The MAYRON COLE PIANO METHOD

Fantasie-Impromptu, Op. 66 Largo

Frederic Chopin 1810 – 1849



Frederic Chopin (pronounced: SHOW-pan) was a Polish composer who lived and wrote in the Romantic Era. *(The Romantic Era in music was roughly from 1800 – 1850.)* So why did a Polish composer have a French surname?

Years earlier, a sixteen-year old Nicolas Chopin had fled France to avoid being drafted into the French Army. Nicolas went to Poland where he had relatives, and while in Poland he was drafted into the Polish Army! After his army days were finished, Nicolas tutored children of the Polish aristocracy.

Nicolas Chopin, although a Frenchman, decided to stay in Poland after he met and married a Polish woman, Justyna Krzyzanowska. They eventually had four children; Frederic was their only son. When Frederic was only six months old, Nicolas moved his family to Warsaw, Poland where he took a job teaching French at The Warsaw Lyceum School that was housed in the Saxon Palace. The Chopins lived in and ran a boarding house for the young boys who were students at the school. Young Frederic was surrounded by an environment filled with education and music. His father Nicolas played the flute and violin, and his mother Justyna taught piano lessons to the boys who lived at their boarding house.

We are only surmising that Frederic's mother was his first piano teacher. But we do know that when he was six he began taking piano lessons from a Mr. Zywny. By the time Frederic was seven, he began giving public concerts and was often compared to Wolfgang Mozart's genius as a child prodigy. That same year, seven-year old Frederic composed two polonaises (*polonaise* is the French word for a Polish dance). When he was eleven, Frederic wrote a *Polonaise in A-flat Major* and dedicated it to his piano teacher, Mr. Zywny. Of Frederic Chopin's first compositions, the A-flat Major Polonaise is the *only* manuscript that still exists.

Since his family lived close to the palace, Frederic was around royalty all the time and often was the playmate of Grand Duke Constantine's young son. While visiting at the palace, he would play the piano for the Duke and composed a march for the Duke as a gift.

When Frederic Chopin was sixteen he began studying music theory, figured bass, and composition at the Warsaw Conservatory. His final report card from his teacher stated that Frederic Chopin was showing "exceptional talent and musical genius."

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During this time, Chopin continued to give recitals around Warsaw. He was such a popular performer that he was invited to give a recital before Tsar Alexander who was visiting Warsaw. The Tsar was so pleased he gave Chopin a diamond ring.

Chopin composed many of his compositions during this period. After Chopin graduated from the Warsaw Conservatory he left Poland. He was twenty.

About a month after Chopin left Warsaw, the 1830 Uprising occurred. Polish cadets stationed in Warsaw rebelled against the Russian Empire. The Polish cadets were soon joined by others of their countrymen. But the skirmish was all for naught – the Polish cadets lost! After that unrest, Russia declared Warsaw under its rule.

Thankfully Chopin was not in Warsaw for all the chaos but was on a journey with a friend. The two intended to travel to Austria and then journey to Italy. While in Vienna, Austria he and his friend learned of the Polish rebels' uprising back in Warsaw. His friend immediately left Austria to go back to Poland to enlist in the rebel's army. Chopin was left alone in Vienna and became homesick for Poland and worried for his homeland. He wrote to a friend, "I curse the moment of my departure."

Chopin traveled on to Paris by himself and arrived in the fall of 1831. He never returned to his beloved Poland. Since his father was French-born, Chopin was given French citizenship and traveled on a French passport. Other Polish citizens had also fled to France after the 1830 Uprising, and Chopin kept in contact with many of them during the remainder of his life.

Although Chopin was fluent in French, he never felt comfortable speaking the language. According to his biographer, Zamoyski, Chopin never thought of himself as French even though his father was from France. Chopin always thought of himself as Polish.

