J.S. Bach

Selected transcriptions
for tenor viola da gamba
(includes bass and treble versions)

Dick Yates
November 2020

This collection features pieces selected from Bach's solo cello and violin compositions. Bach's compositions for solo strings often show textures involving chords and implied counterpoint. Despite its more advanced melodic, contrapuntal and harmonic sophistication – indeed, one of the supreme monuments of music history – there is yet a textural similarity to seventeenth-century music for lyra viol. Lyra viol music points the way toward the transcription of Bach's solo string music by both simply showing that it is possible but also demonstrating some of the specific kinds of adjustments that might be useful such as the voicings of chords and handling of string crossings.

The lyra viol was a small bass viol popular in England with an extensive repertoire, much of which is written in tablature. Lyra-viols, while pitched like other basses, were close to the size of large tenor viols. This size provides good compromises of low and high resonances, more singing than a large bass and more substantial than a treble, and balances adequate string separation for contrapuntal textures with reasonable left-hand extensions.

With these advantages in mind, the transcriptions here were made specifically for tenor viol, but versions for both treble and bass viols are also included. These versions are the same as the tenor scores with changes only to the clef and key. Fingering has not been adjusted to account for the different sizes of those viols. In many instances the fingerings will work satisfactorily, but in others the player will undoubtedly have to make adjustments. And you may find that some pieces do not work well at all on those instruments, but digital scoring programs and distribution make them all easy to provide in order to ferret out those that do.

Transcription of solo music from violin and cello to viola da gamba entails unique and interesting challenges. Because they are all bowed string instruments, a superficial view might be that most music can be thus transferred with only a few adjustments, but the reality is quite different. The simple difference of the relative tuning of the strings has widespread repercussions on what is possible.

Violins and cellos are tuned with the strings at an interval of a perfect fifth; gambas' strings are a perfect fourth apart (and with a major third in the middle). This affects all scale patterns and chord fingerings. And when the composer has a comprehensive practical knowledge of the instrument and how it is played, as is certainly the case with Bach, the music often ingeniously exploits its capabilities in ways that do not translate to another tuning.

The simplest example of this is Bach's use of *bariolage* in which there is a quick alternation of an open string against an adjacent string that carries its own melody.

The availability of that open string is what makes the technique possible, but in transcription to a viola da gamba that open string is not always available. There can sometimes be clever accommodations to this difficulty, and I highly recommend Jacqui Robertson-Wade's transcription of Cello Suite No. 1, BWV 1007 (Rondo Publishing, 2013) as an example.

Chord formations are also all altered. Consider a simple octave on the violin with an open string against its higher pitched neighbor. The higher string is stopped at the fifth "fret" while the hand easily remains in first position. On a gamba, that higher string is stopped at the seventh fret with all the attendant adjustments to hand position and preceding and subsequent notes. A frequent accommodation is to revoice a chord by adding notes to fill in on strings that must be included in order to play the full range of the chord. This can add richness but also often difficulty.

A word about fingering: All gambists owe great gratitude to the modern string players who sparked the resurrection of the viola da gamba. A very common progression has been from modern cello, to increased specialization via the Baroque cello, and then to further exploration with the viola da gamba. One result of this is that there is a residual, albeit understandable, conception of the viola da gamba in terms of the modern strings. But a viola da gamba is not a cello with a couple extra strings. It is more accurately conceived of as a "bowed lute" and the left-hand's chores are far closer to the lutenist's than to the cellist's. The difference shows up incongruously even in notation. How do the symbols and nomenclature "down bow" and "up bow" make any sense on a viola da gamba where the bow is horizontal, and especially when the underhand bow hold reverses the effect of these motions? The tutors that we have from the heyday of the viola da gamba do not use this terminology, instead referring sensibly to "forward" and "backward" or to "push" and "pull." And consider the oddity of describing fingering two adjacent strings on the same fret as "lute fingering." Of course, only those coming from modern strings would see this as a specialized technique requiring a distinguishing term. Lute players just call it "fingering."

Bowing directions and slurs come from several considerations. Always coming first were Bach's manuscript scores, or those of his family when those are the primary sources available to us. Modern editions and even videos provided useful insights. But transcriptions are not a blind copying of music from one instrument to another. The goal is not to play the music as closely as possible to how it would have been played on a cello or violin, but, rather, to play the music as if had been written for the viola da gamba. Slurs, in particular, present many puzzles. While they often can be entirely in the service of shaping, phrasing and articulating the music, they also inevitably must adjust to practical realities of fingers, strings and frets. How this

accommodation is made on one instrument by the composer is not always the best accommodation on the destination instrument of a transcription. This brief introduction cannot begin to explore all those factors, but the scores here are the result of careful consideration. If some decisions seem puzzling, please look a little further into the matter. If you ultimately disagree with them please let me know. I may be persuaded!

Regarding notation, left-hand fingering is indicated in the usual way with numbers either above or immediately before notes. '0' indicates an open string. •|• indicates a barre of two or more strings and the width and duration are to be deduced by context. Rather than use solid lines extending from a fingering number to show how long it is held – this usually is unnecessary – a hold is shown by a single dash following the number, and the duration is, as with the barre, to be deduced from context. A dash before a number indicates that a finger was either shifted to that note along a string or was pre-placed there as an aid in, for instance, fingering a chord. Last, in the absence of sensible symbols for push-bow and pull-bow, the common ones appear here: ∨ for push and ⊓ for pull. All slurs mean a single bow stroke and are not to be confused with phrasing marks.

As someone with a background in music for plucked strings – guitar, lute, vihuela – and who has never even held a violin or cello, I have made transcriptions here that inevitably rely on that experience and may surprise or puzzle at times. If they also betray a blindness to practical realities of viola da gamba technique, I would love to hear from you about that, but be assured that all the pieces in this edition have been developed, practiced, played and enjoyed on the tenor viola da gamba.

Dick Yates
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November 2020

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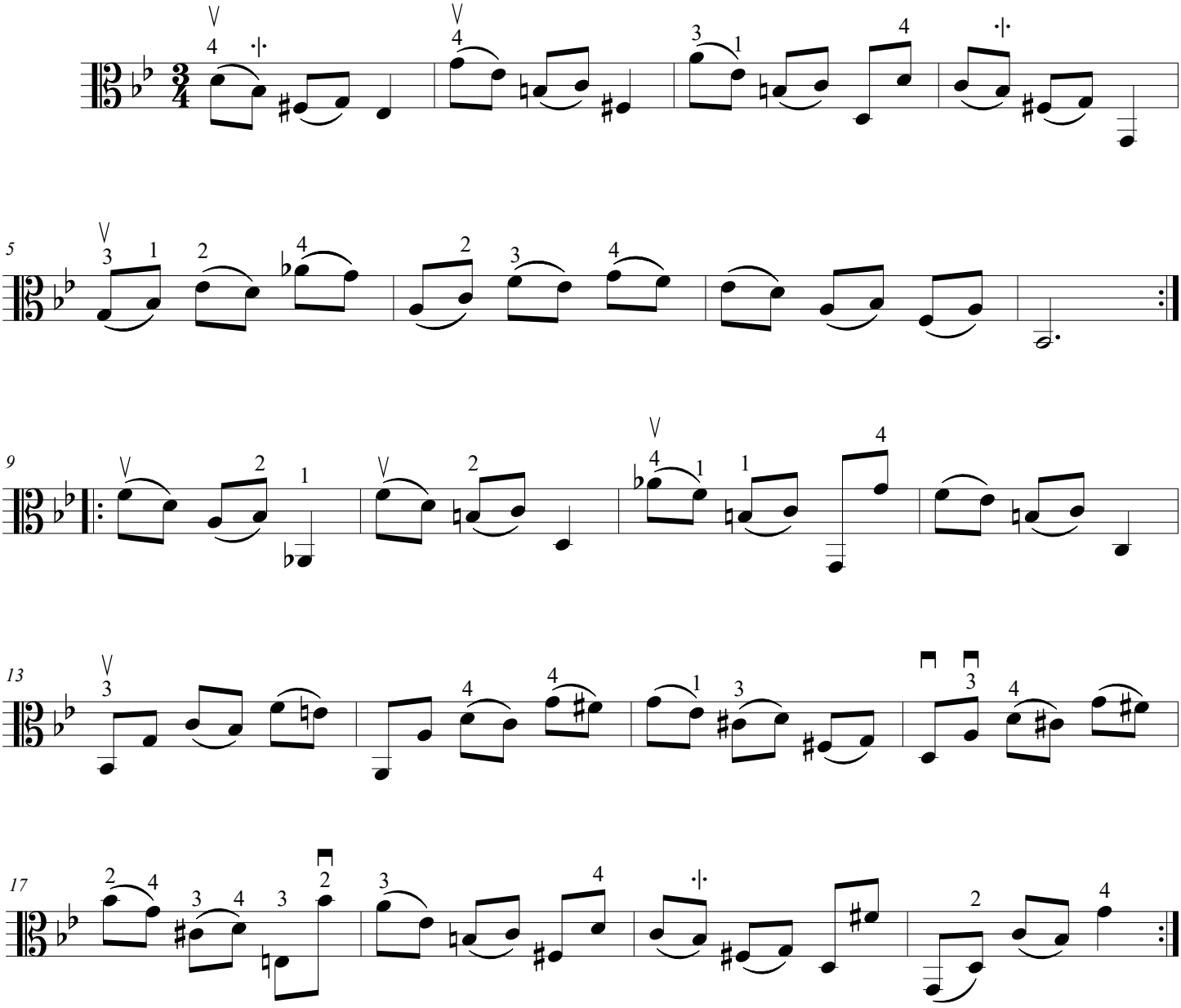
Sarabande

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

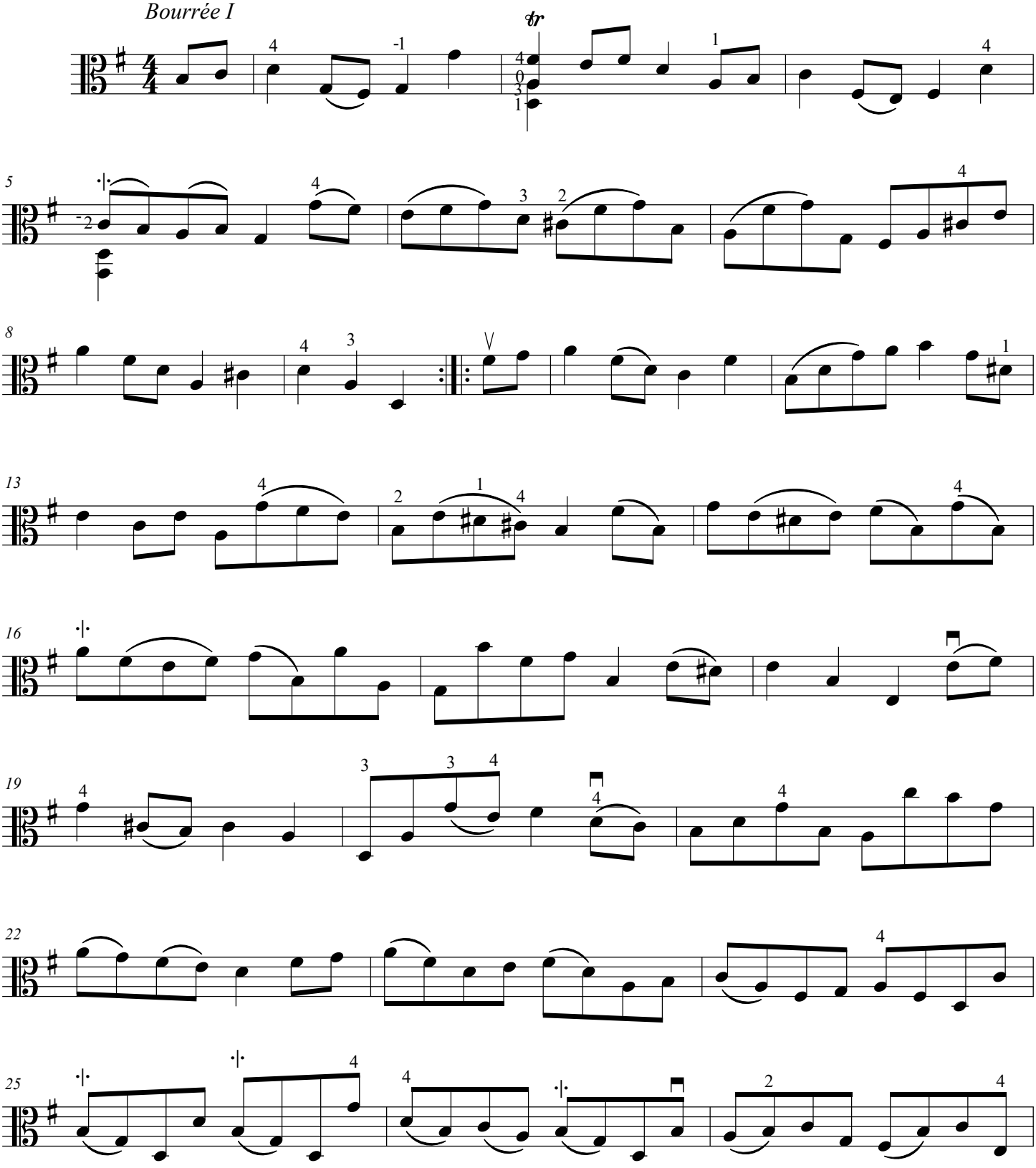


Bourrée I & II

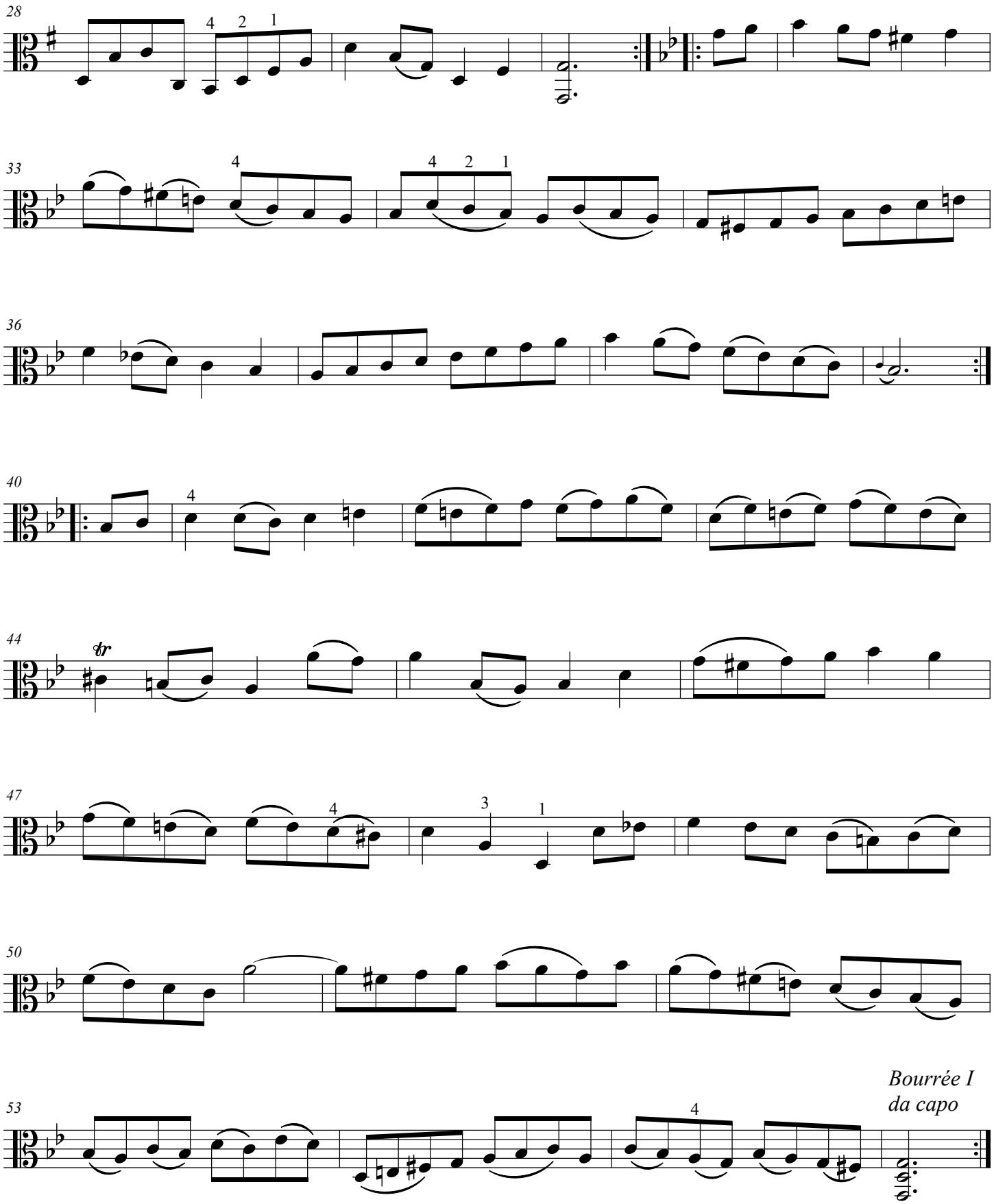
Cello Suite No. 3 BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Bourrée I



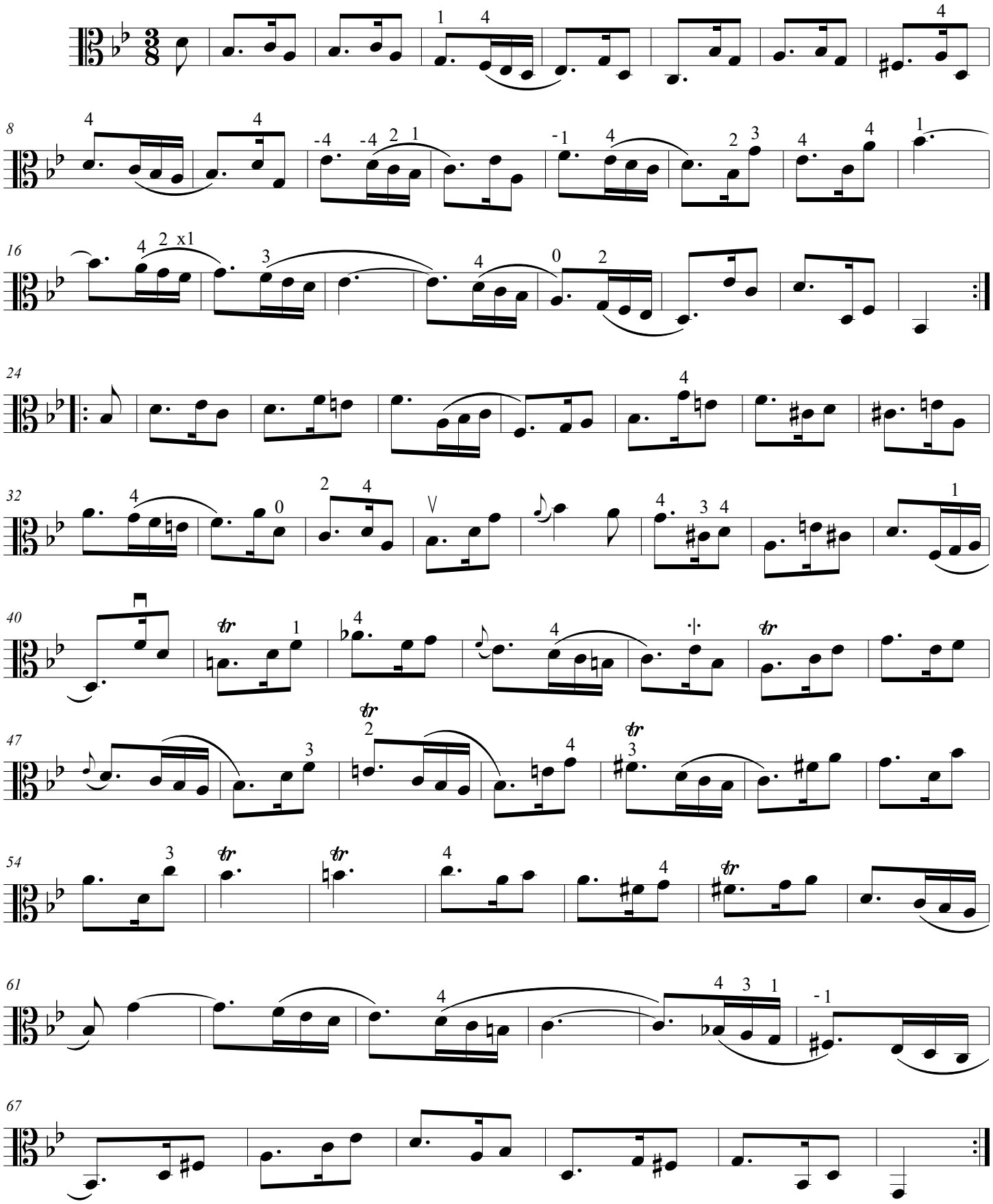
Bourrée II



Gigue

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

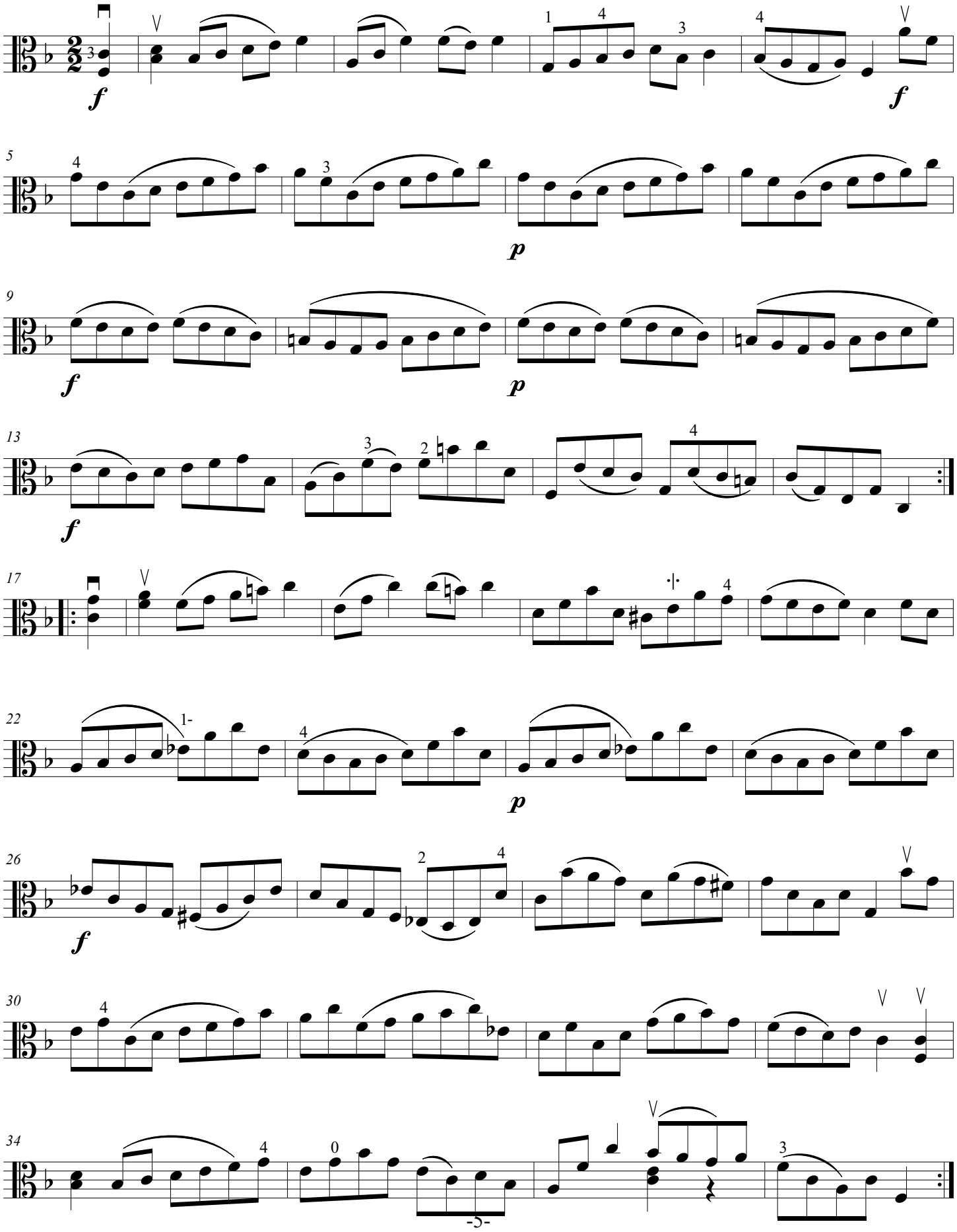
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Bourrée

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

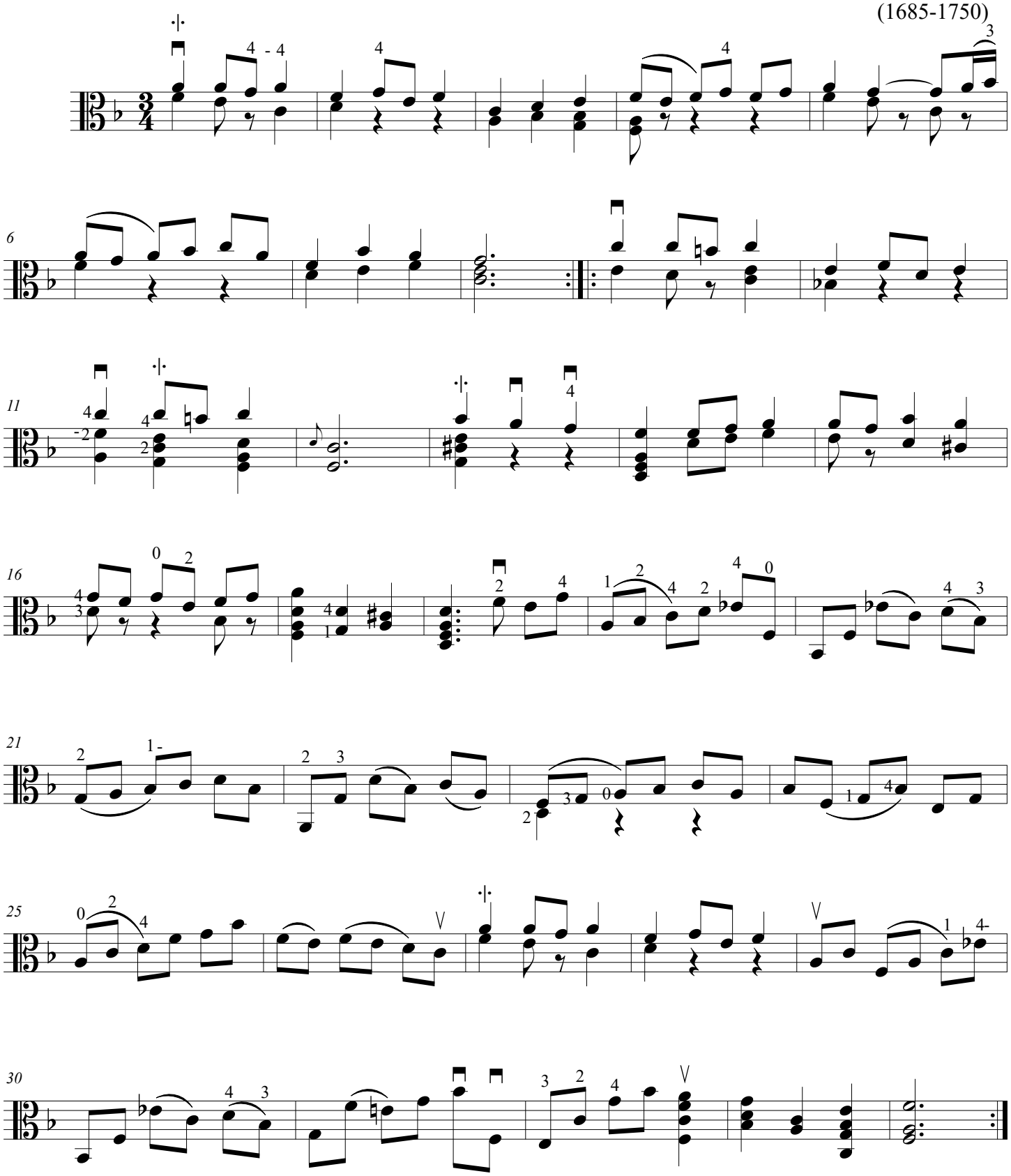
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Menuet I

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



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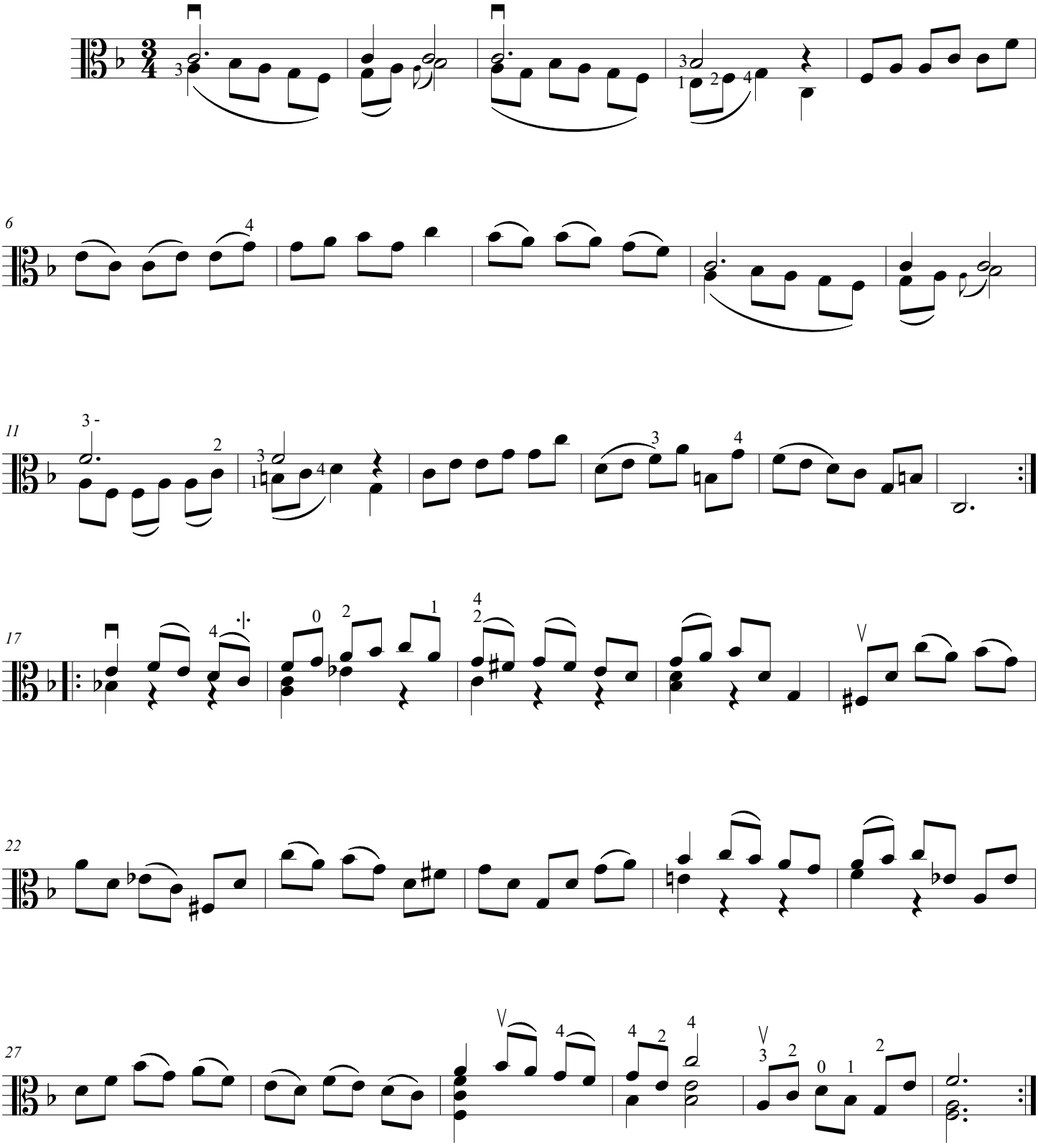
Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

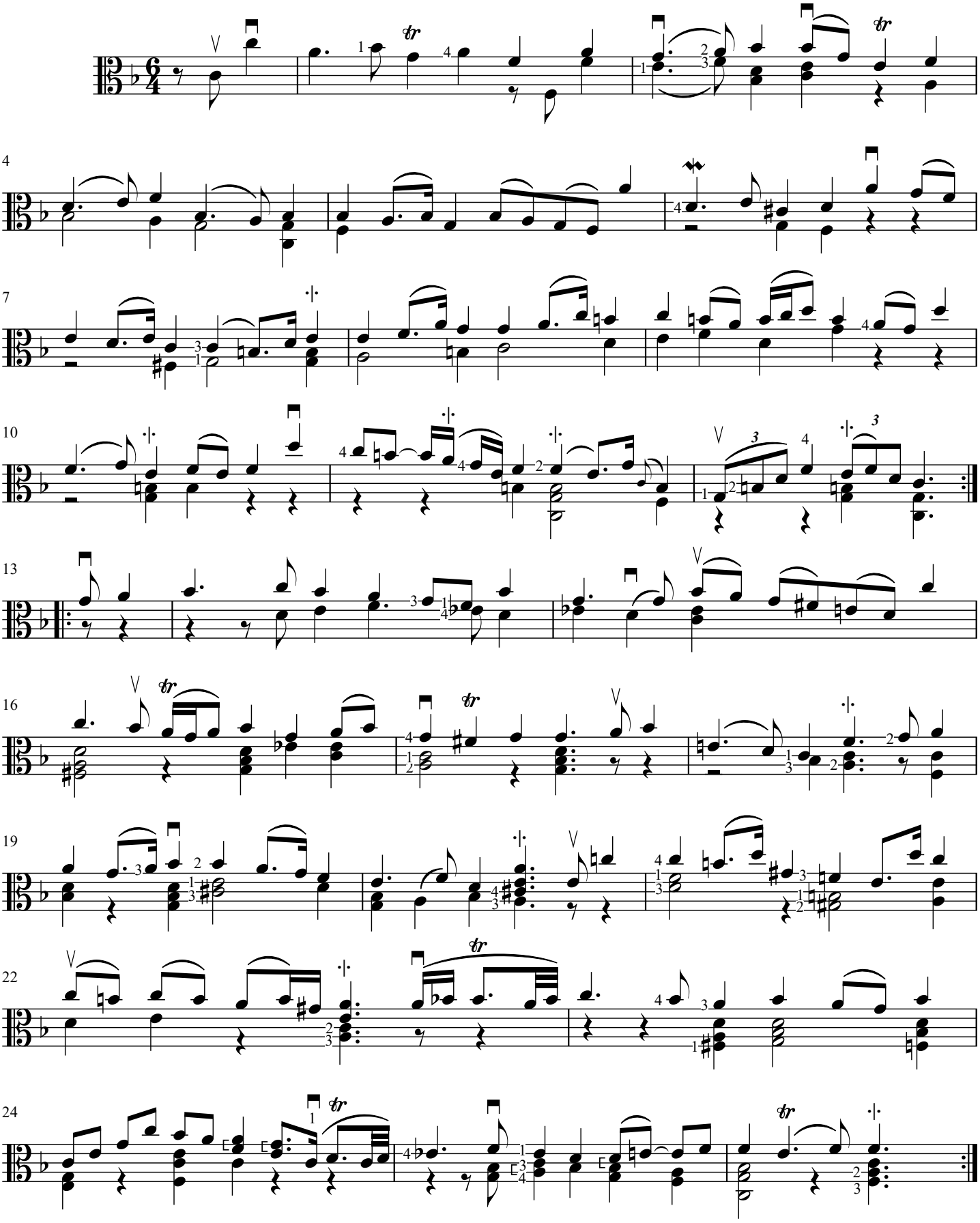
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Loure

Violin Partita #3, BWV 1006

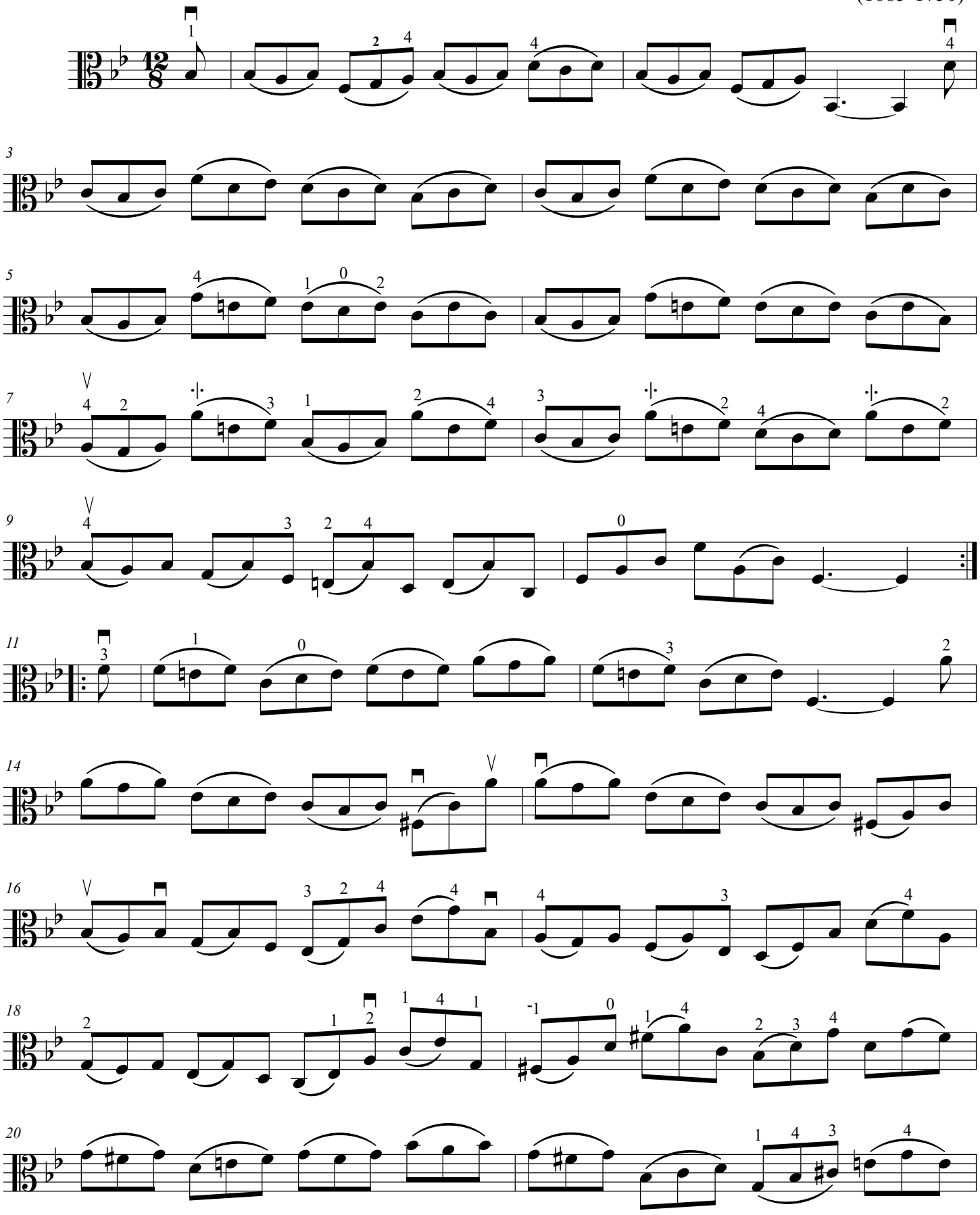
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

