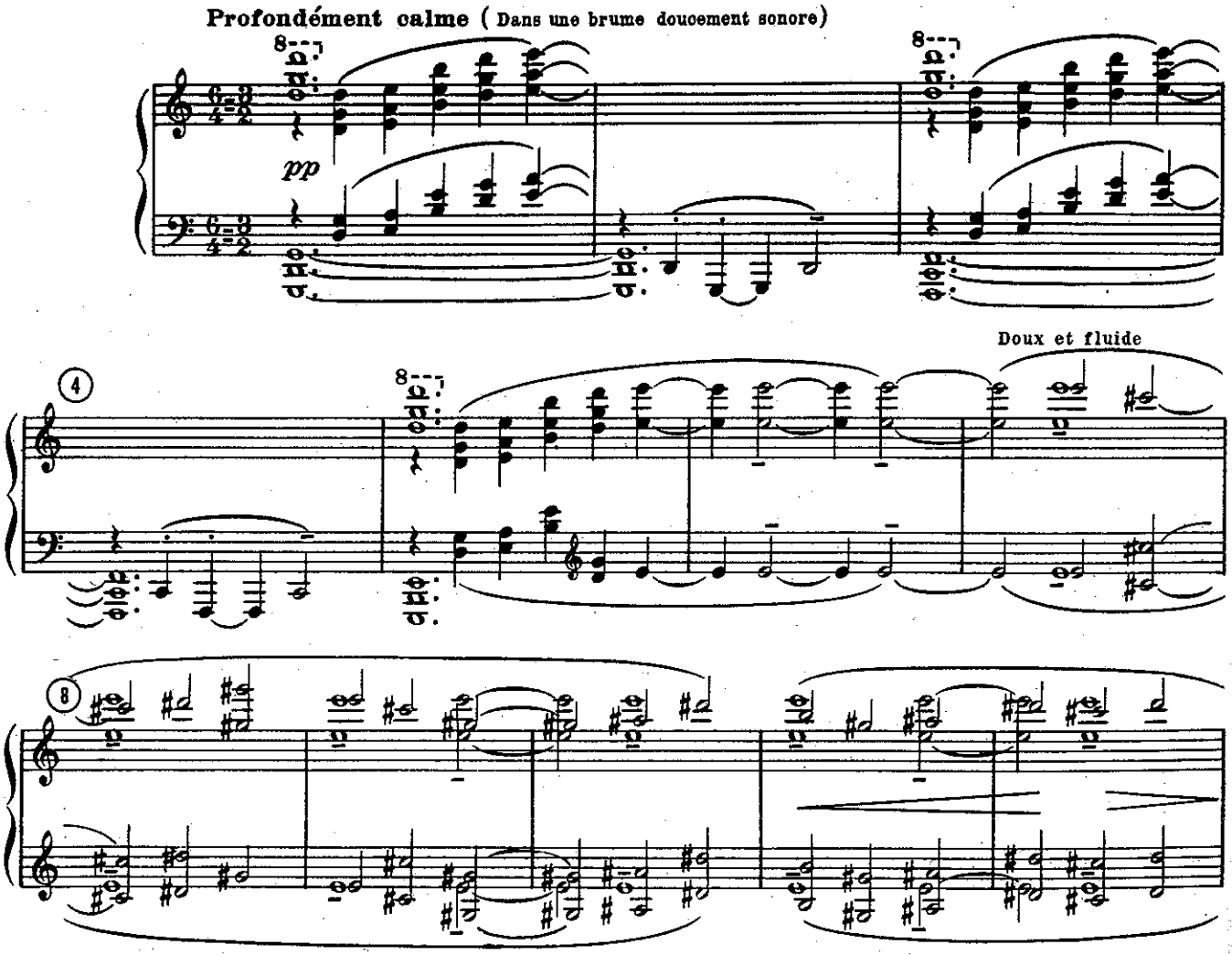
La cathédrale engloutie

from *Preludes, Book I* *(1910)*

Claude Debussy *(1862–1918)*

Apart from the medium, how does the style of *The Sunken Cathedral* differ from that of *Afternoon of a Faun*? What do you make of the triads in this piano piece that seem to have tones added to them—the A's and E's in bar 1, for example? Are such tones purely coloristic, or do they ultimately go somewhere? Are concepts such as "voice leading" and "overall harmonic structure" relevant to an understanding of this music?

