Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
La Sirène

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D.F.E. Auber. Engraving from an ink drawing (c. 1850)

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INTRODUCTION

La Sirène, an *opéra-comique* in three acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe, was first performed at the Opéra-Comique (Deuxième Salle Favart) on 26 March 1844.

The scene is laid in the Abruzzi Mountains, during the Restoration or, alternatively, around 1840. Three travellers, the operatic impresario Bolbaya, his aged servant Mathéa and the naval ensign Scipion, hear in the distance the entrancing song of the Siren, who lures unwary travellers to an ambush laid by her brother, the bandit chief Marco Tempesta. The innkeeper Scopetto and the Duke of Popoli appear. The Duke is upset because the Siren has threatened to expose the illegitimacy of his title. In a solo aria for which the others leave the stage, Scopetto reveals himself as Marco Tempesta.

In act 2 the bandits' ship has been captured, but Scopetto has a plan to smuggle their contraband through the Duke's estate, using Bolbaya's troupe as a front. Zerlina, the Siren, reveals she has fallen in love with a young ensign whom she saw at Naples. She recognizes Scipion as her officer, but the smugglers identify him as the ensign who seized their ship. Scopetto saves him from death at the cost of an oath that he will not reveal their identities. Bolbaya is forced to declare that the bandits are his opera troupe, with Zerlina as prima donna. Scopetto has Scipion arrested as the real Marco Tempesta, while reminding the ensign of the oath he has sworn.

As act 3 opens the contrite bandits plot how to release Scipion as they perform at the Ducal palace. Their off-key singing arouses the Duke's suspicions. Scopetto forces Bolbaya to identify himself as the real Marco Tempesta to the soldiers who come at the Duke's call. Scipion enters with a group of marines to arrest Scopetto. Mathéa then produces papers to show that Scipion is the rightful Duke of Popoli and that Scopetto is his cousin.

Robbers, smugglers, and counterfeiters play a significant role in the works of Scribe. The smugglers of this opera provide a variant on the popular robber motif. The bandit's sister Zerlina plays the role of the sirens of antiquity, attracting by her singing unsuspecting travellers into ambush where they are mercilessly robbed by her brother and his companions. Apart from his villainous profession, Marco Tempesta has a generous soul; he forgives his enemies, marries his sister to a young naval officer who has captured the fortune of the smugglers, and, having made them happy, escapes by opportune evasion and witty revelation of his true identity. The dialogue is agreeable, and the episodes ingeniously disguise a certain narrative thinness.

The music in its style and character belongs to Auber's third period. There is an expansiveness in the melodic phrases and a sensibility that speaks more powerfully than in the earlier works, with a preponderance of florid writing, especially in the finales of acts 2 and 3.

The overture is very arresting, made up as it is of a beautiful song for the violoncellos and an elegant series of waltzes. This *adagio* introduction evokes the character of the mysterious siren, and is taken from the quartet in the act 1 finale where the four male protagonists voice their hopes and expectations, all associated with the siren who is heard in the mountains, but remains invisible. The *Allegro non troppo* waltz sequence is made up of two different sets, each in several sections. The first set, with its perky melody for unison clarinets and piccolos, establishes the mood;

the second is taken from the duet for Zerlina and Scopetto in act 2. A transition leads back into the second waltz sequence, in the dominant (the tonic form reserved for the recapitulation). A triplet figure connects this waltz to the Tyrolienne—a motif relating to Zerlina's identity as a siren of the mountains. The overture is brought to a climax in *Allegro assai* (6/8) by another whirling waltz. In all Auber's waltzes, a square-cut 3/4 metre is present (without the rhythmic elaborations, like hemiolas, found in Chopin, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, or Glazunov).

Act 1 contains the couplets "Ô Dieu des flibustiers" which becomes a recurring motif throughout the work, appearing as solo, trio and duet. The quartet "Ô bonheur qui m'arrive" makes a considerable impact. Act 2 is orchestrated with remarkable talent, and contains the Siren's couplets "Prends garde, montagnards"; a moving scene between brother and sister; and a romance intercalated in the trio "De nos jeunes années". The soprano otherwise has few solos in this opera. But the truncated cavatina in act 2 "Ah! je n'ose pas la m'empêche, hélas" illustrates how Auber sometimes introduces melodic charm by a sudden shift to the mediant, or wide leaps to non-triadic notes. The downward cascading roulades of the *cabalette* relate to the melodic contour of the dominant waltz motifs. One of Auber's best examples of this type of dance is in act 2, and already familiar from the overture ("C'est quel qu'ouvrier?"). Here the central duet of the opera is realized in terms of a waltz modality. Act 3 is structured by the recurring chorus "Les chagrins, arrière", another scene between brother and sister, the dénouement of the imbroglio and the vocalise of the prima donna.

The original cast consisted of: Gustave-Hippolyte Roger (Scopetto); Mlle Louise Lavoye (Zerlina); Marius Pierre Audran (Scipion); Ricquier (the Duke of Popoli); Henri (Bolbaya); Mlle Geneviève-Aimeé-Zoe Prévost (Mathéa); and Charles-François Duvernoy (Pecchione, a companion of Scopetto). The work remained in the repertoire until 1887, numbering 164 performances (including 17 at the Théâtre-Lyrique, 1865-66). It was translated into German, English, Polish, Swedish and Russian, and was produced across Europe from London to St Petersburg, reaching London in 1844, Warsaw in 1845, and Stockholm, Prague and St Petersburg in 1846. In the Americas it was performed in New Orleans (1845), New York and Buenos Aires (both 1854).

Zerlina and Scopetto (act 2 scene 4). Engraving from Scribe's Works (1853-5)

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DES OPÉRAS FRANÇAIS

LA SIRÈNE

OPÉRA-COMIQUE EN TROIS ACTES

MUSIQUE DE

D. F. E. AUBER

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—	Fra Diavolo.	12 »			

A PARIS

CHEZ E. TROUPENAS ET Cie

RUE NEUVE-VIVIENNE, 40

PERSONNAGES.

Soprani.	*Tenors.*	*Basses.*
ZERLINA.	SCOPETTO.	BOLBAYA
MATHÉA.	SCIPION.	LE DUC.
		PECCHIONE.

