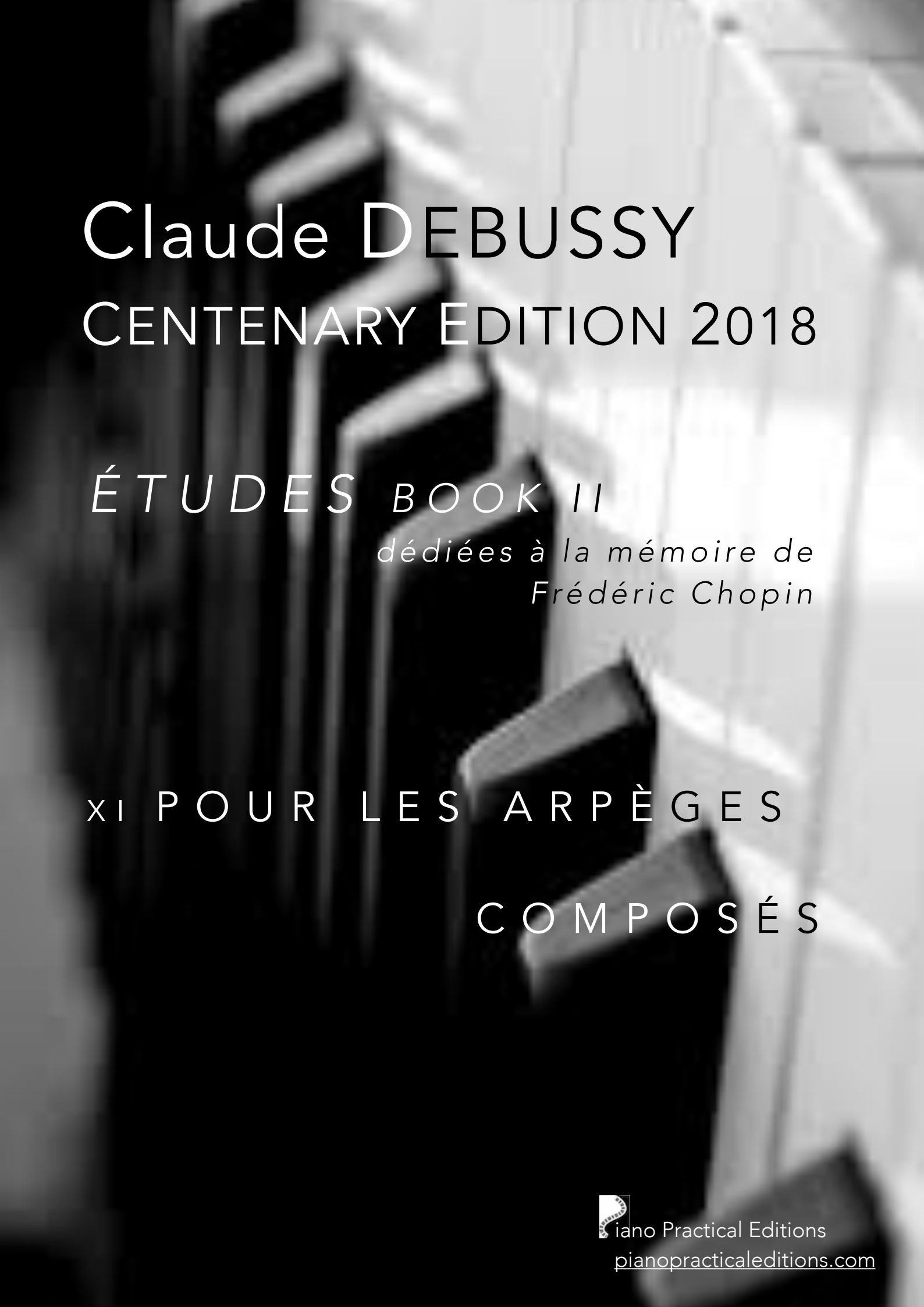

Claude DEBUSSY
CENTENARY EDITION 2018

ÉTUDES BOOK II

dédiées à la mémoire de
Frédéric Chopin

XI POUR LES ARPÈGES COMPOSÉS

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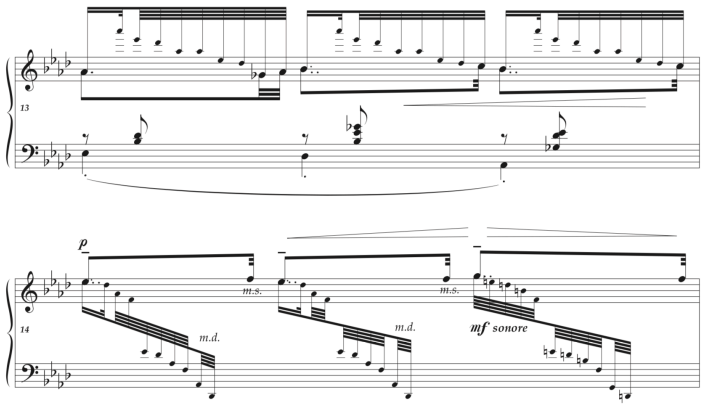
XI *pour les arpèges composés*

— for creative arpeggios — is deservedly the most popular of the études, recrafting these rippled chords in a variety of imaginative ways and influencing composers for generations to come.

The musical challenges are basically how to incorporate these exotic embellishments and to project the melodic and harmonic line. In spite of a ranging world war, the central section in typical Debussy humorous vein is very lively and reminiscent of Pickwick and General Lavine.



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.

