Frank A. Wallace

Sketches I

thirty artful etudes for classical guitar

Singe String Etudes I

Four Thumb Songs

Free Stroke Songs

Jazz and More

Six Blues

New Suite in D Major

Gyre Publications

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Sketches I

by Frank A. Wallace

Introduction

Sketches I is thirty short etudes of easy to moderate difficulty for classical guitar. My goal in writing them is threefold: to offer musically compelling works to the pedagogy of very young players; to make evocative, colorful additions to more rigorous progressive exercises, etudes and pieces for advanced students; and to contribute short new works to the concert repertoire that are inevitable crowd pleasers with their grace and sense of fun. **Sketches II** and **Sketches for Two** are more lengthy and advanced works.

These etudes support fundamentals of technique and beautiful tone. Work on rest stroke, free stroke, arpeggio and two-part playing progresses alongside purely musical concepts such as legato shifts, accents, vibrato, rest stroke with thumb, *laissez vibrer* and sympathetic vibration. When the musical work is satisfying but not technically demanding, *portamento*, expressive dynamics and tempo variation emerge naturally with lyrical artistry. In fact, it is my experience as a singer that influences these collections as much as anything. It is my intention in these works to catch an inspiration, a breath, a character and create a beautiful moment for my students and friends to enjoy. What more can we do—why not teach beautiful creative playing from the beginning?

Read more details about concepts that bring these simple pieces to life on my blog. Video demonstrations accompany the articles here: frankwallace.com/category/techandtone/.

Explore the full spectrum of my classical guitar compositions from simple pieces to extended concert works and chamber music at gyremusic.com. There you will find background notes for all pieces as well as many videos and recordings, including a digital download of my recording of ***Sketches I and II*** *at gyremusic.com/products/sketches-i-etudes-wallace/.*

Enjoy, Frank Wallace

GENERAL DIRECTIONS

Expressive playing requires special techniques that can be learned like any other physical challenge. Please experiment wildly with tempos, dynamics, colors, vibrato, *portamento*, etc. to discover what story you want to tell through this music. The book is organized into six sections, with commentary following on the next three pages.

1. **Single String Etudes I** – lyrical position shifts; melody and accompaniment
2. **Four Thumb Songs** – flexibility, fluidity and variety of timbre with thumb
3. **Free Stroke Songs** – arpeggio and melodic use of free stroke
4. **Jazz and More** – practice in two-part playing
5. **Six Blues** – more practice in two parts with accents in different voices
6. **New Suite in D Major** – introduction to form: three movements with a variety of textures and moods. This piece is a precursor to Sketches II which comprises five suites and a set of variations intended for your student's (or your!) recital.

Single String Etudes

Even in a simple classical etude, melodies cross strings and chordal demands hamper their execution. In the **Single String Etudes**, all melodies are on one string from open to twelfth fret. Shifting smoothly and using portamento to enhance melodic playing, essential to artful guitar proficiency, is best taught early. The medieval/traditional practice of using a drone, a single tone, as accompaniment (think bagpipes) inspired these six works and allows focus on melody. Accompaniments are on a single string (or 2 or 3 adjacent) strings. Roman numerals denote position in the first, but I suggest you write them in for subsequent etudes. Use the following study suggestions (as appropriate to your level) for the six **Single String Etudes** and throughout the book.

1. First, play the scale on the given string; try different fingerings and shifting patterns, i.e: two or three notes per position; don't just think notes, but think smooth and be aware of your position.
2. Play all melodies rest stroke including thumb in the bass (except #2 - #4 is optional), accompanying drones are free stroke and softer, more distant-sounding.
3. Explore *portamento* when shifting, a soft slide over the departing fret; hold the note as long as possible; feel the relation of movement between fingers, wrist, arm and shoulder.
4. Use vibrato on longer notes, or even a continuous vibrato through all notes (difficult!, but try this on #5).
5. Play once *ponticello*, repeat *sul tasto*, and then explore a flowing combination of both, requiring comfort in the right hand/arm position on every point on the string from bridge to frets.
6. *Laissez vibrer* (l.v.) means literally "let vibrate." Often not notated, *l.v.* is an essential part of guitar music. It is most obviously used in arpeggios when all the notes of a chord are allowed to ring over each other. It is an art knowing when to use it and when not to. The beauty of a single string melody is that one is never tempted to let a note ring over another and so these six pieces develop good habits of melodic playing. The subtle slide required by position shifts, *portamento,* is essential to vocal style.
7. Always listen to what is ringing: is it part of the harmony; is it part of the musical language or intention of the composer; is it a low bass note that should be stopped or a high harmonic caused by sympathetic vibration; does it enhance the structure of the music or does it confuse the harmony?

Thumb Songs

Titled as four pieces, perform these in two pairs as a slow intro followed by more rhythmic motion. Play these works entirely with the thumb, except as notated. This will feel awkward at first as it demands the arm and wrist positions constantly adjust. Play the melodies rest stroke, the accompaniments free stroke. The point is to create different levels, or different voices, so the music is complex and rich. **Sphinx** is clearly two voices. The melody should be rich and full, and employ all the techniques discussed above. **Phoenix** has three levels—bass, melody in the middle, and a simple, light high E. Two special challenges: 1) note the accent with thumb on the middle voice, m9, 3rd beat; 2) try to extend the final trill beyond the final low E. **Idyll** (#4) can more easily be played from m9-11 with fingers alternating with thumb, but the intent of the study is to develop the thumb/wrist/arm/shoulder connection to achieve fluid motion in the joints.

Free Stroke Songs

The next six studies use more traditional textures and arpeggio. Play them all free stroke, but being aware of bringing forward the melodic content. The melodies are shorter, almost fragmentary, and are hidden in the texture. Some notes in **Lullaby** and **Abode** perform two functions, both harmony and melody. I have marked notes to be held with a dash or *tenuto* mark.

Jake's Song

This song has a left hand secret—each finger has a specific duty and all but one note are on the second or third fret. 1 and 4 play the second fret, 2 and 3 take on the third fret. In fact, 1 plays E or A, 2 only plays F#, 3 only plays C (except one F#), and 4 only plays G. Feel the slight rotation in the left forearm as you move between 2 on the first string and 3 on the fifth or fourth string.

Reverie

Each measure demands a larger stretch in the right hand between **a** and **m**. Maintain good rest stroke tone with **a**. The tenuto mark over each long E indicates to hold it through the measure. Take the time needed to plant **i** and **m** on the bass strings—fingerings can be used to enhance musical timing. Listen! Hear and enjoy l.v., or *laissez vibrer*, the resonance of the chords produced that alternate with melody in the bass. This is a good example of when not to use rest stroke on the melodic bass line because it would be too heavy and disturb the flow from chord to chord.

I introduce slurs here—they should be studied separately if you are not familiar with them. The secret to pull-offs is to realize that it is simply a left hand pluck and it must be equal in quality to the right hand pluck. It's a two-way street though: don't use a right hand stroke that is too aggressive or the left hand pull-off that follows will not have a chance. Think of them as a way to make a note softer, as well as to create variety of expression.

Prayer Wheel provides more exercise for the **a** finger to help it feel like an equal to **i** and **m**. Parallel sixths begin at m5 using **a** and **i**. Keep all four fingers touching, sliding **m** up and just barely out of the way. This produces a more solid, unified tone. This technique returns at the end of the book.

Meditation is another *l.v.* piece that shows the value of listening to your guitar. Let it speak to you—sit back and enjoy doing nothing for long dotted half notes. How you play into and out of the "silences" makes or breaks the piece. Gentle in, gentle out. No accents nor sudden movements that stop or interrupt the sound. Listen to the essential sympathetic vibrations on the sixth string. In addition, slurs once again need to be as smooth as possible. There are four exercises below the song that develop the particular movements in context of the other tasks the left hand is doing at the same time, i.e. holding a chord. Be sure only the finger executing the slur moves, not the arm or wrist.

Abode

Hold the long bass notes through each measure. They are the foundation of the resonance that makes this piece beautiful. They provide a kind of silence that surrounds a contemplative piece like this—if you listen to them for their full value! Melodic fragments repeat themselves and provide a nudge to the forward movement at the end of several measures.

Jazz and more

Beginning with **Hey Good Lookin'**, the following songs are largely in a two-part style, melody on top and bass line on bottom. The guitar does this really well. Adding a third or fourth part complicates things greatly. The first two songs in this section are jazzy and require the use of swing time, the rhythmic element that makes you want to dance. Simply put, the first ⅛ note of two is longer, the second shorter. It's like a triplet ¼ and ⅛, but it's never written out that way.

Three for Two uses the idea of a drone in the bass again, but this time a constantly pulsing drum beat repeated over and over again. Given this busy thumb work, I like to use **a** and **m** for the top line, which adds to the separation between bass and melody. **Littl' Adam** (written for my two-year old son—see words at end of book) is a two-part jazz riff again. In this, and in the blues pieces coming up, the upper part is the melody, but the bass gets a solo here and there. Think of it as a dialogue and make it a little edgy. **Adam** has more of what is called a walking bass than the repeated basses in **Ramblin'**, which can be greatly enhanced by the notated, though difficult, pattern of long and short articulation (*legato* and *staccato*).

Six Blues

These blues pieces are all about fun and articulation—the art of beginning and ending a note. Is it sudden and quick, slightly elongated or truncated, cut short? *Staccato* and accent are two forms of articulation, both of which can have endless variation and make the music come alive. To some extent they determine your expression, communicate vitality or finesse, raw power or restraint.

The first exercise gives you a chance to explore accent and *staccato* with just two open strings and various rhythms. First in the treble, then in the bass, these simple two-part exercises will develop your ability to hear and control two-part textures. Feel free to alter the rhythms or add new ones.

The exercises on page 14 are for technical development of your LH fourth finger, and the strength of 1-3 slurs. Written in first position, explore moving the exercises up and down the neck through as many positions as you can. Keep the rhythm and dynamic even through the slurs. Try doing 1-4 slurs in the first exercise to strengthen your left hand in general and continue down to the lower two strings when ready.

I have talked about articulation and *laissez vibrer* for artistic purposes, but stopping basses from ringing through notes that have become a different harmony is crucial, even though it takes some time to master. There are several ways to stop bass notes from ringing—two with the RH, two with LH:

1. Touch the ringing string with thumb again.
2. Touch it with the back of the thumb as you prepare to play the adjacent higher string.
3. Use a left hand finger to stop the sound.
4. Simply lift the LH finger holding the note.

These blues pieces are great for developing the above skills. Here's one simple example from m5-6 in **Saint Blues**, p13: play the first bass A, then cut it short by planting or preparing the next thumb stroke; play the second A, then use the back of the thumb to touch the A string as you move to play the D in m6. In the next measure, simply lift the second finger after playing the low F# to create the desired *staccato* effect.

New Suite in D

The **New Suite** introduces themes that will be developed in **Sketches II**. To create a larger musical form, or architecture, I group three songs together as one piece called a suite. The suite developed over many centuries and culminated in the masterpieces of J. S. Bach before giving way to the sonata and symphony in the late 18th century.

First Movement

I think of the first movement as a blues for Bach. Bach famously perfected the technique of implying multi-voice textures with single note melodic lines in his **Suites** and **Partitas** for violin and cello. Here the bass notes are woven into the texture. Actually, three voices play together, wander around each other, poking and teasing. Articulation and accent are crucial to outline the structure. A few measures use what is known as *hemiola*—a rhythmic variation of a group of six being either 3+3 or 2+2+2 with appropriate shifting accents.

The problem with this system of notation is that, as in tablature, the duration of each voice is not specified. Examples: 1) m4 the high melodic notes are effectively quarter notes; 2) bass notes can often be played short and *staccato*, or held for one or more measures as in m15 and m19; 3) the middle voice can be held and accented lightly in m 7 (Bb leads to Bnat.) and other similar instances.

The right hand fingering in this piece is not at all obvious since the "melody" crosses from string to string frequently. The **a** finger becomes essential to facilitating this process as we combine the primary rules of right hand fingering:

1. Always alternate on a single string or two adjacent strings.
2. Arpeggiate when negotiating movement between three or more strings.
3. To aid consistency and memory, choose a repeatable pattern even if it breaks the first two rules.

I have written in a complete fingering as an example of how to study and learn such a piece. There are many alternatives.

Second Movement

The second movement again employs a drone in the bass juxtaposed with a beautiful flowing melody on the top. *Cantabile* or *cantando* both mean singing, which implies playing as smoothly as possible, or *legato*. Expression can be amplified by defining the range and texture with dynamics and timbre. Start *mezzoforte* for the melody in mid range. Then at m13 get softer and more mysterious, move the RH over the hole for a *sul tasto* sound. Build again after m21 as figures repeat themselves and the melody gets more restless moving toward m36. Break loose in m40 when the melody is now enhanced with parallel sixths. More power can be achieved by moving the RH towards the bridge at this point, *sul ponticello,* or simply *pont*.

RH fingerings notated in this piece are based on two ideas: 1) **a** and **m** are more independent of the thumb and so I use them for a sense of freedom from the regular pattern of the thumb (as mentioned in notes to **Prayer Wheel**); 2) the pattern **ami** is used in somewhat unusual circumstances (m17) for memorability and lack of confusion. Avoiding confusion is a basic principle of practice and memorization.

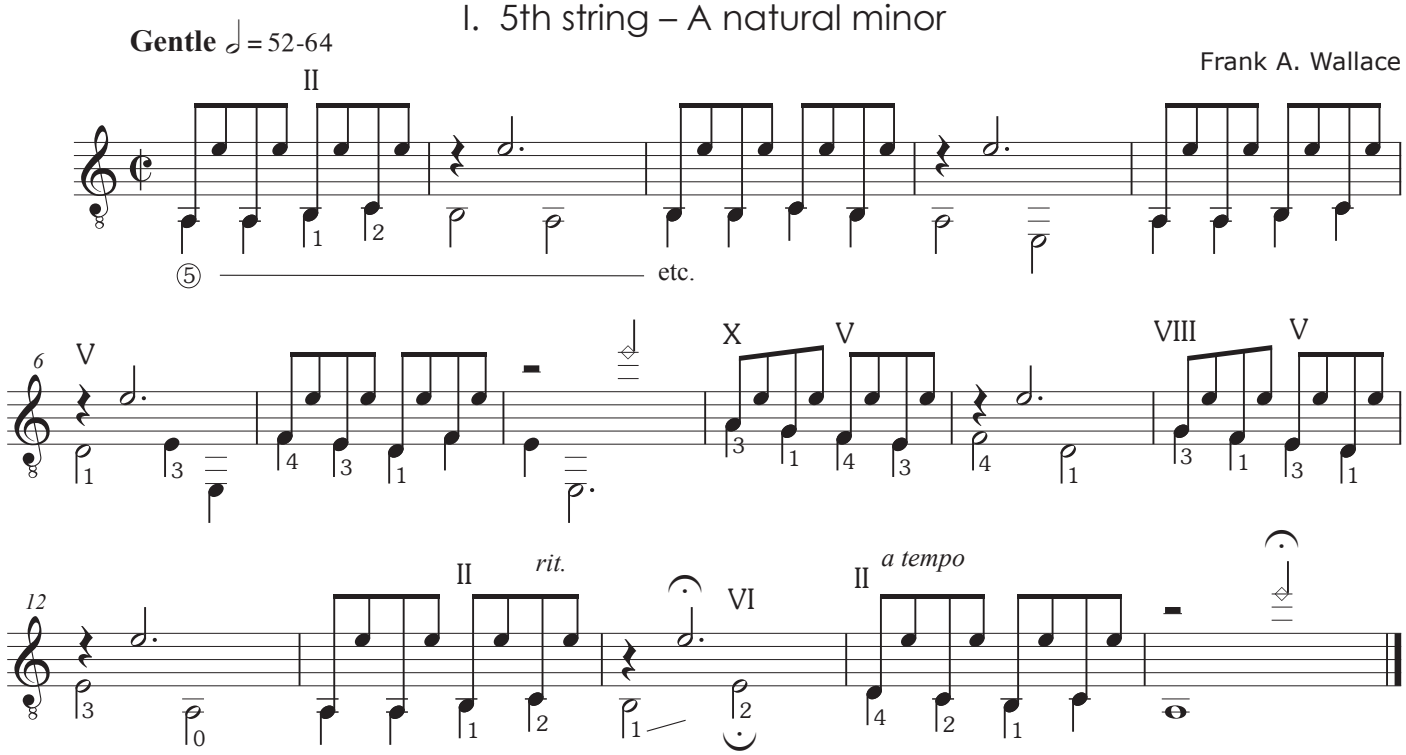
Third Movement

The third movement is full of offbeat dance rhythms and accents. An accent can be stronger when a *staccato* note precedes. It's really one gesture. I often find myself playing with which note should actually be stronger. There is never one way to play anything. For this reason I have kept dynamic marking to a minimum throughout the book, but I beg you, use dynamics extensively and fluidly, boldly and subtly. Surprise us!

