FROM THE SOUNDBOARD ARCHIVE

Athénaïs Paulian's Airs and Variations, op. 1

The Guitarist's Album

MATANYA OPHEE (1991)

TWO SUBJECTS ARE CURRENTLY IN THE FOREFRONT: the celebration of the two-hundred-year anniversary of Mozart's death, and recycling. My column this time deals with both. Mozart never wrote for the guitar. Themes from operas by Mozart, however, were fertile ground for many guitarists at the beginning of the nineteenth century. No need, I hope, to mention the variations on "Das klinget so herrlich" from the *Magic Flute*, the theme used by Fernando Sor in his famous opus 9, of which, at last count, there were more than a hundred recordings. The number of performances in recent years does not seem to abate, even with incessant exhortations by several writers that it is time to lay this one item of rent-a-program to rest. In the spring issue of 1982 of this magazine, I published in this column another version of the same tune, in pretty much the same melodic and harmonic treatment applied by Sor to the Mozart theme. This was the *Rondo Allegro*, published by François Molino in the several editions of his method. In the preface to that column, I gave examples of other treatments of the theme, notably, the one by the Parisian guitarist Athénaïs Paulian. The musical quotation I presented at the time from Paulian's opus 1 was much reduced in size, and one needed a good magnifying glass to read it. Allow me then, in celebration of Mozart, to recycle the Paulian work in its entirety.

The work consists of themes that were popular in the early nineteenth century. They are: the same theme of "Das klinget so herrlich" from *The Magic Flute*; a theme by the French violinist Jacques-Pierre-Joseph Rode (1774–1830), a friend of Boccherini, Boieldieu, and Beethoven; and two popular Italian tunes of the time: "Sul margine d'un rio" and "La biondina." These themes were used by many guitarists of the time, including Giuliani, Gernlein, Carulli, et al. The particular grouping of these four themes as used by Paulian reflects their use by one of the reigning sopranos of the time, the Italian Angelica Catalani (1780–1849), known for her ability to perform vocal variations on given themes. The title page of the work reads as follows:

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Airs et Variations / chantés par Madame Catalani / arrangés pour/ Guitare seule / et dédiés à son frére / par / ATHENAIS PAULIAN. / Op:1. Prix 1 Fr. 50 cs. / Bonn chez N. Simrock. / Propriété de l'éditeur. / [Pl. no.] 2529

A copy of this work is in the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, under call number X4821. The work can be dated as circa 1829. It belongs in the same grouping of plate numbers given by Simrock in that year to the several compositions of François de Fossa.

The identity of Athénaïs Paulian is not established. Apparently, she and her brother Eugène, to whom this work is dedicated, were part of the in-group of guitarists belonging to the Sor-Aguado circle in Paris. Sor dedicated to her his opus 33, *Trois pièces de société*; Aguado dedicated to her his opus 3, *Huit petites pièces*; and her brother, Eugène Paulian, dedicated his own opus 2, variations on "Gentil housard," to Sophie Vautrin, who was later to marry François de Fossa. Undoubtedly, these people knew each other well.

One is tempted to read "Paulian" as a typical surname of Armenian extraction. This is, of course, pure speculation. The similarity to Armenian surnames may be entirely coincidental. Unfortunately, the number of published pieces by the siblings Paulian is quite limited. Hence, they have not earned the attention of scholars who deal with early nineteenth-century guitarists and with women guitarists of the time in particular.

It is hard to determine if the virtuosity required to perform these pieces is indicative of Mlle Paulian's own command of the guitar or of her craftsmanship in portraying the vocal talents of Madame Catalani.[1] Undoubtedly, the work is well on a par and perhaps even superior in many ways to Mauro Giuliani's own treatment of this group.[2] Some performance suggestions:

a Both the staccato sign given as a dot and the *martelé* given as wedge, preceding or following a left-hand slur, indicate simply that these notes are to be played *detaché* by the right-hand fingers. They do not indicate staccato in the sense that is generally understood today.

b Note the obvious misprint in the fingering of the first arpeggio on page 5, line 7.

c Good judgement should be applied to the execution of appoggiaturas. The symbology used, a grace note with one or two flags, is used indiscriminately to indicate both long and short appoggiaturas. What matters in music of this period is not the graphic shape of the symbol, but the musical context in which it is found.

1 Excuse me, but I am unable to conceive of *craftswomanship* as a word in the English language.

2 See Heck catalogue, WoO G-3 and G-4, published by Ricordi, Milan, no. 132095, edited by Germano Cavazzoli. [For the catalogue mentioned, see Thomas F. Heck, *Mauro Giuliani: A Life for the Guitar*, GFA Refereed Monographs 2 (Austin: Guitar Foundation of America, 2013), Kindle. Giuliani's WoO G-3 and G-4 consist of arrangements of numbers from Rossini's *Semiramide*.—Ed.]

