Claude Debussy: *Estampes*, No. 1 'Pagodes' and No. 2 'La soirée dans Grenade'

CD 3 tracks 1–2

Claude Debussy (1862–1918) was one of the most influential composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He reacted against the Romanticism of 19th-century German music by composing in his own distinctive style. Debussy's music is often associated with **Impressionism**; a movement in which art suggests the atmosphere and environment of the subject rather than attempting to be fully descriptive and programmatic. In the same way, Debussy's music places more emphasis on colour and texture rather than a more direct expression of emotion, relying instead on allusion and understatement.

Debussy's piano-writing often used the extreme registers, with widely spaced chords and **parallel movement** and took a new approach to pedalling which produced subtle blending effects. Several of Debussy's piano pieces demonstrate that he was influenced by non-Western scales and instruments.

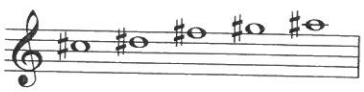
Following the score

Debussy gave most of his performance markings in French; it will help your understanding of the music if you translate these. The abbreviations m.g. and m.d. stand for *main gauche* (left hand) and *main droite* (right hand). Parts of 'La soirée dans Grenade' use three staves in order for the music to be more easily read e.g. bars 96–108.

Estampes (*Prints*)(1903) is a set of three pieces for piano. It is sometimes described as Debussy's first truly impressionistic piano work.

No. 1 'Pagodes' (Pagodas)

In 'Pagodes' Debussy attempted to capture some of the Javanese gamelan sound through his use of the **pentatonic scale**, **ostinato**, shimmering layered textures and interlocking rhythms. Debussy uses the pentatonic scale to emulate the *slendro* scale found in Javanese gamelan music.

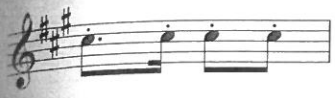


Here is the melody line in bars 4–5, based on the pentatonic scale.

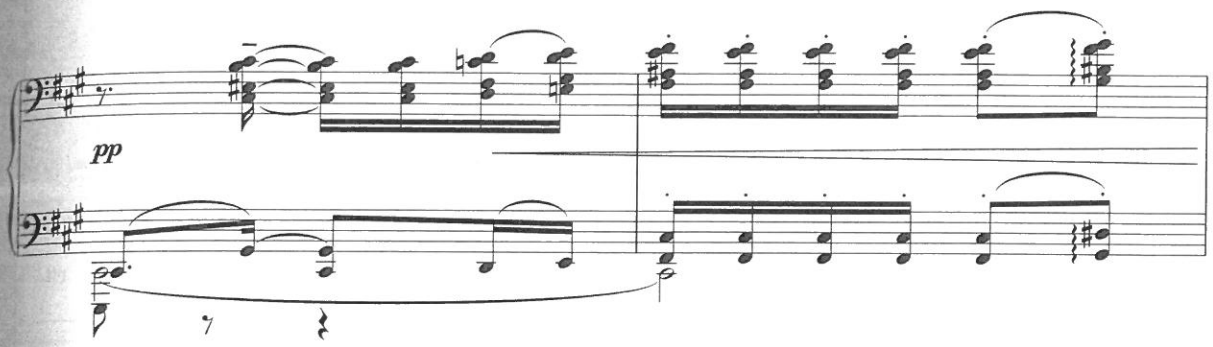
A feeling of underlying stillness is created in part by the use of long pedal points, slowing the rate of harmonic change, eg. bars 61–64.

No. 2 'La soirée dans Grenade' (The evening in Granada)

Debussy evokes varied images of Spain through a range of techniques such as the use of a **habanera** rhythm and the imitation of strummed guitar chords by the piano. The ostinato habanera dance rhythm permeates the entire piece.

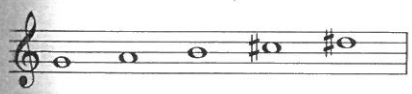


The guitar strumming effect first appears in bars 17–18. Notice the use of **arpeggiation** shown by the wiggly lines in bar 18.



Many of the chords use **parallel movement** (where the movement of two or more parts use the same interval in the same direction) as in the example above. This is a common characteristic of Debussy's music.

In bars 23–28 Debussy uses the **whole tone scale**.



Notice the long pedal points Debussy uses to provide a tonal centre for the music e.g. the C♯ in bars 5–14. A dance-like section opens at bar 38 marked '*Très rhythmé,* ***mf*** *en augmentant beaucoup*' (very rhythmic and getting a lot louder).

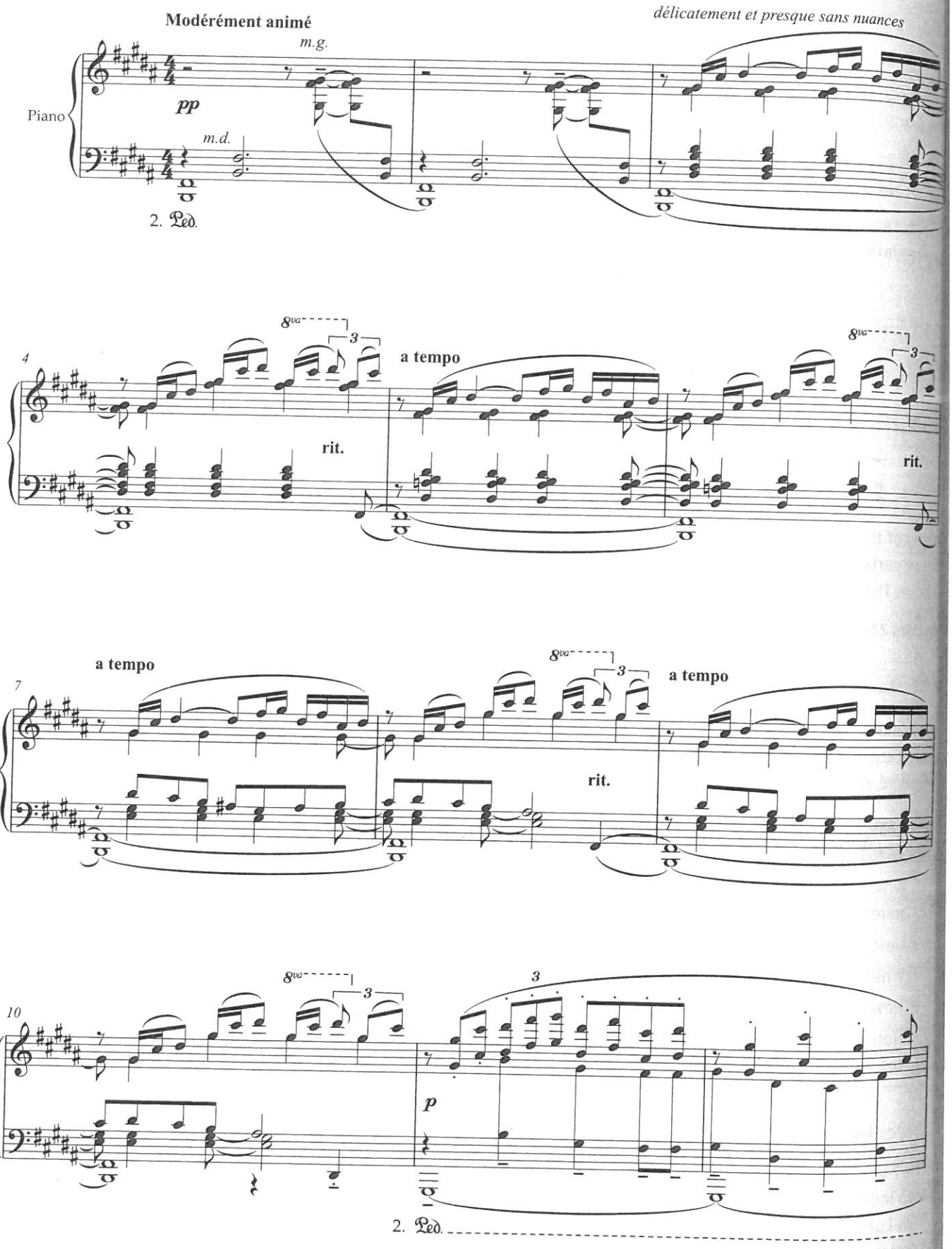
What to listen for

- Which characteristics of Impressionism are evident in 'Pagodes' and 'La soirée dans Grenade'?
- Describe the different textures used in each piece.
- Which aspect of the gamelan sound does Debussy evoke in 'Pagodes'?
- How does Debussy evoke Spain in 'La soirée dans Grenade'?
- Notice the use of the double-harmonic scale (sometimes referred to as the Arabic scale) starting at bar 7.

