String Quartet No. 2

"Choros"

* * *

Alexander Kirsch

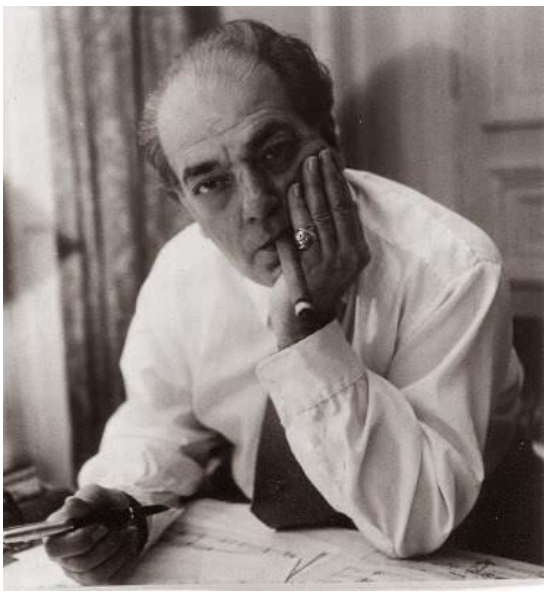
String Quartet No. 2 "Choros"

A preface by the composer

The Brazilian "*Choro*" and the String Quartet No. 2

One normally associates with the term "*Chôros*" the twelve (surviving) orchestral, choral and chamber musical pieces by the great Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887 - 1959), although a *Choro*[1] in its original appearance refers to a popular form of urban street music, or serenade, from the 19th and early 20th century Rio de Janeiro, with its characteristically melodic, sometimes melancholic, yet very appealing and memorable tunes. They are also nowadays often played as purely instrumental pieces.

It is from this genre that the three main themes of my String Quartet No. 2 have been selected[2] and given the work its title, rather than the occasional reminiscence of some of Villa-Lobos' typical compositional features, such as the "zig-zag" (bar 62), the unison ending of the work (bar 635) and, not least, the sweeping, wistful melodies (also termed *Modinhas* by Villa-Lobos[3]) - which are often based on harmonic progressions of falling fifths, just as is the principal theme of the quartet in its original version.[4]



Heitor Villa-Lobos, photographed by Sabine Weiss

[1] from the Portuguese word *chorar*, i.e. "weeping"; both spellings *Chôro* and *Choro* are being used

[2] strictly speaking, a *Choro* ("*Carinhoso"* by Pixinguinha, *O Melhor da Musica Popular Brasileira*, Vol. 1, p.206f., ed. Mário Mascarenhas, Irmãos Vitale, São Paulo / Rio de Janeiro, 1982), a *Tango Brasileiro* ("*Odeon"* by Ernesto Nazareth, Vol. 2, p.135-7, copyright 1968 by MANGIONE & FILHOS, São Paulo), and a *Samba Canc*ão ("*Último Desejo"* by Noel Rosa, *O Melhor da MPB*, Vol. 1 p.28-33). Nevertheless, all these would have been part of the standard repertoire of the *Choro* musicians.

[3] originally a type of Brazilian sentimental love song

[4] For a detailed illustration of the various compositional techniques of Villa-Lobos, see Roberto Duarte, *Villa-Lobos errou?* ("Was Villa-Lobos wrong?"), Compositional methods, p.81ff., Algol Editora Ltda., São Paulo, Brazil, 2009 (Portuguese, French & English)

Far from being a potpourri of Brazilian traditional music, the greatest focus of my String Quartet No. 2 lies in its formal construction, where all four sections are played without a break, thus forming one continuous movement. Whilst there have been famous forbearers of such single movement forms, namely Schubert's "Wanderer Phantasie", Liszt's B minor Sonata and Schumann's 4th Symphony[5], the merit of first fusing together the four movements of a sonata, chamber piece or symphony (i.e. 1st movement, Scherzo, Slow movement, Finale) with the four sections of the classical sonata form (Exposition, Development, Recapitulation, Coda) and the duality of tonic-dominant harmonic relations implied by the contrasting groups of themes (1st or principal group, 2nd or subordinate group), belongs to Arnold Schönberg (1874 - 1951).

Schönberg and the single movement forms

Even a genius like Schönberg - who was as much a skilful analyst of the great masters before him as he was a candid critic of his contemporaries - needed more than one shot before achieving a satisfactory condensation, or minimisation, of all the contents of what by the turn of the 20th century had become extremely large leviathans of music (some of Bruckner's and Mahler's symphonies last over an hour in performance - comprising, in Mahler's case, anything from two to six movements) into a single movement form.

His string sextet "*Verklärte Nacht*" op. 4 from 1899 still follows the two contrasting halfs set out in the poem by Richard Dehmel which gave the piece its name, despite all the motivic relations expressed within the thematic transformation and developing variation used throughout the piece.

The orchestral poem "*Pelleas und Melisande*" op. 5 (1902-03), on the other hand, already comes quite close to a single movement sonata form, albeit in a rather covert manner due to the restrictions set out by the actions contained in the scenes he selected from Maeterlinck's drama.

The first piece to present a formal "plan" of the one-movement structure - to be derived from Schönberg's sketchbooks of that time - is his 1. String Quartet op. 7 from 1904-05. However, so much detail was poured into each of the relevant formal sections, with so much counterpoint and motivic connection throughout[6], that the score confused no other than the great Gustav Mahler himself[7]. With over 1200 bars and 50 minutes playing time it is therefore more than twice as large compared with my 2nd quartet.

The final and most condensed work from this early period of Schönberg's musical development was to be his Chamber Symphony No. 1 op. 9 (1906): Here, in little over 20 minutes, the composer managed to present a comprehensive four part symphony within a single movement sonata form, a reduction not just in size, but also in scale, as it was scored for just "15 solo instruments" - a clear opposite to the

[5] For an overview of the tonal relations and motivic connections within Brahms' 3rd Symphony, see Walter Frisch *Brahms and the Principle of Developing Variation*, University of California Press 1984, p.129ff.

[6] *Anton von Webern* wrote about this quartet: "It is all done thematically! There is [...] no note in this work that doesn't become thematic." *Arnold Schönberg. Mit Beiträgen von Alban Berg et al*. München 1912, p.22–48

[7] Mahler famously said: "I have conducted the most difficult scores of Wagner; I have written complicated music myself in scores of up to thirty staves and more; yet here is a score of not more than four staves, and I am unable to read them."

late romantic symphonies by Bruckner and Mahler[8]. Yet there is an abundance of motivic connections and harmonic relations, despite a widening of the tonal scheme by introducing forth-tone and whole note harmonies, with Schönberg step by step replacing the traditional dominant-tonic cadence using the "Neapolitan" progression from F to E [9] throughout the piece[10].

From this last major achievement of his early years Schönberg went on to compact his musical style into even smaller forms, abandoning the sonata form completely as well as all traditional harmonies, in favour of short pieces and the emancipation of the dissonance[11].

I do not believe that Schönberg had stopped pursuing the single movement sonata form because he thought to have hit a dead end. He rather wanted to move on to discover other more advanced forms of expression. His journey eventually led him - as we know - to invent the method of composing with twelve tones.

On the other hand, I am certain that the sonata principle still has scope for being explored and re-created even in our time - due to its ability to provide interest through contrast within its clear cut architecture. This conclusion had motivated me to structure the 2nd String Quartet exactly in that manner, by using pre-existing themes chosen from some of the popular Brazilian *Choros* mentioned above, developing them through variation and bringing them in line with the tonal relations between each section of the movement[12].

Arnold Schönberg, self portrait, ca. 1910

The concept of the *String Quartet No. 2 "Choros"*

Before we analyse the formal plan of this quartet in more detail, it is necessary to take a closer look at the melodic material that appears throughout the piece, and the way it befits the contrasting thematic groups of the sonata form.

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[8] e.g. Gustav Mahler, Symphony No. 8 "*Symphony of a Thousand*"

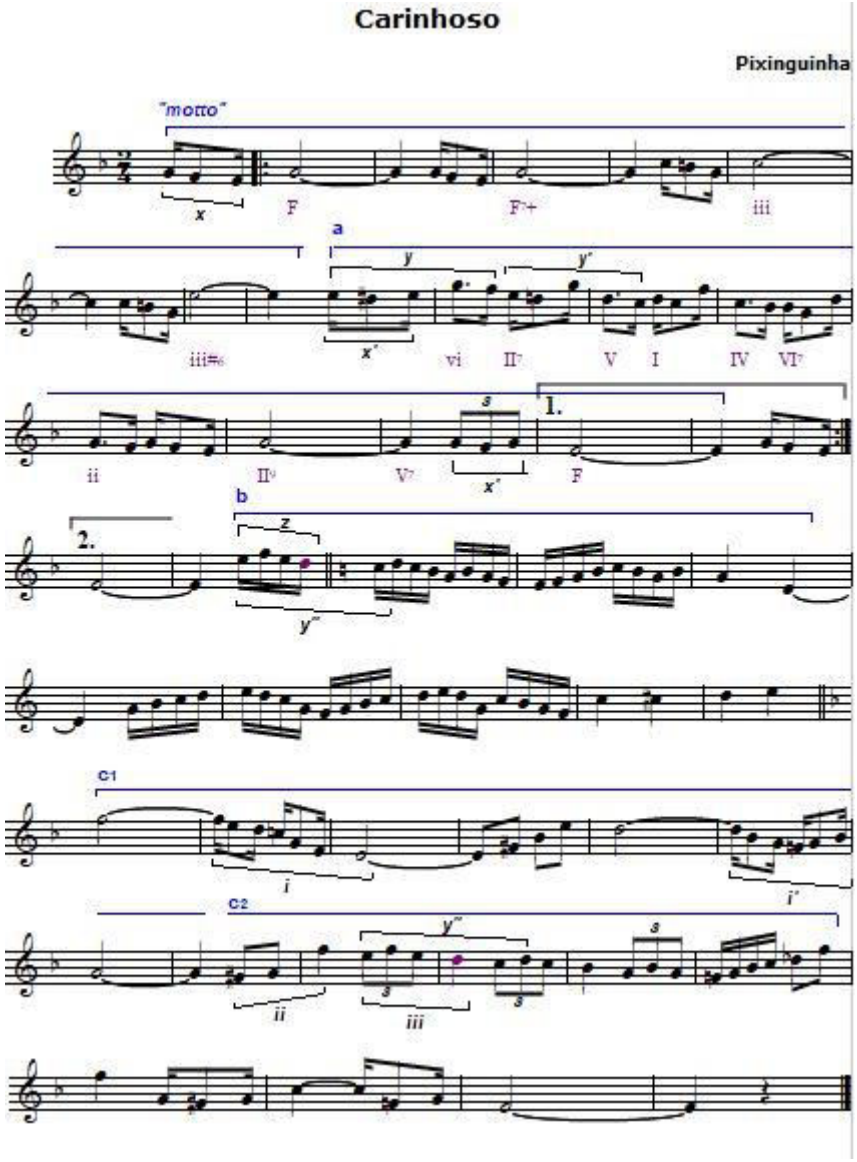
[9] According to Schönbergs *Theory of Harmony*, the “Neapolitan” is a relative of the subdominant and therefore a plagal chord.

[10] For an in-depth analysis of Schönberg’s early music, see Walter Frisch, *The Early Works of Arnold Schönberg, 1893–1908*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993

[11] see for example his *Three Piano Pieces* op. 11 or the *Five Orchestral Pieces* op. 16, both 1909

[12] About the creation of themes and the melodic qualities of English folk tunes, see also the author's preface to his *String Quartet No. 1 "English Suite"*, Blackpool Music Group, 2019.

According to Schönberg, simple folk tunes, i.e. popular tunes, cannot fit the requirements of larger forms, as they "do not produce new material, contrasts, subordinate themes etc.", nor must they "use the language of profundity", in order to remain popular[13]. However, in case of the main theme - or main "*Choro*" - of this string quartet, which opens **Part I.**, the motivic material turns out to be surprisingly varied and interconnected, as the following brief analysis may illuminate (After all, I believe, Schönberg has never been to Brazil, and his evaluation mainly talks about the folk music of Germany, Russia and other European countries.):



The tune starts with an opening "***motto***", which throughout the quartet is being placed at the start of the most important sections, such as the beginning of exposition and recapitulation of the 1. movement (part I.), the transitions to parts II. (Scherzo) and III., in varied form during the slow movement (part III.), and at the beginning of the Finale (part IV.) as well as during the Coda.

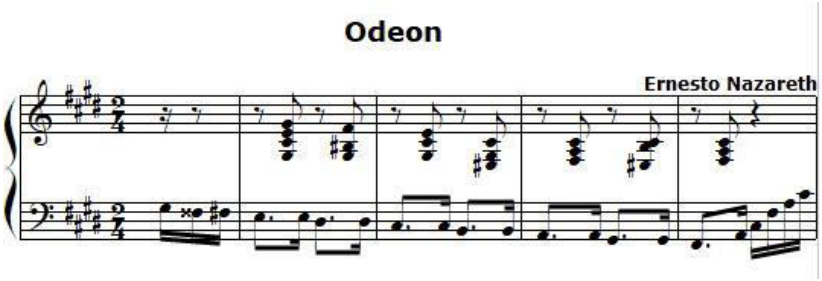
Theme ***a*** - the actual main theme of the quartet - generally appears not accompanied by its typical harmonisation of falling fifth chords, but in contrapuntal imitation, with few exceptions until the final

[13] A. Schönberg, *Style and Idea*, "Folkloristic Symphonies", Faber and Faber Limited, London 1975, p. 163f.

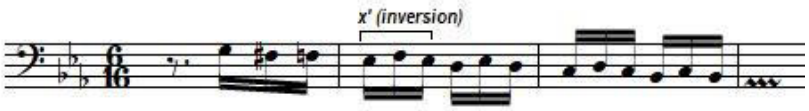
coda[14]. The theme does contain some of the most important motifs of the whole piece, ***x'*** (which is a variation of the opening ***motto's*** motif ***x***), and ***y*** (which combines motif ***x'*** with the characteristic leap of a third that also stems from the ***motto***).

Themes ***b*** and ***c*** of this three partite *Choro* both incorporate an inversion of motif ***y*** (marked ***y''***), but whilst ***b*** has a rather transitional character, theme ***c*** takes on the role of a subordinate theme within the whole structure[15]. After a brief development and a compressed recapitulation, motifs ***a*** and ***b*** form a short transition leading – via the ***motto*** – towards the next part of the sonata model.

The musical material of **Part II.** (Scherzo) is derived from the A-section of the "Tango Brasileiro" *Odeon*[16]. However, in order to attain the characteristic three-beat meter of a scherzo, and in order to occupy the necessary dominant region given to the second main group of the overall sonata form, both the rhythm and the key are changed from:



to (played *pizzicato* throughout):



Through this change, a sudden - and easily perceivable - connection is also being made with the ***x*** motif of the opening theme!

As a contrasting Trio-section to the scherzo, excerpts of the melancholic "Samba-Cancão" *Último Desejo* may show little connection with the previous thematic material, yet they are being elaborated quite extensively during the slow movement (**Part III.**), or central "Development" section of the quartet, in which nearly all the themes are being worked out.

Part IV. (Finale and Coda) first bring us the recapitulation of all previous themes in a Rondo-style, whilst - from the final recapitulation of the A'-section of the rondo - we hear the ***motto*** and the themes from the principal group in a rather more folkloristic setting, abandoning all previous polyphonic and imitative work, first (bar 495ff.) as a typical "*Choro*" from Rio the Janeiro, and then (bar 544ff.) in the lively style of "*Frevo*", the traditional Carnival music from the North East of Brazil, the region where the dedicatee of this String Quartet No. 2 was born.

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[14] This is also the main reason for there not being a key signature in the 1. movement, not because the theme is supposed to be in the Lydian mode; the motto itself modulates almost immediately to the tonic mediant, substituting **B♭** with **B♮**.

[15] In its first appearance in the 1. movement it is set in the key of A, when in the "Recapitulation" of the Finale it returns in the key of D.

[16] Neither the B-section nor the Trio of this piece are being included.

The following table gives a detailed overview of the complete formal plan[17]:

SONATA FORM	EXPOSITION											
	1. (Principal) Group							2. (Subordinate) Group			
Movements	I. Sonata Movement							II. Scherzo			
Tonal region(s)	F							c			
Songs	*"Carinhoso"*							*"Odeon"*	*"Ultimo Desejo"*	*"Odeon"*	
Formal sections	*Exposition*			*Development*	*Recapitulation*		*Coda*	*Scherzo*	*Trio*	*Recapitulation*	*Coda*
Themes	1. Group	transition	2. Group	(a, b)	1. Group	2. Group	transition	d– dev. – d'	e	d - dev. – d''	transition
	motto – a – b – motto	(a' - b')	c		motto – a*	c'	a' – b' - motto				motto
Bars	*1*	*29*	*37*	*48*	*65*		*81*	*115*	*207*	*234*	*296*

a', b', c' etc. = alternative versions / variations of themes

a* = original version (compressed)

DEVELOPMENT	RECAPITULATION					CODA		
III. Slow Movement	IV. Rondo-Finale							
a (modulatory)	F					Db		F
"Carinhoso" *"Odeon"* *"Ultimo Desejo"*	*"Carinhoso"*			*"Odeon"* *"Ultimo Desejo"*		*"Carinhoso"*		
	A	*B*	*A*	*C (Development/Scherzo)*		*A'*	*B'*	*Coda ("Frevo")*
Var. (motto, a, b, c, d, e)	1. Group	2. Group			Transition (motto)	1. Group	2. Group	
	motto – a – b – motto – a'	c	motto - a'	(d – e)		motto – a'	c'	motto – a - b - c
312	*393*	*428*	*440*	*453*	*504*	*510*	*541*	*559*

The greatest challenge within the overall formal aspect is - literally - to avoid "overcrowding", as we have seen in the example of Schönberg's op. 7. To try to squeeze in all necessary material whilst at the same time condensing the four movements of a symphony into a single movement sonata form is not dissimilar to solving a mathematical equation, with the different motifs and themes being the variables which are being placed and varied according to the stringent laws of the sonata principle.

Without any doubt, the work discussed here is by no means perfect and will neither offer a satisfactory nor a final solution to all the problems that have appeared during the compositional process. But it is hoped that it may showcase an idea of how the beautiful folkloristic music of Brazil may be used within the traditional and most aristocratic of all forms of European classical music: the sonata and the four movement symphonic cycle.

Alexander Kirsch

Blackpool, in May 2019

[17] It may be pointed out that – in the interest of providing contrast - the traditional characters of the sonata's main theme groups (i.e. 1st theme dynamic, *allegro*, "masculine" & 2nd theme lyrical, *cantabile*, "feminine") have been reversed, in the smaller context of the 1. movement (1. Group*: Andante moderato* – 2. Group*: Allegretto scherzando*), as much as in the overall form (part I. / 1. movement: *Andante, Moderato, Allegretto* – part II. / Scherzo: *Vivace*). However, the scherzo's slow, lyrical trio section (from letter **I**) rather fits the perceived mood of a 2nd theme. See also Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style*, Faber and Faber Limited, London 1972, p. 80ff.

Parts:

I.	• p. 1
II.	• p. 13
III.	• p. 29
IV.	• p. 42

Duration: approx. 23 minutes

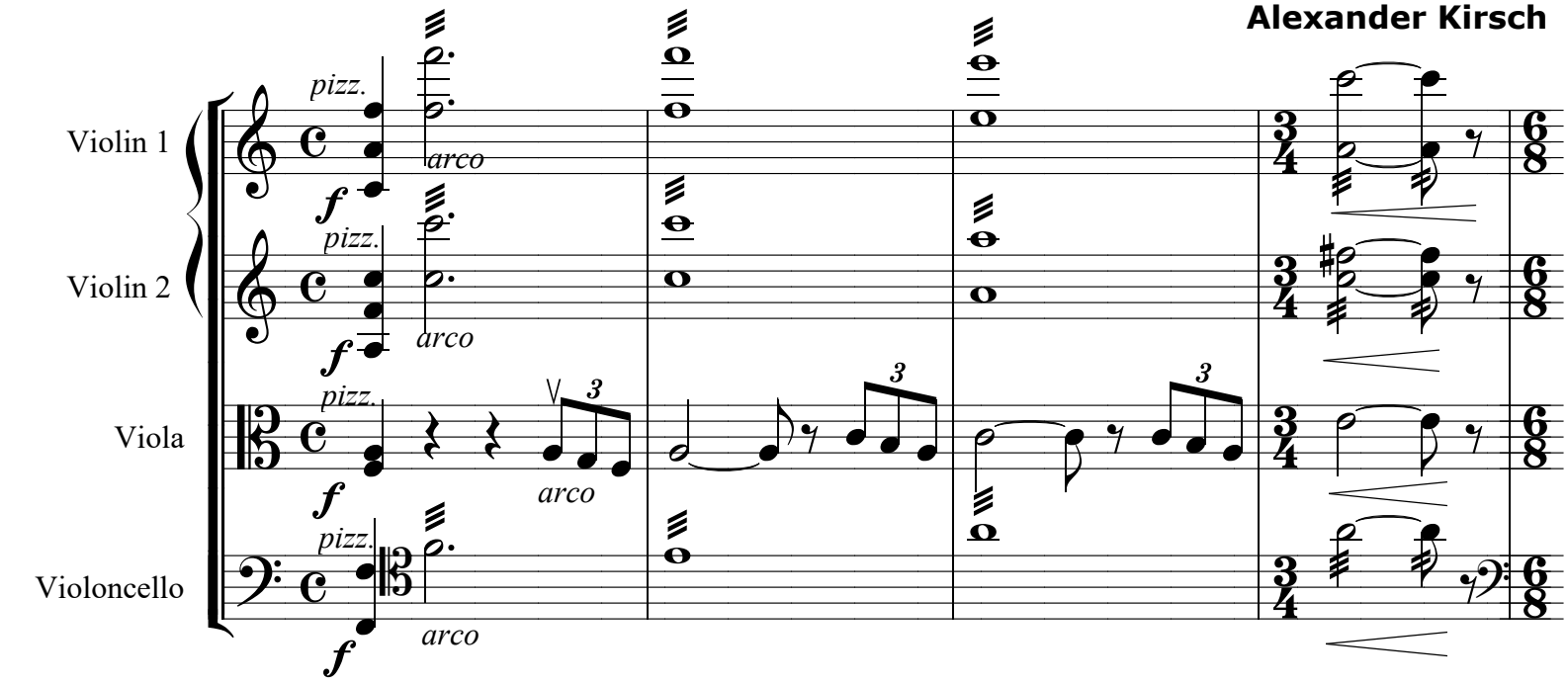
String Quartet No. 2 "Choros"

I.

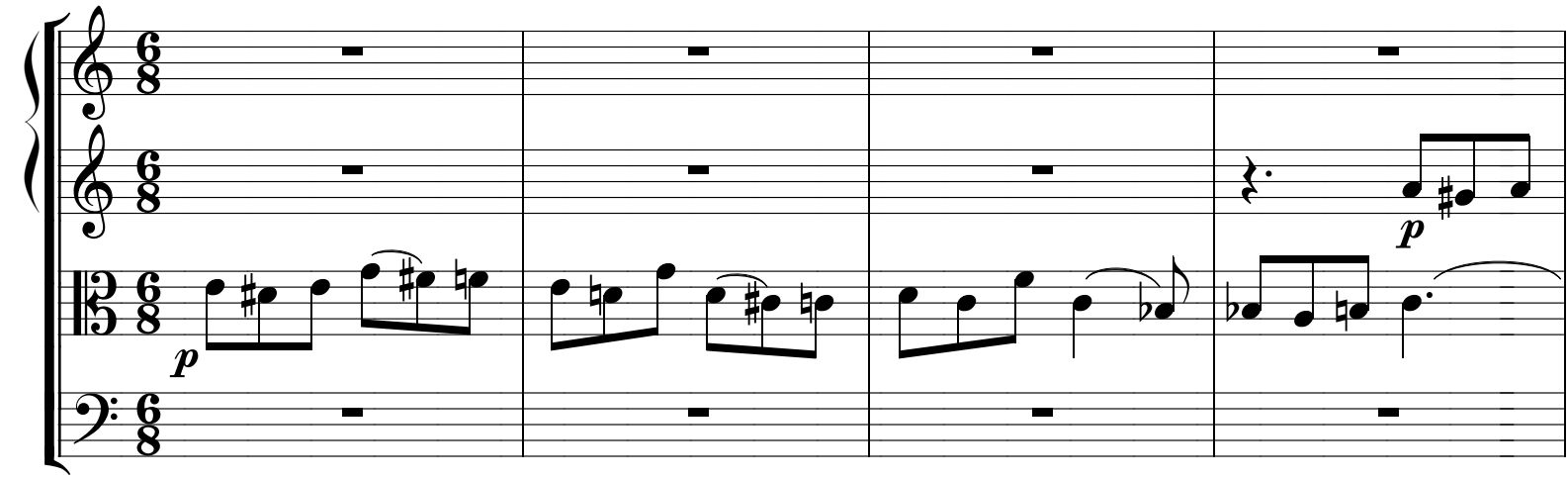
to Mônica

Maestoso

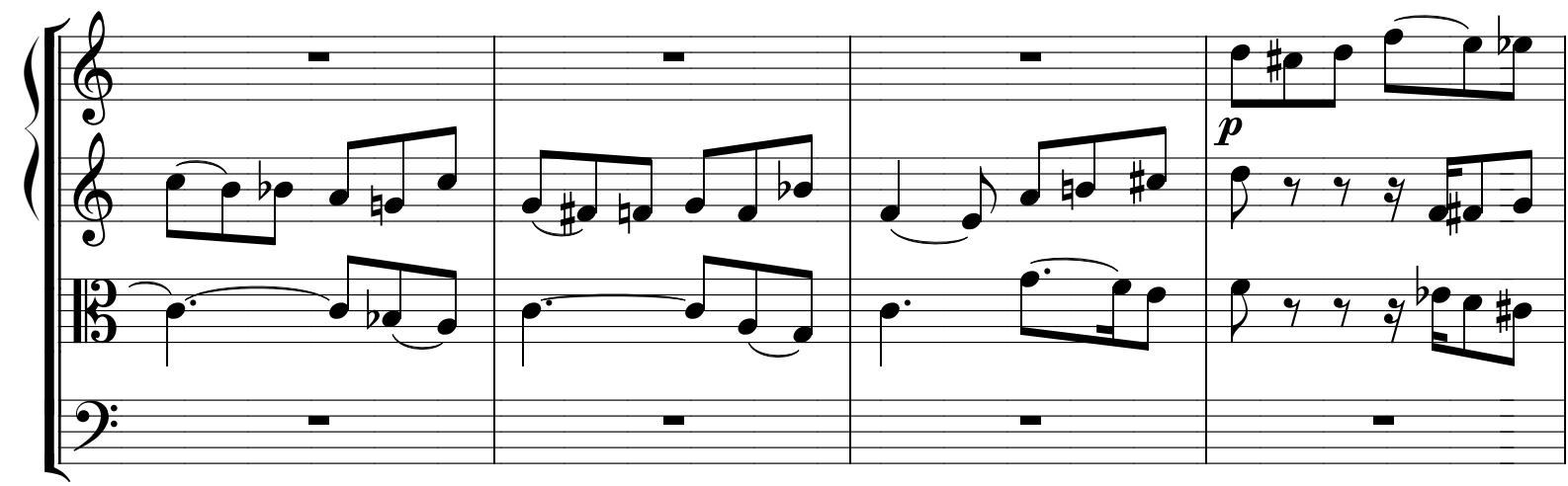
Alexander Kirsch



5 **Andante moderato**



9



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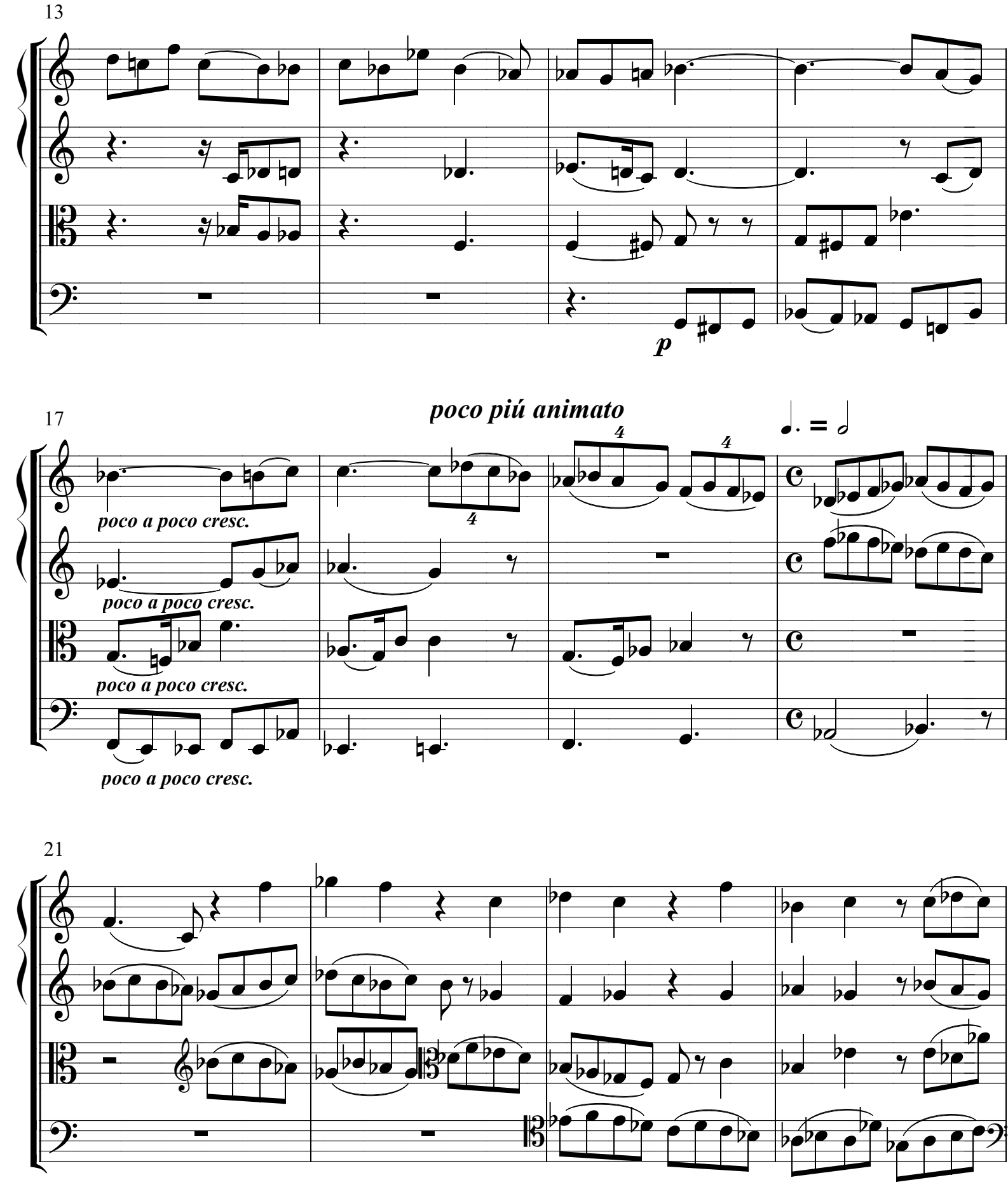

13
p
17
poco piú animato
poco a poco cresc.
poco a poco cresc.
poco a poco cresc.
poco a poco cresc.
21

Tempo 1

25

ff

ff

ff

ff

A

29

Andante moderato

mp

mp

mf

mf

mf

mf

33

un poco accelerando

cresc.

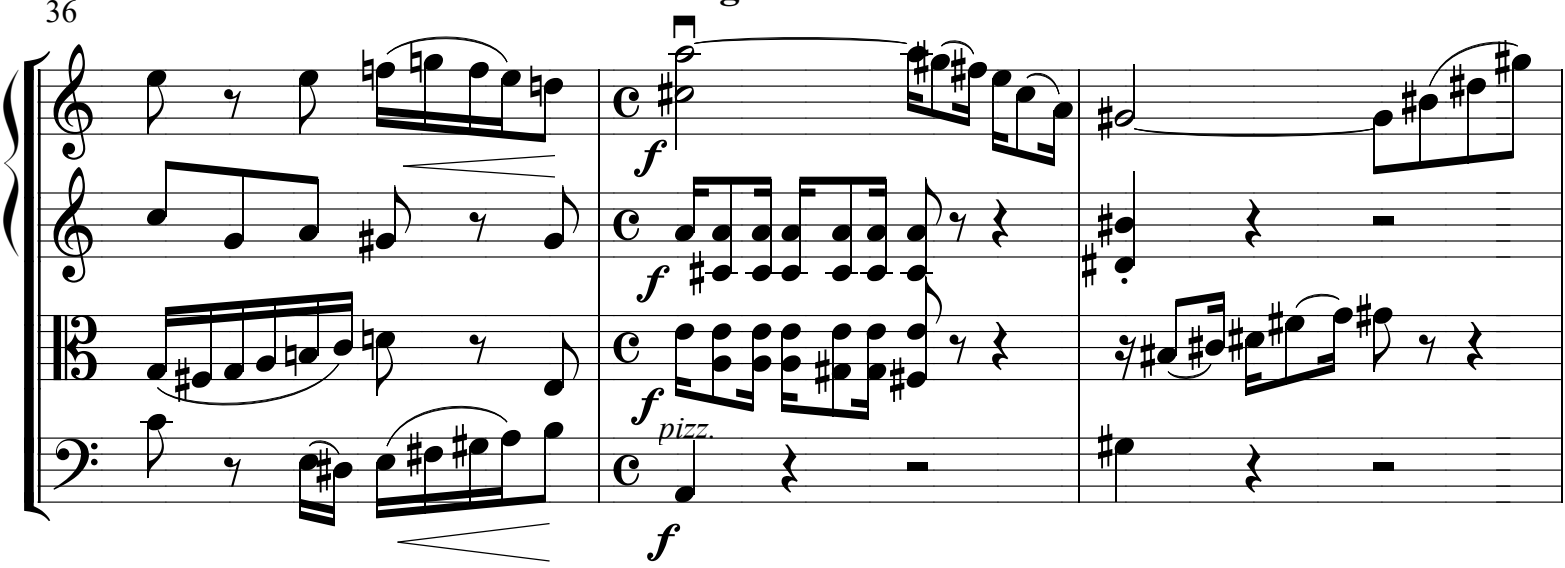
cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

