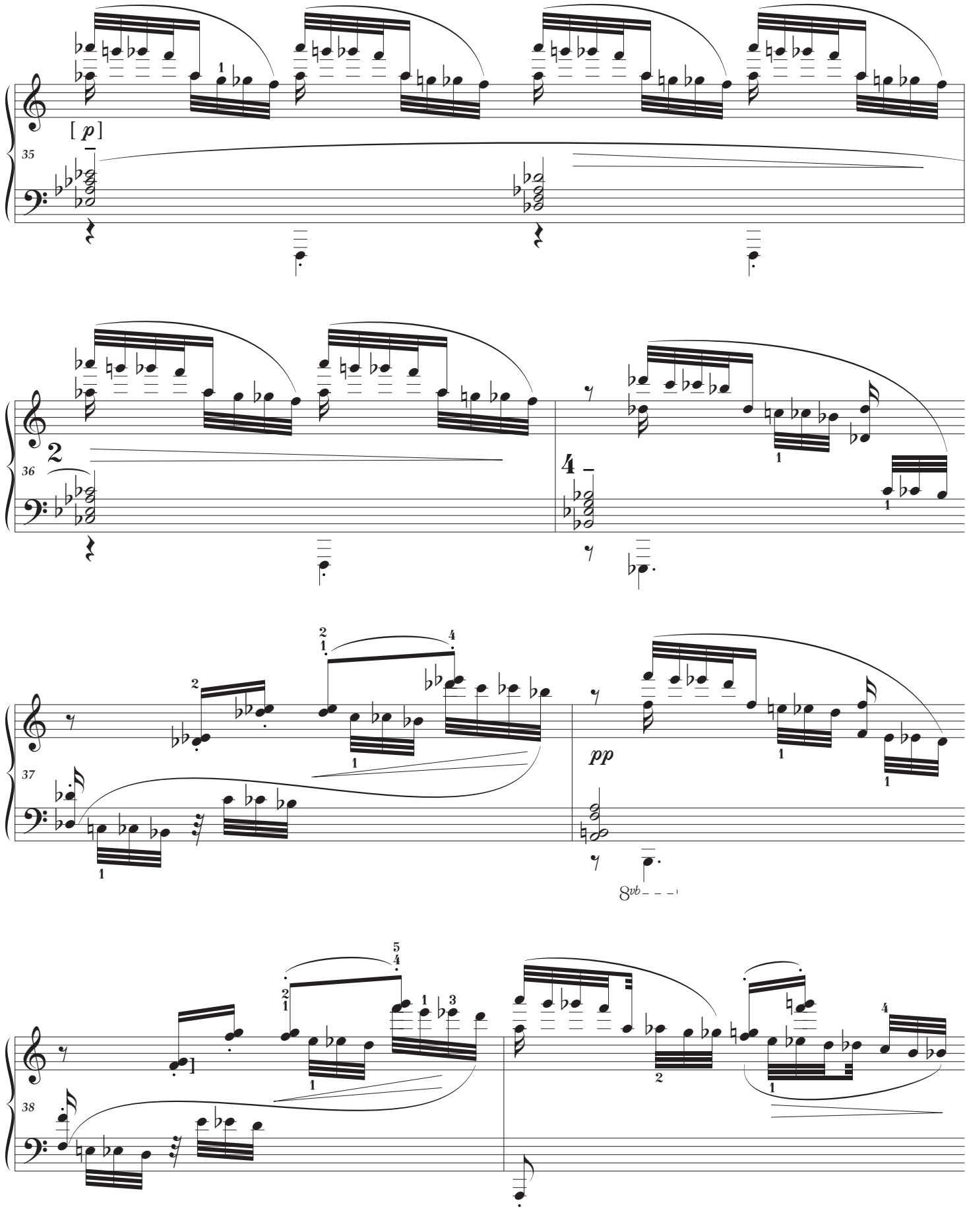

14
15
2
pp
4
16
17
2

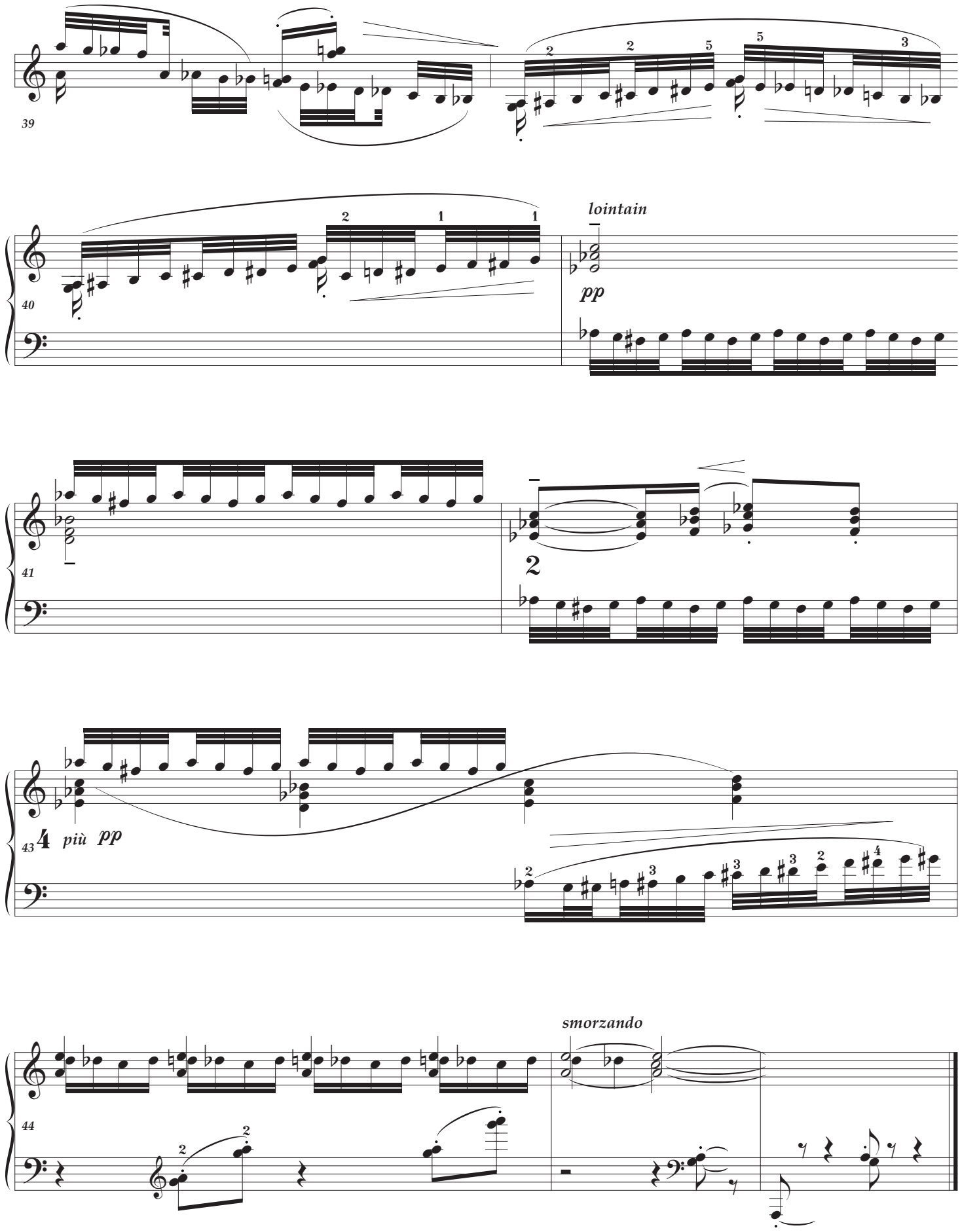

19
mf
p
dolce, un poco marcato
20
p
21
p
p
22
p
più p


sempre leggierissimo
pp
23
24
pp sempre leggierissimo
25
p un poco più sonore
26
poco rinforzato


27
p
28
p
p
29
p
p
30
f
acuto
sfz
f
sfz
f
8va
f


p subito
31
p
32
pp
33
34


[p]
35
2
36
4
pp
37
8vb
38


39
40
lointain
pp
41
2
43
4
più pp
smorzando
44

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Appendix

Comments, afterthoughts & vocabulary

As an interpreter-performer I often have to ask myself why a composer has chosen a particular time or key signature and sometimes the answer is not at all obvious. Now that we have the tools with which to "re-arrange" the music otherwise, my position as an editor becomes much more interesting. When these pieces were first written I like to think that the composer did not necessarily consider all the options, (at the time they had so much else to think about) and I doubt whether a colleague, editor or proofreader would have had the temerity to question a composer's wishes. However, in retrospect I like to think that these now aged composers are approvingly viewing my modifications from above and giving the nod to my humble efforts.

In fact in this piece, I have altered very little apart from the usual suggestions for swapping hands and a dramatic decision to publish it in 4/4 rather than 2/4. This was done for clarity, as barlines tend to restrain the music and make it more difficult to perceive constantly varying phrase lengths. I believe that Schnabel once said that he would like to publish Beethoven without any barlines at all!

In spite of Debussy's witty introduction I have suggested some fingering: *"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!*

The composer indicated metronome speeds very rarely and he once wrote: *"as a rose which might only last for one morning, a metronome speed might only work for one bar."* It is true that this study demands nimble fingers and some speed, but it is often played far too fast to enjoy its subtle soft expression and playfulness.

- **35** Debussy writes ***pp*** — the following diminuendo becoming somewhat challenging.

Duration: 3'

un peu en dehors	gently sonorous
lointain	distant