While in Paris, Chopin supported himself by giving recitals and teaching piano. But he gave only about thirty public performances. After a concert in a large recital hall, he realized that it was difficult for him to play for extended periods of time with a powerful touch. The reason for his lack of power at the keyboard was later diagnosed: Chopin, who had always been small for his age, had tuberculosis. And that disease greatly weakened him. But his style of performing was appreciated for its sensitivity and expression.

After Chopin's experience with performance fatigue, he opted to give his recitals in small salons and parlors. All of Chopin's compositions included beautiful piano parts, and he wrote a large number of piano solos. He wrote sonatas, mazurkas (Polish dances), waltzes, nocturnes, polonaises, etudes, and preludes. He rarely "named" his compositions with lyrical programmatic names; he simply titled his compositions for what they were – such as *Minute Waltz*. (*Minute* is French for "little"). He felt that giving his compositions only genre identity and opus numbers would leave the performer free to add his own interpretations to the music.

In later years, Chopin reconsidered and performed one concert per year in a large concert hall. The rest of the time, he preferred giving small recitals for his friends in his Paris apartment. In spite of the rarity of his public concerts, Chopin acquired a well-deserved reputation as a great pianist.

In 1833, Chopin's music found success with a music publisher, M. Schlesinger. His music was then published in France, England, and Germany.

In 1835, Chopin traveled to Leipzig, Germany where he met with Robert Schumann, Clara Wieck, the famed concert pianist who later married Robert Schumann, and Felix Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn was

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the orchestra conductor for the Leipzig orchestra. While in Leipzig, Chopin's oratorio *St. Paul* was performed. Robert Schumann, composer and music critic, reviewed in his popular music magazine Chopin's *Opus 2 Variations*. Schumann's opinion of this composition was, "Hats off, gentlemen! A genius!"

Chopin mingled easily with the artists, musicians, and authors of Paris and enjoyed a friendship with composer Franz Liszt. In 1836, Chopin attended a party given by Liszt's mistress, Marie d'Agoult. And there Chopin met the free-spirited and famous female author, George Sand. (George Sand's real name was Lucile Aurore Dupin). Regretfully, Chopin fell in love with this woman. From 1837 to 1847, Chopin maintained a fiery and tension-filled relationship with the French writer. George Sand was six years older than Chopin and had had a series of lovers before him. But she wrote after their initial meeting, "I was amazed at the effect the little creature had on me."

In 1838 George Sand, her two children, and Chopin decided to journey to the island of Majorca to seek treatment for Chopin's poor health and to find doctors to treat Sand's teenage son. It was a miserable experience for all concerned. Chopin thought the Majorcan doctors "incompetent." He wrote, "Three doctors have visited me. The first said I was dead; the second said I was dying; and the third said I was about to die." While in Majorca, Chopin had his piano shipped to him so that he could continue composing. He was a very busy composer in spite of his poor health during that stressful period of time.

The weather on the island of Majorca was not good during their stay, and Chopin's health was deteriorating. George Sand decided it was time to leave. She did not want to pay custom duties on Chopin's piano if it were shipped back to Paris – so she sold it!

The small entourage then traveled to Barcelona, Spain and then to the Mediterranean city of Marseilles, France. They stayed for a few months in Marseilles while Chopin convalesced. Then in May 1839, they traveled to George Sand's estate at Nohant, France and spent the summer there. While in Nohant, Chopin's creativity blossomed as he wrote his Polonaise in A-flat Major. Because he enjoyed Nohant so much, Frederic Chopin and George Sand summered in Nohant every summer from 1839 through 1843.

In the fall, the group returned to Paris. Chopin kept an apartment that was close to George Sand's apartment. Even though he visited her apartment daily, he wanted to retain some independence. In 1842 both Sand and Chopin moved to adjacent apartment buildings. Chopin and George Sand presented themselves to Paris society as a married couple, but they never married.

Around 1842 Chopin began teaching piano to a wealthy and beautiful young Scottish heiress, Jane Stirling. She would come back into his life a few years later when he really needed her help.

