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BERNARD VAN DIEREN

PICCOLO PRALINUDETTINO FRIDATO

1934

Piano Solo

Performing Edition by Ronald Stevenson
1987

duration c. 3' 40"

Recorded: Whitetower/BMS Cassette BMS 405

BRAVURA SERIES OF PIANO MASTERWORKS
BARDIC EDITION AYLESBURY ENGLAND

NOTES ON VAN DIEREN'S *PRALINUDETTINO*

Bernard Hélène Joseph van Dieren (1887-1936) was born in Rotterdam, of Dutch and French parentage. He became friendly with Busoni and Schoenberg in the years before 1914, and his music of that time had affinities with both masters. Later his music became more conventionally tonal, though throughout, it retained great polyphonic interest. His work was much curtailed by a recurring kidney complaint from 1912 onwards, and his rate of composition became very variable. Accounts of his friendships with Jacob Epstein, Arnold Bennett and the Sitwell brothers reveal a man of penetrating intellect, broad culture and vast erudition. He became a legend in his own lifetime. Though not a pianist himself, van Dieren had a great knowledge of keyboard music. He was one of the first to write about Alkan.

Piccolo Pralinudettino Fridato was the last of van Dieren's six piano works and dates from 1934. It was the only musical work he completed that year, as most of his diminishing energies were devoted to writing his great collection of essays ***Down among the Dead Men*** (OUP, 1935). As far as is known, the 'little prelude' was not played in public by its dedicatee nor by anyone else until Eiluned Davies included it in her recording of the complete piano music of van Dieren (Whitetower Records-British Music Society cassette BMS 405, 1985).

The dedication of this work to his wife, the pianist Frida Kindler (1879-1964) was an indication of her central importance to van Dieren's life. As one of Busoni's favourite pupils she was an outstanding pianist, and it was probably through her influence that the young van Dieren was introduced to Busoni's circle about 1909. At that time Frida was having particular success in England, so van Dieren joined her there in the autumn of 1909 and they married at Marylebone Registry Office on the first day of 1910. London became their home. By the following year, van Dieren had written the extraordinary ***Six Sketches*** for piano, a muscular work of great assurance in an idiom close to Busoni and Schoenberg. Much of the development of van Dieren from the schoolboy of 1908 to the brilliant young composer of 1911 can be attributed to Frida's influence. She became totally devoted to him and to his music, and indeed at a later point, she sacrificed her concert career to maintain the household during his lengthy periods of illness. Despite the strains that their marriage underwent, their relationship survived to the end. At the beginning of 1936, two years after the composition of the ***Piccolo Pralinudettino Fridato,*** van Dieren was at work on his last task – organising a series of BBC Concerts to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Liszt. He was delighted to be able to entrust some of the most interesting music to Frida.

Alastair Chisholm
May 1988

A REMINISCENCE OF VAN DIEREN

A genius, to be loved and admired in his unsuccess, for its was not failure, rises before me in the person of Bernard van Dieren. I see him lying ill in bed, suffering from the tormenting malady to which he was martyred.....

I first met van Dieren in Guilford Street, at the house of Jacob Epstein. The sculptor, his pocket full of little ivory sculptures from the Congo, had told us that besides being a musician and a Dutchman, van Dieren looked like a Frenchman of ancient family. In fact he had the appearance of, and was dressed like, an alchemist of the sixteenth century, with a touch in his clean-shaven features of the young Napoleon, being at that date about thirty-three years old. He wore a brown velvet smock the length of a jacket, for it did not descend below his knees, and had I known only a few weeks earlier, I would have seen him conducting the small orchestra at his Wigmore Hall concert (1917) wearing a light-blue velvet coat and cap of the same light-blue material with a tassel. Van Dieren was, I believe, a great-great-grandson of Mme La Motte Valois, the adventuress who was implicated in the 'Diamond Necklace' affair at the court of Marie-Antoinette, and through her, he was descended from the Valois, for her ancestor had been the illegitimate son of Henri II (1547-1559). As I say, he had some air about him of a youthful alchemist or necromancer, and his extraordinary mental attainments were in keeping. A memory so prodigious that he could, and did in my presence, recite by heart a whole article in a newspaper he had been reading, while listening, apparently, to our conversation. He was an expert carpenter and bookbinder, making his own marbled endpapers, and, later, was able to earn a living as an electrical engineer. The extent of his reading was remarkable and his library of first editions nearly incredible for a collector of his means. As well, he had a beautiful hand-writing, and his musical scores were marvels of elegance and grace.

The music of this extraordinary being must have been largely conditioned by his perpetual ill-health. Not that he gave an impression of physical weakness. He was, indeed, exceptionally strong, but he was nearly continually in agonising pain. In the result, his music.... has a lassitude and a wavering or weary line.... Van Dieren was an authority on the ancient art of fugue and counterpoint, and it was here, perhaps, that his Netherlandish origin was apparent. He seemed to me a musician who should have been composing in another age of instruments, of lutes and viols and virginals and chamber organs. When he died, in April 1936, a musician possessing every attribute of genius except the health to carry his talents to their fruition had left the world....

