Charles Dancla

Duos Faciles & Progressifs

For Two Violins

Charles Dancla (b.Bagnères de Bigorre, 19 Dec 1817 d. Tunis, 10 Nov 1907)

Dancla was born in Bagnères-de-Bigorre. When he was nine years old, the violinist Pierre Rode in Bordeaux heard his music; he was so impressed that he sent a recommendation letter to Pierre Baillot, Luigi Cherubini and Rodolphe Kreutzer. Thus Dancla became pupil to Paris conservatoires with Baillot for violin and with the opera composer Fromental Halévy for composition. He was strongly shaped by Niccolò Paganini, who experienced him in 1830, as well as by Henri Vieuxtemps. From 1835 onward Dancla was solo violinist in that Paris opera, and shortly thereafter he became concert master. In the year 1857 he was made a Professor to Paris conservatoires, where he was a successful teacher for over 35 years. He died in Tunis.

His two brothers were Arnaud Dancla (1819-1862), Cellist and author of a considerable cello teaching method, and Leopold Dancla (1822-1895), Violinist and composer of chamber music.

Charles Dancla was a Violinist, Composer and Teacher, and the most celebrated member of his family. He first started the violin locally with a teacher named Dussert, but soon, at the age of 9 was given an opportunity to play to Rode, then living in retirement in Bordeaux. Rode was so impressed by his playing and sight reading that he gave Dancla letters of introduction to Baillot, Cherubini (then director of the Paris Conservatoire) and Kreutzer.

From 1828 - 40 Dancla studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Paul Guérin and Baillot, winning a premier prix (first prize) in 1833 ; he then studied counterpoint and fugue with Halévy and composition with Berton. Some of the pupils studying with Dancla were Gounod, Bousquet and César Franck. Dancla, while still a student of composition, would often play the violin in Paris Theatre Orchestras, and soon succeeded Javault as leader at the Opéra-Comique. This provided support for his family, and enabled himself and his brothers to study at the Conservatoire. Dancla was still only 17 years old at this stage.

Dancla was associated with Habeneck's Société des Concerts at the Paris Conservatoire as early as 1834, and he was its leading violinist from 1841 to 1863, appearing also as soloist. Dancla's teacher, Baillot, often performed quartets by Boccherini, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, and this certainly inspired the Danclas (he had 2 brothers who played the violin and cello and a sister who played the piano) to form a chamber music group around 1839. Their concerts at Hesselbein's home became a regular feature of the Paris concert season.

However, Dancla's immediate future was more than slightly troubled! His ambition to succeed Baillot in 1842 as principal professor of violin was never fulfilled due mainly to internal politics at the Conservatoire. This was all the more disappointing considering Dancla had Habeneck's support. In fact, due to unsettled conditions, 6 years later, Dancla refused the post of assistant conductor at the Opéra-Comique and left Paris altogether. For 2 years Dancla became postmaster (!) of Cholet , though he continued to play the violin occasionally with his family in Paris. He would also play locally in the Cholet area. After a Paris concert (1849) in which his 4th quartet in B flat was performed, Henri Blanchard wrote in his review " He is still a good composer even though circumstances have forced him to become a man of letters ". Dancla returned to Paris to work as an official in the postal administration, and was finally offered a position at the Conservatoire in 1855. In 1860 (some sources have 1857) he was made professor of the violin, a post he held for 32 years until his unwilling retirement in 1892. At the age of 72 he was still performing his own works in public.

Dancla's ideal was Vieuxtemps, though he was certainly impressed with de Beriot's style and elegance and overwhelmed by Paganini's virtuosity. Dancla did not tour, so his fame outside France was based on his compositions. Blanchard had some reservations about his playing, which he attributed to Dancla's nervousness and irritability, but he praised Dancla's trills, his lightness of bowing and his brilliance. Dancla was highly respected at the Conservatoire though he did have fewer eminent pupils than his colleague Massart. Pupils of Dancla at the Conservatoire include the American woman violinist Maud Powell, and the Italian violinists Achille Simonetti and Francesco de Guarnieri.

Dancla was a prolific composer and won seven prizes altogether for his string quartets (14 in all) and his works for male chorus. However it is through his didactic works that his music survives. He composed more than 130 pieces for the violin. His most famous pieces (all 4 for violin) are a set of Beginners' Studies Opus 84, the Ecole du mécanisme Op.74 (or Op.23 ?), his 20 Etudes brillantes Op.73, his Airs Varieés (based on famous operatic themes of his day) and a Progressive Method for violin beginners (published by Ricordi). Published by Schott are the 3 books on the "School of Melody". Each book contains a small collection of melodic encore pieces, which as regards melody are to be considered the ultimate test of purity and legato playing. Book 1 is a fine test for early (Grade 2) stage youngsters who have grasped the essence of a true singing tone. Dancla also wrote a book with a list of his

works, Notes et souvenirs (Paris, 1893, 2/ 1898). Dancla is regarded as the last exponent of the classical French school of violin playing.

Places, Events and Oddities

Paris Conservatoire in the 1890s observed its first centenary. Ridden with traditions and a steadfast curriculum, this faculty had no mandatory retirement age.. curious when French musicians are noted for their longevity : At the Conservatoire Massart retired at 80, Sauzay at 84, and Dancla at 75. The post of professeur carried great prestige, though it was poorly paid. As Flesch once put it, “once a teacher had succeeded in getting on the staff he clung firmly to his post until he had one foot in the grave”. In the later 19th century alone, the Conservatoire produced some of the most extraordinary violinist of all time: Wieniawski, Sarasate and Kreisler.

My editorial notes:

Dancla’s Duos were originally published by C.F. Peters (Leipzig) (1847-54) in 11 volumes with various opus numbers, not necessarily in order of difficulty. I have chosen to go as far as Vol. 7, but will complete them eventually.

They were published in separate part books. This version is in duo score, more valuable for study and performance purposes. Page turns are mostly achievable except in the very long ones.

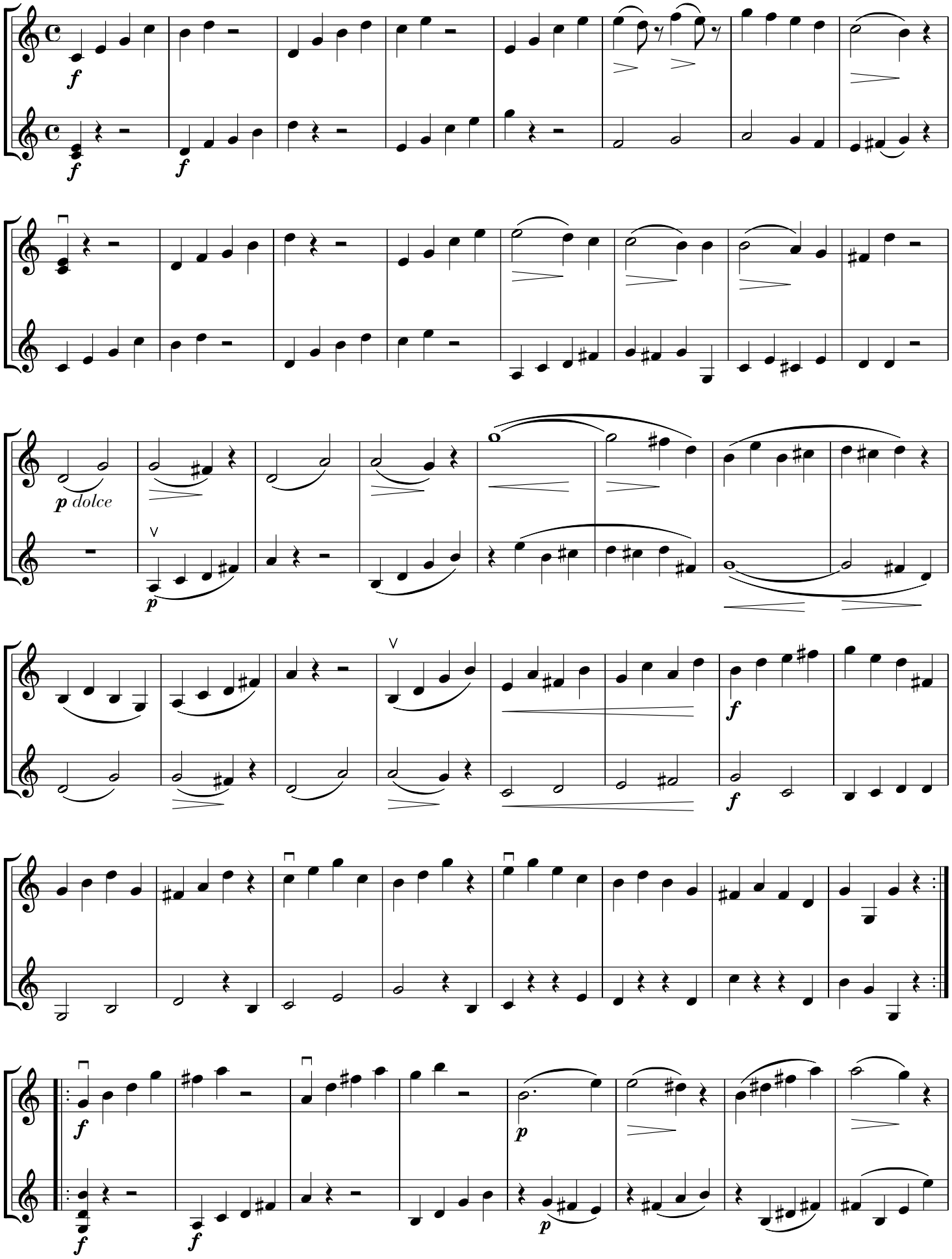
I have retained the original (rather odd) order.

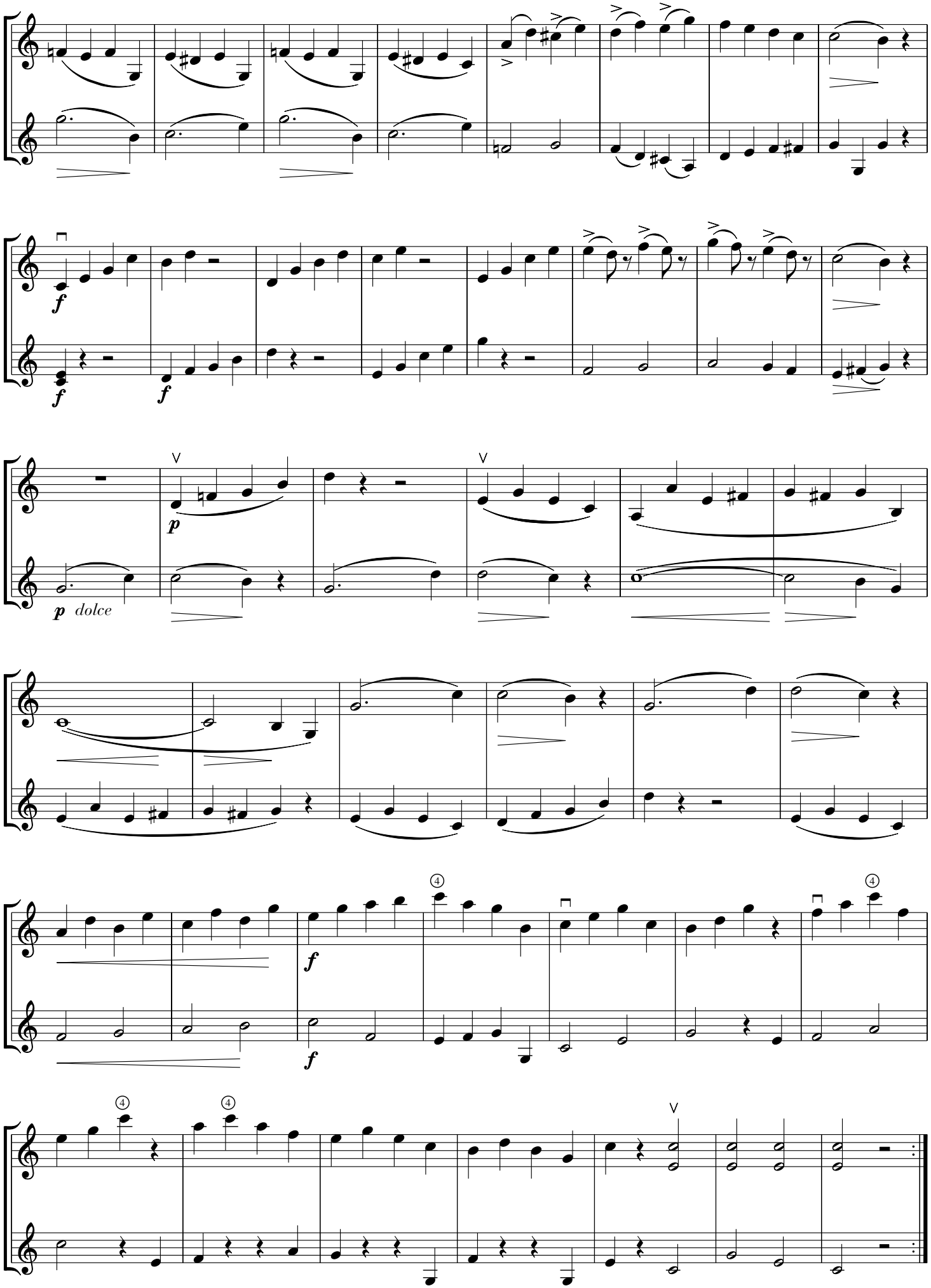
Bowing instructions like *tirez* and *poussez* have been converted to modern bowings, and I have faithfully retained D’s fingerings to understand the style of the period. They can now be taken with a pinch of salt as the slides have now gone out of fashion.

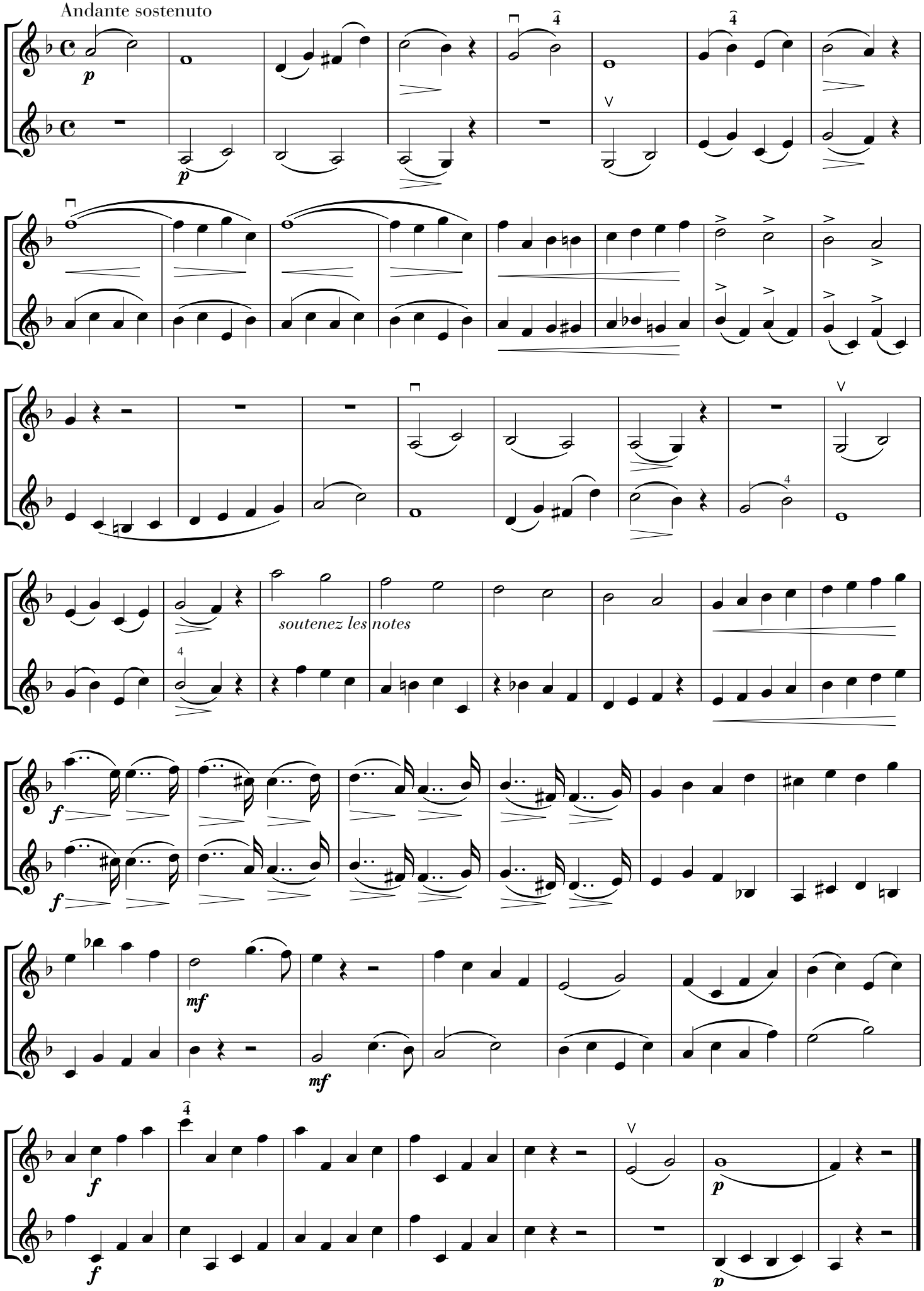
Dancla was a very skilled and respected composer. The Duos are beautifully composed and provide valuable insights into the French Romantic violin style. They should be a very important part of every serious violin student’s curriculum.

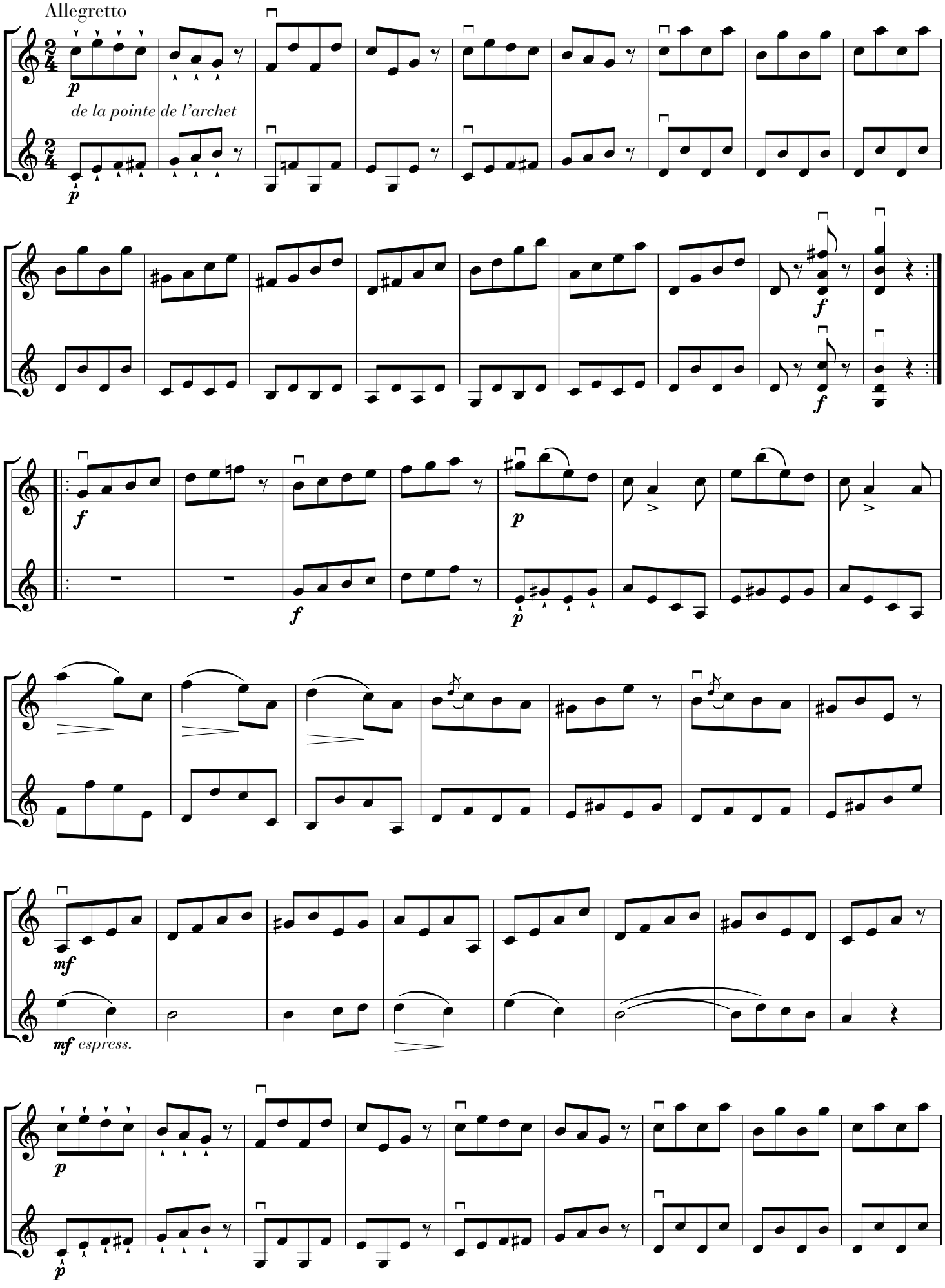
Alan Bonds
Perth, Western Australia, December 2023
[abonds@swiftdsl.com.au]

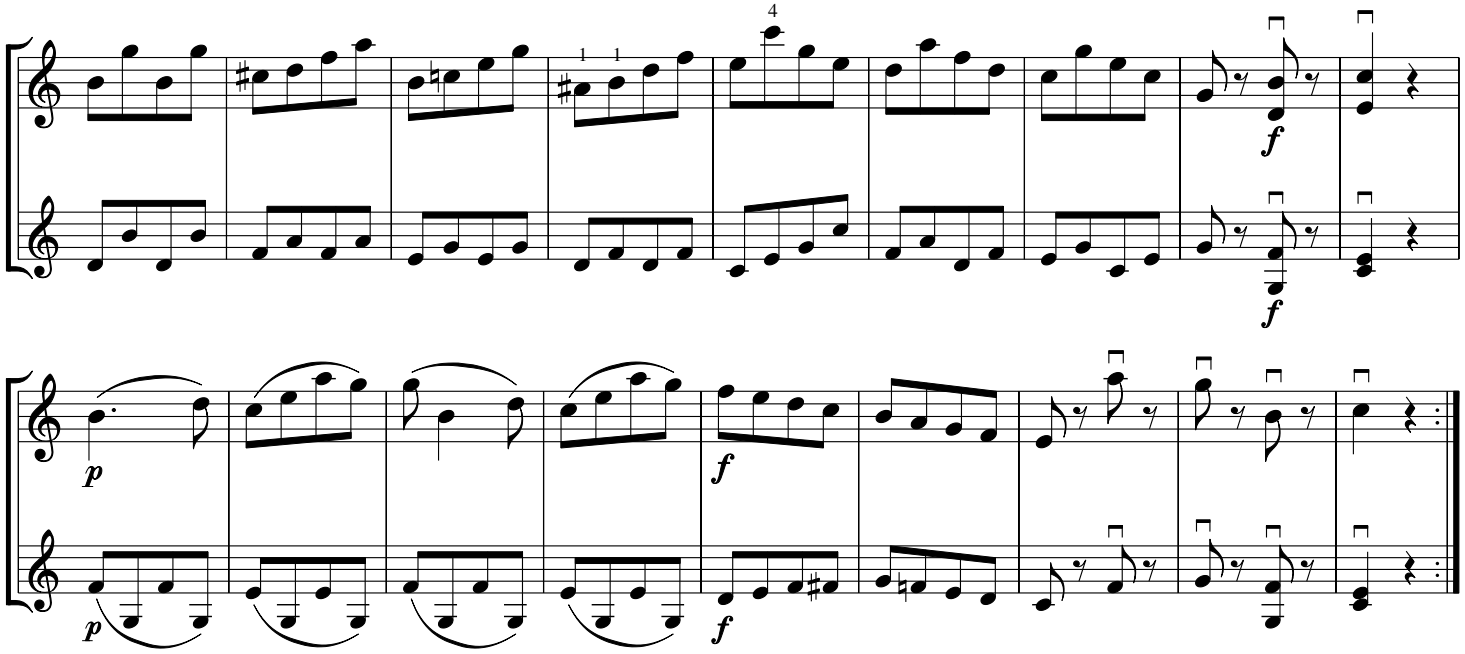
Allegro moderato




f
f
f
p
p dolce
f
f
4
4
4
V
V

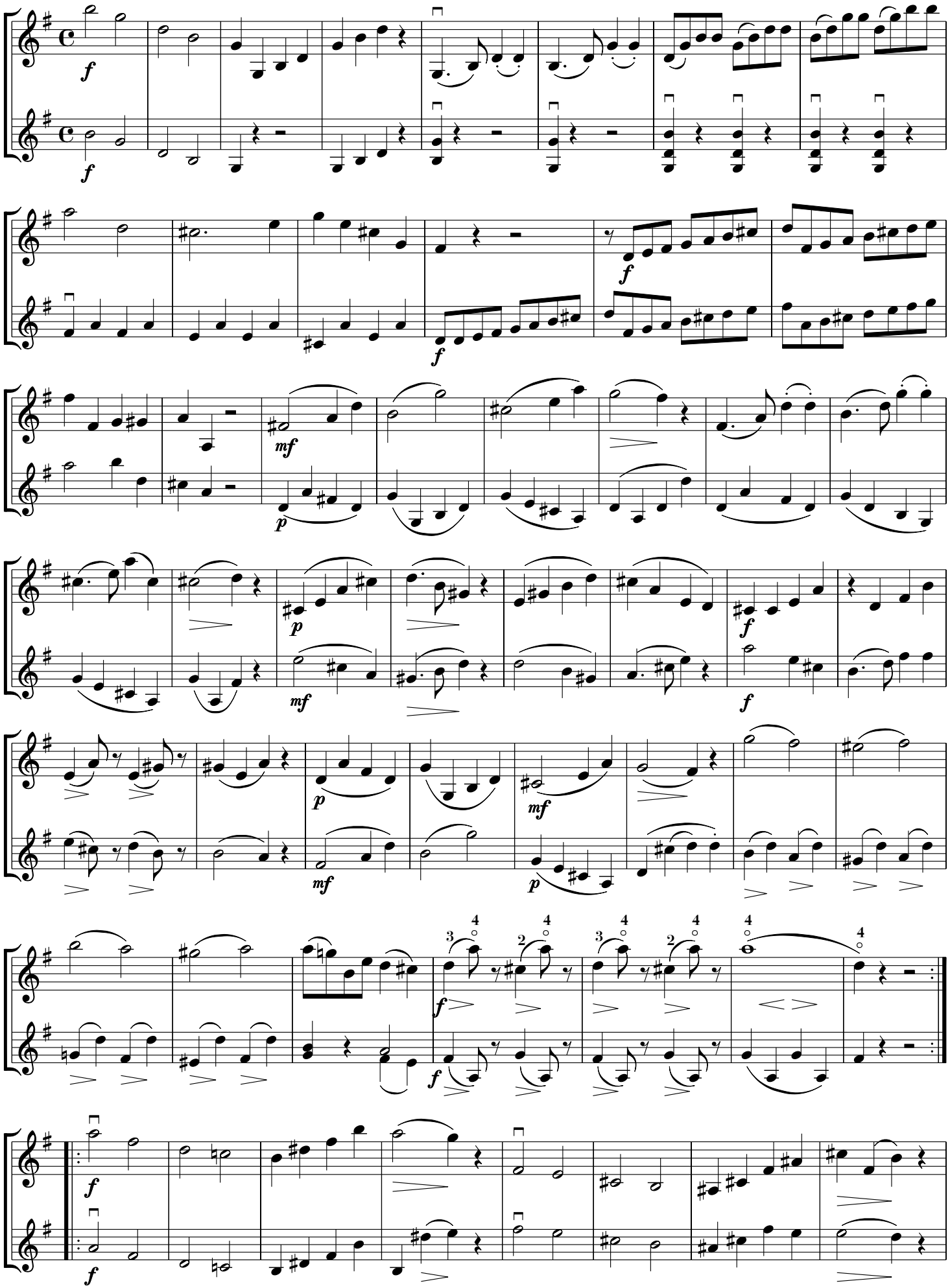

Andante sostenuto
soutenez les notes

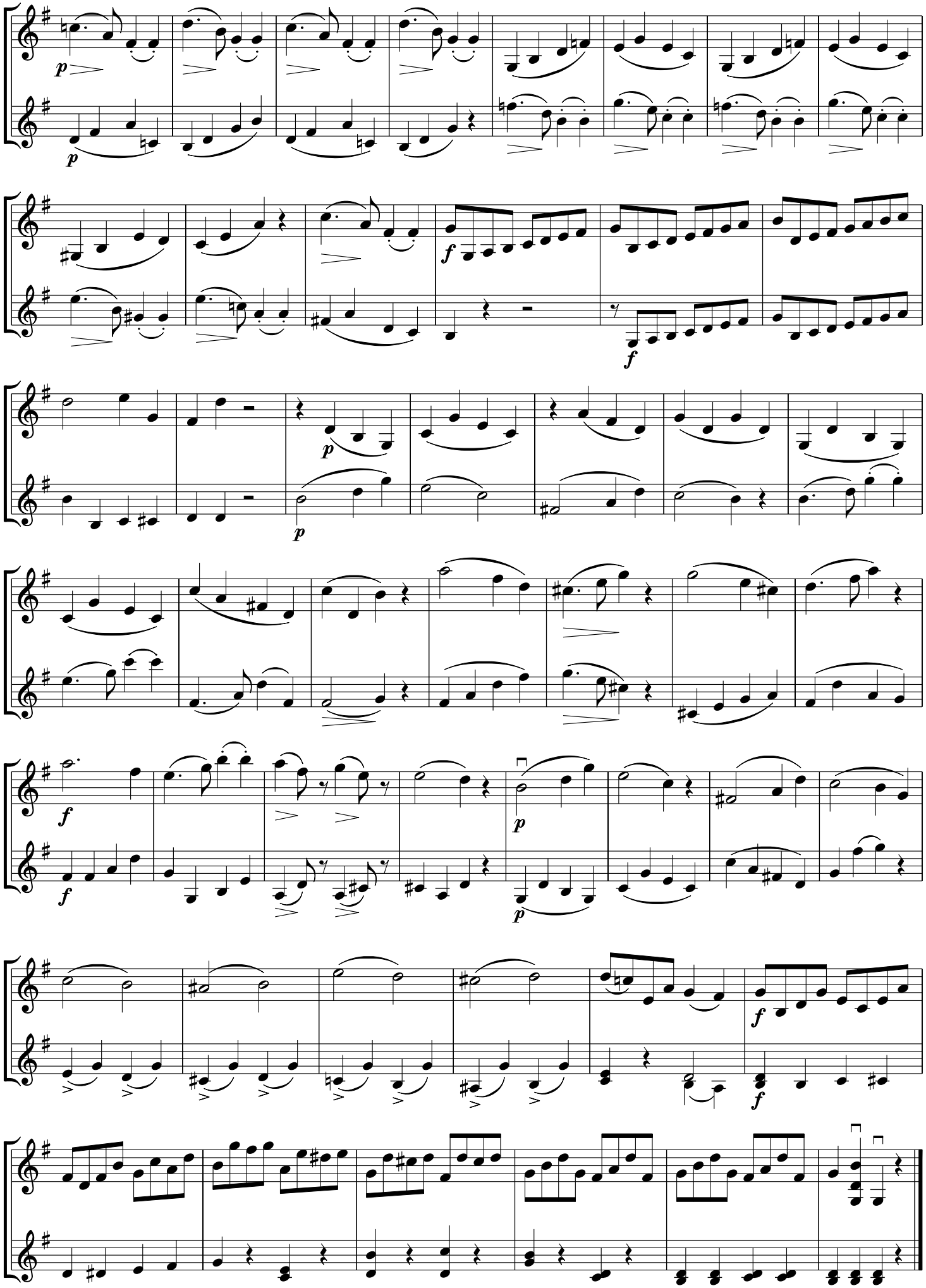

Allegretto
de la pointe de l'archet
espress.

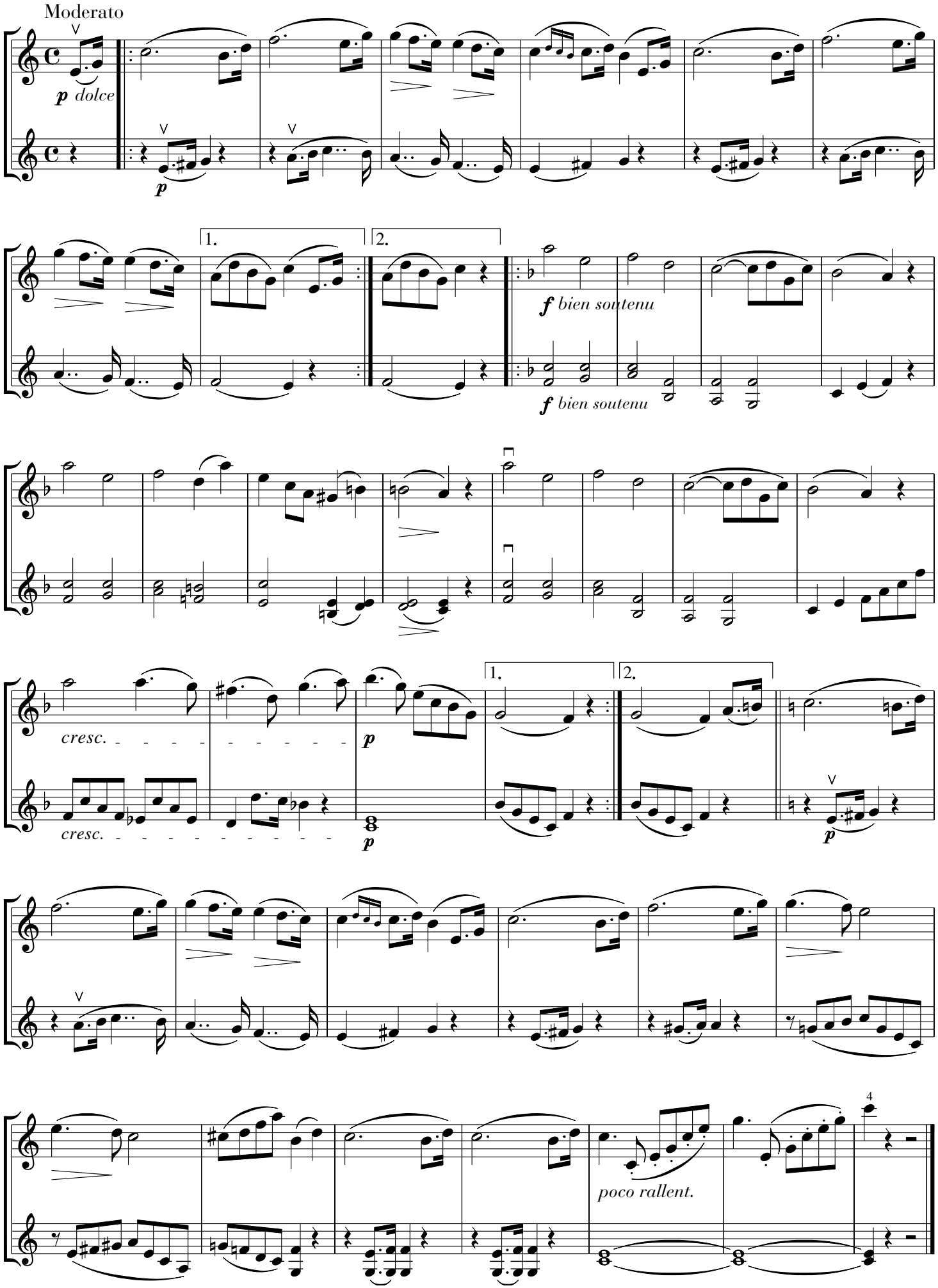


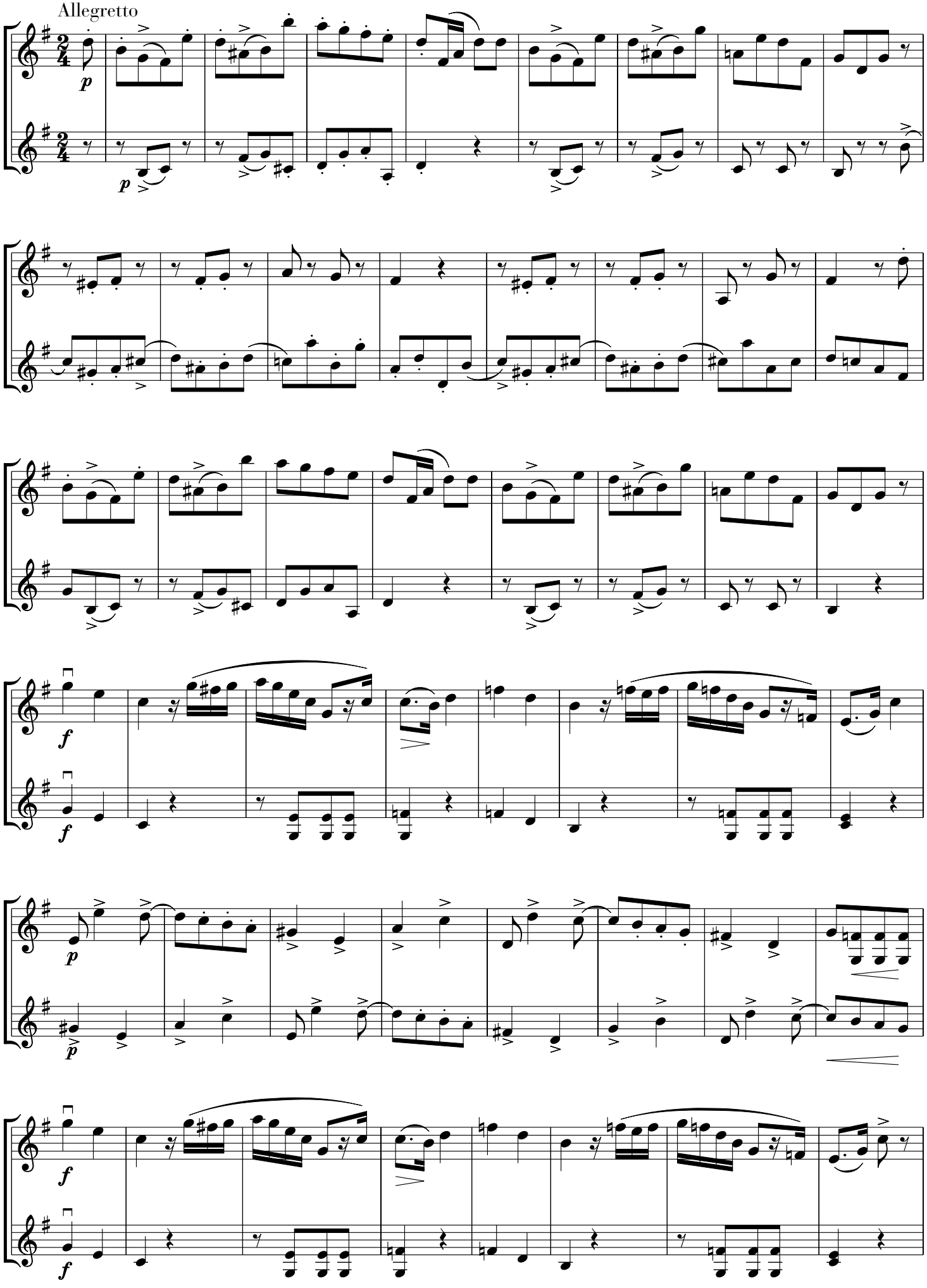
Although the composer explicitly asks for the *staccato* strokes to be played *de la pointe de l'archet* (at the point of the bow), it sounds much better *spiccato* (bouncing bow).
Try first with a crisp stroke at the point, then try spiccato.

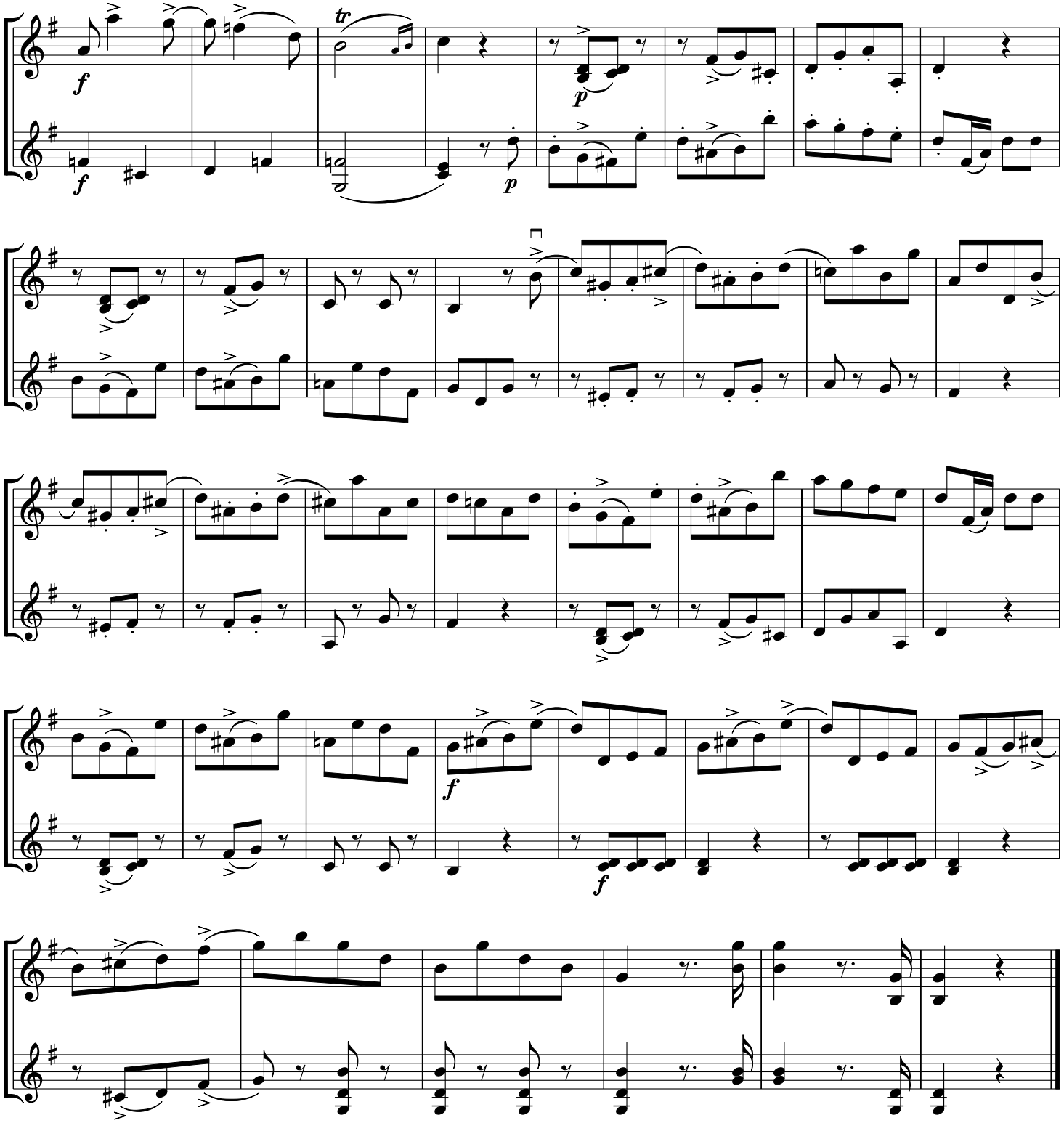
Moderato maestoso



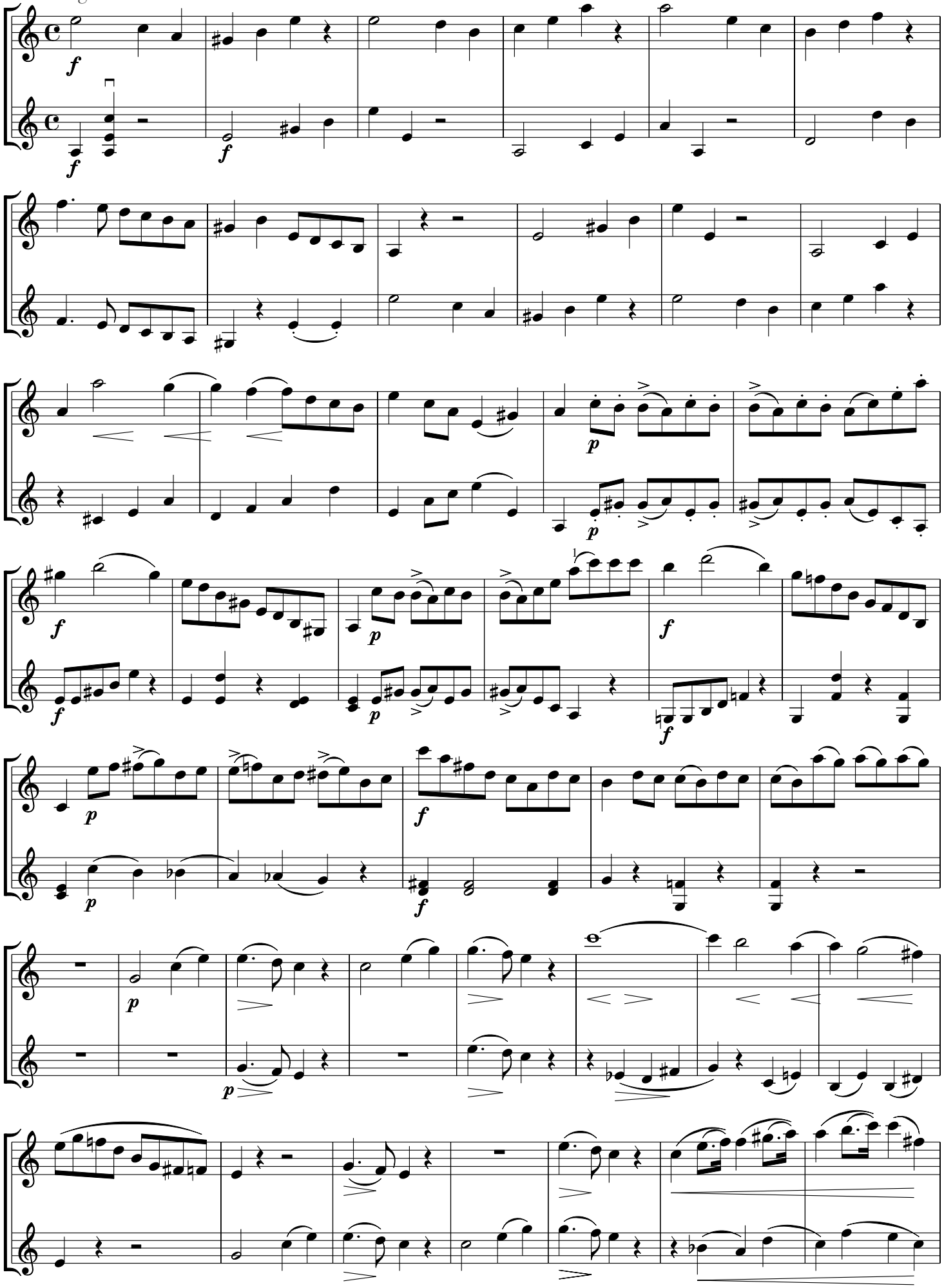


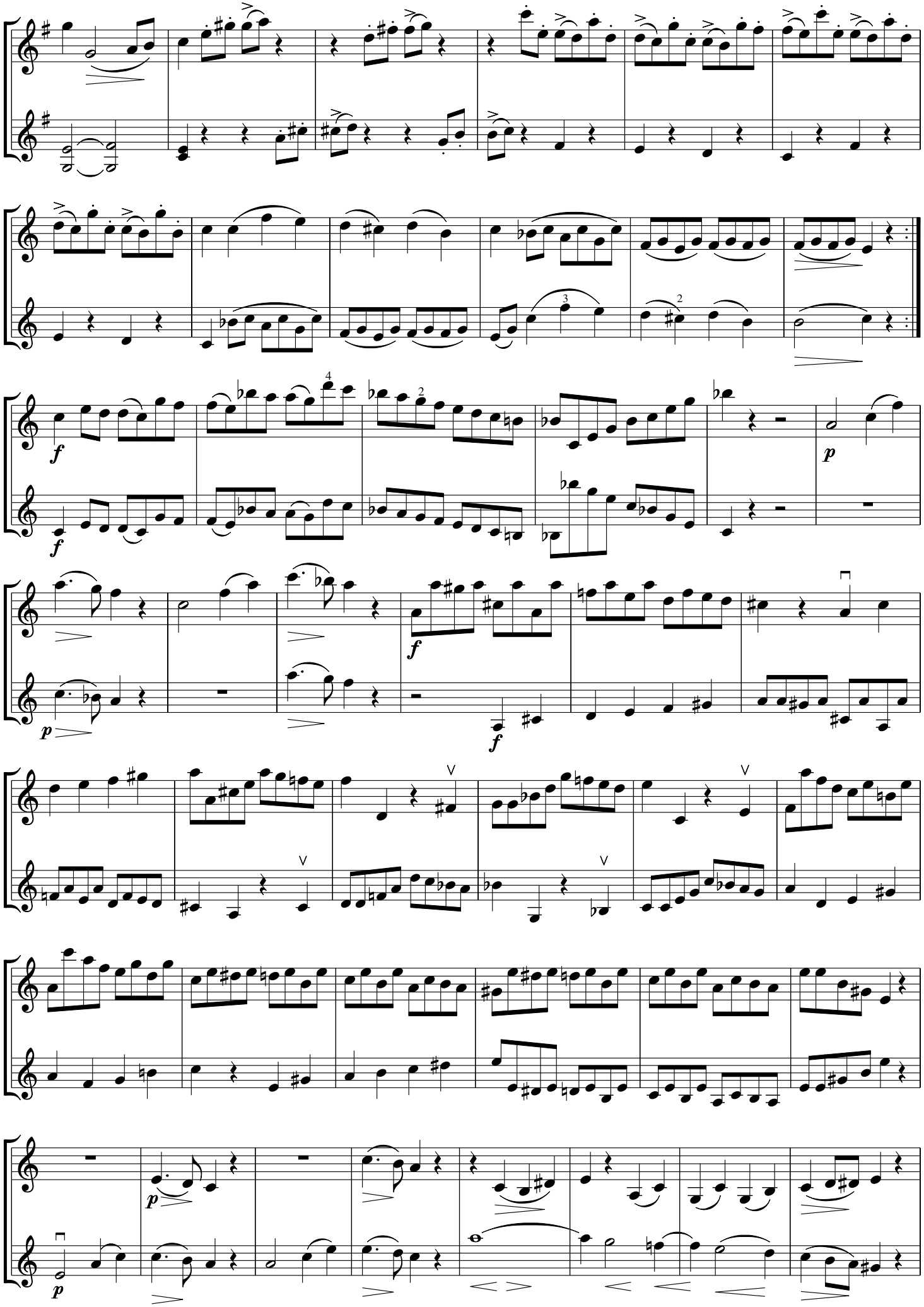

Moderato
p dolce
p
1.
2.
f bien soutenu
f bien soutenu
cresc.
cresc.
p
p
1.
2.
p
poco rallent.
4

