The true ceremony of the sun

(string quartet no.1)

Chris Williams

Commissioned by, and dedicated to, the Flinders Quartet

The true ceremony of the sun

I

(darkness falls like leaves/on the loom of winter)

II

(doorway to another world - flickering/fleeting)

III

(under the broken scroll of the stars/voices like leaves of light)
for Jennie

Program Note (draft)

Perhaps surprisingly for a piece with ‘the sun' in its title, much of *The true ceremony of the sun* is a nocturnal piece, and this apparent paradox sets up a series of oppositional cycles - night and day, winter and summer, life and death - that animate the work and its form.

The title of the piece comes from the Scottish poet George Mackay Brown’s description of a famous Neolithic burial chamber, Maeshowe, on the Orkney Islands, north of mainland Scotland. This underground ceremonial chamber is oriented such that it captures the light of the sun on the winter solstice - providing numinous illumination of the dark chamber at the darkest time of the year. Although never stated explicitly, Mackay Brown’s point is that the true ceremony of the sun is the finding of light in darkness.

The subtitles of the three movements are all drawn from Mackay Brown’s writing or writing about the ceremonial chamber. To begin, we descend - into the tomb, but also into night, winter, darkness, and beyond. In the middle movement, the so-called ‘doorway to another world’ opens, as - like a flame - light fills the darkness, and finally, in the last movement (the emotional core of the piece) we return to the night transformed by the light.

The piece unfolds as a series of cycles within cycles. The first and last movements are more connected to one another than the middle, and all three movements unfold in three parts, so that we are perpetually in motion, always returning to the beginning again.

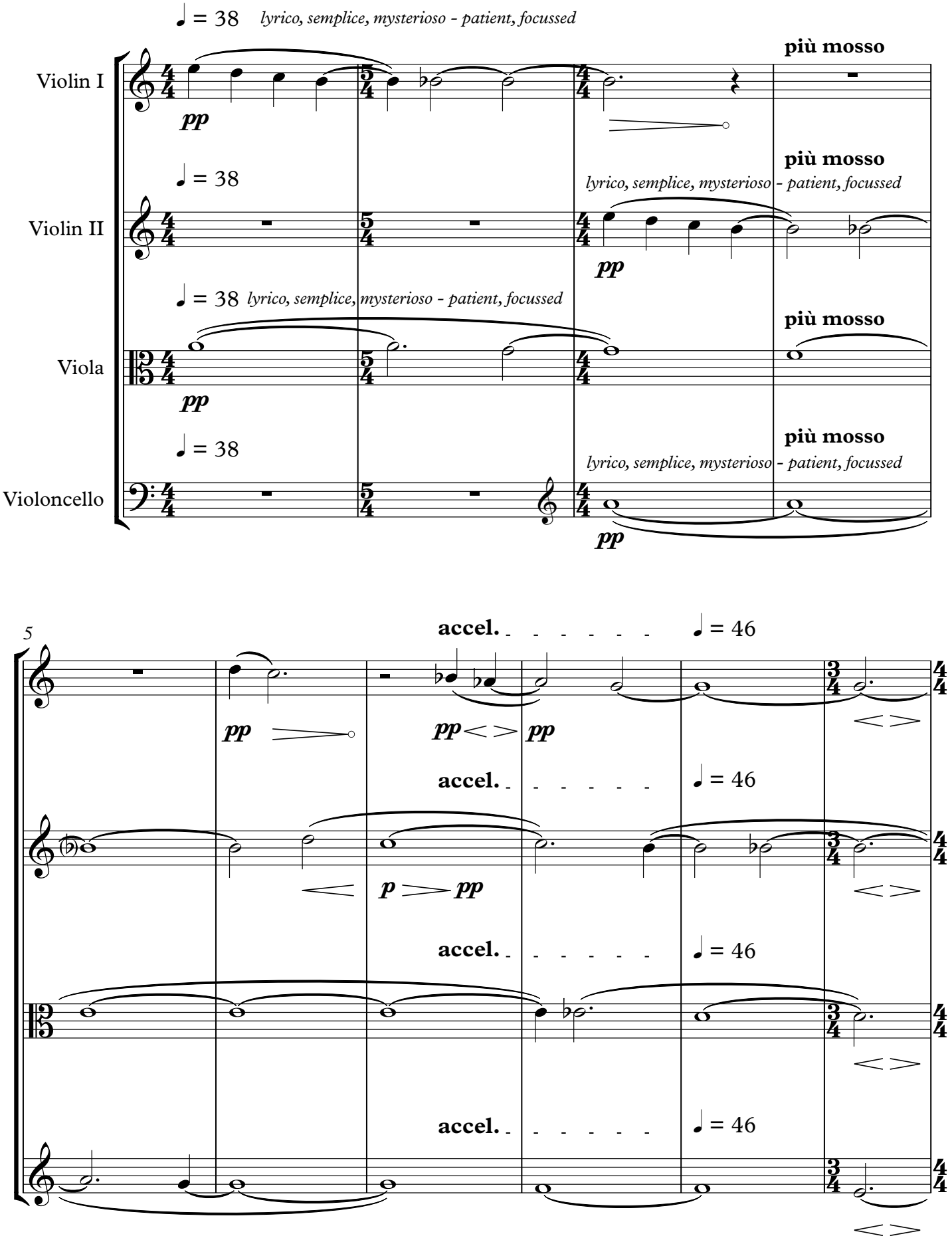
First performed by The Flinders Quartet at The David Li Sound Gallery,
Ian Potter Centre for the Performing Arts, Monash University, Melbourne,
on November 30 2024.

THE TRUE CEREMONY OF THE SUN

I

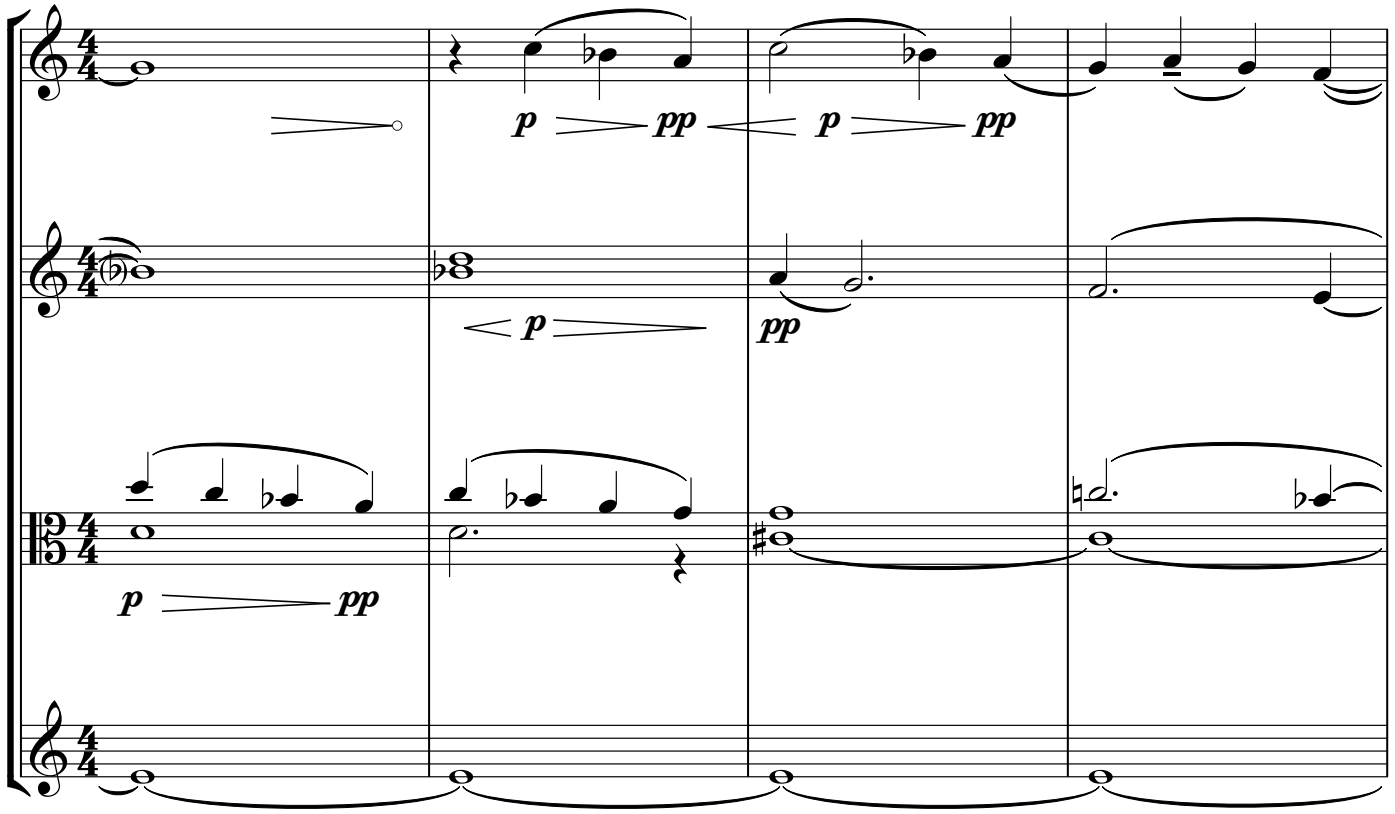
(darkness falls like leaves/on the loom of winter)

Chris Williams



A

11



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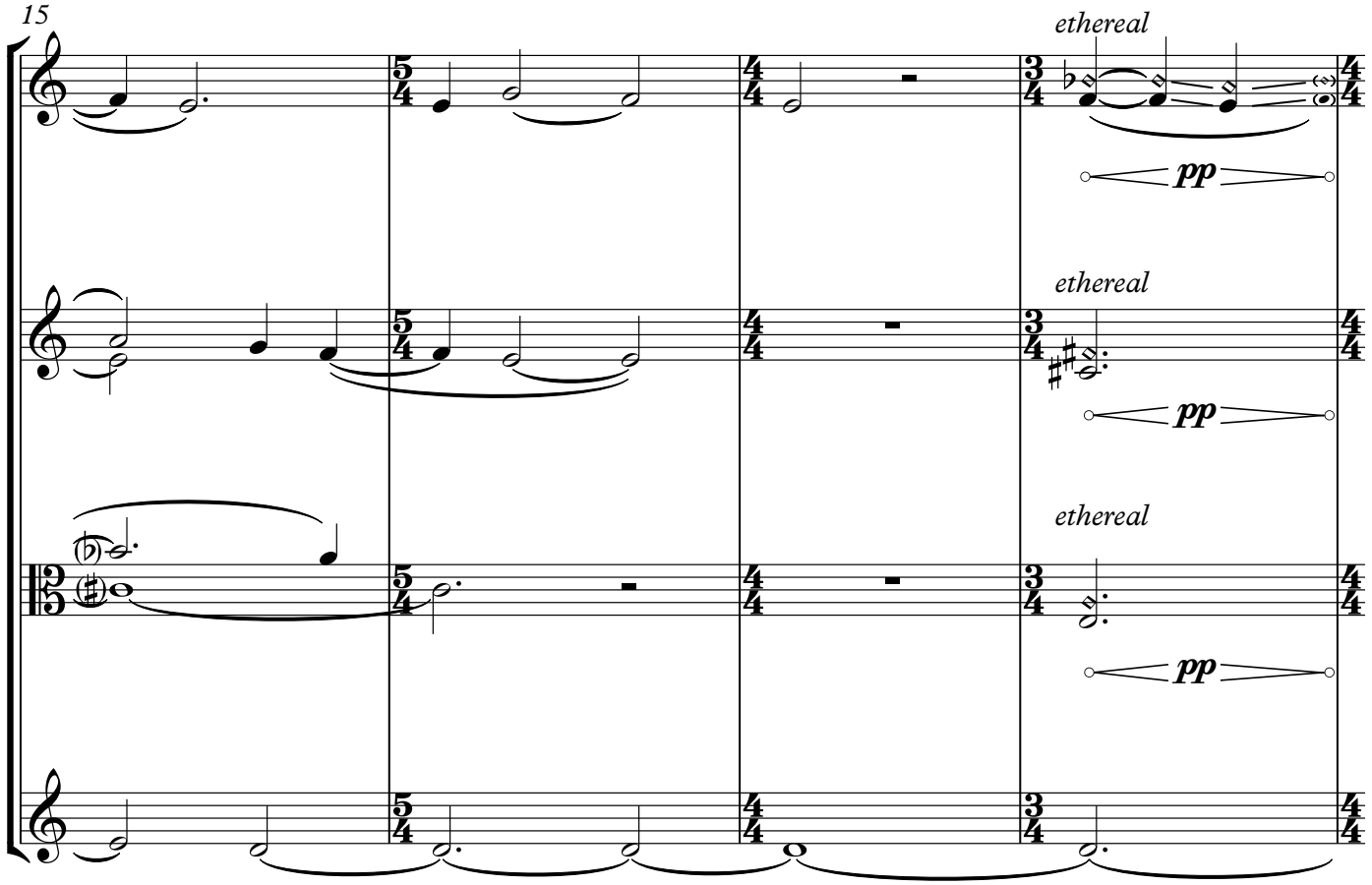

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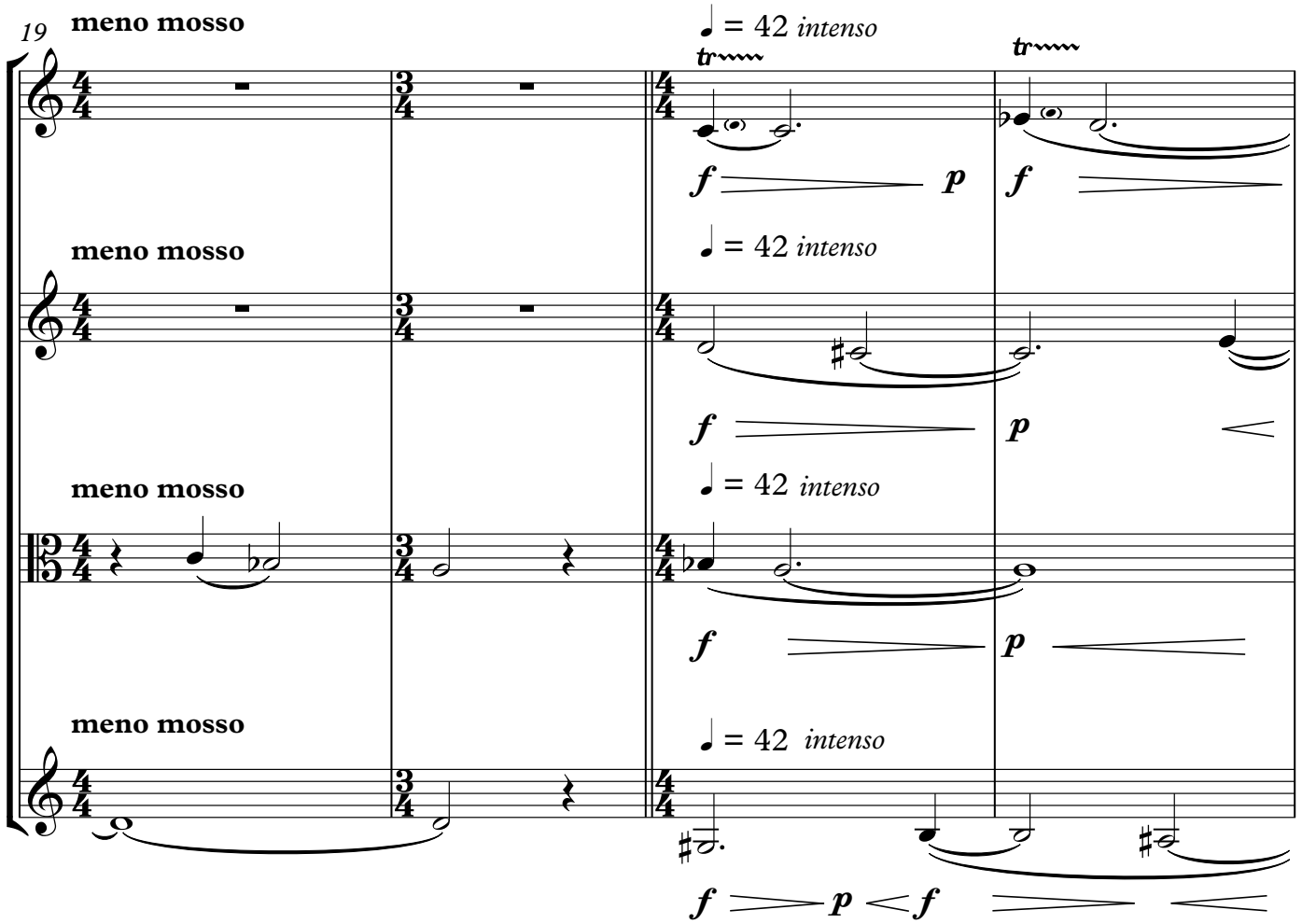
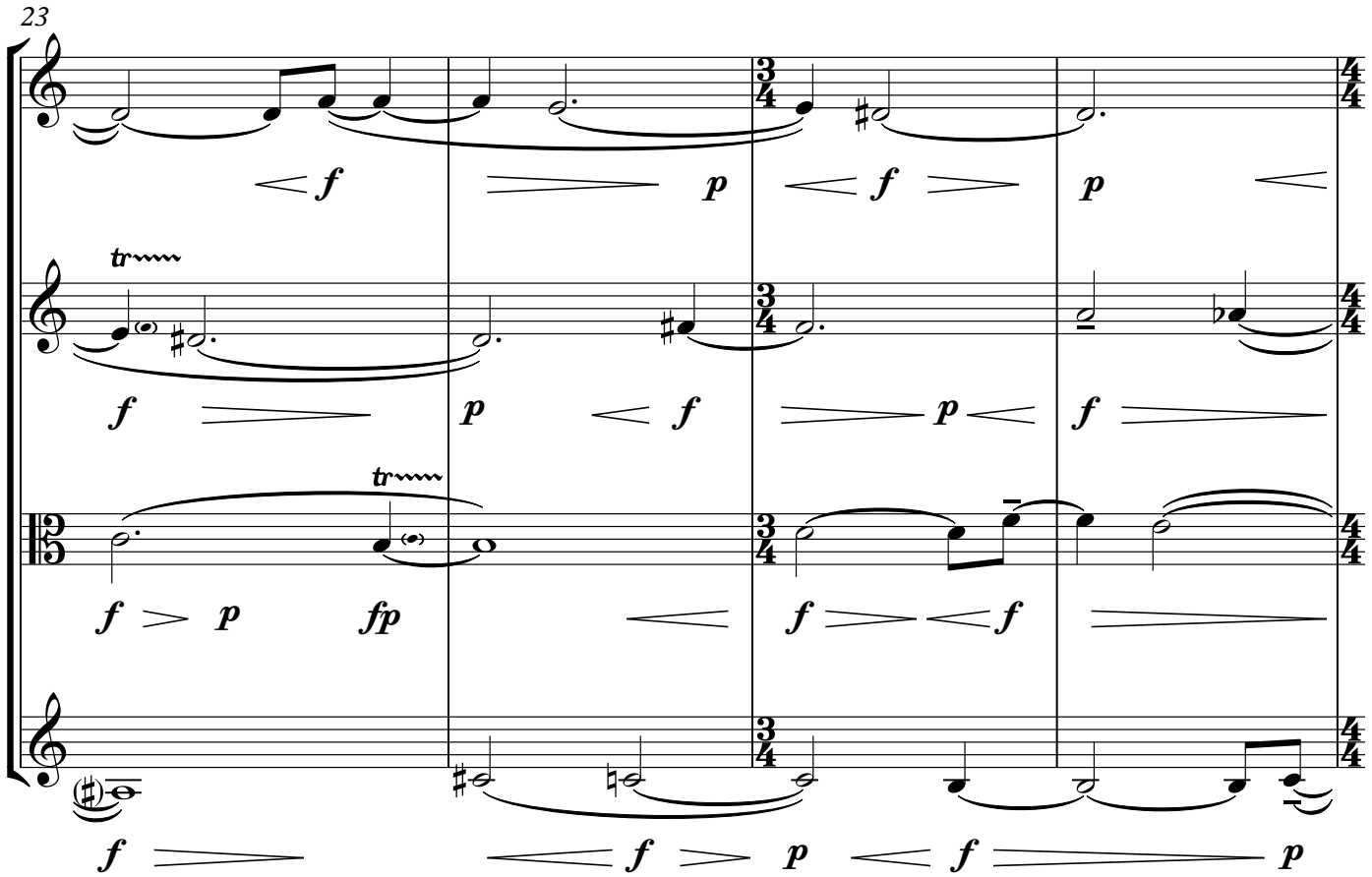
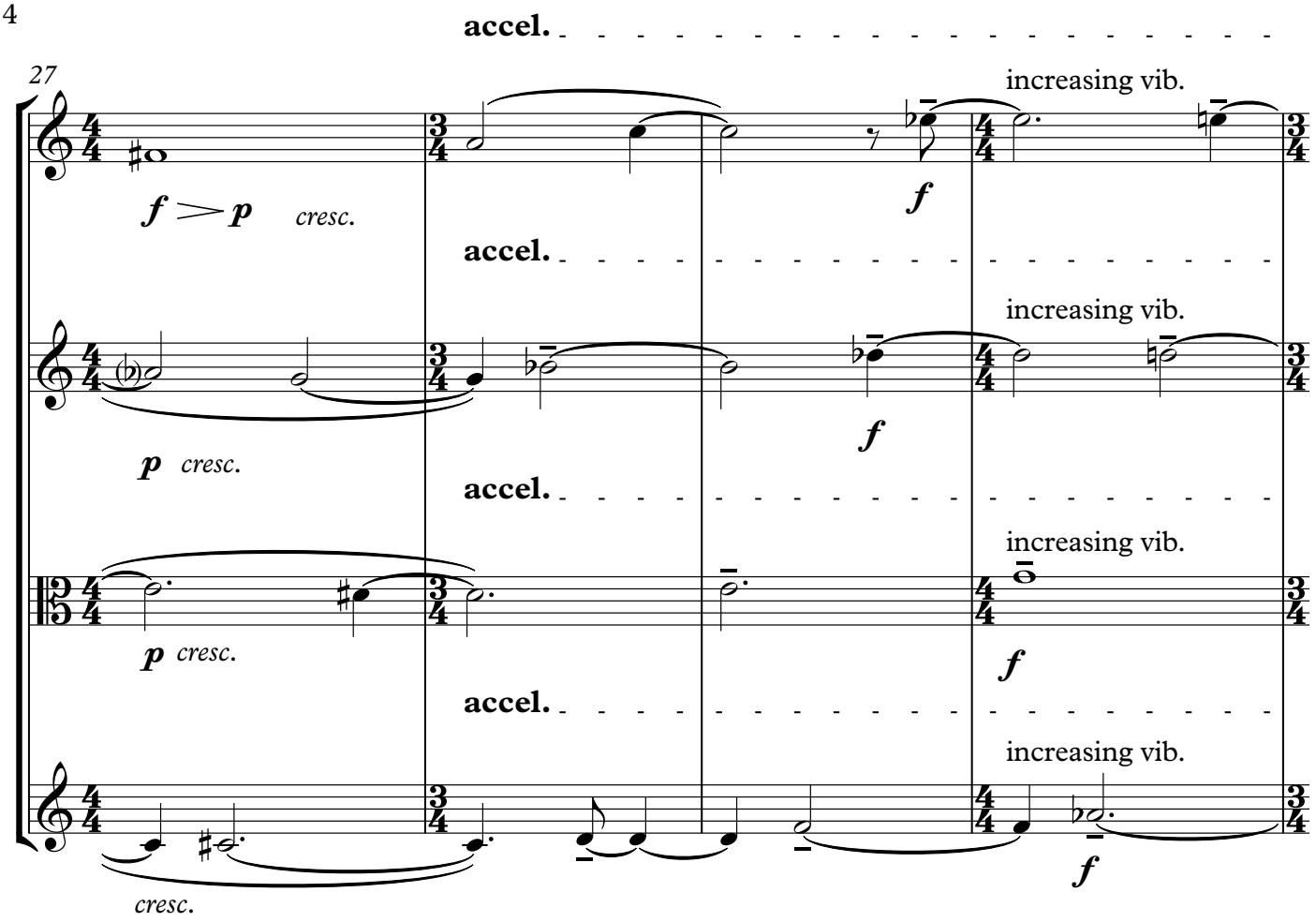
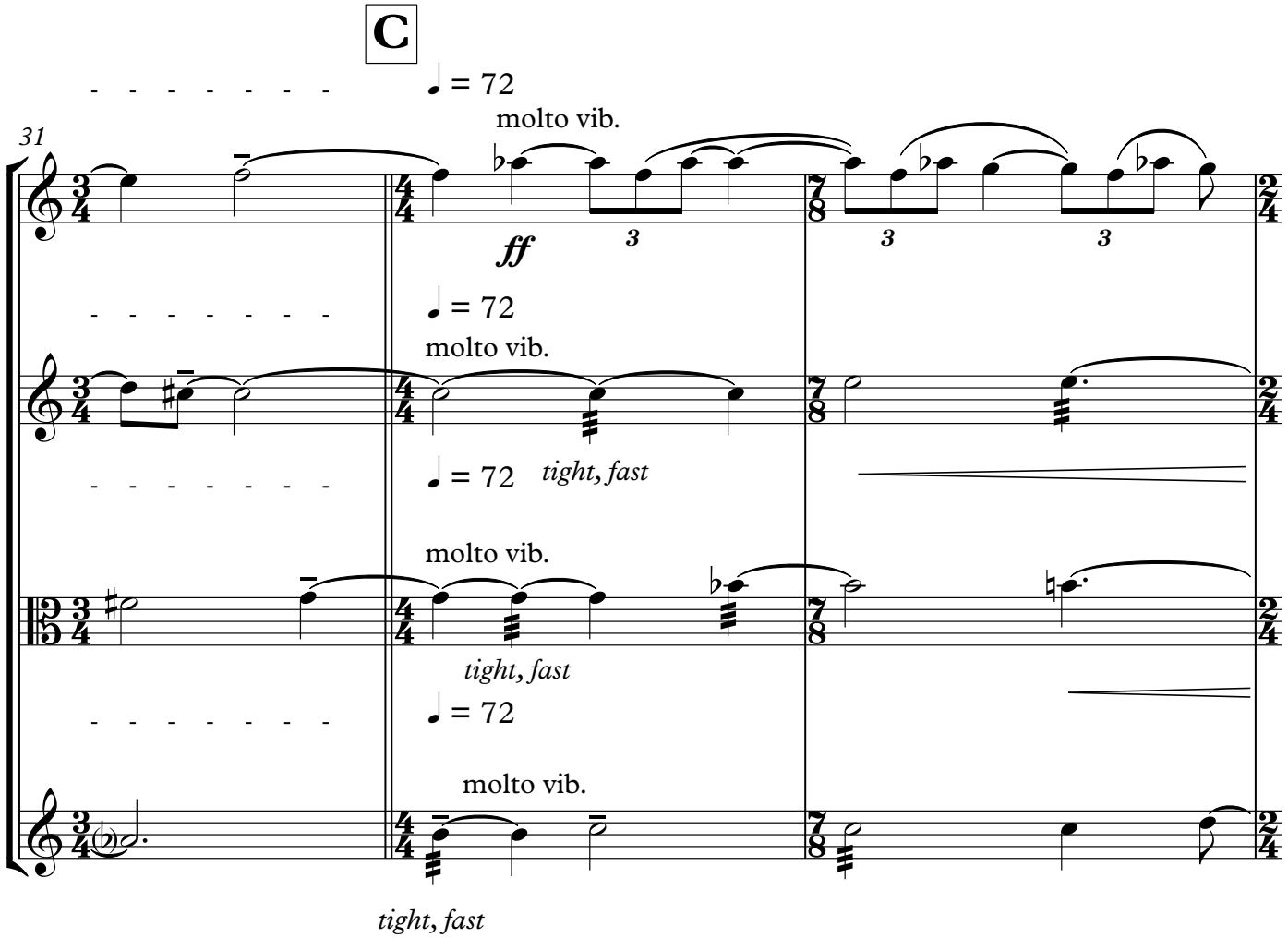
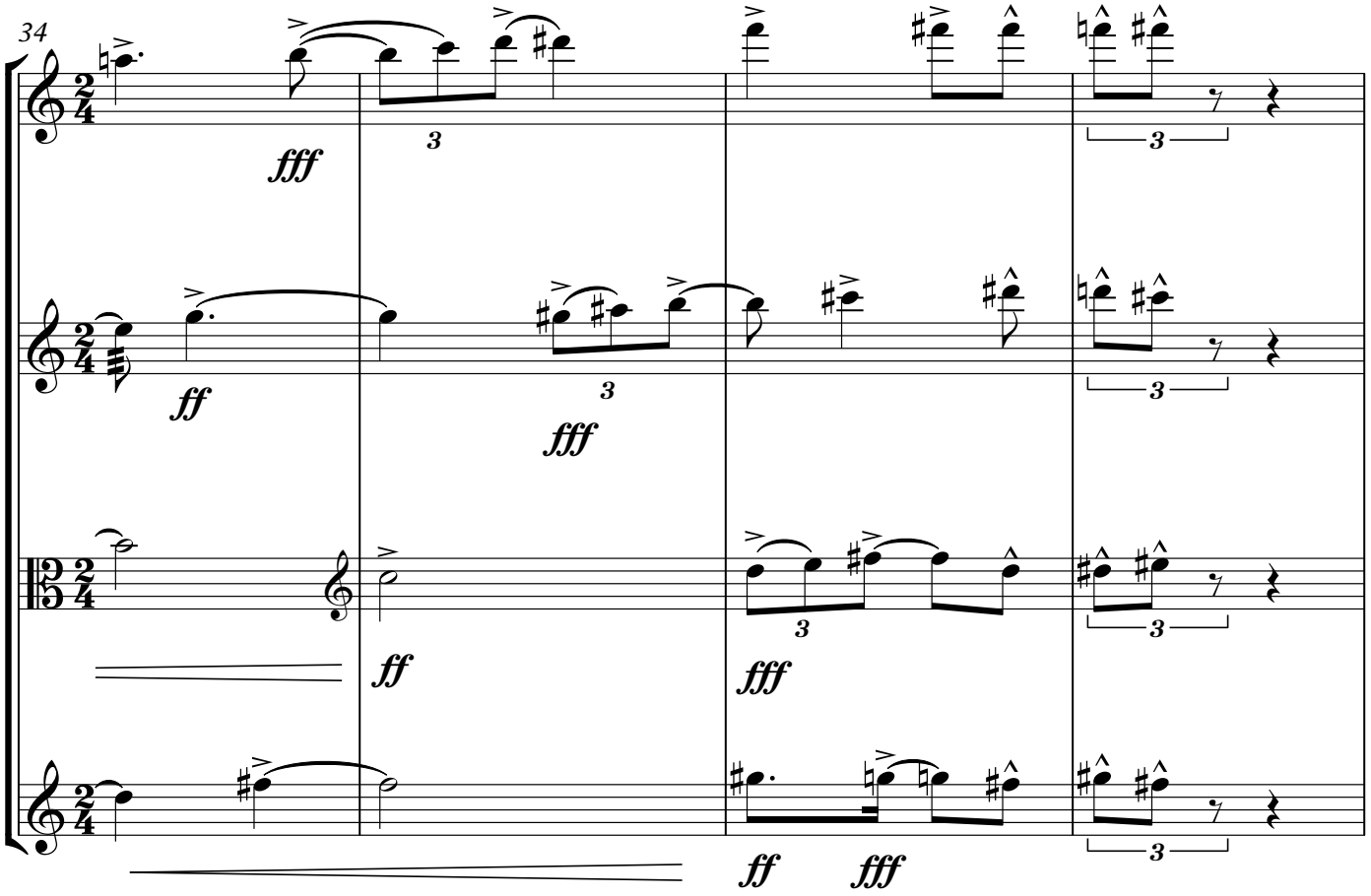
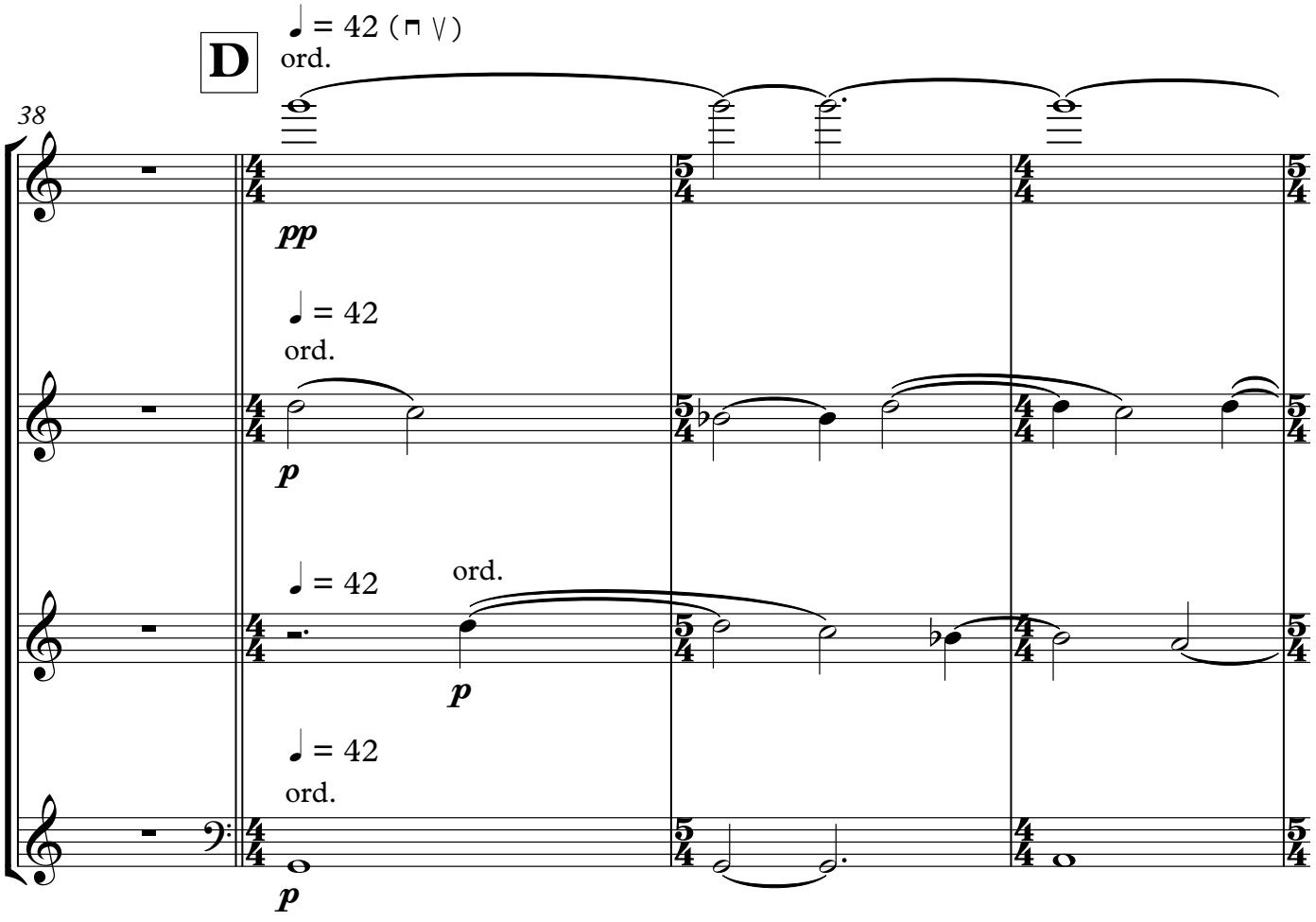