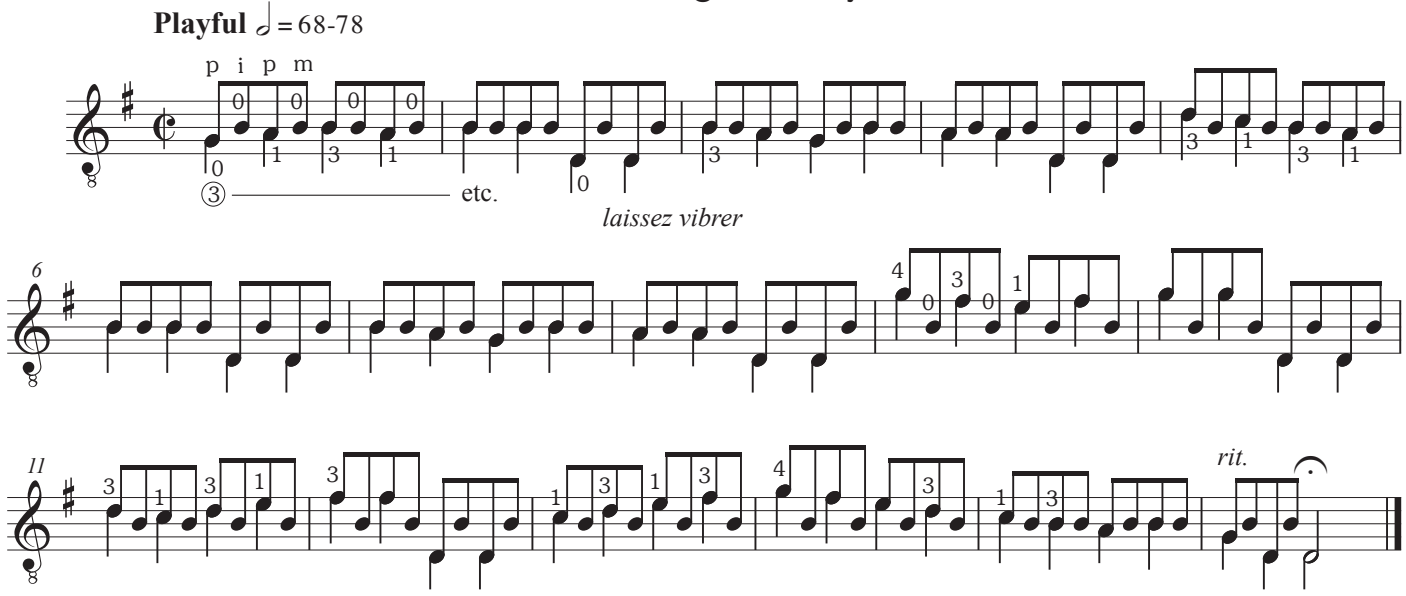
Sketches I

Single String Etudes

I. 5th string – A natural minor



II. 3rd string – G major



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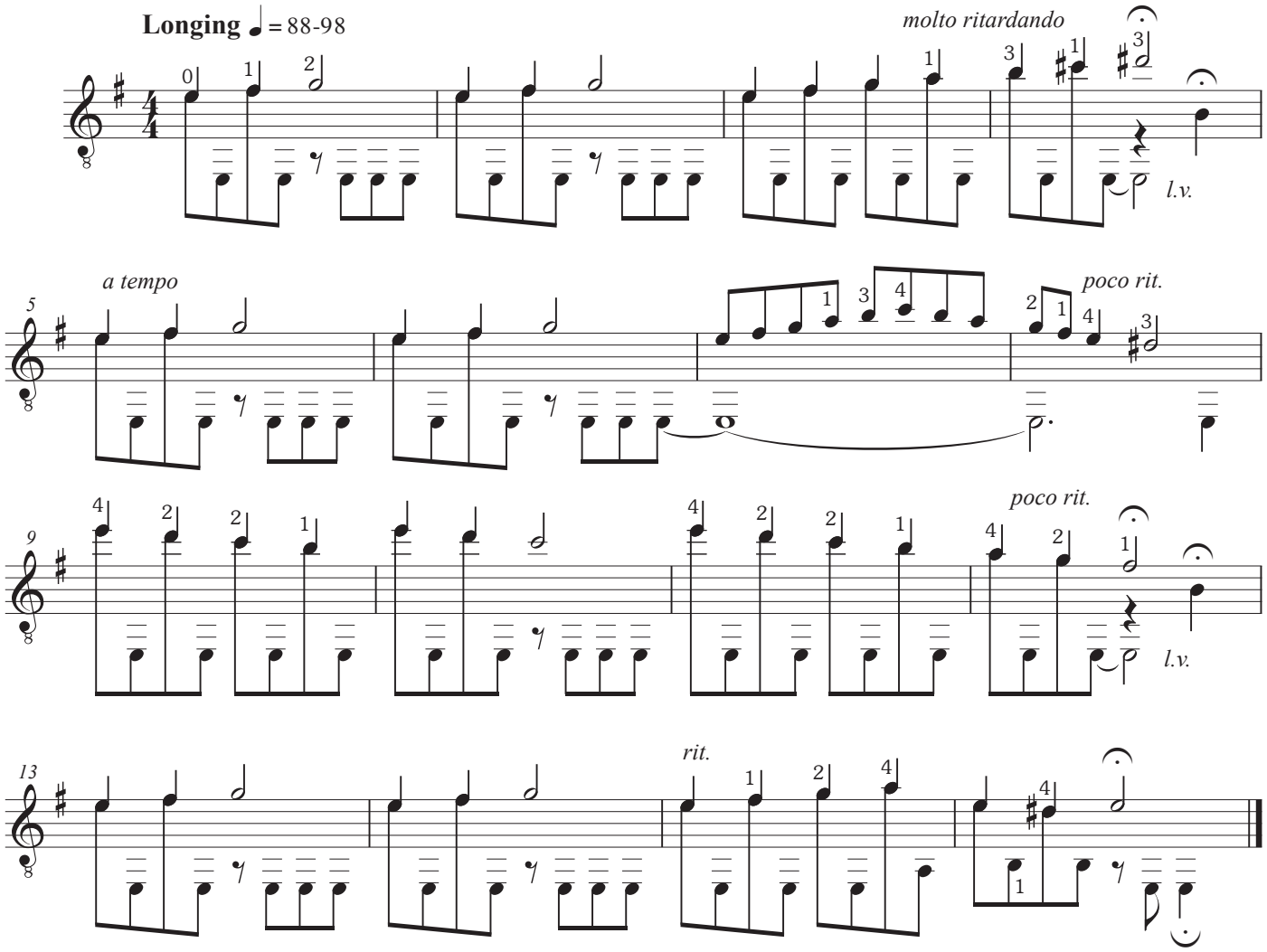
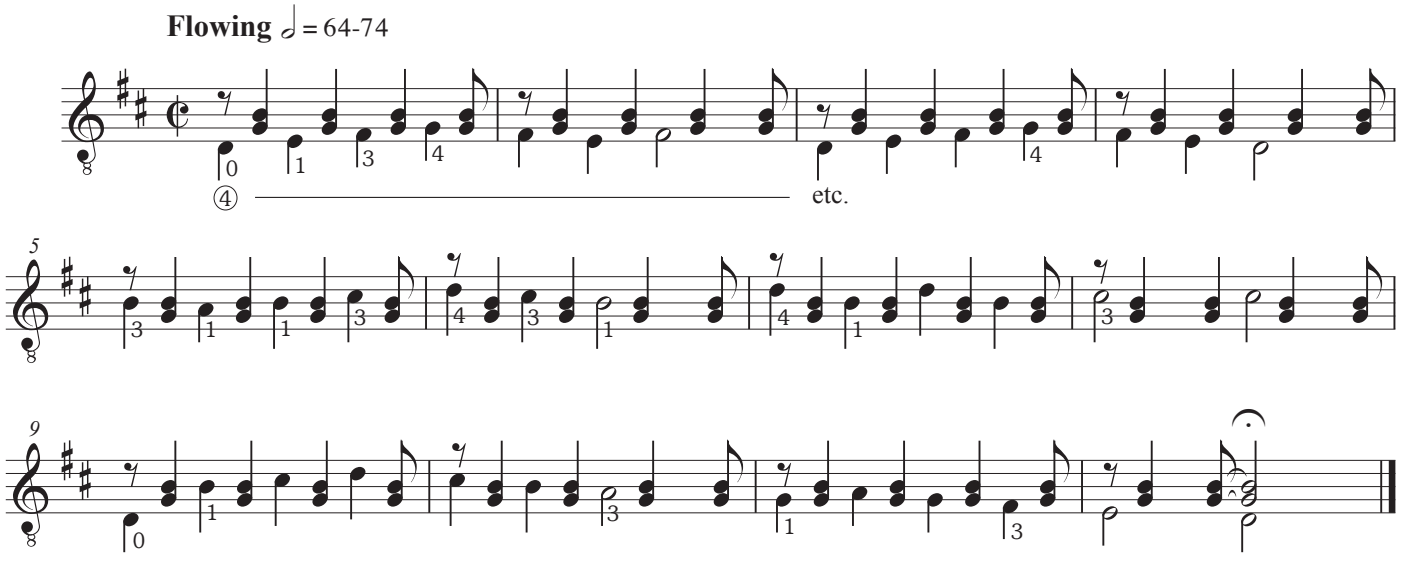
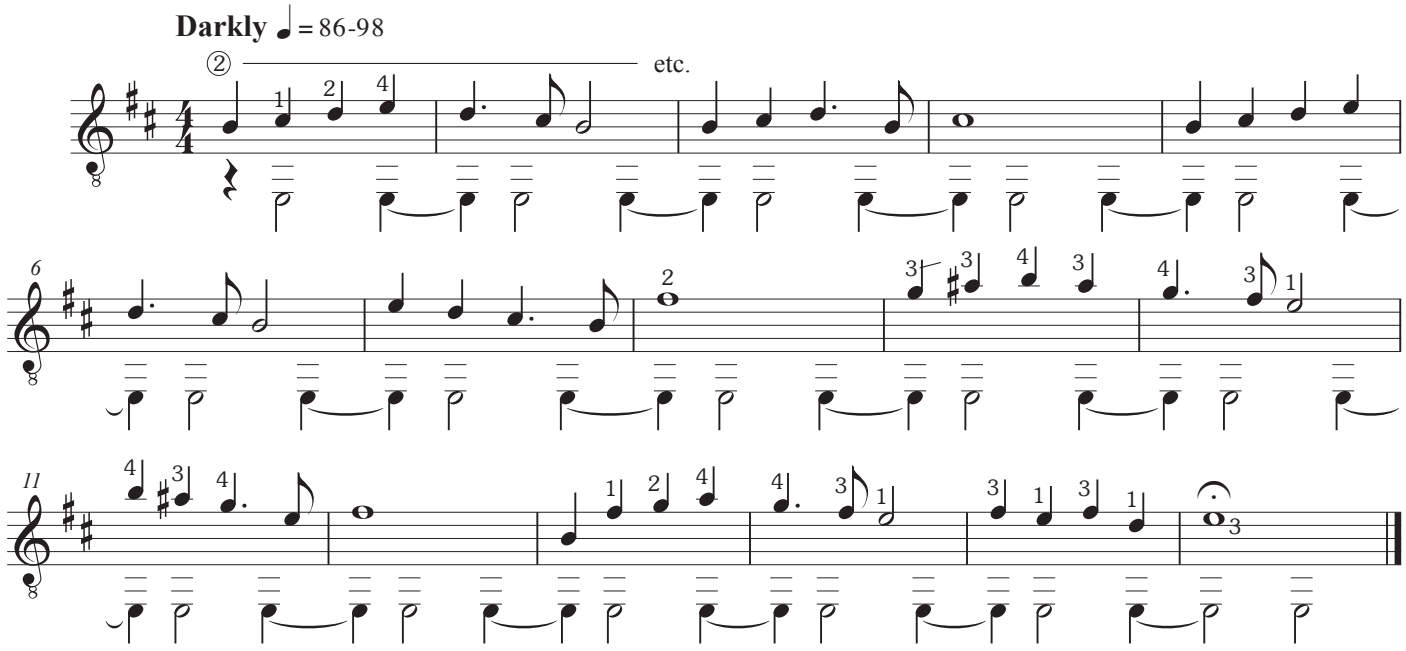
III. 1st string – E melodic minor