By 1845 Chopin's health was continuing a downward spiral. He was quarreling more with George Sand over Sand's daughter Solange and Solange's sculptor fiancé, Auguste Clesinger. Chopin often took Solange's side in the arguments that she had with her mother. And Sand's son Maurice was becoming extremely jealous of Chopin's relationship with his mother. It was not a good time for a creative person to live through especially when that creative person was quickly becoming weaker.

As Chopin's illness increased, George Sand became more of a nurse to him. She cruelly referred to Chopin as her "third child." Once she referred to him, in a letter to a friend, as her "beloved little corpse." In 1847, George Sand published a novel about a rich actress and her love affair with a prince who was in weak health. Everyone knew that she was writing about herself and Frederic Chopin.

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That same year of 1847, Chopin chose not to visit Nohand, and he quietly ended his long relationship with George Sand. George Sand had always taken pride in the fact that *she* was the one who ended relationships with men. And now Chopin had dumped *her*! How dare him! She was angry!

The next year, 1848, he gave his last Paris concert. This final concert was arranged by Jane Stirling, his former student. She rented the large recital hall, paid for the heating, paid for the program printing, and paid for the stage flowers. Jane took care of every detail. The last composition Chopin was to perform that evening was his Barcarole (Boat Song) in F-Sharp Major. But Chopin was too exhausted to finish the composition. He managed to walk off the stage unaided but collapsed into Jane's arms when he reached his dressing room.

Jane had plans for another concert to be given in Paris, but before it could be staged, the Revolution of 1848 had broken out in Paris.

Jane suggested that Chopin give a series of concerts in England. Chopin was very ill and did not want to travel, but he desperately needed the money. Chopin and Stirling left immediately for London where he gave performances that were financed and arranged by Jane. Through Jane's connections, Chopin was introduced to the crème of London society. He played piano at a private performance attended by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.



Also while in London, Chopin met the great Swedish soprano, Jenny Lind. Jenny was a friend of Jane Stirling's, plus she was an adored friend of Felix Mendelssohn's as well as a friend to Clara Wieck and Robert Schumann. Since she knew many of Chopin's friends, she and he quickly established a friendship. (Biographers have hinted at a love affair between Lind and Chopin but that has never been proven. But remember Jenny Lind for she comes back into this story later.)

At the end of the summer the London "season" was over. Jane invited Chopin to travel to her homeland of Scotland. Jane, her sister, and Chopin stayed at Castle Calder House, a castle owned by Jane's brother-in-law. Jane began introducing Chopin to all her wealthy Scottish relatives and friends while they traveled around Scotland to many elaborate estates and parties. Chopin was uneasy about being treated as if he were a prized pet; plus he spoke only French and Polish and could not converse with any of those wealthy people. Feeling like an outsider, his mental and physical condition worsened.

Chopin gave two public concerts while in Scotland that Jane Stirling arranged and financed, but he was so weak that he had to be carried on and off the stage. In the fall of 1848, Chopin wrote out his will, "a kind of disposition to be made of my stuff if I should drop dead somewhere."

A beautiful Jane Stirling wanted to be more than Chopin's friend, but Chopin made it clear to her that all he could offer her was his friendship. Even though romantically rebuffed, Jane Stirling continued to finance Chopin during the last few months of his life. It is interesting to note that Jane Stirling was the *exact opposite* of George Sand. Yet, Chopin *loved* George Sand but only *liked* Jane Stirling.

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Growing weaker every day, Chopin returned to London from Scotland; he gave his last public performance on November 16, 1849. The money from this performance was given to Polish refugees.

