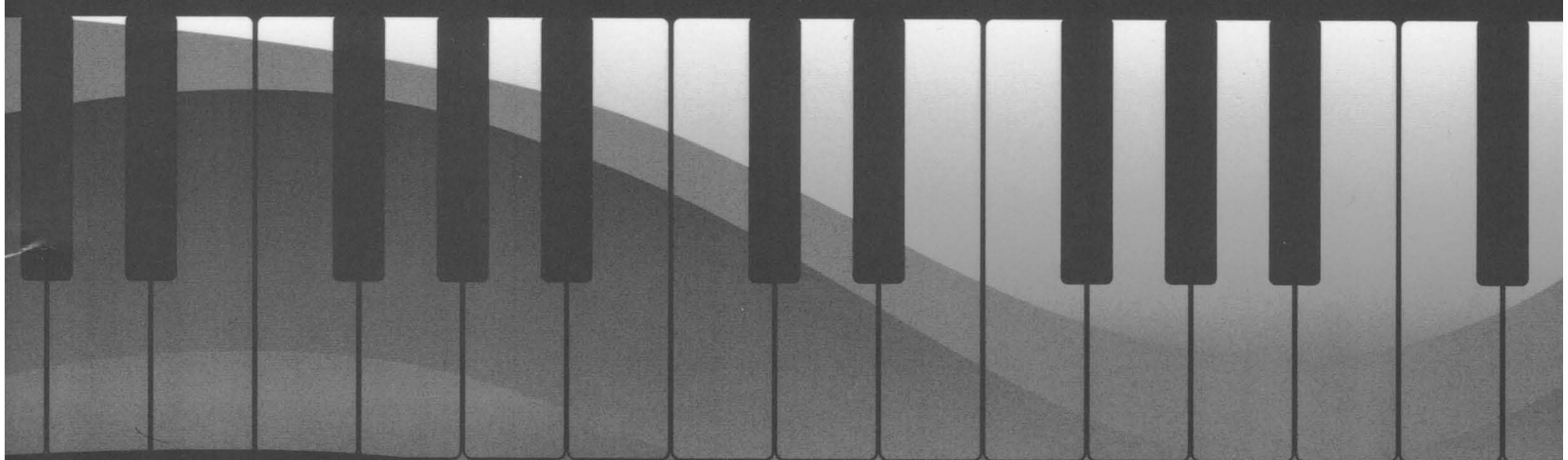
Improve your sight-reading!

New edi

Piano
Level 7
Early advance

A progressive, interactive approach to sight-reading

Paul Harris



FABER *ff* MUSIC

Grade 7 Piano

Improve your sight-reading!

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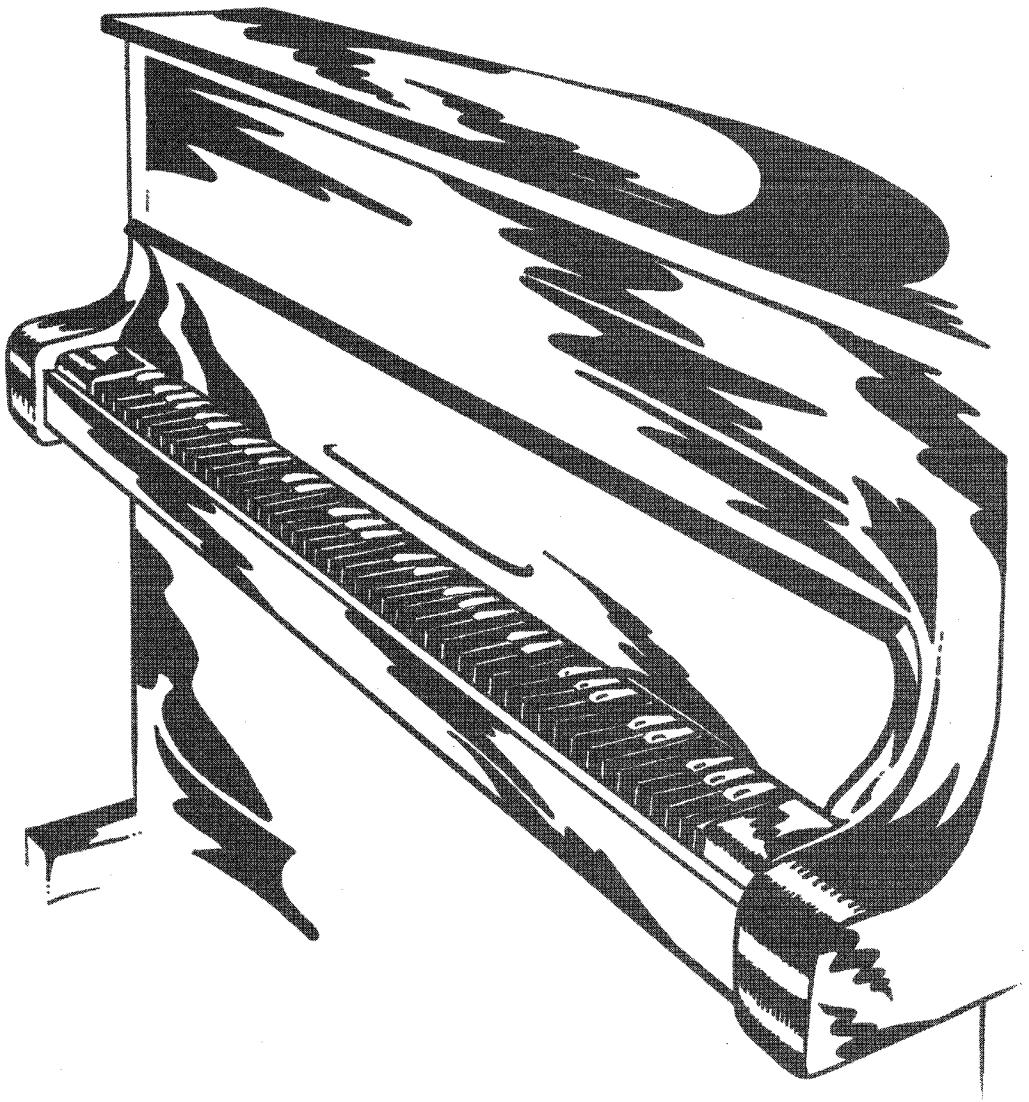

FABER MUSIC

Practice chart

	Comments (from you, your teacher or parent)	*Done!*
Stage 1		
Stage 2		
Stage 3		
Stage 4		
Stage 5		
Stage 6		
Stage 7		
Stage 8		

Teacher's name _____

Telephone _____

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Introduction

By now you should be able to read music as easily as you are reading this. If you work through this book carefully – always making sure that you really understand each exercise before you play it – you'll never have problems learning new pieces or doing well at sight-reading in exams!

Using the workbook

1 Rhythmic exercises

Make sure you have grasped these fully before you go on to the melodic exercises: it is vital that you really know how the rhythms work.

2 Melodic exercises

These exercises now have titles and more markings to help you create greater character and atmosphere. Get into the habit of working through each exercise in the following ways before you begin to play it:

- Make sure you understand the rhythm and counting.
- Think about your fingering, particularly position changes and chords.
- Try to hear the piece through in your head. Always play the first notes to get you started.

3 Prepared pieces

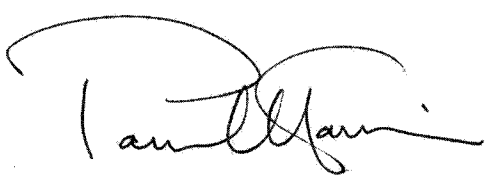
Work your way through the questions first, as these will help you to think about or 'prepare' the piece. Don't begin until you are pretty sure you know exactly what you are going to play and how you're going to play it.

4 Going solo!

It is now up to you to discover the clues in this series of practice pieces. Give yourself about thirty seconds and do your best to *understand* the piece before you play. Check the rhythms and fingering, and try to hear the piece in your head.

Always remember to feel the pulse and to keep going steadily once you've begun.

Good luck and happy sight-reading!



Terminology:
Bar = measure

Stage 1

Fluent reading of text results from understanding single words or short phrases at a glance. Your eyes see and your brain interprets virtually instantaneously. You hardly need more than a quick glance to read and understand:

'It's a nice day today', or 'Improve your sight-reading!'

Complicated, unfamiliar or indeed foreign words are much less easy to process:

'Verbeter uw lazing.'

... will only make sense to you if you understand Dutch! (It means 'improve your sight-reading'!)

So how does all this help your music sight-reading? The answer is simple: music reading depends on **understanding the language**, instantly recognising the symbols and knowing exactly what they mean. You need to know the different keys, spot recurring melodic patterns, really understand how rhythms go and develop an instinct for fingering.

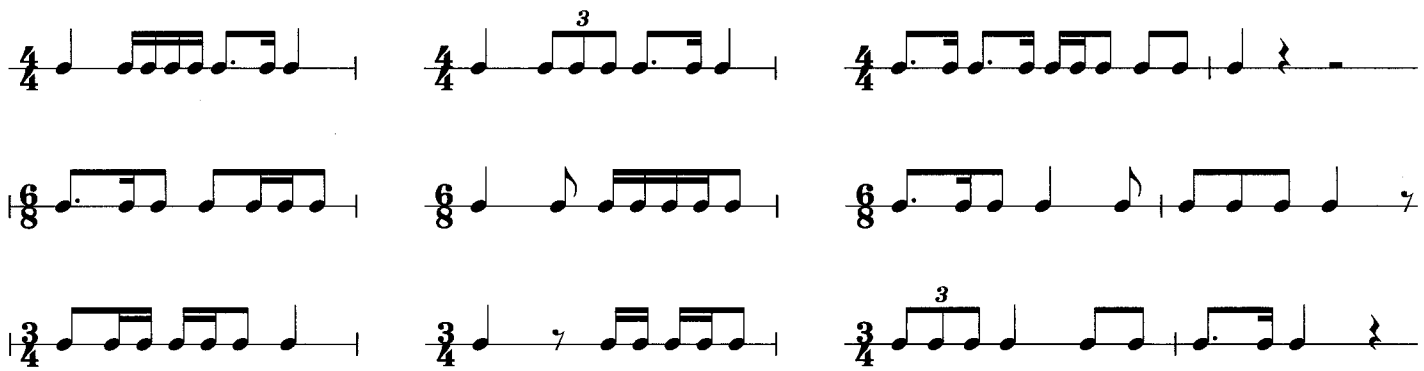
When you prepare to sight-read, if you can say yes to each of the following questions you can be confident that the reading will be accurate and fluent:

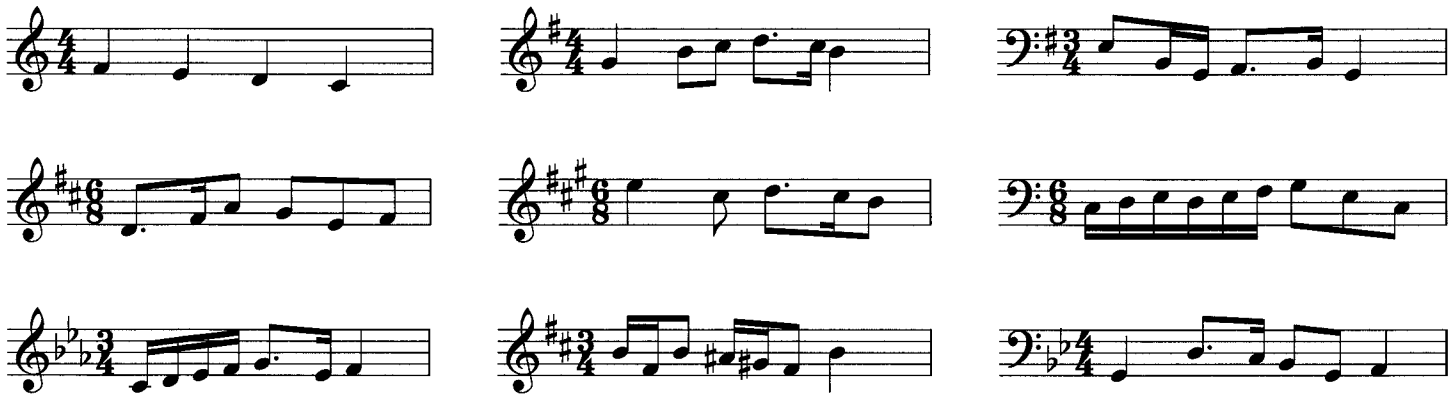
- Do I know the key?
- Can I see any familiar patterns (probably based on scale and arpeggio shapes)?
- Do I really know all the rhythms?
- Can I see my way through the fingering?

Memory

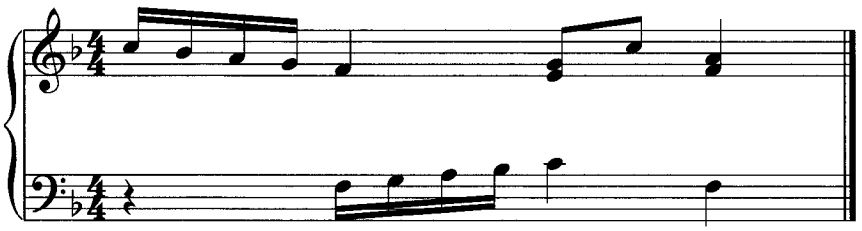
Memory is another important factor in sight-reading. You are asking your brain to memorise the beat or bar you are playing while your eyes are looking ahead to the next beat or bar. Work carefully through the next exercises and you will begin to develop this ability.

Look at each exercise for a few seconds only, then either clap or play it straight away, looking away from the music, or closing your eyes. After you've done this, check if you were correct!





Look at the next exercise, and imagine your fingers actually playing it. After a few seconds, place your fingers on the keyboard, shut your eyes and play it.

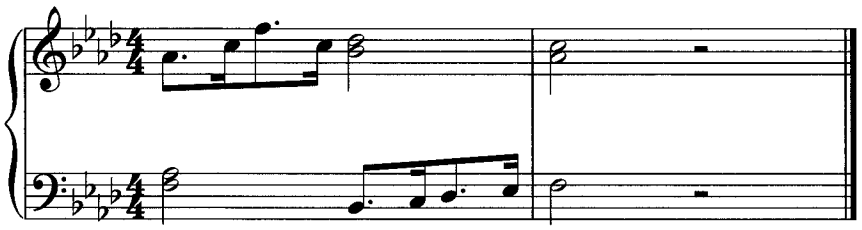


Did you get it right?

You should have instantly recognised:

- a descending scale pattern of F major
- an ascending scale pattern of F major
- a perfect cadence in F.

Have another go with this one:



How did you get on? Did you notice:

- a dotted arpeggio pattern over an F minor chord?
- the same rhythmic pattern but hands reversed?
- an ascending scale pattern?

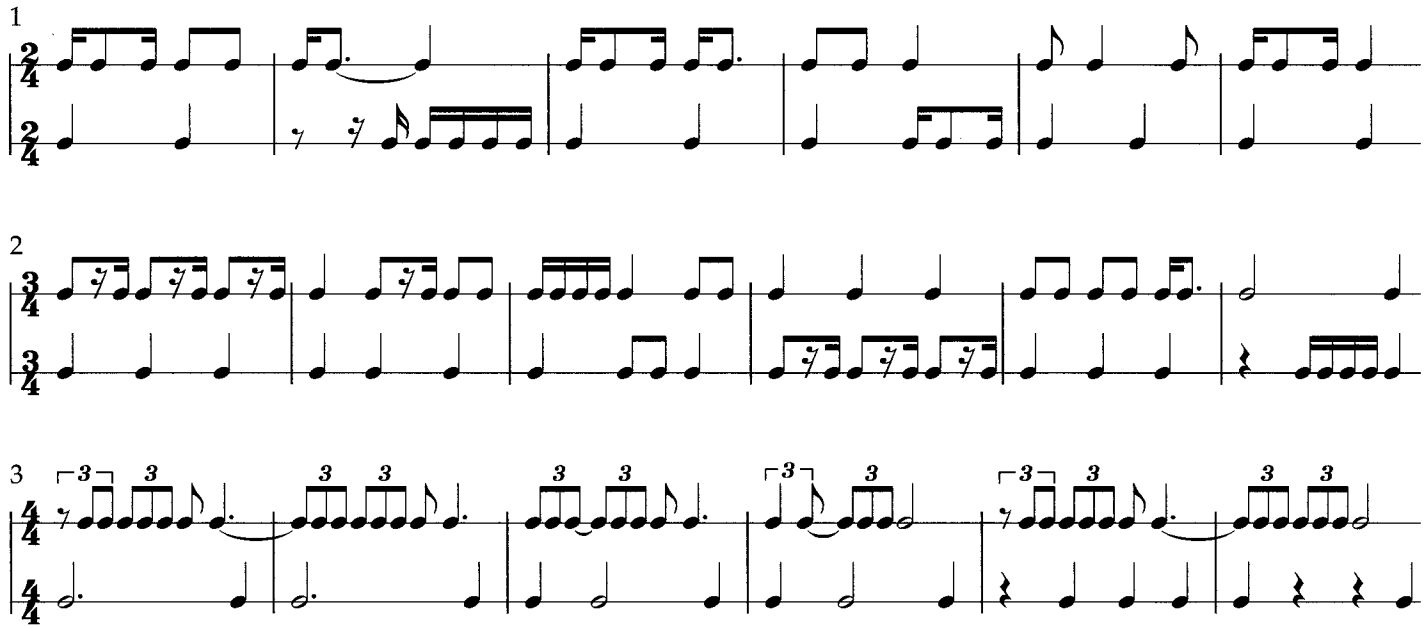
Aim always to read at least a beat ahead: this will develop with time and you will find yourself reading ahead more confidently. The fluency and accuracy of your reading will benefit hugely!

Stage 2

More ties and new rhythms

Rhythmic exercises

As well as clapping or tapping both hands, try these exercises tapping one hand and thinking the other.

