MENDELSSOHN

Variations Sérieuses

Op. 54

Demonstratian pages

Arrangement

Reitze Smits

ORGEL/ORGAN

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FELIX MENDELSSOHN-BARTHOLDY

Variations Sérieuses

Op. 54

Arrangement for organ

Reitze Smits

VA0034

Foreword

The nineteenth century organ repertoire is definitely overshadowed by the abundant piano music from that period. All composers were adept at using the piano to advantage, but few knew the organ and its possibilities. The development of piano technique and virtuosity made the difference between piano and organ even greater. Composers who opted to write for the organ often resorted to traditional forms; the second-rate role of church music drove them to a sober style of writing. Among the important 19th century composers, only Mendelssohn produced a substantial organ oeuvre. Only occasionally did he employ the organ as a true concert instrument.[1]

The 19th century tradition of arranging piano works for other media allows us to extend the organ repertoire. Arrangements form a substantial part of the repertoire: Liszt's most important works for organ are his own arrangements of his works for piano. With his most important piano composition, *Variations Sérieuses*, Mendelssohn offers us a great challenge. The first set of variations of this work are very similar to organ variations of his contemporaries such as Hesse and Köhler. In addition, the variation form allows us to use the rich assortment of organ stops to great advantage. The initiative to arrange the *Variations Sérieuses*, for the organ stems from J. A. Van Eyken (1823-1864), a contemporary of Mendelssohn.[2] However, Van Eyken's arrangement compromises the work because of its many cuts. This new arrangement offers an improvement by re-instating Mendelssohn's original intentions. In doing so it enriches the organ repertoire with a composition whose level is far superior to most organ works of that period.

In contrast to existing variation works, the *Variations Sérieuses* should not be seen as a series of independent variations with the same general tempo. This work has a unifying structure, whose short variations can be considered as links in a chain. (The double bar lines between the phrases and the variations are original; the variations are therefore not separated by the kind of double bar line whose right bar is thicker than the left, indicating the end of a movement.) The transitions from one part to the next form important unifying or contrasting moments. The development from variations 1 through 7 portrays a climax in dynamics and tempo (variations 1,2, 3,6,7). Variations 4 and 5 offer a short 'relief' that increases the effect of the following parts. Variations 14 and 15 offer a comparison to this, a turn in the development, followed by the typical 'agitato ma piano' variation (compare variation 15 with no. 5) after which the development continues to the end. The intervening variations 10 through 13 are devoted to the traditional 'varietas': varying in texture from fugato, cantabile, scherzo, trio, culminating with an ideal 'choraliter' organ texture. These variations portray the organ's diverse colors to good advantage.

This arrangement sometimes follows the original[3] literally, in which the bass (often in octaves) is relegated to the pedal (for example, variations 1 through 4). At other times, the texture is thinned (variations 9, 16, etc.). At times a 'transcription' to the organ was necessary (variations 11 and 12). Only in variation 17 is a cut applied, that has no negative effect on the structure.

Organs from the period concerned often had d' as the highest pedal note. To preserve the original voice leading, variation 3 notates f' in the pedal. The performer is at liberty to play certain pedal notes an octave lower.

Slurs in the score are reproduced unchanged. The original often portrays a sf (sforzando) at the beginning of a slur, followed by a diminuendo. The original dynamics, that often indicated a great diversity within a variation, have not been maintained. In this edition, general dynamics are suggested that conform to the on-going dynamics within the variation concerned, and with the development of the work as a whole.