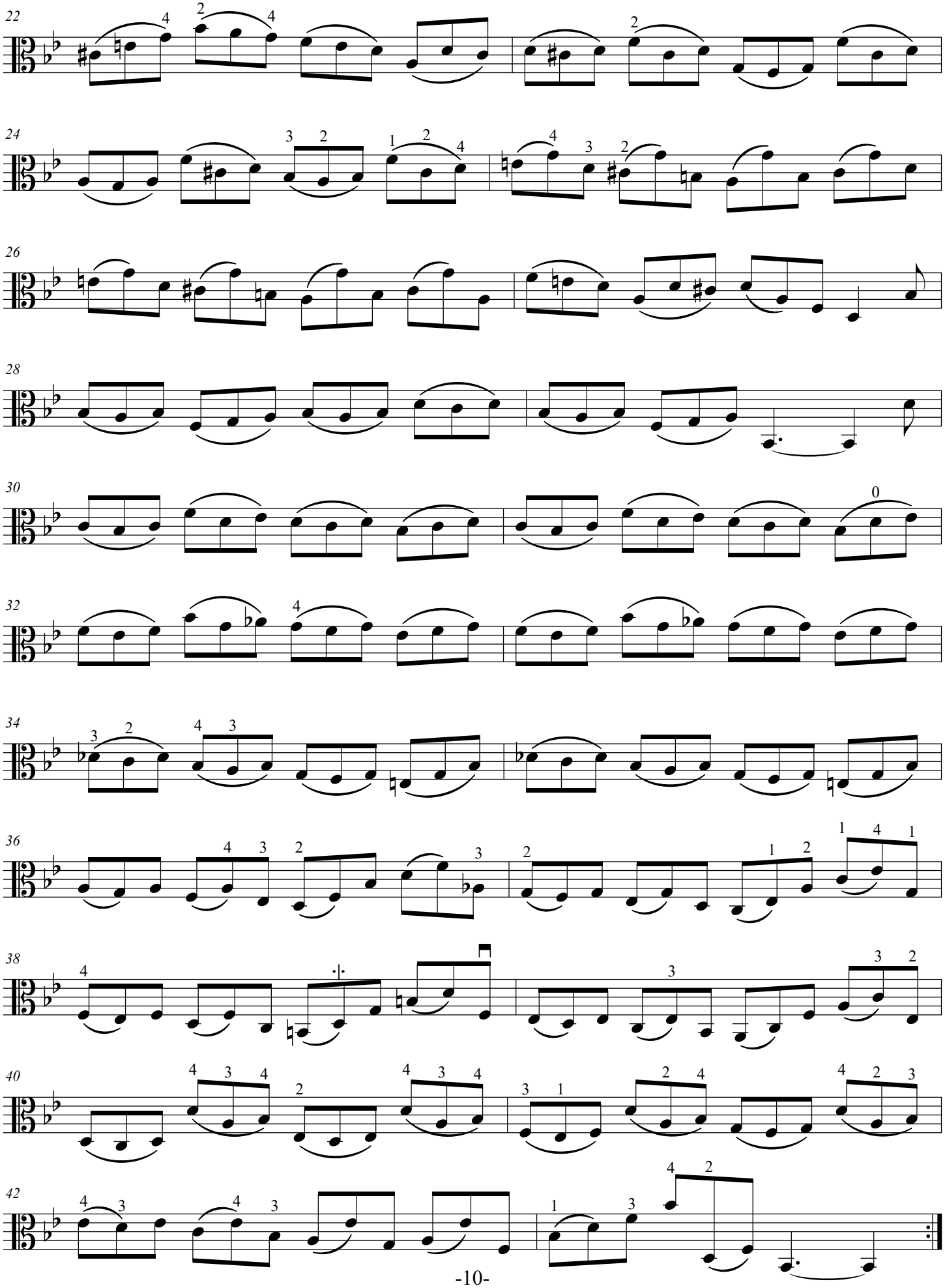


Gigue

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

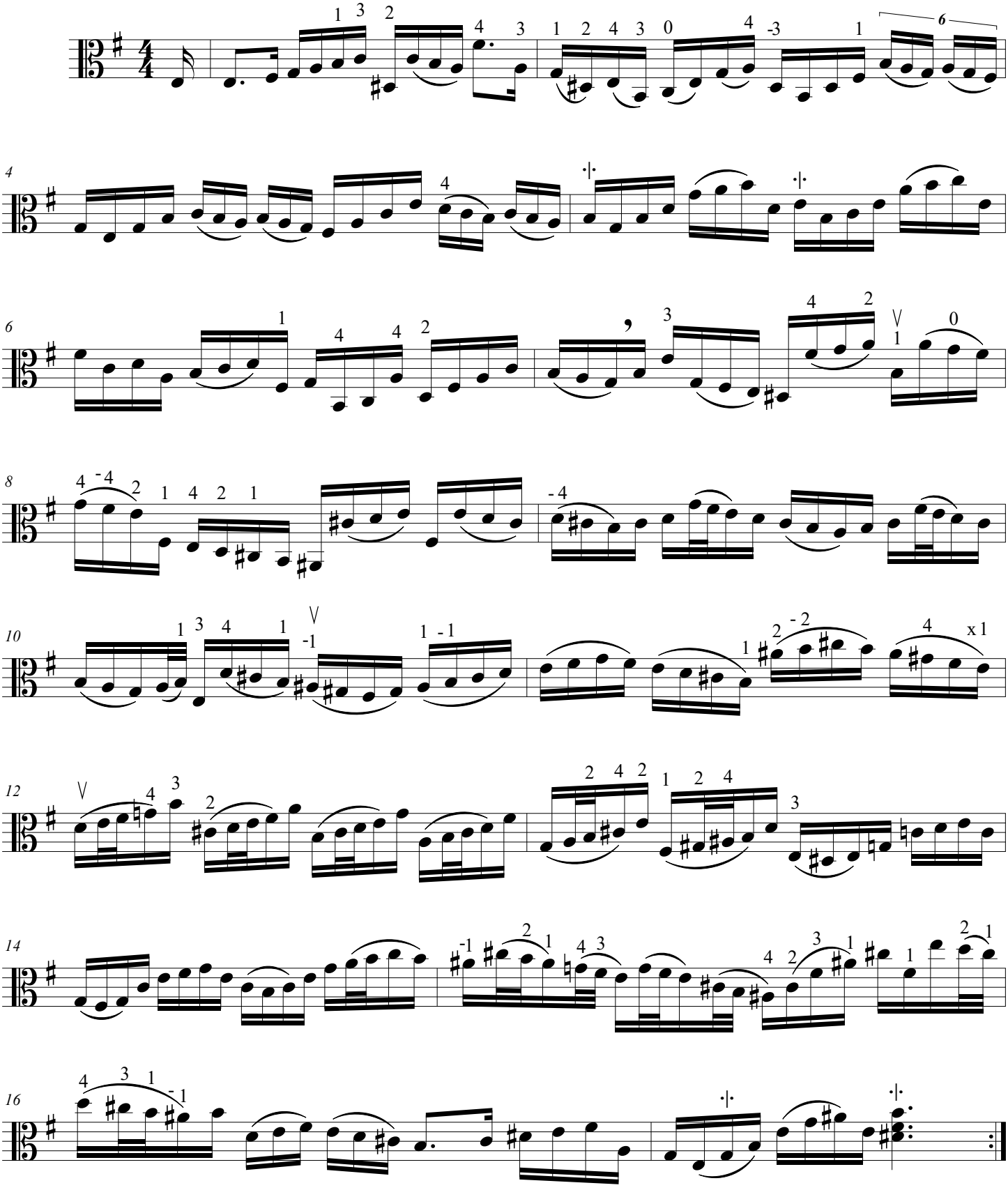


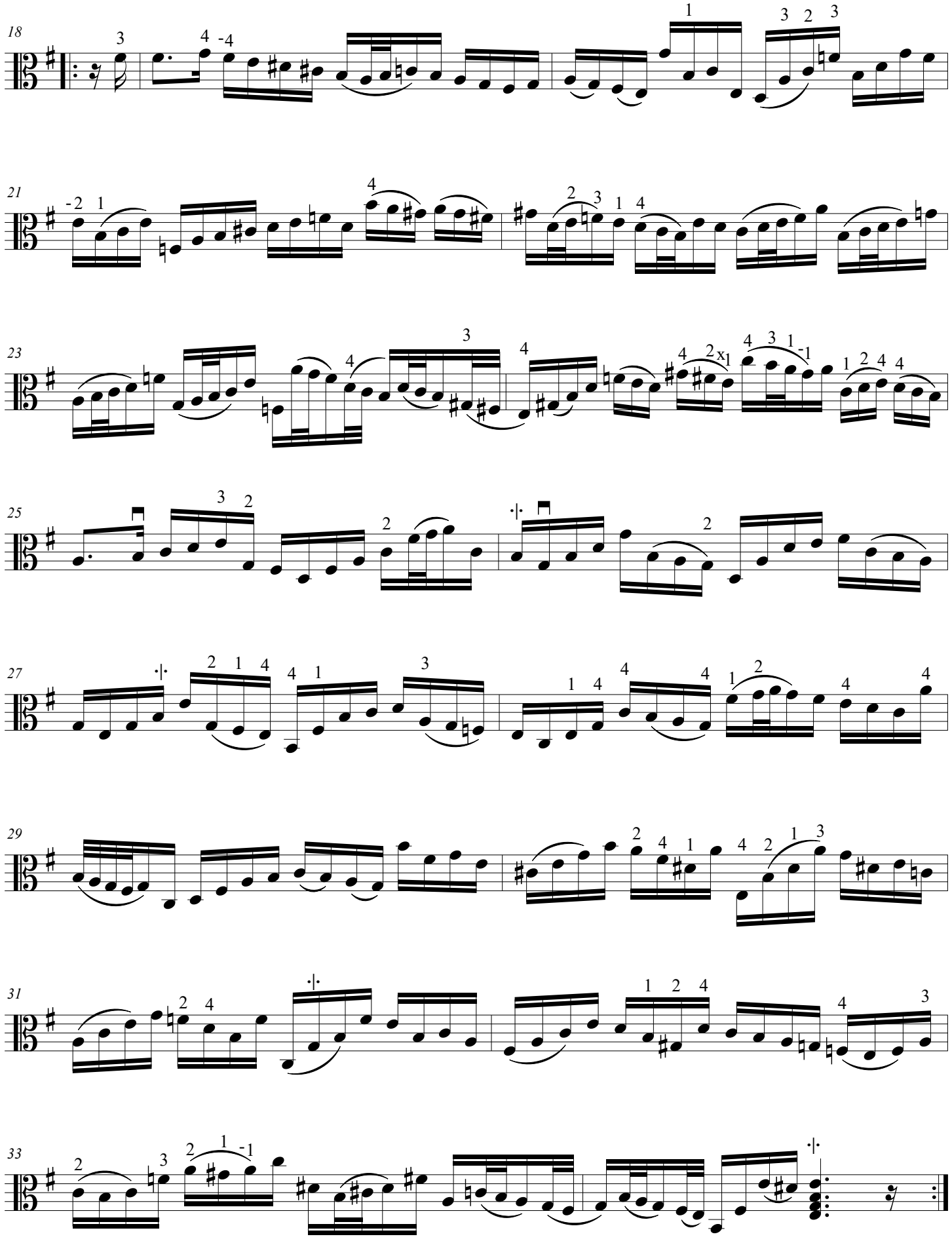


Allemande

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

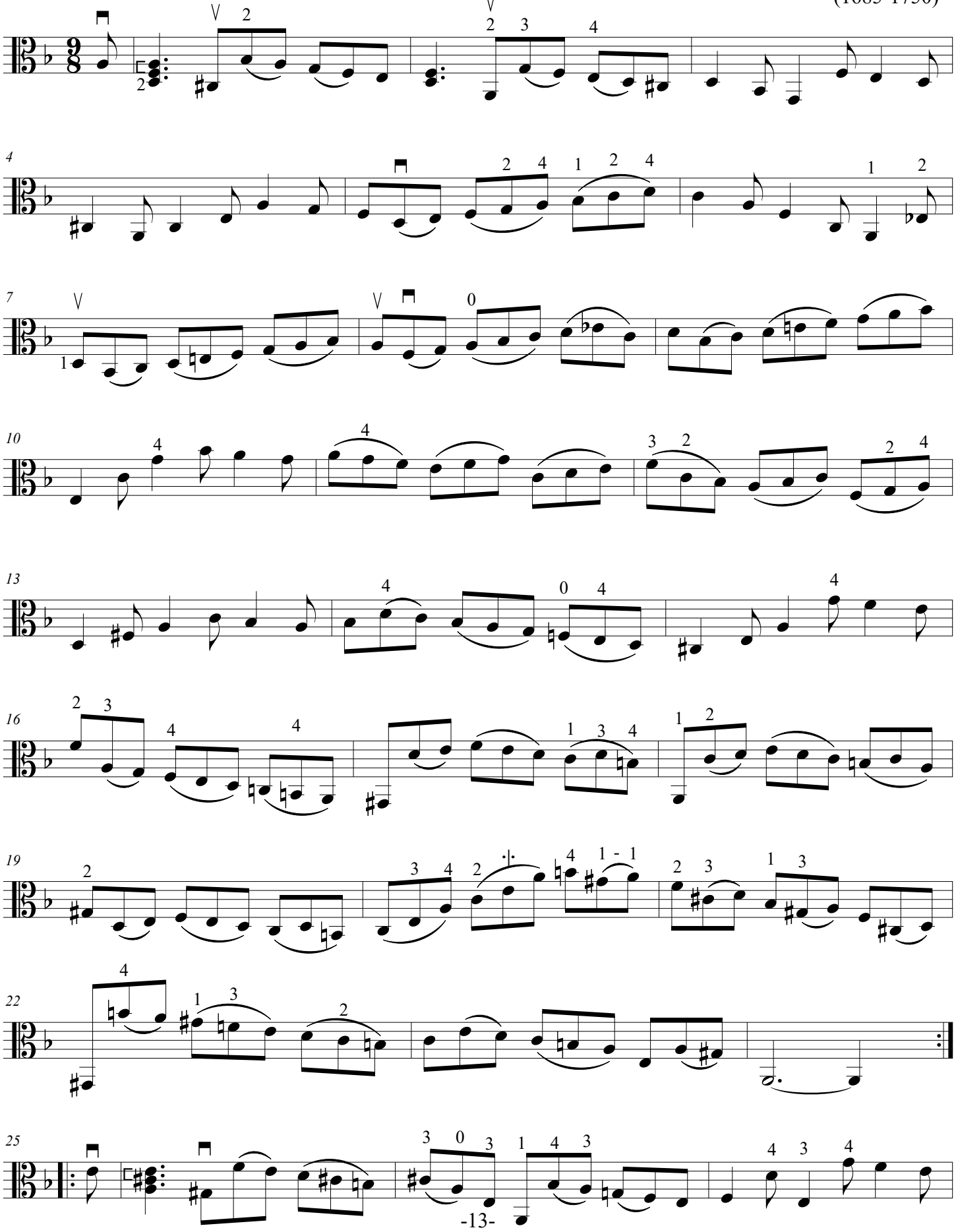


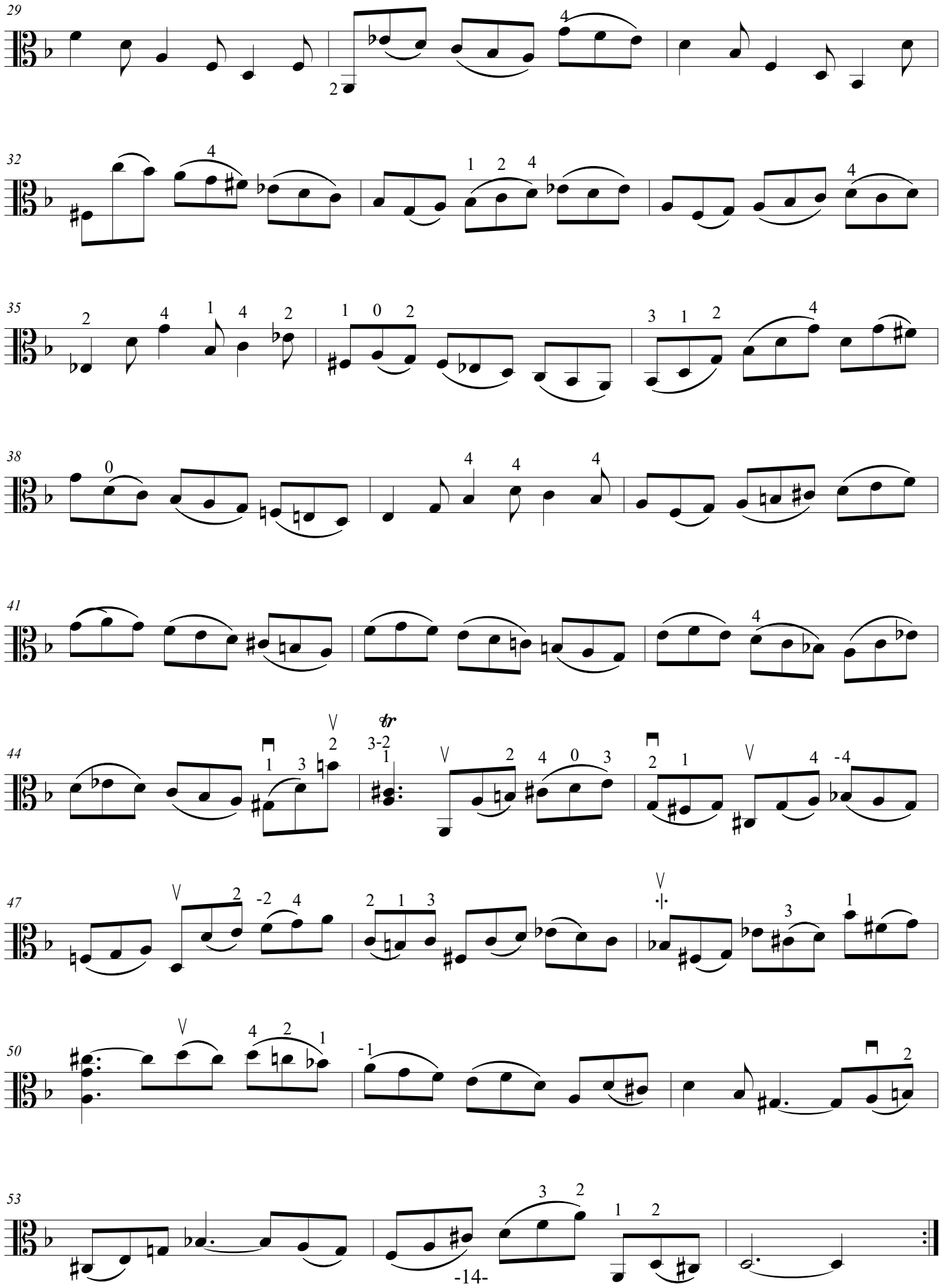


Courante

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

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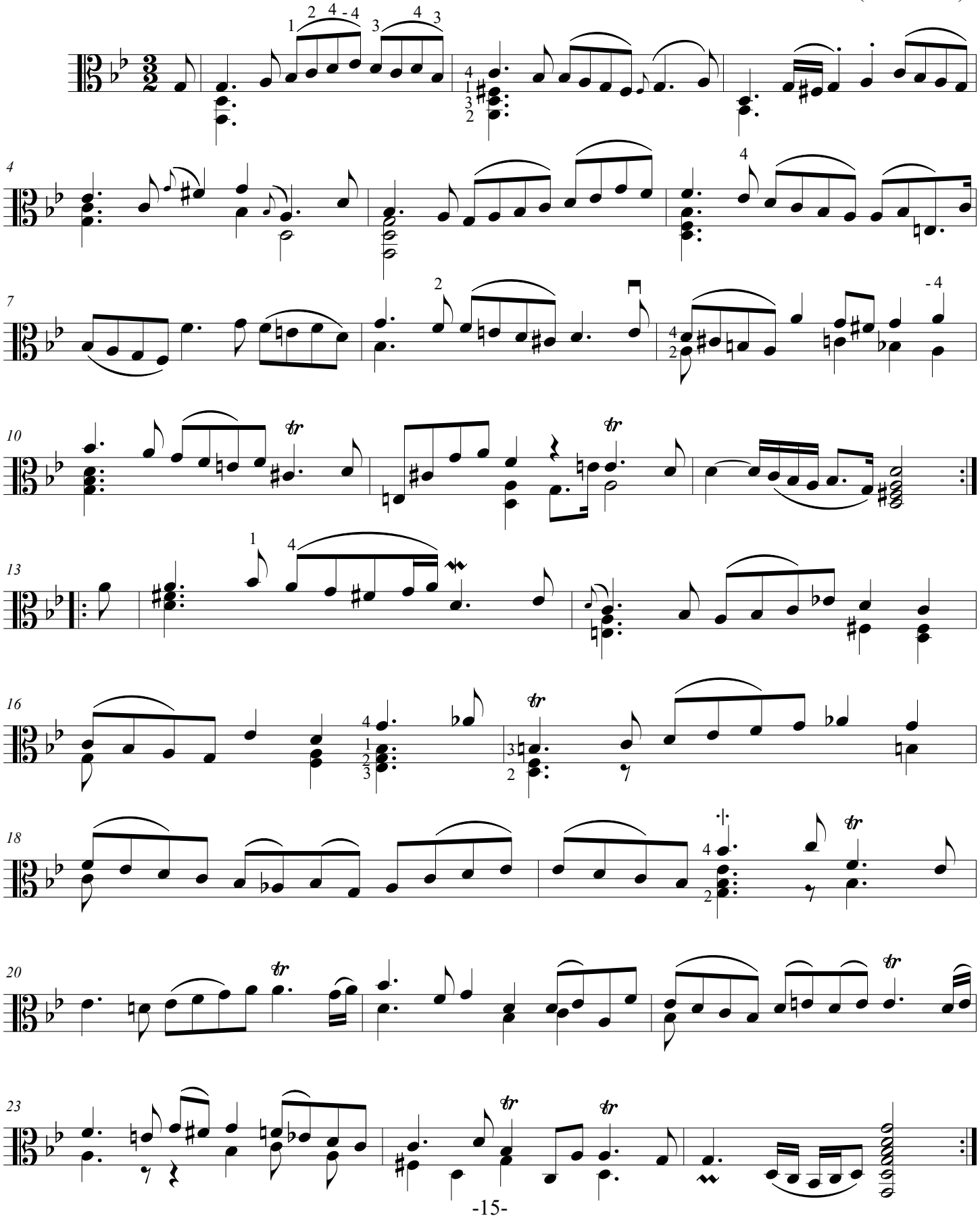
Courante

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

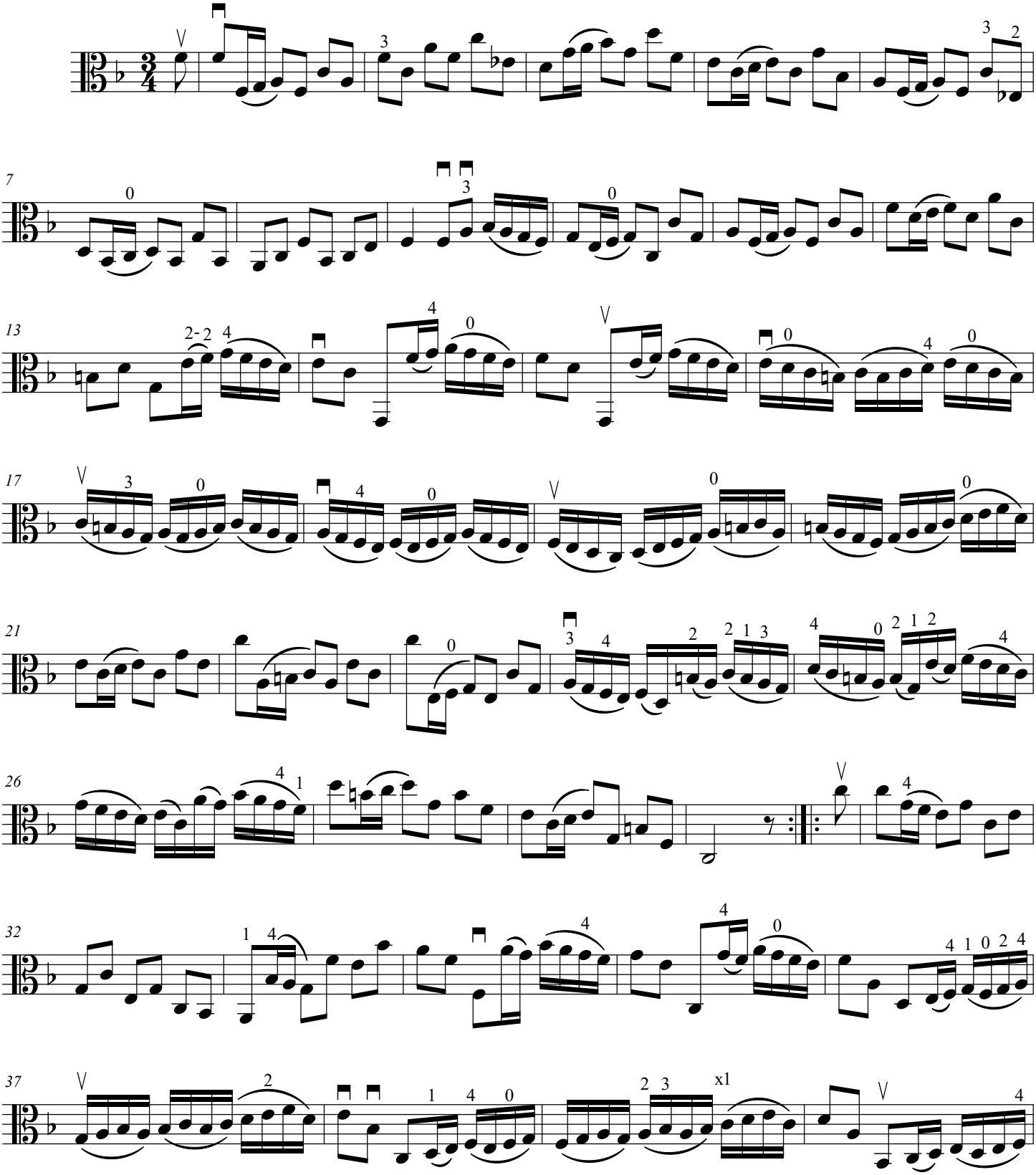
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

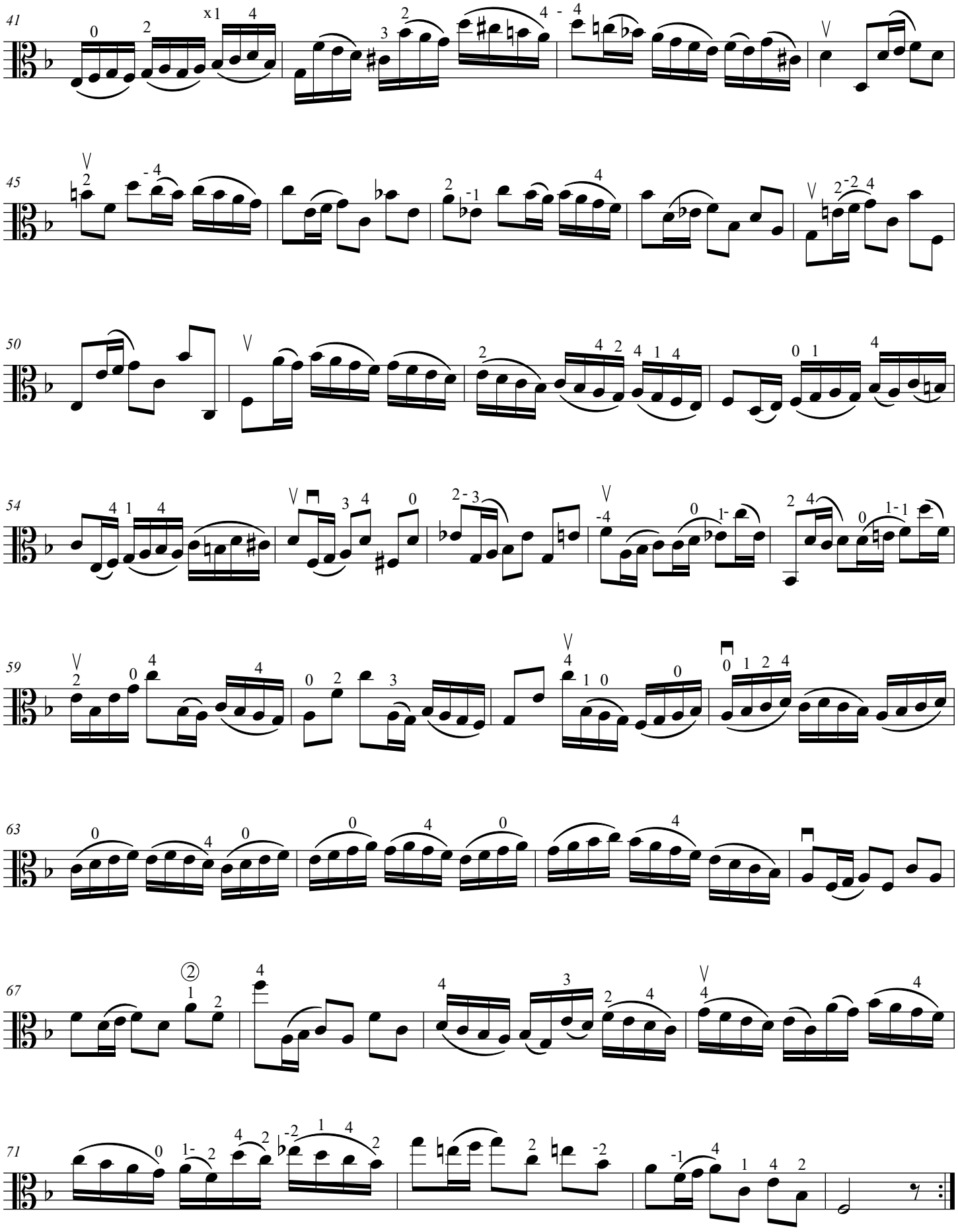


Courante

Cello Suite #6, BWV 1012

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

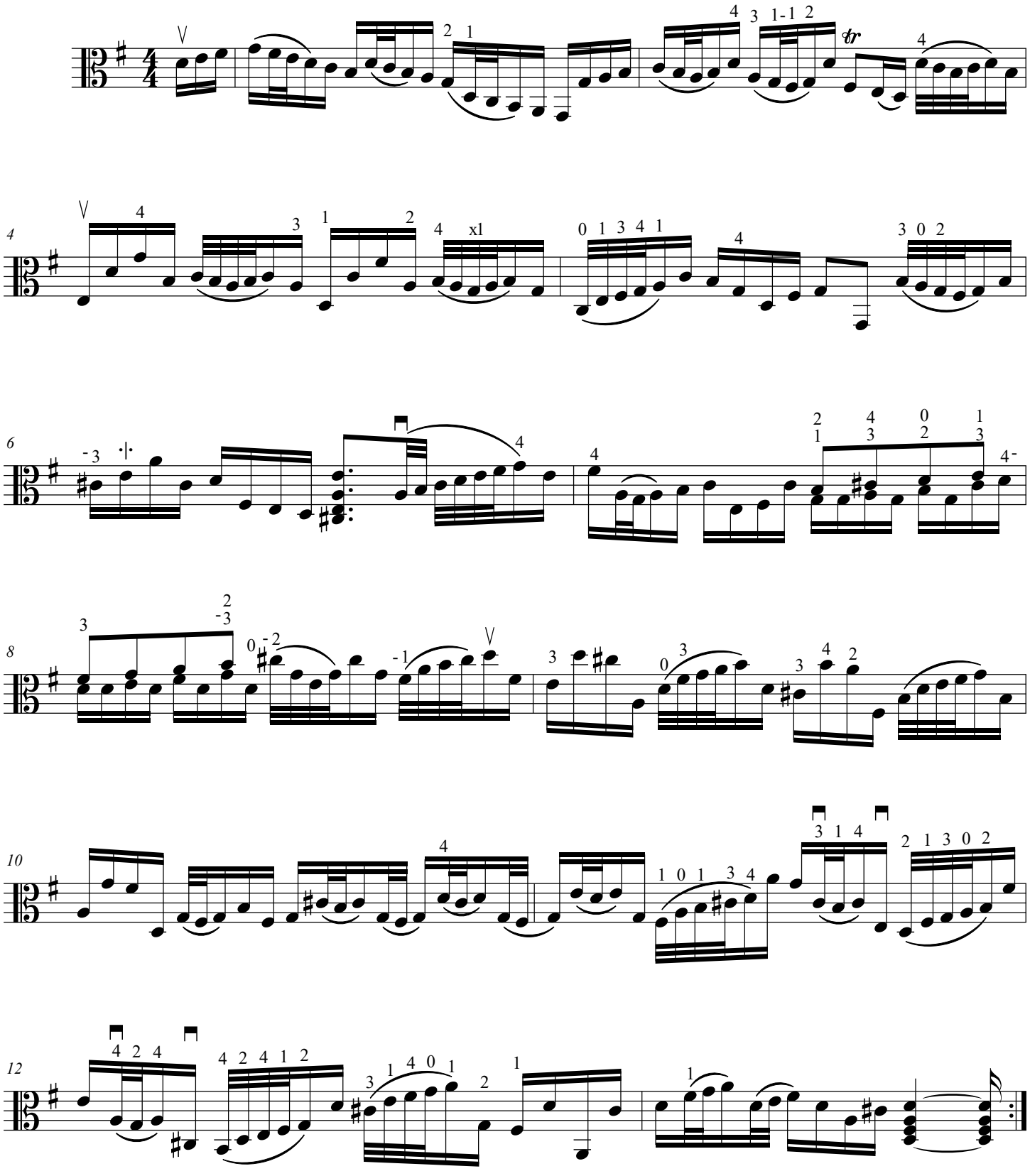


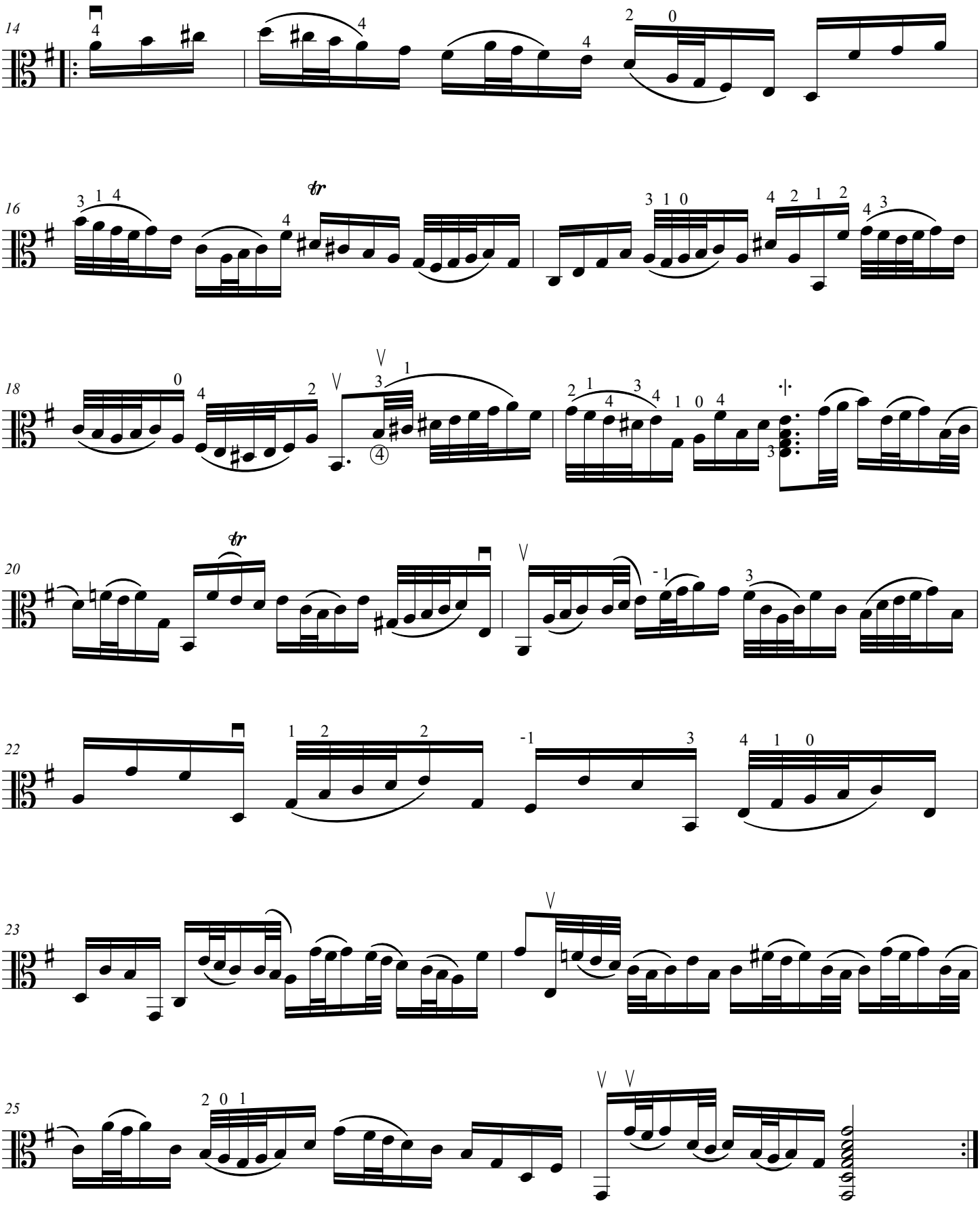


Allemande

Cello Suite No. 3, BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

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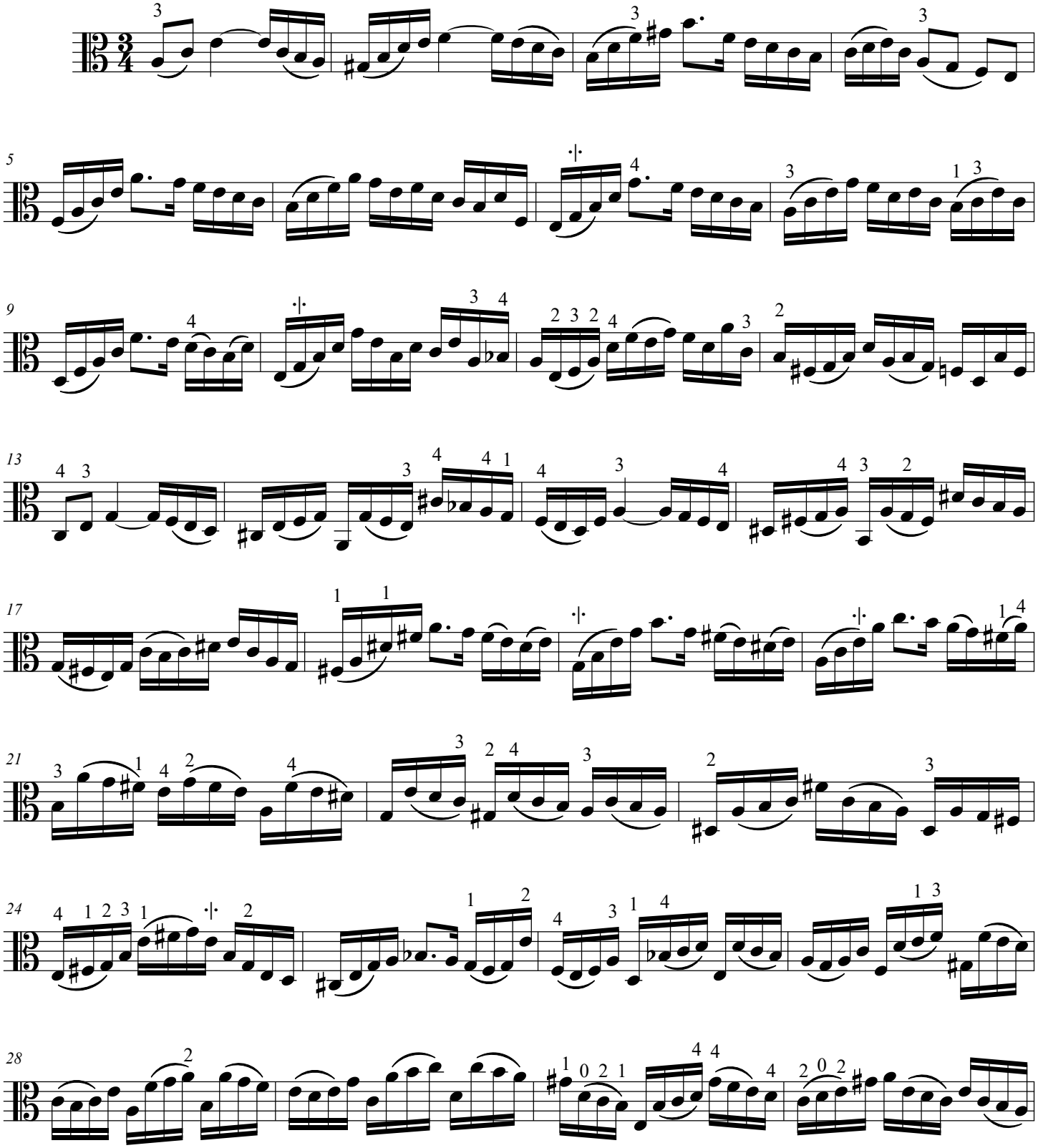
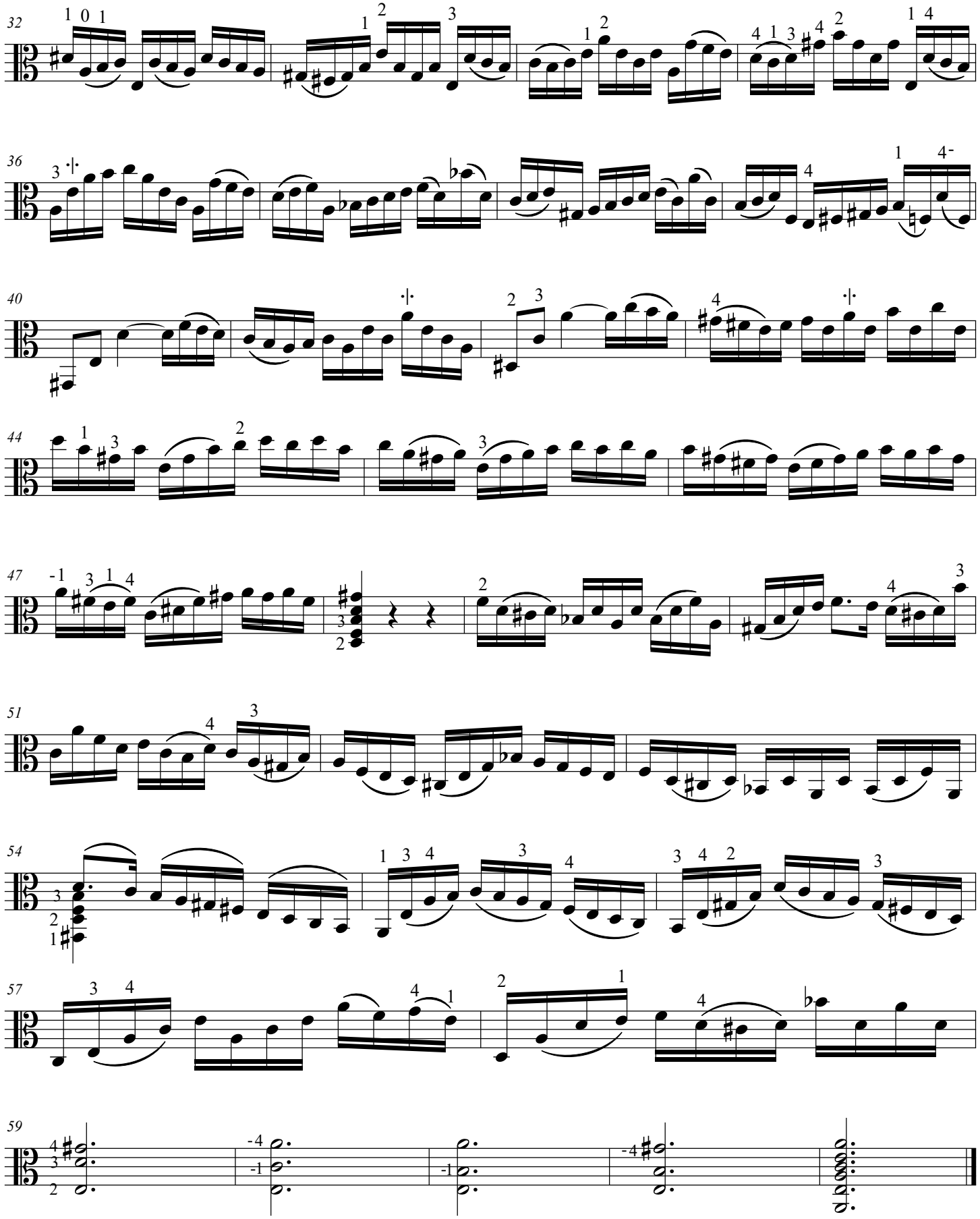
Prélude

Cello Suite No. 2, BWV 1008

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

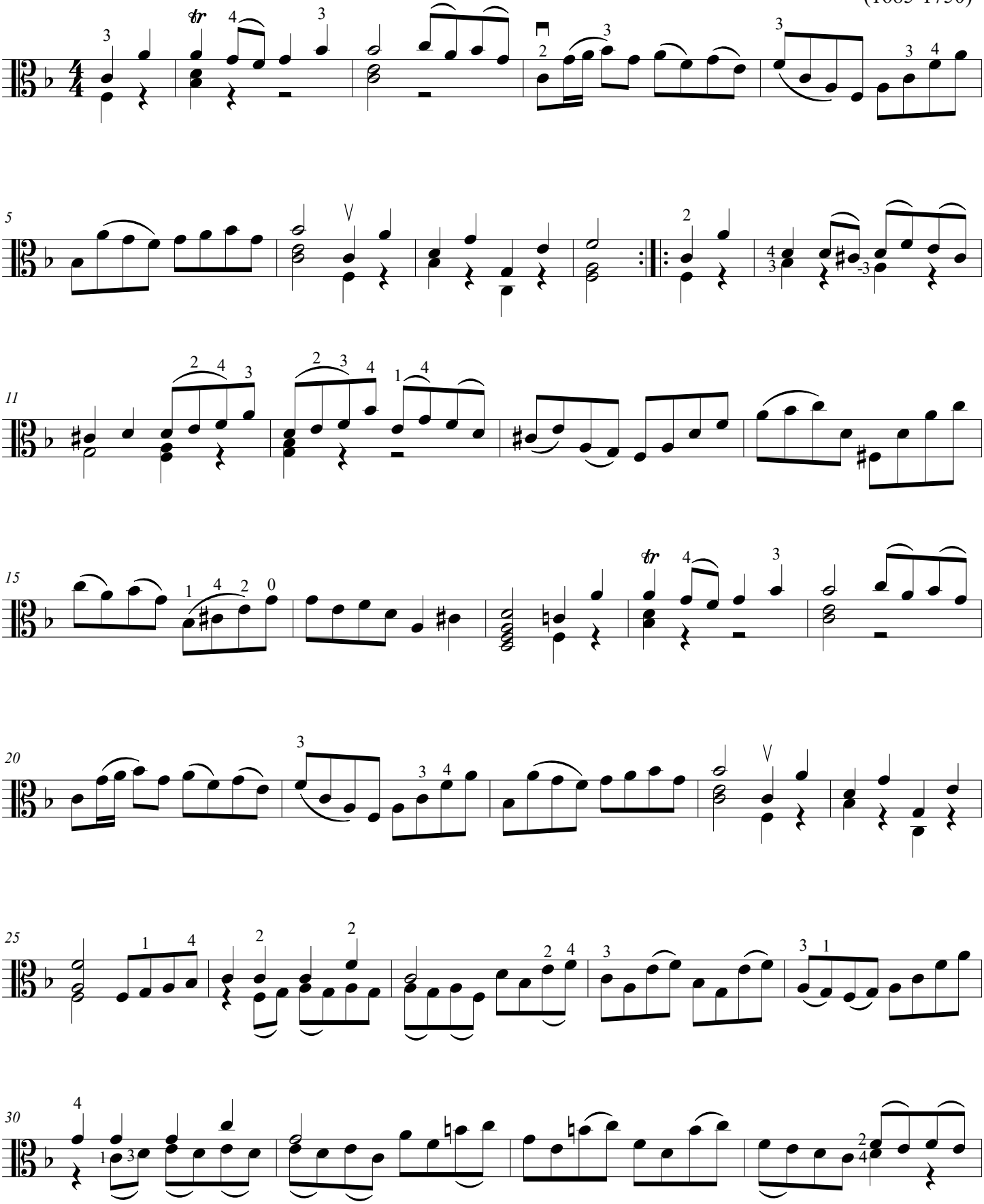


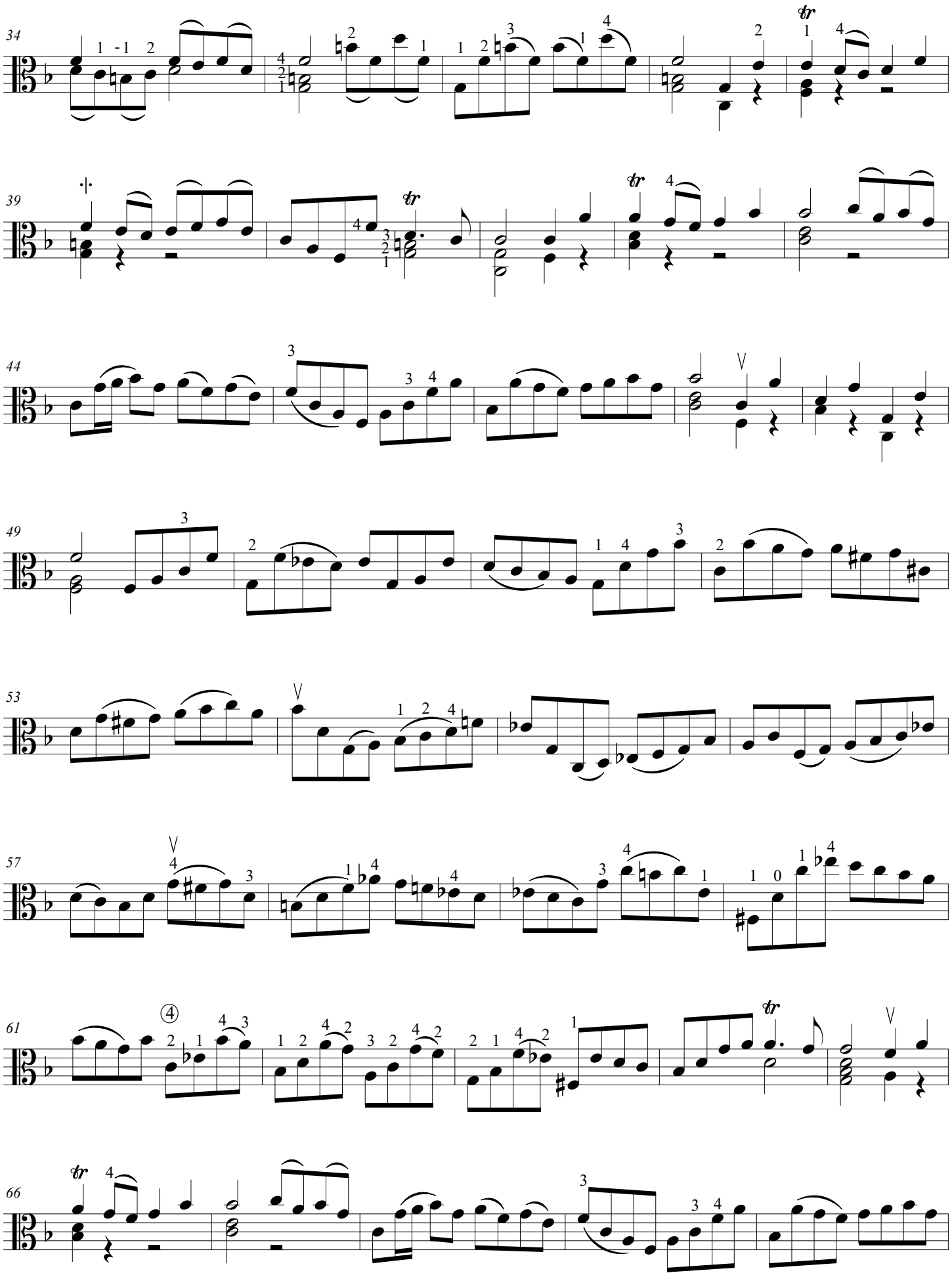


Gavotte en Rondeau

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

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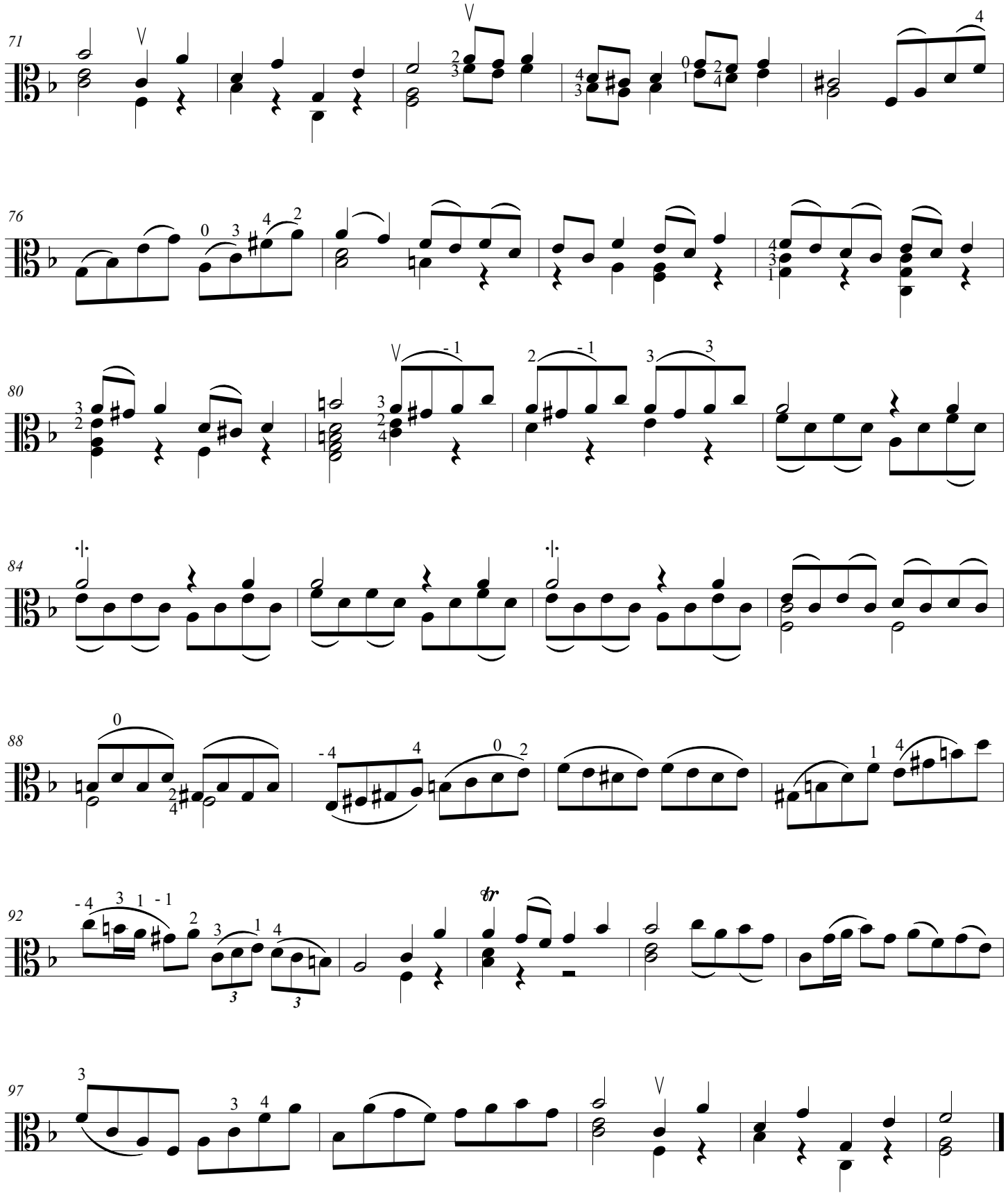
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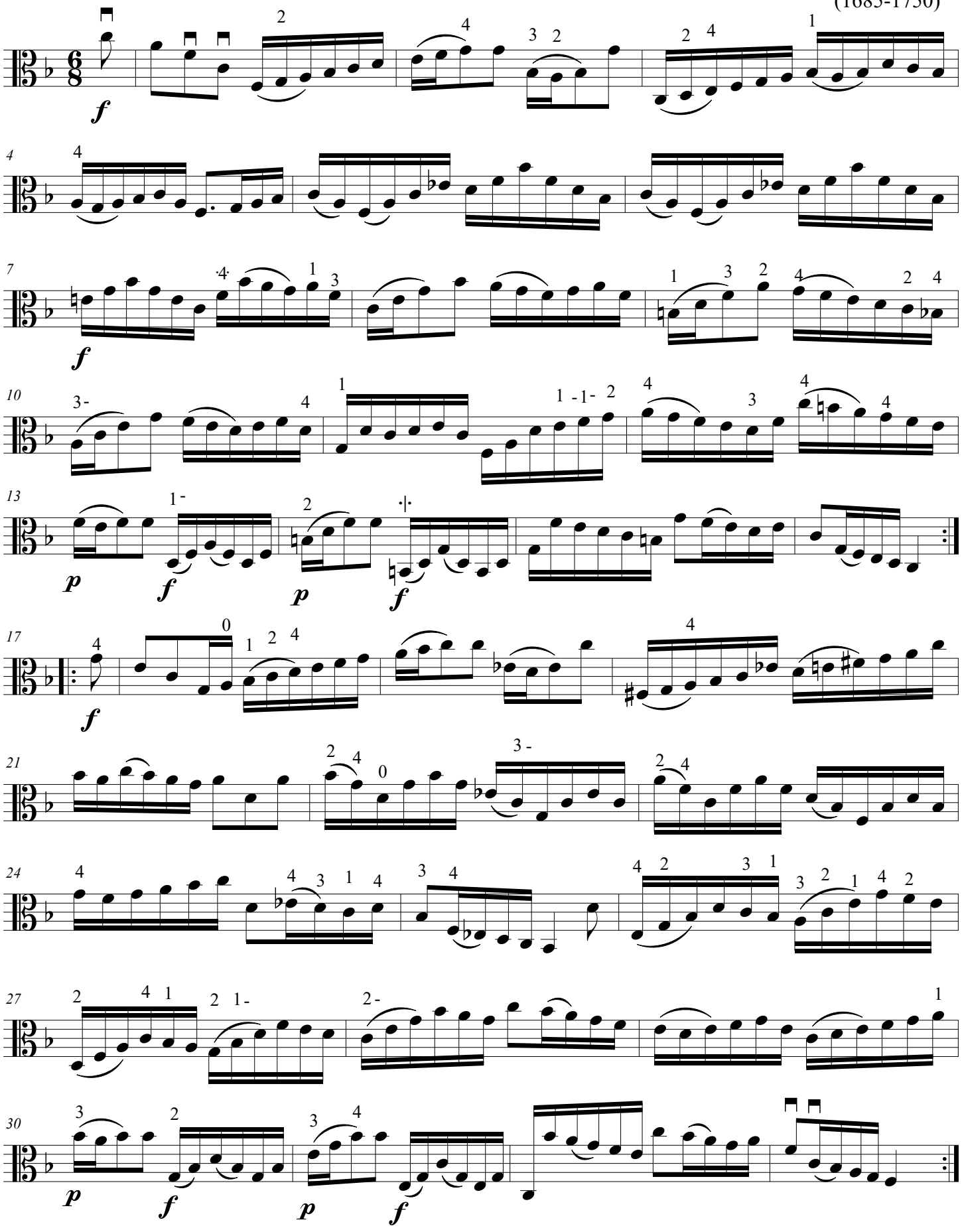
Gigue