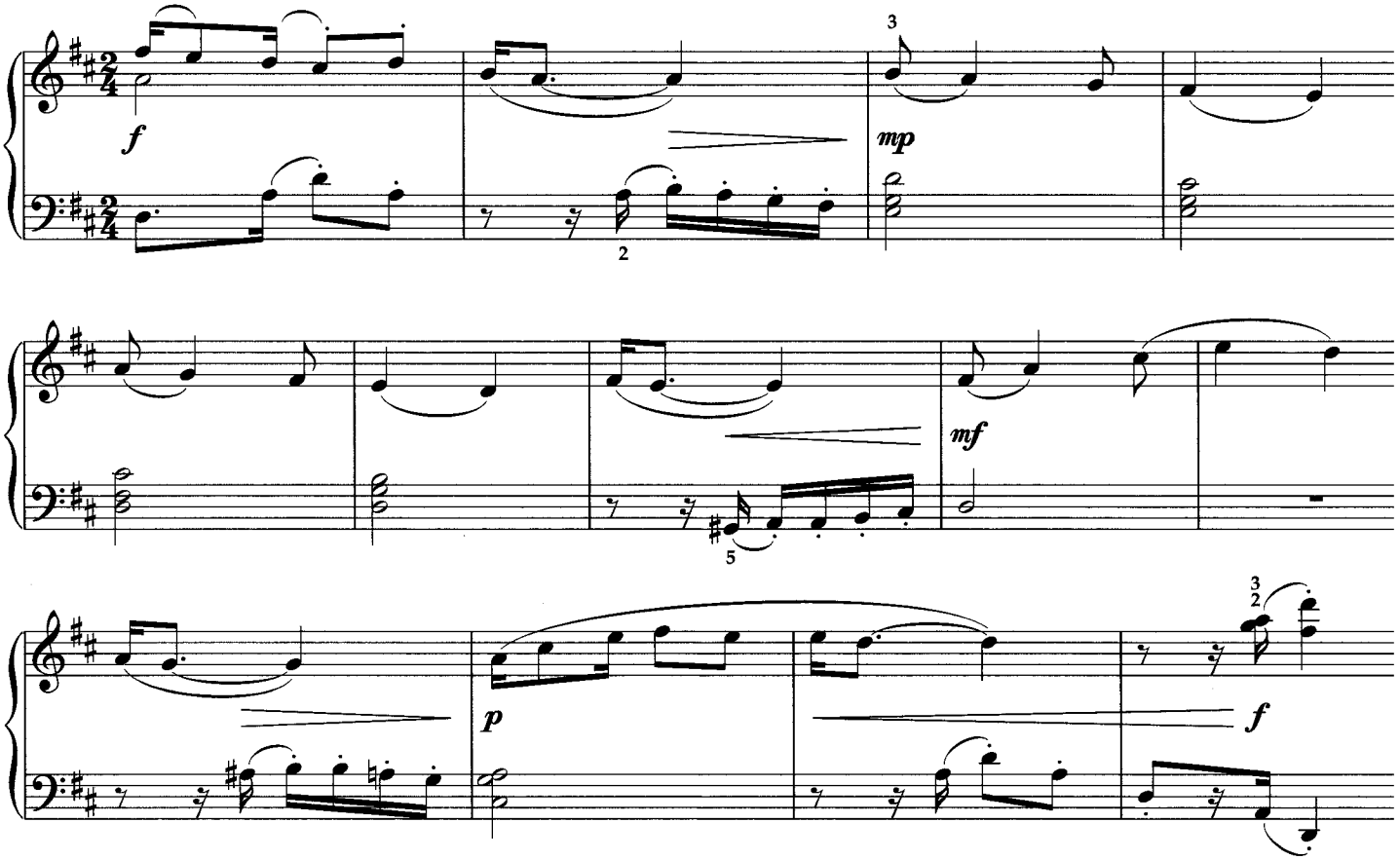


Melodic exercises

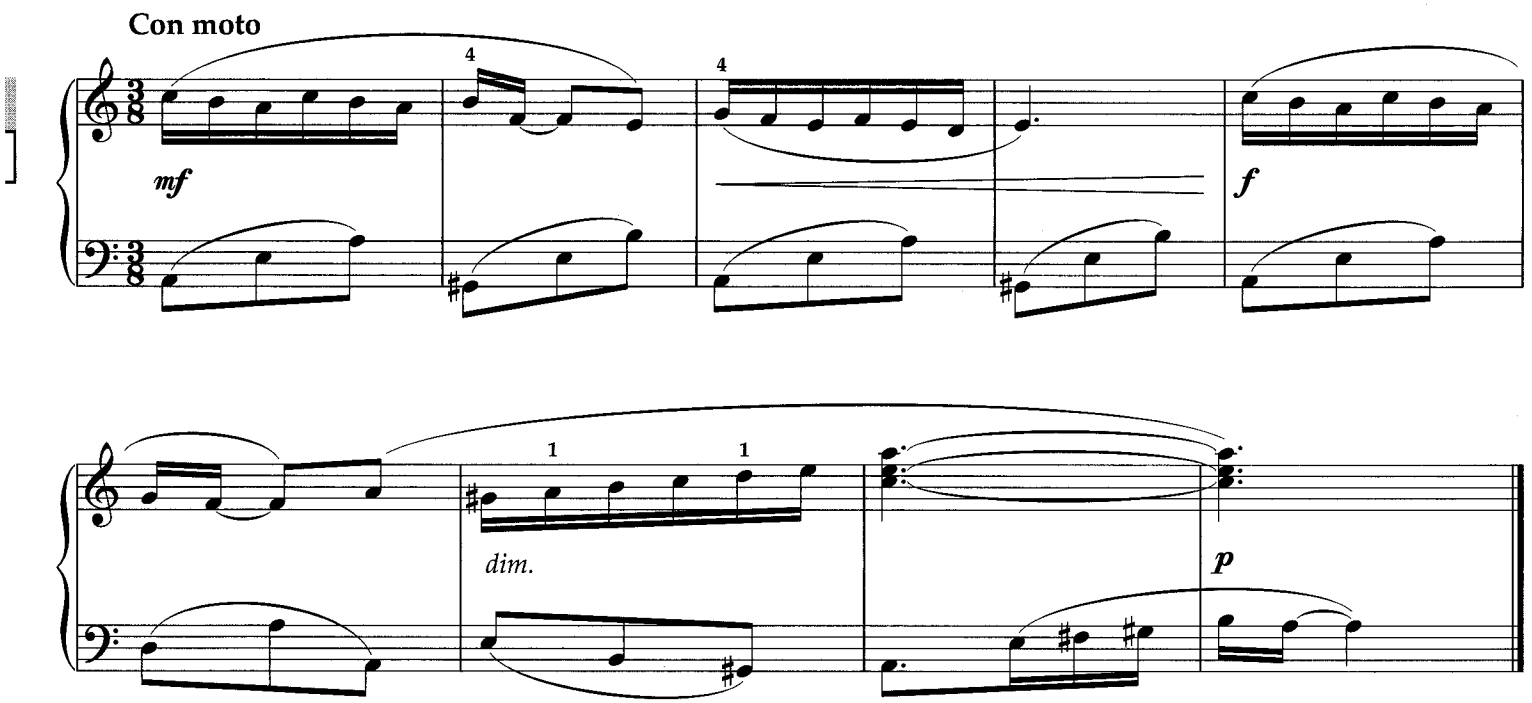
It takes two

Tango tempo

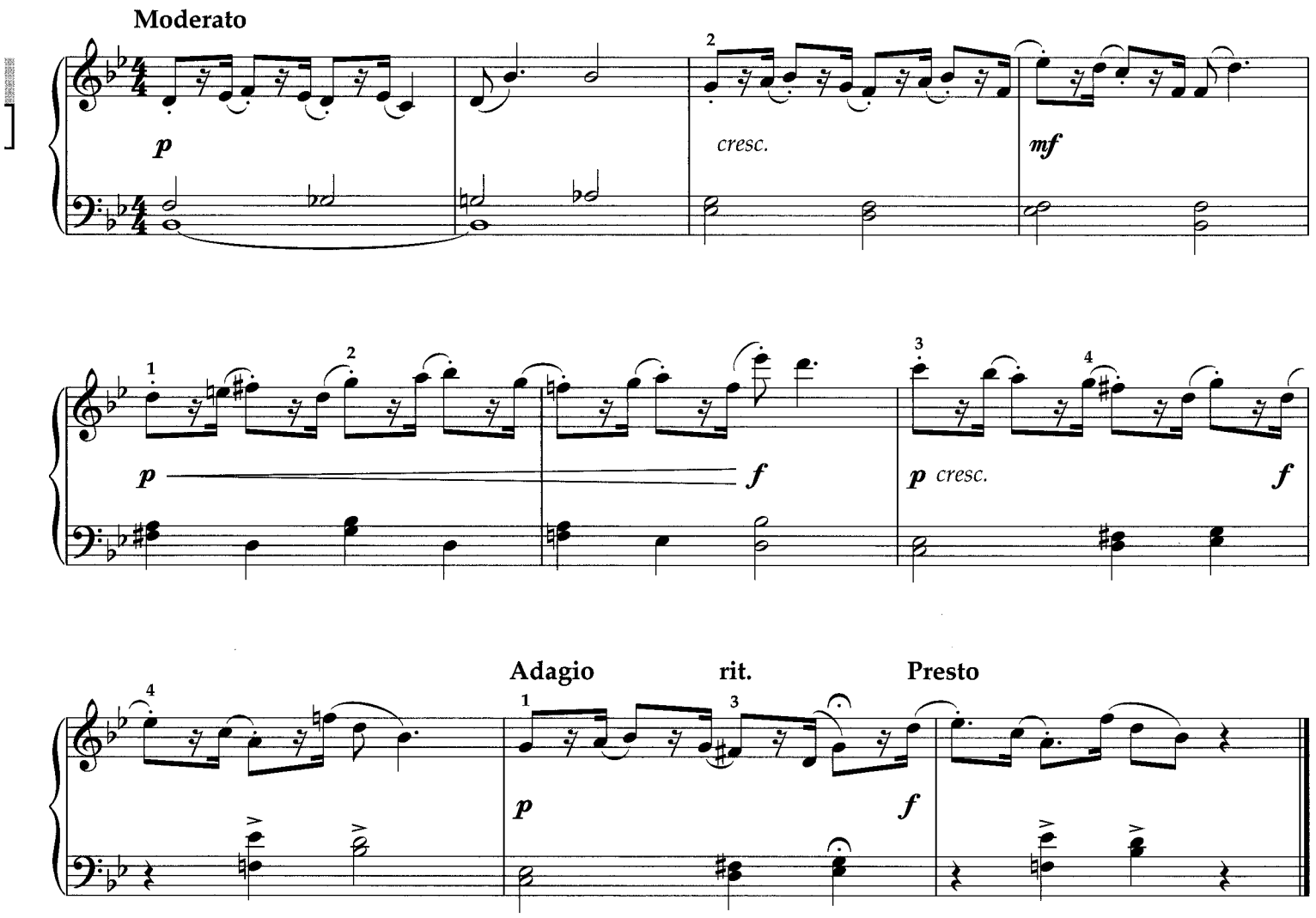
1



Punting with strawberries



Jester

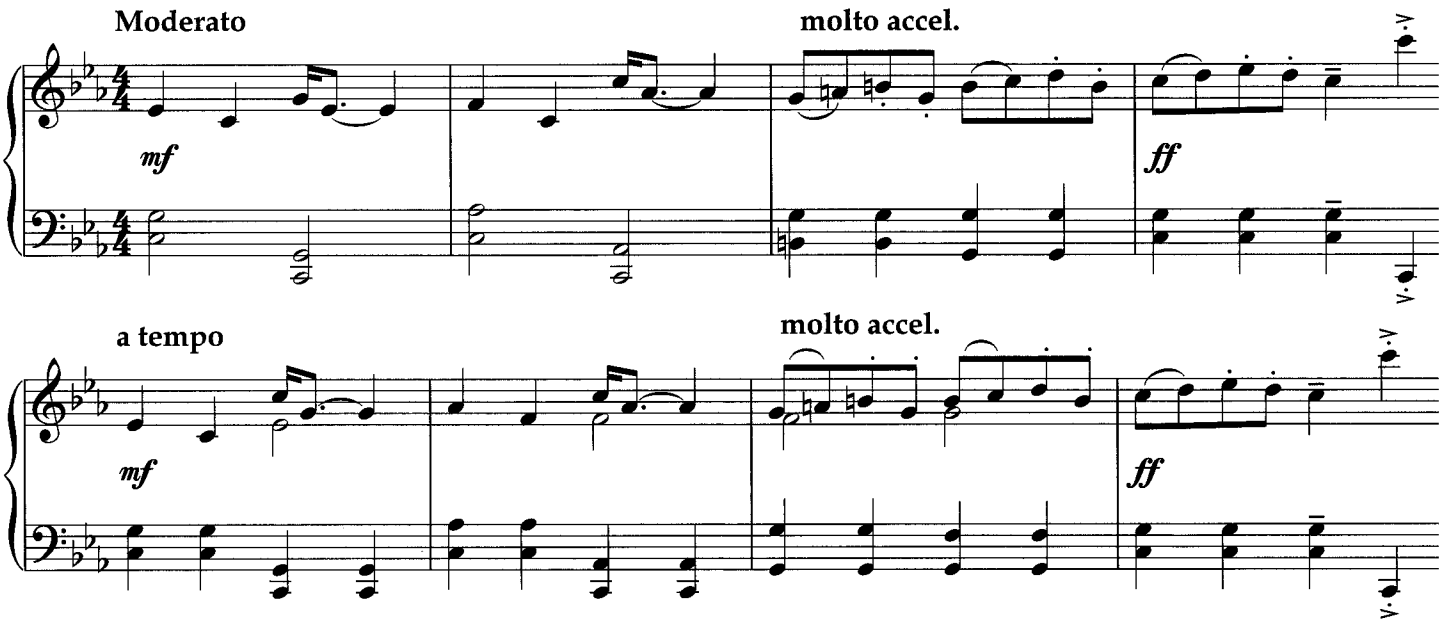


Prepared pieces

1. In which key is this piece? Try to analyse the chord sequence.
2. How do the two 4-bar phrases relate? What are their similarities and differences?
3. What do the two dashes at the end of the first line indicate?
4. How will you convey the character? How will the pedal help?
5. Hear the piece in your head as best you can, thinking through the fingering carefully.

Hungarian goulash

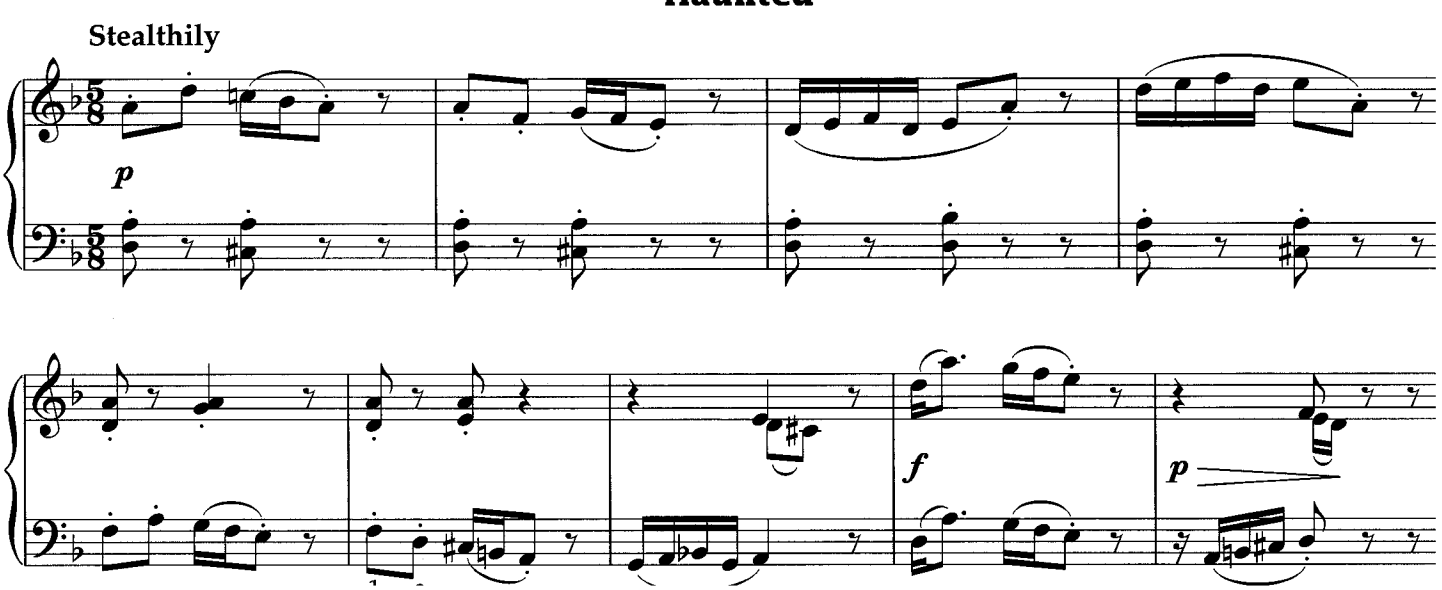
1



1. In which key is this piece? Look carefully at the chords in both hands.
2. Can you spot the patterns? How do they differ?
3. Where is the climax of the piece?
4. Look through the piece for changes of hand position.
5. Hear the piece in your head as best you can, thinking through the rhythm carefully.

Haunted

2

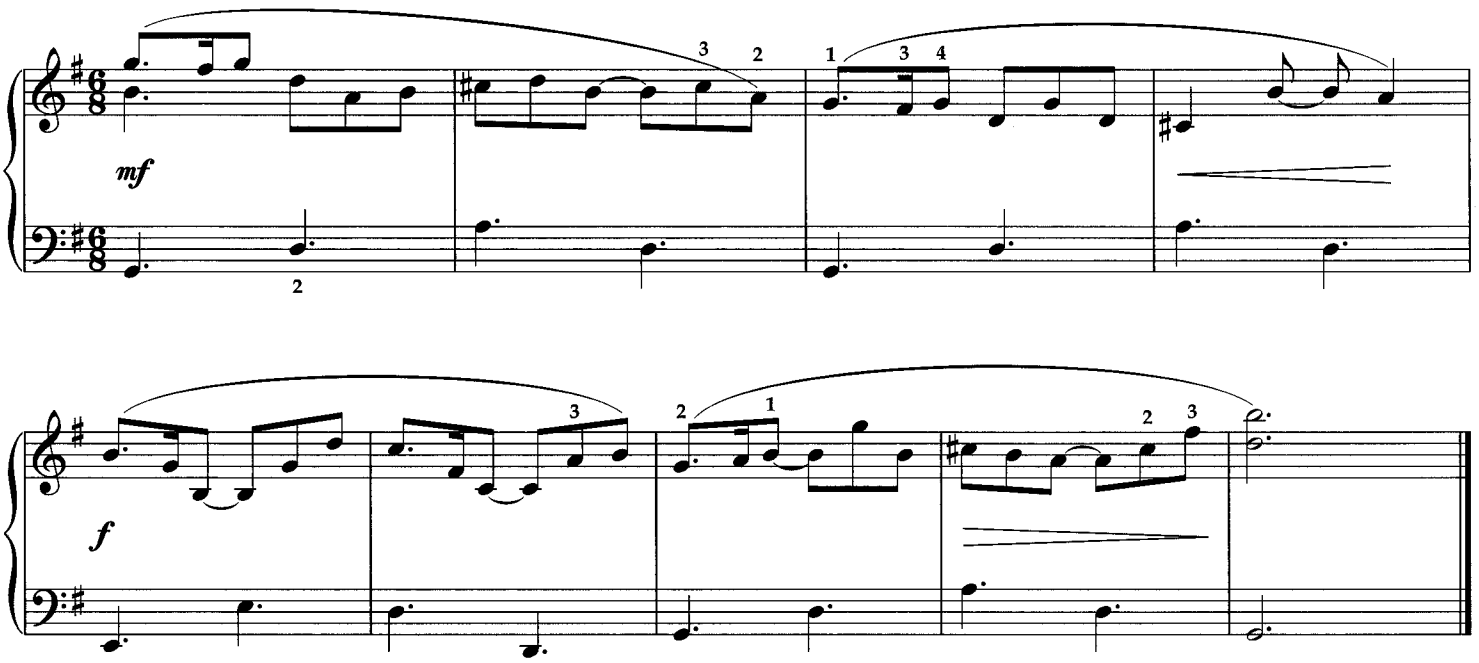


Going solo!

Remember to think through the pieces before you begin as you did for the Prepared pieces.

