Three part counterpoint in Franck's Andantino

Andantino is one of the notable pieces from César Franck's L'Organiste, Volume 1, composed in 1891. This collection of short works for harmonium or organ demonstrates Franck's ability to combine lyrical expression with structural simplicity, resulting in music that is both approachable and artistically refined. Andantino's flowing phrasing, subtle chromatic touches, and gentle dynamic shifts make it a fine example of Romantic music for the harmonium.

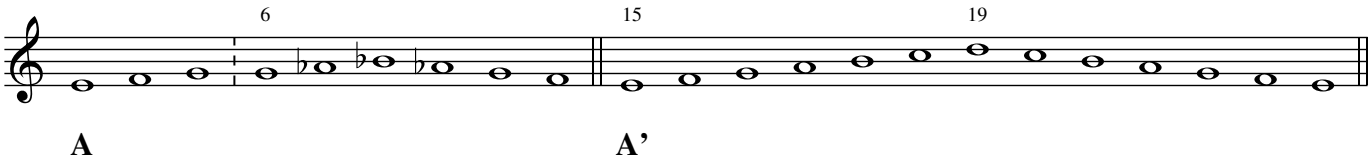
Written in C major, Andantino is structured in binary form (A-A'), a common design in shorter Romantic-era compositions:

- A (measures 1-14): moves from the tonic (I) to the dominant (V) in C major, passing through Eb major.

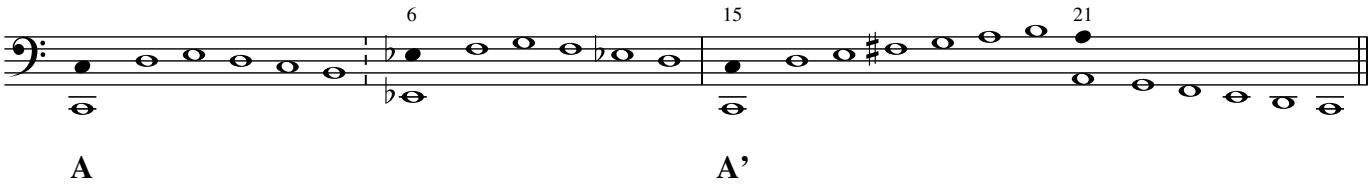
- A' (measures 15-28): starts in and returns to the tonic (I) via the dominant (G major).

From a technical perspective, Andantino serves as an excellent example of three-part counterpoint: the three voices (upper, middle, and lower) interact intricately, creating a rich tapestry of sound. Analyzing each voice individually reveals a coherent sequence of main tones, shaped by linear progressions and neighbourtone figures. An easy melodic design.