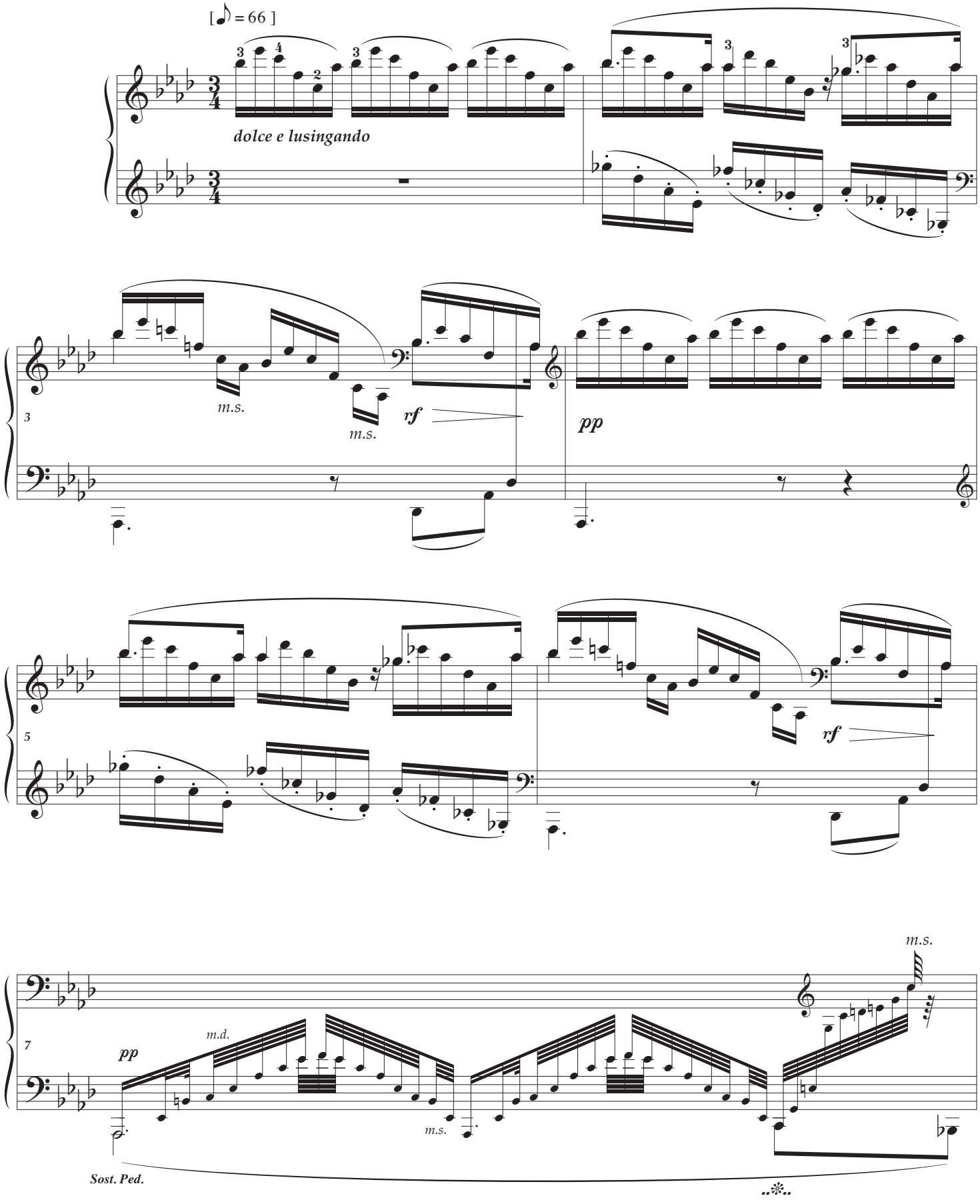
Debussy revolutionised the meaning of pianistic sound and how we listen to music, defining our perception of his surreal world. He was also a sensitive pianist, enriching the tradition of Chopin and advancing the integral soul of the sustaining pedal; he apparently played with penetrating softness and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

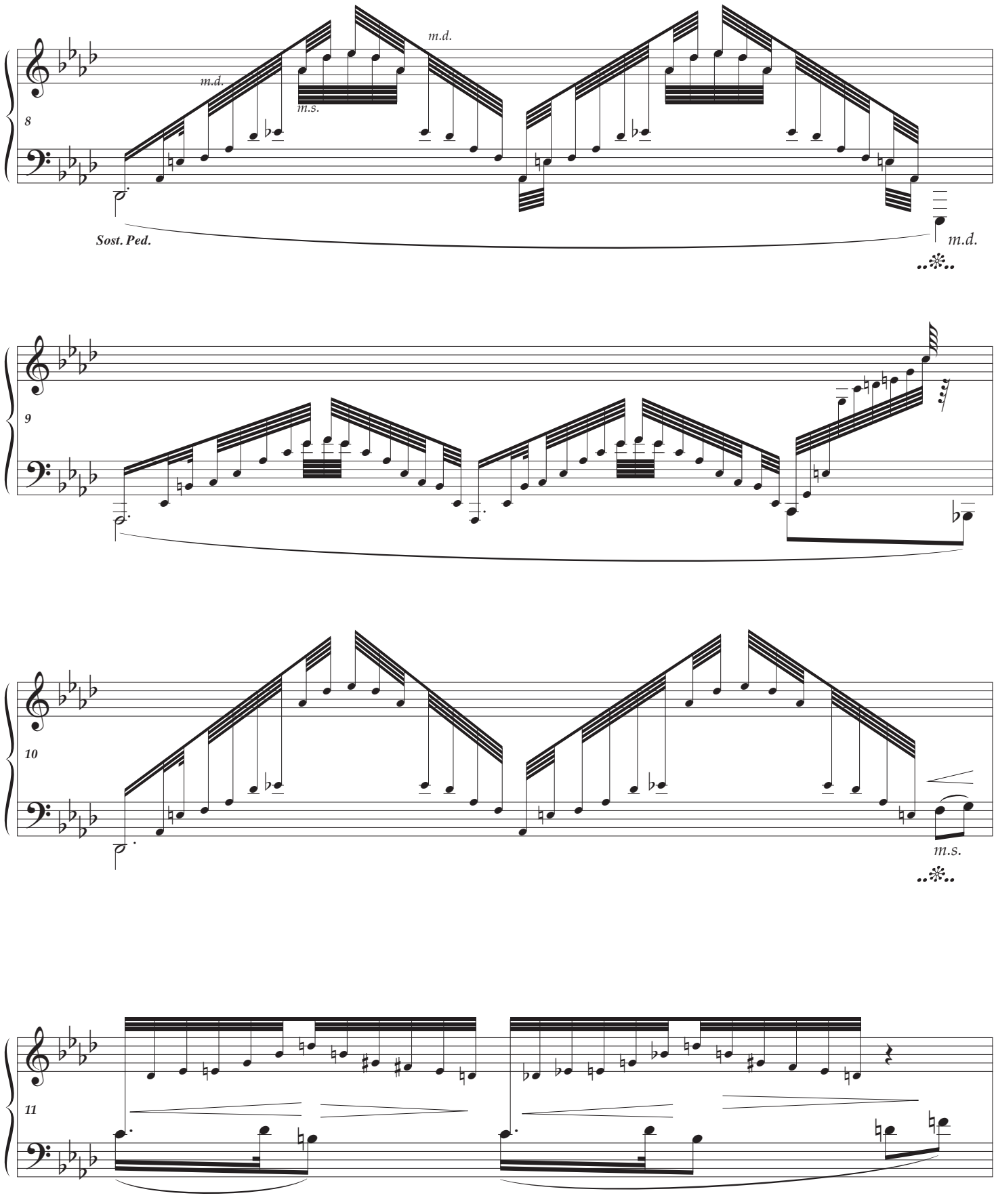
Here is a witty extract from Debussy's own introduction to his fingering-free etudes:

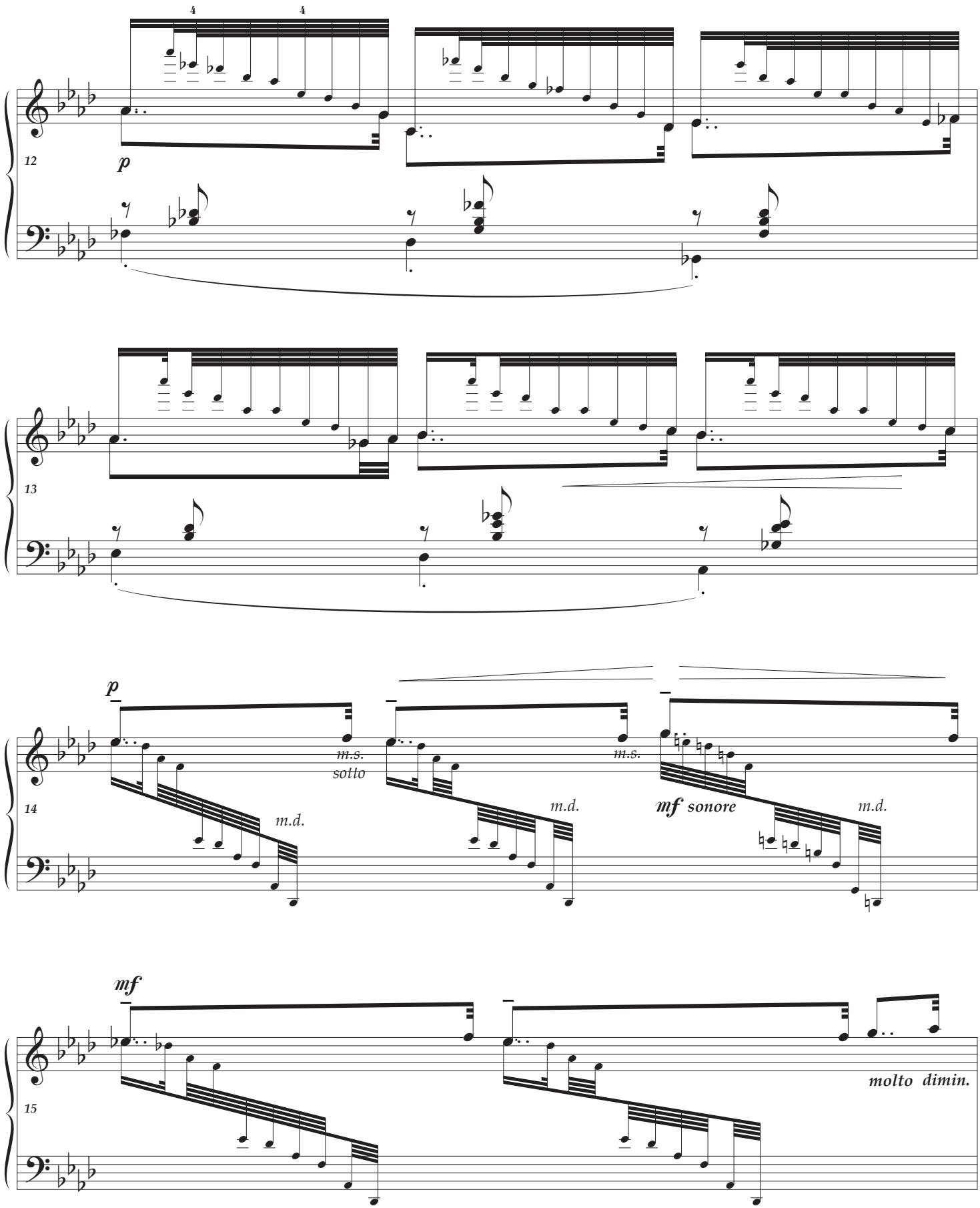
> *"Absence of fingering is an excellent exercise, negating musicians' perverse desire to completely dismiss the composer's (and editor's), and thereby vindicating words of eternal wisdom: 'If you want something done well, do it yourself'. Let us devise our own fingering!"*

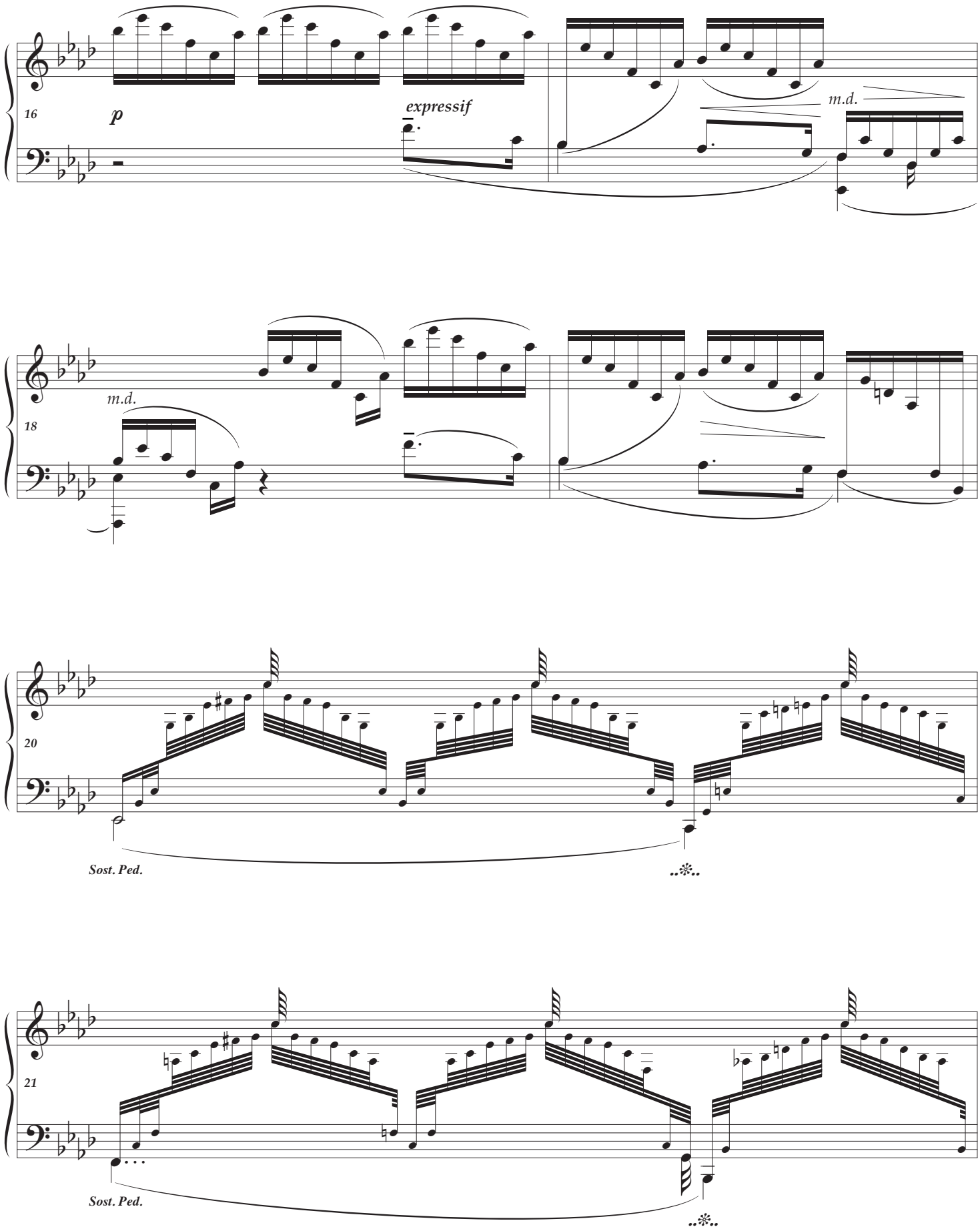
In this edition just three studies have been initially selected as being possibly the most approachable.