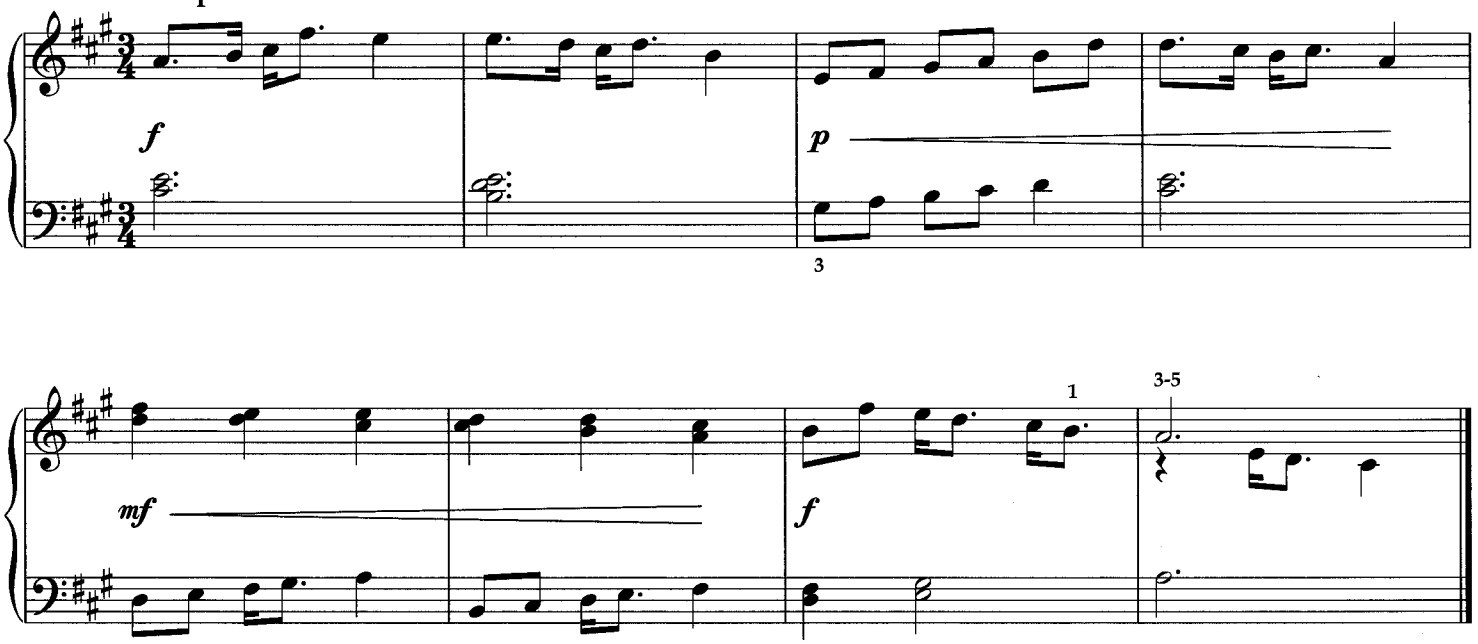
Retail therapy

Allegretto grazioso



By Loch Lomond

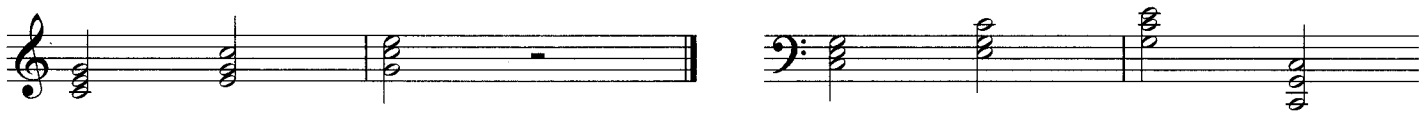
Con spirito



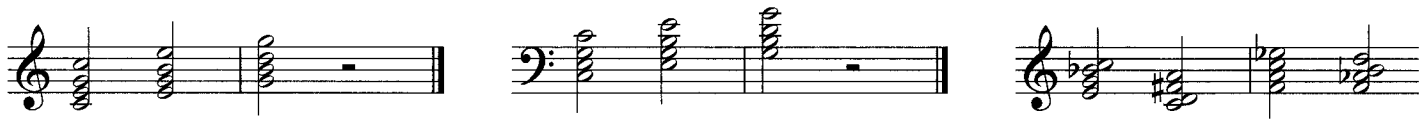
Stage 3

Thicker and more complex textures

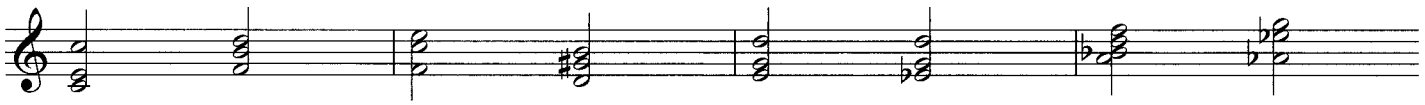
Like familiar rhythmic and note groupings, chords (like words) can be read easily at a glance. Many will be based on simple 3-note patterns: root, 1st or 2nd inversion triads. Try to identify each of these chords before you play them. The first would be 'C major tonic triad, root position'.



Some may be four-note chords (triads with the root on top, dominant or diminished seventh chords).



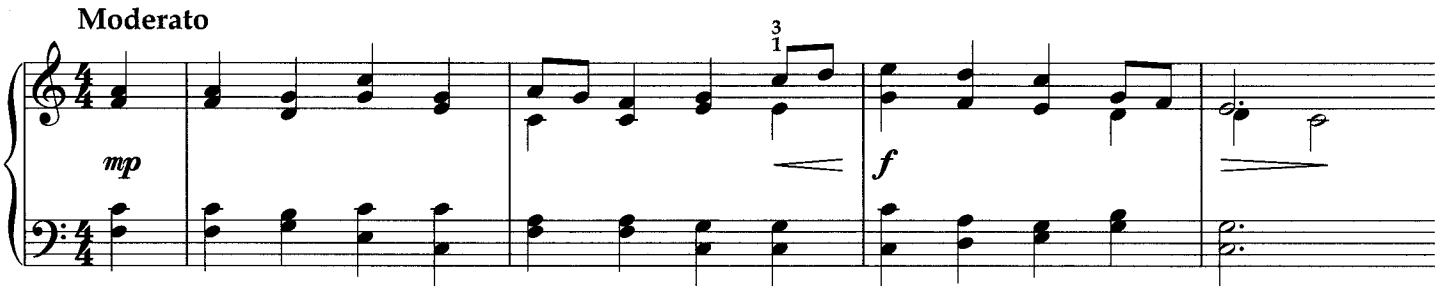
Some may be chords with notes missed out or simply more 'colourful'!



Melodic exercises

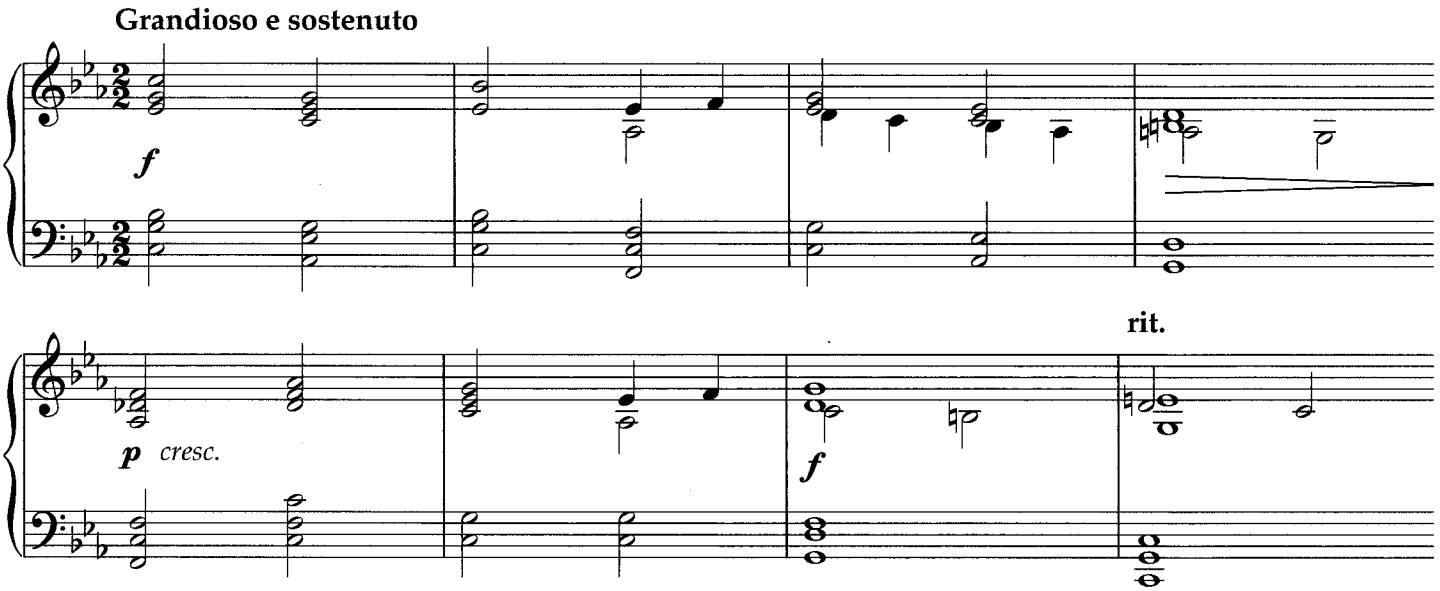
Anthem: Piano teachers be praised

1



Procession

2



The grand piano

Maestoso

f

ff

Veils

Moderato, rubato

mp

cresc.

p

rall.

dim.

Prepared pieces

1. Have a look through the piece and get a feel for the shape and mood. How will you convey the character?
2. How do the patterns in bars 6–7 and 8–9 differ?
3. Look at the chords in the first four bars. What do you notice about their shape?
4. Play the first notes in each hand and try to hear the piece in your head as best you can.

Night jazz

1

Dreamily

mp *p* *cresc.* *mp*

mf rall. *dim.* *pp*

1. What is the key of this piece?
2. Play the tonic chord – how often does this chord occur?
3. How would you describe this style of music? On what other instrument would it sound effective?
4. How will you balance the hands?
5. Do you feel you understand the piece? Try to hear it through in your head.

Chorale

2

Dignified but with movement

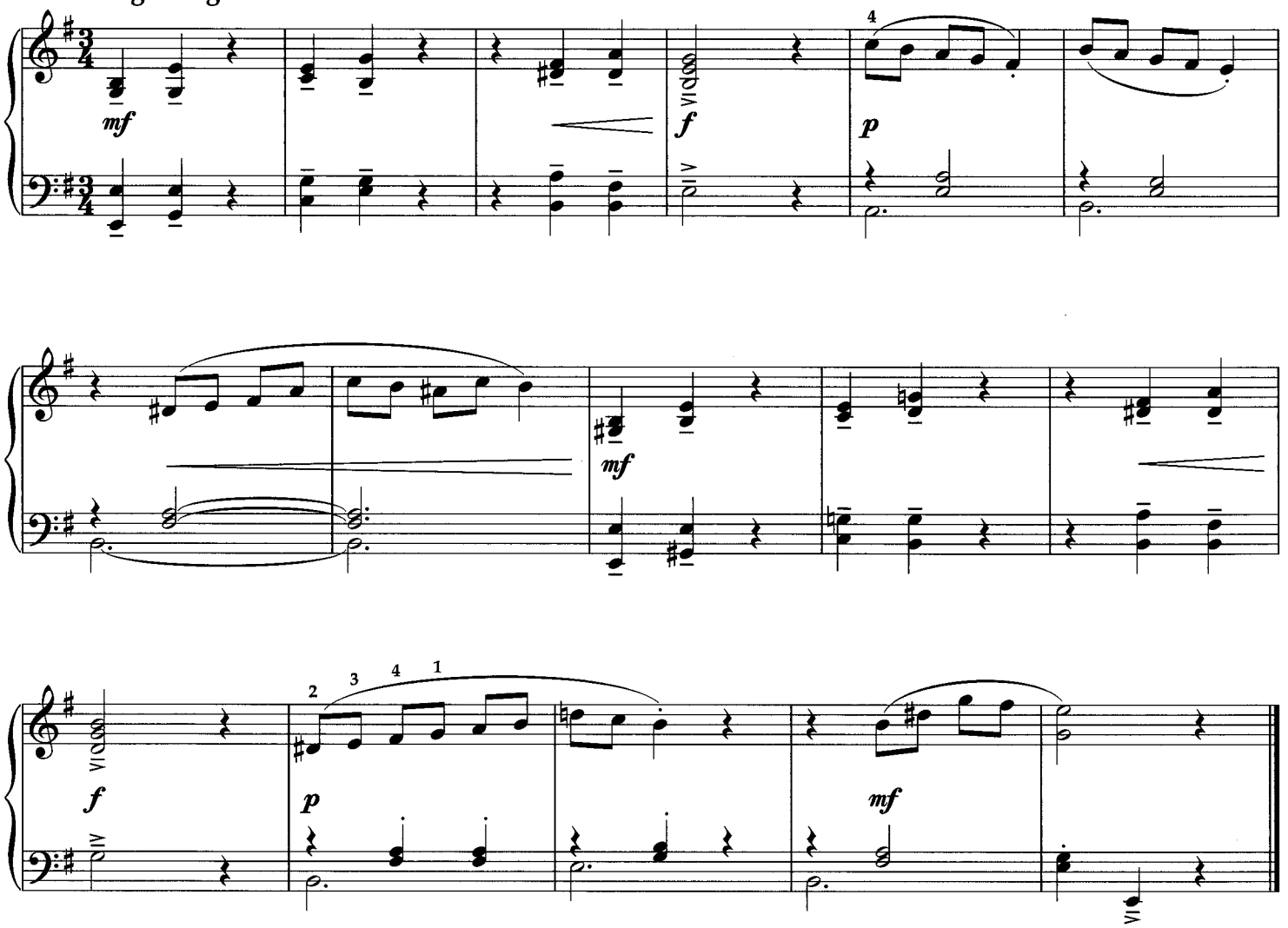
f *ff*

8vb

Going solo

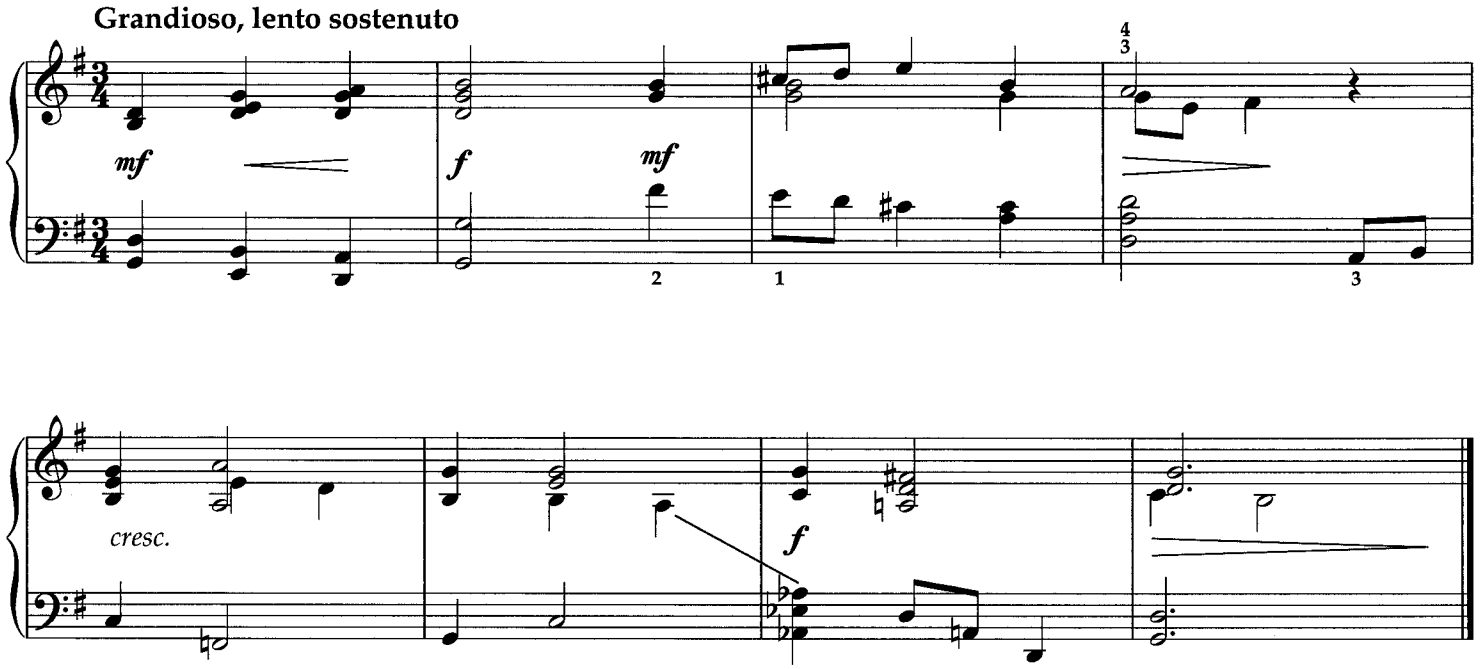
Russian winter

Allegretto grazioso



Walking with kings

Grandioso, lento sostenuto



Stage 4

More harmonic and rhythmic patterns in $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{4}{4}$ $\frac{5}{4}$ and $\frac{7}{4}$

Rhythmic exercises

1

2

3

Melodic exercises

Cortège

Marche funèbre

1

f *p* *f*

p *f* *ff*

Maple syrup rag

Moderato

2

mf *p* *mf* *p*

Only joking

Scherzando

mp

cresc.

f

Dashed hopes

Andante mesto

mf

p *cresc.*

f

rit.

Rudolph rag

Moderato

f *leggiero*

mp *cresc.*

f

Prepared pieces

1. What is the key of this piece? How will you convey the character?
2. How many times is the shape in bar 1 repeated? Where is the climax of the piece?
3. Is the main melodic interest in the right or left hand?
4. Play the first notes in each hand and hear the piece in your head as best you can.

September

1

Con moto

mp

rit.

f

1. What is the key of this piece? Play the scale and arpeggio. How will you convey the mood?
2. Can you spot any repeated patterns? Which pattern is the left-hand part based on?
3. Tap the rhythm of both hands on a table or the piano lid.
4. Play the first note in each hand and hear the piece in your head as best you can.

Ballade

2

Affetuoso

p *espress.*

mf

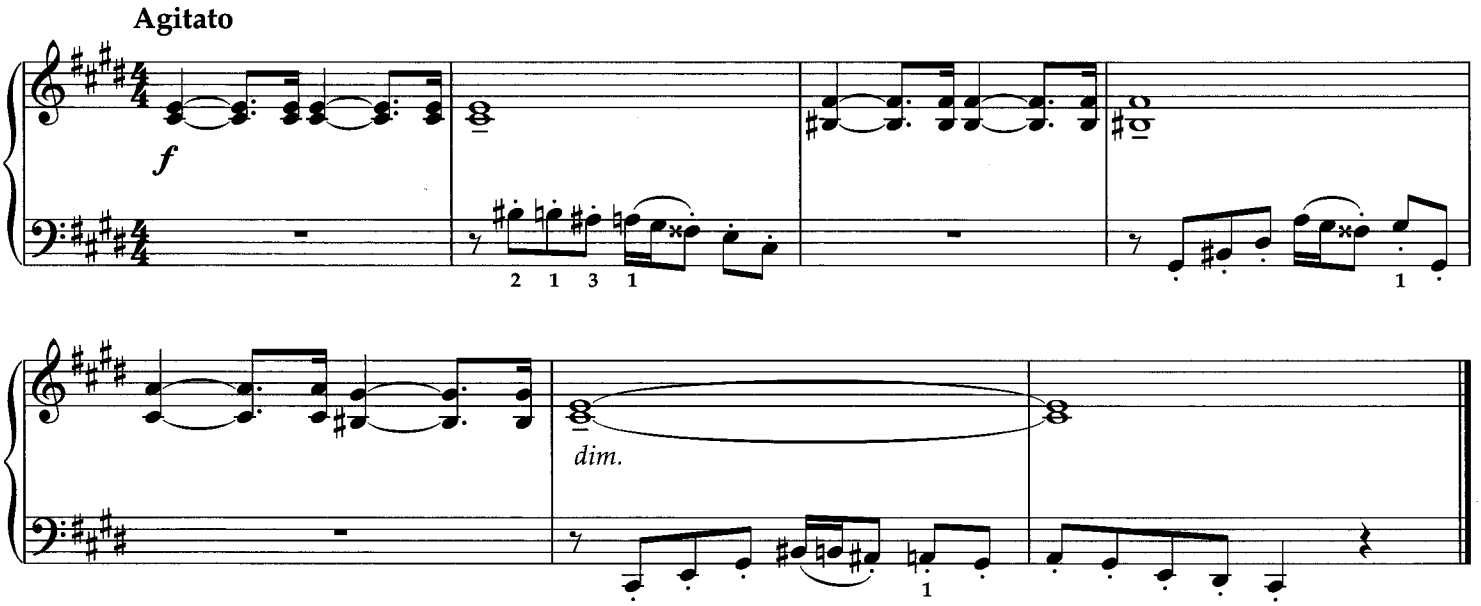
p

dim.