Wider listening

The two movements of *Estampes* are examples of the fusion of Classical music with Indonesian and Spanish music. In *Bachianas Brasileiras*, the composer Villa-Lobos fuses elements of the music of his native Brazil with the contrapuntal spirit of J. S. Bach's music. You could examine how the musical elements are treated in No. 2 for small orchestra and No. 5 for soprano and cellos.

Estampes
No. 1 'Pagodes'



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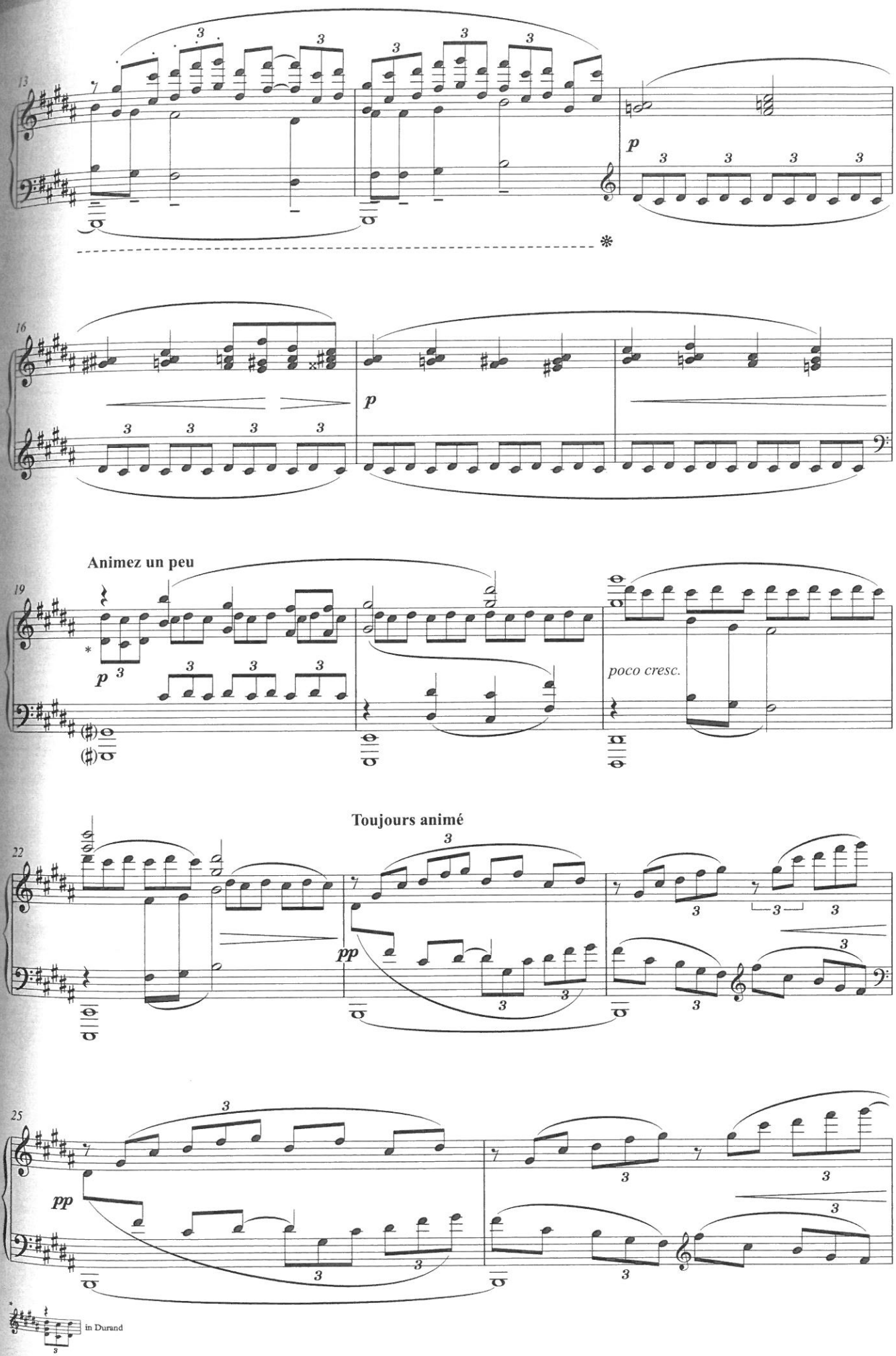
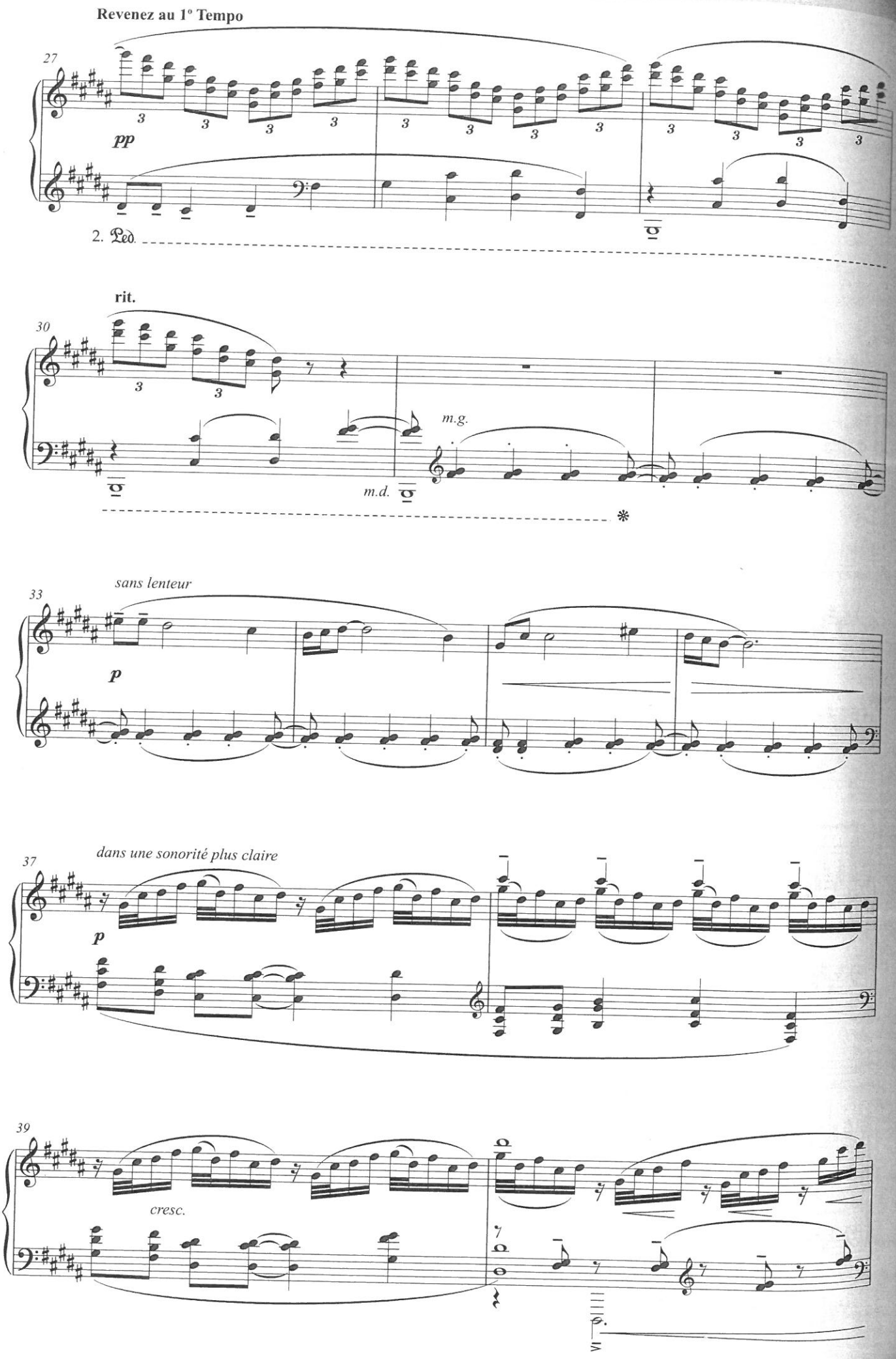
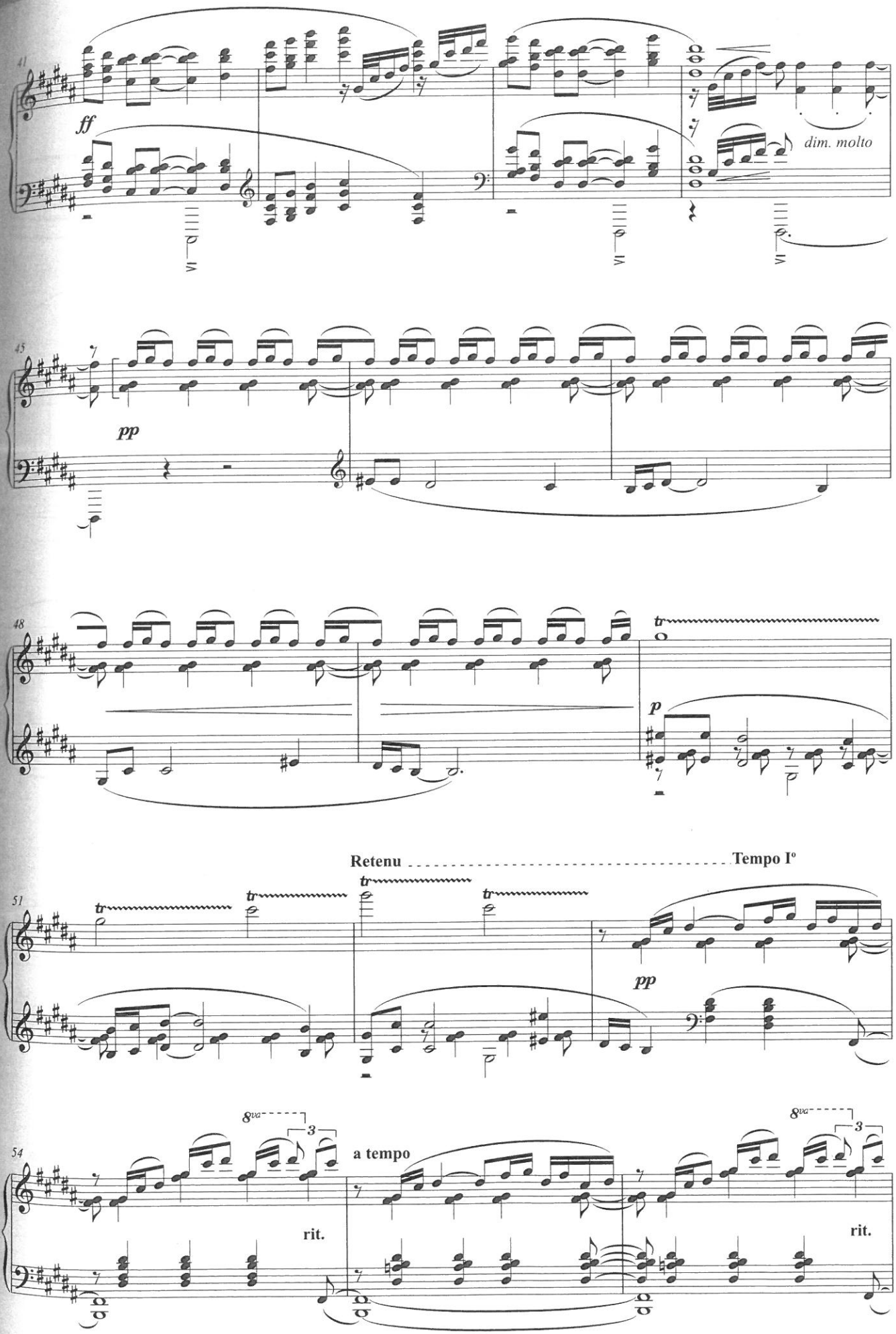
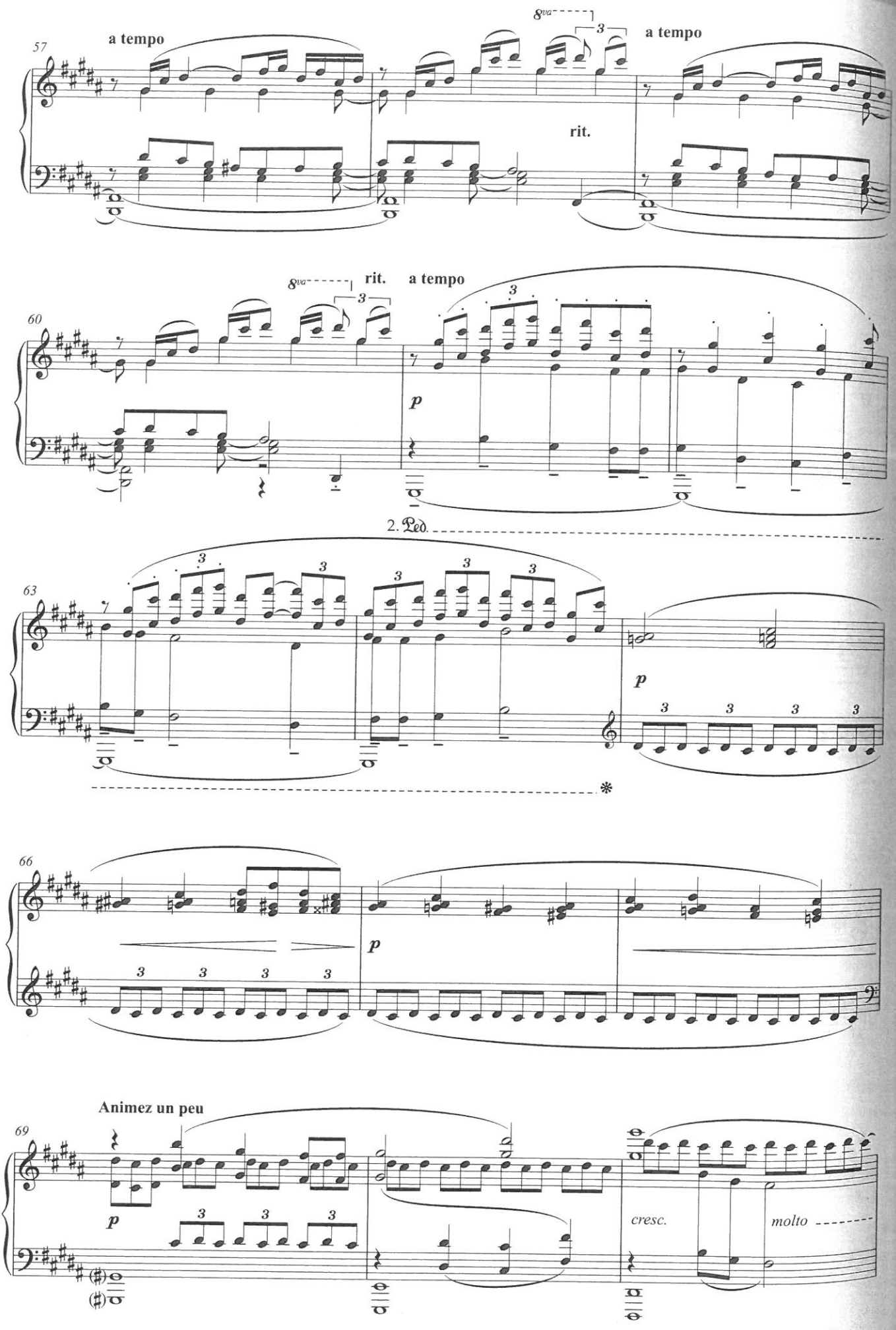
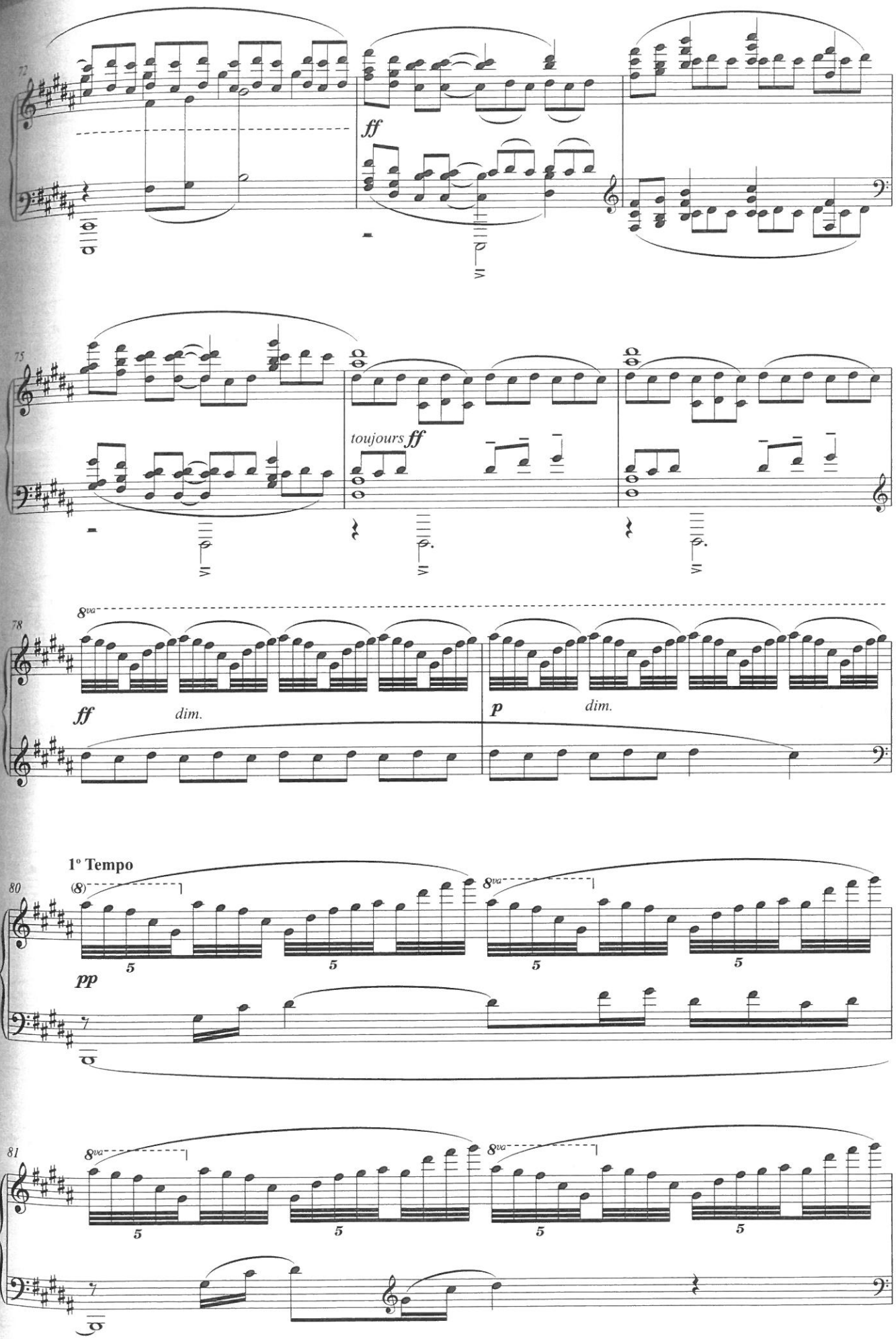
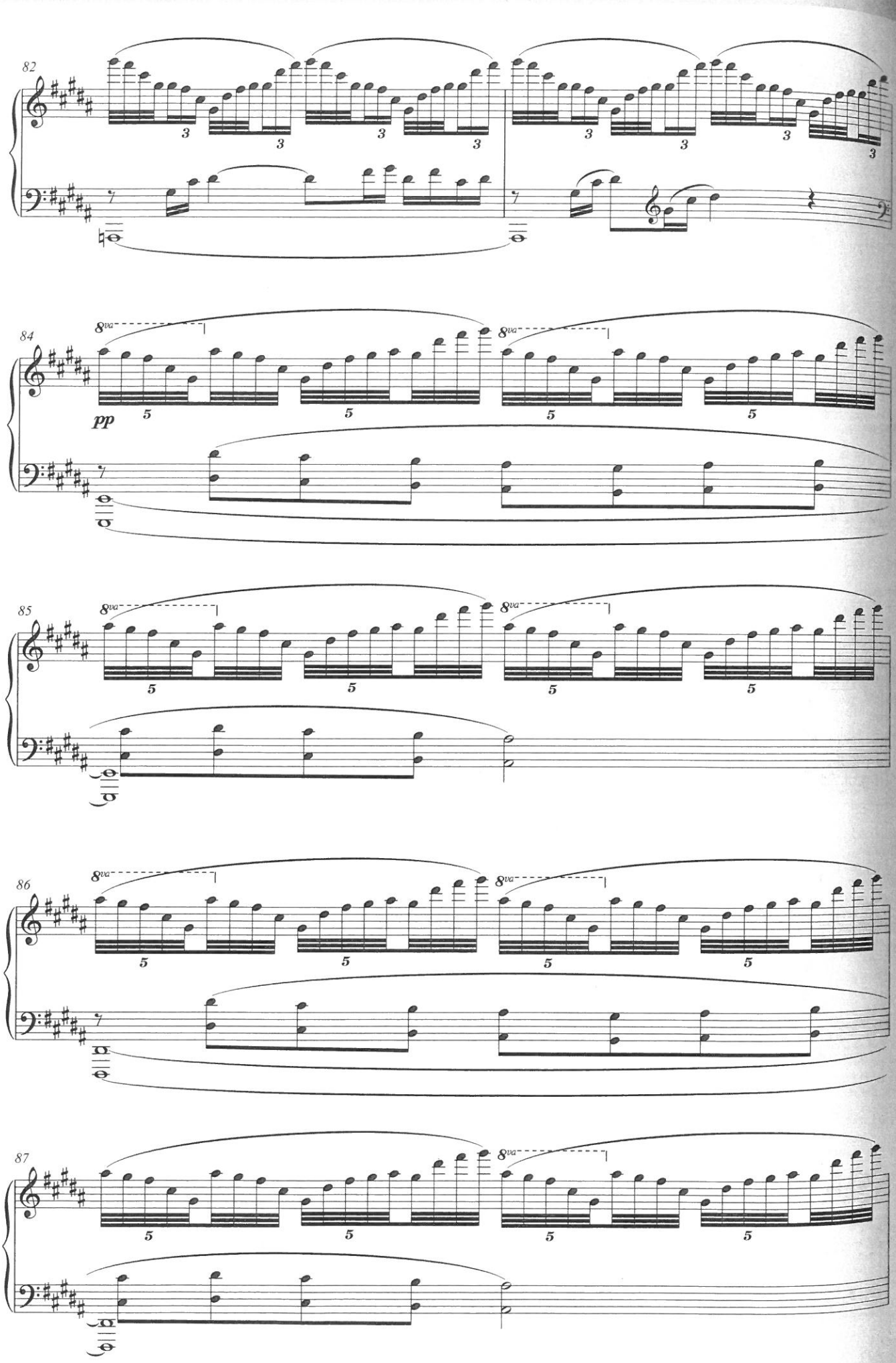