Debussy chose to notate the meter of *The Sunken Cathedral* in a highly idiosyncratic manner that has confused many readers of the score. His time signature $\frac{6}{4} = \frac{3}{2}$ does *not* mean that a bar of ♩♩♩ ♩♩♩ is to equal in duration a bar of 𝅗𝅥𝅗𝅥𝅗𝅥, but rather that the quarter note in the sections notated chiefly in quarter notes is equal in duration to the half note in the sections notated chiefly in half notes. The following are the metrical proportions that Debussy intended: At the start of bar 7, the preceding ♩ equals the coming 𝅗𝅥; similarly, at bar 13, 𝅗𝅥 = ♩; at bar 22, ♩ = 𝅗𝅥; at bar 84, 𝅗𝅥 = ♩; and finally, ♩ = 𝅗𝅥 at bar 86.[3]



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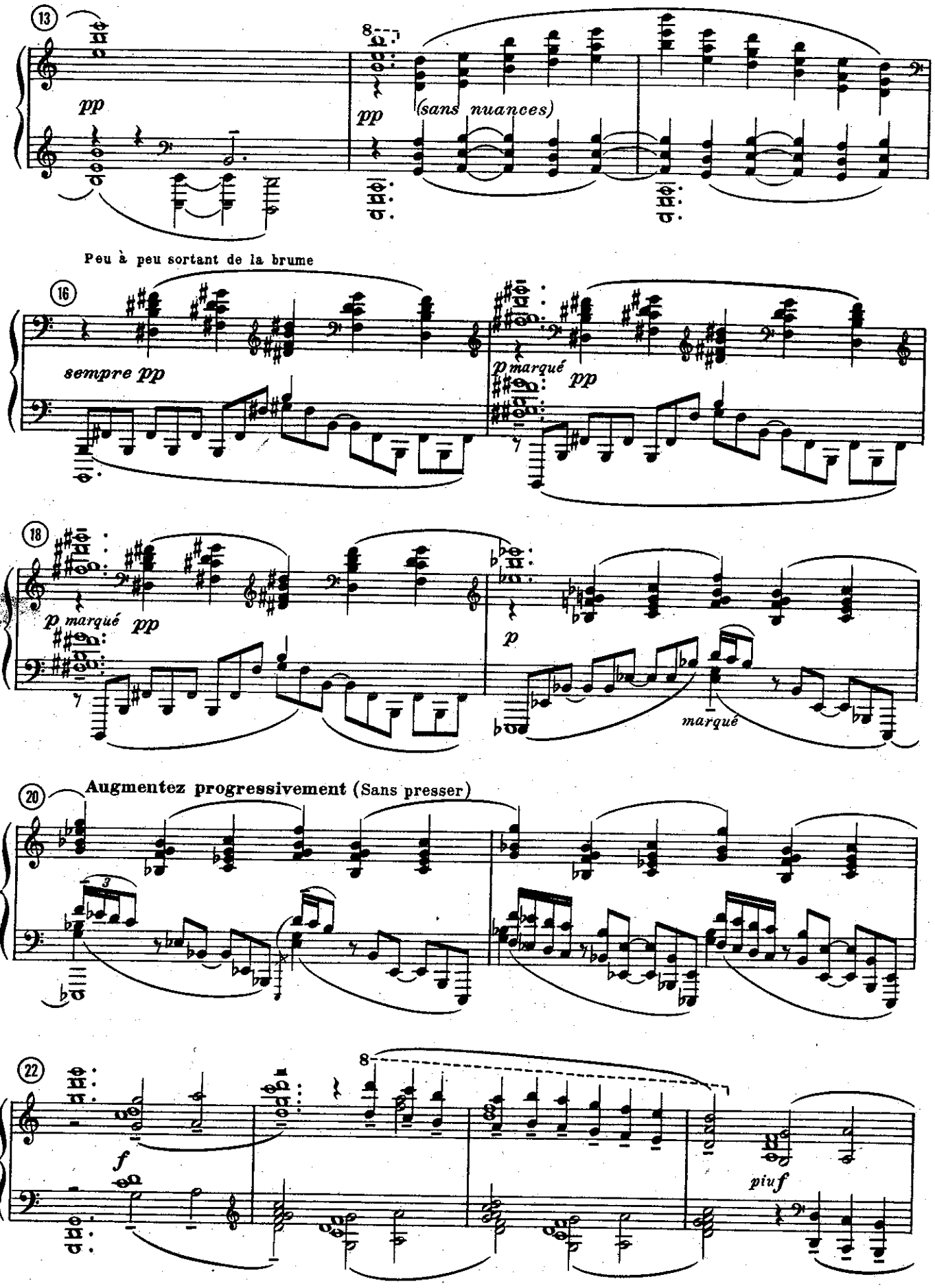
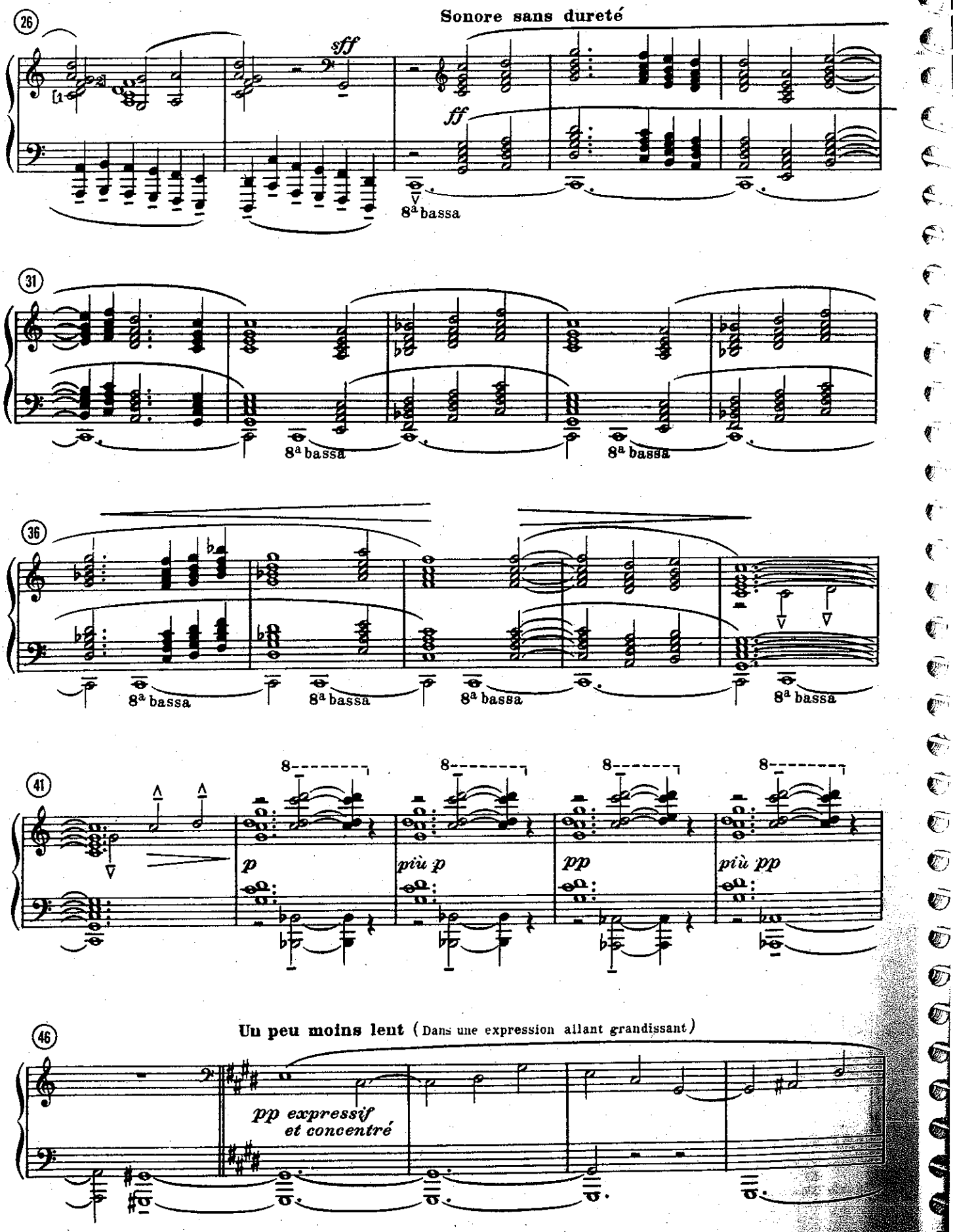
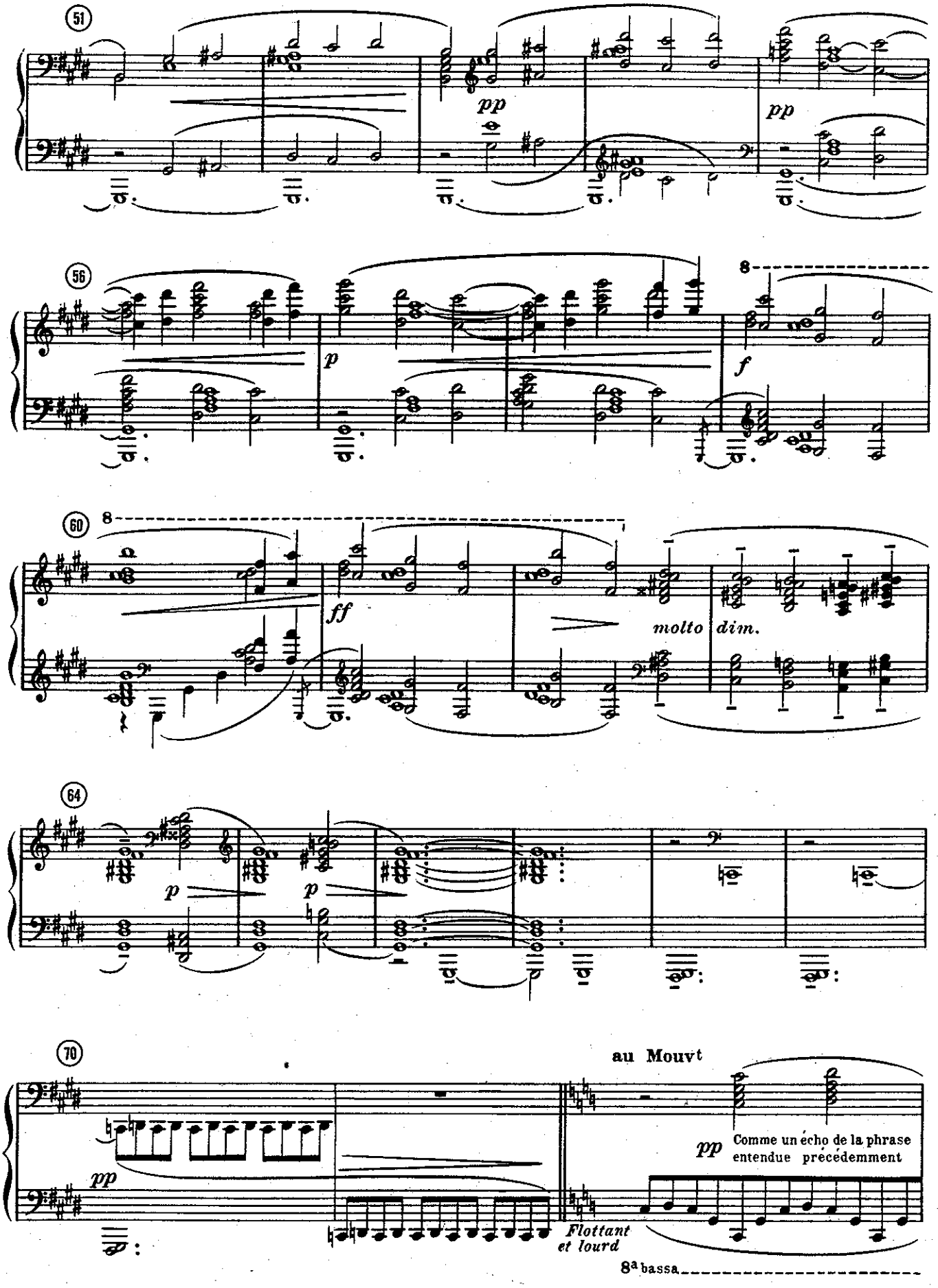
