Genius for Pure Beauty

Module 13 of *Music: Under the Hood*

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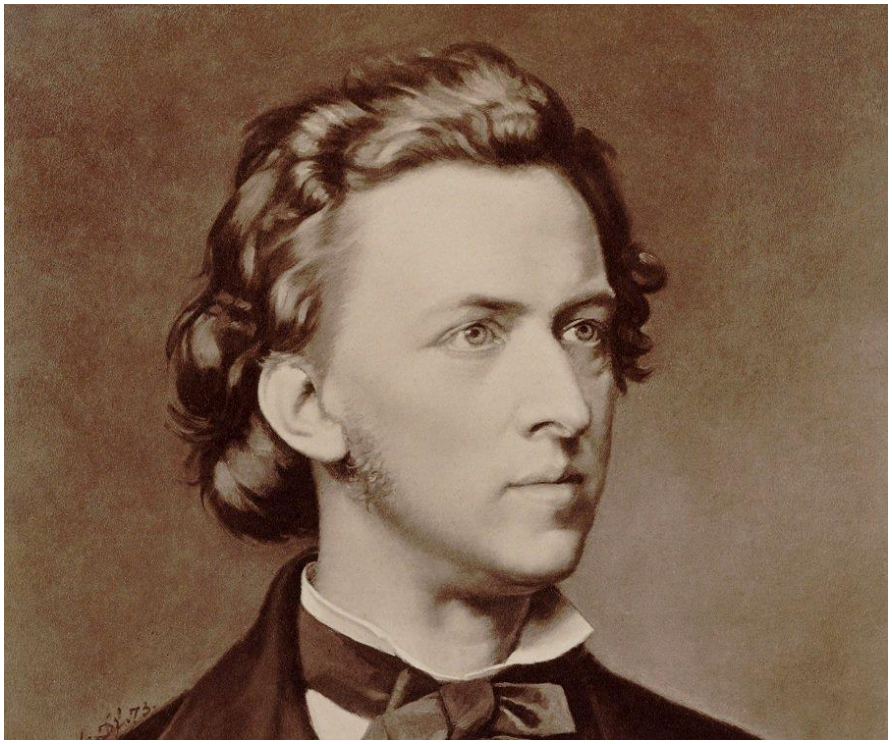
Outline

- Biography of Frédéric Chopin
- *Etude No. 3 in E major*, Op 10 no 3
- *Prelude No. 13 in F♯ major,* Op 28 no 13

Biography

- Frédéric Chopin, 1810-1849
  - Native of Poland
    - Father was a French immigrant, tutor for aristocratic families in Warsaw.
    - By age 6, Frédéric was playing piano and making up tunes to play for his friends.
    - By age 8, he was playing in elegant salons.
    - At age 16, began study at Warsaw Conservatory of Music.



Biography

- Musical development
  - Traveled to Vienna twice, beginning age 19
    - To broaden his experience, but he was homesick.
    - Could not return to Warsaw, Russian occupation.
  - Settled in Paris, age 22.
    - Knew Liszt and Mendelssohn
    - Teaching, publishing provided comfortable life.

