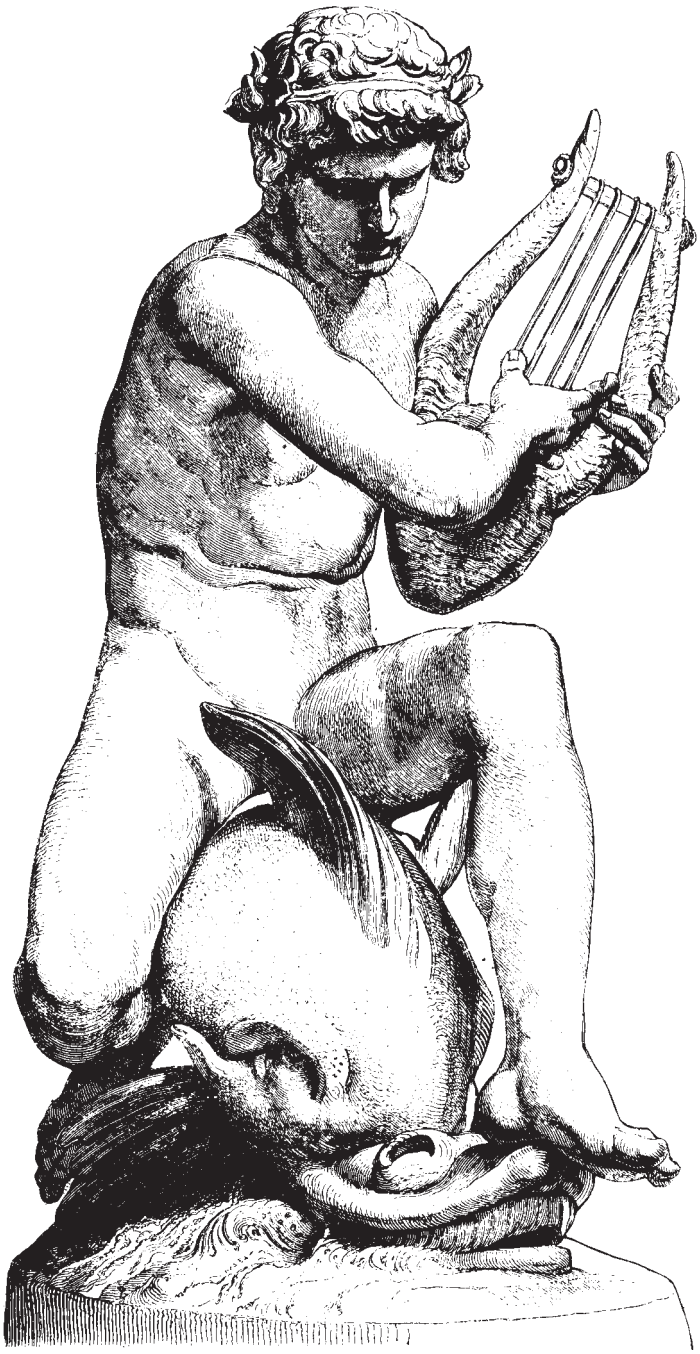
JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH



PARTITA NO.3 FOR UNACCOMPANIED VIOLA
IN A (E) MAJOR
BWV 1006

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Partita No. 3 in E major for solo violin, BWV 1006.1 (formerly 1006), is the last work in Johann Sebastian Bach's set of Sonatas and Partitas. It consists of the following movements:

1. *Preludio*
2. *Loure*
3. *Gavotte en Rondeau*
4. *Menuets (I and II)*
5. *Bourrée*
6. *Gigue*

Bach transcribed the Partita as a suite, cataloged as BWV 1006.2 (formerly 1006a) The music critic Wilhelm Tappert claimed in 1900 that this arrangement was for lute solo, but present research indicates that it was for an unspecified instrument.

Bach was clearly delighted with this partita, and particularly with the first movement. In 1729, Bach arranged this Preludio as an instrumental movement of a wedding cantata (BWV 120a) and as a festive overture at the start of the cantata BWV 29. Furthermore Bach himself copied a version of the whole partita on two staves, which could be a simple keyboard piece, or maybe a suite for lute or theorbo.

The Preludio consists almost entirely of semiquavers (i.e. sixteenth notes). The Preludio was also transcribed by Bach for use in two cantatas:

- the sinfonia which opens the second part of the 1729 cantata Herr Gott, Beherrscher aller Dinge, BWV 120a.
- the opening sinfonia, scored for obbligato organ, oboes, trumpets and strings, of the 1731 cantata *Wir danken dir, Gott, wir danken dir,* BWV 29, in D major.

J
From the Netherlands Bach Society:
https://www.bachvereniging.nl/en/bwv/bwv-1006

Ringtone

Bach clearly bases his composition on the characters of various dances

"This cheerful partita revolves around dancing. The tone is set by the high-spirited Preludio. Just like the Loure, the Preludio is noble, dignified and stately, and refers to French court music. Then the mood becomes lighter, livelier and more popular. The Gavotte en rondeau is comical and playful, and the two Minuets evoke associations with the fiddlers who played dance music at village parties in Bach's day. The final dance, a light-footed Gigue, is a real finale piece.

Like Bach's other works for solo violin, Partita no. 3 is not a stand-alone piece. In 1729, Bach arranged the Preludio from this partita as an instrumental movement (organ and strings) of a wedding cantata (BWV 120a). A couple of years later, in 1731, the Preludio resurfaced, this time as a festive overture (once again for organ and orchestra) at the start of the cantata BWV 29. And that is not all. Bach himself copied a version of the whole partita on two staves, which could be a simple keyboard piece, or maybe a suite for lute or theorbo. In any case, Bach was clearly delighted with this partita, and particularly with the first movement. Anyone who has had an old-fashioned mobile phone will recognise this Preludio as the ubiquitous 'Nokia ringtone' of the time.