19
meno mosso
meno mosso
meno mosso
meno mosso
♩ = 42 intenso
♩ = 42 intenso
♩ = 42 intenso
♩ = 42 intenso
tr
tr
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f

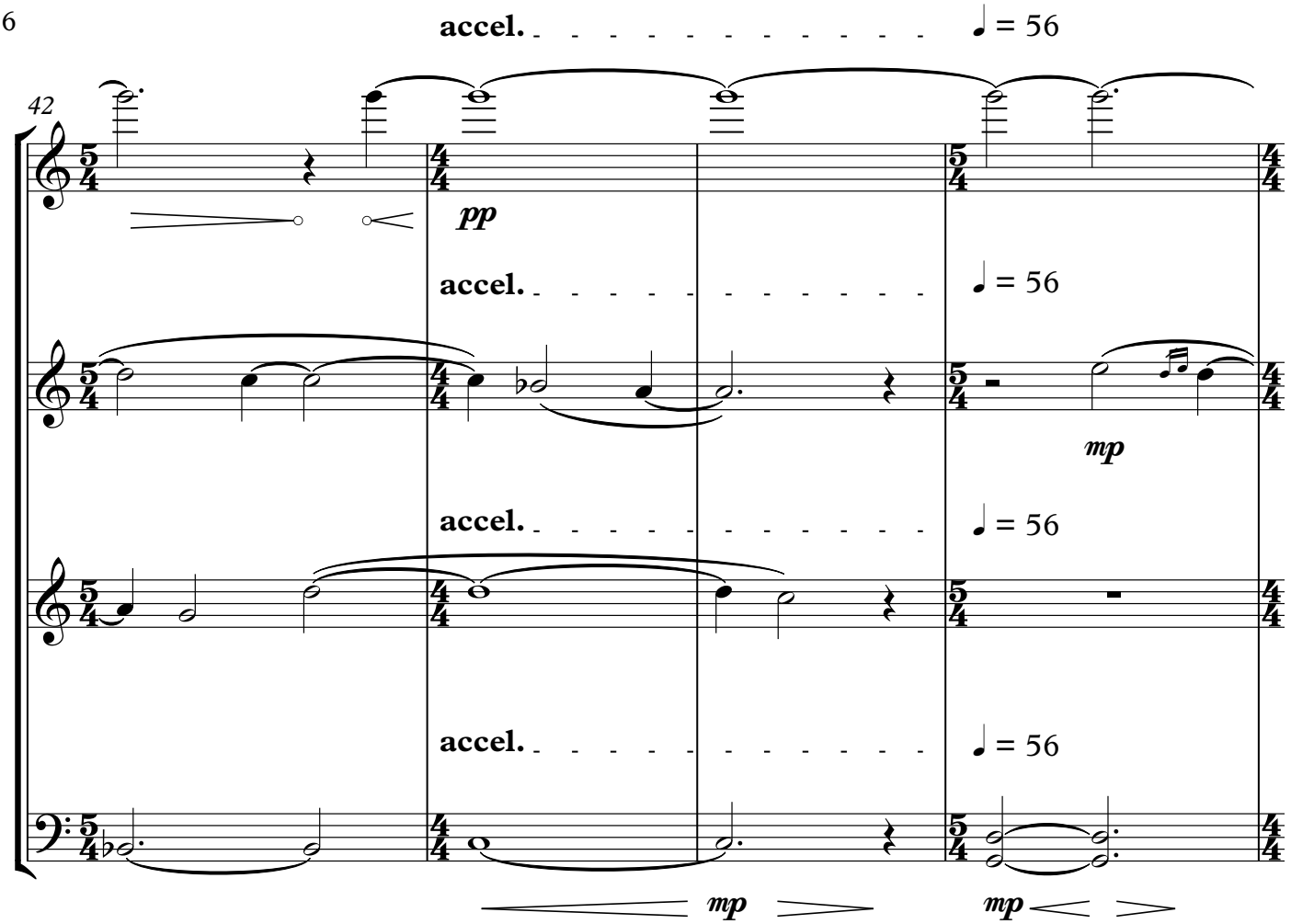

23
tr
tr
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
fp
f
f
f
p
f
p

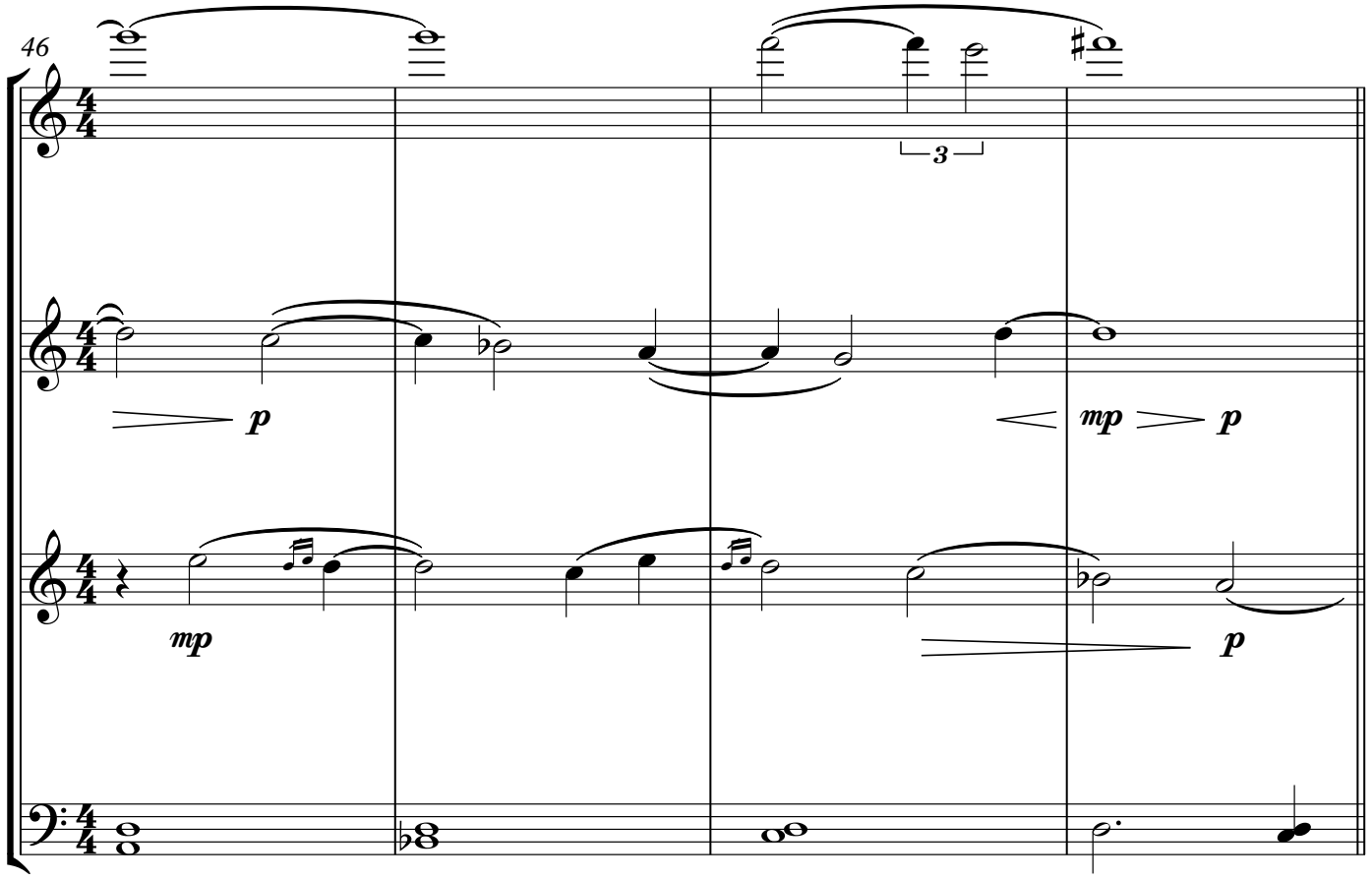

accel.
27
increasing vib.
f > p cresc.
f
accel.
increasing vib.
p cresc.
f
accel.
increasing vib.
p cresc.
f
accel.
increasing vib.
cresc.
f


C
♩ = 72
molto vib.
31
ff
3
3
3
♩ = 72
molto vib.
♩ = 72 tight, fast
molto vib.
tight, fast
♩ = 72
molto vib.
tight, fast


34
fff
ff
fff
ff
fff
ff
fff
3


D
38
♩ = 42 (⊓ ∨)
ord.
pp
♩ = 42
ord.
p
♩ = 42
ord.
p
♩ = 42
ord.
p

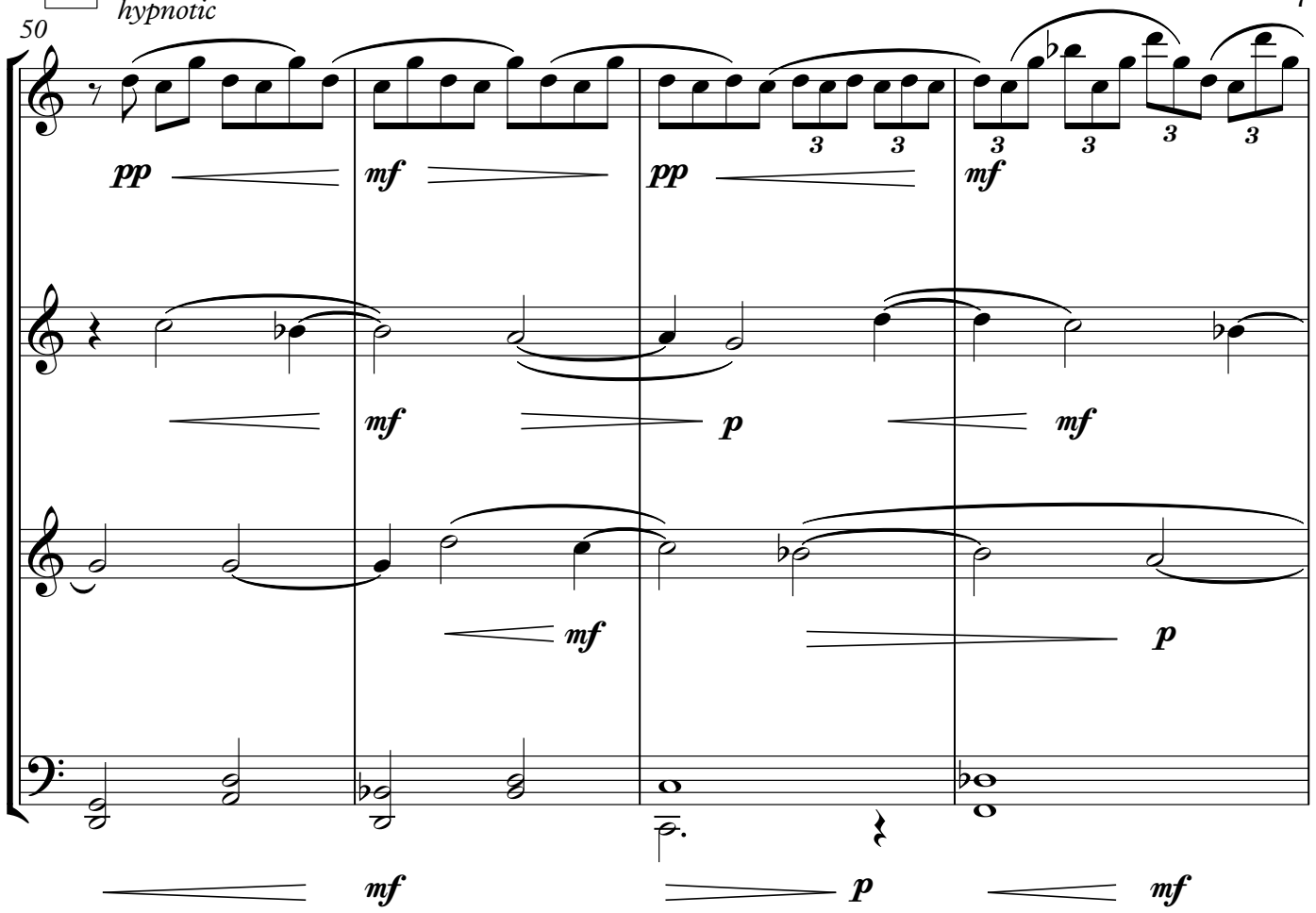

accel.
♩ = 56
42
pp
accel.
♩ = 56
mp
accel.
♩ = 56
accel.
♩ = 56
mp
mp


46
3
p
mp
p
mp
p

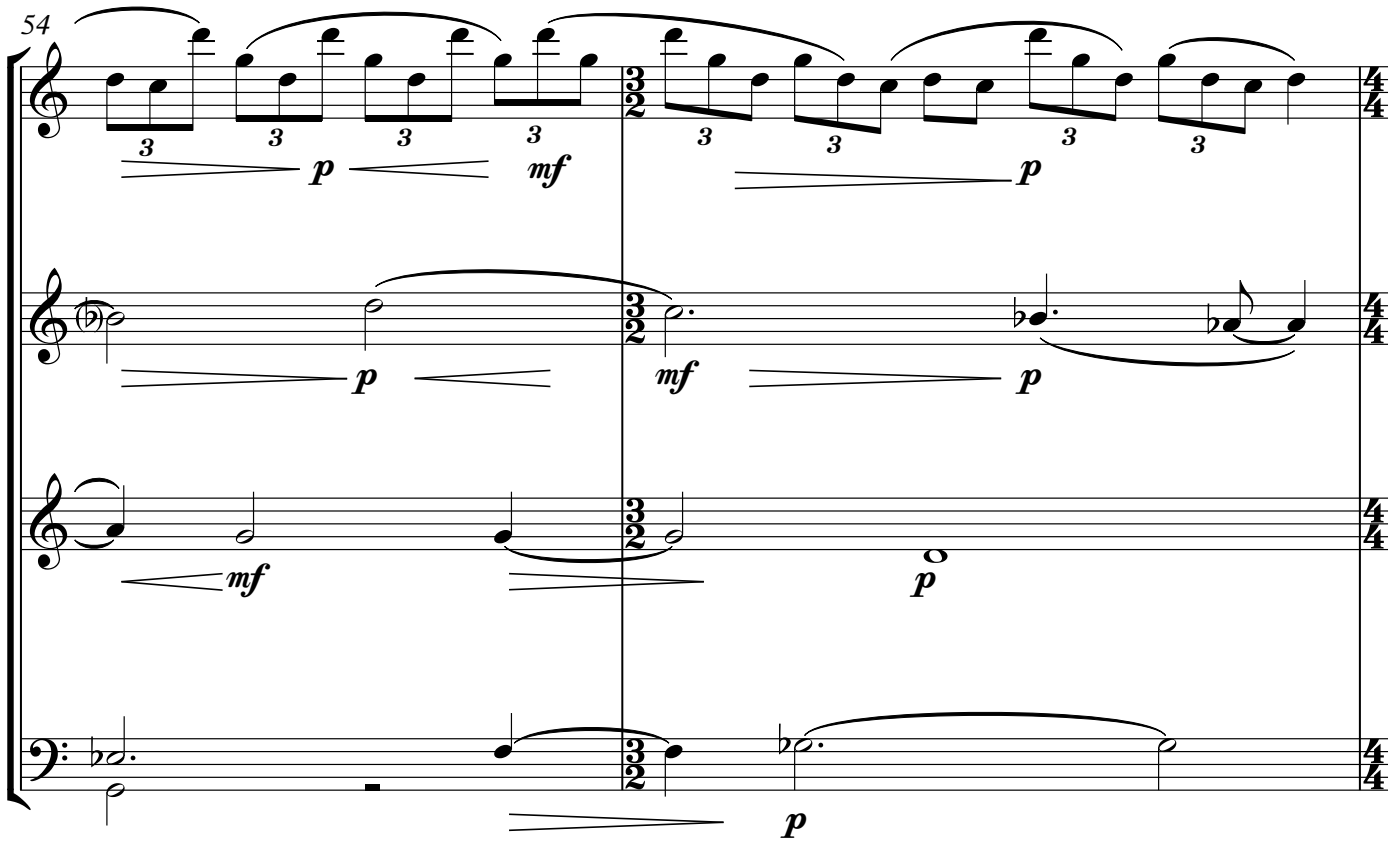
E

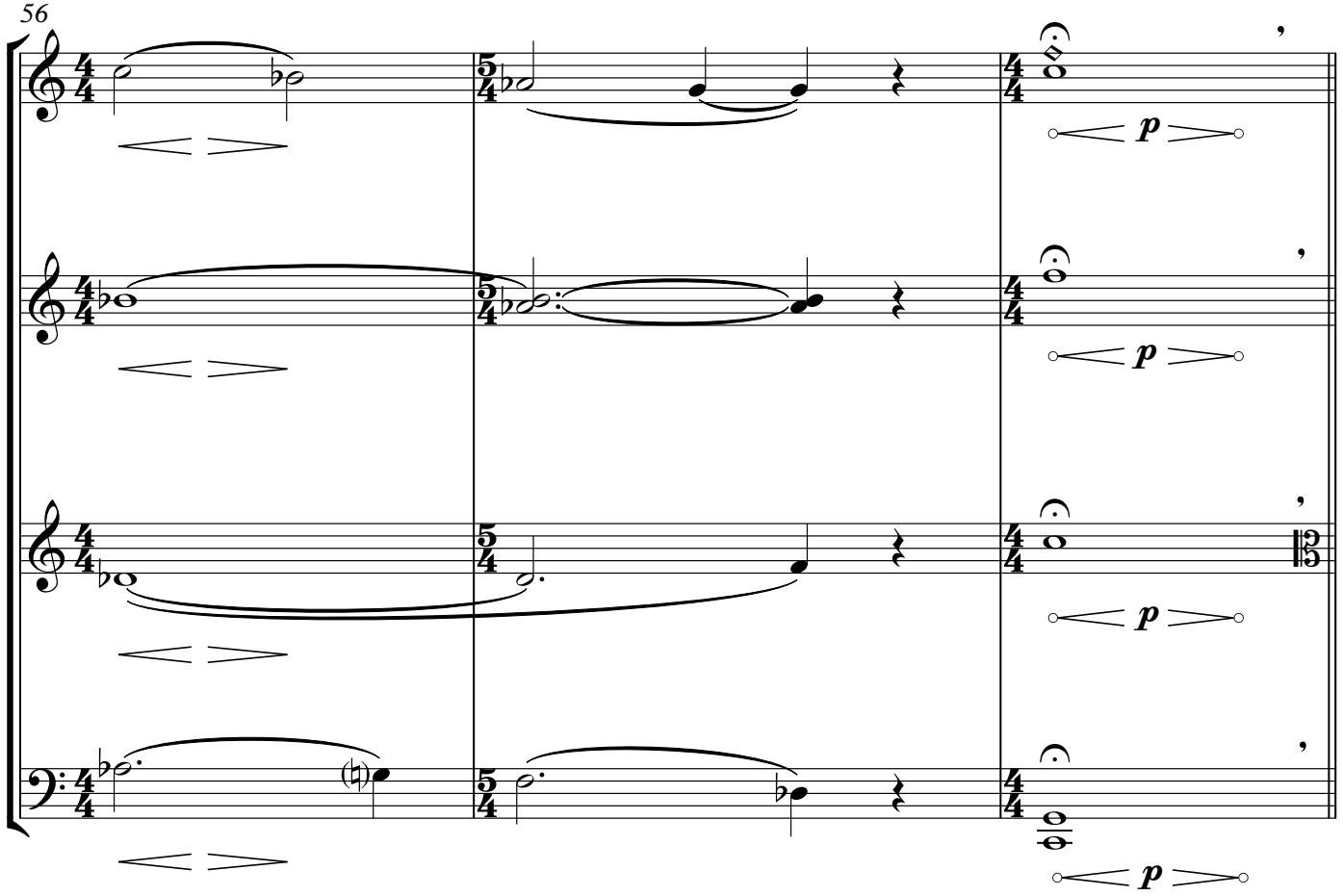
hypnotic

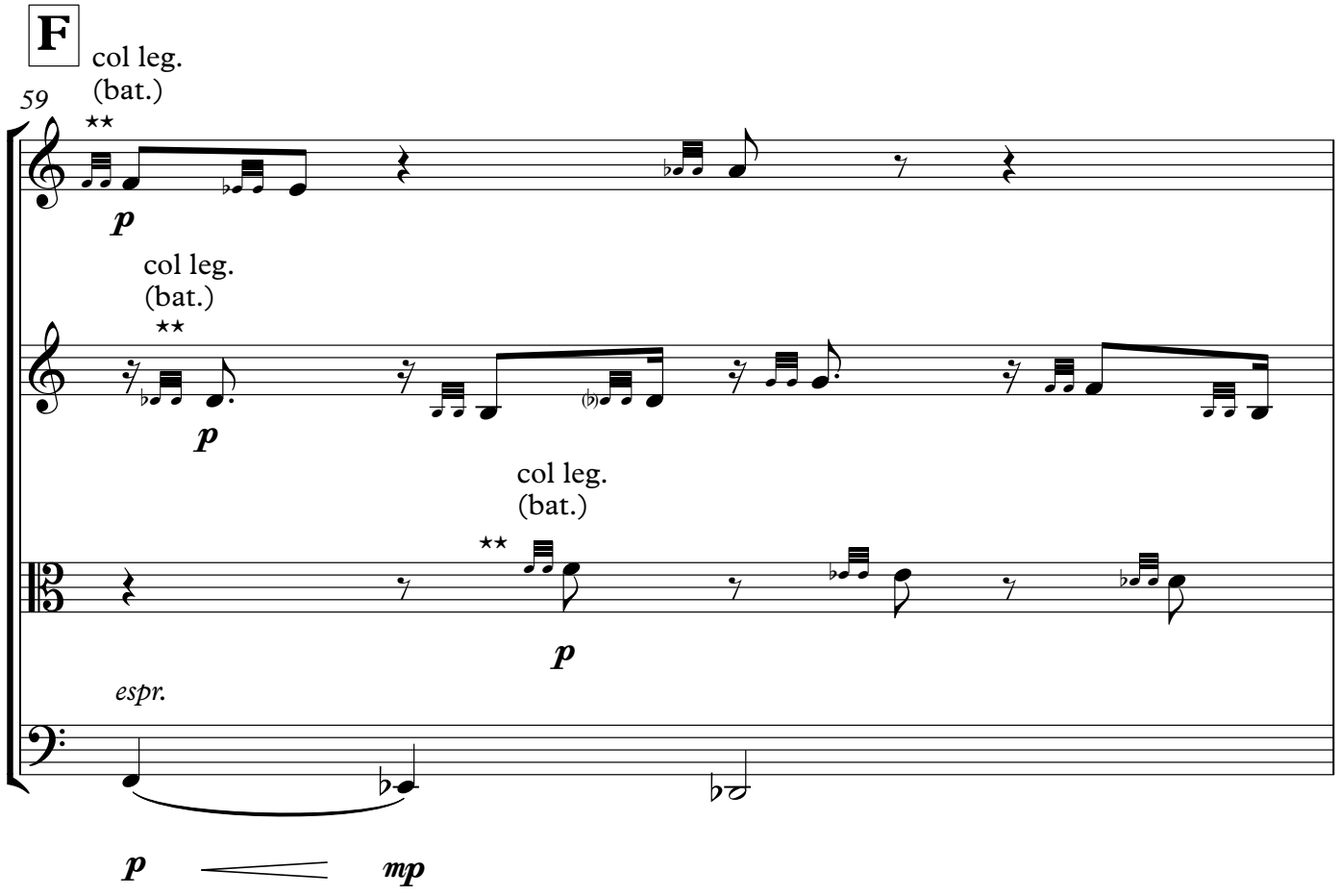
50



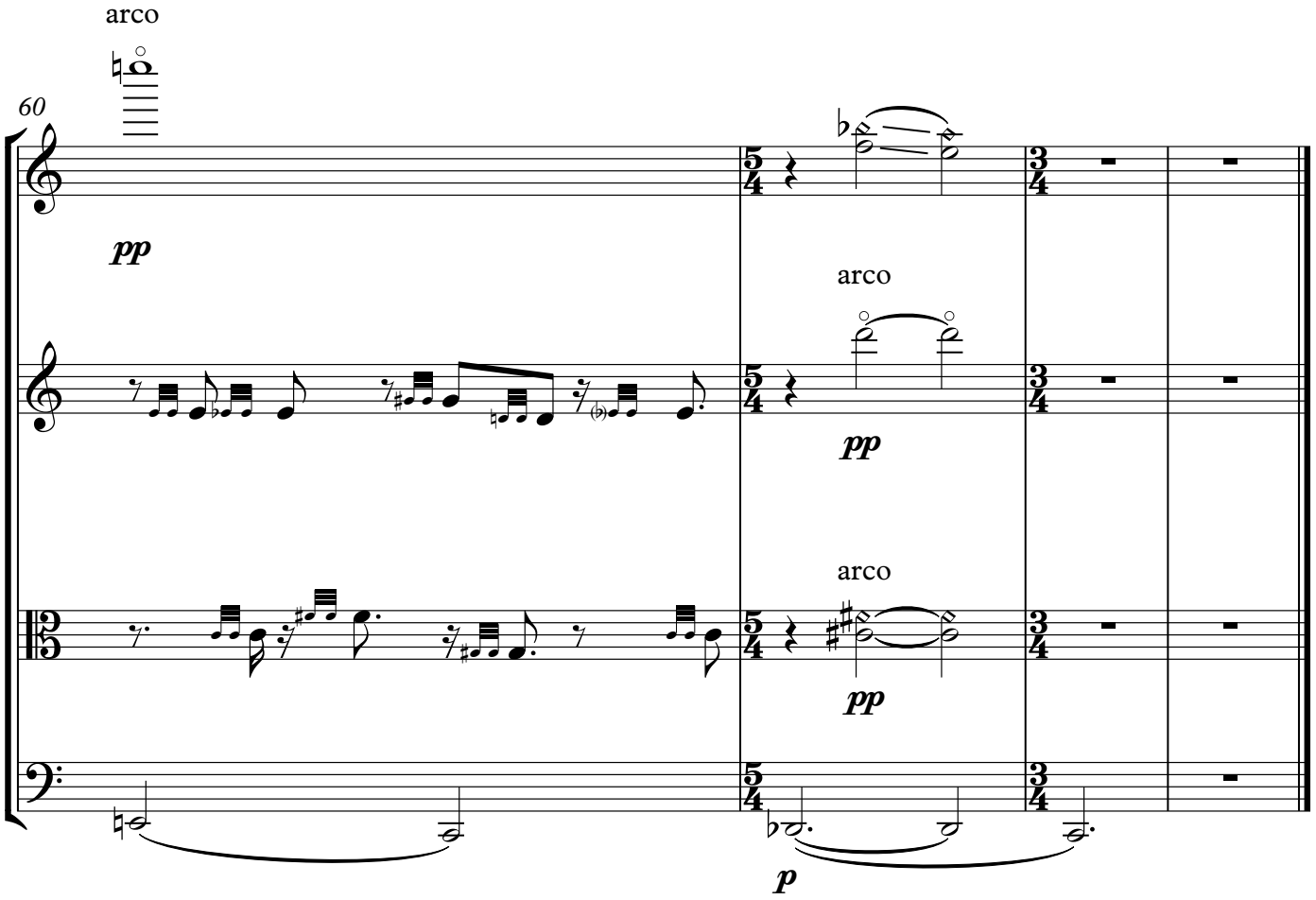
54





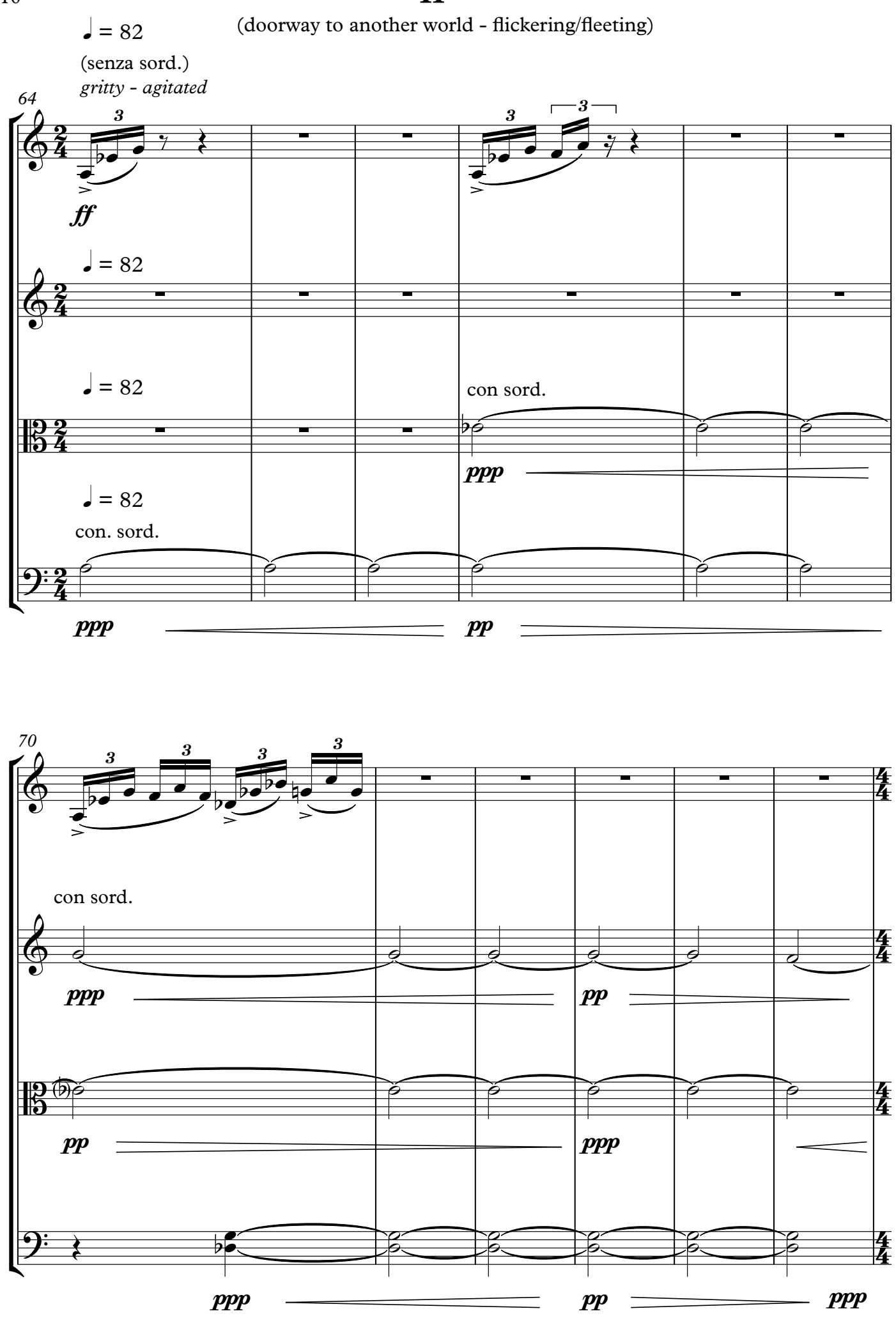


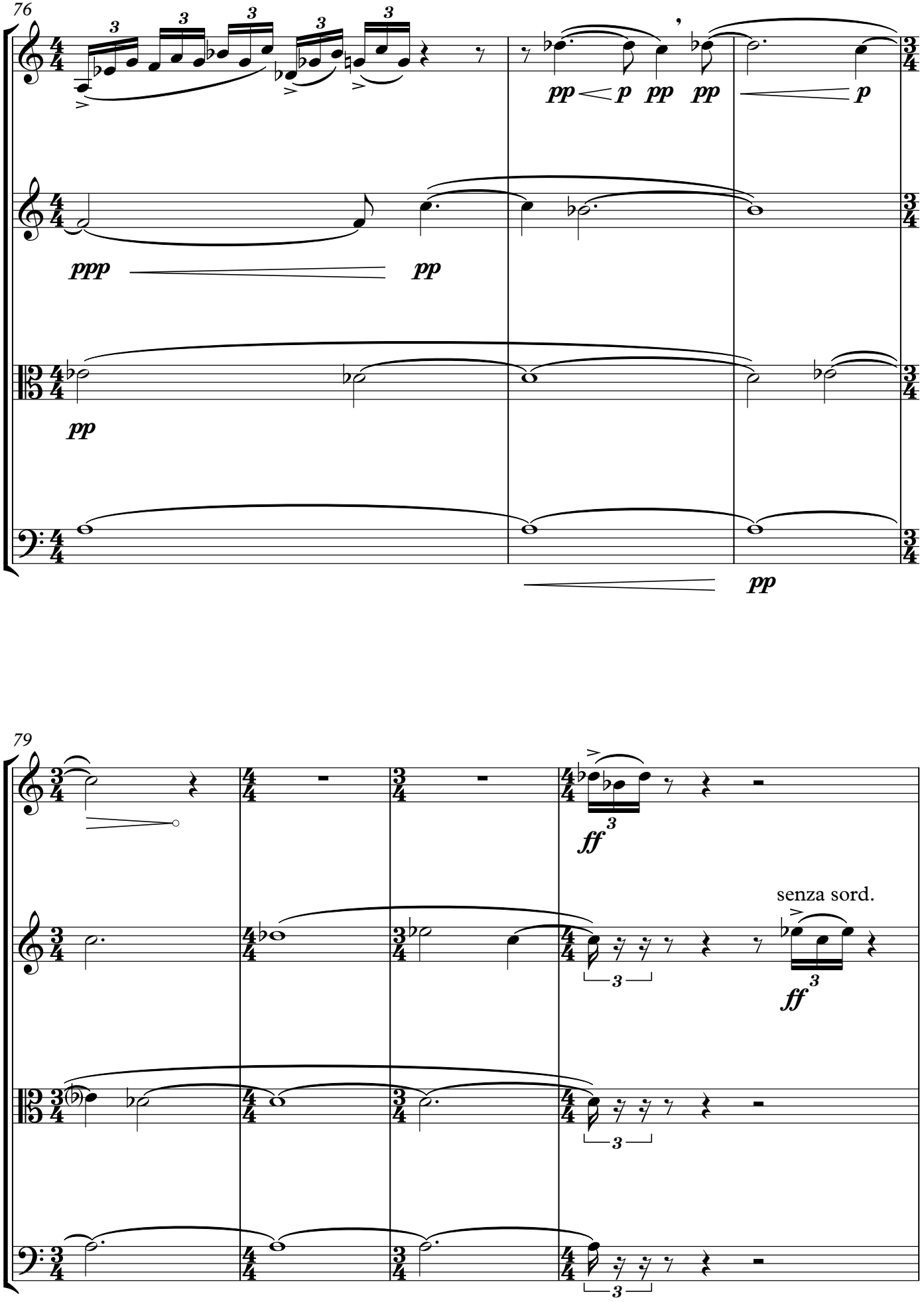
** performed strictly:

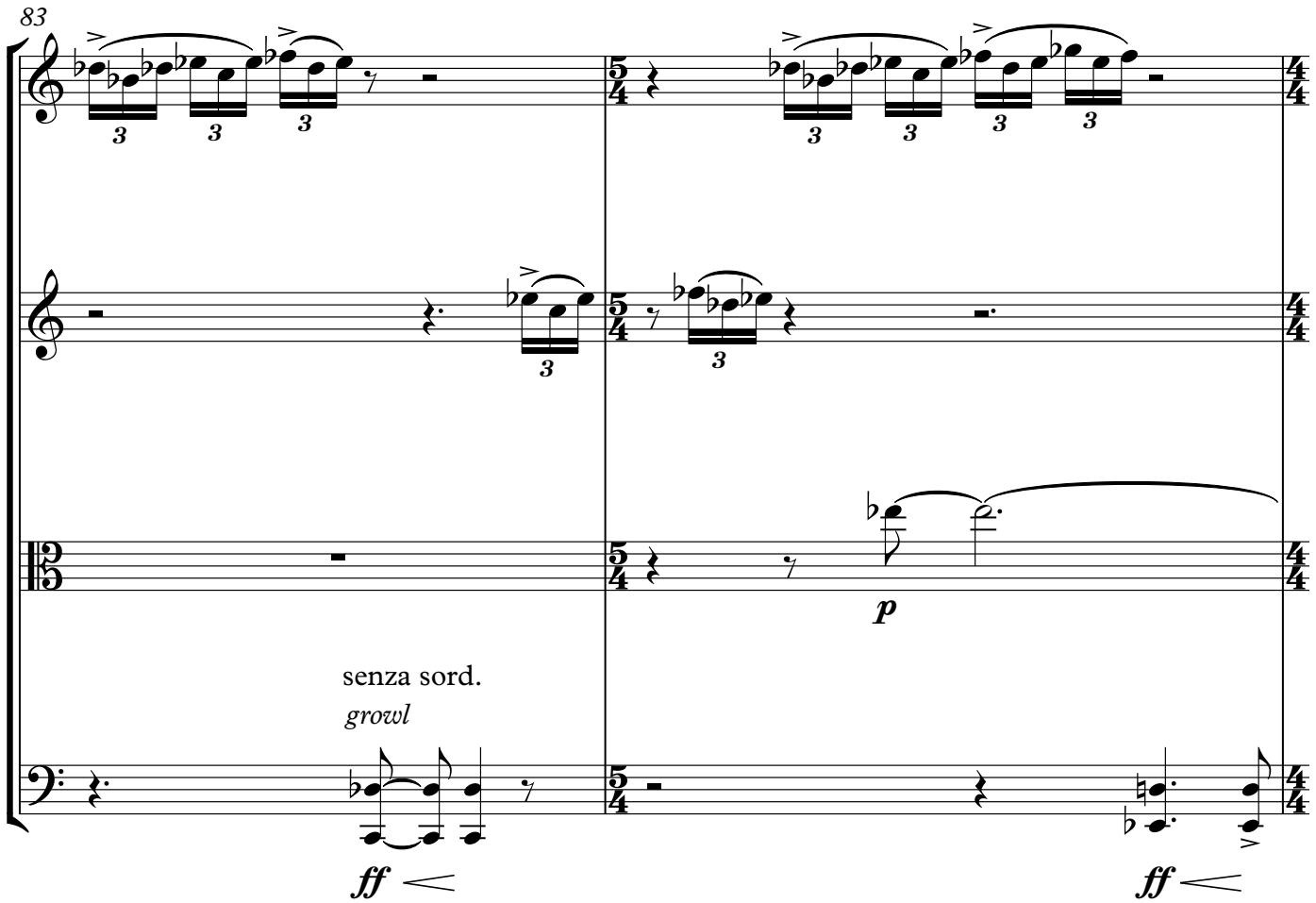

arco
60
pp
arco
pp
arco
pp
p

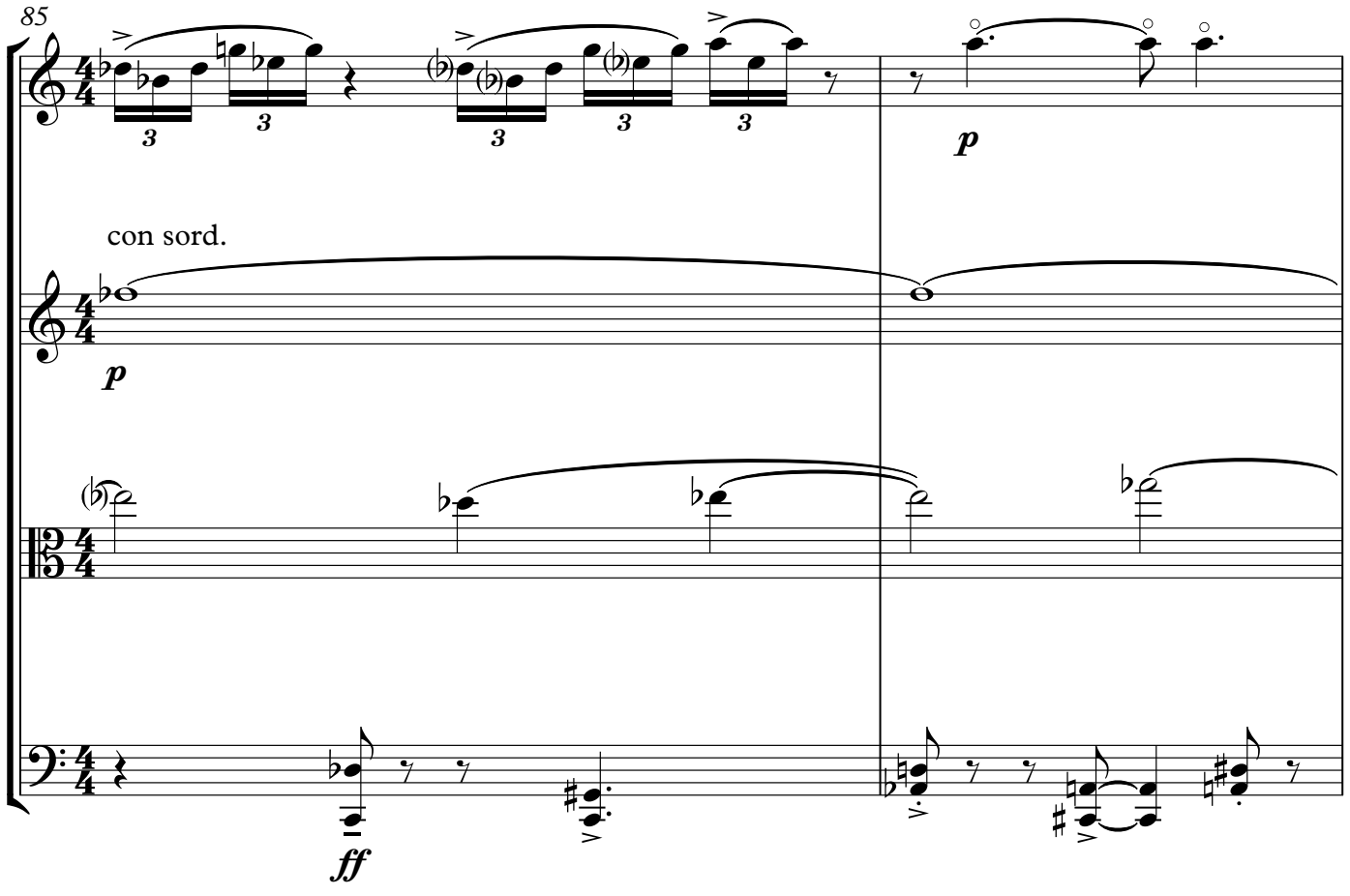
II

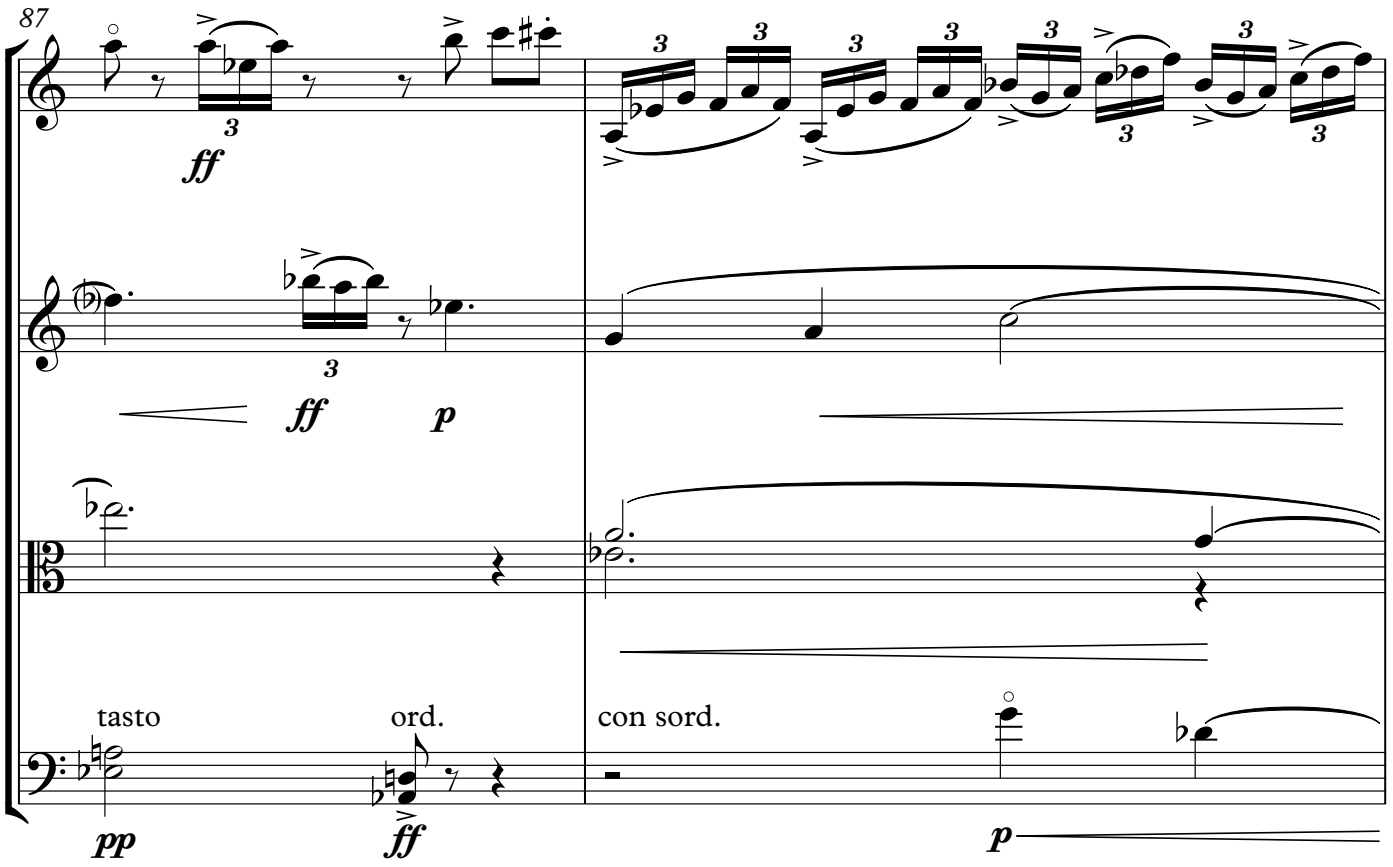
(doorway to another world - flickering/fleeting)

