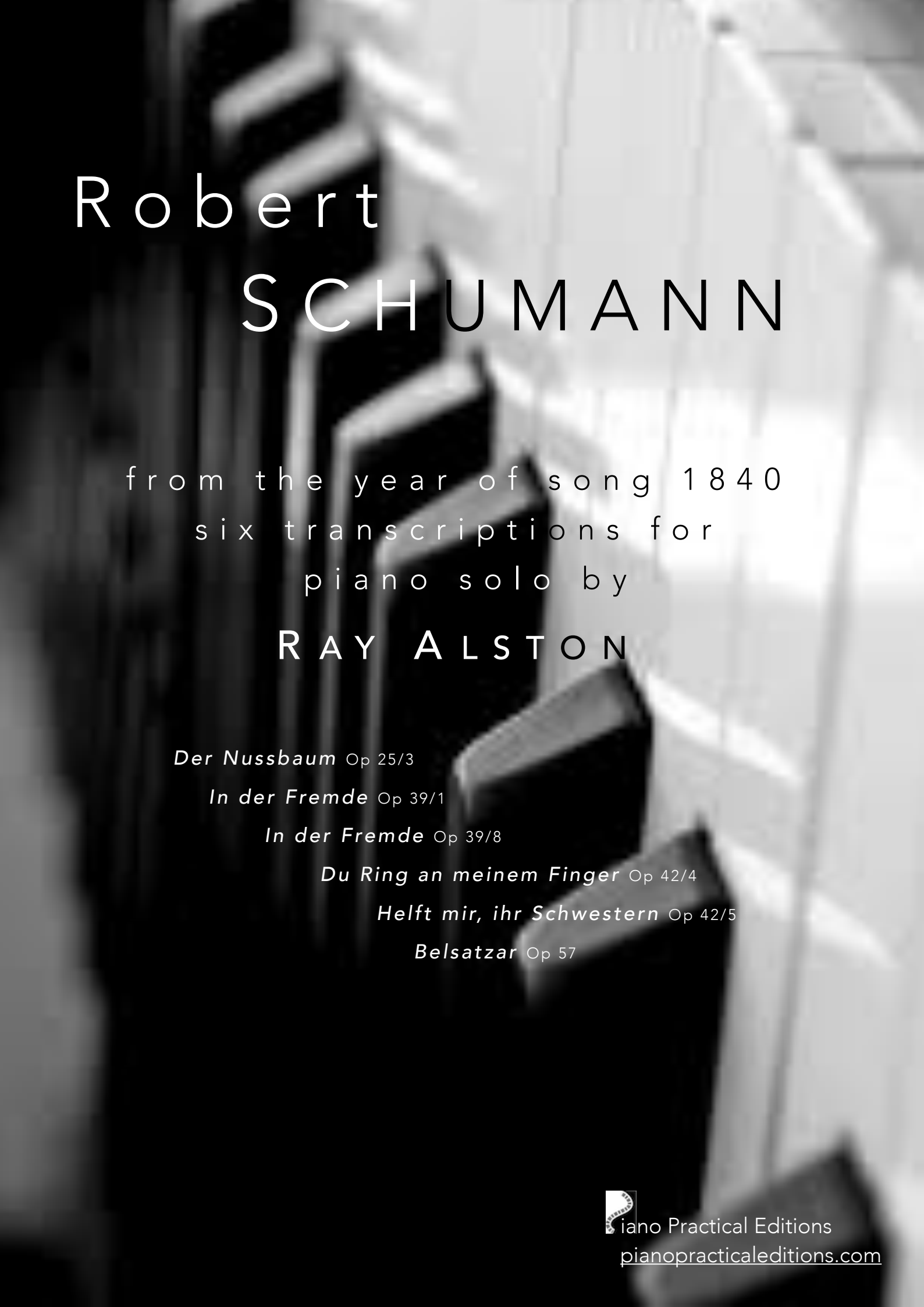

Robert SCHUMANN

from the year of song 1840
six transcriptions for
piano solo by

RAY ALSTON

Der Nussbaum Op 25/3

In der Fremde Op 39/1

In der Fremde Op 39/8

Du Ring an meinem Finger Op 42/4

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern Op 42/5

Belsatzar Op 57

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Robert SCHUMANN 1810 - 1856

from the year of song 1840

six transcriptions for piano solo by RAY ALSTON

for my very dear friends Will & Jean Mason

Op 25/3 *Der Nussbaum* page **3**
Op 39/1 *In der Fremde* page **9**
Op 39/8 *In der Fremde* page **16**
Op 42/4 *Du Ring an meinem Finger* page **20**
Op 42/5 *Helft mir, ihr Schwestern* page **25**
Op 57 *Belsatzar* page **30**

At the age of 30, 1840 was a dramatic year and turning point in Schumann's life; after a difficult and bitter legal battle with his ex-piano teacher and future father-in-law, on 12 September he finally married Clara Wieck, simultaneously ceasing to compose exclusively for the piano and devoting himself to the voice.

In that year, Schumann wrote well over 100 songs, many of which are quite extraordinary. These transcriptions aim to fill the gap between Clara's straightforward piano solo arrangements and the more flamboyant versions of Liszt and Godowsky.

I have chosen six and with the exception of Belsatzar they are inspired by the profound passion between Robert and Clara; he referred to the song cycle Op 39 as "my most romantic music ever, with much of you in it, dearest Clara".

My purpose was to discover the essence of this irresistible music, at the same time creating a pianistic challenge and an addition to the recital repertoire. I have faithfully kept to the original melodic lines and harmonies with some artistic licence.

One of Schumann's first song cycles, ***Myrthen*** — Myrtles — Op 25, was a wedding present and dedicated "to his dear bride", Clara Wieck. ***Der Nussbaum*** — the Nut Tree — was sent with a letter early in 1840: "I have composed six volumes of songs — my Clara, and I include one for you which I have just written. Read the text, and then think of your Robert". Clara answered with delight: "It is the most tender song that one can imagine, and yet, despite its simplicity, so appropriate – today I have already sung it, I don't know how many times, and am completely enchanted."

Myrtle is an ancient shrub which had a ceremonial role in many civilisations and is considered to be a symbol of peace and of marriage. As a bridal adornment, the tradition was later adopted in Germany. The plant can signify — youth, virginity, fertility, innocence, immortality and fidelity — but first and foremost, love.

Adelbert von Chamisso's cycle of poems Written in 1830 ***Frauenliebe und Leben*** — A Woman's Love and Life — Op 42 describes the unfolding of a woman's love for her husband, from infatuation, engagement, marriage and beyond until the closing poem unexpectedly announces his death. The sentiment expressed in these poems is totally out of step with the concept of women's liberation, but the music is absolutely gorgeous.

Liederkreis Op 39 was composed towards the end of 1840, when a very depressed Schumann and Clara were forcibly separated by her autocratic father. The twelve songs are taken from texts by Joseph von Eichendorff. ***In der Fremde*** — In a Foreign Land — opens the cycle with a very dark poem, portraying death as a release from loneliness.

Belsatzar —Belshazzar — a ballad by one of Schumann's favourite poets, Heinrich Heine, narrating a story from the Old Testament Book of Daniel, set during the Babylonian exile after Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BCE.

Der Nussbaum

Myrthen *Op 25 N° 3*

Julius Mosen

1803 - 1867

A most appropriate poem for their forthcoming marriage – **The Walnut Tree** – Julius Mosen describing leafy boughs spread with fragrant blossoms, tenderly caressed by the wind. They form pairs, whispering, gracefully inclining their heads to kiss. Leaves are rustling for the soft song of a dreaming maiden, musing and yearning for a future bridegroom.

E grünet ein Nussbaum, vor dem Haus,
Duftig,
Luftig
Breitet er blättrig die Blätter aus.

Viel liebliche Blüten stehen d'ran,
Linde
Winde
Kommen, sie herzlich zu umfahn.

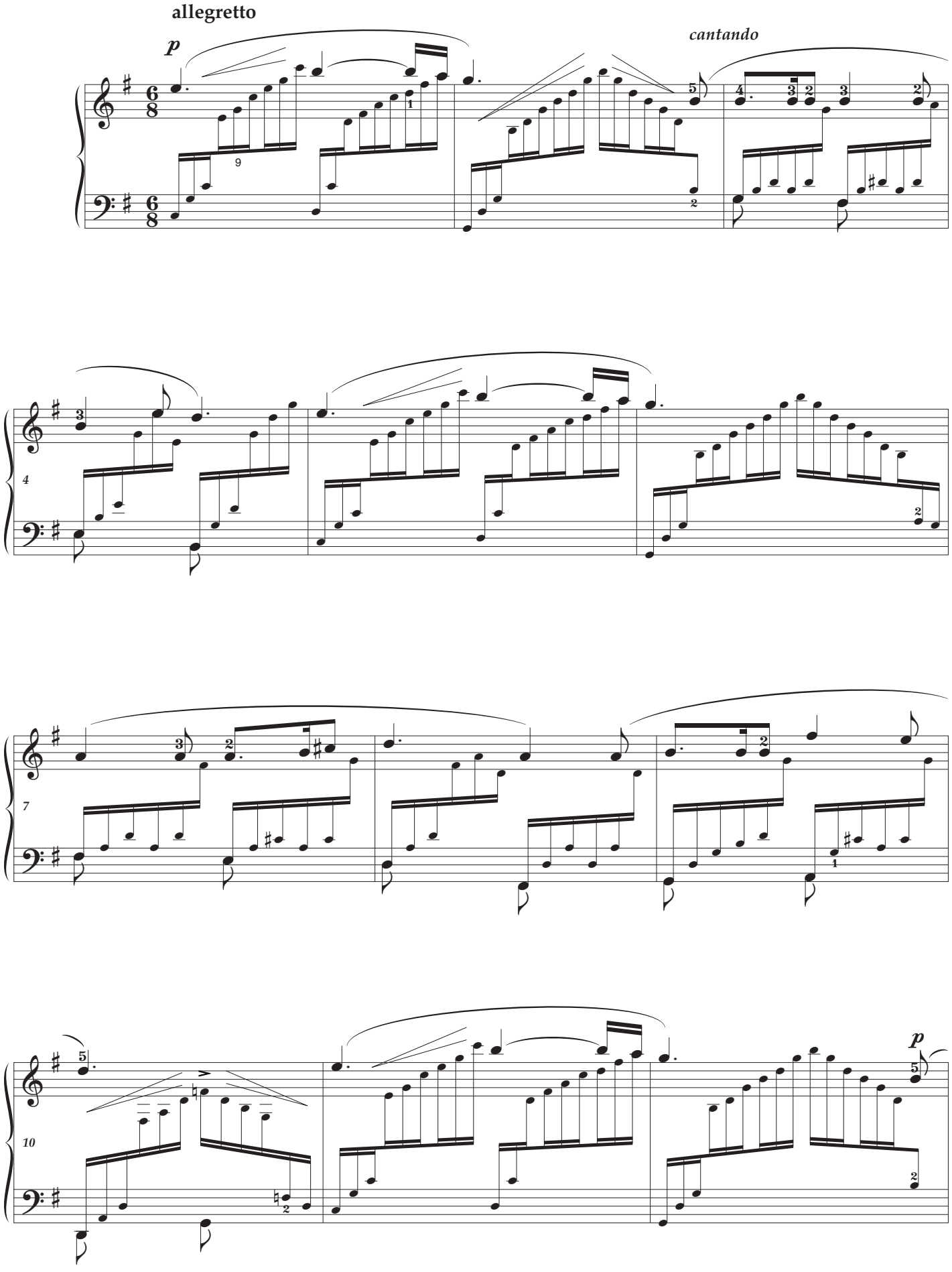
Es flüstern je zwei zu zwei gepaart,
Neigend,
Beugend
Zierlich zum Kusse die Häuptchen zart.

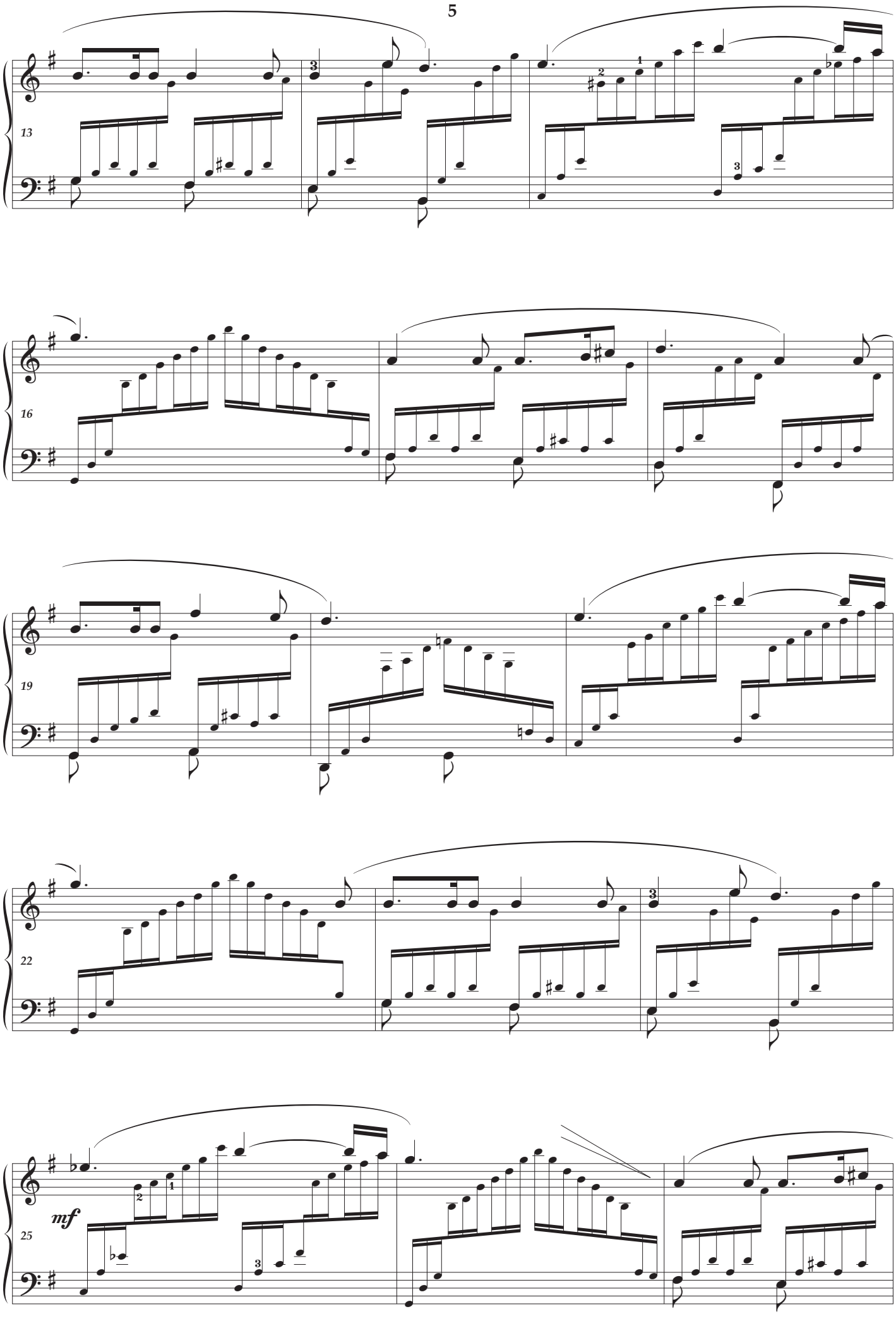
Sie flüstern von einem Mägdlein, das
Dächte
Die Nächte
Und Tagelang, wüsste ach! selber nicht was.

Sie flüstern–wer mag verstehen so gar
Leise
Weis'?
Flüstern von Bräut'gam und nächstem Jahr.

Das Mägdlien horchet, es rauscht im Baum;
Sehnend,
Wähnend
Sinkt es lächelnd in Schlaf und Traum.

