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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by David Mathews Pelton

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Approved by:

Donald H Foster

THE FRENCH ROMANCES OF FÉLICIEN DAVID

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I wish to thank the Boston Public Library for microfilming the most important collection of David's romances, Gérard's Cinquante mélodies, scènes, et romances pour chant et piano, published in 1866, and the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris for sending copies of those songs not included in this edition. I particularly wish to acknowledge with deepest thanks Dr. Donald H. Foster of the University of Cincinnati for his invaluable advice and assistance. Without both this study would never have been completed. Further, I wish to thank Ethel Thompson for typing this paper.

In the musical examples and in the Appendix of this study, inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the original texts have been corrected without comment.

CHAPTER 1

THE FRENCH ROMANCE: A BRIEF HISTORY

Of the numerous types of French solo vocal music composed from the Middle Ages to the present none has been more maligned and denigrated than the romance. It has been called frivolous, trite, and inane. One early 19th-century author went so far as to recommend that "an autodafé be made of all bad music commencing with the romance,"[1] while another some sixty years later remarked that "one cannot continue believing in its stupidities."[2] That there is some truth to these comments is undeniable. However, as the romance played a key role in 19th-century French society, its significance cannot be completely ignored.

The romance was a "small rhymed poem, divided into couplets, of which the subject [was] ordinarily the account of desires or of the torments of love and which [was] sung to an air written expressly for it."[3] This air, "composed of a single phrase, almost always in a minor mode, contained a complementary phrase written in the relative major mode which returned to the original key at the desired time."[4] It "corresponded to the character of the text and [was] free of ornaments,

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[1]Frédéric Robert, La musique française au XIX[e] siècle (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), p. 23.

[2]Frits Noske, French Song from Berlioz to Duparc (New York: Dover Publications, Inc.), p. 8.

[3]Joseph-Marc Bailbé, Le roman et la musique en France sous la Monarchie de juillet (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1969), p. 119.

[4]Pierre Scudo, La musique ancienne et moderne: L'art ancien et l'art moderne; nouveaux mélanges de critique et de littérature musicale (Paris: Garnier Frères, Librairies, 1854), pp. 322-23.

unmannered and [built around] a sweet, natural rustic melody."[5] As these statements imply, the romance was a very naive and unsophisticated bit of song. Its melodies were straightforward, its accompaniments were simple, and its harmonies, rhythms, and forms were highly conventional. It avoided such academic compositional techniques as imitation and shied away from such aesthetic devices as word painting and musical allusion. It was a short, strophic piece which only occasionally was stretched into a longer through-composed work.

The romance emerged as a specific type of solo song in the 1760s and continued to be composed well into the 1900s. This "manifestation of French sensibility, grace and elegance"[6] underwent few changes in form and content during its long history and was only incidentally influenced by its more famous counterpart, the German lied.

Chronologically, the romance can be divided into five periods which conveniently coincide with or encompass a number of events in 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century French politics. The first includes the last years of Louis XV's reign (ca. 1760-74) and the whole of Louis XVI's (1774-89), while the second coincides with the four periods of the Revolution: the Constituency (1789-91), the Legislature (1791-92), the Convention (1792-95), and the Directory (1795-99). The third spans the Consulate (1799-1804), the First Empire (1804-15), the Restoration of the Bourbons (1815-30), and the July Monarchy (1830-48), while the fourth overlaps the Second Republic (1848-52) and the Second Empire

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[5]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Dictionnaire de musique (Paris: La Veuve Duchesne, Librairie, 1768), p. 420.

[6]Scudo, La musique ancienne et moderne, p. 322.

(1852-70), and the fifth the Third Republic (1870-1914), the First World War (1914-19) and the Interwar Period (1919-39).[7]

Of these five periods the first was the least important. Prerevolutionary romances were composed by such members of the aristocracy as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78) and were, consequently, inaccessible to or rejected by the middle and lower classes. However, they became increasingly popular during the Revolution. As one writer remarks, "The revolution and the counter-revolution were made while singing." "Throughout this impassioned epoch," he notes, "one can say that there was no event, glorious, pathetic or tragic, nor sentiment which was not made into a song."[8] Disguised as marches, hymns, and other patriotic pieces, romances were composed by a number of citizen musicians, including Devienne (1759-1803) and the brothers Jadin, Louis (1768-1853) and Hyacinthe (1769-ca. 1800).

The most significant period of romance composition immediately followed the cataclysmic events of 1789-99. From 1800 to approximately 1848 the writing of these simple and ingenuous songs grew steadily in popularity and productivity. The now socially dominant bourgeoisie befriended scores of amateur and professional musicians, who composed and performed literally thousands of romances for it during the first half of the 19th century. Often accompanying themselves on the harp or the guitar, these artists mesmerized audiences between 1815 and the late

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[7] These dates are taken from various subheadings used in the historical portion of the Encyclopedia Britannica article on France. (Encyclopedia Britannica, 200th anniv. ed., s.v. "France.")

[8] Léon Guichard, La musique et les lettres au temps du romantisme (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955), p. 11.

1840s with an assortment of solo vocal pieces. The most fashionable, which differed from the romance proper in subject matter only, were the ballade, the barcarolle, the boléro, the chansonette, the mélodie, the nocturne, the tarentelle, the tyrolienne, and the valse.[9] Also, around 1825 a number of composers began writing "romances dialoguées," which became equally popular. In these more theatrical pieces the voice was accompanied by the piano and complemented by an obbligato instrument, usually a flute, oboe, horn, violin, or cello. Among the many romancistes who accommodated France's new ruling class were Pauline Duchambge (1778-1858), Loïsa Puget (1810-89), P.-J. Garat (1764-1823), Queen Hortense de Beauharnais (1773-1837), Sophie Gail (1775-1819), Antoine Romagnési (1781-1850), Auguste Panseron (1796-1859), and François Masini (dates unknown).

The decline of the romance during the Second Republic and the Second Empire was precipitated by the introduction into French society of the lied in the 1850s and '60s and by the gradual emergence of the mélodie as its artistic equal in the 1860's and '70s. Though such composers as Paul Henrion (1819-1901), Henri Reber (1807-80), Victor Massé (1822-88), and Ernest Reyer (1823-1909) continued to write romances, they had by this time lost much of their popular appeal and had degenerated into nothing more than "sentimental mementos yellowing with age in very old cardboard boxes."[10]

From the mid 1870s to the mid 1930s the romance continued its decline though a number of composers, such as Cécile Chaminade (1861-

[9]For a more detailed treatment of these subtypes see Noske, French Song, pp. 5-6 and Robert, La musique française, p. 24.

[10]Noske, French Song, p. 8.

1944), Augusta Holmès (1847-1903), Paul Delmet (1862-1904), Gabriel Dupont (1879-1914), and Anatole Lionnet (dates unknown), surprisingly still found these "pleasant ditties"[11] alluring and "produced quantities with a charm slightly antiquated but of which a few were truly inspired."[12]

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[11] Edward Lockspeiser, "The French Song in the 19th Century," Musical Quarterly, 26 (April 1940):193.

[12] Robert, La musique française, p. 24.

CHAPTER 2

FÉLICIEN DAVID: HIS LIFE AND WORKS

Early years

One of the more fashionable mid-19th-century *romancistes* was Félicien-César David, whose sixty songs, composed between 1837 and 1866, were quite popular during the July Monarchy, the Second Republic, and the Second Empire. He was born at Cadenet in the Vaucluse region of southern France on April 13, 1810, the fifth child of a local jeweler and amateur violinist, Charles-Nicolas David. By the age of four Félicien had already acquired an exceptional musical memory and by the age of six his talents had advanced so quickly and so far that the principal oboist of the Paris Opéra orchestra suggested that he begin formal study immediately.

As a result, in 1817 he was sent to the choir school attached to Aix-en-Provence's Cathedral of Saint-Sauveur and undertook an academic program consisting of reading, writing, solfège, and Latin. In addition to his formal instruction he privately examined the music of Haydn, Mozart, and Cherubini and began composing simple hymns and motets.

In 1824, following his term at the *maîtrise*, he was admitted to the local Jesuit Collège. There he continued to study composition on his own and, in order to learn the principles of orchestration, taught himself to play the violin.

However, in 1828 a national directive ordering the closure of all Jesuit institutions abruptly terminated David's formal academic education. Shortly after the Collège's demise he joined an *aixois*

vaudeville theater as its second conductor, only to resign six months later. He then worked as a clerk in the chambers of a prominent aixois lawyer, though he again left after only a brief stay in order to become chief organist at the Cathedral of Saint-Sauveur, a position which he held until the summer of 1830.

In the fall of that year David entered the Paris Conservatory and for the first time formally studied harmony, counterpoint, and, later, improvisation. He also took private lessons in theory, continued his experiments in orchestration, and taught himself to play the piano.

Maturity and Saint-Simonism

In 1831 David abandoned his conservatory studies and, after spending several months privately teaching harmony, solfège, and piano, became a member of a socialist fraternity headed by Prosper Enfantin, a Parisian engineer and fanatic follower of Claude-Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon. Enfantin's philosophy of social reform was based exclusively on the writings of Saint-Simon and, though slightly more radical than his mentor's, greatly appealed to the young composer.

Society, Saint-Simon wrote, had throughout its history been subjected to alternate periods of balance and imbalance and, following the socio-political events of the Revolution of 1789-99, was again "ripe for the consolidation of a new period of equilibrium."[13] In order to achieve this state he believed that society should be divided into three distinct classes: the savants, the propertied, and the unpropertied. The savants were to control the "spiritual power" of this new order and

[13] Edmund Wilson, To the Finland Station (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc.), p. 81.

were to be elected, if qualified, to its supreme ruling body. This committee, to be known as the Council of Newton, was to consist of three mathematicians, three physicians, three chemists, three physiologists, three littérateurs, three painters, and three musicians, and was "to devise new inventions and works of art for the general improvement of humanity, and in [particular to] discover a new law of gravitation applicable to the behavior of social bodies which would keep people in equilibrium with one another."[14]

Though society should ultimately be controlled by "men of genius,"[15] it should also be able to govern itself without the assistance of these savants. And, as the unpropertied class had shown itself incapable of rule during the Revolution, Saint-Simon argued that the actual process of government should be given to "those members of the community who possessed enough income to live on and [who] could work for the State without pay."[16]

Saint-Simon's belief that society should be structured hierarchically remained unchanged throughout his life, though in his last years it was somewhat modified. In Nouveau Christianisme, a work written shortly before his death, he continued to maintain that savants were society's best rulers and landowners its best administrators. However, he now called for the creation of a new religion which would give some meaning to the lives of the poor. Its members should deal directly with the problems of the unpropertied class and should assist the propertied

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[14] Ibid., p. 82.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 83.

gentry and the savants whenever possible. Only if this were done, he concluded, would society as a whole reach its desired state of equilibrium.

Enfantin, on the other hand, believed that the working class should never be exploited or enslaved by the owning class and that the Council of Newton should be enlarged to include engineers and other men of practical science. Further, he believed that Saint-Simon's new religion was essentially temporal and that he should be one of its popes, or pères.

Enfantin's ideas on free love and the abolition of such institutions as marriage brought him into direct conflict with the authorities and, shortly after David had joined his band, le père chose to retire to his estate at Ménilmontant, where he established a pseudo-religious monastery. Here he and his forty disciples wore special costumes of red, white, and violet and arranged their daily lives around a number of exotic ceremonies, for which David composed the music. These fidèles, as they were called, lived and worked in private, though they allowed the public to share their services and meals twice a week.

In 1832 Enfantin was briefly imprisoned for "preaching doctrines dangerous to public morality"[17] and the Ménilmontant brotherhood was forced to disband. However, David and several of his friends continued to practice Enfantin's version of Saint-Simon's social religion and spent the next two years extolling its virtues in the southern French provinces and in the Middle East. Their voyage, which began in March of 1833, took them to Lyons, Avignon, and Marseilles and then on to Turkey,

[17] Ibid., p. 100.

Smyrna, Jerusalem, Alexandria, the Suez, Cairo, Gaza, and Sidon. Upon return to France in the summer of 1835 they too disbanded, since their idealistic views of social reform had been greatly altered by their travels and experiences.

In the fall of 1835 David renewed his studies in orchestration and his private teaching in Paris. For reasons of health, however, he moved to a country house near the village of Igny three years later, where he lived and composed in absolute privacy until 1841. In that year he resettled in the French capital and, except for a brief voyage to Germany and Hungary in the winter and spring of 1845 and for several visits to Aix-en-Provence, remained there until his death on August 29, 1876, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.

Musical Compositions

David composed most of his music from 1832 to 1866. Though he had penned a few motets, hymns, romances, and string quartets while a resident of Aix, his first major compositions were those hymns and work songs written for Enfantin's Saint-Simonist monastery at Ménilmontant. These choruses were followed in turn by a series of short descriptive piano pieces entitled Mélodies orientales, written during his trip to the Middle East in 1833-35, and by several symphonies, romances, string quartets, and works for brass composed in Paris and Igny between 1836 and 1843.

Published in 1836, the Mélodies orientales are of considerable historical importance, since they are the first examples of French music

to blend occidental techniques with Oriental sounds and colors.[18] The idiosyncracies of the religious chants, the peculiarities of the folk songs and dances, and the eccentricities of the instruments which David had heard while in the Middle East greatly affected his style. In fact, his most significant work, the choral-symphonic ode Le désert, composed in Paris in 1844, was based entirely on his Eastern experiences. It contains a number of exotic melodies, rhythms, colors, and texts never before used in such a large piece and was so well received by critics and the general public that it not only influenced the type of music he composed for the next twenty years, but also brought him considerable, though ephemeral, fame.[19] Except for three trios for piano, violin, and cello written in 1857, three string quartets written after 1865, and numerous romances written between 1844 and 1866, all of his remaining compositions were written for the stage or for the concert hall. These consisted of two oratorios written in 1846 (Moïse au Sinaï) and 1848 (L'Éden), another choral-symphonic ode composed in 1847 (Christophe Colomb), one unstaged concert opera premiered in 1849 (Le jugement dernier), one opera written in 1859 (Herculanum), and four opéras-comiques composed in 1852 (La perle du Brésil), 1862 (Lalla-Roukh), 1864 (La captive), and 1865 (Le saphir).

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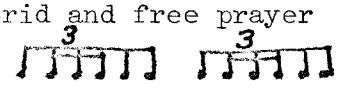
[18] Many 19th- and 20th-century historians believe that David first used Eastern sounds and colors in his symphonic ode Le désert, composed in 1844. A few scholars now contend, however, that he did so in these Mélodies orientales, which appeared eight years earlier.

[19] Among the more exotic melodies, rhythms, and orchestral textures found in this three-part work are: (a) a highly florid and free prayer to Allah sung in Arabic and (b) a rhythmic ostinato  played for several measures by the violas and cellos in open fifths.

CHAPTER 3

THE ROMANCES OF FÉLICIEN DAVID

THEIR PUBLICATION, AUTHORS, AND TEXTS

Publication

David's romances constitute approximately two-thirds of his total compositional output and exemplify, as well as any of his other works, his overall musical style and technique. Though the precise dates of composition for only a few of these sixty songs are known, all, according to his biographers, were written sometime between 1837 and 1866. His first romances were apparently composed between 1837 and 1841, followed by a second set published in 1842. These in turn were followed by a third set of seven published in 1846, an edition of ten more issued in 1847, and a collection of fifty printed in 1866.[20]

Seven of these songs were originally published under different titles.[21] "Le vieillard et les roses" first appeared as "Les roses et le printemps," "Le jour des morts" as "La pensée des morts," "L'océan" as "Gronde, océan," "Le quart" as "L'océan,"[22] "Amour perdu" as "Bonheur d'aimer," "La pluie" as "La rosée," and "La bayadère" first as "Un revers de médaille," then as "Joie et tristesse."

Also, forty initially bore subtitles. Sixteen were called "mélodies," three "romances," three "rêveries," two "méditations," two

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[20] For more information about the dates of these songs see Noske, French Song, pp. 343-47 and Alexis Jacob Azevedo, F. David, coup d'oeil sur sa vie et son oeuvre (Paris: Heugel et Cie.), p. 67.

