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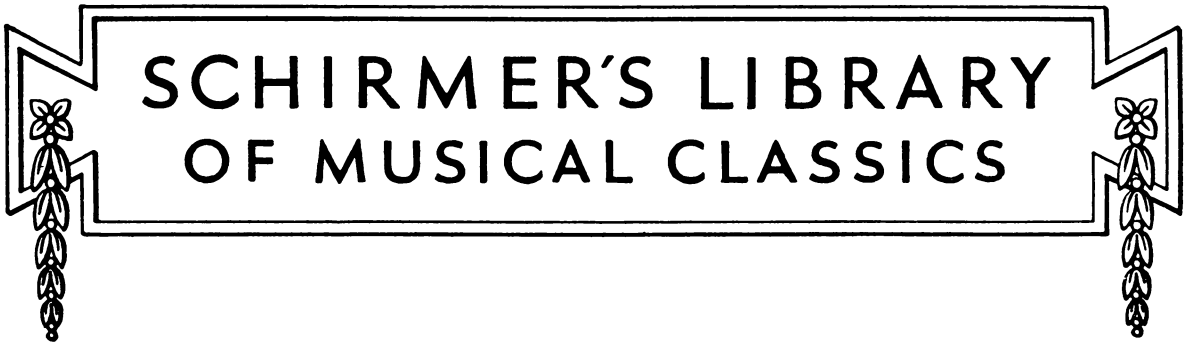

FREDERIC CHOPIN

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 FRANÇOIS 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.

THREE RONDOS

IT is related that once Robert Schumann wearily shook his head when his early work was mentioned. "Dreary stuff!" said the composer, whose critical sense did not fail him even in so personal a question. What Chopin thought of his youthful music may be discovered in his correspondence. To suppose that the young Chopin sprang into the musical arena a fully equipped warrior is one of those romantic notions which gain currency among people unfamiliar with artistic evolution. His musical ancestry is easily traced; from opus 1 to opus 22 virtuosity for its own sheer sake is evident. Liszt has said that every young artist suffers from virtuoso fever, and Chopin did not altogether escape the fever of the footlights. He began composing at a time when piano music was well-nigh strangled by excess of ornament, and acrobats of the keyboard were kings; and when the Bach fugues and Beethoven sonatas lay dusty and neglected in the memory of the many. Little wonder, then, that we find this Polish virtuoso not timidly treading in the path of popular approval, but bravely carrying his banner —spangled, glittering, fanciful—and outstripping at their own game the *virtuosi* of Europe. His originality in this bejewelled work caused Hummel to admire, Kalkbrenner to wonder and Thalberg to detract. (This latter pianist made sport, in the company of Mendelssohn and Hiller, of Chopin's narrow range of dynamics. He once started to shouting after a concert of the Pole's and explained that, as he had felt stifled all the evening, he wanted to hear a real *forte*.) The supple fingers of the young man from Warsaw made quick work of existing technical difficulties. He needs must invent some of his own, and when Schumann saw the pages of opus 2 he uttered his now historical cry. To-day we wonder somewhat at his enthusiasm. It is the old story—a generation seeks to know, a second generation comprehends and enjoys, and the generation following discards.

Opus 1, a Rondo in C minor, dedicated to Madame de Linde (the wife of his father's friend, the rector Dr. Linde, and a lady with whom Frédéric often played duets), saw the light in 1825, though preceded by two Polonaises, a set of Variations, and two Mazurkas in G and B flat major. Schumann declared that Chopin's first published work was actually his tenth; and between opus 1 and opus 2 lay two years and twenty compositions. Be this as it may, one cannot help liking the C minor Rondo. In the A flat section is a premonition of his F minor Concerto. There is a light hand, and a joy in creation, which contrast with the heavy, dour quality of the C minor Sonata, opus 4. In a formal sense it is loosely constructed and possibly too exuberant for its close confines, yet this opus 1 is almost as remarkable as the Abegg Variations, the first work of Schumann. The *Rondeau à la Mazur* in F, opus 5, was published in 1827 (?) and Schumann reviewed it in 1836. It is sprightly, Polish in feeling and rhythmic life, and a glance at its pages gives us the familiar Chopin impression—florid passage-work, chromatic progressions, chords in extensions. Of this work Dr. Niecks says: "Schumann . . . thought it perhaps had been written in the eighteenth year of the composer, but he found in it, some confused passages excepted, no indication of the author's youth . . . the individuality and with it his nationality begin to reveal themselves unmistakably. Who could fail to recognize him in the peculiar sweet and persuasive flow of sound, and the serpent-like winding of the melodic outline, the widespread chords, the dissolving of the harmonies and the linking of their constituent parts . . . The harmonies are often novel, the matter is more homogeneous and better welded into oneness."

The E flat Rondo, opus 16, is in great favor at Conservatories, and is neat, rather than poetical, though the introduction has dramatic touches. It is to this brilliant piece, with its Weberish affinities, that Richard Burmeister has given an orchestral accompaniment. Niecks frankly ranks the piece low among the master's, as it is "patchy, unequal and little poetical." The remaining Rondo, for two pianos, posthumously published as opus 73 (composed in 1828), was originally intended (so Chopin writes in 1828) for one piano, therefore consideration of it does not fall into the present classification. The Chopin Rondos, while not the most significant of his works, nevertheless cannot be overlooked in any comprehensive estimate; besides, they are not without charm and effectiveness.

James Huneker

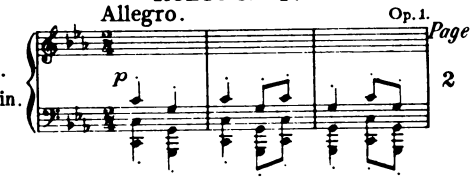
Thematic Index.

Rondos.

Rondo No 1.

Allegro. Op. 1.

III. C min.



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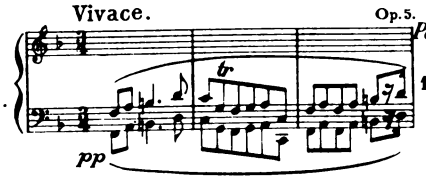
Rondo à la Mazur. No 2.

Vivace. Op. 5.

IV. F maj.



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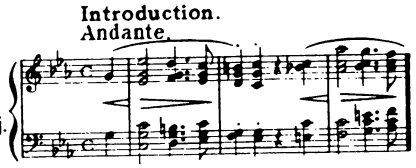
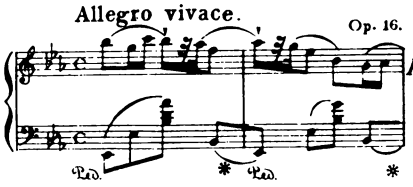
Rondo No 3.

Introduction. Andante.

V. E♭ maj.



Allegro vivace. Op. 16.



