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OF MUSICAL CLASSICS

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN

Complete Works for the Piano

Edited and Fingered,
and provided with an Introductory Note by
CARL MIKULI

Historical and Analytical Comments by
JAMES HUNEKER

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FRÉDÉRIC FRANCOIS CHOPIN

According to a tradition—and, be it said, an erroneous one—Chopin's playing was like that of one dreaming rather than awake—scarcely audible in its continual *pianissimos* and *una cordas*, with feebly developed technique and quite lacking in confidence, or at least indistinct, and distorted out of all rhythmic form by an incessant *tempo rubato!* The effect of these notions could not be otherwise than very prejudicial to the interpretation of his works, even by the most able artists—in their very striving after truthfulness; besides, they are easily accounted for.

Chopin played rarely and always unwillingly in public; "exhibitions" of himself were totally repugnant to his nature. Long years of sickliness and nervous irritability did not always permit him the necessary repose in the concert-hall, for displaying untrammeled the full wealth of his resources. In more familiar circles, too, he seldom played anything but his shorter pieces, or occasional fragments from the larger works. Small wonder, therefore, that Chopin the Pianist should fail of general recognition.

Yet Chopin possessed a highly developed technique, giving him complete mastery over the instrument. In all styles of touch the evenness of his scales and passages was unsurpassed—nay, fabulous; under his hands the pianoforte needed to envy neither the violin for its bow nor wind-instruments for the living breath. The tones melted one into the other with the liquid effect of beautiful song.

A genuine piano-hand, extremely flexible though not large, enabled him to play arpeggios of most widely dispersed harmonies and passages in wide stretches, which he brought into vogue as something never attempted before; and everything without the slightest apparent exertion, a pleasing freedom and lightness being a distinguishing characteristic of his style. At the same time, the tone which he could *draw out* of the instrument was prodigious, especially in the *cantabiles;* in this regard John Field alone could compare with him.

A lofty, virile energy lent imposing effect to suitable passages—an energy without roughness; on the other hand, he could carry away his hearers by the tenderness of his soulful delivery—a tenderness without affectation. But with all the warmth of his peculiarly ardent temperament, his playing was always within bounds, chaste, polished and at times even severely reserved.

In keeping time Chopin was inflexible, and many will be surprised to learn that the metronome never left his piano. Even in his oft-decried *tempo rubato* one hand—that having the accompaniment—always played on in strict time, while the other, singing the melody, either hesitating as if undecided, or, with increased animation, anticipating with a kind of impatient vehemence as if in passionate utterances, maintained the freedom of musical expression from the fetters of strict regularity.

Some information concerning Chopin the Teacher, even in the shape of a mere sketch, can hardly fail to interest many readers.

Far from regarding his work as a teacher, which his position as an artist and his social connections in Paris rendered difficult of avoidance, as a burdensome task, Chopin daily devoted his entire energies to it for several hours and with genuine delight. True, his demands on the talent and industry of the pupil were very great. There were often "de leçons orageuses" ("stormy lessons"), as they were called in school parlance, and many a fair eye wet with tears departed from the high altar of the Cité d'Orleans, rue St. Lazare, yet without the slightest resentment on that score against the dearly beloved master. For this same severity, so little prone to easy satisfaction, this feverish vehemence with which the master strove to raise his disciples to his own plane, this insistence on the repetition of a passage until it was understood, were a guaranty that he had the pupil's progress at heart. He would glow with a sacred zeal for art; every word from his lips was stimulating and inspiring. Single lessons often lasted literally for several hours in succession, until master and pupil were overcome by fatigue.

On beginning with a pupil, Chopin was chiefly anxious to do away with any stiffness in, or cramped, convulsive movement of, the hand, thereby obtaining the first requisite of a fine technique, "souplesse" (suppleness), and at the same time independence in the motion of the fingers. He was never tired of inculcating that such technical exercises are not merely mechanical, but claim the intelligence and entire will-power of the pupil; and, consequently, that a twentyfold or fortyfold repetition (still the lauded arcanum of so many schools) does no good whatever—not to mention the kind of practising advocated by Kalkbrenner, during which one may also occupy oneself with reading! He treated the various styles of touch very thoroughly, more especially the full-toned *legato.*

As gymnastic aids he recommended bending the wrist inward and outward, the repeated wrist-stroke, the pressing apart of the fingers—but all with an earnest warning against over-exertion. For scale-practice he required a very full tone, as *legato* as possible, at first very slowly and taking a quicker tempo only step by step, and playing with metronomic evenness. To facilitate the passing under of the thumb and passing over of the fingers, the hand was to be bent inward. The scales having many black keys (B major, F-sharp, D-flat) were

studied first, C major, as the hardest, coming last. In like order he took up Clementi's Preludes and Exercises, a work which he highly valued on account of its utility. According to Chopin, evenness in scale-playing and arpeggios depends not only on the equality in the strength of the fingers obtained through five-finger exercises, and a perfect freedom of the thumb in passing under and over, but foremostly on the perfectly smooth and constant sideways movement of the hand (not *step* by *step*), letting the elbow hang down freely and loosely at all times. This movement he exemplified by a *glissando* across the keys. After this he gave as studies a selection from Cramer's Études, Clementi's Gradus ad Parnassum, The Finishing Studies in Style by Moscheles, which were very congenial to him, Bach's English and French Suites, and some Preludes and Fugues from the Well-Tempered Clavichord.

Field's and his own nocturnes also figured to a certain extent as studies, for through them—partly by learning from his explanations, partly by hearing and imitating them as played indefatigably by Chopin himself—the pupil was taught to recognize, love and produce the *legato* and the beautiful connected singing tone. For paired notes and chords he exacted strictly simultaneous striking of the notes, an arpeggio being permitted only where marked by the composer himself; in the trill, which he generally commenced on the auxiliary, he required perfect evenness rather than great rapidity, the closing turn to be played easily and without haste.

For the turn (*gruppetto*) and appoggiatura he recommended the great Italian singers as models; he desired octaves to be played with the wrist-stroke, but without losing in fullness of tone thereby. Only far-advanced pupils were given his Études Op. 10 and Op. 25.

Chopin's attention was always directed to teaching correct phrasing. With reference to wrong phrasing he often repeated the apt remark, that it struck him as if some one were reciting, in a language not understood by the speaker, a speech carefully learned by rote, in the course of which the speaker not only neglected the natural quantity of the syllables, but even stopped in the middle of words. The pseudo-musician, he said, shows in a similar way, by his wrong phrasing, that music is not his mother-tongue, but something foreign and incomprehensible to him, and must, like the aforesaid speaker, quite renounce the idea of making any effect upon his hearers by his delivery.

In marking the fingering, especially that peculiar to himself, Chopin was not sparing. Piano-playing owes him many innovations in this respect, whose practicalness caused their speedy adoption, though at first certain authorities, like Kalkbrenner, were fairly horrified by them. For example, Chopin did not hesitate to use the thumb on the black keys, or to pass it under the little finger (with a decided inward bend of the wrist, to be sure), where it facilitated the execution, rendering the latter quieter and smoother. With one and the same finger he often struck two neighboring keys in succession (and this not simply in a slide from a black key to the next white one), without the slightest noticeable break in the continuity of the tones. He frequently passed the longest fingers over each other without the intervention of the thumb (see Étude No. 2, Op. 10), and not only in passages where (e.g.) it was made necessary by the holding down of a key with the thumb. The fingering for chromatic thirds based on this device (and marked by himself in Étude No. 5, Op. 25), renders it far easier to obtain the smoothest *legato* in the most rapid tempo, and with a perfectly quiet hand, than the fingering followed before. The fingerings in the present edition are, in most cases, those indicated by Chopin himself; where this is not the case, they are at least marked in conformity with his principles, and therefore calculated to facilitate the execution in accordance with his conceptions.

In the shading he insisted on a real and carefully graduated *crescendo* and *decrescendo*. On phrasing, and on style in general, he gave his pupils invaluable and highly suggestive hints and instructions, assuring himself, however, that they were understood by playing not only single passages, but whole pieces, over and over again, and this with a scrupulous care, an enthusiasm, such as none of his auditors in the concert-hall ever had an opportunity to witness. The whole lesson-hour often passed without the pupil's having played more than a few measures, while Chopin, at a Pleyel upright piano (the pupil always played on a fine concert grand, and was obliged to promise to practise on only the best instruments), continually interrupting and correcting, proffered for his admiration and imitation the warm, living ideal of perfect beauty. It may be asserted, without exaggeration, that only the pupil knew Chopin the Pianist in his entire unrivalled greatness.

Chopin most urgently recommended ensemble-playing, the cultivation of the best chamber-music—but only in association with the finest musicians. In case no such opportunity offered, the best substitute would be found in four-hand playing.

With equal insistence he advised his pupils to take up thorough theoretical studies as early as practicable. Whatever their condition in life, the master's great heart always beat warmly for the pupils. A sympathetic, fatherly friend, he inspired them to unwearying endeavor, took unaffected delight in their progress, and at all times had an encouraging word for the wavering and dispirited.

CARL MIKULI.