[21] An eighth, "Le chibouk," had been first issued as "Le Tchibouk" or "Le Chybouk."

[22] This song and the one preceding it are not identical.

"berceuses," one a "barcarolle," one an "élégie," one a "chant du moyen âge," one a "chant du soldat," one a "lamento," one a "venitienne," one an "orientale," one a "nocturne à deux voix," one a "scène dramatique," one a "sérénade," and one a "prière au prophète."

Apparently, all of David's songs were conceived as separate pieces. He wrote no cycles, though six works, "Mon almée," "Reviens, reviens!" "Amour pour amour," "L'océan," "Tristesse de l'odalisque," and "Amour perdu," were issued in 1846 as a set entitled Les perles d'Orient.

Moreover, all of the romances he wrote seem to have been published, since none of his chroniclers mentions additional songs found only in manuscript.[23]

Poets

David chose poems by an inordinately large number of writers as texts for these vocal vignettes. As the following list indicates, he used works by some twenty-eight poets, of whom his most favorite were Émile Barateau, Théophile Gautier, and Marc Constantin:

Poet	Number of poems set
Barateau, Émile	8
Bouscatel, Edouard	1
Brazier	1
Chaubet, Charles	4
Cognat, Jacques	2
Constantin, Marc	7

[23]These do not include those vocal works composed for the Saint-Simonists or those written while living in Aix-en-Provence.

Deschamps, Antony	1
Deschamps, Émile	1
Escudier, L.	1
Fonteille, M.	3
Gautier, Théophile	5
Hanapier, Eugène	1
L'Hériter	1
L'Hôtelier, Volny	1
Jourdain, Louis	1
Lamartine, Alphonse de	2
de Marecourt, Charles	1
Monavon, Gabriel	1
de Musset, Alfred	1
Plouvier, Edouard	2
Poncy, Charles	1
Mme de la Renaudière	1
Saint-Étienne, Sylvain	3
Séjour, Victor	1
Tastet, Tyrtée	2
Tourneux, E.	1
Mme E. T.	1
Mme E. Tourneux de Voves[24]	1
unknown	3

[24]Mme E. Tourneaux de Voves is probably also Mme E. T., since both their poems are about the same village, Charence.

Texts

In forty-three of the fifty-seven songs examined[25] the author speaks in the first person.[26] In three he talks specifically of love or of friendship, in four he talks about nature, in eight he talks directly to another person or object, in twelve he either talks indirectly to someone or about someone, and in sixteen he talks about himself. In the remaining poems he is not directly involved. Of these fourteen three are lullabies; two are portraits of the moon and of the sea; one is a dialogue between a flower and a hummingbird; another is a tale of a flower's revenge; a third is an impression of a dream; a fourth is an exhortation to enjoy travel, song, and love; a fifth is a cry to arms; a sixth is a reflection of a voyage along a river; a seventh is a patriotic lament; an eighth is a prayer to charity; and a ninth is an invitation to dance.

The language and prosody most often used by these poets is unsophisticated and unimaginative. They avoid unusual or picturesque words and only a few attempt to create verbal images such as those achieved by Gautier in the last verse of "Sultan Mahmoud":

> Ni la vierge de Grèce,
> Marbre vivant,
> Ni la sombre Négresse,
> Toujours rêvant,
> Ni la blonde Française
> Á l'air môqueur,
> Ni la plaintive Anglaise
> N'ont pris mon coeur.

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[25] Due to their unavailability, the three poems which have not been studied are "Un amour dans les nuages," "La rosée," and "Le fou de Bicêtre."

[26] In this context the term "author" refers to that individual who is carrying on the conversation in a particular poem. In three, "La bayadère," "L'Égyptienne," and "Au couvent," the author is a woman.

Moreover, all poets ignore such literary devices as alliteration and onomatopoeia, though others, such as metaphor and simile, are sometimes used by Barateau, Cognat, Escudier, Gautier, de Marecourt, Monavon, Saint-Étienne, Tastet, and one unknown poet.

The formal construction of the poems David set is simple and straightforward. The majority are three verses long, though several contain as few as two or as many as five. Also, one-sixth include a refrain. In each verse the final syllables of the individual lines are arranged either in alternation, i.e., abab cdcd,[27] as in the first verse of "Rêverie"

Oh! dormir sous votre ombre,	a
Beaux arbres de Charence!	b
Laisser couler sans nombre	a
Ses jours dans le silence.	b
Paupière demiclose,	c
Ecouter dans les fleurs	d
L'abeille qui se pose	c
Et chante son bonheur;	d
Entendre le ruisseau	e
Qui gémit et murmure,	f
Et porte en vos rameaux	e
Son onde fraîche et pure!	f

in repetition, i.e., aa etc., as in the initial verse of "Qui t'aime plus que moi?"

Toi qui sous la mante grise,	a
Parais toujours la mieux mise,	a
Pauvre fille de Venise,	a

---

[27]This pattern is sometimes reversed, i.e., abba, as in the second verse of "Amour perdu":

Alors il me disait, exalté de bonheur,	a
Tremblant à mes genoux, il me disait: Marie!	b
Oh, de tes blonds cheveux une bouche chérie	b
Pour garder sur mon coeur.	a

La plus belle . . . c'est bien toi! b
Aussi dans notre Italie, c
Brune fleur, toi si jolie, c
Chacun t'aime à la folie, c
Moins encore . . . moins que moi! b
Près de toi riante est l'heure; d
Mais quand la brise t'effleure, d
Je suis jaloux, et je pleure . . . d
Dis, qui t'aime . . . plus que moi? b

in succession, i.e., abcd etc., as in the second verse of "Reviens, reviens!"

D'ici là-bas que de campagnes, a
Que de villes et de hameaux, b
Que de vallons et de montagnes a
À lasser le pied des chevaux! b
Au pays qui me prends ma belle, c
Hélas! si je pouvais aller, d
Et si mon corps avait un aile c
Comme mon âme pour voler! d

or in any combination or variation of all three as in the last verse of "La chanson du pêcheur":

Sur moi la nuit immense a
S'étend comme un linceul, b
Je chante ma romance a
Que le ciel entend seul; b
Ah! Comme elle était belle c
Et comme je l'aimais! d
Je n'aimerais jamais d
Une femme autant qu'elle, c
Que mon sort est amer e
Ah! sans amour s'en aller sur la mer! e

the middle verse of "Amour pour amour":

J'aime aussi l'odeur fine a
De la fleur des houris, b
Sur un plat de la Chine a
Les sorbets d'ambre gris: b
L'opium, ciel liquide, c
Poison doux et perfide; c
Remplissant le coeur vide c
D'un bonheur étoilé d
Et sur l'eau qui réplique e
Un doux bruit de musique, e
S'échappant d'un caïque e
De falots constellé. d

or in the initial verse of "Le captif":

Sur le palais et la chaumière	a
Le jour se lève radieux;	b
Quand il descend du haut des cieux,	b
À ses rayons doux et joyeux	b
Chacun espère un temps heureux,	b
Espère un temps heureux:	b
Mais jamais sa vive lumière ne luit sur ces mûrs odieux,	b
Sa lueur sainte et tutelaire	a
Jamais ne console mes yeux,	b
Jamais ne luit sur ces mûrs odieux . . .	b

The number of syllables per line of verse generally fits into fairly rigid patterns. In eighteen poems these patterns never vary. For example, each line in "Le nuage" contains six syllables; each line in "Éoline," four; each line in "Qui t'aime plus que moi?" seven; each line in "Reviens, reviens!" eight; and each line in "Rêverie," six. In the remaining thirty-nine this practice is not so rigidly followed. Lines are either shortened, as in "Tristesse de l'odalisque," making a syllabic pattern per verse of 84848484; or elongated, as in "Les hirondelles," forming one of 6669, or, as in "Magdeleine," making one of 334334.

Finally, the arrangement of strong and weak syllables in each line usually remains the same throughout a verse, as in the first four lines of the last verse of "L'amour créateur":

Que Dieu l'ordonne,
L'étoile le rit,
L'oiseau frédonne,
La fleur fleurit:

or as in the first phrase of "Le ramier":

Oh! d'où viens-tu beau ramier qui voyage
Sur l'aquilon qui t'emporte incertain?

though occasionally it becomes more complicated, as in the initial lines of "La providence à l'homme":

Quoi! le fils du néant a maudit l'existence!
Quoi! tu peux m'accuser de mes propres bienfaits!
Tu peux fermer tes yeux à la magnificence
Des dons que je t'ai faits, que je t'ai faits!

or as in the second phrase of the first verse of "L'ange rebelle":

Vaincu, précipité de la voûte céleste
Puisque l'enfer me reste
Je ne suis pas déshérité!

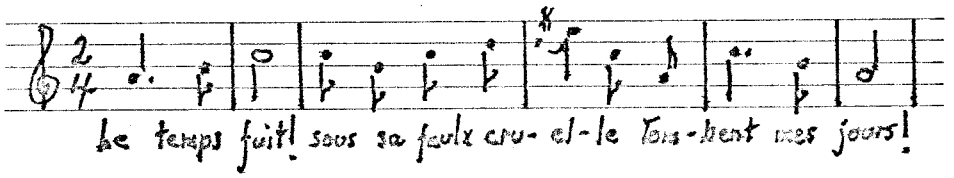
CHAPTER 4

THE ROMANCES OF FÉLICIEN DAVID

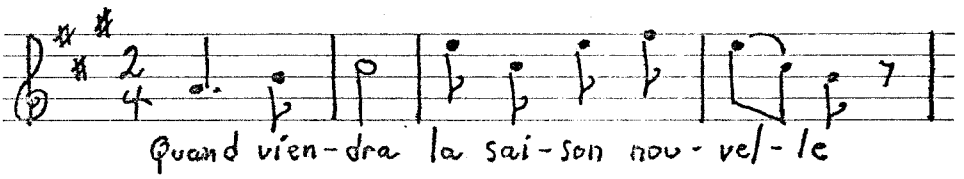
A MUSICAL EXAMINATION

David must have admired the music which these ingenuous and unaffected poems inspired, since his songs diligently adhere to its many conventions. These pieces are, in all but four instances, strophic and generally composed of short, lyrical melodies and unambiguous and unpretentious rhythms, harmonies, and accompaniments. Furthermore, these works contain no outstanding or atypical compositional features and are therefore practically indistinguishable from other romances composed during the mid 19th century. David's vocal phrases, for example, are no different in melodic and rhythmic construction than those written by such contemporary composers as Hector Berlioz, Louis Niedermeyer, or J. B. Weckerlin (Examples 1-3).

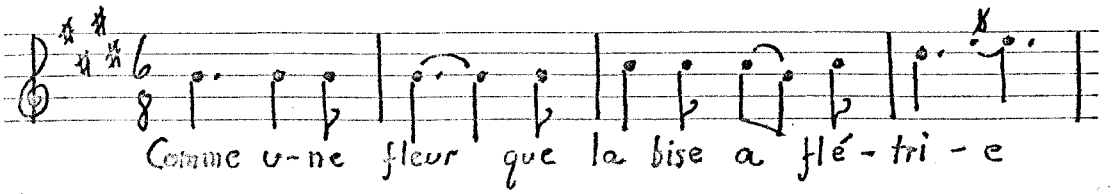
Example 1. a. David, "Le vieillard et les roses"



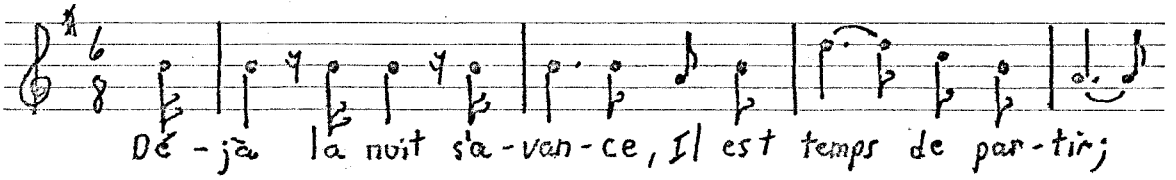
b. Berlioz, "Villanelle" from Les nuits d'été



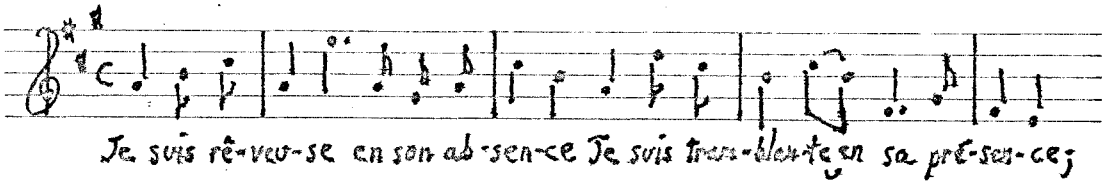
Example 2. a. David, "Le mourant"



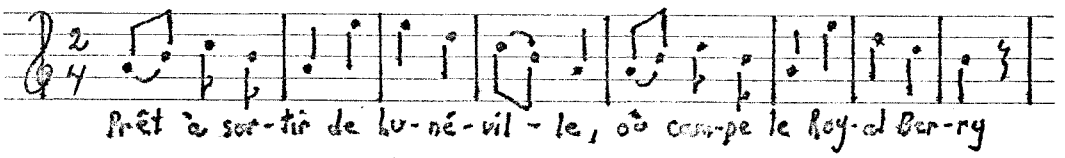
b. Niedermeyer, "Adieu, belle France"



Example 3. a. David, "J'ai peur de l'aimer"



b. Weckerlin, "Brunette"



His harmonic progressions are also no more varied or obscure than those used by such romancistes as Adolphe Adam or Charles Gounod since, like them, he relies almost exclusively on first-and second-

classification chords (Example 4) with occasional brief modulations to the dominant, relative major, or parallel major.

Example 4. a. David, "Le sommeil de l'enfant" (mm. 1-12)

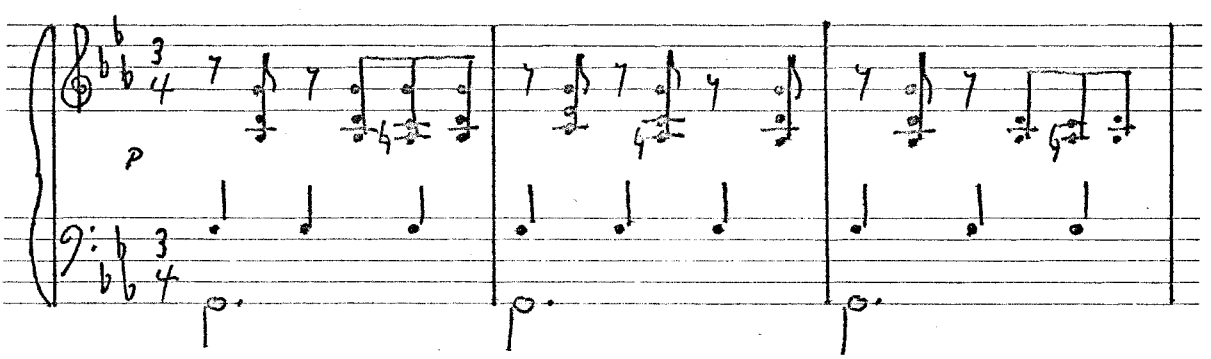
A♭: I | I | I (V^7) | I | I | I | vi V^6_5 I IV | V I^6 |
IV I^6_4 V^7 | I | I V^7 | I

b. Gounod, "Où voulez-vous aller?" (mm. 1-13)

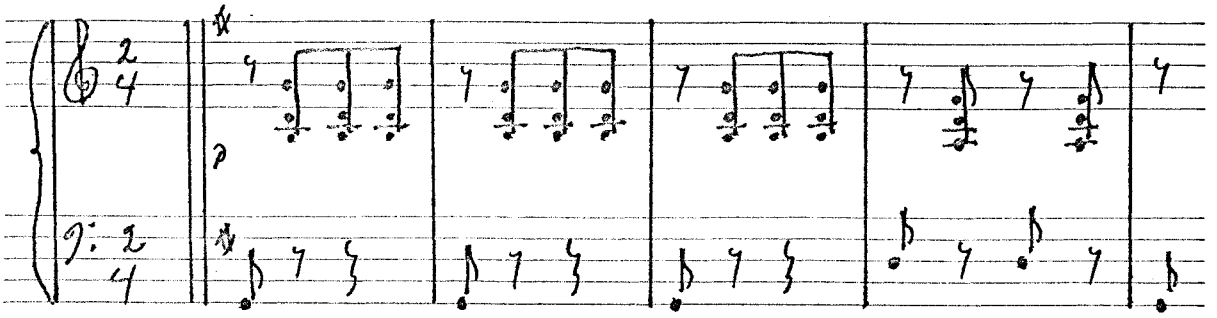
F: I I | I I | I I | I I | I IV^6_4 | I V^4_3 | I IV^6_4 |
I V^4_3 | I IV^6_4 | I V^4_3 | I V/V | V^7_4-3 | I

Further, his accompaniments are no more unusual or unconventional than those conceived by, among others, Ernest Arnaud, Gounod, or Adam since, like theirs, his use such standard techniques as off-beat chordal patterns (Example 5), block-chord harmonizations (Example 6), and chord arpeggiations (Example 7).

