Lyric Variations

For Violin Solo

Benjamin R. Fuhrman

Circa Seven Minutes

Program Notes

"*Goldberg*, not Theme and…" Whenever I hear the word "variations," some part of my subconscious dredges up random movements from some abysmal Classical Period sonata; or worse, one of my student pieces. This is probably due to how I learned music as both a performer and as a composer; playing/composing simple, repetitive themes, then progressing on to slightly more complex variations. Lather, rinse, and repeat ad nauseam.

Fortunately, while learning composition, I was also exposed to Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and their alternative take on the term. While a standard set of variations closely follows the melody, elaborating on the theme as they progress, Bach's variations are written with the bass line and harmonic progression as the functional basis. This alternate take on the term opened up a world of possibilities to my mind at the time, but it would take years before I considered actually writing a set of variations. However, when I was asked to write a piece for solo violin immediately after finishing my second work for saxophone quartet and computer, the time felt right to attempt it. The fact that I would be writing for my primary instrument only served to cement the feeling of returning to my musical roots.

However, I decided to do it my way.

Rather than following the standard theme and variations pattern, the *Lyric Variations* begins with a 32 bar introduction followed immediately by the three bar theme and the subsequent variations. However, instead of following the melody as expected, the variations are actually derived from merging fragments of the introduction with the theme, creating hybrid melodic lines. And while these lines retain similarities to the fragments that were used in their creation, other variables come into the mix to shape the direction of the sound in new directions.

While nominally a D-based blues, the *Variations* also draws from a variety of my musical influences, subtly shifting the harmonic structure. Beyond moving from consonance and stability into atonality, the *Variations* uses both Arabic and Klezmer scales while exploring the range of the violinist's technique. Slow lines give way to rapid passages. Intricate polyphony resolves to simple, static chords. Stable meters are interrupted by unstable shifts. Step-wise passages decay into wide-ranging and disjunct leaps. And simple melodies become intricate variations before returning to their original sources.

They are variations, but they're really variations on influences and expectations.

