6
Suites à
Violoncello solo
senza Basso

composées
par
Sr. J. S. Bach

Maitre de Chapelle

edited,
according to the manuscript
of
Anna Magdalena Bach
by
Anssi Karttunen

2006-2011

Any edition of the Bach Suites tells as much about the person who made it as about the music of Bach. I am sure this one is not an exception. All interpretation of a serious musician naturally claims to be as loyal as possible to the composers intentions. Since Bach's own manuscript of these Suites is lost, we have more variety than usually amongst the various claims of fidelity. I do not claim to have more authority than anybody else in this battle of believers. If I propose yet another reading, it is for the purpose of showing what I have chosen to see, hoping that this will provoke each of my readers to ask themselves what they themselves want to see, and consequently to play.

The manuscript of Anna Magdalena Bach is the closest link to Bach's lost manuscript that we have. With all its ambiguous notes and slurs it leaves us with many questions but - if we know how to read it - also provides many answers. The other existing manuscript copies provide interesting information about the development of Bach-reading, but as they clearly are already re-interpretations of whatever manuscript they were based on, I can't give them the same authority as to Anna Magdalena.

I have decided to take Anna Magdalena's manuscript at its face value. It is clear that every manuscript copy, just like any published edition will always contain some mistakes. Anna Magdalena was a very careful copyist, but surely also made mistakes. All later copyists and editors have proposed corrections to what they thought to be the mistakes. It is now worth asking if some of them were not mistakes after all. The 5th Suitte provides many unclear notes due to the fact that Bachs are notating the top string "as played" rather than "as sounds" and often get confused as to what string should be used, thes notes can luckily be verified from Bach's manuscript of the Lute transcription.

I try to not interpret or correct what I see, but to leave everything as I saw it when I last looked at the manuscript. There is no doubt that when interpreting a manuscript one is always guided by one's own principles, prejudices and the desire to find what one is looking for. I don't wish to read messages hidden behind the notes or point out hidden voices; I believe that to be a private matter and shouldn't prejudice either other players or the public.

Much has been written about Anna Magdalena's copy of the Cello Suites, it has even been claimed that she actually composed the pieces. Some say the copy is extraordinarily sloppy; others claim it to be remarkably accurate.
The definitive answer to this cannot be found unless Bach's own manuscript turns up one day. I do encourage everyone to consult the manuscript whenever a slur or a note looks questionable, one tends to see them a little different every time.

Anssi Karttunen, Paris, May 2010

A few remarks about reading the manuscript:

Accidentals
Bach used a way of notating accidentals that is different of the conventions of today.
- Accidentals are re-notated for every beam in the bar.
- Accidentals always carry on to the next note, event through a bar-line.
- No naturals in the following bar. Naturals are only used inside a beam or to avoid confusion.
- In the 2nd Menuets, Bourrées and Gavottes, the minor key is notated with one accidental less than today.

Time signatures - Tempo
Particular attention should be given to the difference between common time and alla breve time. Most modern and old editions ignore that some of the Preludes are in common time, others in alla breve, just like some of the Allemandes. This gives us a good idea of relations of tempos between movements and Suites.

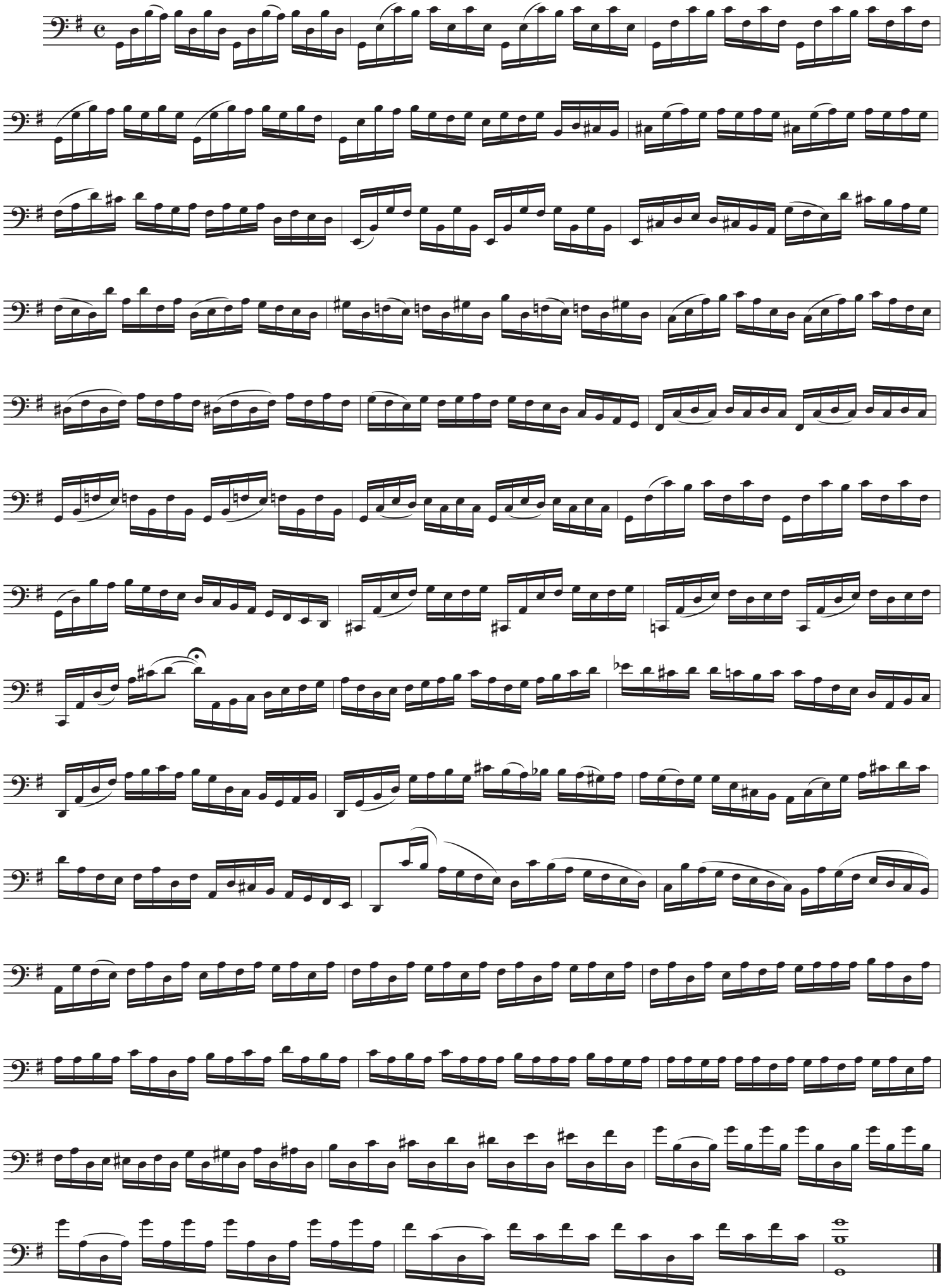
Slurs - Phrasing
It is often impossible to be absolutely sure what Anna Magdalena, (or Johann Sebastian) would have meant with a particular slur. One thing that is clear, however, is that similar passages do not automatically get similar phrasing. It seems that the Bachs go to great lengths to invent varying ways of bowing similar passages. To me the misreading of one particular slur is not as important as allowing for the strangest of the slurs the benefit of a doubt. In this edition I have placed the slurs as ambiguously as I saw them.

Dynamics
It was not necessary for Bach to mark his dynamics, as musicians were well aware of the conventions of his period. The dynamics would have largely been guided by the harmony, with dissonant harmonies always stronger than consonant ones. If one follows this very simple principle, the resulting dynamics shape the music quite differently than the modern way of looking for long lines based on crescendo and diminuendo. Only in the Prelude of the 6th Suite does he mark some echo dynamics and I think he did this because it would not automatically have been expected. What would follow is that elsewhere the same echo does not apply.

Articulation
Here we can be guided by the instruments, strings and bows used at the time of Bach. Experimenting with what the instruments naturally propose and the practices of the period will be much more useful than any instructions I could give.

Suitte 1re

Prelude



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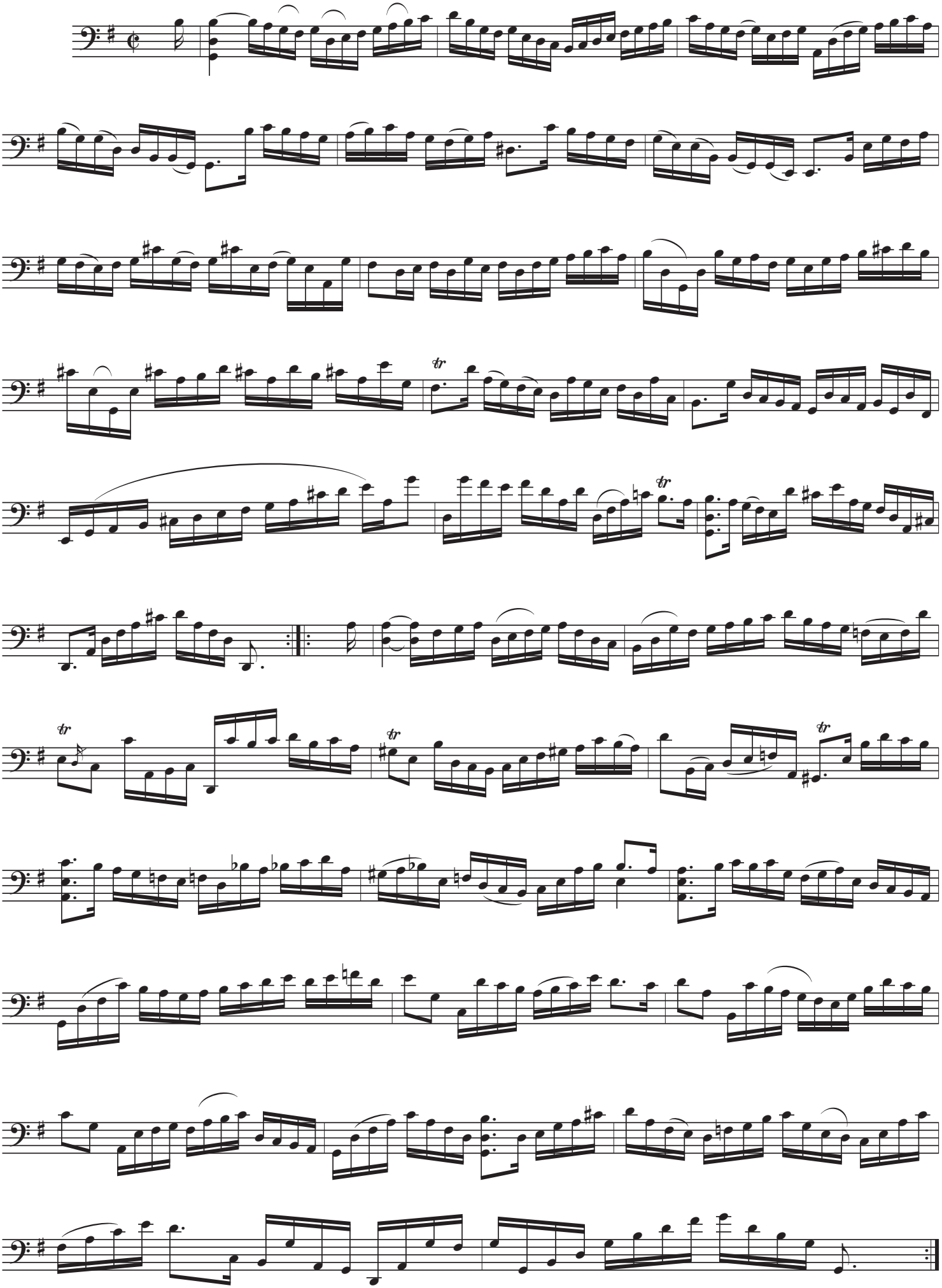
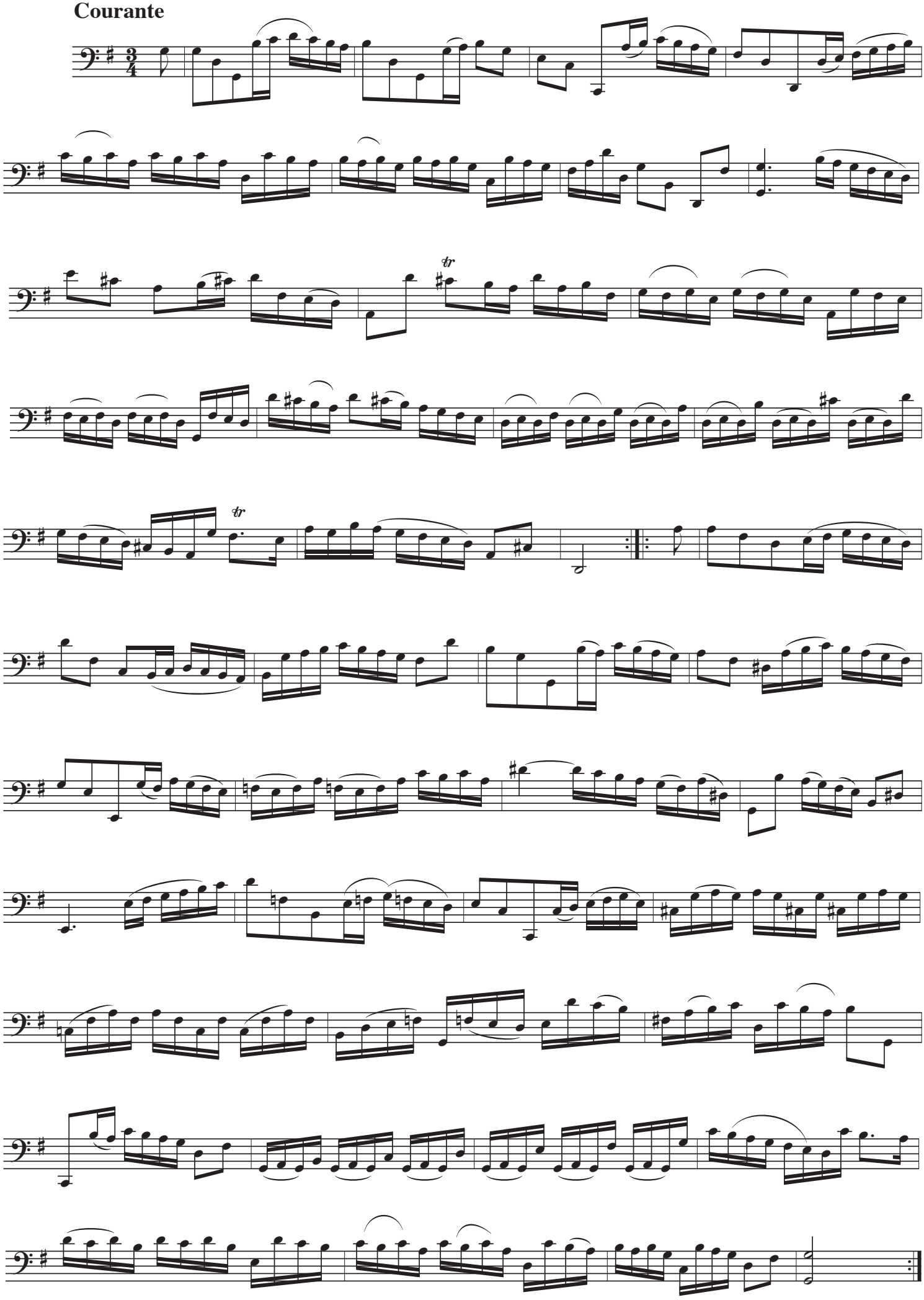
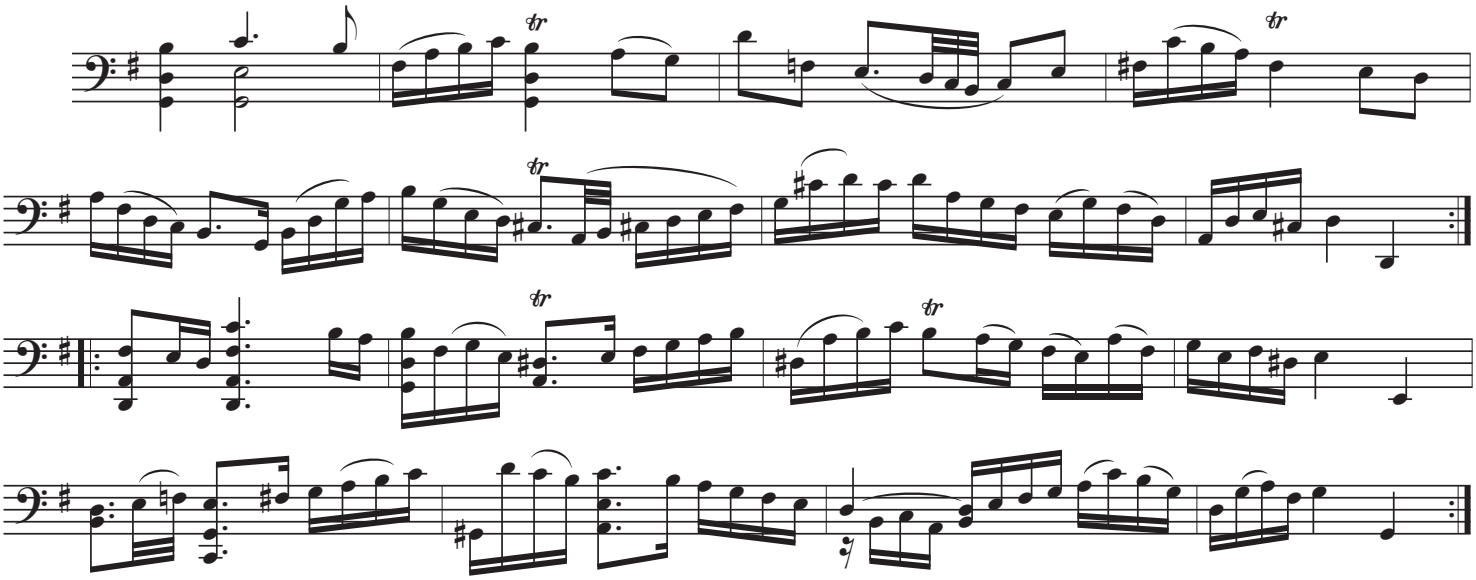
Allemande