THE BALLADES

CHOPIN composed four Ballades; the first, in G minor, opus 23, was published in June, 1836; the second, in F major-A minor, opus 38, in September, 1840; the third, in A flat, opus 47, November, 1841; and the fourth, in F minor, opus 52, in February, 1843. In his "Studies in Modern Music," W. H. Hadow has said some pertinent things about Chopin. Yet we must not unconditionally accept his statement that "in structure Chopin is a child playing with a few simple types; and almost helpless as soon as he advances beyond them; in phraseology he is a master whose felicitous perfection of style is one of the abiding treasures of the art." Chopin then, according to Hadow, is no builder of the lofty rhyme, but the poet of the single line, a maker of the phrase exquisite. This is hardly comprehensive enough. With the more classic, complex types of musical organism Chopin had little sympathy, nevertheless he contrives to write two movements of a piano sonata that are excellent—the first half of the B flat minor Sonata. But he preferred the idealized dance-forms; the Polonaise, Mazurka, and Waltz were already in existence for him to manipulate. The Ballade was not. Here he is not an imitator or remodeller, but creator. Not loosely jointed, but compact structures glowing with genius and of a definite unity in form and expression are the Ballades—commonly written in six-eight and six-four time. "None of Chopin's compositions surpasses in masterliness of form and beauty and poetry of contents his Ballades. In them he attains the acme of his power as an artist," declares Professor Niecks.

The G minor Ballade is the Odyssey of Chopin's soul; in it are the surge and thunder of the poet. That 'cello-like *Largo* with its noiseless suspension stays us for a moment at the entrance of Chopin's House Beautiful. Then, told in his most dreamy tones, the legend begins. As in some fabulous tale of the Genii this Ballade discloses surprising and delicious things. There is the tall lily in the fountain that nods to the sun. It drips in cadenced monotone and its song is echoed by the lips of the slender-hipped girl with the midnight eyes—and so I might weave a story of what I see in this Ballade and my readers would be puzzled or aghast. With such a composition any programme could be planned, even the story of the Englishman who is said to have haunted the presence of Chopin beseeching that he teach him this Ballade. That Chopin had a definite programme there can be no doubt; but, wise artist that he was, he has left no clue beyond the Lithuanian poems of the Polish bard, Adam Mickiewicz. Karasowski relates that when Chopin and Schumann met in Leipsic the former confessed that he had been "incited to the creation of the Ballades by the poetry" of his fellow countryman. The true narrative tone is in this symmetrically constructed Ballade— "After Konrad Wallenrod" —the most spirited and daring work of Chopin, according to Schumann. Of the four Ballades Louis Ehlert writes: "Each one differs entirely from the others, and they have but one thing in common—their romantic working out and the nobility of their motives. Chopin relates in them, not like one who communicates something really experienced; it is as though he told what never took place, but what has sprung up in his inmost soul, the anticipation of something longed for. They may contain a strong element of national woe, much outwardly expressed and inwardly burning rage over the sufferings of his native land; yet they do not convey positive reality as does a Beethoven sonata." Which means that Chopin was not such a realist as Beethoven? Ehlert is one of the few sympathetic German commentators on Chopin, yet he did not always indicate the salient outlines of his art. Perhaps only the Slav may hope to understand Chopin thoroughly. But these Ballades are more truly touched by the universal than any of his works; they belong as much to the world as to Poland.

The G minor Ballade is a logical, well-knit and largely-planned composition; the closest parallelism may be detected in its thematic scheme. Its second theme in E flat major is lovely in line, color and sentiment. The modulating of the first theme, into A minor, and the quick answer in E major of the second, are evidences of Chopin's feeling for organic unity. Development, as in strict cyclic forms, there is not much. After the cadenza, built on a figure of wavering tonality, a waltz-like theme emerges and enjoys a capricious butterfly existence. Passage-work of an etherealized character leads to the second subject, now augmented and treated with a broad brush. The first questioning theme is again heard and like a blast the *presto* comes. It is a whirlwind and the piece ends in storm of scales and octaves. The last bar of the introduction has caused some critical controversy. Gutmann, Mikuli and other Chopin pupils declare for the E flat; Klindworth and Kullak use it. Xaver Scharwenka gives a D natural in the Augener edition. That he is wrong is proved by internal testimony. Chopin intended the E flat, and twenty-eight bars later employs a similar effect; indeed, the entire composition contains

examples—look at the first bar of the Waltz episode. As Niecks puts it, "this dissonant E flat may be said to be the emotional keynote of the whole poem. It is a questioning thought that like a sudden pain shoots through mind and body." There is still more confirmatory evidence. Mr. Ferdinand von Inten, a well-known pianist and pedagogue of New York, saw the original Chopin manuscript at Stuttgart. It was the property of Professor Lebert, and it contains the much discussed E flat. This testimony ought to be final; besides, the D natural robs the bar of its meaning and is insipid. On the third page, third bar, Kullak uses F natural in the treble; so does Klindworth, though F sharp may be found in some editions. On the last page, second bar, first line, Kullak writes the passage beginning in E flat in eighth notes, Klindworth in sixteenths. The close, as Schumann says, "would inspire a poet to write words to it."

How difficult it is not to speak of Chopin except in terms of impressioned prose. Louis Ehlert, classicist by profession, but a romantic in feeling, wrote of the second Ballade: "Perhaps the most touching of all that Chopin has written is the tale of the F major Ballade. I have witnessed children lay aside their games to listen thereto. It appears like some fairy-tale that has become music. The four-voiced part has such a clearness withal, it seems as if warm spring breezes were waving the little leaves of the palm trees. How soft and sweet a breath steals over the senses and the heart!" This Ballade, though dedicated to Robert Schumann, did not excite his warmest praise. "A less artistic work than the first," he wrote, "but equally fantastic and intellectual. Its impassioned episodes seem to have been inserted afterward. I remember very well that when Chopin played this Ballade for me it finished in F major; it now closes in A minor." However, Chopin's musical instinct was seldom at fault, an ending in the major would have hurt this tone-poem, written, as the composer says, under the direct inspiration of Mickiewicz's "Le Lac des Willis." Niecks does not accept Schumann's dictum as to the supposed inferiority of this second Ballade. He is quite justified in asking how "two such wholly dissimilar things can be weighed in this fashion." In truth they cannot. "The second Ballade possesses beauties in no way inferior to those of the first," he continues. "What can be finer than the simple strains of the opening section! They sound as if they had been drawn from the people's store-house of song. The entrance of the *presto* surprises, and seems out of keeping with what precedes; but what we hear after the return of the *tempo primo*—the development of those strains, or rather the cogitations on them—justifies the presence of the *presto*. The second appearance of the latter leads to an urging, restless *coda* in A minor, which closes in the same key and *pianissimo* with a few bars of the simple, serene, now veiled first strain." Rubinstein bore great love for this second Ballade. This is what is meant for him: "Is it possible that the interpreter does not feel the necessity of representing to his audience—a field flower caught by a rush of wind, a caressing of the flower by the wind; the resistance of the flower, the stormy struggle of the wind; the entreaty of the flower, which at last lies there broken; and paraphrased—the field flower a rustic maiden, the wind a knight."

I can find "no lack of affinity" between the *andantino* and *presto*. The surprise is dramatic, withal rudely vigorous. Chopin's robust treatment of the first theme results in a strong piece of craftsmanship. The episodical nature of this Ballade is the fruit of the esoteric moods of the composer. It follows a hidden story, and has the quality—as has also the second Impromptu—of great, unpremeditated art. It shocks one by its abrupt, but by no means fantastic, transitions. The key-color is changeful, and the fluctuating themes are well contrasted. It was written at Majorca when the composer was only too noticeably disturbed in body and soul. *Presto con fuoco* Chopin marks the second section. Like Klindworth, Kullak prefers the E nine bars before the return of the *presto*. At the eighth bar, after this return, Kullak adheres to the E, instead of F at the beginning of the bar, treble clef. Klindworth indicates both. Nor does Kullak follow Mikuli in using a D in the *coda;* he prefers D sharp instead of a natural. I wish this Ballade were oftener heard in public. It is almost neglected for the third in A flat, which, as Ehlert says, has the voice of the people.

The third Ballade, once known as the "Undine," after the poem of Mickiewicz, is the schoolgirl's delight, who familiarly toys with its demon, seeing only favor and prettiness in its elegant measures. In it "the refined, gifted Pole, who is accustomed to move in the most distinguished circles of the French capital, is preëminently to be recognized," remarks Schumann. Forsooth, it is aristocratic, gay, piquant, graceful, and also something more. Even in its playful moments there is delicate irony, a spiritual sporting with graver and more passionate emotions. Those broken octaves which each time usher in the second theme, with its infectious rhythmic lilt, what an ironically joyous fillip they give to the imagination! "A coquettish grace—if we accept by this expression that half unconscious toying with the power that charms and fires, that follows up confession with reluctance—seems the very essence of Chopin's feeling." Ehlert evidently sees a ball-room picture of brilliancy, with the regulation tender avowal. But the episodes in this Ballade are so attenuated of grosser elements that none but psychic meanings should be read into them. The disputed passage is on the fifth page of the Kullak edition, after the trills. A measure is missing in Kullak, who, like Klindworth, gives it a footnote.

To my mind this repetition adds emphasis, though it is a formal blur. And what an irresistible moment it is, this delectable territory, before the darker mood of the C sharp minor part is reached. Niecks becomes enthusiastic over the insinuation and persuasion of the work, "the composer showing himself in a fundamentally caressing mood." The ease with which the entire composition floats proves that when in mental health Chopin was not daunted by larger forms. There is moonlight in this music, and some sunlight too, but the prevailing moods are coquetry and sweet contentment. Contrapuntal skill is shown in the working-out section. Chopin always wears his learning lightly, it does not oppress us. The inverted dominant pedal in the C sharp minor episode reveals, with the massive *coda*, a great master. Kullak suggests some variants. He uses the transient shake in the third bar, instead of the *appoggiatura* which Klindworth prefers. Klindworth attacks the trill on the second page with the upper tone, A flat. Kullak and Mertke—in the Steingräber edition—are in substantial agreement in the performance of the passage. Mikuli is the most logical.