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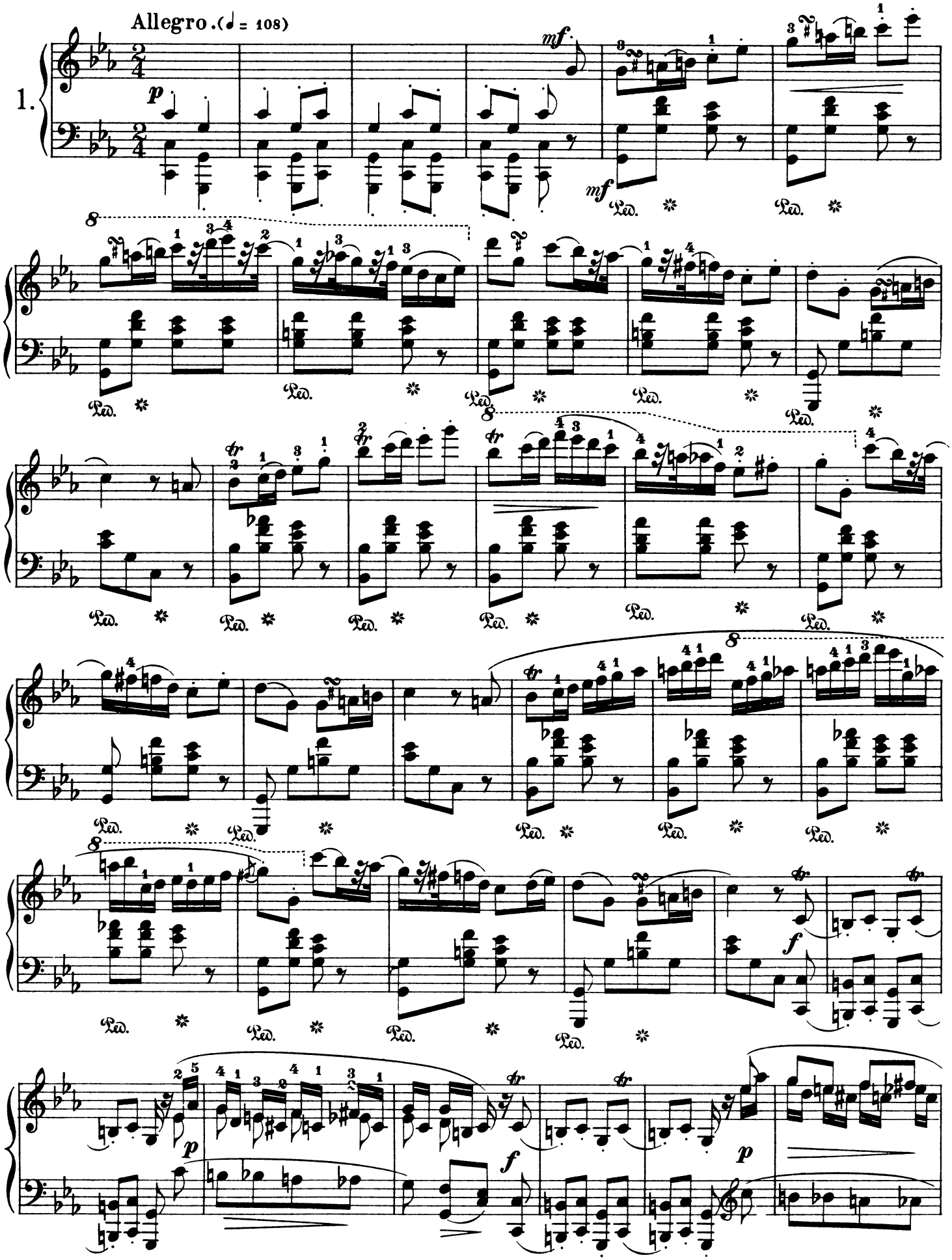
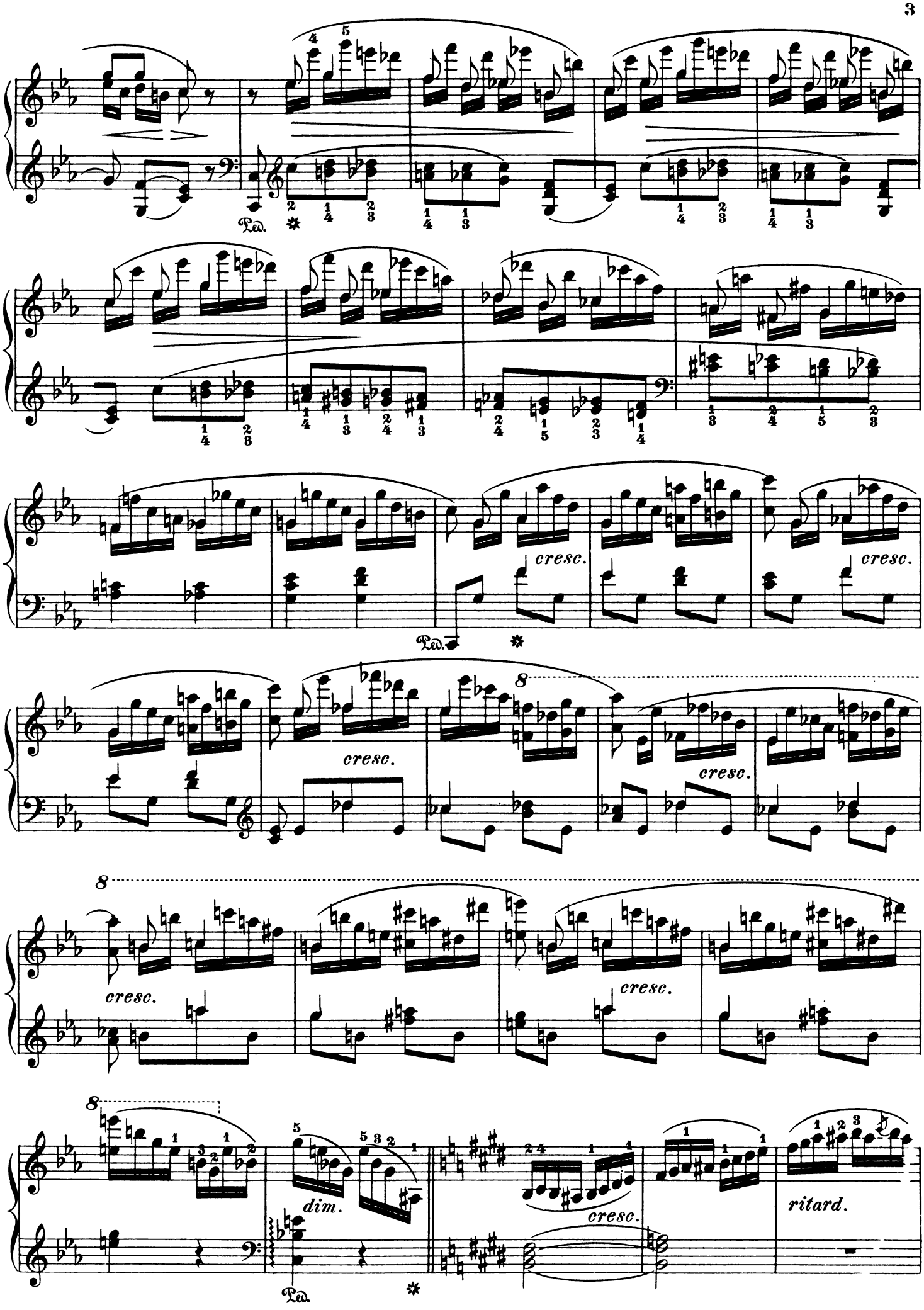
RONDO.

a Mme de Linde.

F. CHOPIN. Op. 1.




Ped.
cresc.
cresc.
8
cresc.
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cresc.
8
dim.
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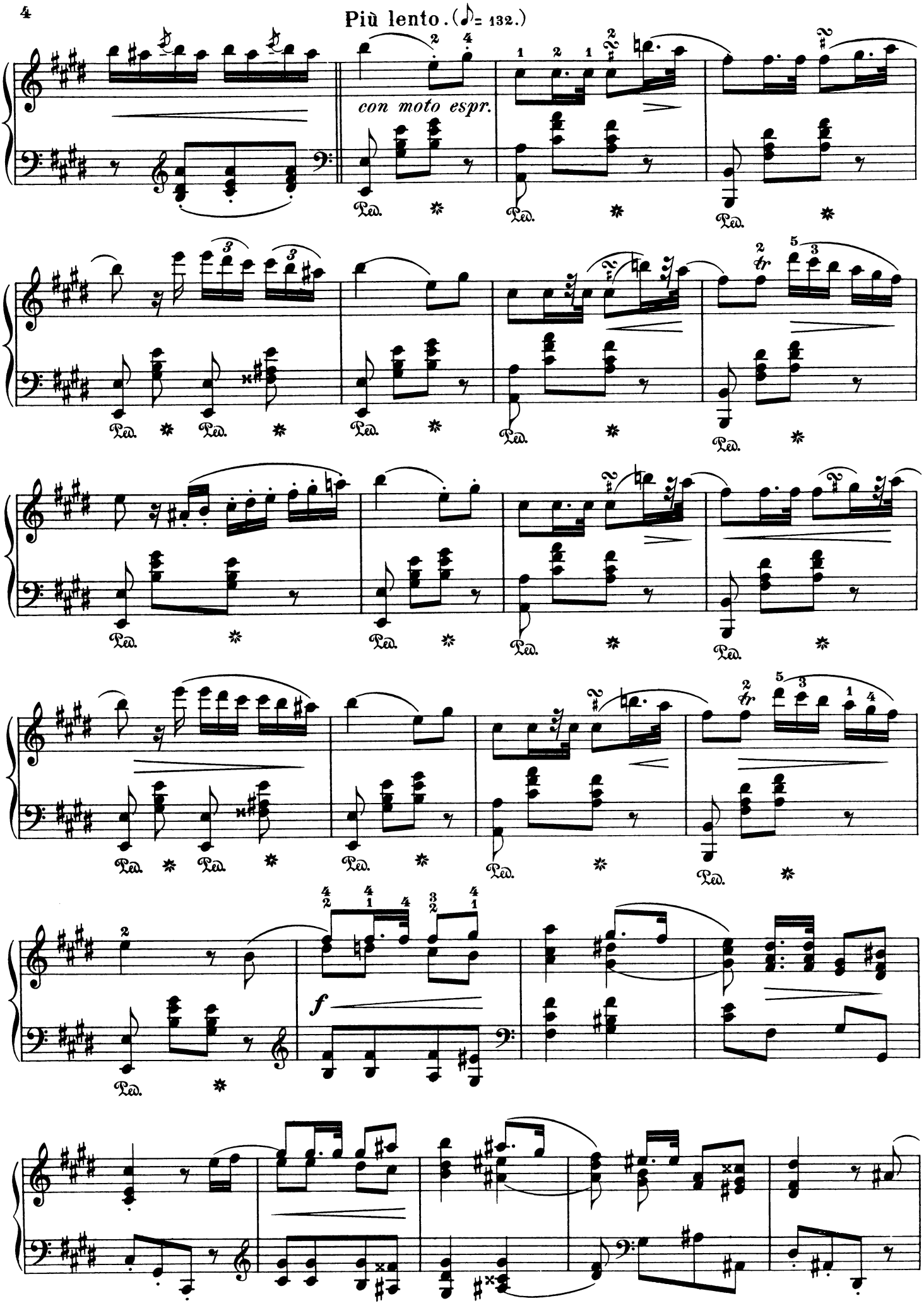
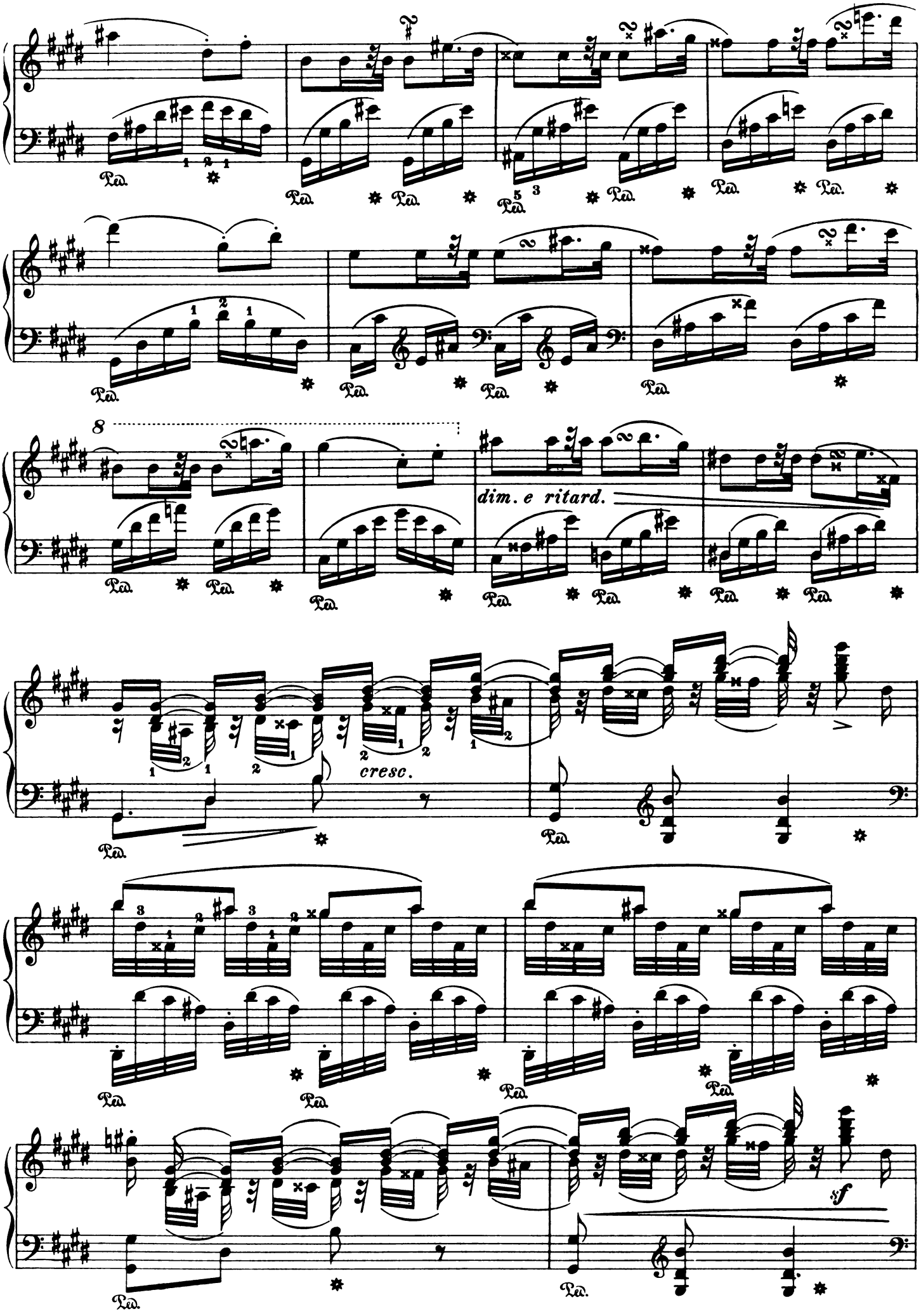

