Sydney Smith, Op 103

La Traviata
Fantaisie Brillante

Modern edition by
Philip R Buttall

(Edward) Sydney Smith (1839 - 1889)

SYDNEY SMITH was born in South Street, Dorchester on July 14, 1839. Sydney's father, a native of Deal in Kent, had settled in Dorset with his young bride, Helen (née Boyton), of Clifton, Bristol, the daughter of a 'professor of the pianoforte', and had established a school of music and dancing in Dorchester, and later in some other local towns. Sydney was the middle of three sons, the first of whom, Boyton, was also a musician, later studying with S S Wesley, and at Hereford and Salisbury cathedrals. Both studied firstly with their parents, and at the age of sixteen, Sydney gained a place at the prestigious Leipzig Conservatory. The precise circumstances of the award are unknown, but it is probable that, like Arthur Sullivan, he won a Mendelssohn scholarship, and went on to spend the next three years studying piano with Moscheles and Louis Plaidy, and cello with Friedrich Grützmacher.

1858 saw his return to Dorchester where his talent was recognised by the eminent violinist, Henry Blagrove, who advised Sydney to move to London where, in 1859, he quickly gained a reputation as a recitalist, and as a piano teacher in fashionable circles. His popularity grew rapidly over the next three decades, and he virtually became a household name, initially at home, then in Europe, America and finally Australia. His piano compositions were published in all these countries and sold well. Two or three times a year, assisted by his best pupils, he would give concerts in London and elsewhere, playing his latest pieces in addition to the virtuoso repertoire of the day. Especially popular were his elaborate transcriptions of favourite operas at which he excelled, and some of these are still popular today. His numerous solo piano compositions (including his famous *Tarantellas*) would be found in the old Victorian piano albums in many households. In the late 1880s, Sydney was already suffering from a 'severe malignant tumour of the spine and ribs', which had forced him to relinquish his teaching and concert careers, with the consequent adverse effect on his income which had hitherto seemed ample. Despite the huge popularity of his music, nearly 400 compositions in all - an average of ten or so per year - there can have been no royalties to fall back on, and Sydney was even driven to borrow £160 on a life insurance policy of £1000. As the illness progressed, financial hardship must have added to the tragedy. Eventually, an application was made to the Royal Society of Musicians, which he had joined in 1875, and once it was ascertained that he had, in fact, less than £20 left in the bank, they granted some relief.

The spring of 1889 was a particularly bitter one and on March 3, the celebrated composer died. Four days later, he was laid to rest at Kensal Green Cemetery, where a simple uninscribed cross now marks the overgrown grave.
A brief obituary in *The Musical Times* reflects the change that had taken place in musical taste by this time, and its dismissive tone paved the way for most subsequent comment on Sydney***s*** Smith and his music.

The evocative titles of Sydney Smith's pieces paint a vivid picture of middle class Victorian music-making at its most robust, and although he was very clever at supplying a public need, the much repeated criticism of this style - summed up by the basic formula 'maximum effect with minimum difficulty' - does not bear scrutiny. It should be argued in Smith's favour that he had the gift of achieving his effects by the most musically economic means. Unlike many popular Victorian composers whose style is marred by a plethora of superfluous notes disguising a slight content, Smith rarely permits himself this indulgence in his well-crafted pieces. These compositions may not aspire to the rank of the highest sophistication, but to follow the established fashion of dismissing Sydney Smith's entire output as musical trivia is surely to miss the point. Here we have a composer whose melodies still have the power to delight and amuse, and his best creations certainly deserve a fresh appraisal. This can only come about if the manuscripts are collated and preserved, indeed, even rescued from oblivion. This, together with the promotion of the music of Sydney Smith and his contemporaries, is the aim of **The Sydney Smith Archive**. [For a complete biography, please see below]

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Trinity Guildhall has been especially enterprising in allowing potential candidates to choose one of two Sydney Smith transcriptions as part of a programme for its *Advanced Certificate* Examination - the present *La Traviata* transcription, and one on Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. This examination, along with its easier *Foundation* and *Intermediate* level certificates, in fact, marks an important step forward in music examination syllabi, by being a web-based qualification, continually refreshed and updated. Whilst candidates may freely download a photocopy of the original transcription, and indeed all of Sydney Smith's transcription, it is still in the original type-setting. I have merely sought to produce a more user-friendly modern playing edition, with permission from both **The Sydney Smith Archive** and ***Trinity Guildhall.***

For further information on **The Sydney Smith Archive**, please visit: **www.sydneysmitharchive.org.uk**

For further information on ***Trinity Guildhall***, please visit **www.trinitycollege.co.uk**

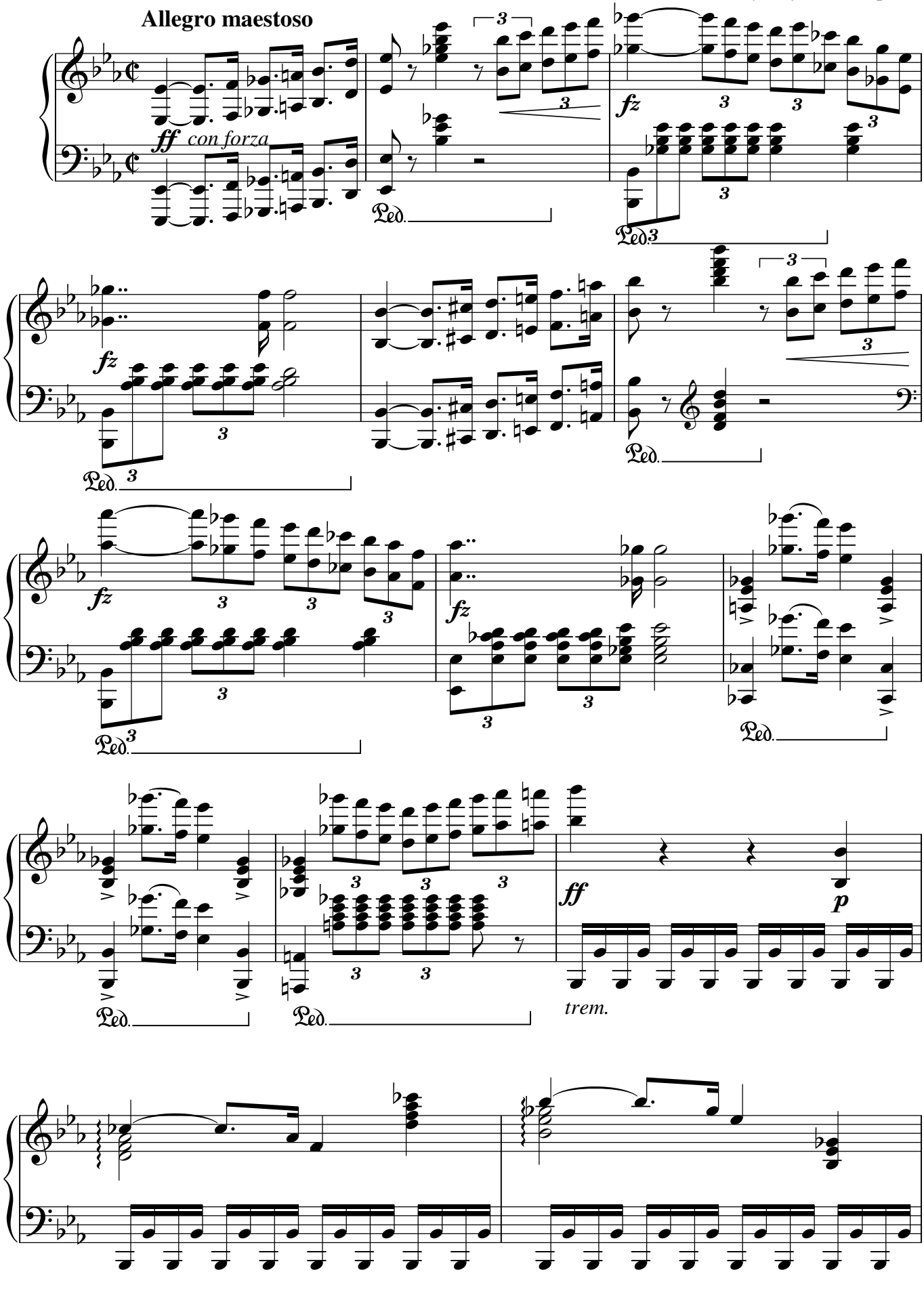
For **editorial** notes and comment, please see p. 20