Allegretto scherzando

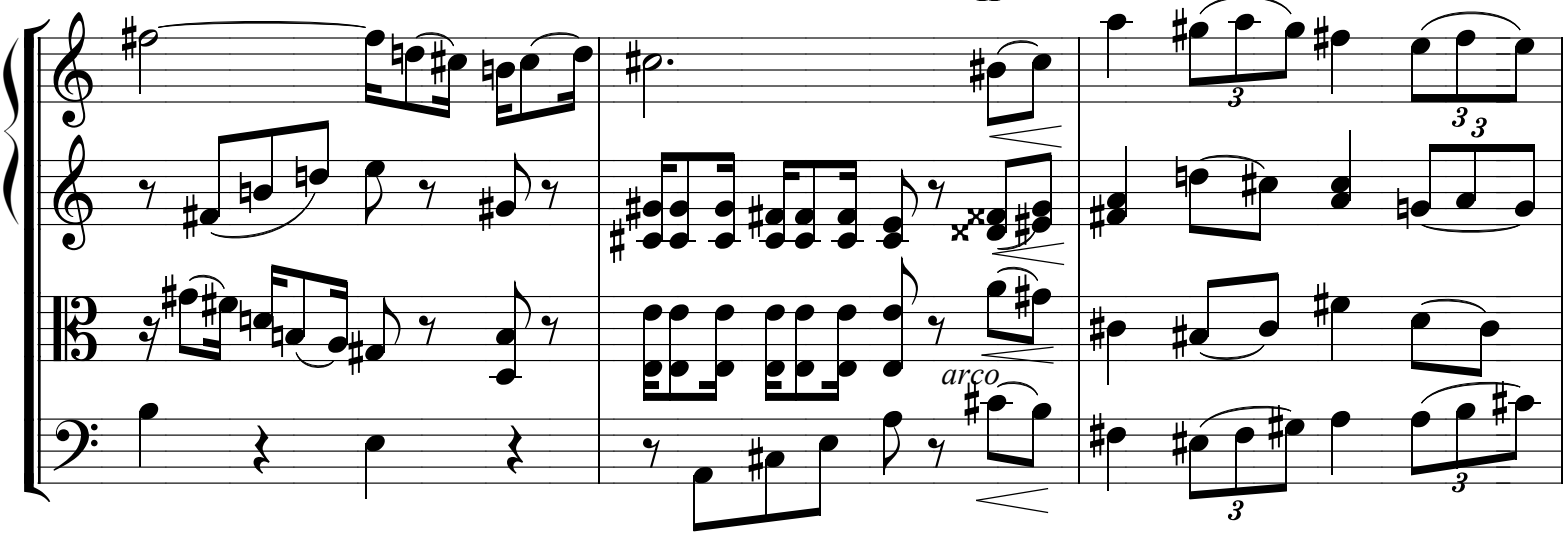
36



espressivo

II

39



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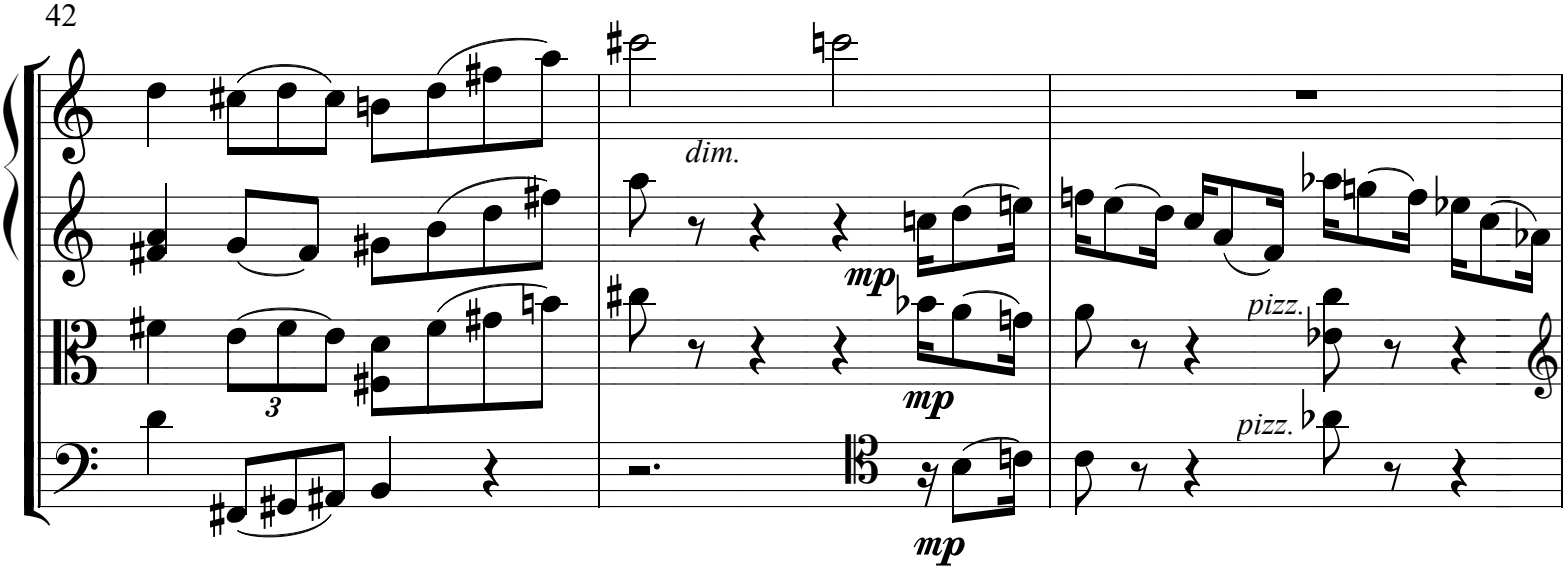
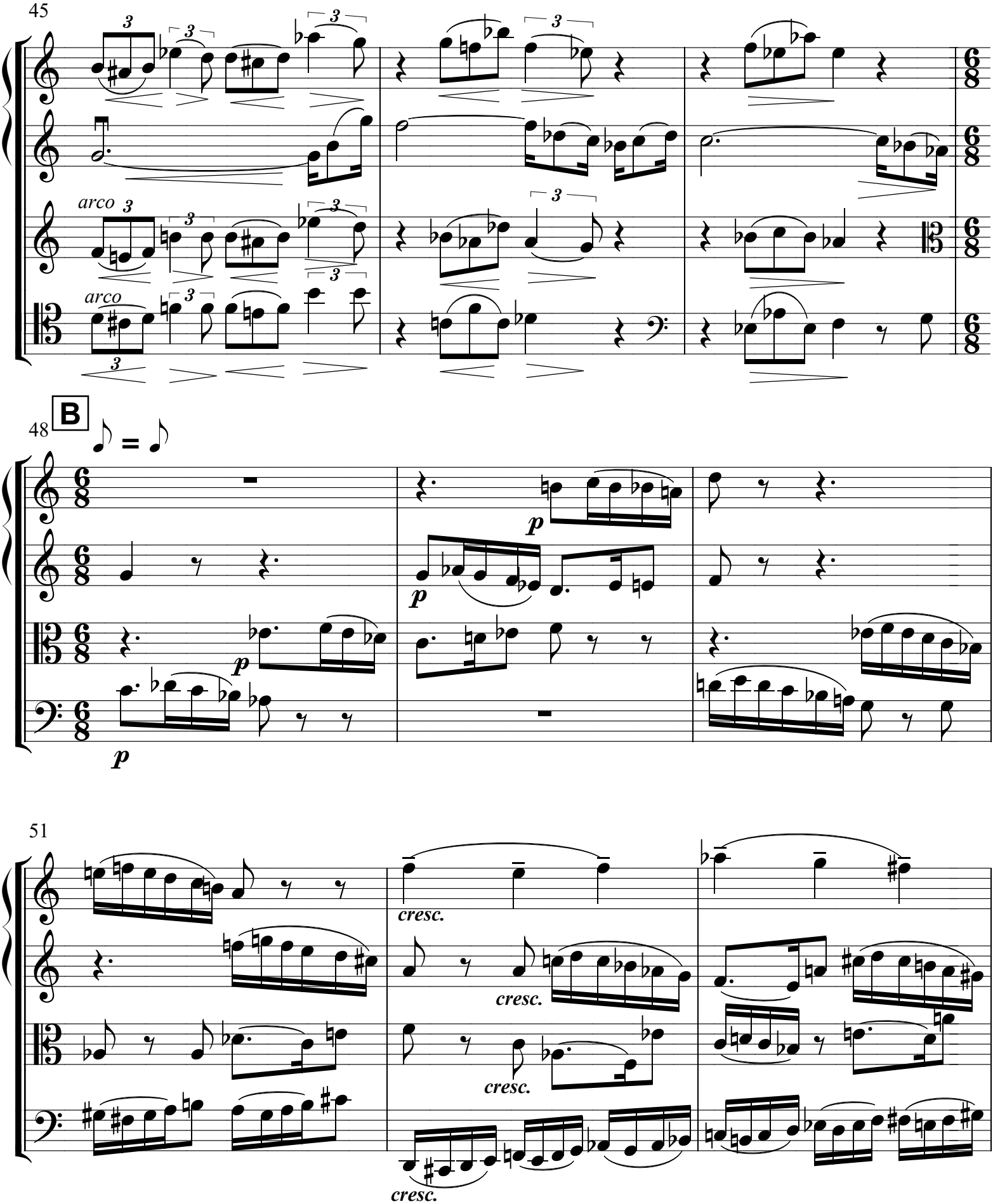
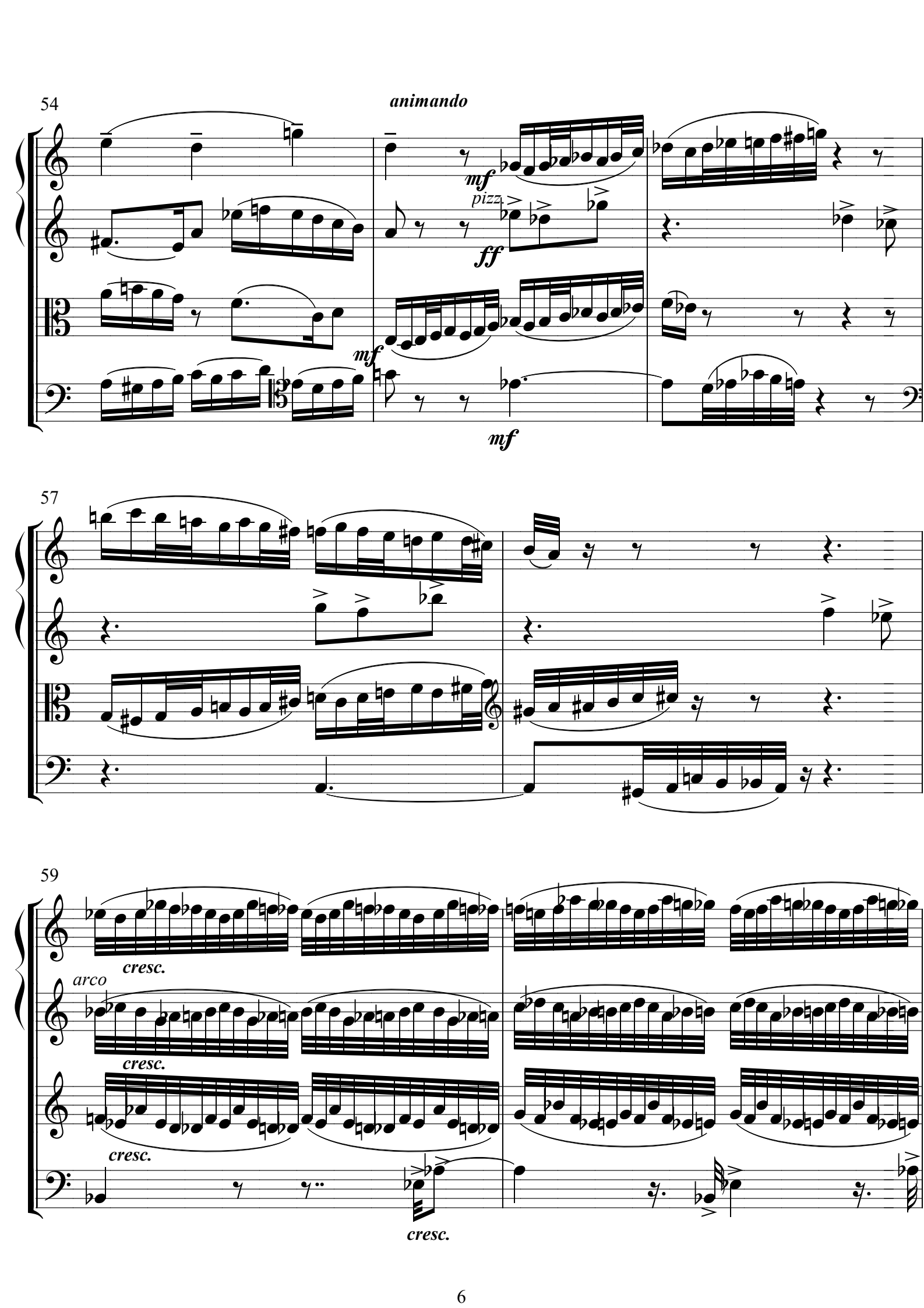
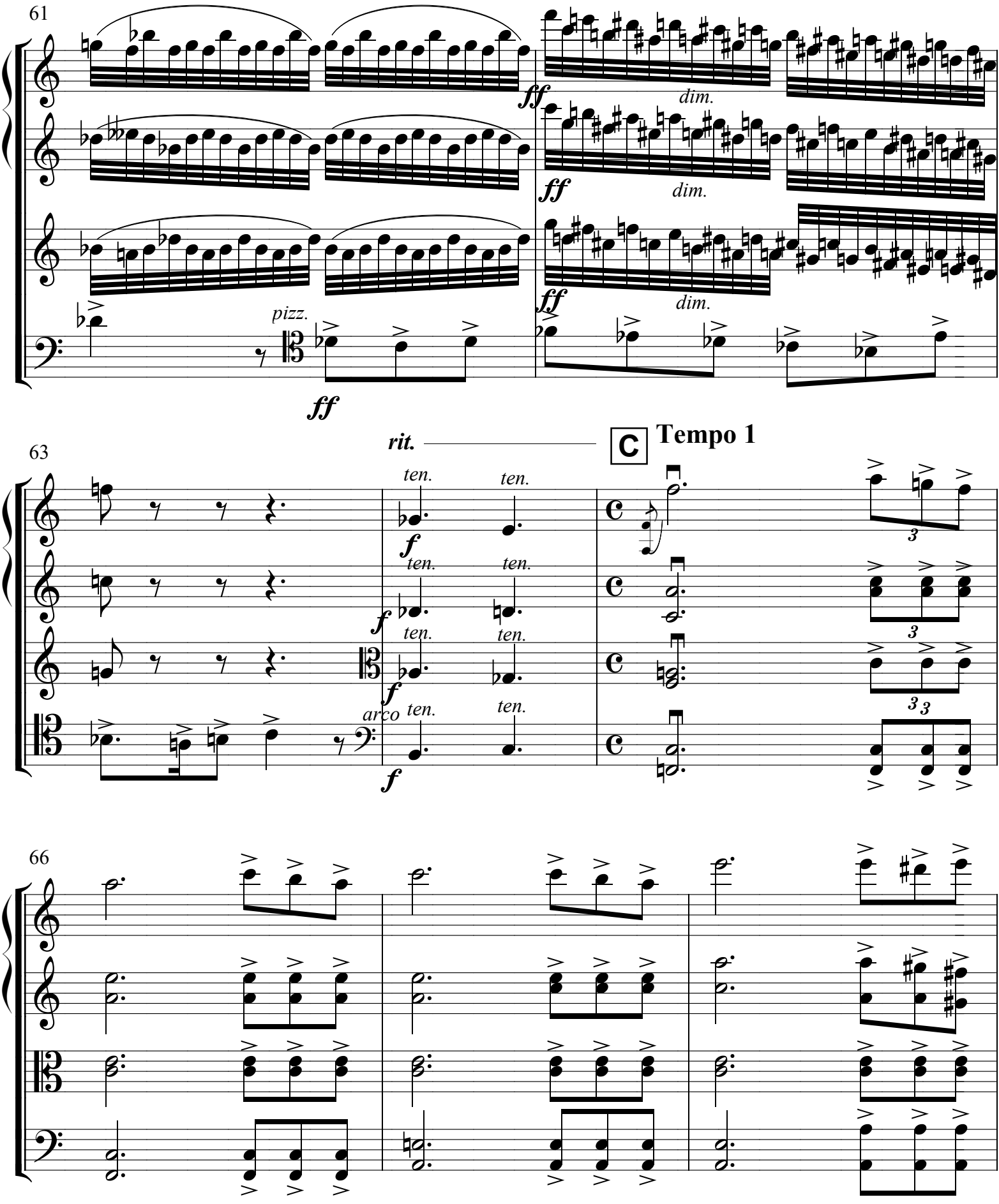
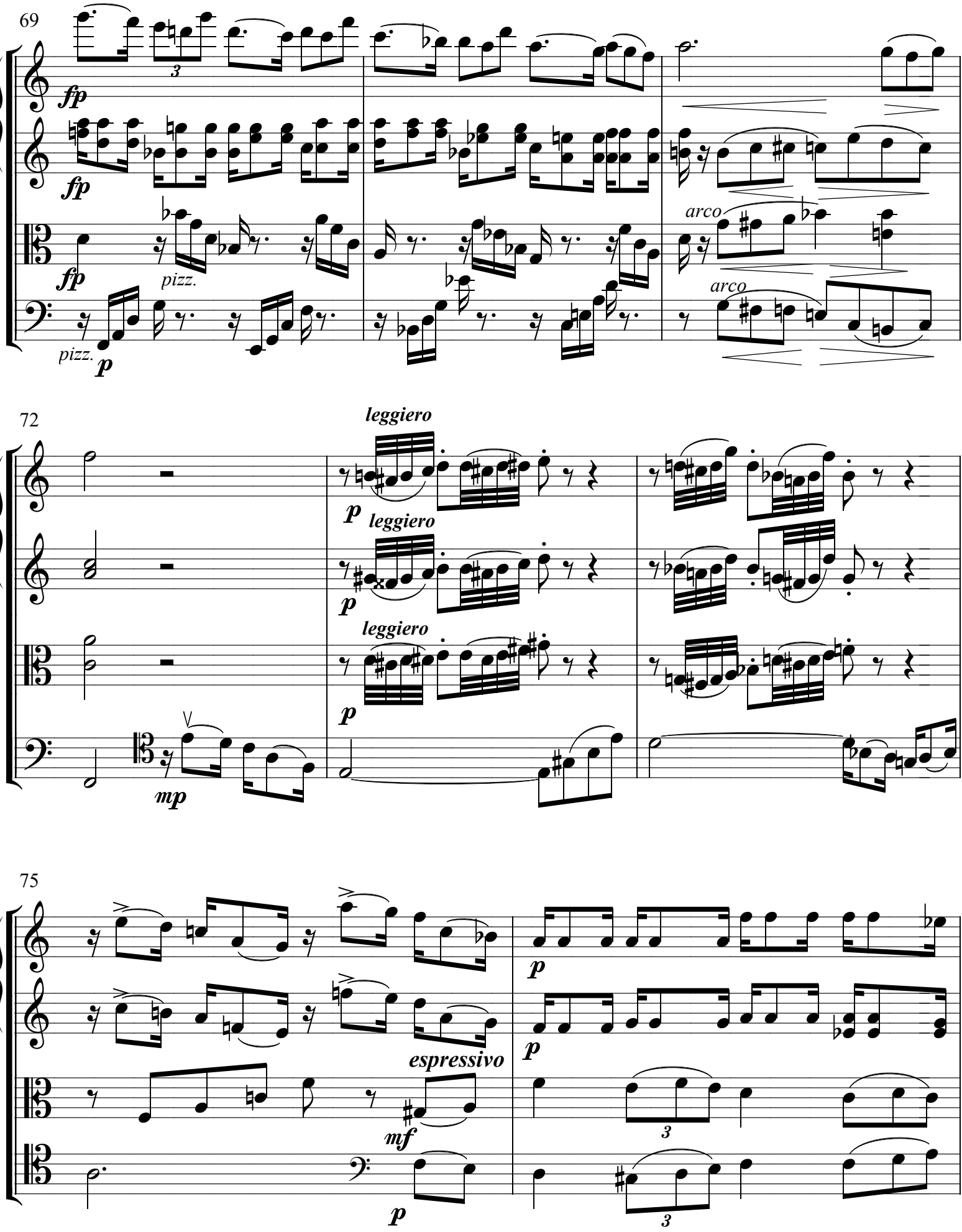


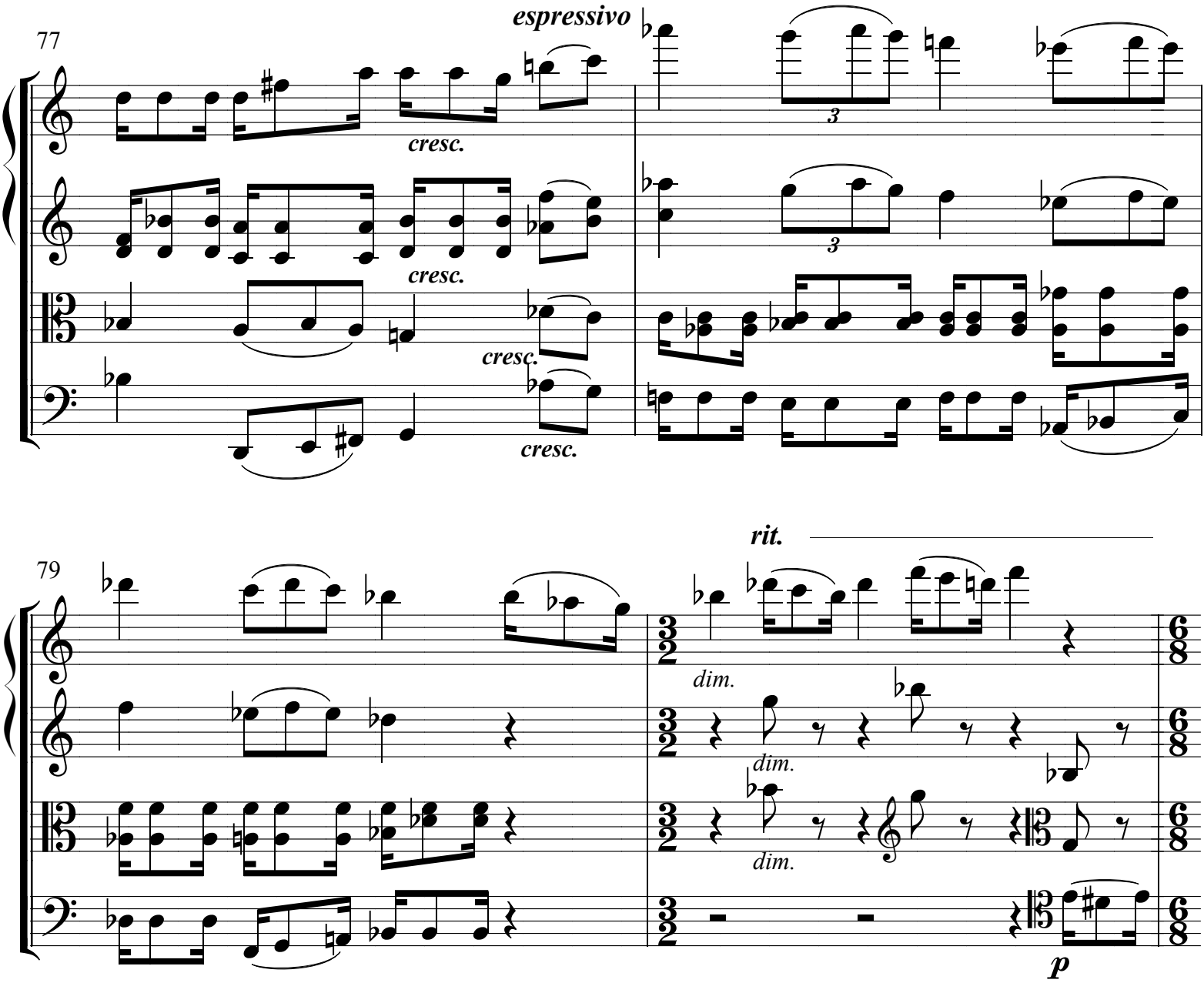

45
arco
arco
48
B
51
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.


54
animando
mf
pizz.
ff
mf
mf
57
59
arco
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.


61
ff
dim.
ff
dim.
ff
dim.
pizz.
ff
63
rit.
C
Tempo 1
ten.
ten.
f
ten.
ten.
f
ten.
ten.
f
arco
ten.
ten.
f
3
3
3 3
66

Allegretto scherzando




77
espressivo
cresc.
cresc.
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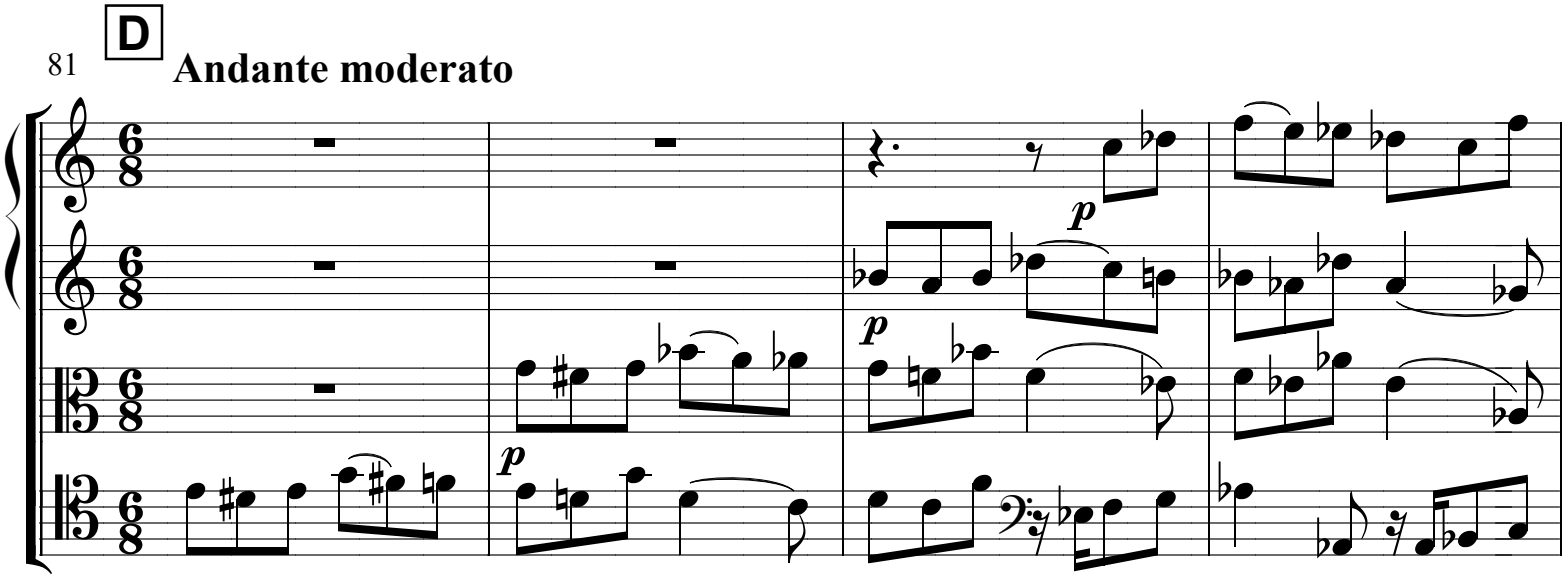
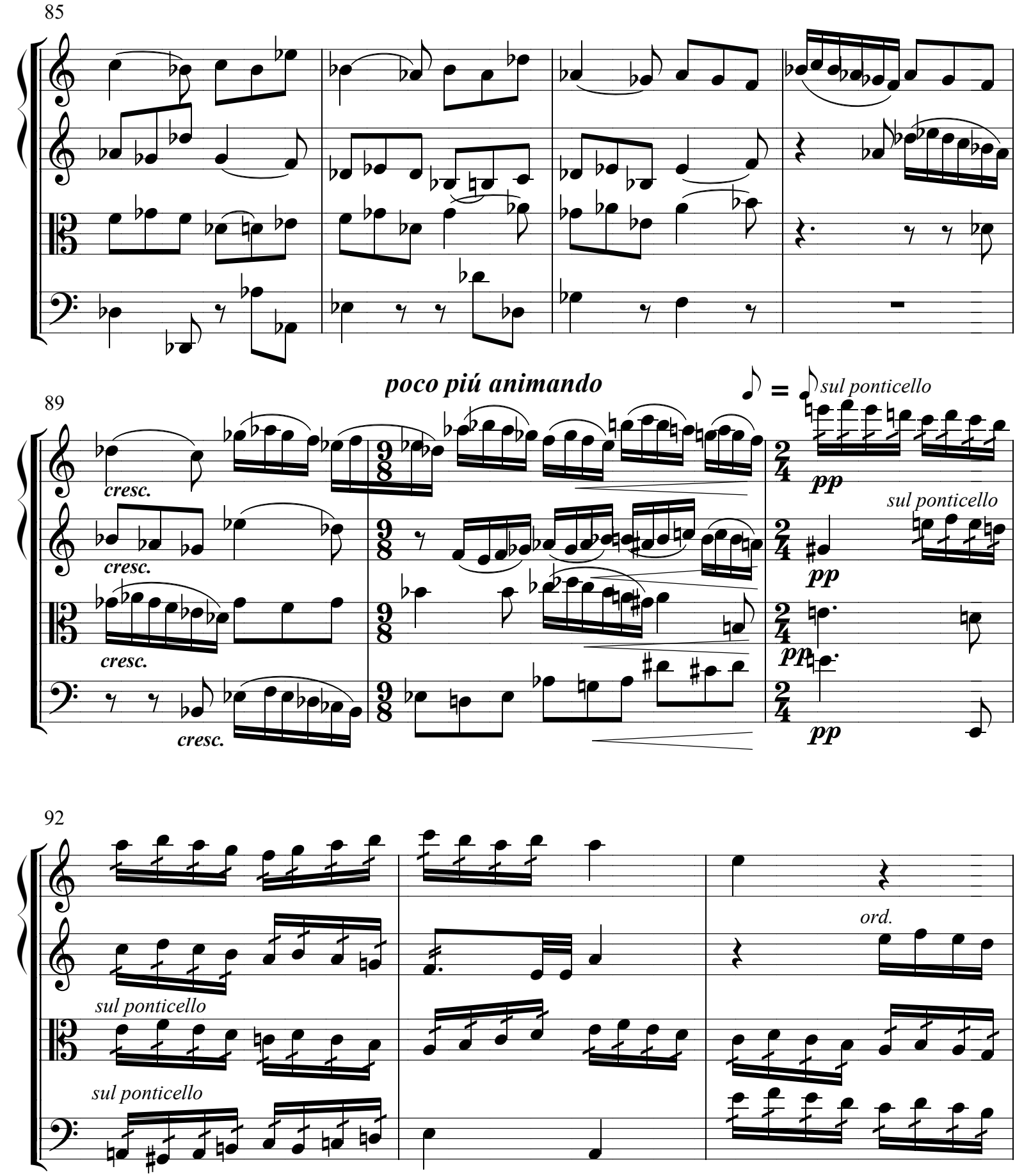
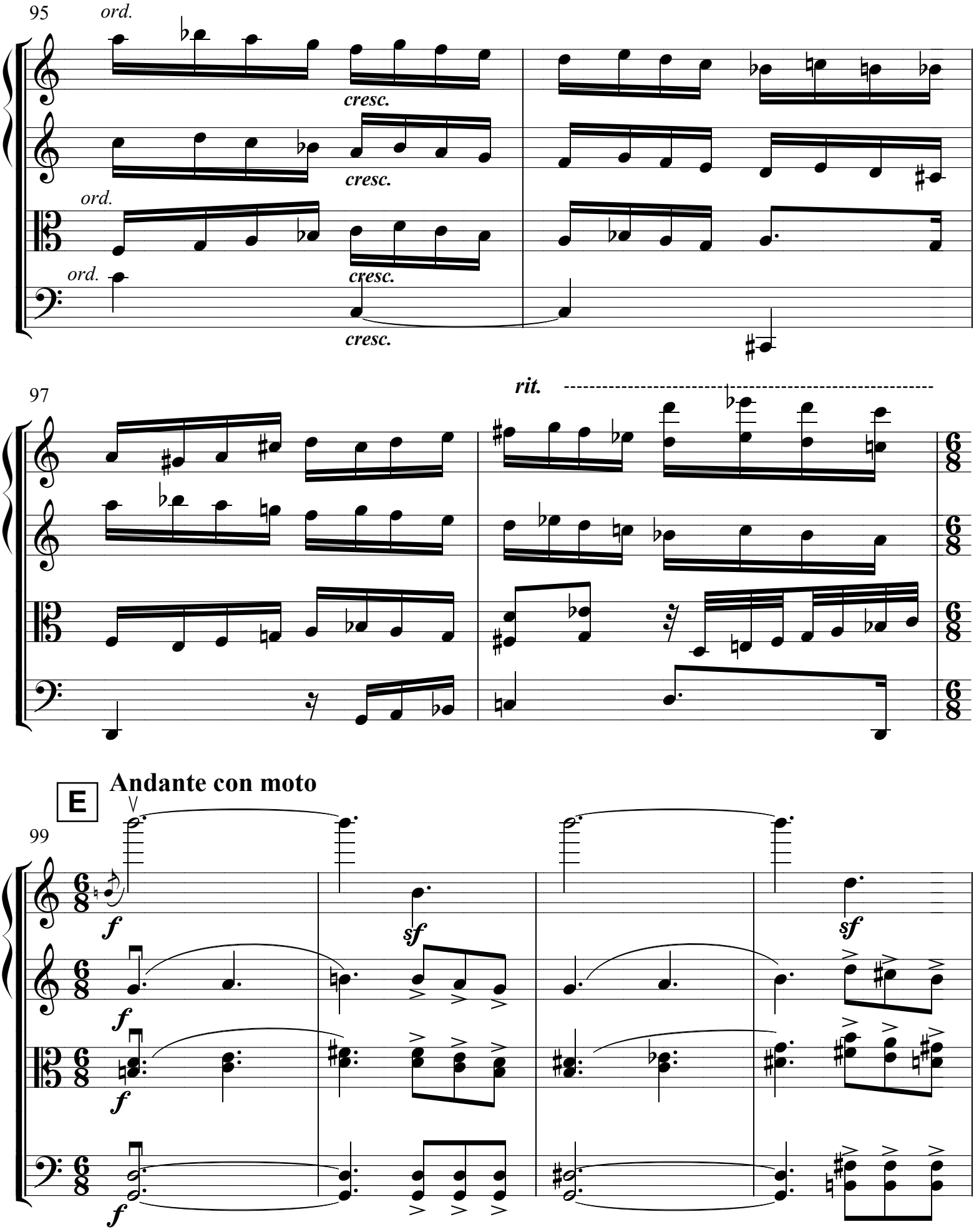
cresc.
3
3

79
rit.
dim.
dim.
dim.
p


81
D
Andante moderato
p
p
p


85
poco piú animando
89
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
pp
pp
pp
pp
sul ponticello
sul ponticello
92
sul ponticello
sul ponticello
ord.


95
ord.
cresc.
cresc.
ord.
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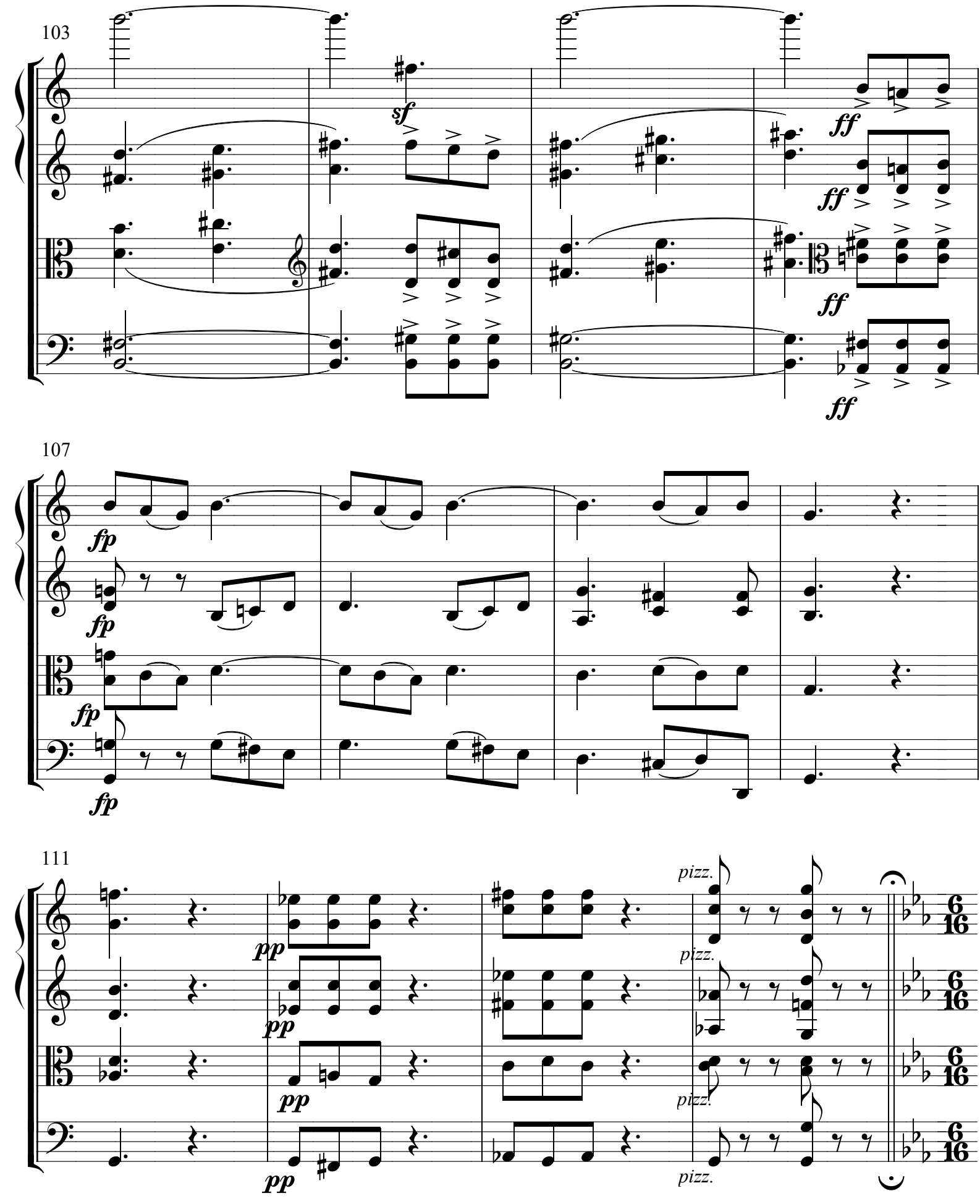
ord.
cresc.
97
rit.
E
Andante con moto
99
f
sf
f
sf
f
f


103
sf
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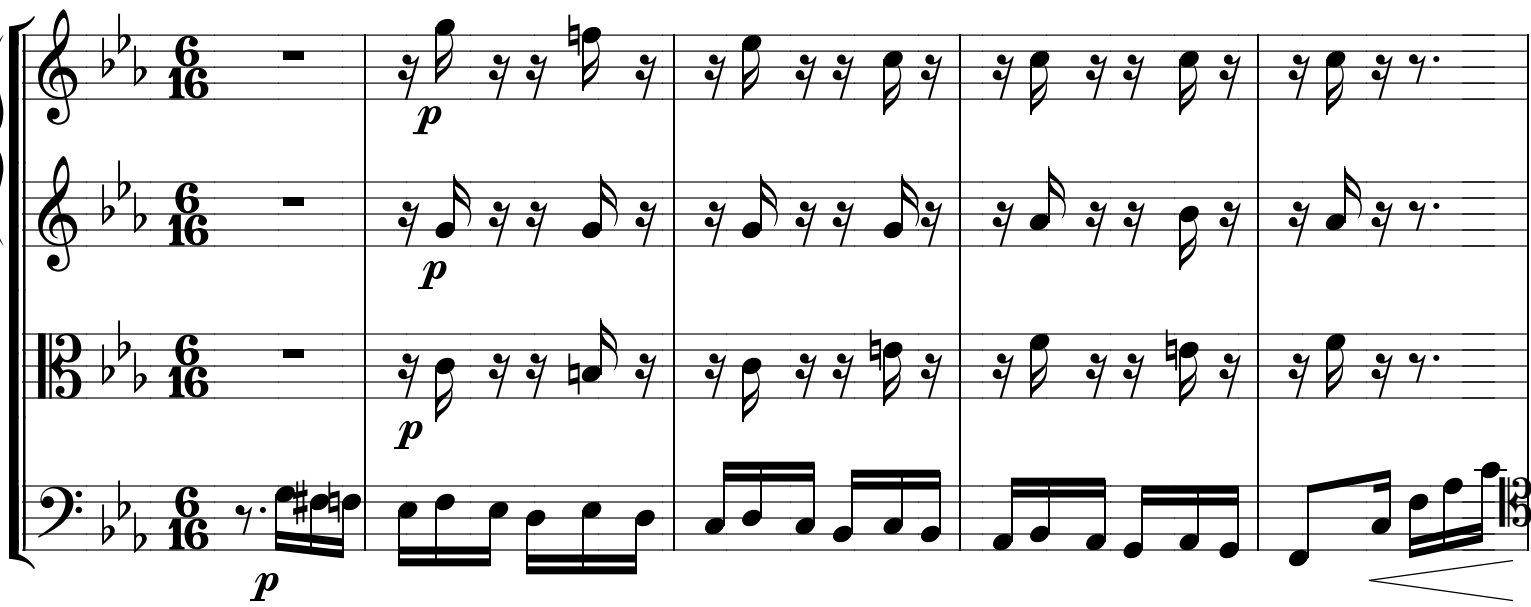
107
fp
fp
fp
fp
111
pp
pp
pp
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.
6/16
6/16
6/16
6/16

II.

Vivace

F

115



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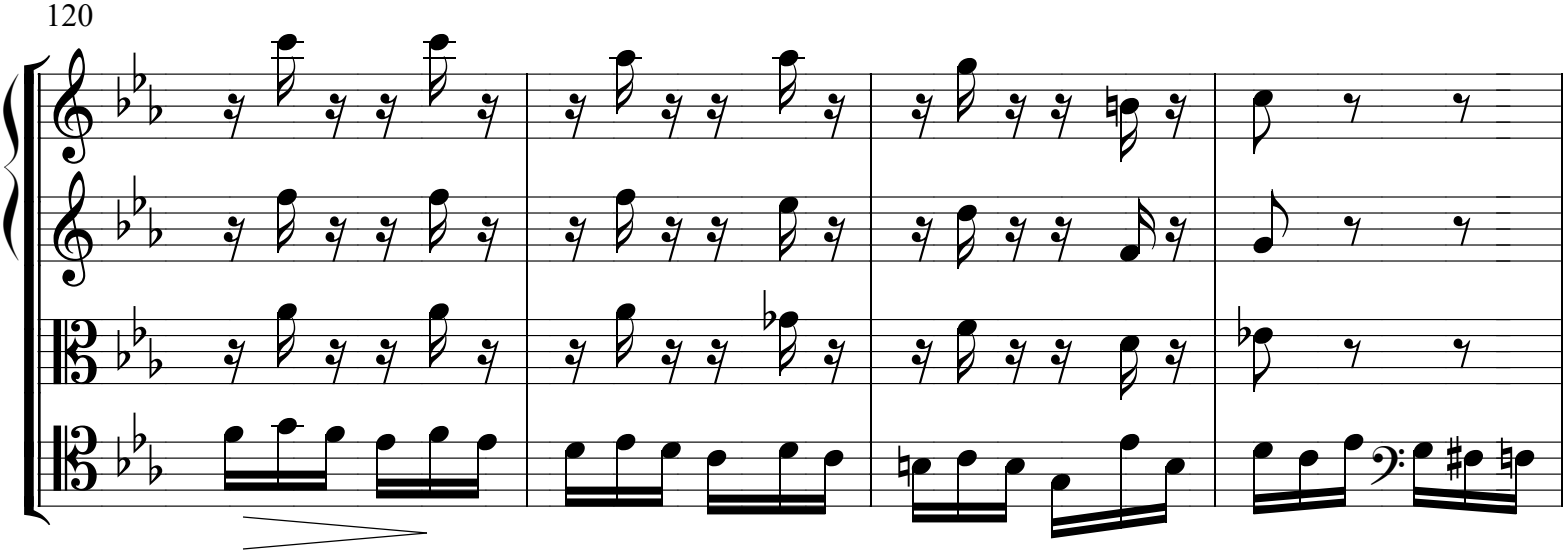
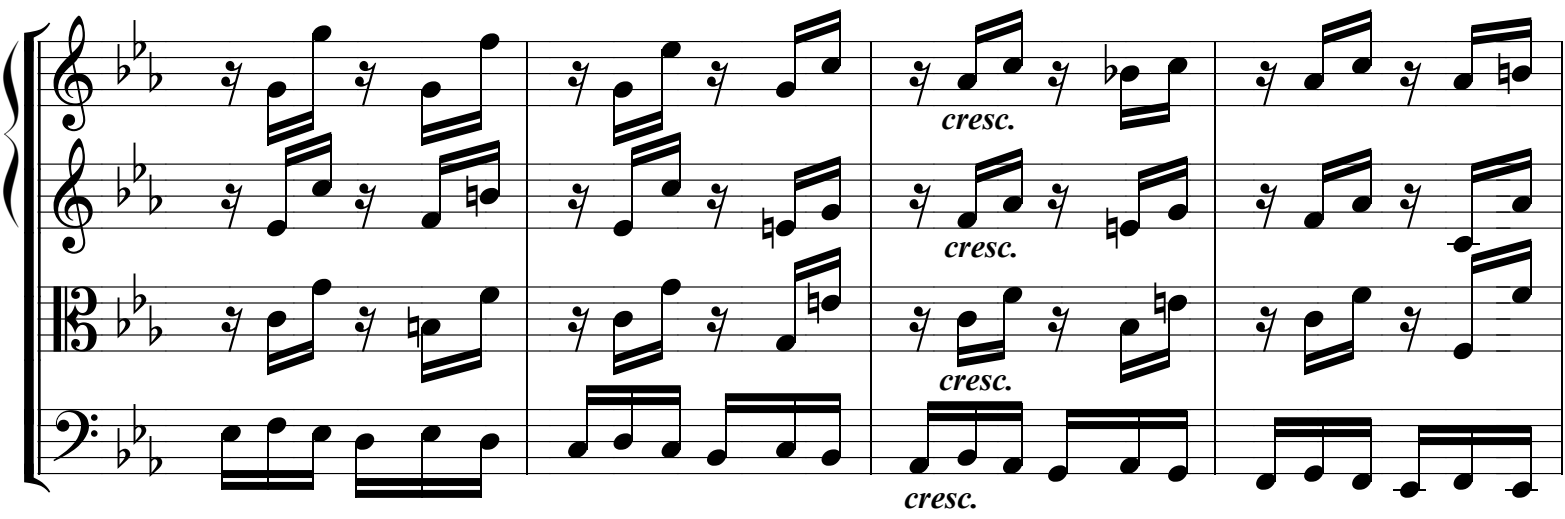
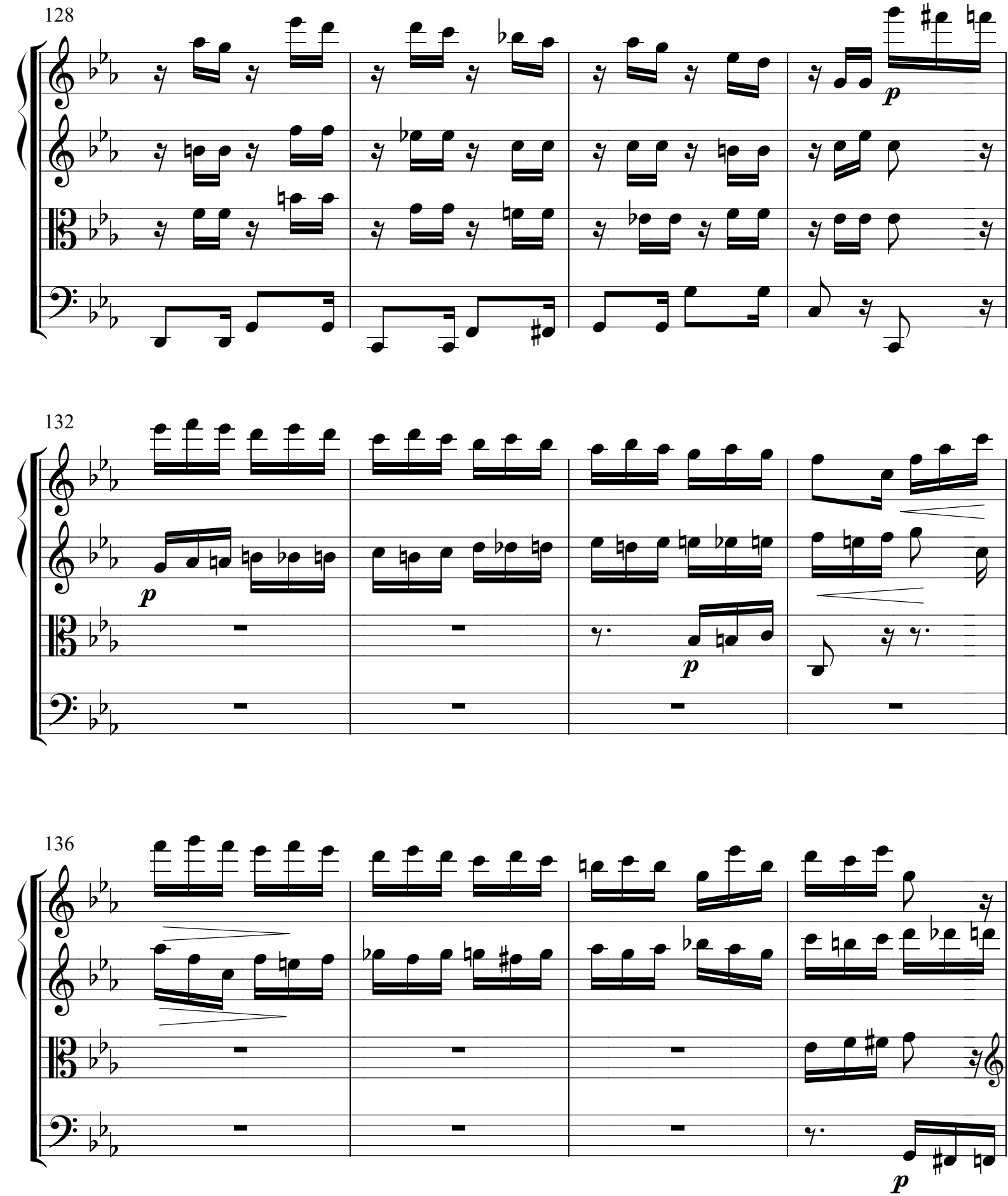
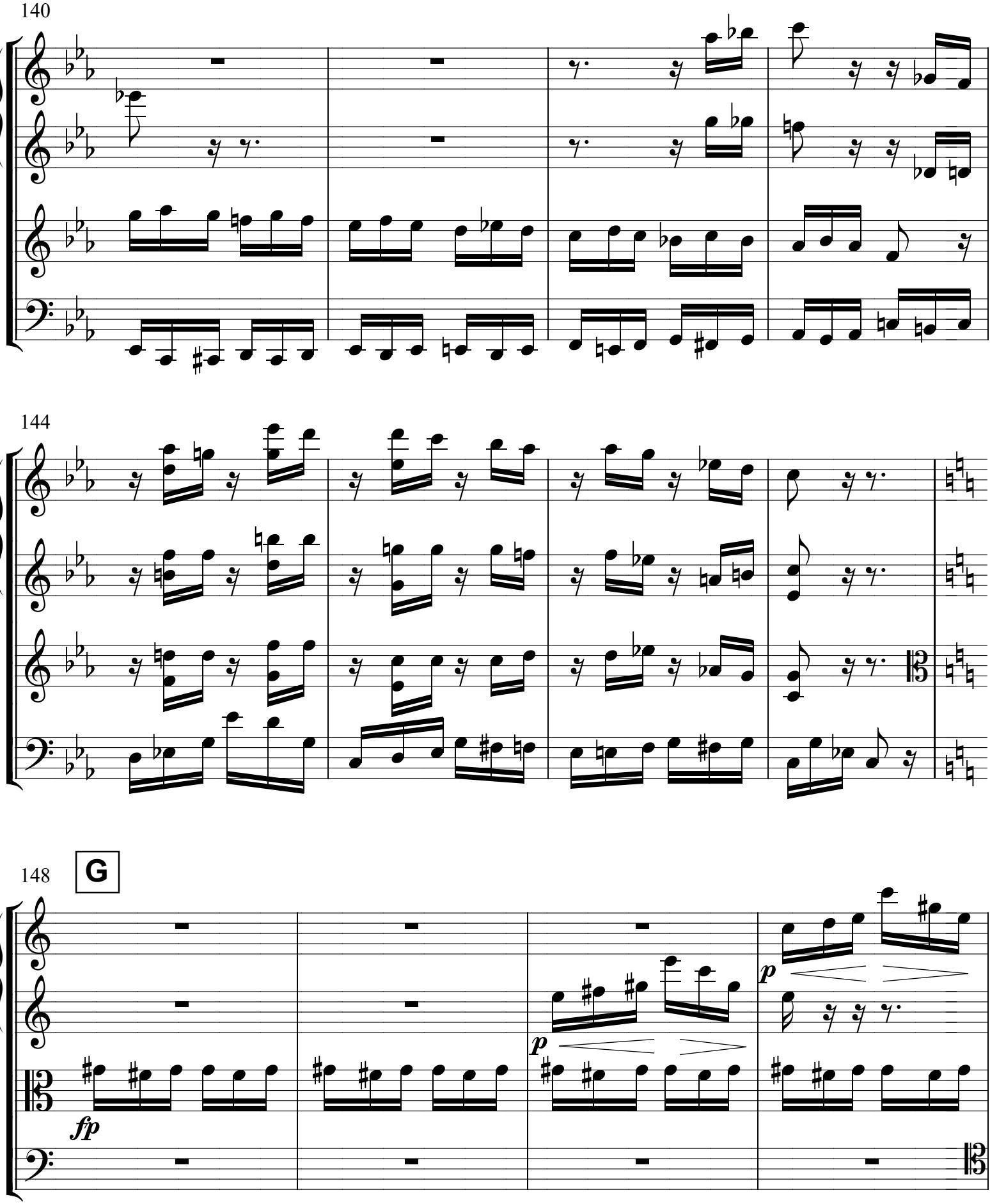
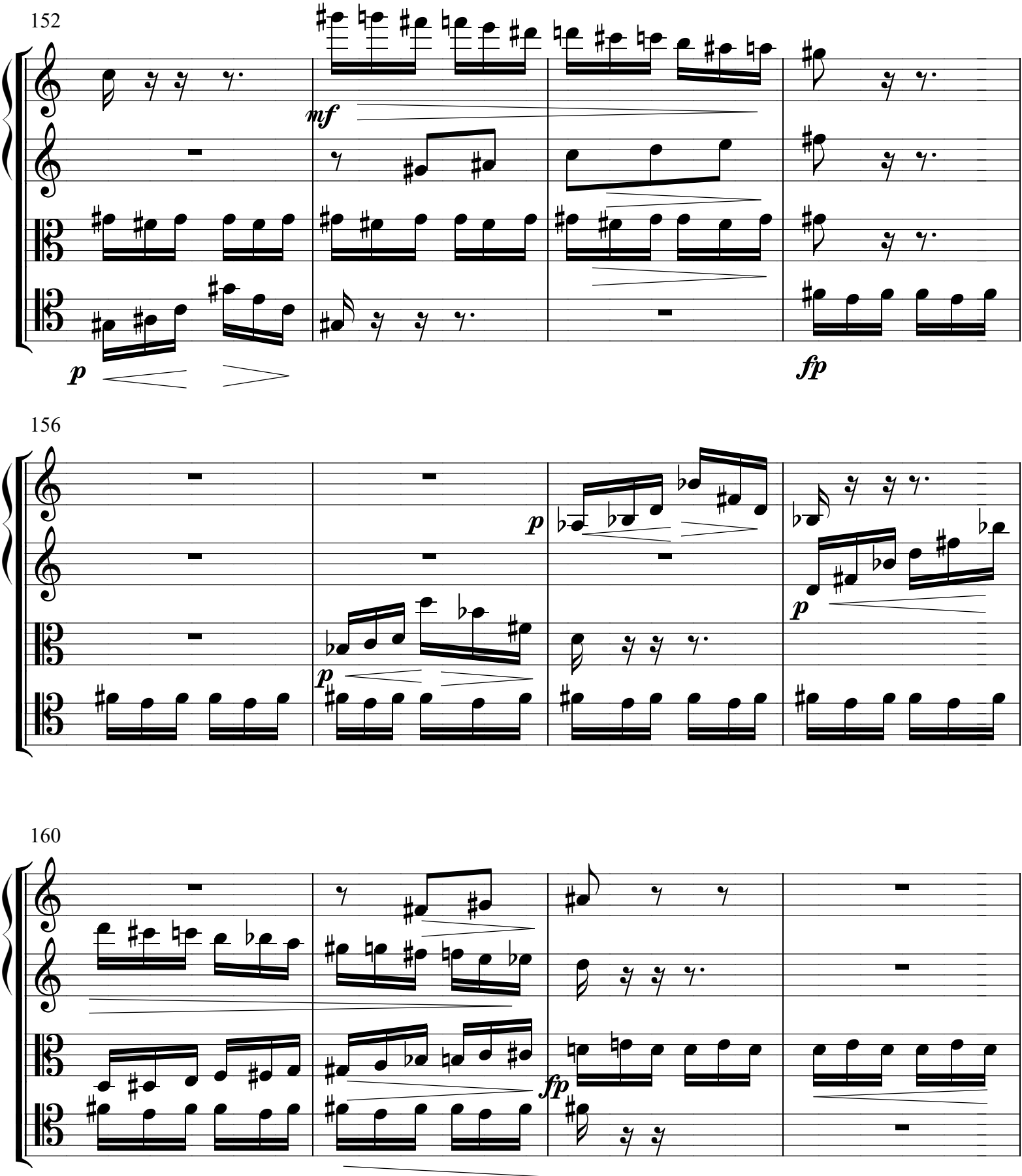


