

# Mastering THE BOW

PART 2:

STUDIES FOR BASS

SPICCATO

DEVELOPING THE STROKE SYSTEMATICALLY THROUGH A  
VARIETY OF EXERCISES AND ÉTUDES

BY

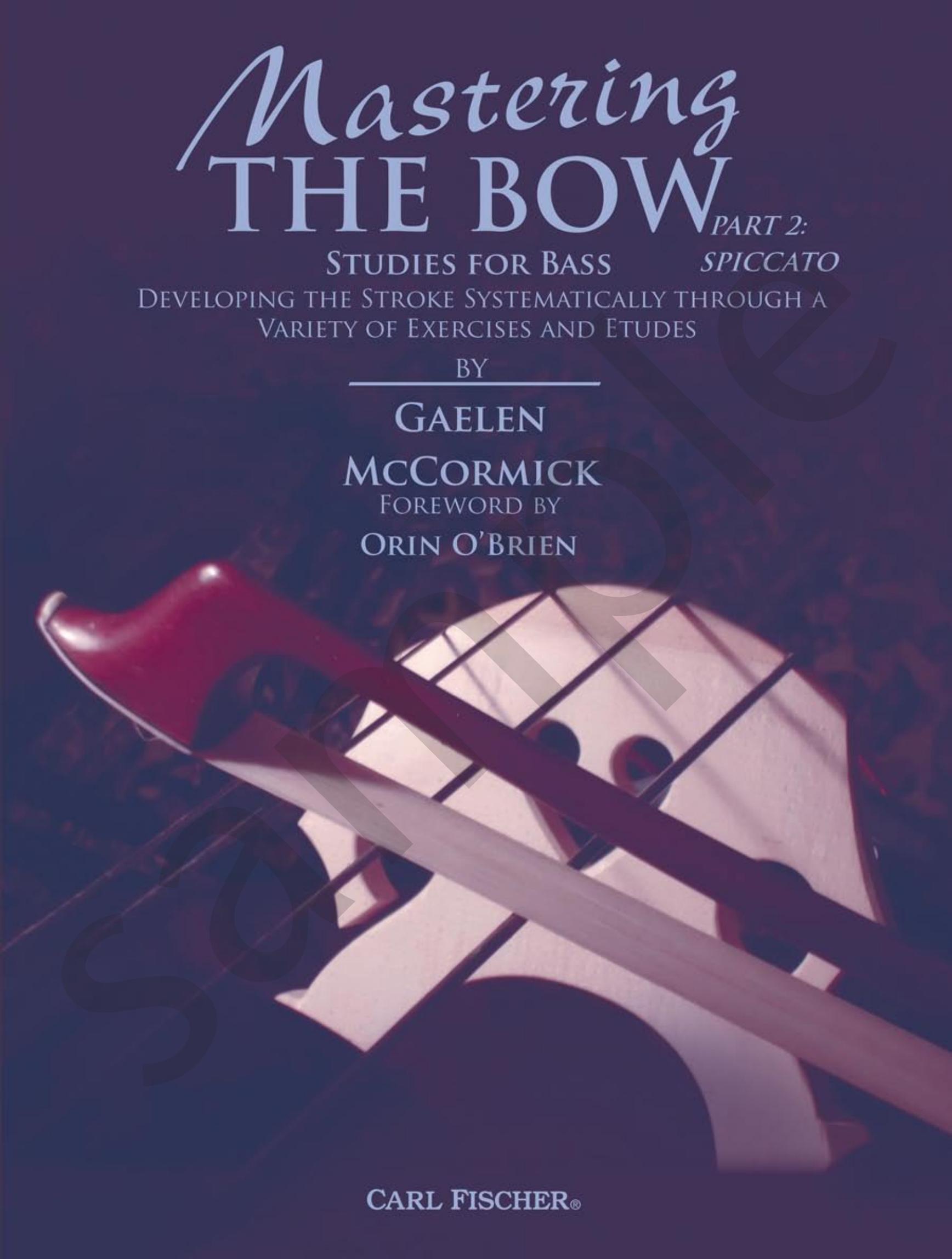
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FOREWORD BY

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## INTRODUCTION

The spiccato is by far the most complex stroke we use, and the one that we tend to arrive at later in our development as bass players. In searching for ways to develop my own technical ability at this stroke, I was frustrated that there was not one go-to book for working out the myriad of ways spiccato will be used. For instance, there are some good books to help develop this stroke, such as Frederick Zimmermann's *Contemporary Concept of Bowing Technique for the Double Bass* and Otakar Ševčík's *School of Bowing Technique*, Op. 2. While these books are incredibly thorough, I was searching for etudes that used melody and ways to combine the stroke with other strokes, as we all do in solo and orchestral repertoire. This book aims to remedy that situation. I have delved into the etude books of cello, bassoon, violin, viola and, of course, our own materials to develop this work. My hope is that you will find ways to improve your own spiccato and enjoy this guide to working through it.