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Airs et Variations

chantés par Madame Catalani

arrangés pour

Guitare seule

et dédiés à son frère

par

ATHENAIS PAULIAN.

Op:1. Prix 1 Fr. 50 Ct

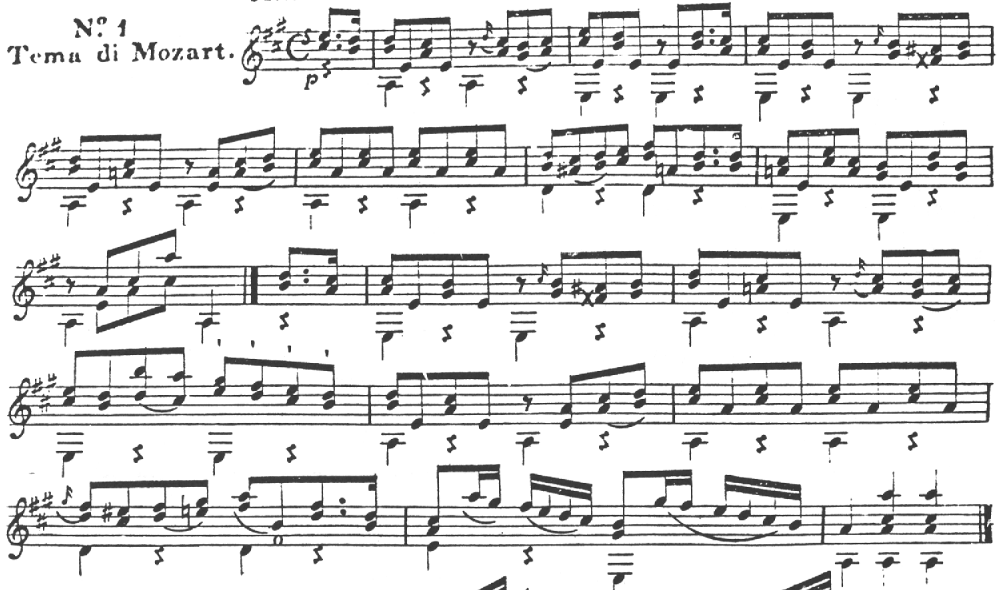
A Bonn chez N. Simrock.

Propriété de l'éditeur.

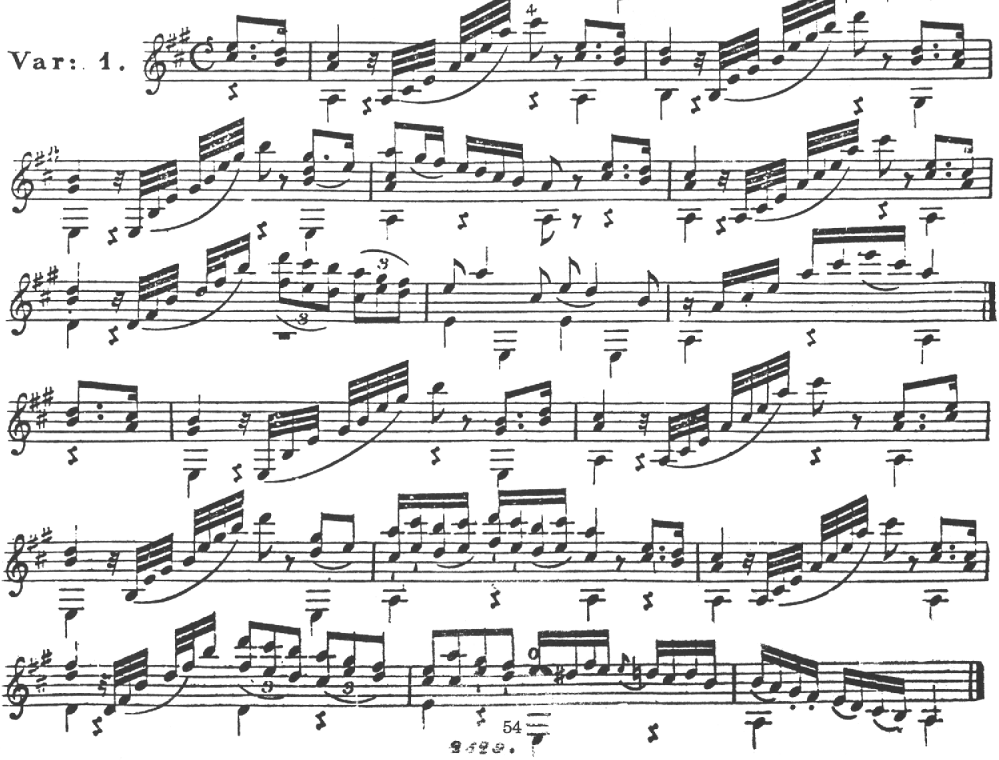
9529.

