8 Miniatures for Guitar

Michael Bemmels
2020

8 Miniatures for Guitar - Composer's Notes

Here I am: back again with the mighty pen and eight tiny new compositions credited to my name. It would be tempting for me to write about these Miniatures as if my views on them represent *the* definitive truth of "what they are," but I fear that this is not aligned with the actual reality of the situation. I should rather say that I am "sharing my own perspective" of the Miniatures.

I would like to set forth the unconventional view that music, and intellectual concepts about music, have no real existence outside of an individual's personal first-hand experience of it (and perhaps quite a few things other than music should be understood this way too…). As a human being, I cannot objectively experience "music itself," but can only experience my own subjective interpretation of music, which I myself create. When hearing a piece of music, the energetic vibrations of sound waves are *interpreted by me* as music when they come into contact with my own personal sensory-organs, brain, consciousness, etc. If I (and all other humans) were removed entirely from the aforementioned sound waves, there would really not be any actual *music* in existence: it only *becomes* music when a human is there to *interpret* it as music within his/her own experiential reality. Do you see what I mean? In sum: I cannot "tell you what the world is," I can only "tell you what *my* world is!"

It should also be understood that the conditions that create "my world" are a temporary thing. The Michael Bemmels that is writing this now is surely a transient individual, with an absolute guarantee that future existences of this "Michael Bemmels" entity will be different than the current one. For an example of changes to my person, consider that the Michael Bemmels from 20 years ago had never even laid hands upon a guitar yet! (In some regards it is a puzzling wonder how the same name can be conventionally applied to an unceasingly dynamic being like a human…)

Clarifying further, then, I am at this moment "sharing my own *current* perspective" of these Miniatures. In 10 years from now, future Michael Bemmels will be able to listen to the recordings and read these words, and experience a unique new subjective interpretation of this "current" perspective all over again. (What a kind gift I am leaving for my future self!)

Branching now beyond my own self-oriented contemplations, it is hopefully not too big of a stretch to remark that each and every individual human must have his/her own unique subjective experiential interpretation of music. Each and every one of us has our own special combination of genes, upbringing, nervous-system, personality, life experiences, etc. that have lead to the creation of "what we are" at this particular moment in our lives. While humans may indeed be able to share many experiences and perspectives in common, it will never truly be *exactly* the same from one human to the next. So, for another emphatic repetition: I cannot tell you what *your* world is, I cannot tell you what *the* world is, I can only tell you what *my* world is right at this exact moment!

With this in mind, I cordially invite you to have a hopefully meaningful, worthwhile, and not-altogether-too-unpleasant experience of the music and writings that have come into existence at this moment, as a part of the wonderfully complex and dynamic world we live in.

Miniature No. 1 - Long Time No C

This first Miniature was composed as a musical realization of the play on words generated from the homonym substitution of “C” for “See.” I decided the piece would be in the key of C Major, and I allowed myself to use the note C only in the first and last measures of the piece. I had a fun time creating slippery tactics to avoid C’s at cadential moments, and to try to make incomplete harmonies sound as complete as I could. Overall the music turned out rather dramatic and intense, despite being based upon a silly pun!

Miniature No. 2 - Ding-Dong

The well-known French nursery rhyme *Frère Jacques* served as the basis for my second Miniature. The entire melody is stated in the bass four times, as follows:

Measures 1 - 8 : Minor Mode
Measures 9 - 16 : Inversion
Measures 17 - 24: Retrograde
Measures 25 - 32 : Original Theme in the Major Mode

When composing the melody for the upper-voice, I tried to prominently feature the interval of a descending major 3rd. As a teacher, I often advise my students to remember the “Ding-Dong” sound of a doorbell to identify the descending major 3rd interval. I thought this was a fitting theme to pair with the lyrical mention of ringing bells in the nursery rhyme. At least in the part of the world where I live, doorbells are about the only loud ringing bells one ever hears.

Miniature No. 3 - VIVID

No, I didn’t accidentally leave the “caps lock” button on while typing out the title! The harmonies in this Miniature continually follow the pattern of V - IV - I. Overall, the piece is in D Major, hence V-IV-I in D or, VIVID. First I generated the chords for the V - IV - I progression in the key of D Major, and then generated the V - IV - I progression based upon each of those three chords, and then applied this procedure once again to all of the newly generated chords. The following diagram illustrates my process:

```
          A                   G                   D
    E     D      A      D     C      G      A     G      D
 B  A  E|A  G  D|E  D  A|A  G  D|G  F  C|D  C  G|E  D  A|D  C  G|A  G  D
```

The bottom row of this diagram represents the actual harmonies in the order that I used them to compose the piece.

Of course, the piece should be played *vividly*! This harmonic progression mostly reminds me of the final 4 measures of a 12-bar blues, and so I added a lot of fun “bluesy” and “rock-n’-roll” elements into the piece.

Miniature No. 4 - Six Eights

With this Miniature I wanted to write something that exclusively used Octatonic collections of notes, but that sounded as much like "normal tonal" music as possible. I'm not sure how "normal" it sounds, but I at least enjoyed how it turned out!

I conceived of six different Octatonic scales (hence, "Six Eights"). Firstly, there are only three possible unique sets of pitches that can be generated with the Octatonic scale pattern of alternating semitones and whole-tones. One contains C and C#, another contains C# and D, and another contains D and Eb. Of each of those three types, I derived two possible variations: the first beginning with a semitone as the first interval following the tonic (type 1), and the second beginning with a whole-tone as the first interval following the tonic (type 2).

Here is the complete appearance of Octatonic scales used in this composition:

Measures 1 - 4: Oct (D, Eb) Type 2 - A B C D Eb F F# G#

Measures 5 - 8: Oct (C#, D) Type 1 - Bb B C# D E F G Ab

Measures 9 - 12: Oct (C#, D) Type 2 - Ab Bb B C# D E F G

Measures 13 - 16: Oct (D, Eb) Type 1 - Ab A B C D Eb F Gb

Measures 17 - 20: Oct (C, C#) Type 2 - Bb C C# D# E F# G A

Measures 21 - End: Oct (C, C#) Type 1 - A Bb C C# D# E F# G

Take note that the scales alternate between the first and second types (begin with semitone, or begin with whole-tone), and the tonalities form a palindrome (A, Bb, Ab, Ab, Bb, A). To top it all off, the time signature is 6/8!

Miniature No. 5 - Down and Up

I unfortunately have no puns or creative theoretical ideas behind this Miniature; I just had fun writing a piece of music! The music is sometimes sliding downwards, sometimes crawling upwards; motives are economically developed; there's plenty of exciting chromaticism; and the cadences have a bit of a punchy and surprising quality throughout the piece.

Miniature No. 6 - Hypometer

For this piece, I decided to state the exact same notes three times in a row, but shift around their metrical placements in each restatement. I was perhaps listening to a bit too much progressive rock while writing this one…! Even in the original statement, the meter is constantly changing and following irregular groupings of notes into two's or three's. The tenuto and staccato articulations are imperative for creating accents that highlight the meter.

"Hypometer" is a silly word I made up. Whereas *Hyper*meter considers broader perspectives of entire measures grouping together into their own metrical patterns, this piece is dealing with metrical changes on a minute, note-by-note basis. It's interesting to hear how the metrical changes impact the music, and how your own perception of the metrical groupings may change with repeated listens (e.g., which ones sound "normal" and which ones sound "weird").

Miniature No. 7 - Slap-Happy

It is only with extreme difficulty that I can play or listen to this piece without bursting out laughing. I hoped to create something akin to ridiculous circus-music by exclusively using finger-slapping in both hands, and spastic rhythms in the melody. My left hand could scarcely remember how to play anything other than power chords in this Miniature, but the two hands together took advantage of this bizarre technique to create a rare piece of music for solo guitar in the key of F# Major.

Miniature No. 8 - Healing

There's been a lot of puns and silliness in these Minatures, but I saved "Healing" for last in order to remind people of (what I think) is most important. One of my favourite songs to sing is from Robert Munsch's book "Love You Forever." When no-one else is around, I sing it at the piano in the key of Eb Major (that key seems to fit the nicest with my voice). I thought it unfortunate that Eb is such an awkward key to compose in for the guitar, and so I sought assistance from a capo to make that key a simpler reality for me.

A lot music I play (including my own!) is stimulating, challenging, and exciting, but can leave me feeling worn-down and exhausted if played for too long. With this Miniature I thought to myself "why don't I make a piece that feels *healing* rather than *draining*?!" I wanted to make something that was simple, humble, relaxing, beautiful, encouraging of calm introspection, and embodying something along the lines of unconditional love (like Munsch's song).