Der Nussbaum




13
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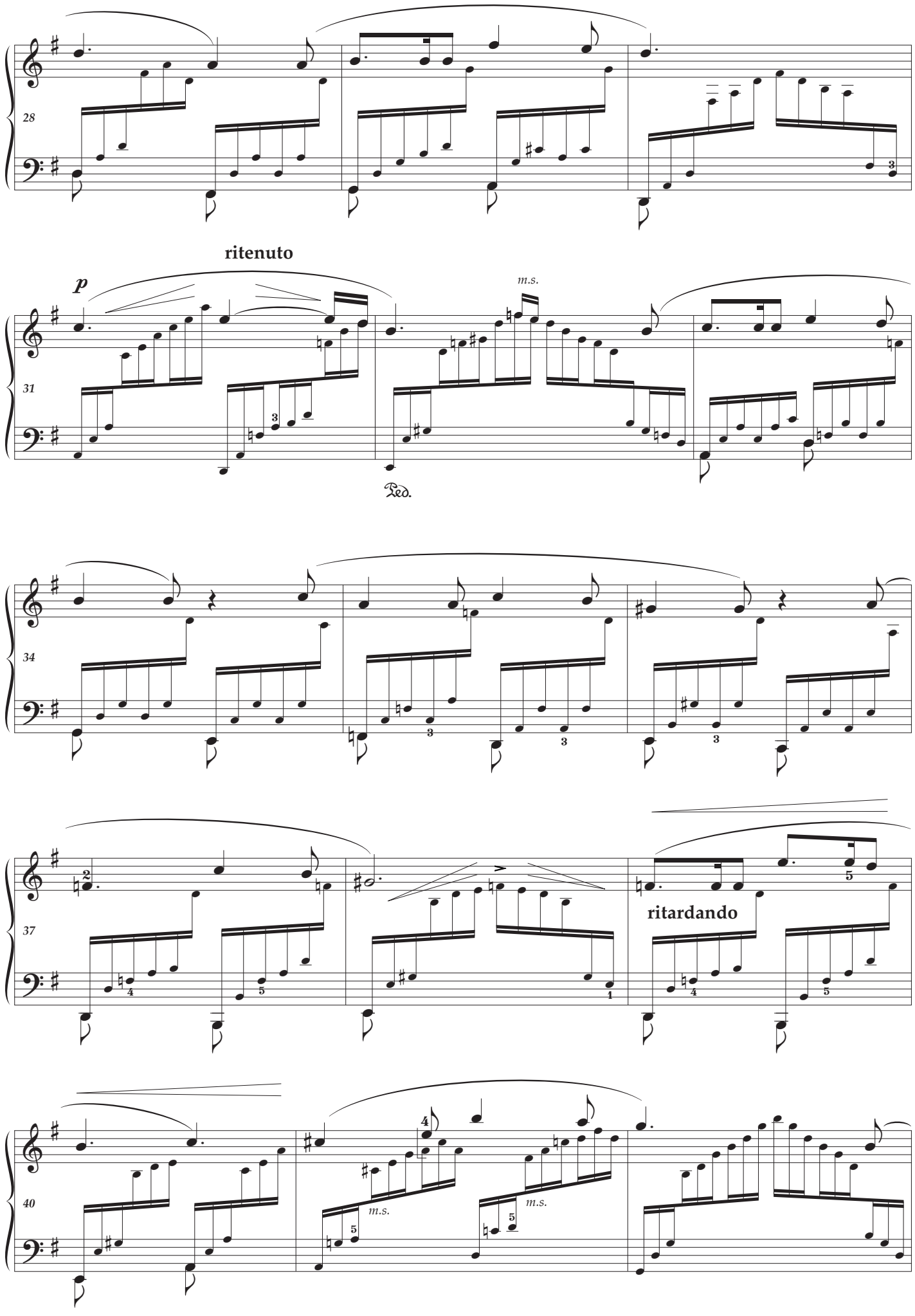
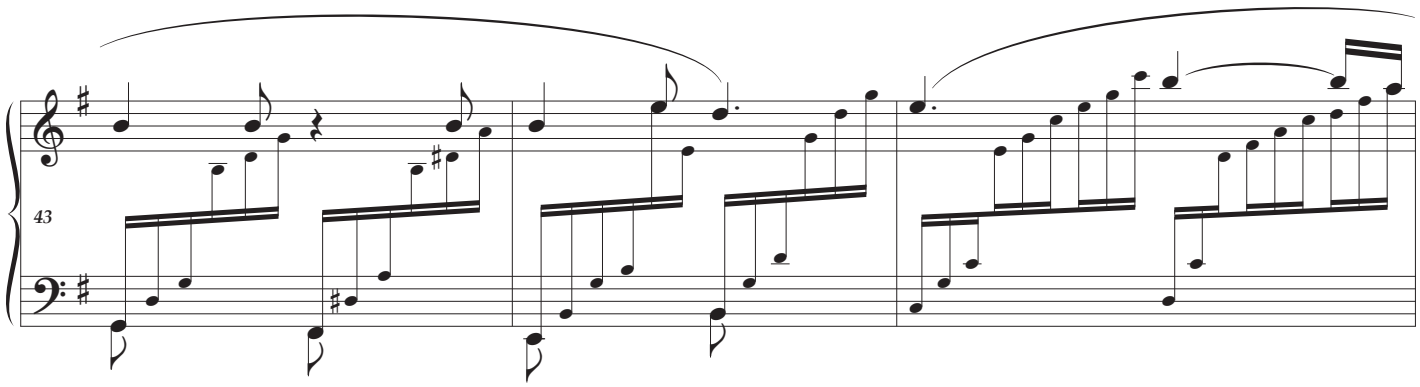
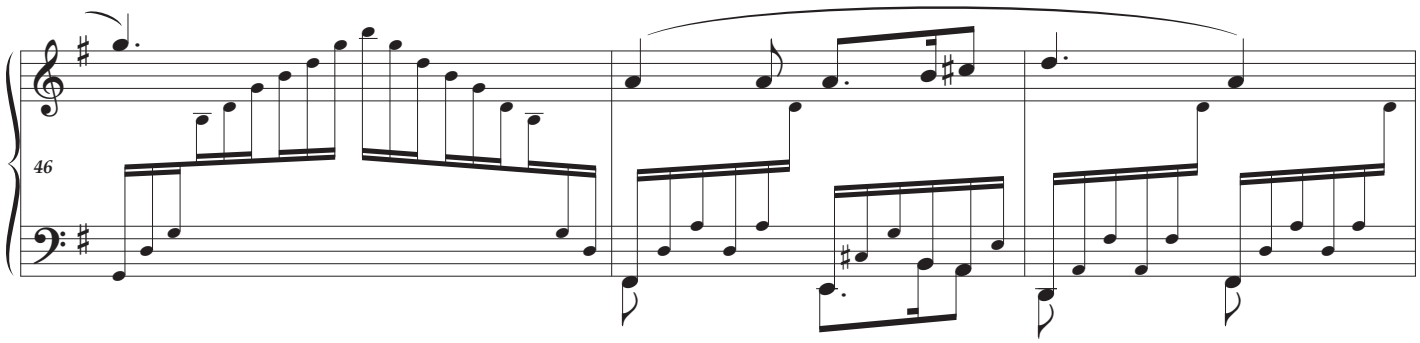
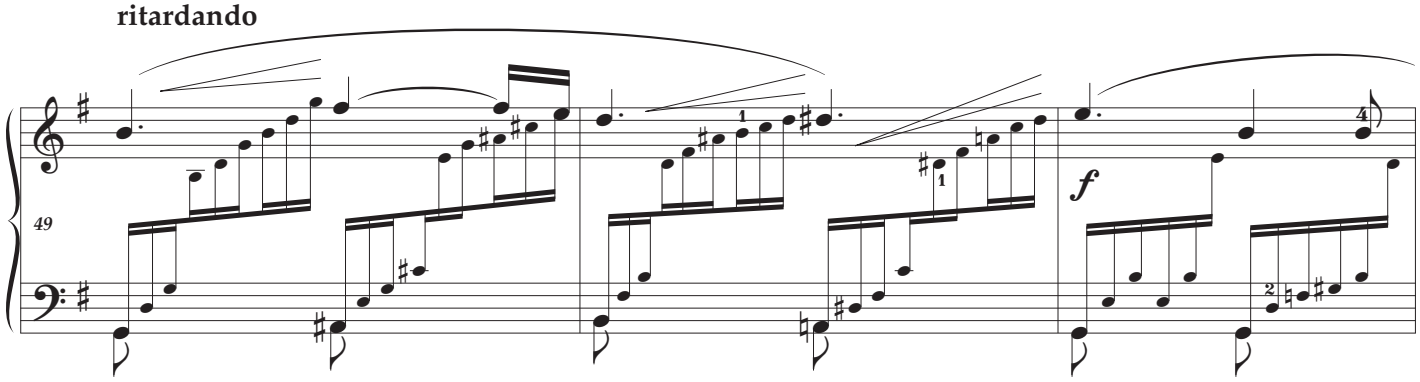
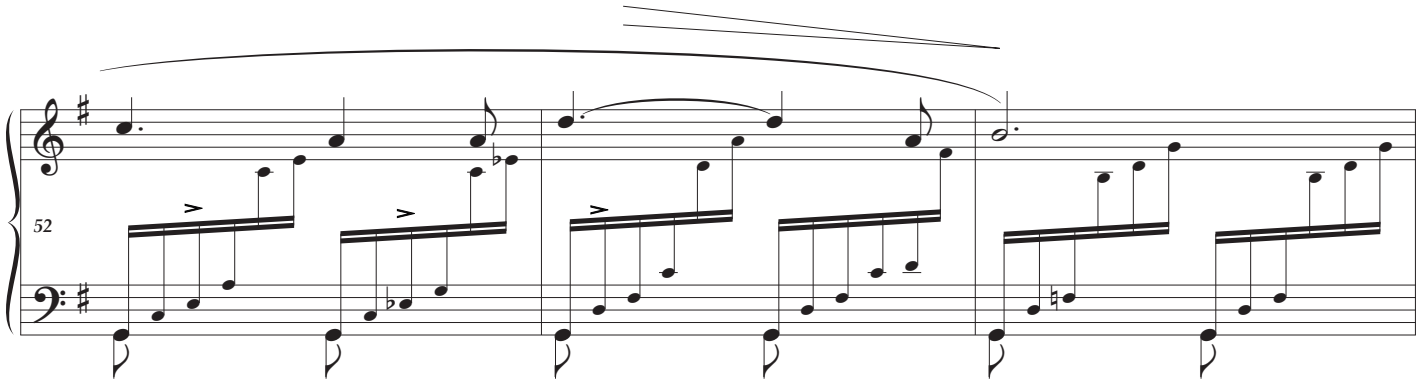

28
ritenuto
p
m.s.
31
Ped.
34
37
ritardando
40
m.s.
m.s.

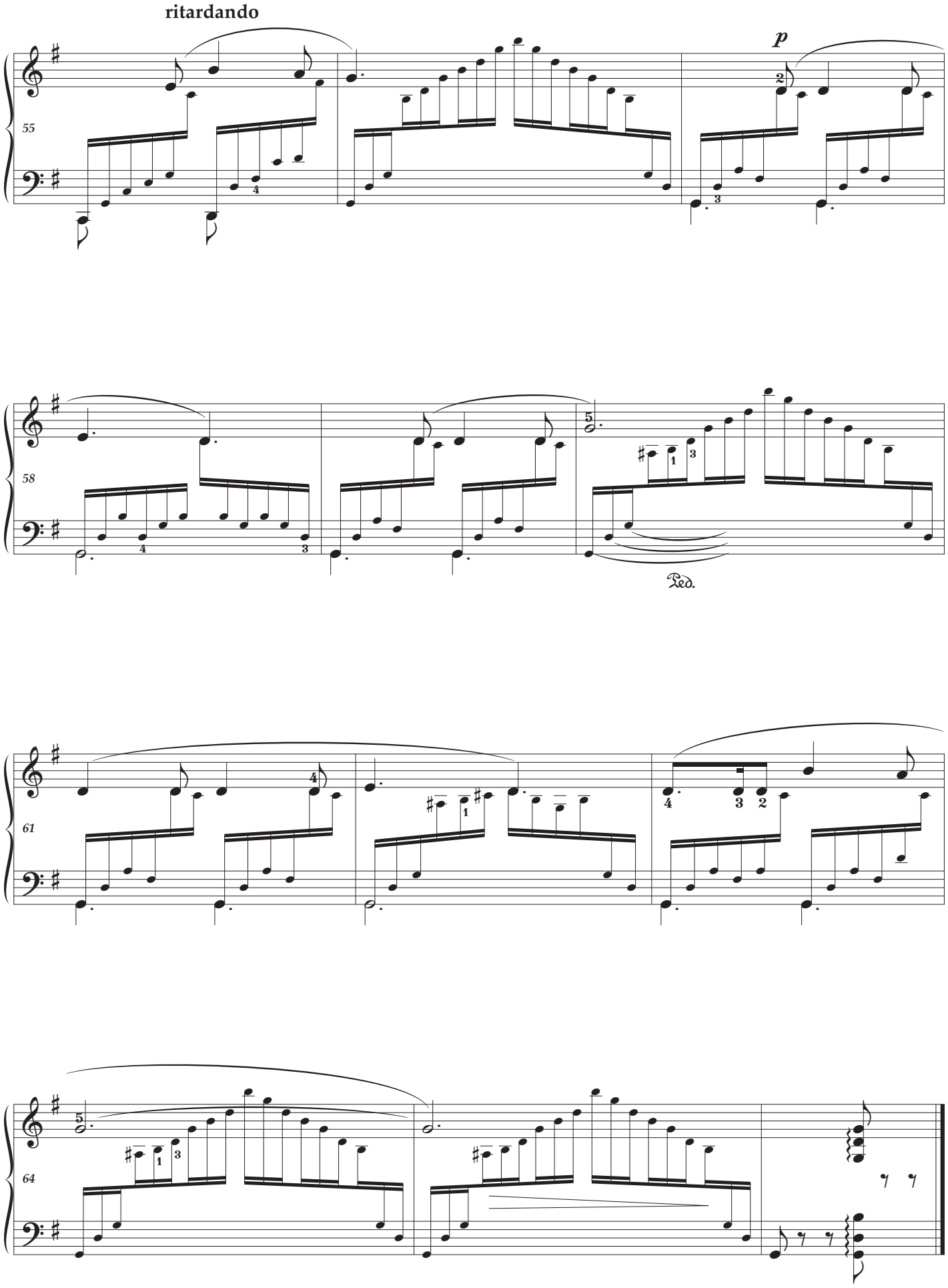




ritardando






ritardando
p
55
58
Ped.
61
64

In der Fremde

Liederkreis *Op 39 N° 1*

Joseph von Eichendorff

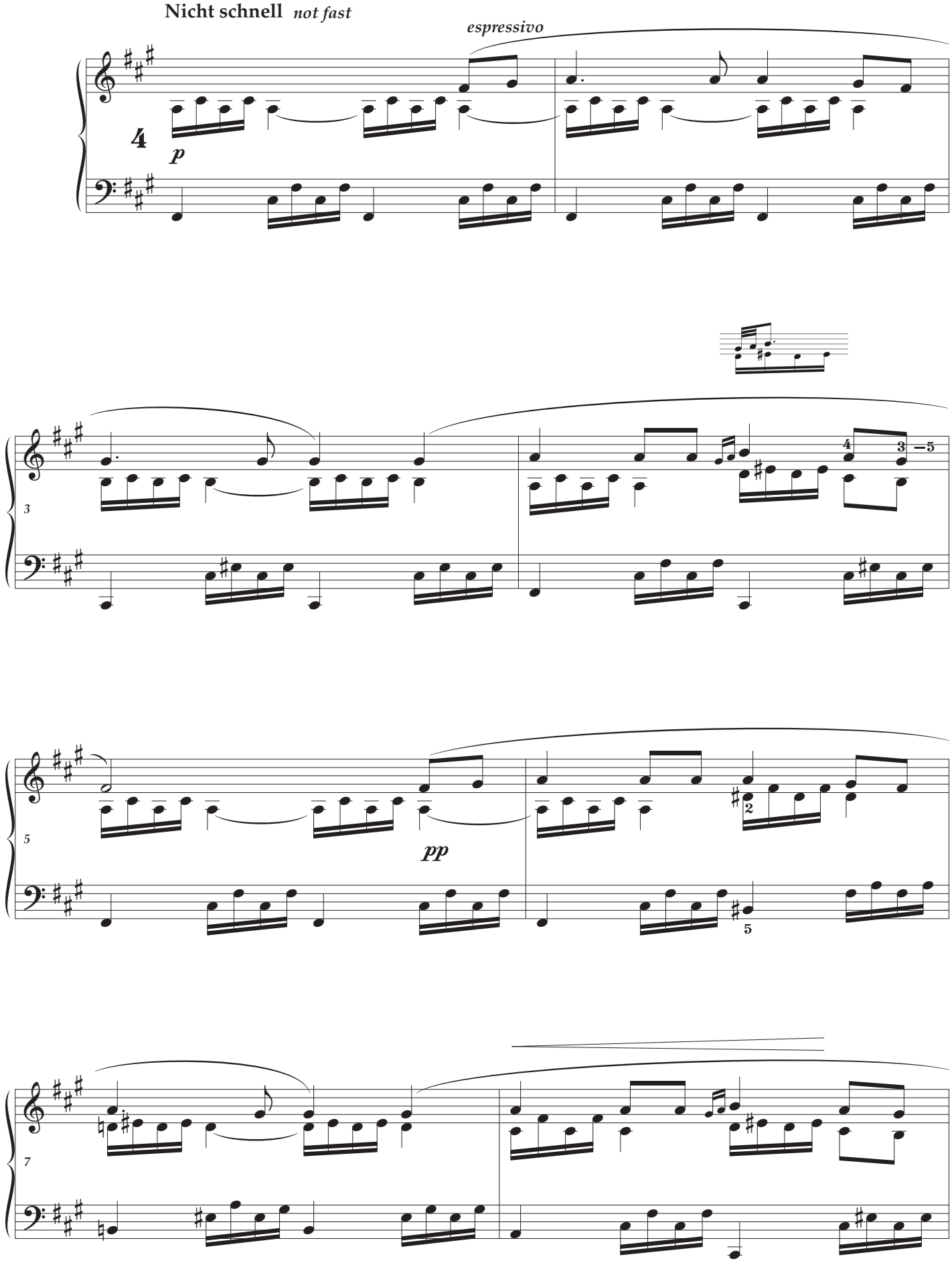
1788 - 1857

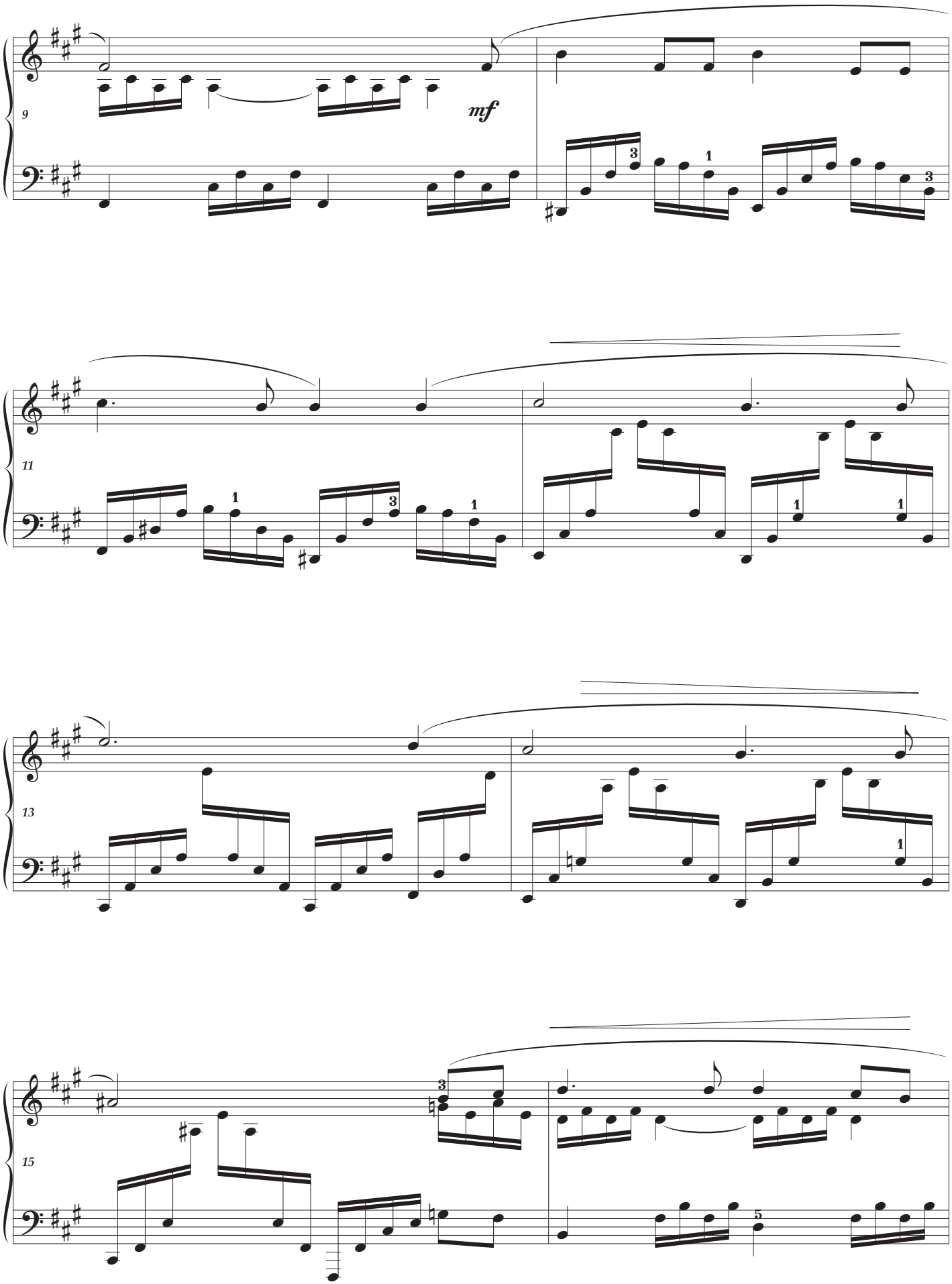
A particularly melancholic and elusive text – **In a Foreign Land** – the poet reflects in wooded isolation, mourning his distant homeland, long deceased parents and deep loneliness. He then contemplates sufferance, mortality and the solace that death will bring.