Chopin's boyhood home

Biography

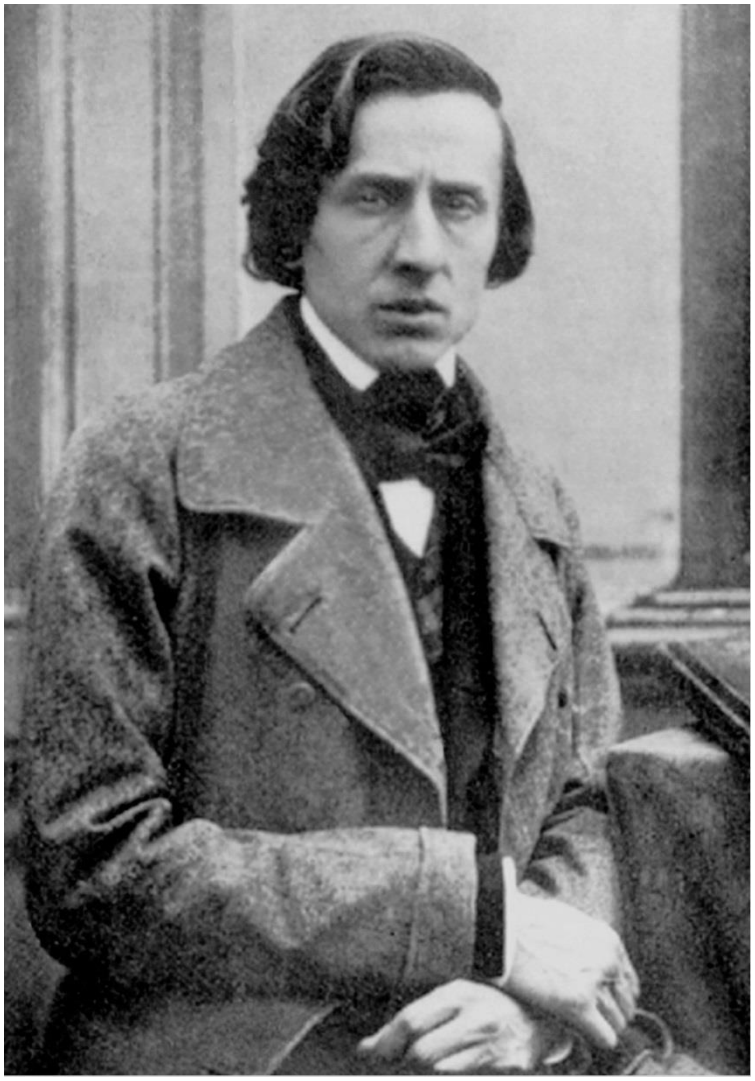
- Musical development
  - Can be followed in Chopin Museum, Warsaw
    - Listen to compositions chronologically in sound booths.
    - Music grew in sophistication with the *Etudes.*

Biography

- George Sand
  - Began affair with Chopin when he was 28
    - Aka Amatine Lucile Aurore Dupin, had affairs with several artists.
  - Chopin became ill
    - While living with Sand in Mallorca.
    - Sand found treatment and hosted Chopin in her country home for several years.
  - Breakup, age 38
    - Chopin died from poor health the next year.

Biography

- Approach to composition
  - Prophet of the piano
    - Wanted the piano to “sing.”
    - Known for elegance, melancholy.
  - Focused on miniatures
    - *Mazurkas, Waltzes, Nocturnes, Etudes, Preludes*
    - Common practice at the time
      - Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann
      - No post-Beethoven solution to large-scale organization.
    - Decided the next day whether to tear up a piece.



Biography

- Legacy
  - Transformed piano literature.
  - One of the most loved classical composers.
    - “Play Bach with respect, Beethoven with passion, Chopin with love.”
    - All of Paris attended his funeral.

Chopin’s grave in Père-Lachaise Cemetery, Paris. It has become something of a shrine.

Etude No. 3

- Chopin's *Etudes* are a set of piano exercises
  - He raised technical exercises to works of art.
  - No. 3 has a very different character than the others.
    - Slow, reflective tempo
    - Called *Tristesse* (Sadness)
    - Chopin regarded its theme as his most beautiful melody.
    - The most popular *Etude* today.