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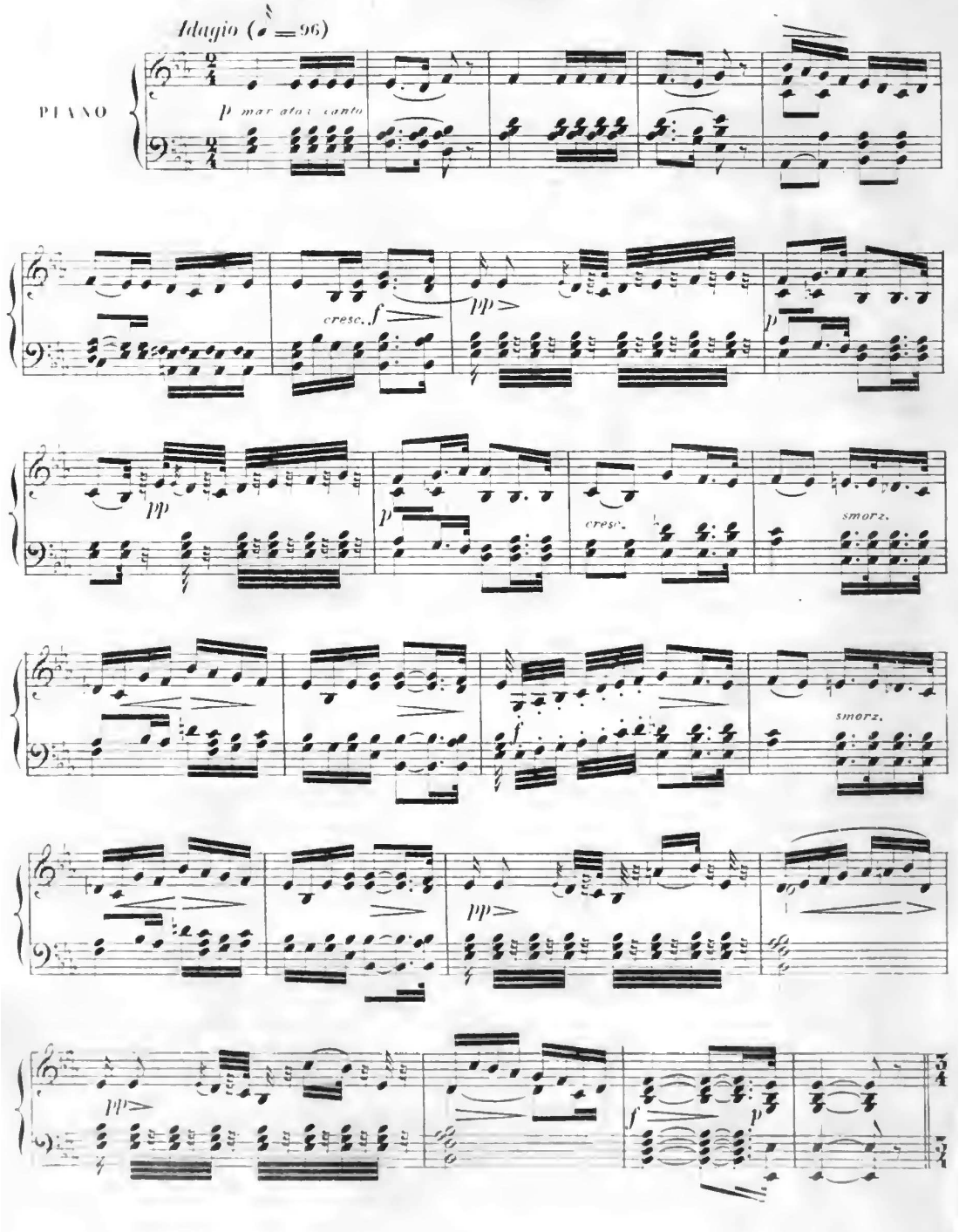
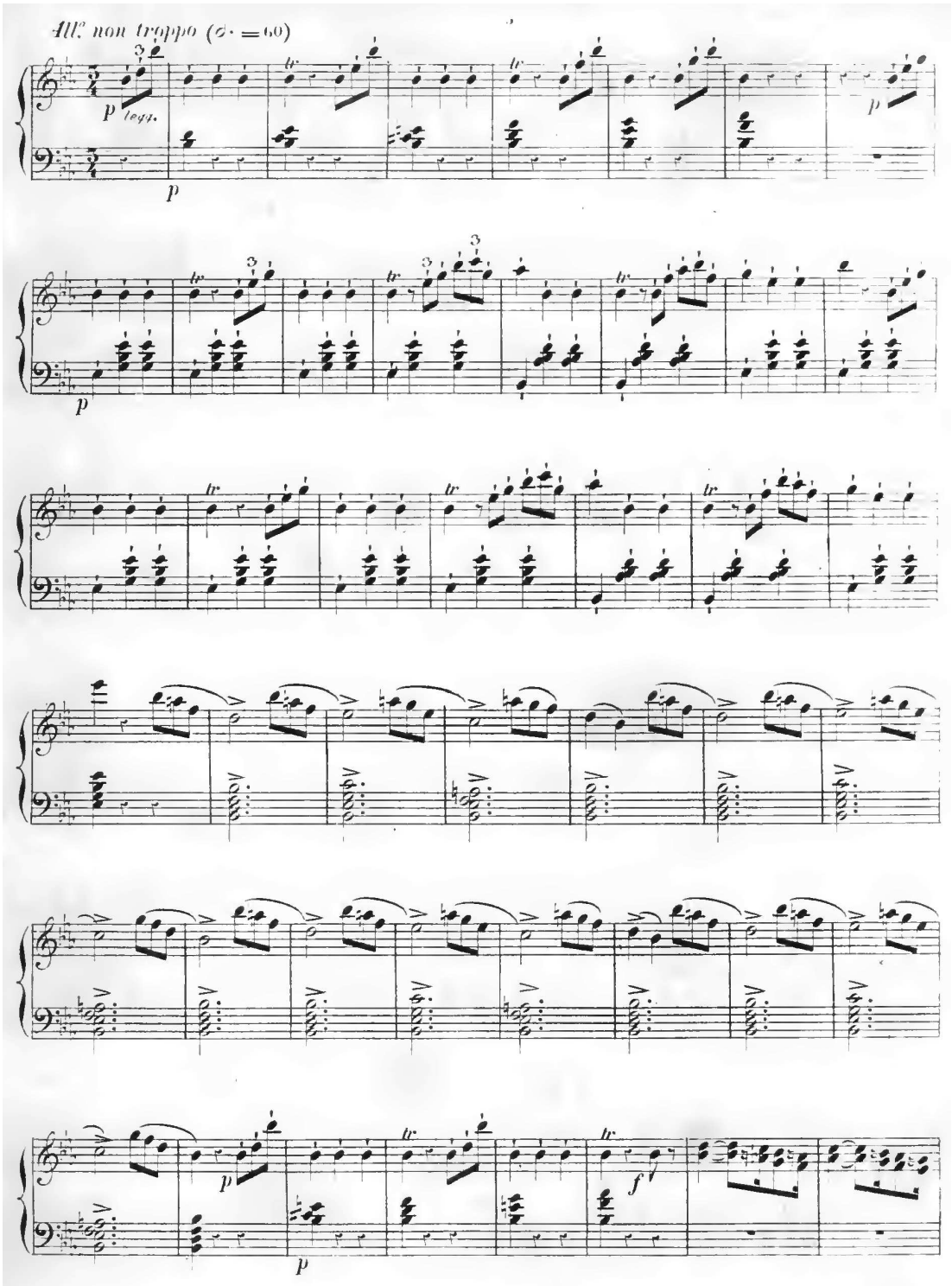
