Composition Techniques for the Harp

Or

Writing for your harpist so we can play your piece!

By

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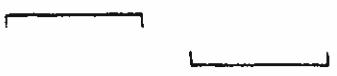
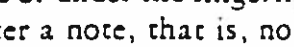
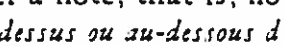
EXPLANATION OF HARPISTIC SYMBOLS USED IN THE FOLLOWING STUDIES

EXPLICATION DES SIGNES HARPISTIQUES EMPLOYÉS DANS LES ÉTUDES SUIVANTES

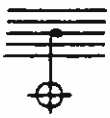


to place (prepare) simultaneously a group of notes.
pour placer (préparer) simultanément un groupe de notes.

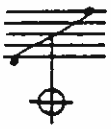
A dot above or under the fingering or at the end of the placing symbol () means to leave after a note, that is, not to connect.
Un point au-dessus ou au-dessous d'un doigté ou à la fin du signe pour placer () veut dire de quitter après la note, c'est à dire, de ne pas placer.

to roll a chord.
pour arpéger un accord.

to play flat, without the slightest breaking.
pour jouer sans arpéger (plaqué).



to muffle a single note.
pour étouffer une note seule.



to muffle a specified group of strings.
pour étouffer un groupe spécifié de cordes.

to muffle totally.
pour étouffer totalement.

L.V. to let vibrate.
pour laisser vibrer.

to slide with suppleness along a string, from the center to the top and vice versa.
pour glisser avec souplesse le long d'une corde, de son milieu à son extrémité supérieure et vice versa.

o o
o

Harmonics are written where they actually sound; they are produced on the string an octave lower.
Les sons harmoniques sont écrits en sons réels; ils sont produits sur la corde à l'octave basse de la note indiquée.