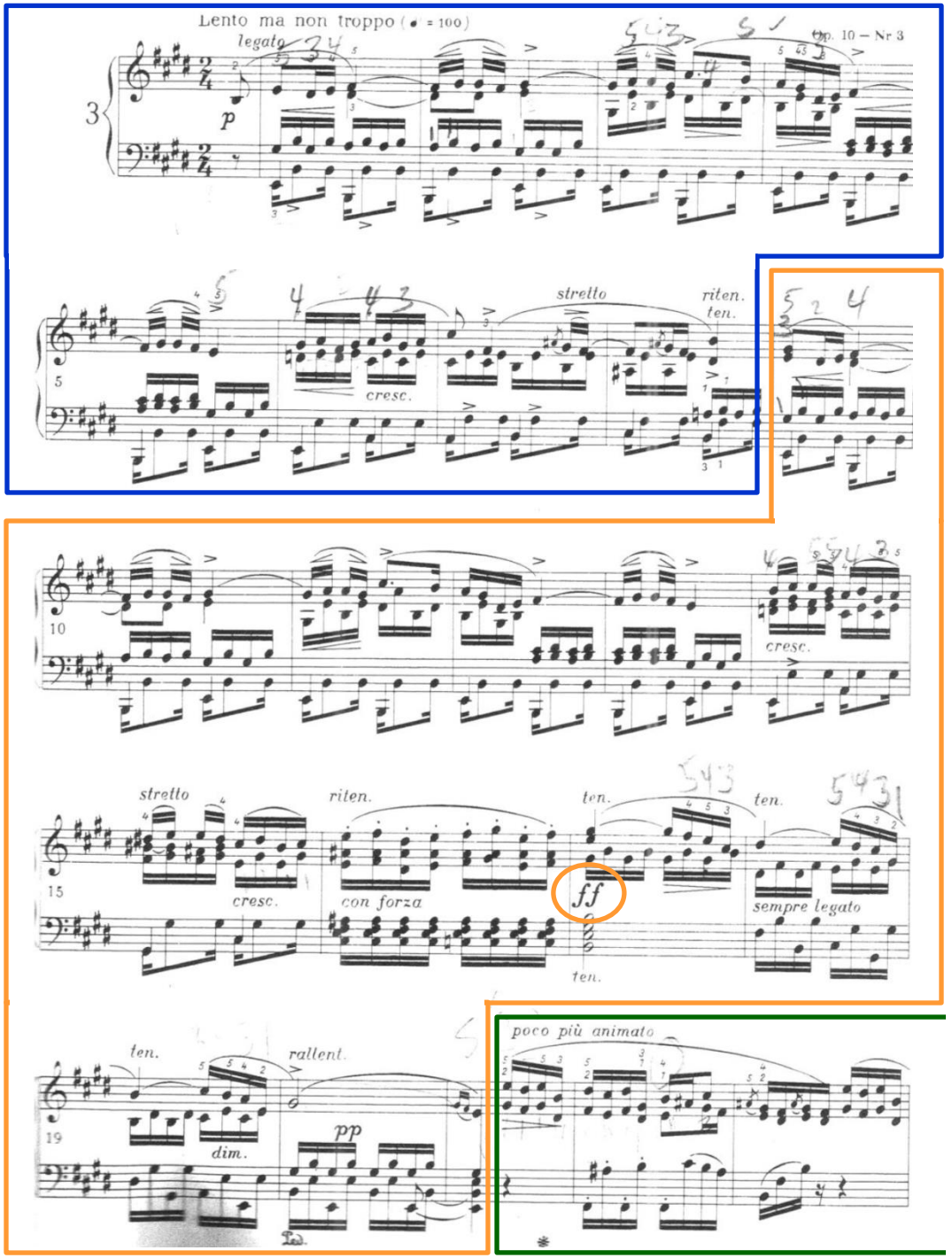
Chopin statue, Warsaw

Audio file

Exposition

Repeat, with extension leading to *fortissimo* climax

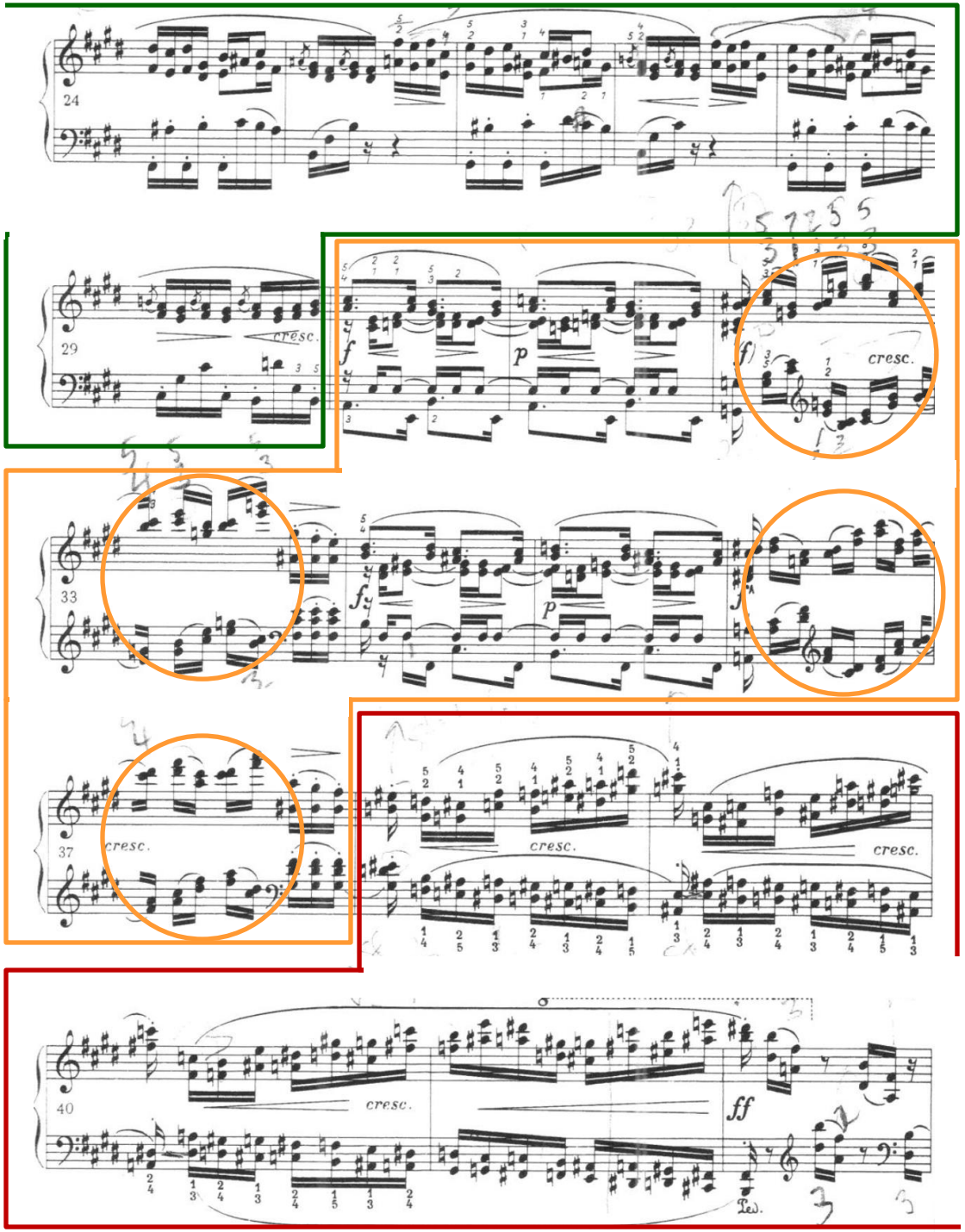
Middle section, part 1
Contrasting theme



Middle section, part 1.
Contrasting theme

Middle section, part 2.
Theme lapses into
minor 6th chords,
as reason begins to
surrender to emotion

Middle section, part 3.
Tritones and minor 7ths.
Tonality disintegrates,
as emotion takes over



