Bryan Johanson

24 Preludes

Bryan Johanson is an active concert guitarist, composer, and author who has taught at Portland State University since 1978. A Professor of Music, he currently serves as Chair of the Department of Music. His articles and reviews on the guitar have appeared in the top journals and magazines in the field, including *Soundboard, Guitar Review, Acoustic Guitar,* and *American Lutherie.* His compositions have been published by Columbia Music Company, Edizioni Musicali Berben, Frederick Harris Music Publishers, Guitar Solo Publications, Thomas House Publication, Earthsongs Music Publishers, Mel Bay Publications, Ltd, and Doberman-Yppan. The recipient of many commissions, his music has been performed and recorded by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Chamber Music Northwest, The Oregon Symphony, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, David Starobin, the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet, David Tanenbaum, the Portland Symphonic choir, and Third Angle New Music Ensemble. He has won numerous composition prizes, including awards from the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Aspen Music Festival, the Esztergom (Hungary) International Guitar Festival, the Festival of August (Venezuela), the Roger Wagner Center for Choral Studies, as well as multiple awards from the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). Johanson's music is recorded extensively and appears on record labels such as Albany, Bridge, EMI, GSP, Gagliano Recordings, and Naxos. In 1999, his critically acclaimed composition *Open Up Your Ears* for guitar was recorded on David Starobin's Grammy Award nominated *New Dance*, and, in 2004, his *Pluck, Strum, and Hammer* and *Let's Be Frank* were recorded by the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet on their Grammy Award winning *Guitar Heroes*.

24 Preludes

Initially the *24 Preludes* began as a composition exercise intended to teach me how to write short, concise works. The project rapidly evolved into the cycle of preludes presented here. Ironically, I achieved my initial goal while simultaneously composing my longest sustained work for solo guitar to date.

Many composers have written 24 Preludes, usually basing their set on Bach's WTC model (Chopin, Shostakovich, Scriabin, etc.); composing one in every major and minor key. However, for me, composing a prelude in every key was not very appealing. There are several reasons for this: 1) my personal harmonic language tends to stray in and out of keys, sometimes toward and away from tonality at the same time; 2) the classical guitar itself does not fit all keys equally well and; 3) the reasons for writing in every major and minor key, though it may have been challenging and essential to Bach's harmonic development, no longer exist. Nevertheless, the idea of composing 24 Preludes grew on me, primarily because the historical model proved successful at challenging composers to dig deeply into the inventive possibilities of the short form.

My set can be roughly divided into two parts. In **Part One** (Preludes 1-12) the pieces begin short and simple, slowly working toward longer and more complex forms and increasing harmonic diversity. In **Part Two** (Preludes 13-24) the process is reversed with the formal, harmonic and melodic content becoming more simplified as the cycle works toward the concluding prelude.

One additional formal aspect is that each prelude in the first half has a companion prelude in the second half. Though each pair is not symmetrically placed, the pairs will become increasingly obvious as the listener becomes more familiar with the work. The binding agent between the pairs varies with each, creating pairs that behave sometimes like mates, sometimes like siblings, sometimes like cousins, and sometimes like twins (even an evil twin shows up in this process). However, the careful listener will eventually discover the commonalities, achieving what I hope will be a deeper level of musical and emotional engagement.

1. Allegro vivo. The opening prelude is cast in a perpetual motion frame centered in the key of *e minor*. The music begins using a rising melodic octave device, eventually settling into more straightforward harmonic and melodic patterns.

2. Presto spiccato. This prelude features a simple Ciaconna pattern, heard in the first measures. The spiccato material indicated in the title slowly gives way to a more legato presentation of the repeated pattern.

3. Allegro moderato. One of the central challenges in this cycle was to find various ways to present the lyrical side of the guitar. Because the fundamental sound of each note involves immediate decay, writing in a style that requires lyrical playing does not come easily or naturally to the instrument. This prelude, cast in *c minor*, is the first of several preludes designed to explore the various ways in which the guitar has learned to naturally express its melodic charms.

4. Animato. This prelude features an asymmetrical rhythmic figure that is intended to create some irregular energy. Though set in *b minor*, this prelude is the first to assert some unpredictable chromatically inflected melodic passages. The effect should seem jazzy, not jarring.

5. Tempo di Valse lento. No surprises here; the tempo indication pretty much says it all. It is a short valse in *A mixolydian major*.

6. Allegro. Another musical category I wanted to explore in this set of preludes was the etude. Most guitar etudes are designed to conquer a particular technical skill. Often on the path to conquering the particular skill they also kill whatever musical material comes their way. The result is technically engaging but musically quite uninteresting. I found that casting preludes founded on etude figures was a more musically satisfying way to approach the problem. This prelude is the first of this hybrid type that can be found in this cycle. The tonal language is predominantly atonal, though not by much.

7. Sostenuto. This prelude is the first of the set that uses a fully chromatic/atonal language. Not to worry, though: this prelude does not blast atonality in your face. Rather, it explores the more lyrical side of the atonal language by focusing on melody rather than brittle textures or strident harmony.

8. Adagio – Liberamente – Allegro energico – Presto non molto – Liberamente – Allegro energico – Presto non molto – Liberamente – Adagio. What we have here is a kind of musical schizophrenic cocktail. The work opens with a paraphrase of La Folia de Espagna (Adagio), followed by a free, diminished chord cadenza (Liberamente). All of this precedes the central Allegro energico, which is a quasi-salsa section, followed by an arpeggio transition (Presto non molto), which leads back to a short cadenza, a return to a varied salsa and arpeggio transition, one last mini-cadenza, and finally closing with a variation of the opening La Folia material. A sectional diagram would read as follows: A-B-C-D-B'-C'-D'-B"-A'.

9. Andantino. As an antidote to the short attention span high jinks of the previous prelude, this one is clear in design and fairly transparent in harmonic content. There should be no impediment to your enjoyment of this ethnic-inflected, dance-like prelude.

10. Adagio cantabile. This prelude has a history that precedes the writing of this cycle. In 2003 the wonderful luthier Jeffrey Elliott made me a new guitar. As he was putting it together he asked if I would like to "put a message in the bottle". Prior to the making of the instrument Jeff repaired a guitar by Antonio Torres. But not just any Torres guitar – this was the favored guitar of Francisco Tarrega. When Jeff began to repair it he noticed that on the inside of the instrument there was some music paper that was used to patch thin spots in the wood. What was most interesting to him was that there was music written on the paper. He called me and asked if I could identify if it was music written by Tarrega. I rushed over and could tell immediately that Tarrega did not write it. But, on my way over I fanaticized; what if we found an undiscovered Tarrega piece on the inside. How cool would that be? At the time I said to Jeff that it would be great to do that on my new guitar. When Jeff called he let me know that it was time. He had secured some parchment that was from the 19th century and said if I wanted to write a piece and place on the inside I had to do it quickly. I wrote the piece and before it was sealed inside I made one Xerox copy. I wanted to play the work once before it was sealed away. I played the work at a concert and at the conclusion I shred the single existing copy of the score that was sealed

away in my brand new guitar. Everyone there took a strip and that was that. But, the memory of the work haunted me. I wanted to play it more. However, my resolve was firm – this was a piece that belonged to the guts of my own instrument. When I recorded my I Dreamed About You Last Night CD I improvised a piece that was titled Pentamento. It was my improvised memory of what I could recall about the Hidden Prelude. I have no idea how close or how far away the improvisation was to what is sealed inside the guitar. Prelude 10 is my transcription of the work recorded on that CD.

11. Vivace. This prelude falls into the prelude/etude hybrid category. It is primarily about scales, though not exclusively so. The intent of this movement is to create some heat.

12. Calmato - Vivo, ma non troppo. As the tempo indicates, the final prelude in the first half is written in two halves. The first part is a calm, slowly expressive canon. The second half is an irregular arpeggio pattern that works its way down the fingerboard only to rise up and come down again. The prelude concludes with a rapid, descending and diminuendo-ing chromatic riff intended to not only close the prelude but also conclusively cap off the first half of the cycle.

13. Gentile. This lyrical prelude is in the form of a Sicilian. The material, mostly in *g minor*, features a gently swaying melody in compound duple meter.

14. Allegretto agitato, sempre ritmico. While the previous prelude could be described as gently rocking, this one is just rockin'. The single focus of this prelude is a syncopated motive that gets tossed around through a few keys that contrasts with a secondary motive that gets tossed around the fingerboard.

15. Largo maestoso. This prelude explores lyrical material that emerges from a soft, slow and dissonant foundation.

16. Allegro azzurro e molto fresco. This prelude features the guitar in a kind of jazz continuo role. The central musical argument is fusing a walking bass pattern with syncopated harmonic and melodic inserts. With the exception of a few bars here and there, there is a constant stream of quarter notes that serves as the main line for the listener to follow.

17. Allegro comodo. This prelude is a mirror canon. This classic contrapuntal device inverts the riposta, or following voice. If the proposta (leading voice) rises, the riposta falls; if the leading voice descends, the following voice ascends. Naturally, this is a tricky proposition on the guitar because the voices can quickly run out of room on the fingerboard before they cross each other or become too far apart.

18. Allegretto legato. This simple prelude, in ternary form, features a figure that juggles a syncopated sustained melody, a shifting natural harmonic, and an open string. In its original version the syncopated sustained melody was assigned to the second string. As it descended the left hand had to work harder and harder to maintain the legato quality.

19. Lento sostenuto. This prelude is an attempt at paraphrasing a pop song from my youth. As a child I listened to the radio constantly. But, it was AM radio; a frequency range now hardly listened to at all. It was also the age of three television networks and commercial radio stations that played pop, easy listening, or country and western. If you listened to pop radio you heard the same dozen or so songs over and over, week after week. Songs would come and go, sometimes enjoying a rapid rise and a quick decline and sometimes just staying somewhere in the middle. There would be songs that would rise to the top and stay there, week after week. There would also be songs that defied musical logic; songs that would make it on the charts because of their bizarre or quirky nature. Listening to pop radio in my youth was like listening to the craziest mix-up of joke-songs, love ballads, songs with a good beat, the occasional R&B anomaly, and pop songs that are the equivalent of spun sugar – sweet confections with no nutritional value whatsoever. The song I quote here was at the top of the pop charts for weeks and weeks. I never liked and eventually over the weeks great to dislike it intensely. Even today if I have the chance to hear it I still dislike it intensely. It has all the things a pop song should have, but without any emotional content or charm. This was a pop song that was written to be a pop song. Full of pop platitudes, production glitz and glitter, and oozing with commercial aspirations. It also had complete disdain for the listener. It provided fake sentiment in exchange for cash. This was the commercial music machine at it worst. But, sometimes you have to embrace your past and make peace with the ghosts of cruddy songs that somehow live forever in the folds of your brain. I hope the song, now totally deconstructed and transformed into a lyrical prelude, gives the listener pleasure. It was my intent to infill with some emotional content, removing the cynical pop sentiment found in the original. Though it makes no difference to the listener whether you know which song is being paraphrased, it is my hope you enjoy the added puzzle of trying to hear for yourself what song is being paraphrased.

20. Allegretto giocoso. After purging some of my musical ghosts, I felt we needed a little fingerboard romp. This is one of the etude-esque preludes designed to have some fun with the fingers.

21. Cantabile. This expressive prelude features the interplay of two lyrical chunks of material, which alternate between flat keys and sharp keys.

22. Allegro vivo. This is the last of the hybrid prelude/etude type. This prelude features a playful four-note motive that has, at its core, two sets of minor seconds that mirror each other. Like the other preludes/etudes, this music finds itself moving around the fingerboard, looking for ways to apply and vary the main motive.

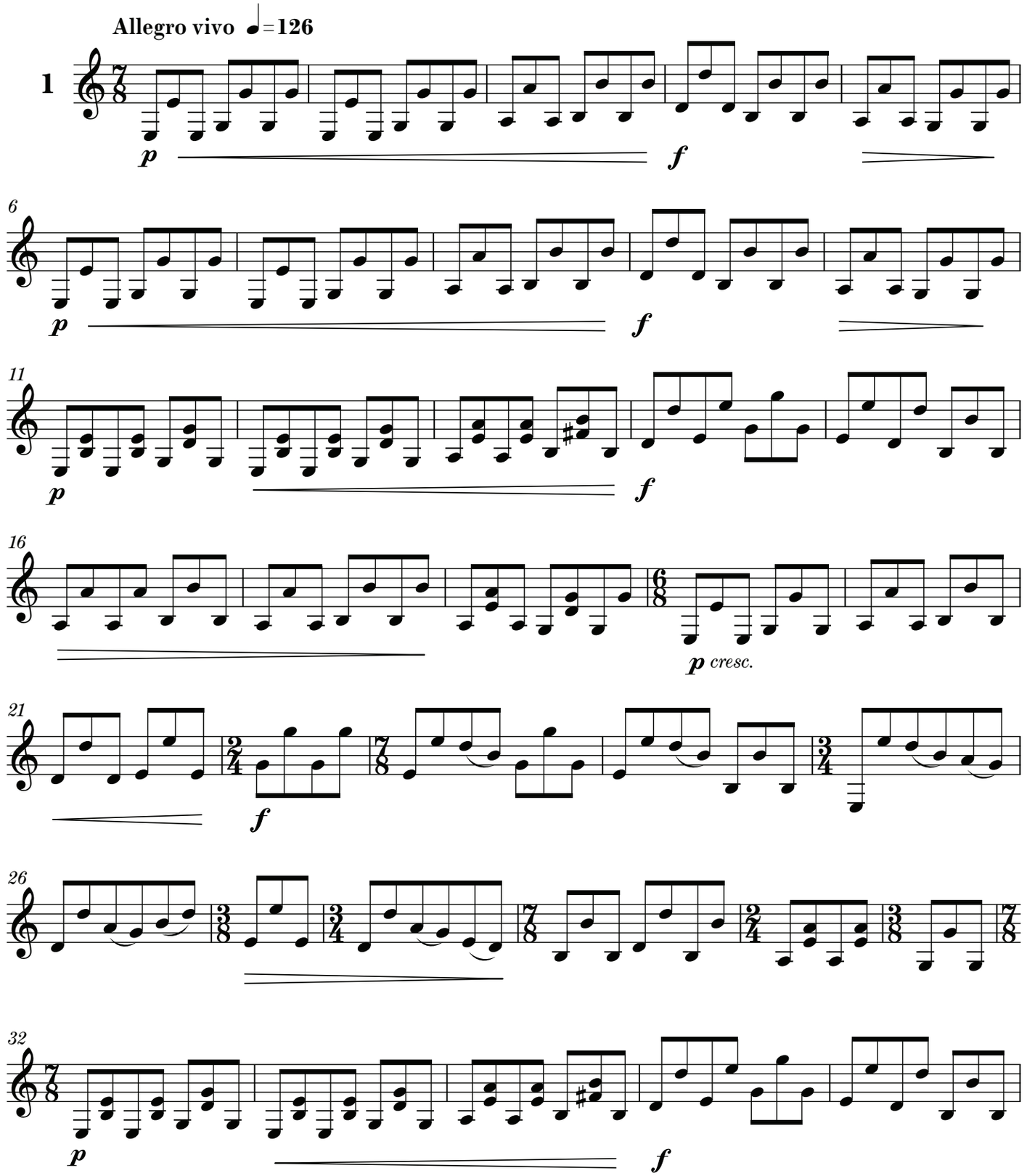
23. Allegretto maestoso. The penultimate prelude explores various ways of looking at itself through an examination of its own first bar of music.

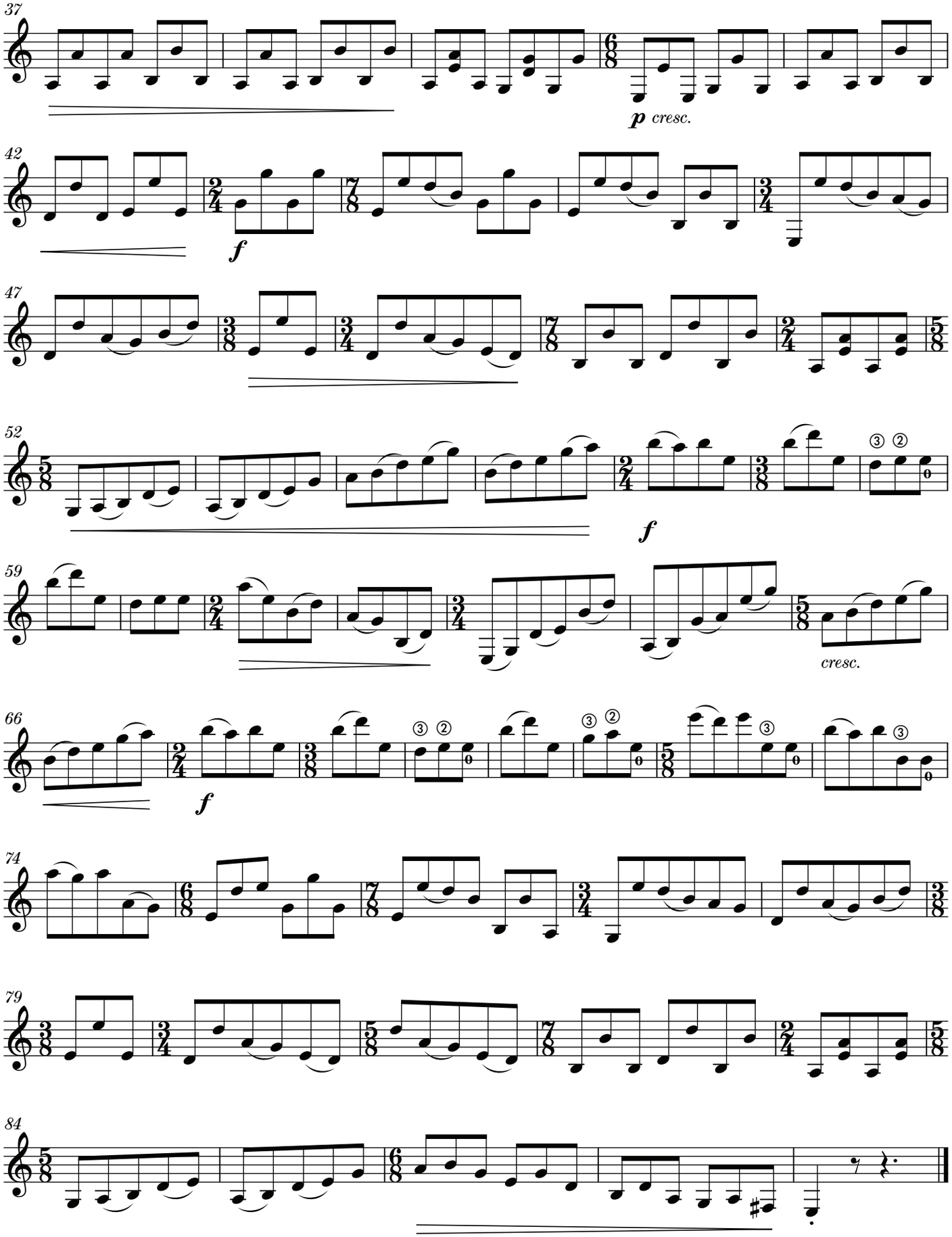
24. Largo sostenuto, molto cantabile. As any cycle comes to its conclusion, the question composer's must face is how will it end. Fortunately, for me, this final prelude was my goal from the beginning. As the title suggests, this is slow, sustained music. At the conclusion of most journeys, you arrive at your home. Home, for me, is where I feel most relaxed and unguarded. It is where I am happiest. As I brought this cycle of preludes to a conclusion, the sentiment I felt most strongly was gratitude. I was thankful for the journey and was glad to be home.