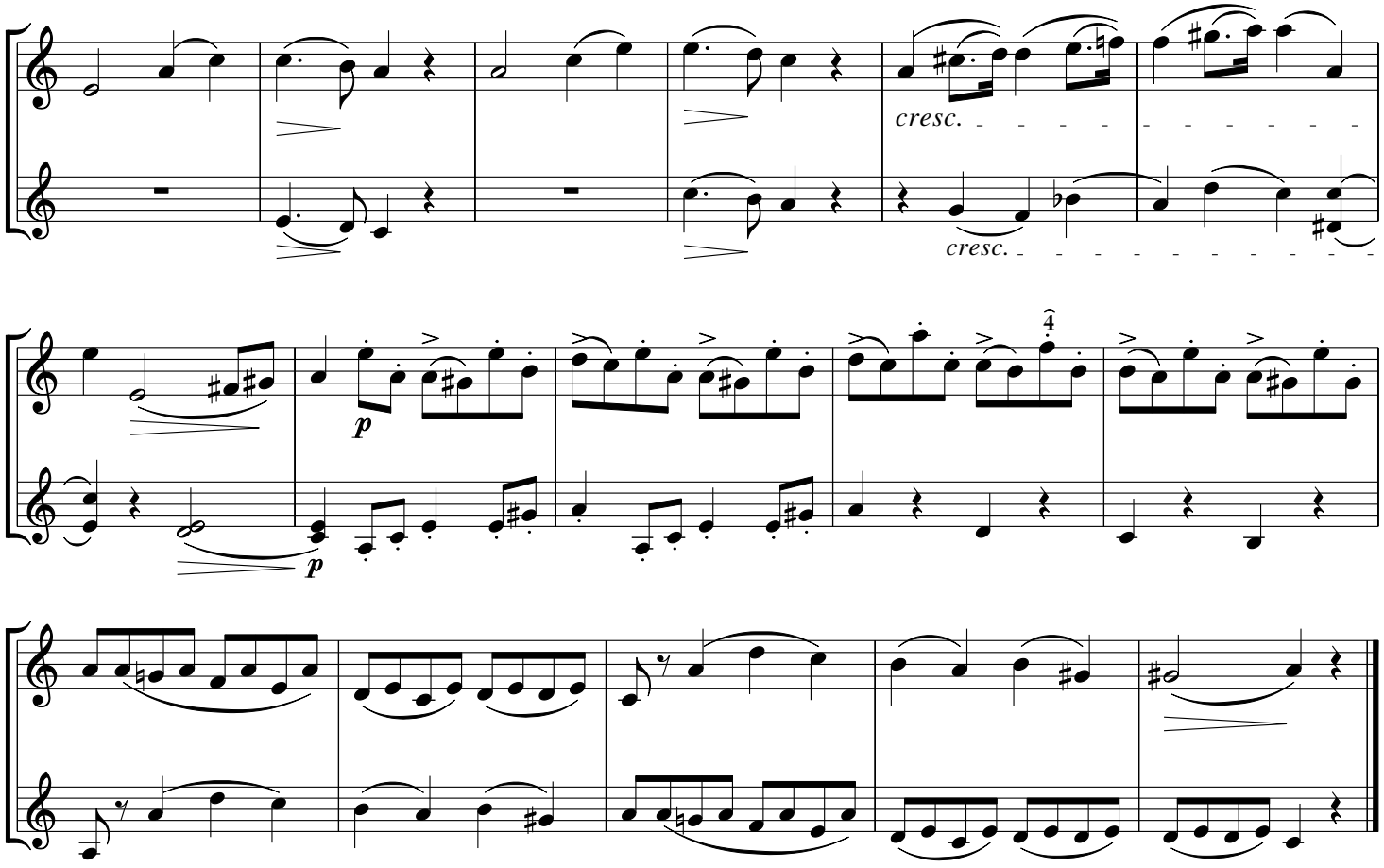

Allegretto

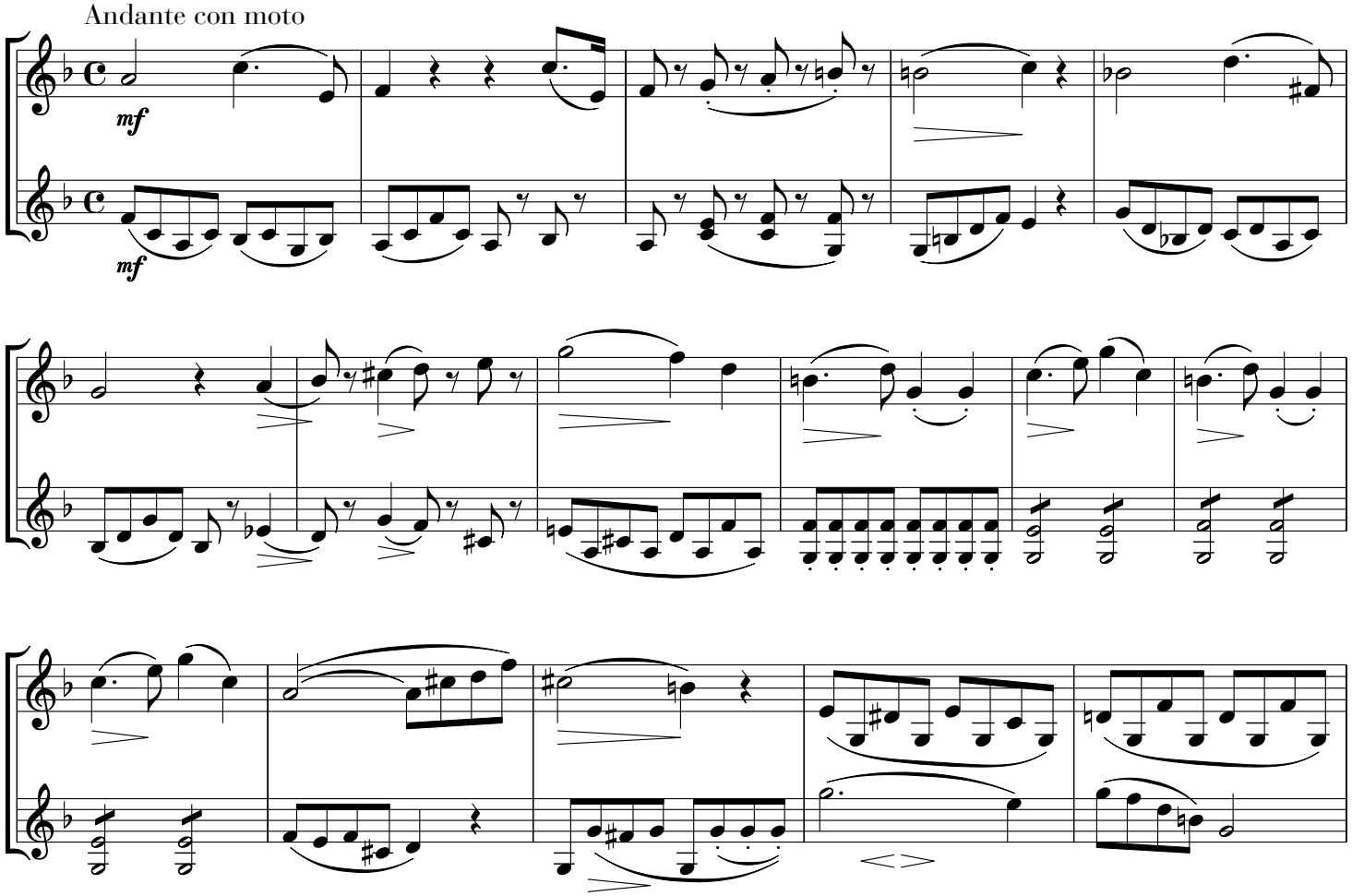


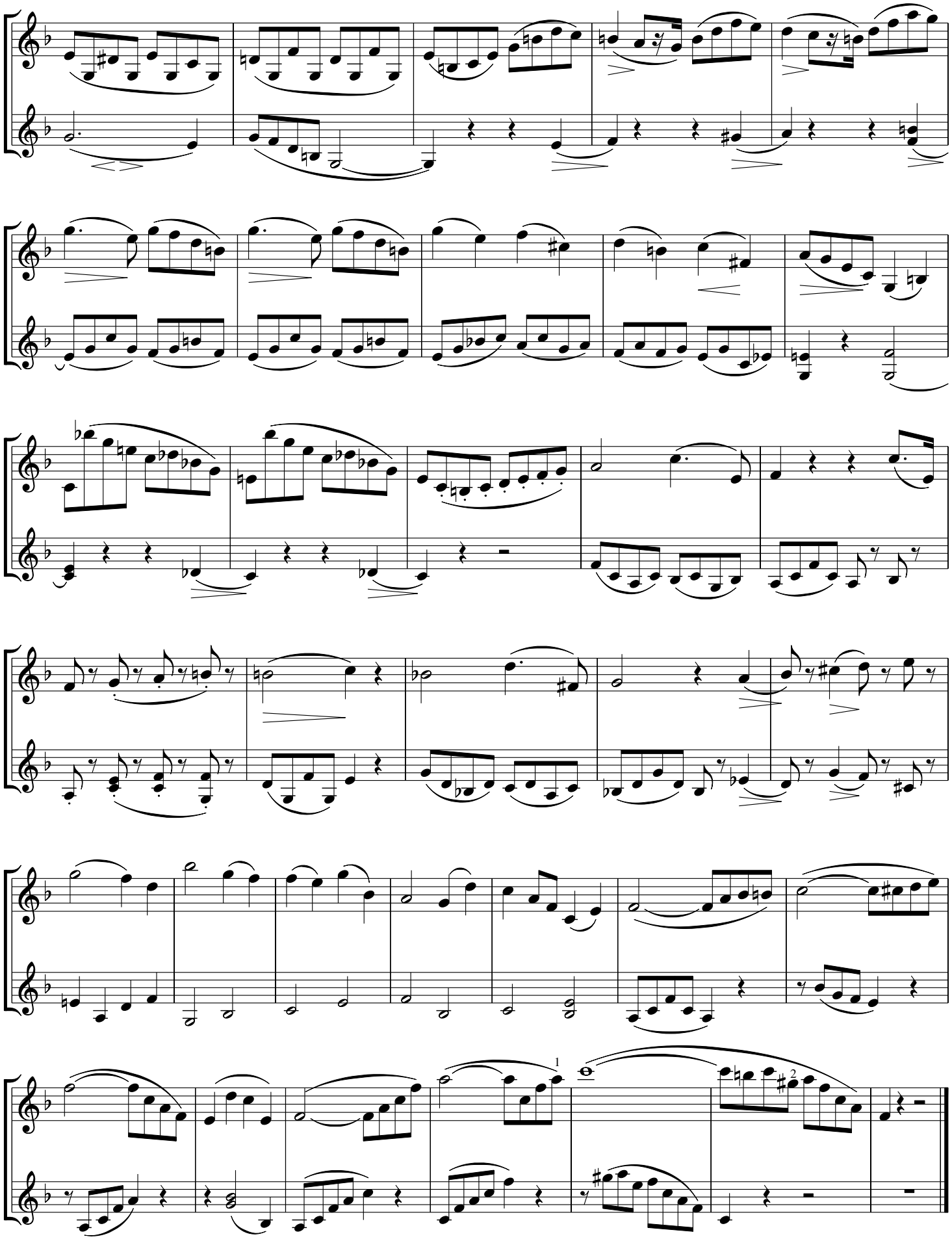
Allegro moderato



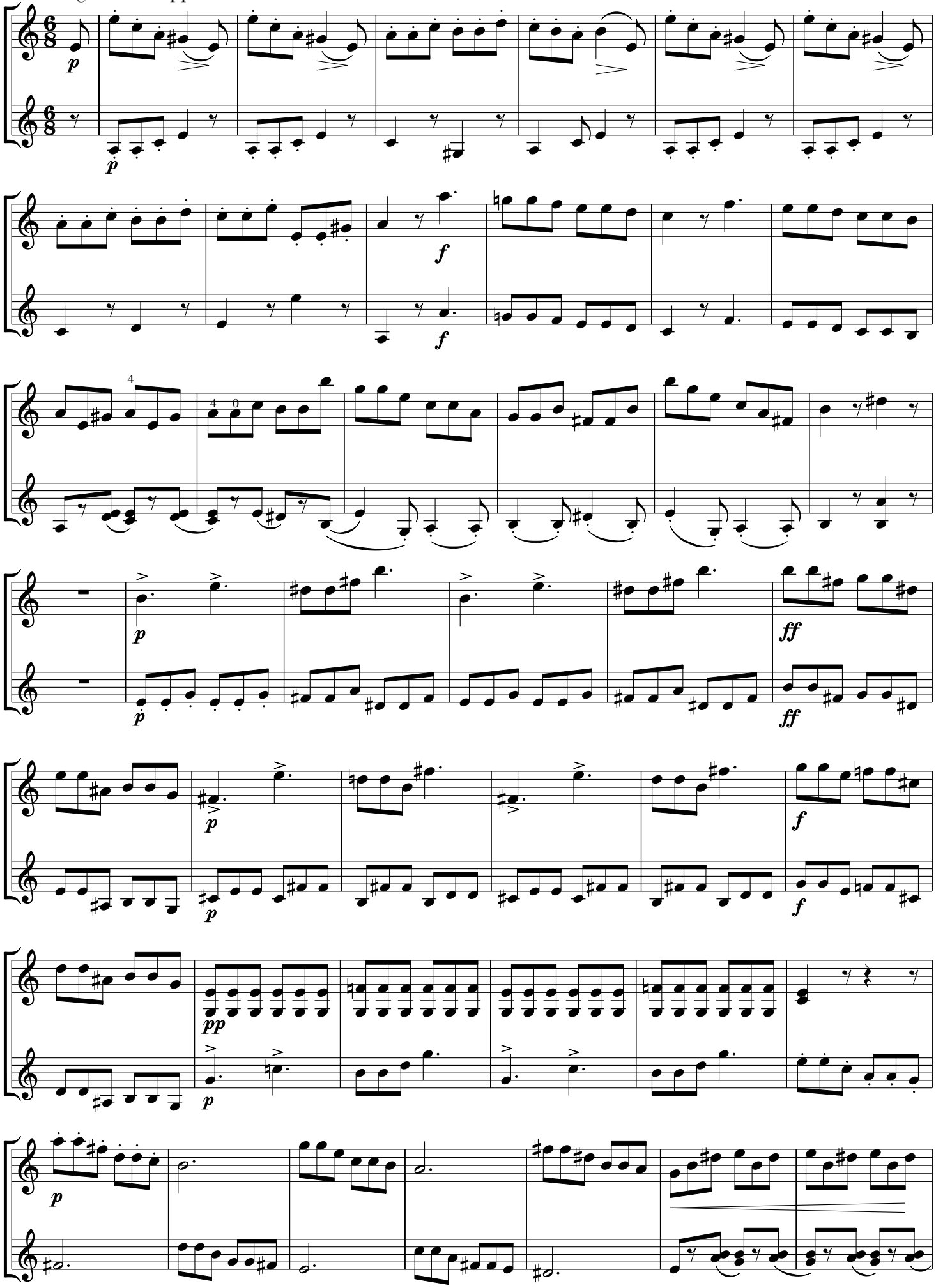


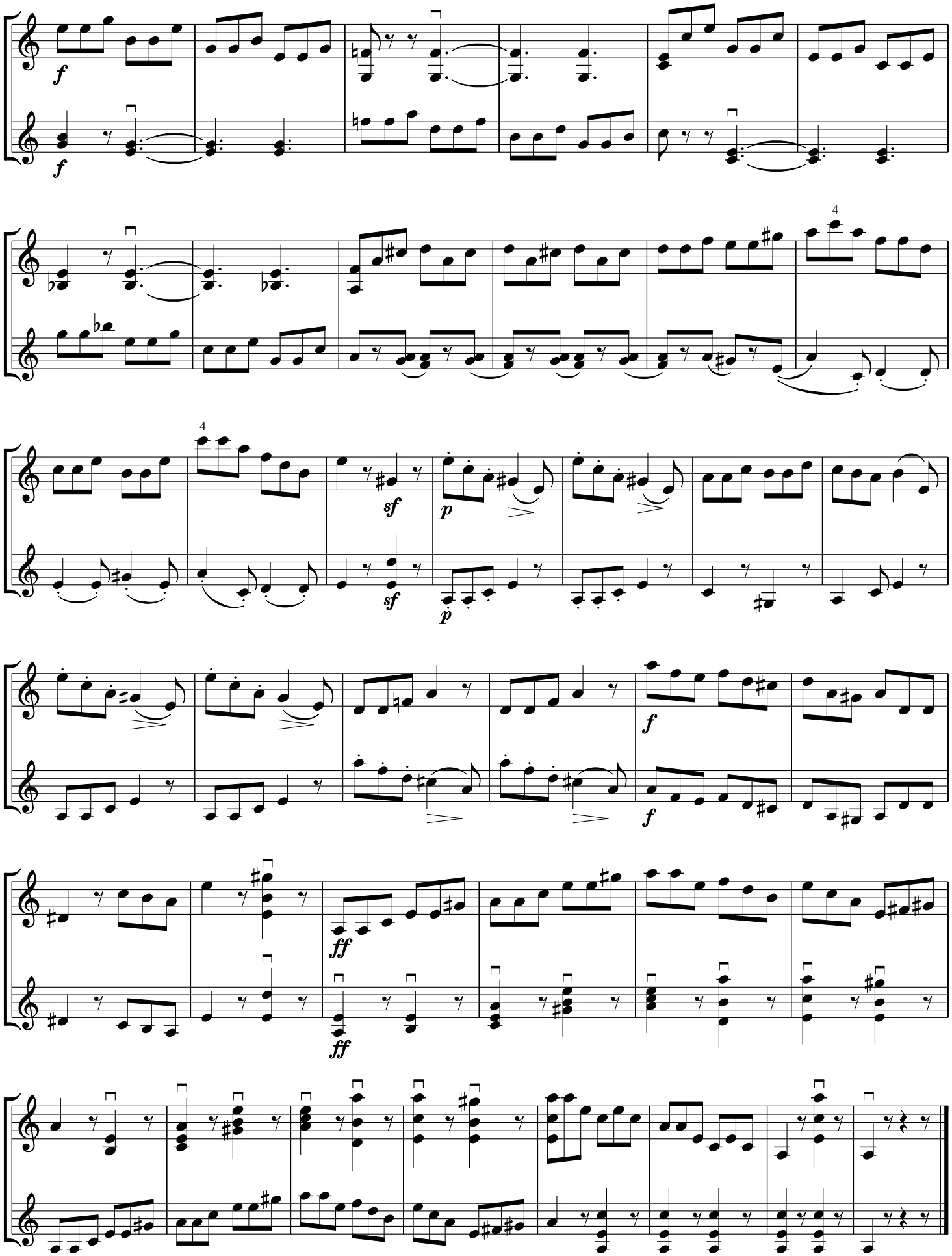

cresc.
cresc.
p
p

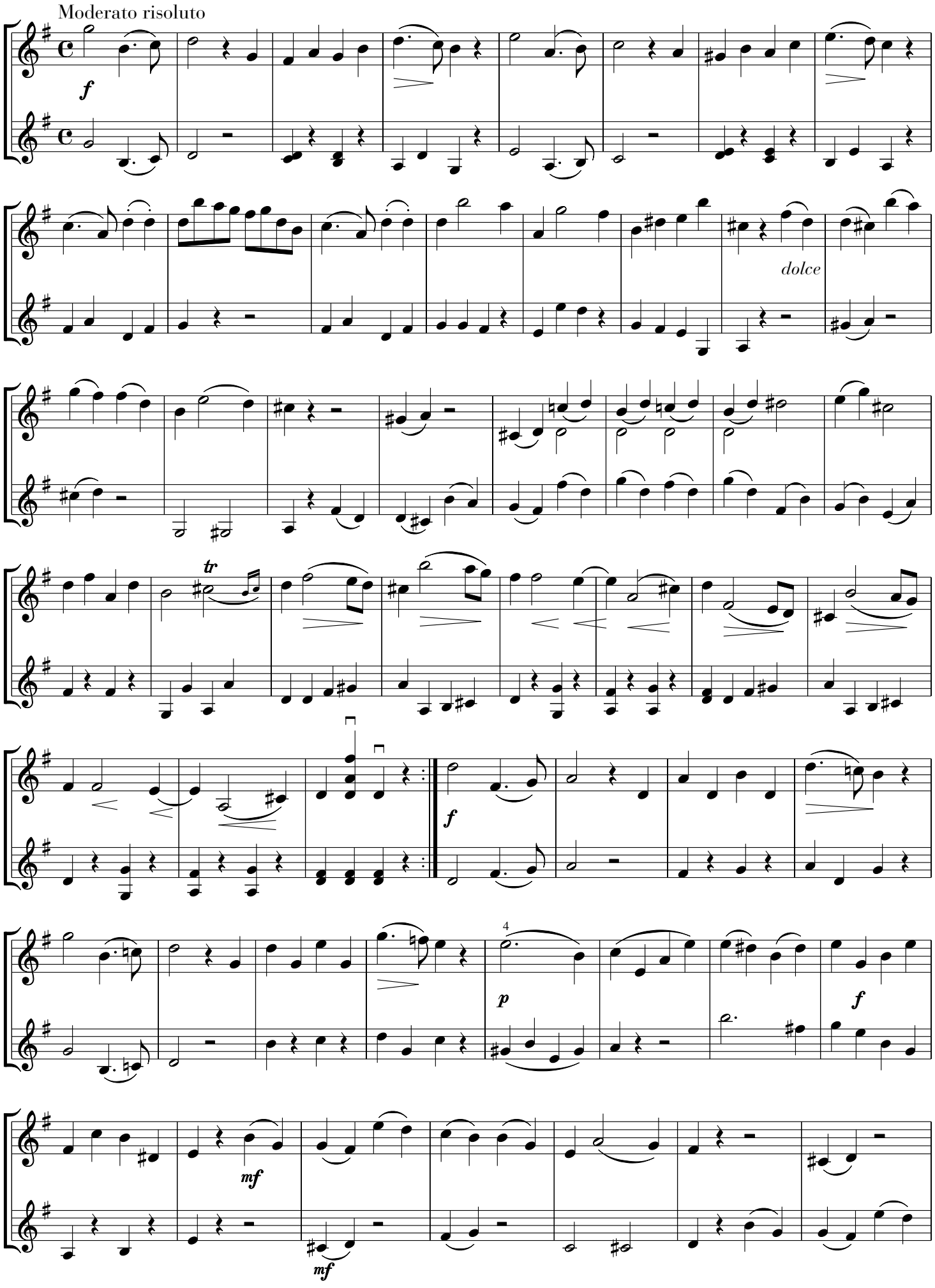

Andante con moto
mf
mf

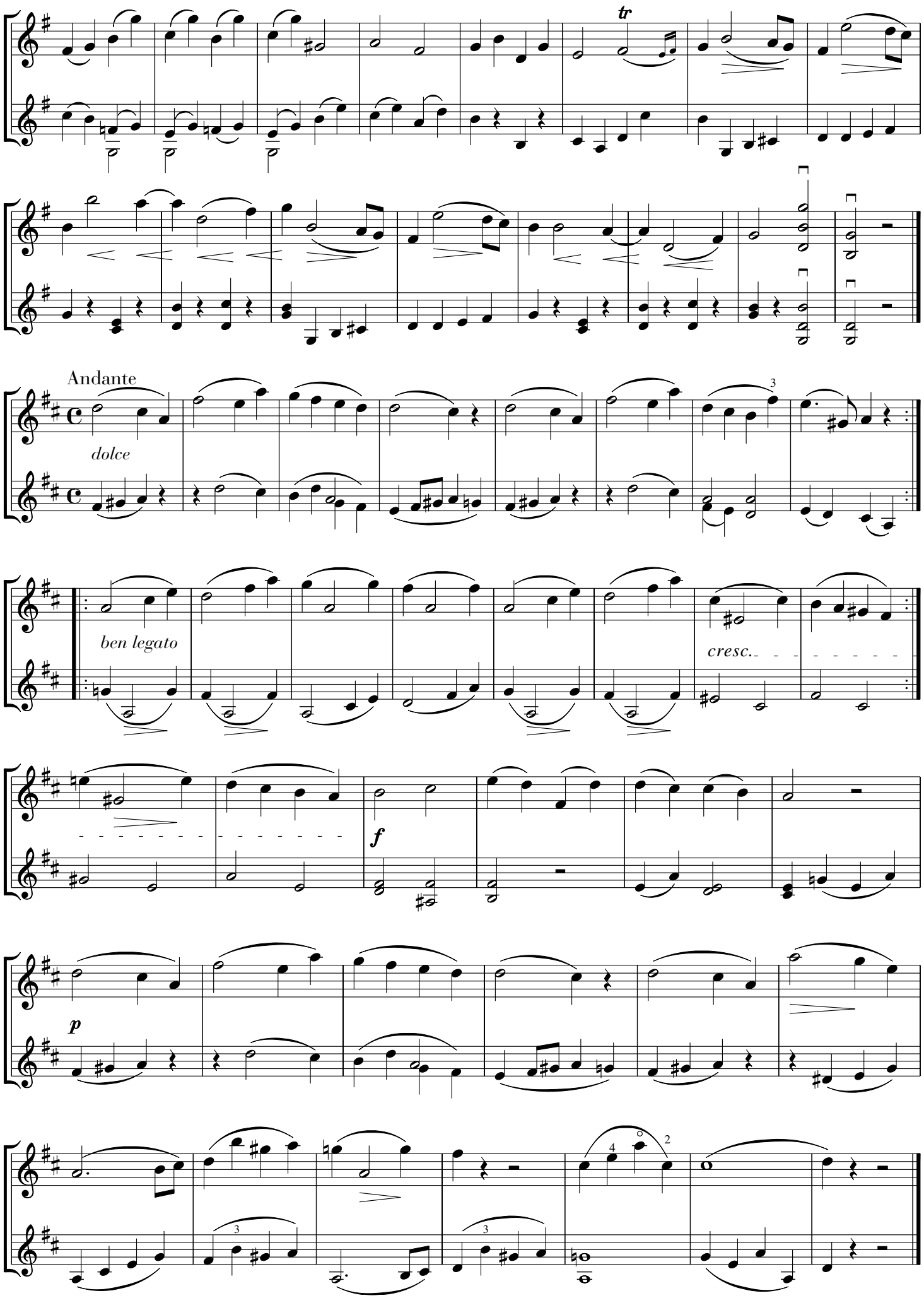


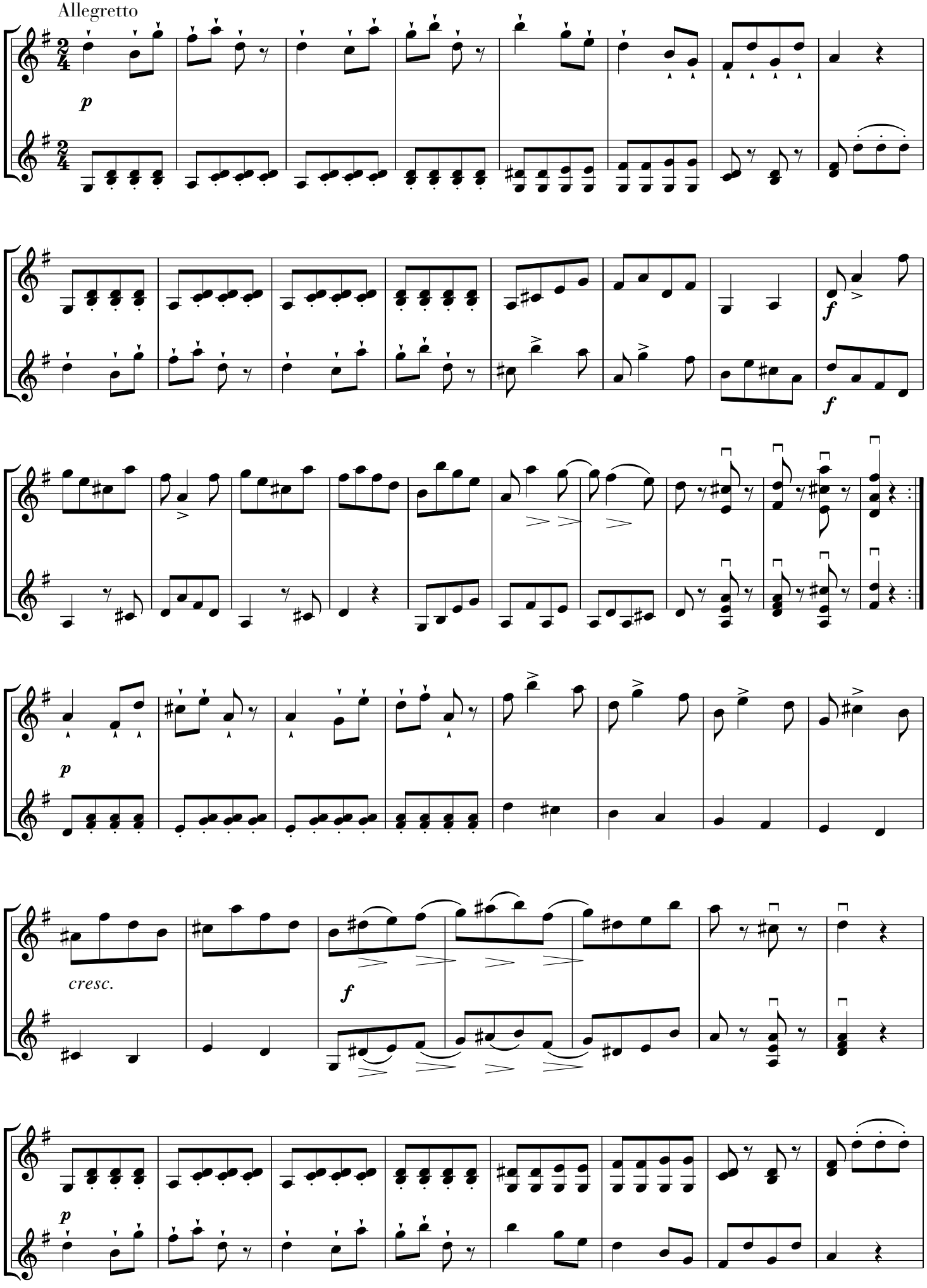
Allegro non troppo

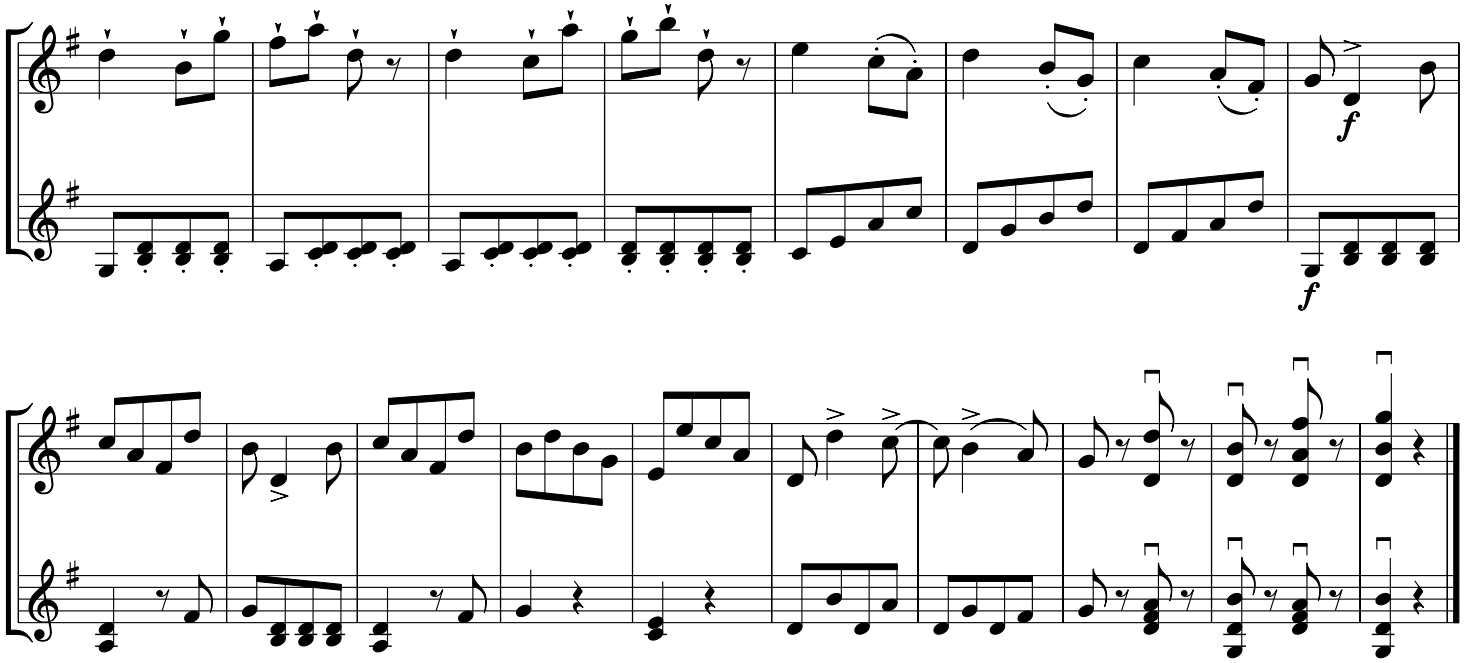


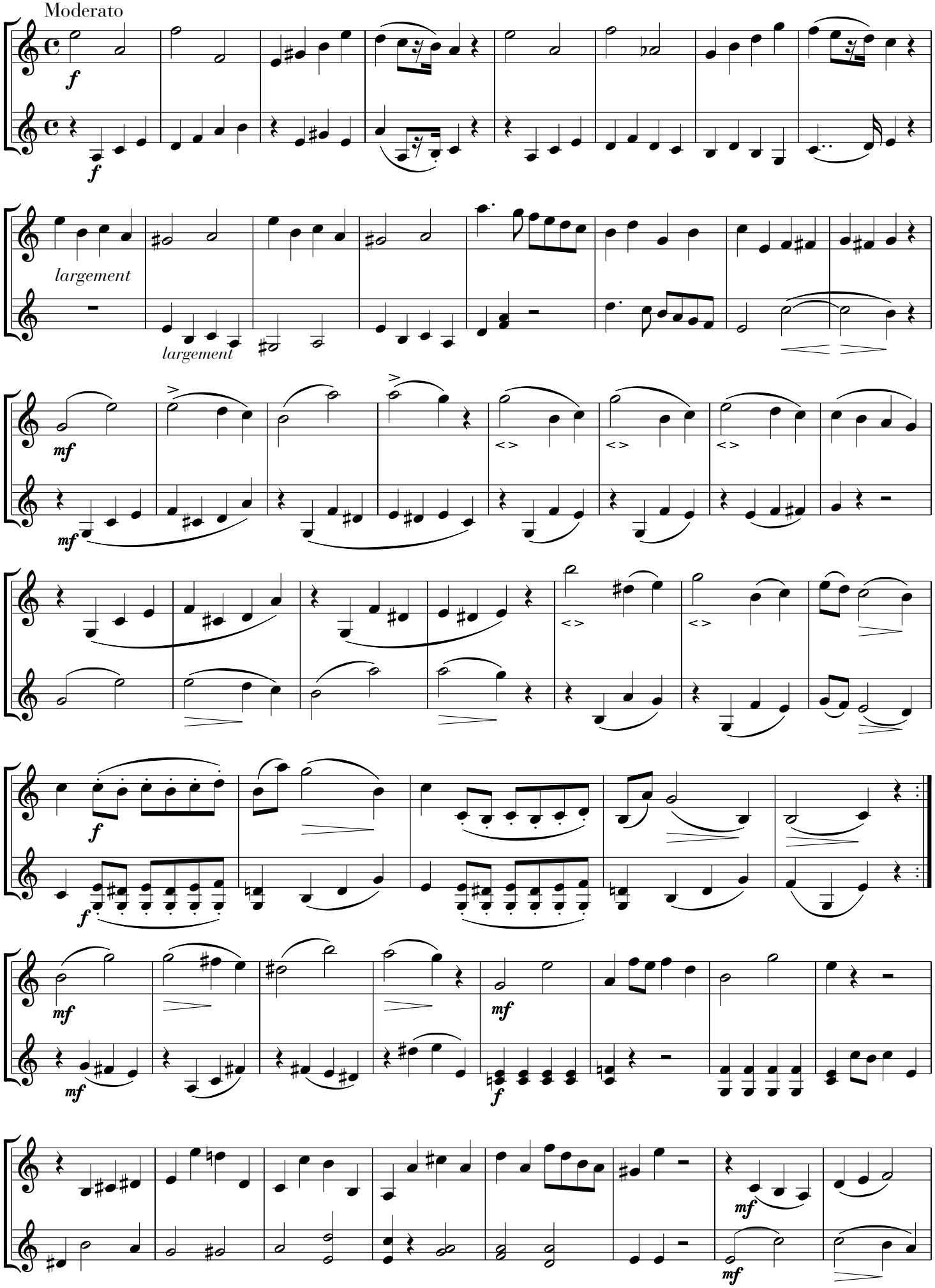

f
f
4
4
sf
p
sf
p
f
f
ff
ff

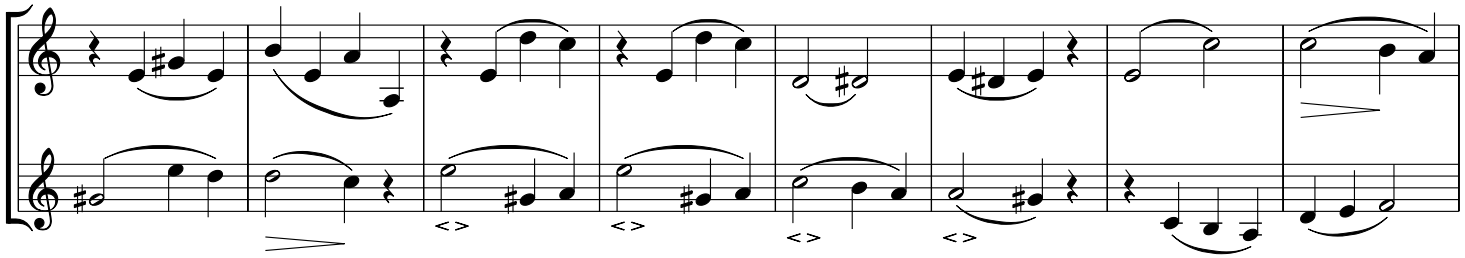

Moderato risoluto
f
dolce
tr
f
4
p
f
mf
mf

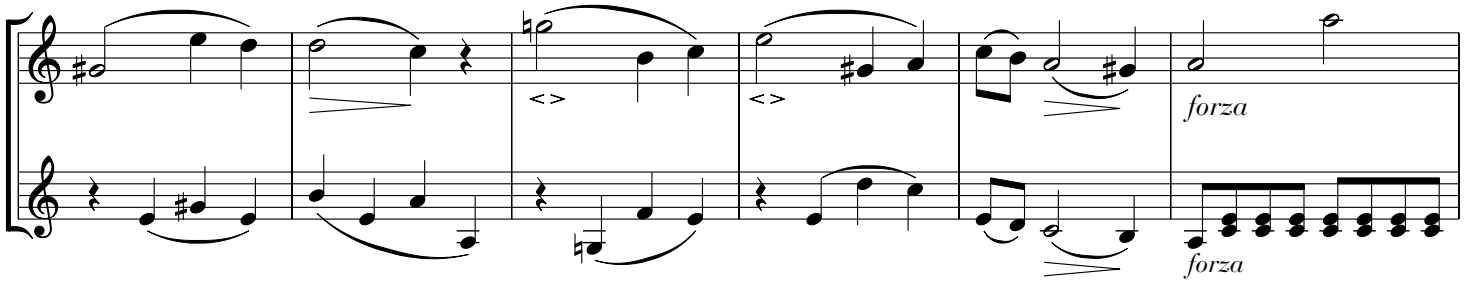

tr
Andante
dolce
ben legato
cresc.
f
p

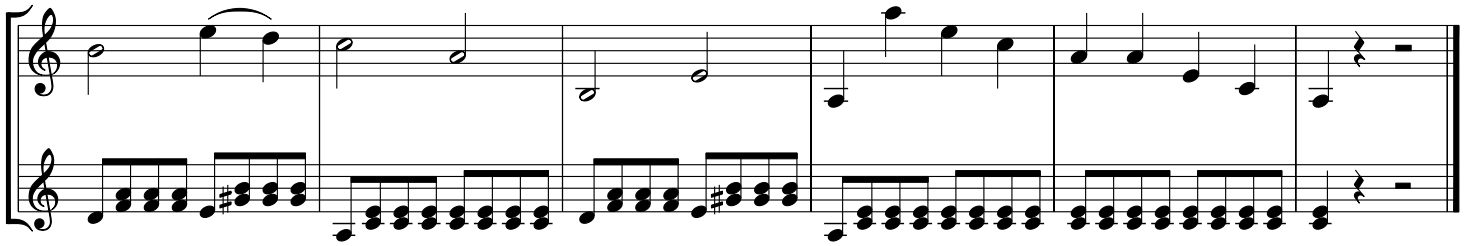

Allegretto
p
f
f
p
cresc.
f
p


f
f

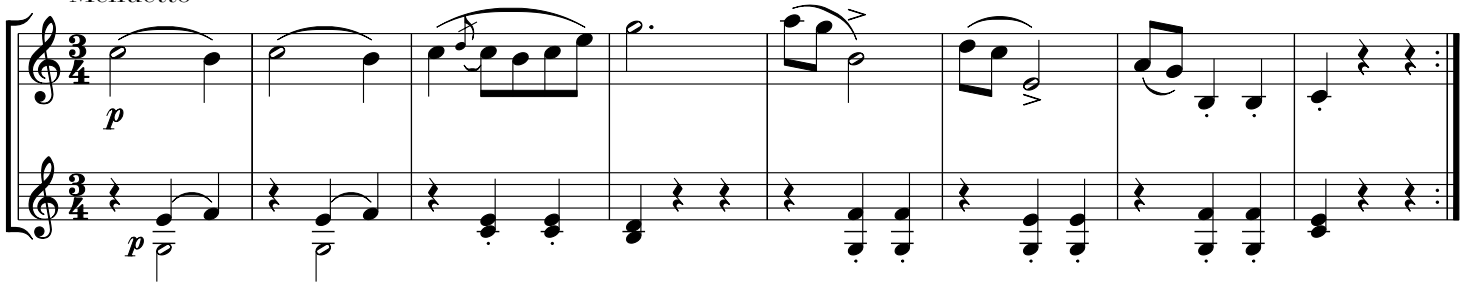

Moderato
largement
largement

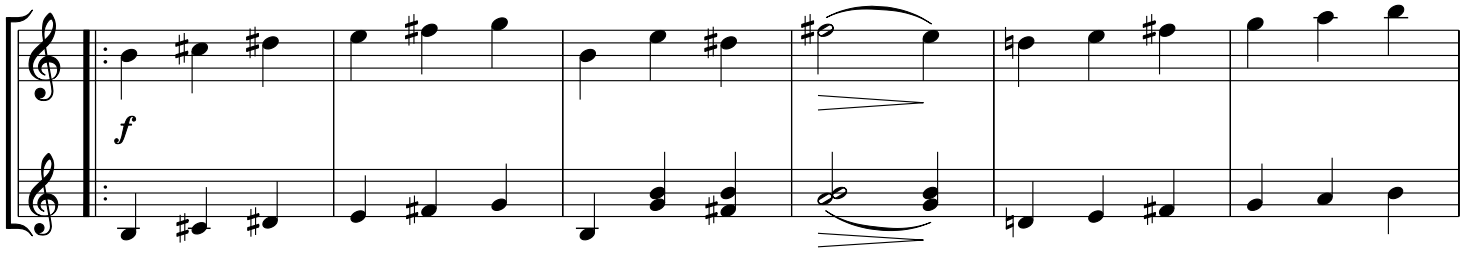


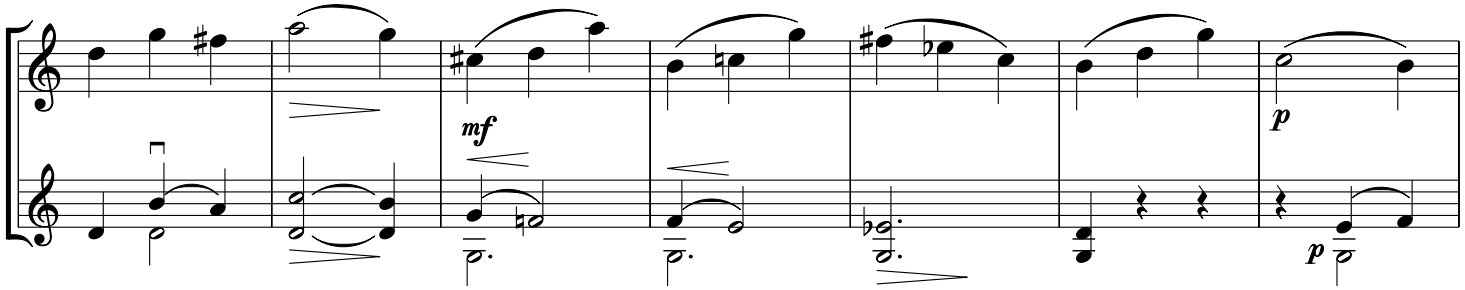


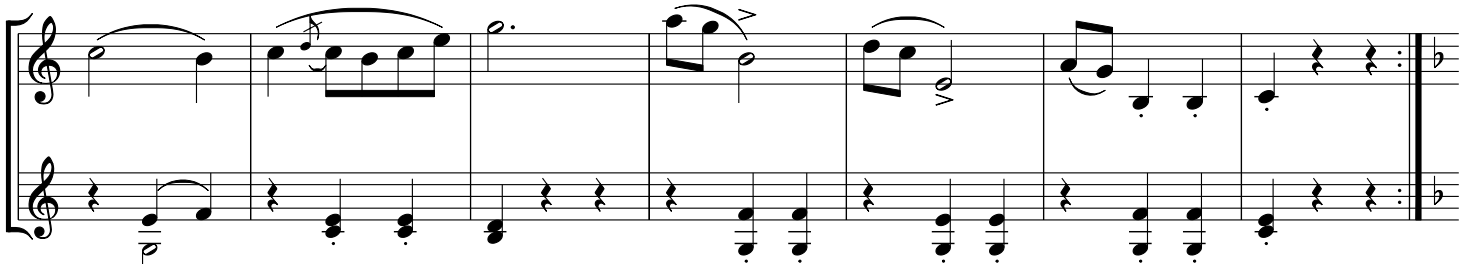


Menuetto









Trio

p *f* *p* *f*

f

p *f* *p* *f* *Minuetto da capo*

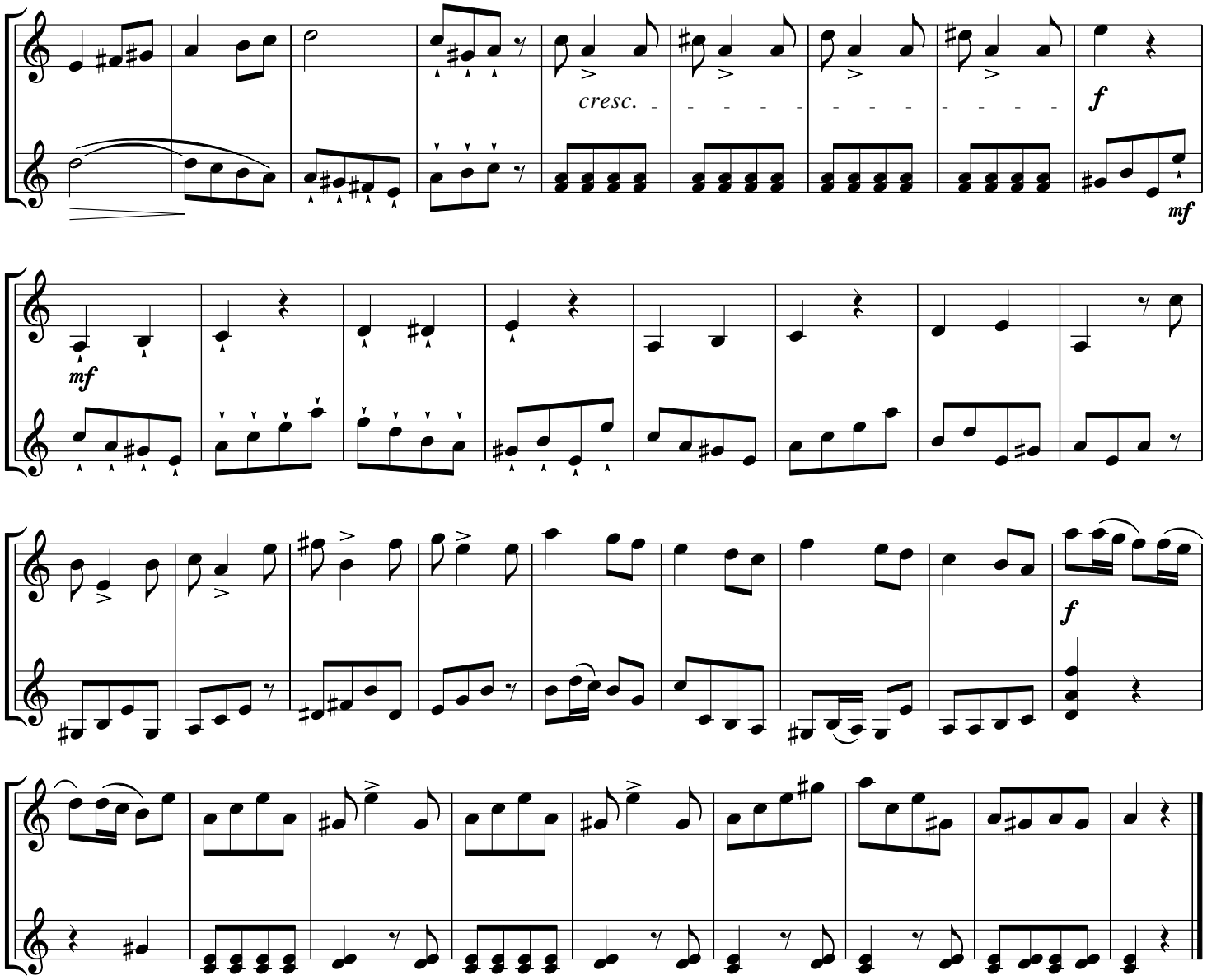