Eolian Flux
Flux éolien

CONCOURS DU CONSERVATOIRE DE PARIS

A Madame PROVINCIALI-CELMER

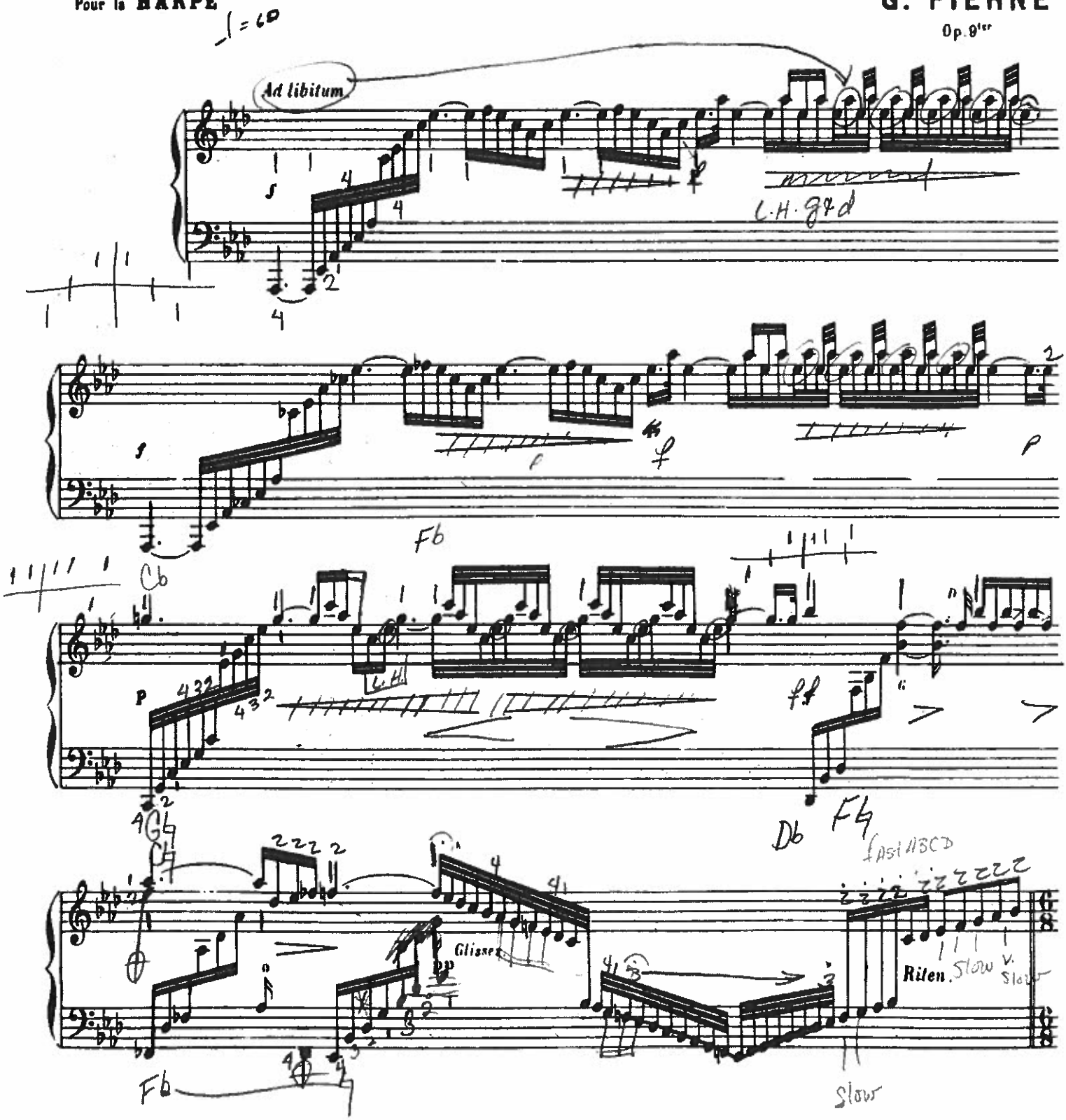
IMPROMPTU-CAPRICE

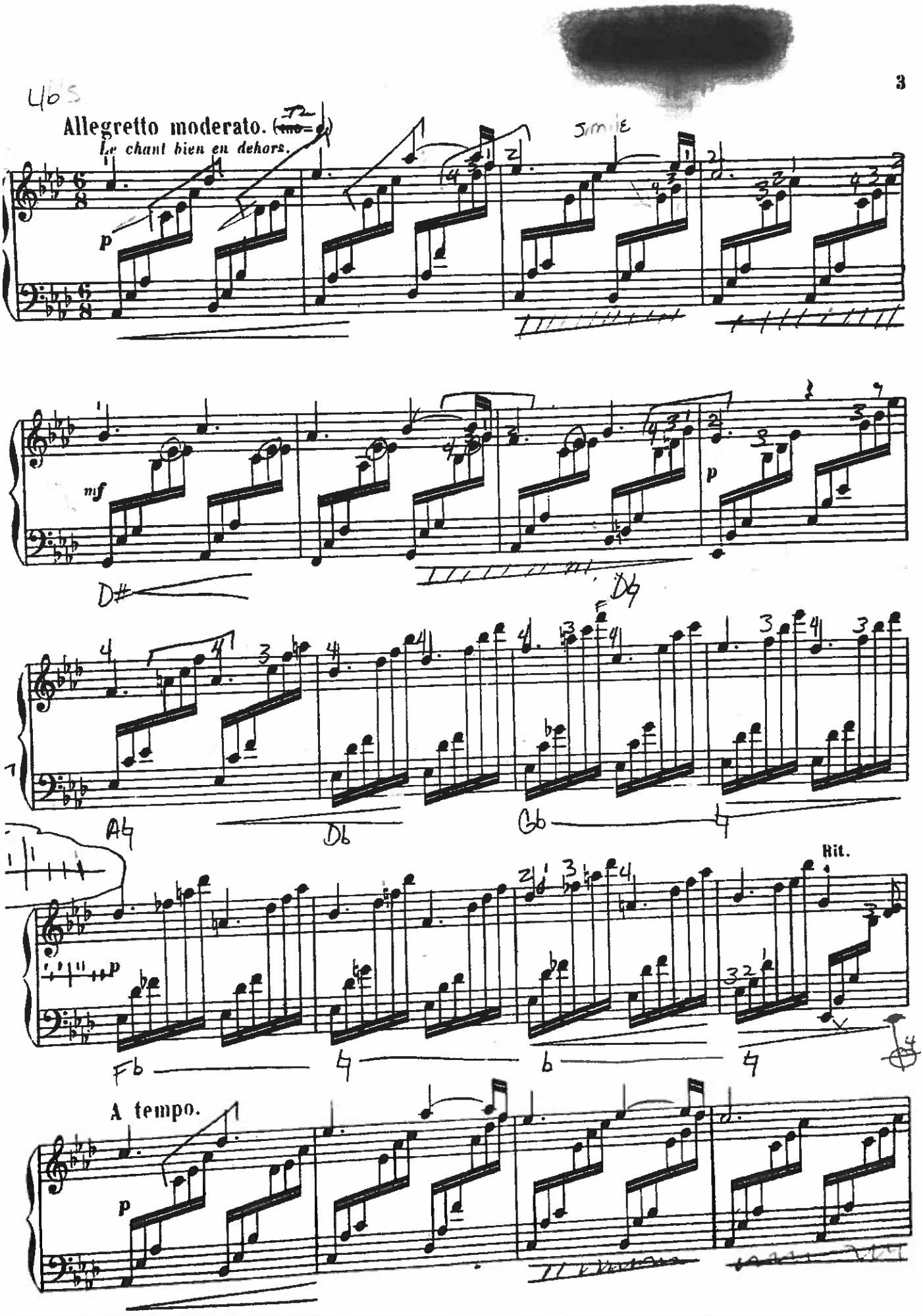
ÉDITION DE CONCERT

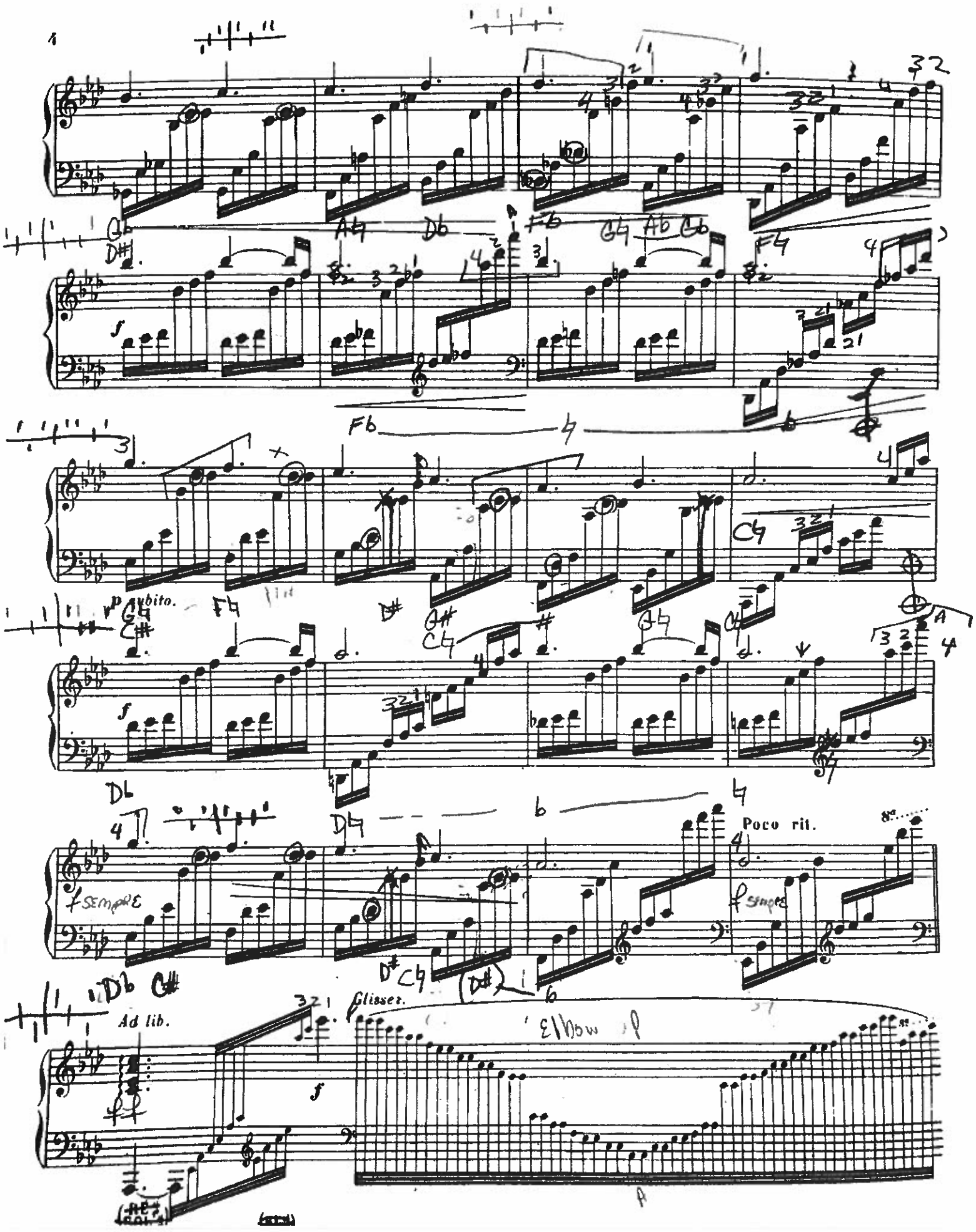
Pour la **HARPE**

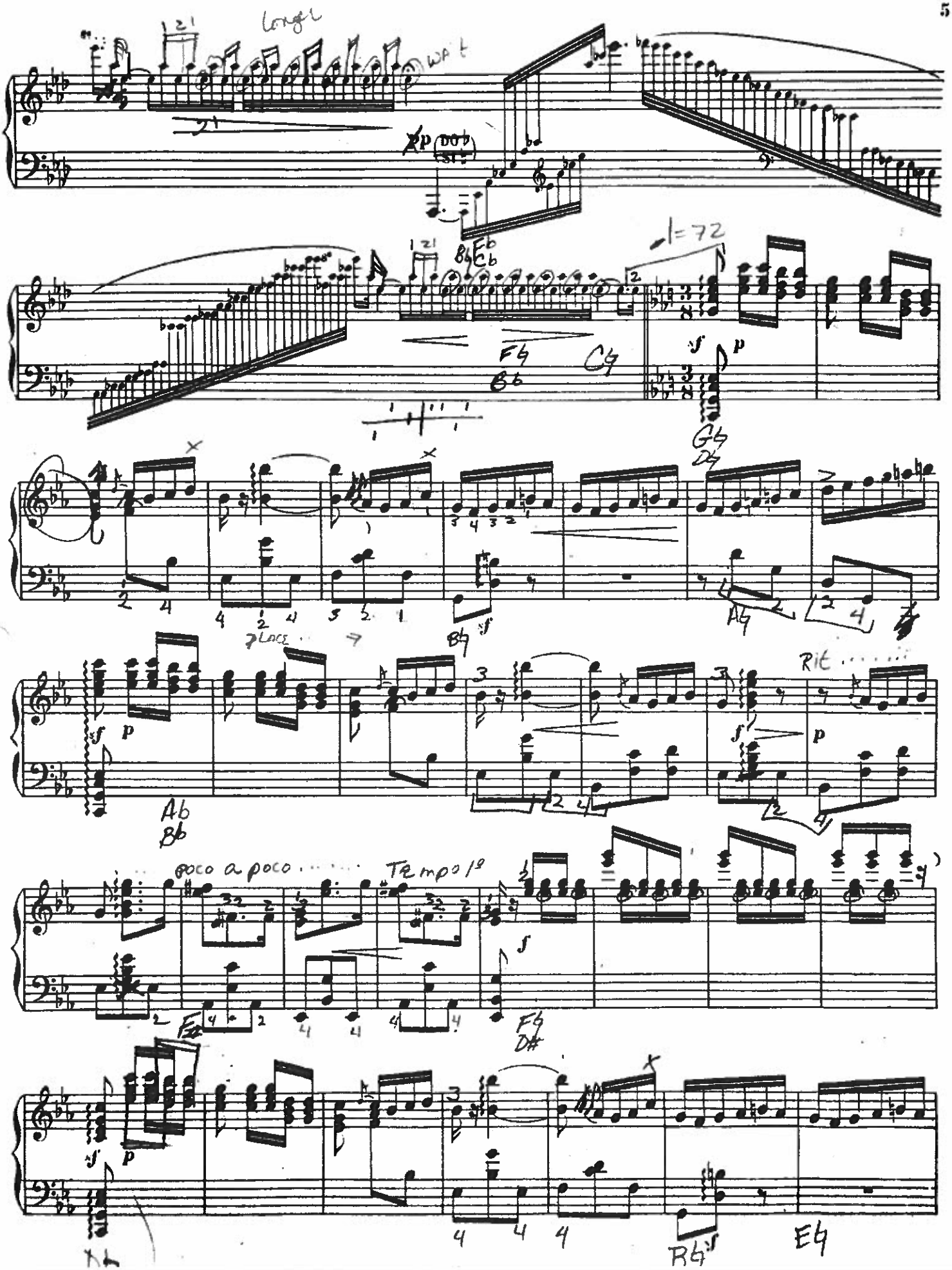
G. PIERNÉ

Op. 9ter



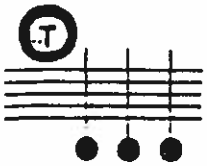

Allegretto moderato.
Le chant bien en dehors.
p
smile
mf
p
Rit.
A tempo.
p


Subito.
Poco rit.
Ad lib.
Glisser.


Longer
wait
♩=72
poco a poco
Tempo 1º
Rit

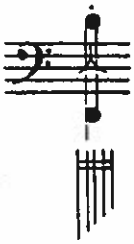
Sliding of pedals
Glissés de pédales

[*Etude Moderne*, page 15]



Timpanic sounds
Sons timbaliques

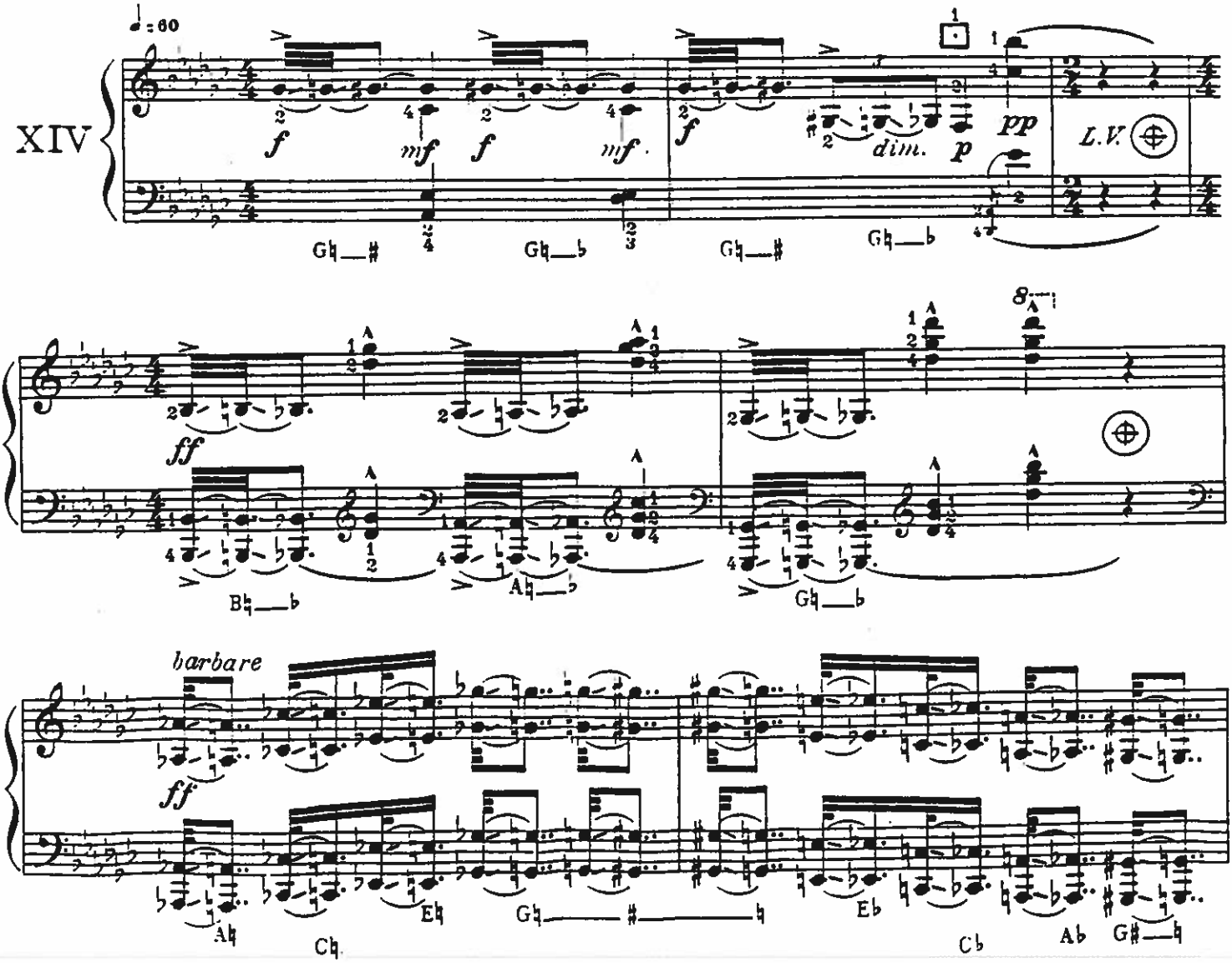
[*Etude Moderne*, page 17]



