Johann Sebastian Bach

The Complete 15 Two Part Keyboard Inventions

Transcribed for Solo Classical Guitar

By Richard F. Sayage

Savage Classical Guitar Transcriptions
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SCGT, Inc. New York, USA
Savage Classical GT

Johann Sebastian Bach.

Discussion Regarding Bach and the Musical Invention

The Invention, as a musical form, though widely associated with Johann Sebastian Bach, is previously discovered within the work of some of his contemporaries, including Johann Pachelbel (1653–1706), and Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741) among others. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach later relayed these facts in the published obituary of his father.

History and supportive documentation has shown that Bach intended the earliest Inventions as part of a total work of exercises for one of his sons, Wilhelm Friedemann Bach, in the year 1720, his son being just over the age of 9 years old. This total collection encompassed 62 pieces, which, among others, contained 11 of the original Preludes from the later known, Well Tempered Clavier I, as well as the Three Part Sinfonia, originally titled, "fantasias", along with pieces written by Telemann (1681-1767) and a partita by George Stolzel (1690-1749). Bach's instructive technique, historically considered thoughtful and well organized, displays equally impressive dedication to the musical education of his children.

The original fifteen Inventions, originally titled Preambles ('praeamblae'), are found halfway through the overall collection, indicative of their relative difficulty, as Bach prescribed an orderly method to his instruction. The overall collection itself contains a wealth of information and is evidentiary to the following discussion. Open to historical debate is Bach's real intention with regard to the instruction provided Wilhelm, among other sons and students, namely performance technique or compositional skill. What is clear about Bach, as gathered from myriad written communication, is that they were of equal importance. Certainly, Bach intended strong finger technique to transform into a clearer understanding of the music, its implied message, and the ability of the student to express it satisfactorily. Conversely, the student would attain gradual improvement and enhanced compositional ability by the gathering of ideas, thus, the word "invention", as Bach later renamed the collection. The development of the "idea" would occur via myriad contrapuntal and other musical technique as demonstrated in the book itself. Bach was firm in his conviction that once the student had a firm grasp of two-part writing that the natural progression to three parts was inevitable. Thus, implying more weight to one is contrary to Bach's own well-rounded expectations of his students.

The clearest message of the Inventions is that there is no single form ascribed, though the collection of Three Part Sinfonia is decidedly fugal in nature. For the most part, analysis of the form belies their structurally miniature resemblance to larger works, namely: original motive, development of such motif and coda. There are exceptions as can be found in Invention #2, 9 and 13, which are rooted in canonic form, among others. Further analysis of the Inventions displays Bach's employment of myriad contrapuntal techniques and manipulation of motive within the array of pieces. Examples of double counterpoint, fugue, canon, sonata, as well as repetition and inversion are evident.

The larger point is that Bach was not fixated upon any one methodology when it came to the Inventions, instinctively allowing the musical idea to dictate its own course and development, logically, yet with incredible depth and beauty. A daunting prospect for any aspiring student to peruse the master's work and wonder, as Mozart did. how is it possible that anyone else could ever write at this level. Fortunately, for all of us, the message behind Bach's instruction remains as enduring as the haunting lyricism of the music itself.

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Note Regarding Tempo, Performance, and Transcription

The original Two Part Inventions, as written by Johann Sebastian Bach, were, as a rule, performed a bit faster than the tempos that may be available to classical guitarists through this collection of work. This, due in large part, to the guitarist's obvious difficulty in performing the two lines smoothly, yet at the appropriate tempo, as marked by the editors of the Bach-Gesellschaft archives, along with the excellent Czerny and the Landshoff keyboard editions as offered by Editions Peters. Ultimately, the goal of the performer is to strengthen their ability to play the pieces at or close to speed, accomplished first by committing the pieces to memory. The second requirement must remain that the performer or student demonstrates overall technical ability and knowledge of the instrument, or a growth towards such. This may seem obvious, but I do not wish to convey false sentiment in describing these pieces. In general, they are not for the faint of heart or ability. Obvious is that, even at a slower tempo, they sound and play wonderfully.

Please note that the top line, typically played by the right on the keyboard, is in fact, complete. There has been very little editing of the main thematic ideas as originally presented by Johann Sebastian Bach. At the very most, the *octave* of the original suffered the smallest alteration to accommodate the range of performance accommodated by the playing guitarist. Subsequently, the line always brought back to the original as quickly and, hopefully, as deftly as possible. You will notice that some of the pieces play the melodic lines up on the standard D and A strings of the instrument, maintaining harmonic structure on the A and E string. This is not the norm, where most classical guitar pieces are concerned, but there is precedence, found in more advanced performance works, such as Jerry Willard's transcriptions of Bach's Lute Suites. Regardless, they sound proper, somewhat unique and play very well as such.

The left hand, however, has undergone some larger transformation. The feasibility of performance remains the driving issue behind said editing. Where possible, supportive harmonic lines report zero to very little editing. Instances of such found in Invention 13, which remarkably, remained untouched, playing with such passion, among others throughout the book. Conversely, Invention 5 and 8, evidence larger alteration born of necessity, as described earlier. There is evidence of obvious compromise in that octave manipulation must have occurred in some of the pieces. The range of the classical guitar, again, must dictate overall feasibility, as does the alteration of key for some of the pieces in the collection.

One hand or the other may have undergone a slight alteration to accommodate the other where the thematic or melodic line is prevalent, such taking obvious precedence. I assure you that the editing was minimal, born of absolute necessity as described earlier.

Enjoy this new music for the classical/baroque guitar. It is my hope that your journey towards the mastery of these 15 pieces is exhilarating, fulfilling your aspirations of performance, allowing you more insight than already possessed as to the enduring music of the master of counterpoint and the knowledge of our most beautiful instrument.

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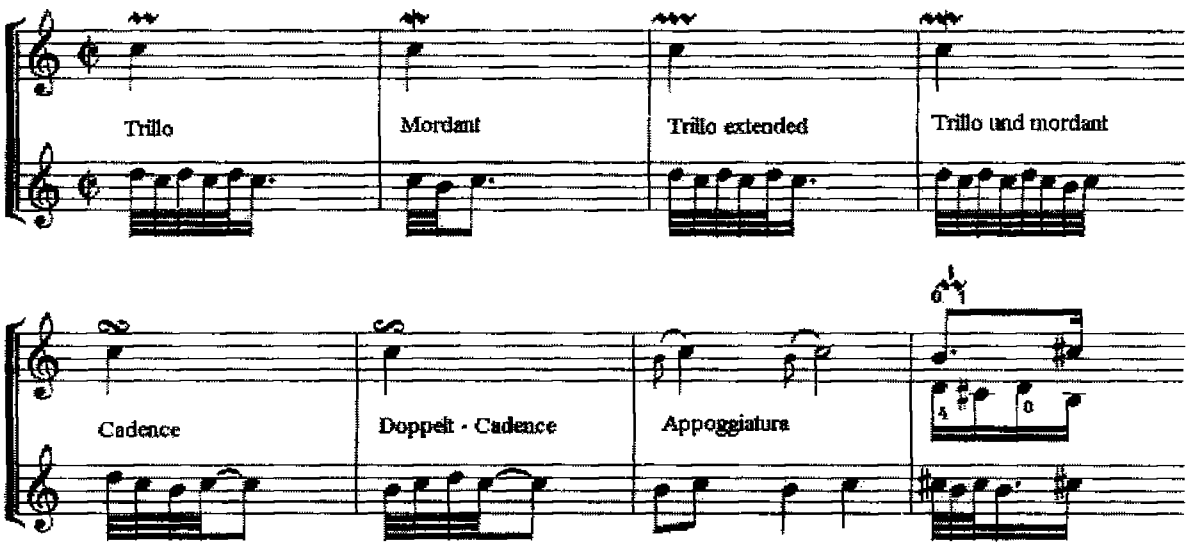
Notes Regarding Ornamentation

Ornament Table
Partially extracted from "A Little Lesson Book for Clavier"
Written by Bach for his children in 1720



A usually hot topic amongst historians and performers, I have chosen to primarily avoid it by relaying Bach's own sentiment on interpretation of his ornaments. The examples above are taken directly from his manuscript as titled above, except for the appoggiatura and the trill with the sharp (#) above it. These last two are accepted baroque norms and should beg little, if any, argument. I have also chosen to limit the ornamentation descriptors to those found within this book.

Accepted is that the baroque trill begins on the higher diatonic, keeping in line with transitional key modulations. The key to any of the ornaments is that they finish as indicated by the note written. Saying this, I must interject, at the risk of massive criticism, that the music and the performer's interpretation must finally dictate first, the choice to make use of the ornament, and secondly, the application of such as dictated by the music itself. This statement supported by the fact that these arrangements are for the classical guitar, thus having zero precedence to guide these specific pieces, though we may refer to numerous guitar interpretations as per myriad well known transcribers and performers of other Bach pieces. We also remain instructed by the written notes of Bach and previous recordings of keyboard based performances, but should we discriminately choose to make use of them, the above is only to serve as a guideline.

It garners much debate, for instance, that the trill or any of its variants are performed as written above. Given that Bach himself wrote this instruction for his children, regarding the explicit interpretation of his ornaments as it pertains to his music, I cannot fathom the basis of the argument, except to simply refer to my previous statement of personal choice and taste.

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Illustration: Bach and his sons, brief musical history

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Invention #1

(BWV 772)

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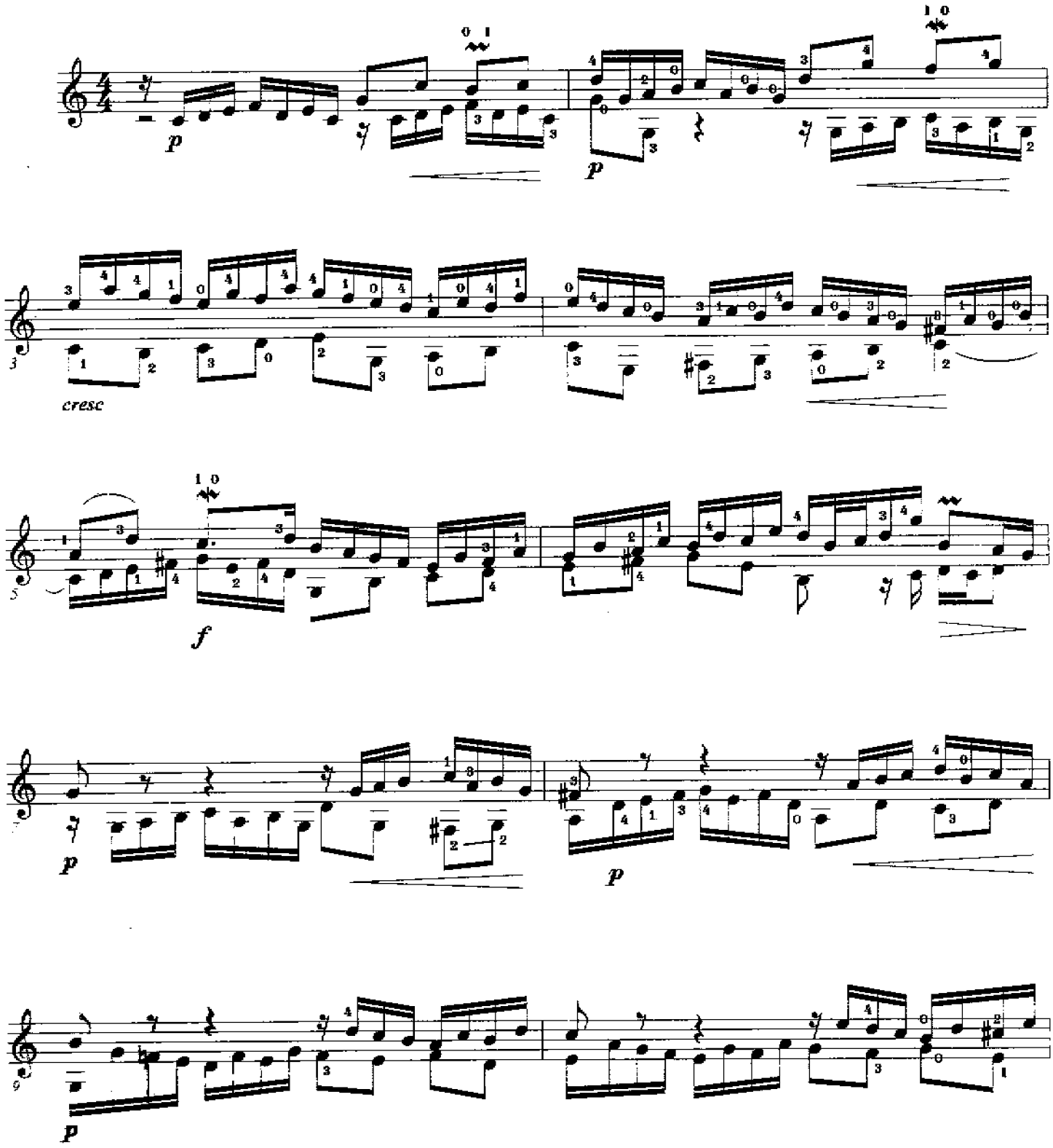
J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750)



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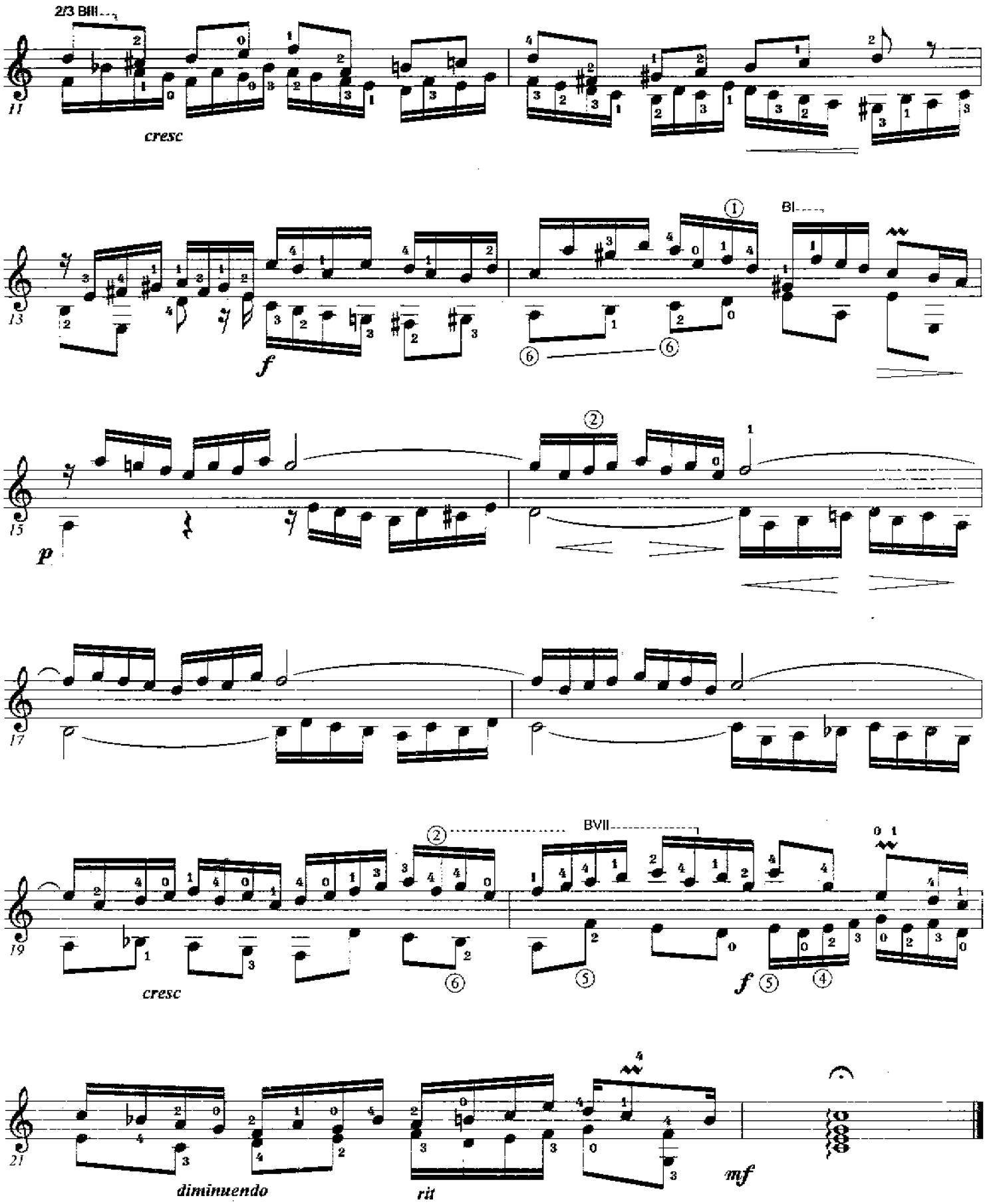
2/3 BIII
11
cresc
13
f
BI
15
p
17
19
BVII
cresc
f
21
diminuendo
rit
mf

Invention #2

(BWV 773)