Reitze Smits

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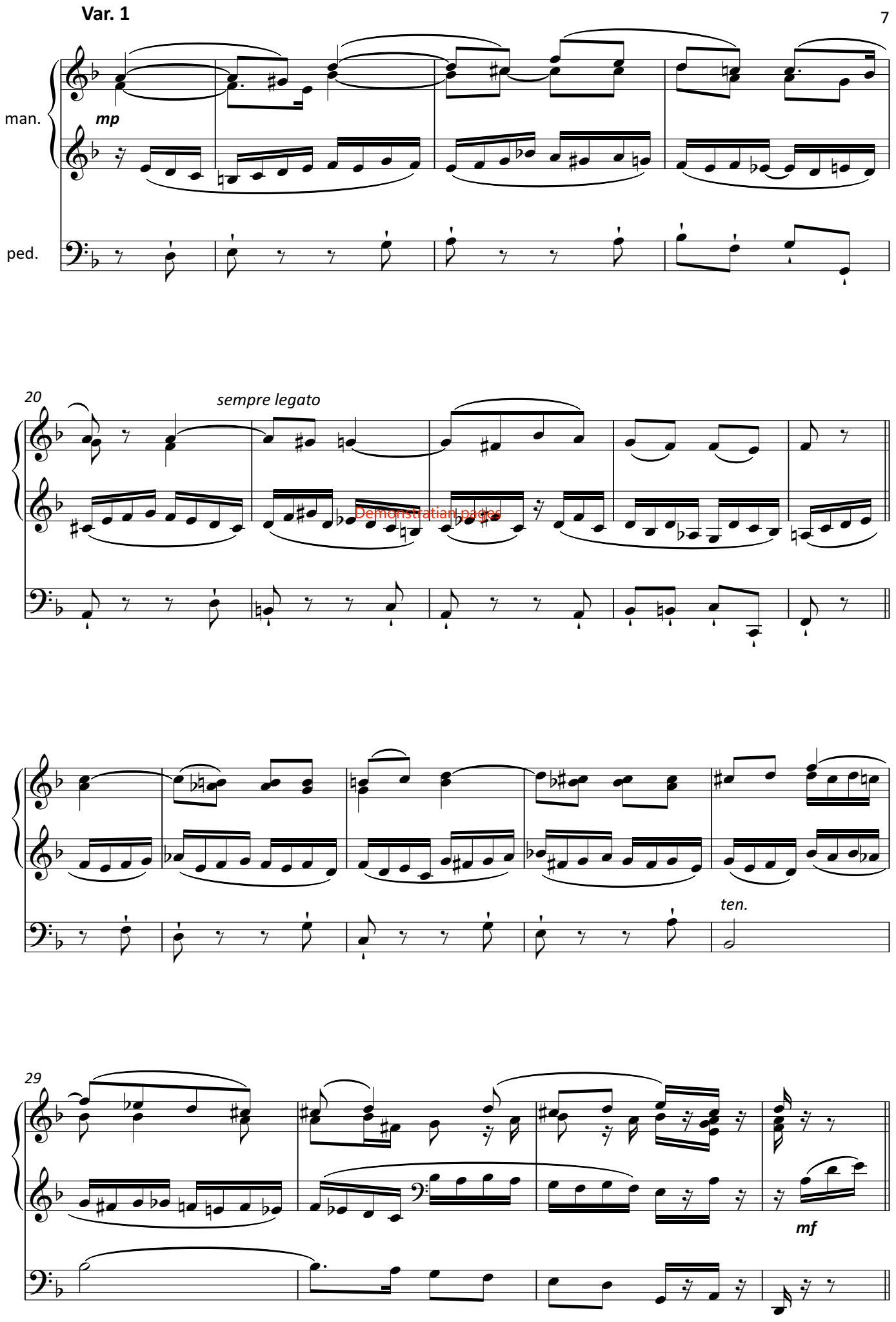
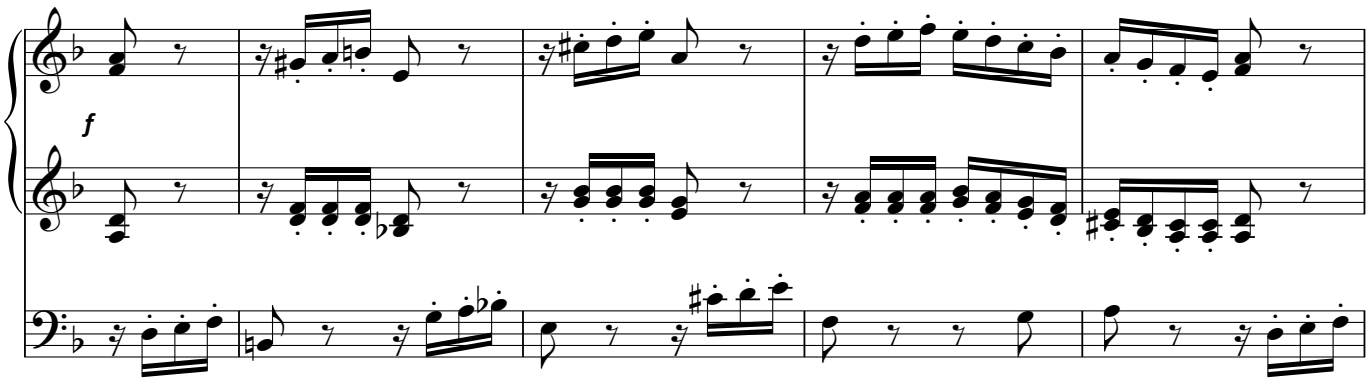
1. César Franck and Max Reger deserve mention here. Despite their prominent rank in the organ repertoire, general music history places them in less-prominent positions.
2. Mendelssohn personally encouraged Van Eyken when the latter studied organ in Germany.
3. The authenticity of Mendelssohn's works is established by the fact that he personally catalogued his manuscripts before his death.