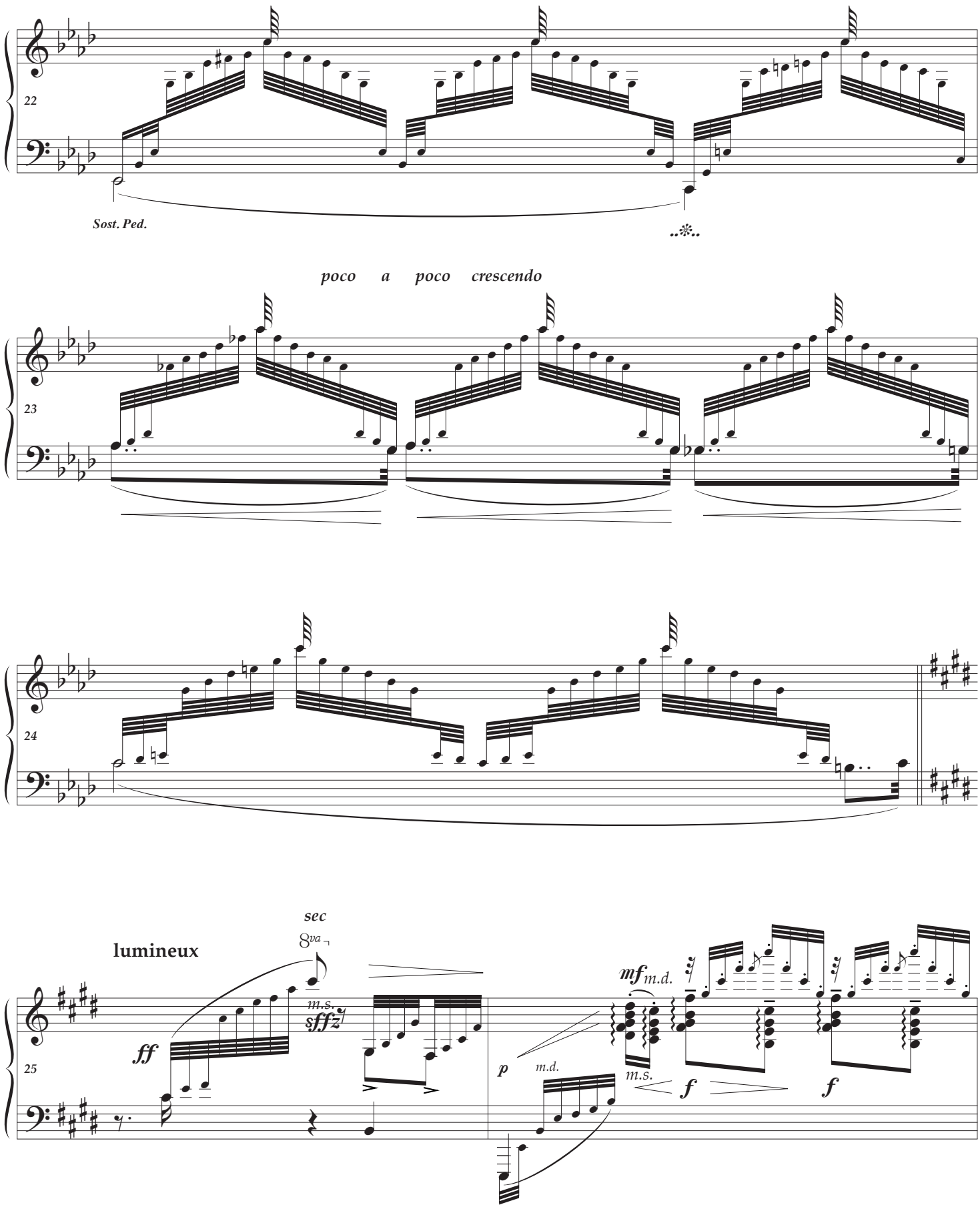
Pour les arpèges composés

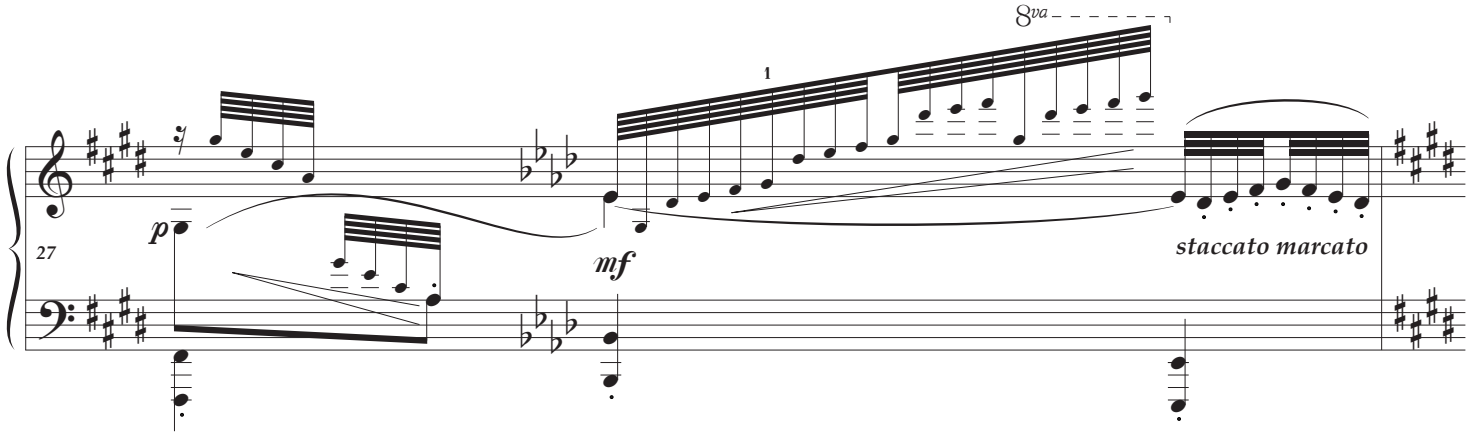


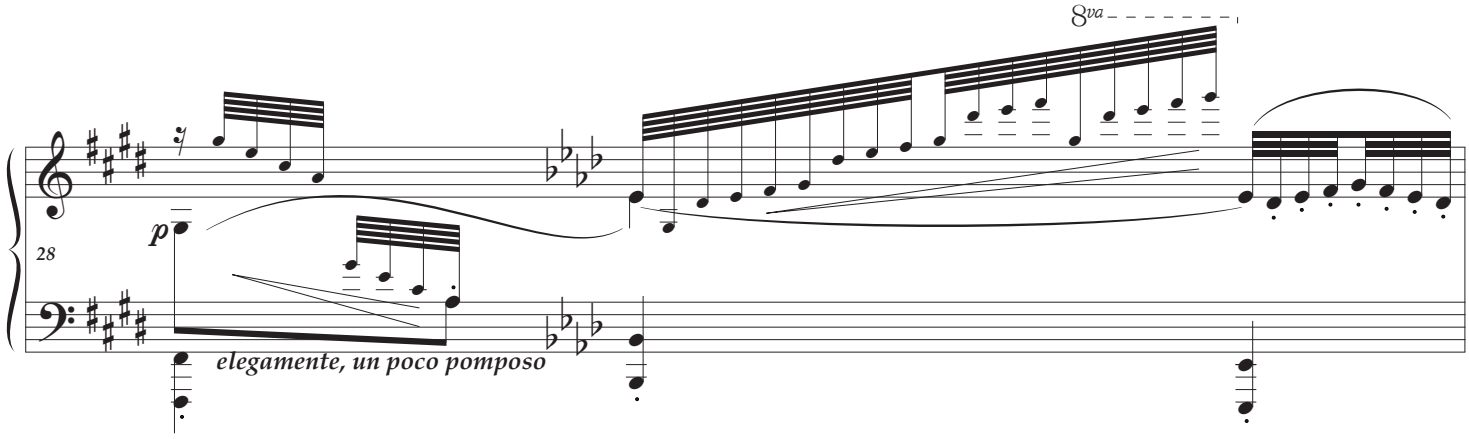

8
m.d.
m.d.
m.s.
Sost. Ped.
m.d.
9
10
m.s.
11