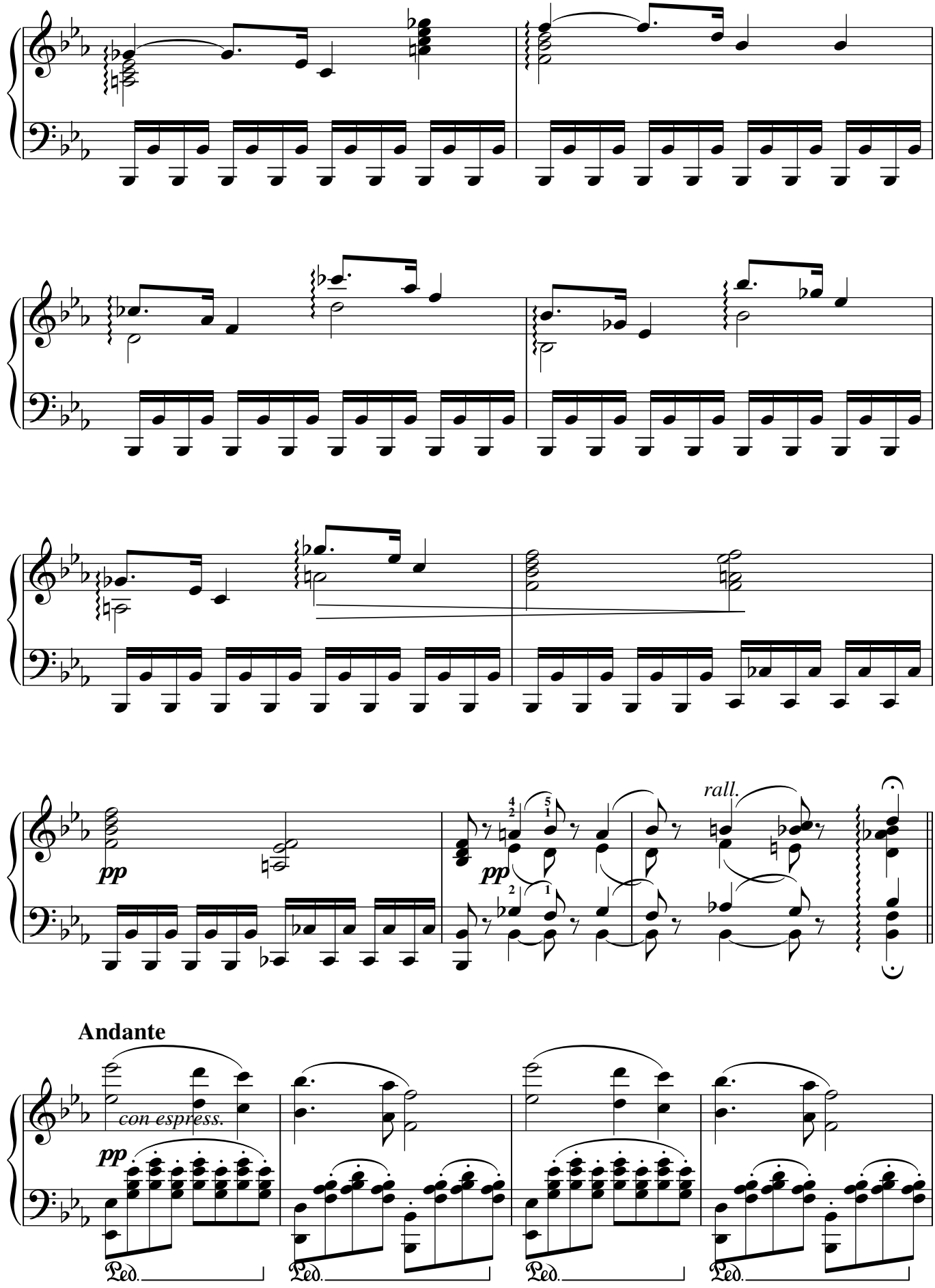
Philip R Buttall - May 2009

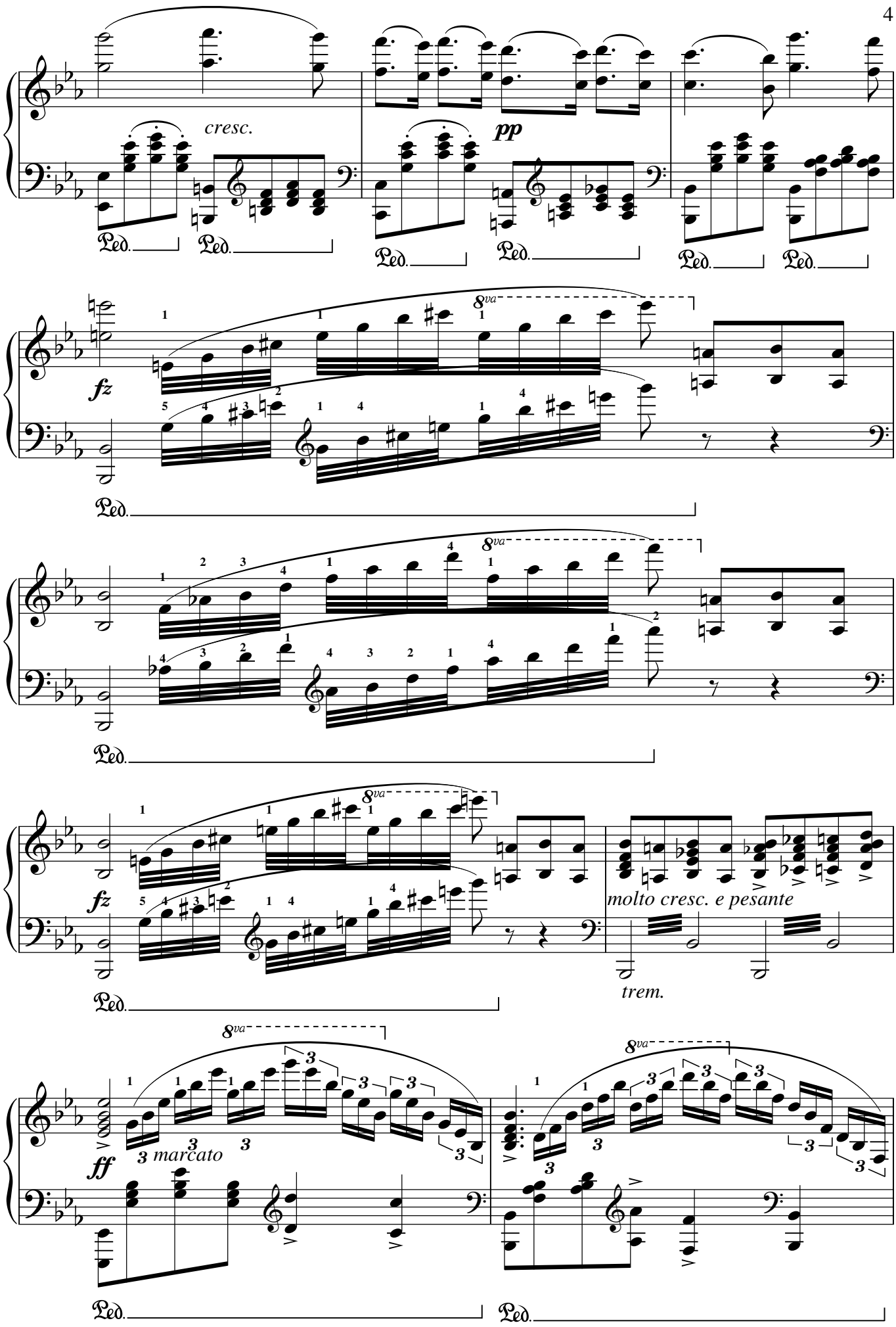
www.philiprbuttall.co.uk

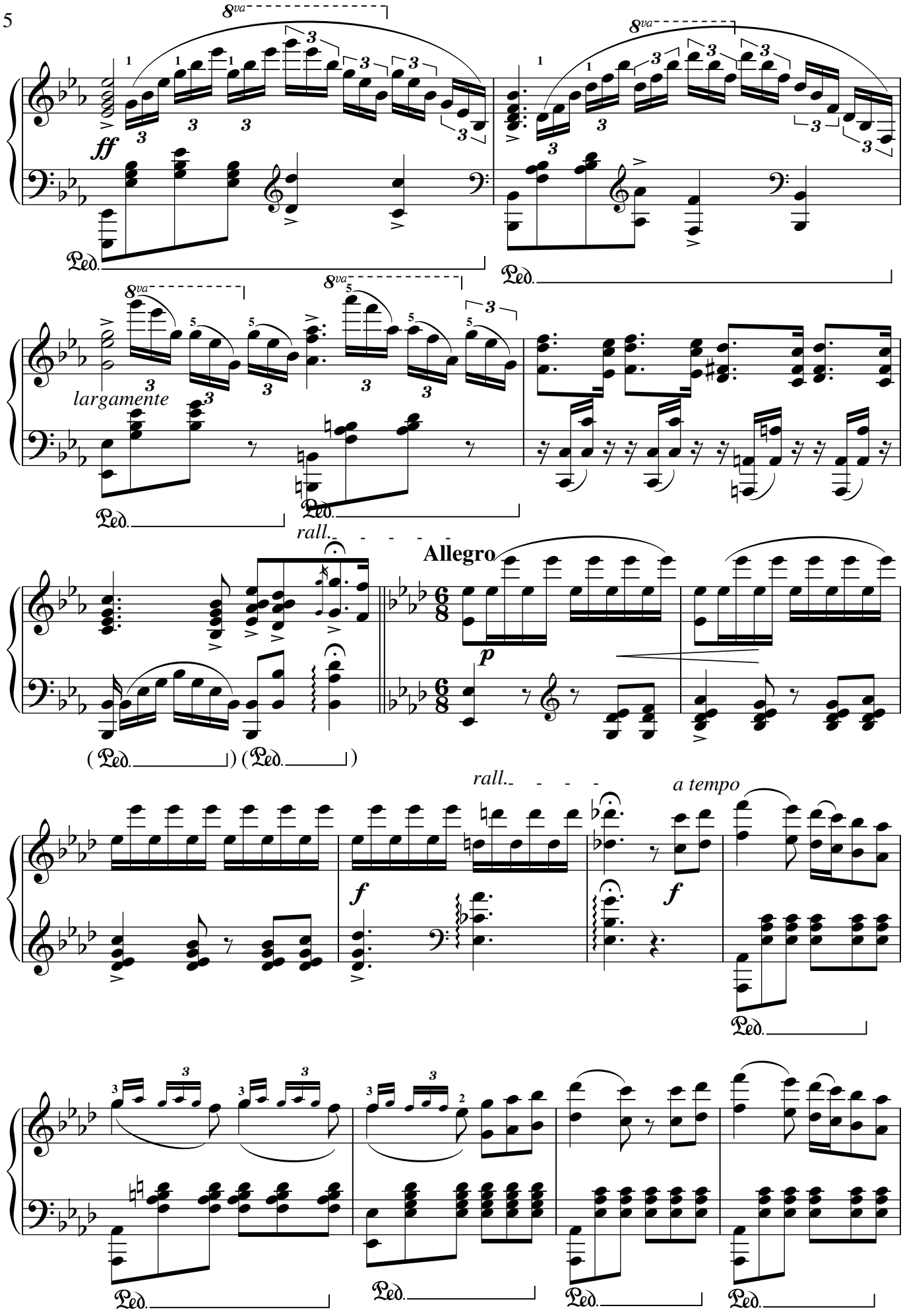
La Traviata - Fantaisie Brillante