Demonstration pages

Var. 3
Più animato



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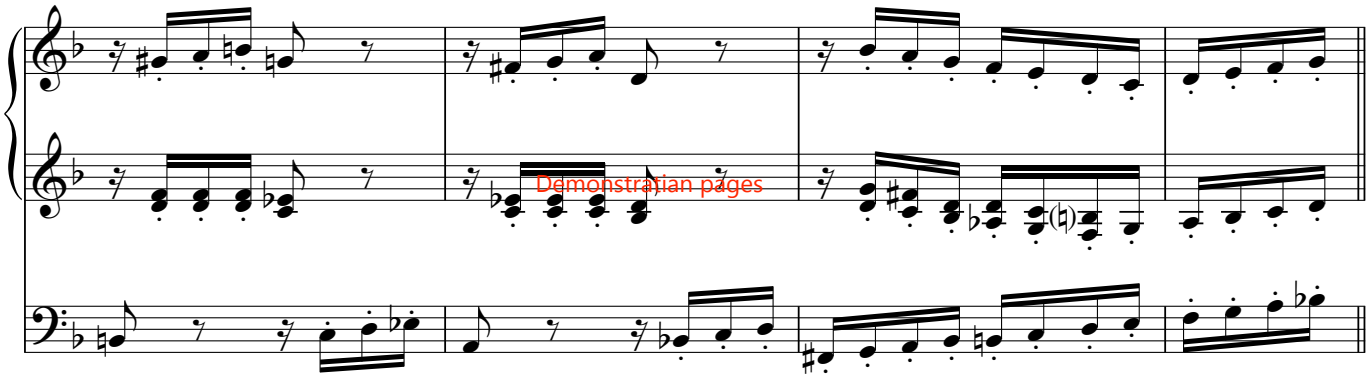
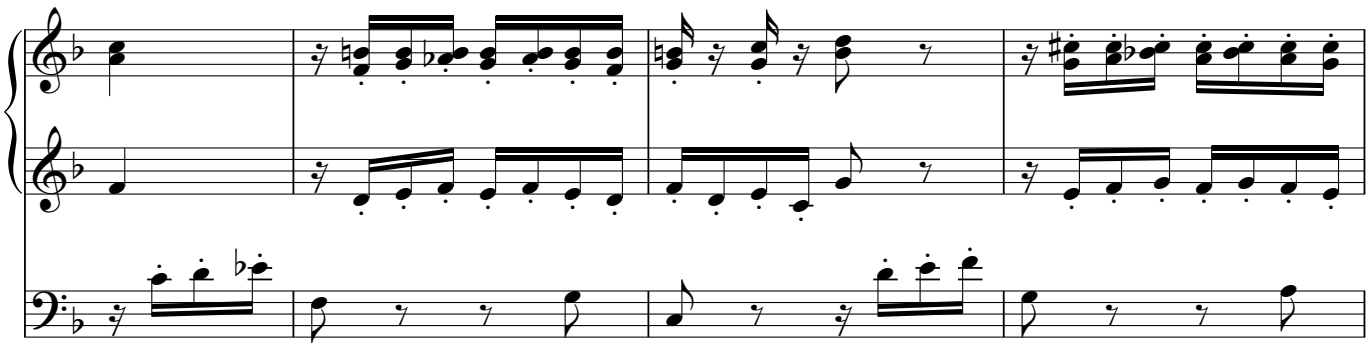