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

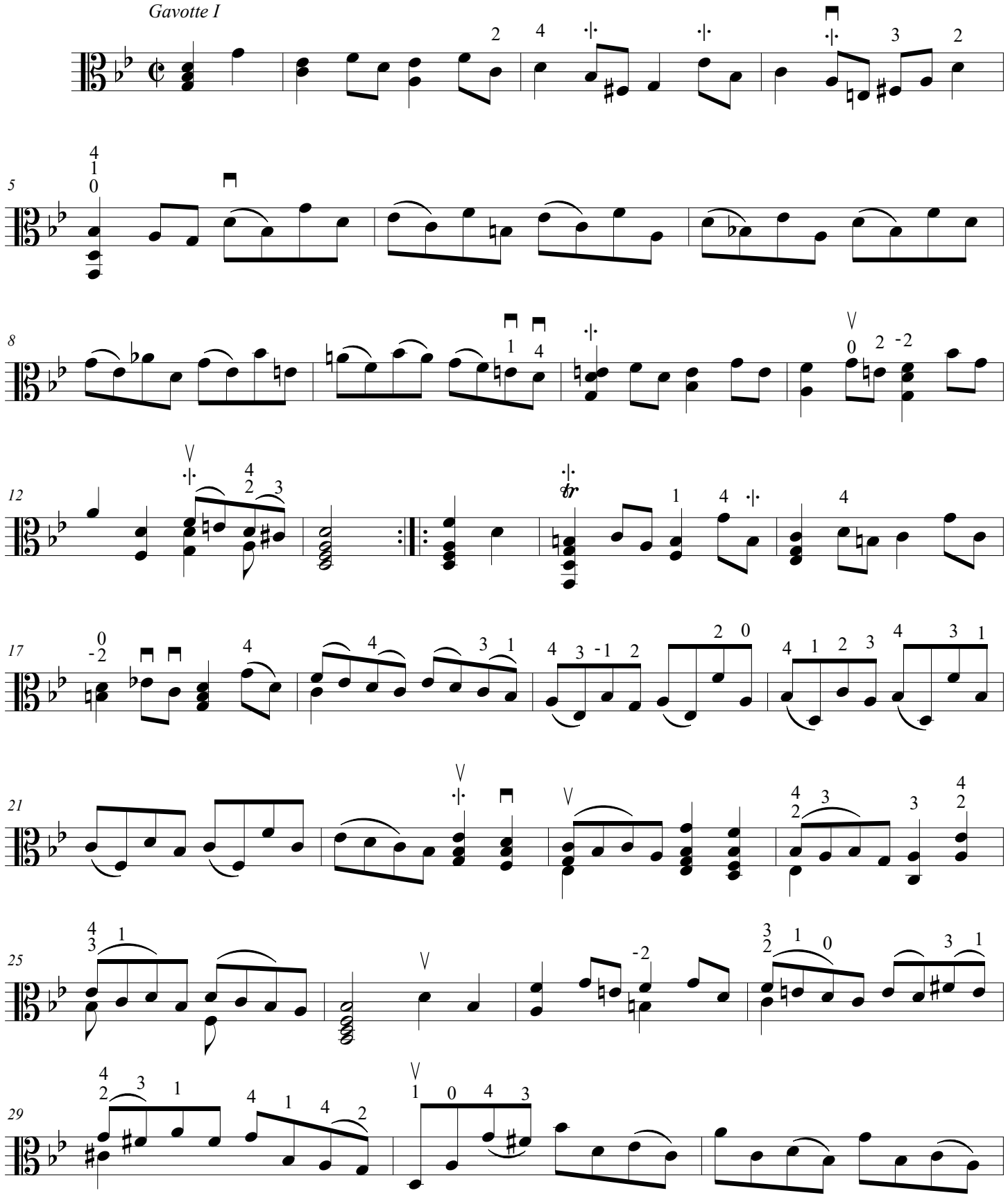


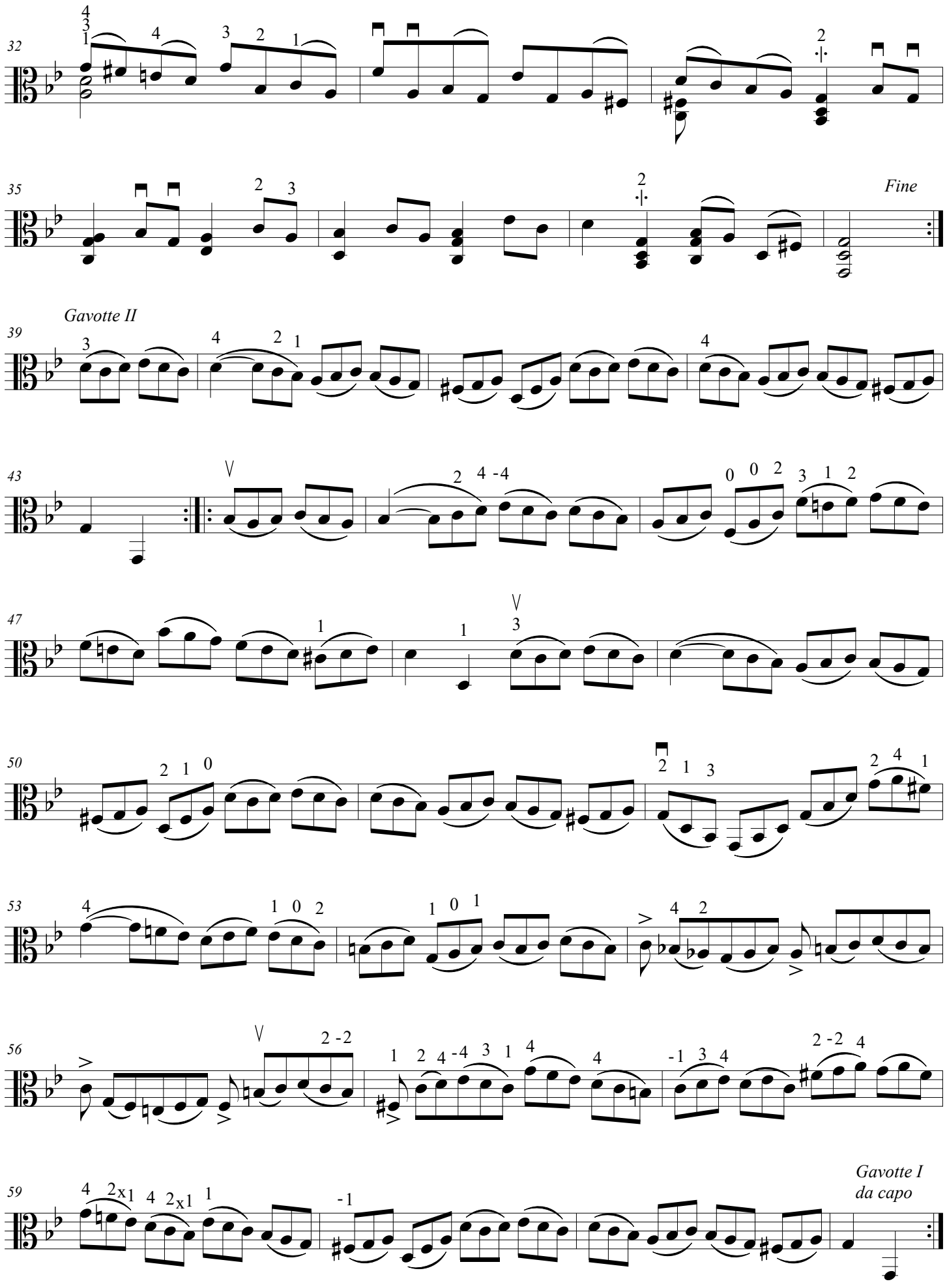
Gavotte I & II

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Gavotte I

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Gavotte II
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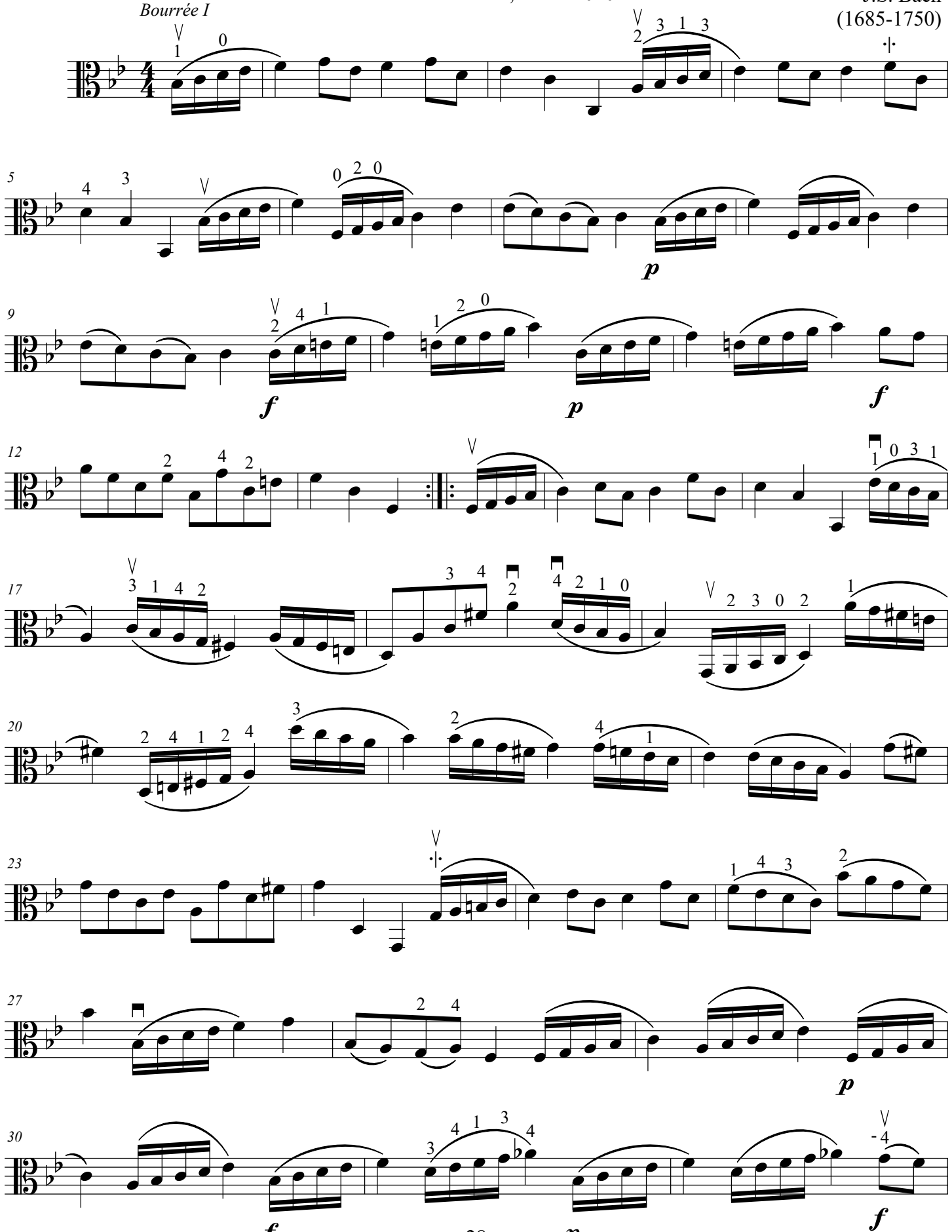
Gavotte I
da capo

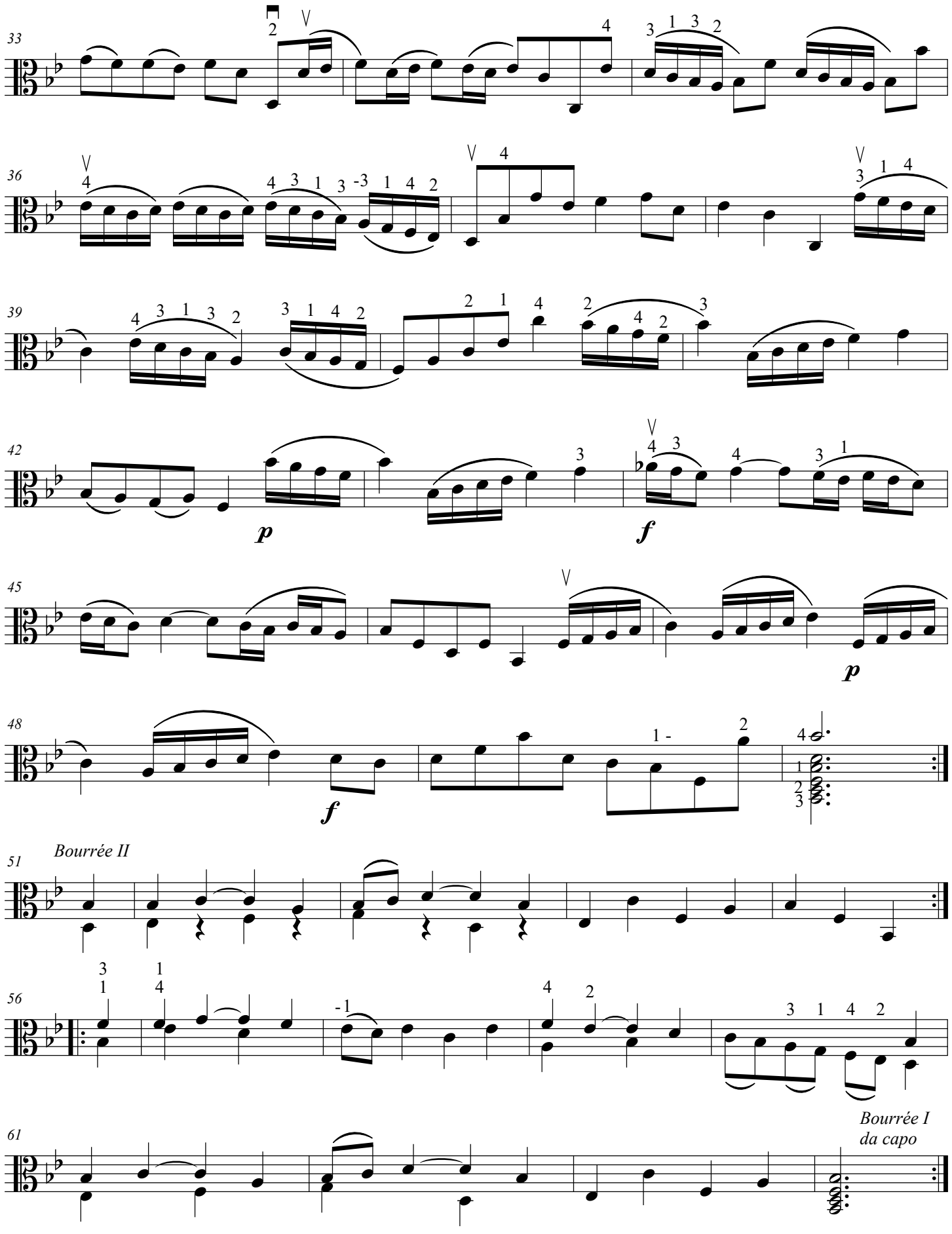
Bourrée I and II

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Bourrée I

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Bourrée II
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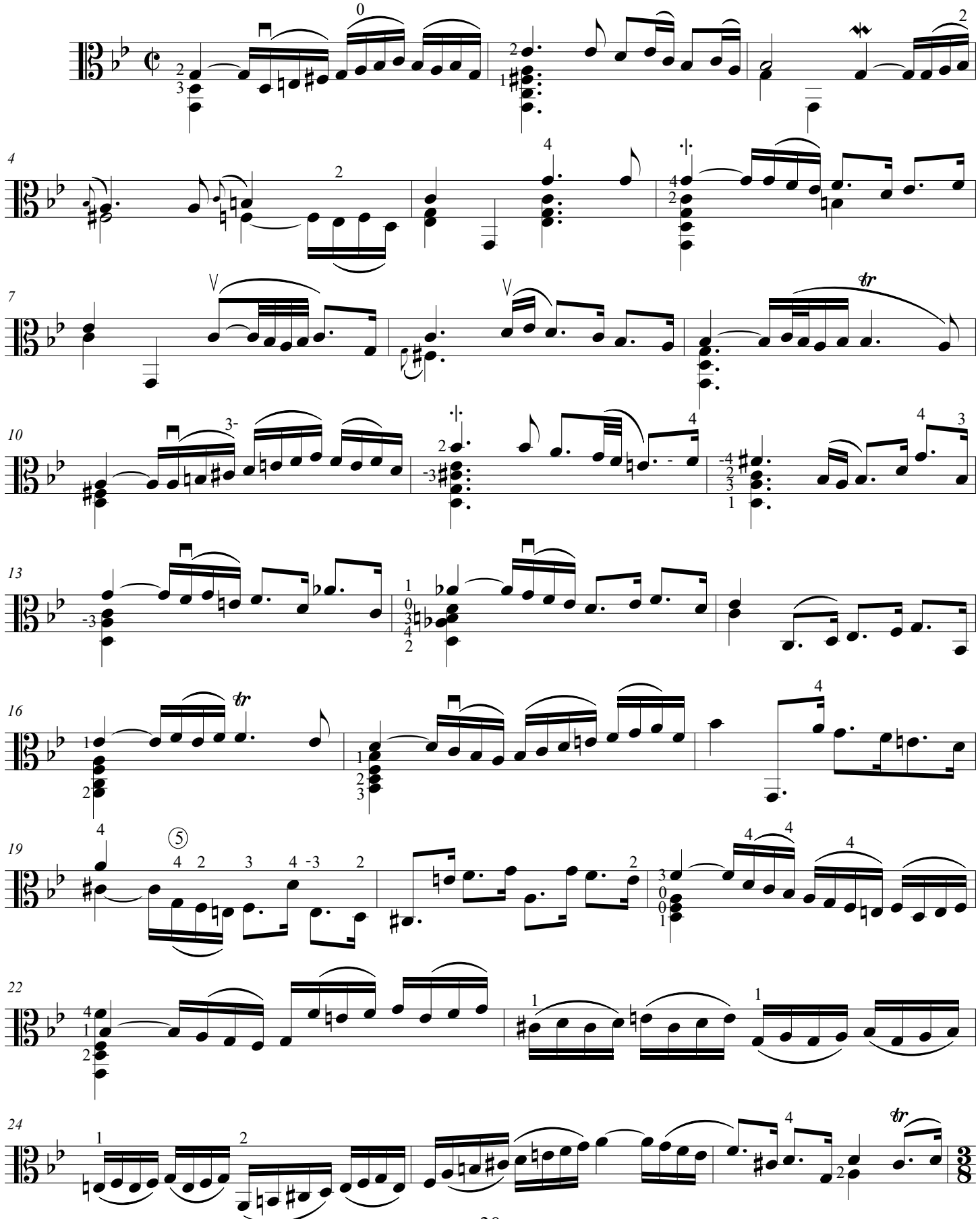
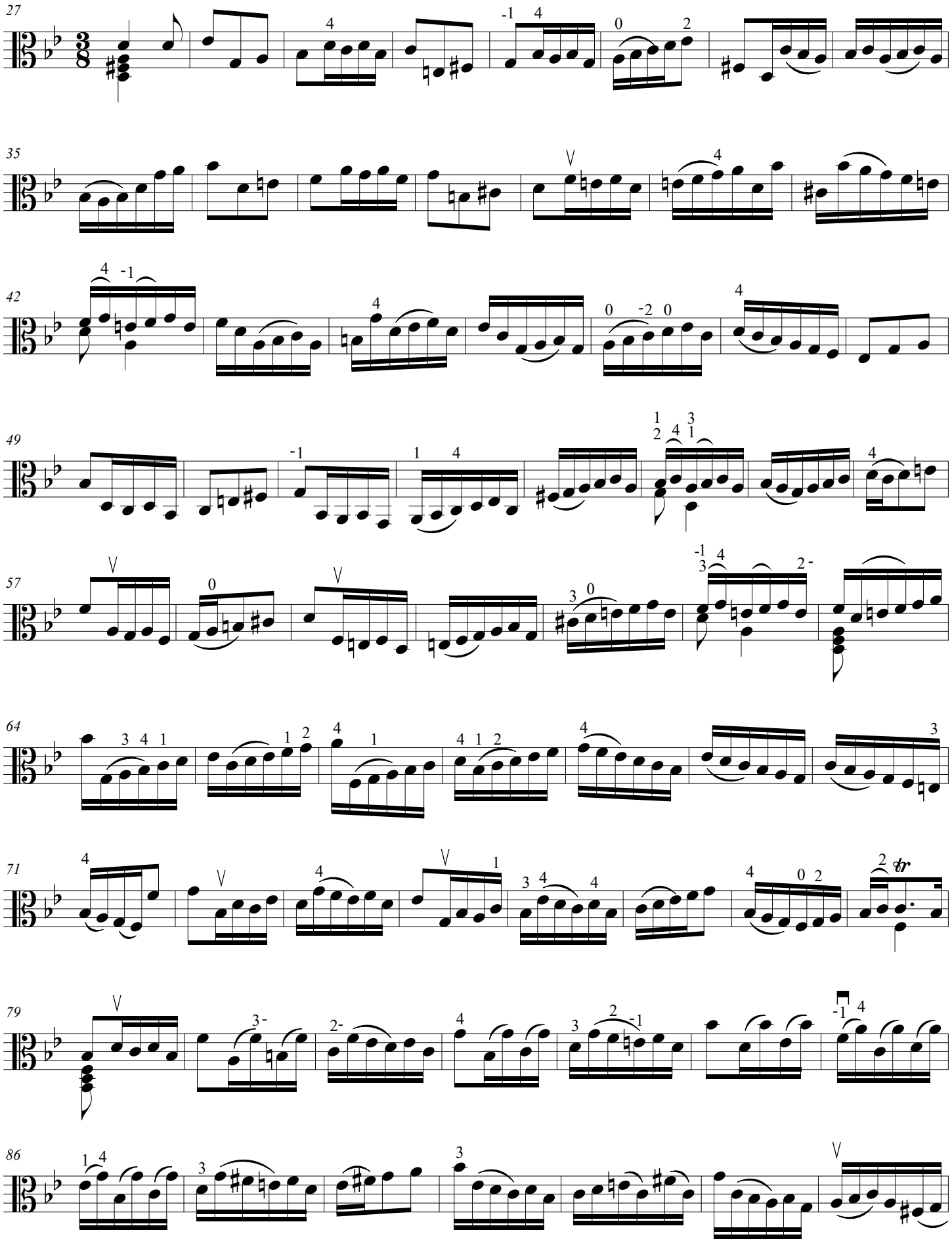
Bourrée I
da capo

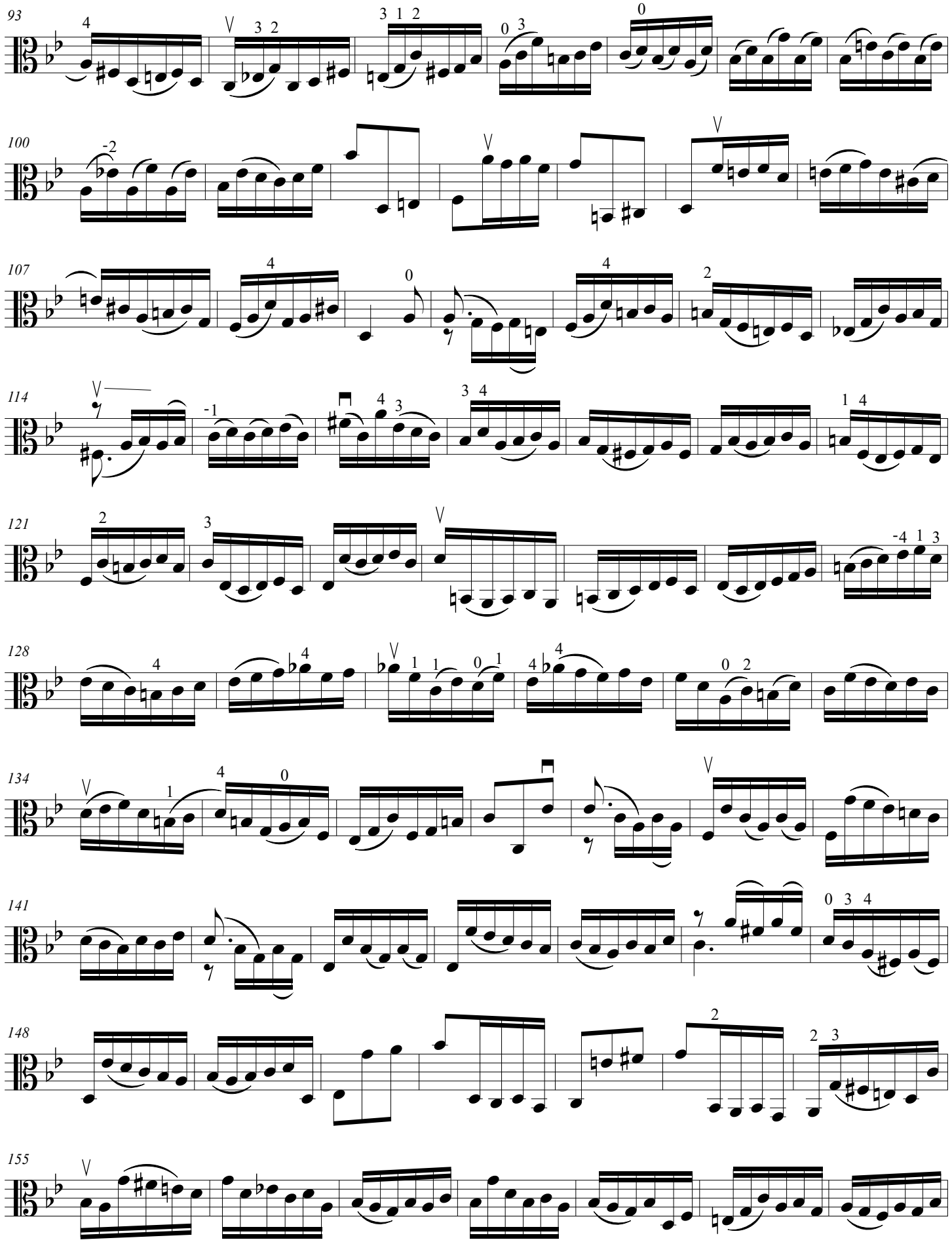
Prelude

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



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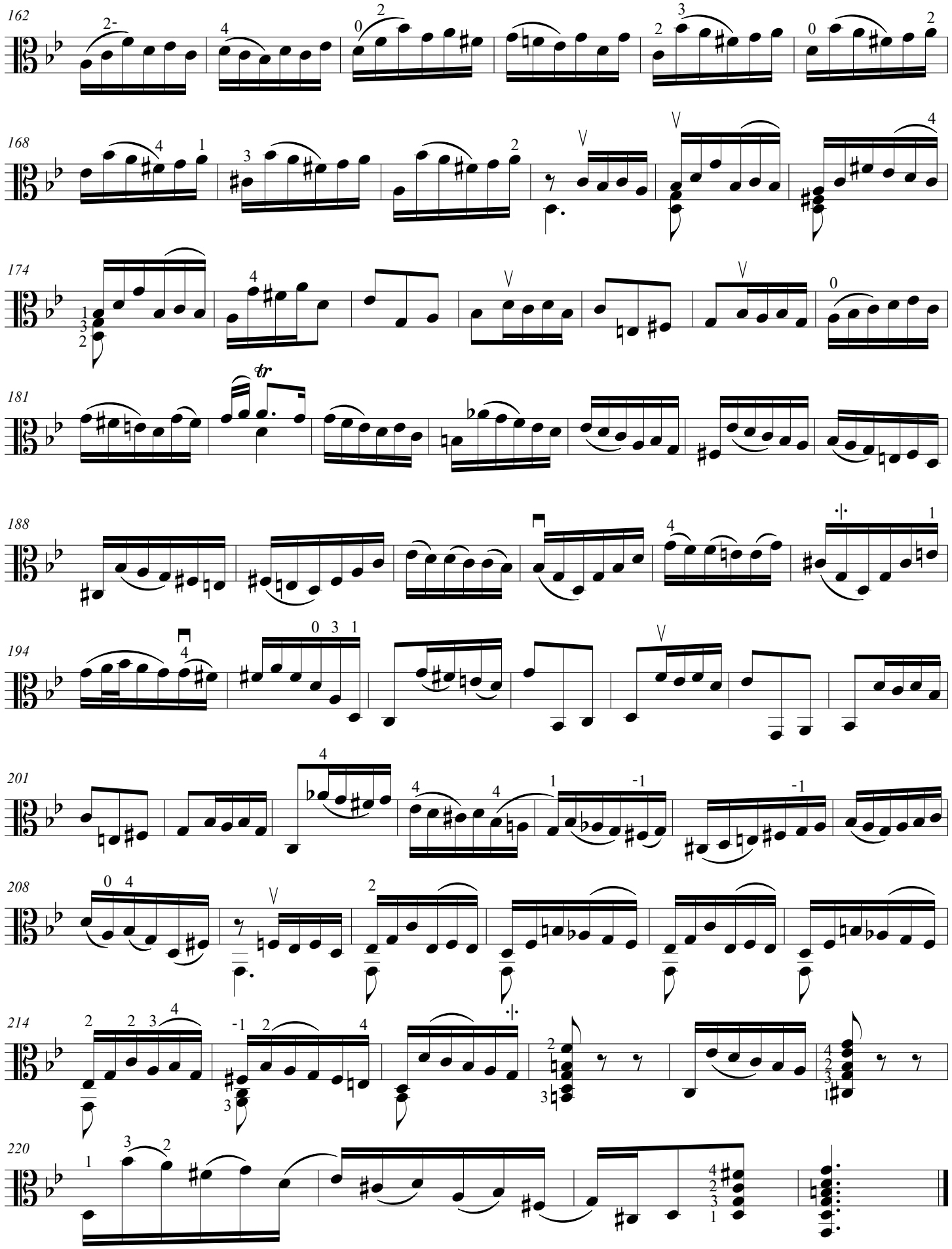
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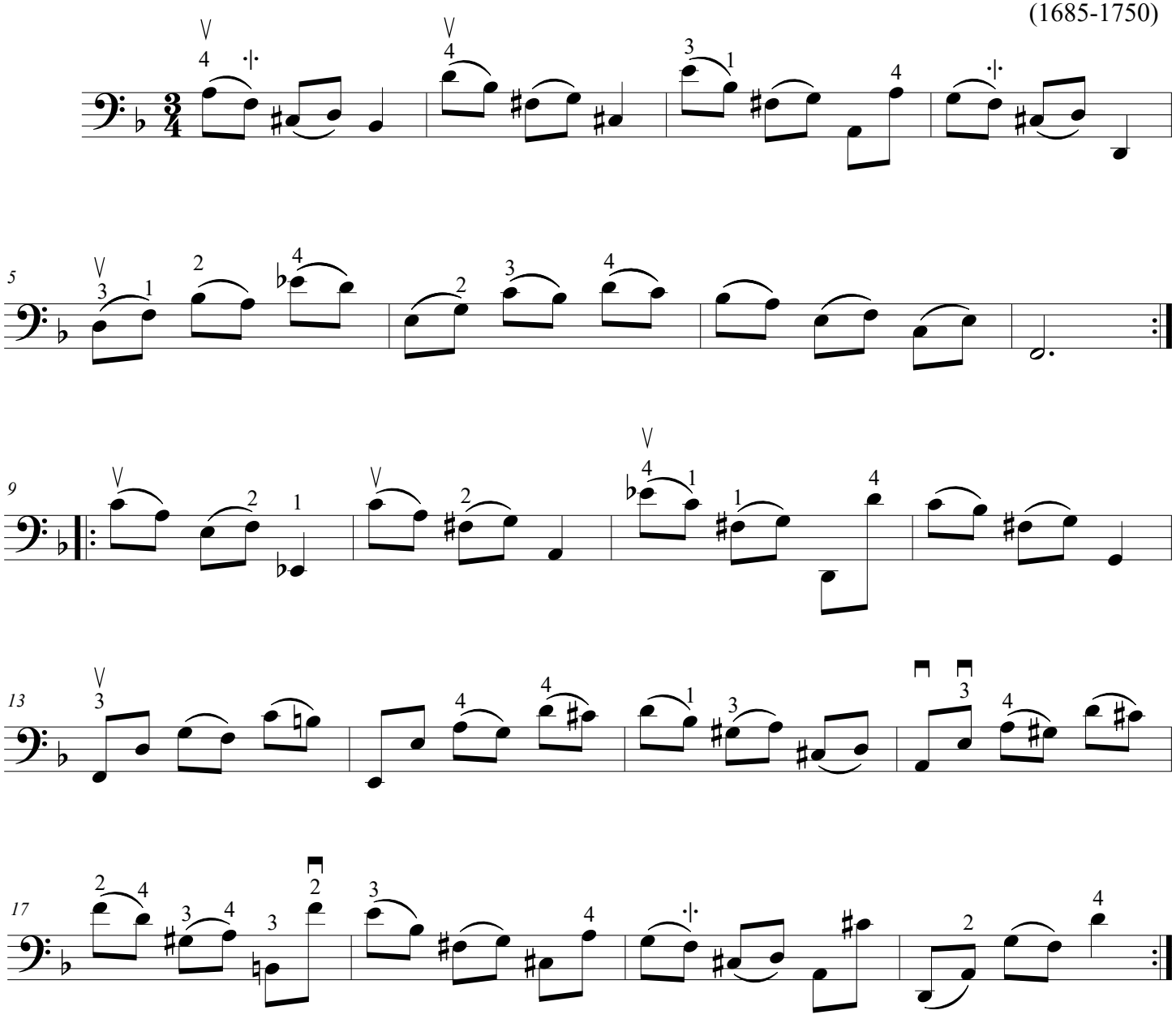
Sarabande

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

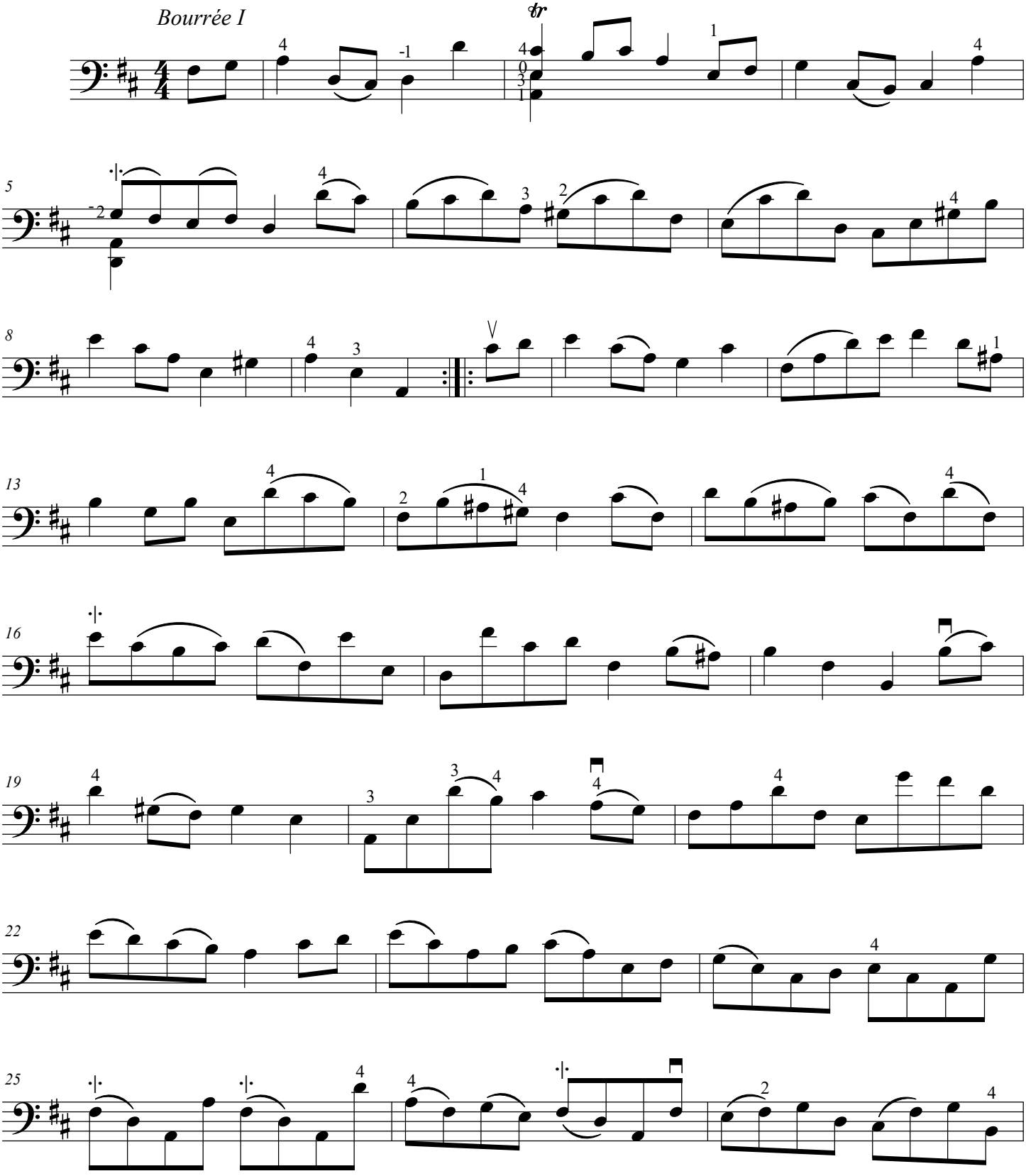
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