Più lento. (♪= 132.)
con moto espr.
Ped.
f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dim. e ritard.
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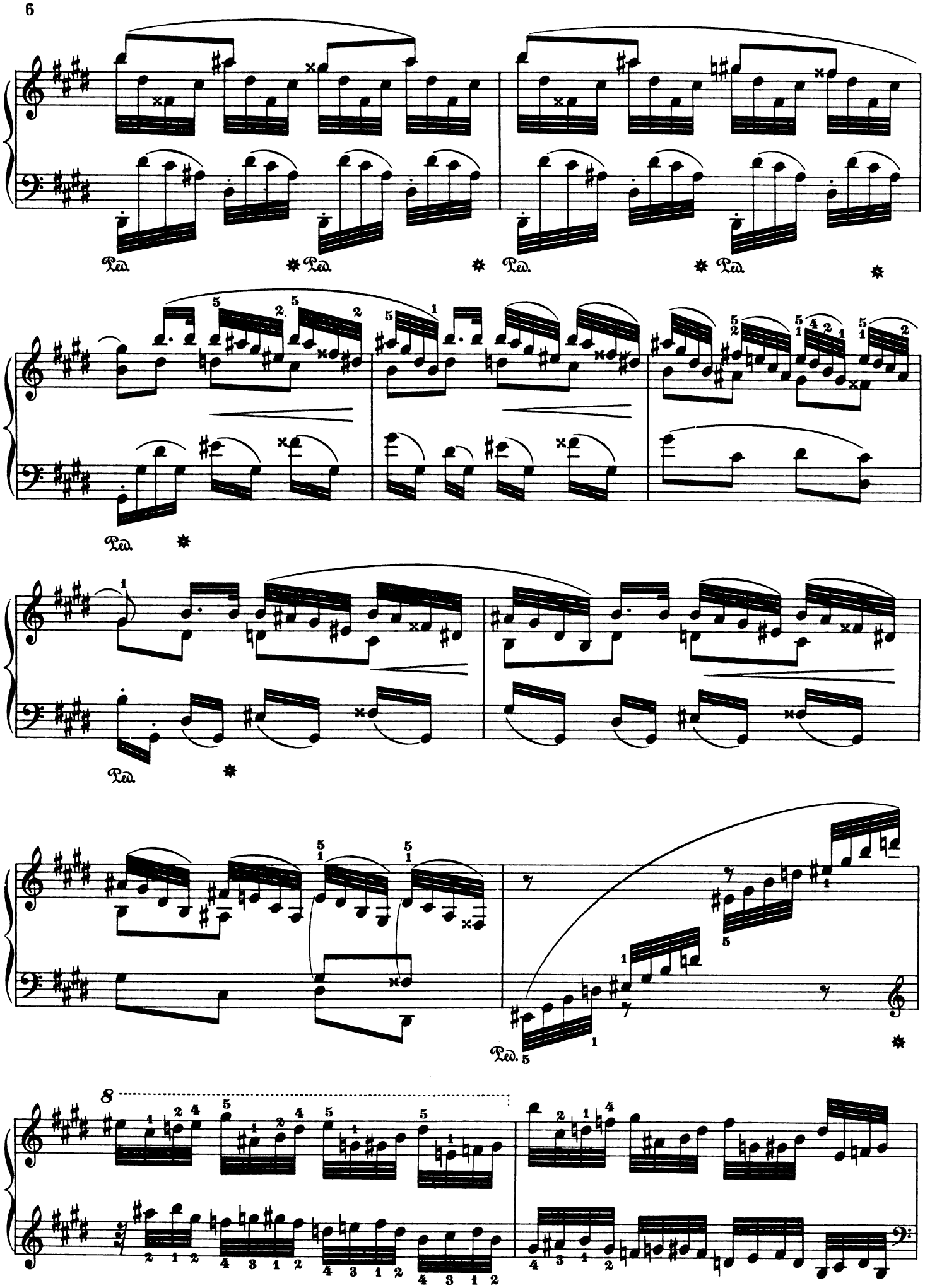
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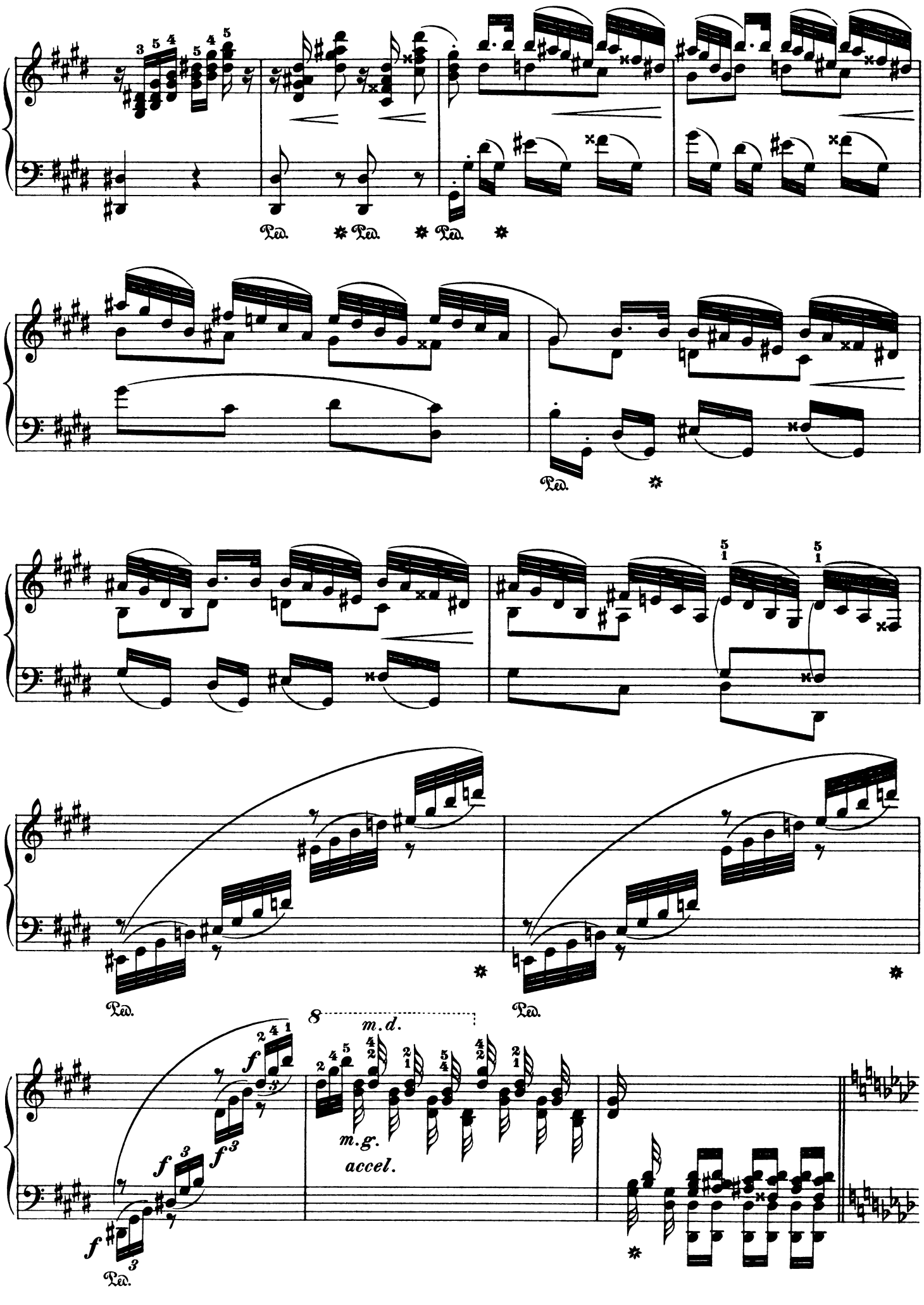
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m.g.
