WEBERN

AV

TWO PIECES
(1899)

for Cello and Piano

From the composer's autograph manuscript
in the Moldenhauer Archives

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PREFATORY NOTE

The two pieces for violoncello and piano here published are Anton von Webern's first known essays in musical composition. His choice of the particular combination of instruments no doubt resulted from the circumstance that the budding composer received instruction on the cello, as well as on the piano, during his Gymnasium years at Klagenfurt. His mother, Amalie, was an amateur pianist who had first awakened the son's love for music. His father, Carl, a man of considerable culture, was particularly fond of the cello, purchasing while the composer was still a boy the instrument that was to accompany him throughout the rest of his life. Damaged during the tumultous weeks at the close of World War II, the cello was preserved by Webern's daughter-in-law, Hermine, and now forms a treasured relic in the Webern Archive. This Archive also houses the autograph manuscripts underlying the present publication. They were found on October 26, 1965, among the remnants of Webern's library, which had been salvaged from the debris of his abandoned home in Maria-Enzersdorf and stored away in the attic of an old house at Perchtoldsdorf, where they lay forgotten for over twenty years. The dramatic discovery, which brought to light a number of important posthumous compositions, came about through this writer's search for a portrait sculpture of Webern which he traced to that hideaway.*

The youthful musician's prowess on the cello is evidenced by the fact that he was admitted in 1898, at the age of only fourteen, to the cello section of the local Konzertverein orchestra. There, for a full four years, he gained first-hand acquaintance with orchestral literature, including such masterworks as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Chamber-ensemble playing likewise belonged to Webern's earliest musical experiences. He formed a trio with his two sisters, who played piano and violin, and home concerts were a cherished activity.

Webern gave the present compositions no specific titles. Both bear only "Langsam" as the tempo marking. The piece in G major gives "Preglhof am 17. Scheiding [September] 1899" as place and time of origin, whereas the one in F major is merely dated "1899." Clearly of the same vintage, the pieces are gentle soliloquys for the solo instrument, with the piano providing but a simple chordal accompaniment. Although in romantic vein, the music, marked by quiet poise and restraint, is pure in line and free from sentimentality. The fifteen-year-old composer wrote out the cello parts separately, and one can readily visualize how he himself performed these early creative products, with his mother or sister at the piano, in the idyllic setting of the Preglhof. That beautiful and rambling country estate, where the family spent summer vacations and holidays, was young Webern's favorite haunt, and many of his compositions up to the year 1912 originated in this inspiring retreat.

The first public performance of the *Two Pieces* (1899) was presented by cellist Gregor Piatigorsky, editor of this publication, and pianist Victor Babin, on June 4, 1970, at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Upon the same occasion, the artists also gave the premiere of the *Cello Sonata* (1914)**, completing the group with the *Three Little Pieces*, Op. 11, a work that Piatigorsky was one of the first to present in public during a 1926 recital in Berlin.

Hans Moldenhauer

* For complete story, see Hans Moldenhauer, "In Quest of Webern," *Saturday Review*, August 17, 1966, and Hans Moldenhauer, "A Webern Pilgrimage," *Musical Times* (London), February, 1968.