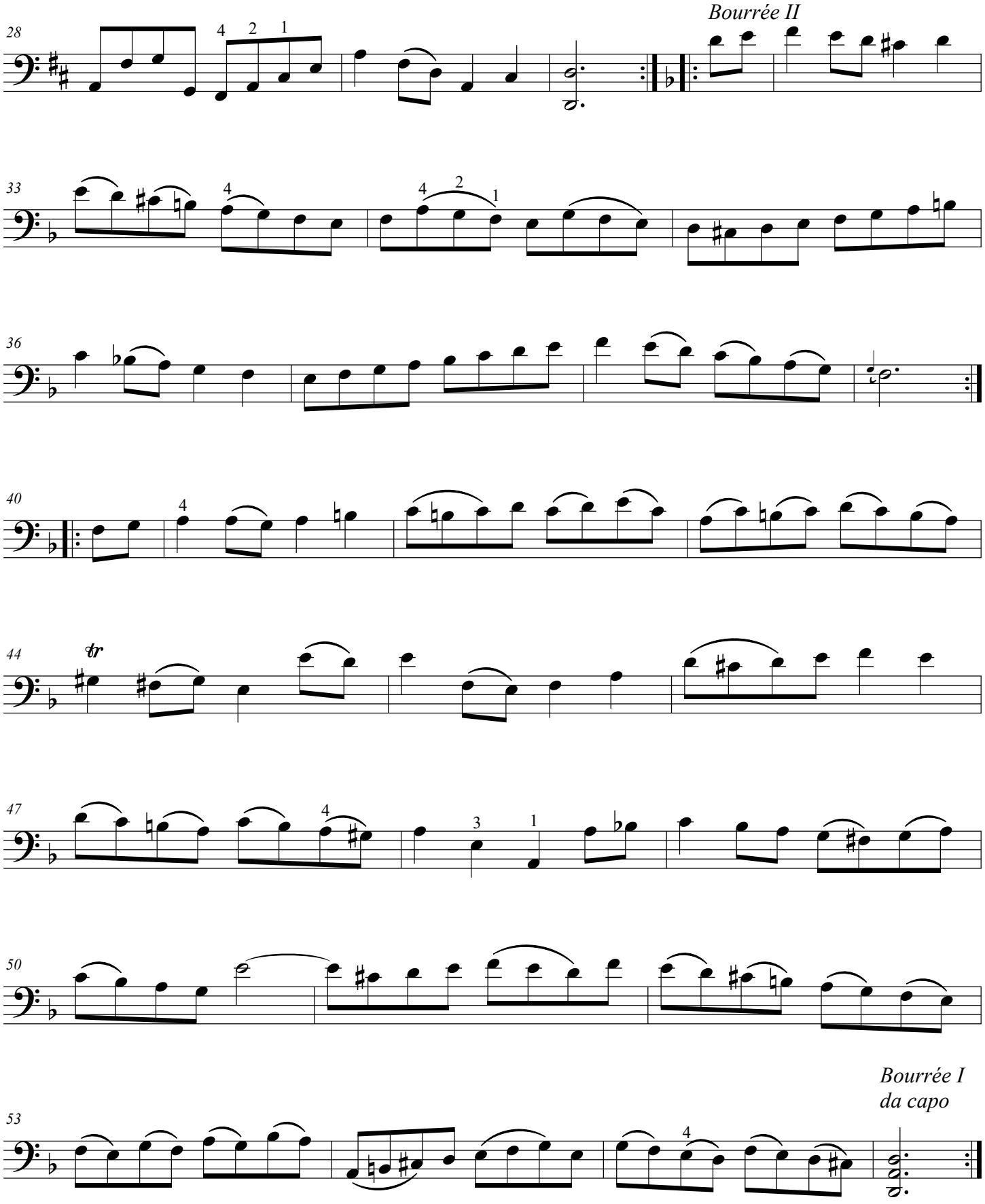


Bourrée I & II

Cello Suite No. 3 BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

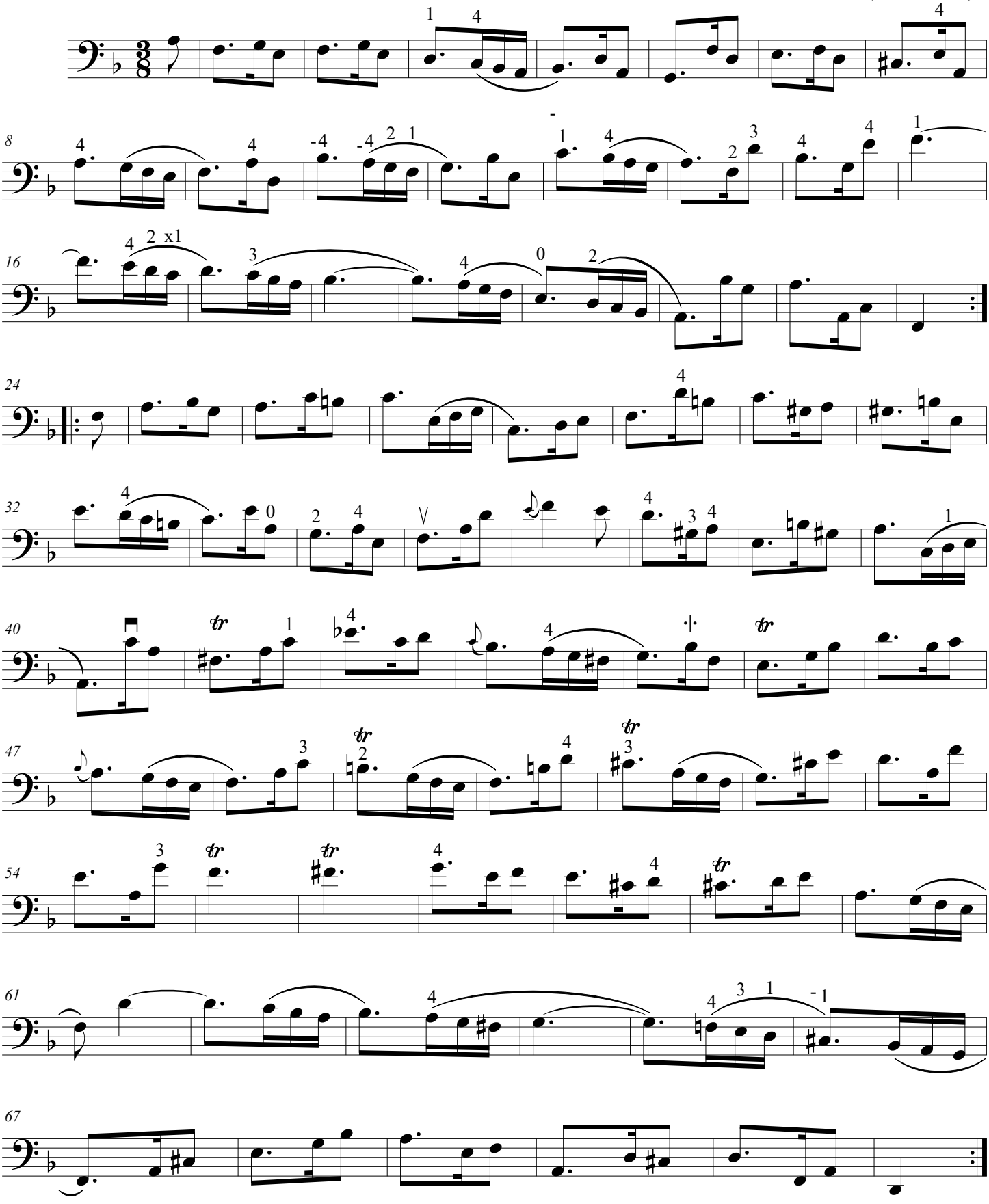



Bourrée II
28
33
36
40
44
47
50
Bourrée I
da capo
53

Gigue

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

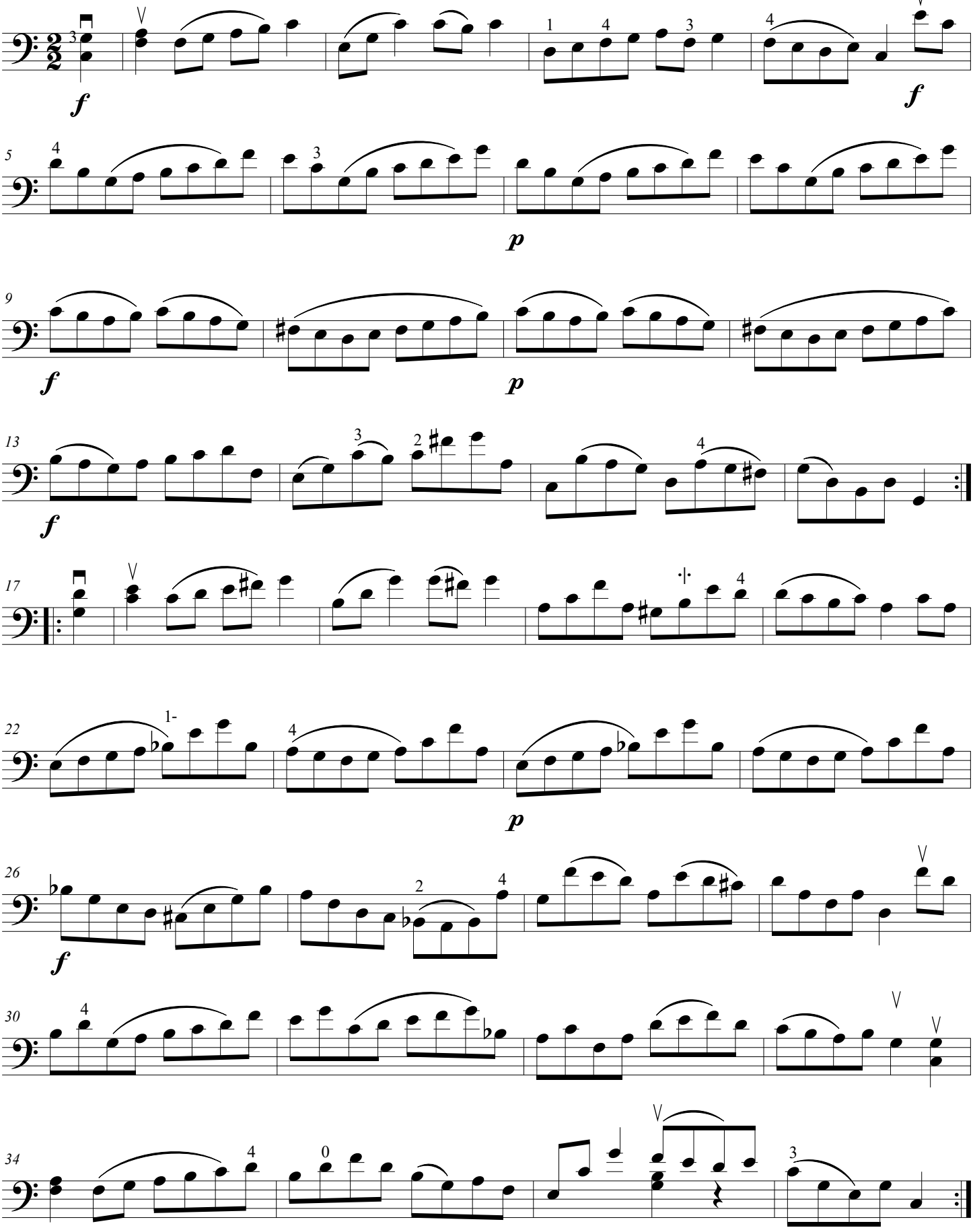
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Bourrée

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

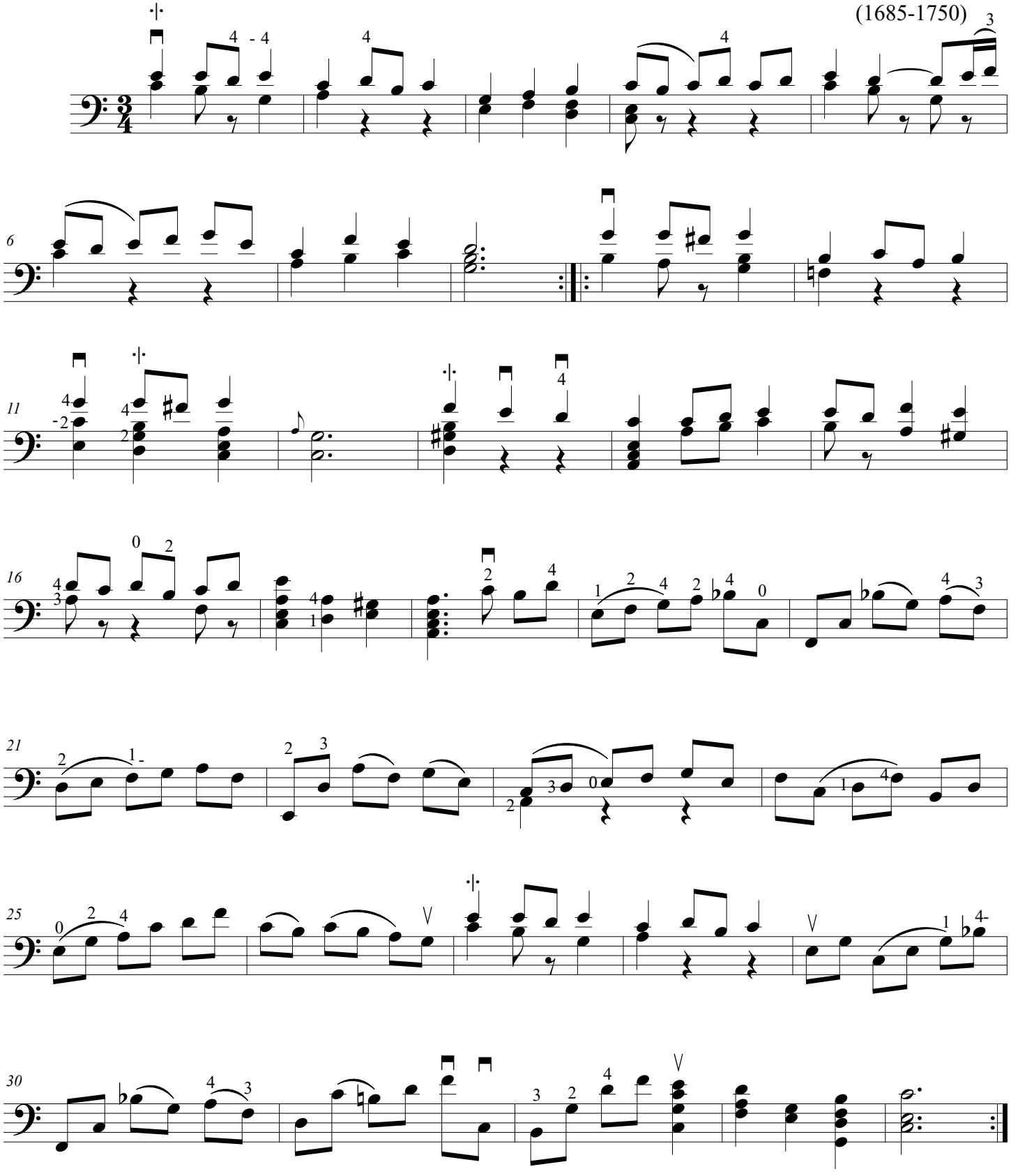
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Menuet I

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

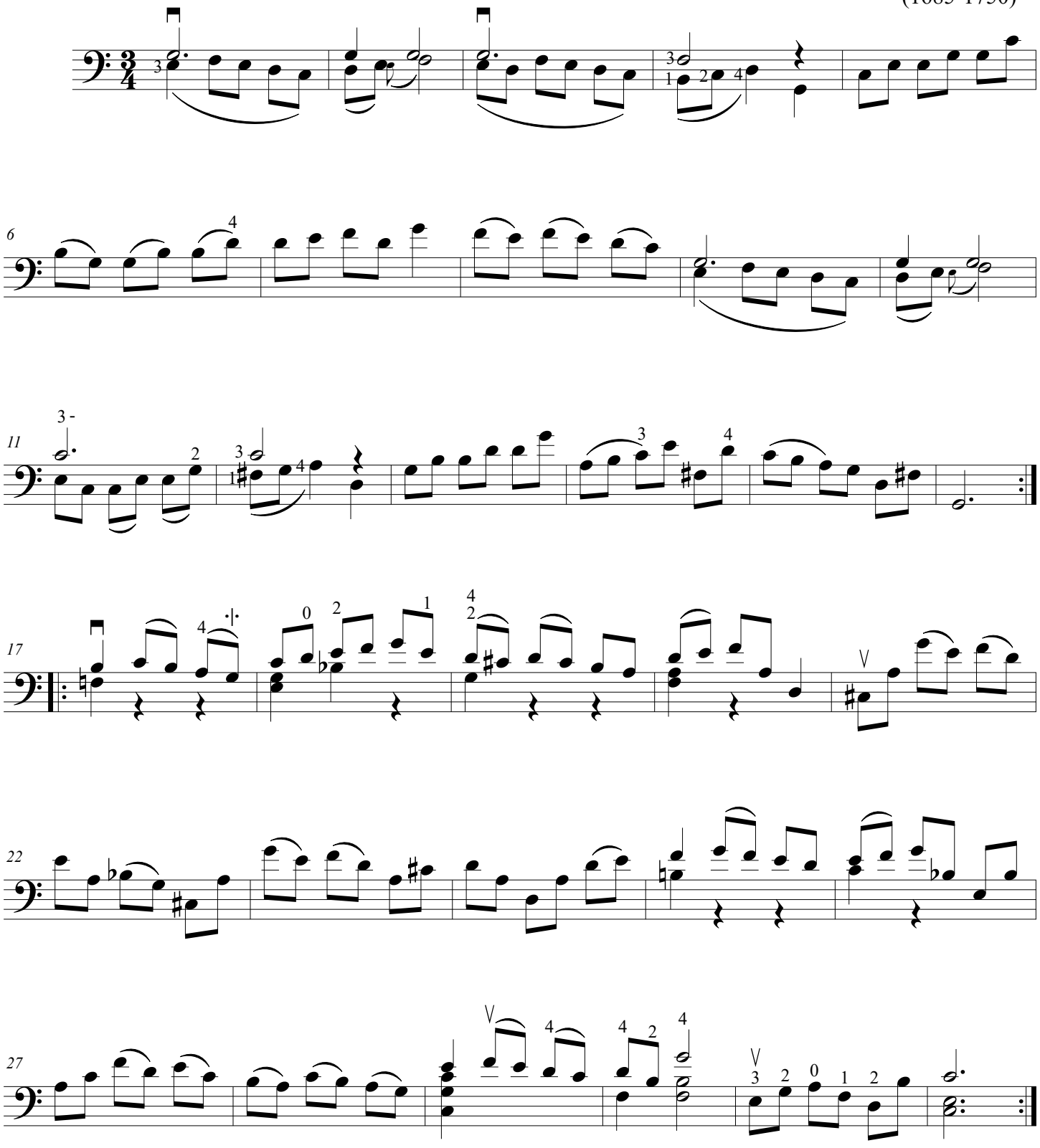
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Menuet II

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

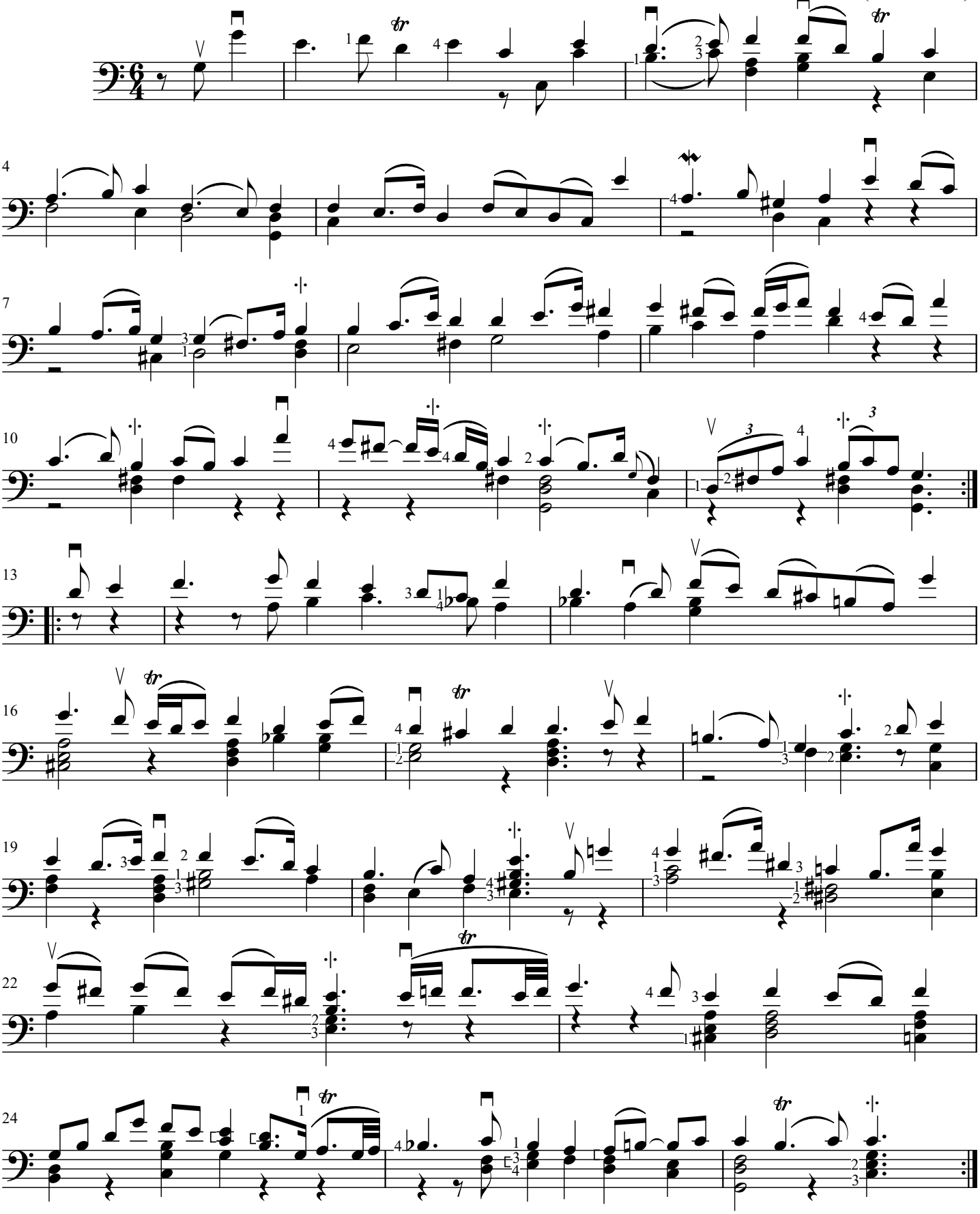
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Loure

Violin Partita #3, BWV 1006

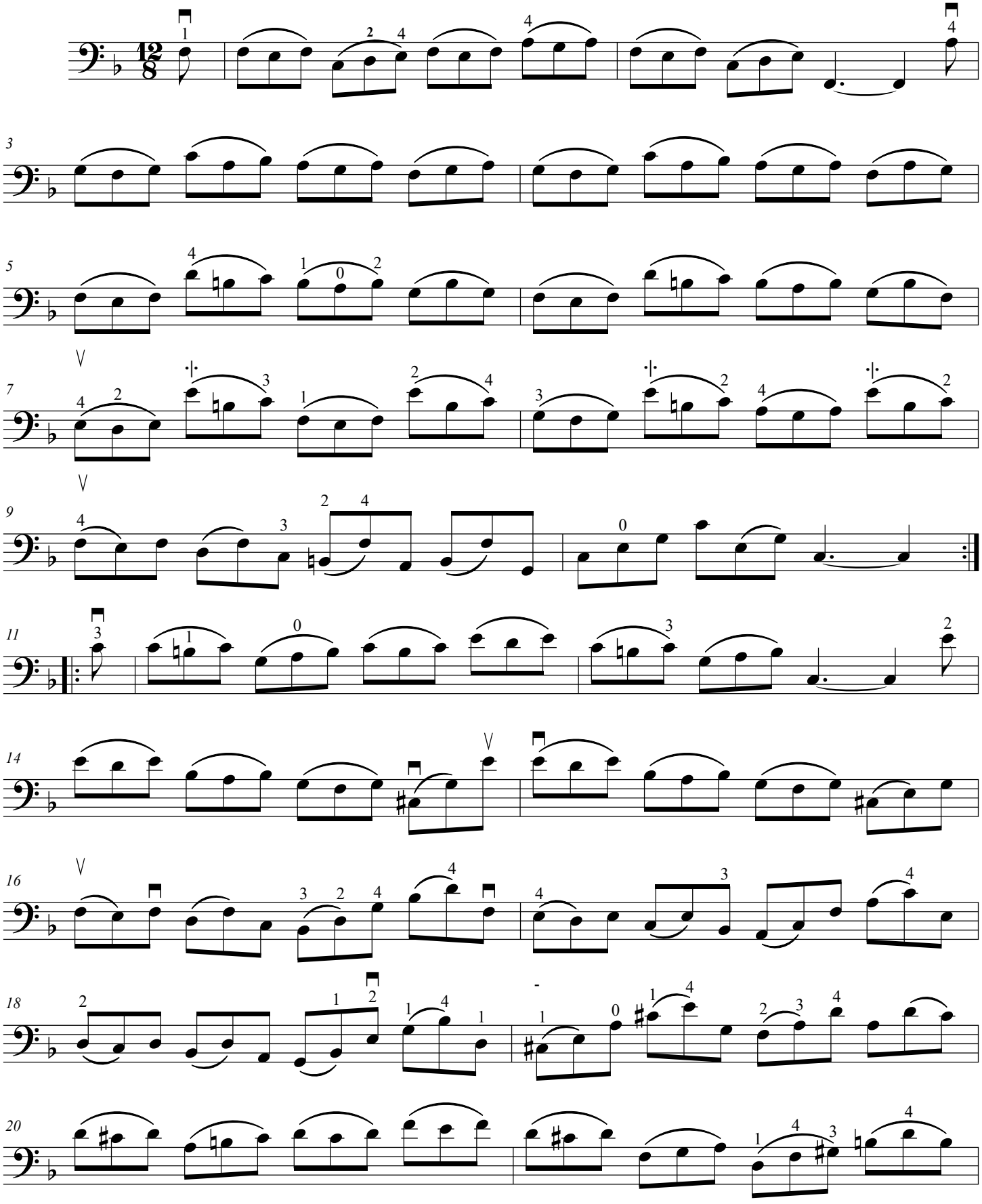
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

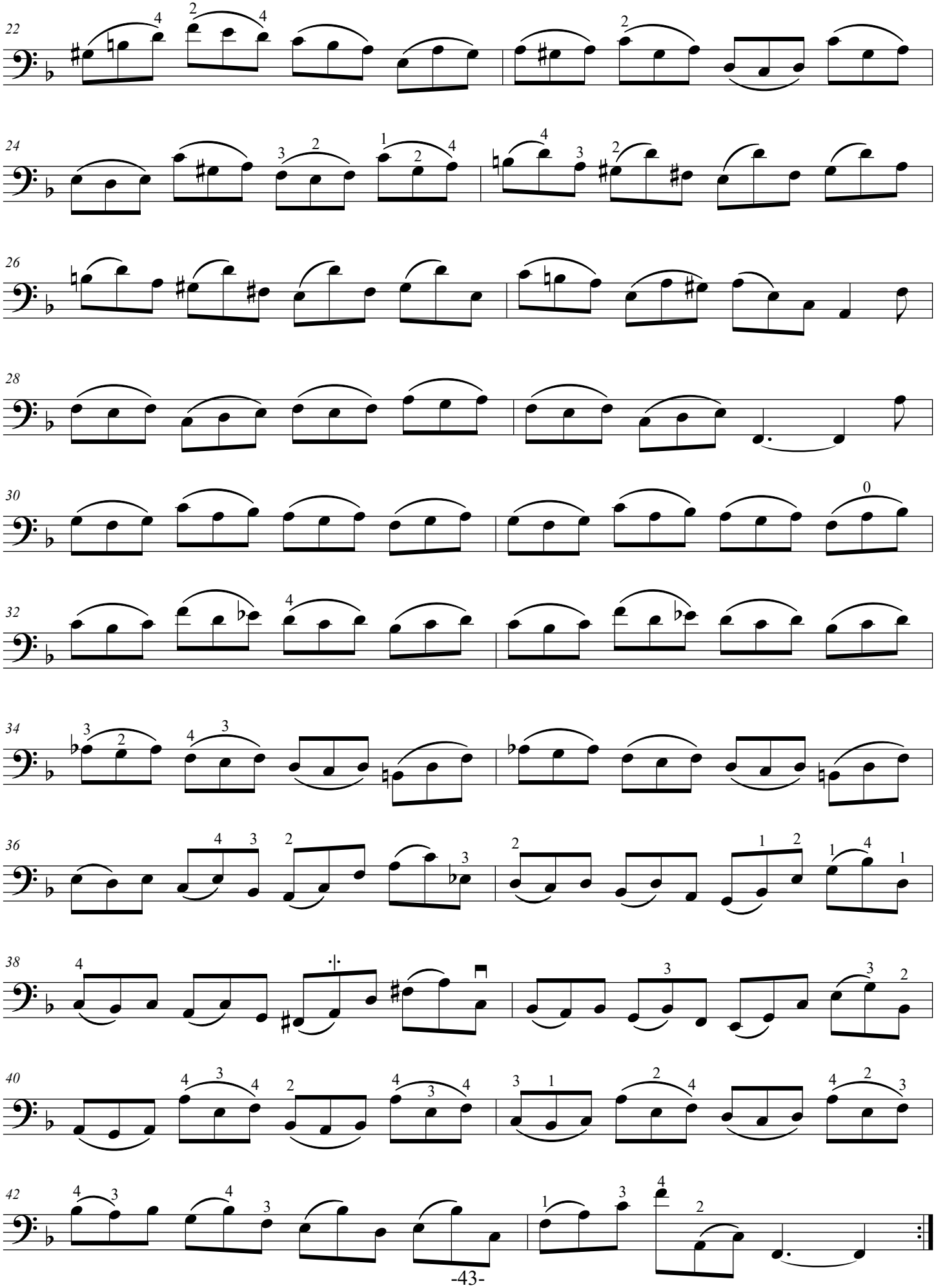


Gigue

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

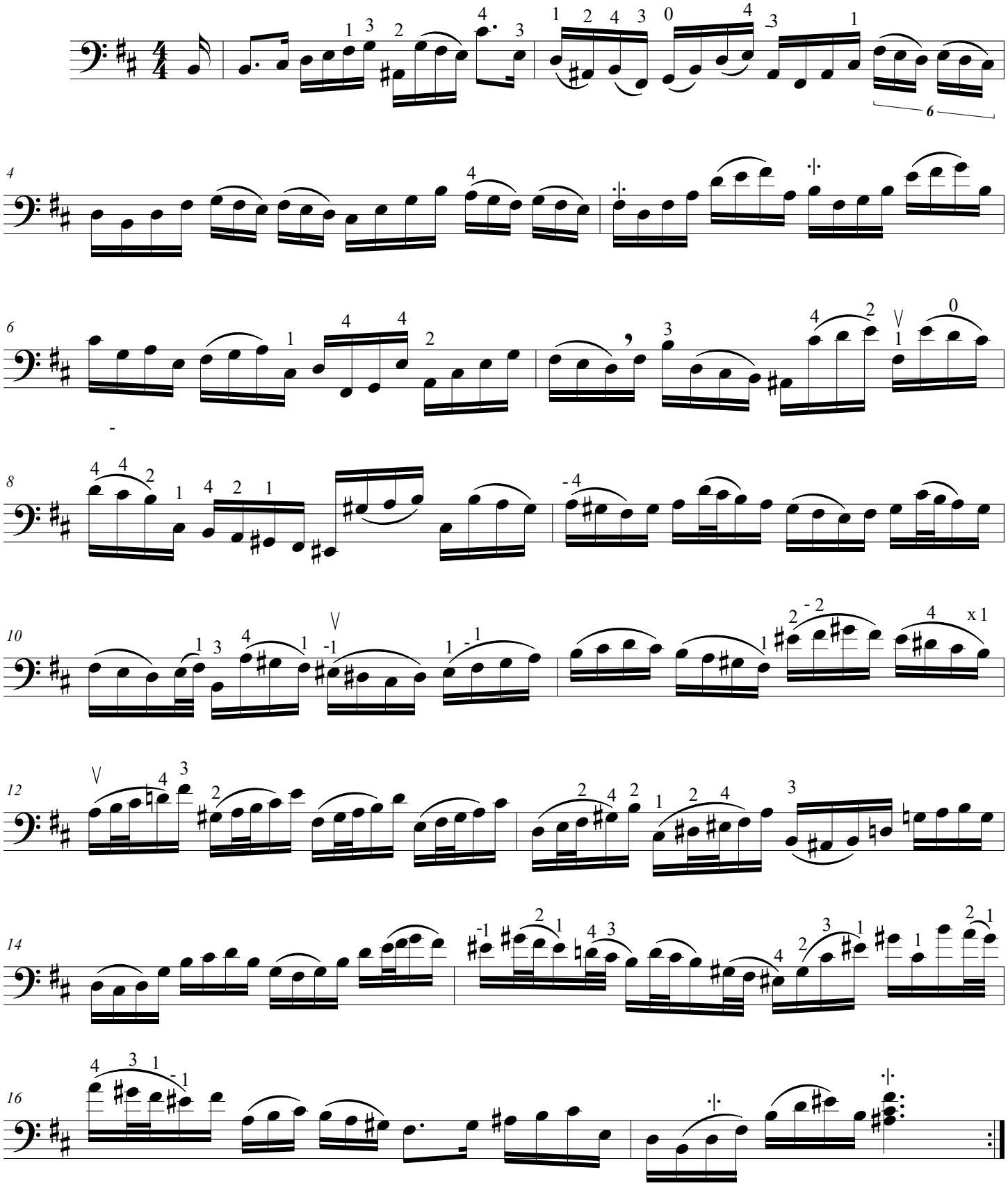


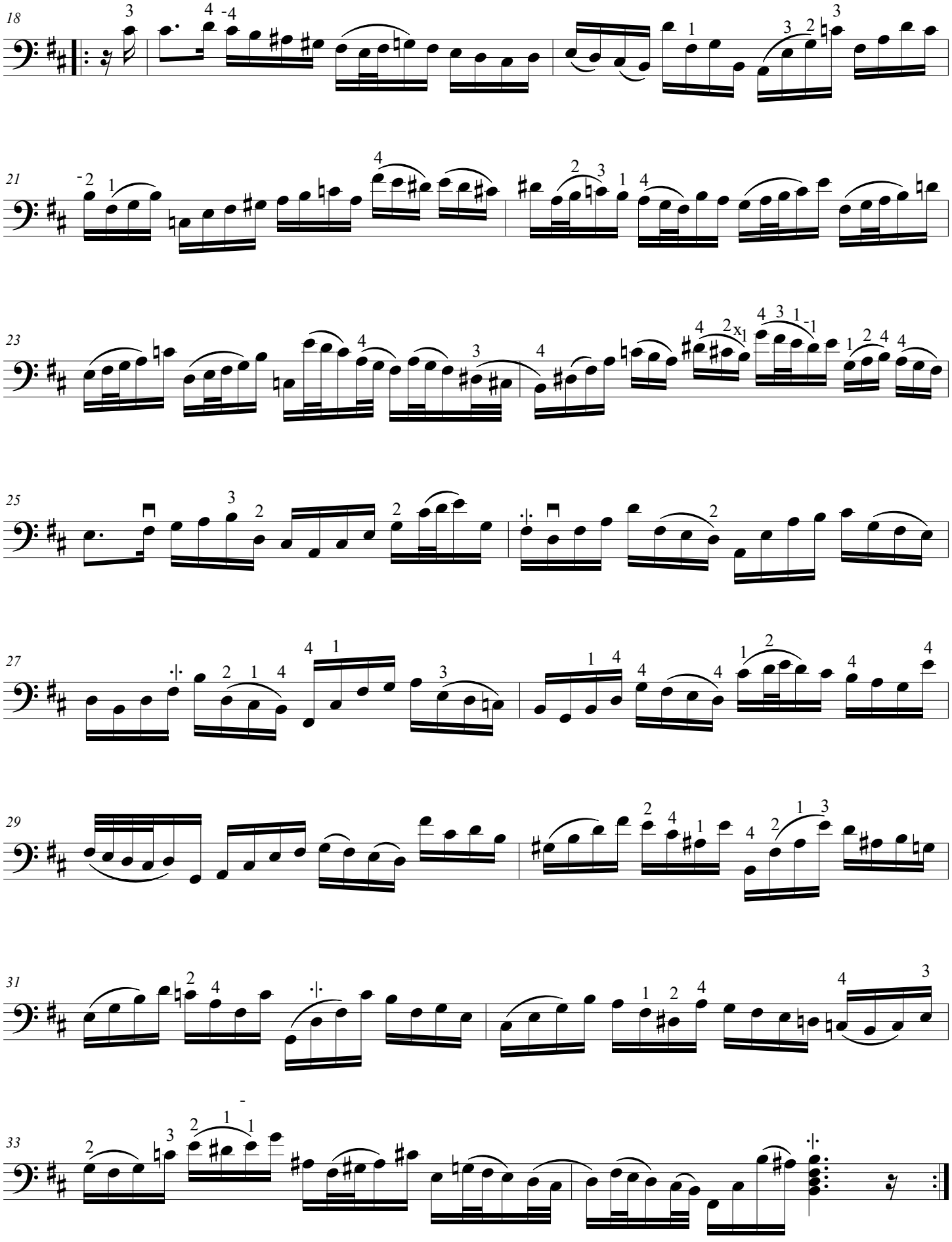


Allemande

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

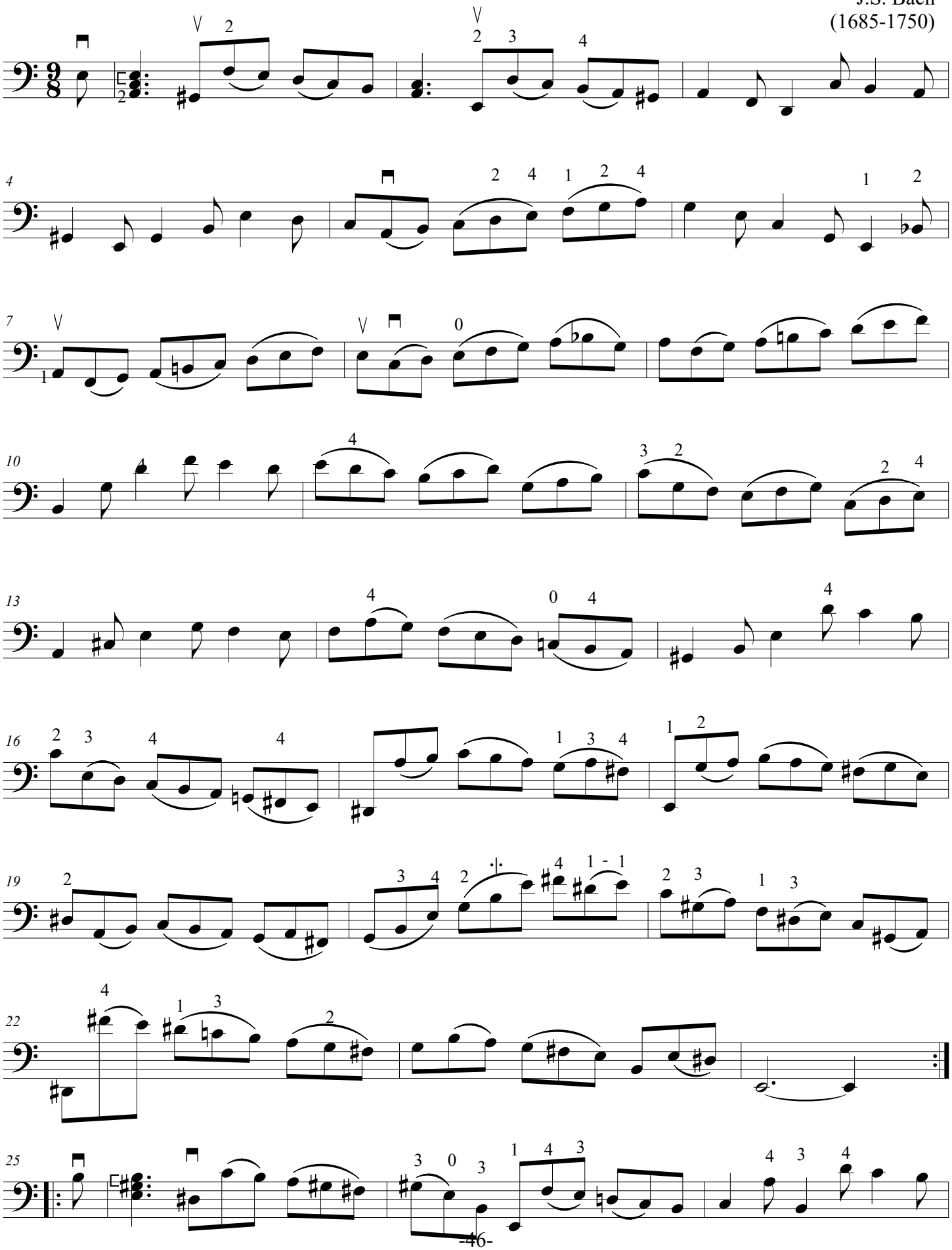


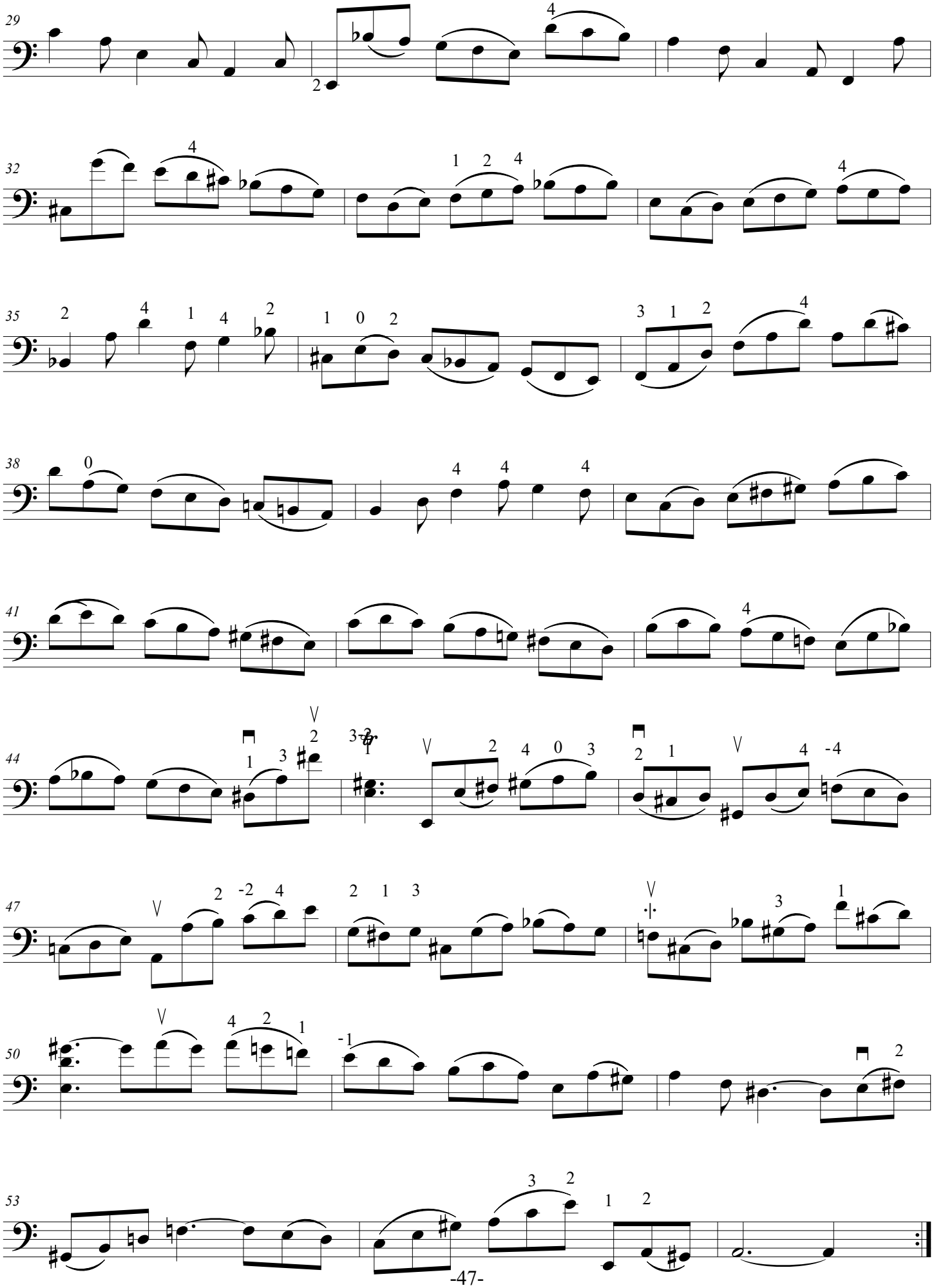


Courante

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

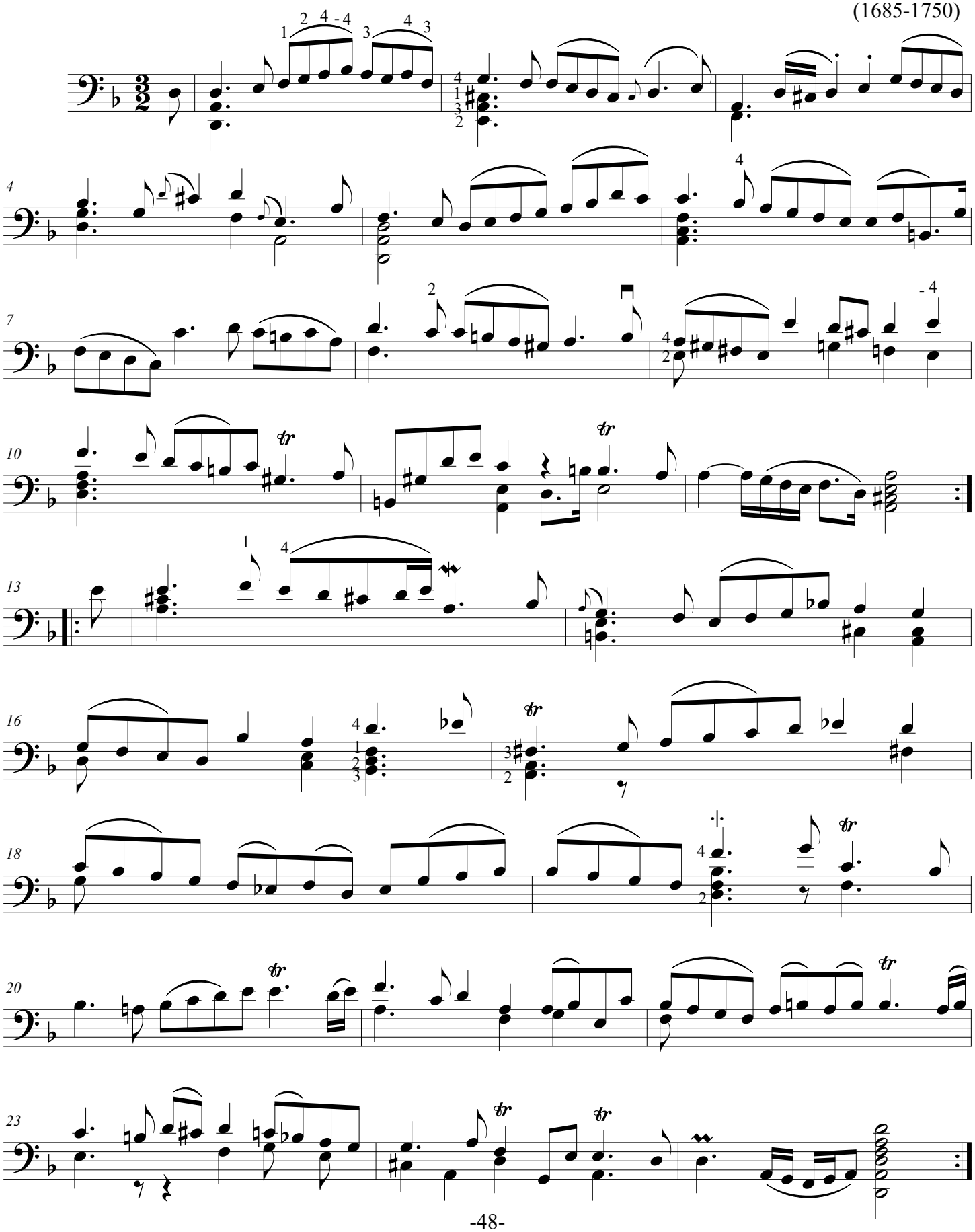




Courante

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

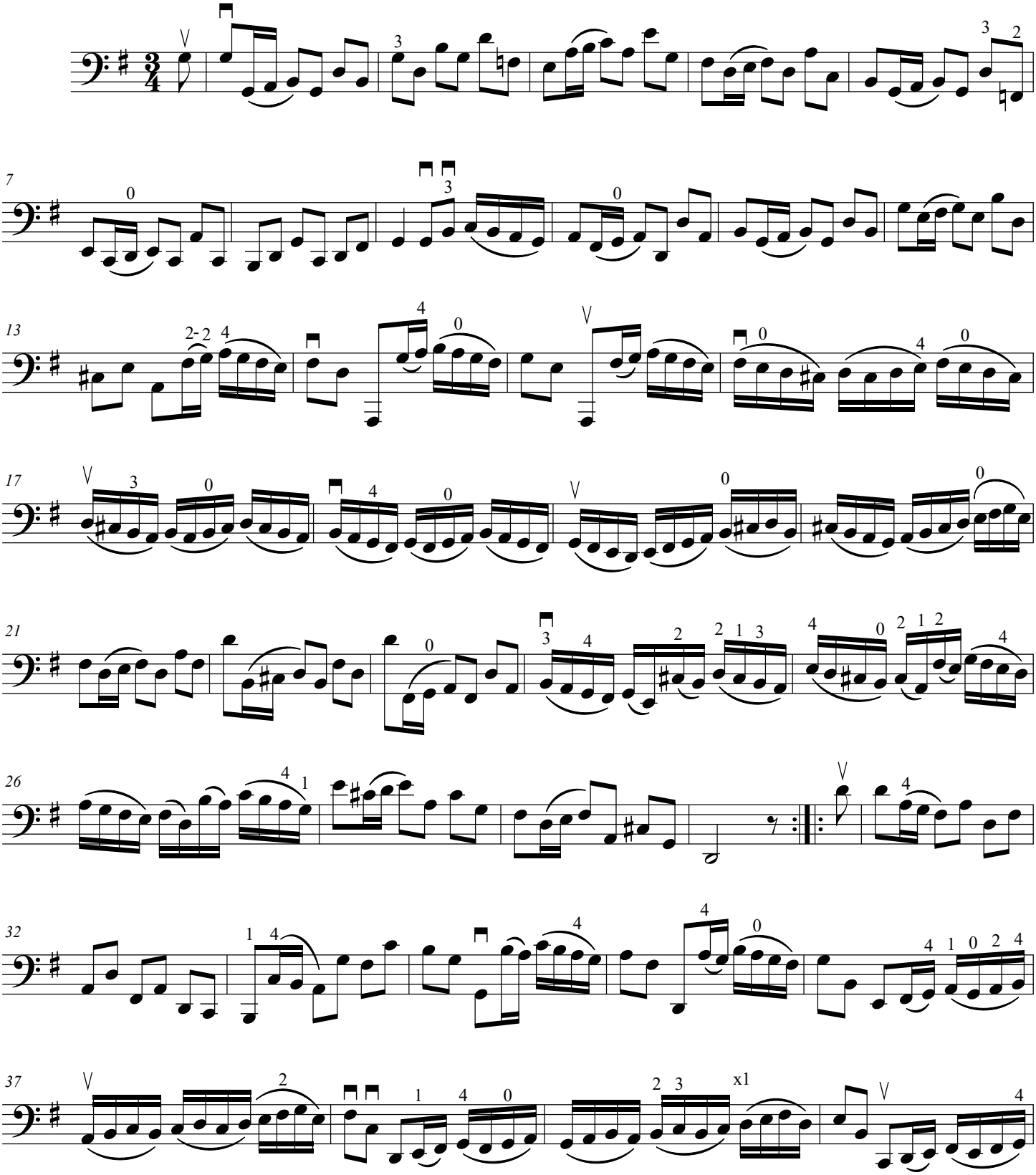
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