Allegretto non troppo

mf

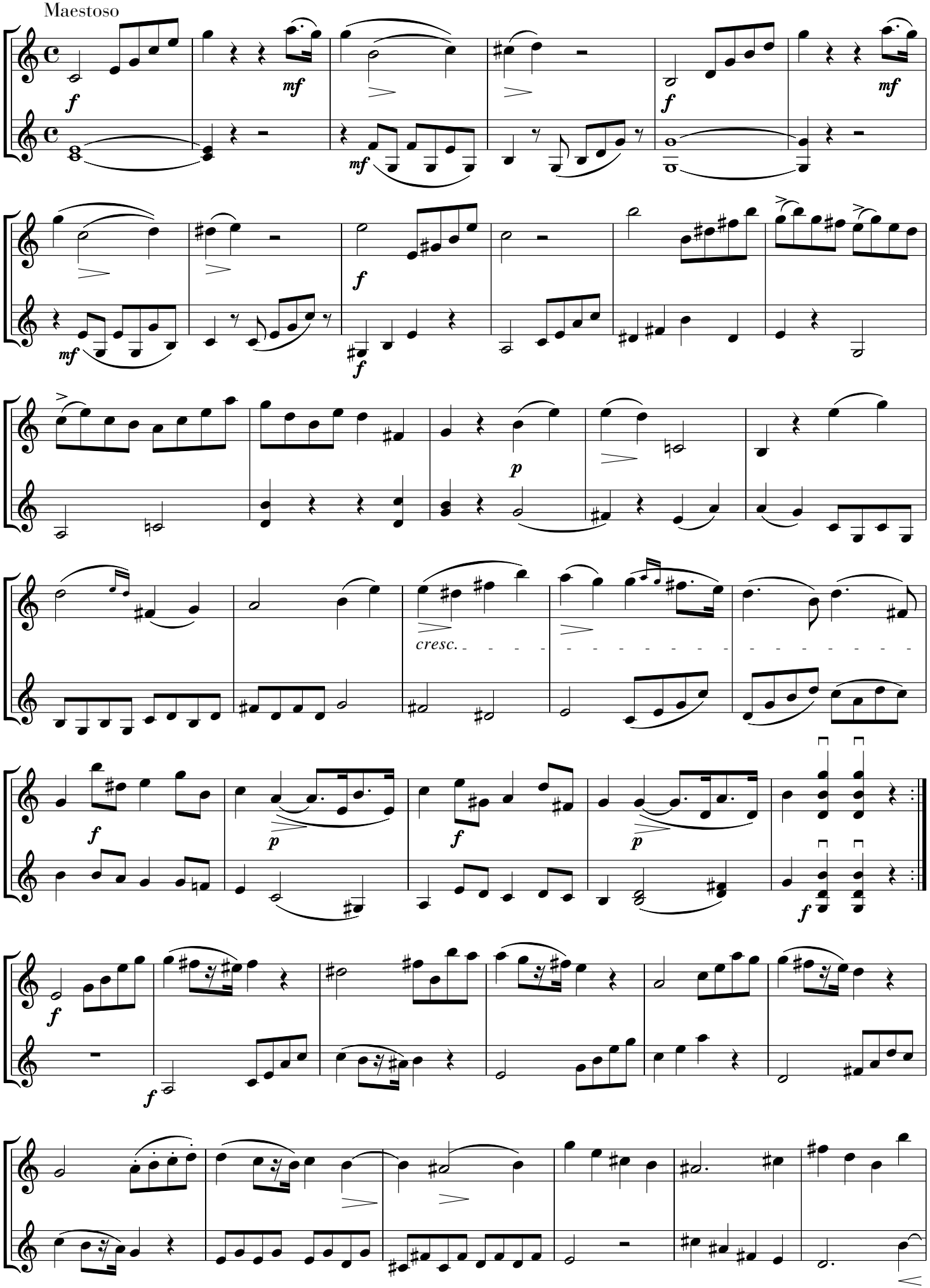
f

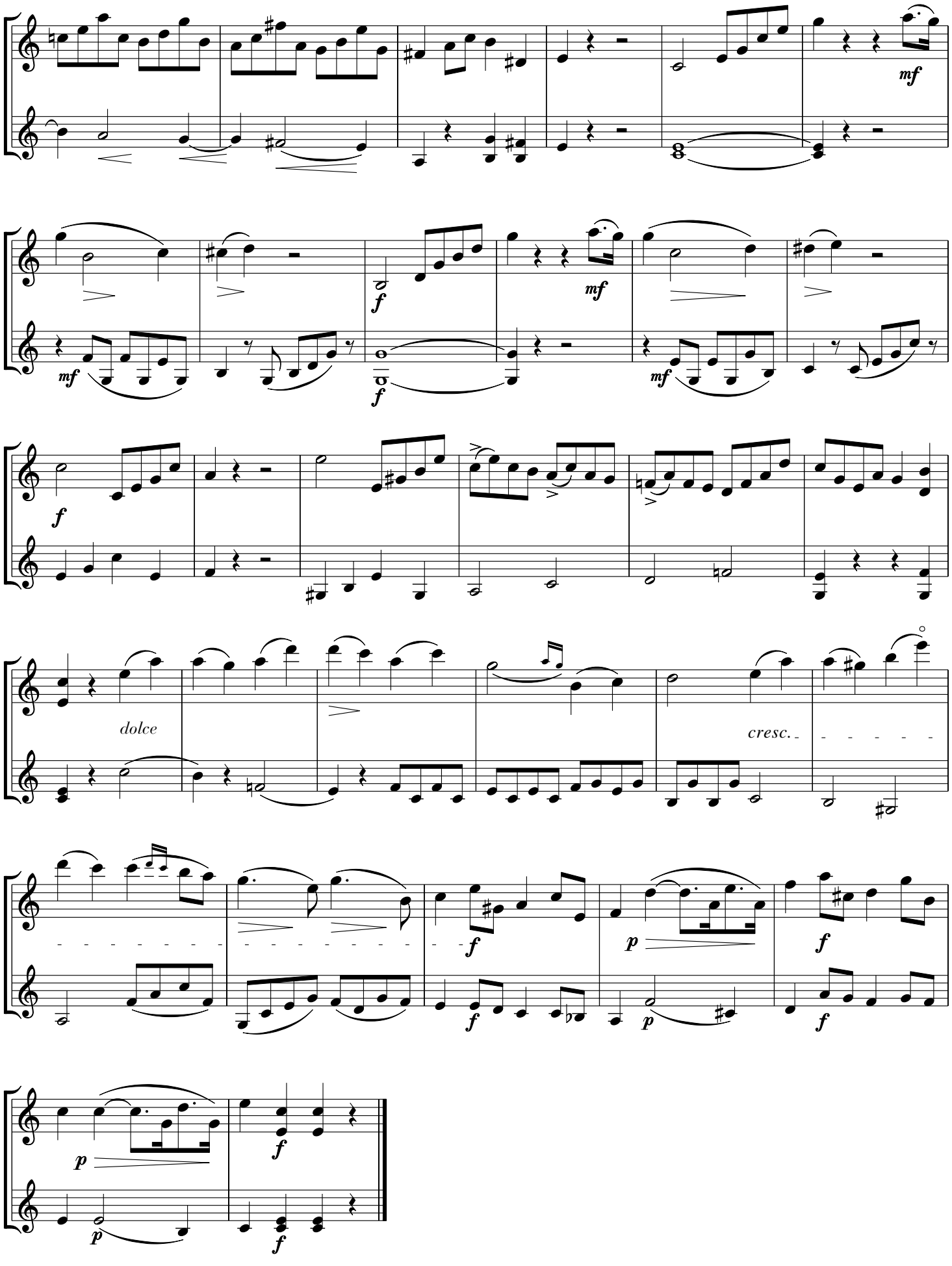
p

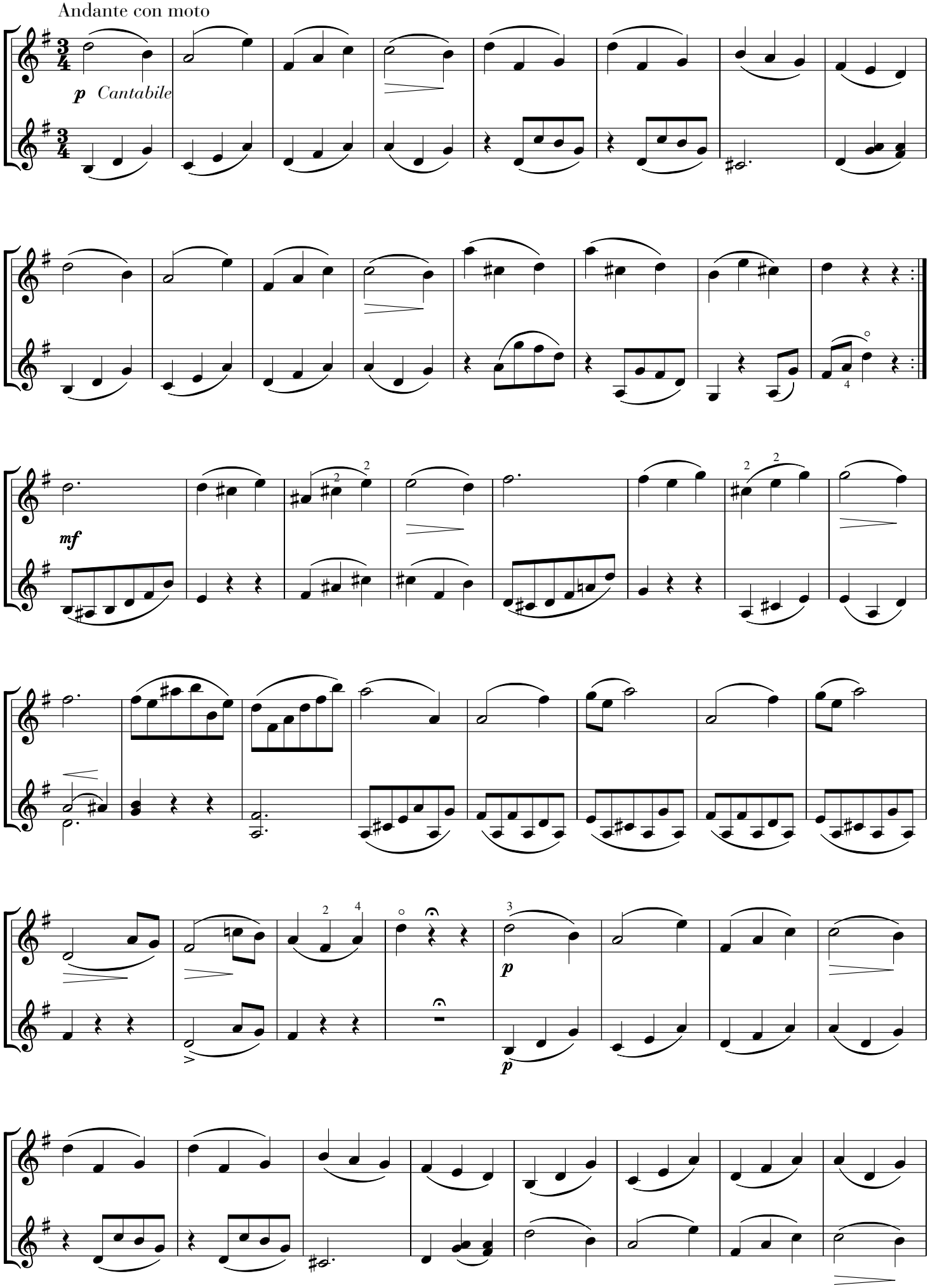
p

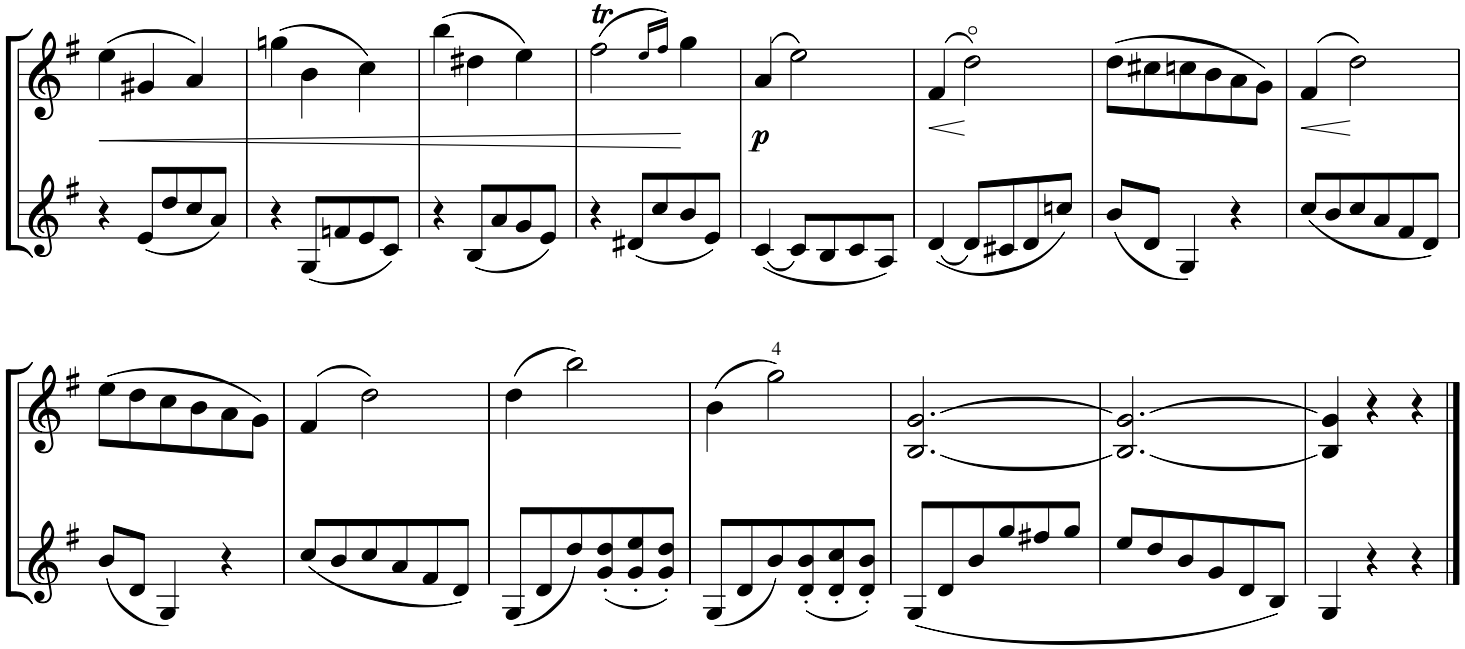

cresc.
f
mf
mf
f

Maestoso

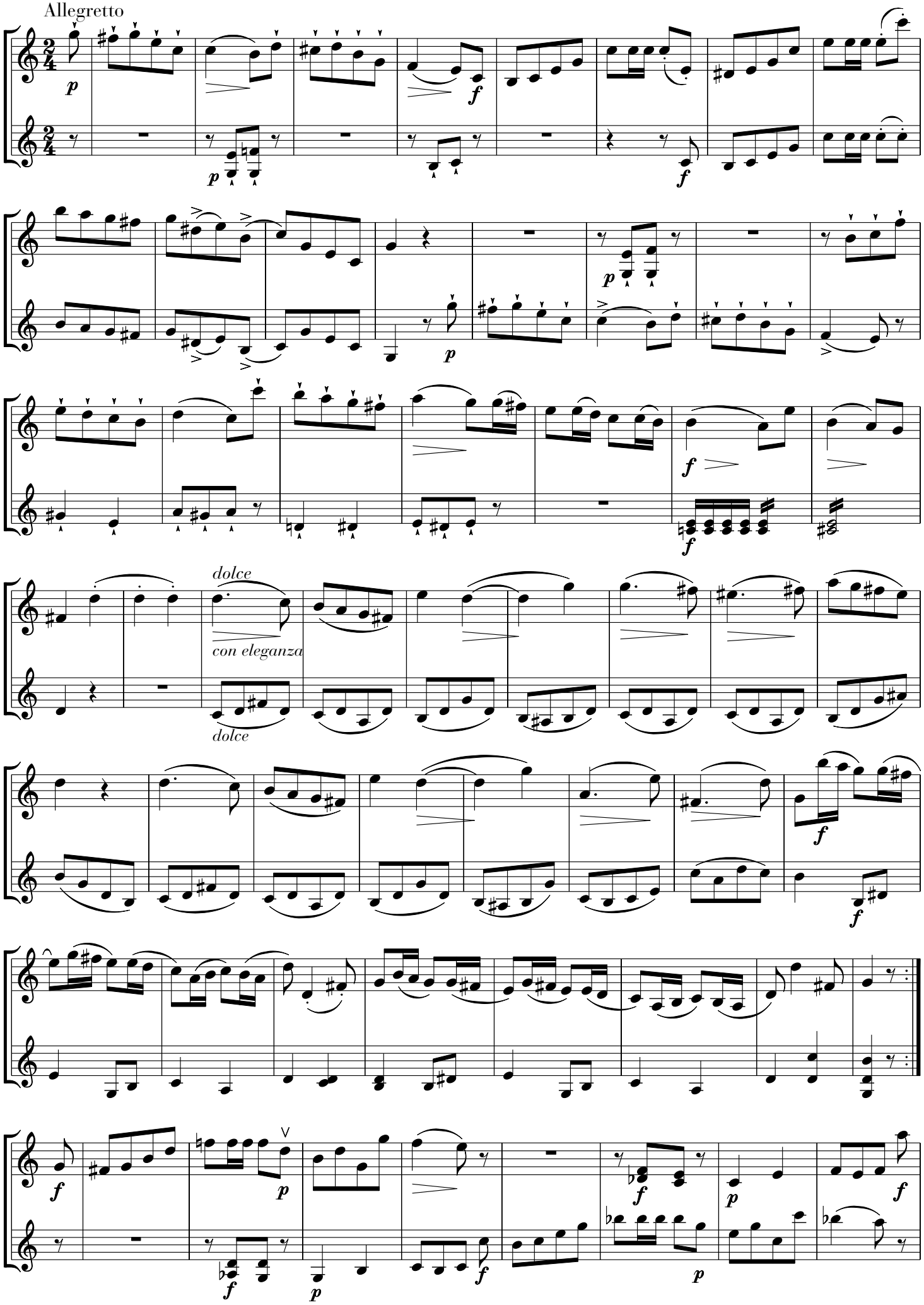


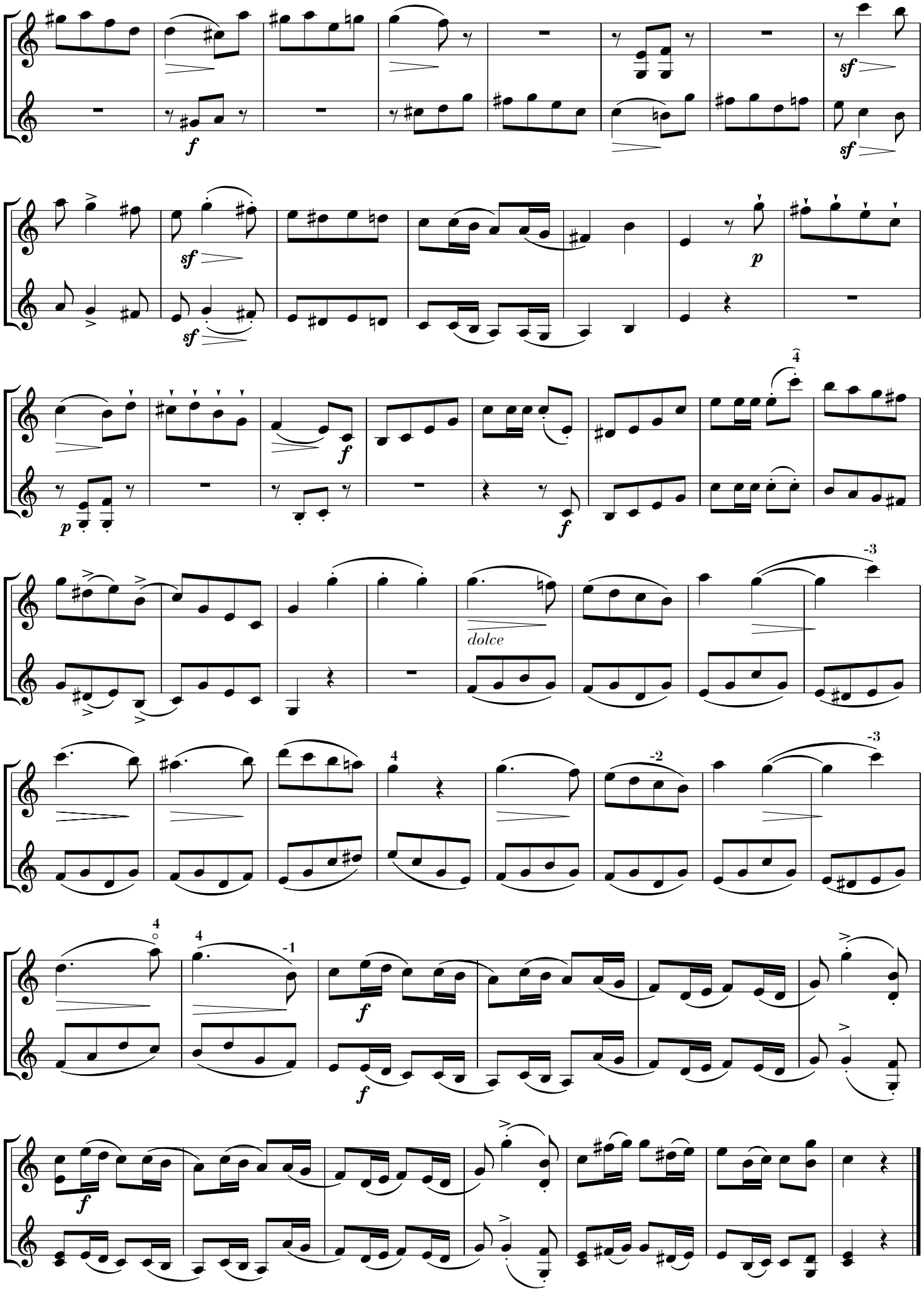

mf
mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
dolce
cresc.
f
p
f
f
p
f
p
f


Andante con moto
p Cantabile
mf
p
p

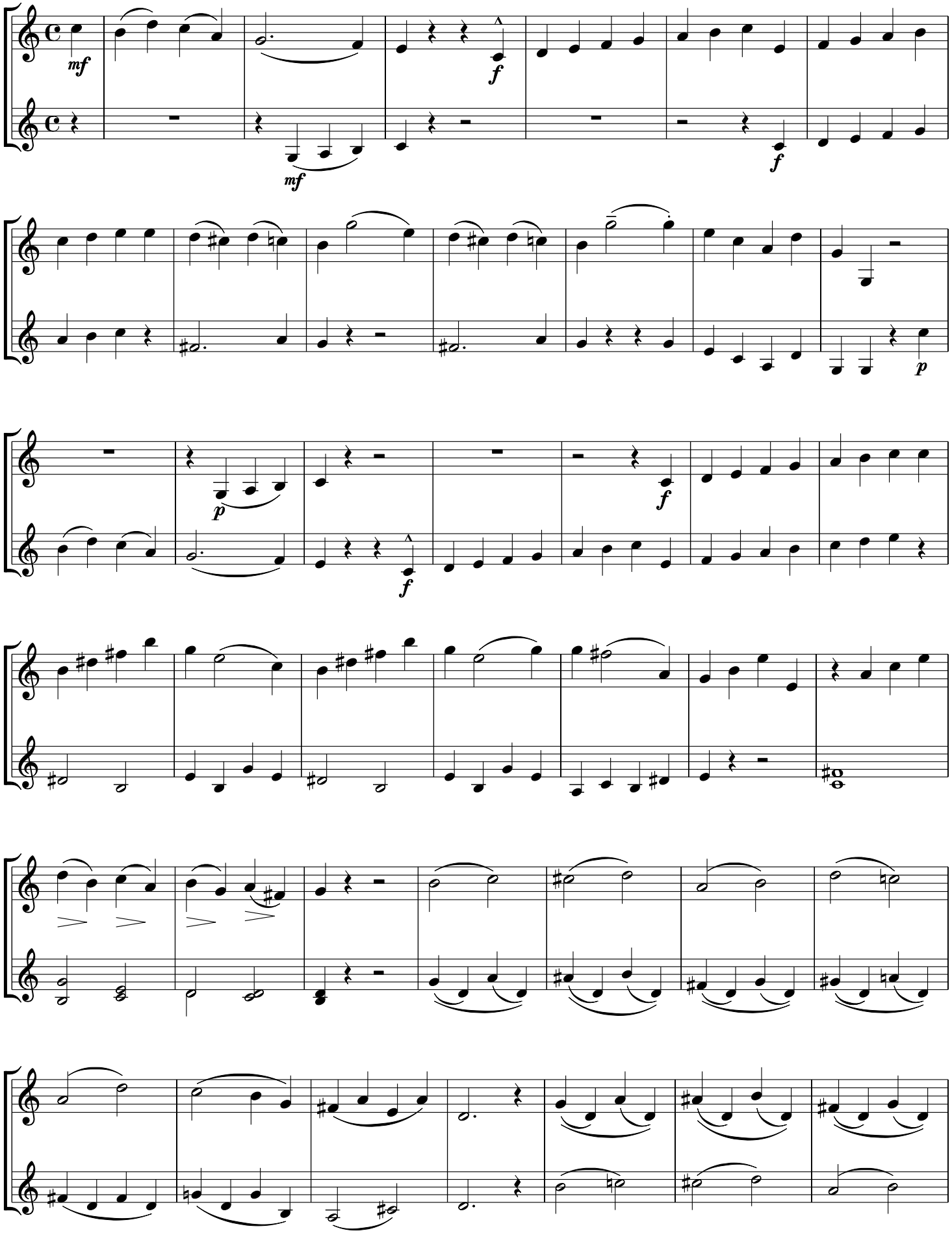

tr
p

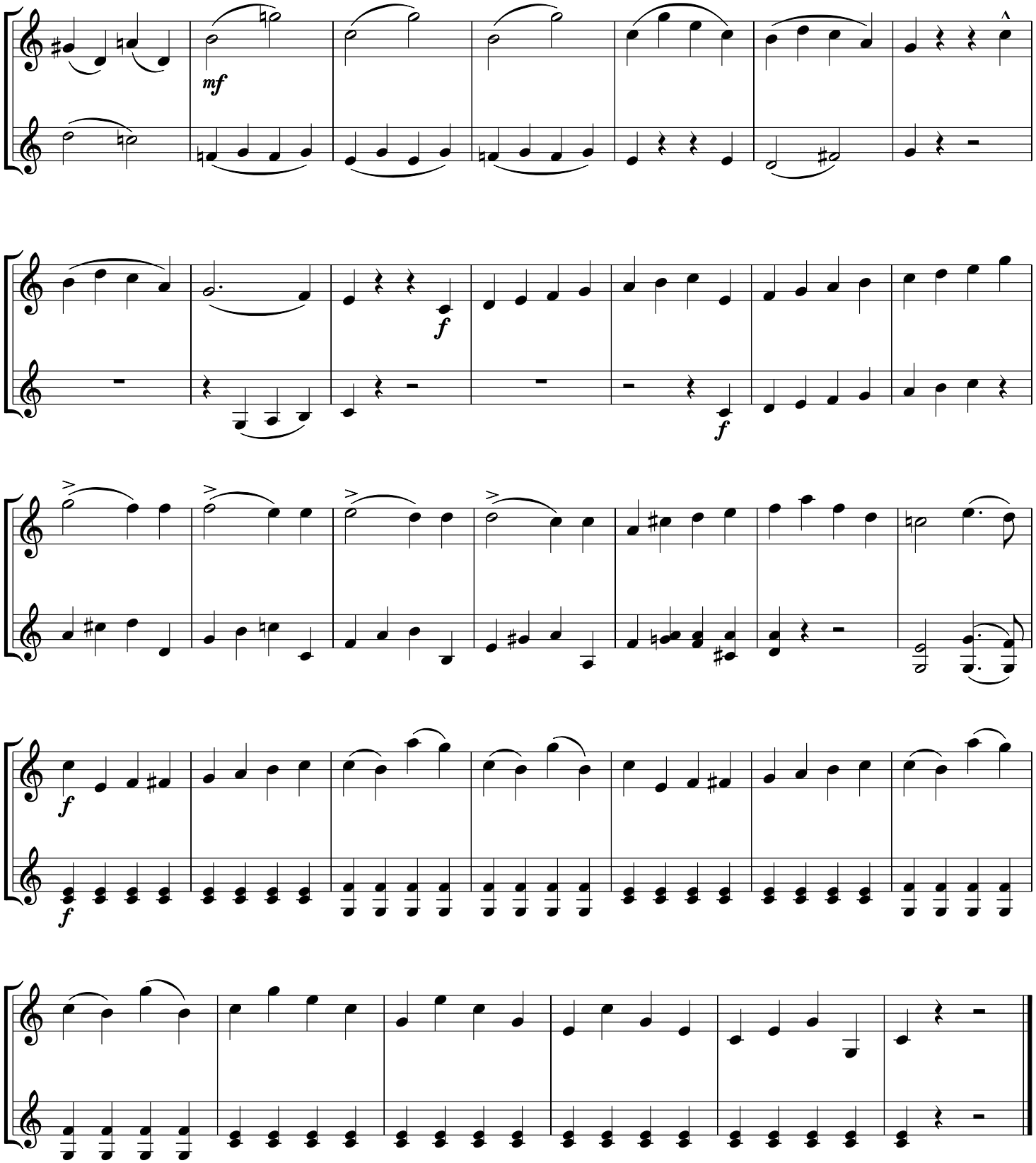
4

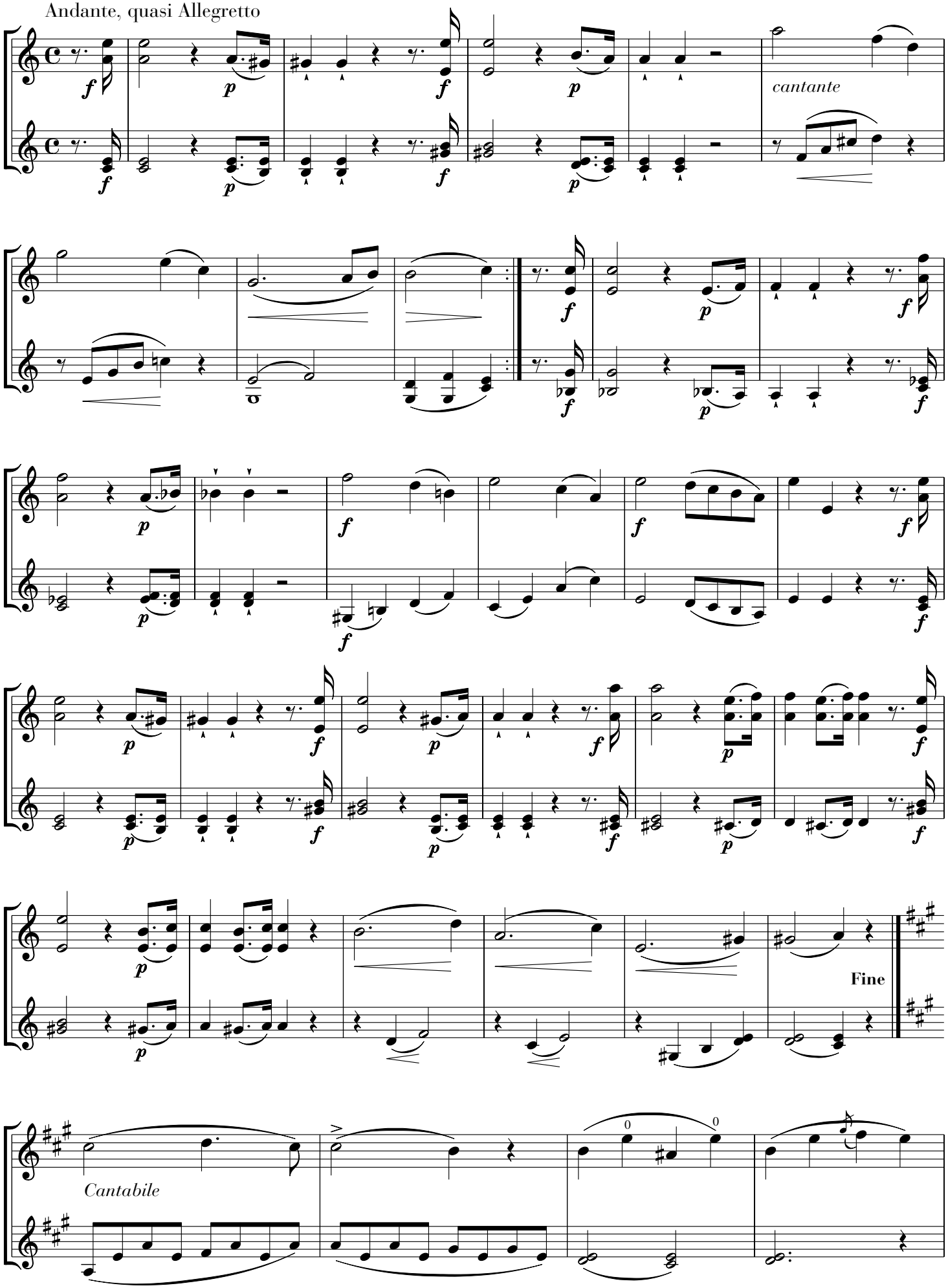

Allegretto
dolce
con eleganza
dolce

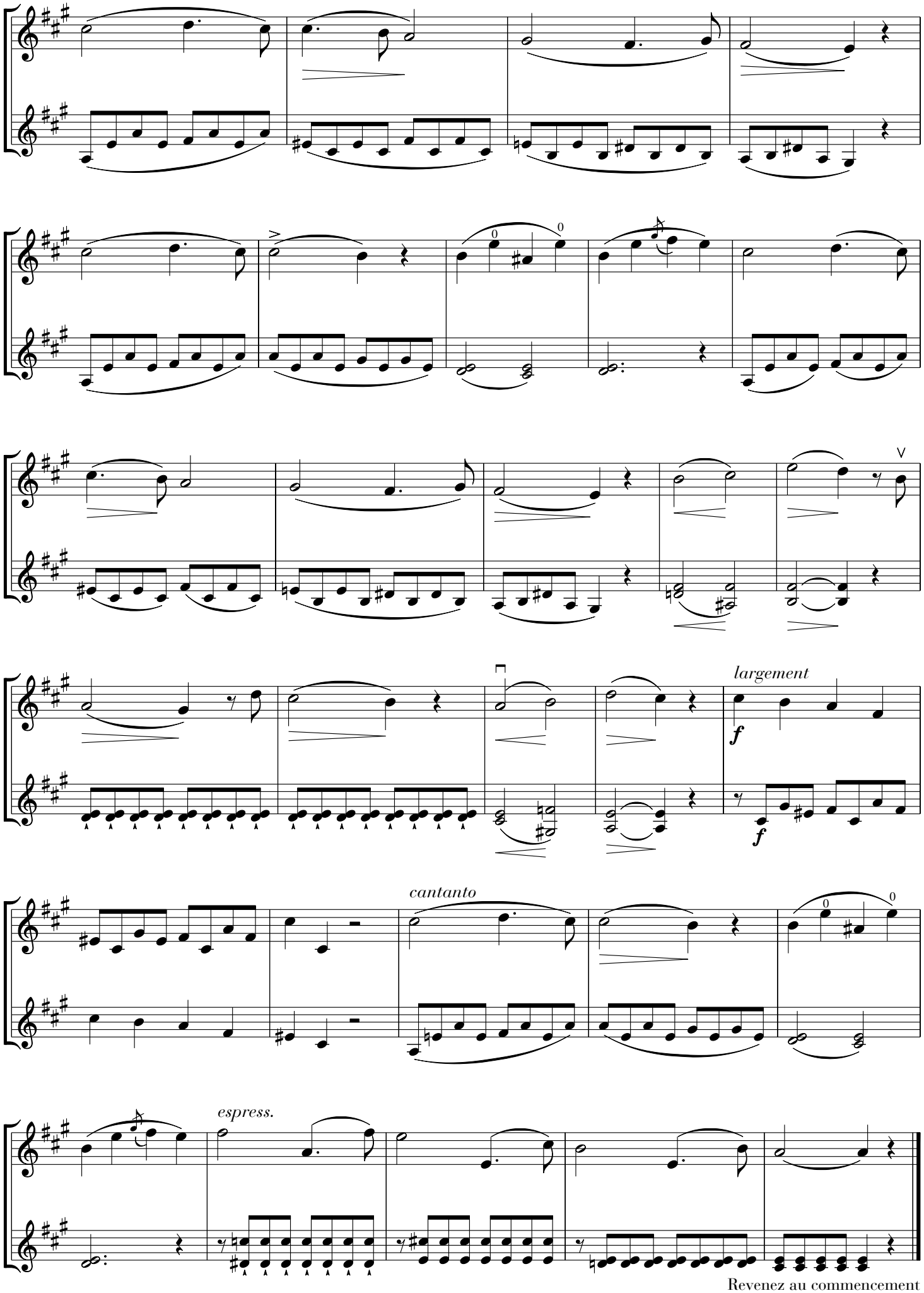

f
sf
sf
sf
p
p
f
f
dolce
f
f

Moderato



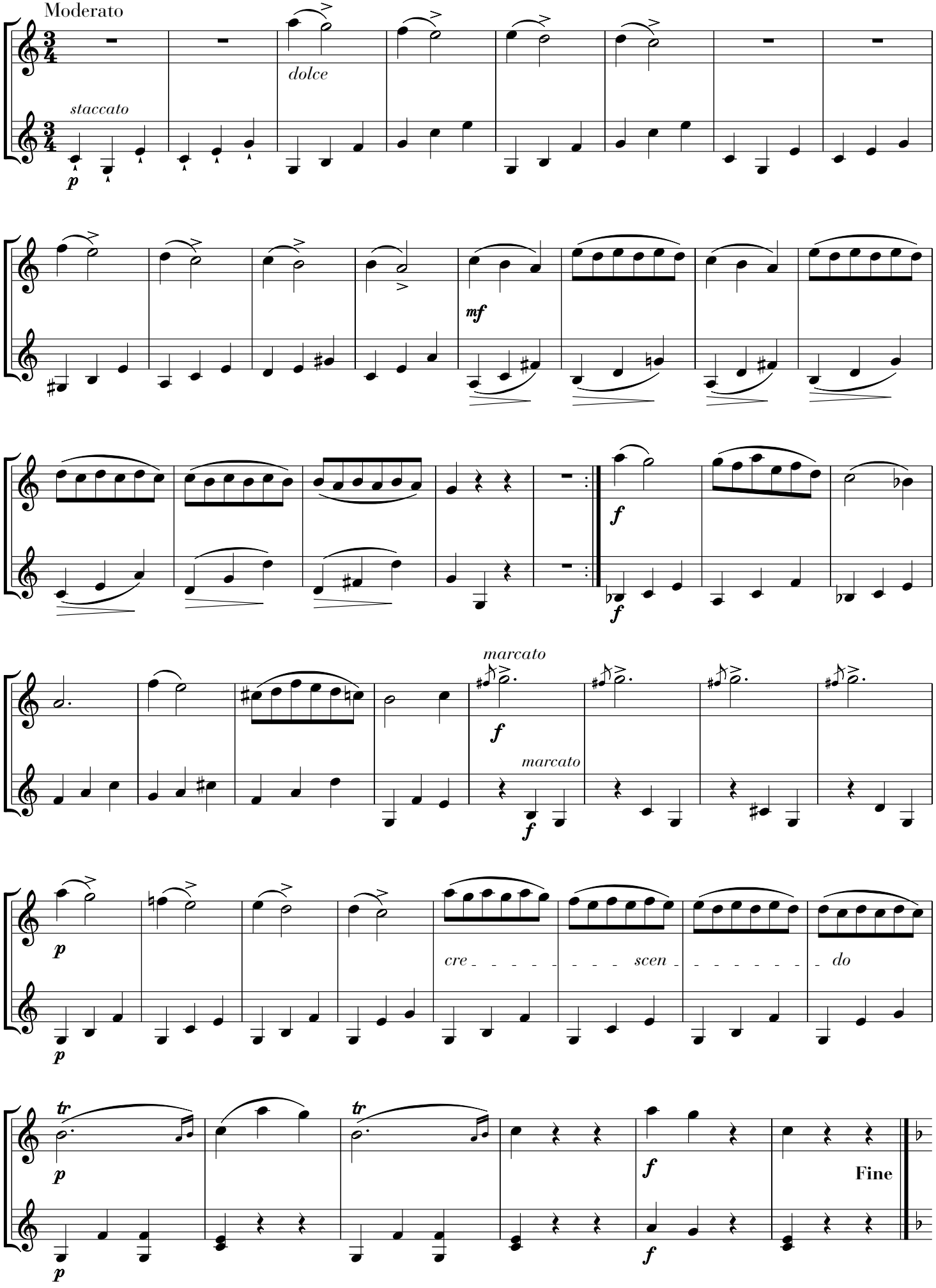

mf
f
f
f
f


Andante, quasi Allegretto
cantante
Fine
Cantabile

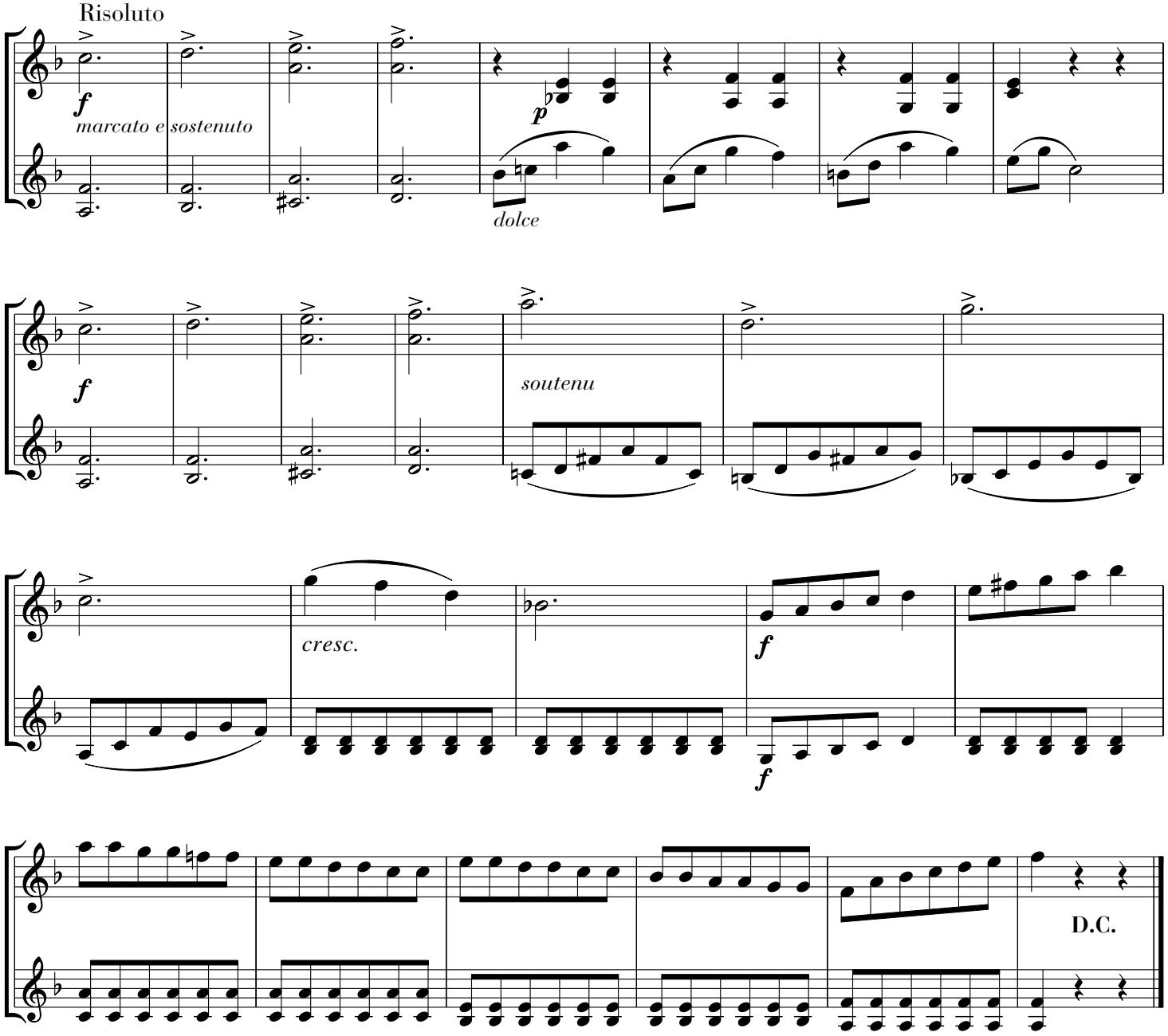


Revenez au commencement
et jouez jusqu'au mot Fine

VALSE


Moderato
staccato
dolce
mf
marcato
marcato
cre scen do
tr
tr
Fine

TRIO



Allegro moderato

f *les sons bien soutenu*

f

risoluto

sostenuto

tr

p

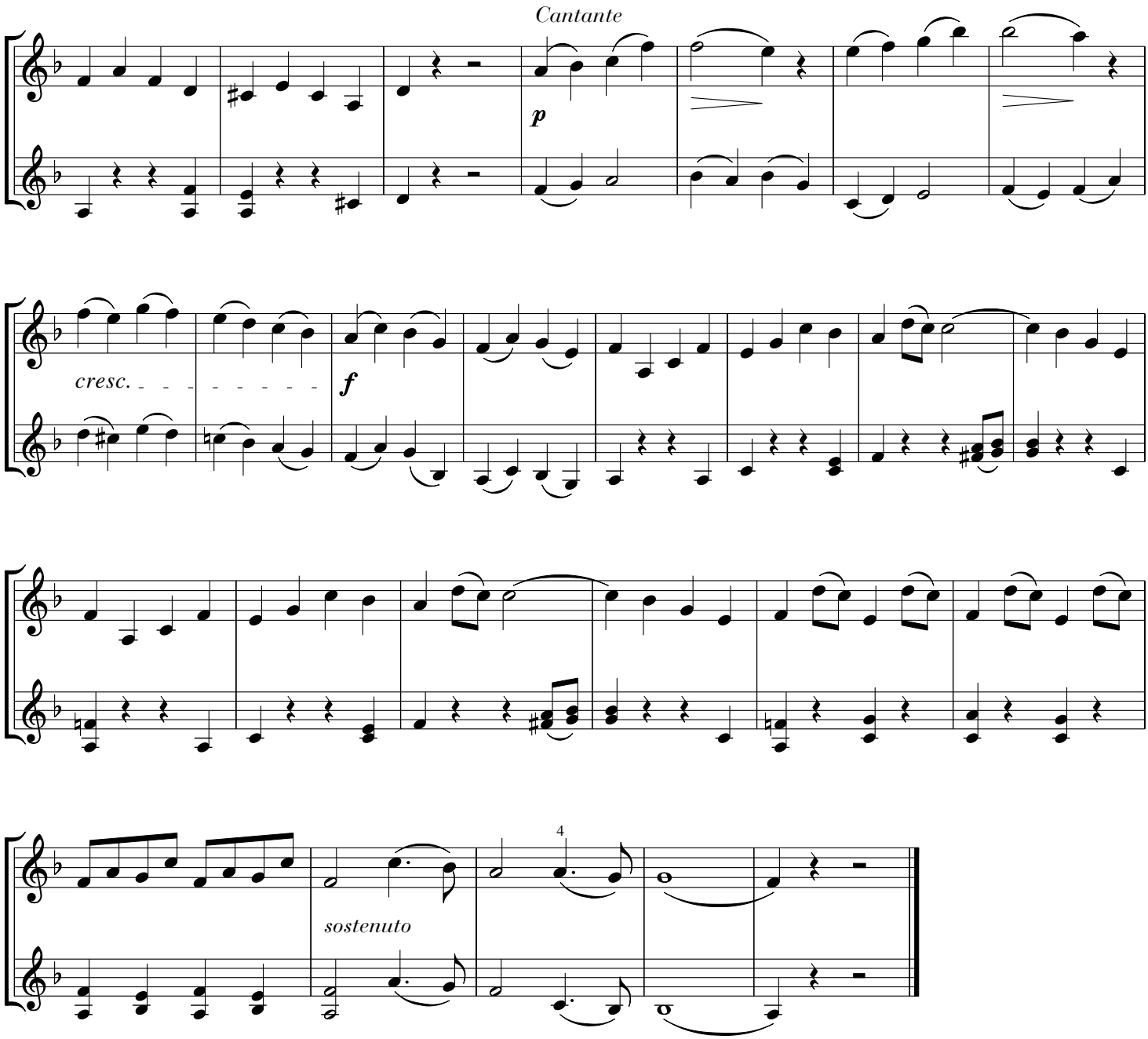
cresc.