13
p
16
p
Animez un peu
19
p
poco cresc.
Toujours animé
22
pp
25
pp
in Durand

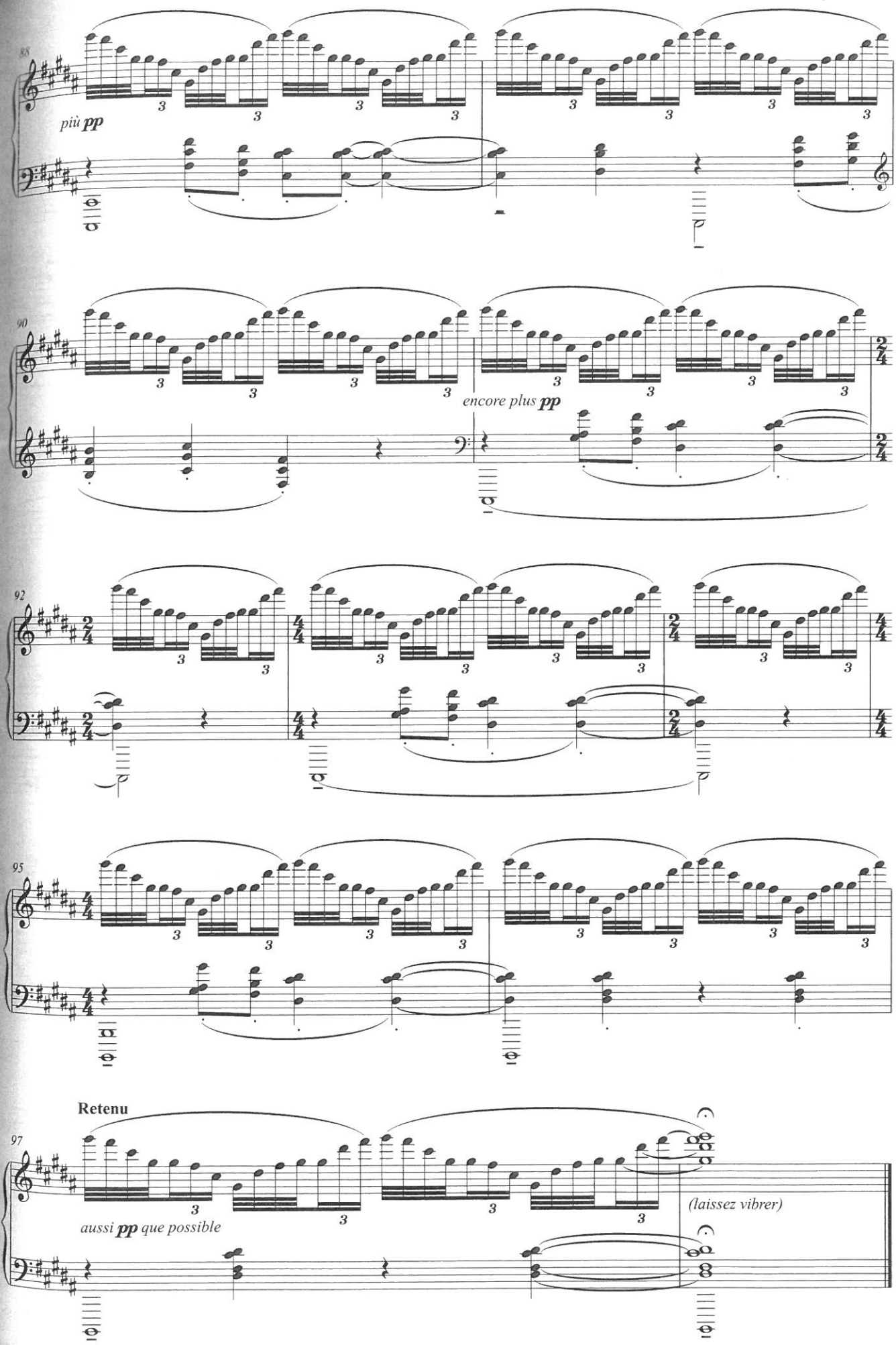

Revenez au 1° Tempo
27
pp
2. Ped.
rit.
30
m.g.
m.d.
sans lenteur
33
p
dans une sonorité plus claire
37
p
39
cresc.


41
ff
dim. molto
45
pp
48
tr
p
Retenu
Tempo I°
51
tr
pp
54
8va
3
a tempo
rit.


57
a tempo
8va
3
a tempo
rit.
60
8va
rit.
a tempo
p
2. Ped.
63
p
*
66
p
Animez un peu
69
p
cresc.
molto


72
ff
75
toujours ff
78
8va
ff
dim.
p
dim.
1° Tempo
80
(8)
8va
pp
81
8va
8va


82
84
8va
pp
85
86
87


88
più pp
90
encore plus pp
92
95
Retenu
97
aussi pp que possible
(laissez vibrer)

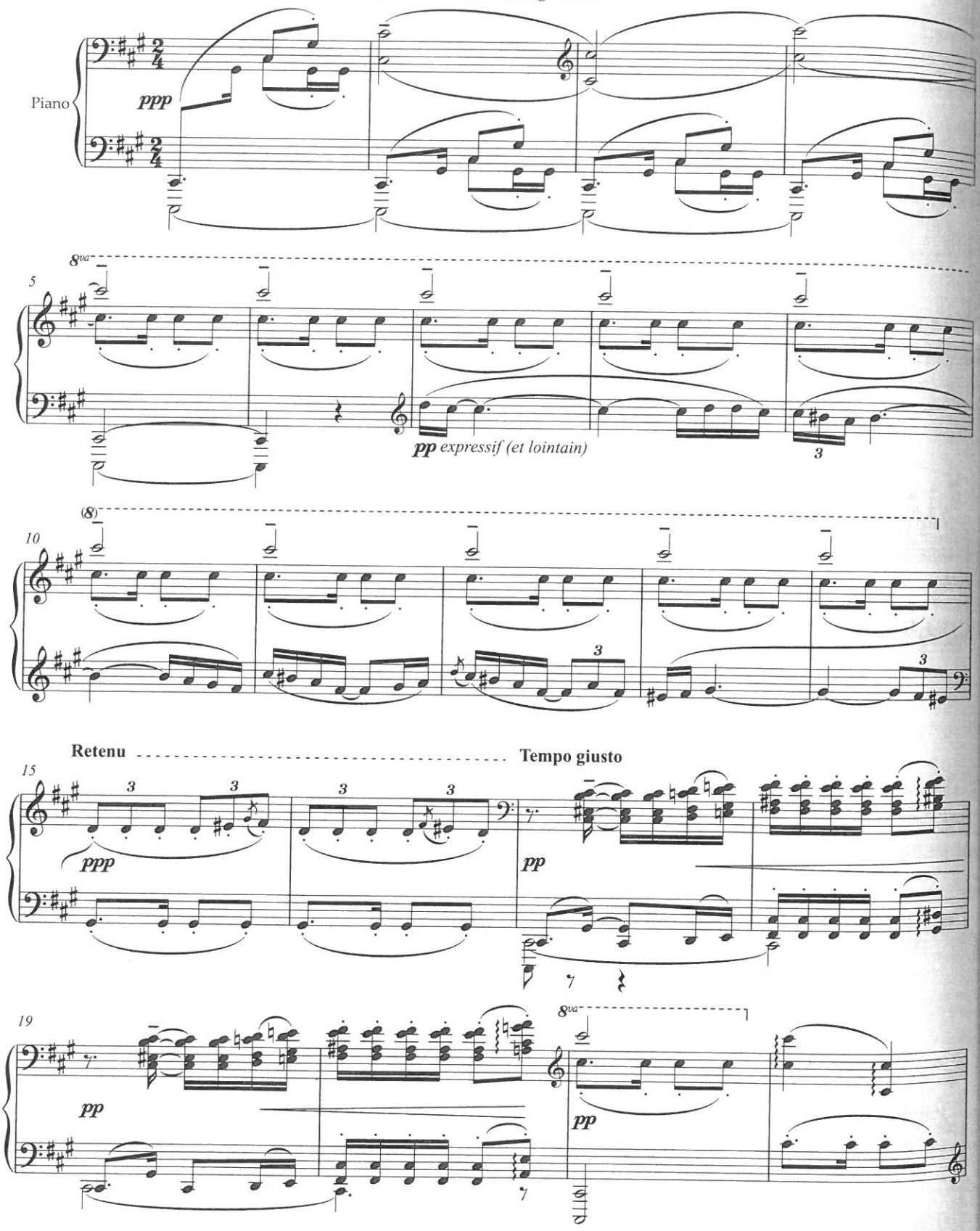
No. 2 'La soirée dans Grenade'