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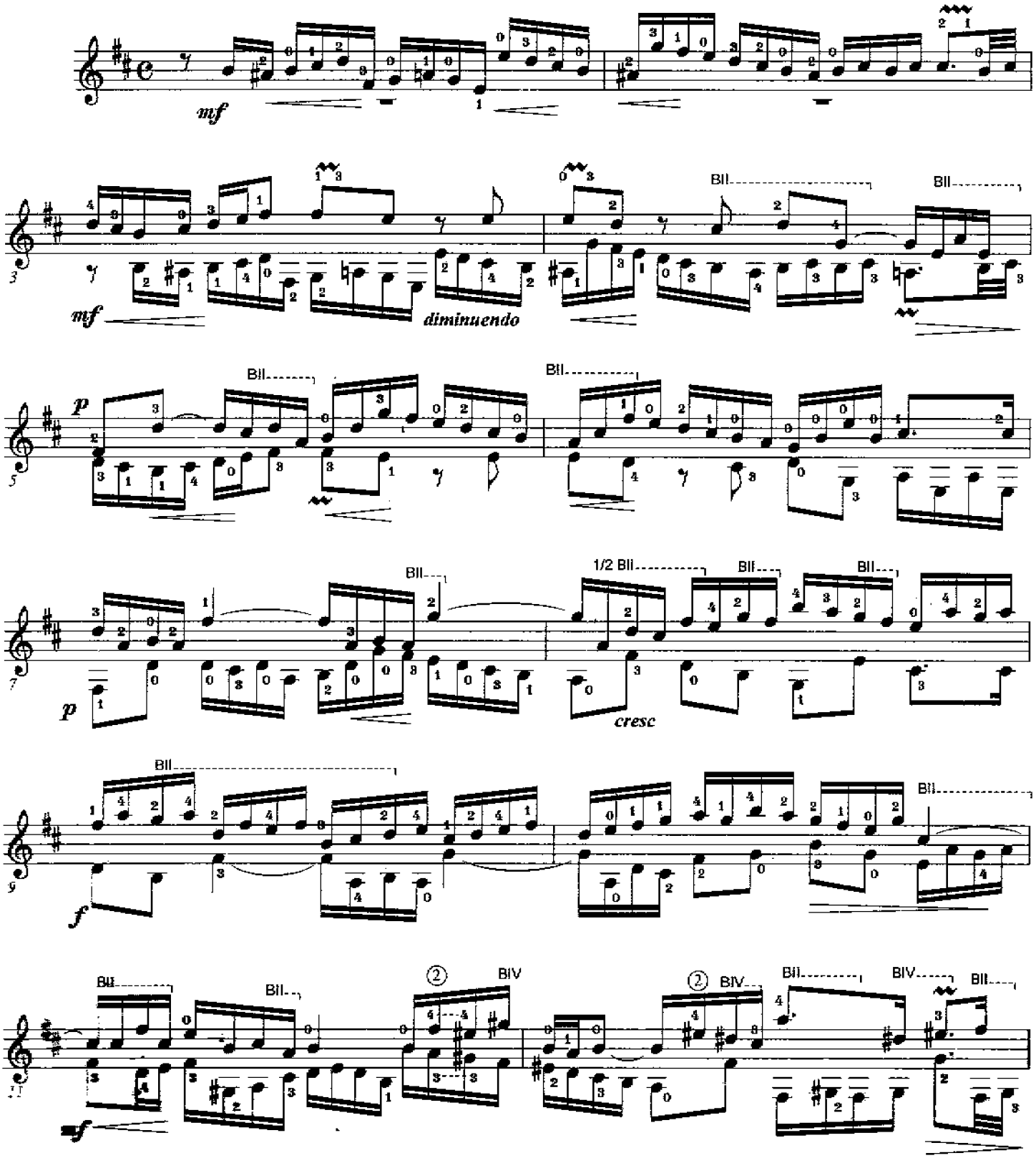
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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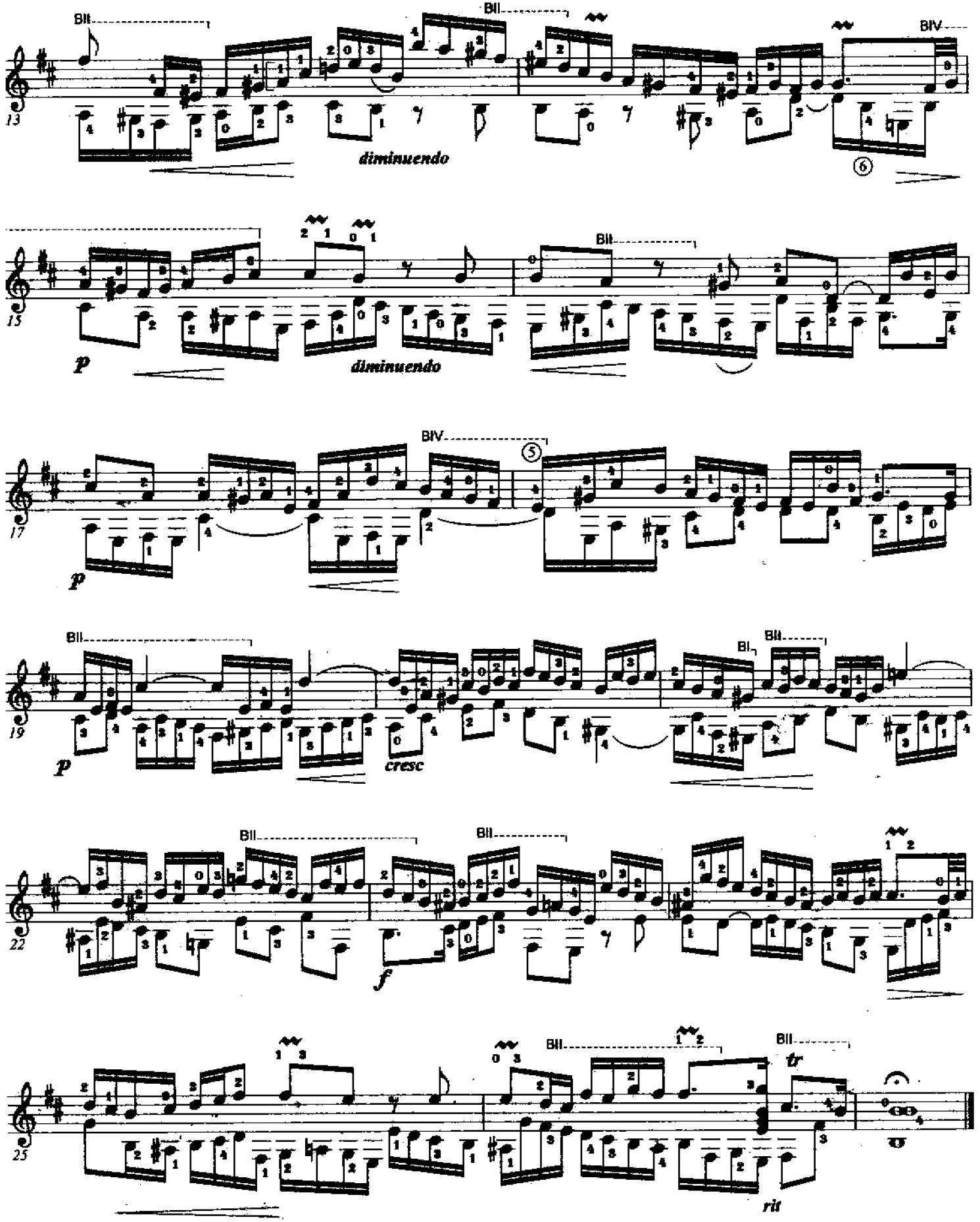
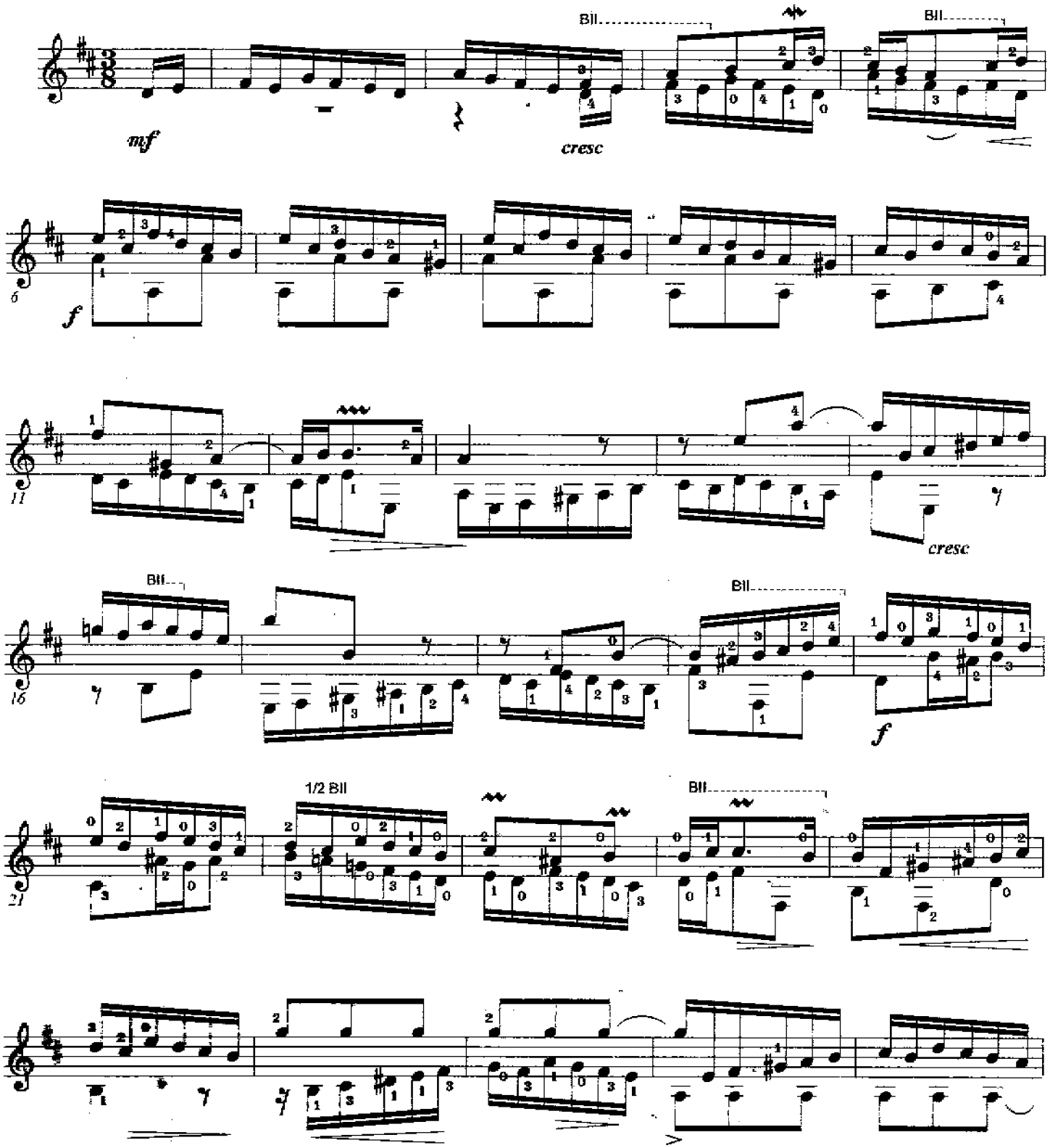

BII
BIV
13
diminuendo
6
15
p
diminuendo
17
5
19
cresc
22
f
25
tr
rit

Invention #3

(BWV 774)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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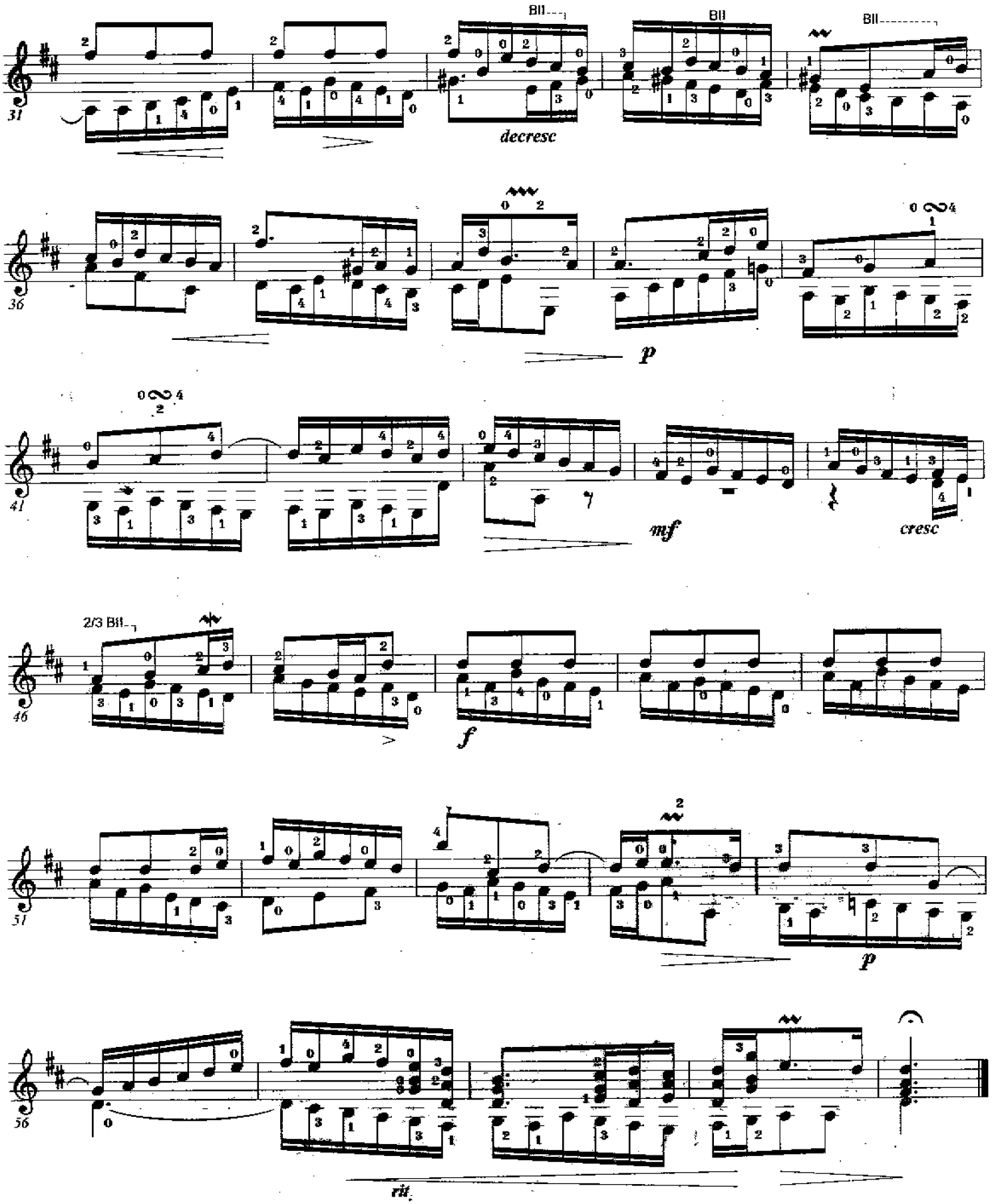
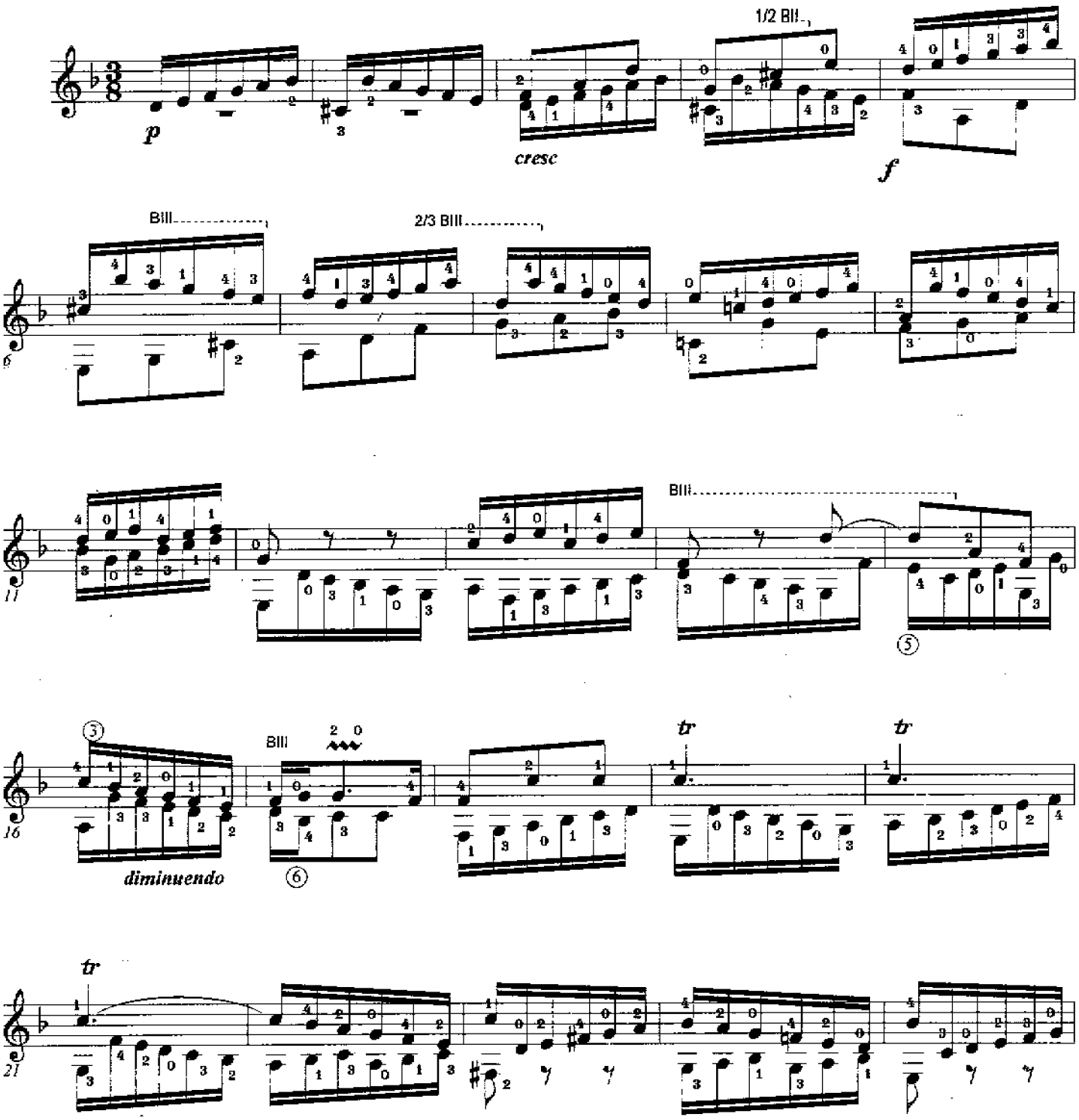