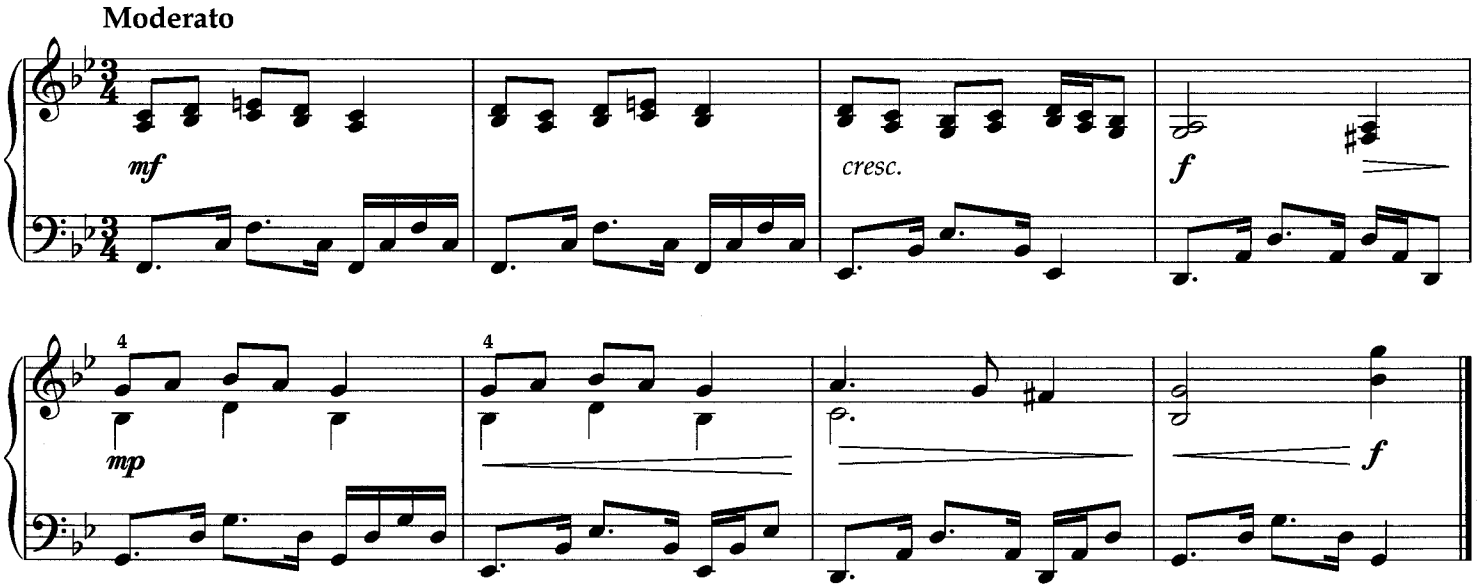
rit.

Going solo

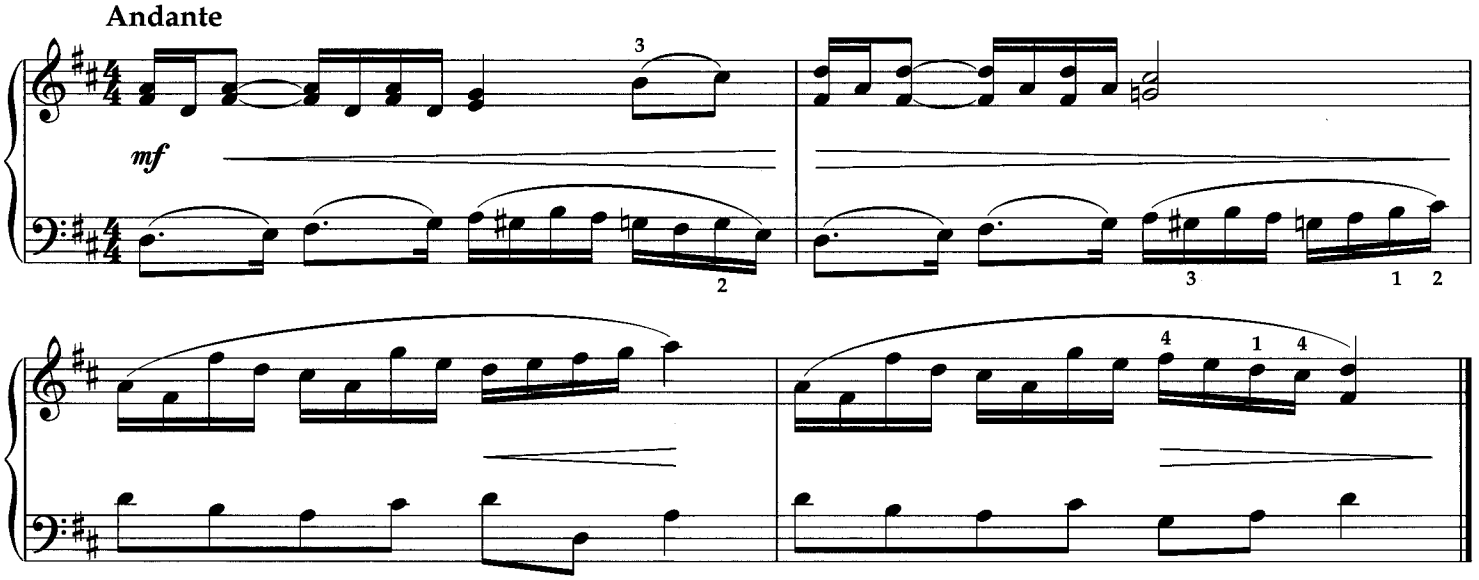
Car chase



Amazon adventure



The old nursery



Stage 5

More harmonic and rhythmic patterns in $\frac{3}{8}$ $\frac{4}{8}$ $\frac{5}{8}$ and $\frac{7}{8}$

Rhythmic exercises

1

2

3

Melodic exercises

Stand-up comic

1

Allegro spiritoso

f *leggiero*

p *f* *p* *f*

Gold leaf

2

Molto lento

mf *p*

Broken romance

Appassionato e rubato

mf *cresc.*

f *dim.* molto rall.

In the dark shadows

Lento

p *cresc.* *f* *p*

Moto perpetuo

Allegro

p *cresc.* *f*

Prepared pieces

1 Study this piece carefully for a few minutes. Think about the rhythm.
2 What do you notice about the intervals in the left hand, bars 1–2 and 8–9?
3 What will you count? Tap the rhythm of each hand separately, then both together.
4 Do you think you understand the piece? What character will you try to convey?

Arabesque

1

Allegro grazioso

f *p* *p*

f

1 In which key is this piece? Play the scale and arpeggio.
2 Think the rhythm of both hands through in your head, tapping the pulse.
3 How will you convey the mood and style of the piece? What is the effect in bars 5–8?
4 Play the first notes of each hand and then hear the piece in your head as best you can.

Kites

2

Flowing

p *f*

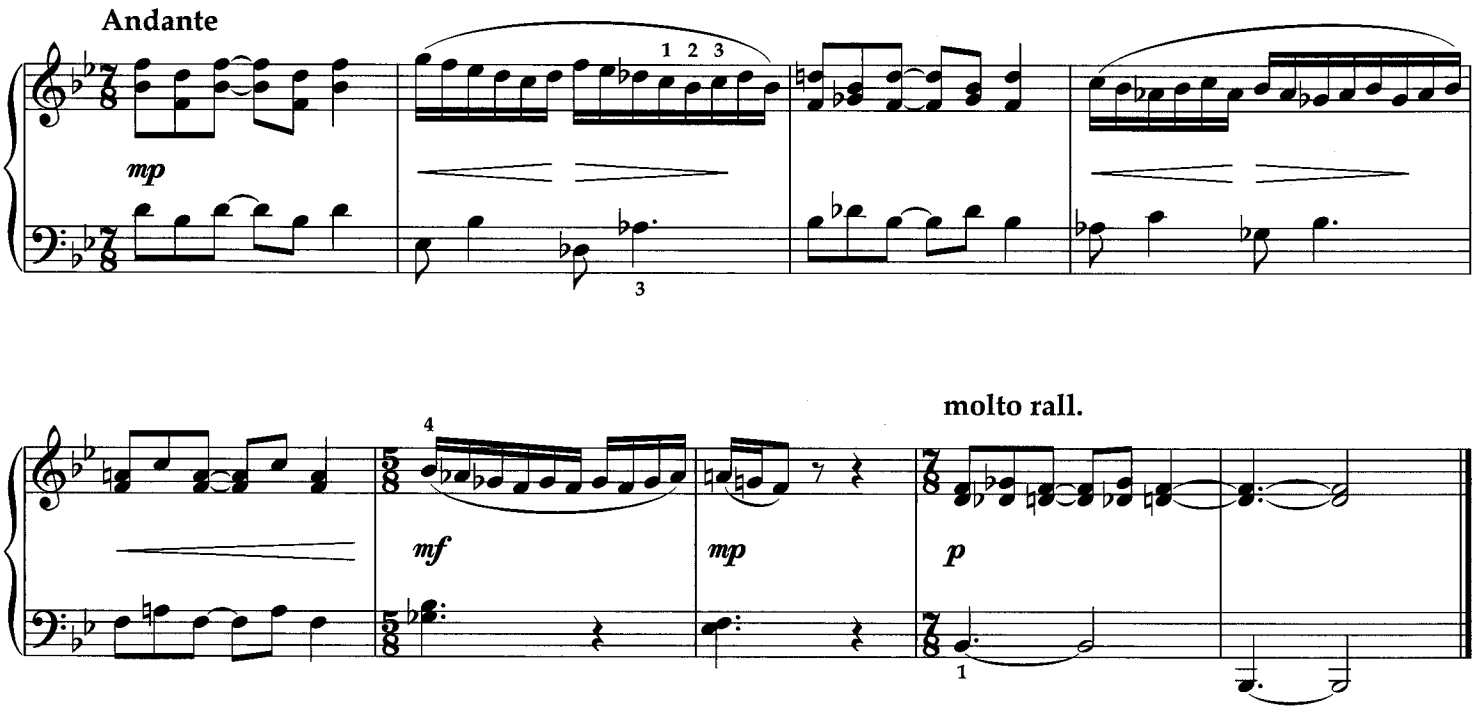
con ped.

rit.

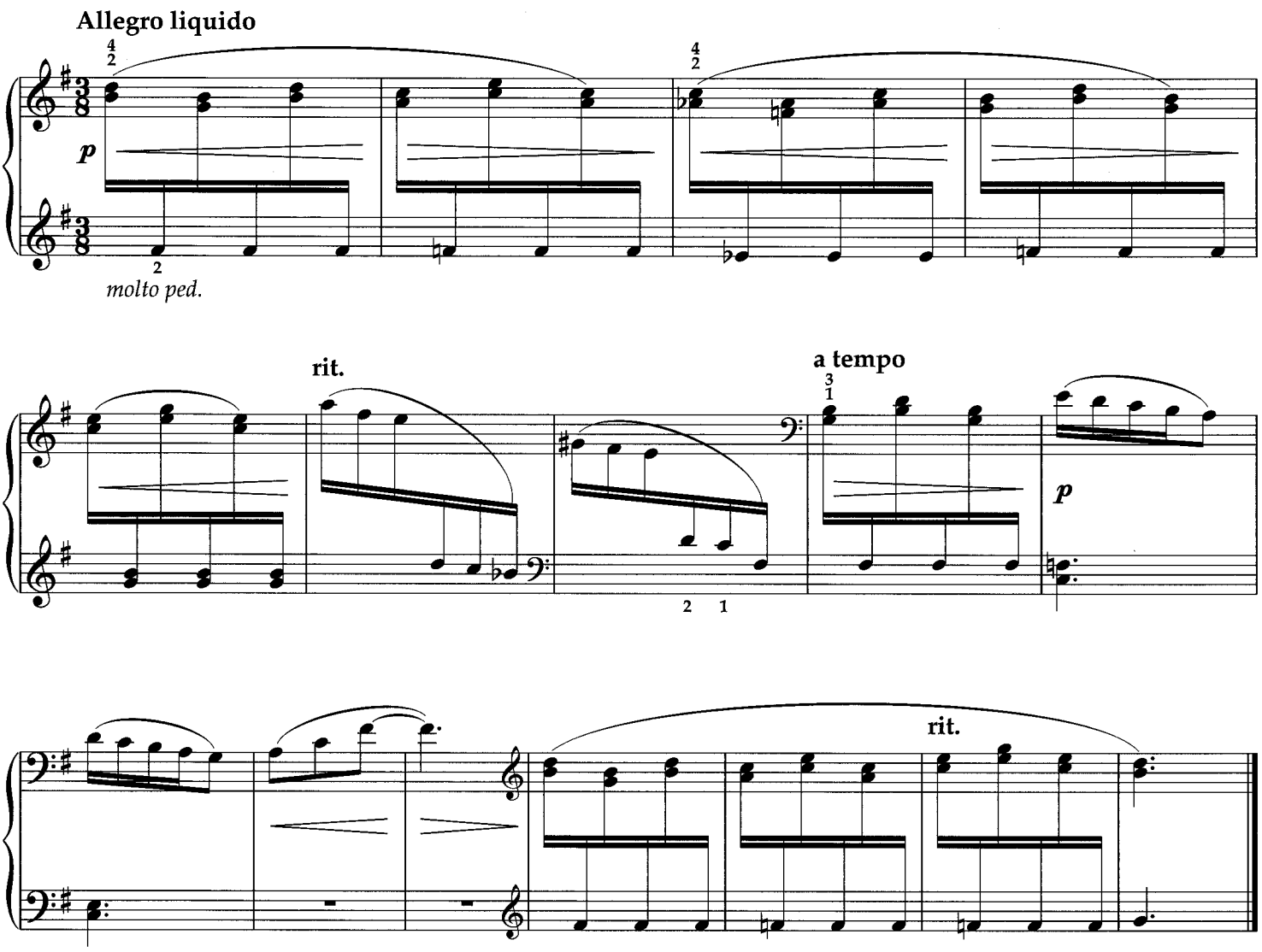
p

Going solo!

Still streams run deep

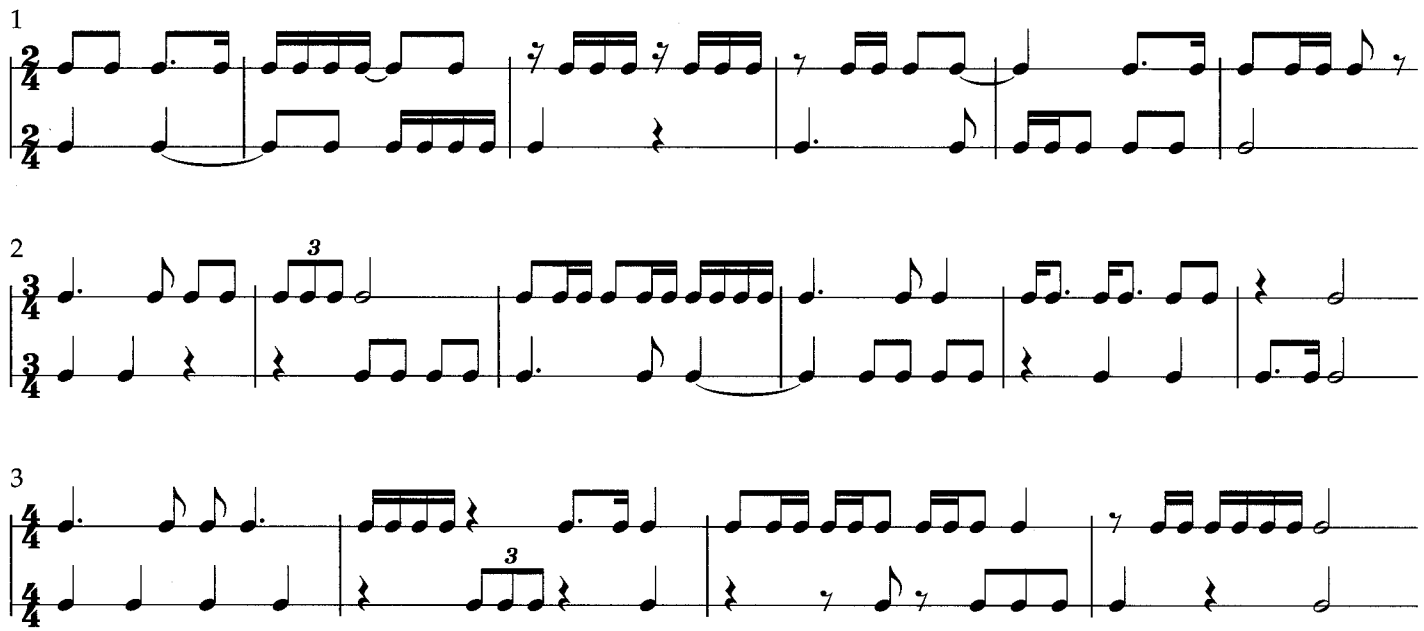


Summer shower



Stage 6

Rhythmic exercises

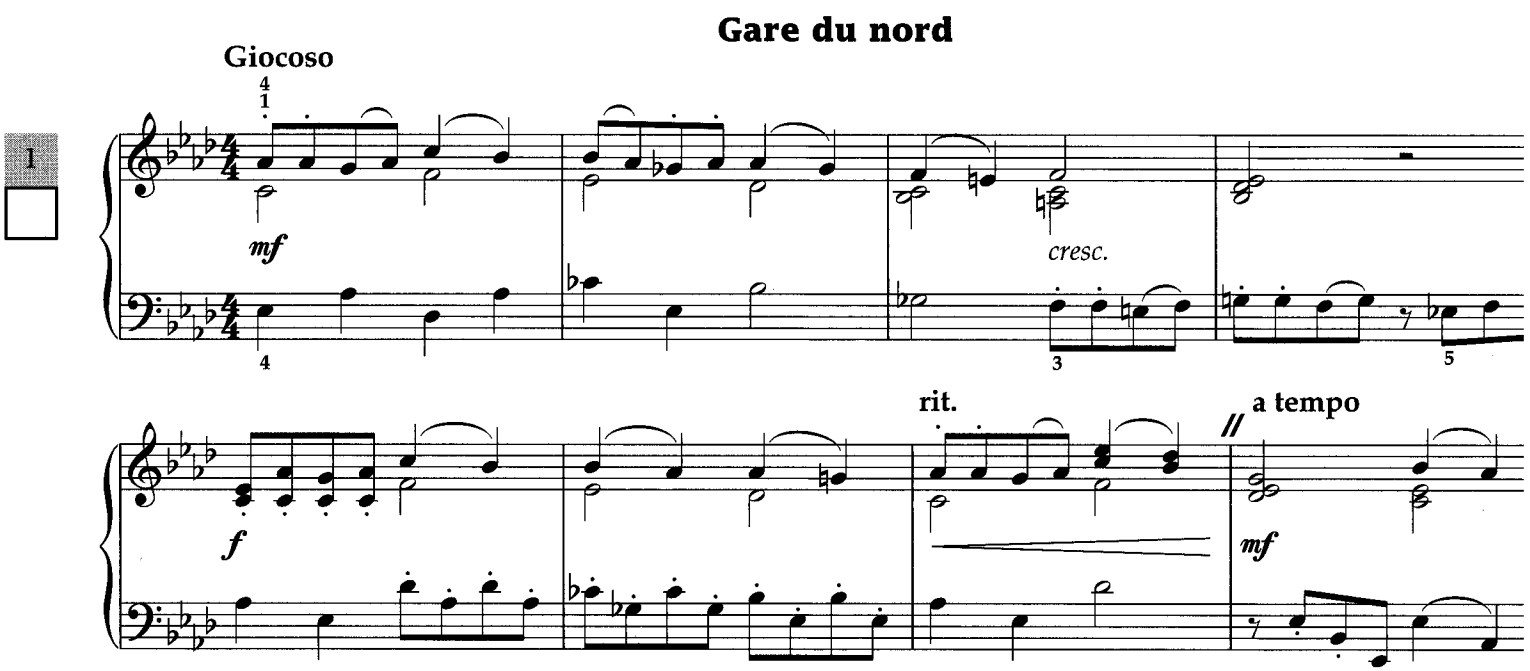


Melodic exercises

It's not difficult to read music in these keys. If you really know your scales and arpeggios and you are *thinking in the key*, you'll find you can play fluently. It is important that you learn your scales and arpeggios from notation as well as by ear. So many patterns in sight-reading are based on scale and arpeggio shapes: that's why it's necessary to have had the experience of seeing the patterns written down. You won't necessarily use 'official' scale fingerings in pieces but it is very helpful to have them at the back of your mind.