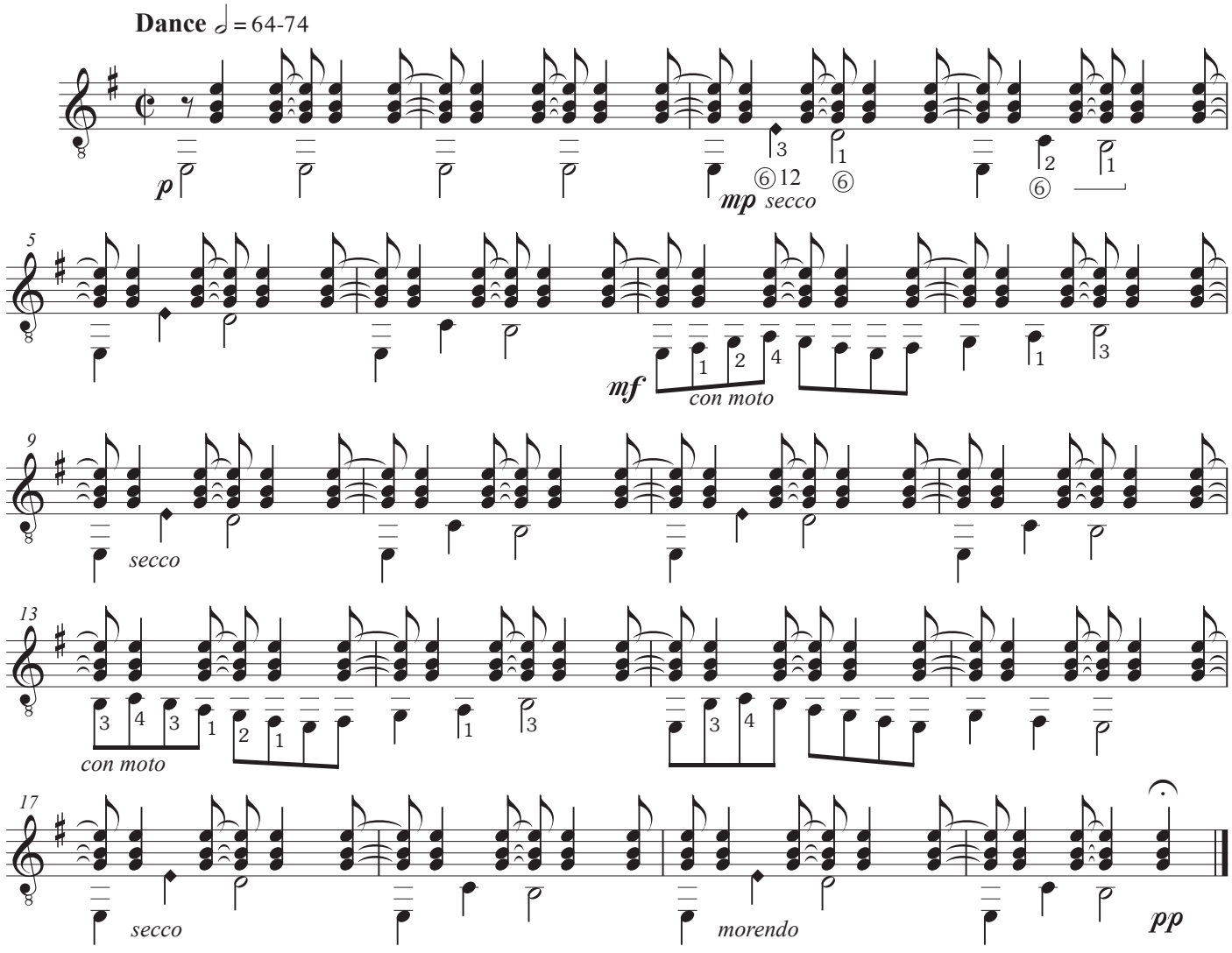
IV. 4th string – D major



V. 2nd string – B harmonic minor



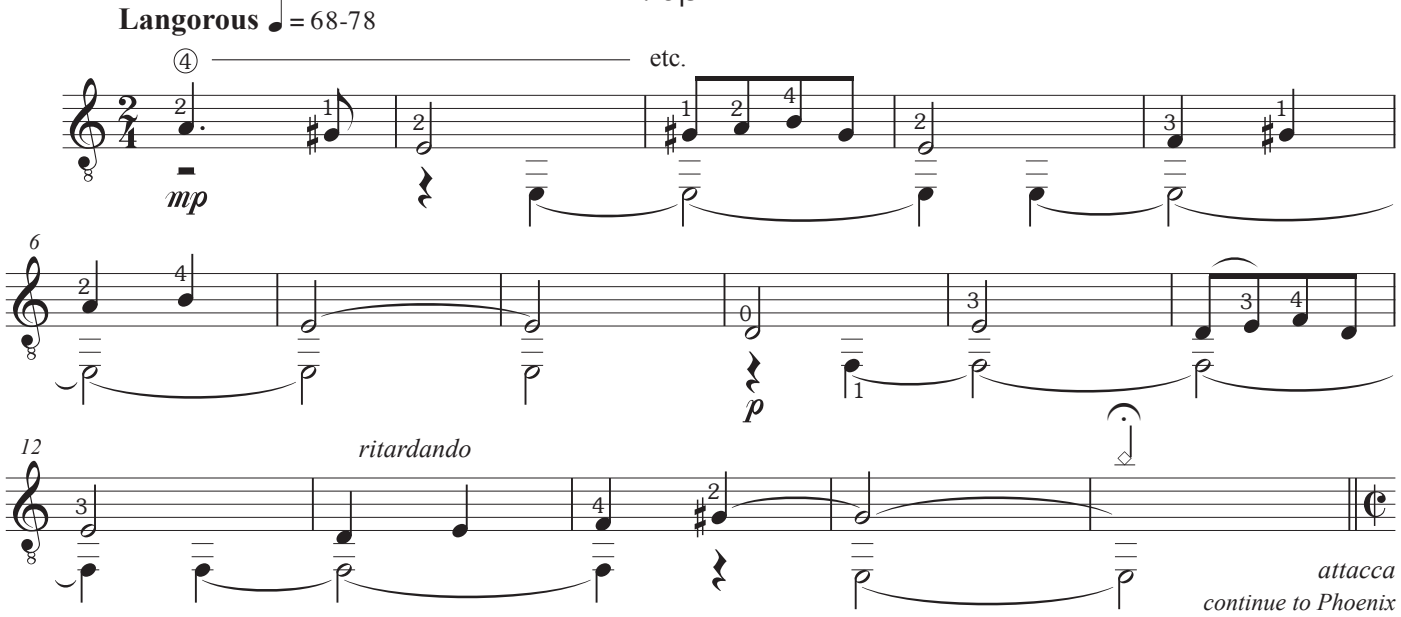
VI. 6th string – E natural minor



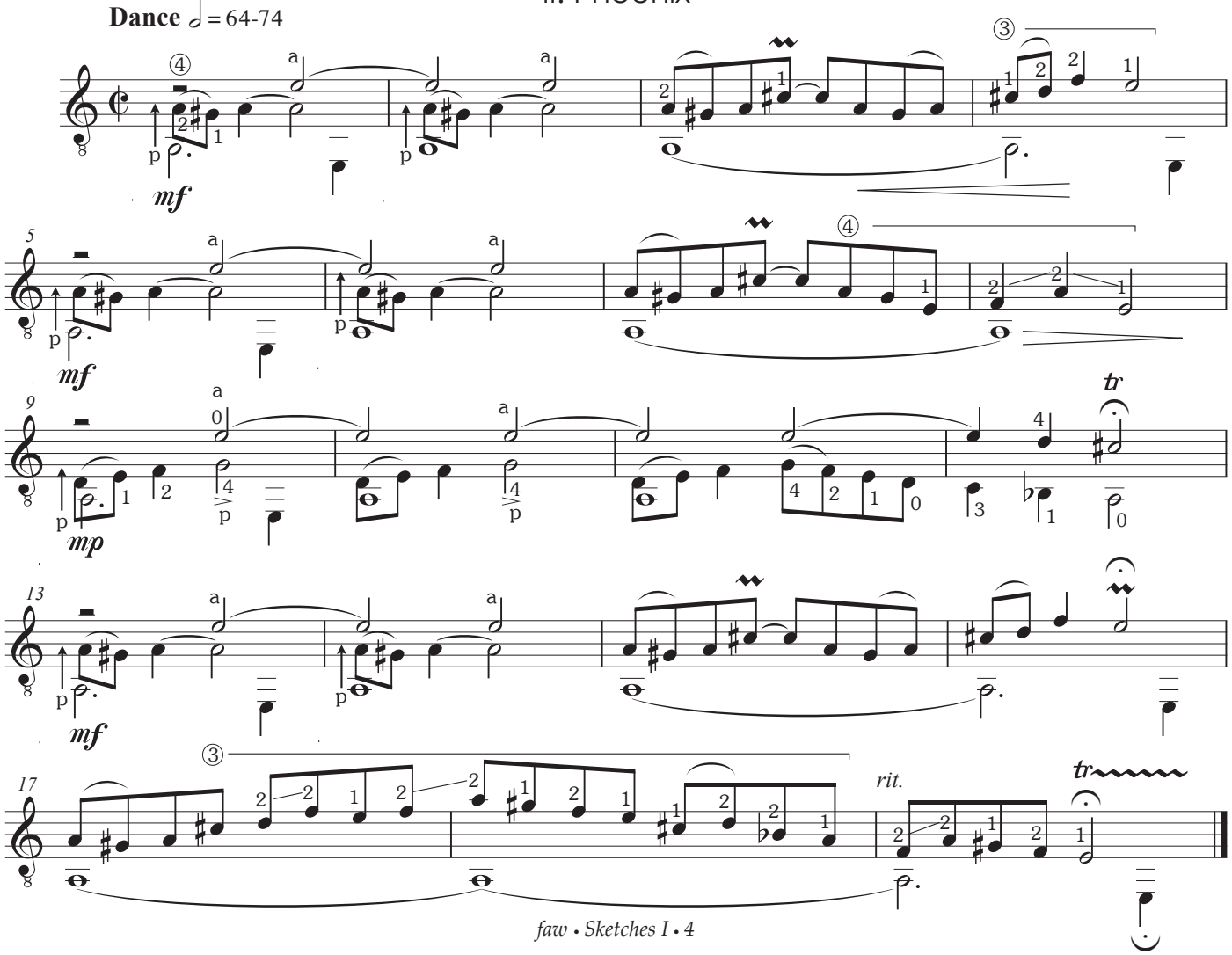
Four Thumb Songs

play these four songs entirely with the thumb except as notated

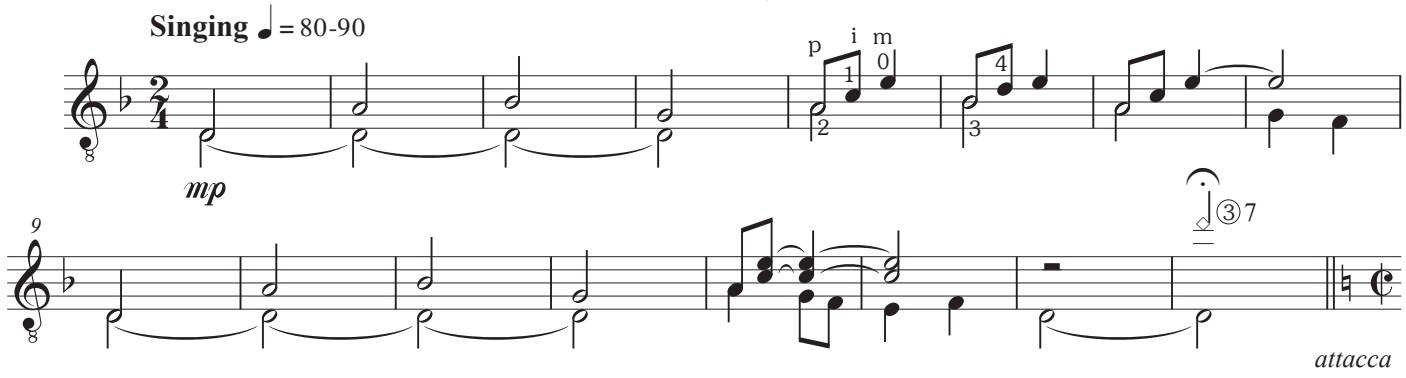
I. Sphinx



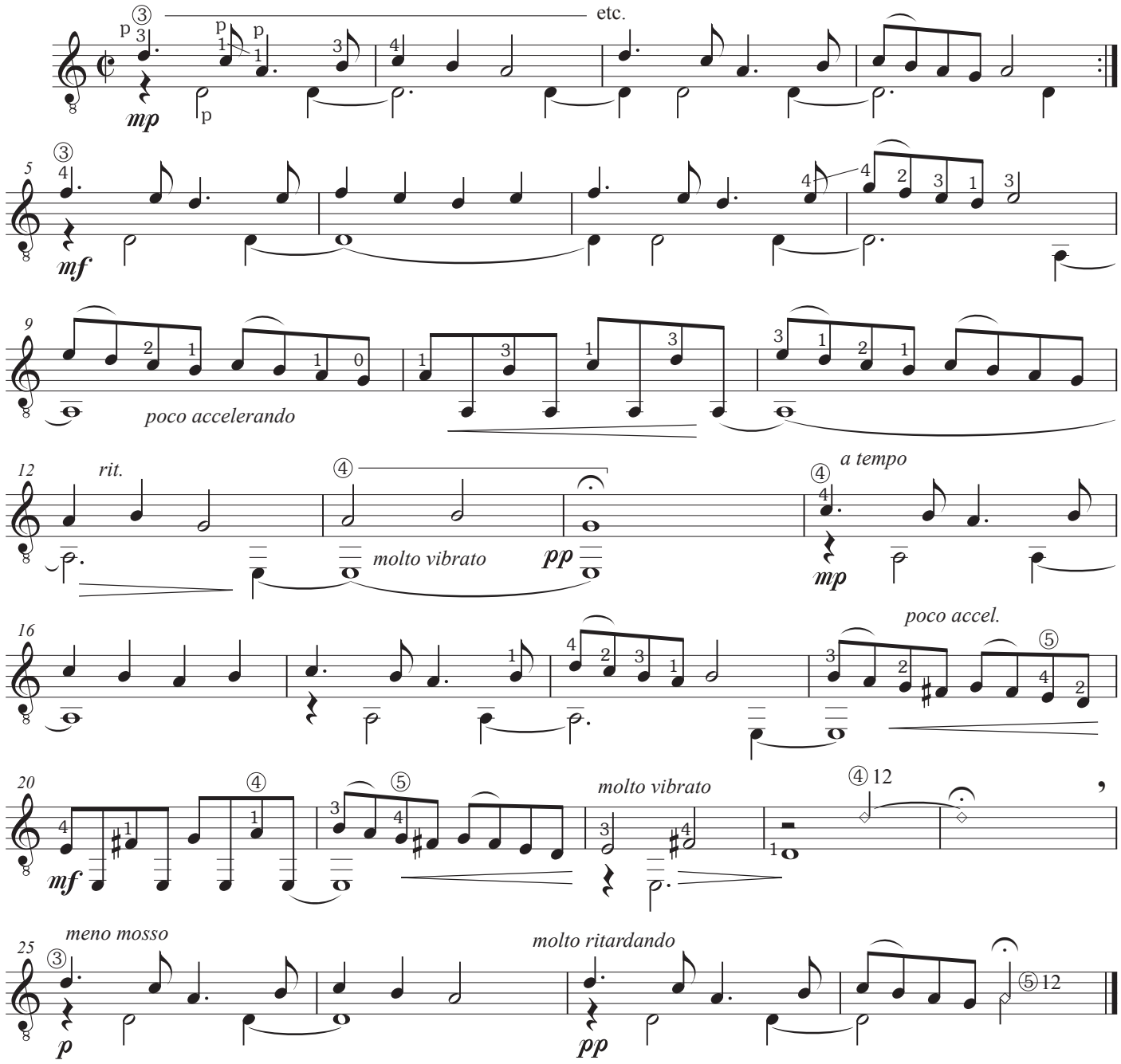