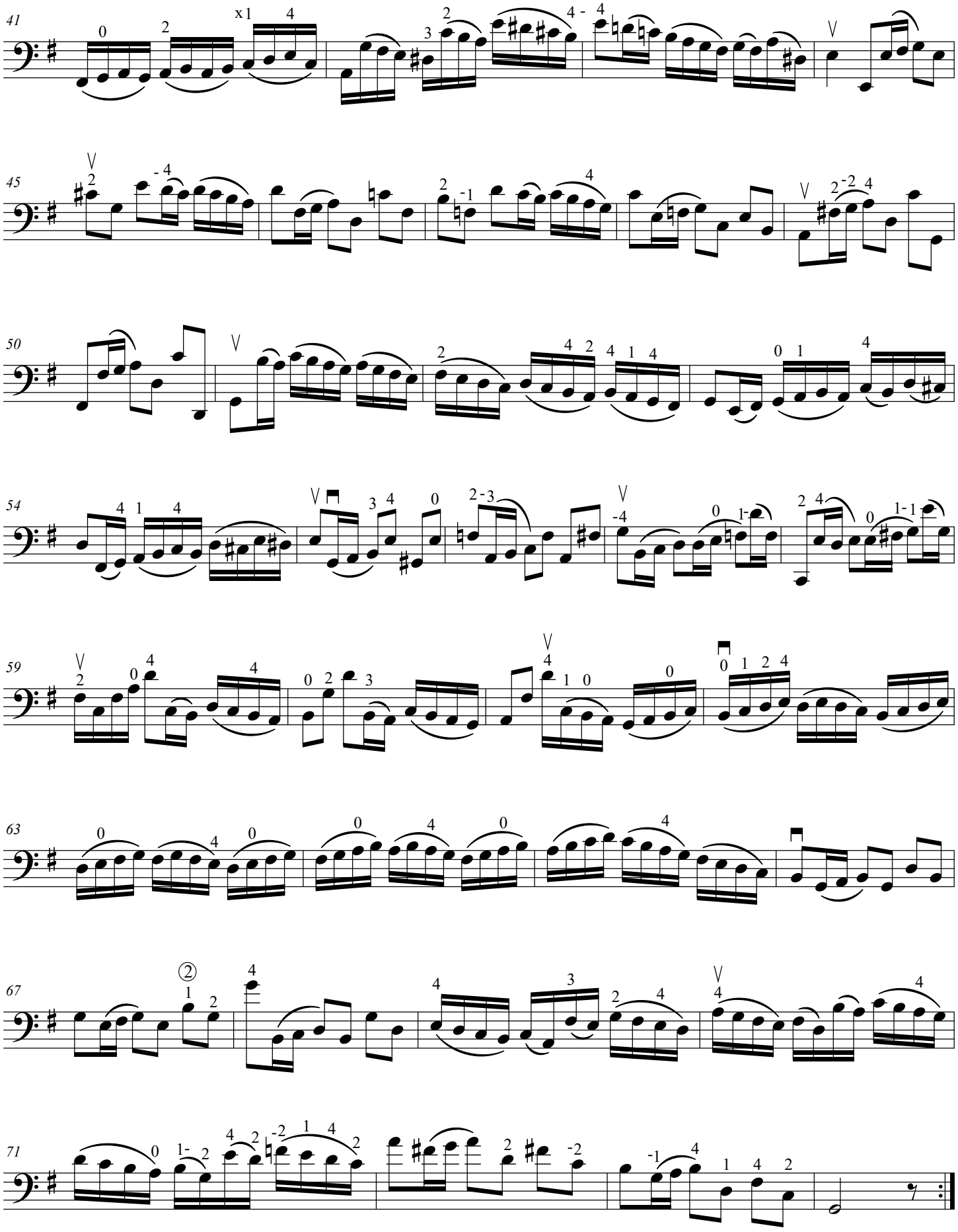


Courante

Cello Suite No. 6, BWV 1012

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

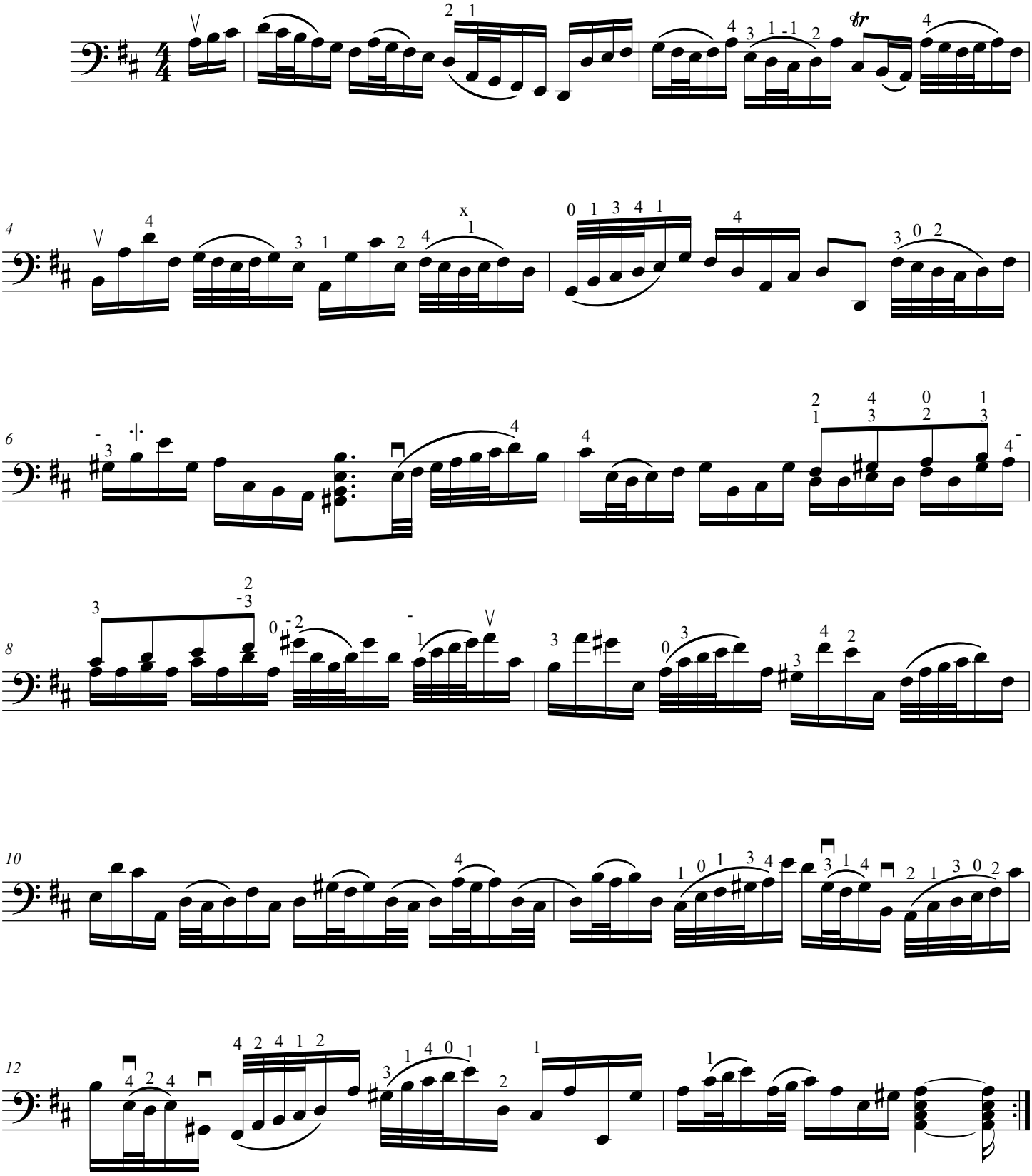


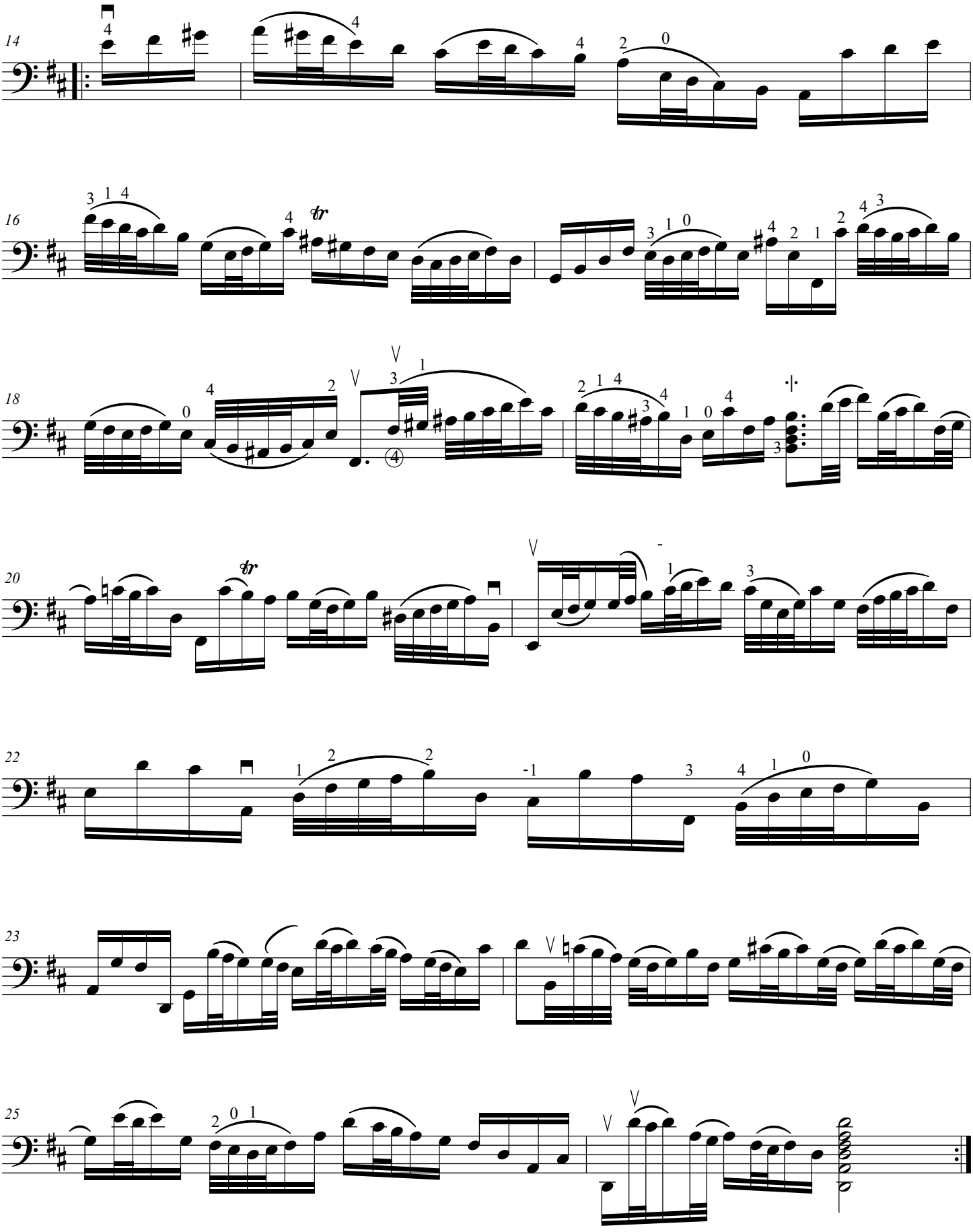


Allemande

Cello Suite No. 3, BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

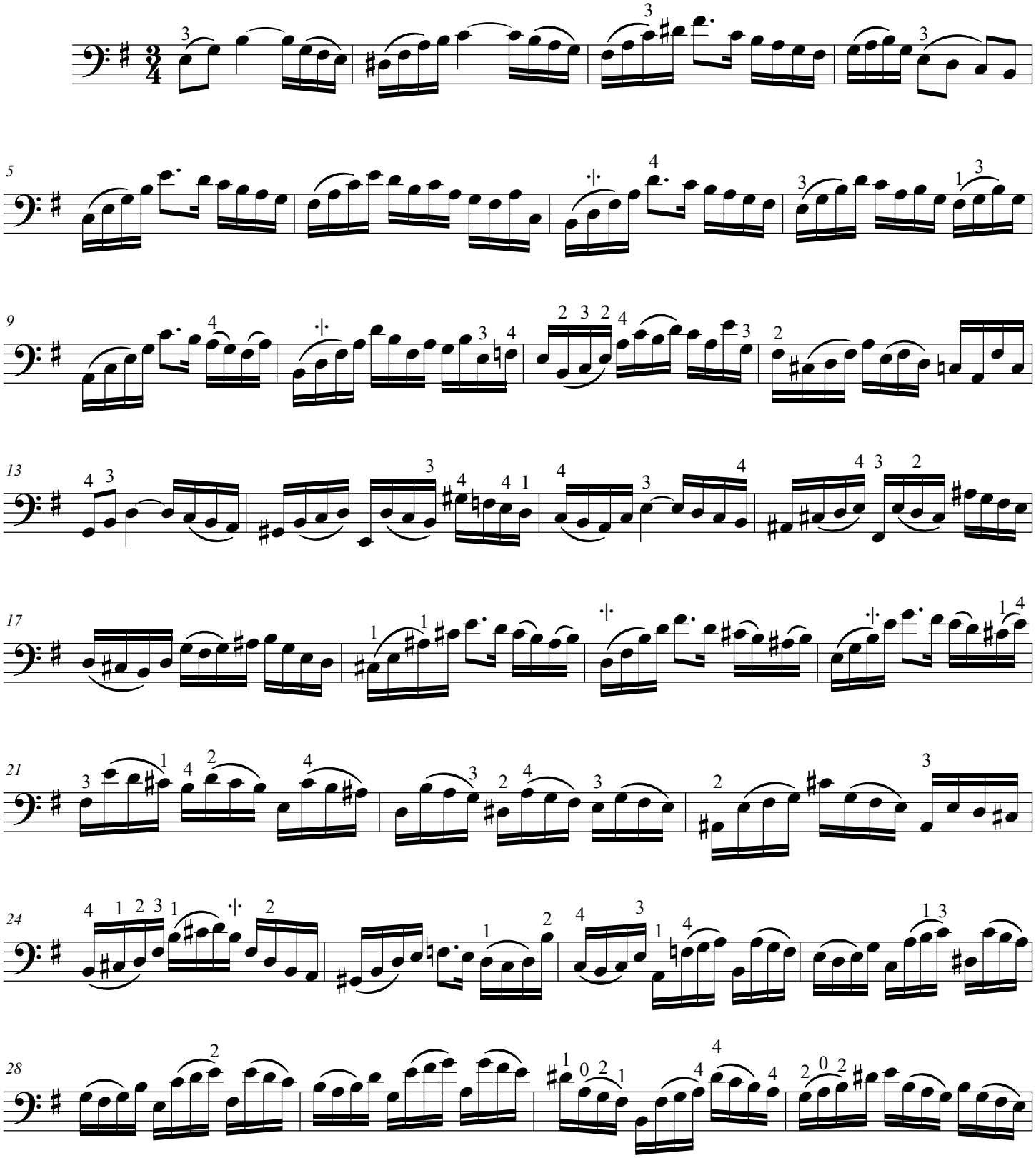


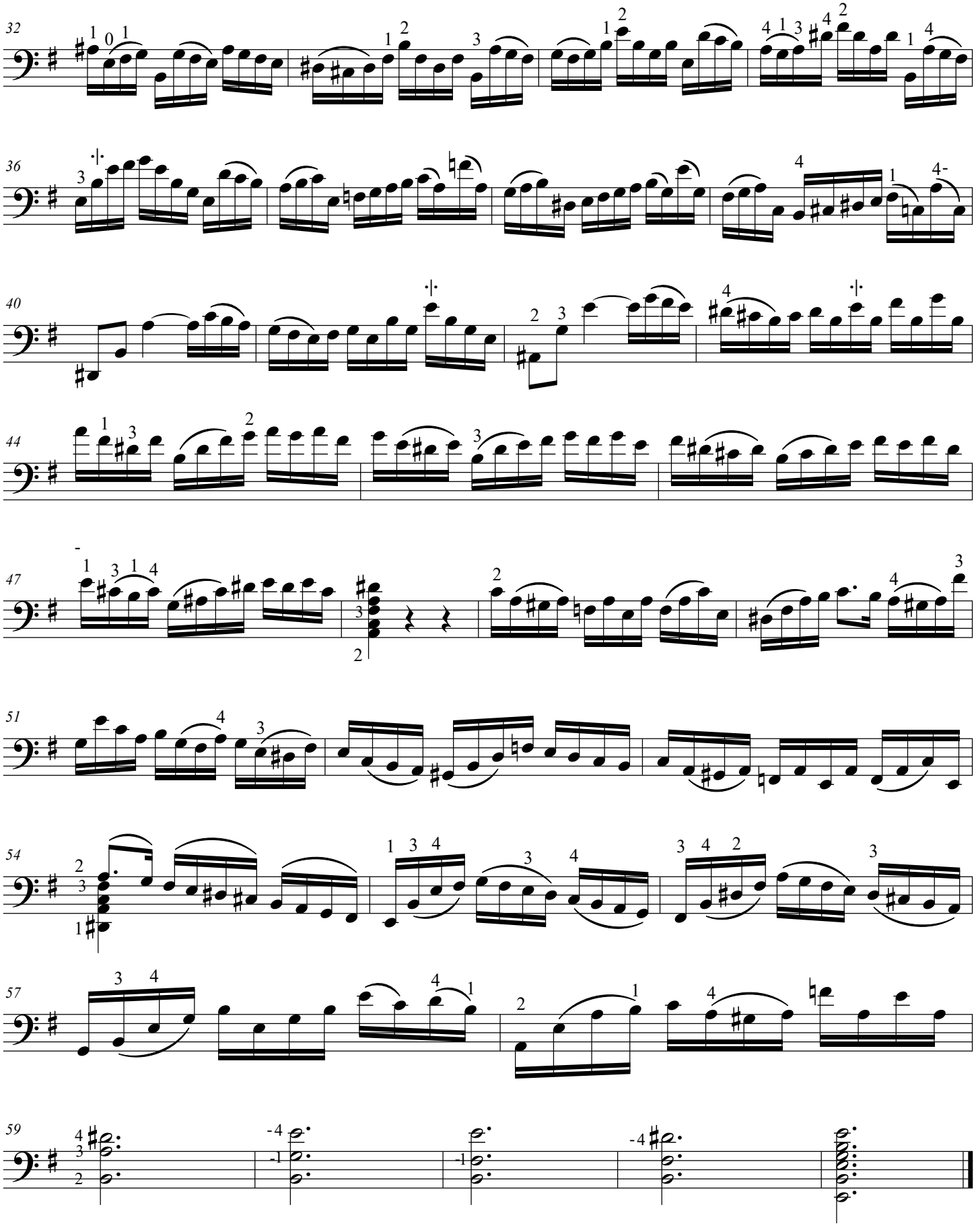

14
16
18
20
22
23
25

Prélude

Cello Suite No. 2, BWV 1008

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

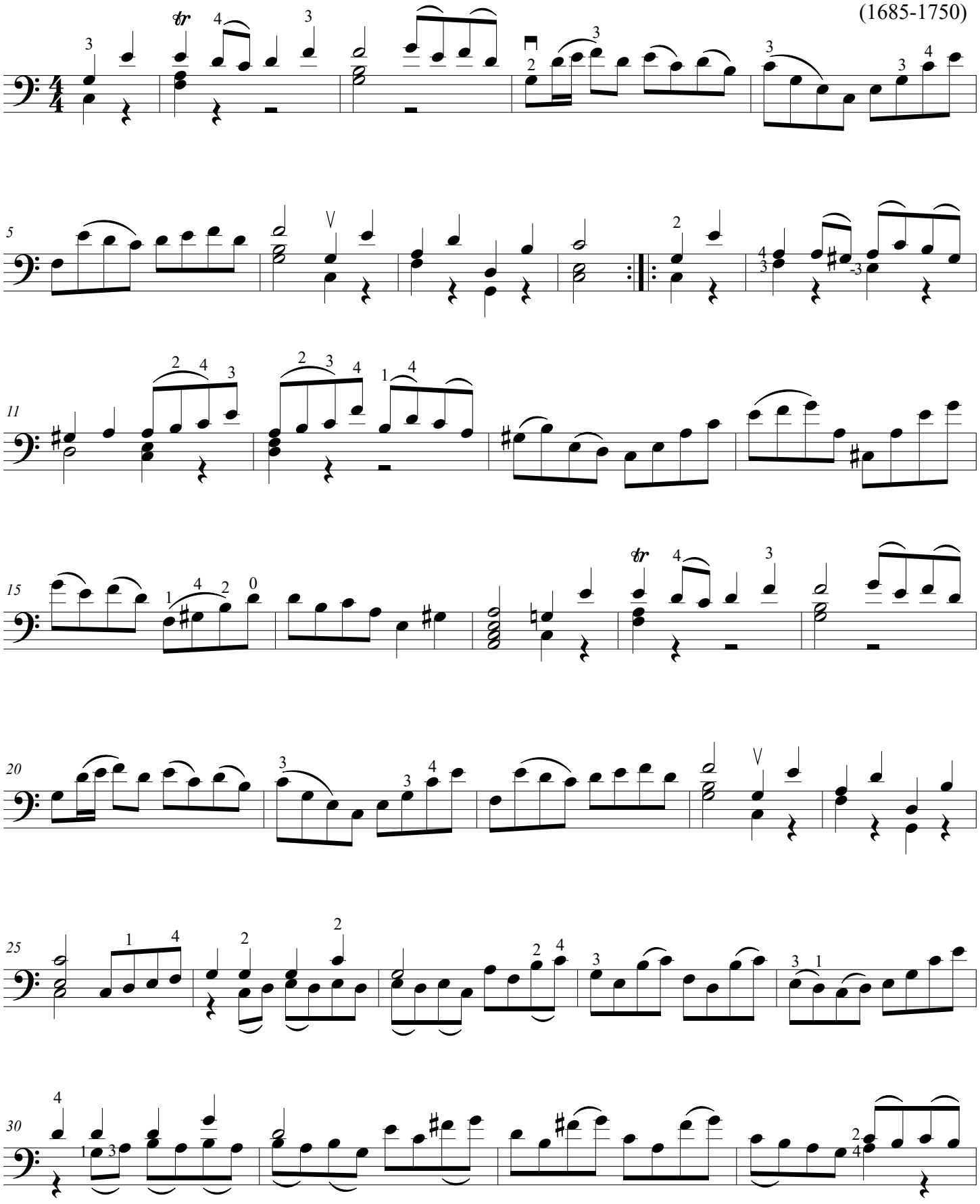


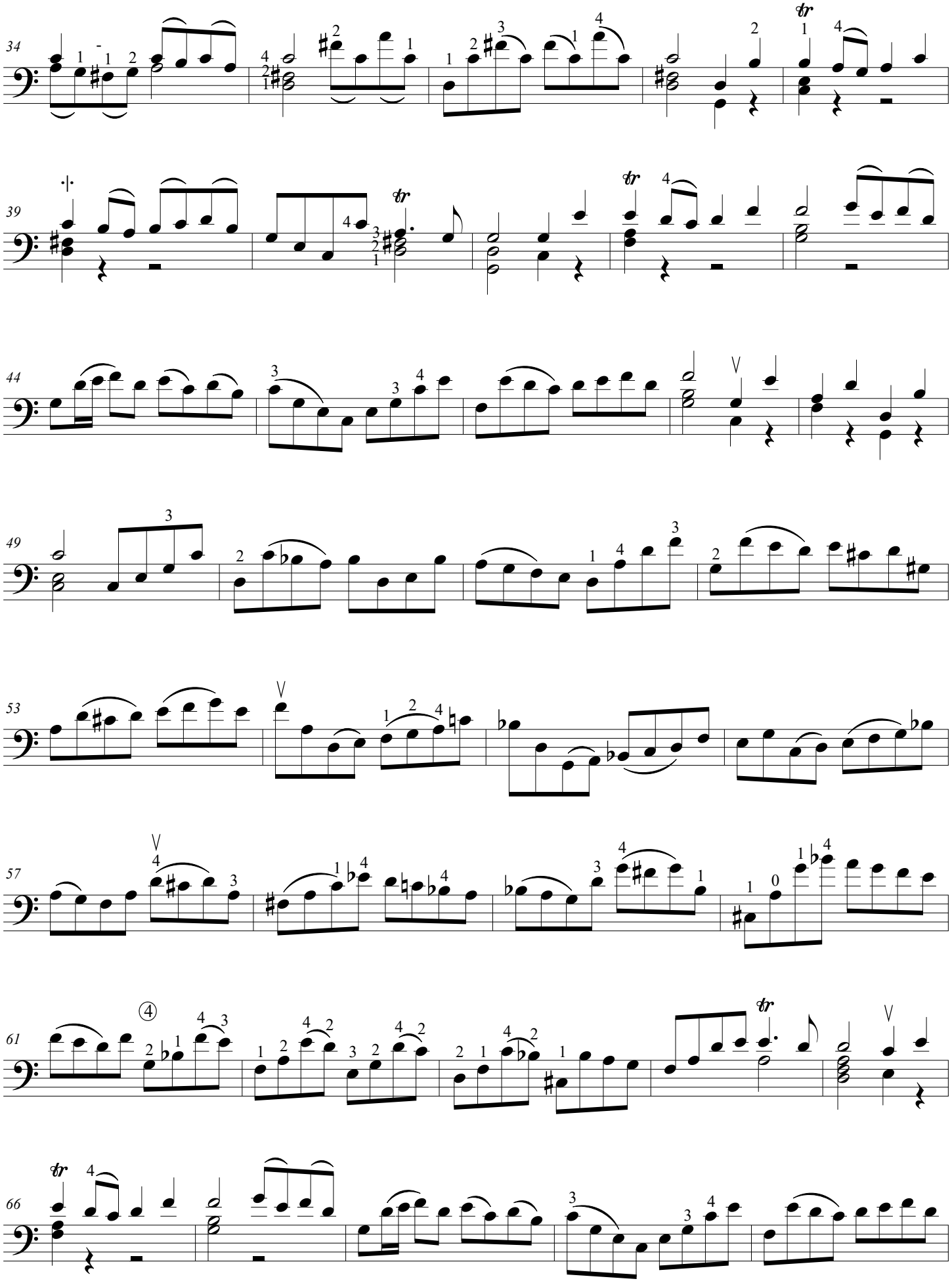


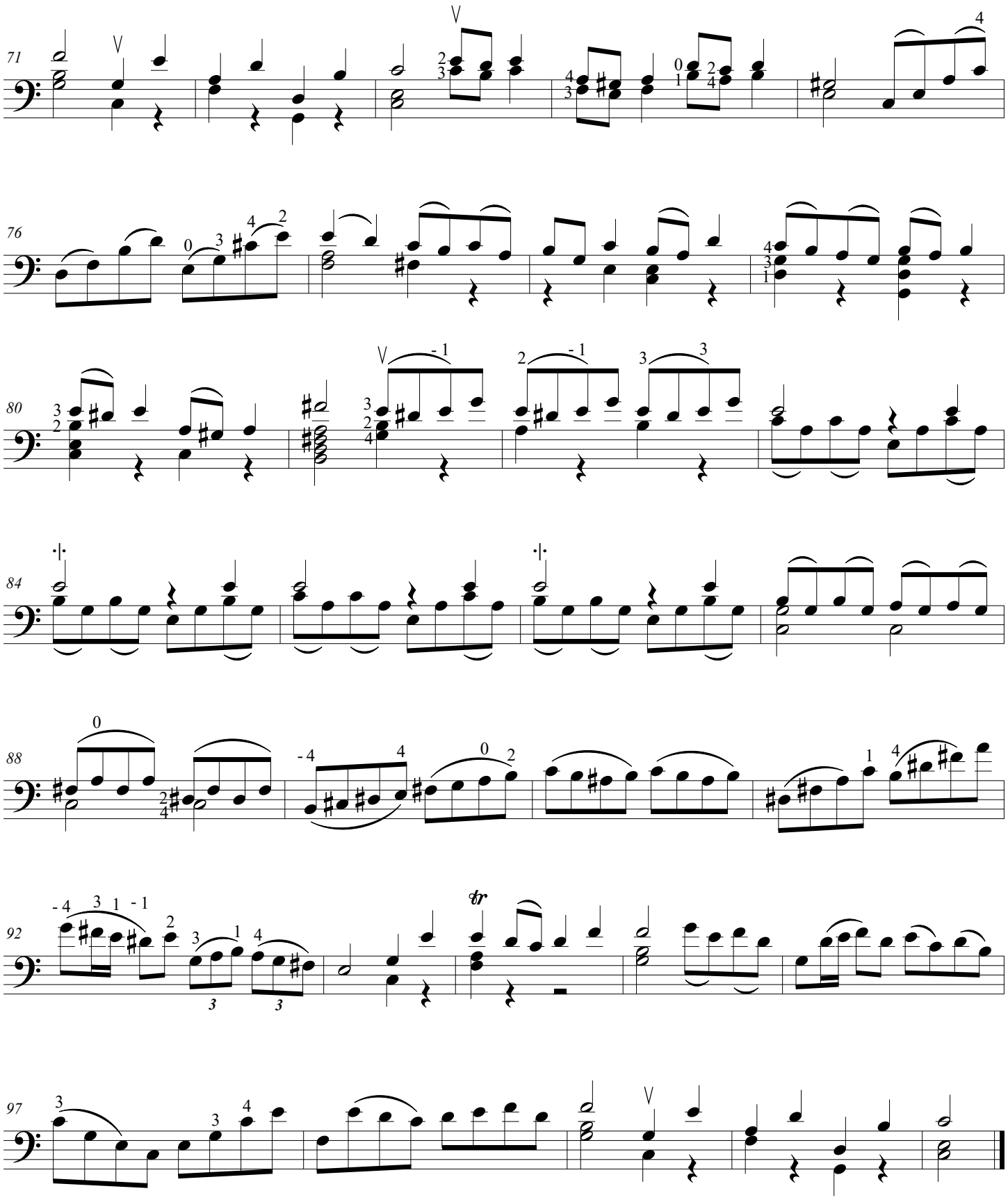
Gavotte en Rondeau

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



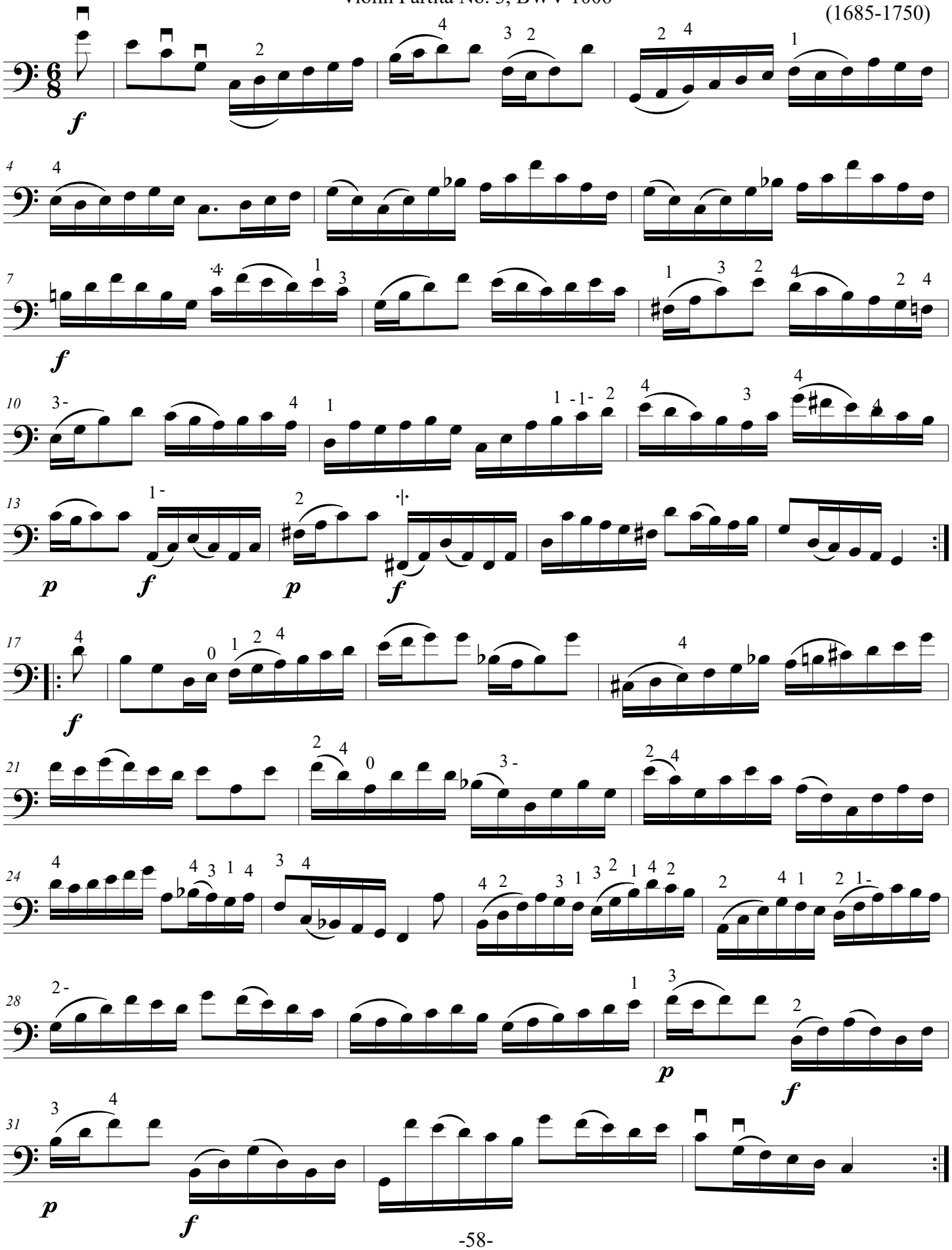

34
39
44
49
53
57
61
66


71
76
80
84
88
92
97
tr

Gigue

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

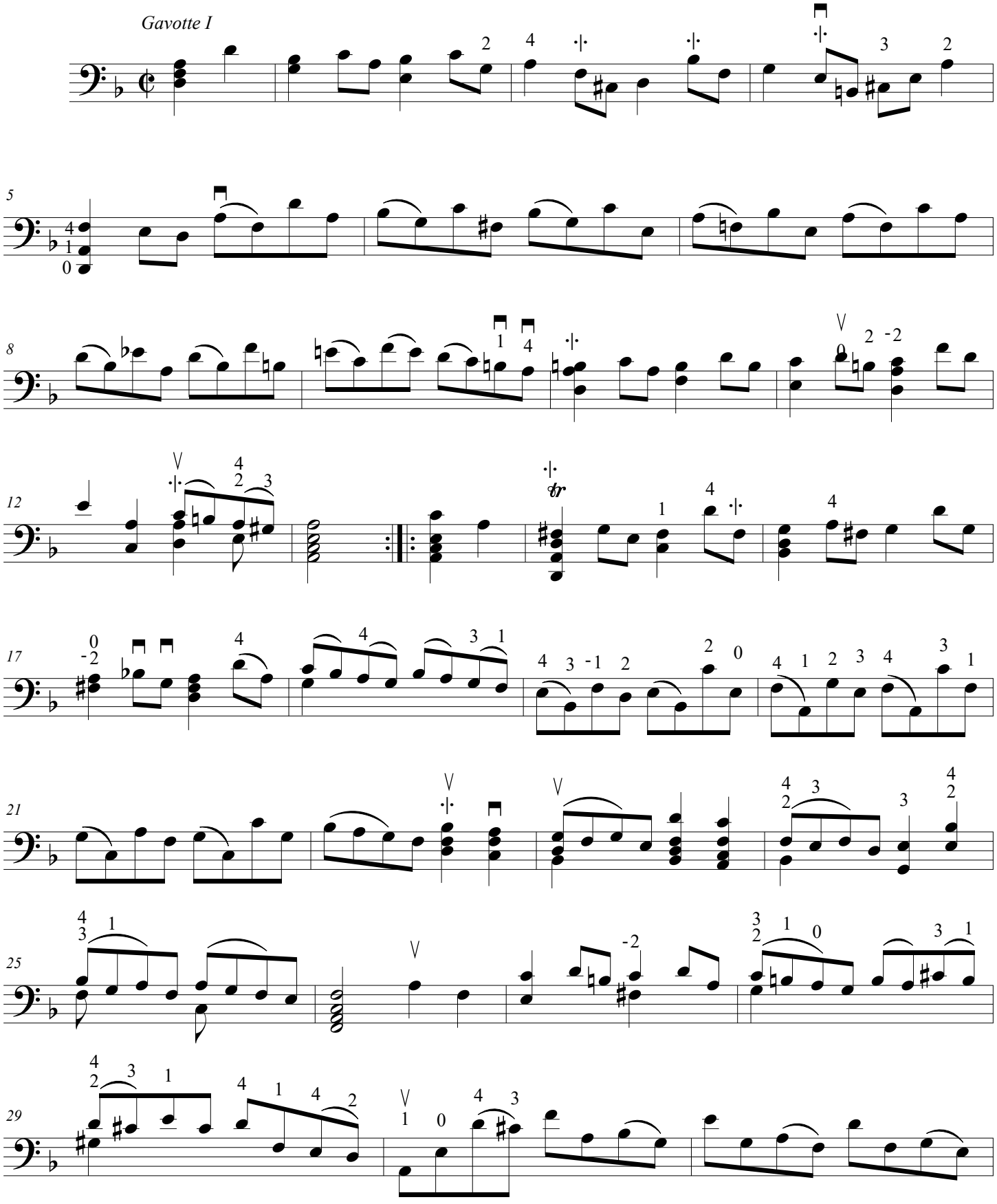


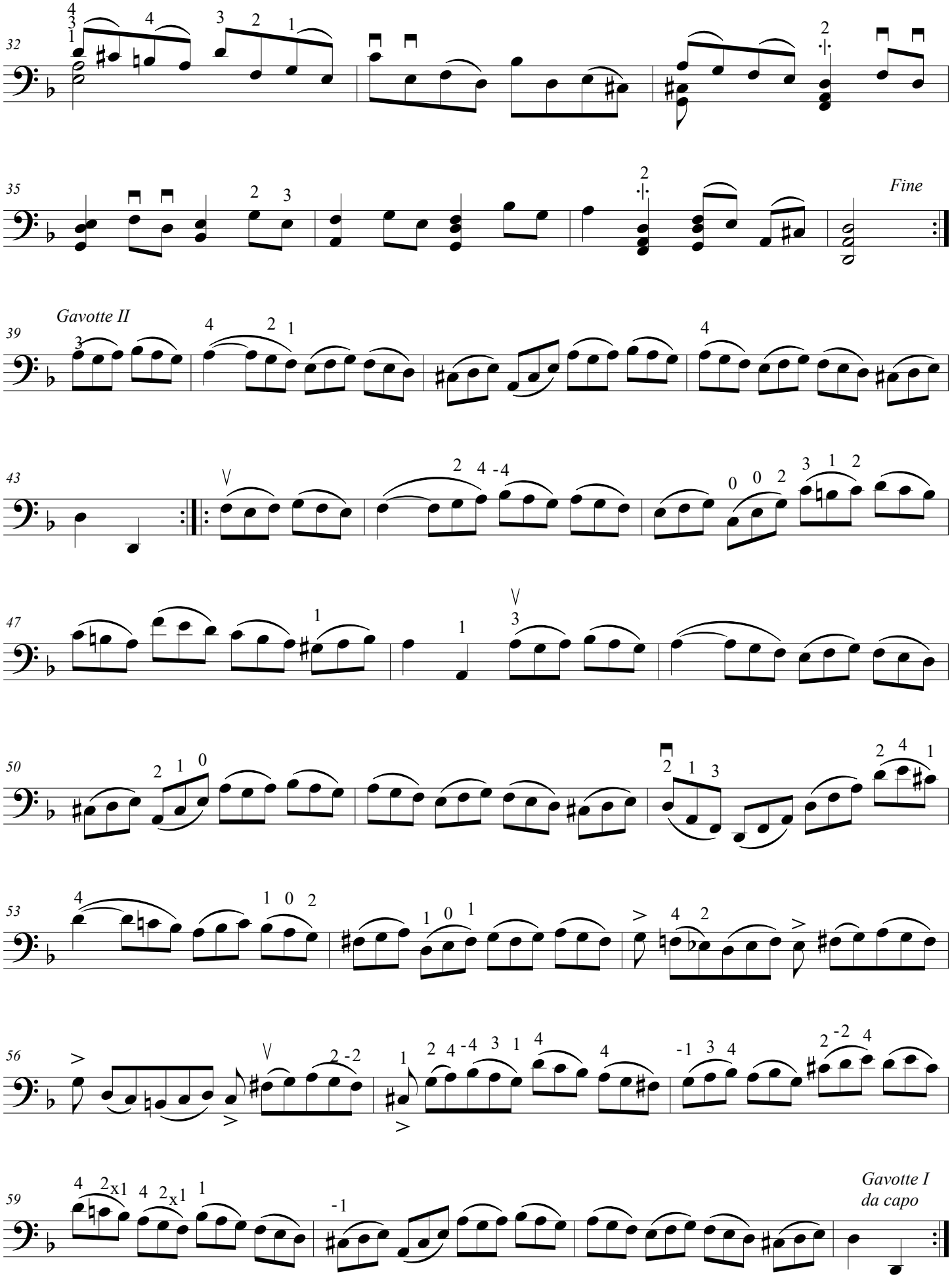
Gavotte I & II

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Gavotte I



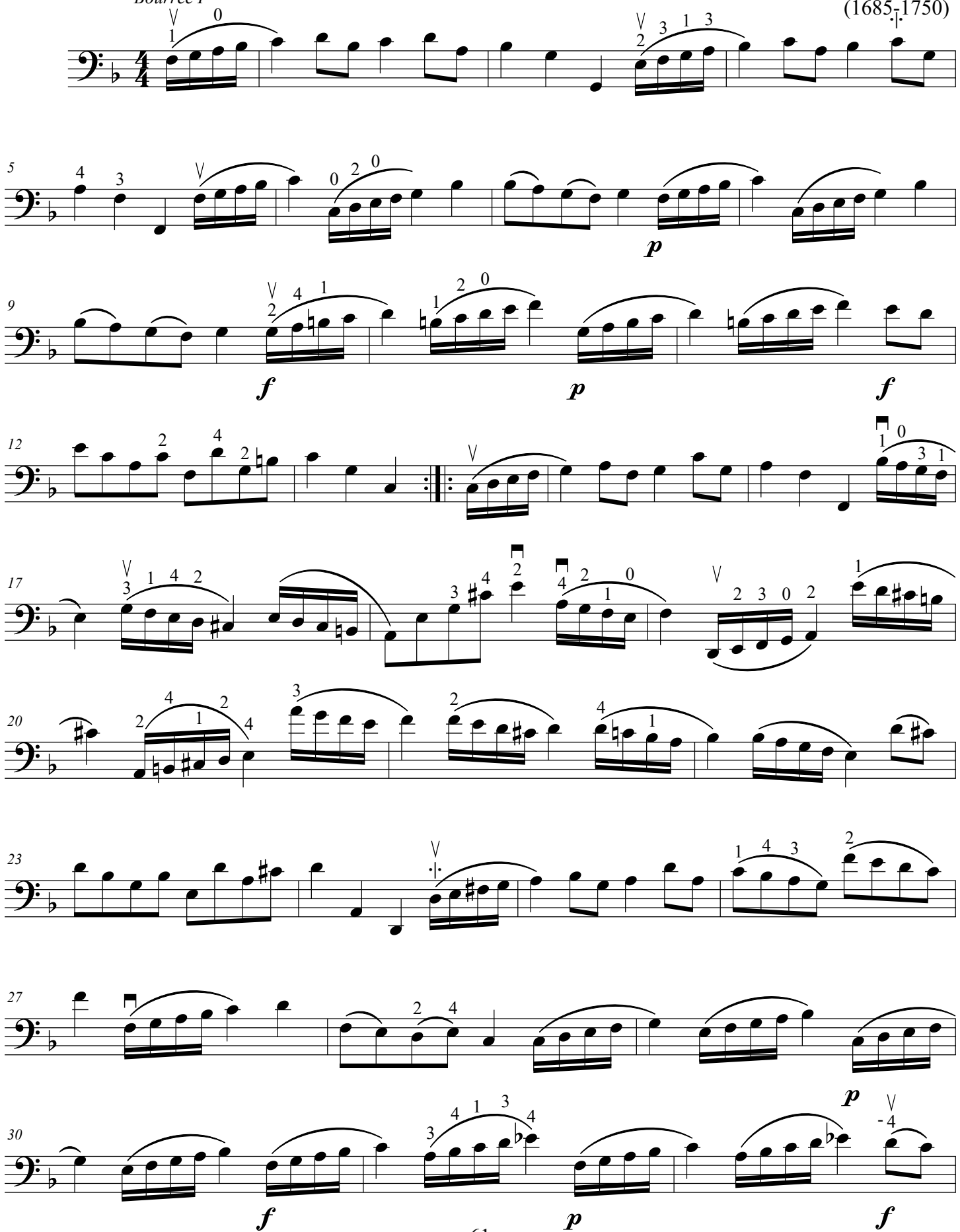

32
35
Fine
Gavotte II
39
43
47
50
53
56
59
Gavotte I
da capo

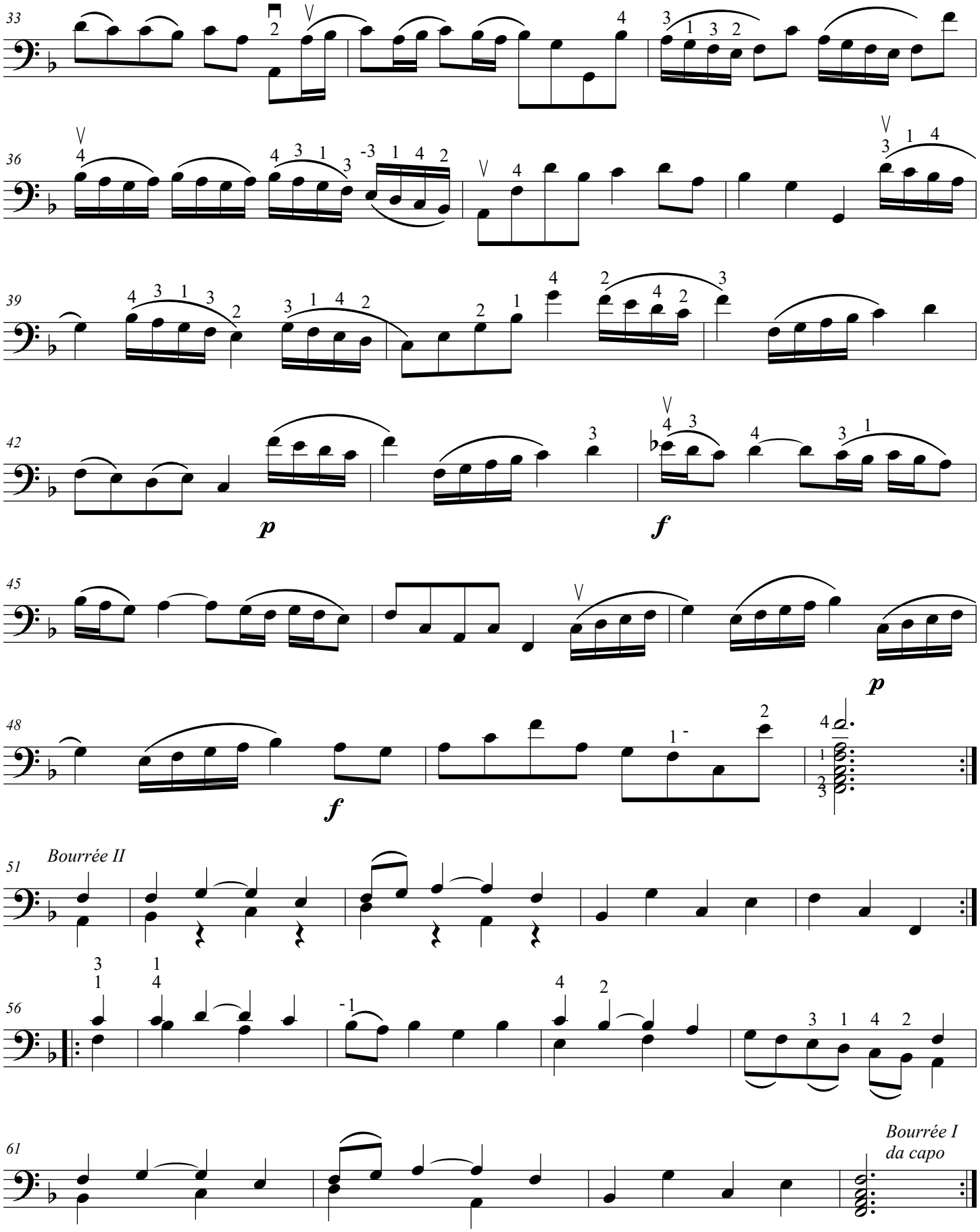
Bourrée I and II

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Bourrée I

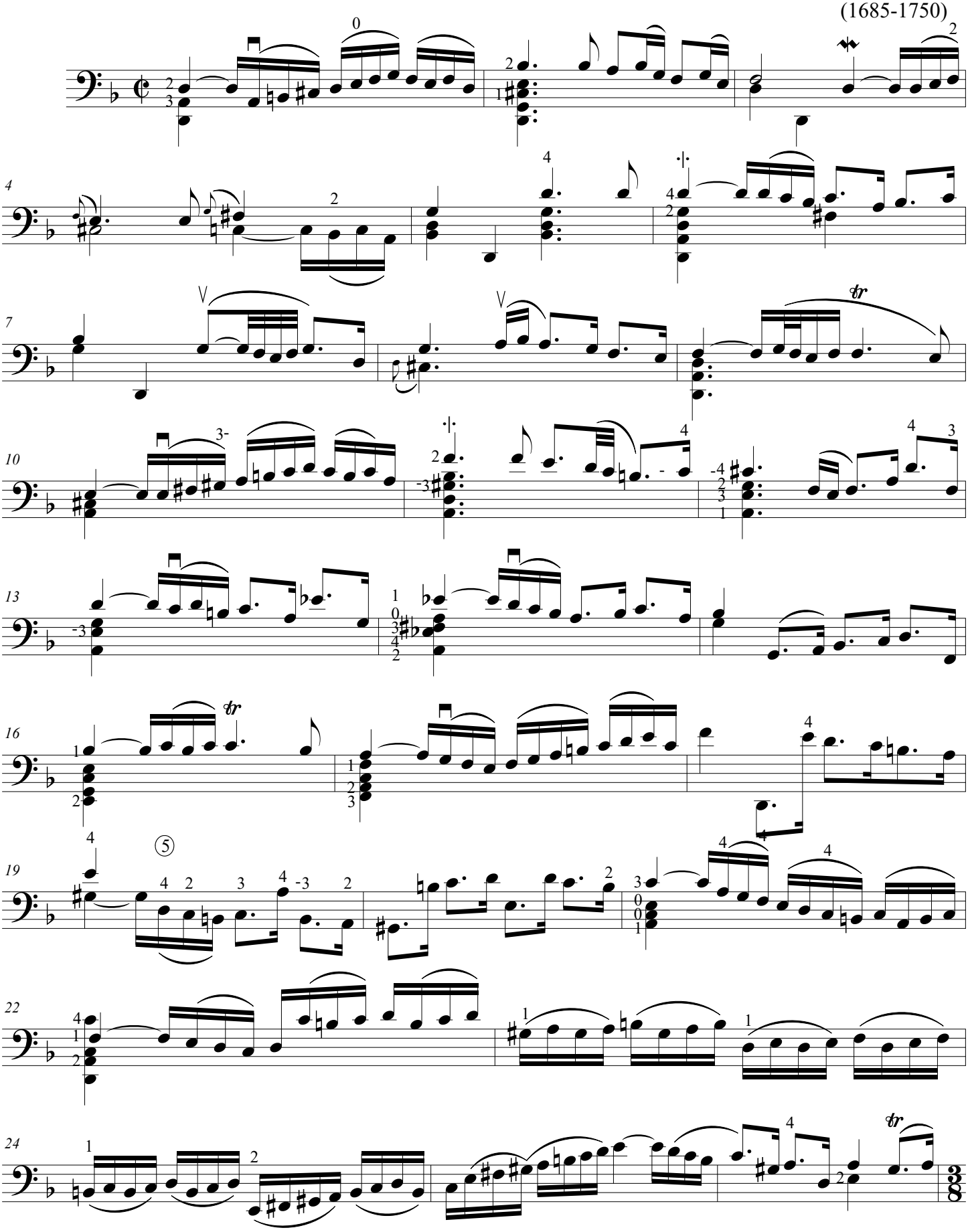