Now Chopin was seriously ill. His sickness was in the terminal stage, and his weight had dropped to ninety-nine pounds. In November 24, Chopin and Jane Stirling returned to Paris; Chopin also returned to a mountain of debts. Jane again came to the rescue and paid off all of Chopin's debts. He needed a place to live so Jane rented for him a beautiful apartment that she elegantly furnished for him. And it wasn't a small apartment. It was seven rooms large and had formerly housed the Russian Embassy. She even gave him a grand piano, and had it moved into the apartment.

As his condition became quickly worse, Chopin wanted his sister Ludwika to be with him. She, her daughter, and her husband arrived in Paris in the fall of 1849. Jane Stirling paid their travel expenses. Chopin, too weak to stand, was now bed-ridden. Some of his friends, at Chopin's request, came to his apartment and played music for him to comfort him.

A few days before his death, Jane Stirling purchased his grand piano from him. She then had the piano shipped to Warsaw and gave it to Chopin's sister, Ludwika. Jane Stirling then purchased all of Chopin's furniture and had it shipped to Castle Calder House in Scotland after his death. In a special room in Calder House Jane Stirling displayed all of Chopin's furniture, a death mask made by George Sand's son-in-law Auguste Clesinger, and various documents, manuscripts, and letters containing his handwriting. The room became known as the Chopin Museum.

Chopin requested that, after his death, his body be buried in Paris, but his heart be returned to Poland. Standing beside him as he lie dying, were his sister Ludwika, Sand's daughter Solange, and two other close friends. At the very last moment of Chopin's life, his doctor leaned down and whispered to him, "Are you in pain?" Chopin whispered back, "No longer." Those were his last words.

George Sand did not visit Chopin during those final hours. A friend of Chopin's later remarked that if Chopin had never met George Sand he probably would have lived a much longer and happier life. George Sand was like a poison to Chopin that he could not resist.



The funeral was delayed for two weeks while many musical dignitaries, royalty, and friends were traveling to Paris. The Church of the Madeleine was packed and attendees had to have tickets in order to enter the church. The organist played Chopin's preludes while the mourners filed past the casket. The funeral procession to the cemetery was led by an aged Polish Prince Czartoryski. Immediately behind the casket walked Chopin's sister, Ludwika.

The expenses of the funeral and the beautiful sculpted monument, by George Sand's son-in-law Auguste Clesinger, that stands at Chopin's Paris grave were paid for by Jane Stirling. Stirling also covered the expenses that Ludwika and her family had as they journeyed back to Poland. At her brother's request, Ludwika took Chopin's heart, in an urn, back to Poland. His heart is enclosed in a funerary monument that sits on a pillar in Holy Cross Church of Warsaw, Poland.

Ludwika returned to George Sand a collection of over two hundred letters that Sand had sent to Chopin during the ten years of their love affair. George Sand destroyed all of those letters.