31
BII
BII
BII
decresc
36
p
41
mf
cresc
46
2/3 BII
f
51
p
56
rit.

Invention #4
(BWV 775)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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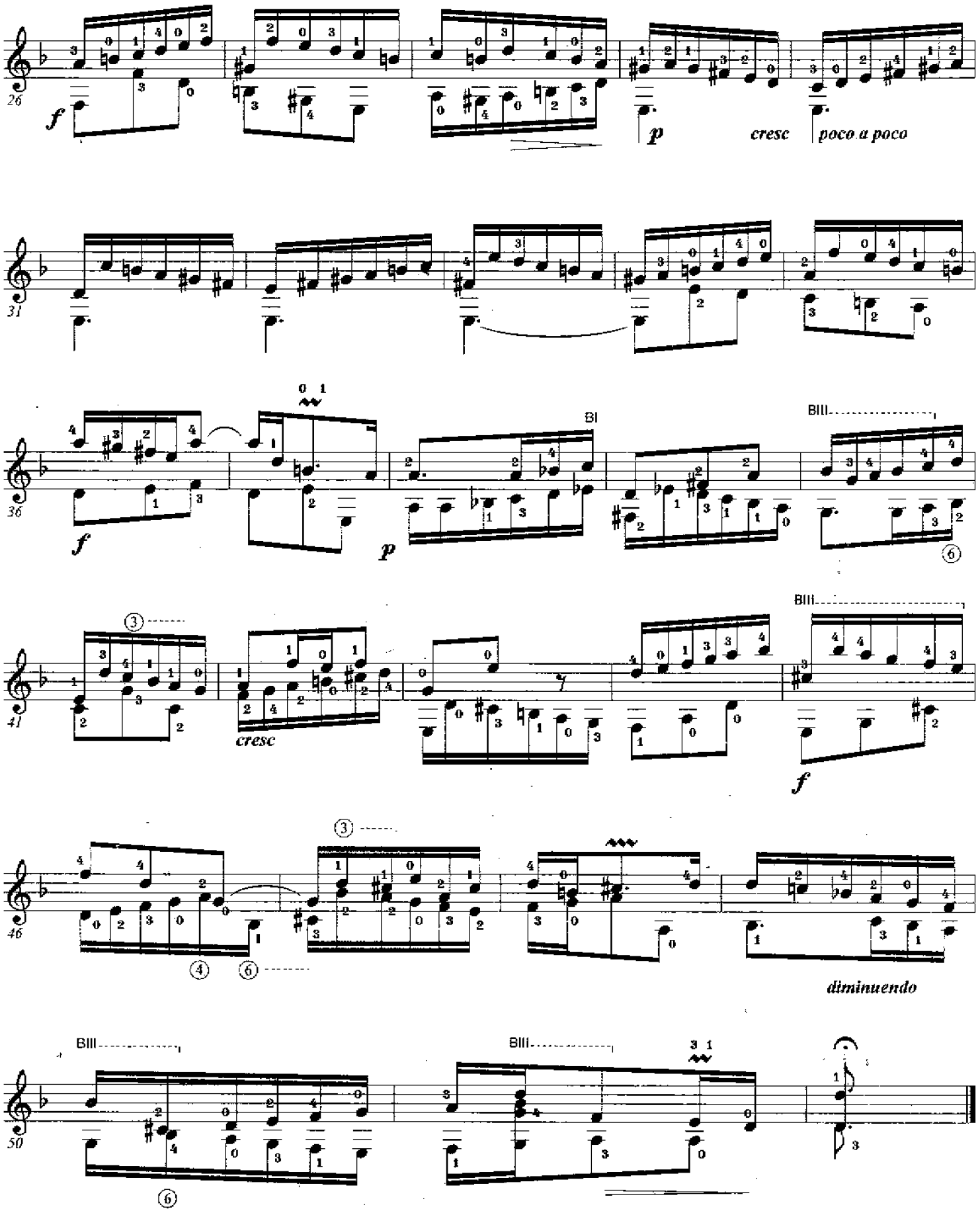
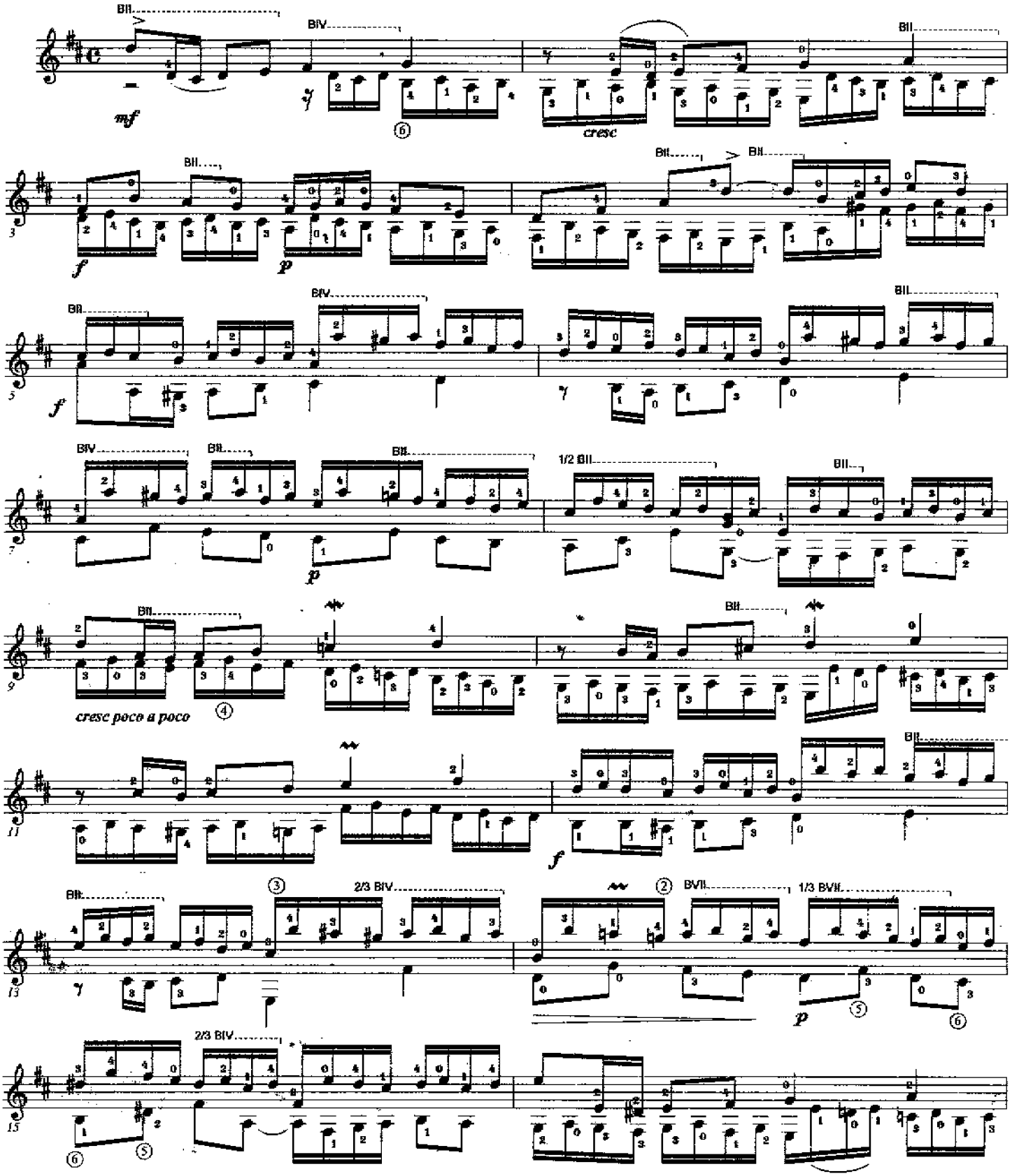

26
f
p
cresc
poco a poco
31
36
f
p
BI
BIII
41
cresc
BIII
f
46
diminuendo
50
BIII
BIII

Invention #5
(BWV 776)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750)



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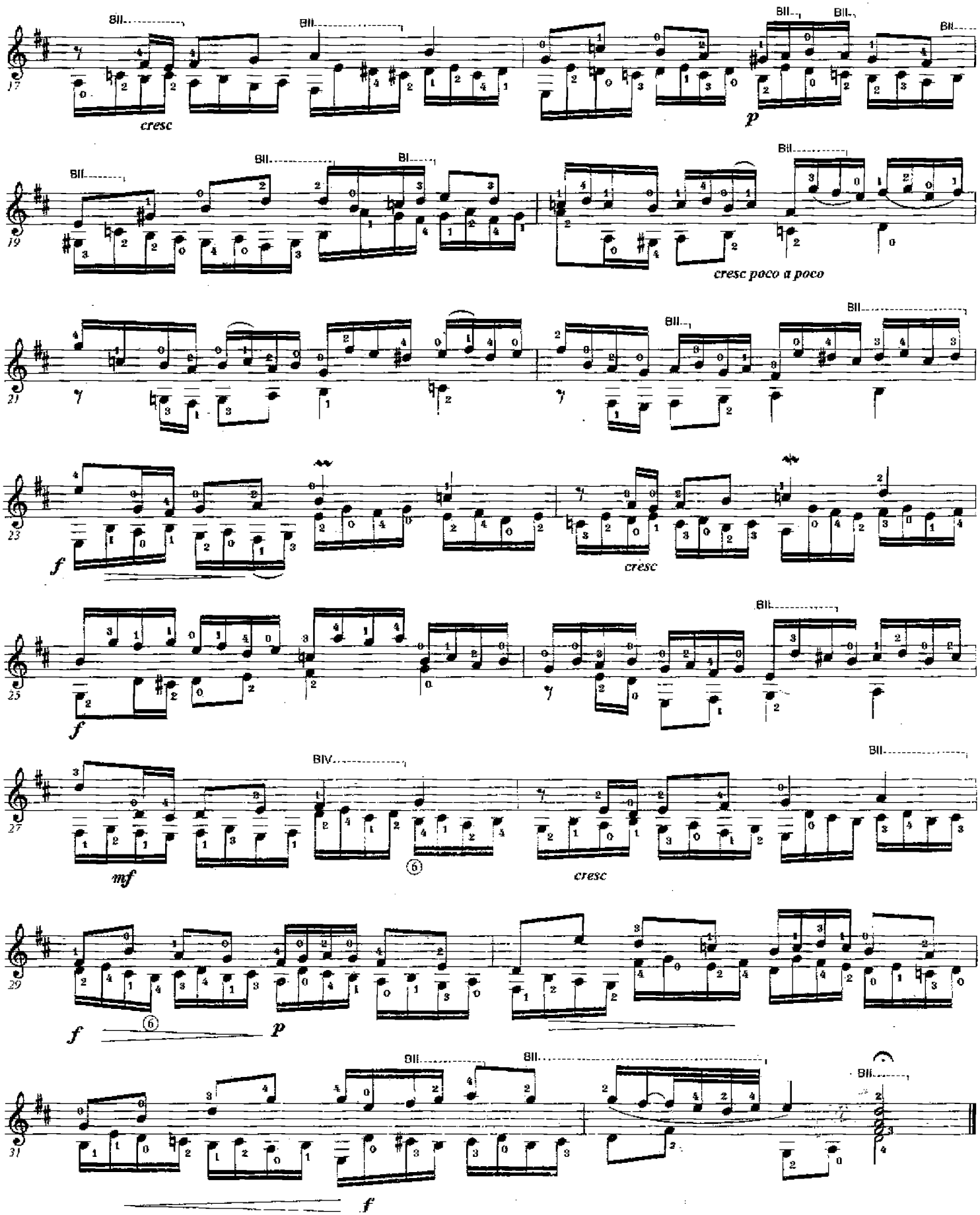
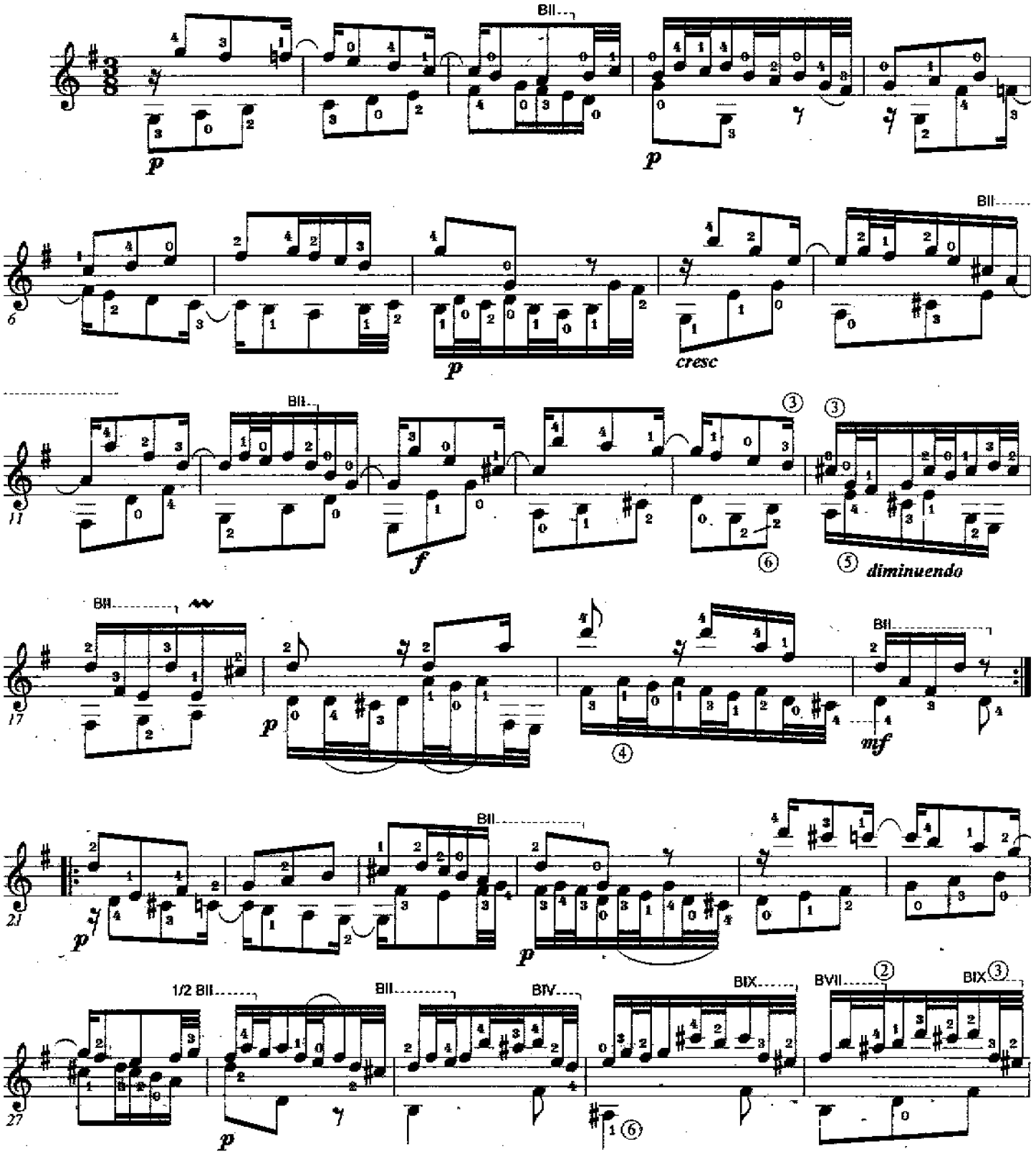

17
cresc
p
19
cresc poco a poco
21
23
f
cresc
25
f
27
mf
BIV
cresc
29
f
p
31
f

Invention #6
(BWV 777)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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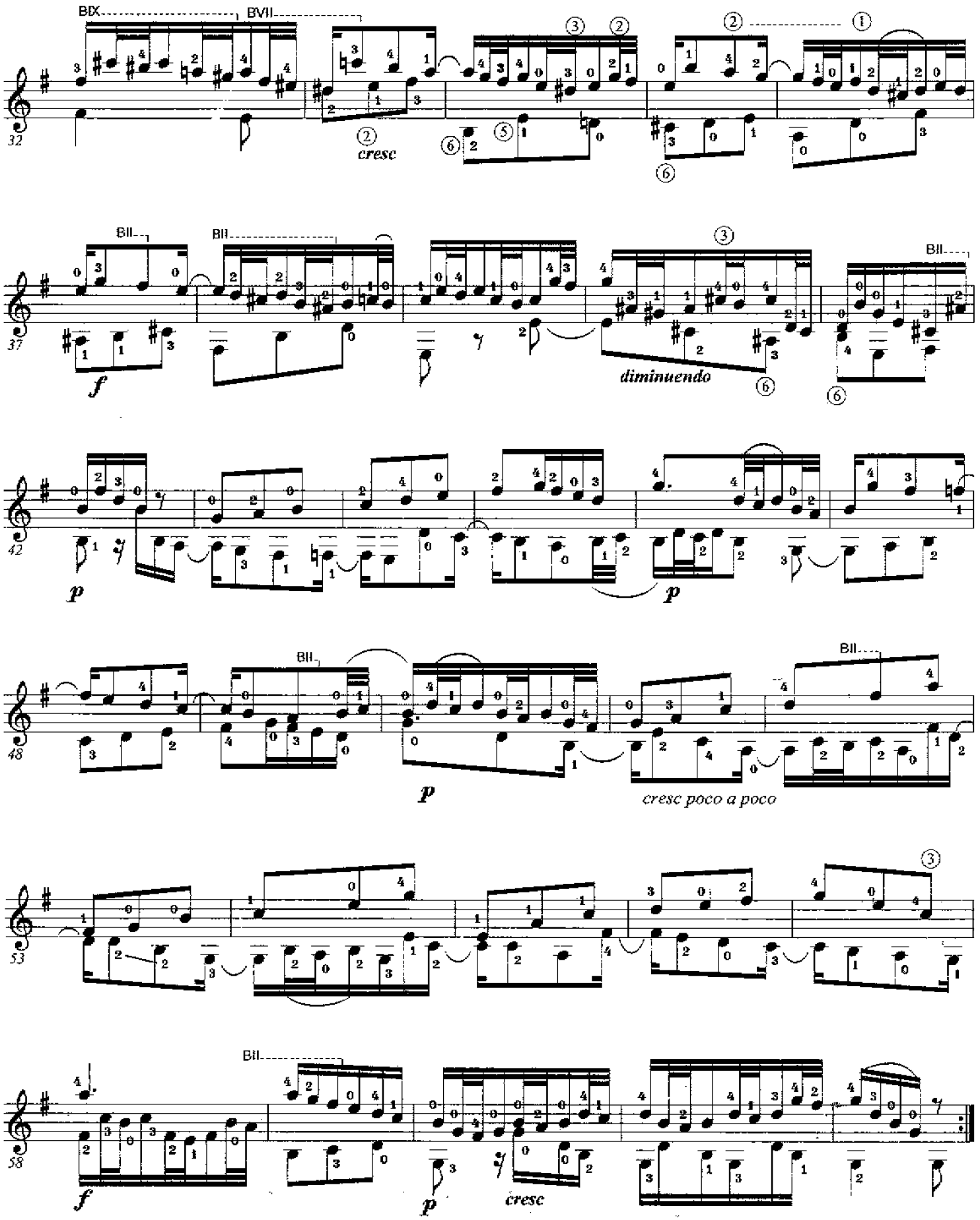
BIX
BVII
cresc
BII
f
diminuendo
p
cresc poco a poco

Invention #7
(BWV 778)