Aus der Heimat hinter den Blitzen rot
Da kommen die Wolken her,
Aber Vater und Mutter sind lange tot,
Es kennt mich dort keiner mehr.

Wie bald, ach wie bald kommt die stille Zeit,
Da ruhe ich auch, und über mir
Rauscht die schöne Waldeinsamkeit,
Und keiner kennt mich mehr hier.

In der Fremde Op 39 N° 1




9
mf
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13
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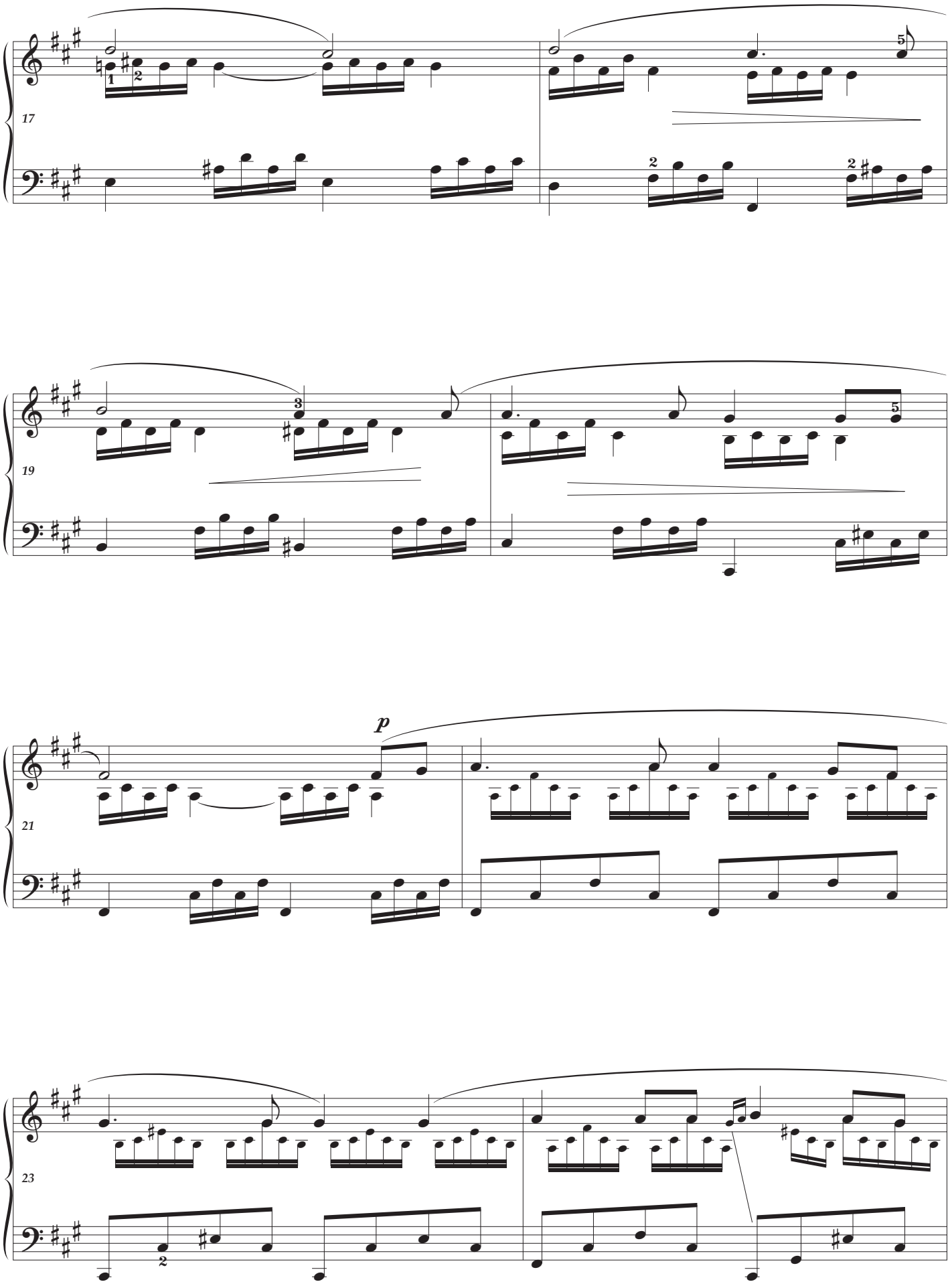
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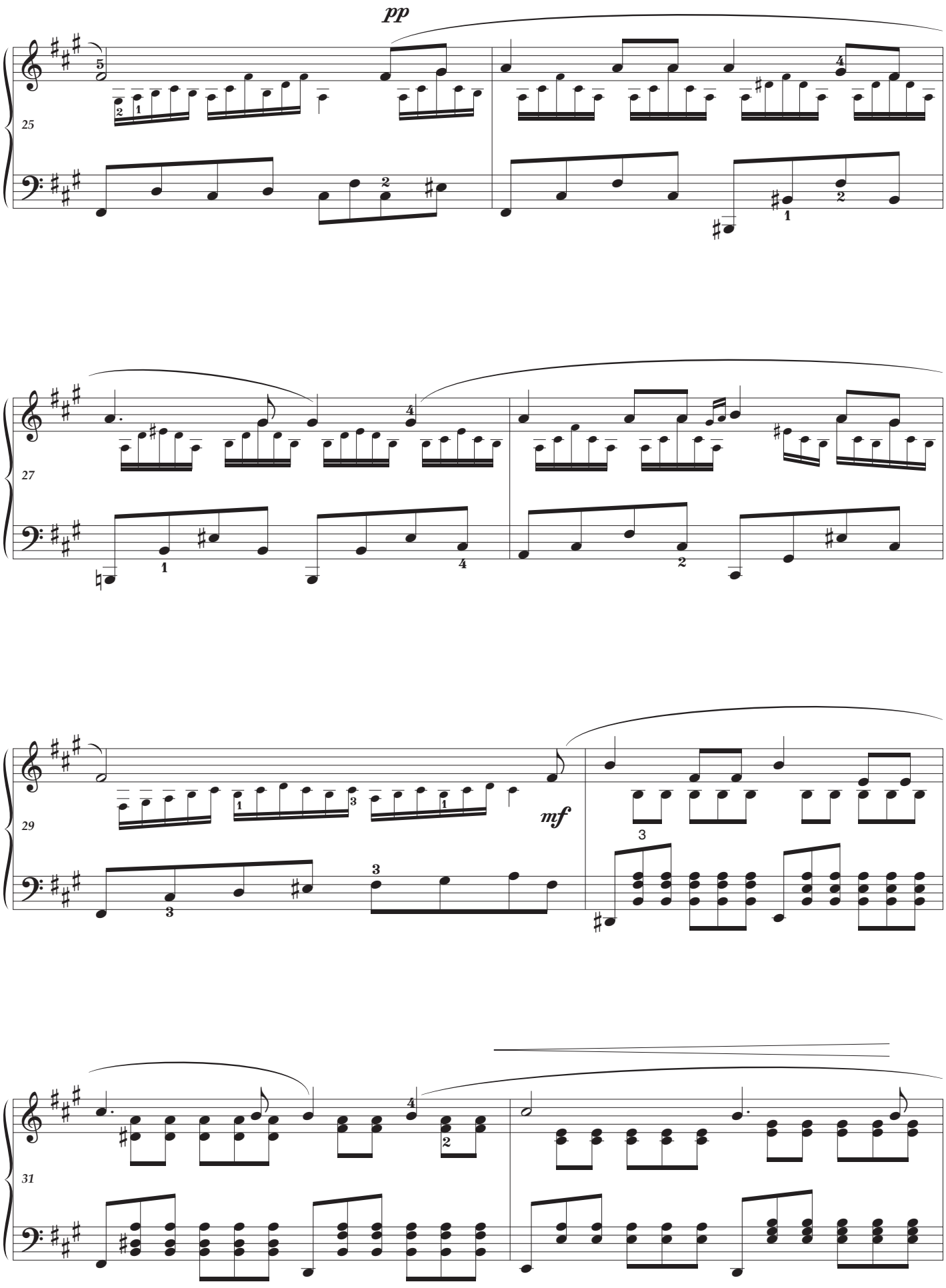
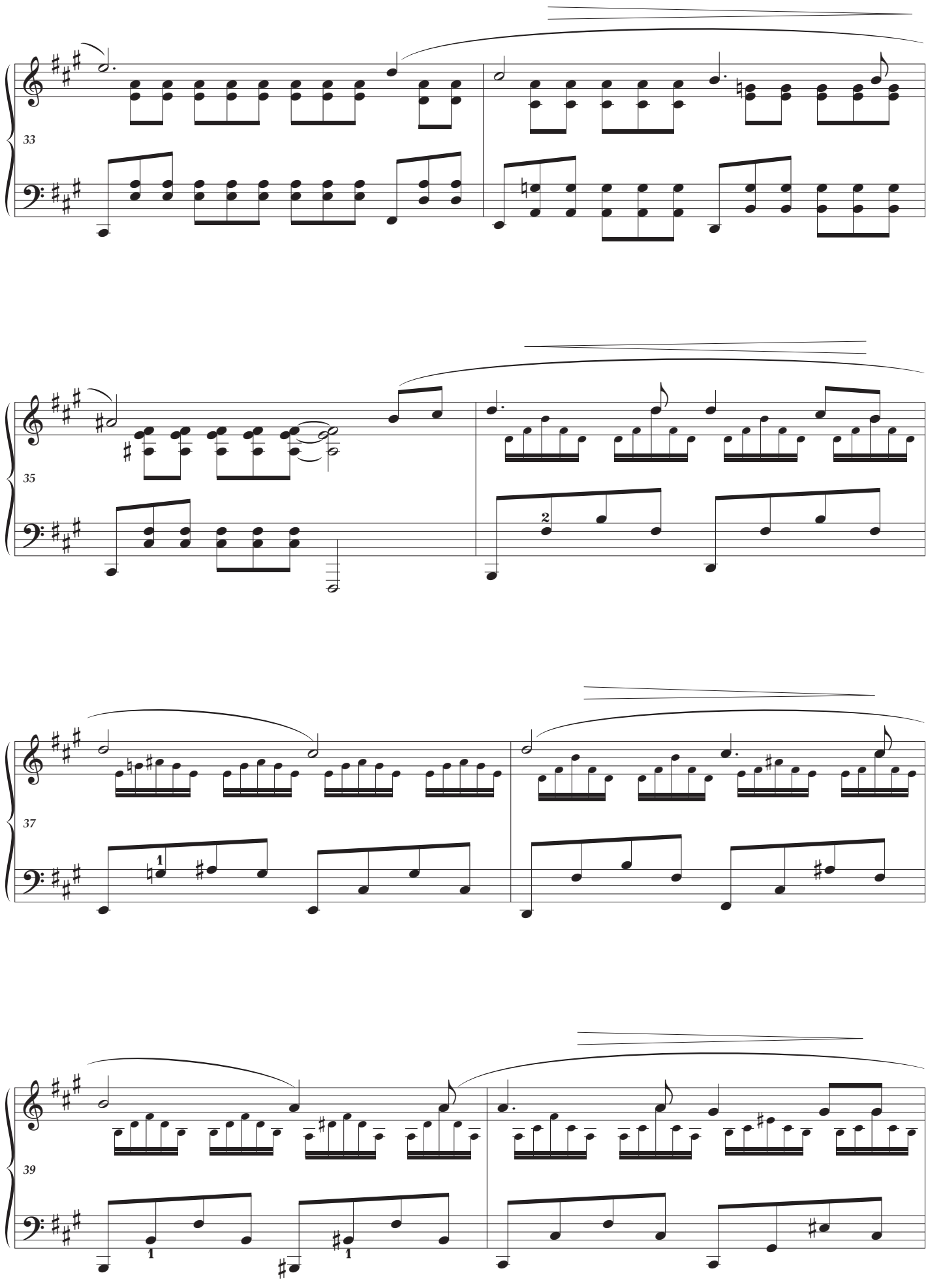

pp
25
27
29
mf
31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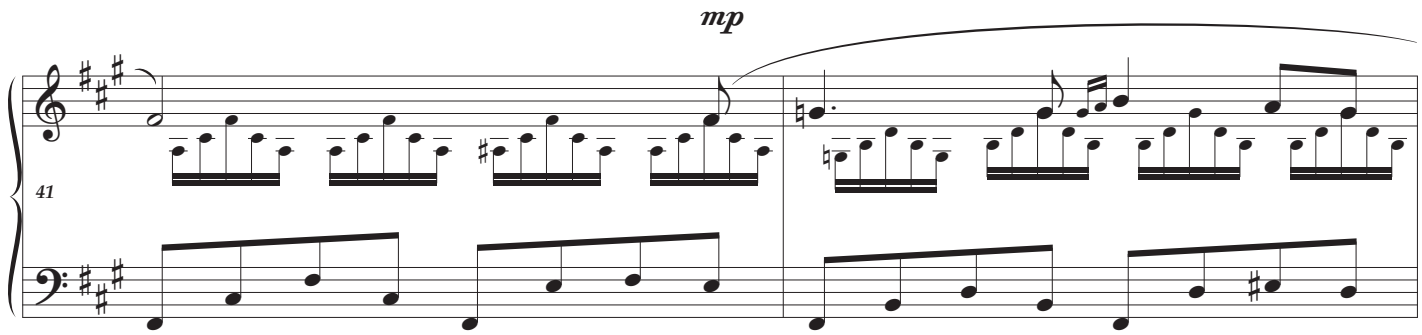
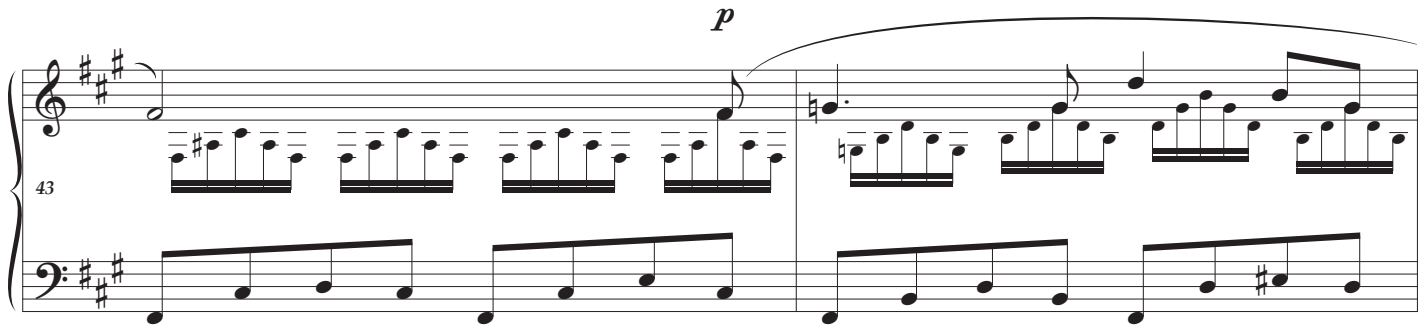
39