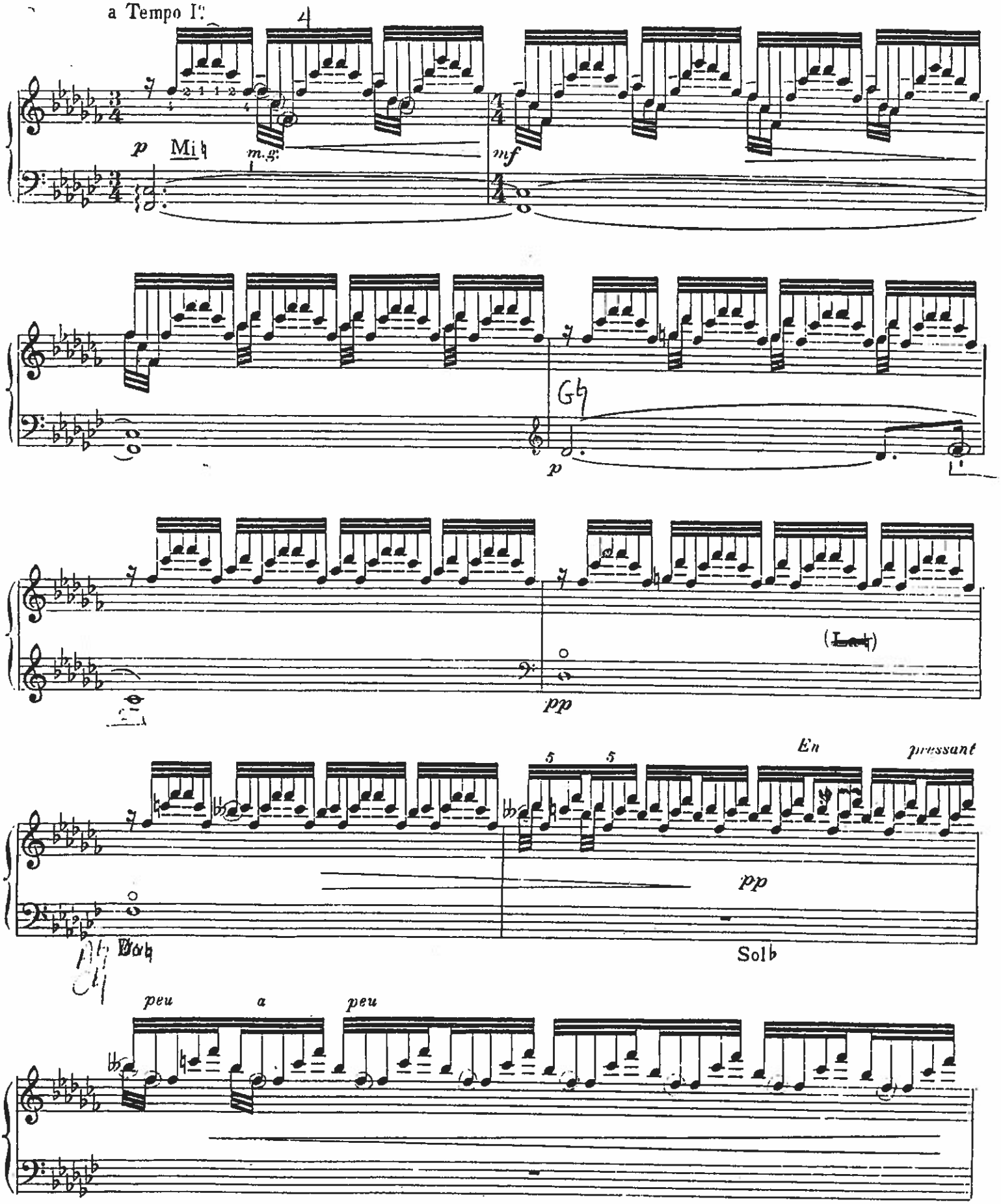
(Rapid) Whistling sounds
Sons sifflés rapides

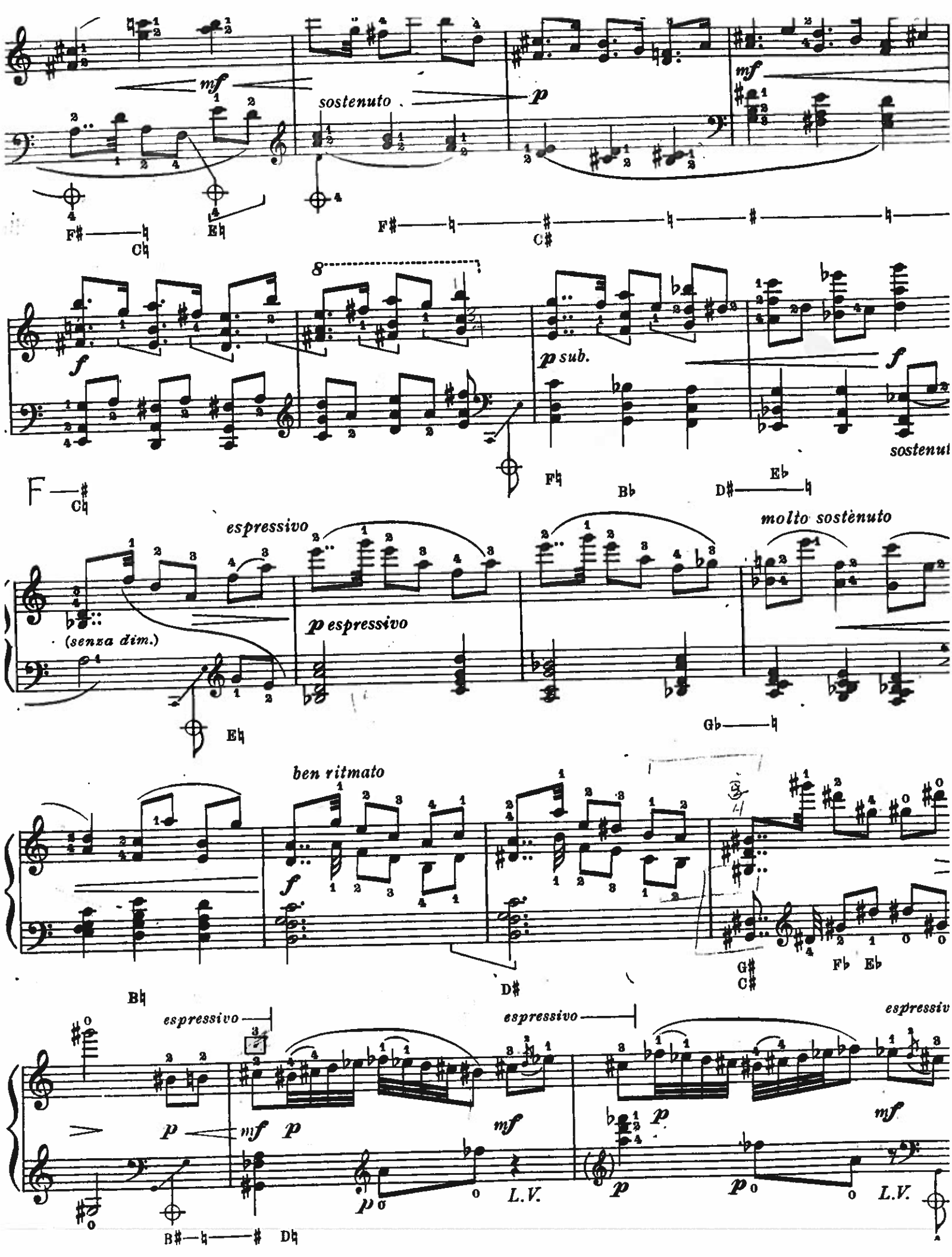
[*Etude Moderne*, page 15]

