The MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD

Impressionistic Era

La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin & Clair de Lune

Claude Debussy
1862 – 1918



Achille-Claude Debussy (pronounced "DEB-you-see") was born on August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. He was the oldest of five children. Though his family had little extra money, enough money was found to give little Claude piano lessons at the age of seven. His piano teacher, Madam Maute, had been a piano student of Frederic Chopin. When he was ten, Claude's piano teacher sent him to study at the Paris Conservatory where Claude amazed his instructors and fellow students with his talent. One of his instructors at the Conservatory remarked: I am not saying that what you do is not beautiful, but it is theoretically absurd." Debussy replied: "There is no theory. You have merely to listen." Even though his pianistic ability was obvious, his attempts at strange and new musical tones and chordal structure was often misunderstood.

When Debussy was eighteen years old, a very wealthy Russian woman, Nadezhda von Meck, hired him to teach piano to her children. Soon, Debussy was traveling Europe with the woman and her children and absorbing all the musical and cultural experiences like a sponge. His time spent in Russia with the von Meck family exposed Debussy to the great music of Russian composers. These Russian composers' music would later influence Debussy's compositions.

When he was twenty-two Debussy entered his composition, *The Prodigal Child*, in the Prix de Rome (a competition for composers). He won the grand prize which was enough money for him to study for three years in Rome. While in Rome, Debussy met Franz Liszt and Liszt's son-in-law, Richard Wagner. Debussy became interested in Wagner's music, especially Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde.* Later, Debussy quipped: "Operas have too much singing!"

Even though Claude's prize money was for three years of musical study in Rome, Debussy returned to France after only two years. In 1889, the Paris World Exposition opened, and at that exhibition, Debussy heard a musical ensemble composed of a variety of bells, gongs, metallophones and xylophones. He also heard John Philip Sousa's band play something new called "ragtime". He was

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mesmerized. Soon Debussy was incorporating these same musical elements into his style of composing. During this period of writing, some of Debussy's masterpieces were created.

Debussy's personal life was often chaotic. He was often in and out of romantic affairs as he enjoyed his young life in Paris. He eventually met Rosalie (Lilly) Texier who was a beautiful fashion model. He persuaded Texier to marry him by threatening suicide if she refused him. How dramatic! But eventually Debussy became bored with Texier and her limited intellect and lack of musical knowledge. In 1904, Debussy began an affair with a married woman: Emma Bardac. Compared to his wife Lilly, Emma Bardac was a great conversationalist and an accomplished singer. She was also quite wealthy. She was perfect for him, Debussy thought. So in the summer of 1904, Debussy sent Lilly to her father's home so that he could take Emma on a secret holiday. When he and Emma returned to France in August, Debussy wrote Lilly informing her that their marriage was over. Five days before their fifth wedding anniversary, Lilly shot herself in the chest. She survived, but the bullet remained lodged in her for the rest of her life. The news that her suicide attempt had been caused by Debussy's affair with the married Bardac created a scandal in France. Debussy was alienated from his friends, and Bardac's family disowned her.

By the spring of 1905, the hostility towards Bardac, now pregnant, and Debussy had become intolerable. The couple fled to England. Bardac's divorce was finalized in May and Debussy's divorce from Texier was settled in August. Feeling that the public's anger towards the couple had diminished, Bardac and Debussy returned to Paris. In October, the composer's only child, Claude-Emma, was born. Her parents gave their baby the nickname "Chouchou". Three years later Debussy and Bardac were married.

Debussy adored his daughter and thought she had been sent from Heaven to be his inspiration to compose. He would later write the suite *Children's Corner* and dedicate it to his little girl.

For the next thirteen years, Claude Debussy spent his time writing as a music critic and composing, plus traveling internationally to perform his own music. Regretfully, Debussy's life was not a long one. He died of colon cancer in Paris at the age of 55. Sadly, his adored daughter, Claude-Emma, died a year later of diphtheria.

Claude Debussy will always be acclaimed as a master composer of impressionistic music. He, however, hated being labeled as an impressionistic composer. The composition in this book, *The Girl with the Flaxen Hair*, is not intended to be a description of the girl herself but to be a description of how he felt when he saw the girl with the flaxen hair. So that is what "impressionism" is. It is the way one feels when seeing or experiencing an object or scene. You might want to view some impressionistic artists' works such as Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Paul Cezanne, Camille Pissarro, to name a few. The tones of Debussy's music smear into each other much like the colors smear on the canvases of the impressionistic artists.