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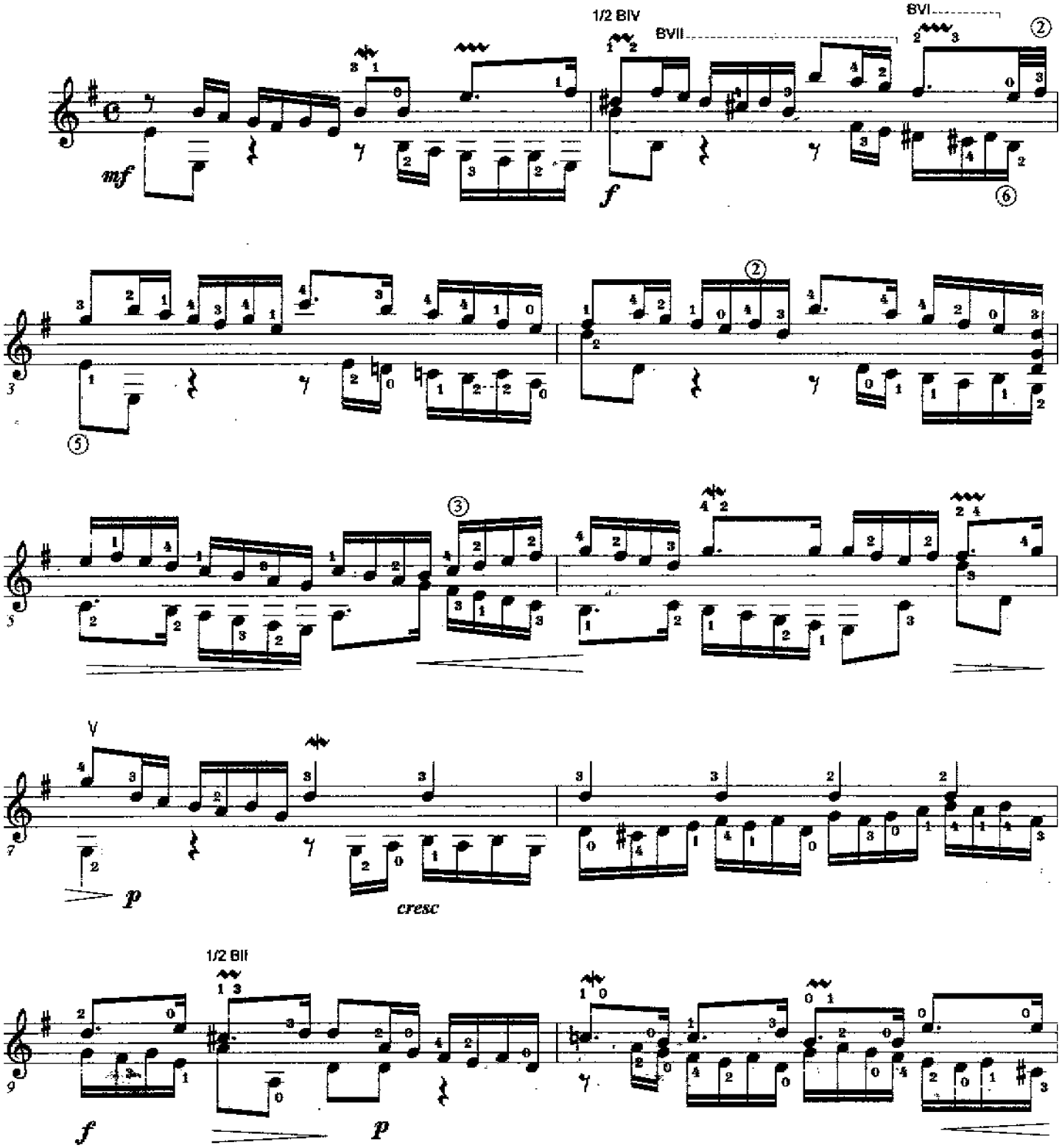
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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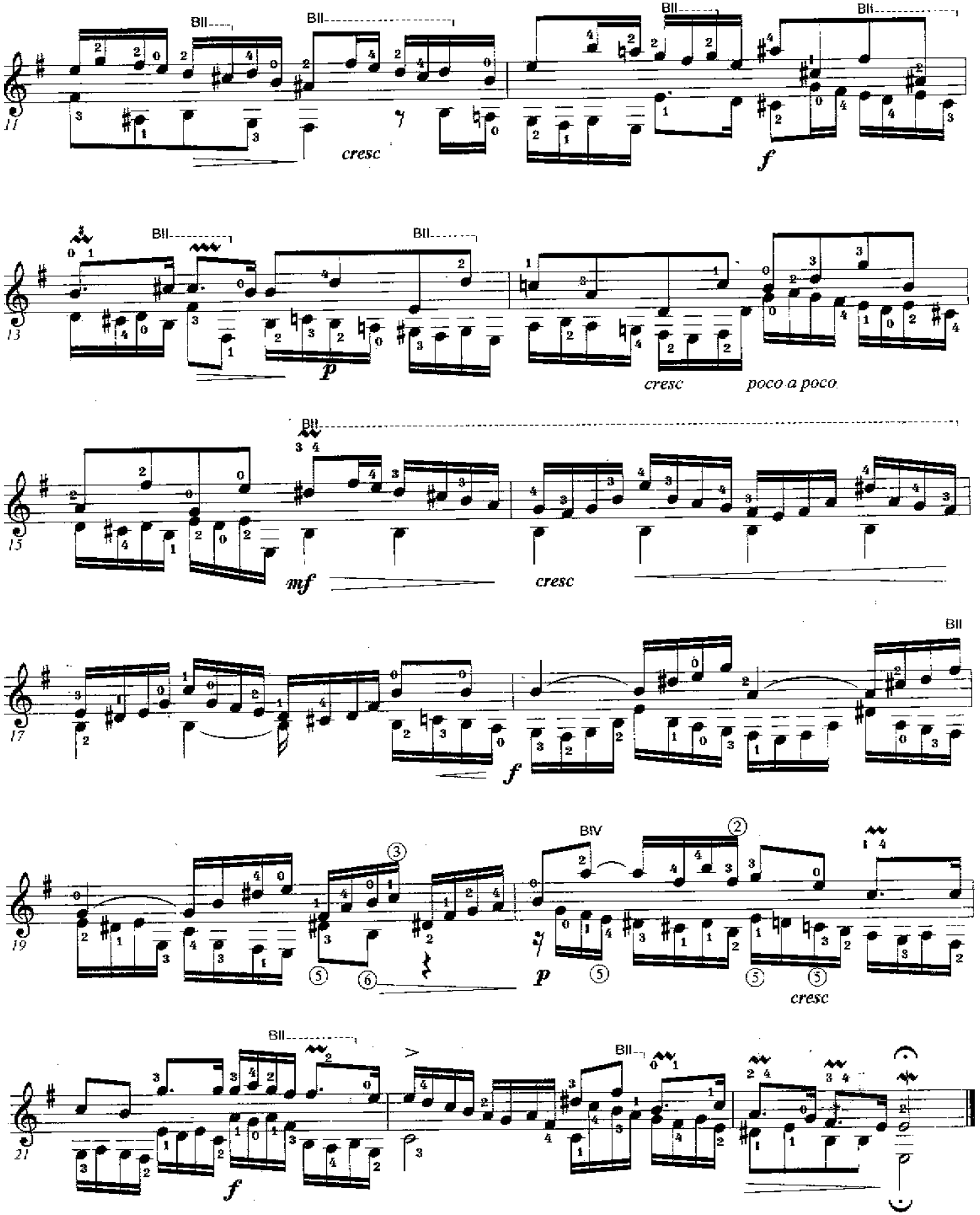
11
BII
BII
cresc
BII
BII
f
13
BII
BII
p
cresc
poco a poco
15
BII
mf
cresc
17
f
BII
19
BIV
p
cresc
21
BII
BII
f

Invention #8

(BWV 779)

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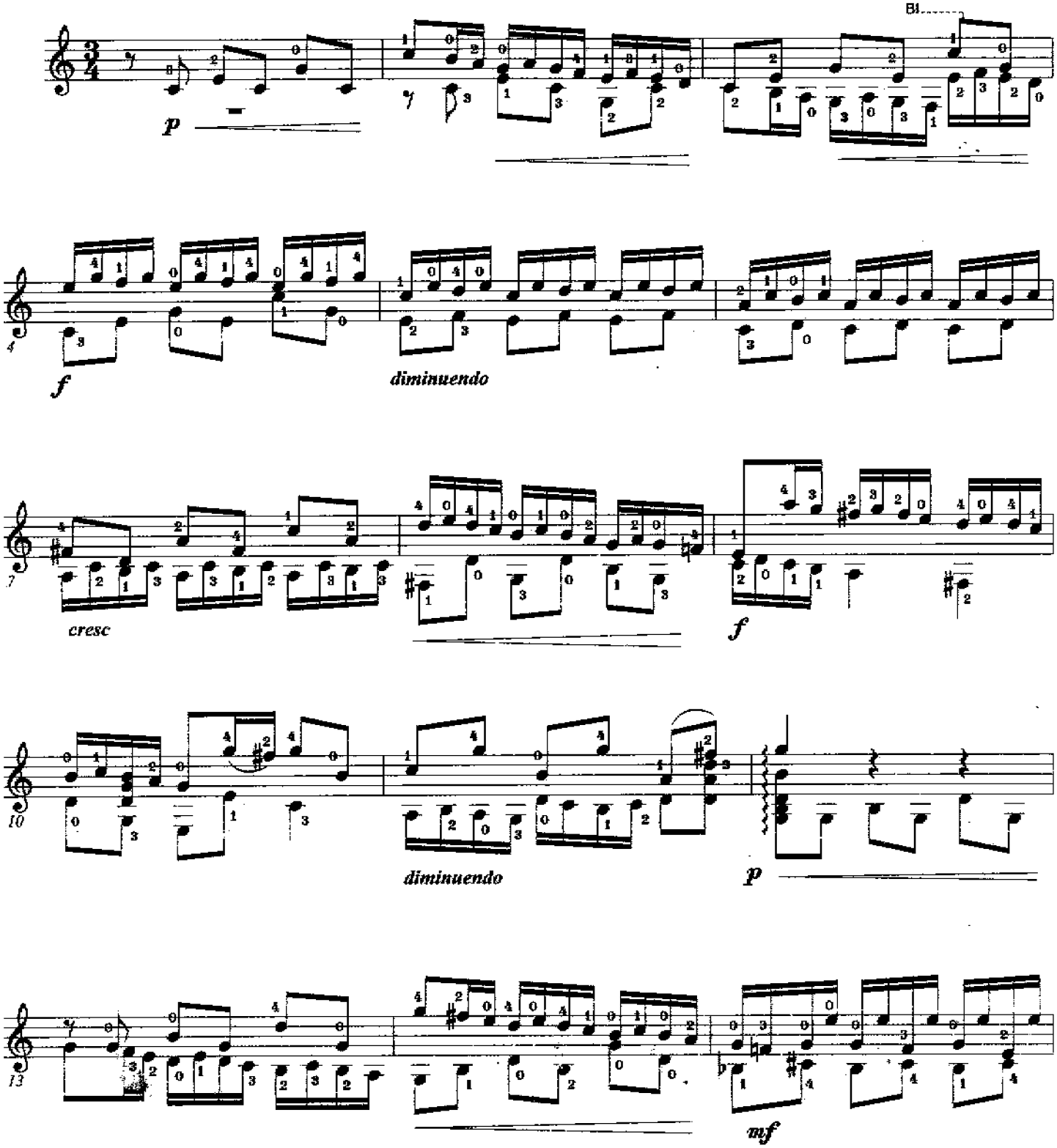
J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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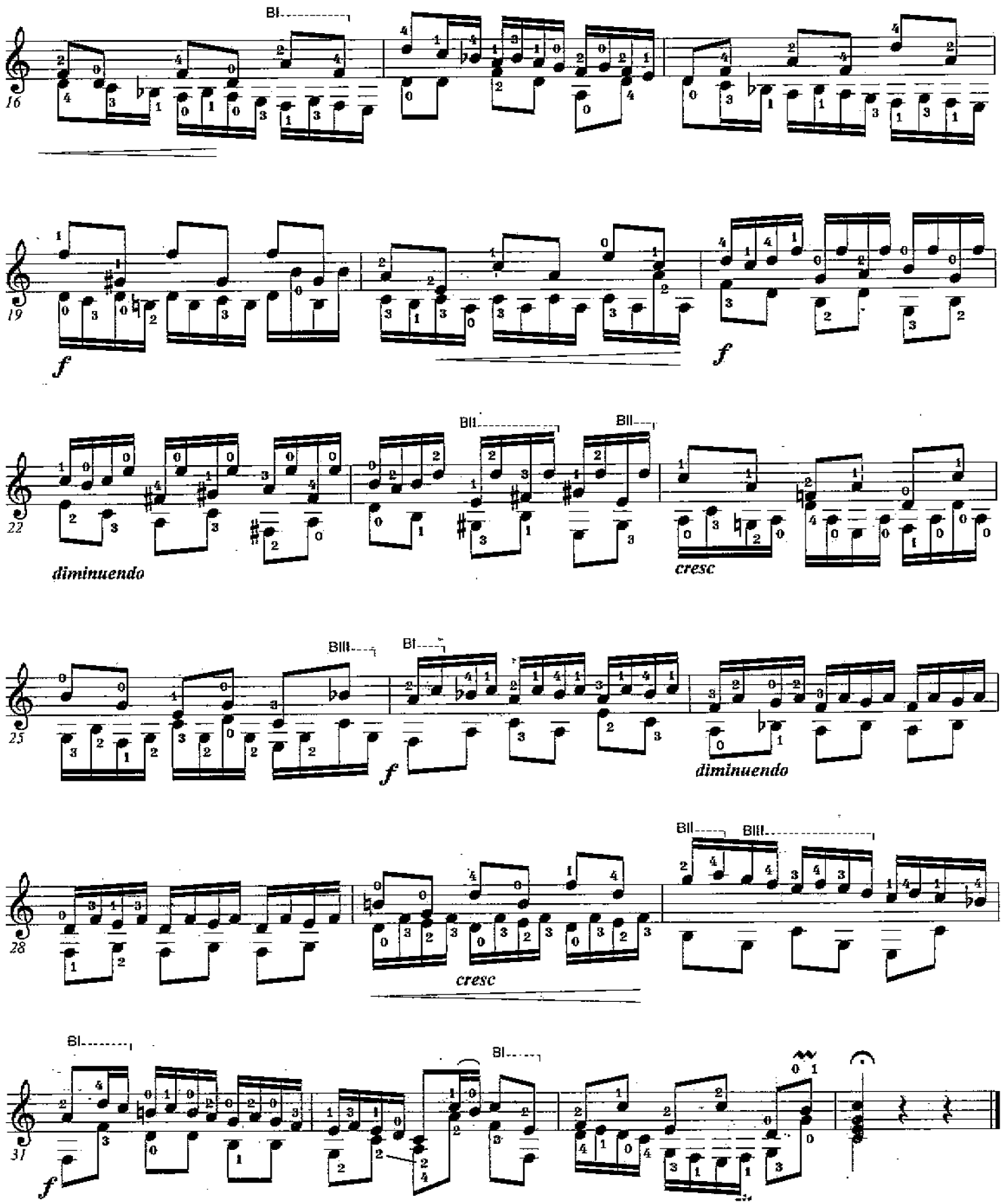
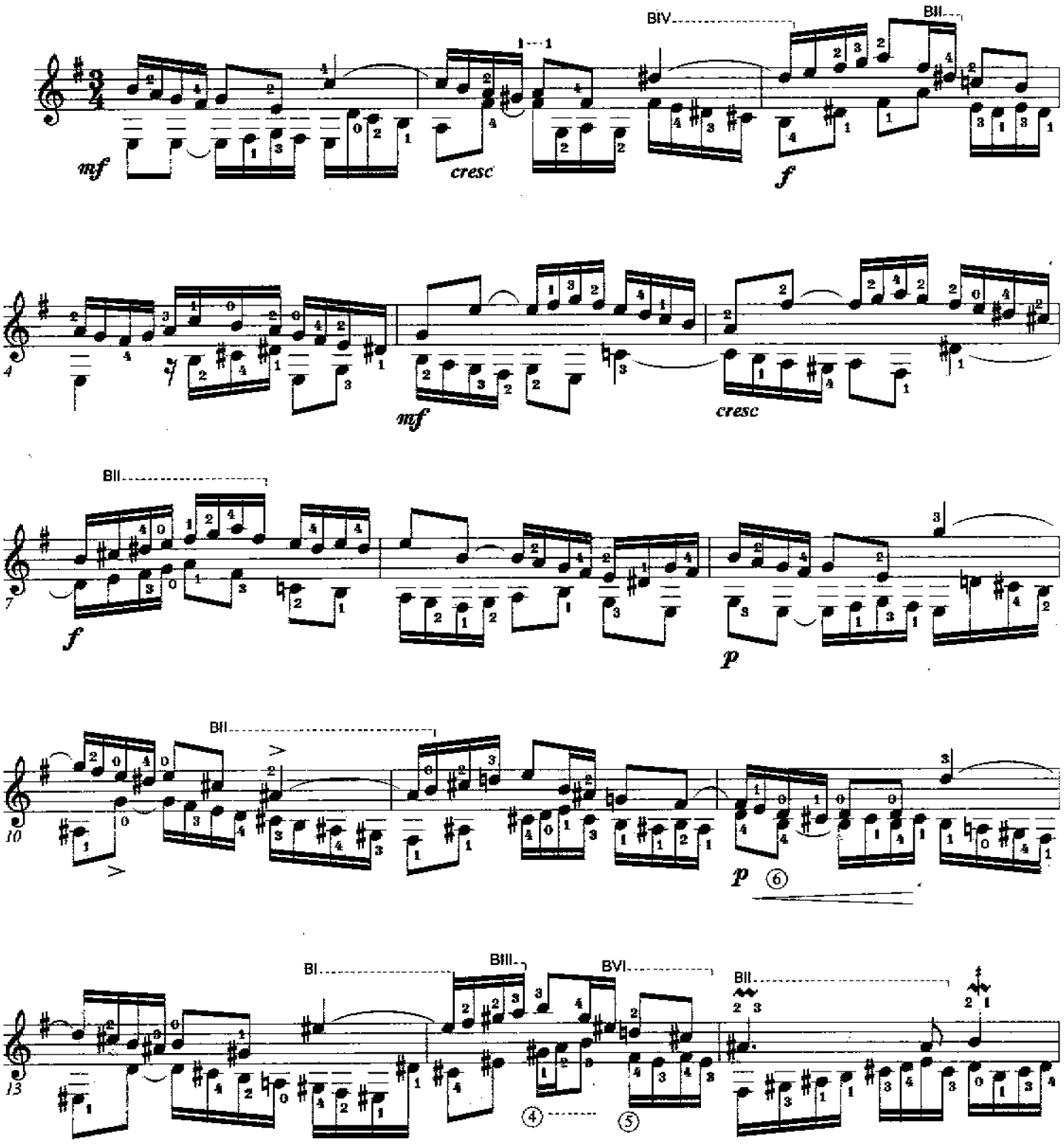

16
BI
19
f
f
22
BII
BII
diminuendo
cresc
25
BIII
BI
f
diminuendo
28
BII
BIII
cresc
31
BI
BI
f

Invention #9

(BWV 780)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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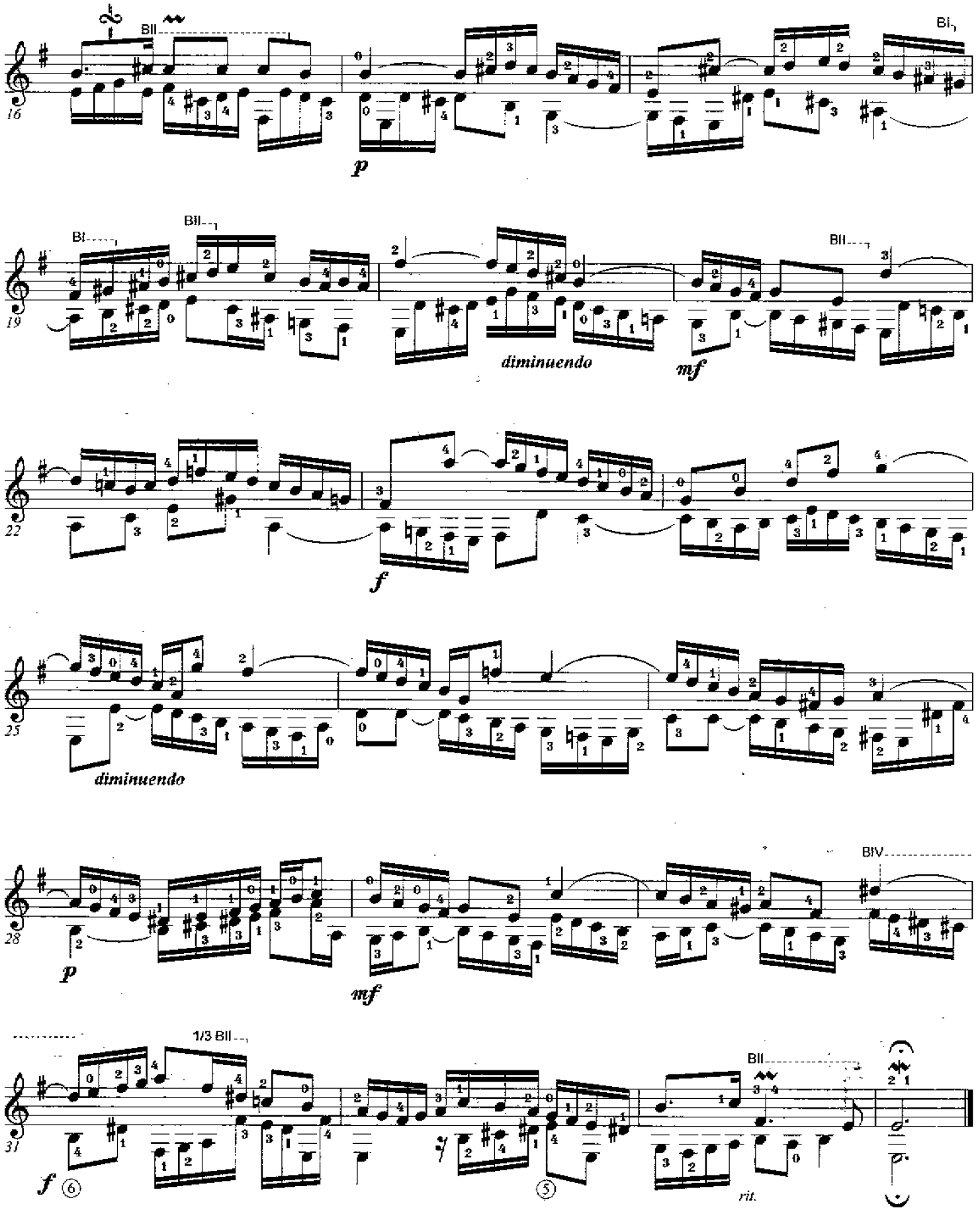
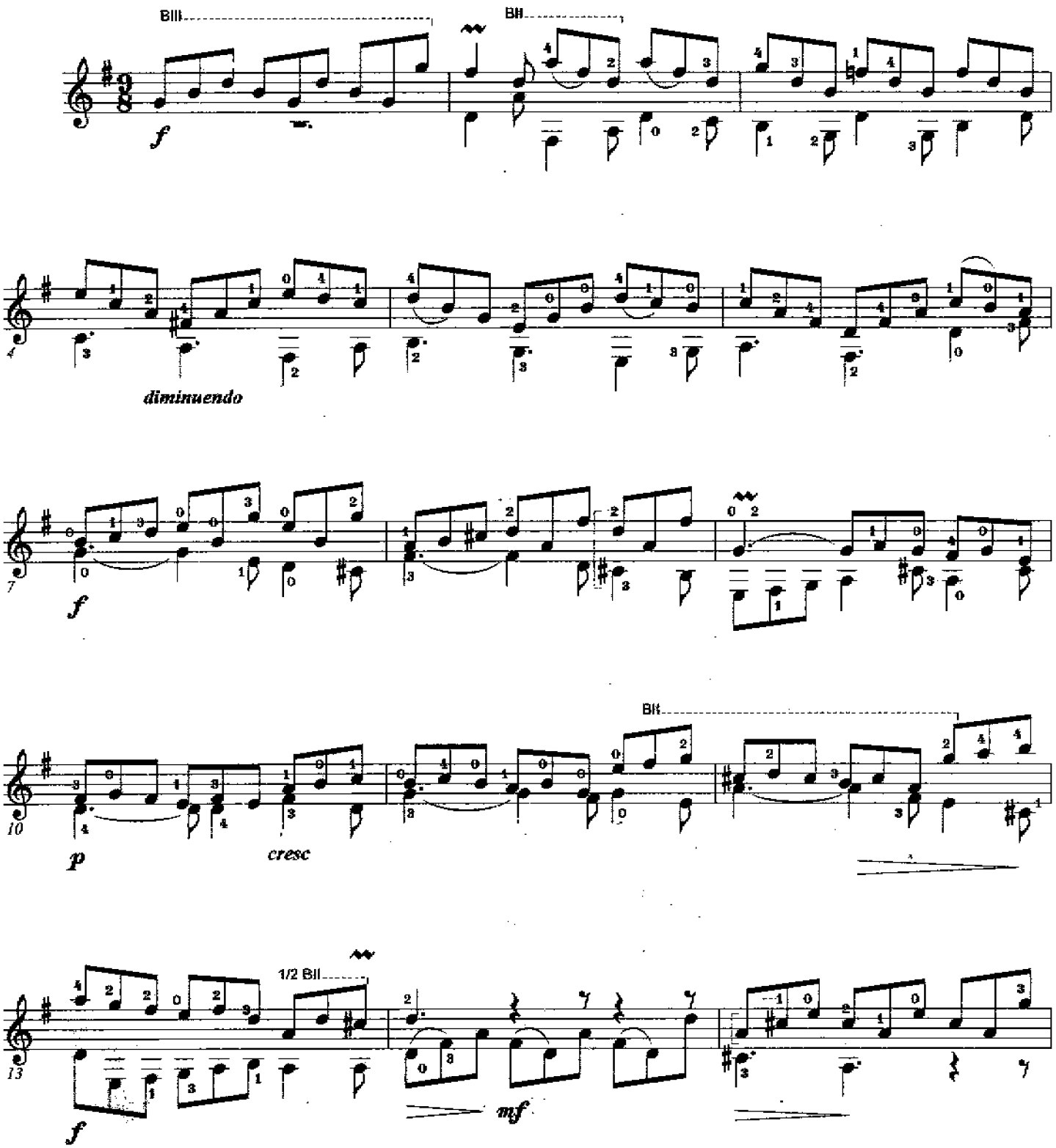

