Grieg's recipe of making a binary form A-A'

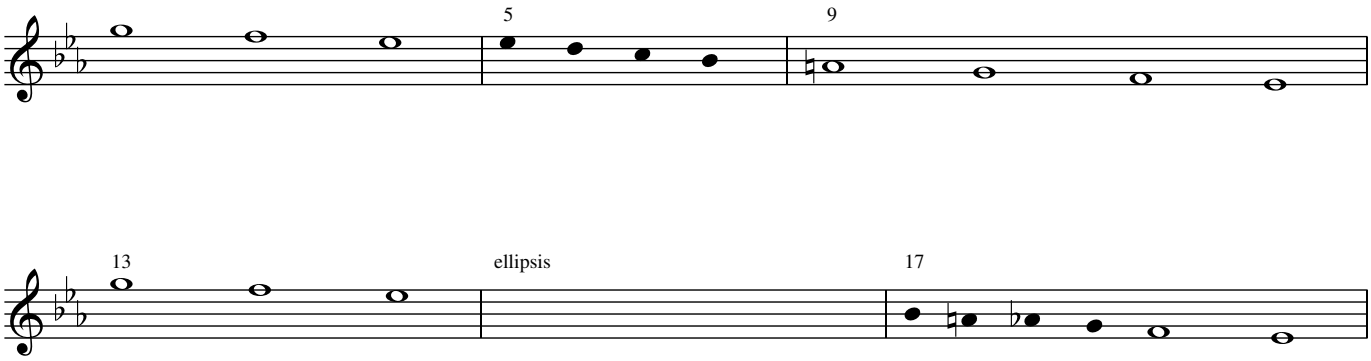
In music, binary form refers to a structure composed of two distinct sections, typically labeled as A and B, or sometimes as A and A' if the second section is a variation of the first. A notable example of binary form is Edvard Grieg's Arietta (Op. 12, No. 1). The way Grieg crafted this piece can be translated into a straightforward yet highly effective recipe. Here's how it works:

Step 1. Establish a Descending Linear Progression (A)
Compose a melody with a clear, descending line to define section A. This serves as the primary melodic material.

Step 2. Simplify the Progression (A')
For section A', repeat the same progression but leave out some notes (ellipsis). This creates variation while keeping the structure recognizable.

Grieg applies this method in his Arietta, where the descending melodic structure of section A is subtly modified in A' through the omission of selected notes, preserving continuity while adding contrast and variation. Dominant Bb is the primary reference point.

Arietta, Edvard Grieg, op. 12 no 1

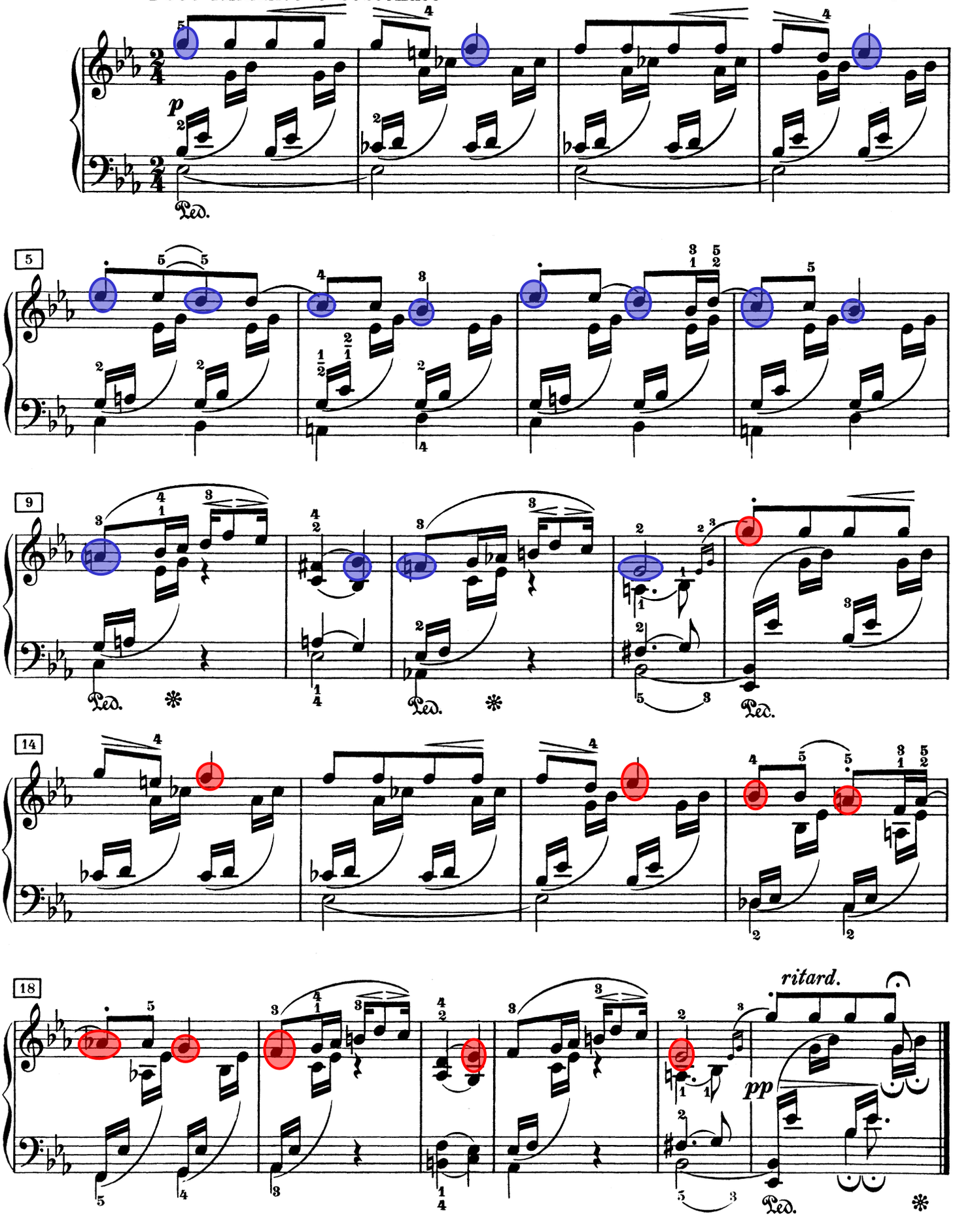


The annotated score in the appendix should provide clarity and support for this analysis. And notice how the speed of the stepwise movements changes!

1. Arietta

Poco Andante e sostenuto

Opus 12



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