CD 3 track 2

Claude Debussy

Mouvement de habanera

Commencer lentement dans un rythme nonchalamment gracieux



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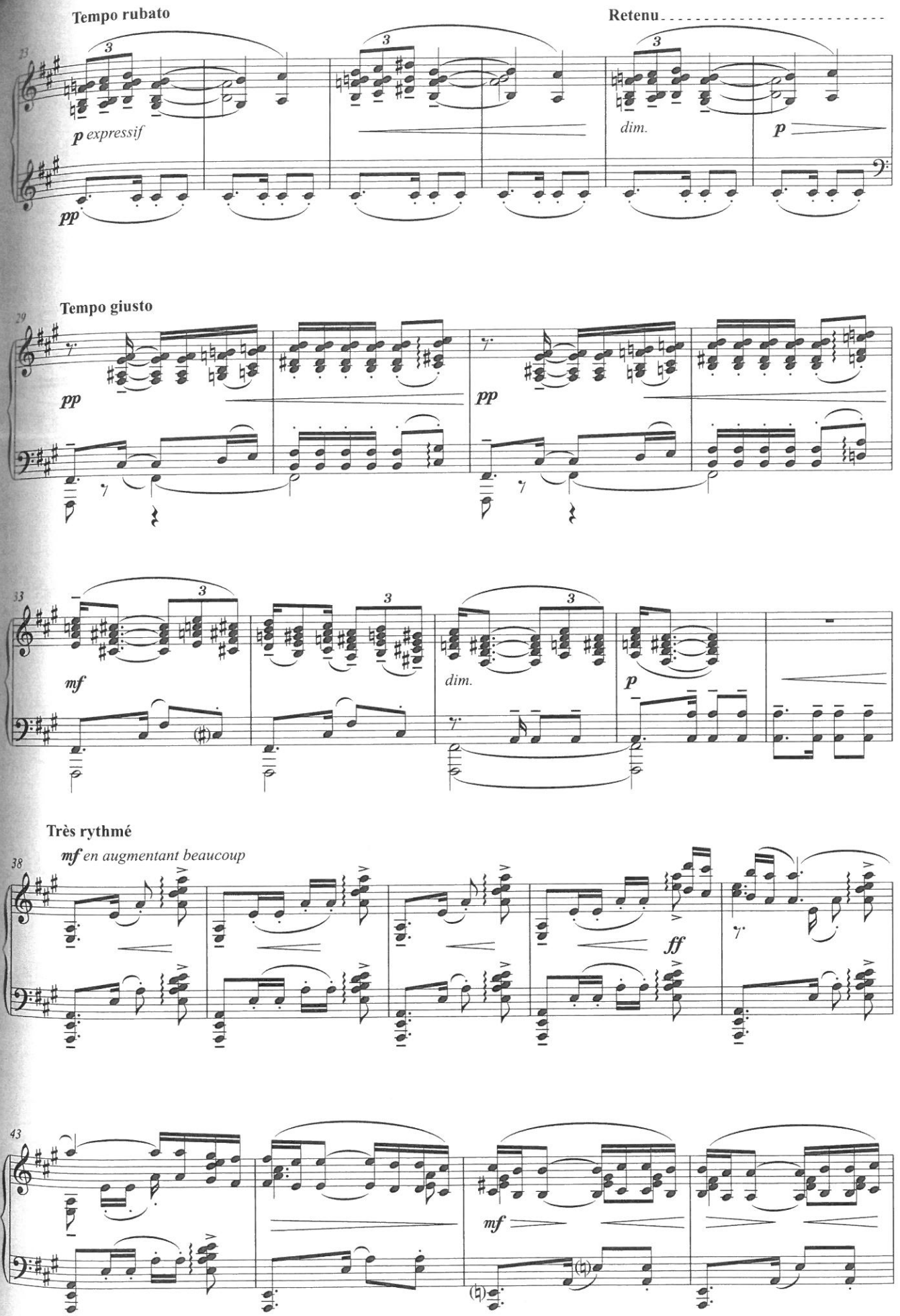
