Nocturne-Lullaby

Michael Bemmels
2019

Nocturne-Lullaby – Composer's Notes

Firstly, thank you for taking the time to listen to or play this composition! Without other humans, what would be the point of creating new music? This work is a dark, intense, and highly chromatic musical exploration of the famous Brahms' Lullaby (Wiegenlied). I'll leave it up to the listeners and performers to decide for themselves what sort of programmatic narrative or commentary on the Lullaby this composition might elicit.

Structure

This work is motivically very economical, deriving nearly all of its substance from the original melody by Brahms. It would take a lengthy essay for me to point out all the uses of motives in this piece, but performers may enjoy trying to locate the many fragments of the Lullaby in various inverted and rhythmically displaced forms. Motivic material of my own addition includes a descending chromatic line and prominent use of half-diminished seventh chords.

The form of this composition is highly unusual. It begins with a nebulous, ever-modulating section that sounds like it belongs in the developmental, middle portion of a work. Despite sounding rather imaginative and freely structured, its tonal centres complete the aggregate by following patterns that spell out augmented triads spaced a minor-third apart from each other.

The following chart illustrates the tonalities and the first measure they appear:

[**G** (m.1), **Eb** (m. 2, beat 3), **B** (m. 5)] – an extra return to G by m. 7
[**Bb** (m.9), **Gb** (m. 10), **D** (m. 12)]
[**C#** (m. 13), **A** (m. 16), **F** (m. 18)]
[**E** (m. 20), **C** (m.23), **Ab** (m.25)]

The third beat of m. 26 begins the first clear statement of the Lullaby's melody, harmonized over a descending chromatic line. Measure 34 carries on with the melody in a rather distorted form, culminating in a tense 3rd inversion, augmented-seventh chord in m. 45.

Measure 46 beings a fugal section. The fugue modulates, and each subsequent entrance of the subject is a major 3rd lower than the previous one. The fugue restarts in the bass range in m. 60, and leads on to an intense, highly developmental section which spills into recapitulatory material around m. 85. The *dolce* harmonies in m. 93 finally settle the piece into tonal stability and another, clearer, presentation of the original Brahms' Lullaby. Coda material beginning in m. 116 dives into a little more harmonic and motivic exploration, before resting firmly in the key of A major.

Overall, the piece gives the impression of a hazy, confused beginning, which passes through many stages of unsettled intensity, before finally reaching a delicate, clear point of stability at the end.

Performance

As usual, I have notated fingerings and cautionary accidentals perhaps a little too meticulously, but my intention is that they may help a performer understand the work, rather than confine the performer to one particular mode of execution. The tempo direction *Larghetto sensibile* encourages performers not to rush, and to play in a way that is sensitive, susceptible, emotionally responsive, sympathetic, receptive, etc. Performers should definitely make use of tempo fluctuations beyond just the areas that I have marked explicitly in the score.

Measures 16-17 and mm. 91-92 are a wonderful opportunity to play a descending chromatic passage with successive notes on different strings of the guitar, allowing the notes to ring and blur together. Overall the fingerings are designed to facilitate smooth and legato playing, but individual performers are of course invited to create their own alterations to my suggestions.

Contemplations

I cannot resist adding a few more thoughts into this document. It disturbs and saddens me to witness how commonplace it has become for musicians (especially highly-educated, classical) to speak of a piece of music like it is an objective, permanent entity, and to approach performance as if its primary purpose is to flaunt technical proficiency. Oh, please do not let my music become an occasion for argumentation or (deluded, absurd) attempts at being universally, irrefutably perfect in performance or understanding! Do not forget that music is created in the mind of each individual's first-hand experiential reality. This experience is ineffable, impermanent, and not very befitting to concrete concepts and words. Yet, this is where the real, substantial meaning and value of music resides: in the felt, first-person experience.

We are each of us creating our own meaning to music each time we experience it, and while humans may share similarities in the way we experience a piece of music, it can never become a fixed, permanent object to stand immortal for the rest of time. Of course, sharing and discussing music can be incredibly rewarding, intelligent, communal, beneficial, and emotionally significant, but it must be done in a way that recognizes and openly acknowledges that we are all ultimately just making things up and creating our own realities.

