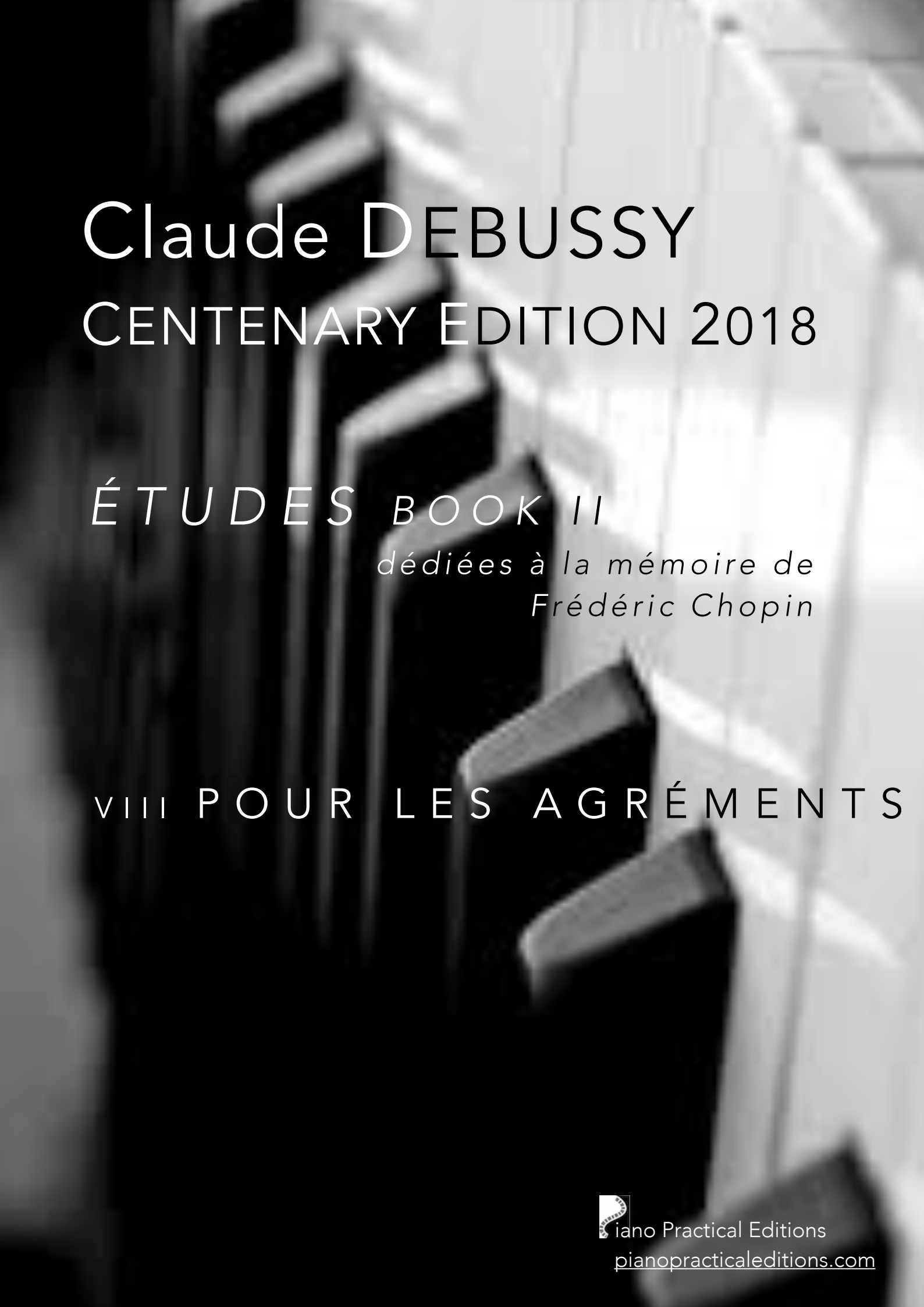

Claude DEBUSSY

CENTENARY EDITION 2018

ÉTUDES BOOK II

dédiées à la mémoire de
Frédéric Chopin

VIII POUR LES AGRÉMENTS

Piano Practical Editions
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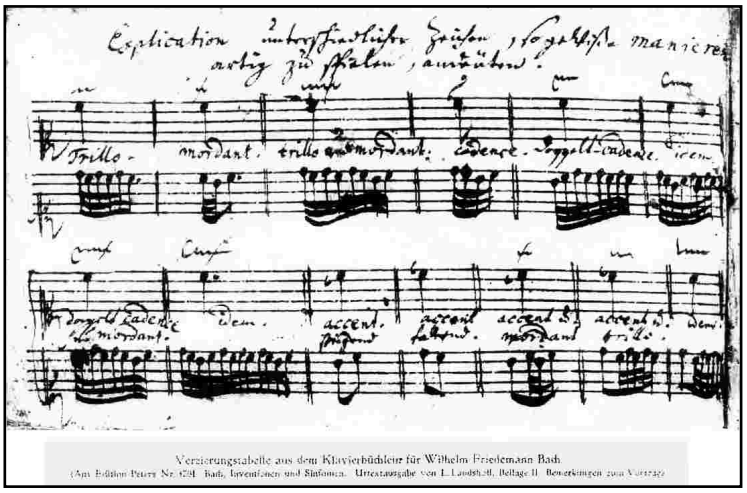
VIII *pour les agréments*

— for ornamentation — is a most original work... featuring several musical ideas ... mixing embellishments, arpeggios, and short passages in the style of cadenzas.