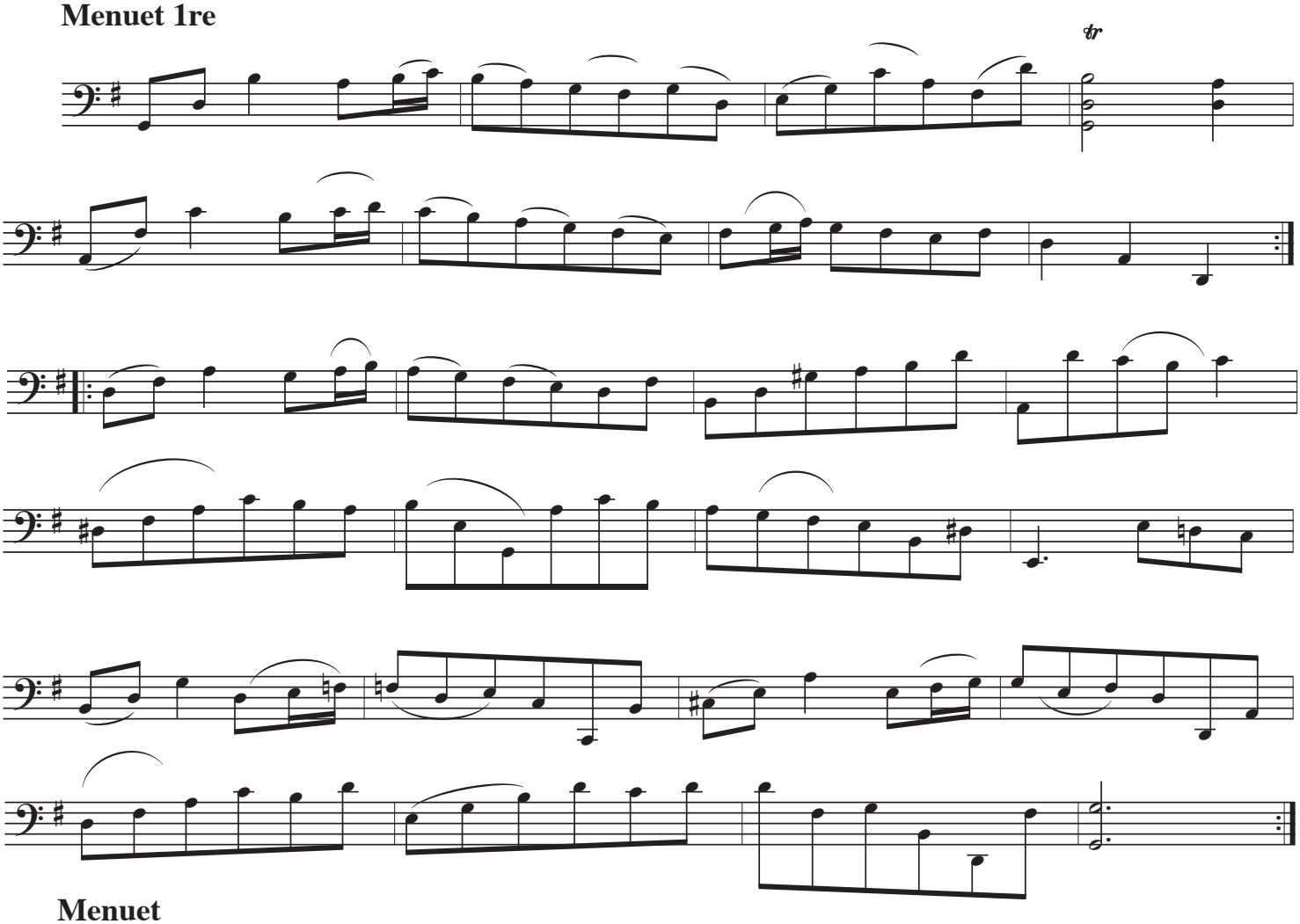
Courante



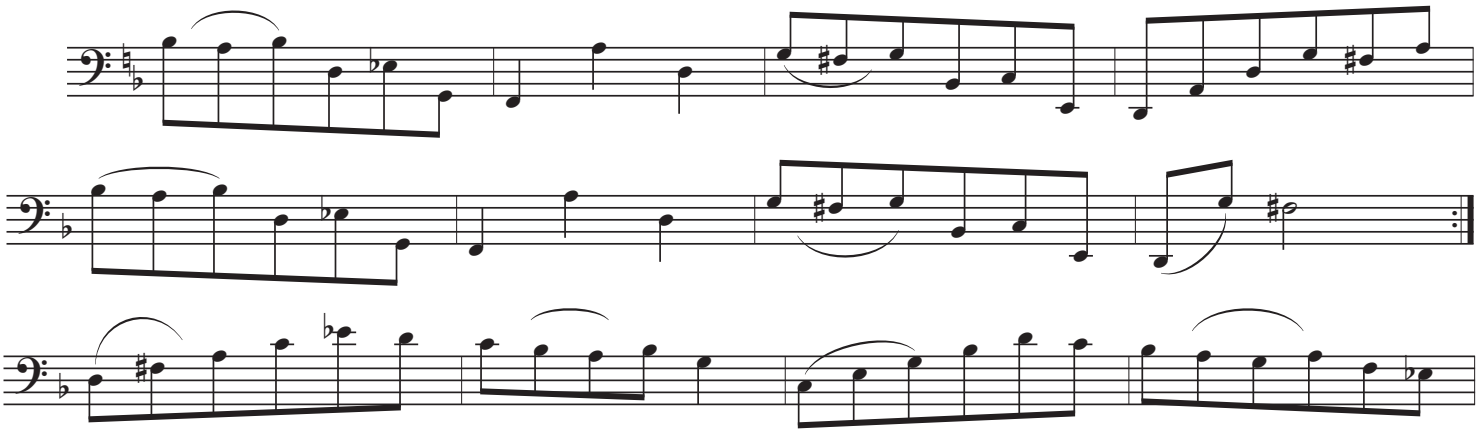
Sarabande

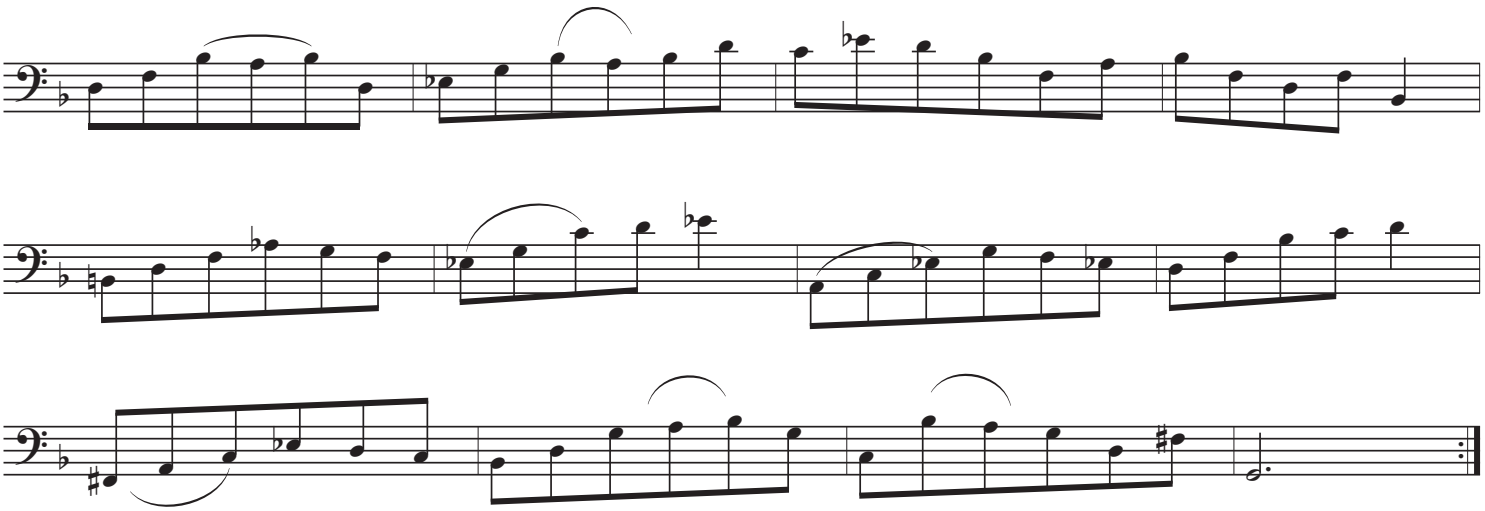


Menuet 1re

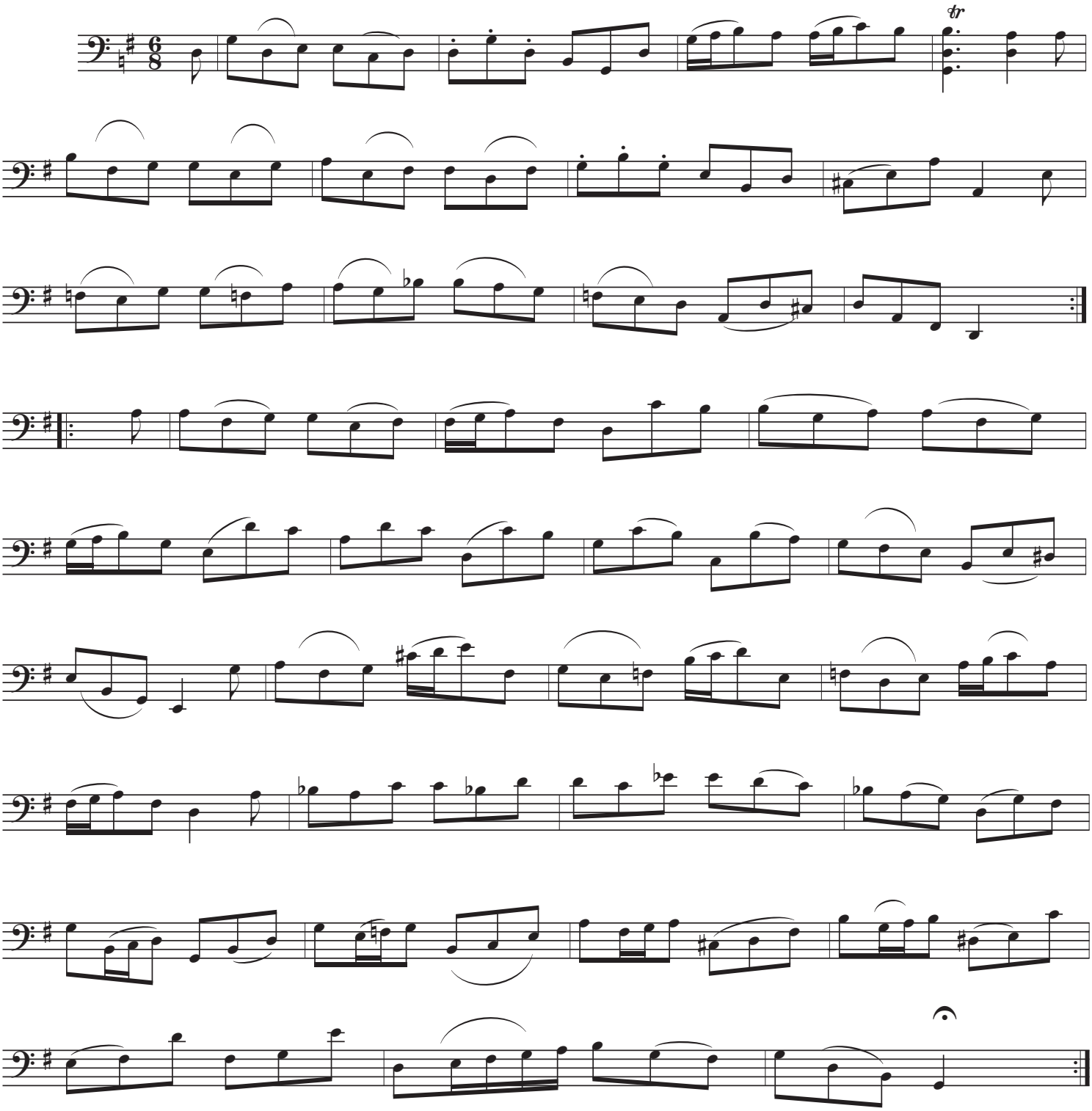


Menuet



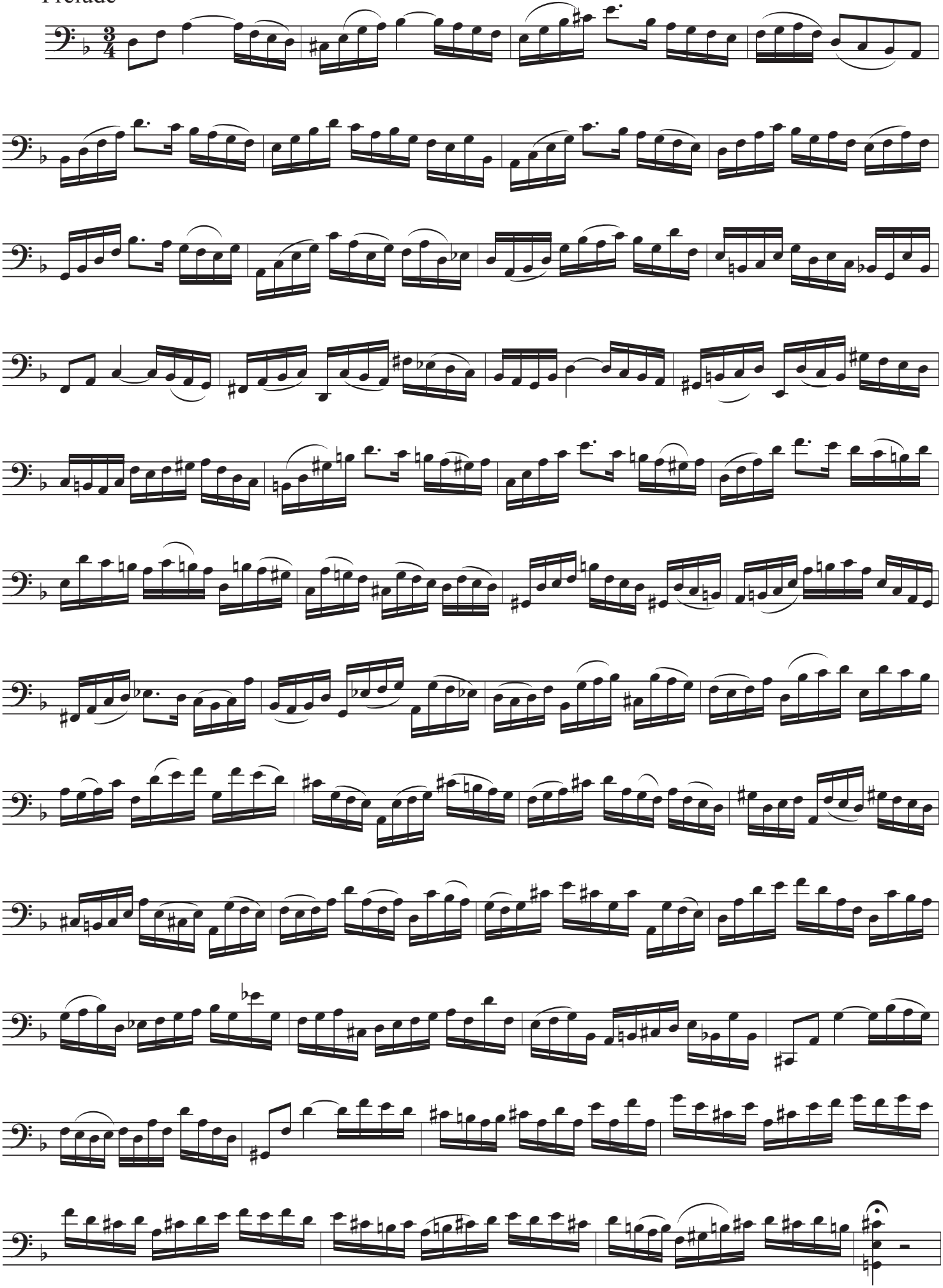


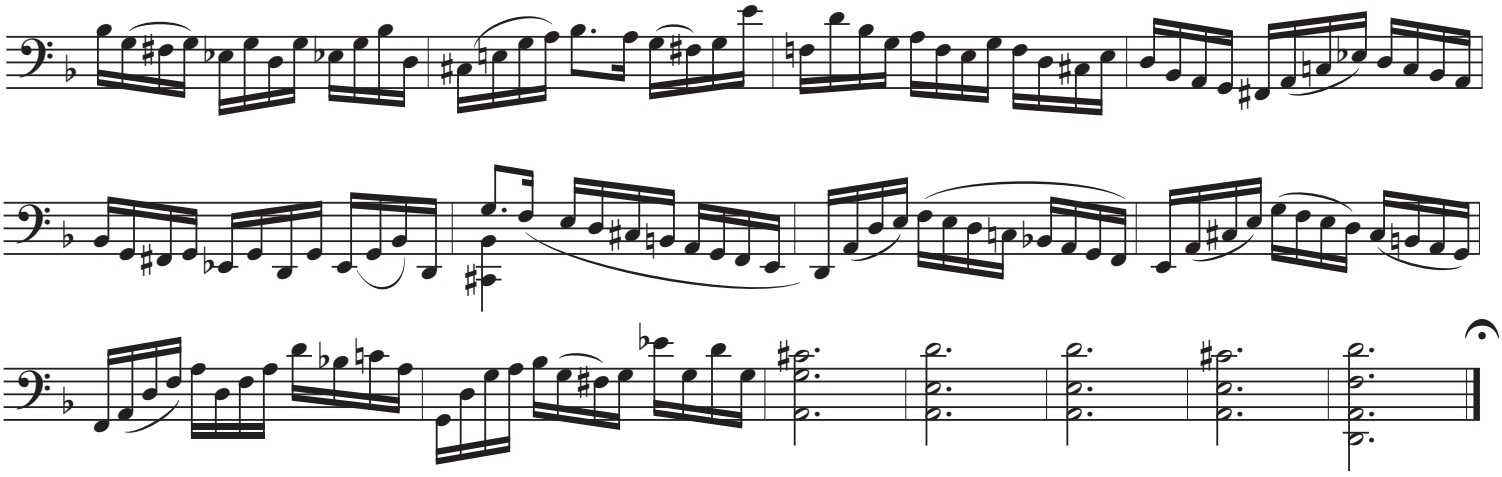
Gigue



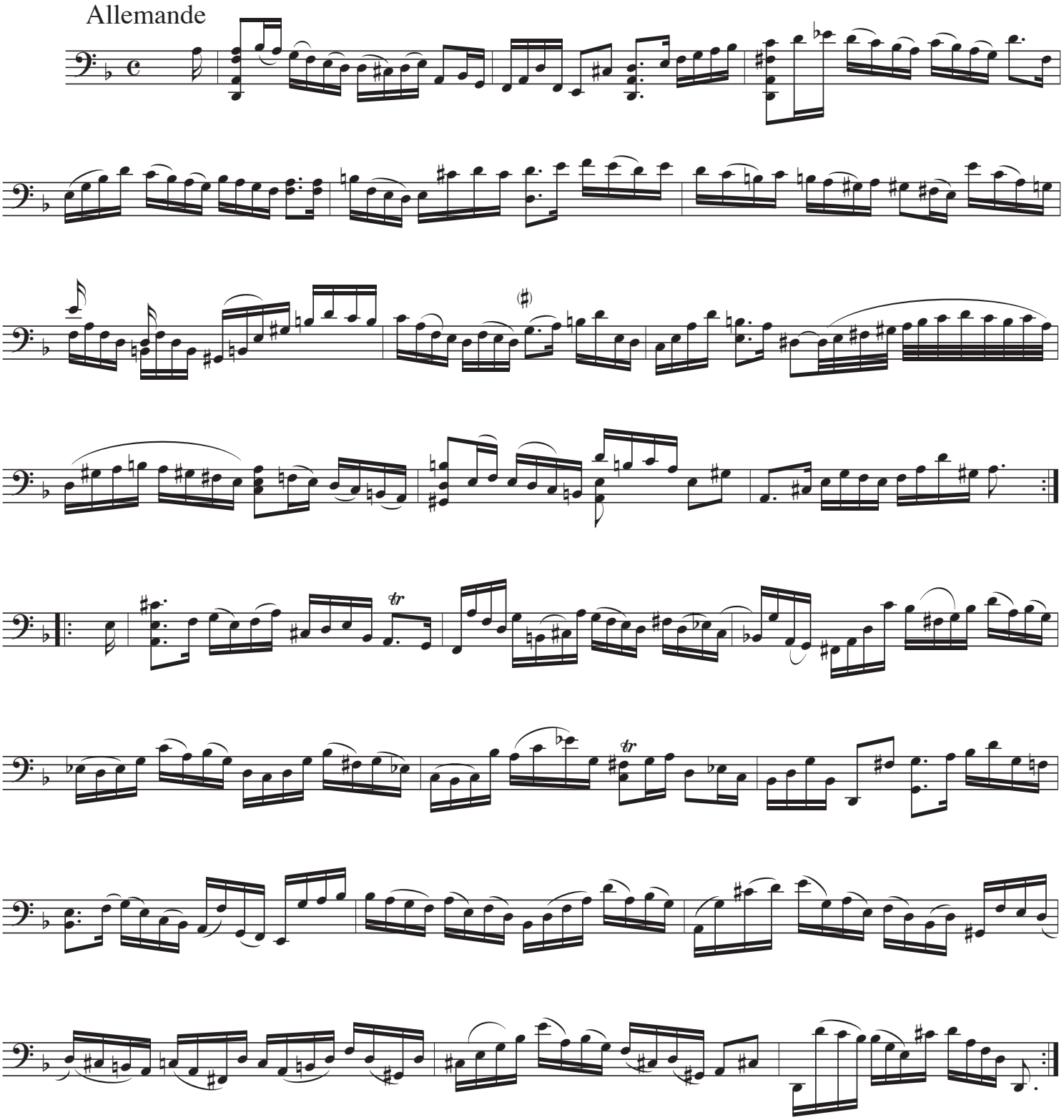
Suitte 2de

Prelude





Allemande



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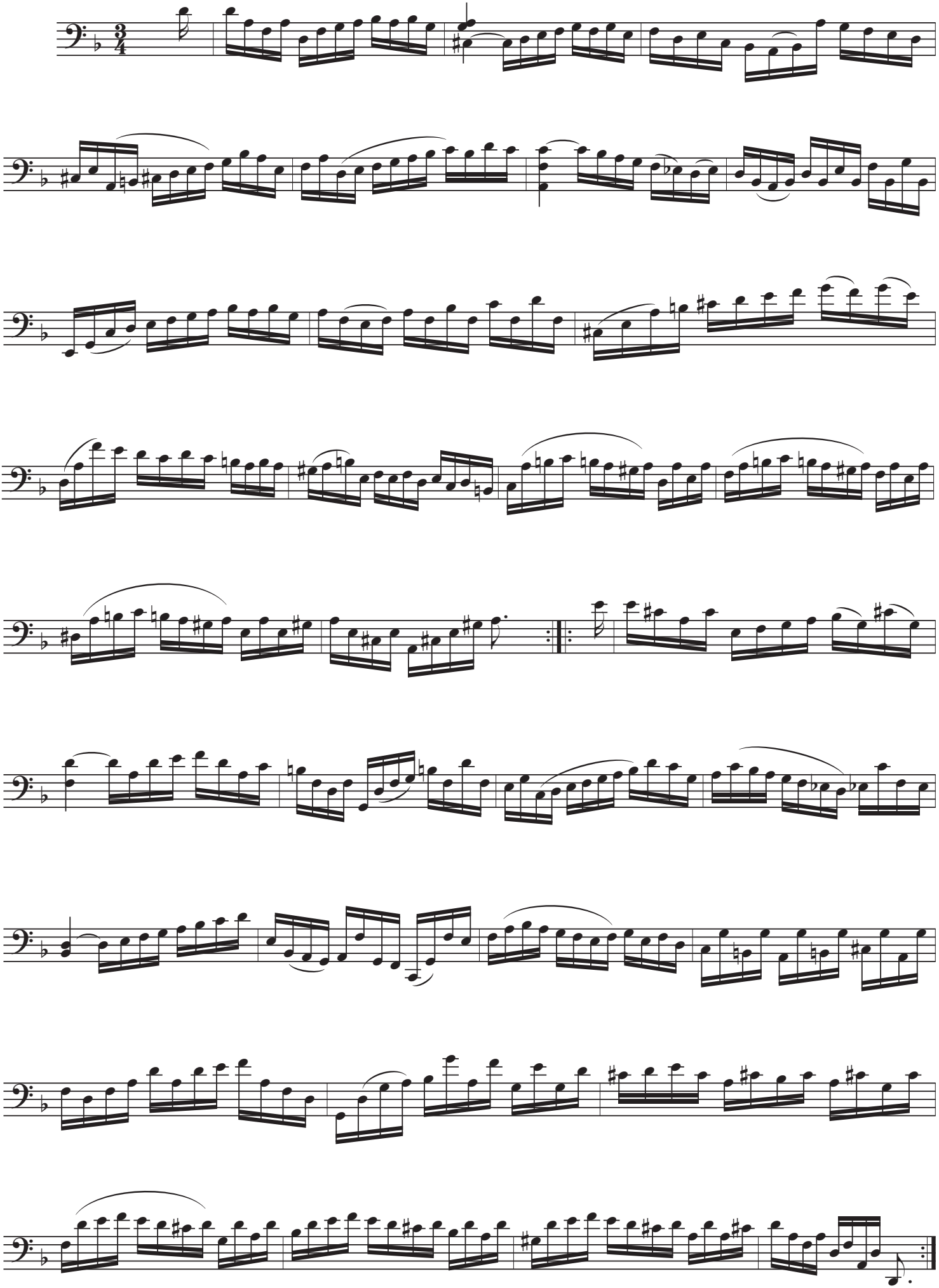
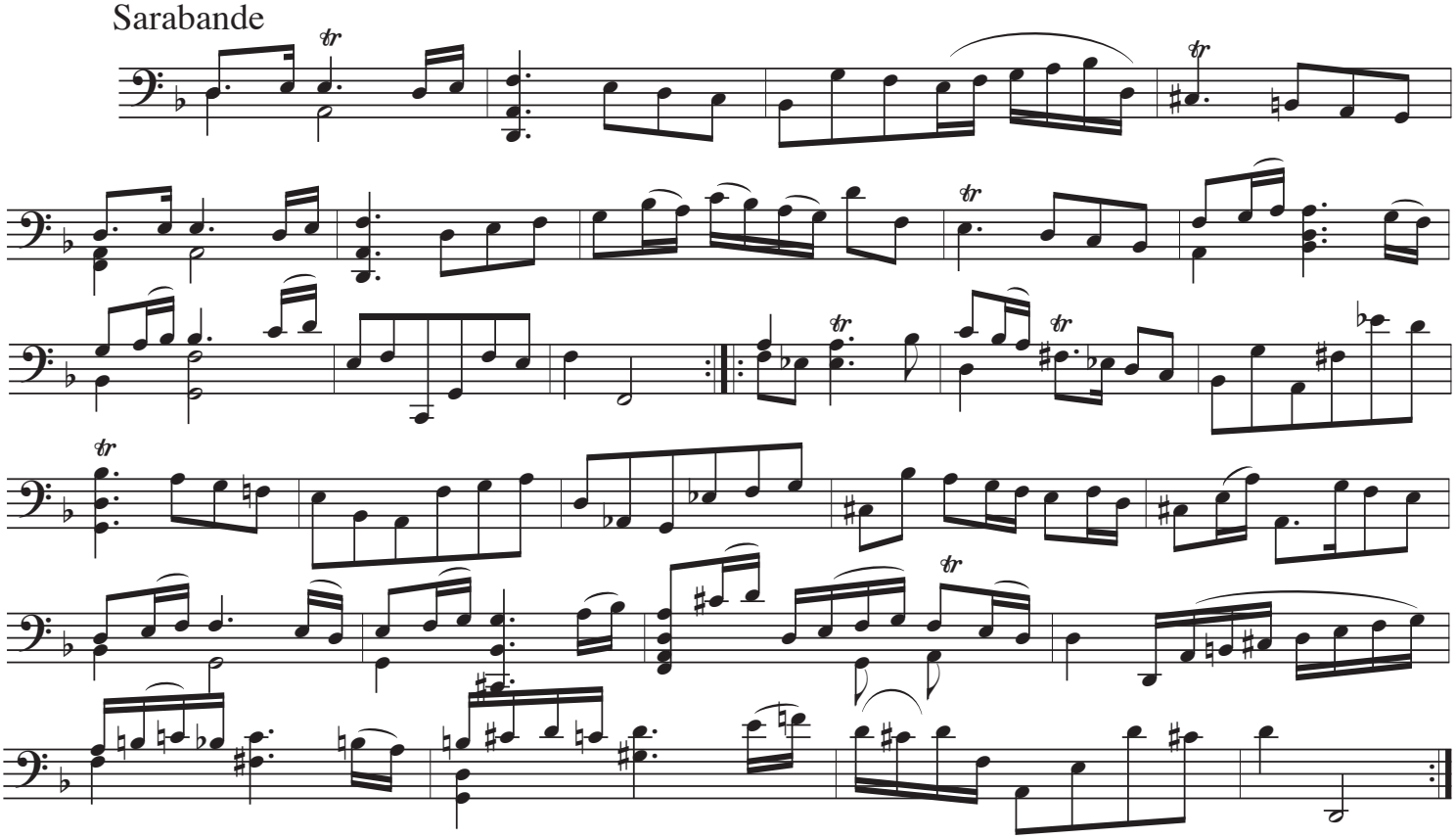