Six sonatas and partitas for solo violin, BWV 1001-1006

At the top of his manuscript of six solo works for violin, Bach wrote *'Sei solo*'. But did he mean six solos (which is '*Sei soli'* in correct Italian), or did he really mean *'Sei solo'*… you are on your own? In the days before spellchecks, spelling was more a question of feeling, especially in another language. It could be that Bach deliberately did not write *'Sei soli'* above his six violin solos, choosing rather to warn his soloists before sending them off to perform with just a bow, four strings and a few of his most difficult pieces.

Bach's solo works are in line with the wonderful tradition of Westhoff, Biber, Matteis, Schop and others, although Bach aims not so much for virtuosity, but for interiority, playing a theoretical game with the impossibility of true polyphony on a single melody instrument. Bach understood perfectly well how our brain naturally makes music out of sounds. He was also aware of the importance of his work, calling the autograph manuscript of the sonatas and partitas from 1720 'Book 1'. He may have had the Cello Suites and the now solitary Flute Partita in mind as carefully planned sequels for the future. Polyphony on your own – you can hardly get your head around it."

Bach the violinist

San Francisco Symphony program notes written by James. M Keller:

"Johann Sebastian Bach was renowned in his day as a keyboard virtuoso, but he was also a skilled violinist. His father, Johann Ambrosius Bach, had been a professional violinist in Erfurt and in Eisenach, so the composer surely grew up surrounded by the sounds of the violin. It was as a violinist that Johann Sebastian obtained his first professional appointment…"

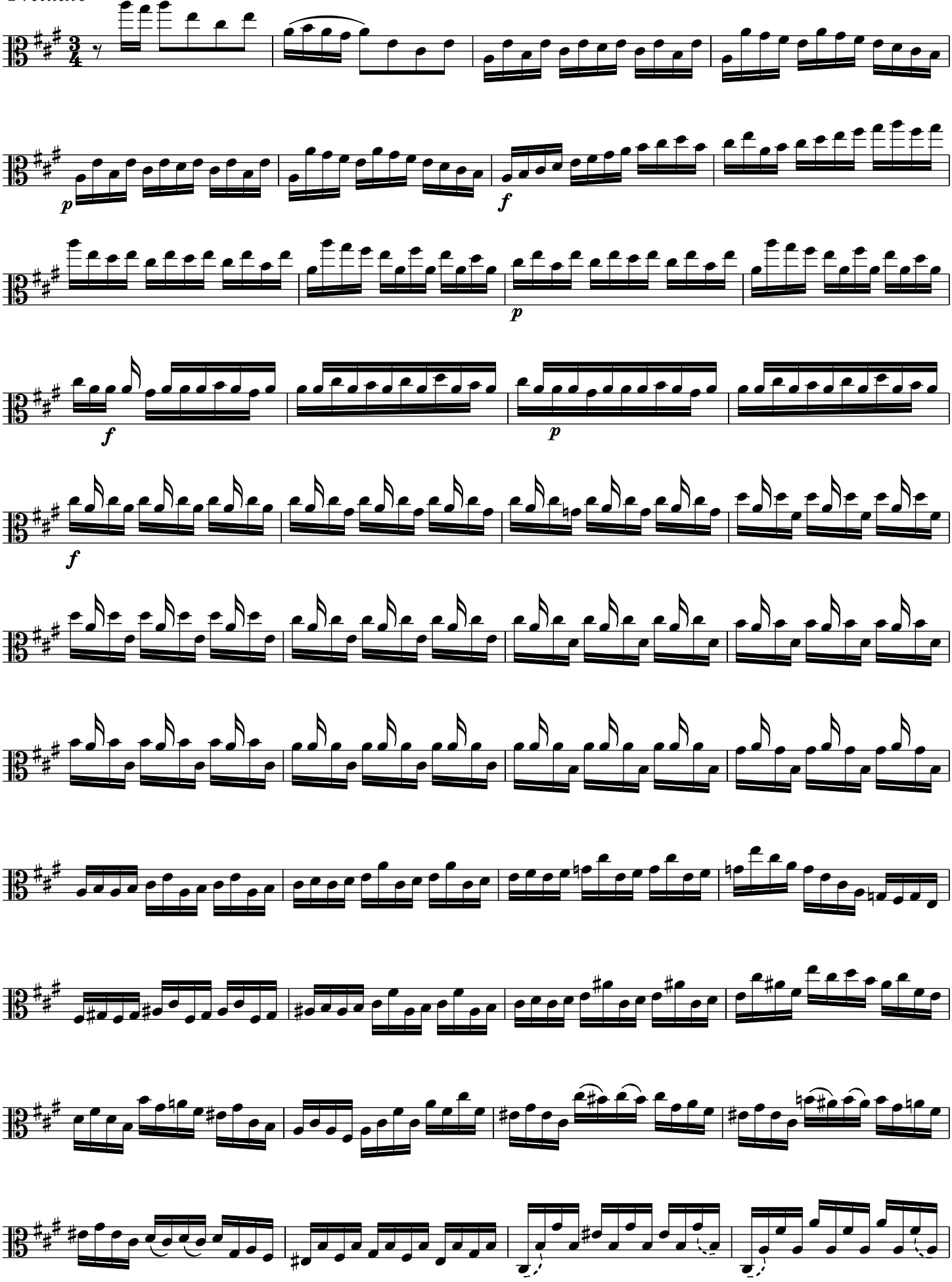
About this transcription for Viola:
It is almost entirely the violin urtext. It works equally as well for viola as violin.
The slurs are Bach's originals. Some are more phrasings/articulations than bowings.