This etude, the longest, was the last to be completed and is also most elaborate; originally placed at the end of the set, Debussy said: *"it borrows the form of a barcarolle on a somewhat Italian sea."*

The ornaments concerned are a far cry from the mordents, trills and turns of W. F. Bach — varied, extended embellishments of the type that he had been experimenting with throughout his composing career.

Wilhelm Friedemann Bach — guide to ornamentation



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.

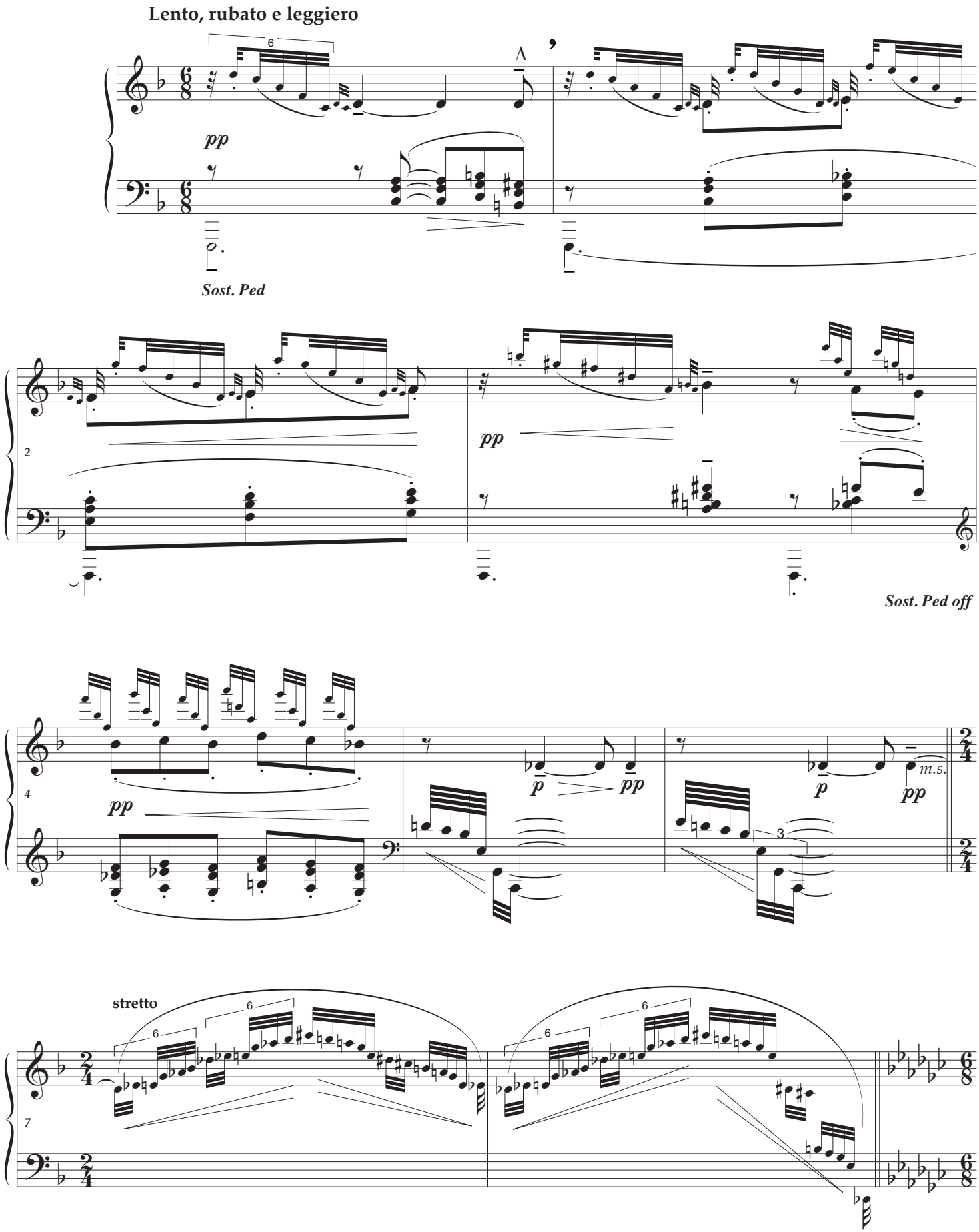
Debussy revolutionised the meaning of pianistic sound and how we listen to music, defining our perception of his surreal world. He was also a sensitive pianist, enriching the tradition of Chopin and advancing the integral soul of the sustaining pedal; he apparently played with penetrating softness and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