II. Phoenix



III. Birling

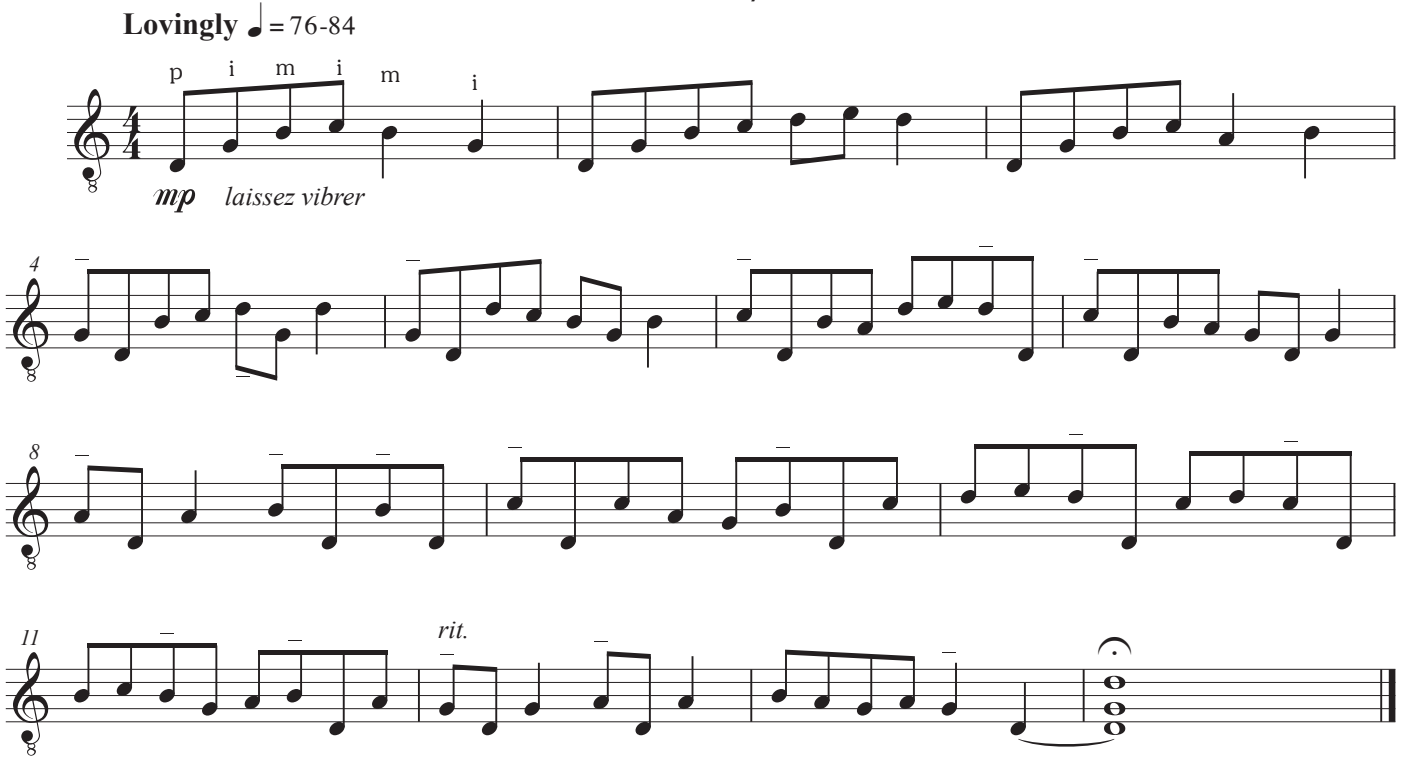


IV. Idyll

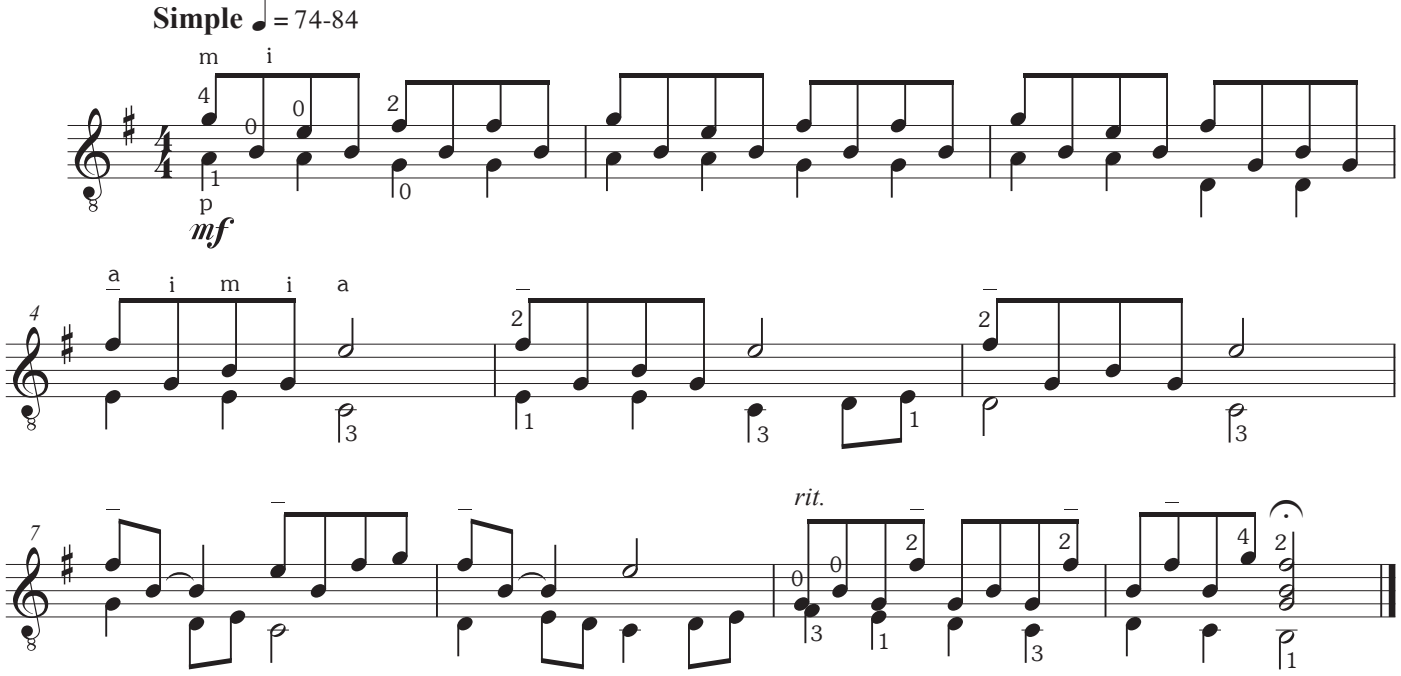


Free Stroke Songs

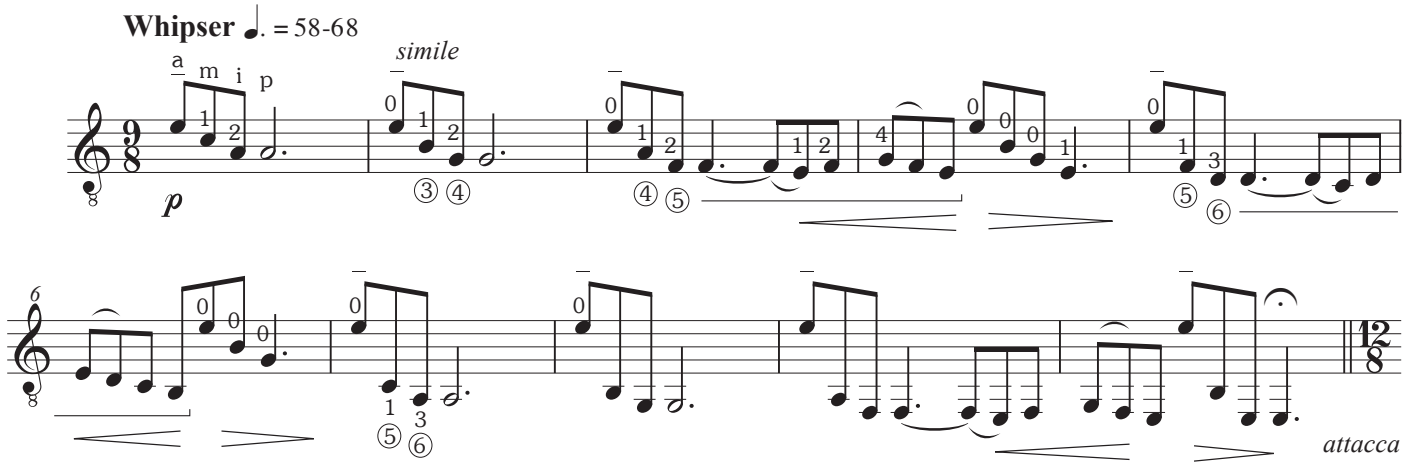
Lullaby



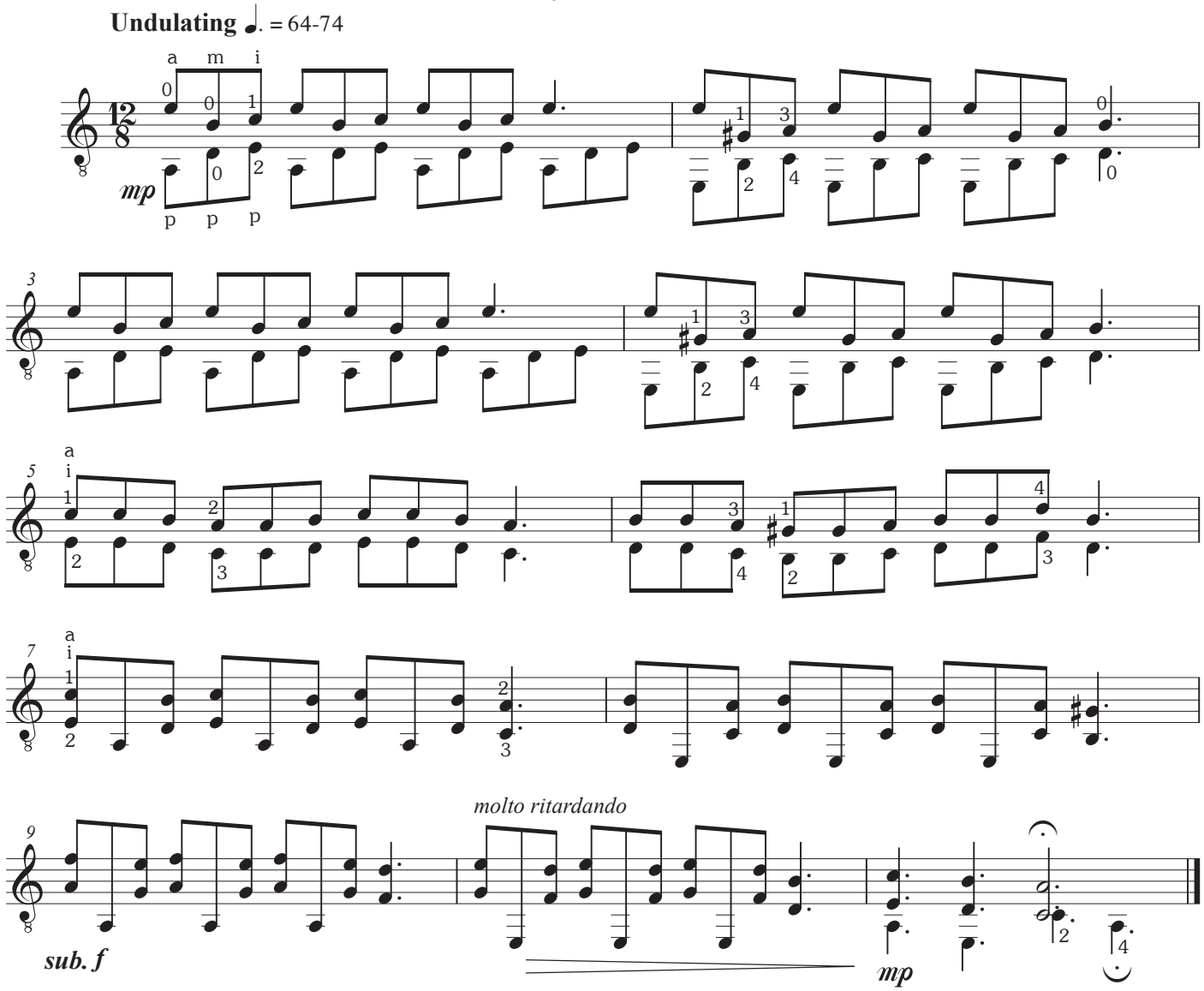
Jake's Song



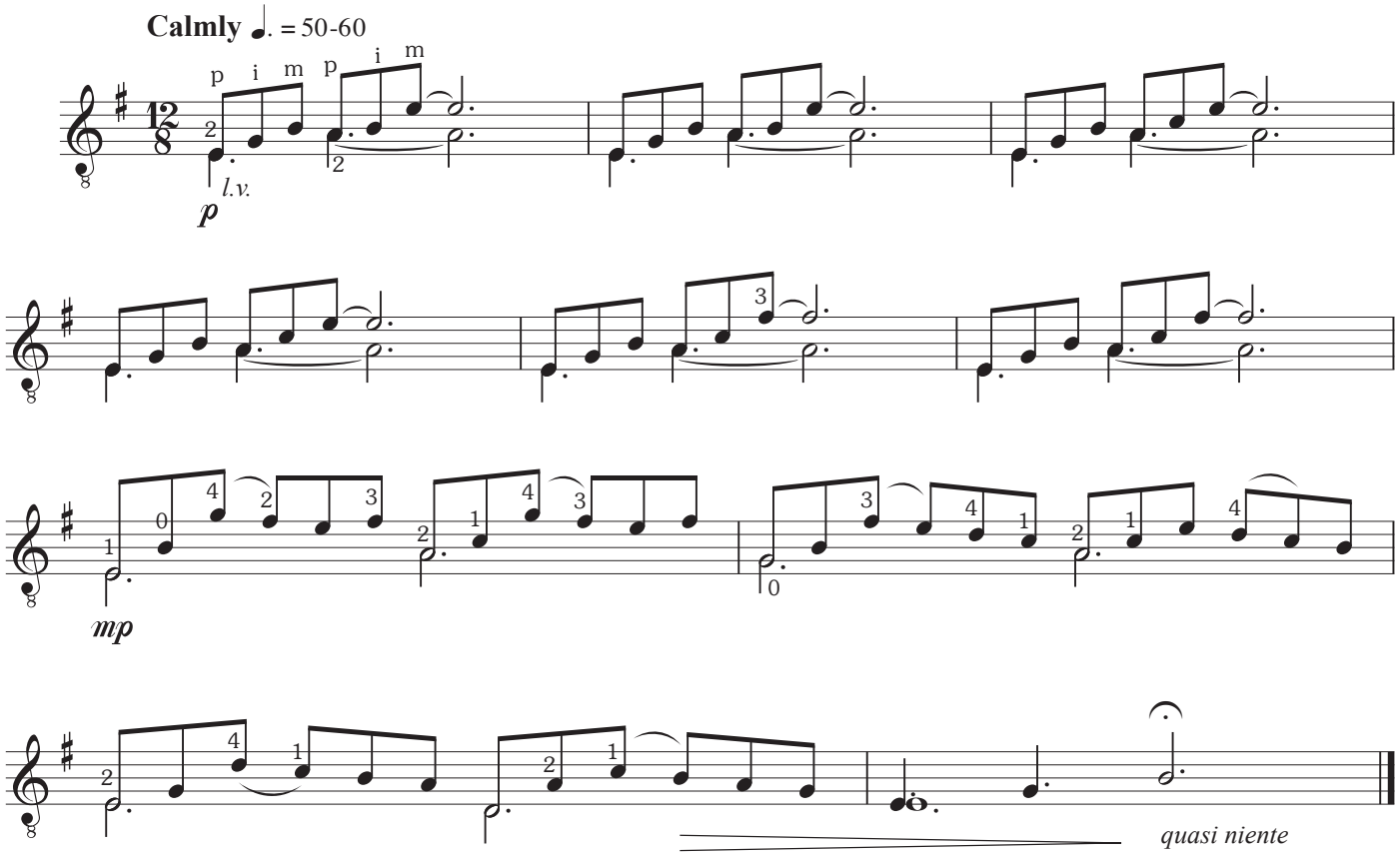
Reverie



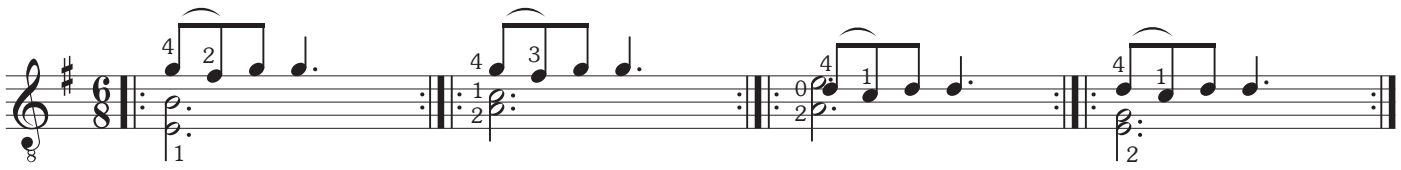
Prayer Wheel