Sarabande



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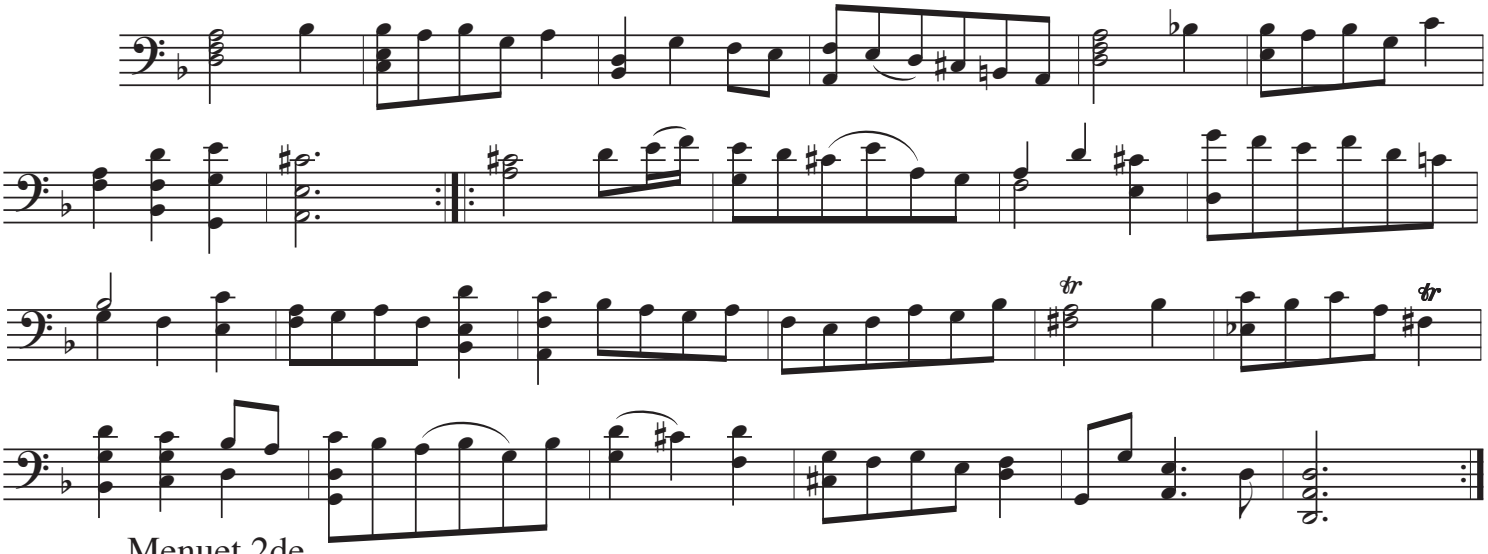
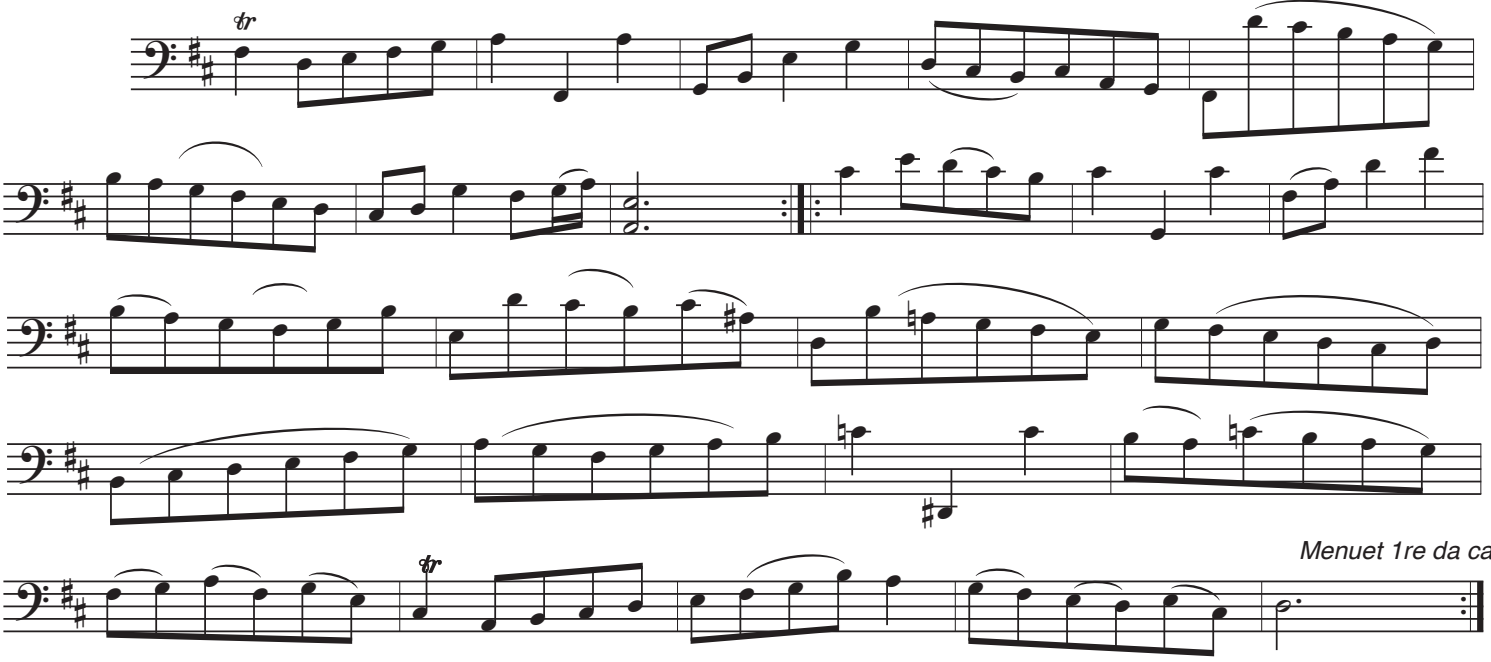
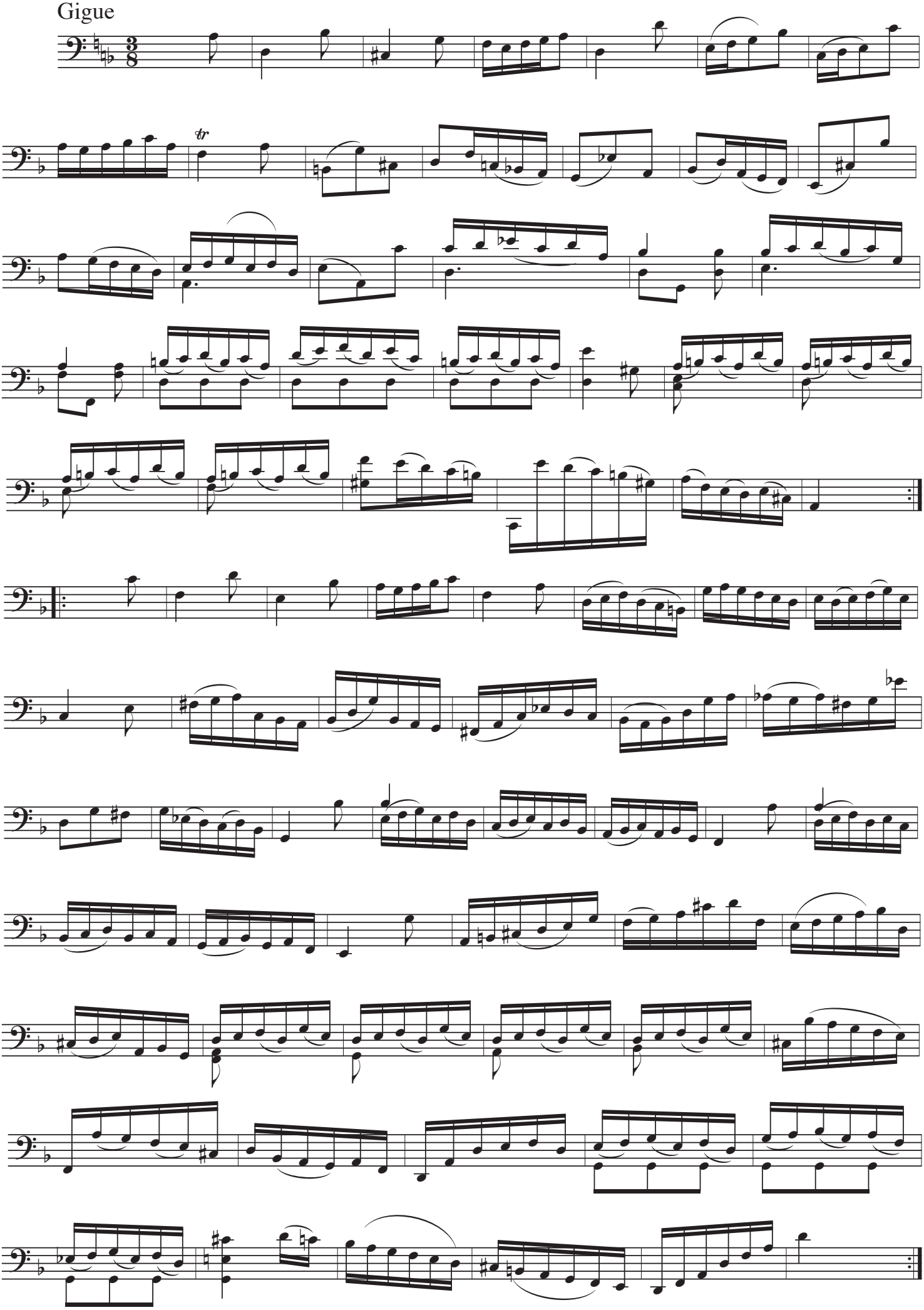


Menuet 2de



Menuet 1re da capo

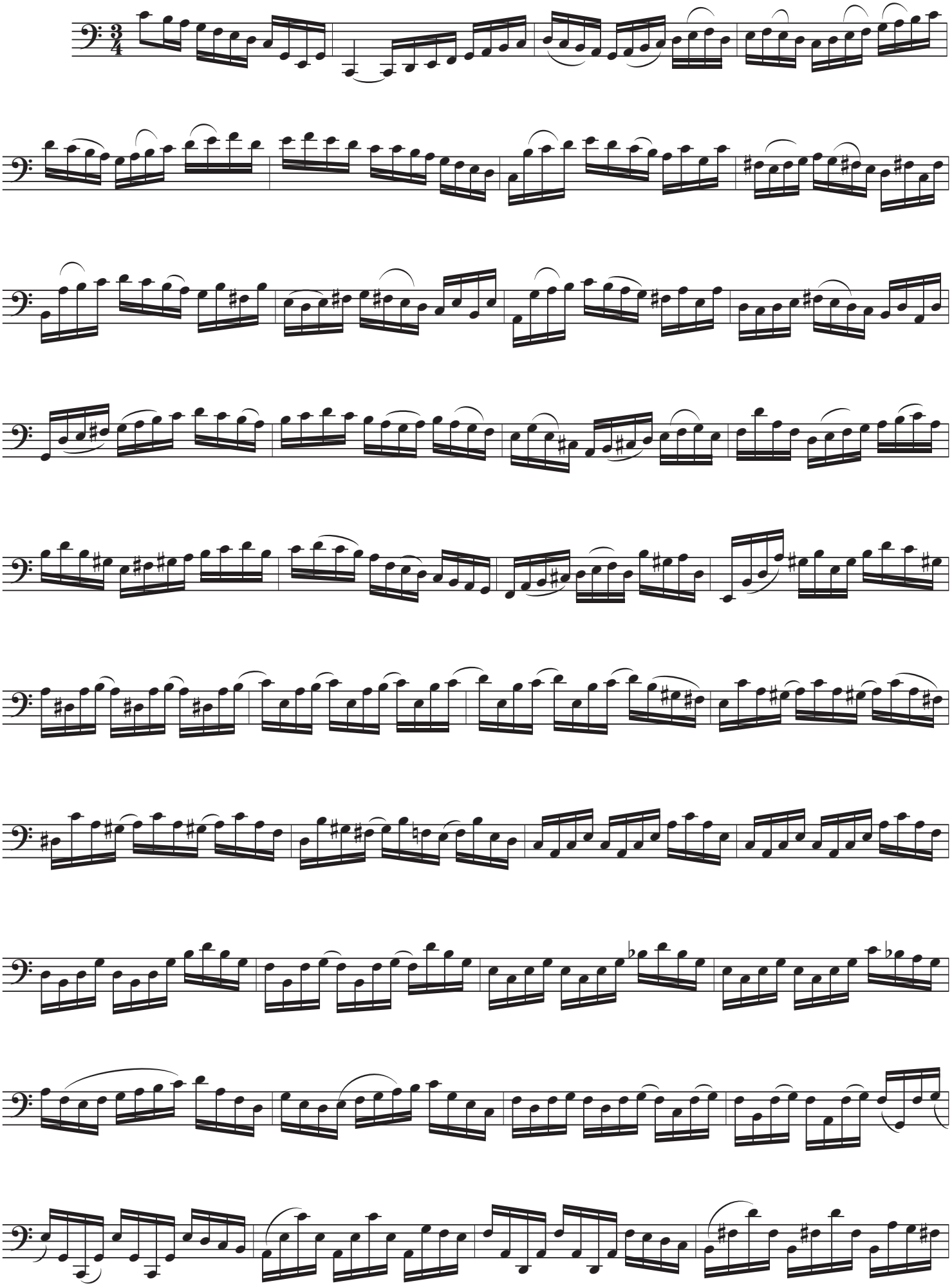
Gigue

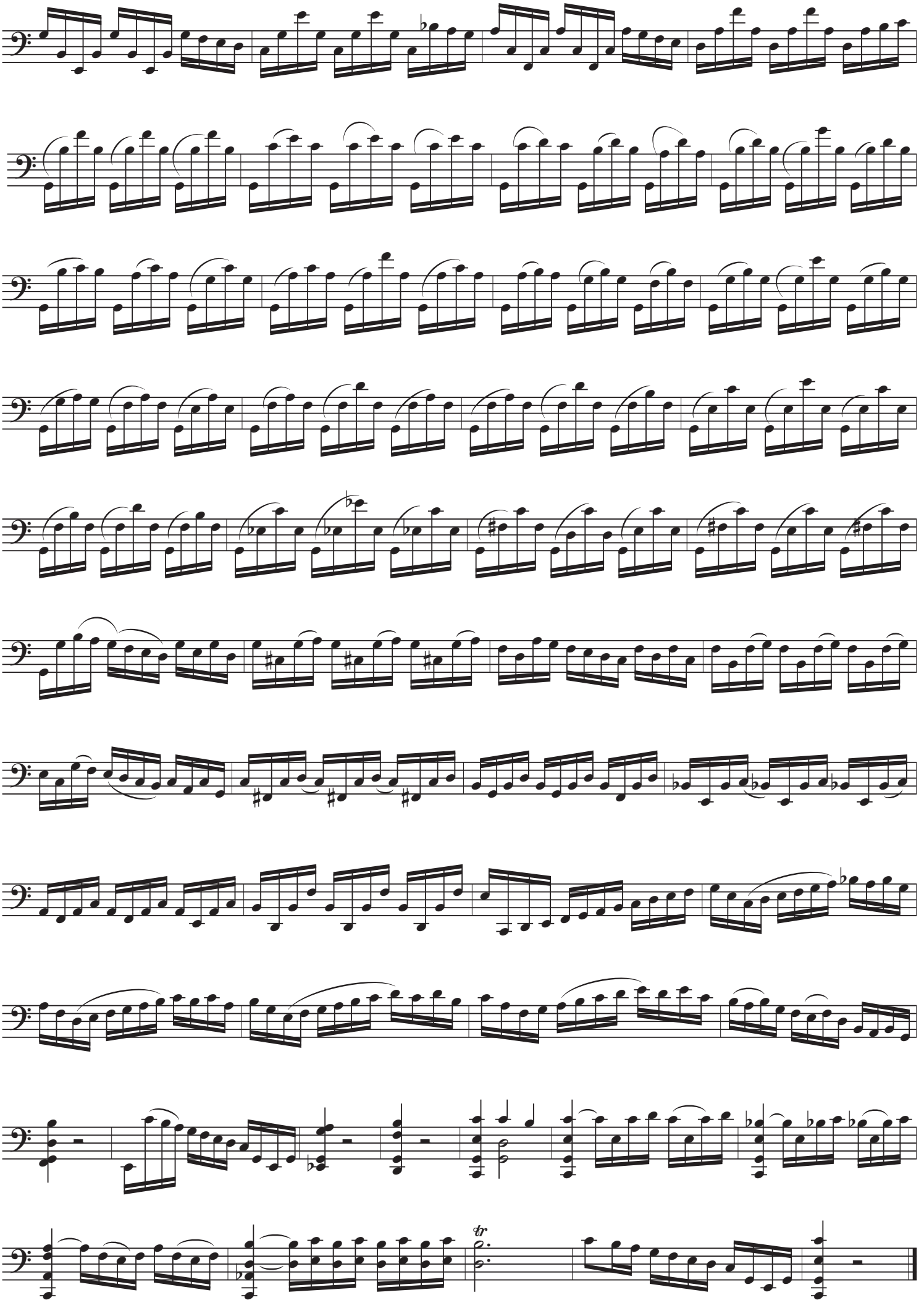


Turn page for more Bach

Suitte 3

Prelude





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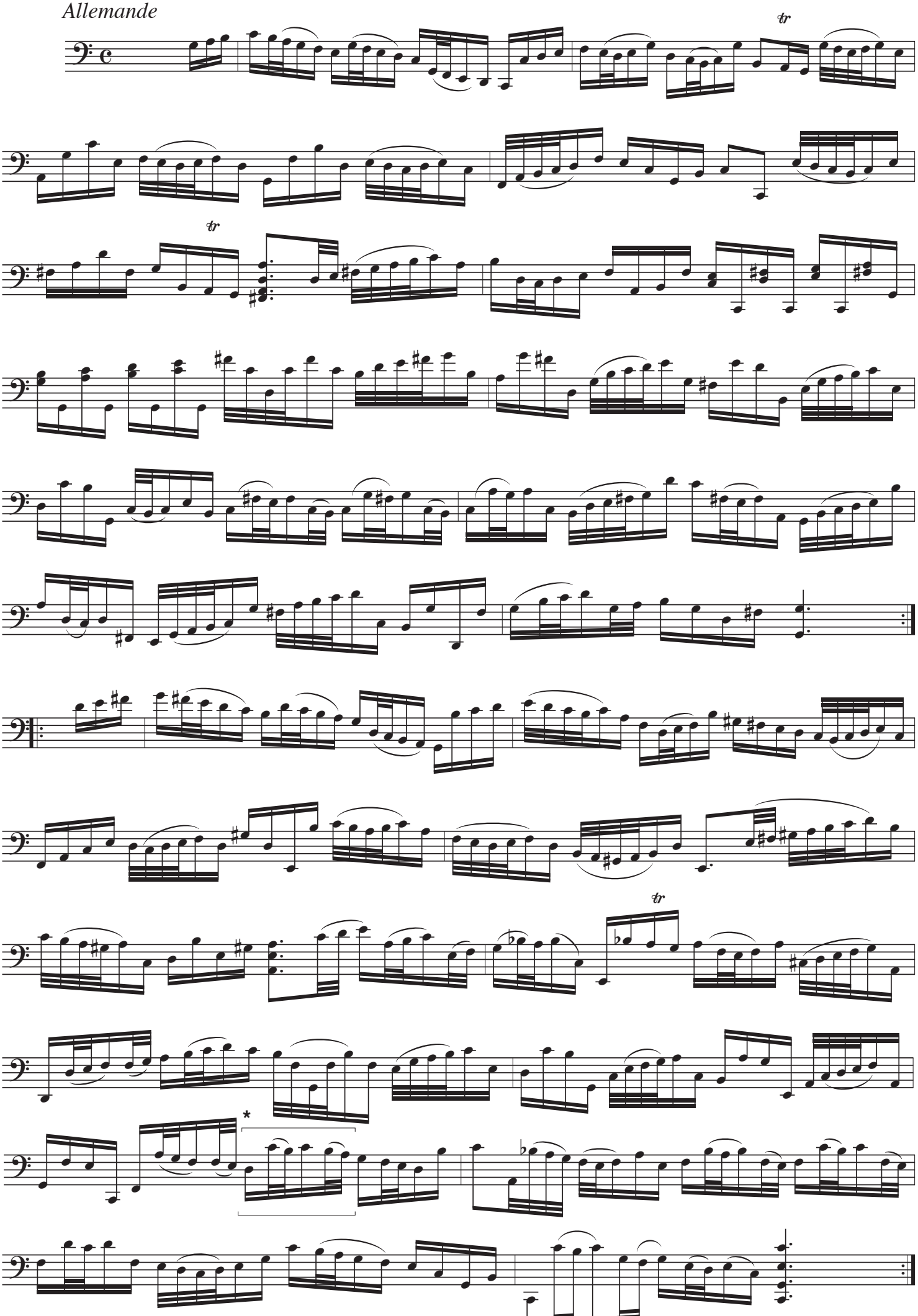
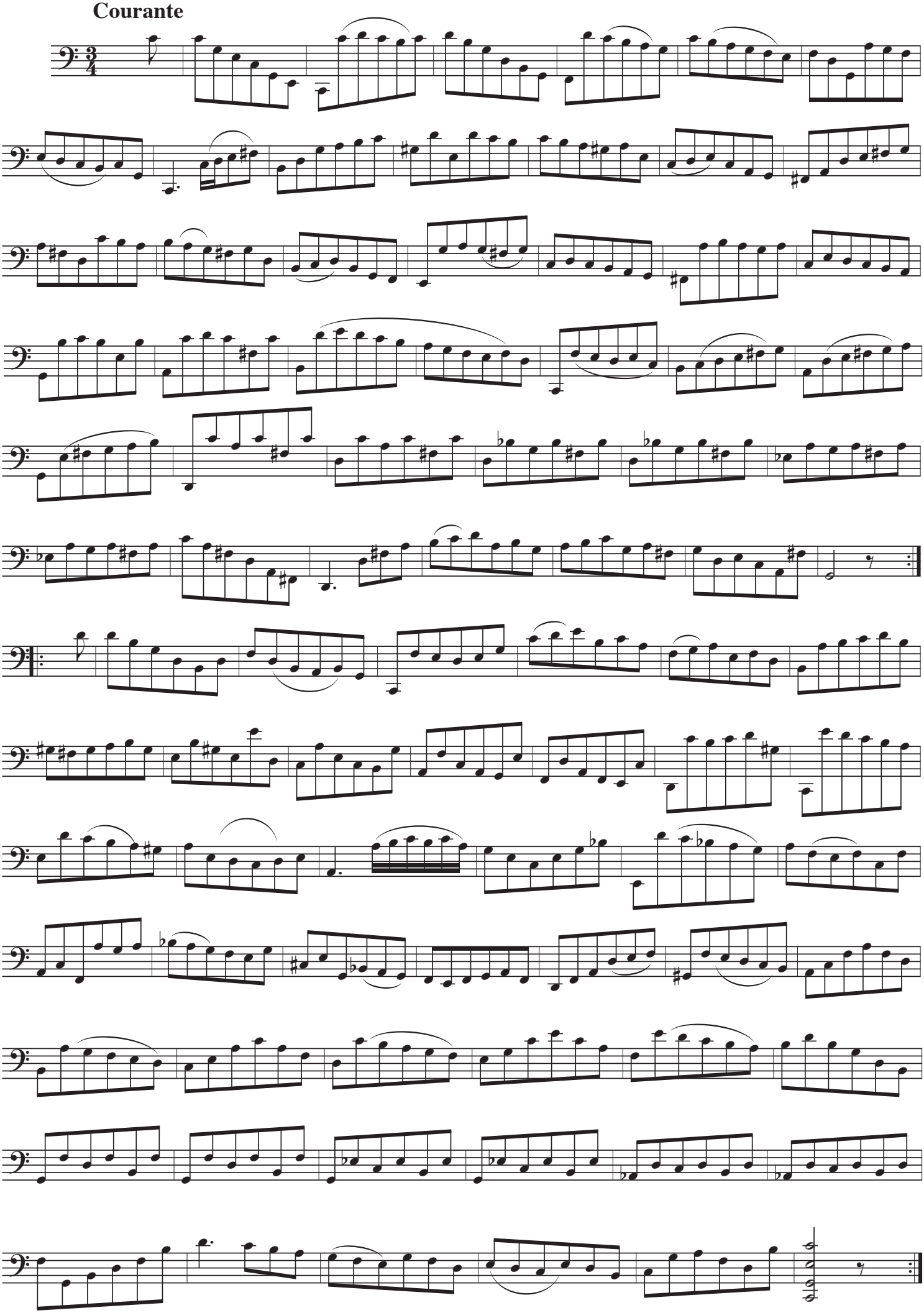