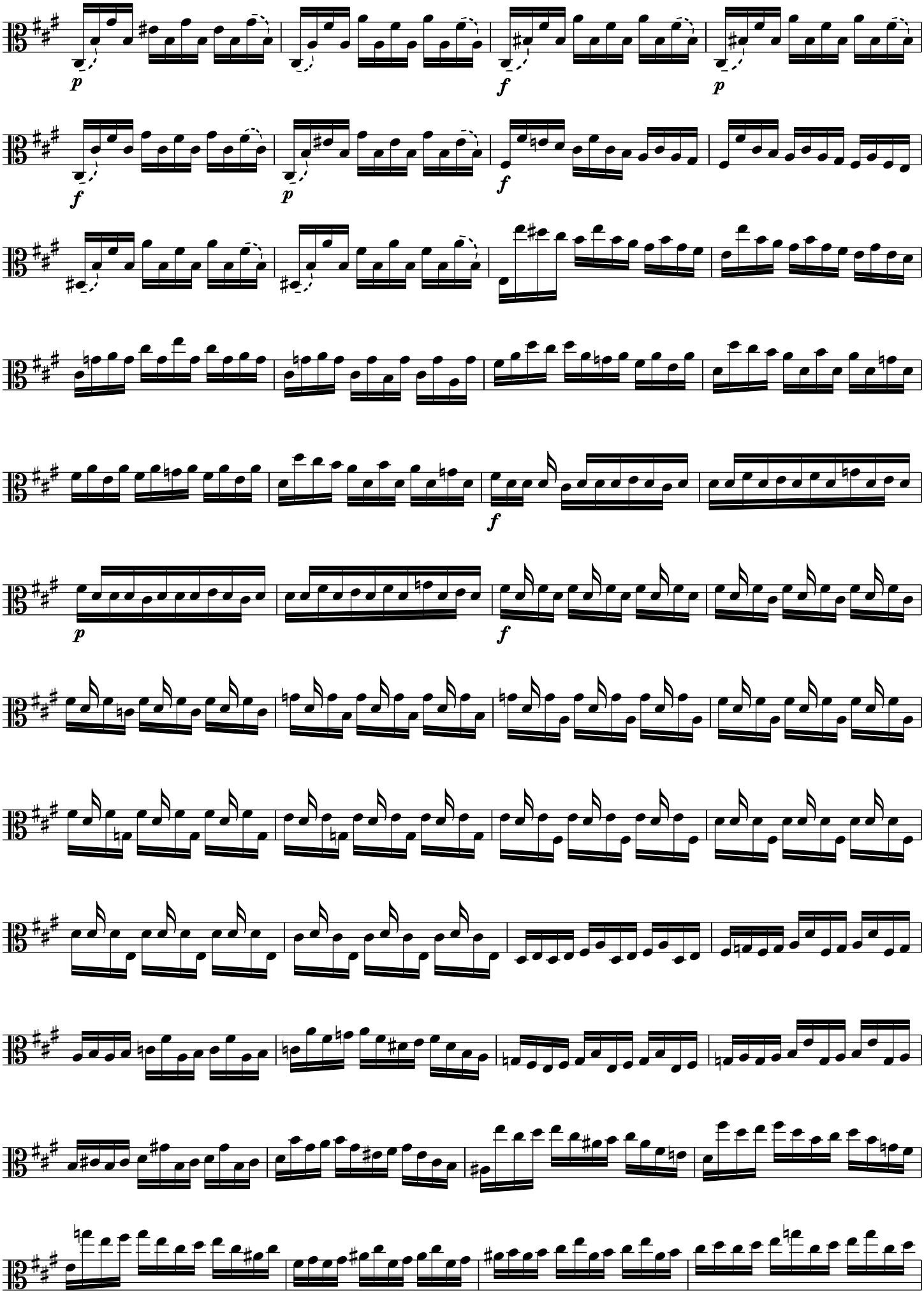
Alan Bonds
abonds@swiftdsl.com.au
Perth, Western Australia
June 2025