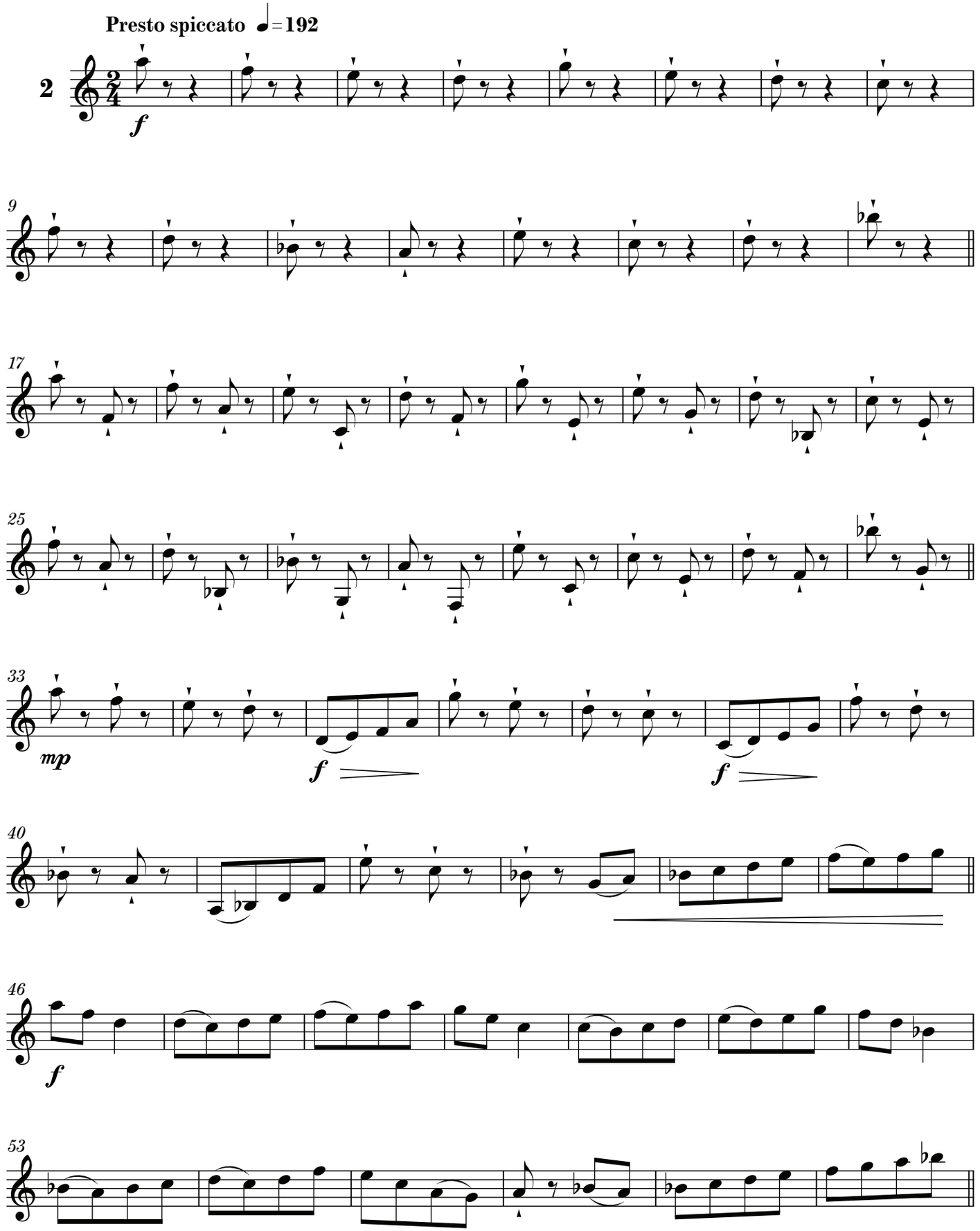
- Bryan Johanson, Portland, Oregon

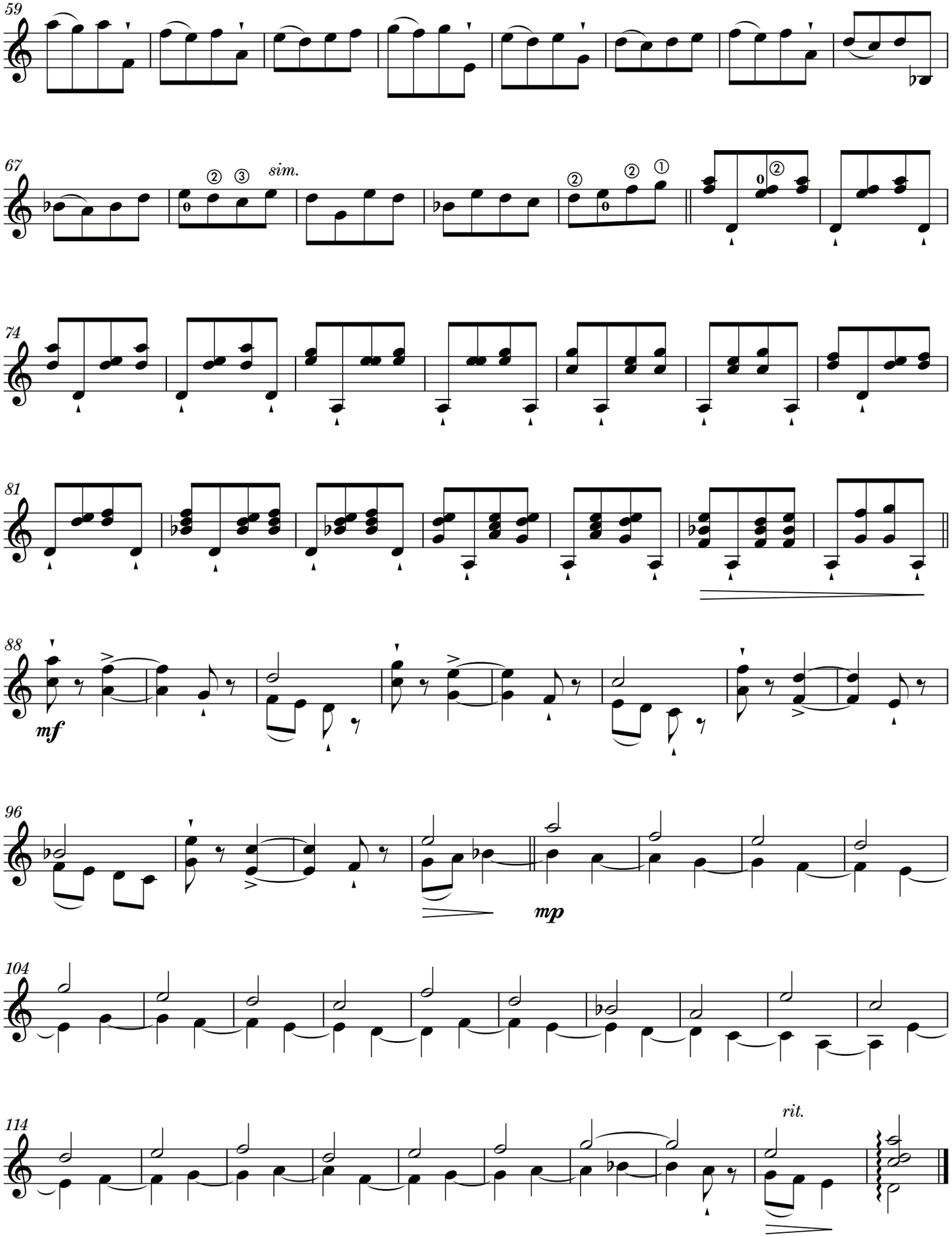
24 Preludes

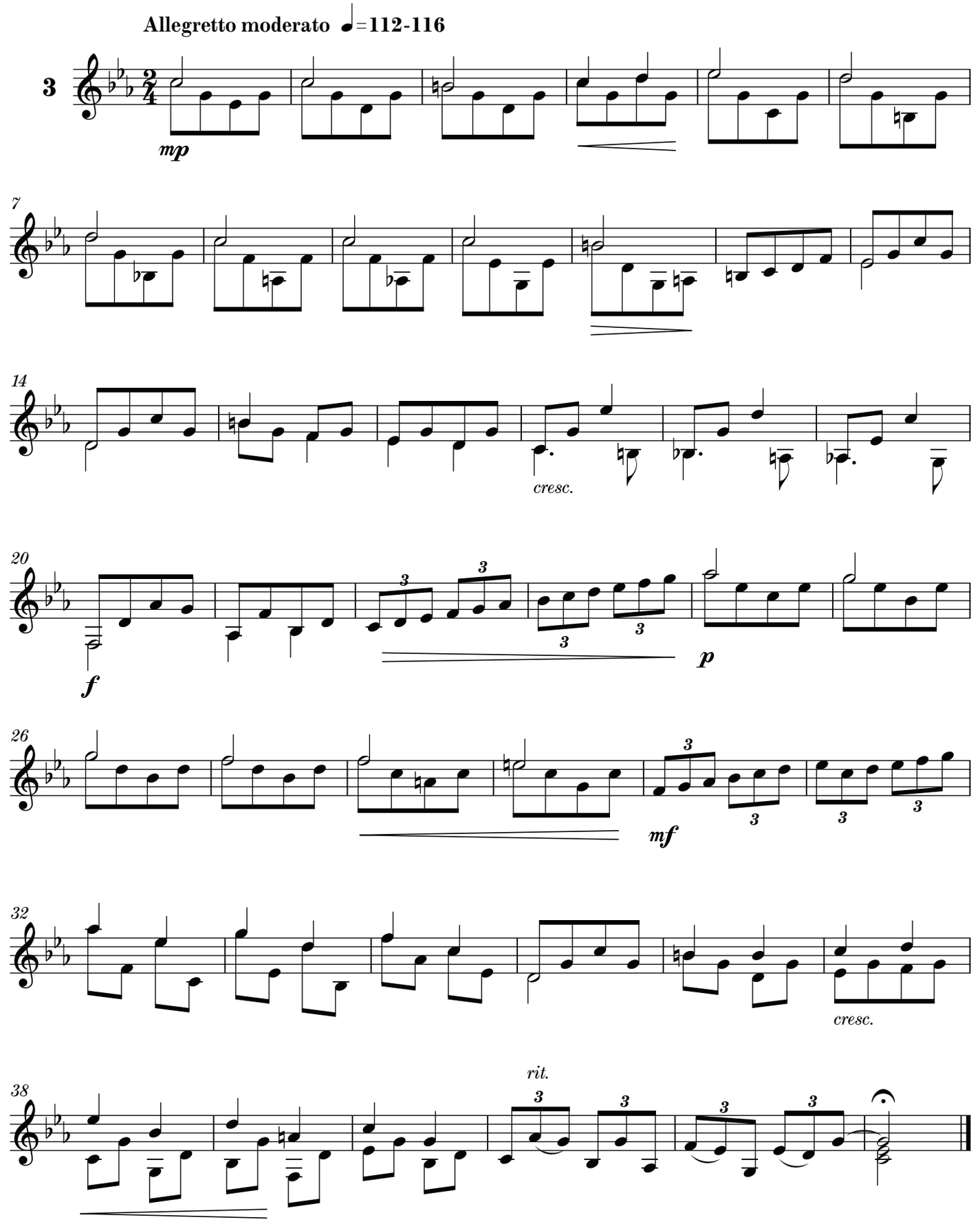
Bryan Johanson

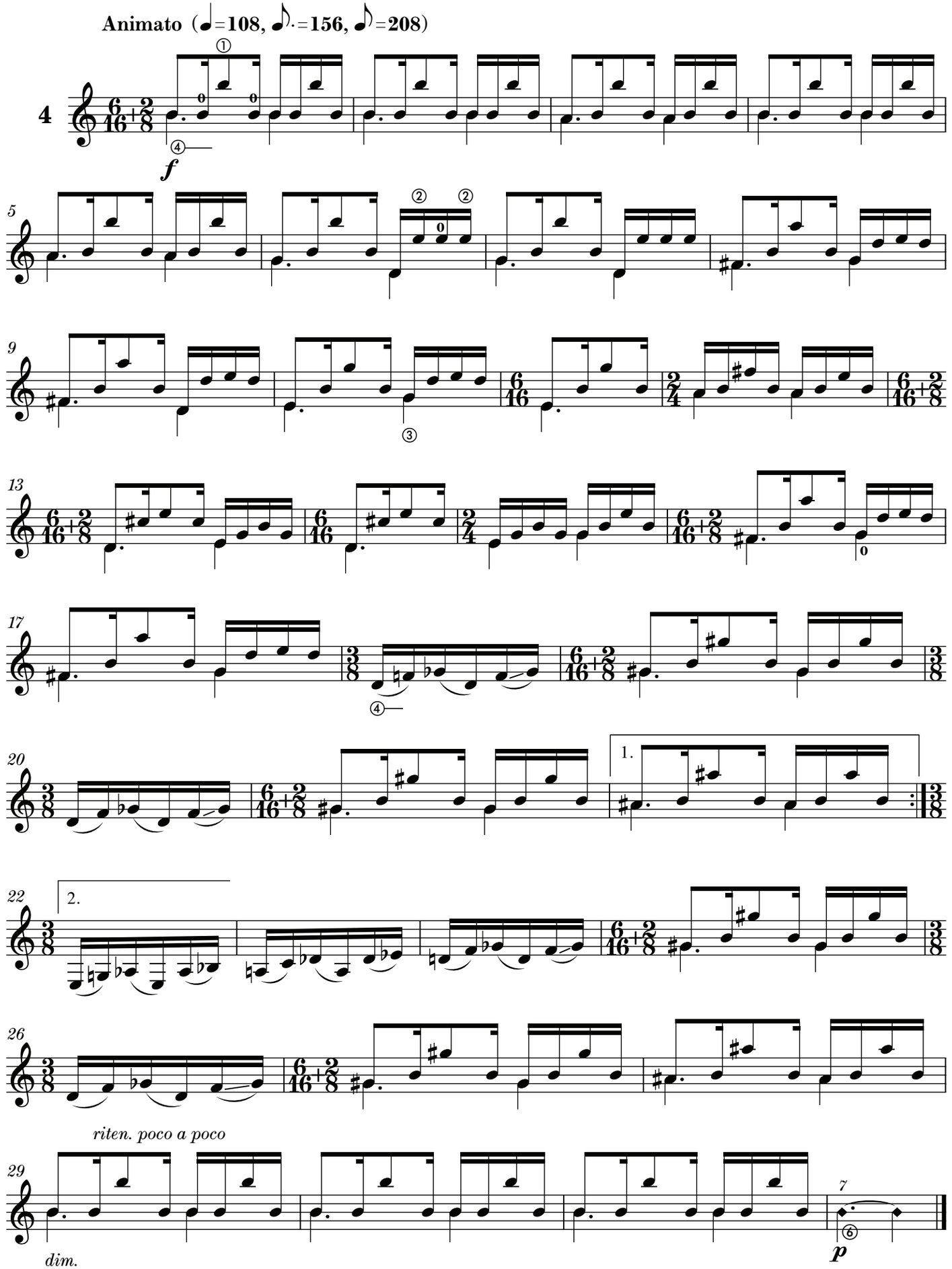


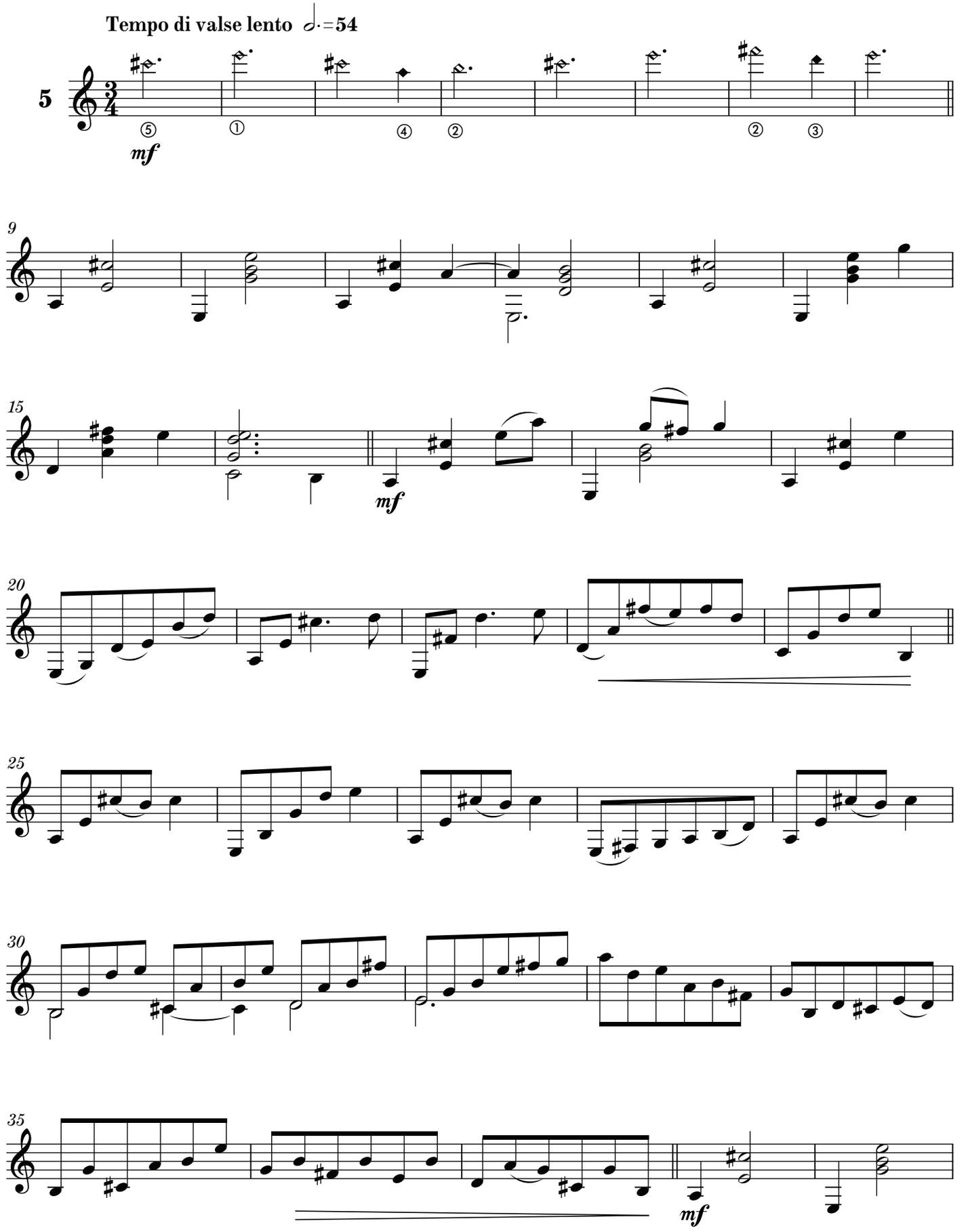

37
p cresc.
42
f
47
52
f
59
cresc.
66
f
74
79
84

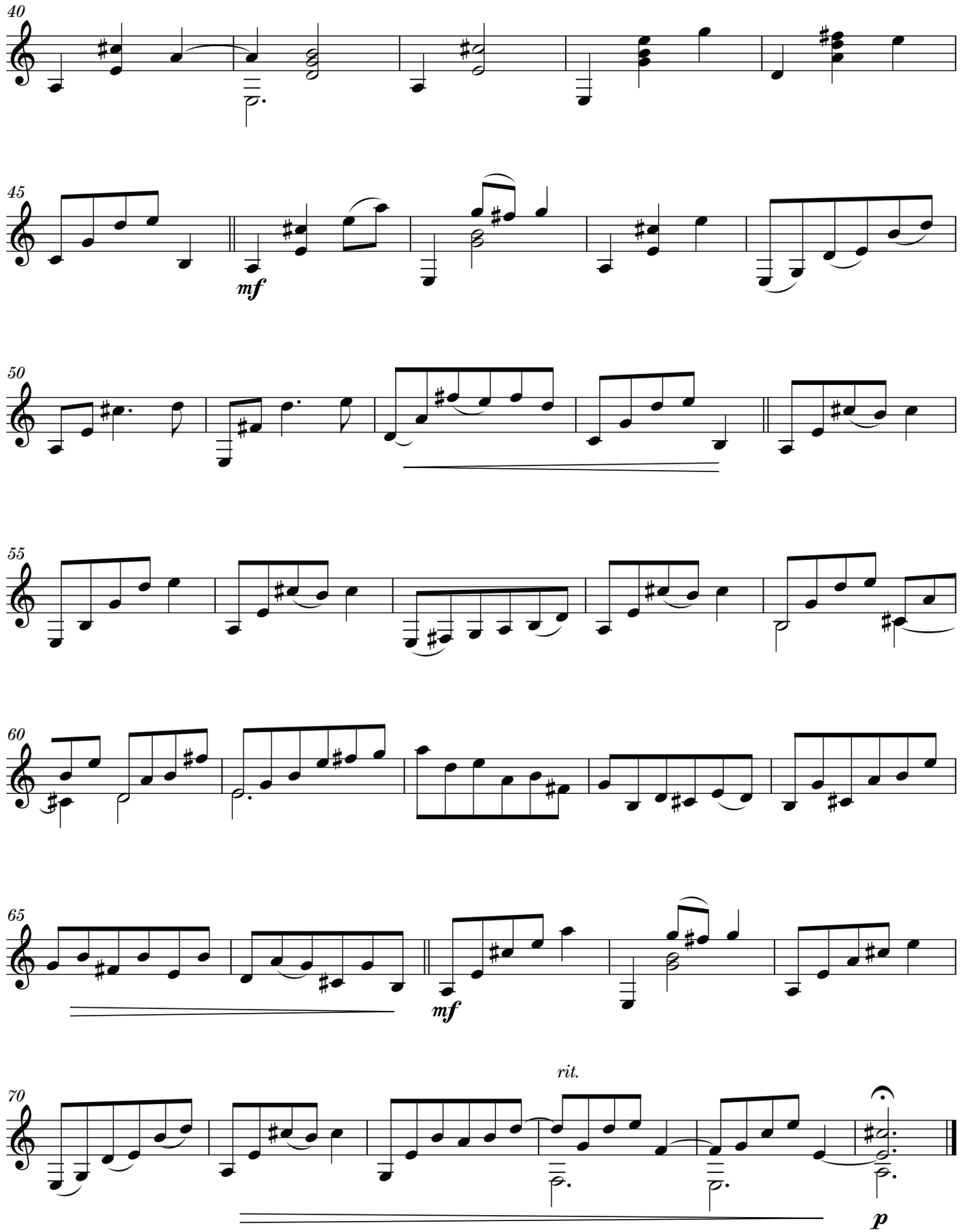

Presto spiccato ♩=192
2
f
9
17
25
33
mp
f
f
40
46
f
53

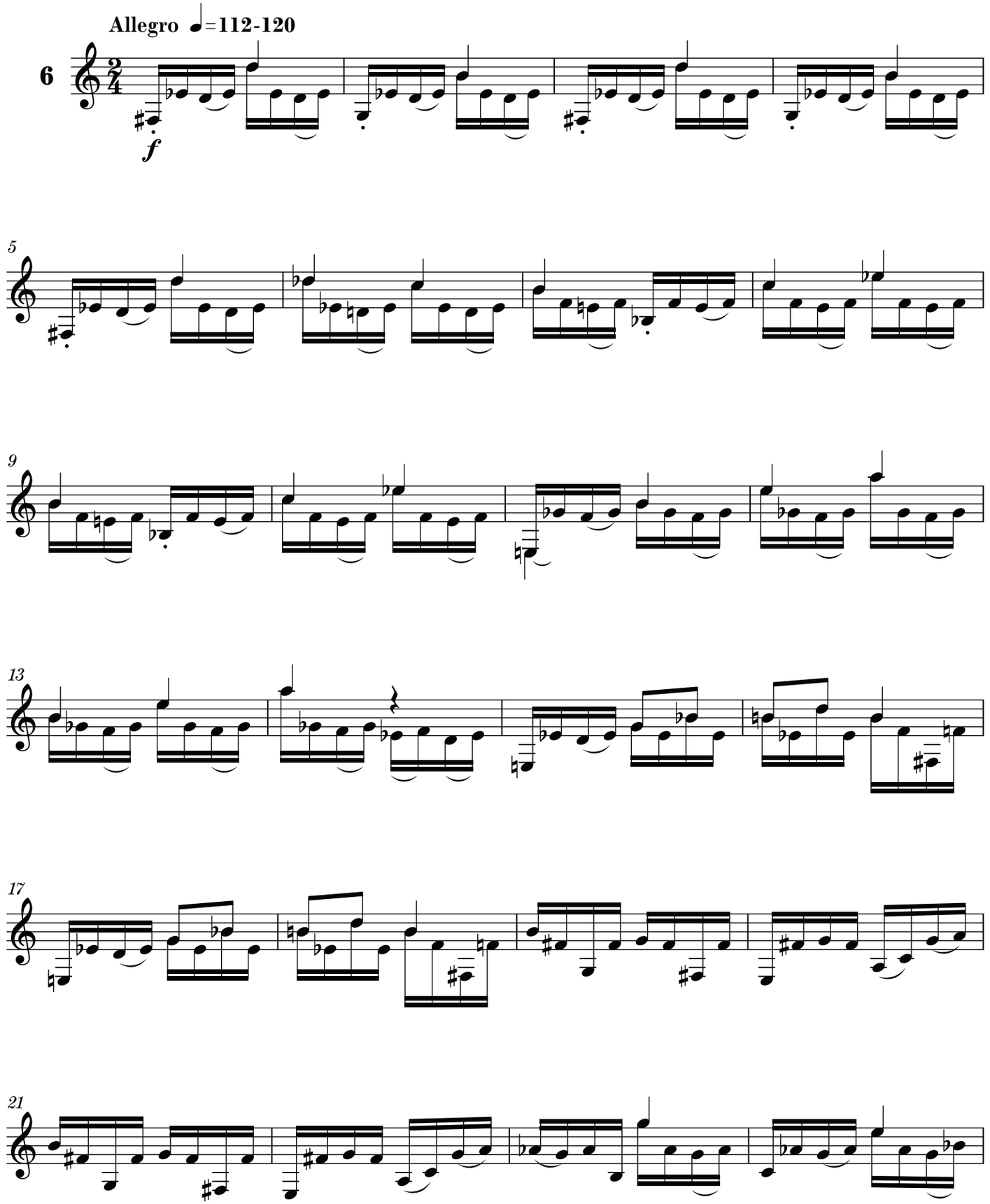

59
67
sim.
74
81
88
mf
96
mp
104
114
rit.