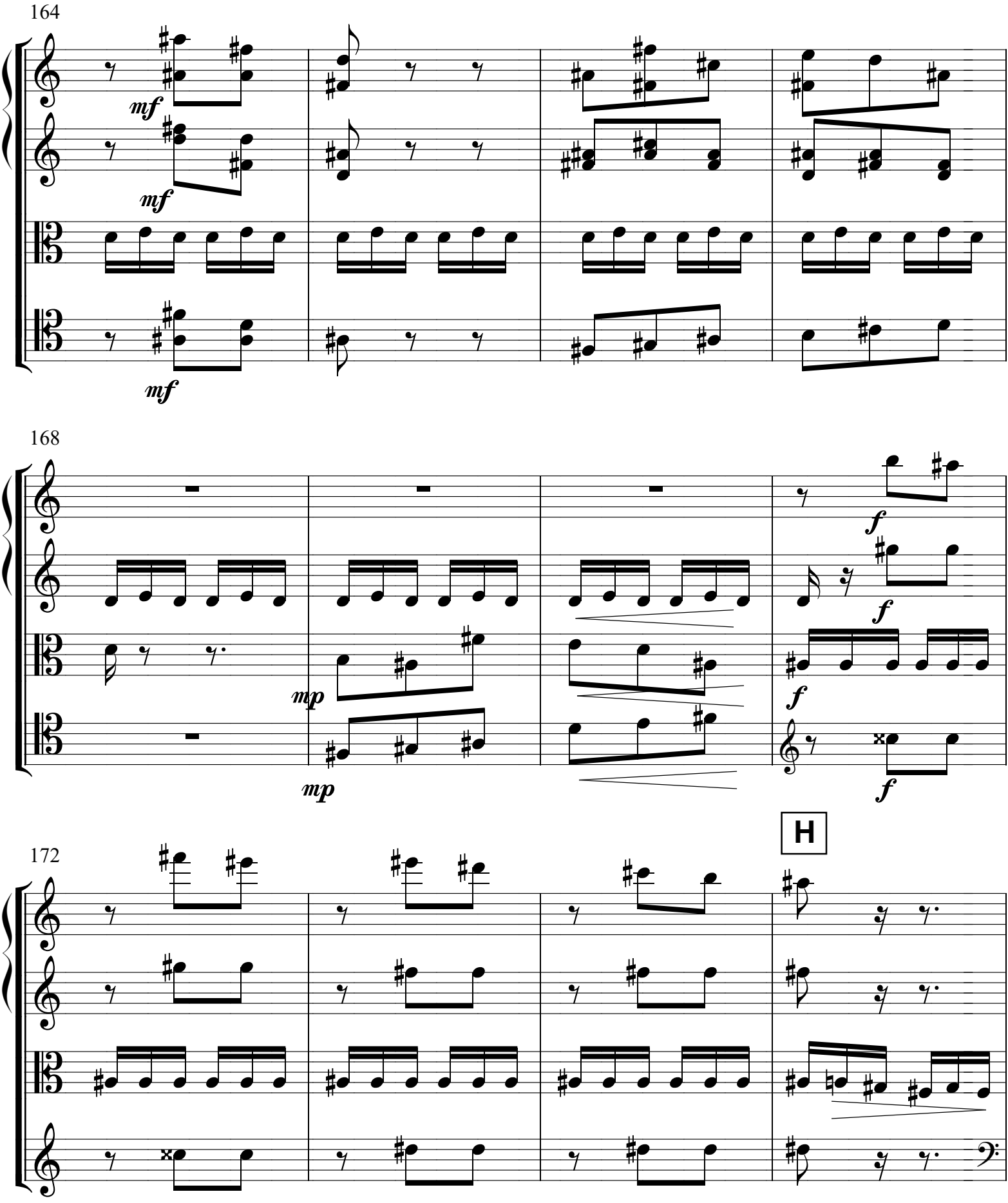
124



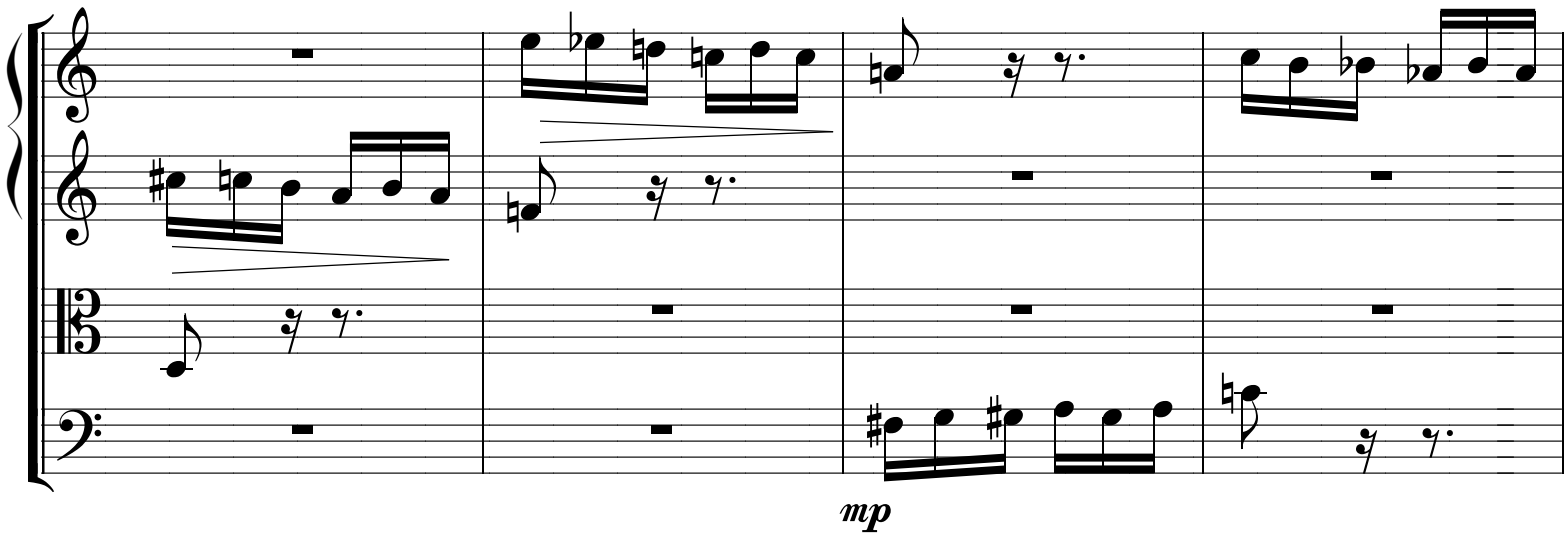

128
p
132
p
p
136
p


140
144
148
G
fp
p
p

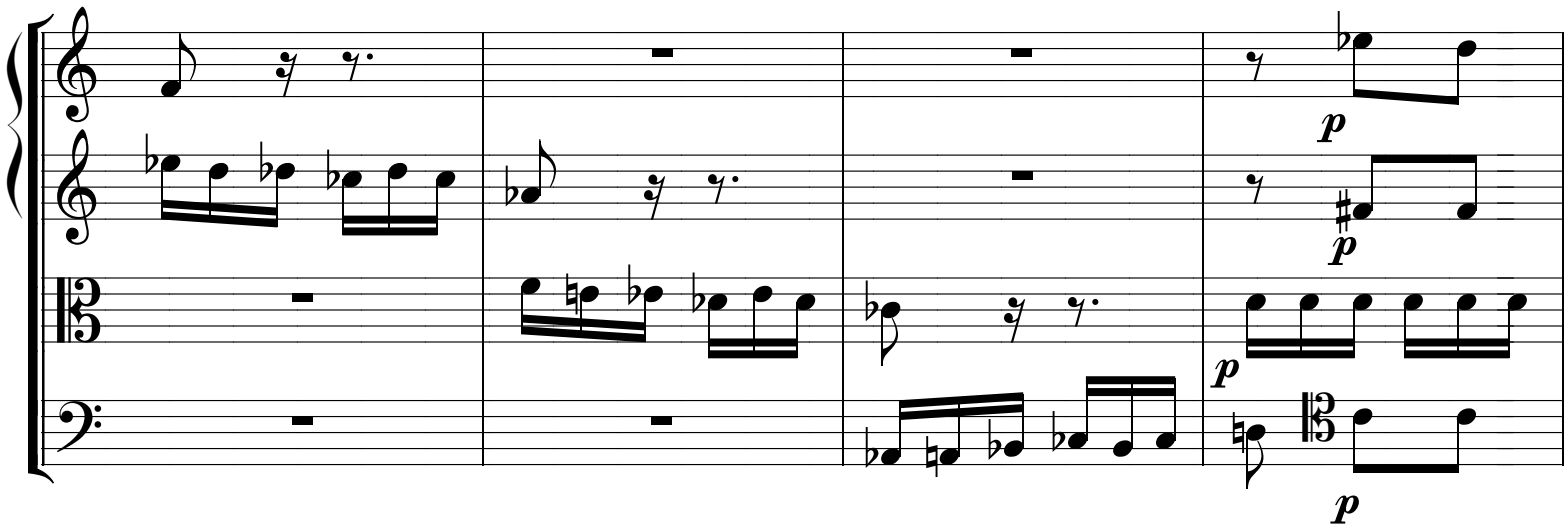

152
mf
p
fp
156
p
p
p
160
fp


164
mf
mf
mf
168
mp
mp
f
f
f
f
H
172

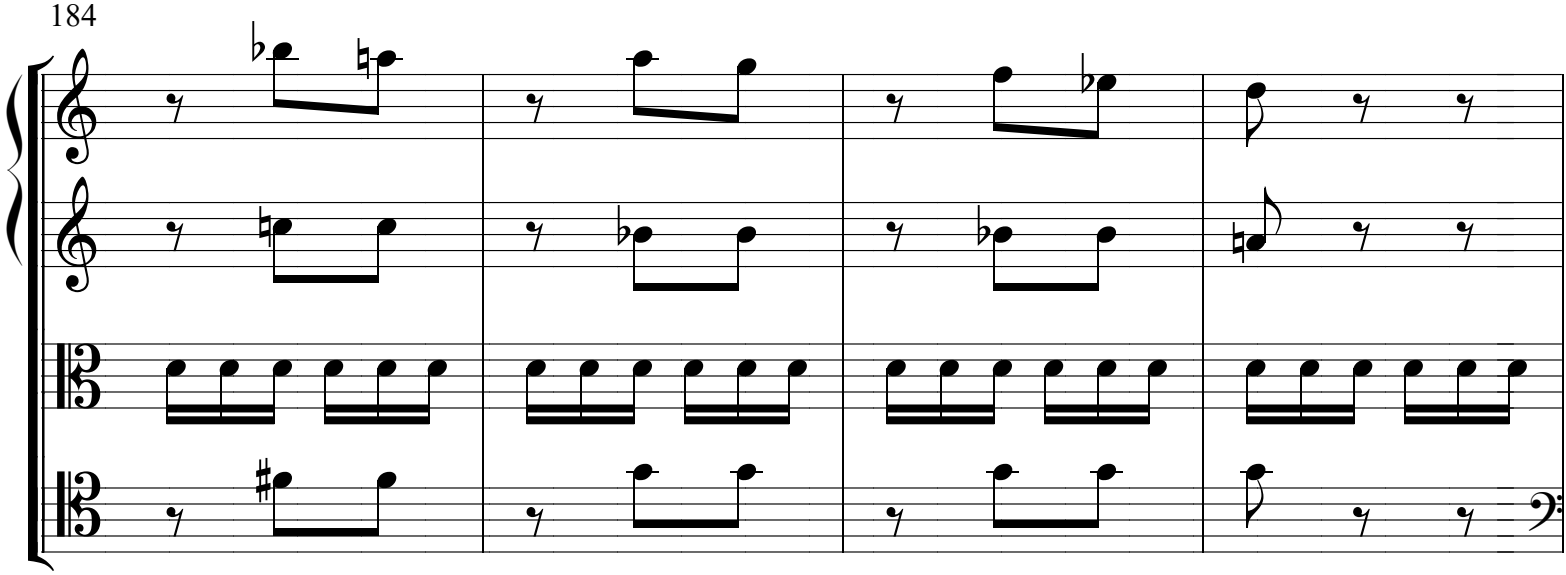
176

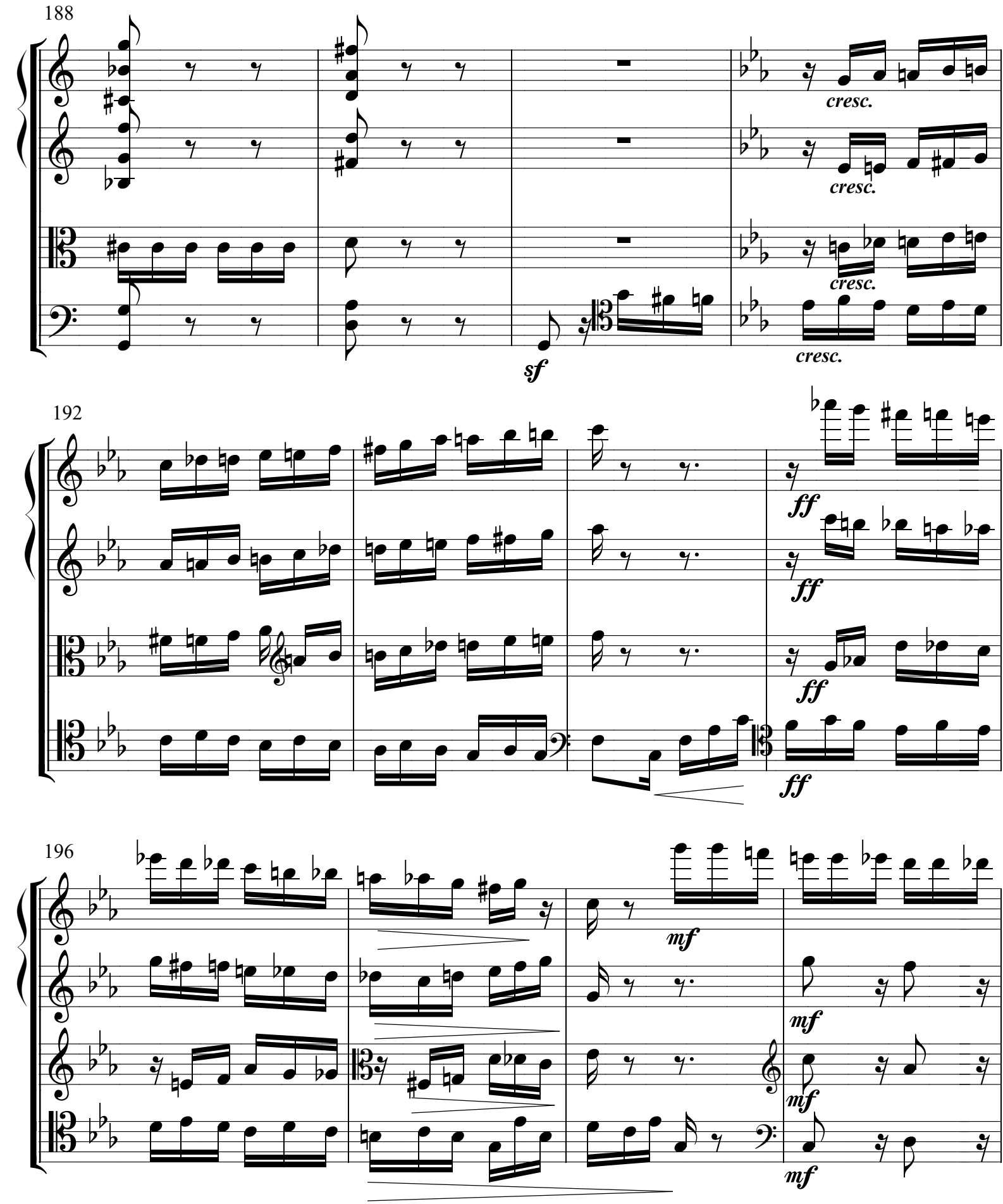


180



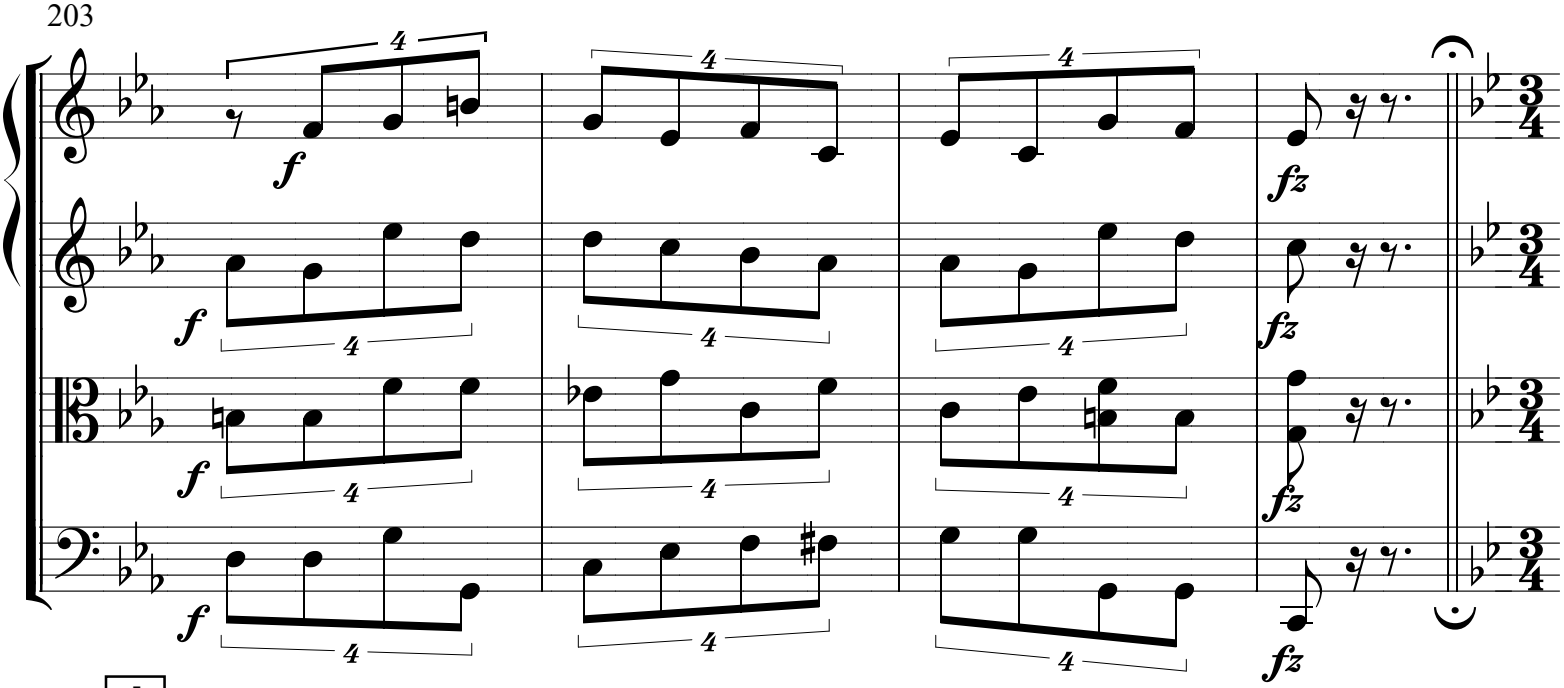
184




188
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
sf
192
ff
ff
ff
ff
196
mf
mf
mf
mf

200

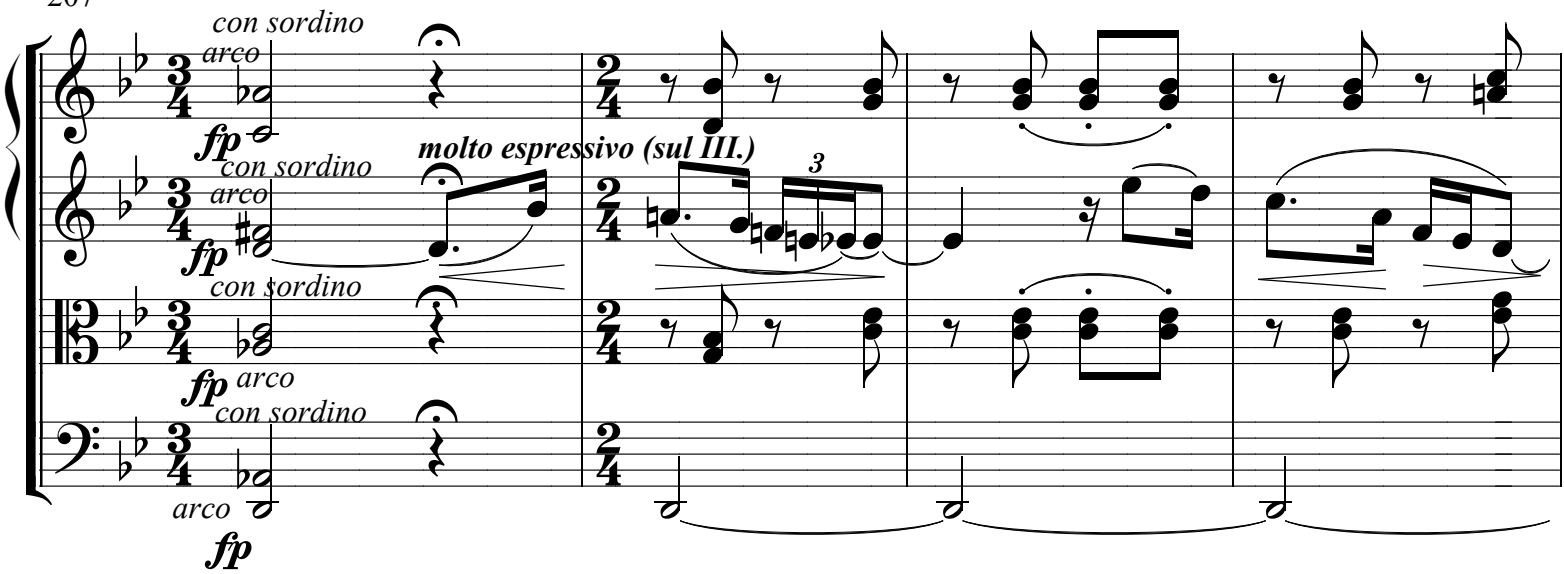
203



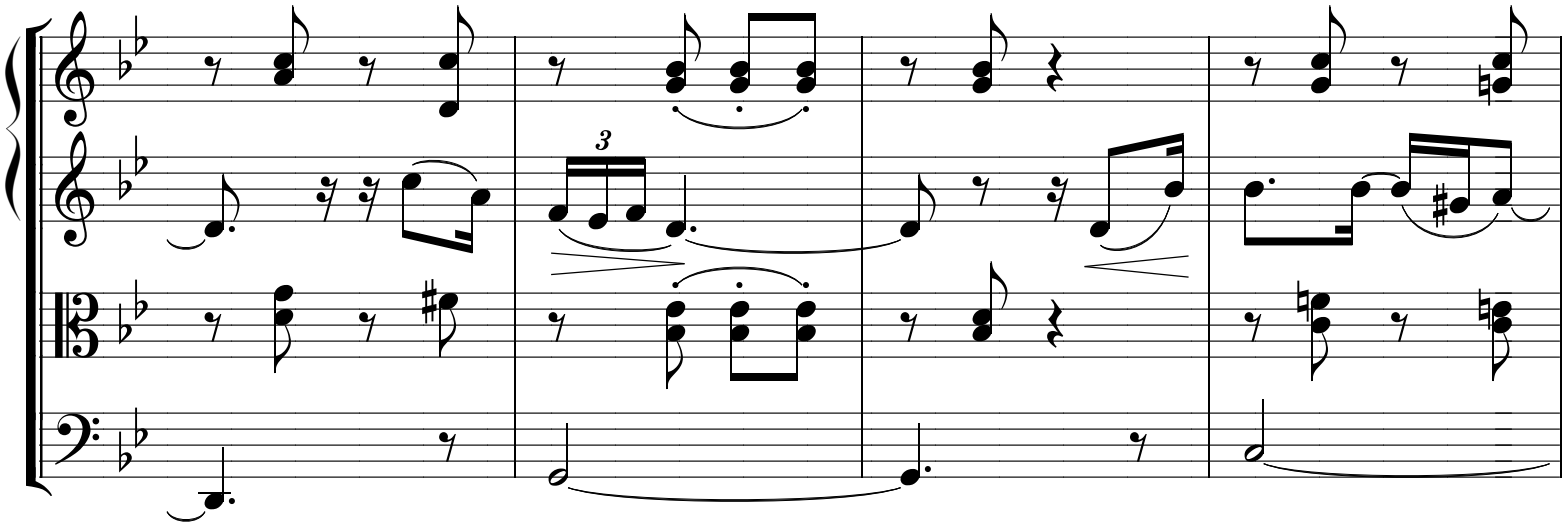
I

poco Adagio

207



211



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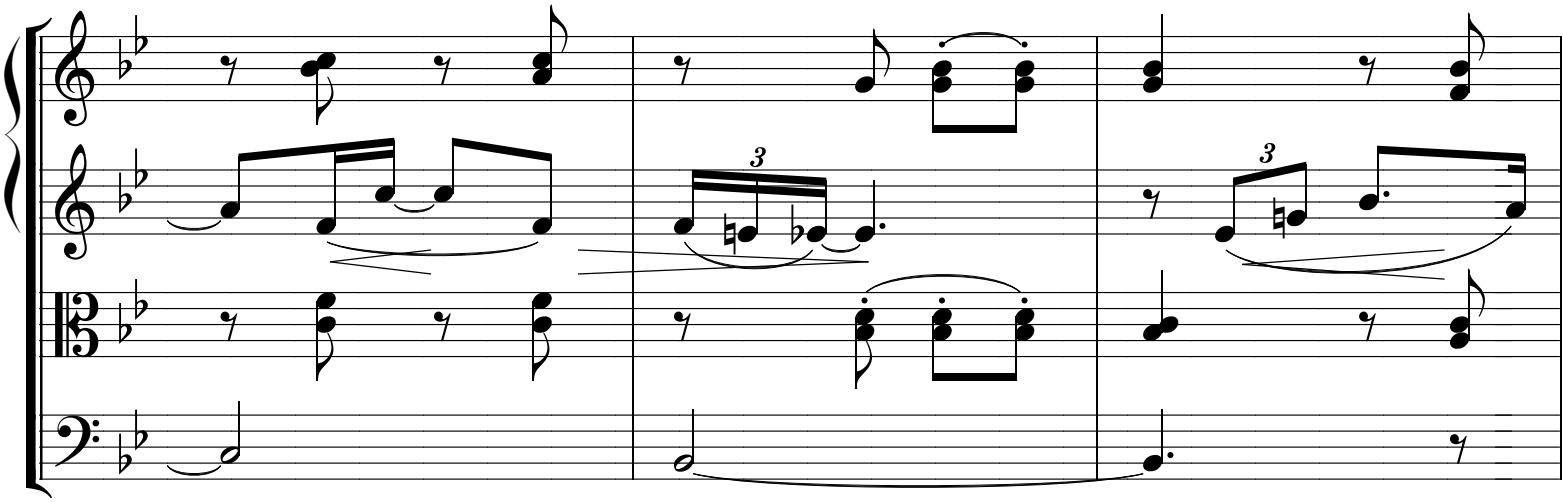
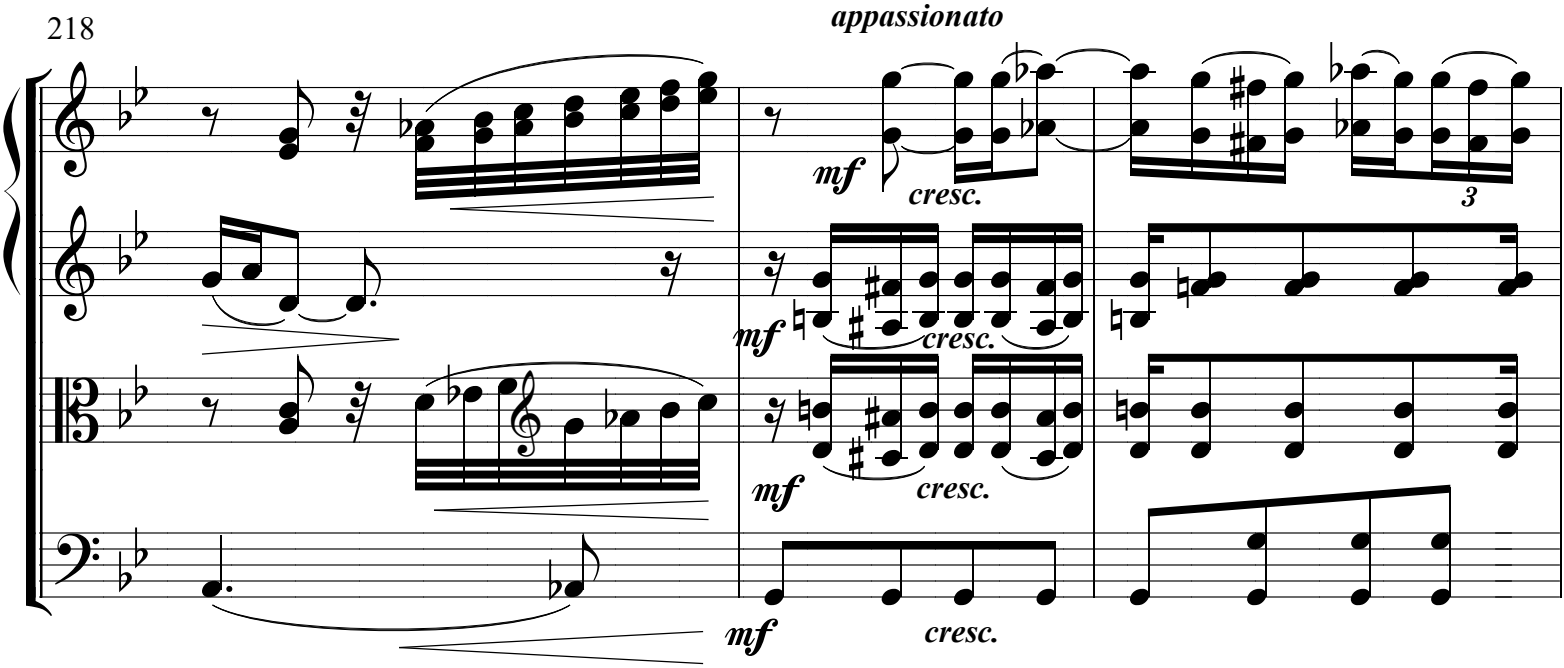
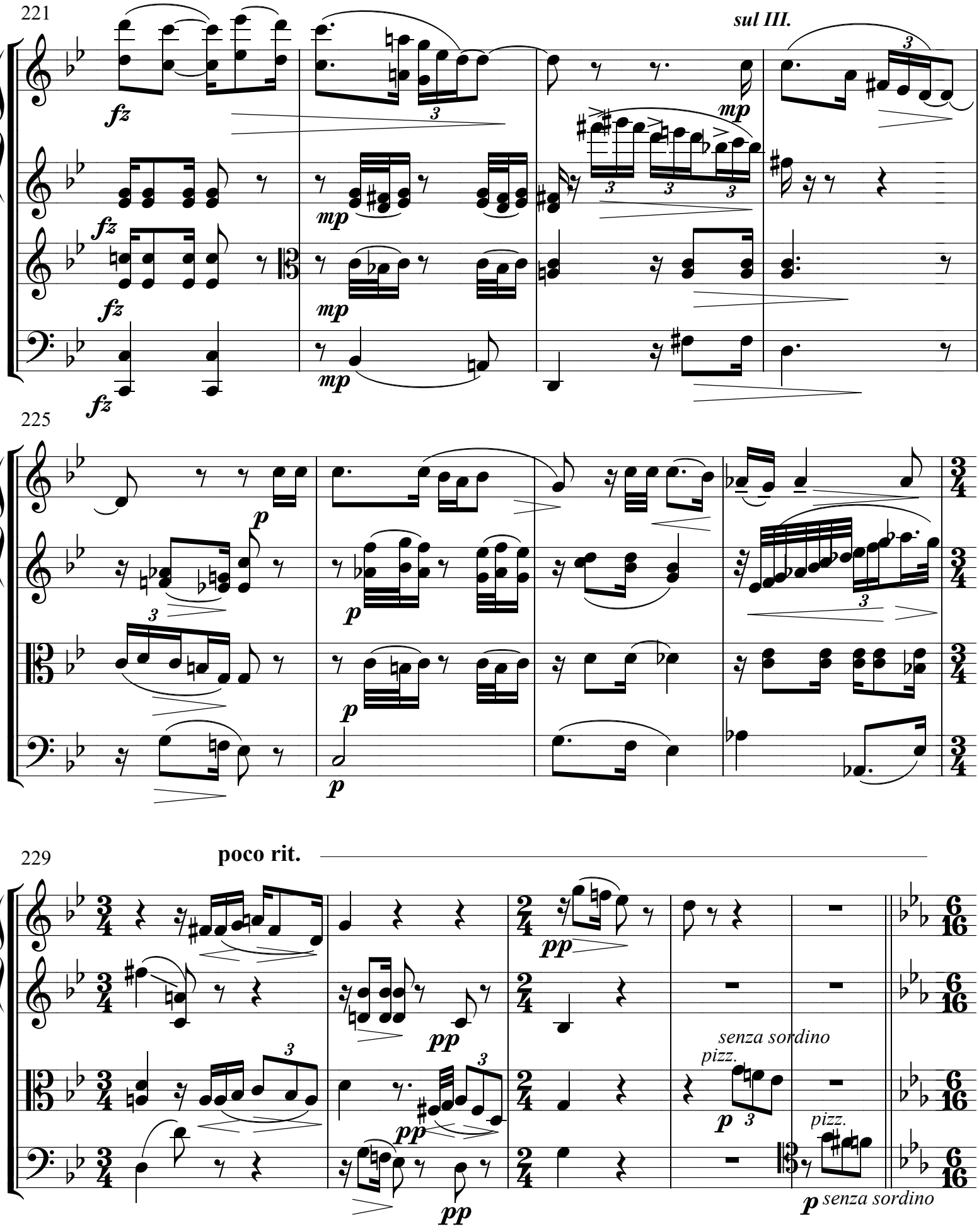
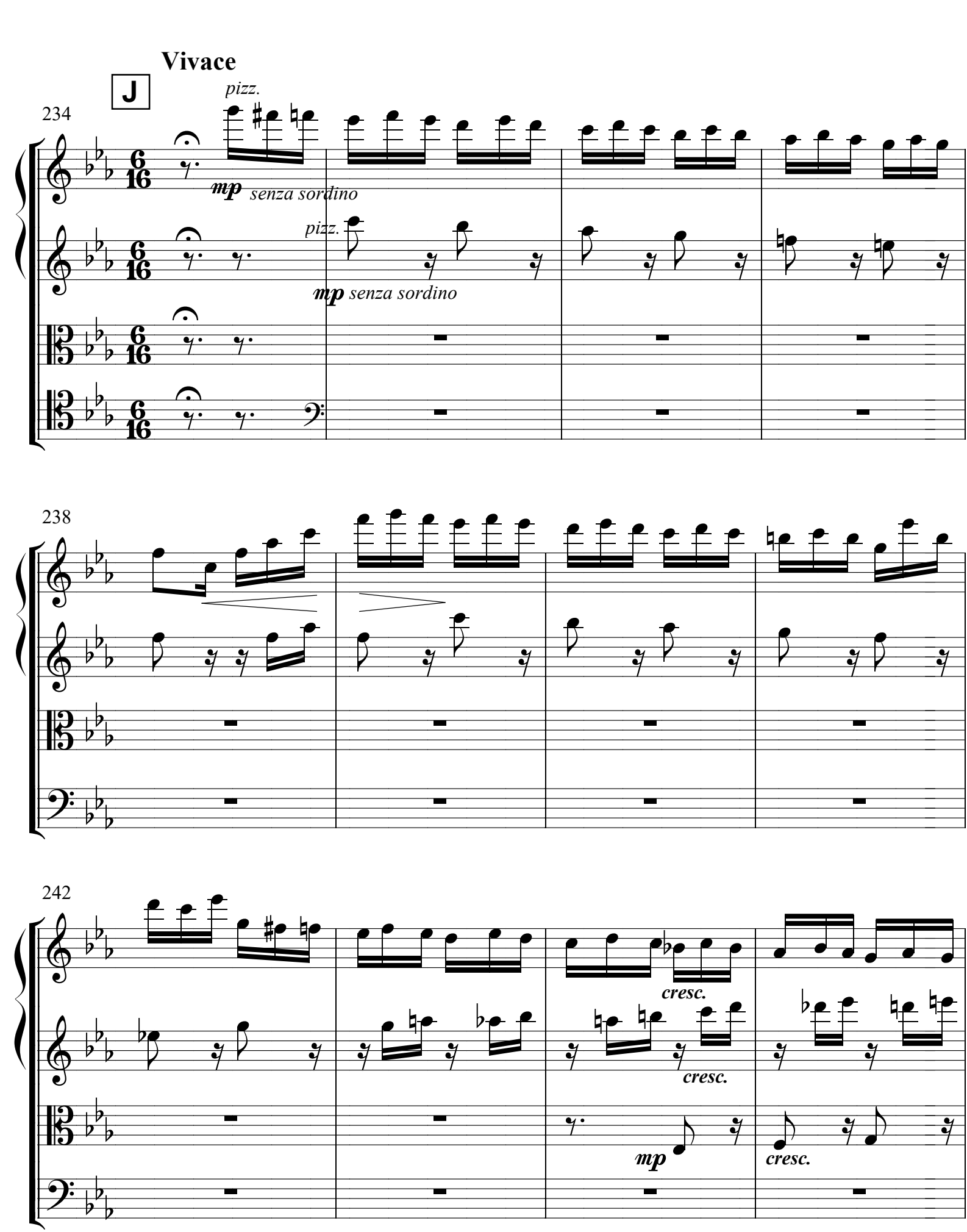


218

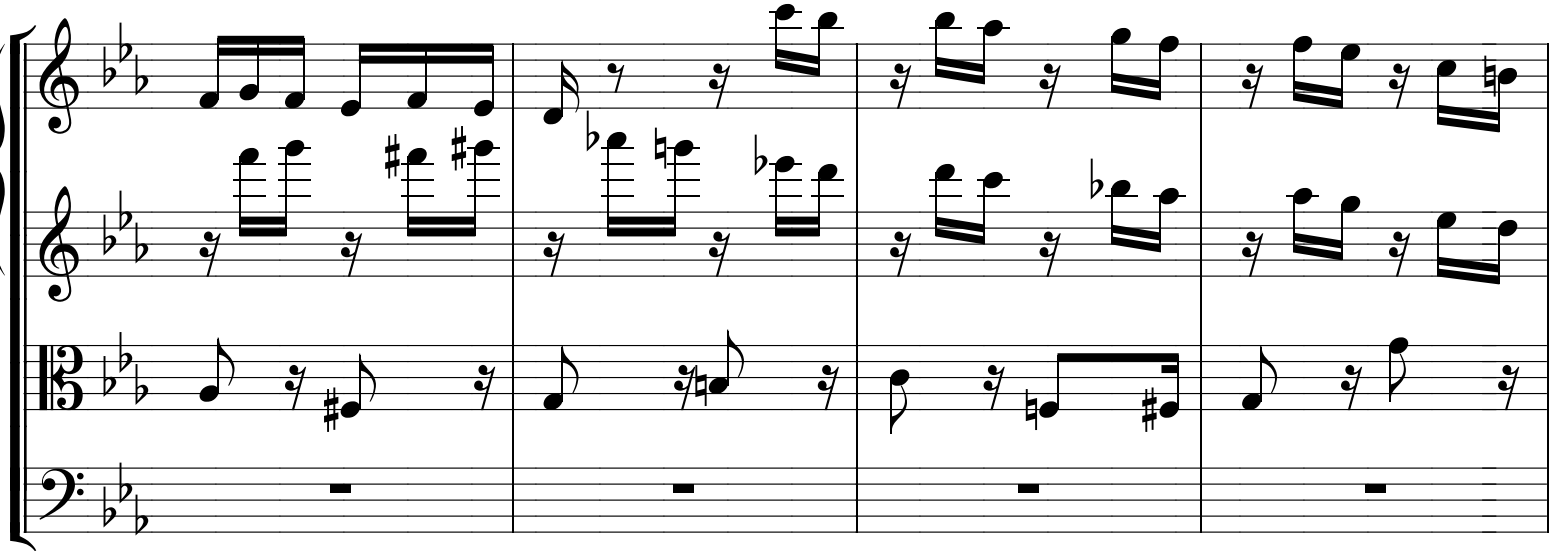
appassionato



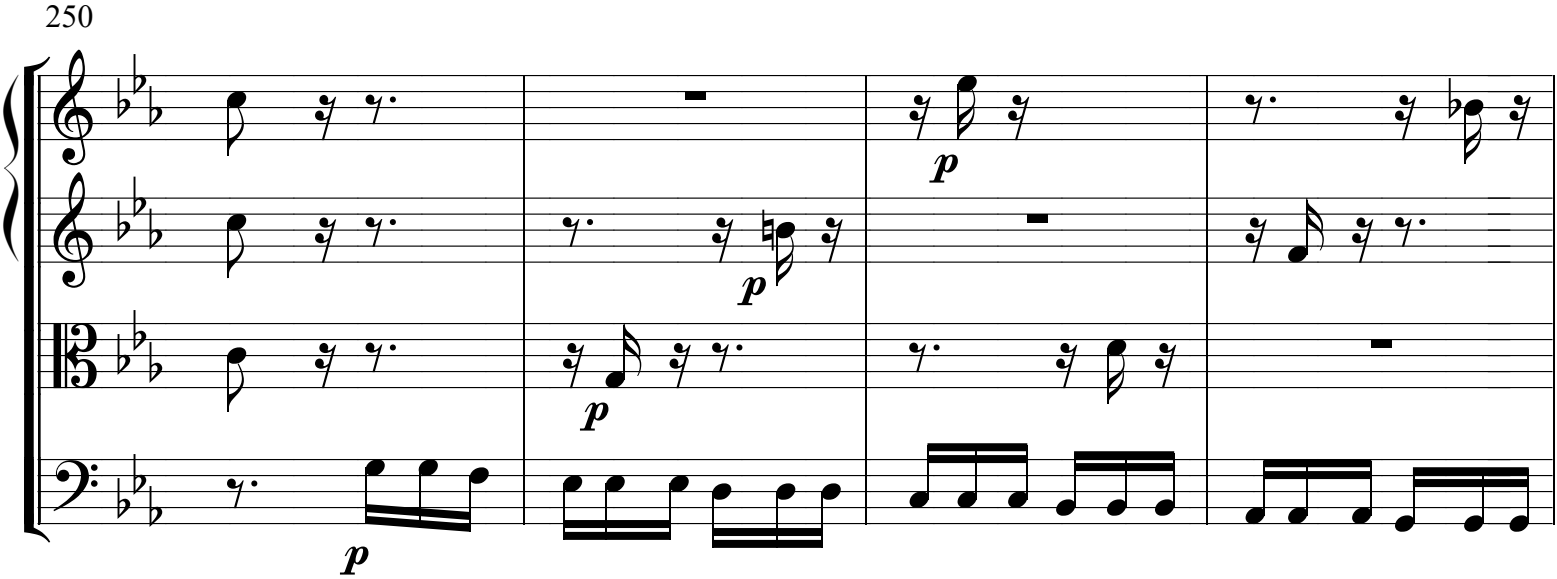

221
sul III.
225
229
poco rit.
senza sordino
pizz.
pizz.
senza sordino


Vivace
J
234
pizz.
mp senza sordino
pizz.
mp senza sordino
238
242
cresc.
cresc.
mp
cresc.