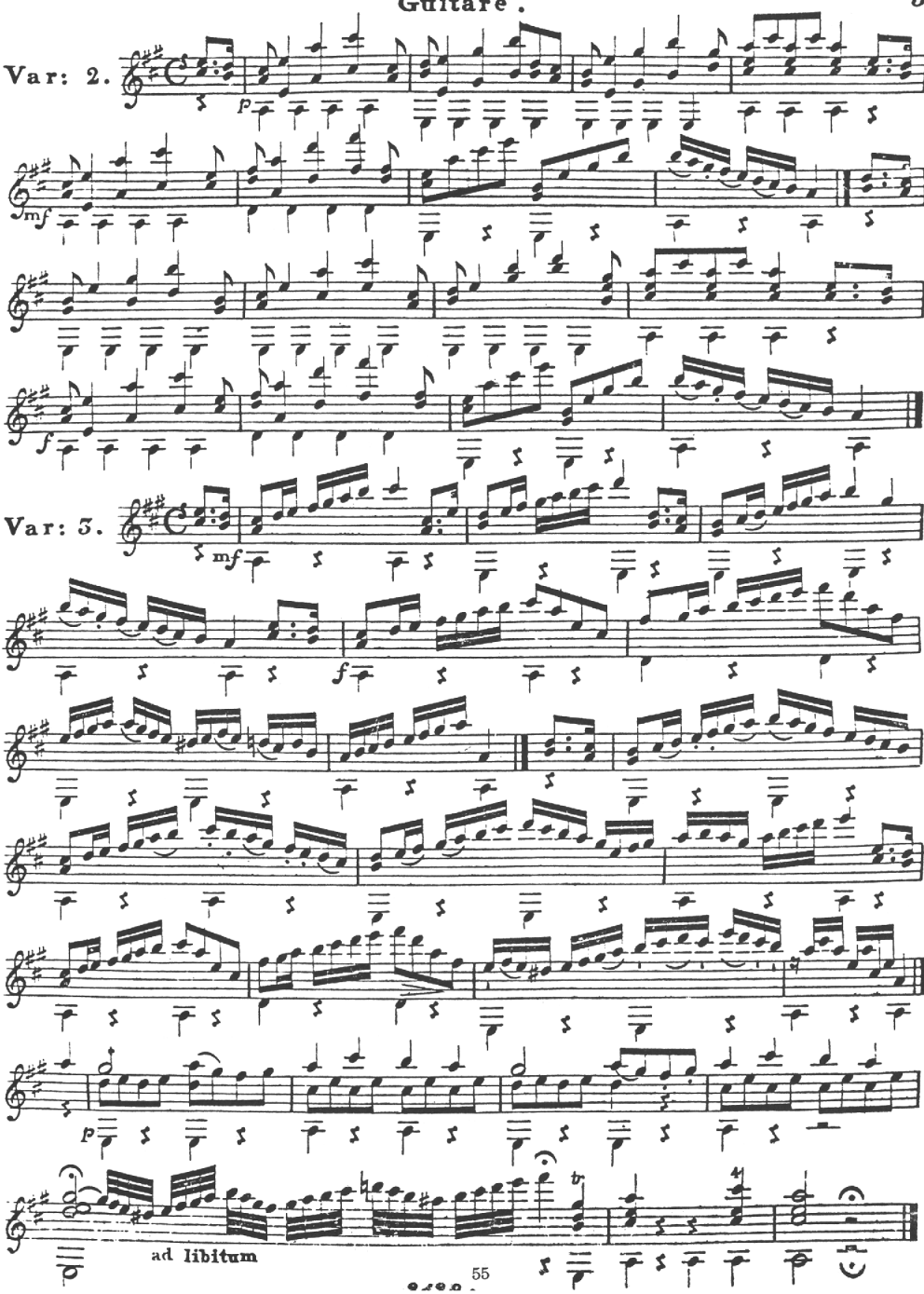
Andante maestoso.

N.° 1
Tema di Mozart.



Var: 1.