Today, Debussy is revered as a musical legend. For the past century, his unique chordal structures and mixture of smeared tones have served as an inspirational source for musicians everywhere. Surely his great music will be analyzed, learned and performed for many decades to come.

Essay by Mayron Cole

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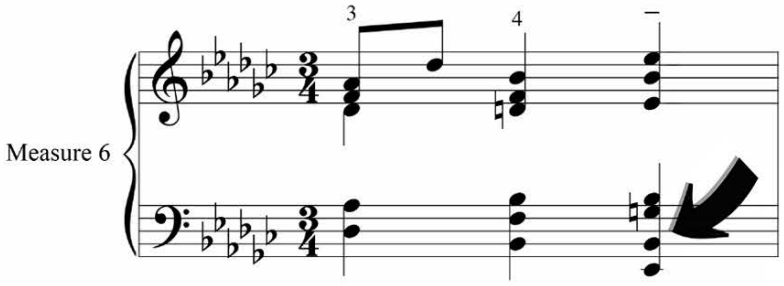
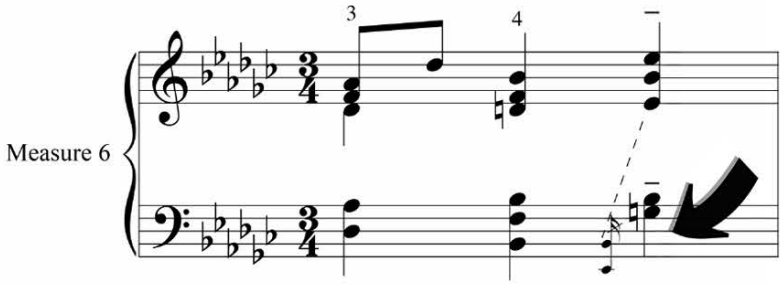
La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin
(The Girl with the Flaxen Hair)
Theory

The following measures must be studied individually before you attempt to play **La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin**. Let's begin by studying Measure 6. Measure 6 is written as:



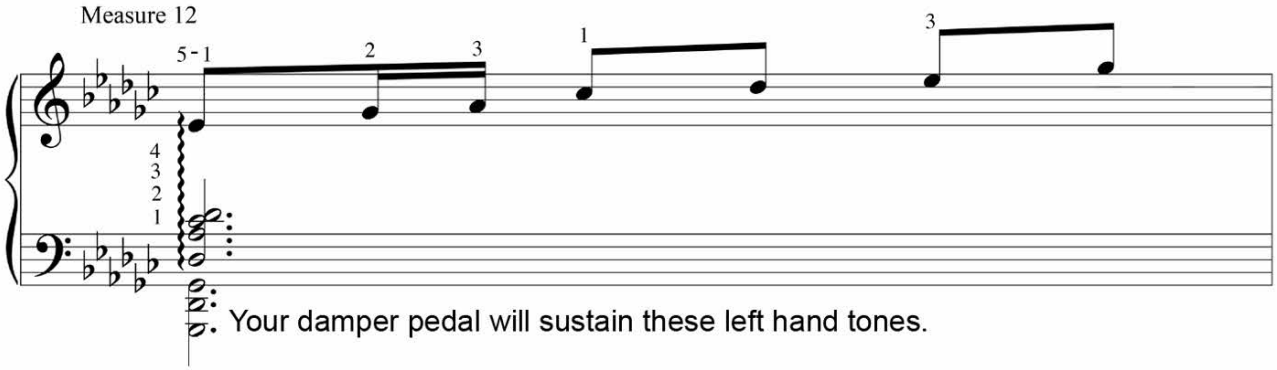
As you can see, the last chord in the left hand is impossible to reach, thus it will be played as:





Play Measure 6 above three times.

Now let's take a look at Measure 12. Be sure to use the fingering indicated for the RIGHT HAND broken chord. You need all five fingers to play the broken chord plus the E in the treble staff.



Your damper pedal will sustain these left hand tones.

Play Measure 12 above three times, please.