About the fourth and glorious Ballade in F minor I could write a volume. It is Chopin in his most reflective, yet most lyrical mood. A passionate lyrism is the keynote of the work, with a *nuance* of self-absorption, suppressed feeling—truly Slavic this trait of shyness—and a concentration that is remarkable even for Chopin. The narrative tone is sometimes missing after the first page, a rather moody and melancholy pondering often usurping its place. It is the mood of a man who examines with morbid, curious insistence the malady that devours his soul. This Ballade is the companion to the Fantaisie-Polonaise, and, as a Ballade, "fully worthy of its sisters," to quote Niecks once more. Its theme in F minor has the elusive charm of a very slow, mournful waltz, and returns twice bejewelled, yet never overladen. Here is the very apotheosis of the ornament; in the figuration the idea is displayed in dazzling relief. There are episodes and transitional passage-work distinguished by novelty and the highest art. At no place is there virtuosity for its own sake. The cadenza in A is a pause for breath, rather a sigh, before the rigorously logical imitations which presage the reëntrance of the theme. How wonderful is the treatment of the Introduction. What a harmonist is Chopin. Consider the scales beginning in D flat for the left hand —how suave, how satisfying is this page. And what could be more evocative of dramatic suspense than the sixteen bars before the mad, terrifying *coda*. How the solemn splendors of the half-notes weave an atmosphere of mystic tragedy. De Lenz in his "Great Piano Virtuosos of our Time" (G. Schirmer)—a book I heartily commend to music students for its sympathetic portraits of Liszt, Chopin, Tausig and Henselt—describes the interpretation of the Ballade at the hands of the mighty Karl Tausig. He mentions a "lingering" in the reading which is the *tempo rubato*, as a rule fatally misunderstood by the majority of Chopin players. De Lenz in a note quotes Meyerbeer—Meyerbeer, who quarrelled with Chopin over the rhythm of a certain Mazurka—as asking: "Can one reduce women to notation? They would breed mischief were they emancipated from the measure."

There is poetic passion in the curves of this most eloquent composition. It is Chopin at the summit of his supreme art, an art alembicated, personal, intoxicating. I know nothing in music like the F minor Ballade, nothing so intimate, so subtly distinctive.

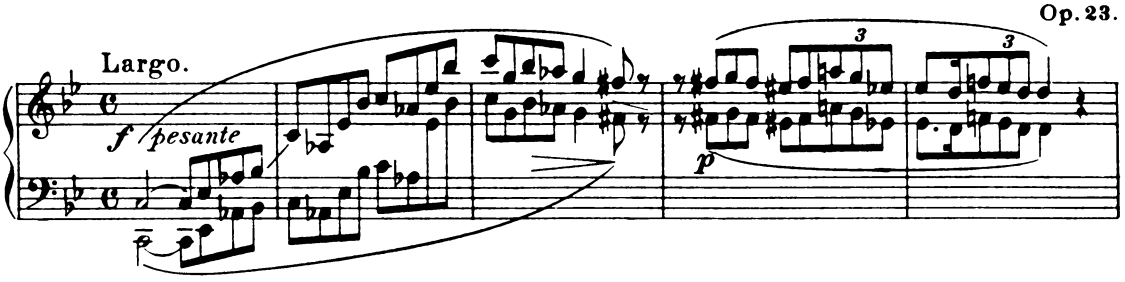
James Huneker

Thematic Index.

BALLADES.

1.
G Minor.

Op. 23.



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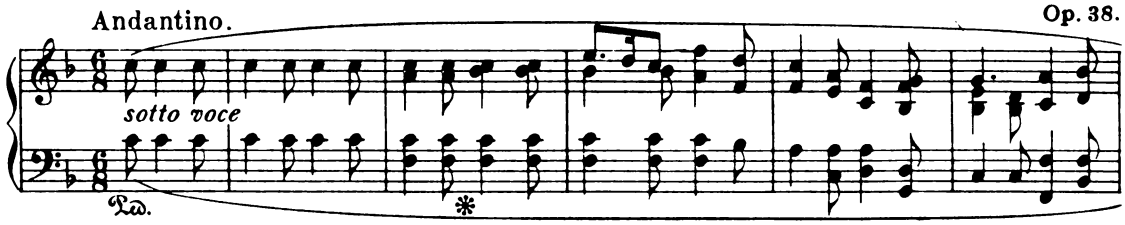
2.
F Major.

Op. 38.



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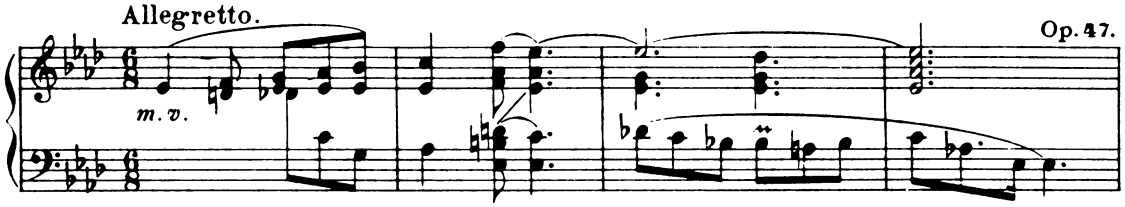
3.
A♭ Major.

Op. 47.



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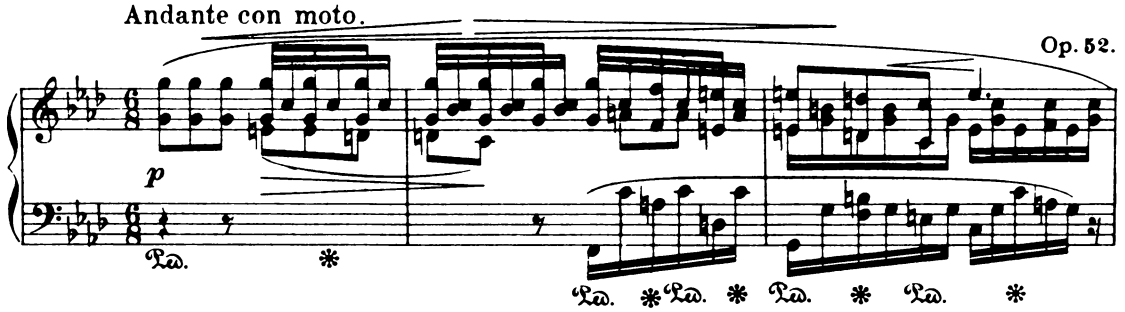
4.
F Minor.

Op. 52.



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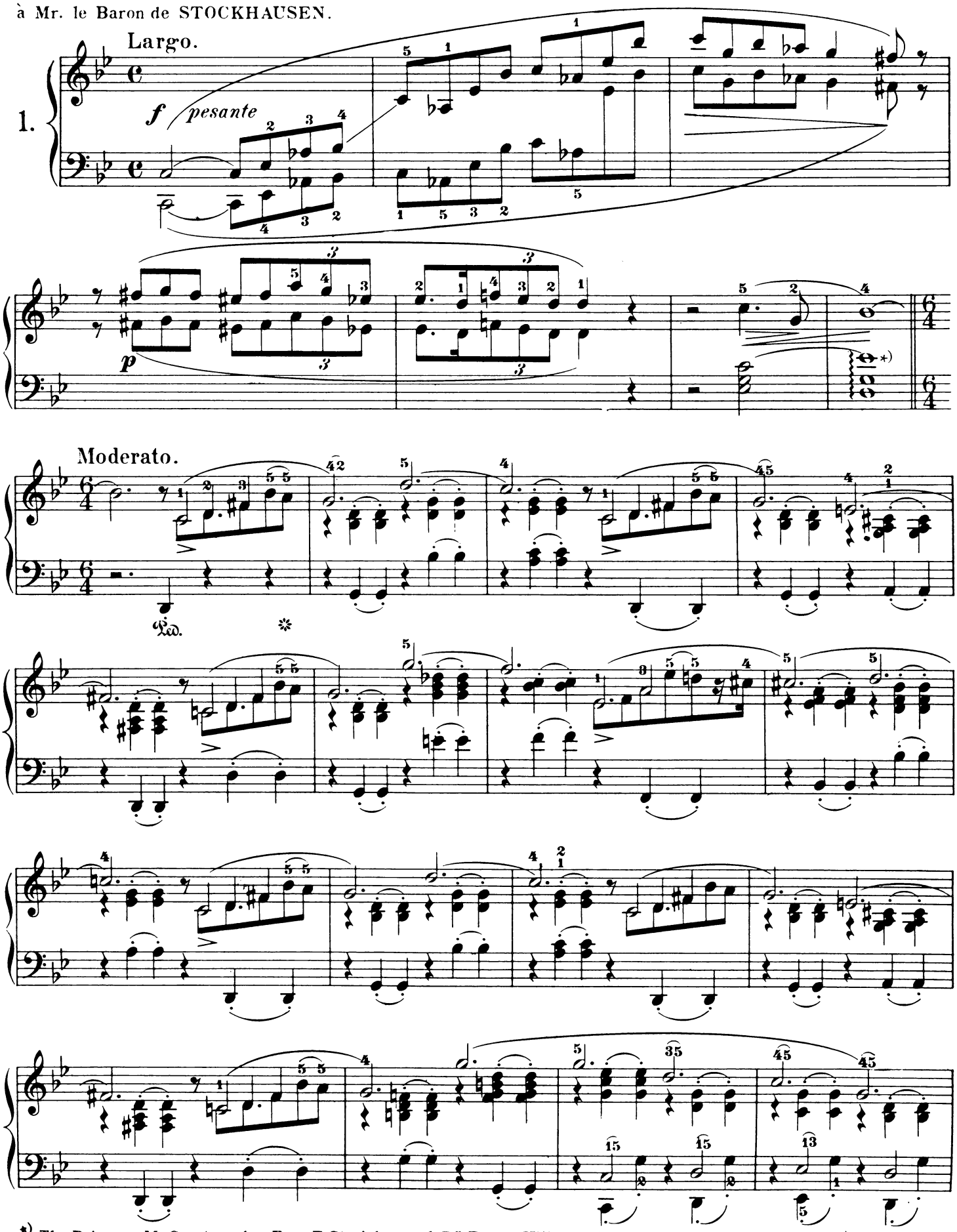
Première Ballade.