Demonstration pages



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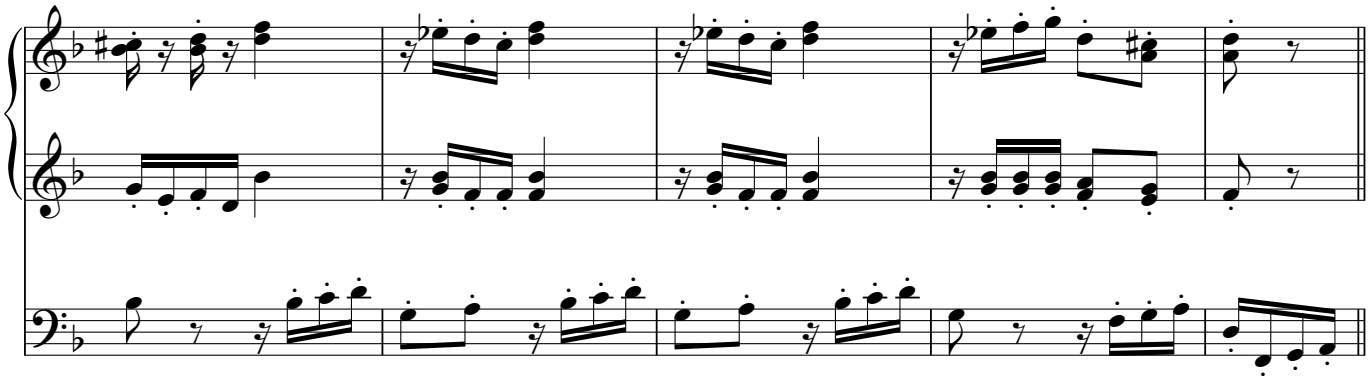
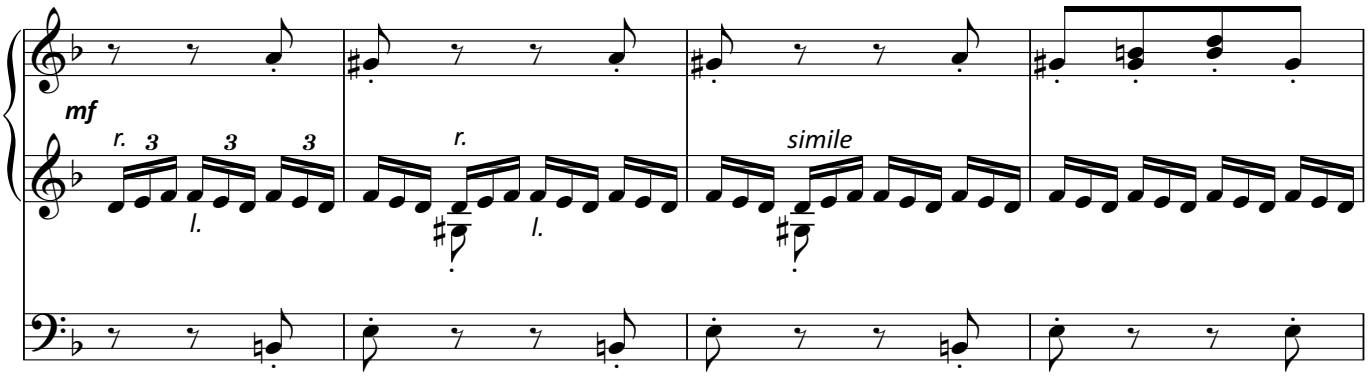
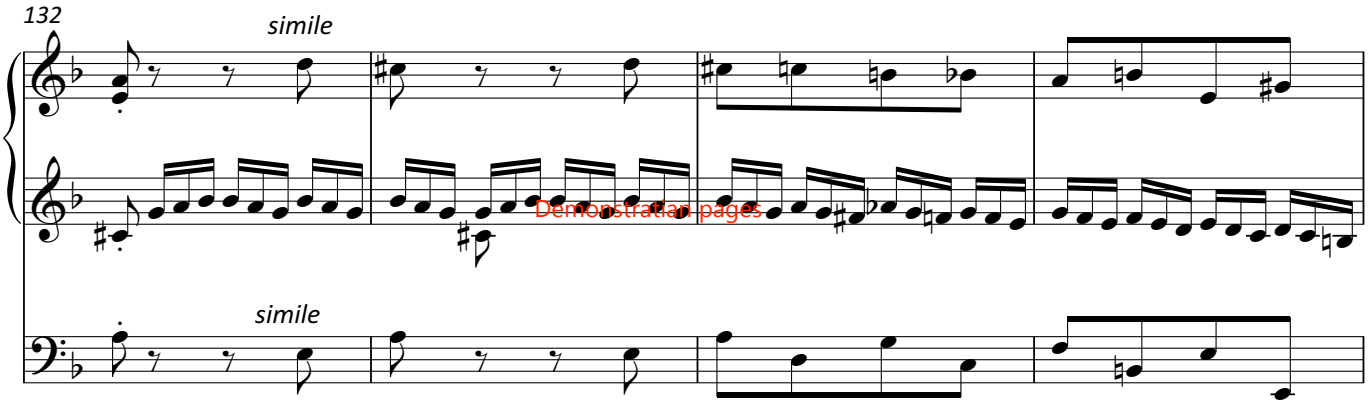