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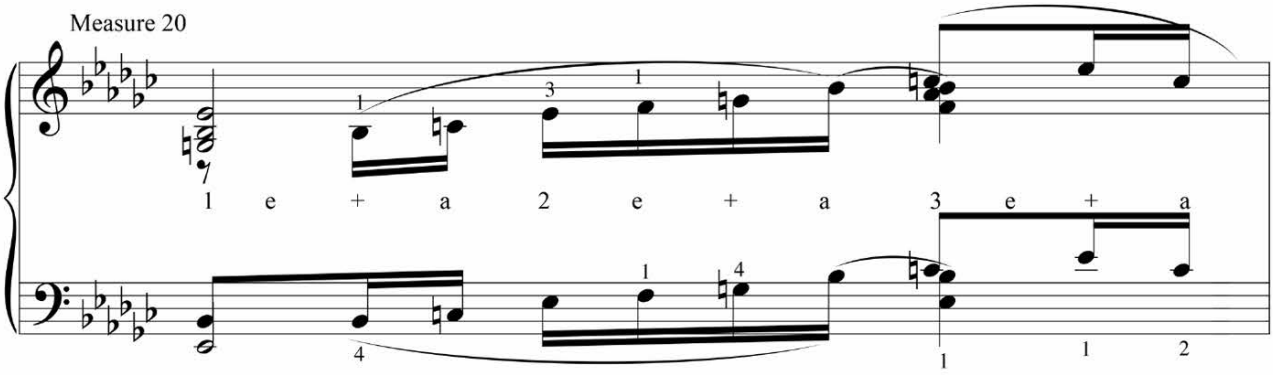
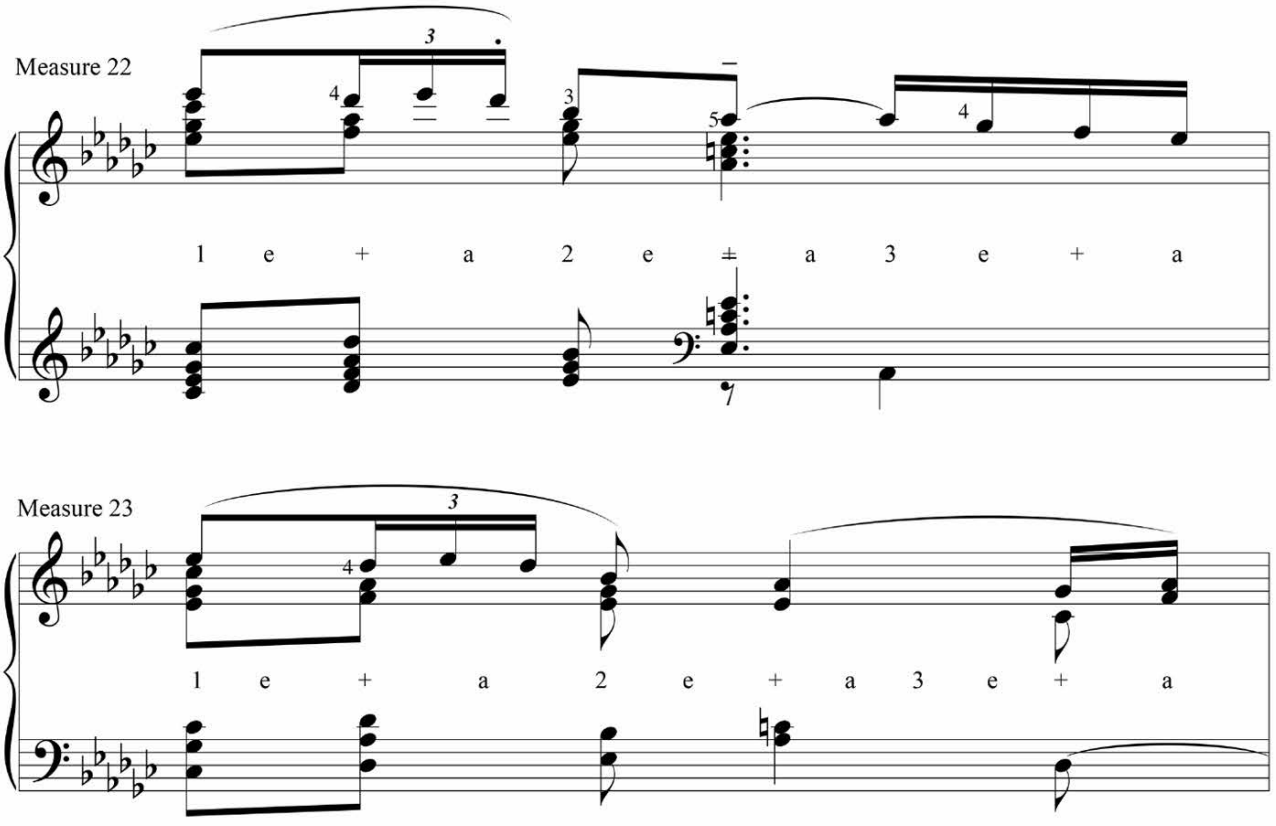
Since there are many 16th notes in **La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin**, count the whole piece with sixteenth notes to help you determine the duration of each note. You have been counting sixteenth notes since Level 4A of The Mayron Cole Piano Method, so you should have no trouble playing the 16th notes in Measure 20.