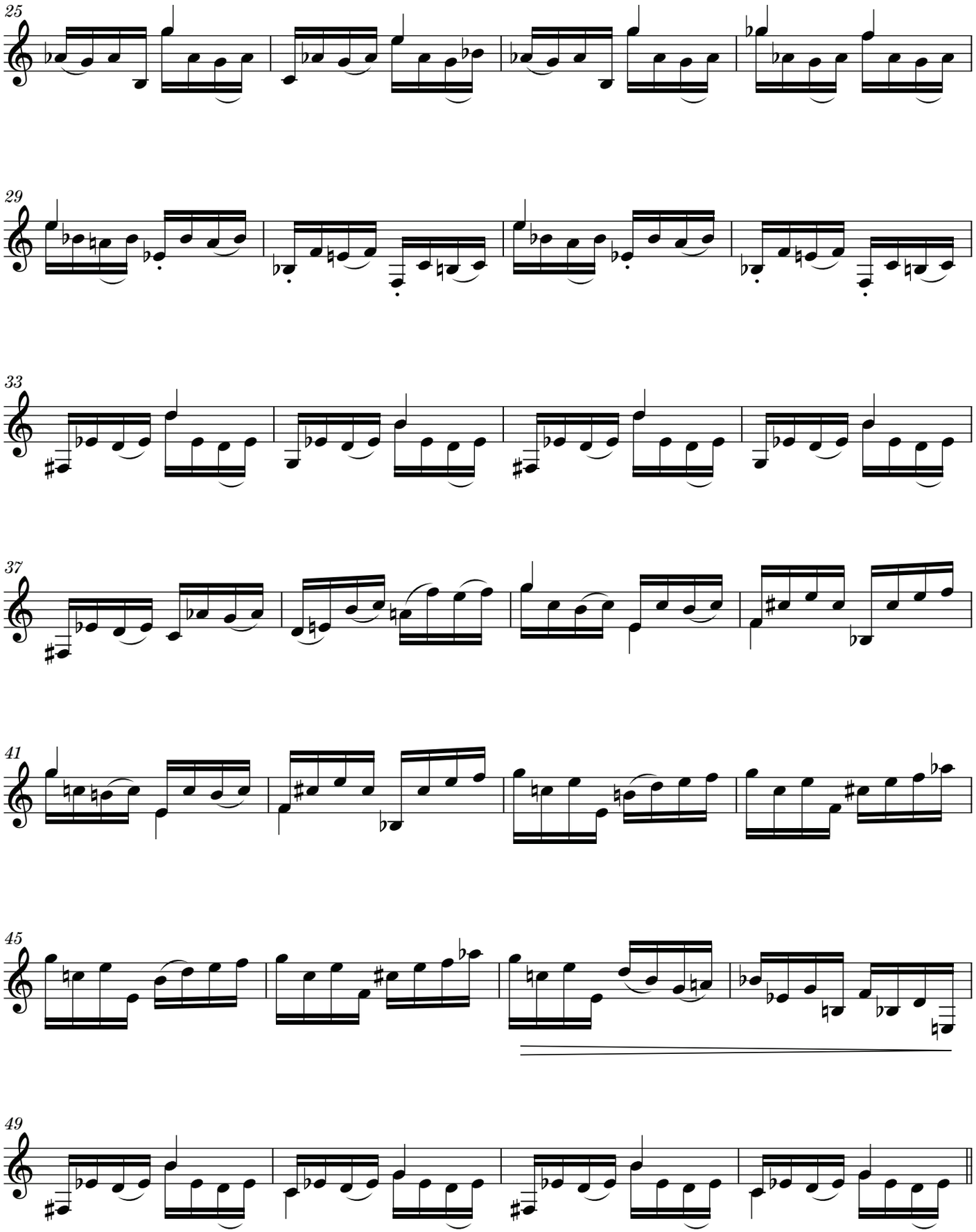

Allegretto moderato ♩=112-116
3
mp
7
14
cresc.
20
f
p
26
mf
32
cresc.
38
rit.

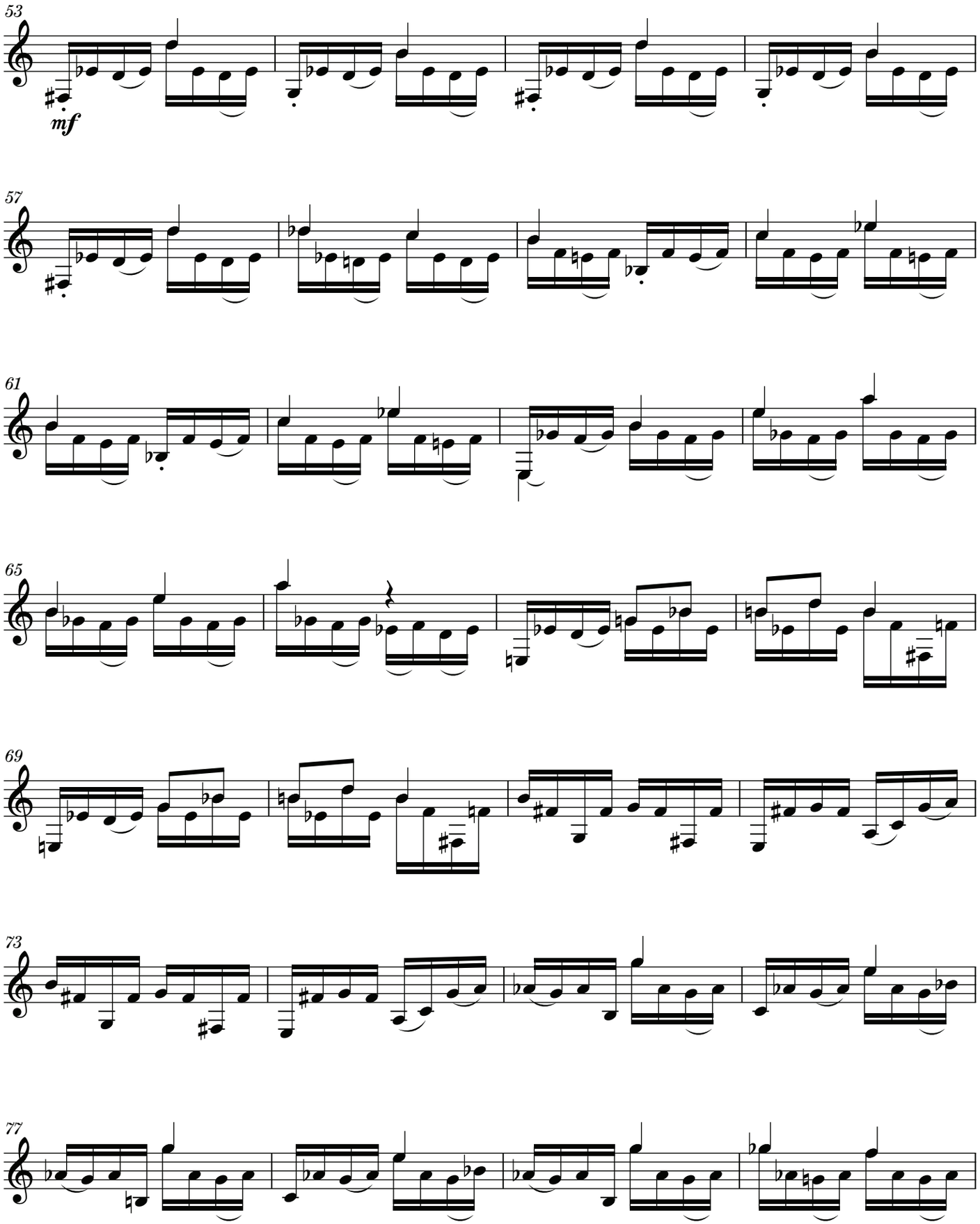

Animato (♩=108, ♪.=156, ♪=208)
4
f
5
9
13
17
20
1.
22
2.
26
riten. poco a poco
29
7
dim.
p