The premise of this piece is an entirely emotional one, and I want to explicitly promote the idea that we should not be afraid to place serious importance upon the intuitive, feeling aspects music. I don't want people to think that these Miniatures are all about intellectual arrogance or punning tomfoolery. I sincerely hope that the music will be played, listened to, and shared with compassionate kindness, mutual support, light-heartedness, and communal enjoyment. It is my wish that theoretical ingenuity will never be pursued without an equally strong commitment to the feeling heart. As far as I'm concerned, if music, or discussions about music, are not acknowledging the heart and intuitive feelings, then it is sorely missing the most integral ingredients. After all, our musical universe is something that we are actively *creating* for ourselves; why shouldn't we make it into something that is healthily-balanced, meaningful, what we truly enjoy, and embracing of all aspects of what it is to be a human being?

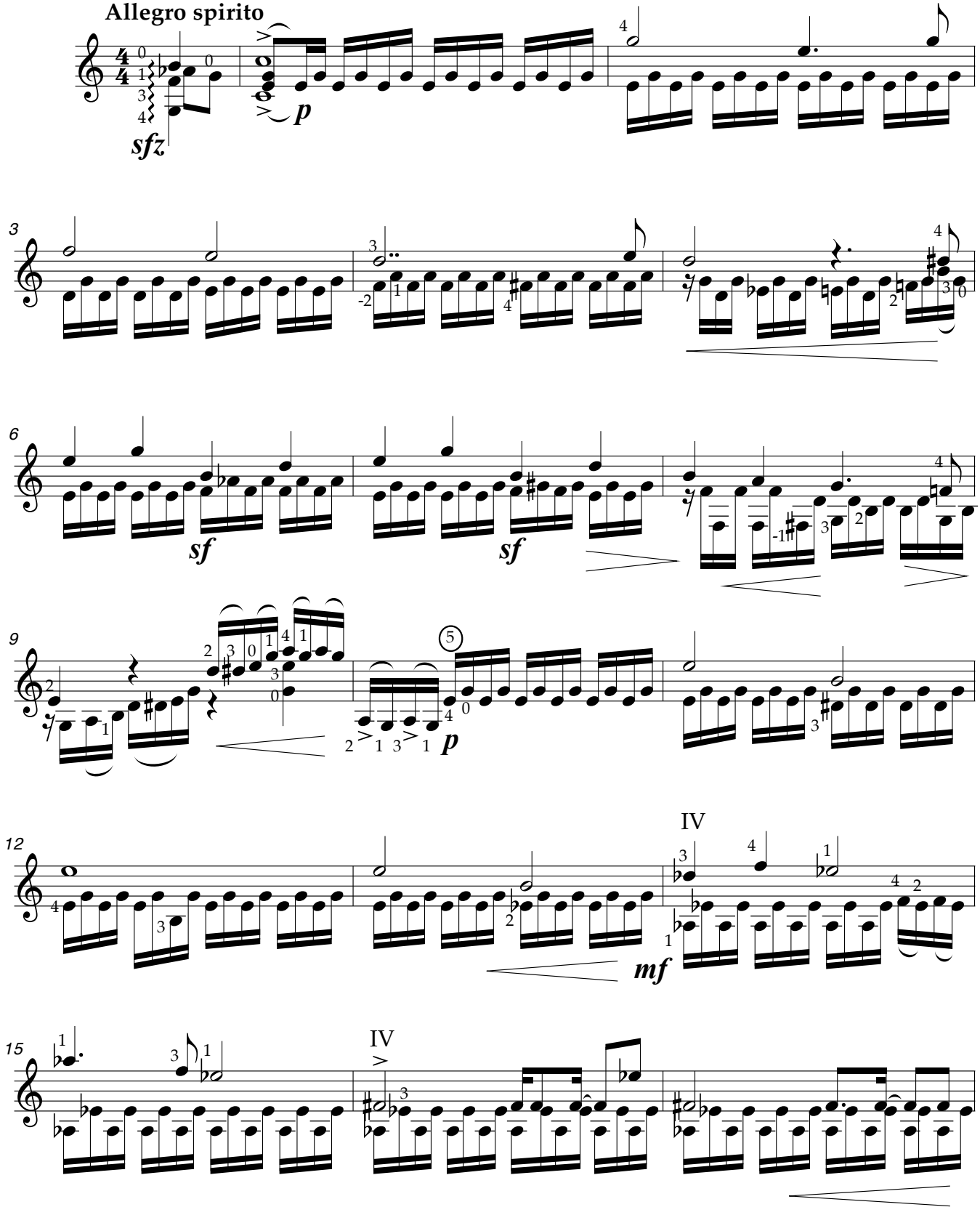
Here I conclude, with much appreciation to you for taking the time to experience the art that I have created,

Michael Bemmels
Vancouver, B.C., Canada
August 2020

8 Miniatures for Guitar

Miniature No. 1 - Long Time No C

Michael Bemmels
(2020)