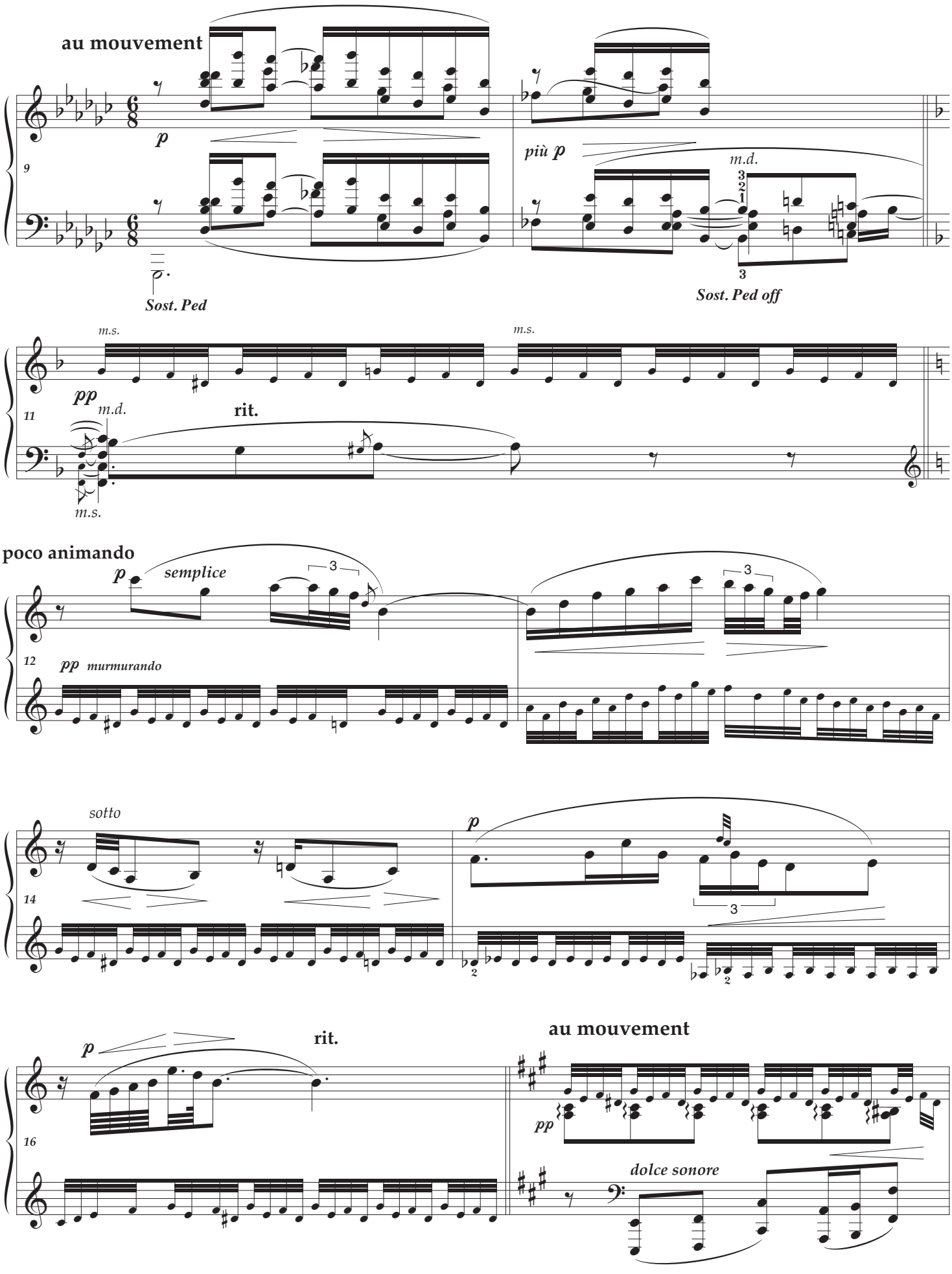
Here is a witty extract from Debussy's own introduction to his fingering-free etudes:

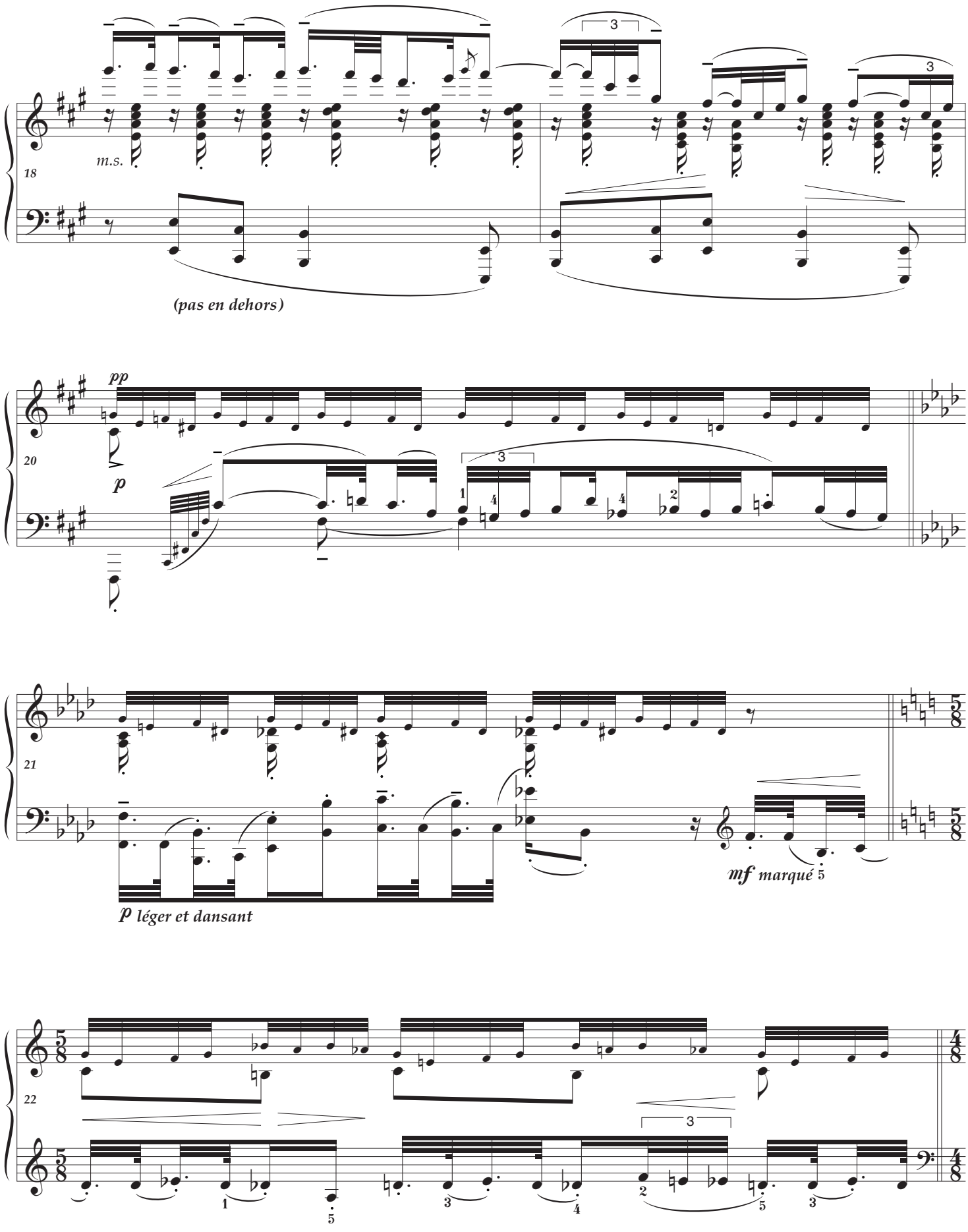
> ***"Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians' perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer's (and editor's), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'. Let us devise our own fingering!"***