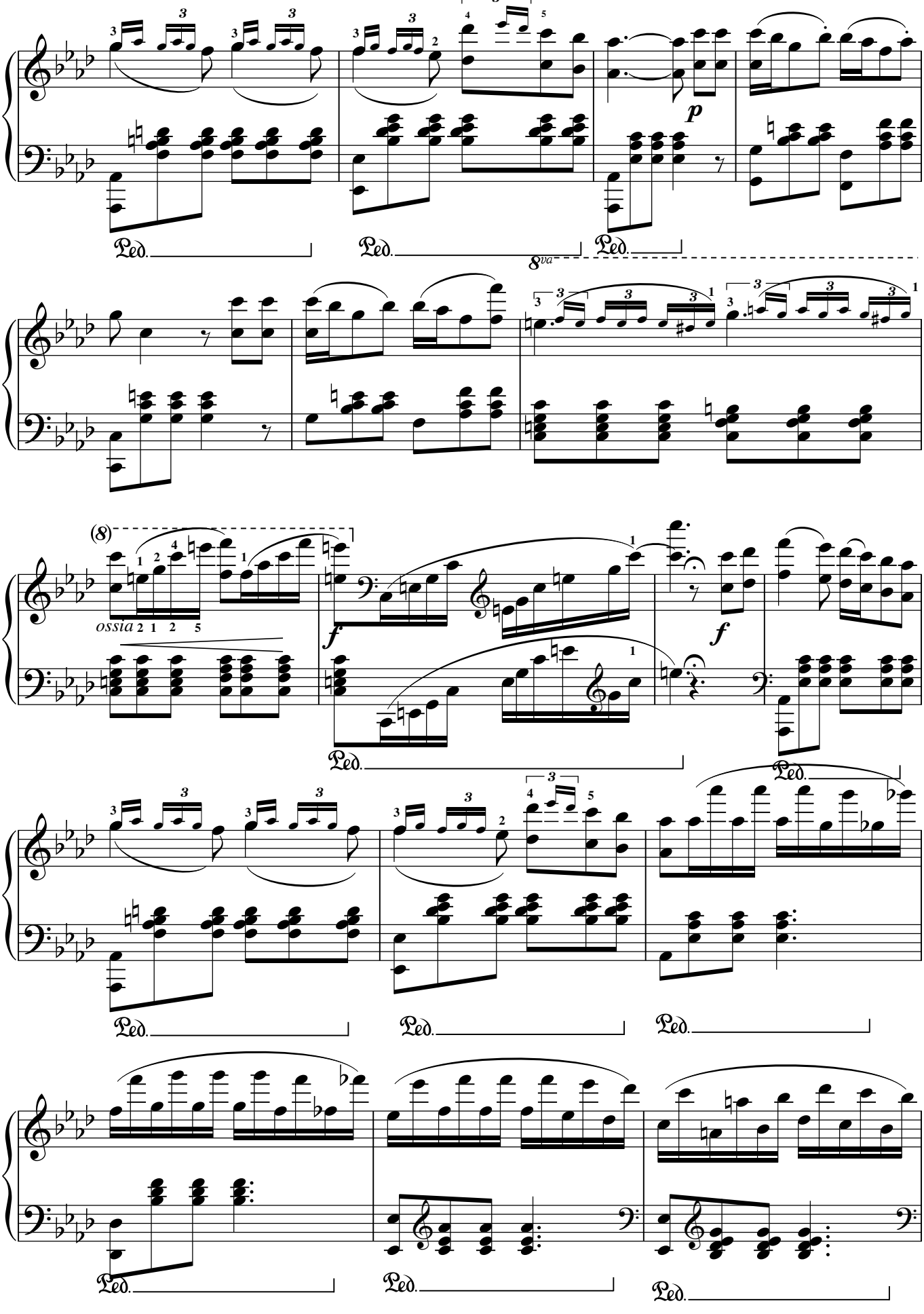
Sydney Smith, Op 103

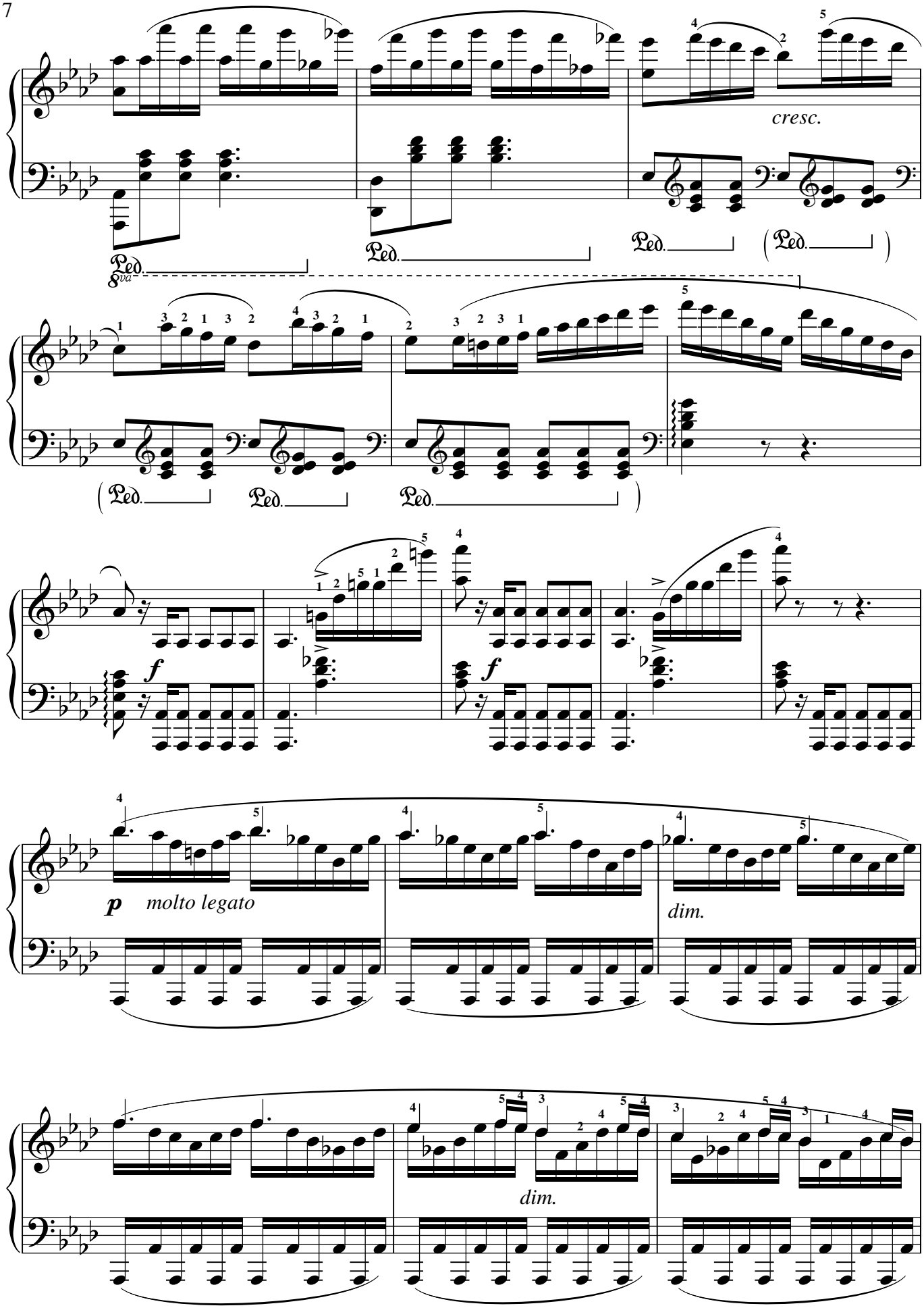


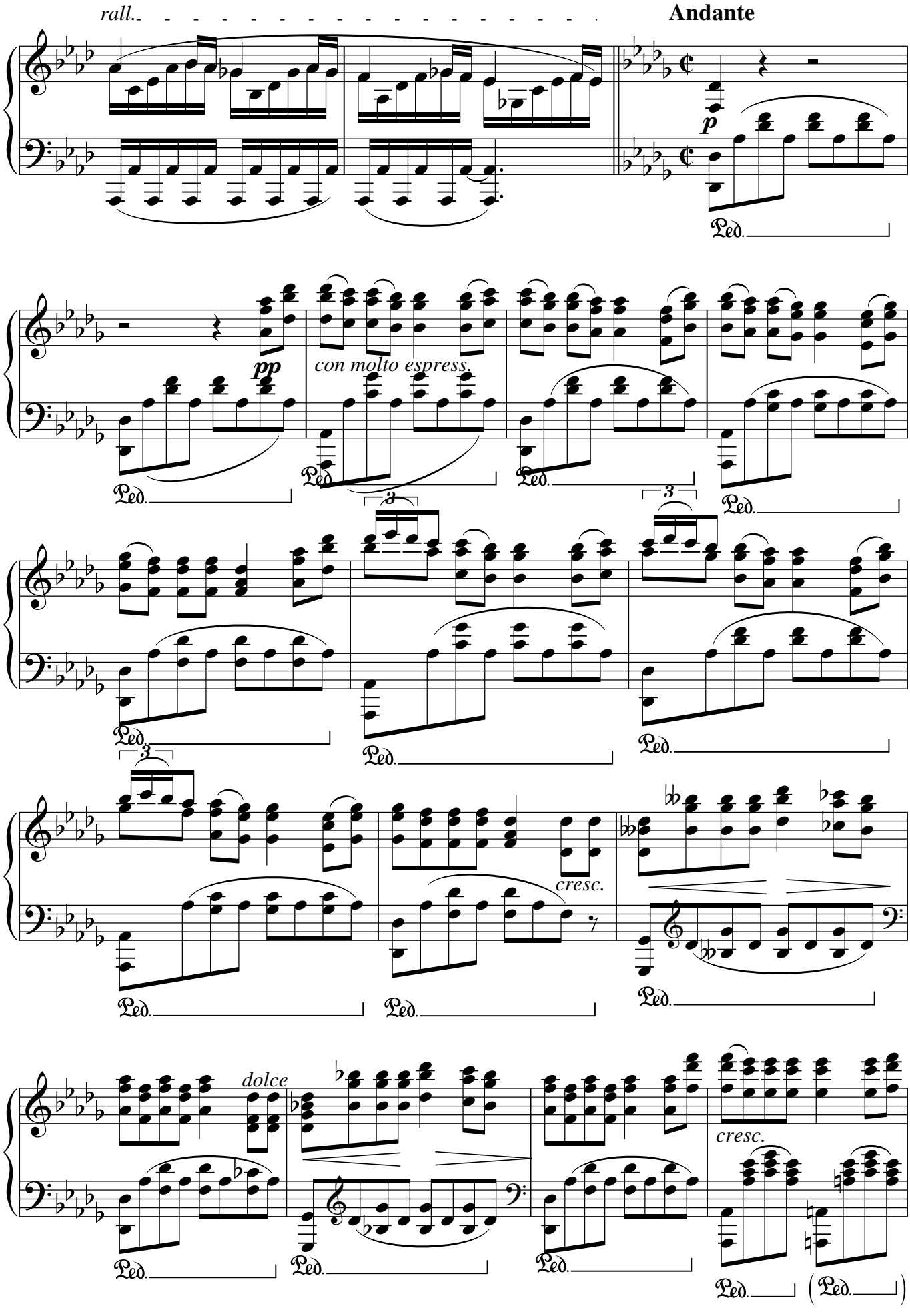

pp
pp
rall.
Andante
con espress.
pp
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