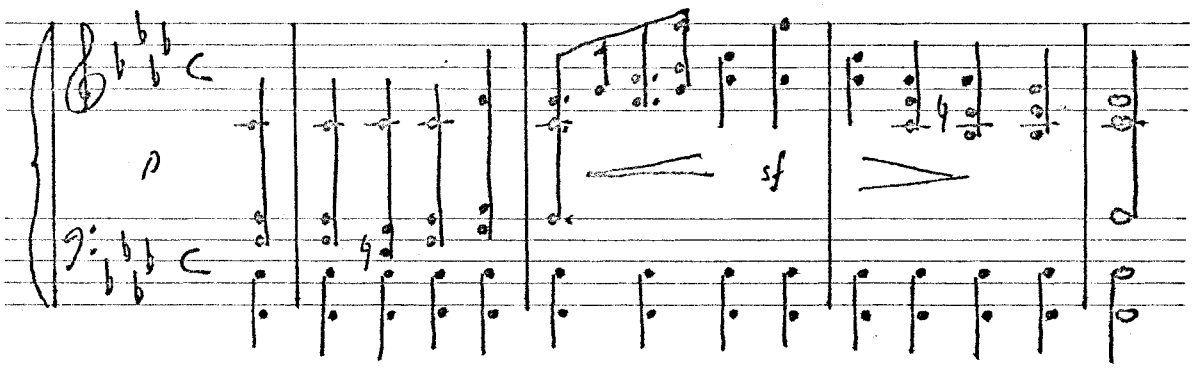
Example 5. a. David, "Éveillez-vous" (mm. 15-17)



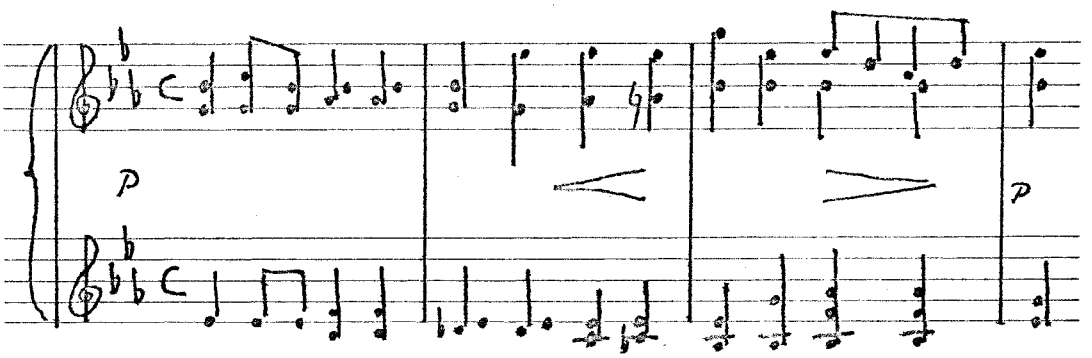
b. Arnaud, "Les fleurs animées" (mm. 35-38)



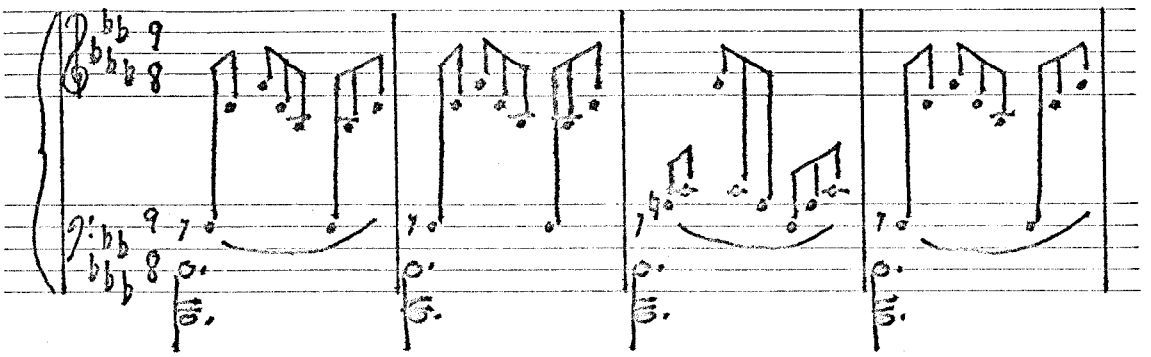
Example 6. a. David, "Plainte amoureuse" (mm. 1-4)



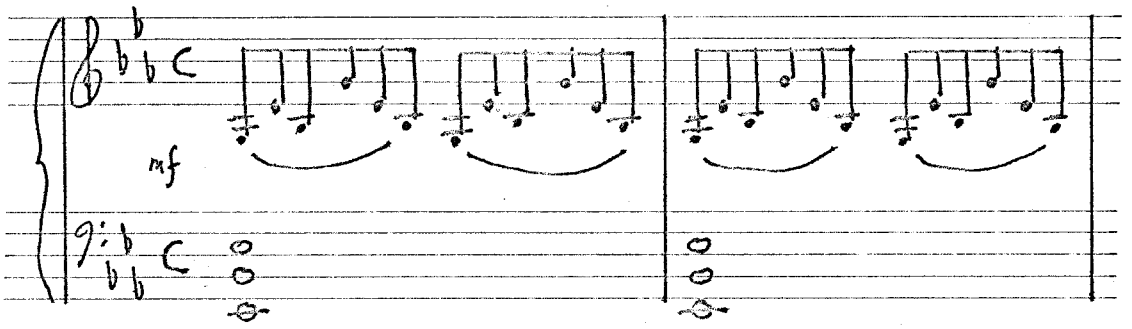
b. Gounod, "L'ange gardien" (mm. 1-4)



Example 7. a. David, "L'absence" (mm. 1-4)



b. Adam, "Cantique de Noël" (mm. 1-2)



As mentioned above, all but four of David's romances are strophic. The forms which he uses in these works are again no more abstruse or unconventional than those used by the majority of romance composers, since all rely quite heavily on set formulas comprised of alternating instrumental sections and verses. Of his fifty-six strophic works approximately one-half are cast in a single structural mold. It is the most common form used in this genre, consisting of three verses (v) introduced, separated, and followed by the same accompanimental material (x):

$$x\ v^{1}\ x\ v^{2}\ x\ v^{3}\ x$$

In the remaining half of David's songs he modifies this formula in seventeen different ways. In five, for example, it is lengthened by the addition of a fourth verse:

$$x\ v^{1}\ x\ v^{2}\ x\ v^{3}\ x\ v^{4}\ x$$

and in another five it is shortened by the deletion of the final instrumental phrase:

$$x\ v^{1}\ x\ v^{2}\ x\ v^{3}$$

In several others it is altered by the addition of an independent vocal refrain (r):

$$x\ r\ v^{1}\ r\ v^{2}\ r\ v^{3}\ r$$

$$r\ x\ v^{1}\ r\ x\ v^{2}\ r\ x\ v^{3}\ r$$

or

$$v^{1}\ r\ v^{2}\ r\ v^{3}\ r$$

while in a few more it is modified by the addition of a second instrumental idea (y):

$$x\ v^{1}\ y\ x\ v^{2}\ y\ x\ v^{3}\ y$$

or

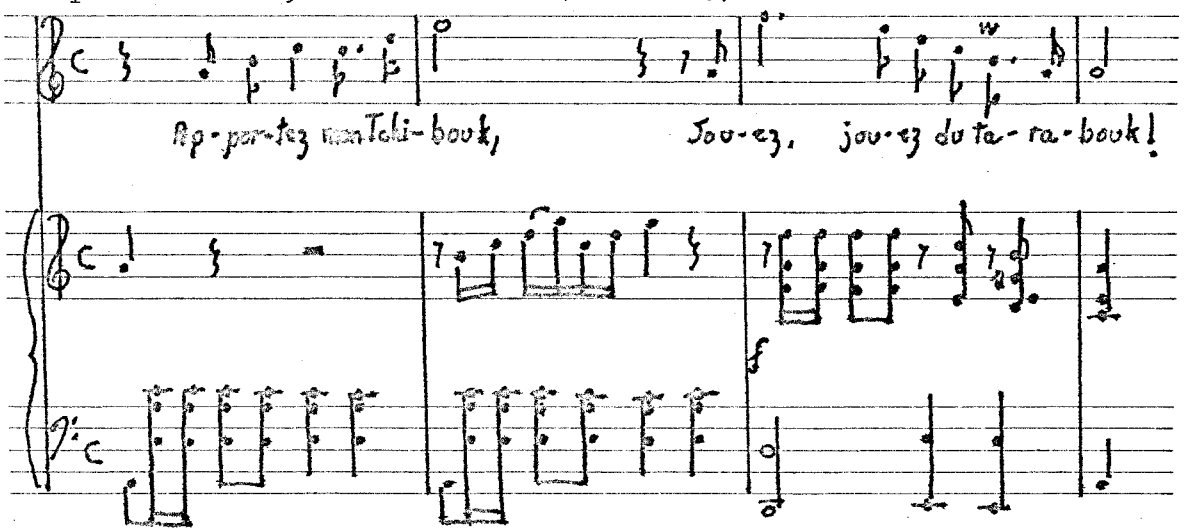
$$x\ v^{1}\ r\ y\ x\ v^{2}\ r\ y\ x\ v^{3}\ r\ y$$

In his through-composed songs there are no such regular patterns of vocal and instrumental alternation. Although divided into sections, the form of each romance is unique. In three, no accompanimental or vocal material is repeated, while in the fourth the opening vocal phrase is partially restated once.

David's musical Orientalism, which is considered by many to be one of the most salient ingredients of his compositional style, is not as obvious in these romances as it is, for example, in Le désert. In fact,

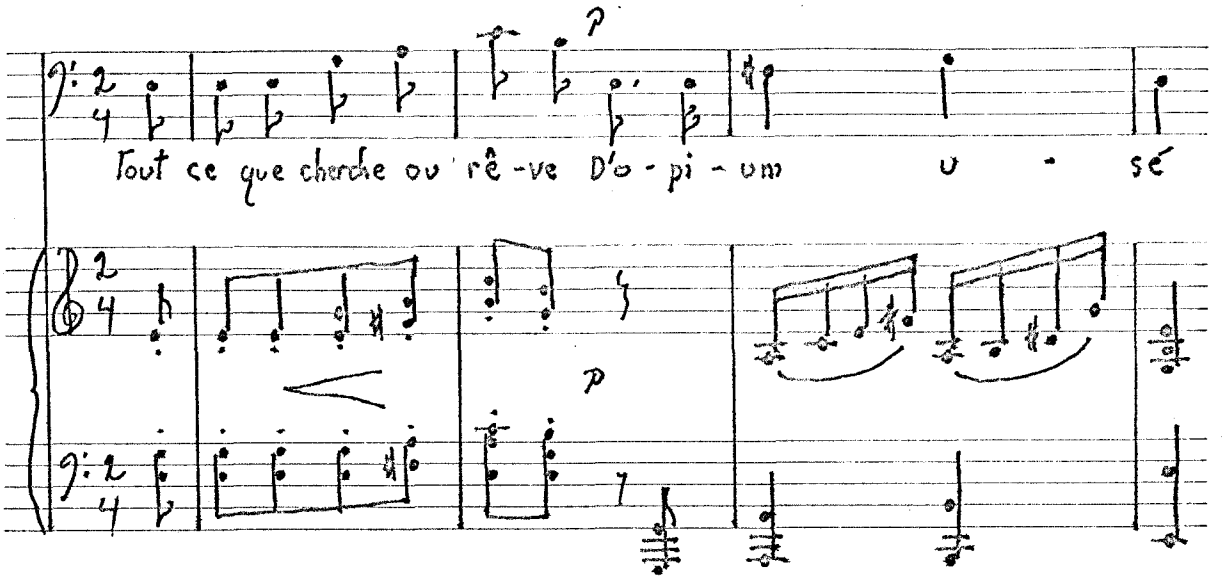
it appears to be no more exotic than the Orientalism found in those "eastern" songs of his contemporaries.[28] Instead of actually using Mediterranean and Asiatic themes and rhythms in "Le Bédouin," "Sultan Mahmoud," "La bayadère," "L'Égyptienne," "Le captif," "Amour pour amour," "Le Tchibouk," "Le cri de Bosphore," "Mon almée," and "Tristesse de l'odalisque," he, like his confreres, relies on a variety of pseudo-oriental techniques such as slightly more melodic ornamentation and chromaticism than usual to give his songs some degree of authenticity. As Examples 8, 9, and 10 illustrate, the results are not totally convincing.

Example 8. David, "Le Tchibouk" (mm. 10-13)

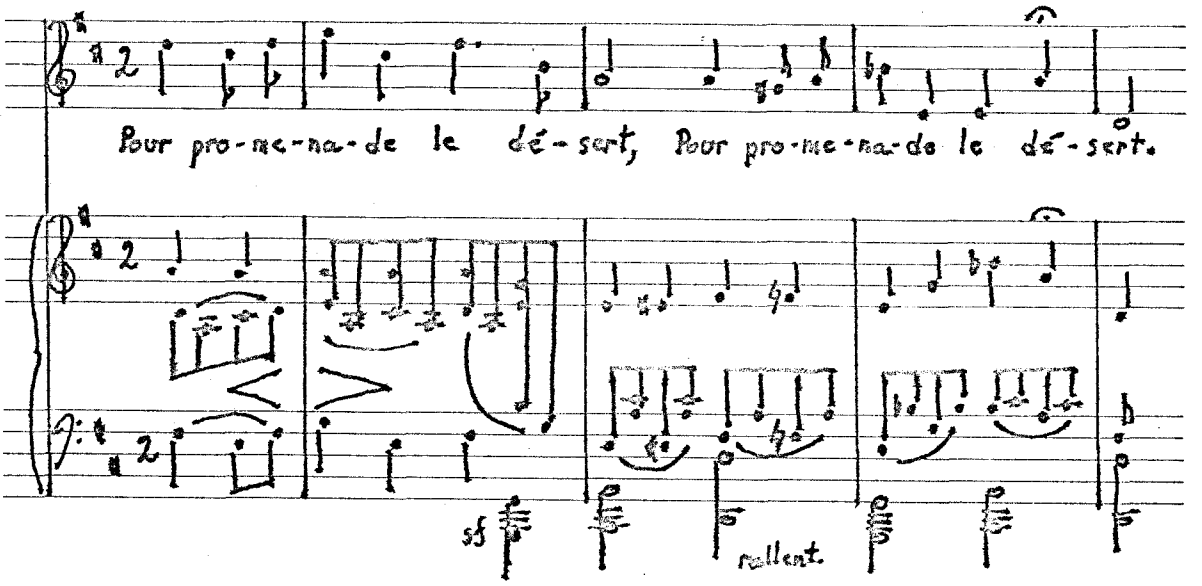


[28] Though David was the first, most French composers of this period were at one time or another also influenced by the Orient. Among those who attempted to duplicate eastern sounds and colors in their songs were Auber ("Sois ma bayadère"), Berlioz ("La captive"), Bizet ("Adieu de l'hôtesse arabe"), Gounod ("Medjé"), and Saint-Saëns ("Désirs de l'Orient" and six Mélodies persanes).