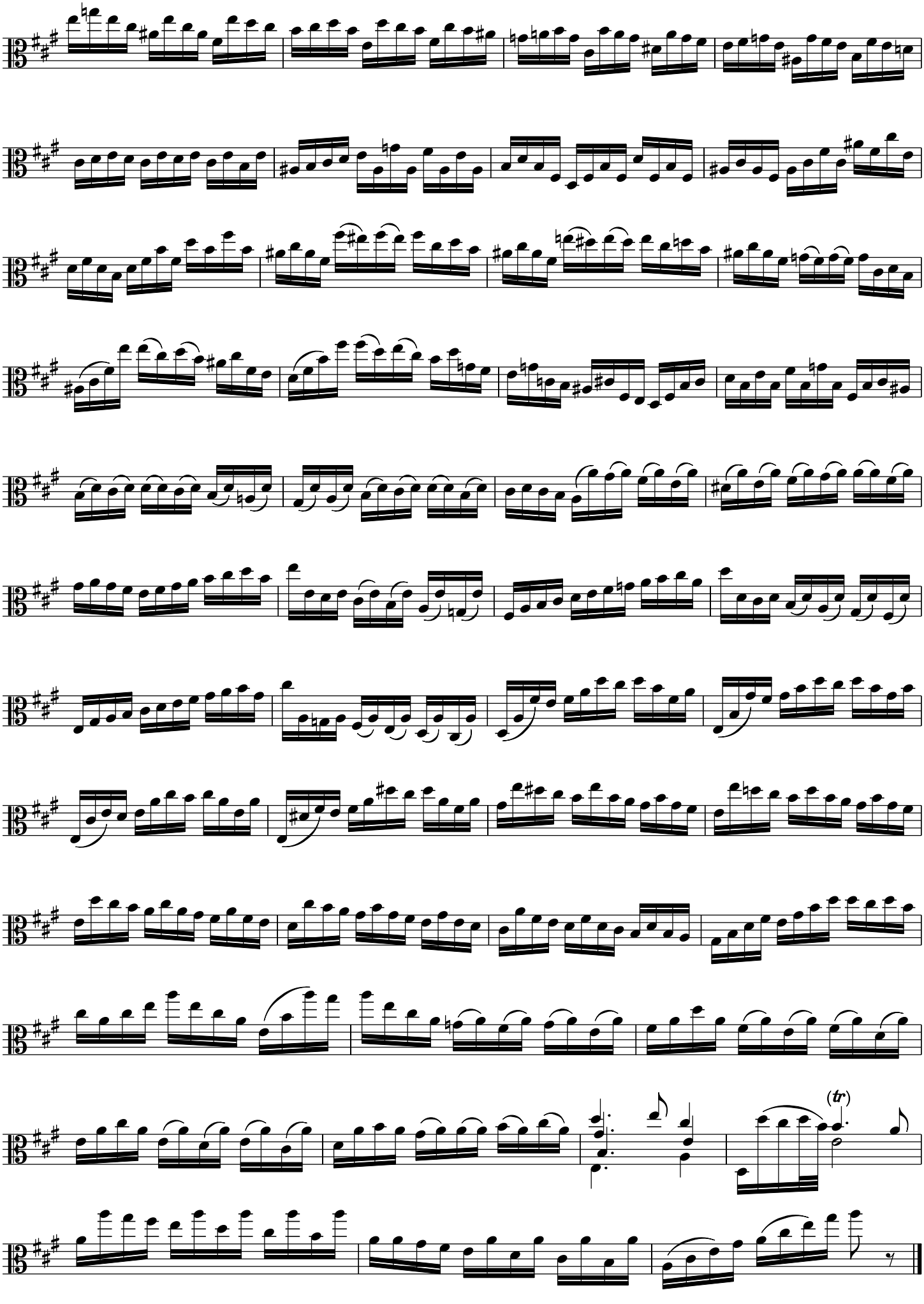
Partita III

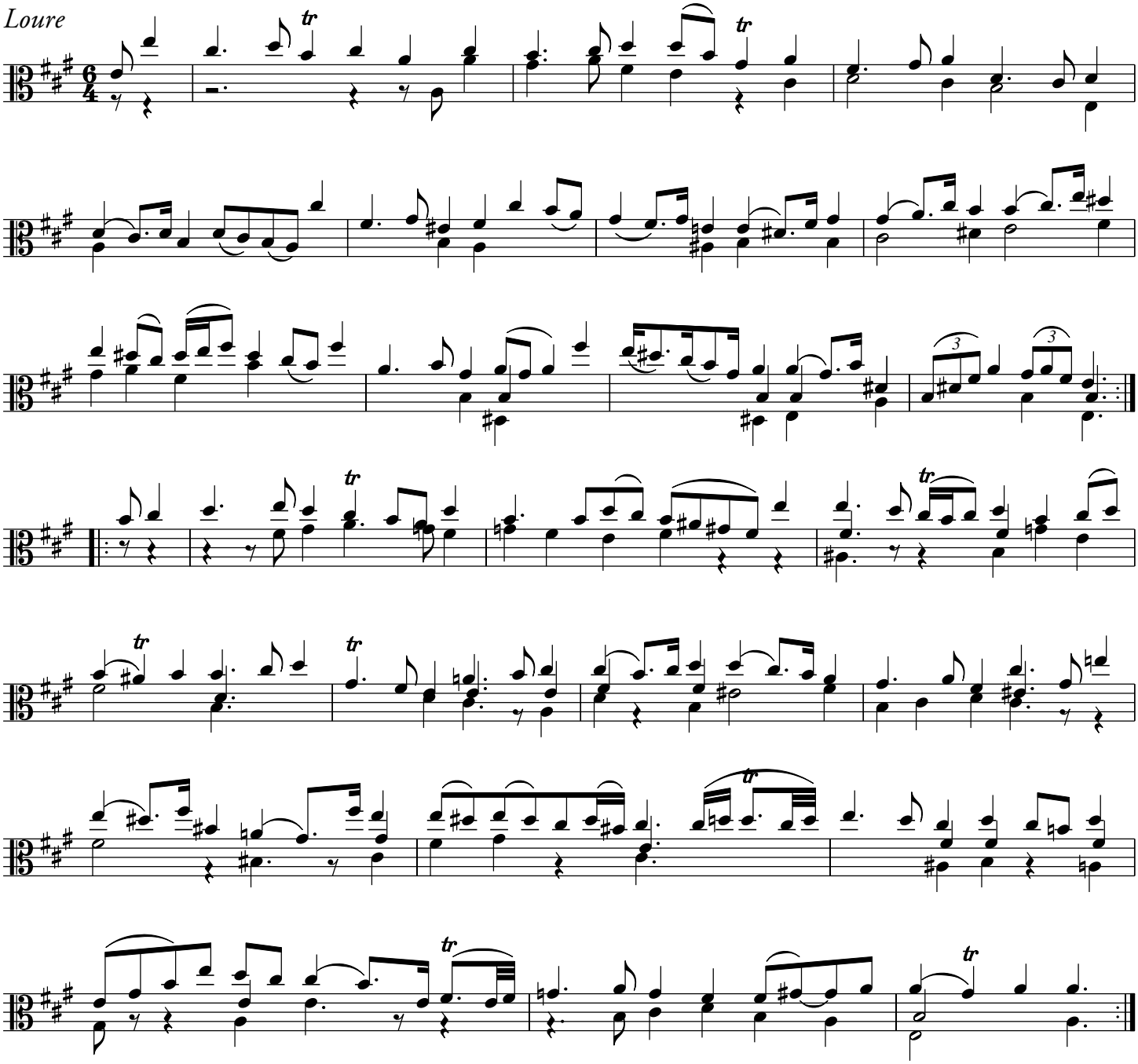