—Gaelen McCormick,  
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### The Strokes Covered in Part 2 and Their Order of Development

In Part 1, we explored the détaché and martelé strokes, the “mother strokes” from which all other strokes are derived. In this book, we will focus on two off-the-string strokes that are most valuable to bassists: spiccato and brush stroke. In looking at the “family tree” of bow strokes, the brush stroke does come from the martelé stroke; then the spiccato is a higher, more off-the-string stroke, leading to the sautillé, and then the ricochet stroke. While the brush stroke is executed closer to the string and is more like martelé, this book will focus on learning the spiccato first, then on feeling and executing the brush stroke. Once the player can feel and execute the differences between martelé and spiccato, brush is much easier to learn. Because sautillé and ricochet have a more limited use in our solo and orchestral repertoire, they will not be developed in the etudes of Part 2.

### What Is Spiccato?

This is an off-the-string, bounced stroke, one which utilizes the natural spring of the stick, the hair and the string. This stroke can vary in height and width depending on the amount of tone or percussive attack the player desires. When working on the stroke, remember that part of this work is allowing the stick to bounce, and part is controlling the variables of that bounce.

Some notable and thorough definitions of the stroke:

Ivan Galamian, *Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*. (Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1962), p. 75.

...the bow is dropped from the air and leaves the string again after every note. In doing so it describes an arc-like motion....The bow contacts the string at or near the bottom of the arc. The movement has both a horizontal and a vertical component. If the horizontal component is emphasized more than the vertical one, then the arc will be flatter. In this case, the tone will have more substance and will be rounder, softer, more vowel-like. If the vertical component is more prominent, the arc is narrower and deeper... and consequently the tone is sharper, more accented and percussive. Tone quality and dynamics will also be influenced by the height of the drop: the higher the starting point, the louder and, in general, the sharper will be the resulting sound.

It is very important to listen to the tone quality and to try to obtain a resonant sound. Therefore, it is advisable in most cases to stress the horizontal element rather than the vertical; in other words, to use generally more bow and not let it jump too high. The direction of the bow has to be watched, and the weight, speed, and sounding point must be adjusted in just the right way for the resonant fullness of sound that is desirable. In the concert hall especially, violinists will be well advised to avoid the use of the too-steep and too-percussive spiccato. Although it might sound fairly good at close range, it does not carry properly because of the lack of vowel quality.

### Method 1: from the Air down to the String

### Method 2: from the String until the Bow Lifts Off

These are all within the category of *spiccato*

1. Silent tapping, letting the bow's natural spring happen, stays in one spot on string, in the middle of the bow



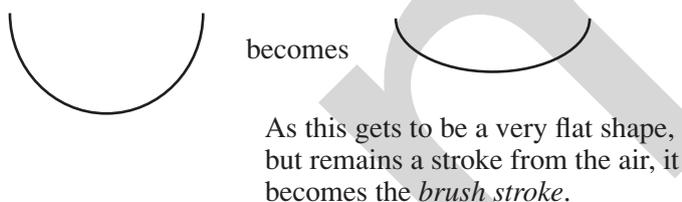
2. Slightly widen the stroke, creating a very sharp V, start to move this shape toward the balance point



3. Continue to widen the "V", allowing the bow to stay in the string longer in the middle now, hand gets slightly firmer as the shape progresses from up/down bounce, to a wider "U" shape



4. As the shape continues to widen, the stroke flattens out, allowing more time in the string during the middle of the shape, this is less percussive and more singing



5. Allow the shape to become flat, but continue to articulate the ends of each stroke, letting this become martelé with a pinch that begins each stroke. This will yield a stroke with a very clear beginning articulation. The bow stays on the string now.