So, I hope you may experience something meaningful and valuable in this musical composition, but please don't become so attached to your experience that you think of it as the only "true" or "correct" way to understand and experience the work. :)

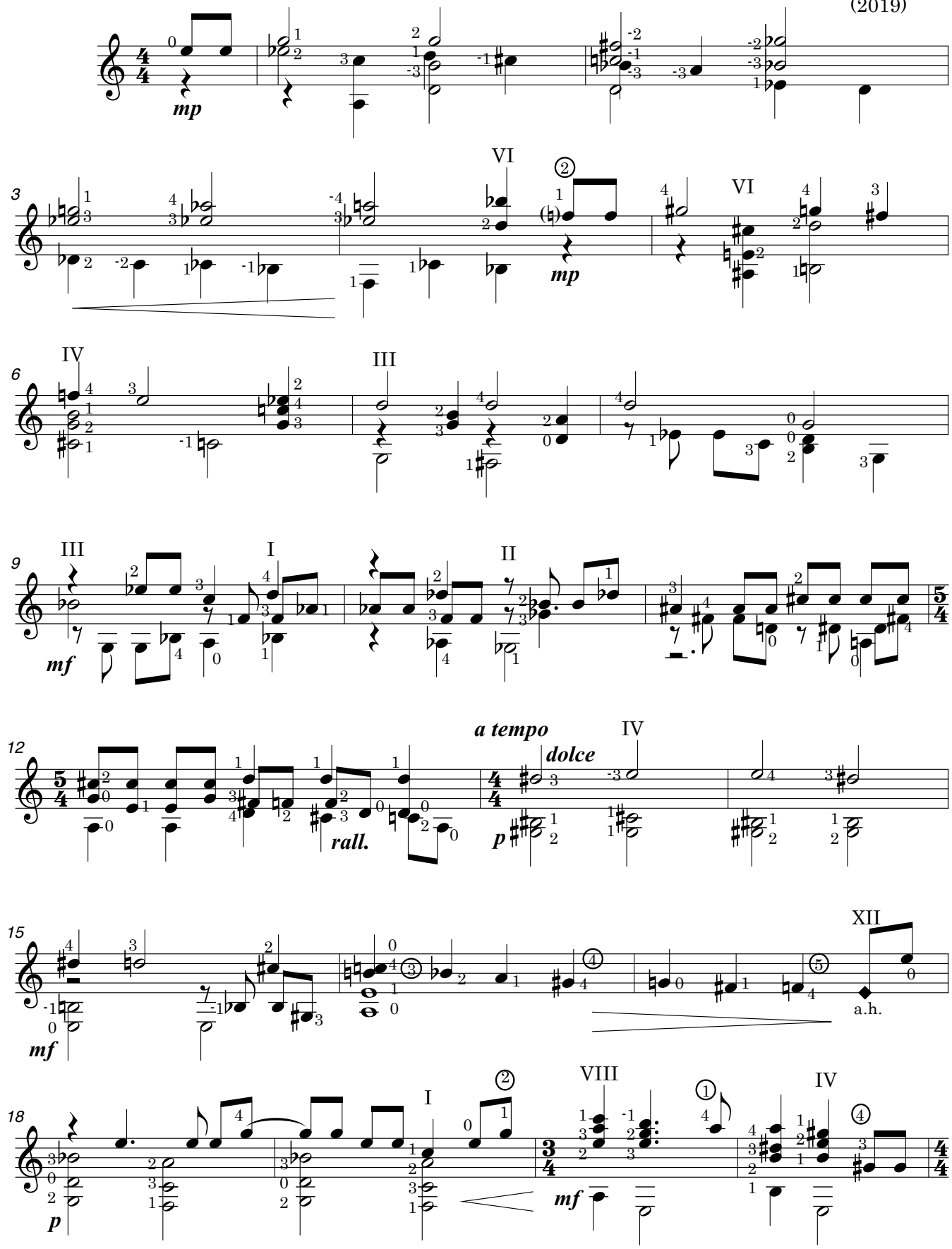
Michael Bemmels
Vancouver, B.C, Canada
January 2019