In Measures 22 and 23, the sixteenth notes are a bit more complicated with the addition of 16th note triplets. The sixteenth note triplet equals one eighth note:



Count aloud as you play Measures 20, 22, and 23 above 3 times each.

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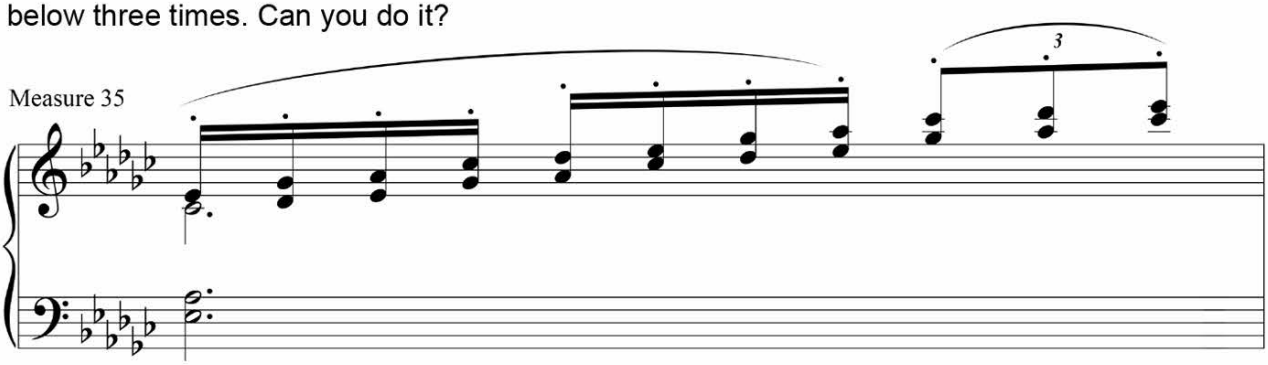
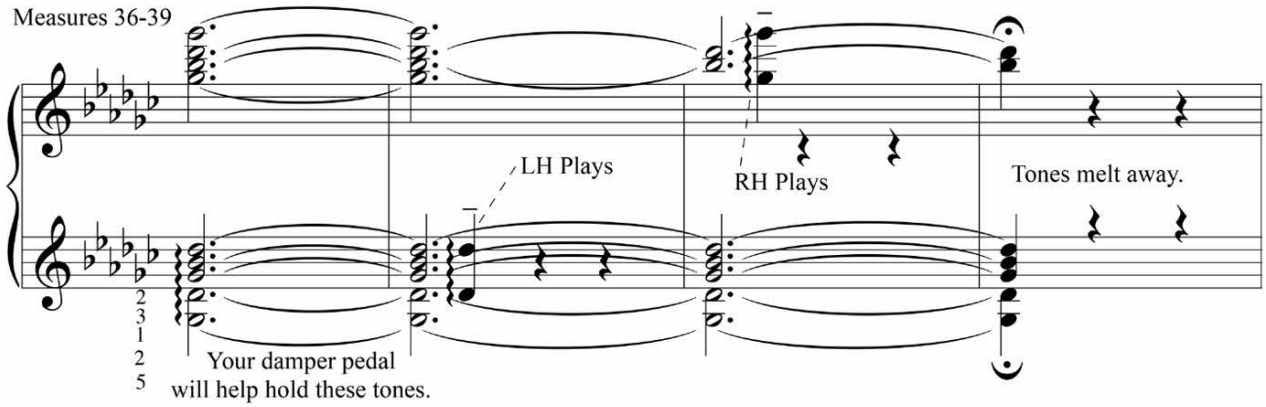
The PORTATO dots in Measure 35 below are not staccato dots. We know the dots cannot be staccato dots because there are slurs, therefore the dots must be portatos. These portatos are telling you to slightly stress each key while maintaining a legato touch. Try playing Measure 35 below three times. Can you do it?