16
BII
p
BI
19
BI
BII
diminuendo
mf
BII
22
f
25
diminuendo
28
p
mf
BIV
31
1/3 BII
f
⑥
⑤
BII
rit.

Invention #10

(BWV 781)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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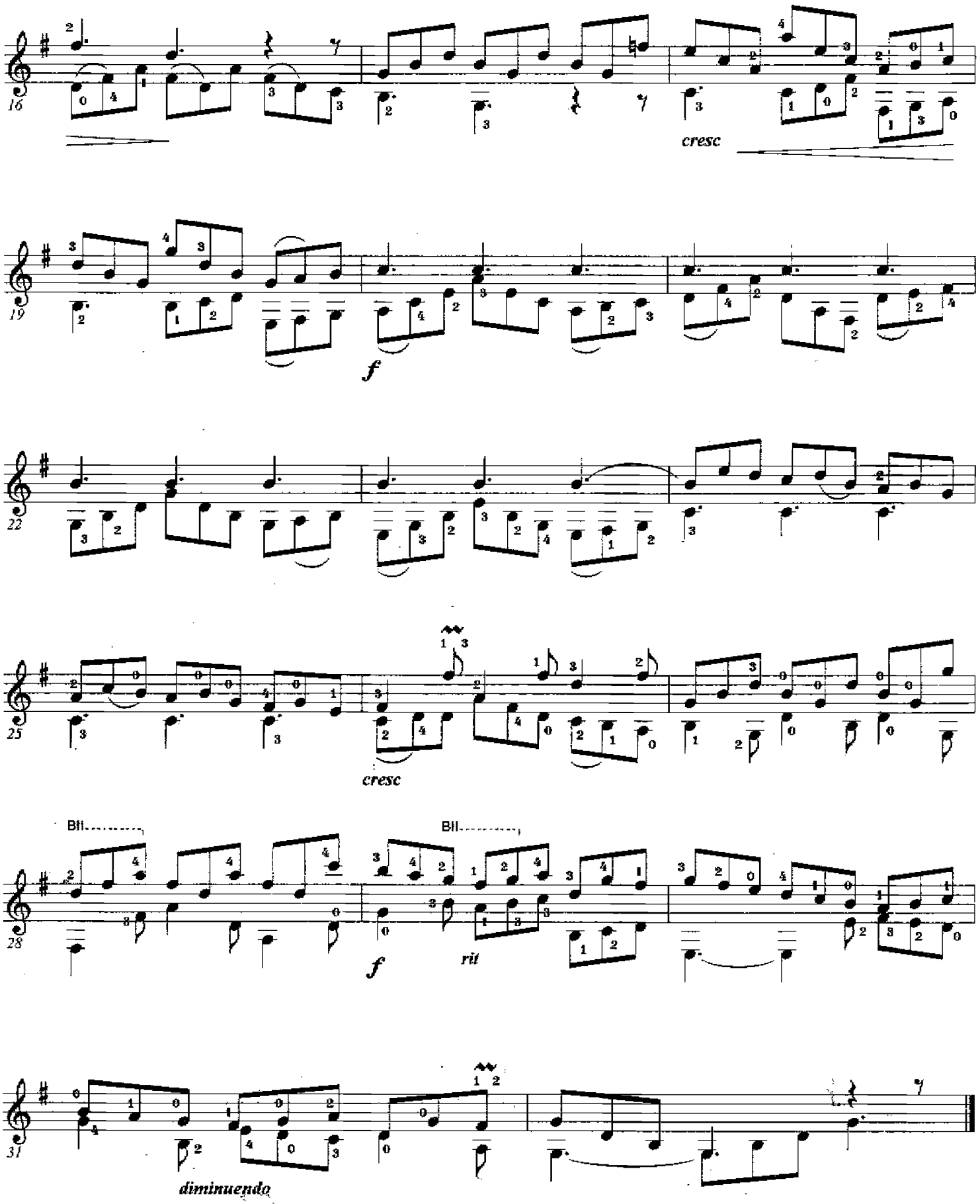
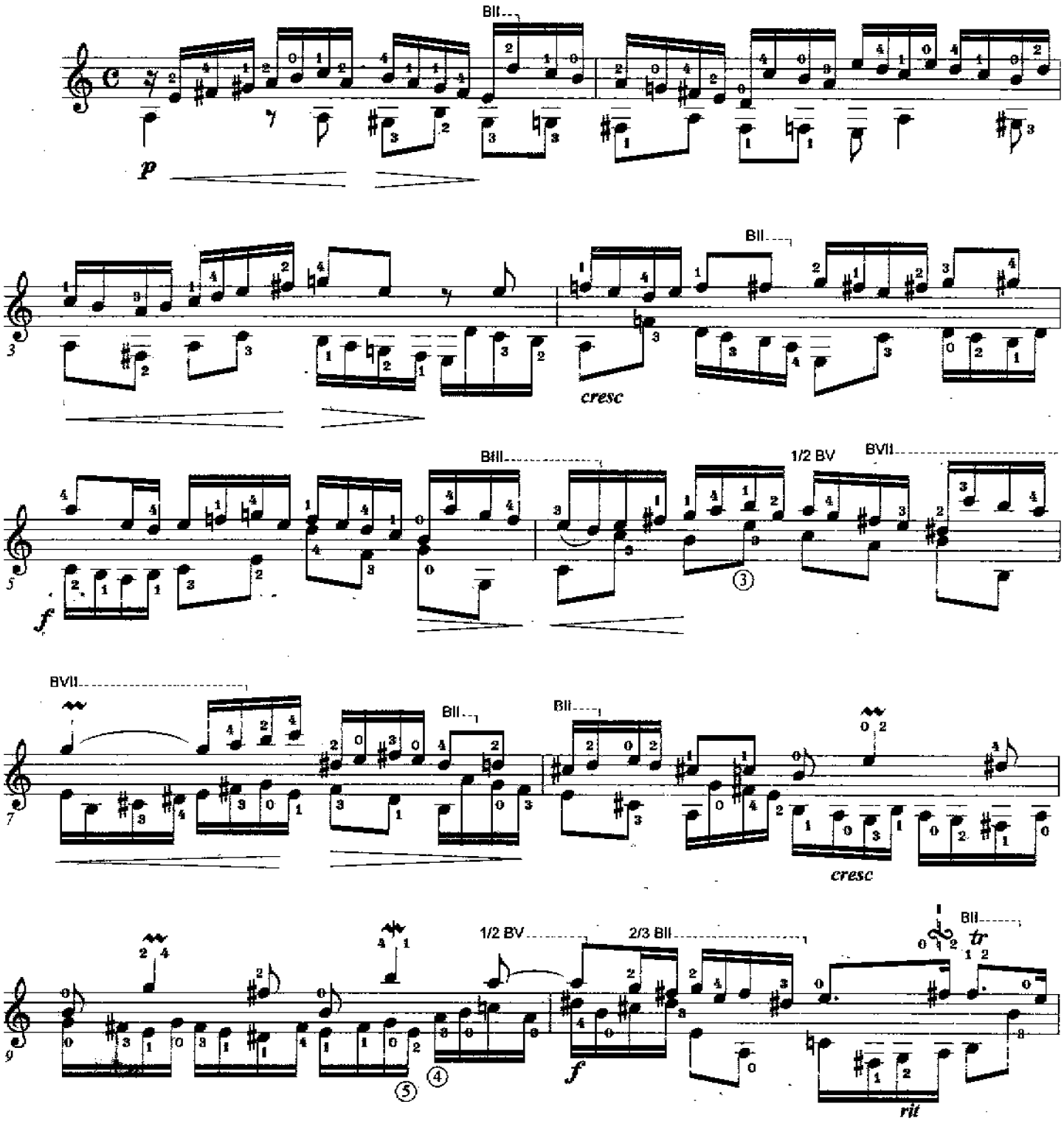

16
cresc
19
f
22
25
cresc
28
Bll.
Bll.
f
rit
31
diminuendo

Invention #11

(BWV 782)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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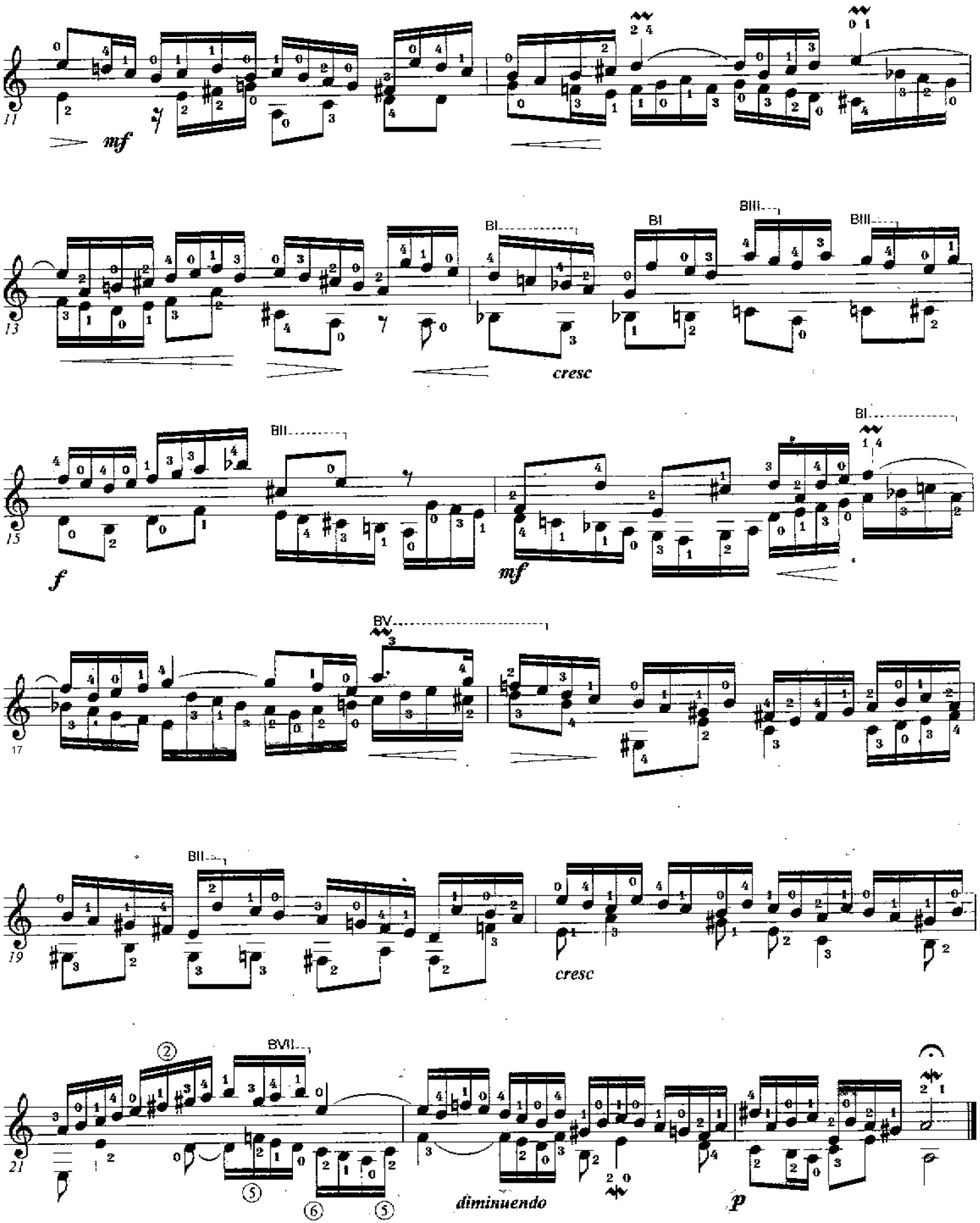
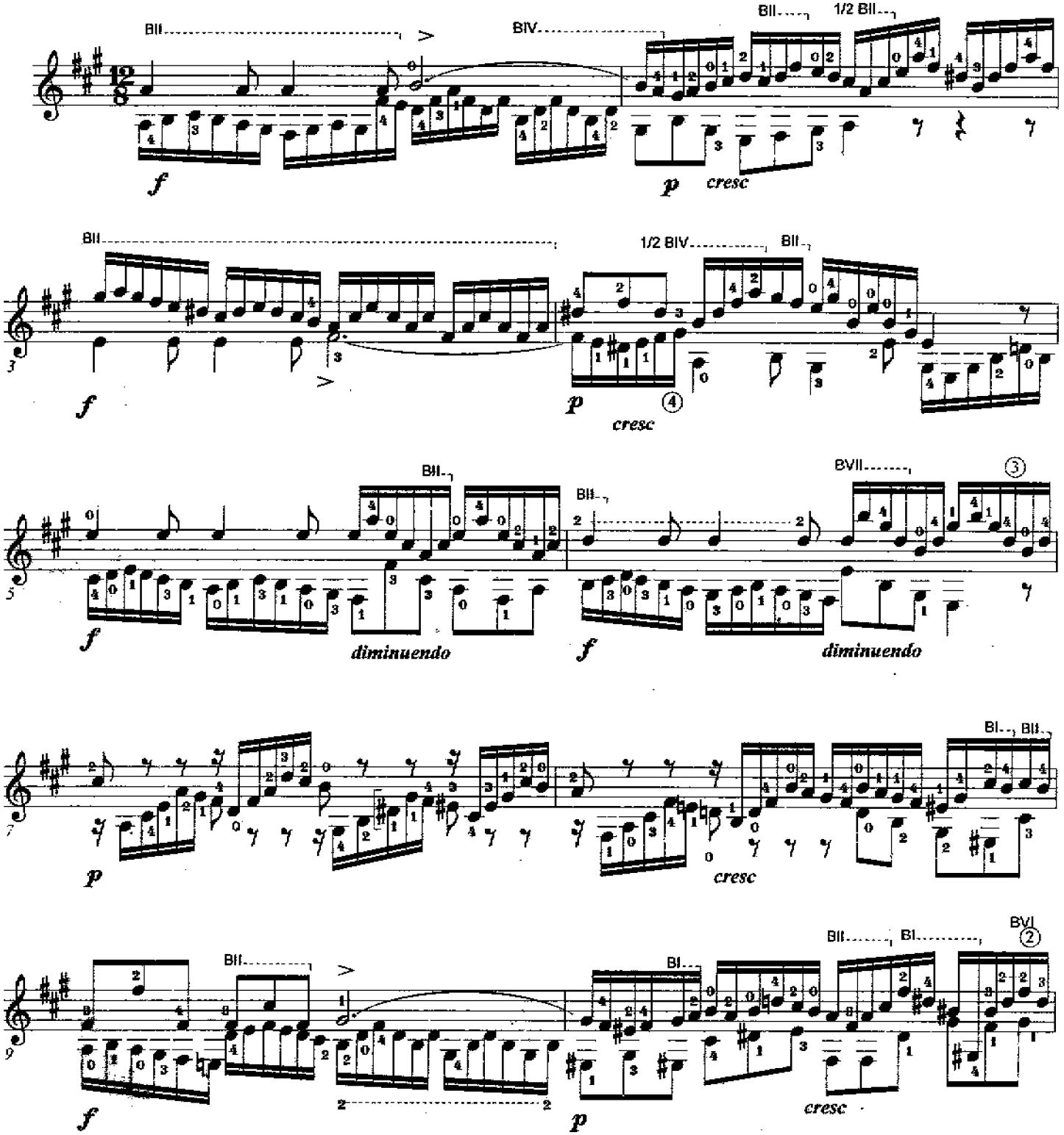

11
mf
13
BI
BI
BIII
BIII
cresc
15
BII
BI
f
mf
17
BV
19
BII
cresc
21
②
BVII
⑤
⑥
⑤
diminuendo
p

Invention #12

(BWV 783)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750)