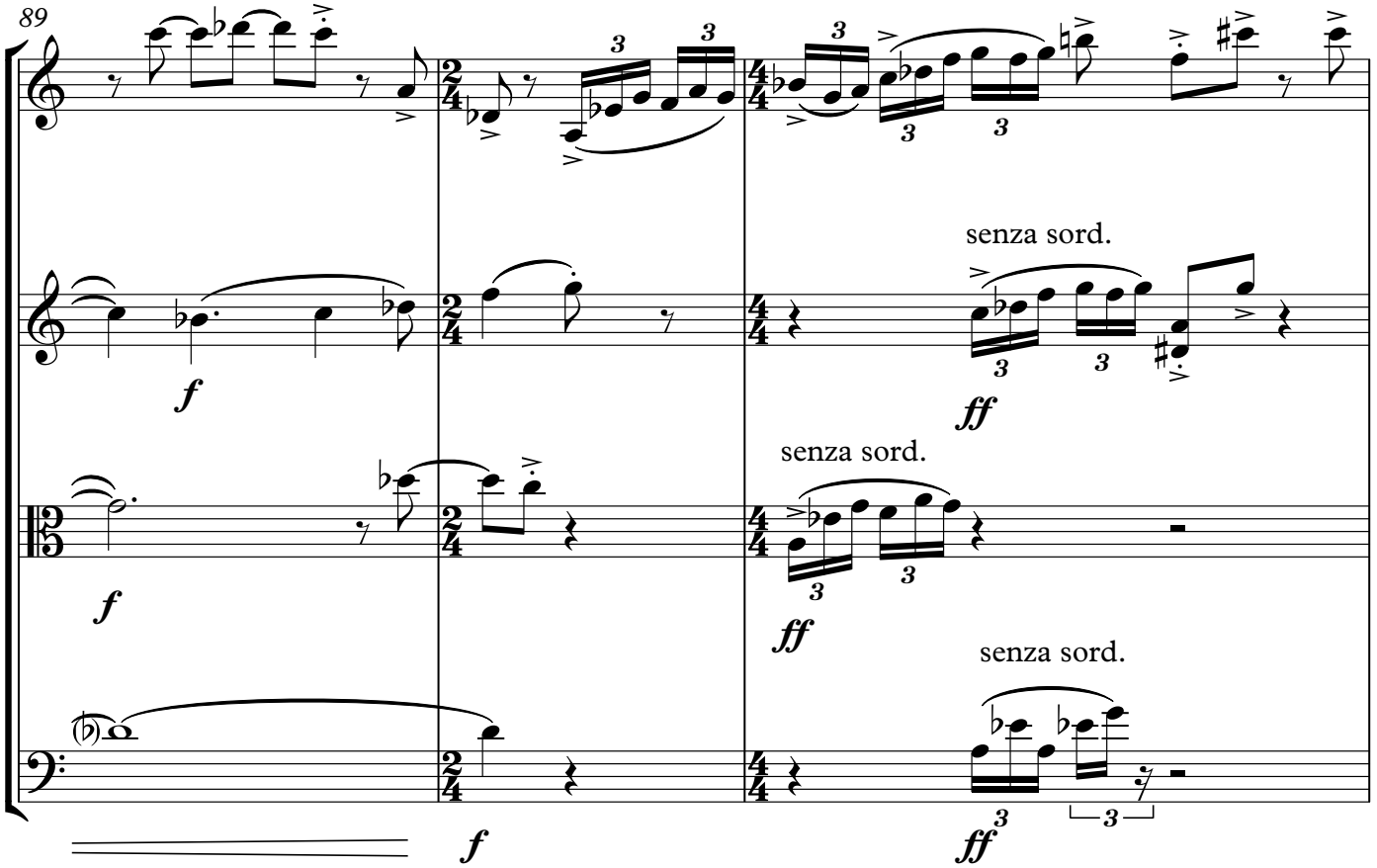



76
pp p pp pp p
ppp pp
pp
pp
79
ff
senza sord.
ff

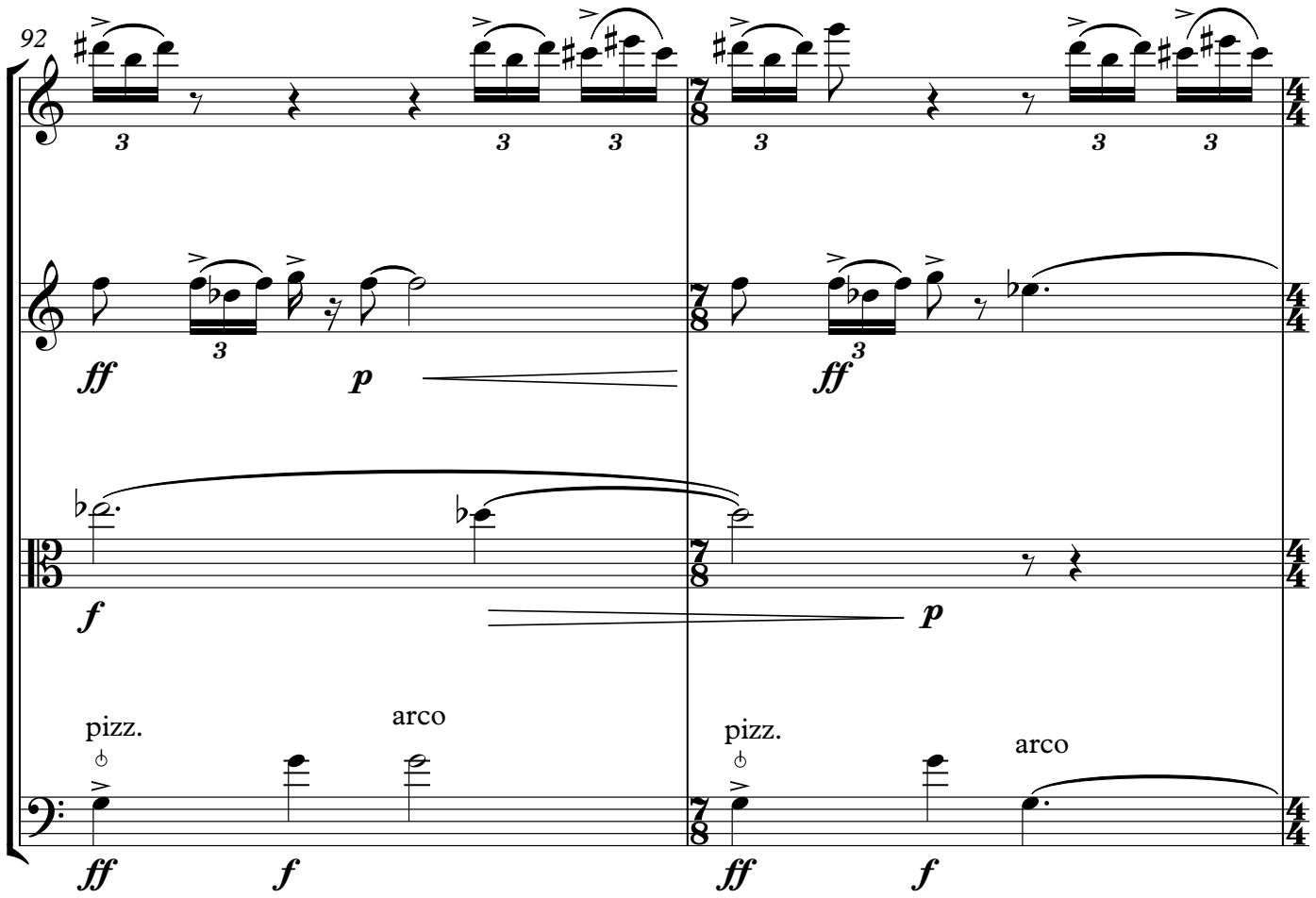

83
senza sord.
growl
ff
p
ff

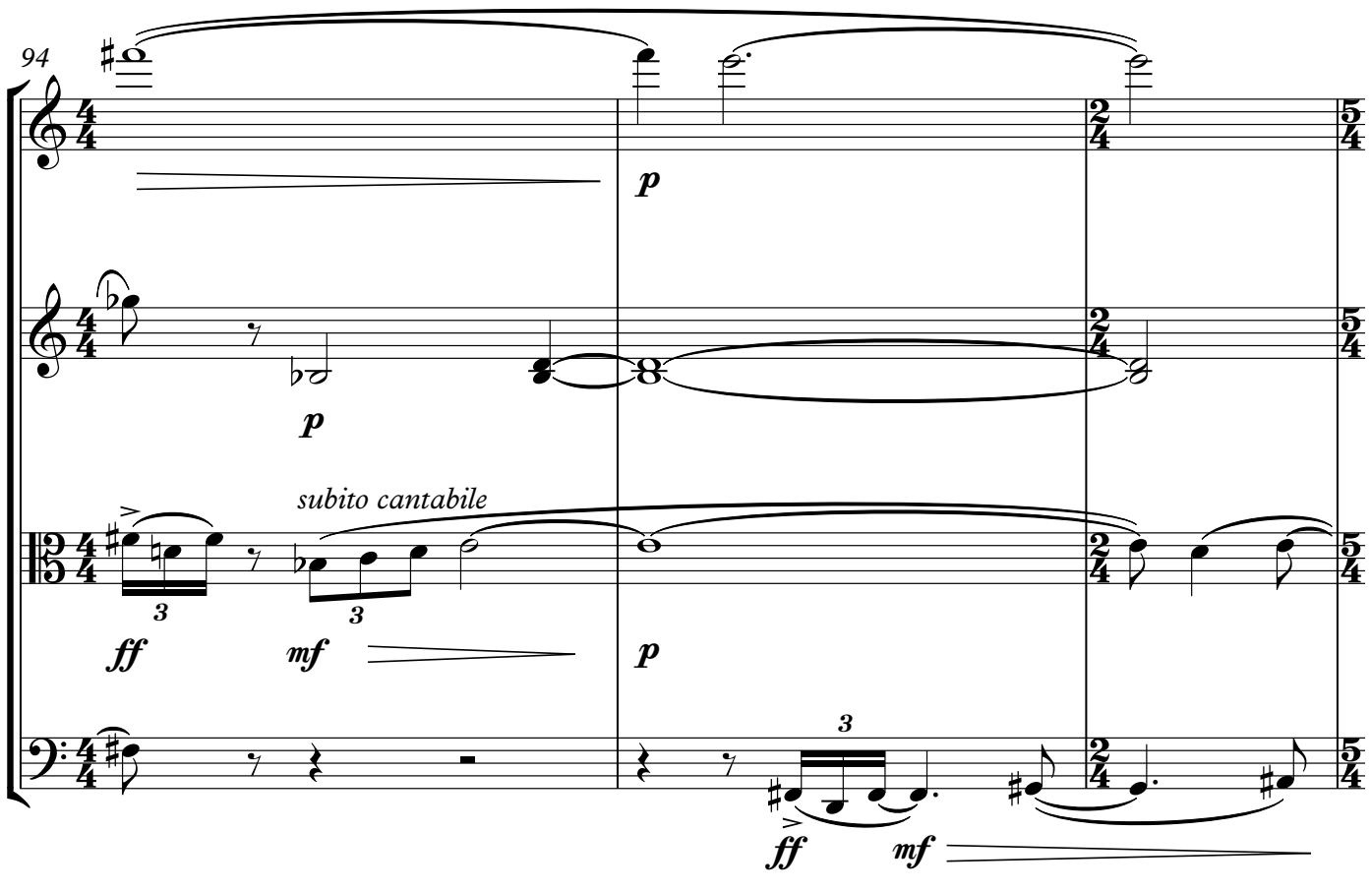

85
p
con sord.
p
ff

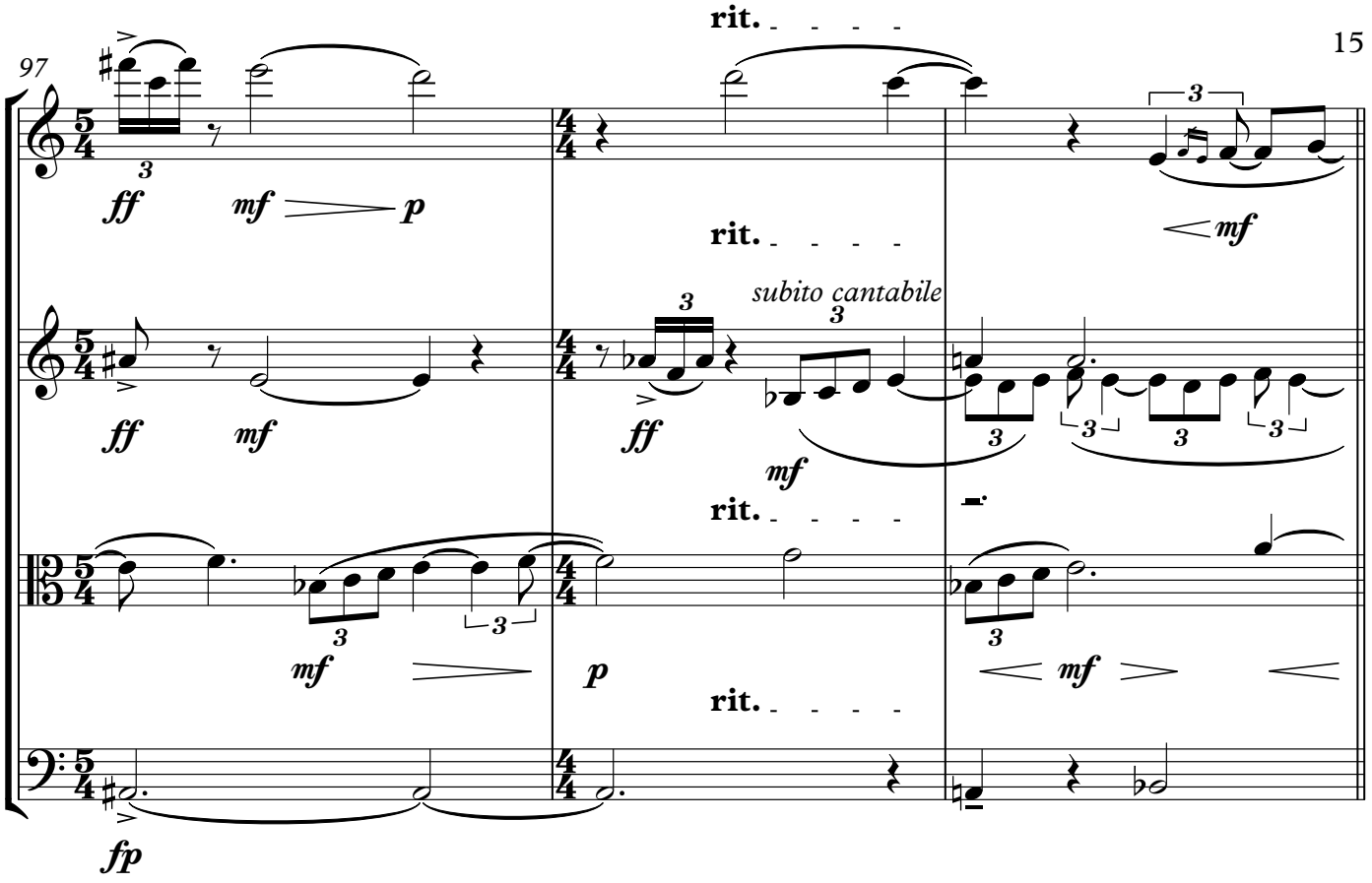

87
ff
ff
p
tasto
ord.
con sord.
pp
ff
p

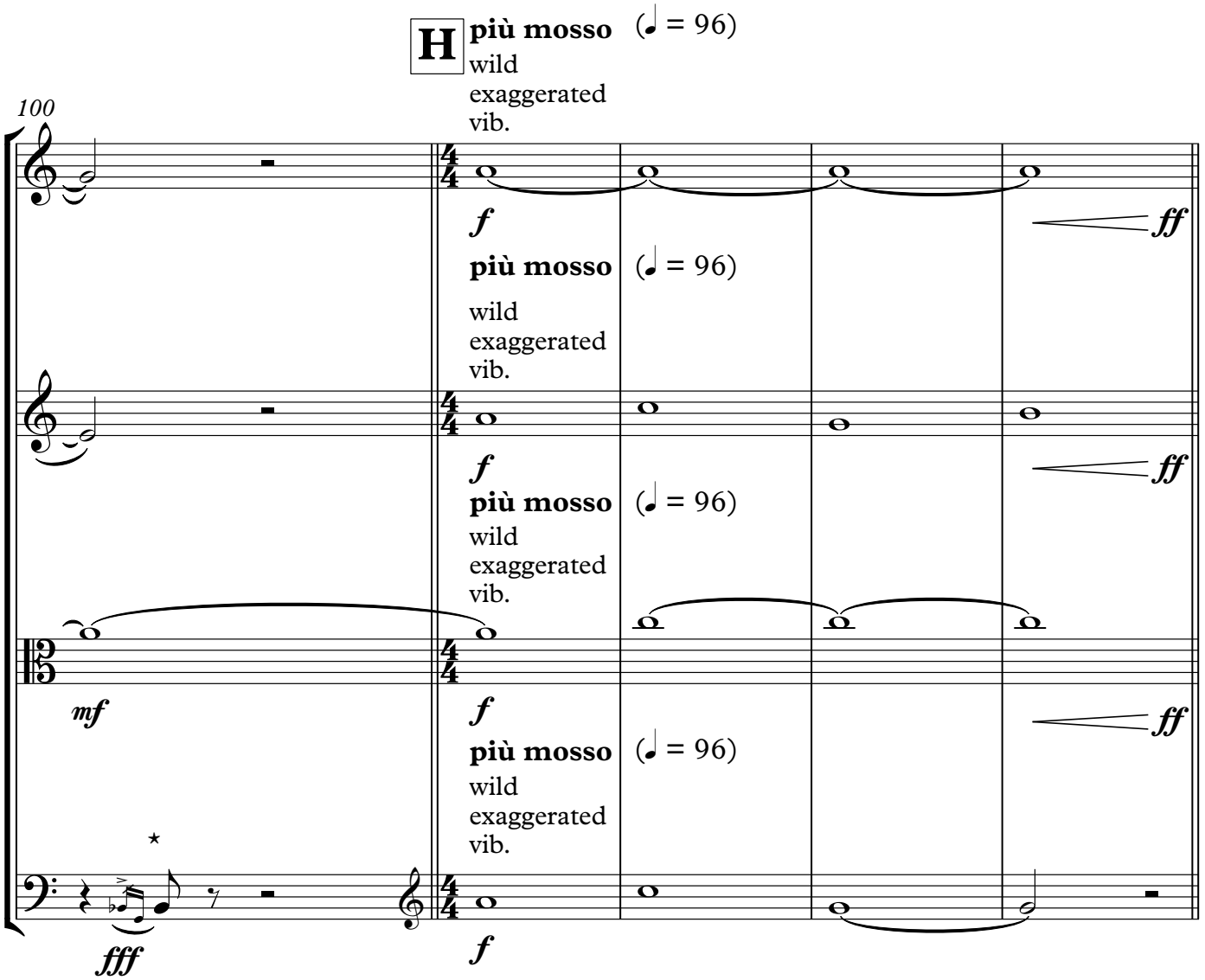

89
f
senza sord.
ff
f
senza sord.
ff
senza sord.
f
ff

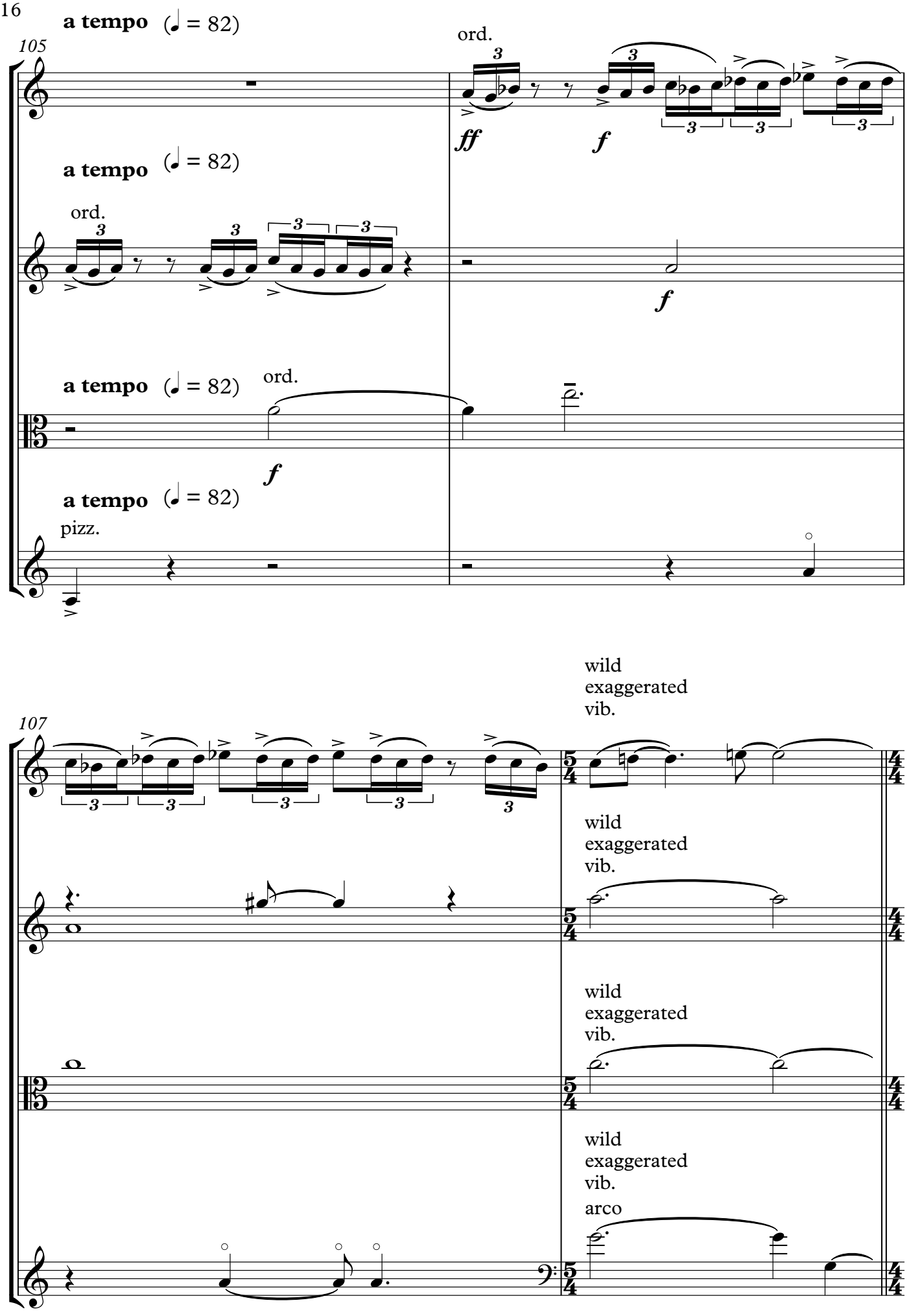
G

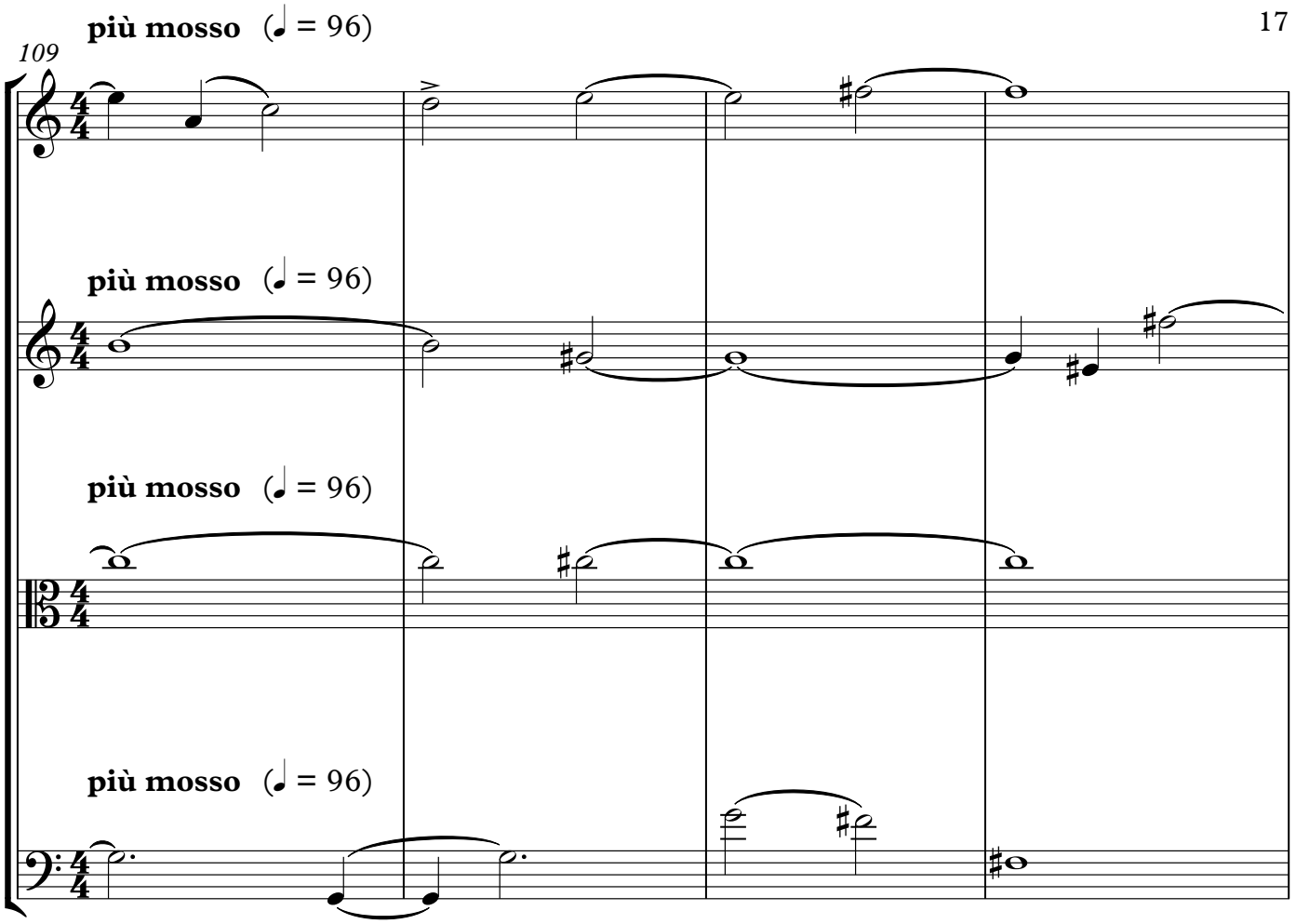


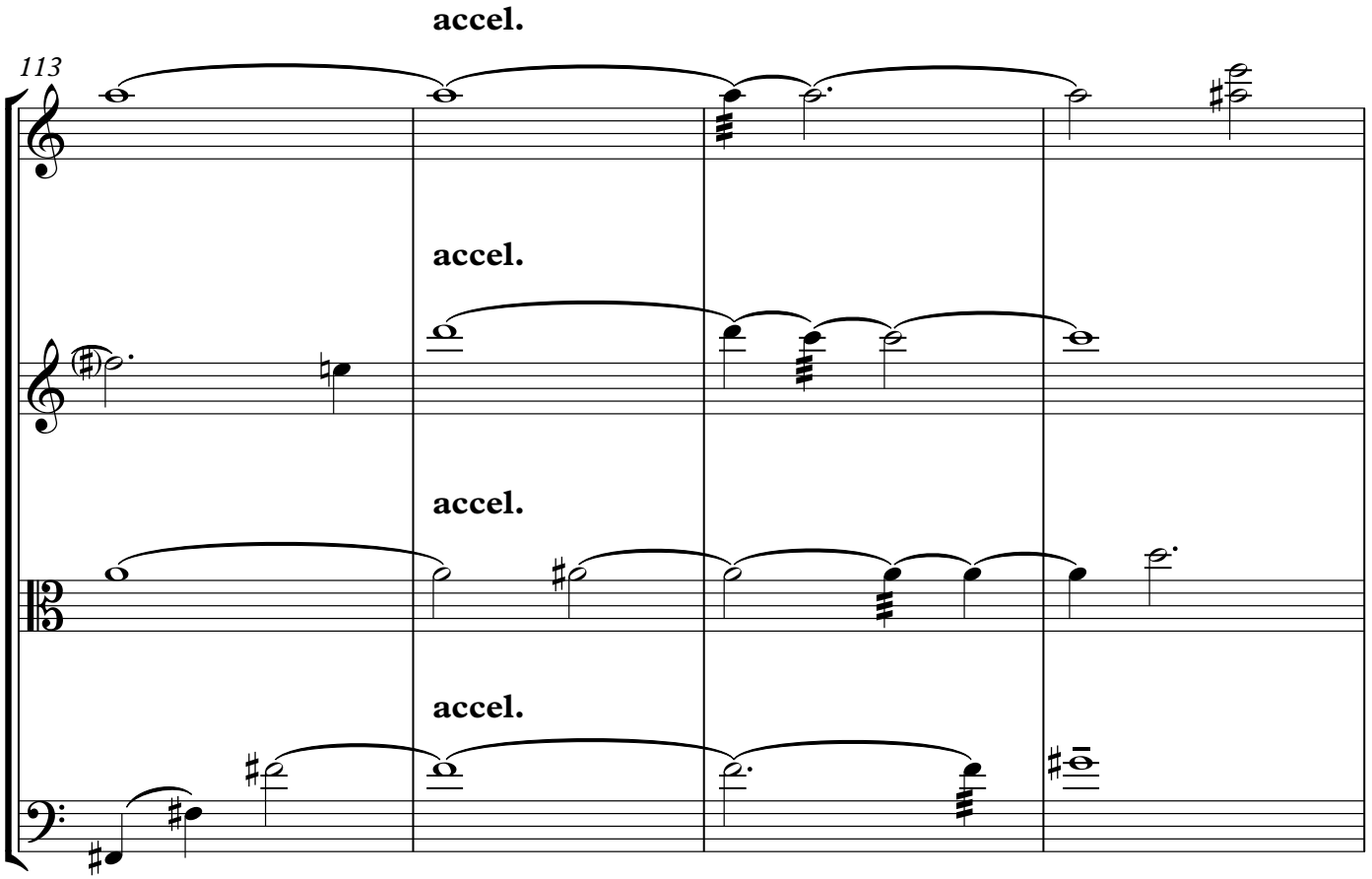


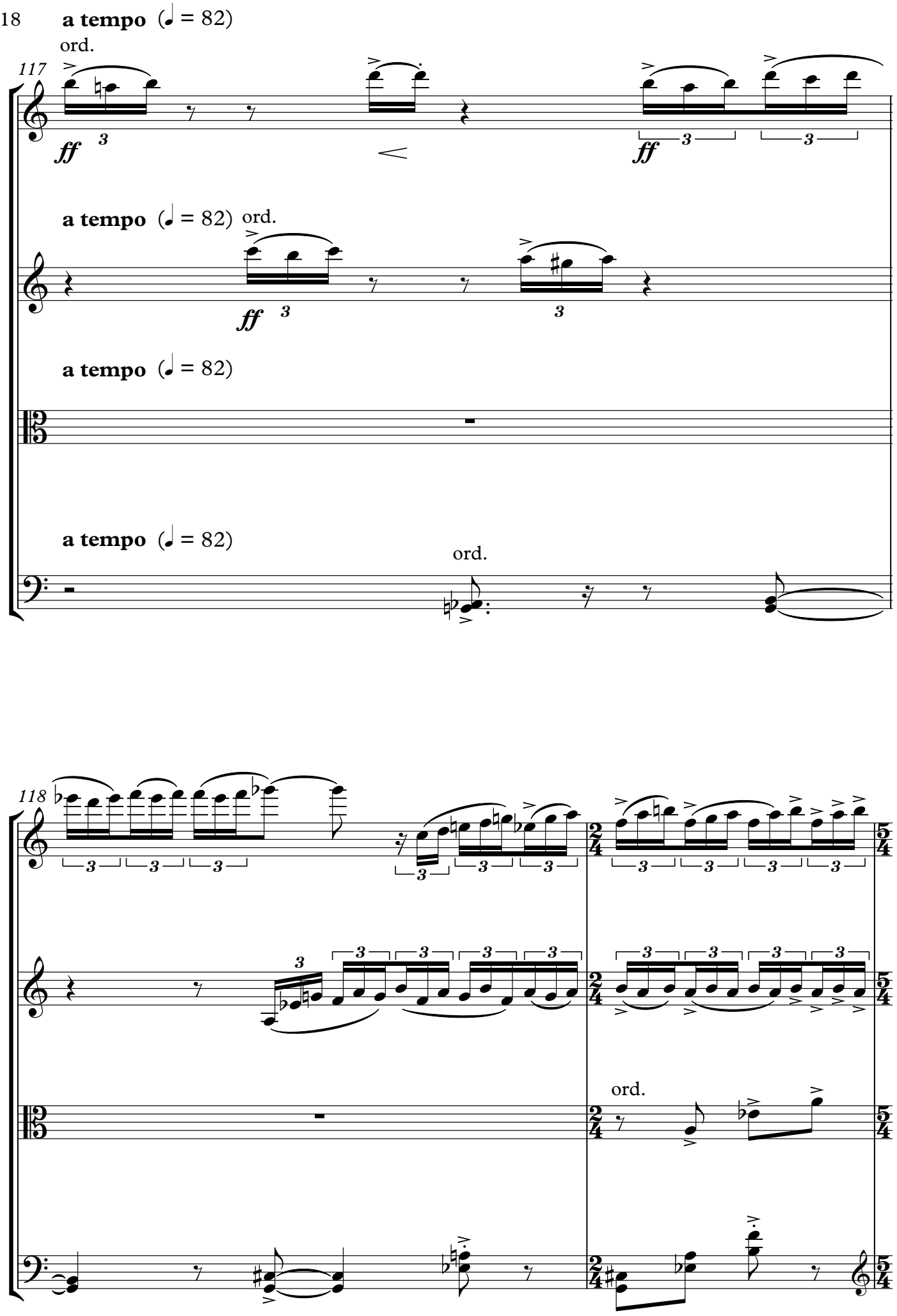

97
rit.
ff
mf
p
subito cantabile
fp

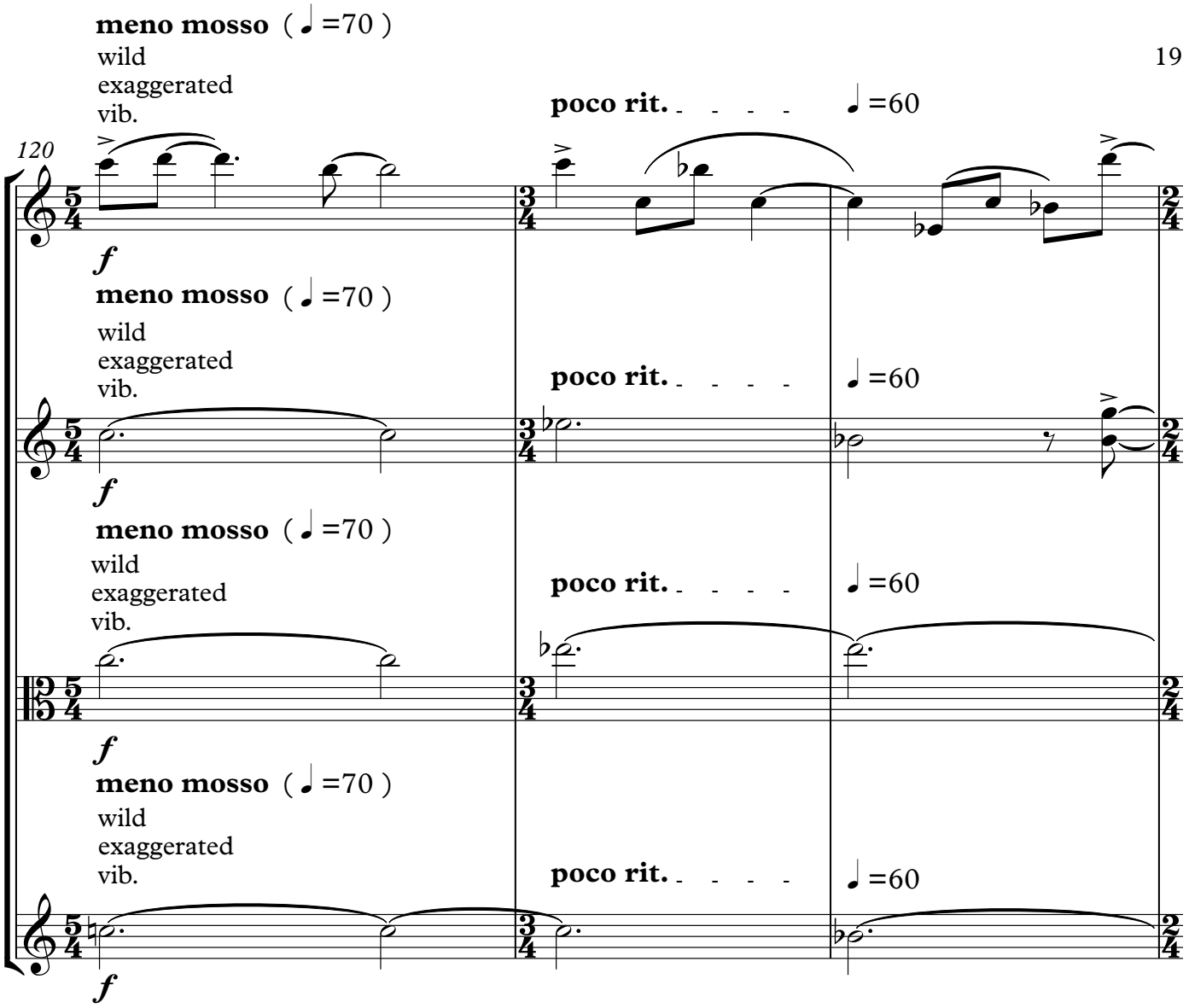

H
più mosso (♩ = 96)
wild
exaggerated
vib.
100
f
ff
mf
fff
*On the beat, played as figure in previous tempo

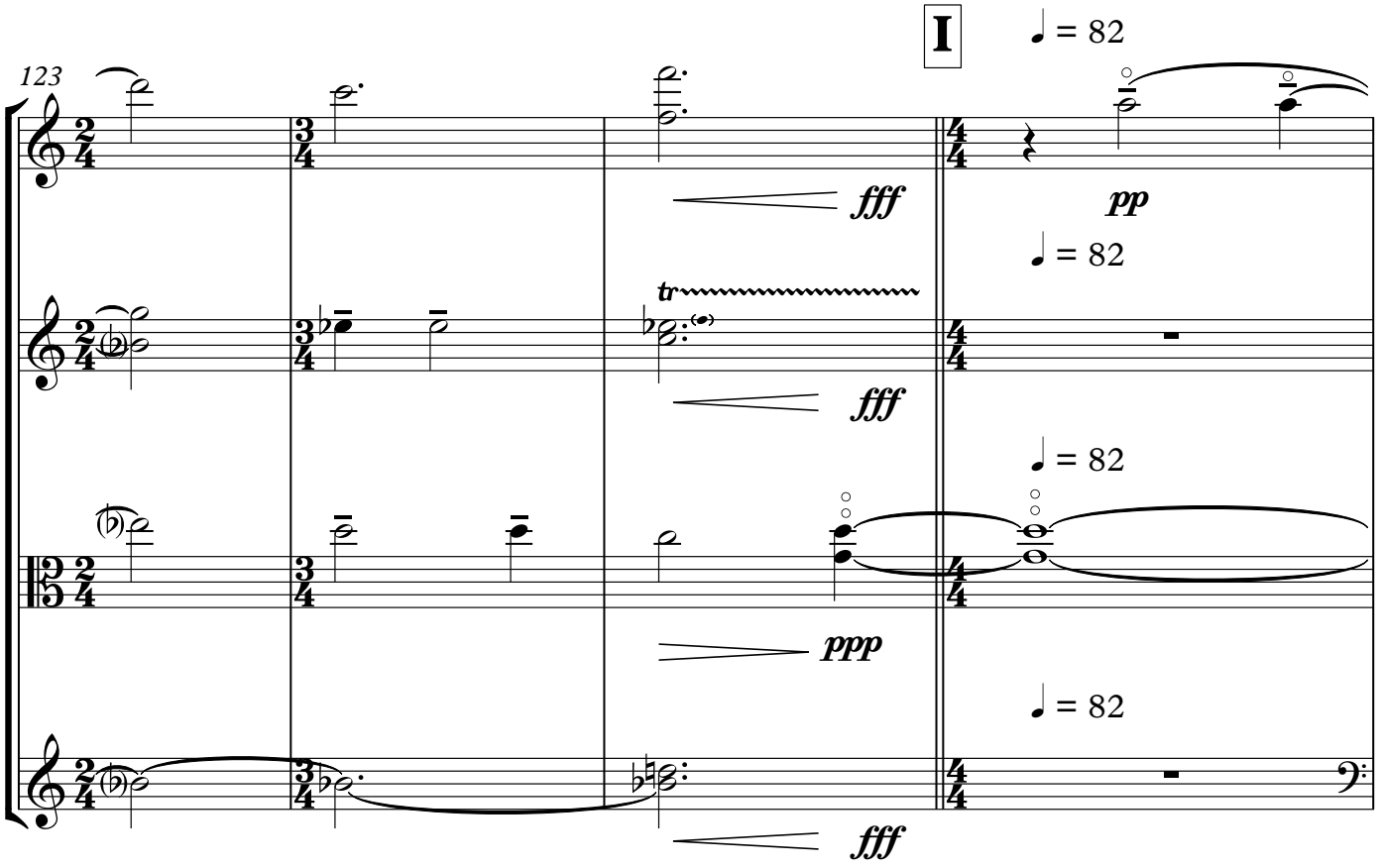

105
a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
ff
f
a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
f
a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
f
a tempo (♩ = 82)
pizz.
107
wild exaggerated vib.
wild exaggerated vib.
wild exaggerated vib.
wild exaggerated vib.
arco

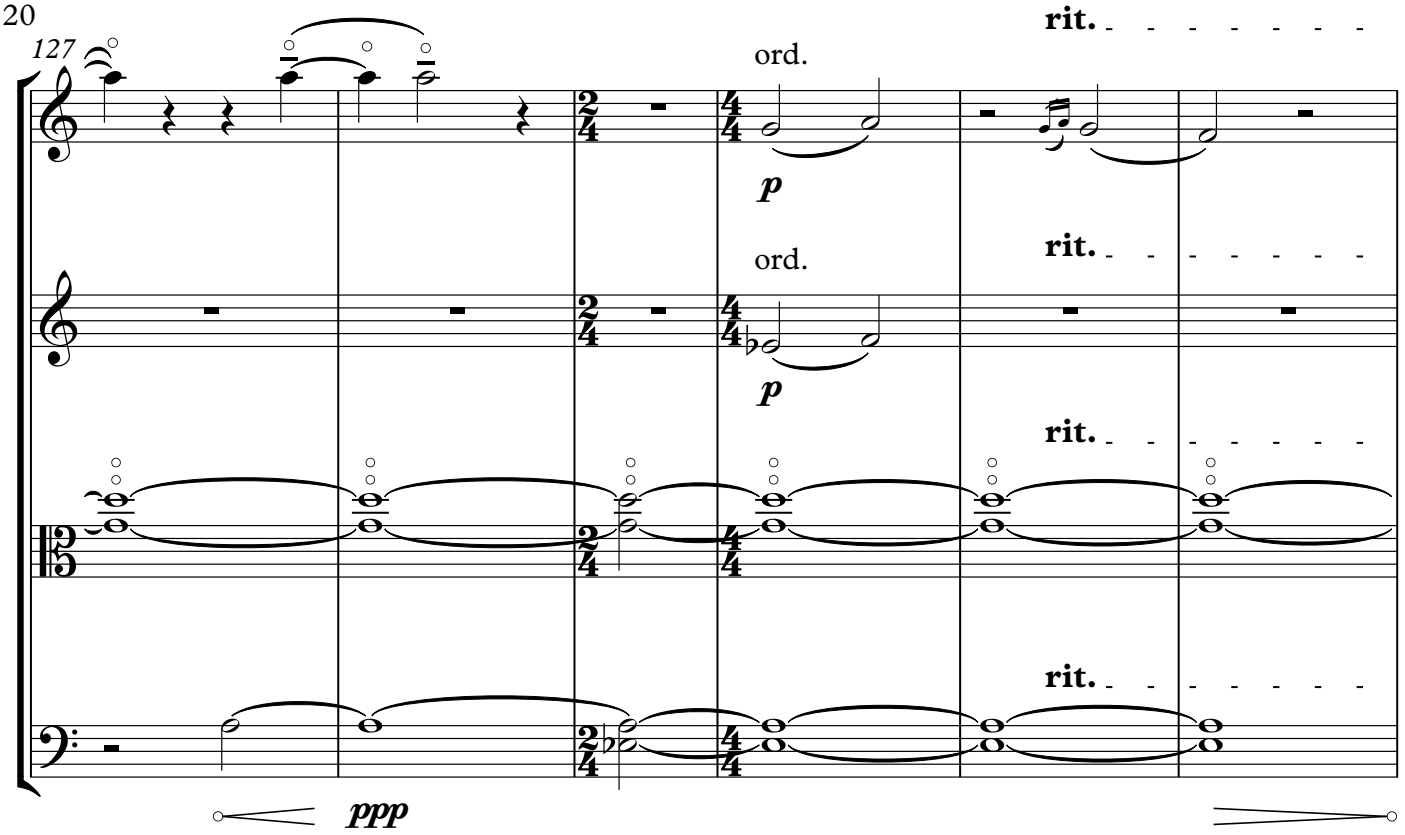

109
più mosso (♩ = 96)
più mosso (♩ = 96)
più mosso (♩ = 96)
più mosso (♩ = 96)

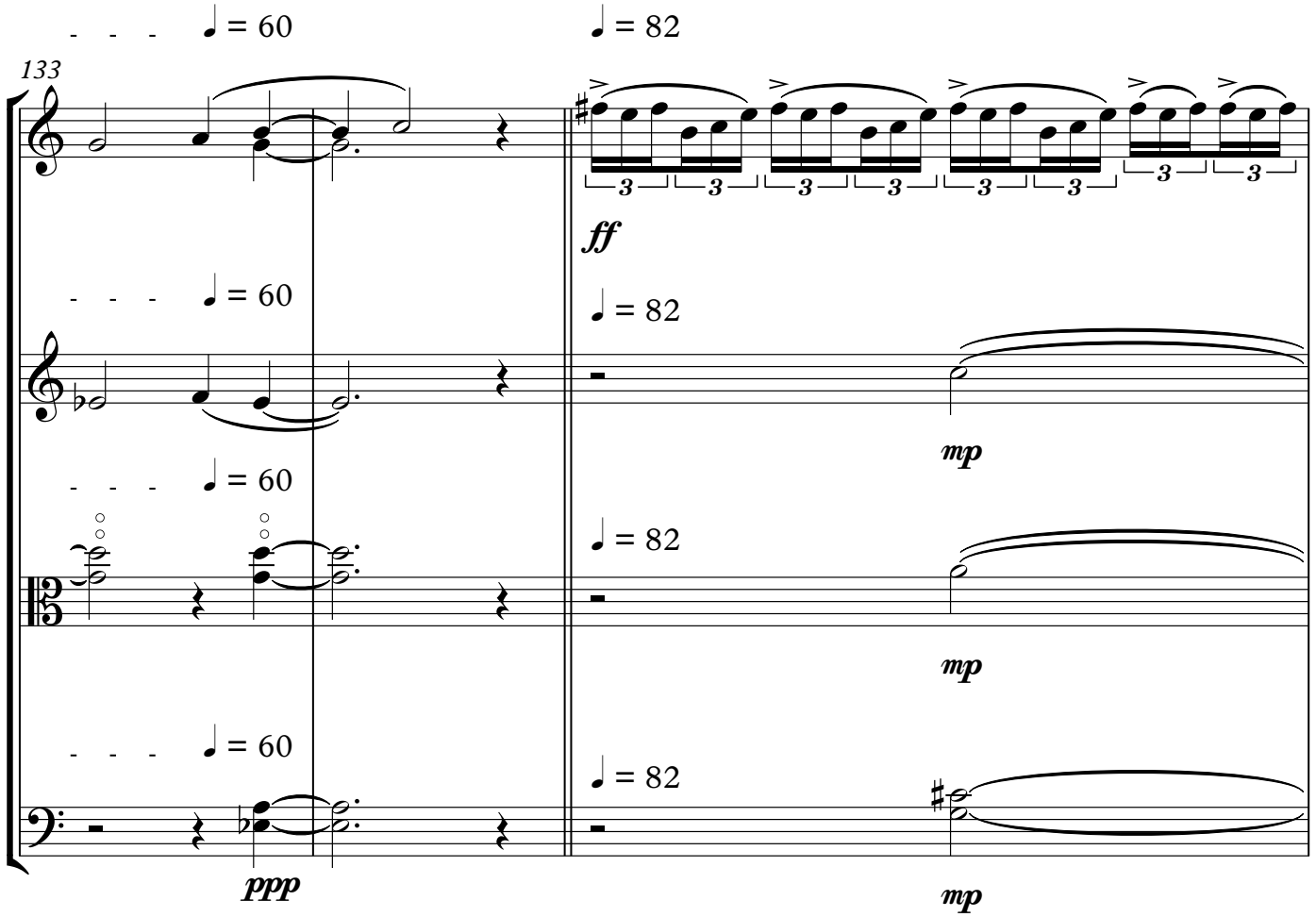

113
accel.
accel.
accel.
accel.

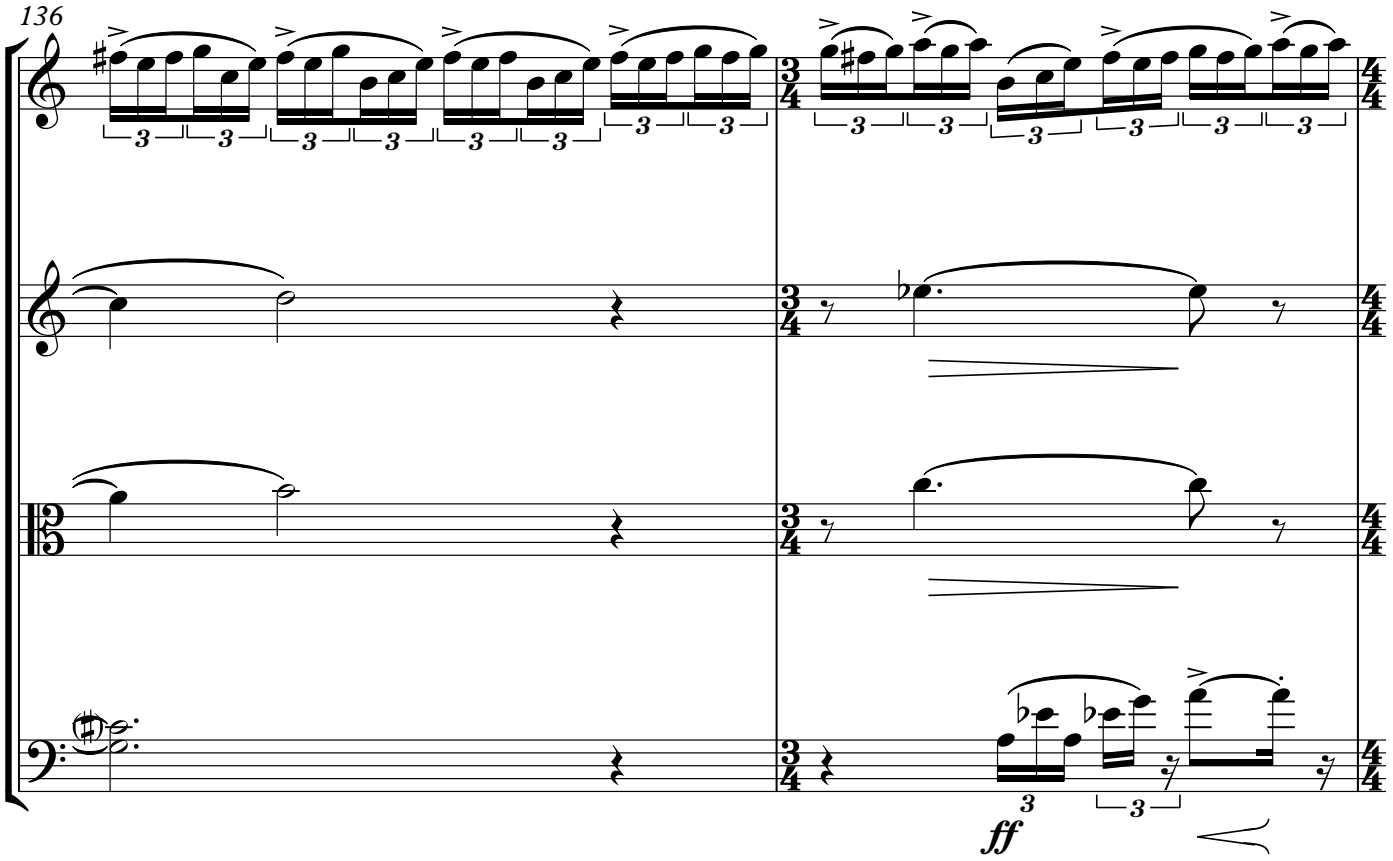

a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
117
ff
3
a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
ff
3
a tempo (♩ = 82)
a tempo (♩ = 82)
ord.
118
3
2/4
5/4
ord.