Sacheverell Sitwell:
THE HUNTERS & THE HUNTED
(MacMillan, London, 1947)
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Photograph of Bernard van Dieren circa 1930
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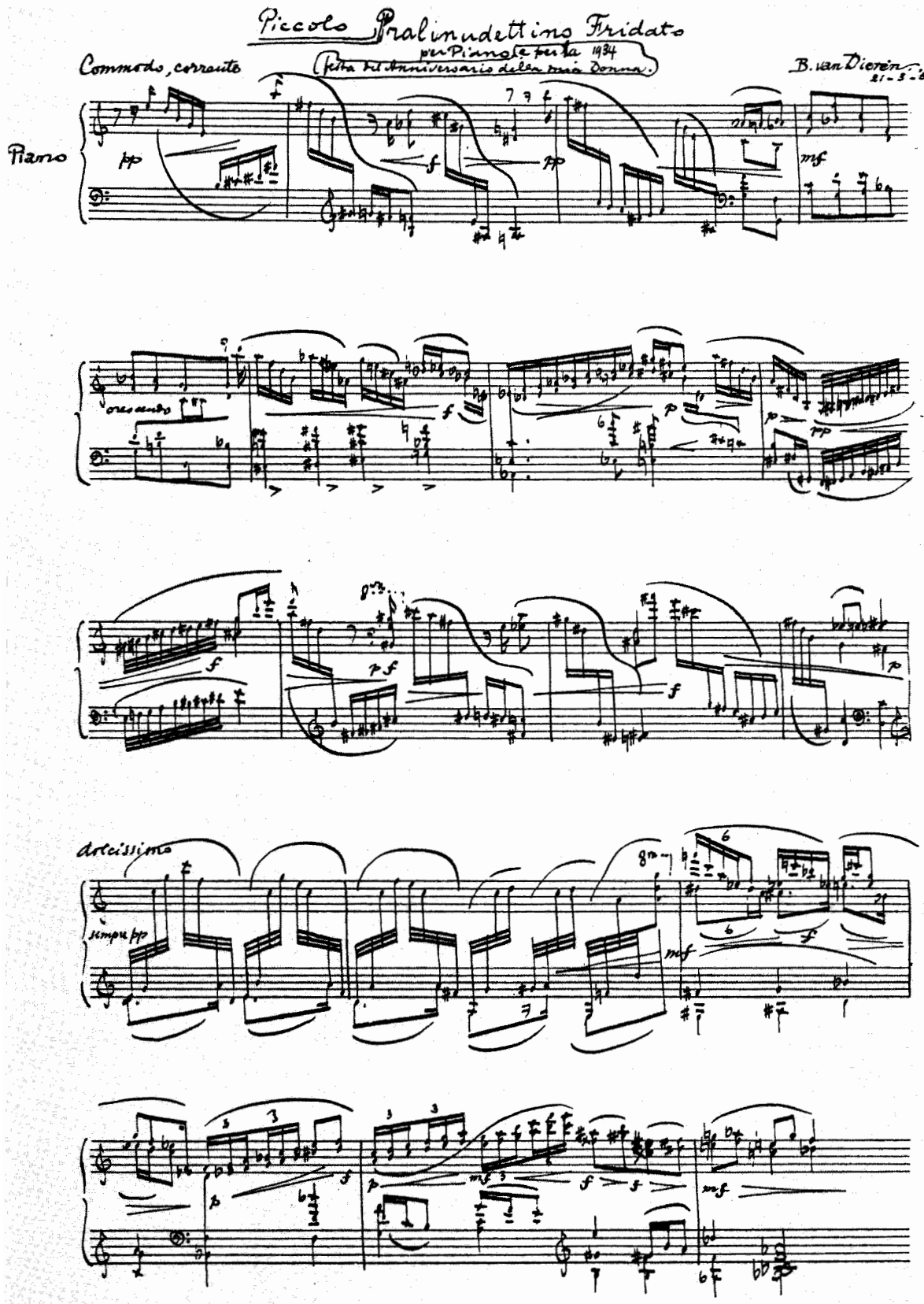
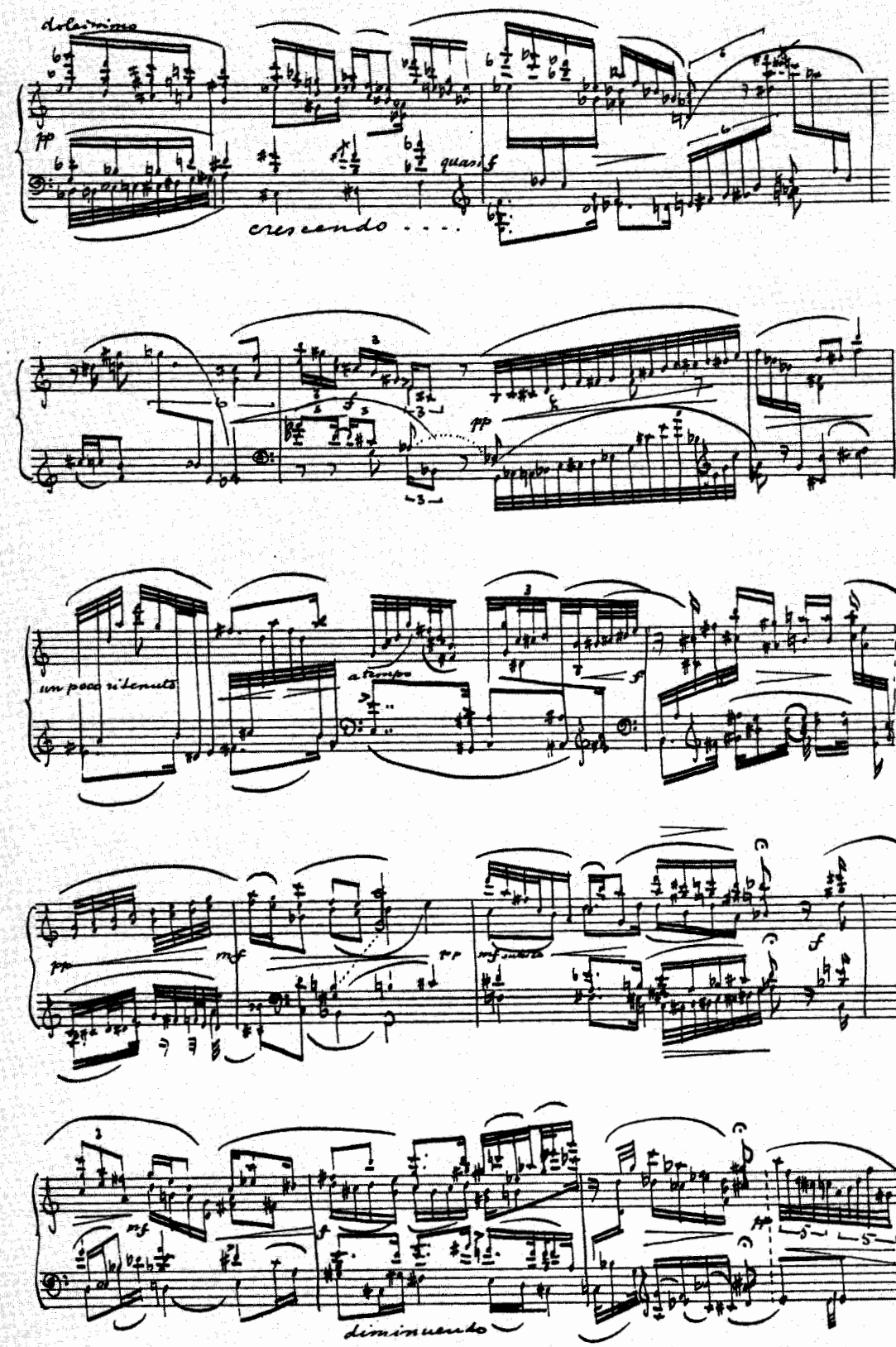
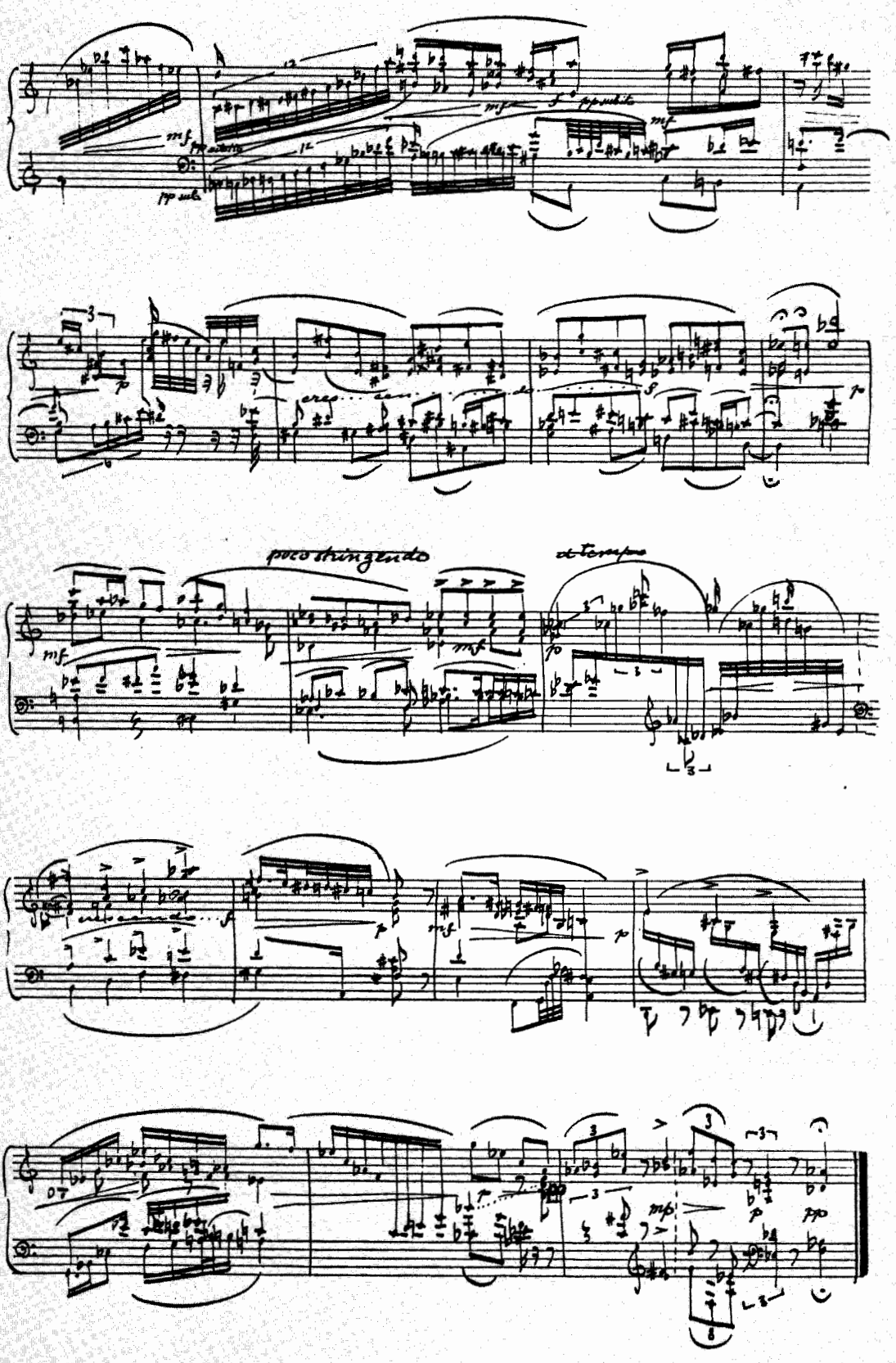