* The 3rd beat of this bar is missing in the AMB manuscript

Courante



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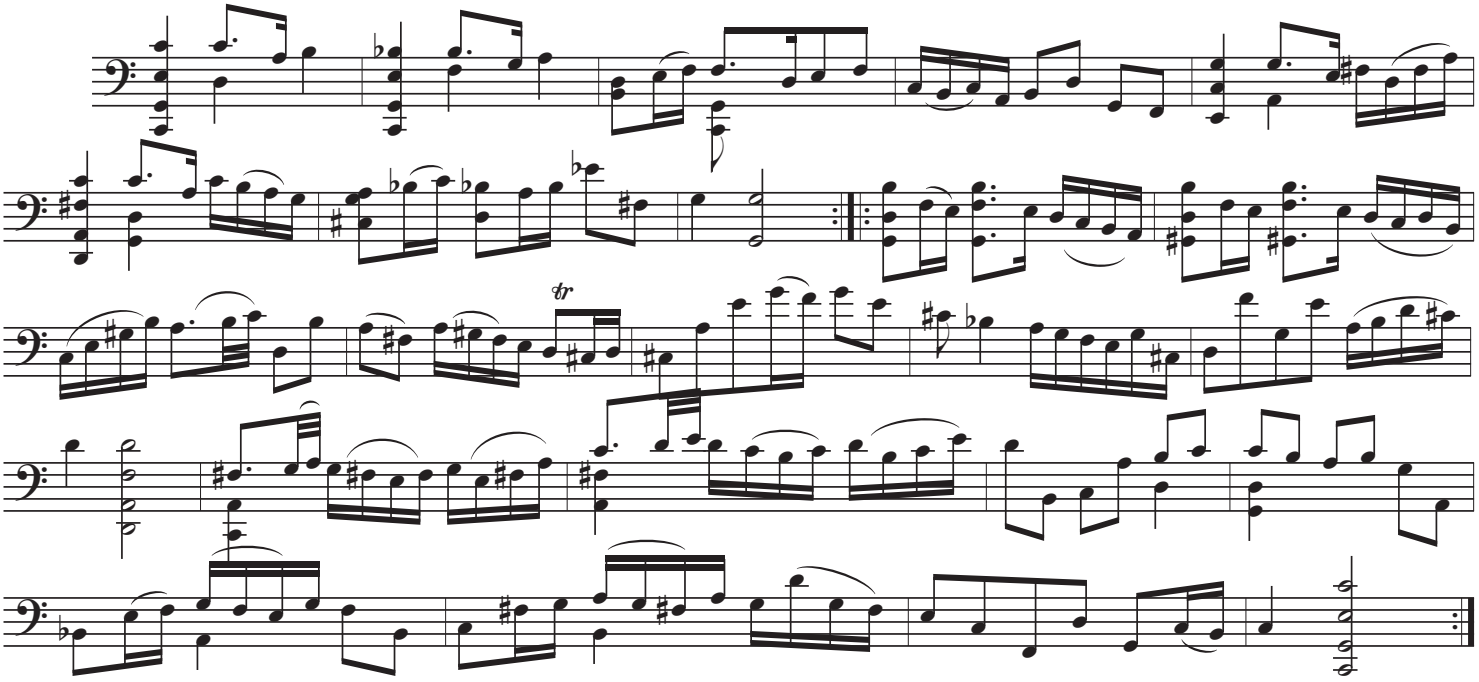
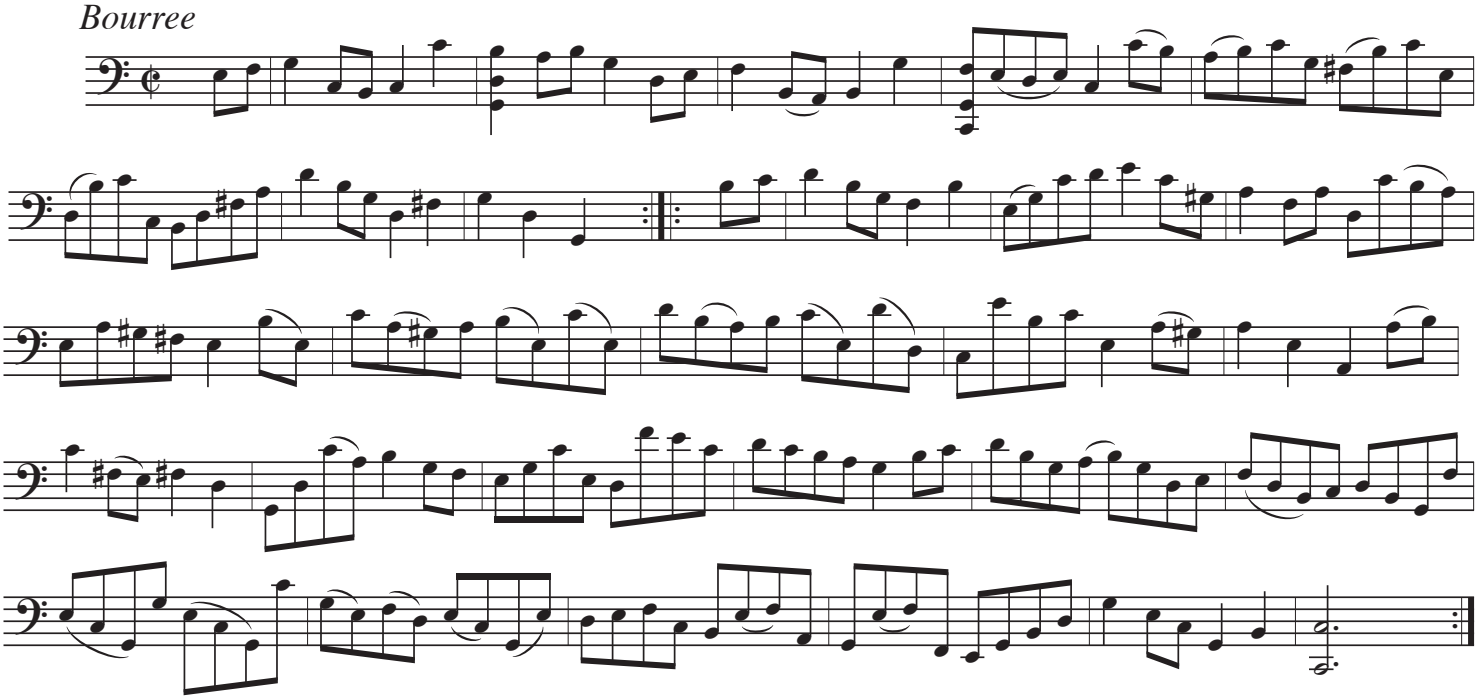


Bourree



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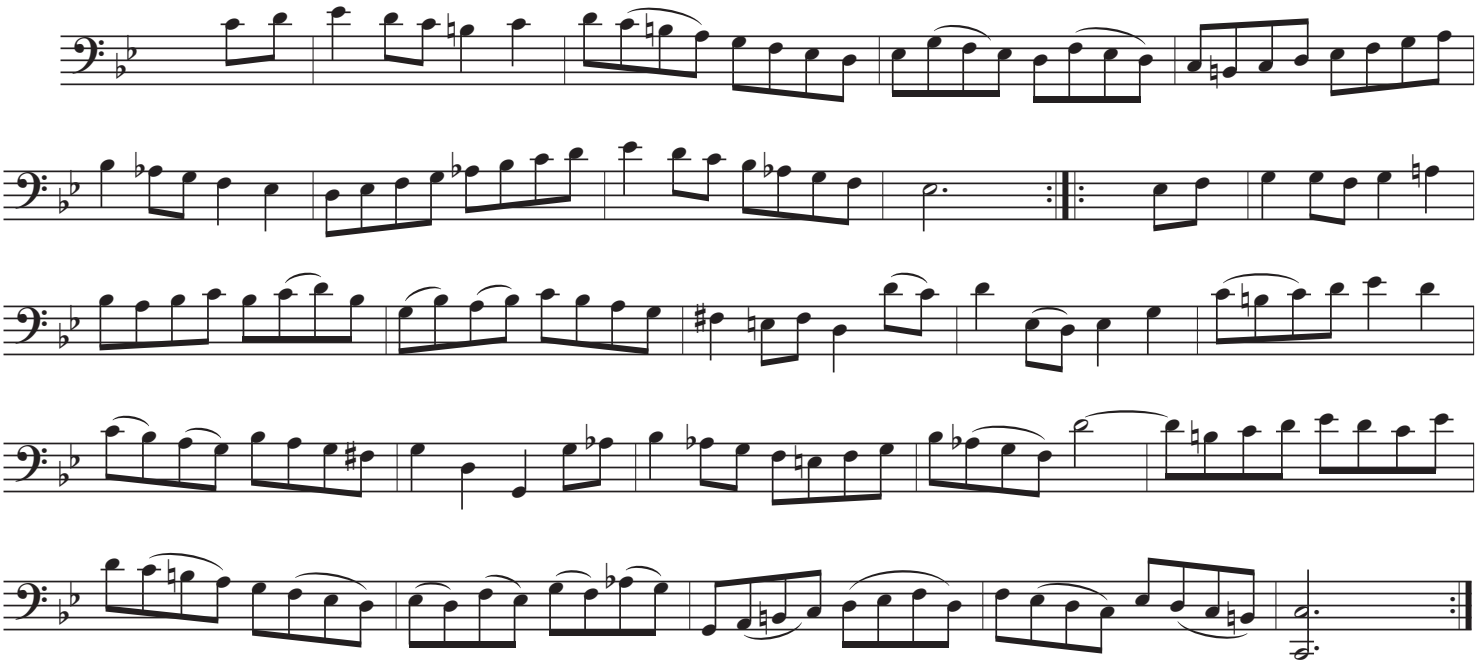

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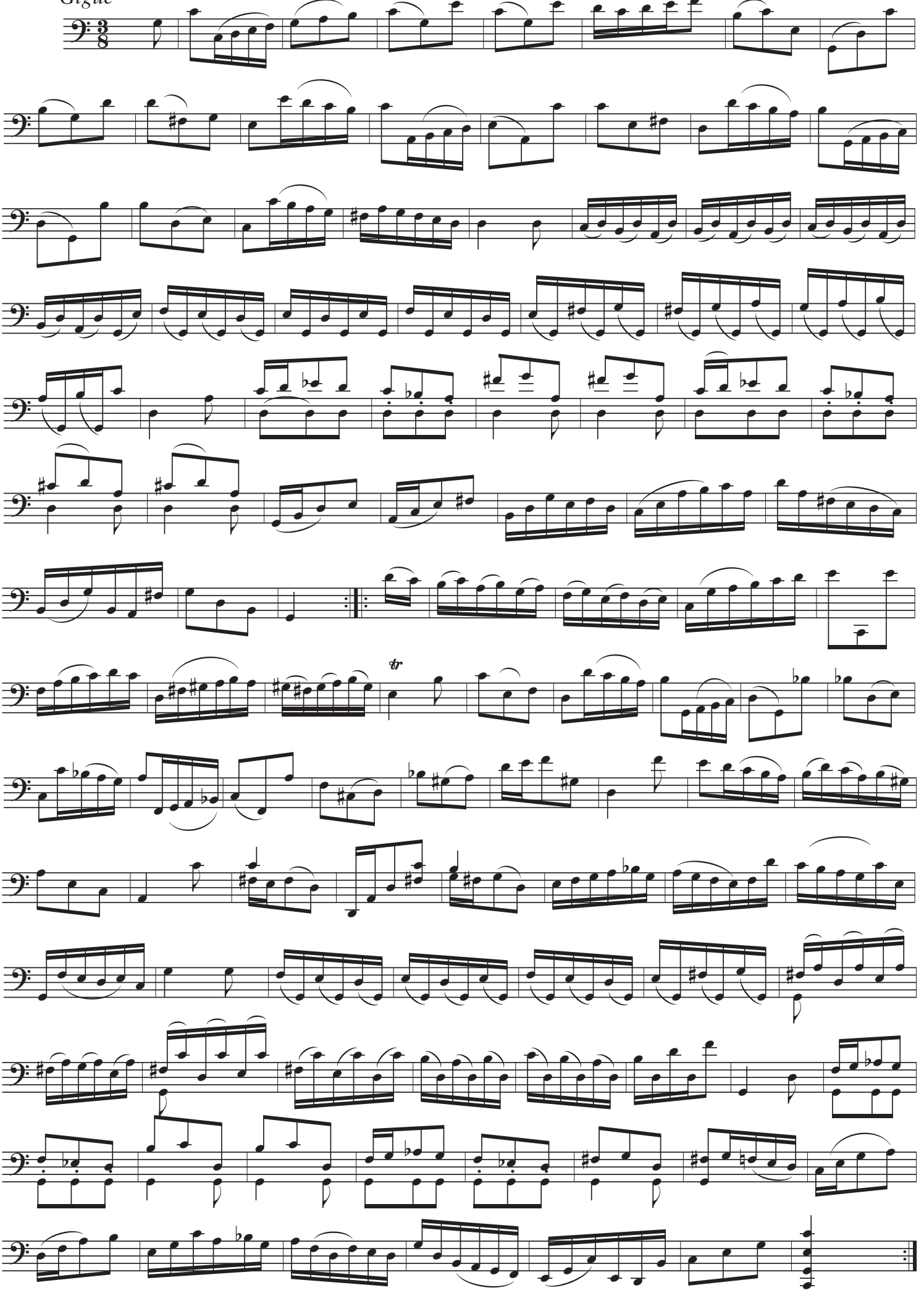
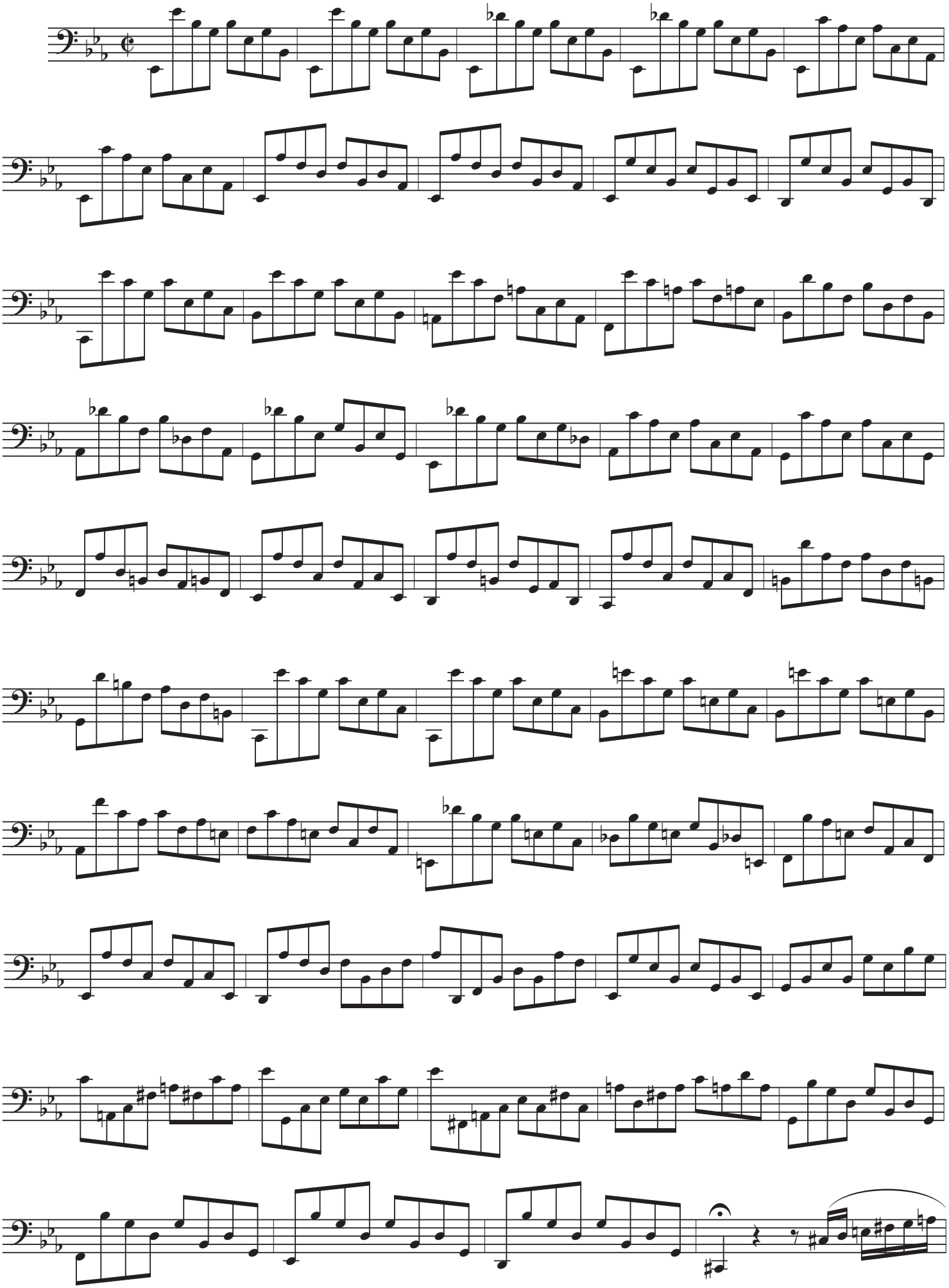
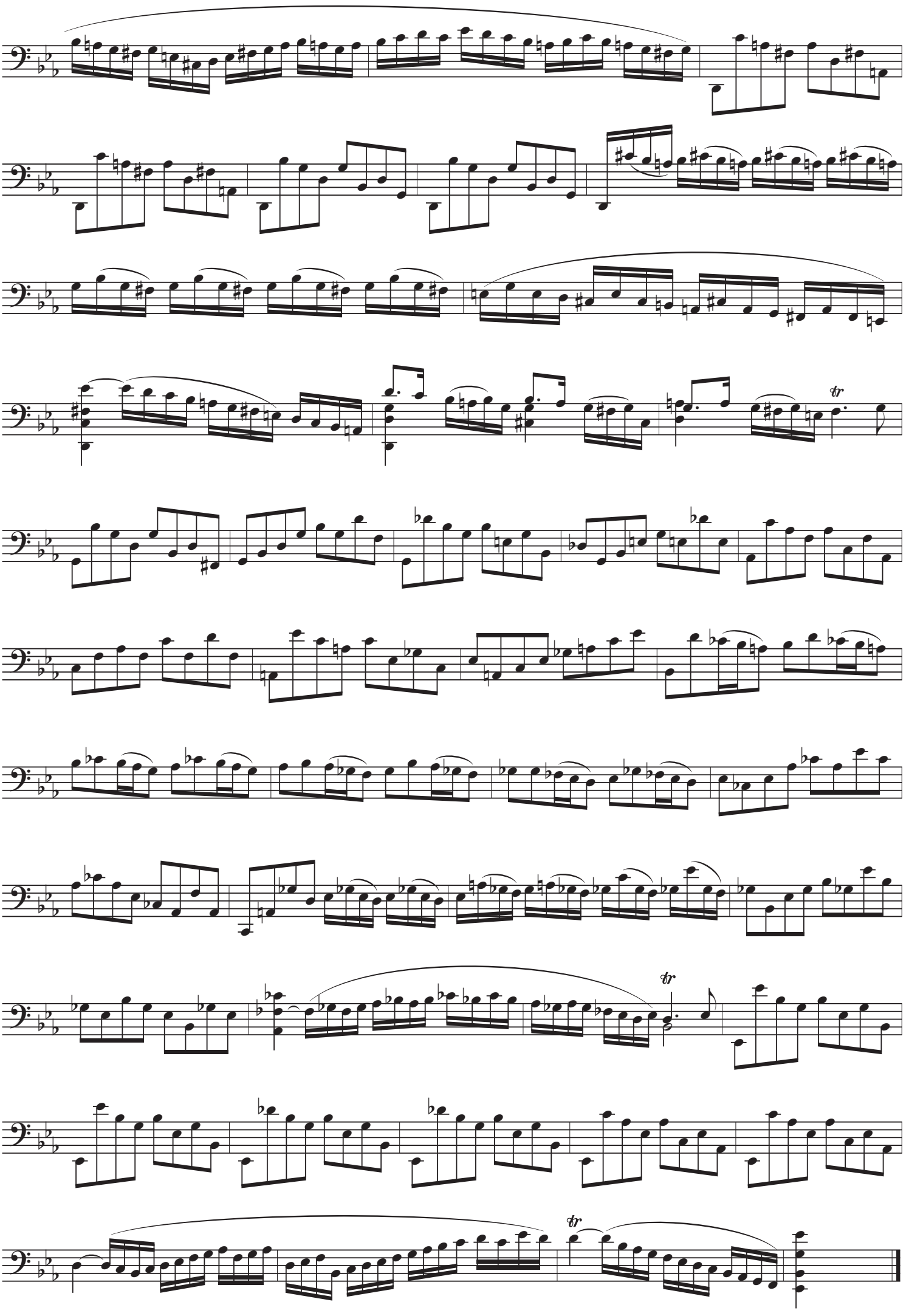


Suitte 4

Preludium





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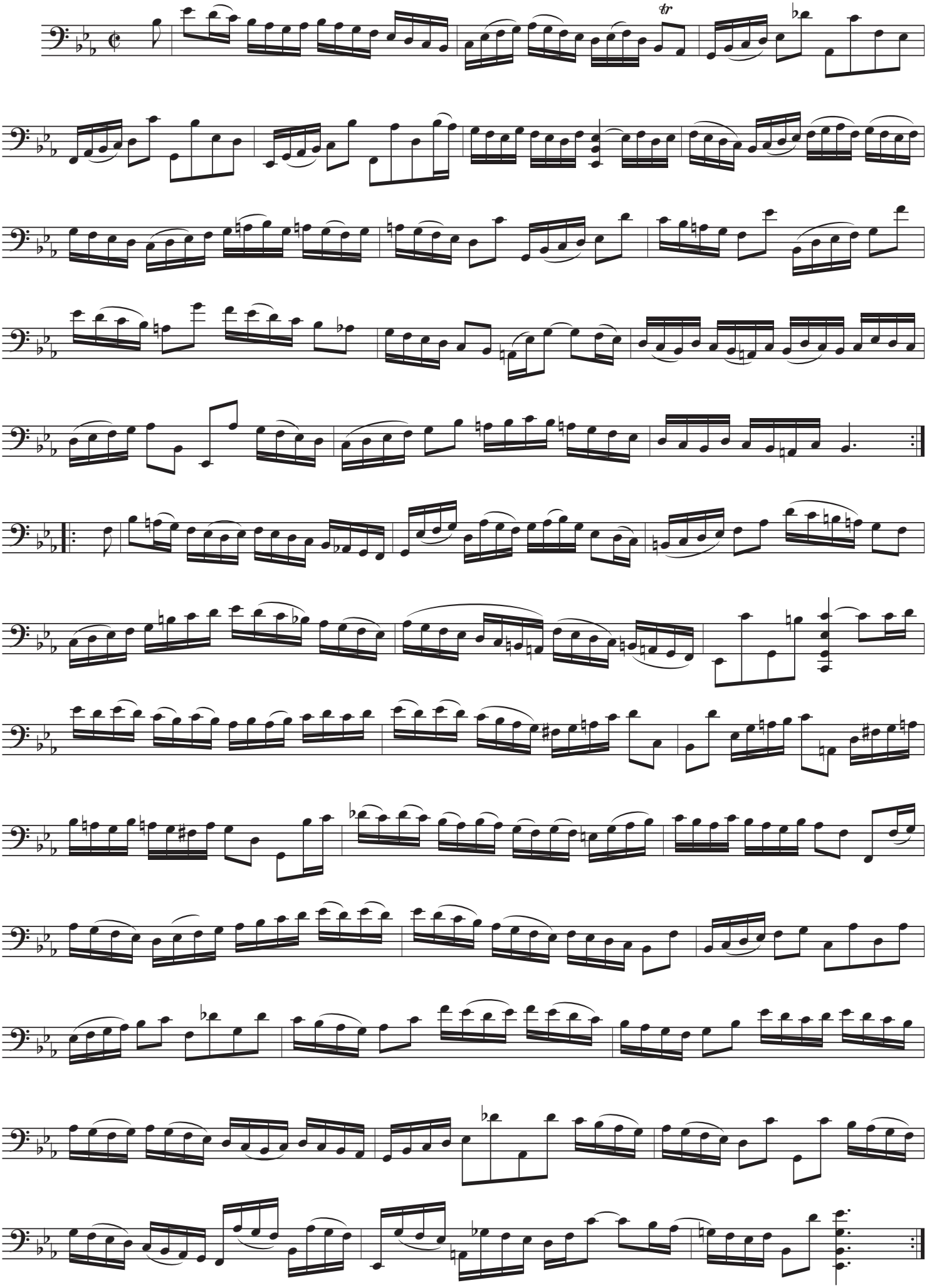