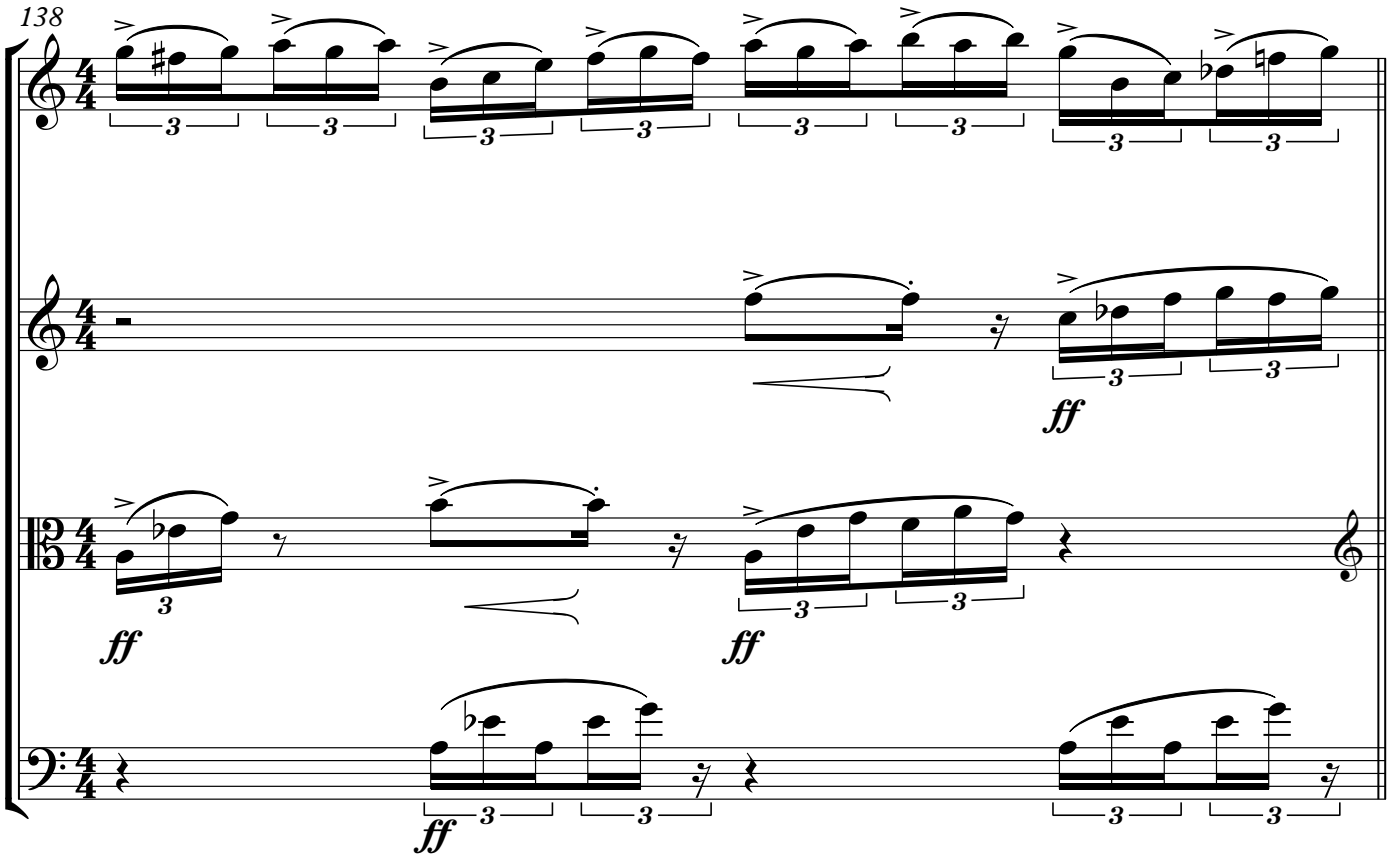

meno mosso (♩ =70)
wild
exaggerated
vib.
poco rit.
♩ =60
120
f


I
♩ = 82
123
fff
pp
tr
ppp

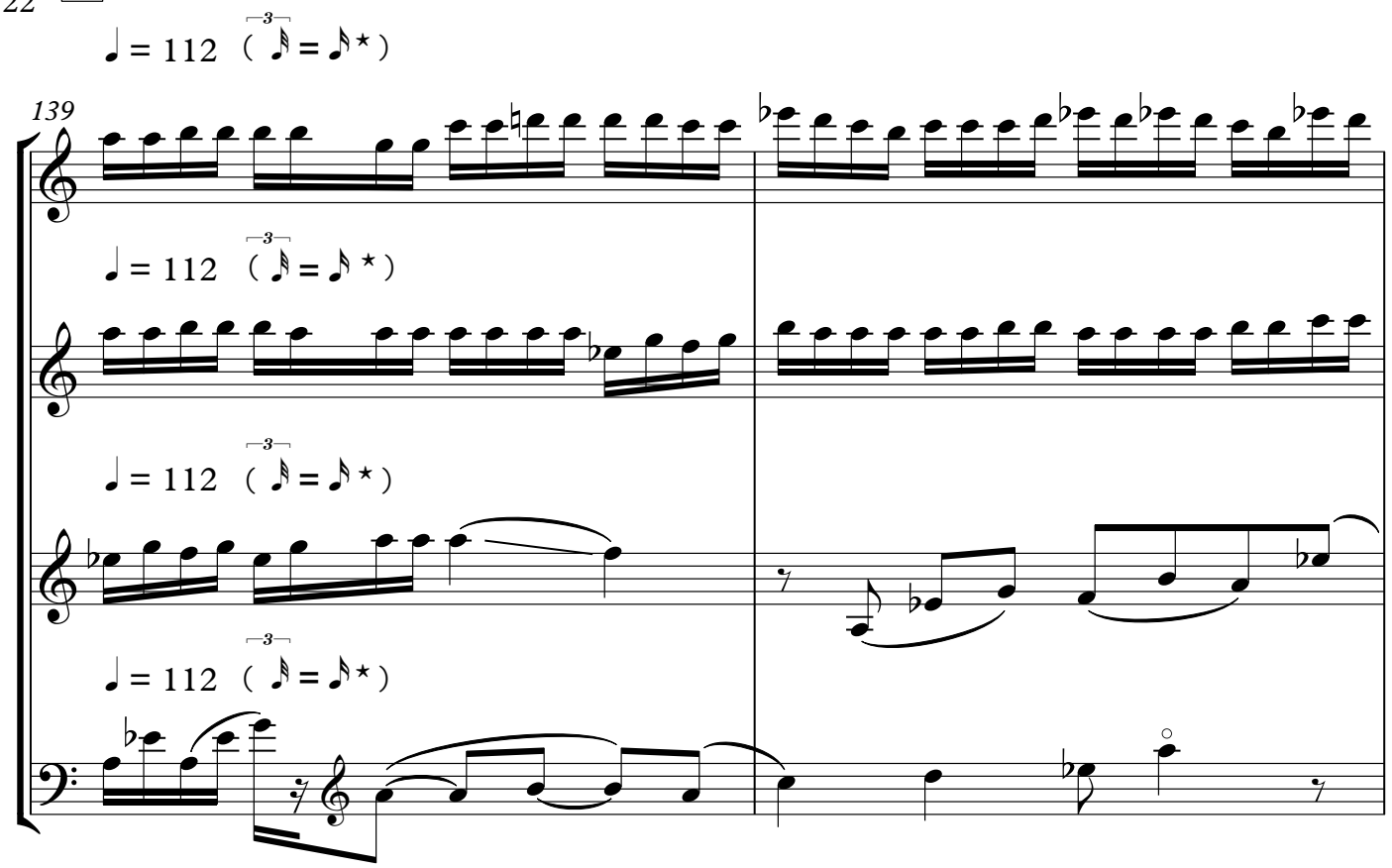

127
ord.
p
rit.
ord.
p
rit.
rit.
rit.
ppp


♩ = 60
♩ = 82
133
ff
♩ = 60
♩ = 82
mp
♩ = 60
♩ = 82
mp
♩ = 60
♩ = 82
ppp
mp

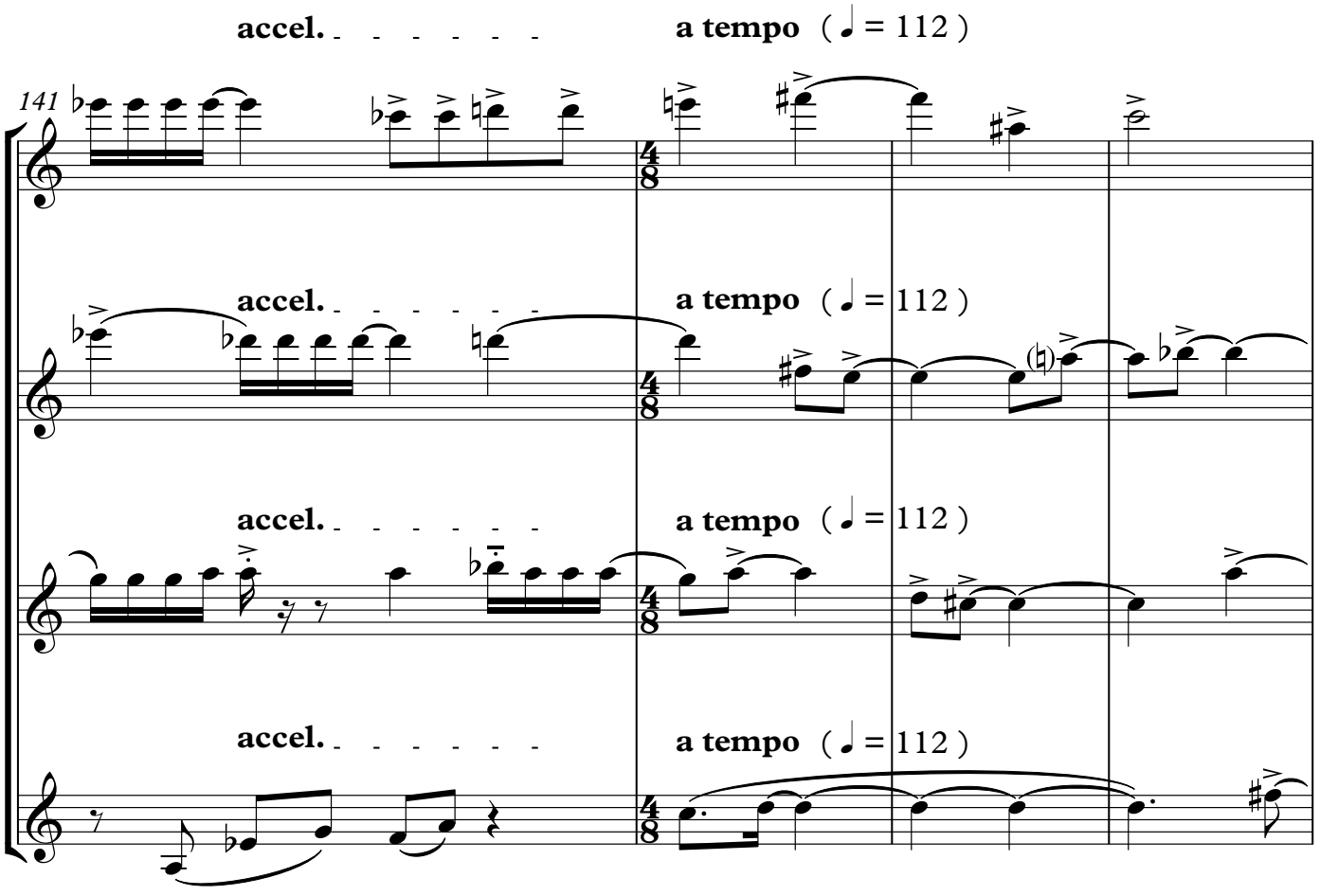

136
ff

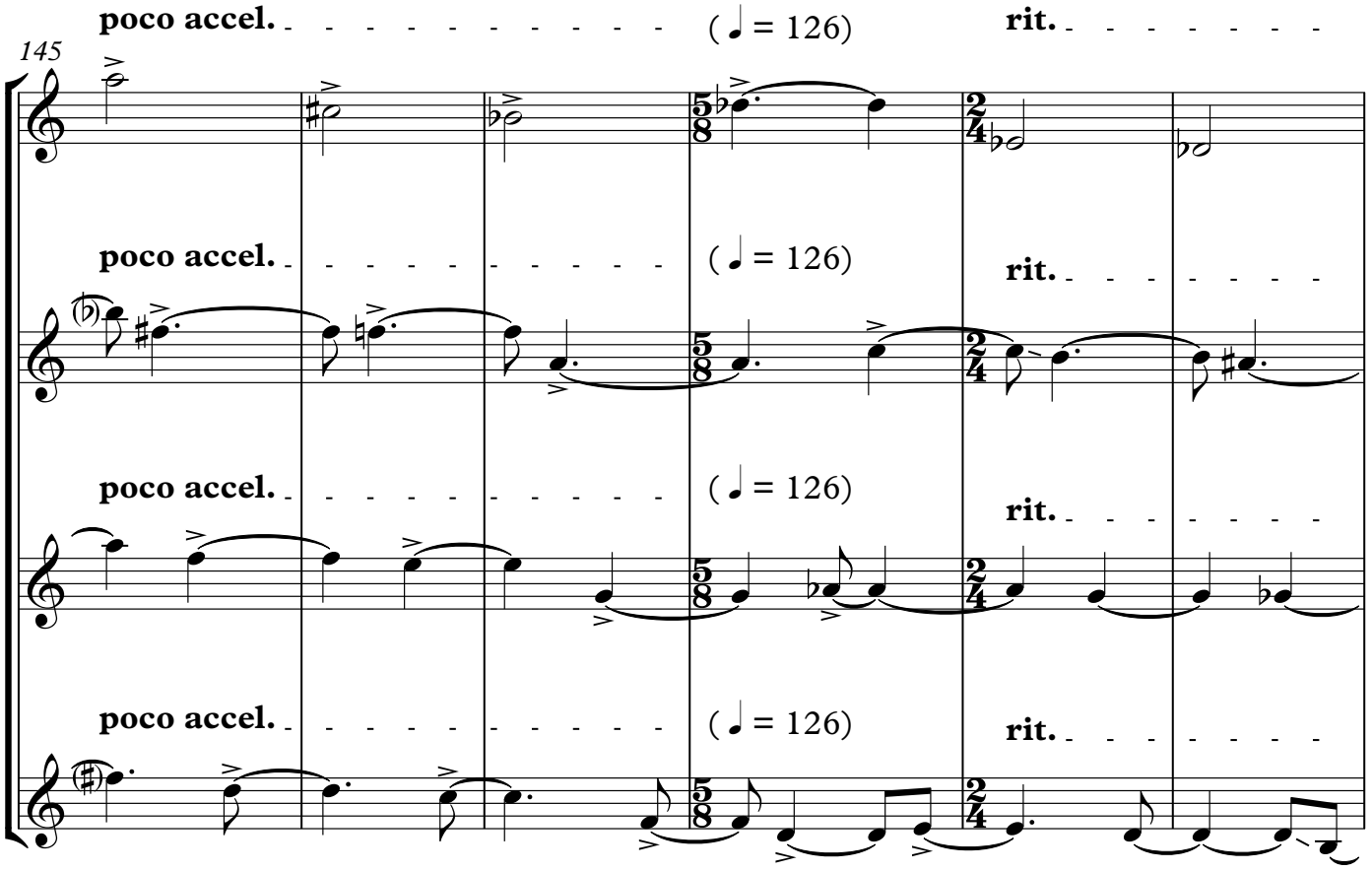

138
ff
ff
ff
ff

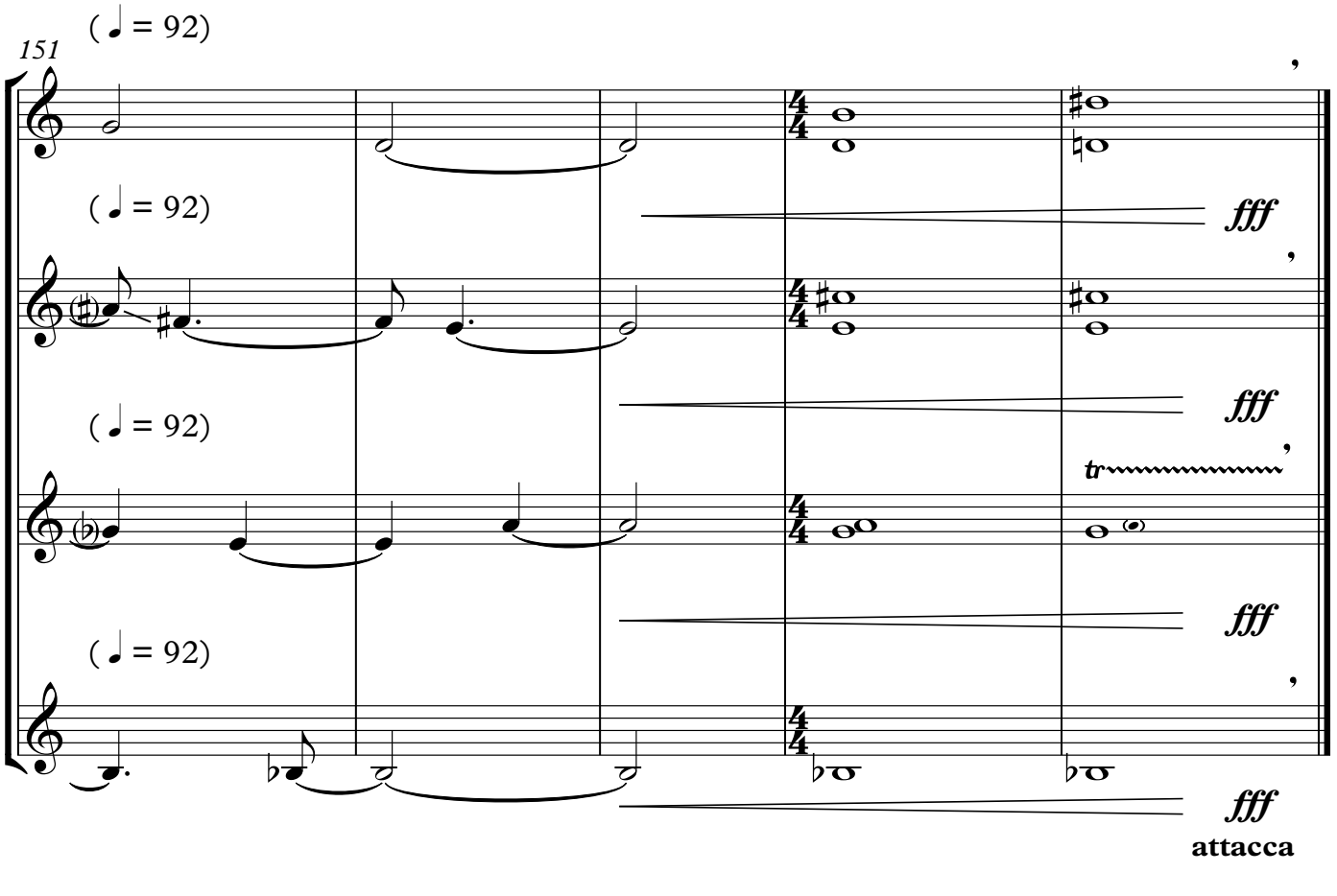
J



⋆ 112 is actually slightly slower than the triplet pulse of the preceding tempo, but this metric modulation should guide you.



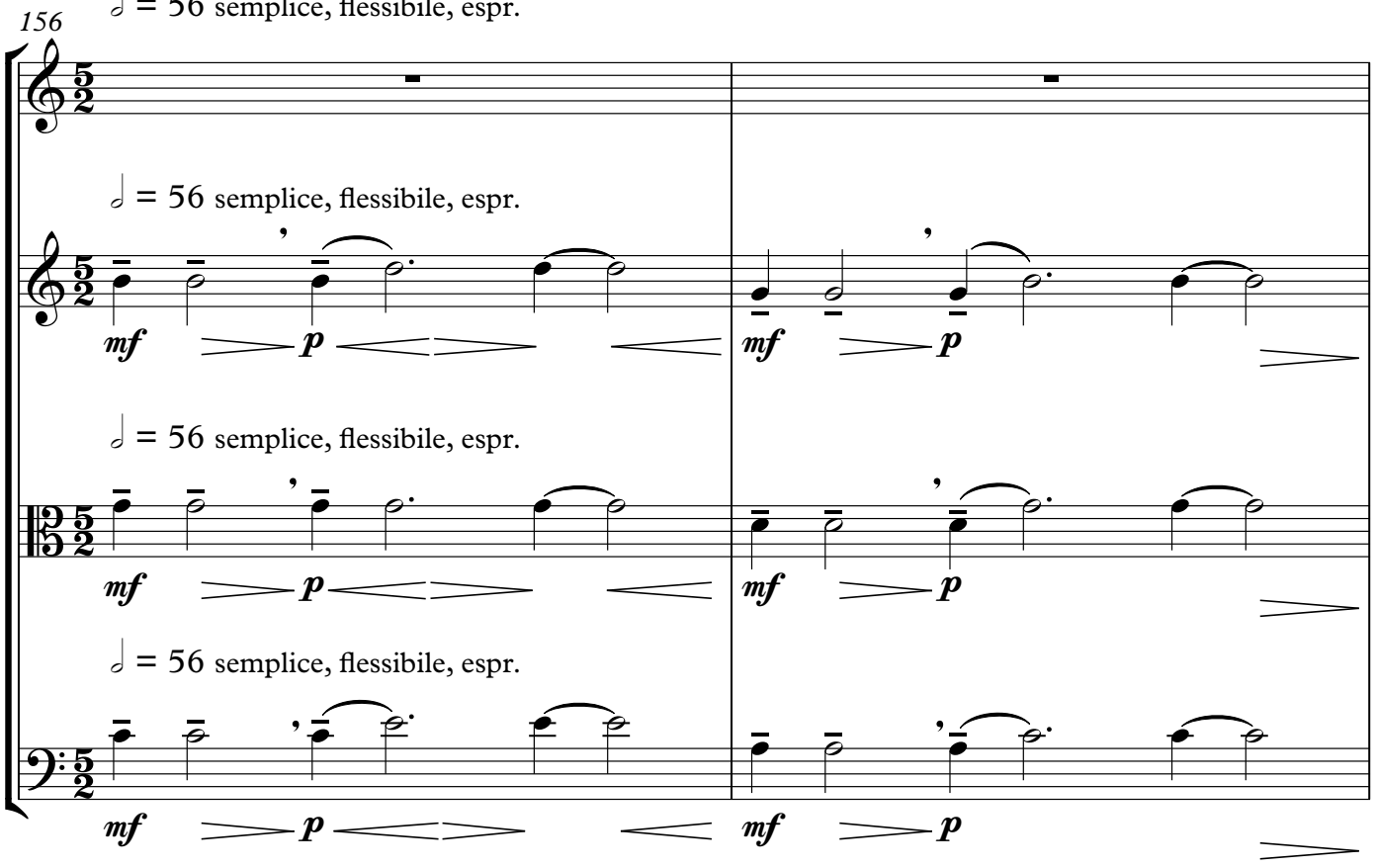

145
poco accel.
(♩ = 126)
rit.
poco accel.
(♩ = 126)
rit.
poco accel.
(♩ = 126)
rit.
poco accel.
(♩ = 126)
rit.

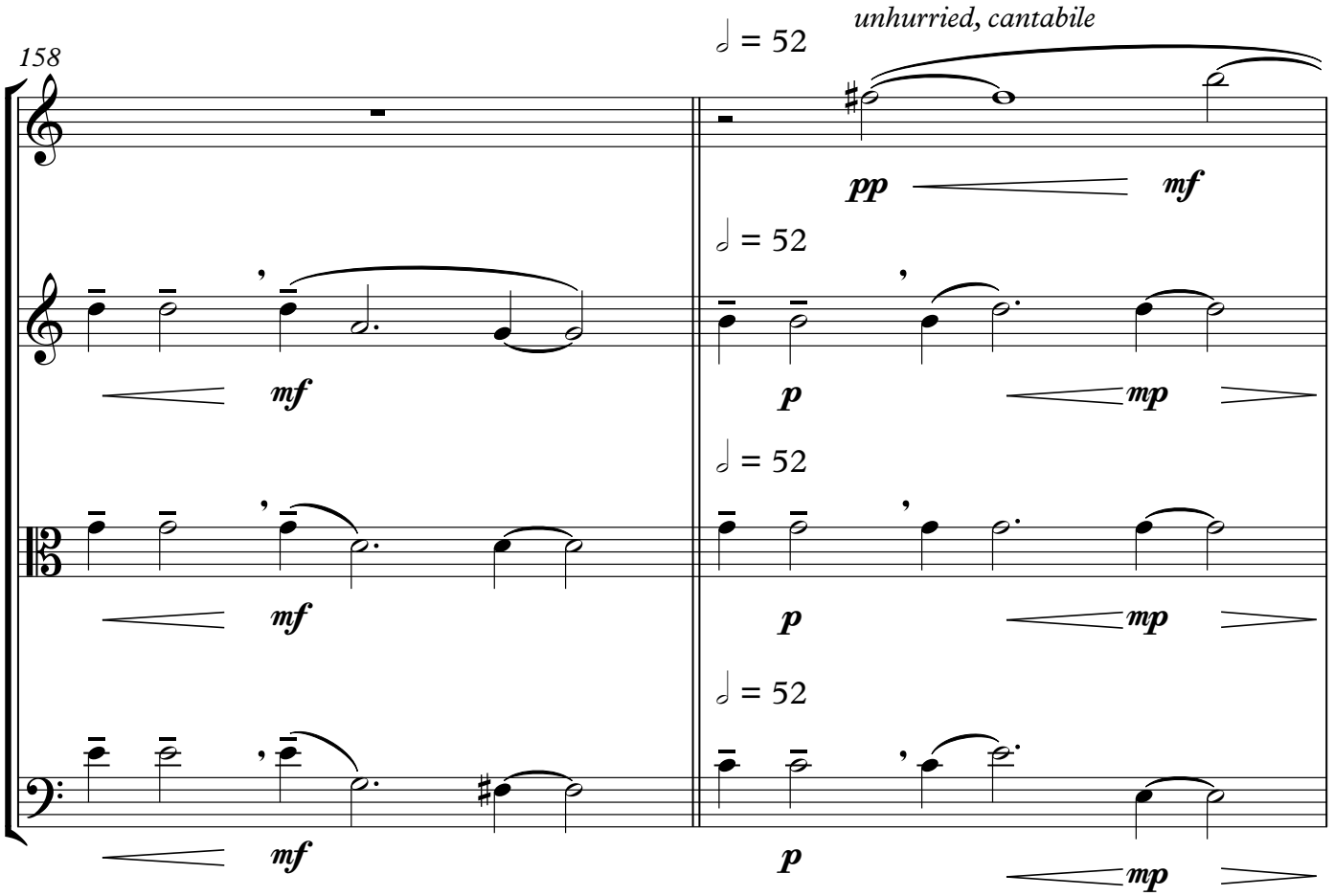

151
(♩ = 92)
(♩ = 92)
fff
(♩ = 92)
fff
tr
(♩ = 92)
fff
fff
attacca

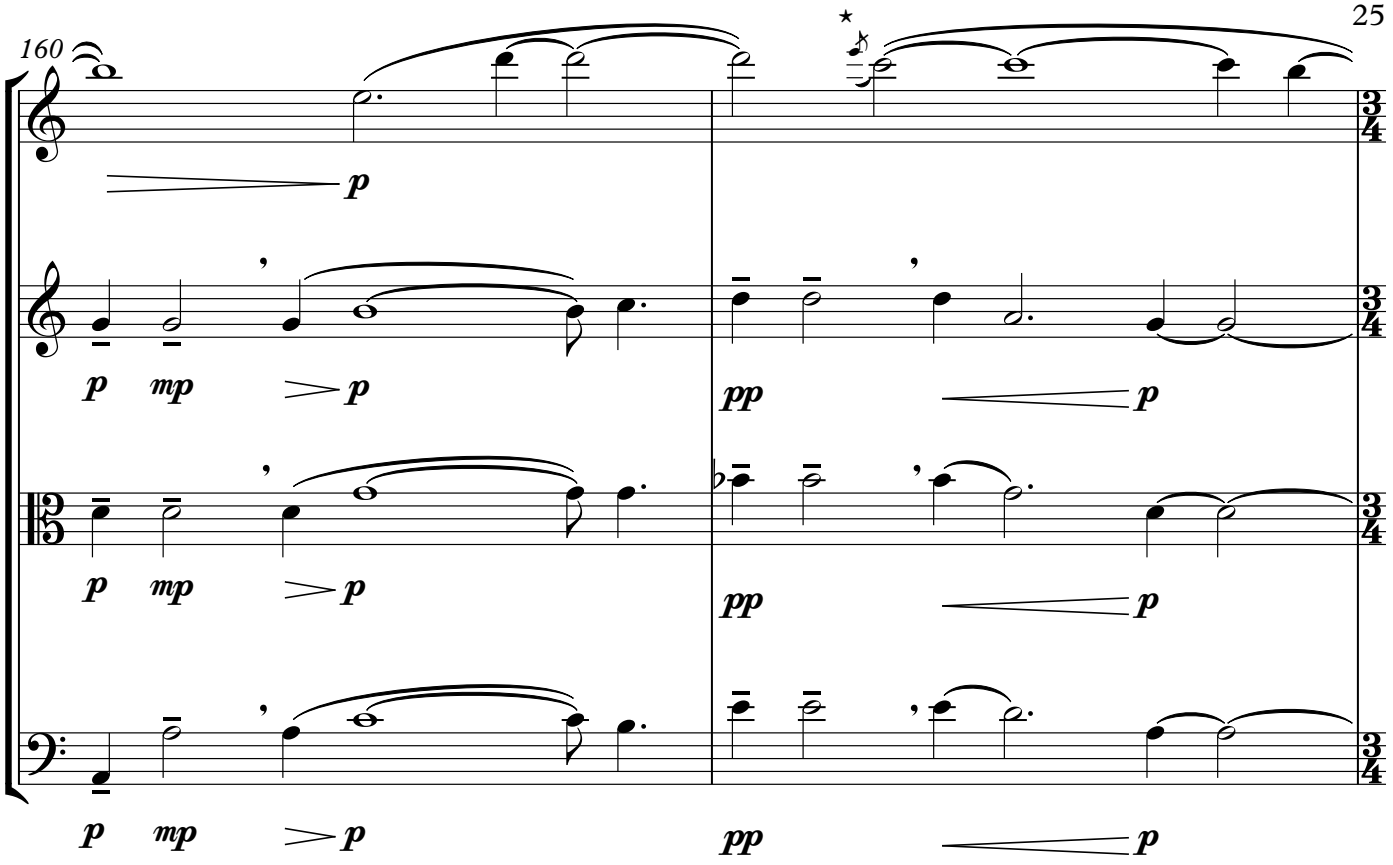
III

(under the broken scroll of the stars/voices like leaves of light)