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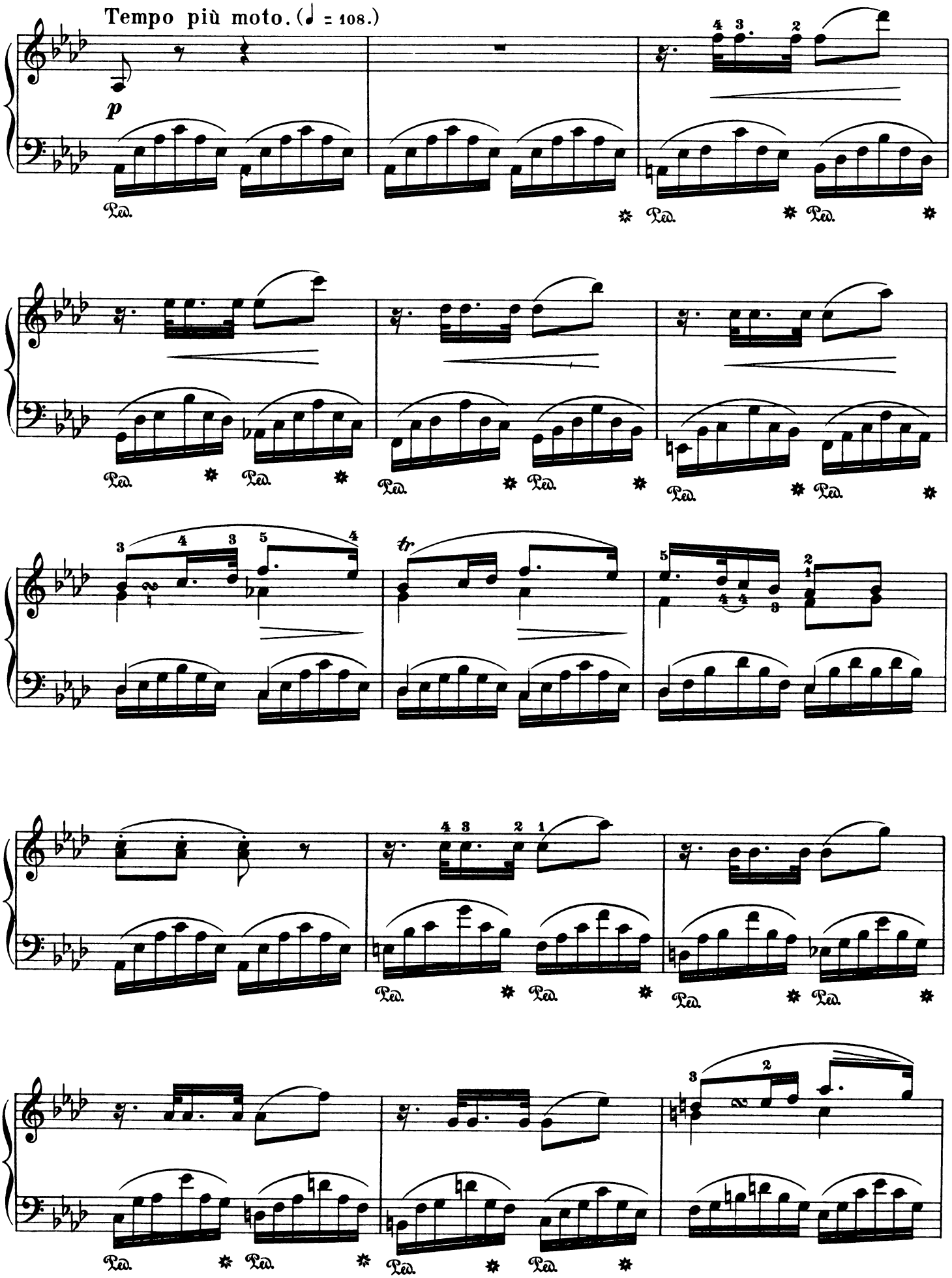
Tempo più moto. (♩ = 108.)
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Ped.
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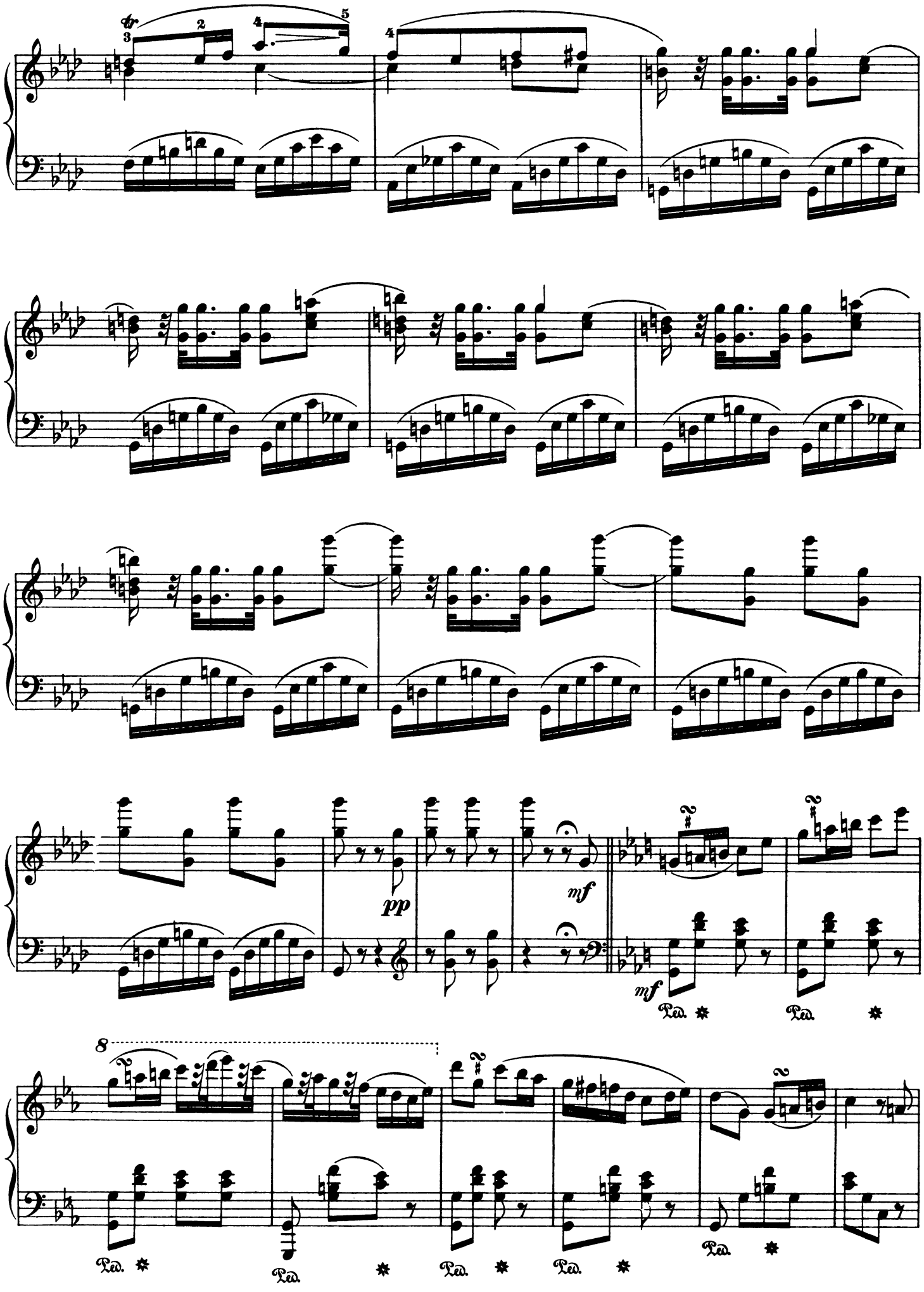
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Ped.
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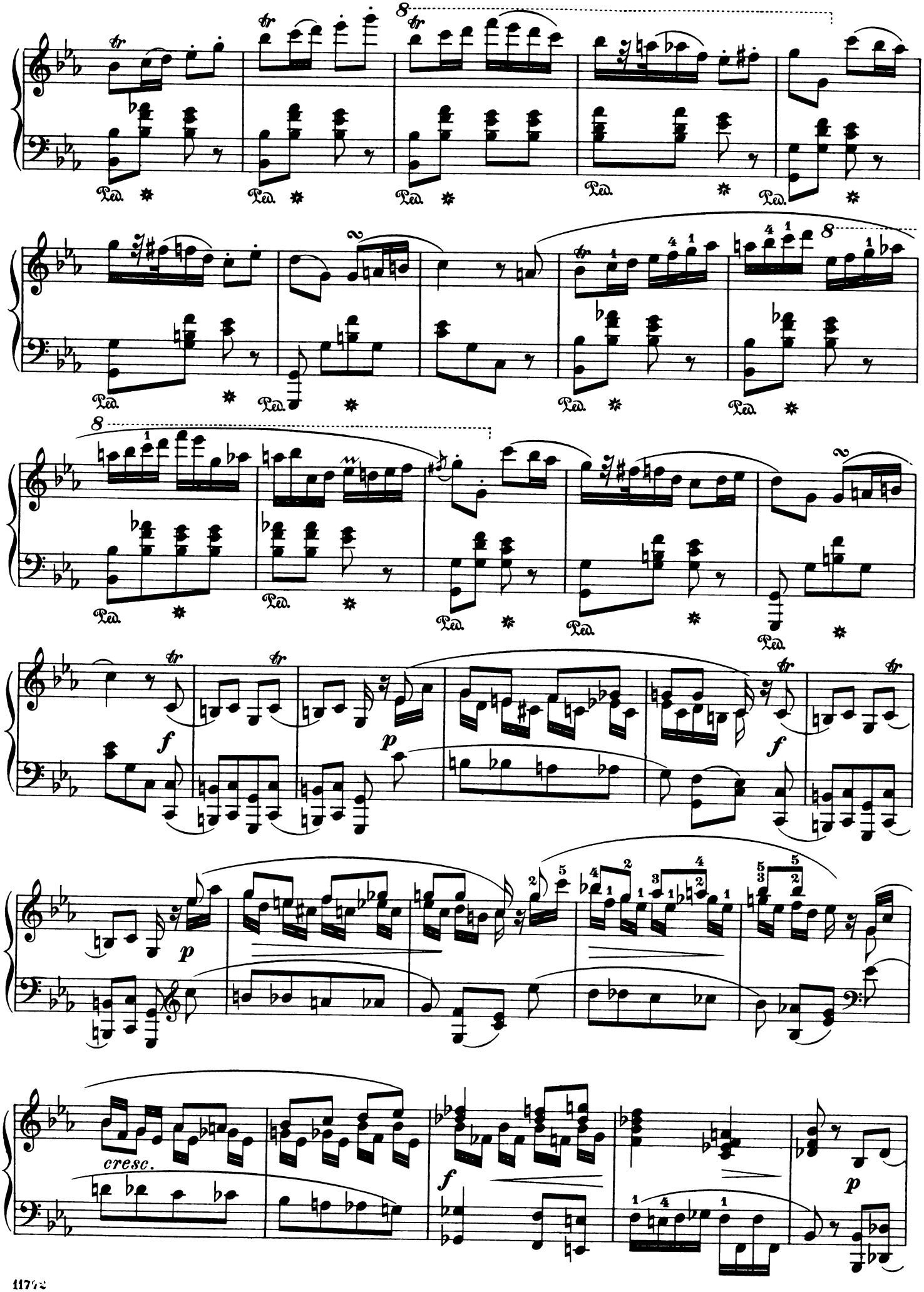
Ped.
Ped.