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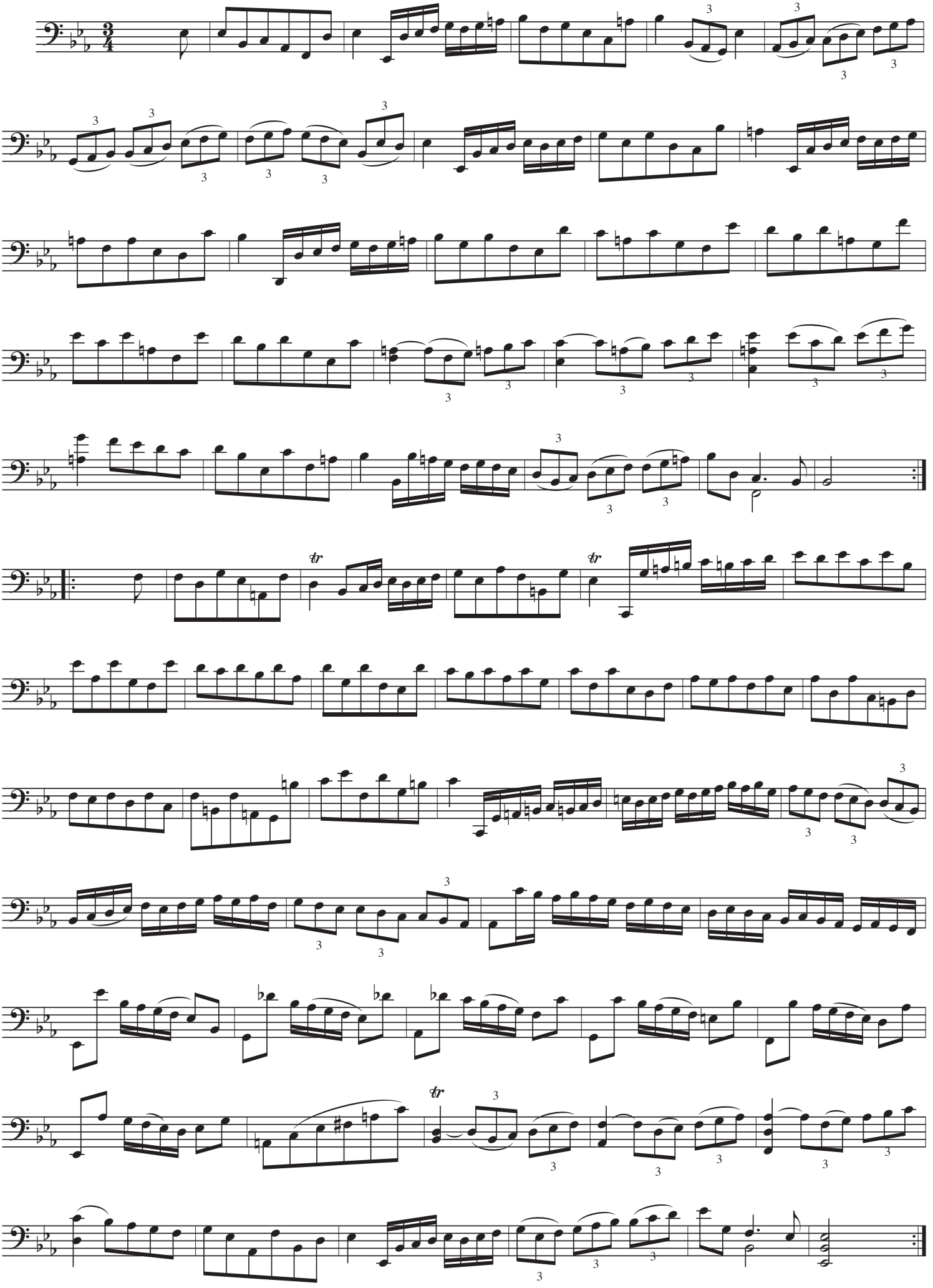

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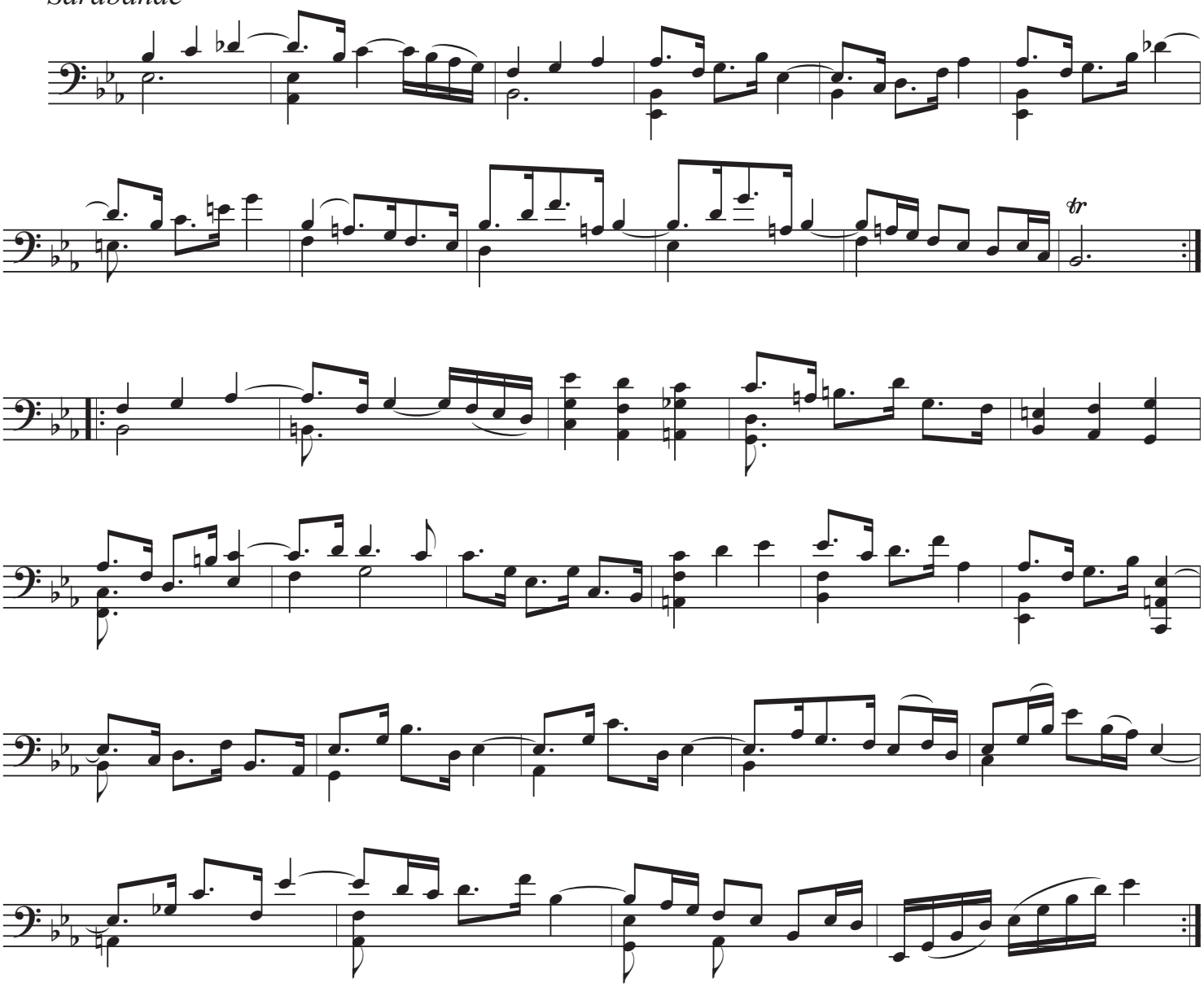
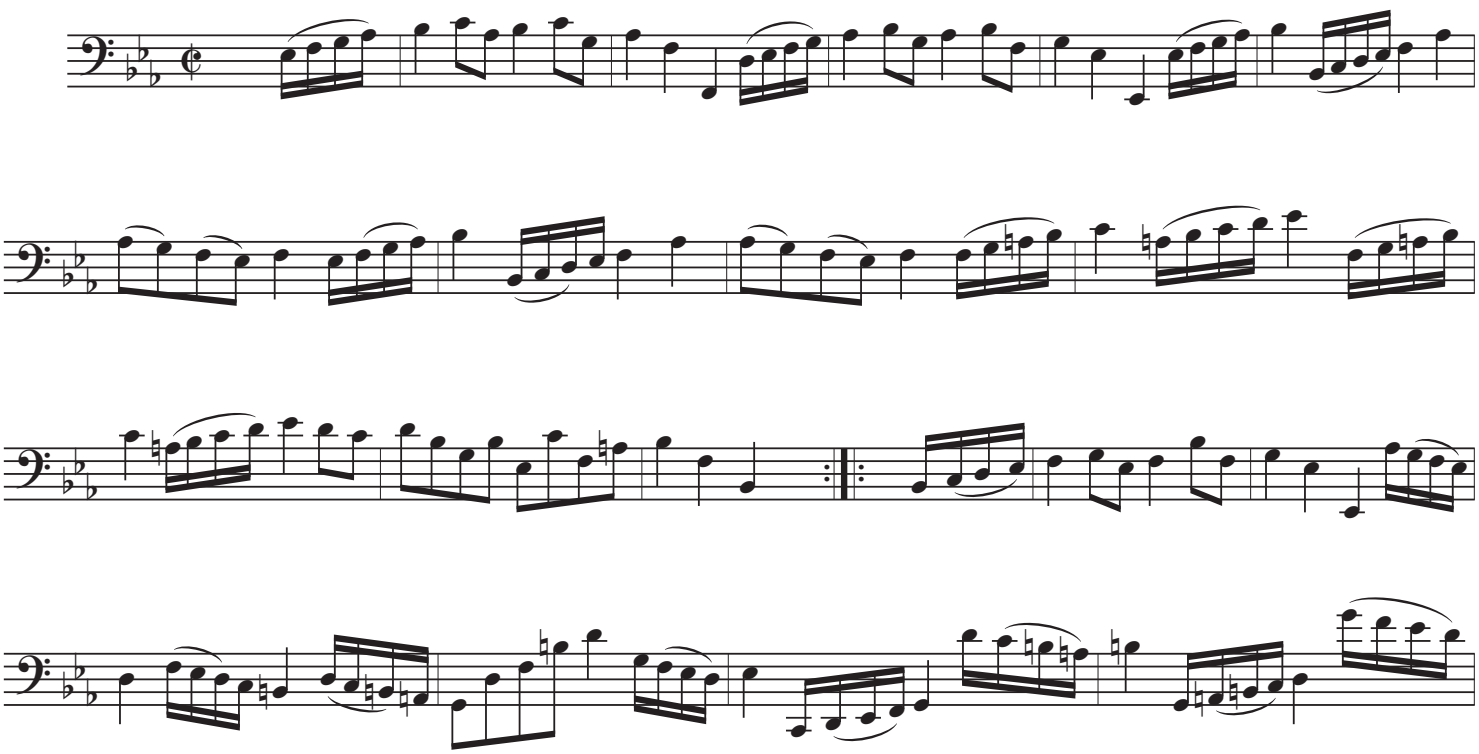
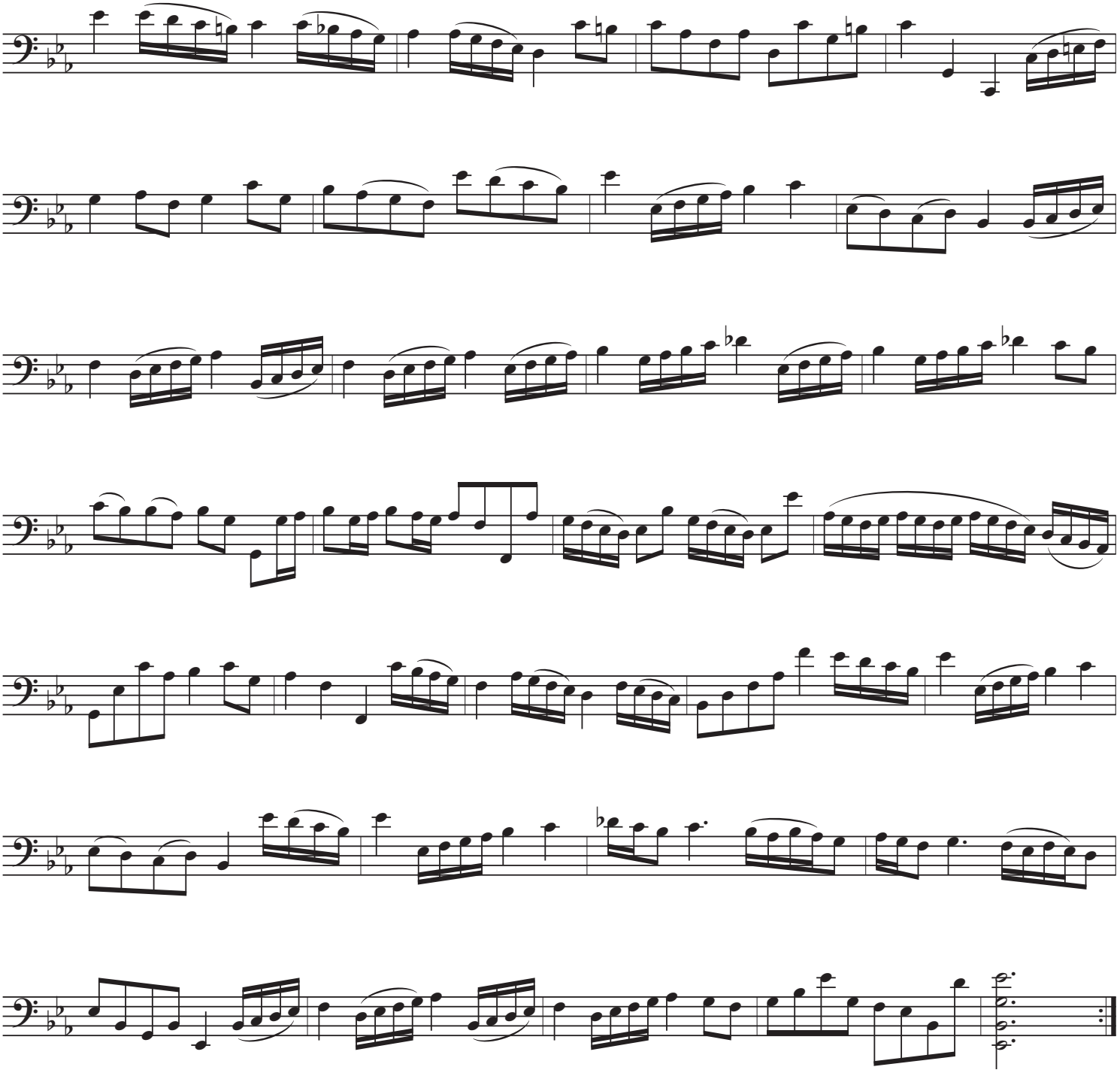
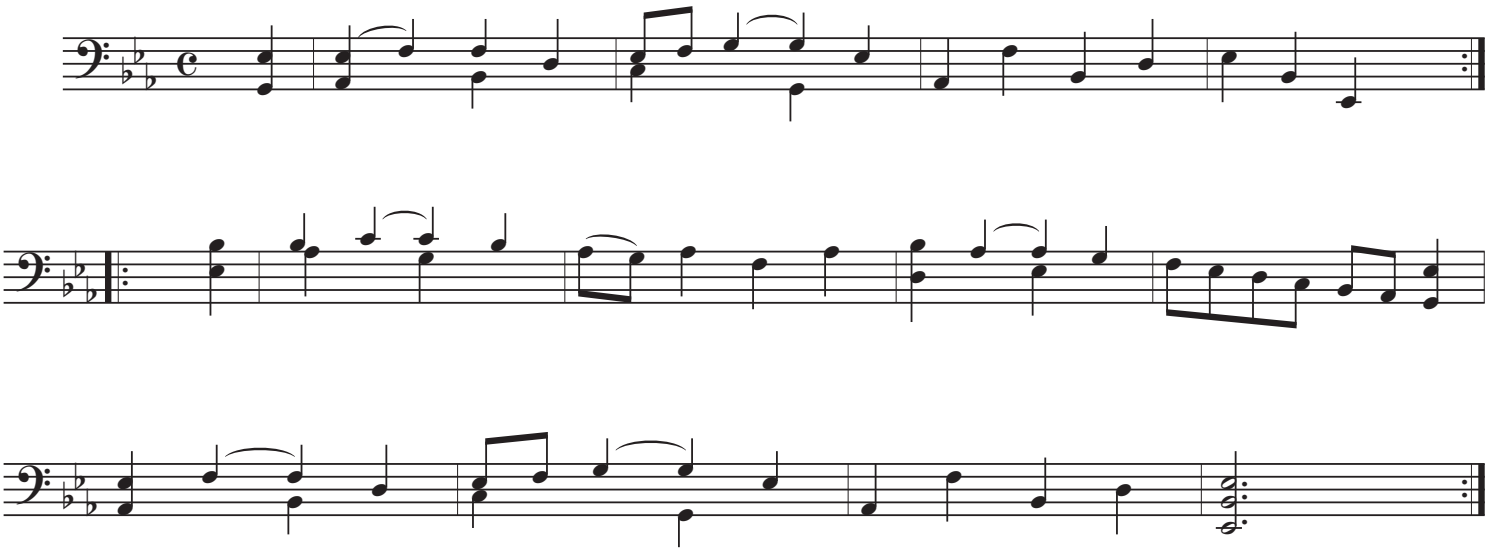


Bourree 1re





Bourree 2de



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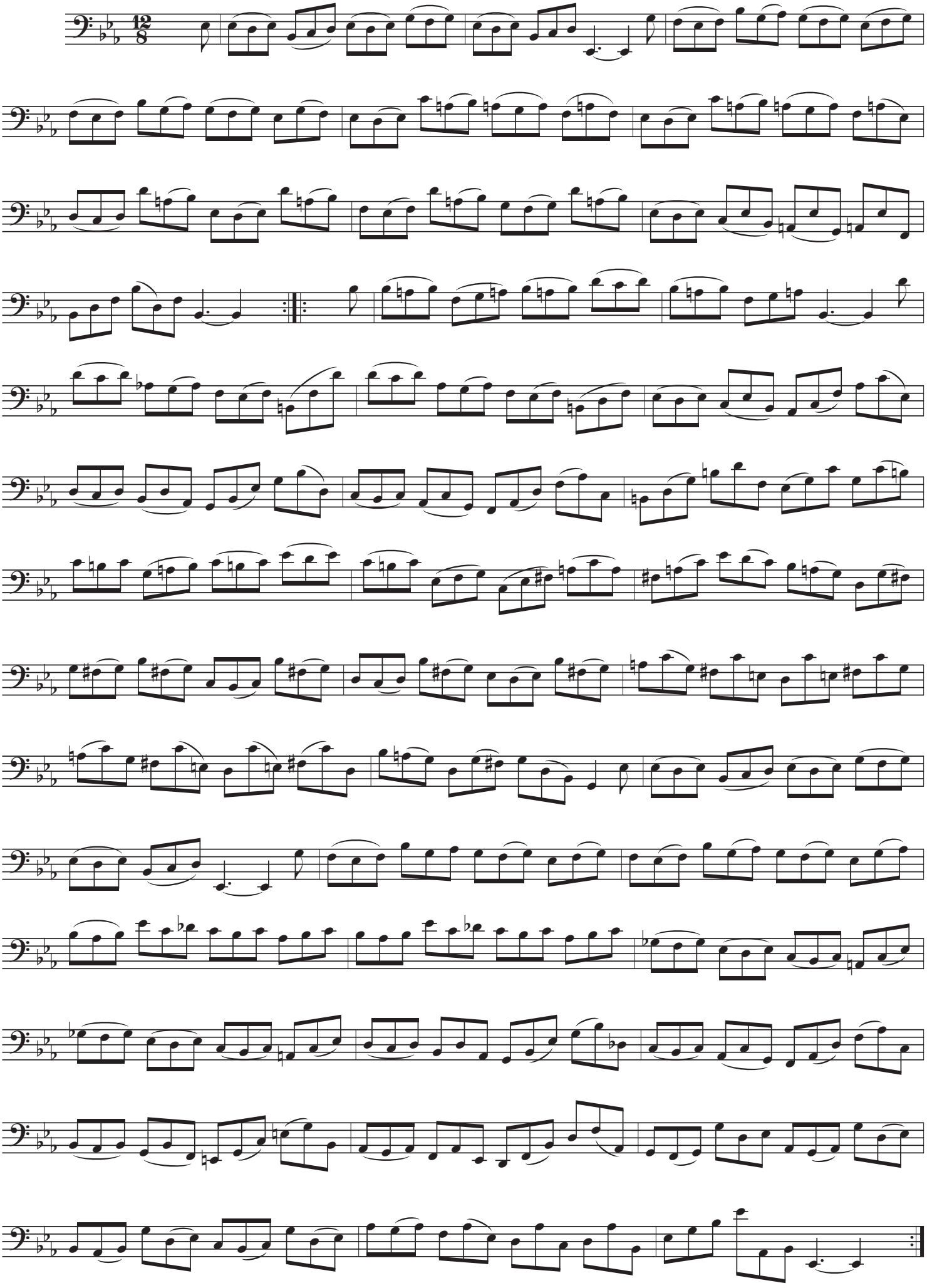