-Benjamin R. Fuhrman

To Barton Samuel Rotberg

Lyric Variations

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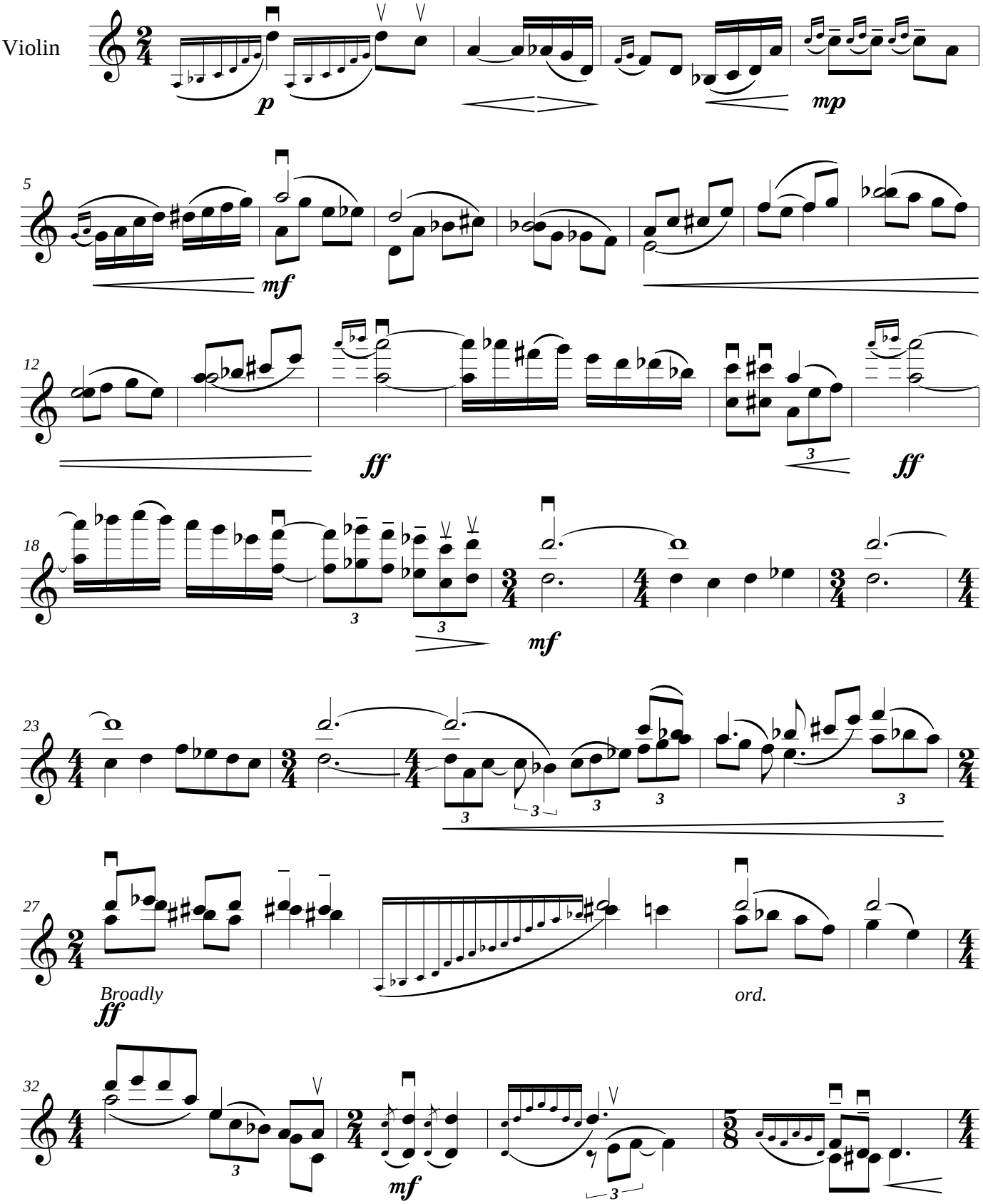
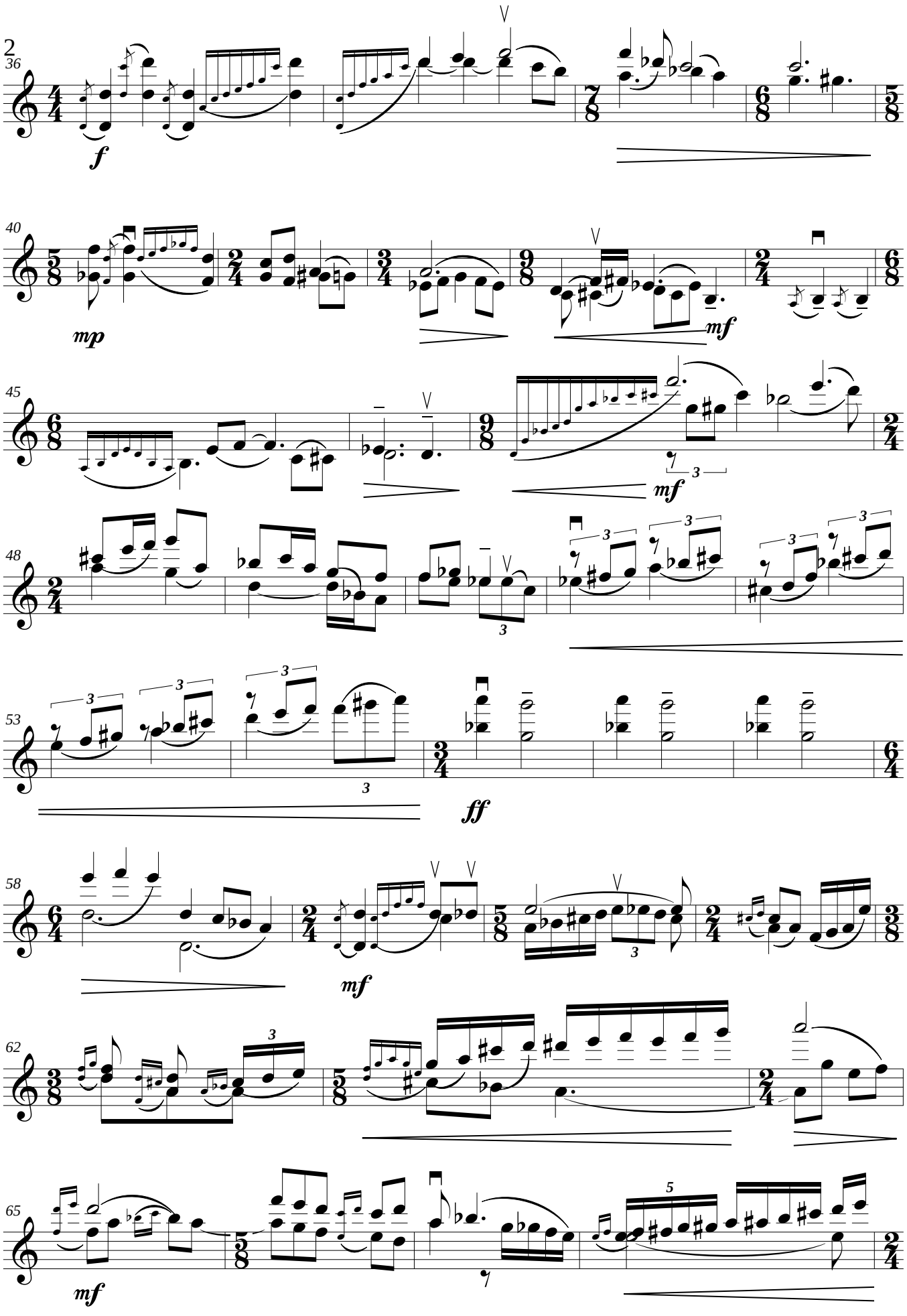
Slow, somewhat rubato ♩ = 56