8
Ped.
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Ped.
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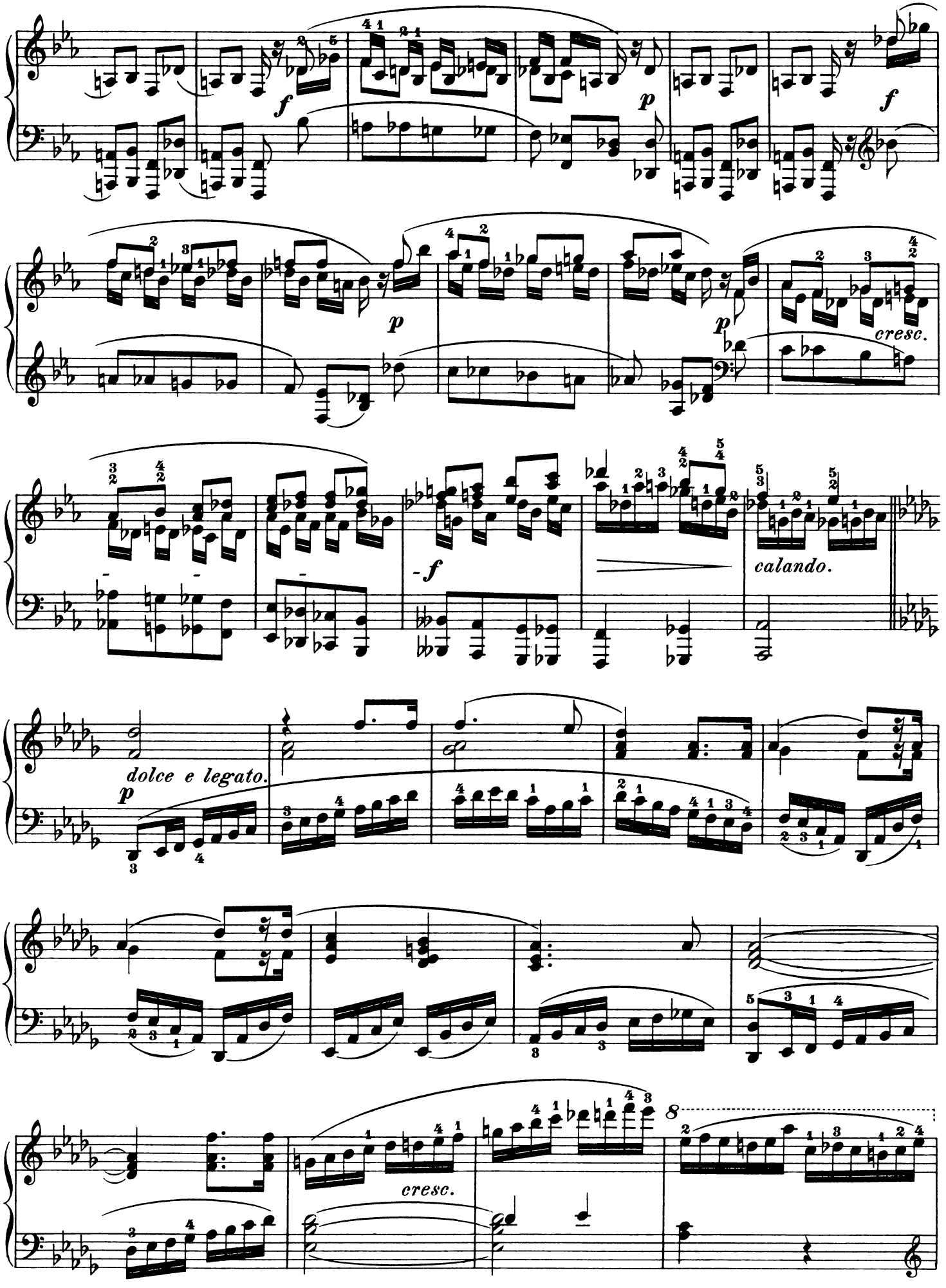
Ped.
f
p
f
p
cresc.
f
p