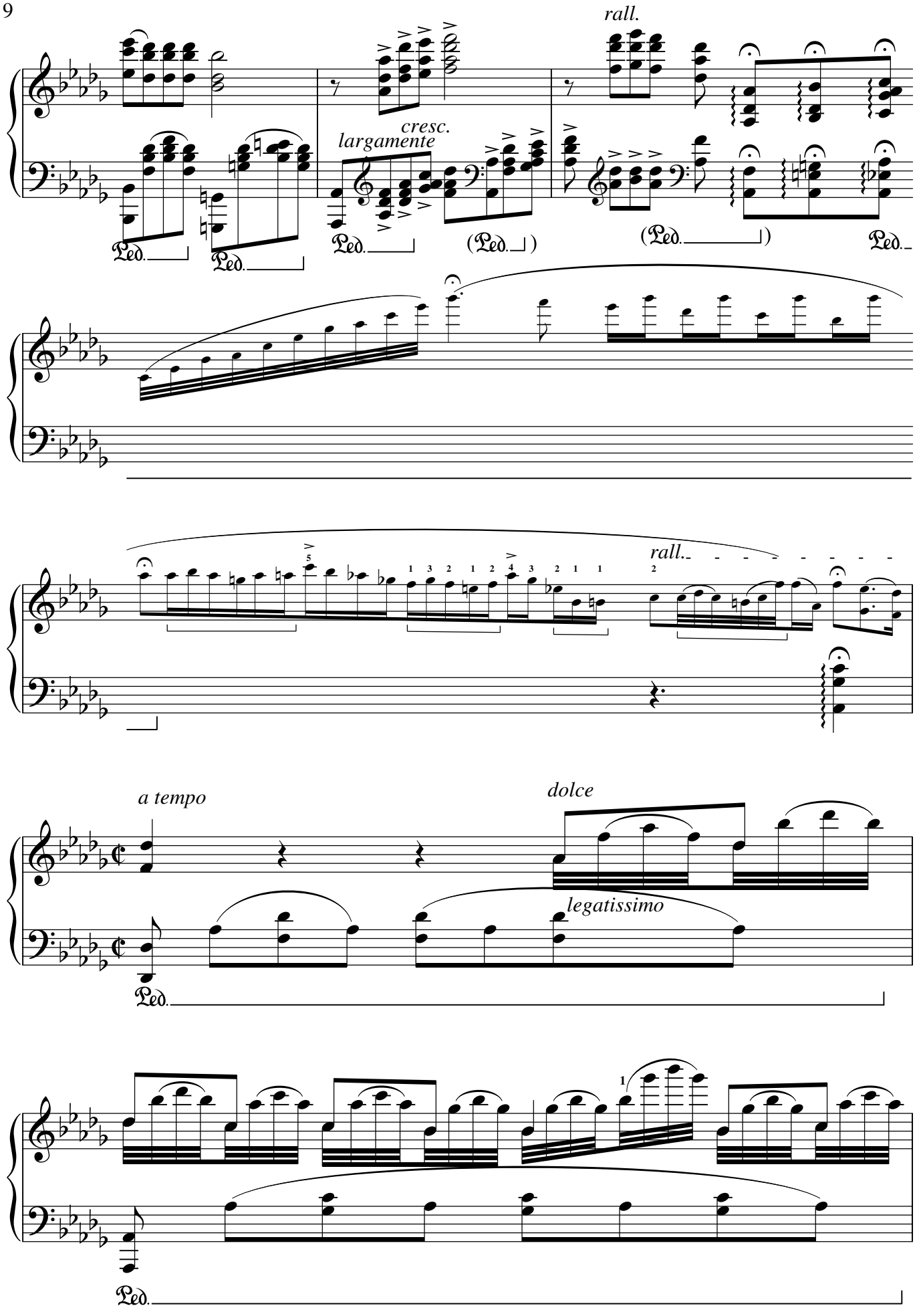

cresc.
pp
fz
8va
Ped.
fz
molto cresc. e pesante
trem.
ff
marcato

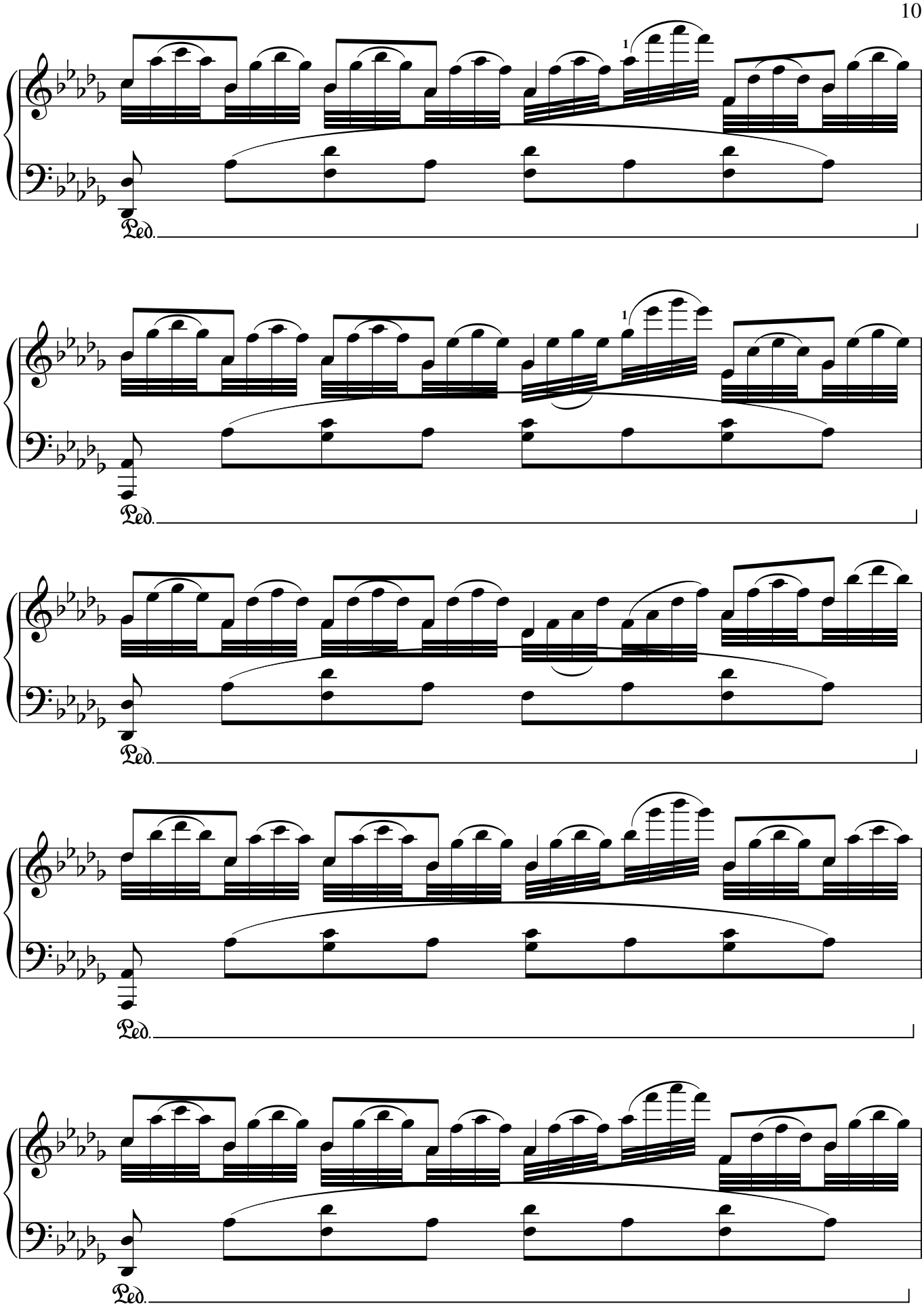

8va
ff
Ped.
largamente
rall.
Allegro
p
a tempo
f

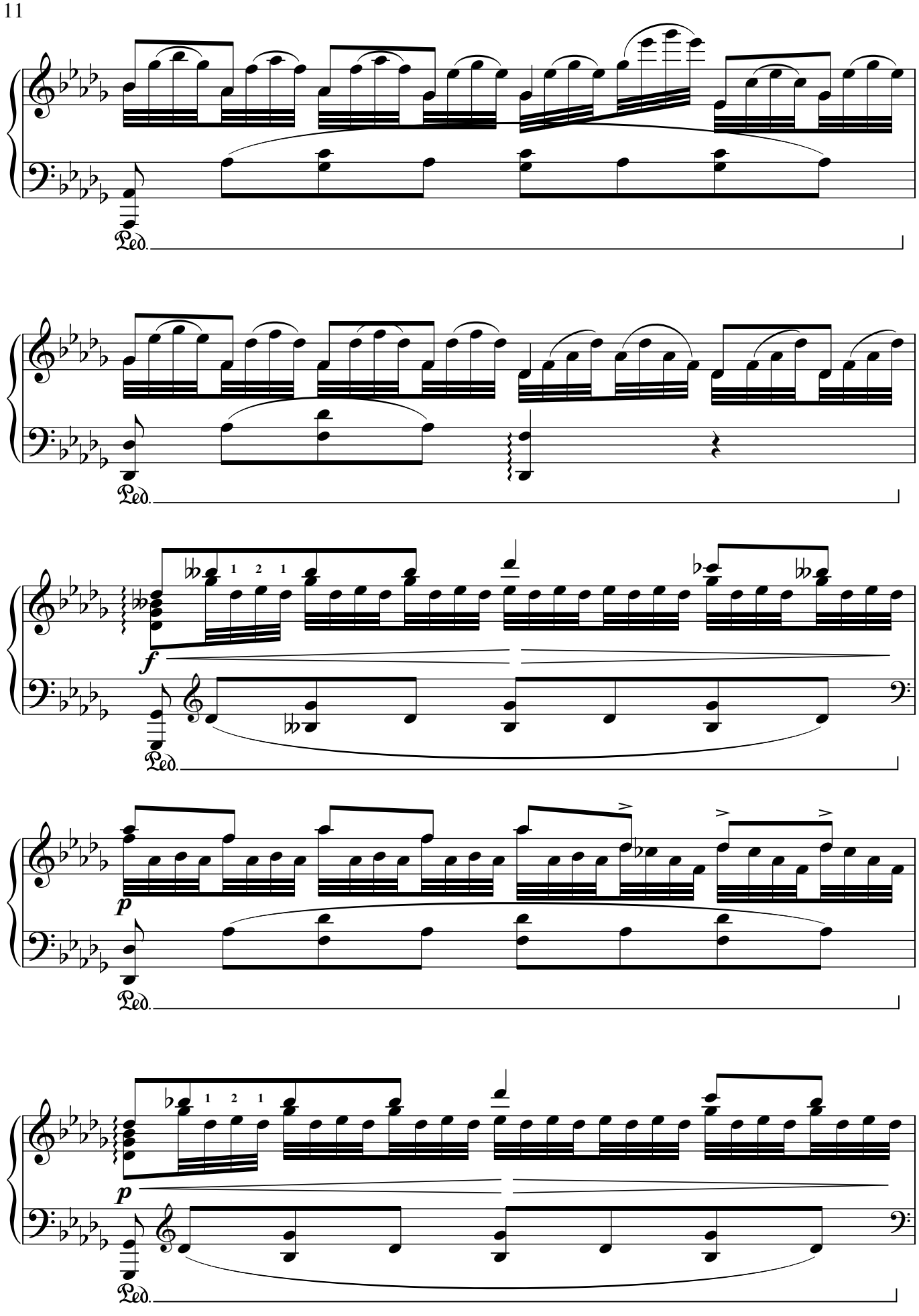

p
8va
(8)
ossia
f
f
Ped.

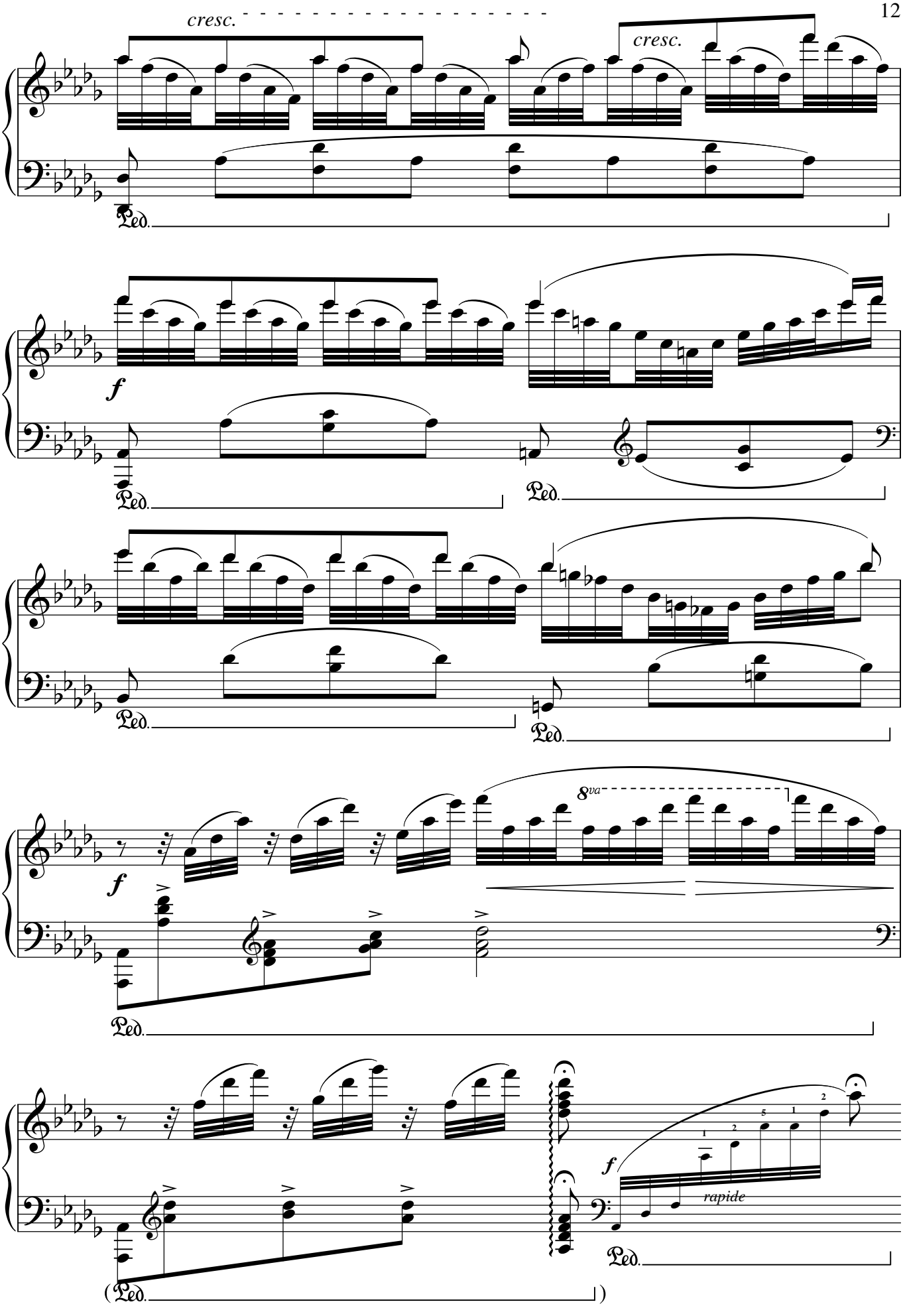

cresc.
molto legato
dim.
dim.

