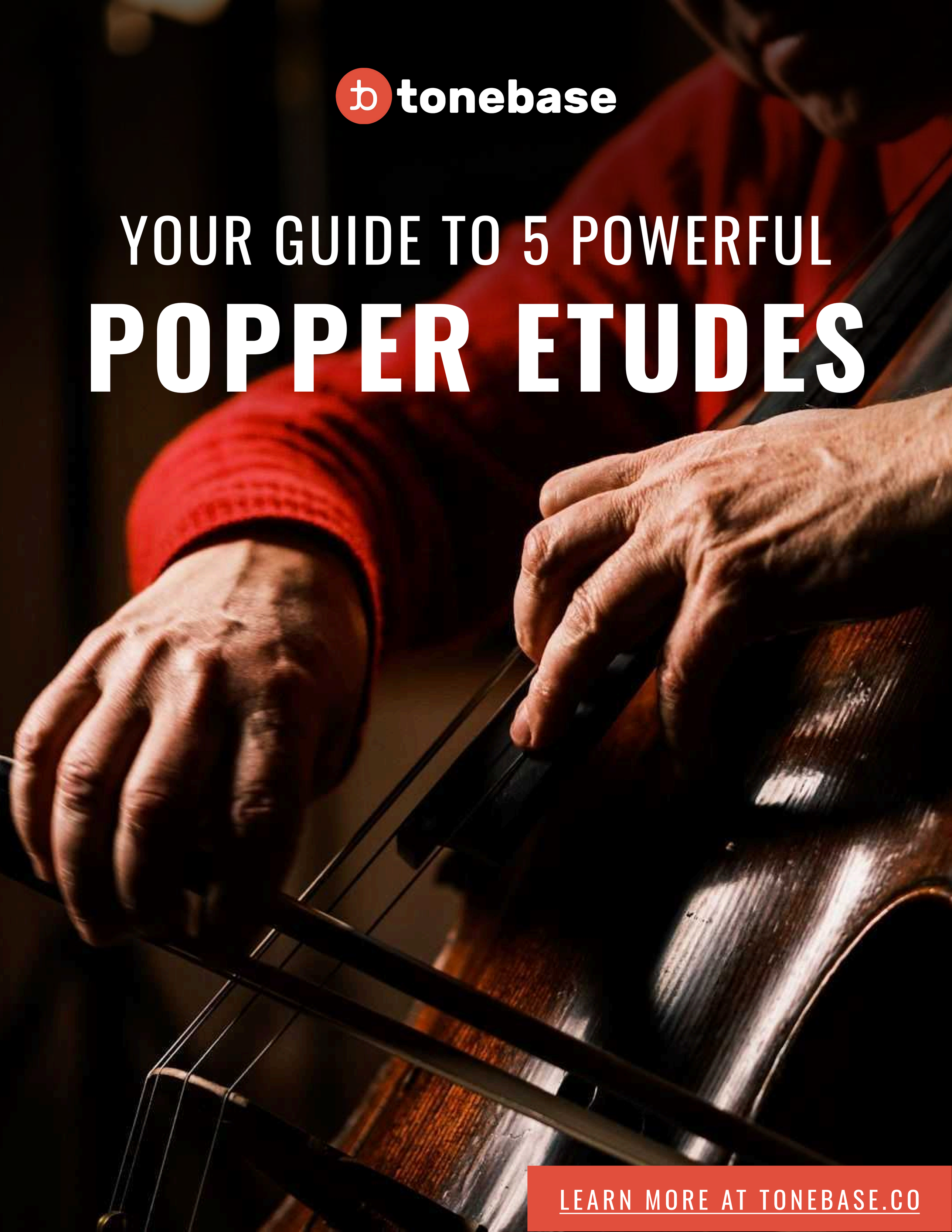
tonebase

YOUR GUIDE TO 5 POWERFUL

POPPER ETUDES



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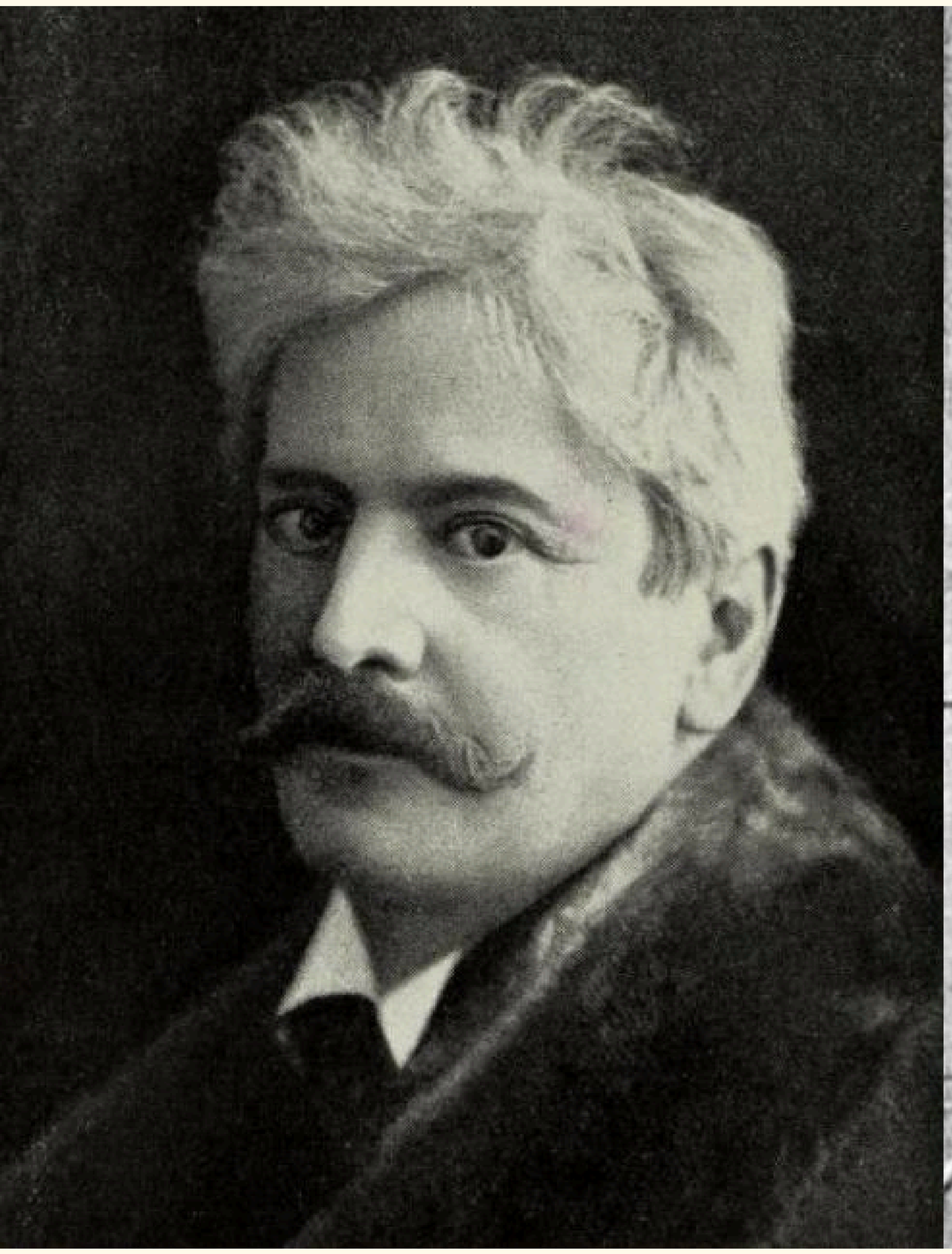
INTRODUCTION

David Popper (1843–1913) was one of the most important figures in cello playing. Known in his time as a virtuoso cellist, he played principal cello in the Hungarian and Vienna State Operas, including as first cellist under Mahler. Mahler believed Popper was the greatest cellist he had heard, and Popper was legendary for his incredible dexterity and virtuosity on the cello. Popper knew all the great composers of the day, such as Brahms, Liszt, Wagner, Grieg, and Tchaikovsky.