f
p
f
p
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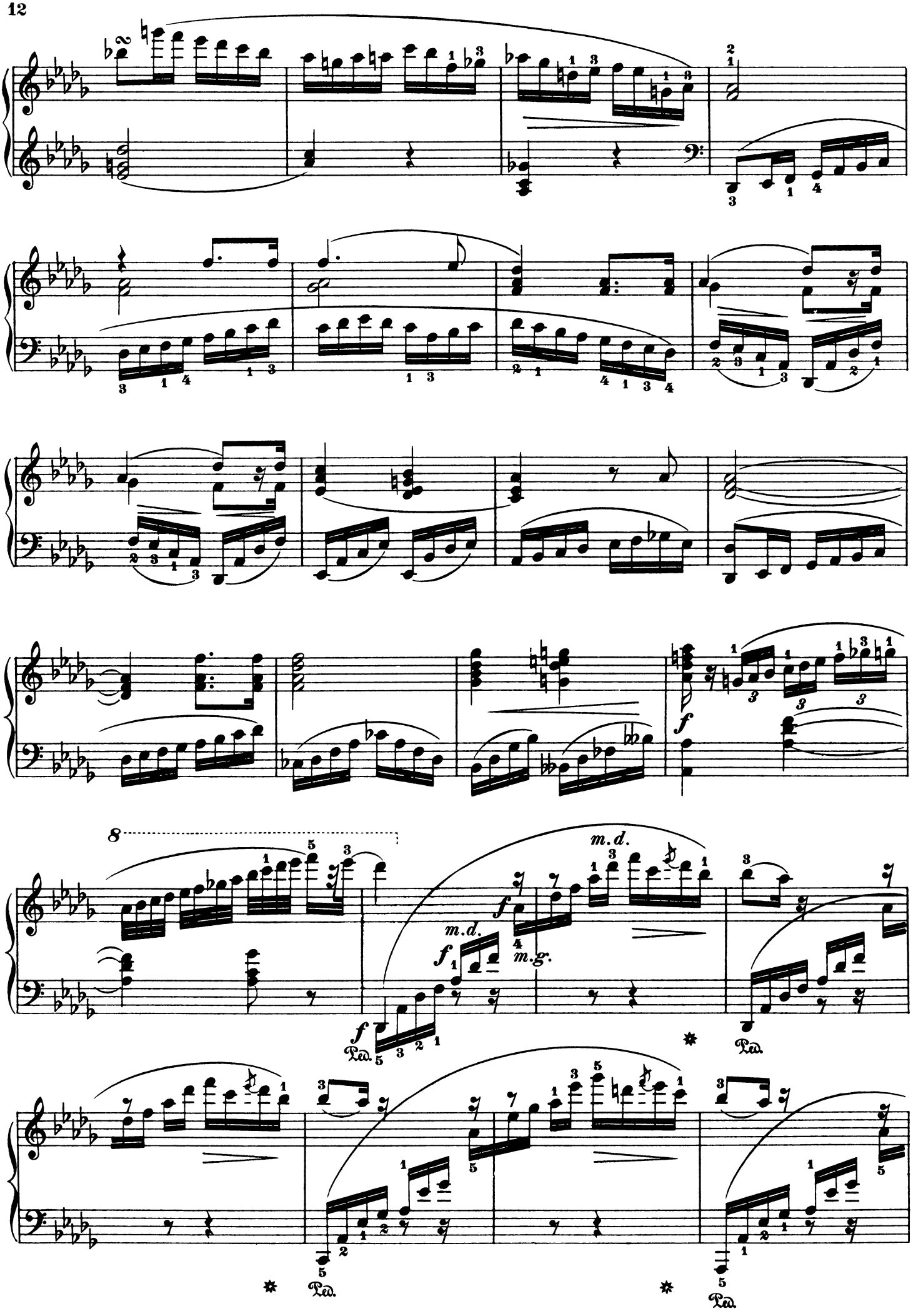
cresc.
-f
calando.
dolce e legato.
p
cresc.
8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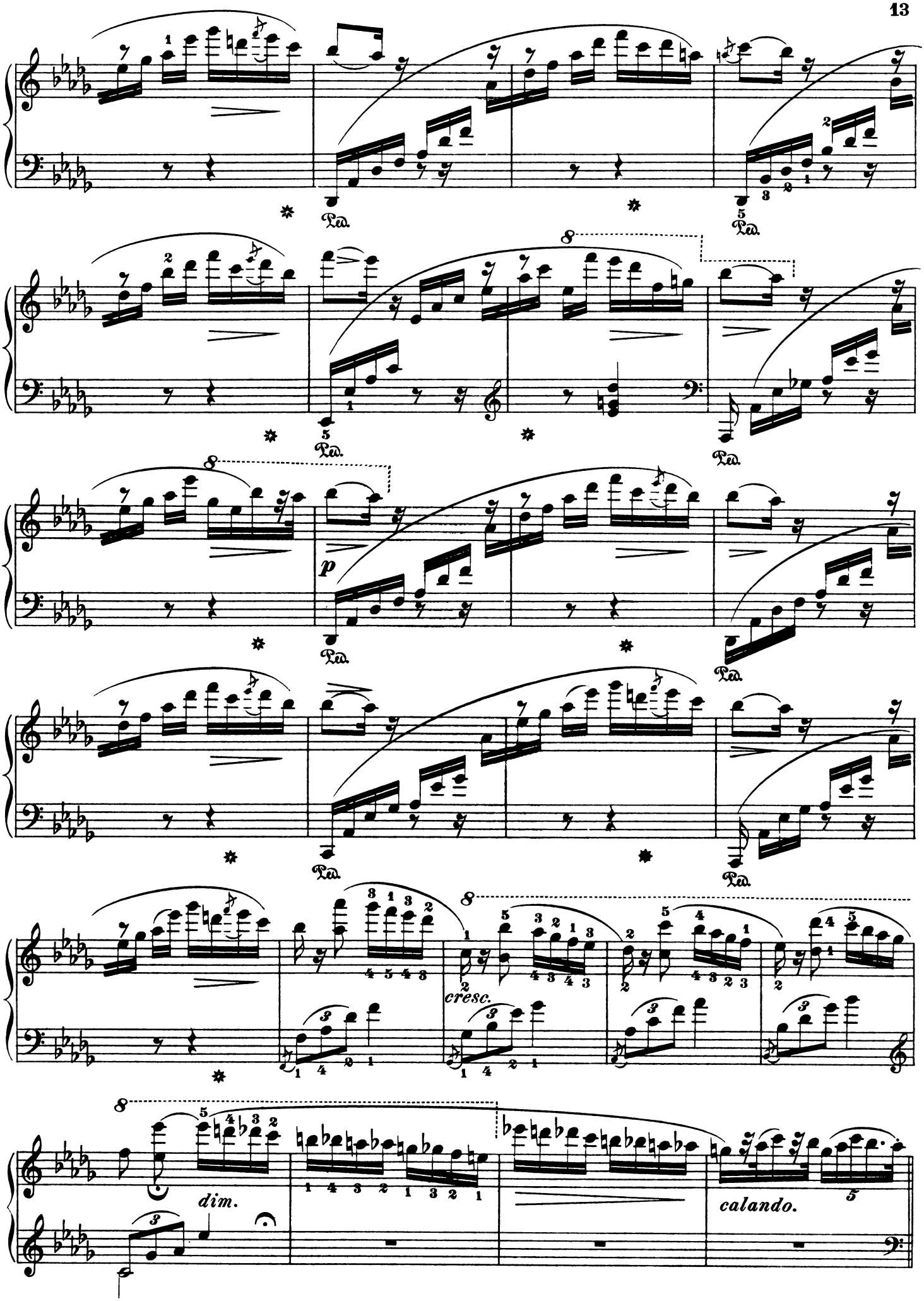
m.d.
m.g.
Ped.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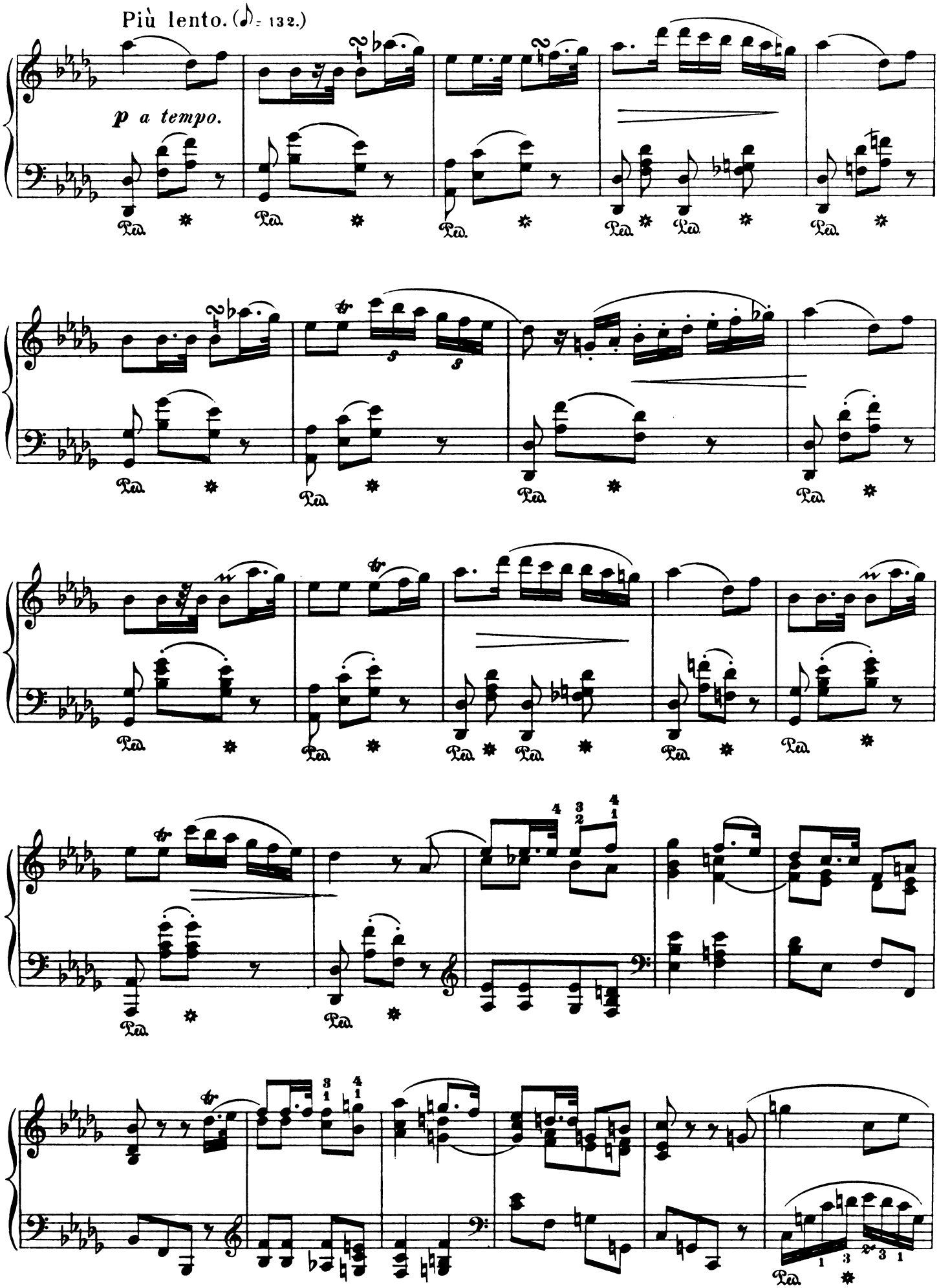
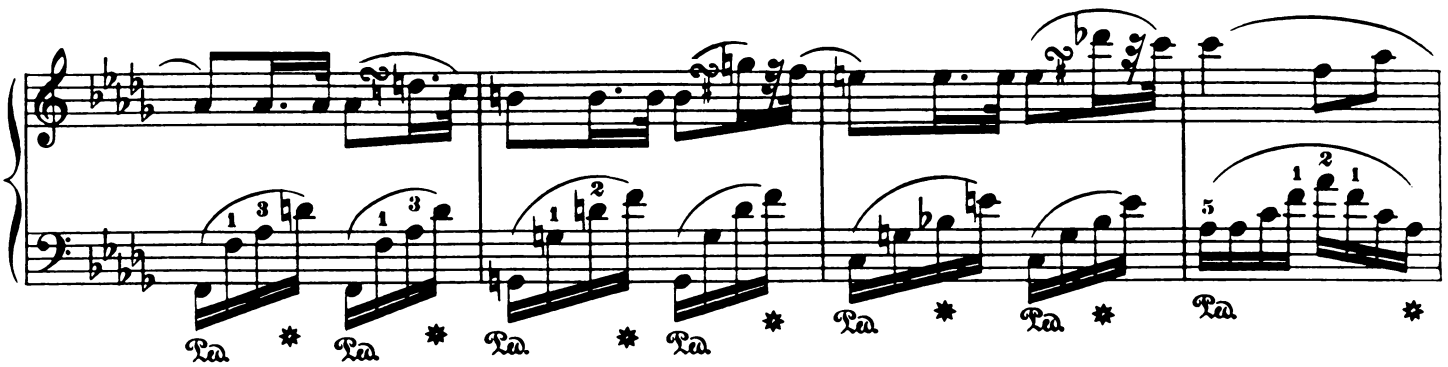
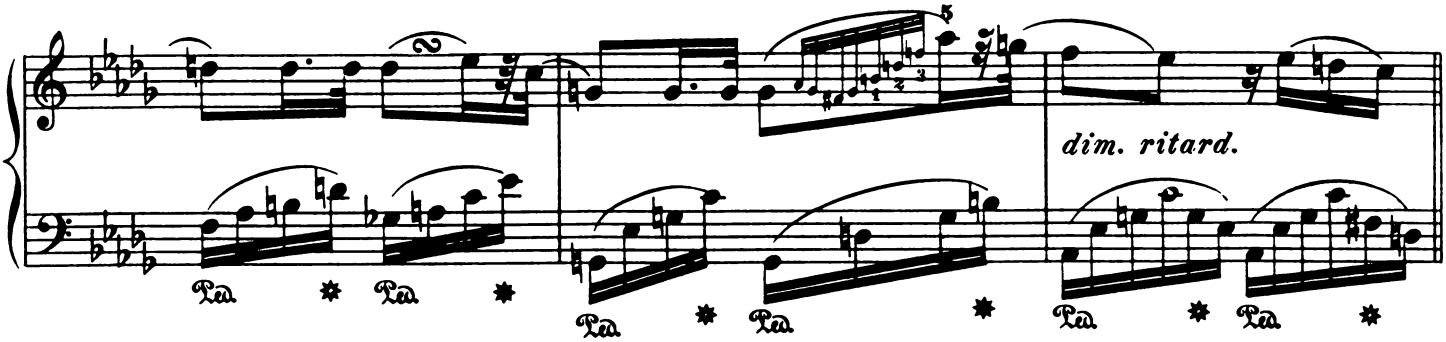
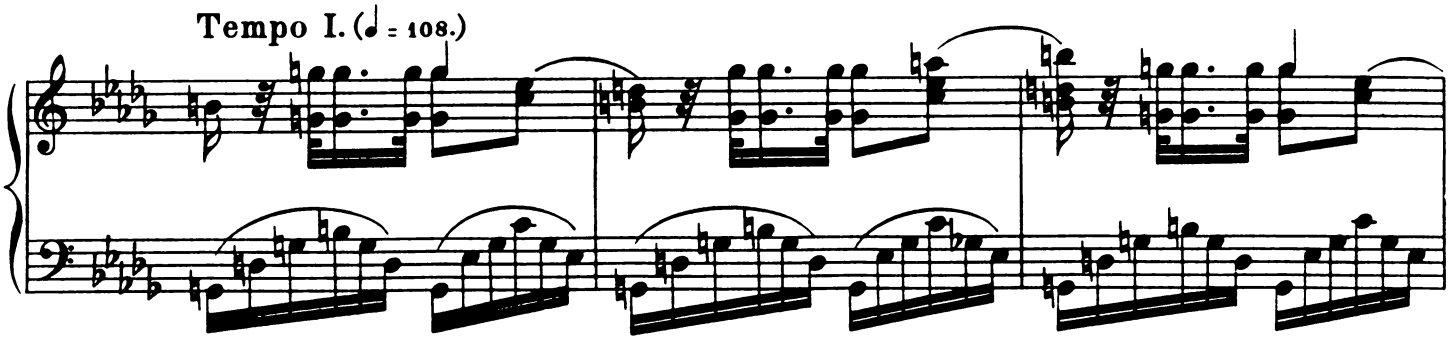
cresc.
dim.
calando.