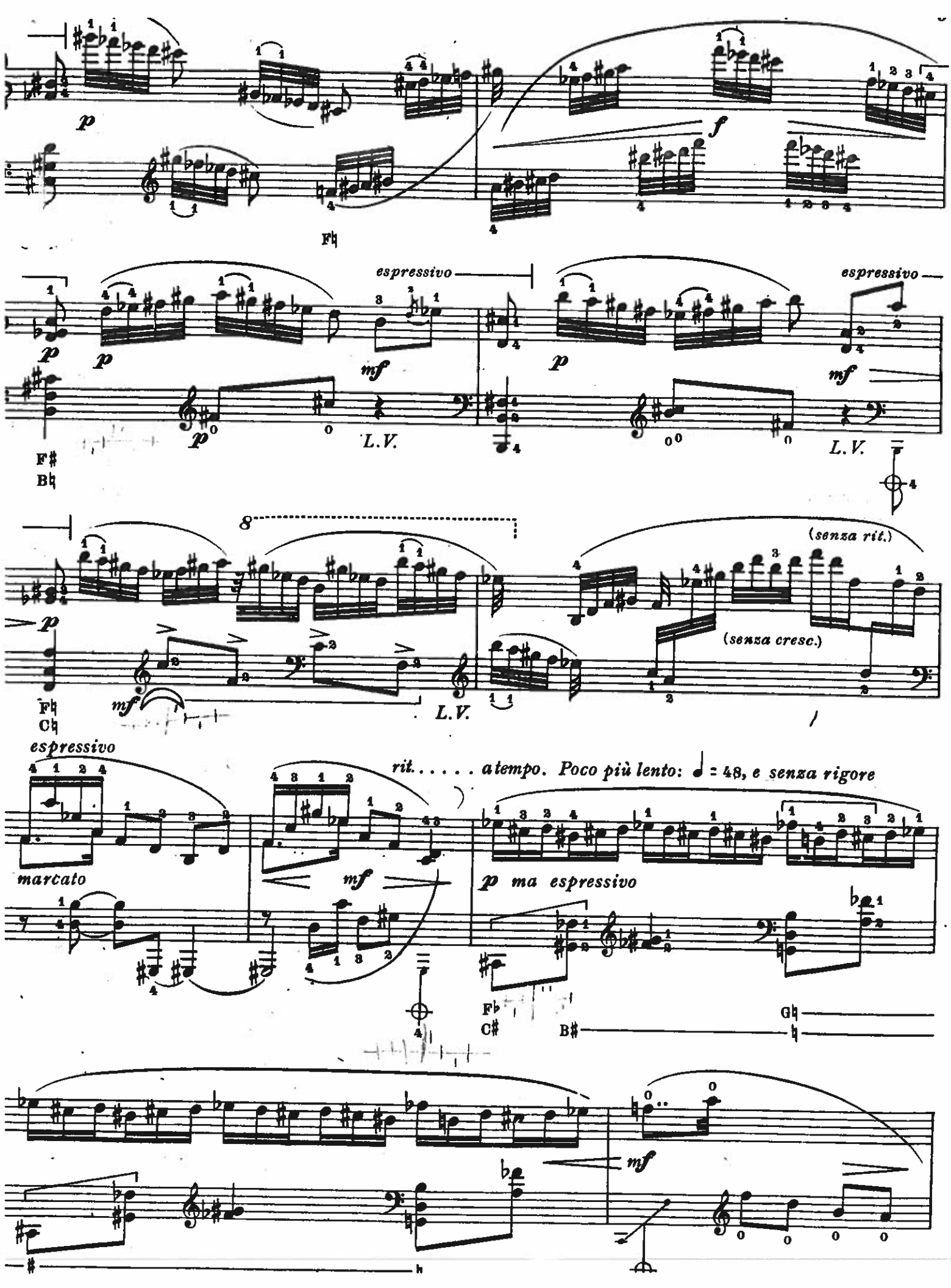
La Désirade

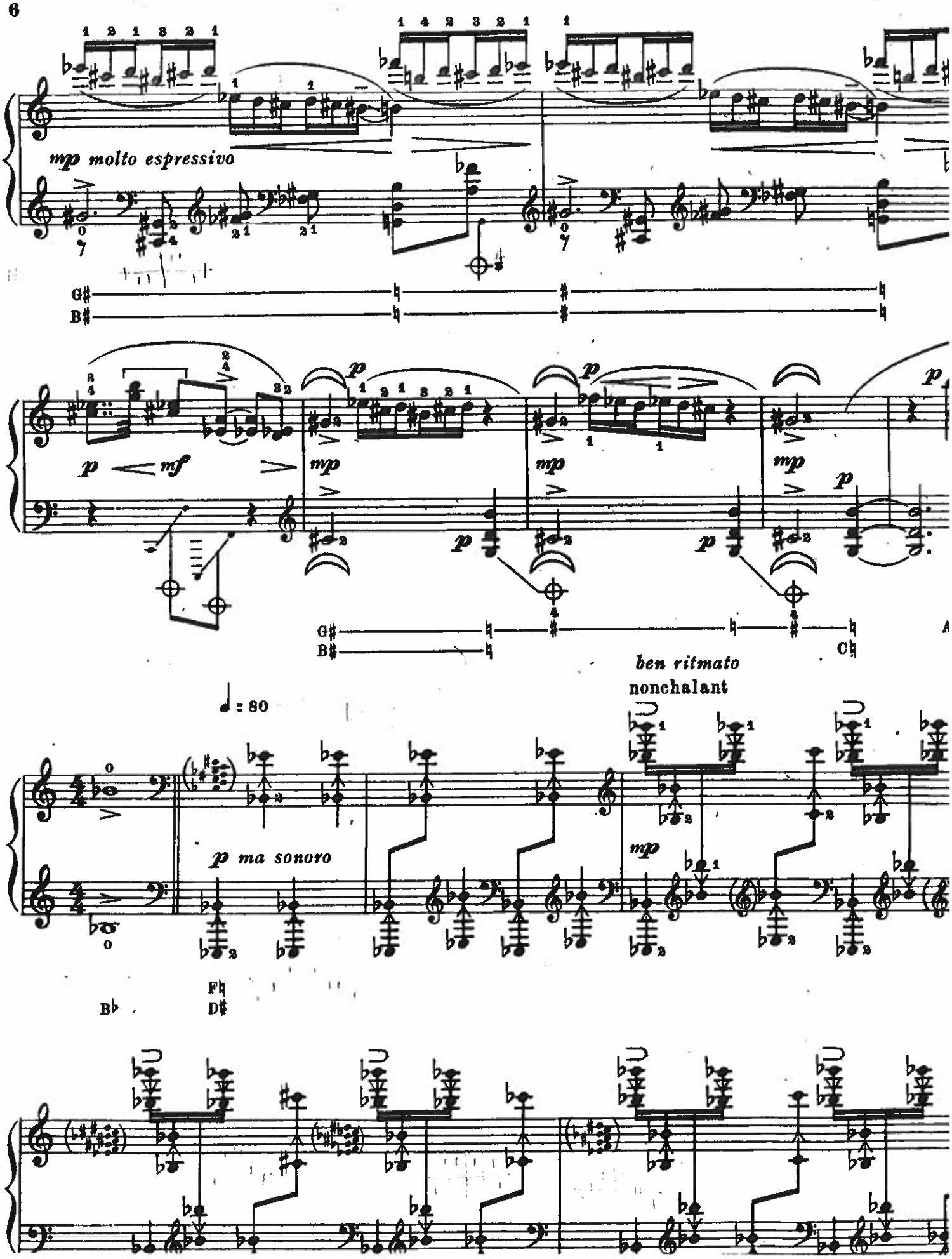


Vers la source dans le bois-
M. Tournier




mf
sostenuto
p
mf
f
p sub.
f
sostenut
espressivo
molto sostènuto
(senza dim.)
p espressivo
ben ritmato
f
espressivo
espressivo
espressiv
p
mf p
mf
p
mf
L.V.
L.V.


p
f
F♮
espressivo
espressivo
p
p
mf
p
mf
p
L.V.
L.V.
F♯
B♮
8
(senza rit.)
(senza cresc.)
p
mf
L.V.
F♮
C♮
espressivo
rit. . . . . a tempo. Poco più lento: ♩ = 48, e senza rigore
marcato
mf
p ma espressivo
F♭
C♯
B♯
G♮
mf


mp molto espressivo
G♯
B♯
p
mf
mp
p
G♯
B♯
C♮
A
♩= 80
ben ritmato
nonchalant
p ma sonoro
mp
B♭
F♮
D♯

From "Harp Scoring"
Stanley Chaloupka

CHAPTER I
THE HARP

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

In order to achieve a fuller understanding of the harp, it is first necessary to become familiar with its basic construction.

The harp is somewhat triangular in shape, stands approximately 6 feet tall (1.83 meters), and weighs almost 80 pounds (36.2 kilos). A pedestal (base) supports the column, the body and soundboard, while the upper portion is spanned by the neck which contains the mechanism. See Fig. 1.

The base houses seven pedals. See Fig. 2. The seven pedals are attached to the mechanism by connecting-rods inside the column.

The neck contains tuning pins and bridge pins, as well as the mechanism or "mechanical fingers." See Fig. 3.

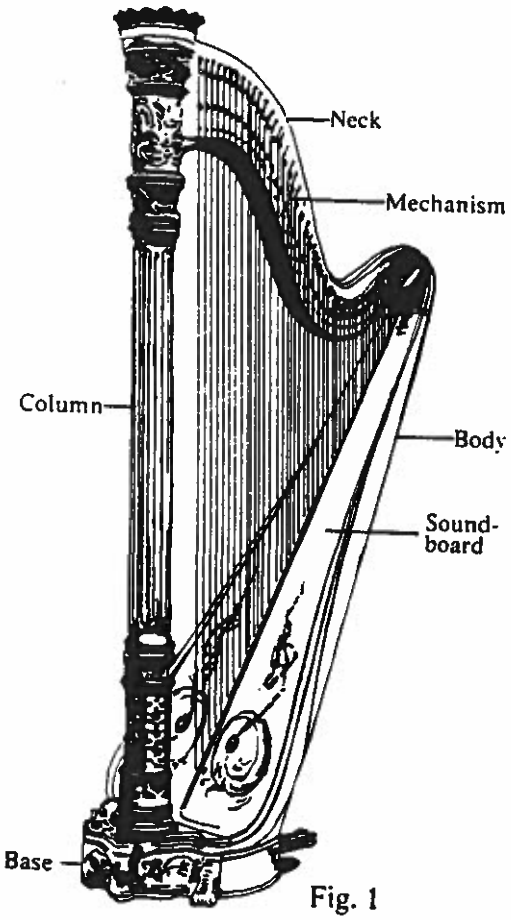


Fig. 1

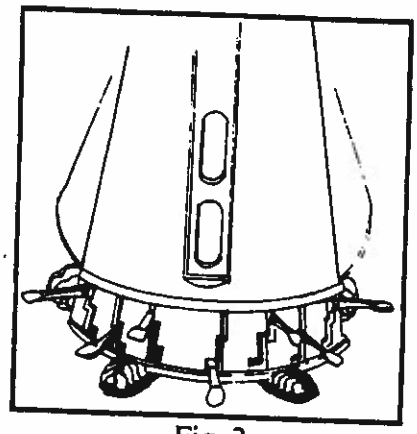


Fig. 2

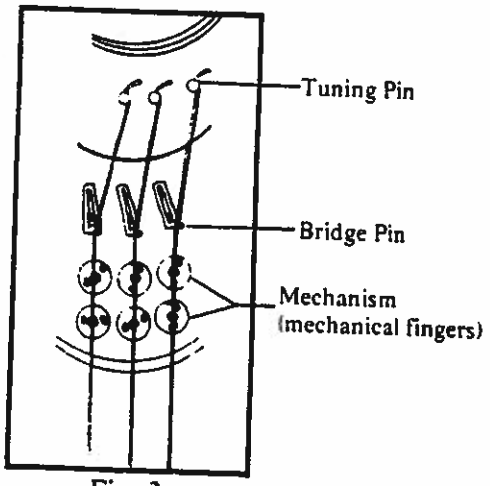


Fig. 3

CHAPTER II
BASIC HARP SCORING

Harp music, like piano music, is notated in the bass and treble clefs. Many effective possibilities utilizing the harp are derived from different combinations and variations of basic harp scoring.

ARPEGGIATED CHORDS

Notation

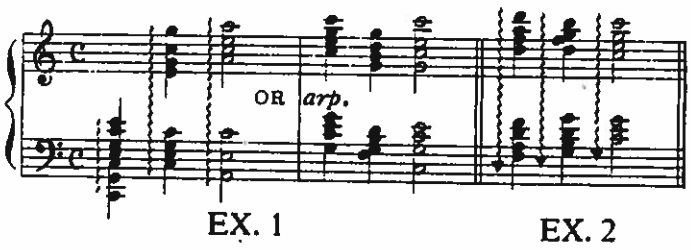
Unless there is a notation to the contrary, a harpist will instinctively roll (slightly arpeggiate) any chord. This is somewhat like a very fast arpeggio — the bottom note of the chord starting just ahead of the beat, followed by the rest of the notes in rapid sequence, ending with the top or last note **on the beat.**

Arpeggiation

Should the composer desire a broadly arpeggiated chord, it should be indicated by an *arpeggiando* sign (⦚) preceding the chord, or the term *"arp."* (anticipated — arpeggiated upward — top note on the beat) See EX. 1.

Reverse Arpeggiation

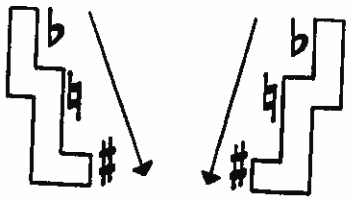
Reverse arpeggiation should be indicated by an *arpeggiando* sign with an arrow at the bottom (⦚) preceding the chord. (anticipated — arpeggiated downward — bottom note on the beat) See EX. 2.



EX. 1 EX. 2

On the Beat Arpeggiation

There may be instances when the composer desires an arpeggiated chord not anticipated — starting with the bottom note **on the beat,** followed by the



Detail of Pedal Notches
Fig. 13

The seven pedals operate within these grooves and are attached to the mechanism via connecting-rods in the column. Moving a pedal actuates the mechanism or "mechanical fingers."

Each pedal has a strong spring attached to it, and offers a resistance to changing the pedals. The pedal spring always forces the pedal upward, toward the flat (♭) position.

Although resistance varies with different harps, approximately 7 to 20 lb. pressure is needed to move a pedal for a **single pedal change.** Therefore, a considerably larger total amount of energy must be expended during a quick, multiple pedal change.

Remember, the pedal spring forces the pedal **upward,** to the flat (♭) position. See Fig. 14.

To put a pedal into the natural (♮) position, the pedal must be "hooked" into the natural (♮) notch, or it will not stay in natural. See Fig. 15.

To put a pedal into the sharp (♯) position, the pedal must be "hooked" into the sharp (♯) notch, or it will not stay in sharp. See Fig. 16.

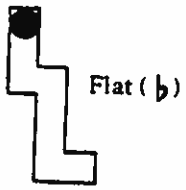


Fig. 14

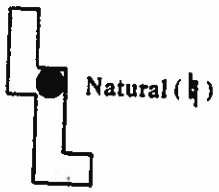


Fig. 15

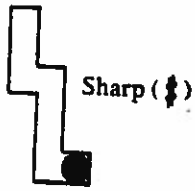


Fig. 16

(The pedal is represented by the black dot in these three illustrations.)

A pedal must be "unhooked" to be changed from ♮ to ♭, ♯ to ♮, or from ♯ to ♭. However, in the **flat** (♭) position the pedal does not have to be "unhooked" to be changed, nor does it have to be "hooked" to stay in the **flat** (♭) position. See examples in Fig. 17.

(Arrow indicates path of pedal during pedal change.)

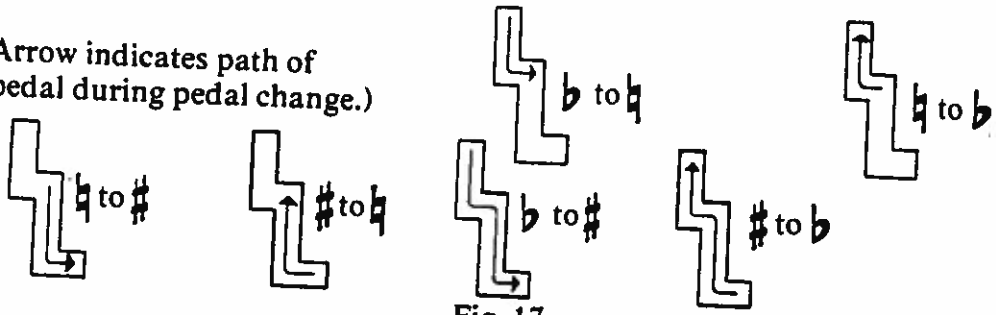


Fig. 17

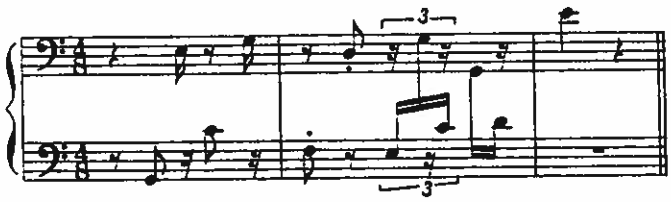
UNNECESSARY HANDICAPS

Music that jumps back and forth between two staves with identical clef signs imposes unnecessary handicaps upon the harpist. It is rarely necessary to write music in this way.