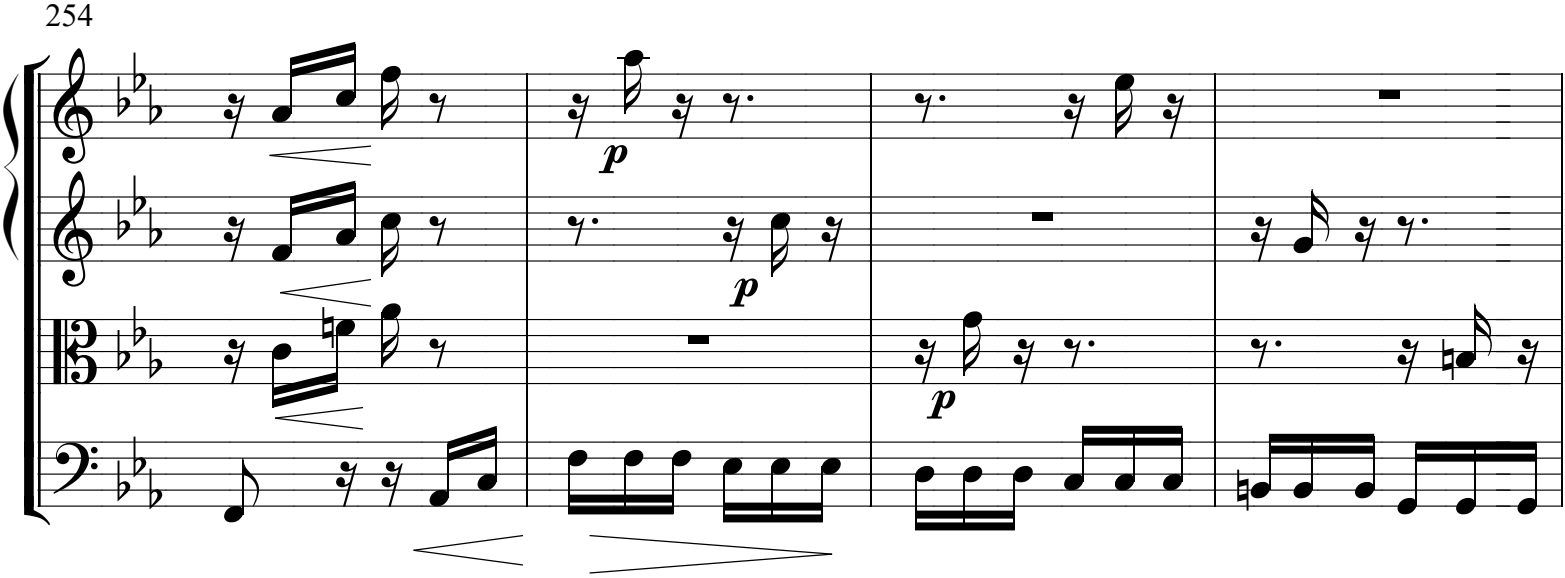
246

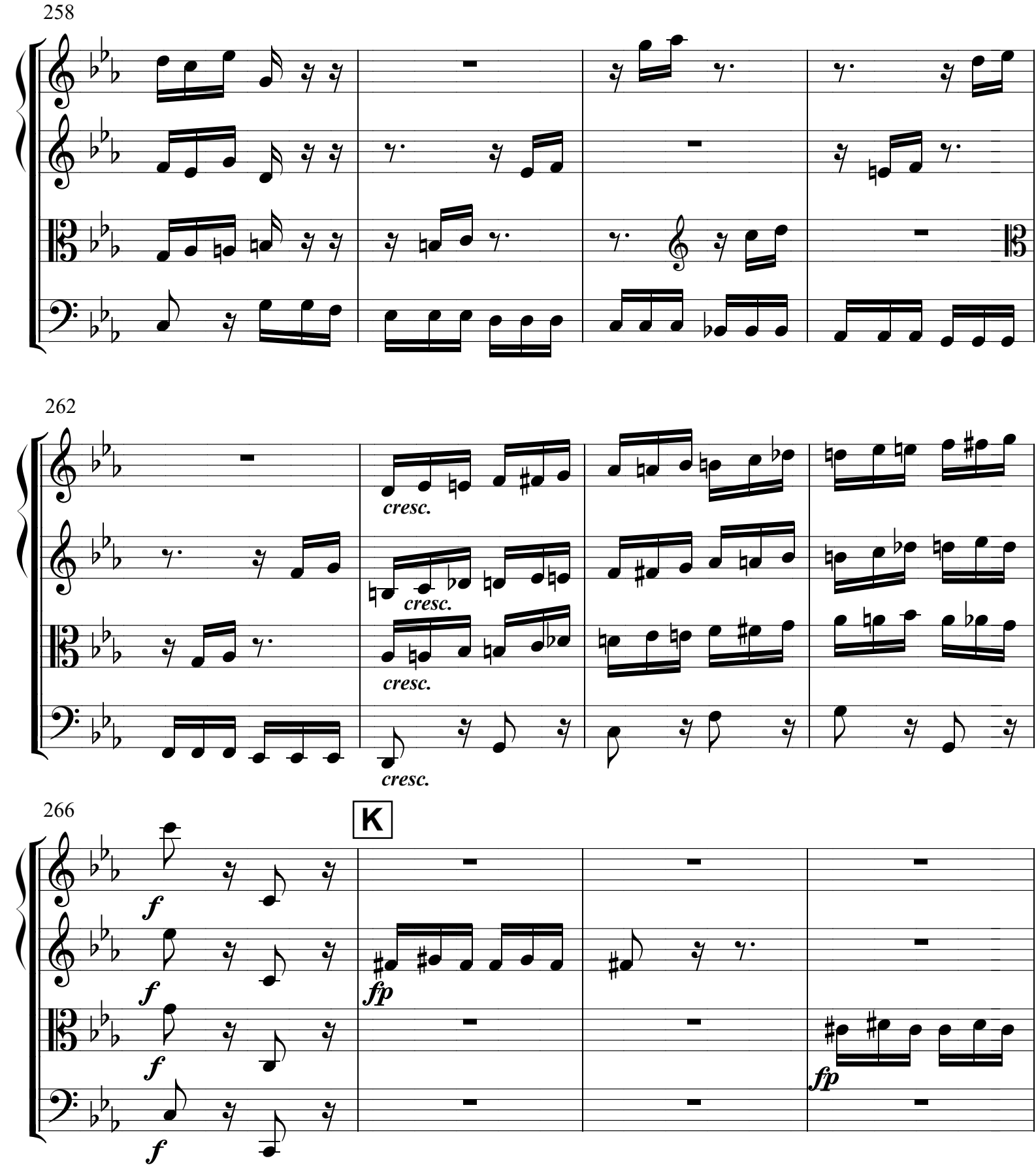


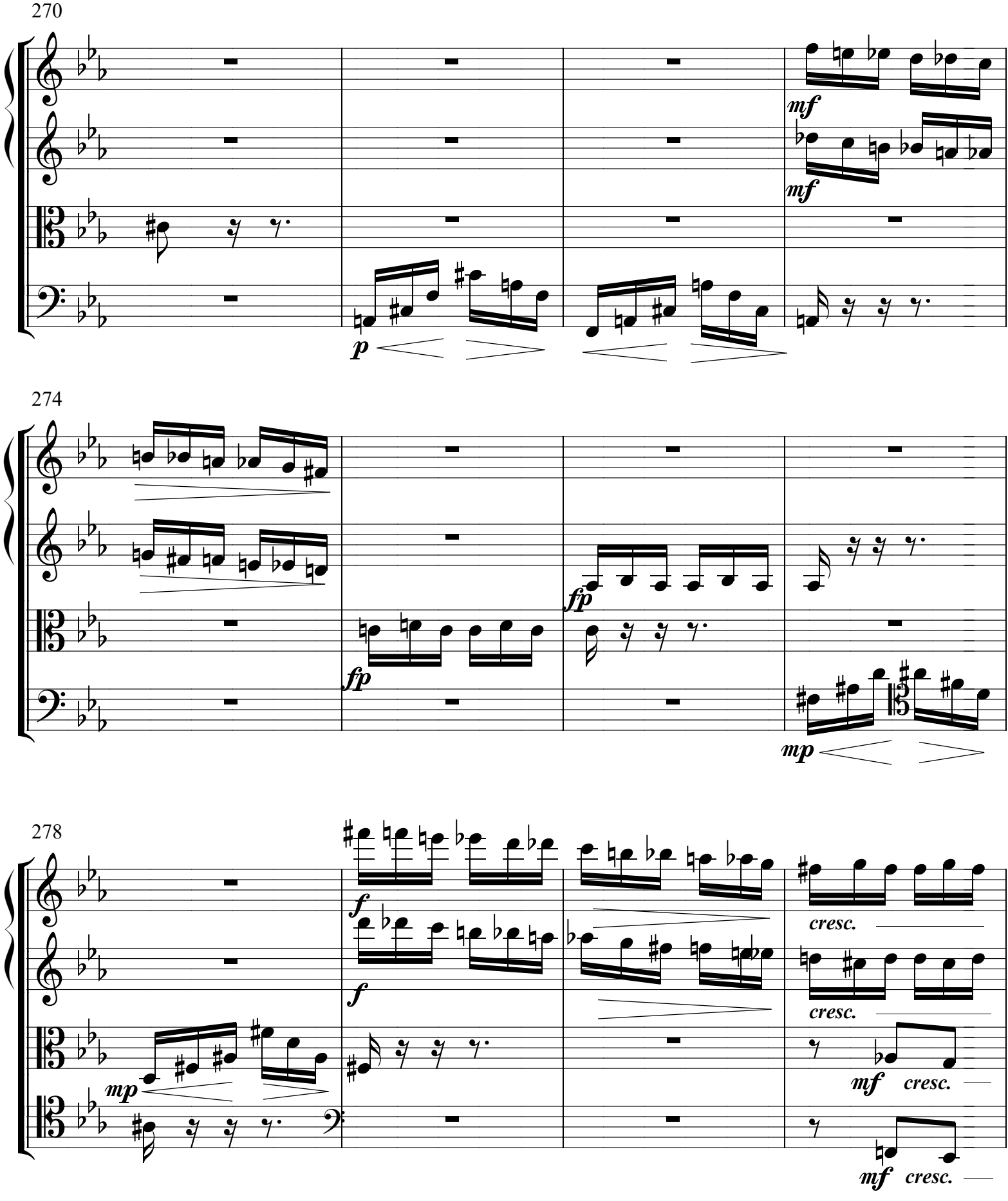
250

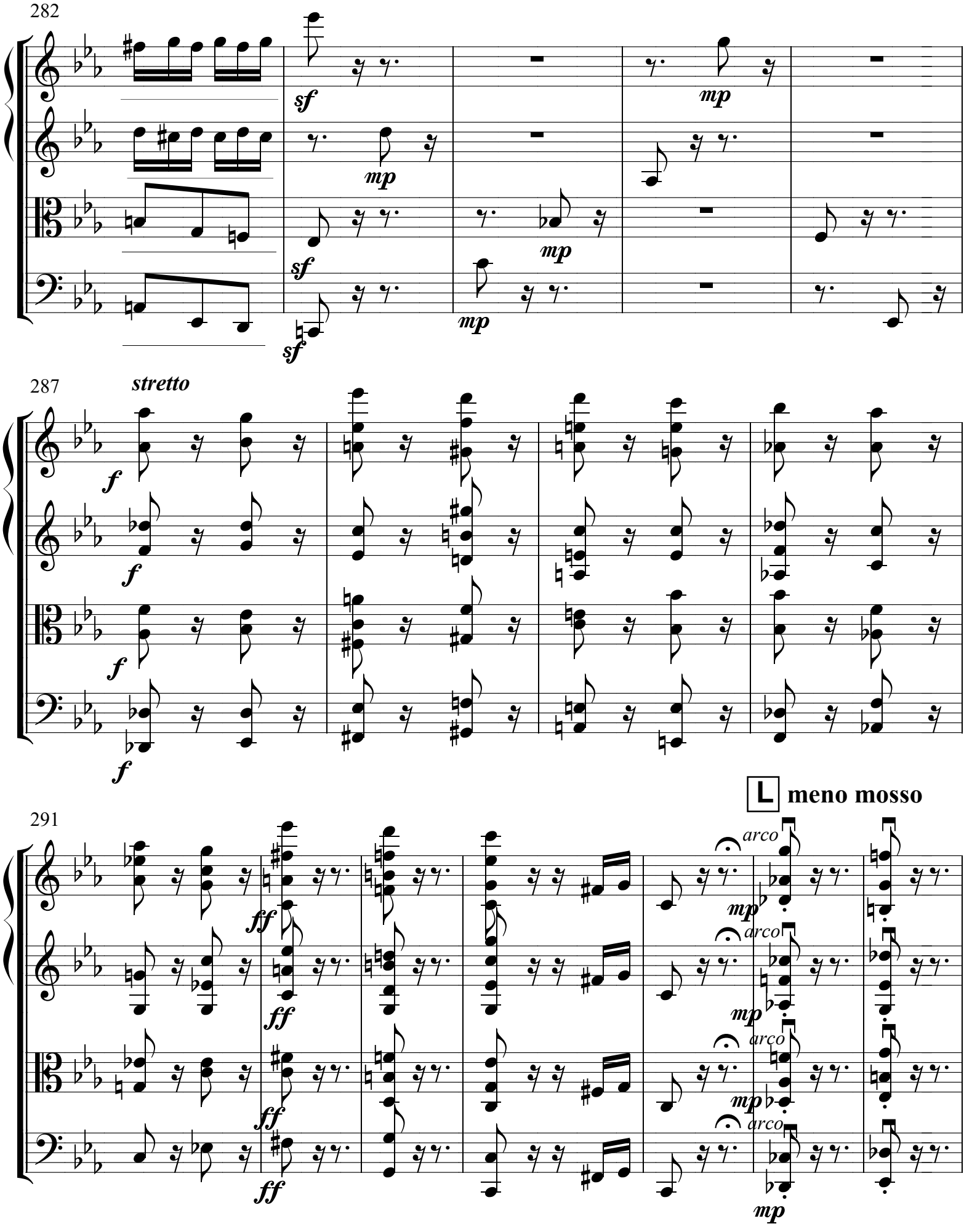


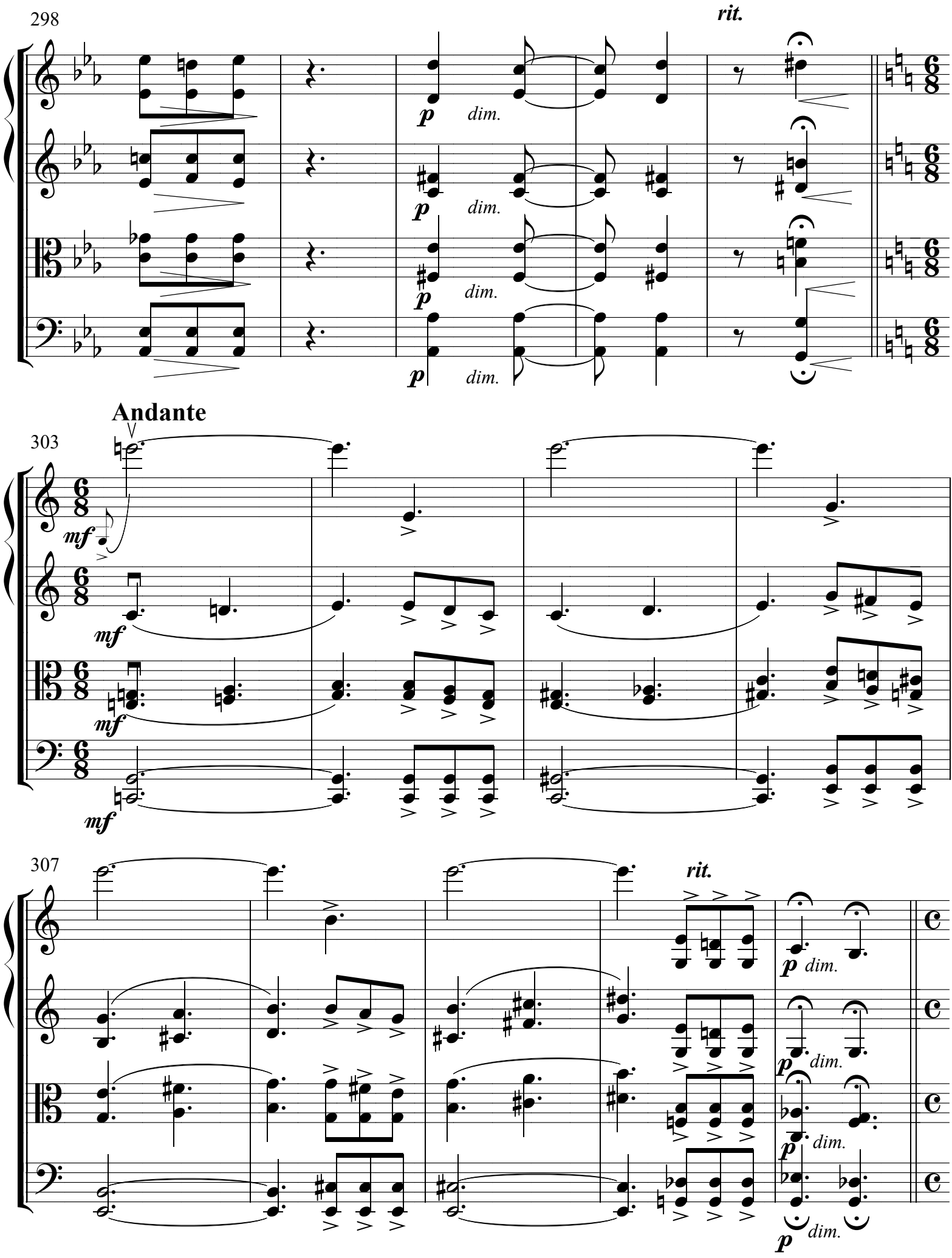
254




258
262
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
266
K
f
f
f
f
fp
fp


270
mf
mf
p
274
fp
fp
mp
278
f
f
cresc.
cresc.
mp
mf cresc.
mf cresc.


282
sf
mp
287
stretto
f
L meno mosso
291
ff
arco
mp

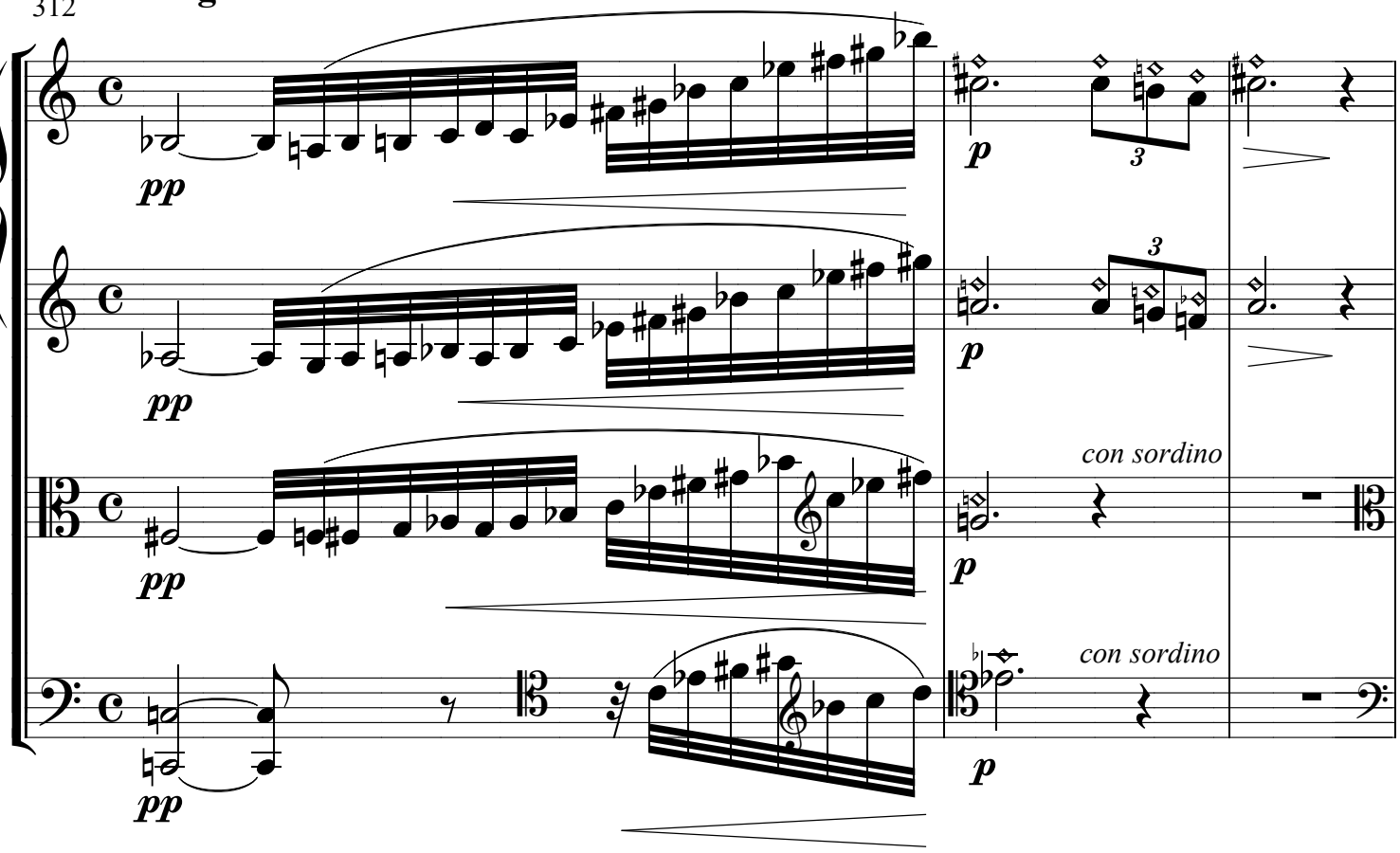

298
rit.
p
dim.
Andante
303
mf
307
rit.
p
dim.

M

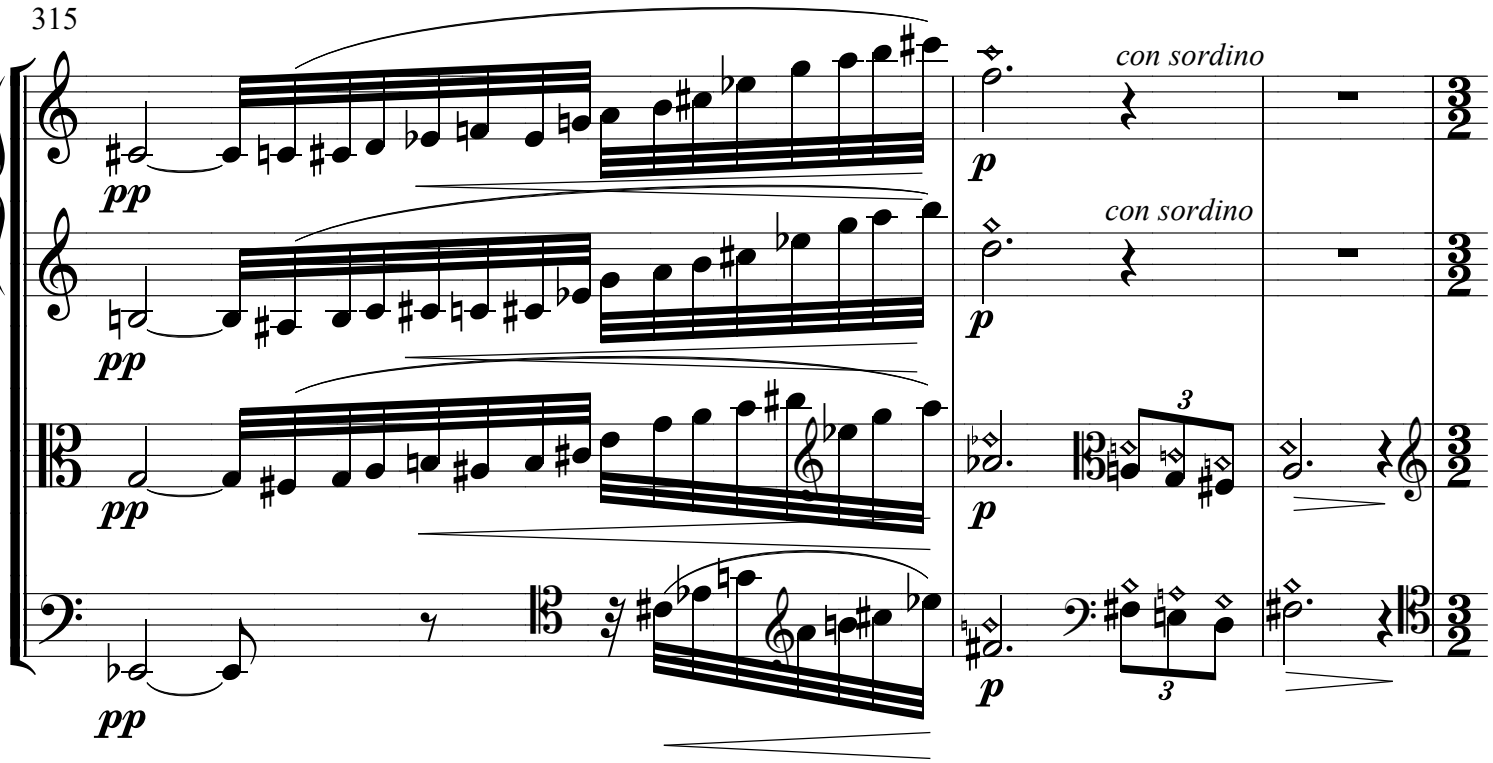
III.

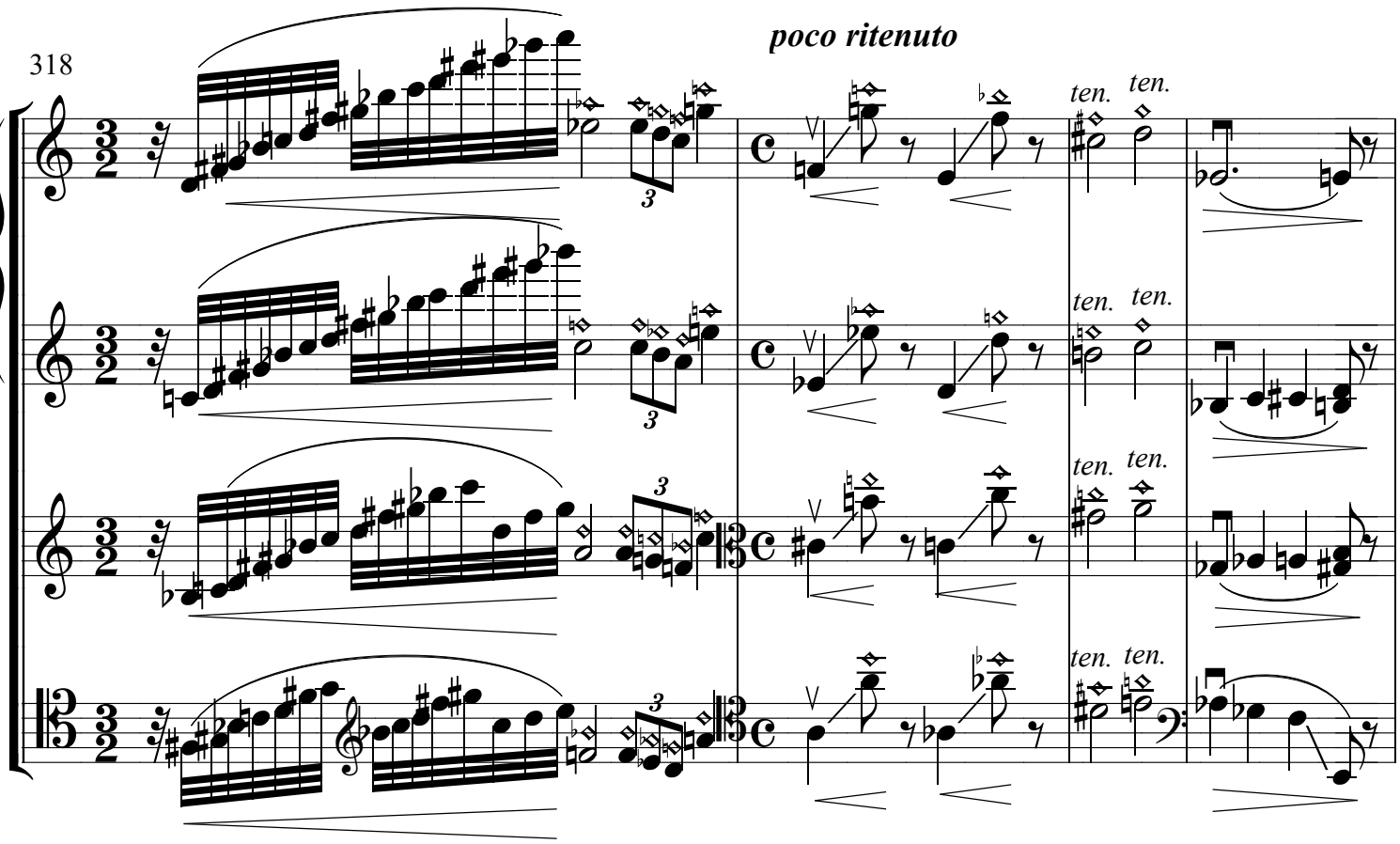
Largo

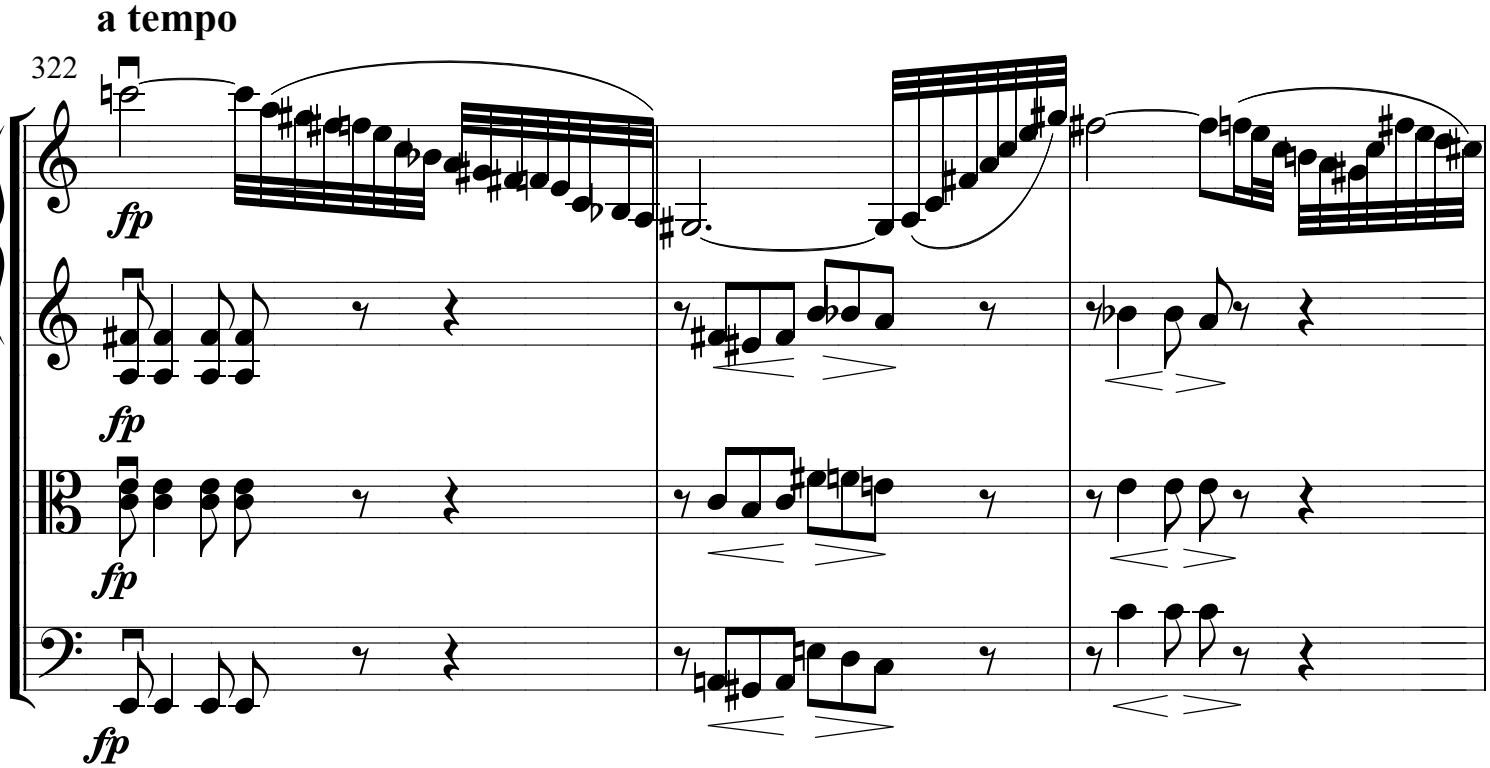
312

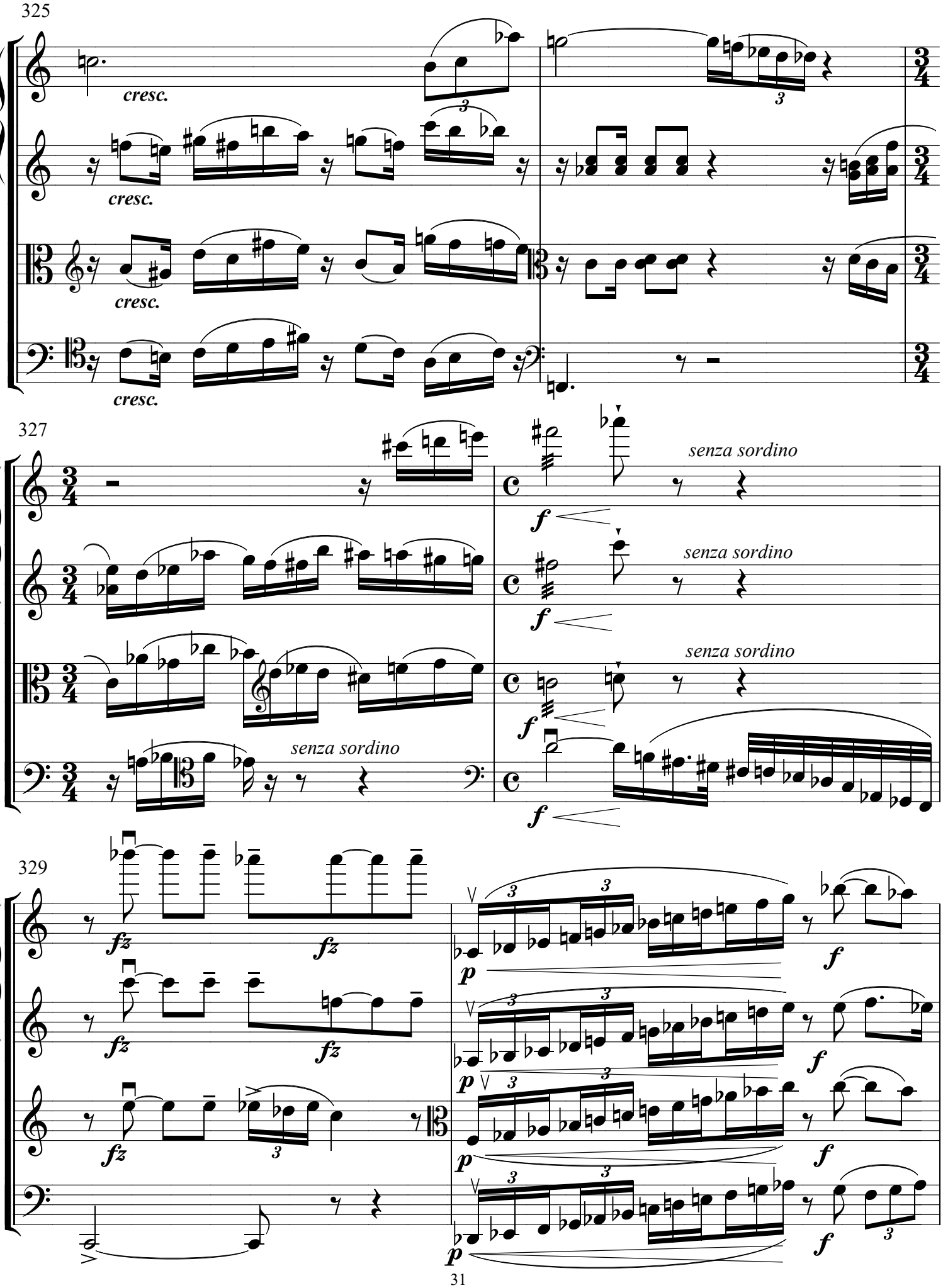


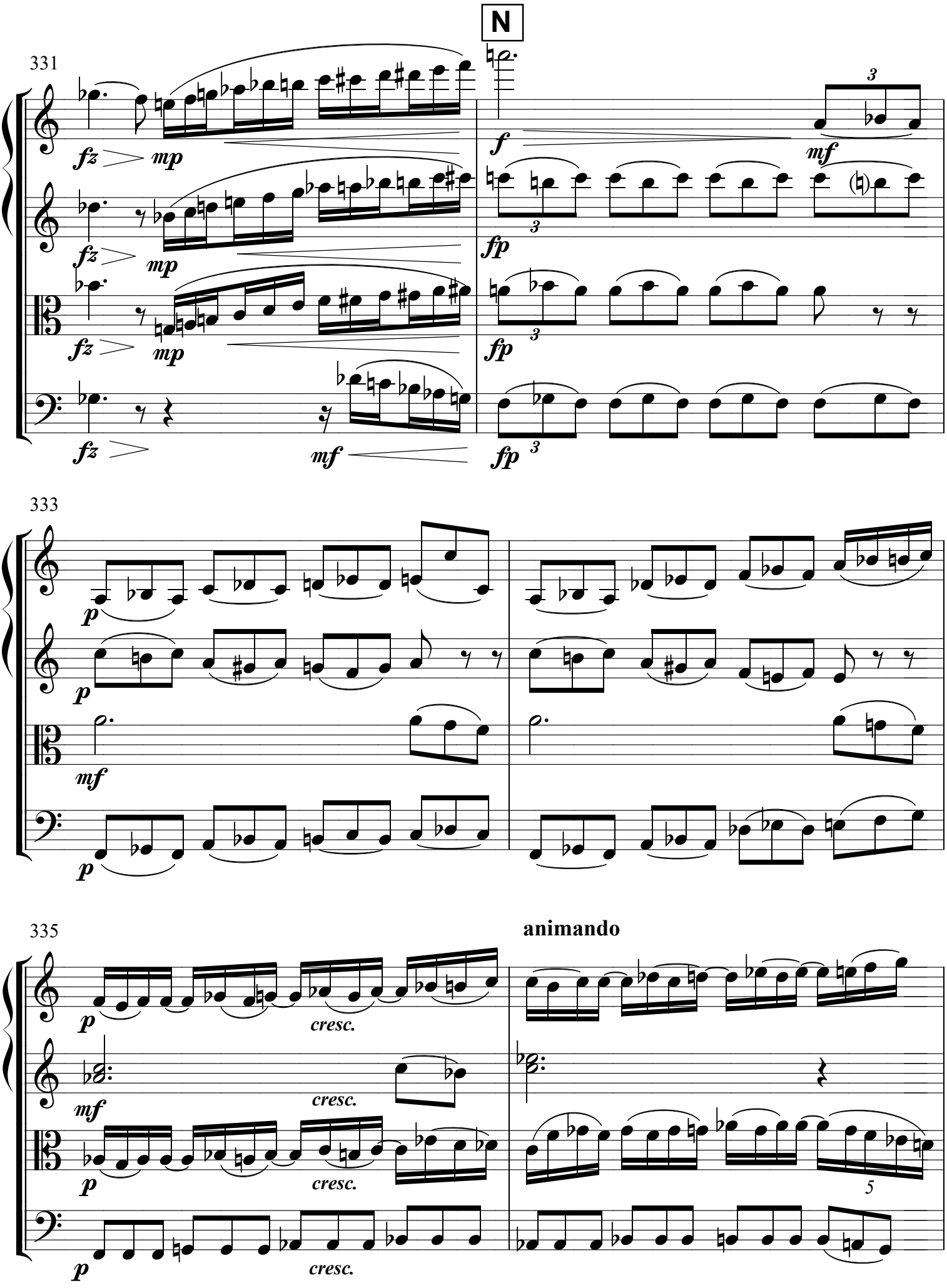
315

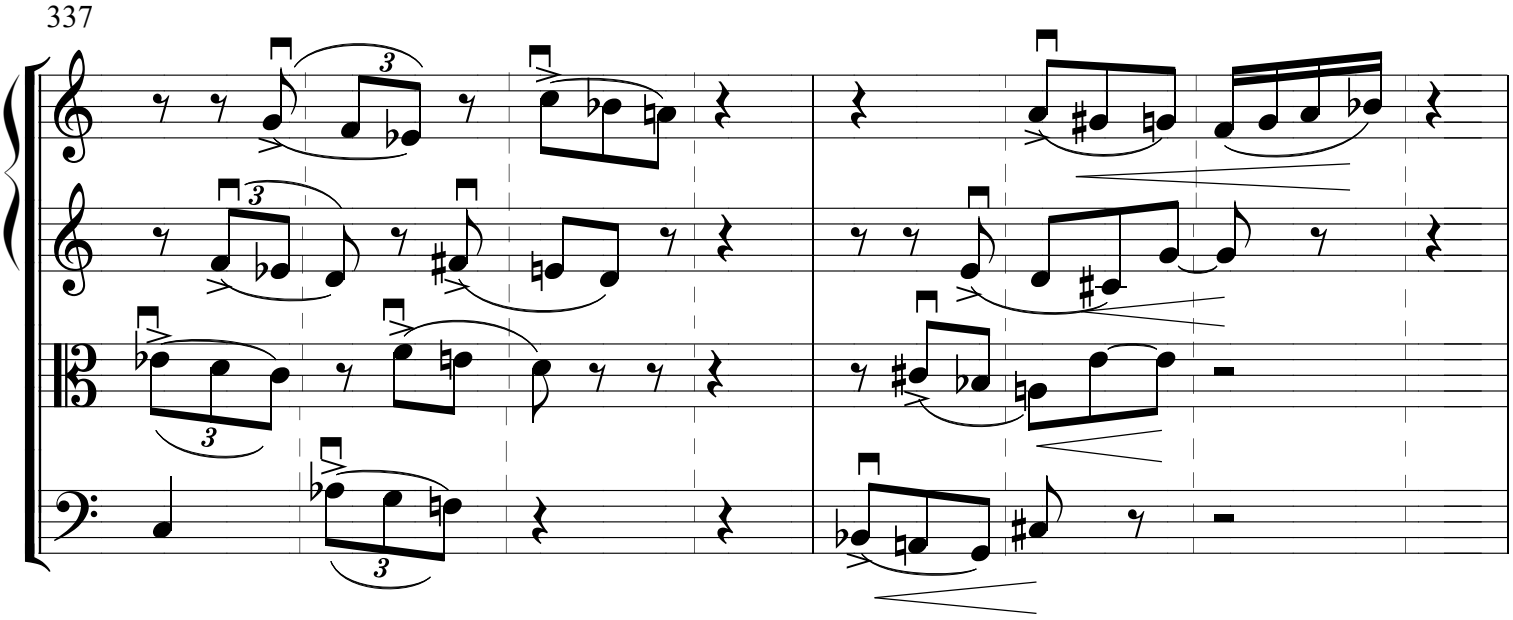


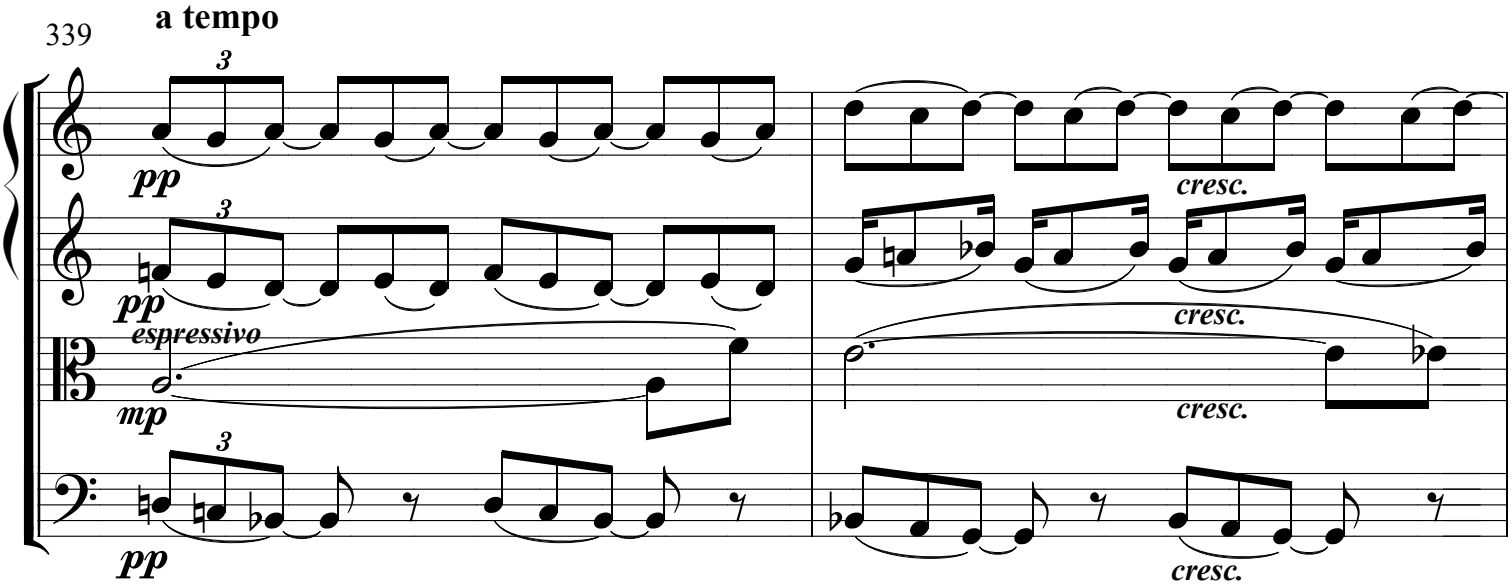

318
poco ritenuto
ten.
ten.