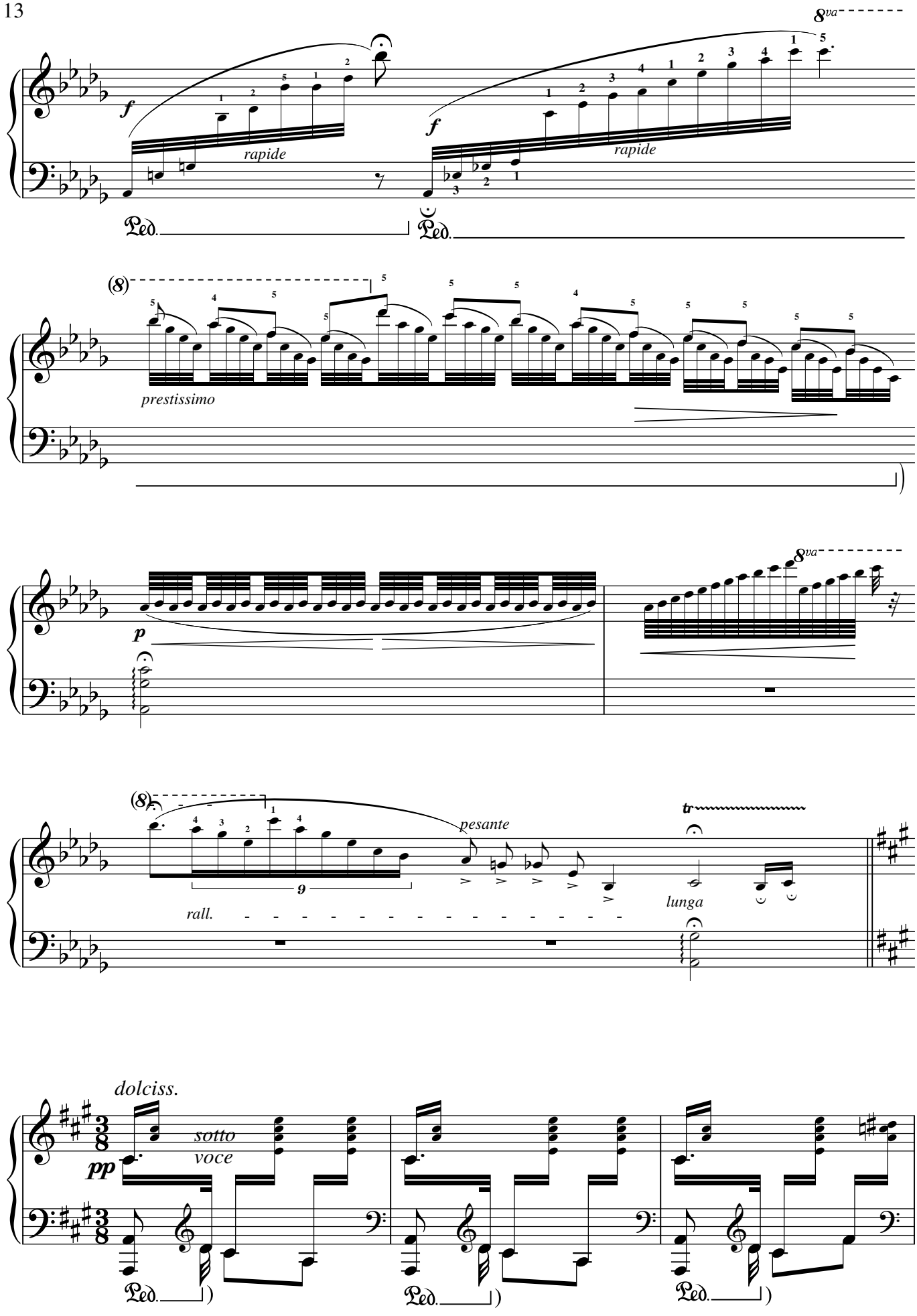

rall.
Andante
p
Ped.
pp
con molto espress.
3
cresc.
dolce

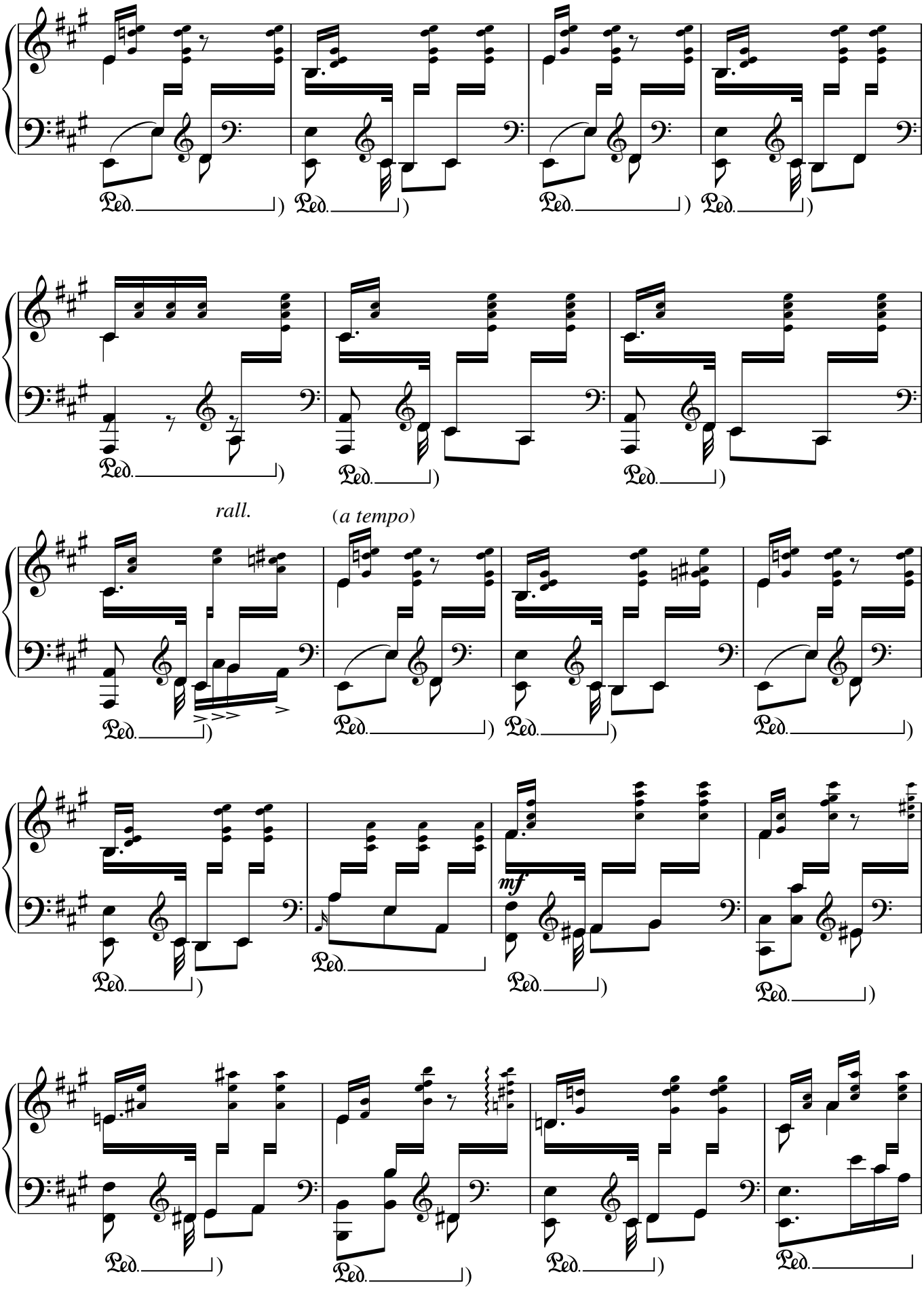

rall.
largamente
cresc.
Ped.
(Ped.)
(Ped.)
Ped.
rall.
a tempo
dolce
legatissimo
Ped.
Ped.