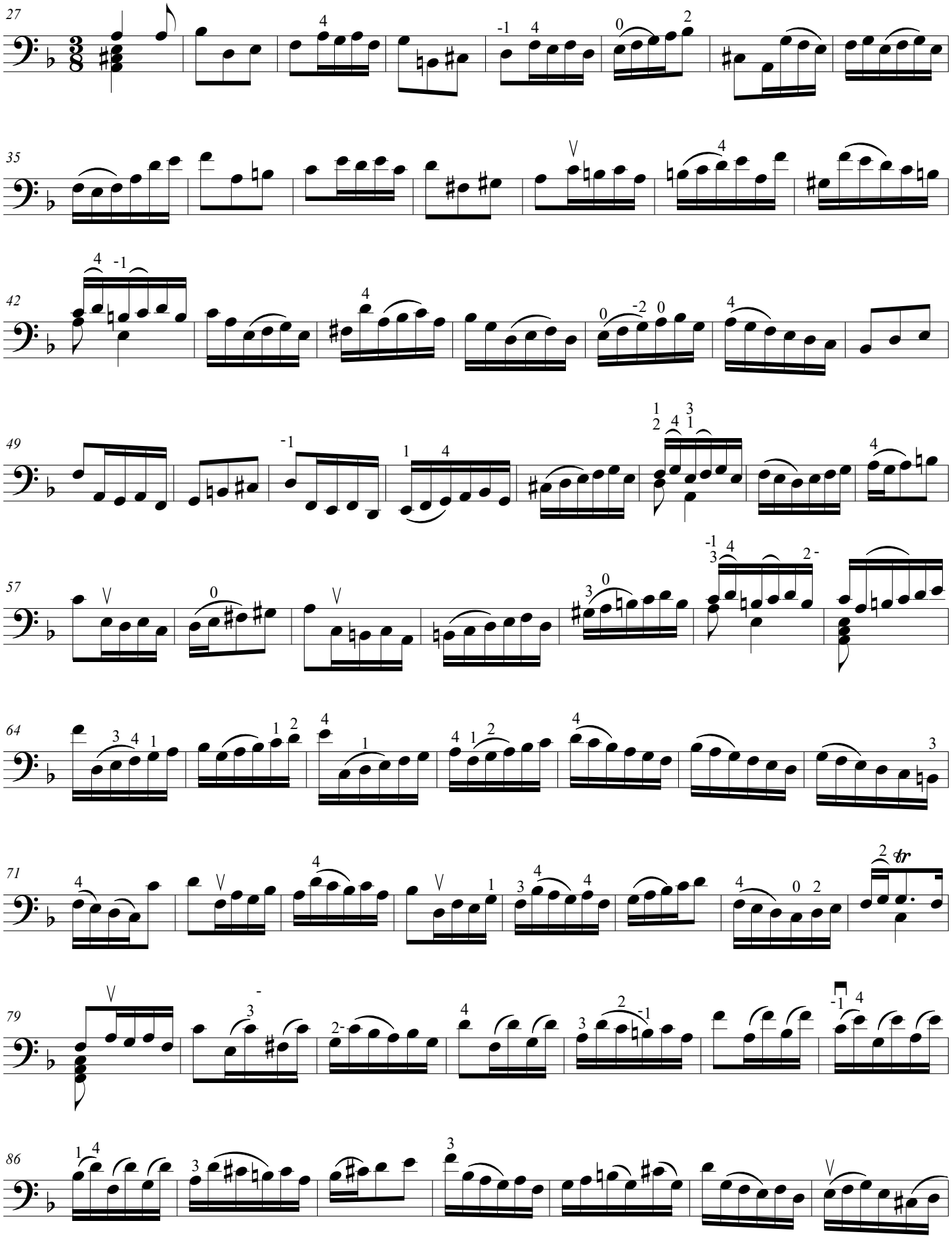

33
36
39
42
p
f
45
p
48
f
51
Bourrée II
56
61
Bourrée I
da capo

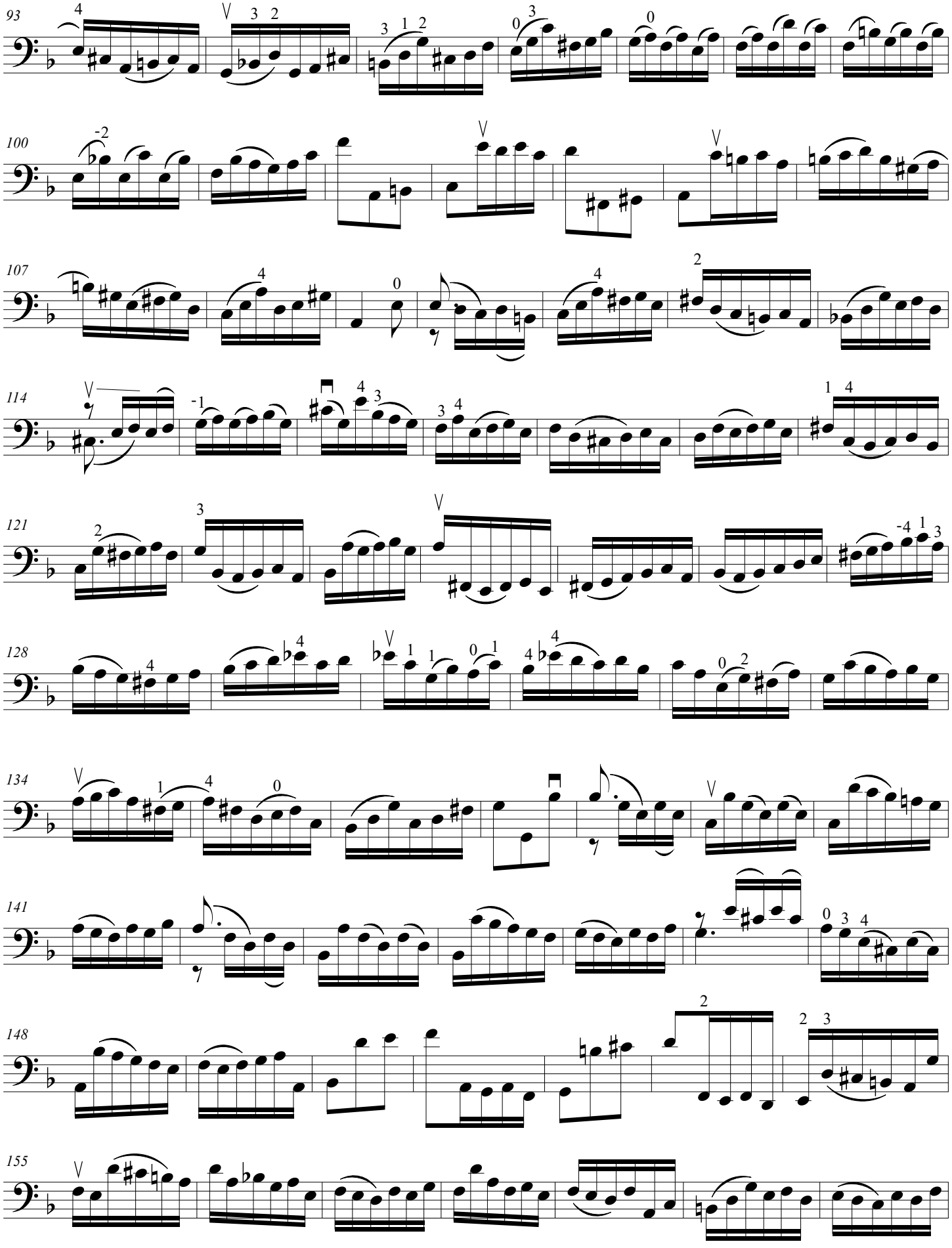
Prelude

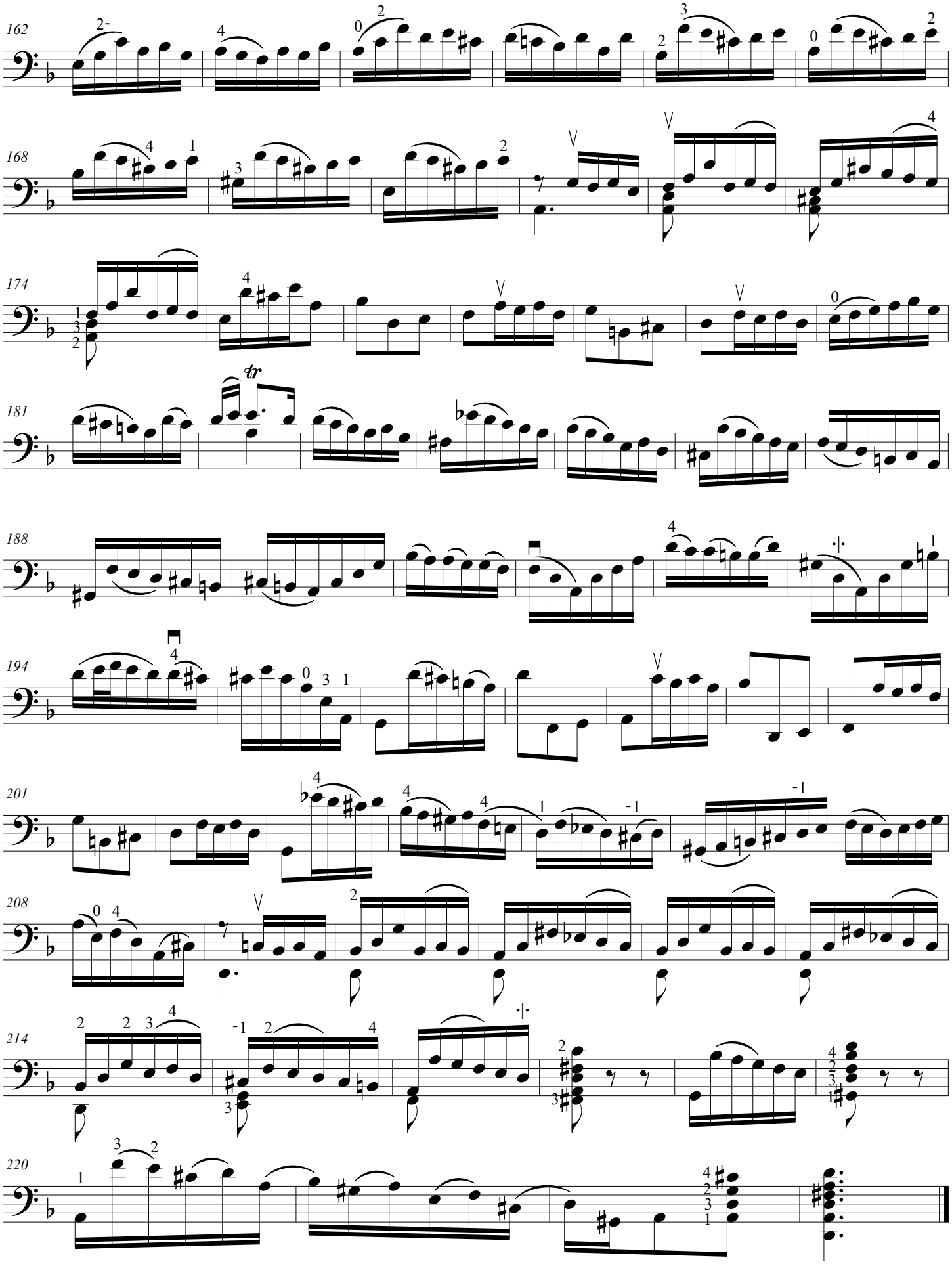
Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)





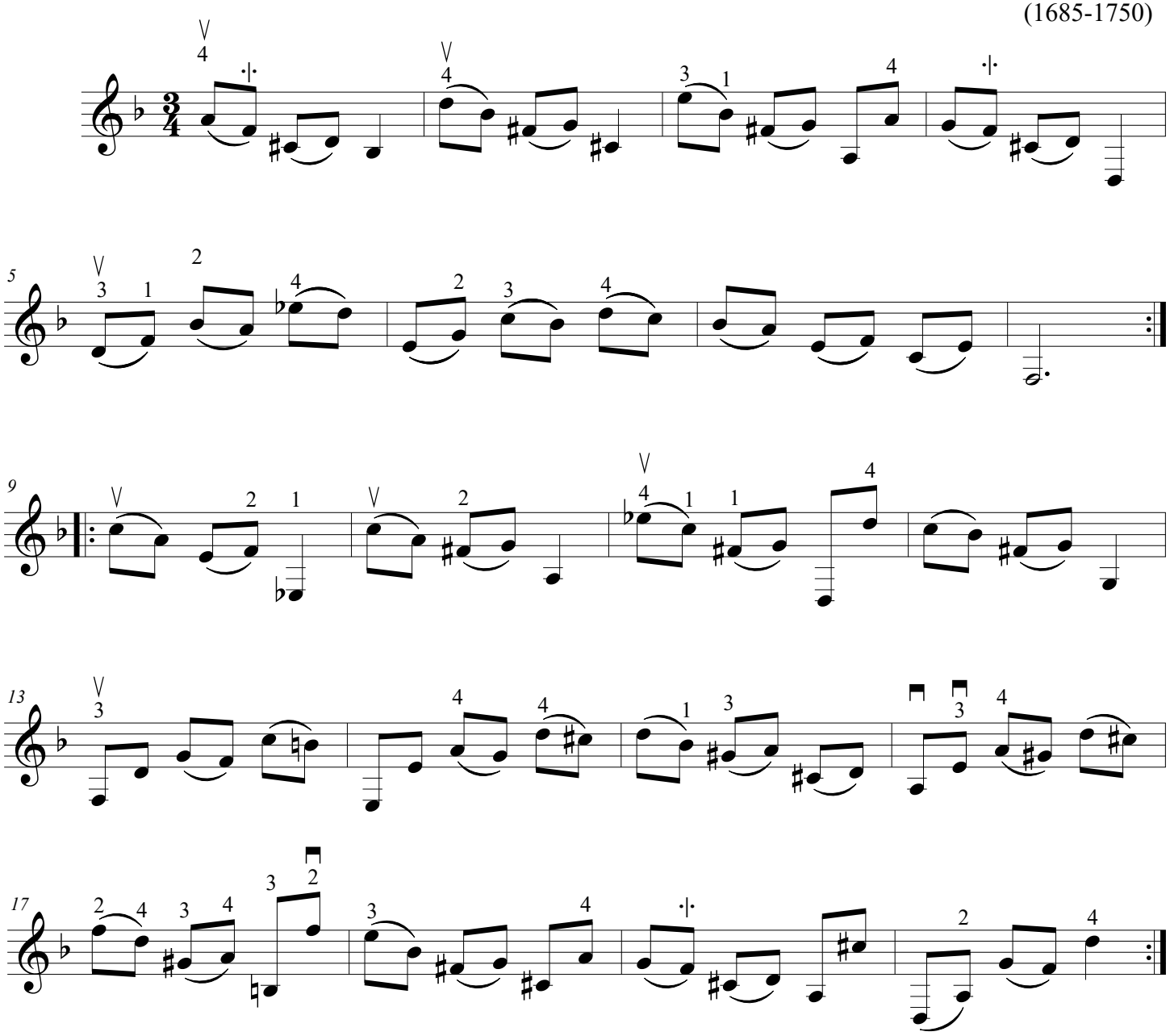

93
100
107
114
121
128
134
141
148
155


162
168
174
181
188
194
201
208
214
220

Sarabande

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

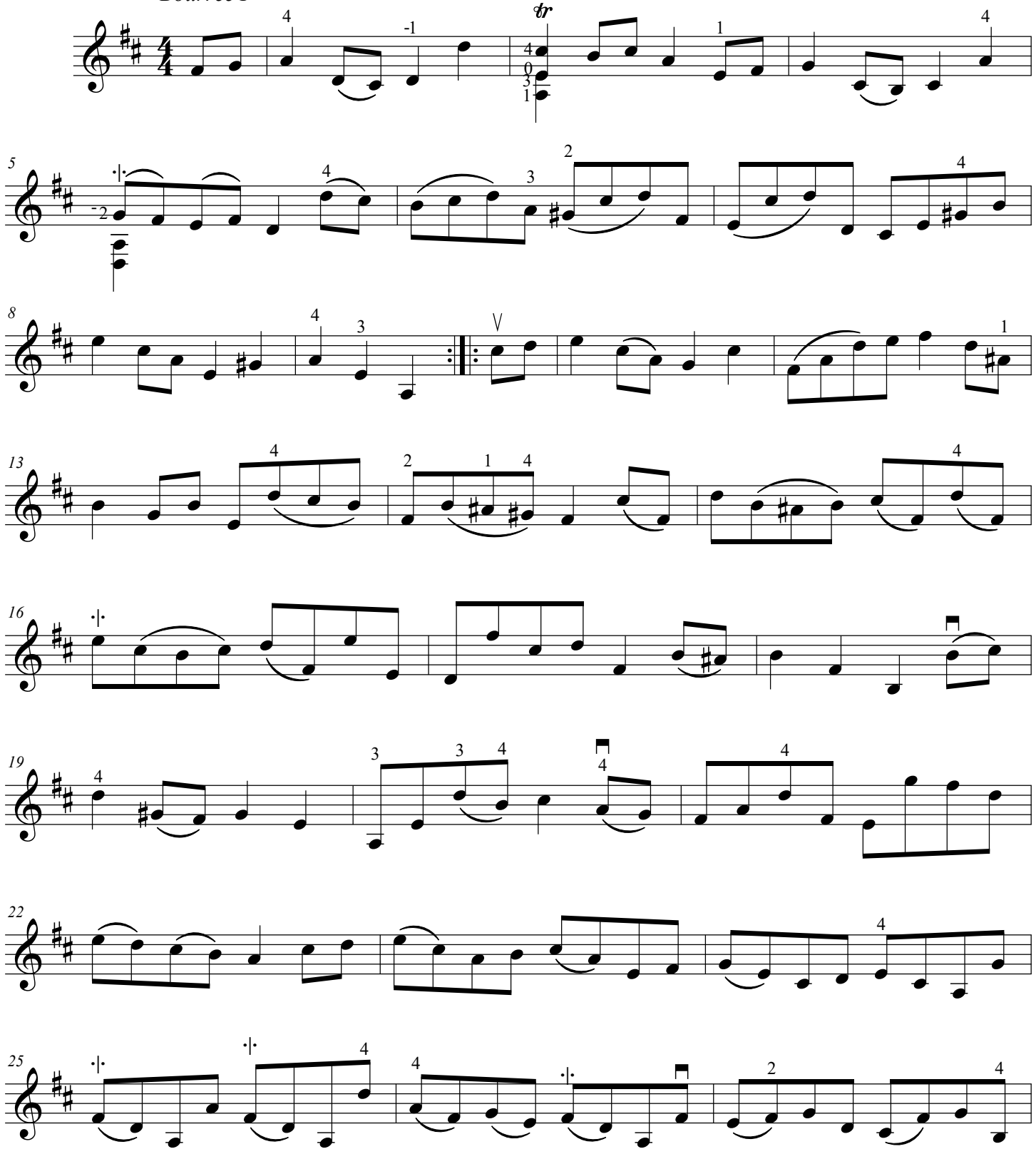


Bourrée I & II

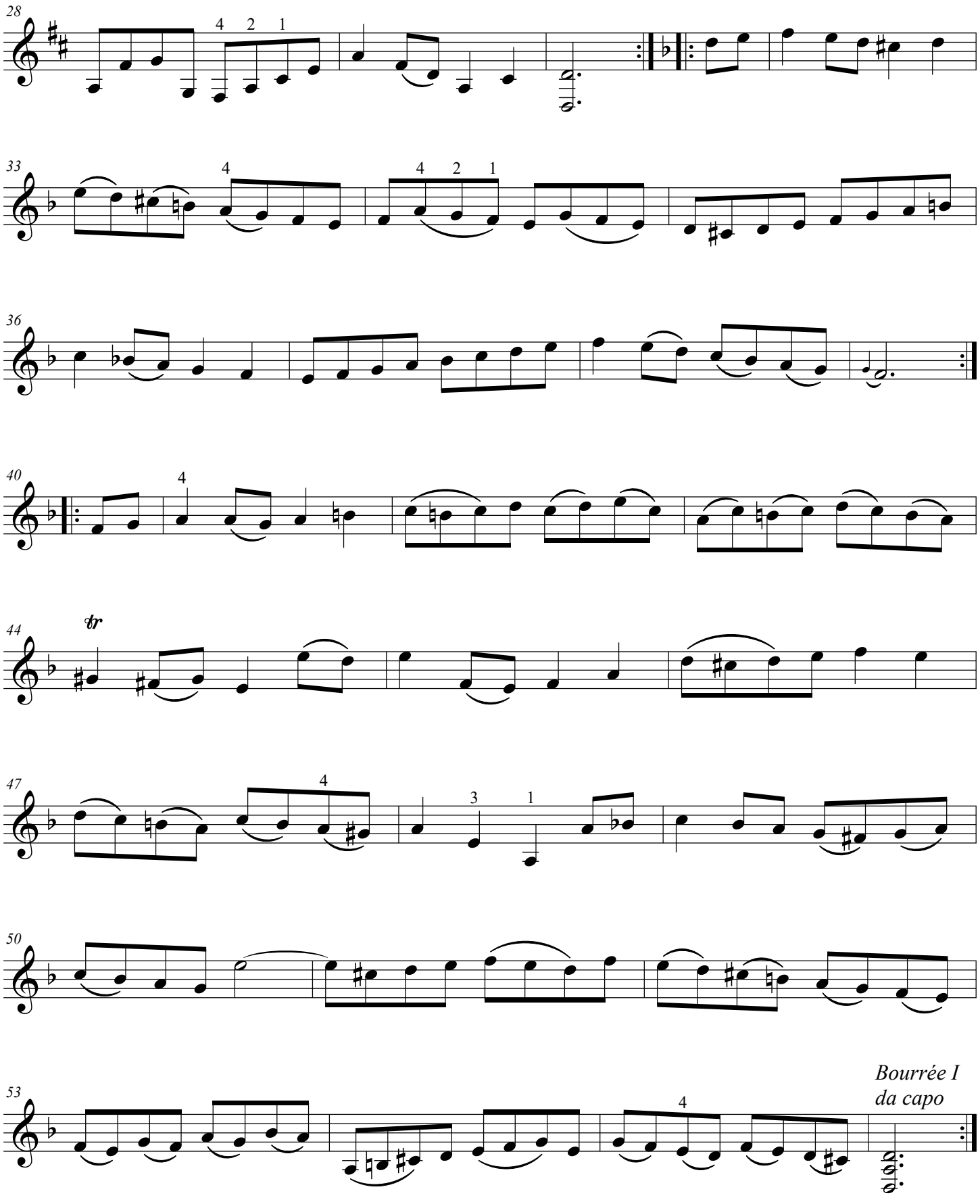
Cello Suite No. 3 BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Bourrée I



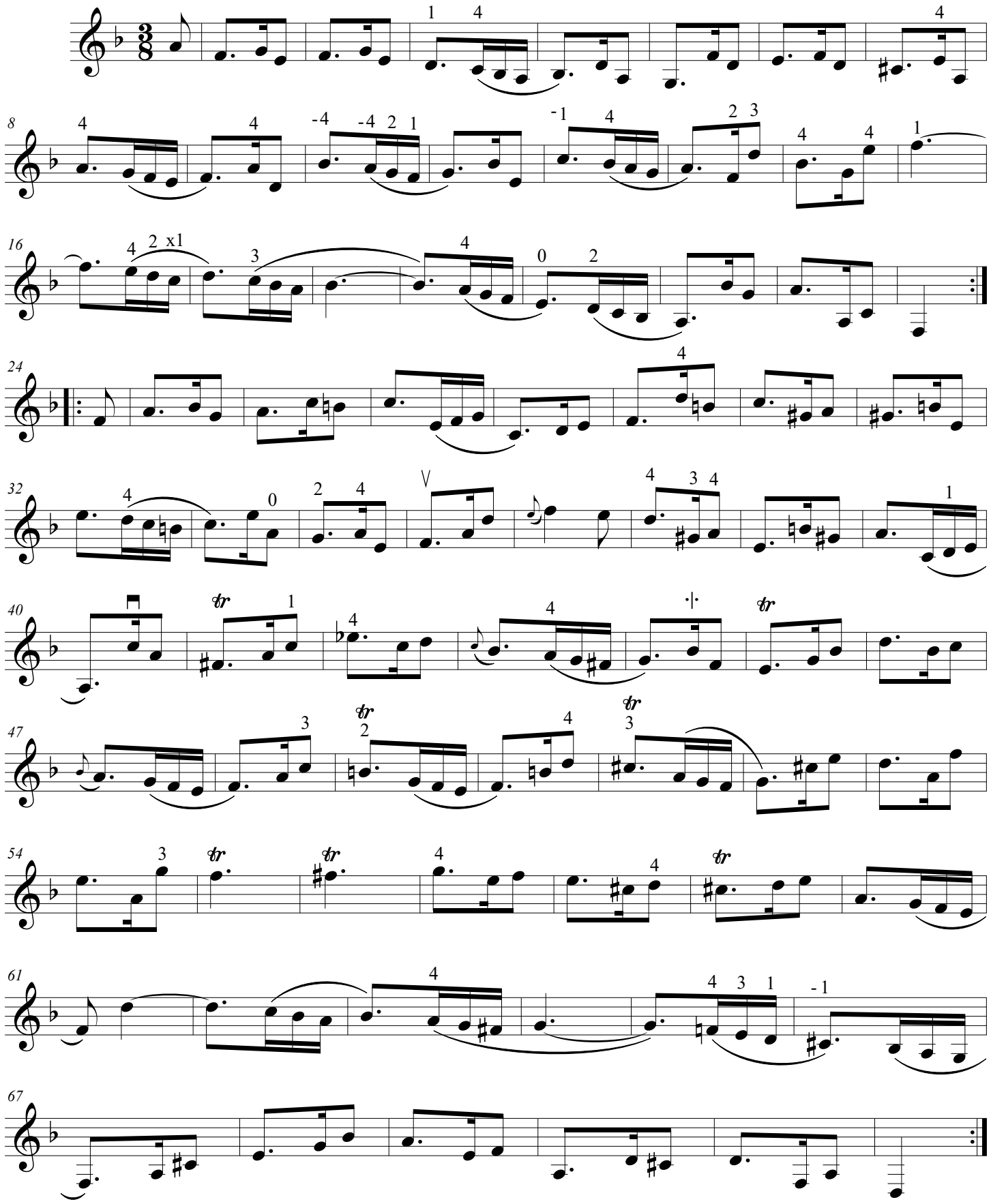
Bourrée II



Gigue

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

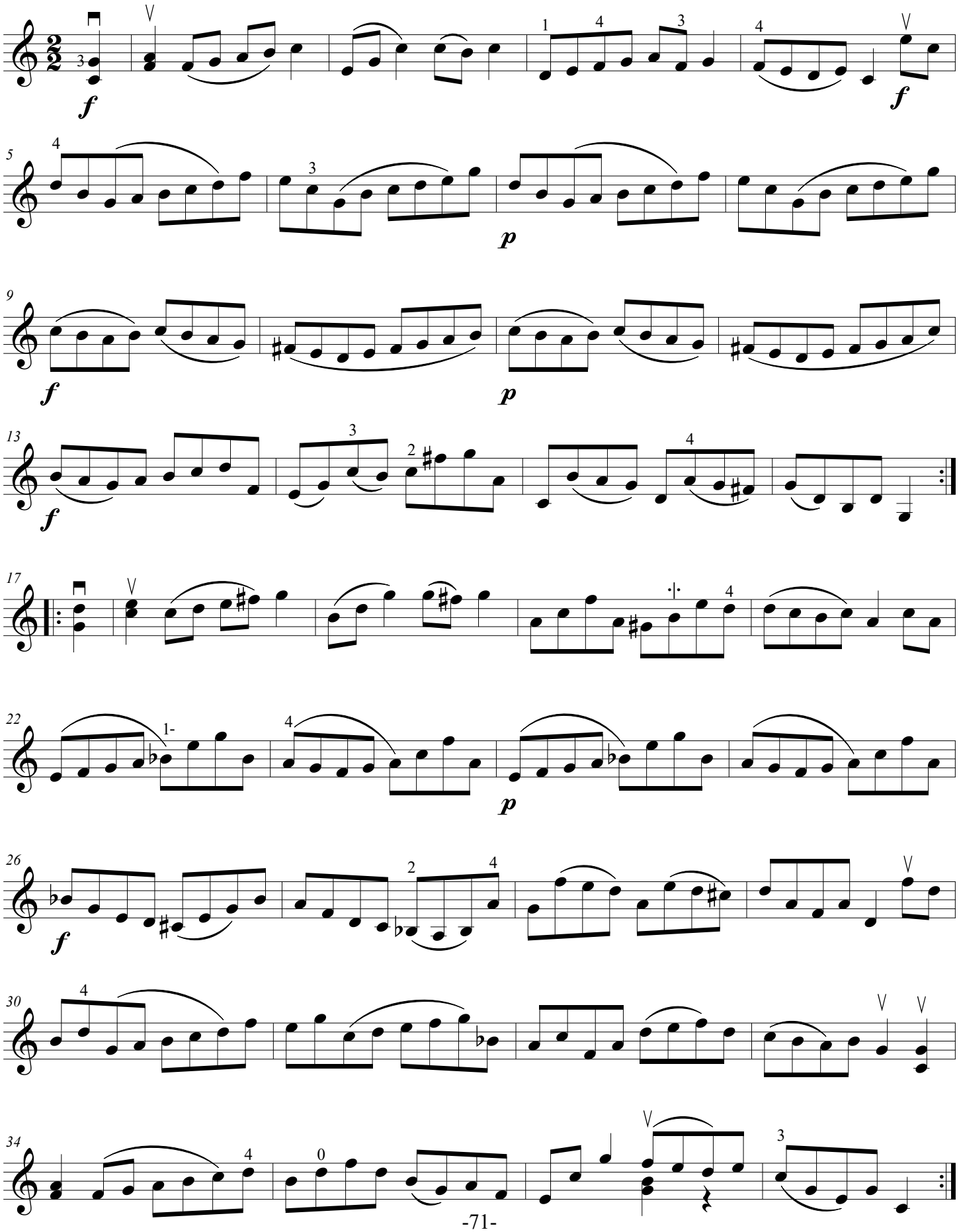
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Bourrée

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

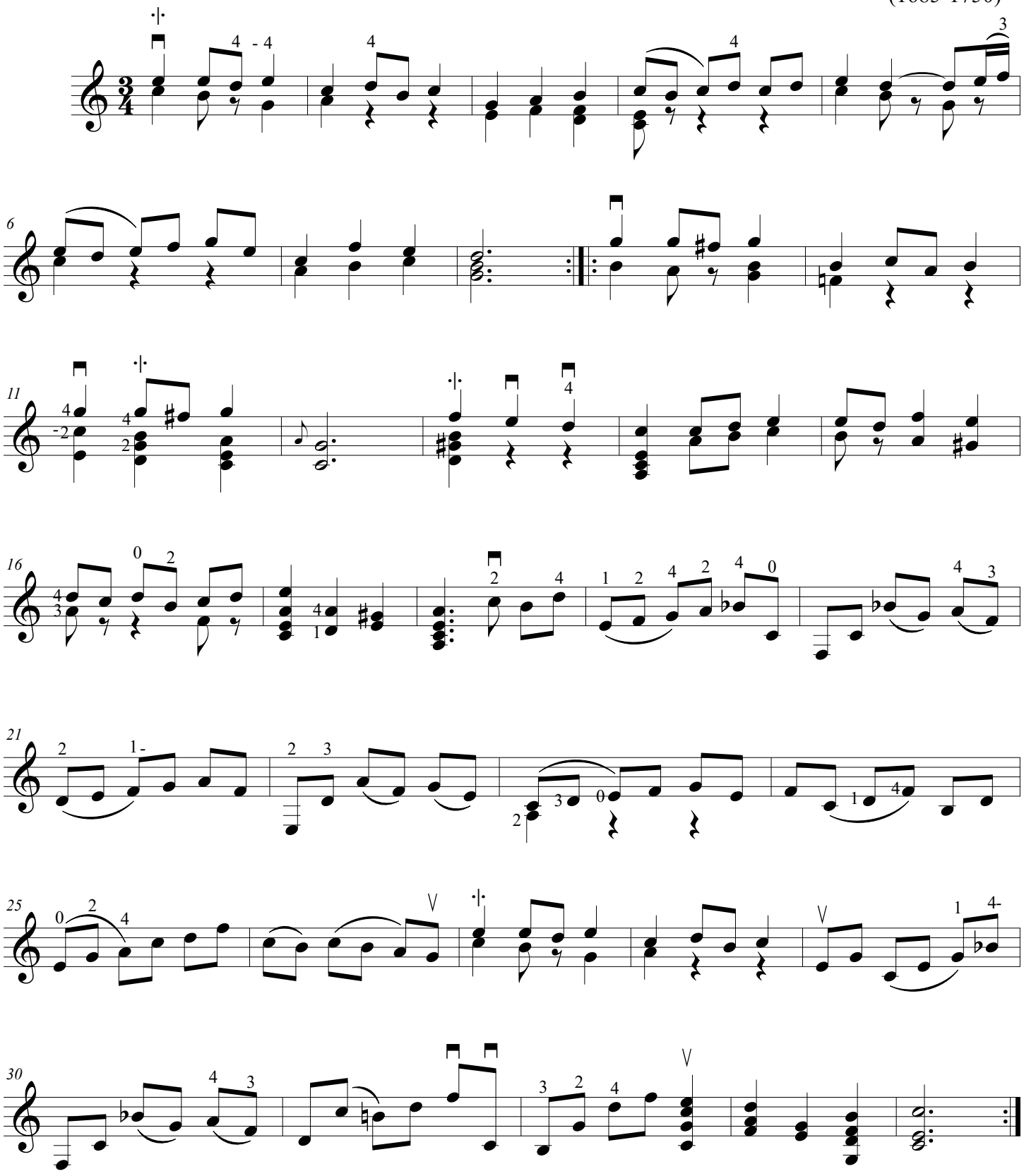
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Menuet I

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

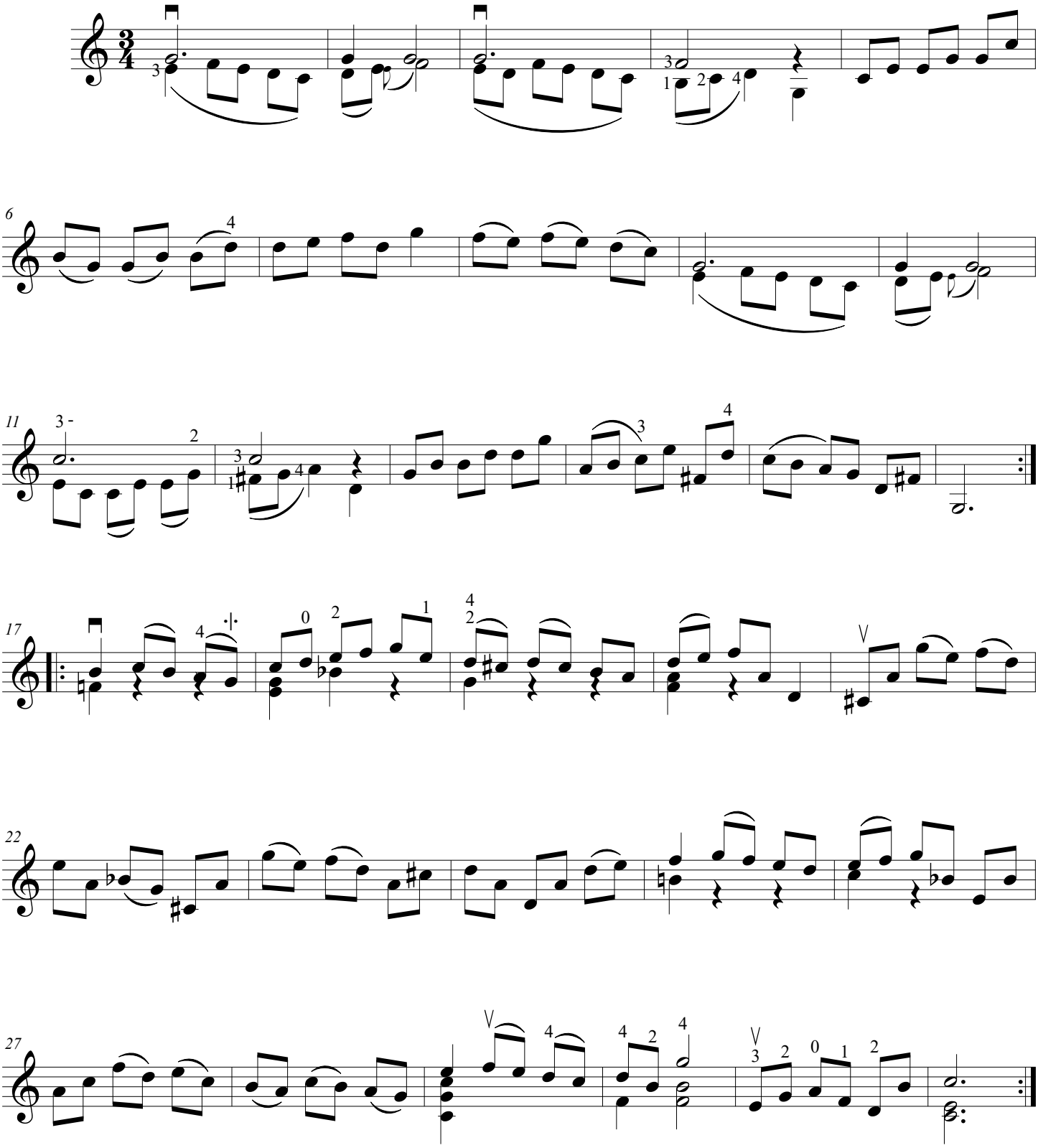
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Menuet II

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

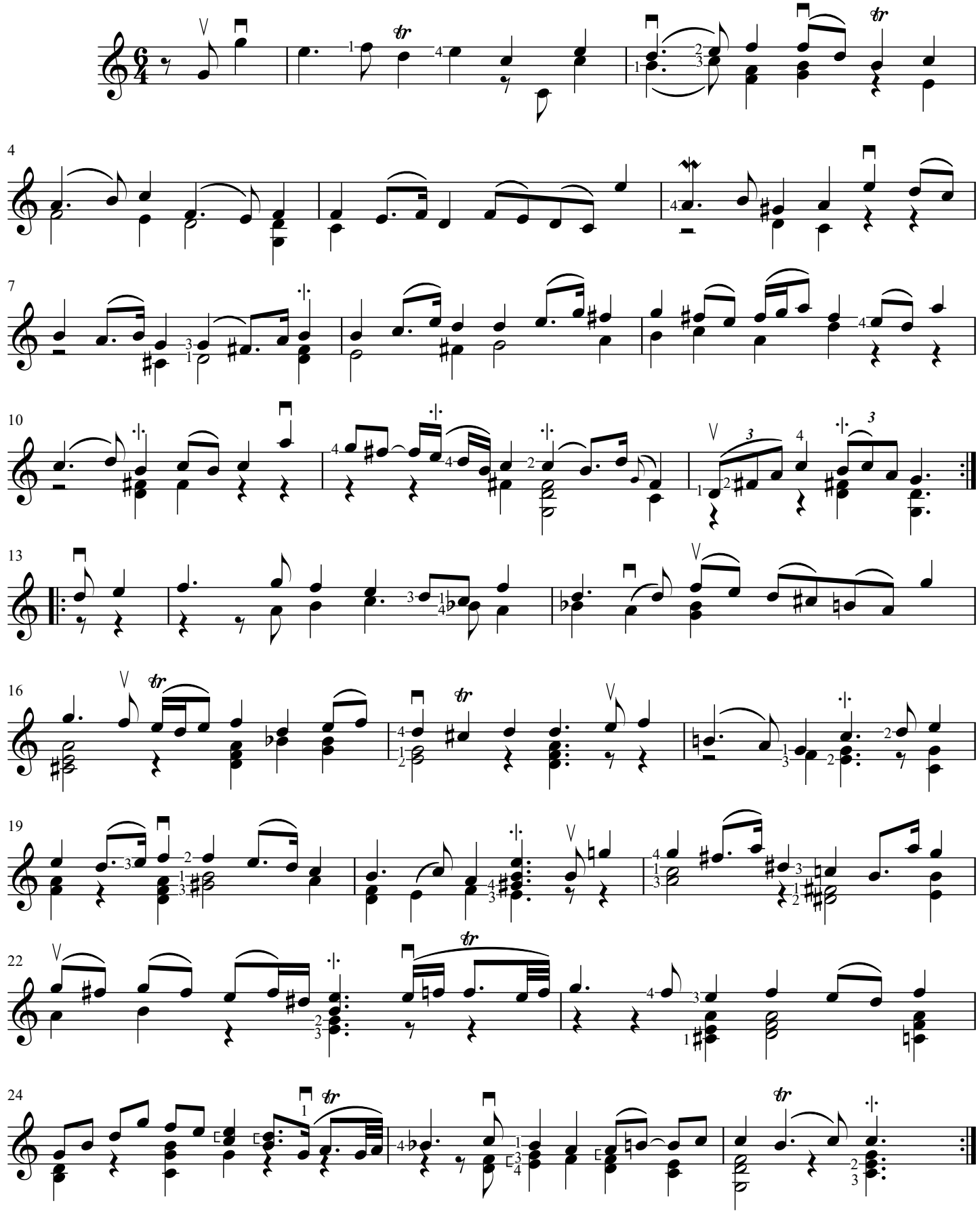
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