BWV 1006

Preludio

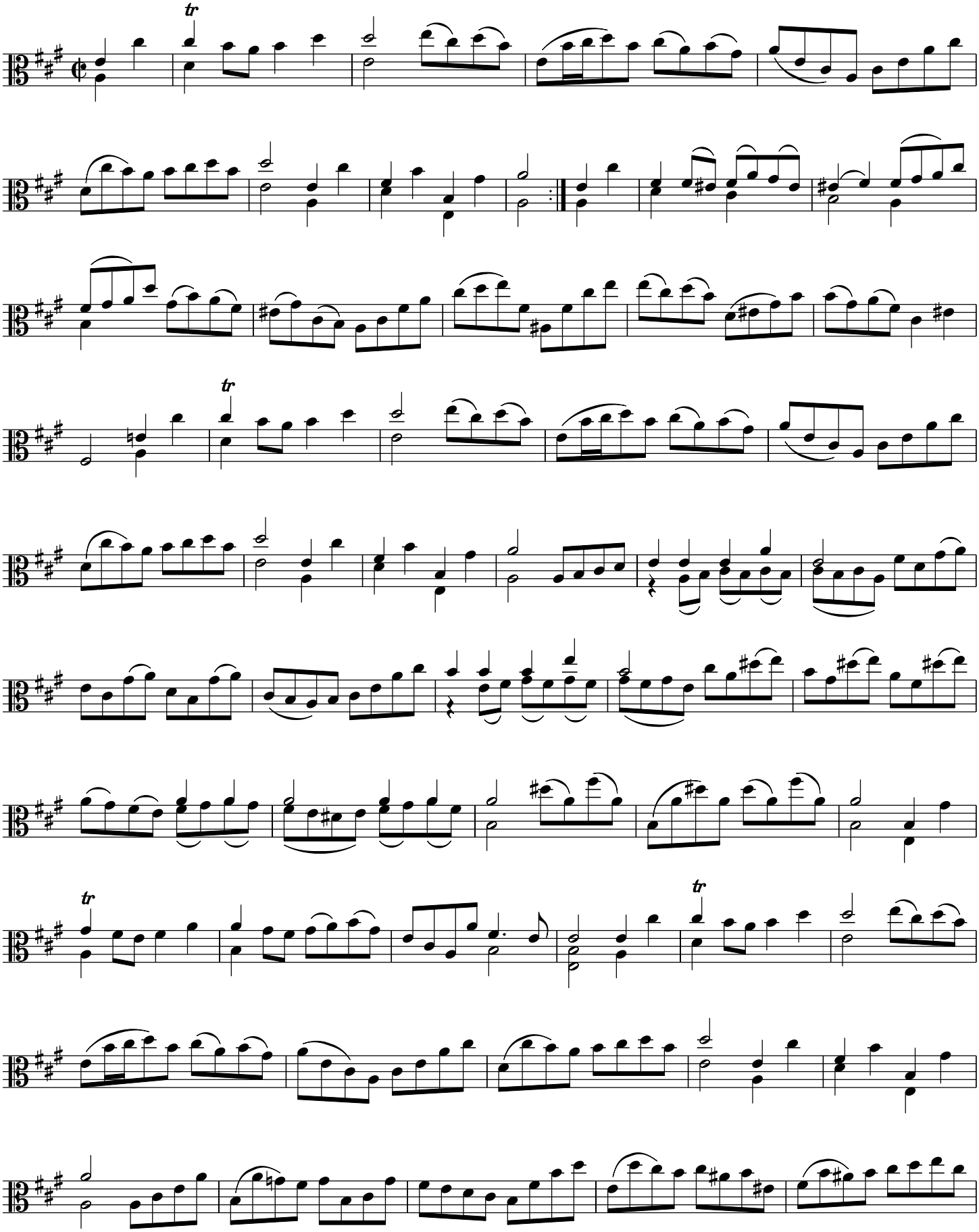


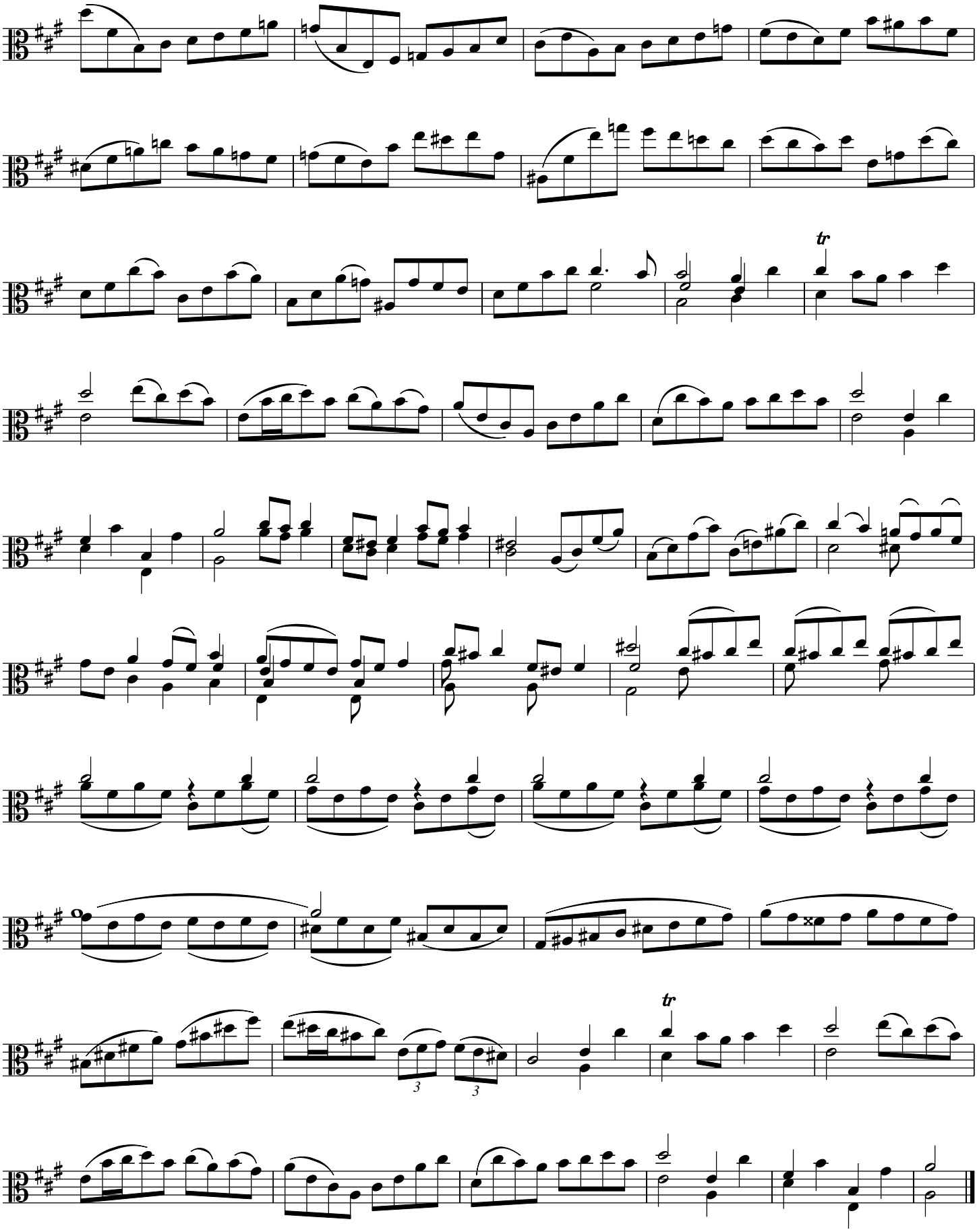