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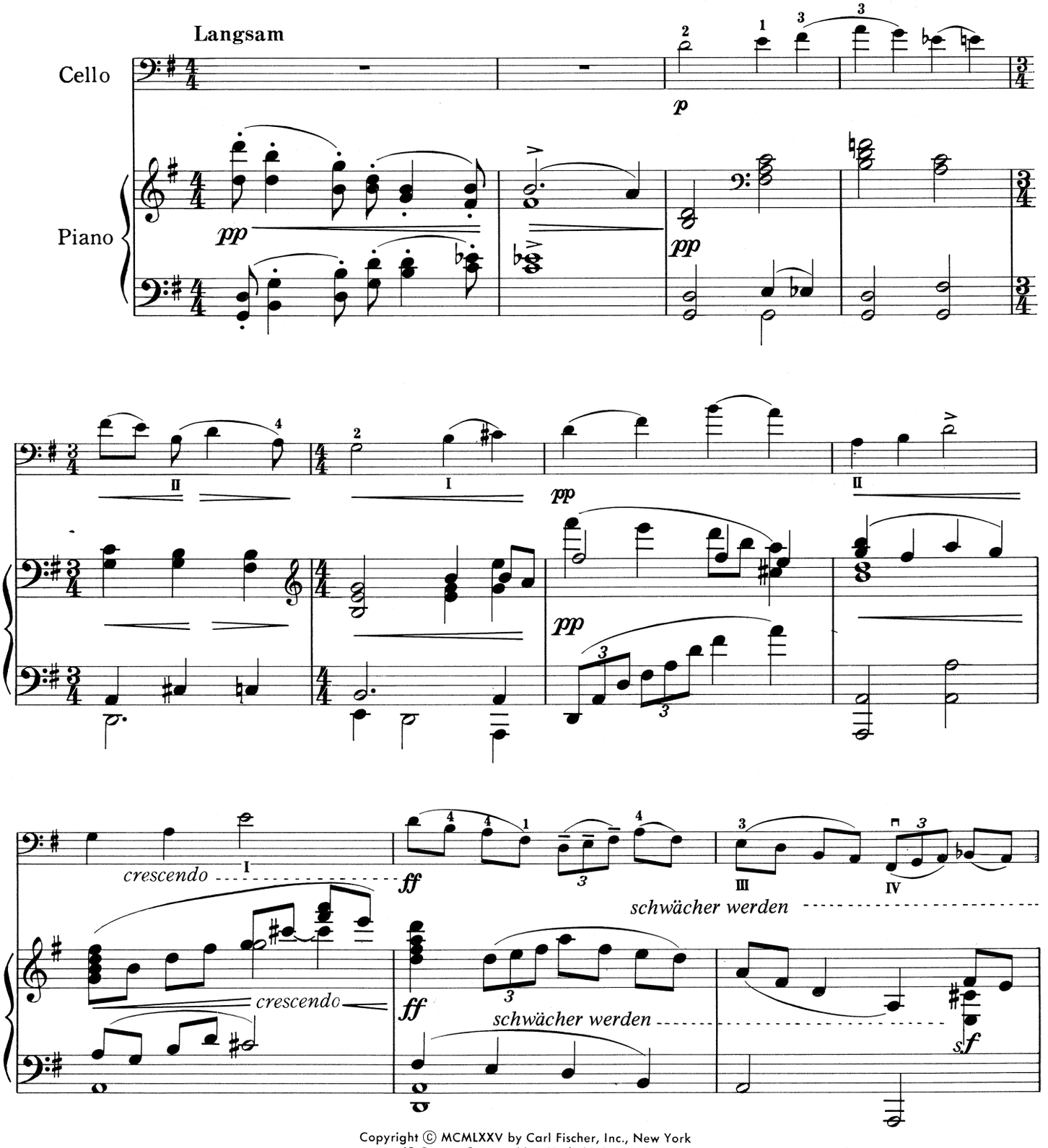
TWO PIECES (1899)