mp
41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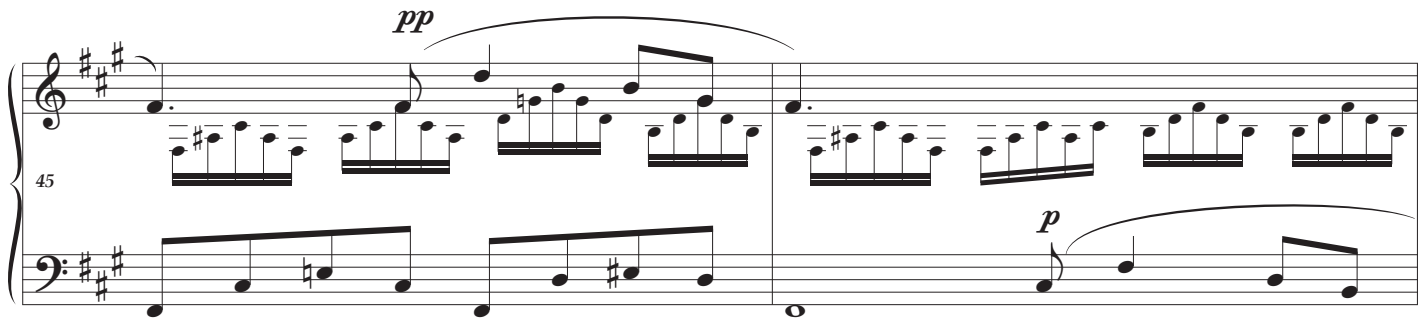
pp
45
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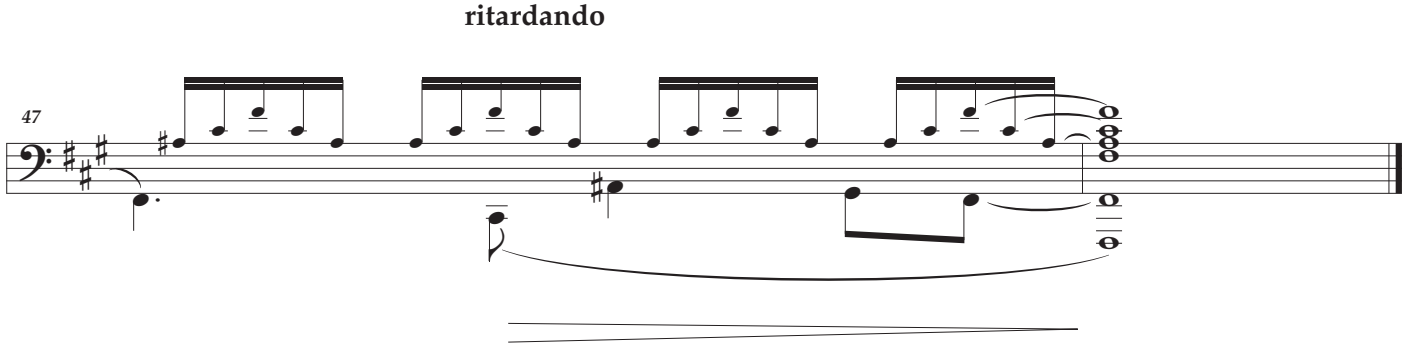
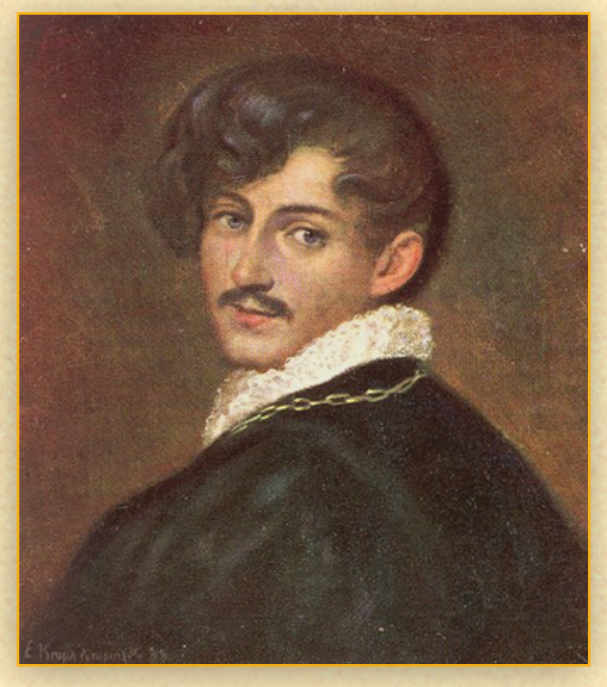

ritardando
47

In der Fremde

Liederkreis Op 39 N° 8

Joseph von Eichendorff

1788 - 1857

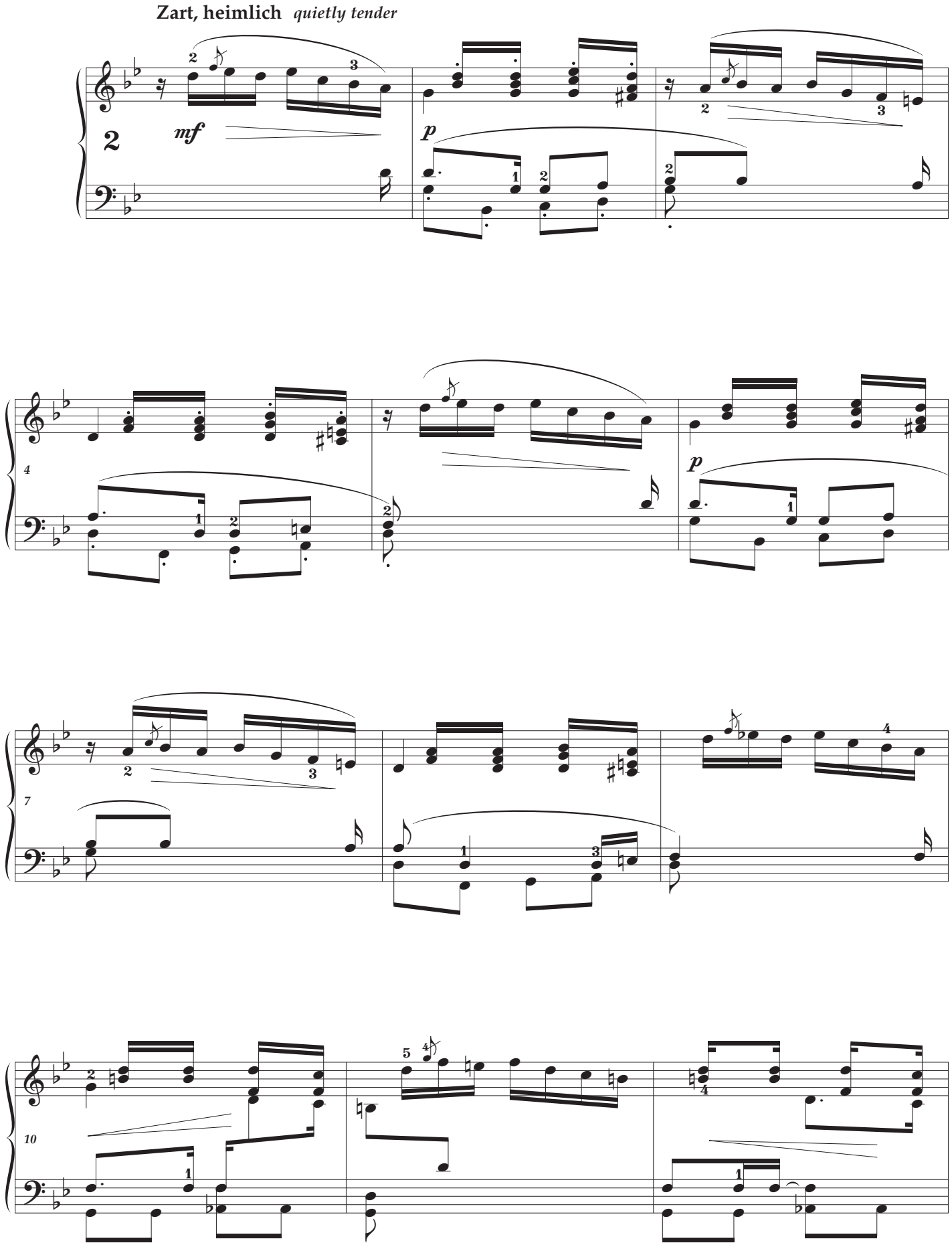


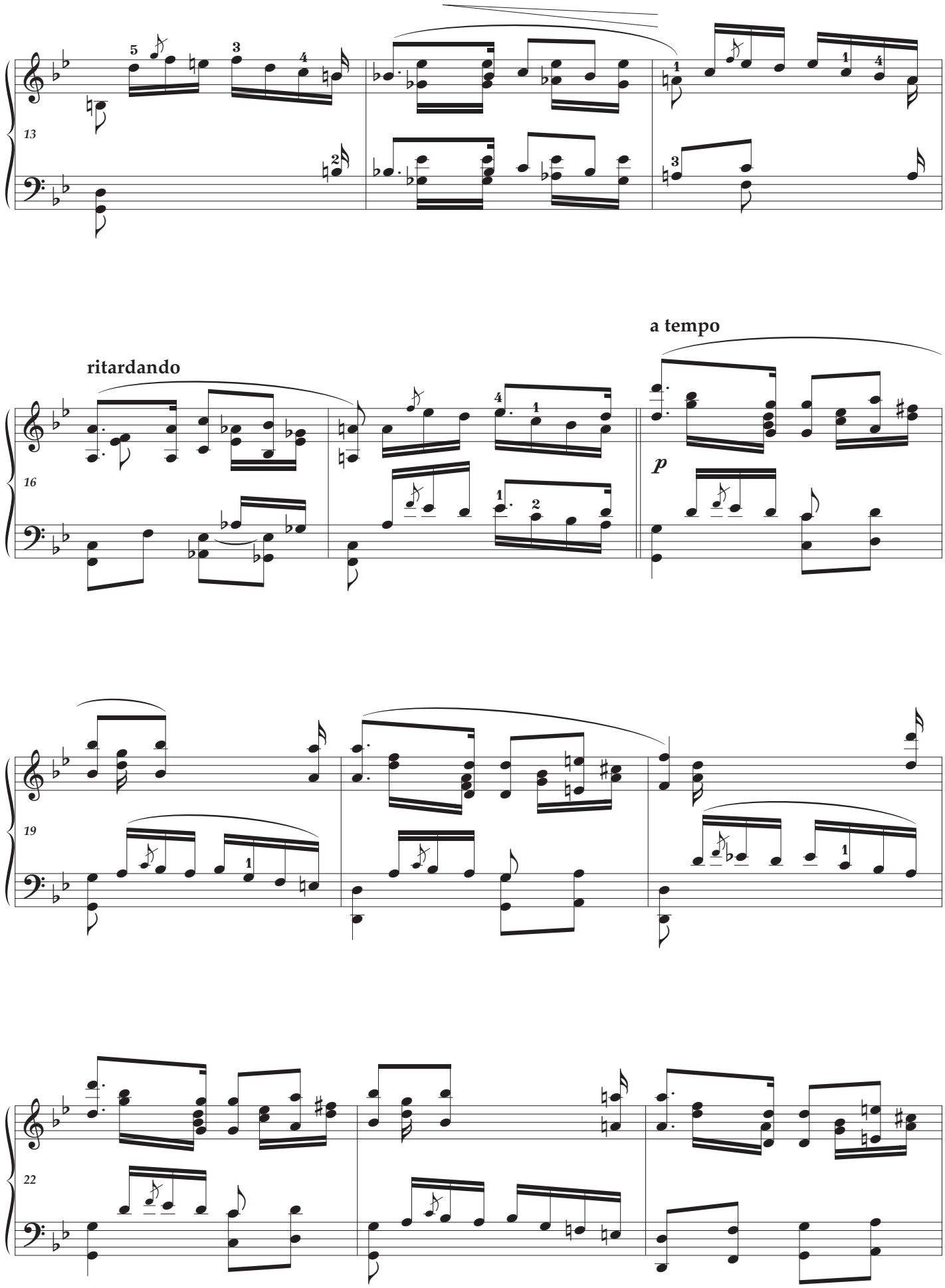
Unlike the earlier tragic poem with the same title – **In a Foreign Land** – the poet still obsessed with mortality, now hears babbling brooks and nightingales. He muses upon enchanting days past, with shimmering moonlight and a distant castle in a valley, a garden full of white and red roses, and his love awaiting him even though she died so long ago.

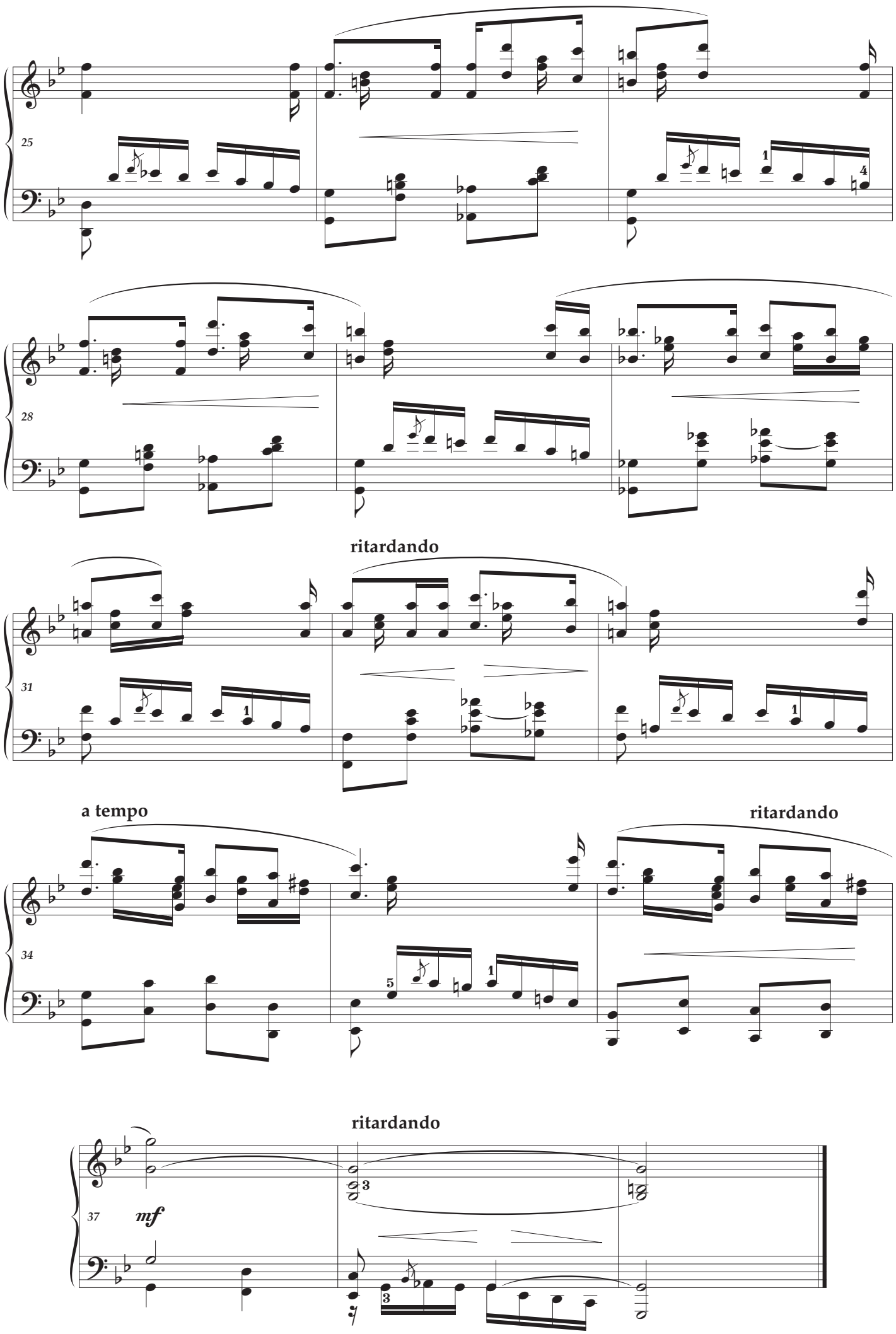
Ich hör' die Bächlein rauschen
Im Walde her und hin,
Im Walde, in dem Rauschen
Ich weiß nicht, wo ich bin.
Die Nachtigallen schlagen
Hier in der Einsamkeit,
Als wollten sie was sagen
Von der alten, schönen Zeit.

Die Mondesschimmer fliegen,
Als säh' ich unter mir
Das Schloß im Tale liegen,
Und ist doch so weit von hier!
Als müßte in dem Garten
Voll Rosen weiß und rot,
Meine Liebste auf mich warten,
Und ist doch so lange tot.

In der Fremde 2




13
16
ritardando
a tempo
p
19
22


25
28
ritardando
31
a tempo
ritardando
34
ritardando
37
mf

Du Ring an Meinem Finger

Frauenliebe und Leben *Op 42 N° 4*

Adelbert von Chamisso

1781 - 1838

The fiancée speaks to her ring, recalling erstwhile childhood dreams and contemplating it as a symbol for a new life. Wishing to serve and live for her husband, sacrificing and yielding to him completely, she finally presses the ring devoutly to her lips and to her heart.

Du Ring an meinem Finger,
Mein goldenes Ringelein,
Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen,
Dich fromm an das Herze mein.