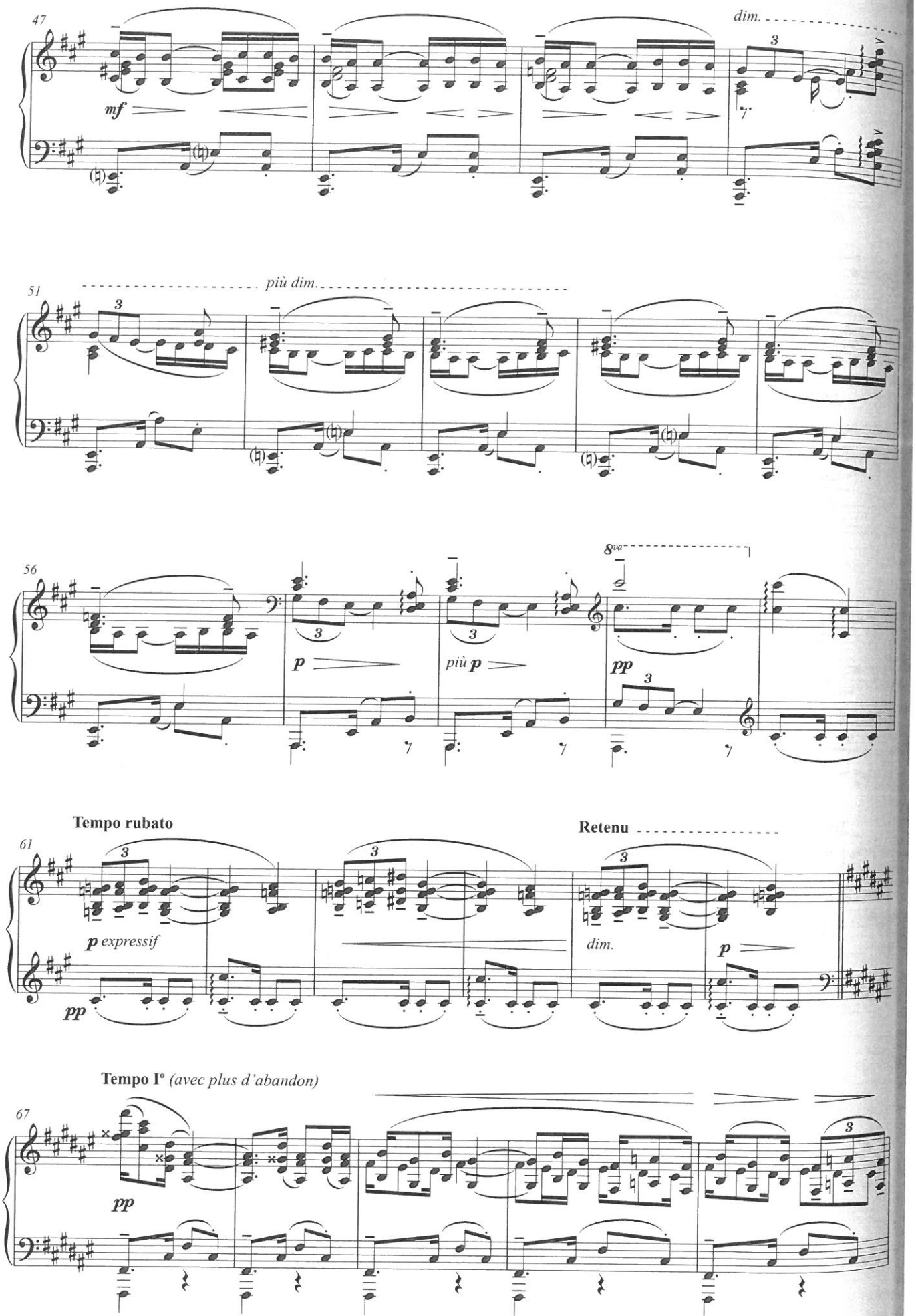
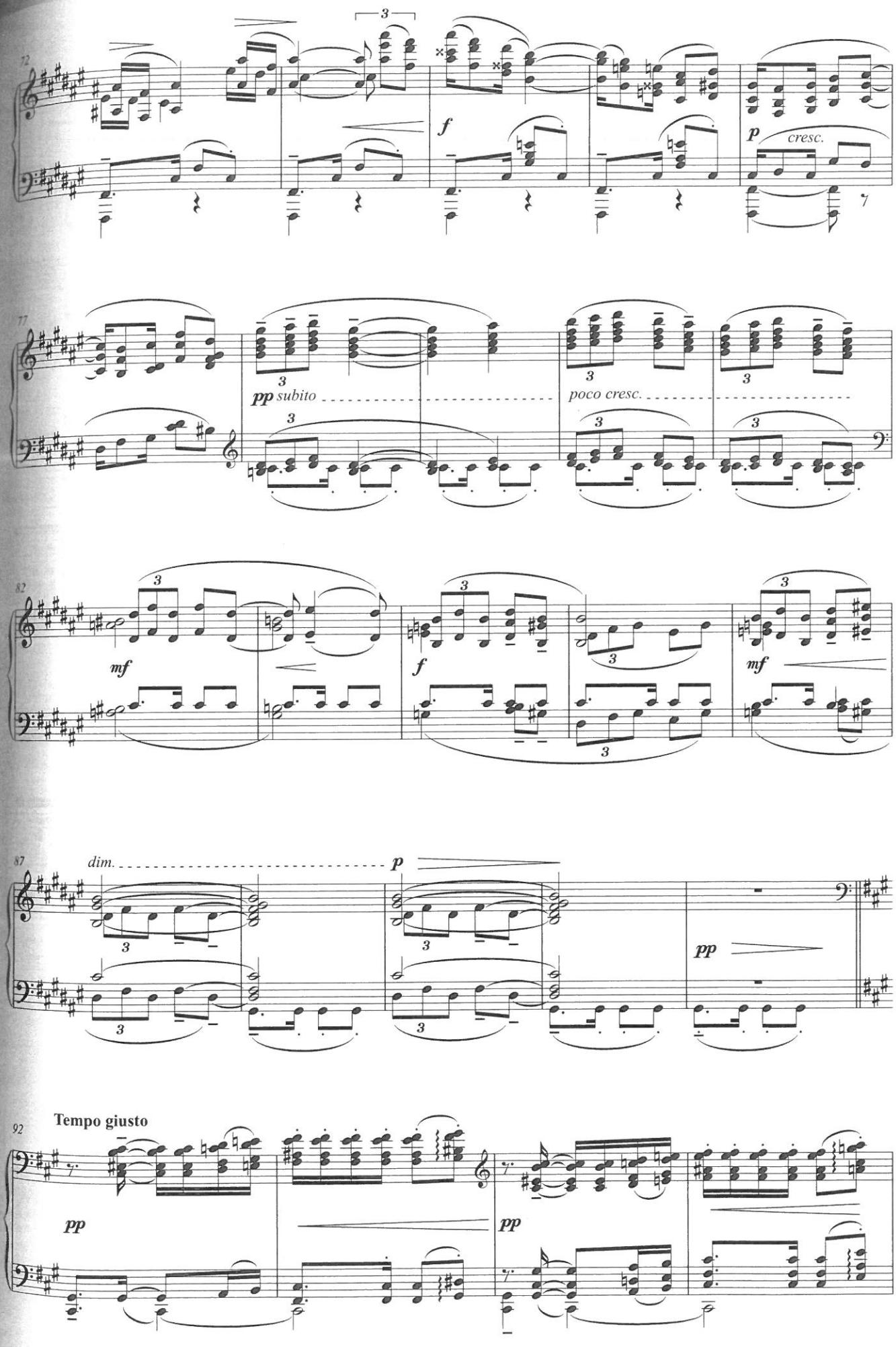
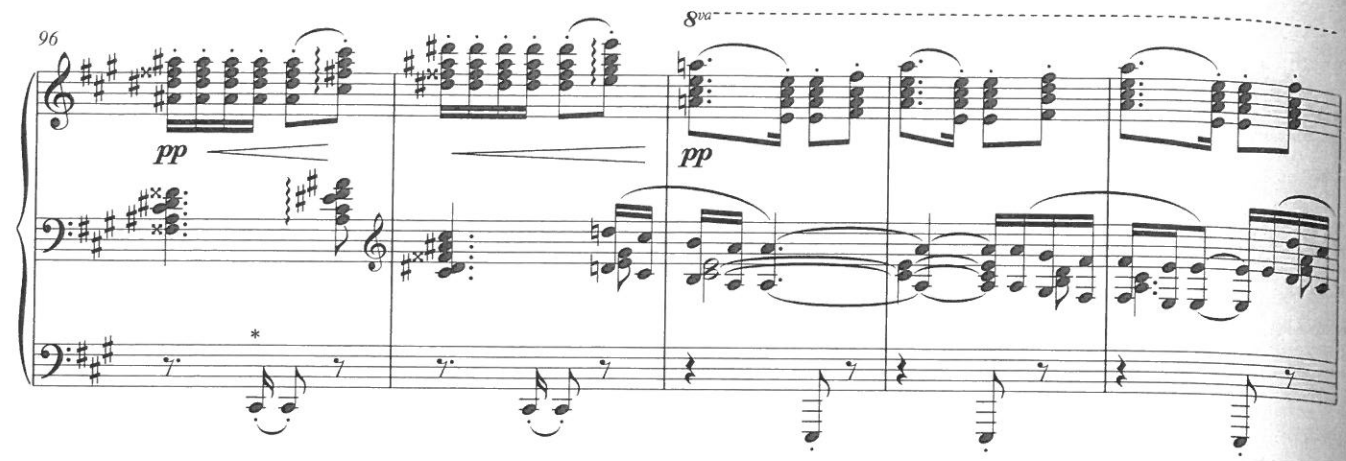
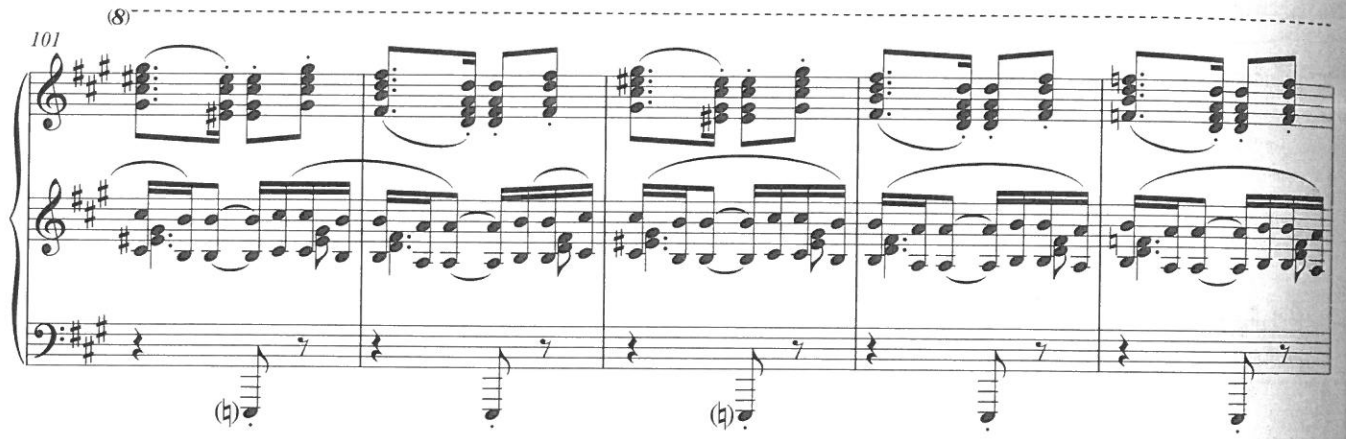
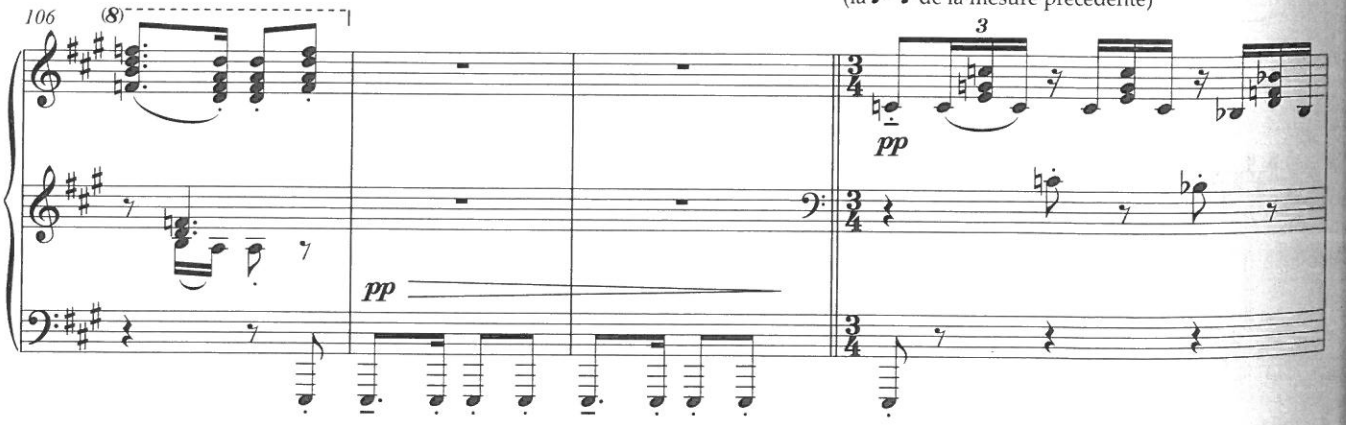