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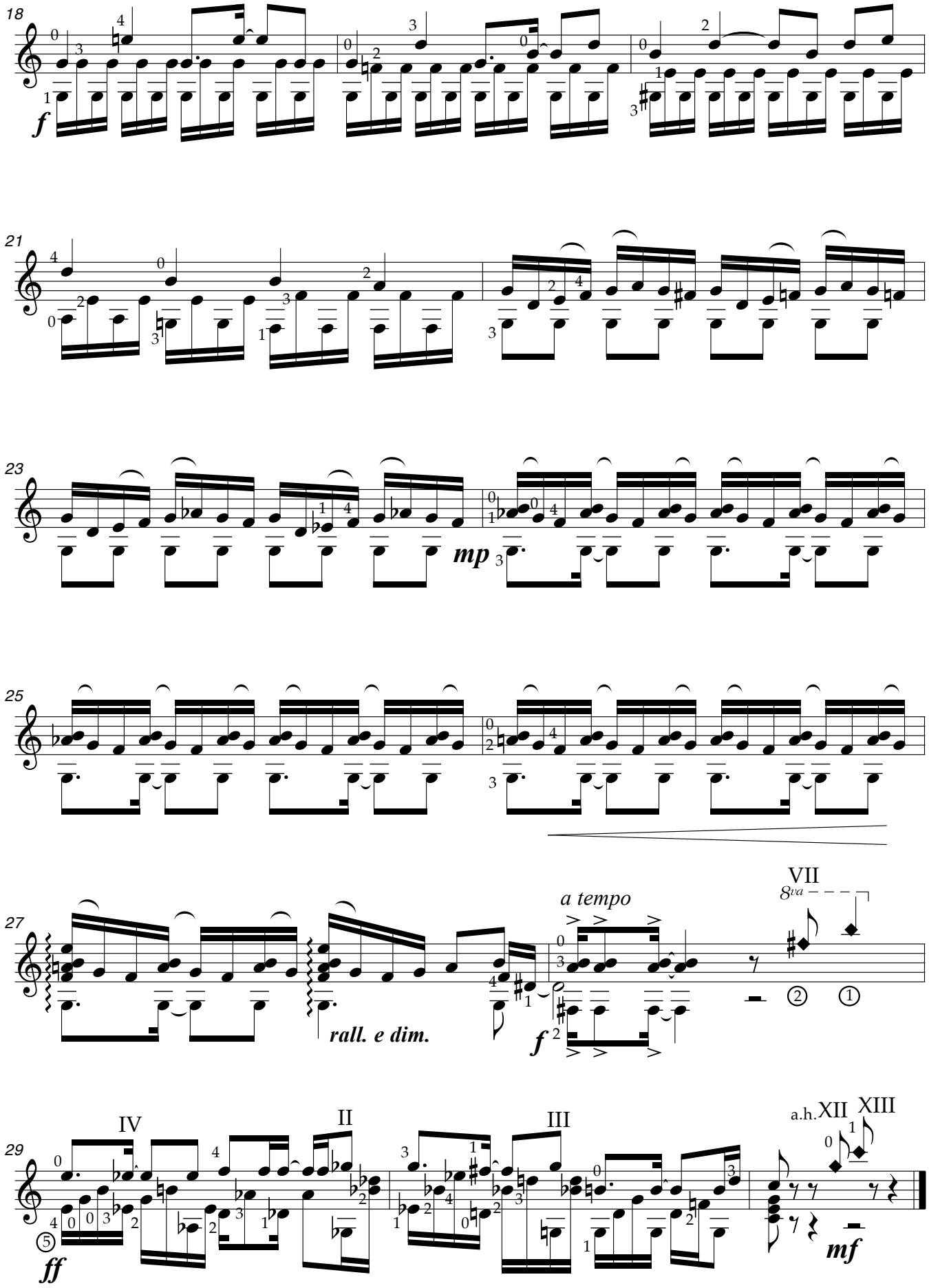
18
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27
rall. e dim.
a tempo
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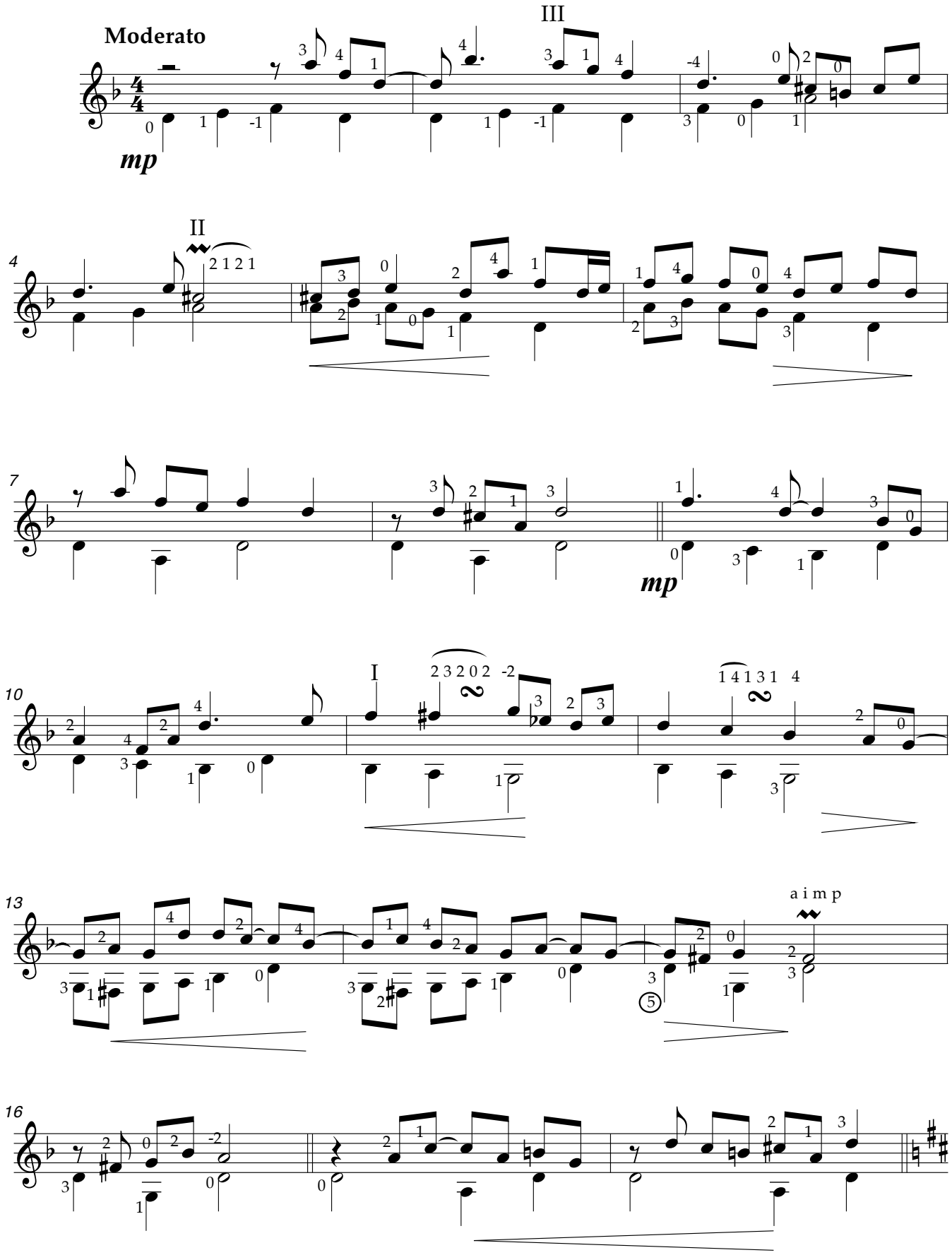
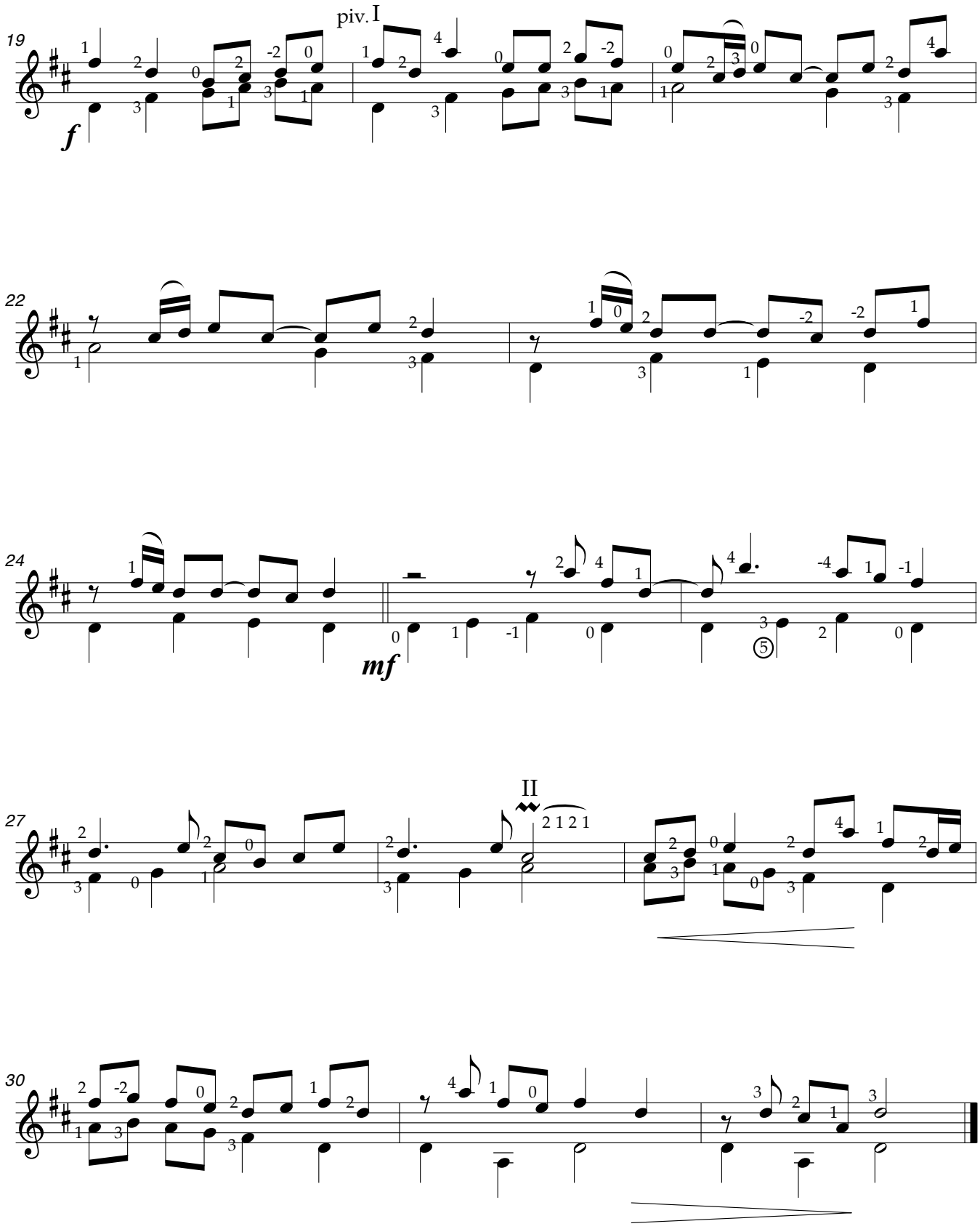
VII
8va
29
IV
II
III
a.h.XII
XIII
ff
mf