Violin




36
f
40
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45
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48
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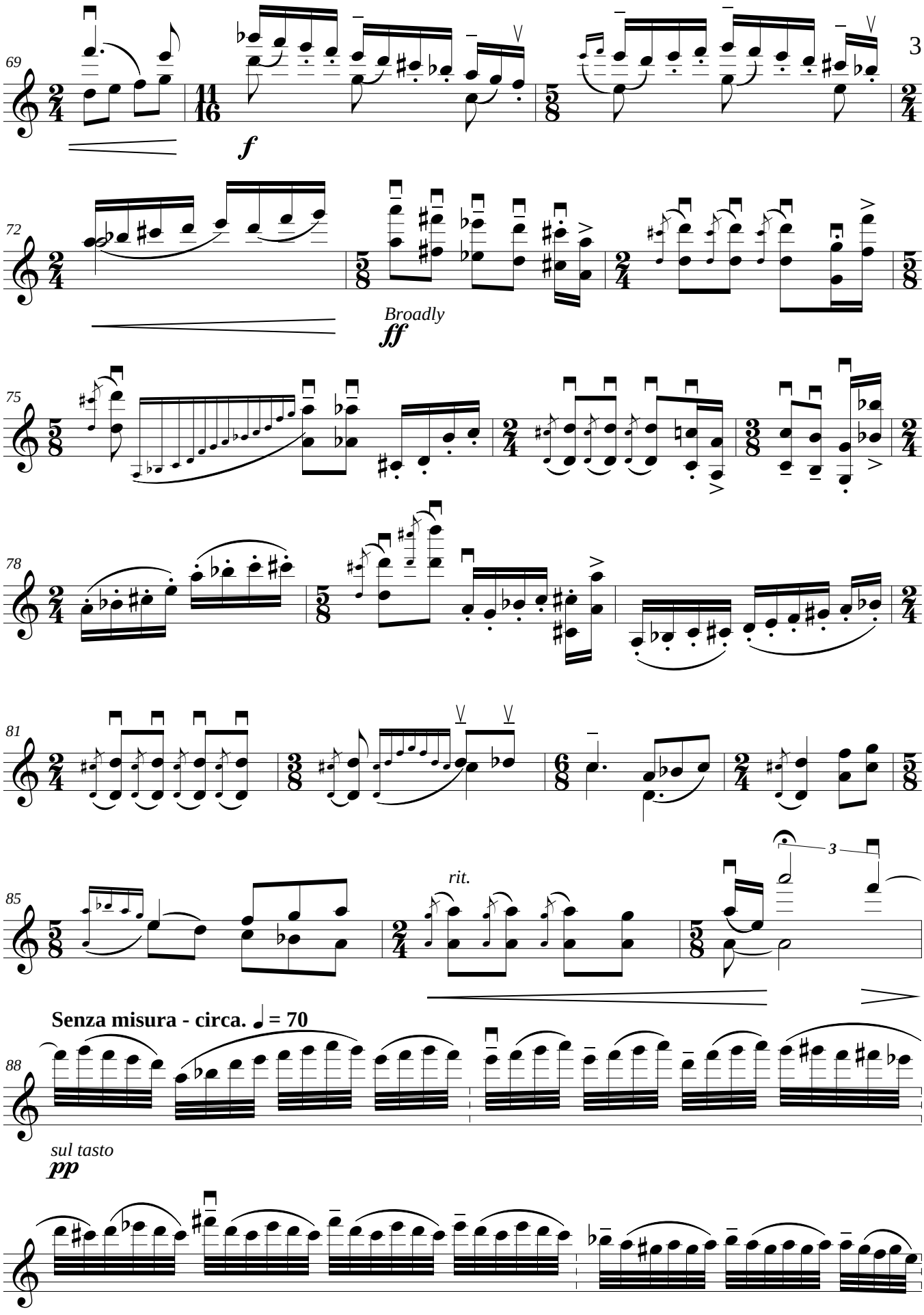