Più lento. (♪ = 132.)
p a tempo.
Ped.




dim. ritard.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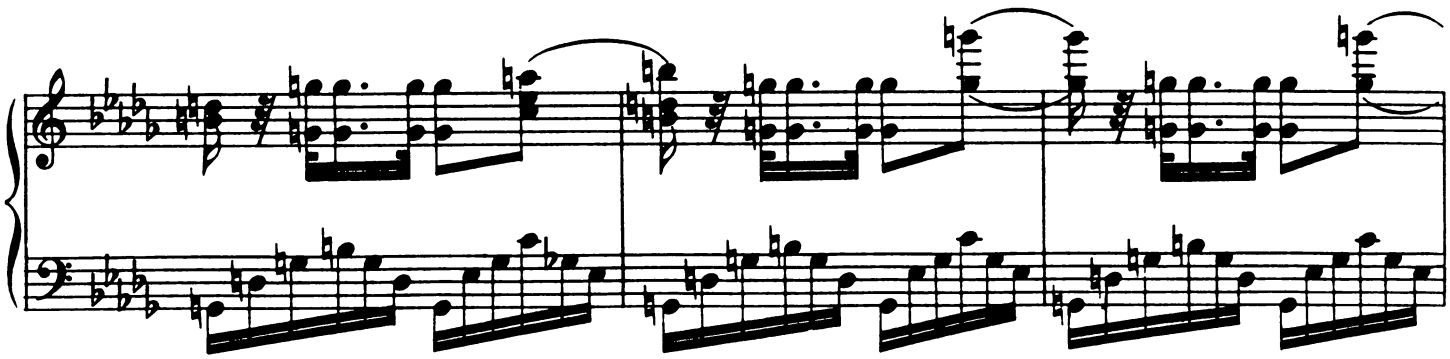