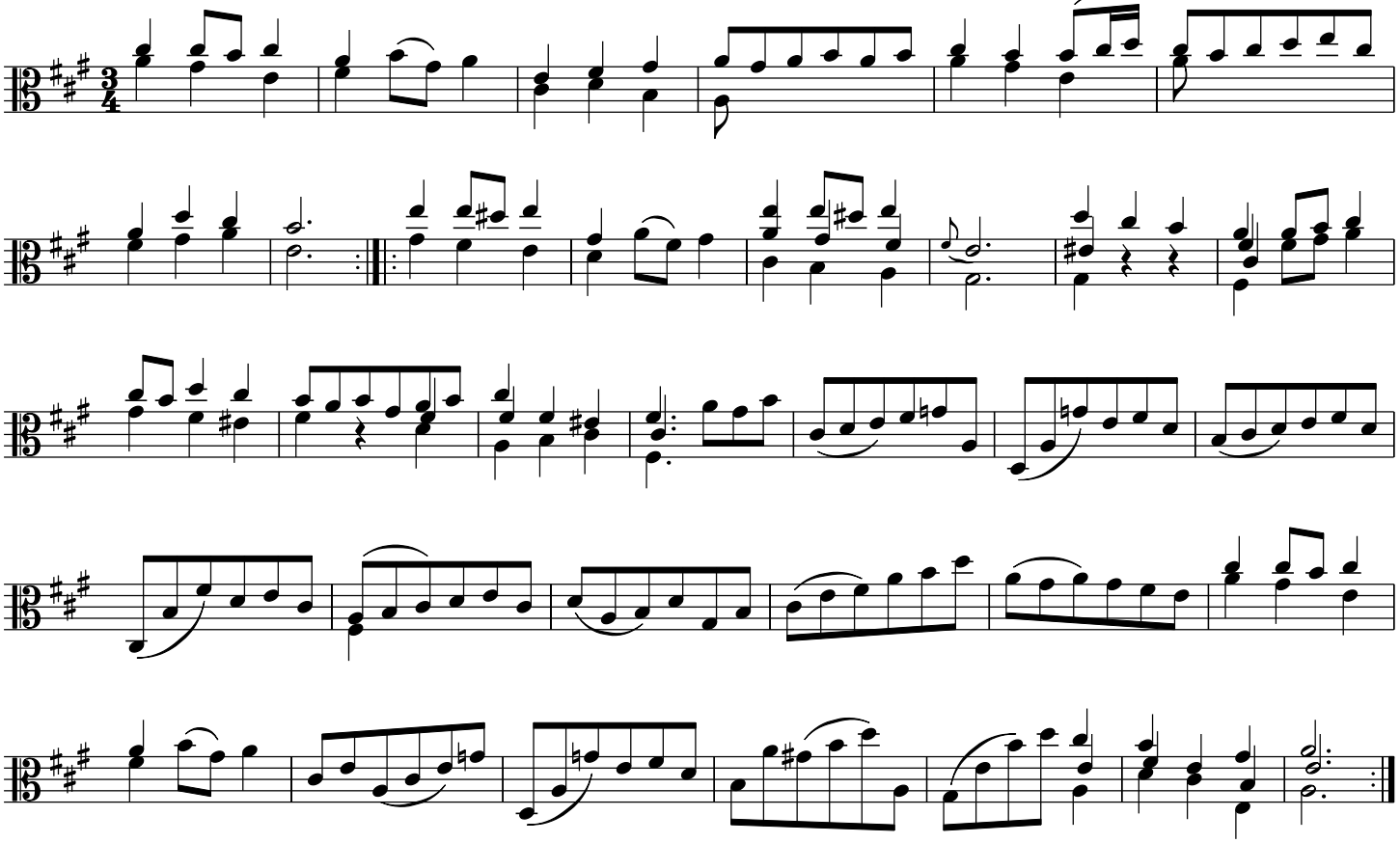

Loure

Gavotte en Rondeau