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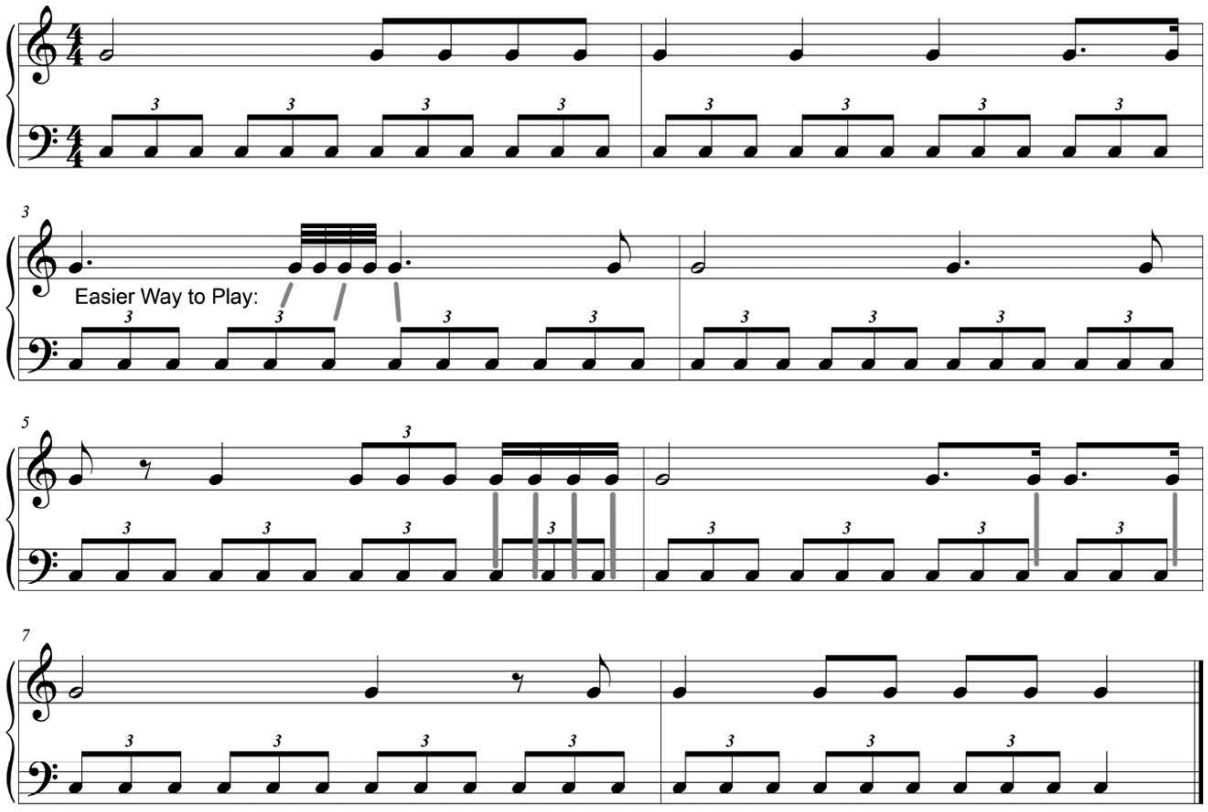
On the first anniversary of Chopin's death, Jane Stirling scattered Polish soil over Chopin's Paris grave. Still in existence today is a lock of Chopin's auburn hair that Jane Stirling kept with her.



But here is the mystery: Historians think that all of Chopin's expenses were *secretly* paid for by – **Jenny Lind!** Jenny (pictured here) had a huge income with more than enough money to provide the funds that Chopin needed at the end of his life. And Jenny Lind had a history of giving large sums of money to worthy causes and to people in need. Historians say that Jane Stirling had *not* inherited enough money to pay the exorbitant expenses that Chopin incurred. Since Jenny Lind was a close friend of Jane Stirling's, did Jenny Lind ask Jane Stirling to be her agent in anonymously channeling money to Chopin? It's a music history mystery!

Some Great Rhythm Taps Courtesy of Frederic Chopin

Reminder: Keep a steady LH beat with the triplets; make the RH fit into that steady rhythm.



Look at M. 3's rhythms shown above. Mayron Cole has simplified the playing of this rhythm for you. You will find this rhythm pattern in M. 17 and M. 29 of the Fantasie-Impromptu by Chopin.

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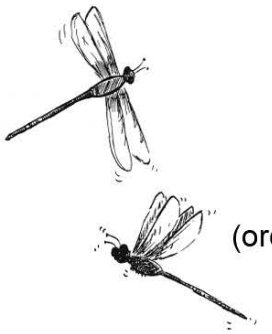

Fantasie-Impromptu
Op.66 Largo
(I'm Always Chasing Rainbows)

(orchestrated accompaniment has a 2 measure count-in)