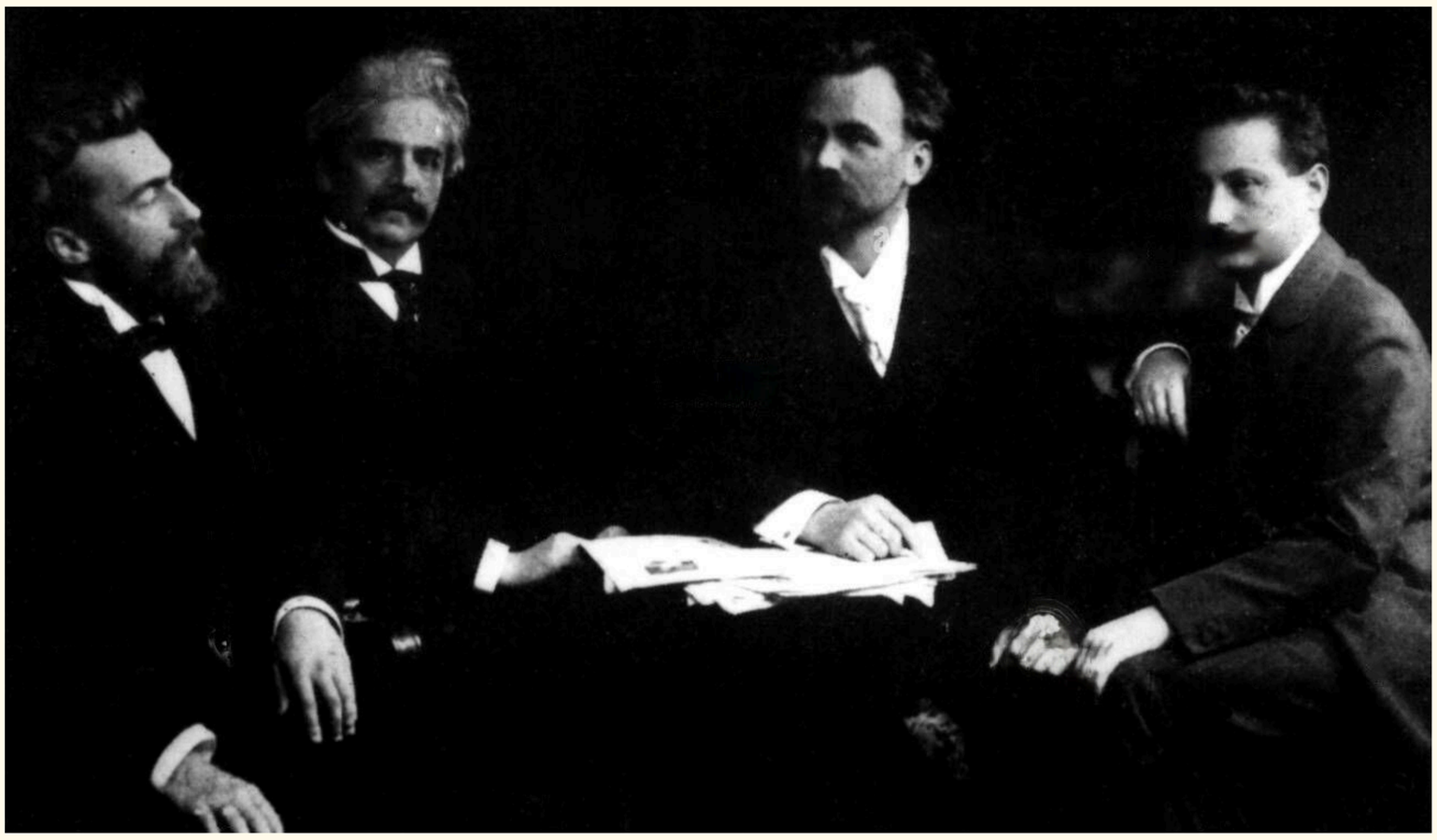


CELLO

Popper wrote many pieces for cello himself – concerti, short pieces, and virtuoso works. But of course, nothing is more legendary (or infamous!) than his 40 études for cello, which he called the “High School of Cello Playing.” These 40 studies are an incredible tour through all the difficulties of cello playing—spiccato, legato, shifting, and complicated bowing techniques. They are musically fascinating and technically difficult, with a style all their own. The great Hungarian cellist Janos Starker, whose own teacher Adolf Schiffer was a student of Popper, said that these Popper études teach, better than anything else, “the geography of the cello.”

The tonebase cello team has selected the five most crucial Popper études from the book of 40, and we have written some practice comments and guidelines to help you. Remember that studying this fantastic book of repertoire is a long process. Whether you are just beginning your Popper journey or have been working on these studies for twenty years, work slowly, calmly, and methodically. Improvement will come gradually as you train your ear. Don’t forget to take a break if you feel stiff or tired, record yourself often, and play for your friends! As usual, the tonebase cello team is here to answer any questions you may have. Don’t hesitate to reach out!

Jeno Hubay and David Popper Quartet



ETUDE NO. 2

This is a classic Popper étude for practicing shifting, string crossing, and bow division at the same time. The final result should be smooth and lyrical, and you should take Popper's own direction "gently sliding" literally! Here are some things to keep in mind when practicing:

1. Try to maintain a beauty of tone throughout. One way to approach this is by practicing with shorter slurs, such as two beats per bow or even one beat (four notes), to get a beautiful sound.

2. Leave early for shifts! This is a common theme for many Popper studies. Especially when we have long shifts, leave early, and shift in the most relaxed manner possible.

3. Prepare string crossings! We can often lose a lot of time crossing strings if we do not prepare, and with so many notes to fit under a slur, we can't afford to lose any precious bow. So prepare and anticipate, which means getting the bow as near as possible to the next string you're going to play so it is ready to go.

Popper and his students

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Etude No. 2

from 40 Etudes: High School of Cello Playing, Op. 73

David Popper

(1843-1913)

Andante

p *with very steady bow*

gently sliding

G- - - -

G- - - - - - - D- - - - - - G- - - - - - - D- - - - - - - - - - - - G- - - D- - - - - - G- - - - - - - D- - - A- - - - -

Popper – Etude No. 2

15

mf

17

19

f

21

G- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - D- - - - - A- - - - -

G- - - - - - - - D- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - A- - - - -