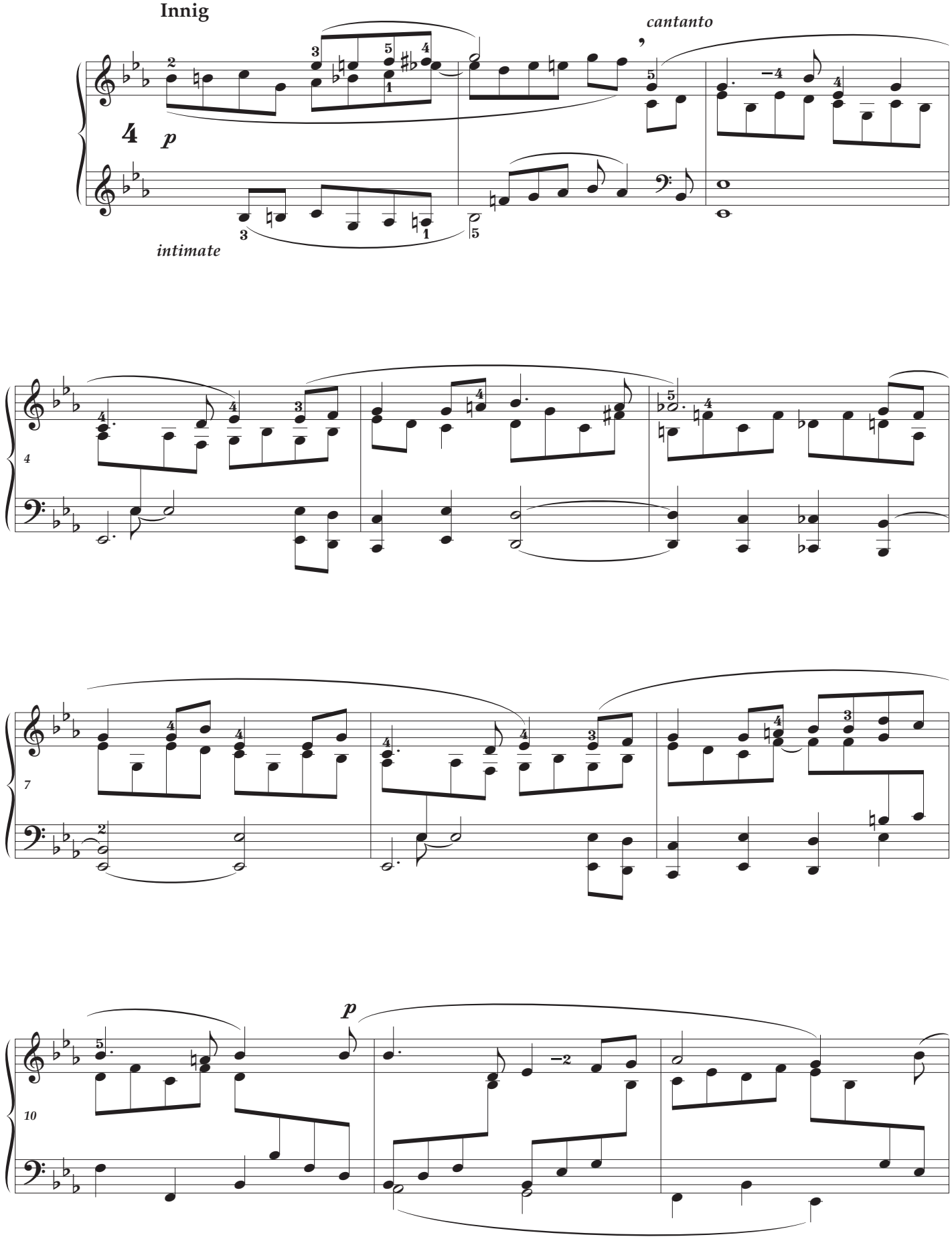
Ich hatt ihn ausgeträumet,
Der Kindheit friedlich schönen Traum,
Ich fand allein mich, verloren
Im öden, unendlichen Raum.

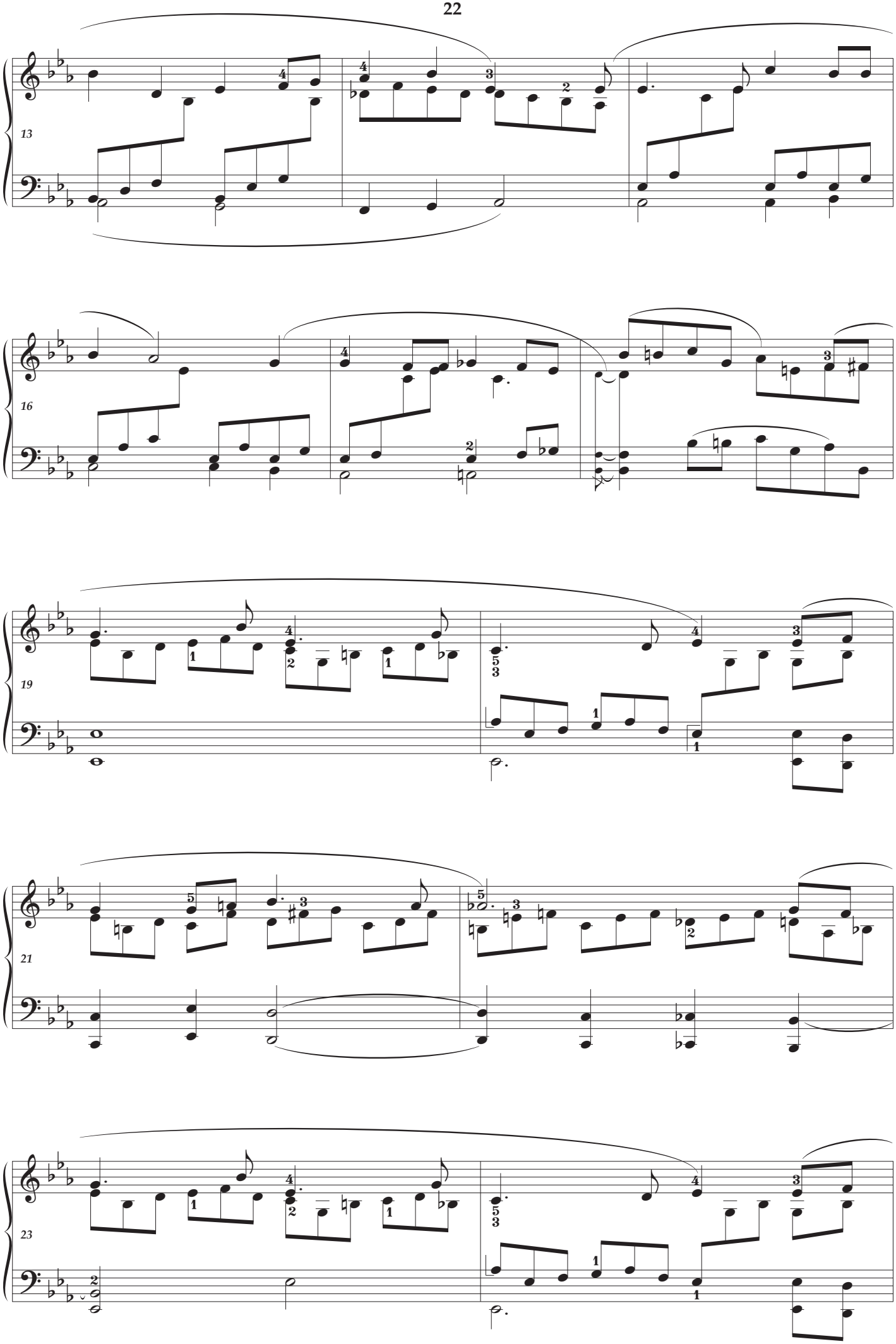
Du Ring an meinem Finger
Da hast du mich erst belehrt,
Hast meinem Blick erschlossen
Des Lebens unendlichen, tiefen Wert.

Ich will ihm dienen, ihm leben,
Ihm angehören ganz,
Hin selber mich geben und finden
Verklärt mich in seinem Glanz.

Du Ring an meinem Finger,
Mein goldenes Ringelein,
Ich drücke dich fromm an die Lippen,
Dich fromm an das Herze mein.

Du Ring an meinem Finger Op 42 Nº 4

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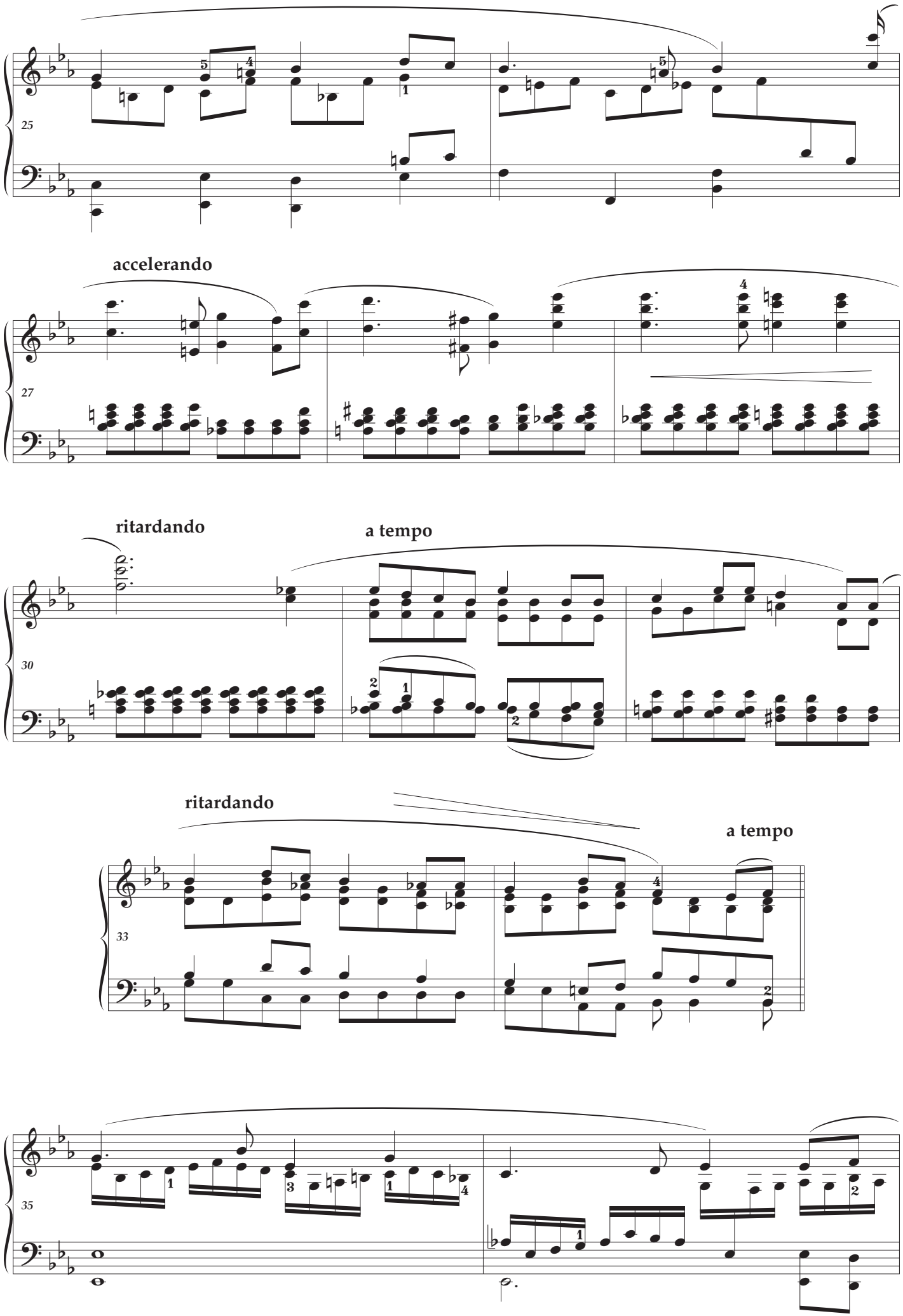
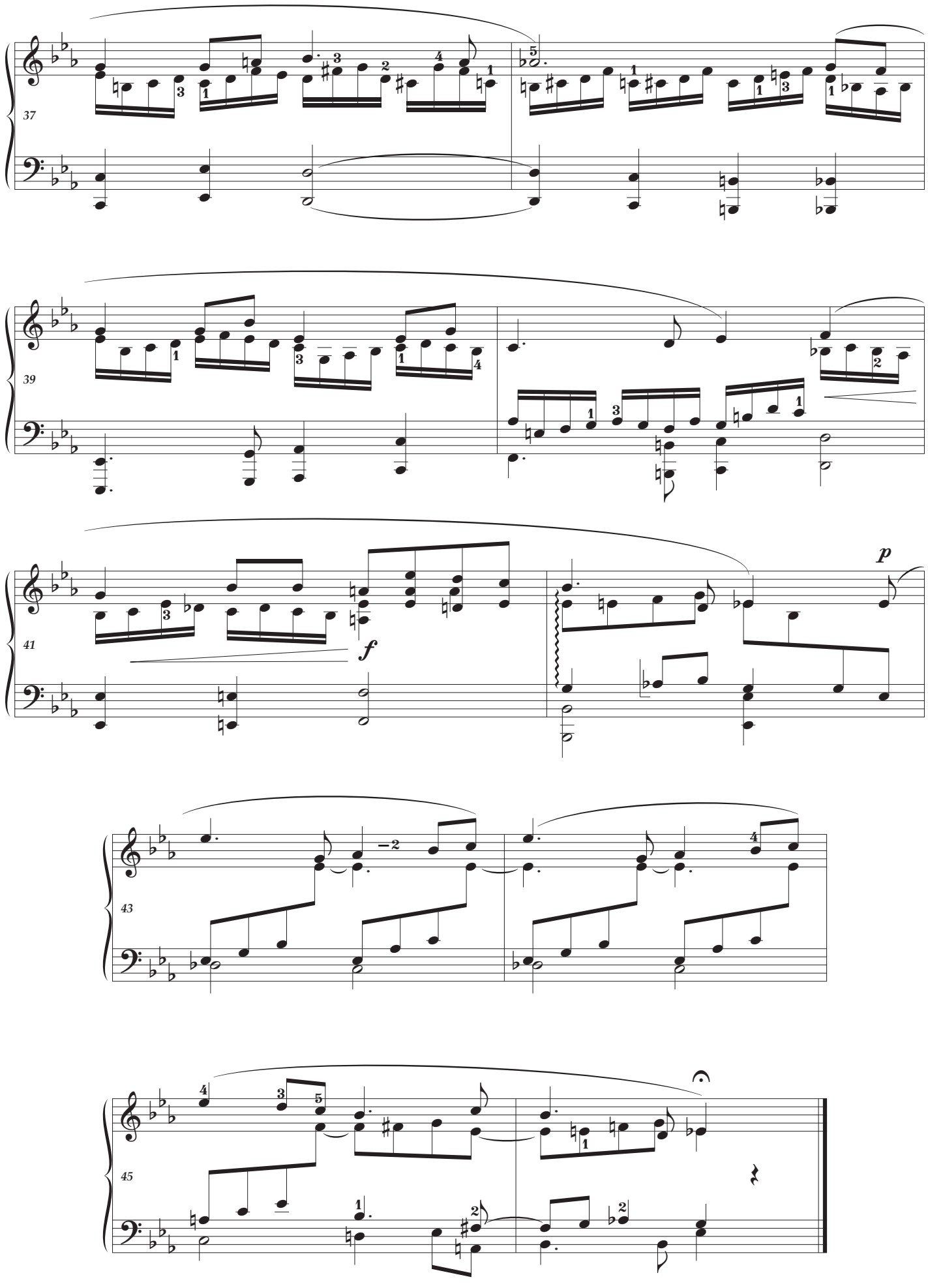

25
accelerando
27
ritardando
a tempo
30
ritardando
a tempo
33
35


37
39
41
f
p
43
45

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern

Frauenliebe und Leben *Op 42 N° 5*

Adelbert von Chamisso

1781 - 1838

The betrothed asks her sisters to help with the wedding dress, braids and a garland of flowering myrtle. Lying in the arms of her beloved with an elated heart, she asks for support to dispel foolish nerves, that she may welcome the author of her happiness. Has he really entered her life? In reverence and humility, may she bow before her spouse – scatter roses before him? Finally, in sorrow, she joyfully bids her sisters farewell.

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,
Freundlich mich schmücken,
Dient der Glücklichen heute mir.
Windet geschäftig
Mir um die Stirne
Noch der blühenden Myrte Zier.

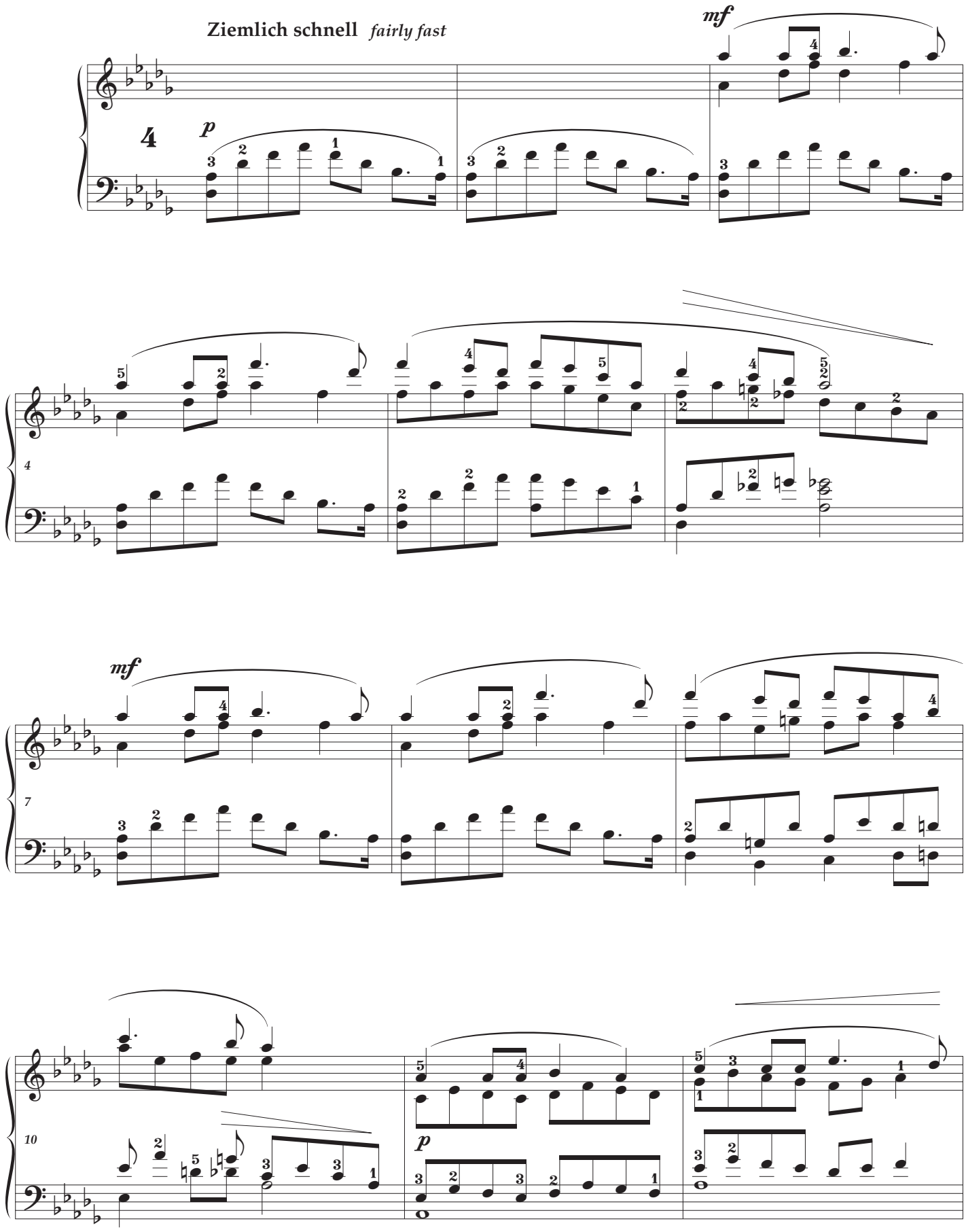
Als ich befriedigt,
Freudigen Herzens,
Sonst dem Geliebten im Arme lag,
Immer noch rief er,
Sehnsucht im Herzen,
Ungeduldig den heutigen Tag.