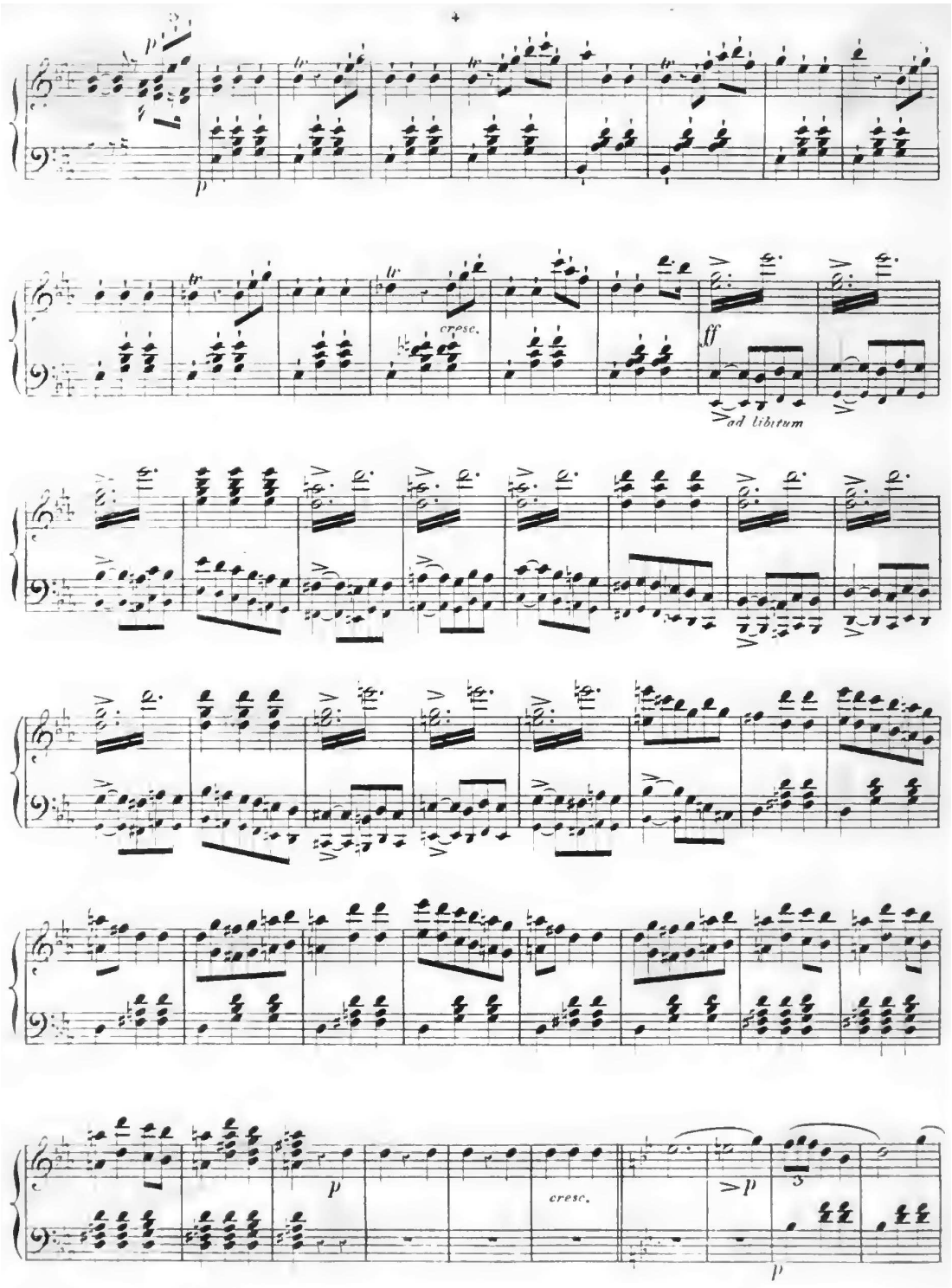
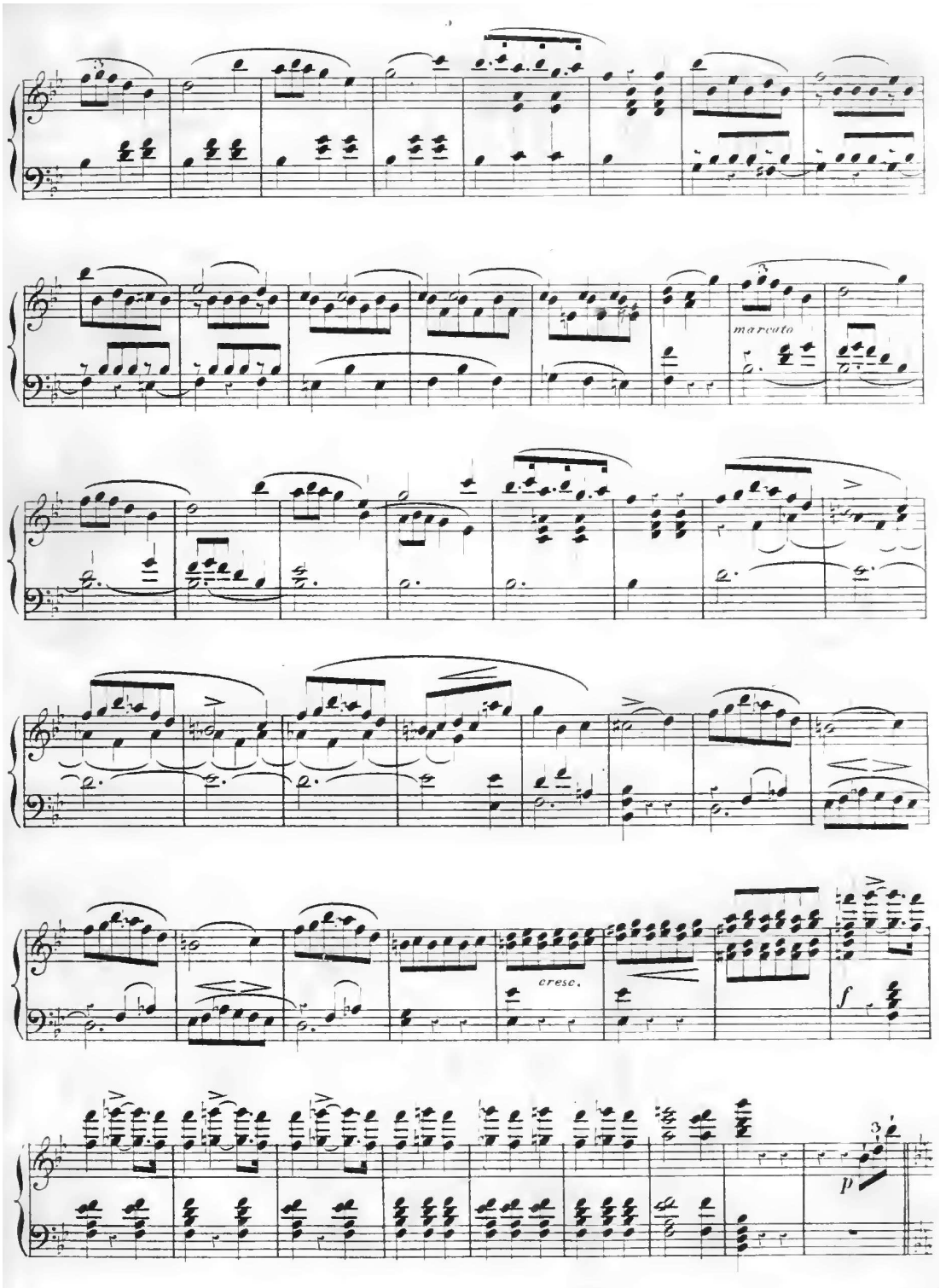
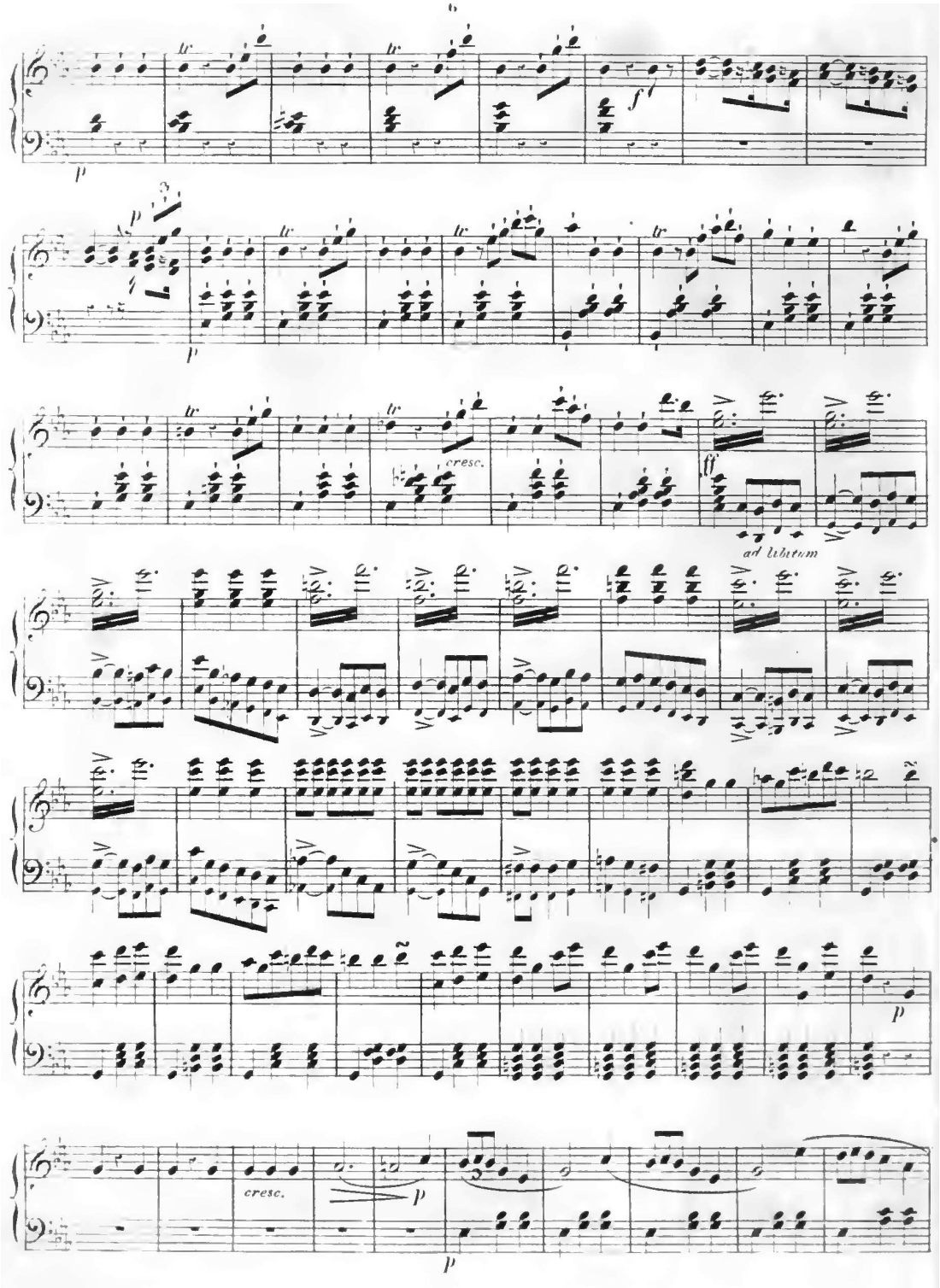
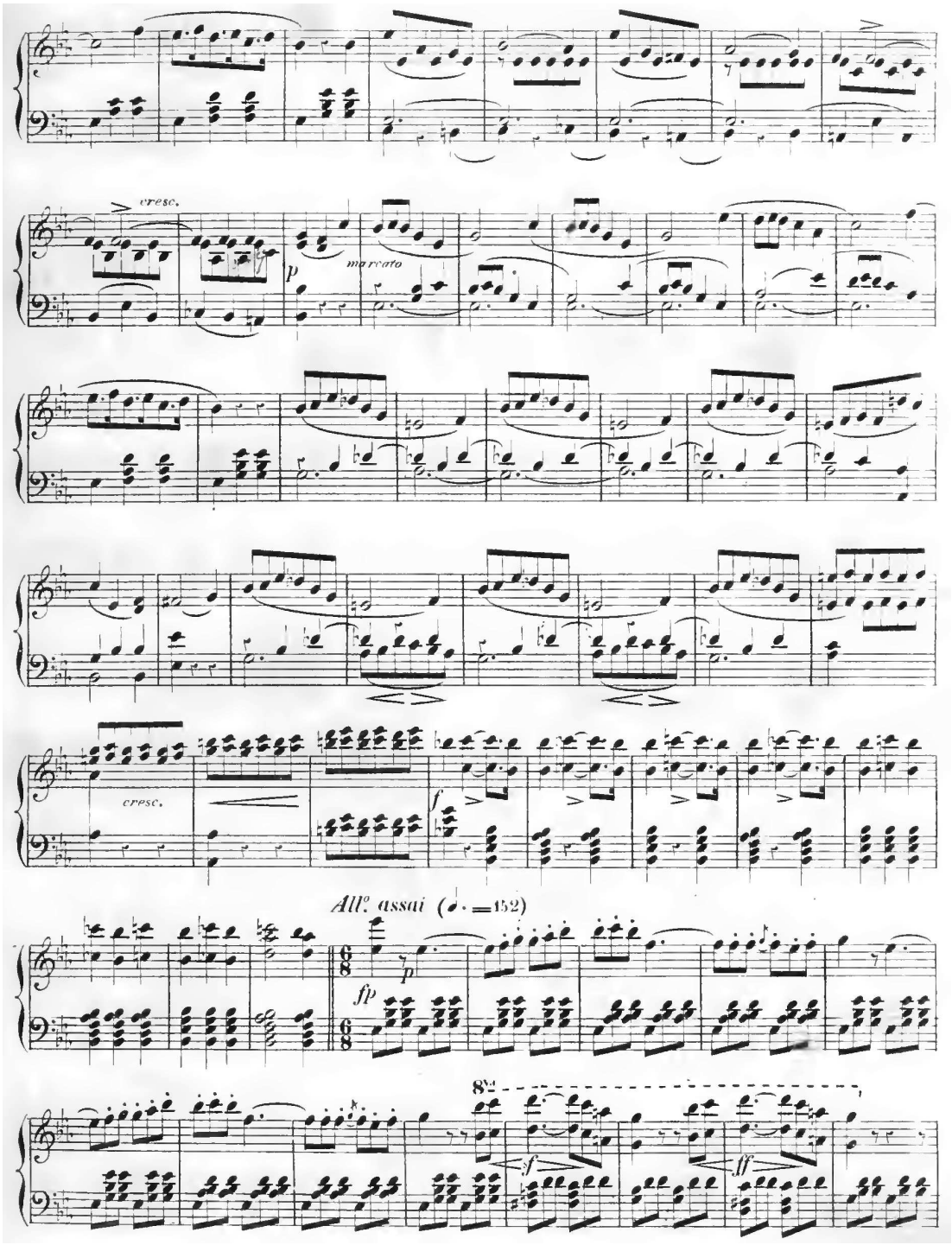