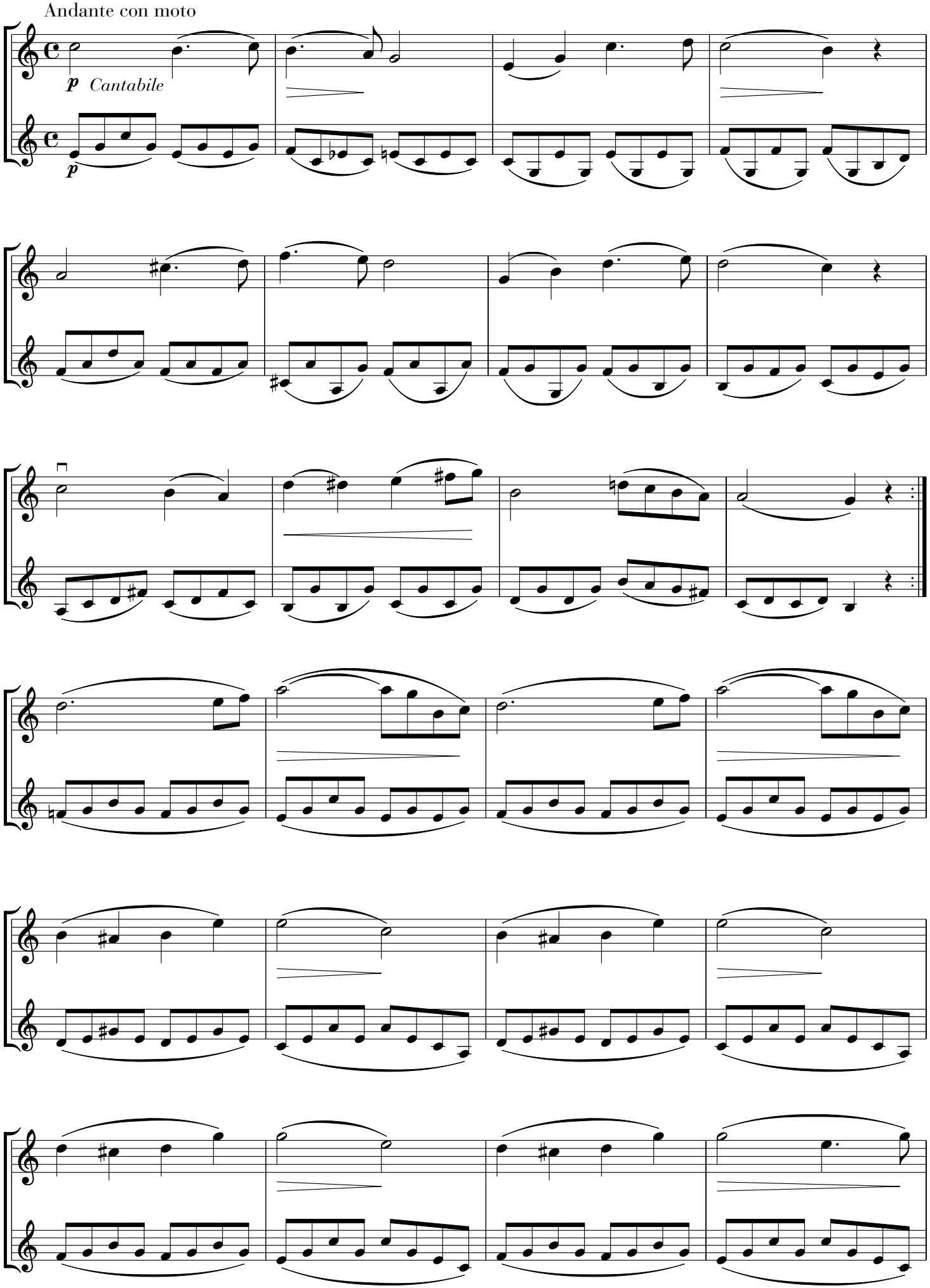
f

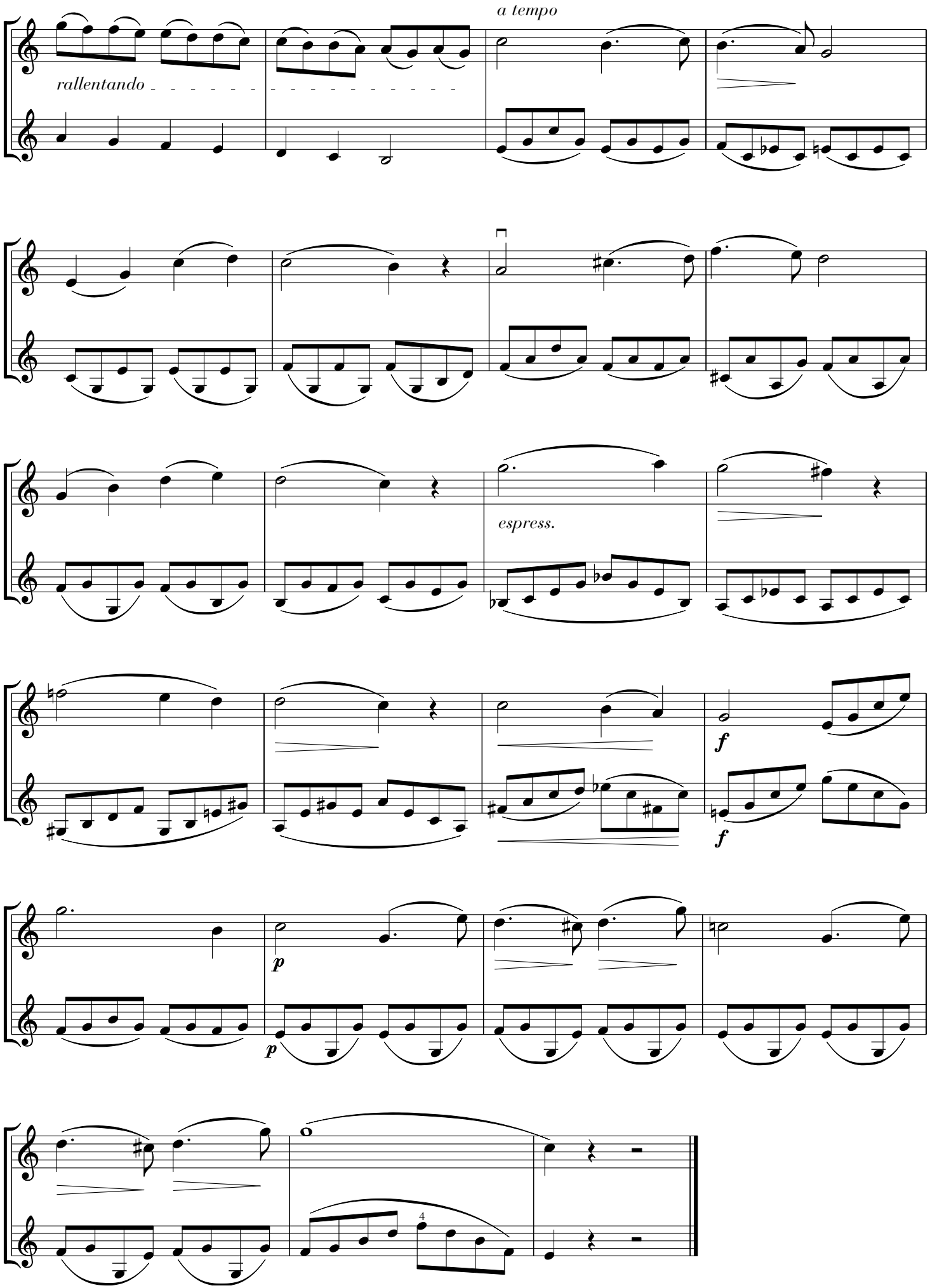
p

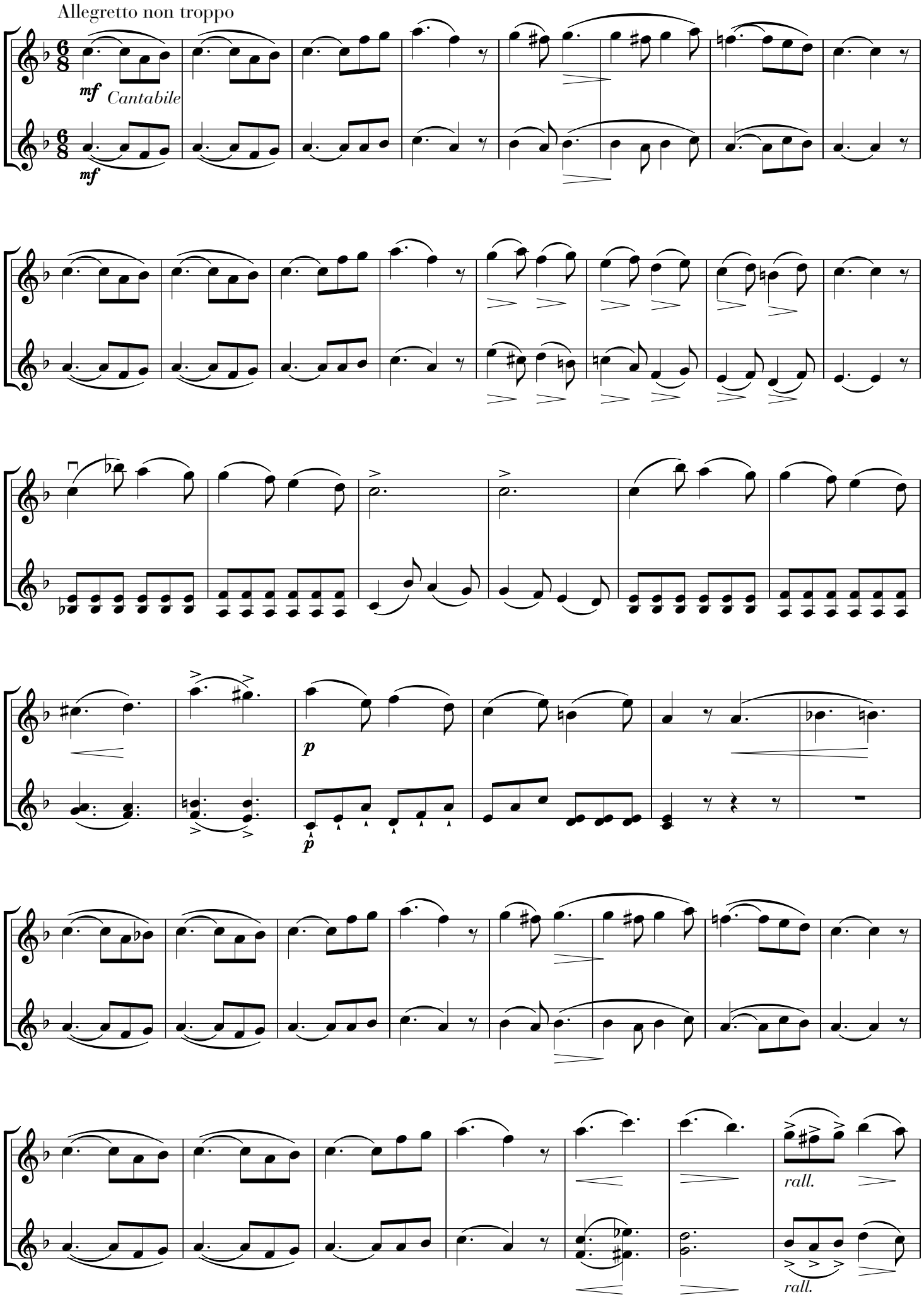
f

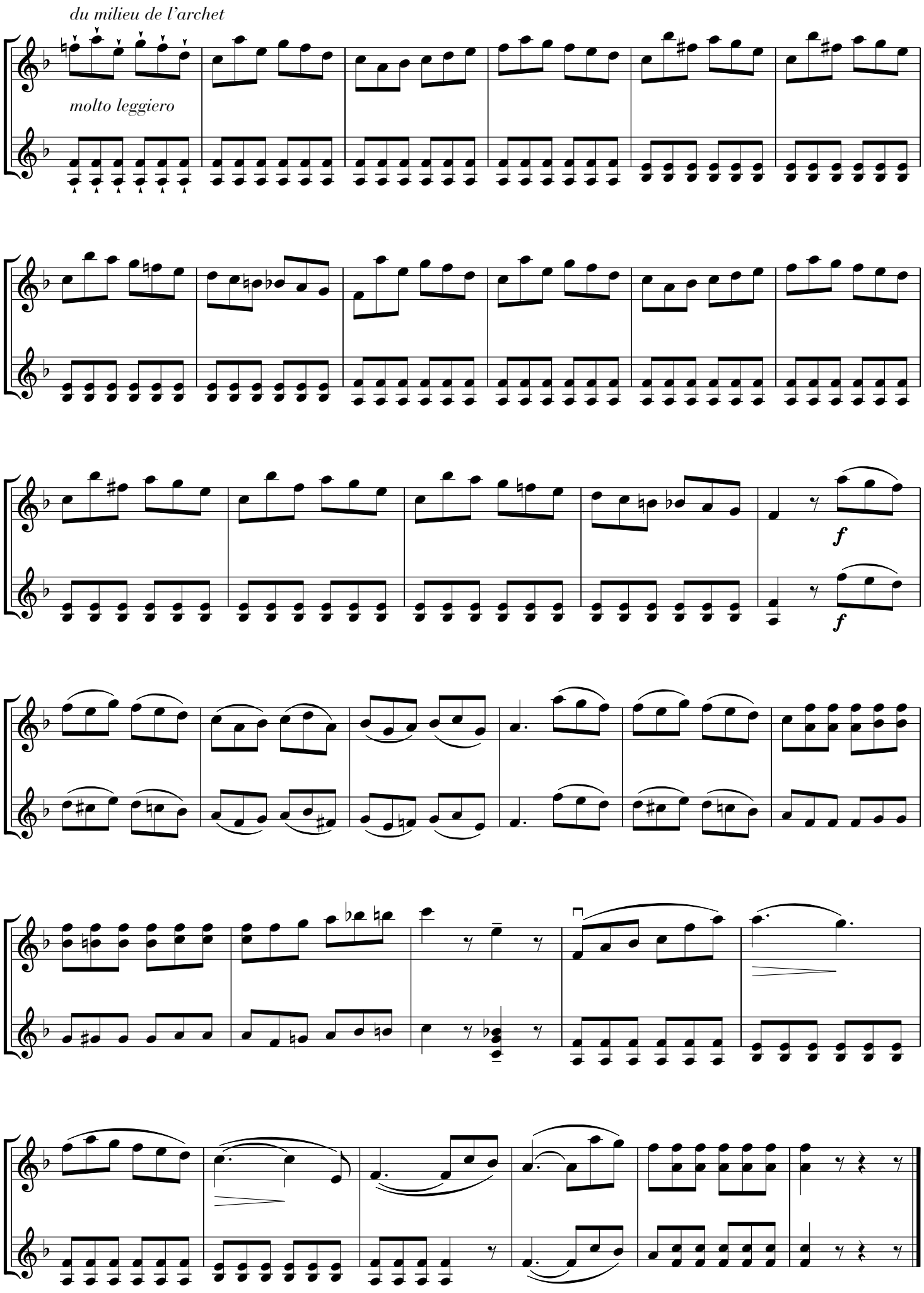
risoluto

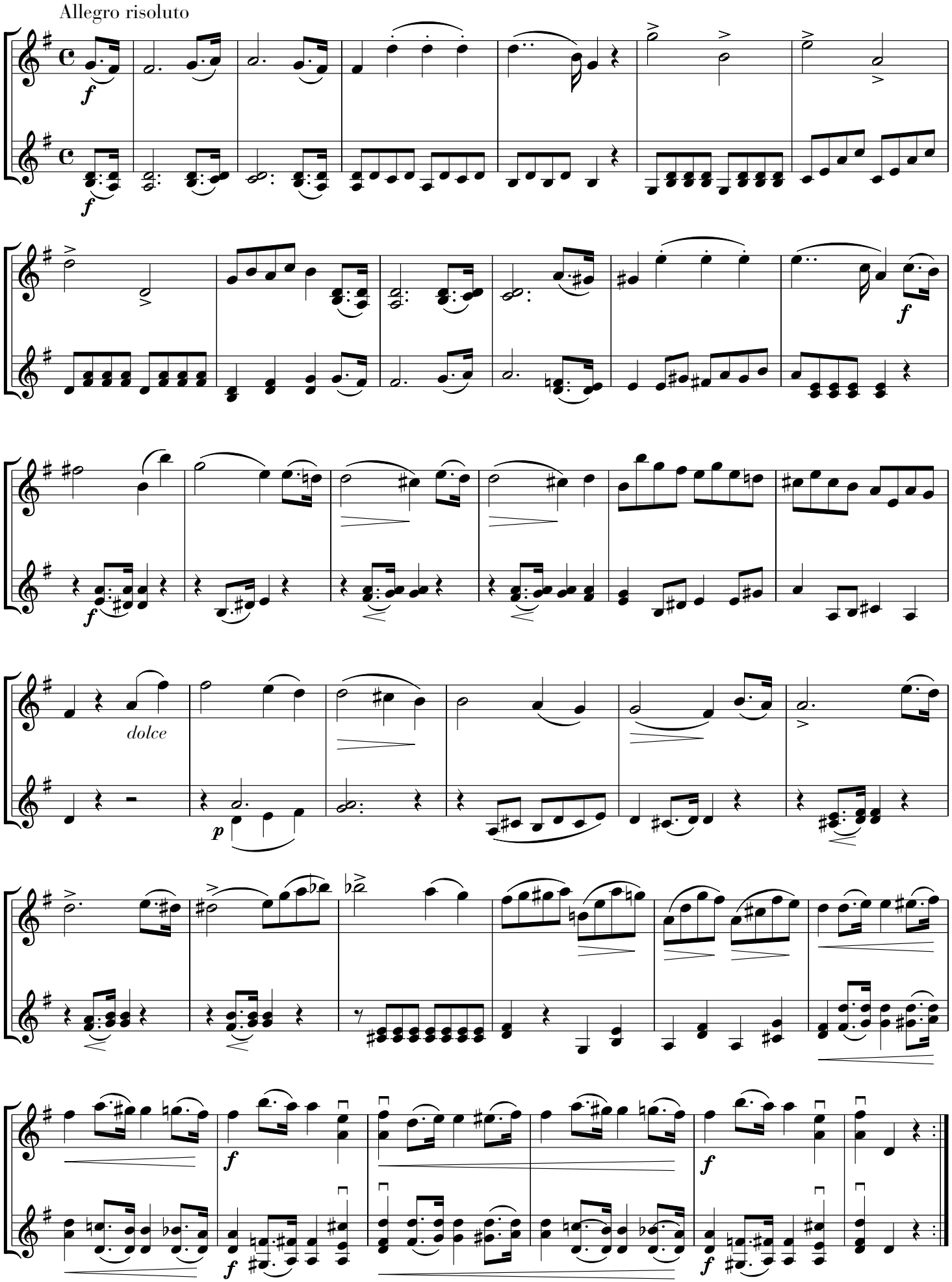

Cantante
p
cresc.
f
4
sostenuto

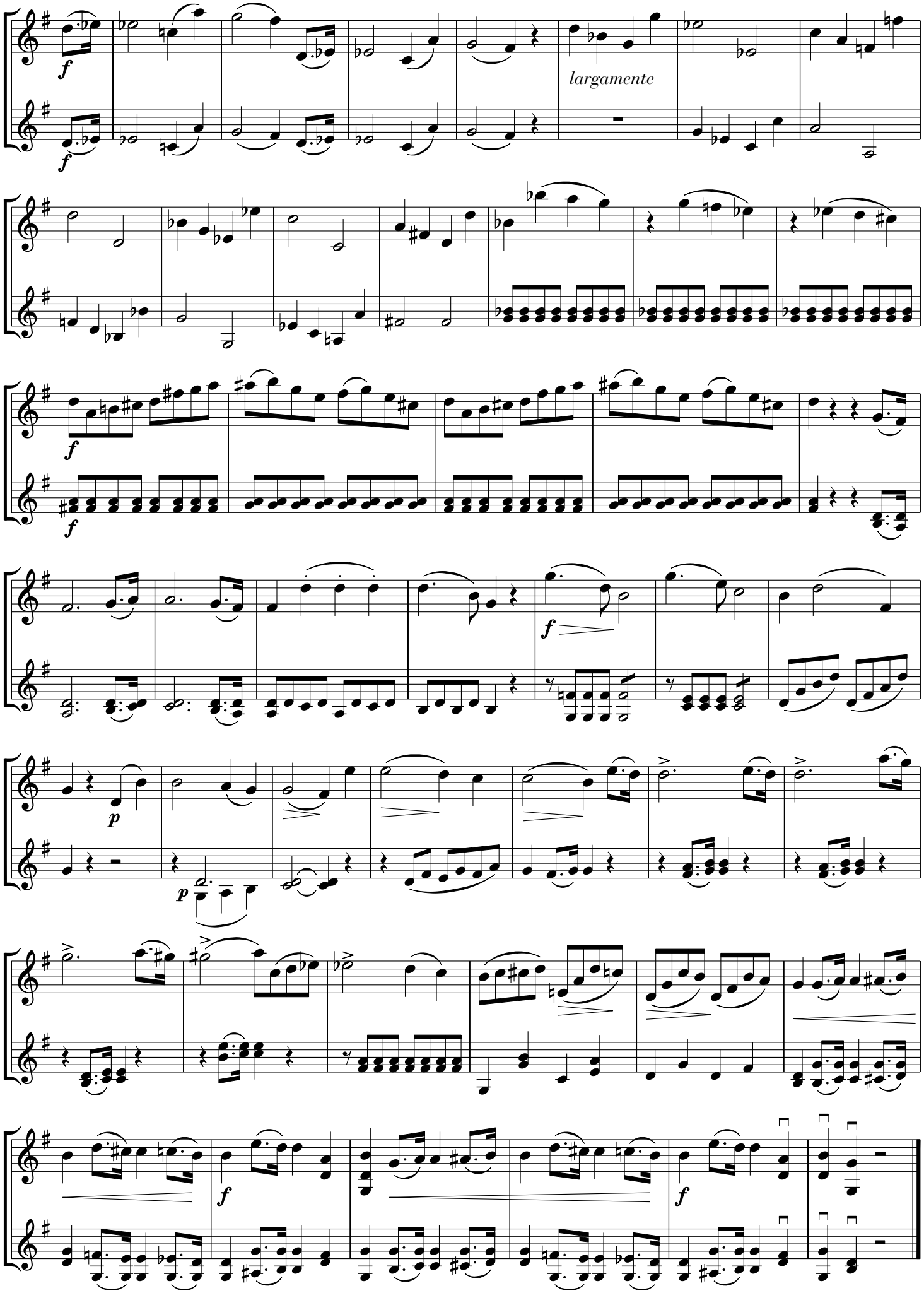

Andante con moto
p
Cantabile
p

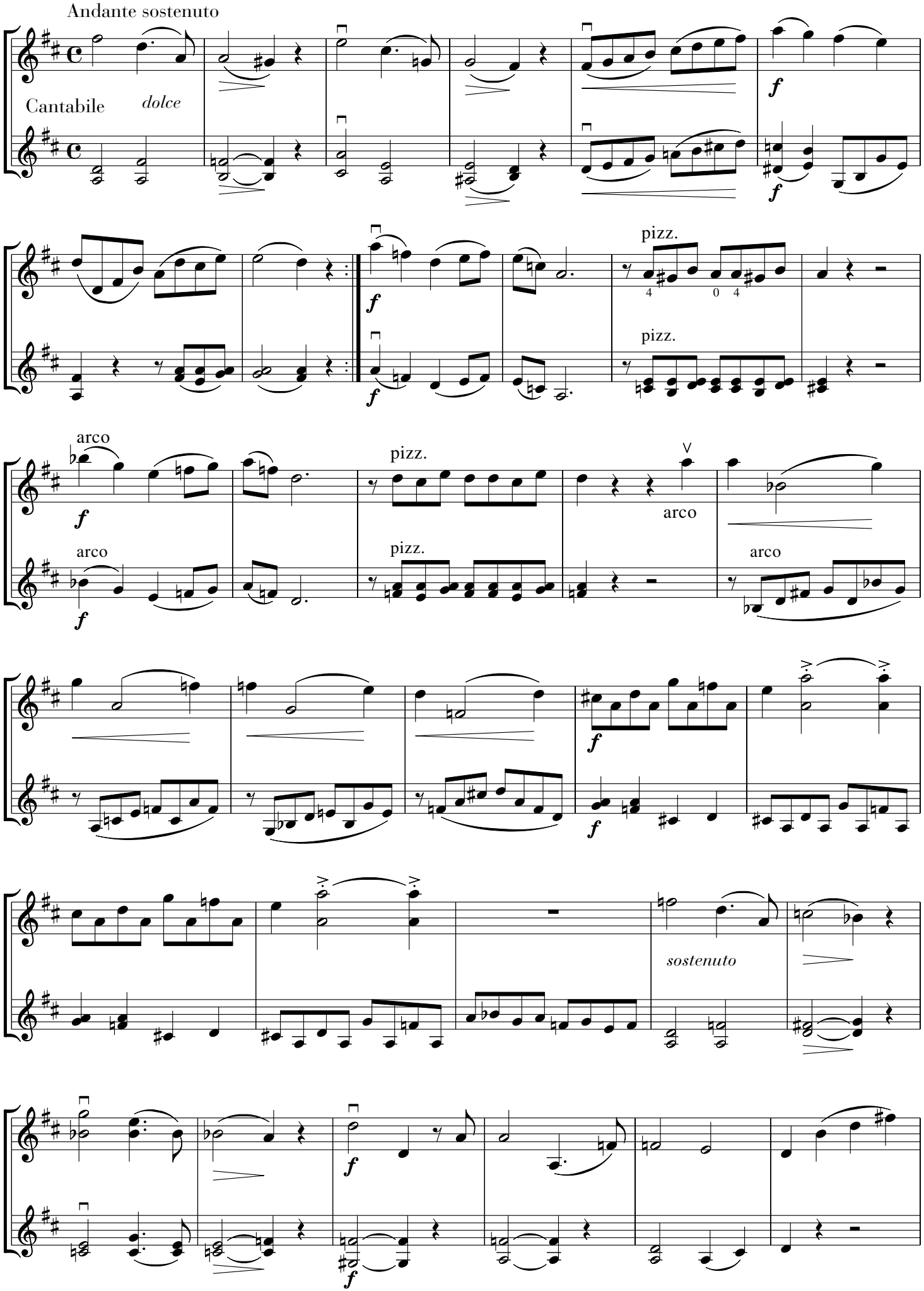

a tempo
rallentando
espress.
f
f
p
p
4

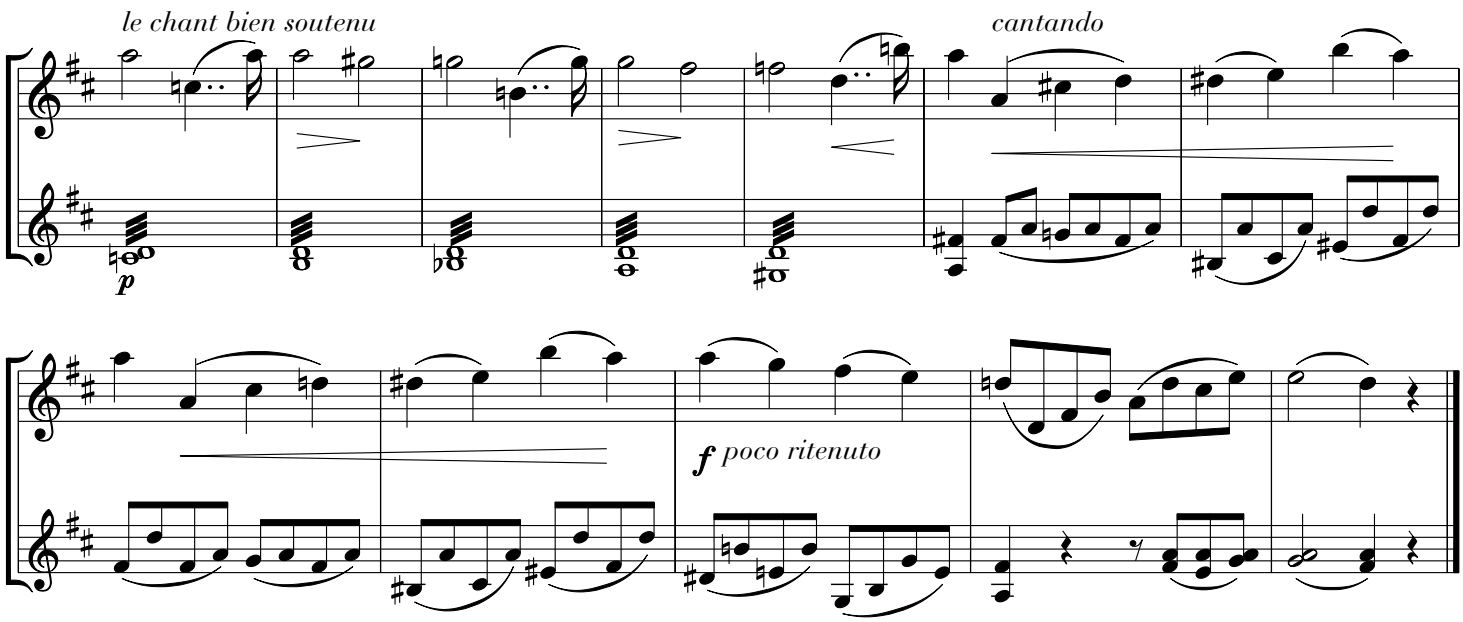

Allegretto non troppo
mf
Cantabile
mf
p
p
rall.
rall.

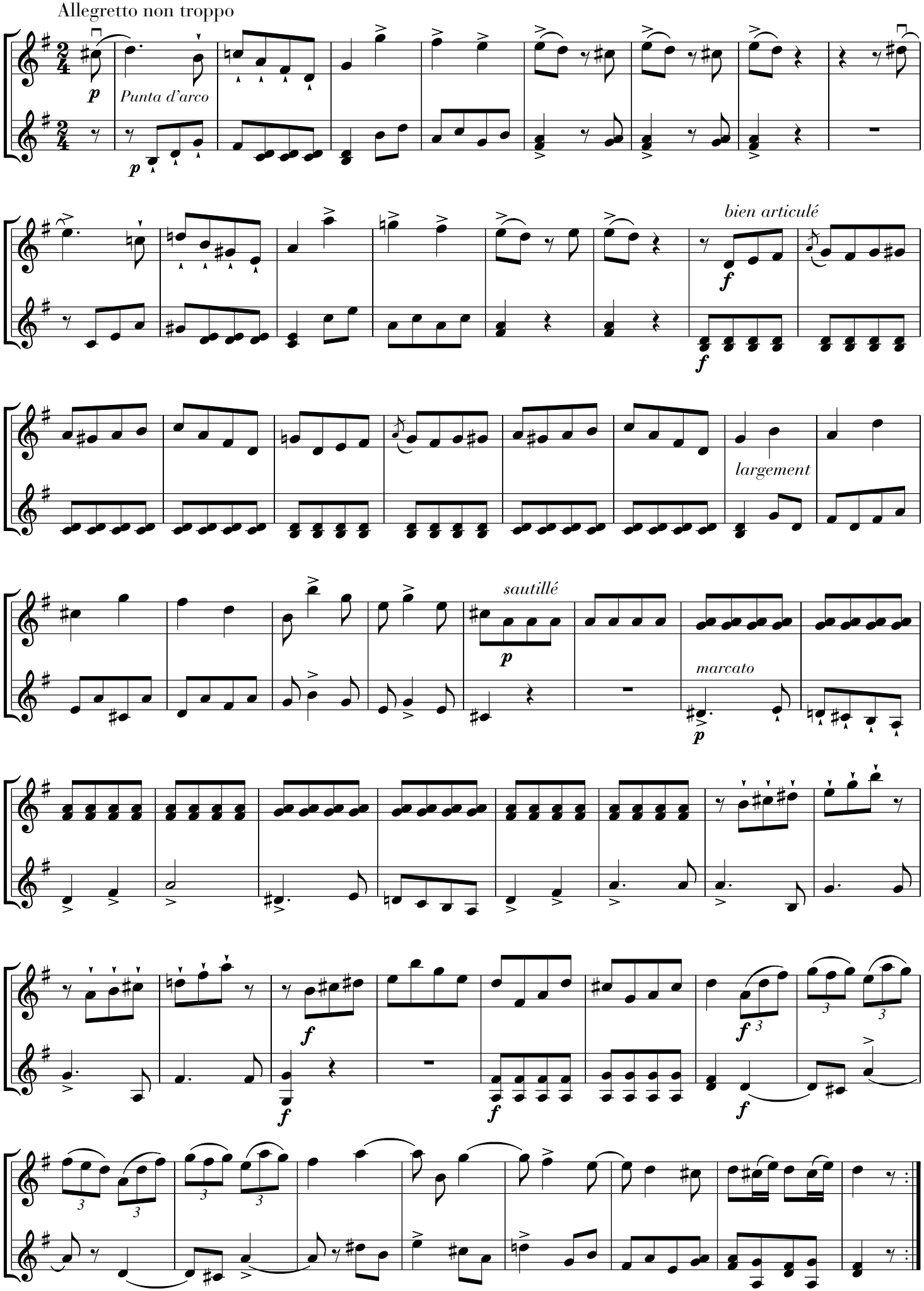

du milieu de l'archet
molto leggiero
f
f

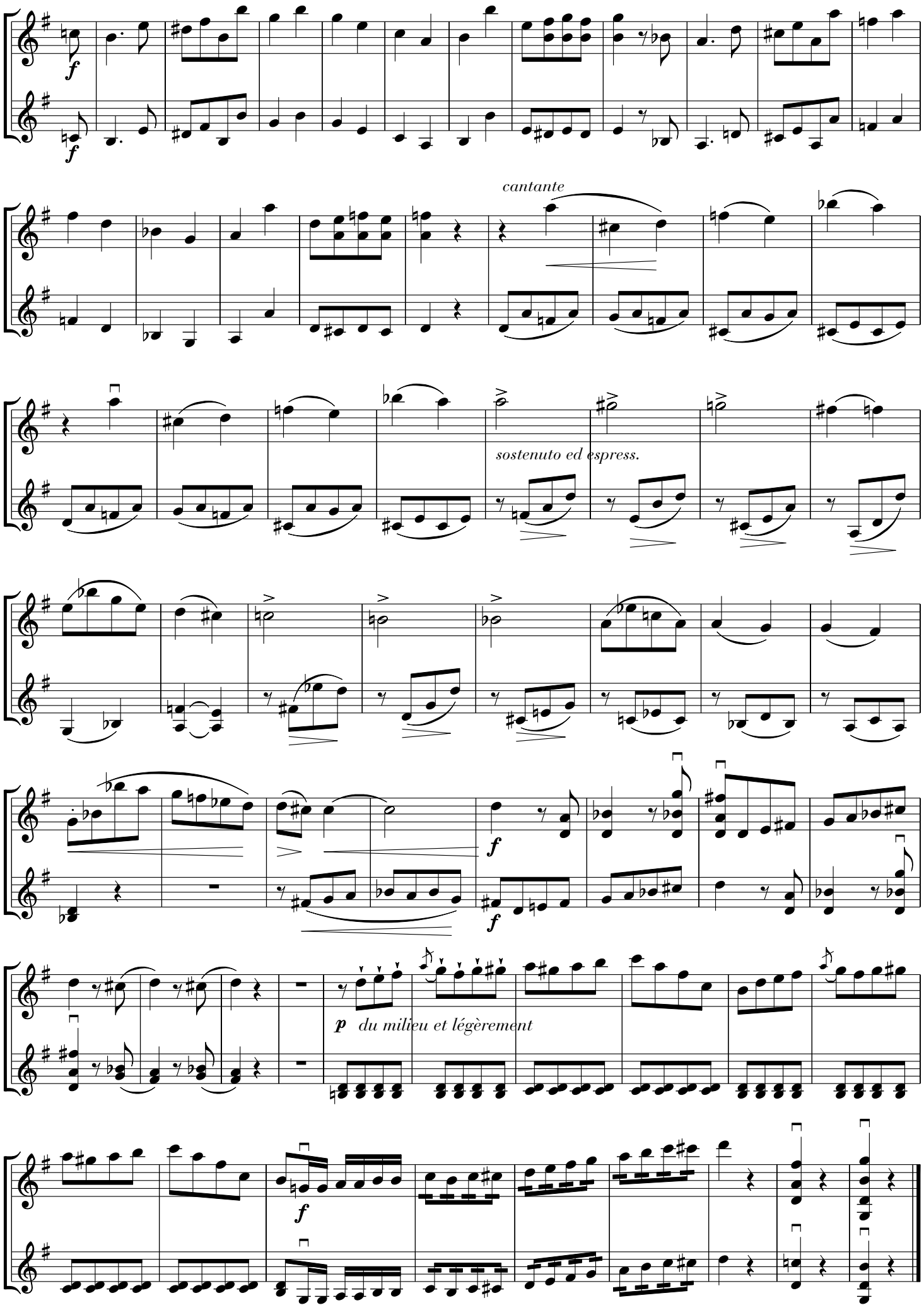

Allegro risoluto
dolce


largamente

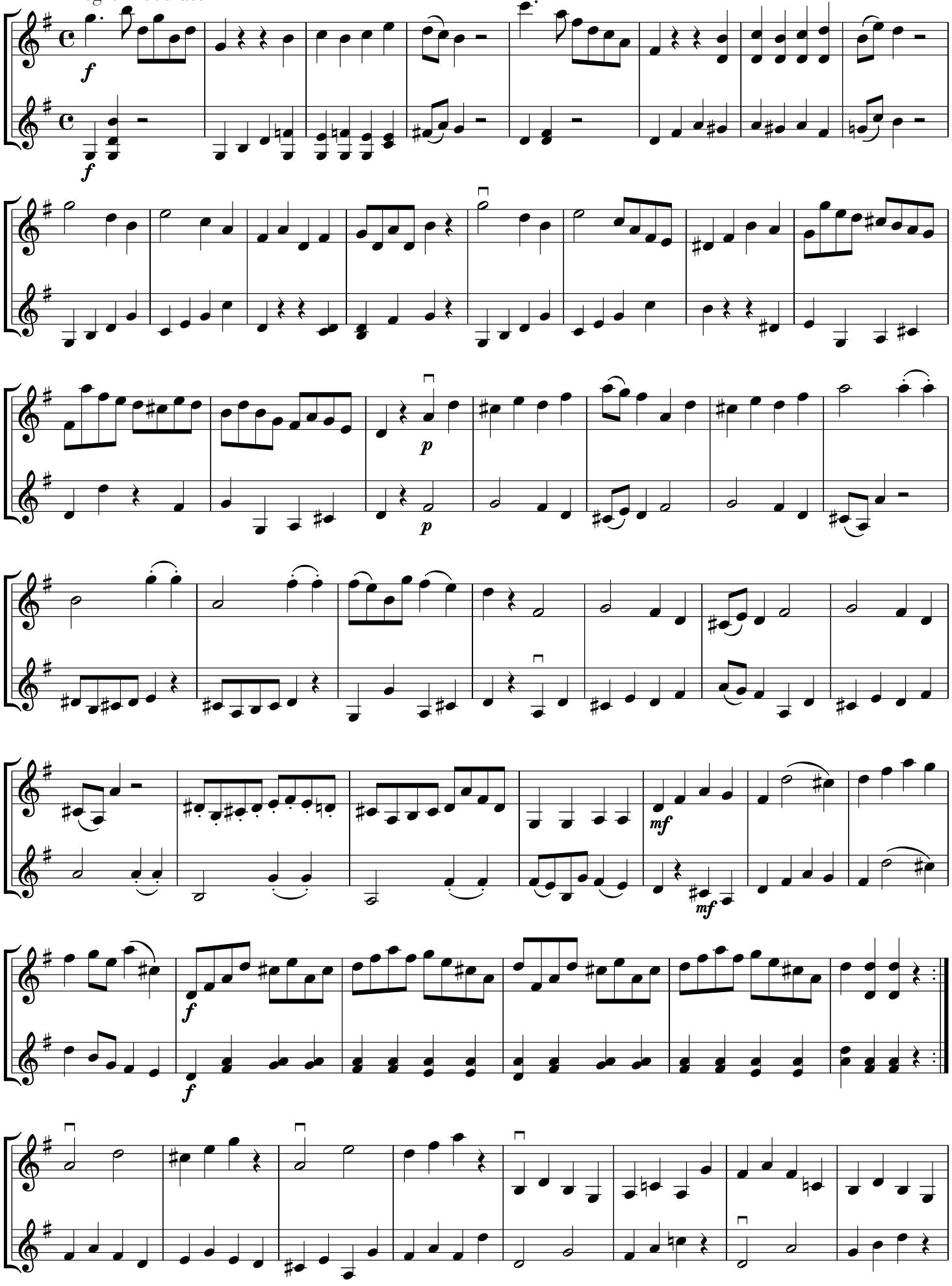

Andante sostenuto
Cantabile
dolce
f
pizz.
arco
sostenuto

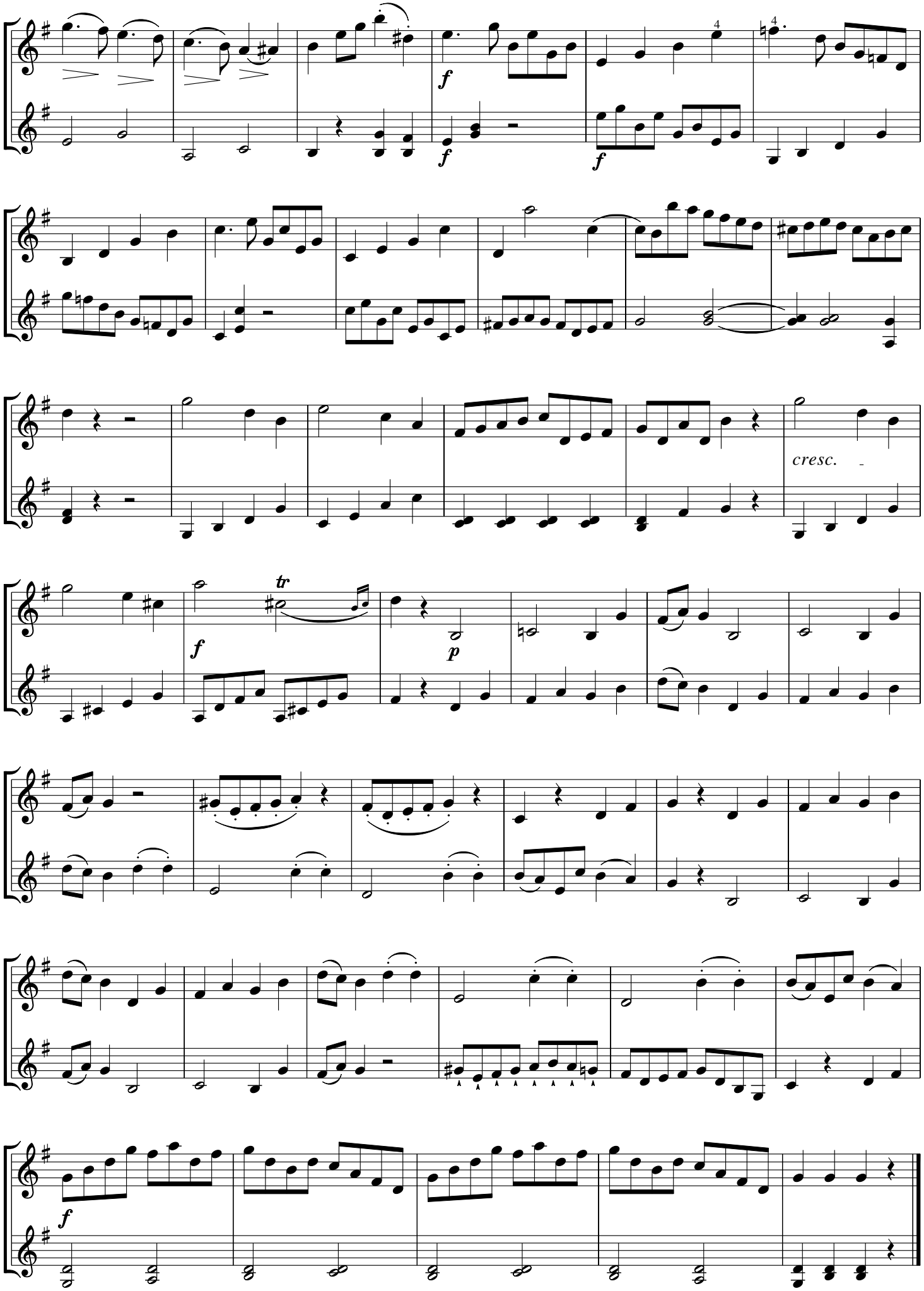

le chant bien soutenu
cantando
p
f poco ritenuto

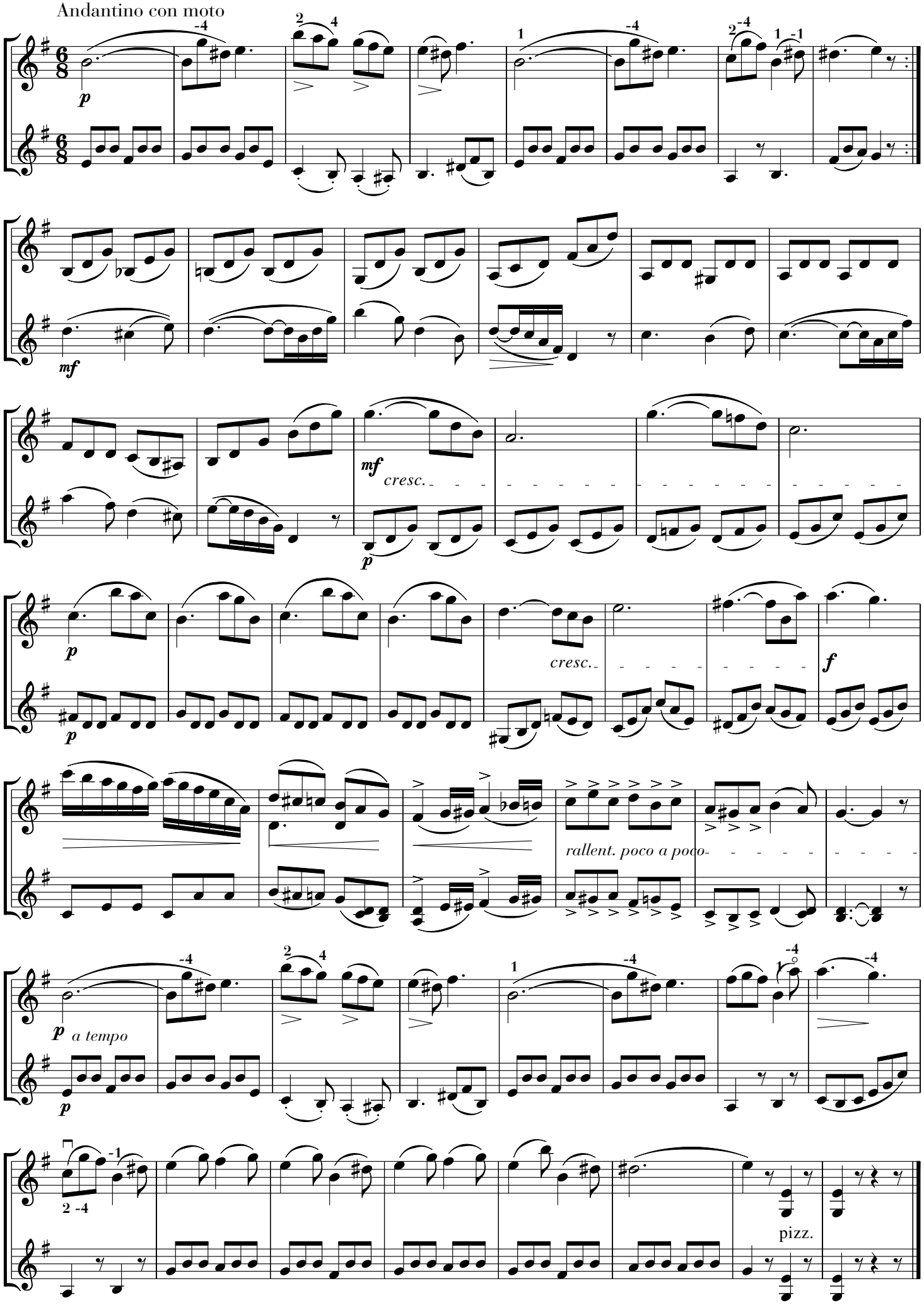

Allegretto non troppo
p
Punta d'arco
p
bien articulé
f
f
largement
sautillé
p
marcato
p
f
f
f
f
f
3
3
3
3
3


cantante
sostenuto ed espress.
p du milieu et légèrement

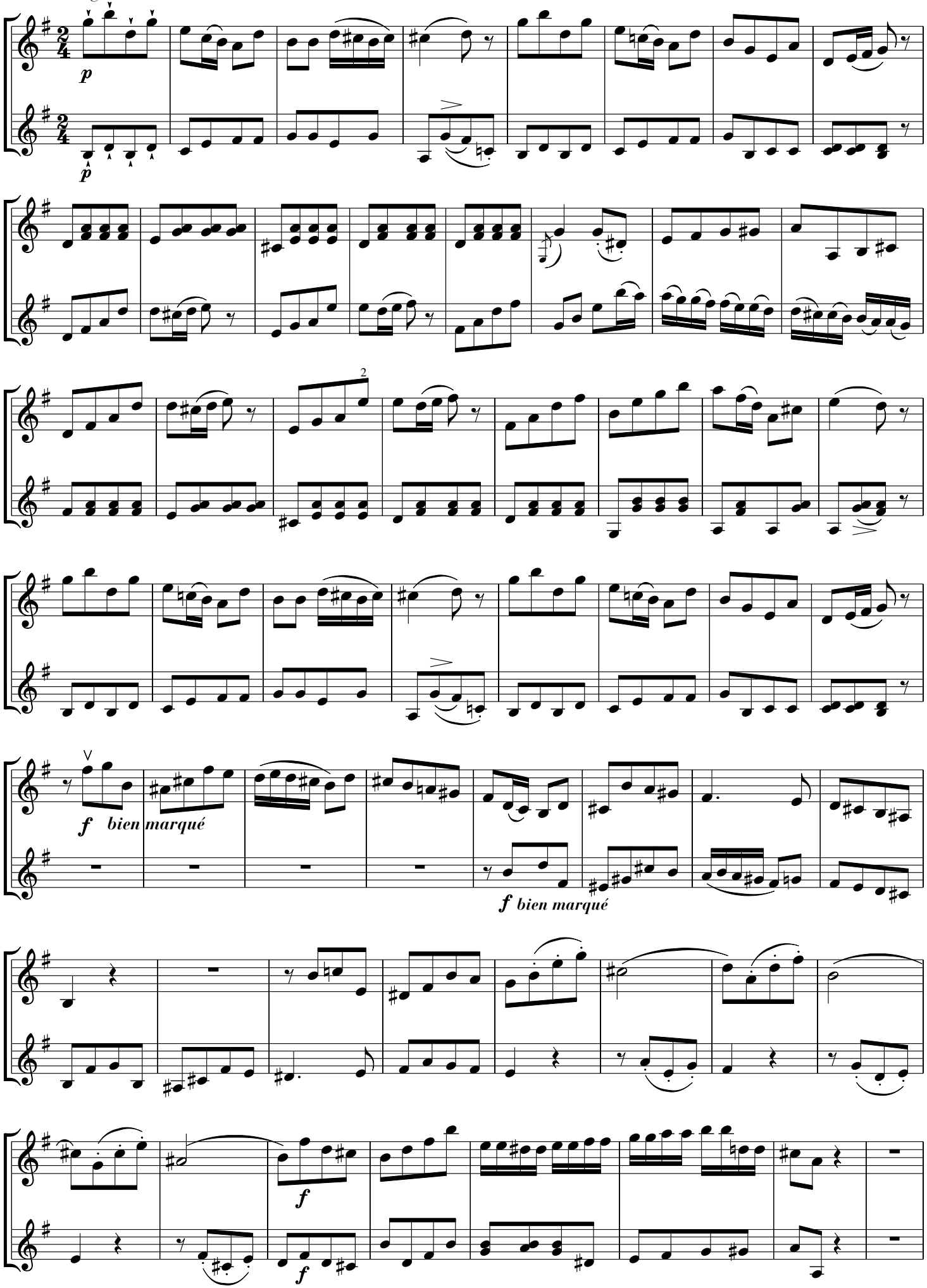
Allegro moderato

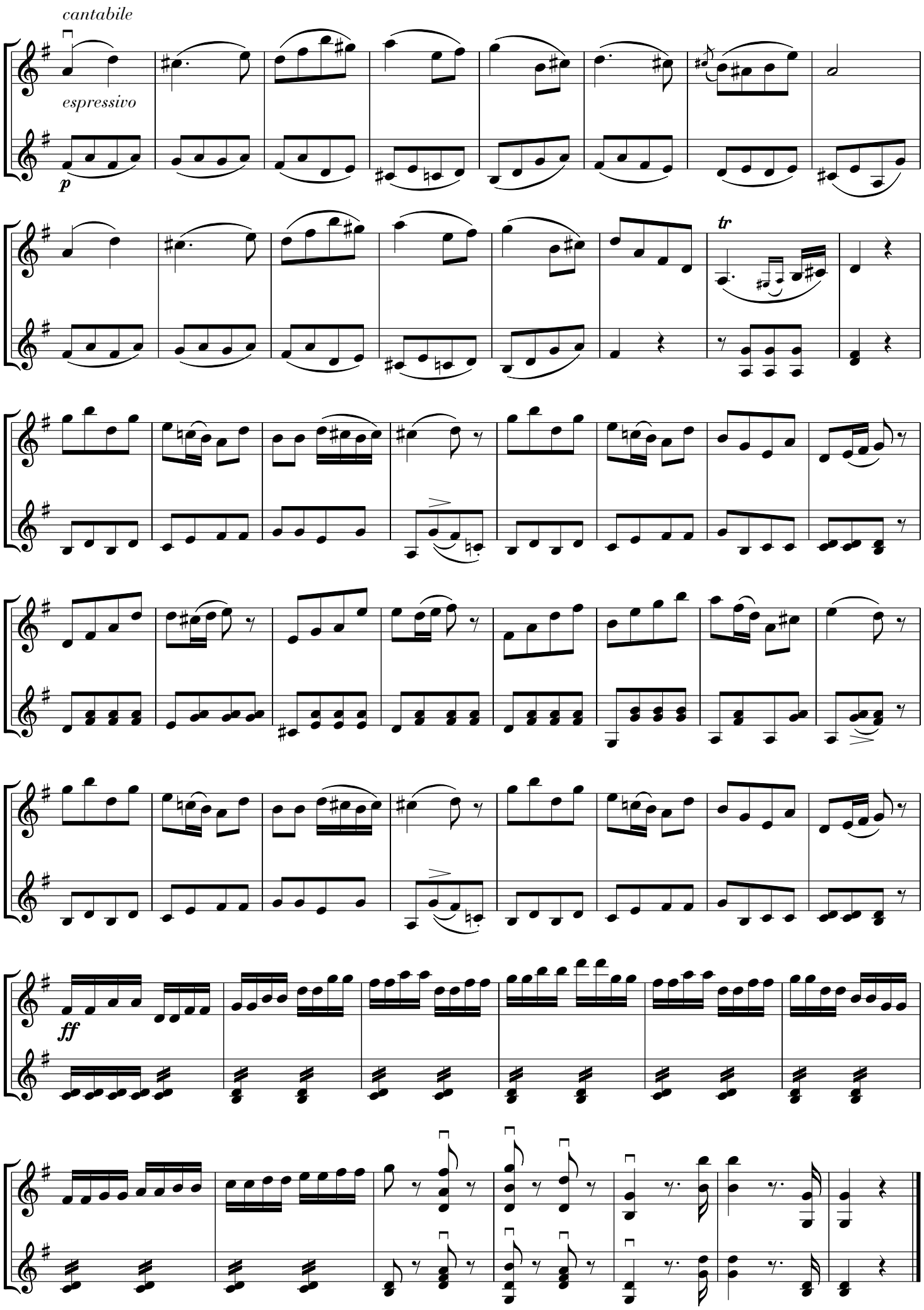



f
f
f
cresc.
tr
f
p
f

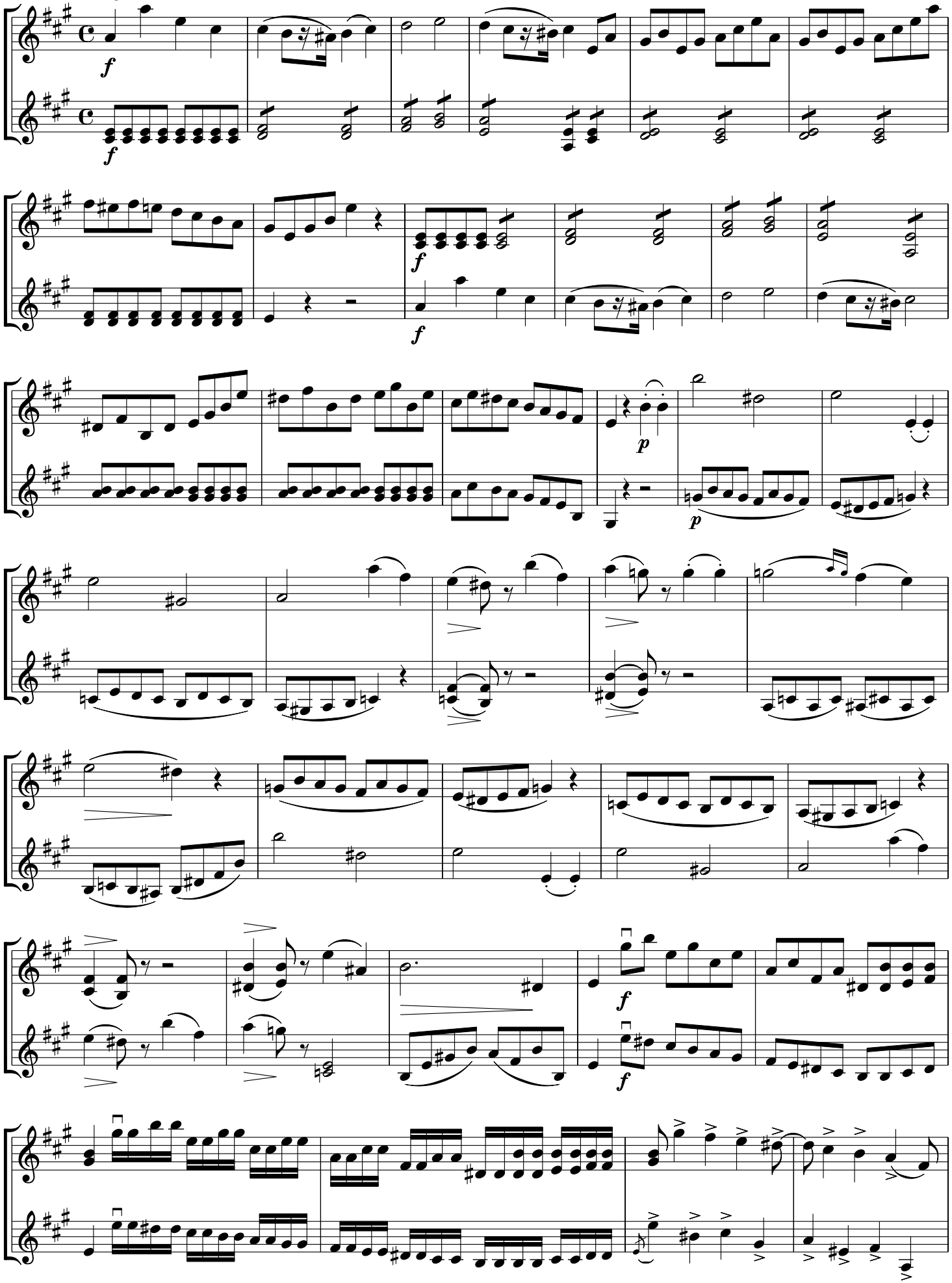

Andantino con moto
p
mf
cresc.
p
p
cresc.
f
rallent. poco a poco
p
a tempo
pizz.