Notice the shape still isn't quite 100% flat, as the wrist still acts at the ends of the stroke to prepare the "pinch" that starts martelé. The line underneath is for perspective.

6. Finally let the stroke become fully on the string, *détaché* bow changes. This should produce a smooth, seamless sound.



1. Start on the string, *détaché*, and confine the stroke to the lower half of the bow



2. Add the "pinch" of martelé beginning articulations (indicated with the bar), still on the string.



3. Continue to confine the sweep of the bow to the lower half, using martelé changes, and now speed up the bow changes

- Start ♩ = 80, play as quarter notes, then as eighth notes, then triplets.
- Move the metronome up to 120, begin again at quarter notes, move to eighth notes, then triplets.
- Finally, return to 80 on the metronome, play sixteenths, and move your metronome up by increments of four (84, 88, 92, etc), maintaining solid rhythm of sixteenth at each metronome marking.



4. As you increase the tempo, stay light in the right hand and allow the natural spring of the bow to lift out at the end of the stroke. Watch for the stroke to keep passing through the balance point, which you have marked on your bow with a little sticker. The amount of bow can decrease now that the bow is lifting off the string.

5. Your bow grip will need to be just firm enough to keep redirecting the bow back to the string for the next stroke.

6. It is helpful to think of the hair contacting the side of the string as this stroke becomes more vertical: down-bows contact the left side (G-string side) of the string, up-bows contact the right side (E-string side) of the string.

7. Watch that the stick stays in the same plane, and does not twist as you change bows. Observing the tip will help to see if the stick is twisting at the change. Think of the bow being held between two plates of glass; the hair can move left and right, toward the string and away. This keeps it in its own plane and doesn't allow wobbling.

## Etude No. 1. Simple Spiccato Development Exercises

As you develop the spiccato stroke, start with working on one string at a time, using scales, listening for clean and consistent attacks for all notes, no noise when shifting. Be aware of the amount of bow needed to play higher positions and higher strings compared to lower positions and lower strings. As you master these preliminary exercises, be sure to go through them in all keys, and also starting up-bow. The goal is to have such technical control that bow direction becomes no issue.

### 1. Length of Stroke as Pitches Ascend

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♩ = 88–104

Musical notation for Exercise 1, consisting of four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first staff starts with a finger number '0' above the first note. The second and third staves continue the ascending scale. The fourth staff starts with finger numbers '2' and '3' above the first two notes. The exercise consists of continuous eighth-note patterns with a slight bow lift between notes.

### 2. Crossing Strings Cleanly

Musical notation for Exercise 2, consisting of four staves of music in bass clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The exercise involves eighth-note patterns that cross strings. Finger numbers are indicated above notes: 4, 2, 1, 0 on the first staff; 4, 2 on the second staff; and 4 on the third and fourth staves. The exercise consists of continuous eighth-note patterns with a slight bow lift between notes.

## Etude No. 3. Simple Spiccato

The pitches of this etude often move in a scale pattern but sometimes move in thirds. Finger this in a way that keeps the bow on one string while creating more shifts for the left hand. This settles the bow and allows the spiccato to continue more easily.

**Preparation:** double the notes to slow the pace of shifting and focus on stroke



♩ = 92

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI (1821–1889), No. 17



5



9



13



17



21



25



29



## CHAPTER 2: RESTARTING SPICCATO

Now that we have introduced the spiccato stroke, this chapter will focus on combining it with other strokes and interruptions to the continuity of the stroke, like rests or longer rhythms. The challenge here is to restart the stroke from the string and get into spiccato right away. Focus on where the stroke begins in the stick, close to the balance point of your bow. Each etude in this chapter uses a different way of interrupting the flow of the stroke, and sometimes requires restarting the stroke “backwards” or up-bow. Our goal is to make the stroke always sound the same, so that starting up-bow sounds just as confident and clear as starting down-bow.

## Etude No. 9. Stop-Start

The flow of spiccato is interrupted here by the quarter note followed by a new down-bow. Lift and reset the bow back to the balance point by shortening the quarter note as shown in the preparation below. This etude also explores restarting spiccato in the opposite direction (m. 5) following martelé eighth notes. Start from the string to create a uniform attack in spiccato.