F. CHOPIN. Op. 23.

à Mr. le Baron de STOCKHAUSEN.



*) The Princess M. Czartorvska, Frau F. Streicher, and Dr F. von Hiller maintain the authenticity of this Eb in opposition to the D of earlier editions.

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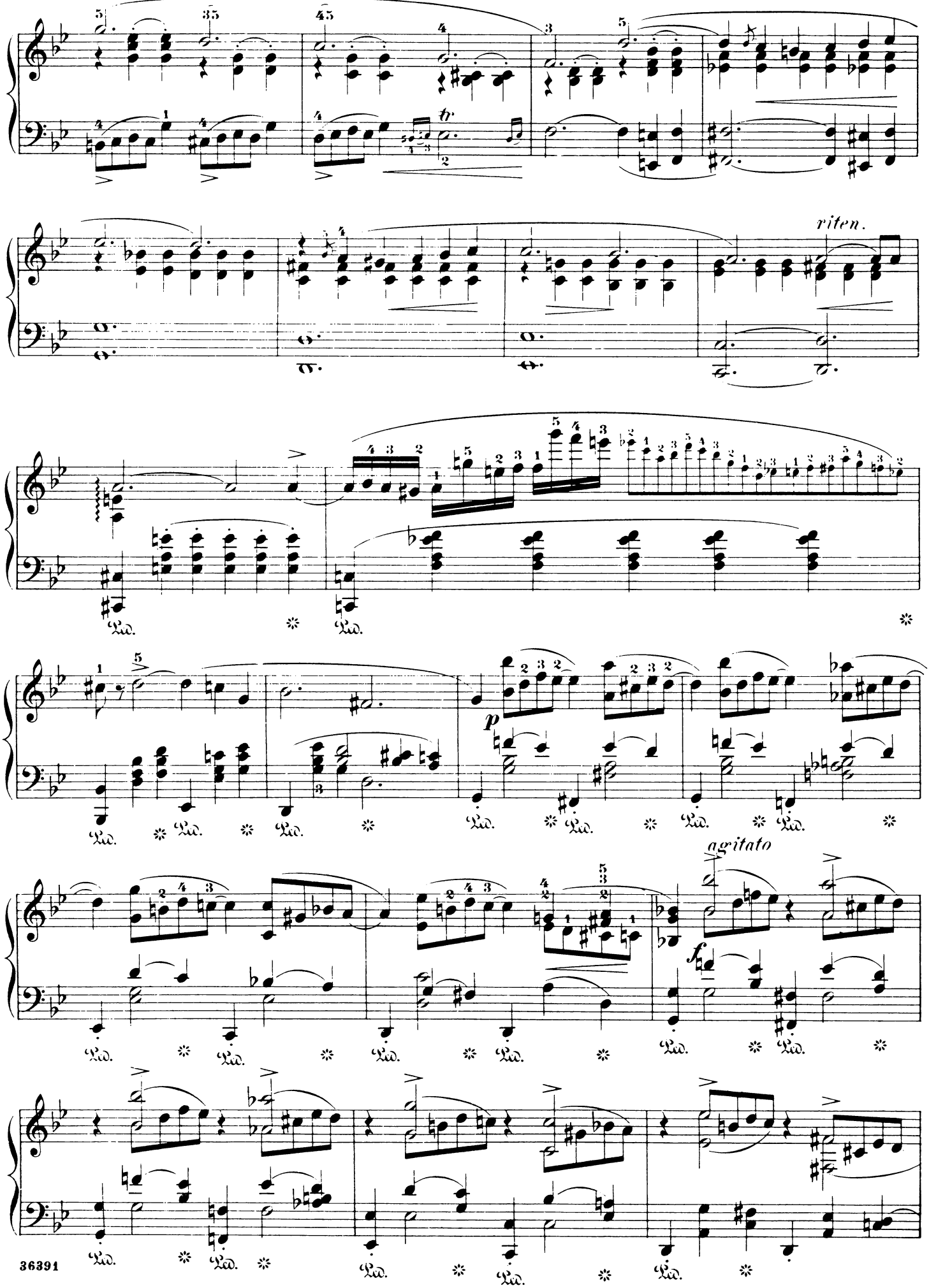
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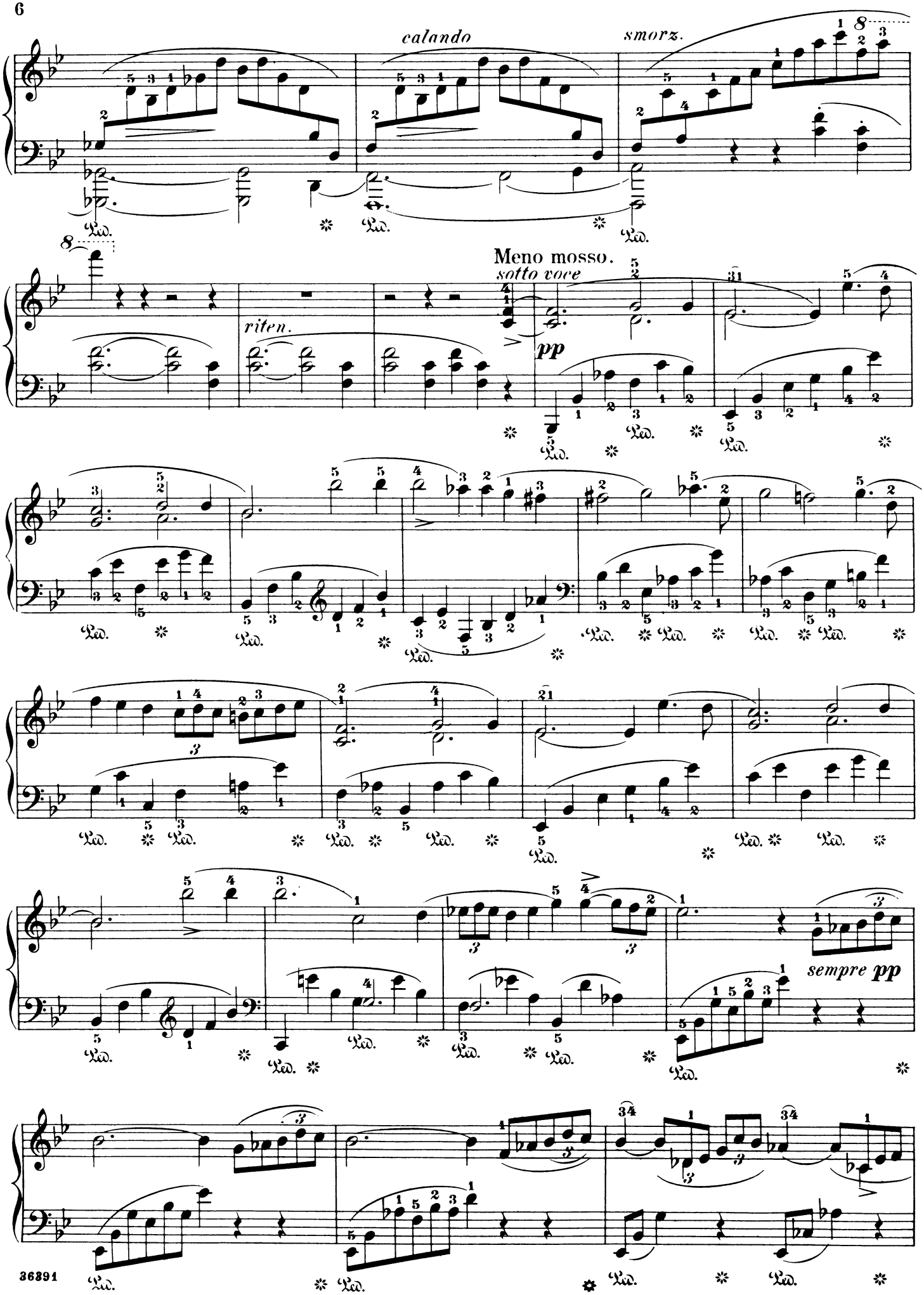
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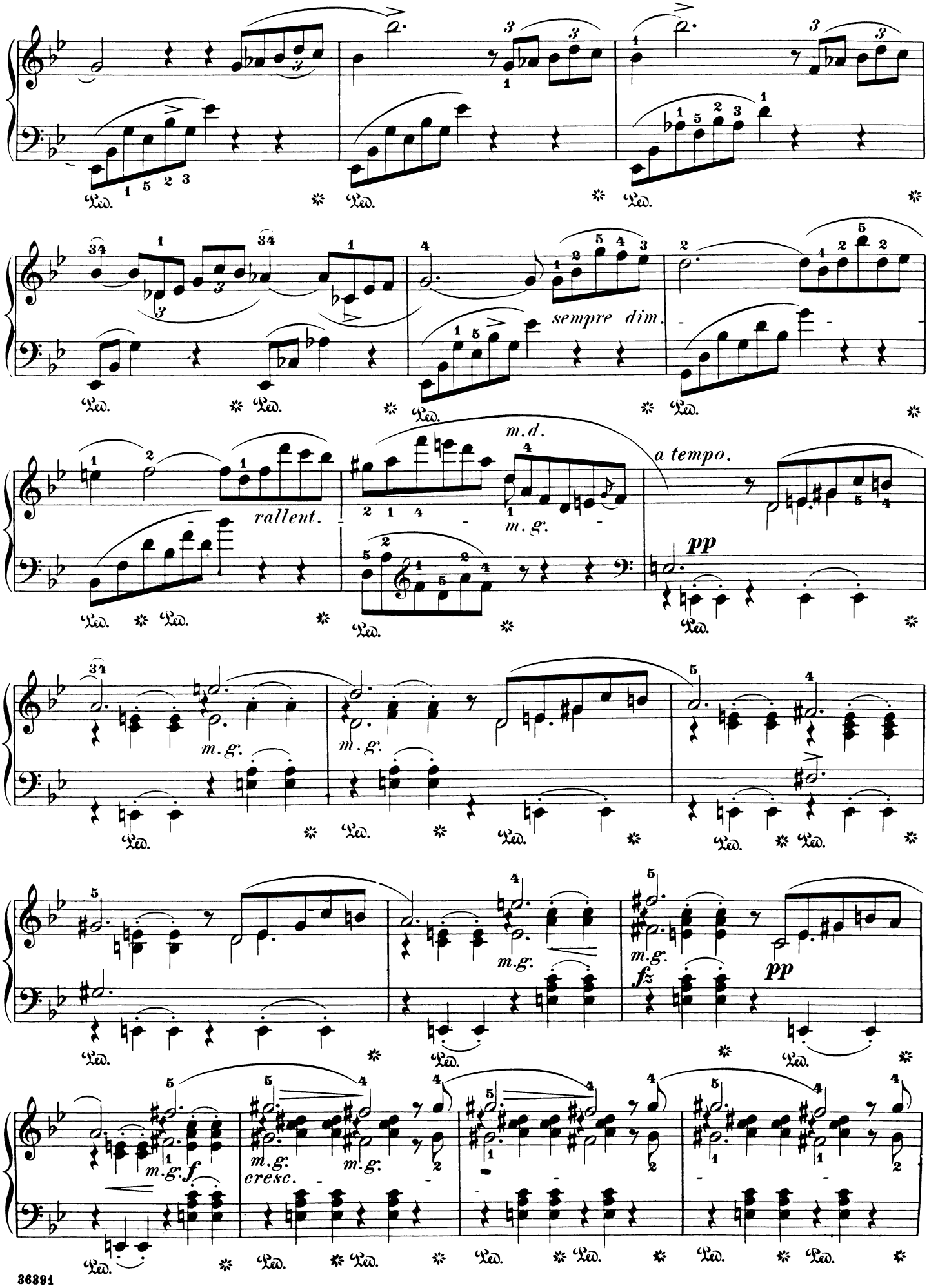