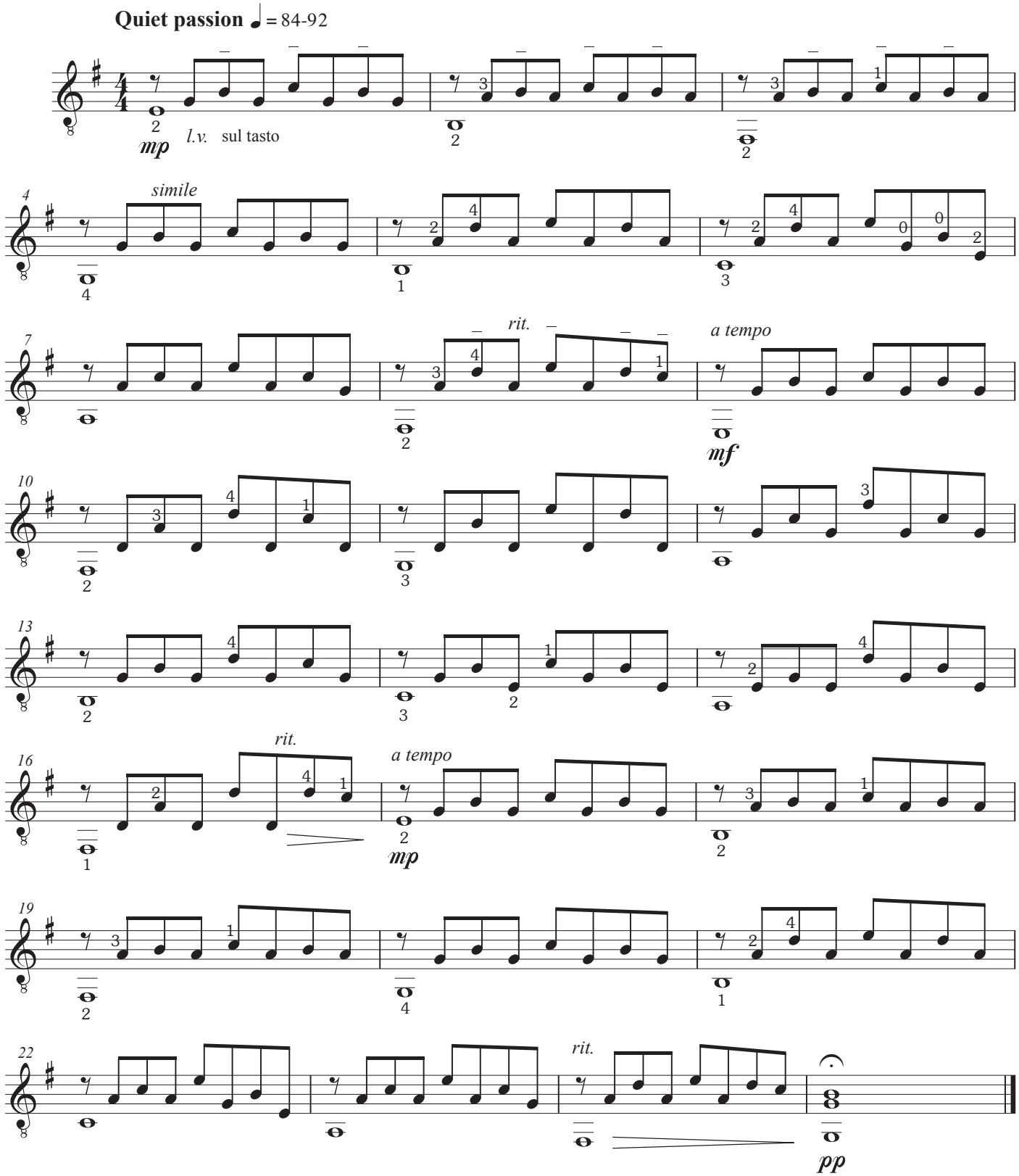
Meditation



Preliminary exercises



Abode


Quiet passion ♩ = 84-92
mp
l.v. sul tasto
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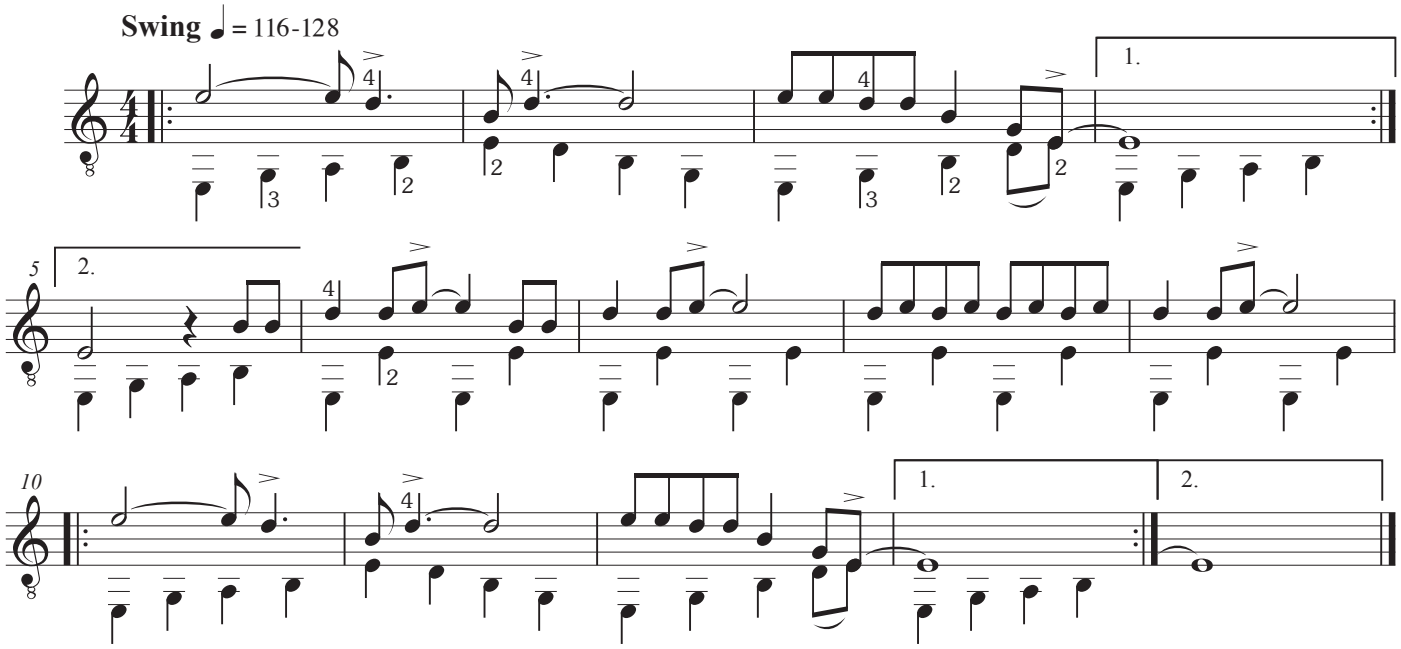
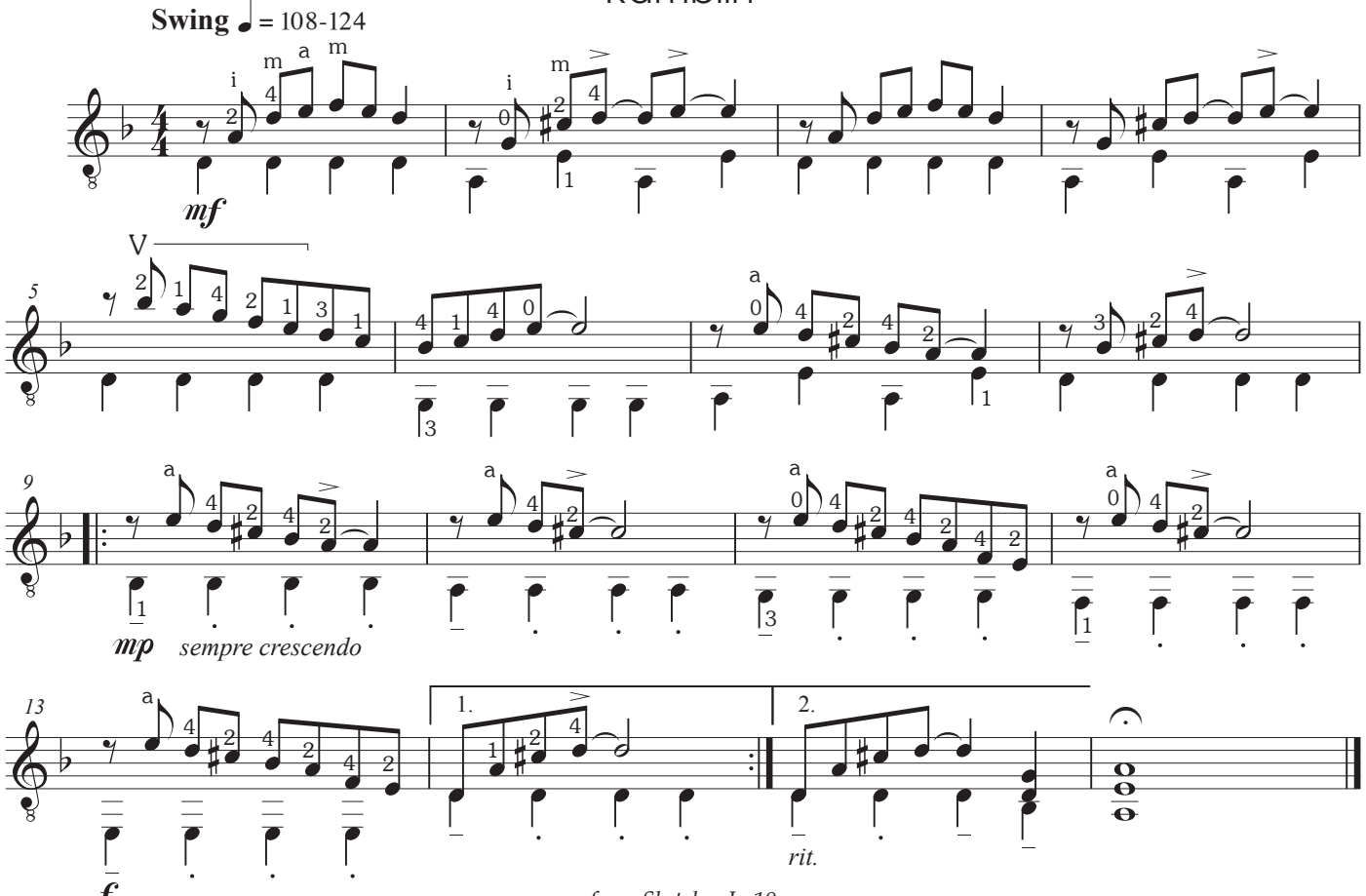
Jazz and More

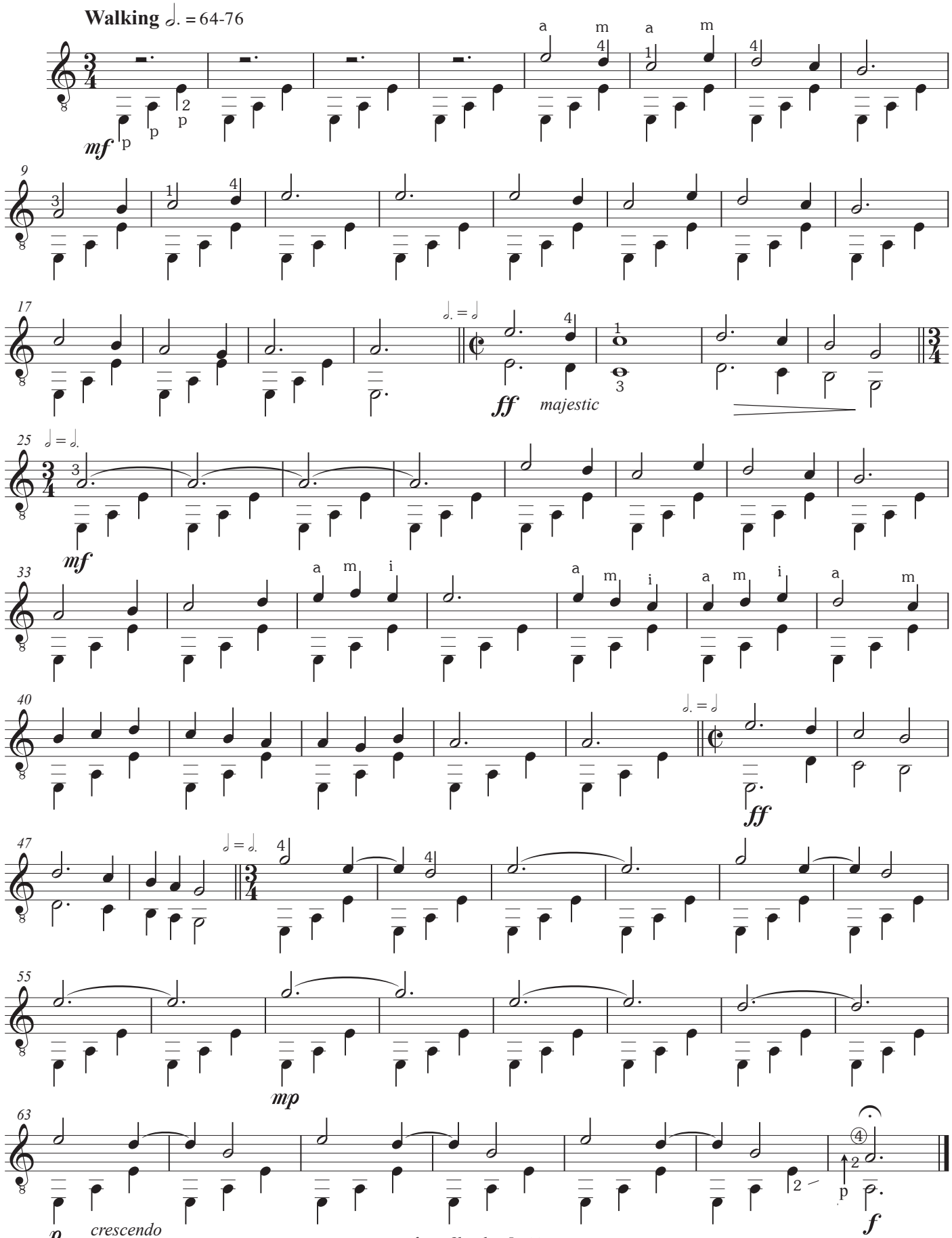
Hey Good Lookin'



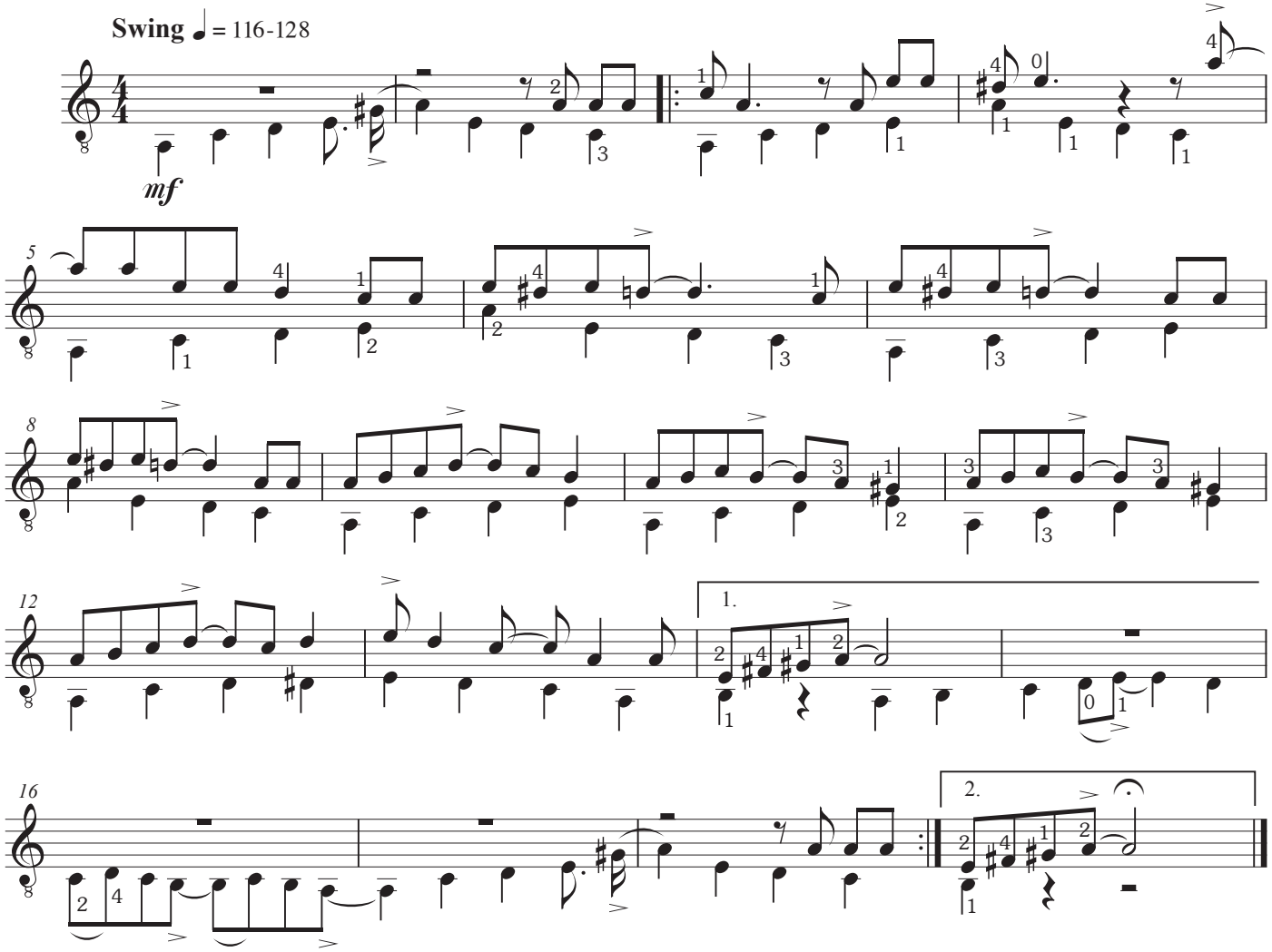
Ramblin'