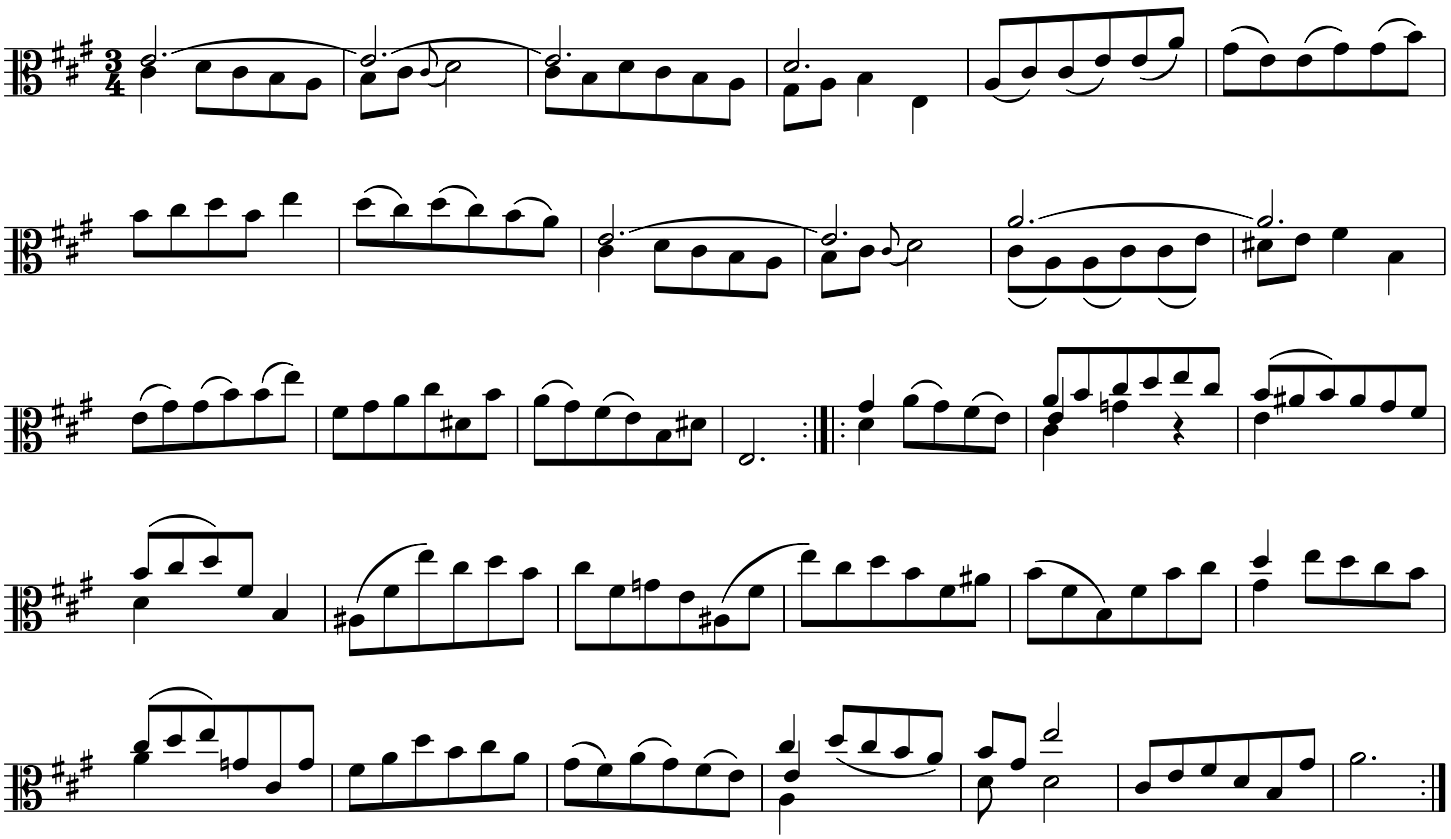



tr
tr
3
3

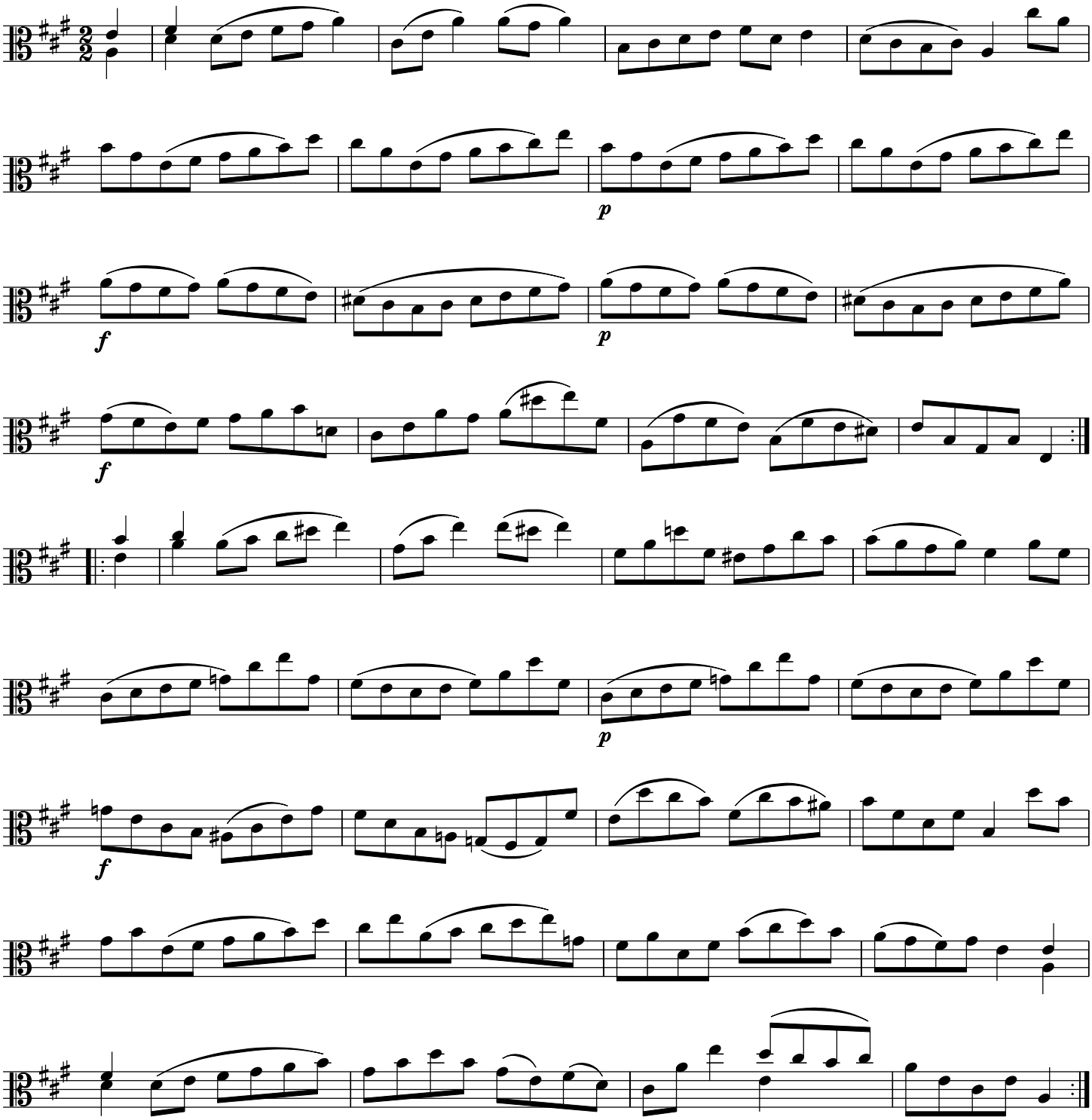