WEDDING MUSIC

Frédéric Chopin

Largo (♩ = 65 mm)

con pedal

cantabile

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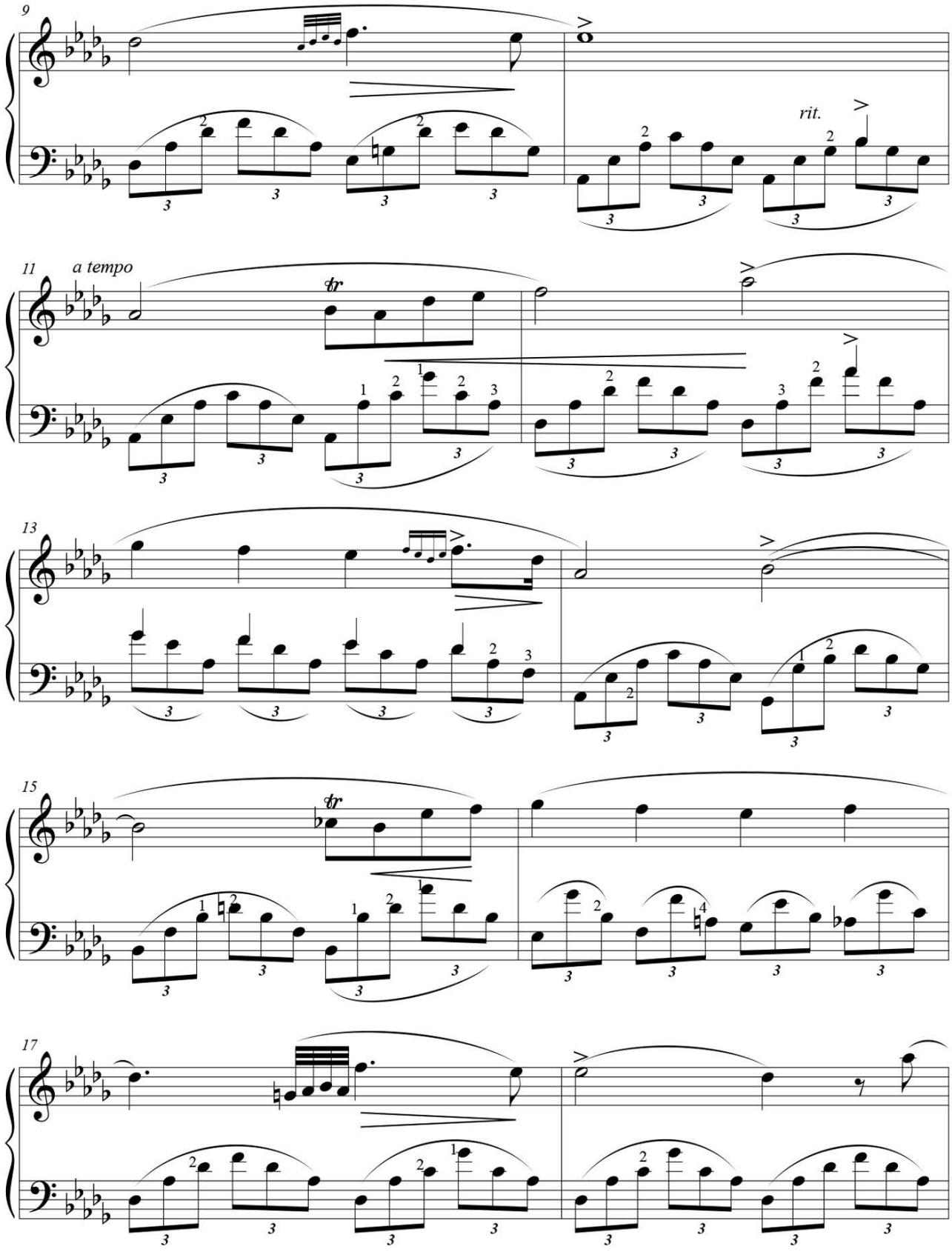