Var. 8
Allegro vivace





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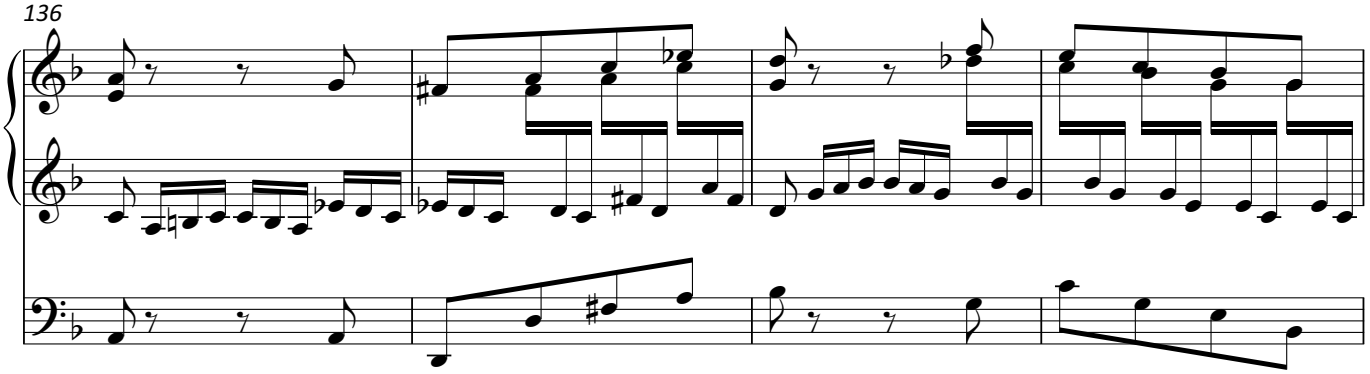