Loure

Violin Partita #3, BWV 1006

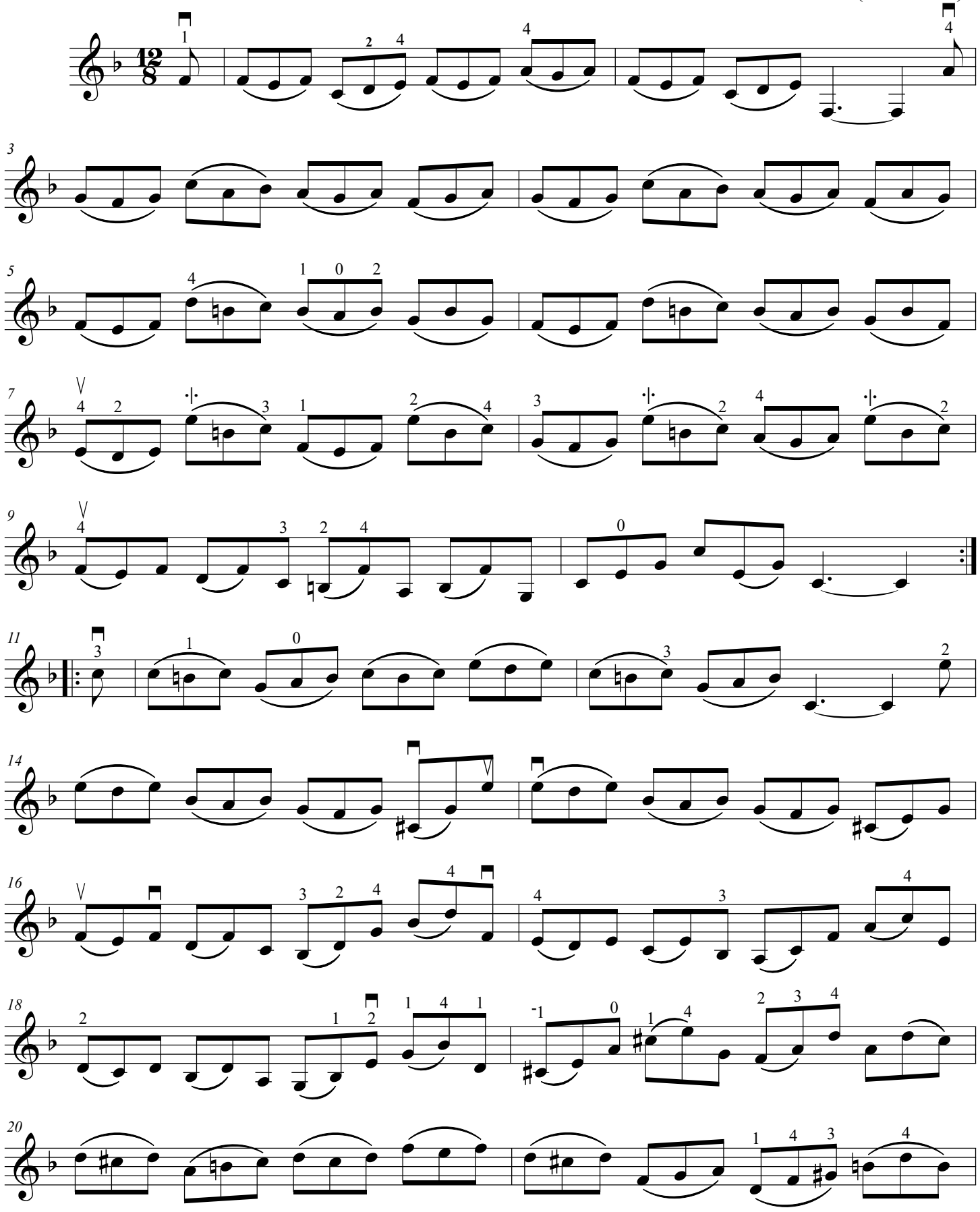
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

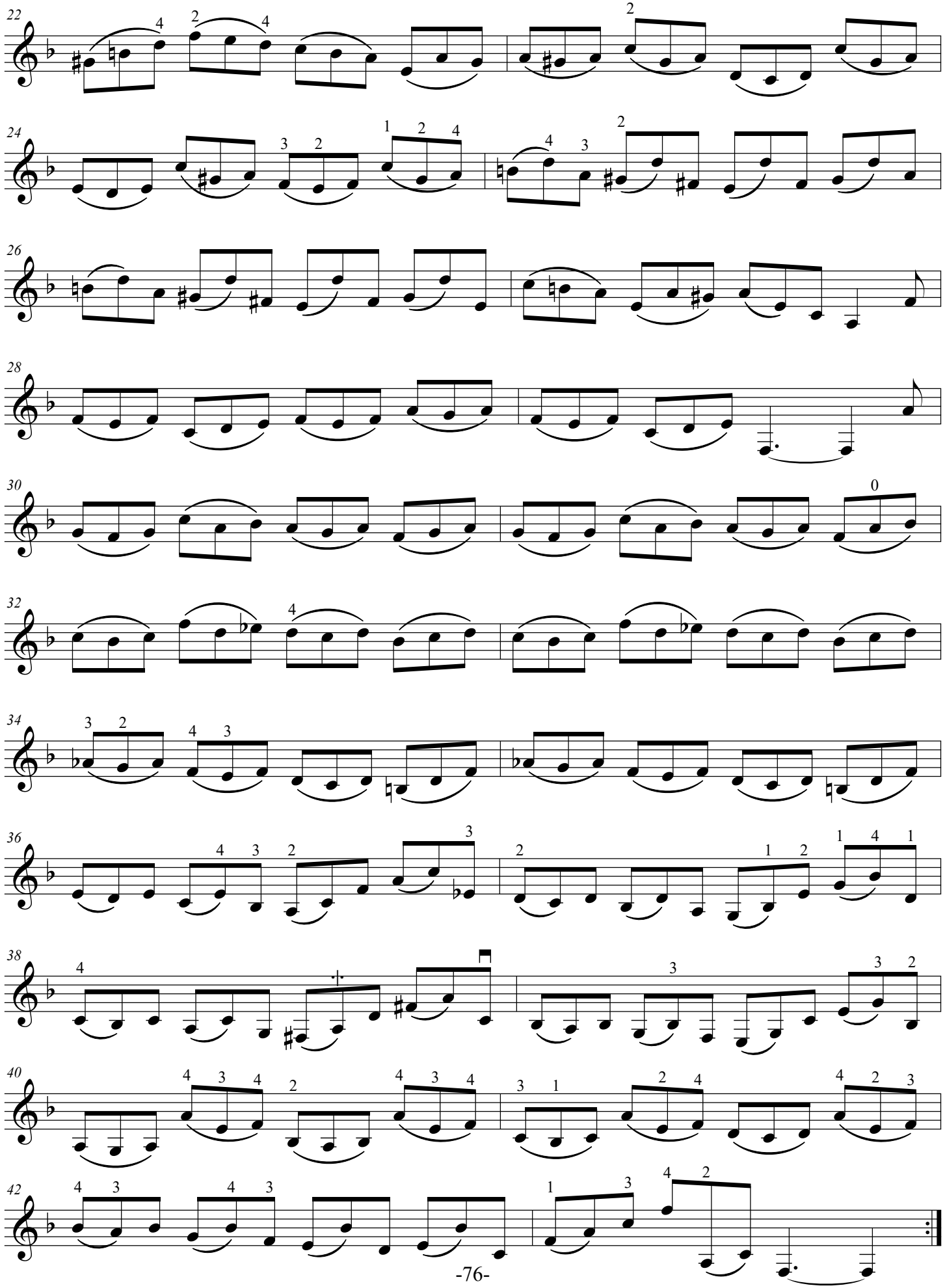


Gigue

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

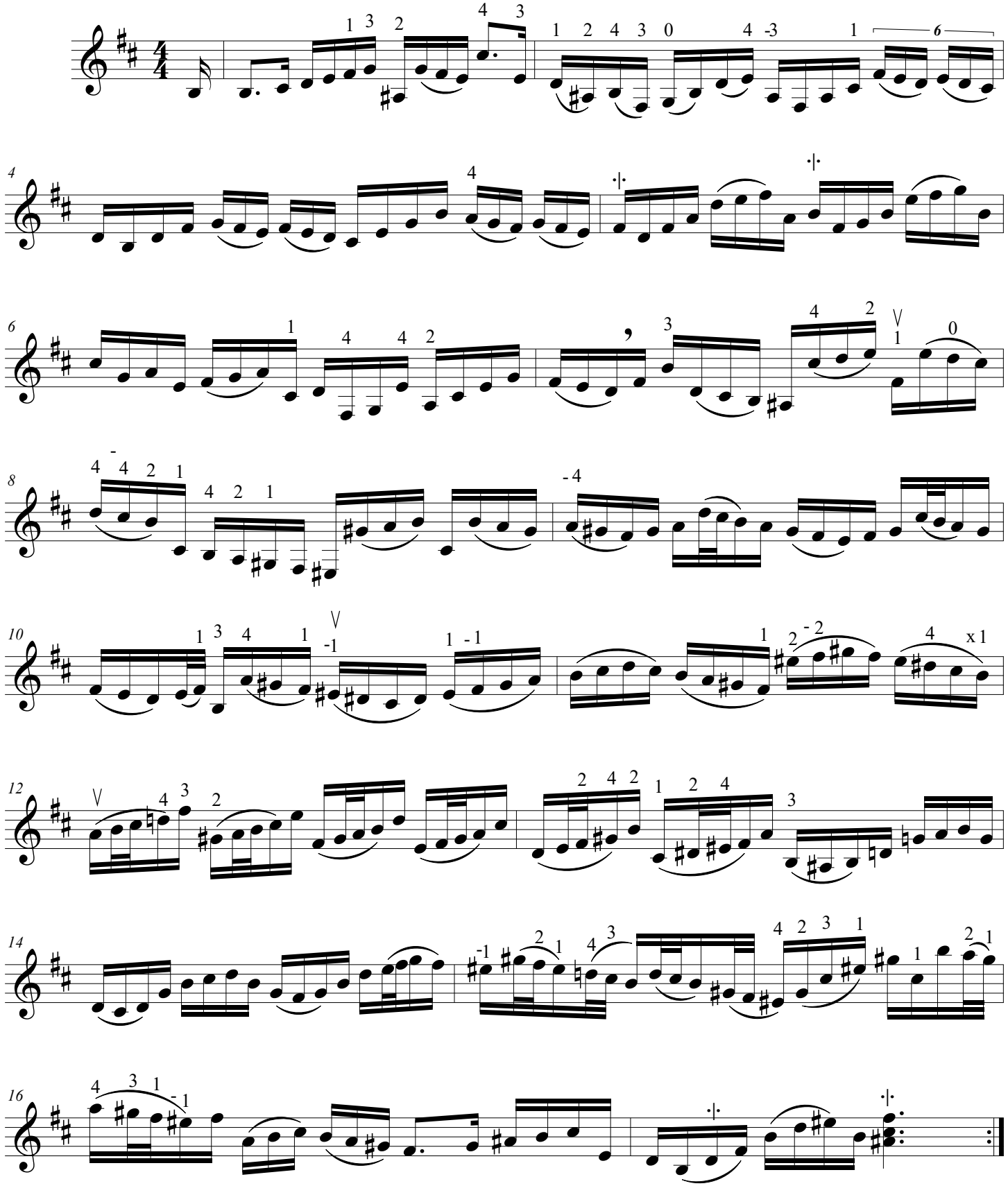


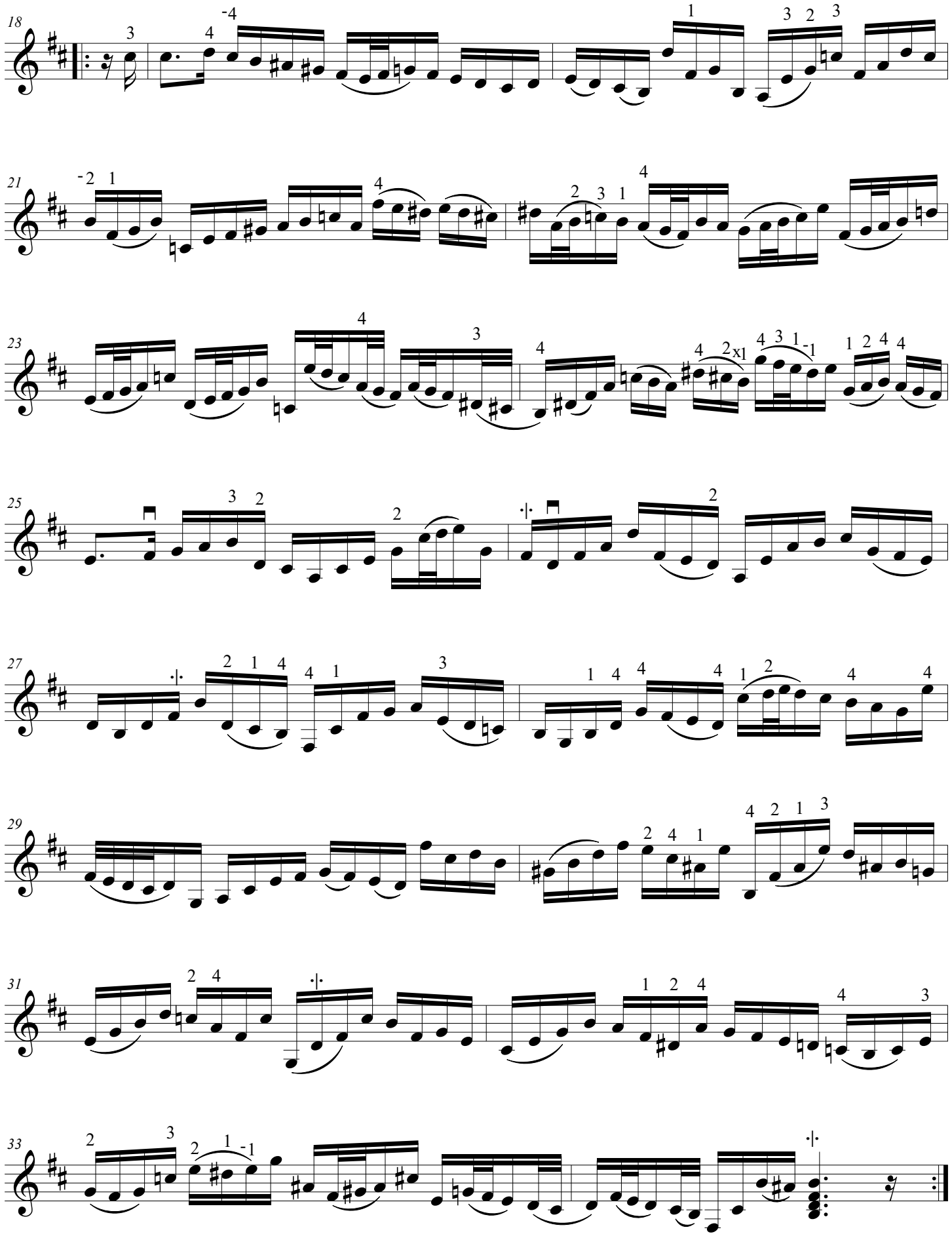


Allemande

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

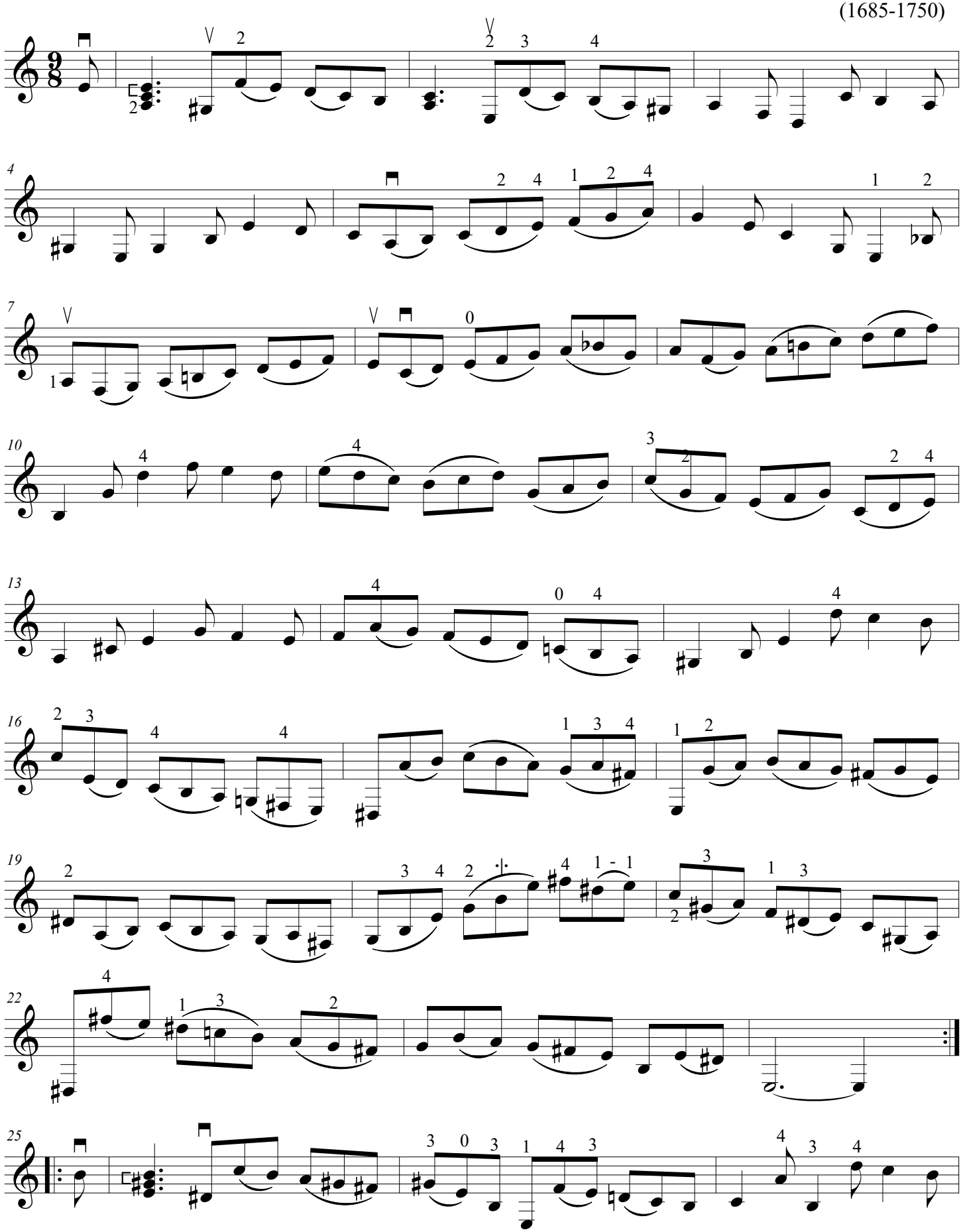


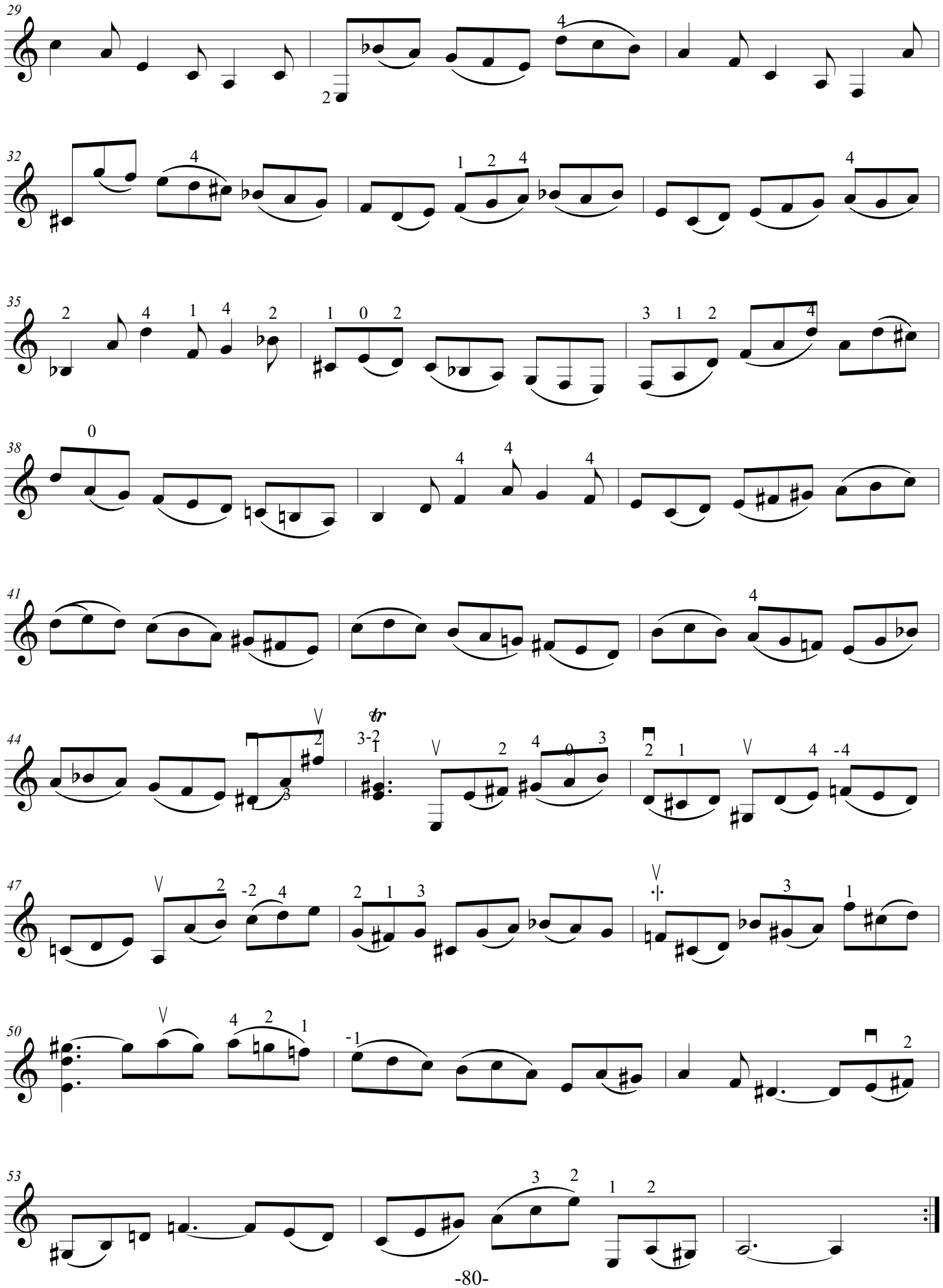


Courante

Violin Partita No. 2, BWV 1004

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

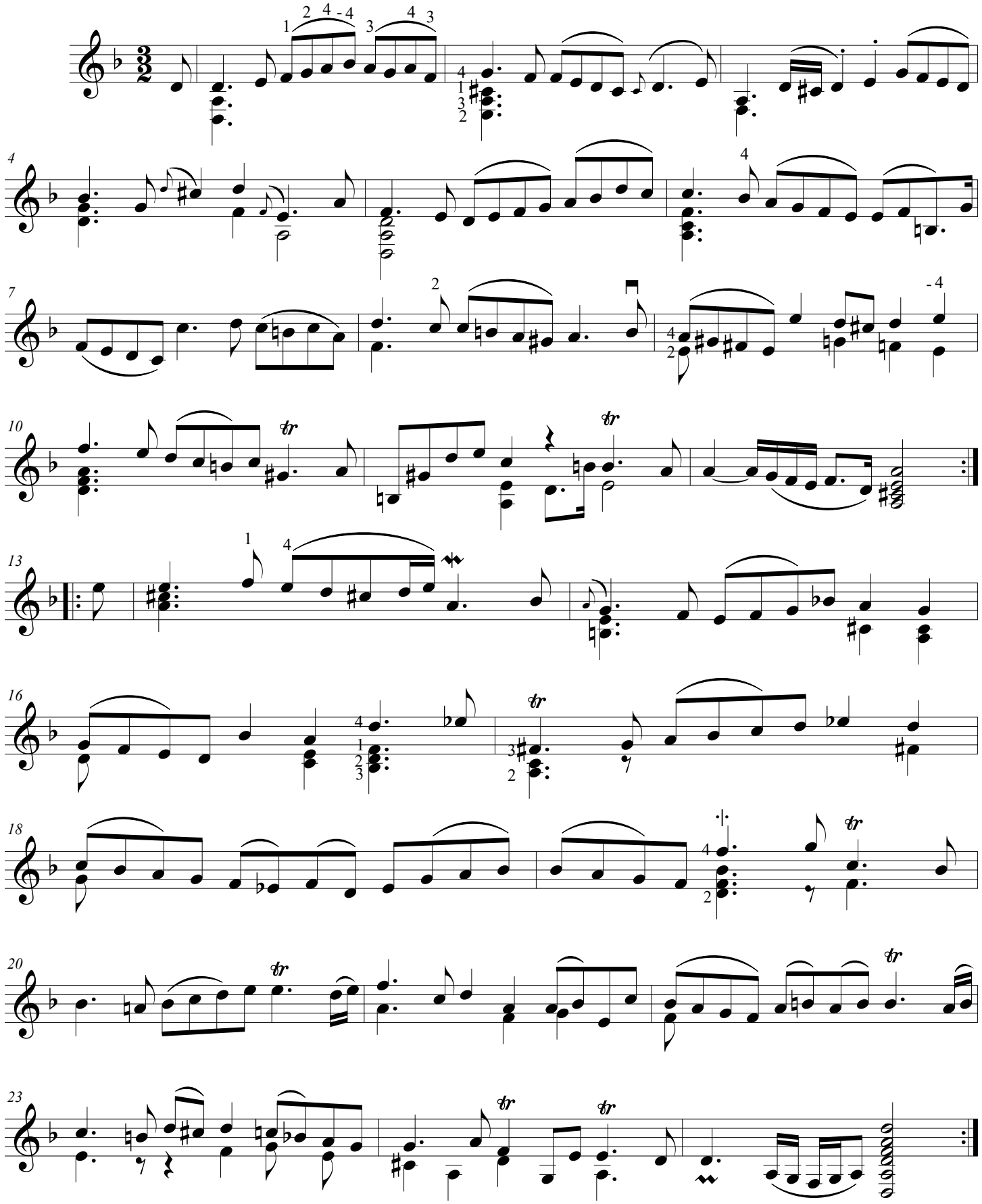



29
32
35
38
41
44
tr
47
50
53

Courante

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

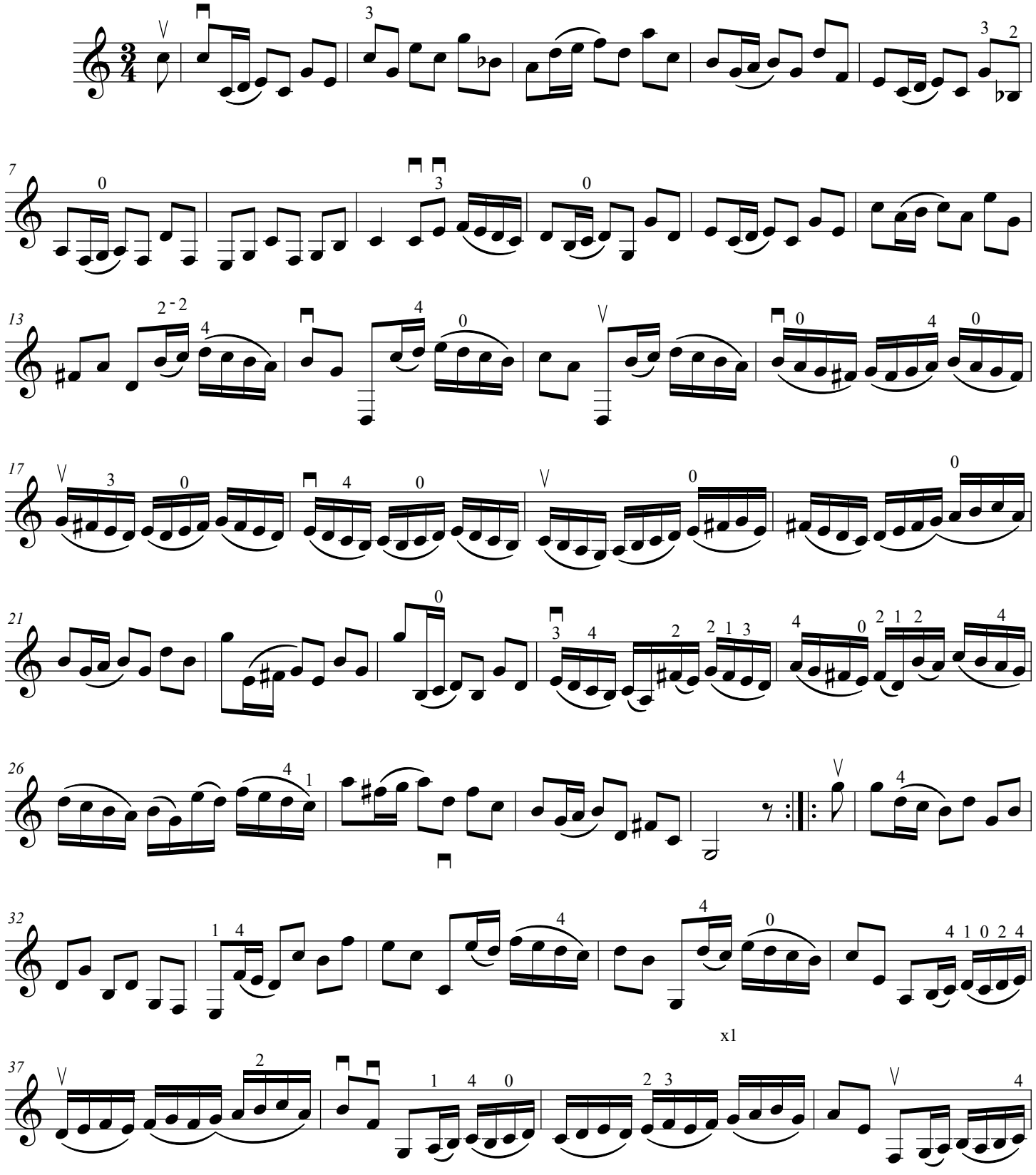
J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