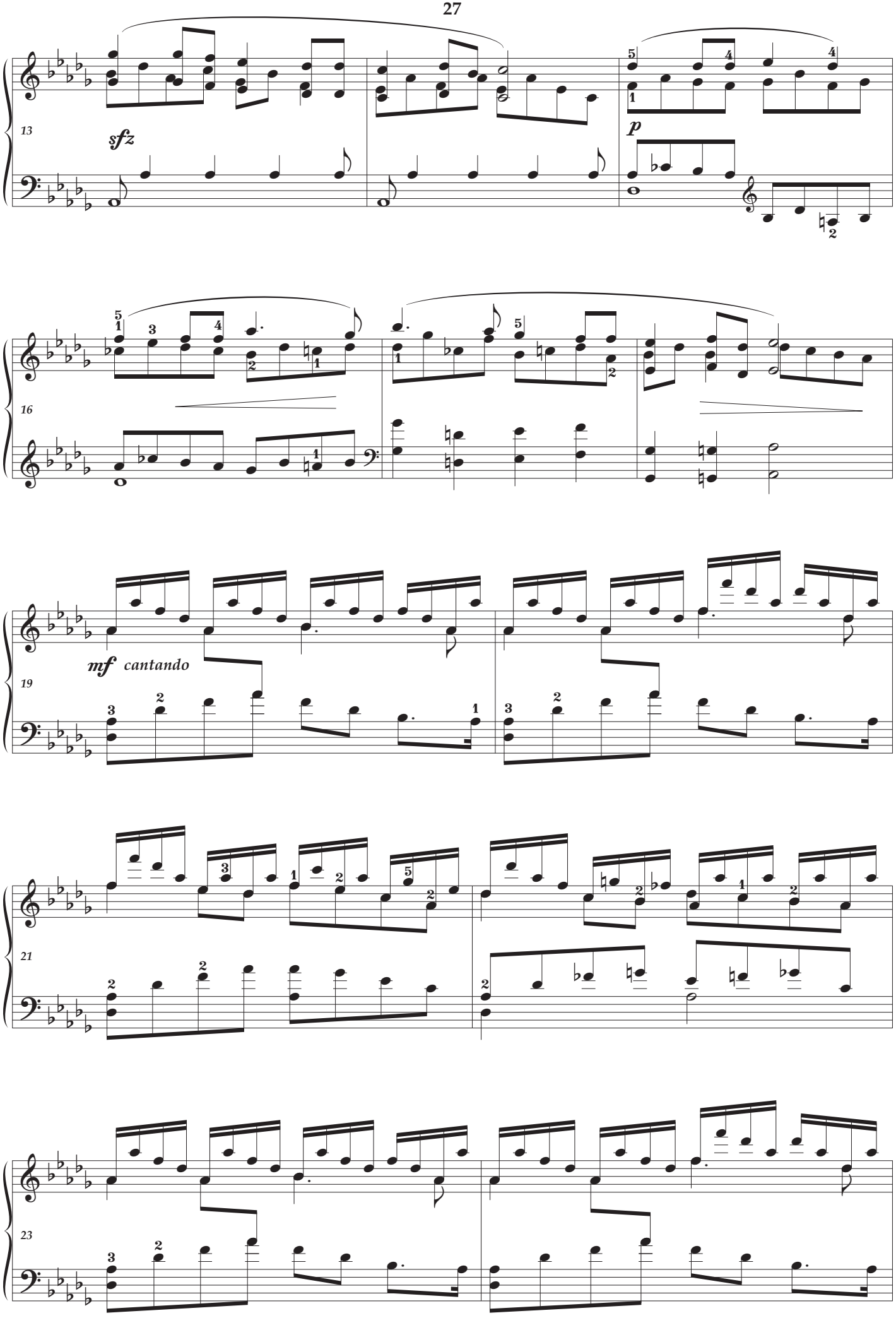
Helft mir, ihr Schwestern,
Helft mir verscheuchen
Eine thörichte Bangigkeit;
Daß ich mit klarem
Aug' ihn empfange,
Ihn, die Quelle der Freudigkeit.

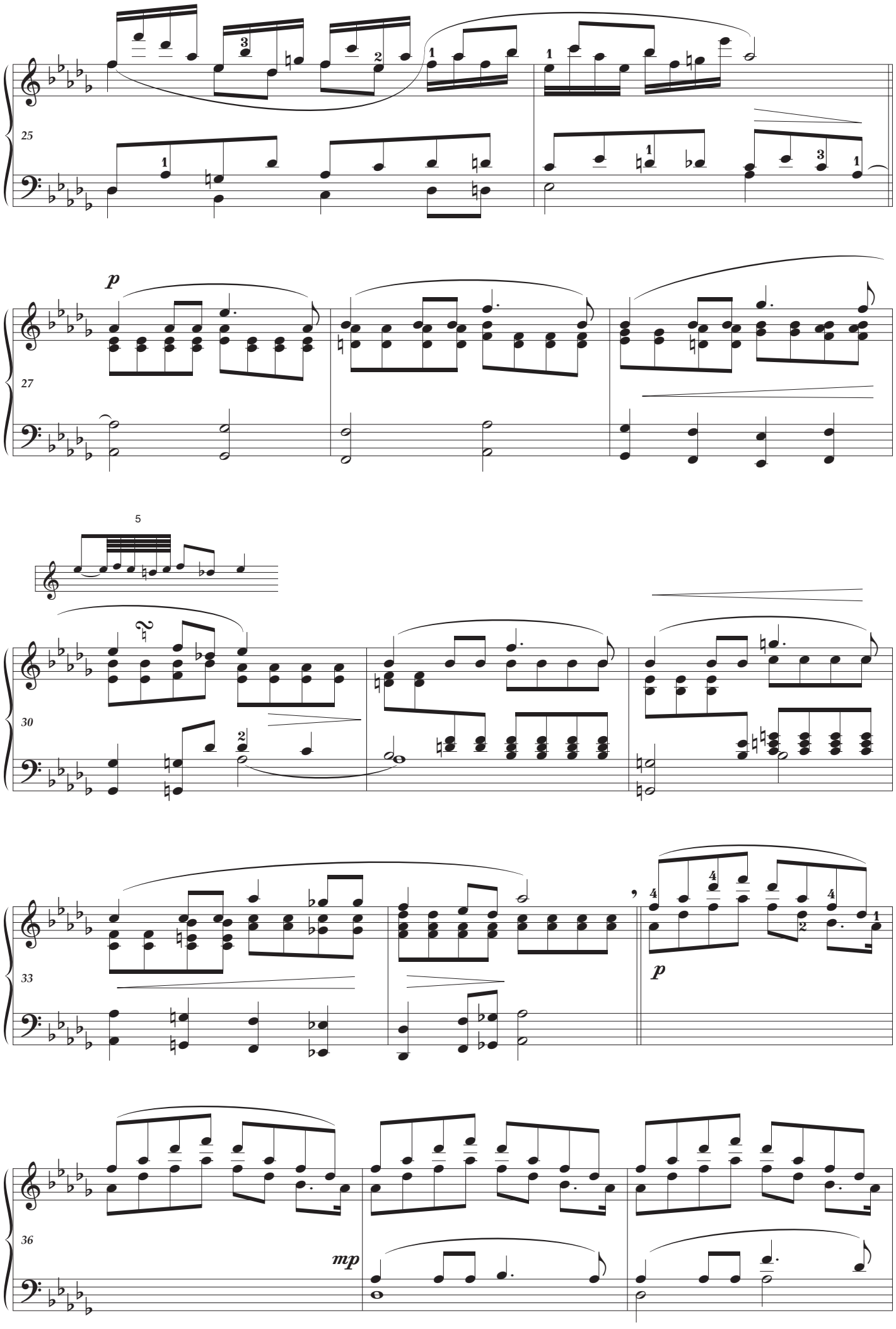
Bist, mein Geliebter,
Du mir erschienen,
Giebst du mir, Sonne deinen Schein?
Laß mich in Andacht,
Laß mich in Demuth,
Laß mich verneigen dem Herren mein.

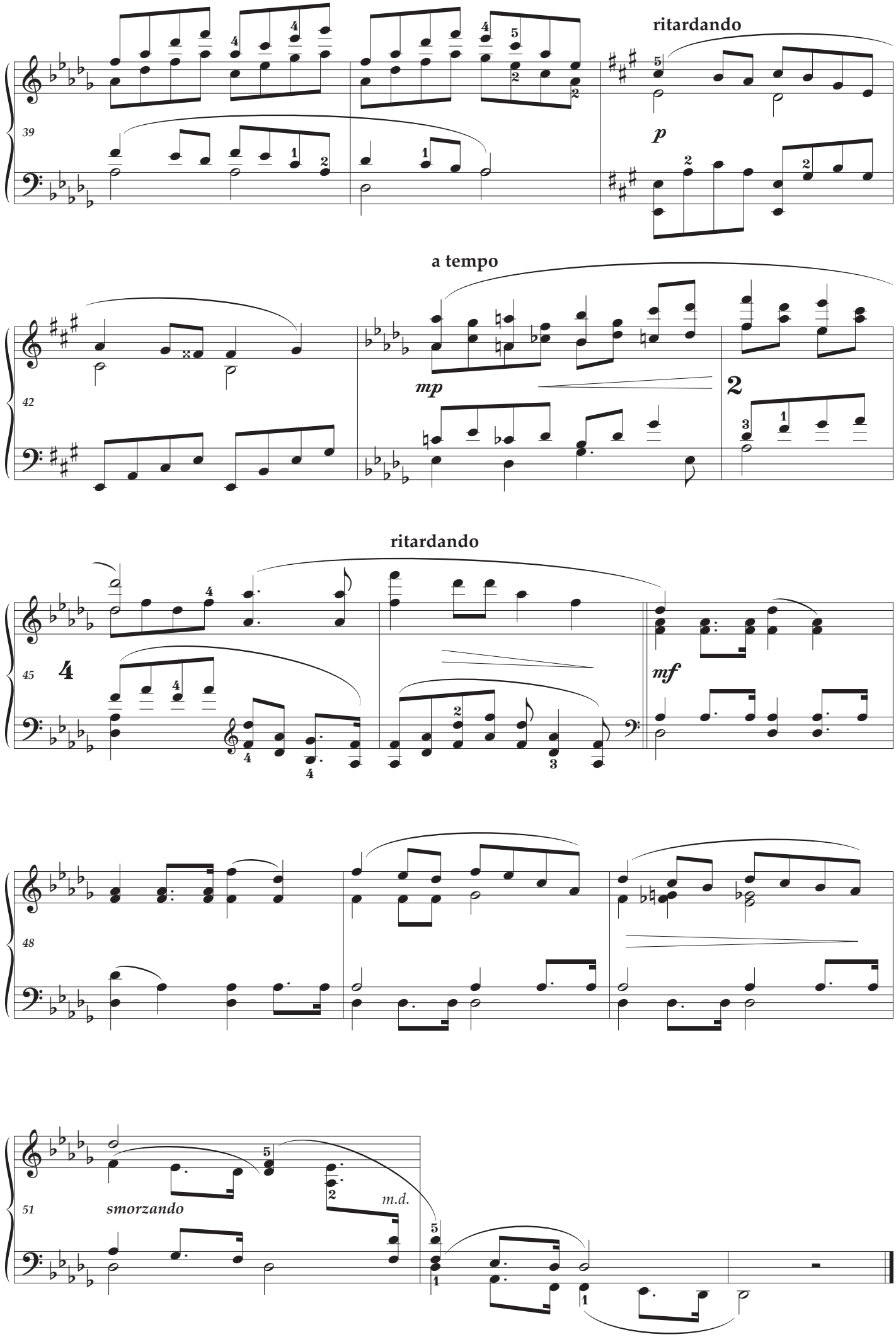
Streuet ihm, Schwestern,
Streuet ihm Blumen,
bringet ihm knospende Rosen dar.
Aber euch, Schwestern,
Grüß' ich mit Wehmuth,
Freudig scheidend aus eurer Schaar.

Helft mir, ihr Schwestern Op 42 Nº 5




13
sfz
p
16
19
mf cantando
21
23


25
p
27
5
30
33
p
36
mp


ritardando
39
p
a tempo
42
mp
2
ritardando
45
4
mf
48
51
smorzando
m.d.

Belsatzar *Op 57*

Heinrich Heine

1797 - 1856

The most dramatic of these six transcriptions and a true collaboration between voice and piano.

Heine's ballad is based on the Old Testament Book of Daniel and set during the Babylonian exile after Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Solomon's Temple in 587 BCE.

The narrator describes the royal banquet, where guests are regally and generously served goblets of wine. Somewhat the worse for drink, Belshazzar the king of Babylon gloats over the many vessels of gold plundered from the temple, and then blasphemes against Jehovah, God of the Jews – "I offer you eternal contempt – I am the king of Babylon!"

Soon realising the true significance of this terrible statement, the king is filled with fear. On the white wall a shape appears like a human hand writing letters of fire. The prophets come but none can interpret the message. Trembling and pale as death, the king stares vacantly.

The biblical account ends: "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain."

Die Mitternacht zog näher schon;
In stummer Ruh' lag Babylon.

Nur oben in des Königs Schloß,
Da flackert's, da lärmt des Königs Troß.

Dort oben in dem Königssaal
Belsatzar hielt sein Königsmahl.

Die Knechte saßen in schimmernden Reihn,
Und leerten die Becher mit funkelndem Wein.

Es klirrten die Becher, es jauchzten die Knecht';
So klang es dem störrigen Könige recht.

Des Königs Wangen leuchten Glut;
Im Wein erwuchs ihm kecker Mut.

Und blindlings reißt der Mut ihn fort;
Und er lästert die Gottheit mit sündigem Wort.

Und er brüstet sich frech, und lästert wild;
Die Knechtenschar ihm Beifall brüllt.

Der König rief mit stolzem Blick;
Der Diener eilt und kehrt zurück.

Er trug viel gülden Gerät auf dem Haupt;
Das war aus dem Tempel Jehovas geraubt.

Und der König ergriff mit frevler Hand
Einen heiligen Becher, gefüllt bis am Rand.

Und er leert' ihn hastig bis auf den Grund
Und rufet laut mit schäumendem Mund:

Jehova! Dir künd' ich auf ewig Hohn,–
Ich bin der König von Babylon!

Doch kaum das grause Wort verklang,
Dem König ward's heimlich im Busen bang.

Das gellende Lachen verstummte zumal;
Es wurde leichenstill im Saal.

Und sieh! und sieh! an weißer Wand
Da kam's hervor wie Menschenhand;

Und schrieb und schrieb an weißer Wand
Buchstaben von Feuer, und schrieb und schwand.

Der König stieren Blicks da saß,
Mit schlotternden Knien und totenblaß.

Die Knechtenschar saß kalt durchgraut,
Und saß gar still, gab keinen Laut.

Die Magier kamen, doch keiner verstand
Zu deuten die Flammenschrift an der Wand.