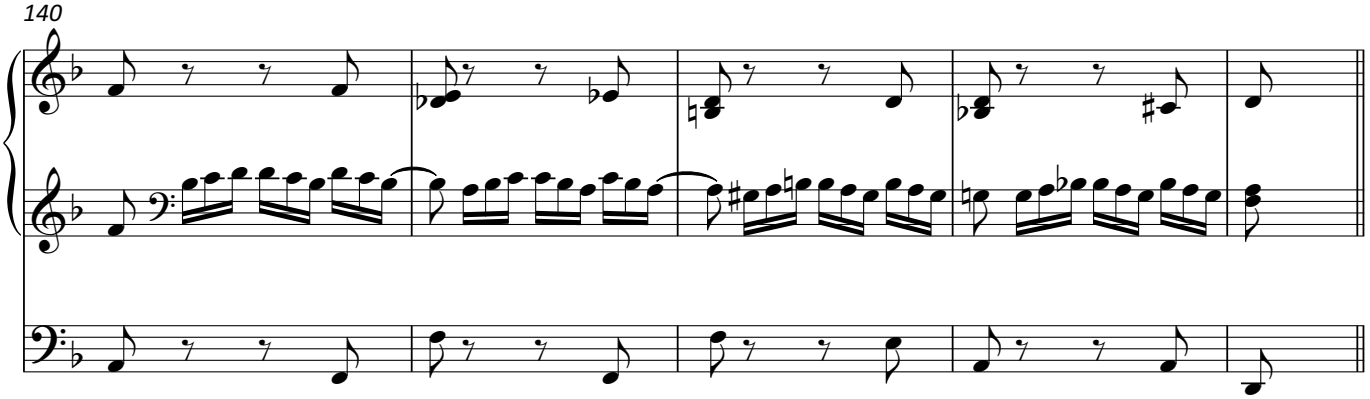
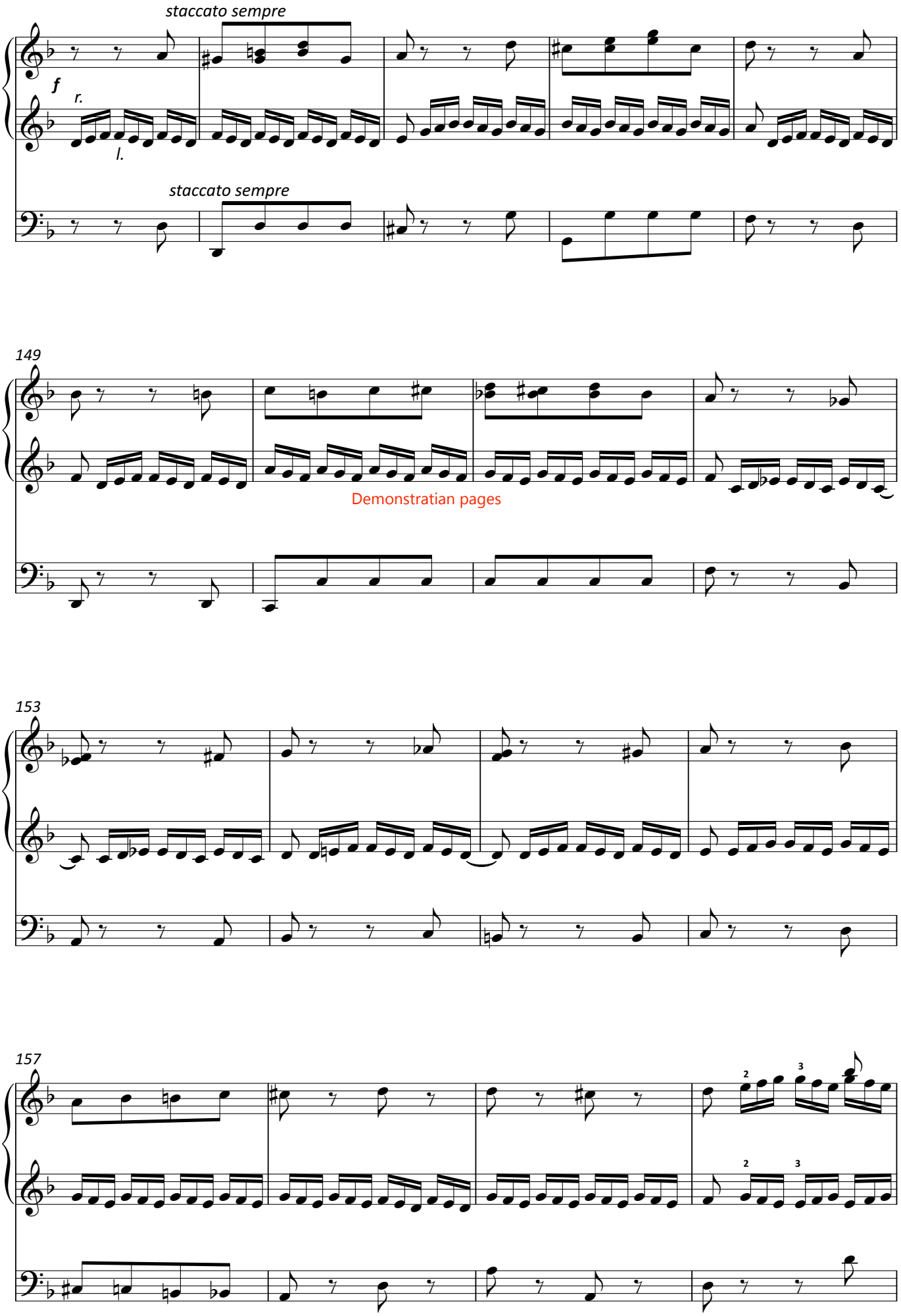