Miniature No. 2 - Ding-Dong




19
piv. I
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22
24
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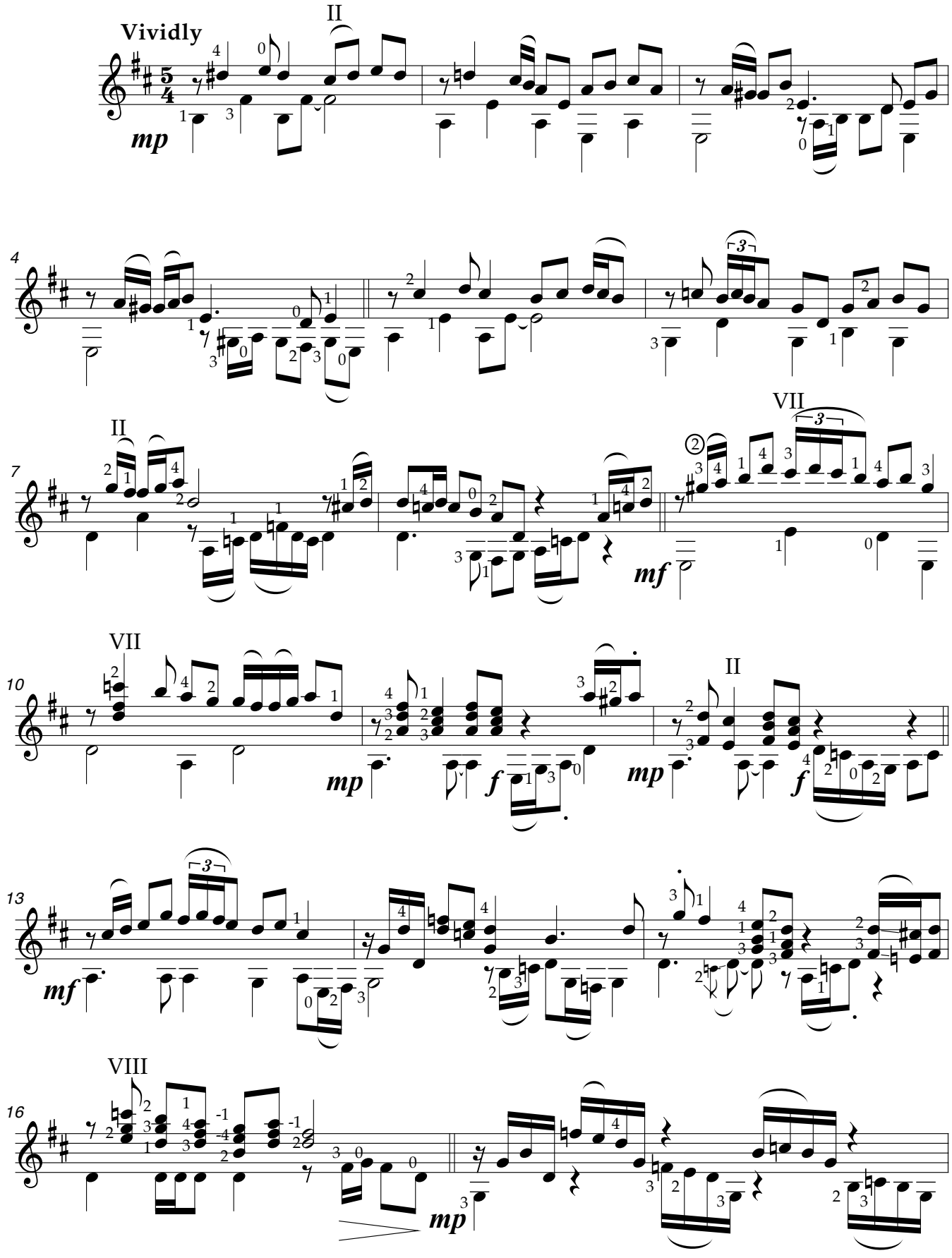
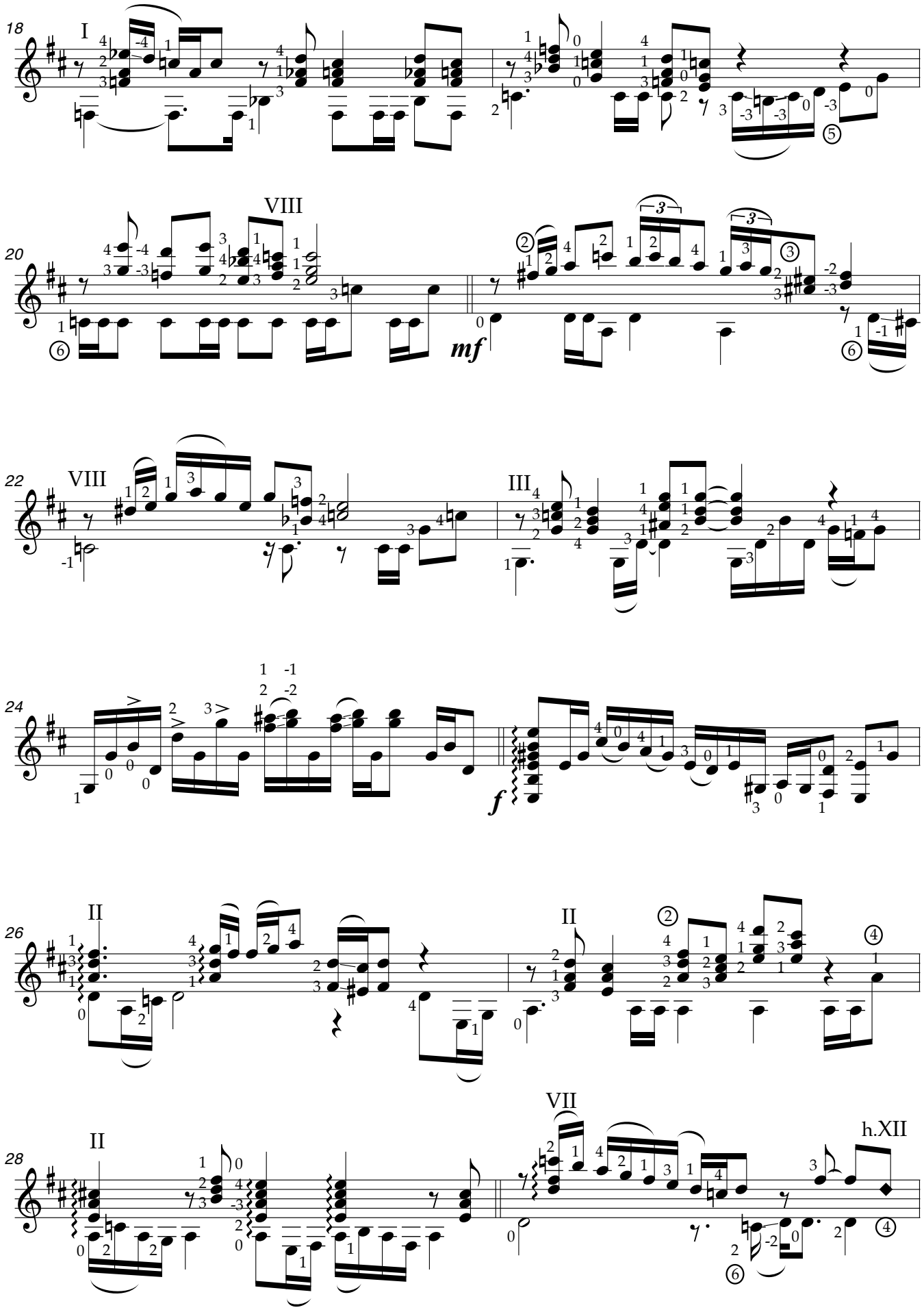
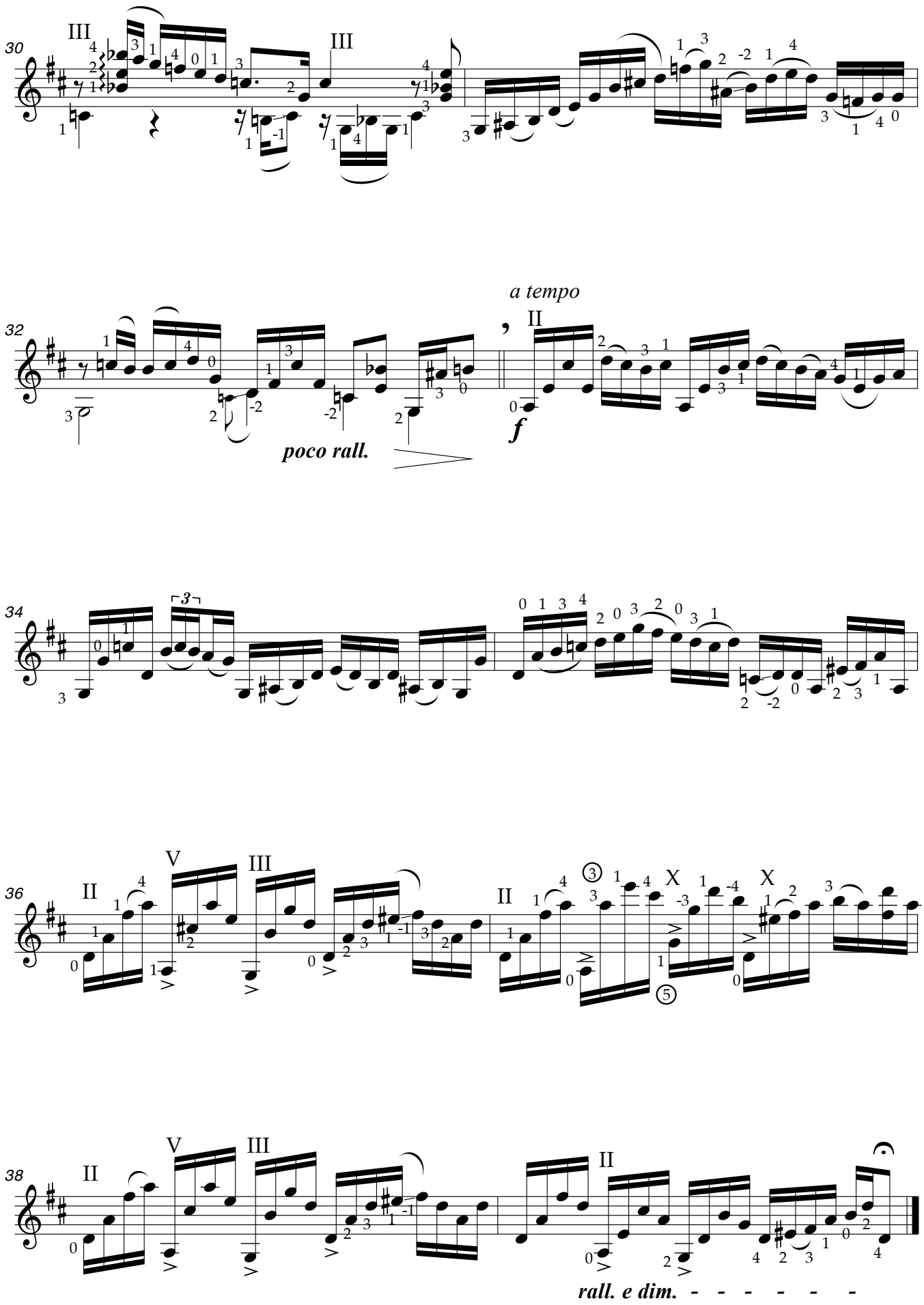
30