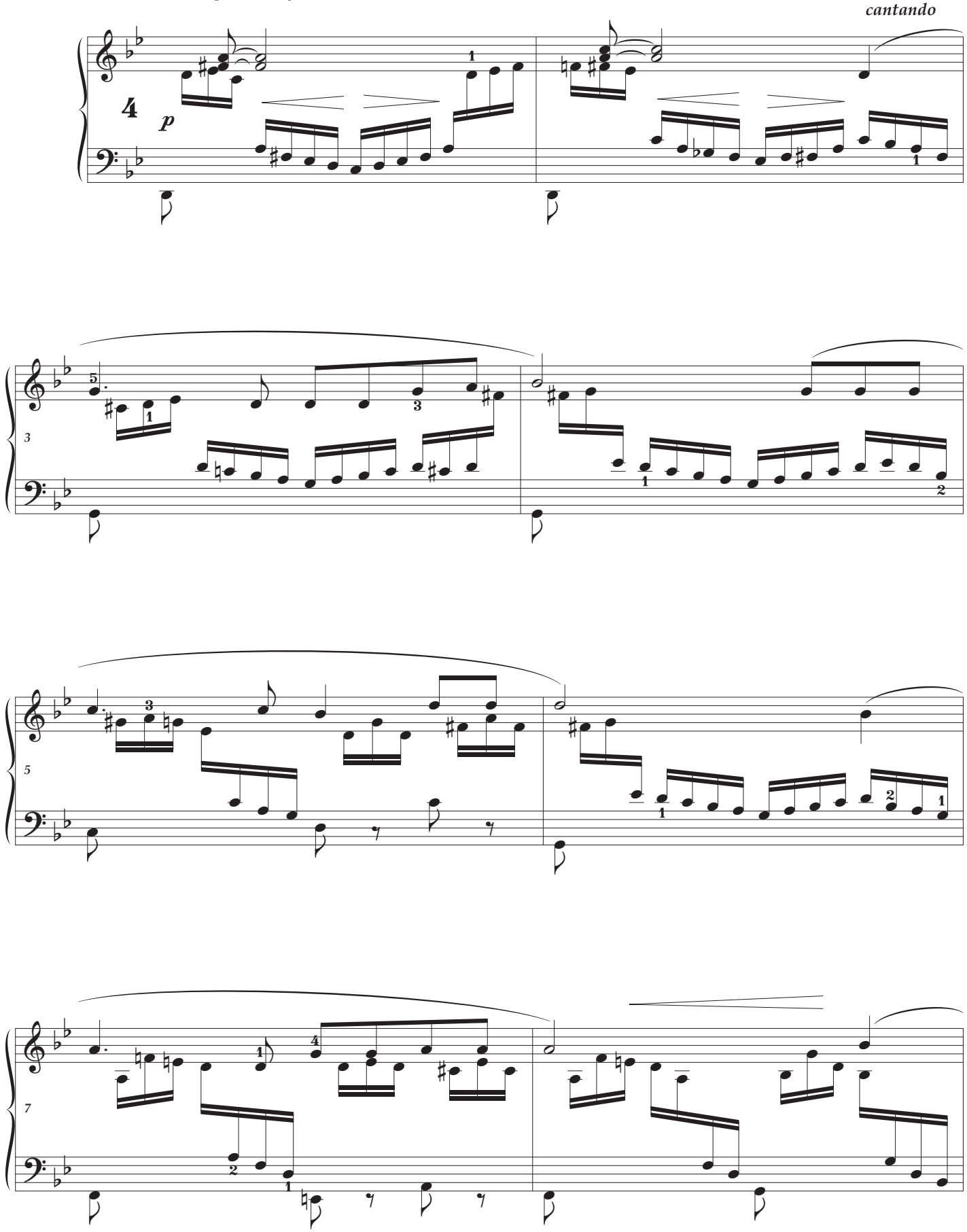
Belsatzar ward aber in selbiger Nacht
Von seinen Knechten umgebracht.

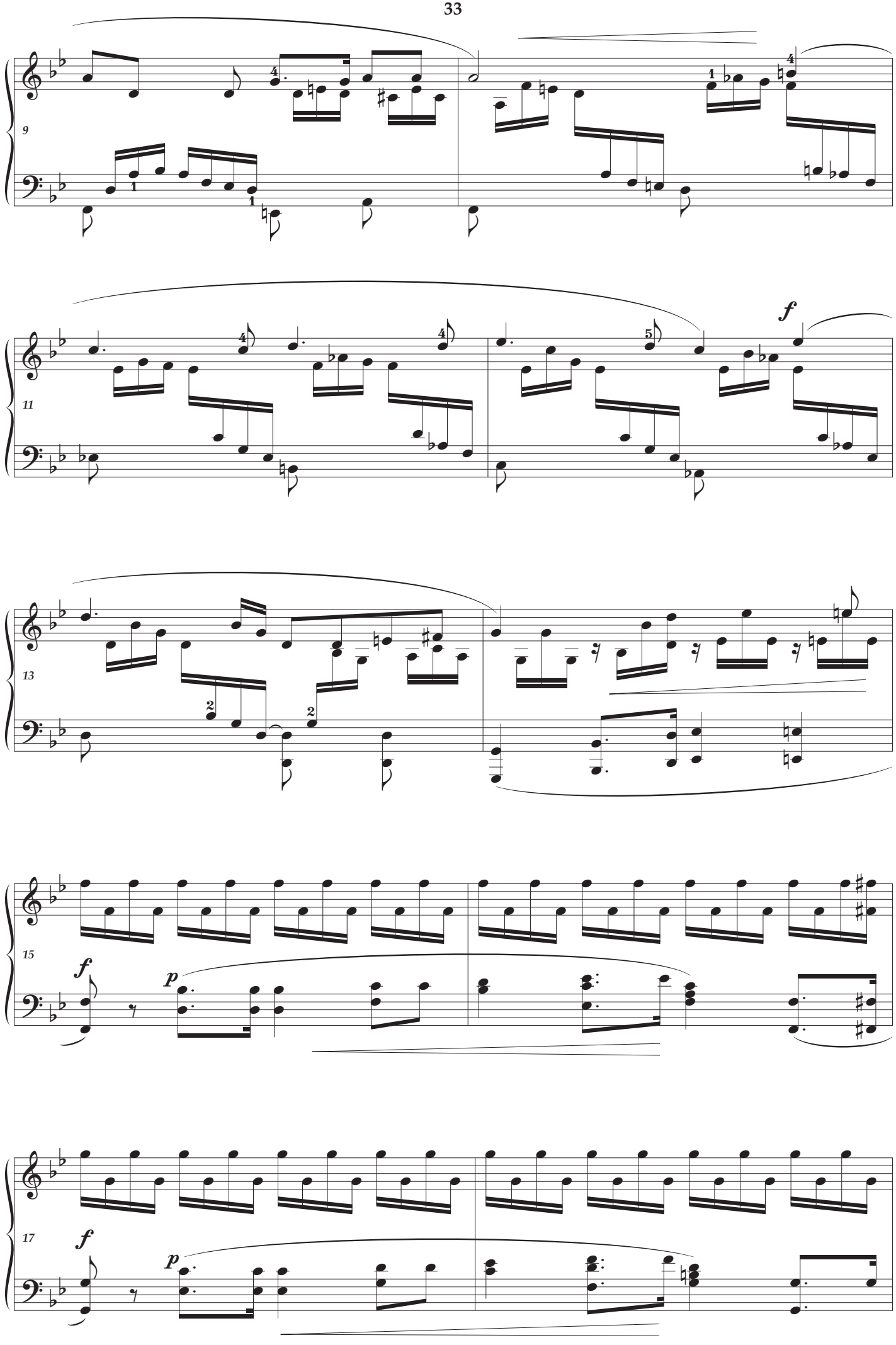
BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST *Rembrandt*
National Gallery, London

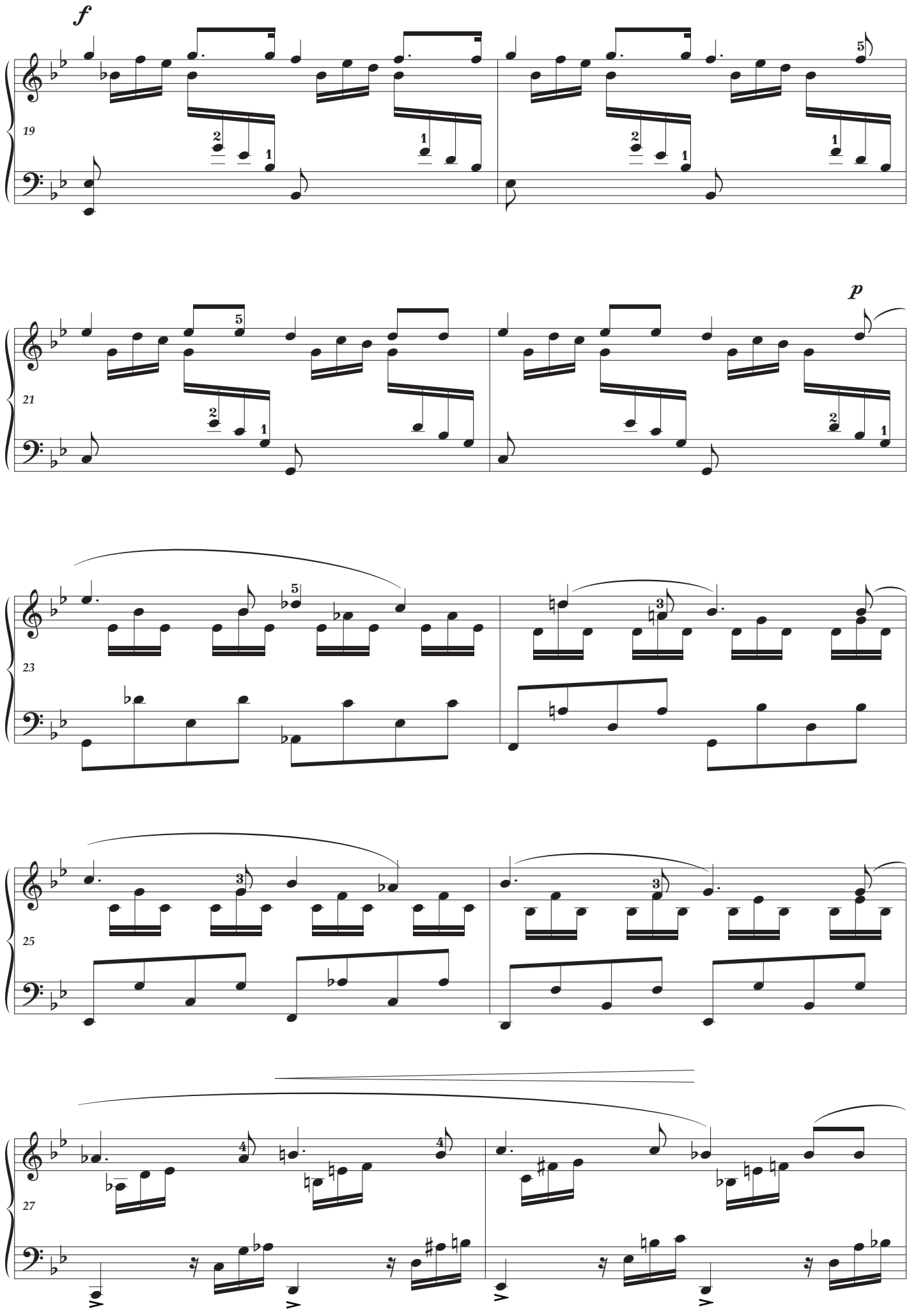
Belsatzar Op 57

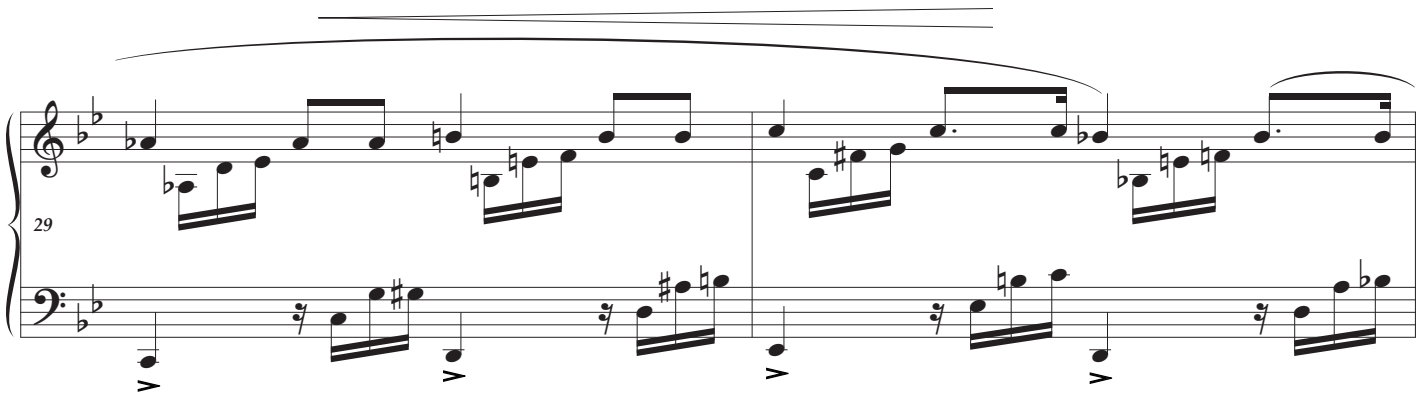
begin not too fast
then gradually accelerate