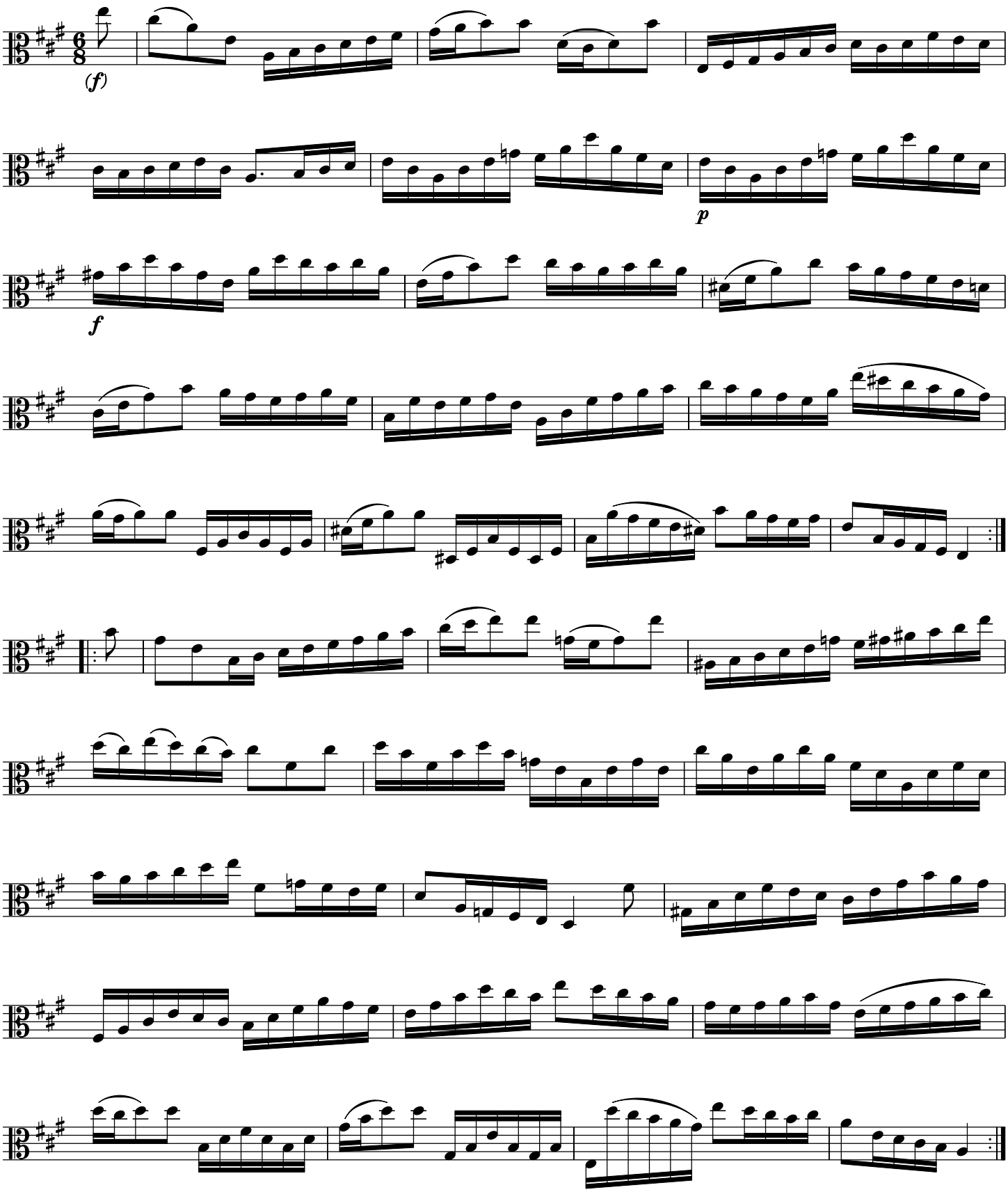
Menuet I



Menuet II



Bourée



Gigue