I

ANTON von WEBERN
(1883 - 1945)
Edited by Gregor Piatigorsky



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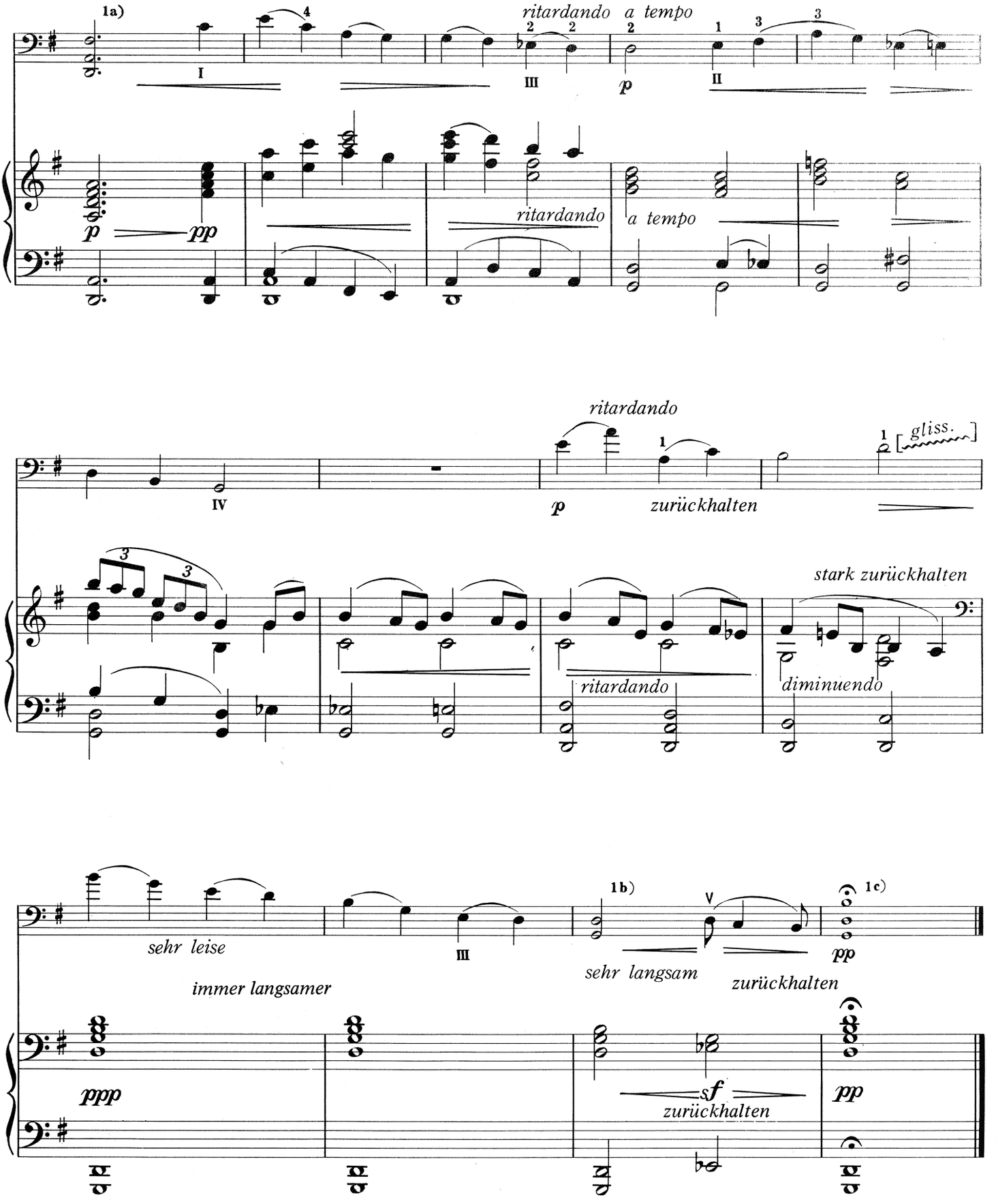
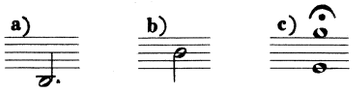
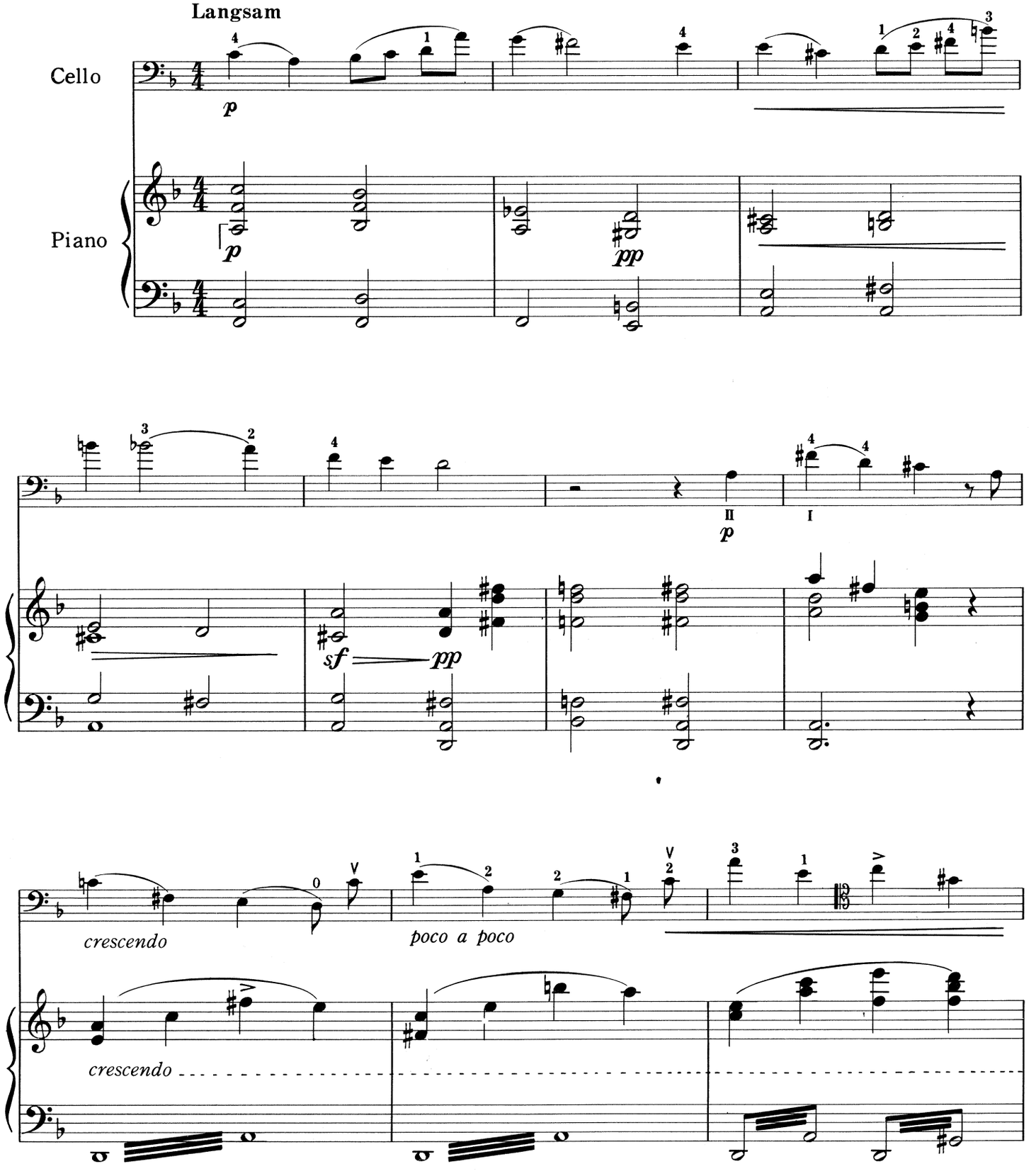