In Measures 36-39, please use the left hand fingering indicated in Measure 36 below. Play Measure 36-39 below three times following the instructions in each measure.





Claude Debussy at a 1916 picnic with his daughter Emma, known as Chouchou.

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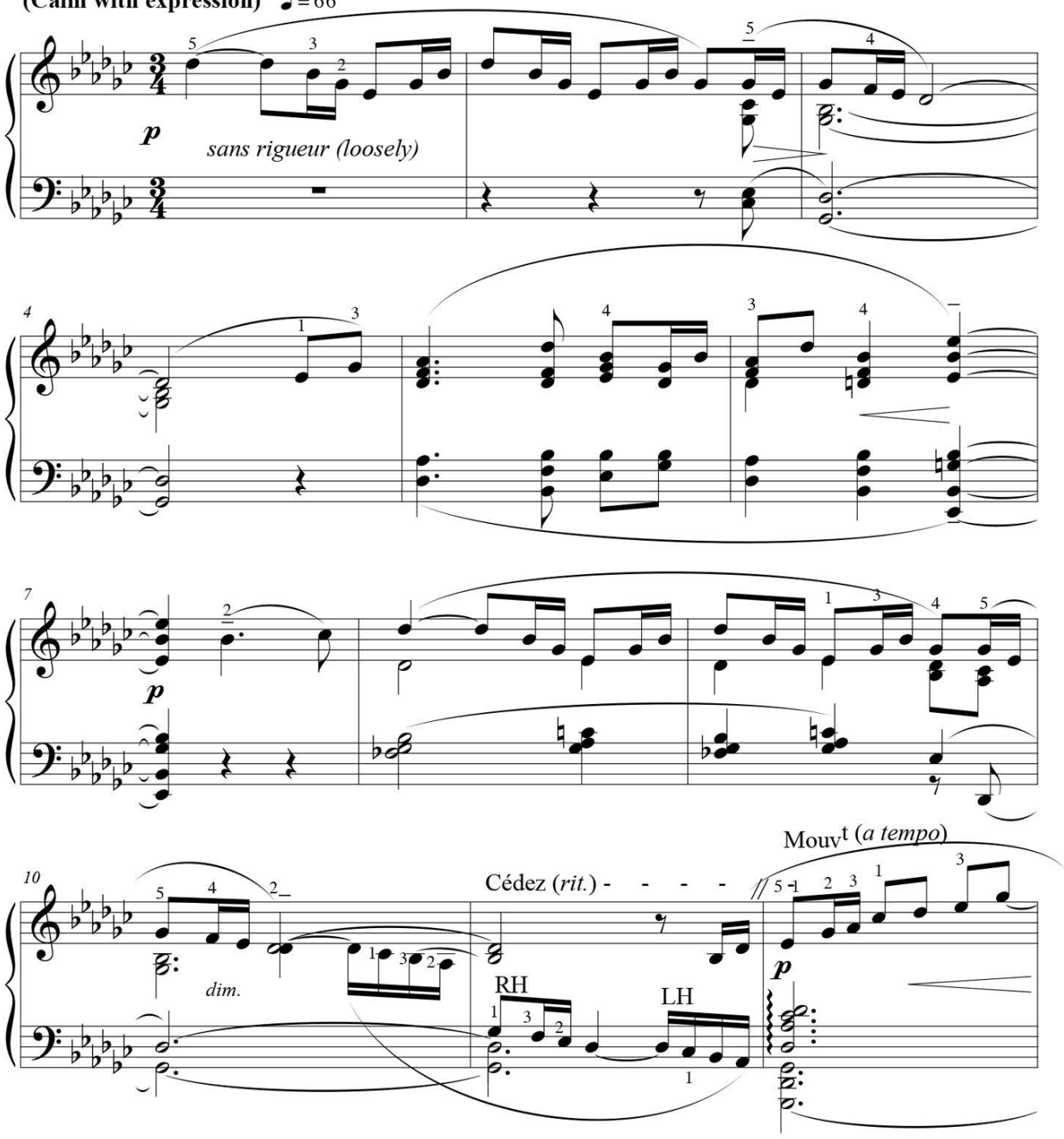
La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin
(The Girl With the Flaxen Hair)