Adagio (♩ = 96)
PIANO
p mar ato i canto
cresc.
f
pp
p
pp
p
cresc.
smorz.
f
smorz.
pp
pp
f
p

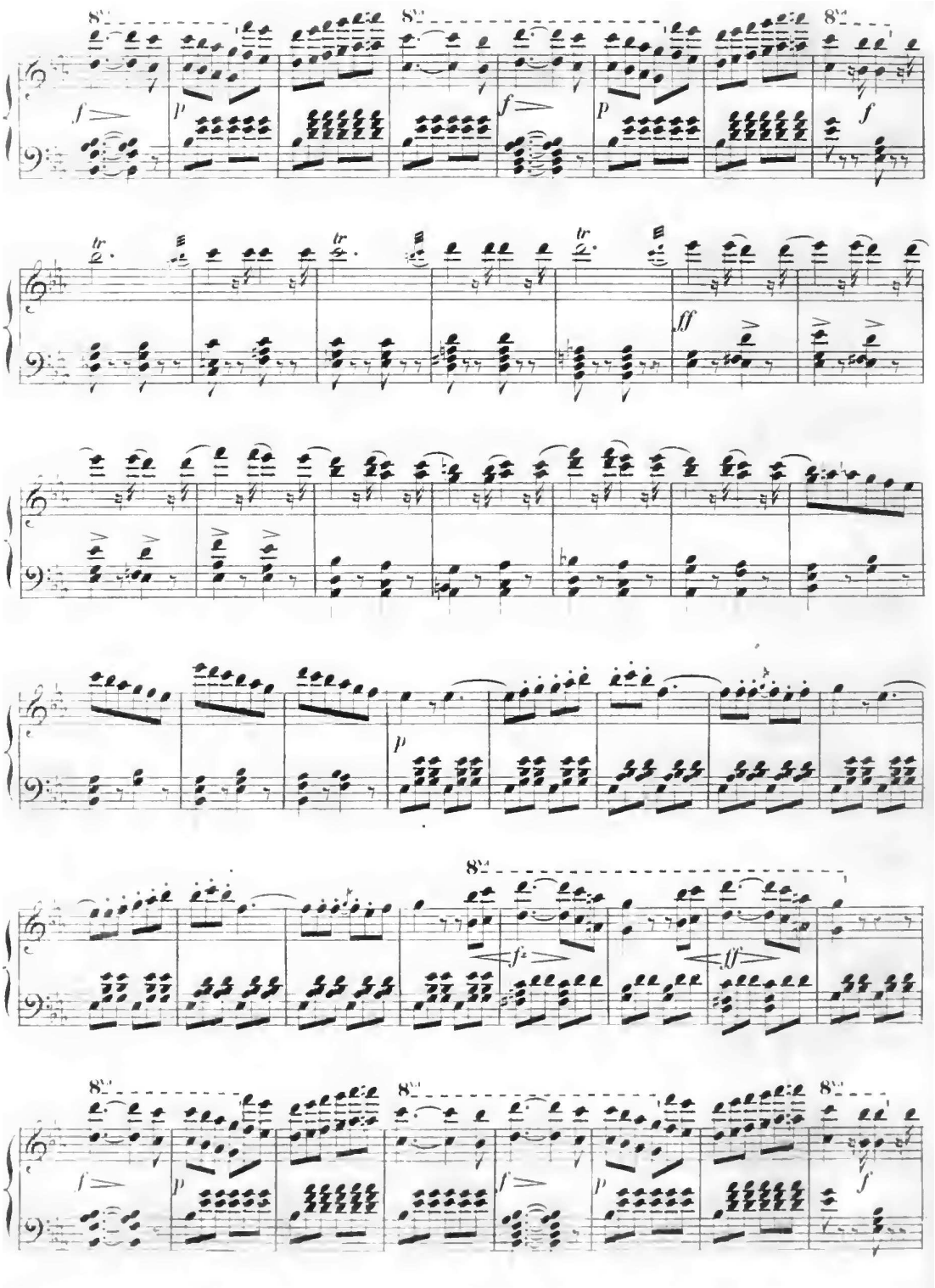

All.o non troppo (𝅗𝅥. = 60)
p legg.
p
p
p
p
f
p

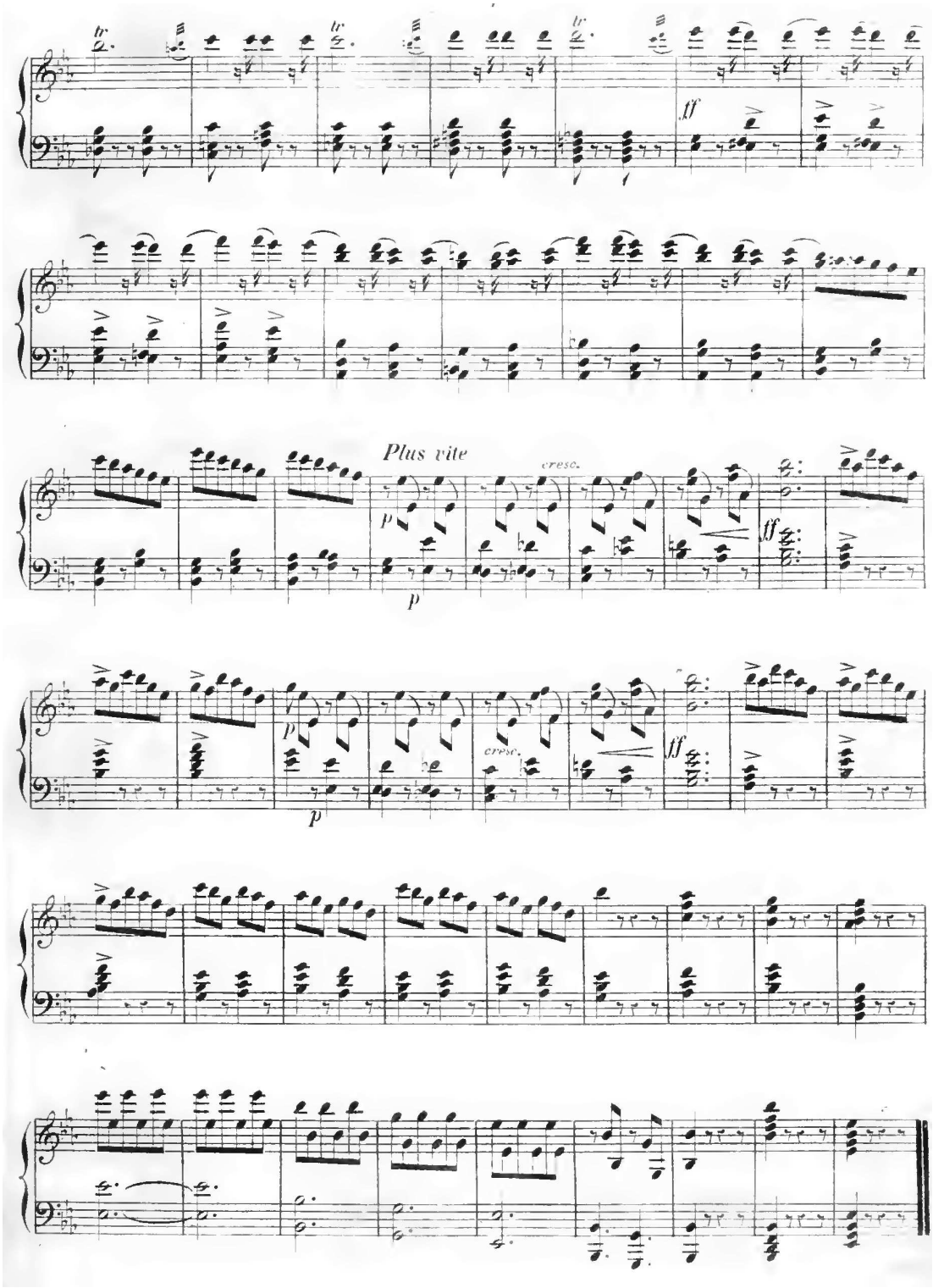

cresc.
ff
ad libitum
p
cresc.
>p
p


marcato
cresc.
f
p


cresc.
ad libitum
cresc.

