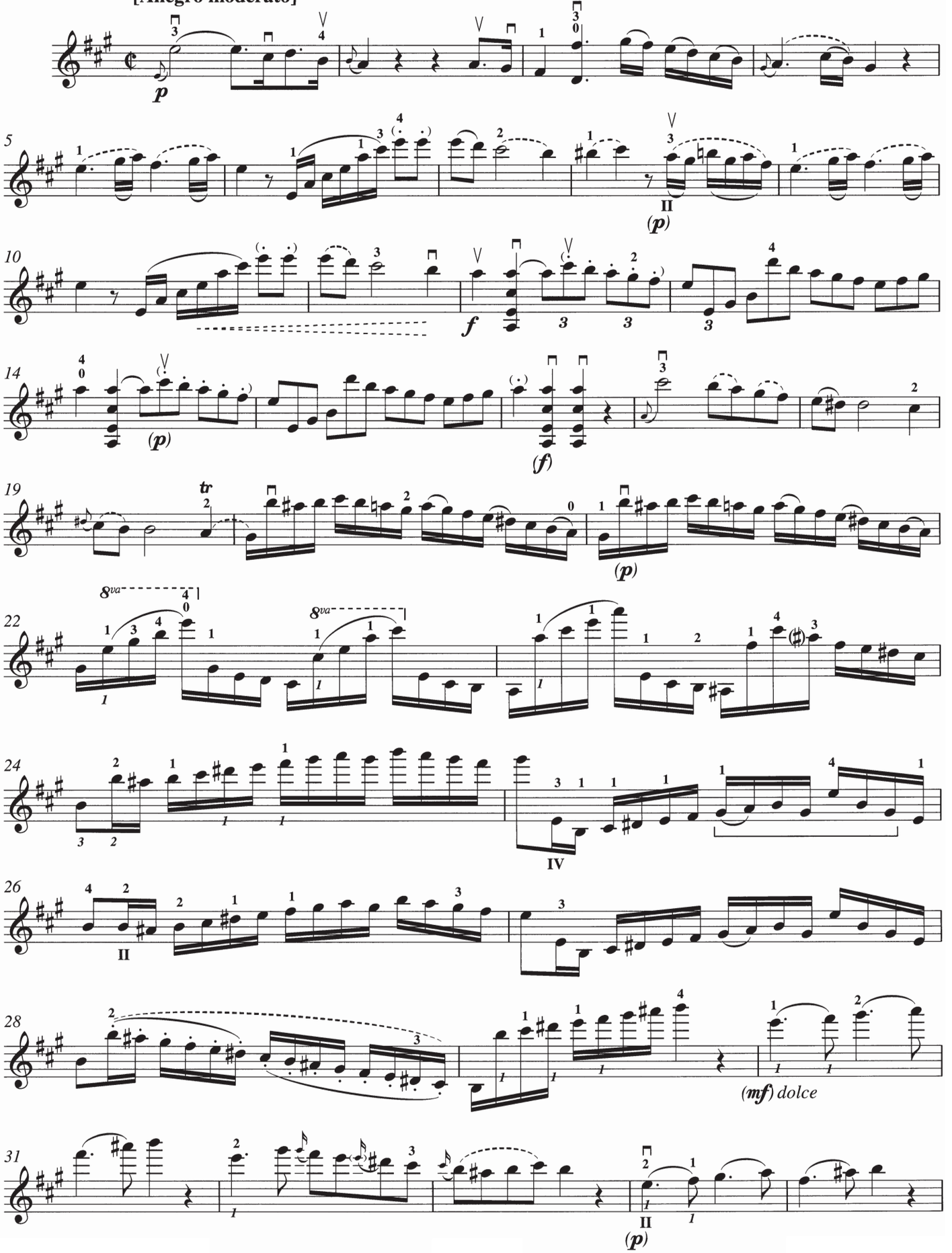
Sonata a violino solo

I

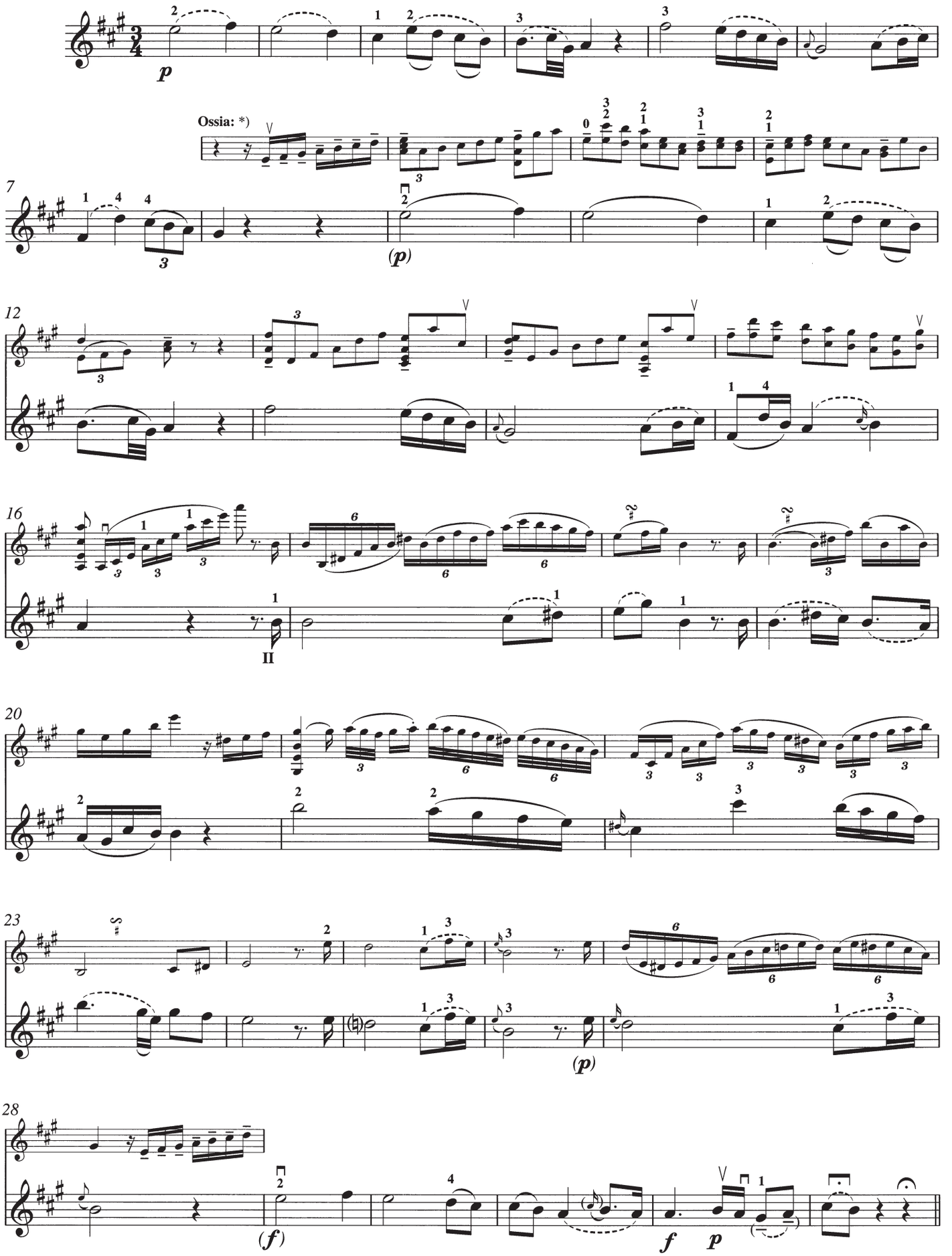
Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840)
Herausgegeben von Michael Jelden

[Allegro moderato]