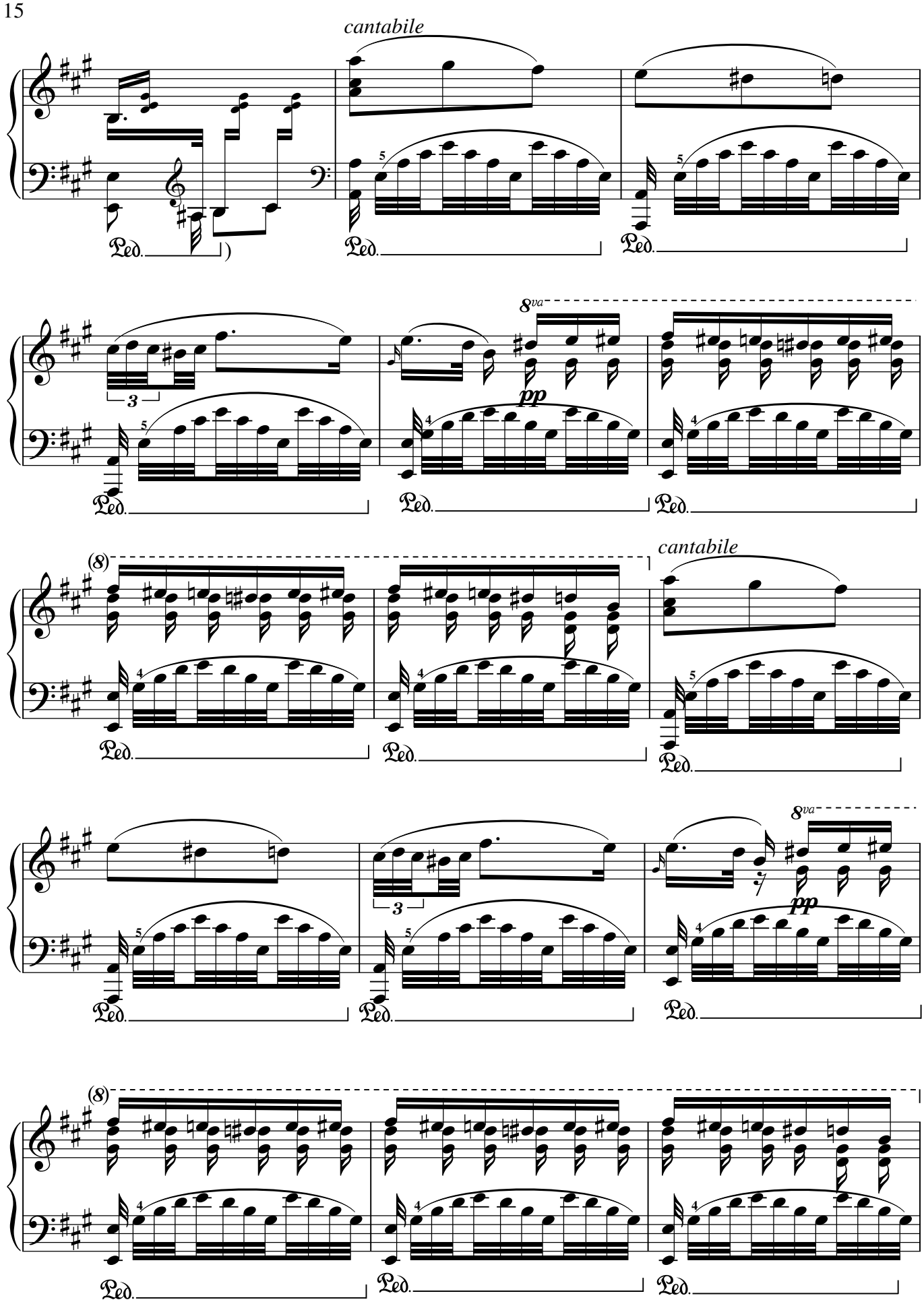

1
Ped.
1
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

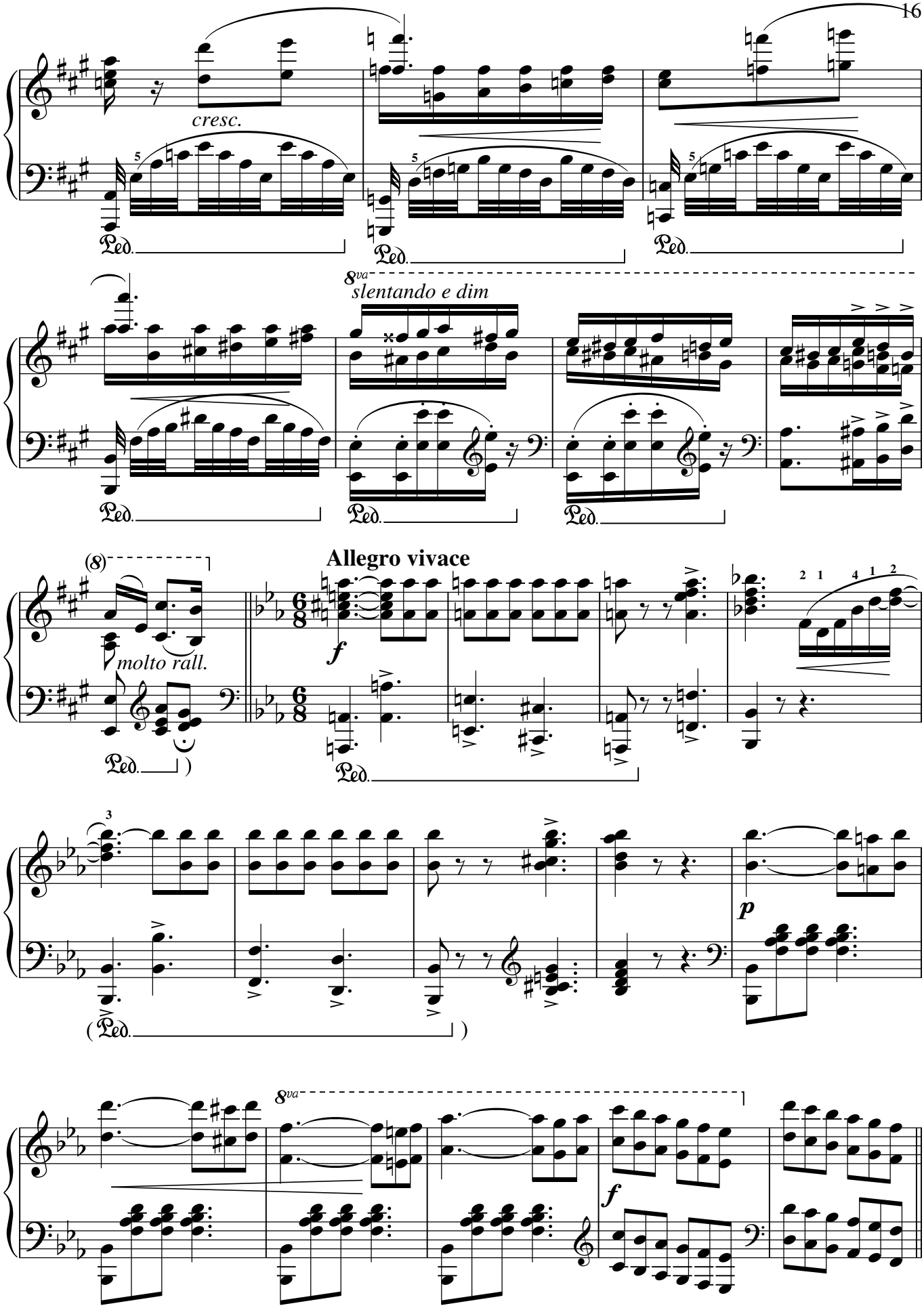

Ped.
Ped.
1 2 1
f
Ped.
p
Ped.
1 2 1
p
Ped.

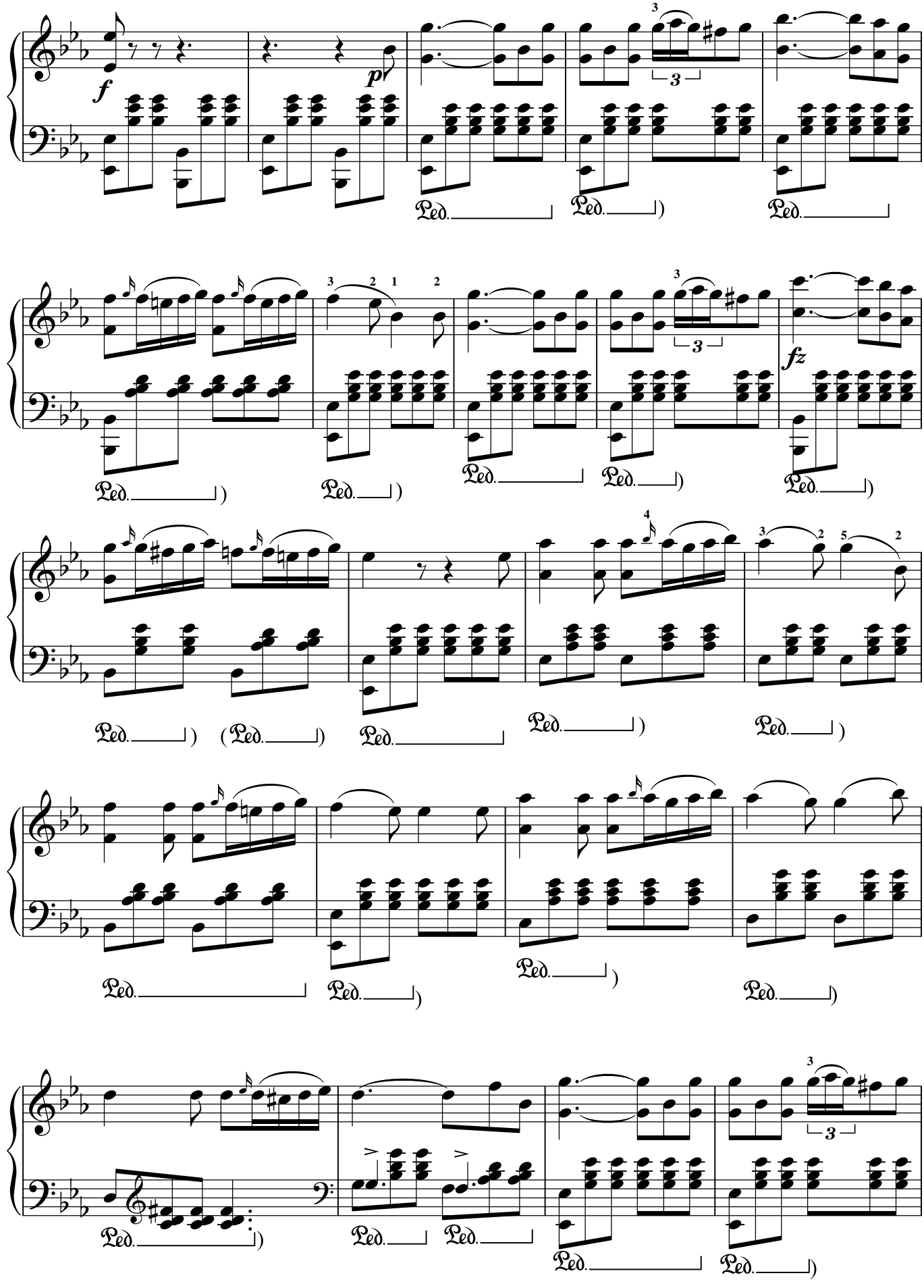