Three for Two

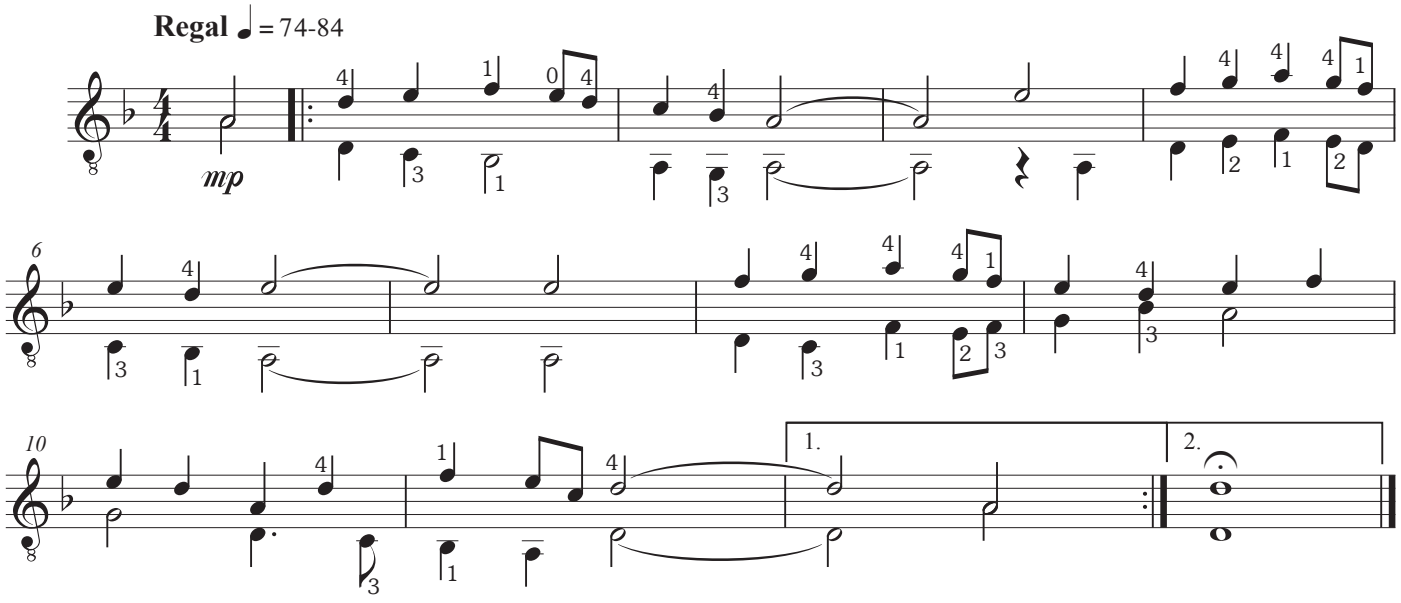


Littl' Adam

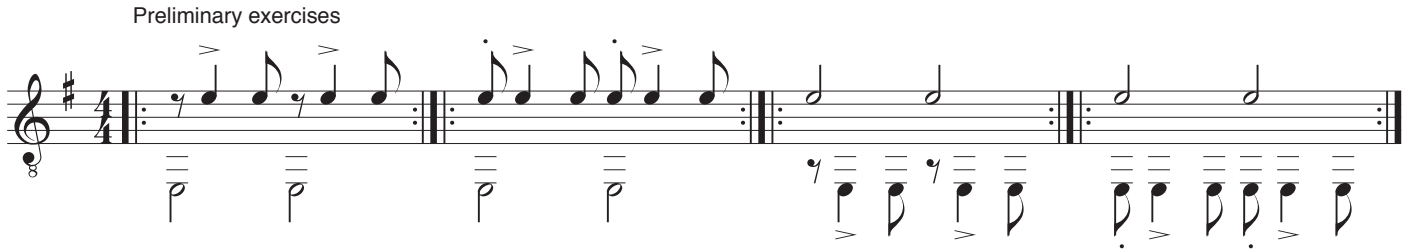


The Stubborn Oak

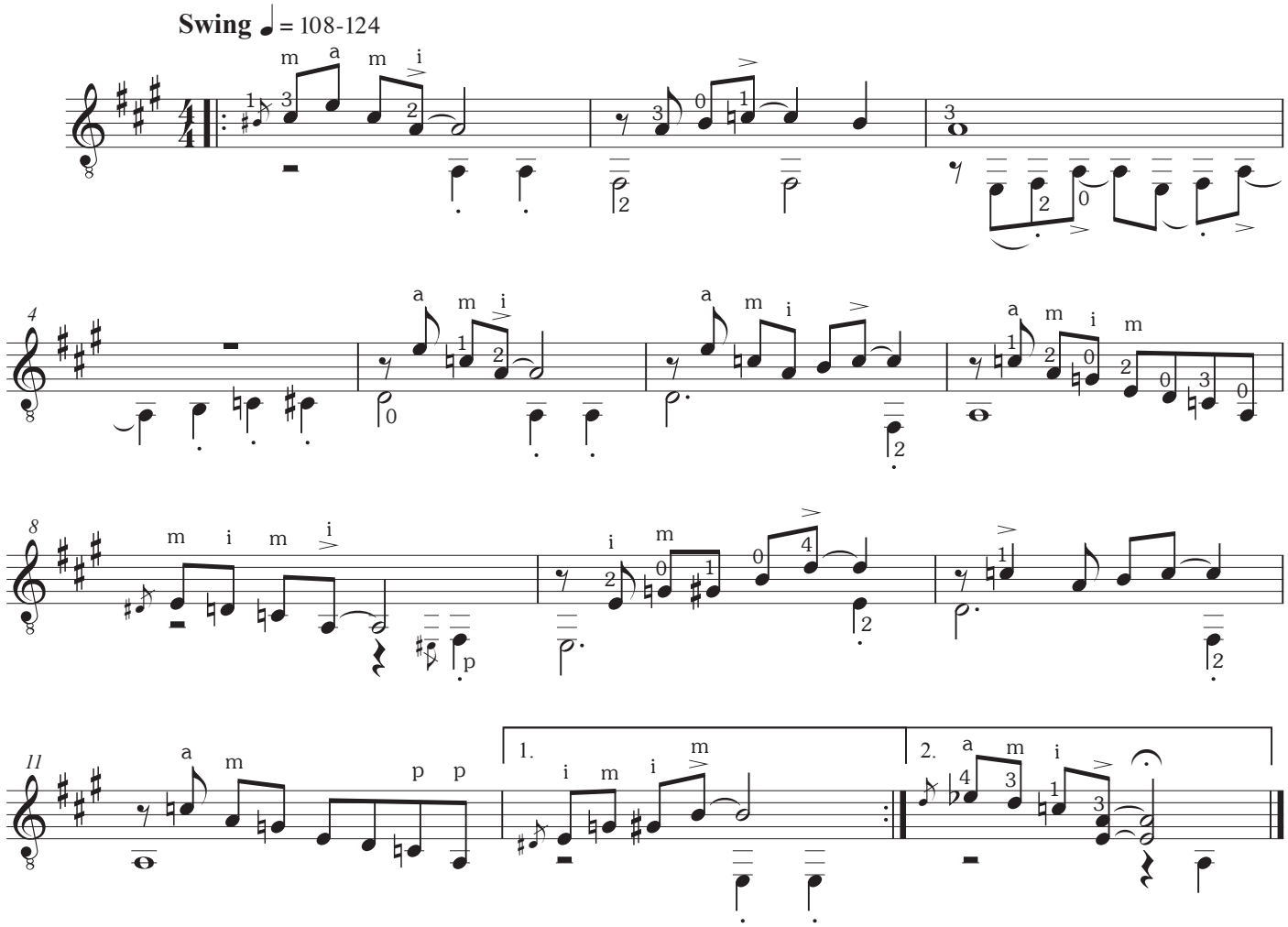
Shaker tune



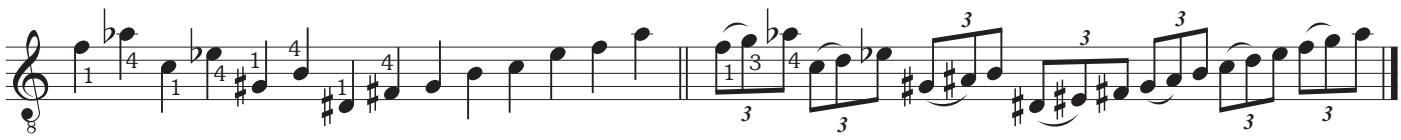
Six Blues



I. Saint Blues

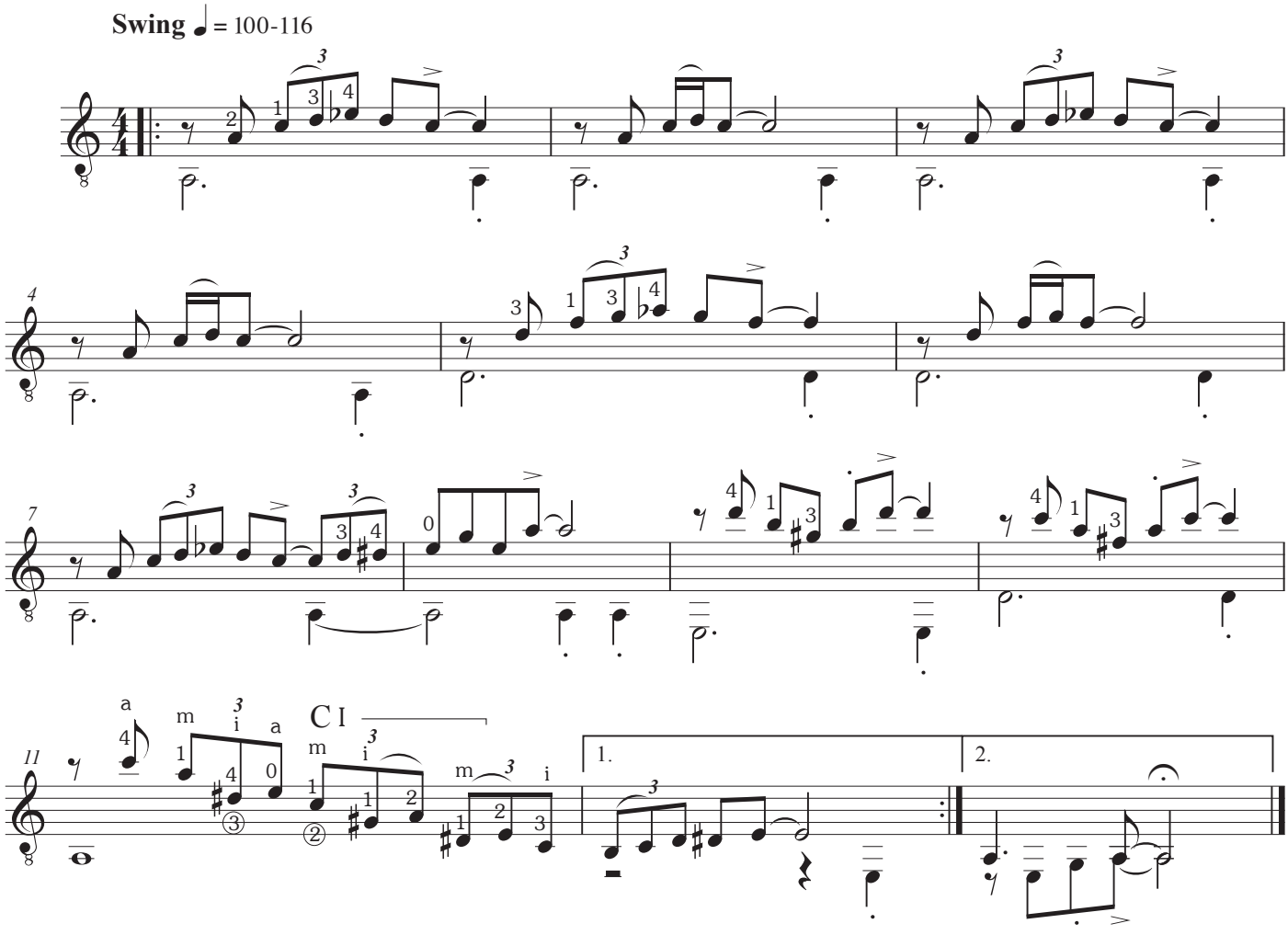


Preliminary exercises

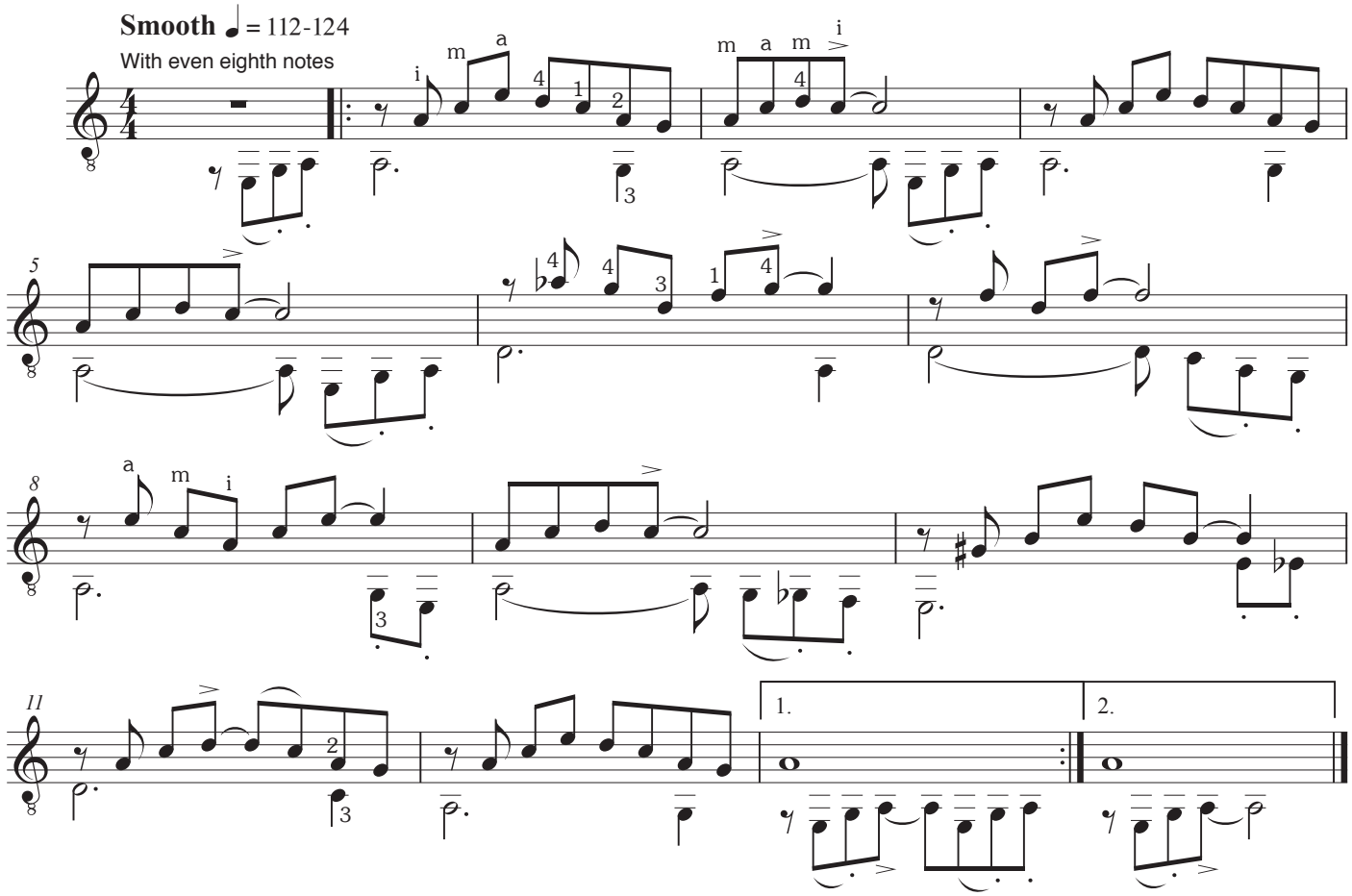


II. Horn-toad Blues

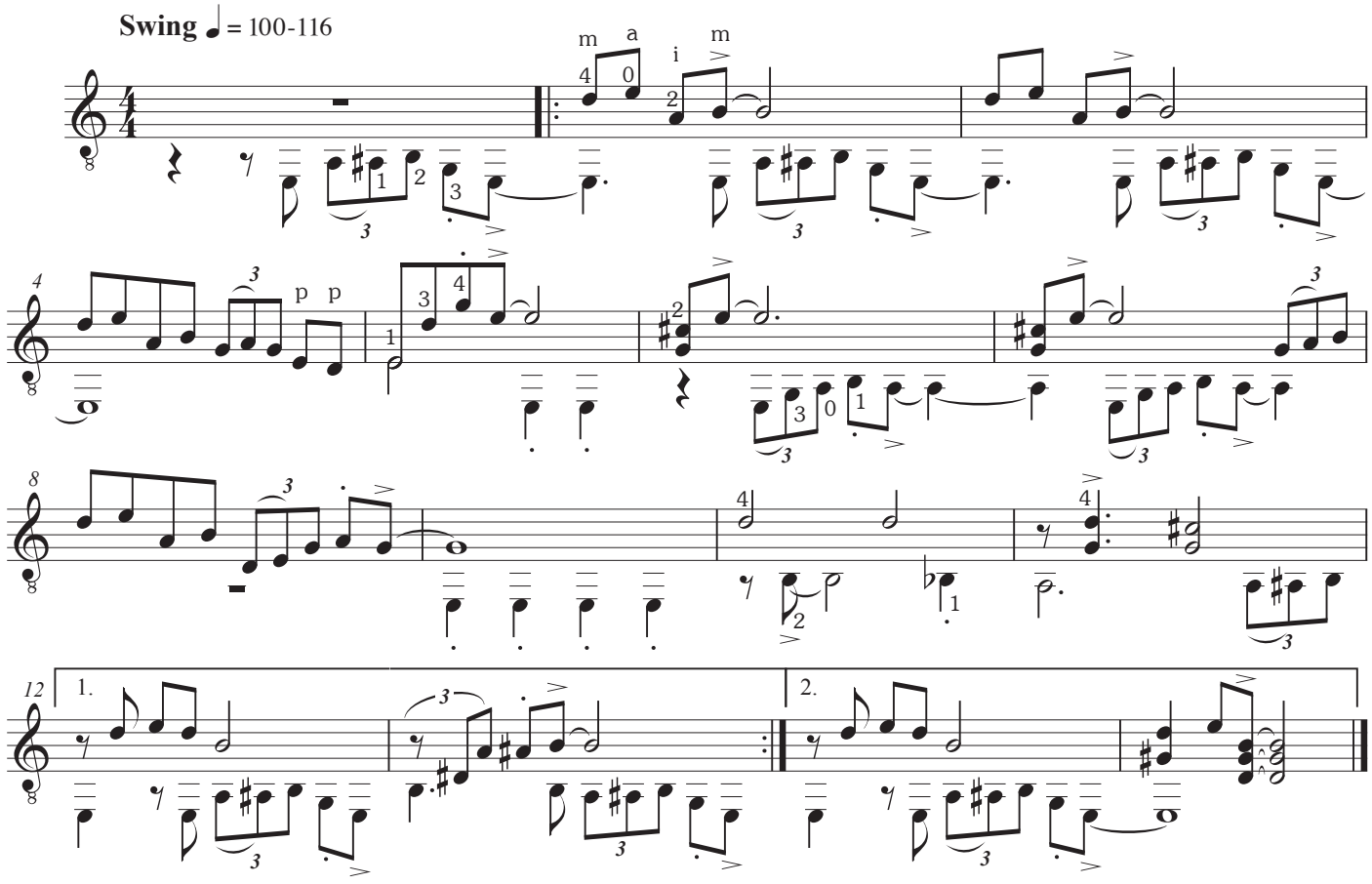
Swing ♩ = 100-116



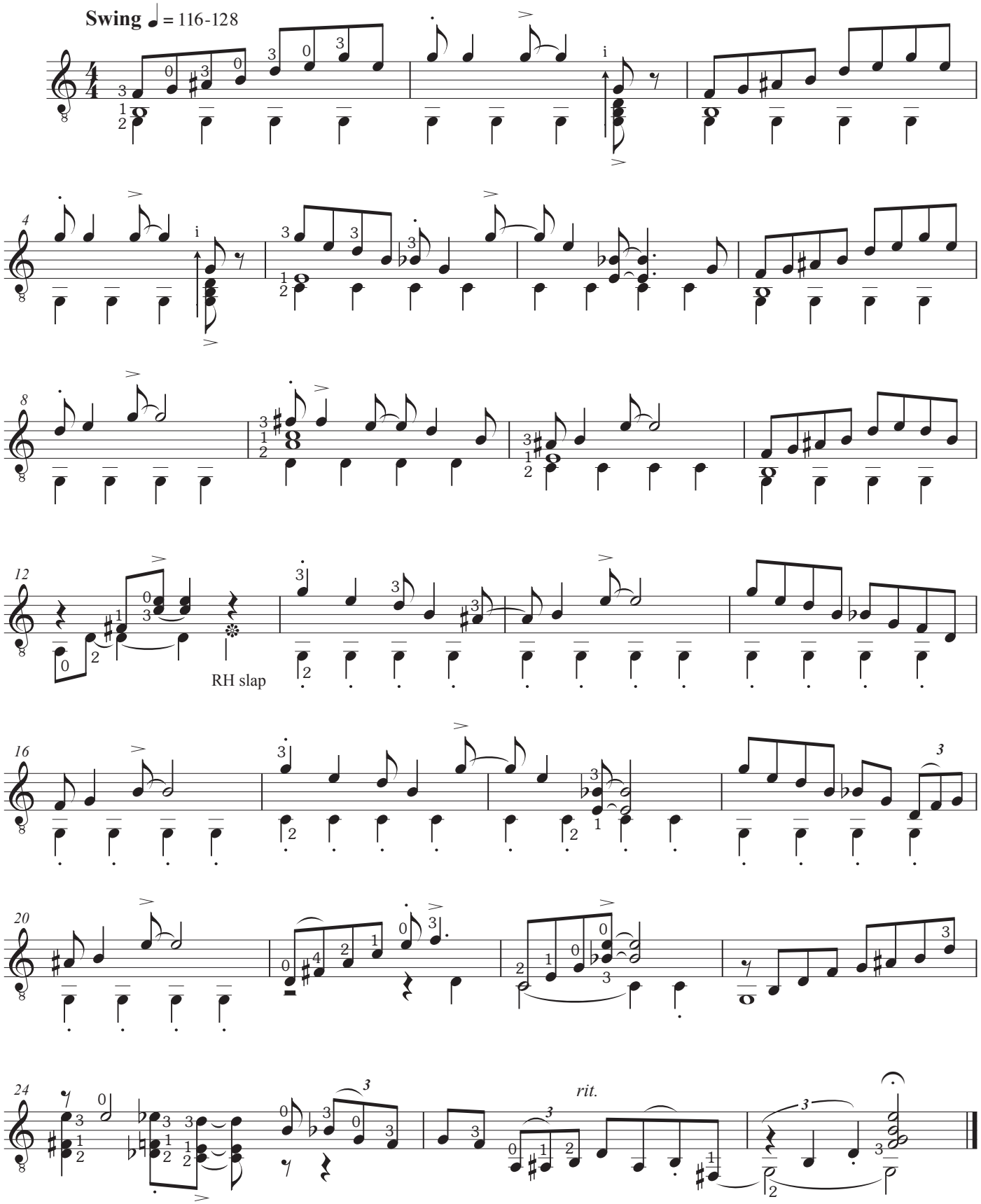
III. Straight Blues



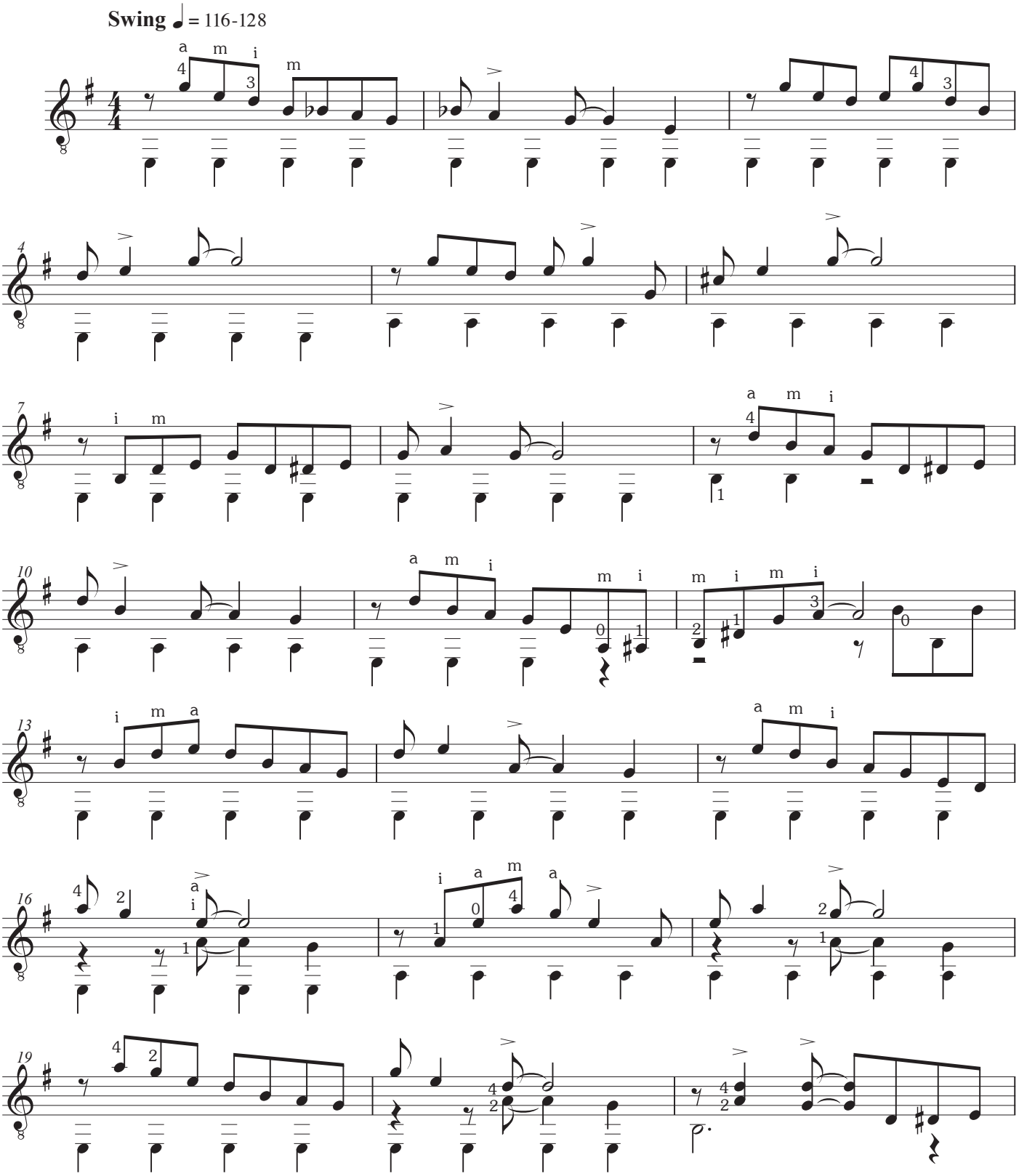
IV. Blue Swing

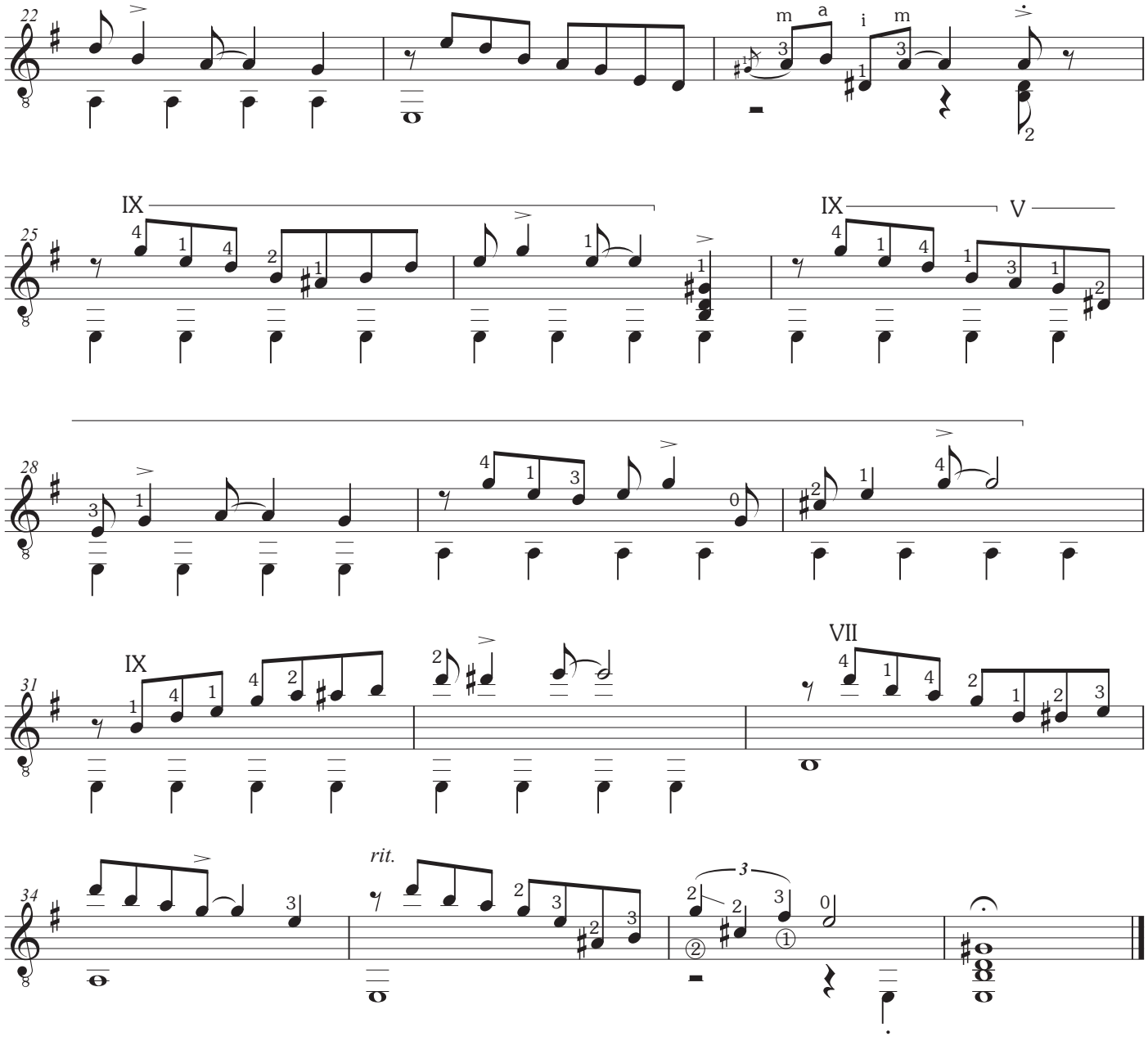


V. Blue Rag



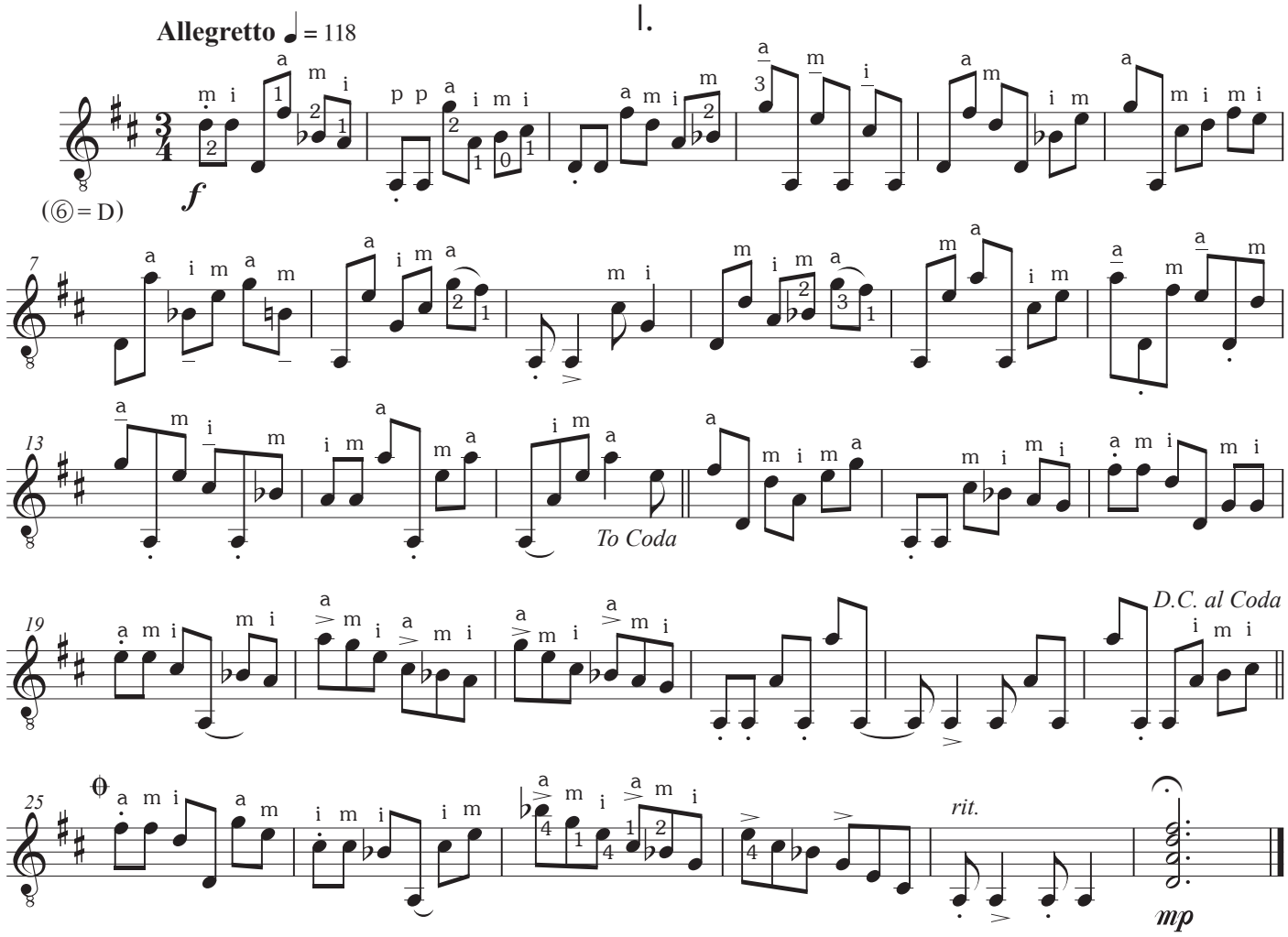
VI. Blues for George