Var. 9


staccato sempre
f
r.
l.
staccato sempre
149
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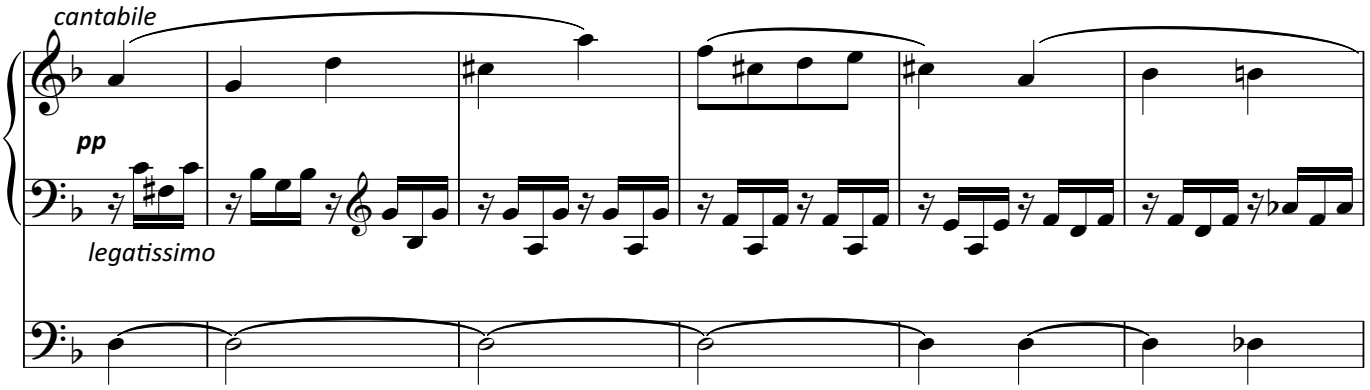
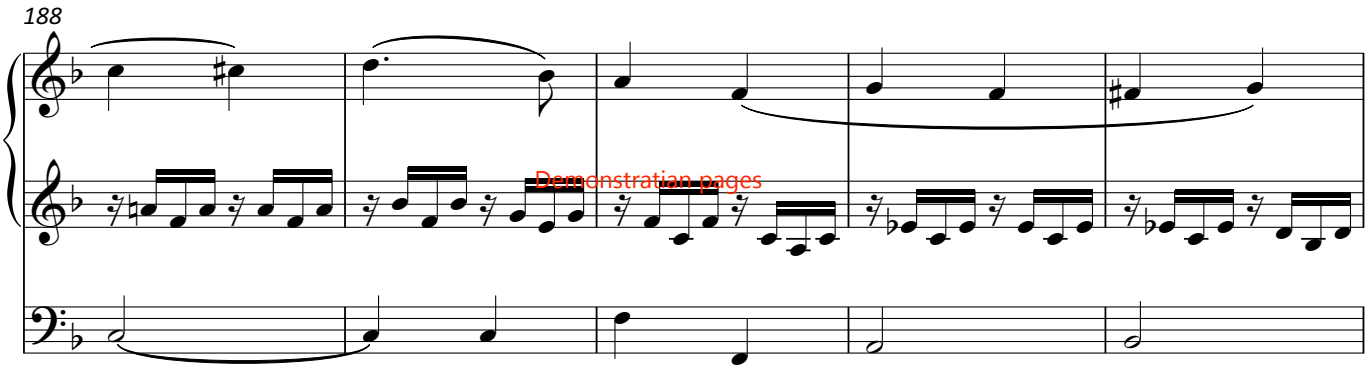
153
157

 Var. 11 (a due clav.)