Nocturne - Lullaby

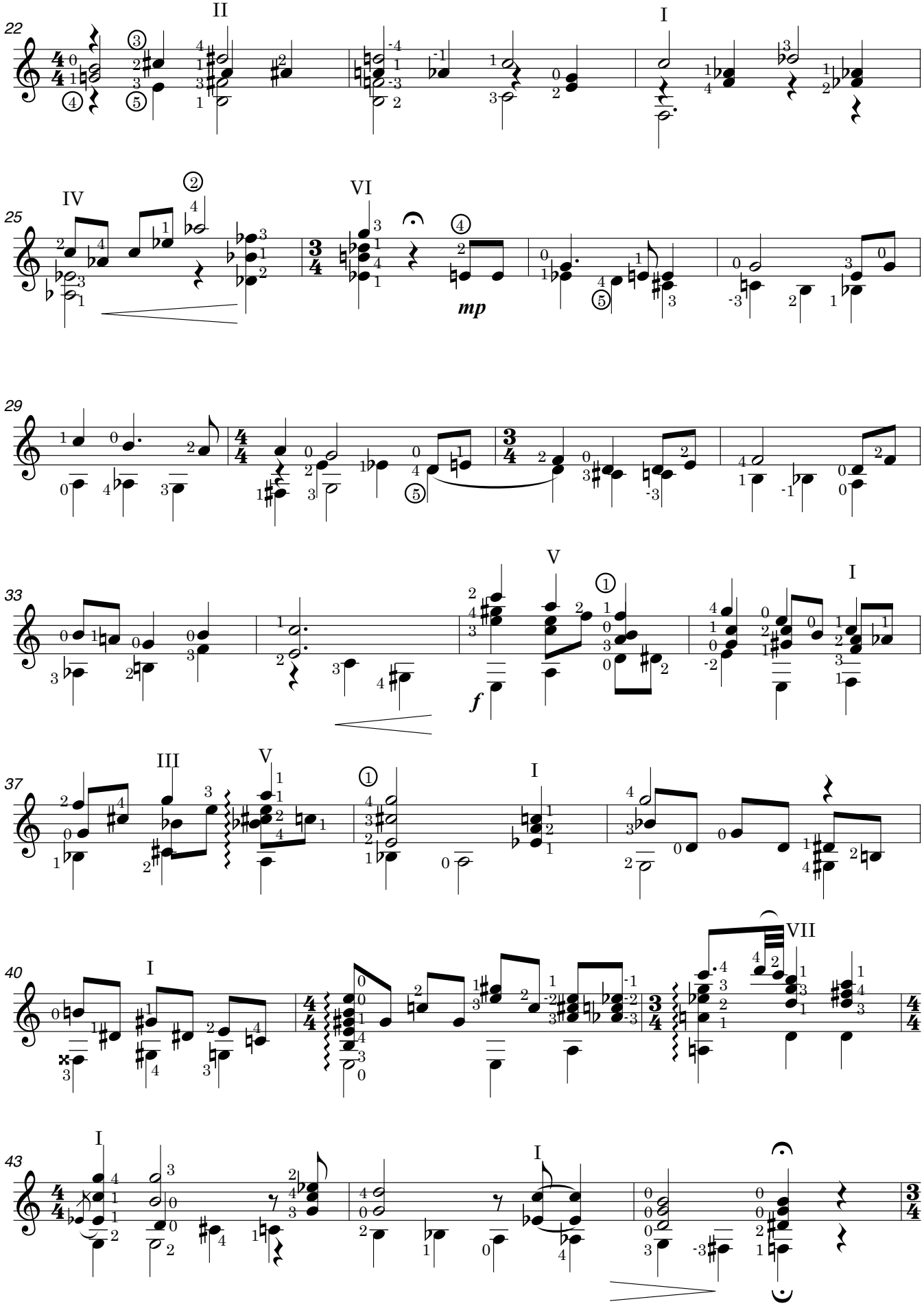
for Solo Guitar