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

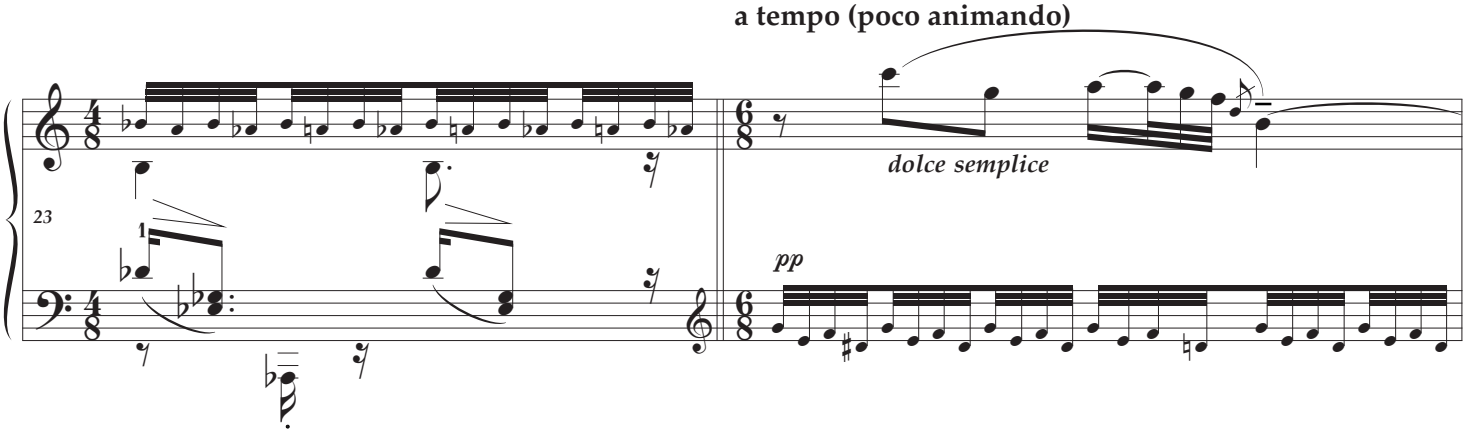
Pour les agréments

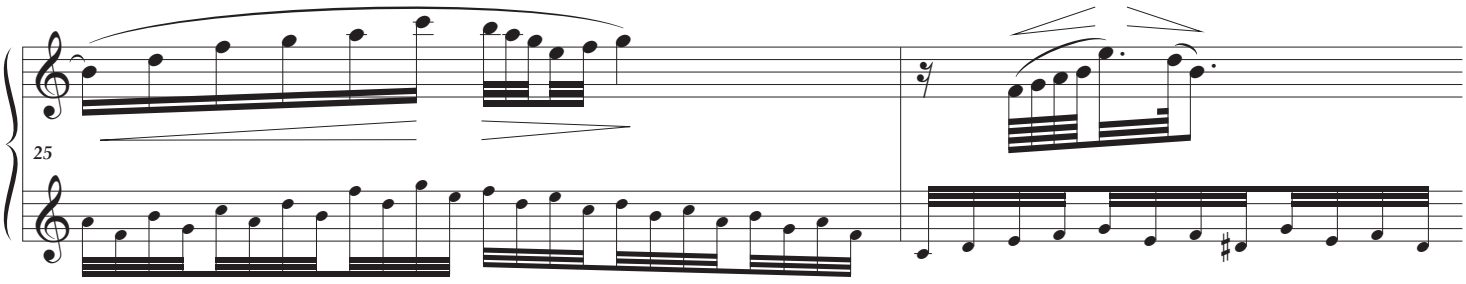



au mouvement
p
9
Sost. Ped
più p
m.d.
Sost. Ped off
m.s.
pp
m.d.
11
rit.
m.s.
poco animando
p
semplice
12
pp murmurando
sotto
14
p
rit.
au mouvement
16
pp
dolce sonore