Example 9. David, "Sultan Mahmoud" (mm. 10-14)

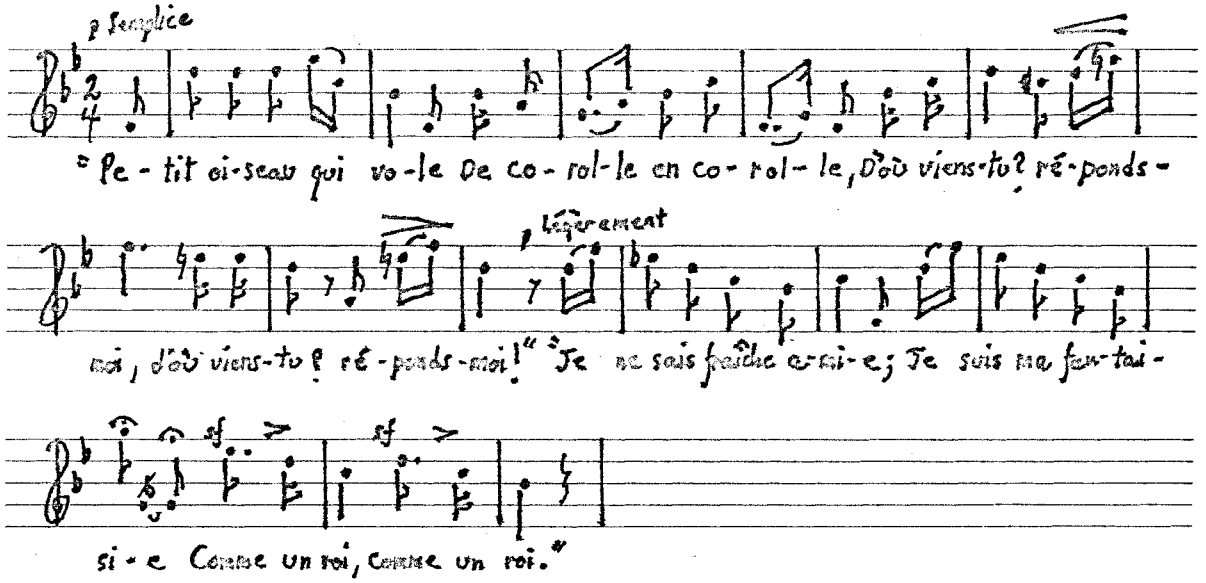


Example 10. David, "La bayadère" (mm. 19-23)

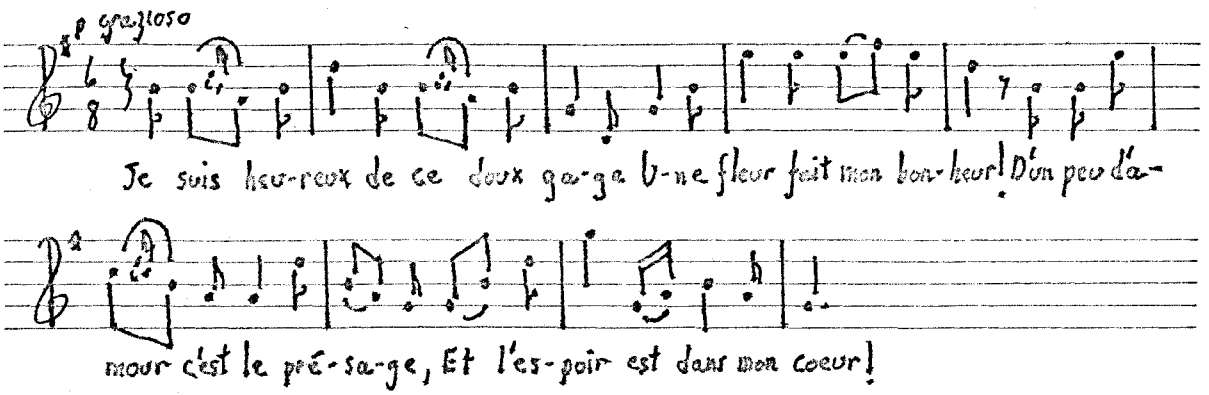


Despite his adherence to the conventions of the romance, however, David's songs are somewhat more interesting to study than most examples of this prosaic and stereotyped idiom. His vocal melodies seem to be more tuneful than those of other romancistes (Examples 11 and 12) and his harmonic vocabulary more complete than theirs, since he relies more heavily than they on such chords as the supertonic, the submediant, the supertonic, the superdominant, and their secondary dominants (Example 13). Also, his handling of form is more inventive than that of most French songsmiths, since he varies the structural design of the romance so often.

Example 11. David, "La fleur et l'oiseau mouche" (mm. 2-15)



Example 12. David, "Fleur de bonheur" (mm. 2-10)



Example 13. David's harmonic progressions

a. "Tristesse de l'odalisque (mm. 1-6)

b: i (V) | i | i i^{6}_{4} $V^{6}_{5}/_{vii}$ | vii | III V | i

b. "Une plainte" (mm. 1-4)

g: i V^{6}_{4} i^{6}_{3} | $V/_{iv}$ iv i | $iv^{\#6}_{5}$ i^{6}_{4} V | i

c. "La vengeance des fleurs" (mm. 6-9)

$E^{\flat}$: I V^{6} I V^{6} | vi $V^{7}/_{vi}$ vi vi ii |
vi ii vi^{6}_{4} $V/_{vi}$ | vi

d. "Au couvent" (mm. 7-12)

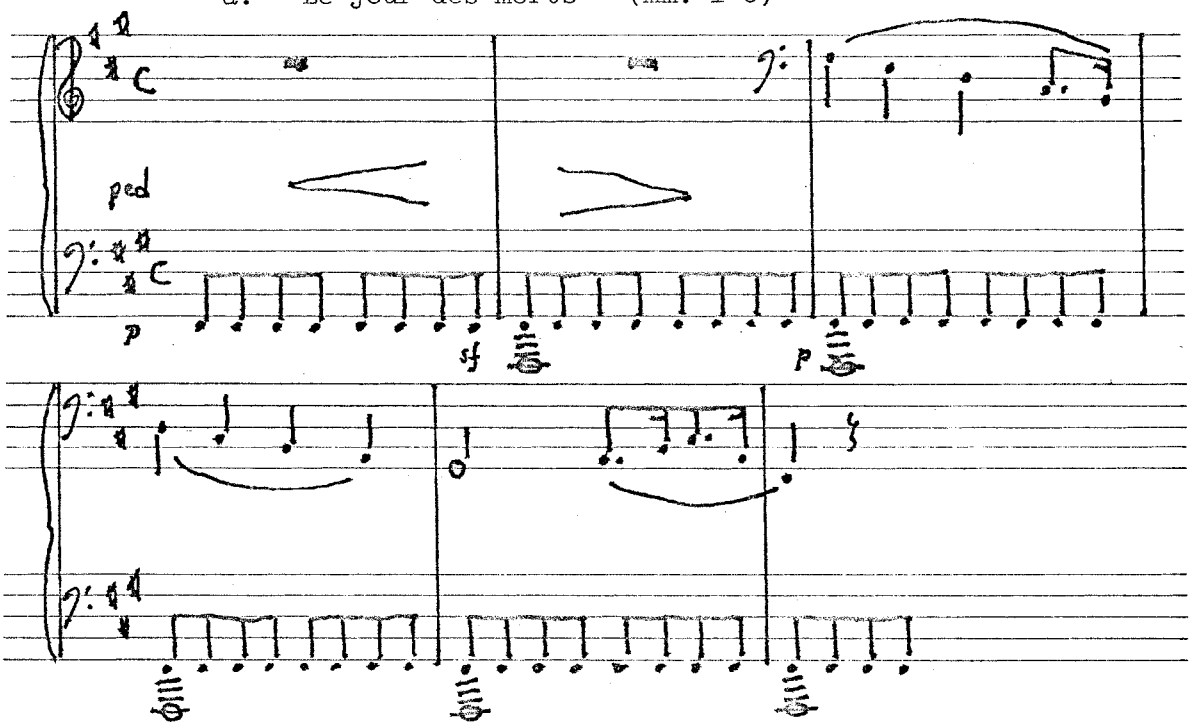
G: I (II^{6}_{4}) | $V/_{iii}$ iii iii^{6} iii^{6}_{4} $V^{7}/_{iii}$ |
iii III | vi ii | VI V^{7} | I

Finally, there are five compositional characteristics in David's romances which occur time and time again. These features are far from unique or unusual, since they are basic to the musical vocabularies of all 19th-century romance composers. However, David employs them more often than most romancistes and with considerably more skill and taste.[29]

(1) In most of his strophic and through-composed songs he incorporates pedal points in his accompaniments. These pedal points are normally found in the left hand and occasionally consist of more than one note (Example 14). They generally occur at the beginning of a song and usually last from three to eleven measures. Also, in no song does he use more than one.

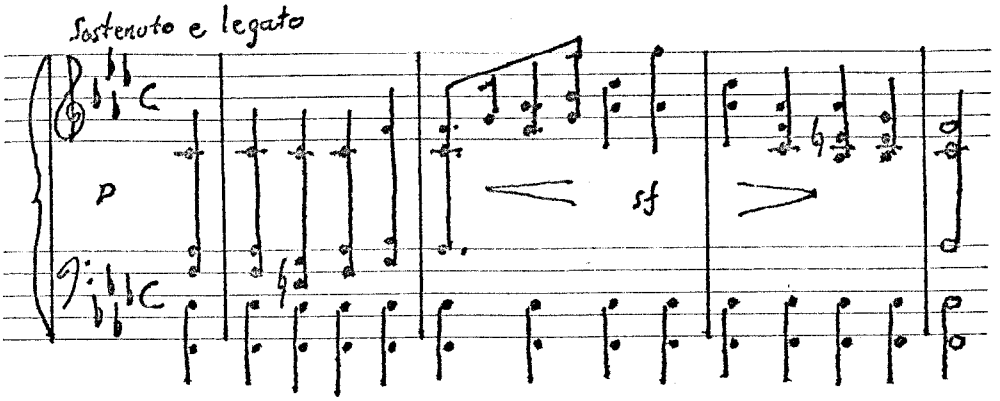
Example 14. David's use of pedal point

a. "Le jour des morts" (mm. 1-6)



[29]Three songs in which David handles these characteristics very effectively are "Au couvent," "Tristesse de l'odalisque," and "La vengeance des fleurs," which may be found in the Appendix.

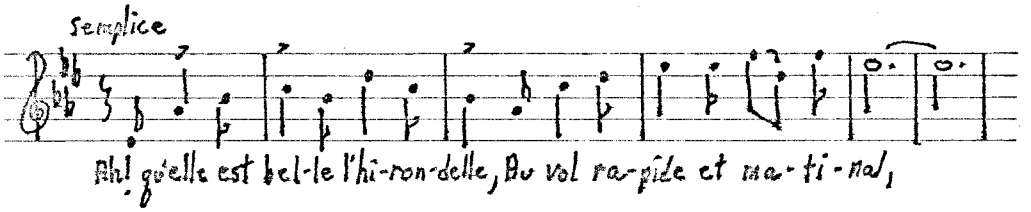
b. "Plainte amoureuse" (mm. 1-4)



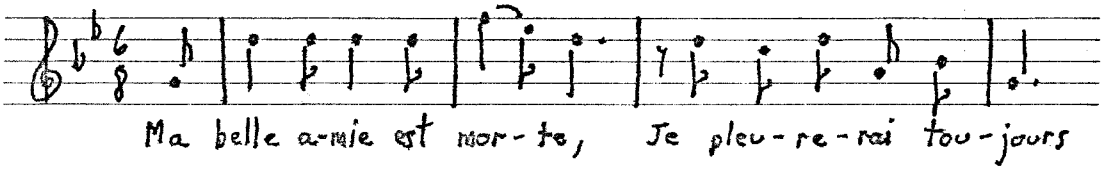
(2) In those songs written in compound meter he writes melodies which rely heavily on the rhythmic pattern ♩♪♩♪|♩♪♩♪ . These melodies usually begin anacrustically and are almost exclusively syllabic (Example 15).

Example 15. David's melodies

a. "Dormez, Marie" (mm. 7-12)



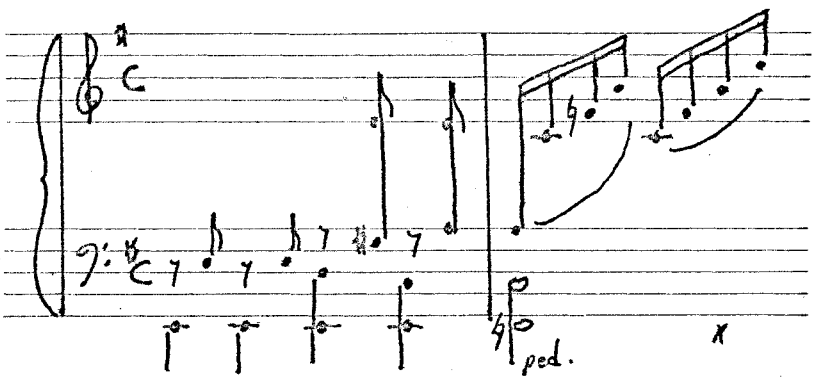
b. "La chanson du pêcheur" (mm. 3-6)



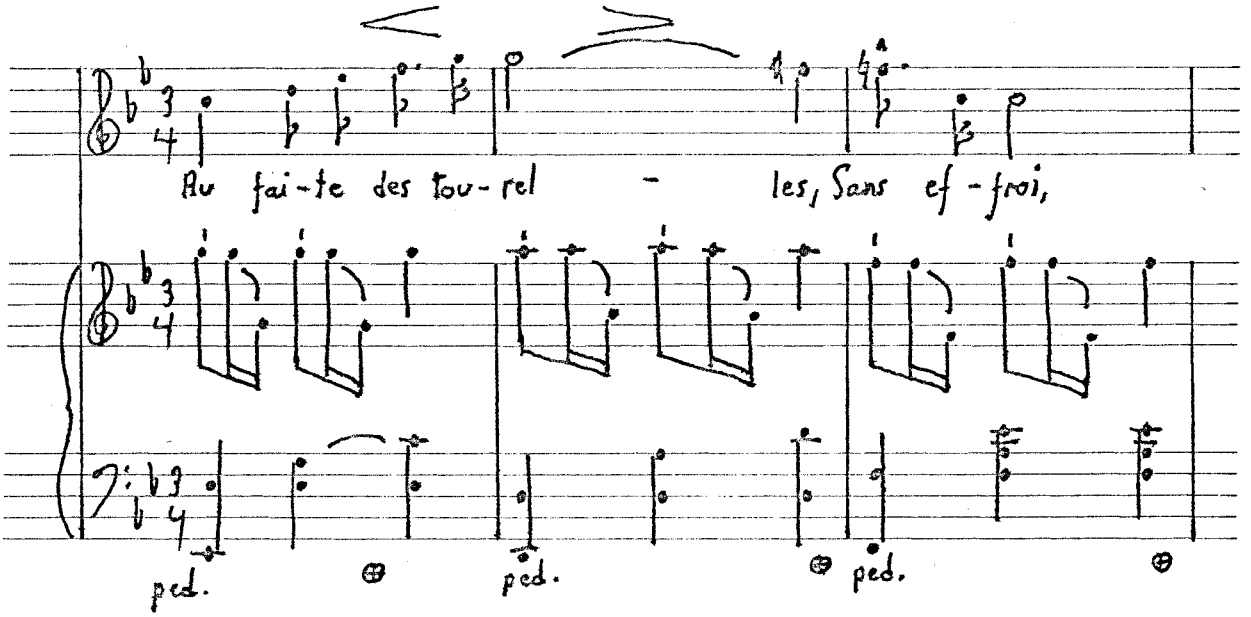
(3) In many songs he shifts harmonies unexpectedly. These juxtapositions follow no specific pattern and are unrelated to matters of textual depiction. Invariably in root position, most move from a minor chord to a major chord or from one major chord to another, usually a second or third apart (Example 16).