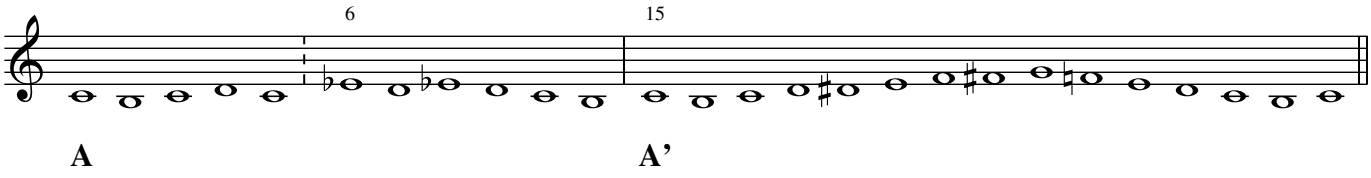
Analysis upper voice



Analysis lower voice

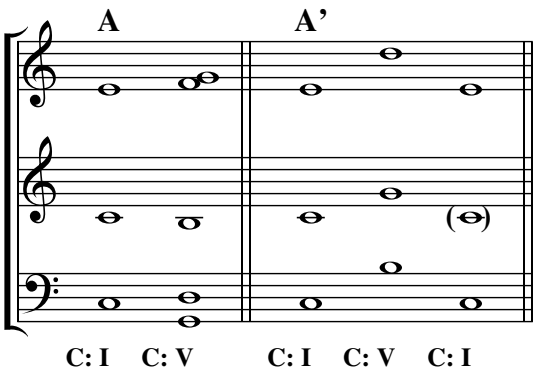


Analysis middle voice

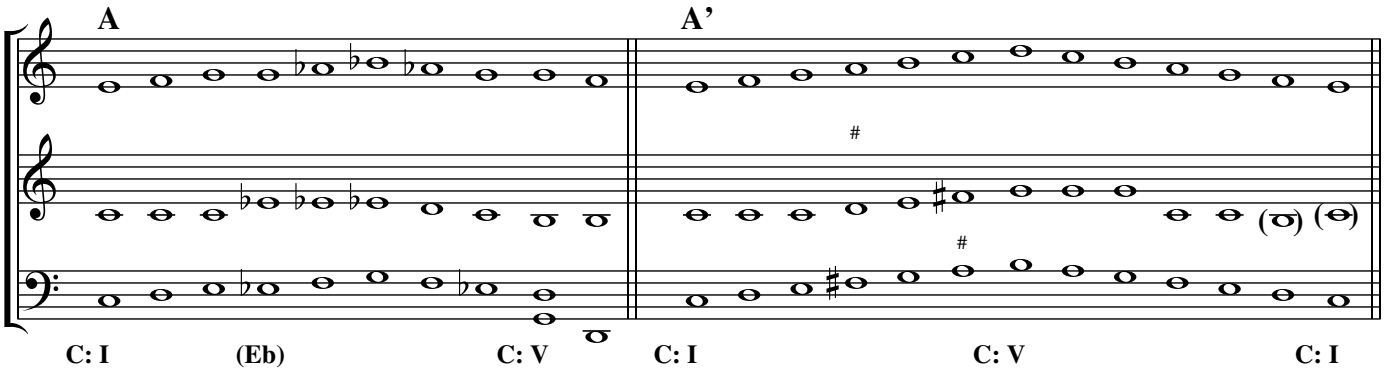


The appendices show annotated scores, that should clarify the above analysis.

Counterpoint is typically defined as the art of combining two or more quasi-independent melodies, each characterized by its own rhythm and melodic contour. However, there is more to it: melody moves from point to point. Therefore, counterpoint can also be understood as the rhythmic and melodic creativity applied to a structural framework of anchor points. In other words, it is a method of filling and elaborating musical space. To delve deeper, let us first identify that musical space, i.e. the beginning and end of musical sections.



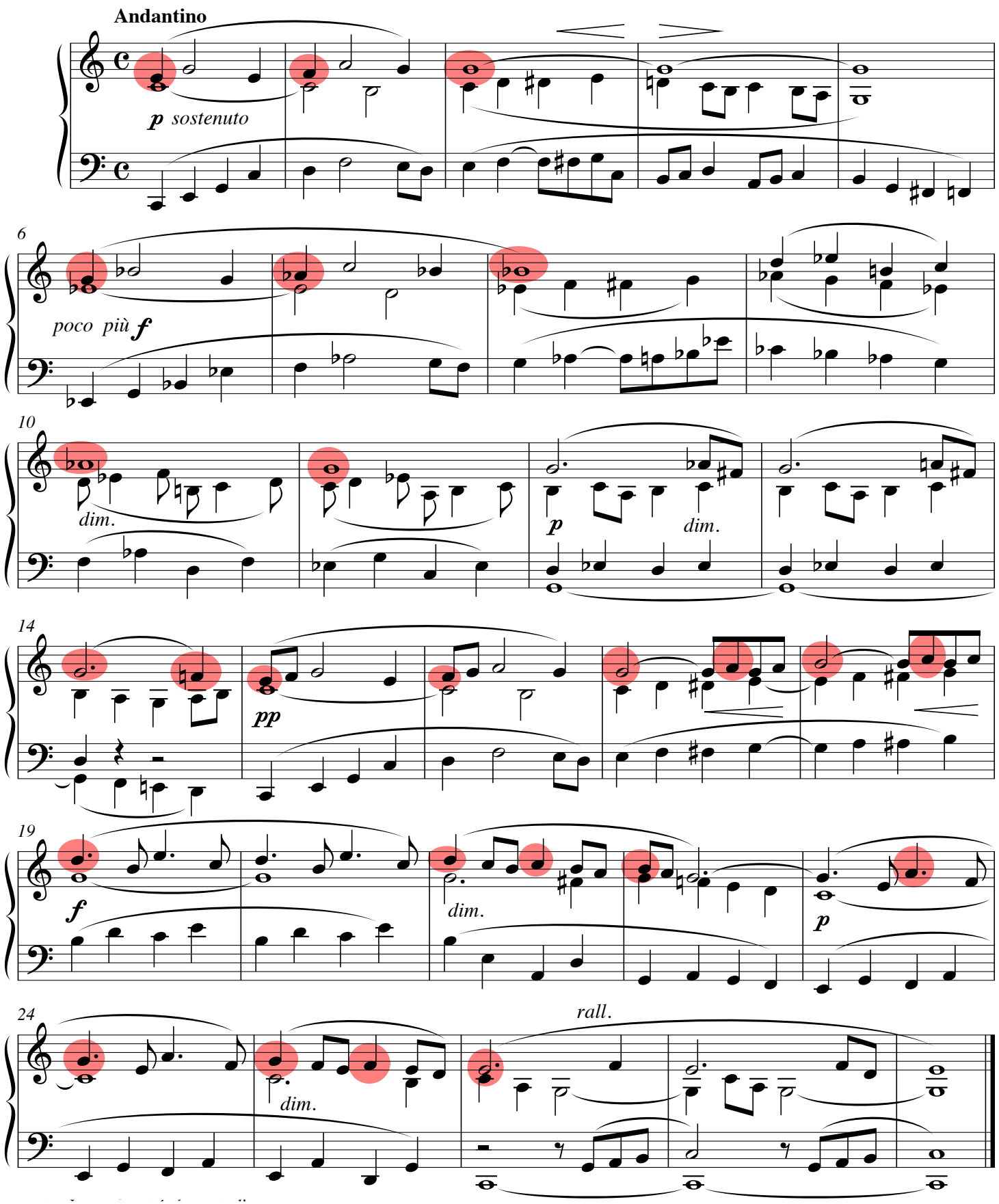
In fact, the musical space can be defined as framework is defined by the tonic and dominant in C major. The connection between these harmonic pillars is completed through stepwise motion in the outer voices, which maintain a third interval relationship:



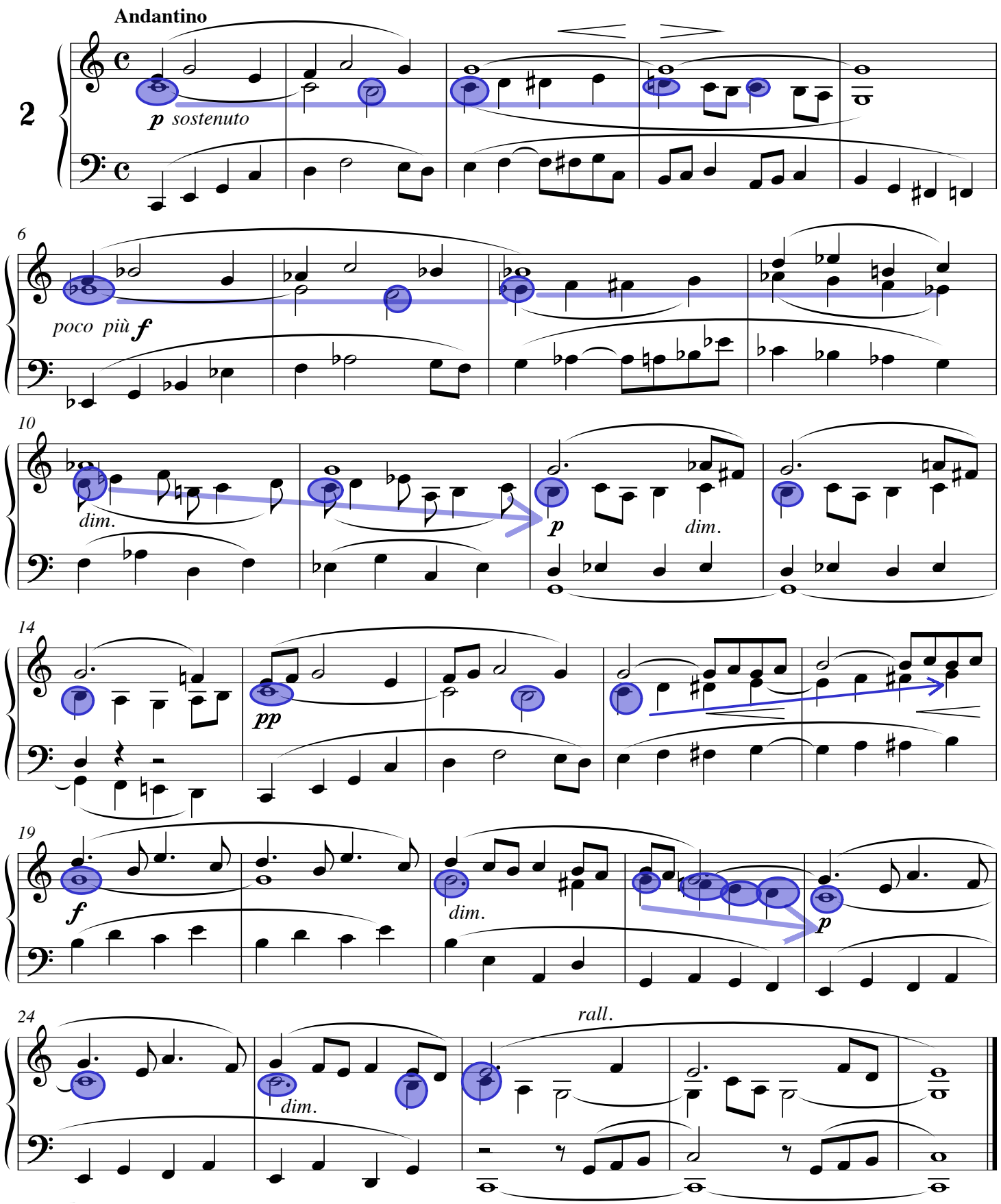
The third interval relationship between outer voices often forms the foundation of simple counterpoint. This relationship ensures harmonic stability while allowing melodic independence, making it a fundamental concept in creating smooth and cohesive contrapuntal lines.