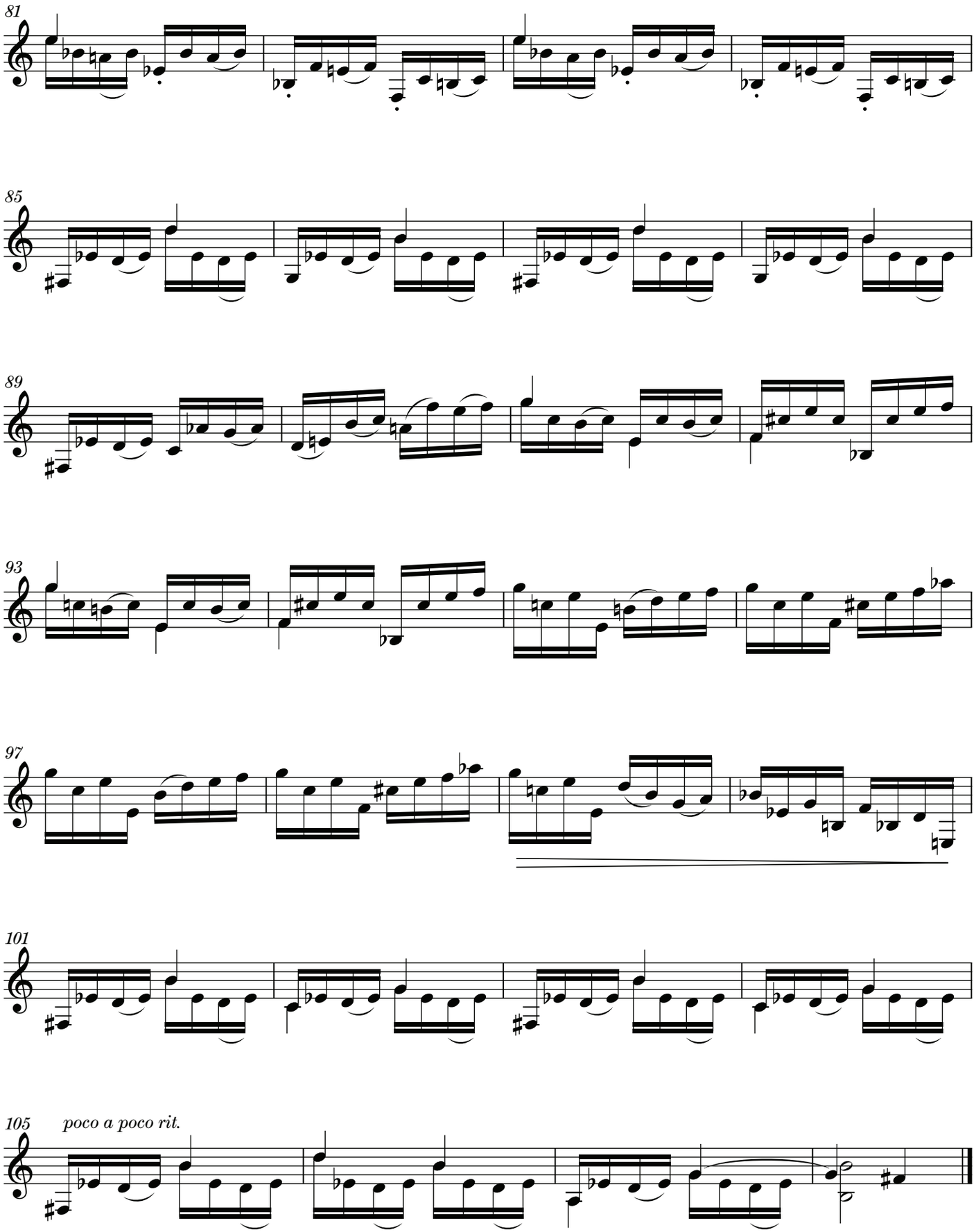

Tempo di valse lento ♩.=54
5
mf
9
15
mf
20
25
30
35
mf

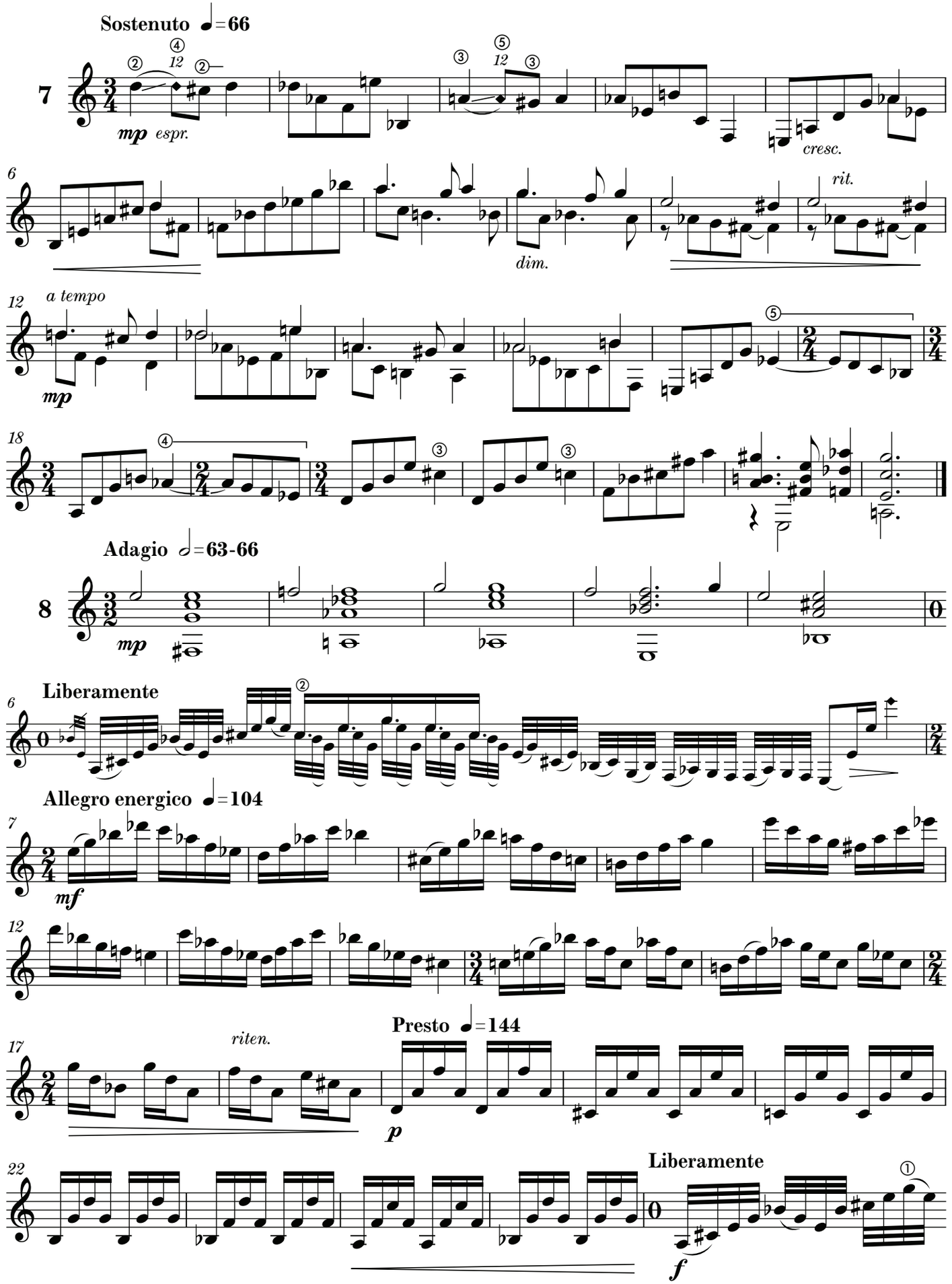

40
45
mf
50
55
60
65
mf
70
rit.
p

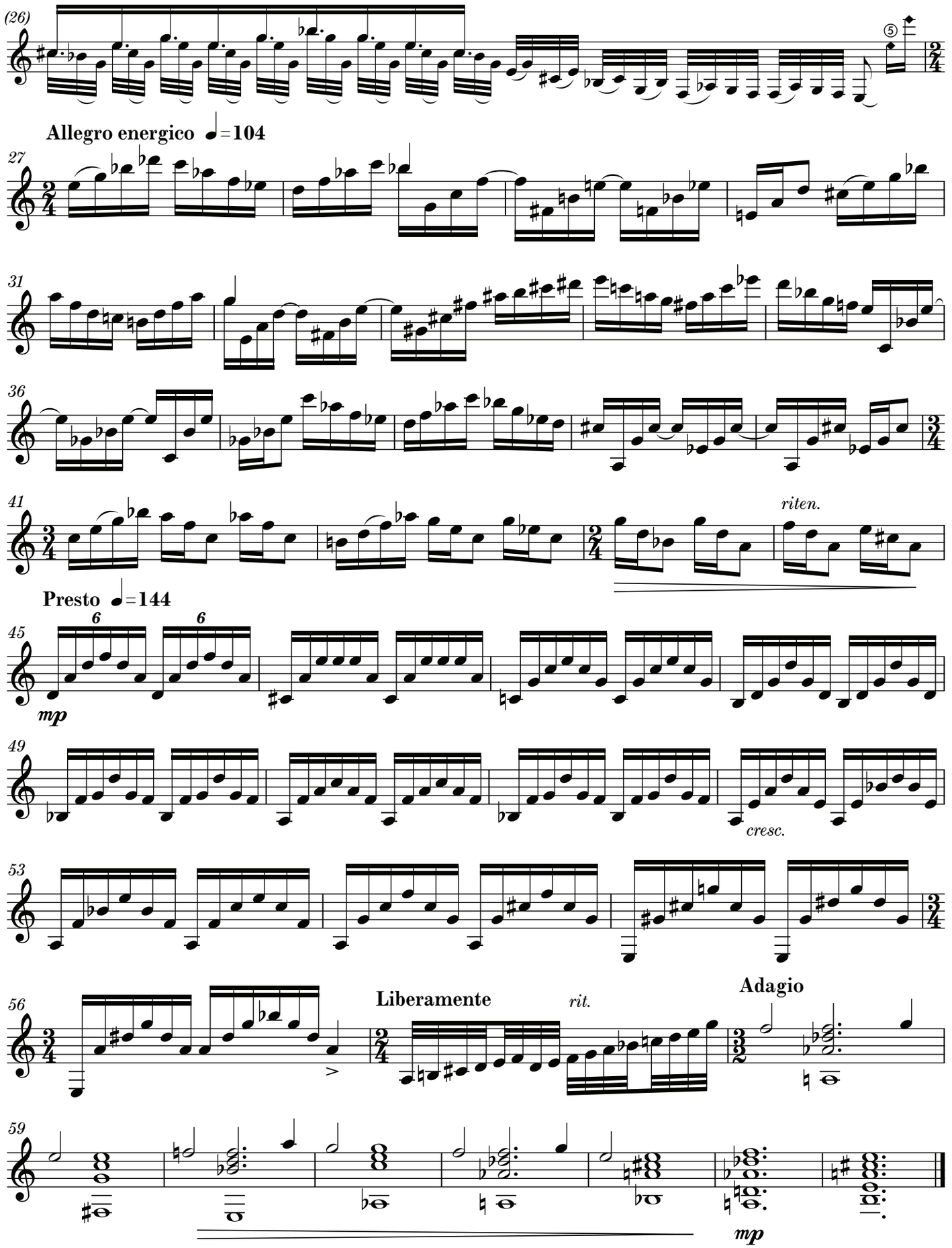

Allegro ♩=112-120
6
f
5
9
13
17
21

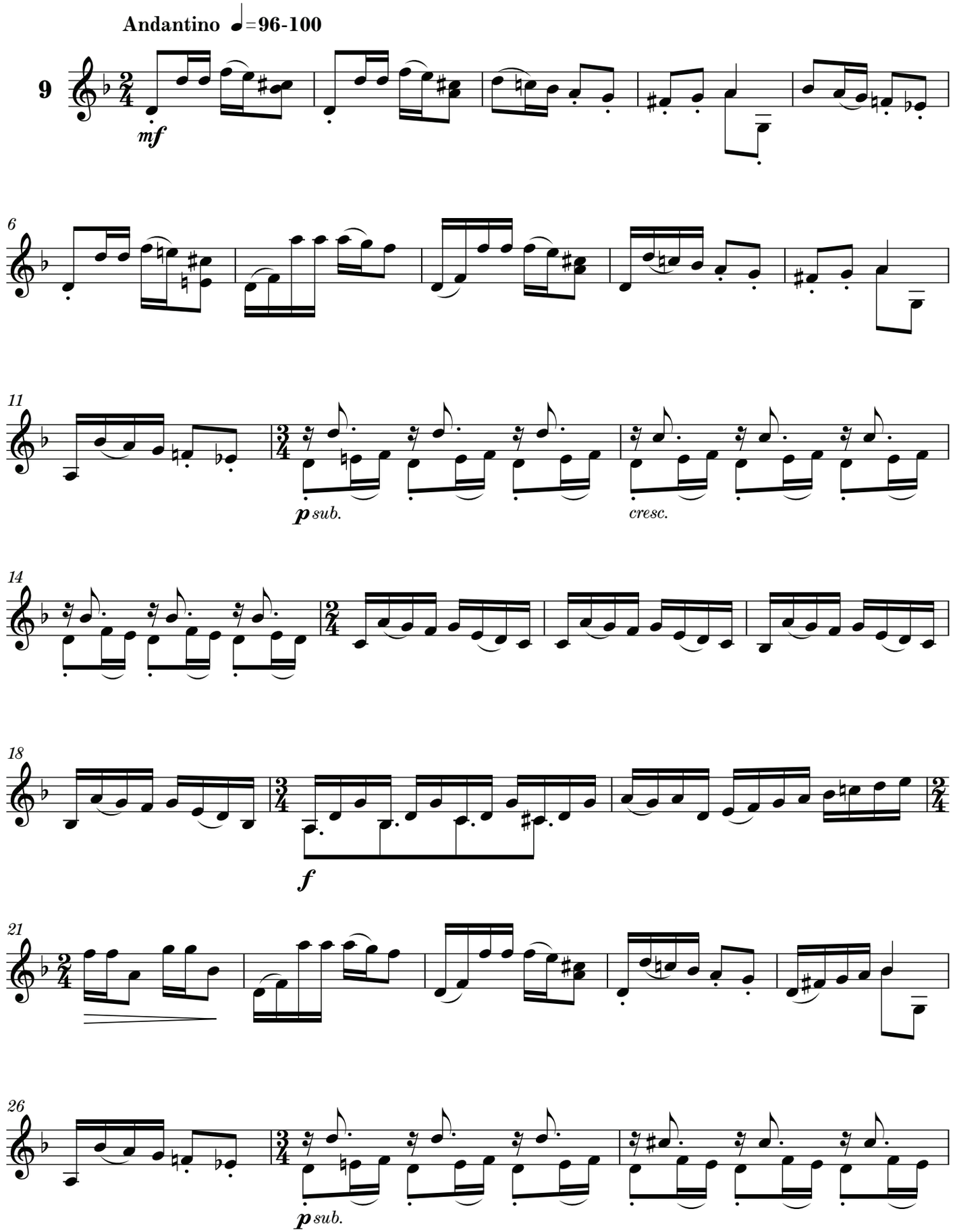

25
29
33
37
41
45
49

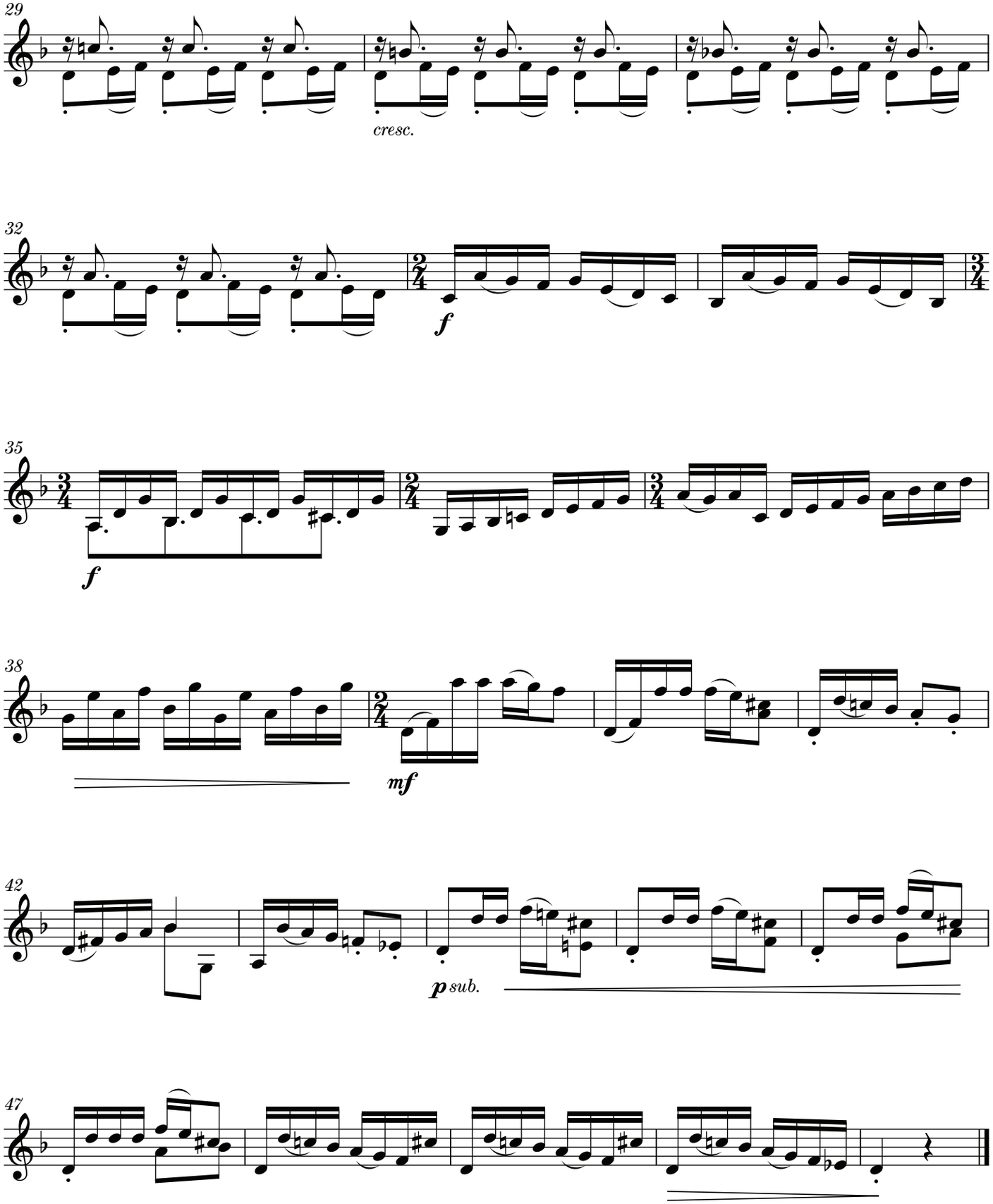

53
mf
57
61
65
69
73
77

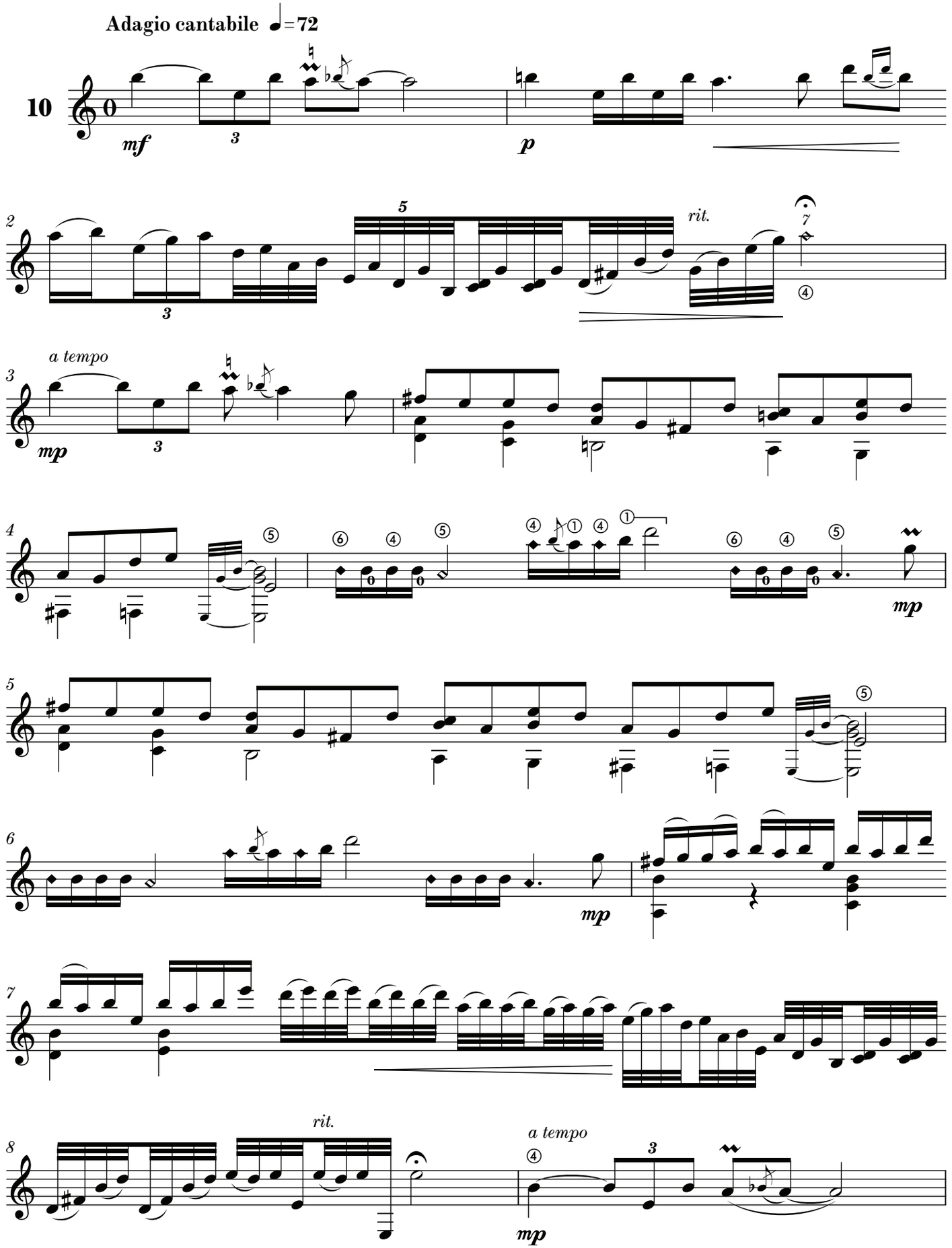

81
85
89
93
97
101
105
poco a poco rit.

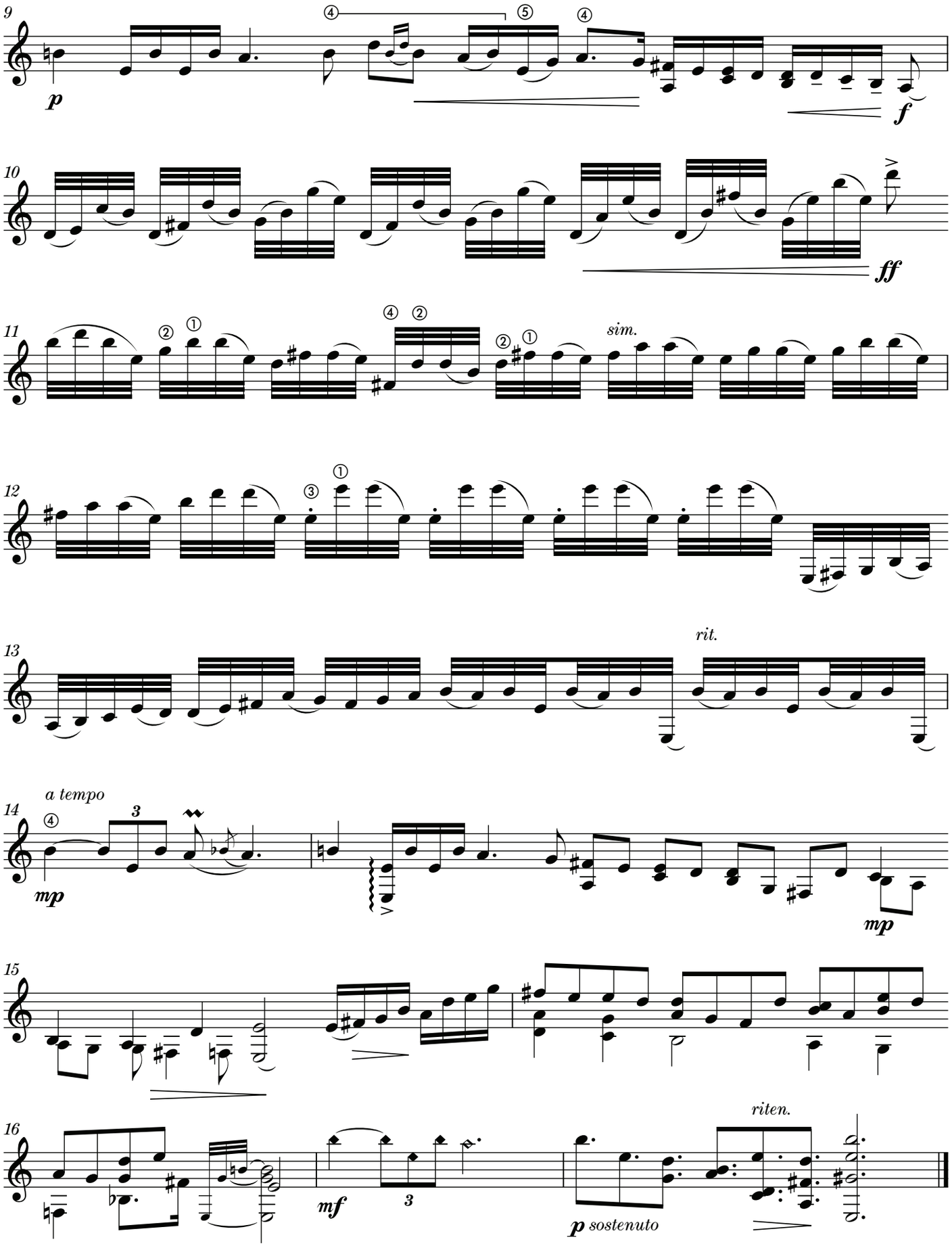

Sostenuto ♩=66
mp espr.
cresc.
dim.
rit.
a tempo
mp
Adagio 𝅗𝅥=63-66
mp
Liberamente
Allegro energico ♩=104
mf
riten.
Presto ♩=144
p
Liberamente
f

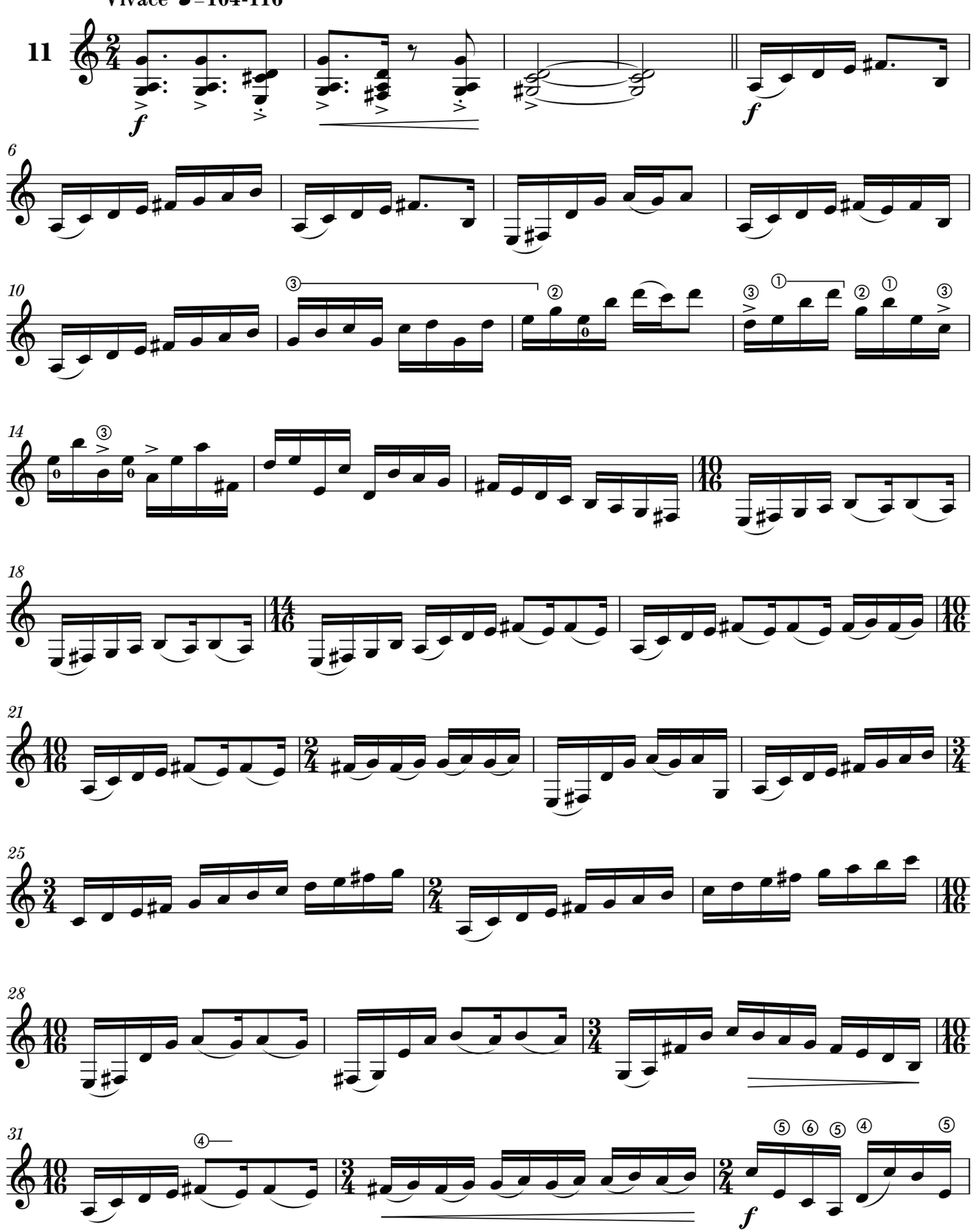

(26)
Allegro energico ♩=104
27
31
36
41
riten.
Presto ♩=144
45
mp
49
cresc.
53
56
Liberamente
rit.
Adagio
59
mp

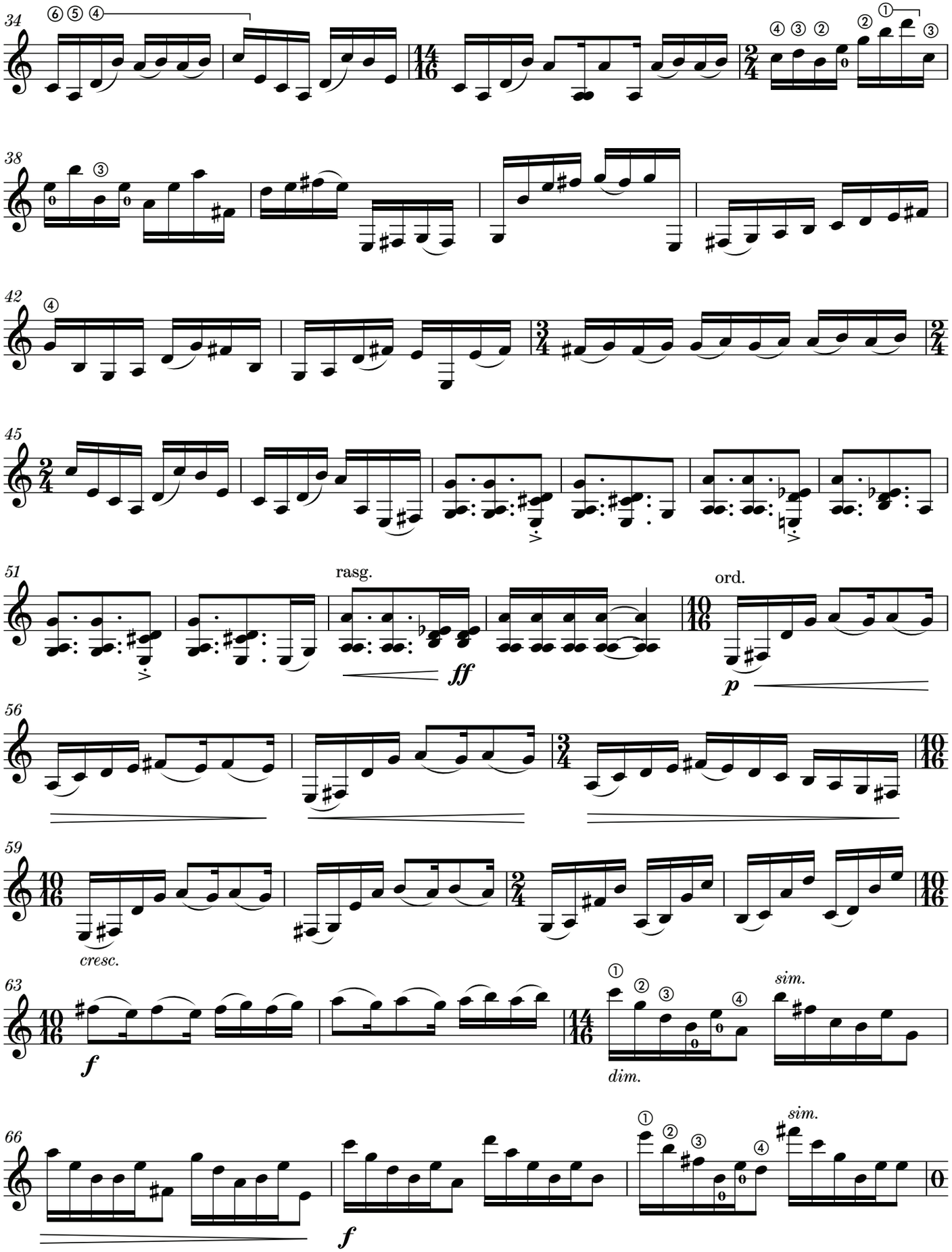

Andantino ♩=96-100
9
mf
6
11
p sub.
cresc.
14
18
f
21
26
p sub.