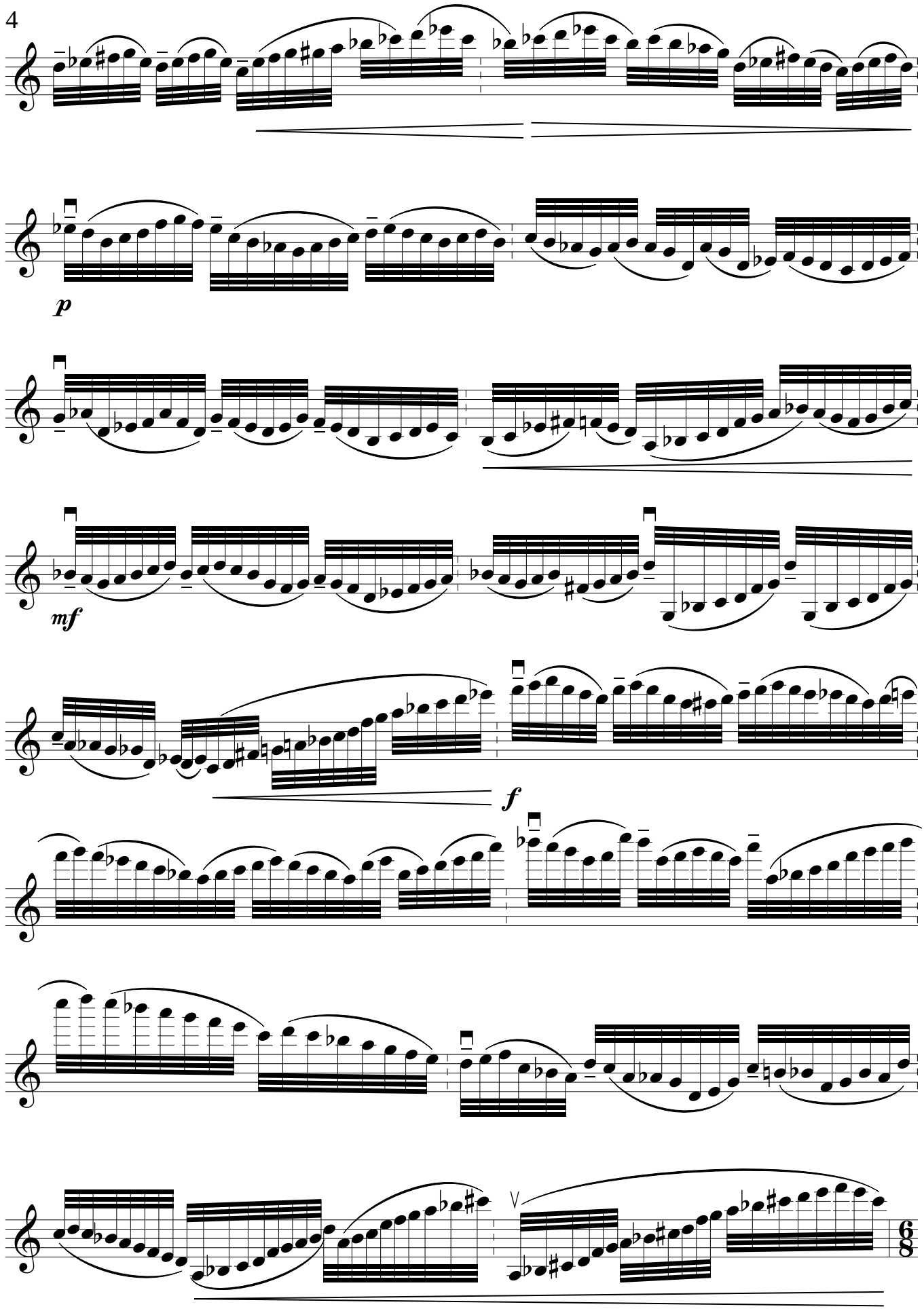
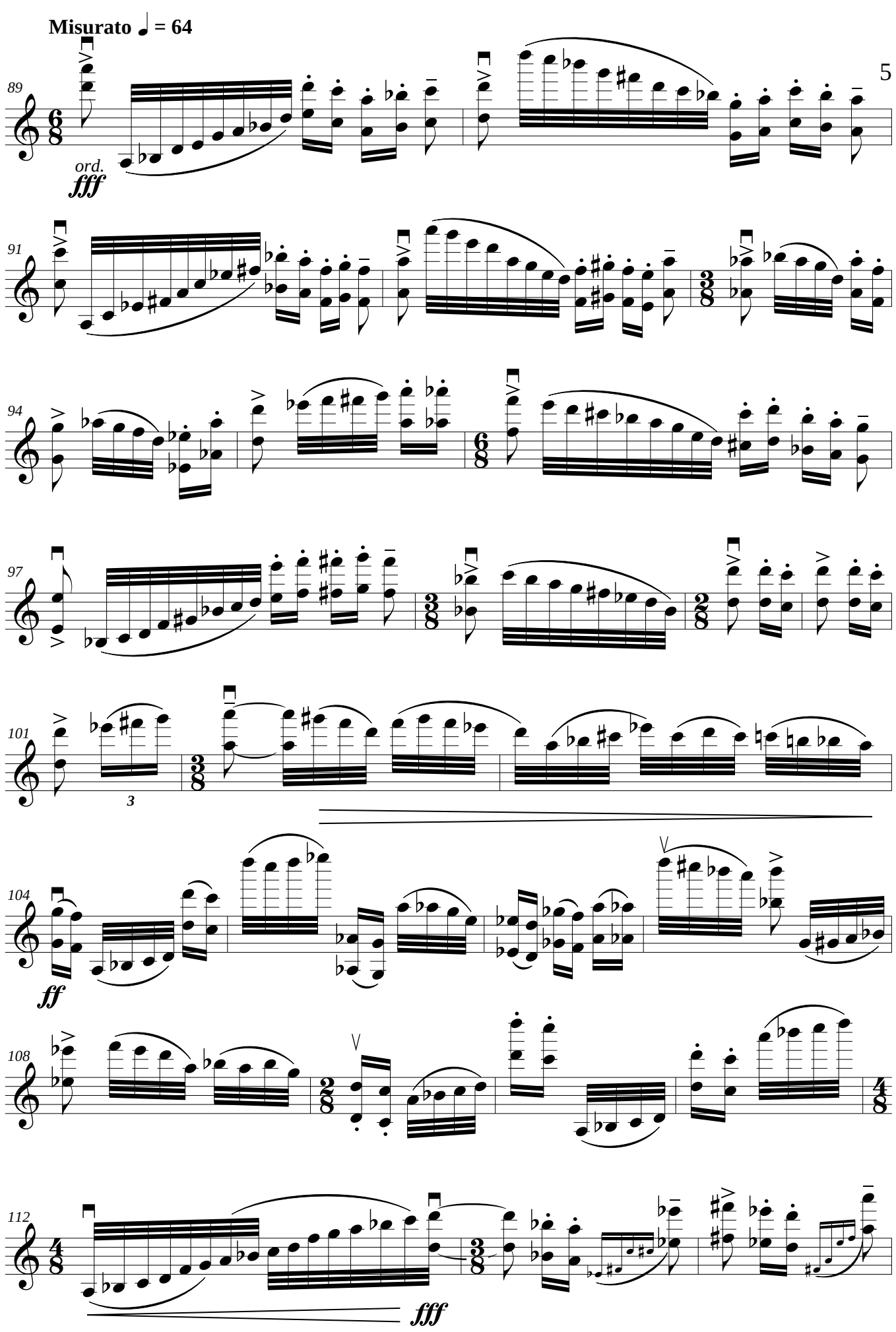
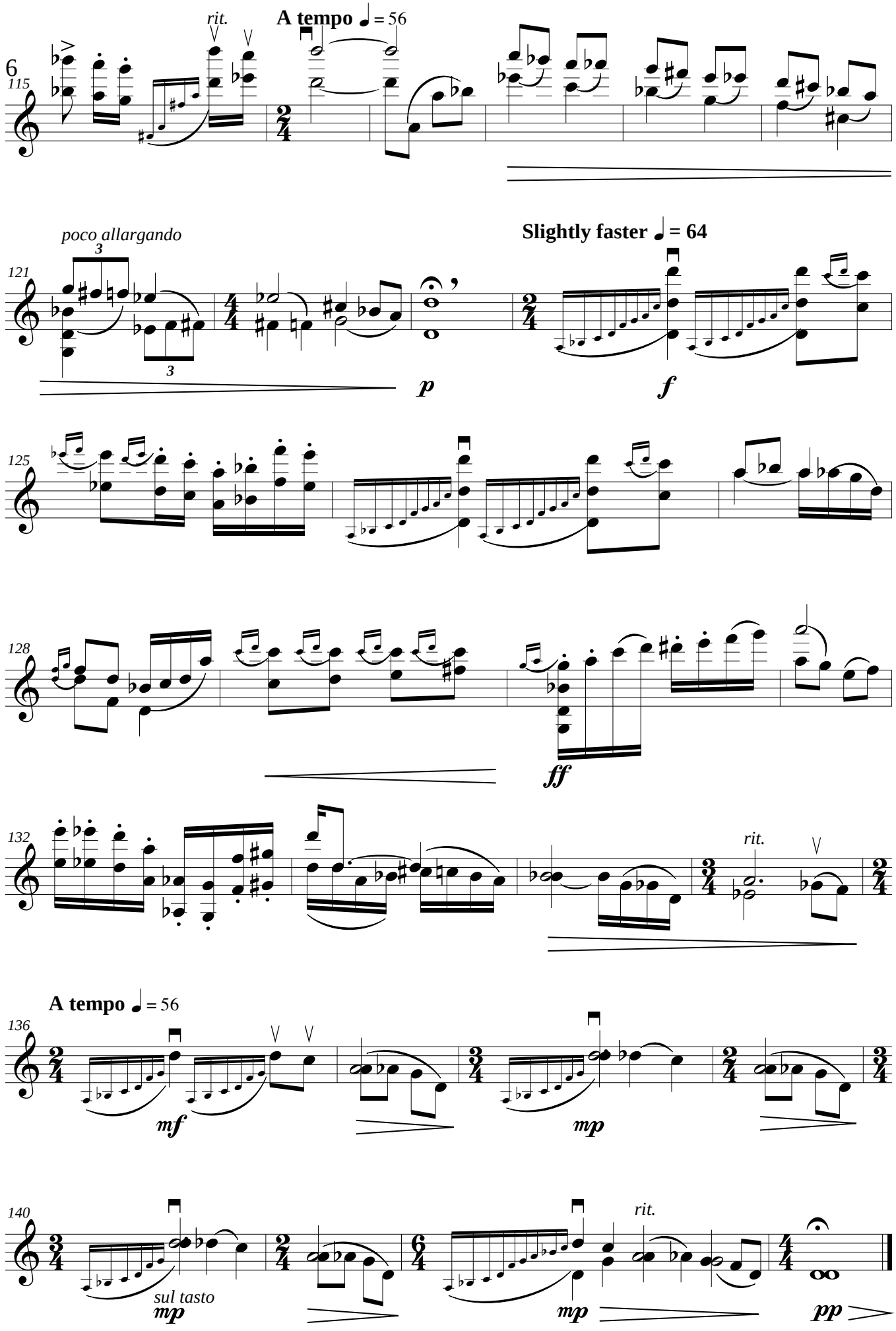

69
f
72
Broadly
ff
75
78
81
85
rit.
3
Senza misura - circa. ♩ = 70
88
sul tasto
pp


p
mf
f


Misurato ♩ = 64
89
ord.
fff
91
94
97
101
3
104
ff
108
112
fff


115
rit.
A tempo ♩ = 56
121
poco allargando
3
3
p
Slightly faster ♩ = 64
f
125
128
ff
132
rit.
A tempo ♩ = 56
136
mf
mp
140
sul tasto
mp
mp
rit.
pp