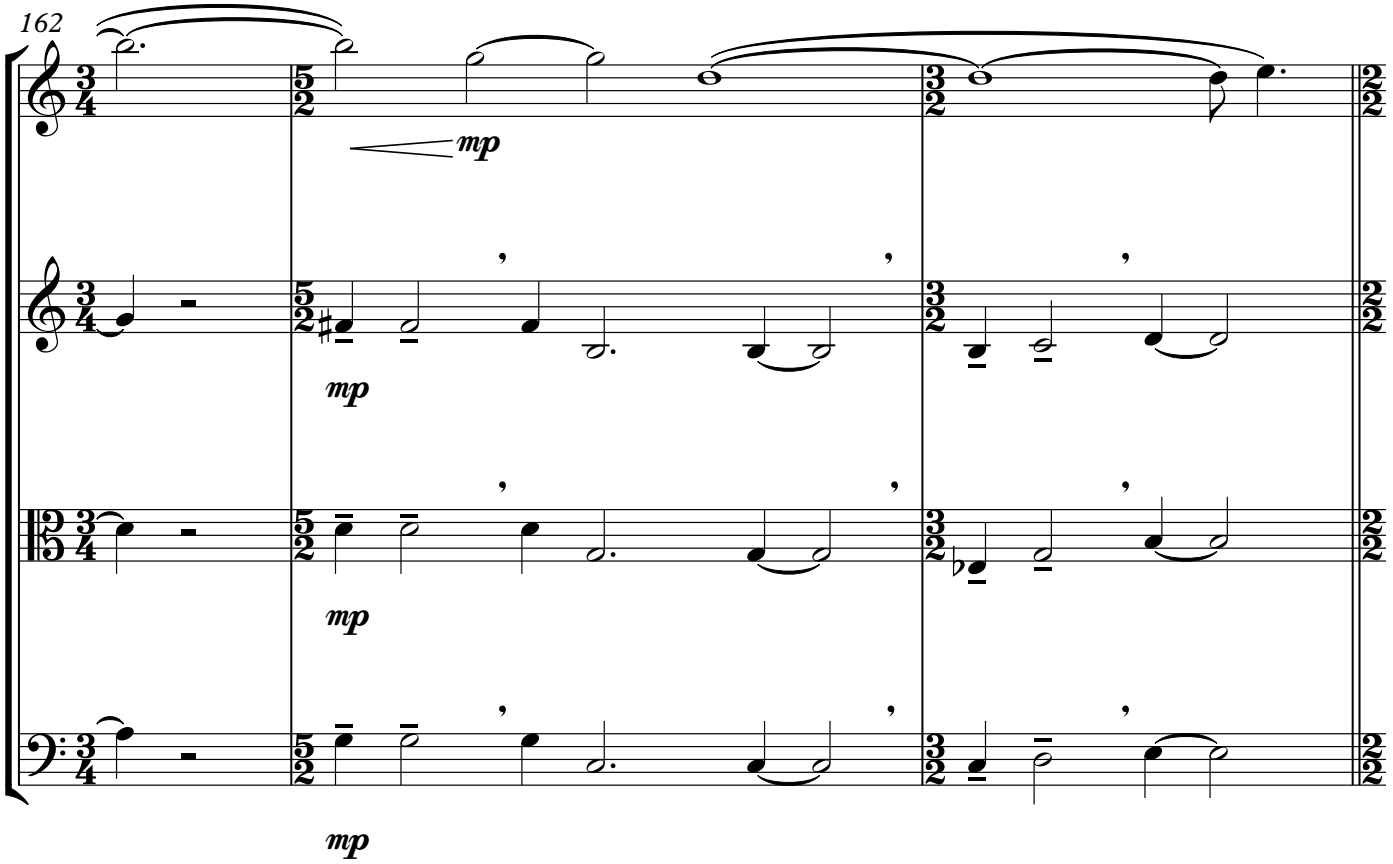
for Jennie

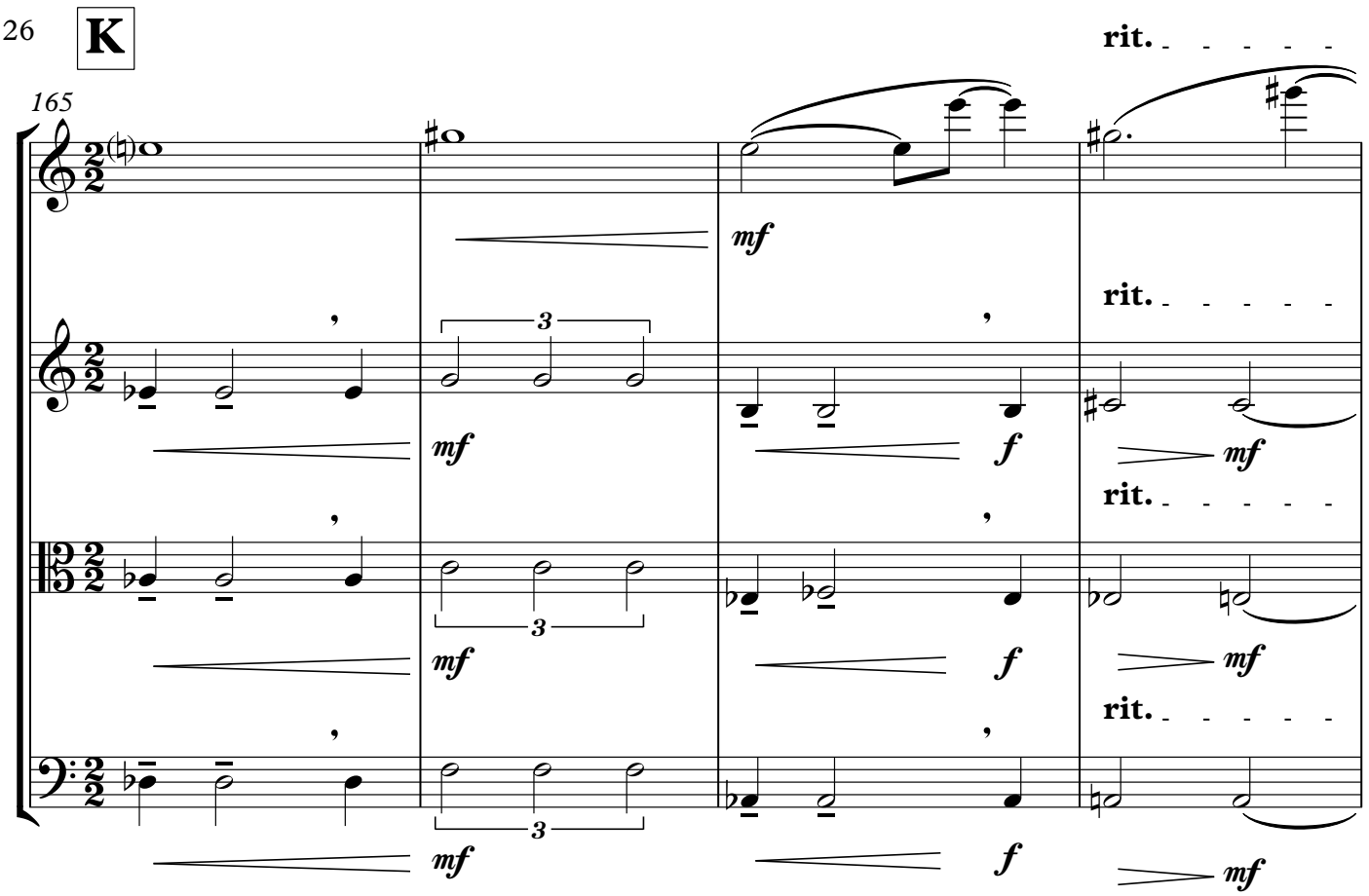


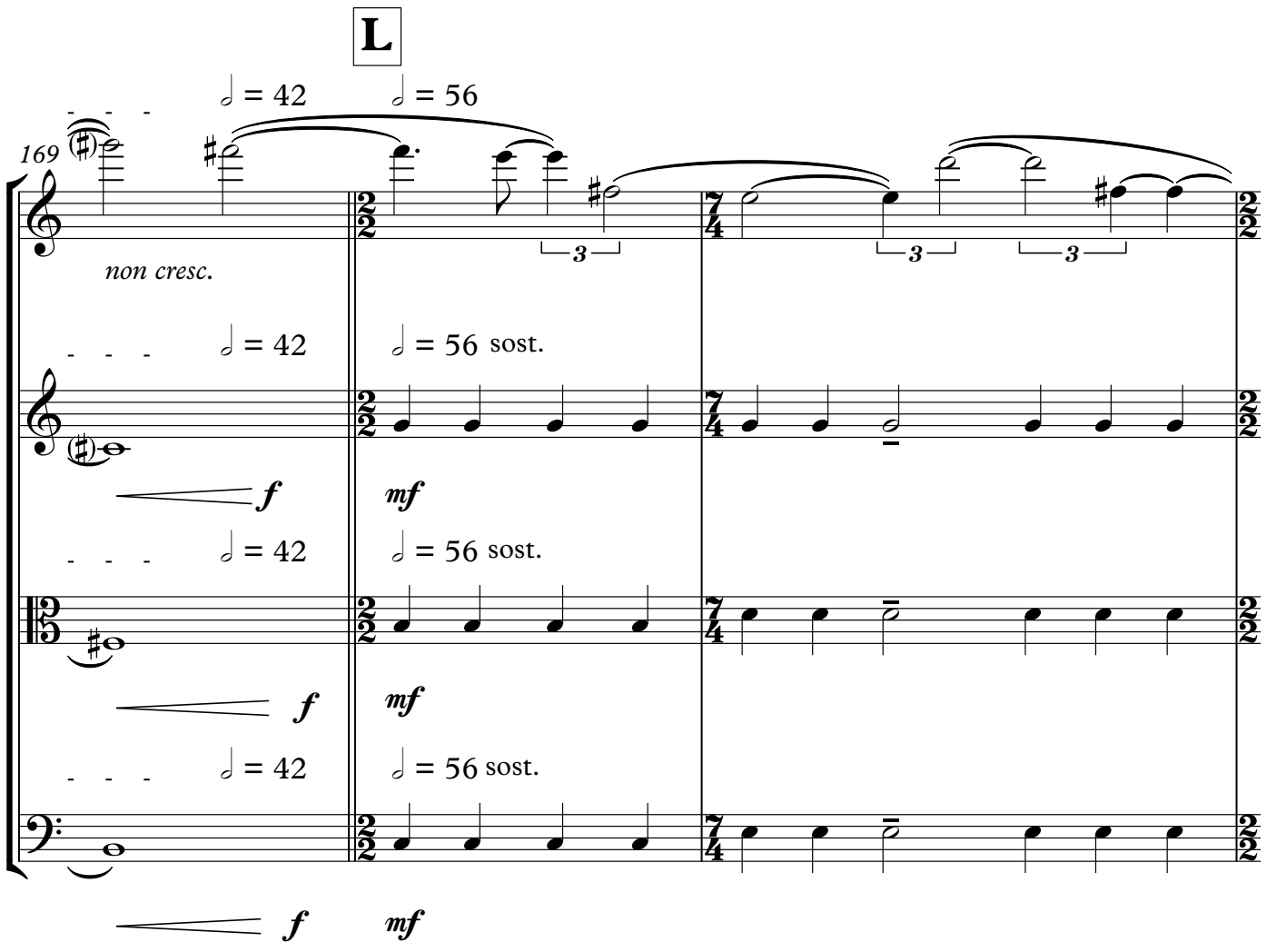


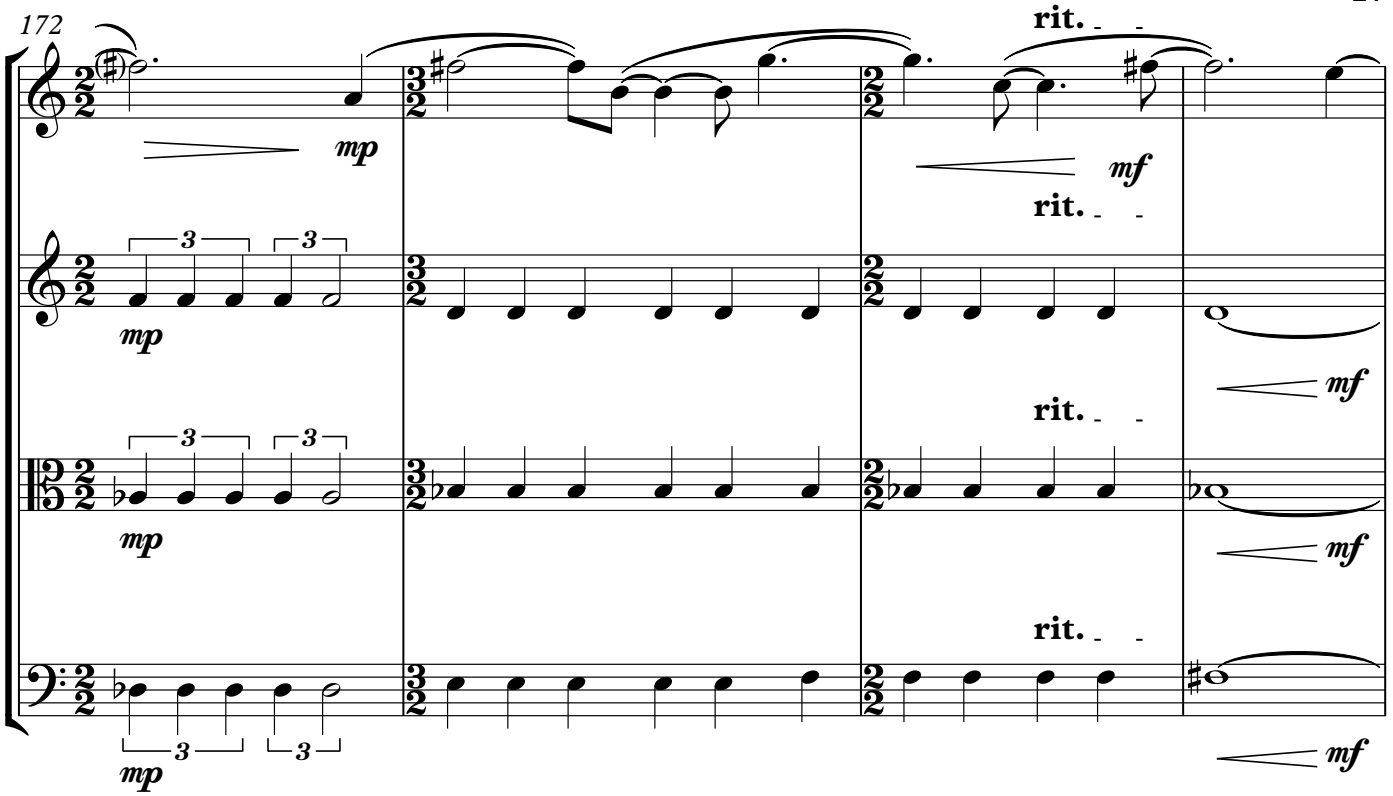


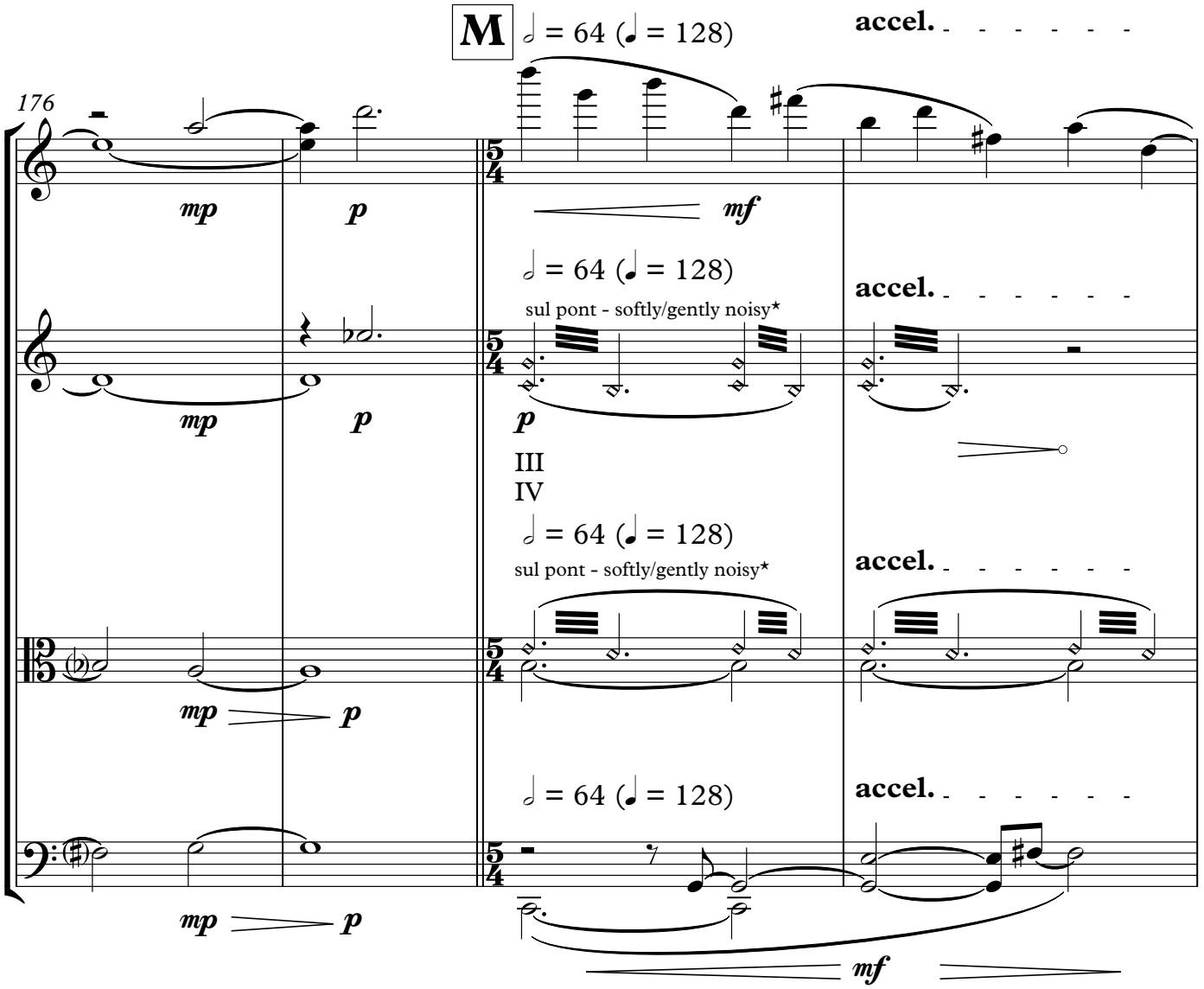
⋆ before the beat



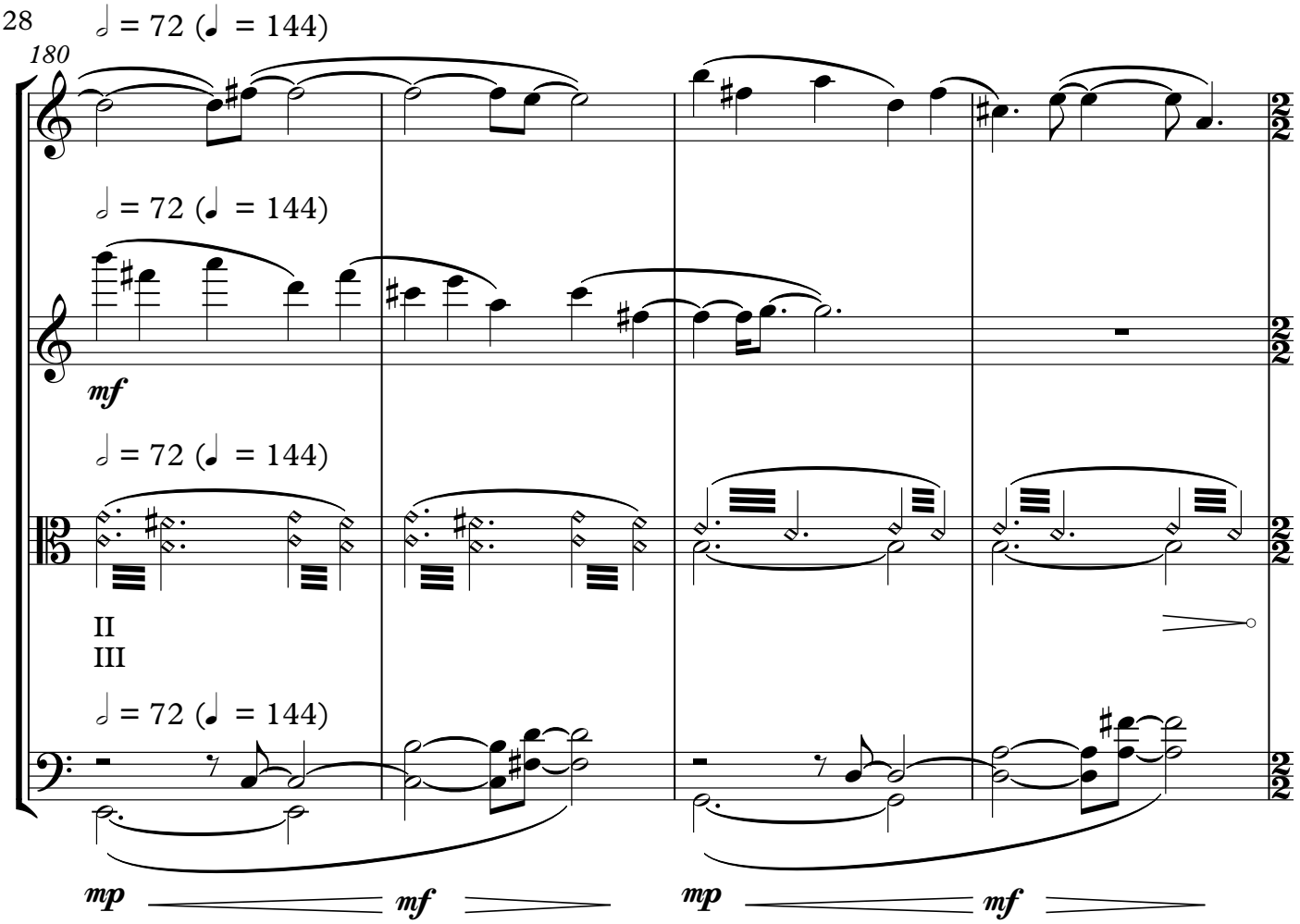

K
165
rit.
mf
f
3

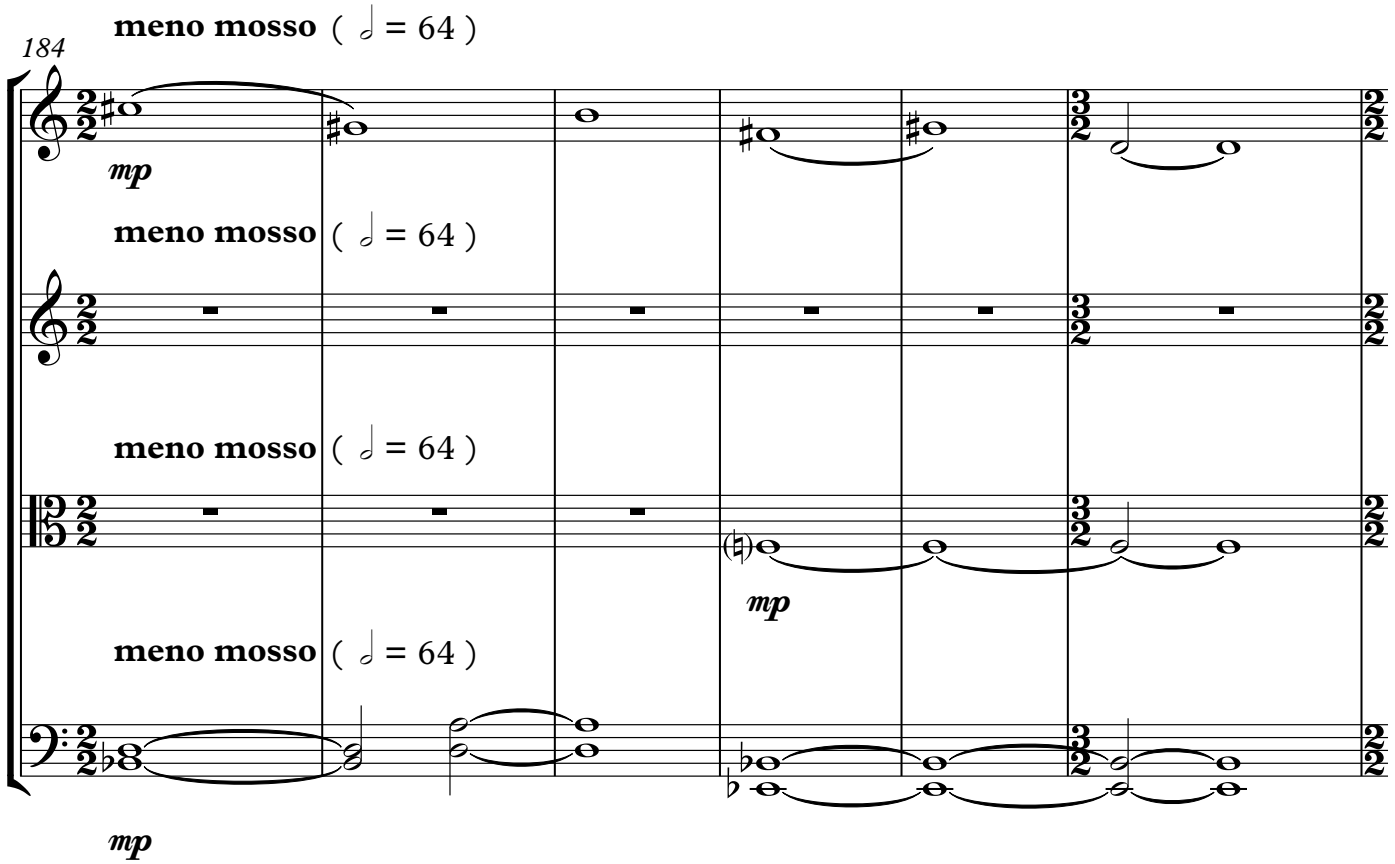

L
169
♩ = 42
♩ = 56
non cresc.
♩ = 56 sost.
f
mf
3

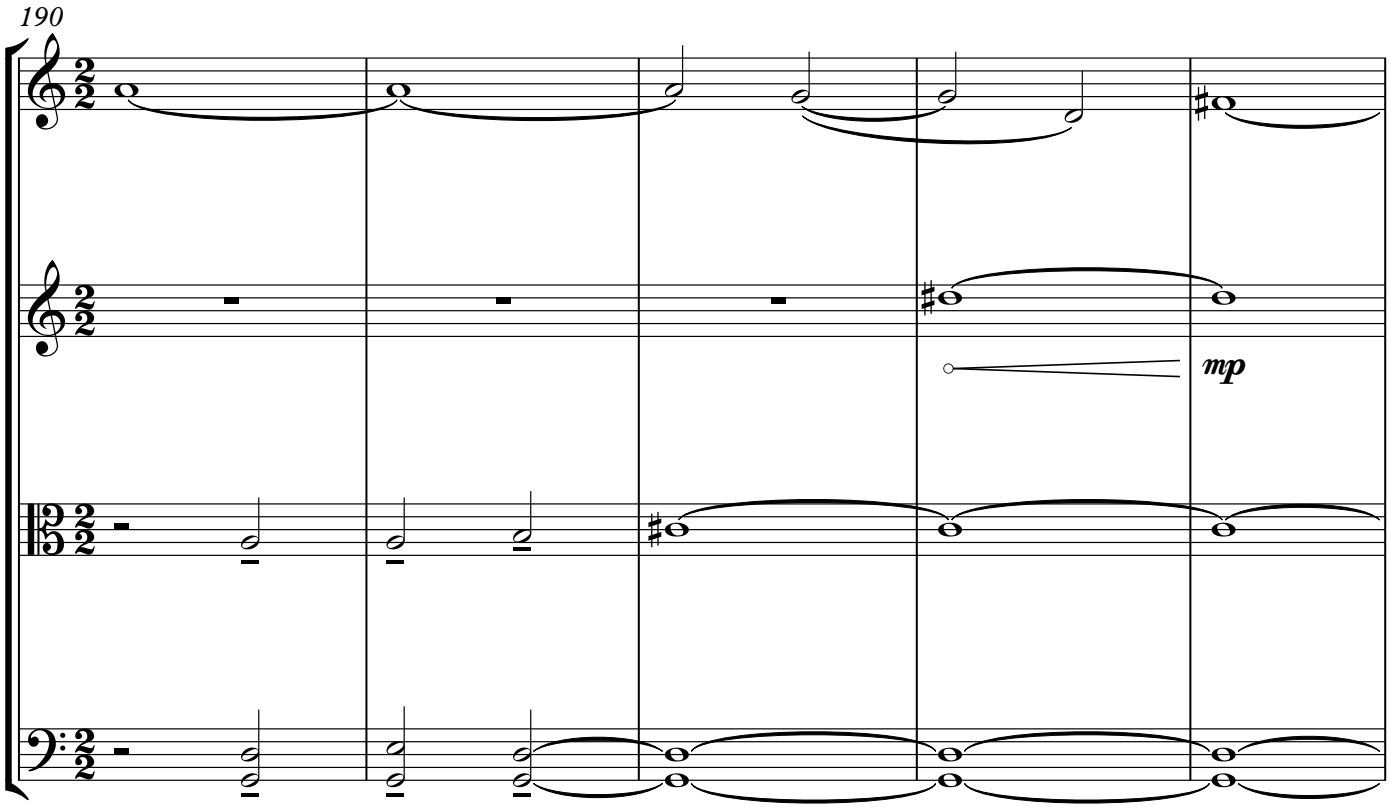


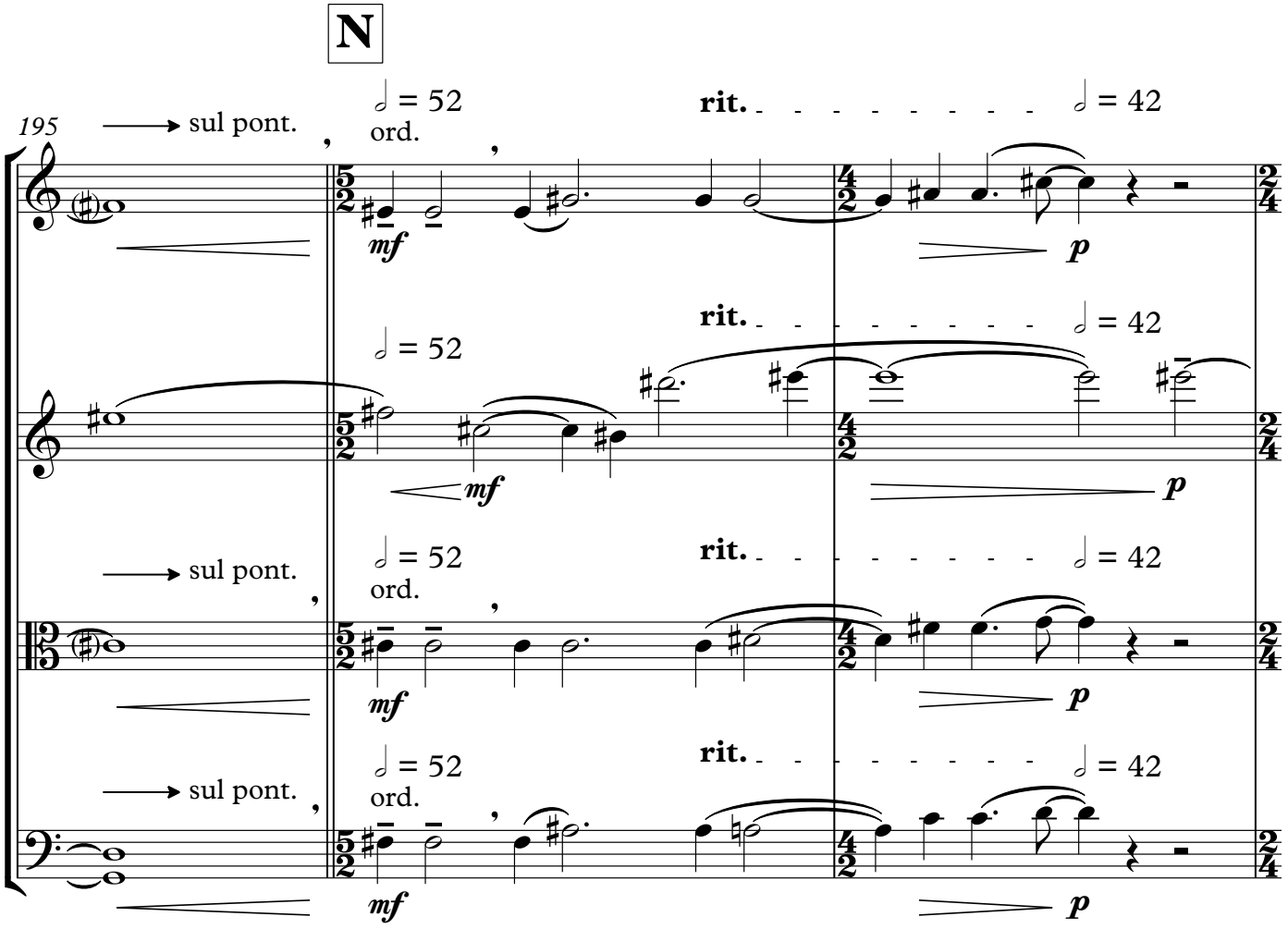


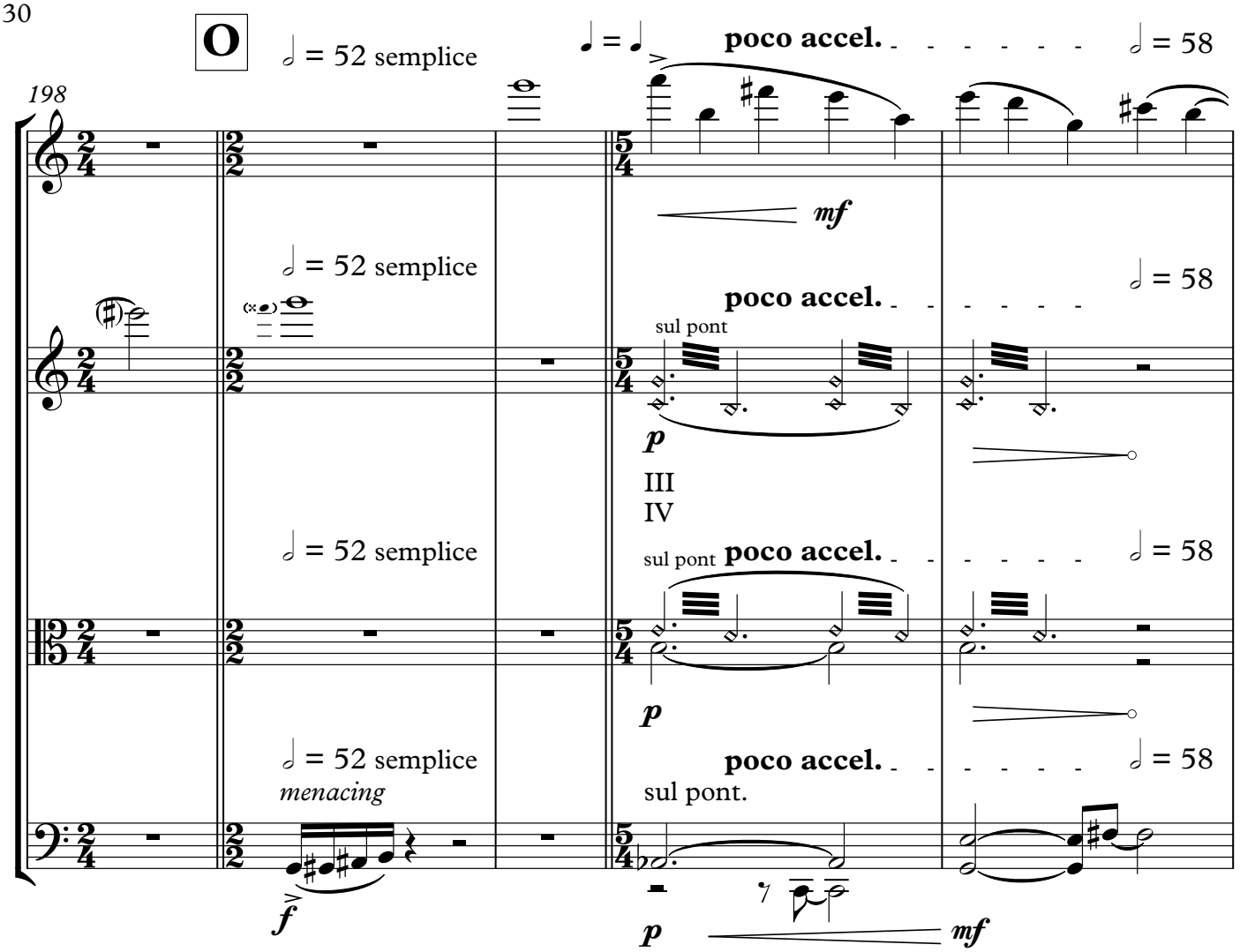
*This effect should be more textural than pitched.