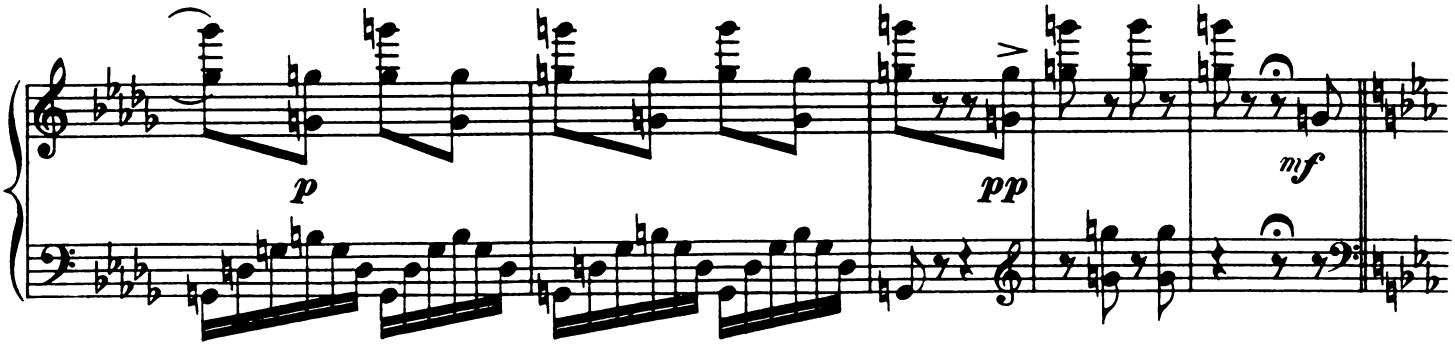
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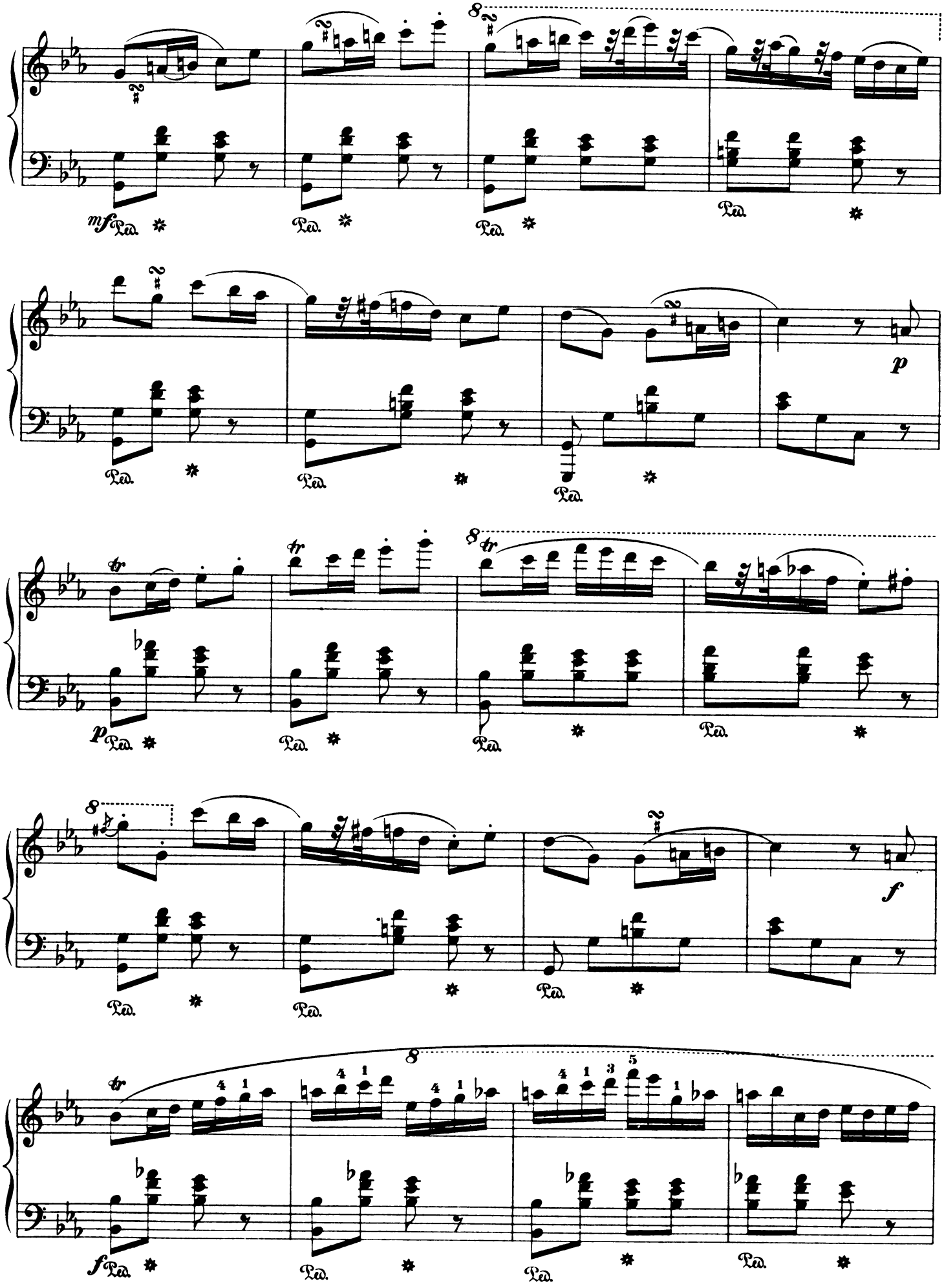
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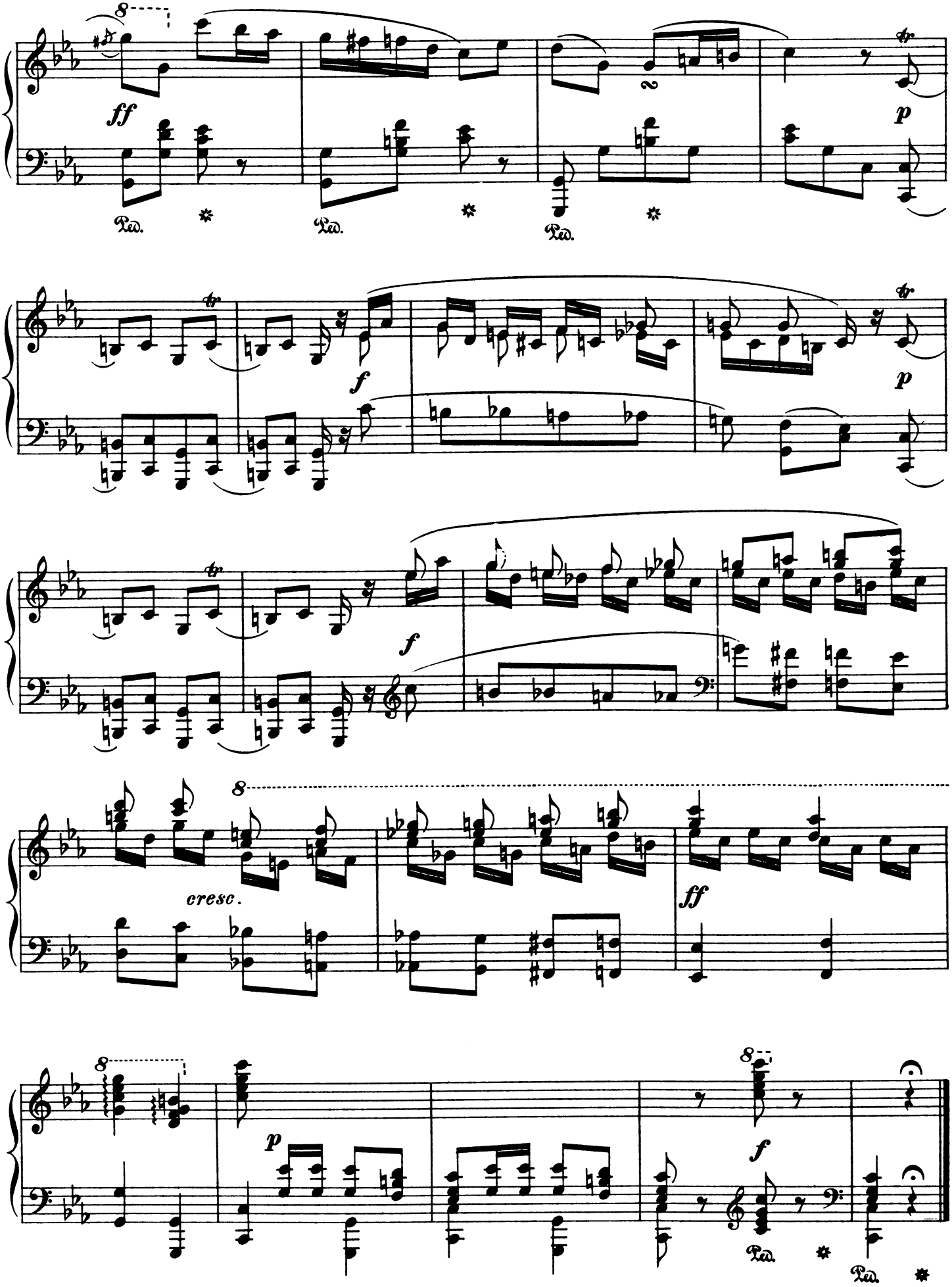
ff
Ped.
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Ped.
p
f
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f
cresc.
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p
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