cresc.
cresc.
f
Ped.
8va
rapide

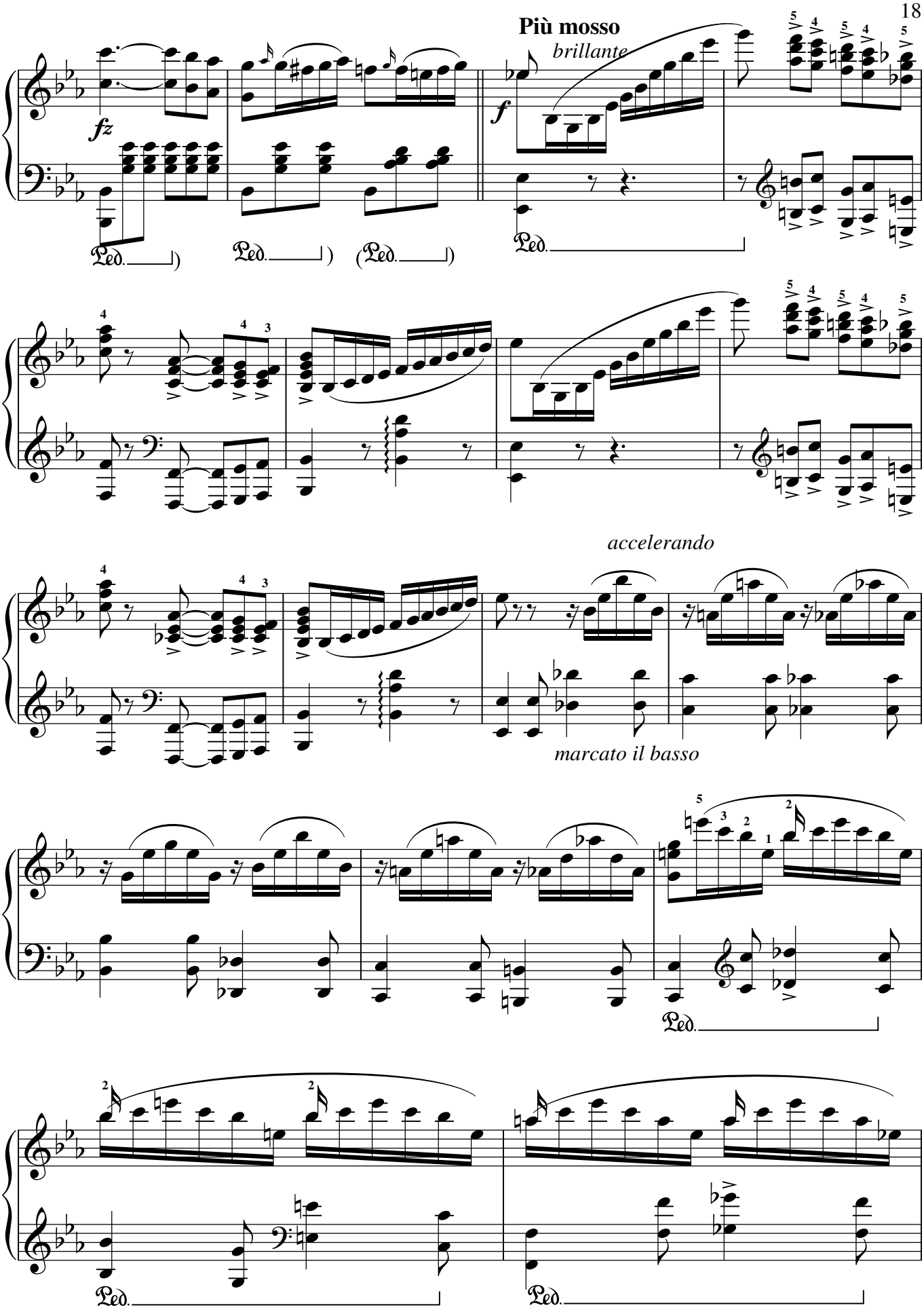

8va
f
rapide
f
rapide
Ped.
Ped.
(8)
prestissimo
p
8va
(8)
pesante
rall.
9
tr
lunga
dolciss.
pp
sotto
voce
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