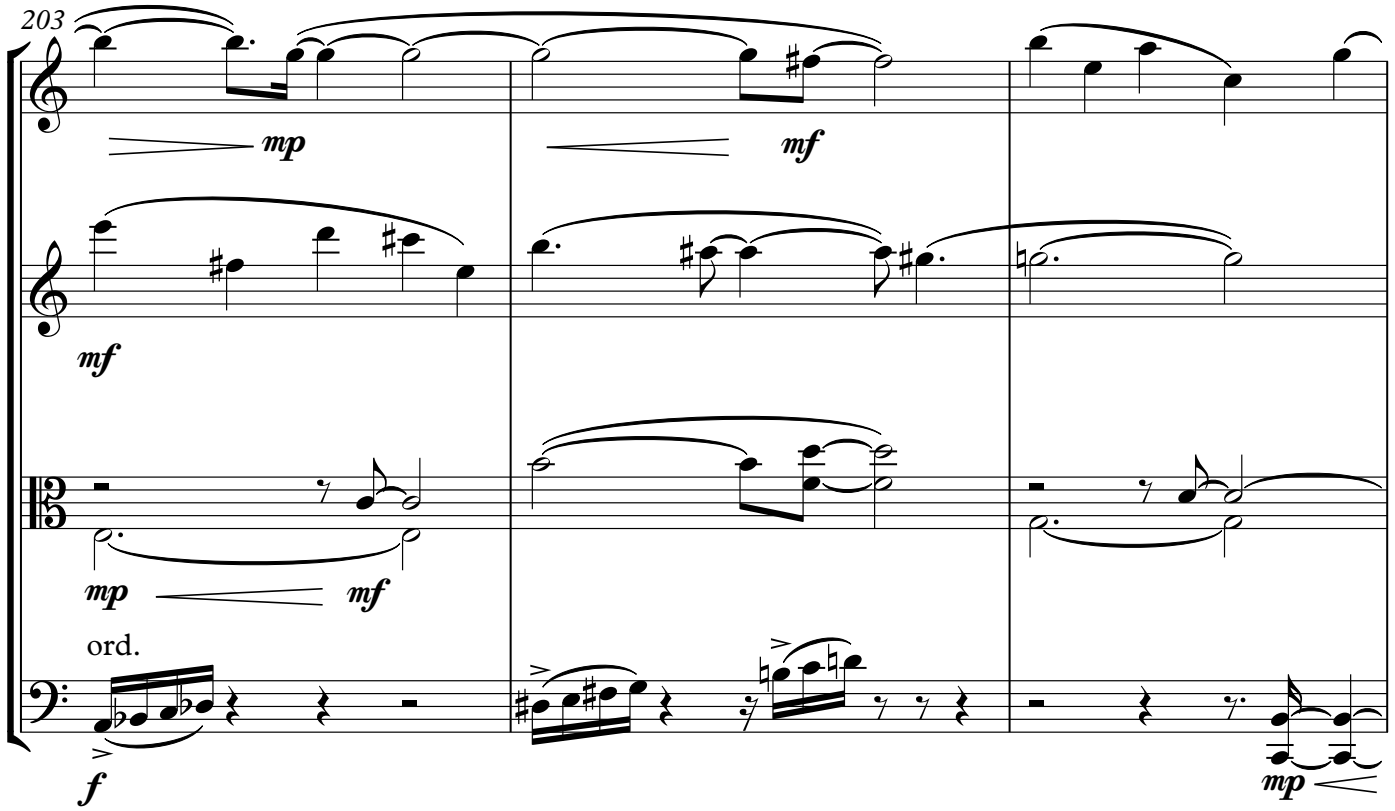

180
𝅗𝅥 = 72 (♩ = 144)
mf
II
III
mp
mf
mp
mf


184
meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = 64)
mp
meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = 64)
meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = 64)
mp
meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = 64)
mp


190
mp


N
195
sul pont.
ord.
mf
p
rit.
♩ = 52
♩ = 42


O
198
𝅗𝅥 = 52 semplice
𝅗𝅥 = 58
poco accel.
mf
sul pont
p
III
IV
menacing
sul pont.
f
mf


203
mp
mf
ord.
f

206

f

f

mp

208

f

ff

mf

ff

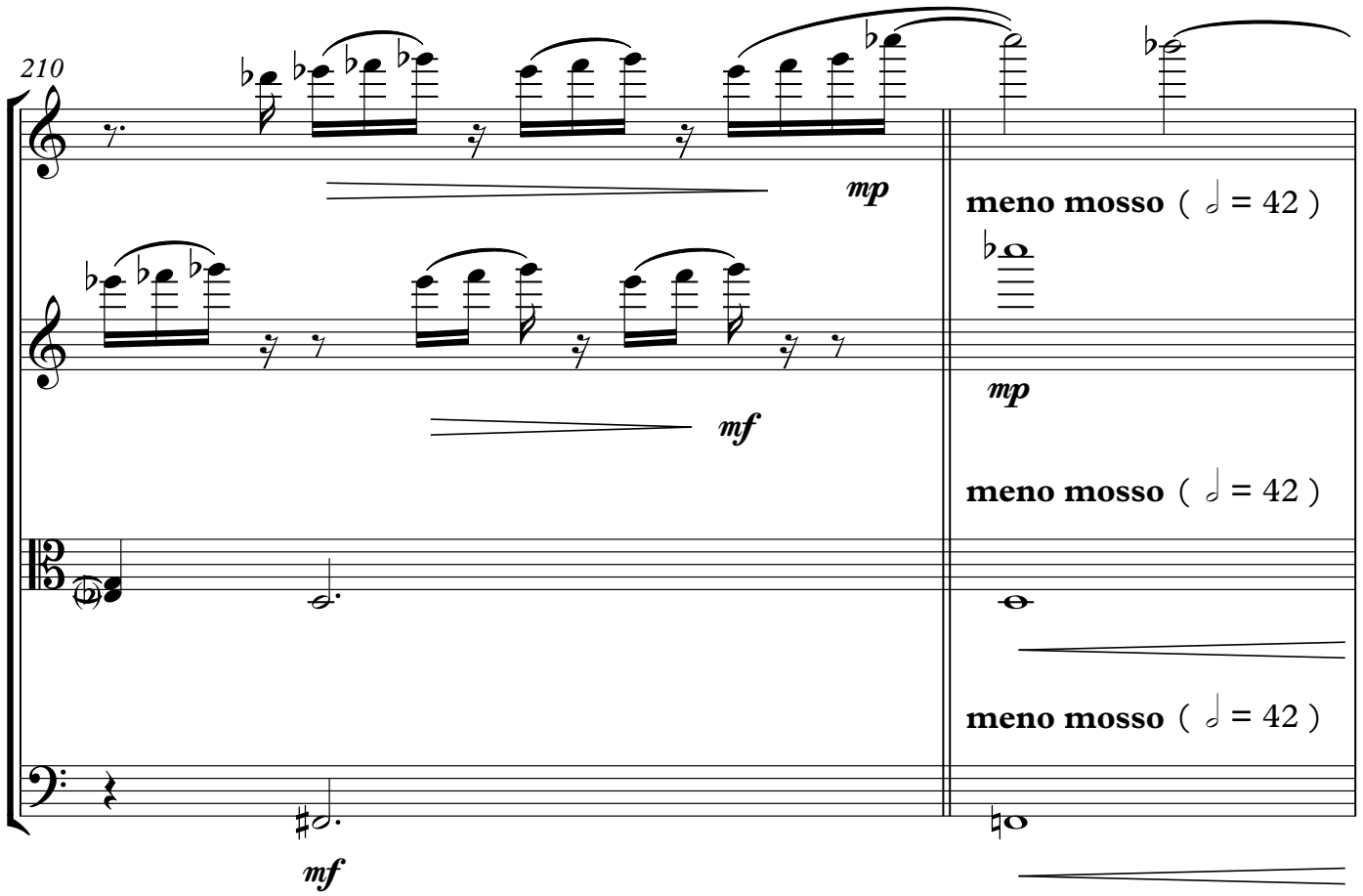
ff

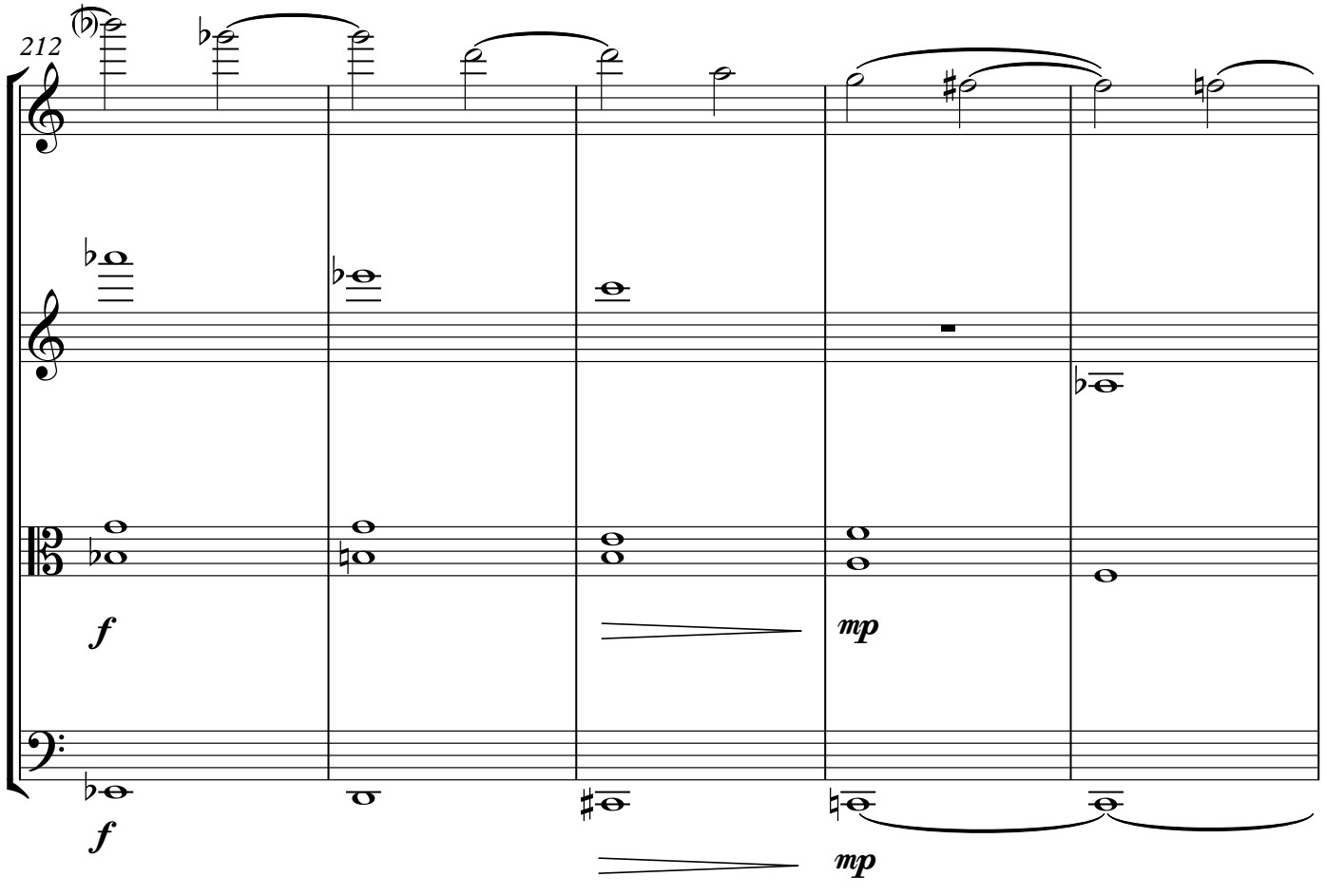
mf

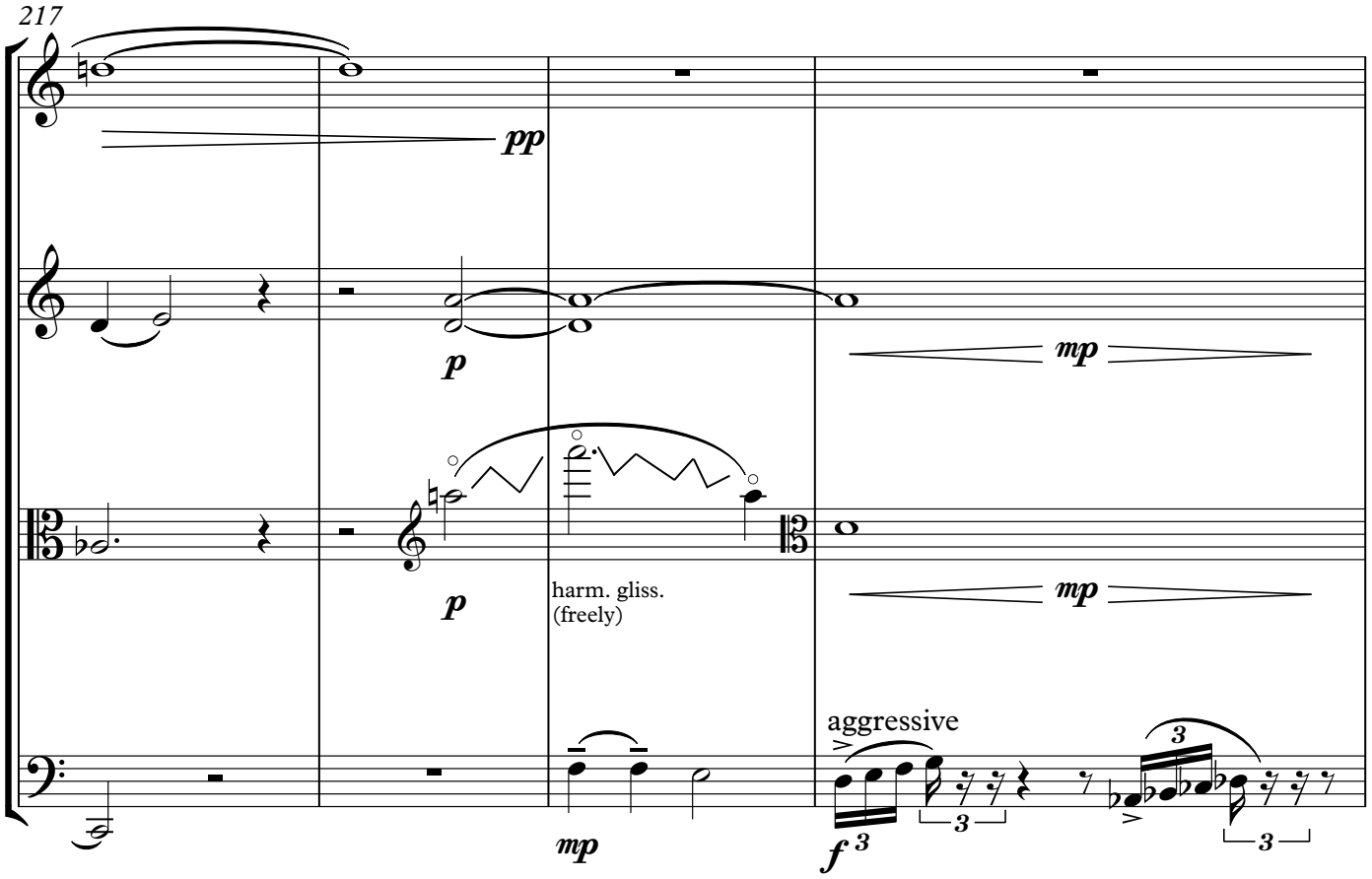
mp

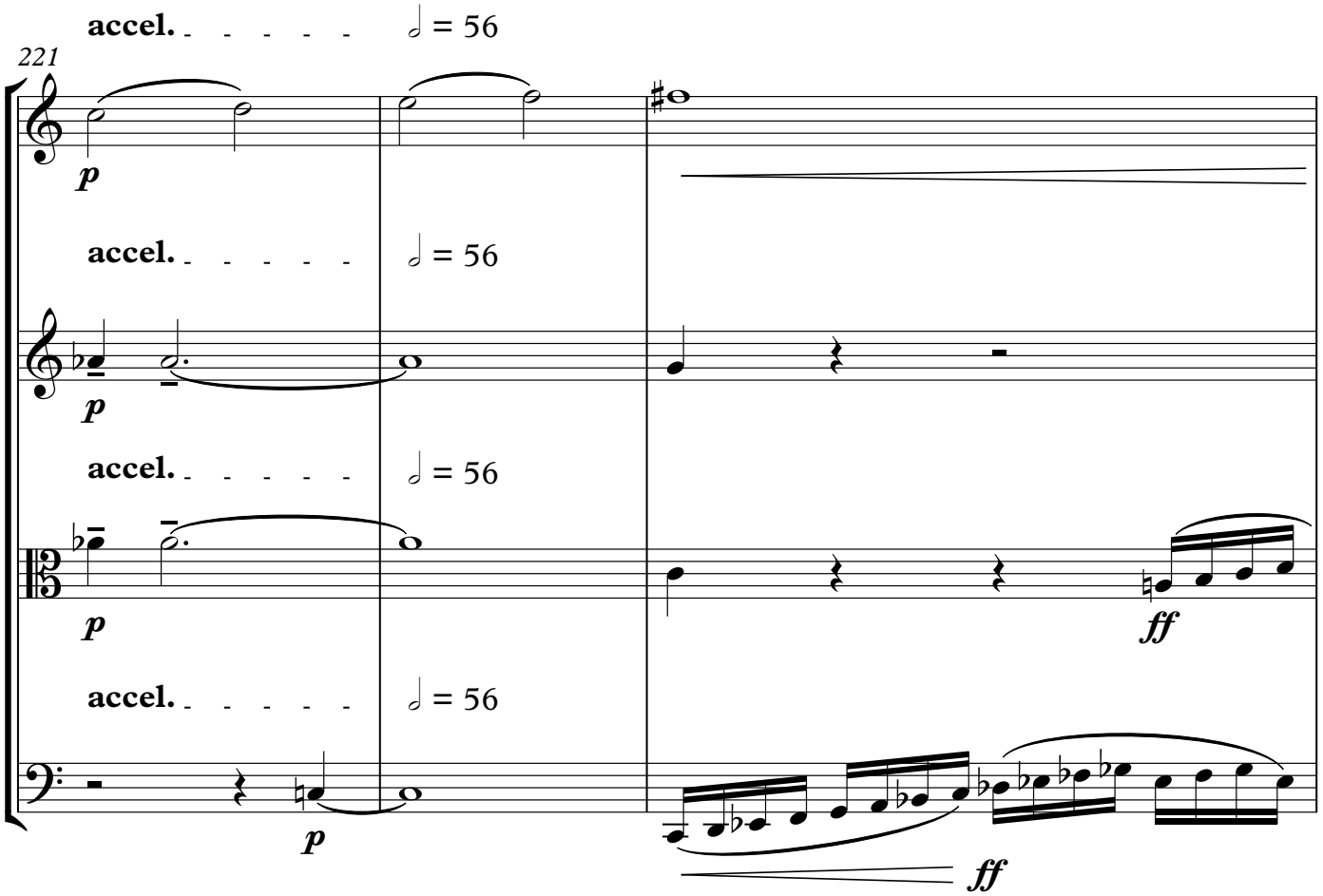
P

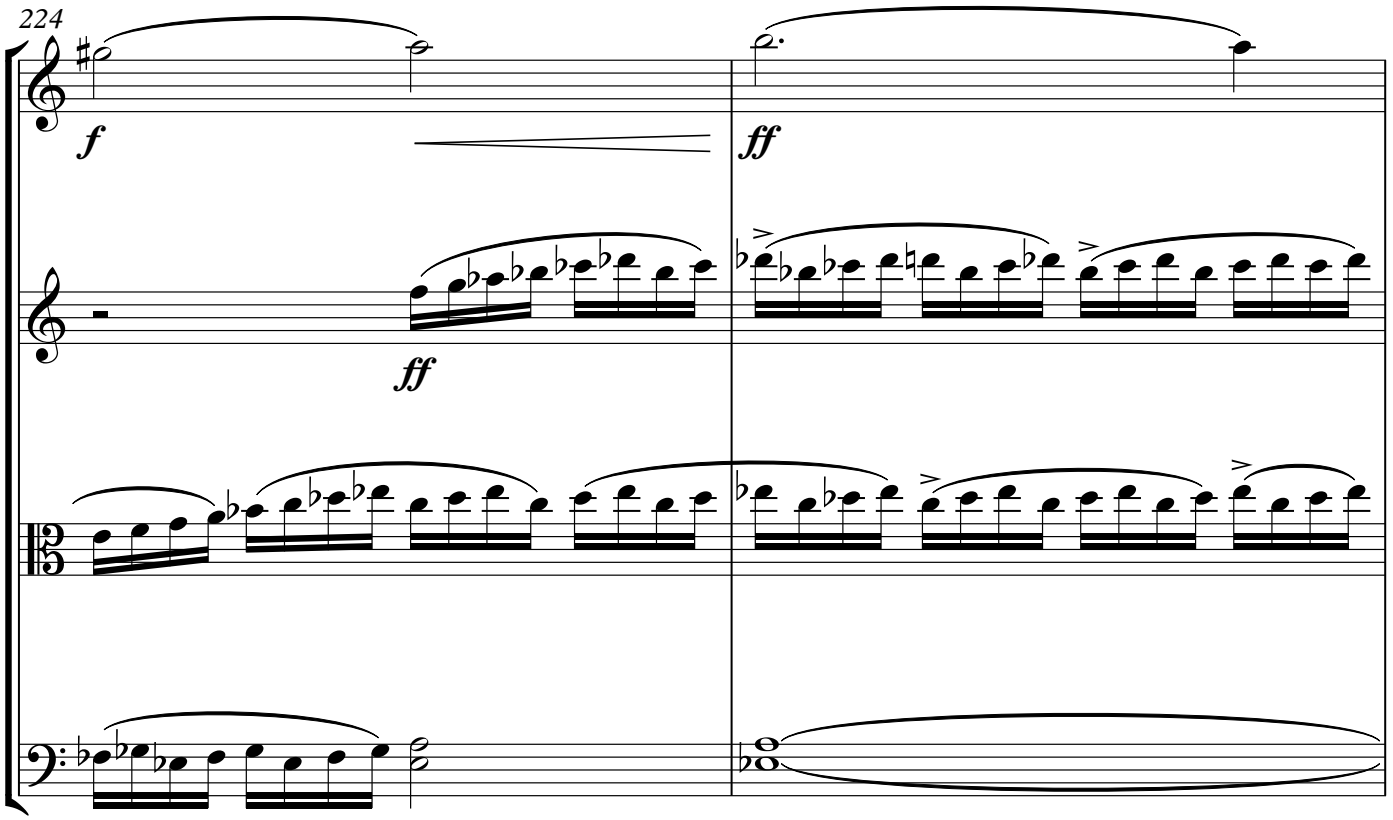
meno mosso (𝅗𝅥 = 42)