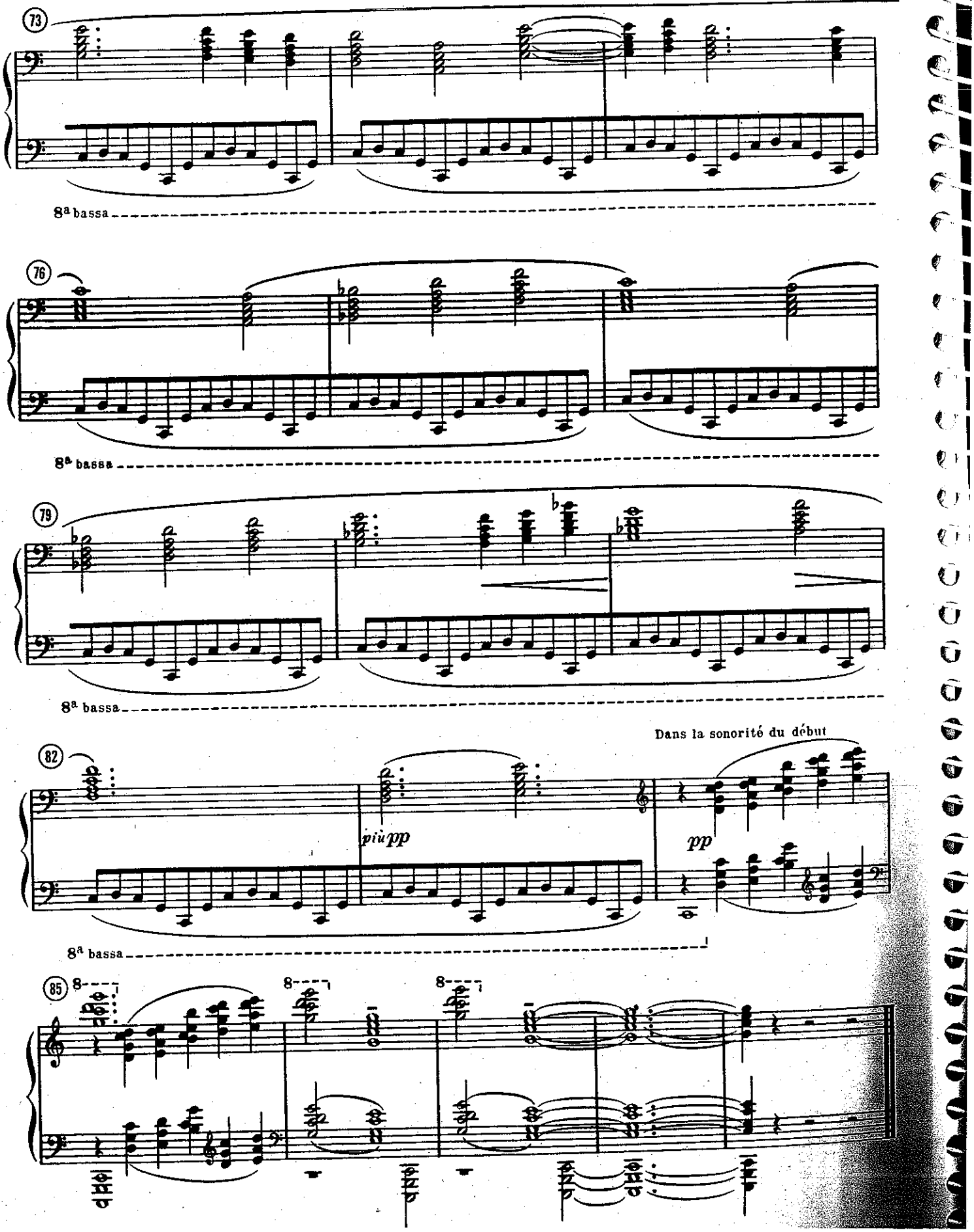
[3]In support of this assertion see Charles Burkhart, "Debussy Plays *La cathédrale engloutie* and Solves Metrical Mystery," in *The Piano Quarterly* (Fall 1968), pp. 14–16.


13
pp
8
pp
(sans nuances)
Peu à peu sortant de la brume
16
sempre pp
p marqué
pp
18
p marqué
pp
p
marqué
20
Augmentez progressivement (Sans presser)
3
22
8
f
piuf


26
Sonore sans dureté
sff
ff
8ª bassa
31
8ª bassa
8ª bassa
36
8ª bassa
8ª bassa
8ª bassa
8ª bassa
41
8
p
più p
pp
più pp
46
Un peu moins lent (Dans une expression allant grandissant)
pp expressif
et concentré


51
pp
pp
56
p
f
8
60
8
ff
molto
dim.
64
p
p
70
au Mouvt
pp
Comme un écho de la phrase entendue précédemment
pp
Flottant et lourd
8ª bassa


73
8ª bassa
76
8ª bassa
79
8ª bassa
82
Dans la sonorité du début
più pp
pp
8ª bassa
85
8
8
8