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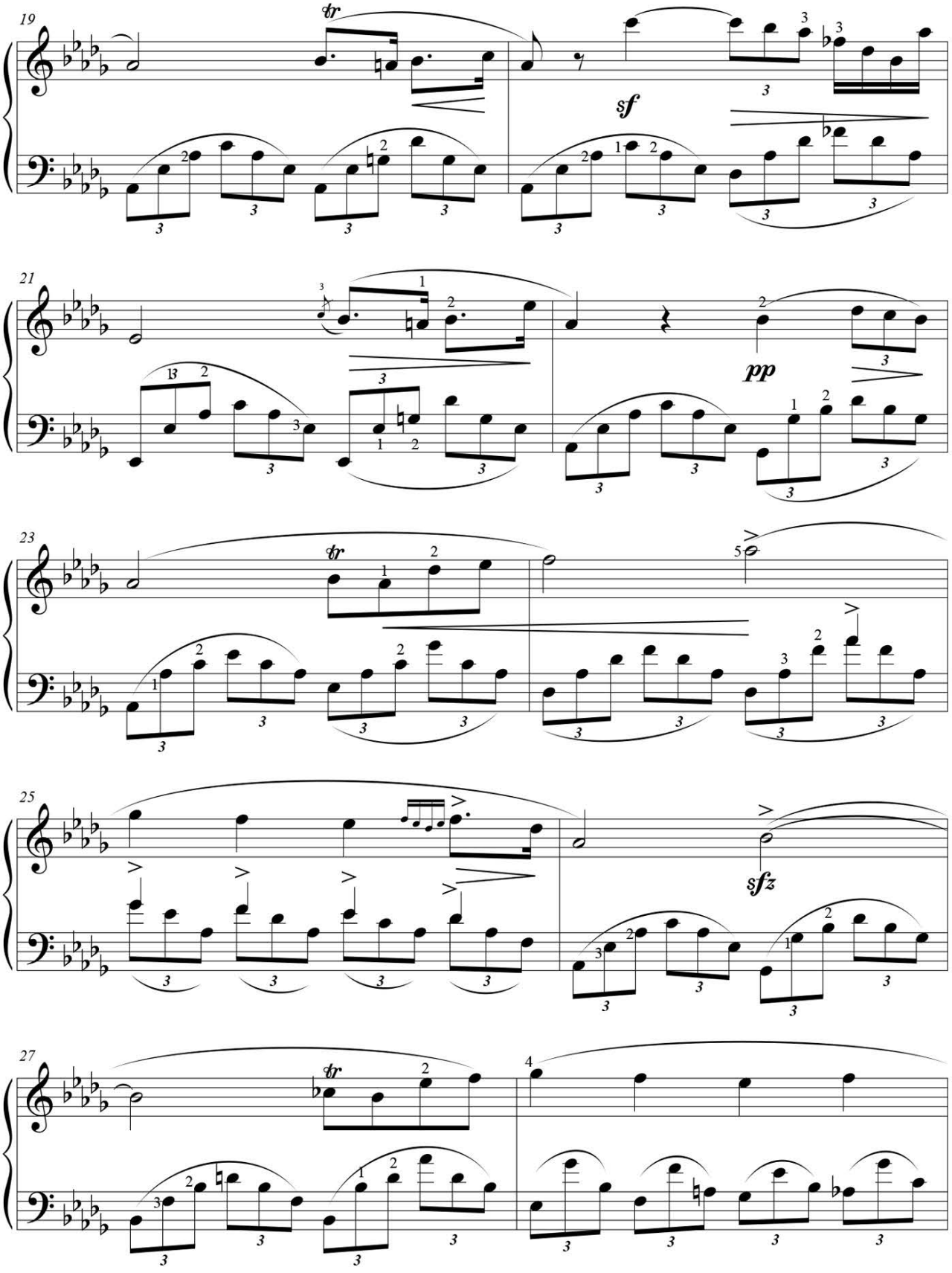