II

Adagio non tanto



*) Ausführungsvorschlag des Herausgebers

Afterword

The present Sonata in A major for unaccompanied violin, by Niccolò Paganini (1782–1840), has come down to us solely in an anonymous contemporary copyist's manuscript; no autograph is extant. Its authenticity is certified by Maria Rosa Moretti and Anna Sorrento in their *Catalogo tematico delle musiche di Niccolò Paganini* (1982), where it is listed as M.S. 83 in close proximity to two other previously unpublished pieces for unaccompanied violin: *Inno patriottico* (M.S. 81) and *Tema variato* (M.S. 82). All three are preserved in the city of Genoa. Since 1982 the copy of the A-major Sonata has been owned by the Banca Carige (Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia) in Genoa, which acquired the manuscript from the private collection of Oscar Shapiro in Washington (how it arrived there is unknown). The editor and the publishers wish to thank the Banca Carige for kindly granting access to the source for the purposes of our edition, the first to present this work in print.

The unusual orthography of the original wording on the manuscript's title page – *Sonata à Violin Solo / por Paganini on Livrna* – has given rise to speculation. The term "Livrno" may be interpreted as "Livorno" (Leghorn) or "Livron," thereby relating the work's genesis to Paganini's stay in Leghorn and to an otherwise unknown figure named "Mr. Livron." The autobiography that Paganini dictated to the physician, musicologist, and composer Peter Lichtenthal in February 1828 has the following to say: "At the age of seventeen he [i.e. Paganini] undertook a journey through upper Italy and Tuscany [...]. One day, when he found himself in Leghorn for his pleasure, without an instrument, a Mr. Livron lent him one so that he could play a concerto by Viotti, and then gave it to him as a present." (Translated from Edward Neill: *Niccolò Paganini*, Munich, 1990, p. 331.)

Legend has it that while staying in Leghorn, Paganini gambled away his own instrument the day before the concert. The Sonata may therefore have been written as a gesture of thanks to Mr. Livron and presented to him as a return favor. Paganini himself called the gift "*il mio cannone violino*" ("my cannon-violin") in reference to its full sound. Built in 1743 by Bartolomeo Giuseppe Guarneri "del Gesù" in Cremona, it has remained in the Paganini estate to the present day and is now housed in the Palazzo Tursi in Genoa. The winner of the annual Paganini Competition receives an opportunity to play the instrument.

With its severe technical demands (harmonics, double stops, extreme positions, and so forth), the Sonata itself reflects not only the high level of virtuosity characteristic of Paganini's music, but his firm resolve to appear as a "serious" composer. The work consists of three movements in the same key. It begins with an extended (untitled) opening movement in classical sonata-allegro form, followed by a songlike *Adagio non tanto* that functions as a brief eye in the storm between the brilliant outside movements. The concluding *Polonoise variée* is laid out as a set of variations, a popular form in Paganini's day, and one to which he also turned in the above-mentioned *Inno patriottico* and *Tema variato*. In their overall design, none of these three compositions attains the stylistic unity of Paganini's later sets of concert variations with orchestral accompaniment, such as *I Palpiti*, *La Primavera*, and *Maestosa Suonata Sentimentale*. It is thus safe to assume that the A-major Sonata, like its two companions, is a youthful work, as was also suggested, at least for the Sonata, in Paganini's above-mentioned autobiography.

The A-major Sonata is Paganini's only contribution to its genre except for the *Sonata a violino solo* (M.S. 6), a short concert piece consisting of an Introduction and Allegro that bears no relation to a sonata beyond its title. It is, moreover, one of the few large-scale works for unaccompanied violin from the early romantic era. Viewed in this light, it is the editor's firm belief that his edition will add an interesting and previously unpublished work to the repertoire for solo violin.

When performing the Sonata, players should take the opportunity to bravely add ornaments and embellishments to the second movement. It is fully in keeping with the composer's intentions for players to add things of their own devising (a suggestion along these lines has been enclosed by the editor). The third movement may prompt some performers to cut a variation while others may well want to insert one of their own. This would be consistent not only with the composer's musical way of thinking, but with the spirit of the times in which the work originated.

Avanti!

Stuttgart, December 2008 *Michael Jelden*

(Translation: J. Bradford Robinson)