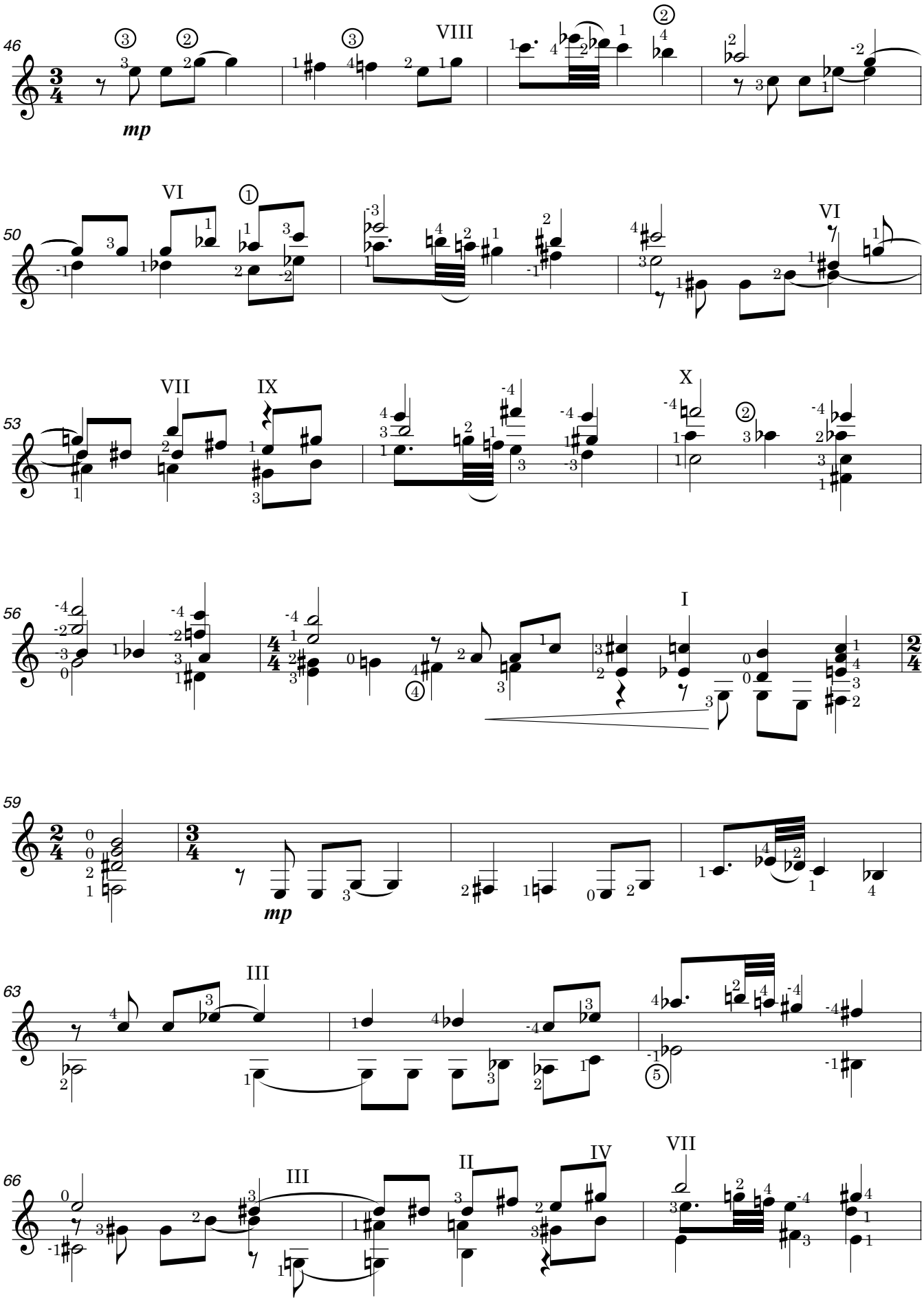
Michael Bemmels
(2019)