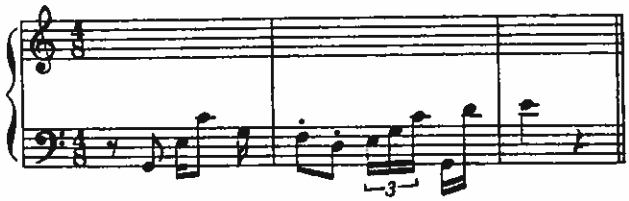
It will assist the harpist if two staves with the same clef signs are used only when absolutely necessary. If possible, all the treble clef passages should utilize the upper staff and all bass clef passages should employ the lower staff.

Awkward Reading

It is extremely awkward to read a harp passage containing various rhythms when it is written in two staves with identical clef signs. The same passage is easy to read when written in one staff. See EX. 70 and 71.



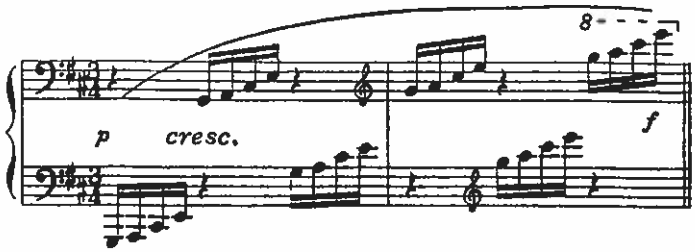
EX. 70 — ILLOGICAL (awkward to read)



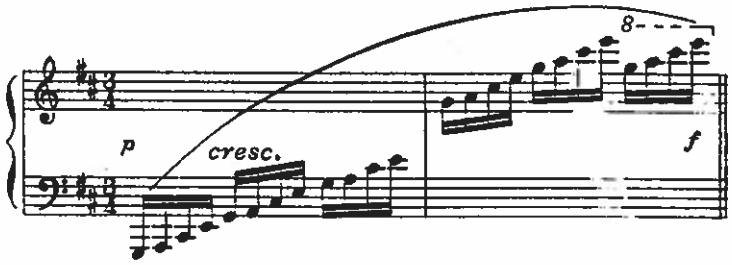
EX. 71 — LOGICAL (easy to read)

Scoring Arpeggios and Scales

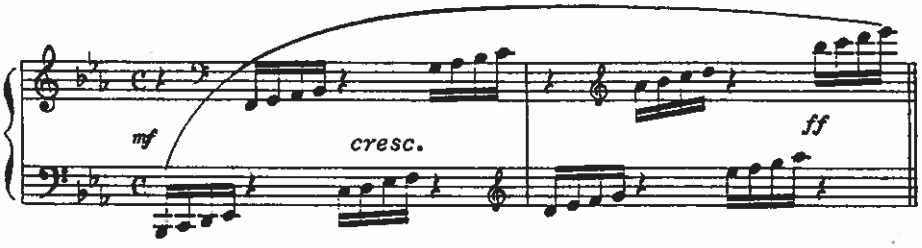
In writing arpeggios or scales, it makes good sense for composers to figure out a logical fingering before writing such a passage (remembering that only four fingers are used in each hand). However, left hand, right hand or fingering should never be indicated. See EX. 72 through 75.



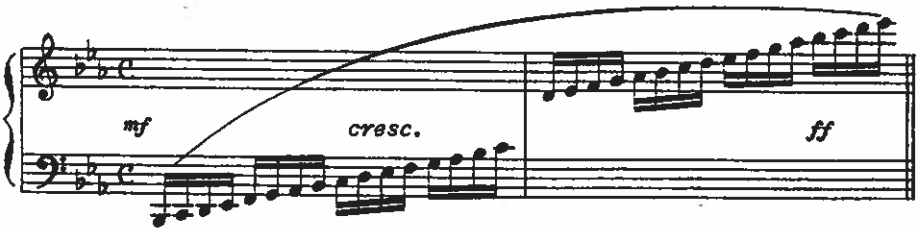
EX. 72 — ILLOGICAL (awkward to read)



EX. 73 — LOGICAL (easy to read)



EX. 74 — ILLOGICAL (awkward to read)



EX. 75 — LOGICAL (easy to read)

Ledger Lines

Composers should utilize the 8va and 8va basso signs rather than using too many ledger lines in scoring harp music. Harpists prefer the 8va sign as it facilitates their reading. (In direct contrast, flutists dislike the 8va signs and prefer ledger lines.)

CHAPTER IX
CONCLUSION

As a final reminder, the following "do nots" are included to help composers, arrangers, and music students avoid some of the pitfalls that may be encountered when writing harp music. Alternate suggestions are offered in many instances.

These harp music "do nots" are specifically listed so that the composer can avoid them and thus help the performance of his composition. (Most of these "do nots" directly concern the composer, but a few will pertain to copyists as well as publishers.) Rather than to facilitate the music for the harpist, the purpose is to **assist the composer in achieving his desired harp scoring objectives.**

DO NOTS

1. Do not use two staves with identical clef signs (two treble clefs or two bass clefs) in writing any rhythmic passage, scale or arpeggio. In most instances it can be written otherwise. Jumping back and forth between two staves with identical clef signs imposes unnecessary handicaps upon the harpist.
   Instead: if possible, use two staves and **always** write all the treble clef passages using the upper staff, the bass clef passages using the lower staff.
2. Do not indicate pedal changes during a passage or between glissandos. Harpists change pedals in different ways and most would rather indicate pedal changes in their own personal way. (Exception: the composer may indicate pedals changing one or two notes in the tonality during a glissando, as in EX. 38, 39, and 40 on page 16.)
3. Do not write fast repeated chords or fast repeated notes unless most of the repeated notes are alternated with enharmonically written notes. (See "Doubling Enharmonically" on page 10.)
4. Do not write any scale or arpeggio passages doubled in seconds or thirds. These notes will sound muffled due to replacement of the fingers. (Exception: a glissando may be doubled in thirds provided the dynamic is very soft.)
   Instead: use tenths for a resonant sound. Octave passages are sonorous while passages using a span two octaves apart are most sonorous.
5. Do not write double sharps (𝄪) or double flats (𝄫) for harp.
   Instead: use enharmonic notes in place of these notes.
6. Do not write any chord, scale, or arpeggio that requires any single pedal to have two different settings or accidentals simultaneously. (A harp pedal cannot have two different settings at the same time.) For instance: E♮ and E♭ should not be employed simultaneously.
   Instead: use enharmonic notes employing E♮ and D♯, or F♭ and E♭, or F♭ and D♯. (See EX. 42 and EX. 43 on page 22.)

7. Do not write harp harmonics as "actual sound."
   Instead: write these harmonics where they are to be played. (Harp harmonics always sound **one octave higher** than the written note.)
8. Do not forget that all key signatures, accidentals, and cancellations are made by the harpist's feet via the pedals. Thus, adequate time must be allowed for pedal changes. (See "Pedal Comprehension" on pages 19 through 25.)
9. Do not write harp music that necessitates a change of pitch for the contra C or D, or the highest string (G). Since there is no mechanism for these three strings they must be pre-tuned to ♭, ♮, or ♯, as called for by the music.
10. Do not use too many ledger lines; use the 8va or 8va basso sign instead. (Harpists prefer the 8va sign in such passages as it facilitates reading.)
11. Do not forget that the harpist uses only four fingers in each hand and must look at the strings in order to place the fingers, prior to playing the strings.

General Musical Do Nots

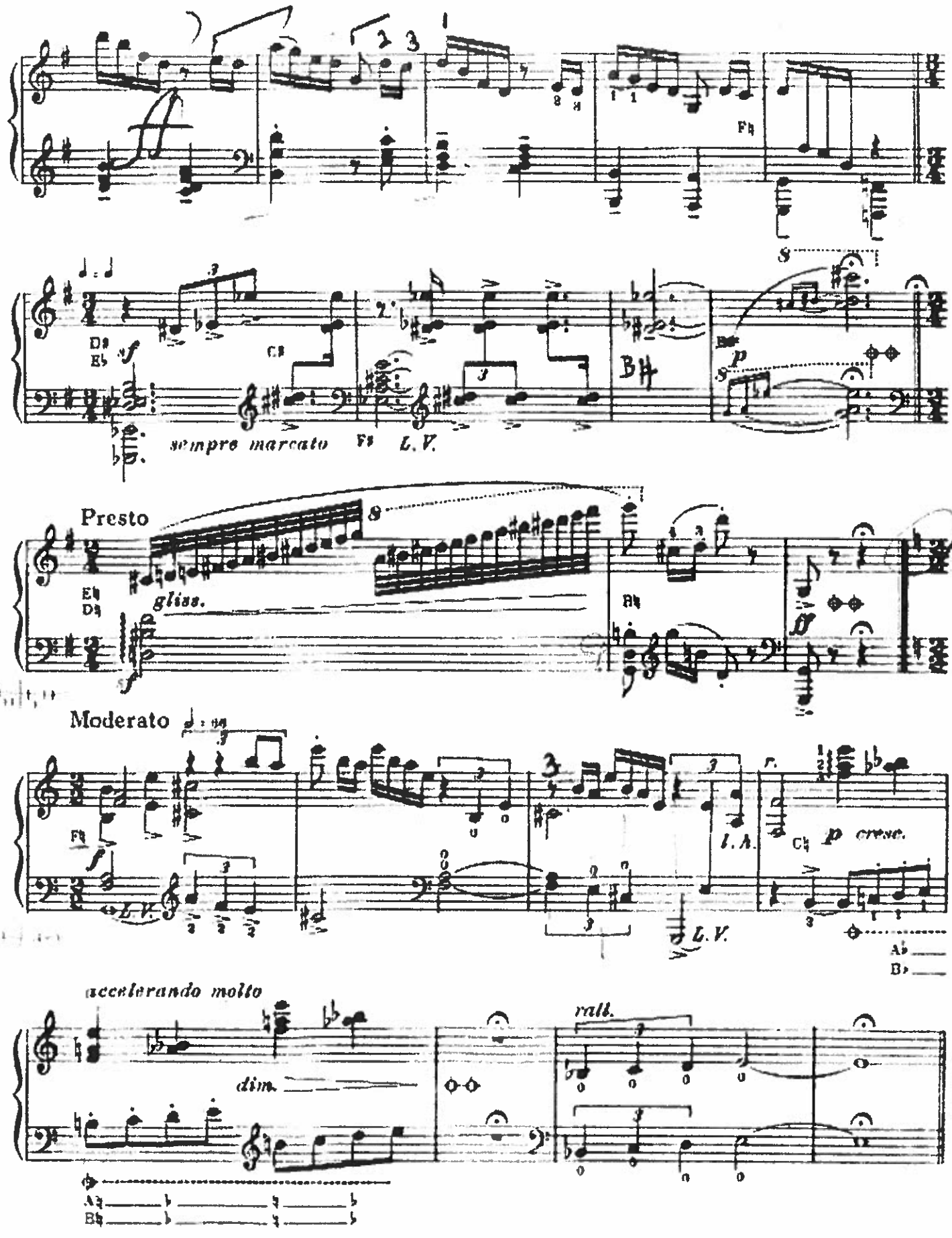
1. Do not number the bars rest in a composition in groups of 5 or 10. This imposes an unnecessary handicap, especially when there are many bars rest during a composition.
   Instead: use occasional bar numbers that coincide with beginnings of phrases, much as rehearsal letters. (Rehearsal numbers or letters should be indicated by the composer and not left to the discretion of a copyist or publisher.)
2. Do not combine Harp I and Harp II into a single part when scoring for two harps as this makes the part awkward to read and necessitates twice as many page turns.
   Instead: the Harp I part should contain only the music to be played by the first harpist and the Harp II part should contain only the music to be played by the second harpist. Occasional cues may be included if deemed helpful.
3. Do not use **only** the upper left-hand corner of the page to indicate clefs and key signatures. **Clefs and key signatures should always appear on every line.**

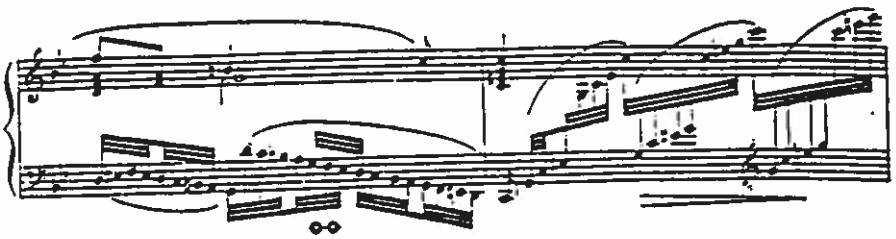
CODA

All the information in this book has been compiled to thoroughly acquaint the reader with many varied and effective possibilities of the harp, thereby expanding his whole concept of this instrument.