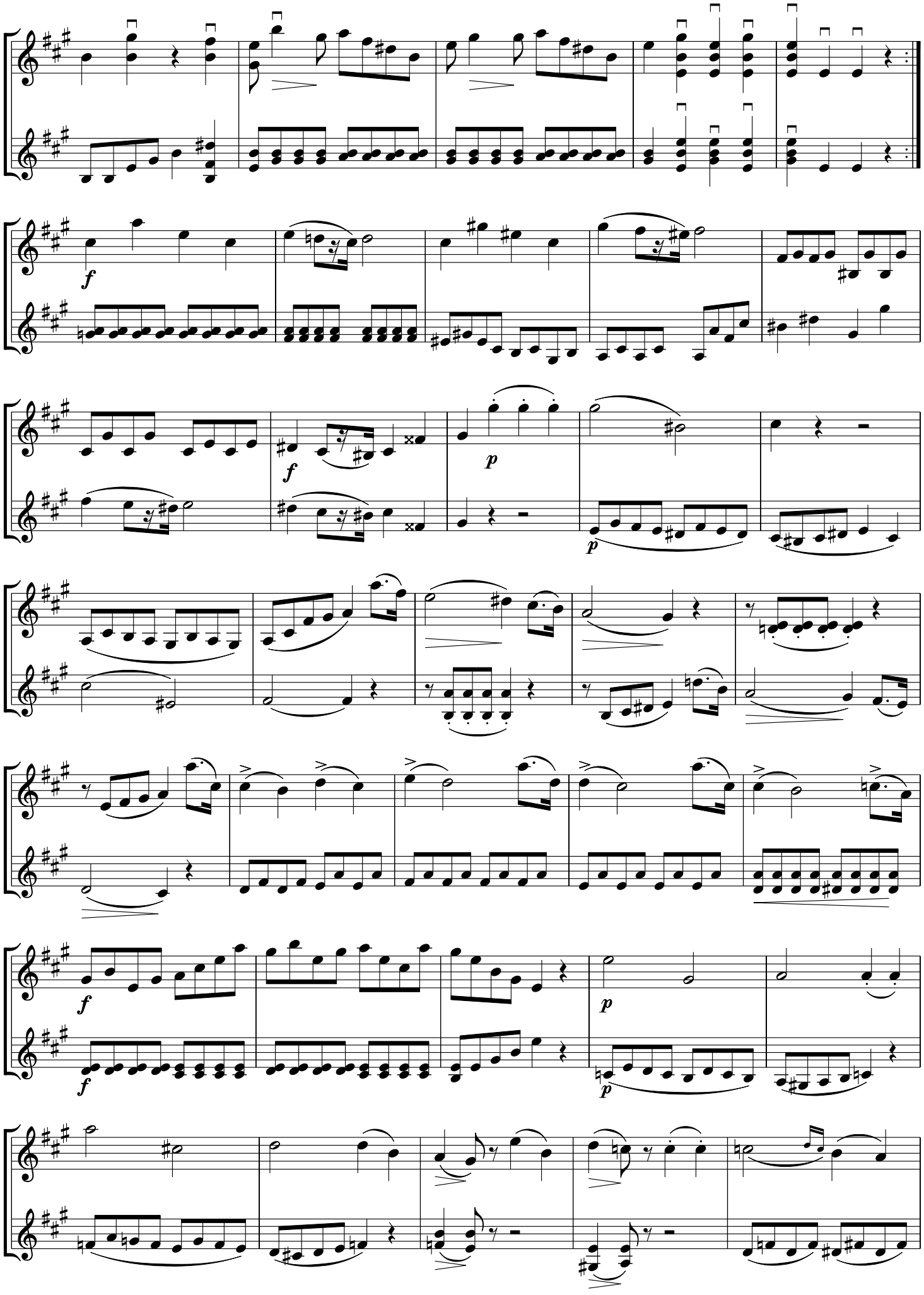
Allegretto

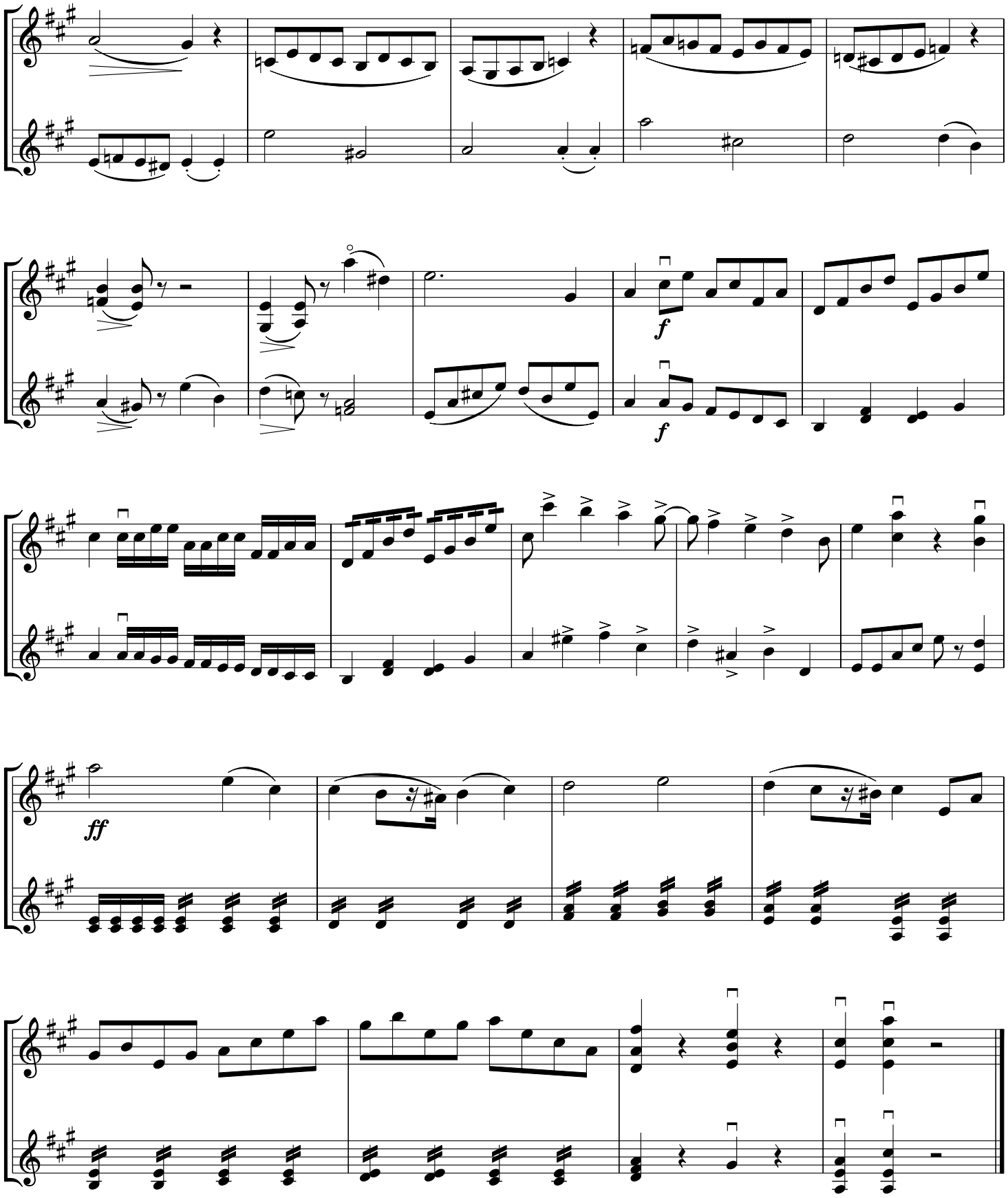



cantabile
espressivo
p
tr
ff

Allegro maestoso

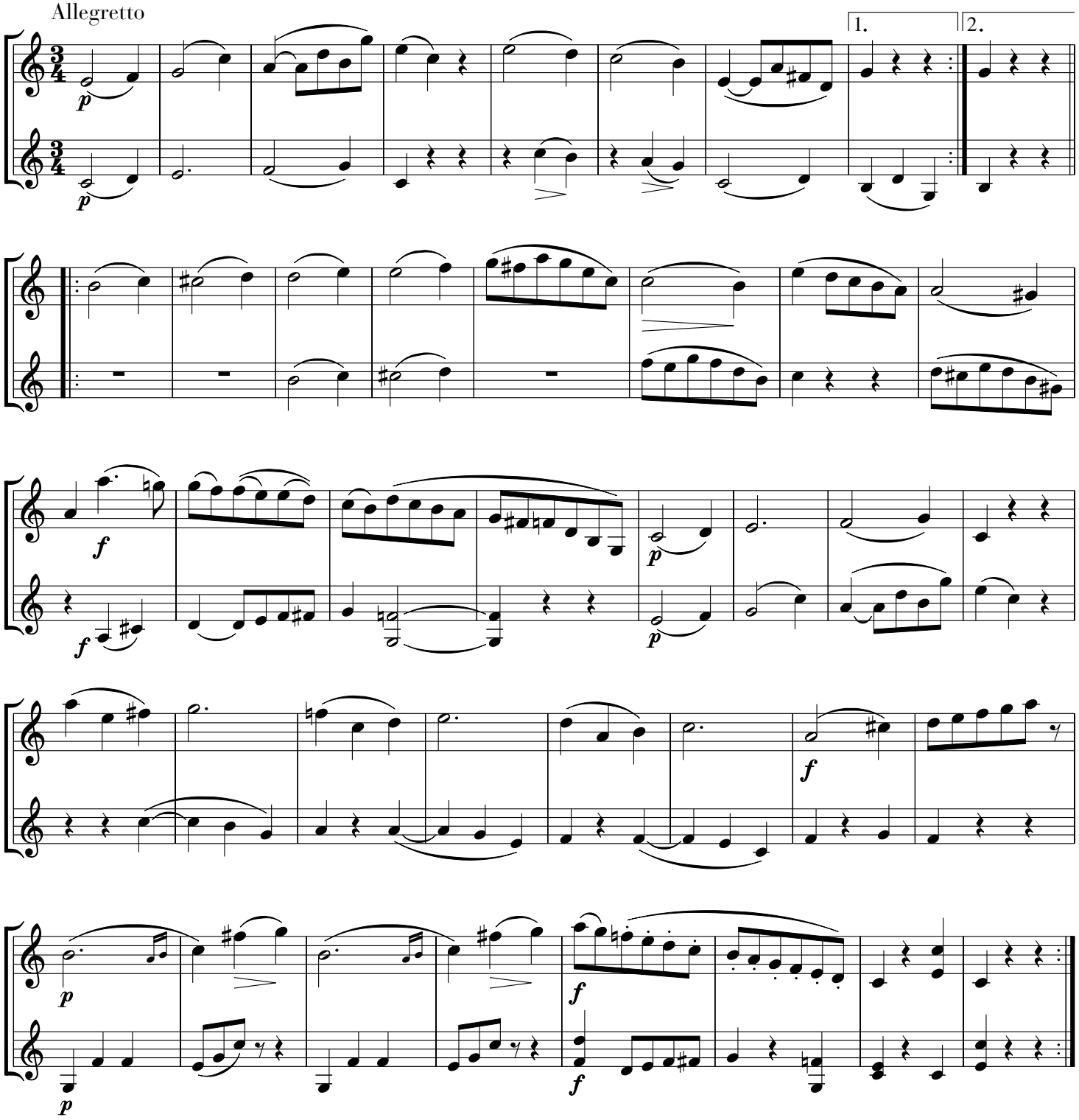




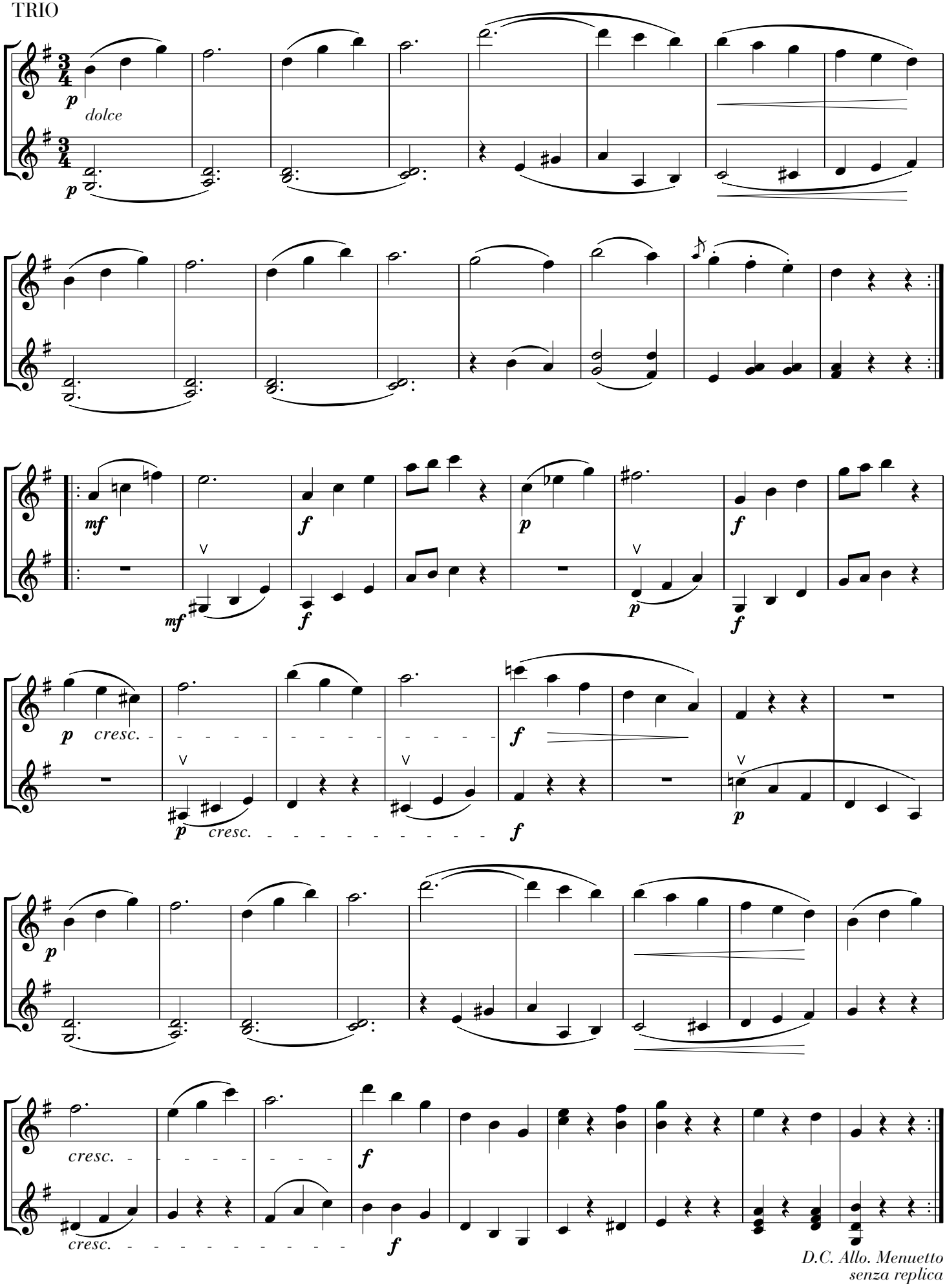

f
f
ff

MENUETTO

Allegretto

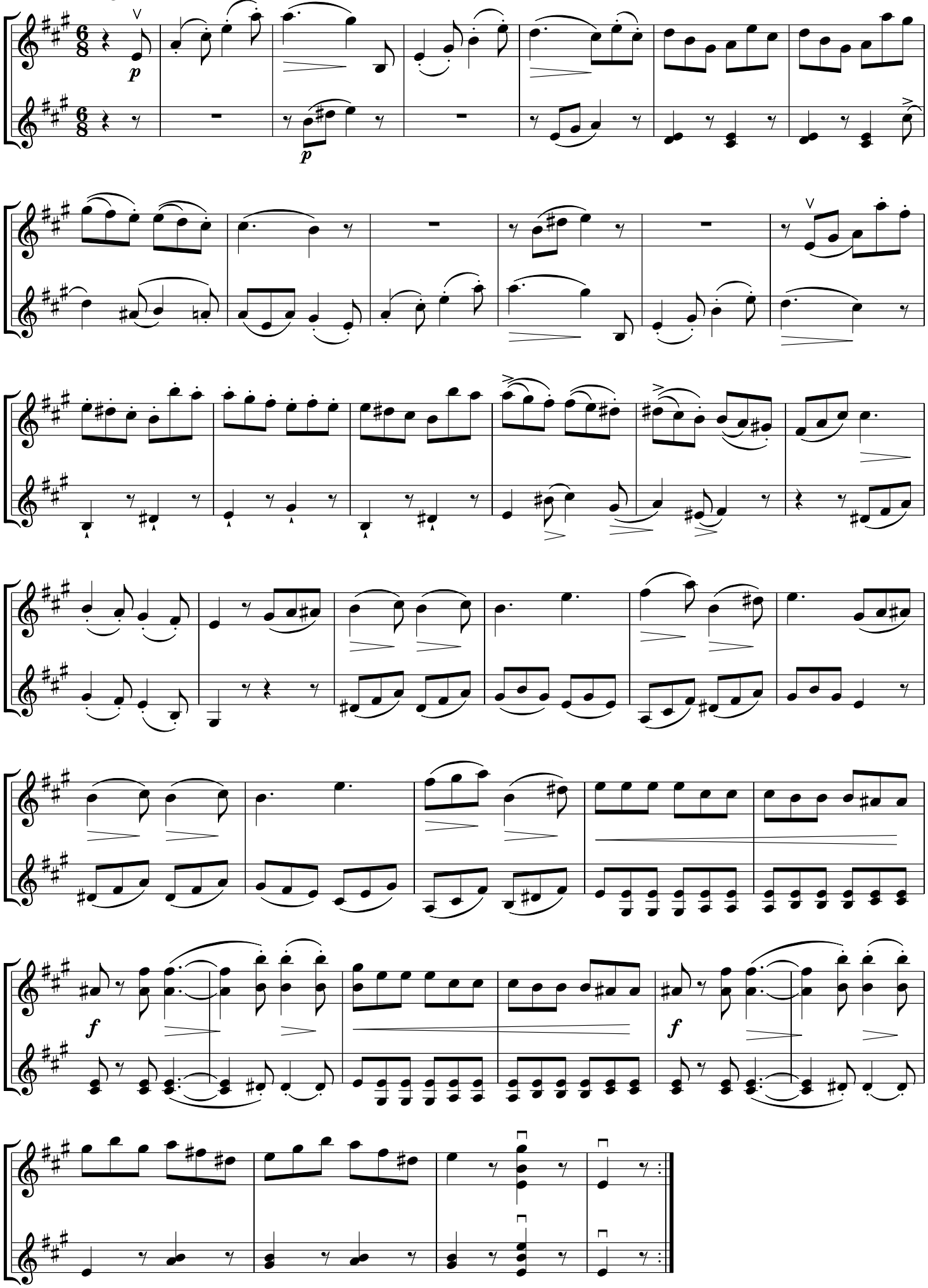


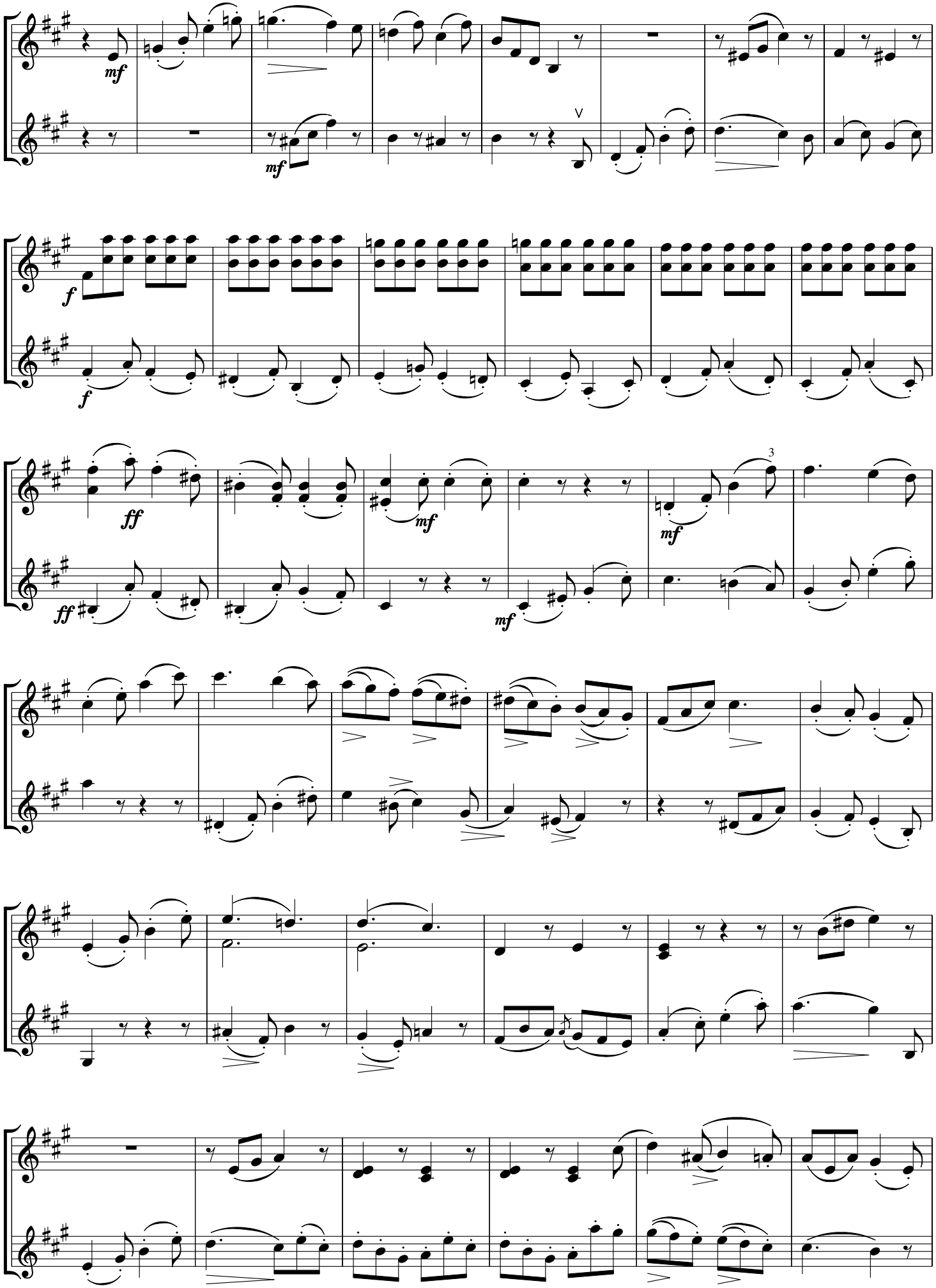
TRIO

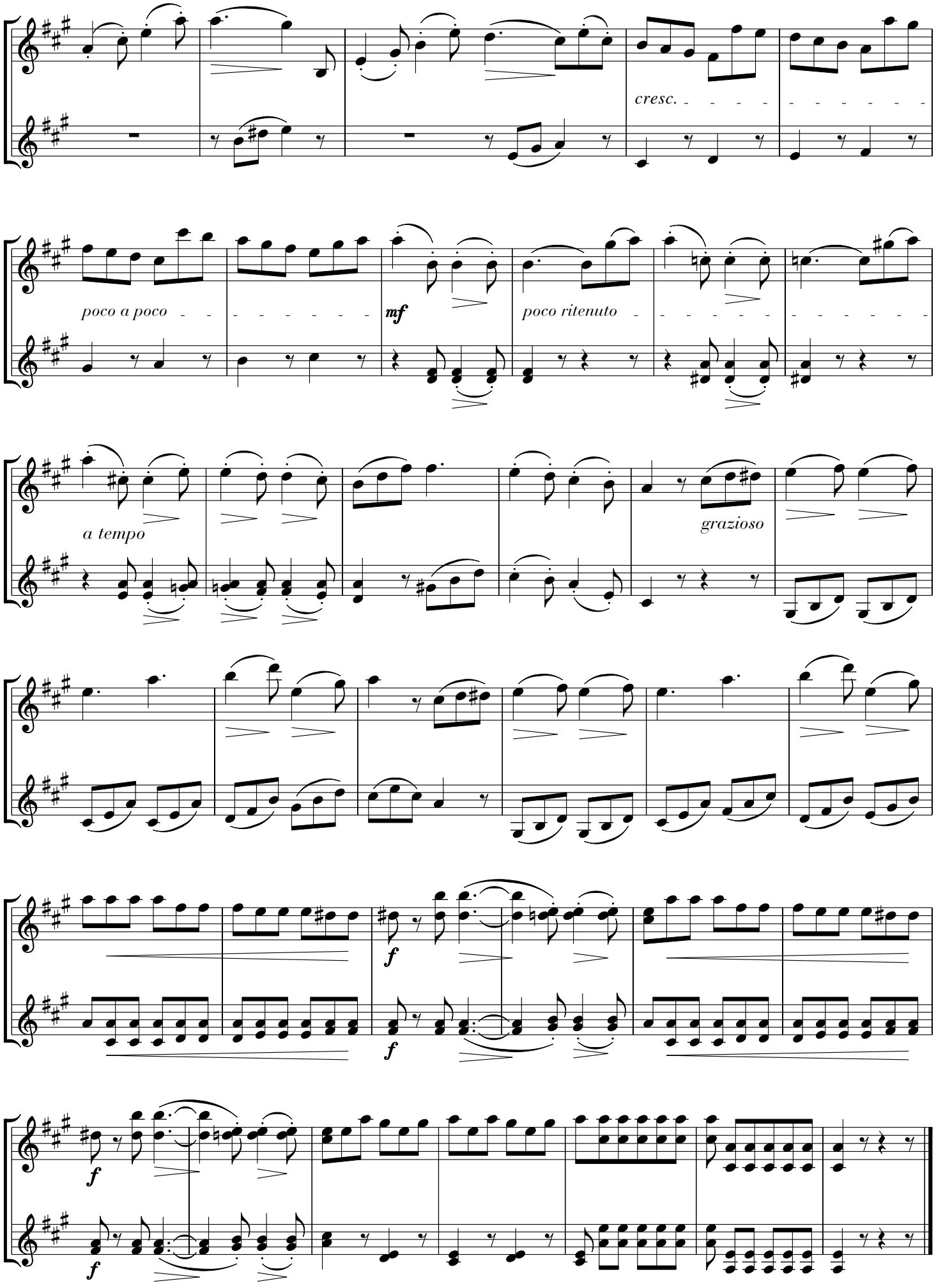


D.C. Allo. Menuetto
senza replica

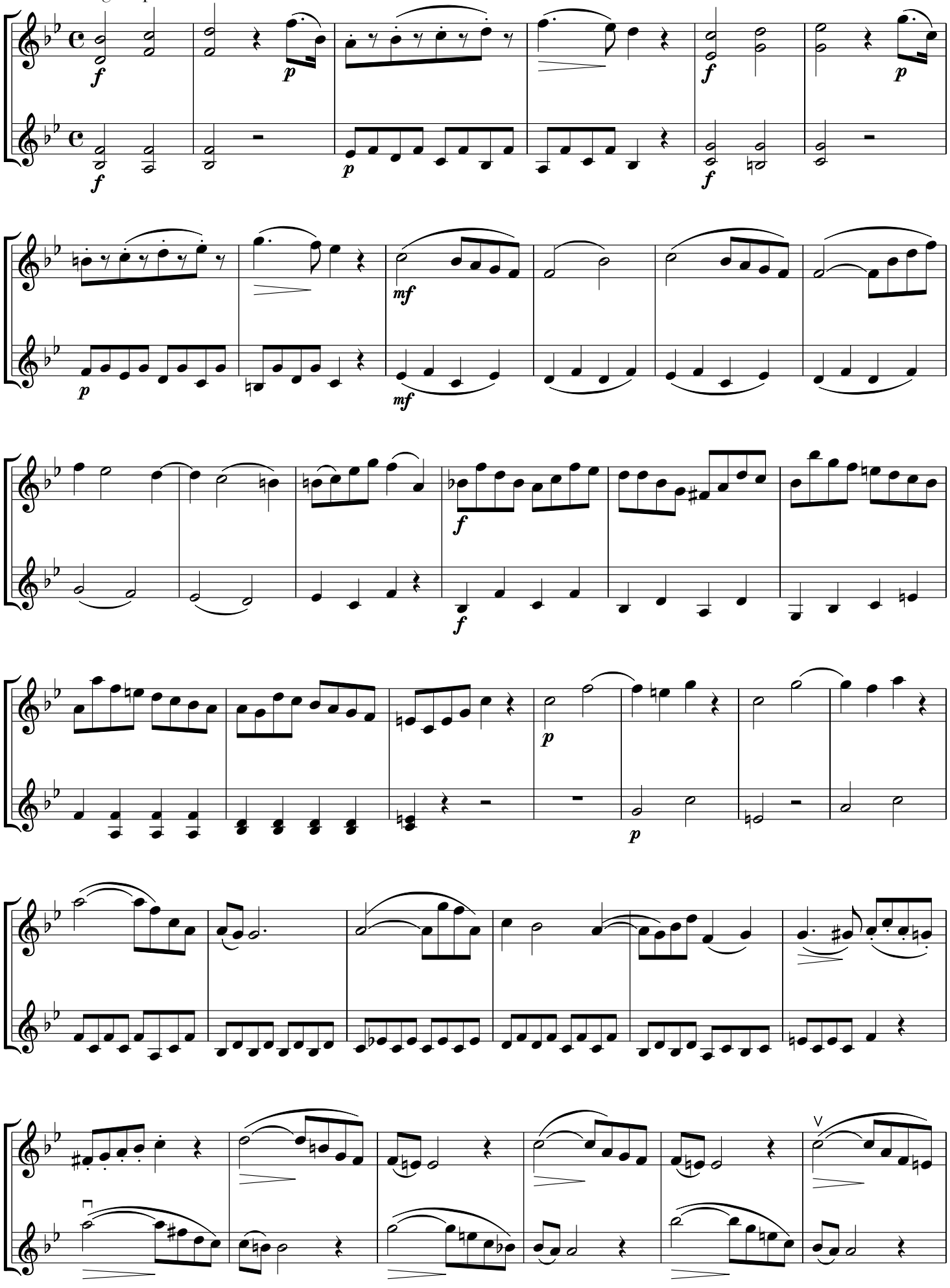
Allegro comodo

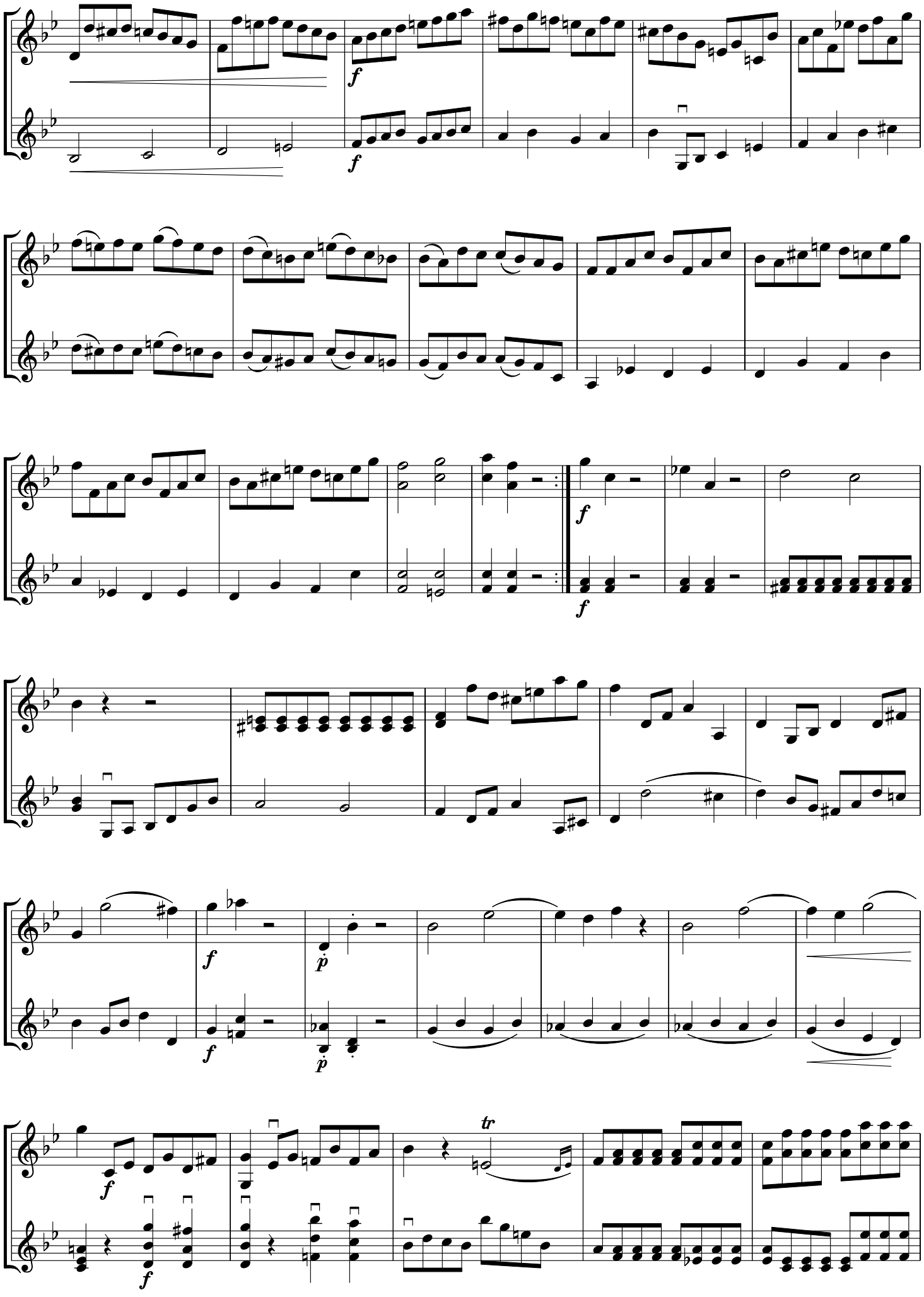


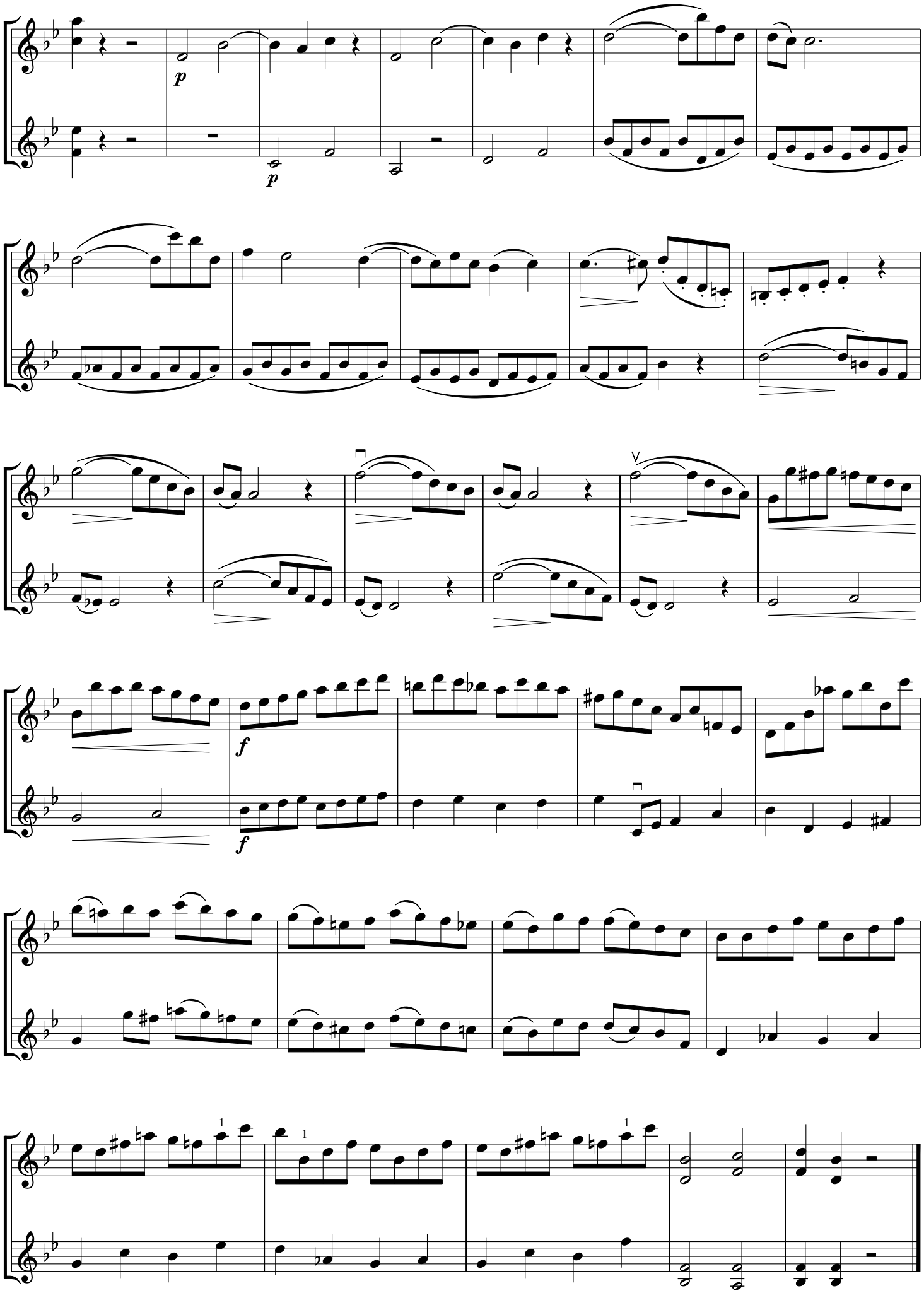

mf
mf
f
f
ff
ff
mf
mf
mf
3

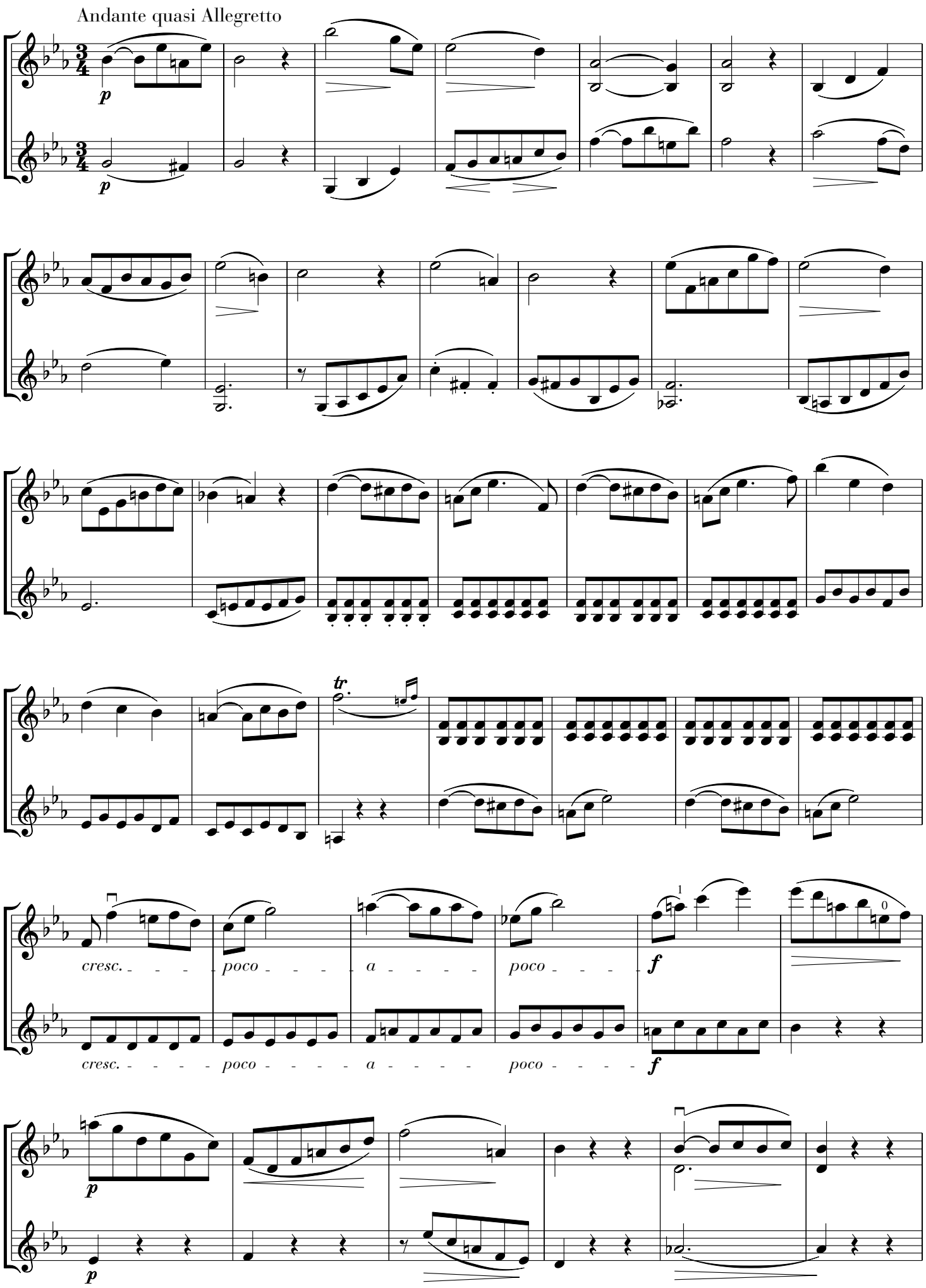

cresc.
poco a poco
mf
poco ritenuto
a tempo
grazioso
f
f
f
f

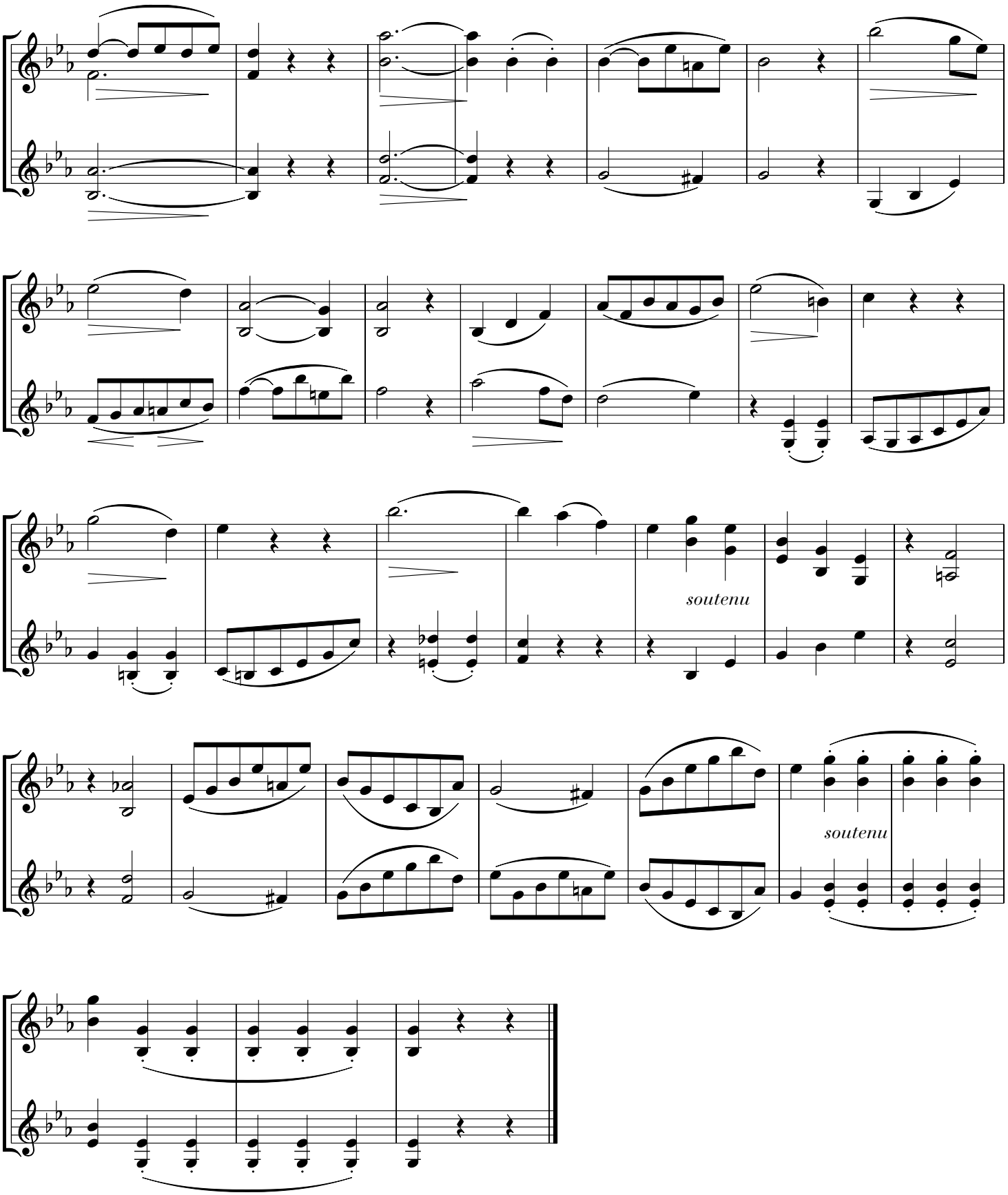
Allegro spiritoso



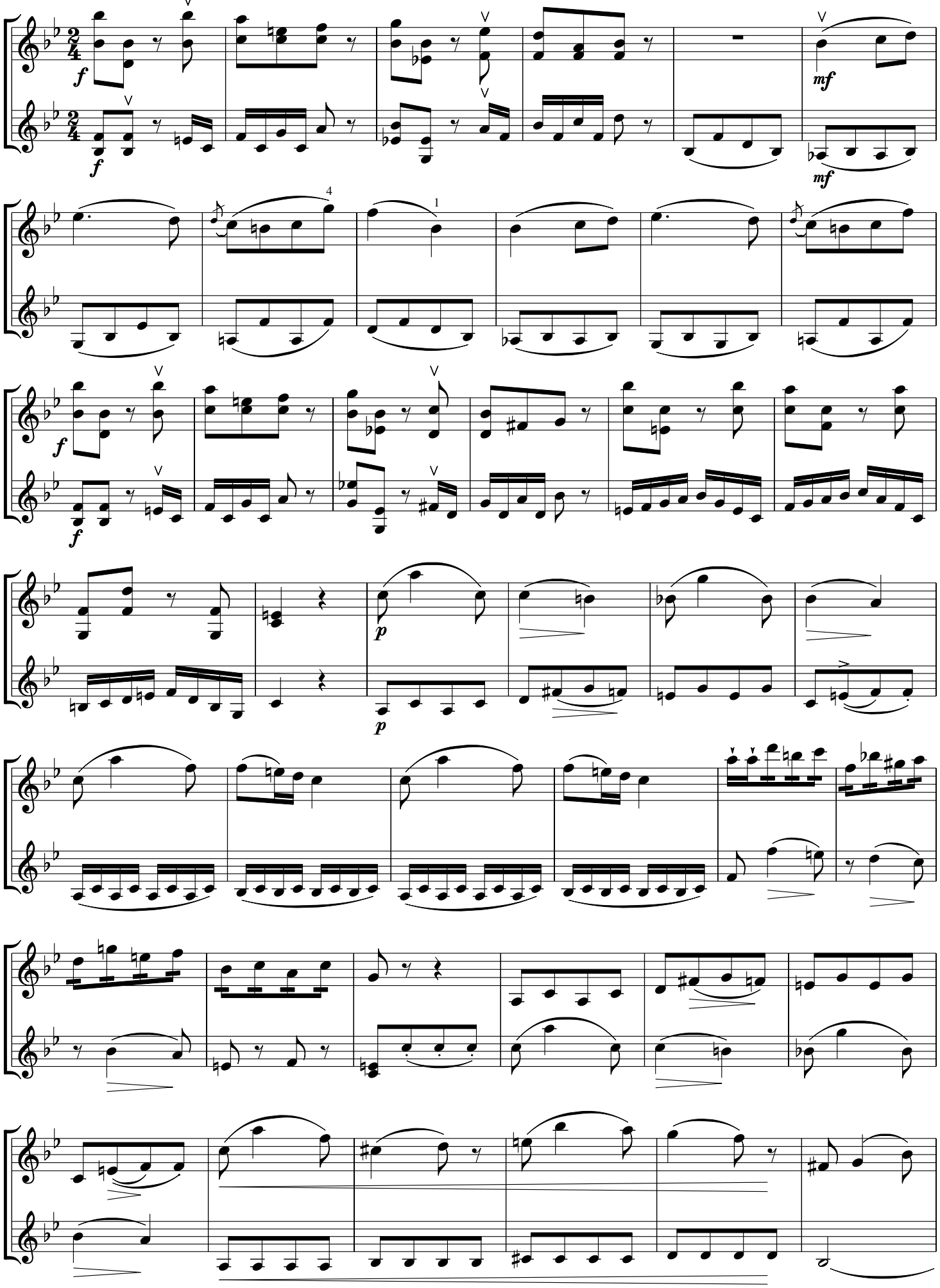


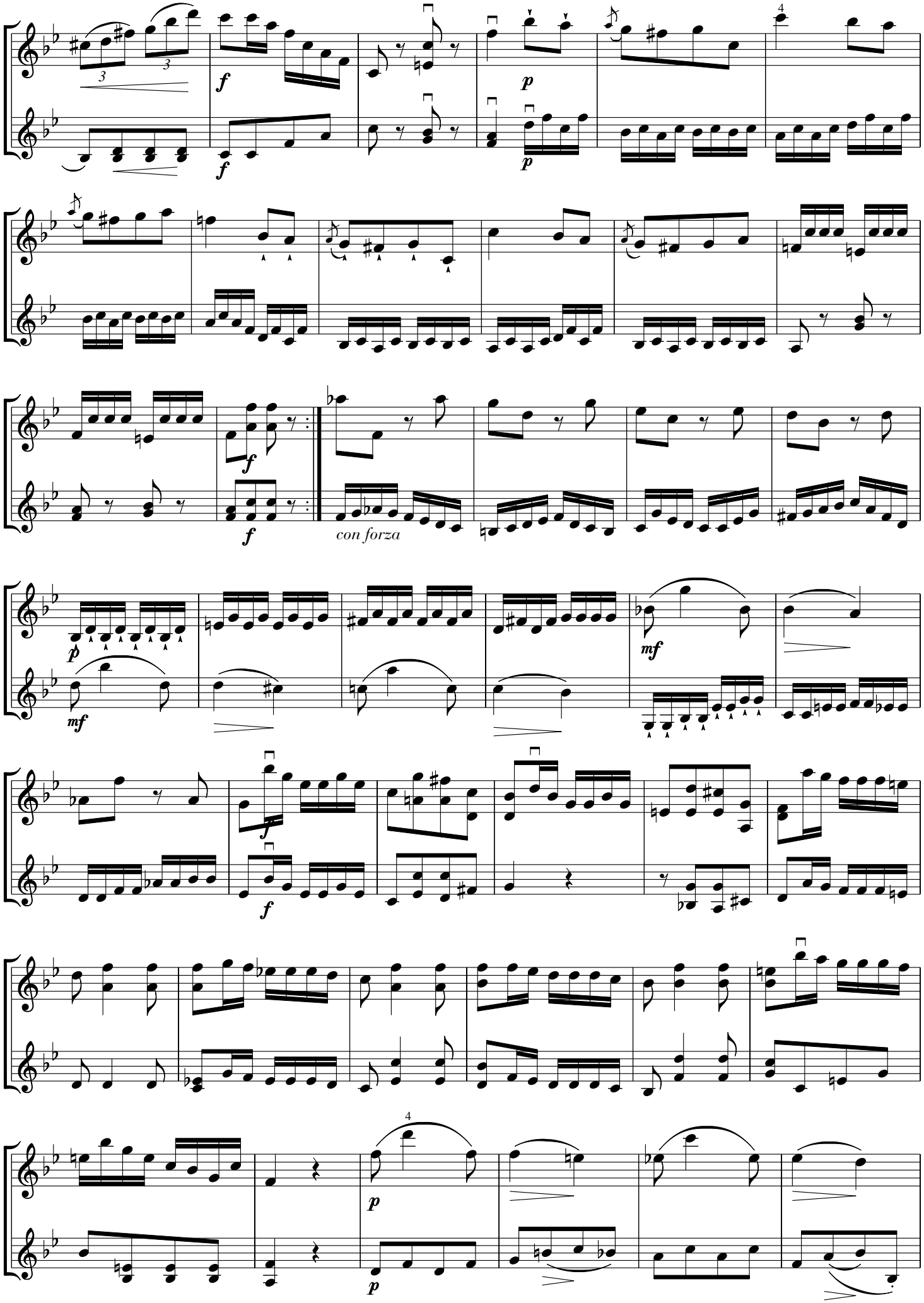

p
p
f
f
V
1
1

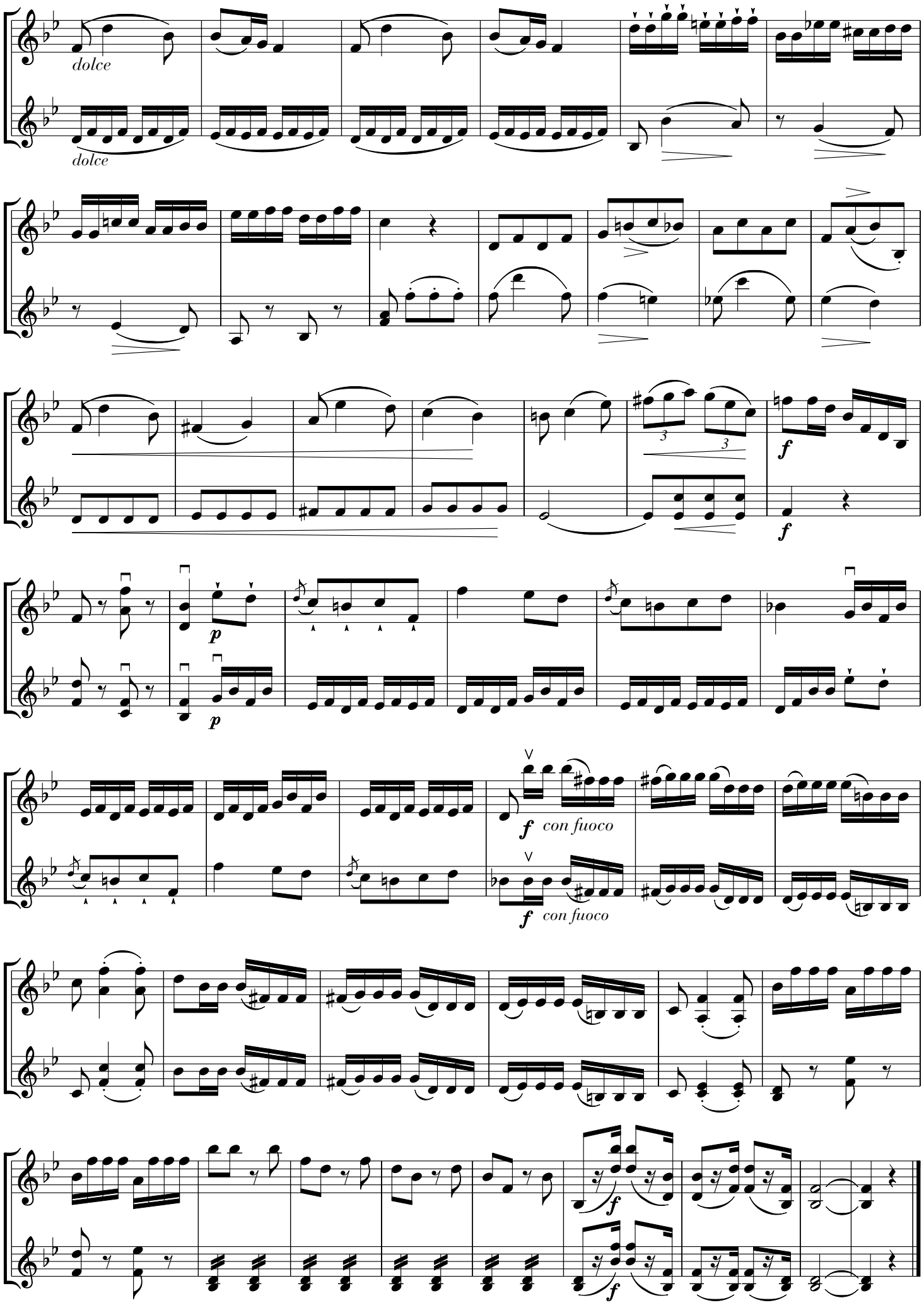

Andante quasi Allegretto
p
p
tr.
cresc. poco a poco
f
cresc. poco a poco
f
p
p


soutenu
soutenu

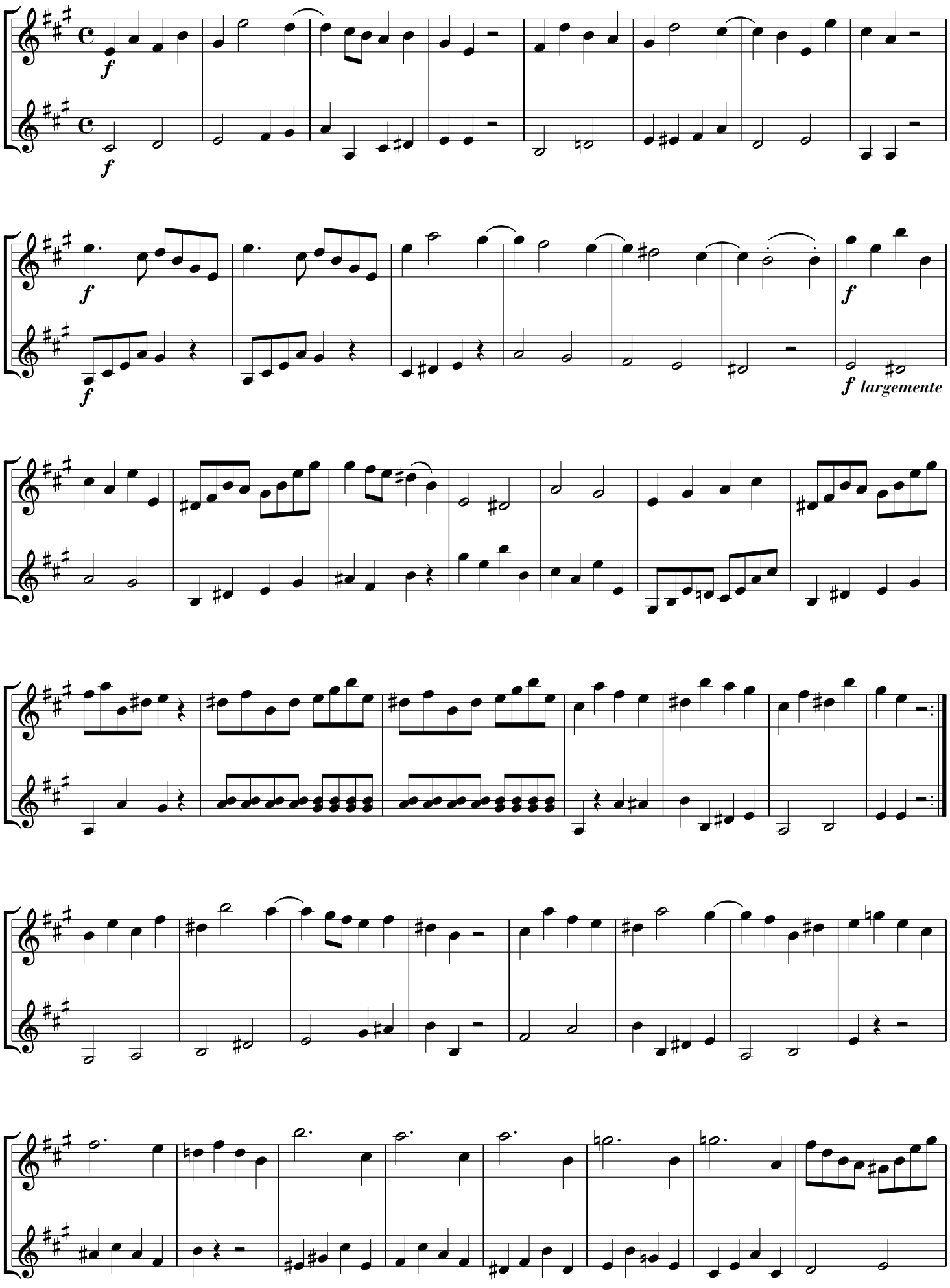
Allegro non troppo

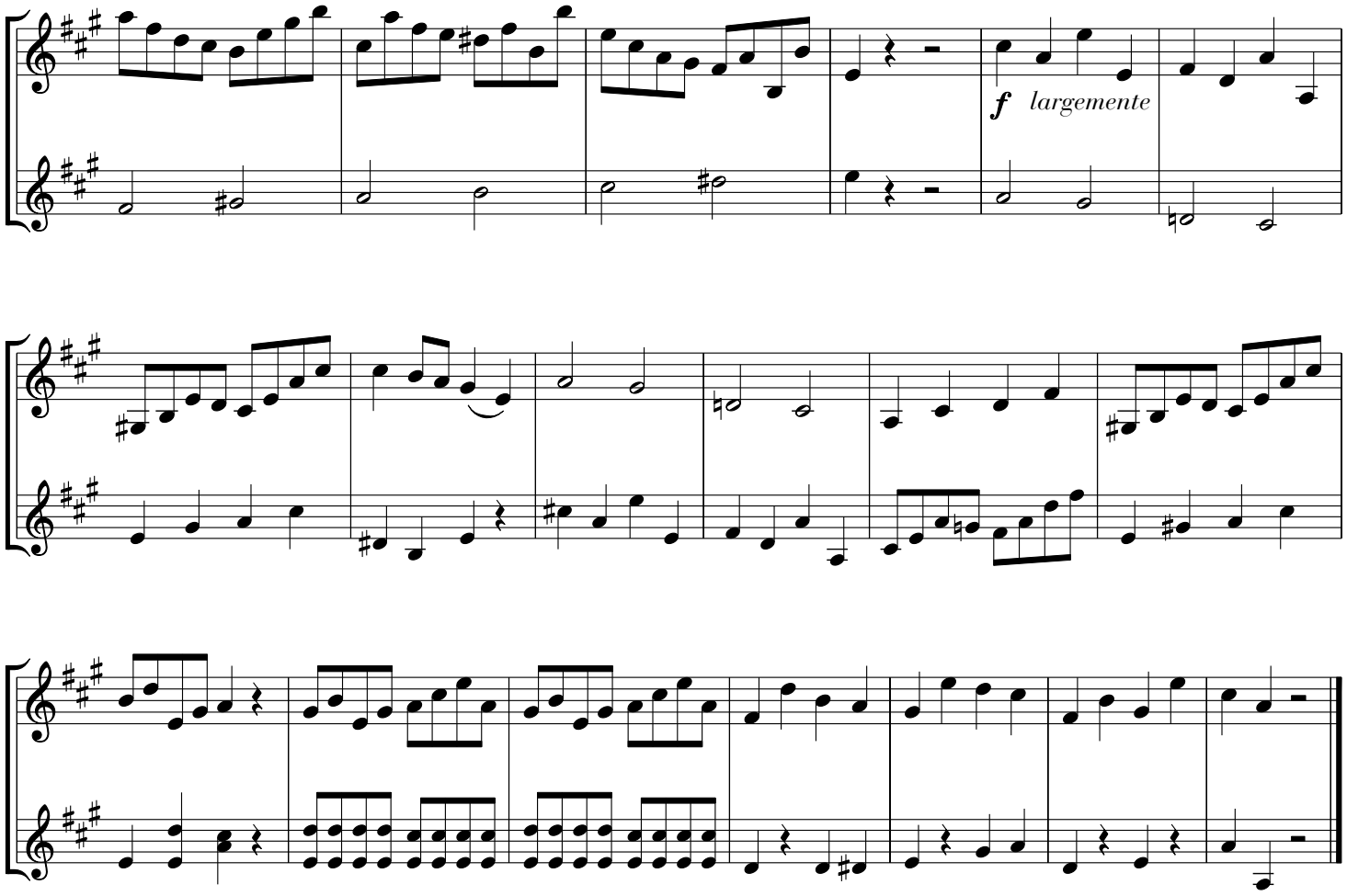



3
3
f
f
p
p
4
f
f
con forza