The essence of counterpoint? Moving seamlessly and understandably from one harmonic anchor to the next while preserving a sense of balance and coherence. Here, this counterpoint adds depth to the composition adn it makes Franck's Andantino a rewarding study for both performers and music scholars alike.

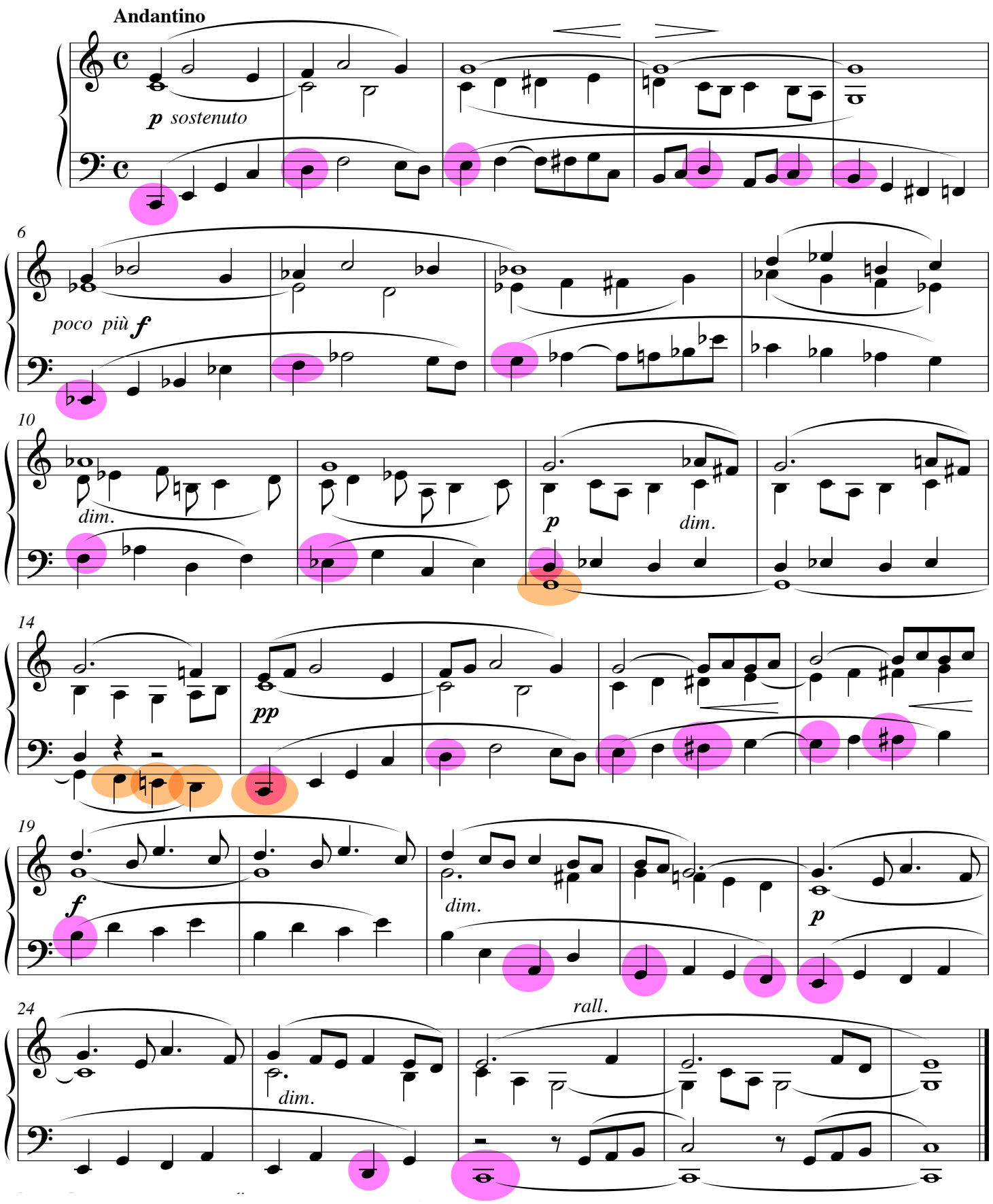
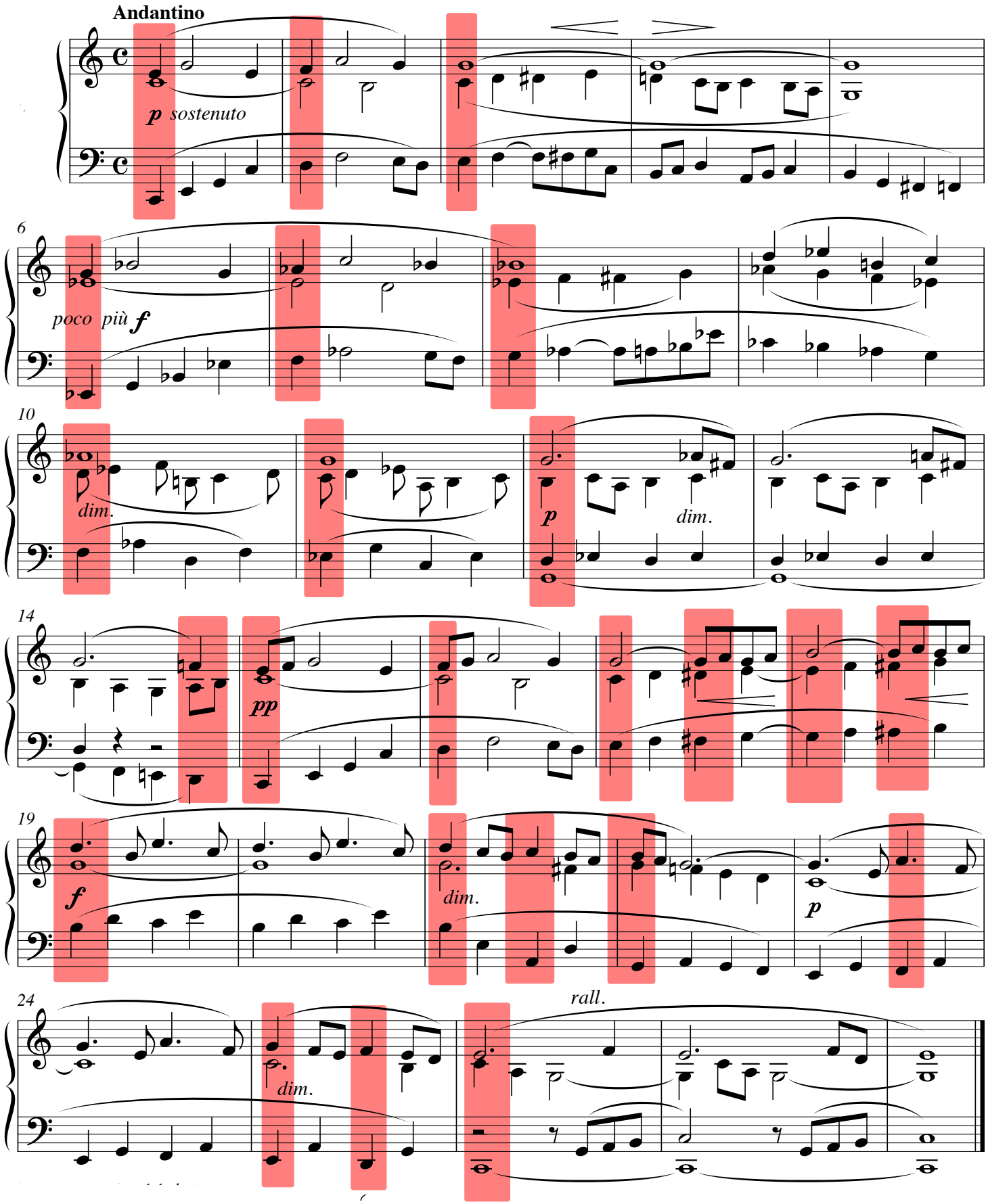
Analysis upper voice



Analysis middle voice



Analysis lower voice



Analysis harmonic pillars