Facsimile MS. of Bernard van Dieren's 'Piccolo Pralinudettino Fridato' reproduced from the original by kind permission of the owner, Mr. Fred Tomlinson.


dolcissimo
pp
quasi f
crescendo . . . .
pp
un poco ritenuto
a tempo
f
pp
mf
pp
mf subito
f
mf
f
diminuendo
pp

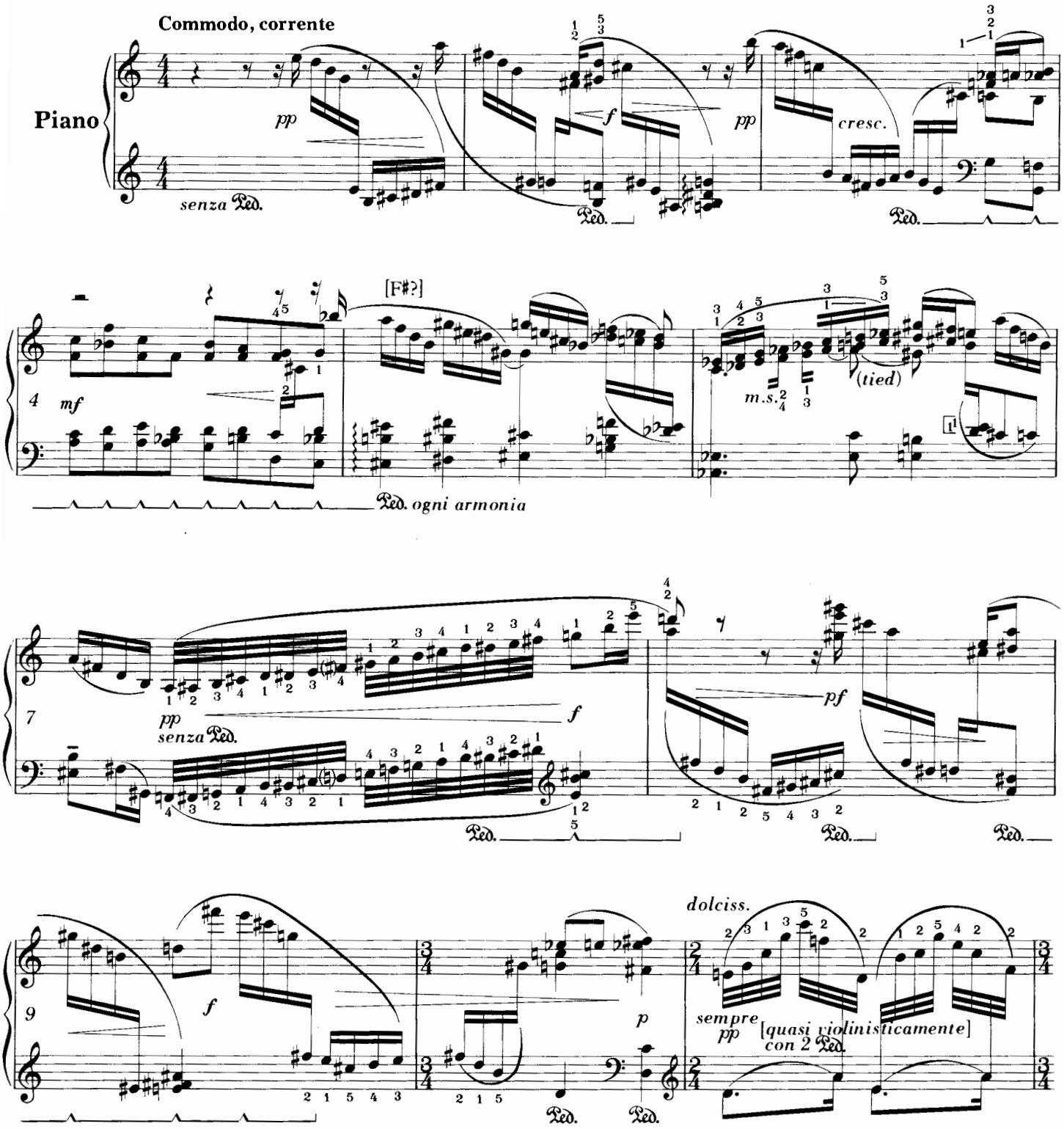

poco stringendo
a tempo

PICCOLO PRALINUDETTINO FRIDATO

per piano
e per la festa dell'anno 1934 dell'anniversario della mia donna

Performing Edition by:
Ronald Stevenson (1987)