Miniature No. 3 - VIVID




18
I
20
VIII
mf
22
VIII
III
24
f
26
II
II
28
II
VII
h.XII


30
III
III
32
a tempo
II
poco rall.
f
34
3
0 1 3 4
2 0 3 2 0
3 1
36
II
V
III
II
X
X
38
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III
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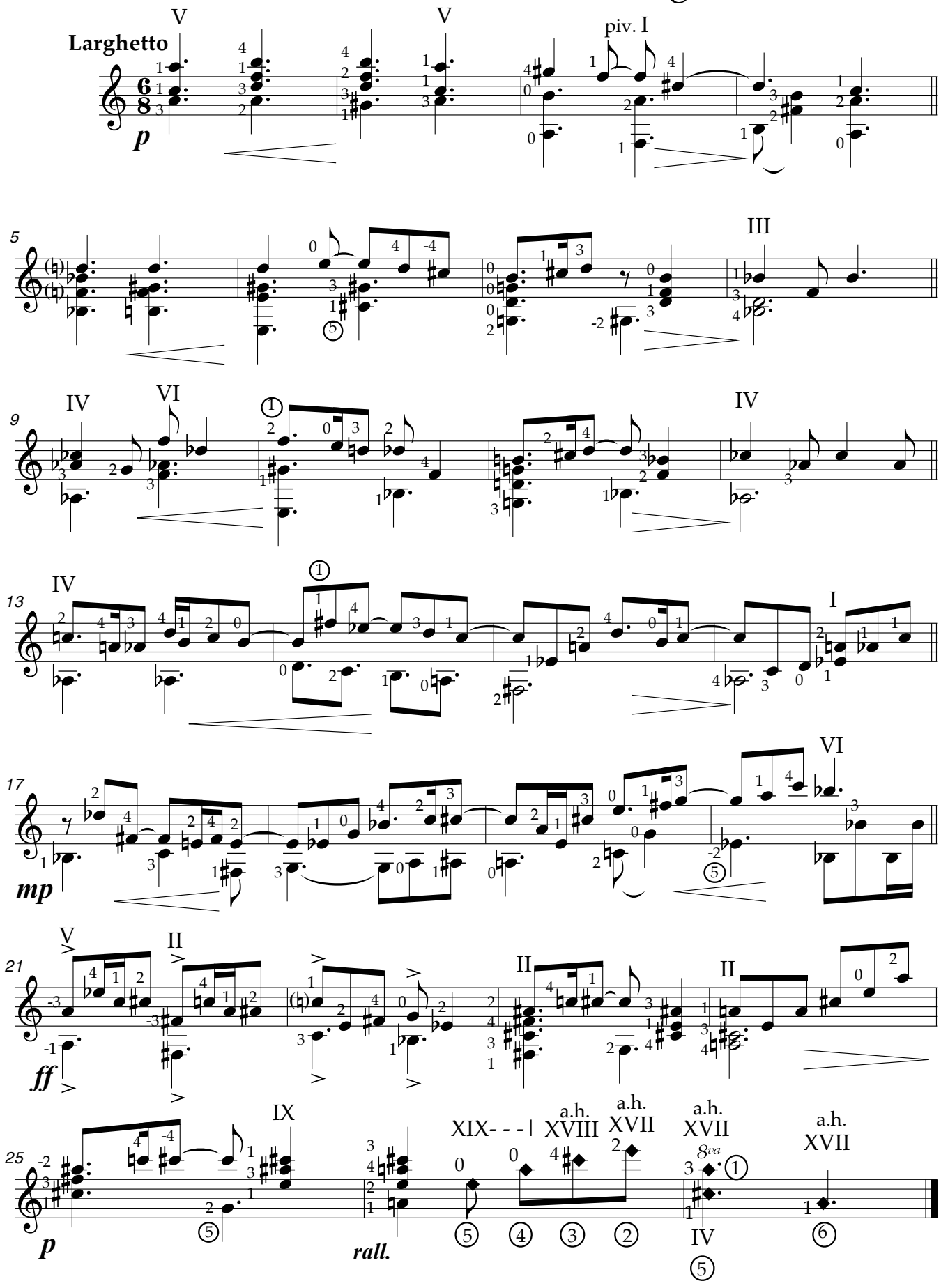
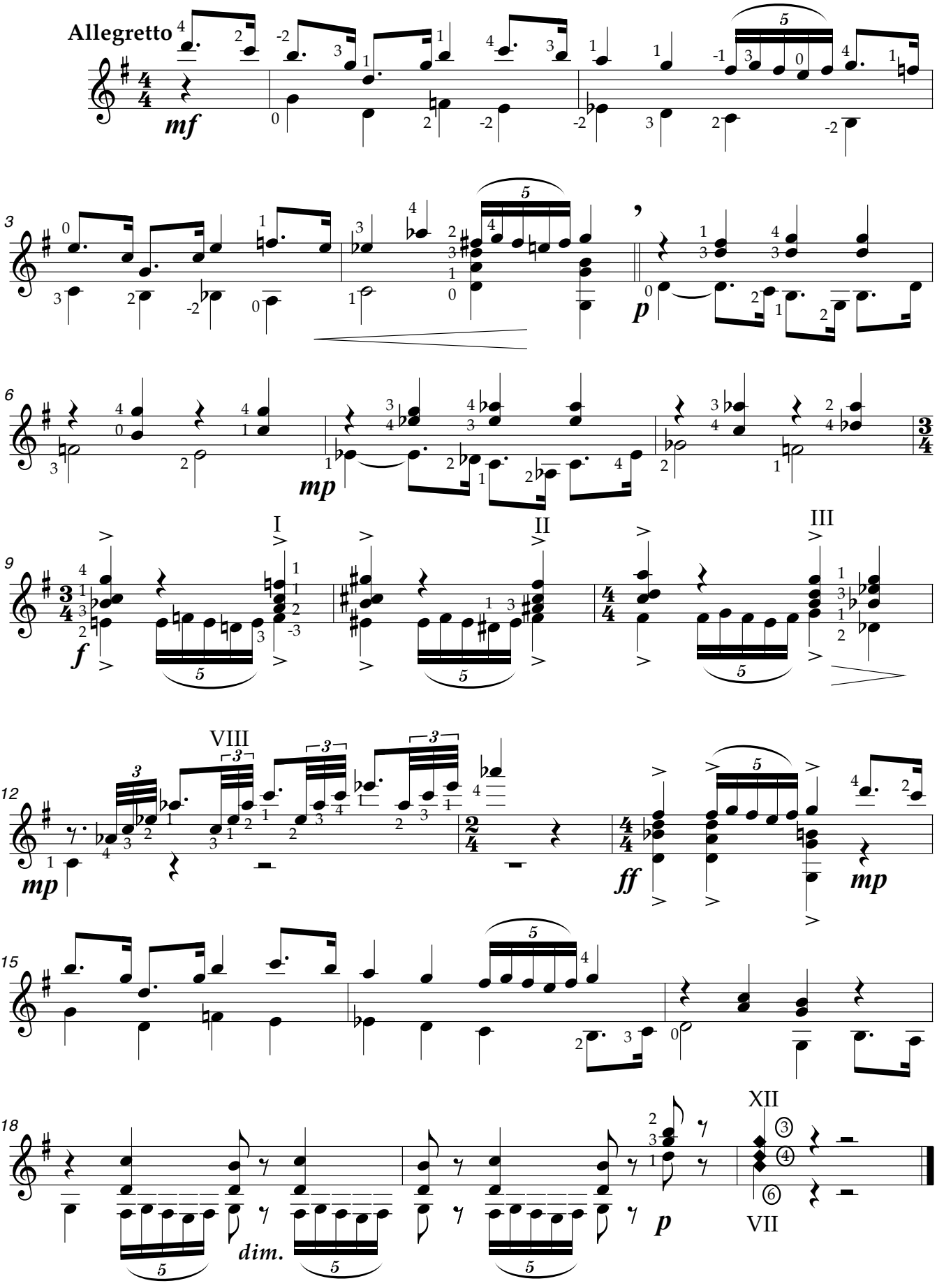
rall. e dim.