Play the scale and arpeggio of the key of each piece in this stage from notation before you play the piece.

Gare du nord



Song of the elegant hippopotamus

Plodding along heavily

f *mf*

f

Waltz of the potted shrimps

Andante con moto

mp

rit.

Interlude in D flat

Moderato

p *f*

Prepared pieces

1. In which key is this piece? Play the scale and think about the patterns of black and white notes.
2. Look for repeated patterns. How do bars 5 and 6 compare?
3. How will you finger the scale patterns in bars 4 and 7?
4. What will you count? Do you understand the rhythm in bar 1 of the right hand?
5. Play the first note and try to hear the piece in your head as best you can.

Get up and go

1

Allegro

f *mf* *p*

mf *f* *p* *f*

1. In which key is this piece? Play the scale and arpeggio.
2. Which bars are based on scale and arpeggio patterns?
3. Does the left-hand chord in bar 1 return? What is the chord?
4. Do you feel you understand the piece? How will you achieve the minuet character?
5. Play the first note and try to hear the piece in your head as best you can.

Flat pack

2

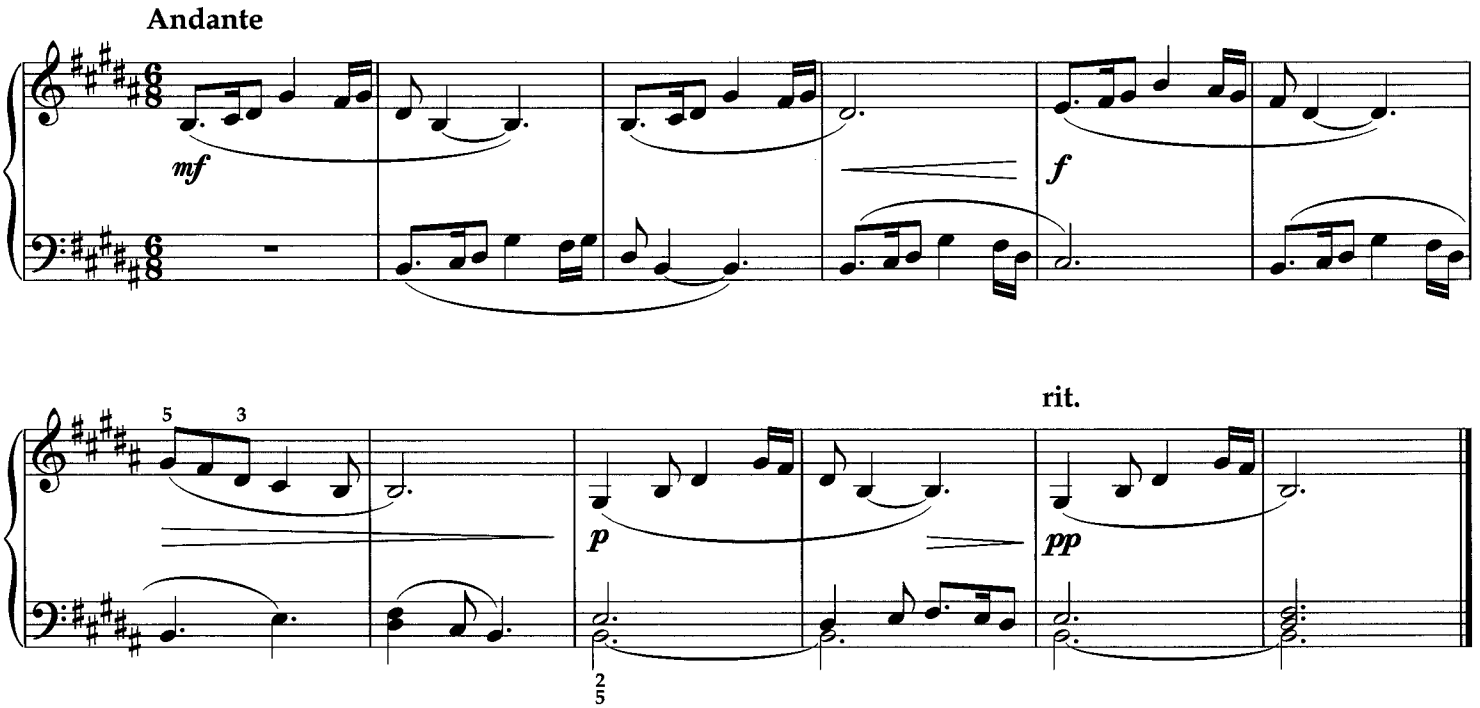
Alla minuet

mf

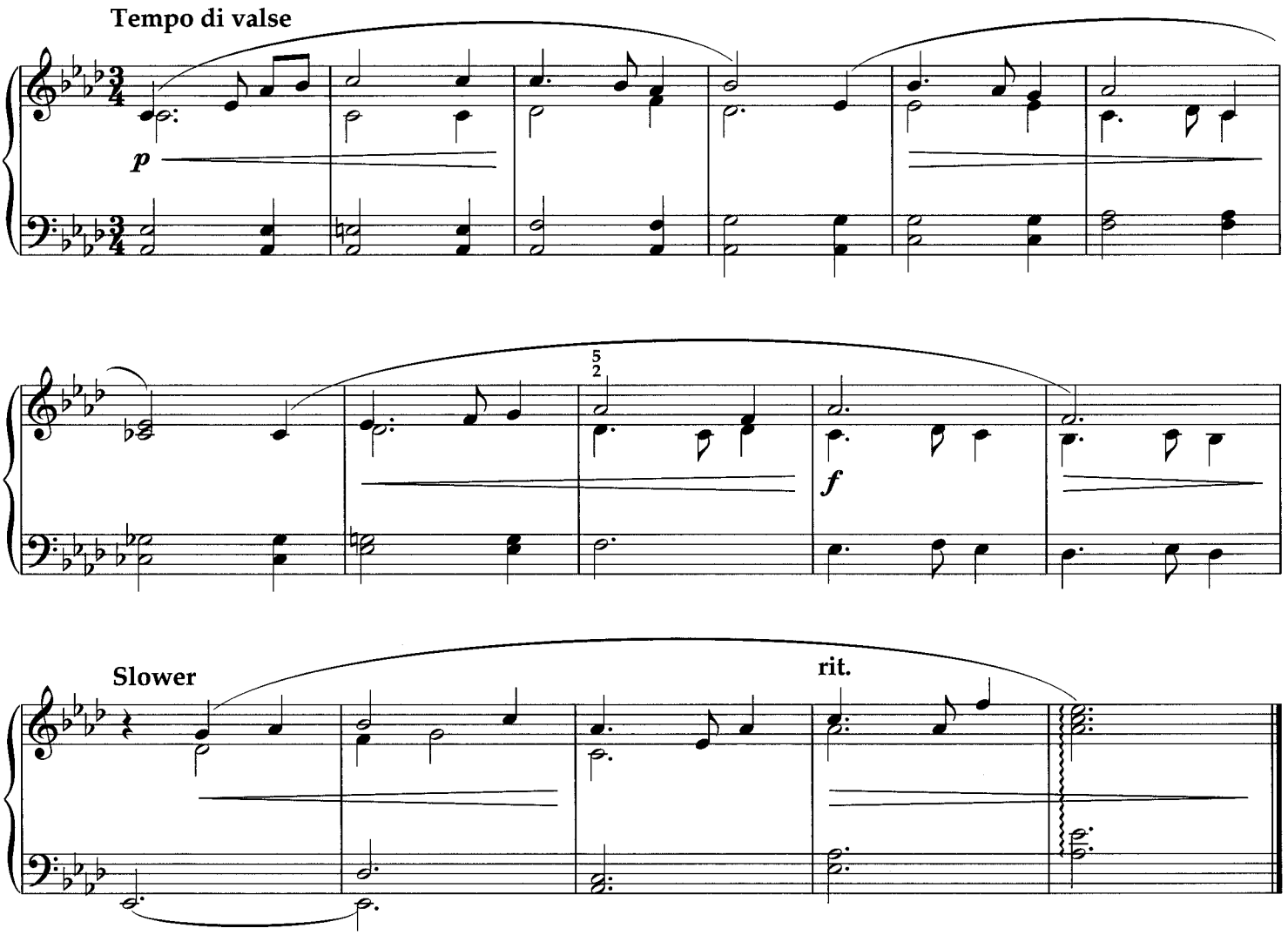
p *f*

Going solo!

Song of the Rocky Mountains



Tulips

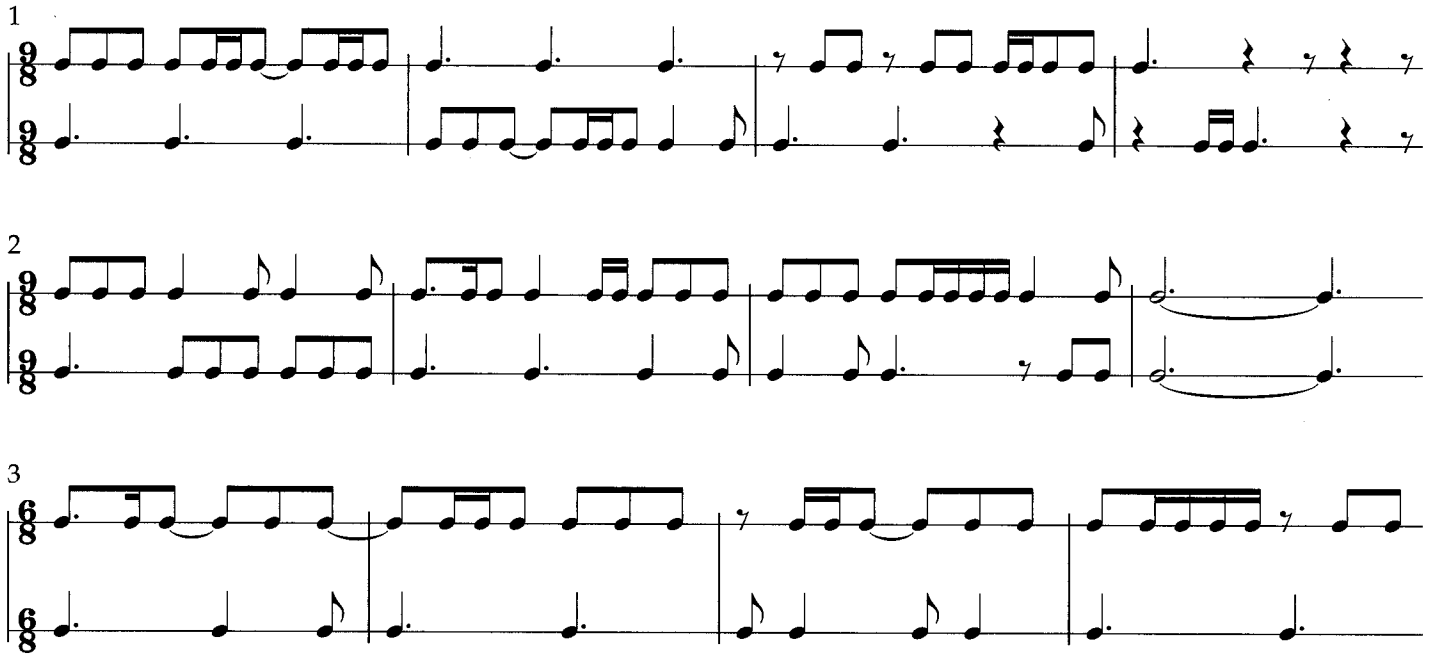


Stage 7

More rhythms in $\frac{6}{8}$ and $\frac{9}{8}$

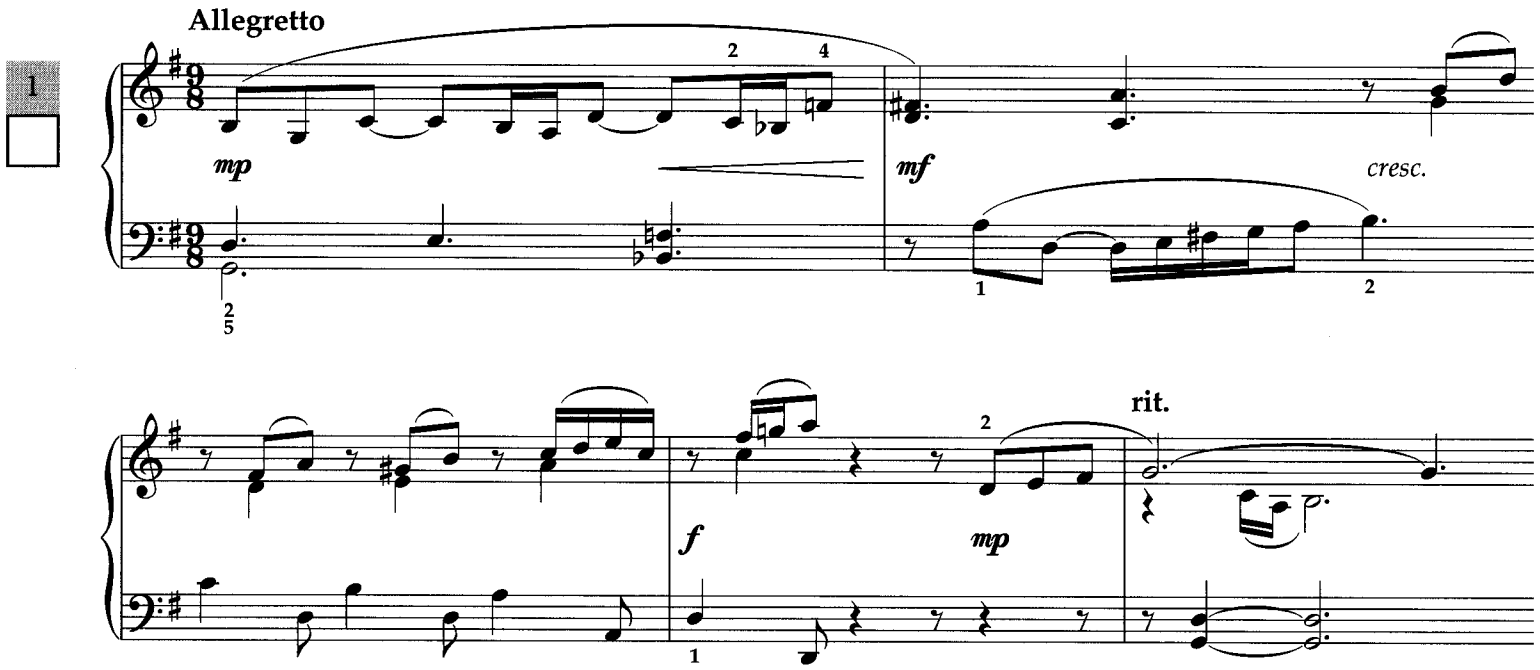
Rhythmic exercises

Always count two bars before you begin each exercise – one out loud and one silently – and keep the pulse really steady.

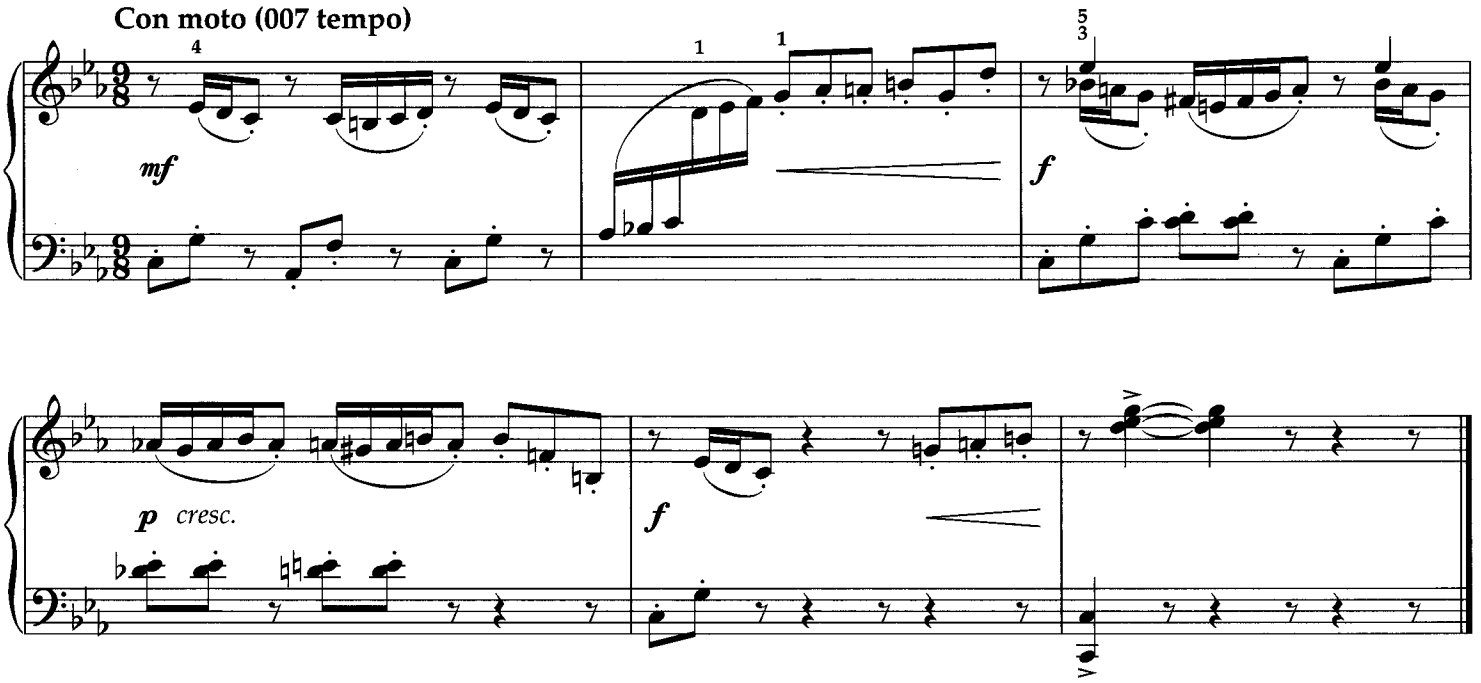


Melodic exercises

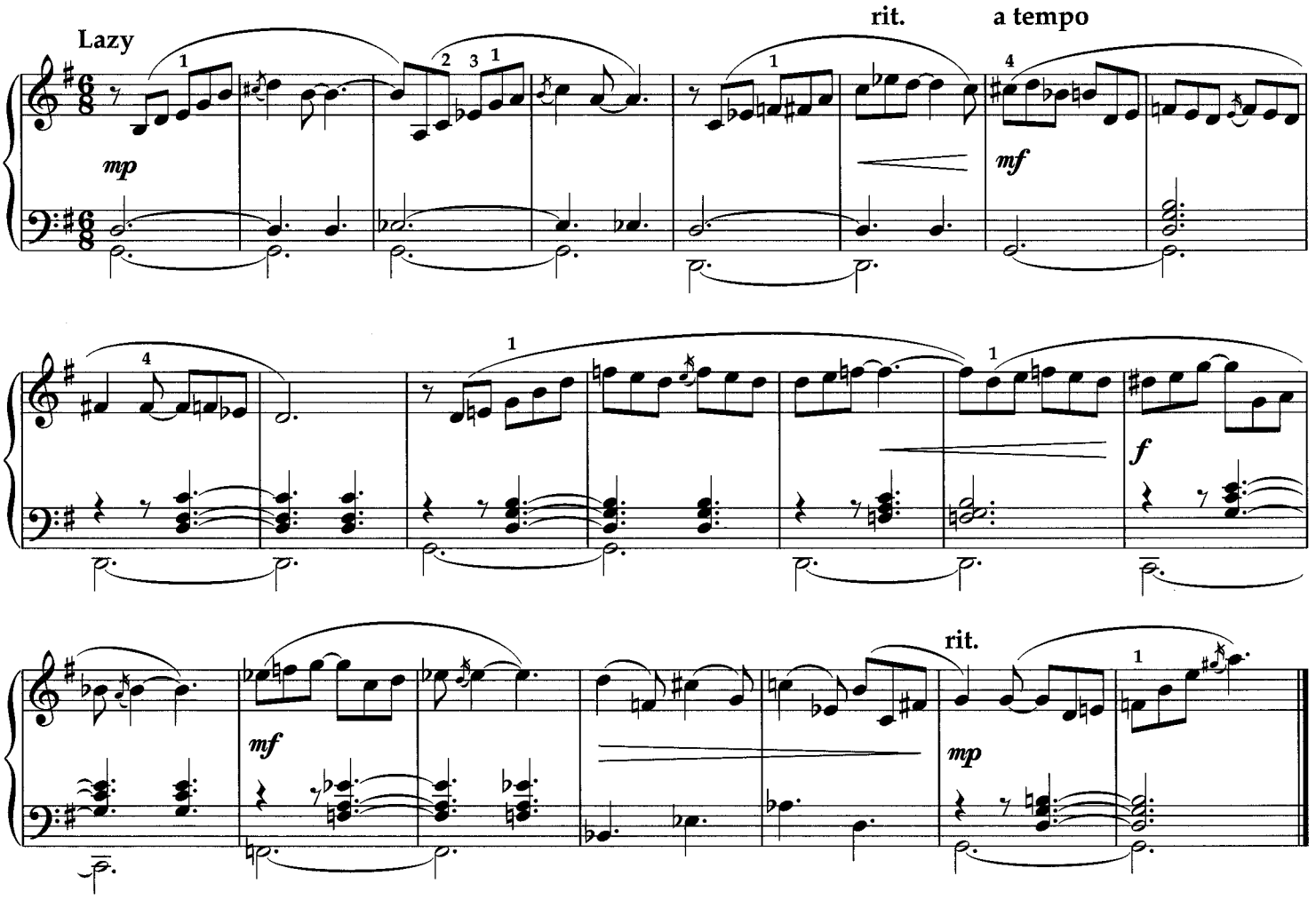
The Malvern Hills



Secret agent



By George!