Example 16. David's harmonic juxtapositions

a. "La providence à l'homme" (mm. 81-82)

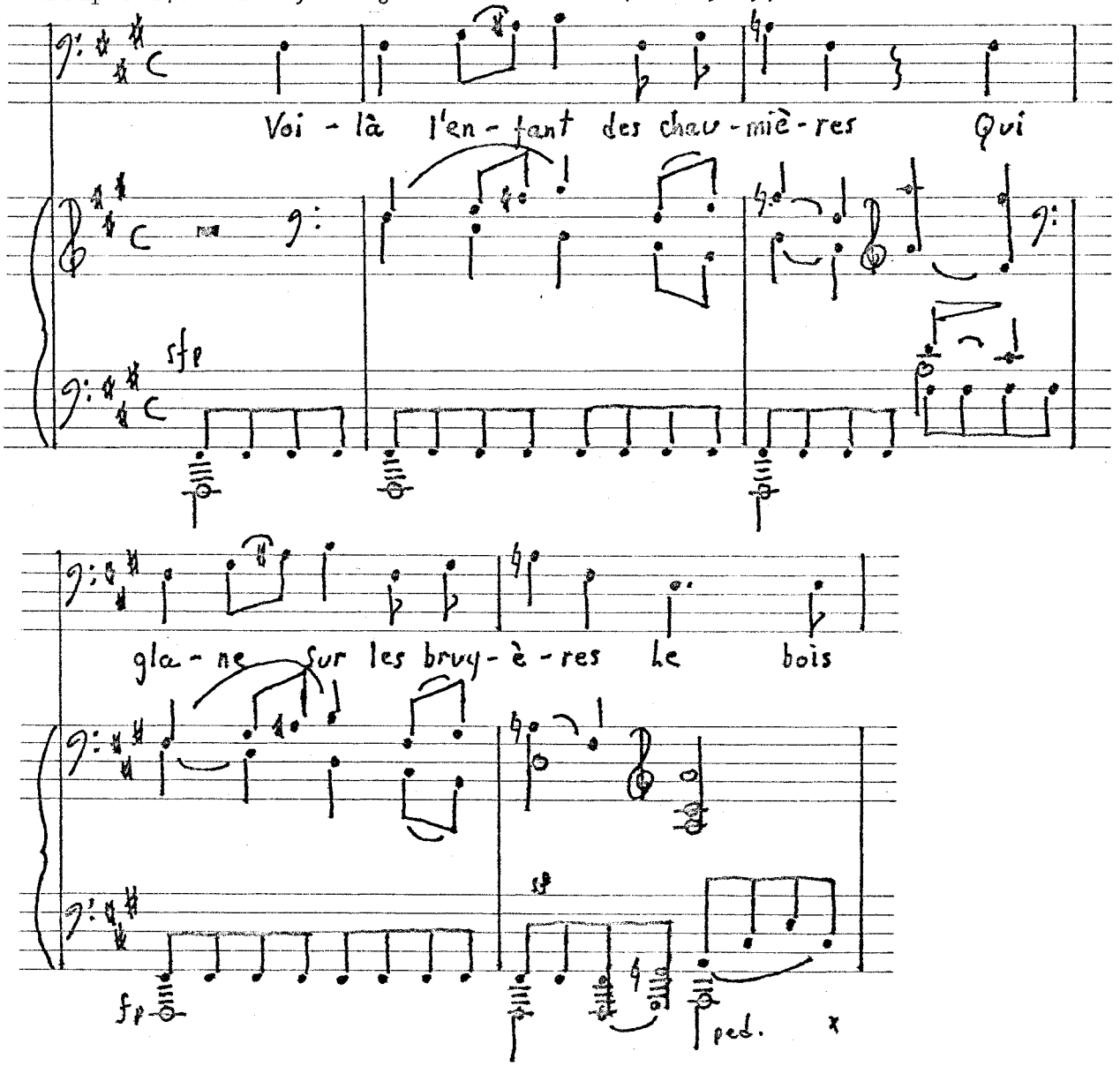


b. "Les hirondelles" (mm. 9-11)

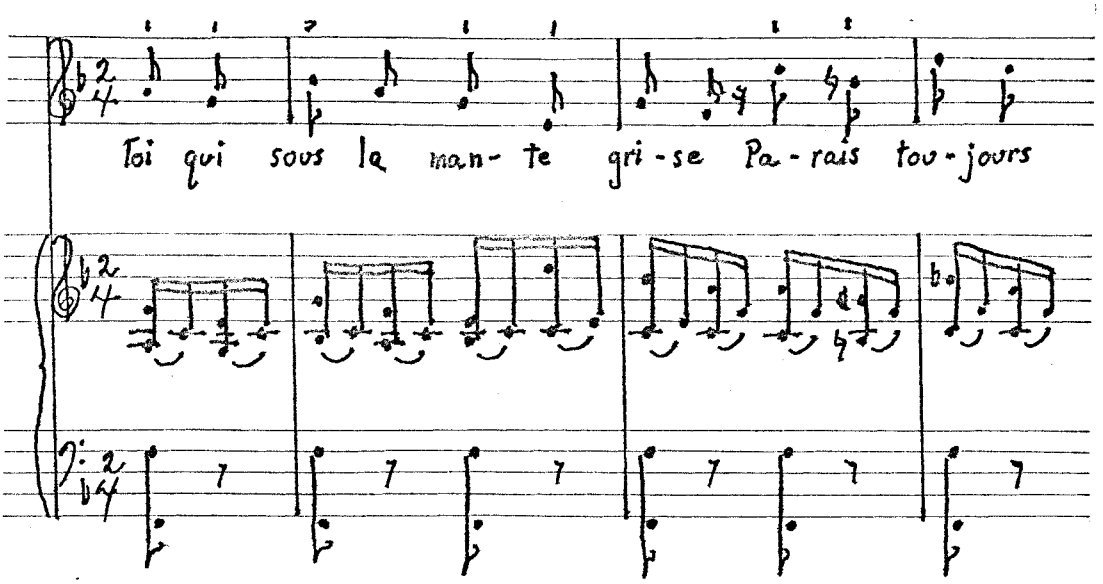


(4) In many songs he doubles the vocal part in the accompaniment. These doublings are either at the octave, the unison, or both and, except in one instance (see "Tristesse de l'odalisque" in the Appendix) appear in the right hand (Example 17). Also, in a number of songs the piano part--again, almost exclusively in the right hand--parallels the vocal melody in thirds, sixths, or both (Example 18).

Example 17. David, "Le jour des morts" (mm. 25-29)



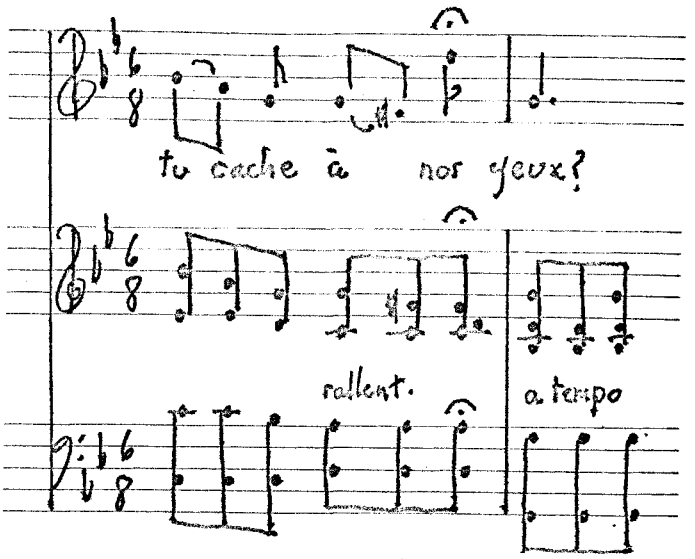
Example 18. David "Qui t'aime plus que moi?" (mm. 4-7)



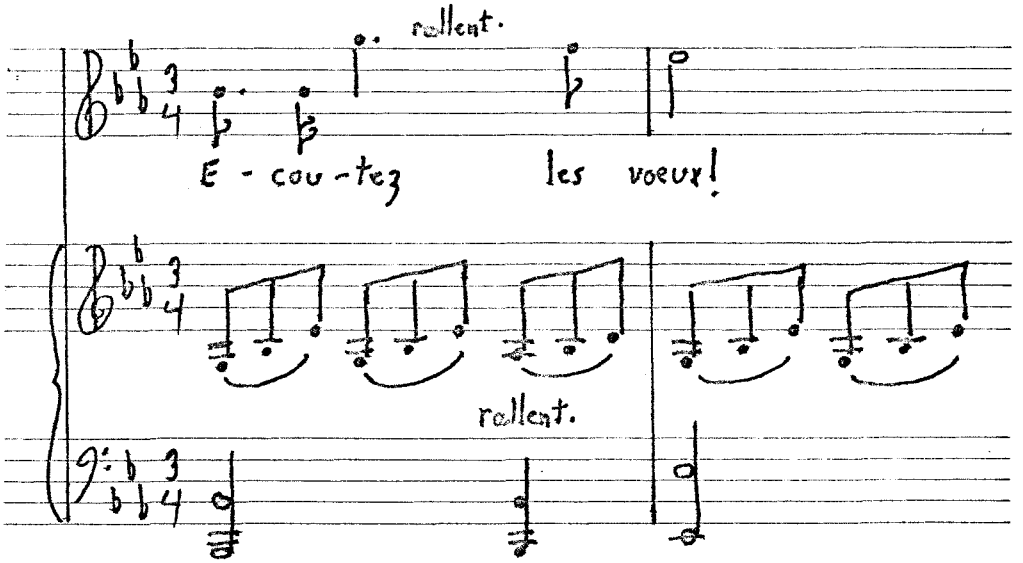
(5) During the course of virtually every song he places fermatas and/or such tempo indications as ritenuto, ritardando, or rallentando at important cadences (Example 19). He uses this device so often that it becomes a stylistic mannerism.

Example 19. David's cadential holds

a. "Le nuage" (mm. 20-21)



b. "Éveillez-vous" (mm. 9-10)



CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Critical Appraisals of David's Music

The majority of 19th- and 20th-century writers who have examined David's music contend that he was not "a great composer"[30] but merely a "pleasant musician endowed with a pleasant personality."[31] All seem to agree with Saint-Saëns that he was a "sincere artist"[32] who occasionally did "some very nice things,"[33] but all are quick to point out that, in general, his work was quite mediocre. His melodic phrases, they argue, were habitually too short and too similarly shaped, his formal development too prosaic and unimaginative, his harmonic and rhythmic vocabularies too timid, and his palette of instrumental colors too bland. In sum, as his "musical ideas . . . were neither great, plentiful, nor varied,"[34] his compositions all too frequently sounded "naive"[35] and "feeble."[36]

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[30]Scudo, La musique ancienne et moderne, p. 341.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Camille Saint-Saëns, Harmonie et mélodie (Paris: Ancienne Maison Michel Lévy Frères, 1885), p. 132.

[33]Mina Stein Curtiss, Bizet and His World (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), p. 139.

[34]Scudo, La musique ancienne et moderne, p. 341.

[35]Saint-Saëns, Harmonie et mélodie, p. 129.

[36]Curtiss, Bizet, p. 139.

On the other hand, a few contemporary authors called David "a great harmonist, a distinguished melodist, and an extraordinary orchestrator."[37] To them his most noteworthy characteristics were "an inspired melodic charm coupled with a great purity of style,"[38] an innate sense of rhythm and form, and a profound understanding of drama and musical propriety.[39] He was a master "whose pieces were mixed, developed, and modulated with . . . sensitivity, . . . science, and taste."[40]

To the present writer David seems to be a competent and sincere composer whose work was pleasant yet technically weak. He appears to have been a timid musician who constantly shied away from offending or startling his audiences with "modern" rhythms or harmonies. He seems also to have been a writer who, instead of experimenting with new compositional techniques, used and reused the same ones over and over. And he was apparently a very restrained and self-controlled craftsman who judiciously refrained from letting his personal emotions get in his musical way. Had he been a more intense and aggressive individual, he might have written some genuinely arresting works. However, as he was not, he simply composed music which was tuneful and lightweight.

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[37]Hector Berlioz, Les musiciens et la musique (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903), p. 236.

[38]René Brancour, Félicien David: Biographie critique (Paris: Laurens, 1914), p. 119.

[39]These two traits are taken from Azevedo's lengthy analysis of David's style. (Azevedo, F. David, coup d'oeil, pp. 91-99.)

[40]Berlioz, Les musiciens et la musique, p. 236.

A Summary of David's Romances

Among David's more revealing works are his sixty vocal romances. They are not only outstanding sources for an in-depth study of his compositional style, but are, as well, excellent examples of this popular 19th-century form. Like so many of these highly sentimental and ingenuous songs, his romances are short, simple, and generally strophic pieces which textually deal with such topics as love, nature, and life. Also, like most romances of the period, they contain the most rudimentary compositional ingredients. The melodies, harmonies, rhythms, forms, accompaniments, and poems which David used are all very ordinary. However, occasionally he mixed these elements quite skillfully and when he did, as in the songs comprising the Appendix, he was able to produce works of considerable interest.

Conclusion

Despite their enormous popularity and productivity, both of which are unequalled in the annals of French music, the romances composed by David and his contemporaries cannot be regarded as extraordinary vocal pieces. Throughout its history the romance followed a set of rules which severely limited its range of expression and color. Had it challenged these restrictions, i.e., the strict adherence to traditional forms and techniques, the repression of personal emotions, and the avoidance of provocative or symbolic texts, it might have become a truly expressive and unique form. Instead it accepted the limitations imposed

on it by, among others, a social class whose taste was "déplorable"[41] and remained for the most part conservative and commonplace.

The artistic mediocrity of this genre was also due to the absence among its practitioners of any great compositional talent. Though a few composers, such as Hippolyte Monpou, Louis Niedermeyer, Hector Berlioz, and Félicien David, possessed enough expertise to write some very attractive and moving songs, no 19th-century French composer produced solo vocal works of consistently high quality.

In sum, the 19th-century romance was a simple, unpretentious, yet highly stylized and stereotyped vocal idiom composed by dozens of amateur and professional composers, none of whom was exceptional. Had it enjoyed the musical and poetic freedom of the German lied and had it suited the personality of a major French master, it might have become one of the most significant types of solo song in the history of Western music. However, as it did not, it merely ranks as one of the past's more interesting artistic creations.