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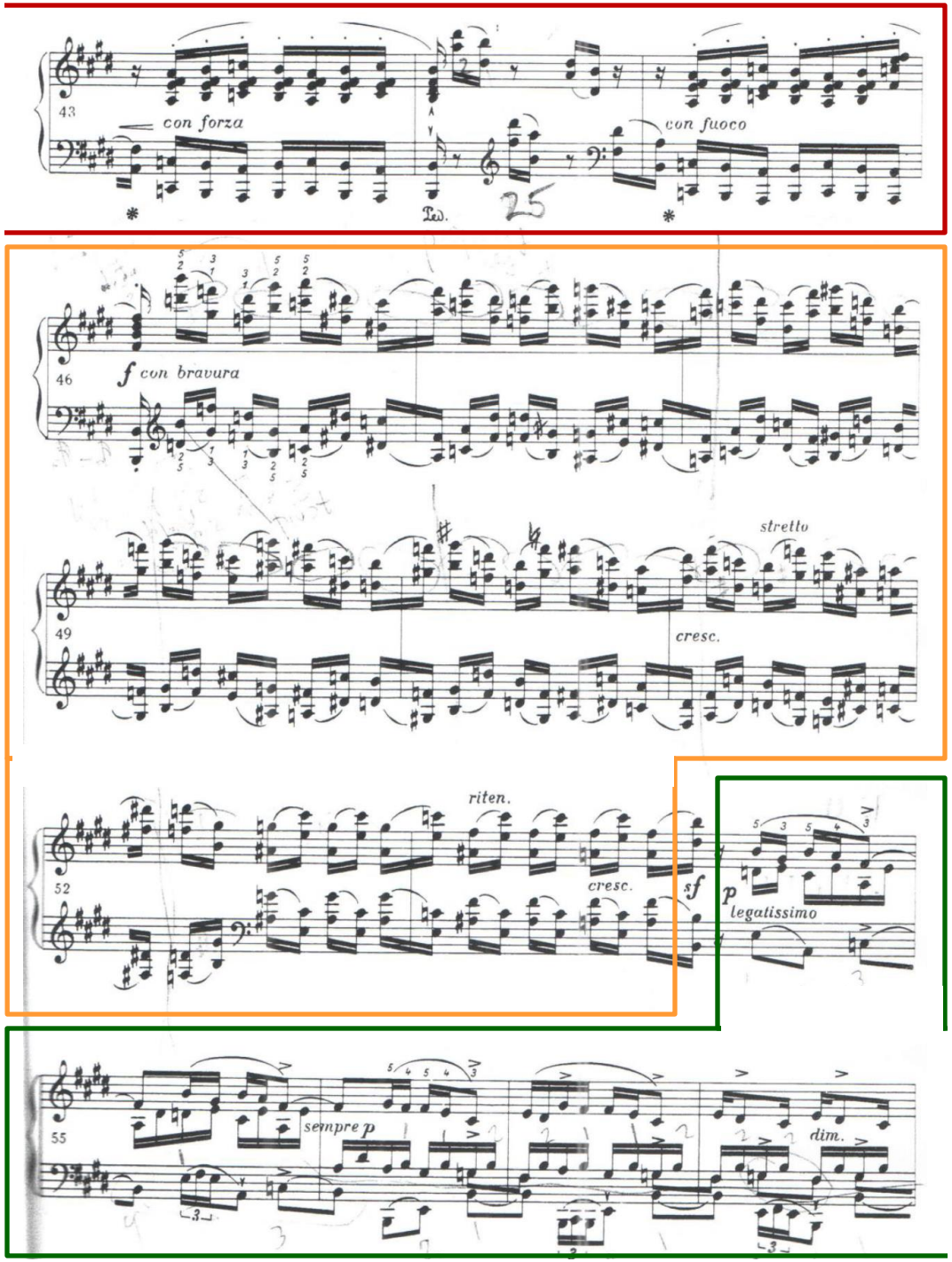
Middle section, part 4.
Random tritones.
Total breakdown of tonality!

Middle section, part 5.
Bridge to recapitulation,
perhaps the most
beautiful ever conceived