1) Editor's recommended performance alternatives:



II



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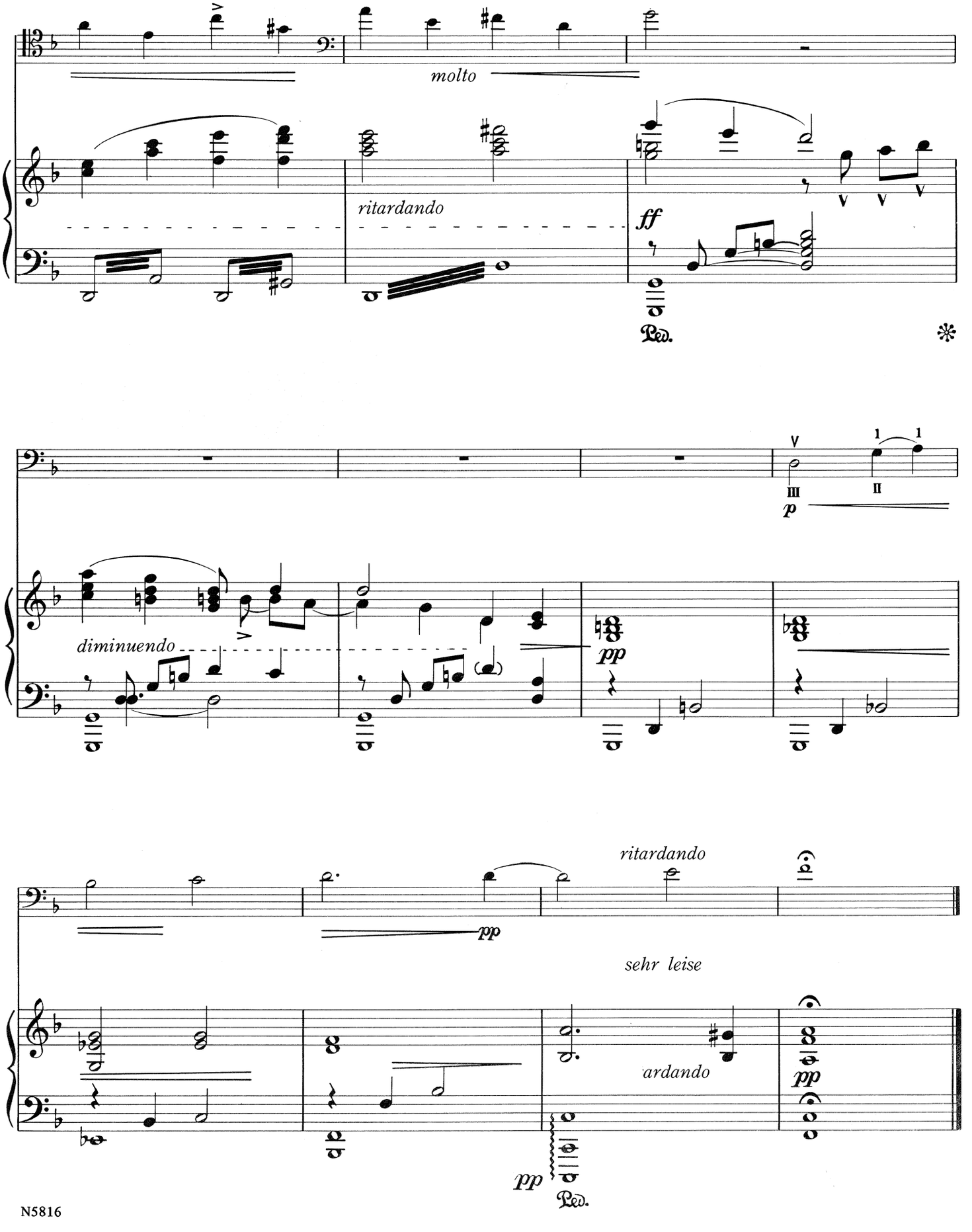
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