Preparation:  $\text{♩} = 84$

is performed:  $\text{♩} = 84$  set on

$\text{♩} = 84$

GIOVANNI BOTTESINI (1821–1889)

## CHAPTER 3: SPICCATO COMBINED WITH SLURS

Adding slurs to the line is another common way of interrupting the flow of the spiccato stroke. This chapter opens with a variety of exercises that test playing the slur in different places within a group of four notes. For an exhaustive exploration of this concept, I recommend working on the Sevcik *School of Bowing Technique*, Op. 2 and Frederick Zimmermann's *A Contemporary Concept of Bowing Technique for the Double Bass*.

To help restart the spiccato after the slur, watch that the bow travels within the balance point area of the stick during the slur, making the whole gesture feel very compact. Many of these slurs also cross strings, adding another layer of complexity to the stroke. Use the wrist more than the arm to bring the bow to the new string, allowing the stroke stay as flat as possible. If the stroke stays on the new string, correct the arm level right away. Otherwise, keep the arm in the plane of the string where you will spend the most time. For the following example, keep the arm on the A-string level and cross to the D-string using wrist and/or forearm.



## Etude No. 19. Preparatory Examples

### Combining Slur and Staccato

The following etudes put a two-note slur in all the possible locations within the four-note grouping and combine it with string crossings. This idea is similar to the last chapter, where we interrupted and restarted the spiccato. The difference here is that the spiccato stroke is continuous with minimal change during the slurred notes.

♩ = 88–92

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1

2

3

4

5

## CHAPTER 4: SPICCATO IN TRIPLETS

The challenge with playing spiccato in triplets is that the emphasis keeps switching from down-bow to up-bow, where in a duple sequence of notes (a line of sixteenth notes, for instance), the emphasis was always on the first group of four notes, which was always down-bow. Draw on the experience from earlier etudes that required starting up-bow, feel the extra little emphasis needed to keep the beat sounding correctly. Begin practicing these triplet etudes with a bit of extra pulse on each beat to clarify the groups of three notes. As that becomes comfortable, reduce the extra pulsing and listen for the overall line of each measure to be clear.

## Etude No. 26. Triplets

Here are the basic combinations for two strings in triplets, with no slurs. One way to practice this is playing scales in thirds, which is shown here. Take this to all keys and registers, always crossing the string to keep the pattern going. Listen for emphasis on first note of each triplet and do not allow down-bows to be heavy and skew the beat.

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1

2

3

4

Detailed description of the musical exercises: The page contains four numbered exercises (1-4) for two strings in triplets. Each exercise consists of two staves of music in 4/4 time. Exercise 1 is in C major (no sharps or flats). Exercise 2 is in D major (one sharp, F#). Exercise 3 is in B minor (two flats, Bb, Eb). Exercise 4 is in E minor (three flats, Bb, Eb, Ab). Each exercise starts with a four-measure introduction of triplets, each with a bowing mark (V) above it. The second staff of each exercise contains a longer scale-like passage with various triplet patterns and fingering numbers (1, 2, 3, 4) indicated above the notes. A large, light gray watermark 'Sample' is oriented diagonally across the page.

## CHAPTER 5: BRUSH STROKE

The brush stroke comes into play at slower tempos or to produce a more melodic bounced stroke. There is no specific notation for this stroke, and it is primarily decided by the player or the conductor if it is appropriate to use. The stroke is very flat, and the hair spends more time in the string to allow more pitch and a less percussive attack compared to a true spiccato stroke. The right hand is fairly supple compared to the spiccato stroke, which feels firmer depending on the amount of attack and percussive bite required.

# Etude No. 34. Brush

(Humoresque)

Brush stroke is a flatter spiccato, kept very close to the string, which scoops the string and allows more time spent in the string during the stroke. Here the brush is used to recover on the two up-bows after the slurred eighth-notes in mm. 1 and 5, for example.

JOHANNES PALASCHKO (1877–1932), No. 1

♩ = 126–132

The musical score is written in bass clef with a 2/4 time signature. It consists of eight staves of music, with measure numbers 7, 14, 21, 28, 35, 42, and 49 indicated at the beginning of their respective staves. The dynamics are marked as follows:

- Staff 1: *p*
- Staff 2: *p*, *f*, *p*
- Staff 3: *pp*, *mf*
- Staff 4: *pp*
- Staff 5: *p*, *f*
- Staff 6: *p*, *f*, *pp*
- Staff 7: *p*, *mf*, *p*
- Staff 8: *pp*

The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic markings. A large watermark 'SAMPLE' is overlaid on the page.