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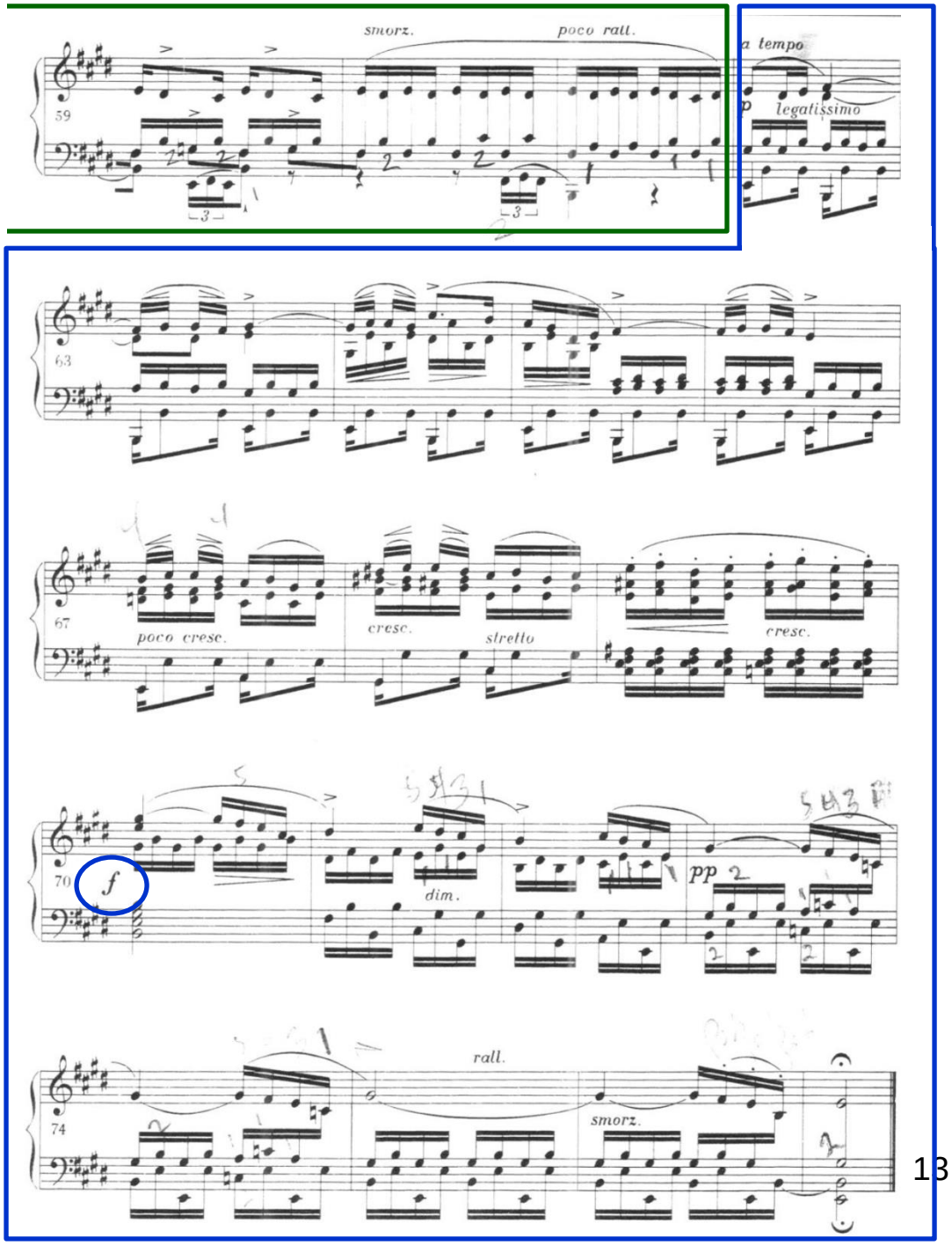
Recapitulation.

Fortissimo is now only *forte*, like a memory.



Etude No. 3

- Chopin's original tempo marking was *vivace*!
  - He later changed it to *Vivace ma non troppo*
    - "Lively, but not too lively."
  - Today it has a completely different marking.
    - *Lento ma non troppo*, "Slow, but not too slow."
      - In official Paderewski edition, published by Chopin Institute, Warsaw.
      - This is how it is played today.
    - I have seen no satisfactory explanation of this.
    - My guess: Chopin realized the true nature of the music only after he wrote it.

Prelude No. 13

- Chopin's *Preludes* are written in all 24 major and minor keys
  - Reflecting Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*
    - But arranged in the cycle of 5ths rather than chromatically.
    - C, G, D, A, E, B, F♯, D♭, A♭, E♭, B♭, F
    - He played the *WTC* from memory throughout his life, from childhood.

  - Chopin wrote no. 13 while staying with George Sand in Mallorca.