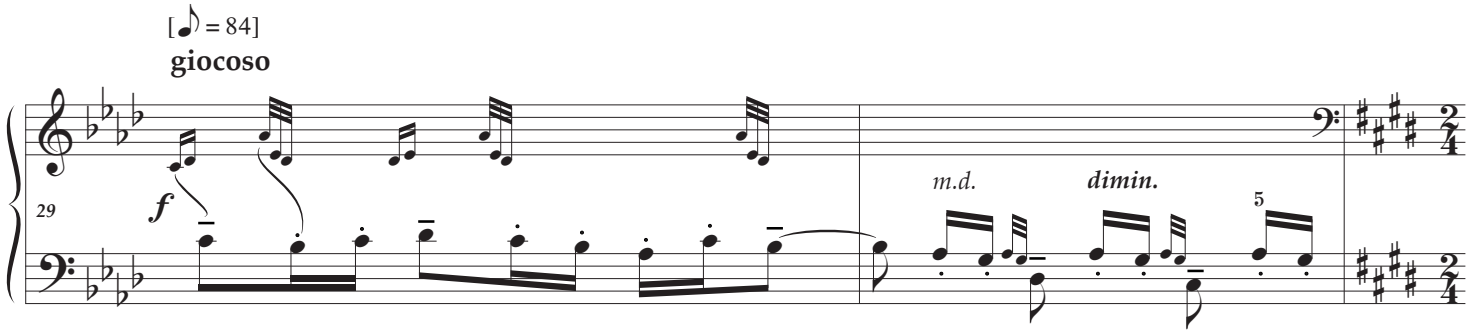

12
p
13
14
p
m.s.
sotto
m.d.
m.s.
m.d.
mf sonore
m.d.
15
mf
molto dimin.

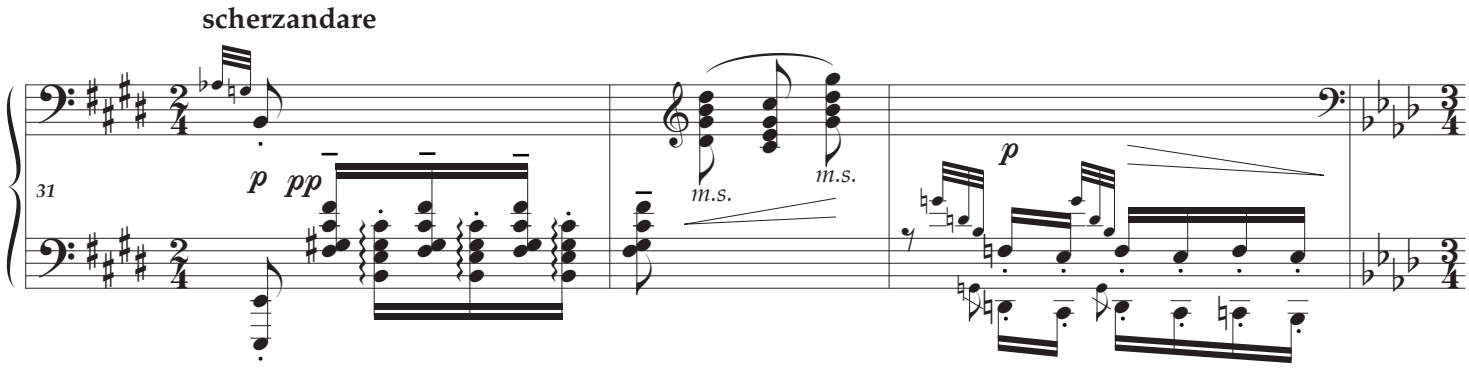

16
p
expressif
m.d.
m.d.
18
20
Sost. Ped.
21
Sost. Ped.