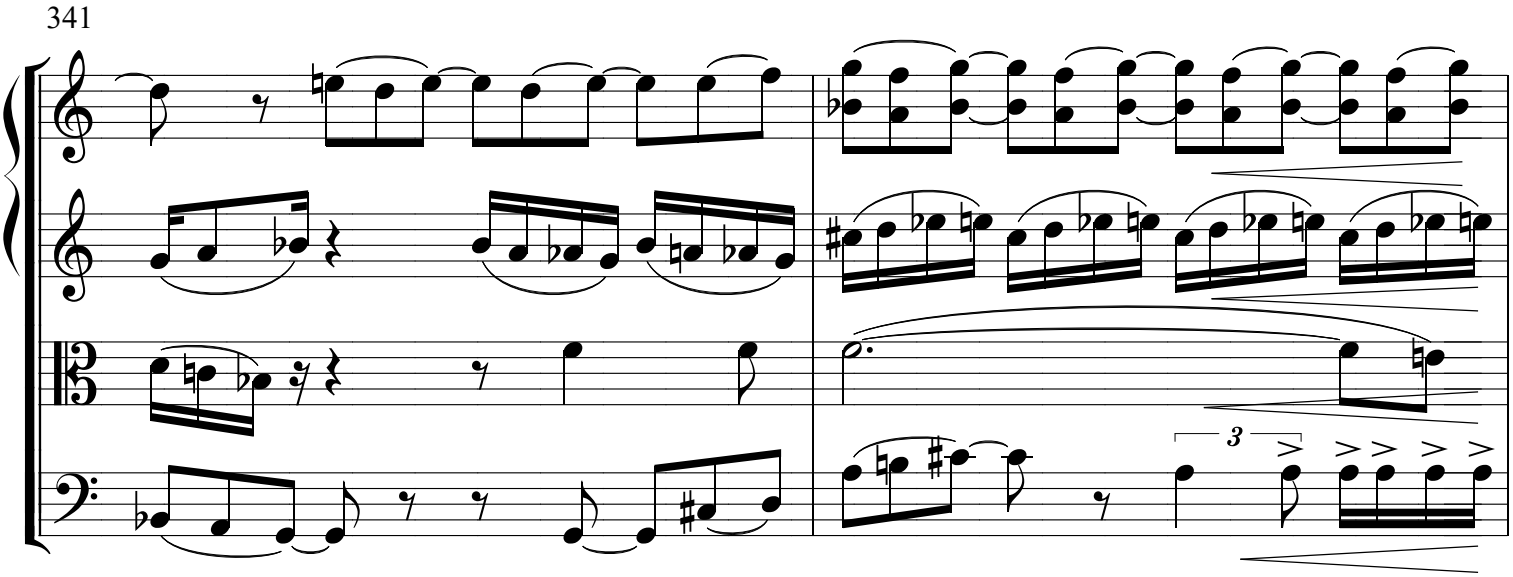

a tempo
322
fp

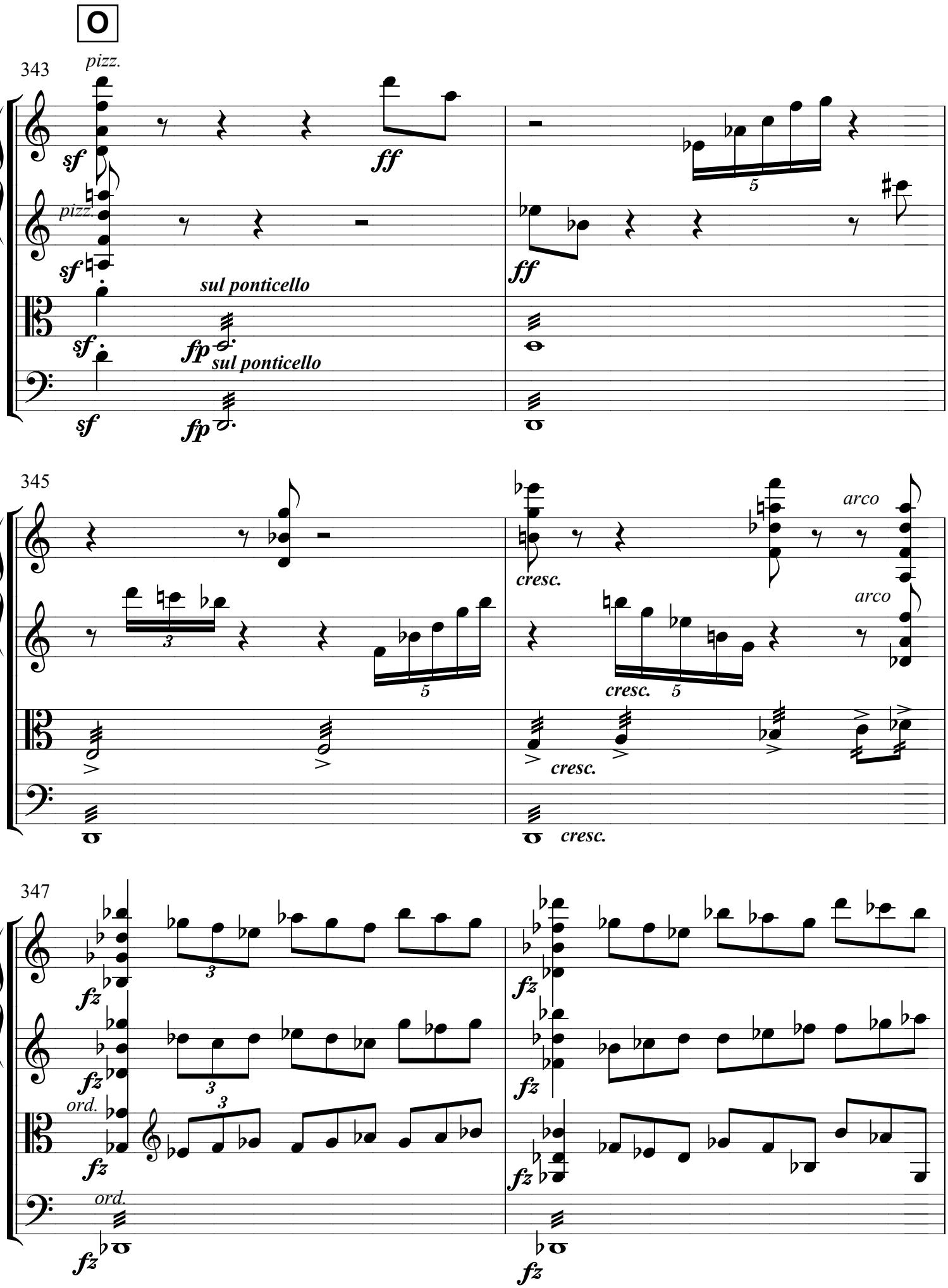

325
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
327
senza sordino
senza sordino
senza sordino
senza sordino
329
fz
fz
fz
fz
p
f

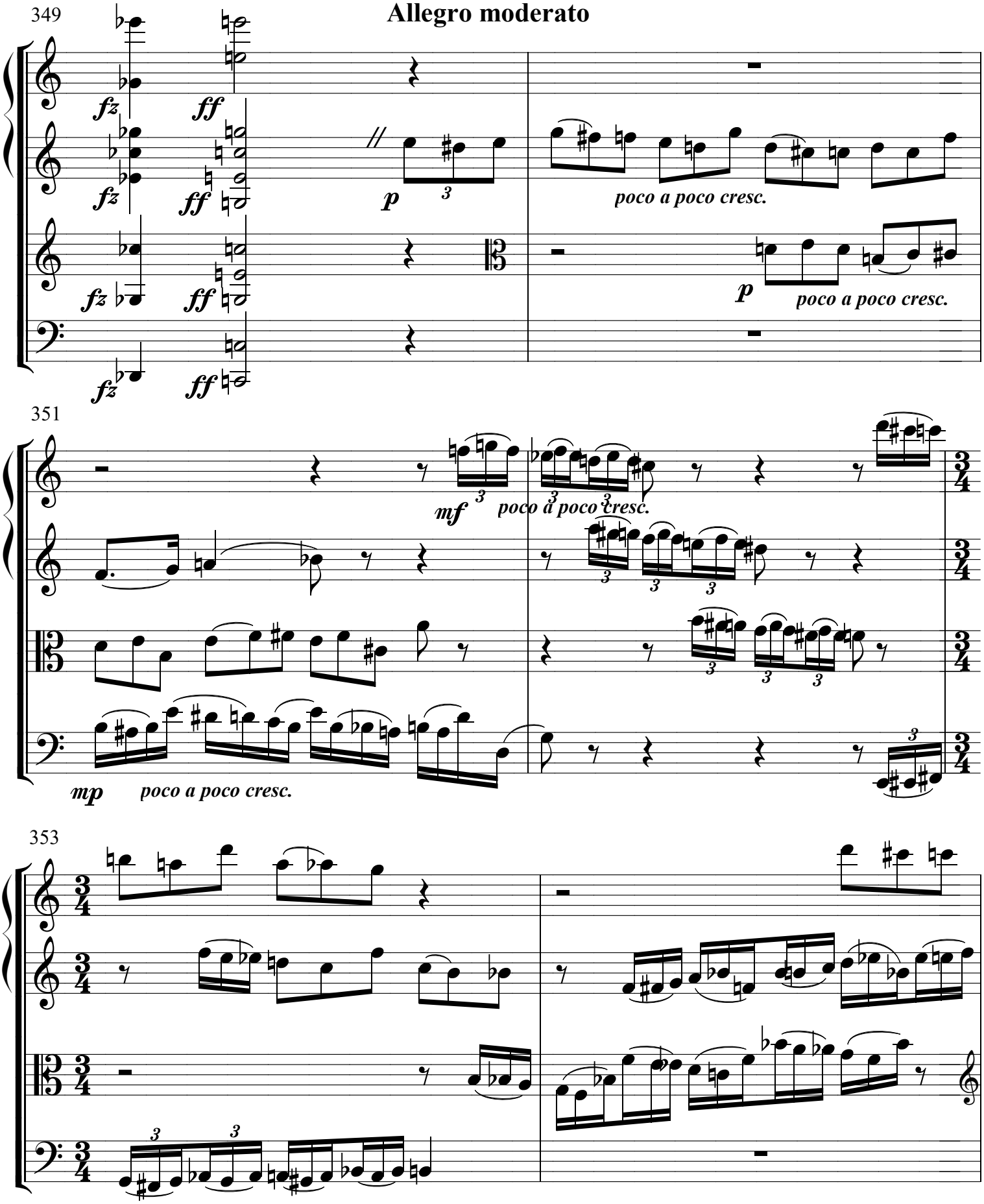

N
331
fz
mp
f
mf
fp
333
p
mf
335
animando
cresc.

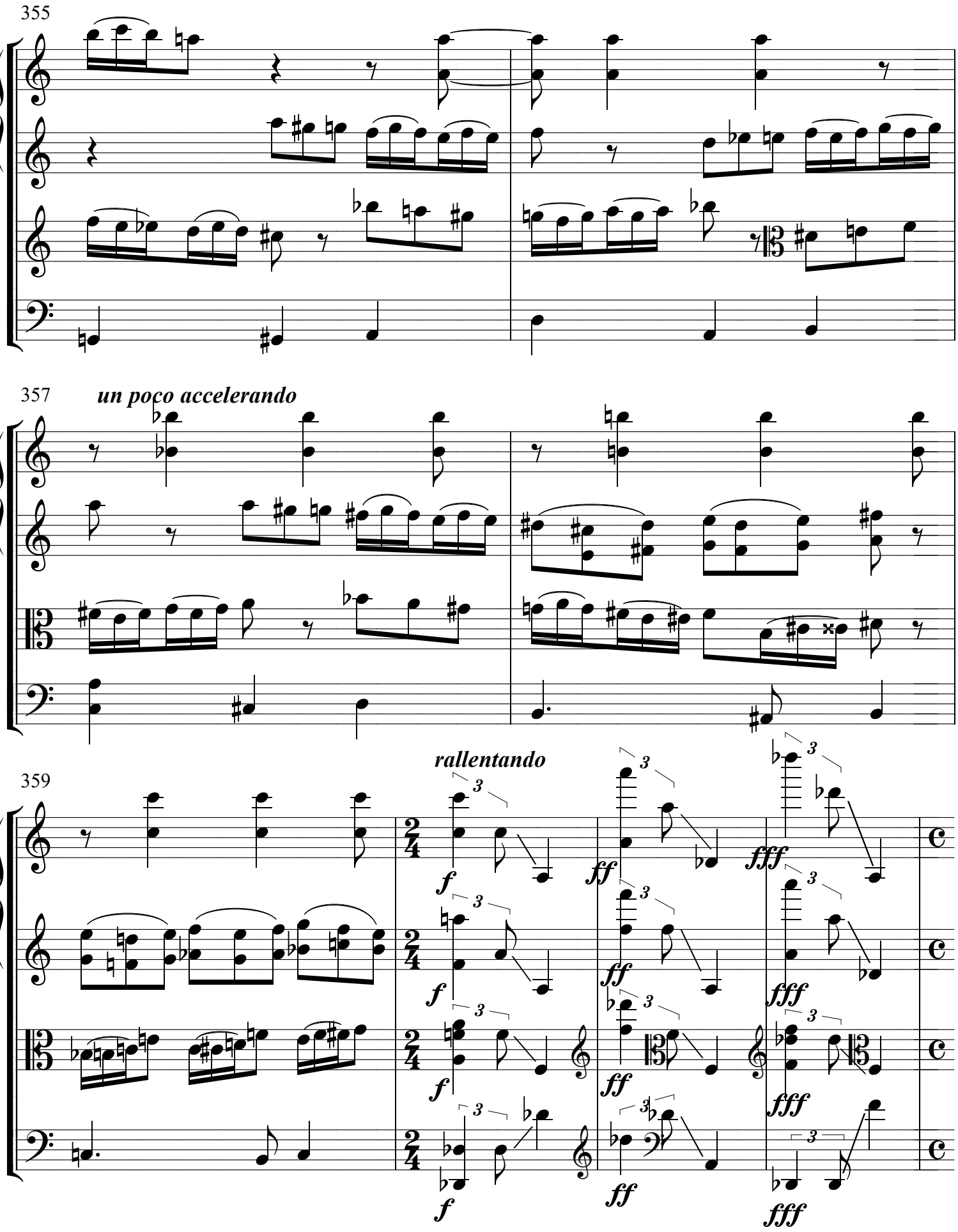

337


339
a tempo
pp
espressivo
mp
cresc.


341

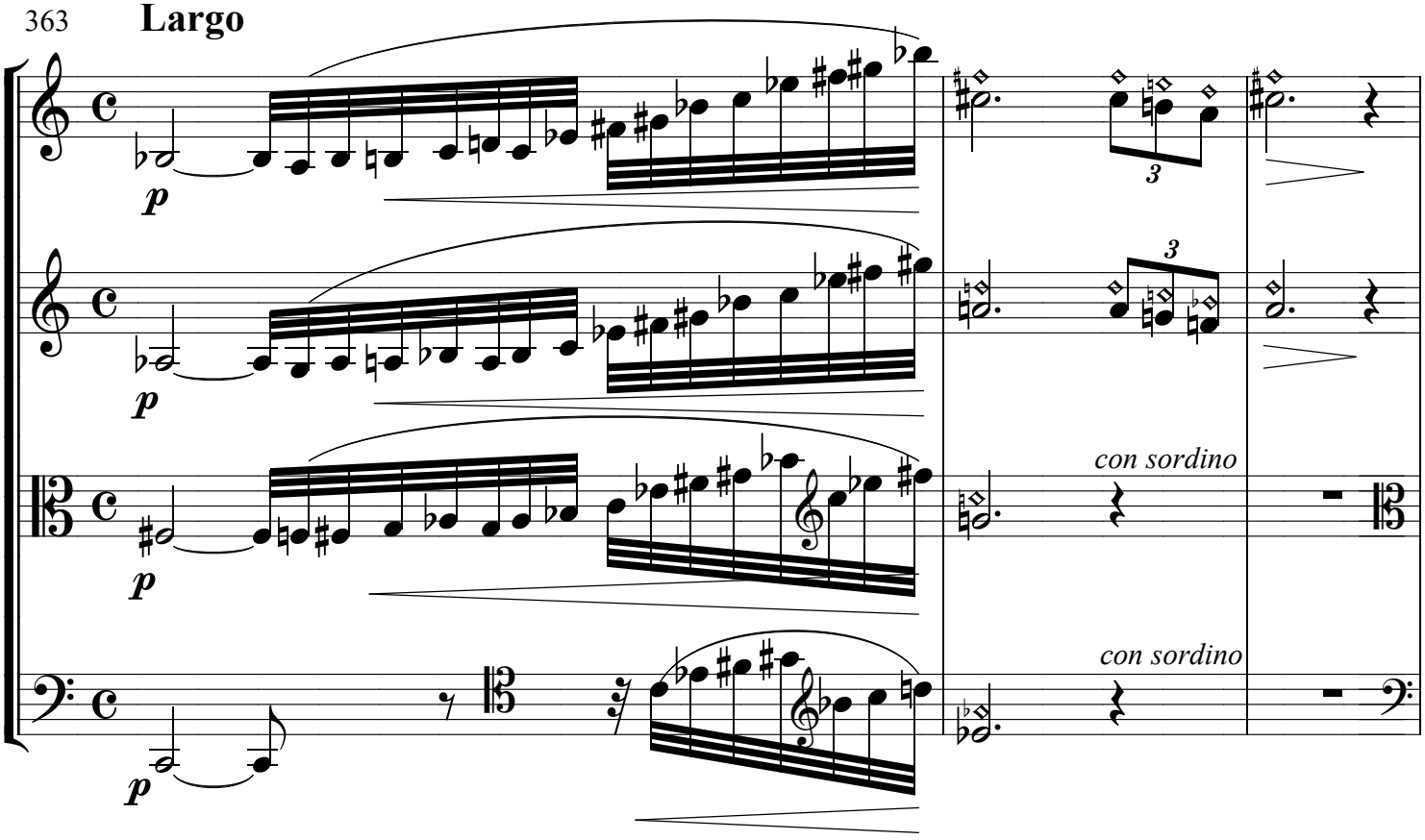

O
343
pizz.
sf
ff
pizz.
sf
sul ponticello
sf
fp
sul ponticello
fp
ff
345
arco
cresc.
arco
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
347
fz
fz
fz
ord.
fz
ord.
fz
fz
fz


Allegro moderato
349
fz
ff
p
poco a poco cresc.
351
mf
poco a poco cresc.
mp
353

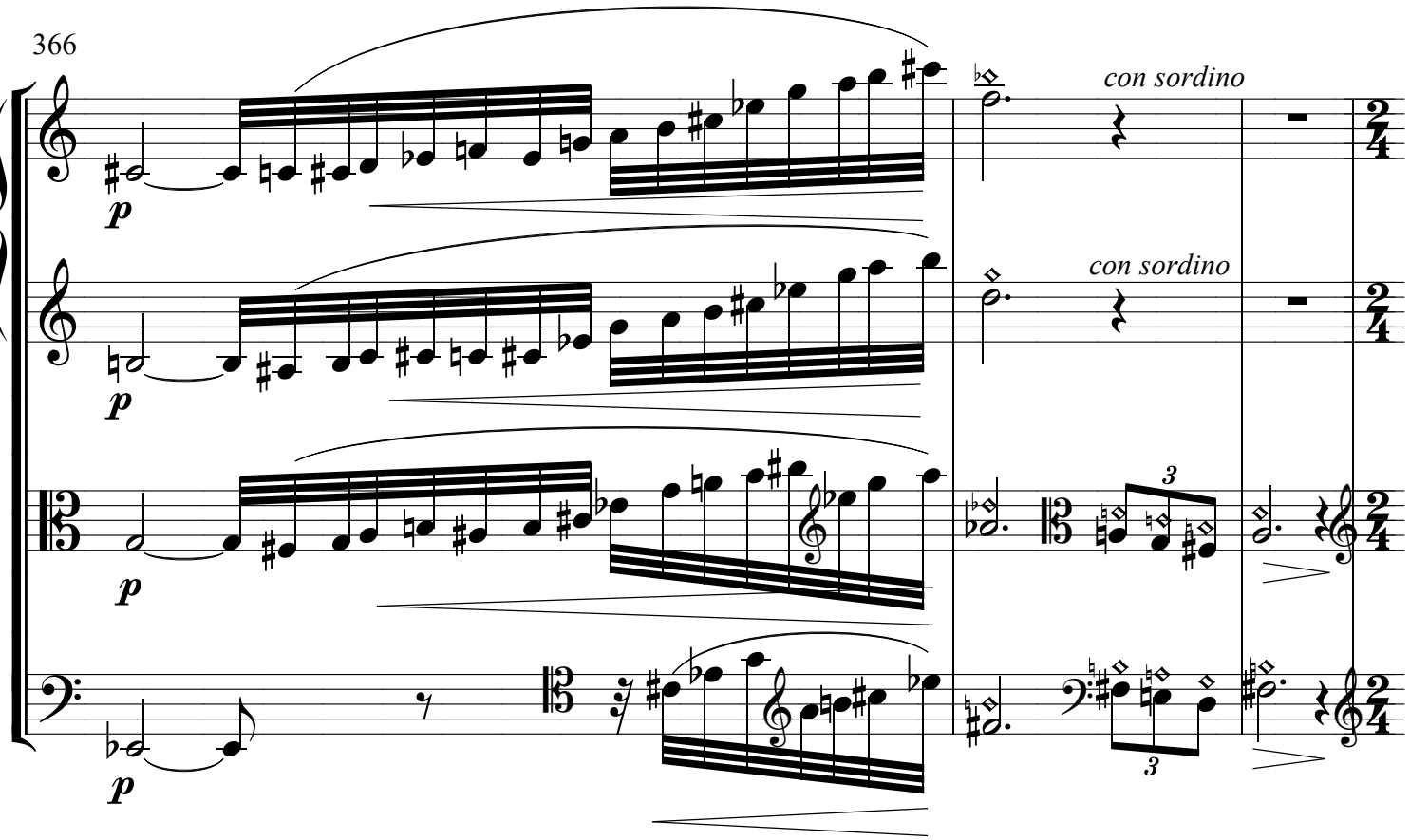

355
357
un poco accelerando
359
rallentando
f
ff
fff

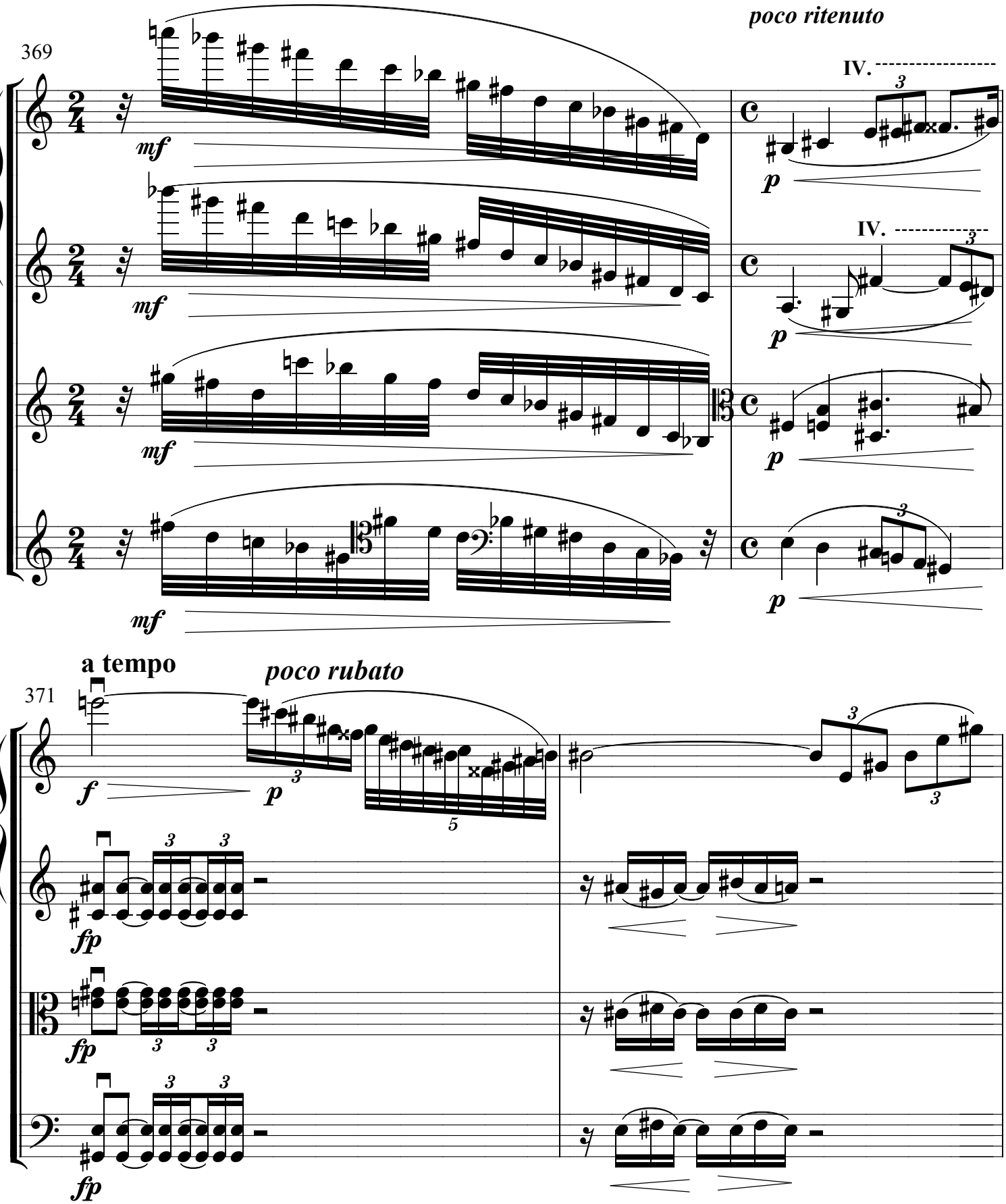
P

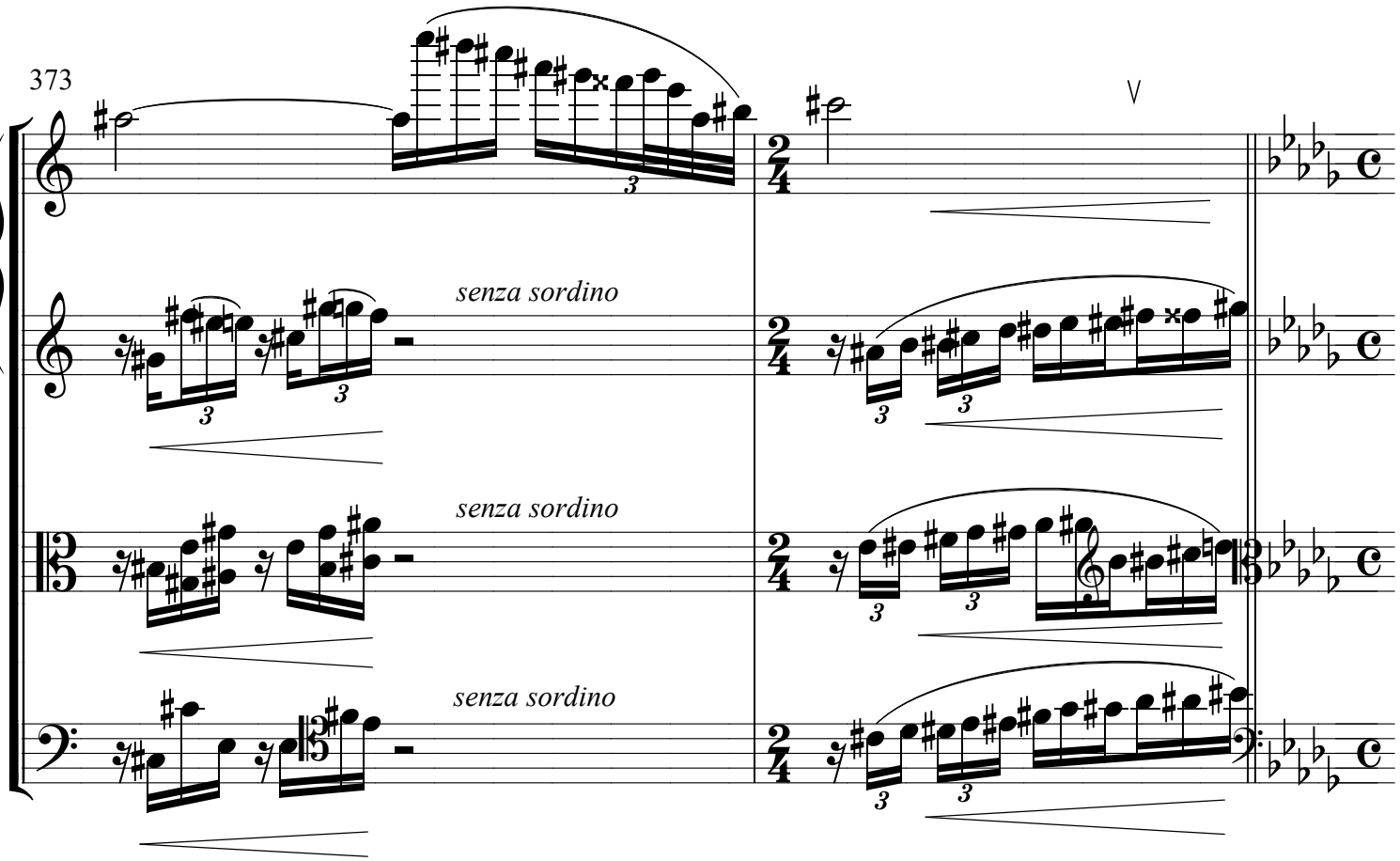
363 **Largo**

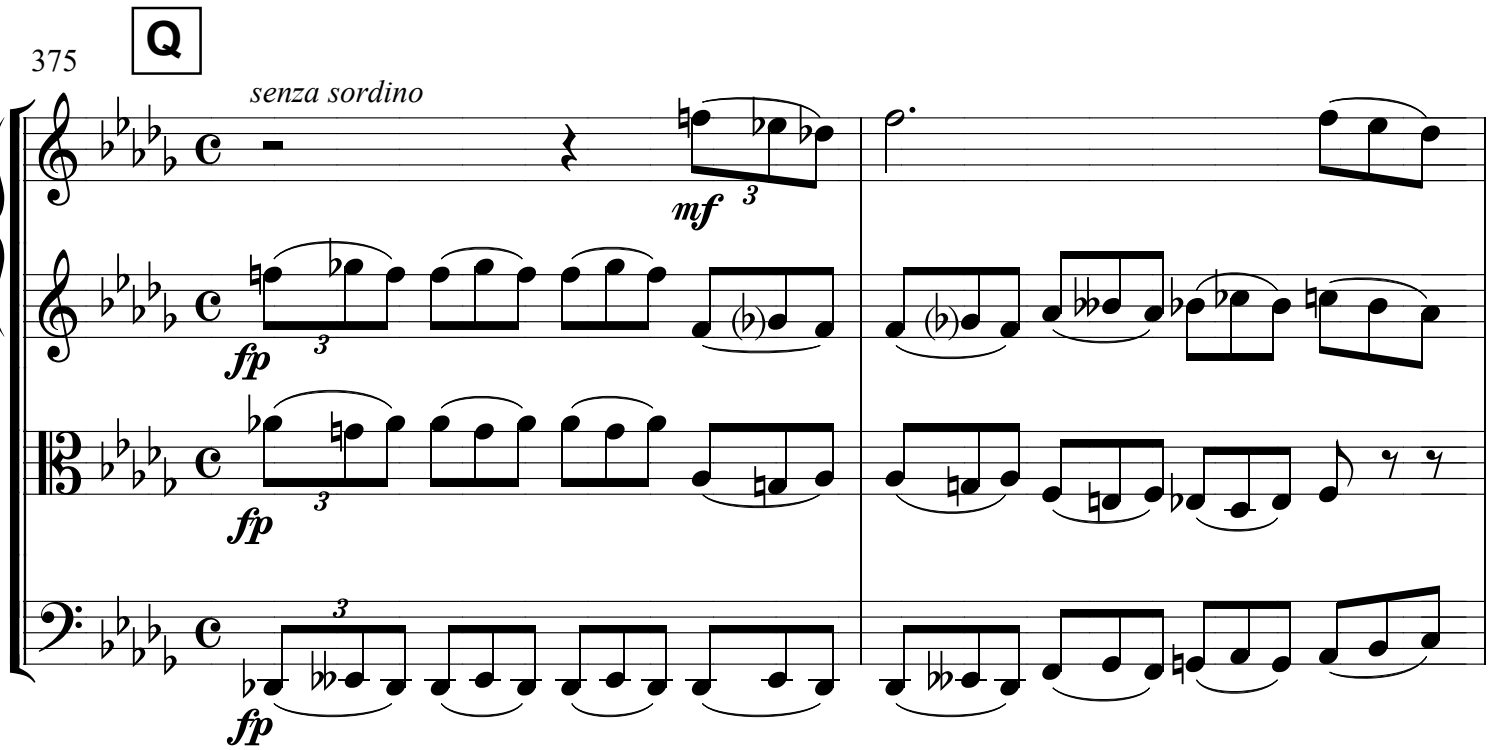


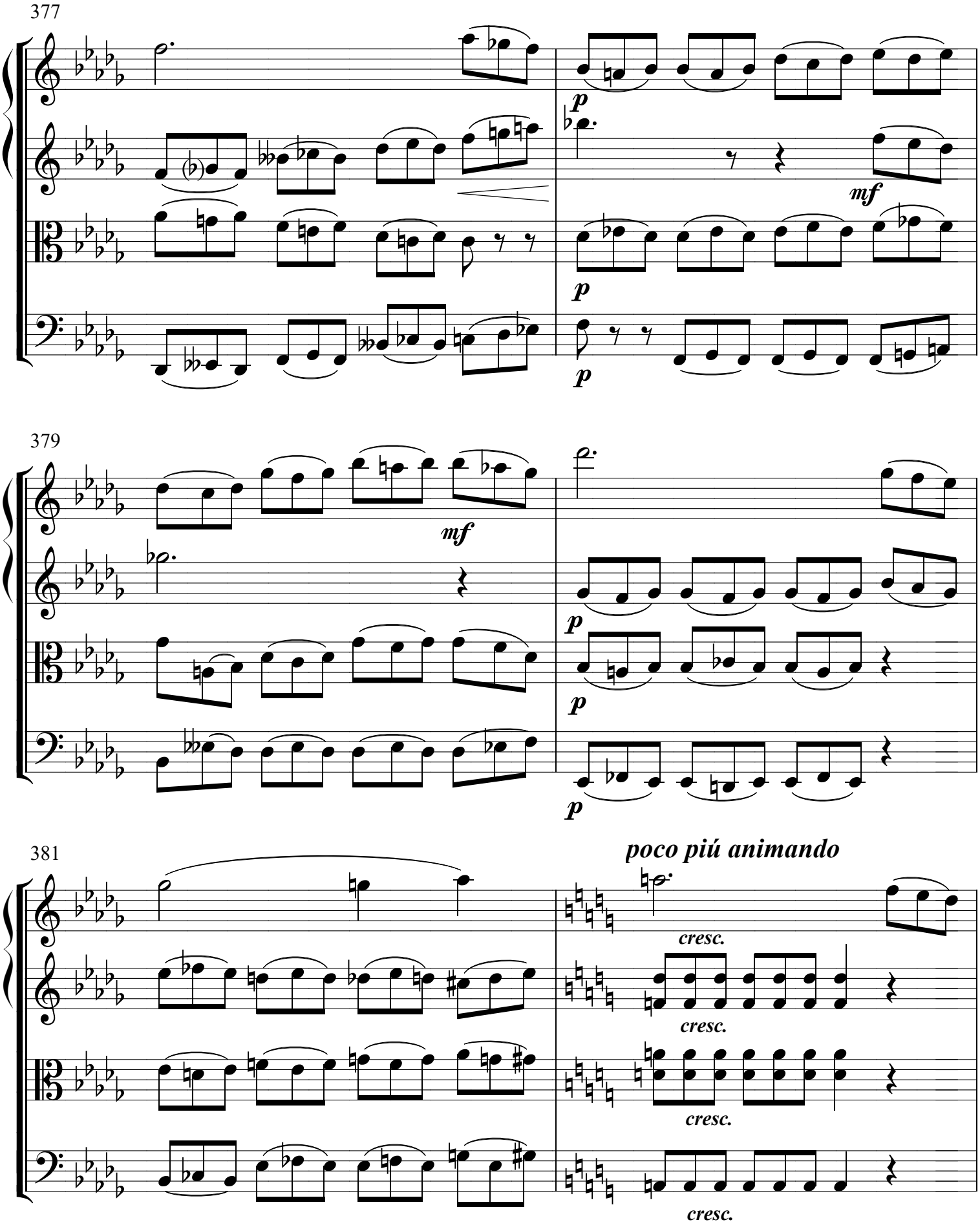
366

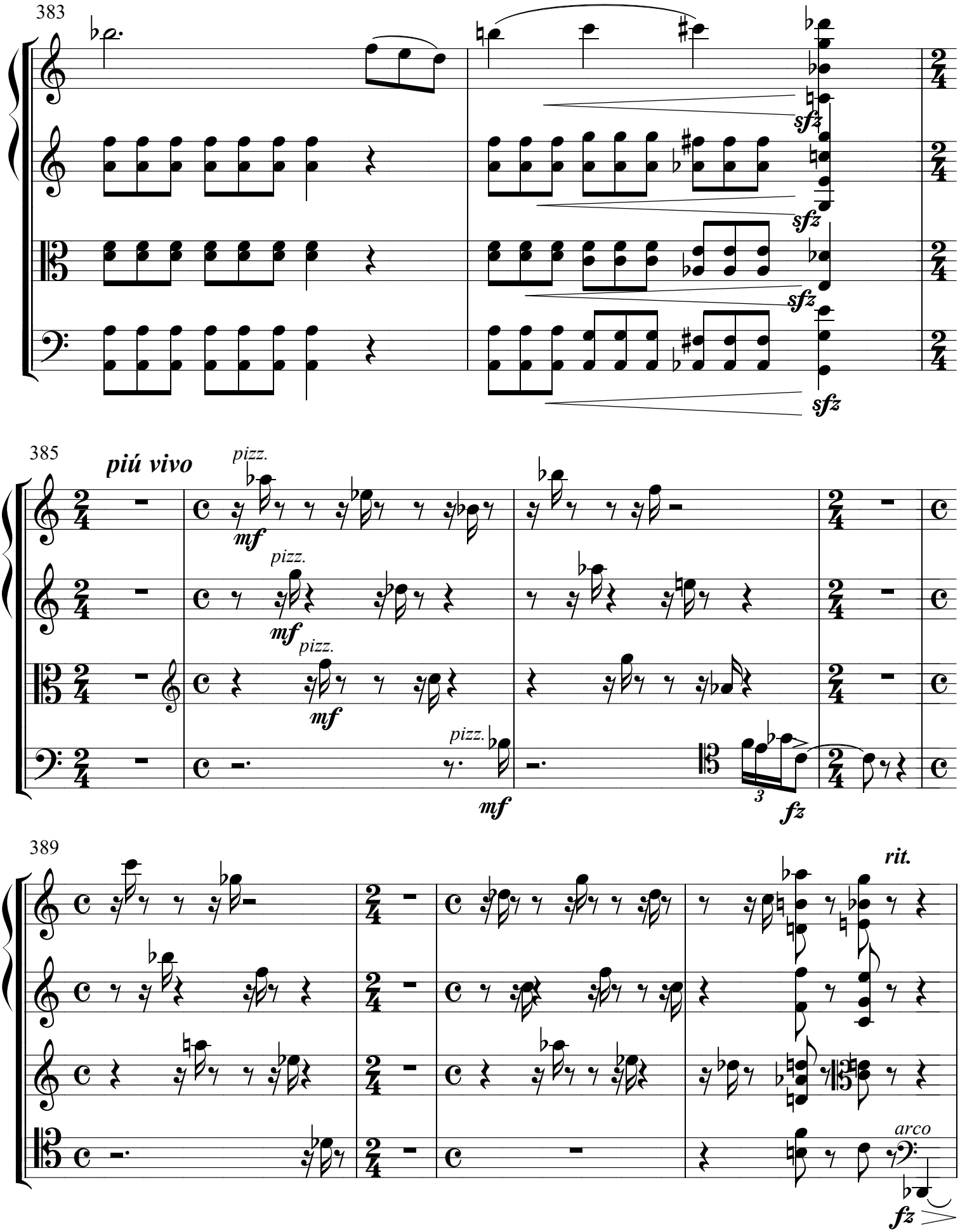


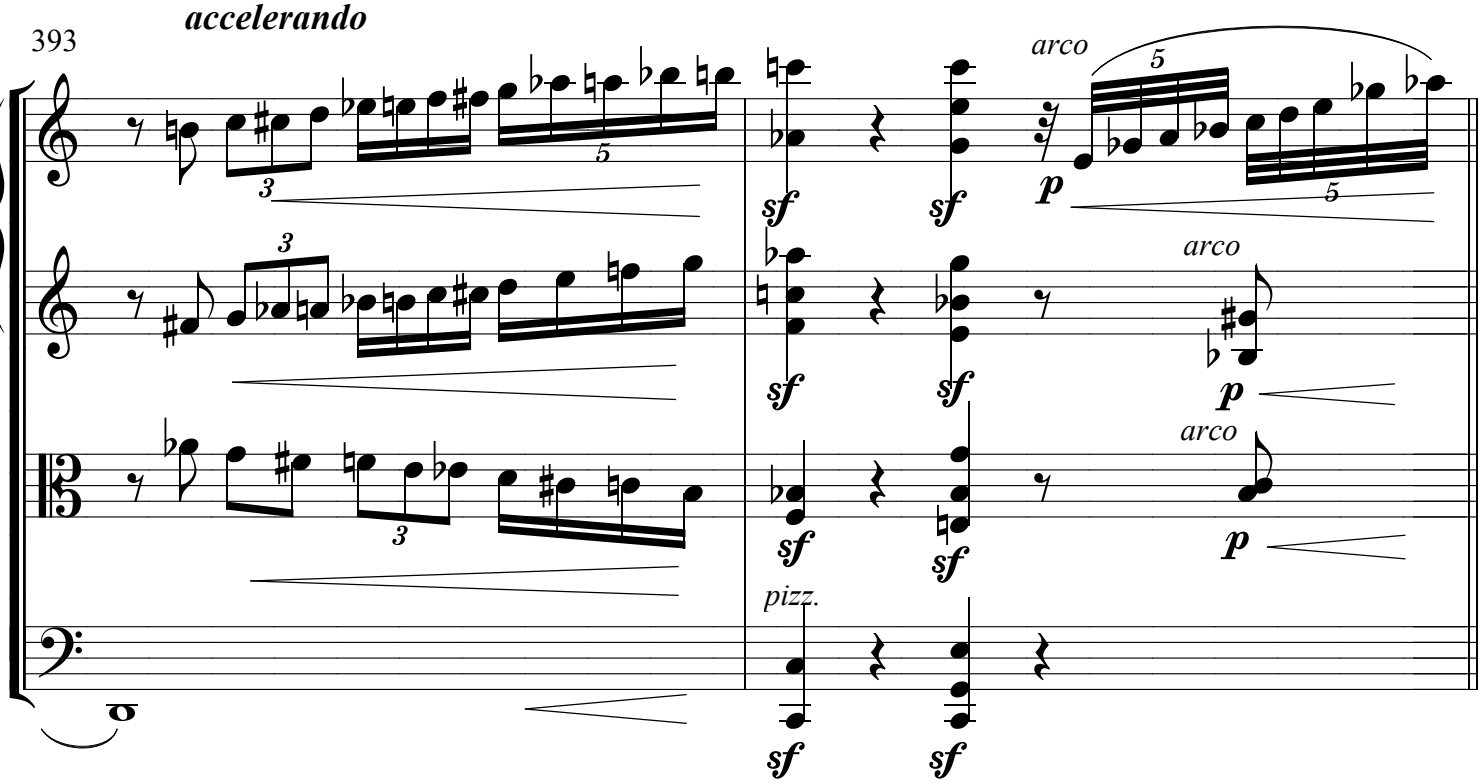

poco ritenuto
369
IV.
mf
p
a tempo
poco rubato
371
f
fp


373
senza sordino
senza sordino
senza sordino


375
Q
senza sordino
mf
fp
fp
fp


377
p
mf
p
p
379
mf
p
p
p
381
poco piú animando
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.