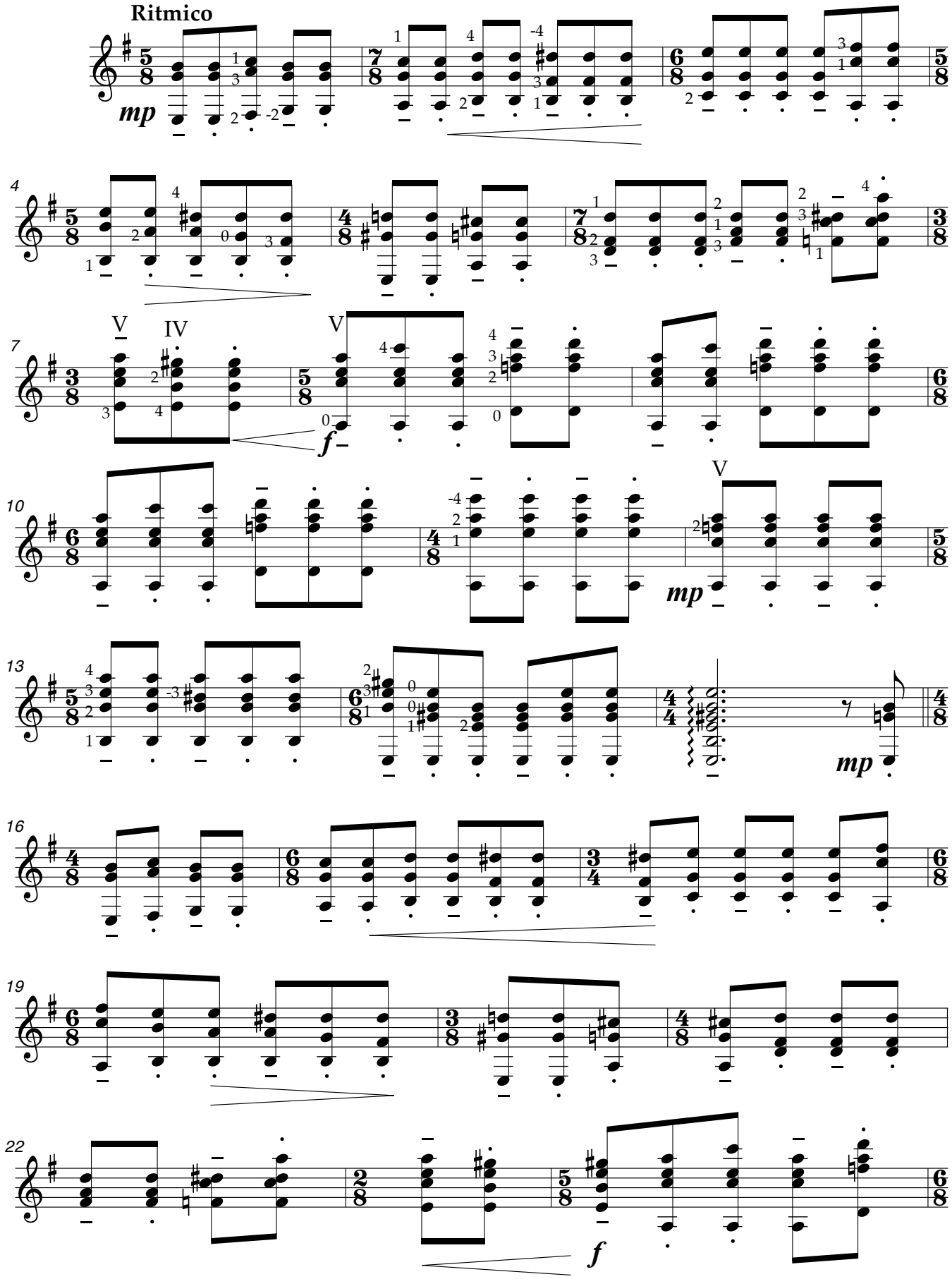
Miniature No. 4 - Six Eights

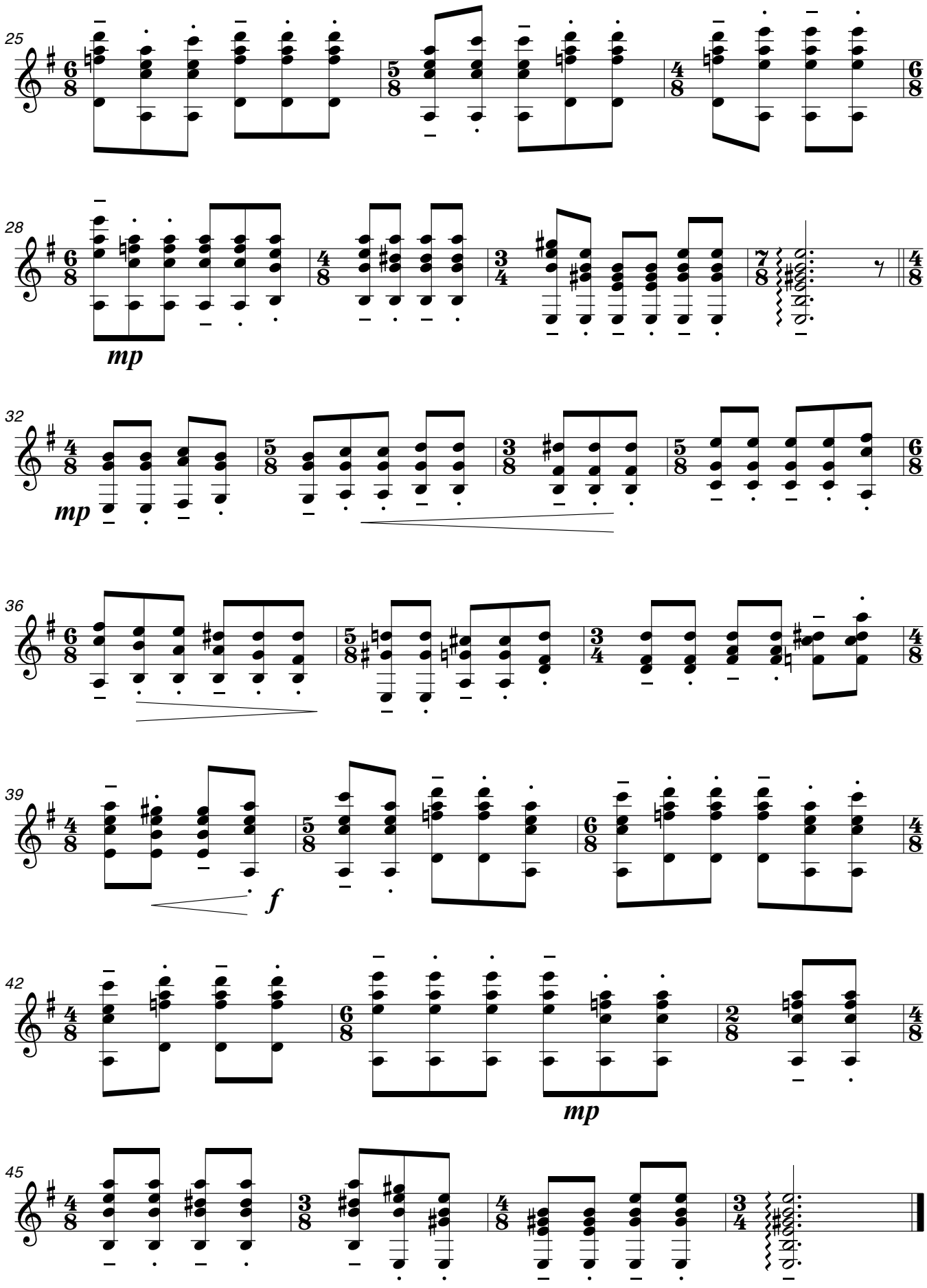


Miniature No. 5 - Down and Up



Miniature No. 6 - Hypometer

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