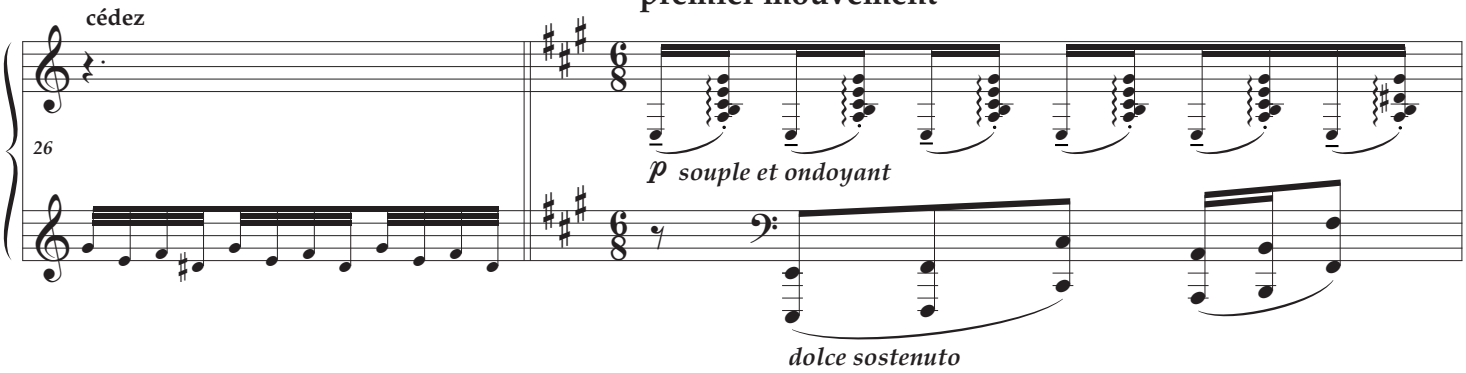

18
m.s.
(pas en dehors)
20
pp
p
21
p léger et dansant
mf marqué
22

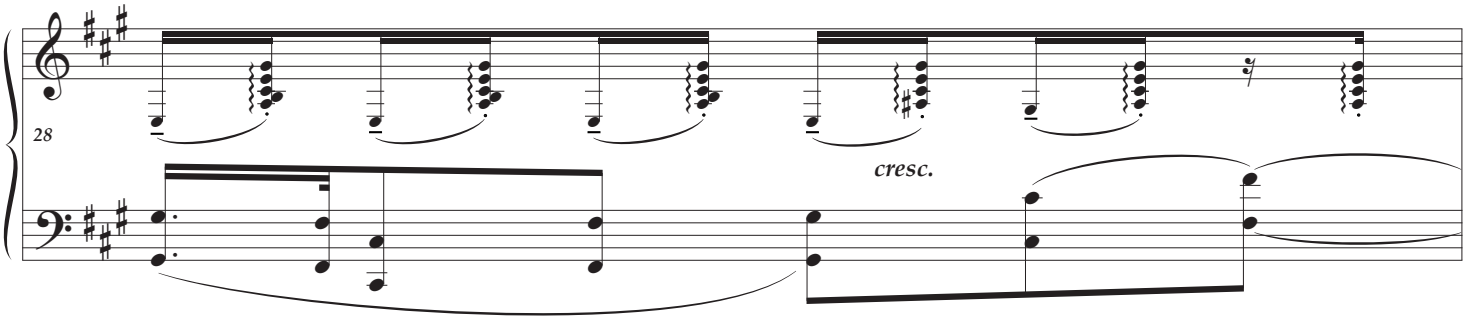
a tempo (poco animando)