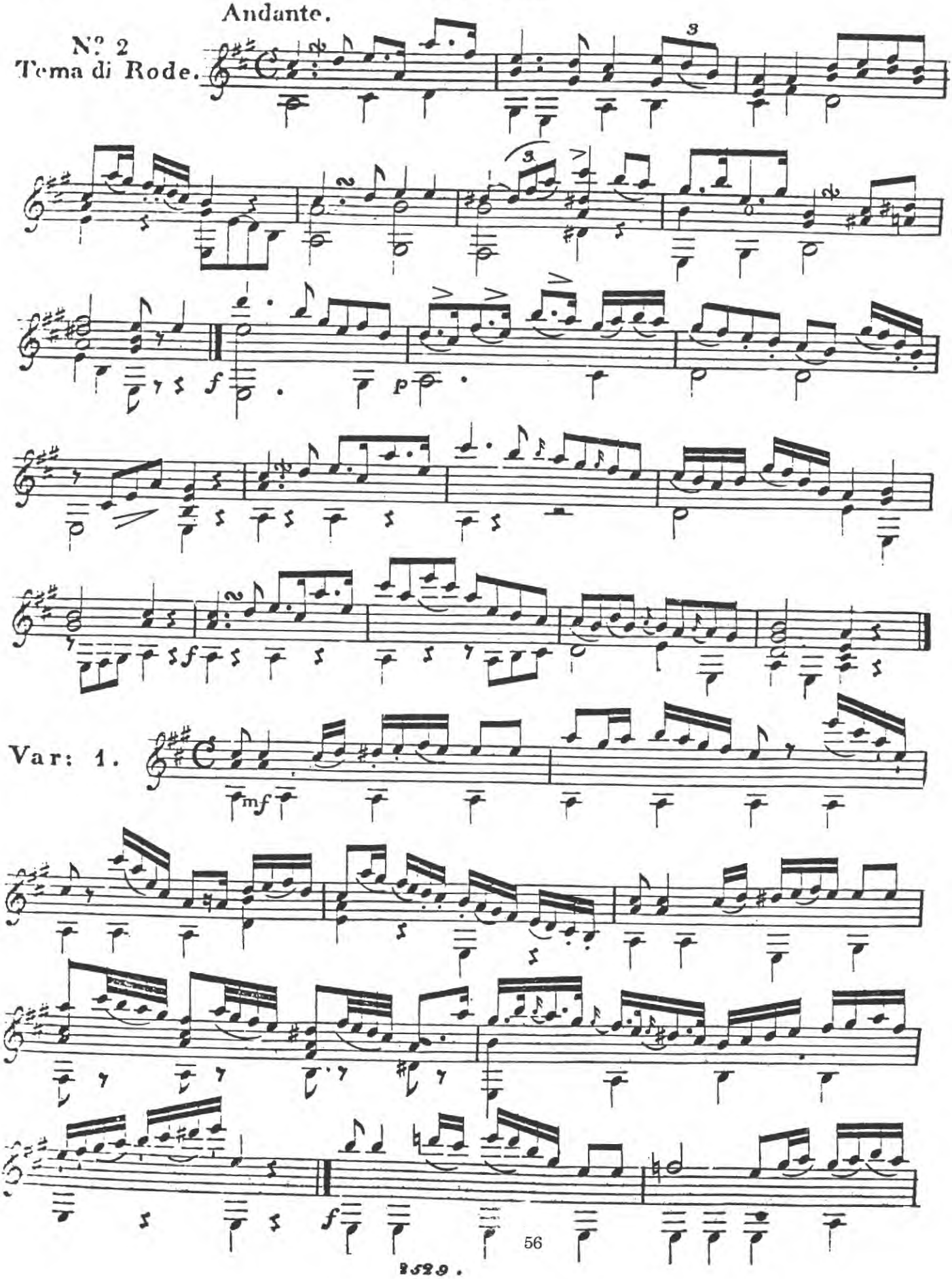


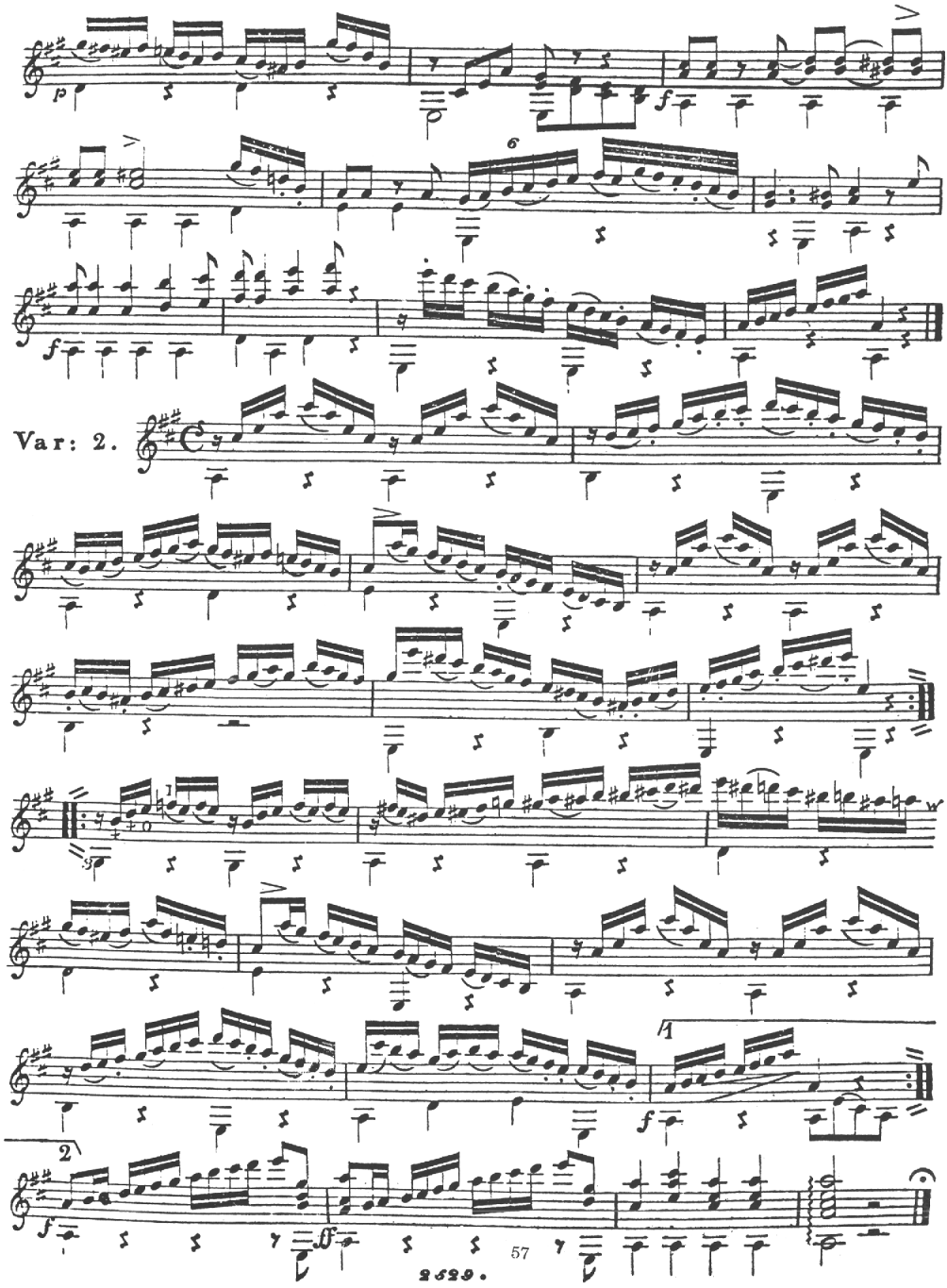

Var: 2.
p
mf
f
Var: 3.
mf
f
p
ad libitum

Guitare.

Andante.

N° 2
Tema di Rode.