No attempt has been made to tell "how to write harp music" since the expression of a composer's personal ideas is of paramount importance. The practical as well as impractical ideas have been pointed out to allow the harp scorer to proceed in a more knowledgeable manner.

The author sincerely hopes that the contents of this book will enlighten composers, assist them in achieving their musical objectives and also encourage a profusion of creative, logical harp scoring.

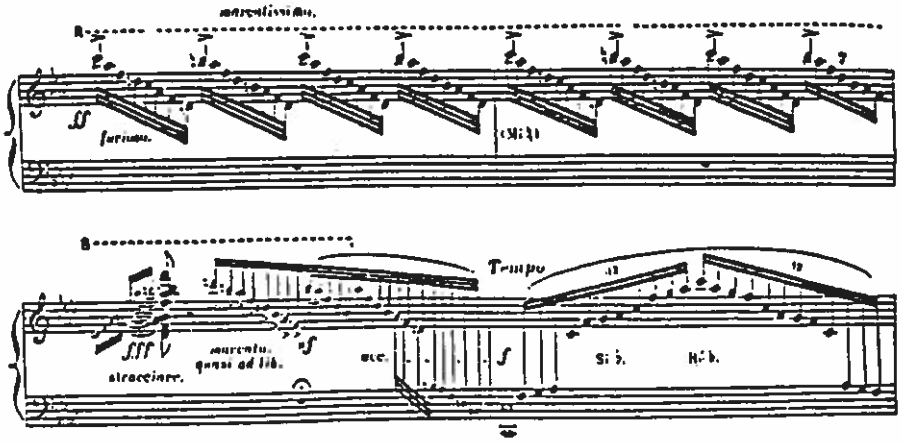

sempre marcato
L.V.
Presto
gliss.
Moderato
L.H.
p cresc.
accelerando molto
dim.
rall.



ARPEGGIOS

Example from "Légende" by Renié, page 17

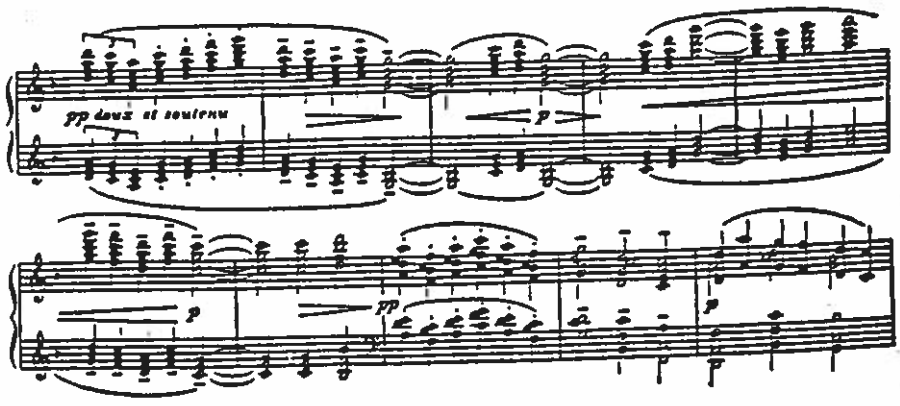
(L. Rouhier)



CHORDS

Example from "Danse Sacrée" by Debussy, page 1

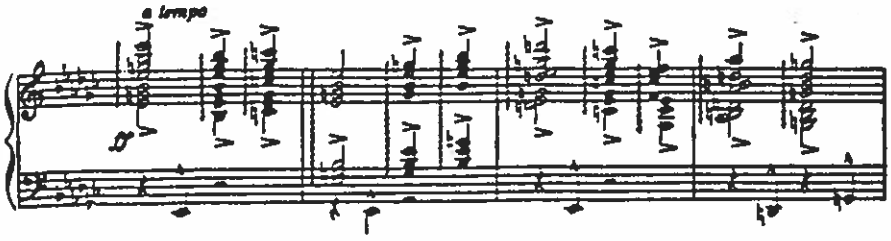
(Durand & Cie)



Arpeggiated Chords are indicated by a wavy line preceding the chord.

Example from "Fantasia Drammatica" by Sodero, page 3

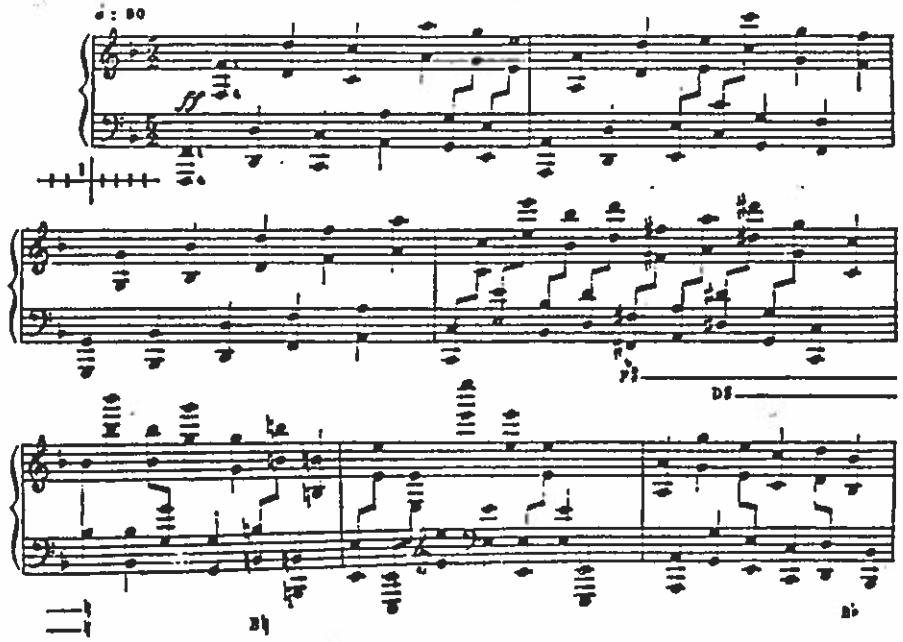
(International Music Pub. Co.)



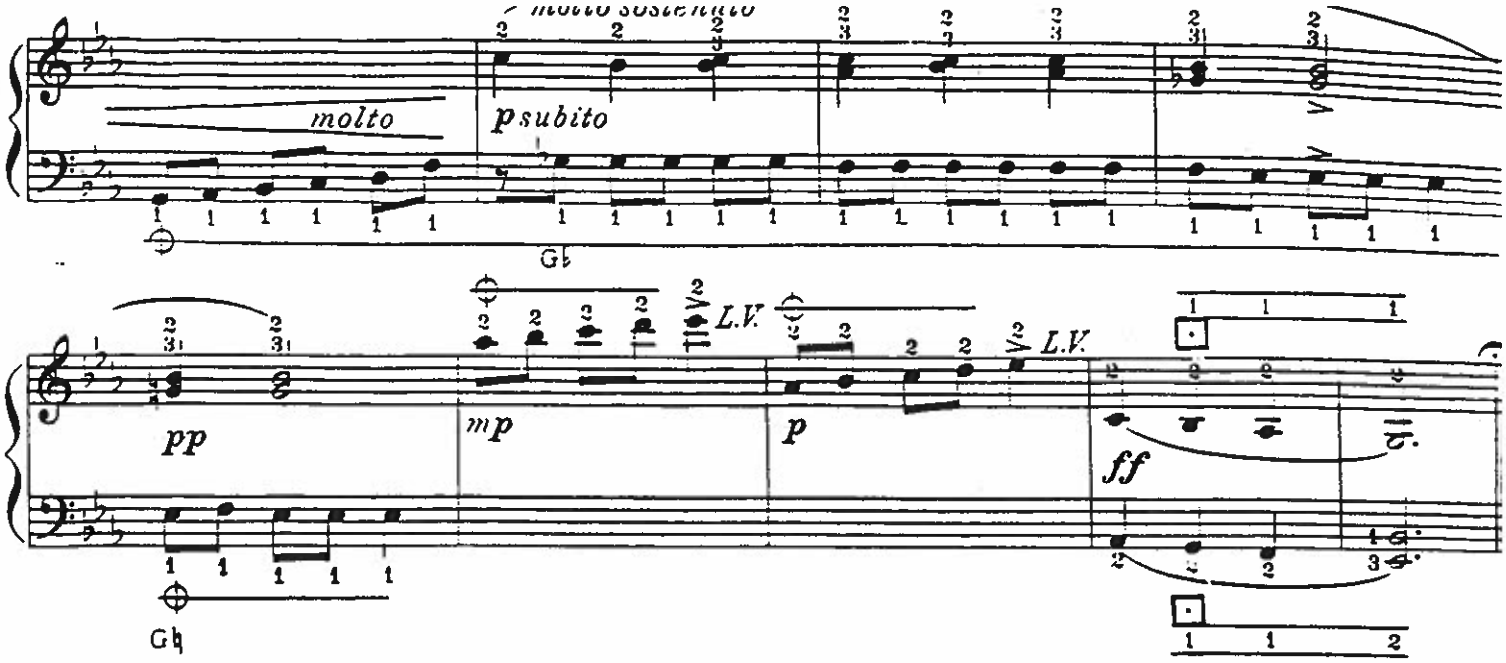
OCTAVES

Example from "On Stilts" from *Short Stories in Music* (second series), by Salzedo, page 3

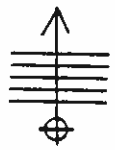
(Elkan-Vogel)



The *tremolo* (for one or two hands), and such embellishments as the *mordent*, the *turn* and the *appoggiatura* are also possible on the harp.

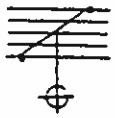


Muffling Series — Série des Etouffés



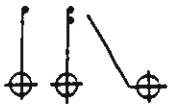
to muffle, with the left hand, a chord (or a single note) played with the right hand, or vice versa, or with both hands.
pour étouffer, avec la main gauche, un accord (ou une note) joué par la main droite, ou vice versa, ou par les deux mains.

[*Etude Moderne*, page 21]



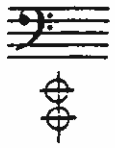
to muffle a specified group of strings.
pour étouffer un groupe spécifié de cordes.

[*Etude Moderne*, page 20]



Individual mufflings.
Etouffés individuels.

[*Etude Moderne*, page 20]



to muffle in the low register.
pour étouffer dans le registre grave.

[*Etude Moderne*, page 21]

to muffle all the strings, from the one indicated in small type to the lowest string.
pour étouffer toutes les cordes, de celle indiquée en petit caractère à la corde la plus grave.

[*Etude Moderne*, page 22]

to muffle totally.
pour étouffer totalement.