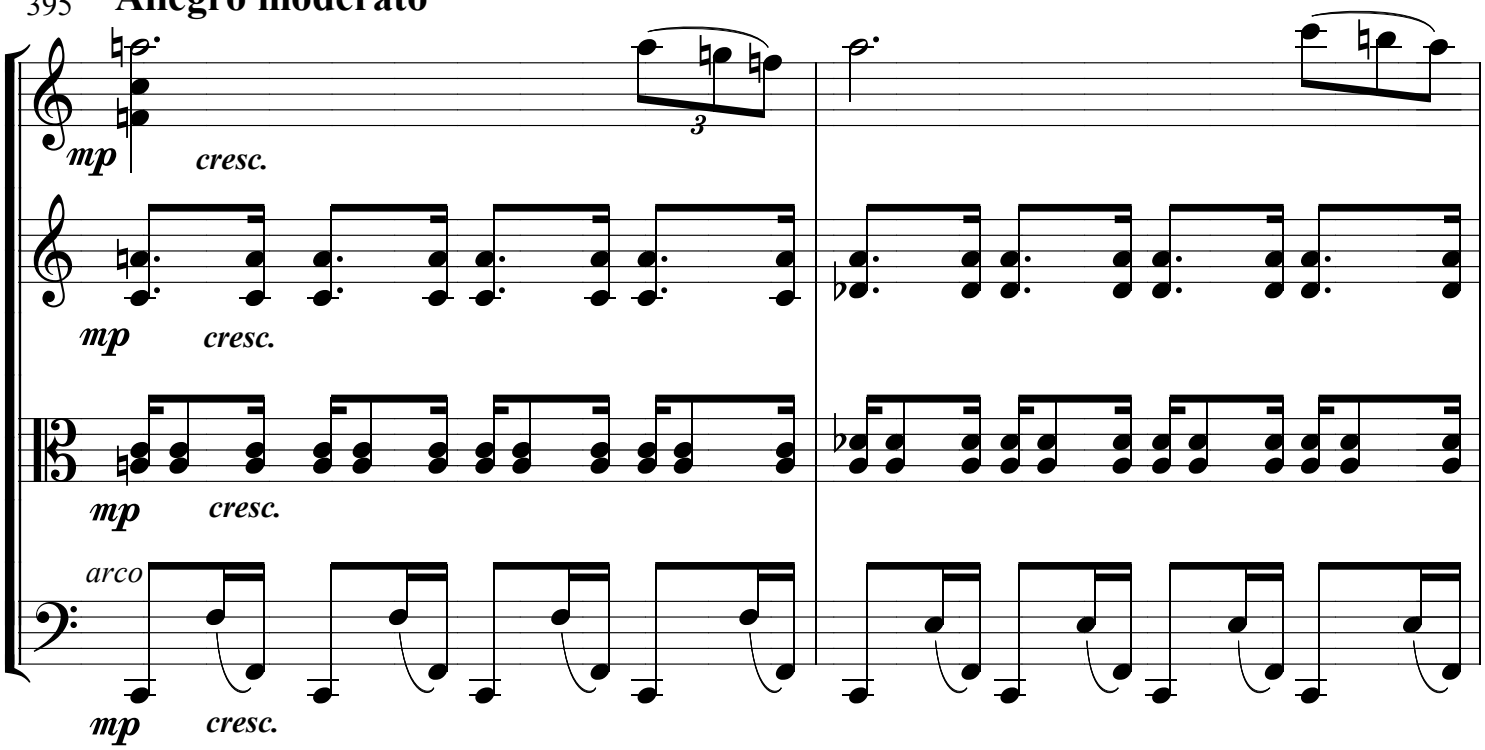

383
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
385
piú vivo
pizz.
mf
pizz.
mf
pizz.
mf
pizz.
mf
3
fz
389
rit.
arco
fz

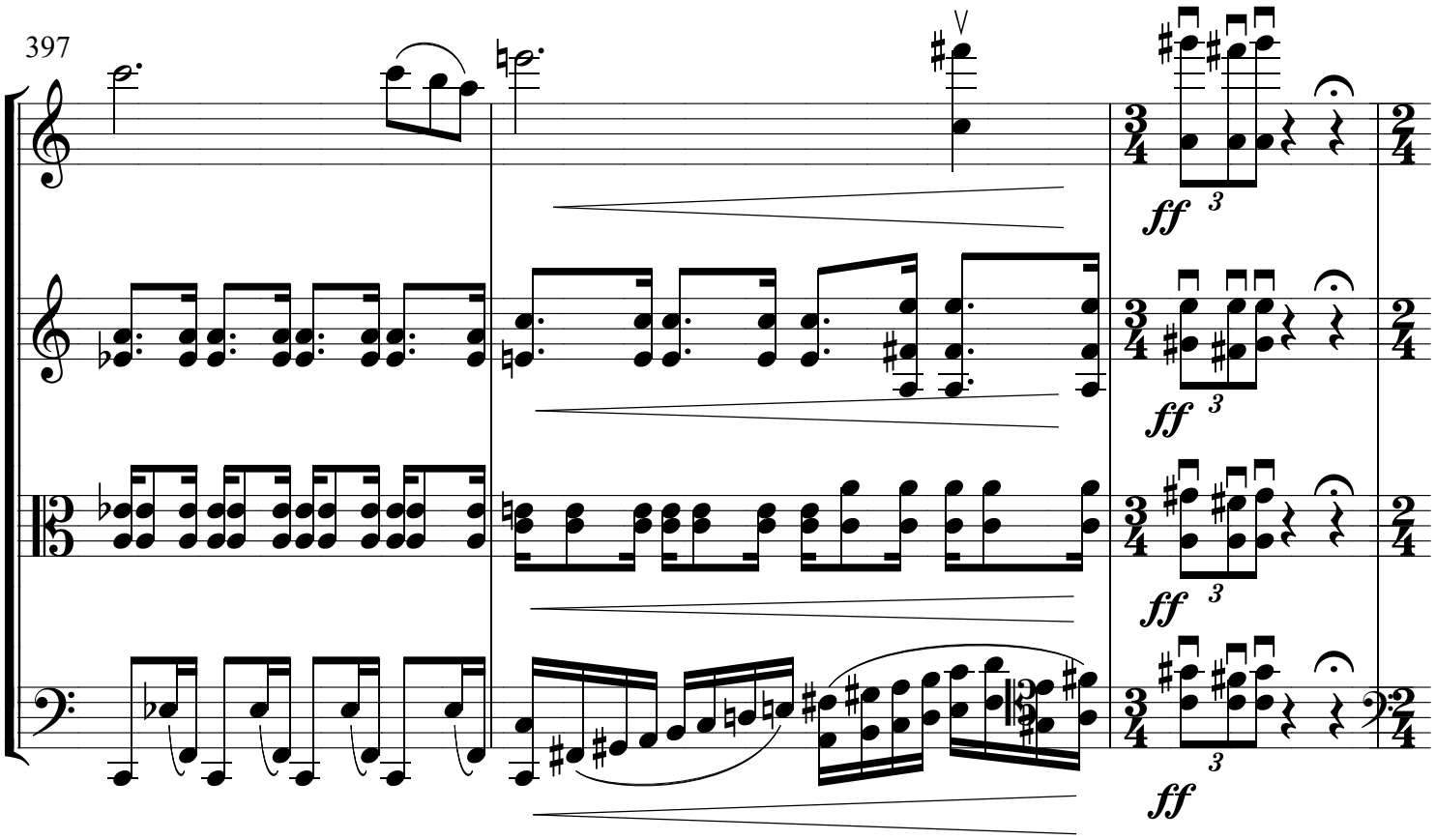


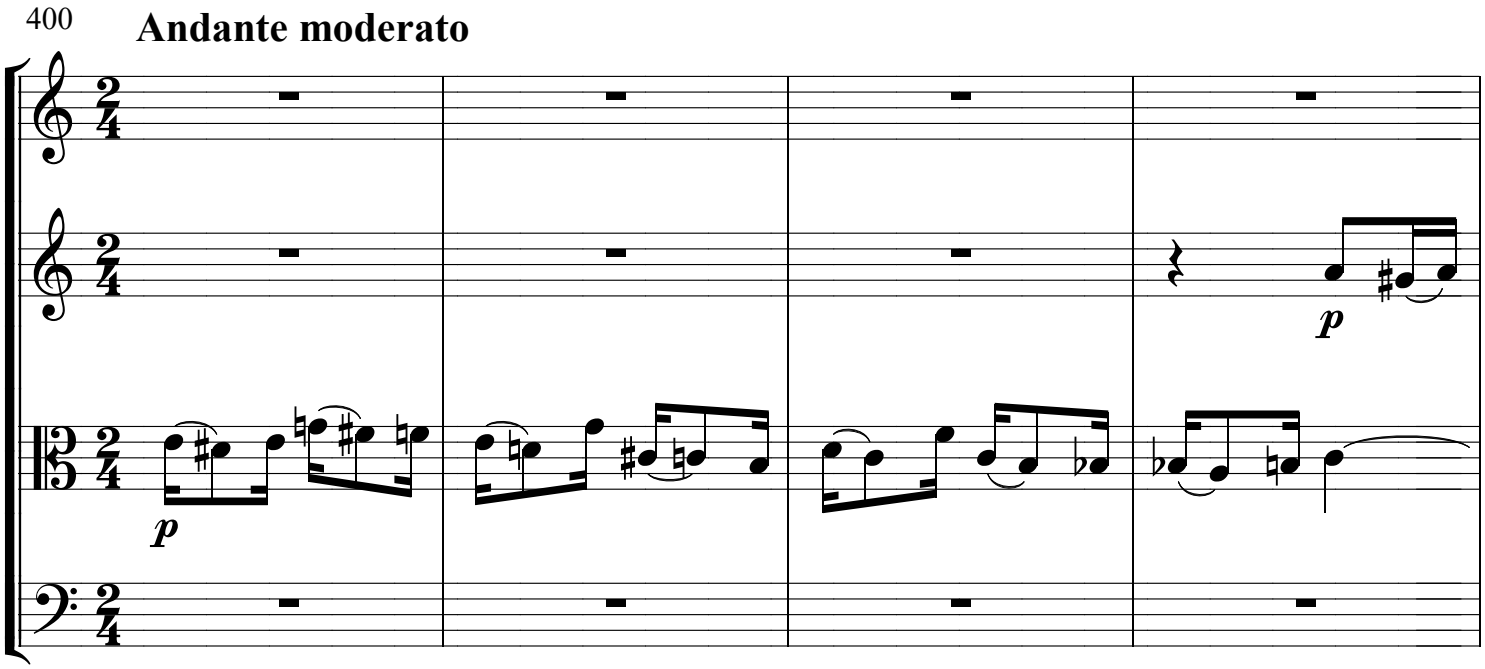
R

IV.

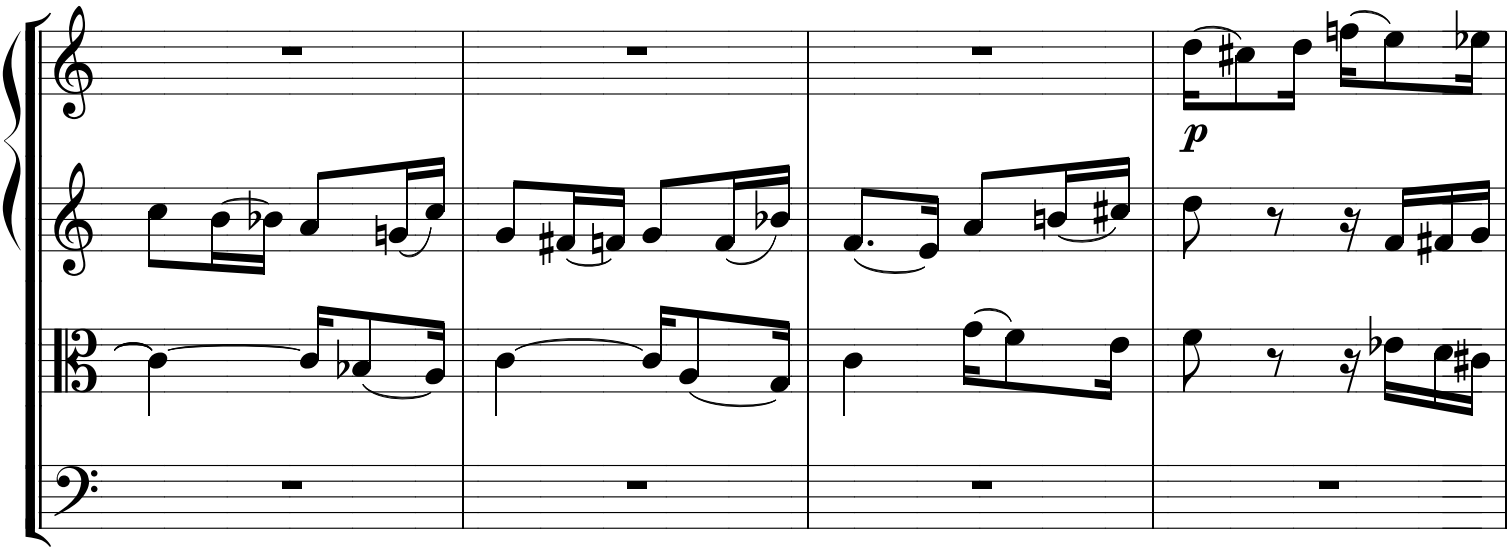
395 **Allegro moderato**



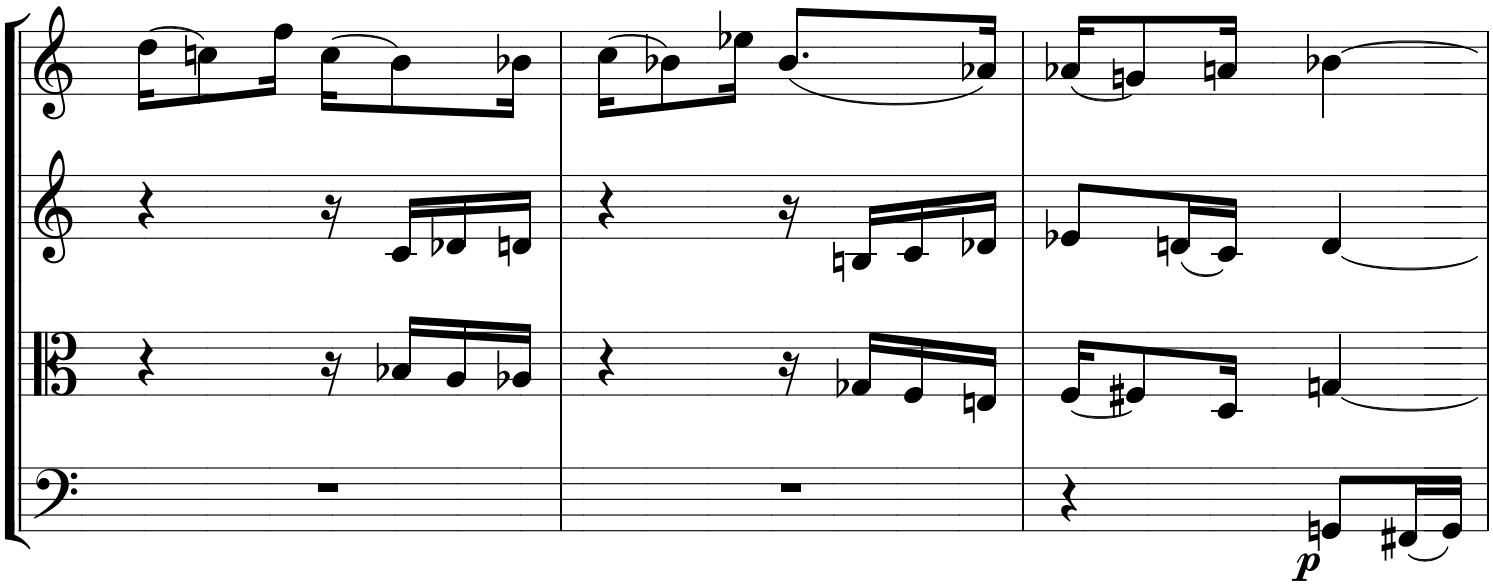

397
ff
ff
ff
ff


400
Andante moderato
p
p

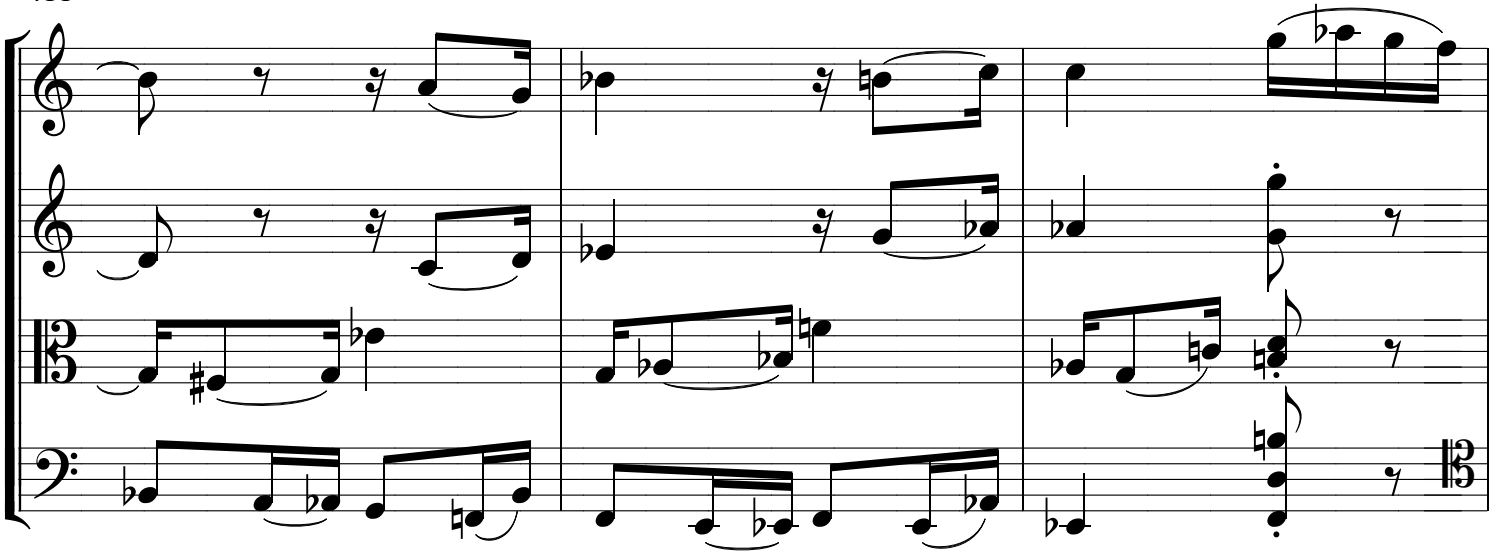
404

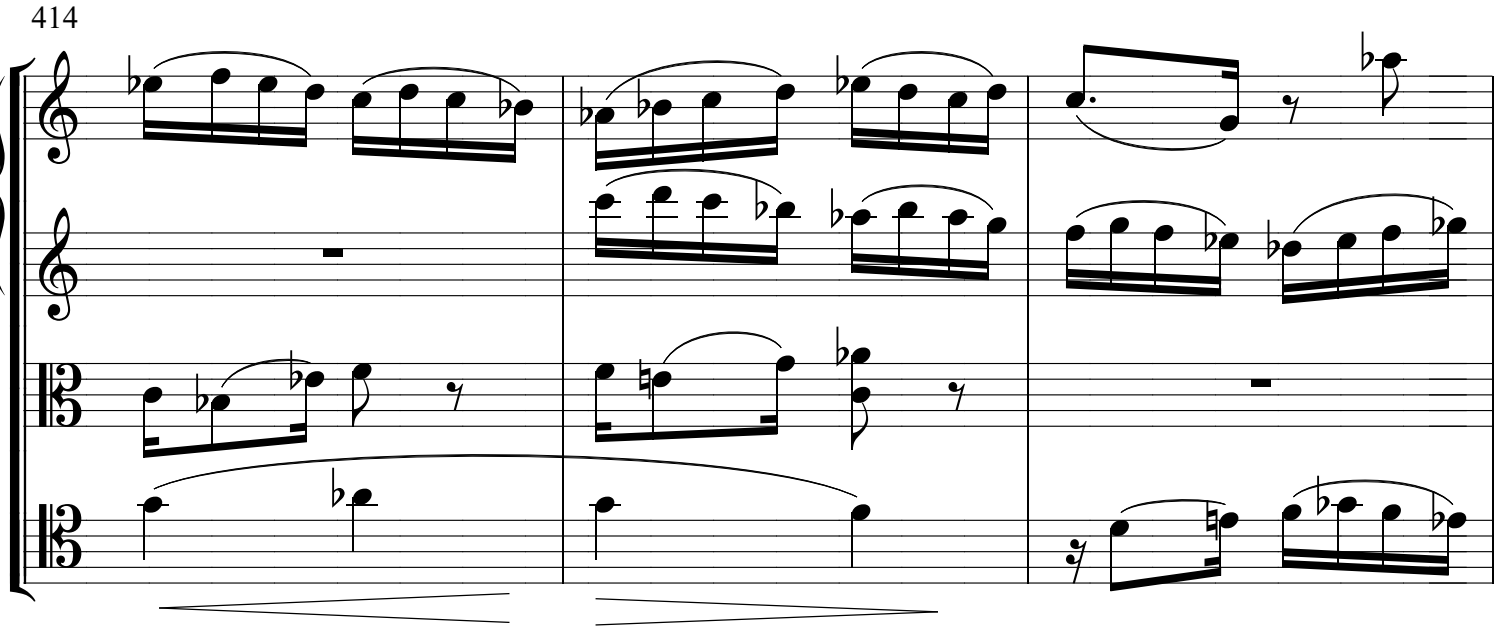


408



411

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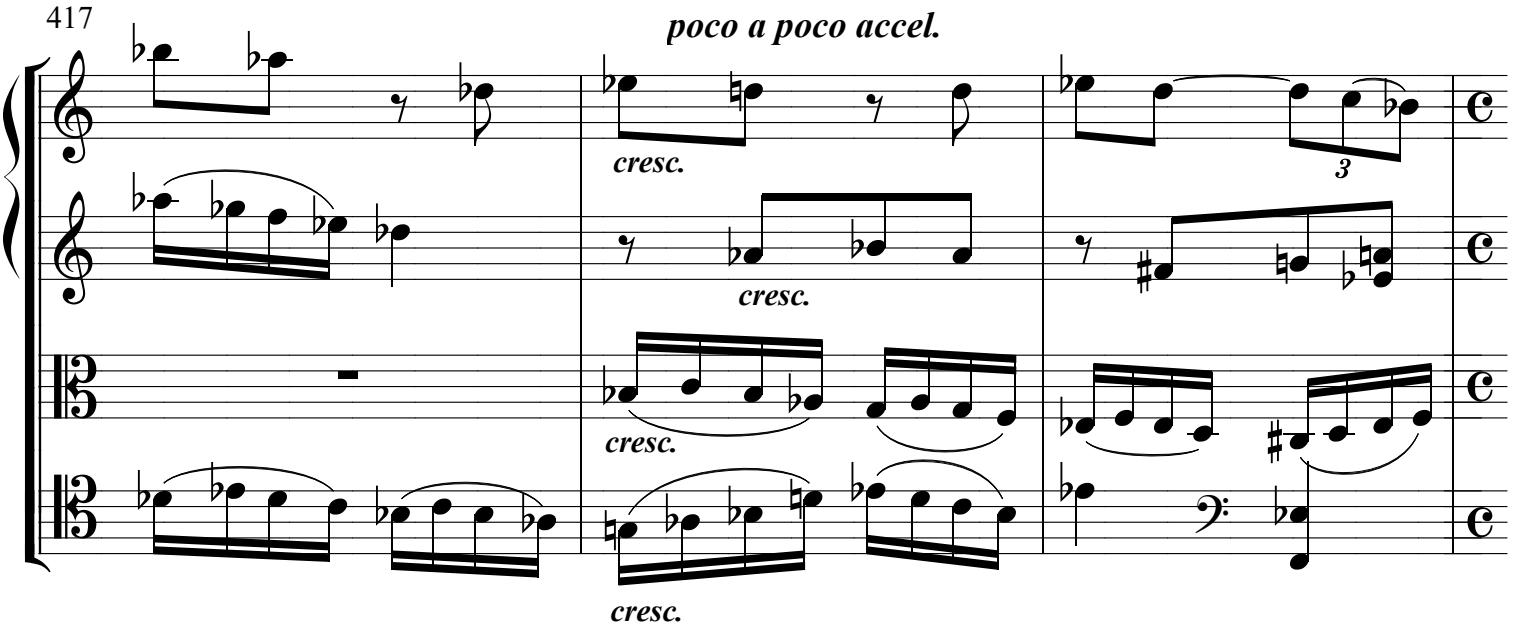
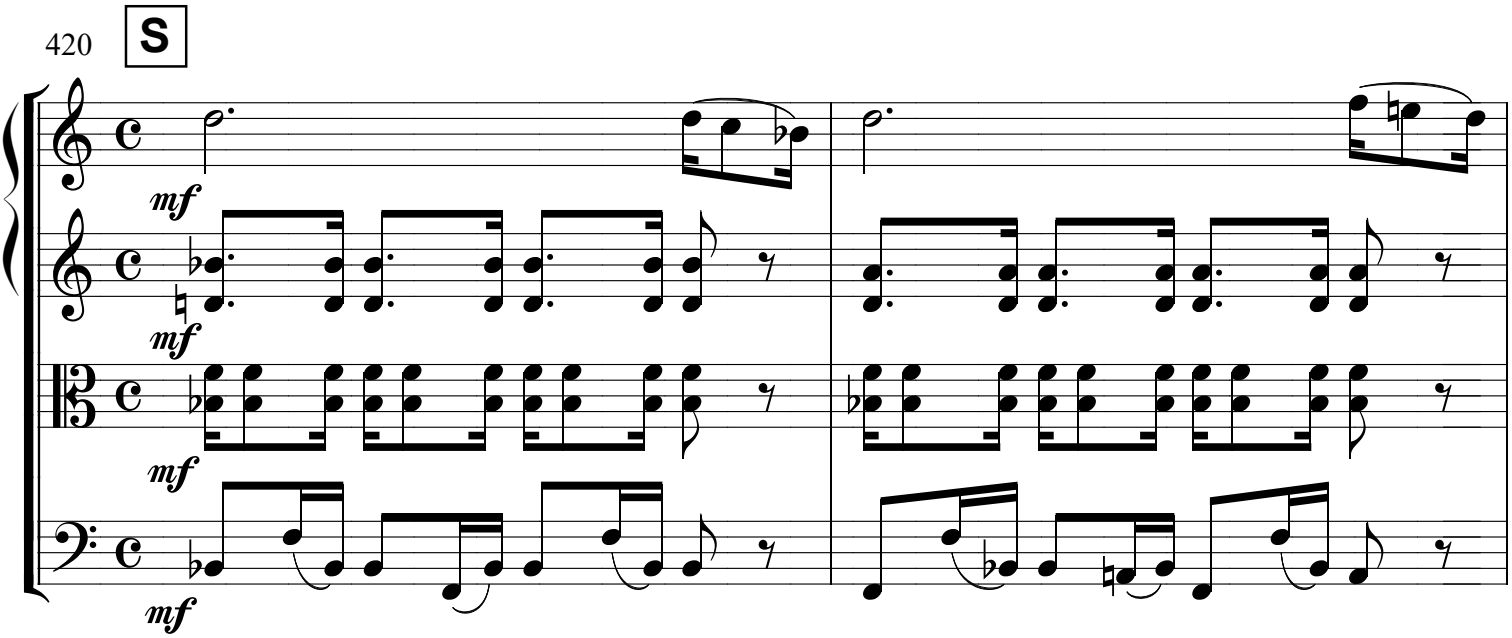

417
poco a poco accel.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
3


420
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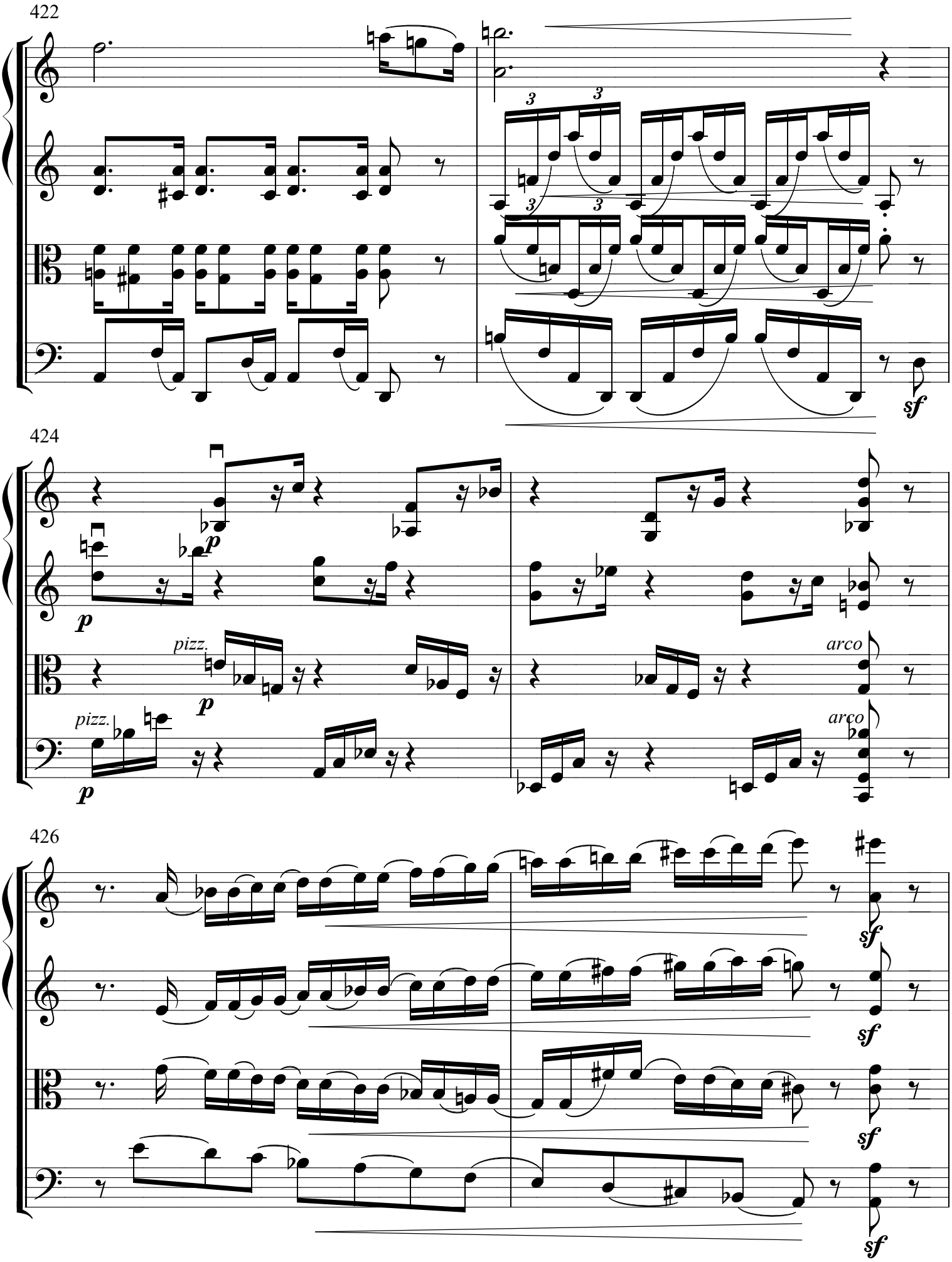
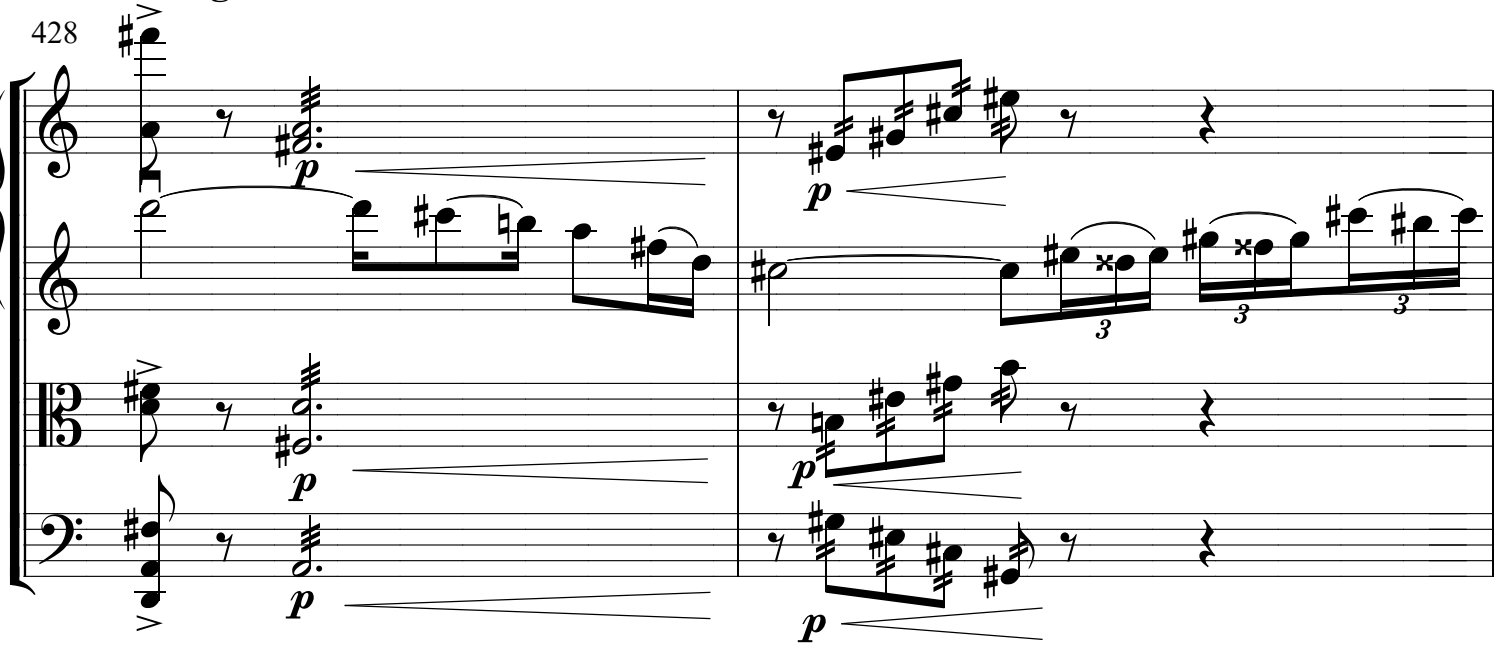
mf
mf
mf


422
424
426
pizz.
arco
sf
p

Allegretto

428



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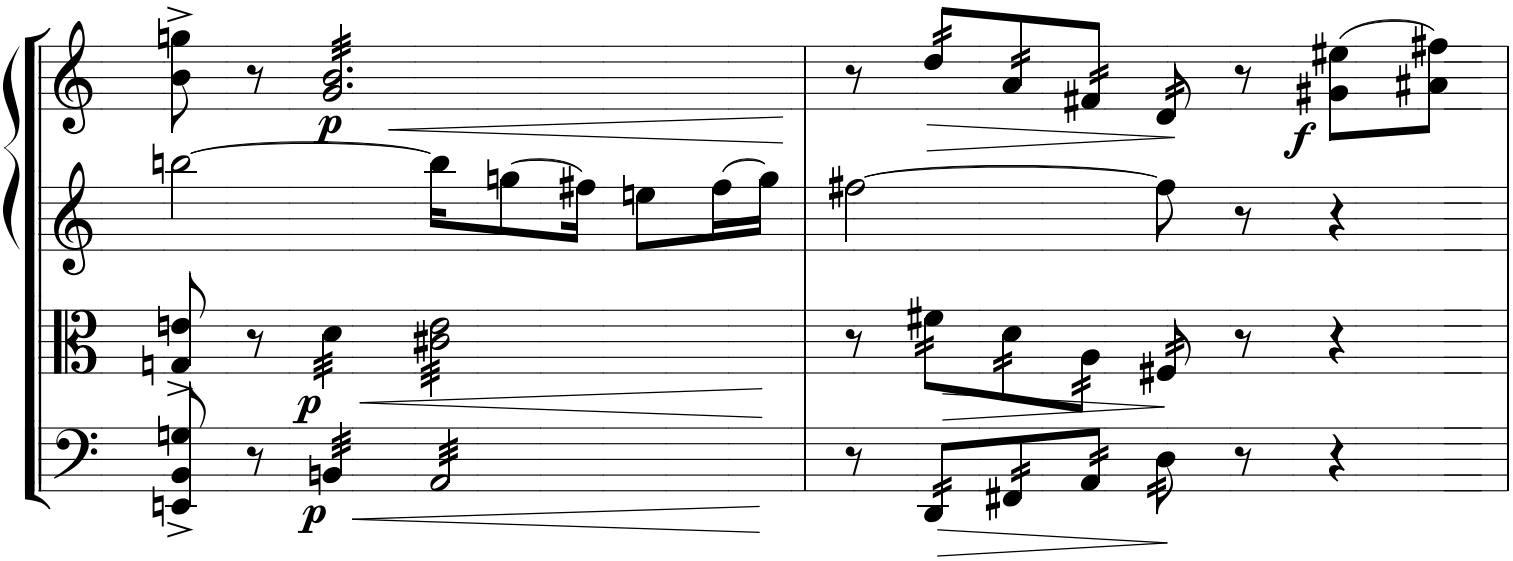

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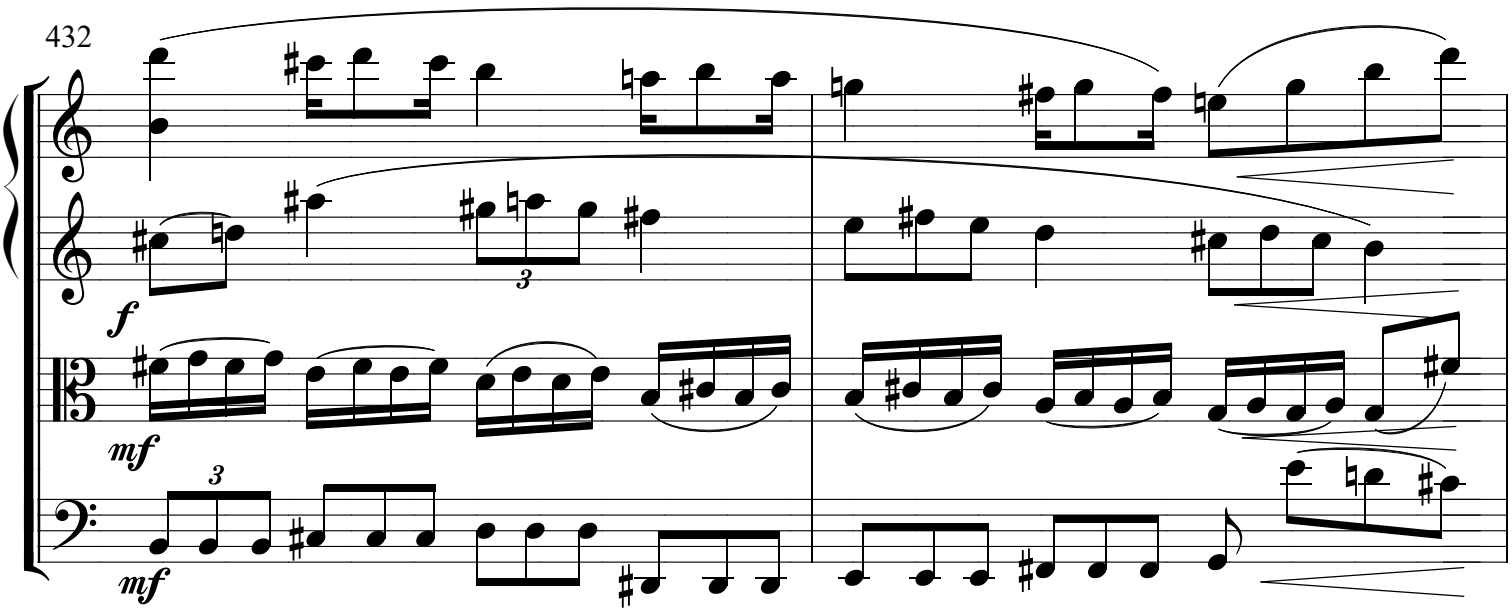