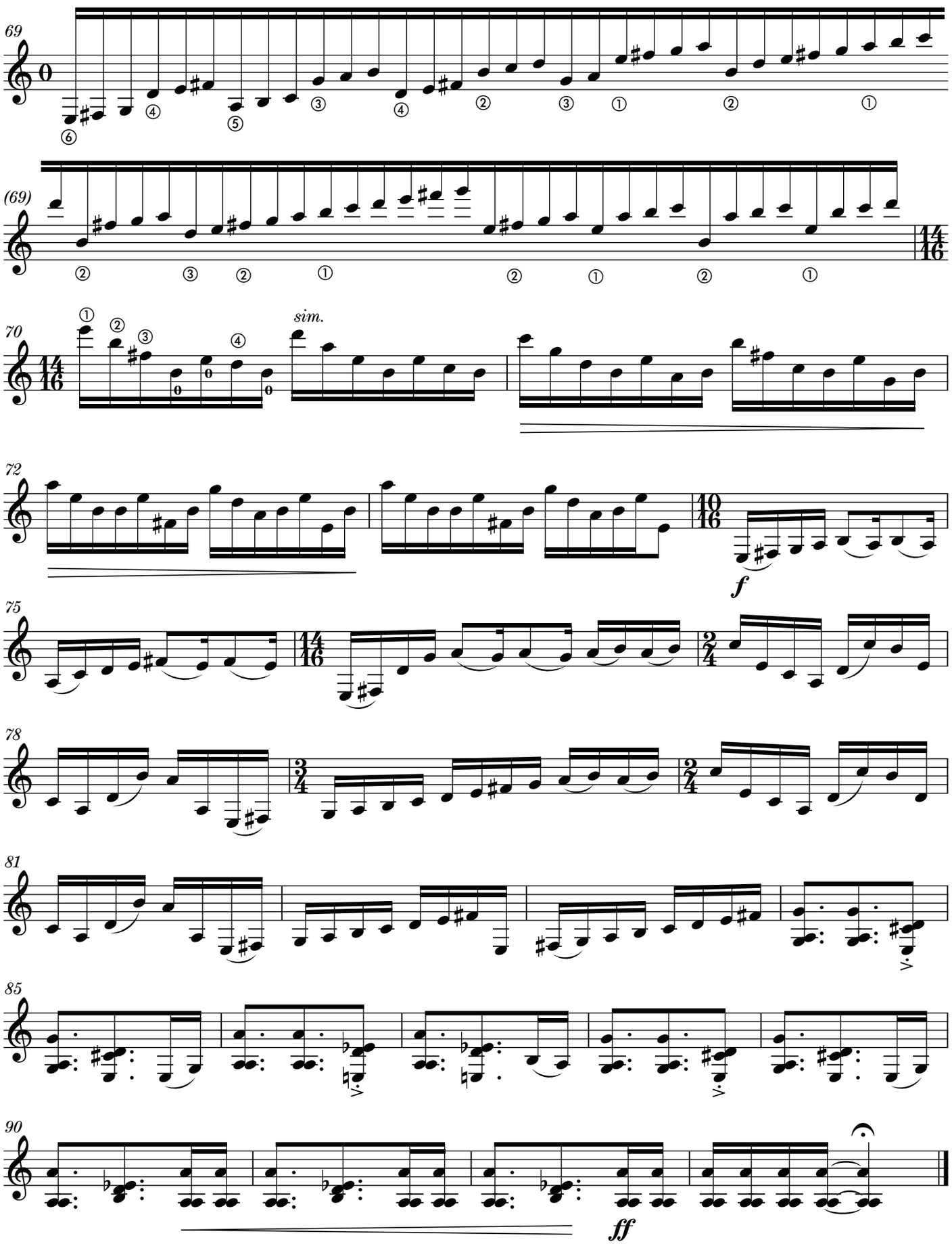

29
cresc.
32
f
35
f
38
mf
42
p sub.
47

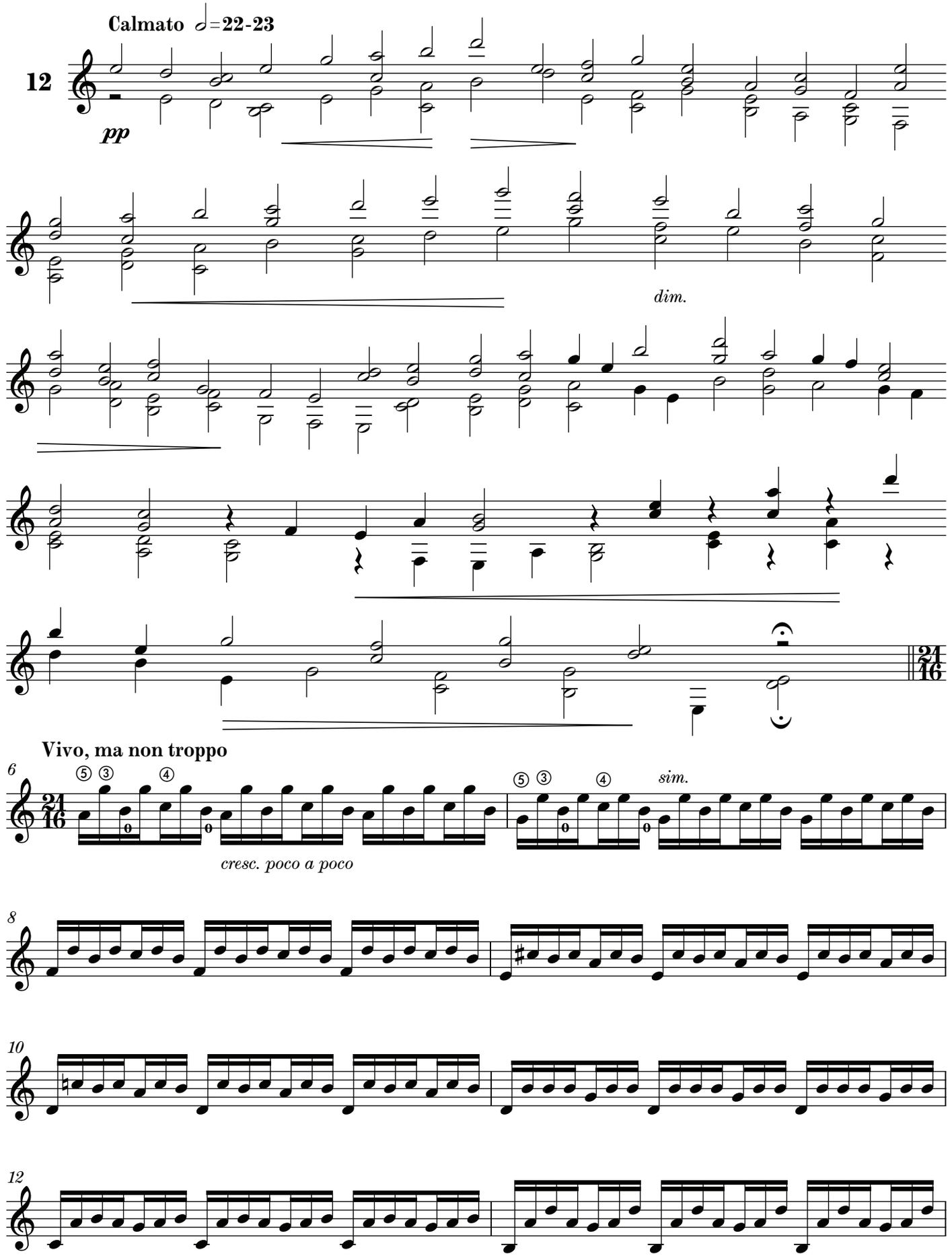

Adagio cantabile ♩= 72
10
mf
p
rit.
a tempo
mp
mp
mp
rit.
a tempo
mp

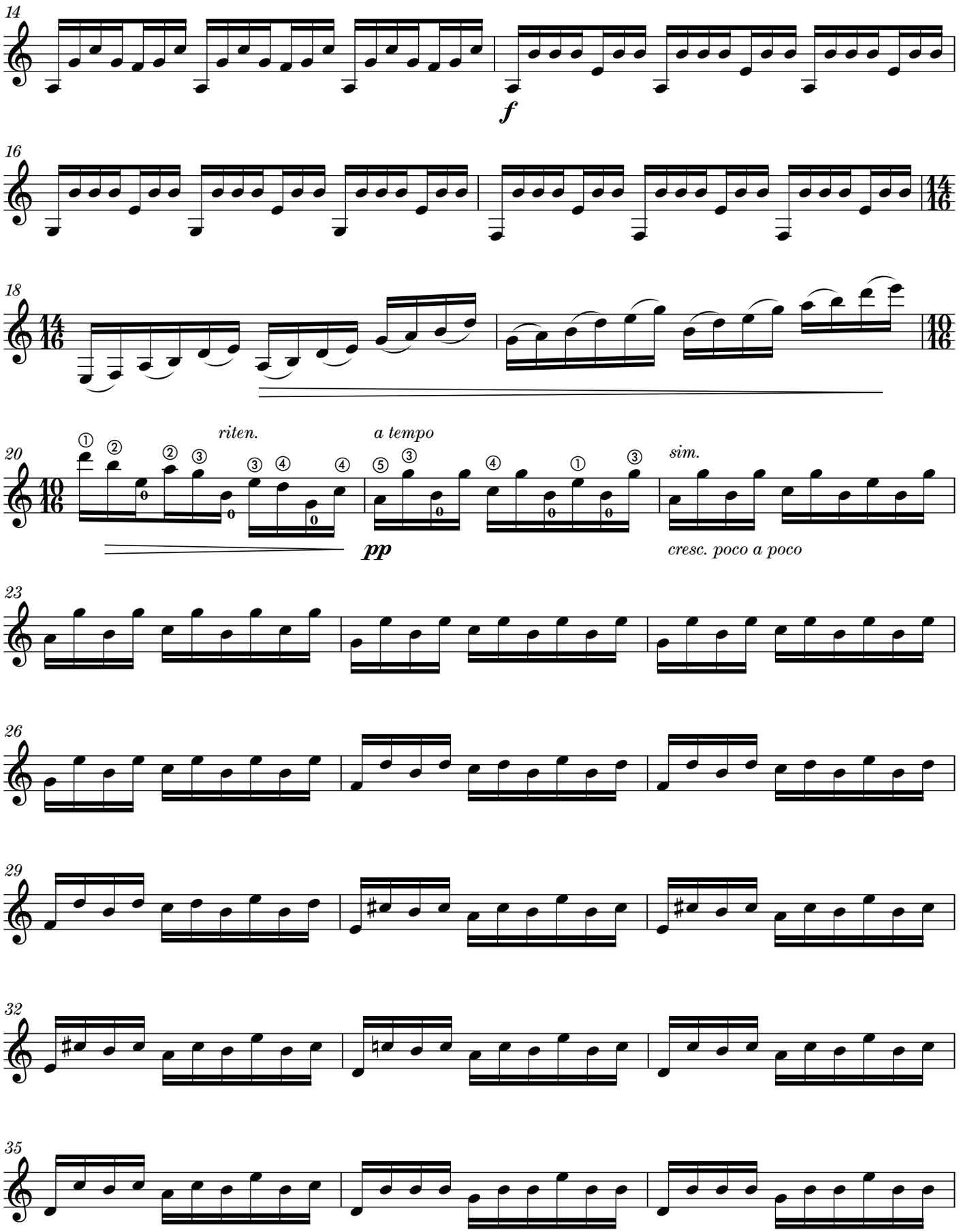

9
p
f
10
ff
11
sim.
12
13
rit.
14
a tempo
mp
mp
15
16
mf
riten.
p sostenuto

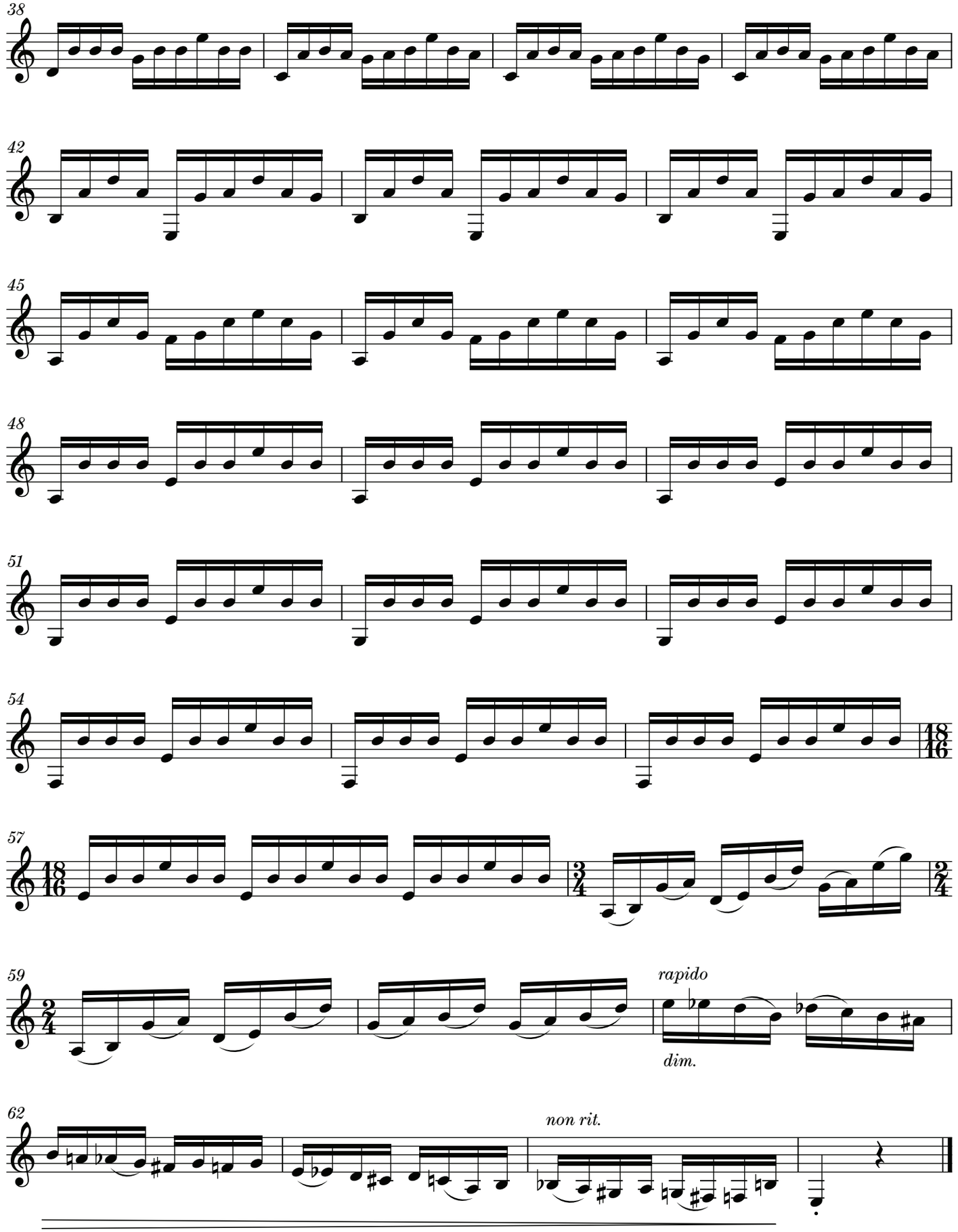

Vivace ♩=104-116
11
f
f
6
10
14
18
21
25
28
31
f

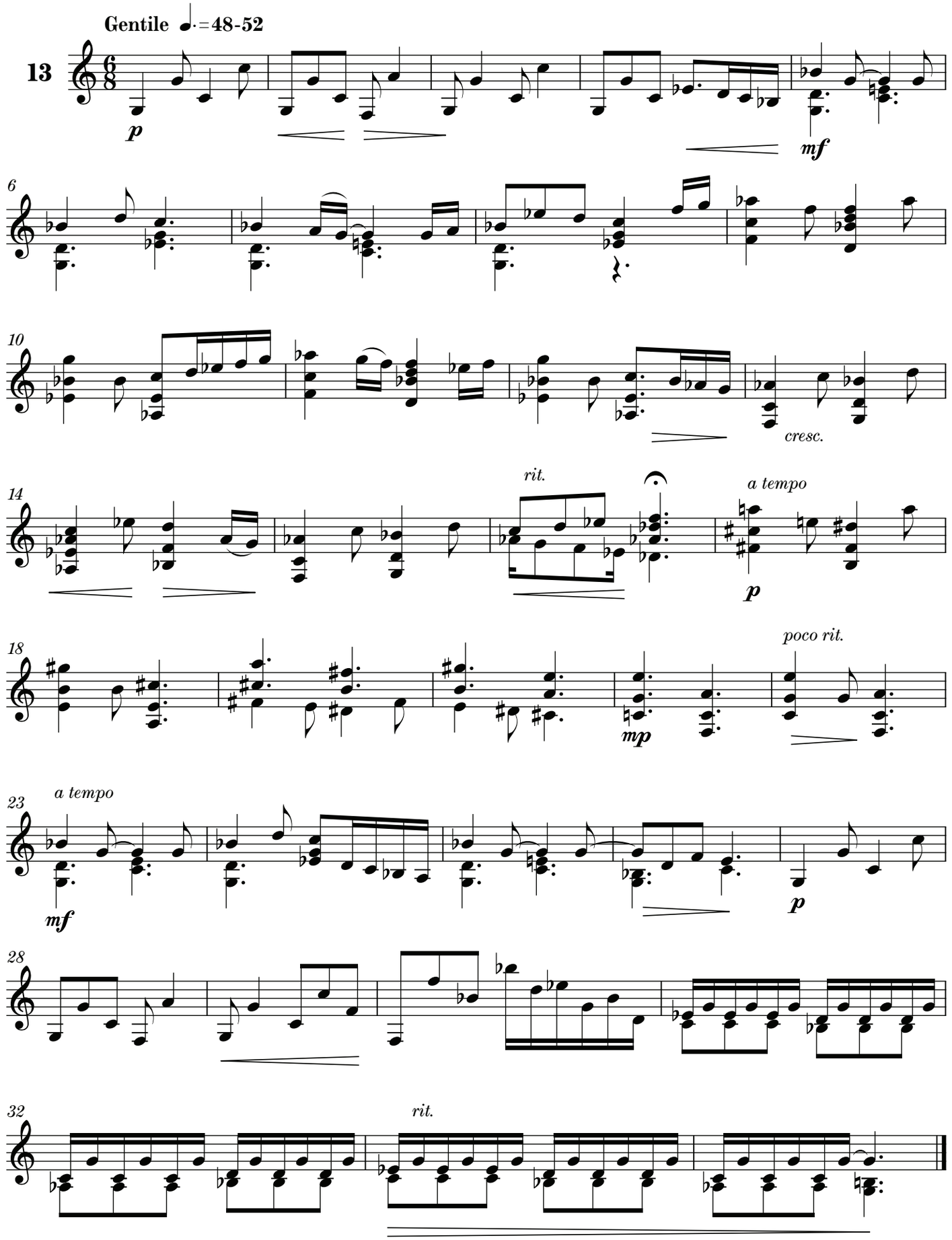

34
38
42
45
51
rasg.
ff
ord.
p
56
59
cresc.
63
f
dim.
sim.
66
f
sim.

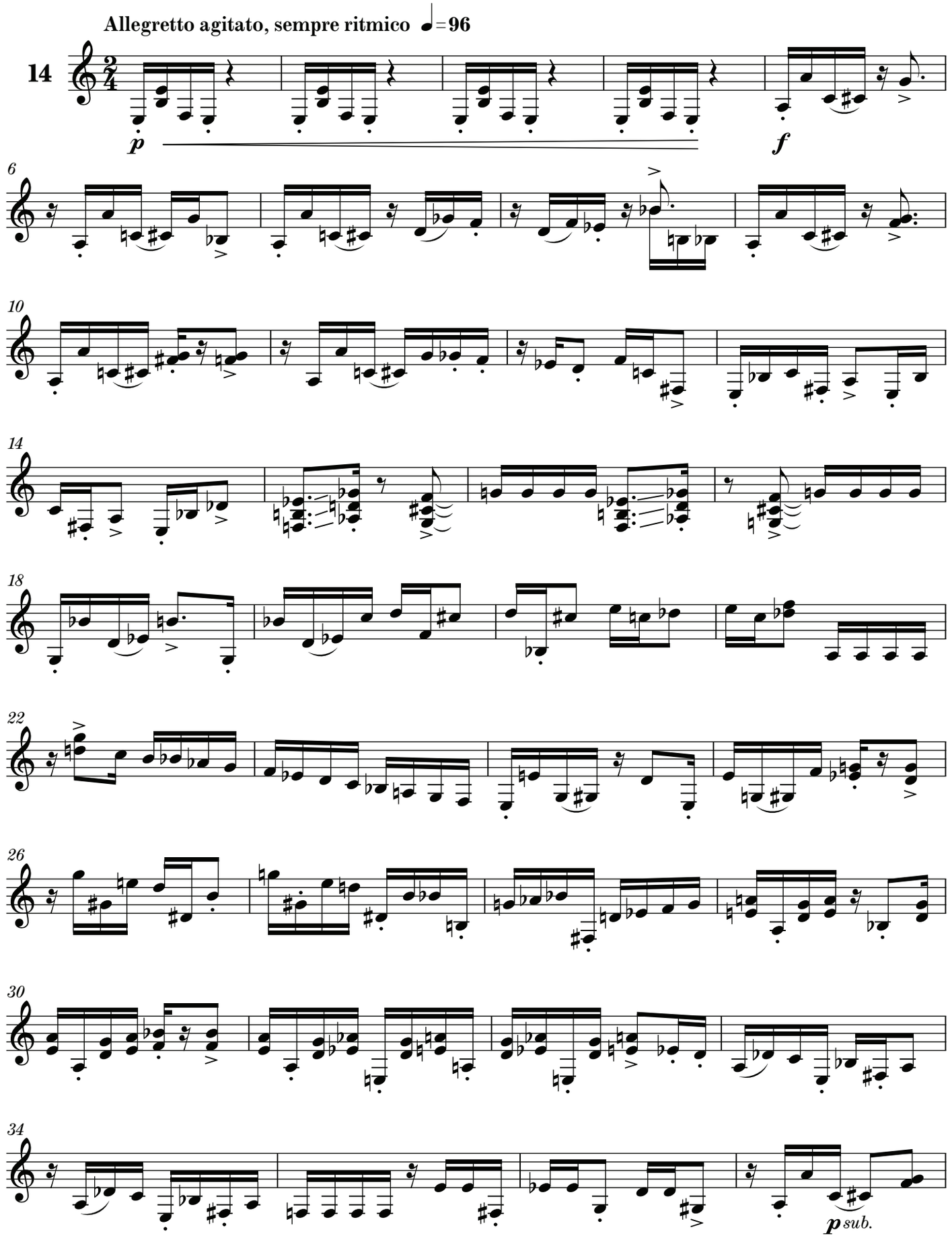

69
(69)
70
sim.
72
f
75
78
81
85
90
ff

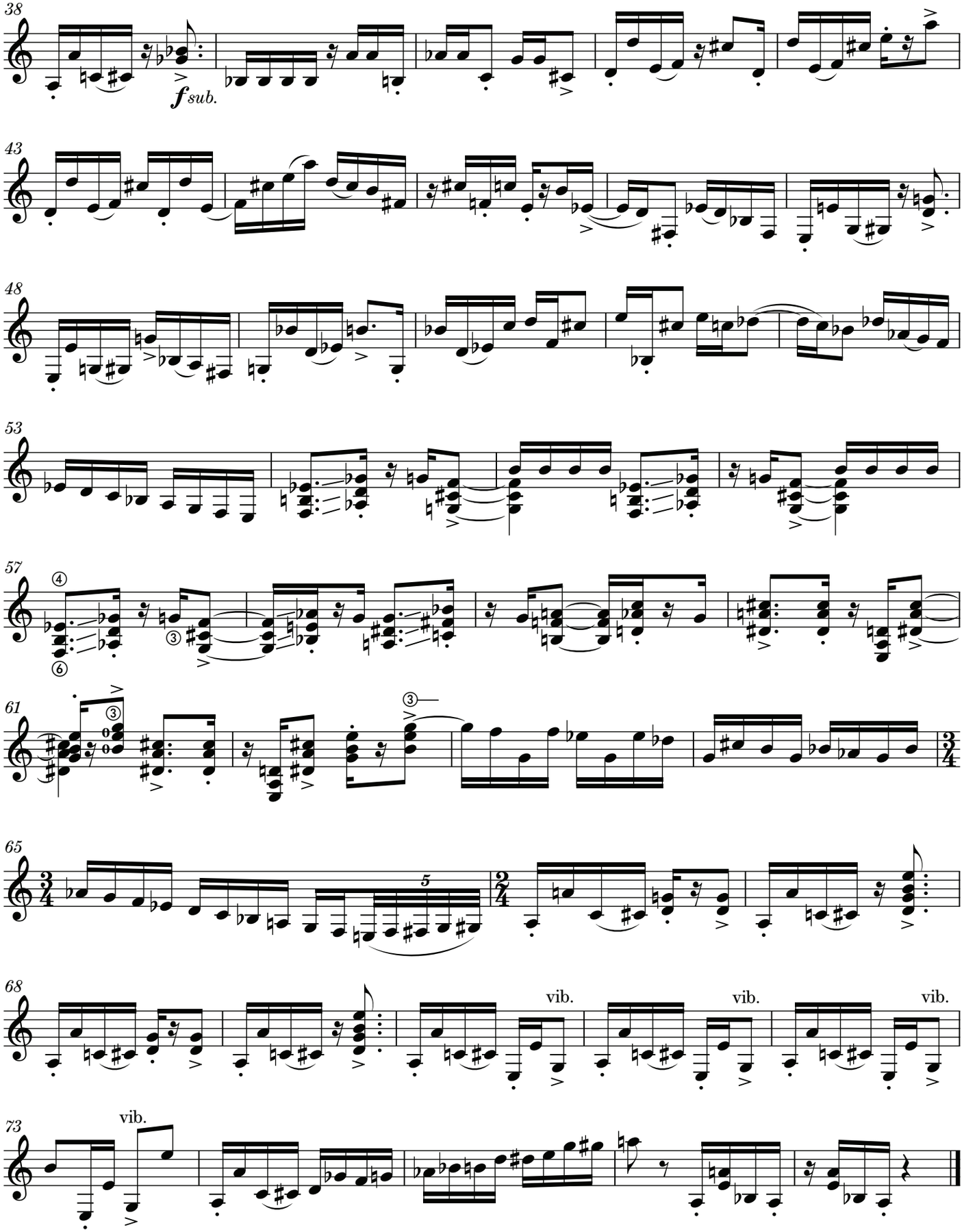

Calmato 𝅗𝅥=22-23
12
pp
dim.
24/16
Vivo, ma non troppo
6
sim.
cresc. poco a poco
8
10
12

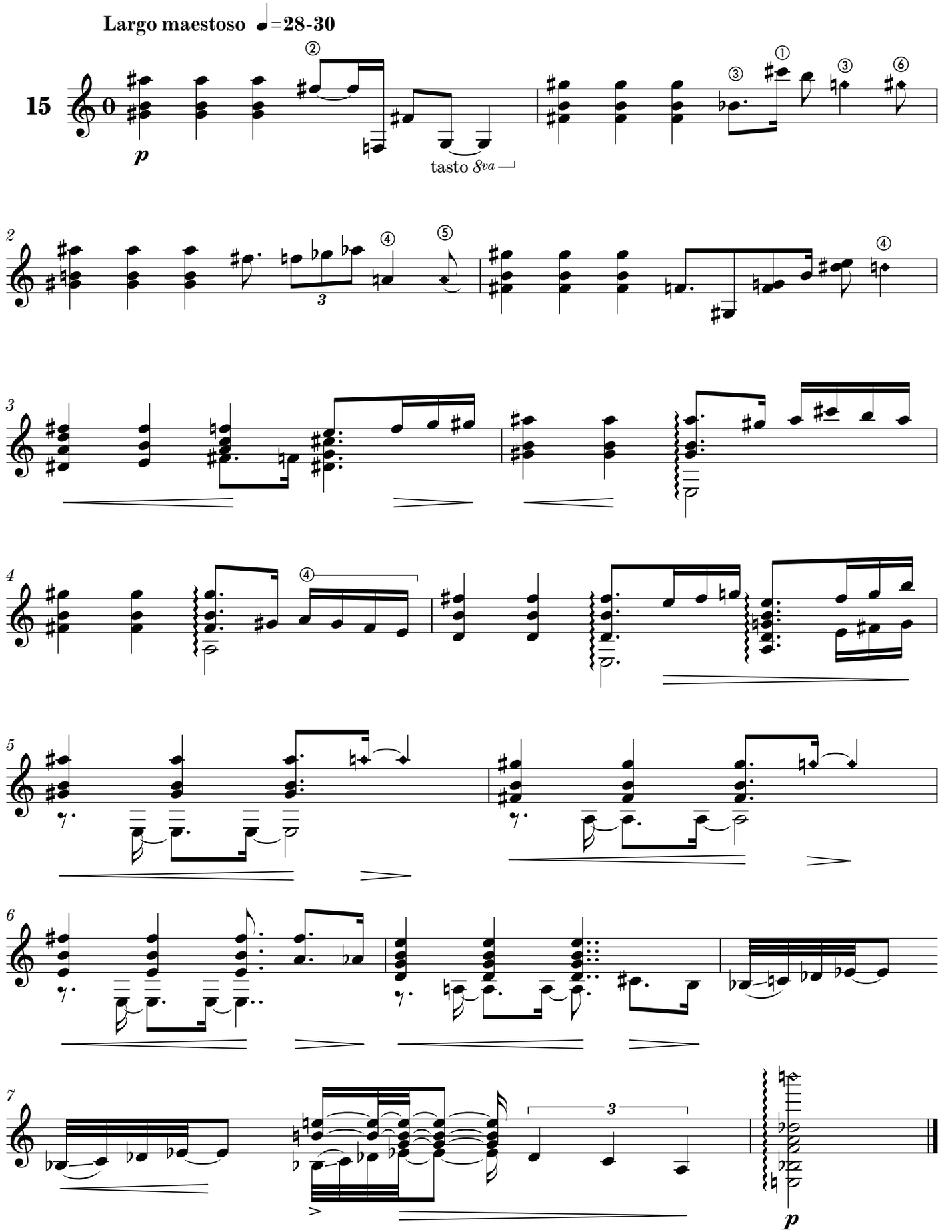

14
f
16
18
20
riten.
a tempo
pp
sim.
cresc. poco a poco
23
26
29
32
35

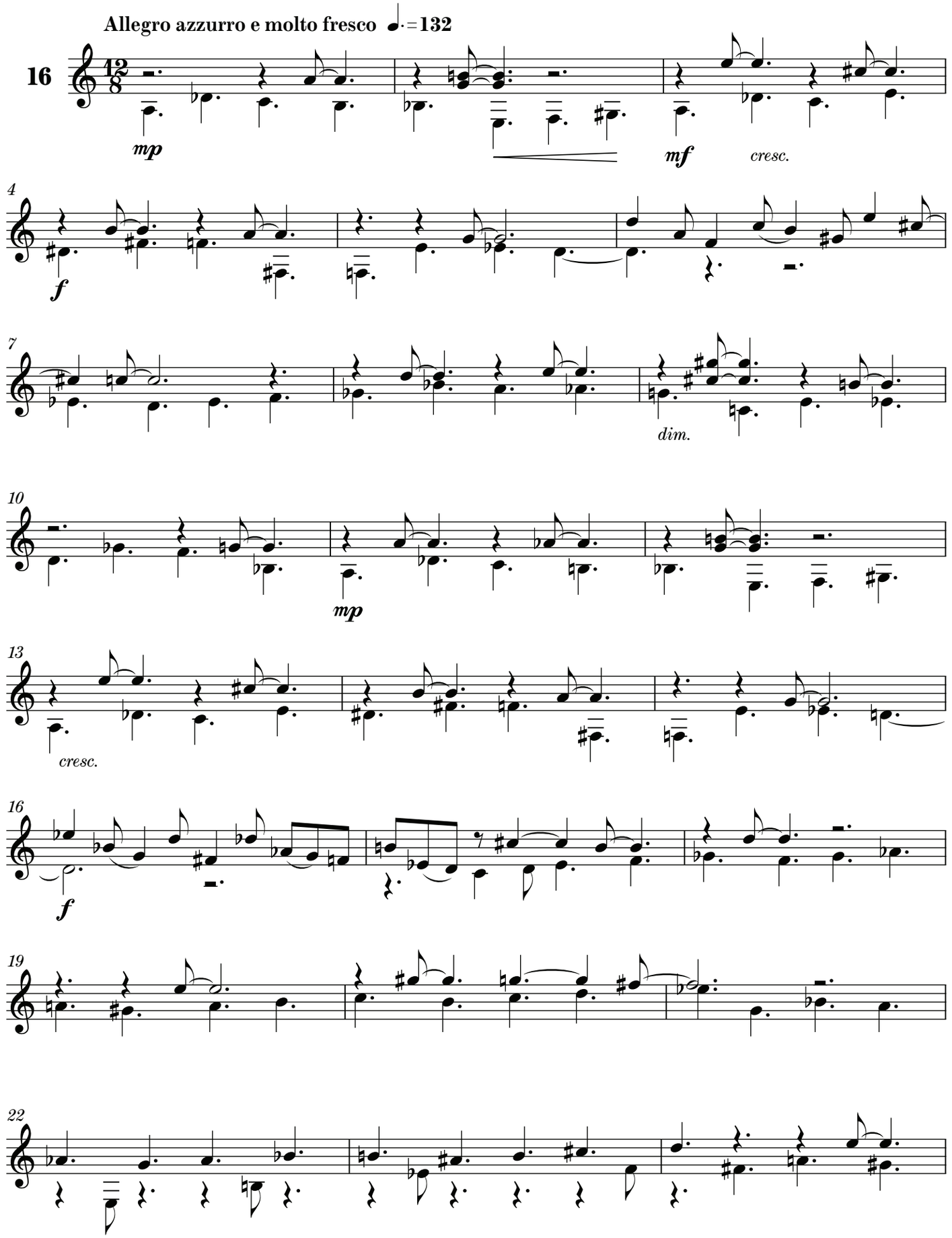

38
42
45
48
51
54
18/16
57
18/16
3/4
2/4
59
2/4
rapido
dim.
62
non rit.