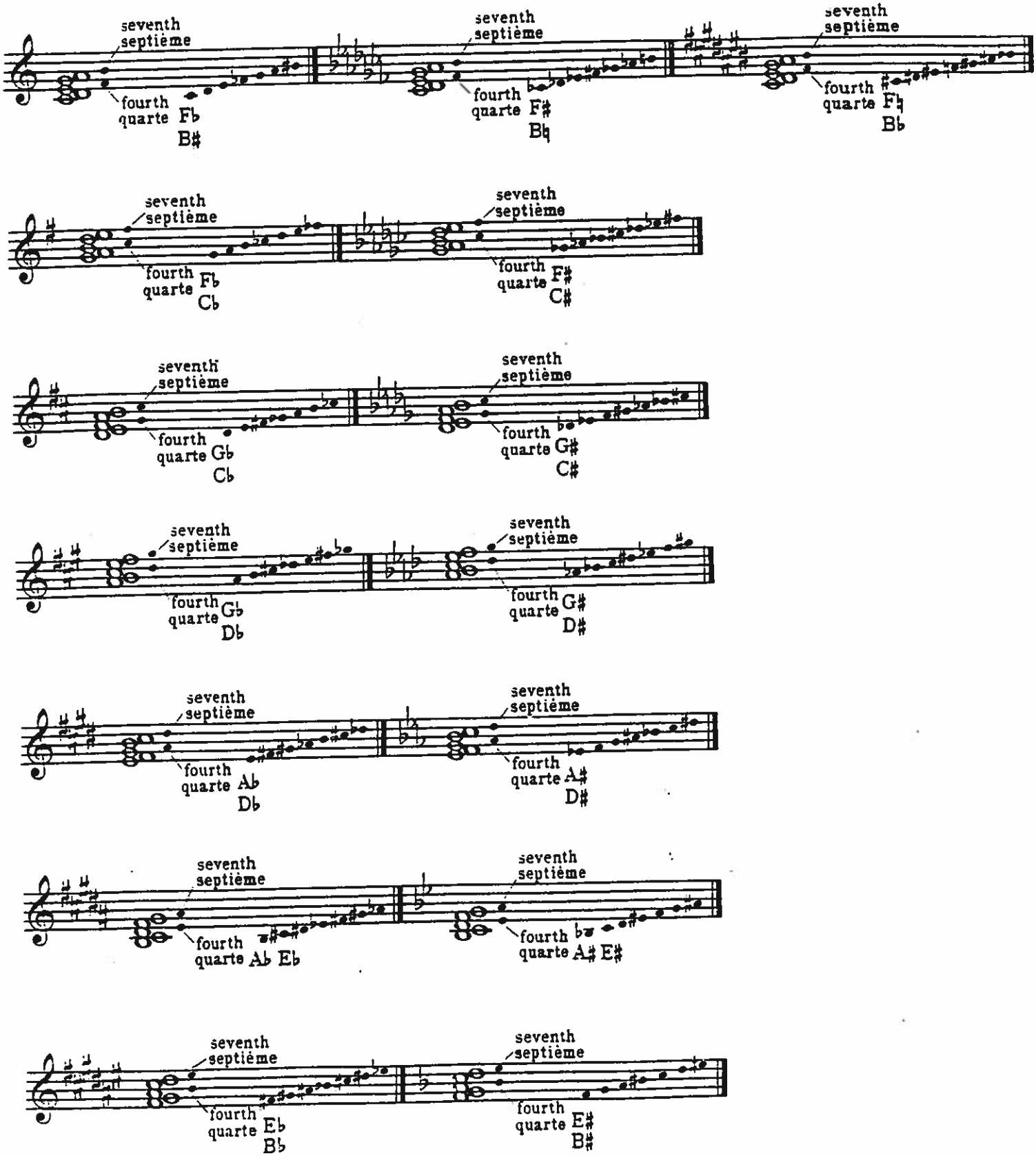
[*Etude Moderne*, page 22]

Table of Major Tonic Triad Fluxes with Added Second and Sixth

These fluxes are constructed by altering the fourth and seventh degrees of the scale, thereby doubling two of the tones.

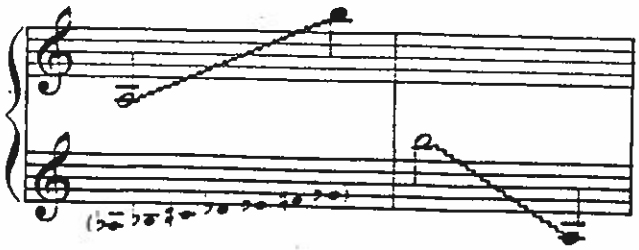
Table des flux sur les accords parfaits majeurs avec adjonction de la seconde et de la sixte

Ces flux se construisent en altérant les quatrième et septième degrés de la gamme, c'est-à-dire, en doublant deux des notes.

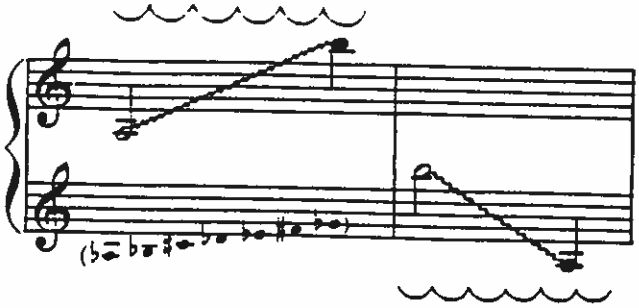


Flux Series

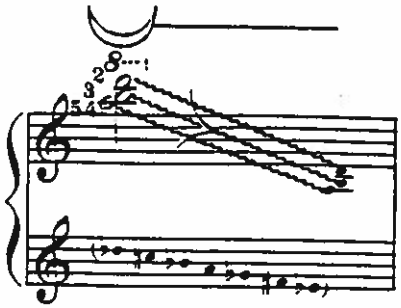
La série des Flux



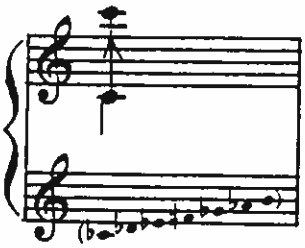
Eolian Flux
Flux éoliens [*Etude Moderne*, page 10]



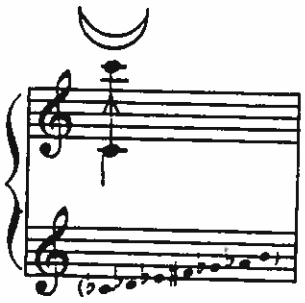
Oboic Flux
Flux hautboïstiques [*Etude Moderne*, page 11]



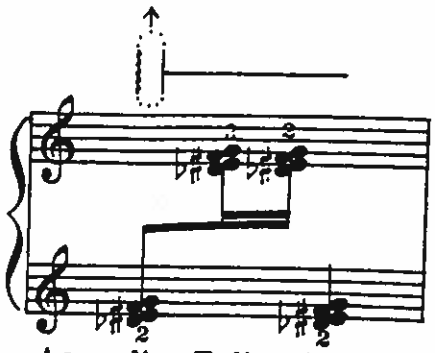
Falling-hail effect
Flux en grêle [*Etude Moderne*, page 11]



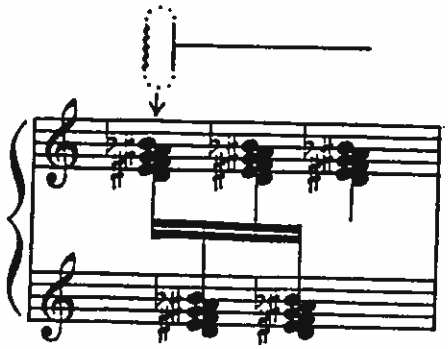
Gushing Chord
Accord en jet [*Etude Moderne*, page 12]



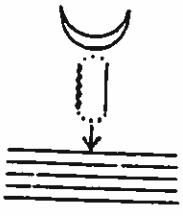
Gushing Chord
Falling-hail eff
(with the thum
Accord en jet
Flux en grêle
(avec le pouce



Ascending Eolian Chords
Accords éoliens ascendants
[*Etude Moderne*, page 13]



Descending Eolian Chords
Accords éoliens descendants
[*Etude Moderne*, page 14]



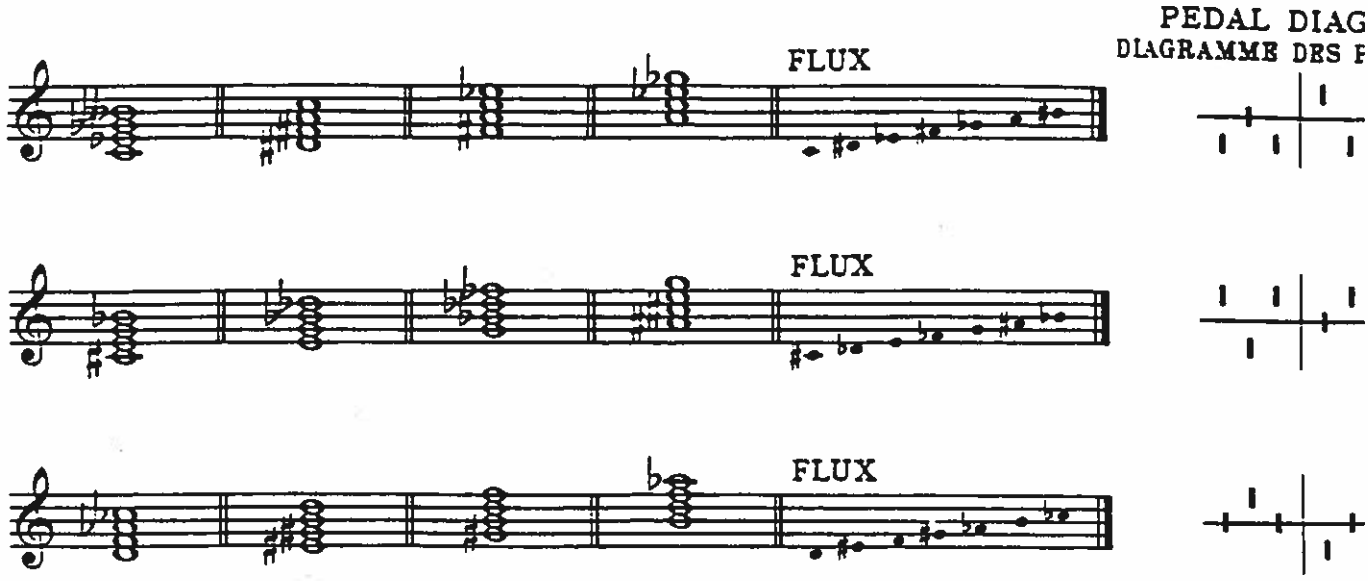
Descending Eolian Chords
with Falling-hail effect
(use 2,3,4, but not the thumb)
Accords éoliens descenda
avec Flux en grêle
(employer 2,3,4, mais pas le pouc

Fluxes on Diminished Seventh Chords

There are only three diminished seventh chords (these chords are composed of three minor thirds). Each of the three diminished seventh chords can be spelled in four different ways:

Flux sur les accords de septième din

Il n'y a que trois accords de septième dim accords se composent de trois tierces mineures) de ces trois accords de septième diminuée pe de quatre manières différentes:

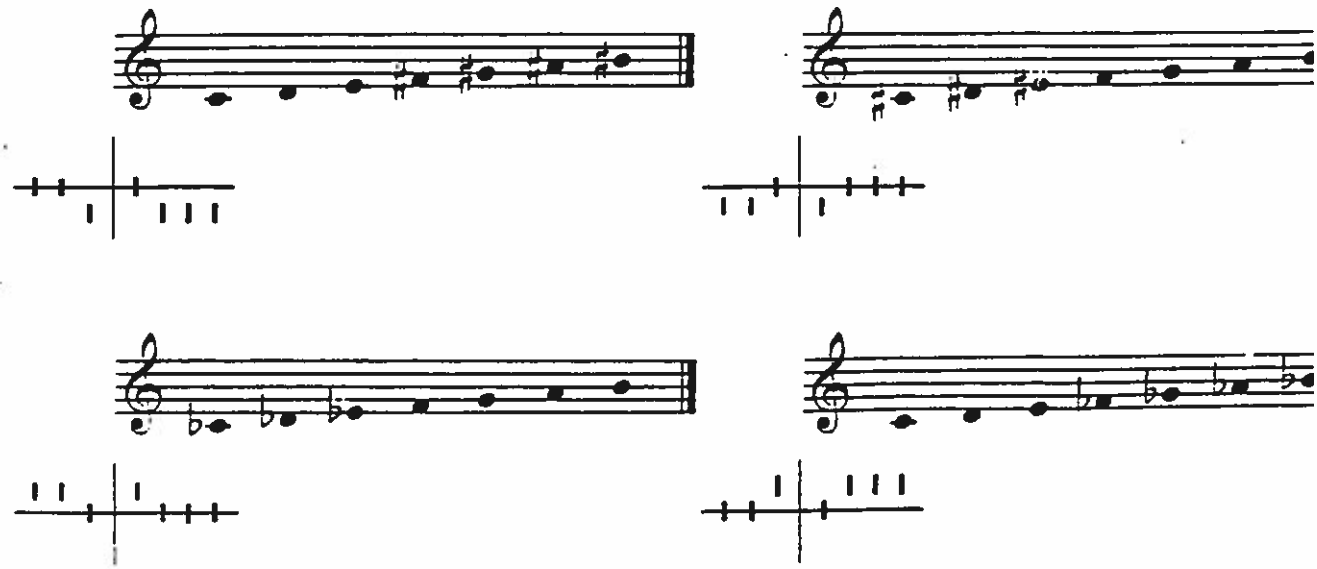


Fluxes on Whole-Tone Scales

There are only two whole-tone scales. Whole-tone fluxes are usually indicated as beginning on a certain note. For this reason they can be spelled in different ways. The harpist will find it practical to remember the following two for sharp keys and the other two for flat keys. Each of these flux includes every note of the whole-tone scale.