23

f

p

25

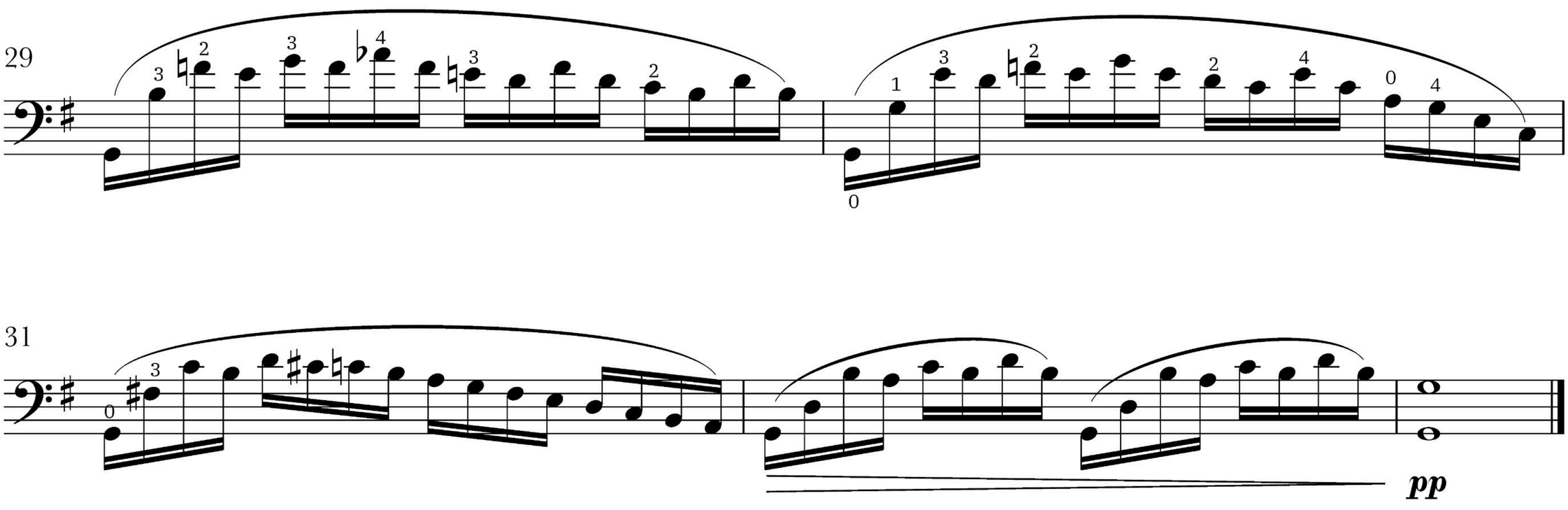
p

27

f

p

Popper – Etude No. 2



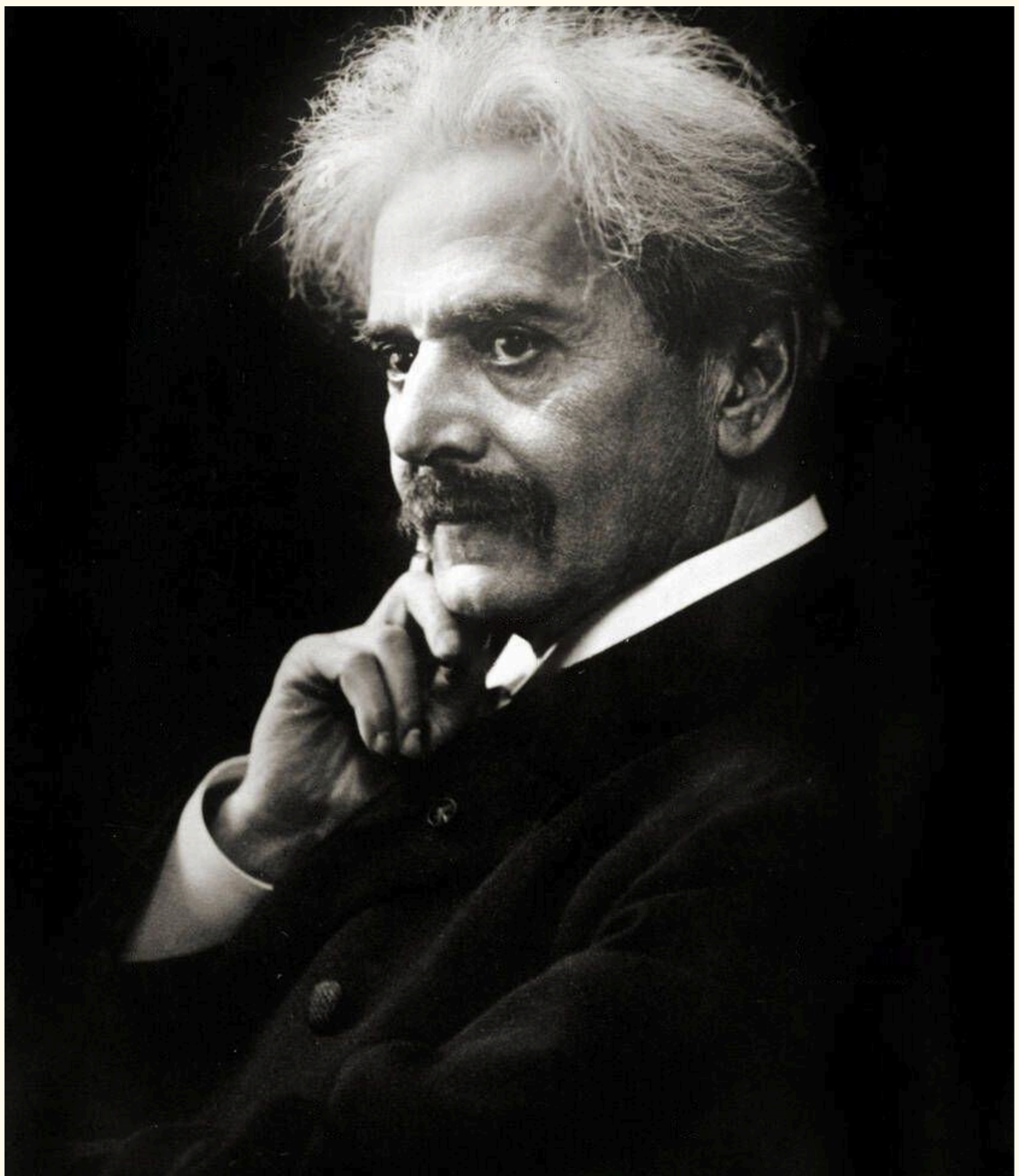
ETUDE NO. 9

This is one of the more difficult études in the book, but if you practice methodically, it will get easier with time. A good general rule is any time we are playing in thirds, sixths, and octaves—play the lower note slightly stronger than the upper one! This helps keep our sense of pitch and is more pleasing to the ear. Here are some things to remember when practicing:

1. Practice each line separately to develop the muscle memory of the distances and get the melodic shape in your ear.

2. Try to vibrate to keep the left hand loose! Especially on longer-duration notes, adding a little vibrato can be very useful to relax the left hand and wrist.

3. Play as legato as possible, connect all bow changes, and play out all shifts. One of the best ways to learn how to play legato thirds is by not hiding the shifts with the bow. It might not be pretty at first, but your ear will be trained faster and more accurately by audibly playing through the shift.



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Etude No. 9

from 40 Etudes: High School of Cello Playing, Op. 73

David Popper

(1843-1913)

Andante sostenuto

mf

p

longa

mf

p

D

mf

G

A

D

A

D

G

D

A

D

dim.

p

Popper – Etude No. 9

24

27

30

longa

mf

34

38

pp

longa

mf

42

p

46

G D G D G D -- G --

A -- D -- A -------

D -- G -- D -------

50

p

pp

ETUDE NO. 19

If there is one most famous (or infamous!) Popper étude that focuses on spiccato, this is it! Don't worry about speed at first—that will come with time. Most important is that you train your ear for the particular chromatic changes and learn about the half steps, as there are many small and large position changes! Here are some things to keep in mind when practicing:

1. When playing spiccato, focus on the suppleness of the right wrist and fingers. This is not a whole arm motion, and your shoulder and upper arm should not be doing the work! Practice open-string spiccato as a warm-up.

2. When beginning, think of the tempo in triplets before you start, and have the bow ready to go near the string. This way, you are connecting your brain and hands before beginning, increasing the chances of a successful opening.