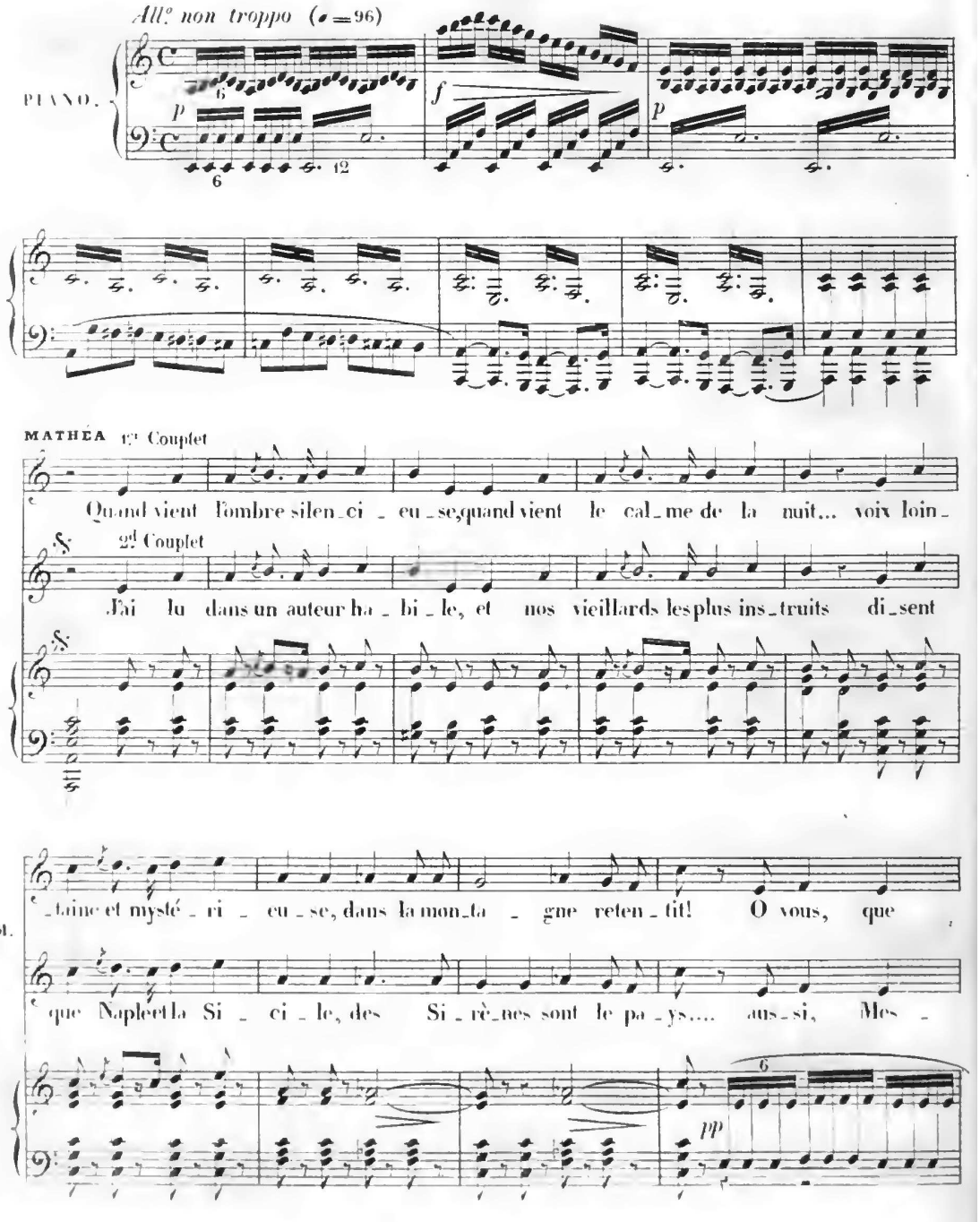

cresc.
p
marcato
cresc.
f
All.o assai (♩. =152)
fp
8va
f
ff

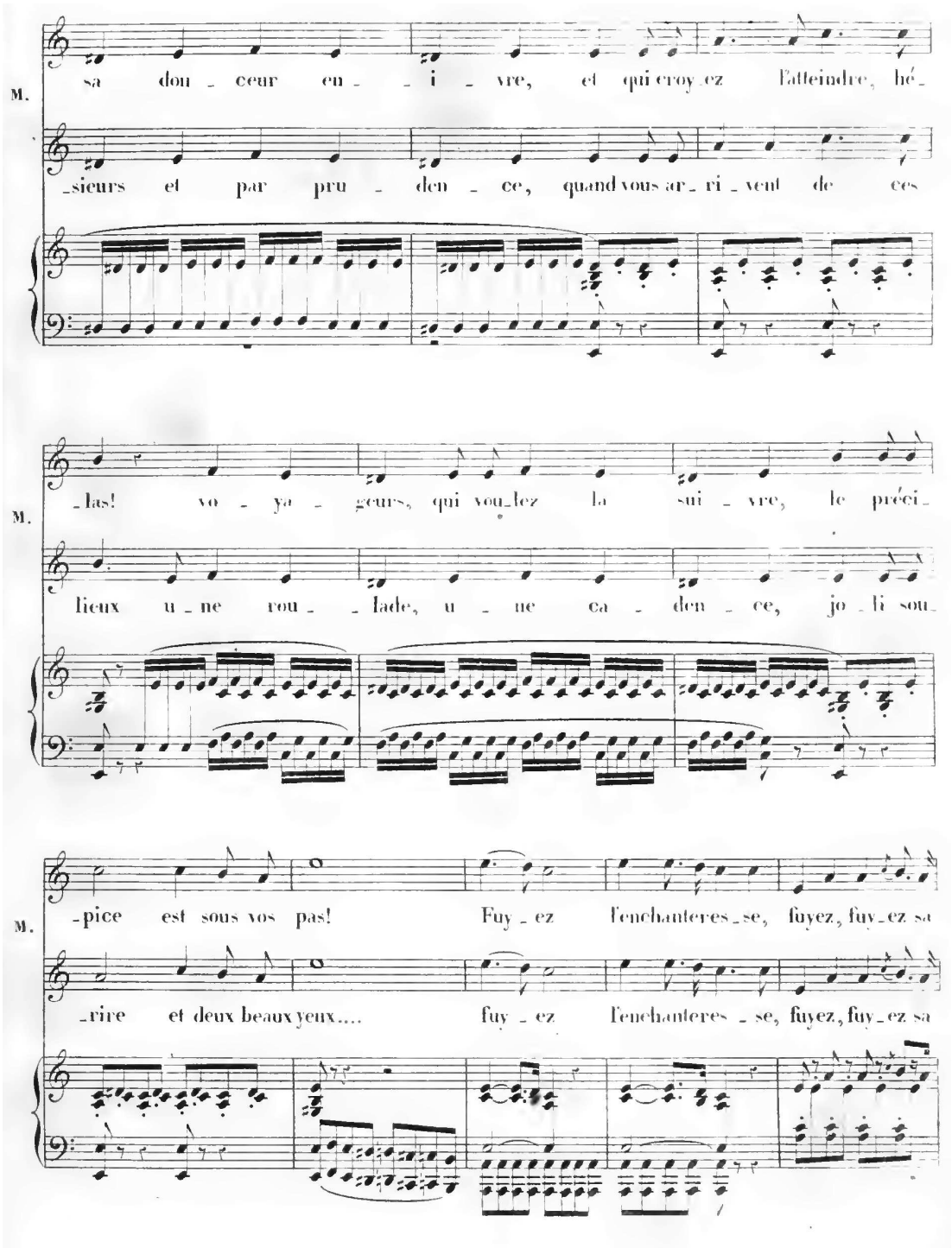


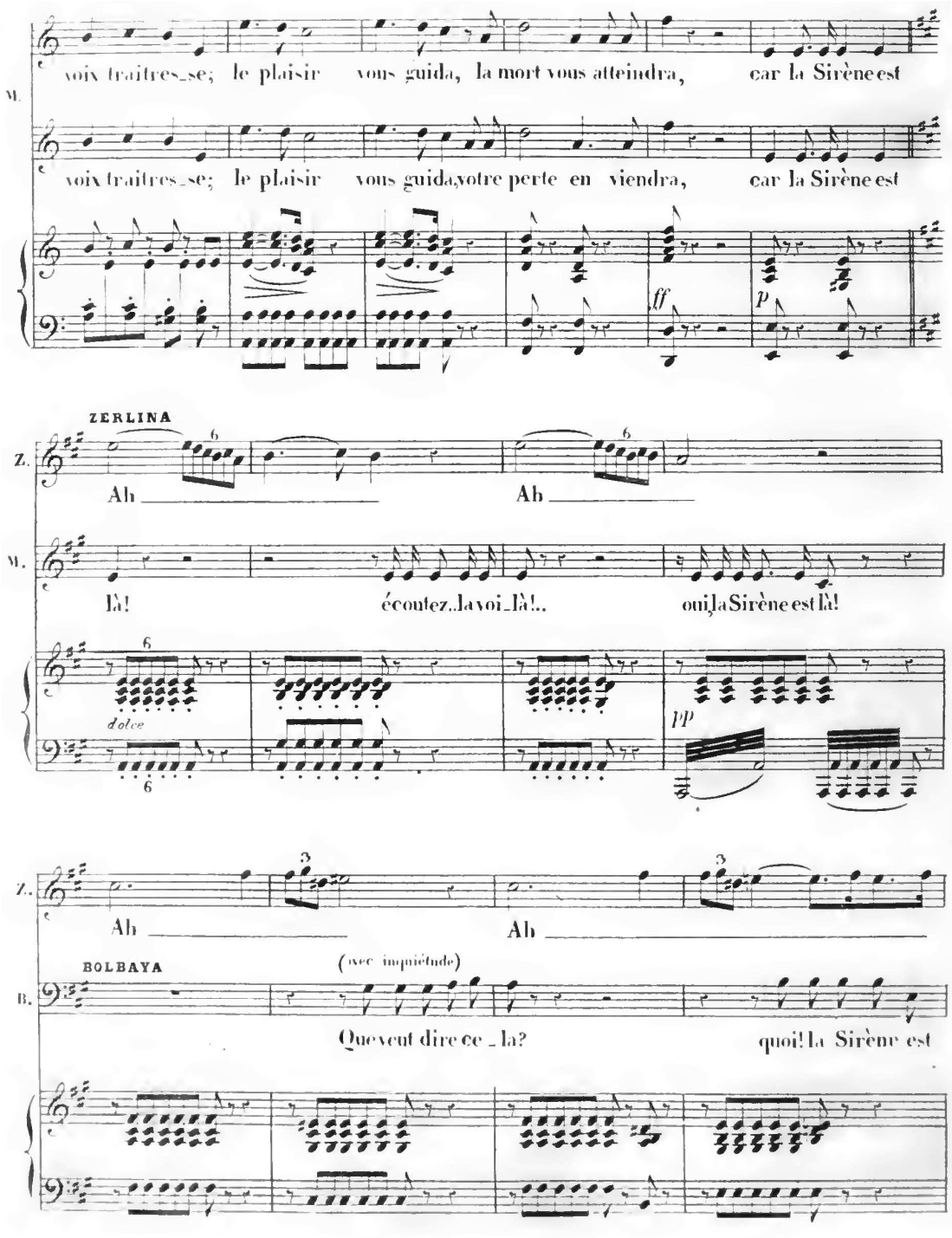

tr
ff
Plus vite
cresc.
p
cresc.
ff

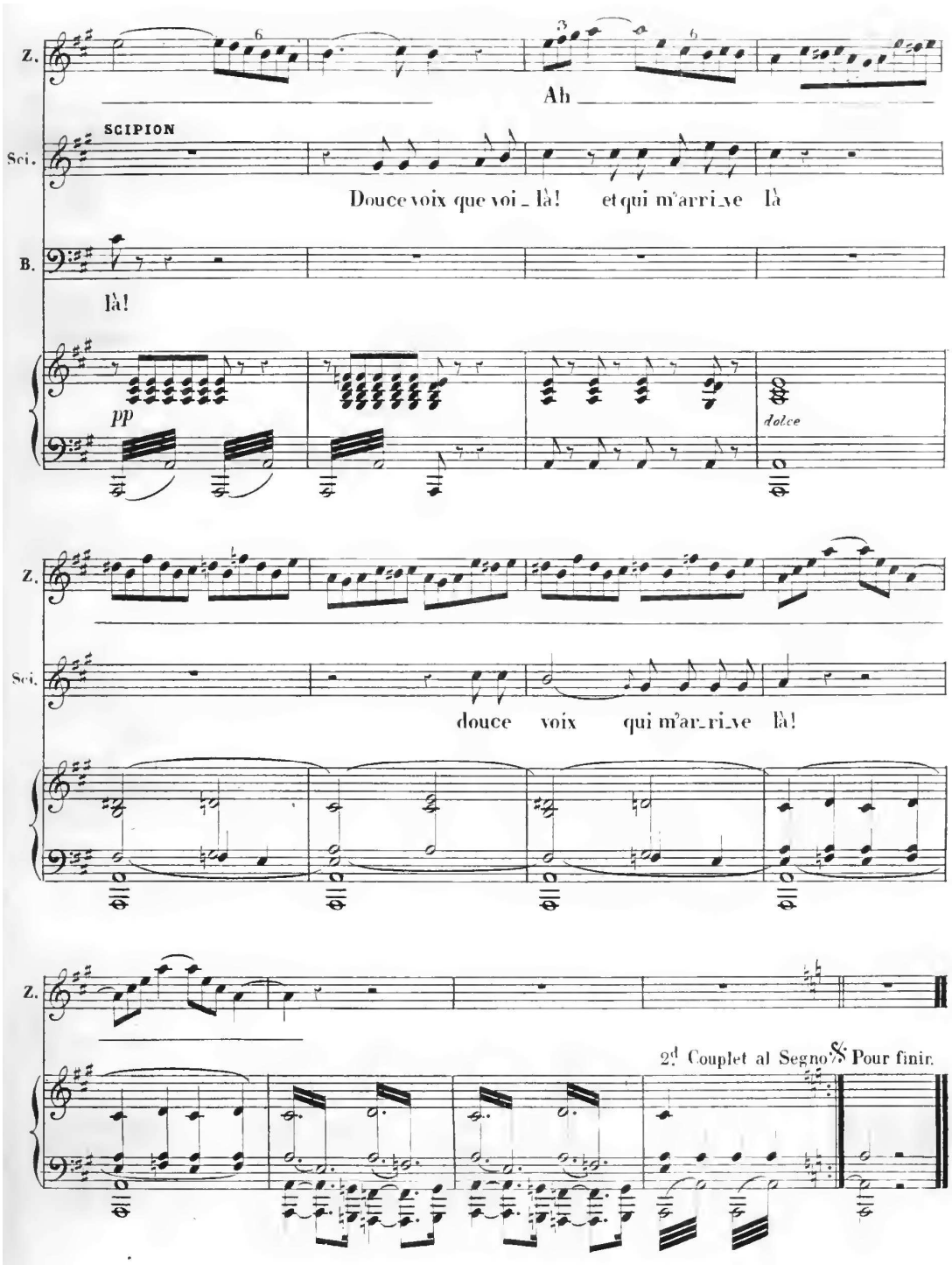
N.° 1.

BALLADE.


All.° non troppo (♩=96)
PIANO.
MATHÉA 1.er Couplet
Quand vient l'ombre silen_ci_eu_se, quand vient le cal_me de la nuit... voix loin_
2.d Couplet
J'ai lu dans un auteur ha_bi_le, et nos vieillards les plus ins_truits di_sent
M.
_taine et mysté_ri_eu_se, dans la mon_ta_gne reten_tit! O vous, que
que Naple et la Si_ci_le, des Si_rè_nes sont le pa_ys.... aus_si, Mes_


M.
sa dou - ceur en - - i - vre, et qui croy-ez l'atteindre, hé-
-sieurs et par pru - den - ce, quand vous ar-ri-vent de ces
M.
-las! vo - ya - geurs, qui vou-lez la sui - vre, le préci-
lieux u-ne rou - - lade, u - ne ca - den - ce, jo-li sou-
M.
-pice est sous vos pas! Fuy - ez l'enchanteres-se, fuyez, fuy-ez sa
-rire et deux beaux yeux.... fuy - ez l'enchanteres - se, fuyez, fuy-ez sa


M.
voix traitres_se; le plaisir vous guida, la mort vous atteindra, car la Sirène est
voix traitres_se; le plaisir vous guida, votre perte en viendra, car la Sirène est
ff
p
ZERLINA
Z.
Ah
Ah
M.
là! écoutez..la voi_là!.. oui, la Sirène est là!
dolce
pp
Z.
Ah
Ah
BOLBAYA
(avec inquiétude)
B.
Que veut dire ce_là? quoi! la Sirène est


Z.
Ah
SCIPION
Sci.
Douce voix que voi_là! et qui m'arri_ve là
B.
là!
pp
dolce
Z.
Sci.
douce voix qui m'ar_ri_ve là!
Z.
2d Couplet al Segno % Pour finir.