(orchestrated accompaniment has a 2 measure count-in)

WEDDING MUSIC

Claude Debussy
1862-1918



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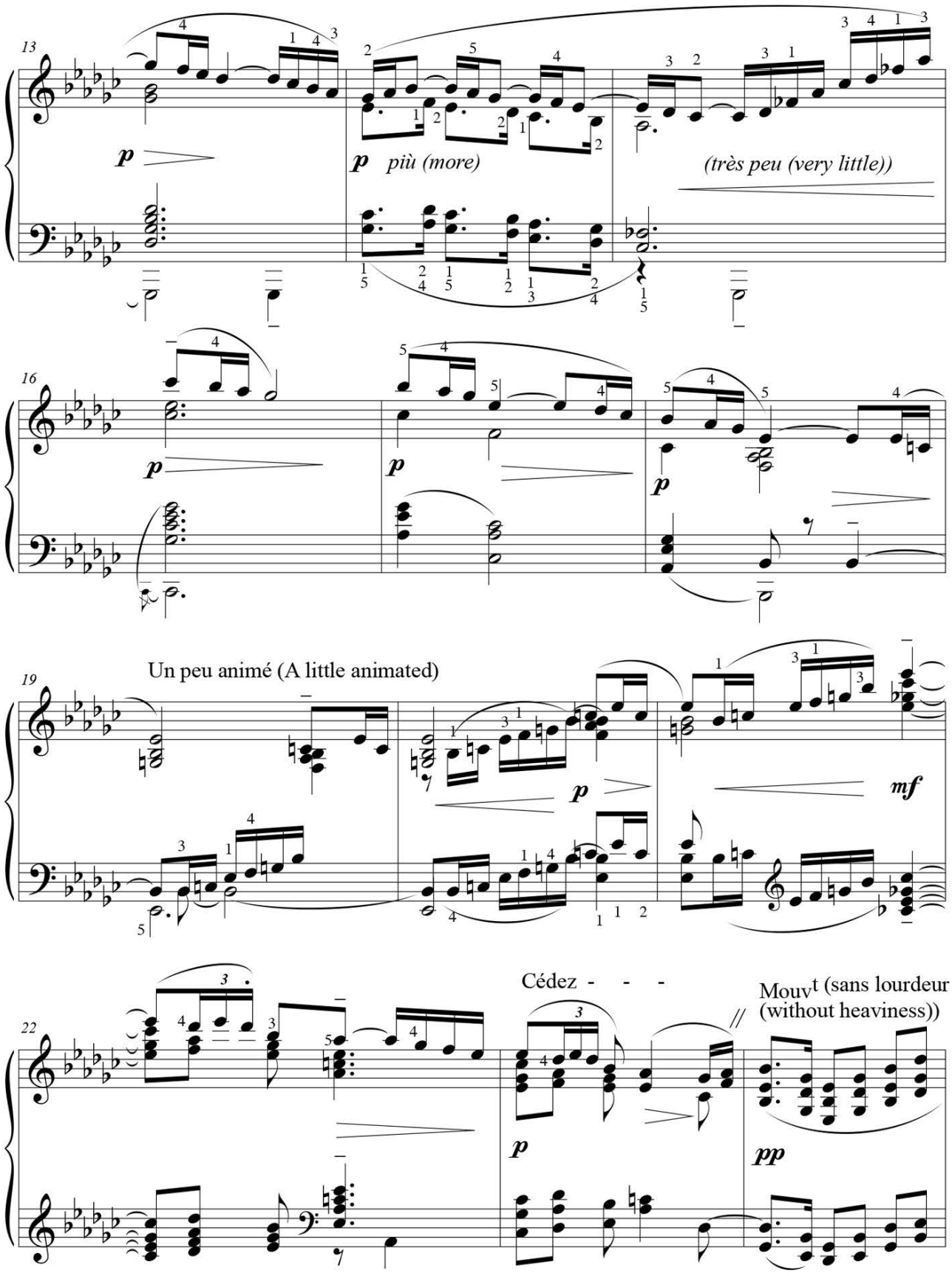