3. Think about varying the bow stroke as you go through the study. When it is louder or higher, you can play a little longer or heavier bow strokes. And when it is shorter and softer, keep the light, compact bow in mind so the music has a sprightly feel.

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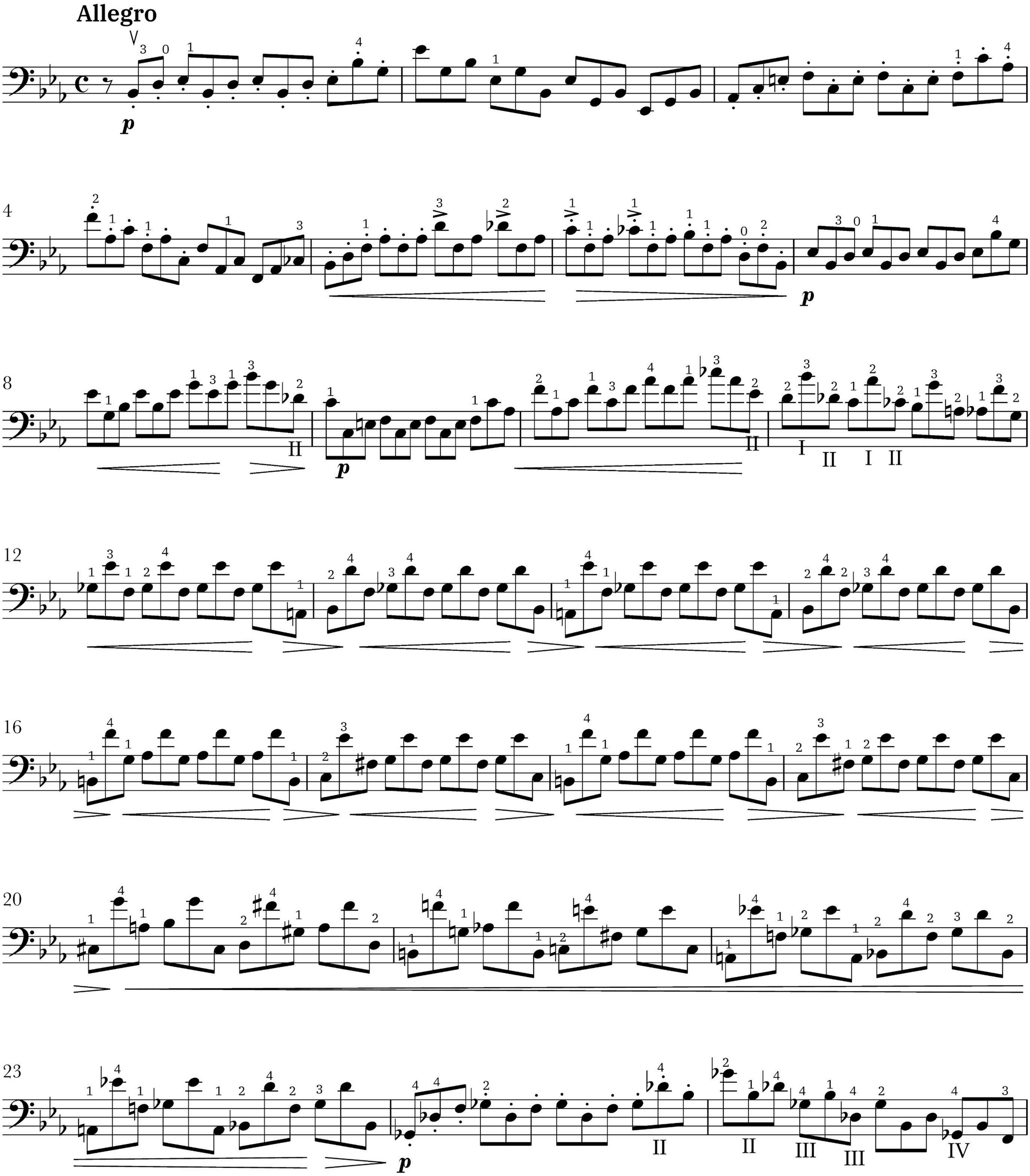
Etude No. 19

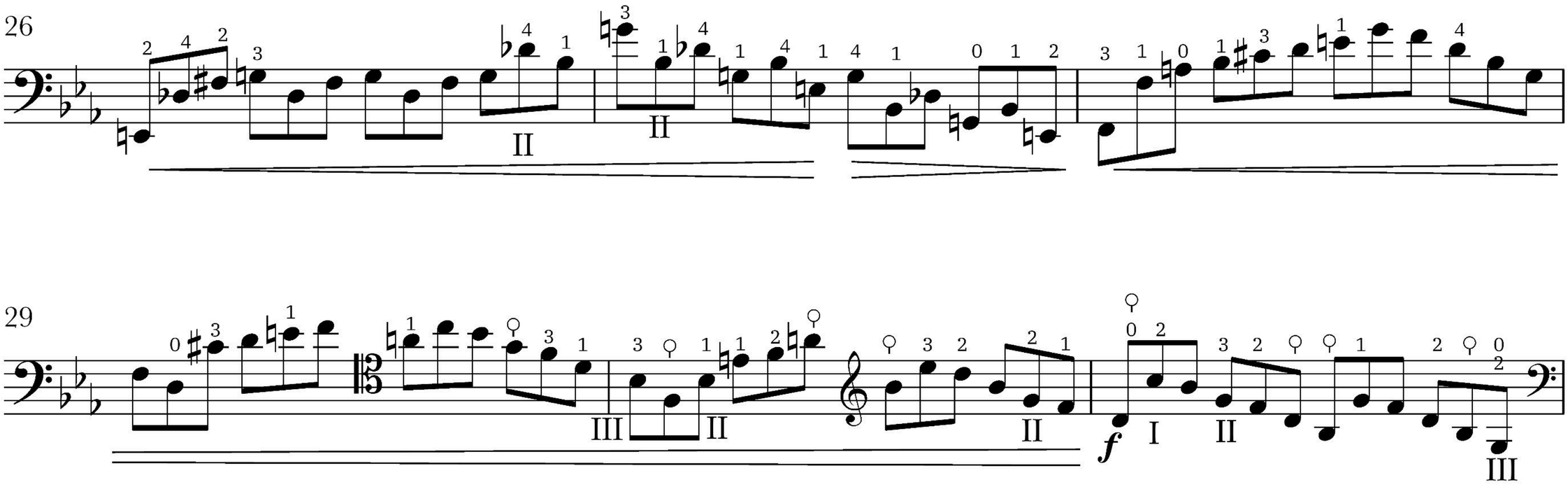
from 40 Etudes: High School of Cello Playing, Op. 73