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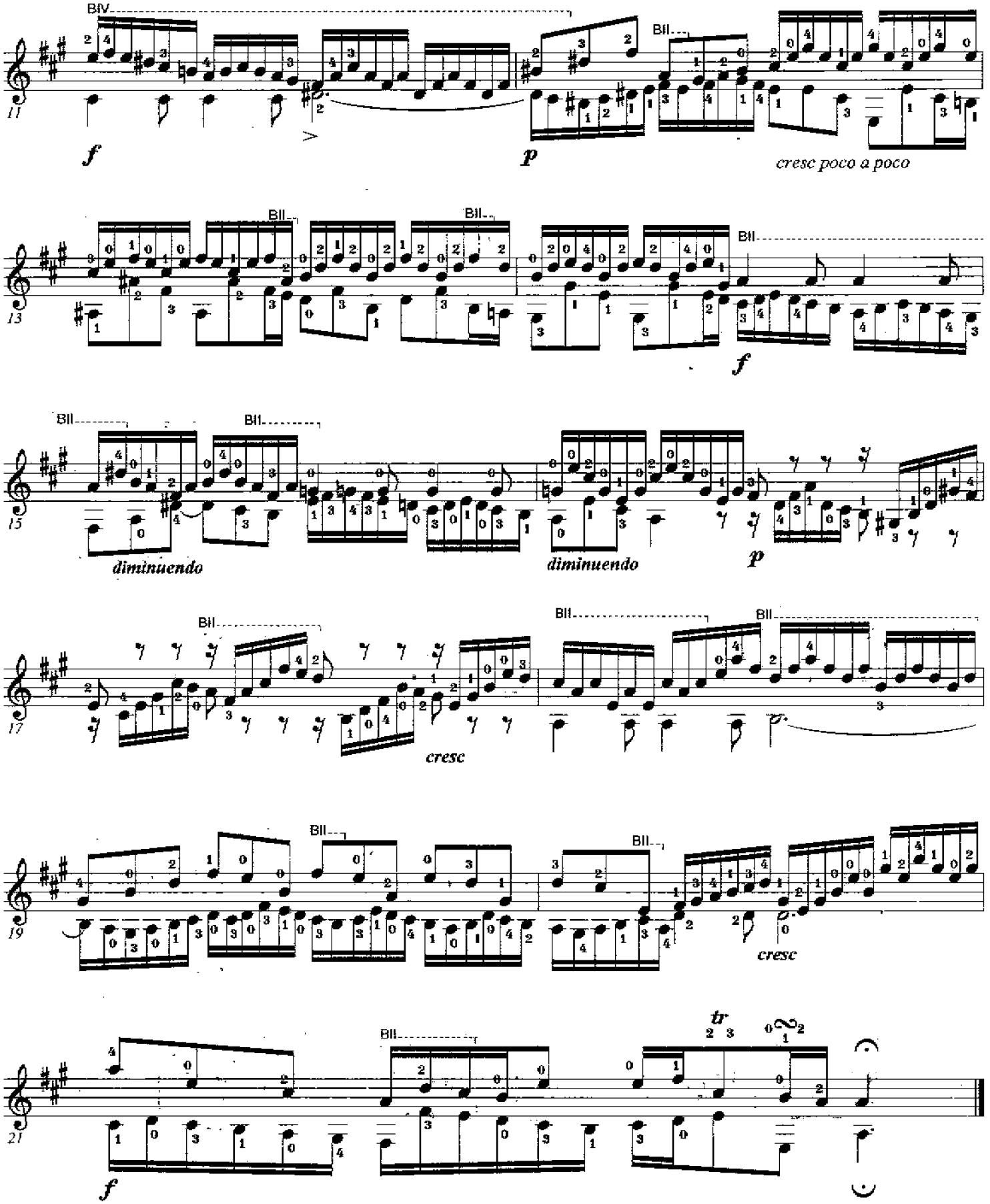
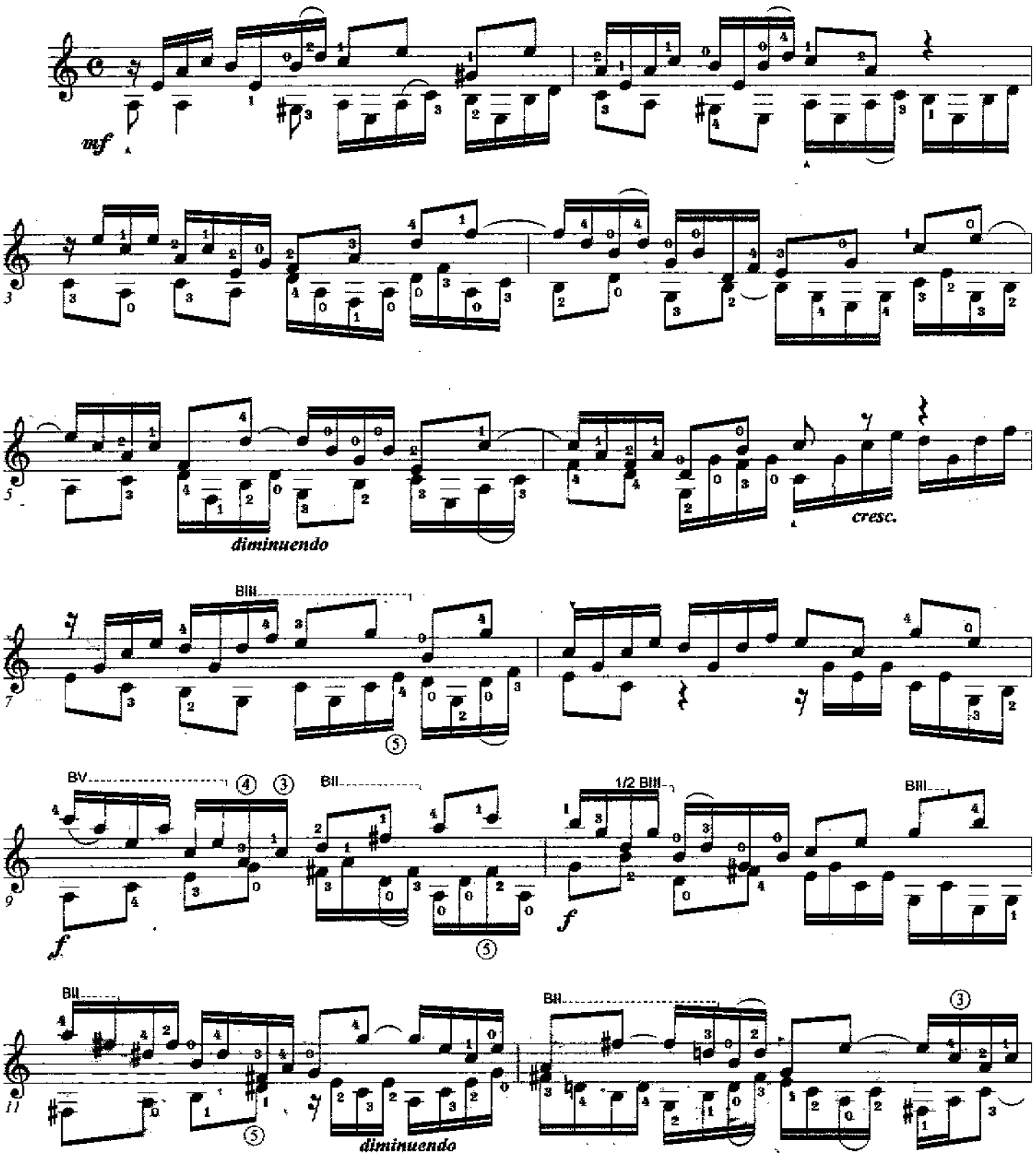

BIV
BII
11
f
p
cresc poco a poco
BII
BII
BII
13
f
BII
BII
15
diminuendo
diminuendo
p
BII
BII
17
cresc
BII
BII
19
cresc
BII
tr
21
f

Invention #13

(BWV 784)

Transcribed by R.F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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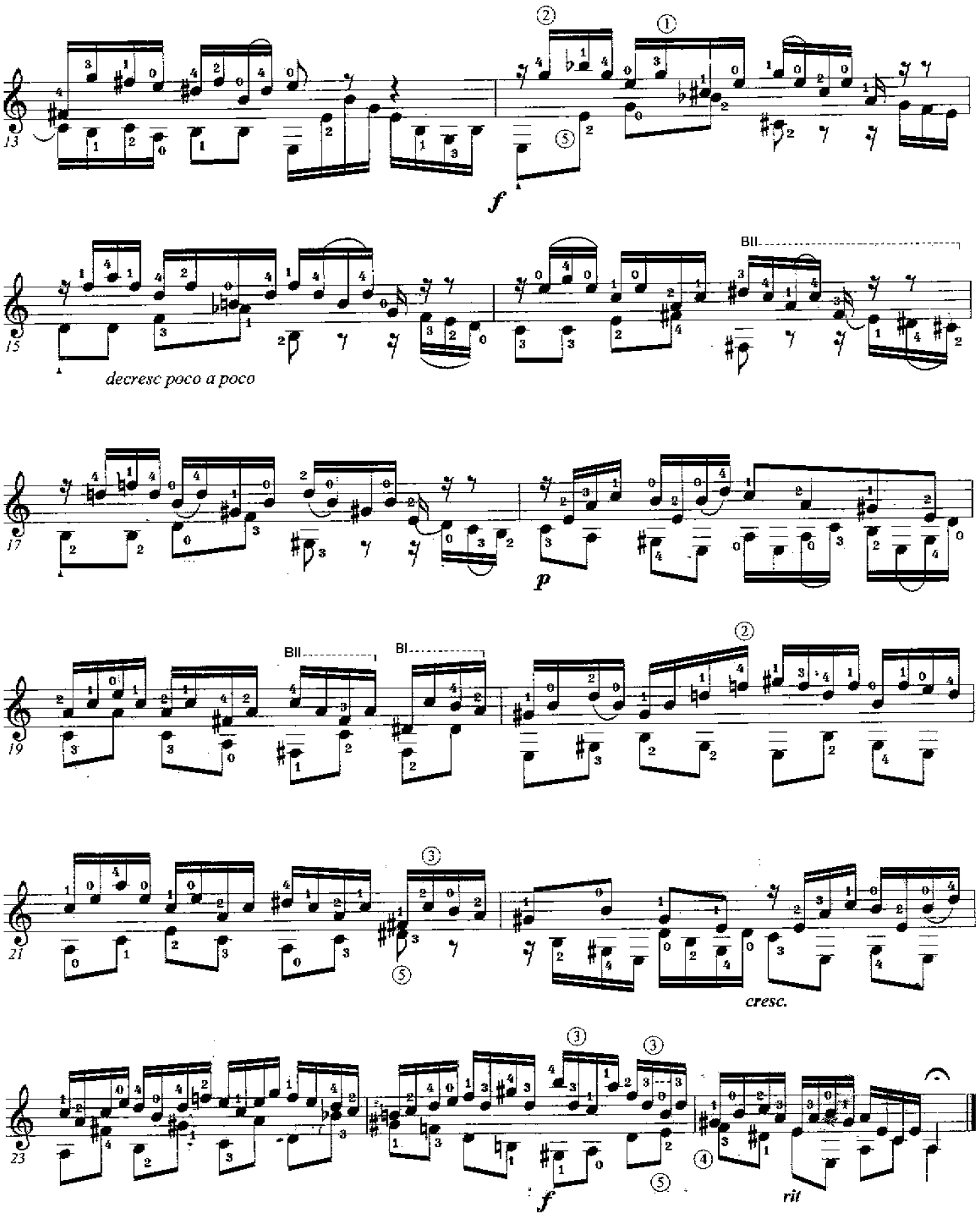
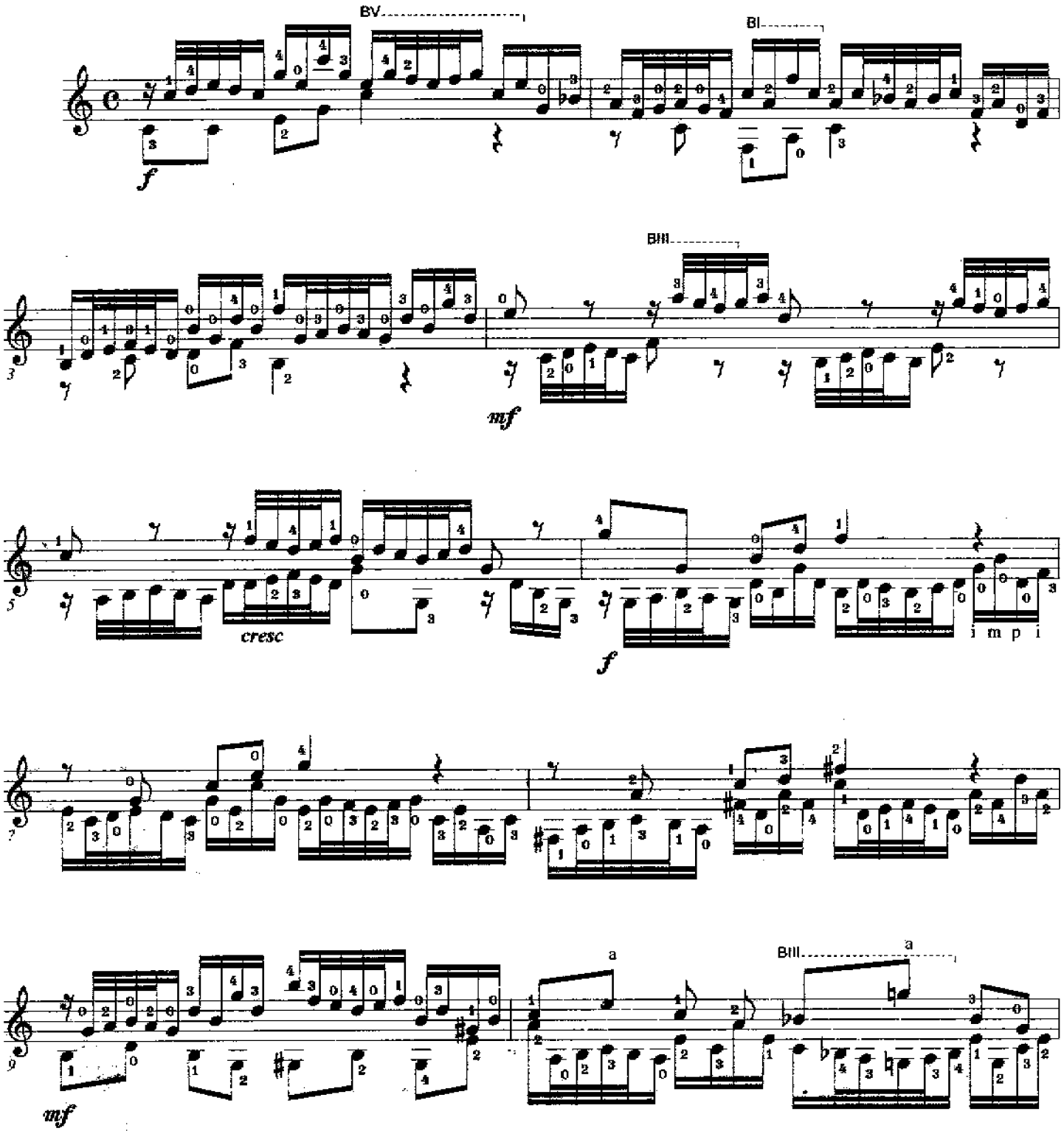

13
f
15
decresc poco a poco
BII
17
p
19
BII
BI
21
cresc.
23
f
rit

Invention #14

(BWV 785)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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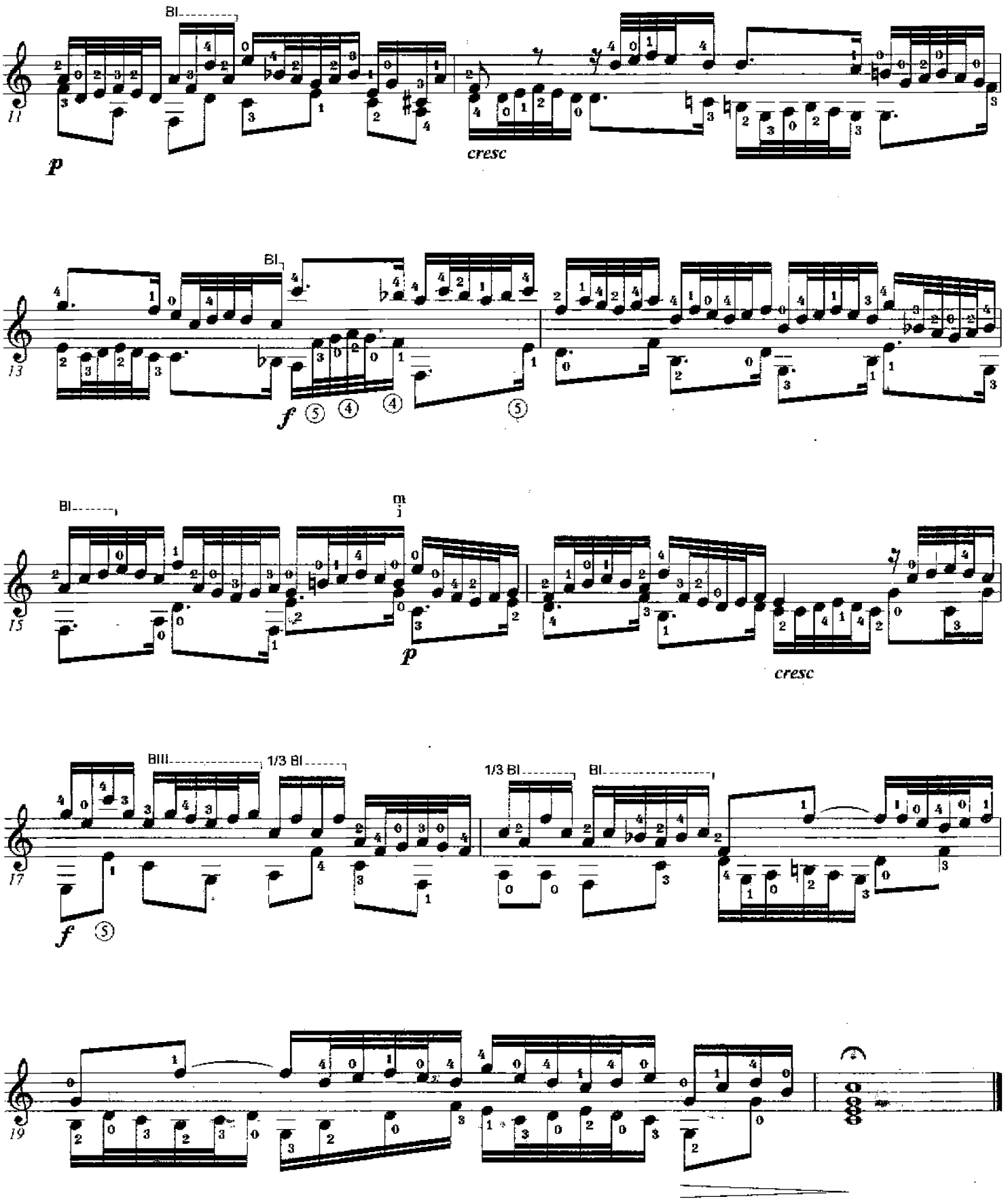
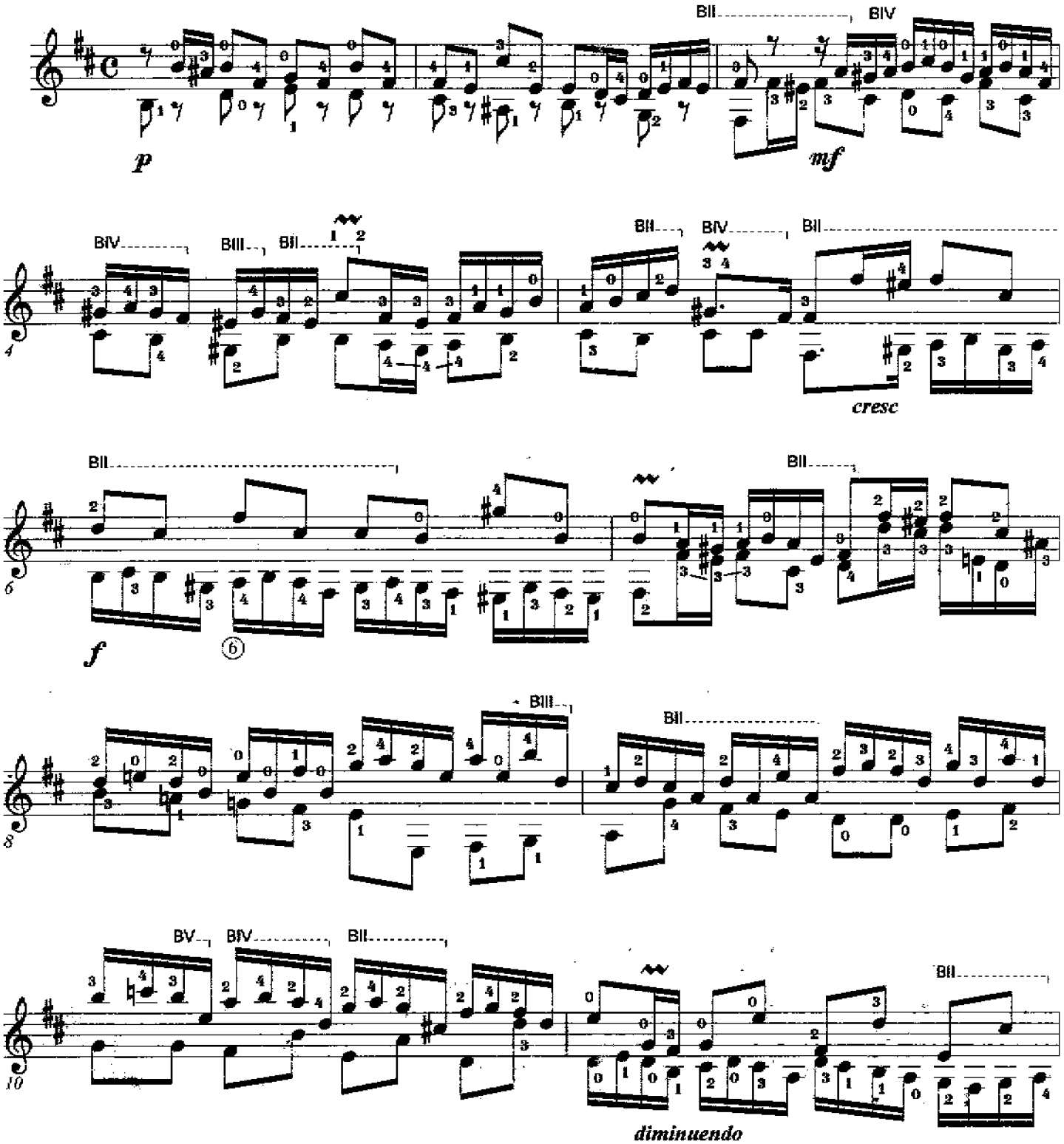