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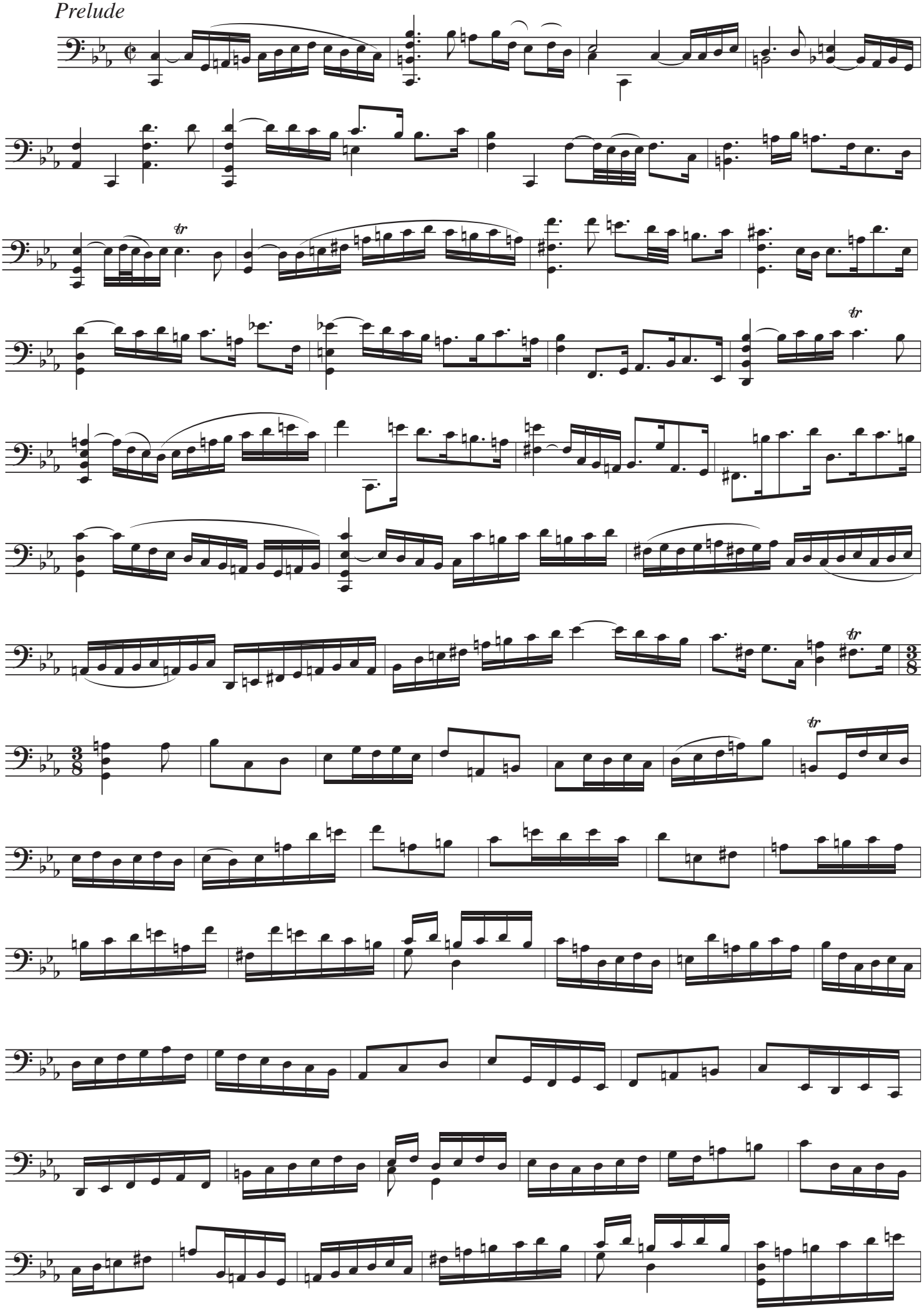
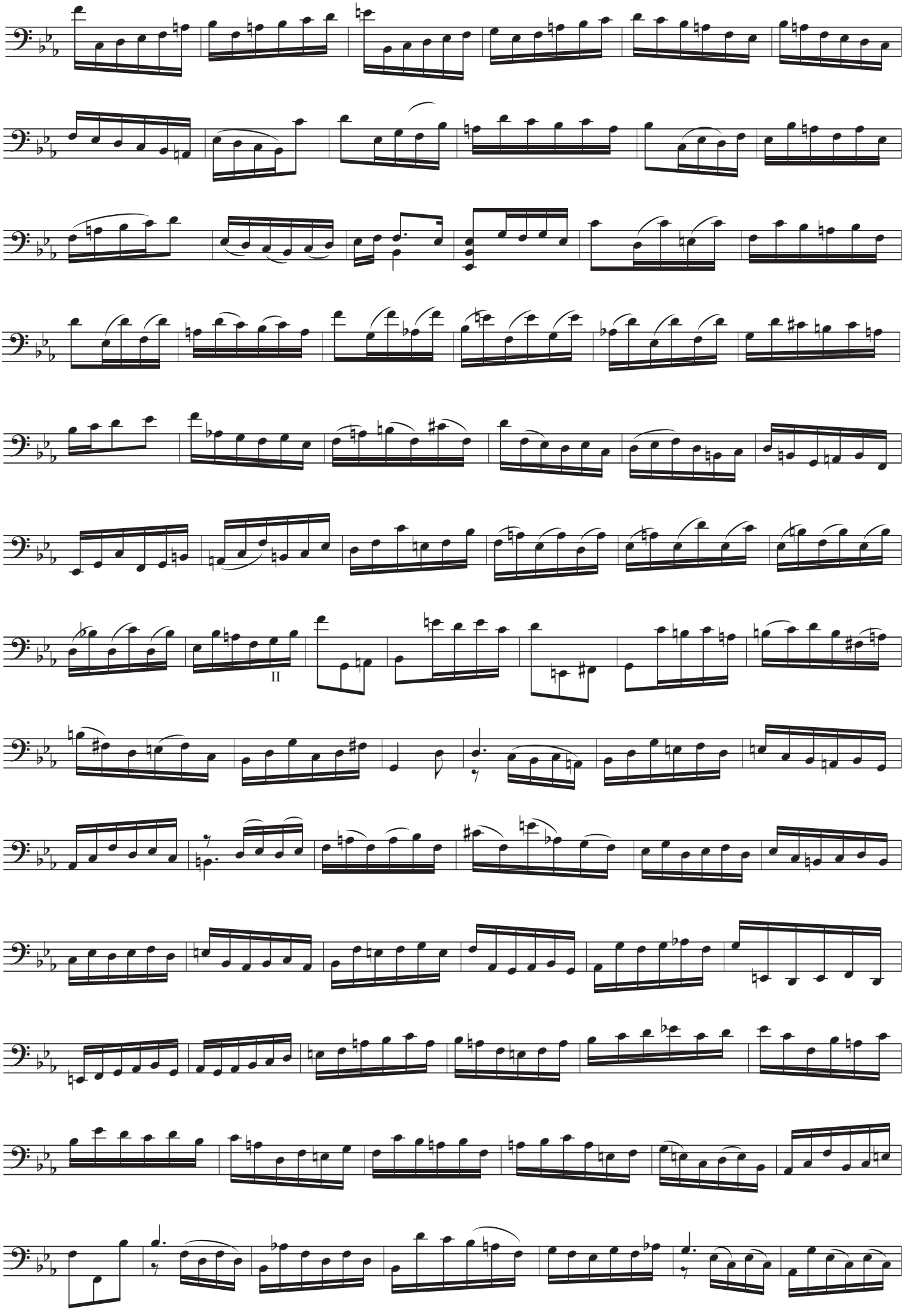
Suitte 5

Prelude

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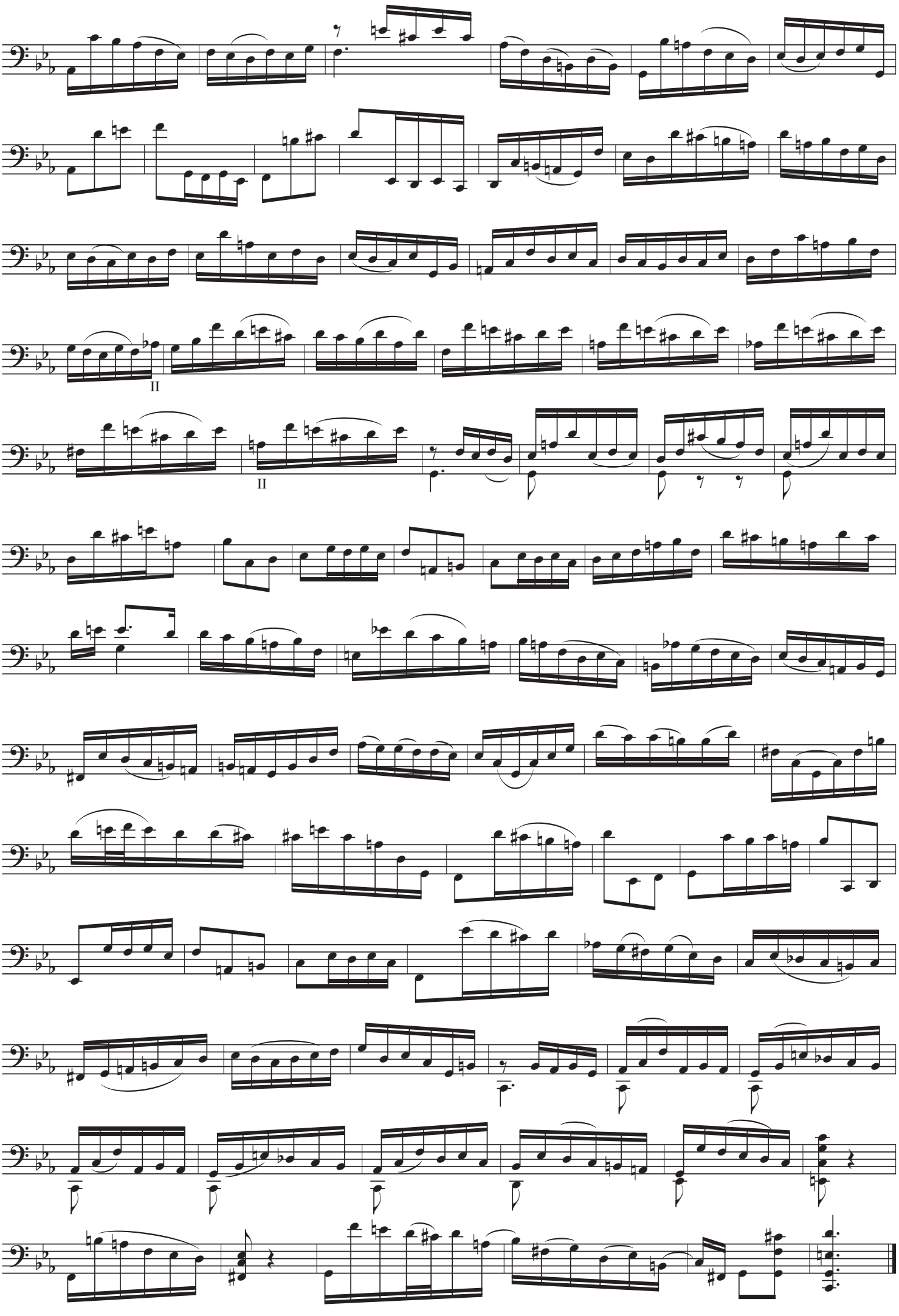
II
II

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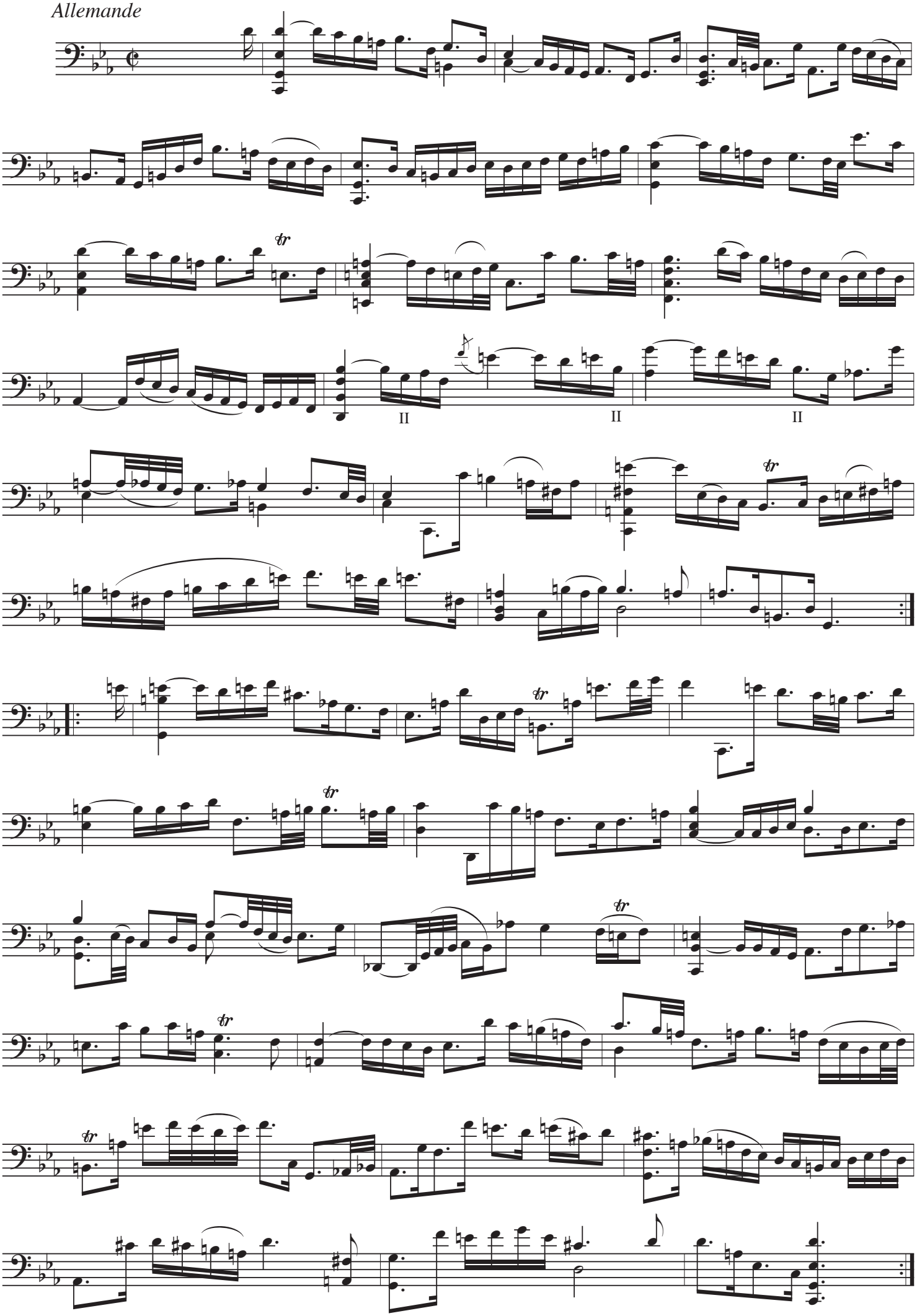
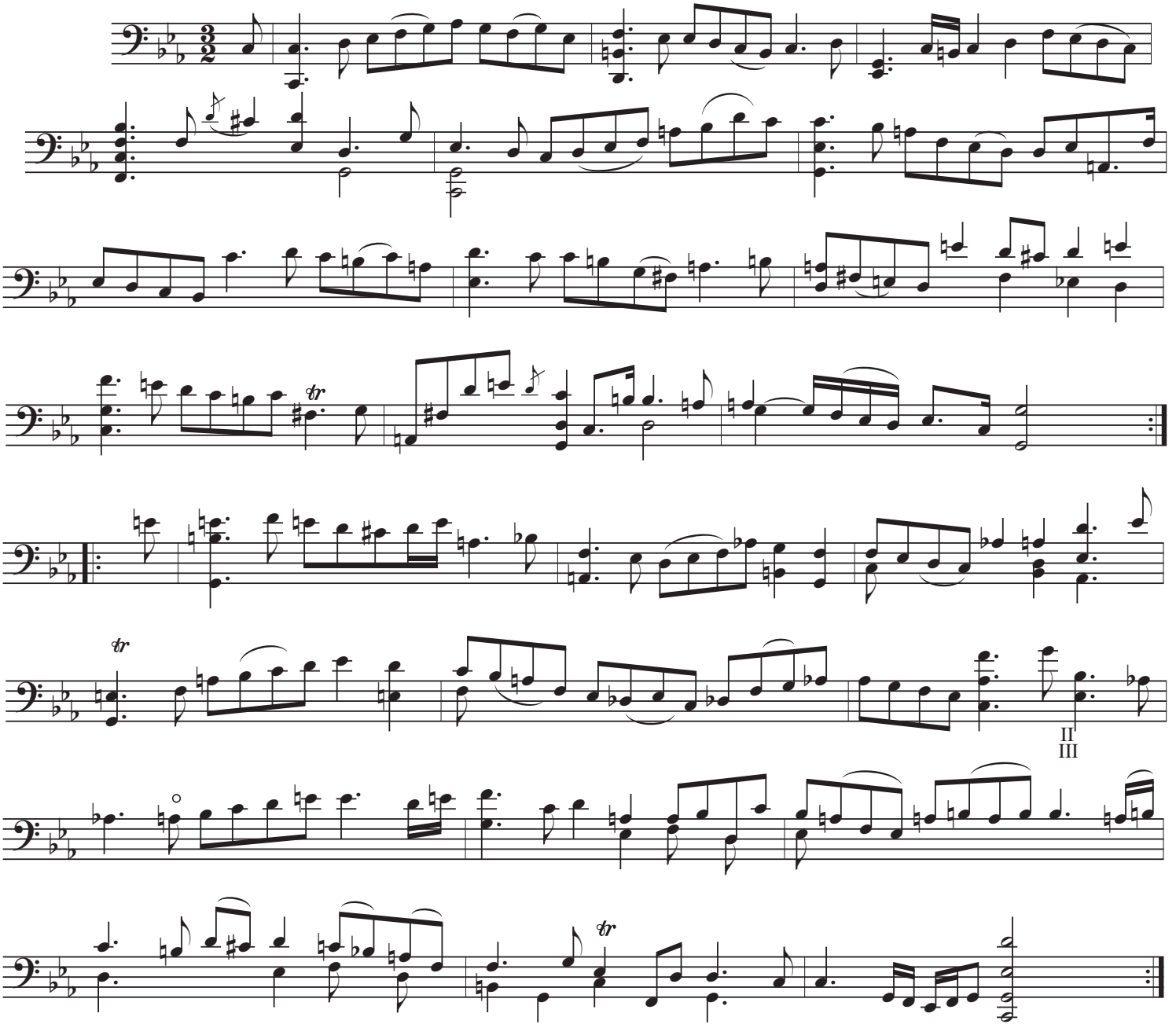
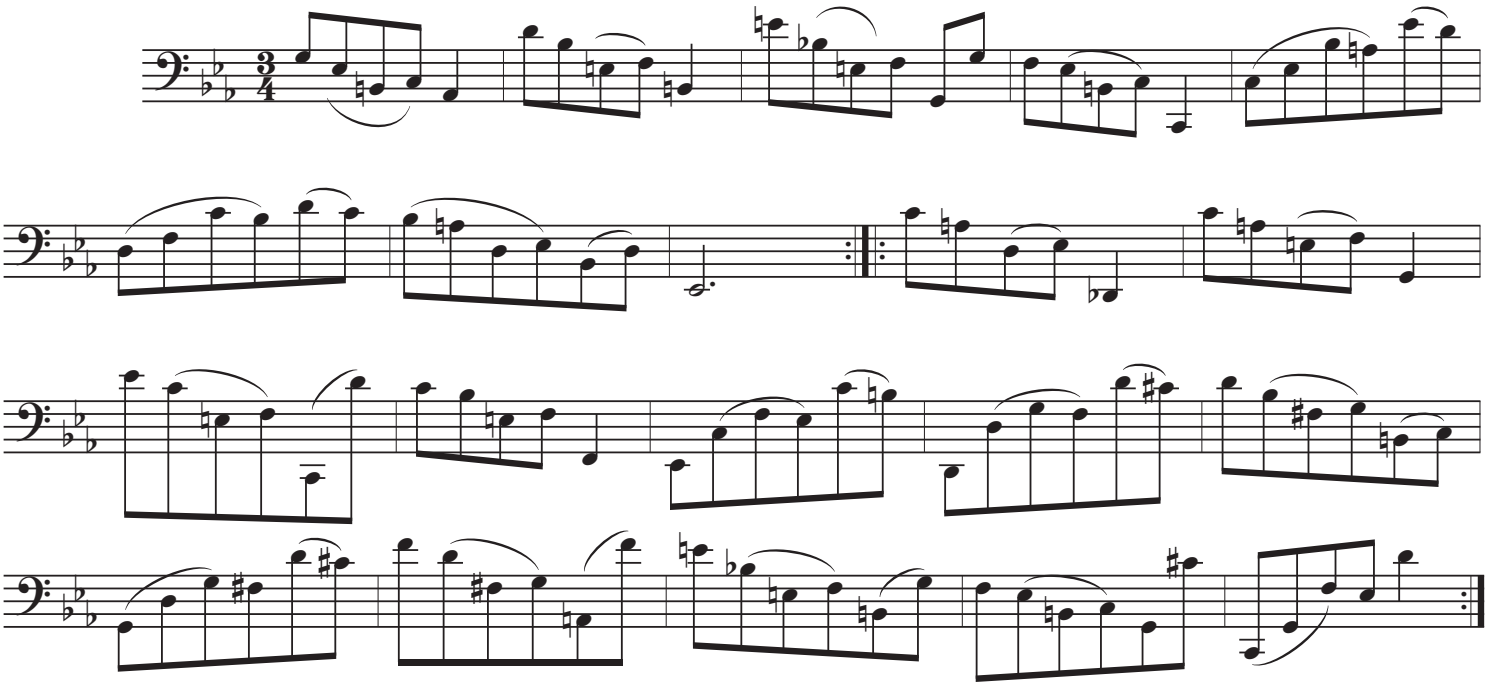
Allemande