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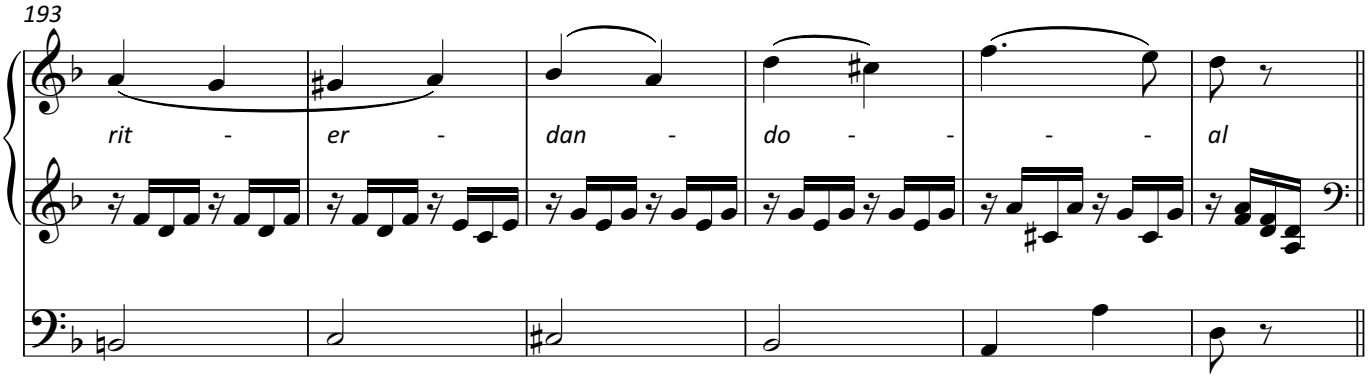
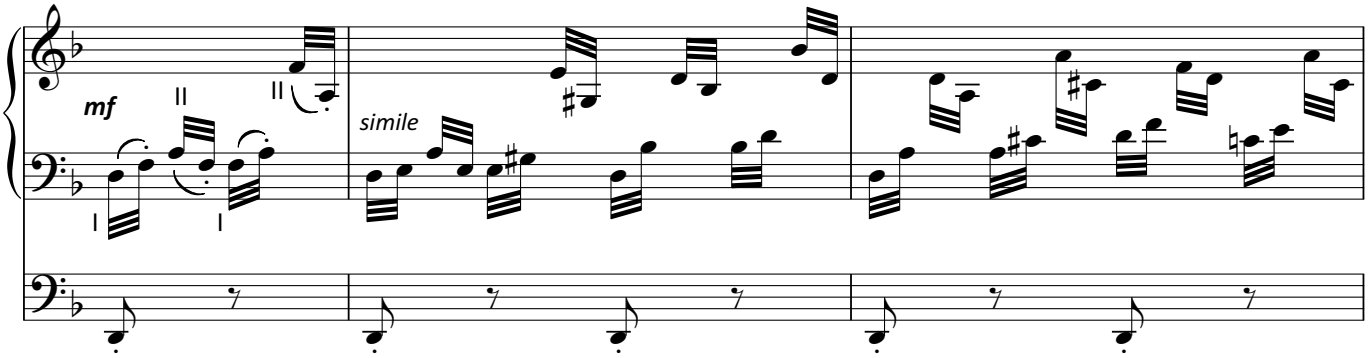


Var. 12 (a due clav.)

Tempo di Tema



Var. 17

f

simile

286

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289

292

348

355

Demonstratian pages

362

368

19

f

(dim.)

p *(clav II)*

(p)

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