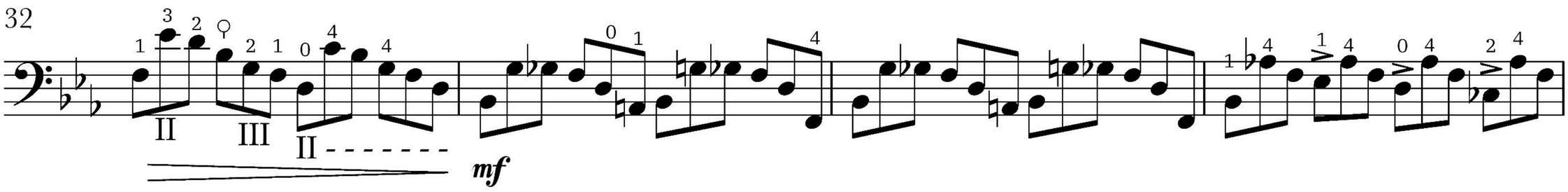
David Popper

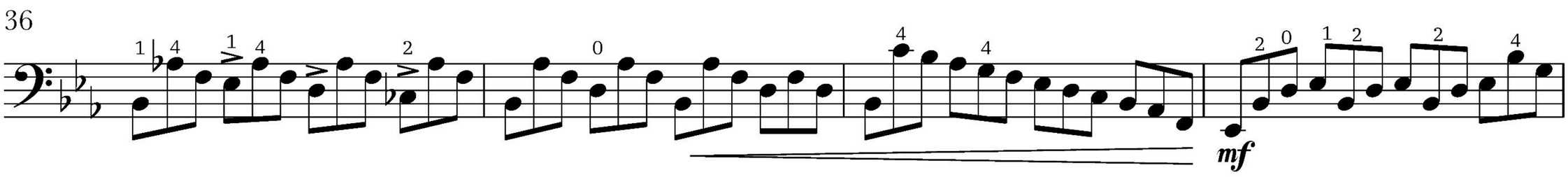
(1843-1913)

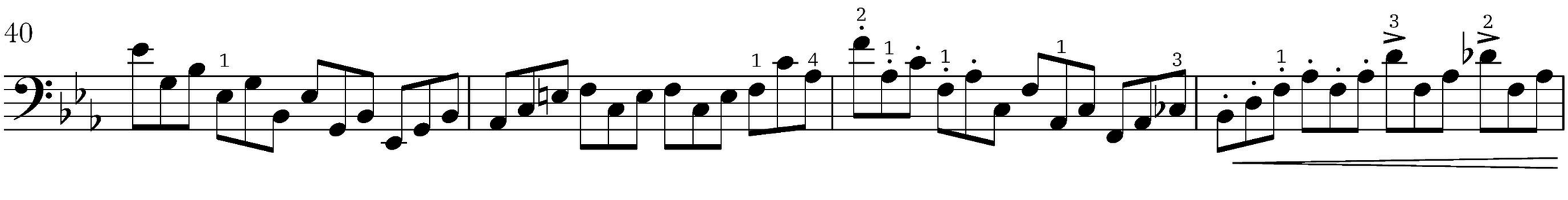


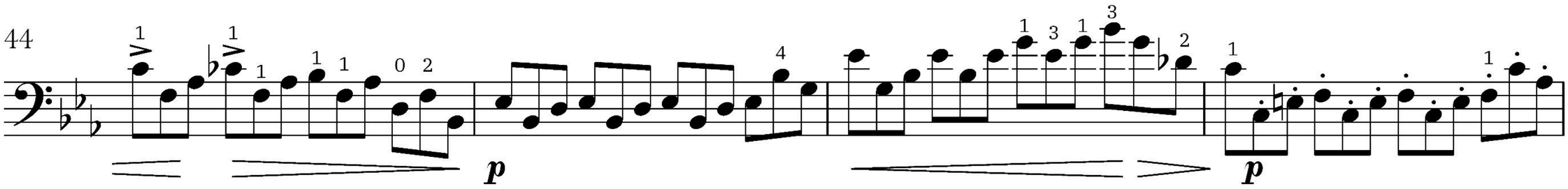
Popper – Etude No. 19

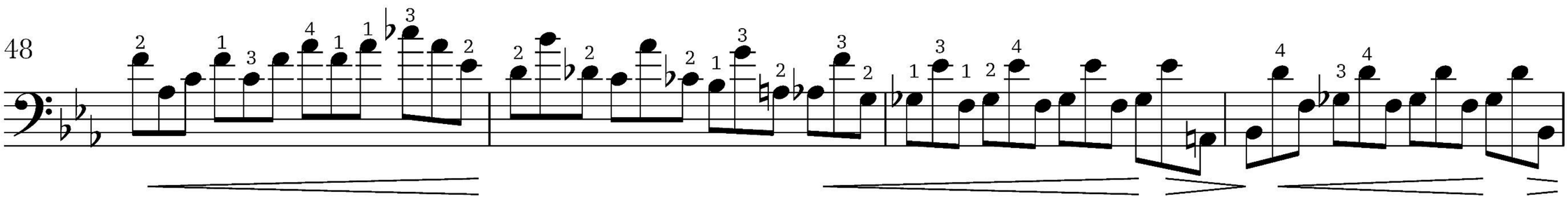






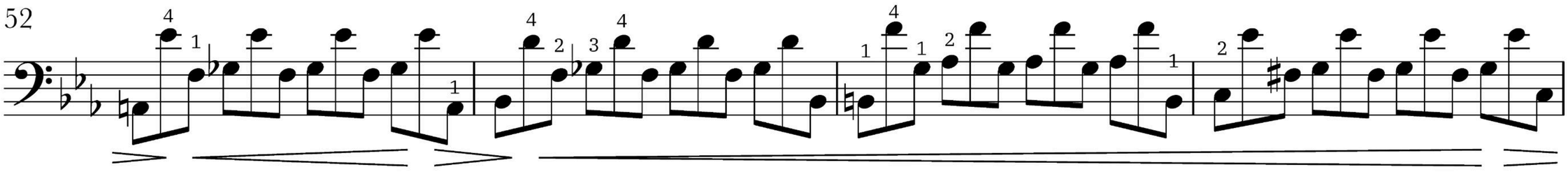






Popper – Etude No. 19

52



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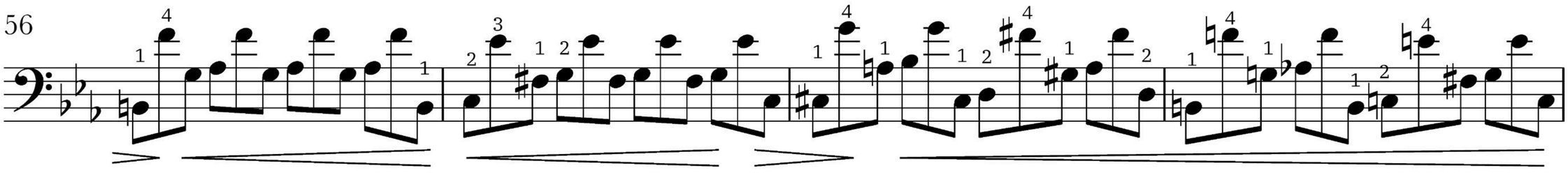

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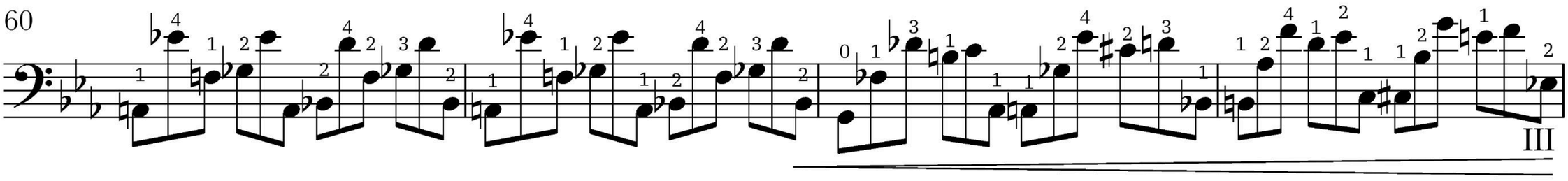