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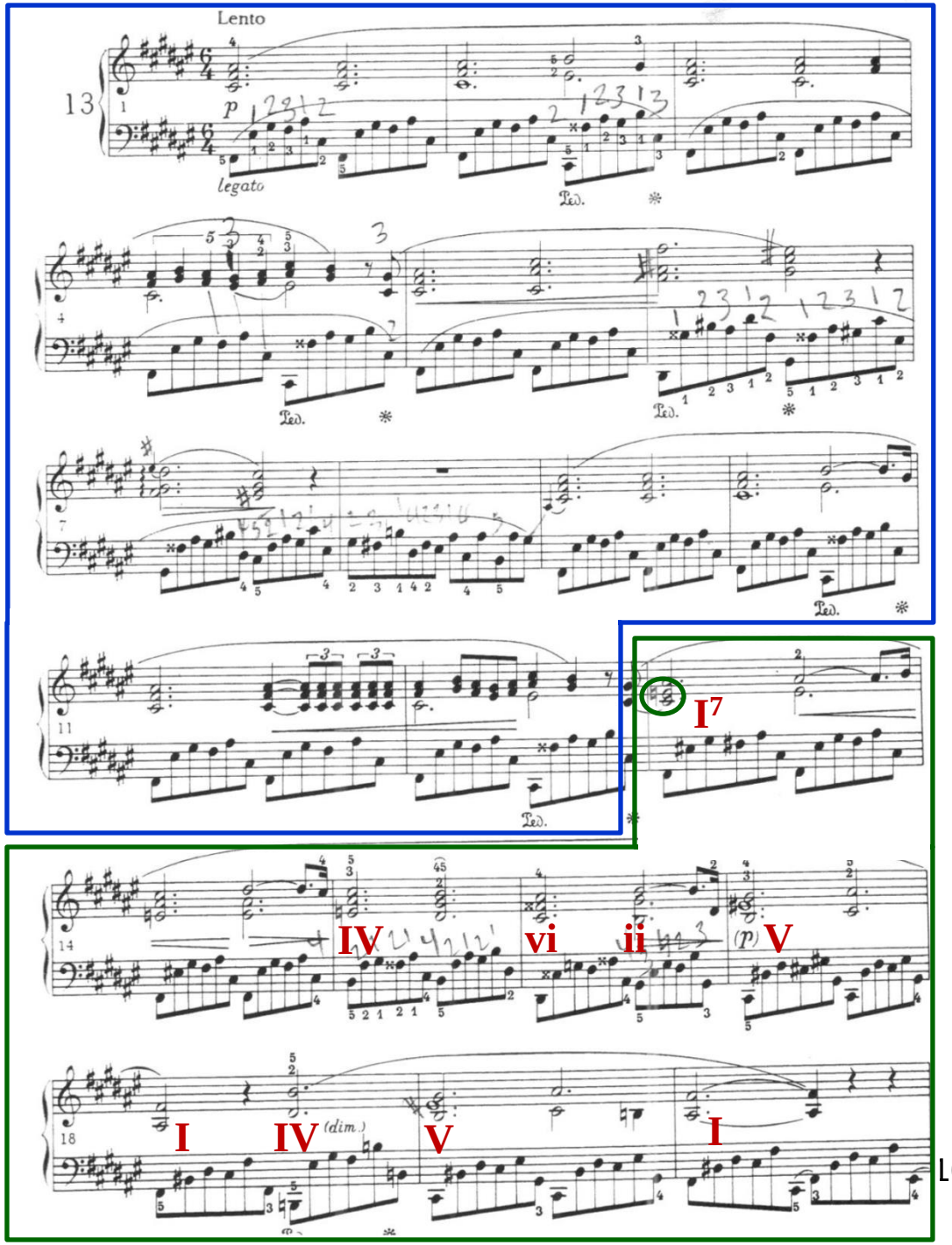
Sleepy, dreamy atmosphere is due to repeated notes in melody, minimal harmonic movement (mostly staying in tonic key)