p
mf
mf
f
f
p
p
4


dolce
dolce
3
3
f
f
p
p
f con fuoco
f con fuoco
f
f

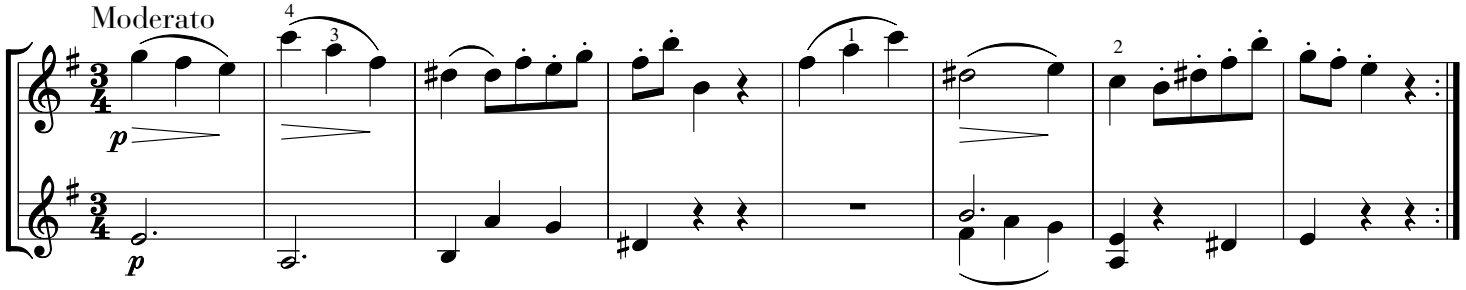
Maestoso

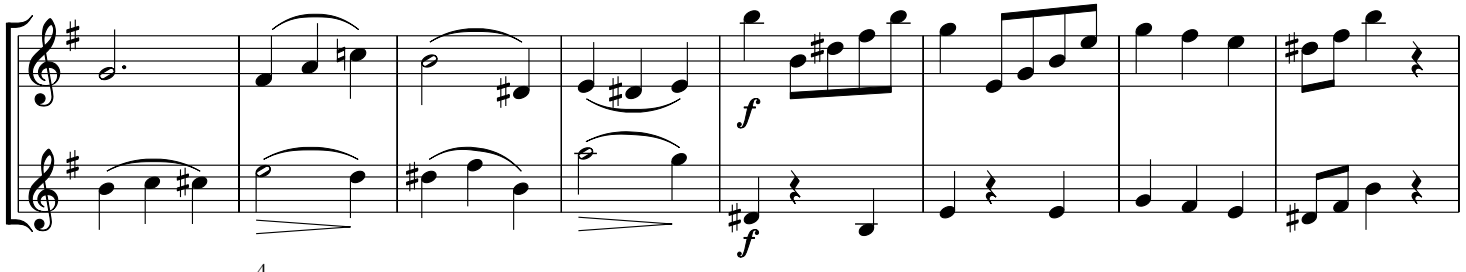


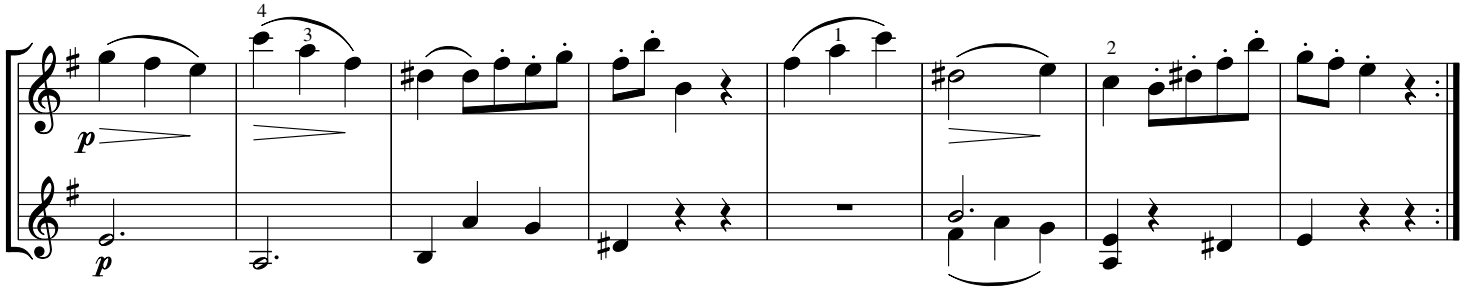

f largemente

MENUETTO

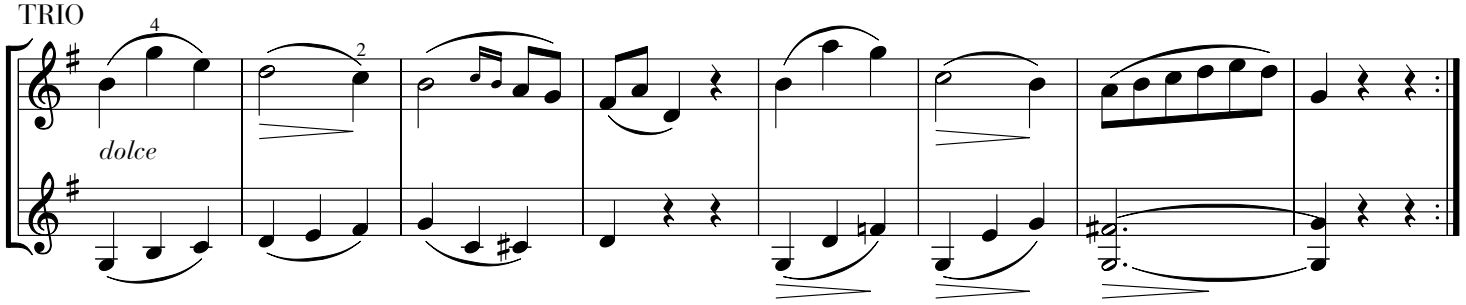
Moderato

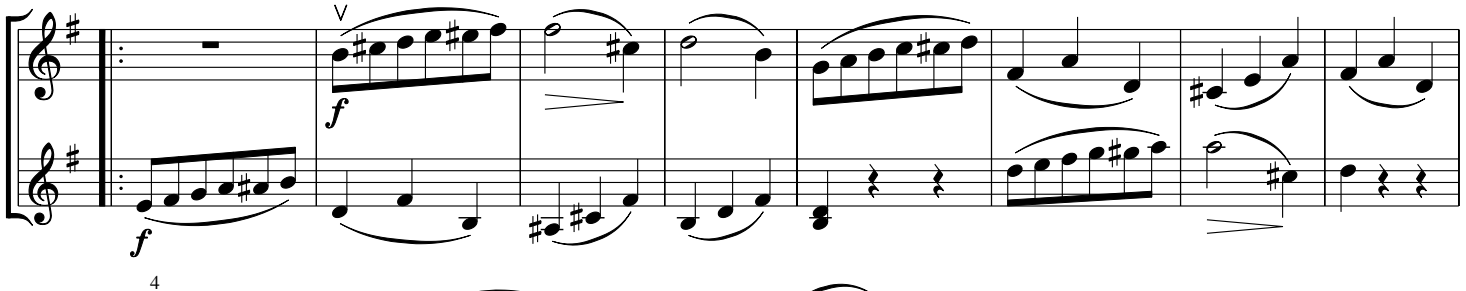


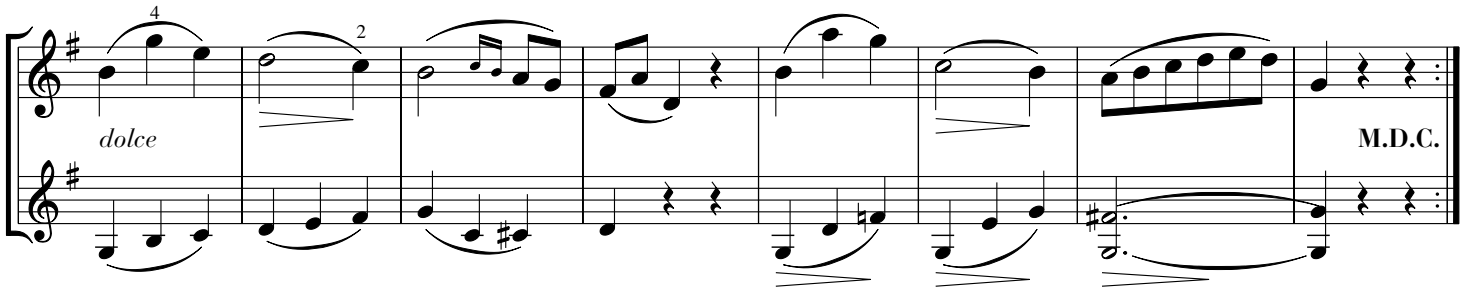


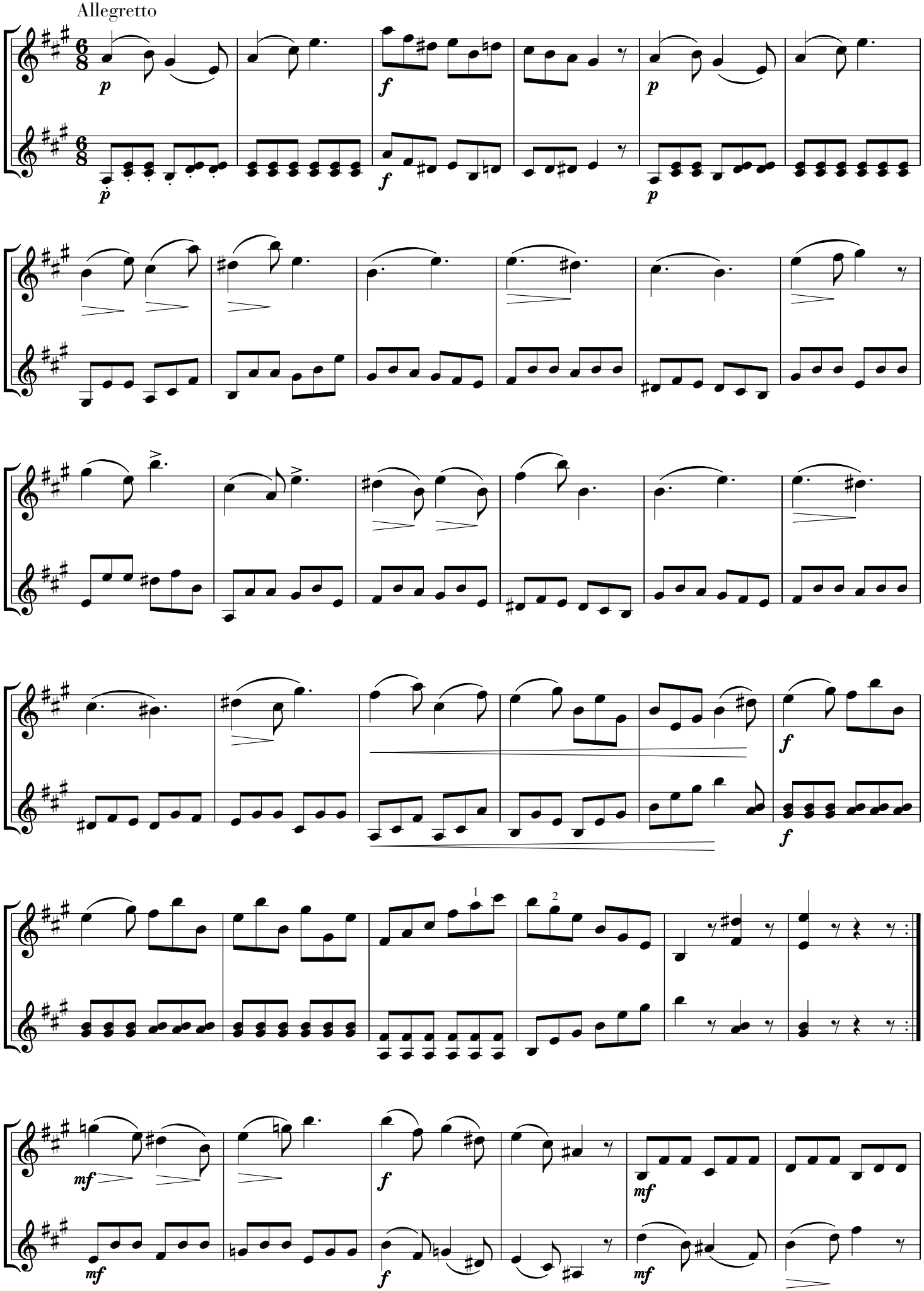


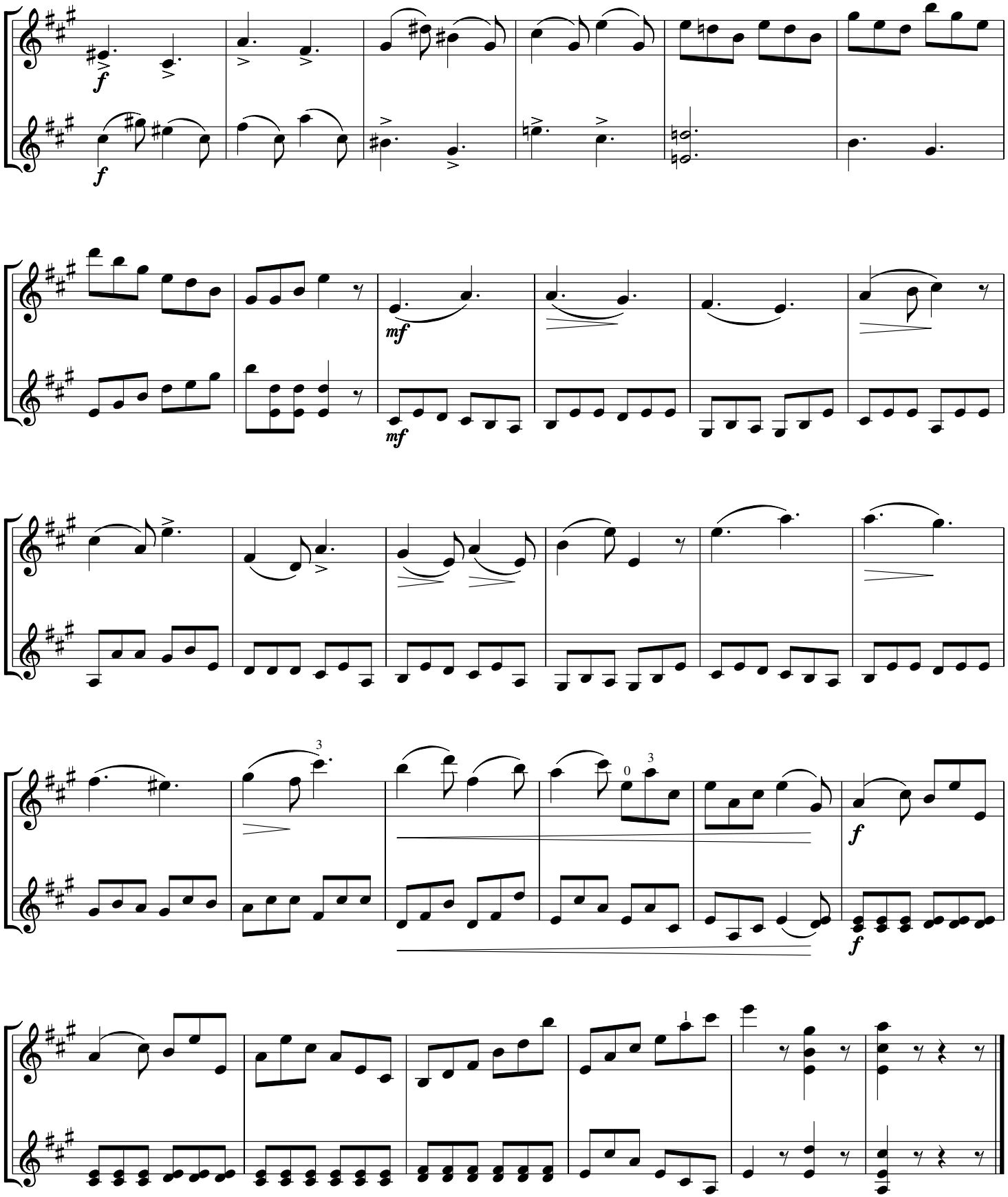
TRIO



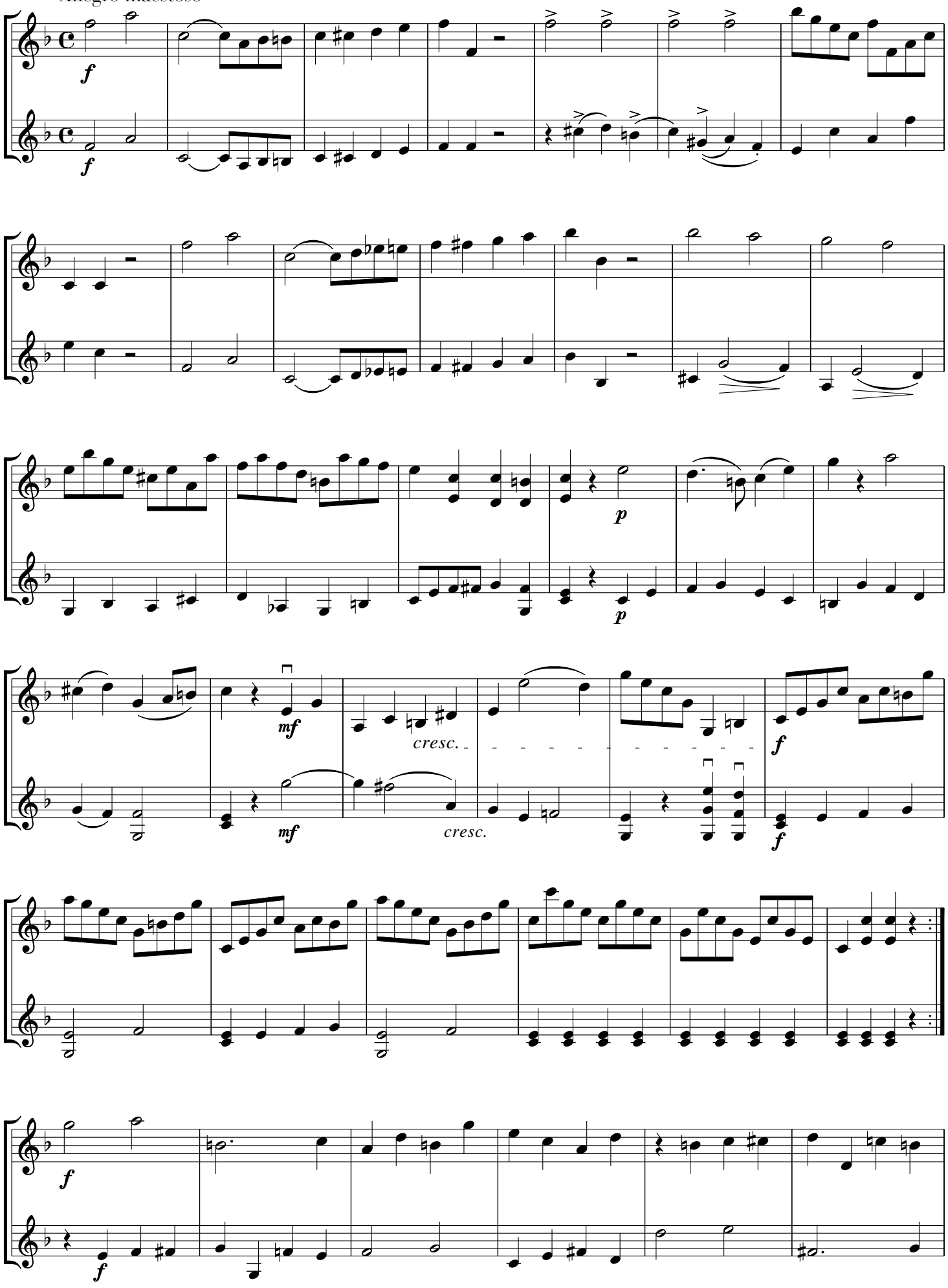


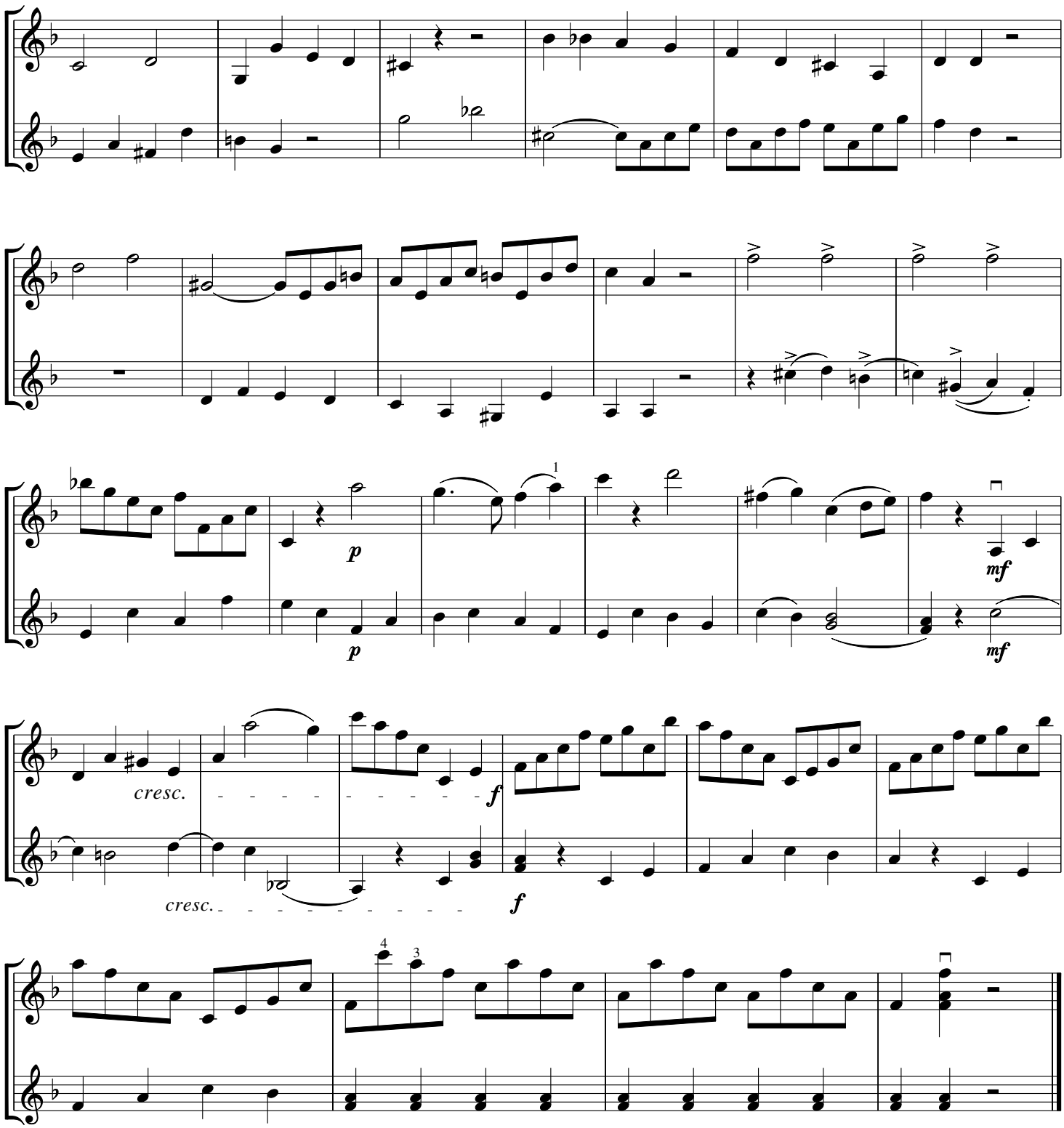


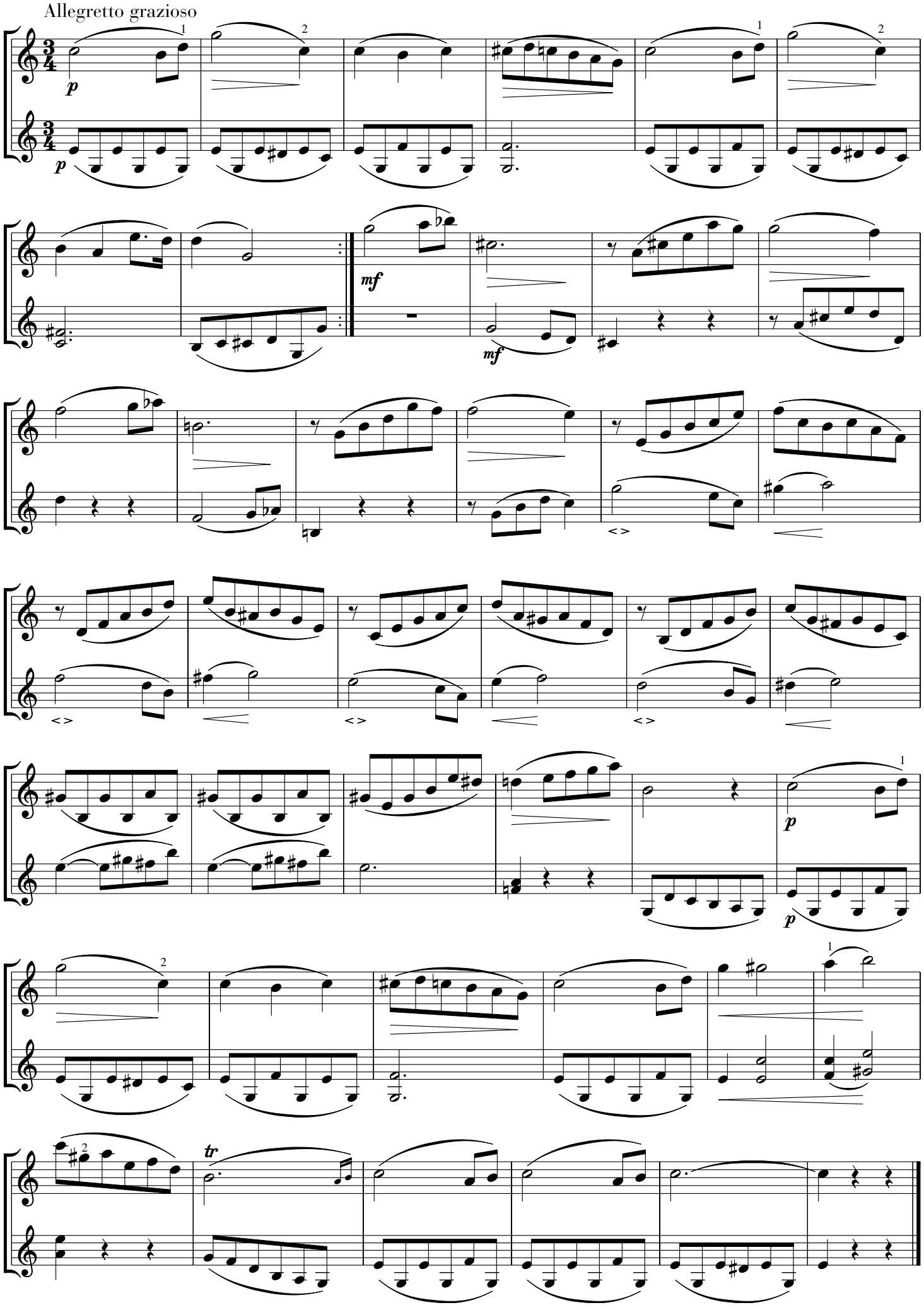

Allegretto
1
2

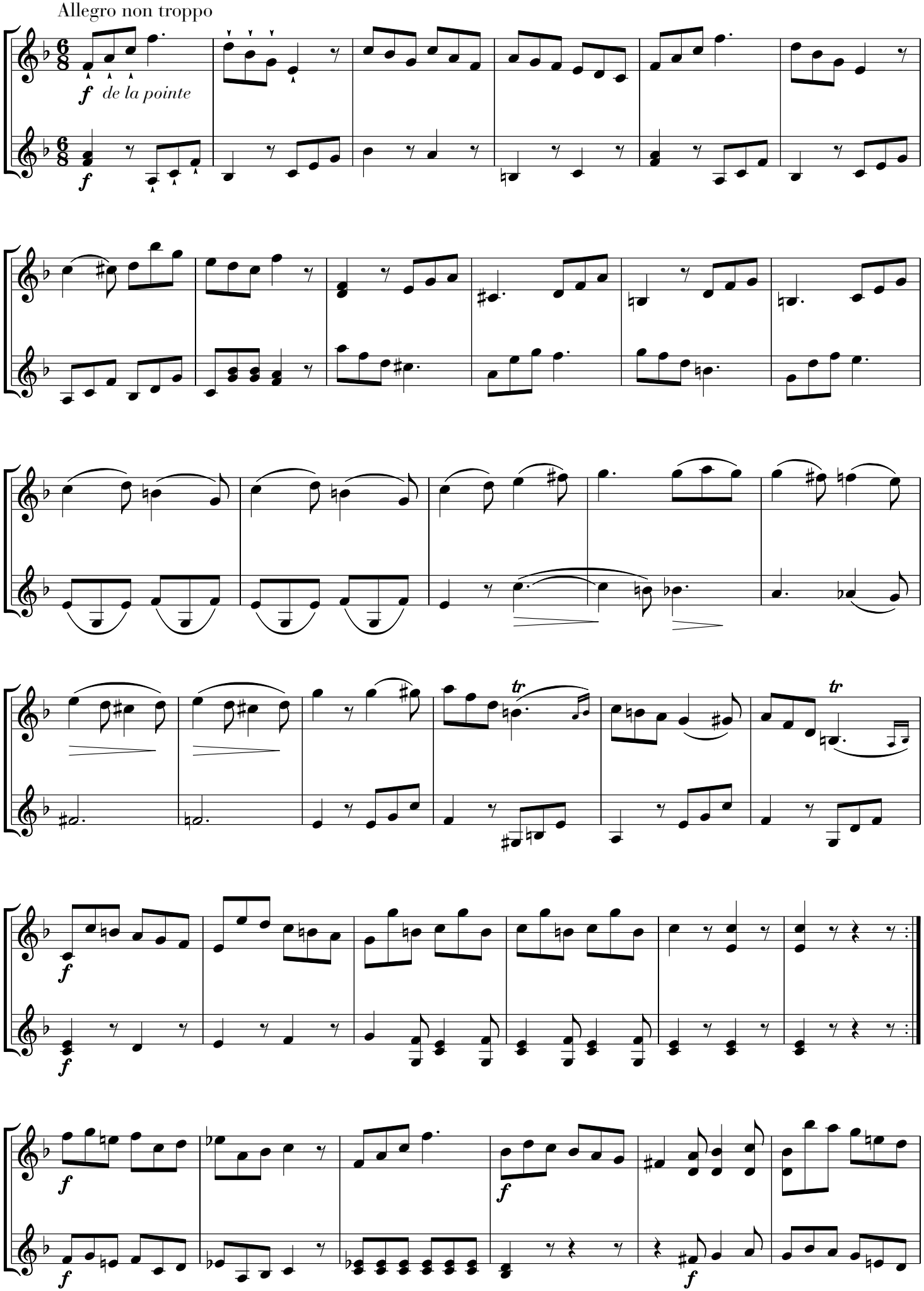

f
f
mf
mf
3
0
3
f
f
1

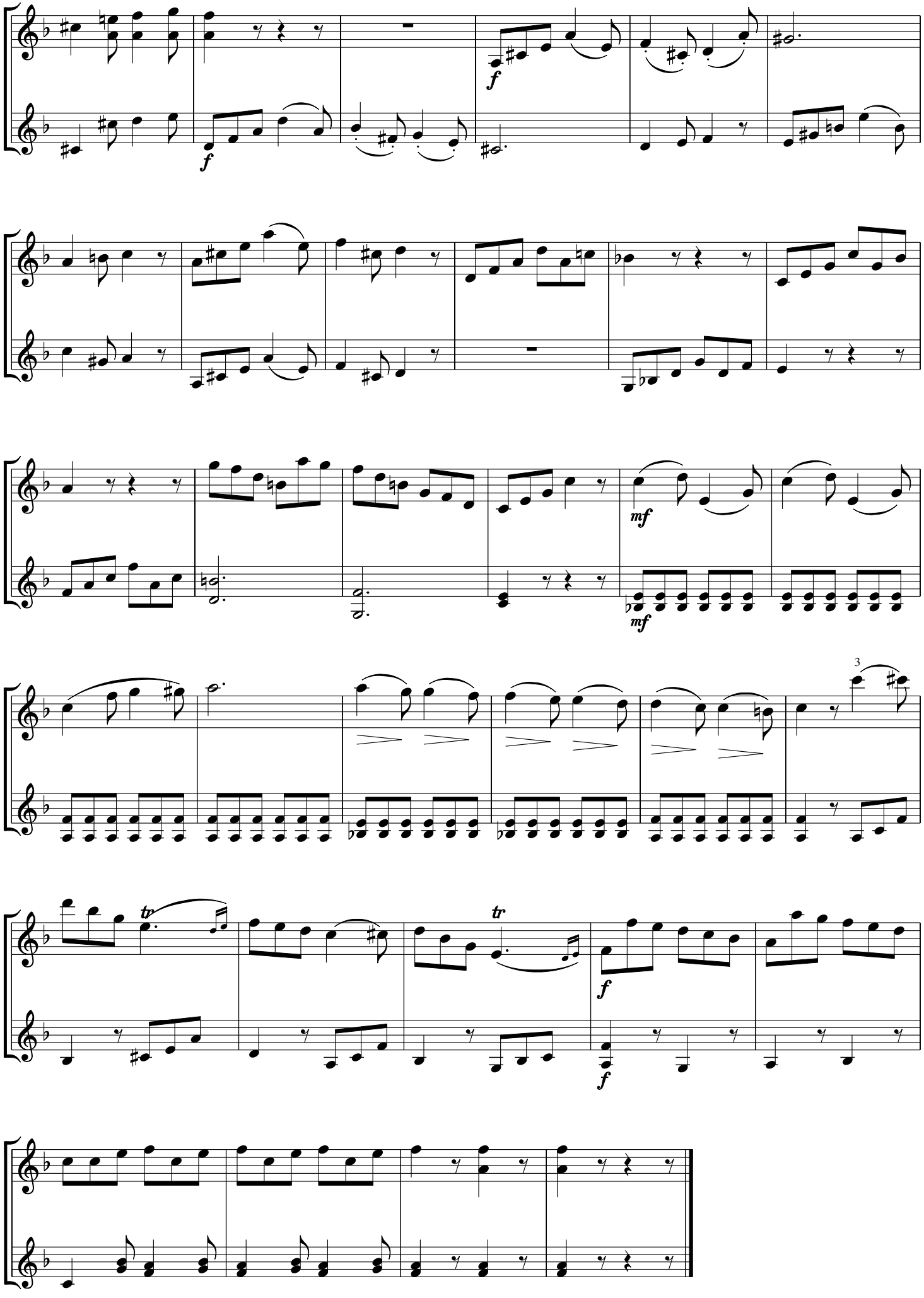
Allegro maestoso



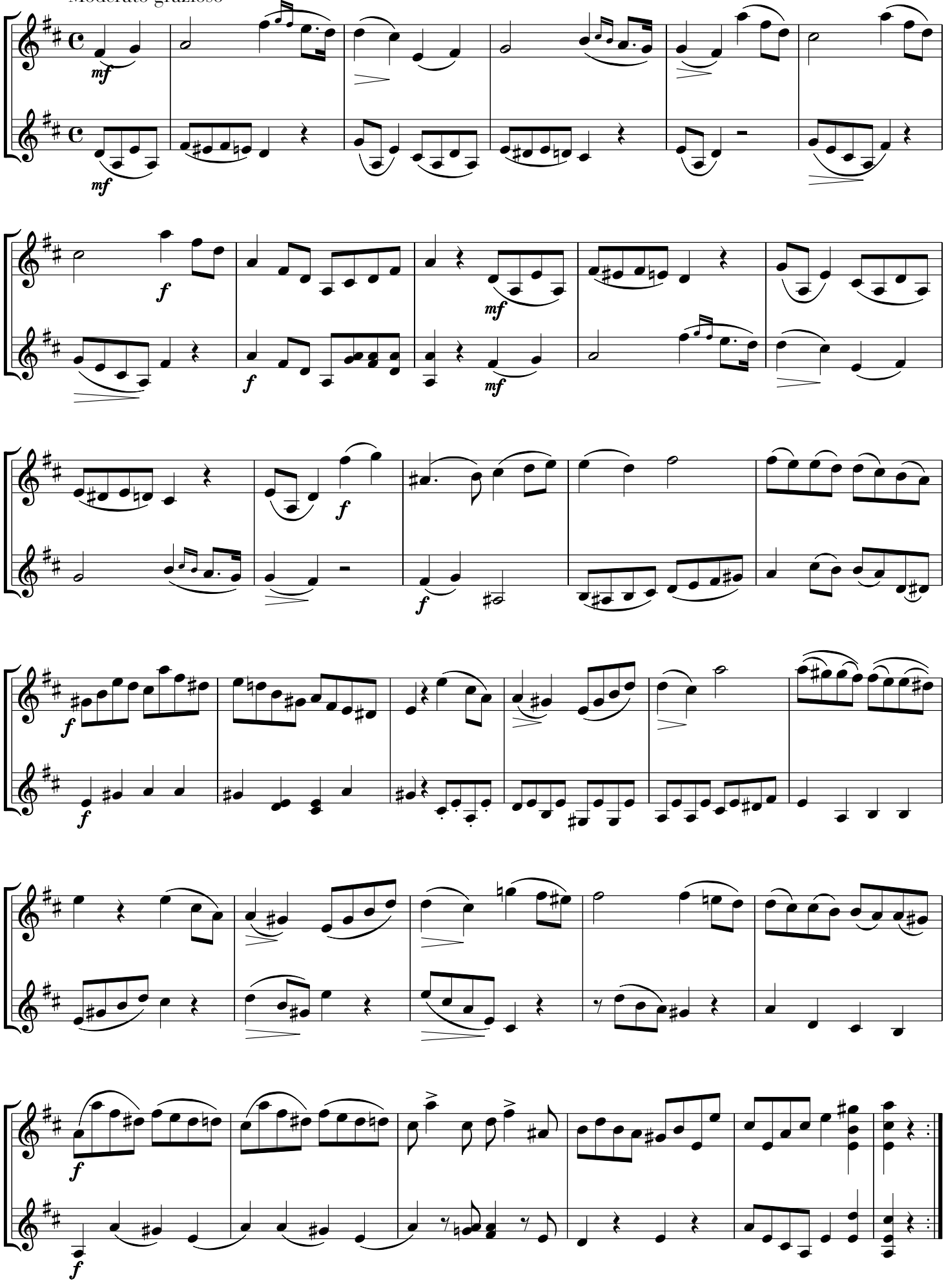

1
p
p
mf
mf
cresc.
f
cresc.
f
4
3

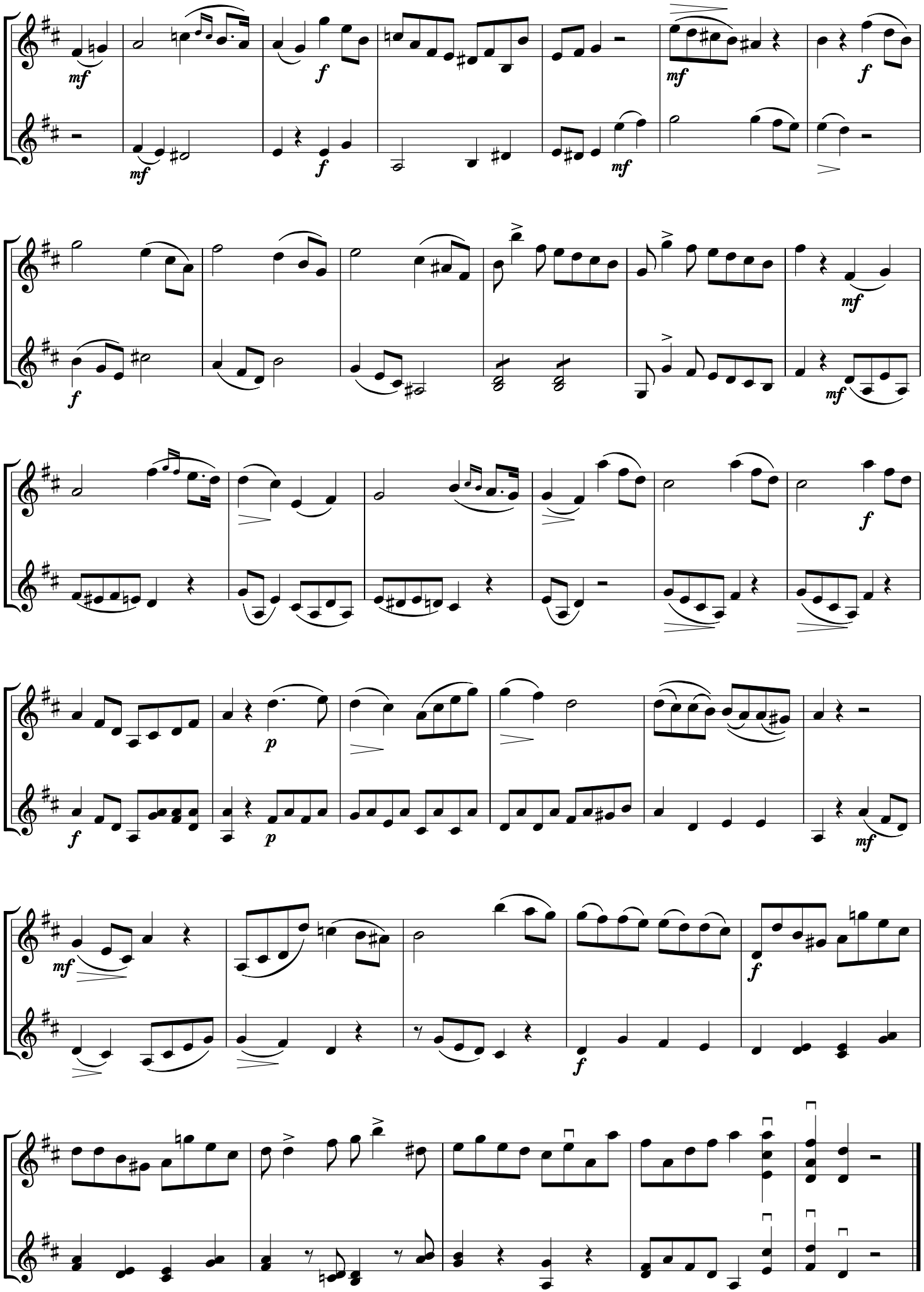

Allegretto grazioso


Allegro non troppo
f de la pointe
f
f
tr
tr
f
f
f
f
f
f


f
f
f
mf
mf
3
tr
tr
f
f

Moderato grazioso




mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
p
p
f
mf
mf
f
f

Romance

mf *molto espress.*

mf

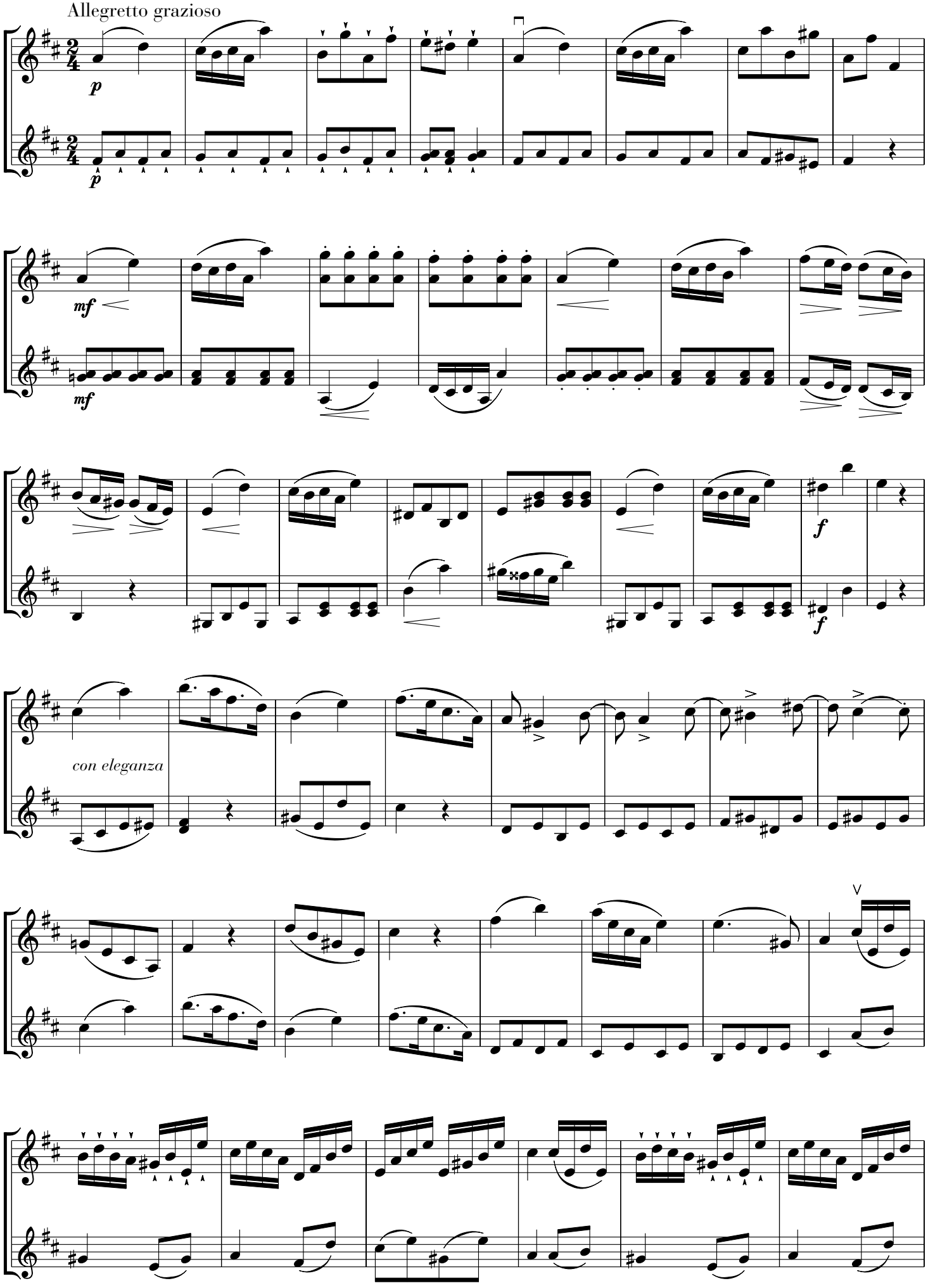
cresc.