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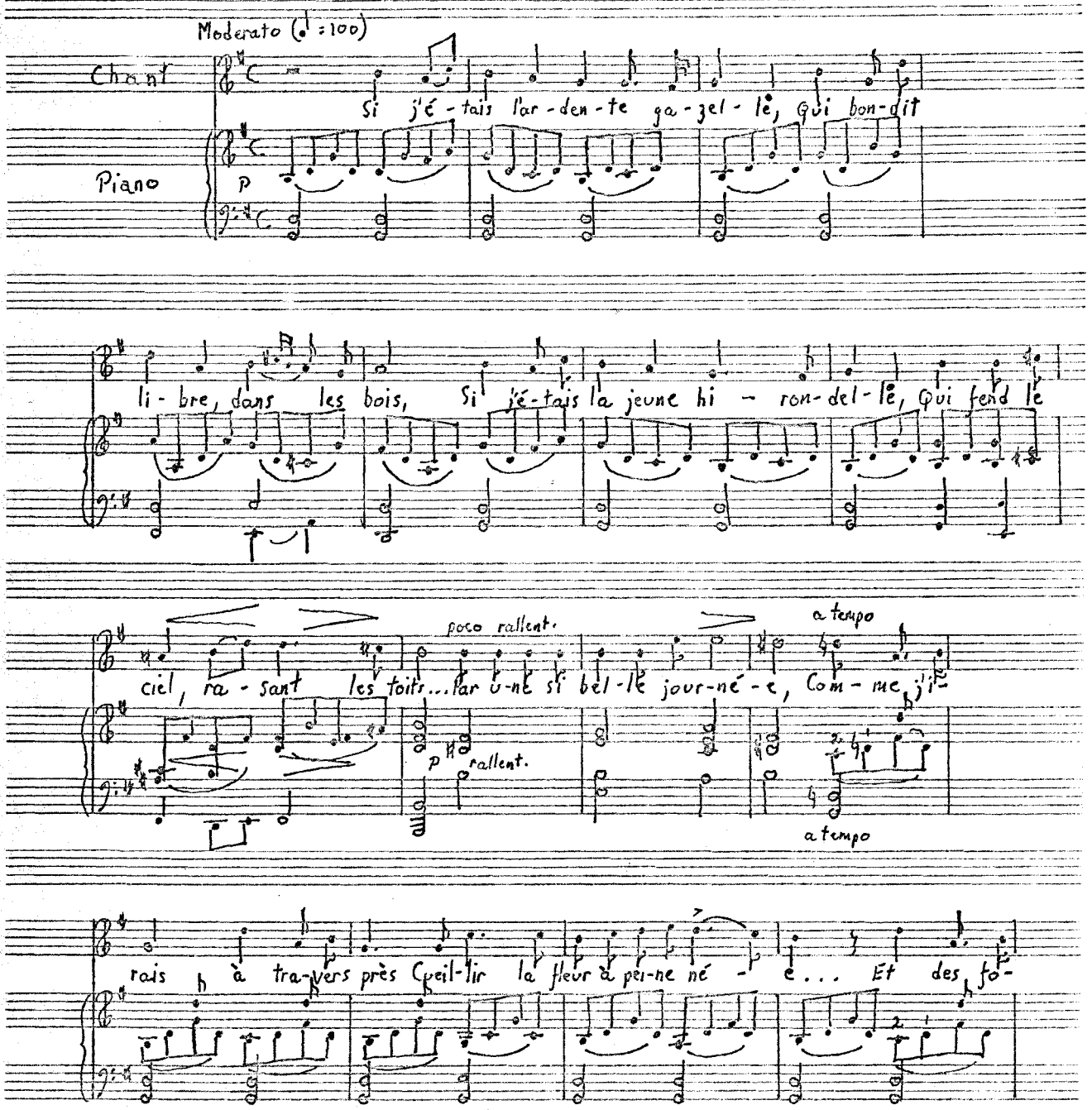
[41] René Dumesnil, La musique romantique française (Paris: Aubier, 1944), p. 229.