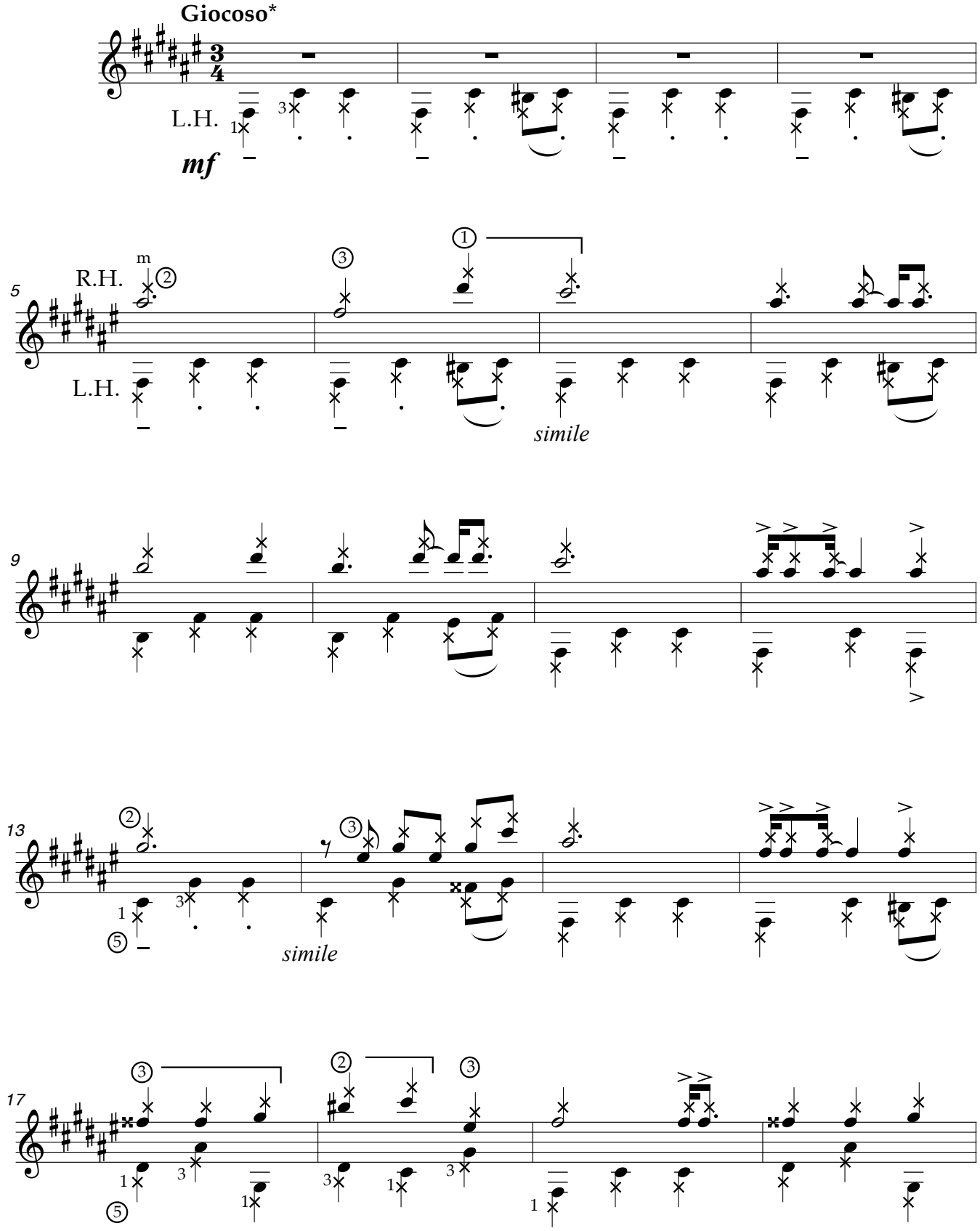
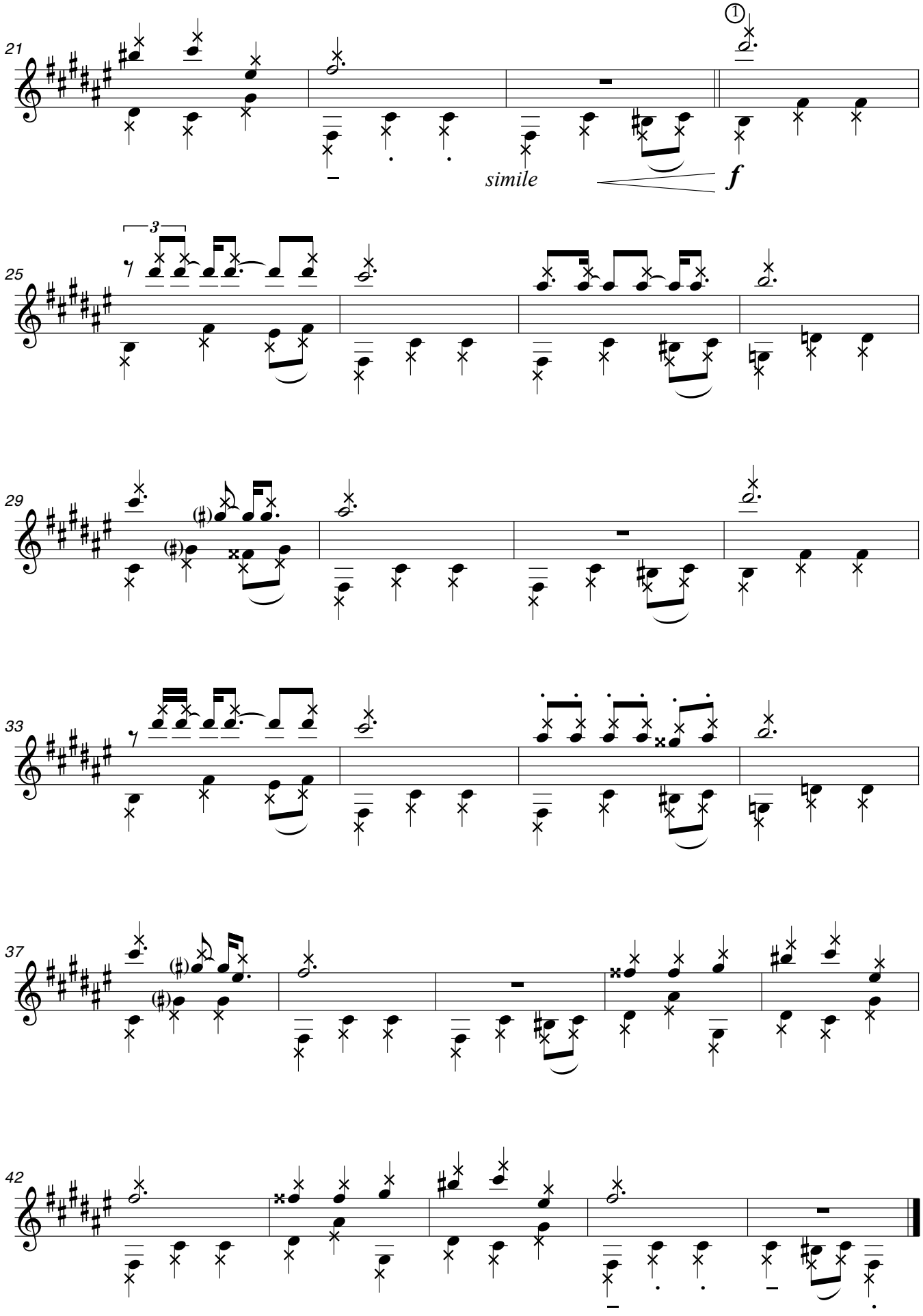
Miniature No. 7 - Slap-Happy



*All notes in this Miniature are performed by slapping the fingers down onto the strings at the fretboard.