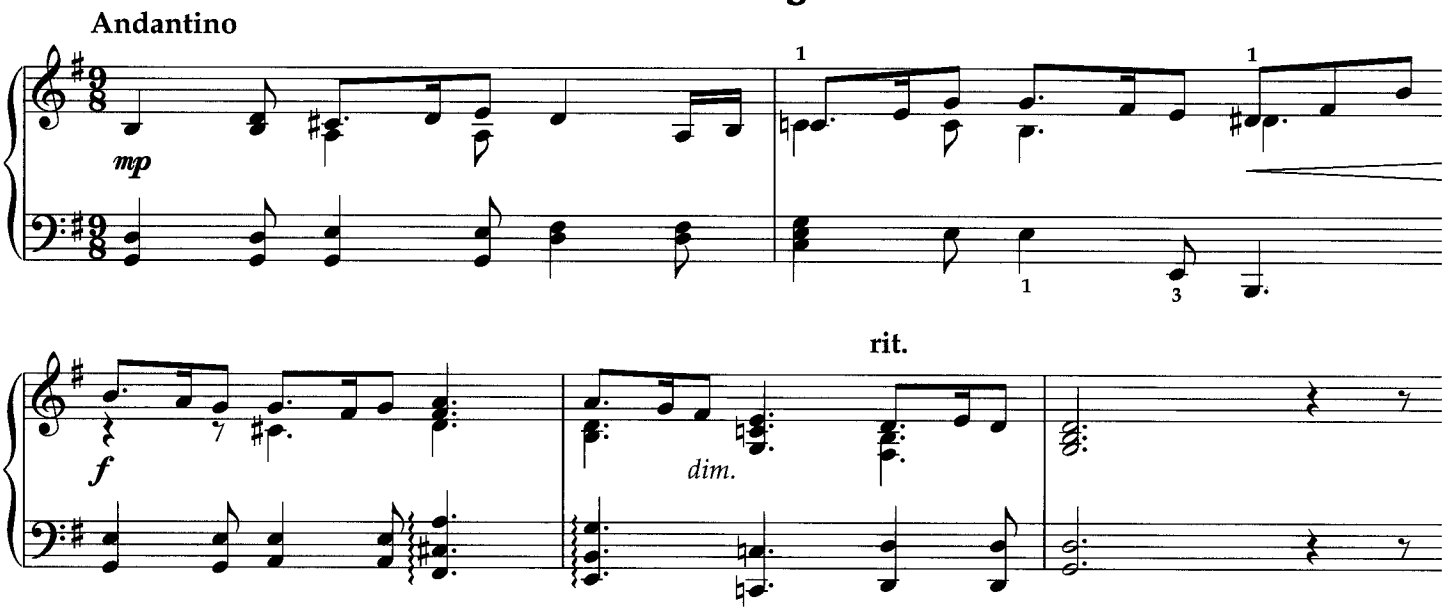


Prepared pieces

1. Think about the chords in G major (I, IV and V). Can you spot examples?
2. Which key does the music pass through at the end of bar 2 and beginning of bar 3?
3. Study the rhythm of the piece for a few moments. Is it all clear to you?
4. Think about the fingering where one hand is in two parts (most of the right-hand part).
5. Play the opening notes and hear the piece through in your head as best you can.

Pavane for King Richard

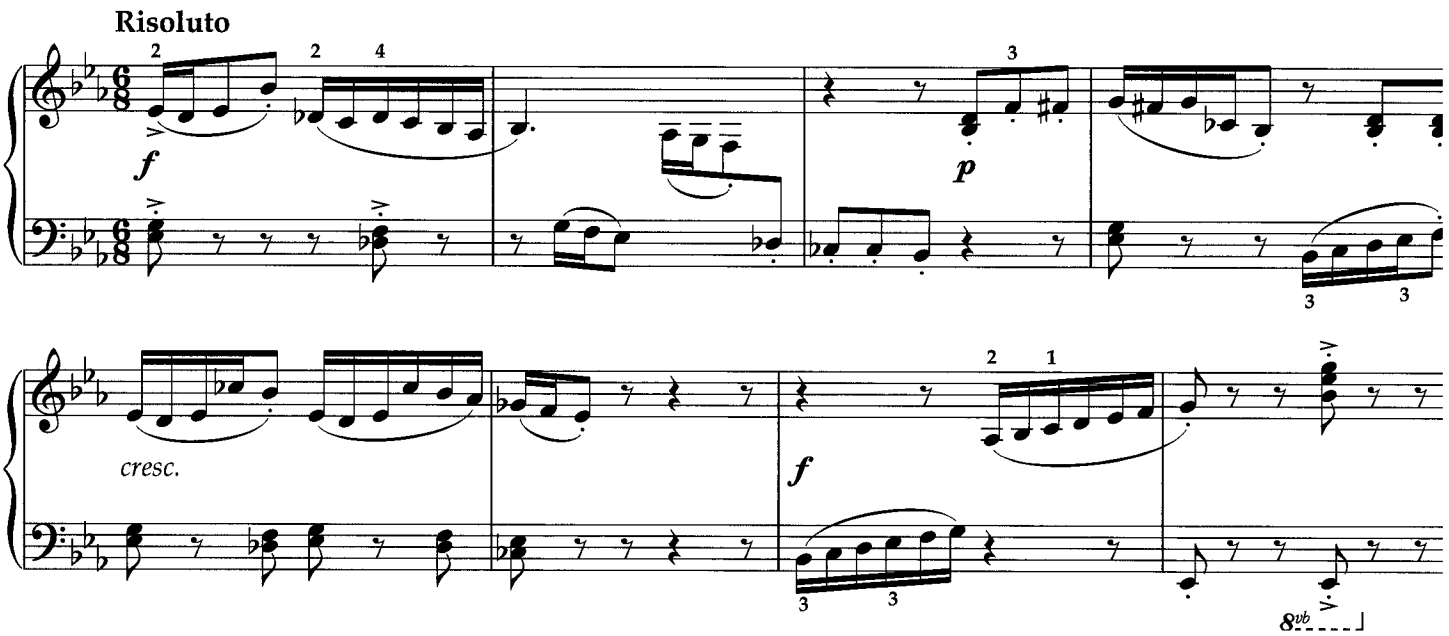
1



1. Look at the whole piece for a few moments. What character will you try to convey?
2. What is the key? How many passages are based on scale patterns? Play the scale.
3. Look at how the melody moves between the hands and check any accidentals.
4. Play the opening notes and hear the piece through as best you can.

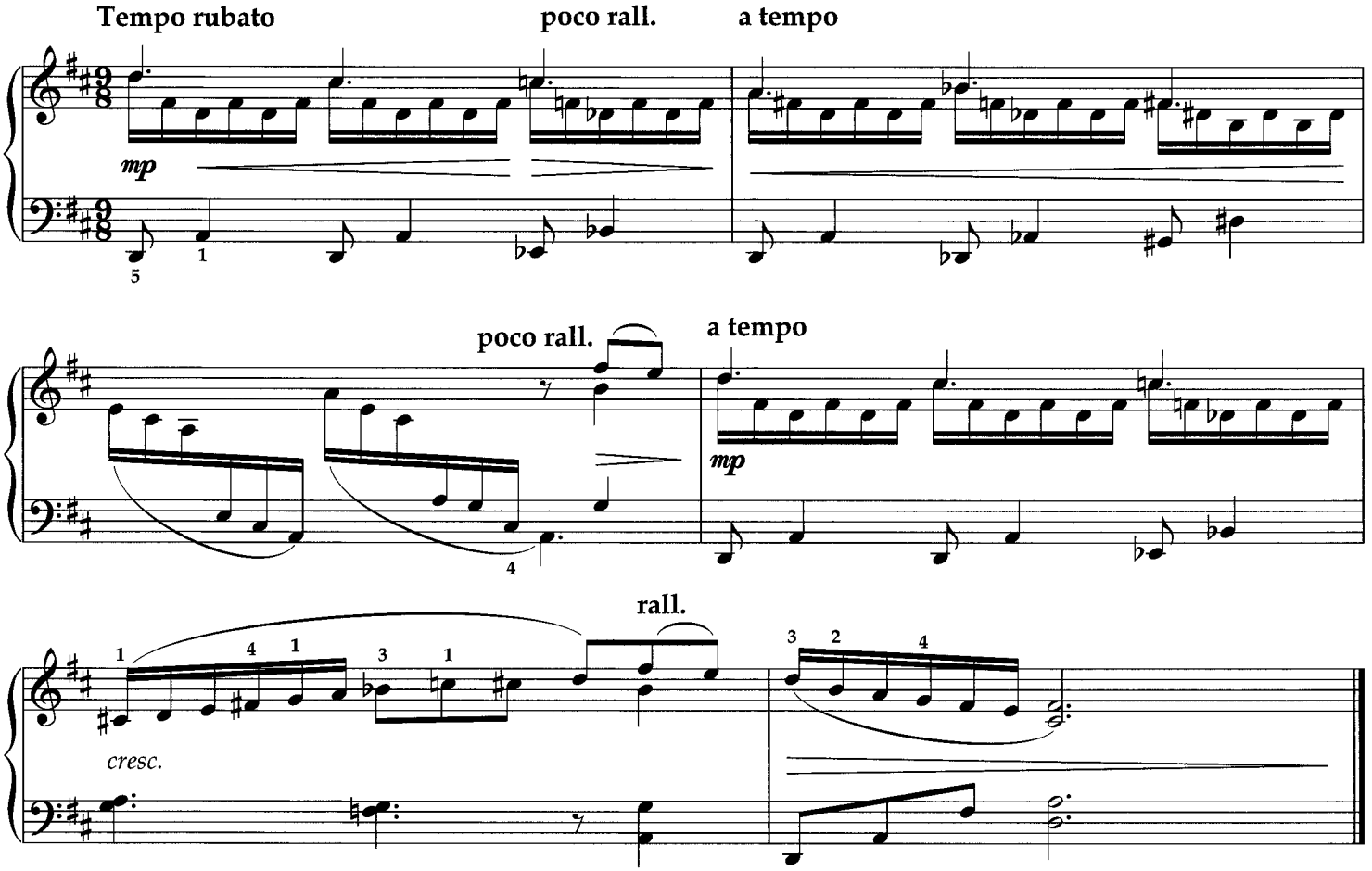
Ants' nest

2

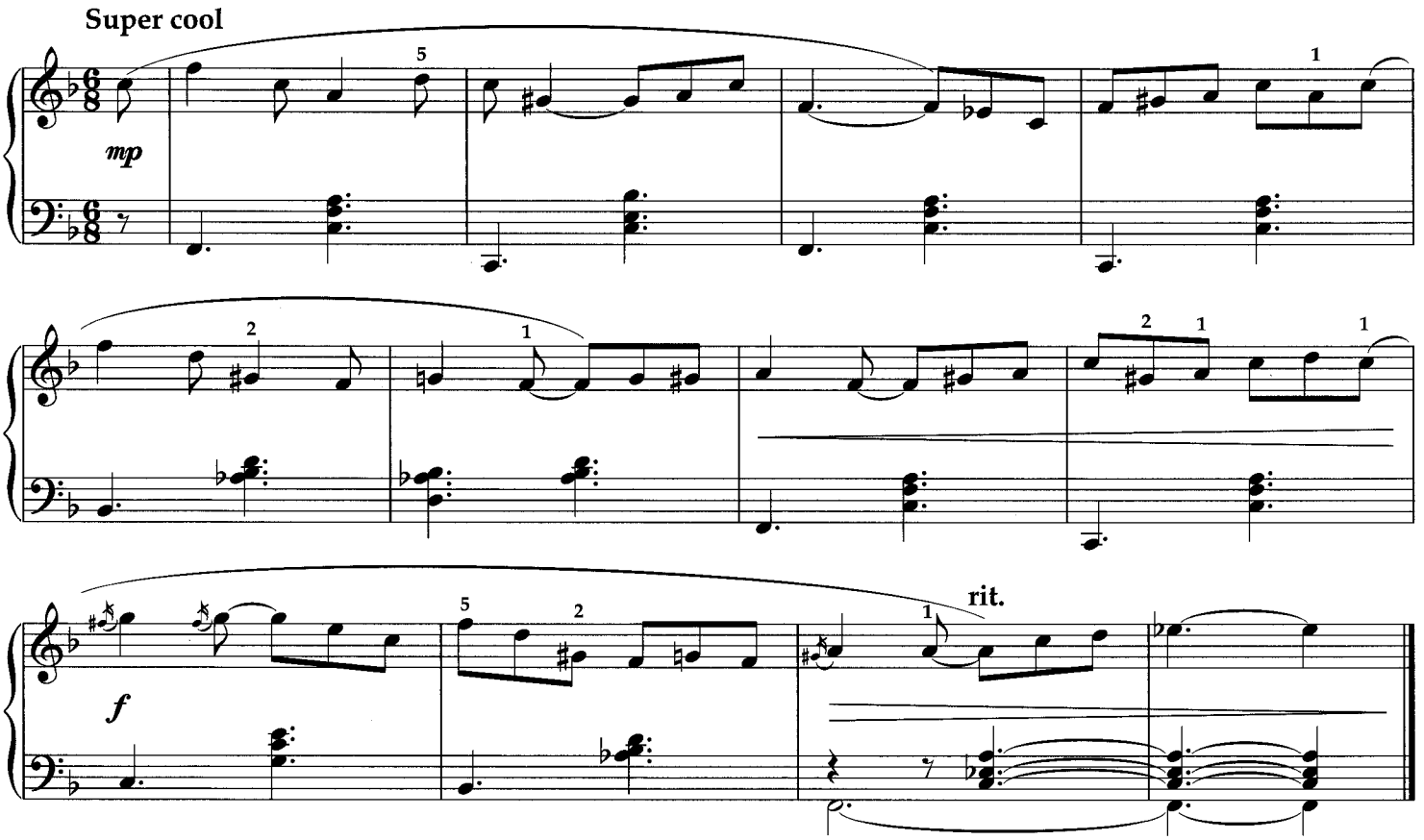


Going solo!

Floating lanterns



Super cool!

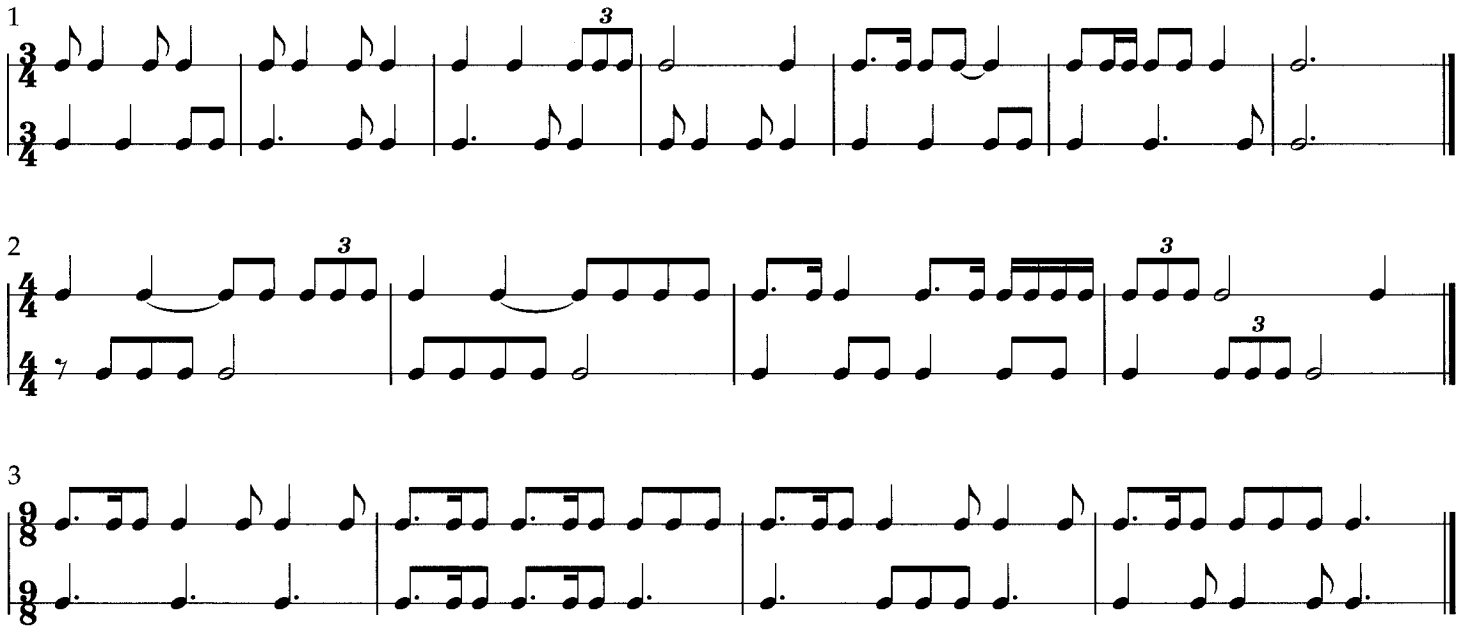


Stage 8

Here are some reminders of what should be in your mind as you prepare and then give a musical performance when sight-reading:

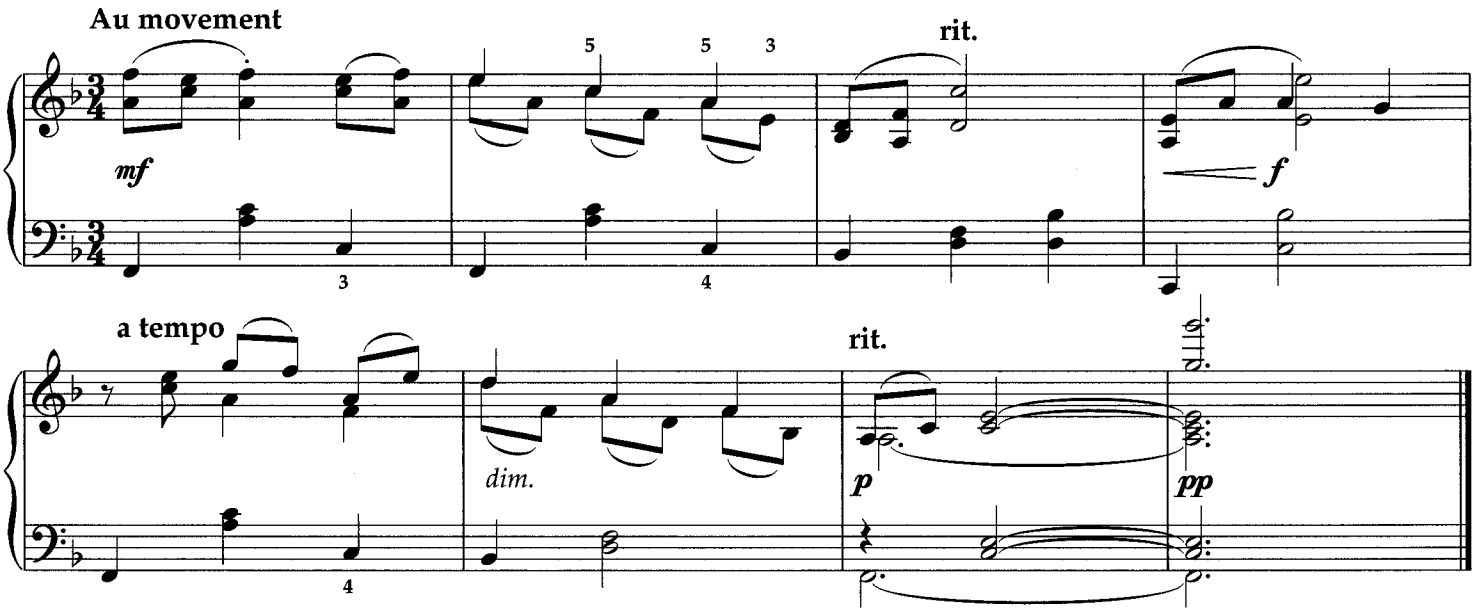
- **Choose a suitable tempo.**
  A lighter touch can help in giving the impression of speed whereas a more sustained quality of sound is appropriate in slower music.
- **Keep the pulse even and steady.**
  If you have been following the instructions throughout these books to count two bars in then you'll have no trouble in establishing a steady pulse. This will also help any musical *rubato* (appropriate in all styles of music) to be more convincing.
- **Give energy to the rhythm.**
  Use occasional (and usually unmarked) accentuation to help drive the music forward.
- **Shape the phrases.**
  Gentle (unmarked) *crescendos* when ascending and *diminuendos* when descending often help to shape phrases. Try to think where each phrase is leading to.
- **Follow dynamics and other markings.**
  These are very important in helping to bring music to life. Add more of your own if you feel they would enhance the character or add more personality to the performance.
- **Use the pedal carefully.**
  Often the pedal is over-used, causing a blurring of detail.
- **Think in the key.**
  In your sight-reading practice always play the scale and arpeggio as part of your preparation.
- **Give musical character to your performance.**
  Just like an actor gets 'in character' before a performance, think about what you want to convey and keep this strongly in mind as you play. Develop your ability to understand what a piece is saying before you begin playing.