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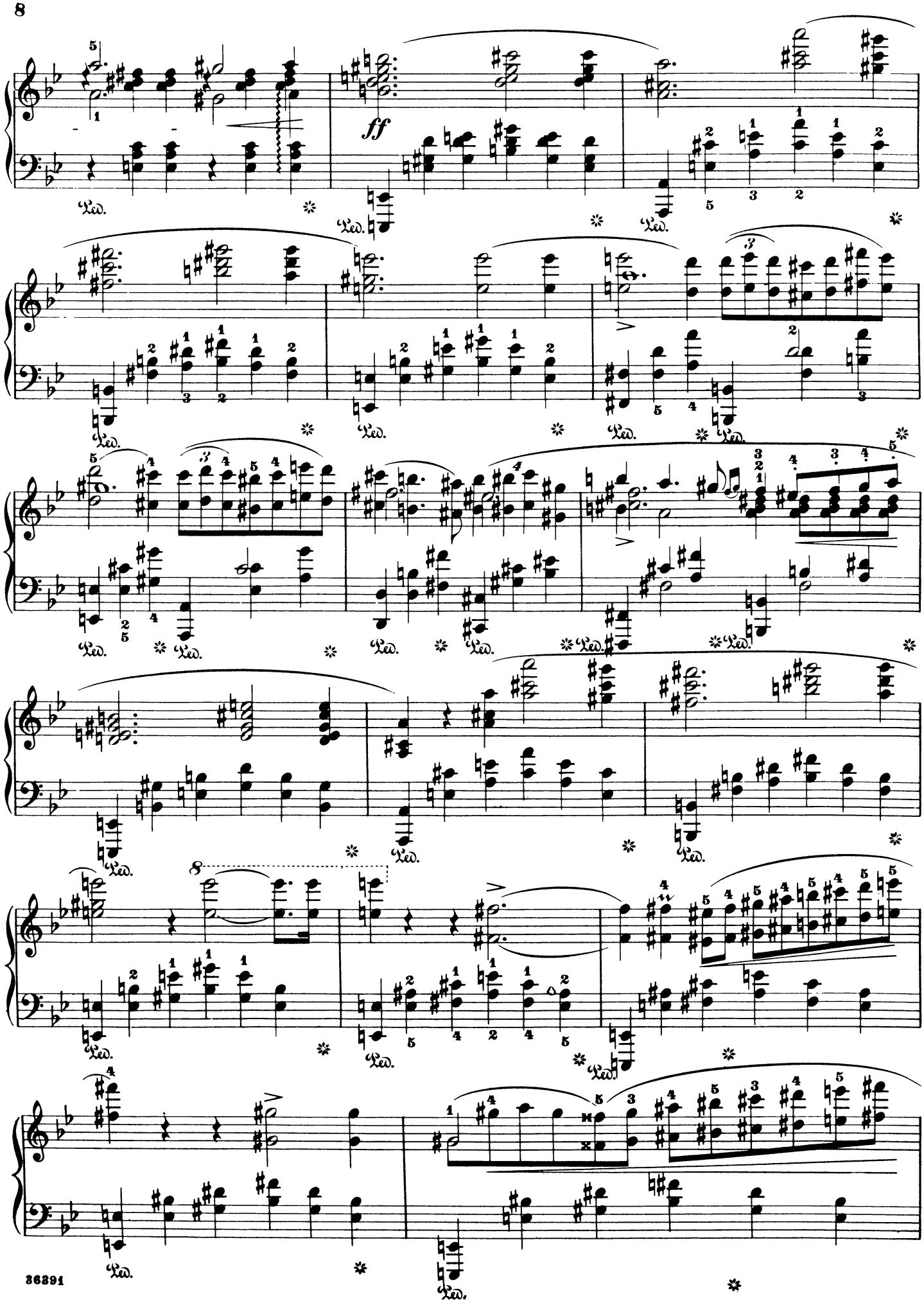
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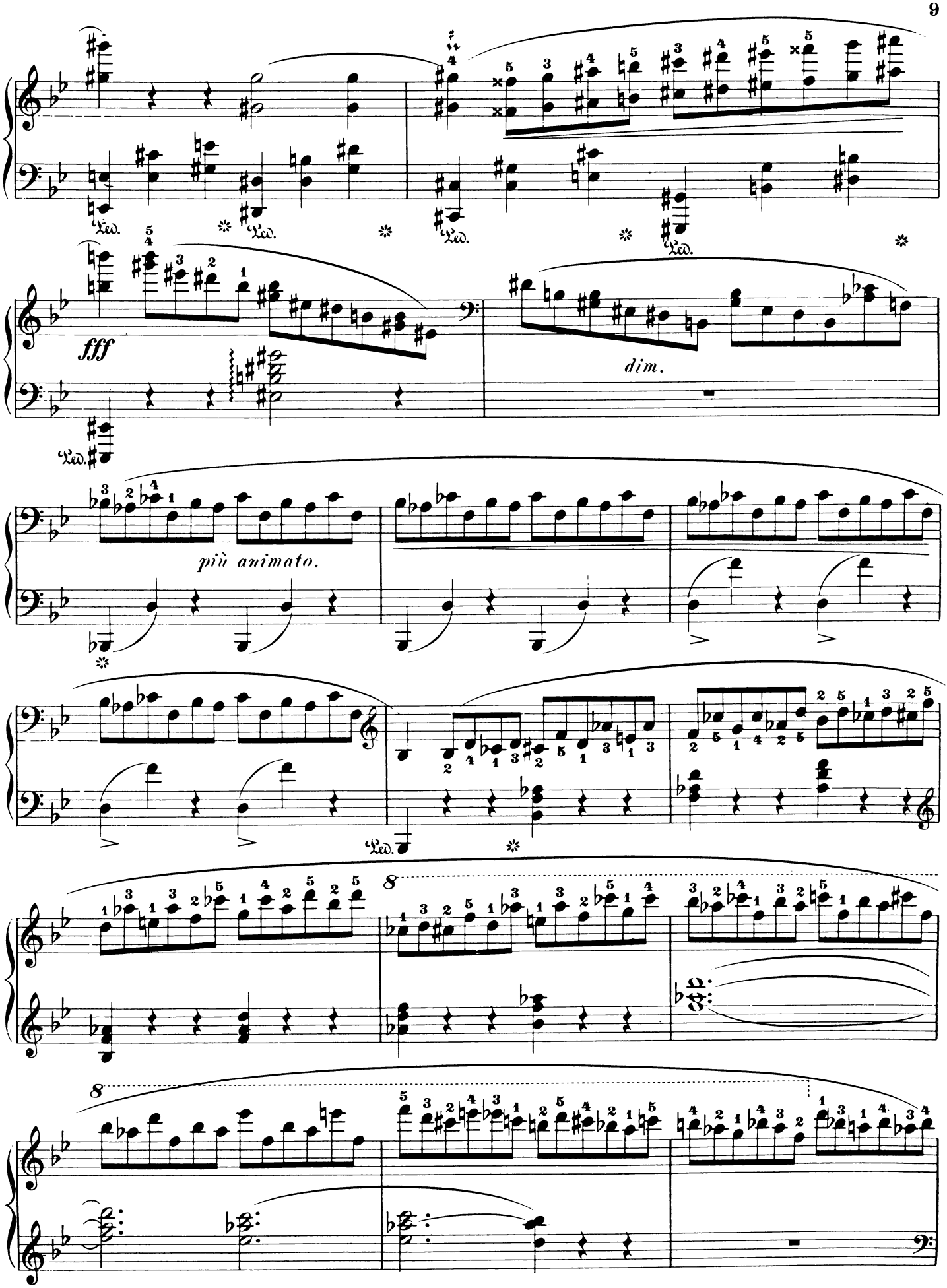
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