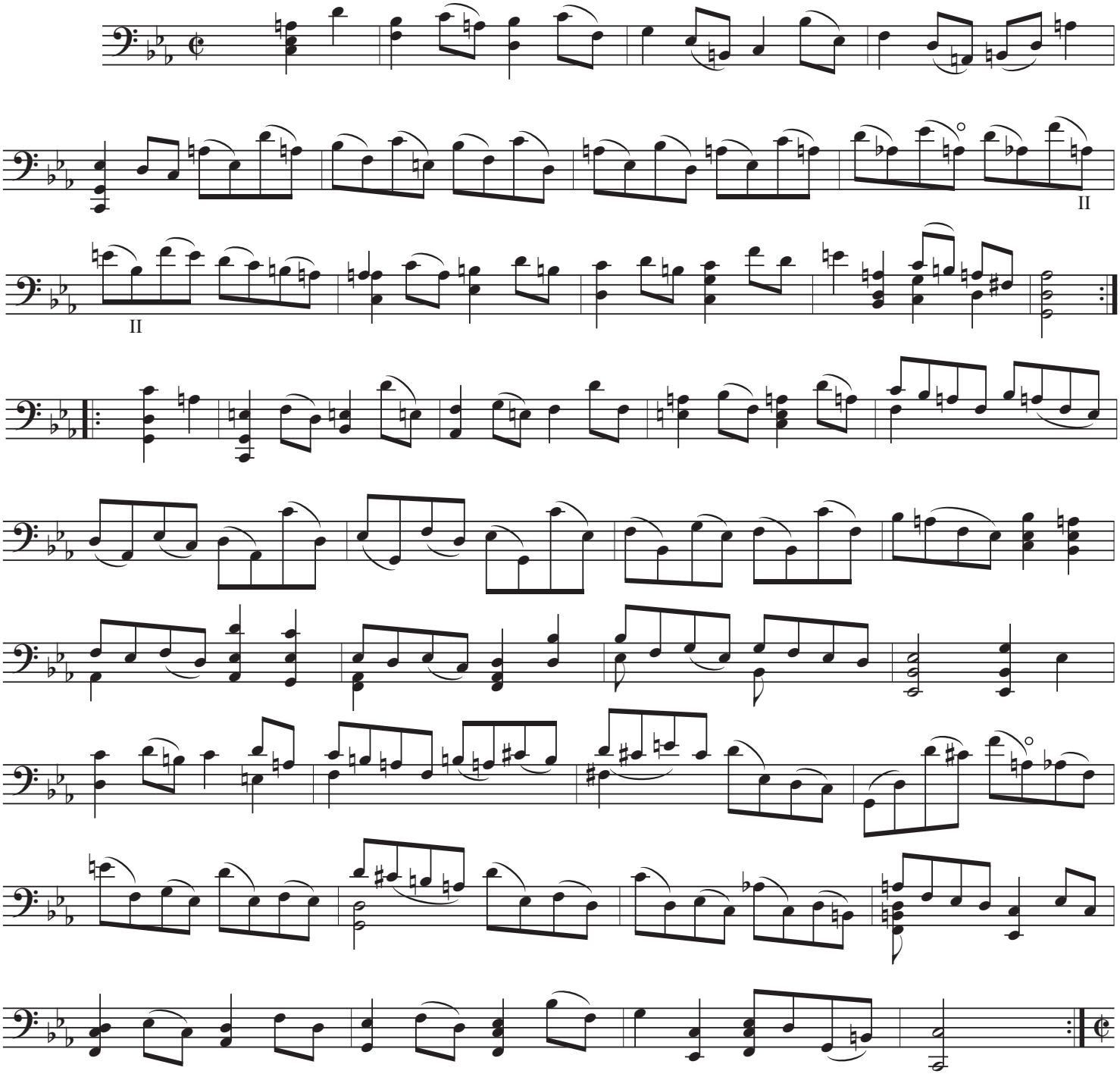
Courante



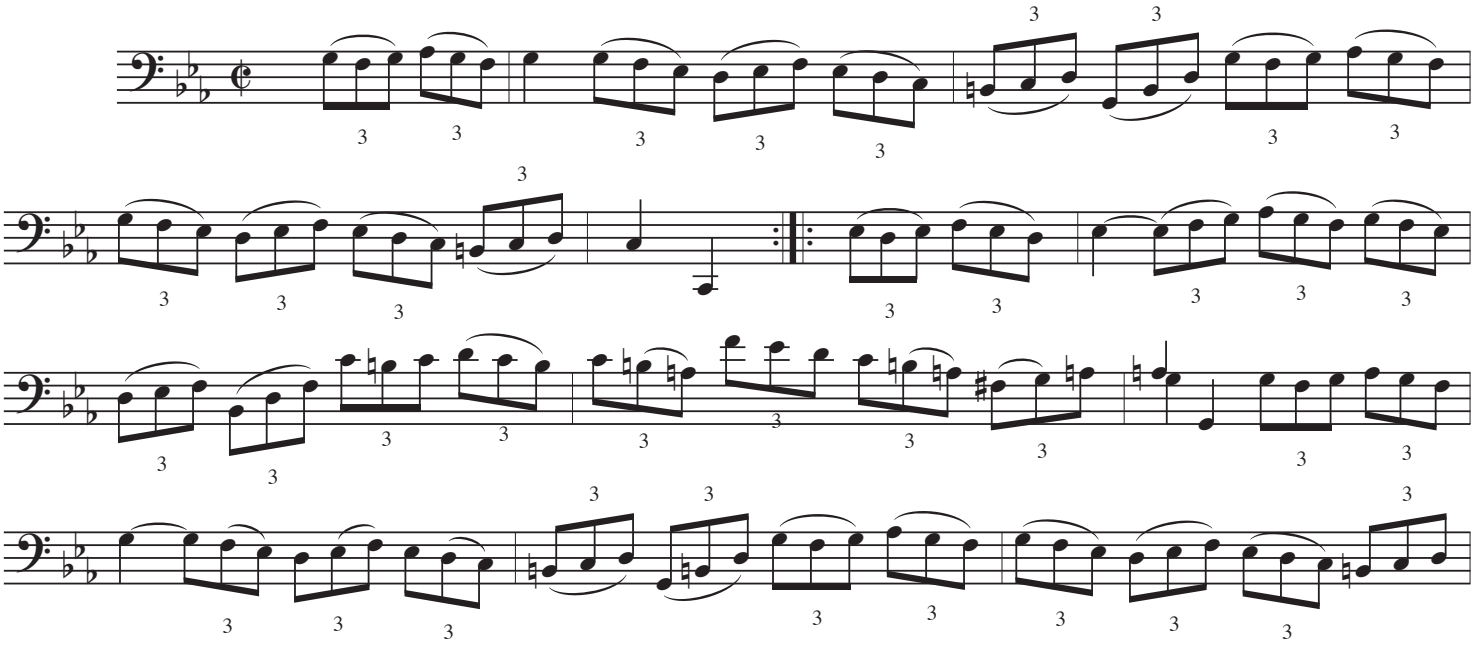
Sarabande

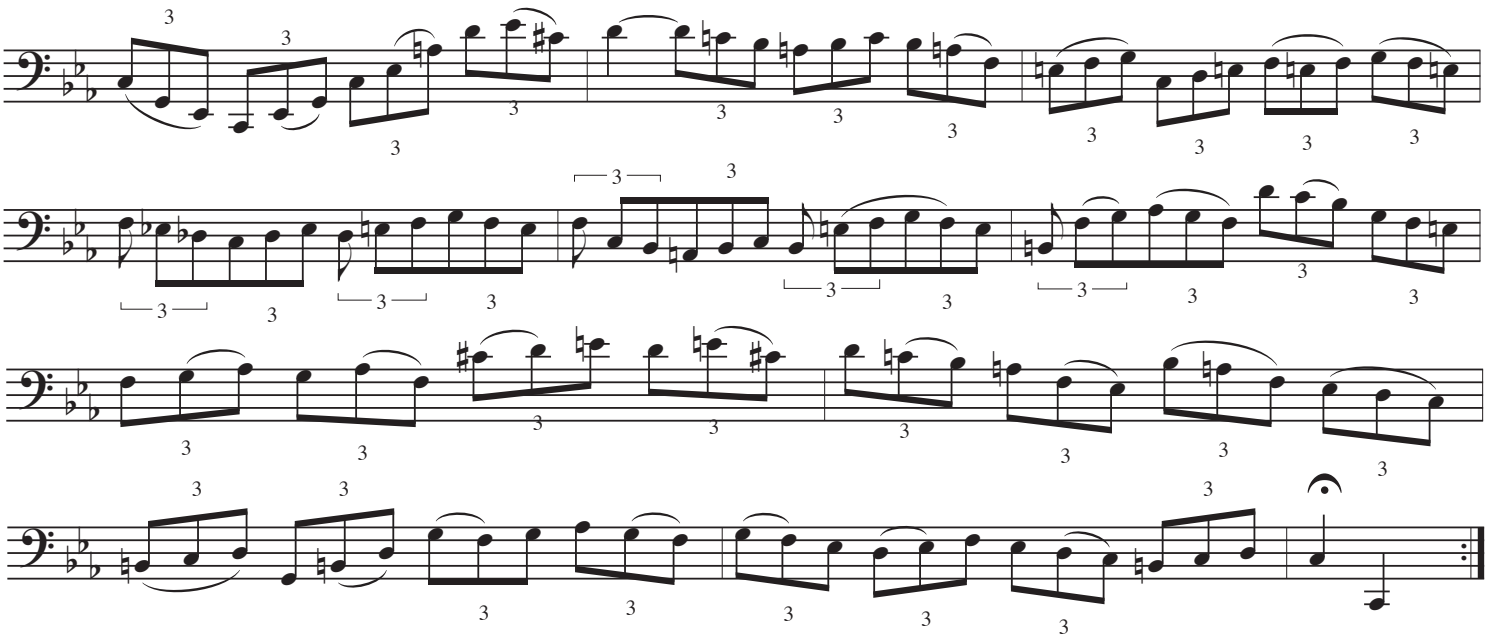


Gavotte 1re

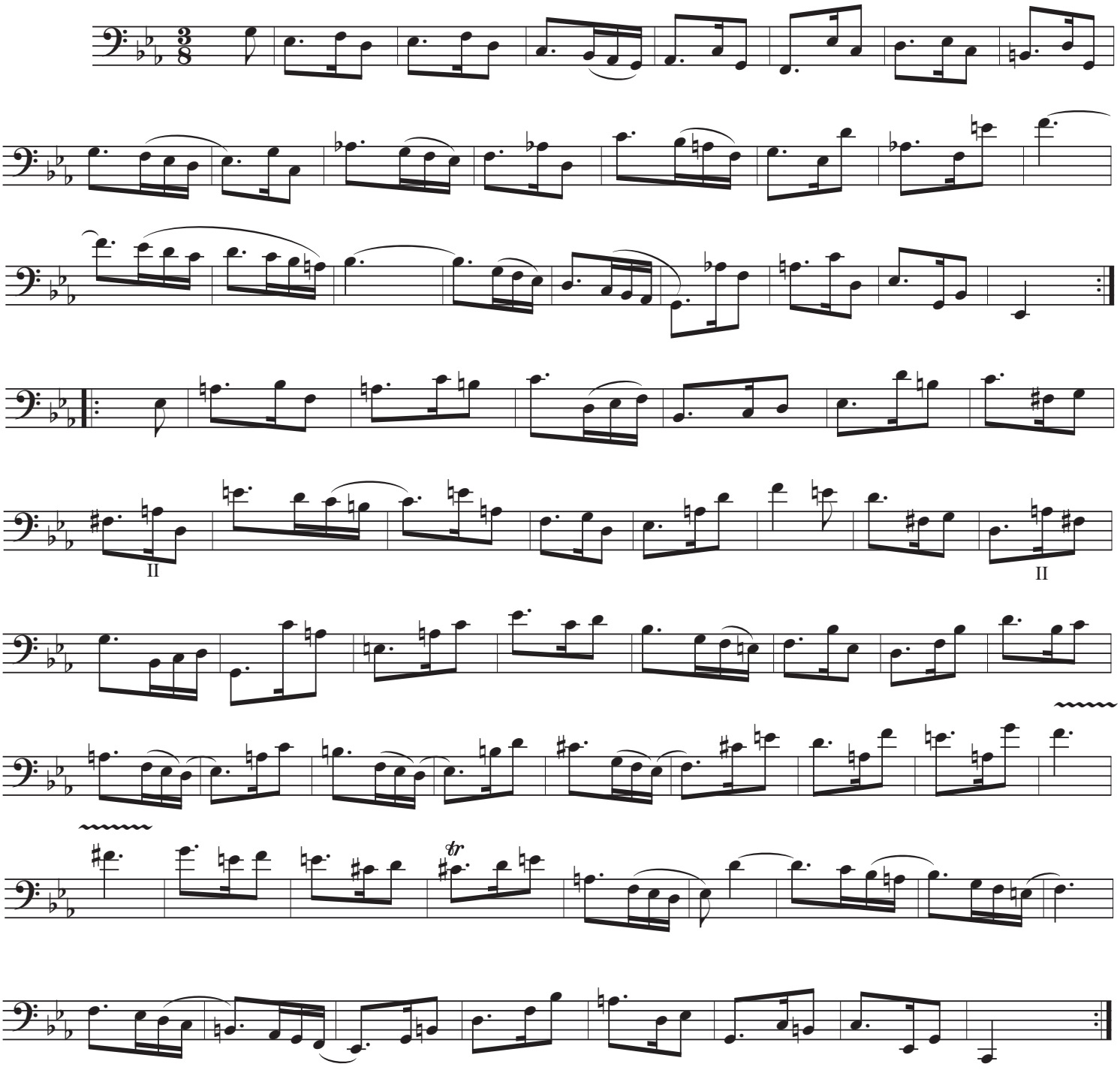


Gavotte 2de



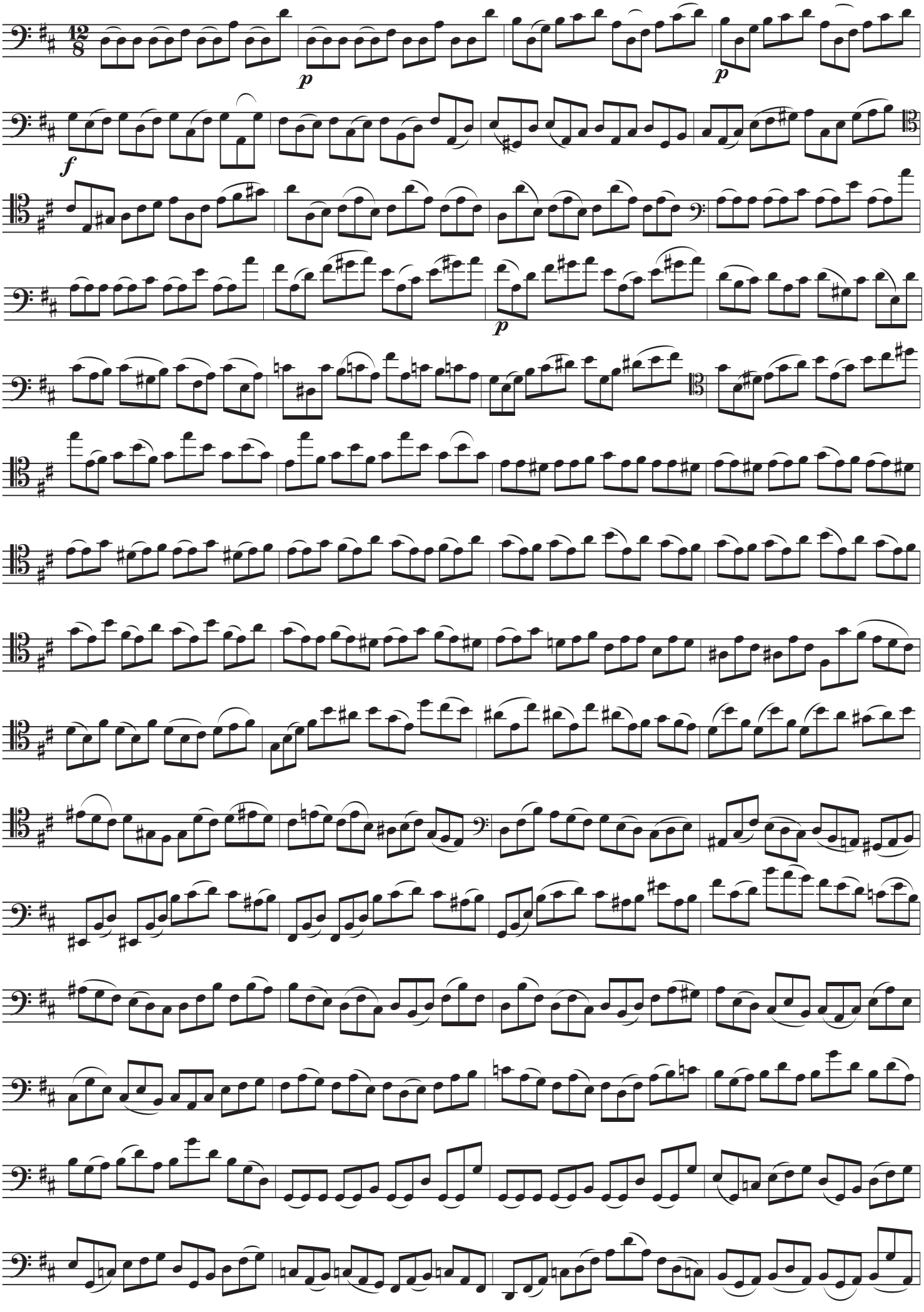


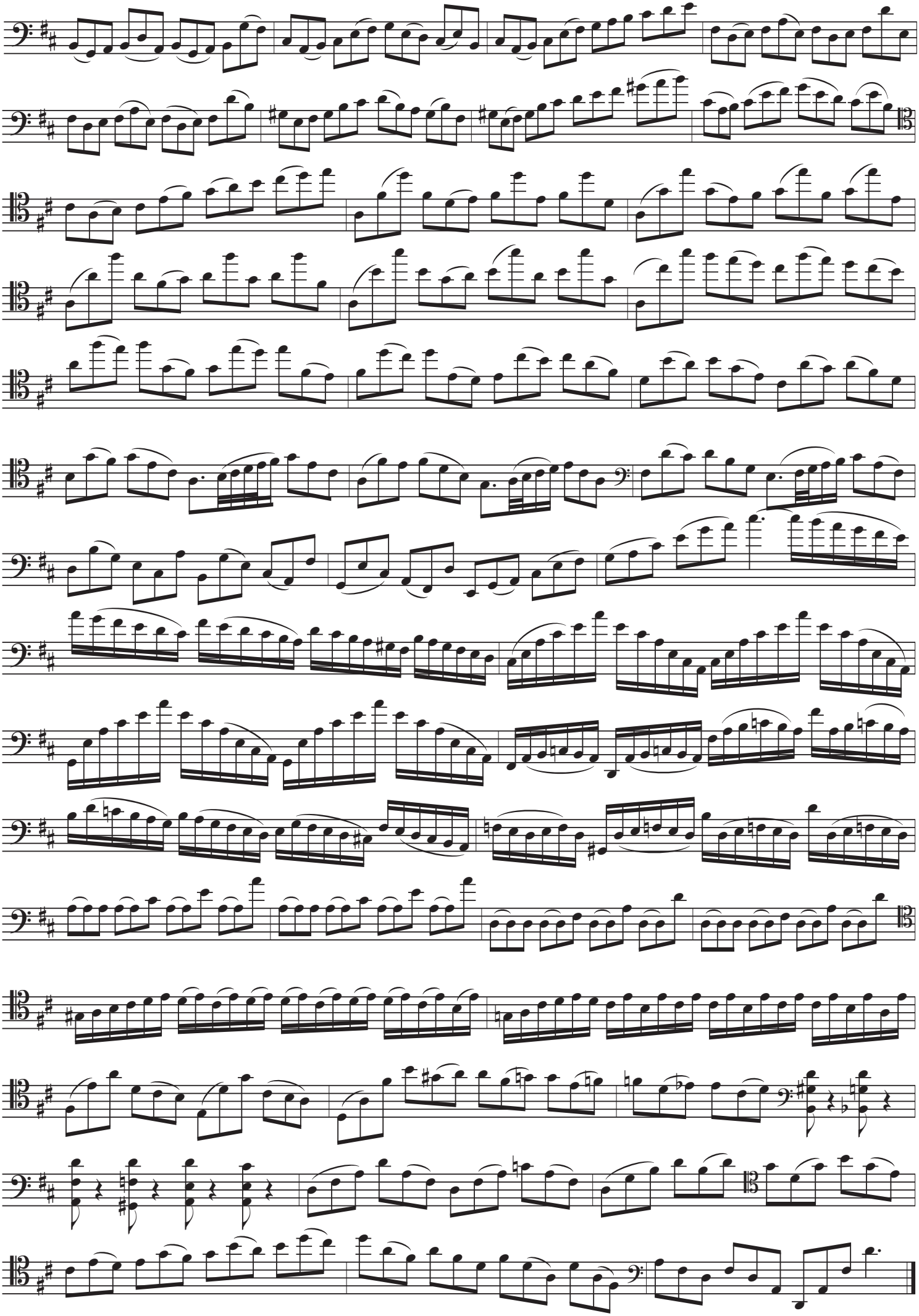
Gigue



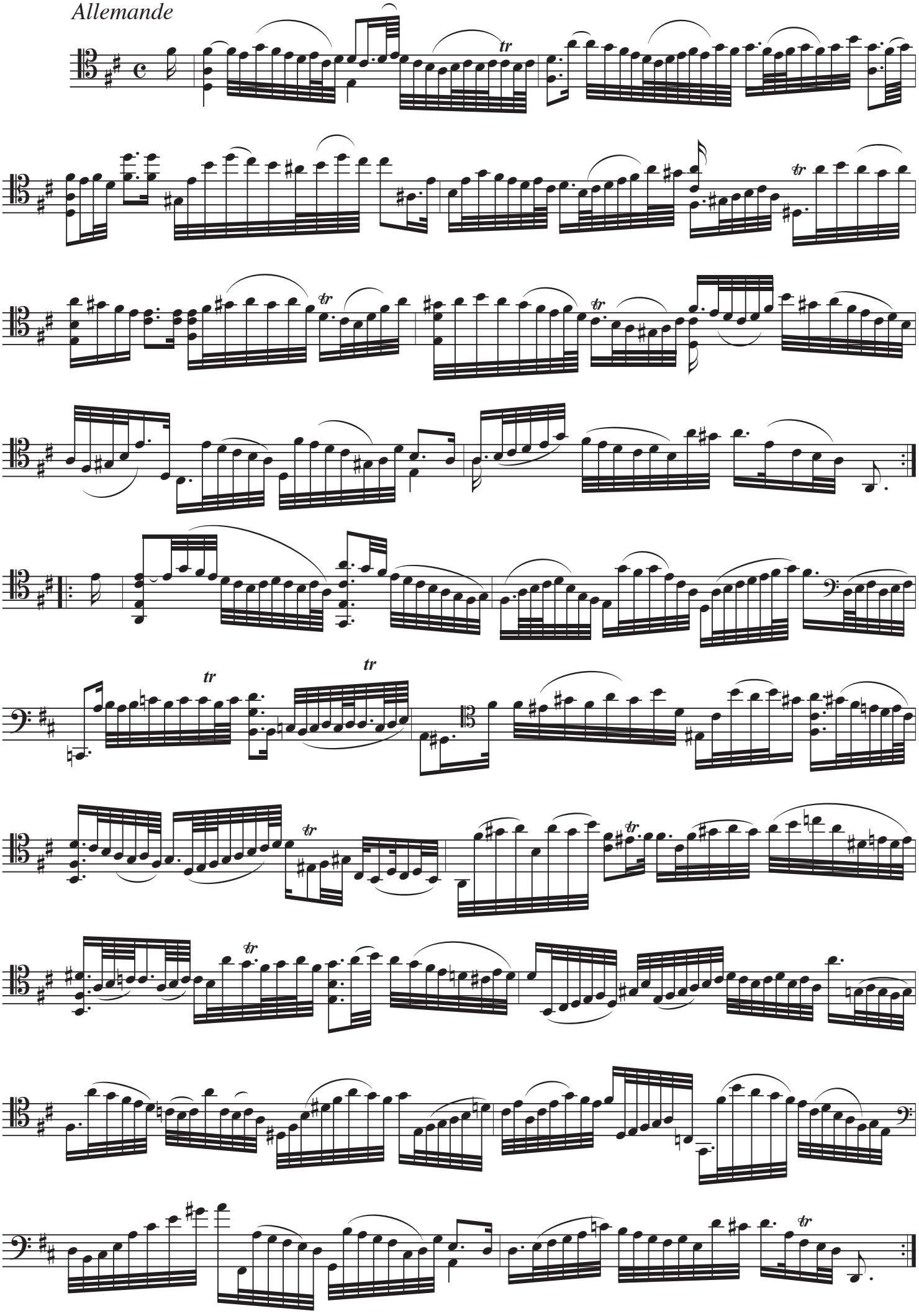
Prelude

Suitte 6



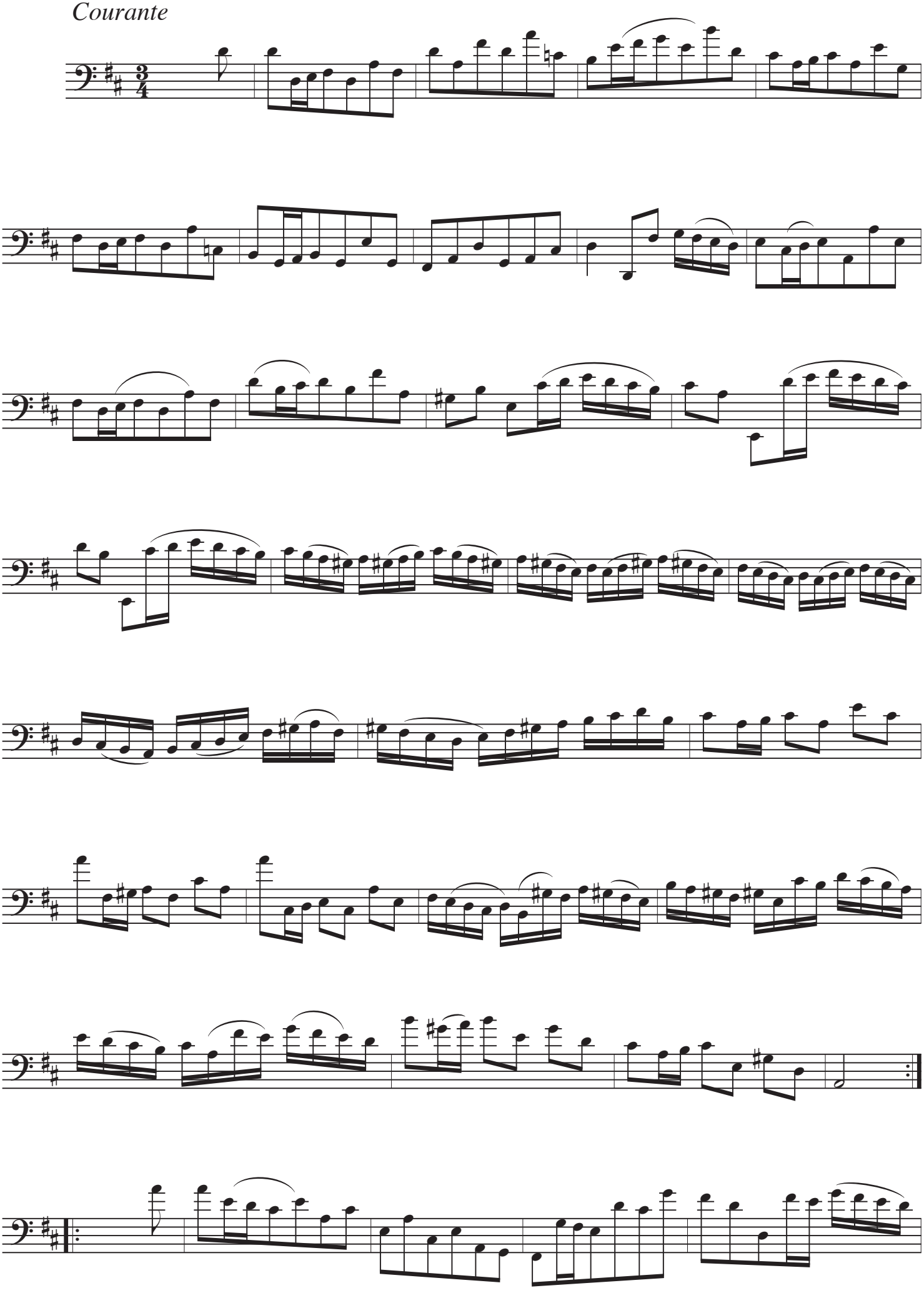


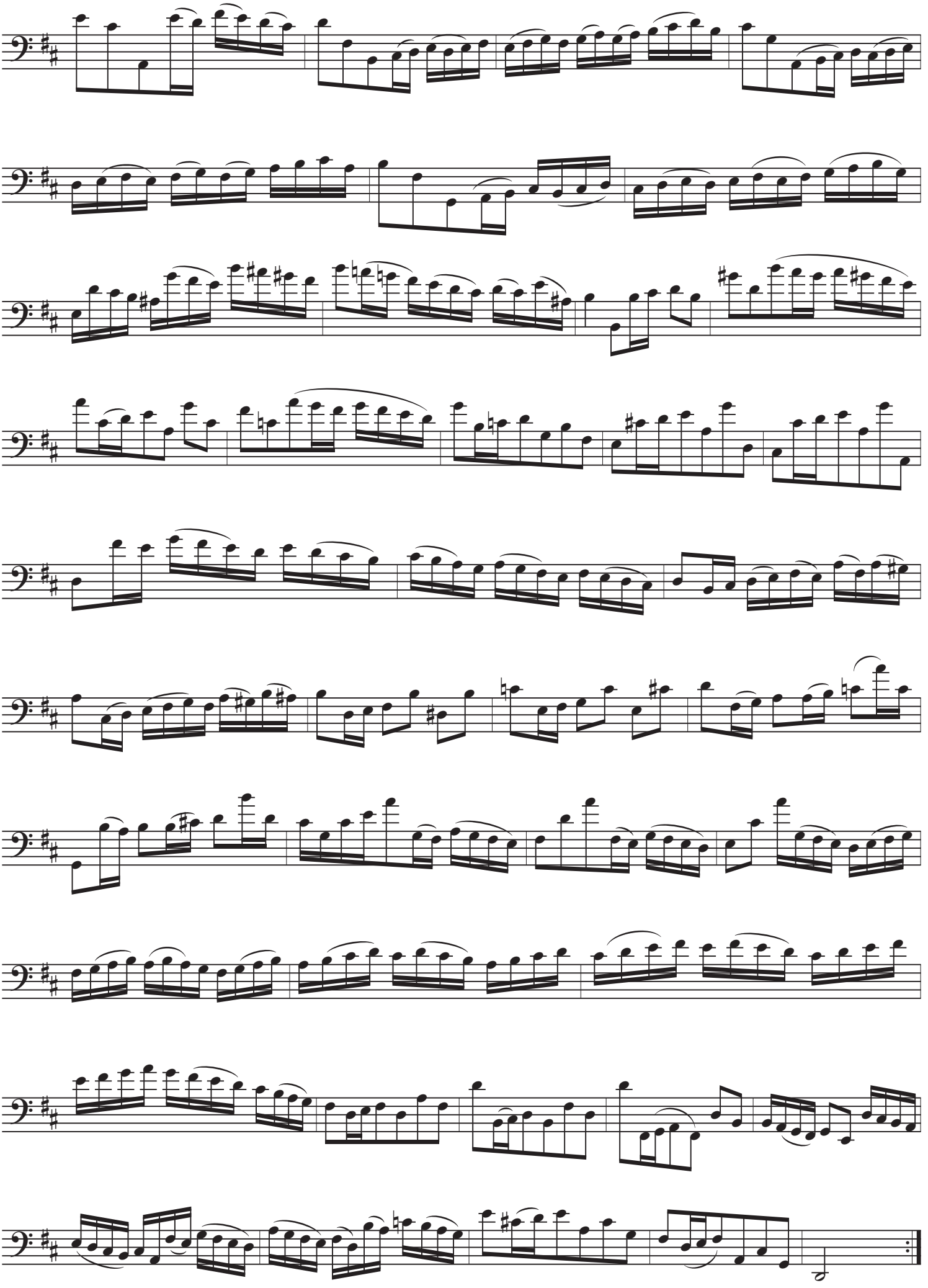