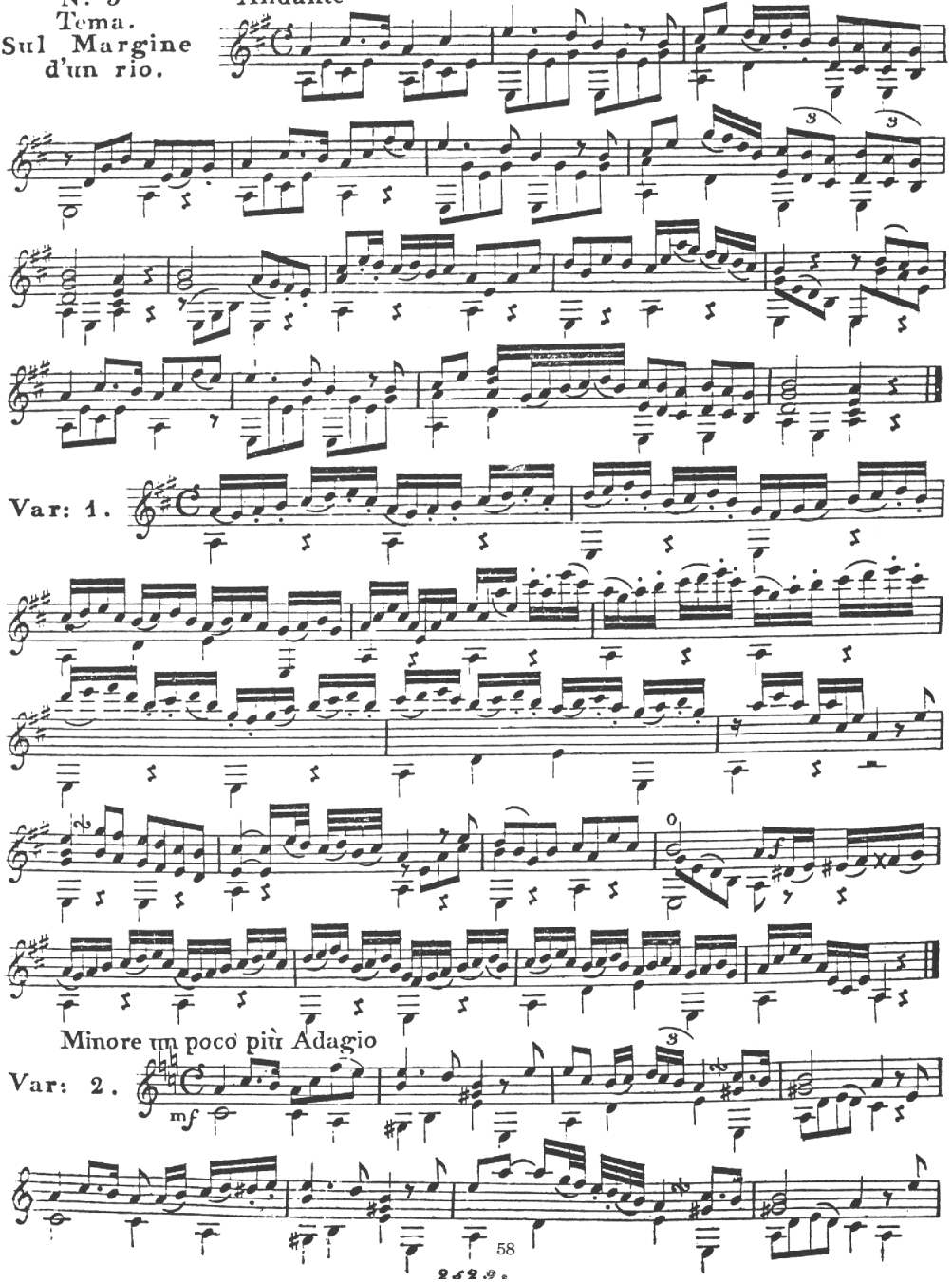


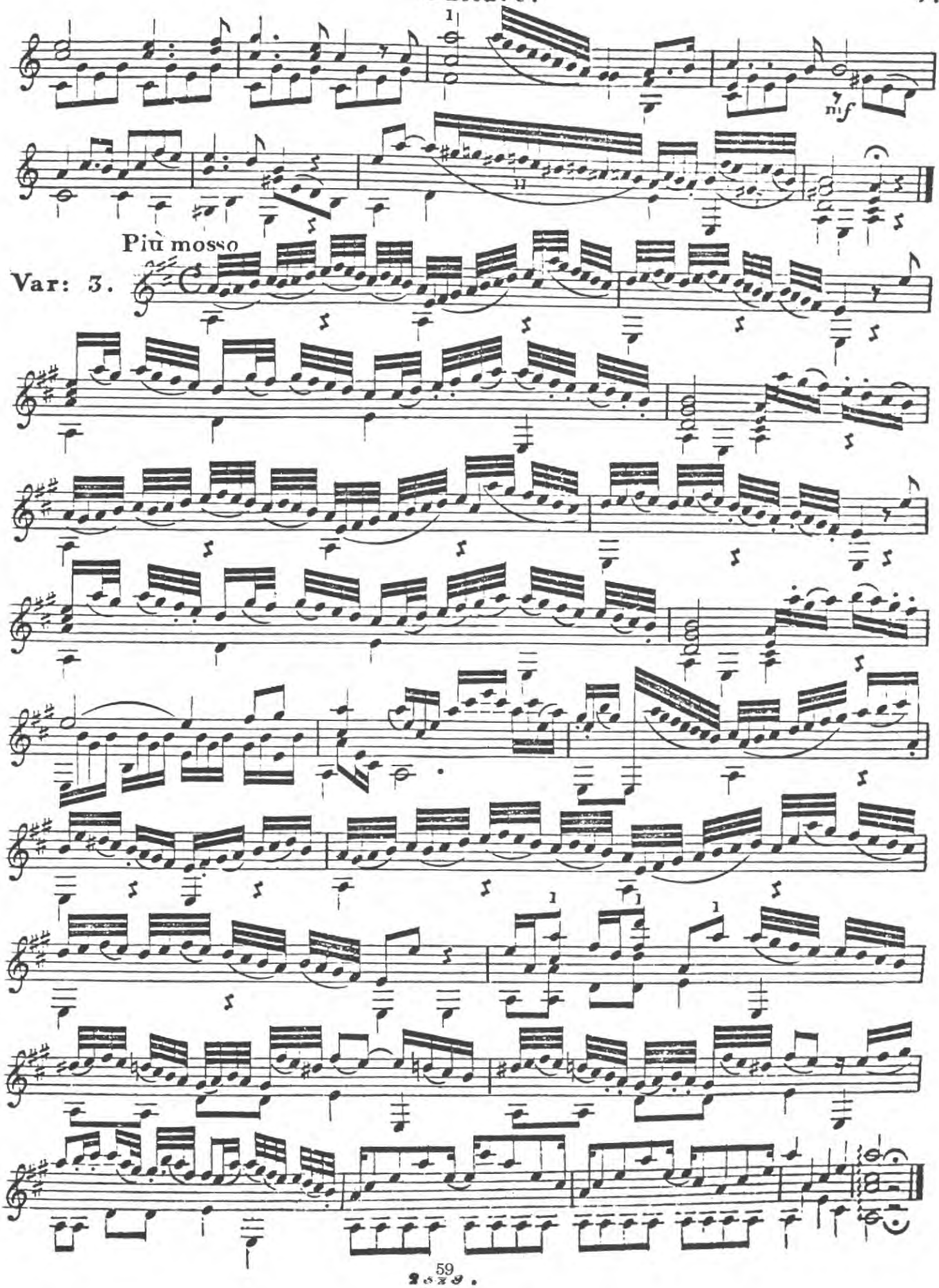


2629.

Nº 3
Tema.
Sul Margine
d'un rio.