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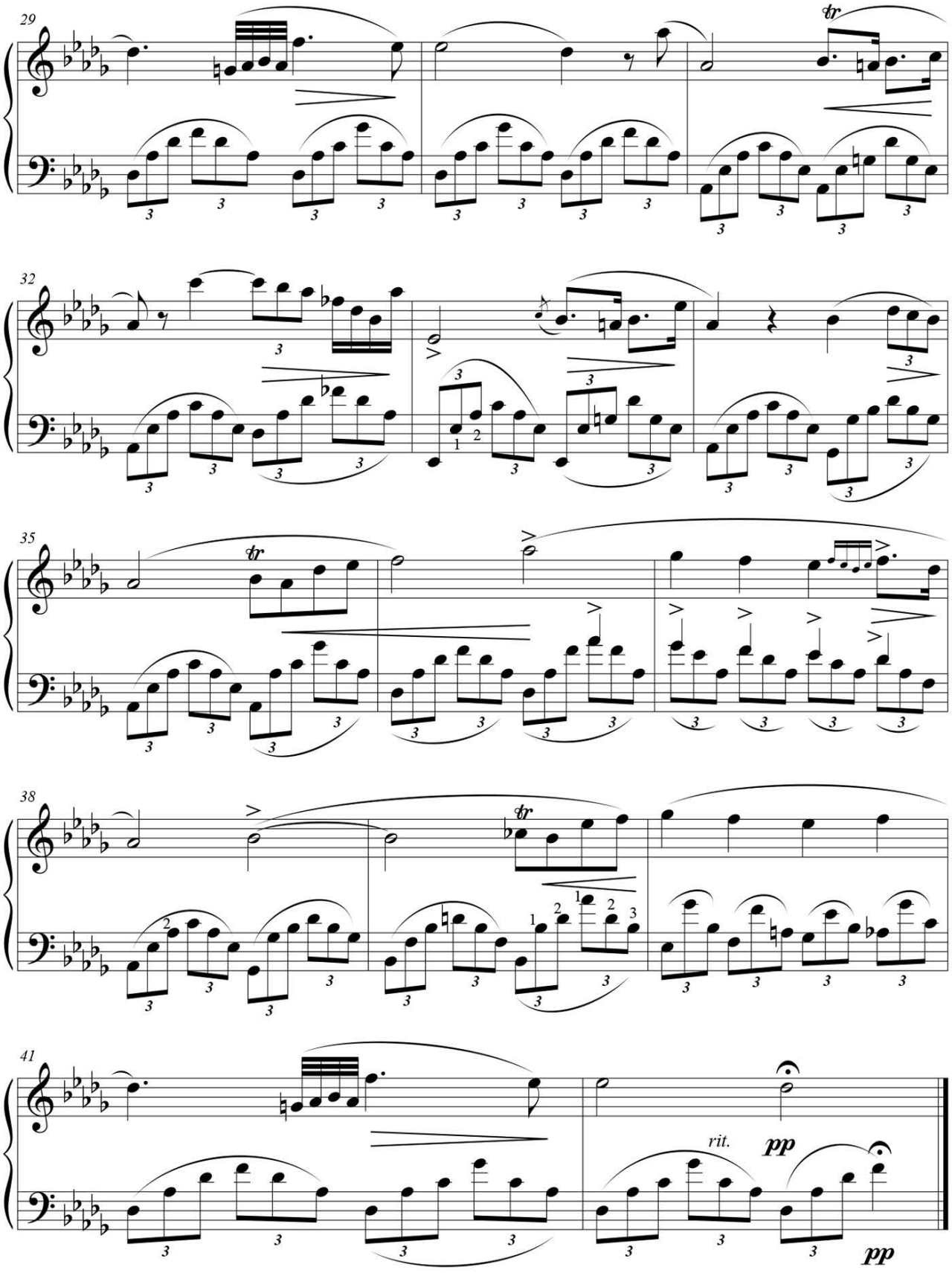

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