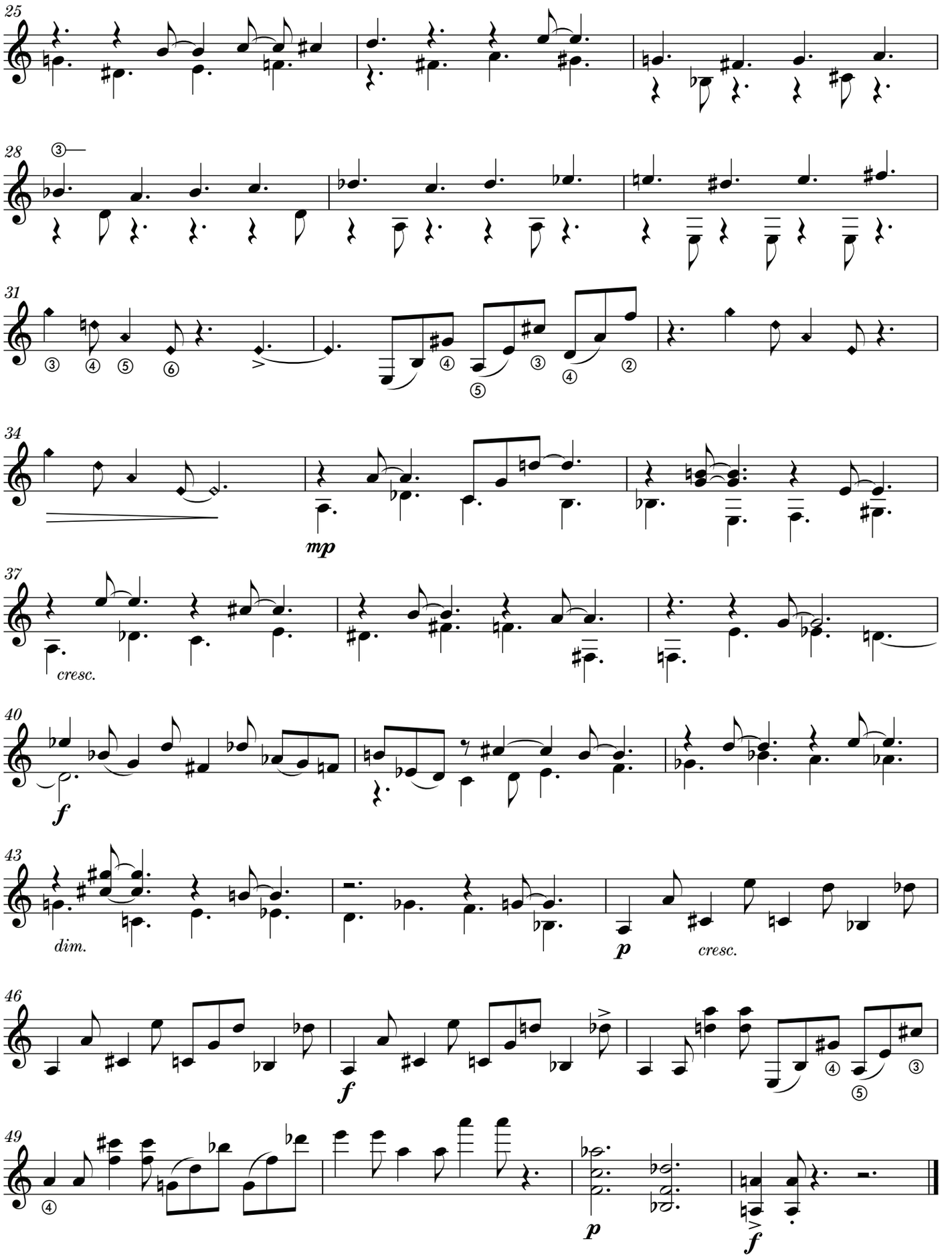

Gentile ♩.=48-52
13
p
mf
6
10
cresc.
14
rit.
a tempo
p
18
mp
poco rit.
23
a tempo
mf
p
28
32
rit.

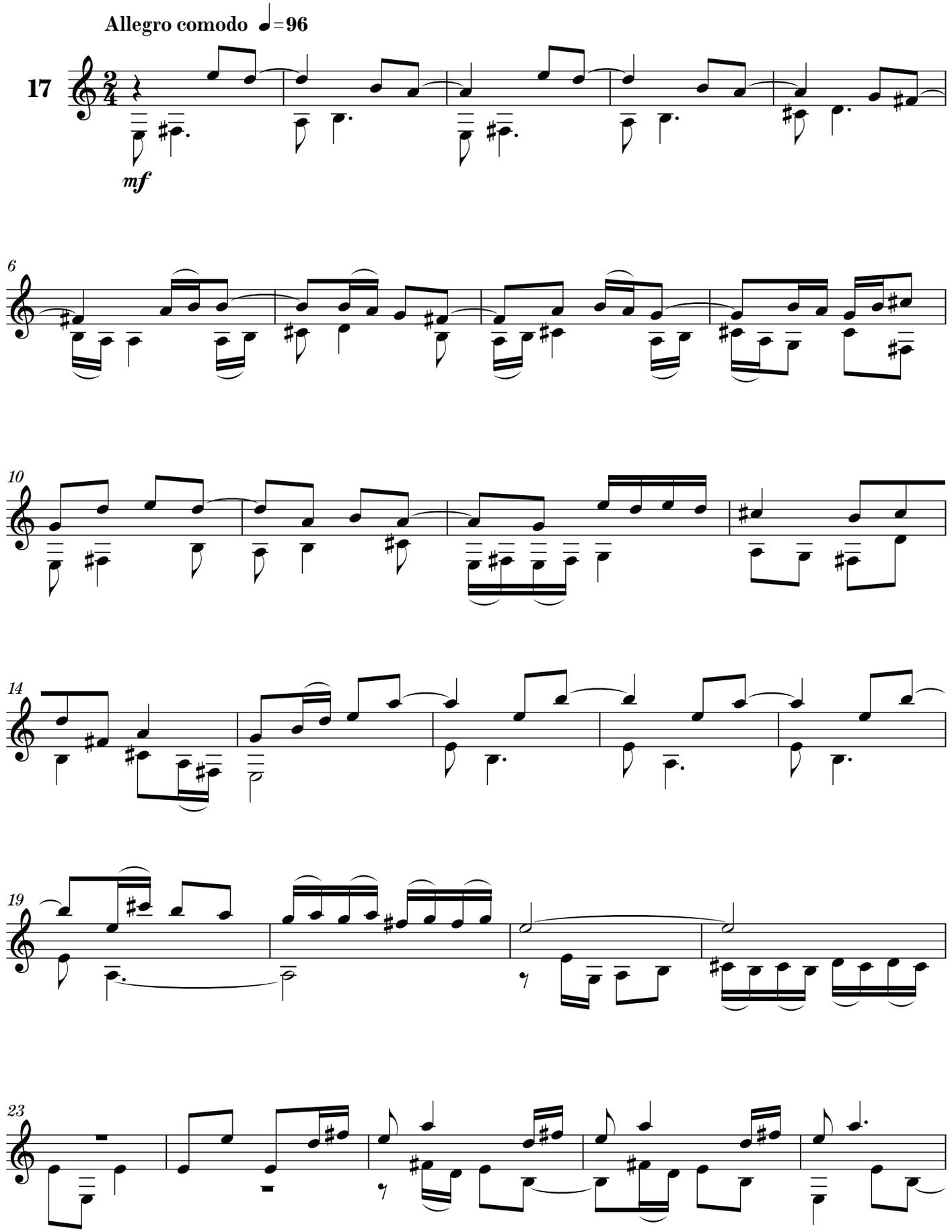

Allegretto agitato, sempre ritmico ♩=96
14
p
f
6
10
14
18
22
26
30
34
p sub.

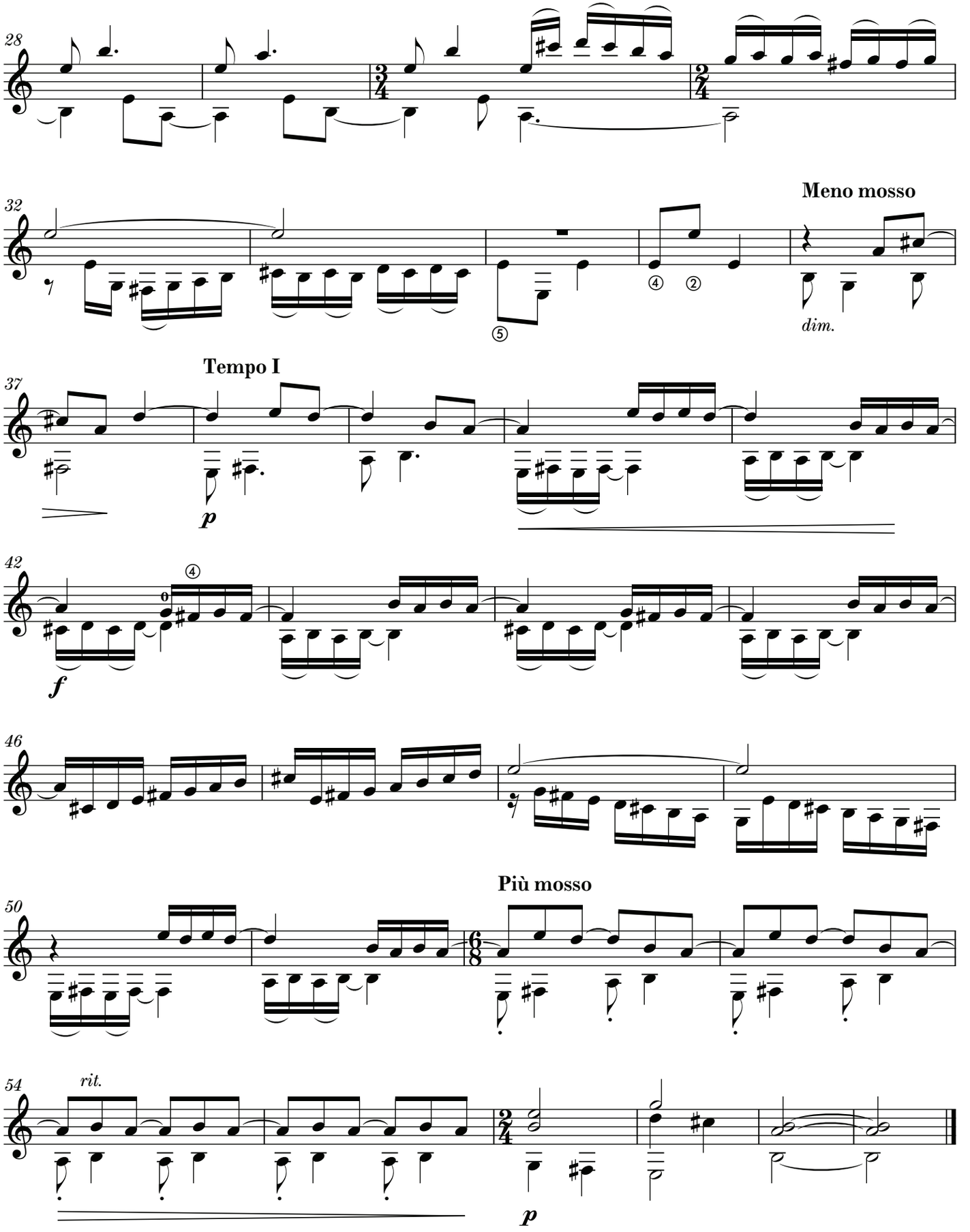

38
f sub.
43
48
53
57
61
65
5
68
vib.
vib.
vib.
73
vib.

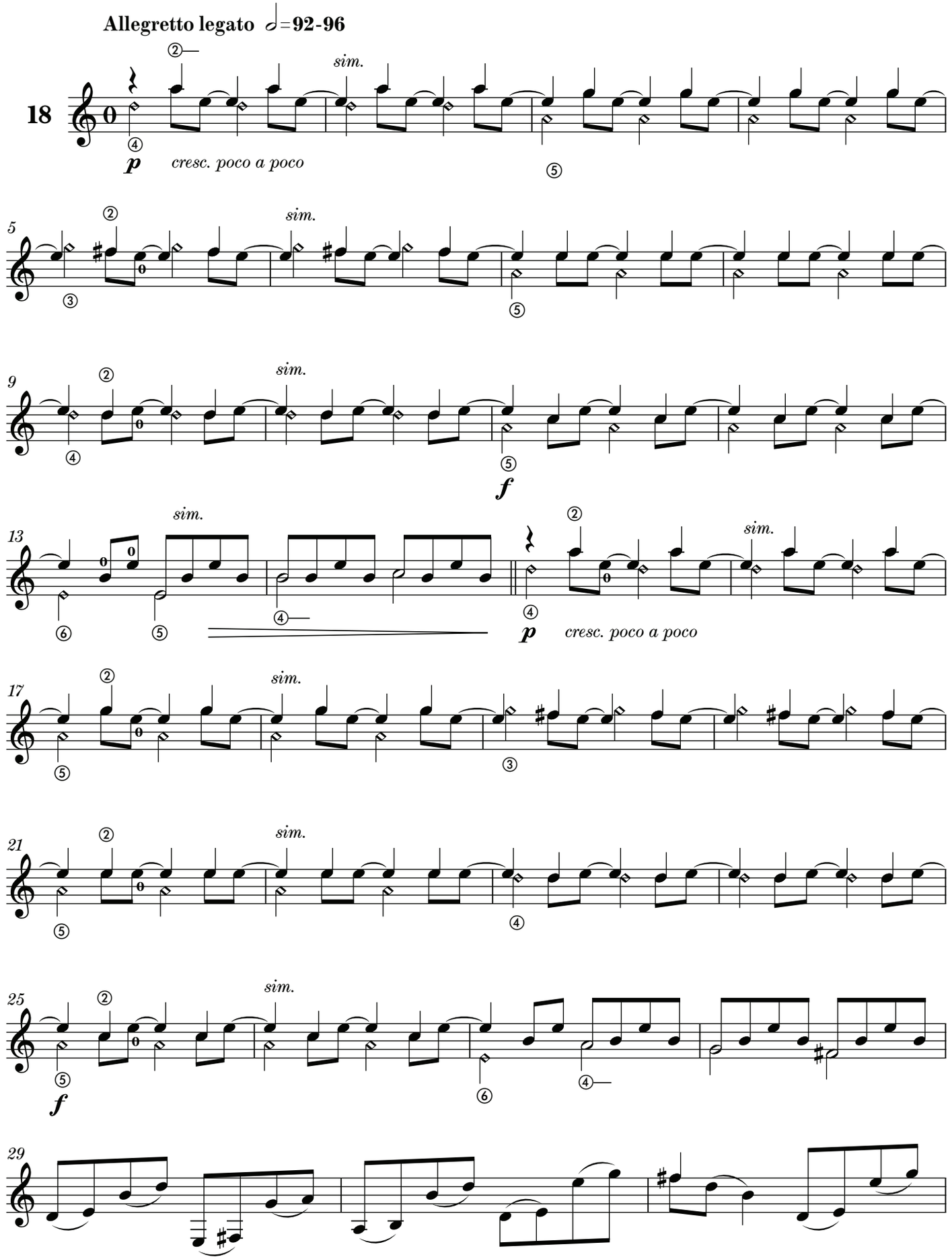

Largo maestoso ♩=28-30
15
p
tasto 8va
2
3
3
4
5
4
4
5
6
7
3
p

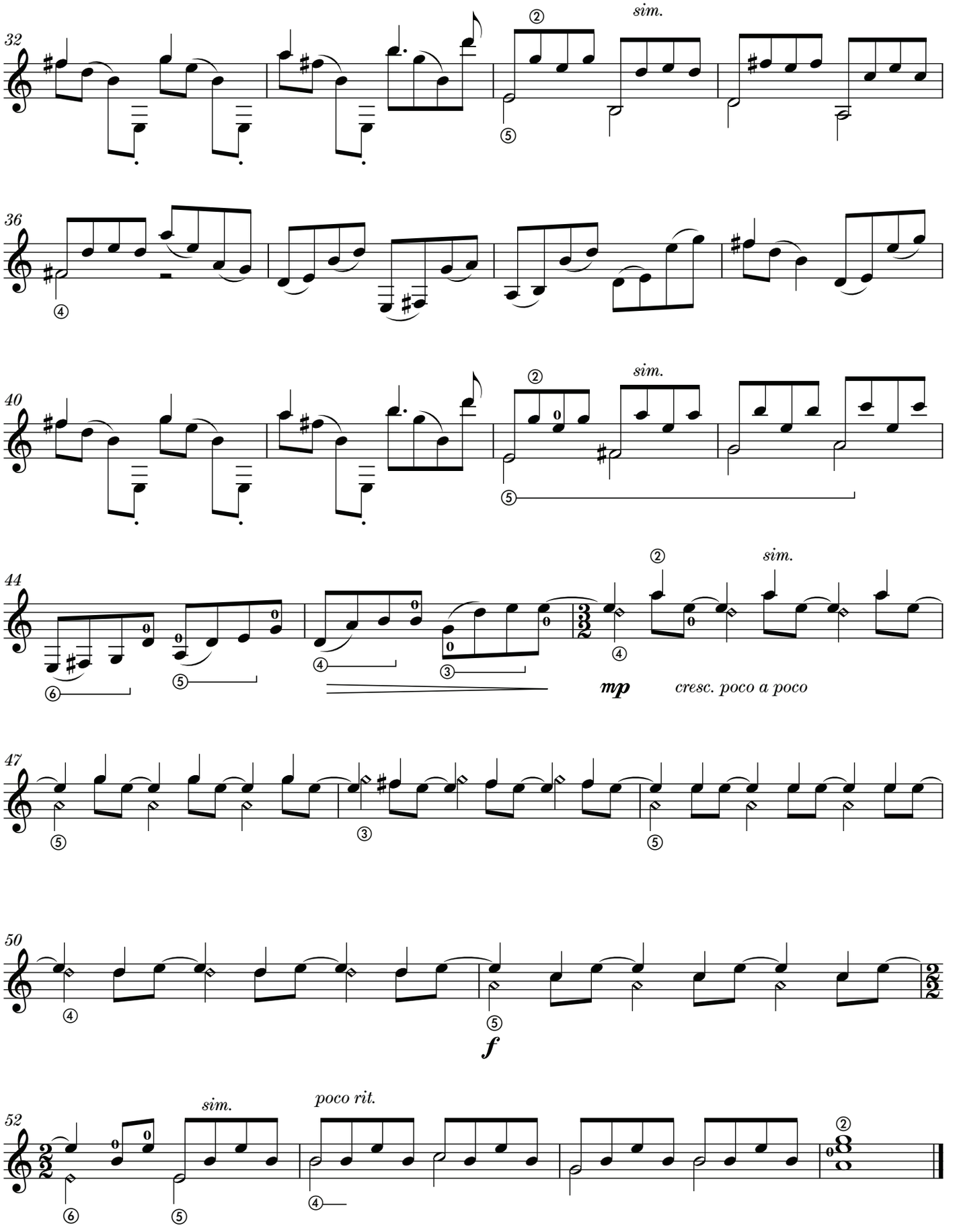

Allegro azzurro e molto fresco ♩. = 132
16
mp
mf
cresc.
4
f
7
dim.
10
mp
13
cresc.
16
f
19
22