Flux sur les gammes à tons enti

Il n'y a que deux gammes à tons entiers. L tons entiers sont généralement indiqués en com sur une certaine note; pour cette raison, ils s'écrire de manières différentes. Le harpiste rappeler des deux flux suivant pour les tons en des deux autres flux pour les tons en bémols. de ces flux contient toutes les notes de la gamm entiers.



DANSES

pour HARPE Chromatique (ou à Pédales)

avec accompt d'orchestre d'instruments à Cordes

Annotées et doigtées
pour la Harpe à Pédales
par H. RENIÉ

Playably transcribed
by Carlos Salzedo (1916)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

HARPE à Pédales

I.— Danse sacrée

Note pour l'exécution
Signes d'abréviations employés:
1º *Pour étouffer* ⊕
2º *Pour étouffer les cordes du bas en vibration* ⊕⊕
3º *Pour jouer en baissant dans les cordes* ⊢

Très modéré (♩ = ~~120~~ 108)

1er Violon

pp doux et expressif

pp

HARPE

pp doux et soutenu

sub.

p

p subito

pp

mf

dim.

p

pp subito

p subito

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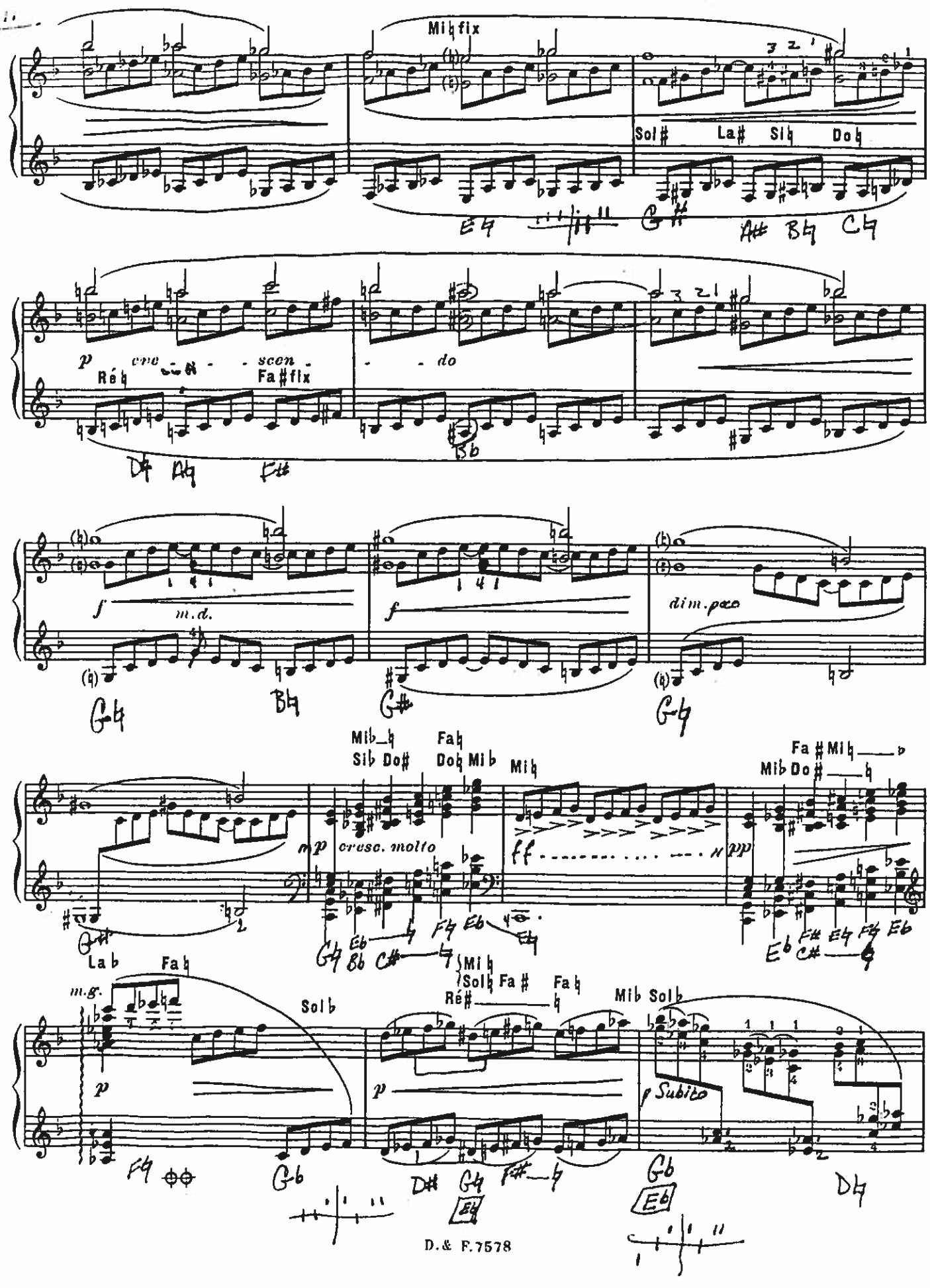
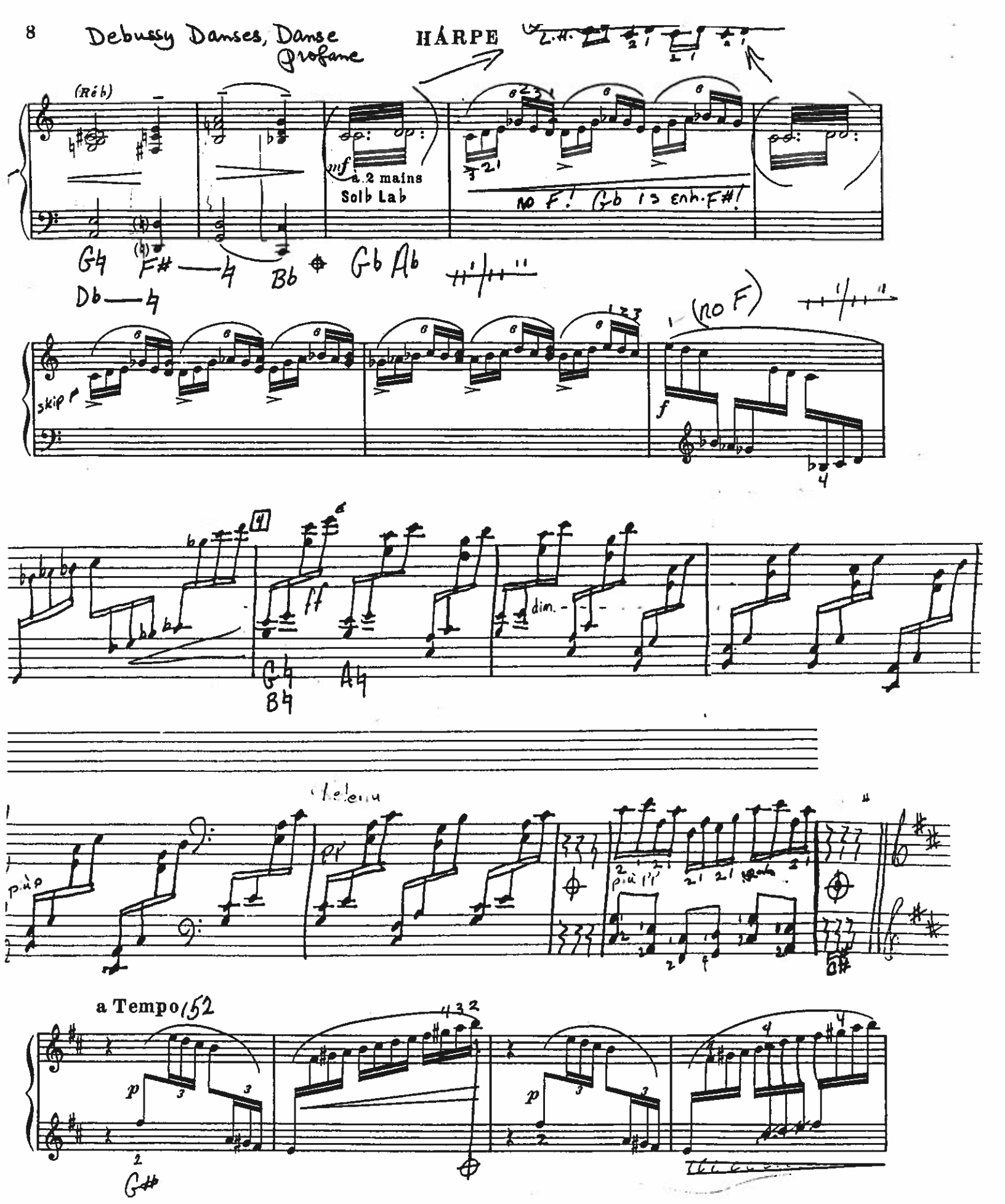
D.&F. 7578

Paris, 4, Place de la Madeleine.


Mi♭ fix
Sol♯ La♯ Si♭ Do♭
p cre - scen - do
Ré♭ Fa♯ fix
f m.d.
f
dim. pco
mp cresc. molto
ff
pp
Mib Sib Do♯
Fa♭ Do♭ Mi♭
Mi♭
Fa♯ Mi♭
Mib Do♯
La♭ Fa♭
m.g.
Sol♭
Ré♯ Sol♭ Fa♯ Fa♭
Mib Sol♭
p
p
f Subito
D.& F.7578

Debussy Danses, Danse Profane

HARPE



Harp Websites:
www.harpconnection.com
www.vanderbiltmusic.com
www.harpcenter.com
www.harpmall.com
www.harpcolumn.com

Partial Harp Listening List:
Berlioz, Symphonie Fantastique, Mvt. 2, the Ball
Franck, Symphony in D minor
Howard Hanson, Symphonies #1-2
Holst, The Planets
Mahler, Symphony #5
Any Puccini Operas
Rimsky-Korsakov- Sheherazade
Verdi-Aida
Shostakovich, Symphony #5
Mussorsky-Pictures at an Exhibition
Bartok-Concerto for Orchestra
Britten-Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra
most of the orch. works of Ravel and Debussy, including La Mer, La Valse, Le Tombeau de Couperin
Bizet- L'Arlesienne, Suite #2