N° 2.

QUINTETTE.

Ill. assai (𝅗𝅥 = 108)

PIANO

SCOPETTO

Qu'une heureu se ren_con_tre un jour vous le montre; le

SCIPION

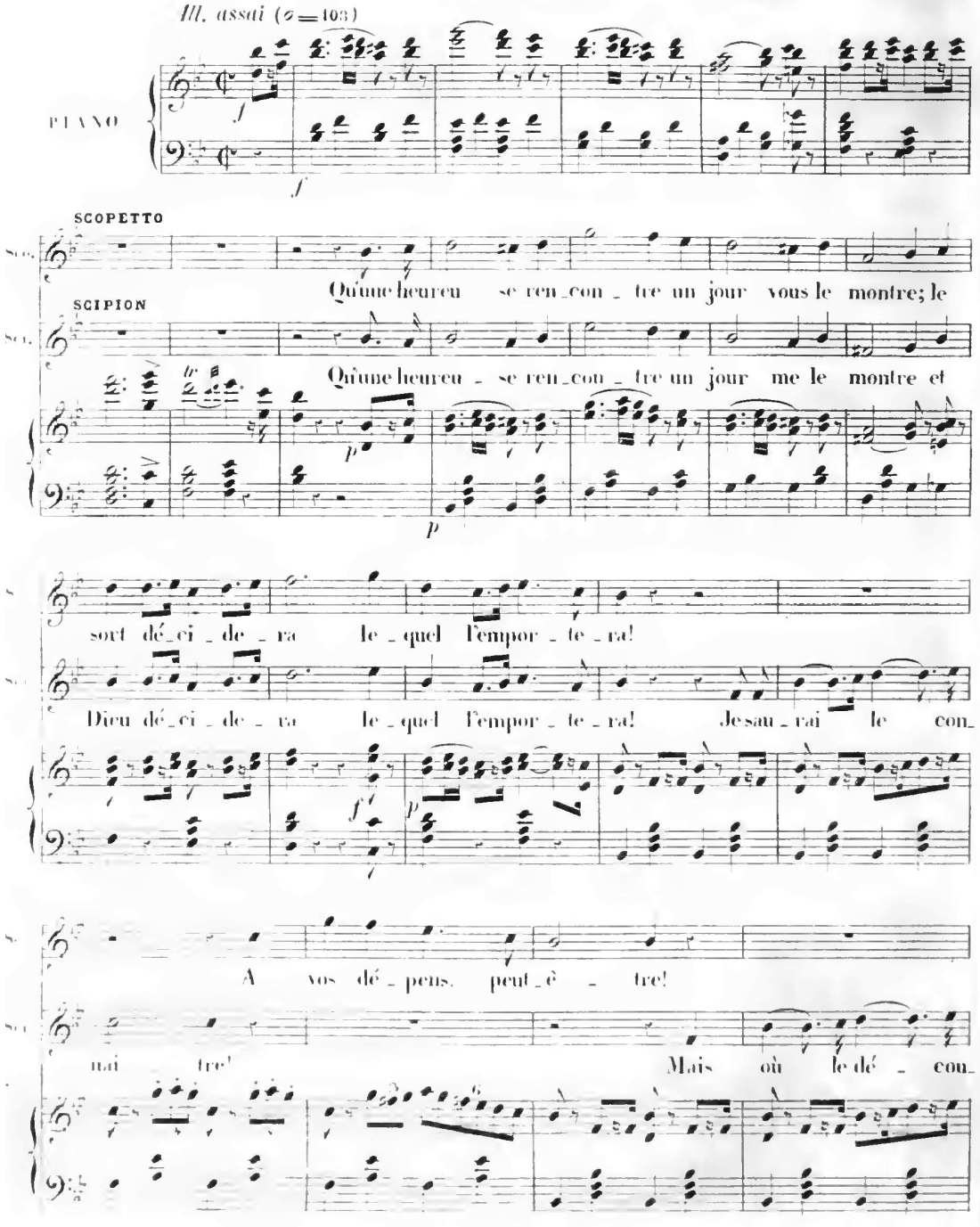
Qu'une heureu_se ren_con_tre un jour me le montre et

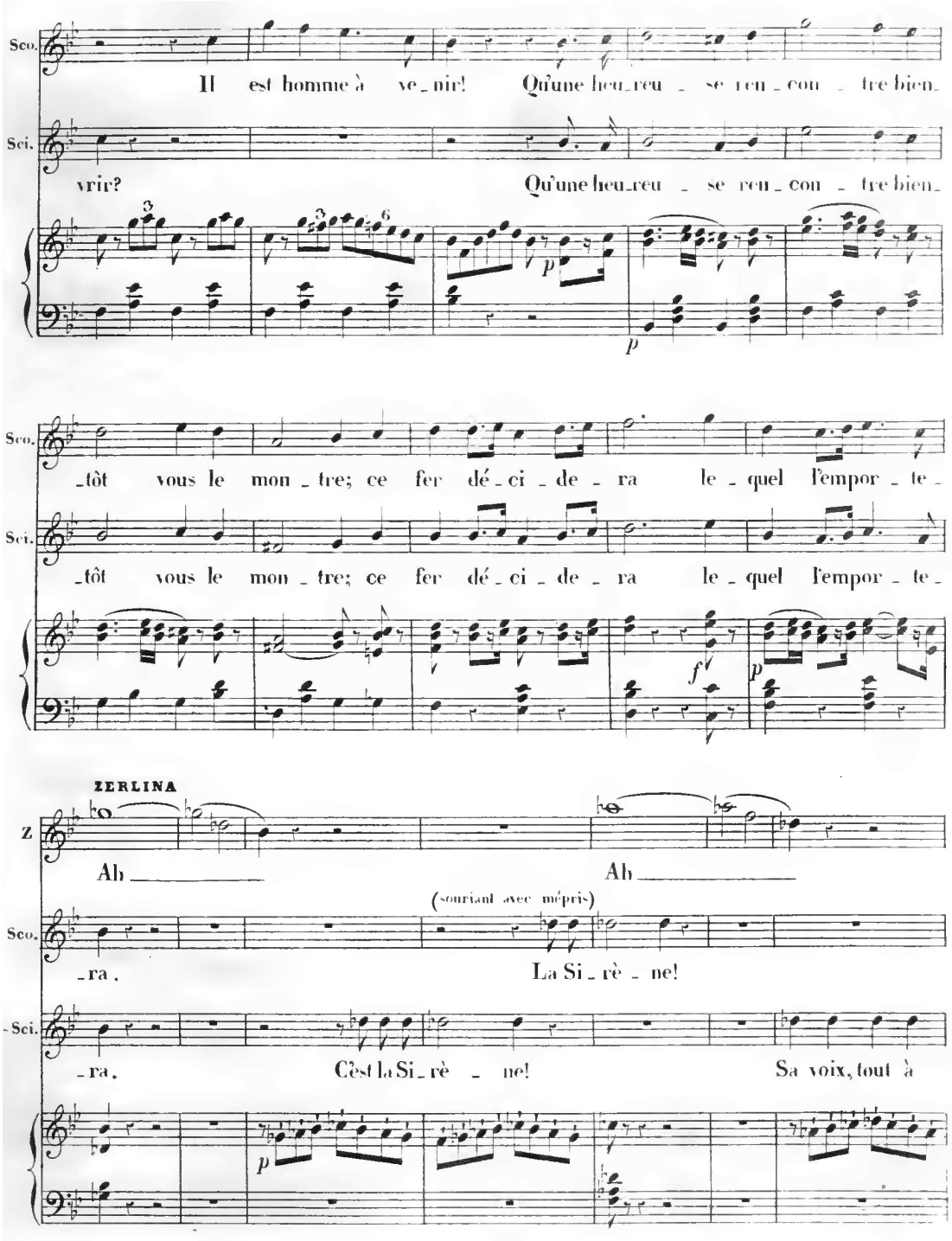
sort dé_ci_de_ra le_quel l'empor_te_ra!