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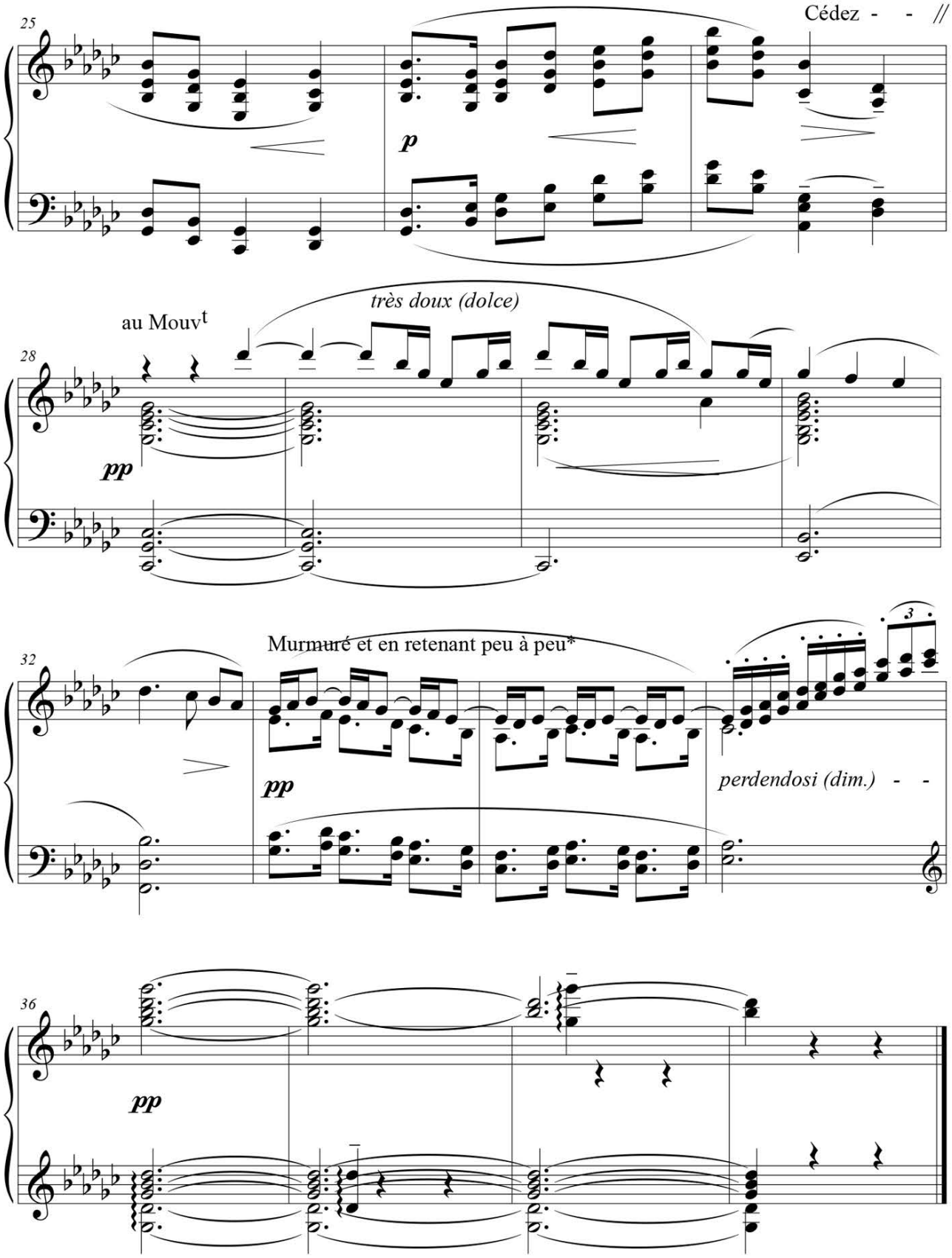

* Whispered and retaining gradually

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