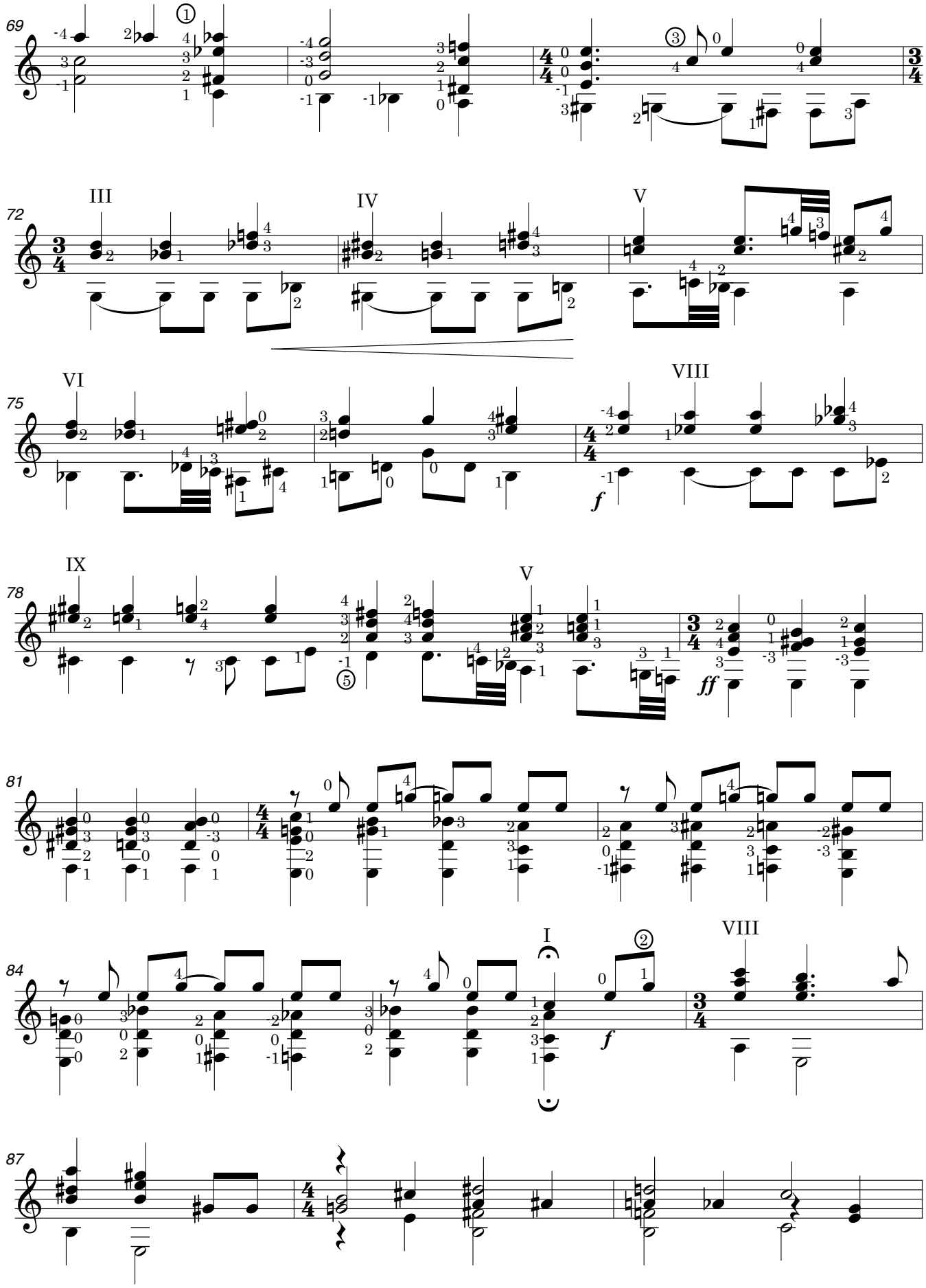
Larghetto sensibile

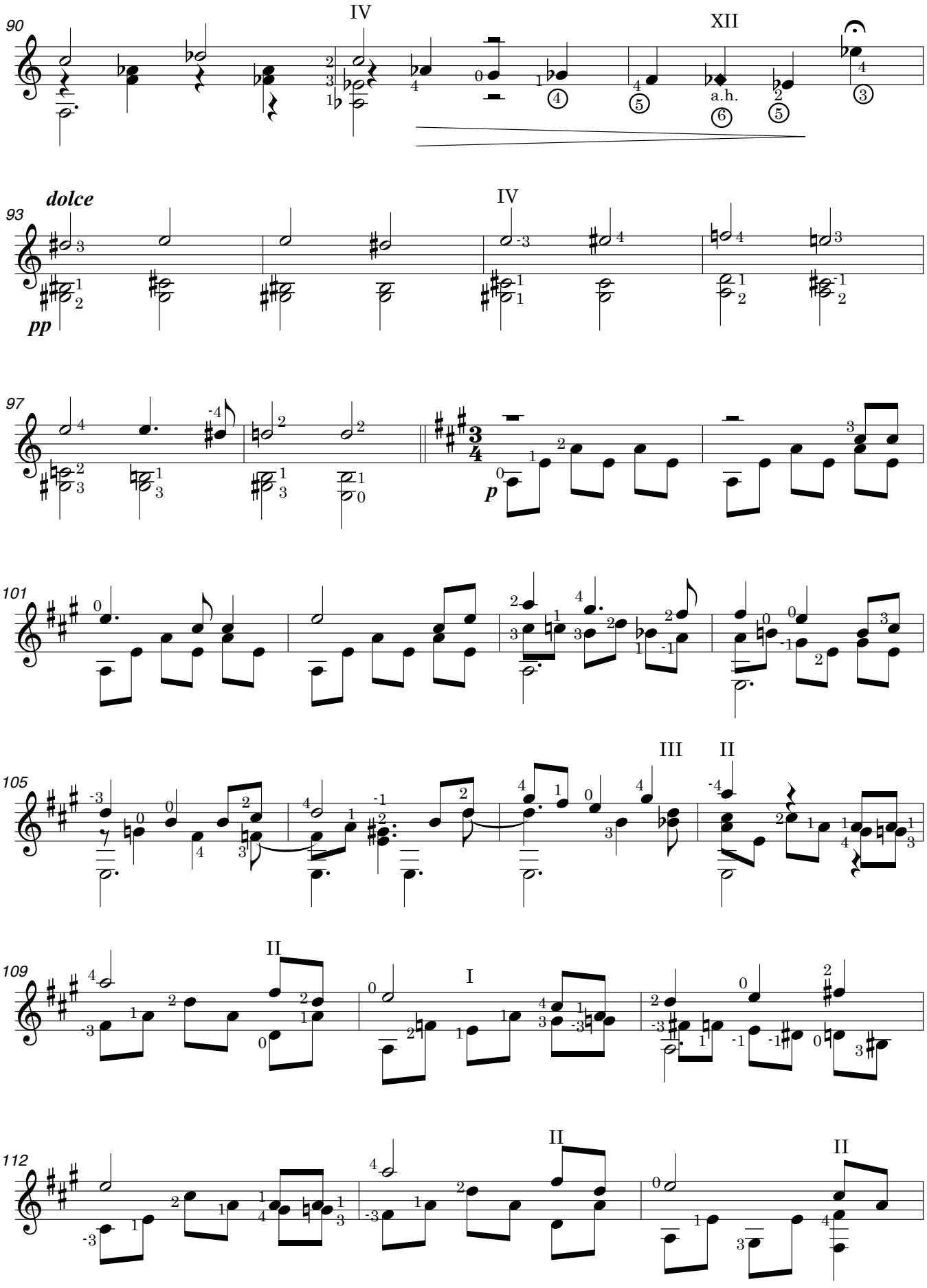


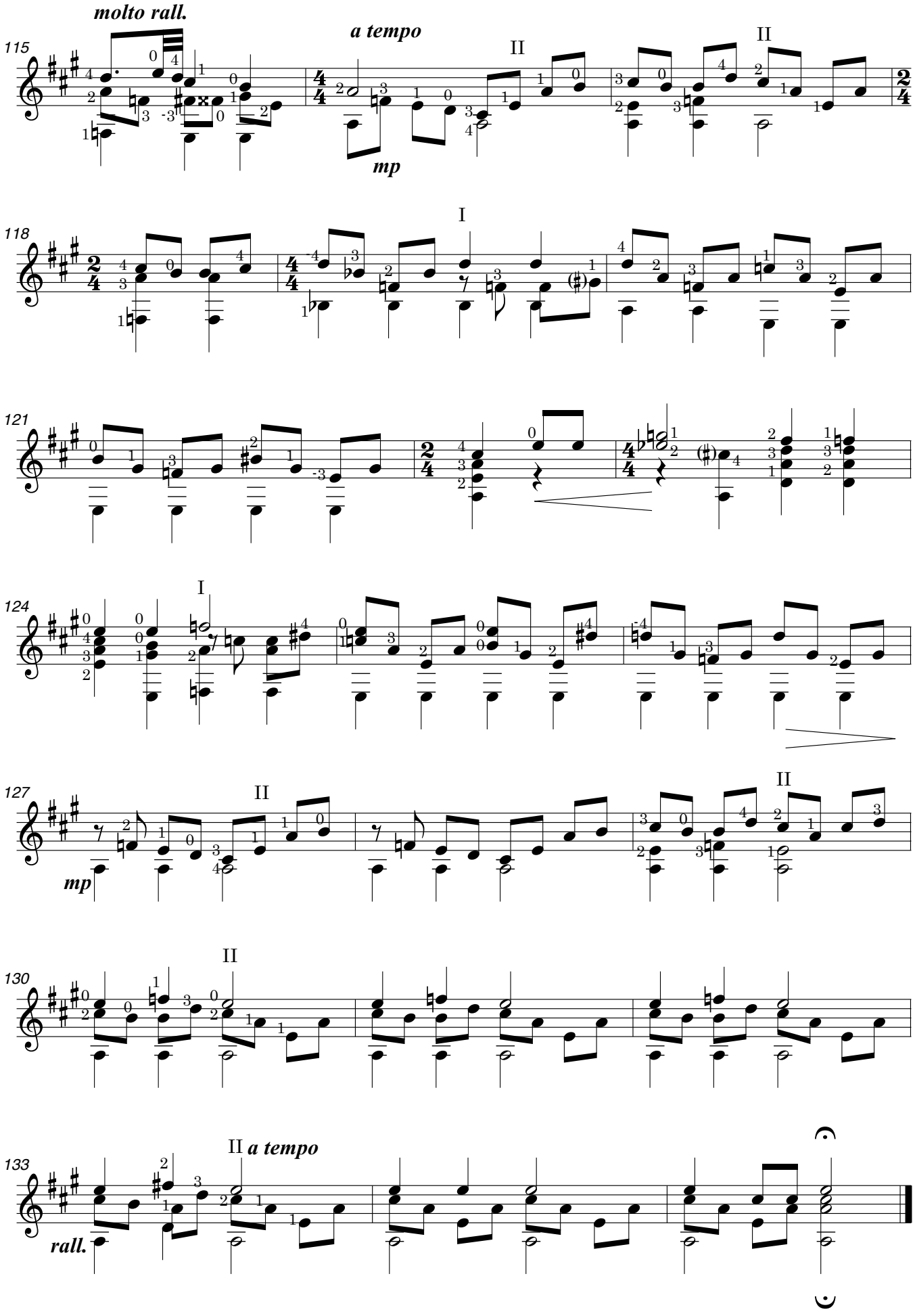
© Michael Bemmels 2019


22
II
I
25
IV
VI
mp
29
33
V
I
f
37
III
V
I
40
I
VII
43
I
I


46
mp
VIII
50
VI
VI
53
VII
IX
X
56
I
59
mp
63
III
66
III
II
IV
VII


69
72
III
IV
V
75
VI
VIII
f
78
IX
V
ff
81
84
I
VIII
f
87


90
IV
XII
a.h.
dolce
93
IV
pp
97
p
101
105
III
II
109
II
I
112
II
II


molto rall.
115
a tempo
II
mp
II
118
I
121
124
I
127
II
mp
II
130
II
133
II a tempo
rall.