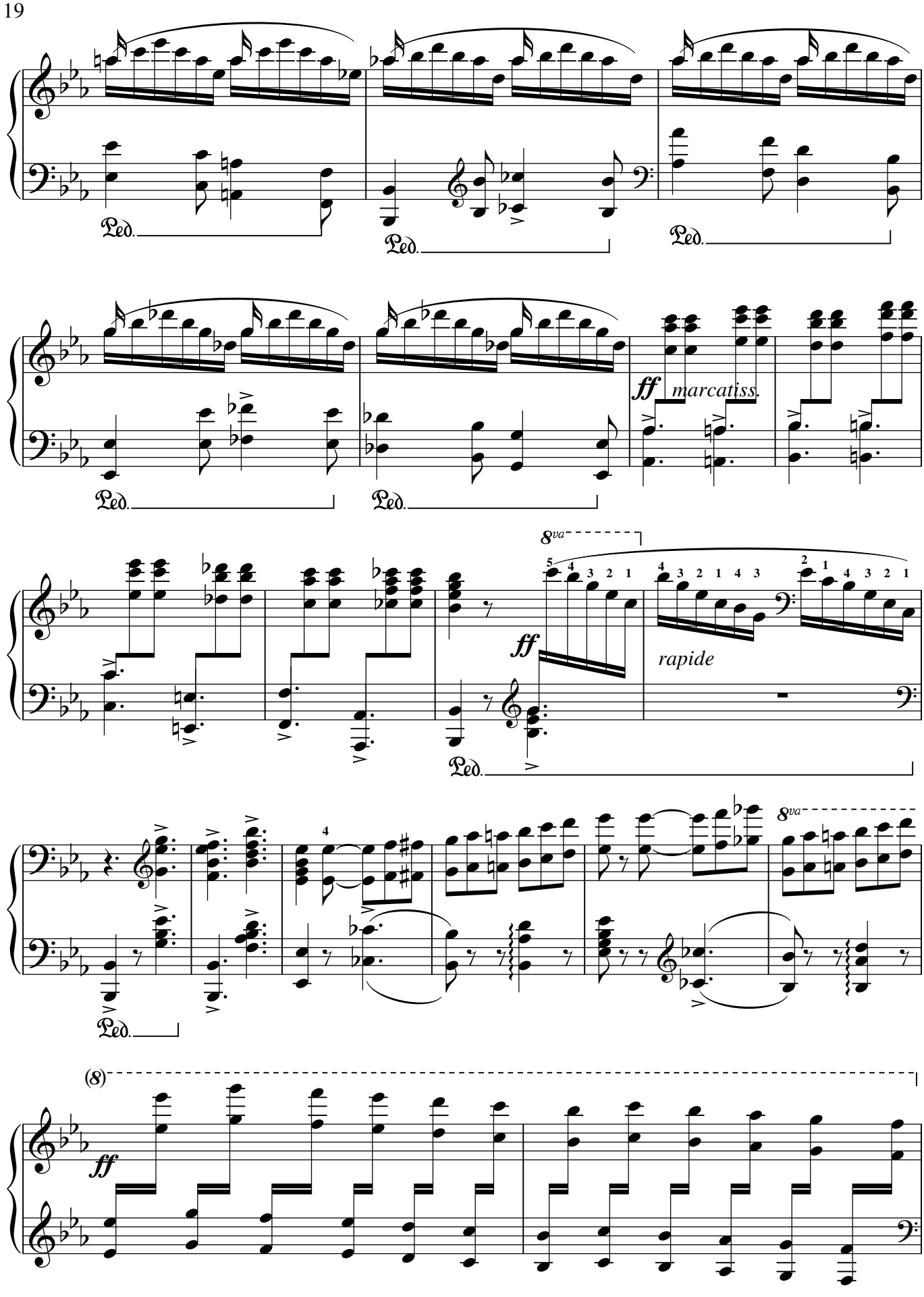

rall.
(a tempo)
mf

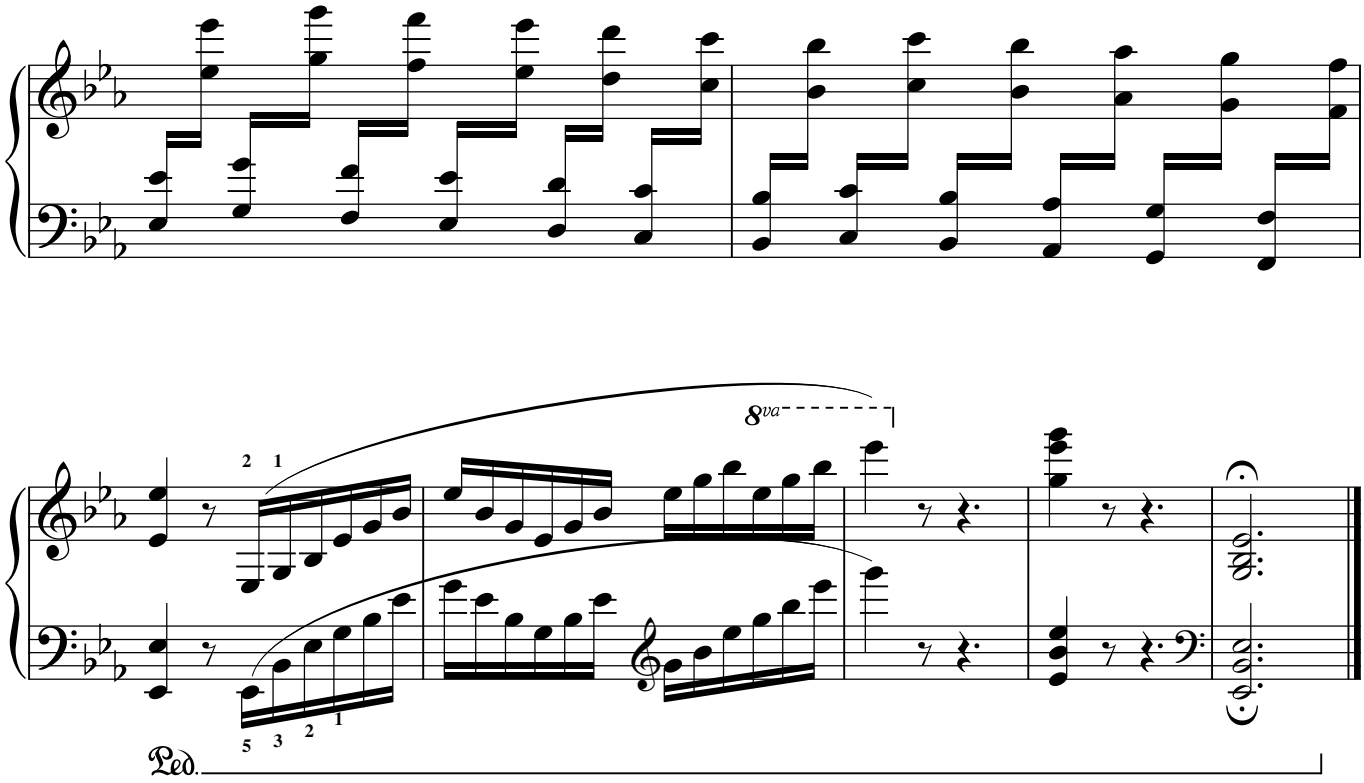

cantabile
8va
pp
(8)
cantabile
8va
pp
(8)
Ped.


cresc.
Ped.
8va
slentando e dim
(8)
molto rall.
Allegro vivace
f
p
8va
f


f
p
fz
Ped.


Più mosso
brillante
fz
f
Ped.
accelerando
marcato il basso


Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
ff
marcatiss.
8va
ff
rapide
Ped.
8va
Ped.
(8)
ff



All editorial changes have been made purely with the intention of producing a score which is essentially more 'user-friendly', in terms of type-setting, layout and overall appearance.

The main changes are in the area of **fingering**, as the original used so-called English fingering (where the thumb is shown by '+', and the fingers then numbered '1 - 4'. Present-day, or Continental fingering, of course, numbers the thumb as '1', and the fingers '2 - 5'.

According to usual practice, any missed or missing accidental is shown *small*.

Original pedalling marks have largely been adhered to, but where it was felt that, on today's instrument, with greater resonance, they were occasionally over-long, and might lead to some harmonic 'confusion' they have been curtailed. Such 'curtailing' has been shown by ')'. Where a pedal mark appears to have been omitted, this has been added, but enclosed by two brackets '(and)'. In all events, pedalling needs to be considered on an individual basis, taking into consideration the instrument, and the acoustic of the room.

Whilst the prime aim is to produce a modern type-setting of the original, wherever possible, playback instructions have been incorporated (but **hidden**) so that playing the score back, either via *MIDI*, or as an MP3 file, will also produce an acceptable 'performance', albeit one that is 'mechanically' produced! No original metronome markings were given, so play-back tempos are largely in accordance with the Italian markings. They are, as such, discretionary, though the intention should no doubt be to reflect the respective original tempi of Verdi's opera.

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