Tempo rubato
Retenu
23
p expressif
pp
dim.
p
Tempo giusto
29
pp
pp
33
mf
dim.
p
Très rythmé
mf en augmentant beaucoup
38
ff
43
mf

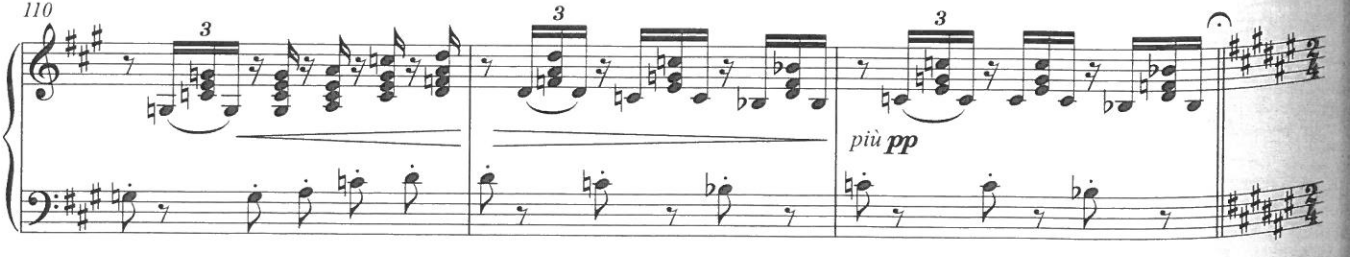

47
mf
dim.
51
più dim.
56
8va
p
più p
pp
Tempo rubato
61
p expressif
pp
Retenu
dim.
p
Tempo I° (avec plus d'abandon)
67
pp


72
f
p
cresc.
77
pp subito
poco cresc.
82
mf
f
mf
87
dim.
p
pp
92
Tempo giusto
pp
pp

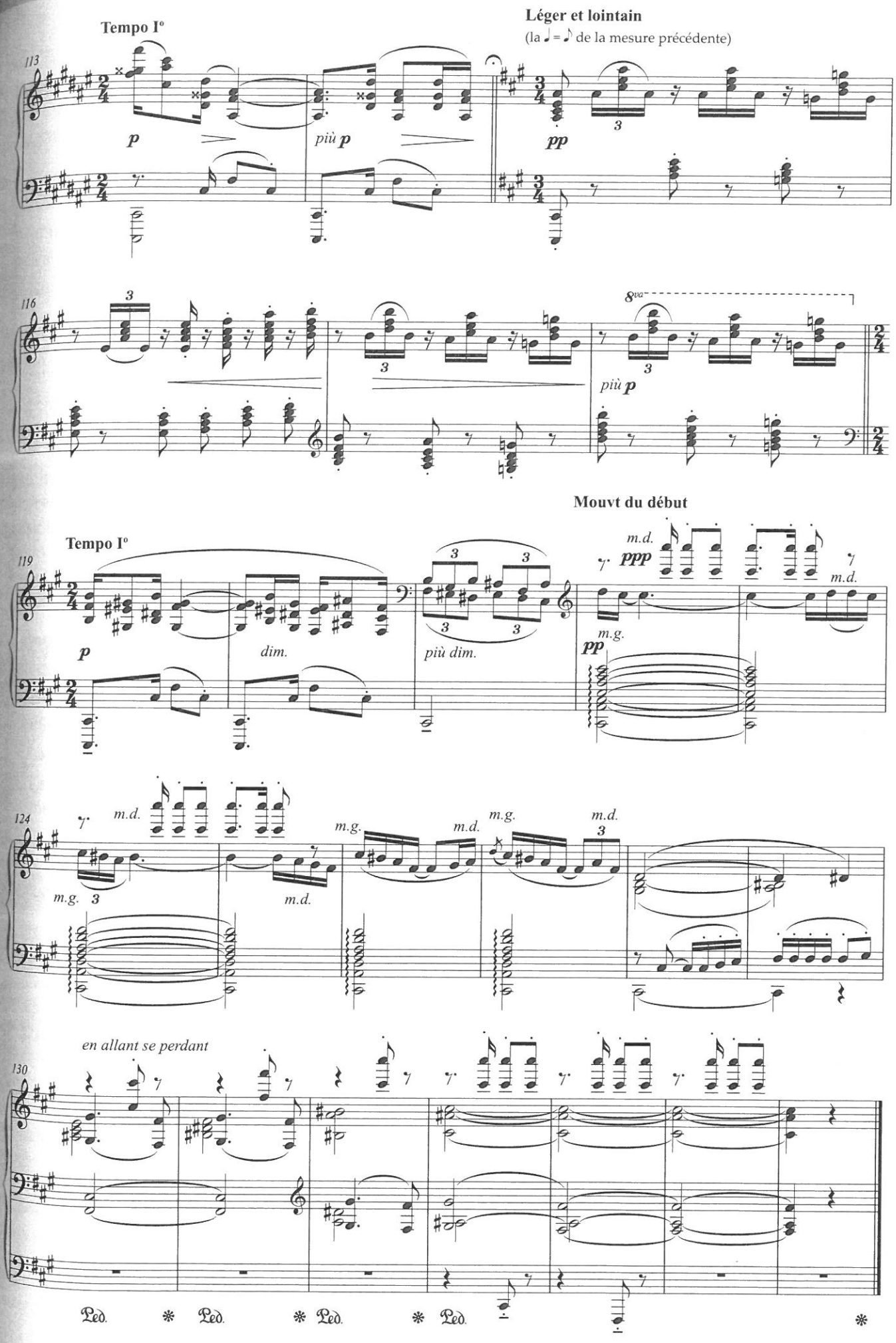

96
8va
pp
pp
*


101
(8)
(♮)
(♮)


106
(8)
pp
Léger et lointain
(la ♩ = ♪ de la mesure précédente)
3
pp


110
3
3
3
più pp

* Durand


Tempo I°
Léger et lointain
(la ♩ = ♪ de la mesure précédente)
113
p
più p
pp
116
8va
più p
Mouvt du début
Tempo I°
119
p
dim.
più dim.
m.d.
ppp
m.g.
pp
124
m.d.
m.g.
3
m.d.
m.g.
m.d.
m.g.
m.d.
3
en allant se perdant
130
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.