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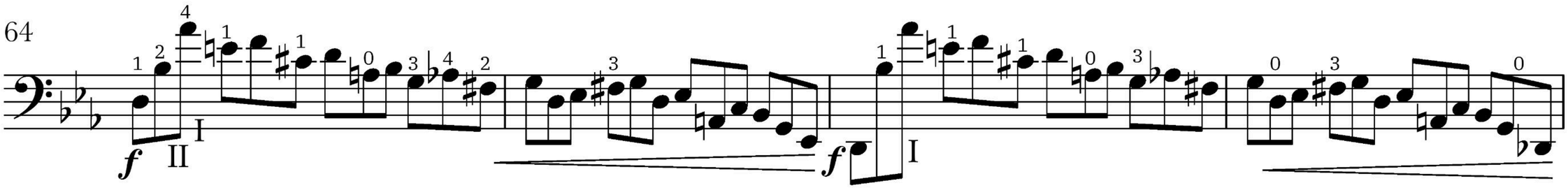

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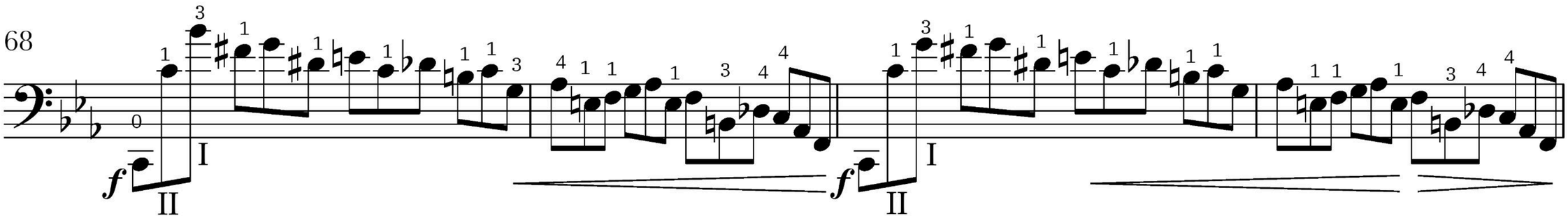

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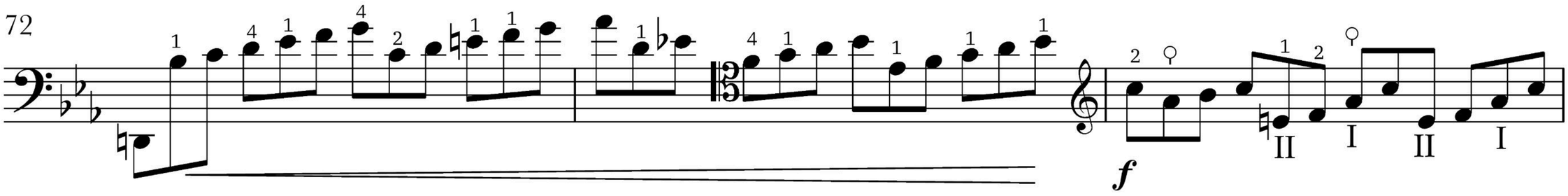

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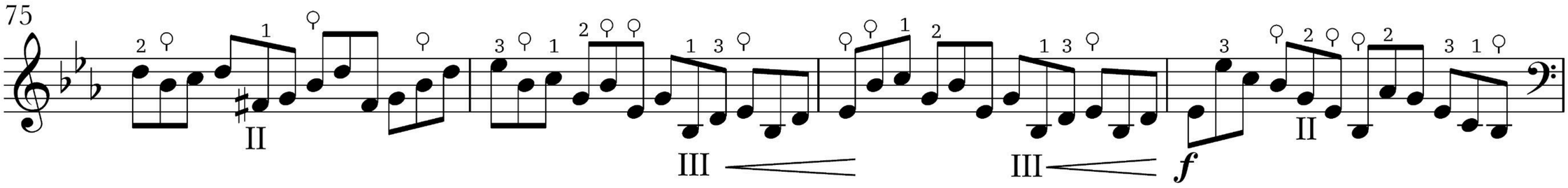

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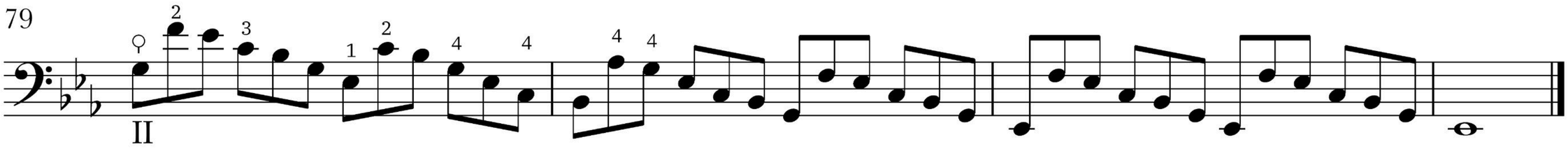

ETUDE NO. 28

With this étude, the goal is to sound as effortless and seamless as possible. It is challenging for both the left and right hands, but for different reasons. The most obvious challenge is the intonation and using the fourth finger in thumb position. This was commonplace in earlier days of cello playing (you see this all the time with Romberg, for example), but in modern cello playing, it is not employed often. Here are some things to keep in mind when practicing:

1. Start practice extremely slowly, just two notes per bow. The left hand may feel somewhat awkward initially, but don't despair! Slow, methodical practice will train the hand to "feel" the positions.

2. Slide between all shifts and feel the distances. This is one of those studies that require lots of shifting on the thumb, which can feel strange at first. Think of the thumb like any of the other fingers. Don't forget to anticipate shifts with the elbow and keep everything relaxed and loose. If you feel your arm tightening or getting tired, take a break and do something else! Come back a few minutes later. Shifting with the thumb is a long game.

3. On the second page, think about your bow division when you have a single note followed by five notes under a slur. Make sure to pull the bow very fast so you have enough bow on the upbow for the next group. It should sound energetic and fun!