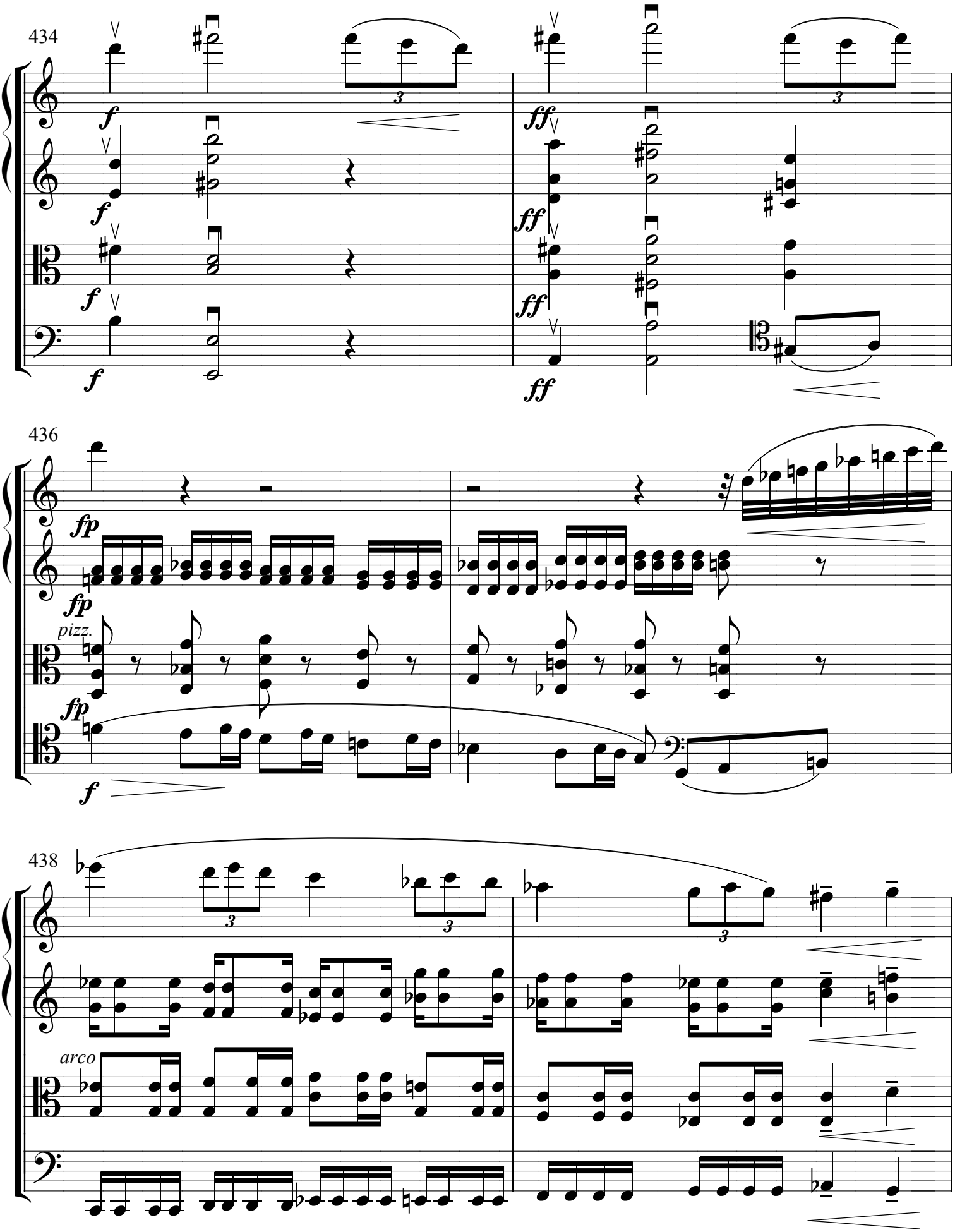
434
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436
fp
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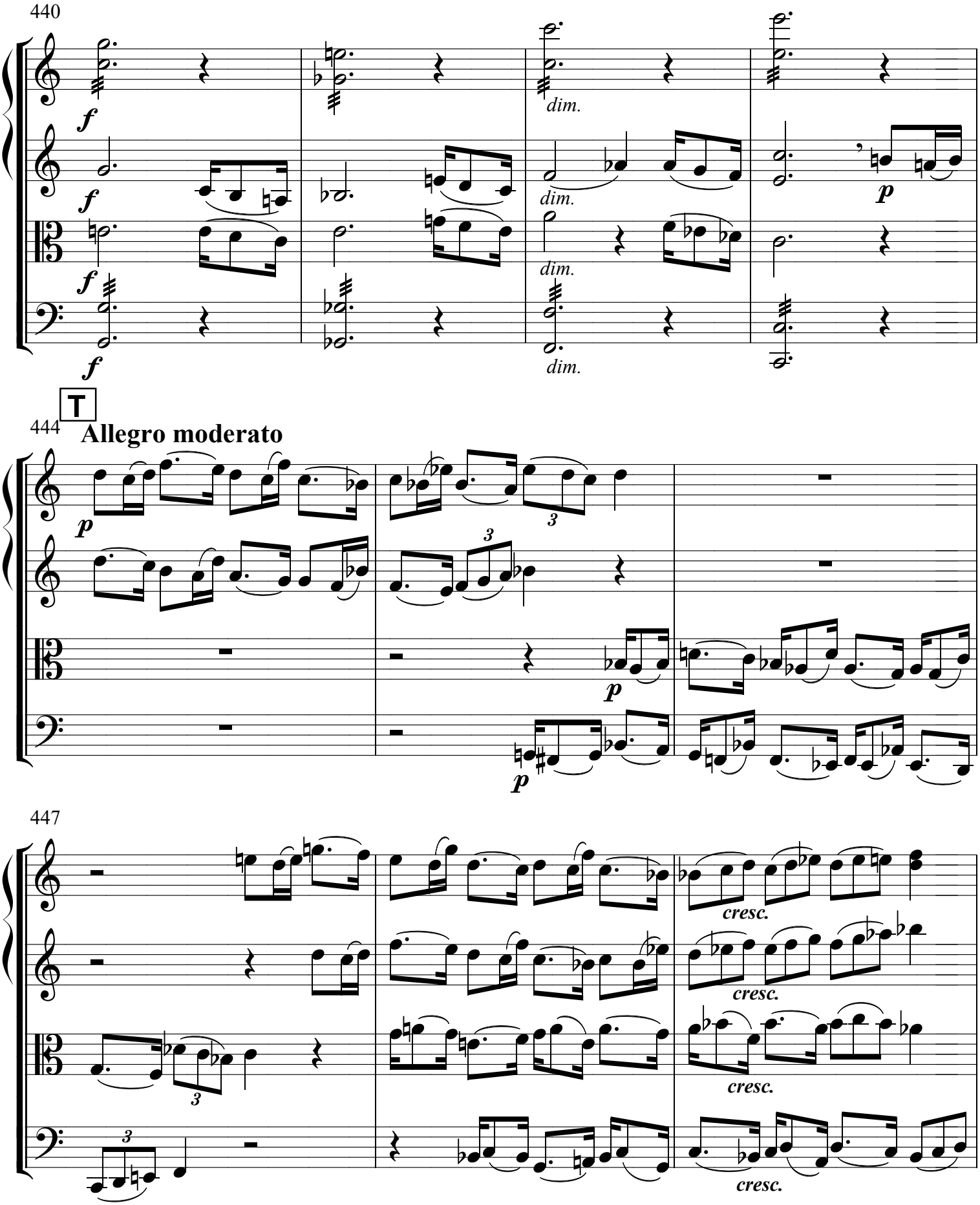
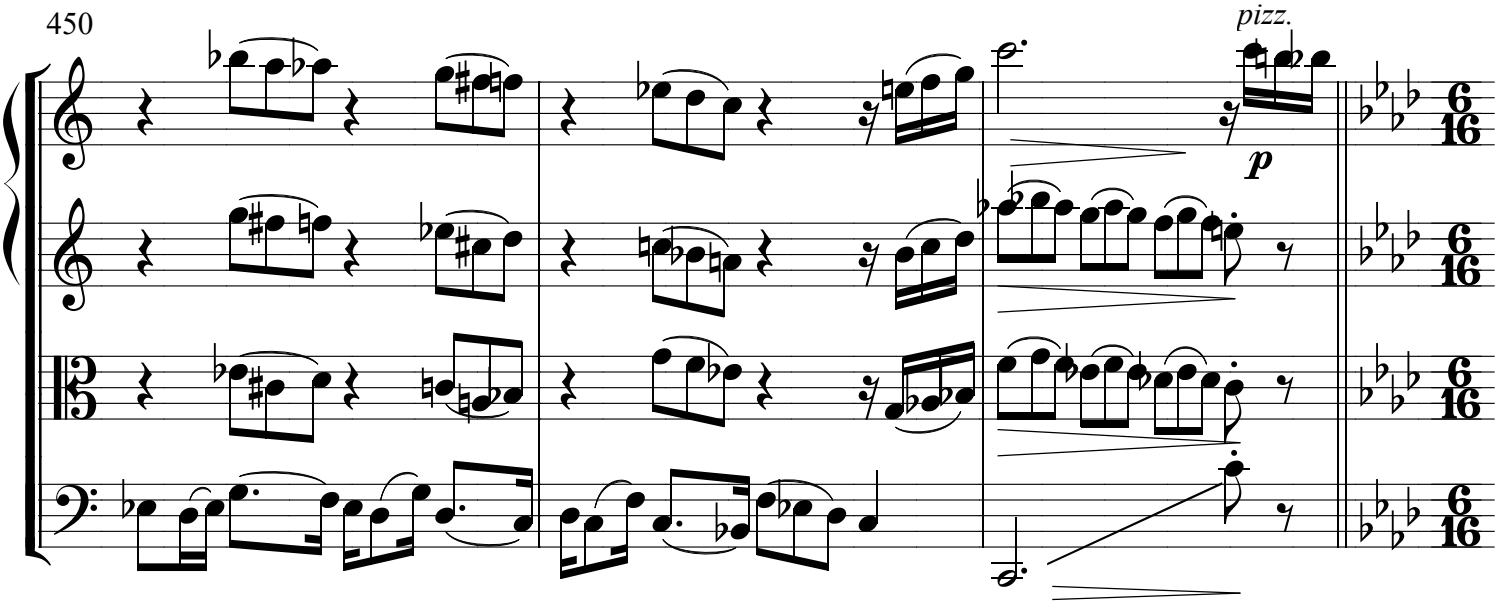
f
438
arco


440
f
dim.
p
444
T
Allegro moderato
447
cresc.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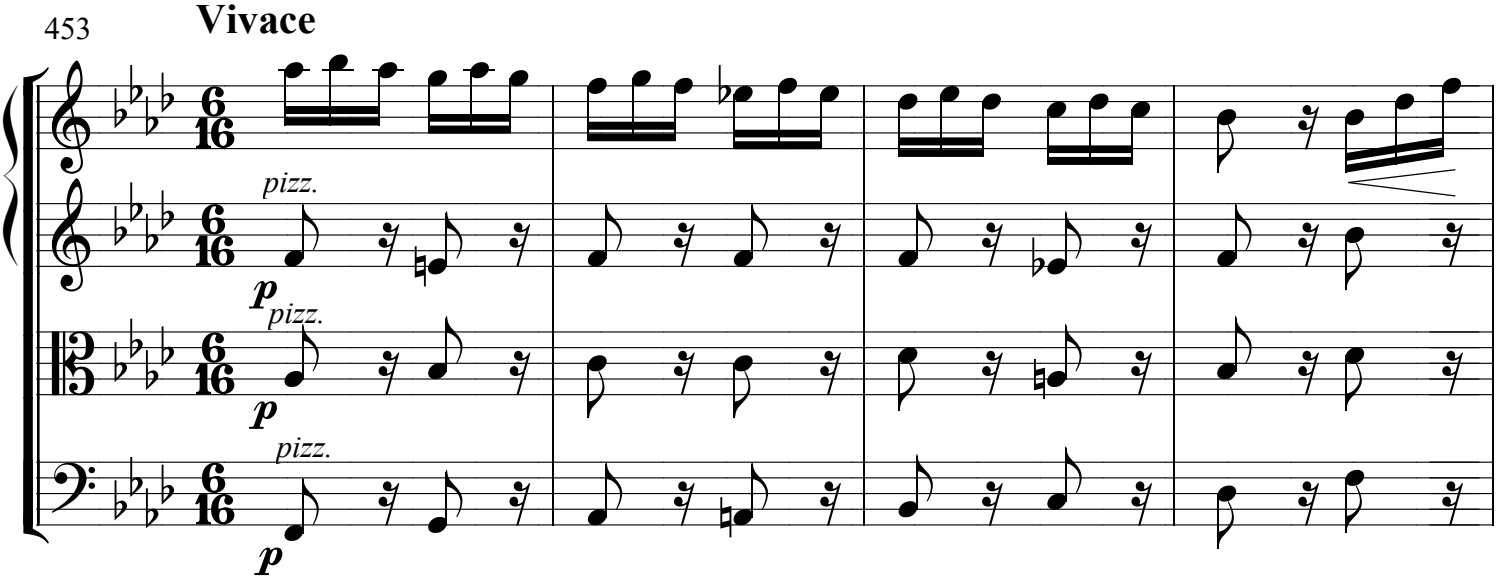
453
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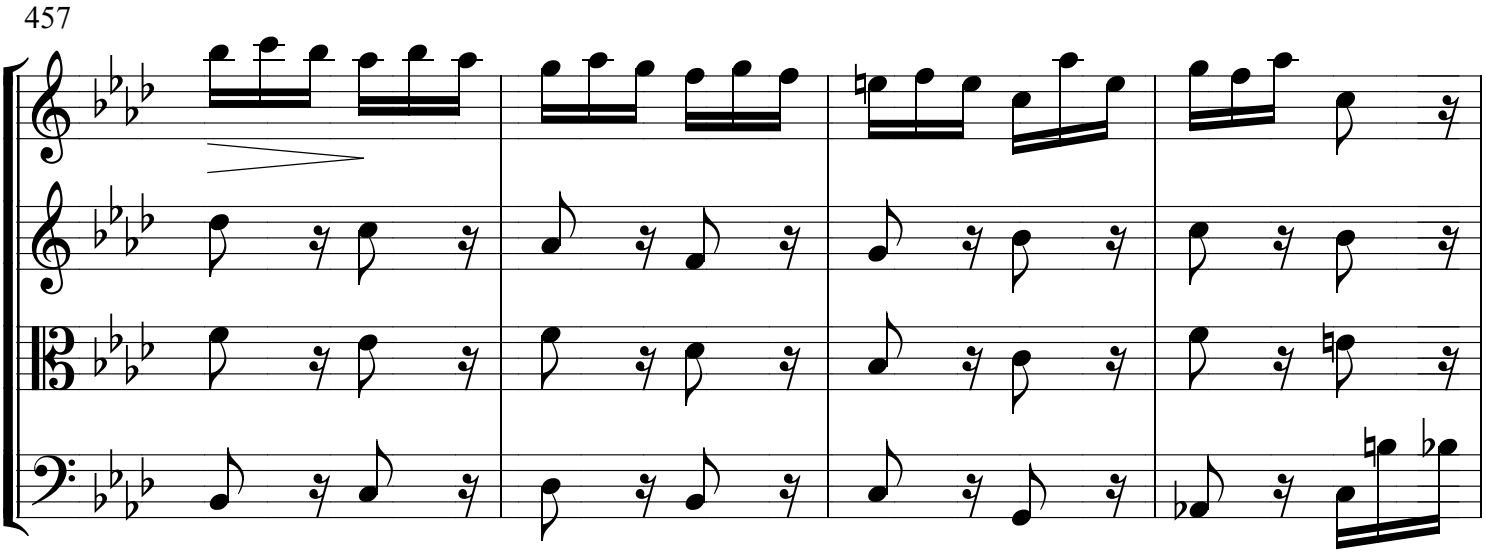
pizz.
p
pizz.
p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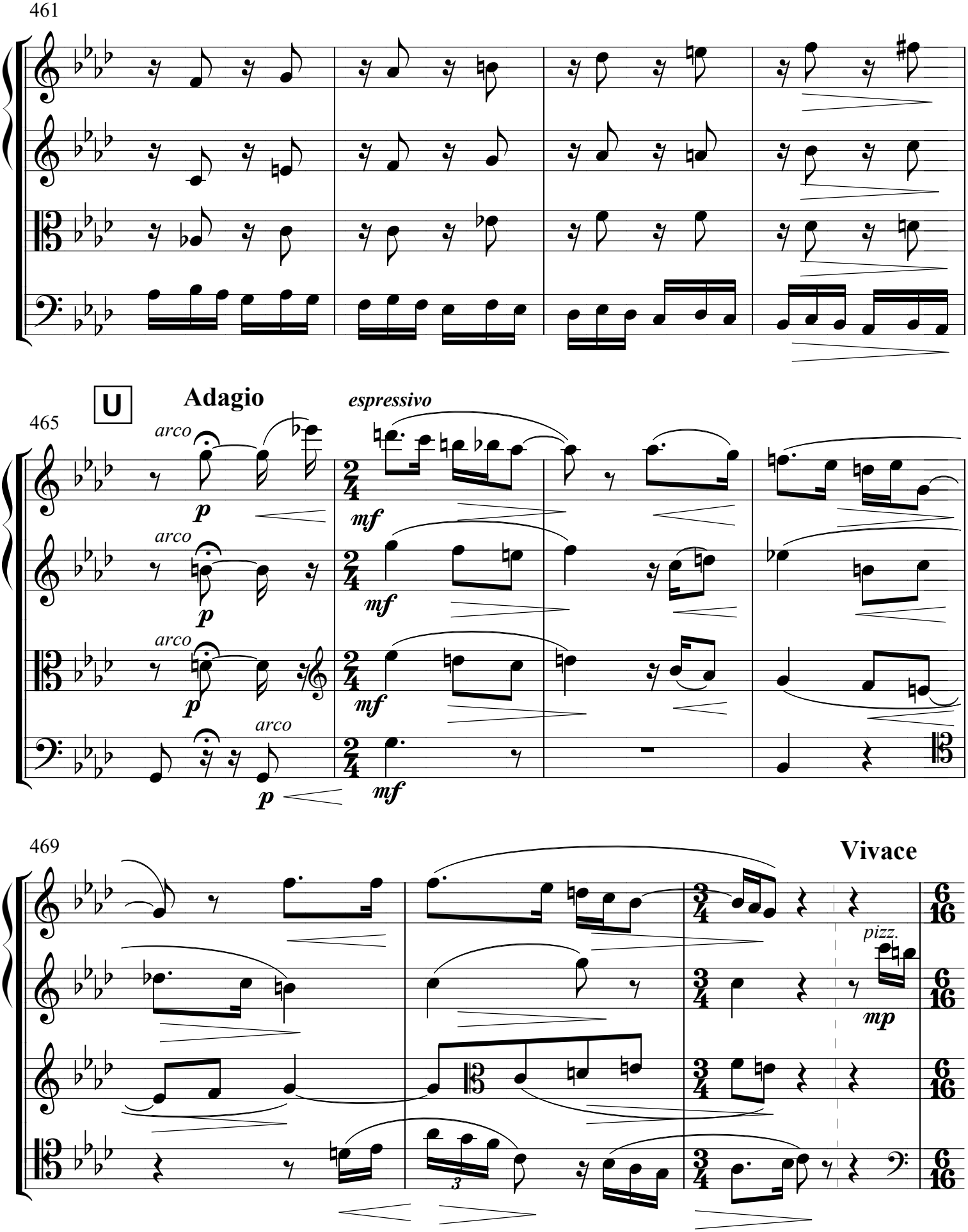
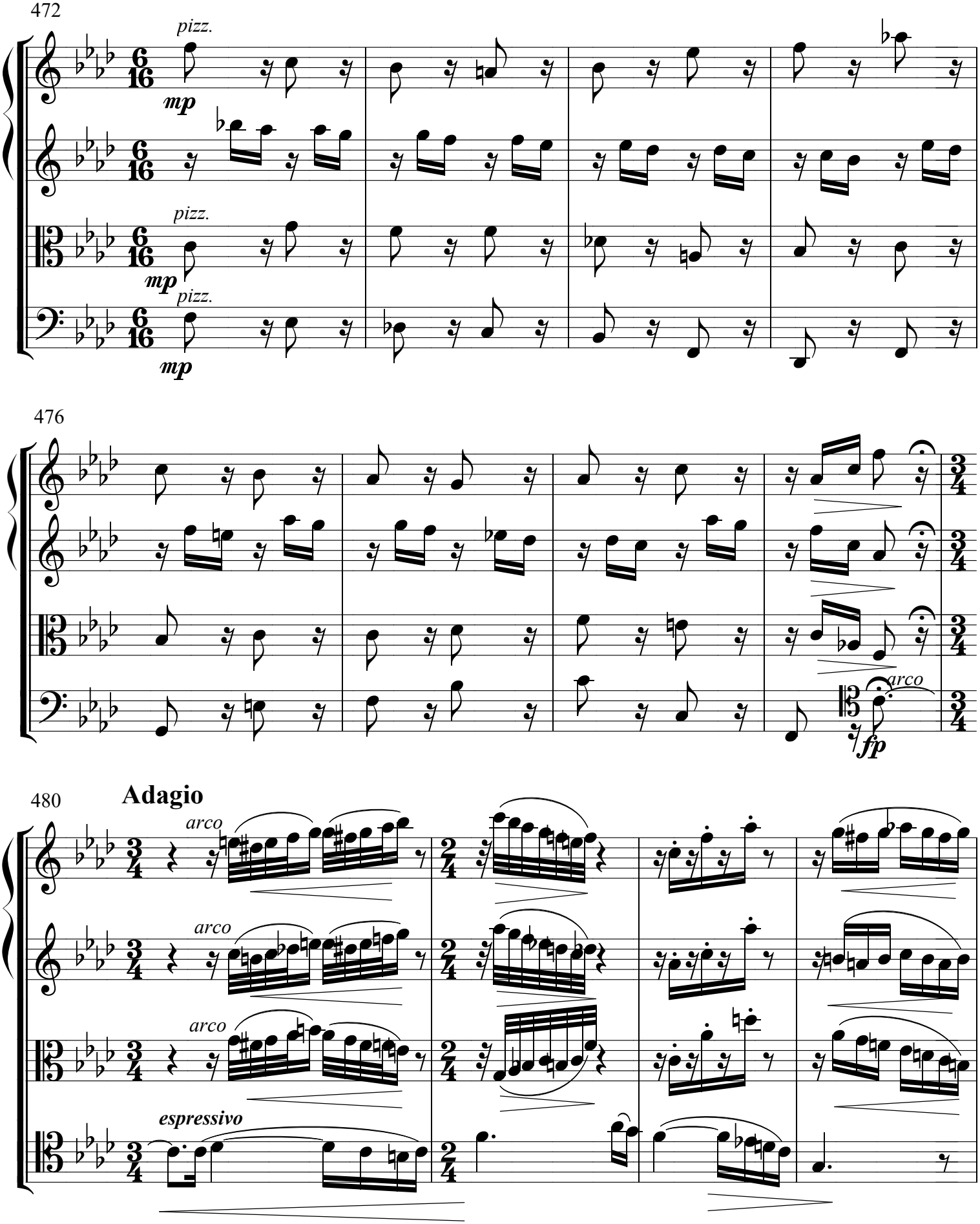

461
U
Adagio
espressivo
465
arco
p
mf
469
Vivace
pizz.
mp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476
arco
fp
480
Adagio
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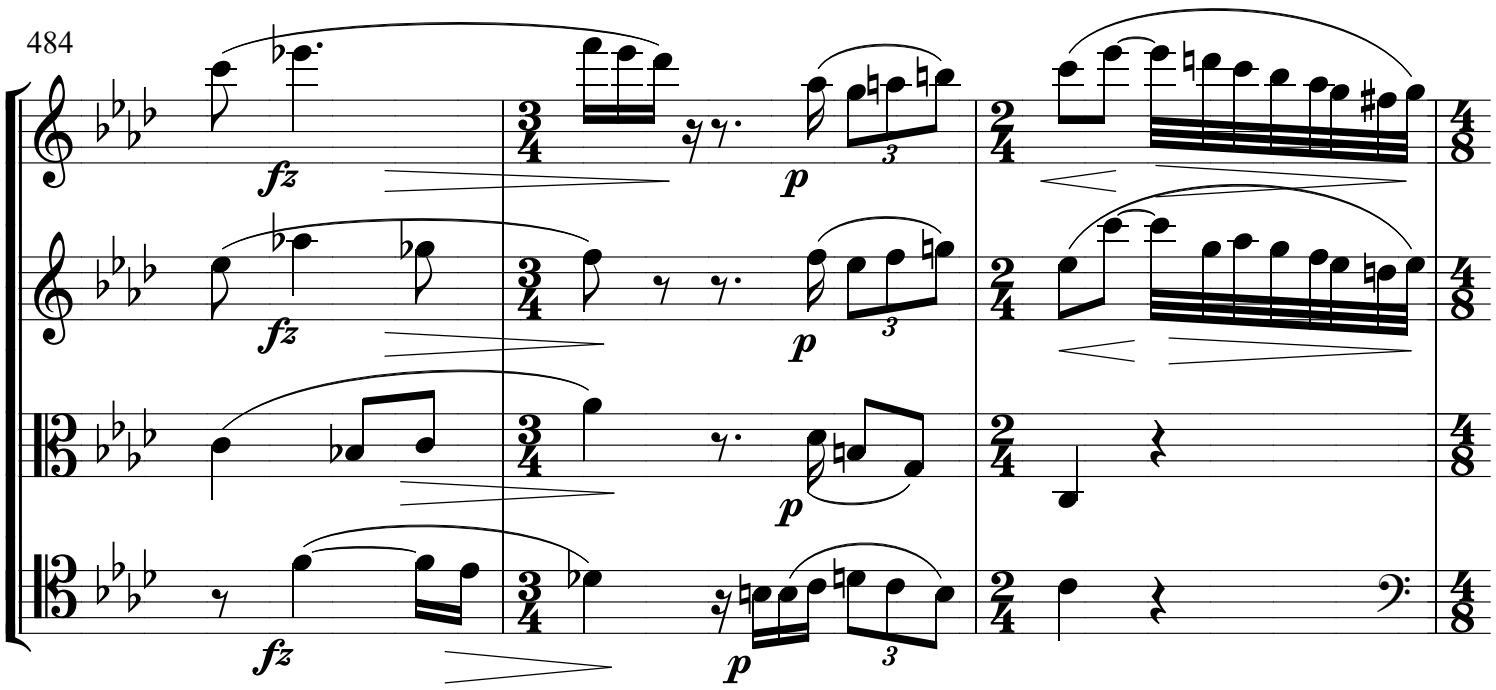
arco
arco
espressivo


484
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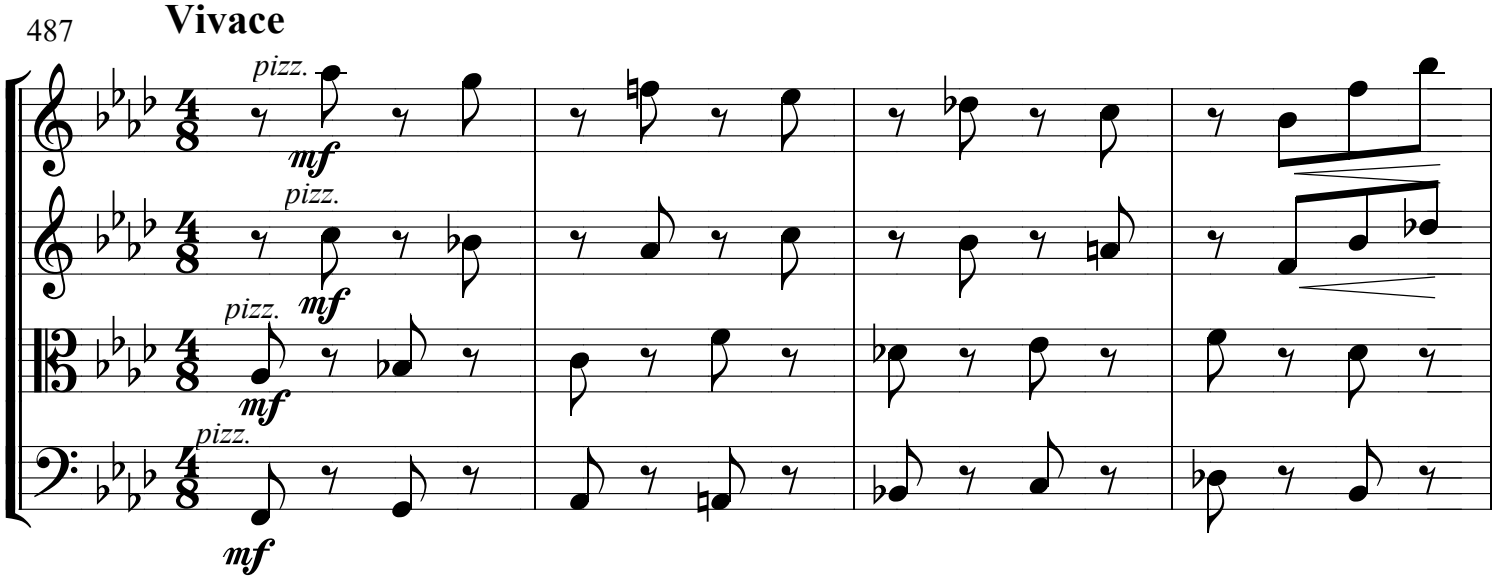
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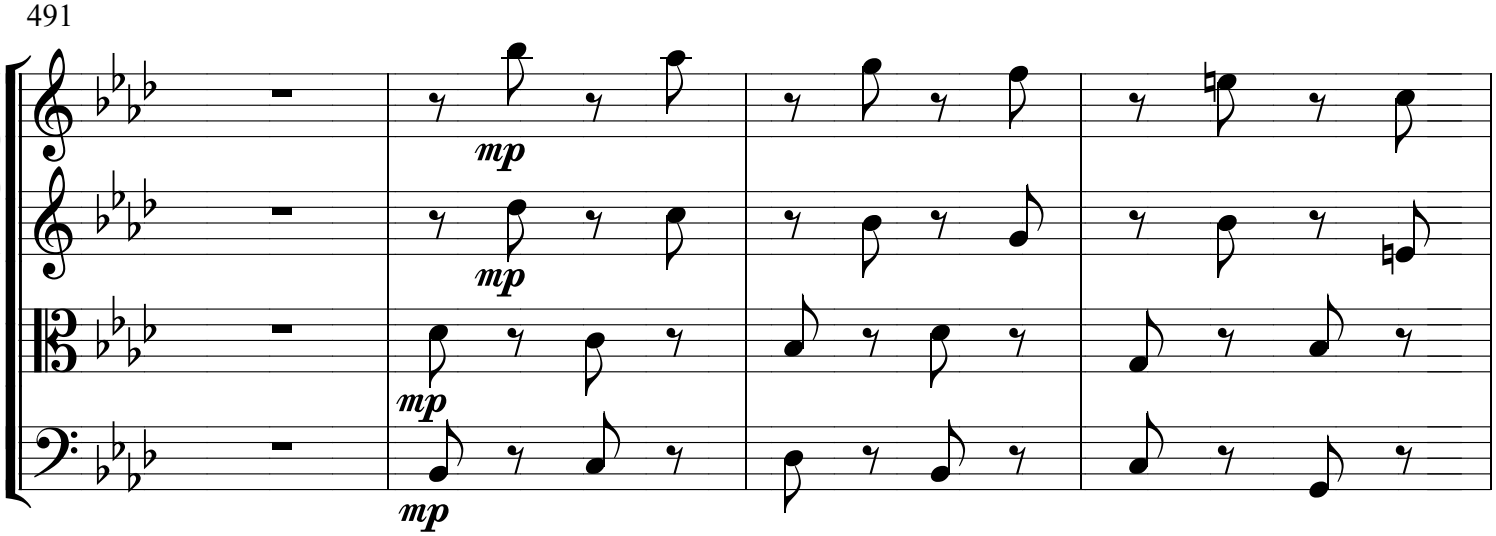
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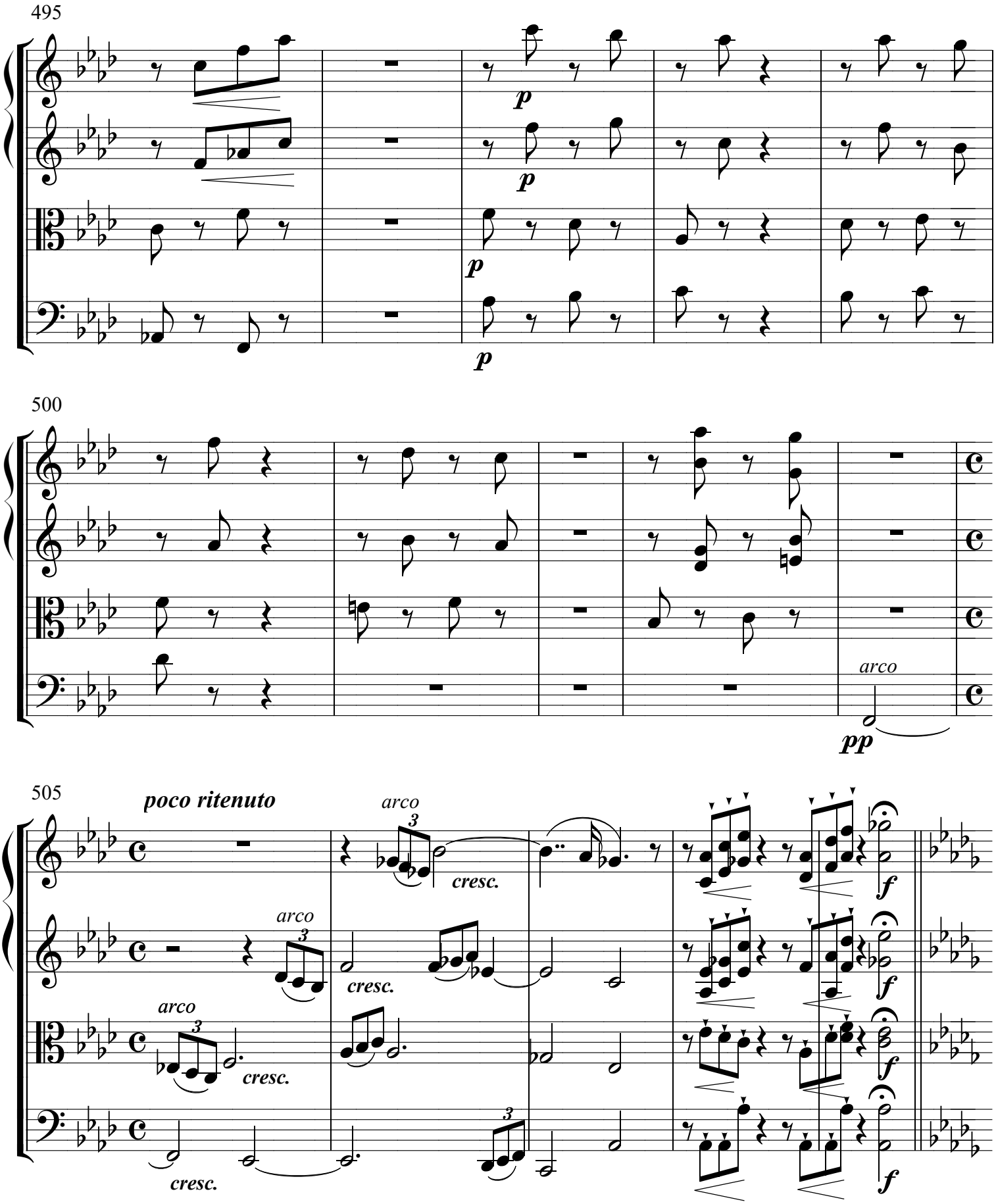
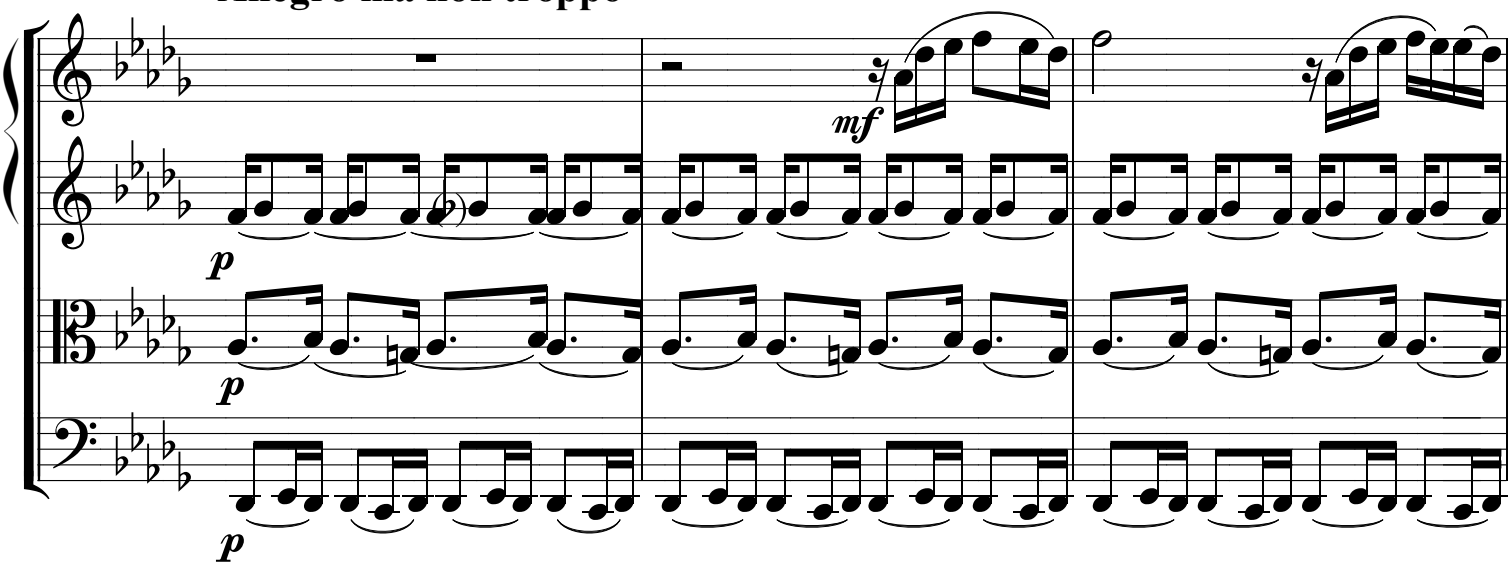

495
p
p
p
p
500
arco
pp
505
poco ritenuto
arco
cresc.
arco
cresc.
arco
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f
f

V

510 **Allegro ma non troppo**



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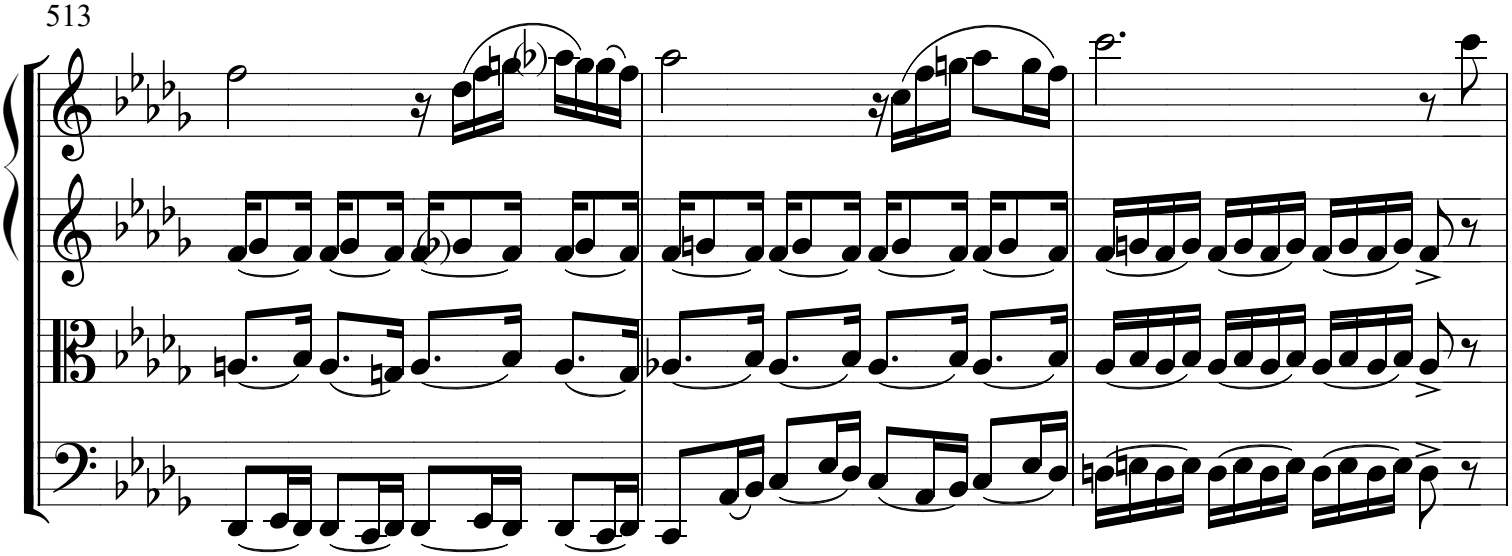