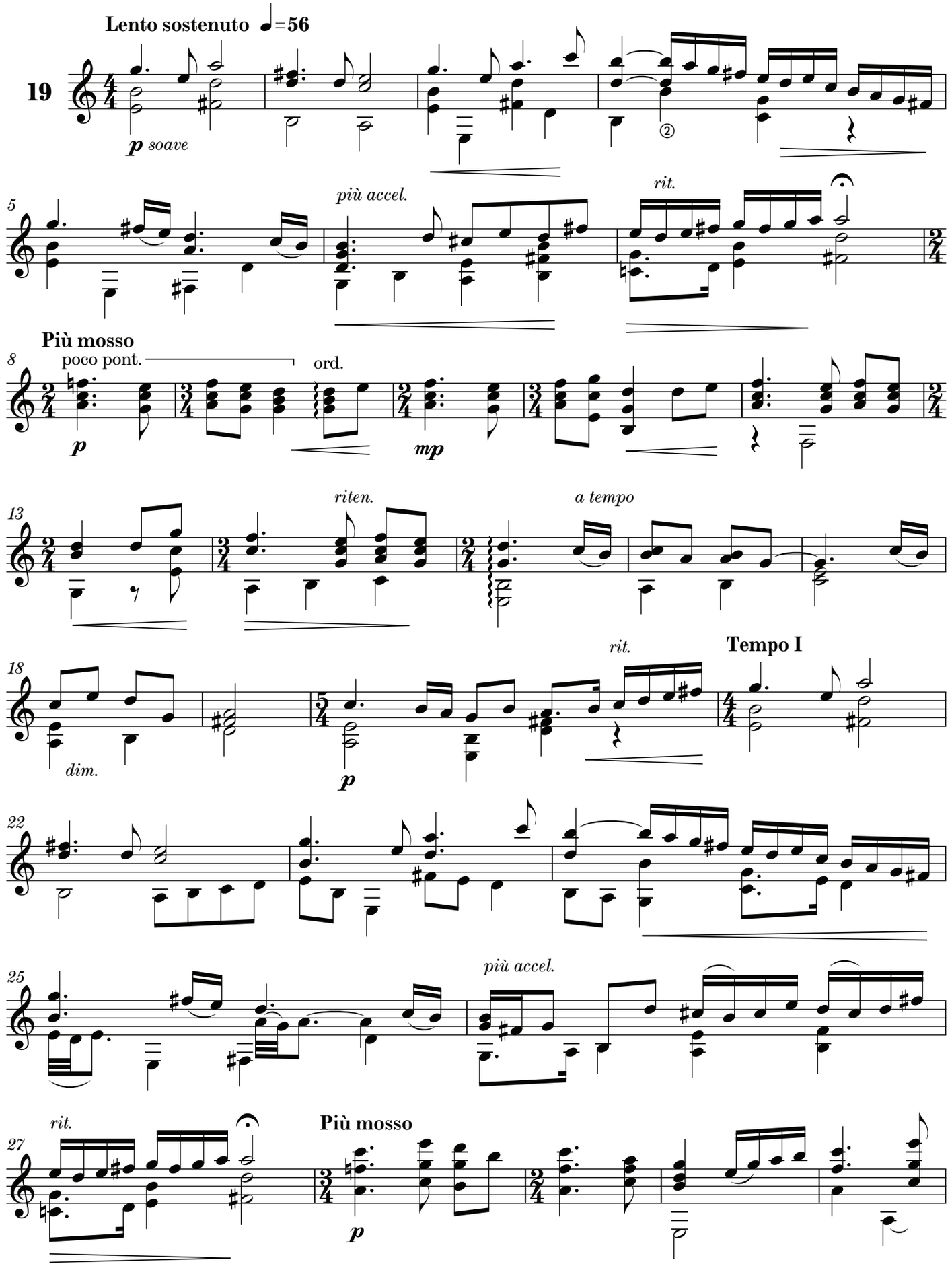

25
28
31
34
mp
37
cresc.
40
f
43
dim.
p
cresc.
46
f
49
p
f

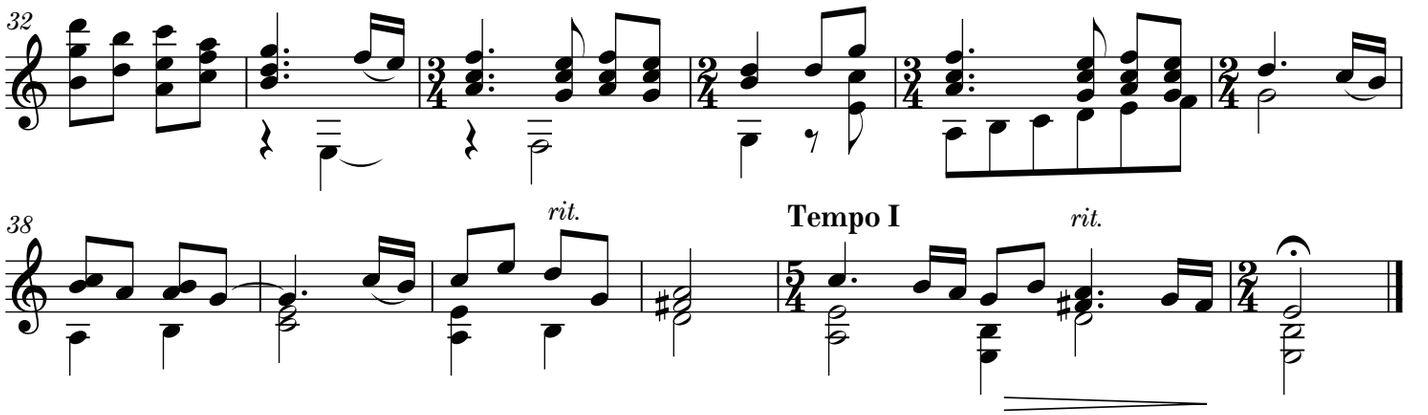

Allegro comodo ♩=96
17
mf
6
10
14
19
23

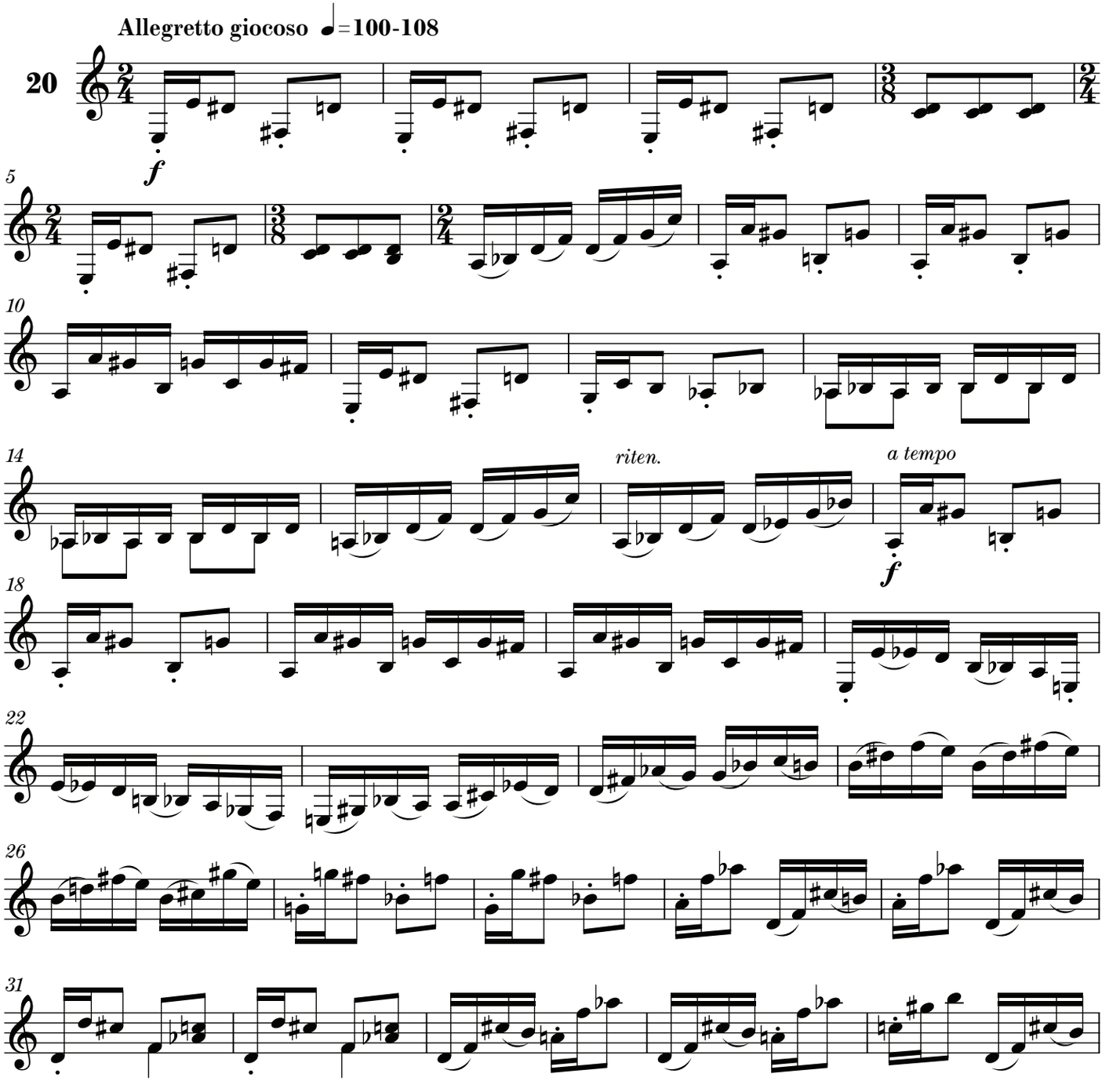

28
32
Meno mosso
dim.
37
Tempo I
p
42
f
46
50
Più mosso
54
rit.
p

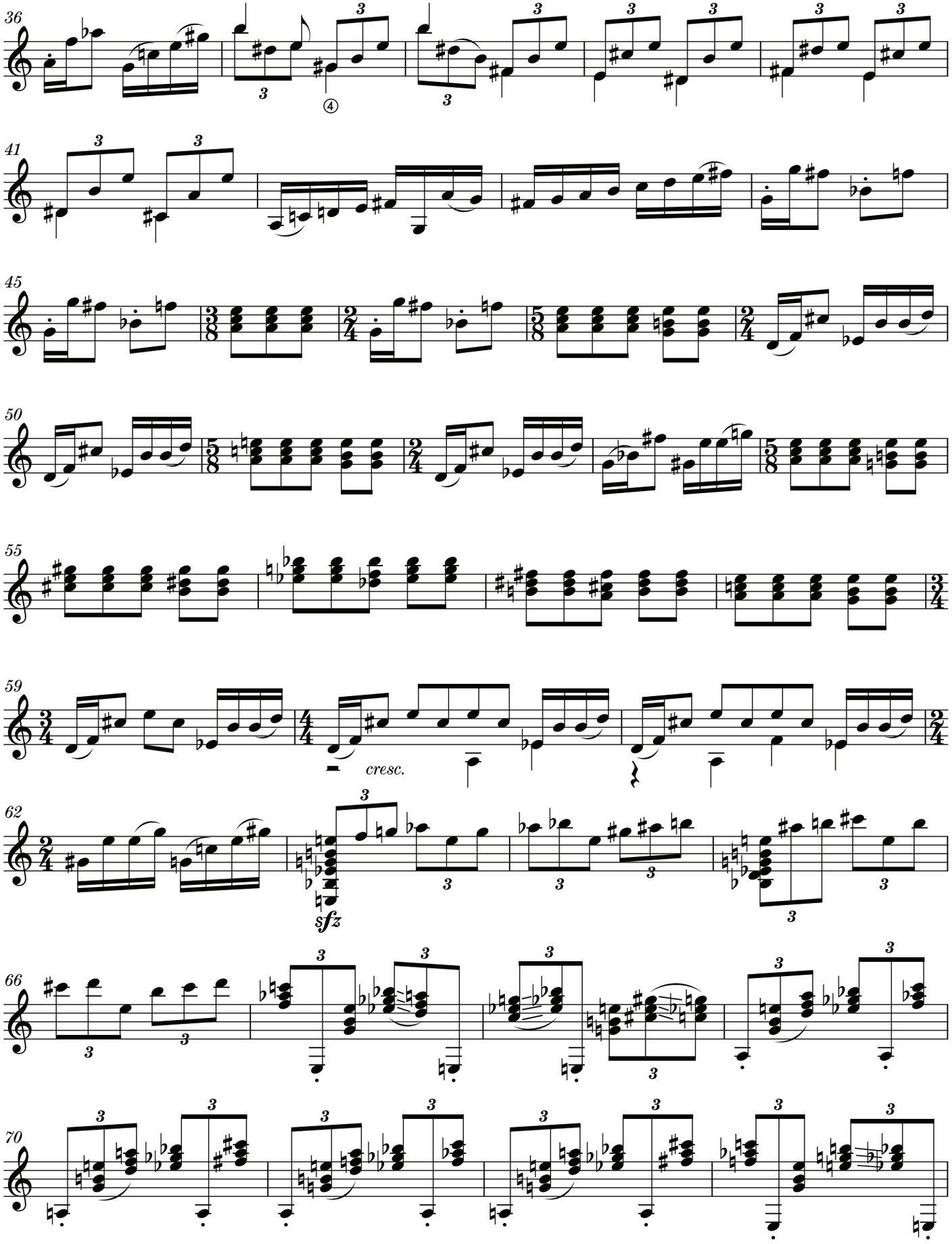

Allegretto legato ♩=92-96
18
sim.
p
cresc. poco a poco
5
sim.
9
sim.
f
13
sim.
sim.
p
cresc. poco a poco
17
sim.
21
sim.
25
sim.
f
29

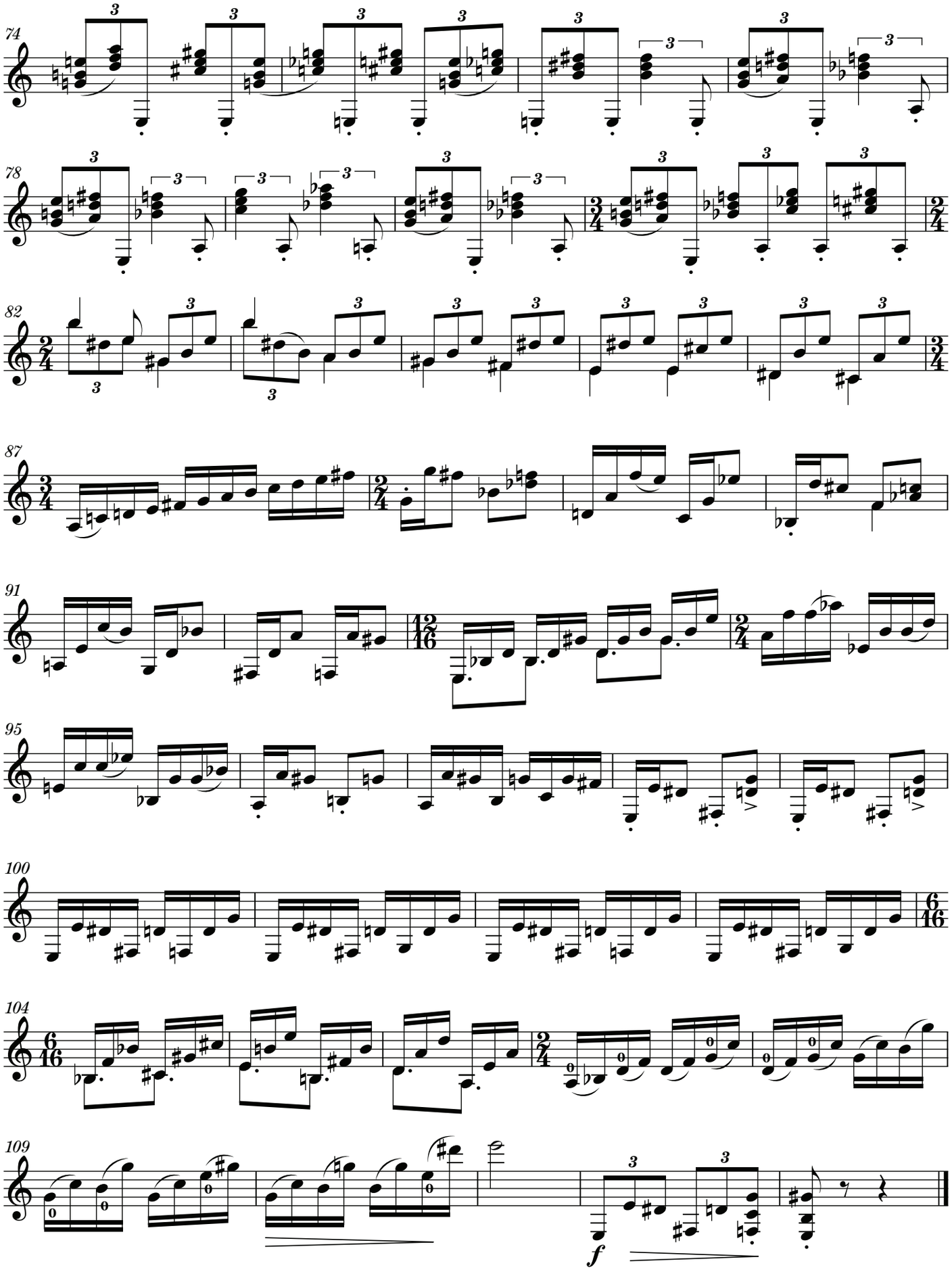

32
sim.
36
40
sim.
44
sim.
mp
cresc. poco a poco
47
50
f
52
sim.
poco rit.

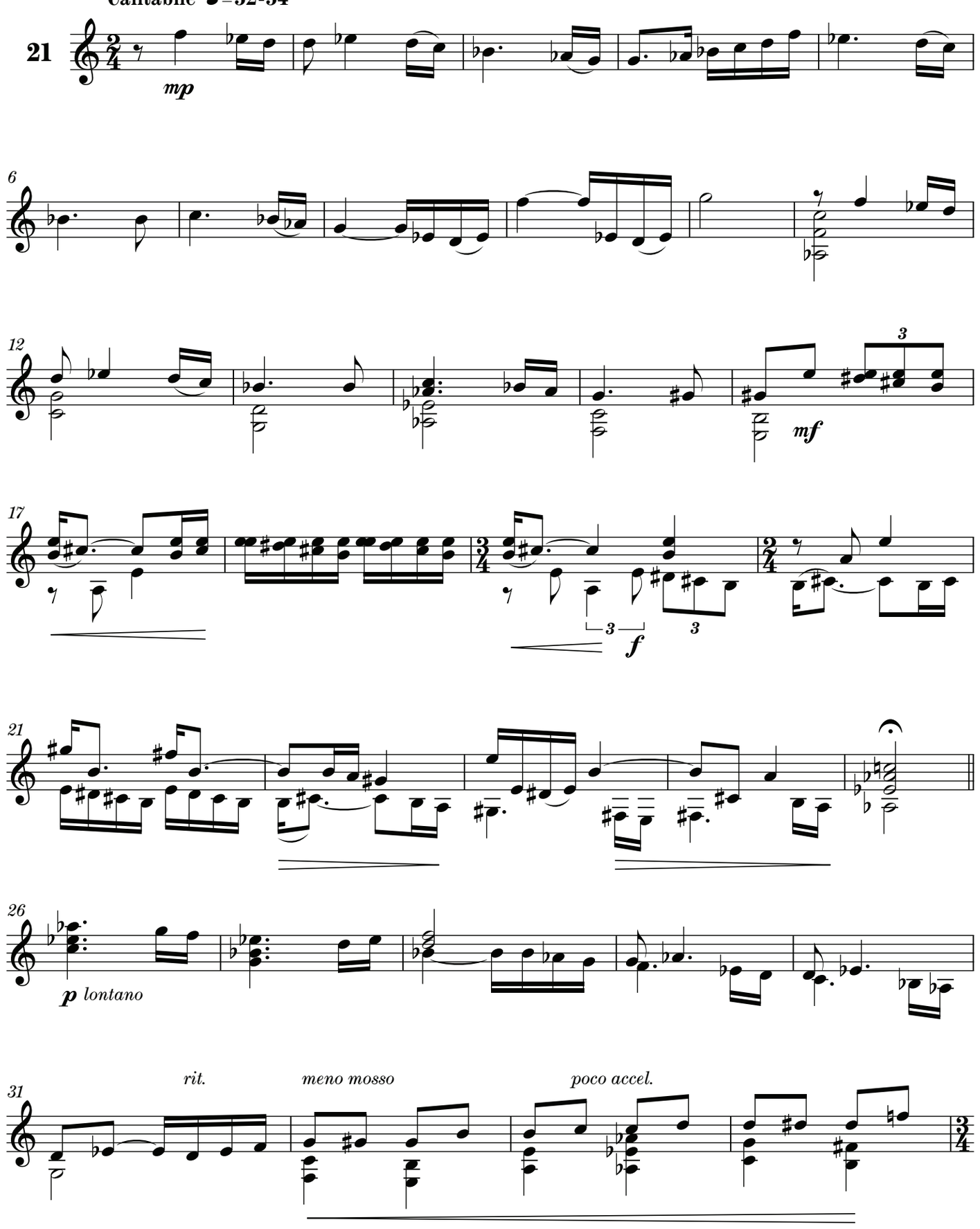

Lento sostenuto ♩=56
19
p soave
5
più accel.
rit.
Più mosso
8
poco pont.
ord.
p
mp
13
riten.
a tempo
18
dim.
rit.
Tempo I
p
22
25
più accel.
rit.
27
Più mosso
p