Bernard van Dieren
21 3 1934



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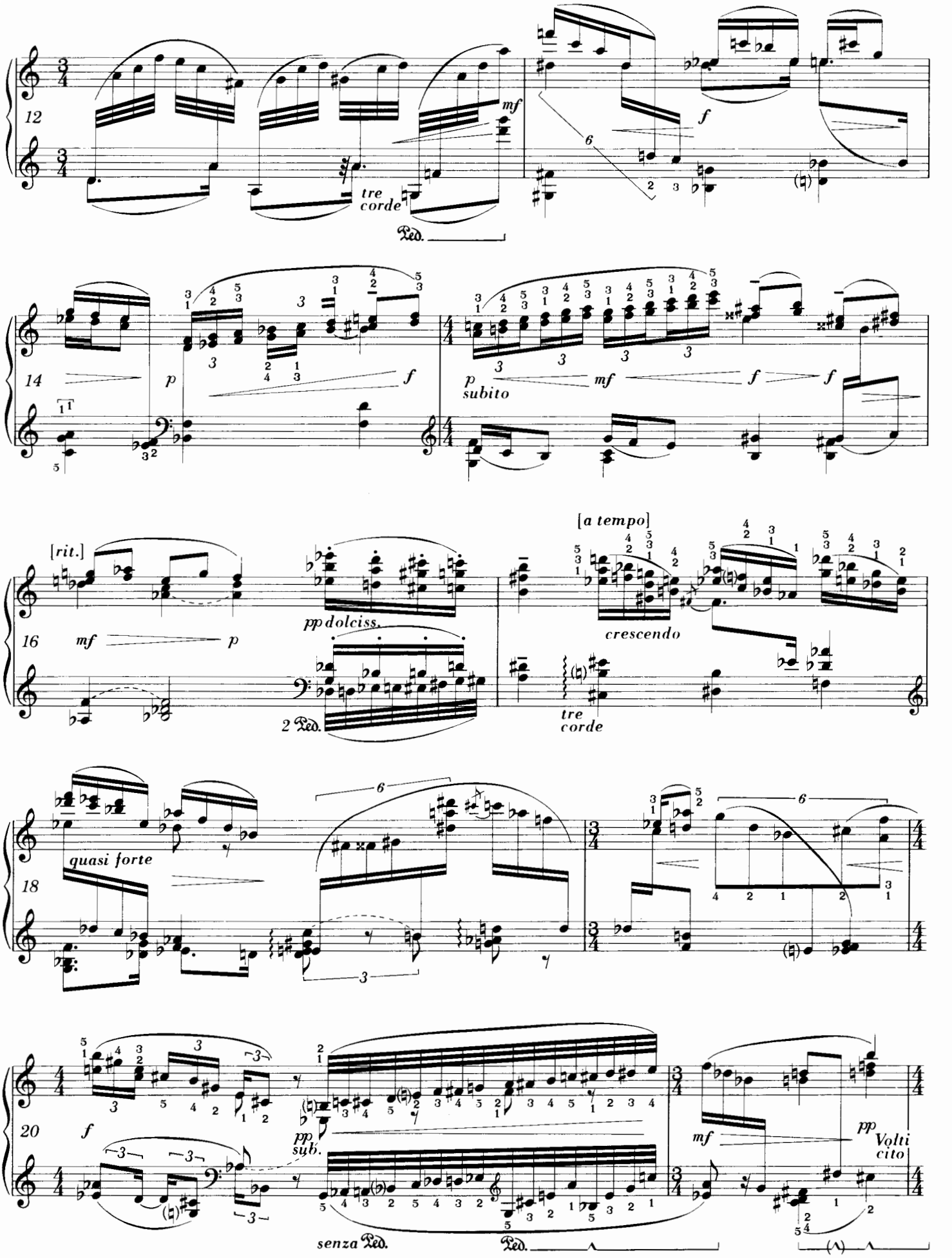
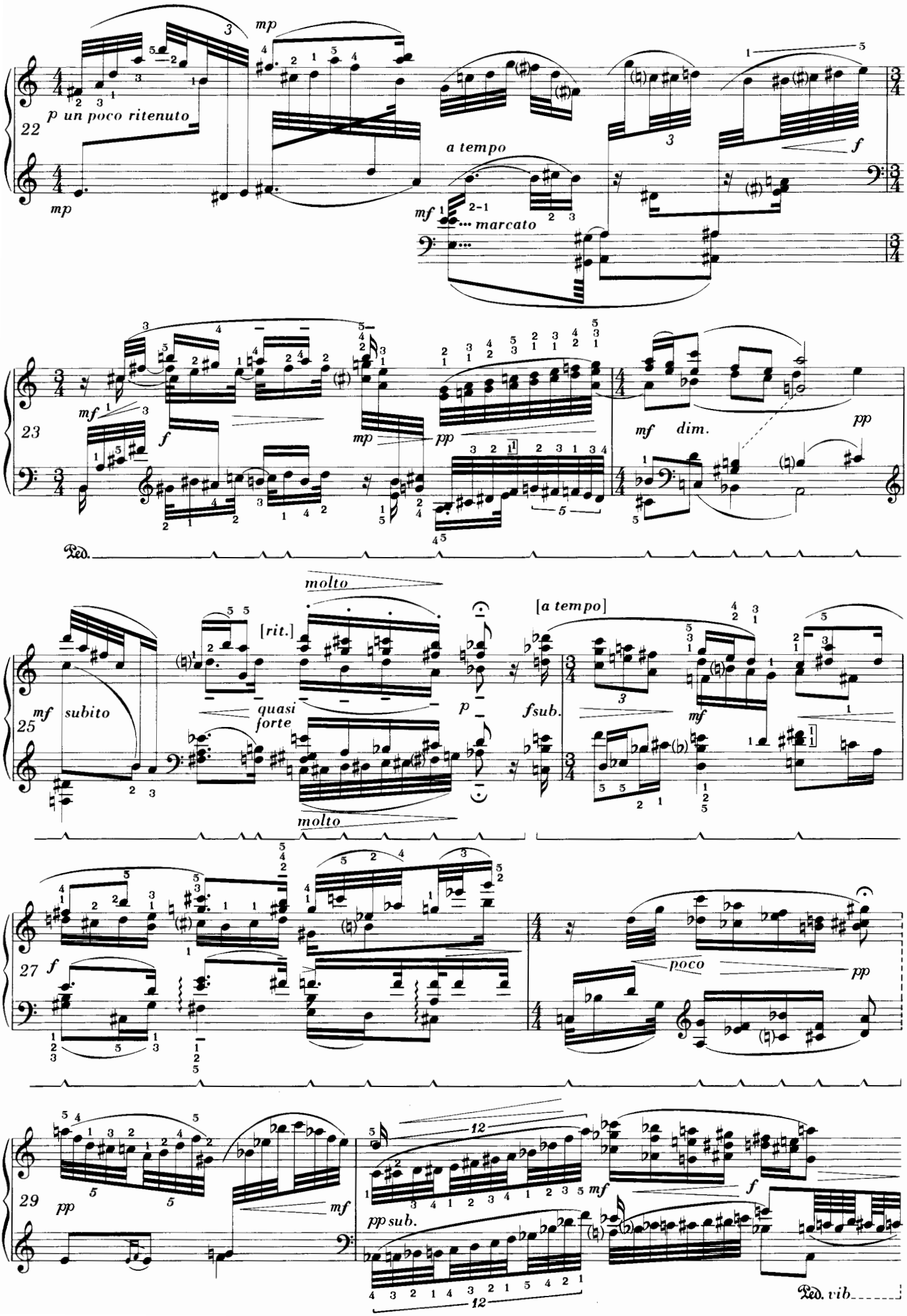
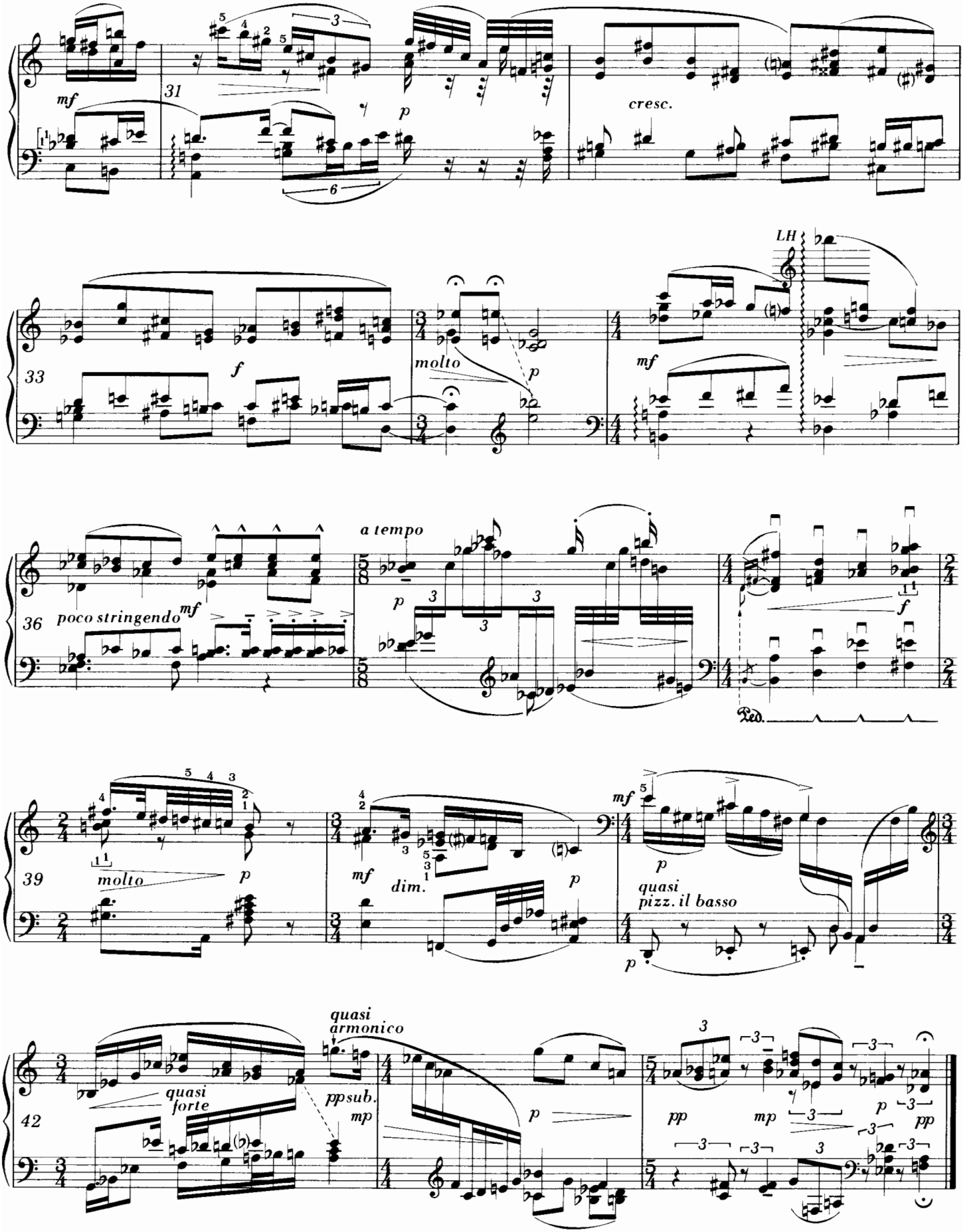