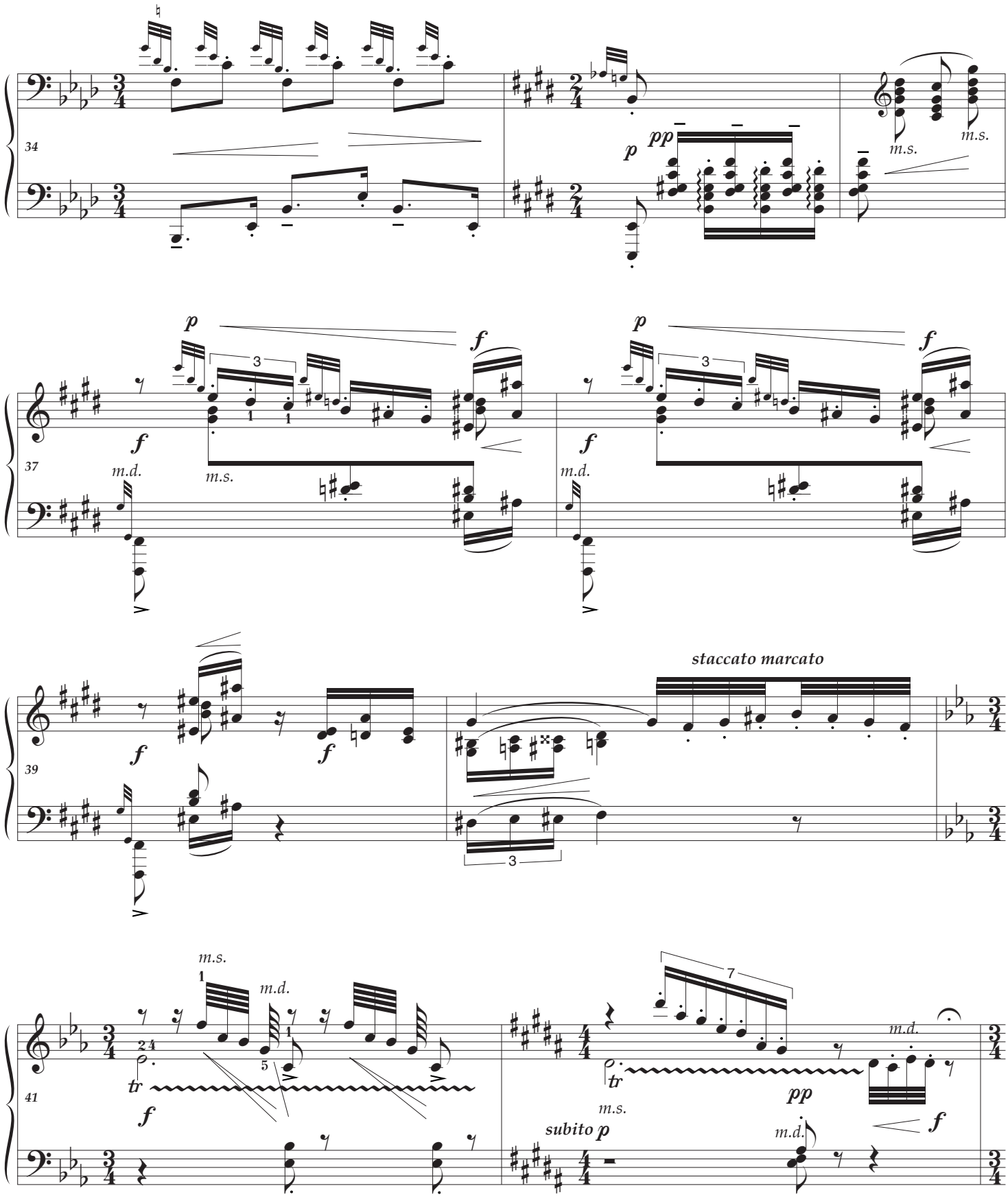

22
Sost. Ped.
poco a poco crescendo
23
24
lumineux
sec
8va
m.s.
sffz
ff
25
p
m.d.
mf m.d.
m.s.
f
f

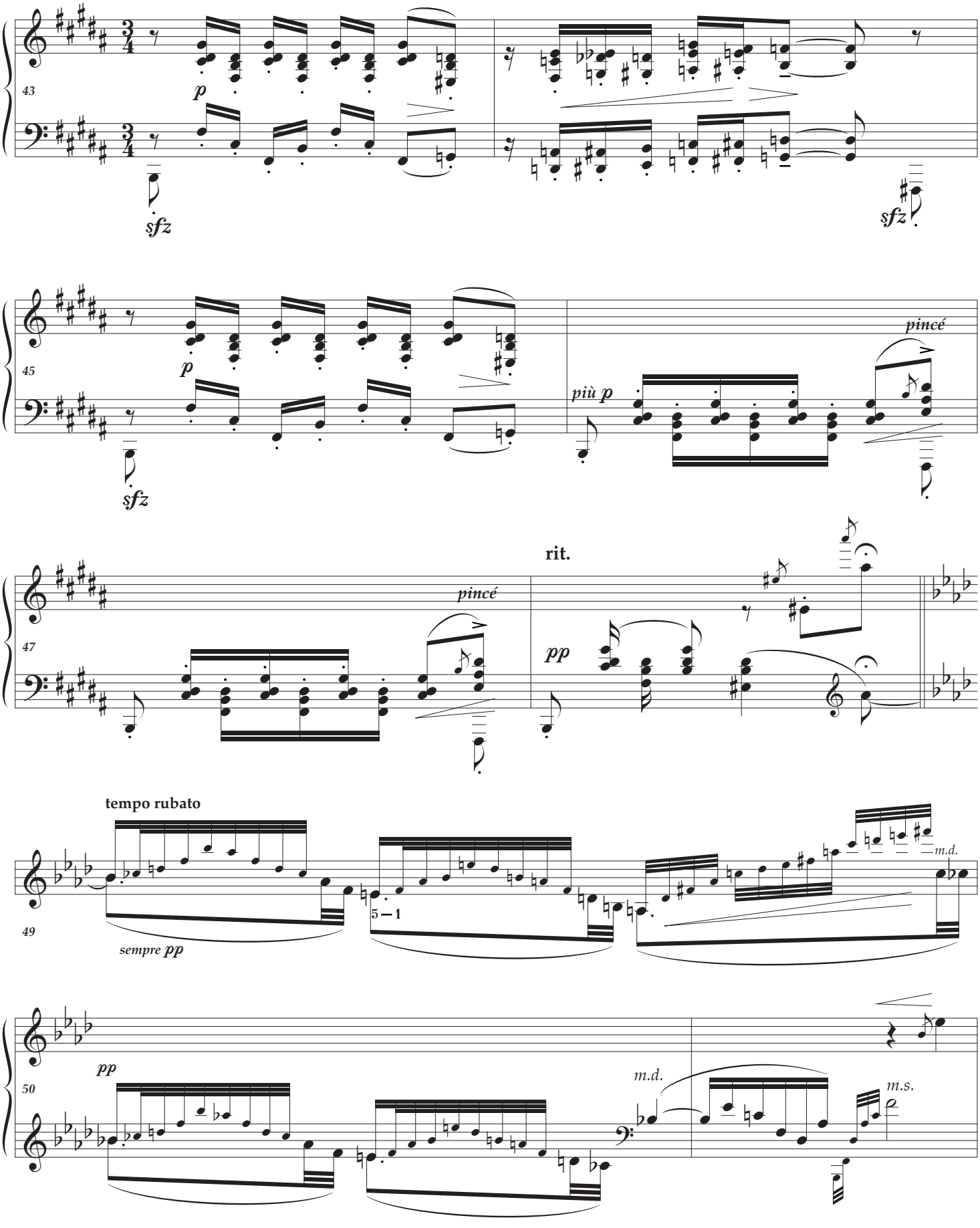

8va
1
27
p
mf
staccato marcato

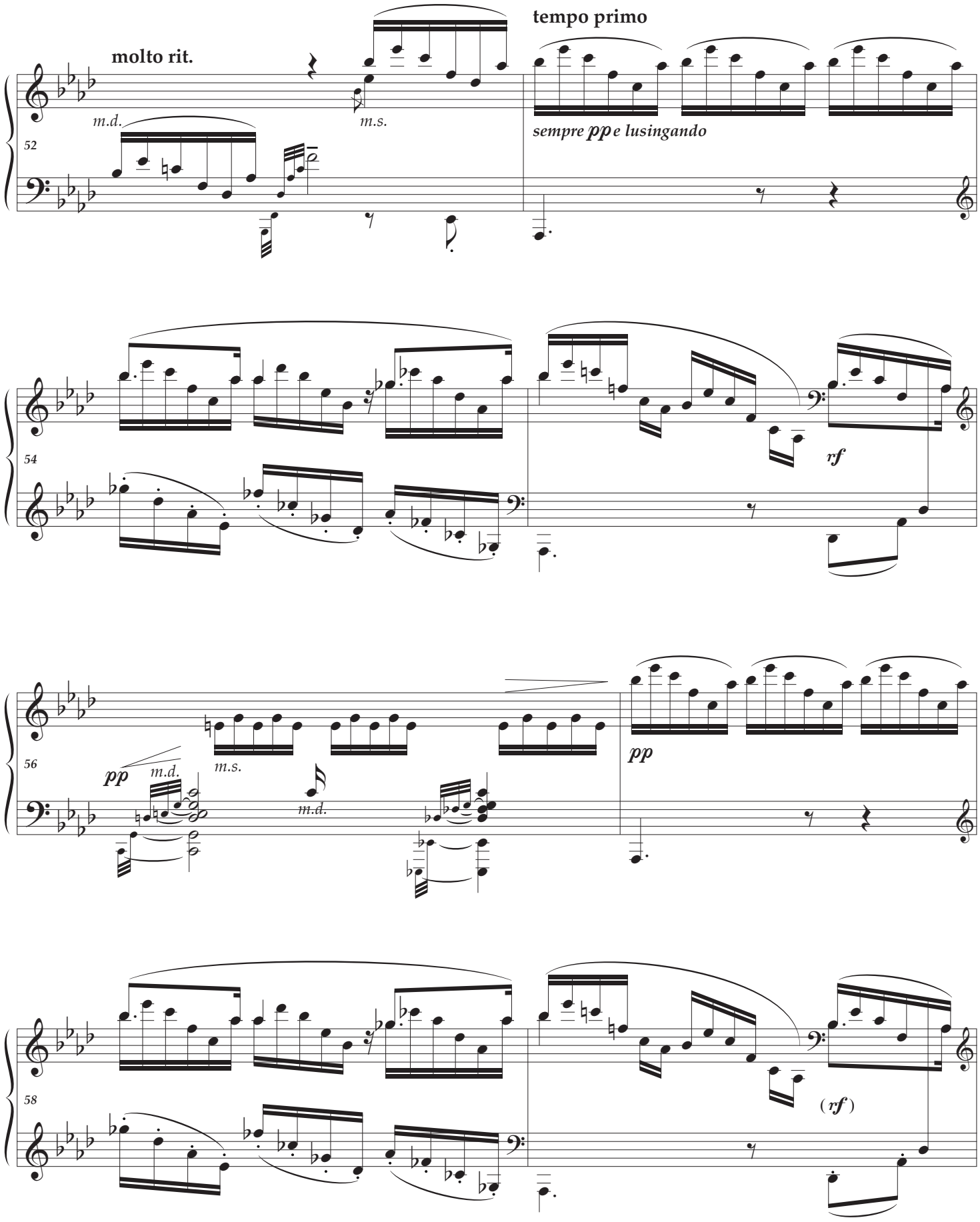

8va
28
p
elegamente, un poco pomposo

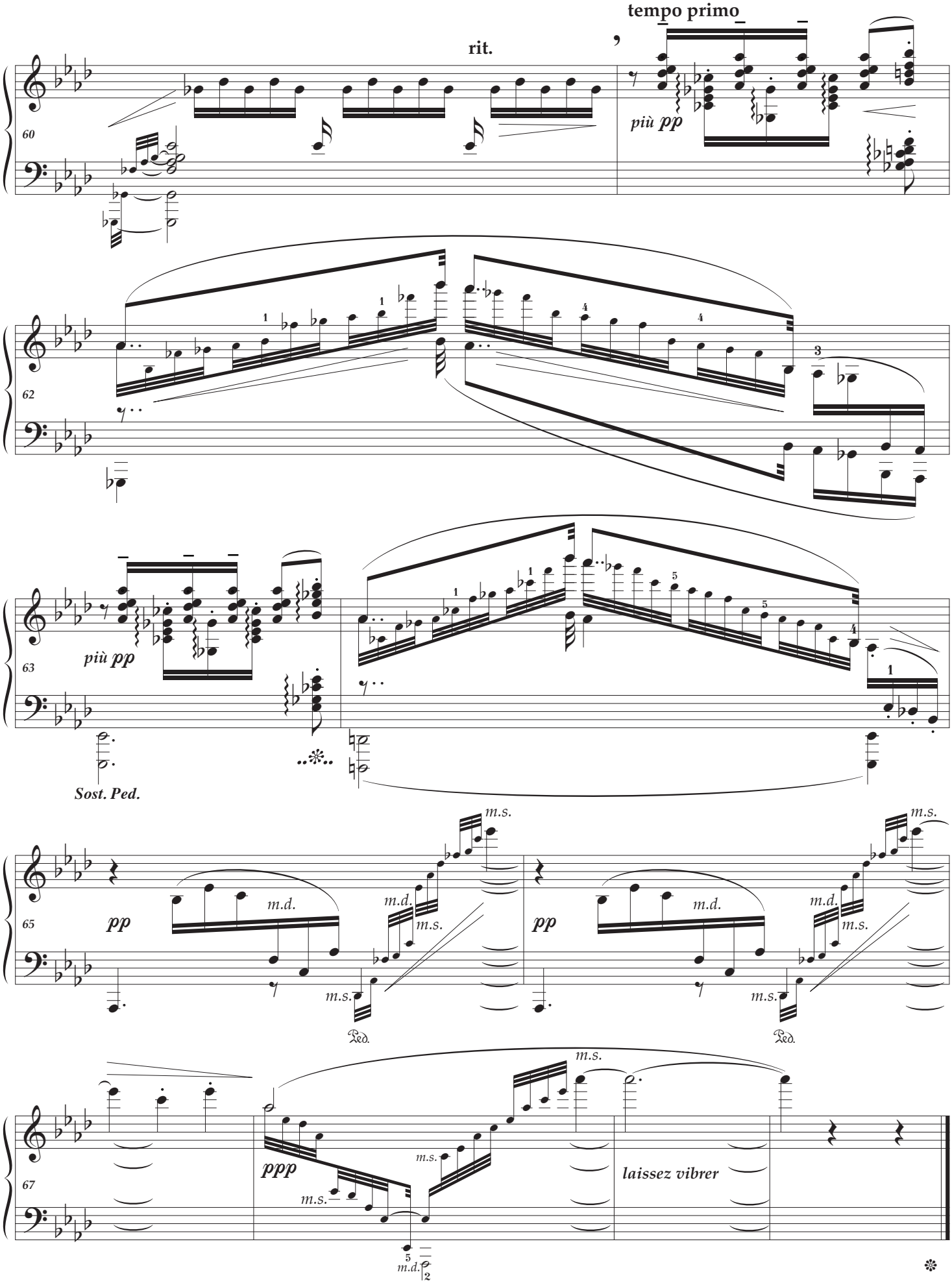

[♪ = 84]
giocoso
29
f
m.d.
dimin.
5


scherzandare
31
p
pp
m.s.
m.s.
p


34
p
pp
m.s.
m.s.
37
p
f
m.d.
m.s.
3
39
staccato marcato
41
m.s.
m.d.
tr
subito p
7
pp
f


43
p
sfz
sfz
45
p
sfz
più p
pincé
47
pincé
rit.
pp
49
tempo rubato
sempre pp
5 — 1
m.d.
50
pp
m.d.
m.s.


molto rit.
tempo primo
m.d.
m.s.
sempre pp e lusingando
52
54
rf
56
pp
m.d.
m.s.
pp
58
(rf)


tempo primo
rit.
più pp
più pp
Sost. Ped.
pp
m.d.
m.s.
Ped.
ppp
laissez vibrer

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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, the craft of an editor becomes much more interesting. When these pieces were first written I doubt whether the composer objectively considered all the options, (at the time they had so much else to think about) and I also 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 this witty introduction by Debussy, 