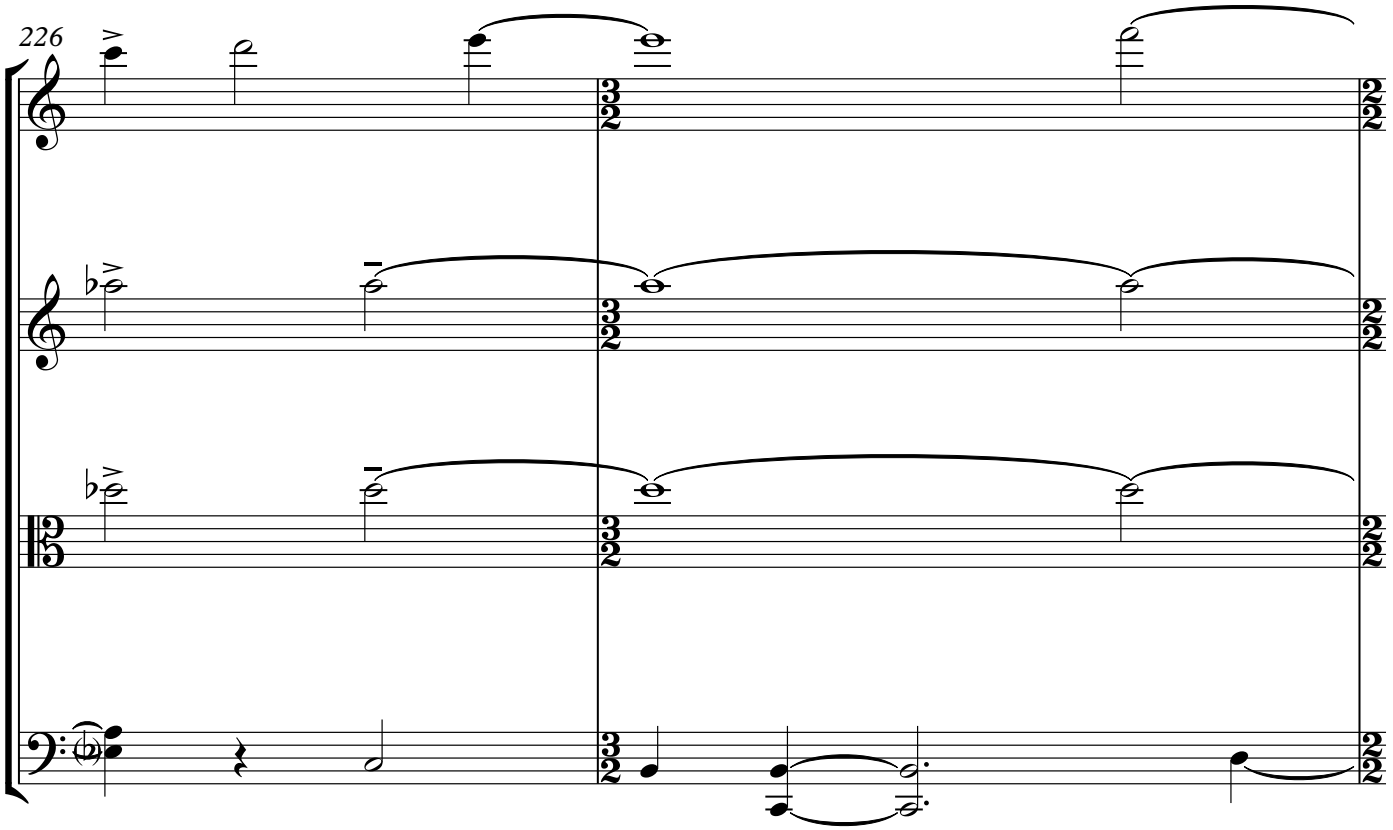


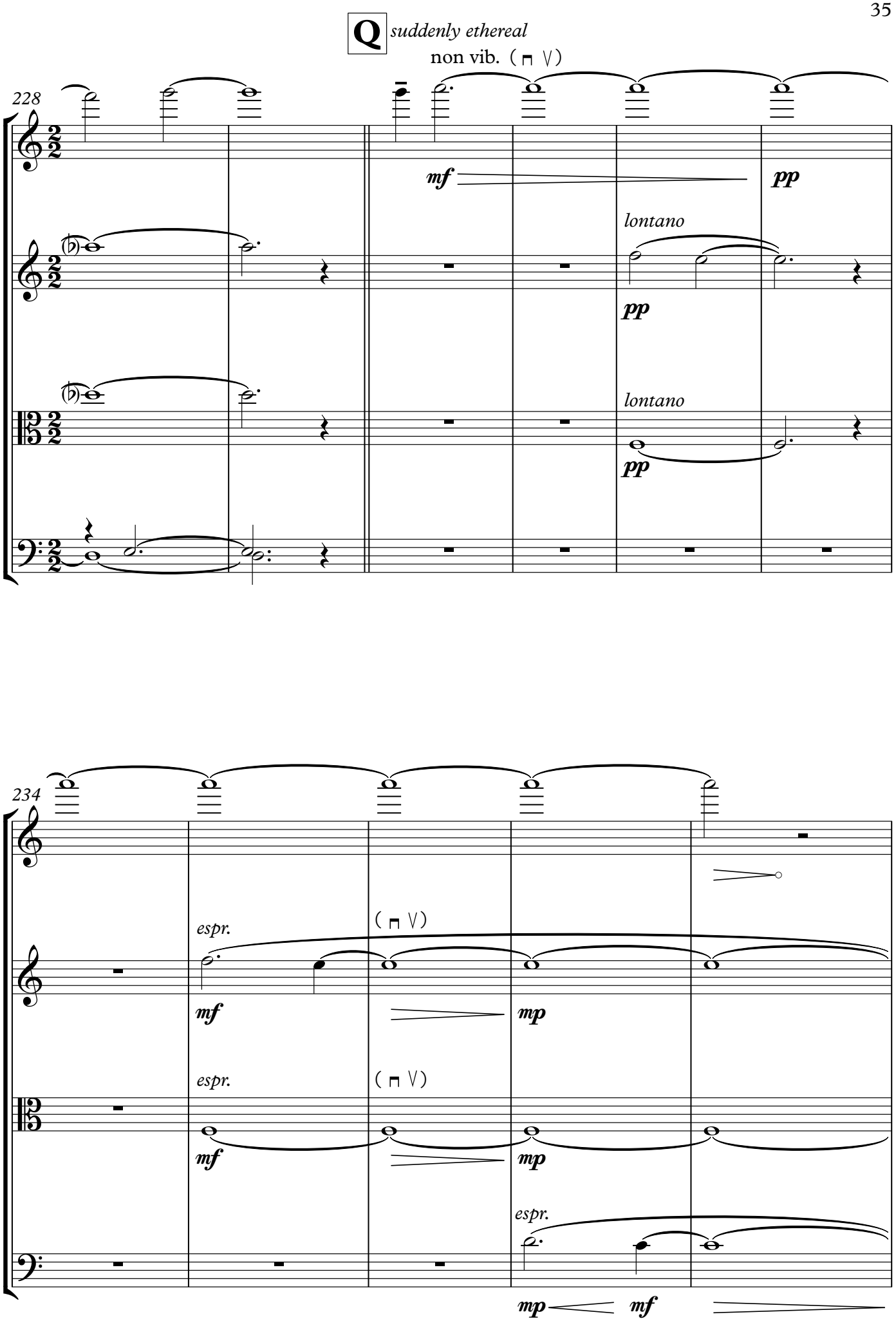


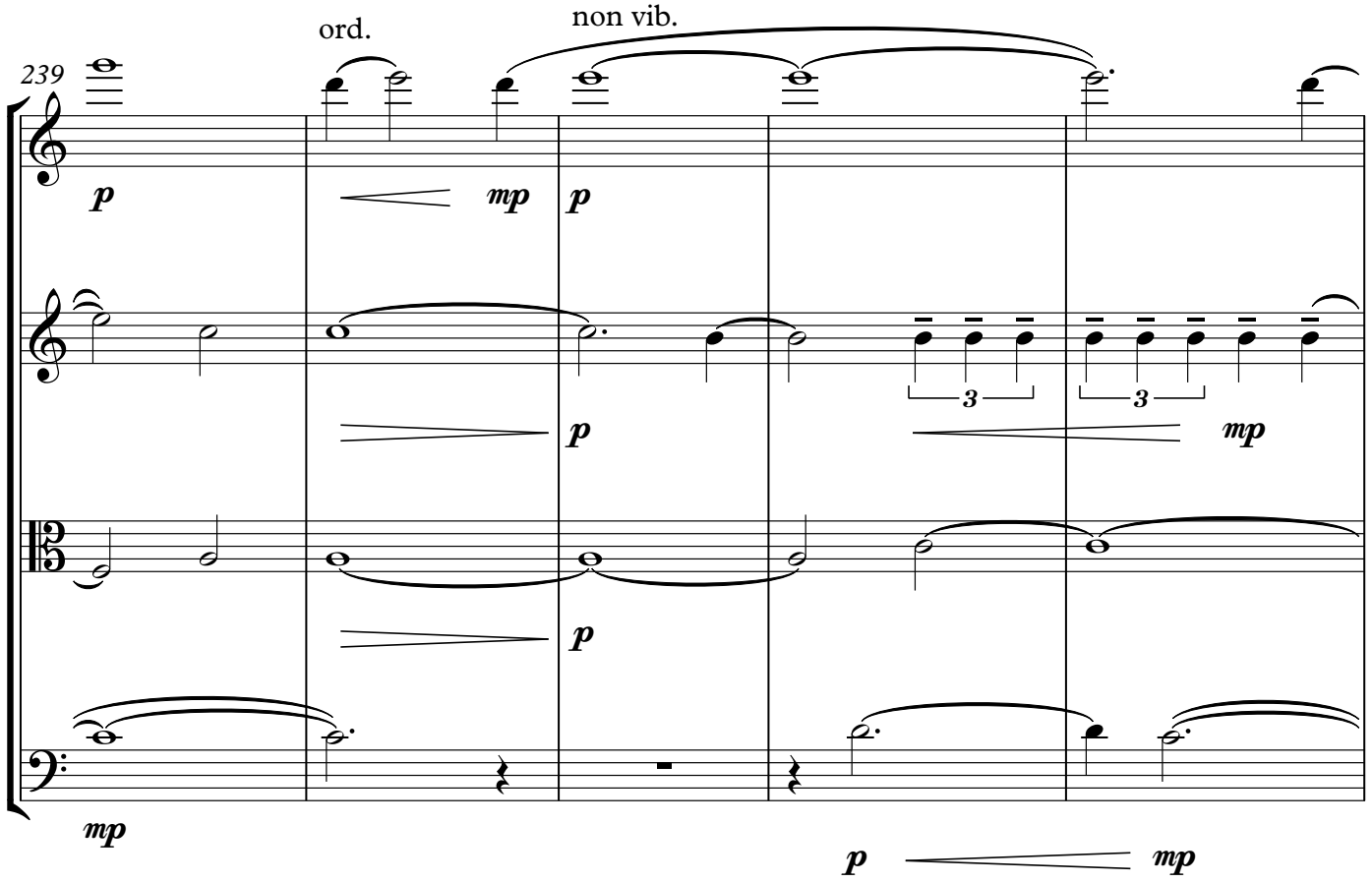

217
pp
p
mp
p
harm. gliss.
(freely)
mp
aggressive
f
3
3
3
3

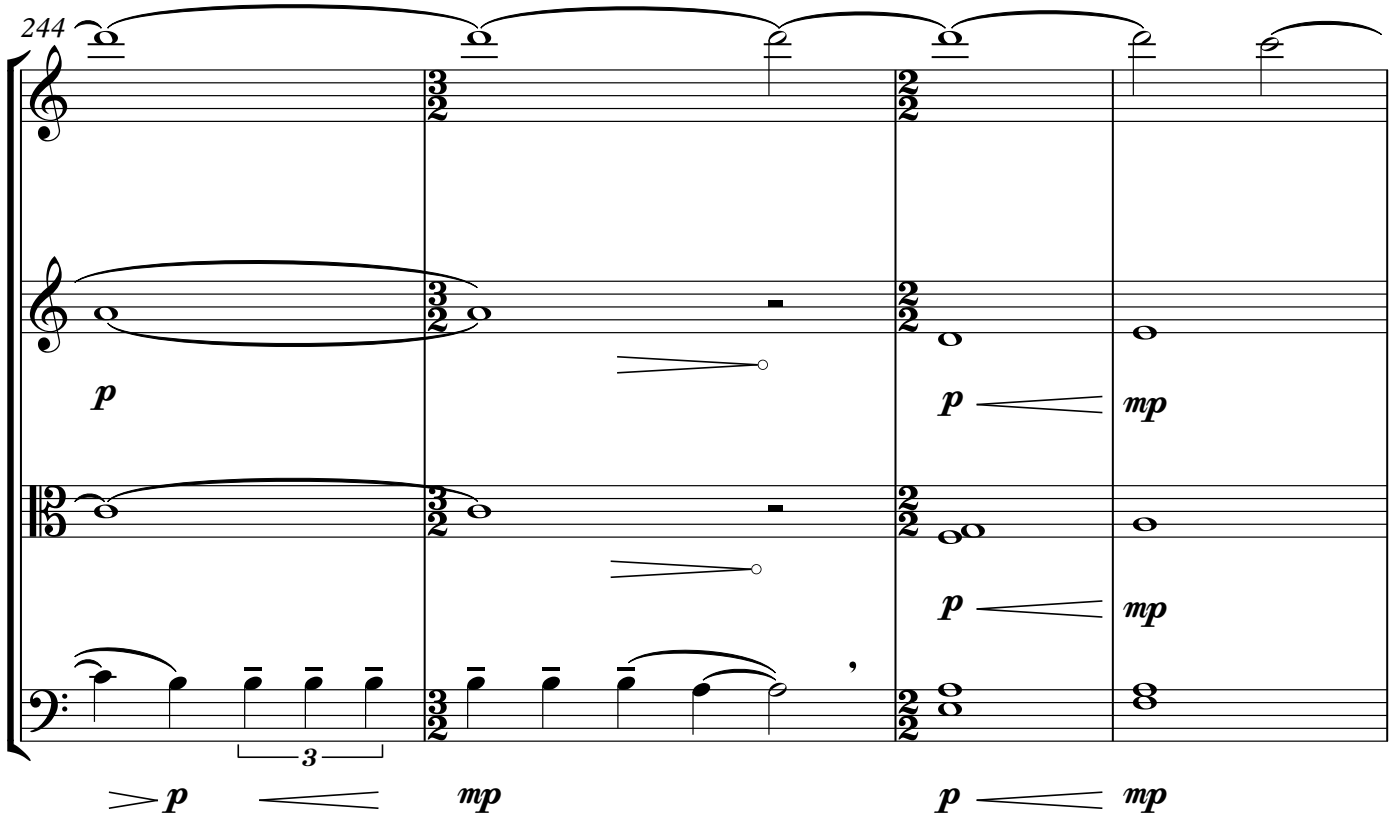

accel. = 56
221
p
accel. = 56
p
accel. = 56
p
ff
accel. = 56
p
ff

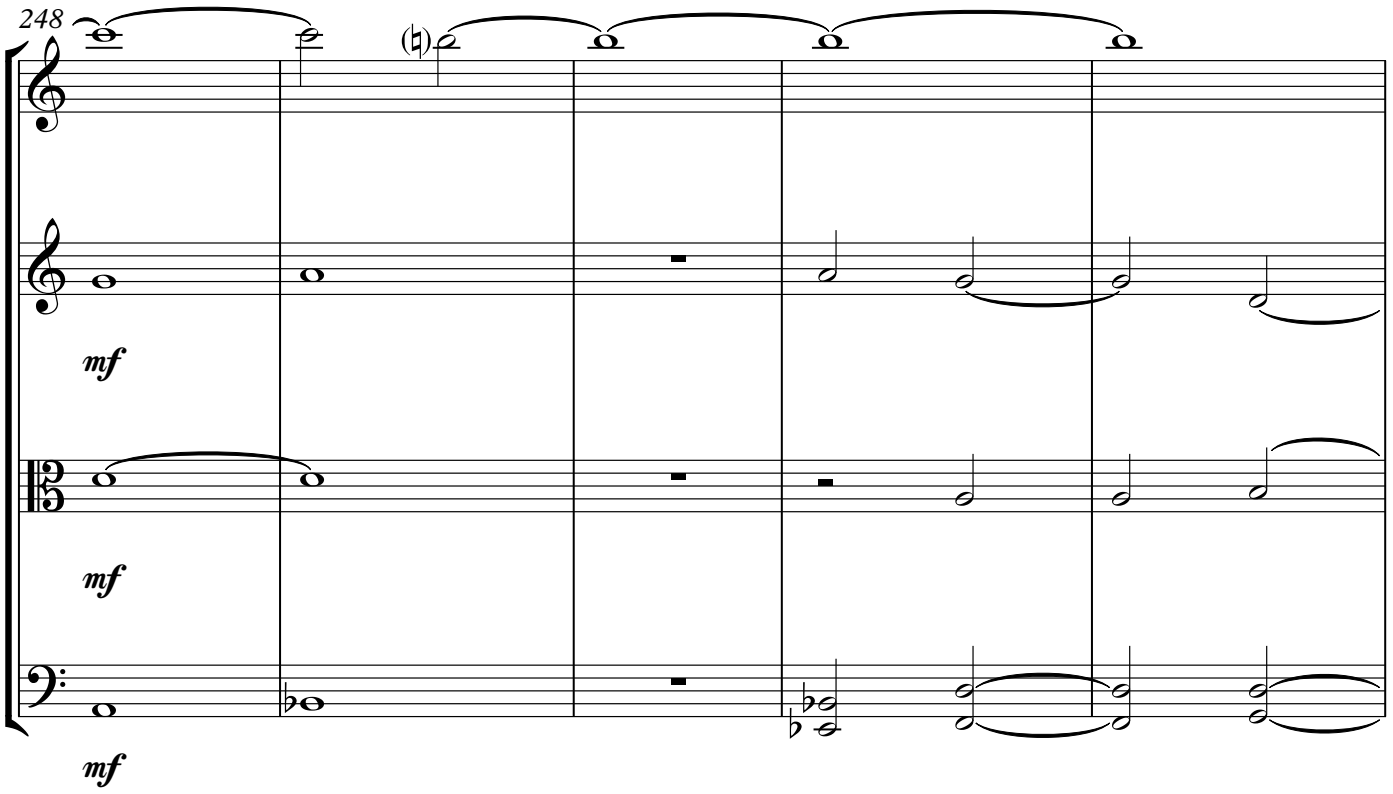

224
f
ff
ff

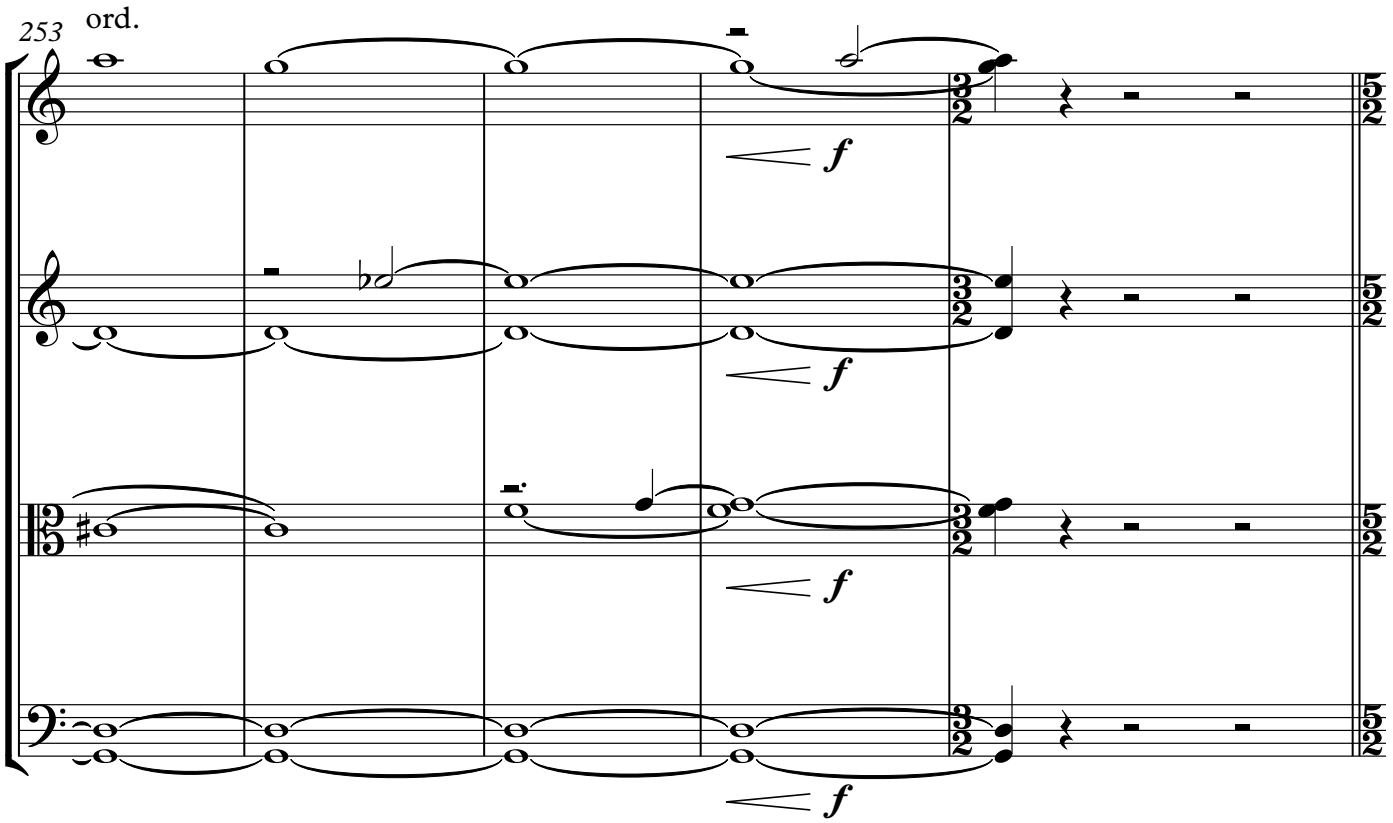

226

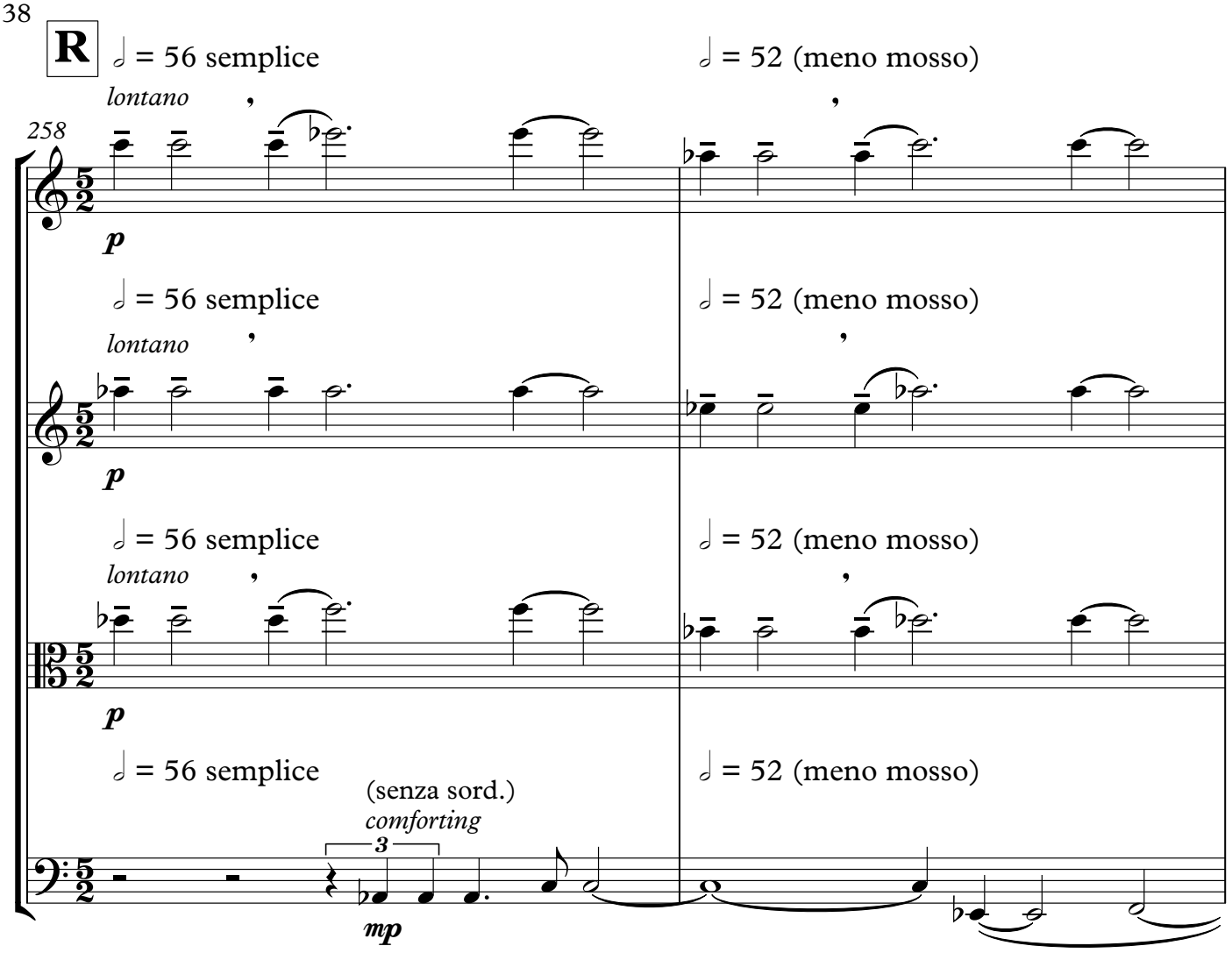

Q
suddenly ethereal
non vib. (⊓ ∨)
228
mf
pp
lontano
pp
lontano
pp
234
espr.
(⊓ ∨)
mf
mp
espr.
(⊓ ∨)
mf
mp
espr.
mp
mf

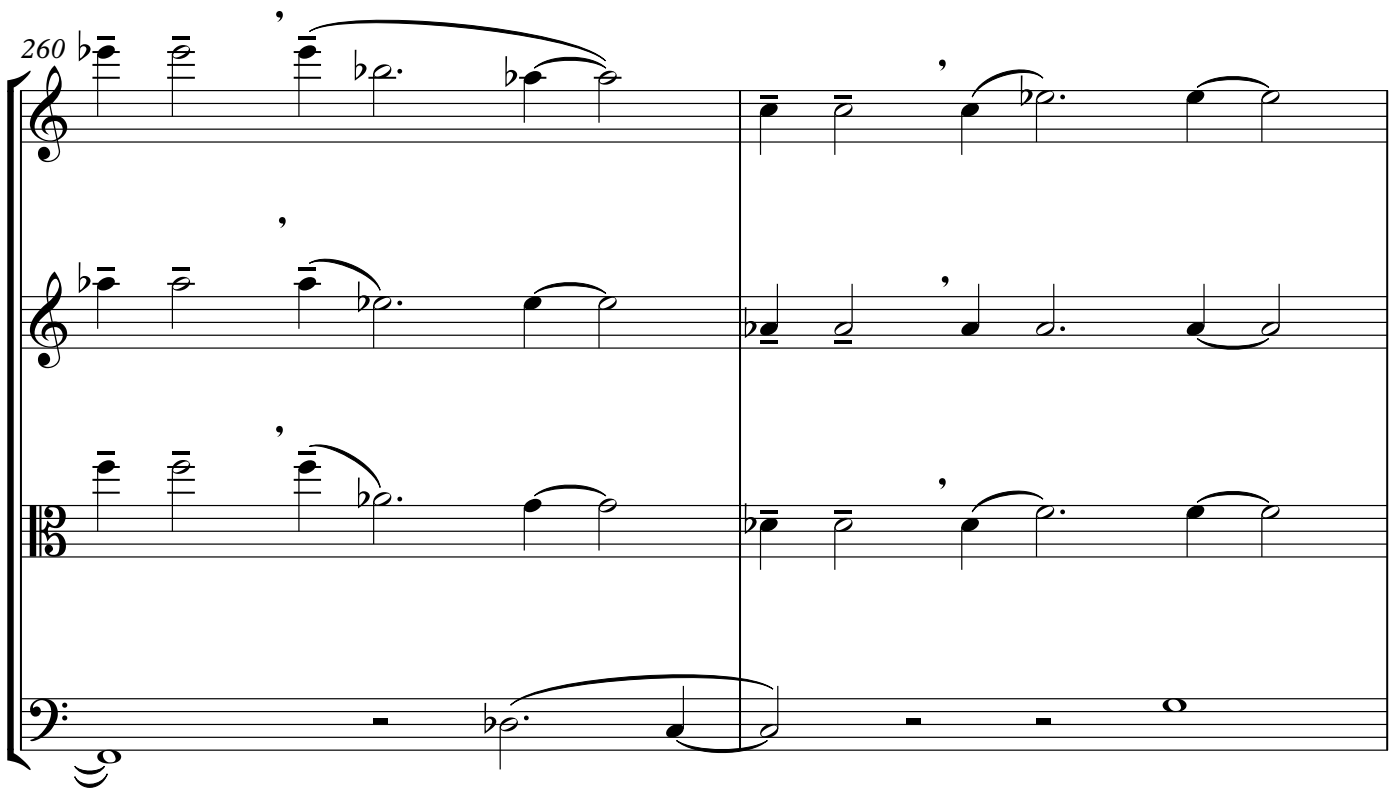

ord.
non vib.
239
p
mp
p
p
3
3
mp
p
mp
p
mp

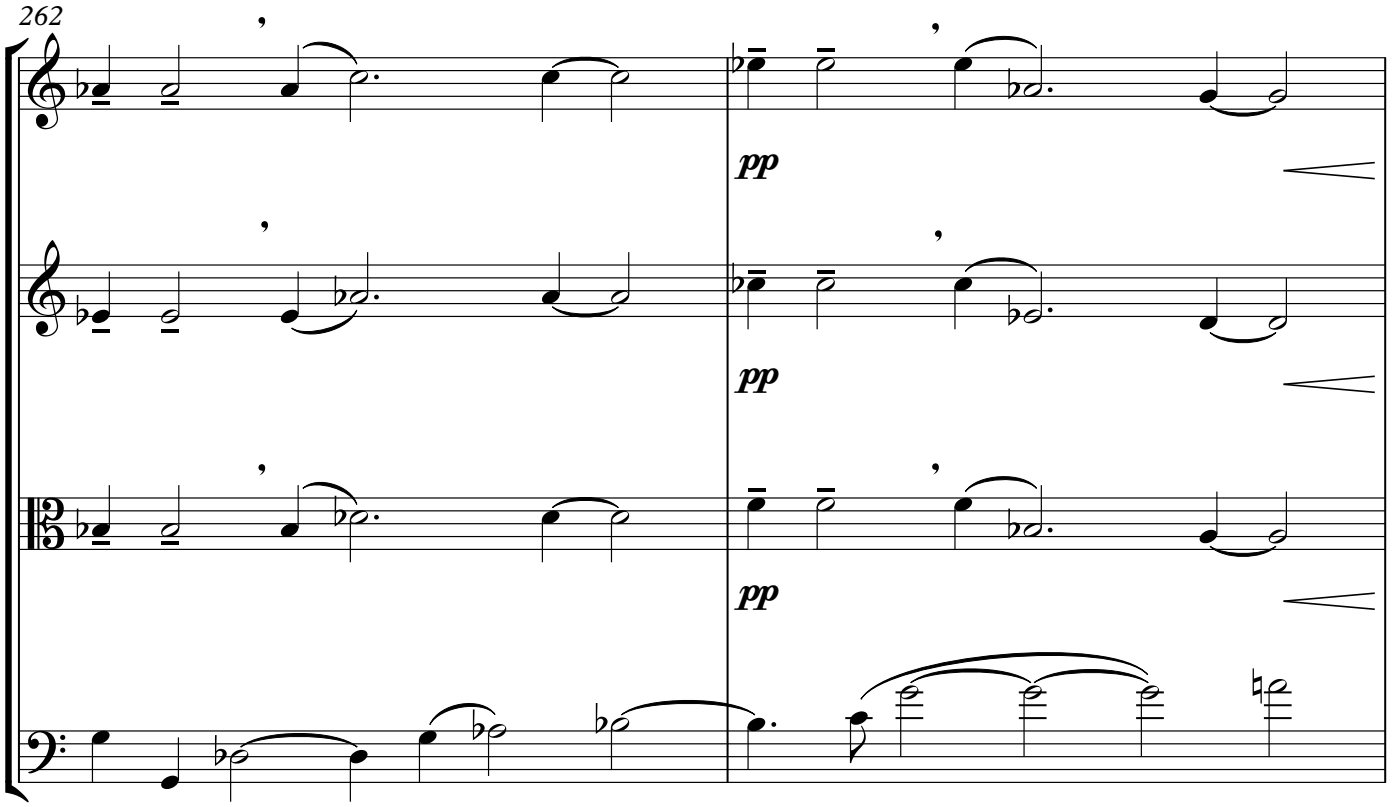

244
p
p
mp
p
mp
3
p
mp
p
mp

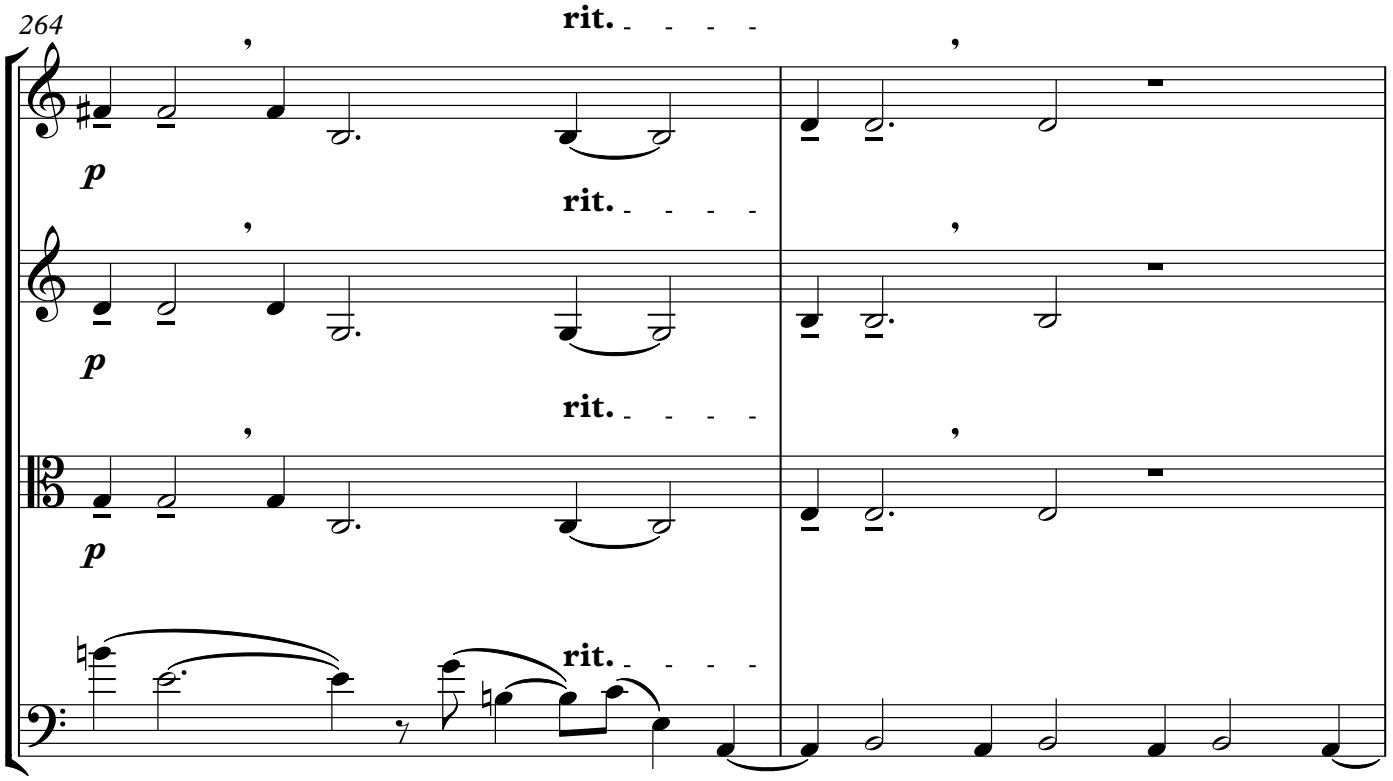

248
mf
mf
mf

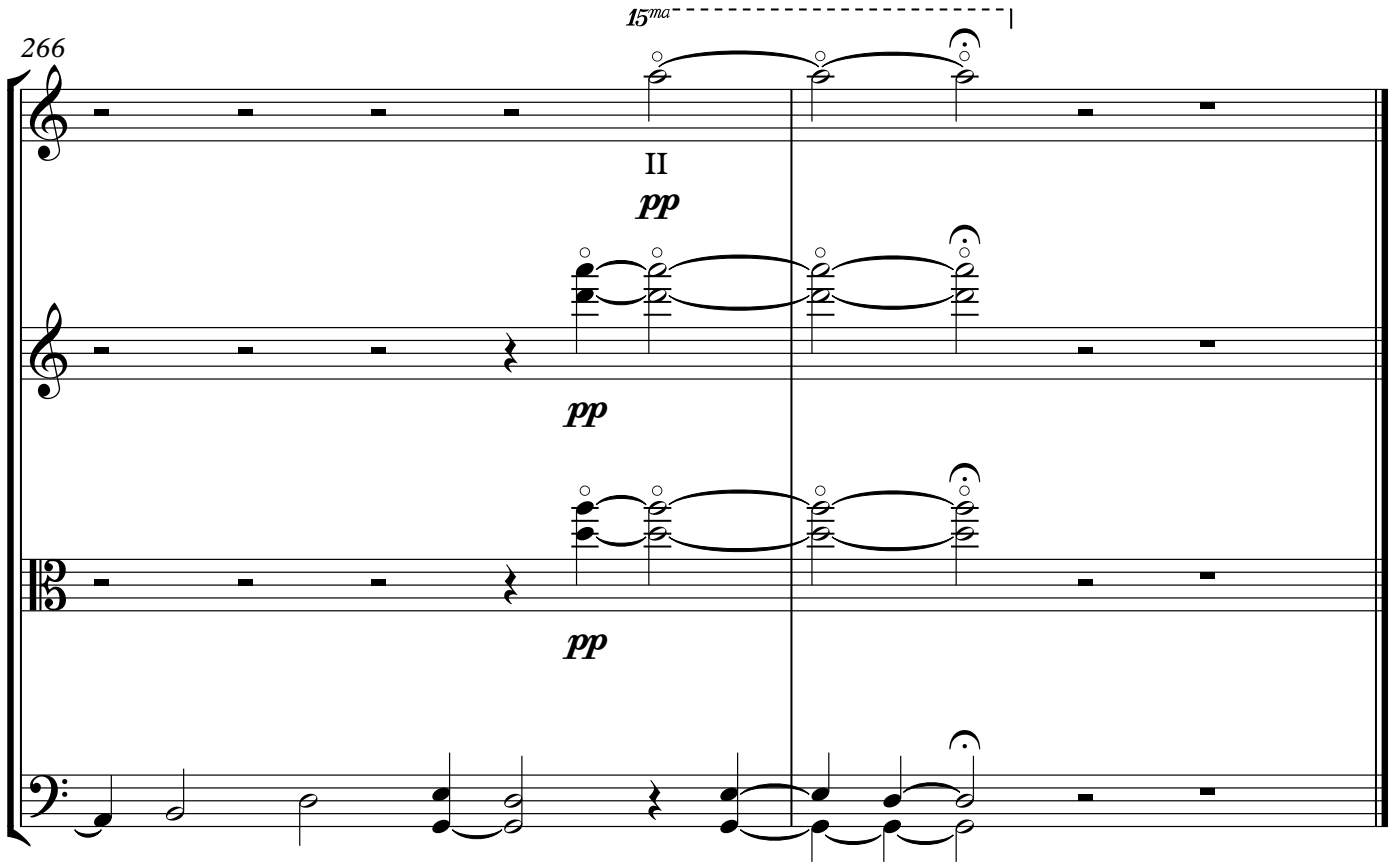

253
ord.
f
f
f
f


R
♩ = 56 semplice
♩ = 52 (meno mosso)
lontano
258
p
(senza sord.)
comforting
3
mp


260


262
pp
pp
pp


264
rit.
p
rit.
p
rit.
p
rit.



circa 14.5 mins
30/9/24
N.C.