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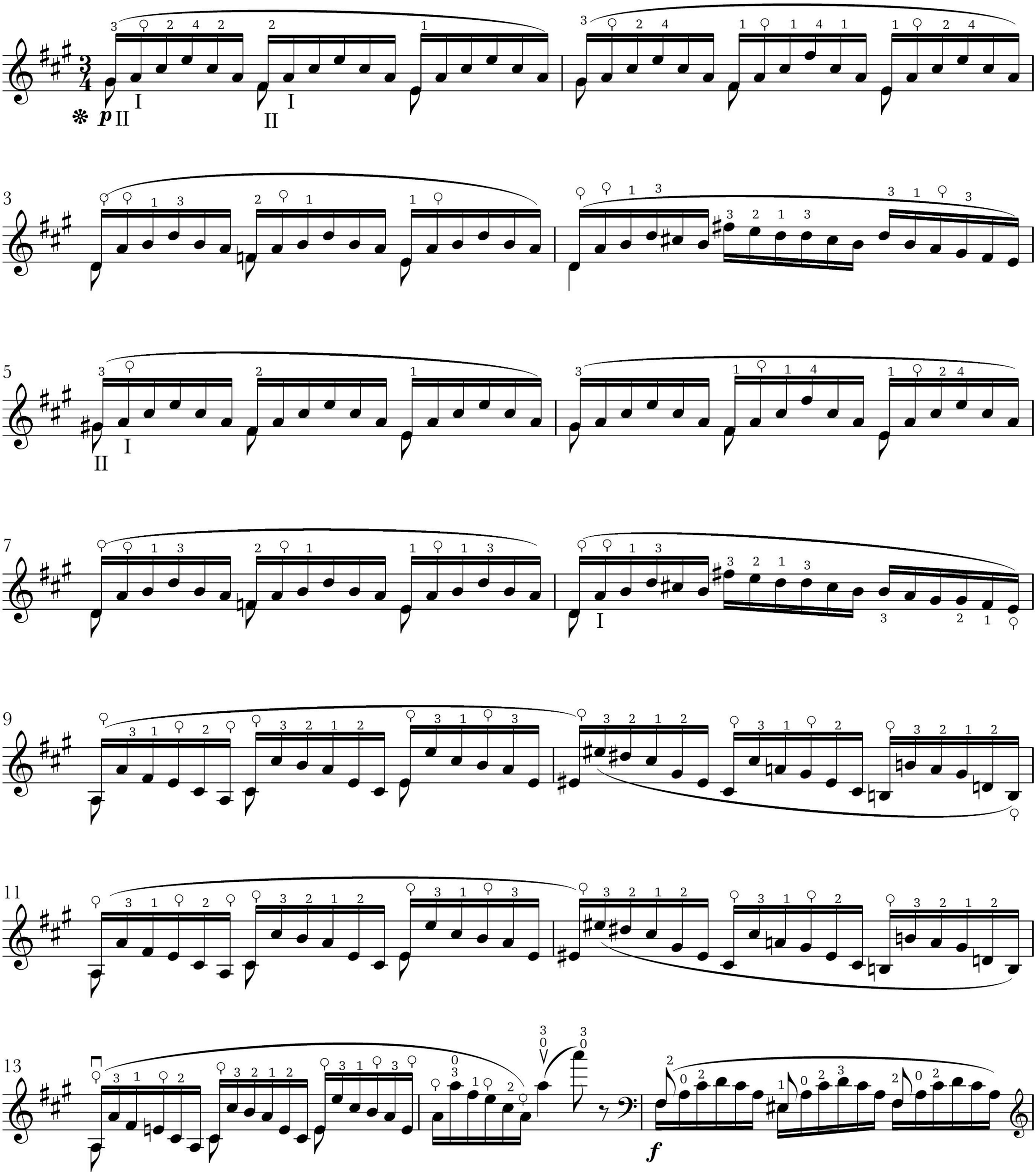
Etude No. 28

from 40 Etudes: High School of Cello Playing, Op. 73

David Popper
(1843–1913)

Andantino grazioso



❋ The first note of each sextuplet to be emphasized slightly and melodically.

Popper – Etude No. 28

16

mf II I II I II I

f

18

mf II I

f

20

mf II I

22

II I

24

f

26

cre - - - - -

28

- - - - - - *scen* - *do*

Popper – Etude No. 28

30

ff

32

34

mf

p

36

p

38

f

ff

ff

pizz.

IV

ETUDE NO. 37

Although Popper writes "study in mordents" at the top, this is really a study in shifting more than anything else. If you can play this étude well, you will have a great understanding of the fingerboard—all strings and all positions. Be sure to follow Popper's fingerings, as it's important to learn the positions as he wants you to, as the application to pieces in the repertoire will be more effective. Here are some things to keep in mind when practicing:

1. Keep your right wrist loose while playing, and use a flatter hair. The goal is to get the most sound quality for the least effort, and by using a flatter hair, we can maximize efficiency.

2. Take your time when you shift—don't "jump" to a new position, but feel the distance as you make your way around the fingerboard. Already in measure 2, we have various large shifts to make, and it's important to give the left hand time to get to where it needs to go.

3. Keep the strength in the left-hand fingers through the mordents. This can be tiring at first, especially in the higher positions, but with time your fingers will gain strength. The most important thing is to remember to keep consistency in the turns. The ability to play the entire piece through will come measure by measure.

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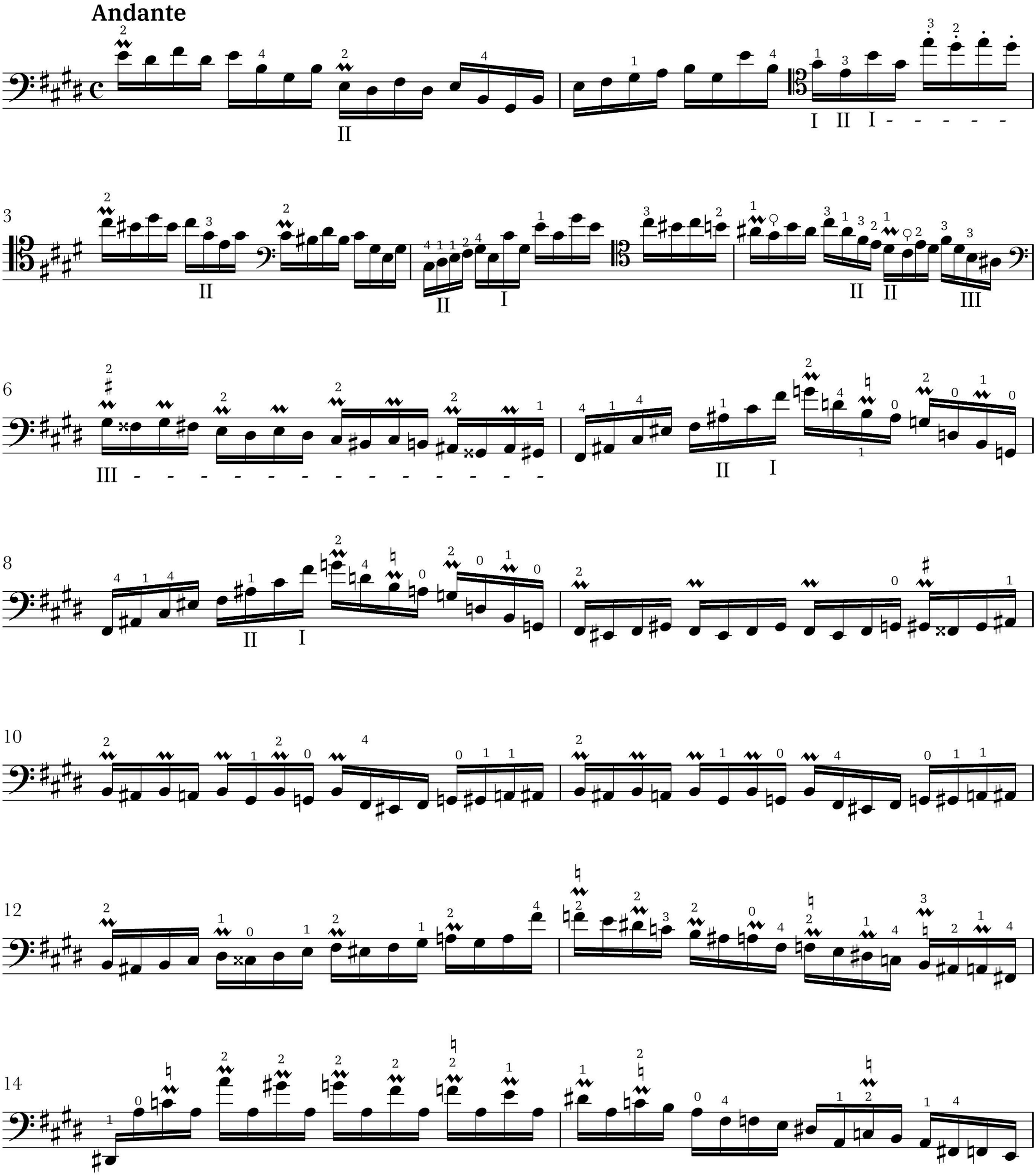
Etude No. 37