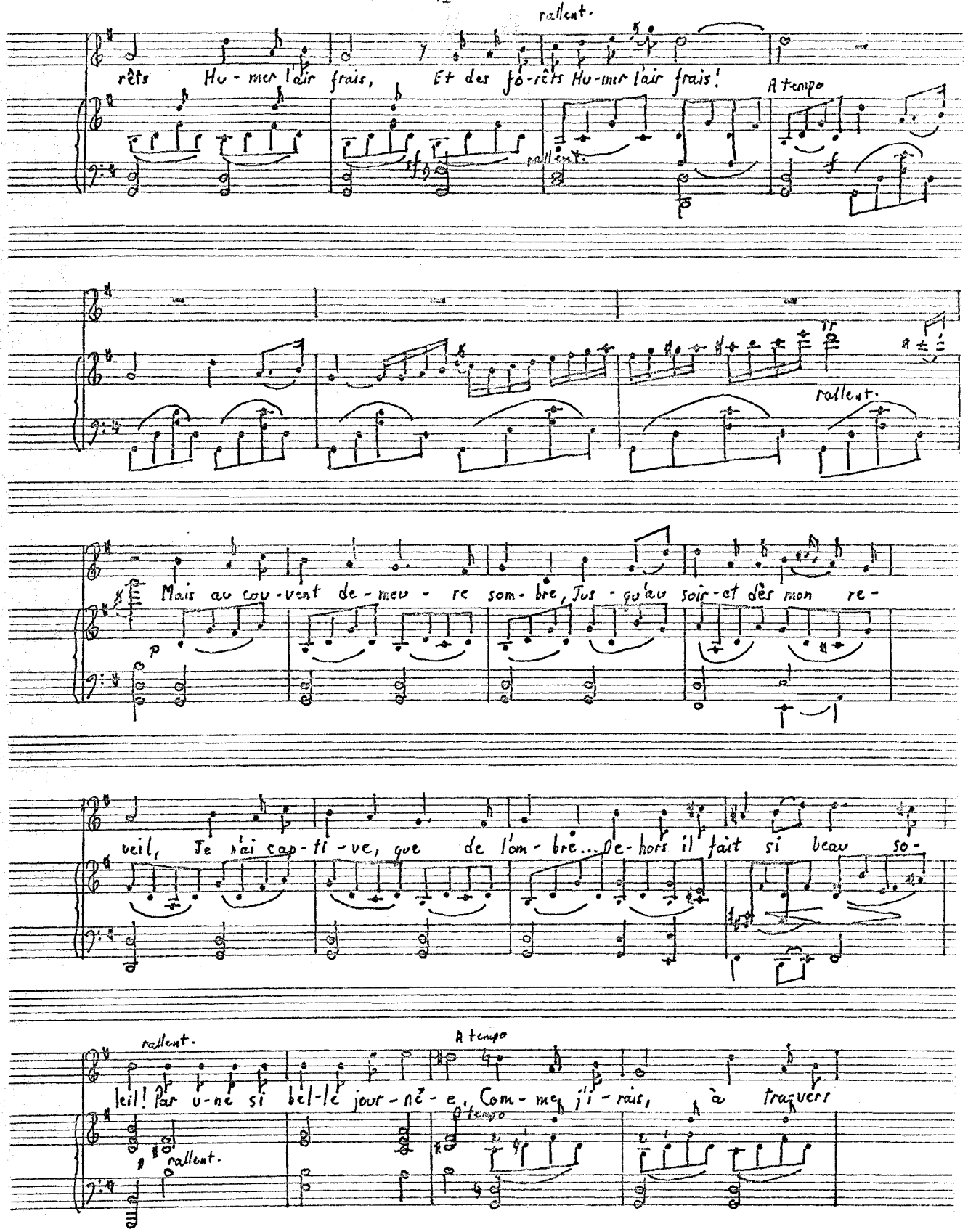
APPENDIX

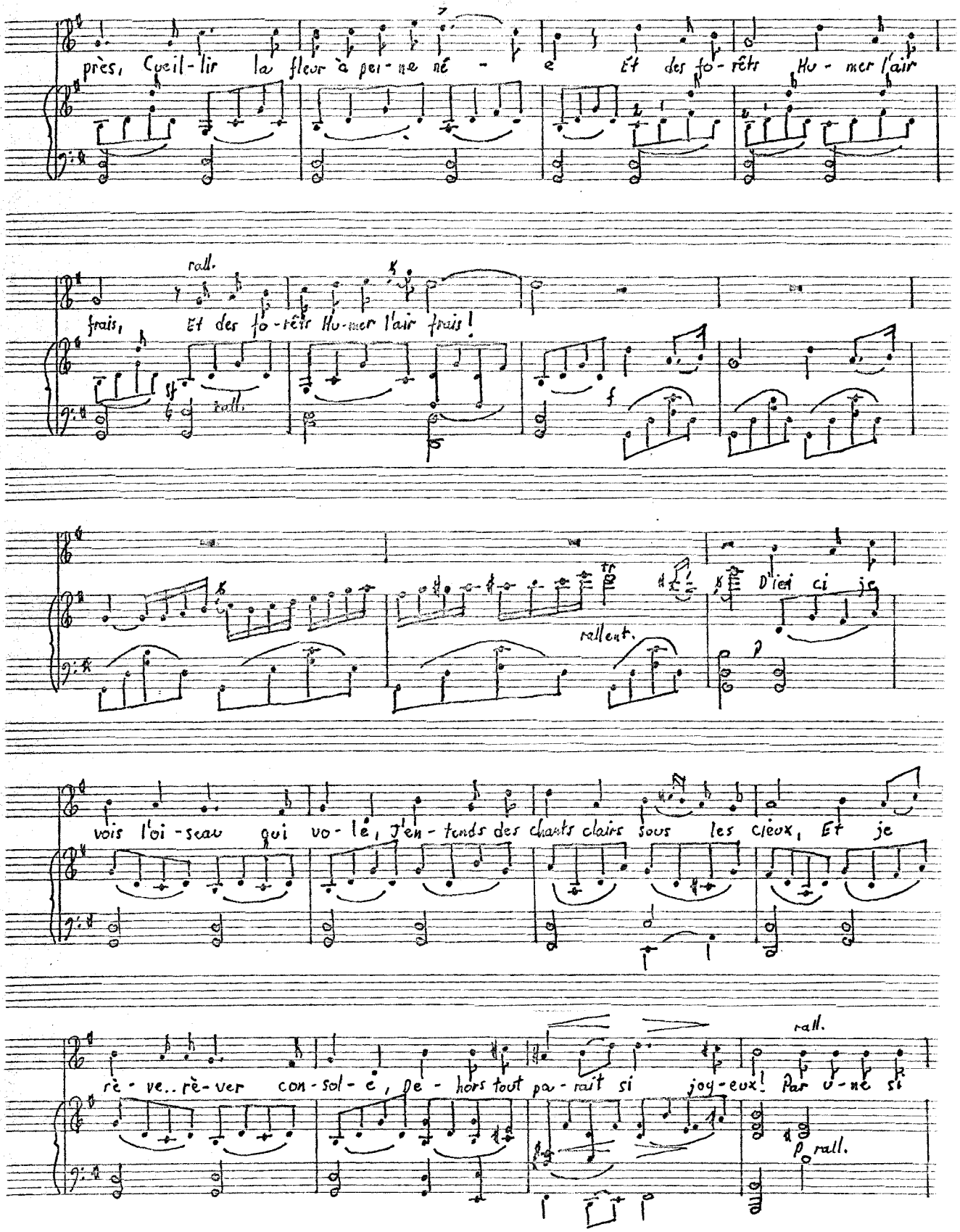
AU COUVENT

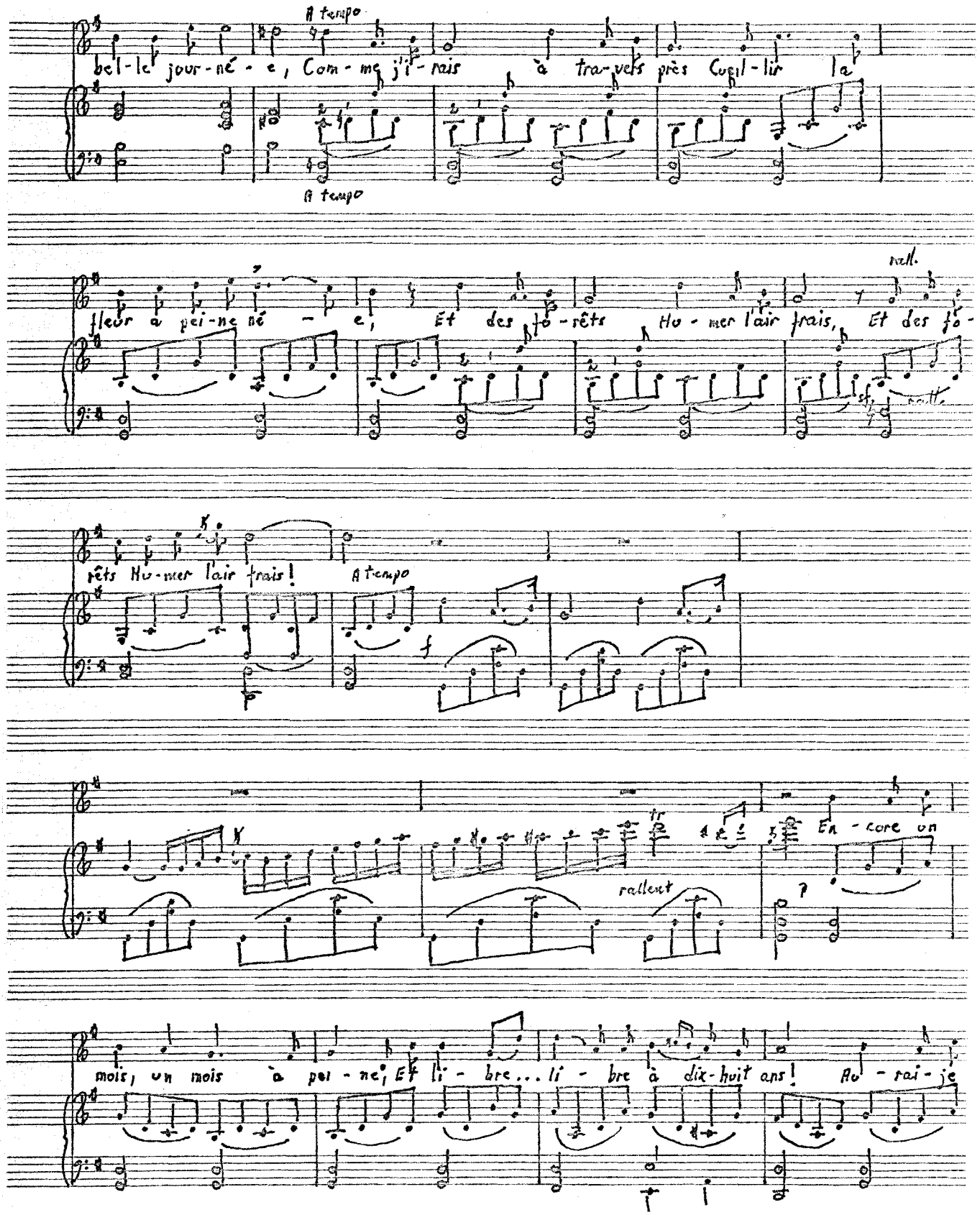
Romance

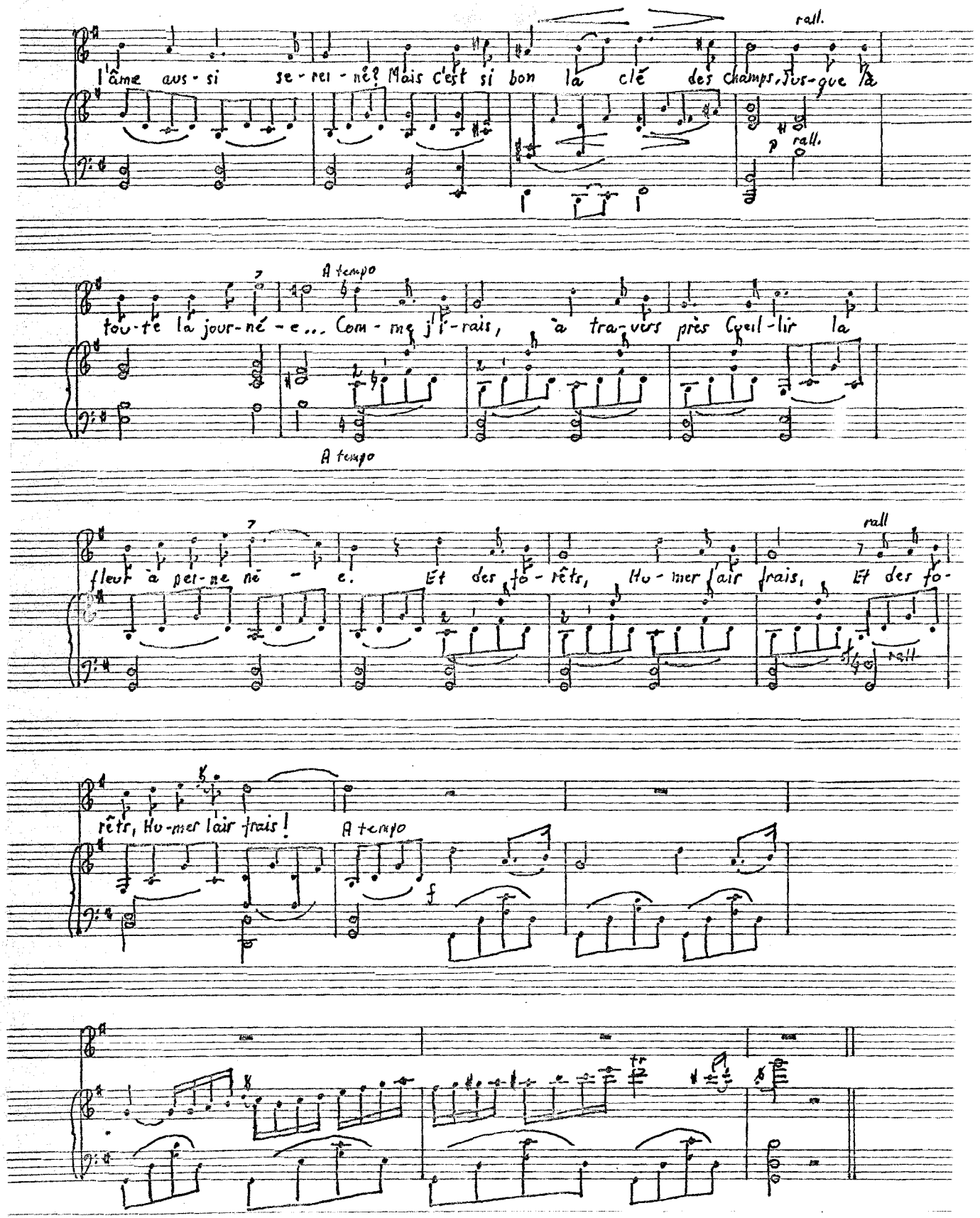
Text by Edouard Bouscatel





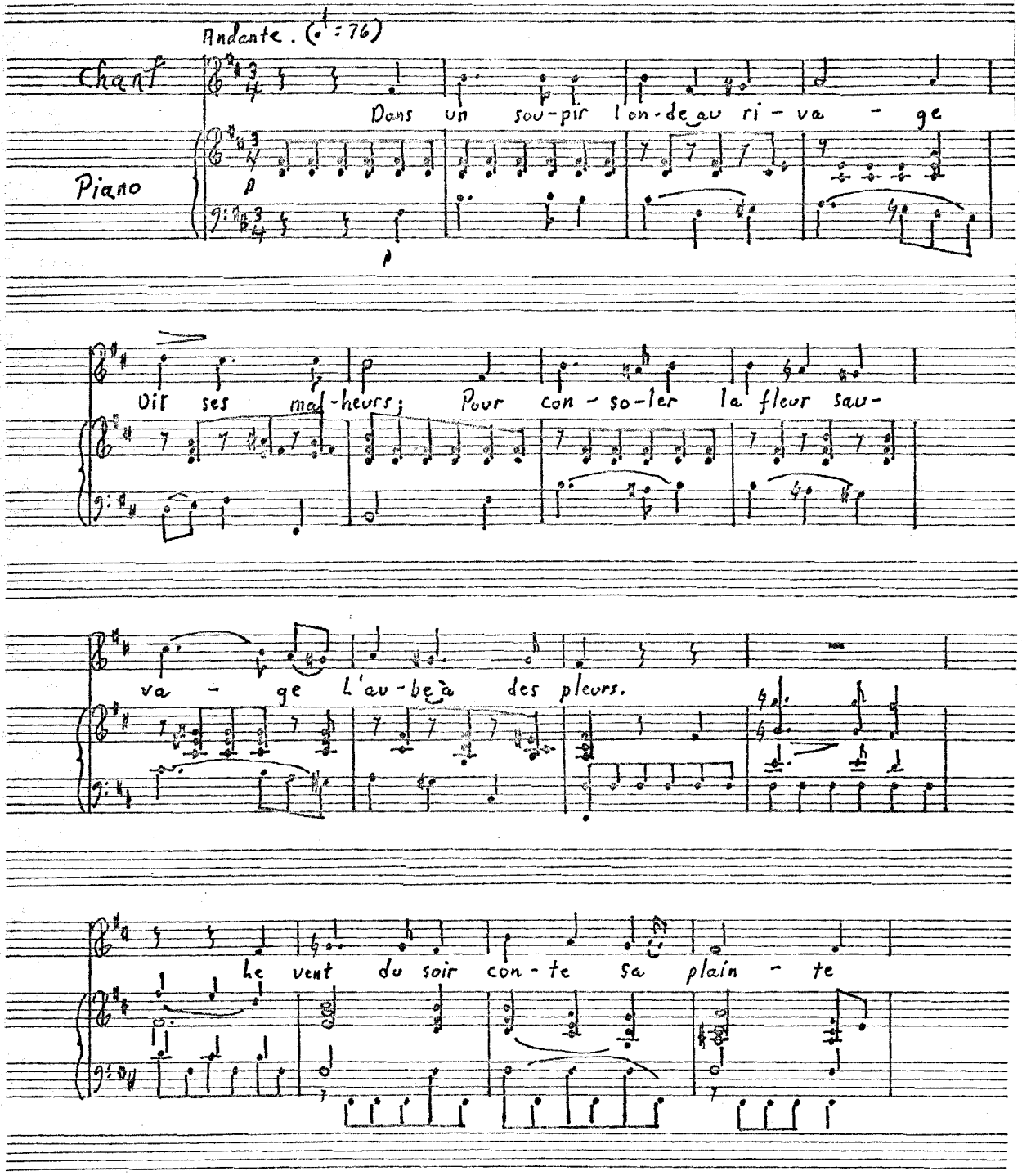


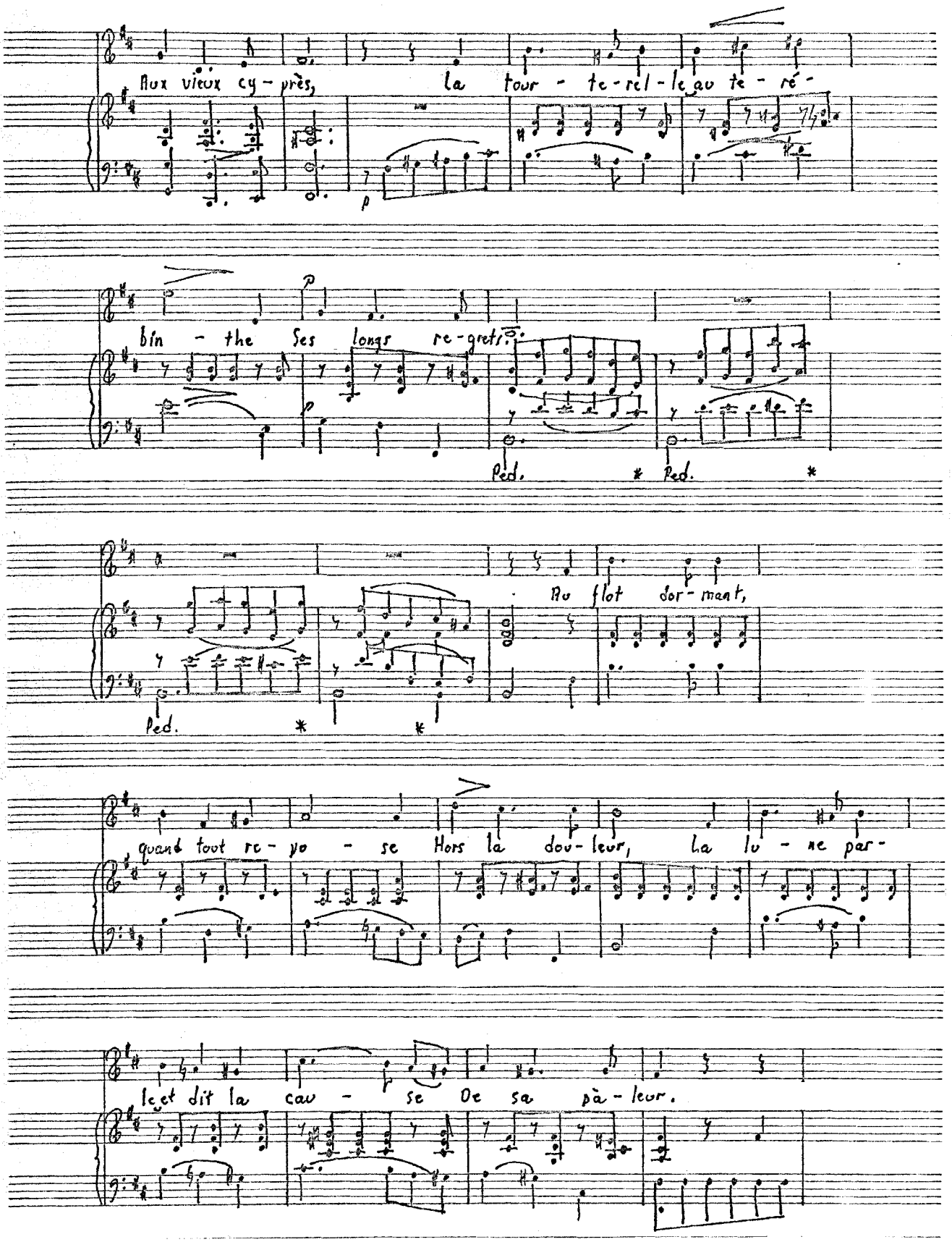


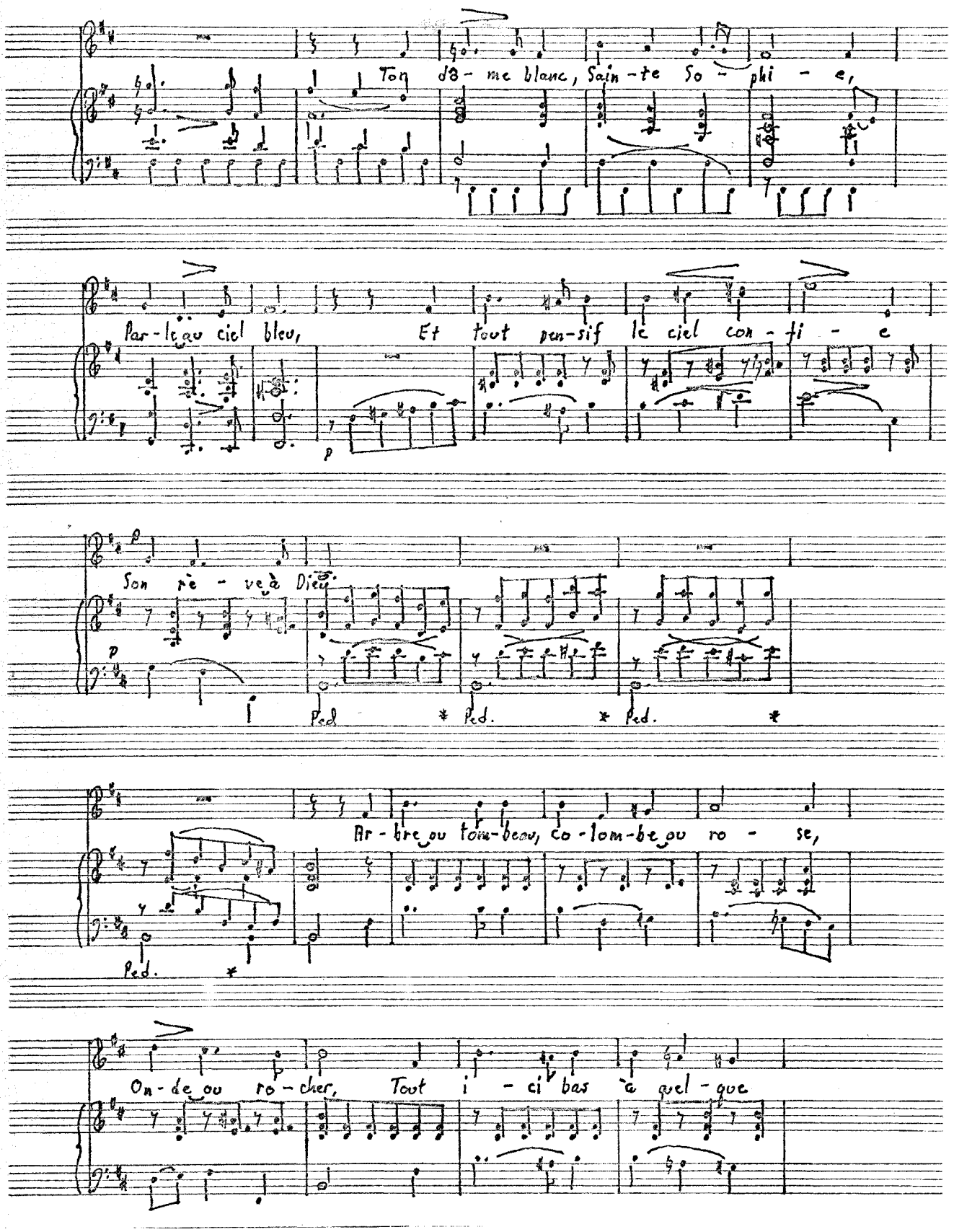