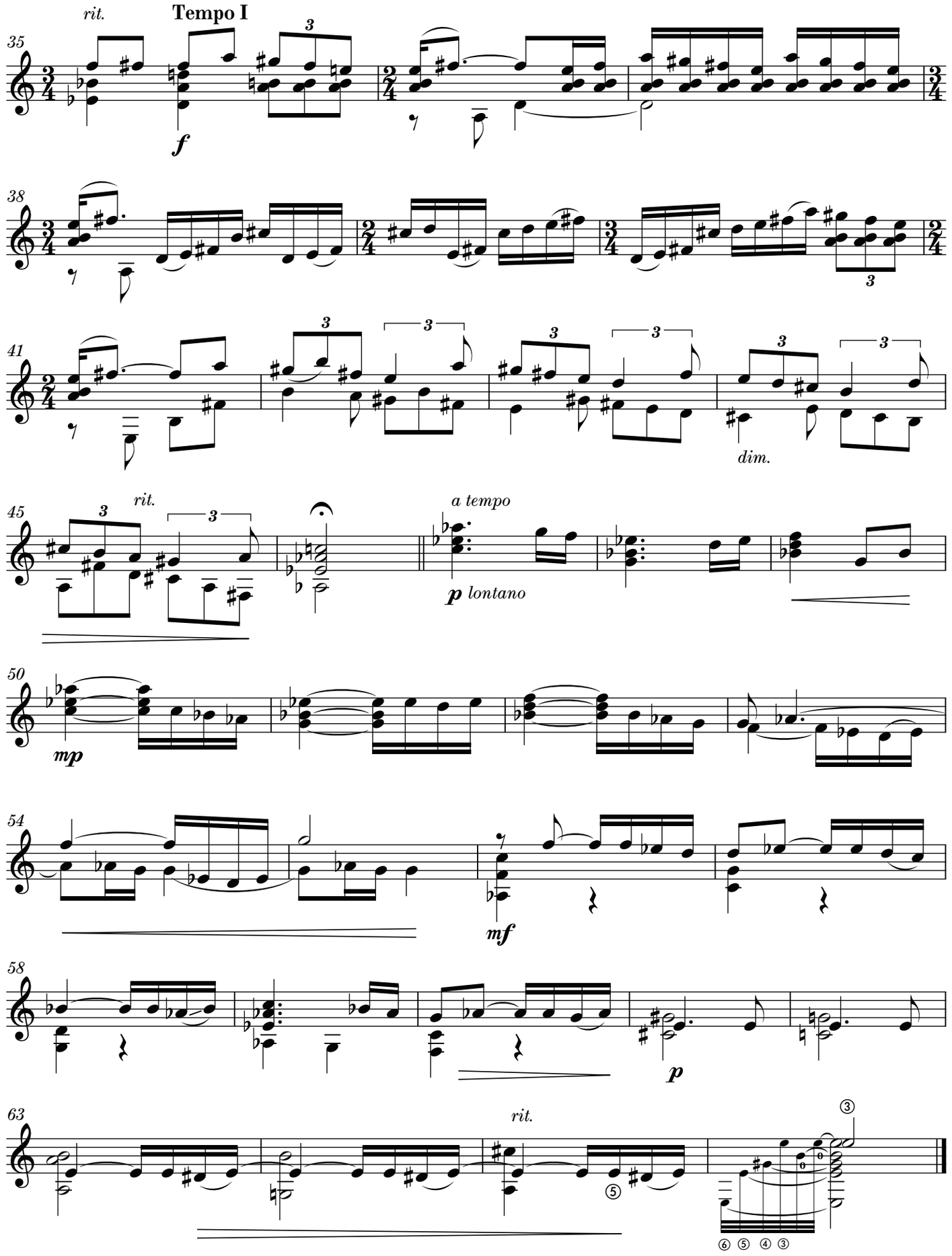

32
rit.
Tempo I
rit.
38

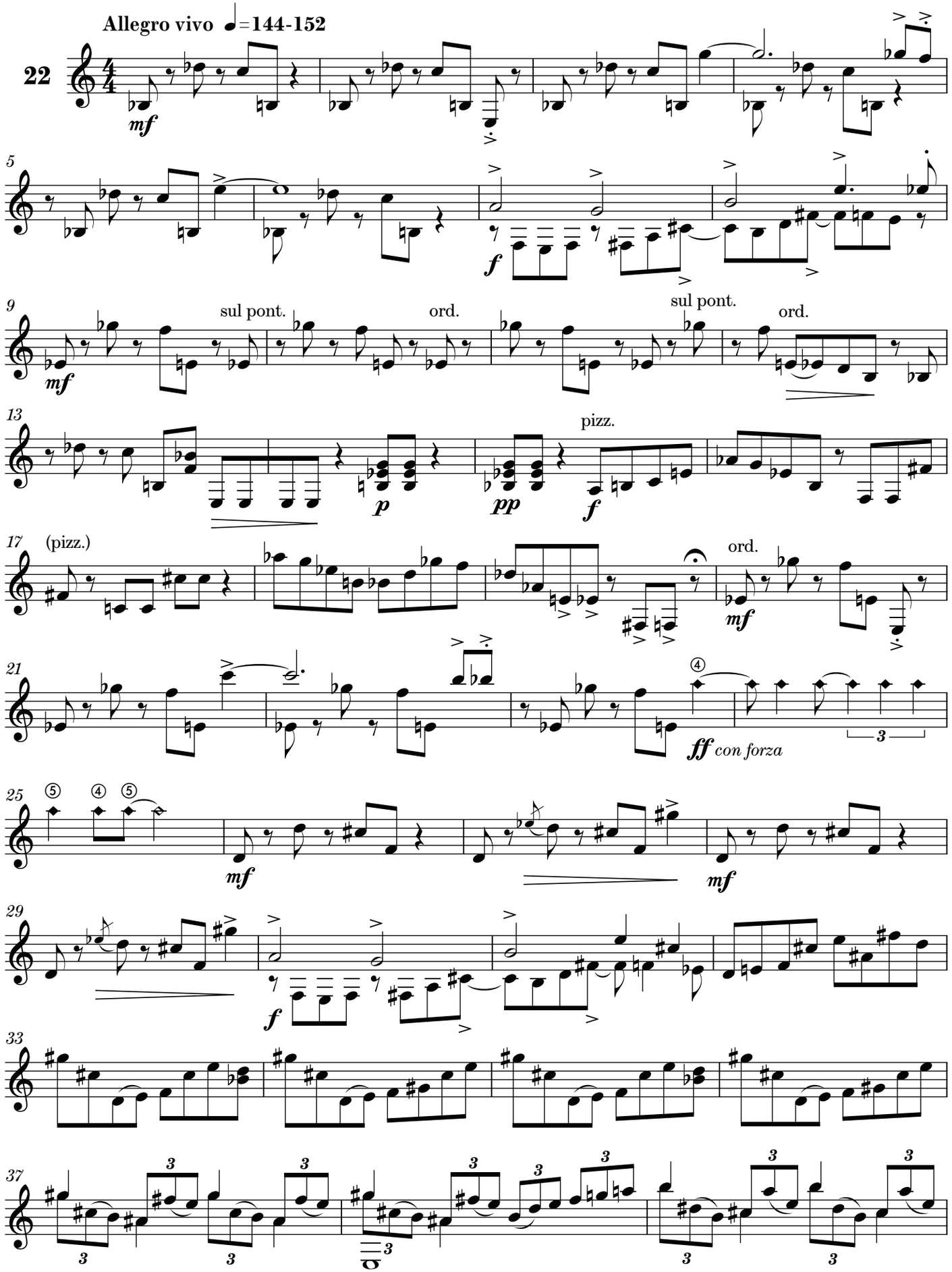

Allegretto giocoso ♩=100-108
20
f
5
10
14
riten.
a tempo
f
18
22
26
31

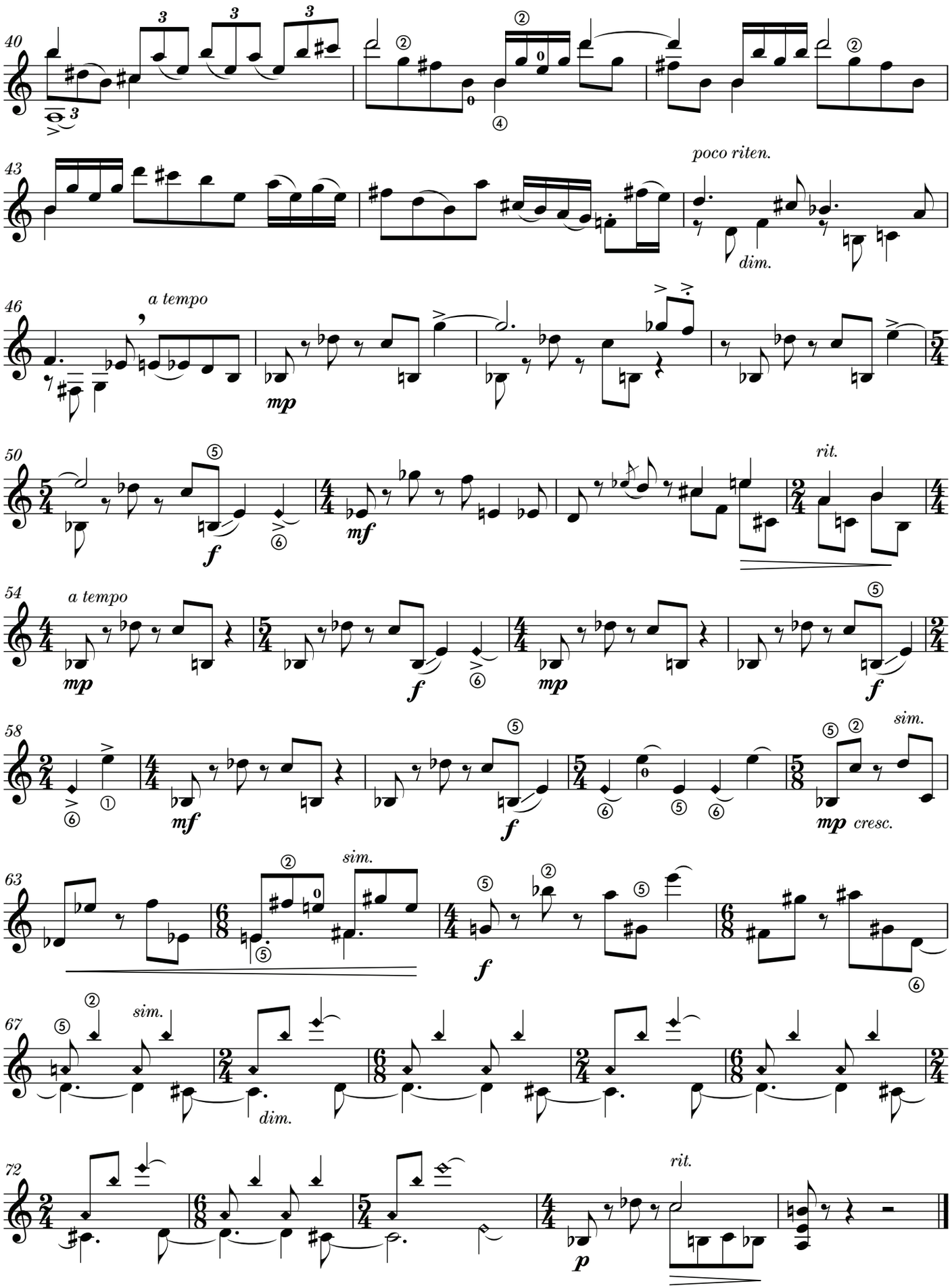

36
41
45
50
55
59
cresc.
62
sfz
66
70

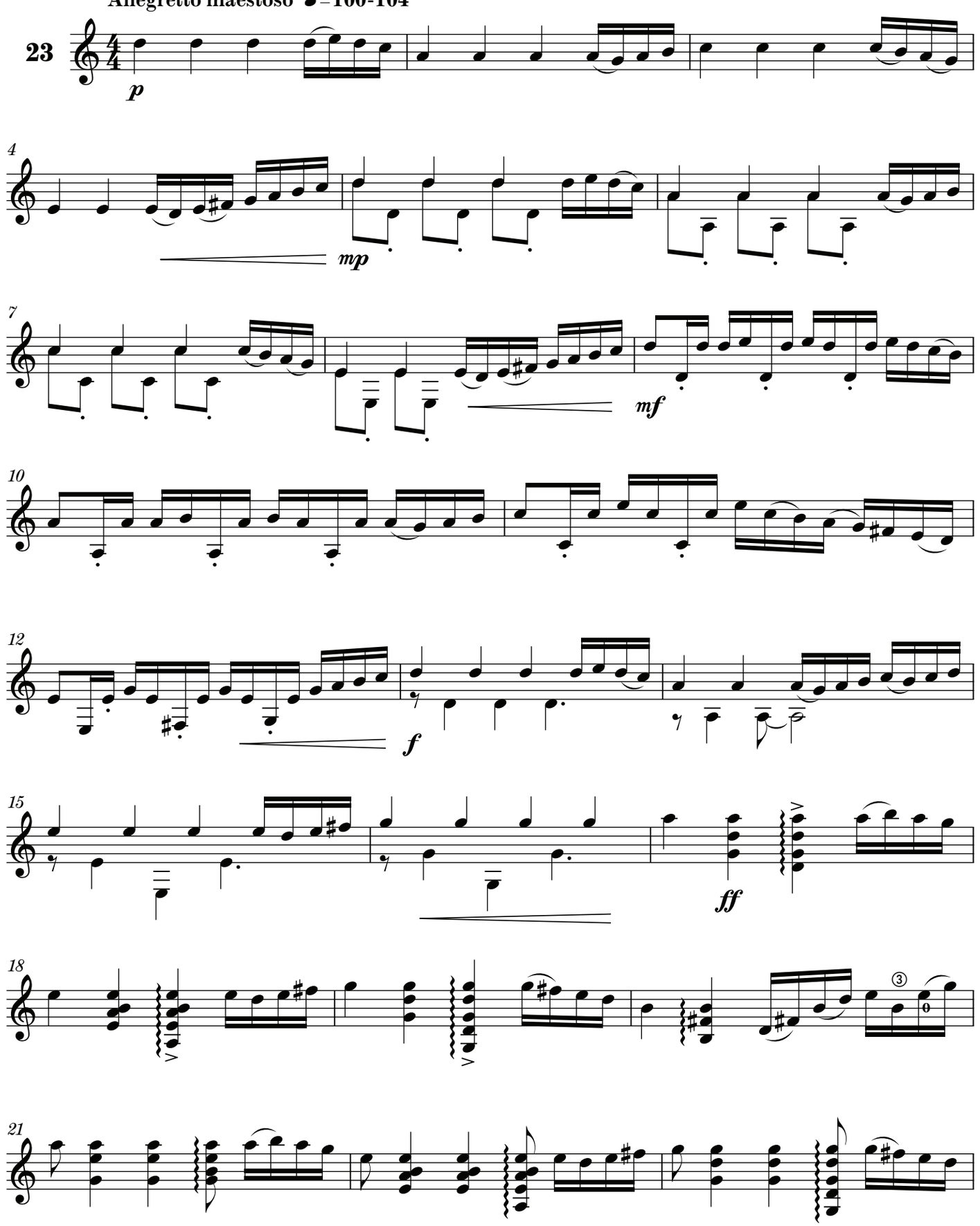

74
78
82
87
91
95
100
104
109
f

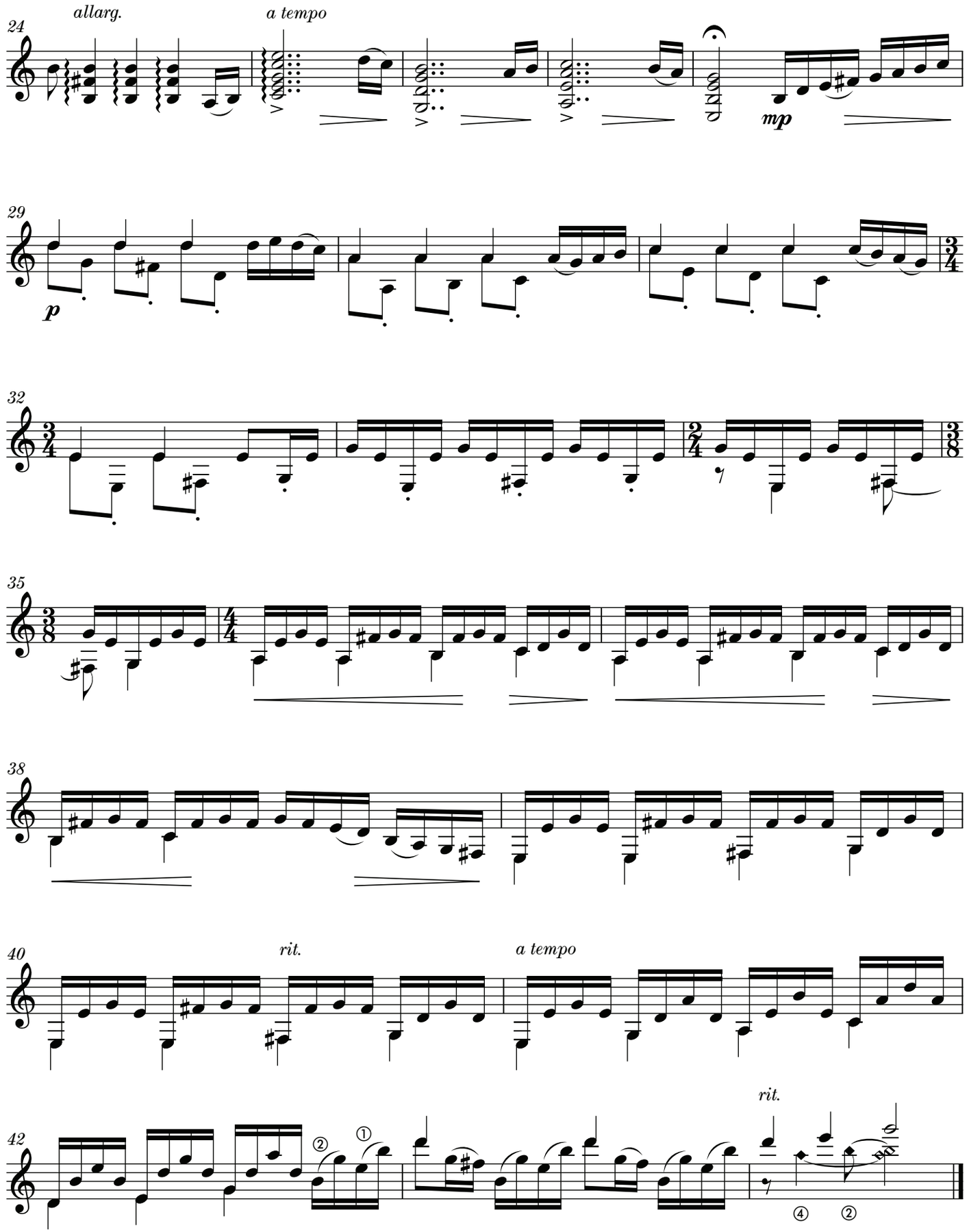

Cantabile ♩=52-54
21
mp
6
12
mf
17
f
21
26
p lontano
31
rit.
meno mosso
poco accel.

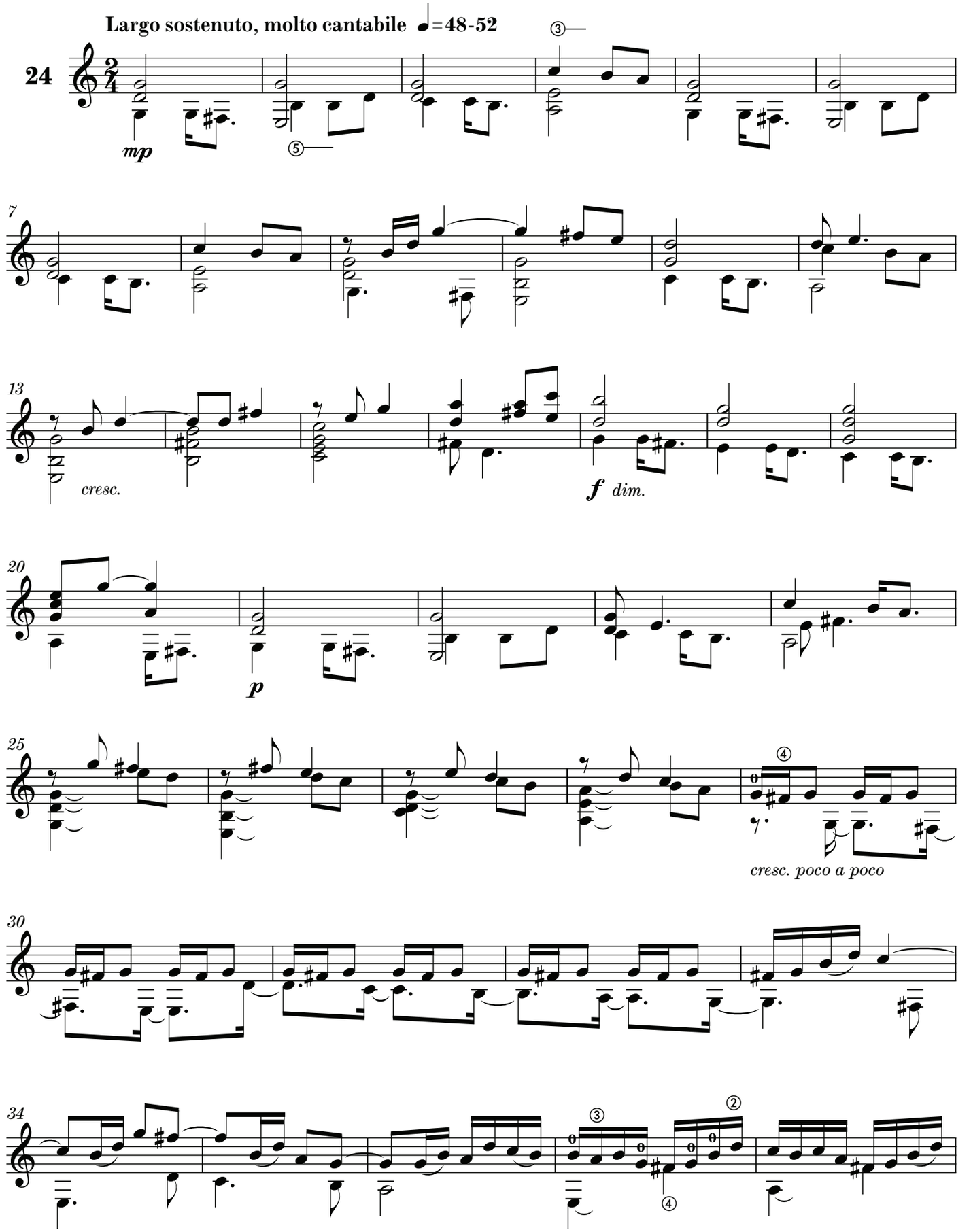

rit.
Tempo I
35
f
38
41
dim.
45
rit.
a tempo
p lontano
50
mp
54
mf
58
p
63
rit.

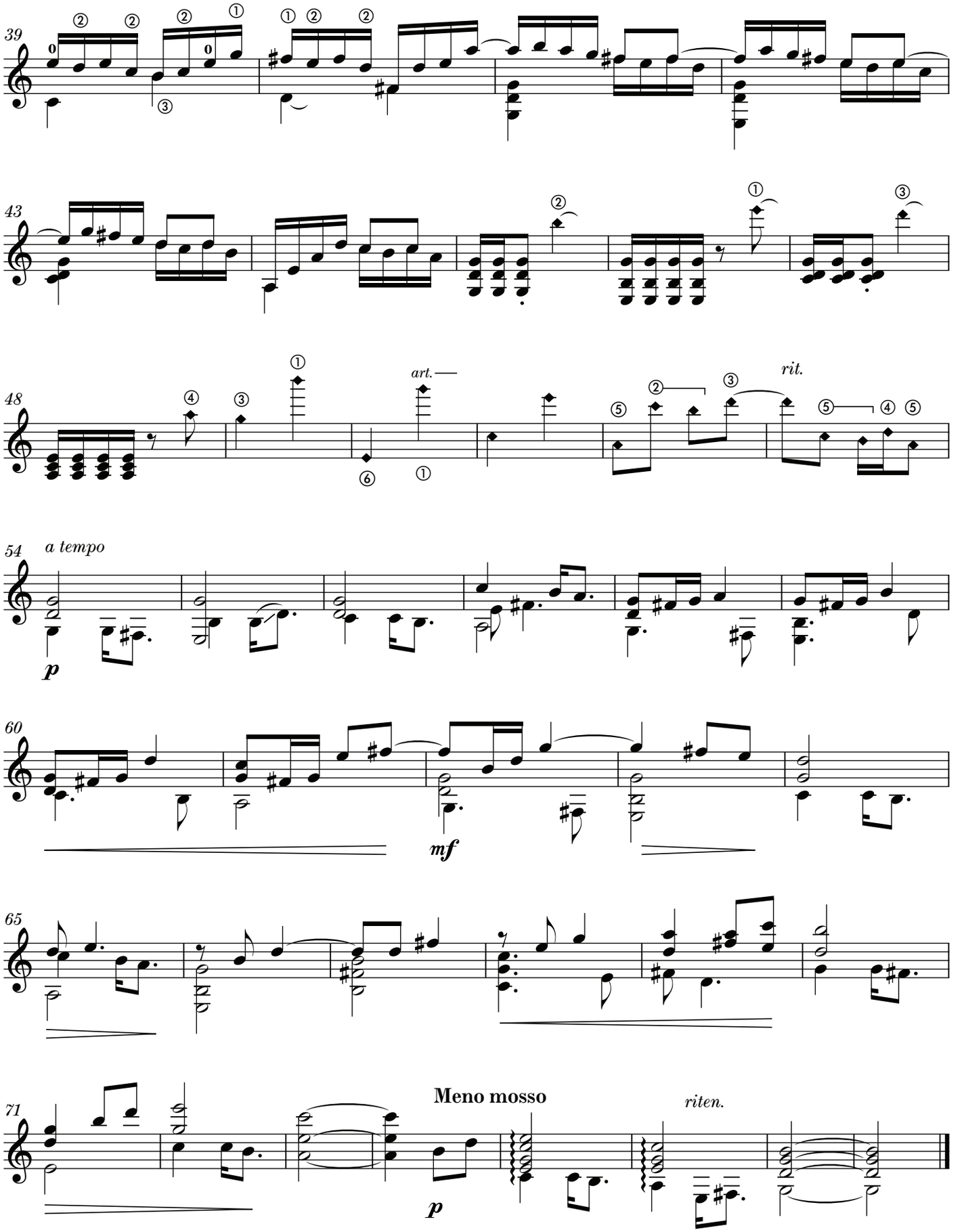

Allegro vivo ♩=144-152
22
mf
5
f
9
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
mf
13
p
pp
pizz.
f
17
(pizz.)
ord.
mf
21
ff con forza
25
mf
mf
29
f
33
37


40
43
poco riten.
dim.
46
a tempo
mp
50
f
mf
rit.
54
a tempo
mp
f
58
mf
f
mp cresc.
sim.
63
sim.
f
67
sim.
dim.
72
rit.
p


Allegretto maestoso ♩=100-104
23
p
4
mp
7
mf
10
12
f
15
ff
18
21


24
allarg.
a tempo
mp
29
p
32
35
38
40
rit.
a tempo
42
rit.


Largo sostenuto, molto cantabile ♩=48-52
24
mp
7
13
cresc.
f dim.
20
p
25
cresc. poco a poco
30
34


39
43
48
art.
rit.
54
a tempo
p
60
mf
65
71
Meno mosso
p
riten.