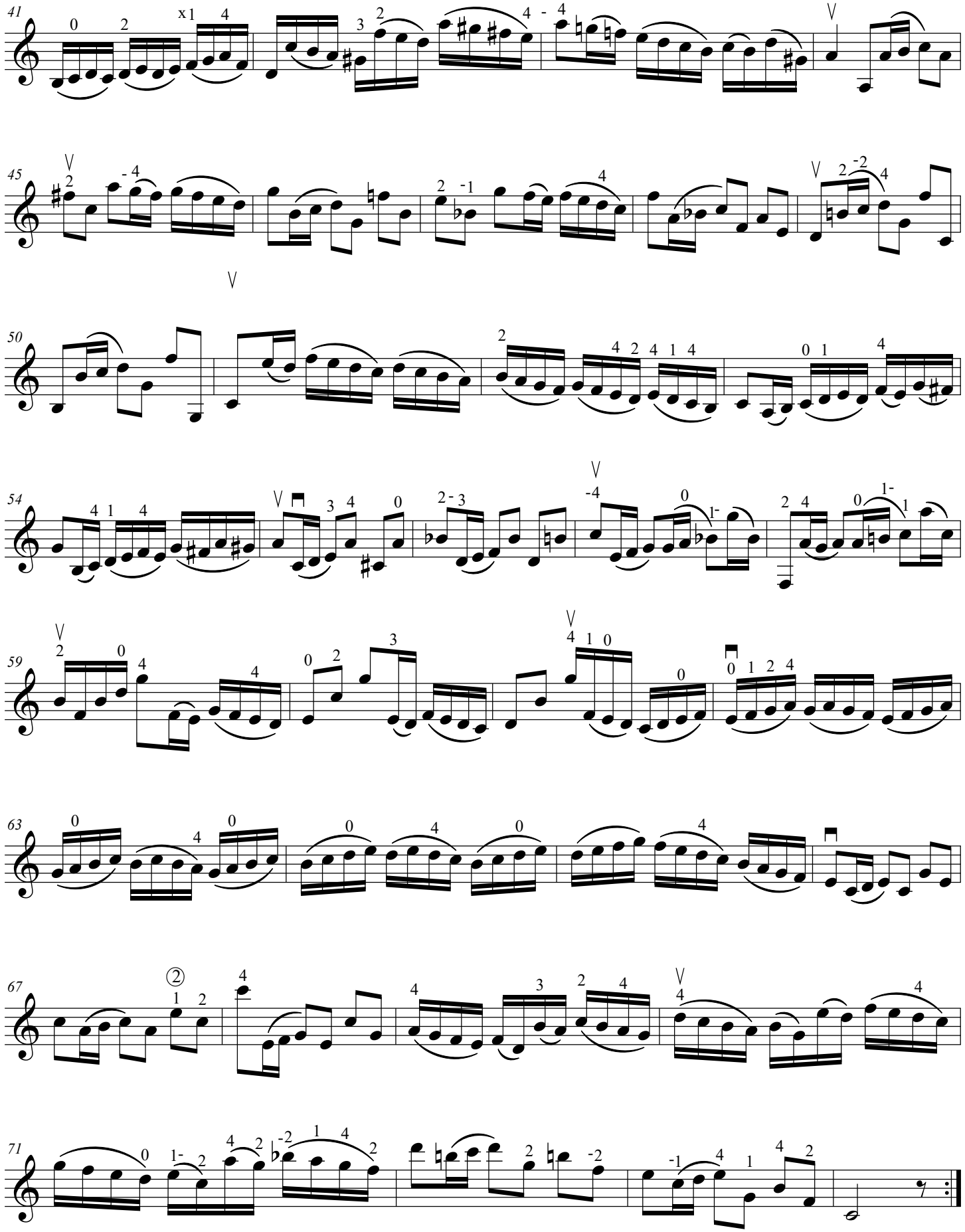


Courante

Cello Suite No. 6, BWV 1012

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

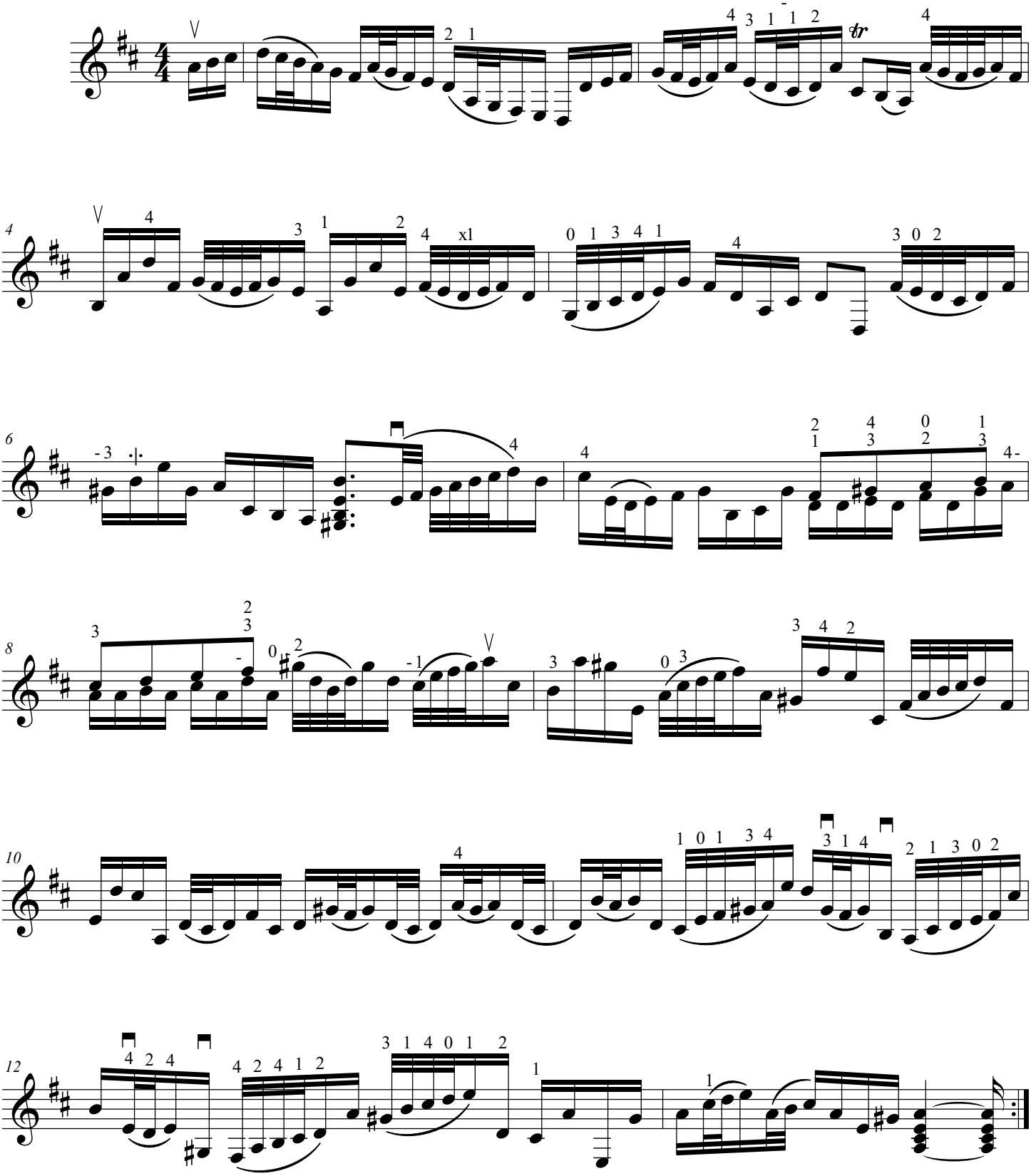


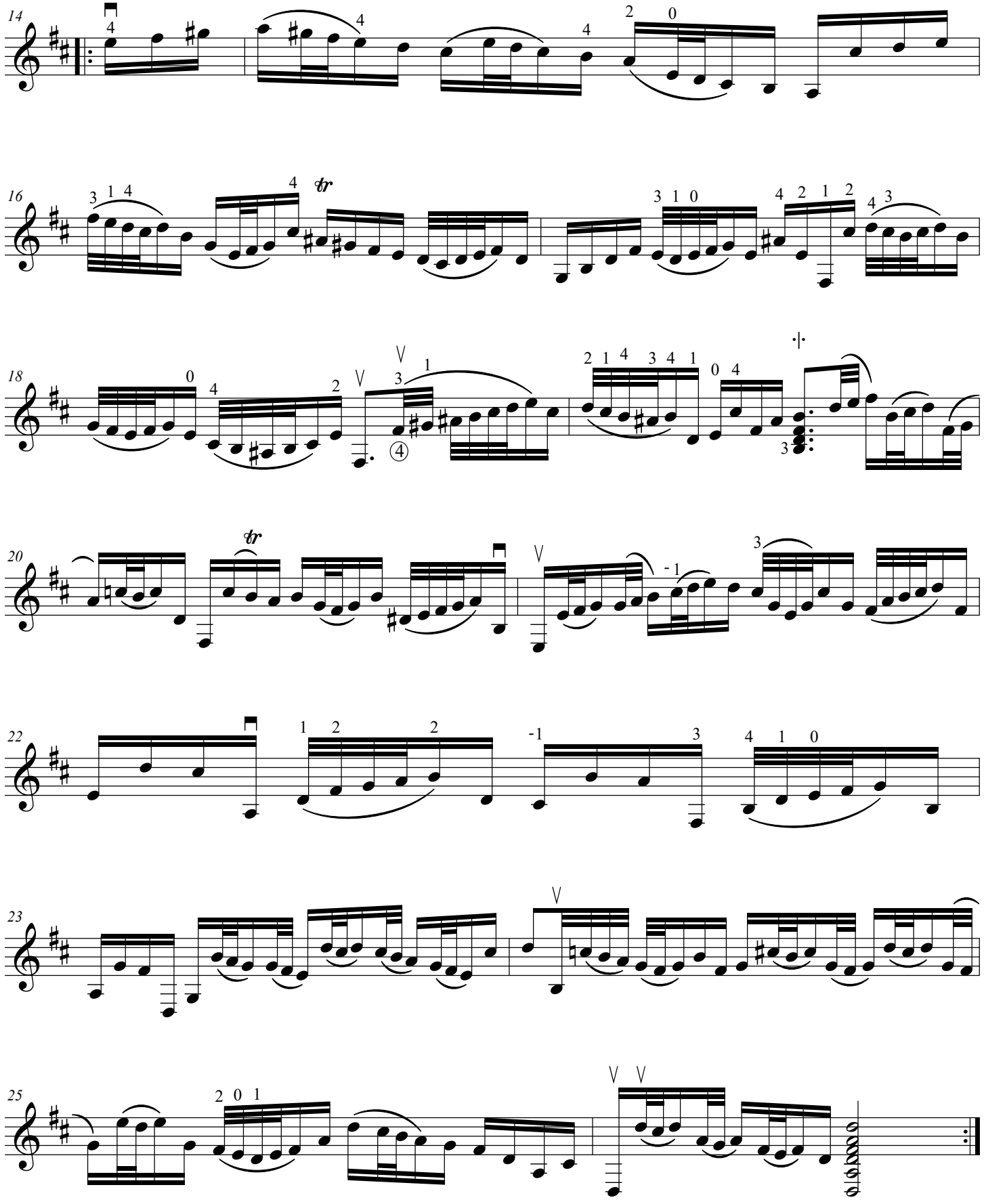


Allemande

Cello Suite No. 3, BWV 1009

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

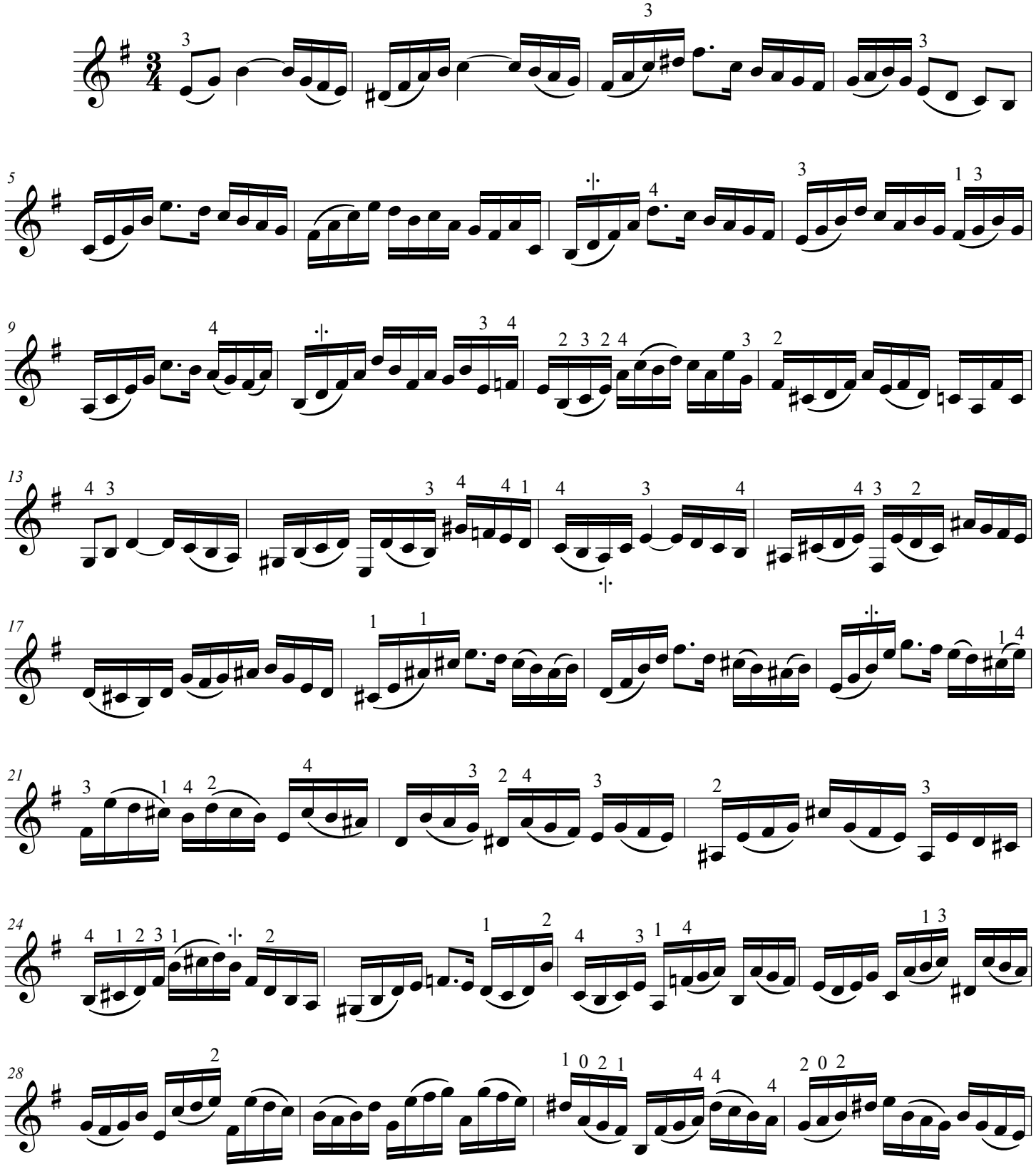


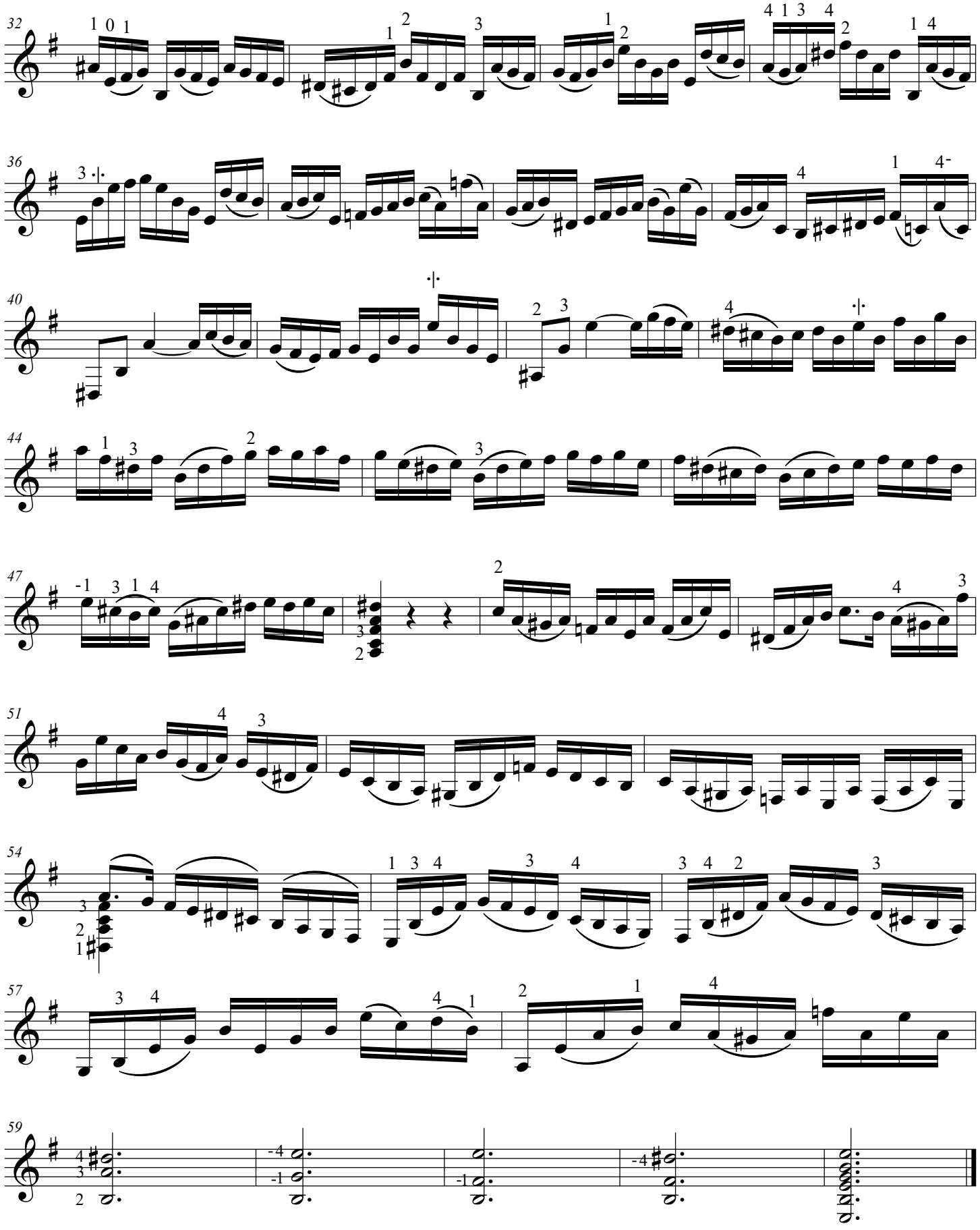


Prélude

Cello Suite No. 2, BWV 1008

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

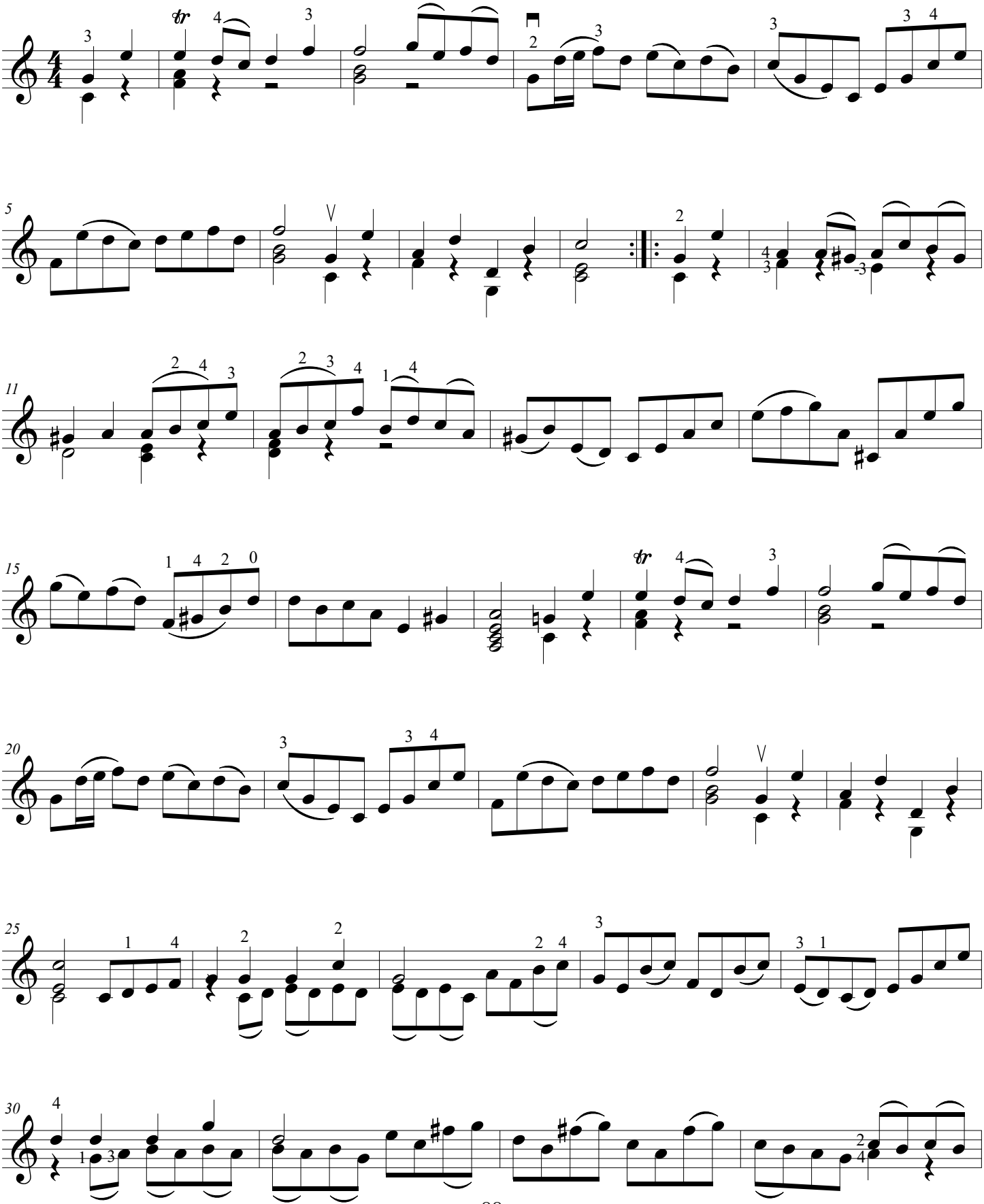


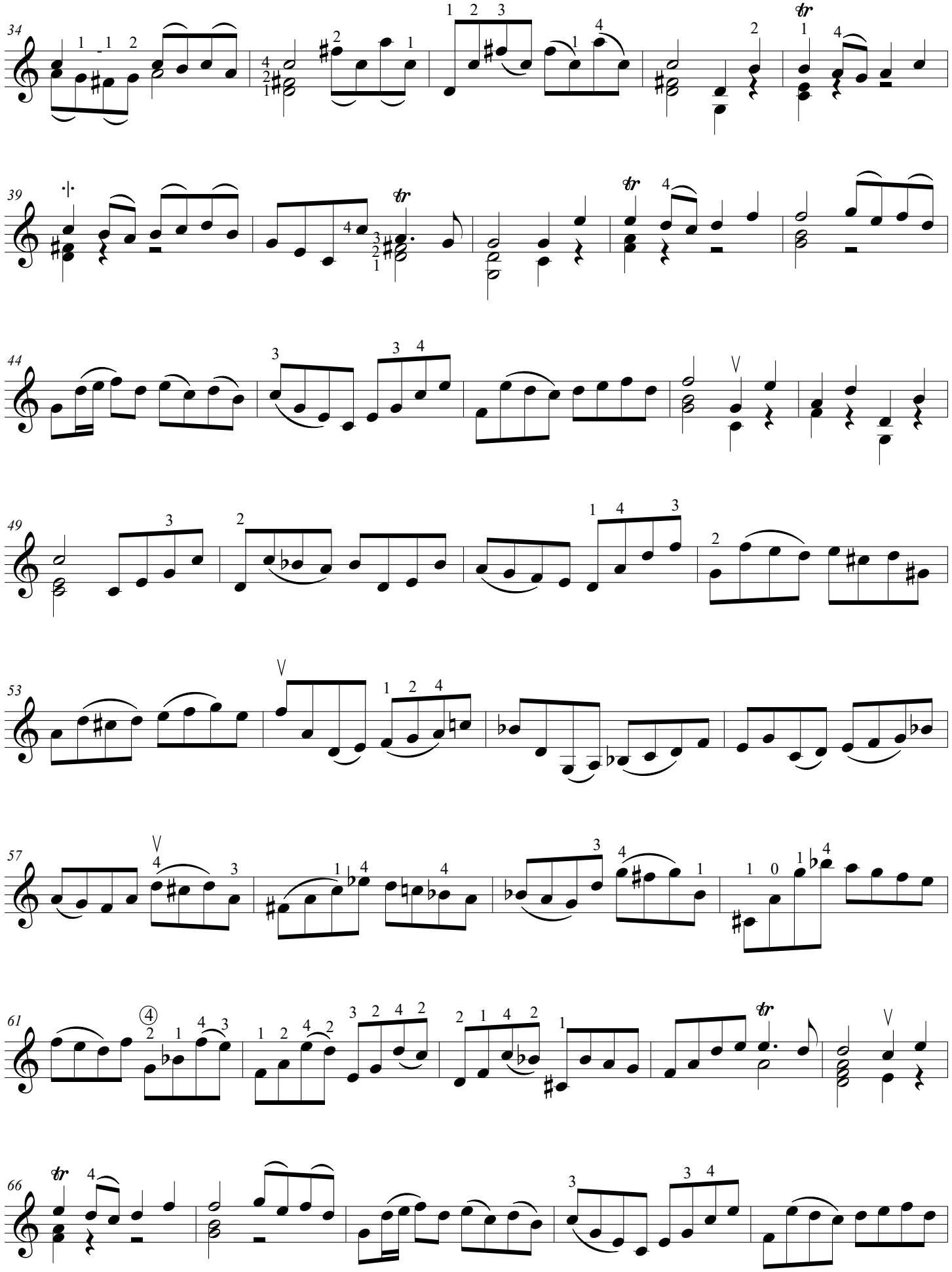


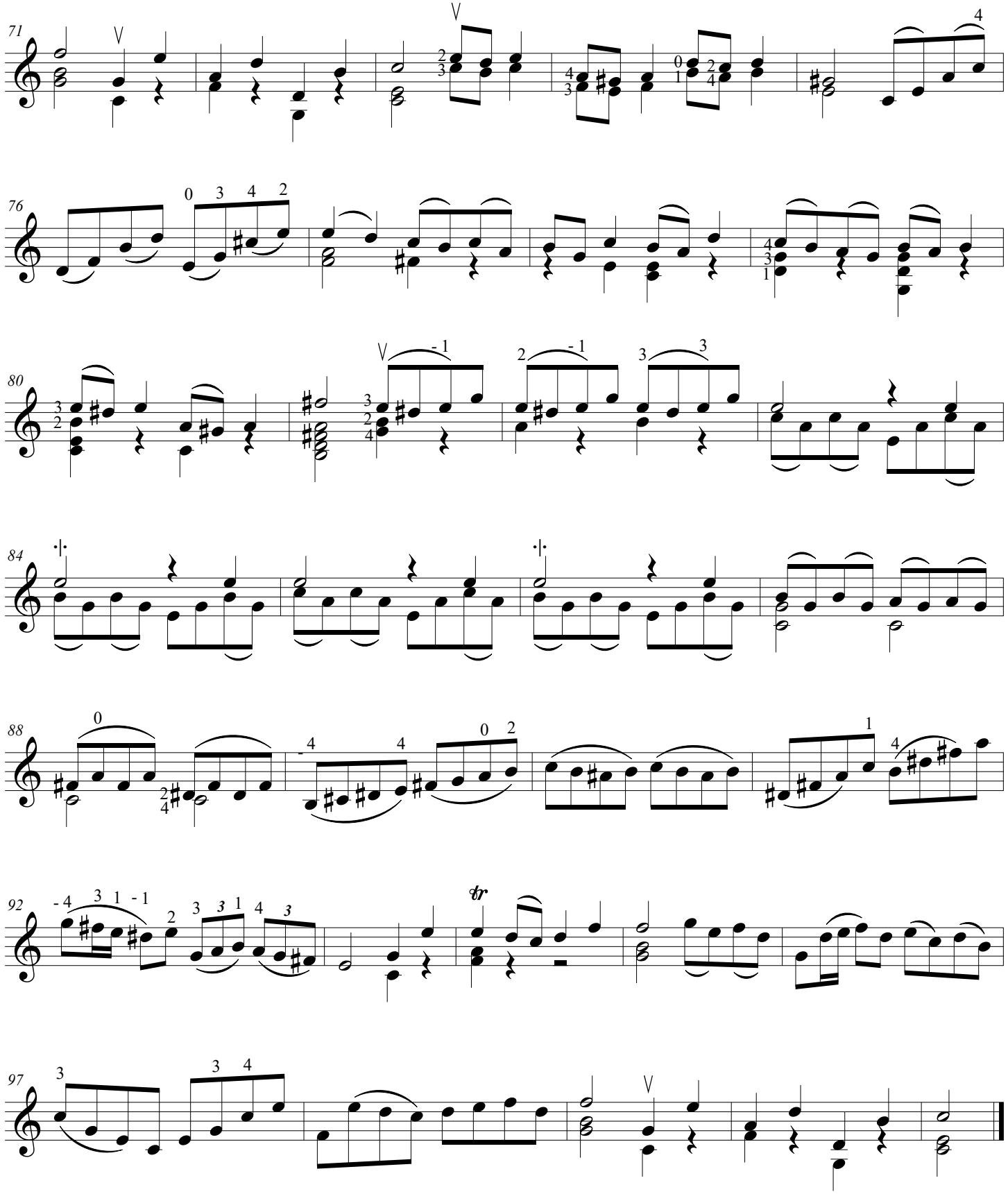
Gavotte en Rondeau

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)



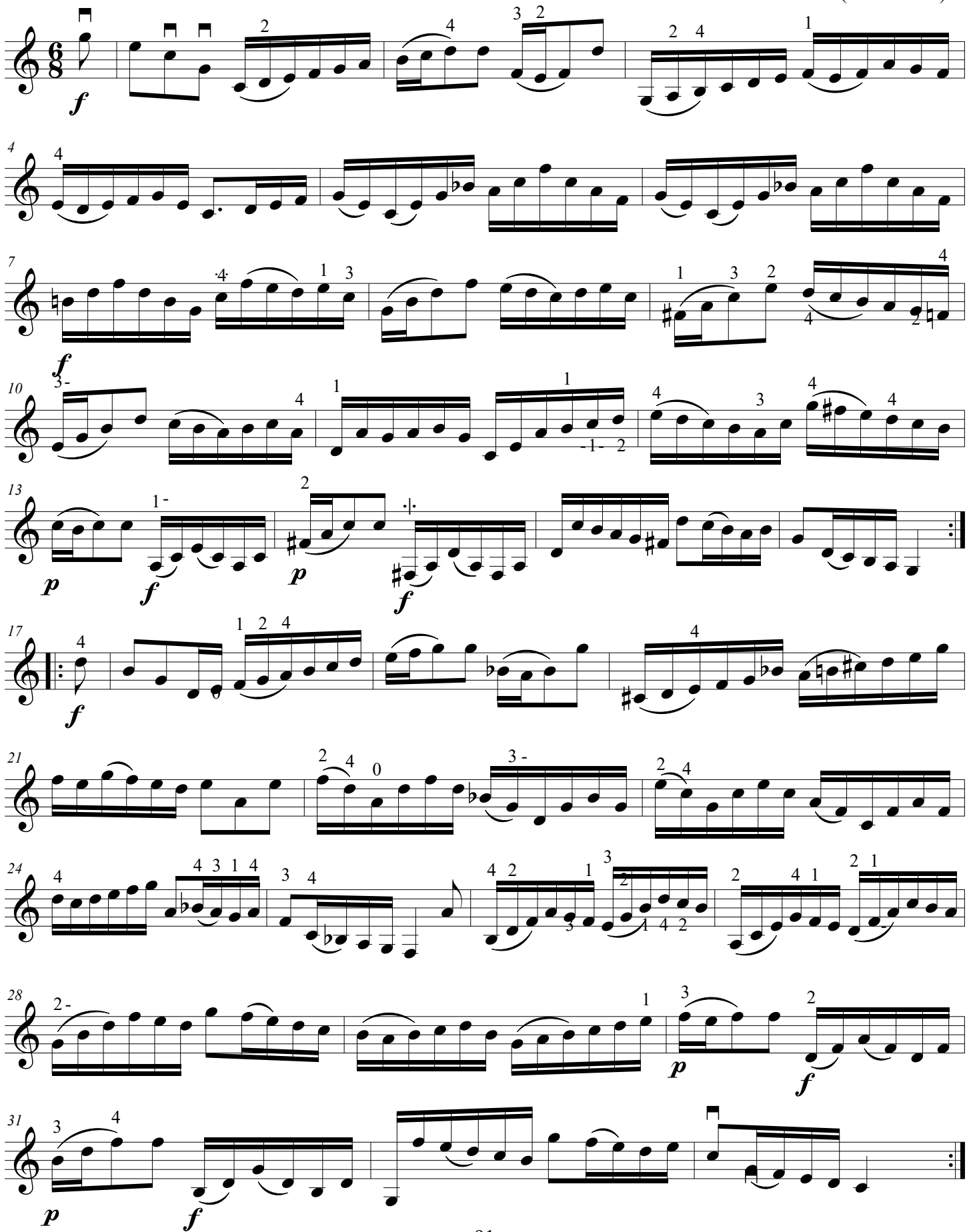




Gigue

Violin Partita No. 3, BWV 1006

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

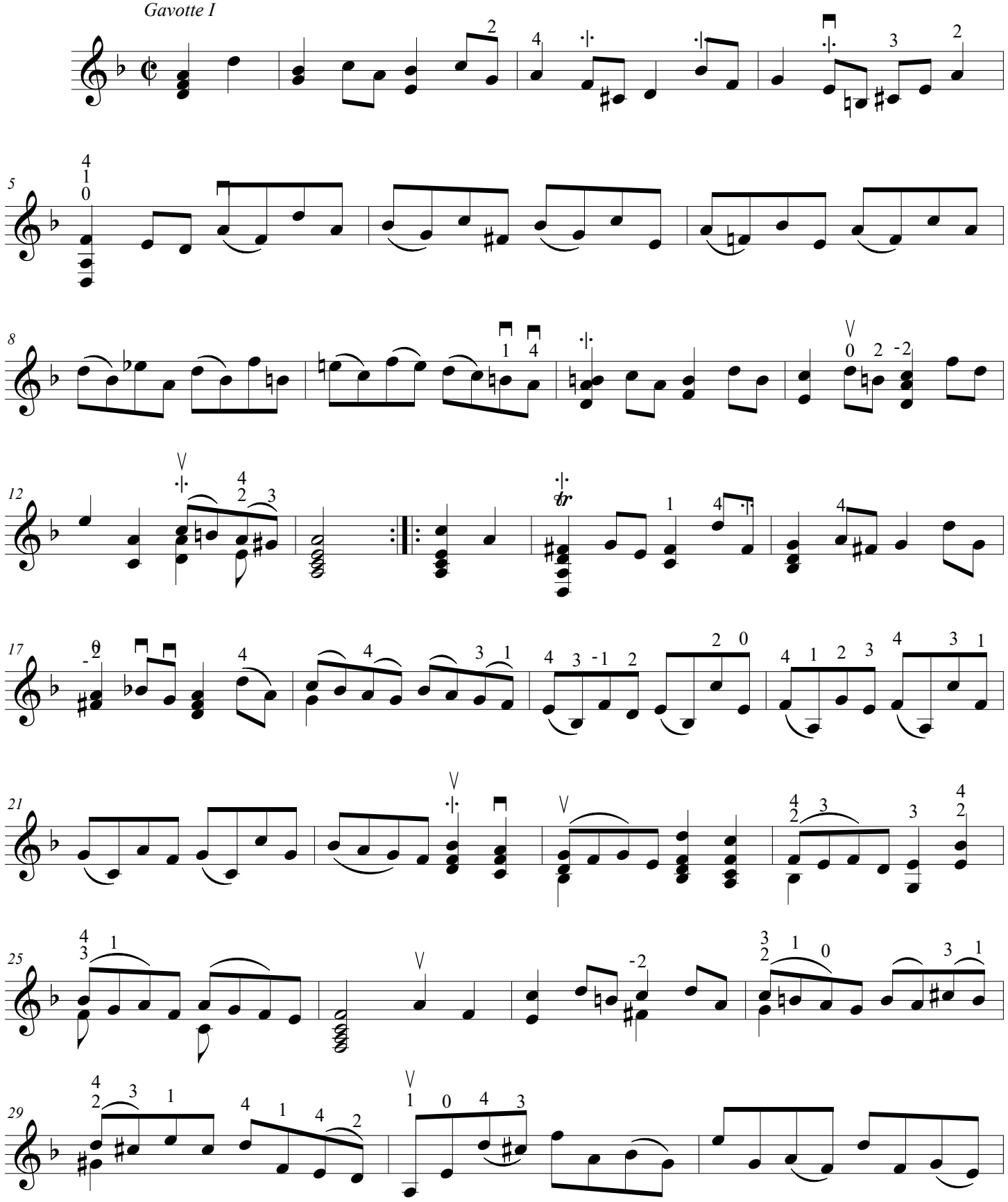


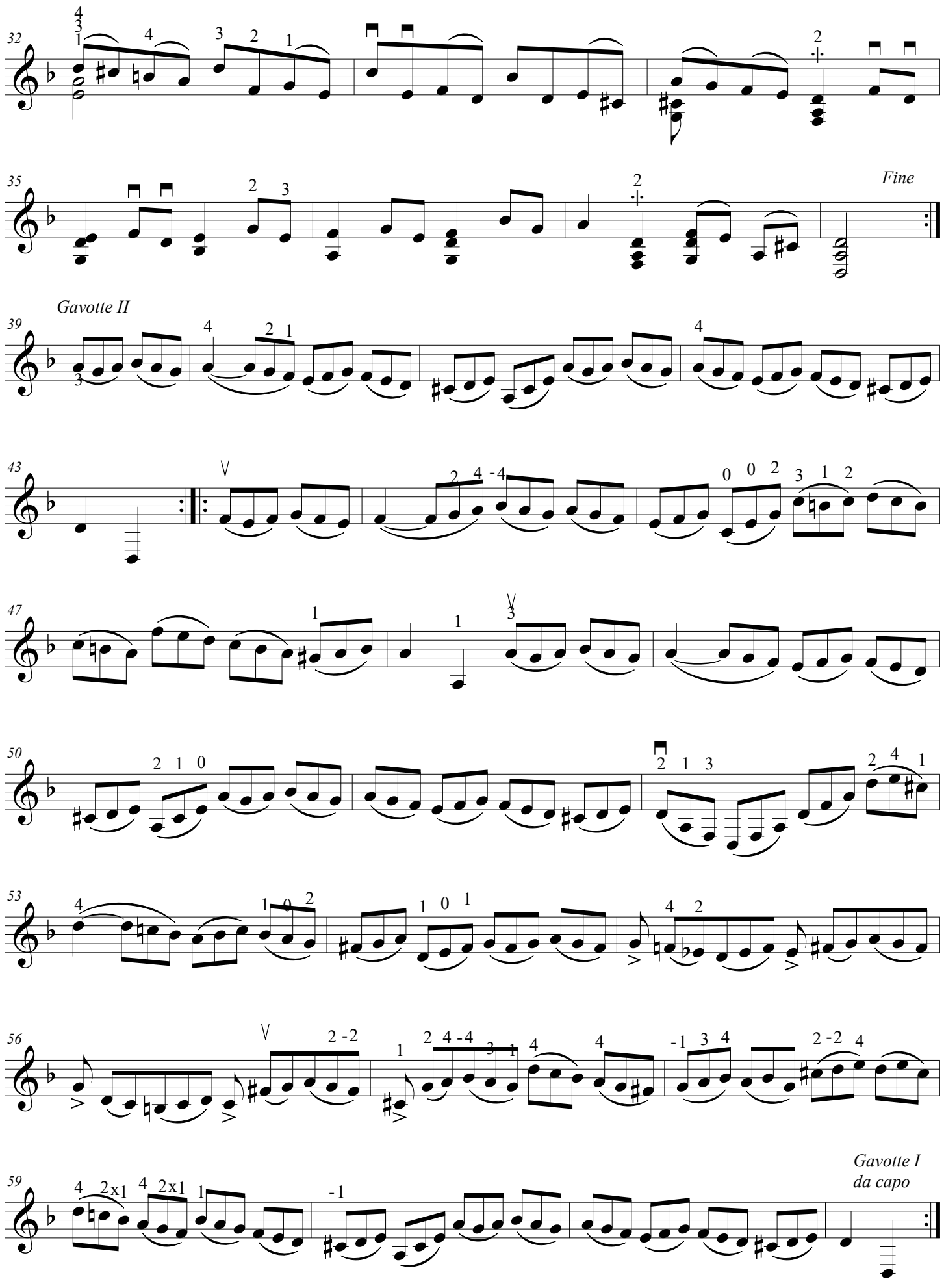
Gavotte I & II

Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Gavotte I



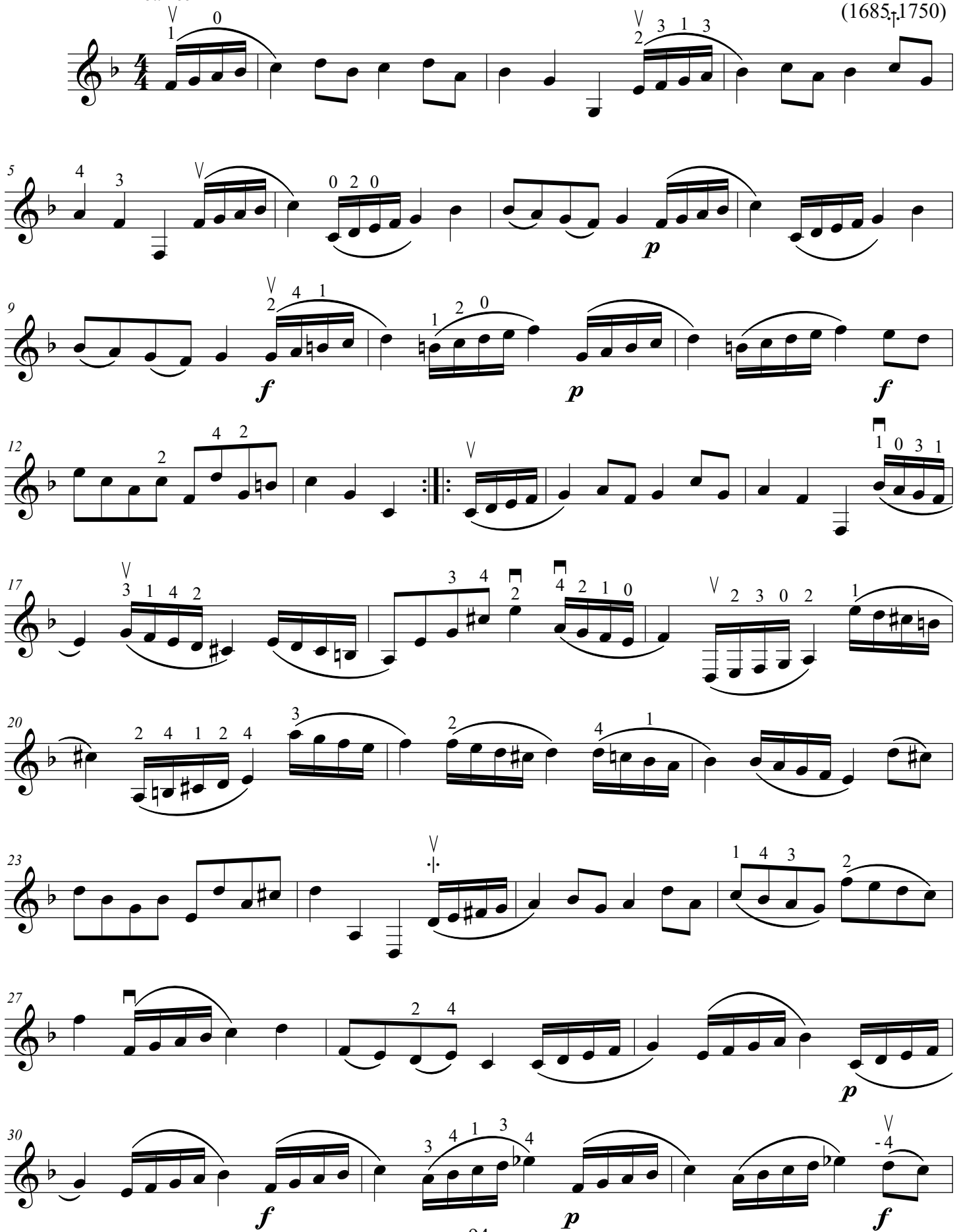

32
35
Fine
Gavotte II
39
43
47
50
53
56
59
Gavotte I
da capo

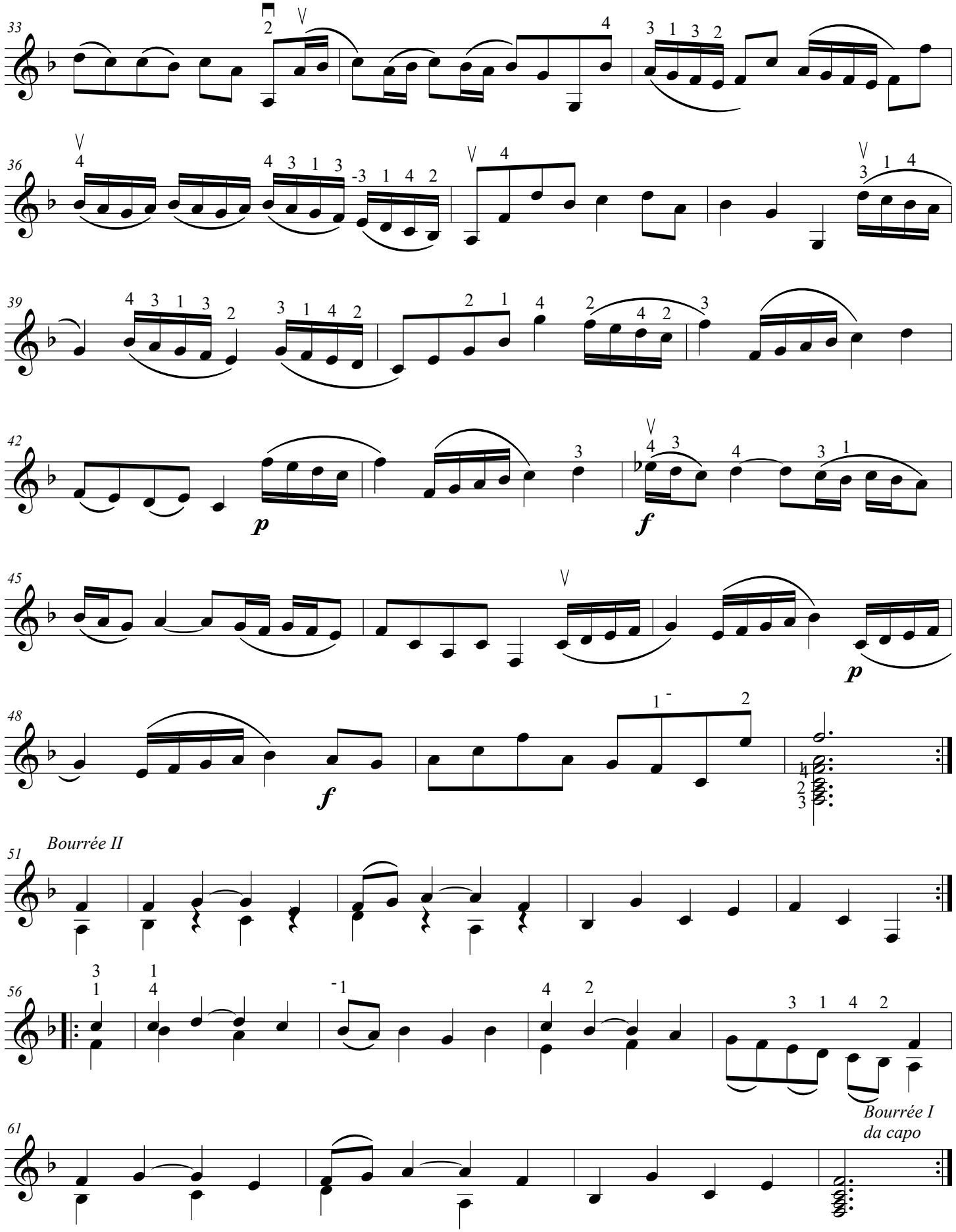
Bourrée I and II

Cello Suite No. 4, BWV 1010

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)

Bourrée I

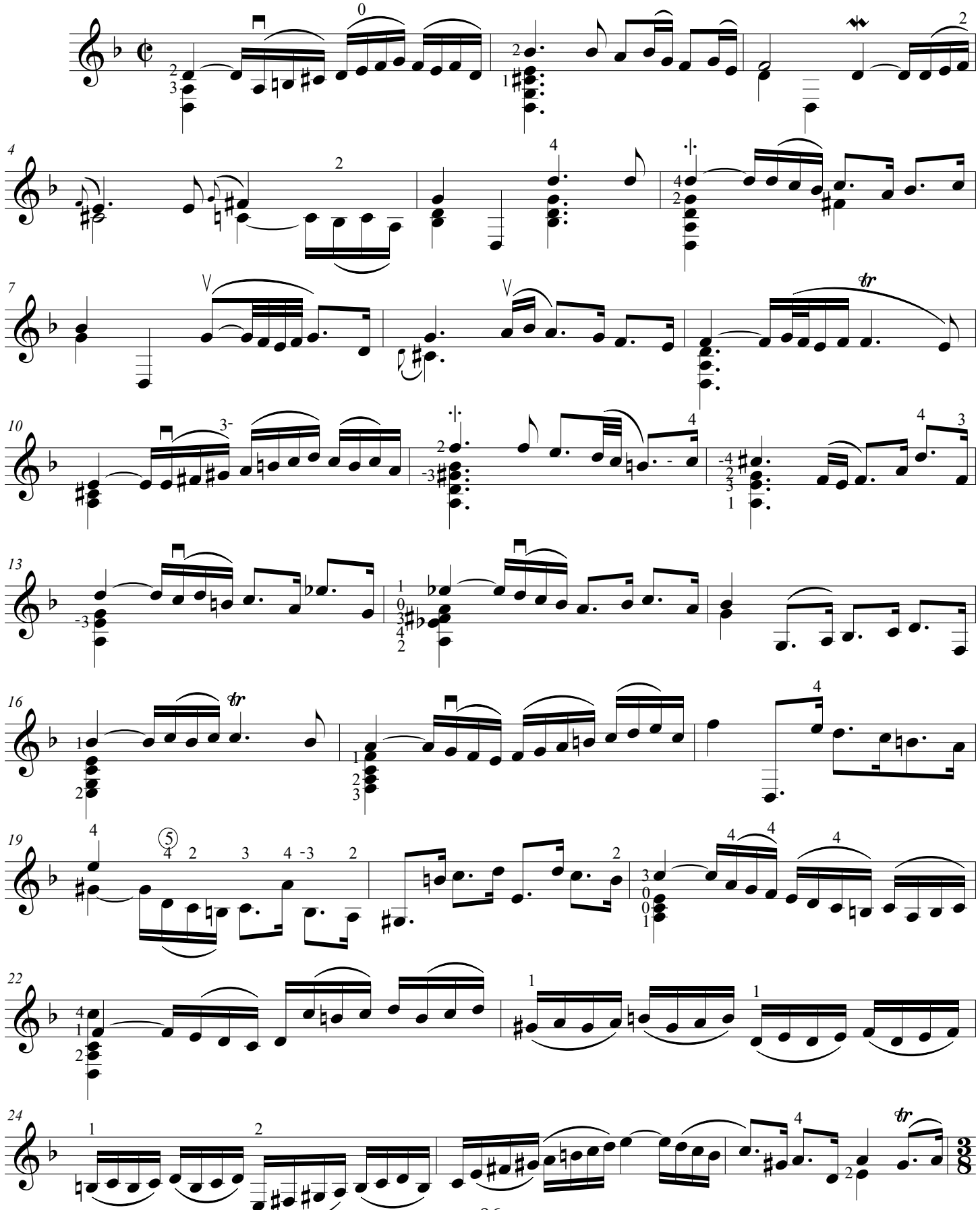


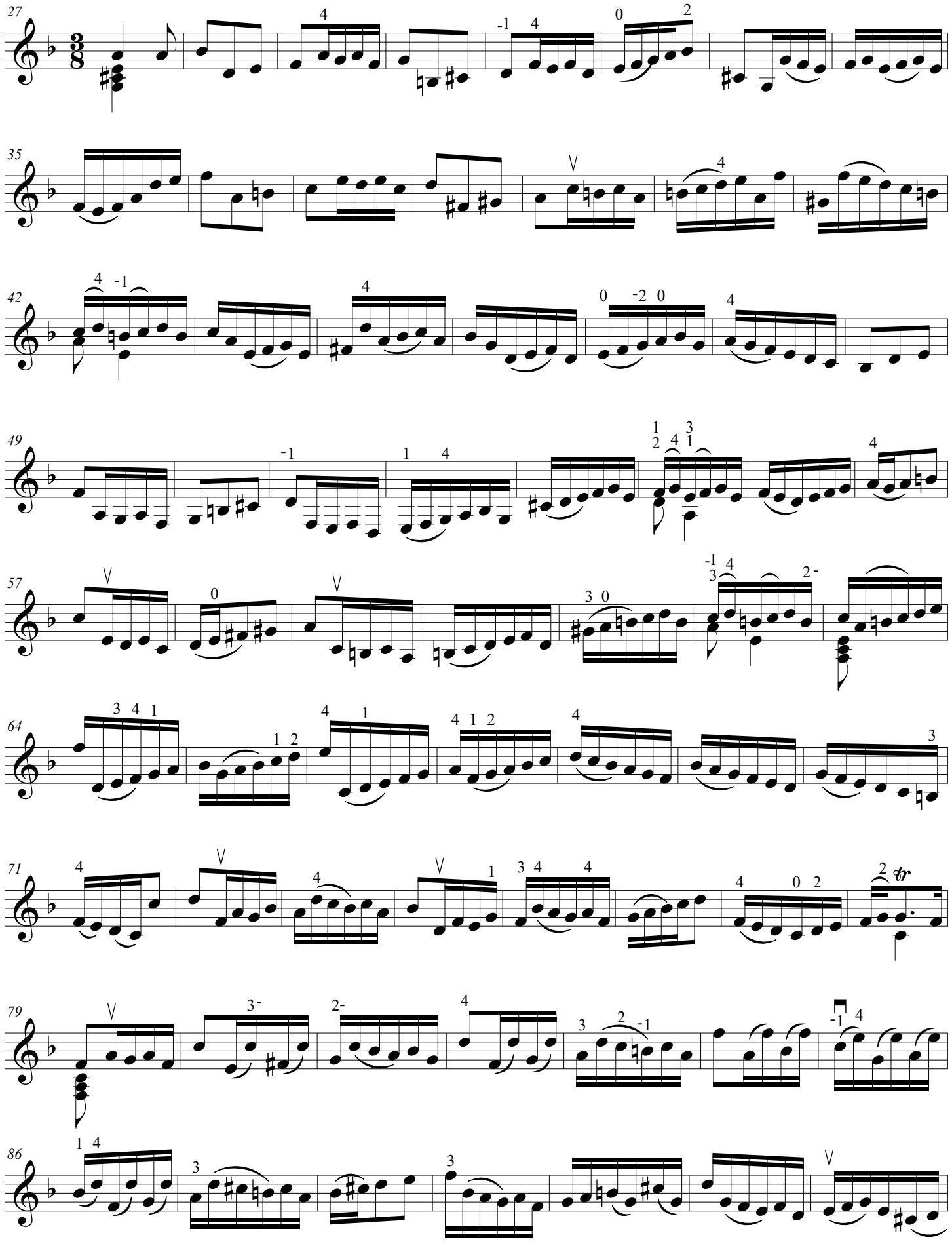

33
36
39
42
45
48
51
Bourrée II
56
61
Bourrée I
da capo

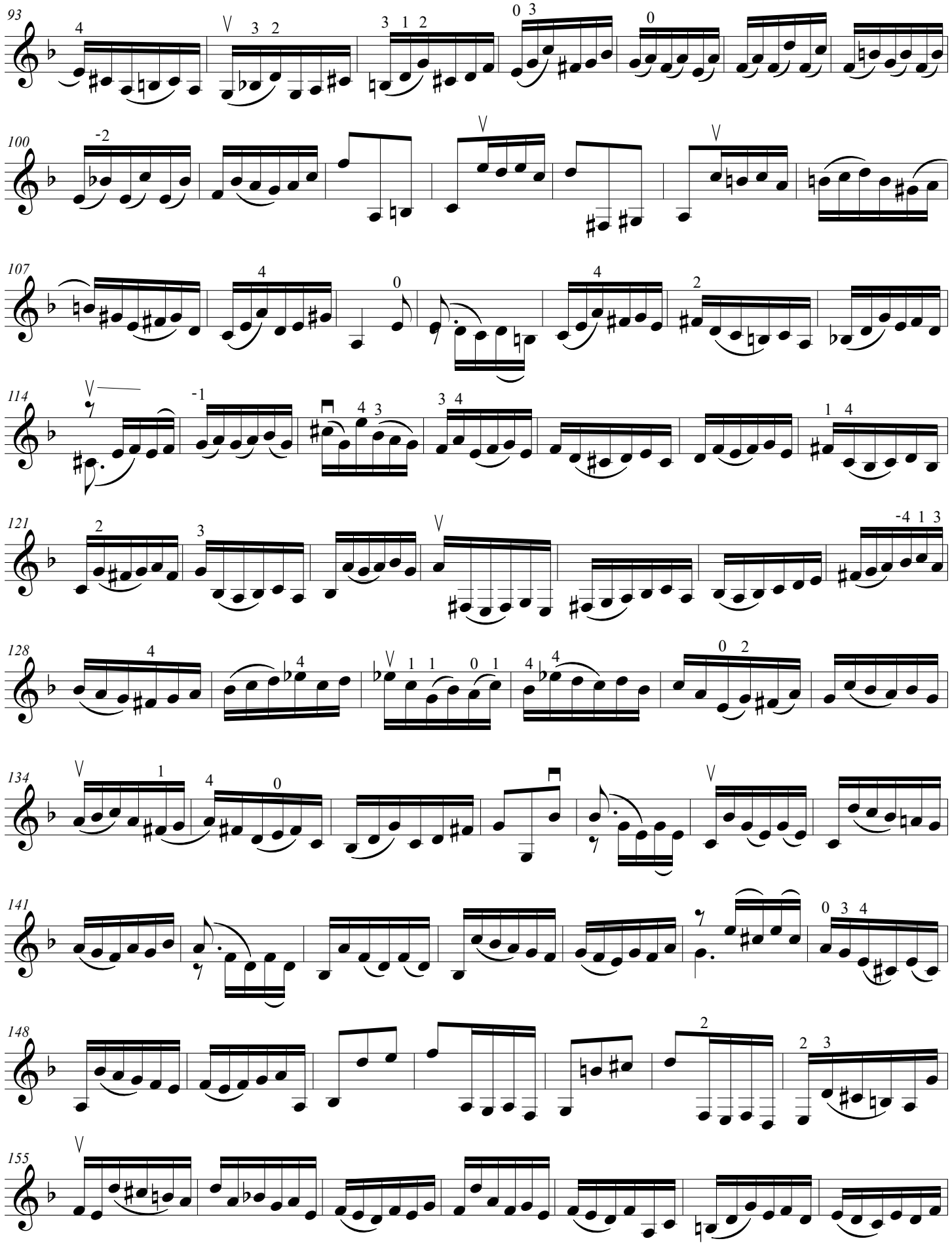
Prelude

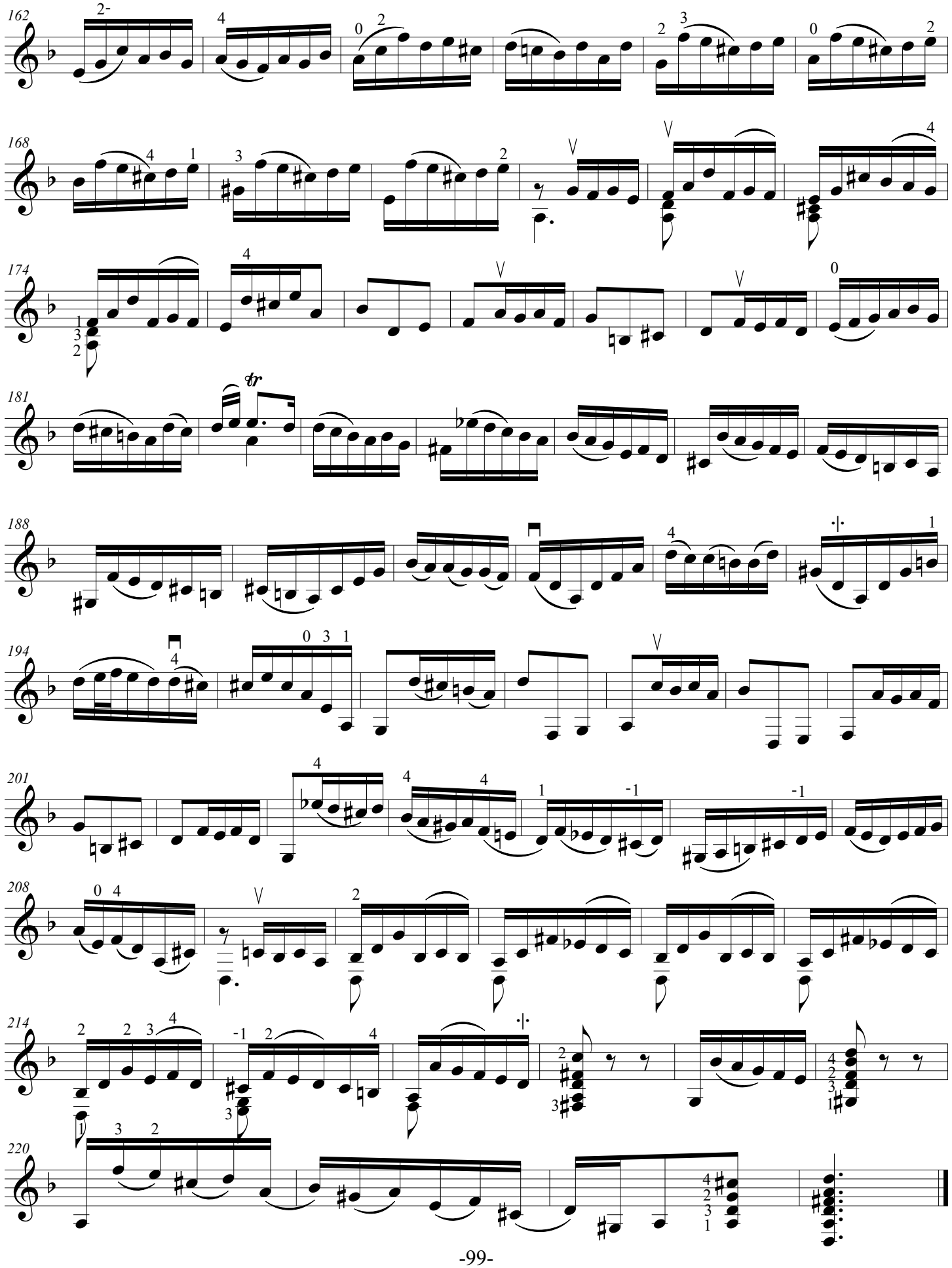
Cello Suite No. 5, BWV 1011

J.S. Bach
(1685-1750)





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