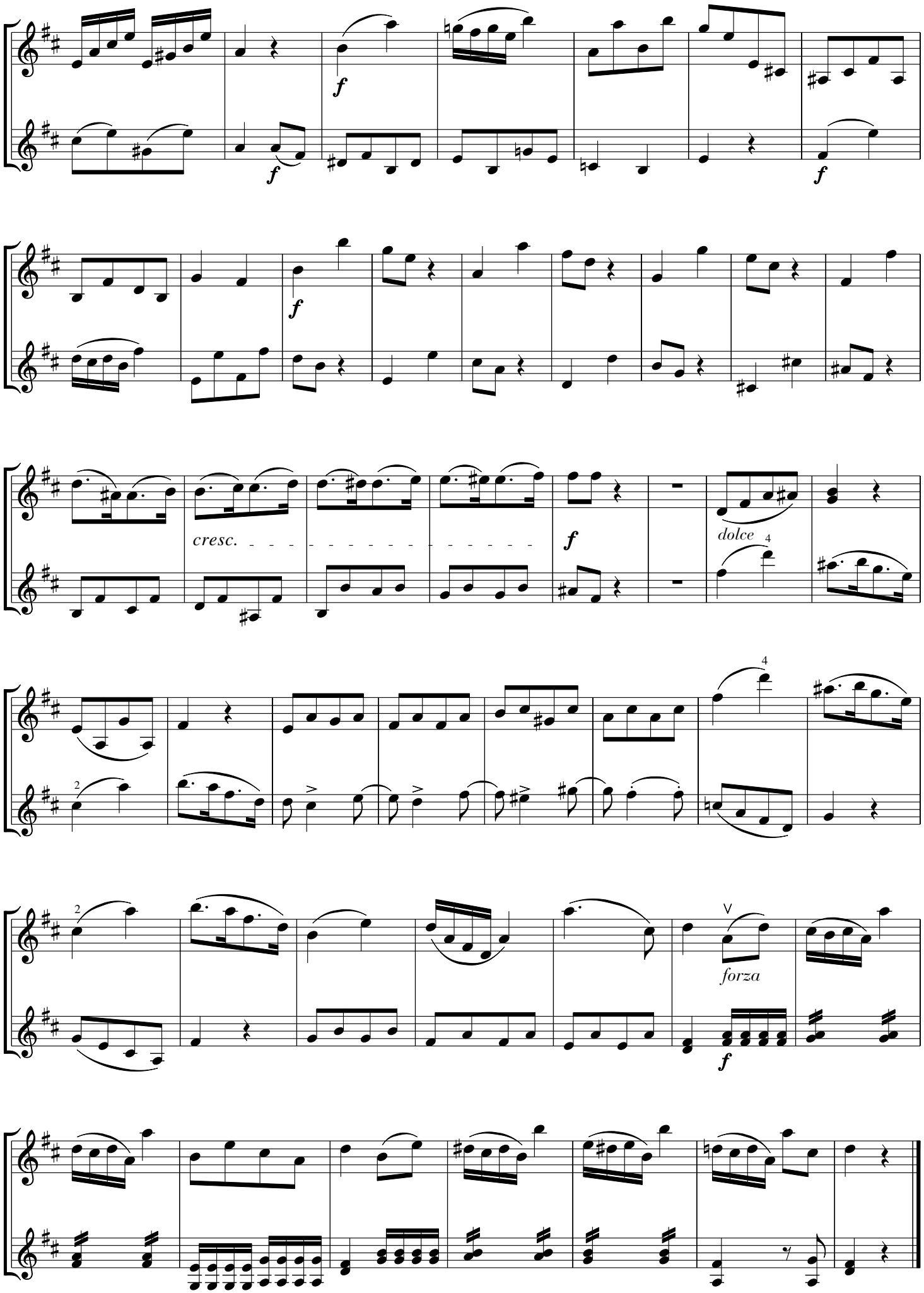
f

f

mf

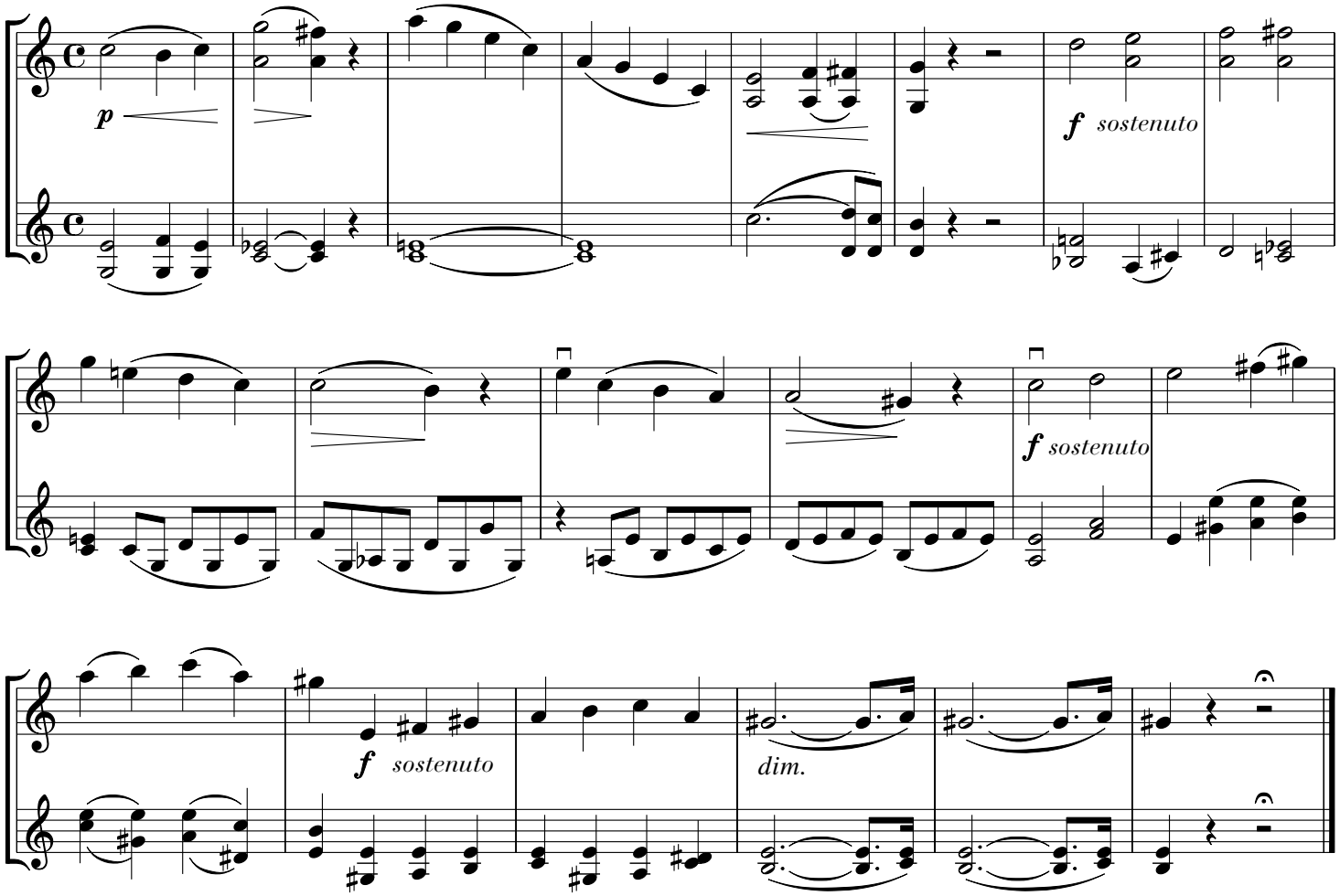
mf


Allegretto grazioso
p
p
mf
mf
f
f
con eleganza


f
f
f
f
f
cresc.
f
dolce
4
2
2
V
forza
f

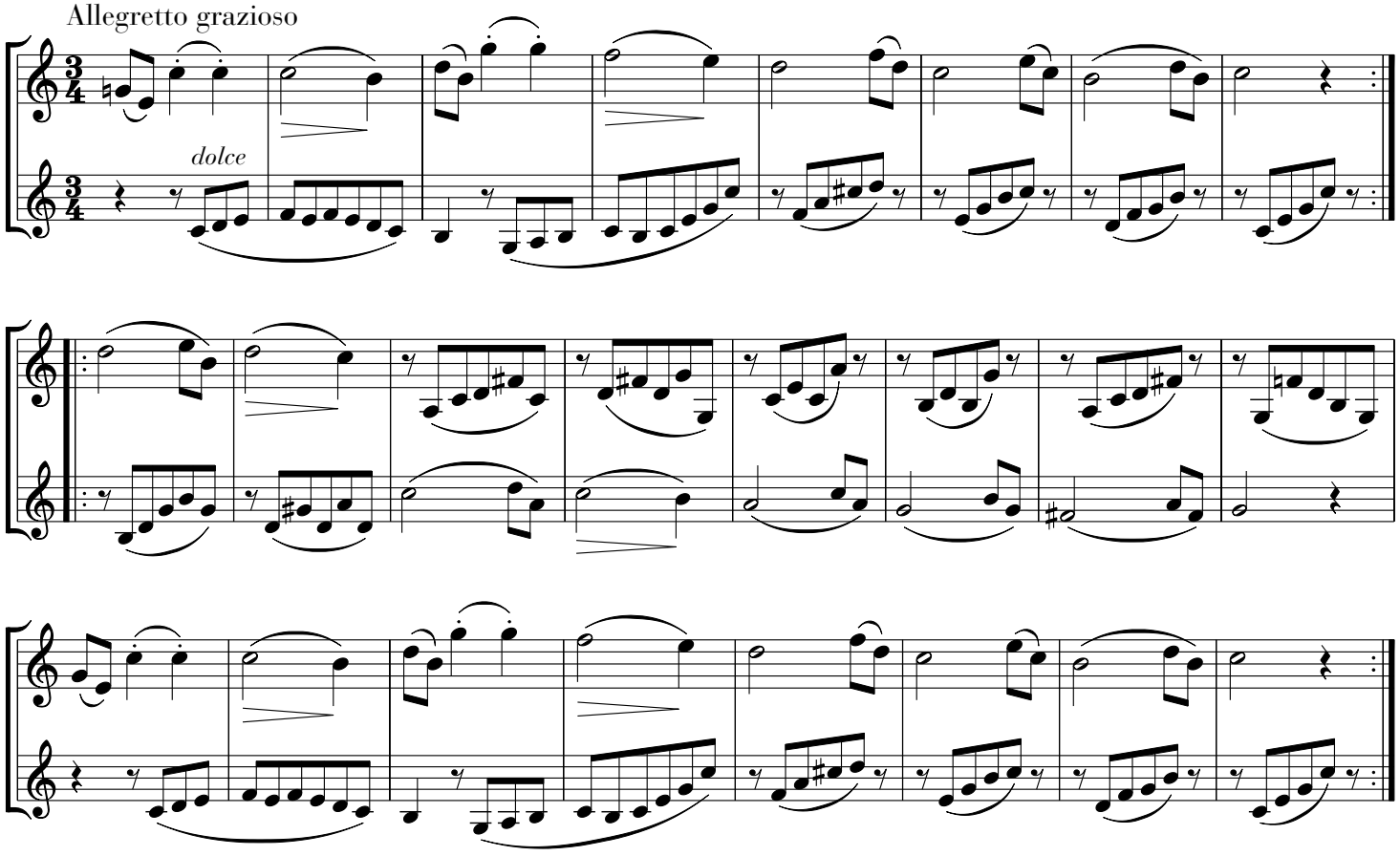
INTRODUCTION

Andante maestoso

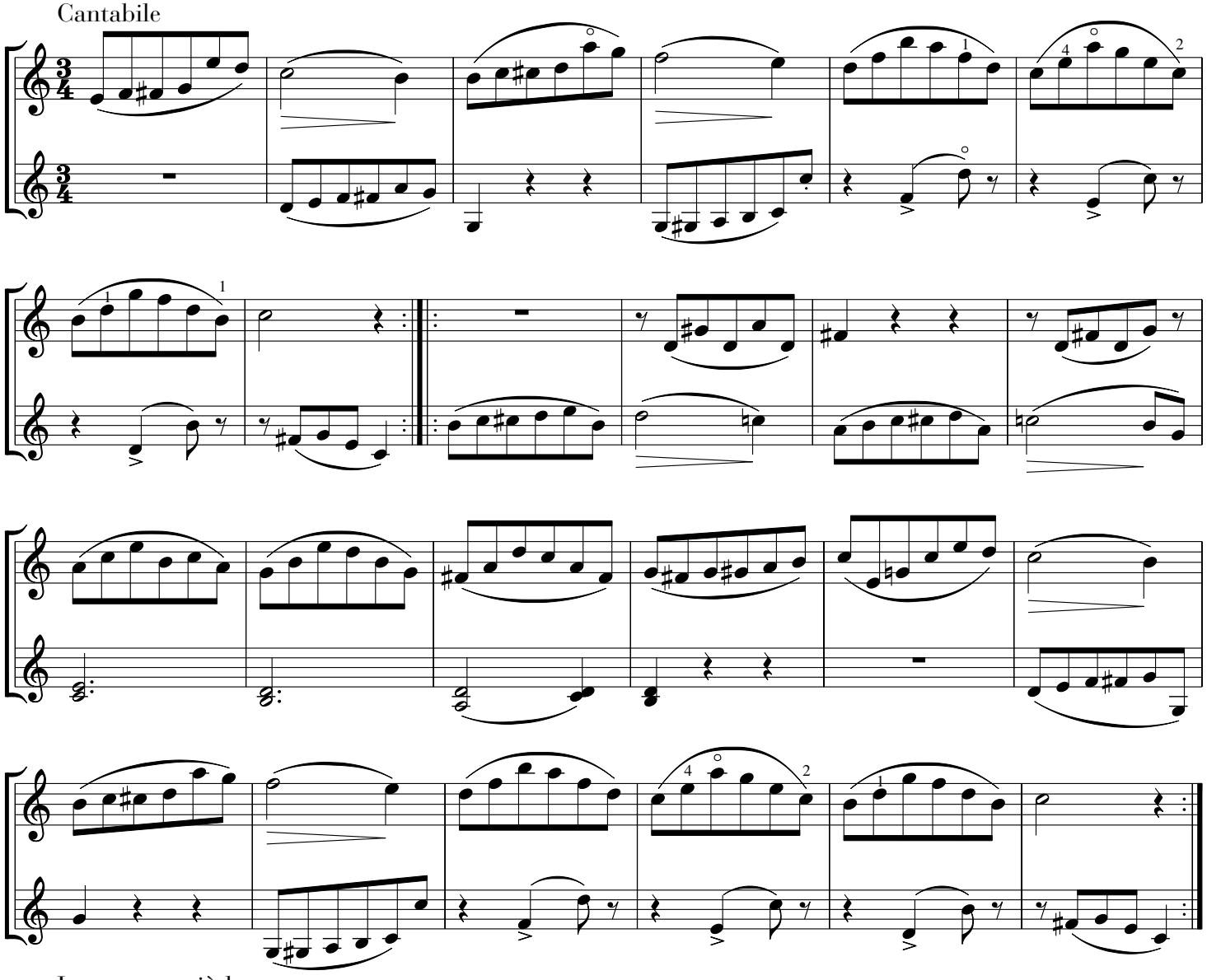


MENUETTO CON VARIAZIONI

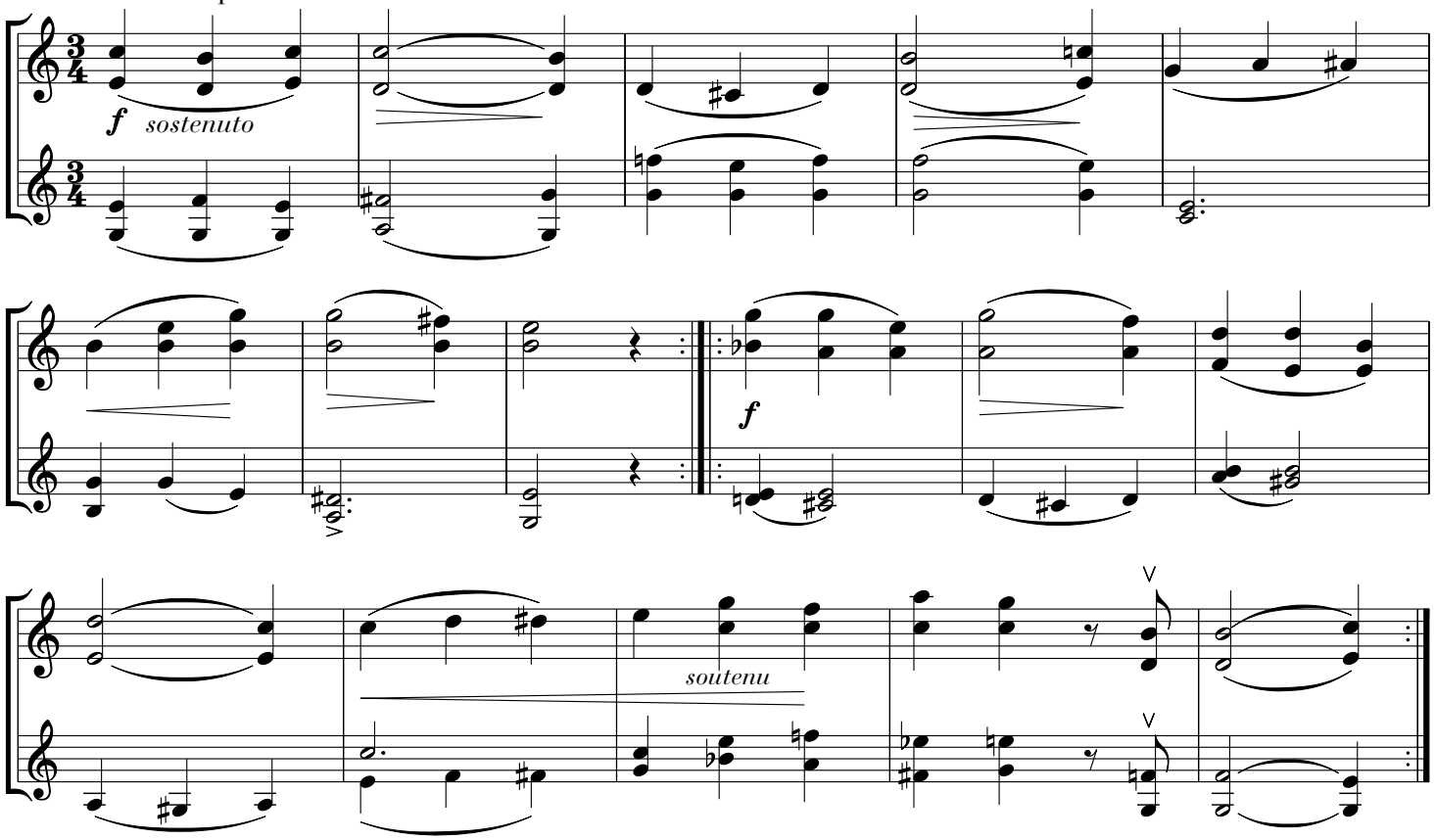
Allegretto grazioso

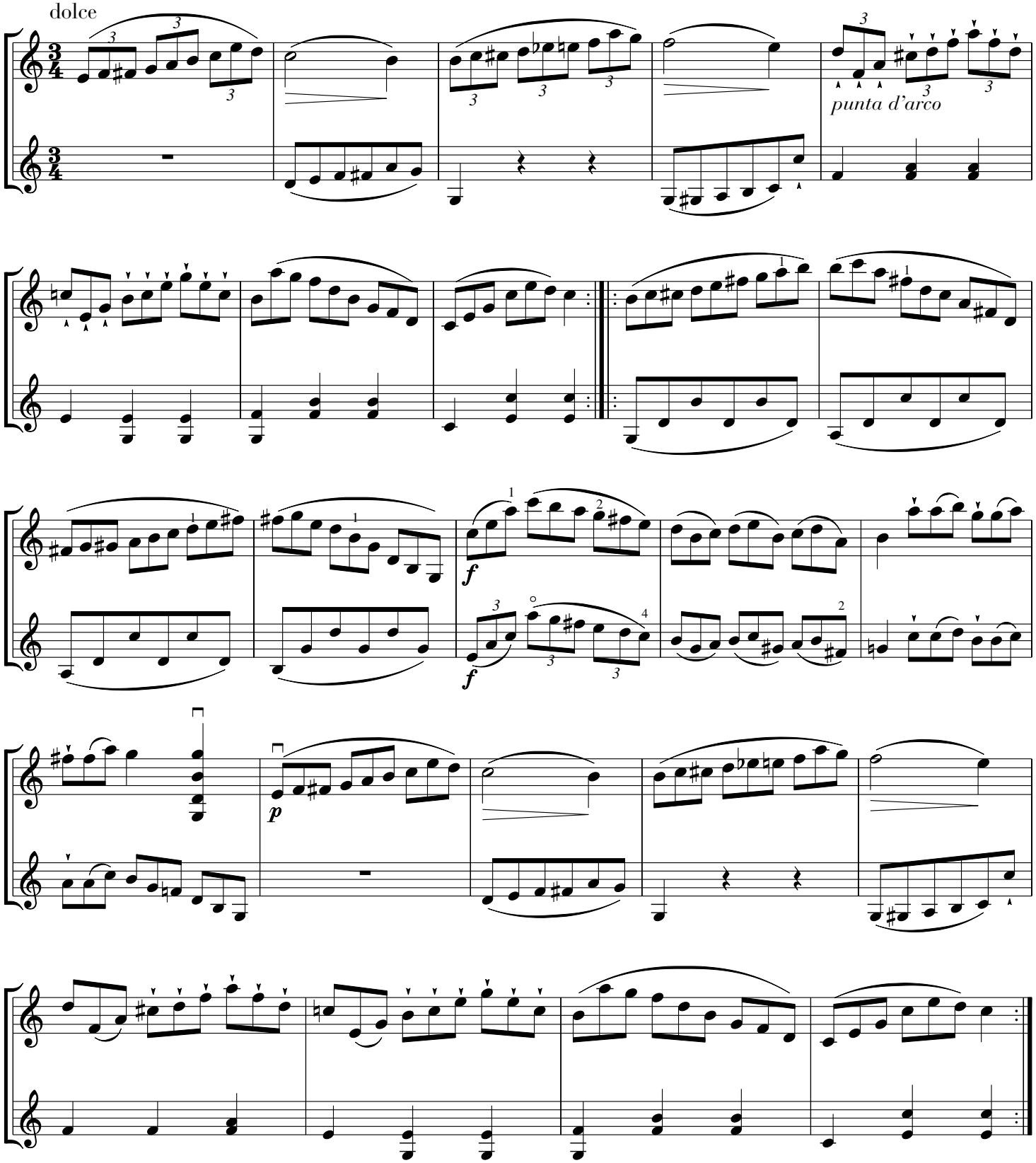


Cantabile



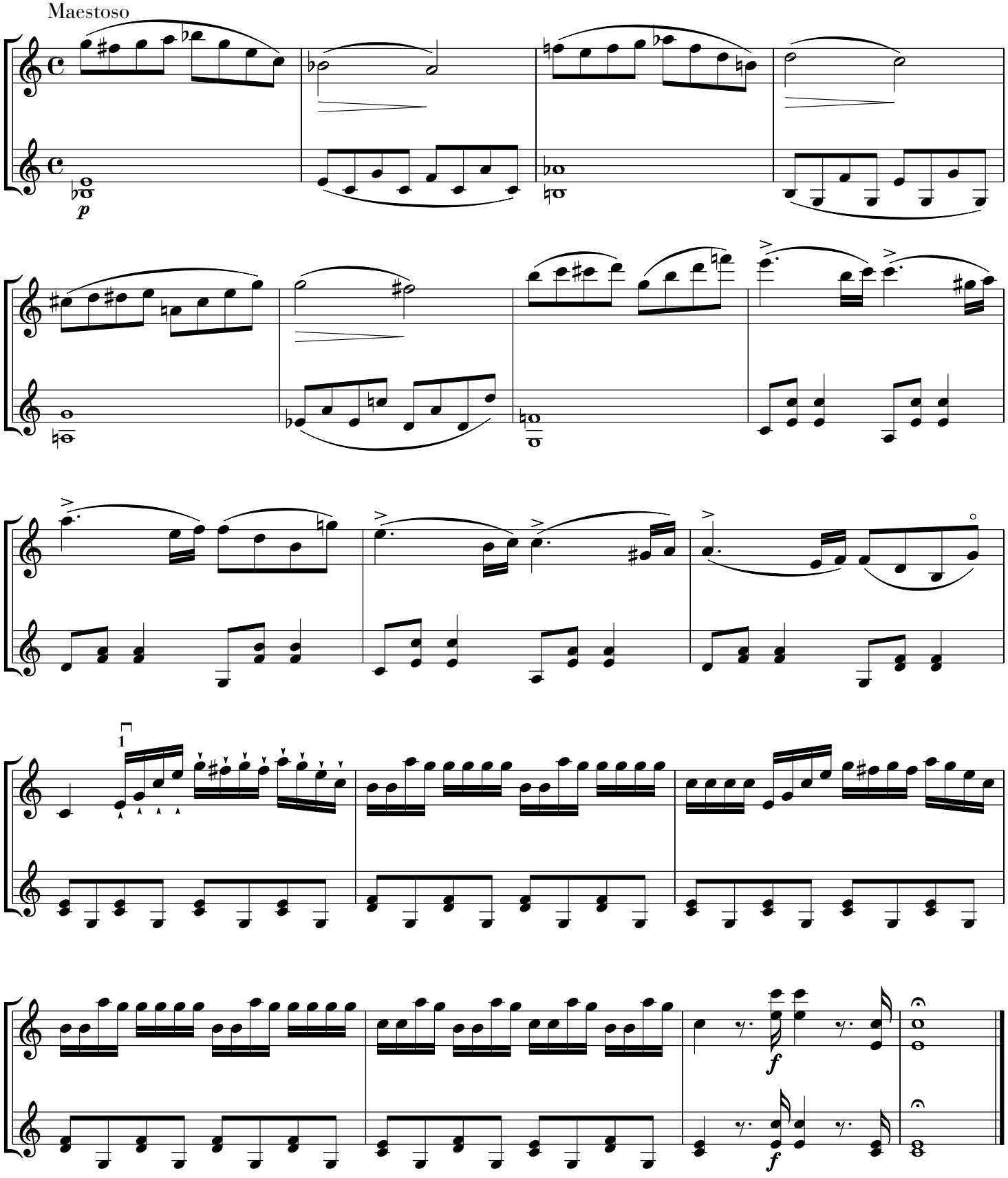
Intermezzo più lento




dolce
punta d'arco
f
f
p

CODA

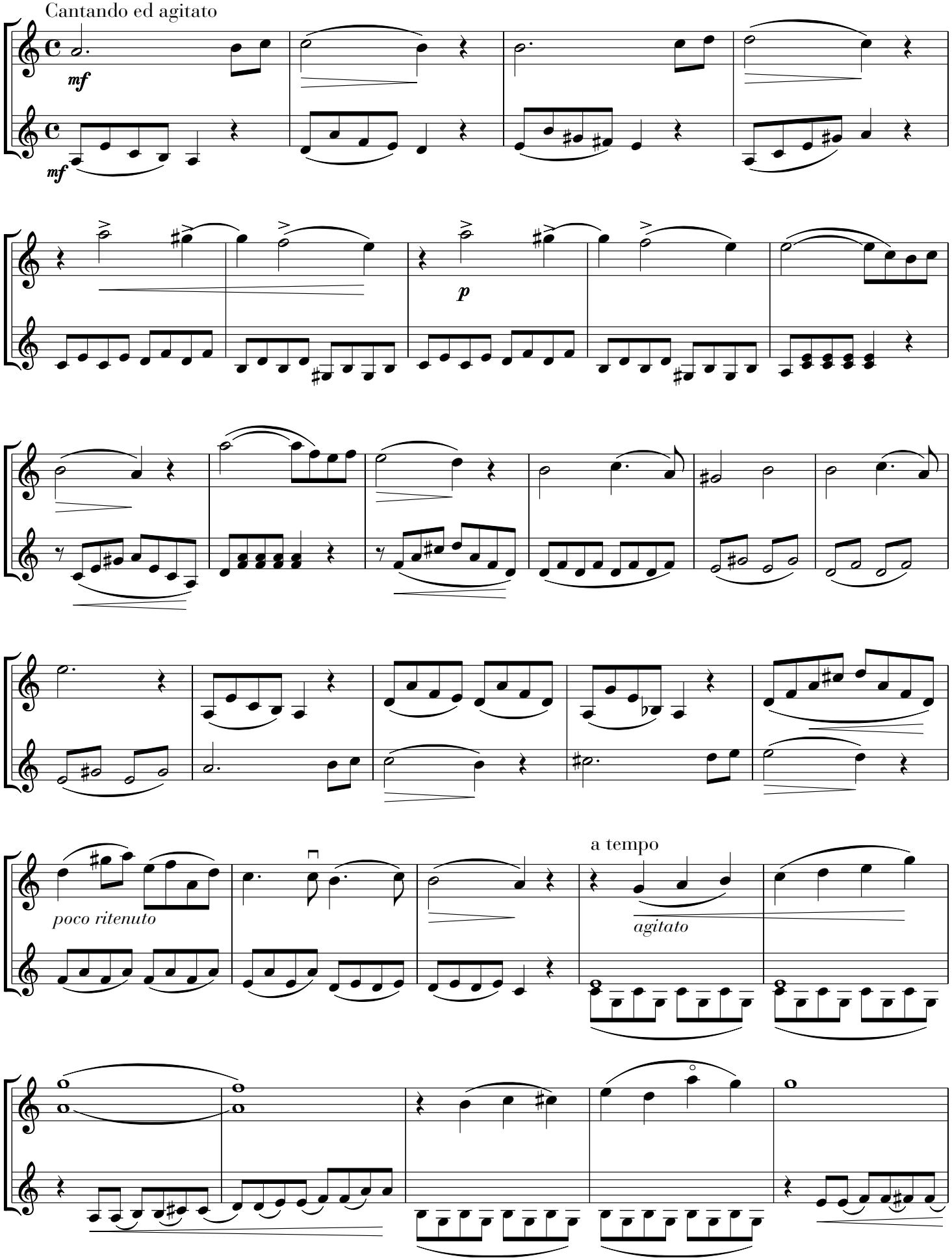
Maestoso

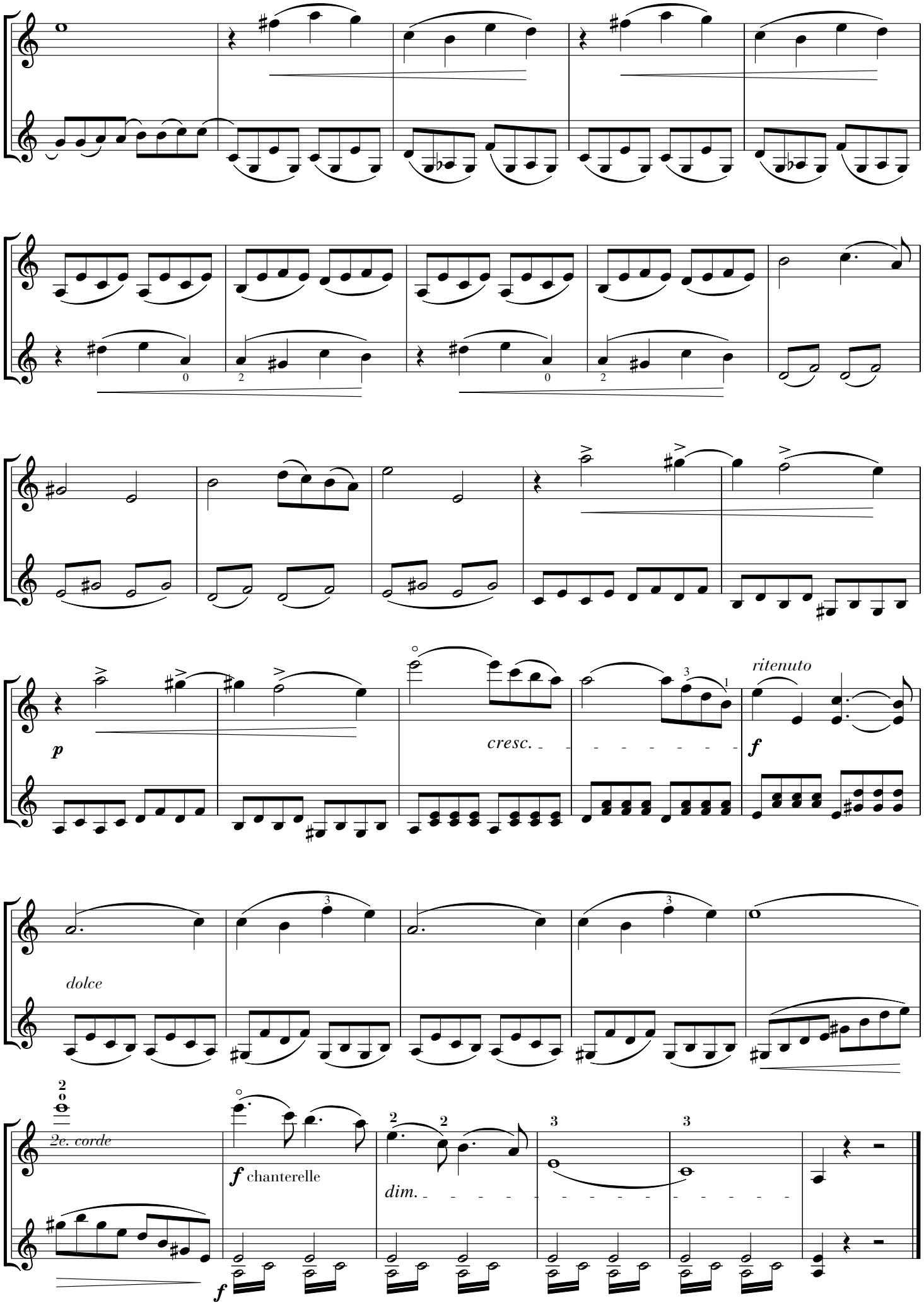


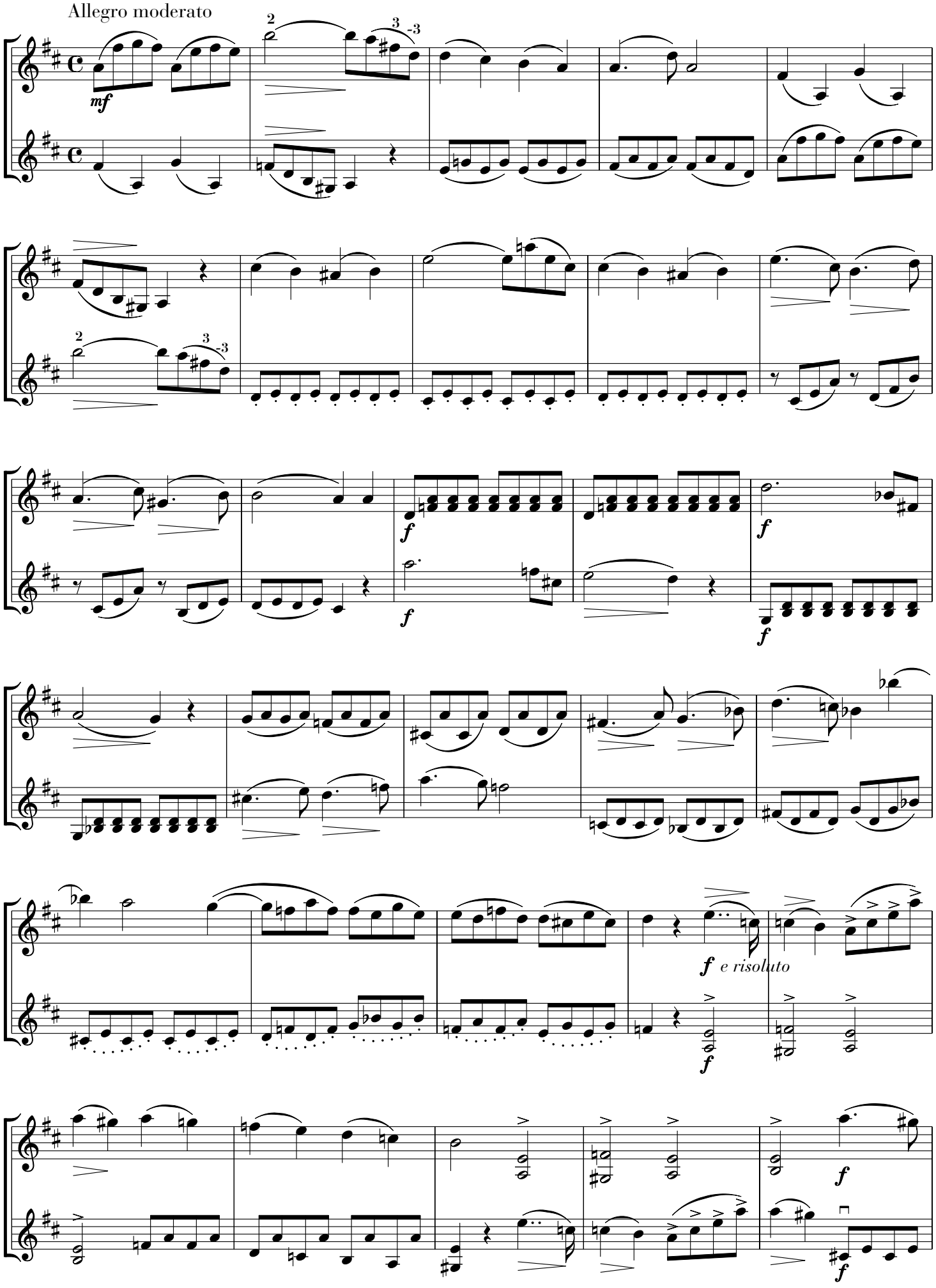
LA PLAINTE

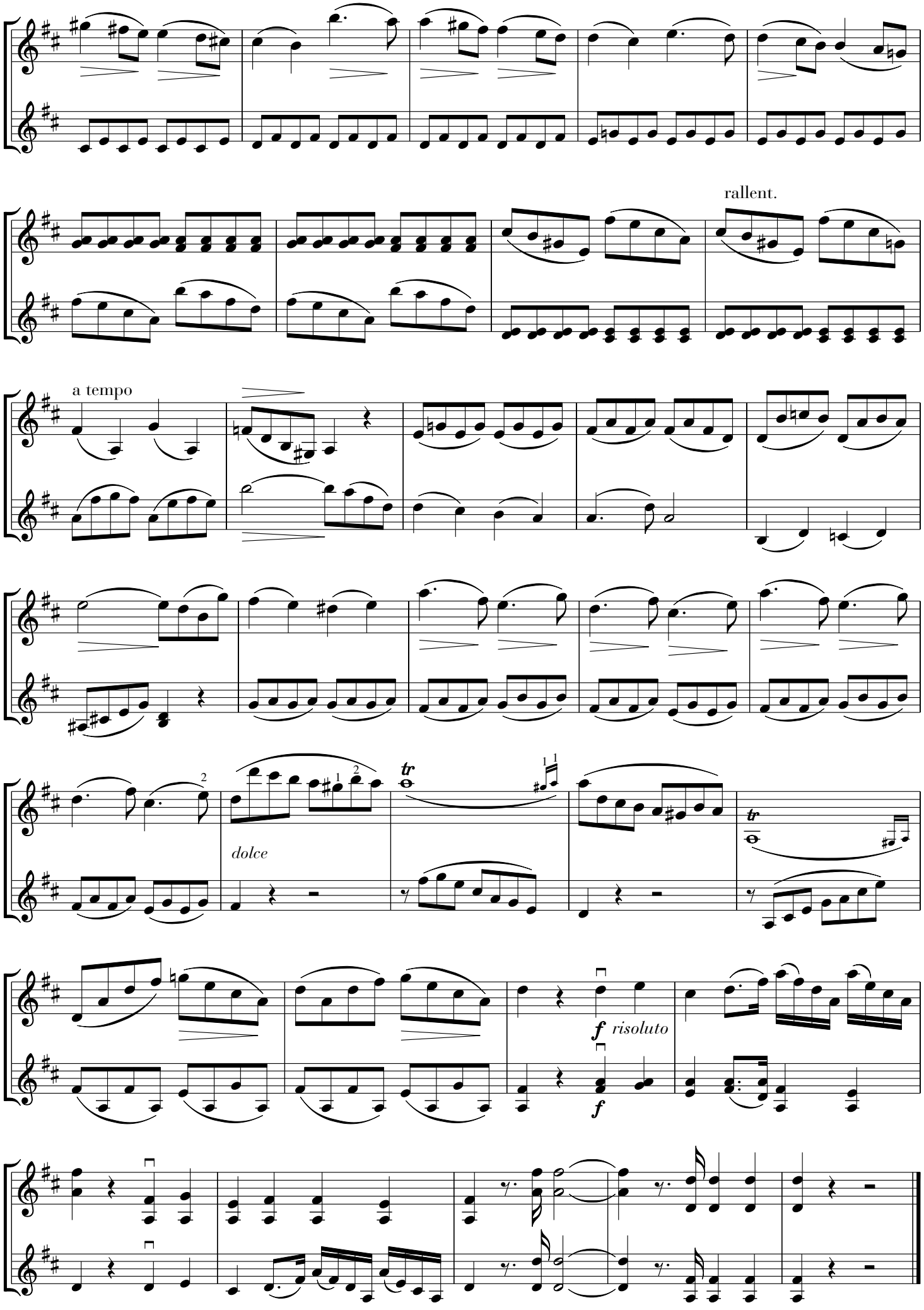
Moderato e molto espressivo

Cantando ed agitato



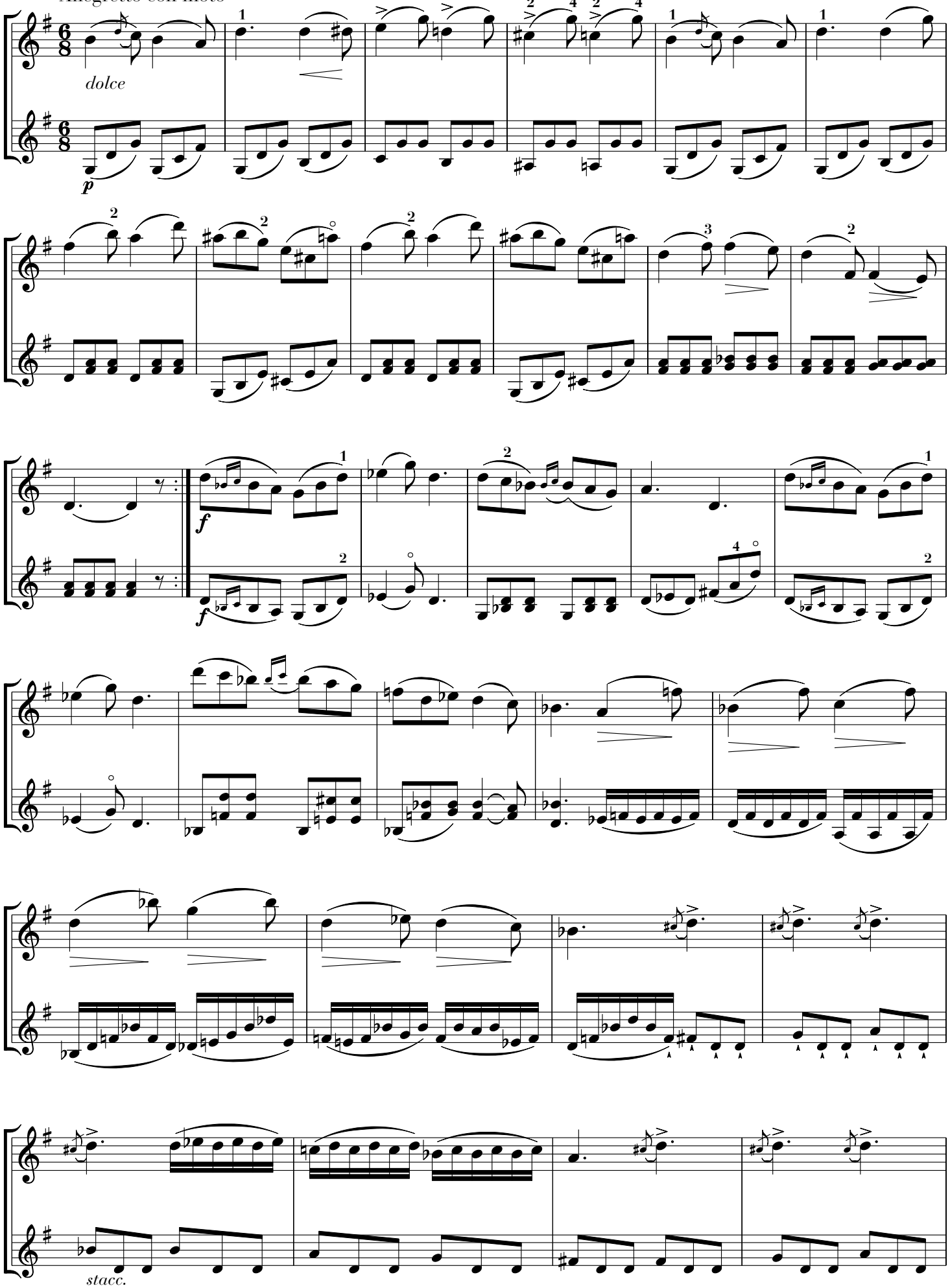

p
cresc.
ritenuto
f
dolce
2e. corde
f chanterelle
dim.
f

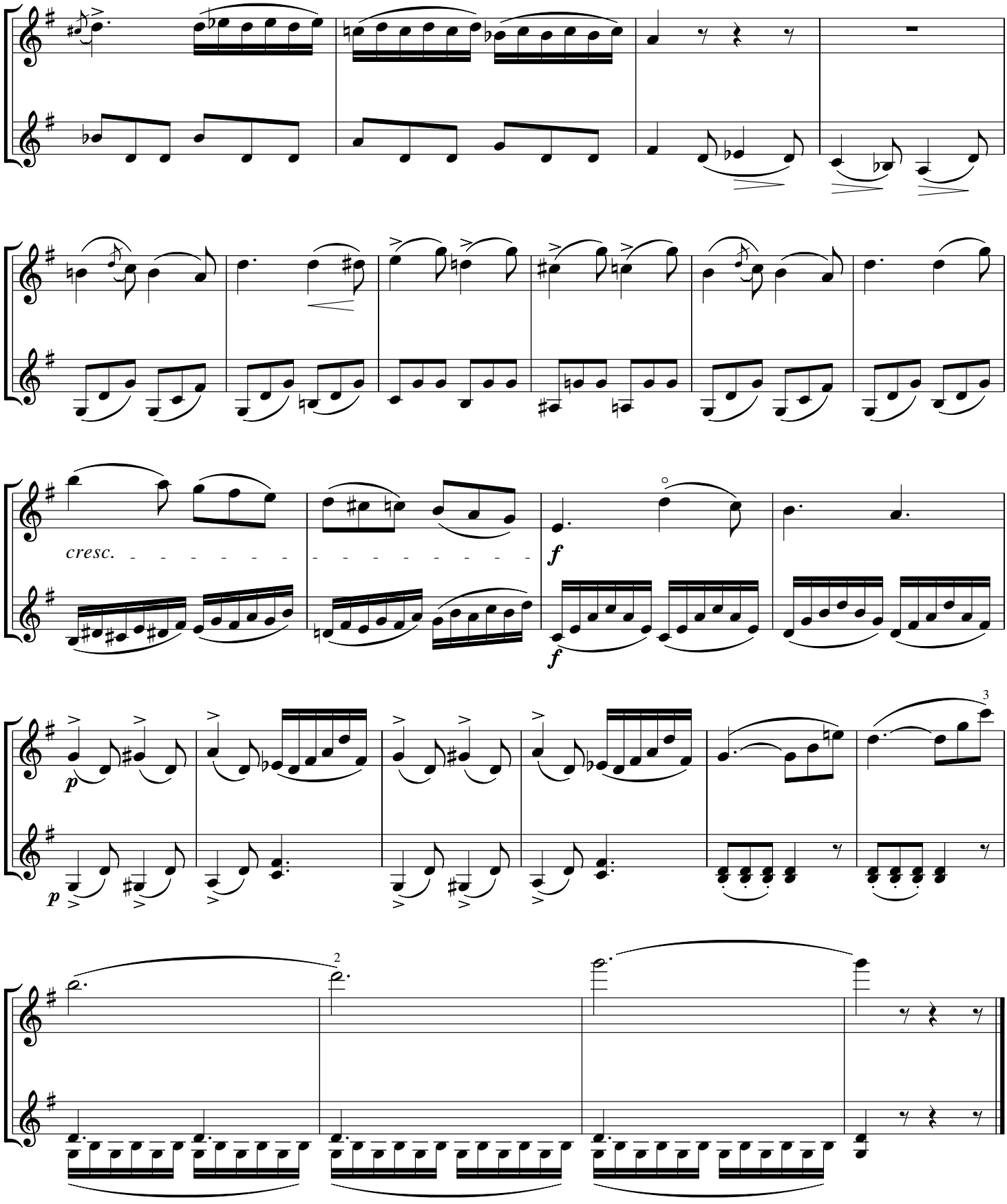

Allegro moderato
mf
f
f
f
f
f e risoluto
f
f


rallent.
a tempo
dolce
tr
tr
f risoluto
f

BARCAROLLE

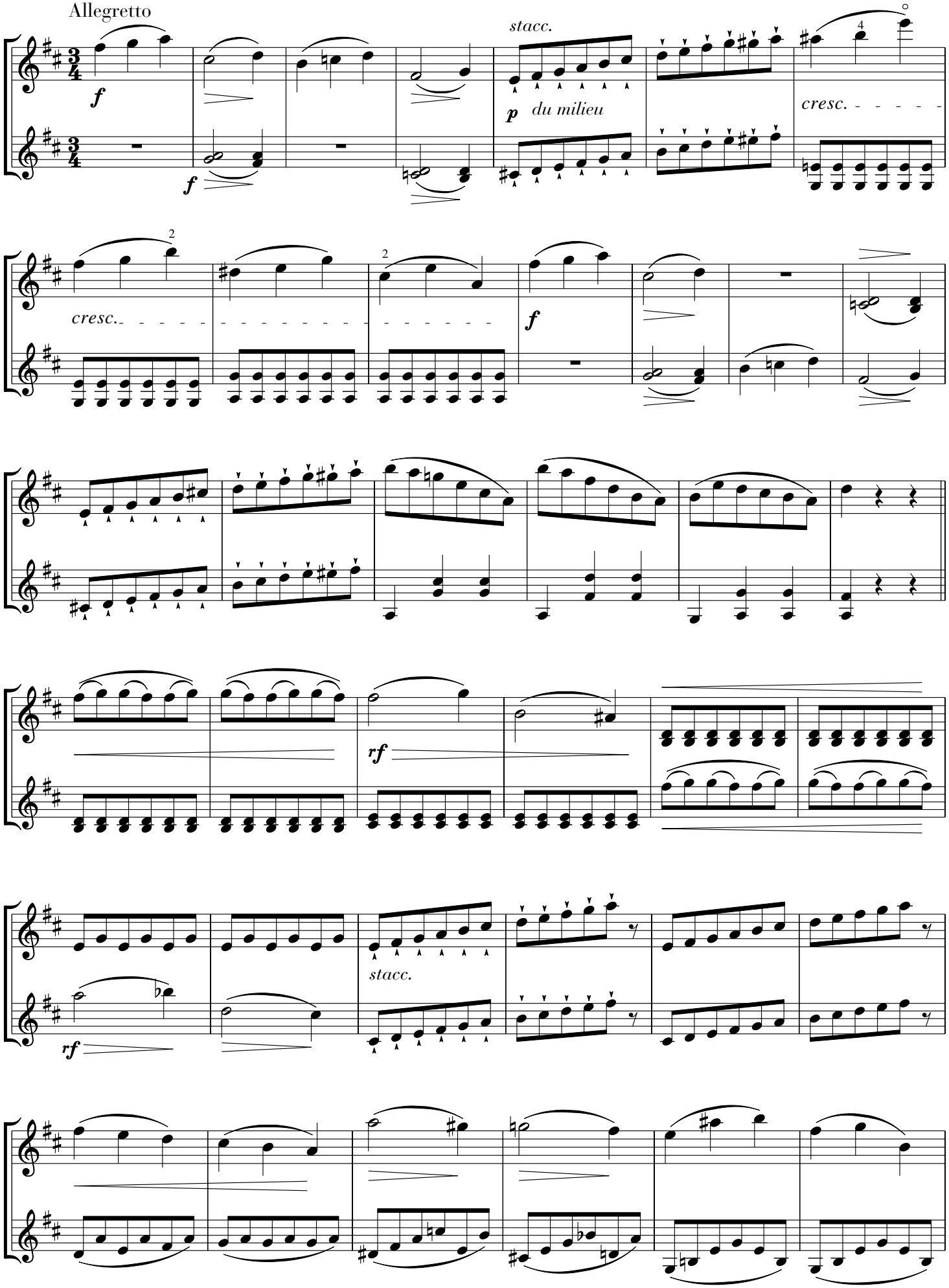
Allegretto con moto

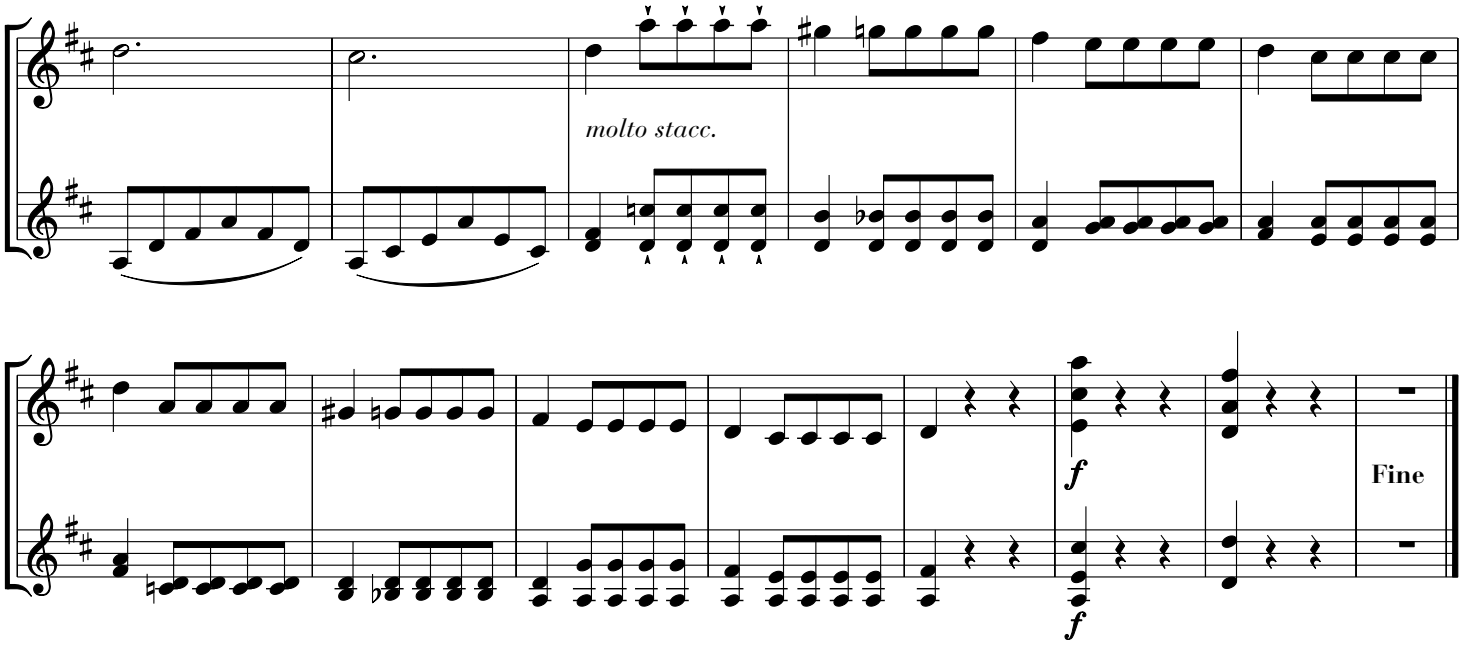



cresc.
f
f
p
p
3
2

SCHERZO

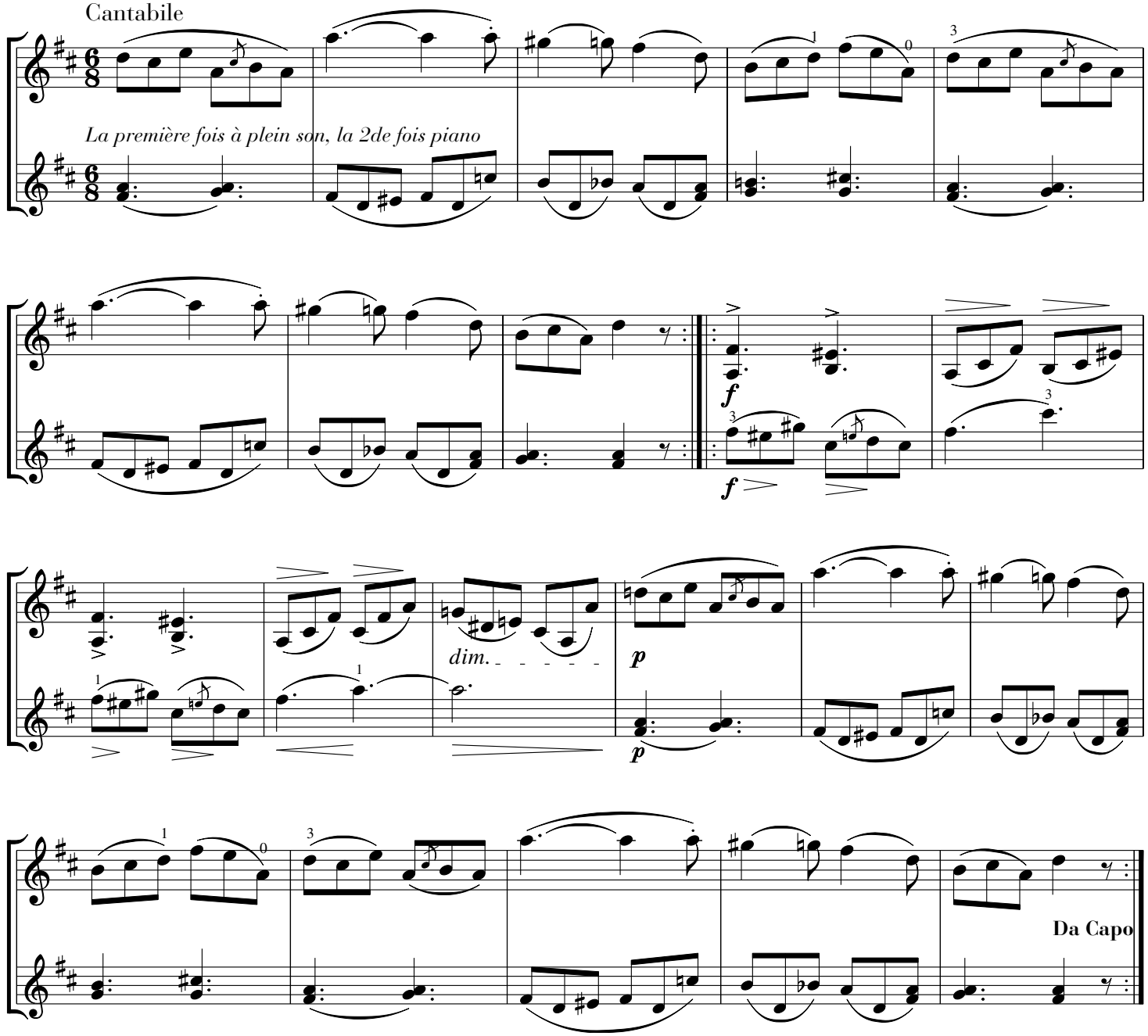
Allegretto



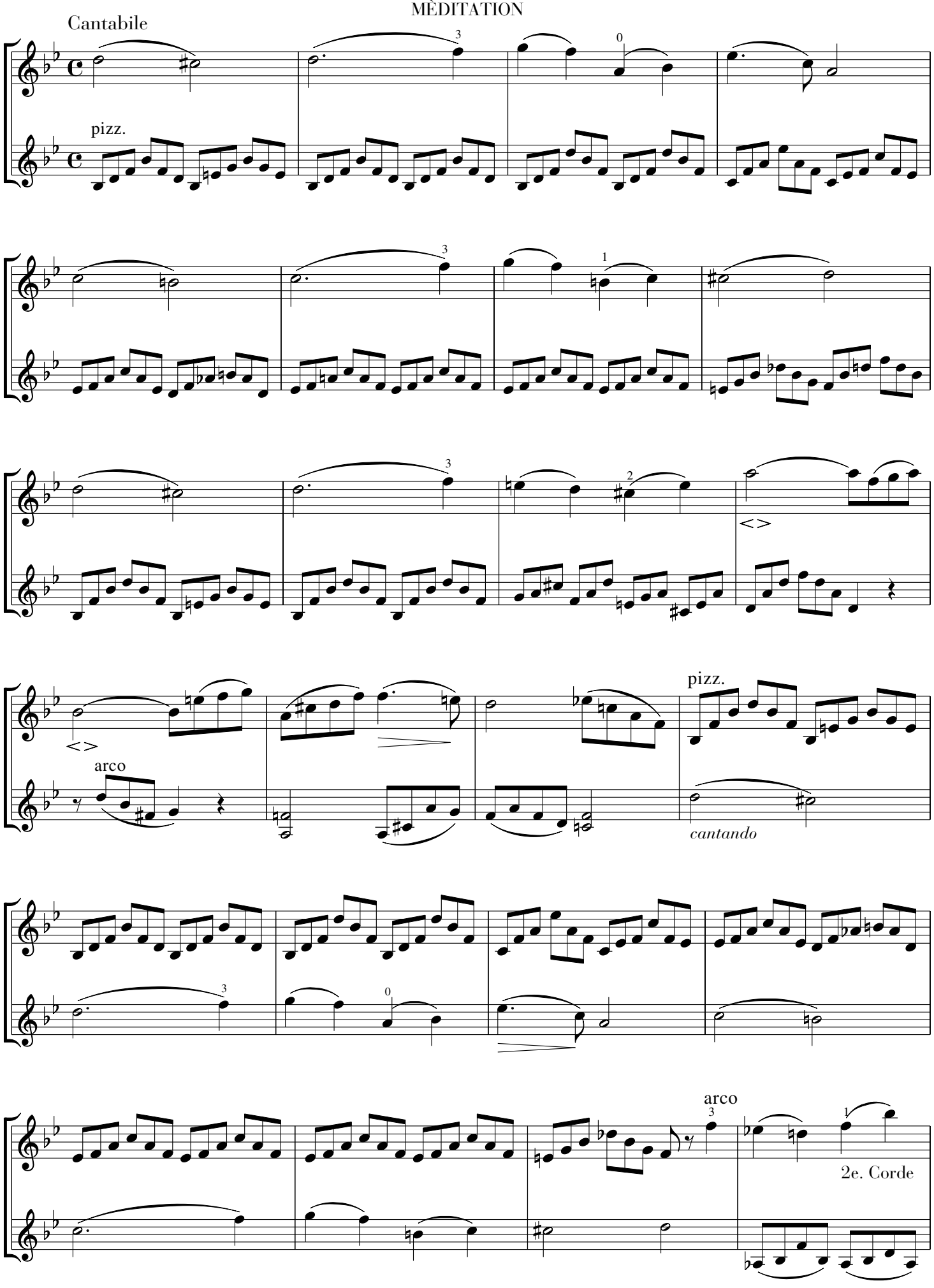