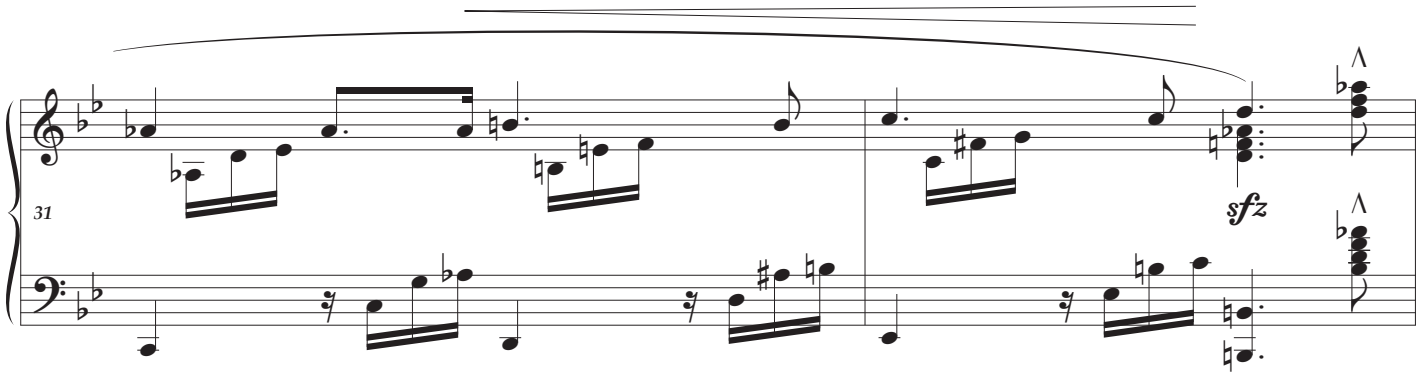
cantando

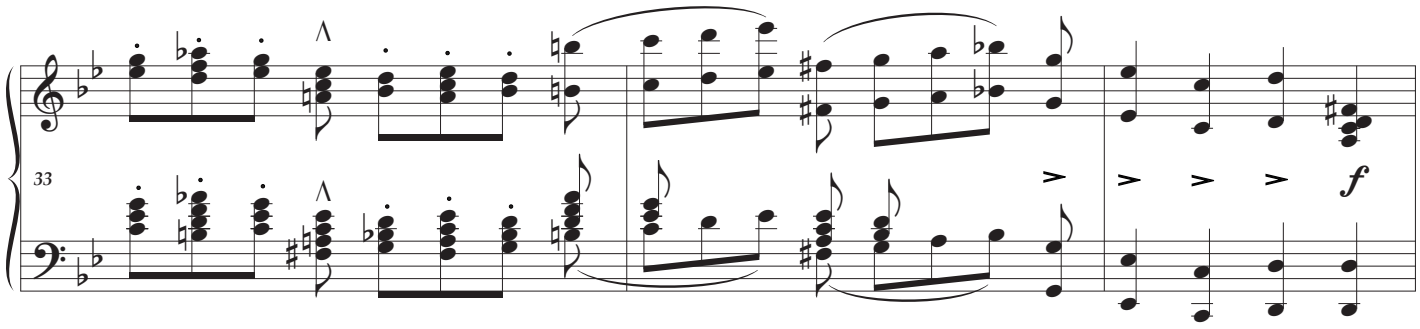



9
11
f
13
15
f
p
17
f
p

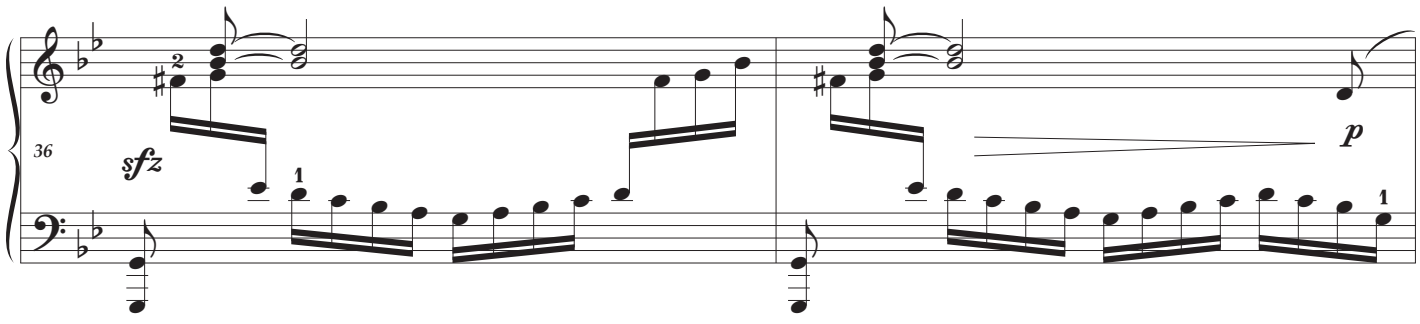

f
19
p
21
23
25
27

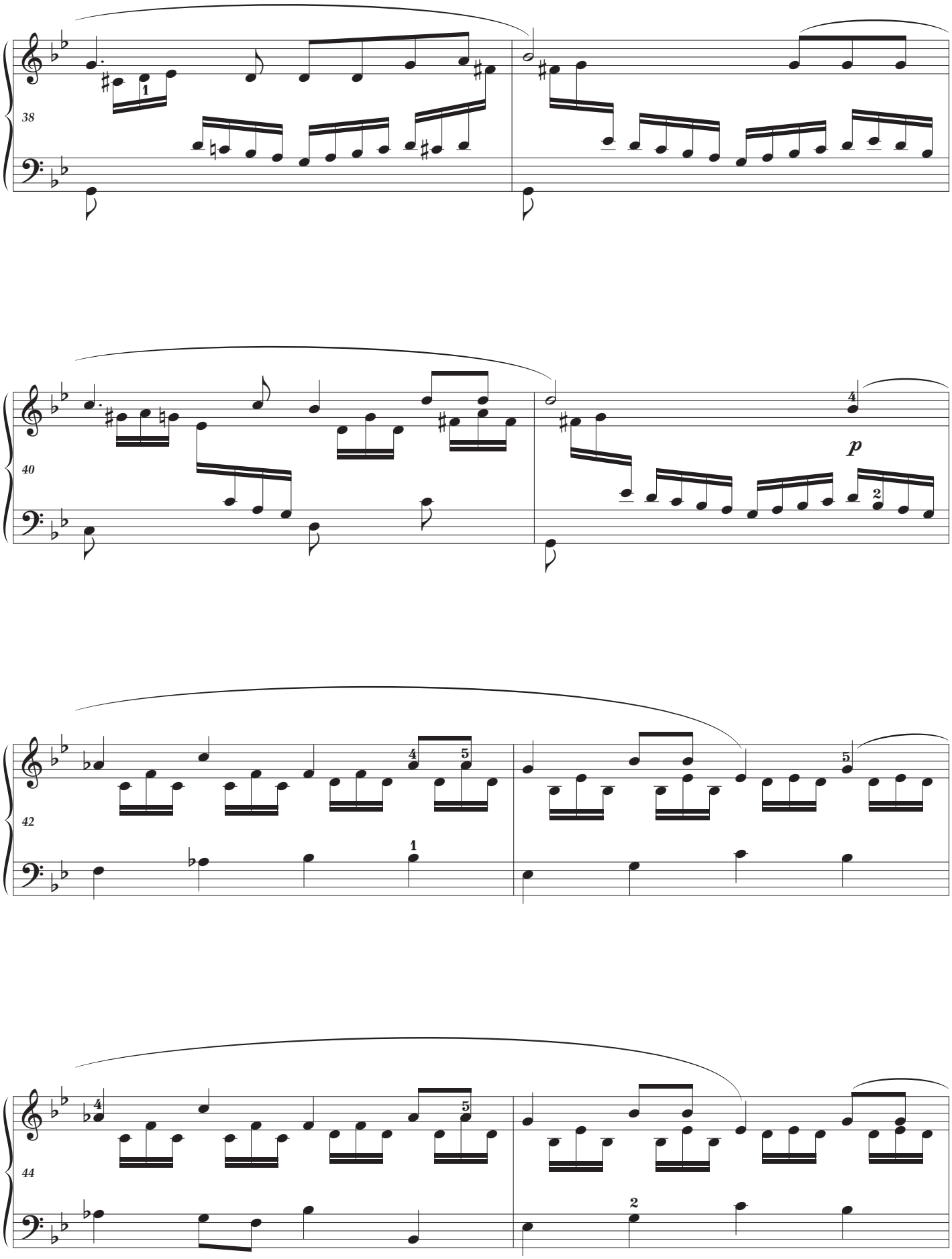


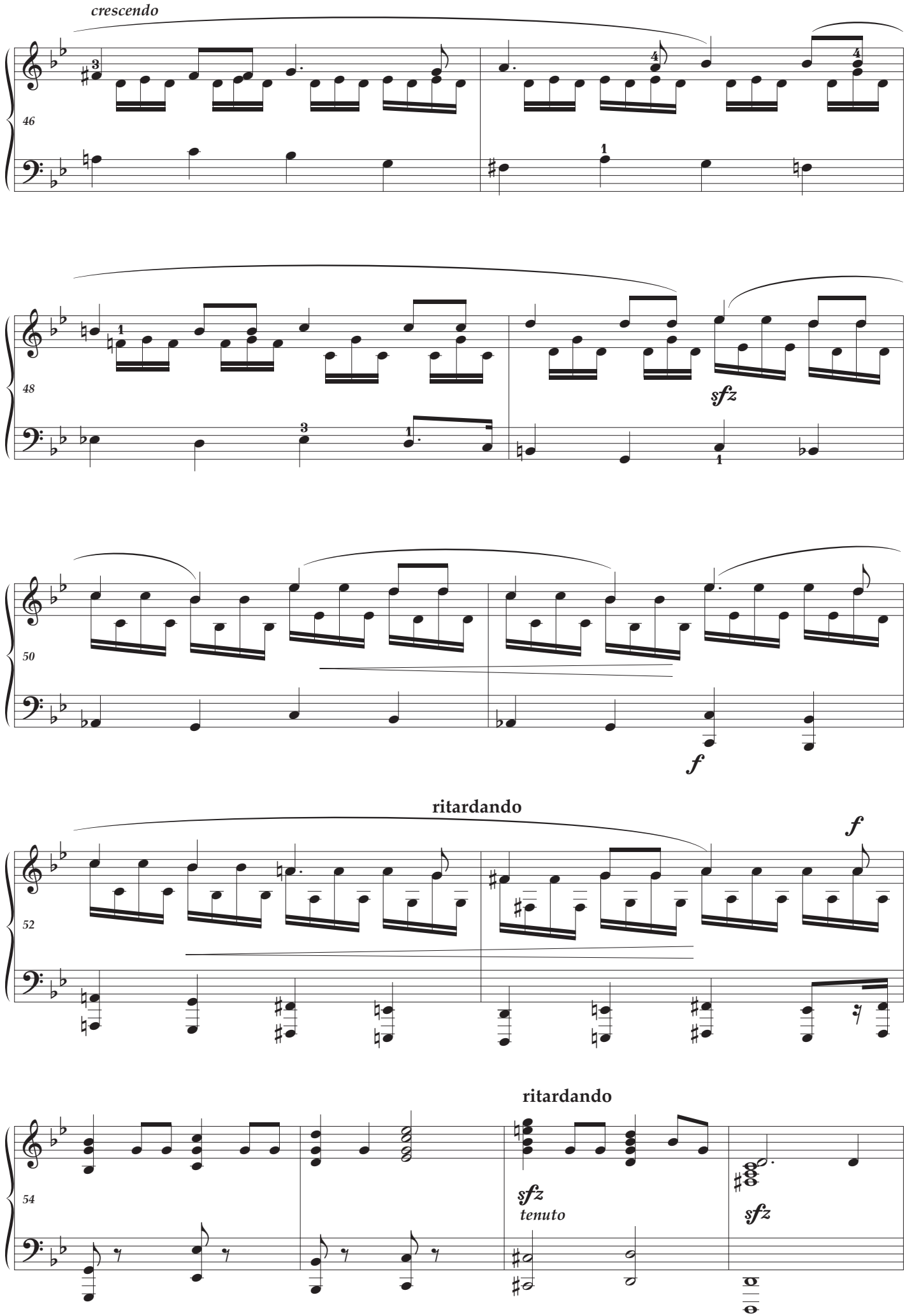


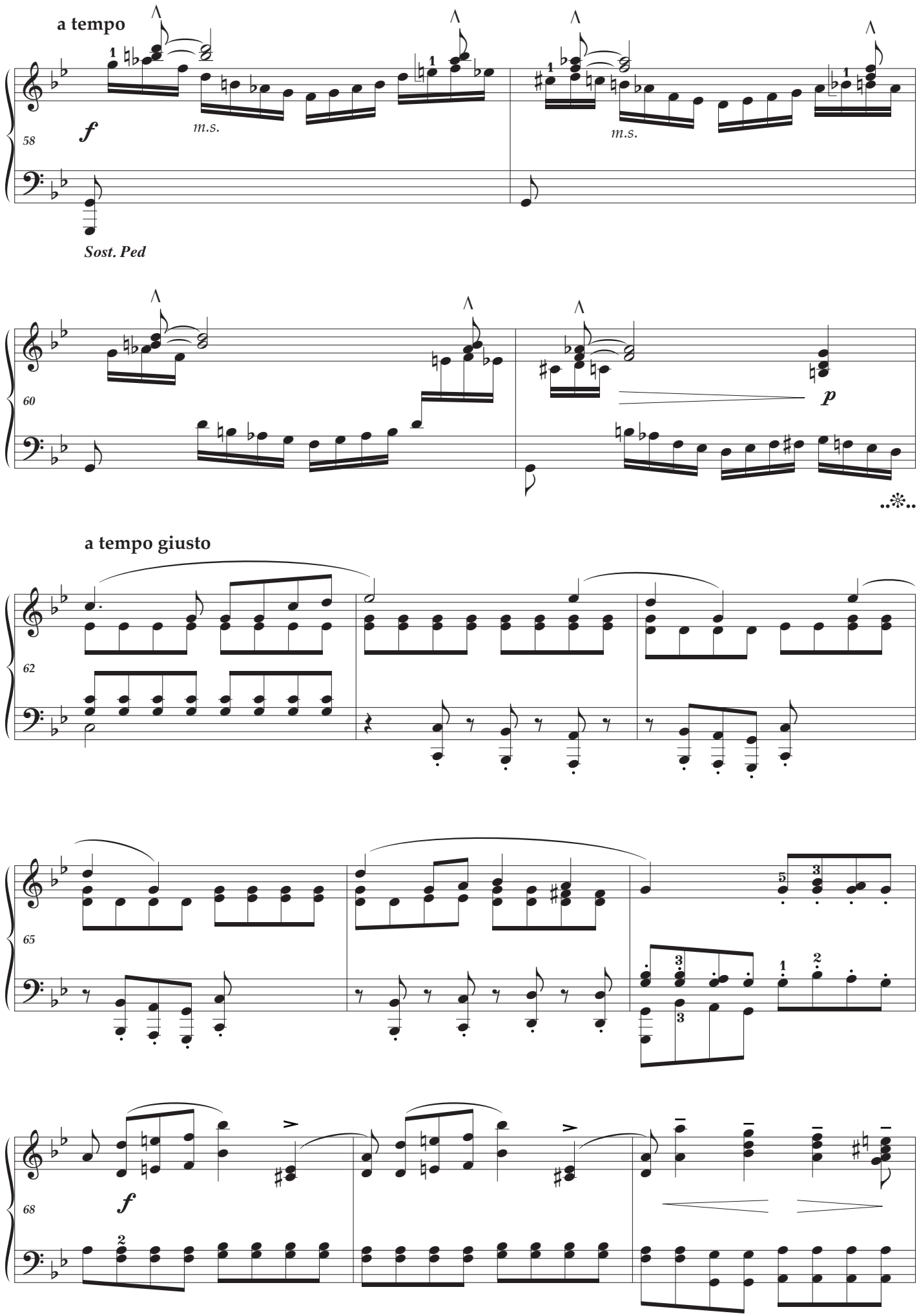


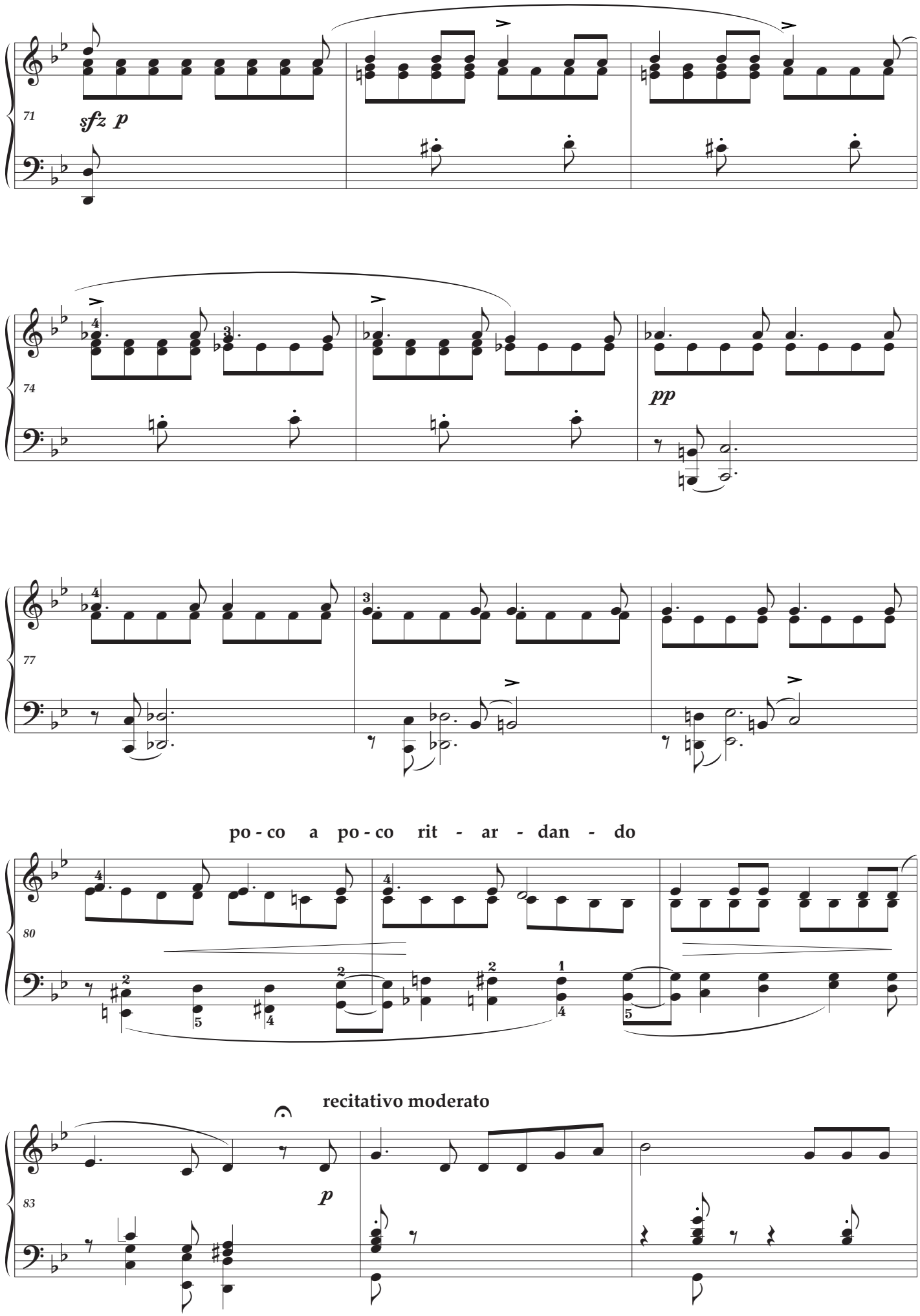
a tempo

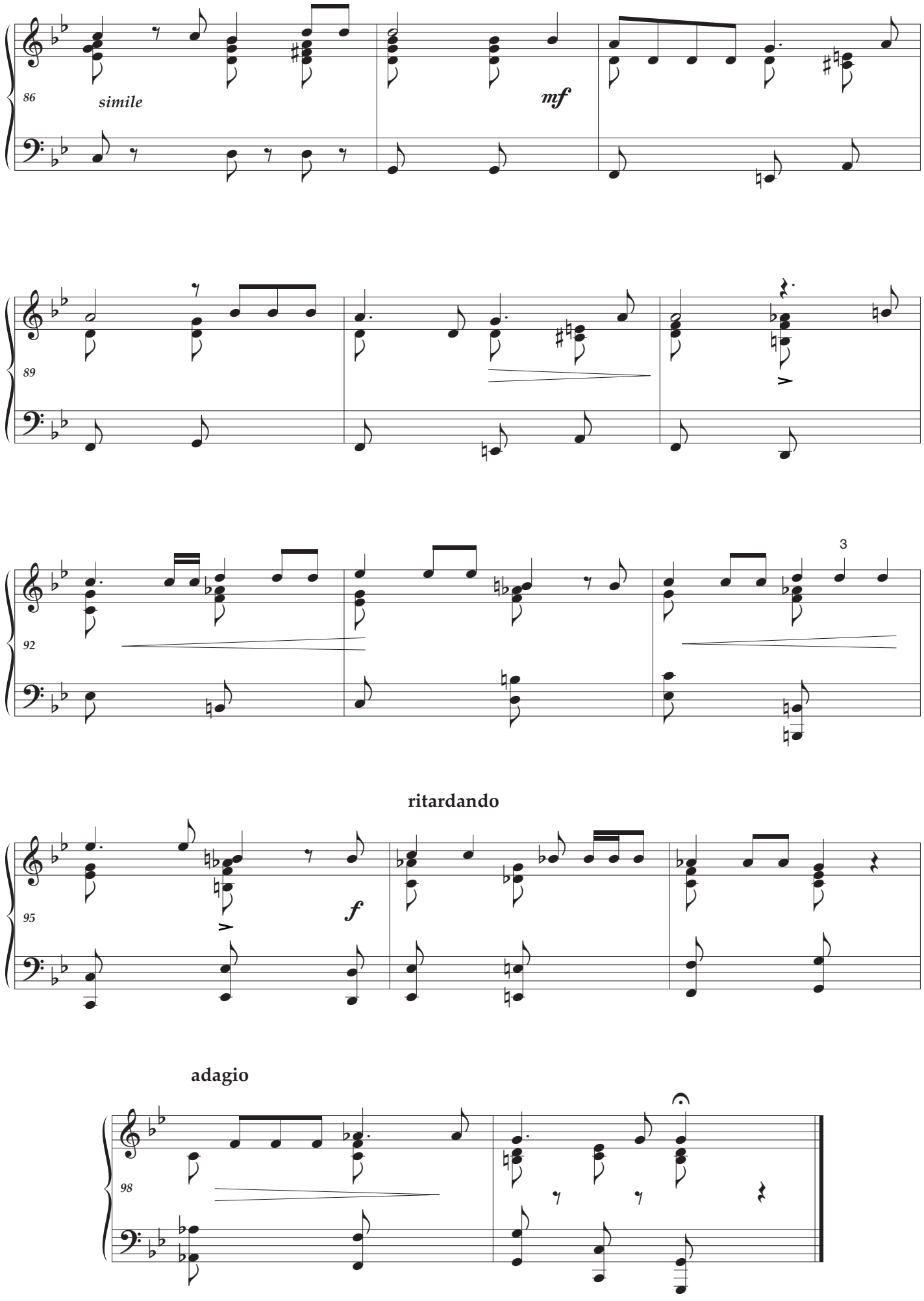



38
40
p
42
44


crescendo
46
48
sfz
50
f
ritardando
f
52
ritardando
54
sfz
tenuto
sfz


a tempo
58
f
m.s.
m.s.
Sost. Ped
60
p
a tempo giusto
62
65
68
f


71
sfz p
74
pp
77
po - co a po - co rit - ar - dan - do
80
recitativo moderato
83
p


86
simile
mf
89
92
3
ritardando
95
f
adagio
98

SCHUMANN

six songs transcribed by

RAY ALSTON

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