Allemande



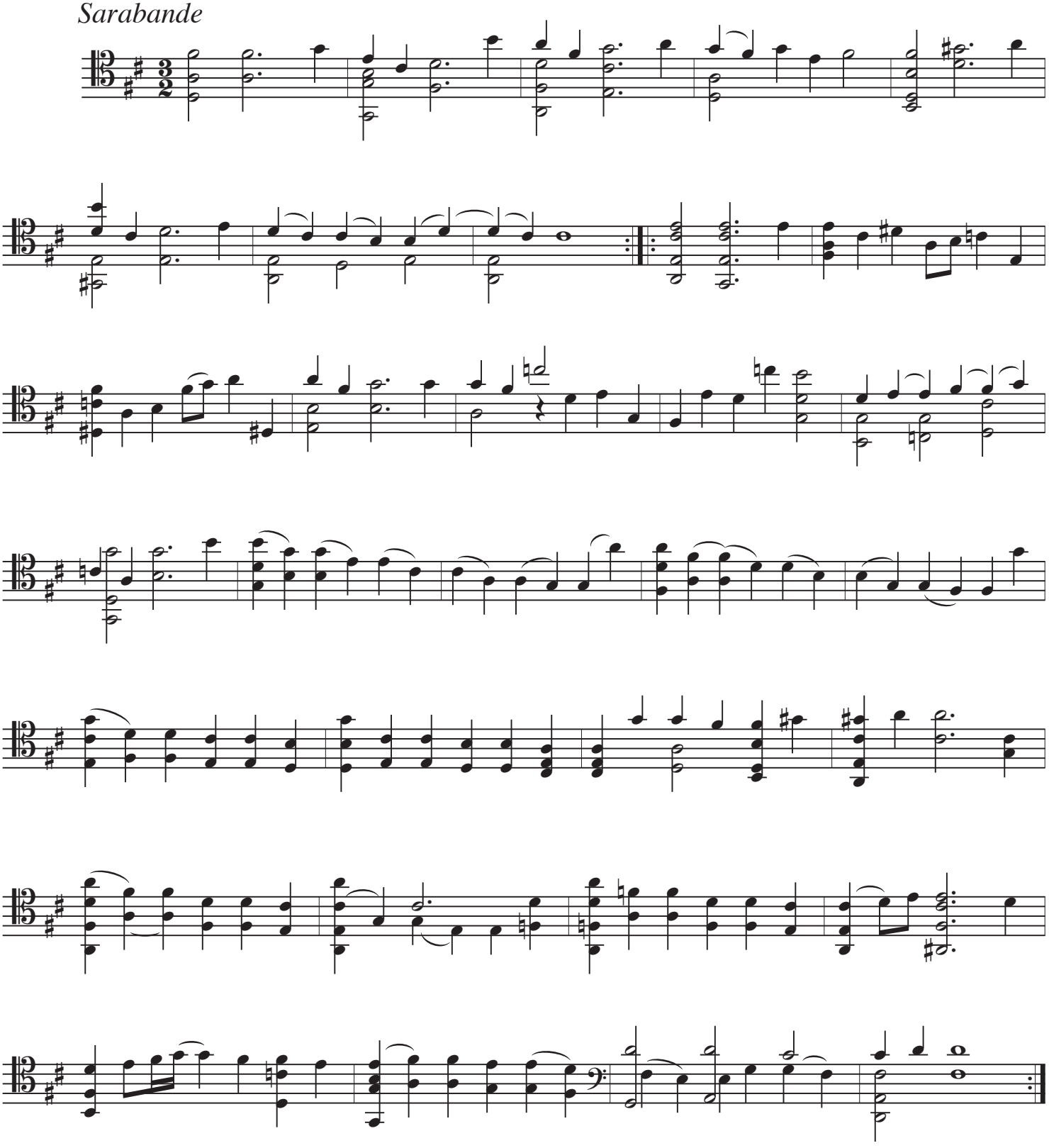
more Bach overleaf

Courante

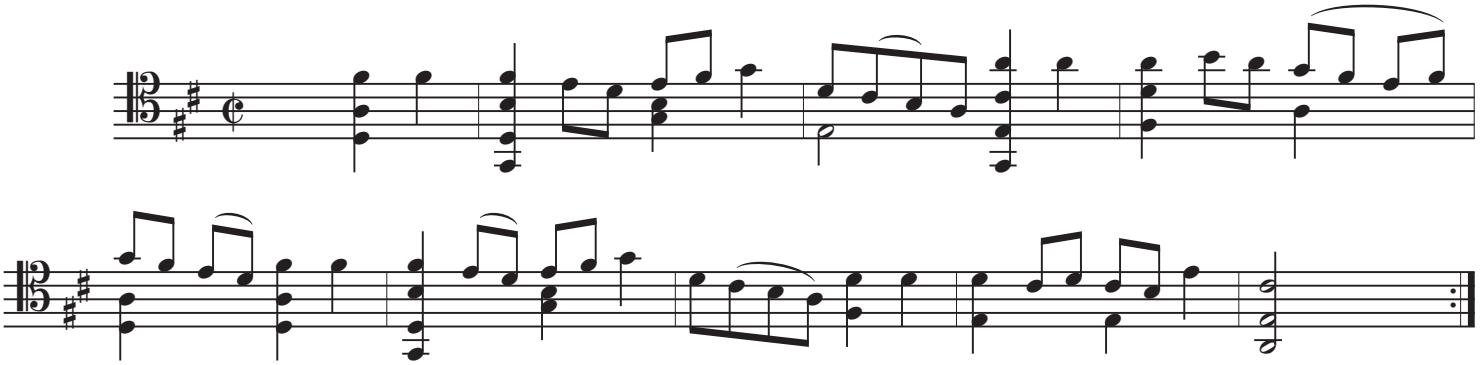


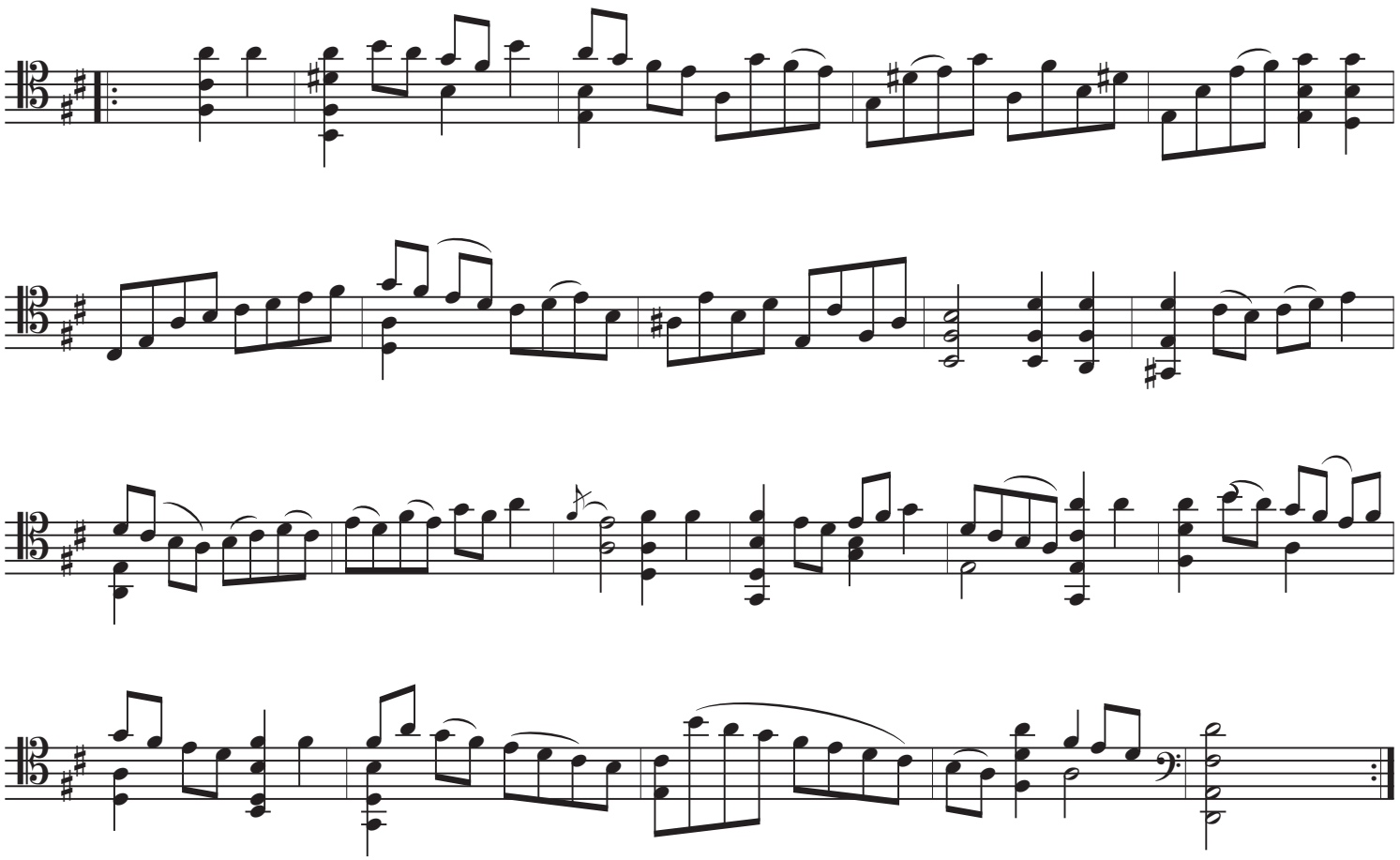


Sarabande



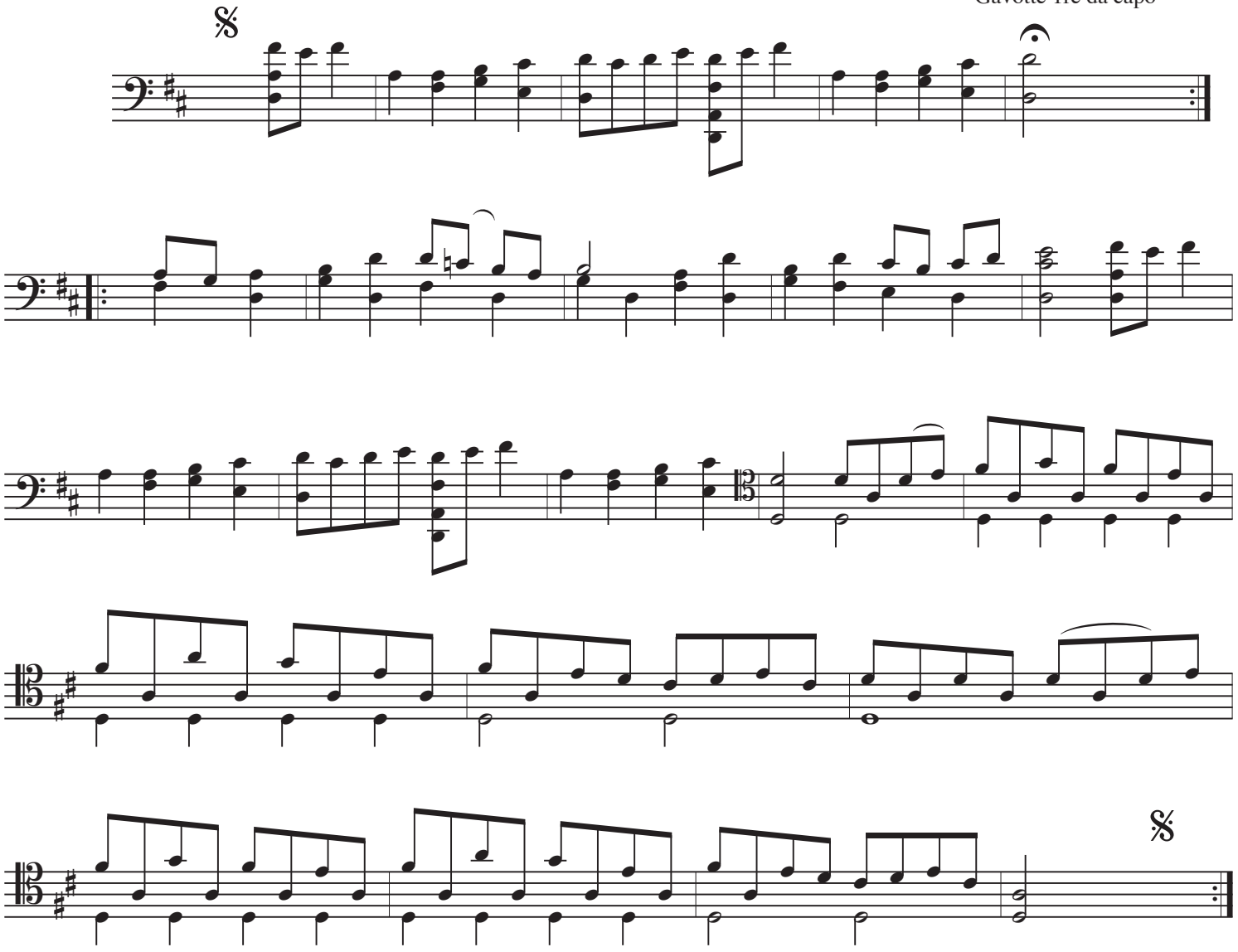
Gavotte 1re



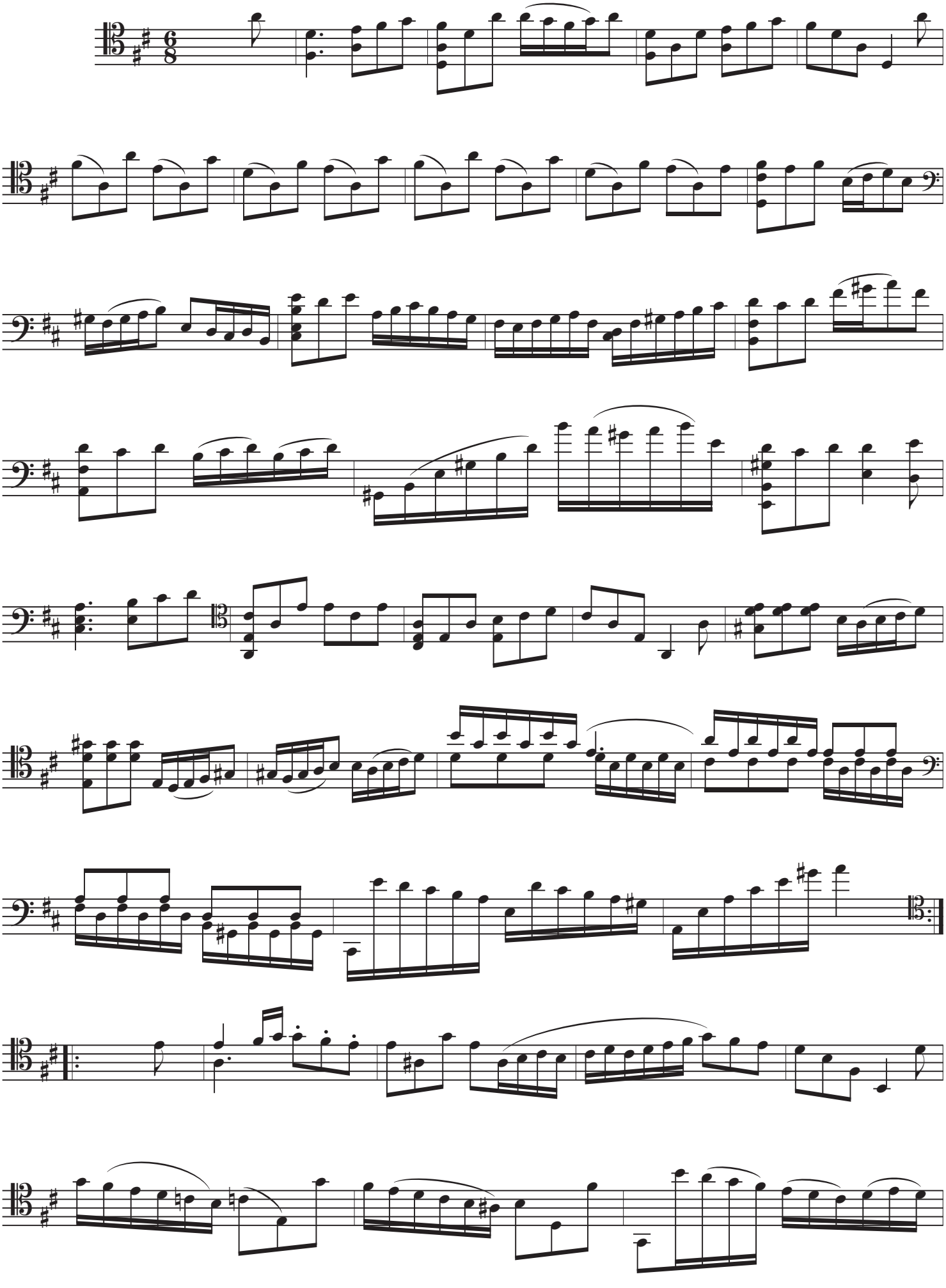


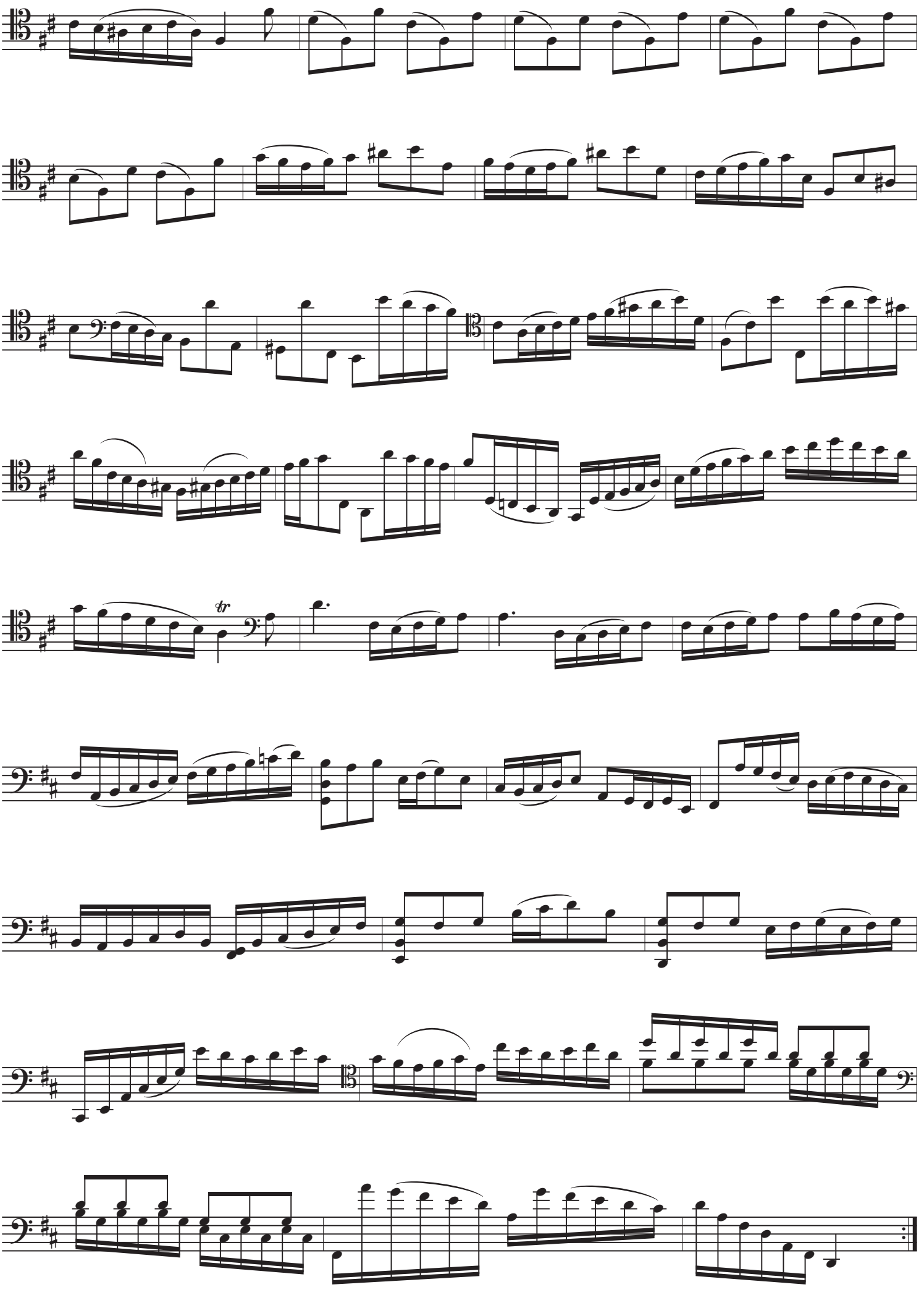
Gavotte 2de

Gavotte 1re da capo



Gigue

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