12
mf
tre corde
Ped.
f
6
14
p
f
p subito
mf
f
f
16
[rit.]
mf
p
pp dolciss.
2 Ped.
[a tempo]
crescendo
tre corde
18
quasi forte
6
3
6
20
f
pp subito
senza Ped.
Ped.
mf
pp
Volti cito


22
p un poco ritenuto
mp
a tempo
mf
marcato
f
23
mf
mp
pp
mf dim.
pp
Ped.
25
molto
[rit.]
mf subito
quasi forte
p
molto
[a tempo]
fsub.
mf
27
f
poco
pp
29
pp
mf
pp sub.
mf
f
Ped. vib.



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EDITORIAL NOTE

with piano practice and interpretative suggestions

Van Dieren's ***Pralinudettino*** has five main recurrent features:

1 – pentatonically oriented arpeggi;
2 – chorale-like chords;
3 – double thirds;
4 – unusual scales;
5 – cadences ending on unresolved chords.

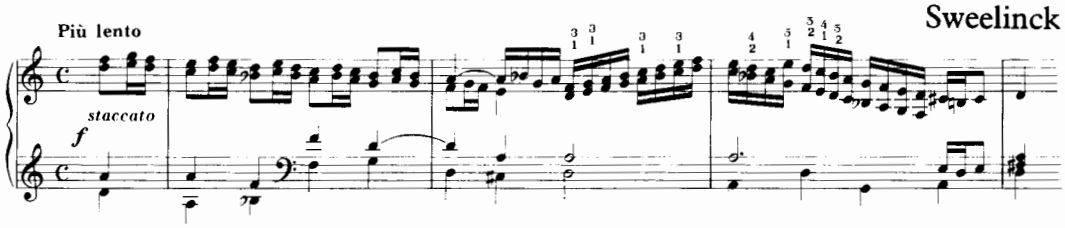
The opening pentatonic arpeggio is reminiscent of ***An Eriskay Love-Lilt*** from the Marjory Kennedy-Fraser ***Songs of the Hebrides***, a song arranged by van Dieren for the baritone John Goss and chamber choir and orchestra. It suggests that a dream-like improvisatory mood should pervade the whole of this piano piece. The theme of the majority of van Dieren's many songs is: sleep as anodyne to pain. He achieved an almost Buddhistic control over his own extreme malady. Epstein sculpted his beautiful head with closed eyes. There is no more significant master of serenity in the music of our age: an attribute rare in 20th century art and at its most refined in van Dieren. This might be remembered in interpreting the reverie-mood of the ***Pralinudettino.***

Against this dream background, the chorale-like chords in measure 4 (and later) should stand in high-relief. These chords are akin to those of Peter Warlock (van Dieren's friend and disciple) in his Belloc song ***My own Country*** (OUP, London, 1926).

A symbiotic relationship of creative stimulation existed between van Dieren and Warlock, as it did three centuries before between another Dutch and another English composer, Sweelinck and John Bull. Indeed, there is also a touch of the clavecin about this van Dieren piece.

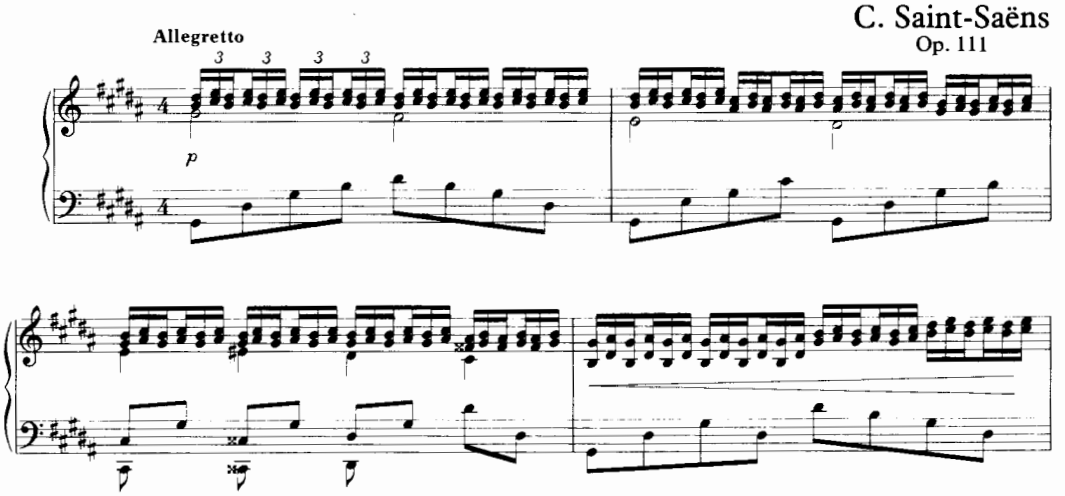
Sweelinck and van Dieren had other affinities: both were consummate contrapuntists; both made variations on French song (Sweelinck in ***Ma Jeunesse a une fin!*** and van Dieren in his free version of di Lasso's ***Mon coeur se recommande à vous*** – van Dieren had some French blood); both exemplified a penchant for textures gradually proliferating in rhythmic diminutions – longer notes giving way to rapid flourishes; and their writing of double-note passages indicates their tactile pleasure in music-making – Sweelinck as organist, van Dieren primarily as violinist.