Rhythmic exercises

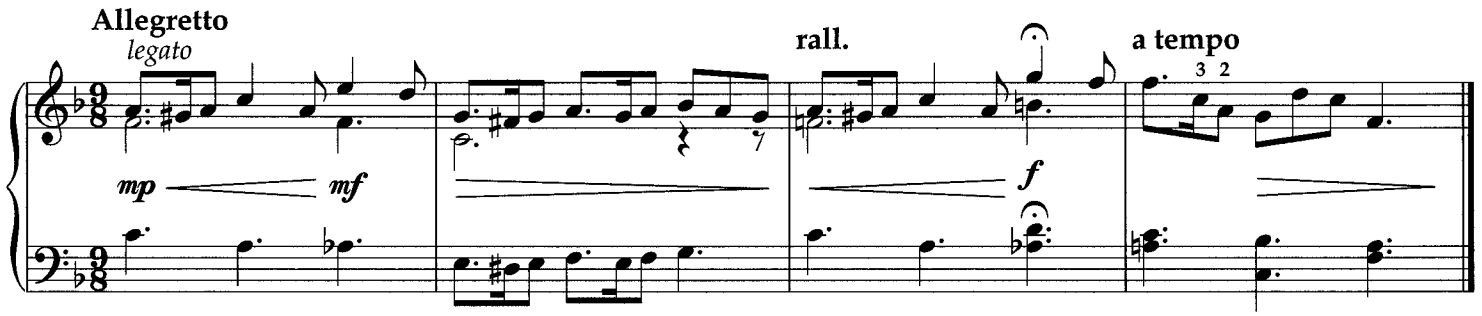


Melodic exercises

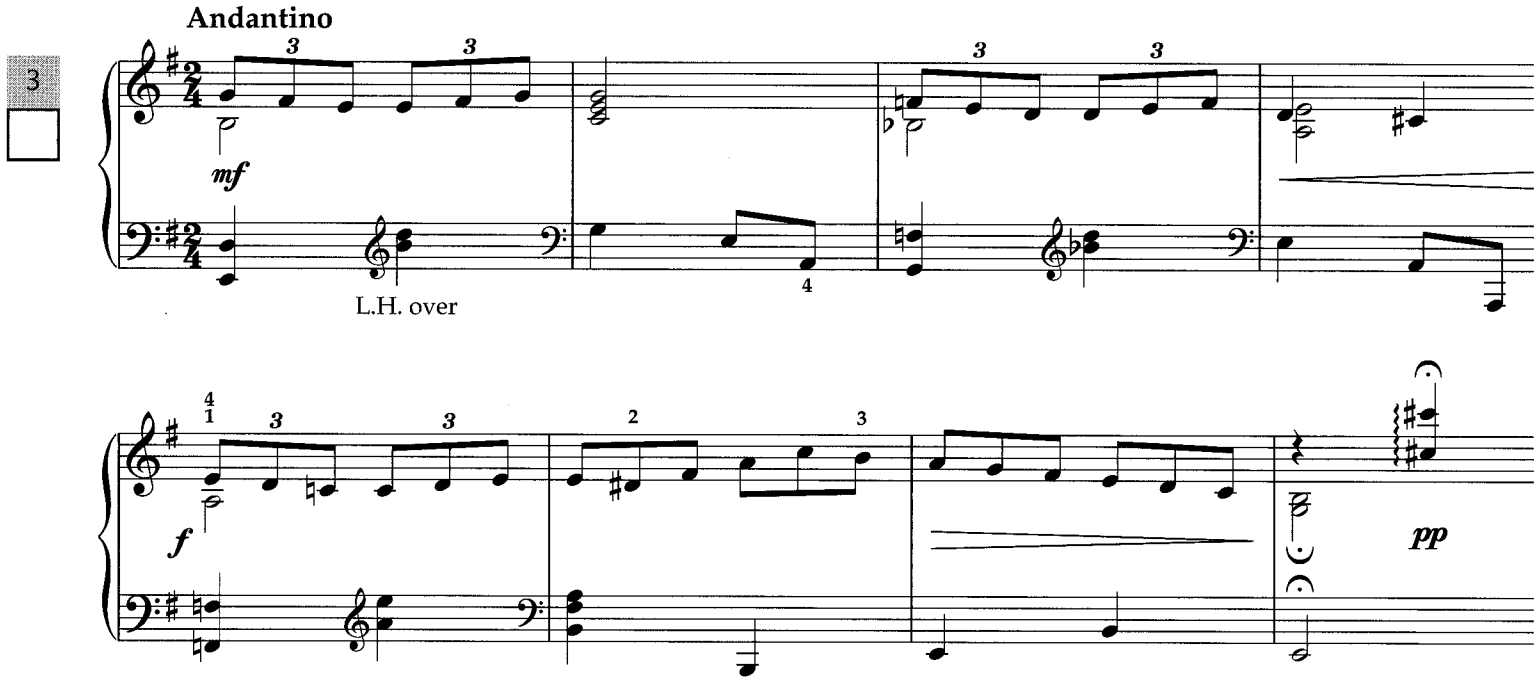
Thé dansant



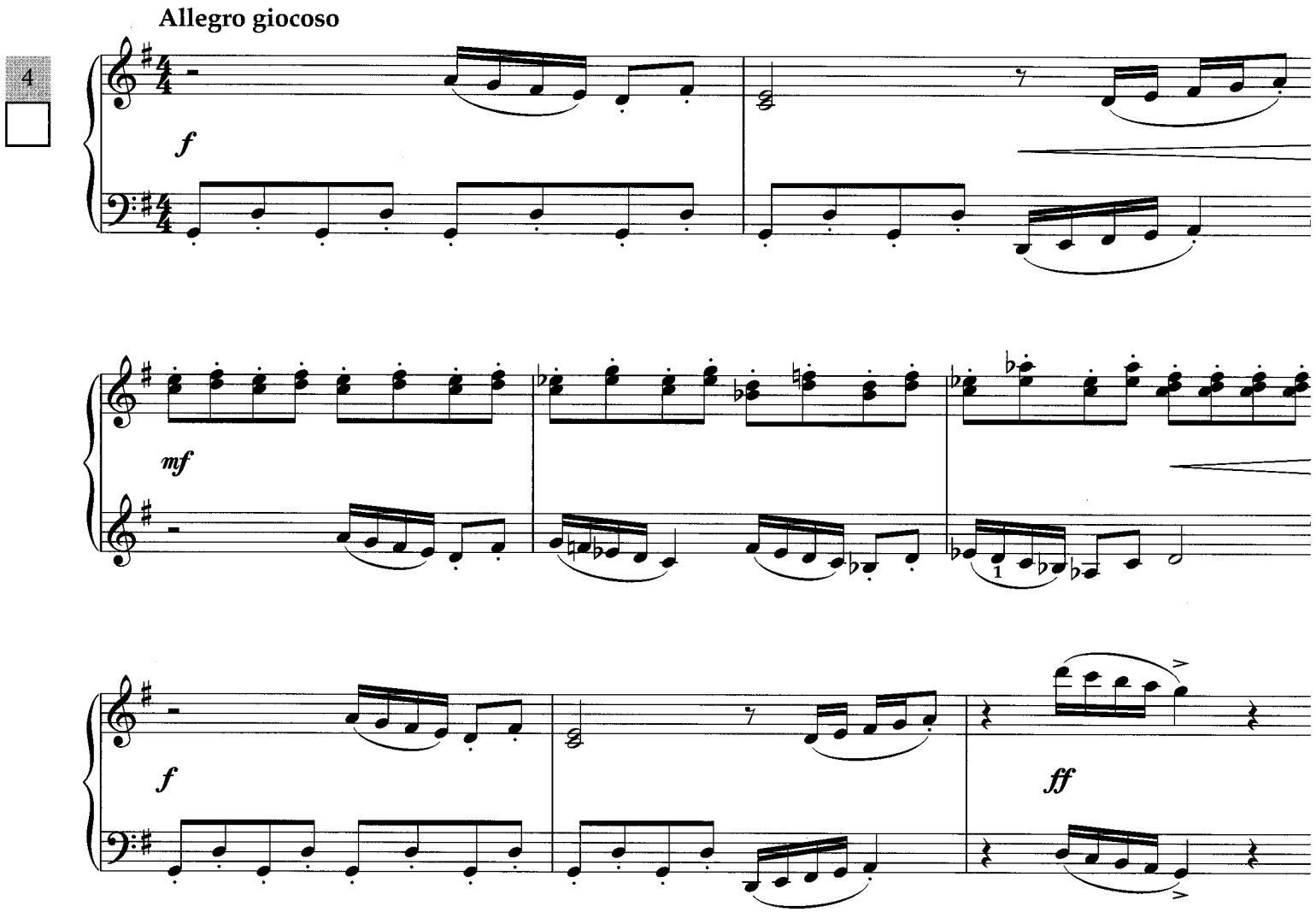
The lighthouse keeper has his lunch



Cocktails on the liner



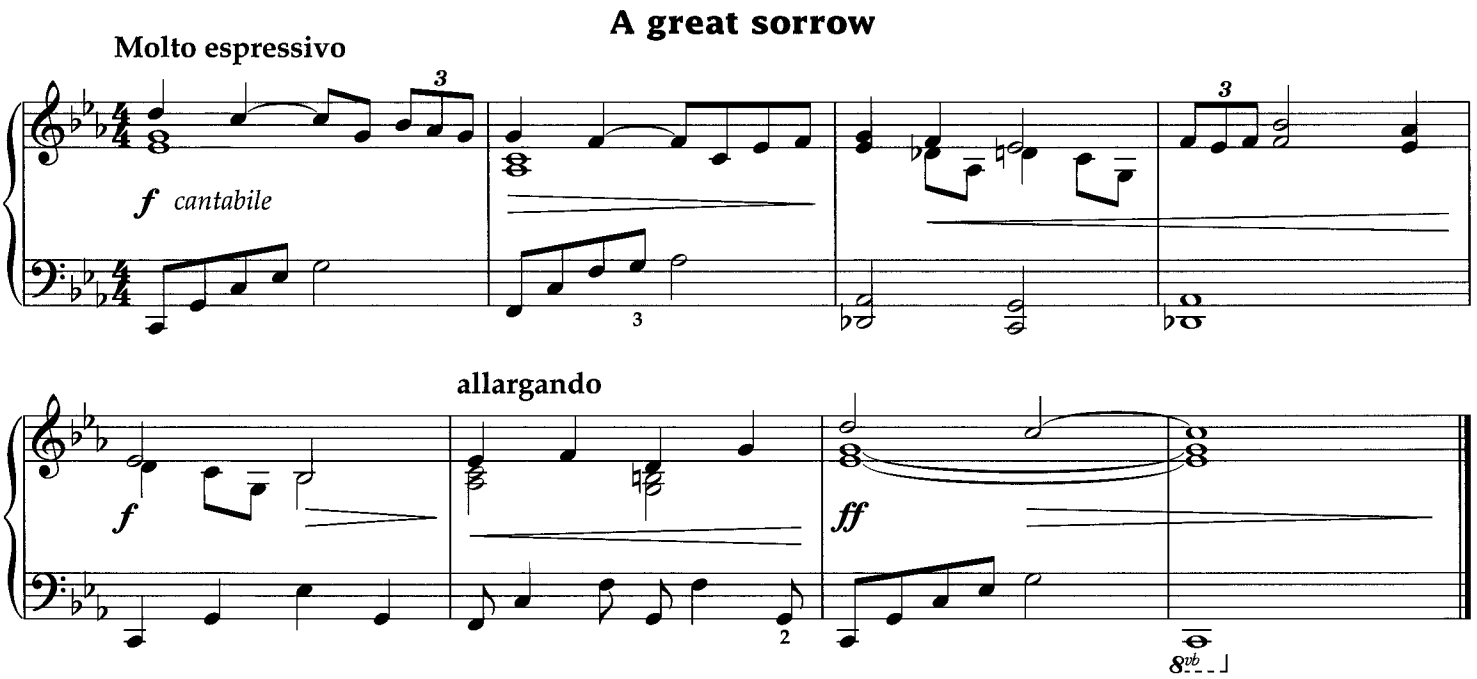
Dance of the garden gnomes



Prepared pieces

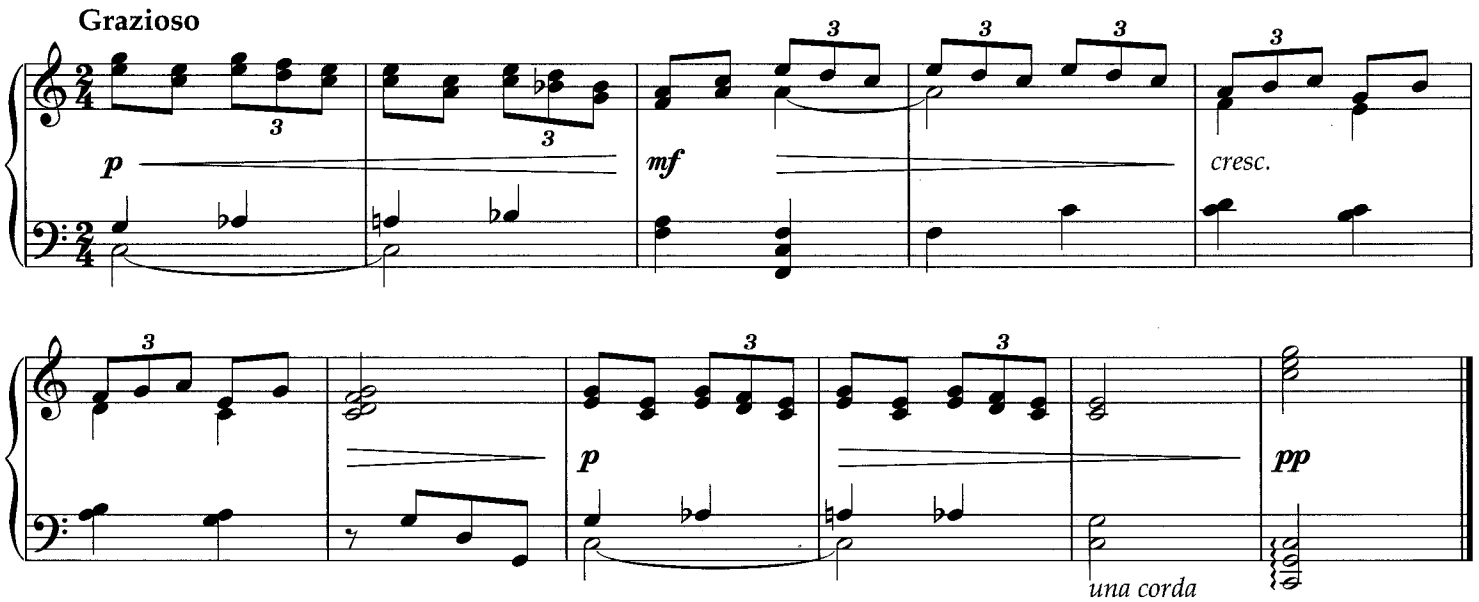
1 In which key is this piece? Can you see any familiar patterns?
2 What does the tempo mark suggest about the character?
3 Look at the various chords and passages of two-part writing and how they will be fingered.
4 Do you feel you understand the piece? Where is the climax?
5 Play the first note and try to hear the piece in your head as best you can.

A great sorrow



1 Think about how you will finger the opening two bars: right hand first, then left.
2 What pattern do the upper notes in the left-hand bars 1–2 represent? Where does this pattern return?
3 Which chord are bars 3–4 based on? Can you see a pattern in bars 5–6?
4 Play the first notes of each hand and try to hear the piece in your head as best you can.