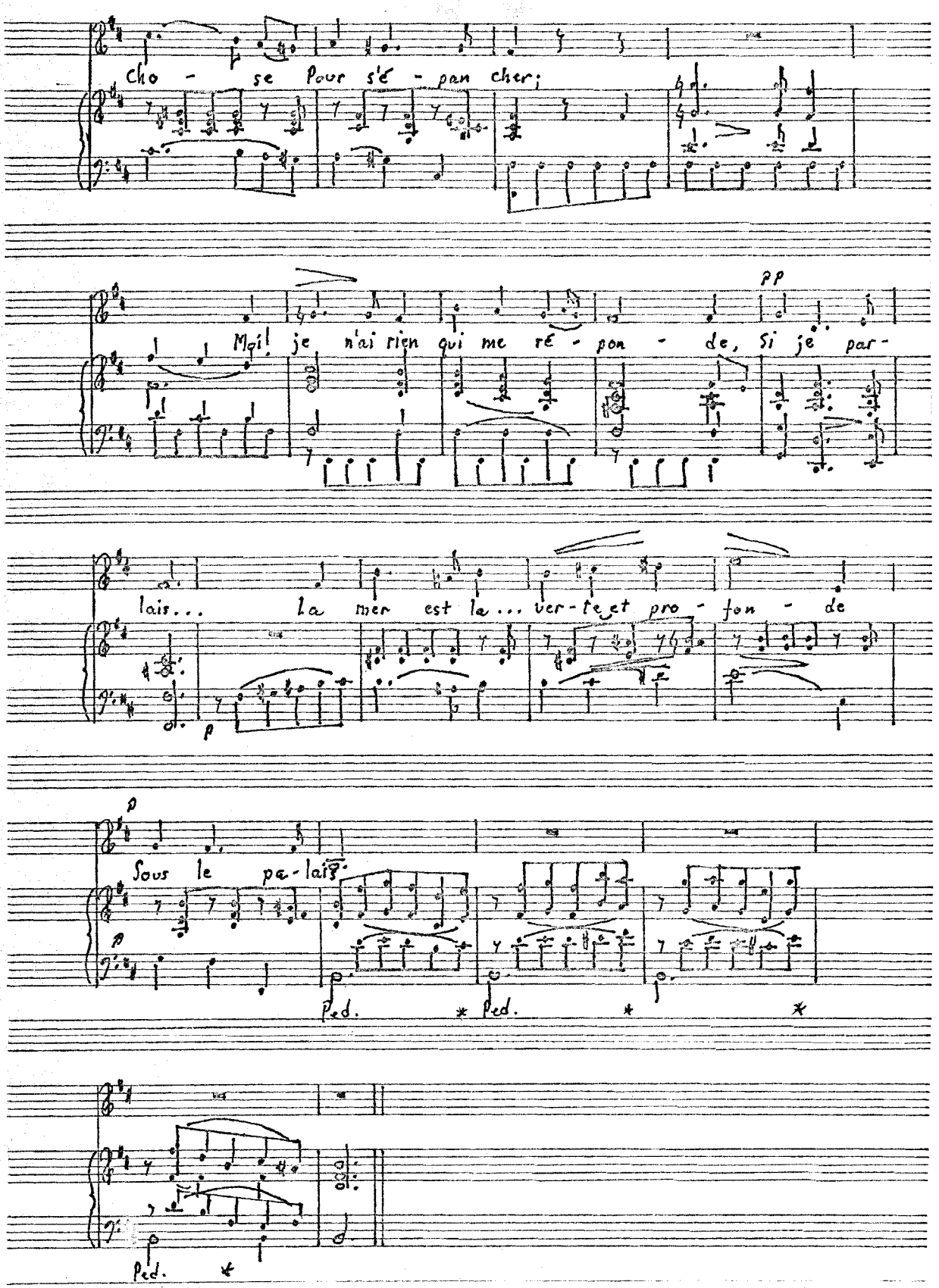
TRISTESSE DE L'ODALISQUE

Text by Théophile Gautier





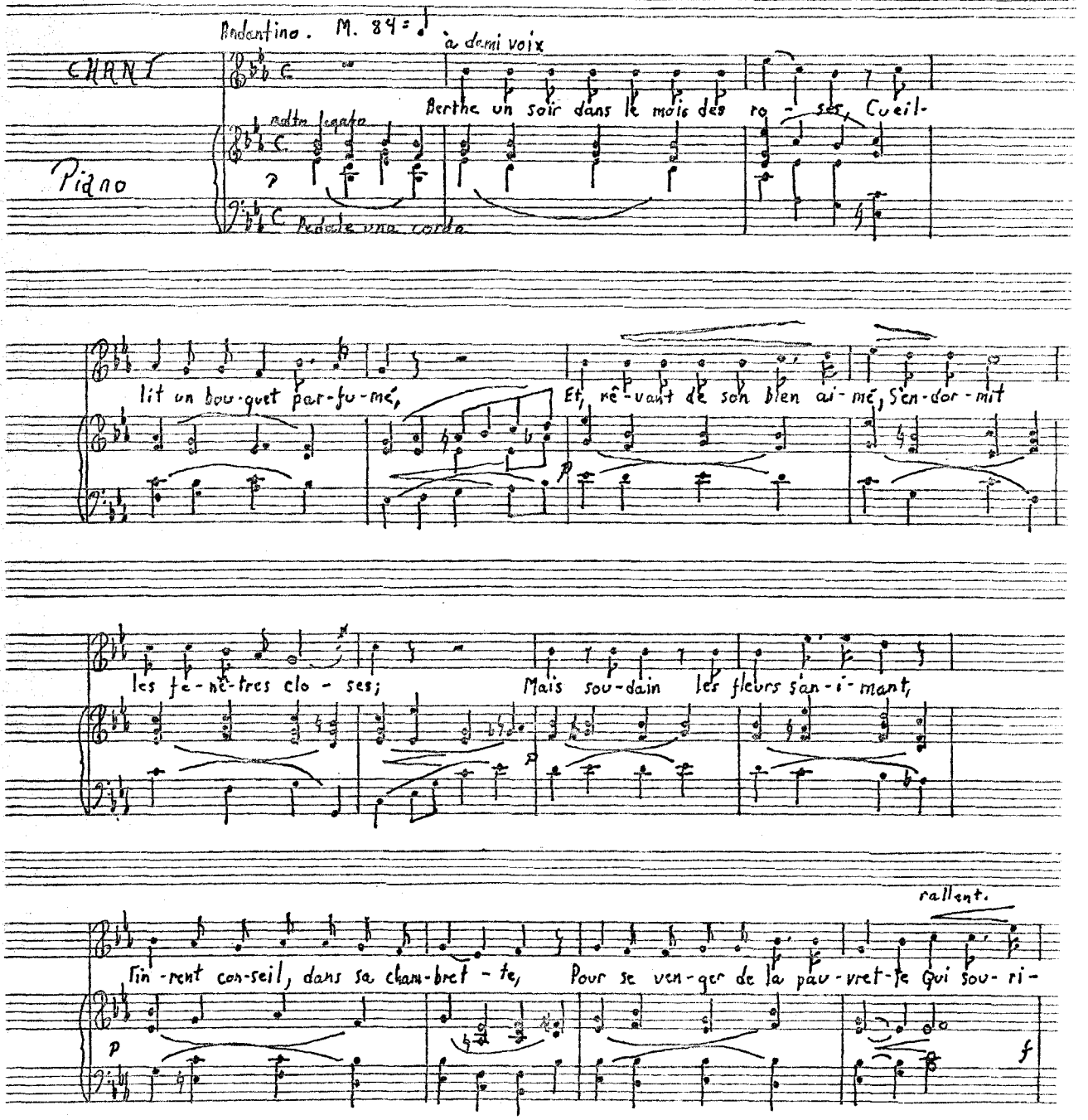


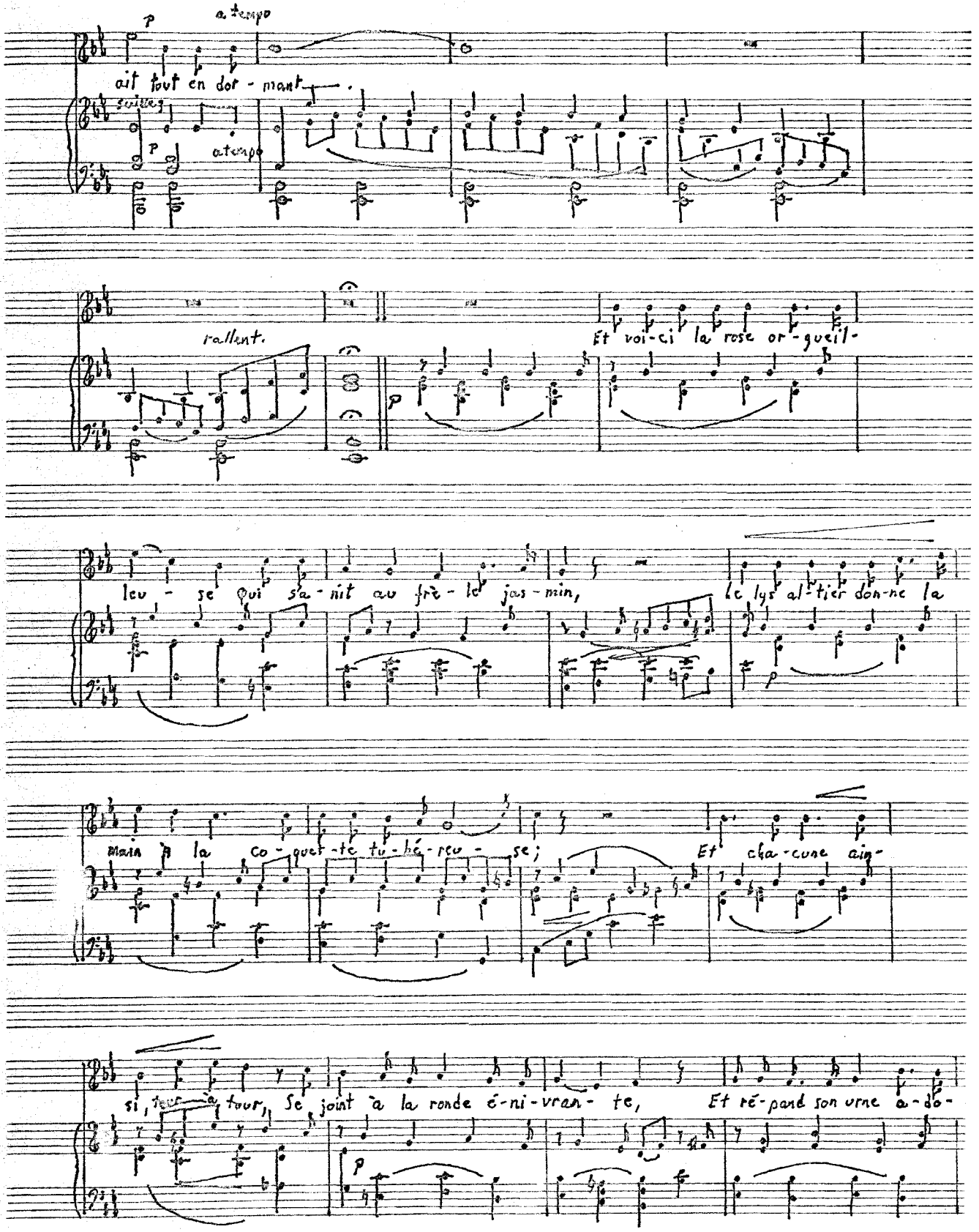


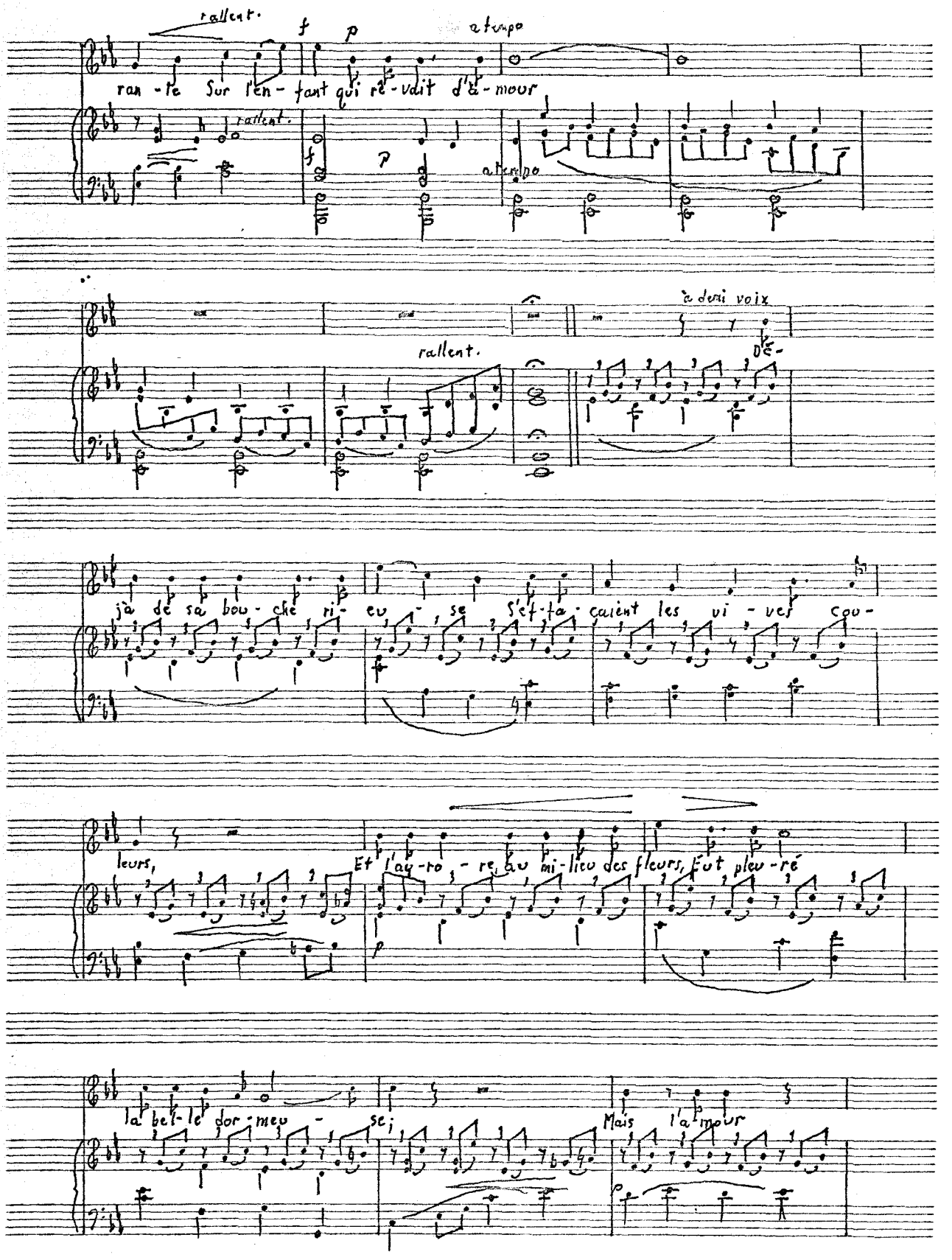
LA VENGEANCE DES FLEURS

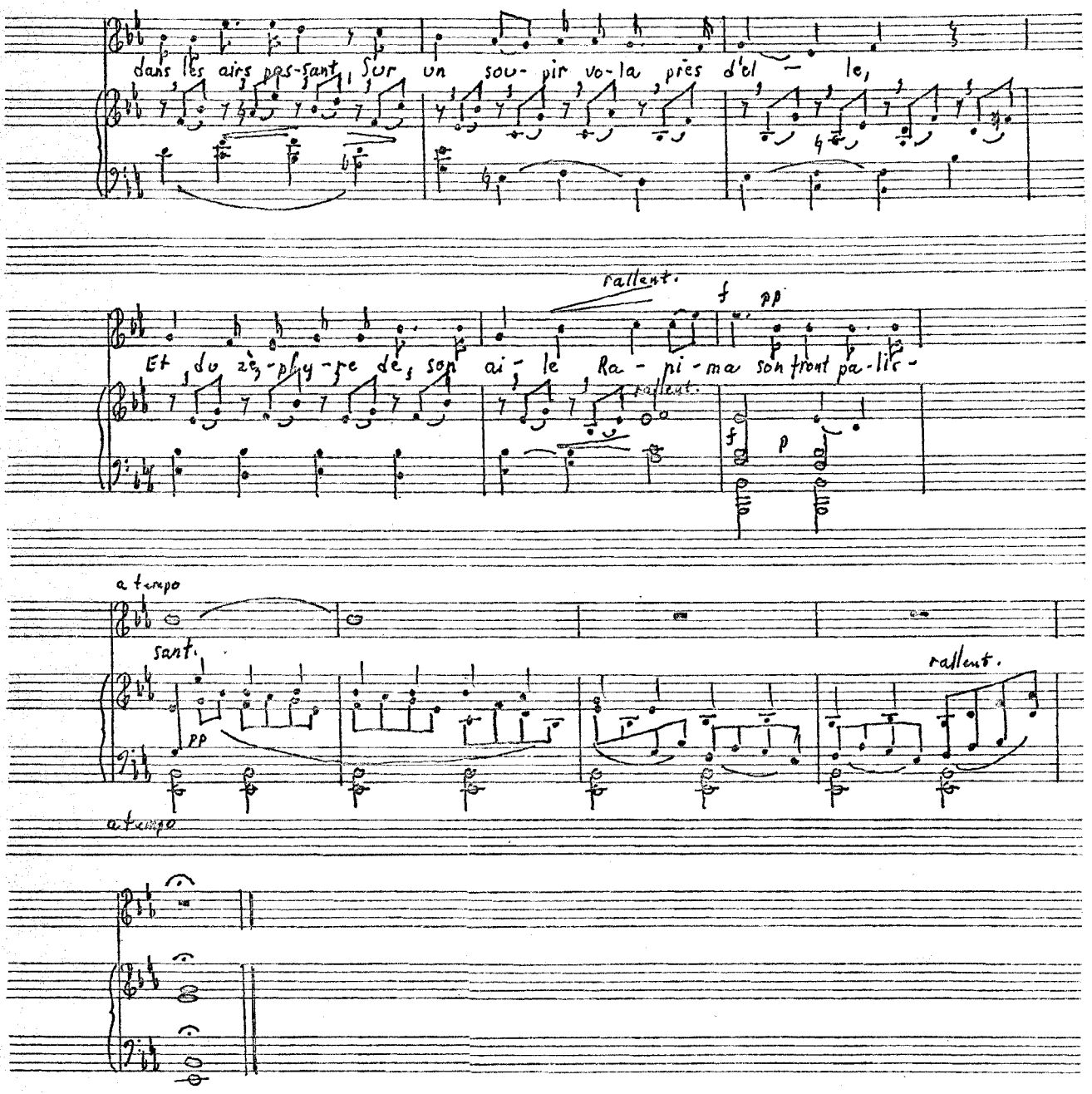
Mélodie

Text by M. Fonteille









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