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 very rarely indicated metronome speeds 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, With practice it is possible to combine the sostenuto and soft pedals with the left foot, and together with the sustaining pedal, one can achieve a beautiful impressionist sound with orchestral and pianistic effect.

Debussy was not always particular about writing a perfect number of notes and rests within a beat or bar, and sometimes one finds inaccuracies and confusion in rhythm. In these instances I believe that the composer preferred to present his music visually and that means we enjoy a certain freedom in interpreting his intentions. I have noted those bars where a lack of mathematical exactitude might cause concern.

- There is neither a French nor Italian tempo indication, nor metronome speed (see above) in the original edition (Durand) and I suggest possibly choosing the tempo from bar **11.**
- **13** 2nd beat : the repeated RH thumb A flat is missing; I have included it for pianistic and aesthetic reasons.
- **21** LH slightly altered to match **20**
- **25** A bar which defies mathematical analysis… here is my solution
- **31 — 40** mostly re-presented in 2/4 time, logically following the rhythmic pattern. The term *scherzandare* has been imaginatively invented by Debussy (possibly an amalgam of *scherzando* and *andare*).
- **34** I wonder whether the RH D flats should be naturals ?
- **37** Bass octave F# is a crotchet in the original, possibly an error (see the next two bars)
- **39** Confusion here… the final 3 semiquavers could be interpreted as a triplet
- **42** 4/4 time-signature missing here — probably an oversight
- **43** Bass B — a *sforzato* quaver to match **45**
- **46 & 47** It is difficult to reconcile *"pincé"* and the tenuto sign in the original
- **49** This rubato link back to the A section is possibly one of the most magical in all Debussy's output for piano
- **54** 3rd beat modified to match **3**
- **61** Tempo primo probably as **31** *giocoso scherzandare*
- **63** The sostenuto pedal suggestion is editorial
- **68** The pedal mark is editorial, time values of the arpeggios have been halved for consistency and the 2nd beat A flat arpeggio has been slightly modified.

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.

lumineux	radiant
pincé	plucked
laisser vibrer	hold the pedal