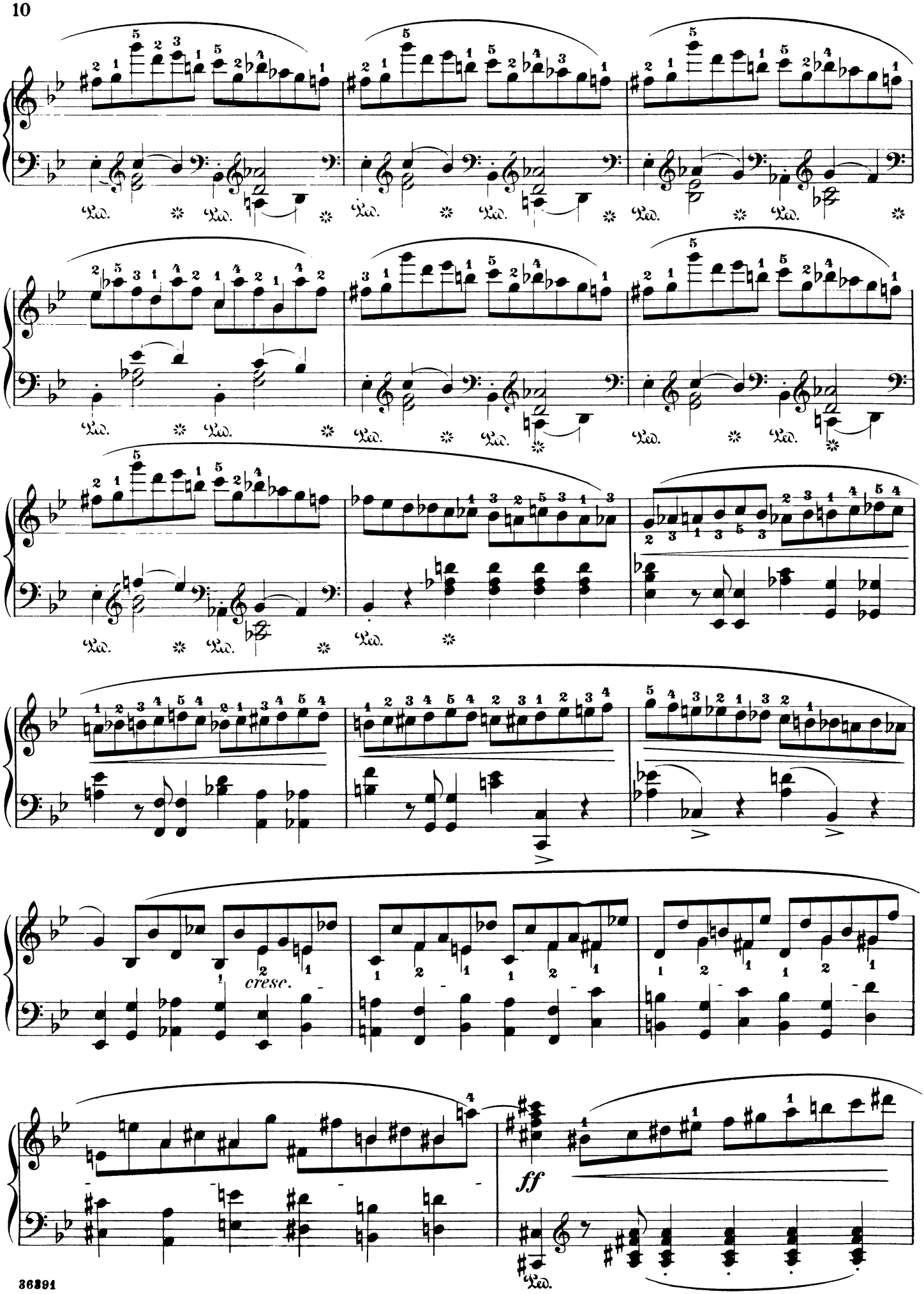
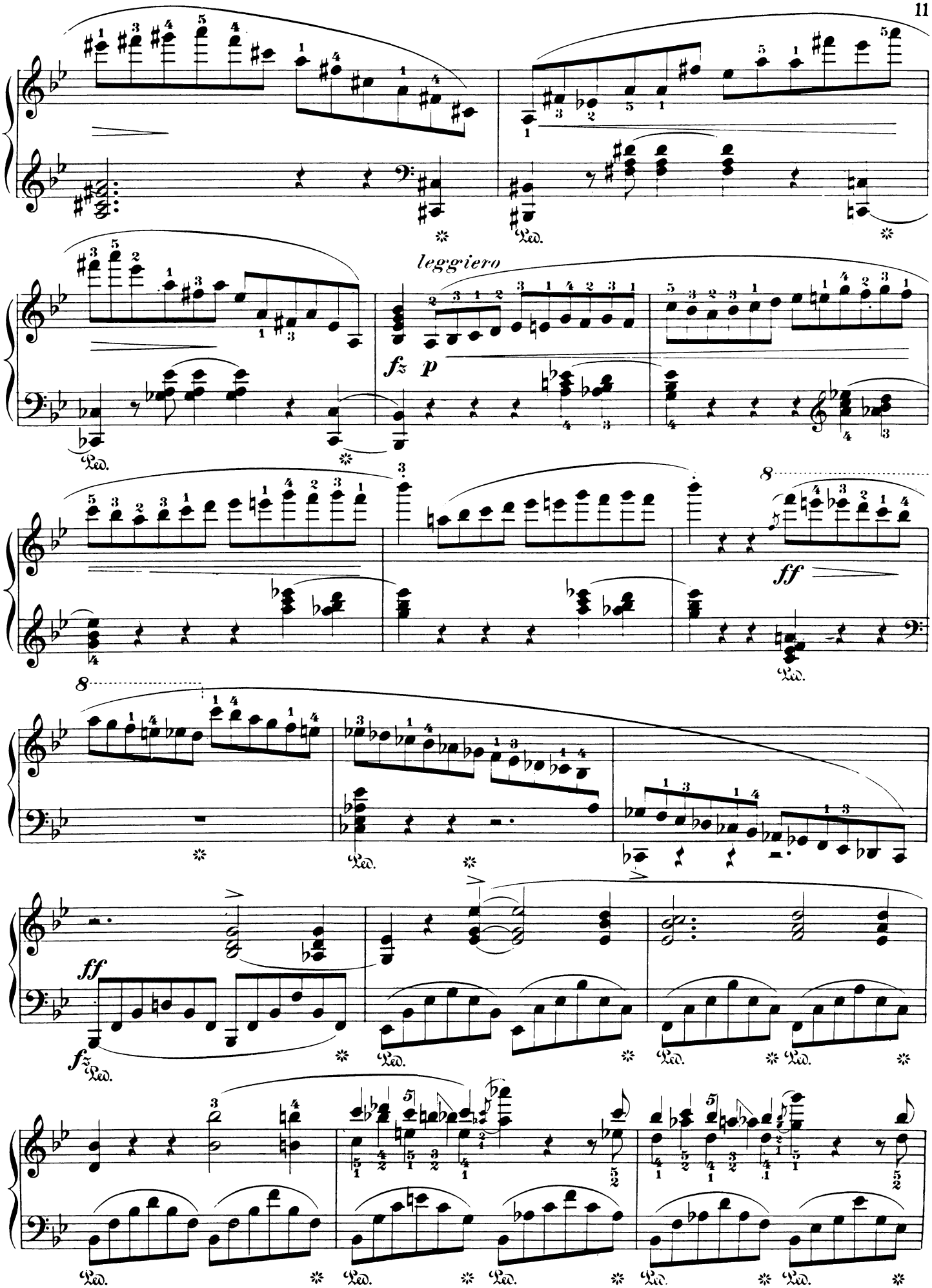
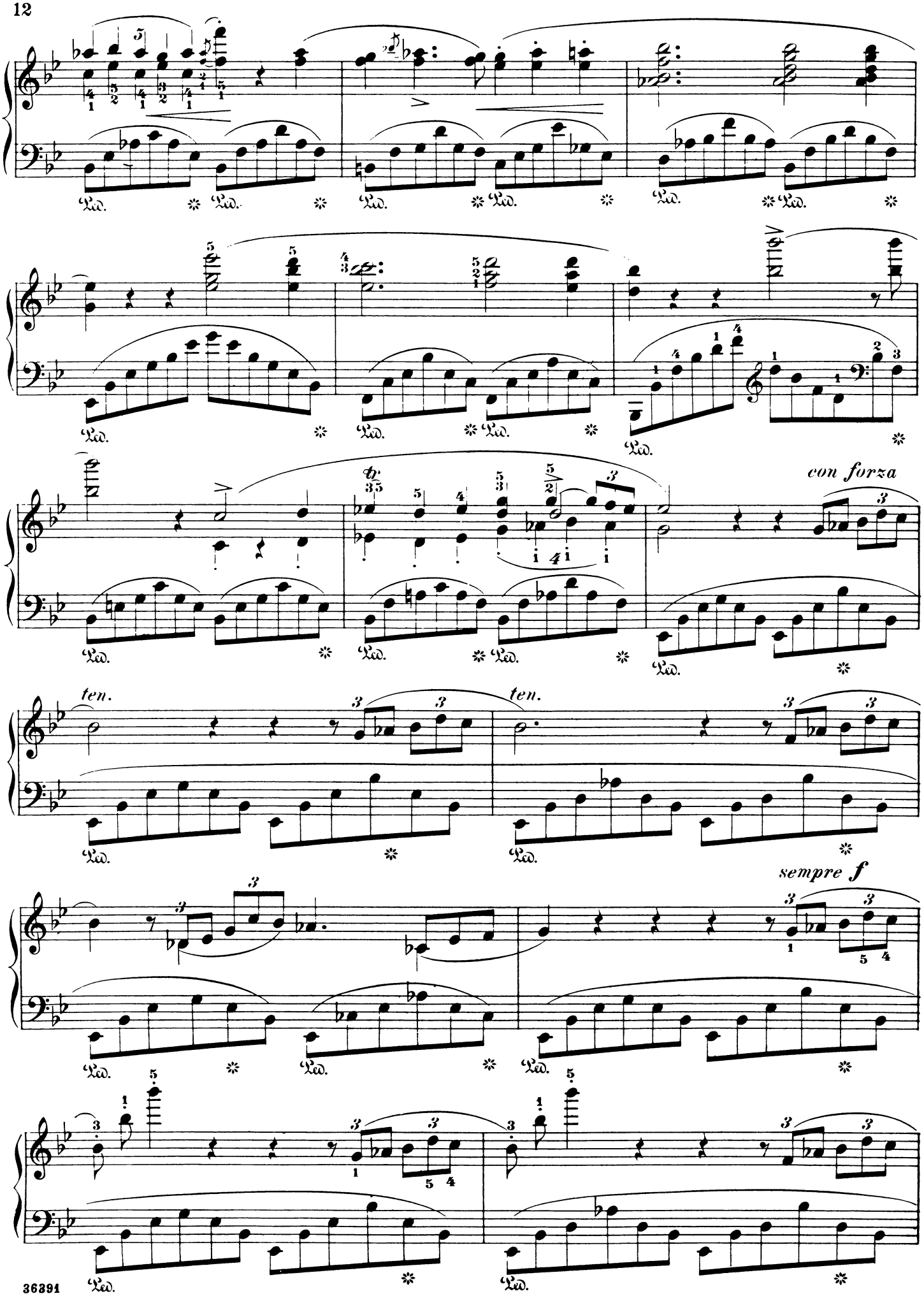
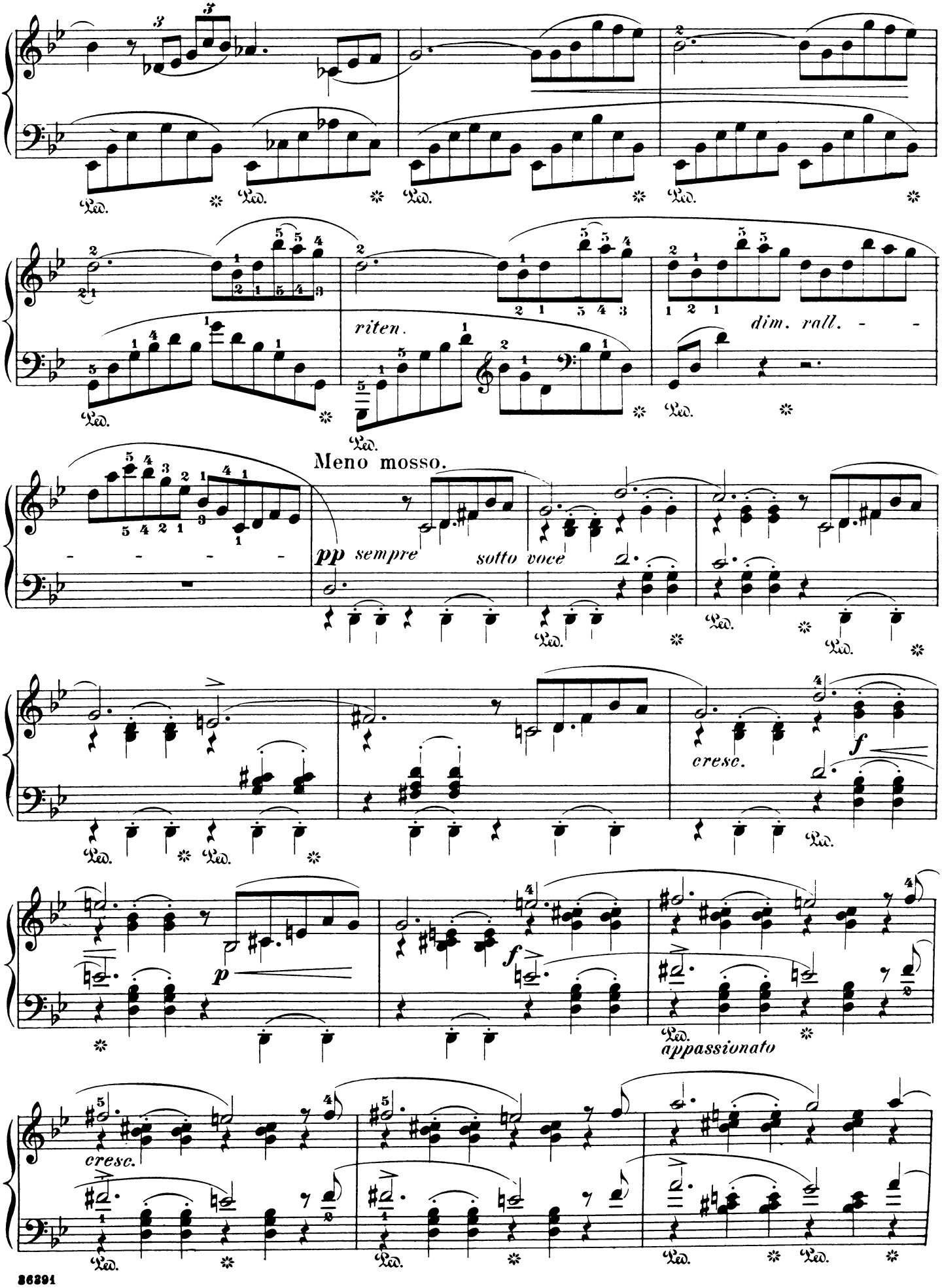
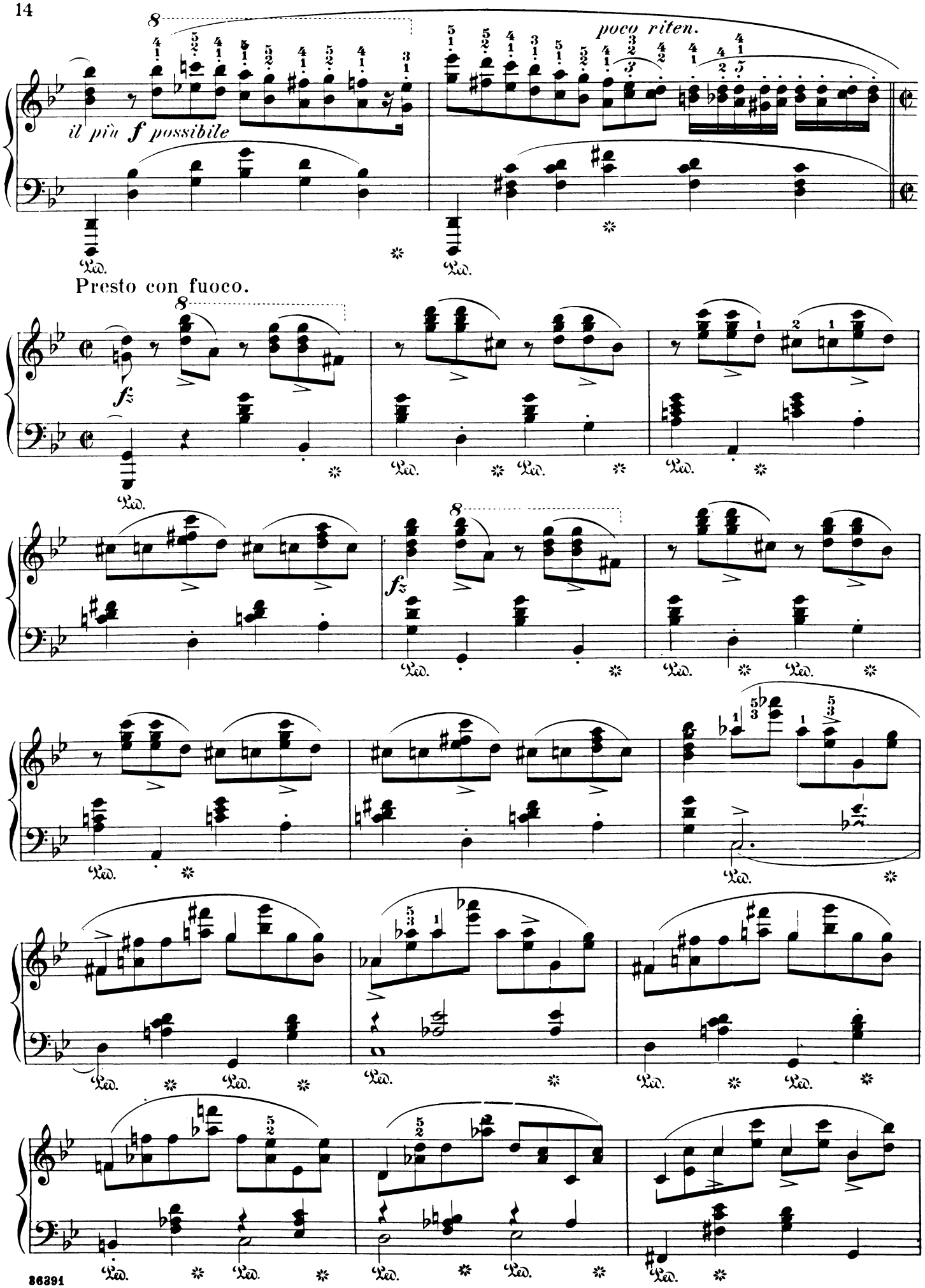
dim.
più animato.