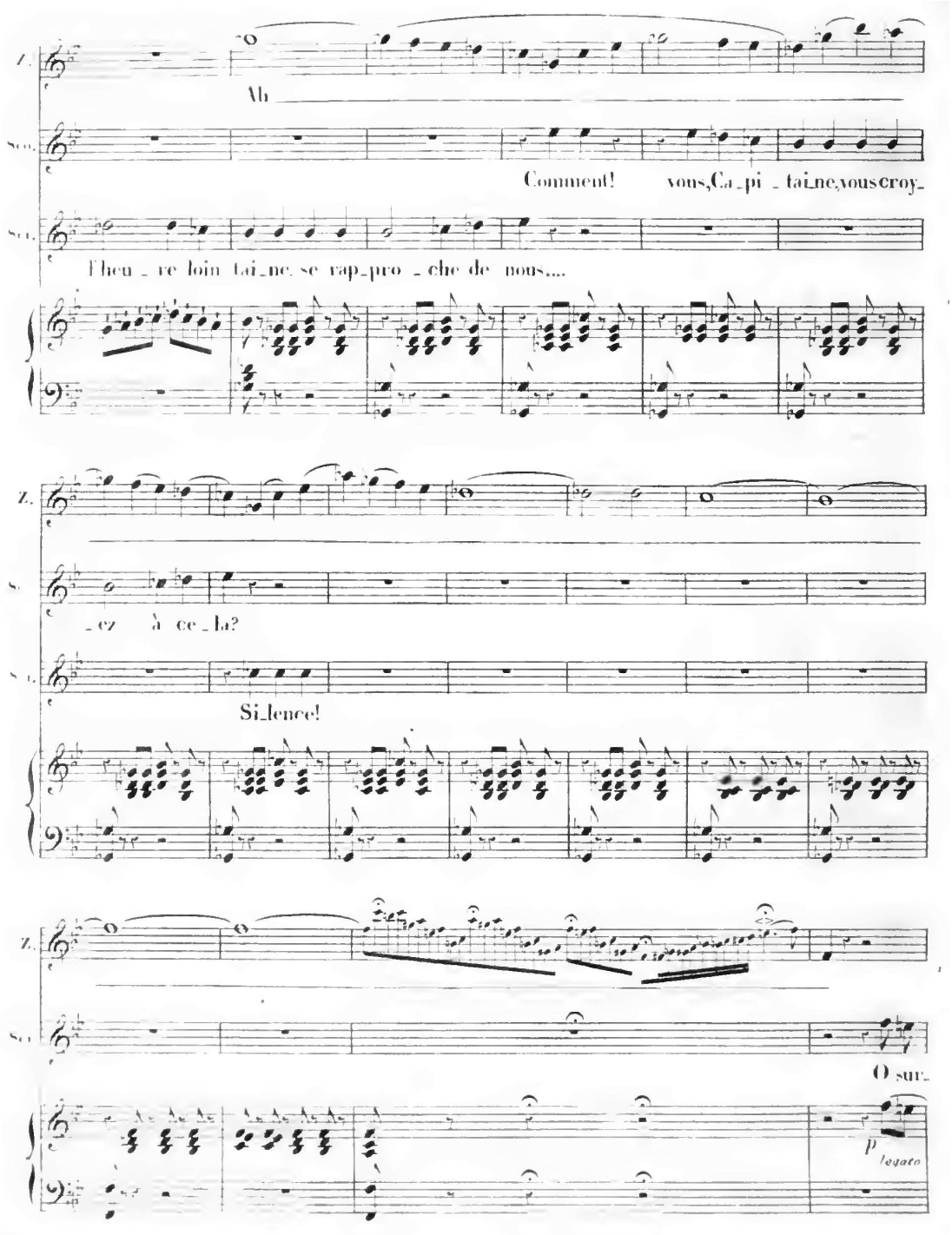
Dieu dé_ci_de_ra le_quel l'empor_te_ra! Je sau_rai le con_

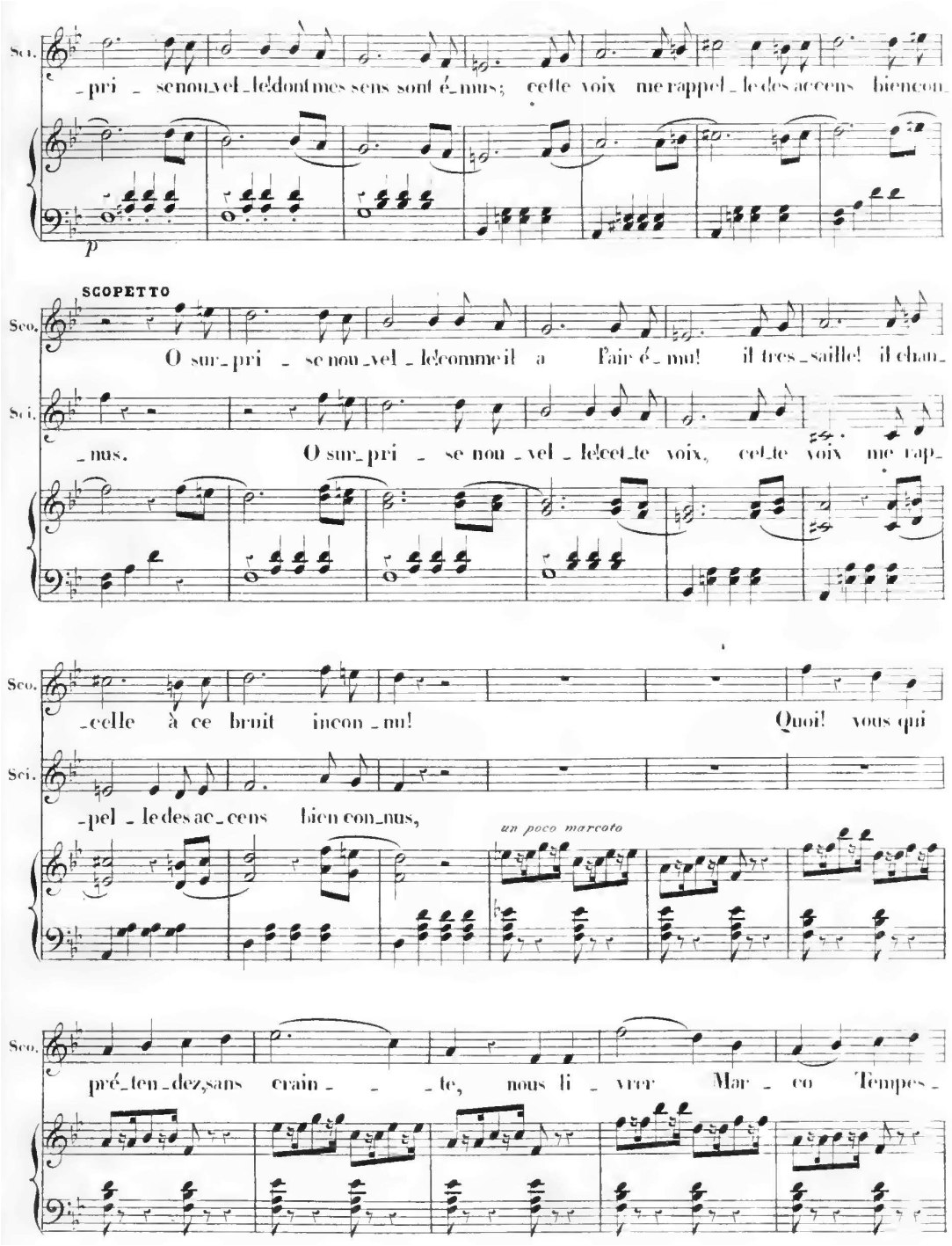
A vos dé_pens, peut_ê_tre!

nai_tre! Mais où le dé_cou_




Sco.
Il est homme à ve_nir! Qu'une heu_reu_se reu_con_tre bien_
Sci.
vrir? Qu'une heu_reu_se reu_con_tre bien_
p
p
Sco.
_tôt vous le mon_tre; ce fer dé_ci_de_ra le_quel l'empor_te_
Sci.
_tôt vous le mon_tre; ce fer dé_ci_de_ra le_quel l'empor_te_
f
p
ZERLINA
Z
Ah Ah
(souriant avec mépris)
Sco.
_ra. La Si_rè_ne!
Sci.
_ra. C'est la Si_rè_ne! Sa voix, tout à
p


Ah
Comment! vous, Ca_pi_tai_ne, vous croy_
l'heu_re loin tai_ne se rap_pro_che de nous....
_ez à ce_la?
Si_lence!
O sur_
p
legato


Sco.
-pri - se nou-vel-le dont mes sens sont é-mus; cette voix me rappel-le des accens bien con-
p
SCOPETTO
Sco.
O sur-pri - se nou-vel-le comme il a l'air é-mu! il tres-saille! il chan-
Sci.
-nus. O sur-pri - se nou-vel-le cet-te voix, cet-te voix me rap-
Sco.
-celle à ce bruit incon-nu! Quoi! vous qui
Sci.
-pel-le des ac-cens bien con-nus,
un poco marcato
Sco.
pré-ten-dez sans crain- - -te, nous li-vrer Mar-co Tempes-