An impressionist painting

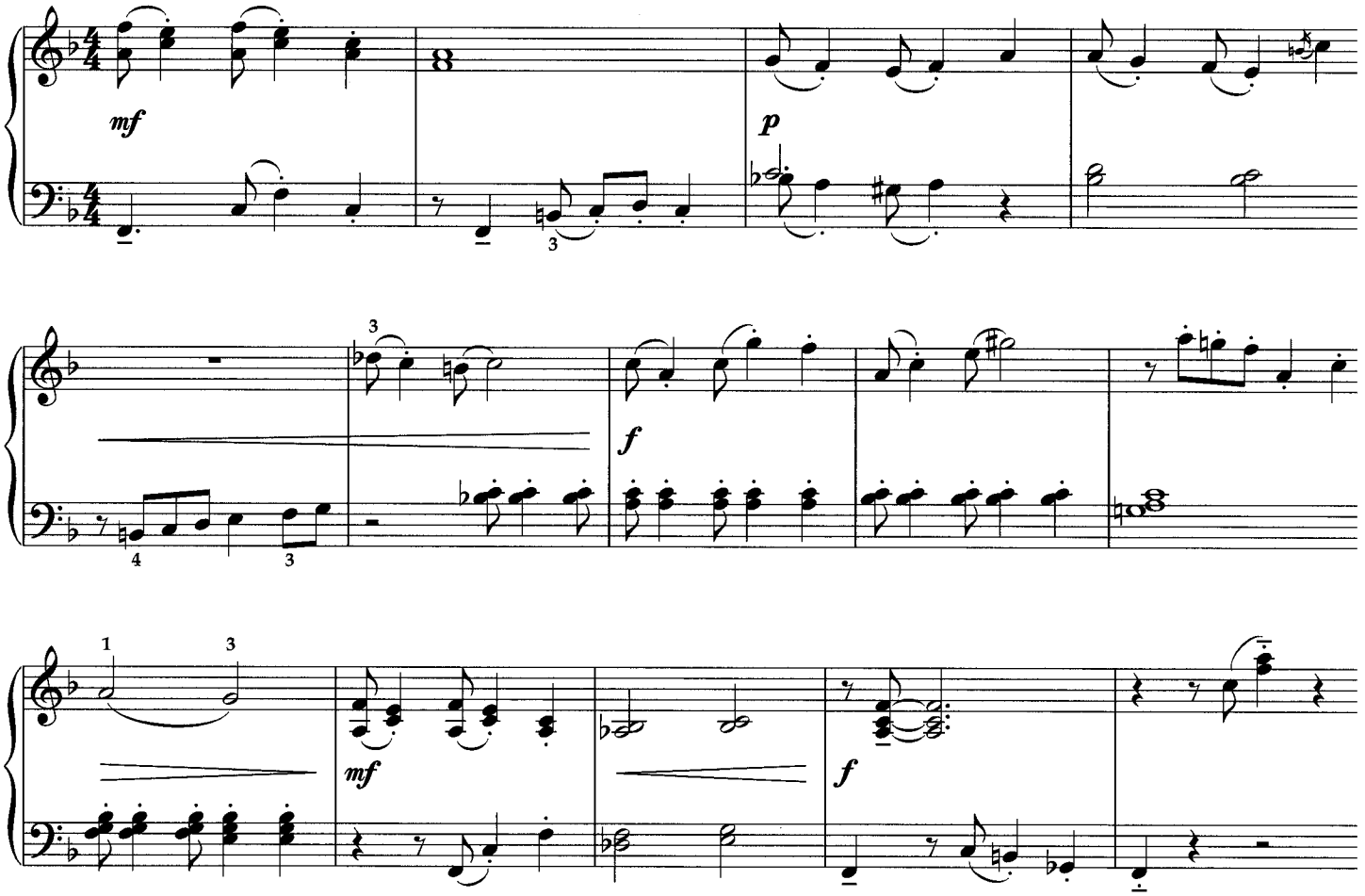


Going solo!

Coconut rum

Calypso tempo

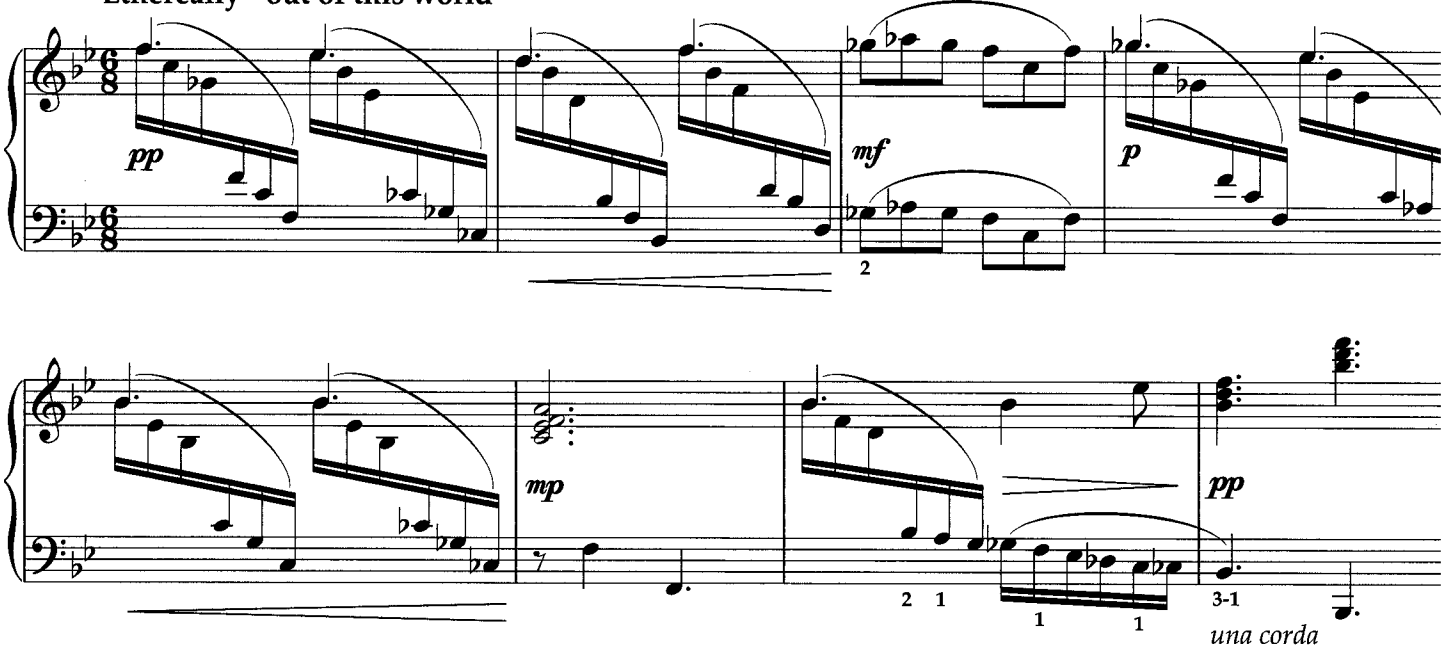
1



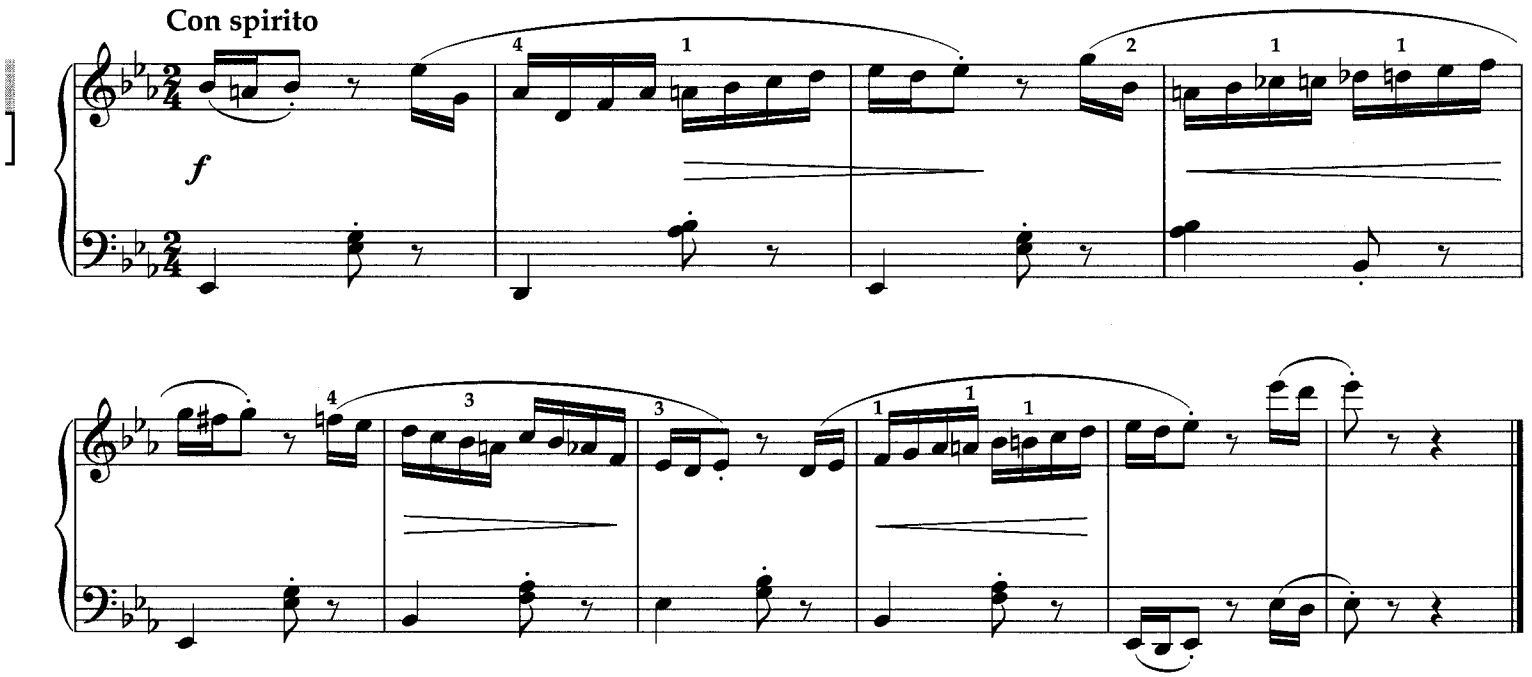
Saturn's moons

Ethereally - out of this world

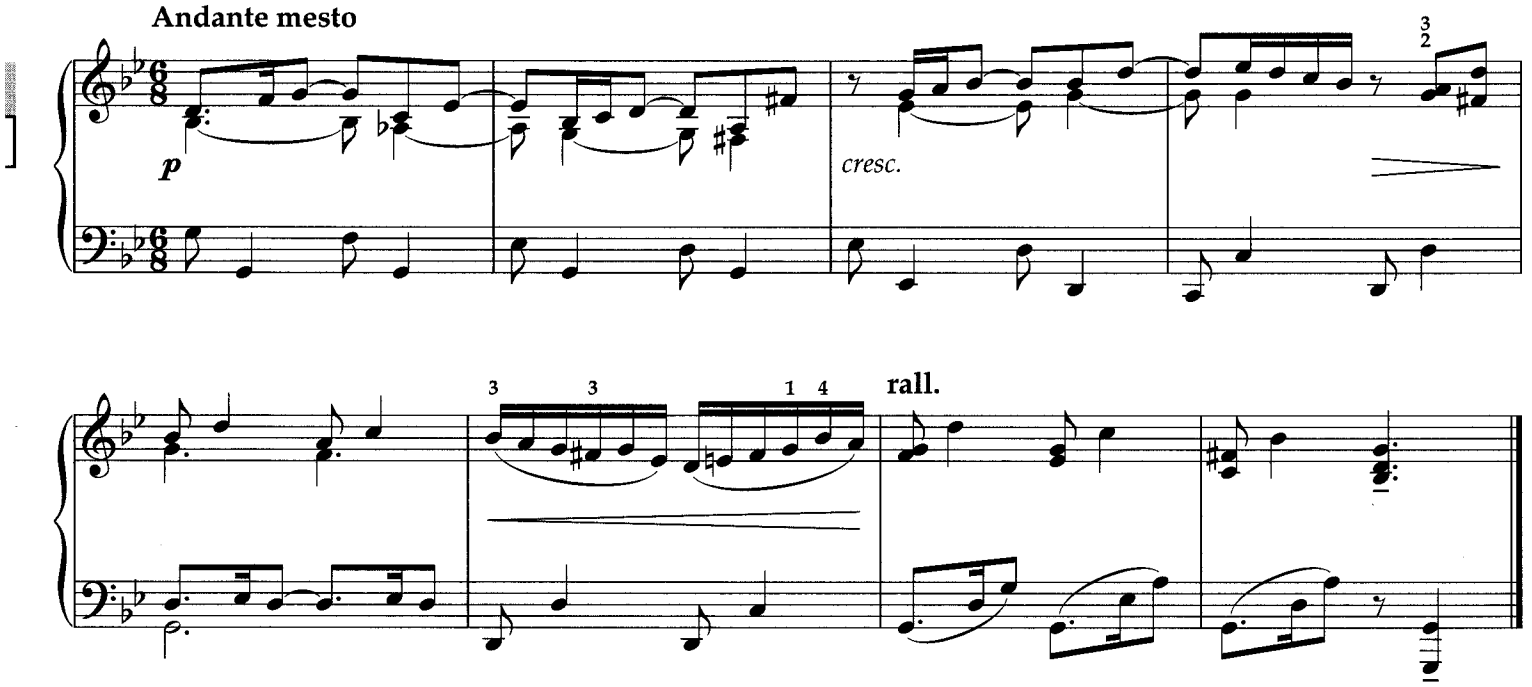
2



Larking about

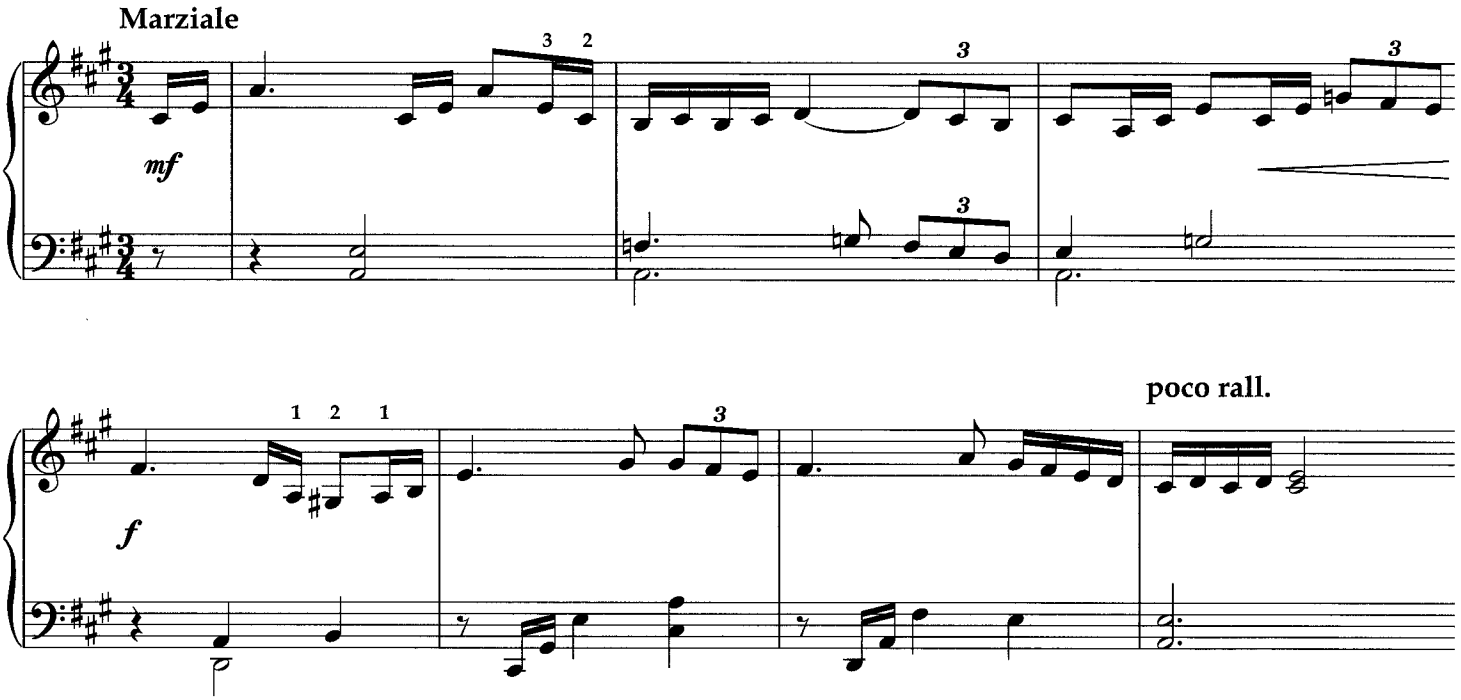


Lament



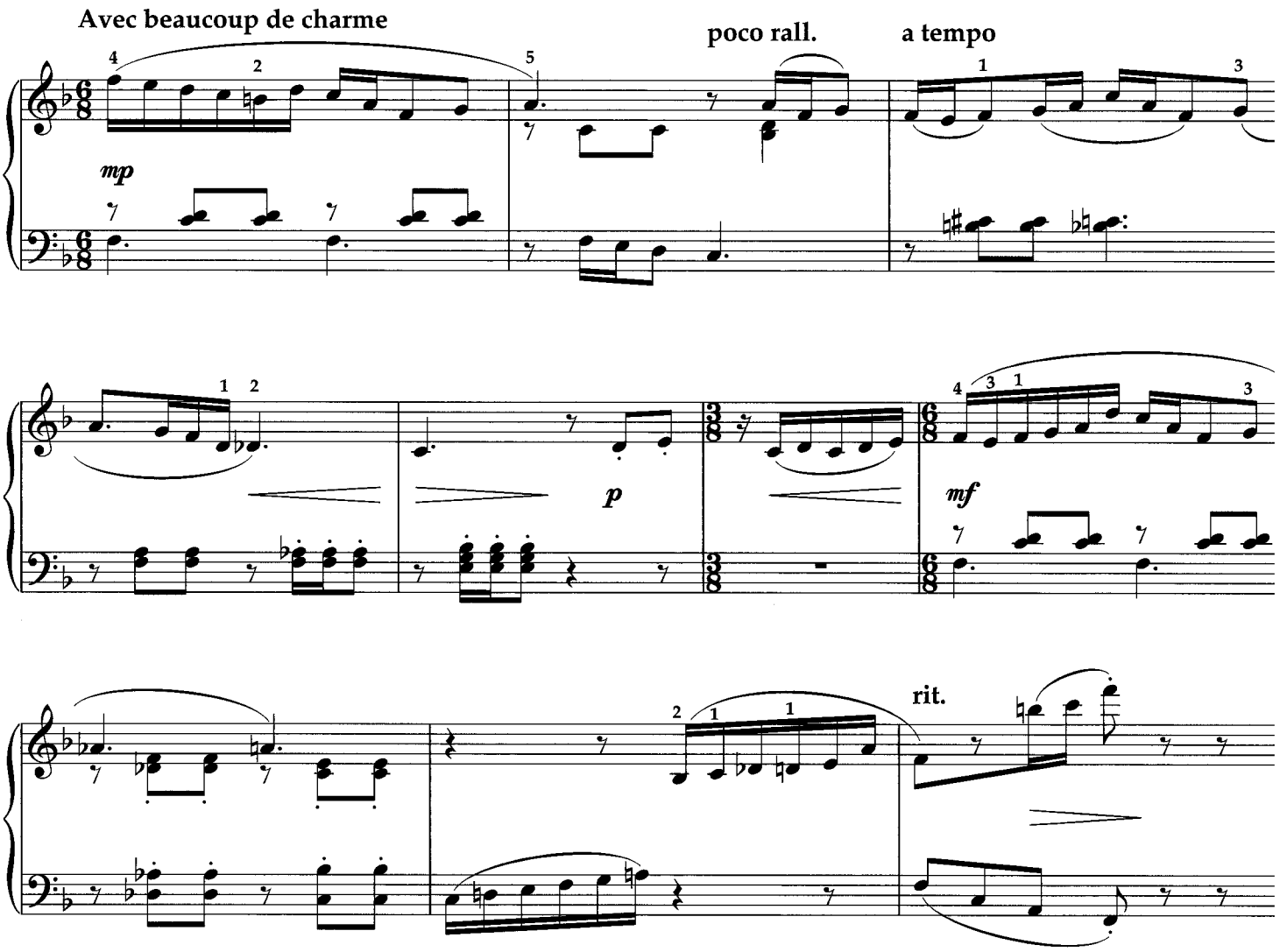
Film music

5



Dance of the grape-pressers

6



The golden rules

Get into the following habits before you play a piece at sight and you'll be well prepared:

1. Scan the piece and get a feel for the *overall musical shape and idea*. What is the mood? Are there important or recurring melodic or rhythmic patterns? *What is the piece about?* Do you understand it?
2. Check the key – look for accidentals that may suggest a modulation.
3. Notice recurring patterns – rhythmic and melodic.
4. Get a feel for the fingering and try to spot potential hand position changes.
5. Notice markings that will help you convey the character and get ready to bring them to life!
6. Count yourself in (silently) in the usual way.

When performing your sight-reading piece:

1. Maintain a feel for the pulse.
2. Keep going at a steady tempo (though some musical *rubato* if appropriate is of course welcome).
3. If you make any mistakes, ignore them.
4. Look ahead.
5. Above all, play musically – convey the mood and character.
6. If you've prepared carefully (both over a period of time in your practice and in lessons, and immediately before playing) then simply relax and enjoy the experience.