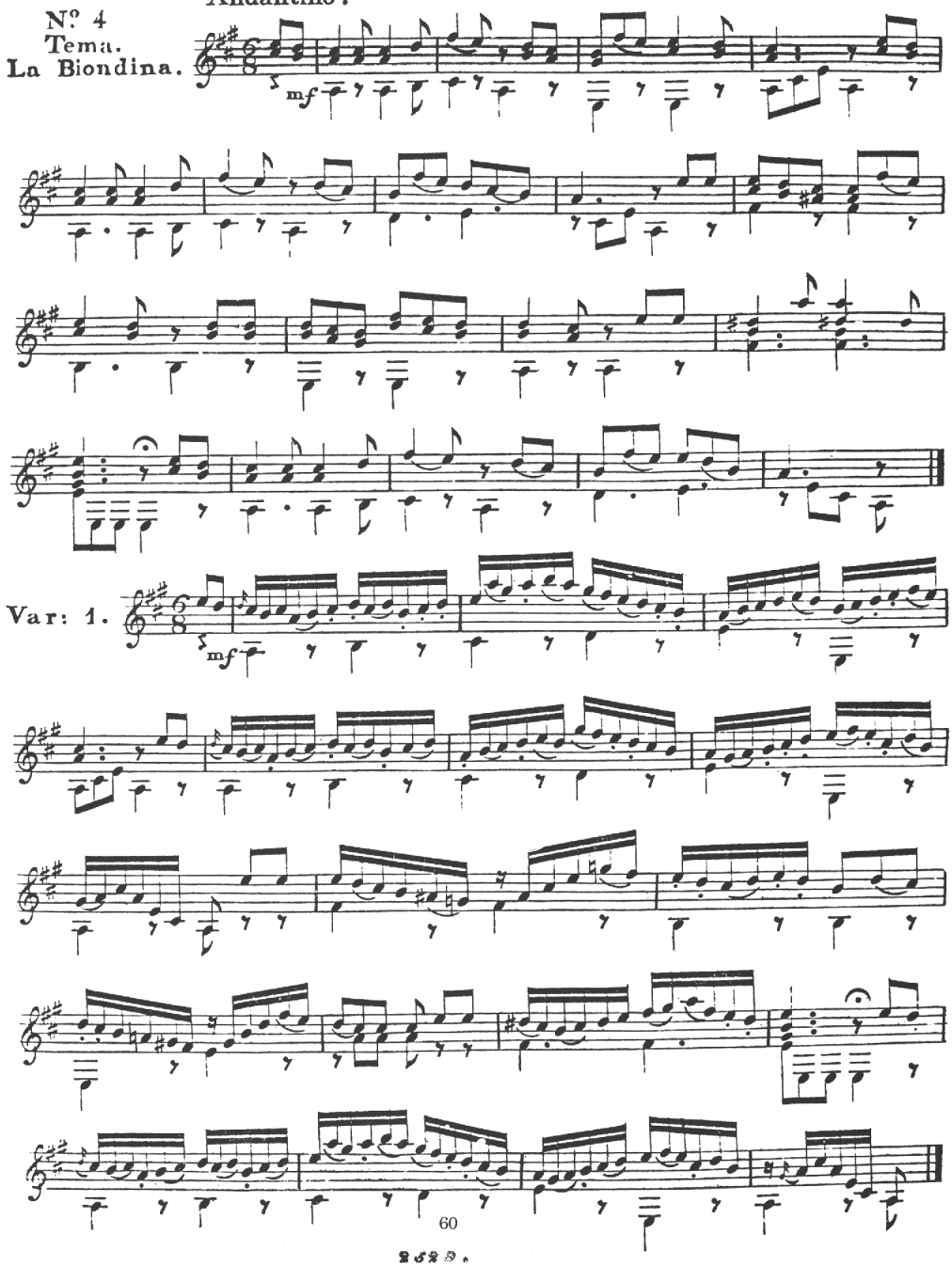
Andante

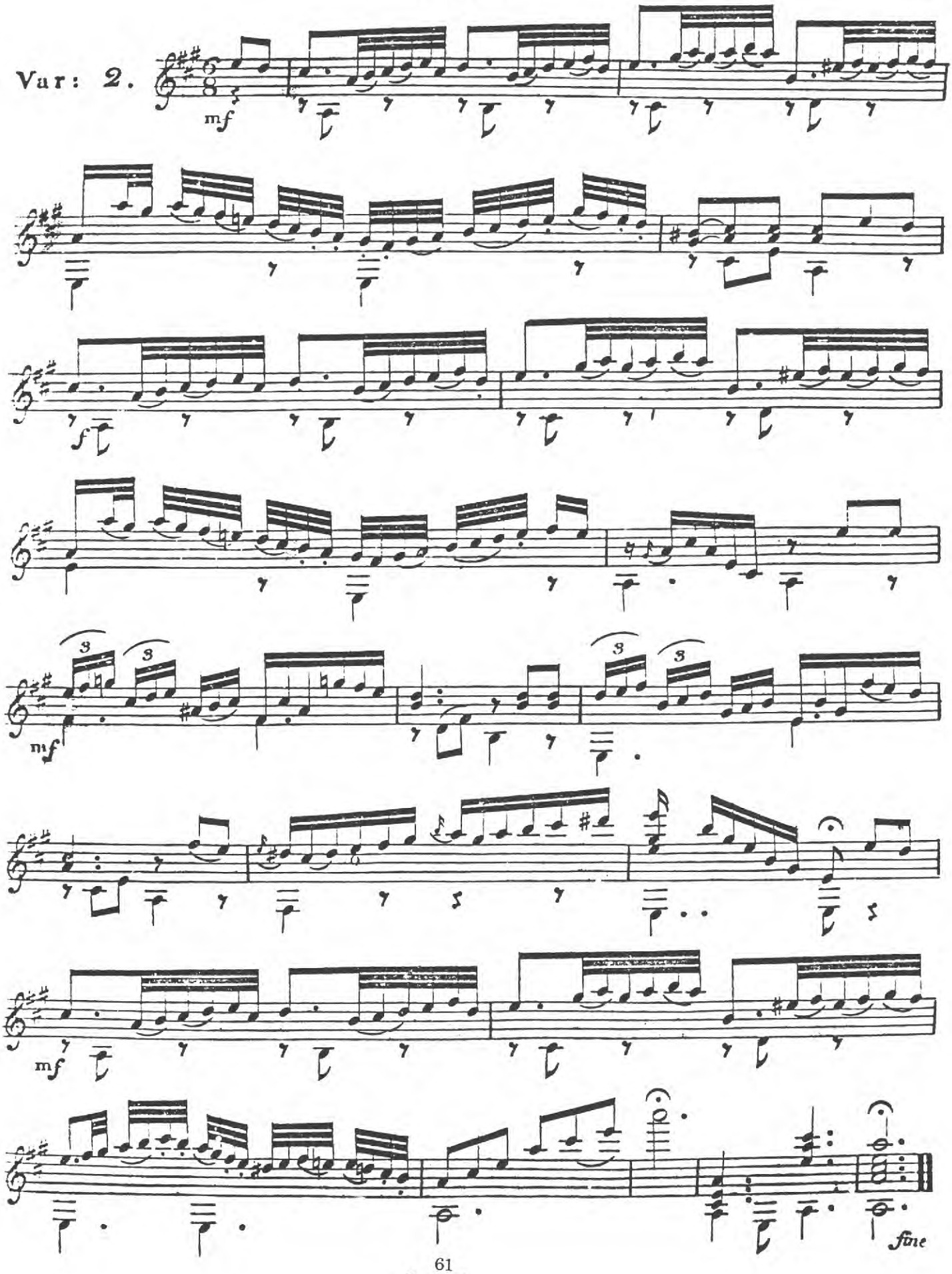



Più mosso
Var: 3.

Andantino.

Nº 4
Tema.
La Biondina.




Var: 2.
mf
f
mf
mf
fine