The Sweelinck Variations mentioned afford one of the earliest examples of double-thirds:

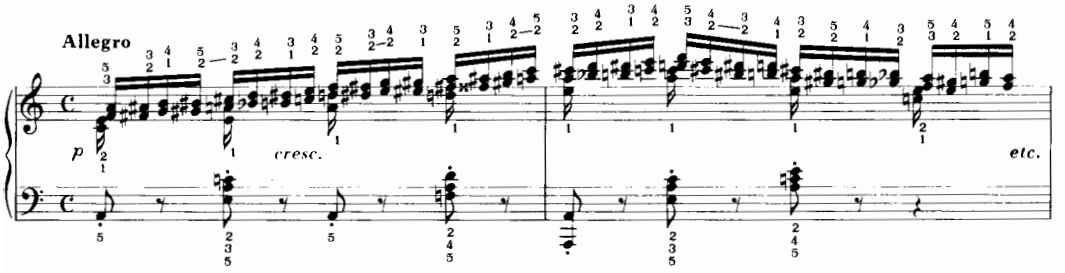


Clementi (the 'father of the Piano') was the first piano master to employ double thirds regularly, particularly in the finale of his ***Sonata in B flat, op. 24 no. 2,*** which Mozart heard him play in 1781.

The Chopin ***Etude in G sharp minor, op. 25 no. 6*** and Saint-Saëns ***Etude*** in the same key continue the evolution of double thirds.



Aspirant pianists might also explore and develop the editor's following suggestions for double third versions of the Chopin ***Etude op. 10 no. 2.***



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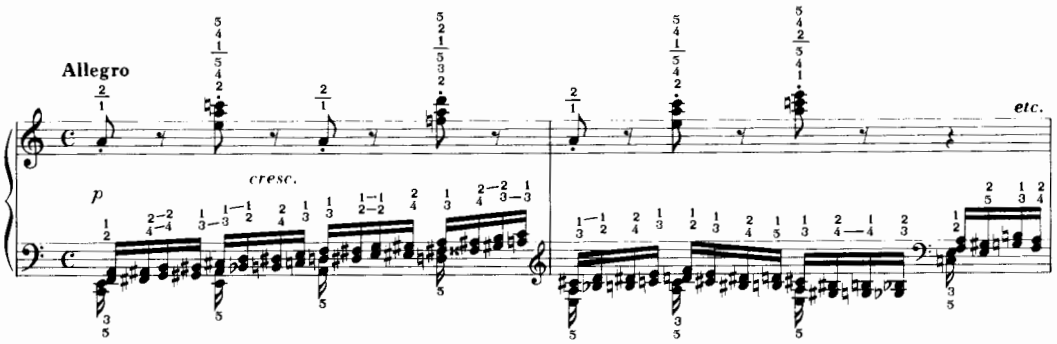


Performance of van Dieren's unusual single-note scales – unusual in their progressions of semitones and tones (see measure 7) – may be improved by practising conventional major or minor scales, but beginning on any note other than the tonic.

That great music critic of ***The Manchester Guardian***, Samuel Langford, declared that music was 'the art of cadence' – Shakespeare's 'dying fall'. If that is true, van Dieren is one of music's masters because he is certainly a master of cadences. His middle period and later works often have phrases cadencing in non-functional dominant sevenths. The ***Pralinudettino*** seems to mark a new departure in his writing – one unfulfilled – for it characteristically cadences frequently on to dominant minor ninth chords. Indeed, his invention in cadences is a hallmark of his style.

Eiluned Davies, a former piano student of Frida Kindler van Dieren who met and played for the composer, has kindly contributed these addenda:

The improvisatory nature of this piece demands great elasticity in performance, so that many melodic figurations may be given time to sound graceful and unhurried.

She suggests the following metronomic directions:

measures 1-16: ♪ = 126

measures 17-21 ♪ = 108

measure 22, beats 1 and 2: ♪ = 76
beats 3 and 4: ♪ = 80

measures 23-25: ♪ = 80

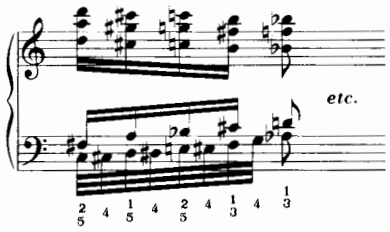
measures 26-35: ♪ = 92

measure 36: stringendo

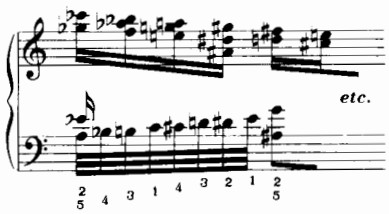
measure 37 to end: ♪ = 108

And Miss Davies also suggests the following facilitations for smaller hands, of measures 25 and 30:

From 3rd beat, measure 25



From 2nd beat, measure 30



The editor's suggested metronome directions are determined by a tripartite conception of the form. The piece has 44 measures; measures 1-22 might be ♩ = 72; measure 22, beats 1 and 2, ♪ = 80; measure 22, beats 3 and 4, to end, ♪ = 72; so that the second half of the composition is half as slow as the first half. The reasoning behind this conception is that the first half of the piece is ***predominantly*** in single-line figuration, whereas its second half is predominantly in double-note or chordal figuration. This symmetrical overview of the work may be modified by construing measures 17-21 as a transition, with ♩ = 60, to accommodate the more difficult figurations. Observe how measures 17 and 18 are a variation of measures 5 and 6, with the same harmonic progression shifted to one beat ahead in the later passage.

The extent of editing is, of course ascertainable from a comparison between the facsimile of van Dieren's manuscript and the performing version; enabling the reader to make his/her own choice in anomalous circumstances.

Ronald Stevenson
June 1988