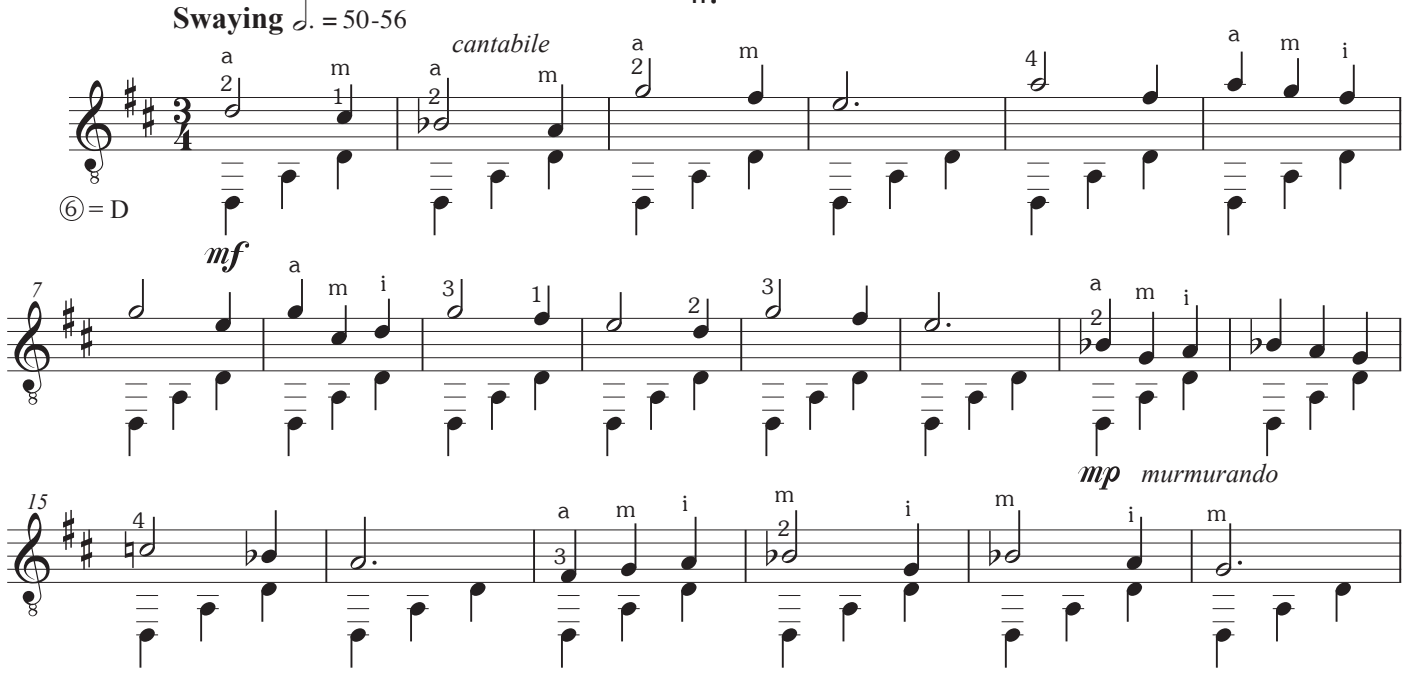

22
m a i m
25
IX
IX
V
28
31
IX
VII
34
rit.

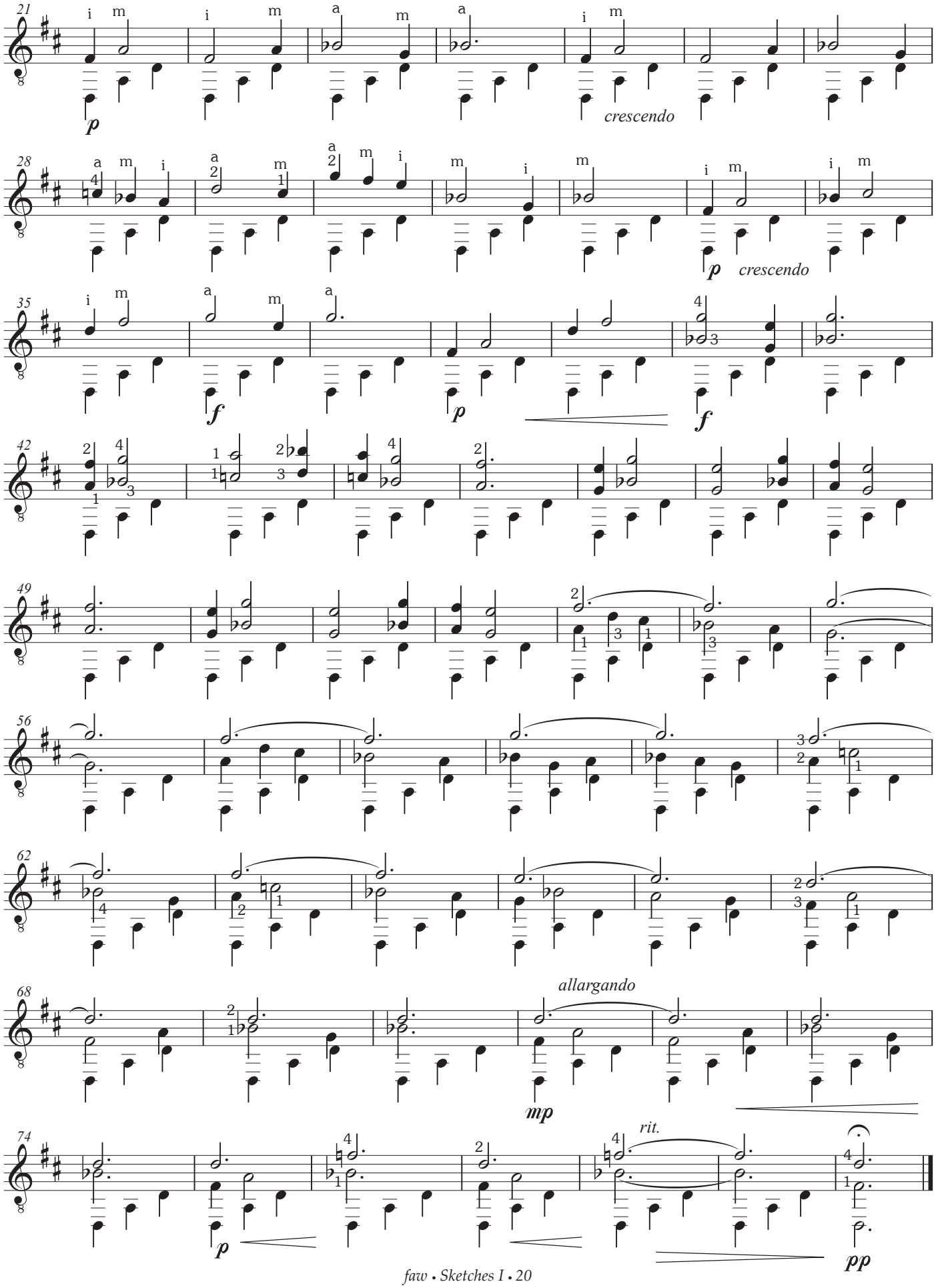
New Suite in D Major

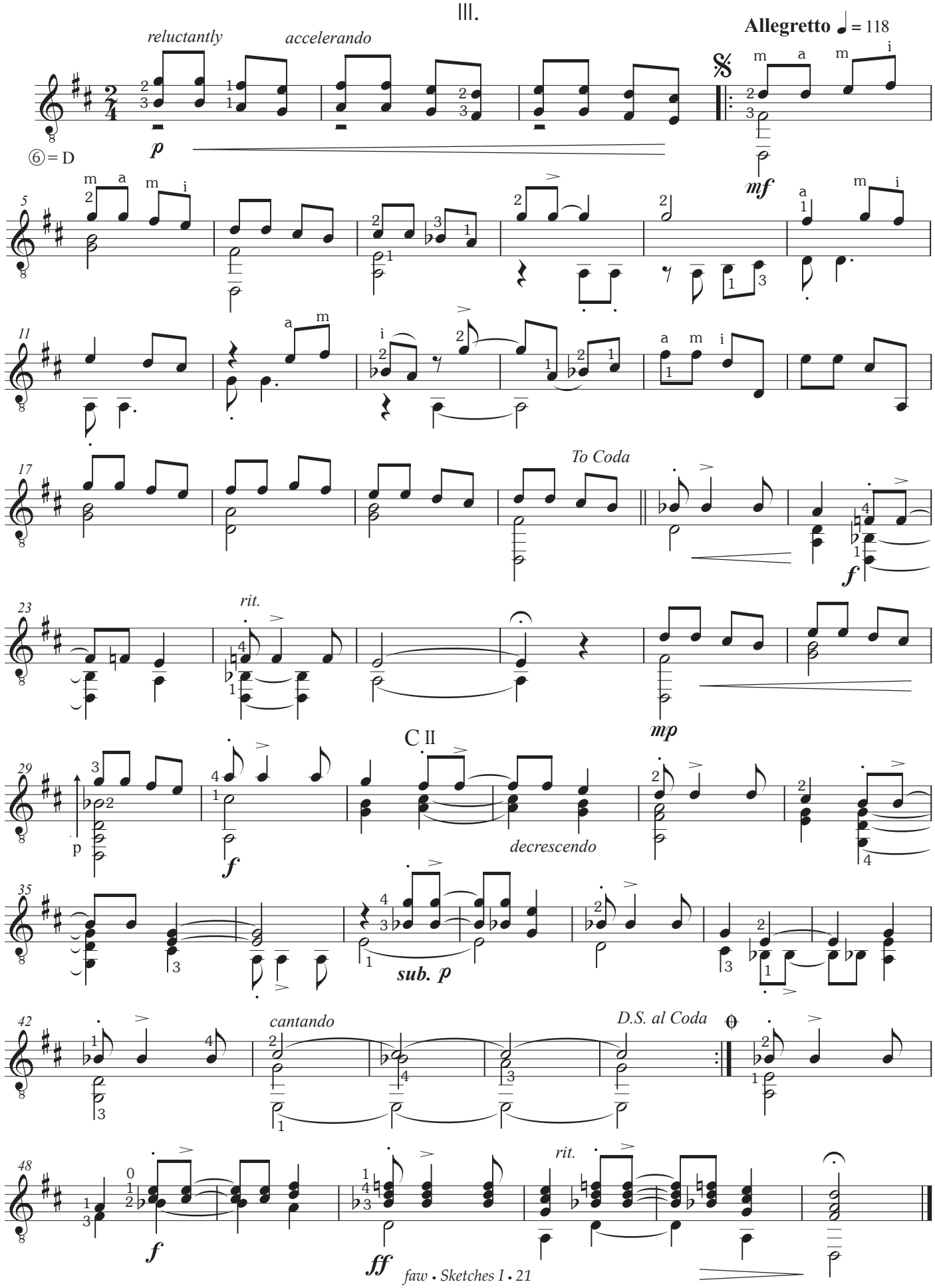
I.



II.




21
p
crescendo
28
p
crescendo
35
f
p
f
42
49
56
62
68
allargando
mp
74
rit.
p
pp


III.
Allegretto ♩ = 118
reluctantly
accelerando
⑥ = D
To Coda
rit.
C II
decrescendo
sub. p
cantando
D.S. al Coda
rit.

Sing while playing, it's
good for breath, posture,
coordination, and soul.
Here are words to **Littl' Adam**
(p. 12). I wrote this for my
son when he was a toddler.

Littl' Adam
a littl' Adam
where ya gonna be
when the sun is at three
and I'm in a tree
lookin' down at the sea?
Oh I think you'll agree
that I have no degree
to tell you where to be
when the sun is at three!

Littl' Adam
a littl' Adam
where ya gonna be
when the sun is at four
and I'm in a store
looking' down at the floor?
Oh I think you'll agree
that I have no degree
to tell you where to be
when the sun is at four!

Littl' Adam
a littl' Adam
where ya gonna be
when the sun is at five
and I'm in a dive
gettin' lots of jive?
Oh I think you'll agree
that I have no degree
to tell you where to be
when the sun is at four!

Littl' Adam
a littl' Adam
where ya gonna be
when the sun is at six
and I'm in the sticks
just pilin' up bricks?
Oh I think you'll agree
that I have no degree
to tell you where to be
when the sun is at six!