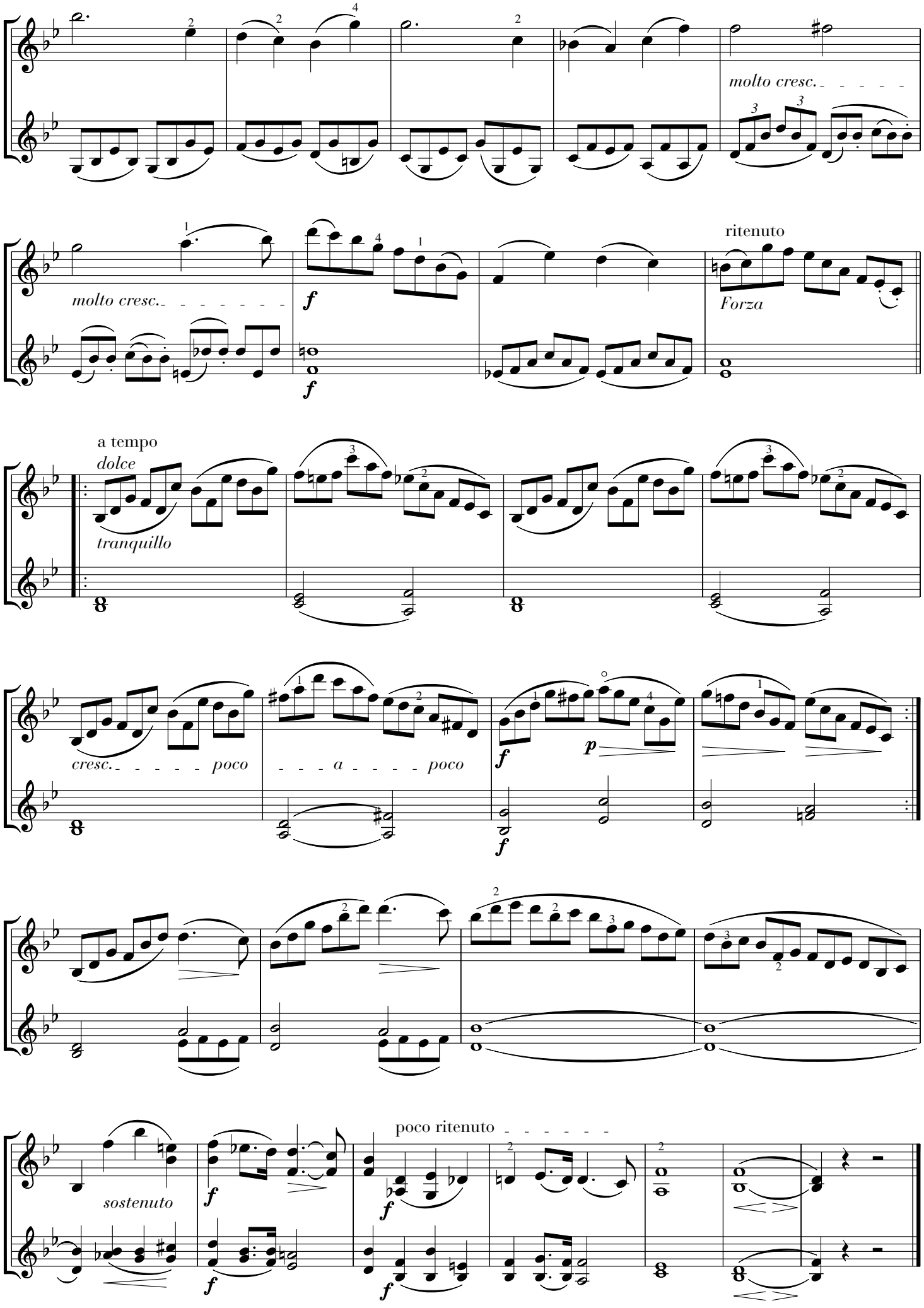
TRIO Sans changer de mouvement

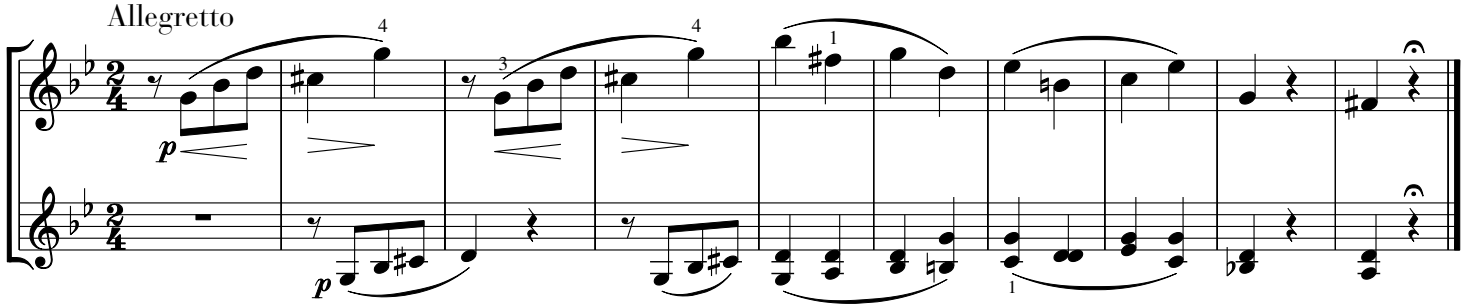
Cantabile



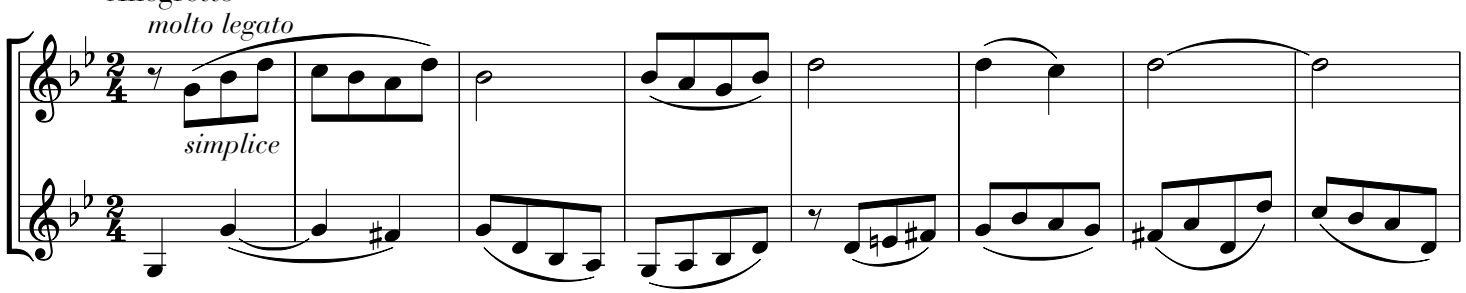
LE CALME
MÈDITATION

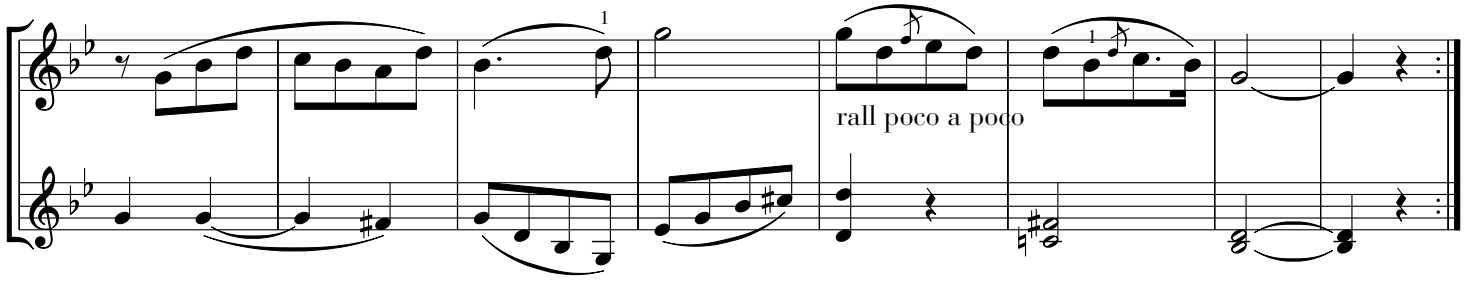


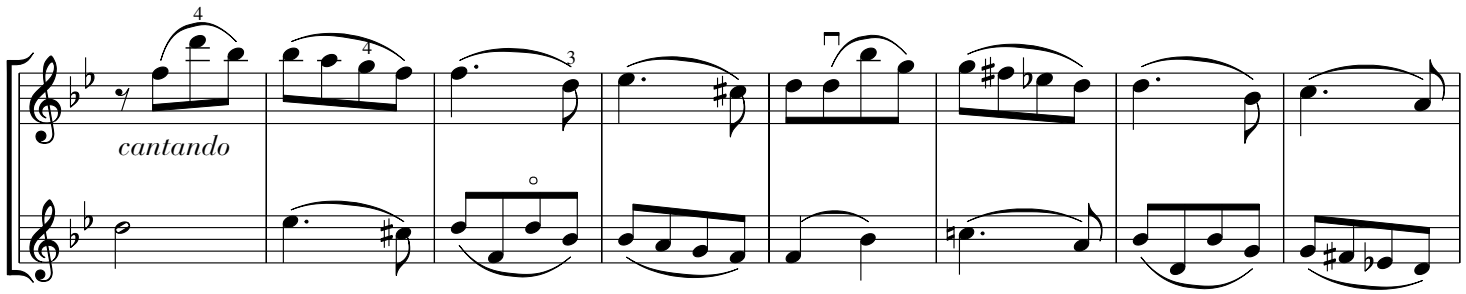

molto cresc.
molto cresc.
f
f
ritenuto
Forza
a tempo
dolce
tranquillo
cresc.
poco
a
poco
f
p
f
sostenuto
f
f
f
poco ritenuto

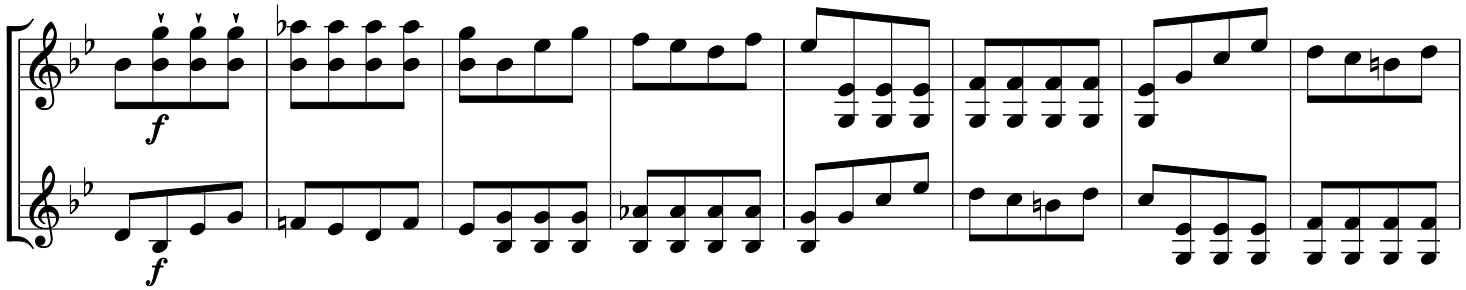

Allegretto
p
p

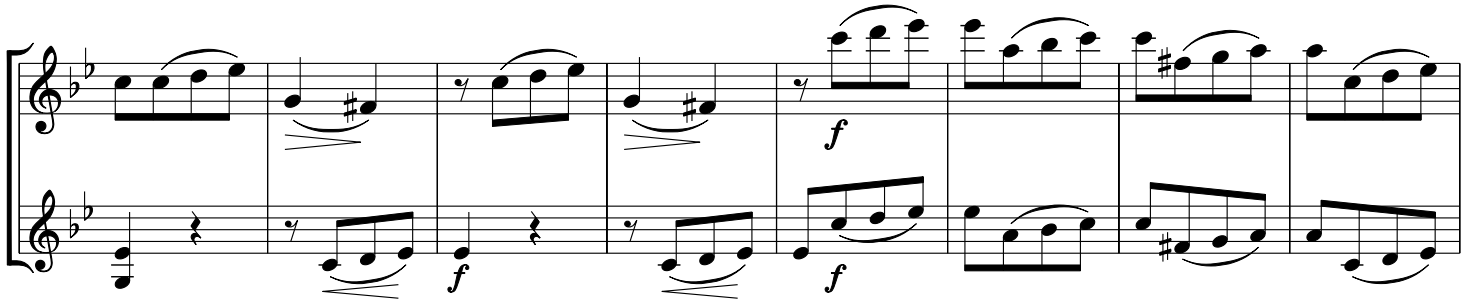
CANZONETTA

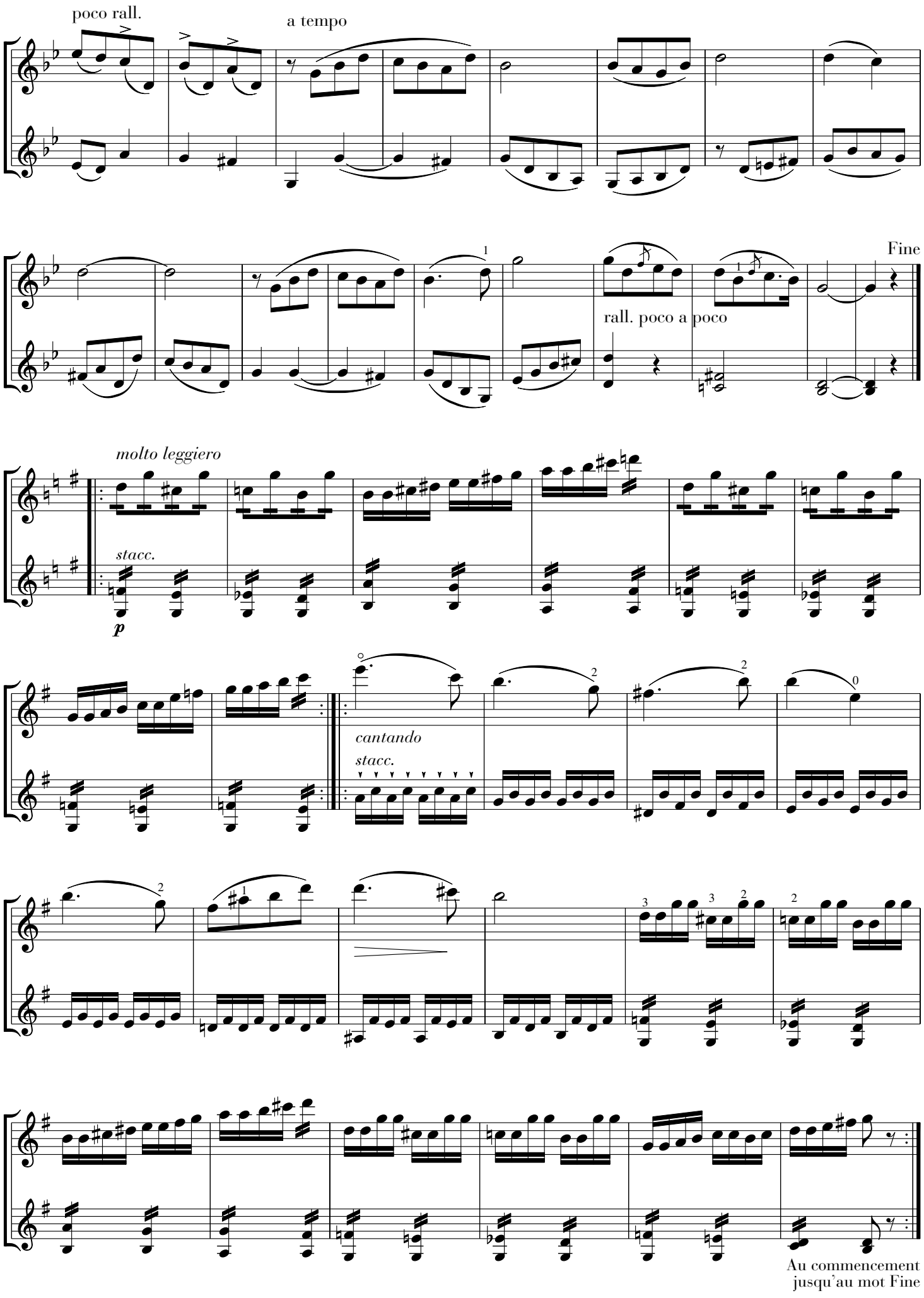

Allegretto
molto legato
simplice


rall poco a poco


cantando

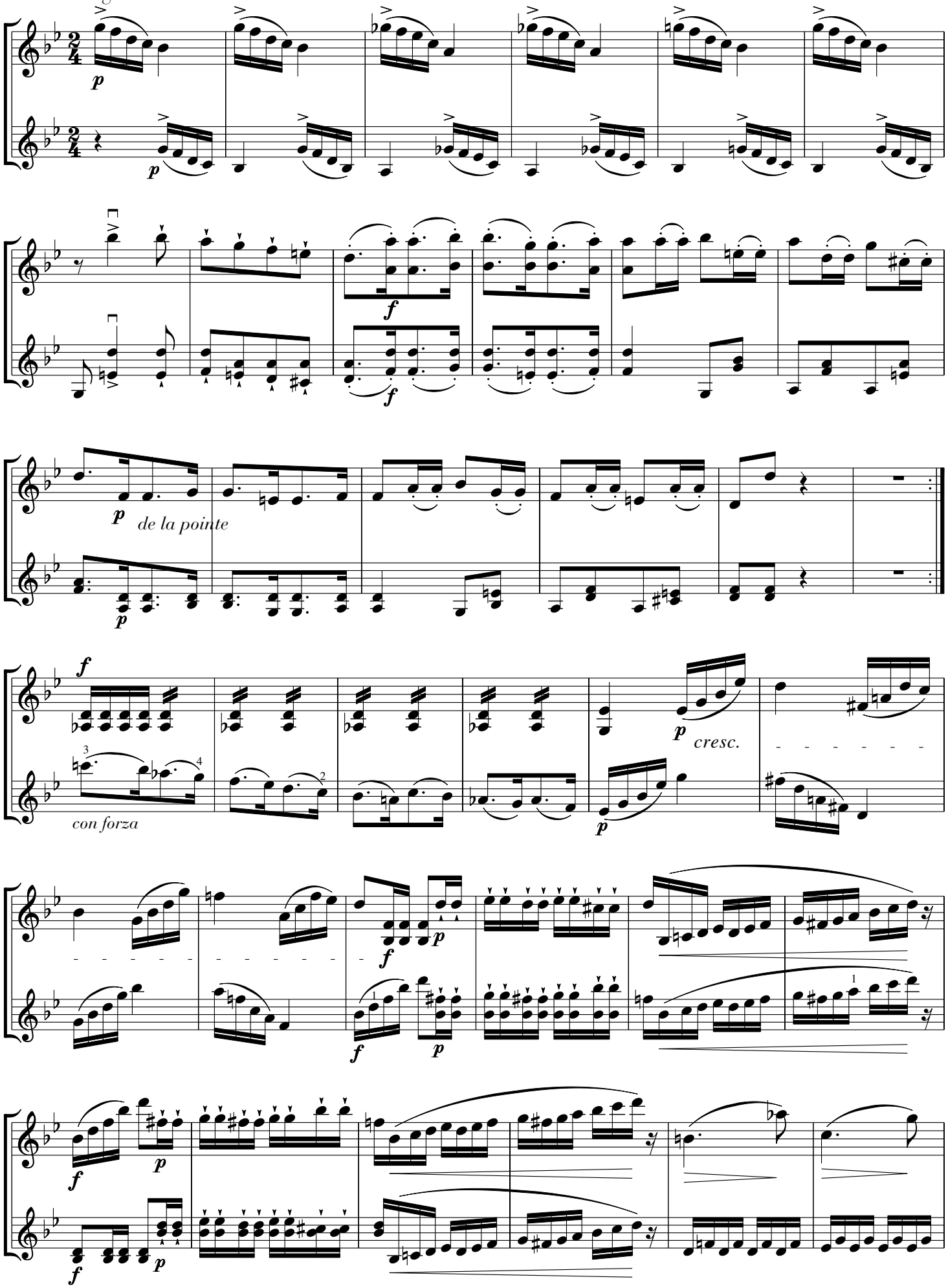

f
f

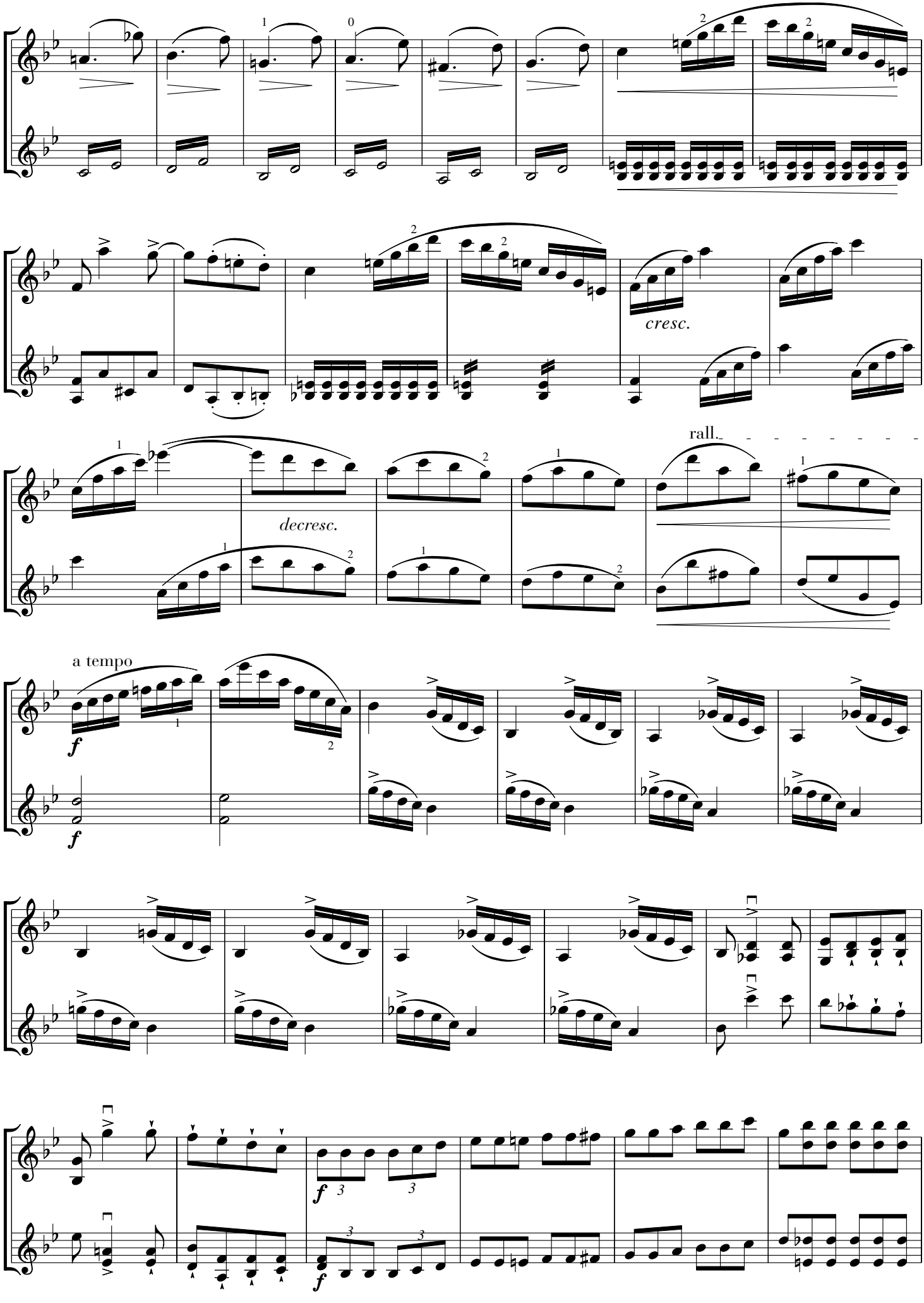

f
f
f
f

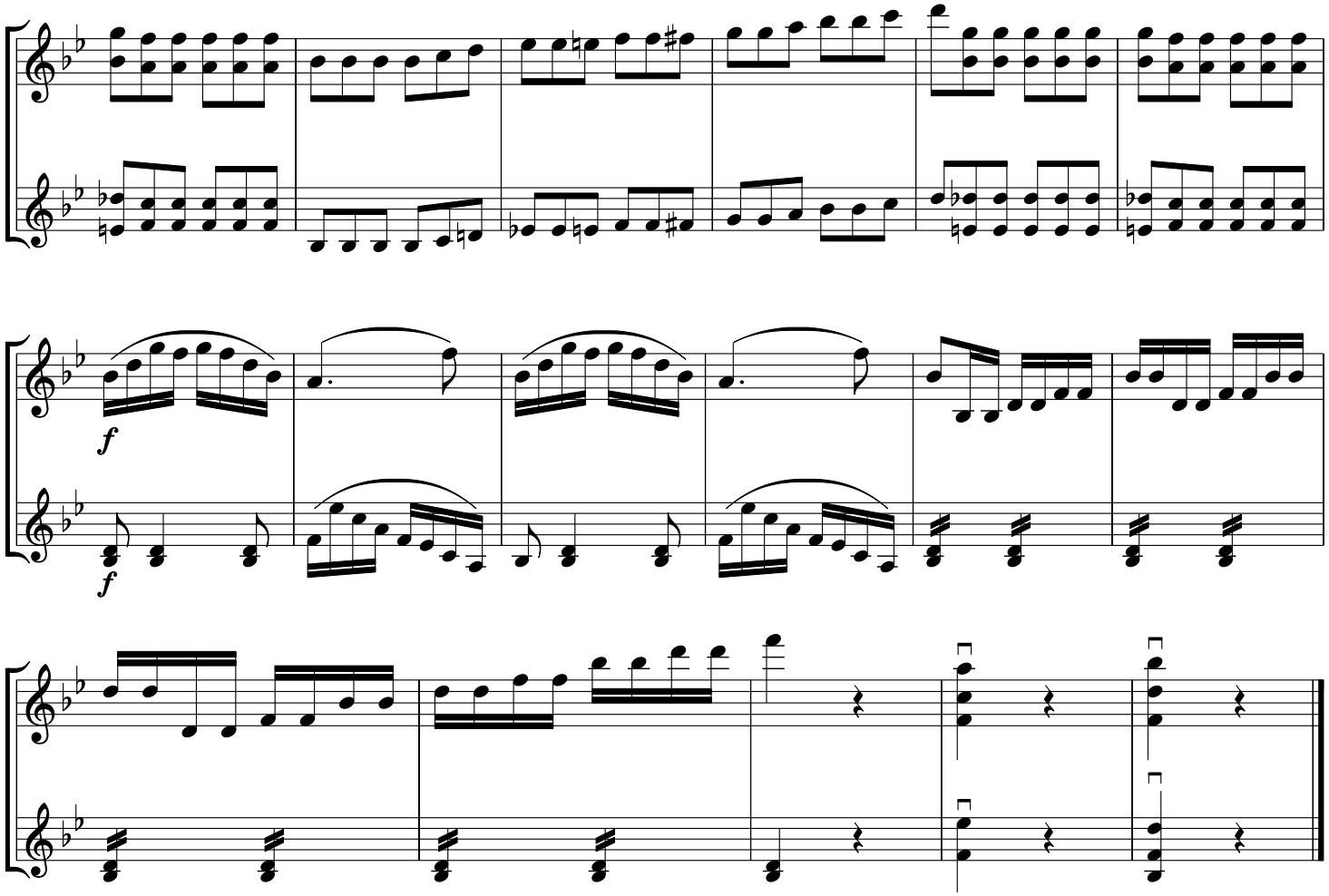

poco rall.
a tempo
Fine
rall. poco a poco
molto leggiero
stacc.
p
cantando
stacc.
Au commencement
jusqu'au mot Fine

FINALE

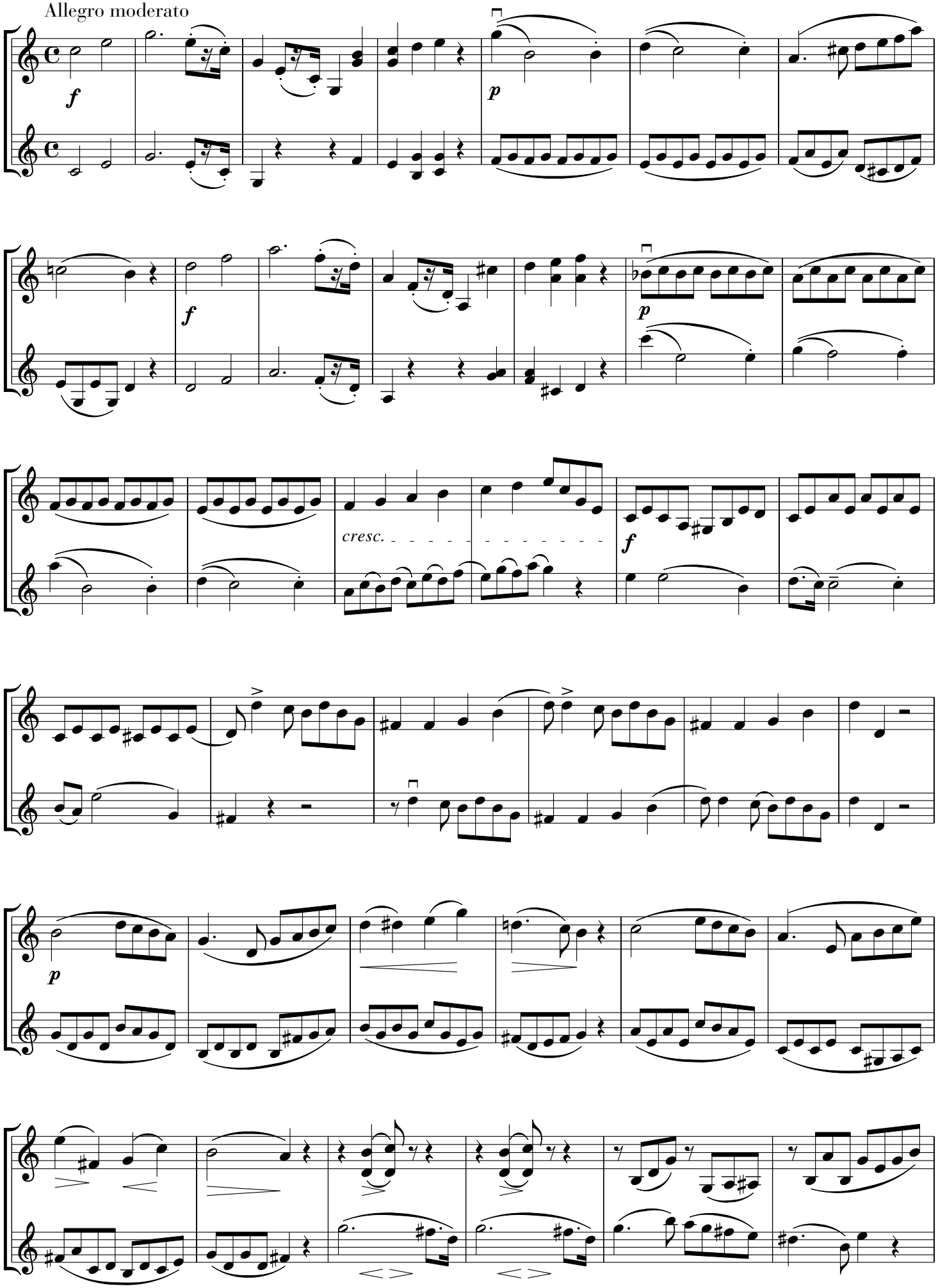
Allegretto

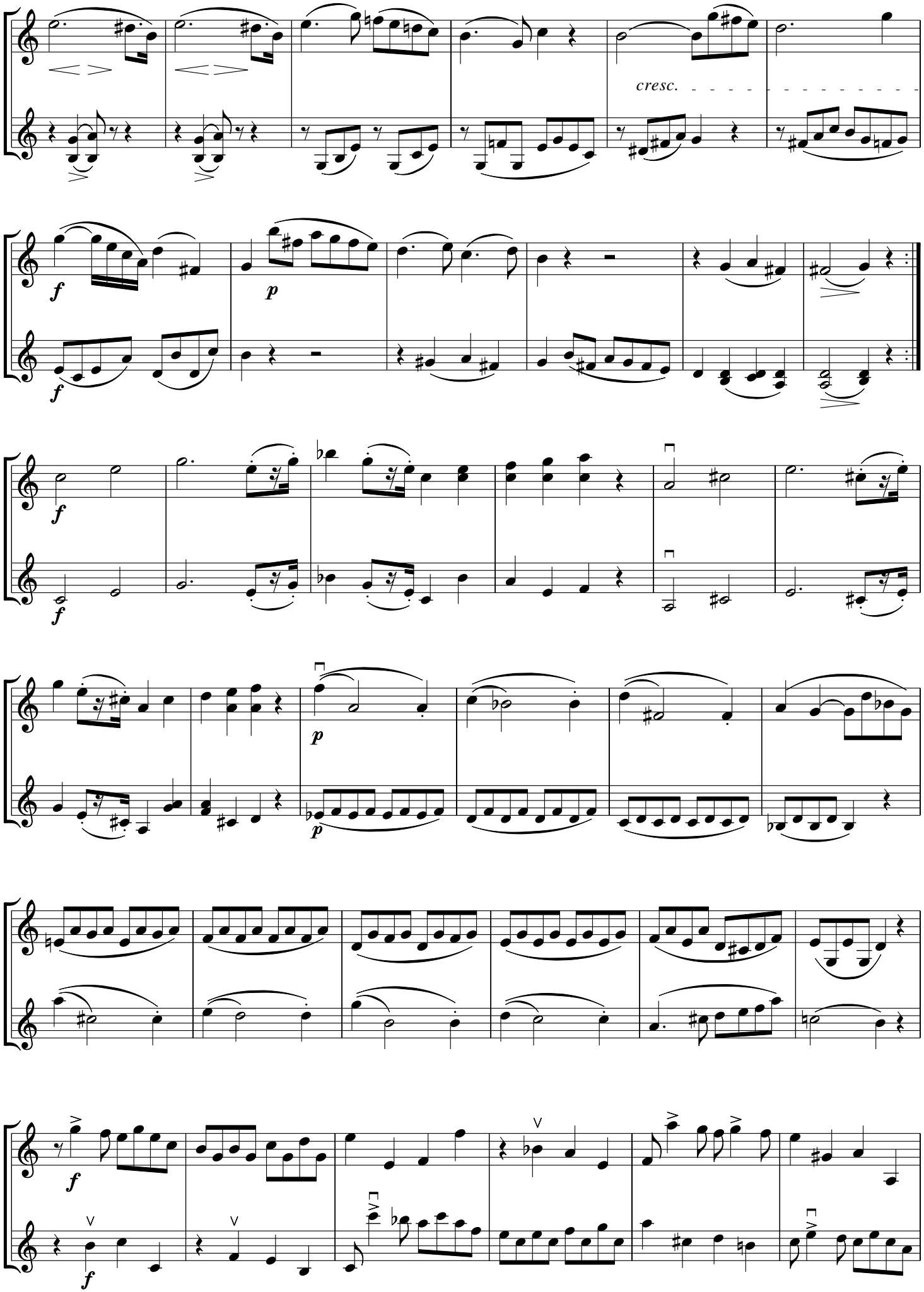


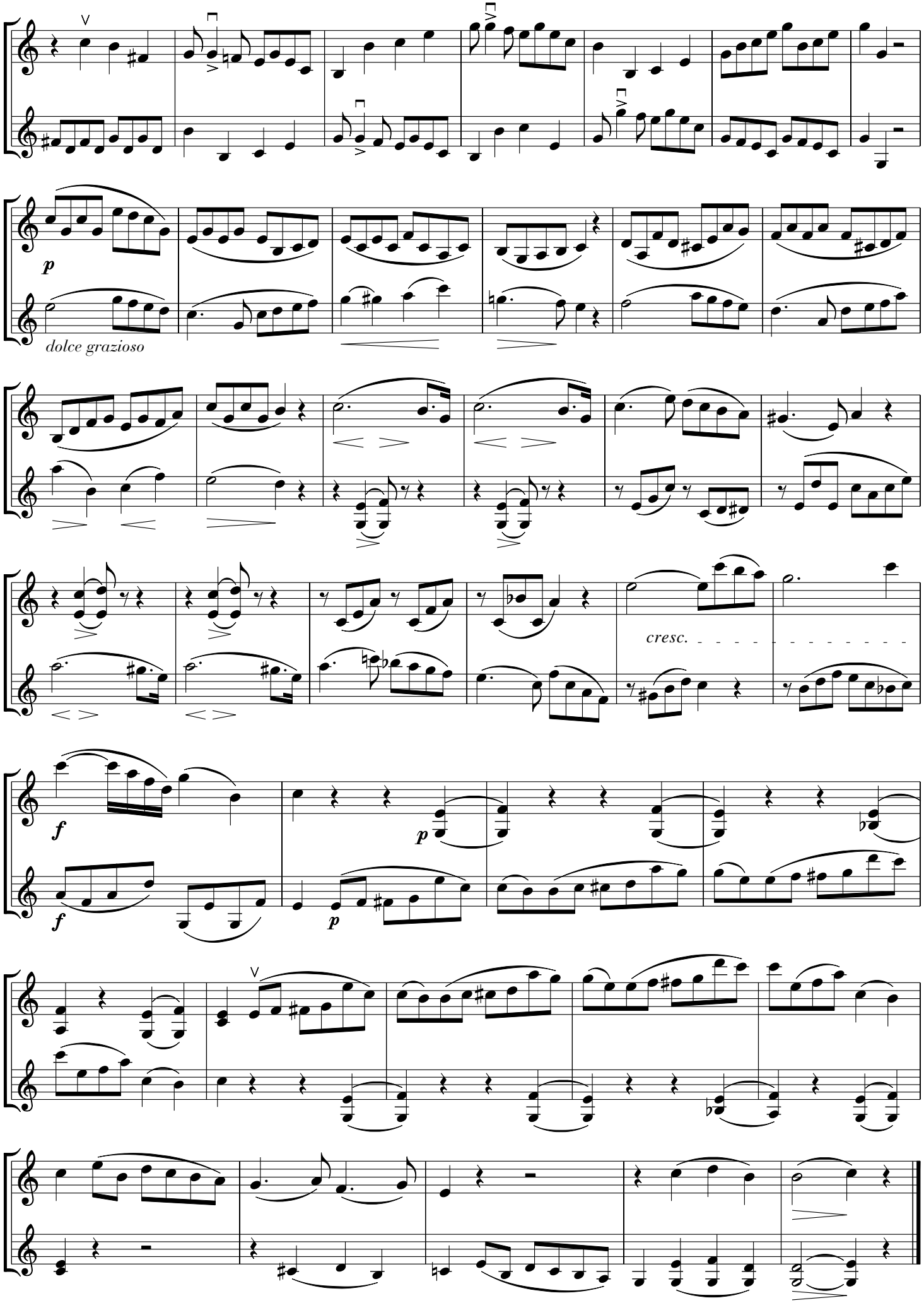

cresc.
decresc.
rall.
a tempo
f
f
f
f


f
f

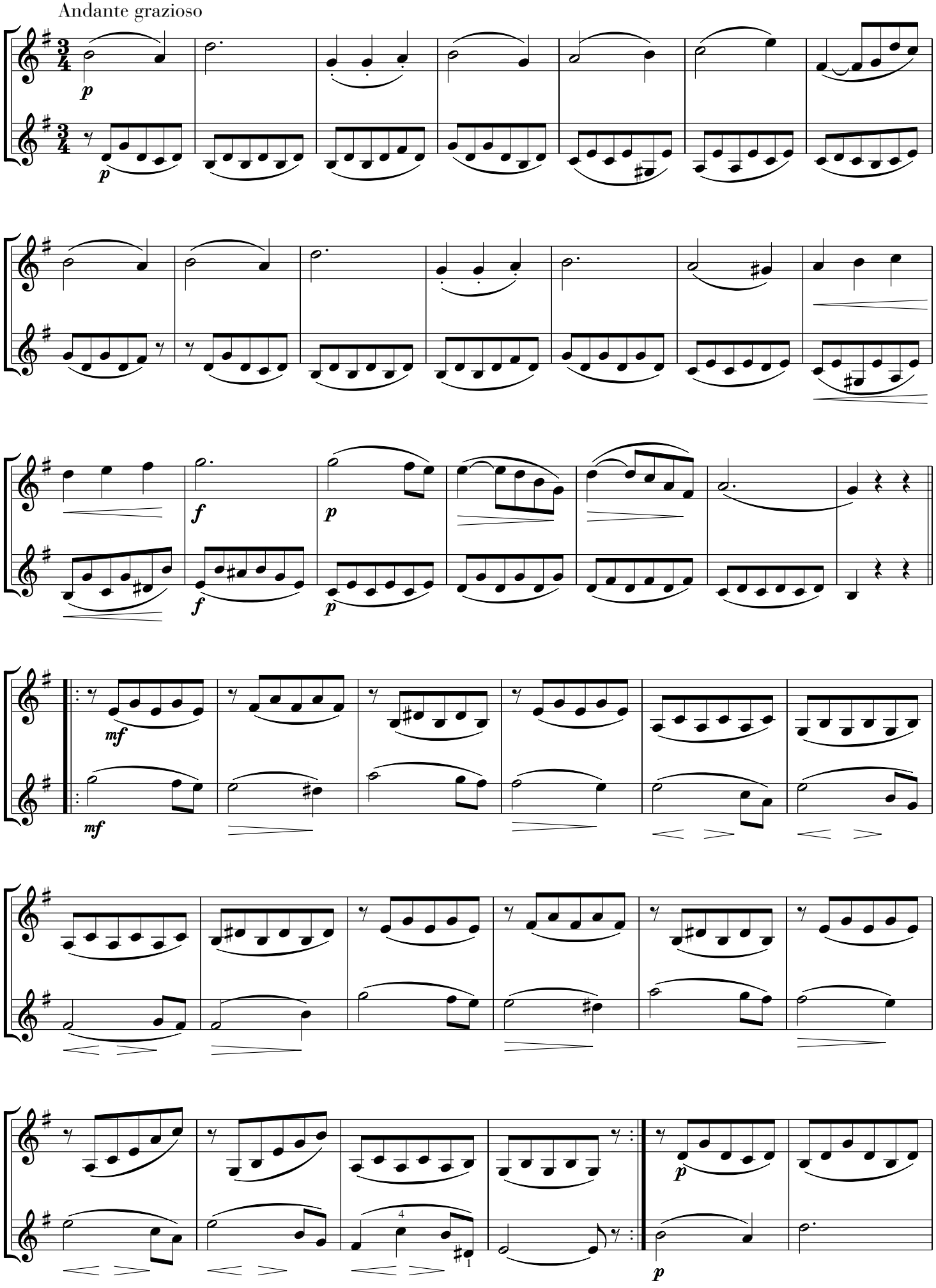
Allegro moderato

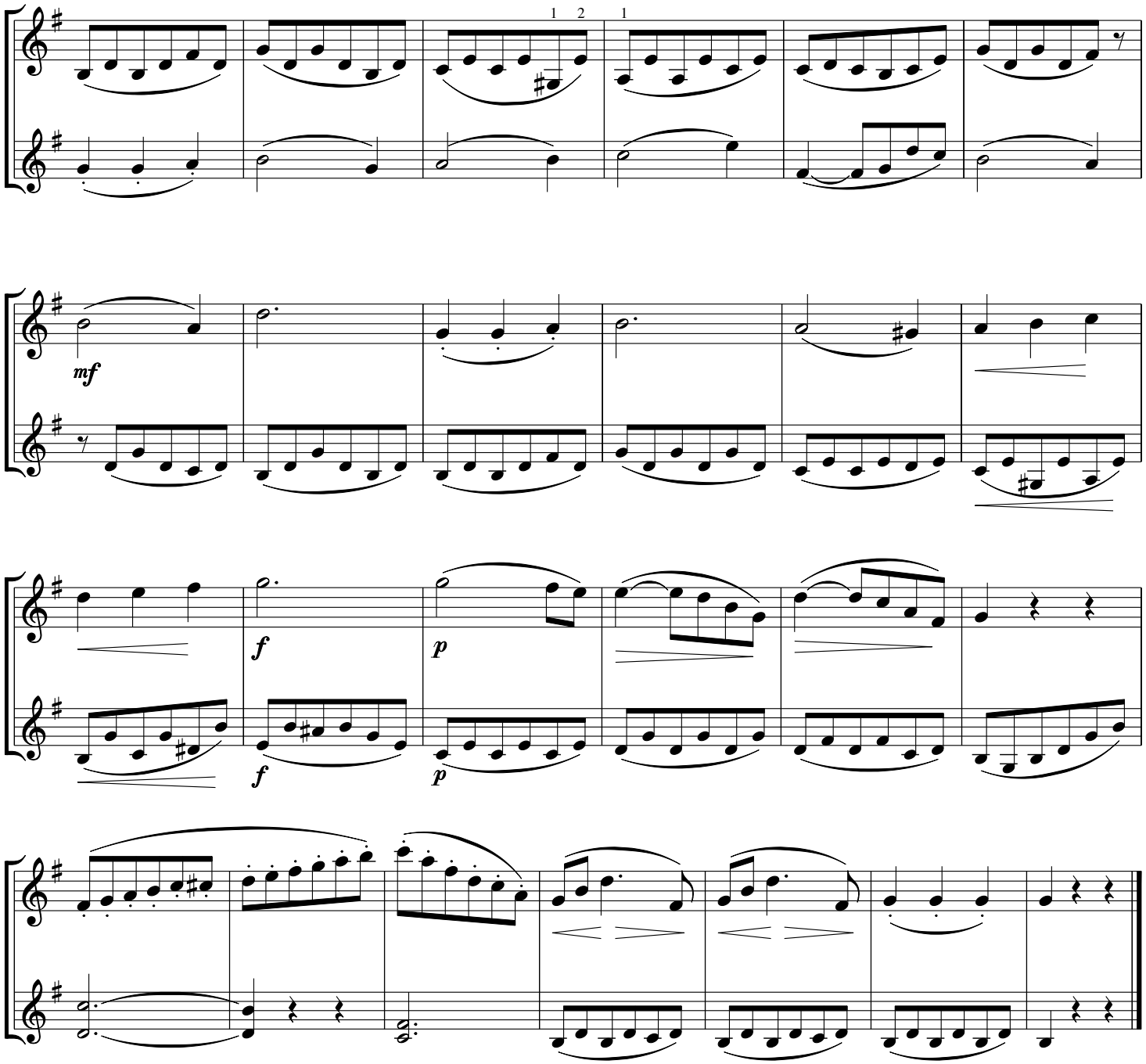



cresc.
f
p
f
f
f
p
p
f
f


p
dolce grazioso
cresc.
f
p
f
p

Andante grazioso




1 2
1
mf
f
p
f
p