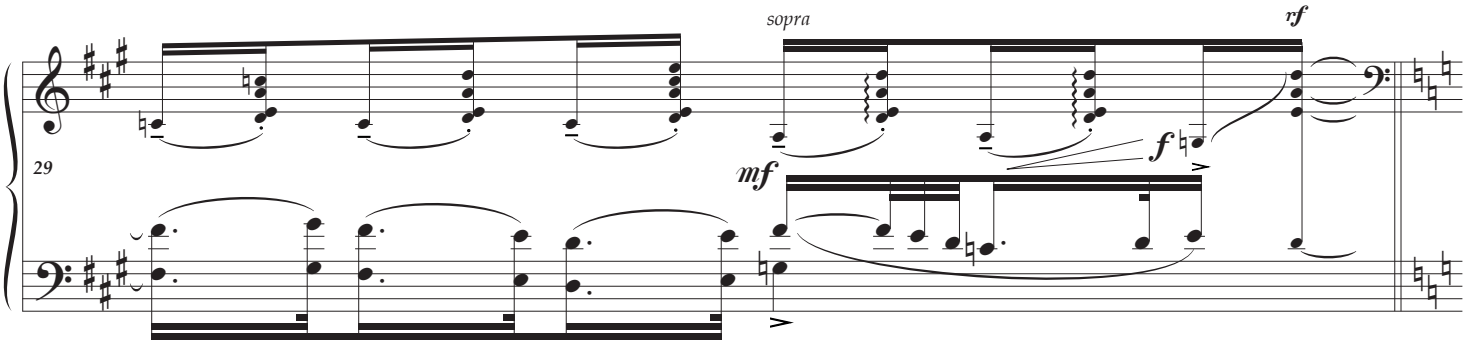


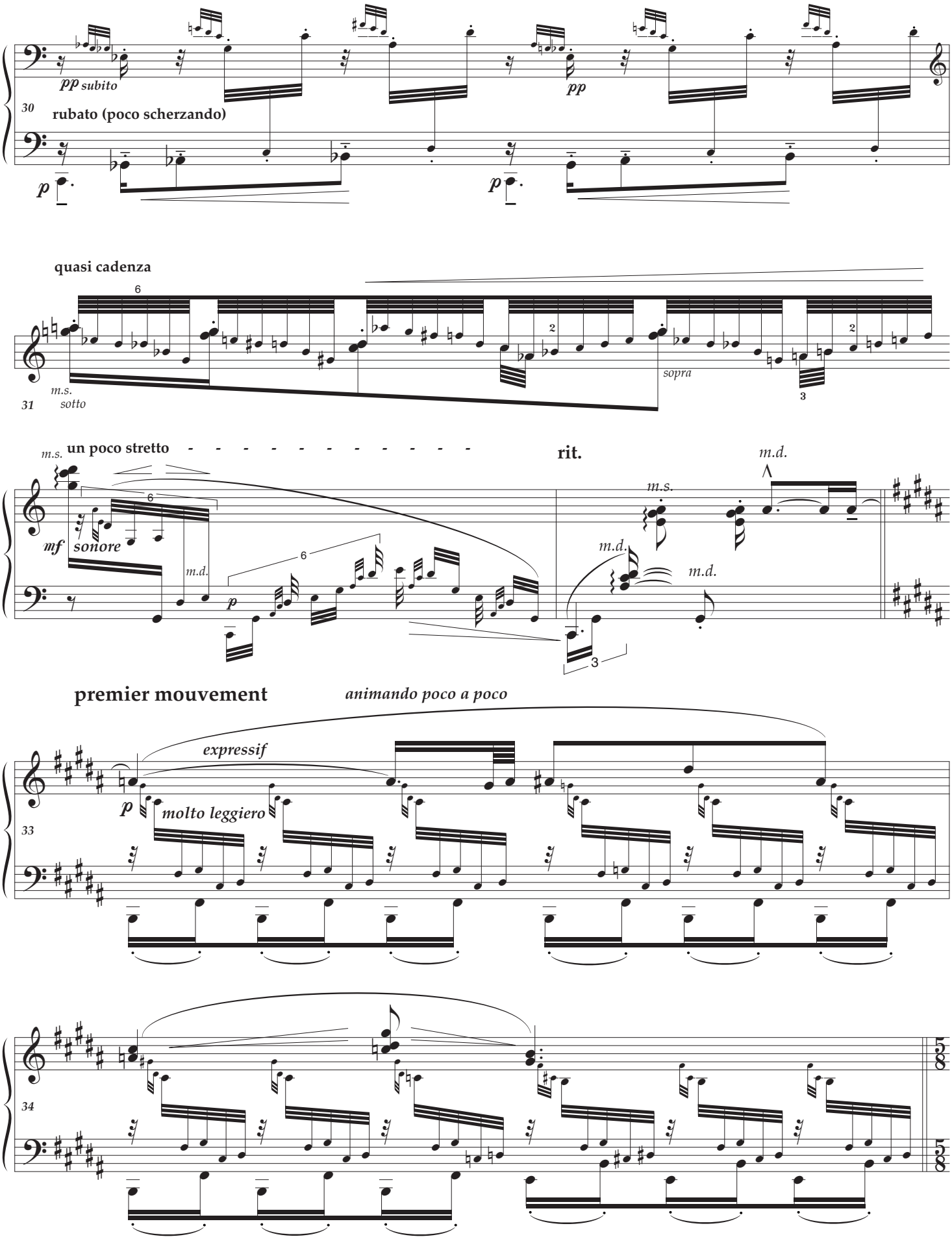


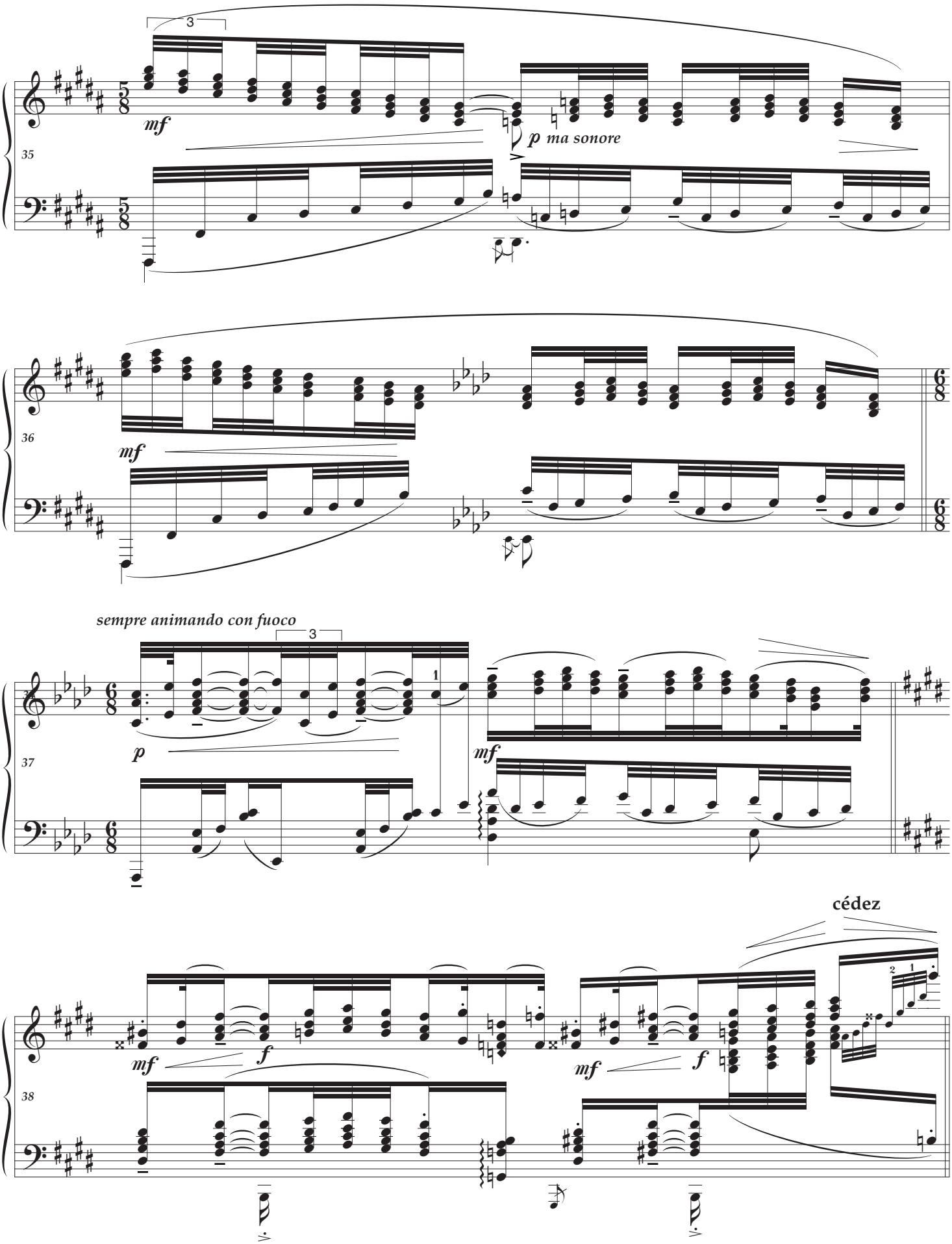
premier mouvement

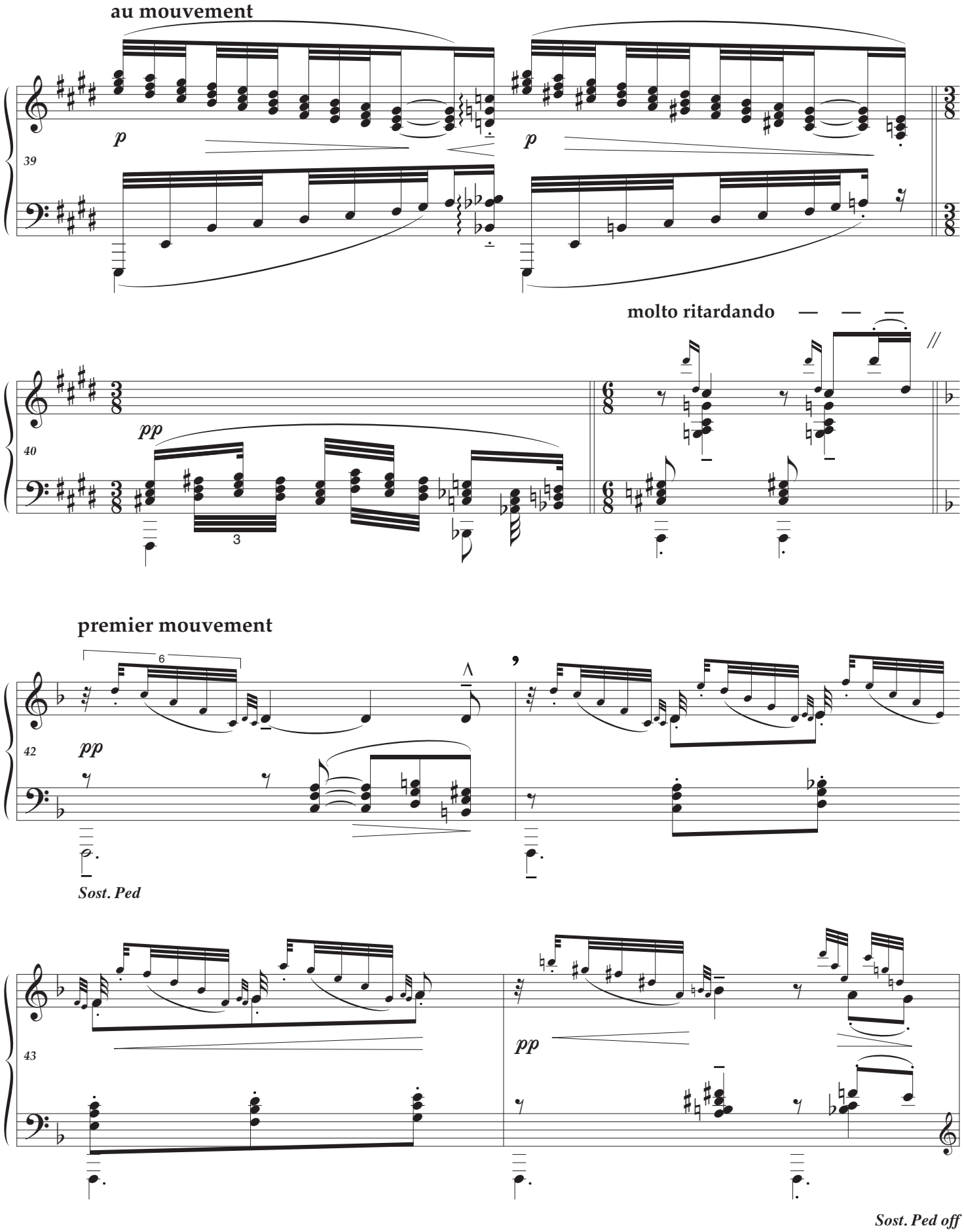


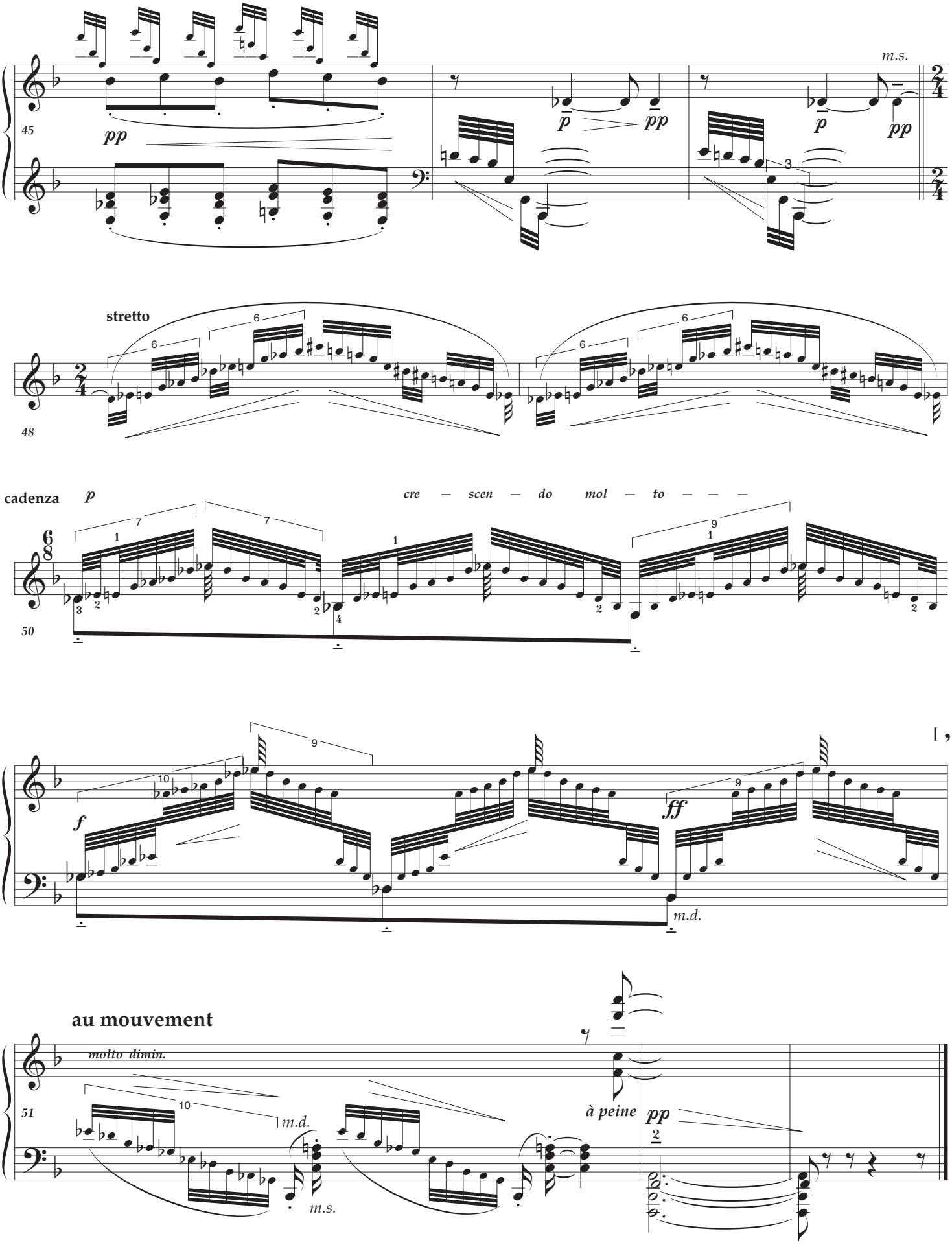





pp subito
pp
30
rubato (poco scherzando)
p
p
quasi cadenza
6
m.s.
sotto
31
sopra
2
2
3
m.s.
un poco stretto
rit.
m.d.
mf sonore
6
m.d.
p
6
m.s.
m.d.
m.d.
3
premier mouvement
animando poco a poco
expressif
p
molto leggiero
33
34


35
mf
p ma sonore
36
mf
sempre animando con fuoco
37
p
mf
cédez
38
mf
f
mf
f


au mouvement
p
p
39
molto ritardando
pp
3
40
premier mouvement
6
pp
42
Sost. Ped
pp
43
Sost. Ped off


m.s.
45
pp
p
pp
p
pp
3
stretto
6
6
6
6
48
cadenza
p
cre — scen — do mol — to — — —
7
7
1
1
9
1
50
[,]
f
10
9
ff
9
m.d.
au mouvement
molto dimin.
51
10
m.d.
m.s.
à peine
pp