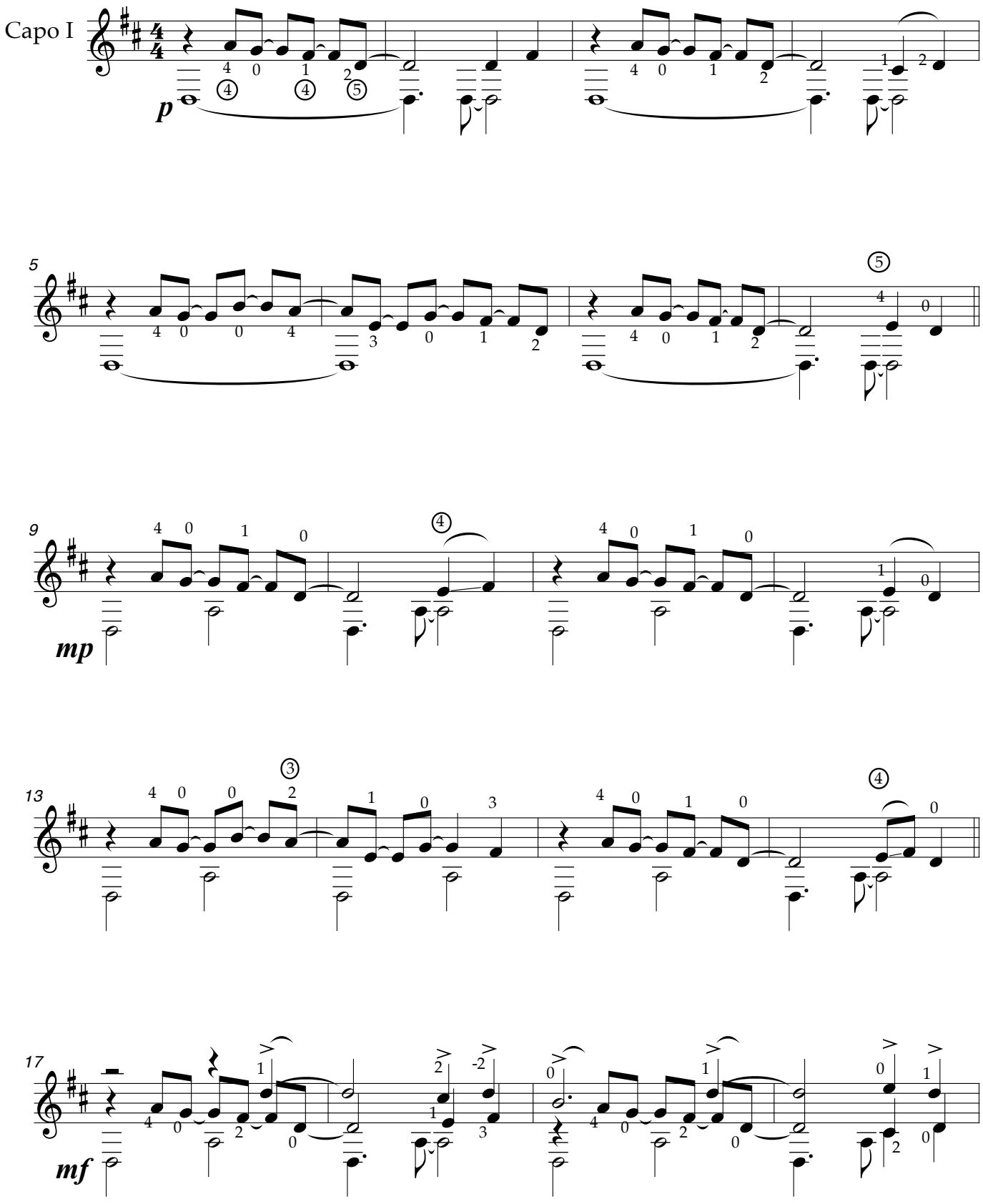

21
simile
f
25
3
29
33
37
42

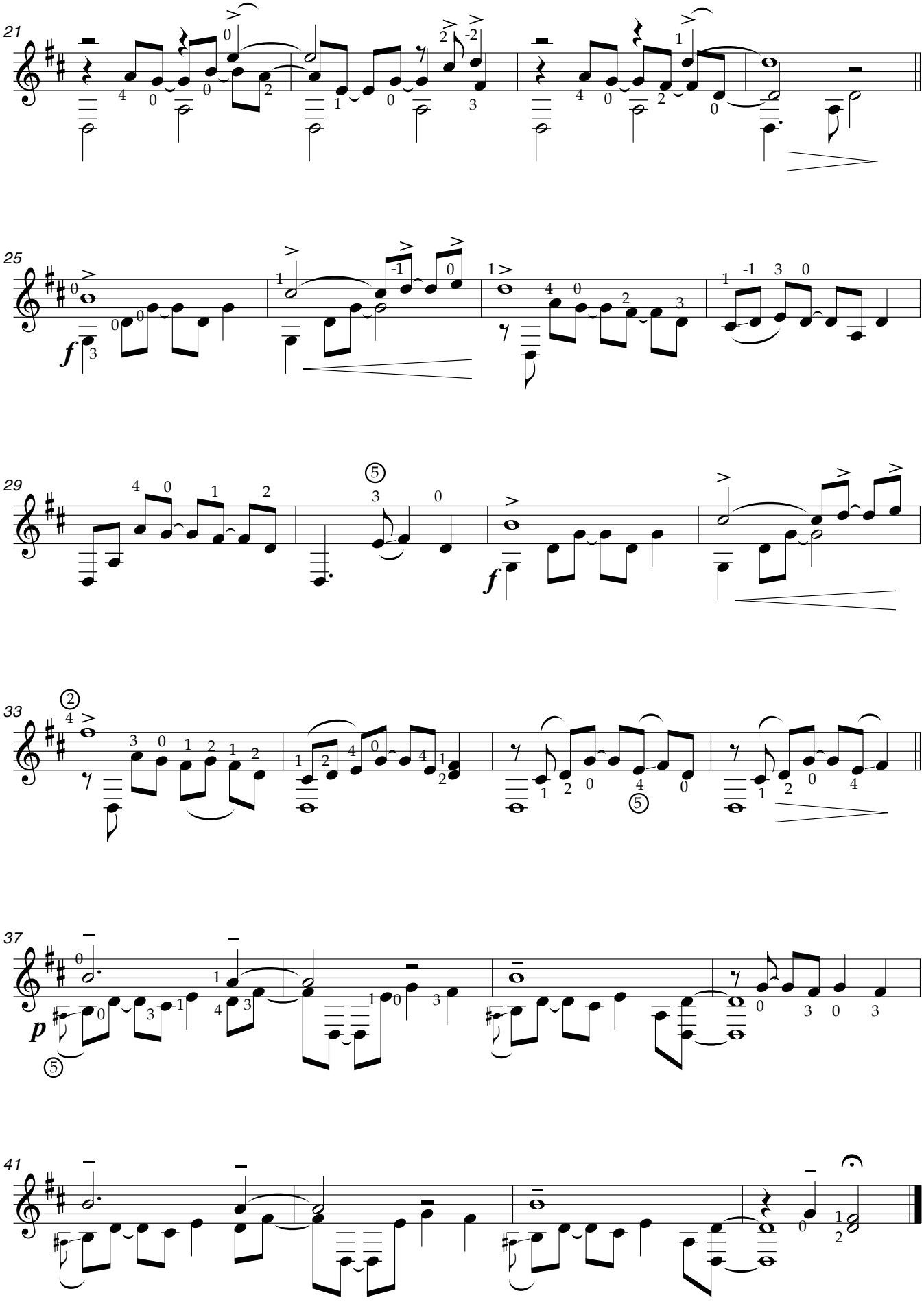
Miniature No. 8 - Healing

⑥ = D

Dolce e sostenuto

Capo I

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37
p
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