BI
p
cresc
BI
f
BI
p
cresc
BIII
1/3 BI
f
1/3 BI
BI

Invention #15

(BWV 786)

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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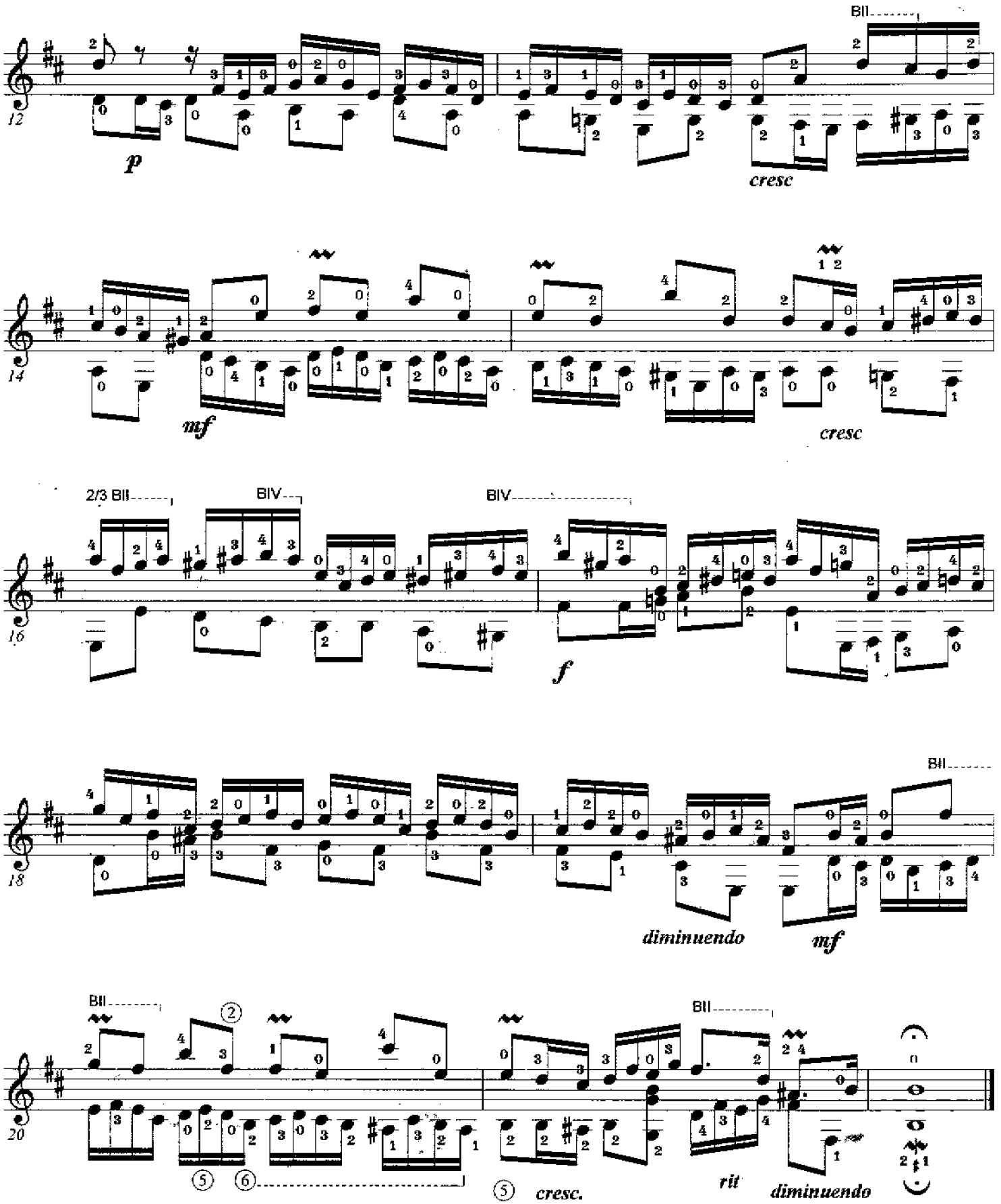
12
BII
p
cresc
14
mf
cresc
16
2/3 BII
BIV
BIV
f
18
BII
diminuendo
mf
20
BII
BII
cresc.
rit
diminuendo

Johann Sebastian Bach was born on March 21, 1685, in the town of Eisenach, the seventh and youngest child of Johann Ambrosius and Maria Elisabeth Bach. Born to a family name that already had become synonymous with "musician", Bach's future elite status as a musical intellect or composer was neither foreseeable nor expected. As he matured, Bach's ability to adhere to his finely developed sense of structure coupled with the expansion of his own musical and scientific development must rank high among the reasons for his list of achievements as composer and musicologist, which may only briefly be summarized by the following works:

- ***The Well Tempered Clavier, Inventions, Sinfonia*:** Musical idea within Major and Minor Tonality
- ***The Art of Fugue*:** Fugue and Canonic Structure
- ***Brandenburg Concertos, Keyboard Concertos*:** Instrumentation
- ***The Chromatic Fantasy & Fugue:*** Harmonic Boundary Expansion
- ***Chorales, Cantatas and Arias*:** Vocal and Instrumentation
- ***Works for Unaccompanied Cello, Flute, Violin:*** Polyphonic Extension

Two works, widely circulated after Bach's death in 1750, laid the eventual foundation for tonal harmony: The Well Tempered Clavier and the collection of four-part Chorales. His methods and principles of harmony, thorough bass, and counterpoint, all cohesively combined, irrevocably changed the face of European music theory.

Johann Sebastian Bach

The Complete 15 Two Part Keyboard Inventions

Alternate Tunings for Select Pieces

Transcribed for Solo Classical Guitar

By Richard F. Savage

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SCGT, Inc. New York, USA

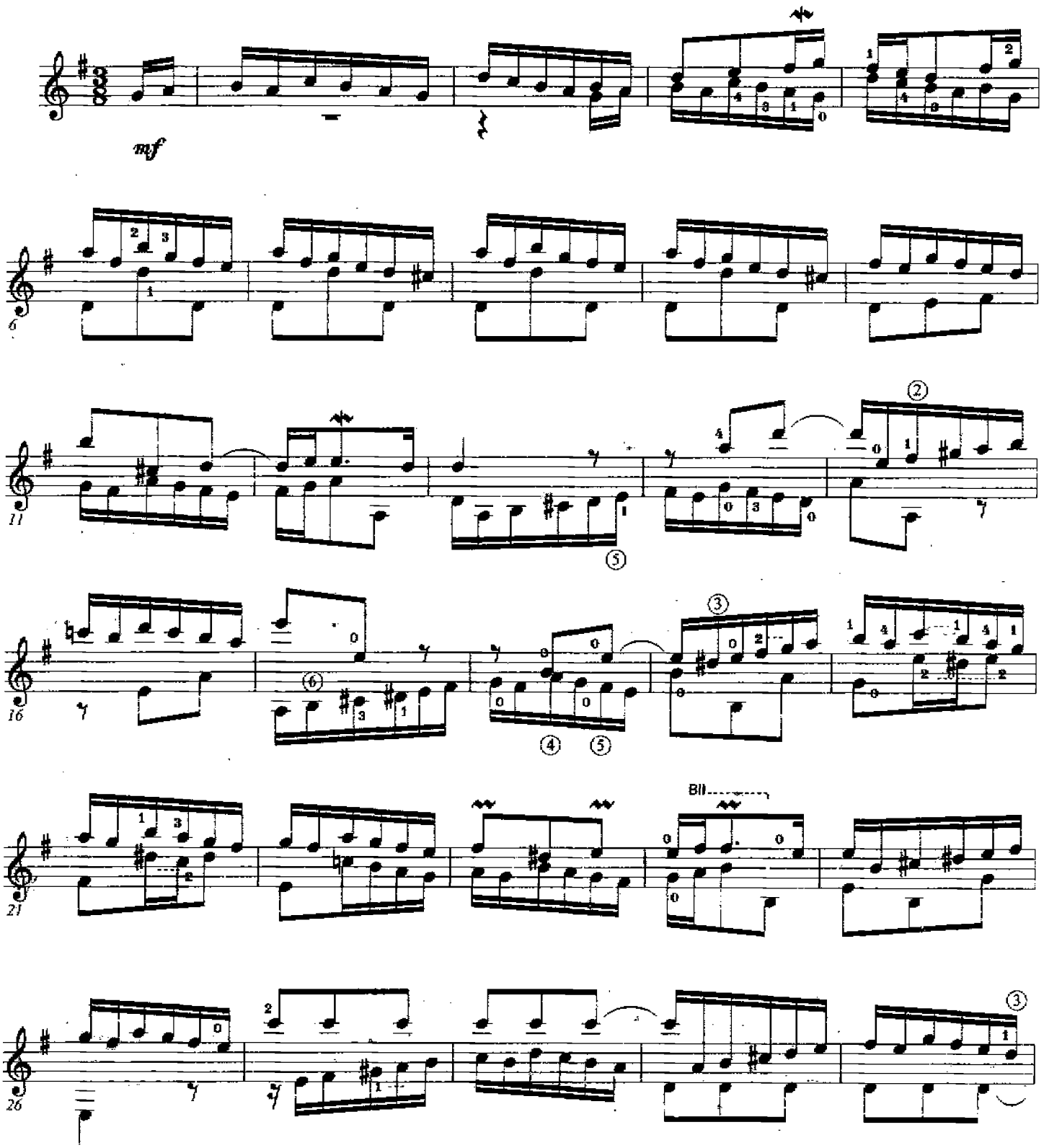
Invention #3

(BWV 774)

Original in D Major

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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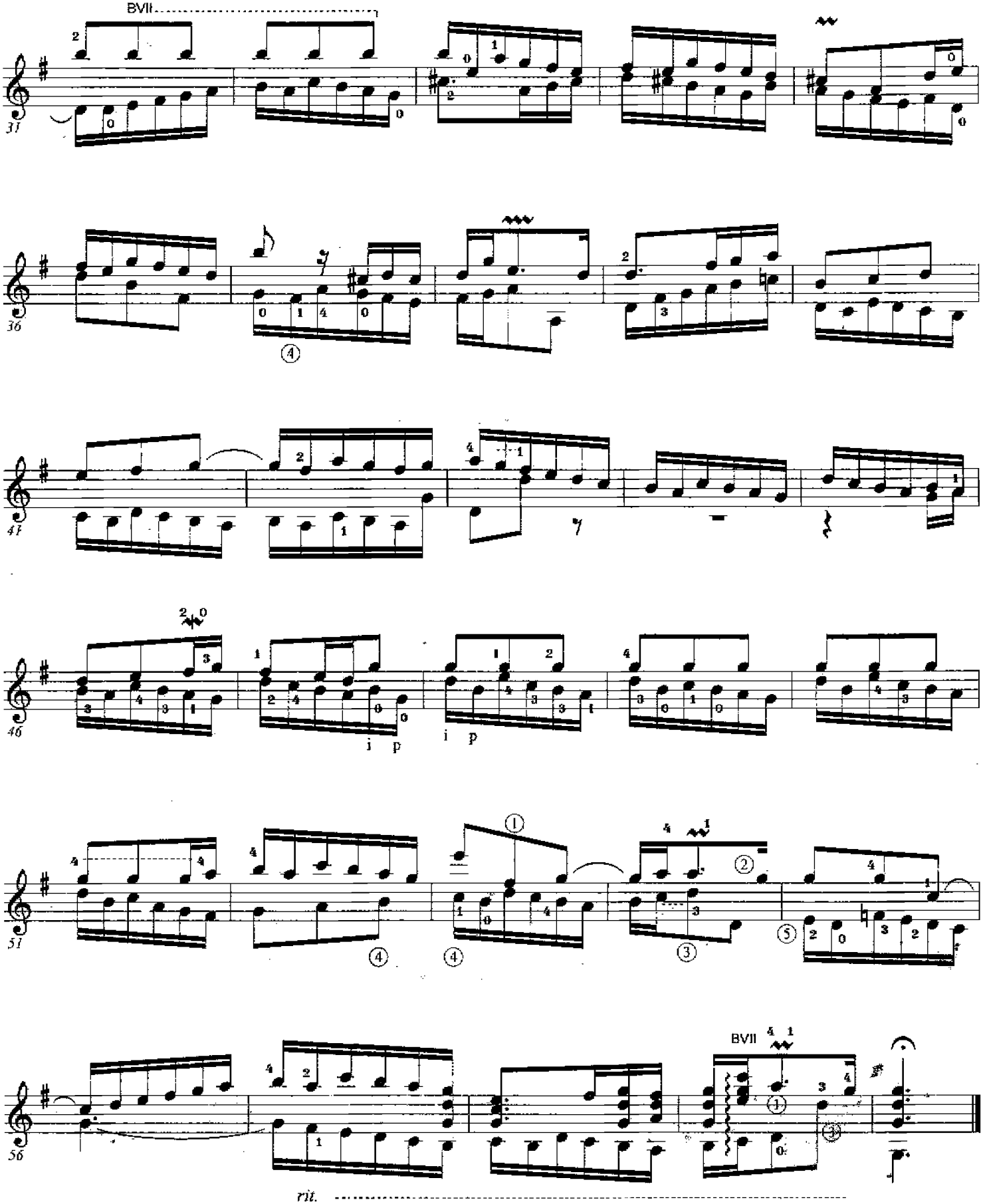

BVII
31
36
41
46
i p
i p
51
56
BVII
rit.

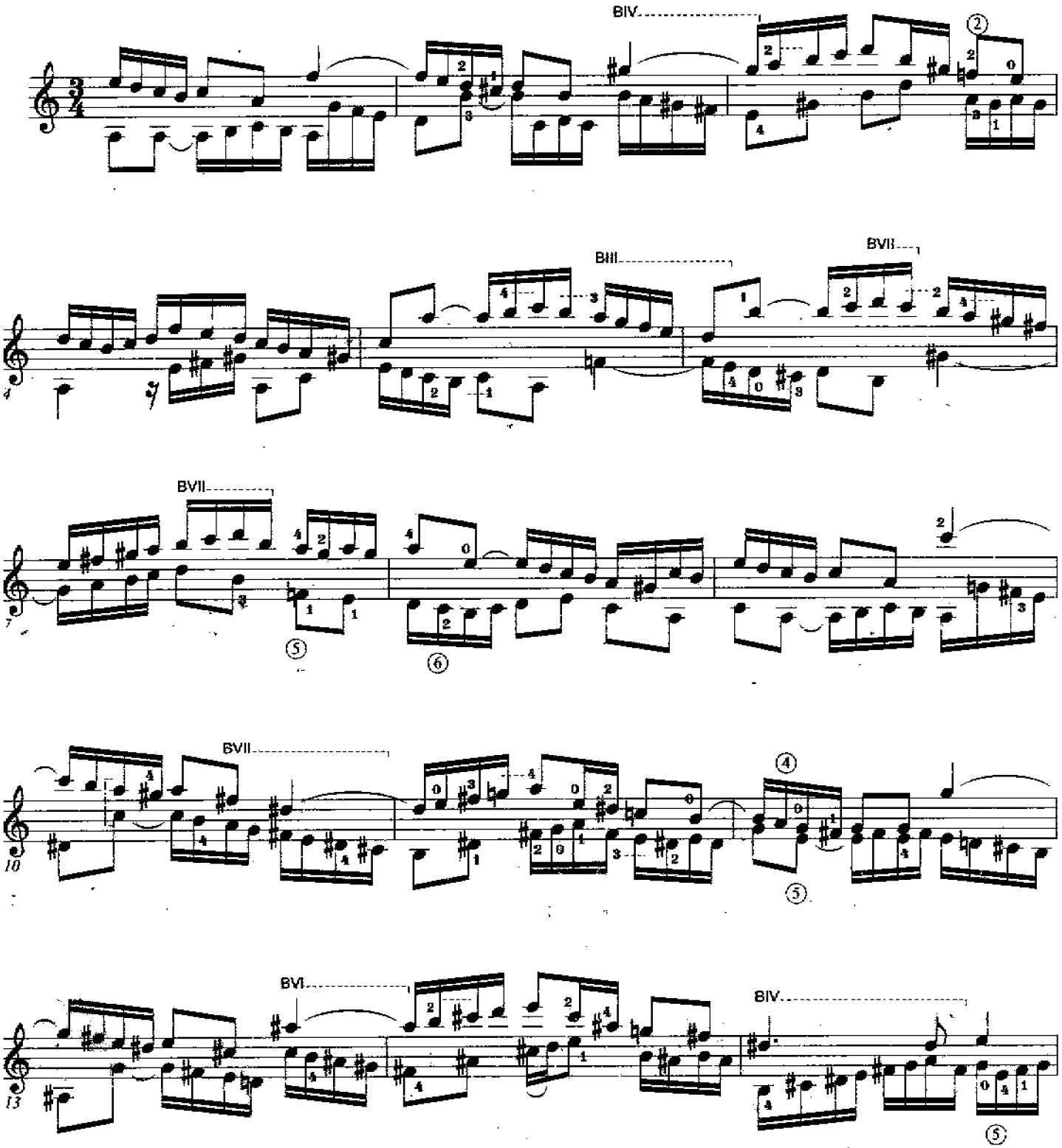
Invention #9

(BWV 780)