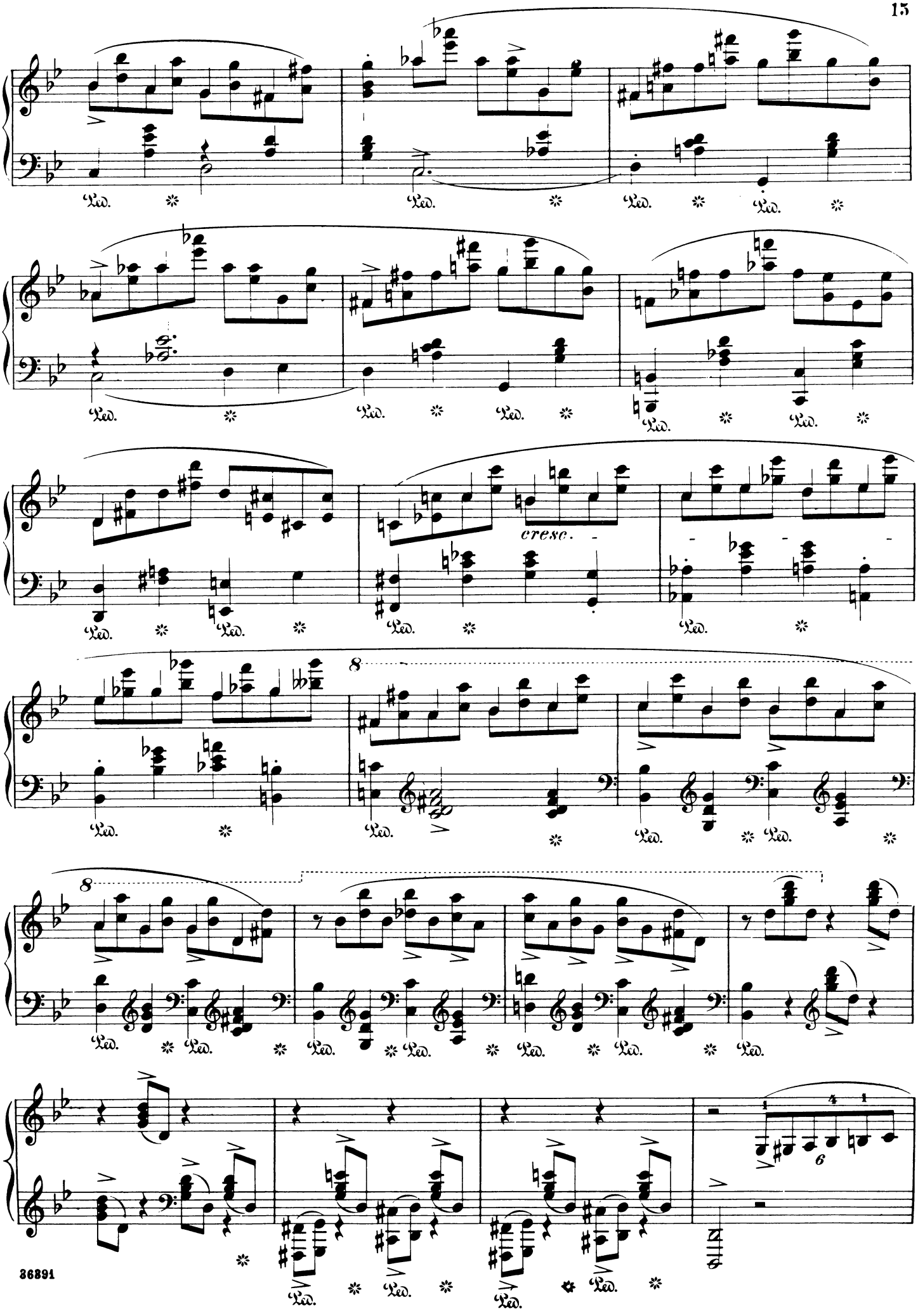

cresc.
ff

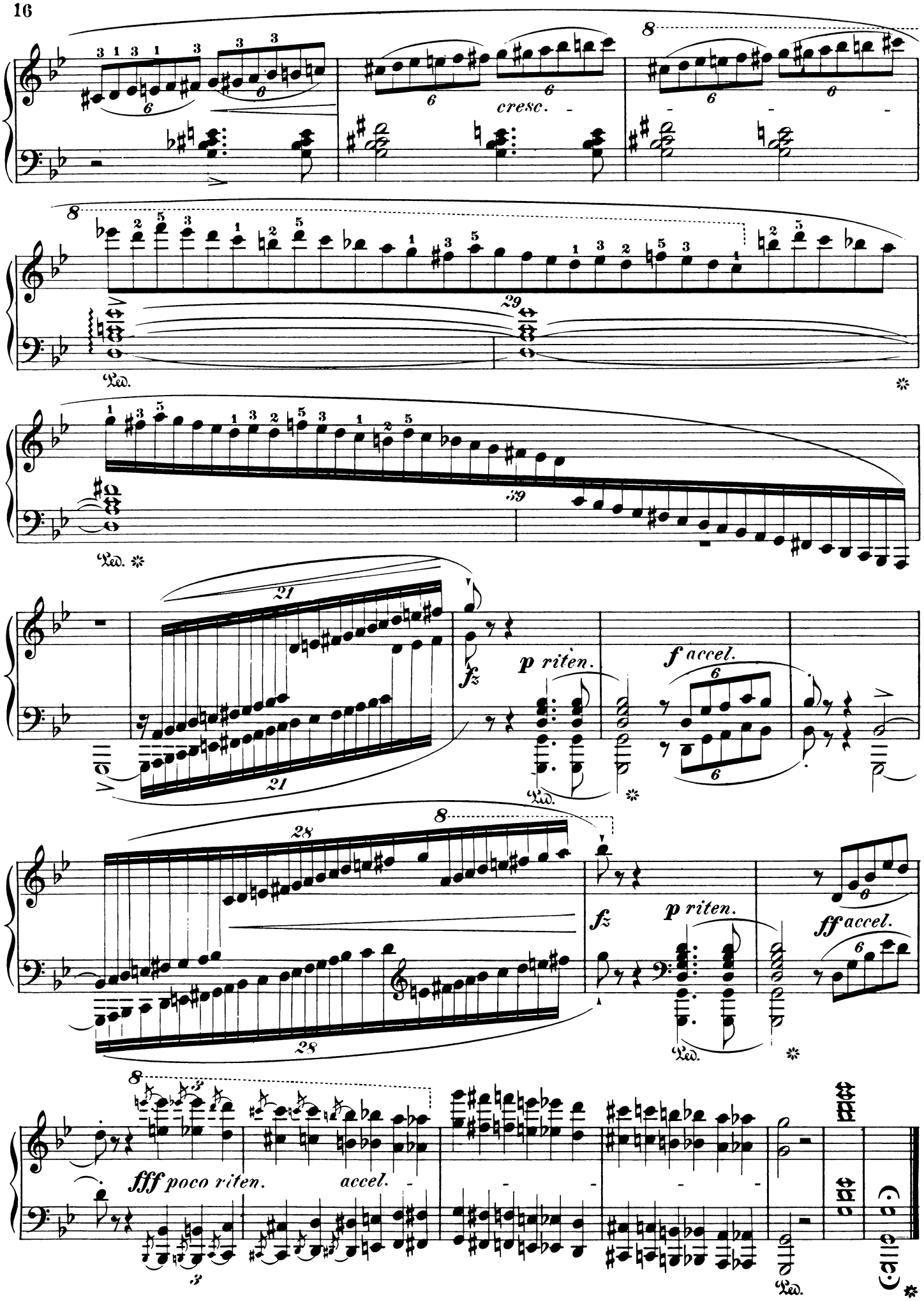

leggiero
fz
p
ff
8
ff
fz


con forza
ten.
ten.
sempre f


riten.
dim. rall.
Meno mosso.
pp sempre sotto voce
cresc.
f
p
f
cresc.
appassionato


poco riten.
il più f possibile
Presto con fuoco.
fz
Ped.


cresc.
8
8
6


cresc.
p riten.
f accel.
fz
p riten.
ff accel.
fff poco riten.
accel.