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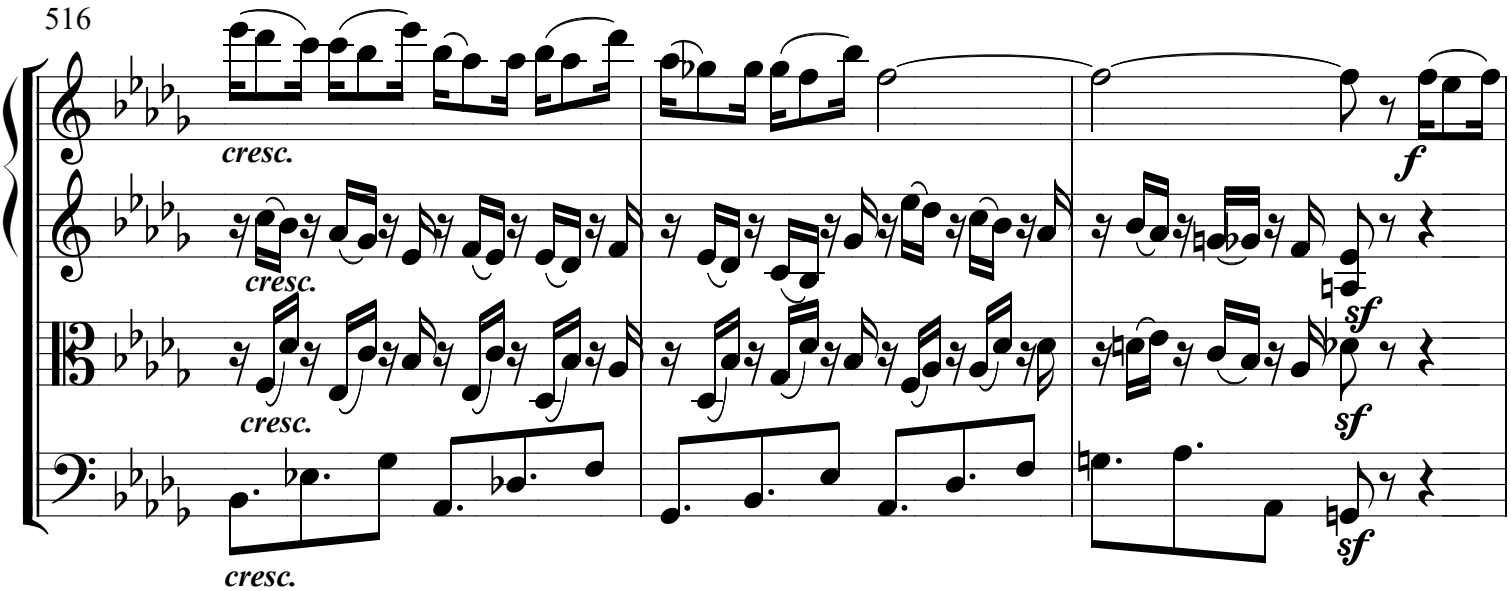
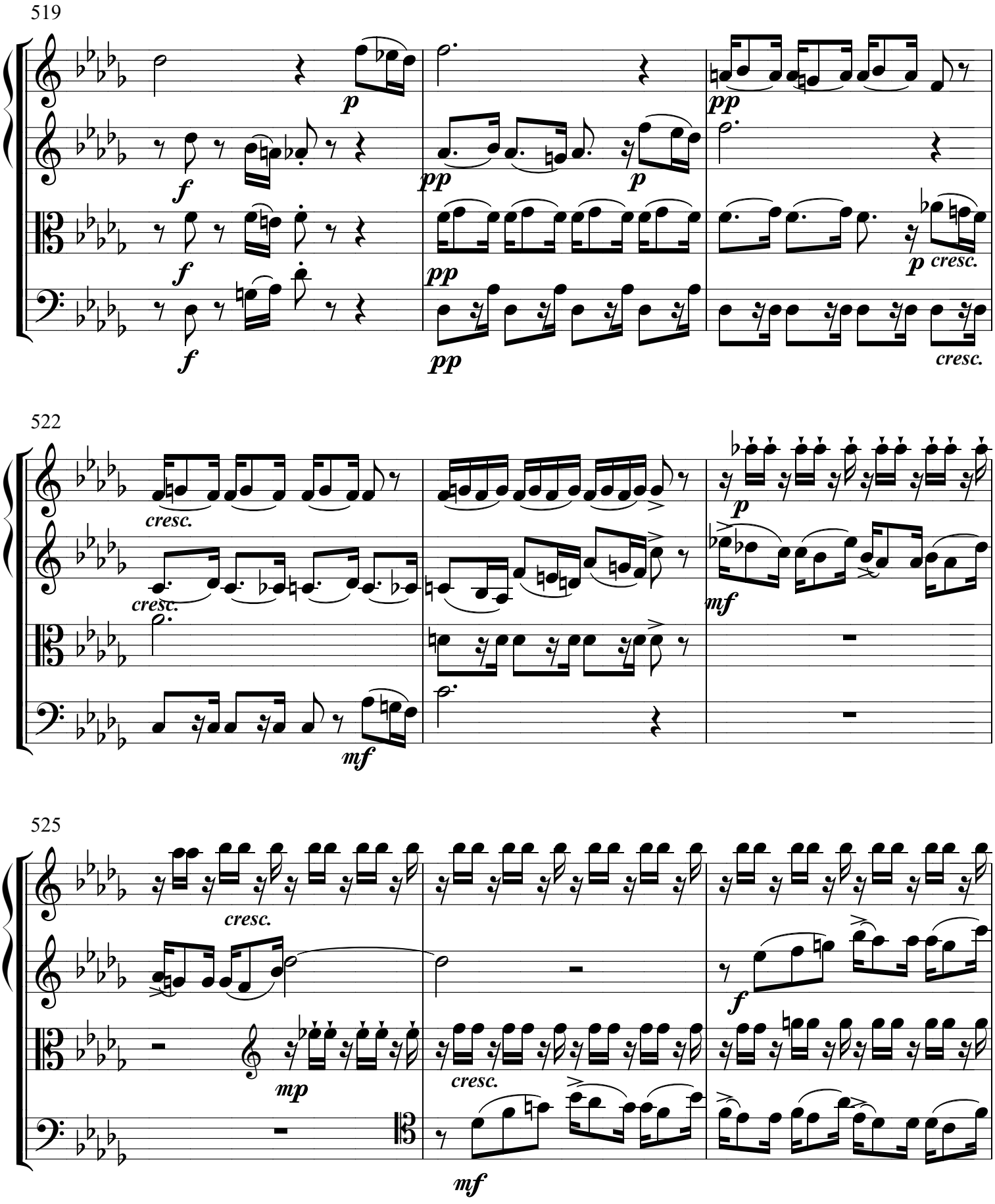
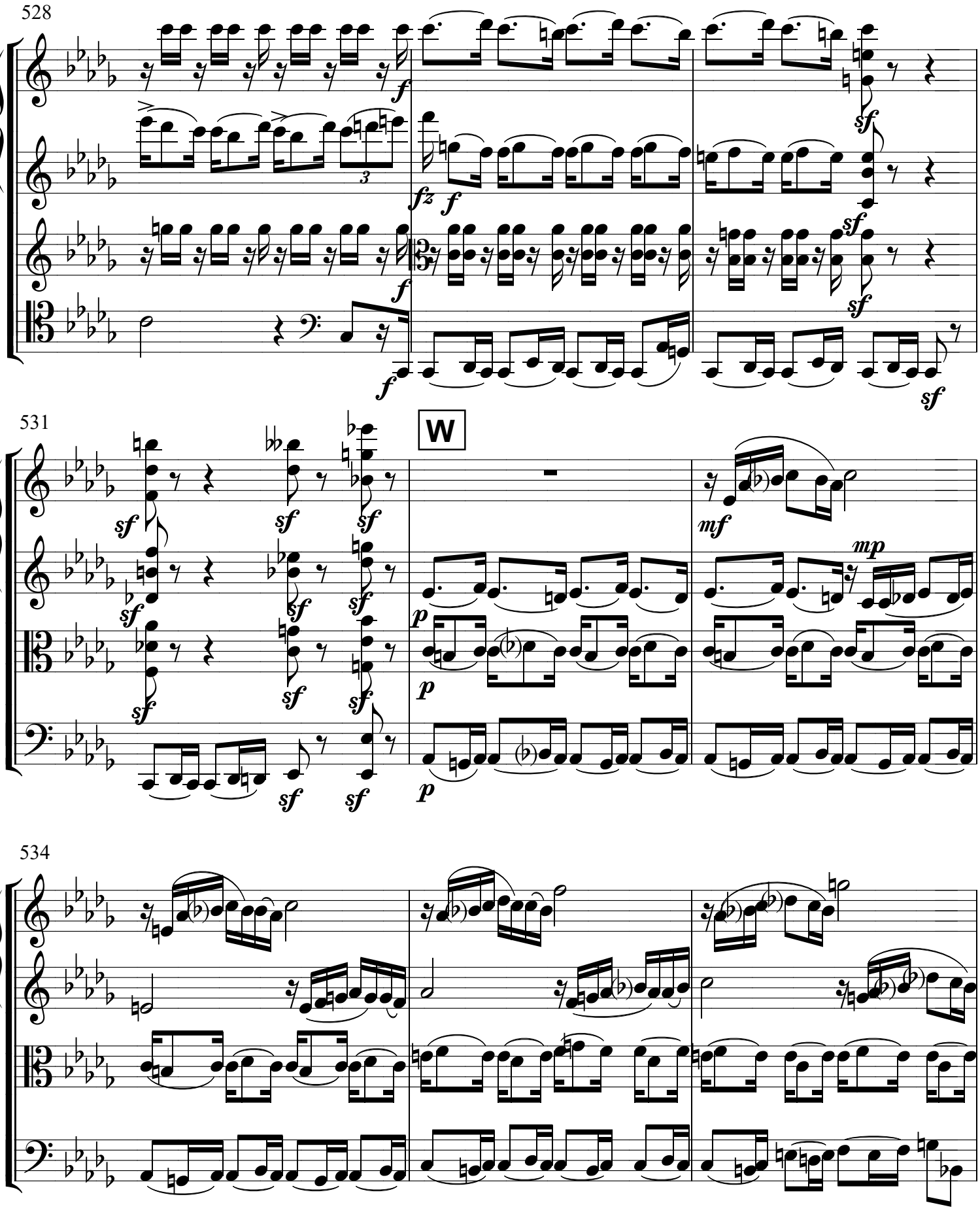



519
p
f
pp
p
pp
f
pp
p cresc.
f
pp
cresc.
522
cresc.
cresc.
p
mf
mf
525
cresc.
f
mp
cresc.
mf


528
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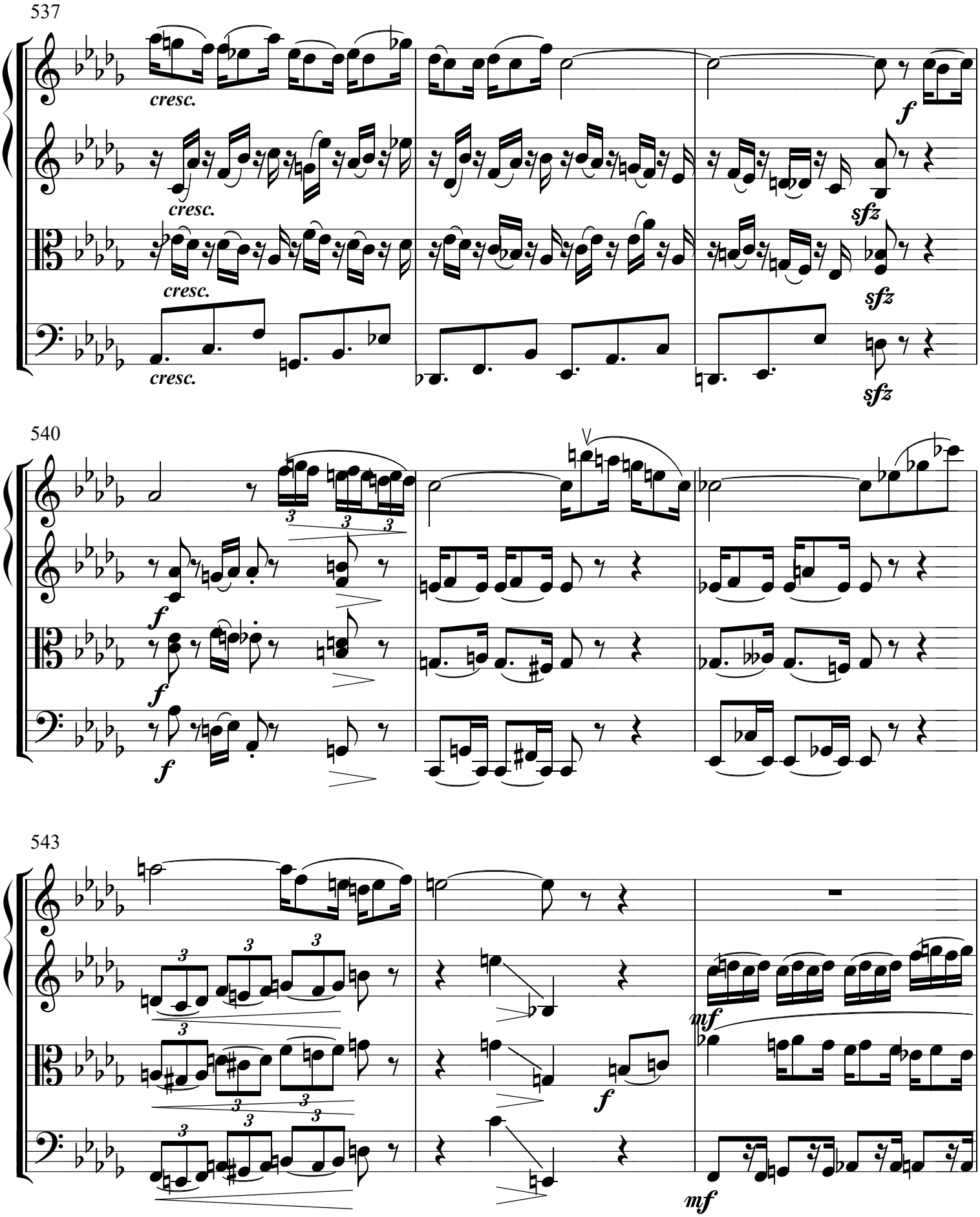
sf
531
W
mf
mp
p
534


537
cresc.
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sfz
sfz
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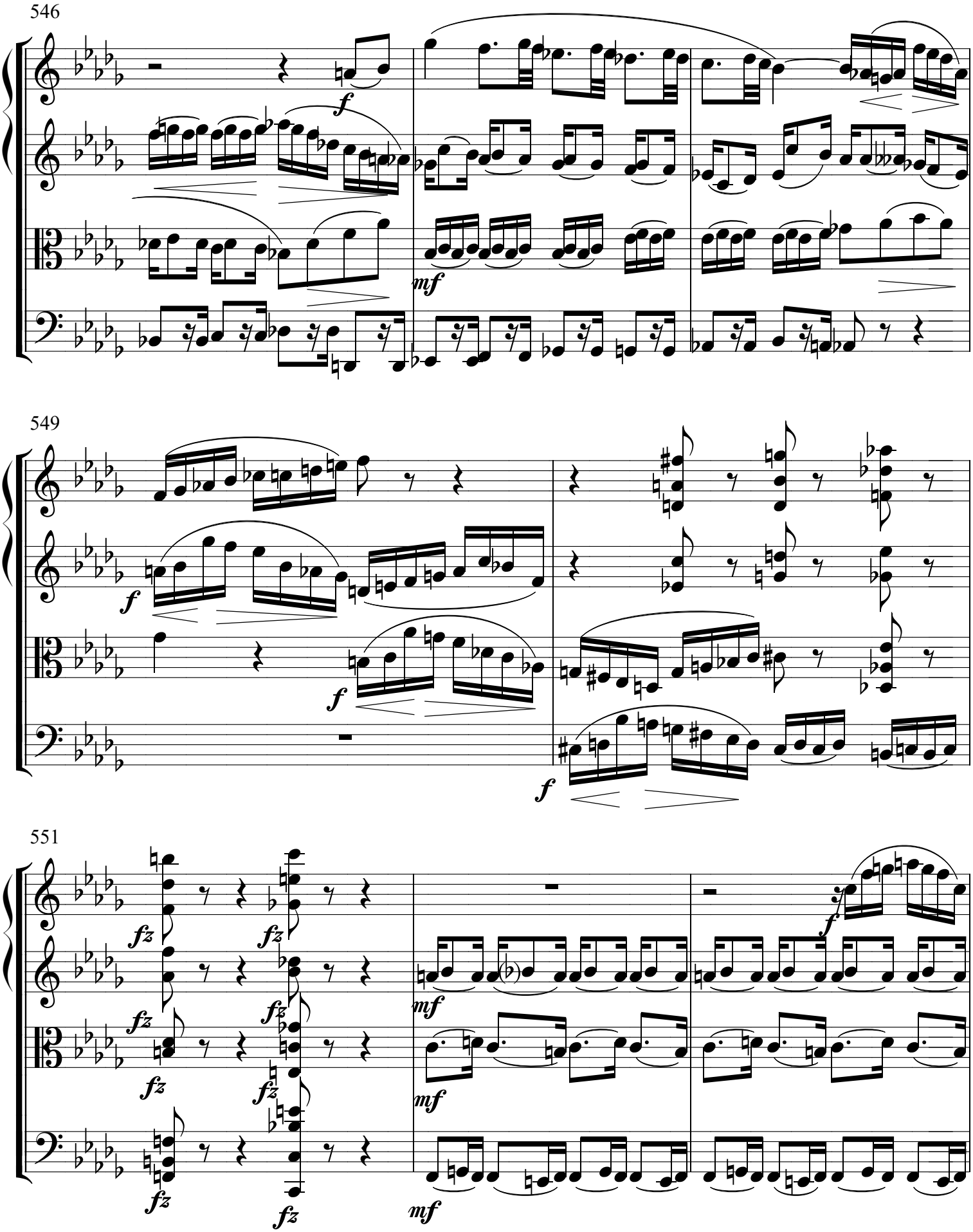
f
f
f
f
543
mf
f
mf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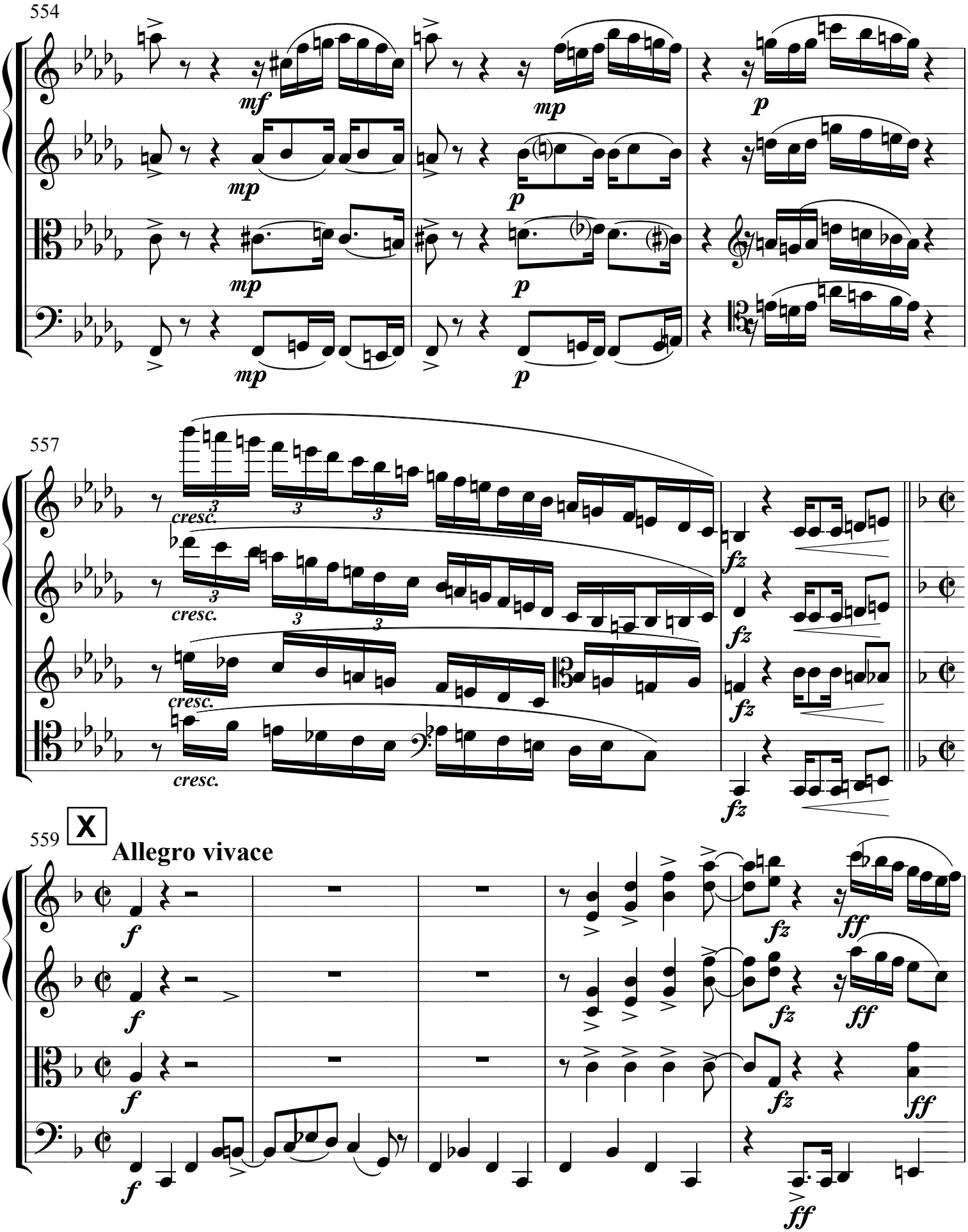
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fz
559
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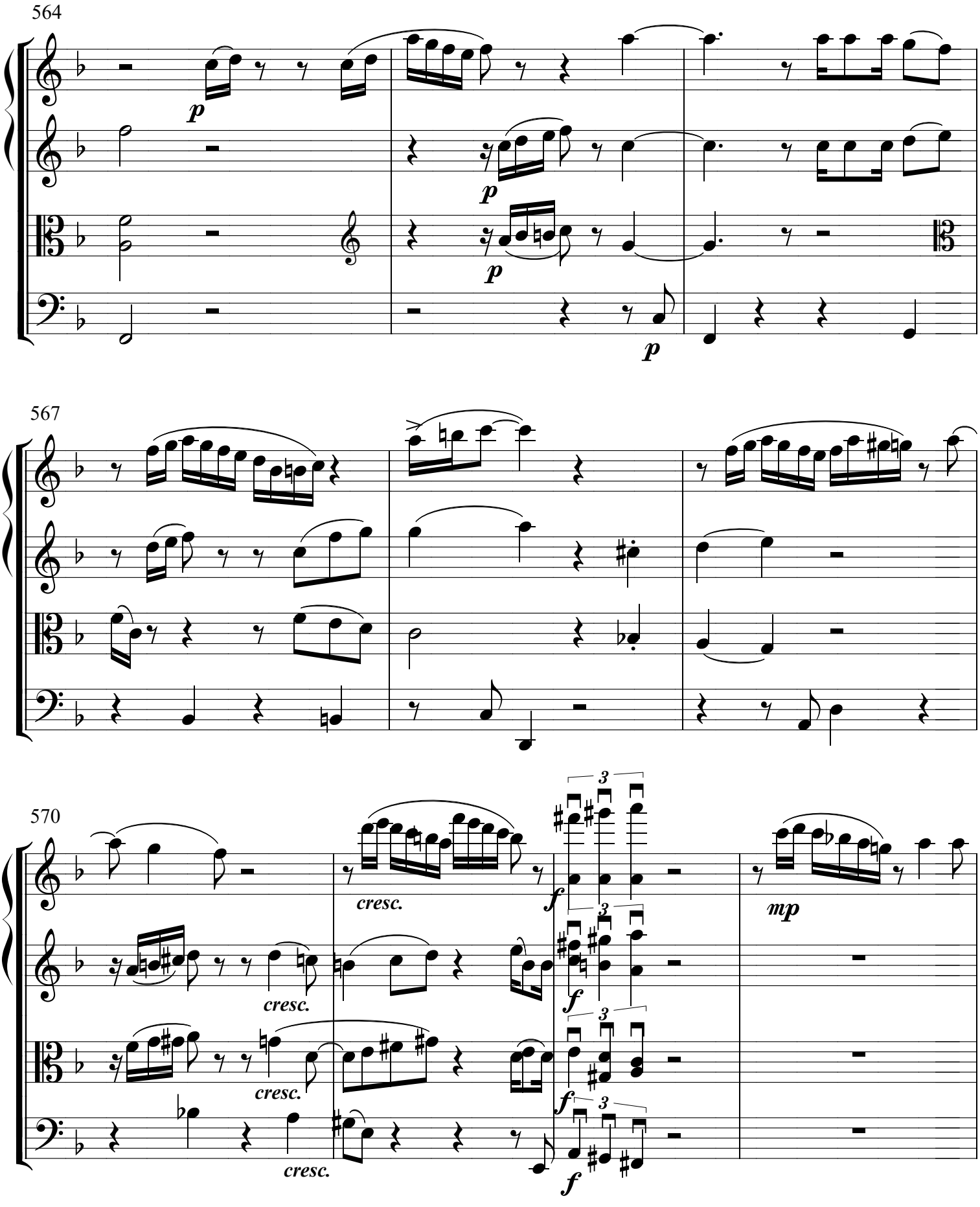
Allegro vivace
f
ff


564
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p
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cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
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3
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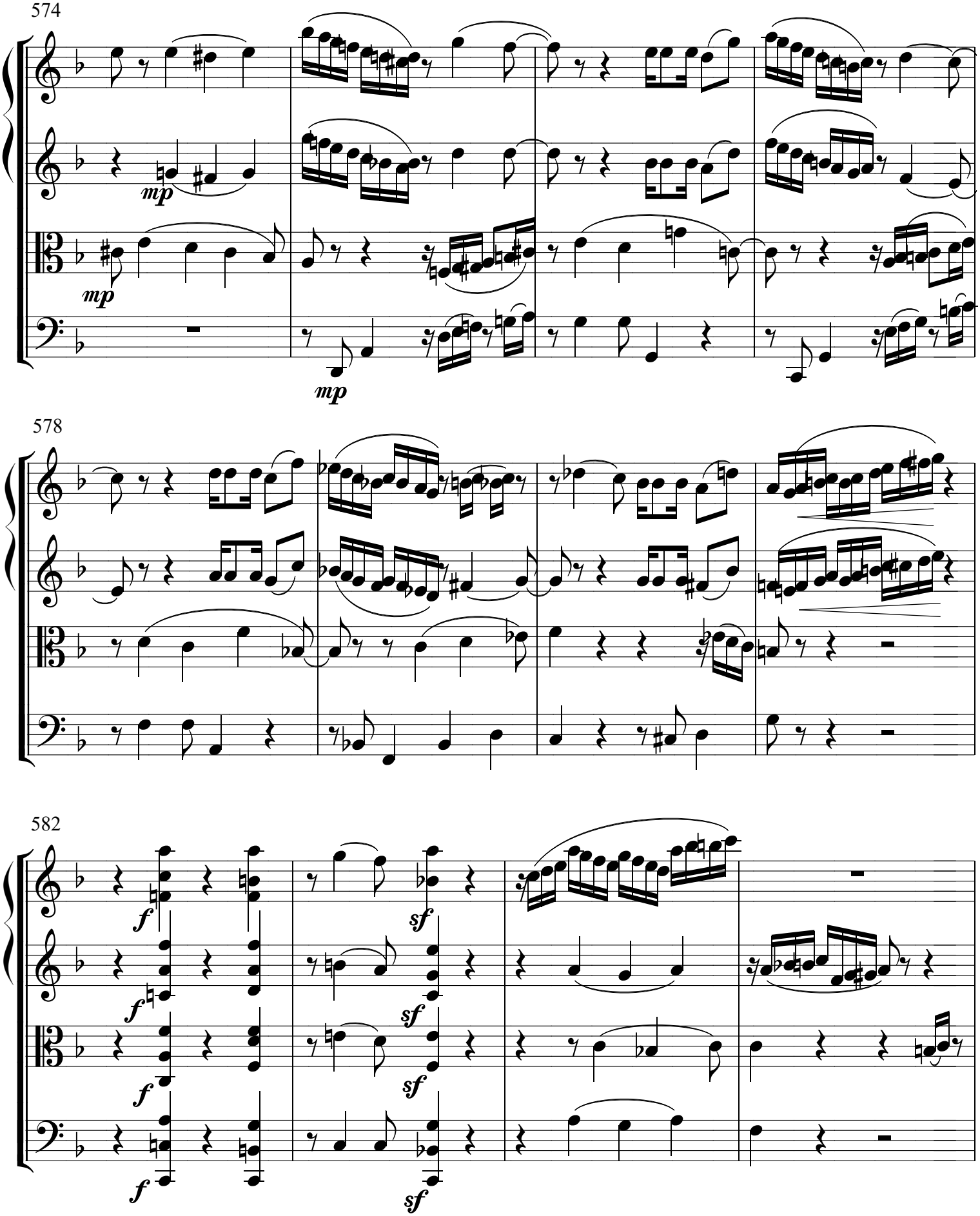
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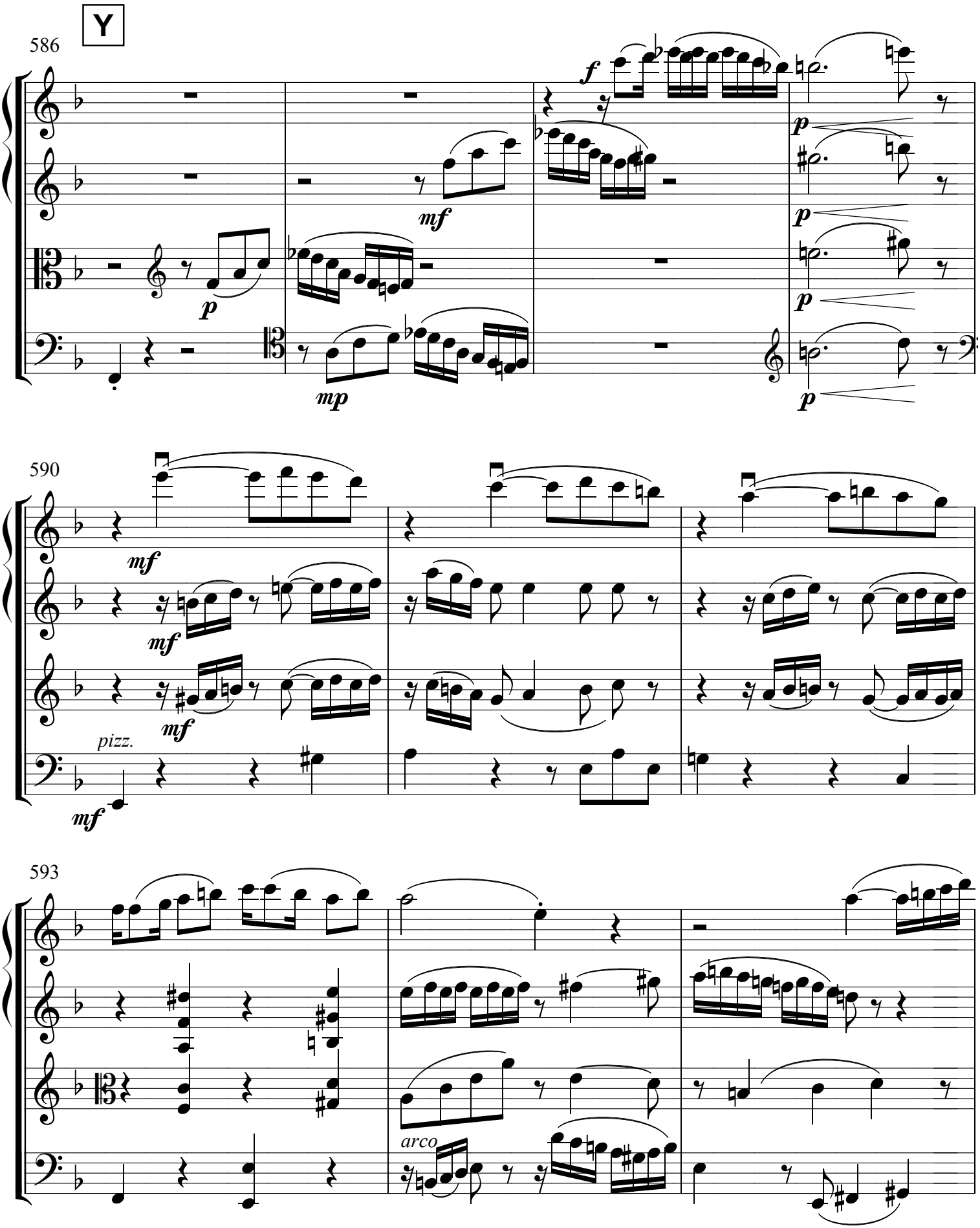
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mf
mf
mf
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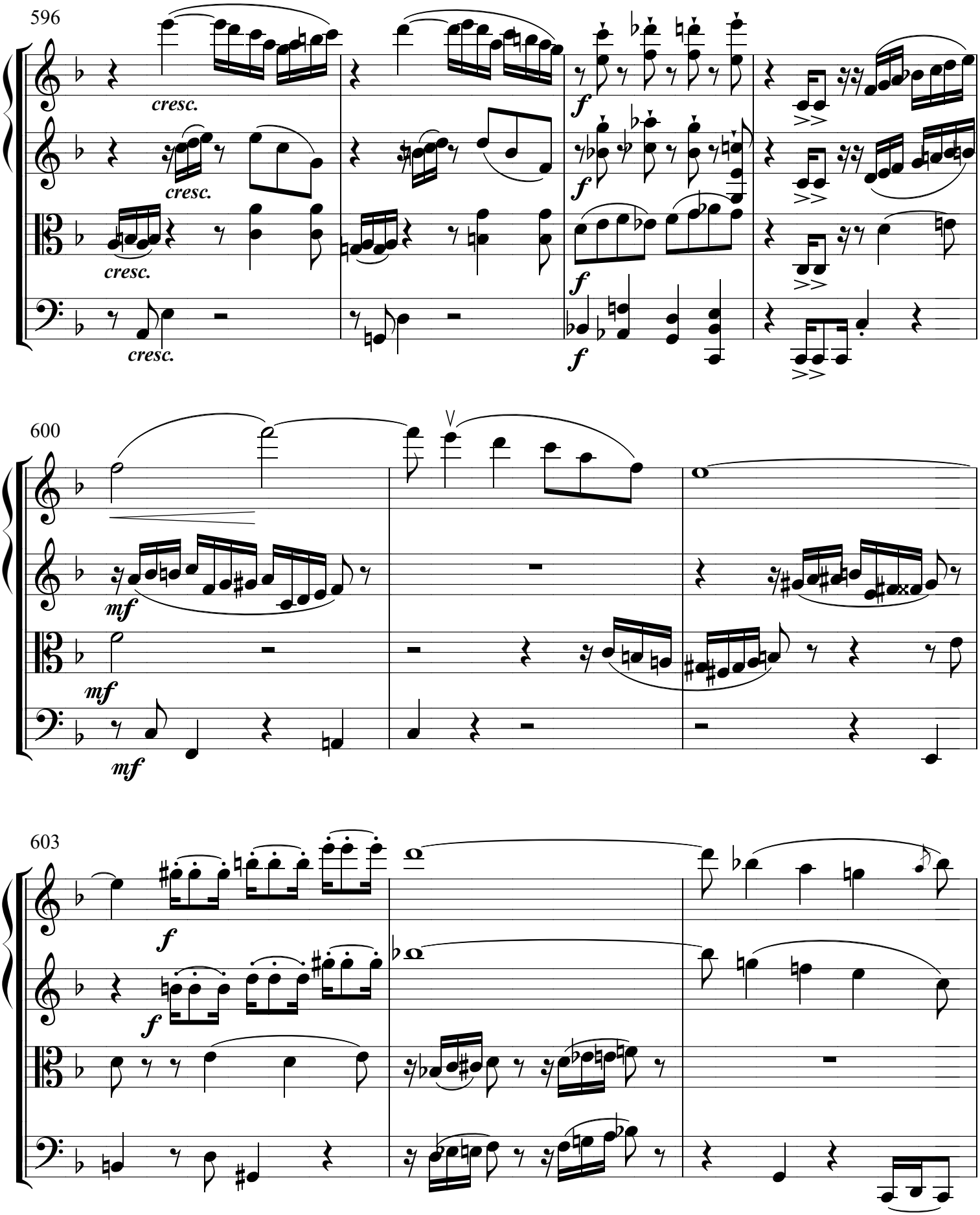
mf
593
arco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mf
mf
603
f
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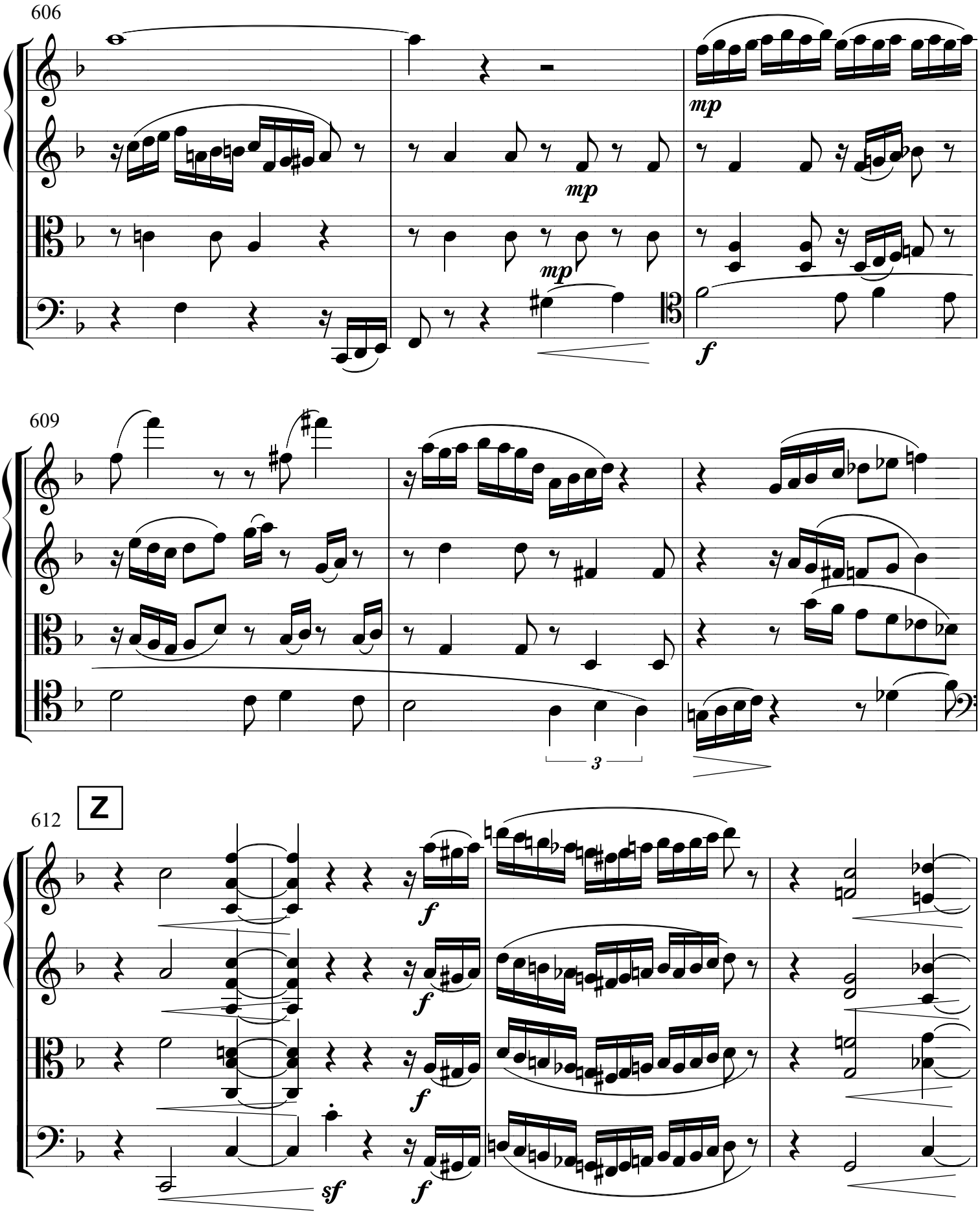
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612
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f
sf
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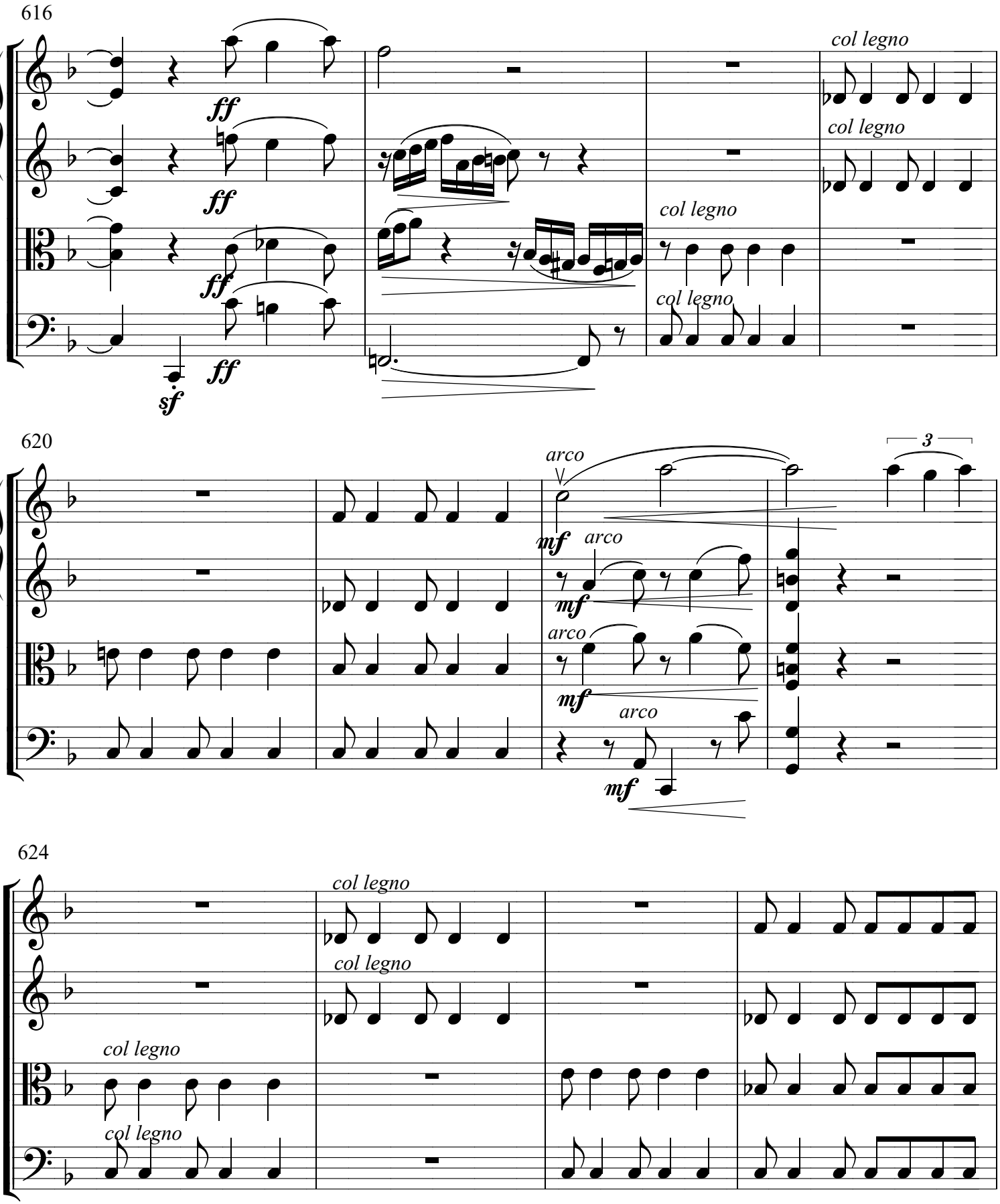
616
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col legno
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3
624
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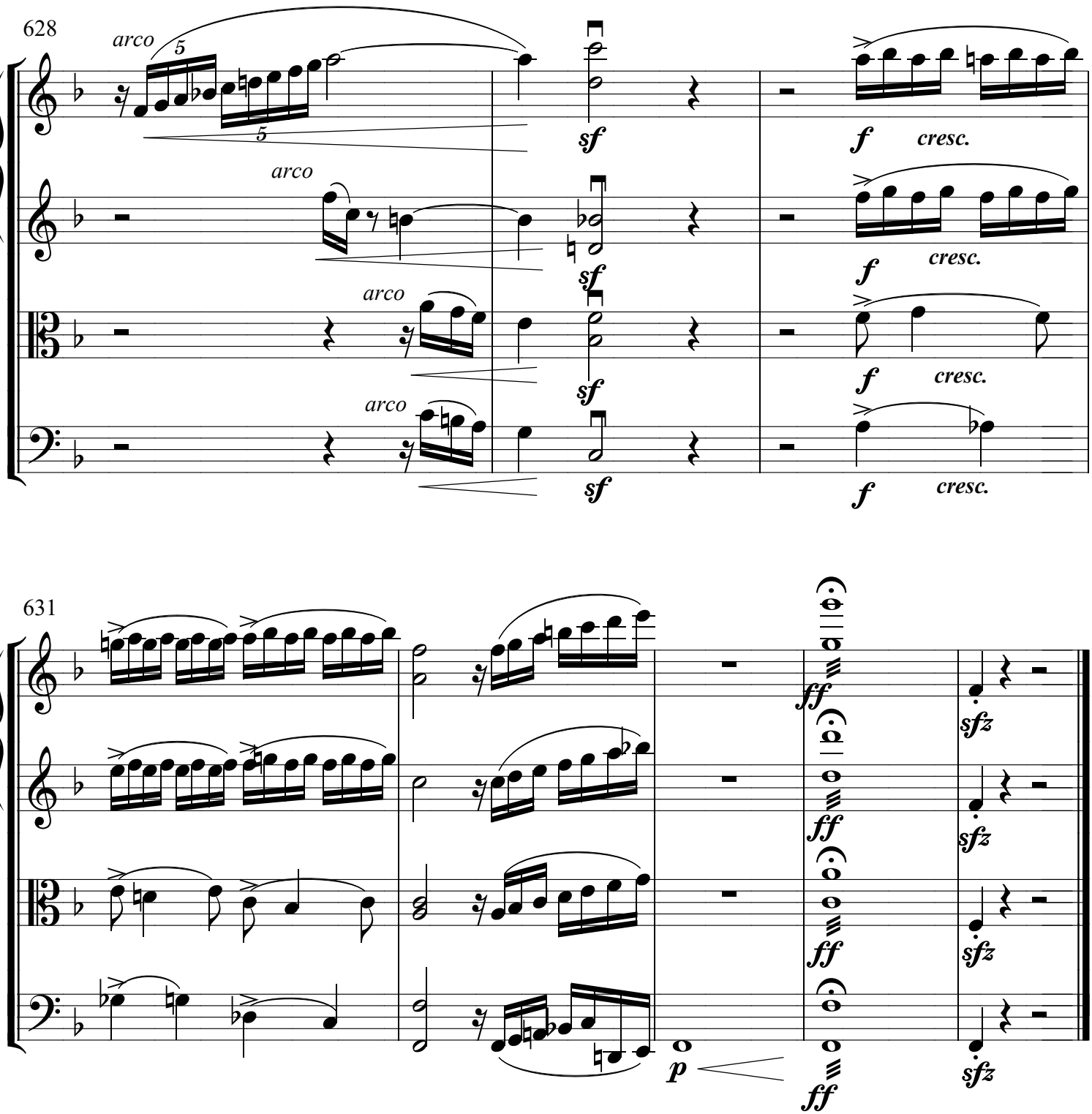
col legno
col legno
col legno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631
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ff
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