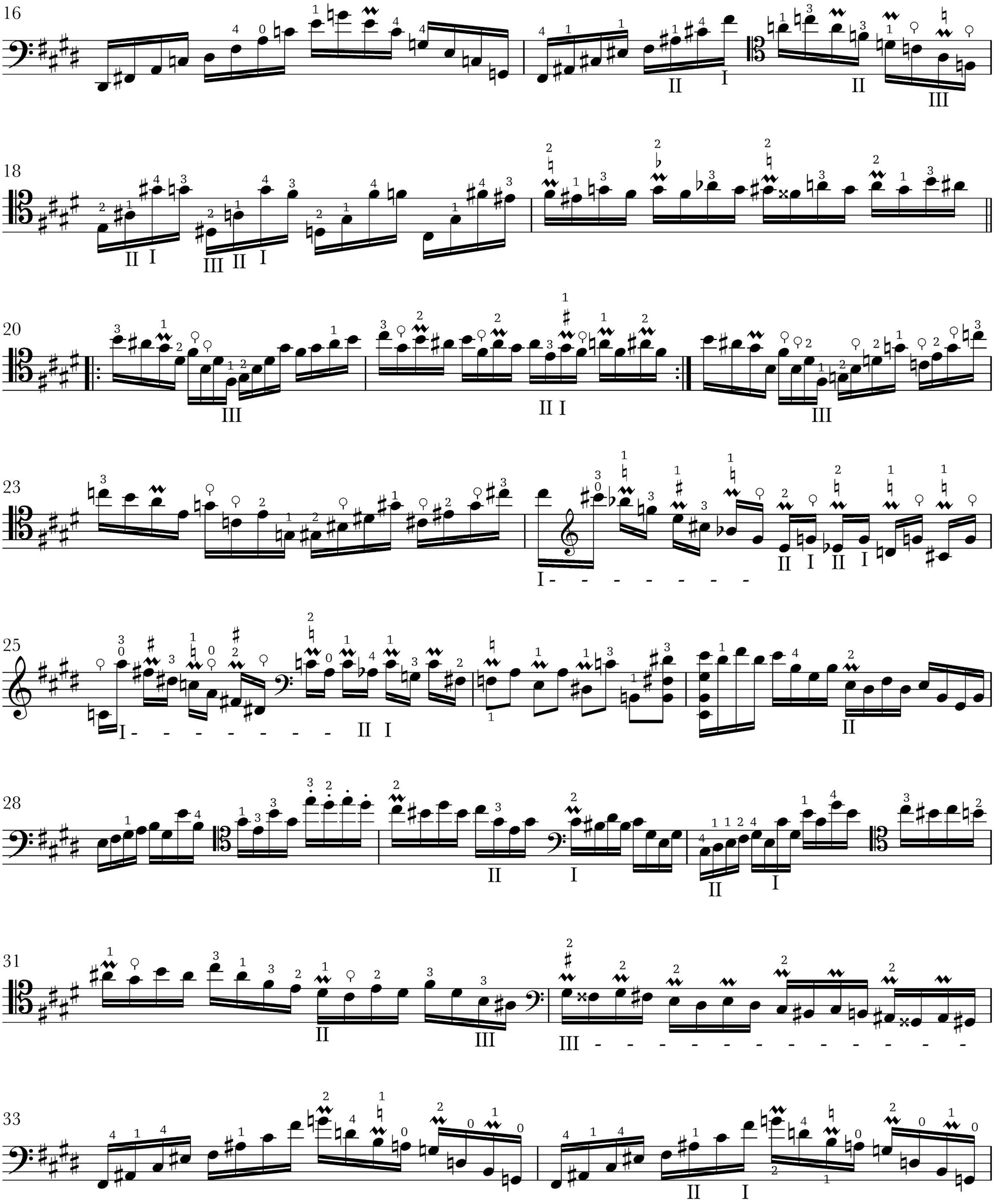
from 40 Etudes: High School of Cello Playing, Op. 73

David Popper

(1843–1913)



Popper – Etude No. 37



Popper – Etude No. 37

35

38

II

40

42

II

II

44

47

50

52

I

Popper – Etude No. 37

54

57

III II I

59

61

63

II III I

I III

I I III

I III II III

65

rit.

mf

II

II

68

II I

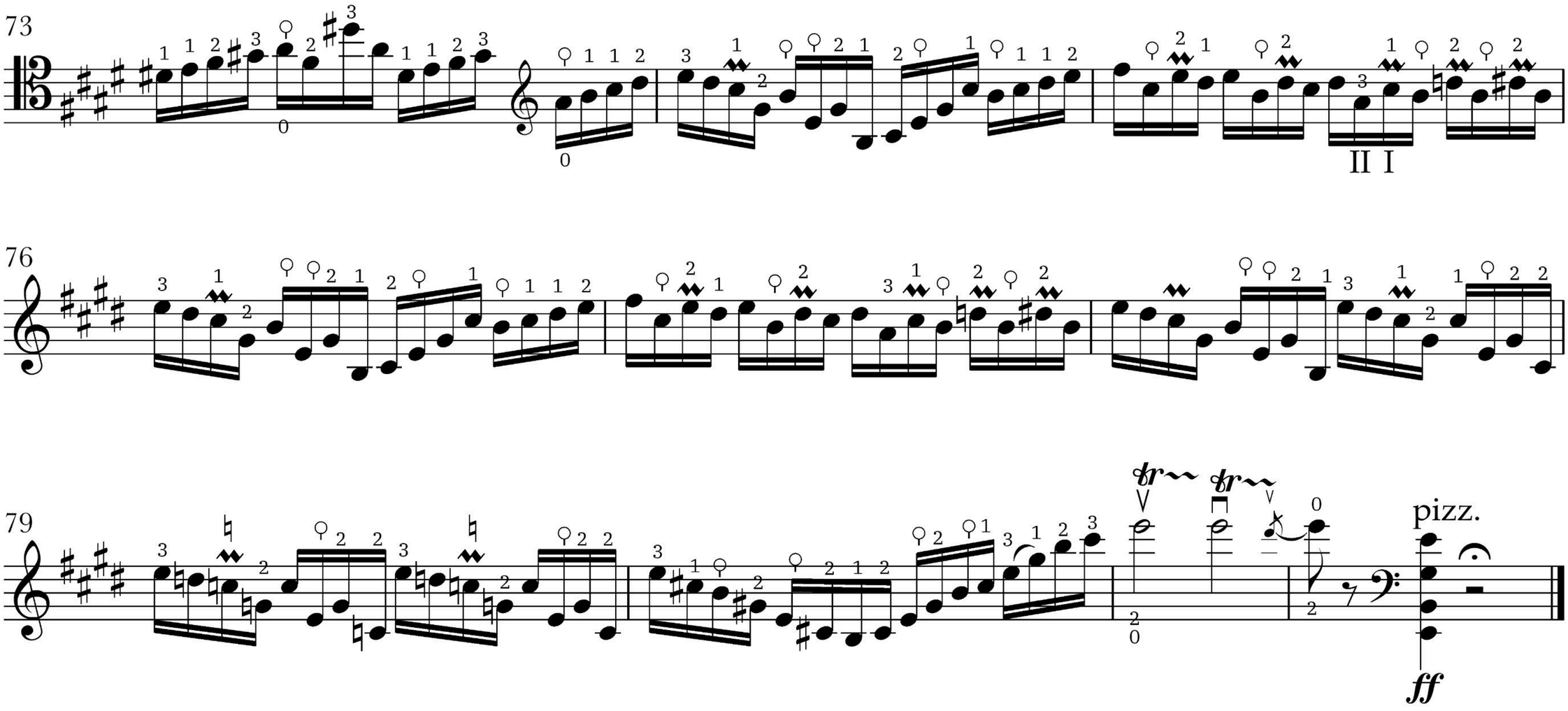
I

II

71

II - - - -

Popper – Etude No. 37



CELLO

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