Original in F Minor

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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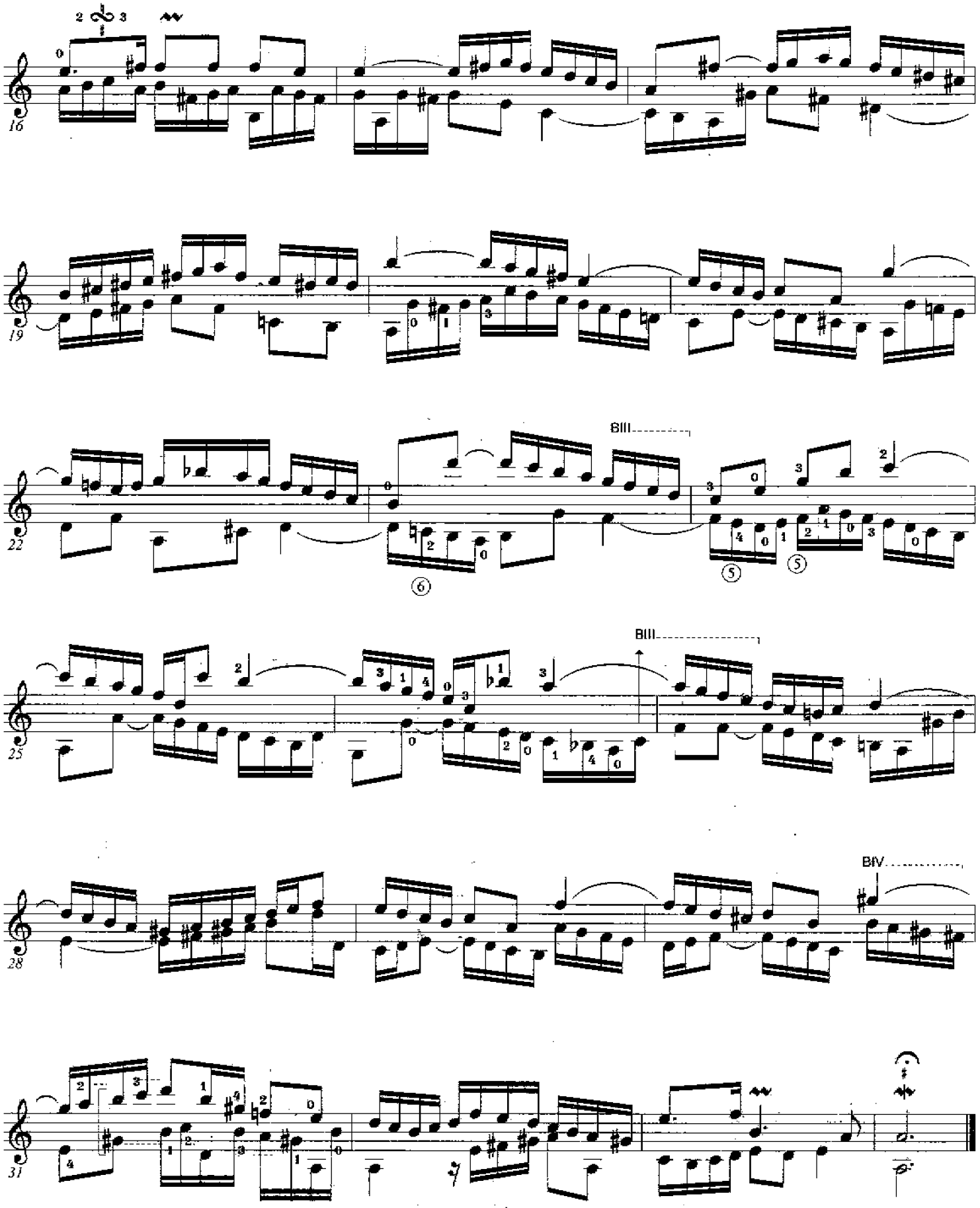

16
19
22
BIII
6
5
5
25
BIII
28
BIV
31

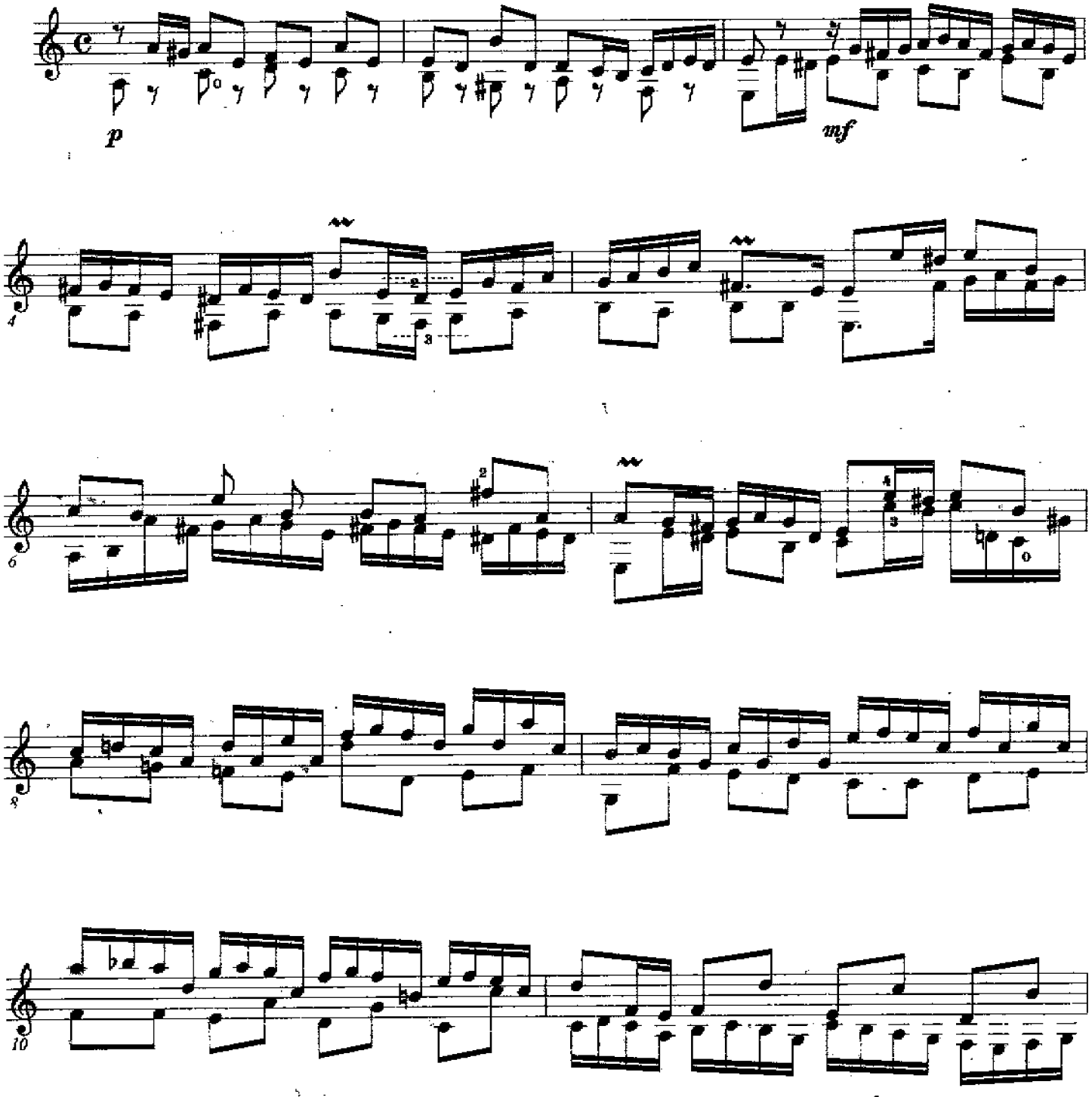
Invention #15

(BWV 786)

Original in B Minor

Transcribed by Richard F. Sayage

J.S. Bach (1685-1750)



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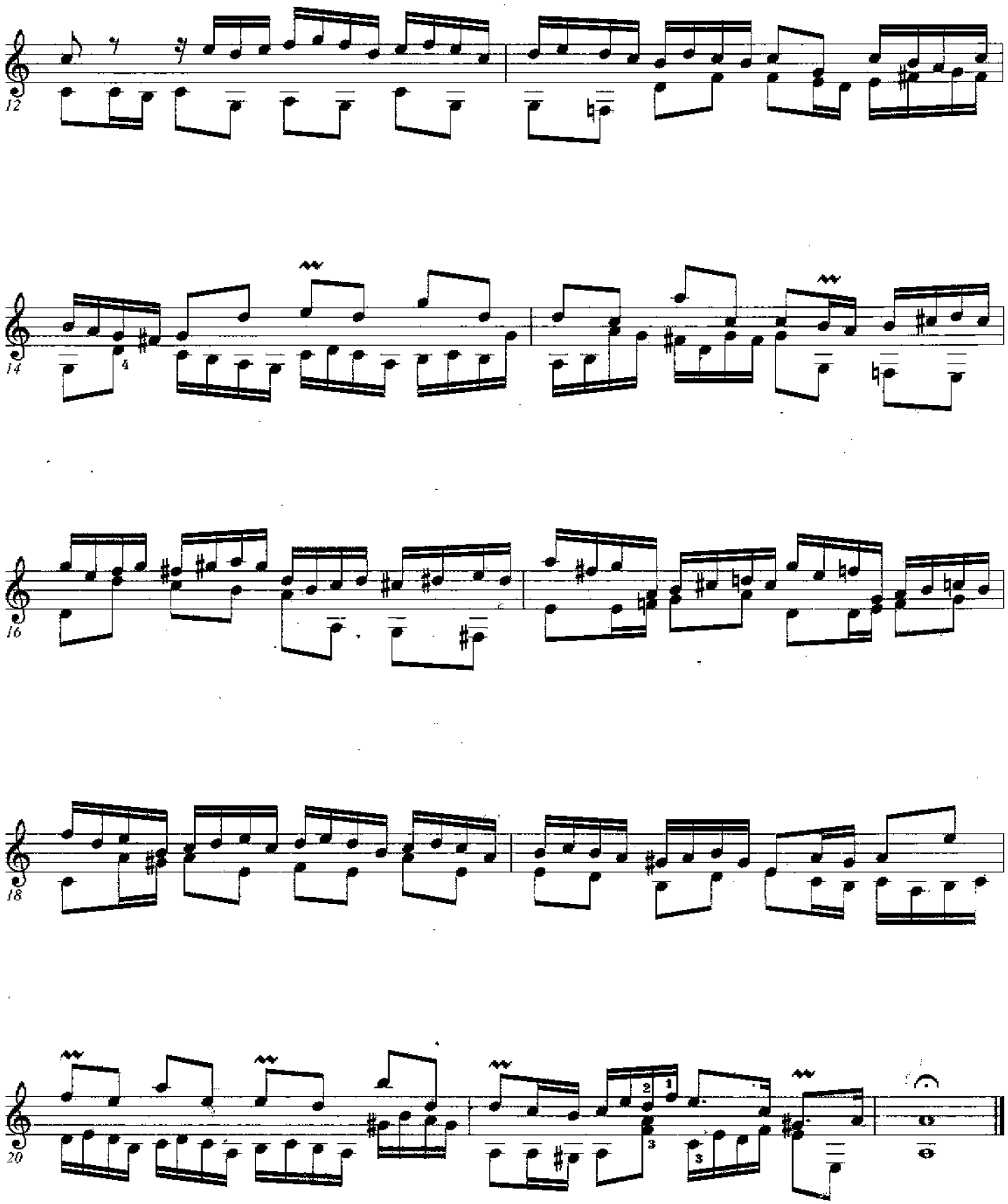

12
14
16
18
20

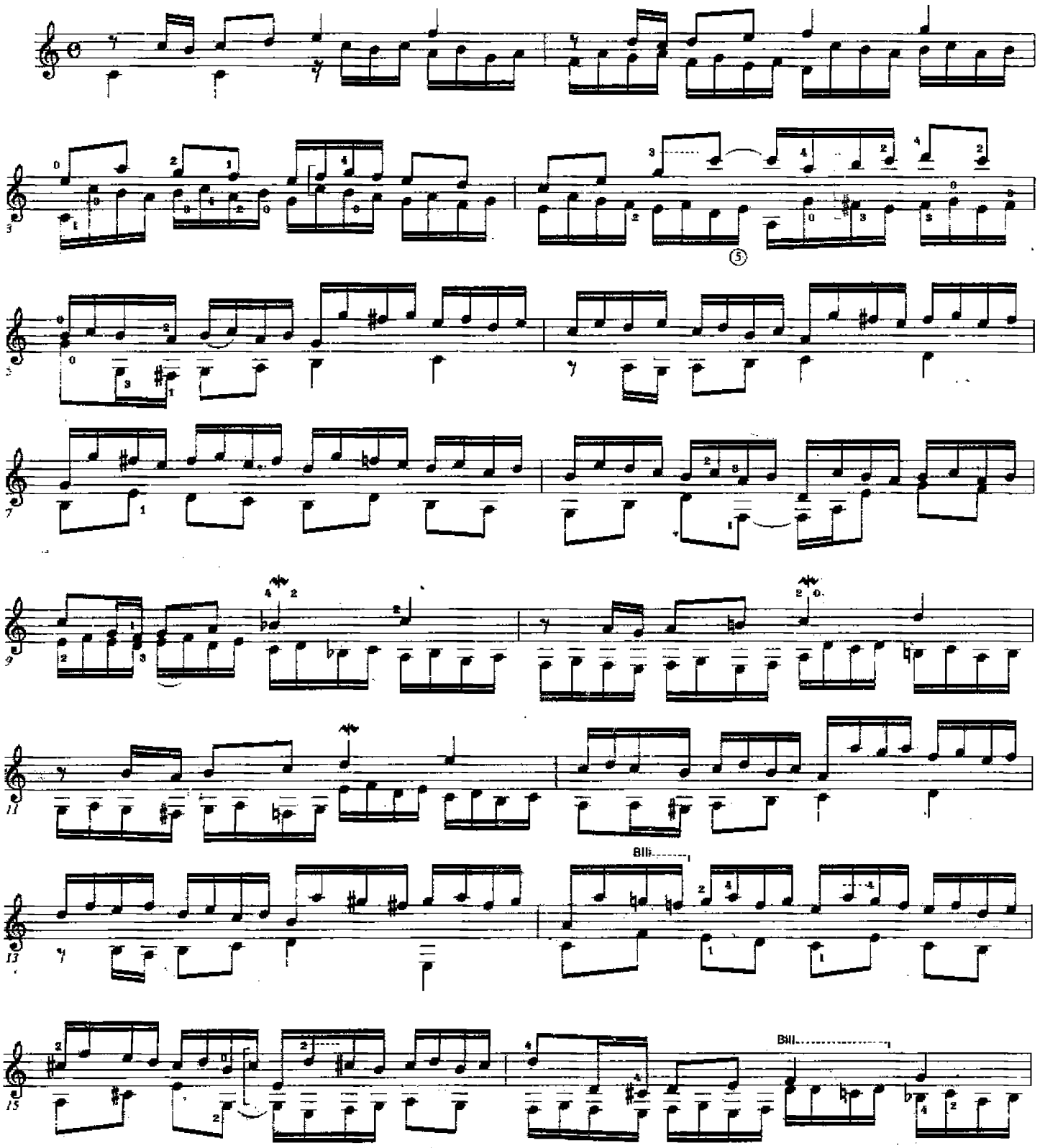
Invention #5

(BWV 776)

Original in Eb Major

Transcribed by Richard F. Savage

J.S. Bach (1685 - 1750)



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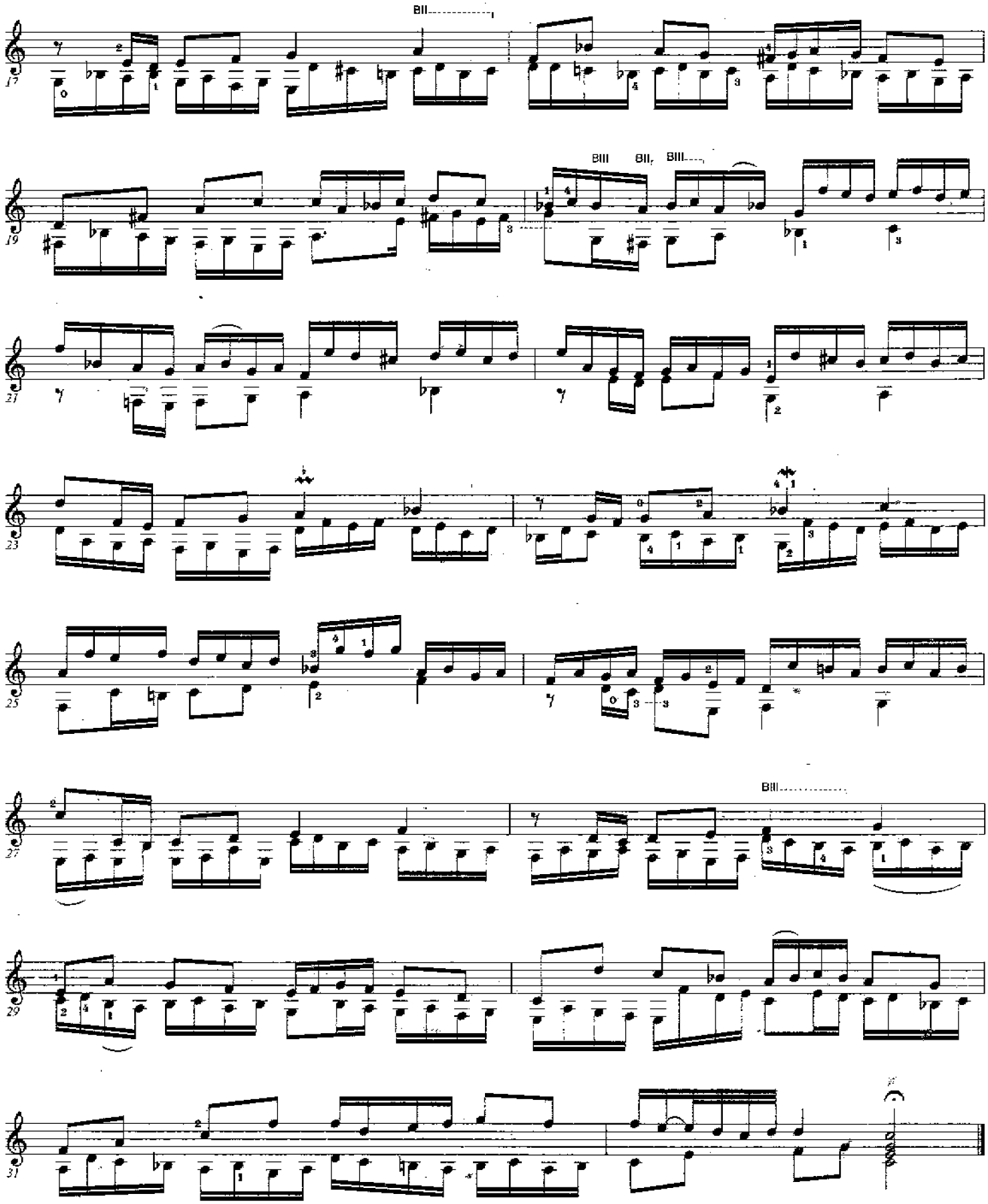
BII
17
BIII
BII
BIII
19
21
23
25
BII
27
29
31