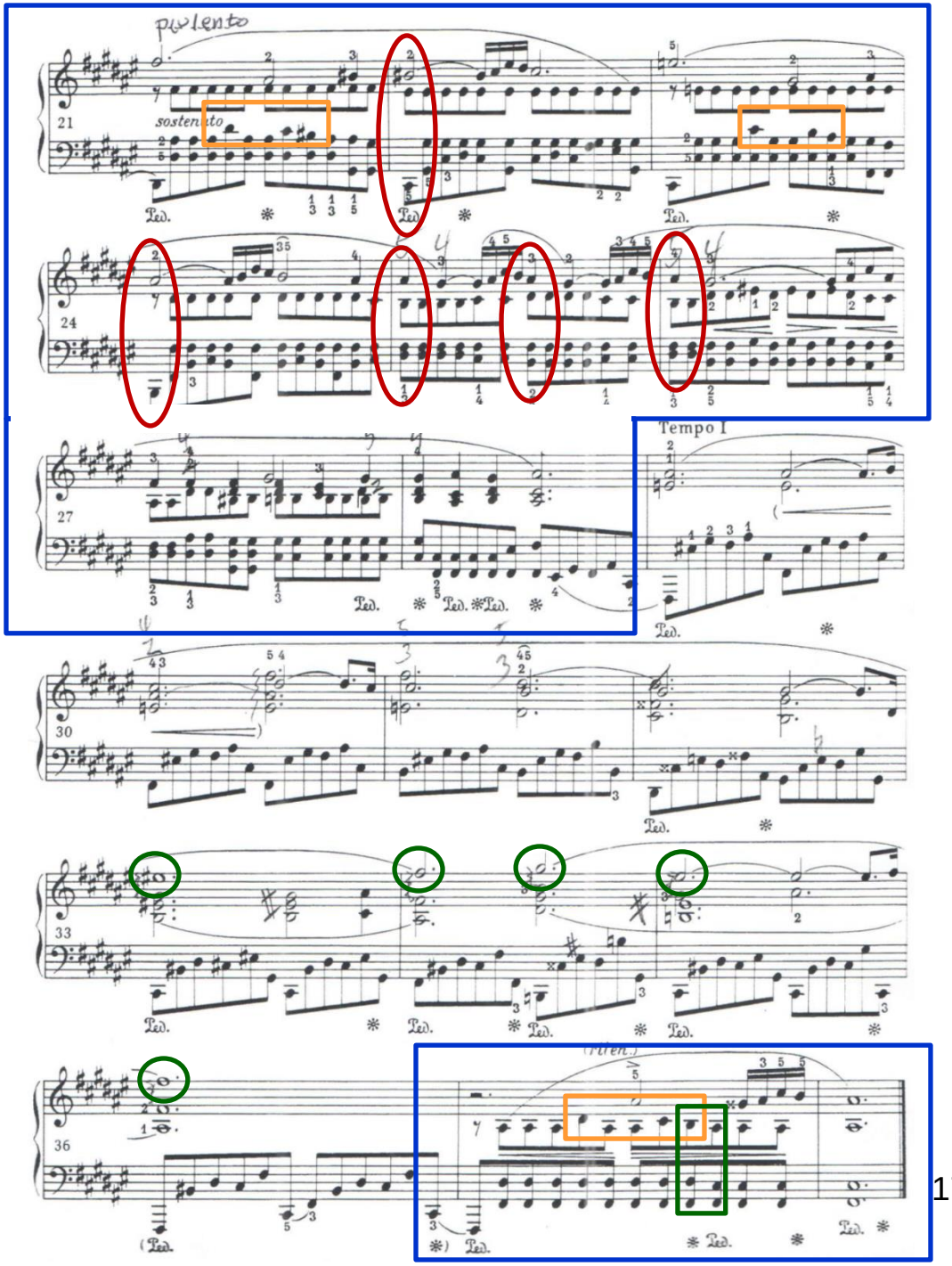
Appearance of 7th modulates to subdominant and anticipates recapitulation



Tempo slows for passage of great tenderness

Descending line in counterpoint with melody

Beautiful appogiaturas and suspensions, creating major 7 chords



"Chimes" now widely imitated.

End with echo of middle section

Plagal cadence resolves on offbeat.