2

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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 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."*

None of the sostenuto pedal * suggestions are attributed to Debussy. However, the opening and closing sections offer an ideal opportunity for the pedal points bass F, and also bass G flat.

- **1** the comma is indicated unusually as a pause with a quaver rest beneath
- **10** at 2nd beat — this edition has tried to make clear Debussy's instruction for the RH to take over the LH chord silently.
- **14** 4th quaver beat D natural delayed by one quaver beat for aesthetic and practical reasons
- **19** 3rd quaver beat LH alto top B removed
- **21** presented in A flat
- **20-23** I must admit to being a little baffled by this section, both musically and in particular with the metre. Barlines and time-signatures have been modified for 22-23.
- **27** — is the final RH semiquaver chord D natural an error ? Here I have added a sharp, although repeating the previous (and following) chords is also an option.
- **38** presented in E. The diamond notehead D natural can be omitted.

Duration: 5'45

* 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 have it. Debussy and Ravel certainly played such Steinways in the Paris *salons*. Apparently, in 1900 the composer René de Castéra bought a 3-pedal Steinway on the advice of Albeniz. One could say that it took over 100 years for it to become established.

pas en dehors	not to be marked
léger et dansant	light and dance-like
marqué	marked
cédez	yield
souple et ondoyant	supple and swaying
à peine	almost silent