David Dzubay

String Quartet No. 1
"Astral"

(2008)

Pro Nova Music

String Quartet No. 1 - "Astral" (2008) by David Dzubay

I	Voyage	[5:20]
II	Starry Night	[3:30]
III	S.E.T.I.	[2:00]
IV	Wintu Dream Song	[4:20]
V	Supernova	[3:00]

Duration: 20 minutes

Program Note:

Beginning work on a piece for the Orion String Quartet, and taking a cue either from the group's name or perhaps from gazing upwards on evening strolls around the MacDowell Colony in rural New Hampshire, I decided to focus on the stars, composing an "Astral" quartet, movements of which would look at stars and space in various ways. Though the movements are somewhat independent, they do share musical elements and together are balanced on the curious middle movement. Like our galaxy, the quartet has a spiral structure, both in the shape of a 'spiral motive' and in the duration of the movements (roughly 5'-3'-2'-4'-3'). The eight-pitch 'spiral motive' is built by combining a few transpositions of the 'root motive' - a group of three pitches separated by a major second and minor third, variations of which are heard frequently in the melodic lines. The 'root motive' is also reflected in the overall tonal progression: G-A-(G)-E. One other recurring element, first heard in the opening bars, is a group of three evenly spaced attacks, a representation of Orion's Belt, the tight grouping of three stars lined up in the Orion constellation.

Voyage is a microcosm of the entire work, presenting five sections in palindrome form, introducing the important motives of the work, and imagining a flight through space, complete with syncopated asteroids and transitory worm holes (!) In the quiet center of the movement, we glimpse the traveler's capsule interior before hurtling through space once more.

The 'three stars in a line' rhythmic motive is perhaps most clearly heard in *Starry Night*, sounding as quiet bell tones here and there in an introspective movement that briefly erupts in turbulence reflective of its namesake by Van Gogh.

S.E.T.I. is named after the organization founded by Carl Sagan that searches for signs of galactic life in radio transmissions. The music alternates between four Focus sections and three View sections, an aural depiction of the search for extra-terrestrial intelligence through the giant radio telescope at Arecibo.

Wintu Dream Song sets a Native American funeral song text of the west coast's Wintu tribe:

It is above that you and I shall go;
Along the Milky Way you and I shall go;
Along the flower trail you and I shall go;
Picking flowers on our way you and I shall go.

After an opening incantation by cello and viola, the song is heard twice, first in the traditional form (a-b-a-b-a-c-d), and then after a transition, in an abbreviated form (a-b-a-c-d). The top voice of the chorale-like texture is fairly repetitive and tonal, following the text closely. One might almost be able to sing along the second time!

Supernova begins with music of constrained energy, explodes in a wild development of earlier ideas and then dissipates into the expanse of space. In a tip of the hat to galactic hitchhiker Douglas Adams and his answer to the Ultimate Question, the final chord arrives with 42 strokes.

David Dzubay, Feb. 11, 2008

This work was begun at the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and was completed while in residence at Copland House, Courtlandt Manor, New York, as a recipient of the Aaron Copland Award.

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Dedicated to the Orion String Quartet

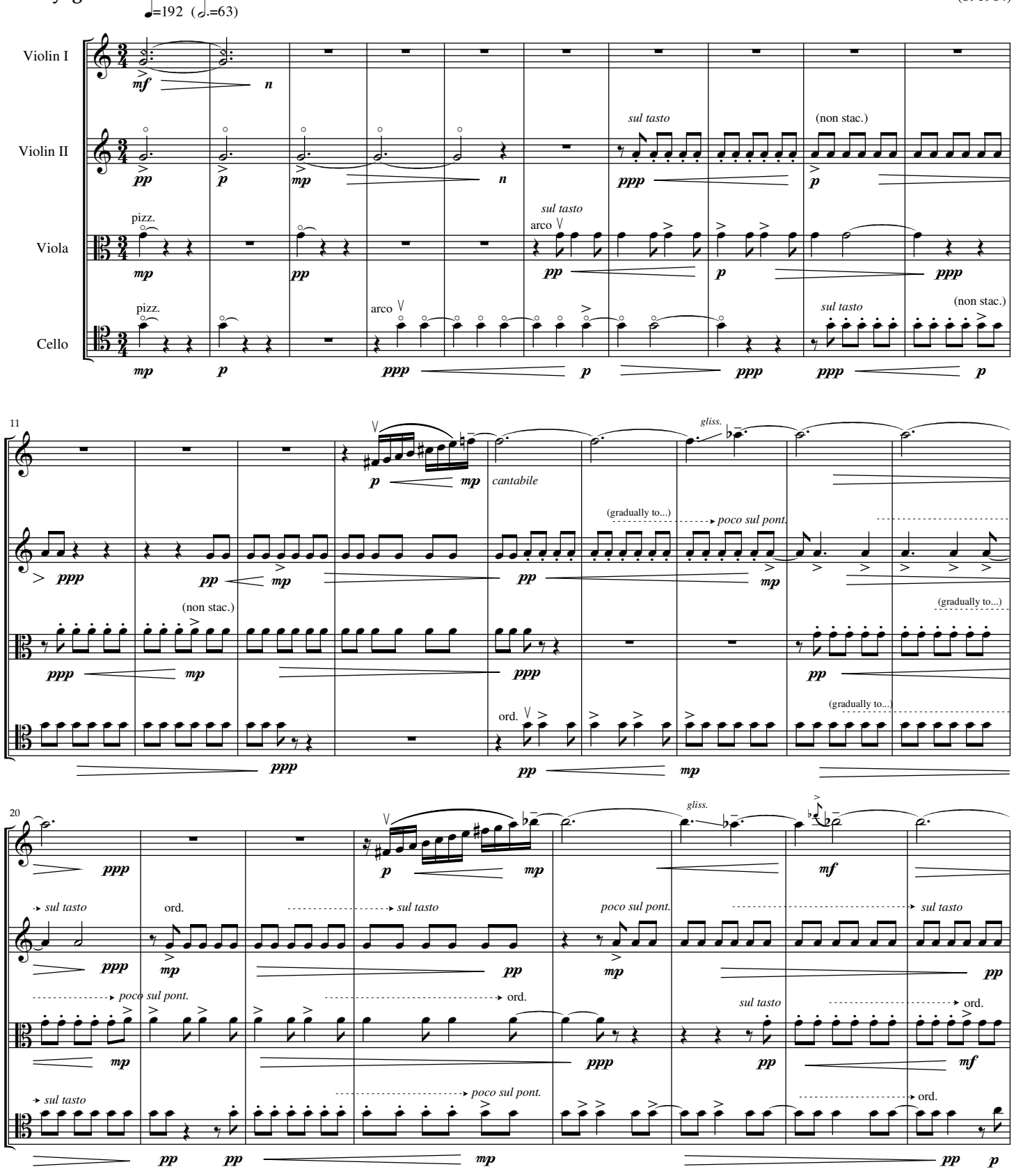
Score

String Quartet No. 1 - "Astral"

(2008)

DAVID DZUBAY
(b. 1964)

I Voyage



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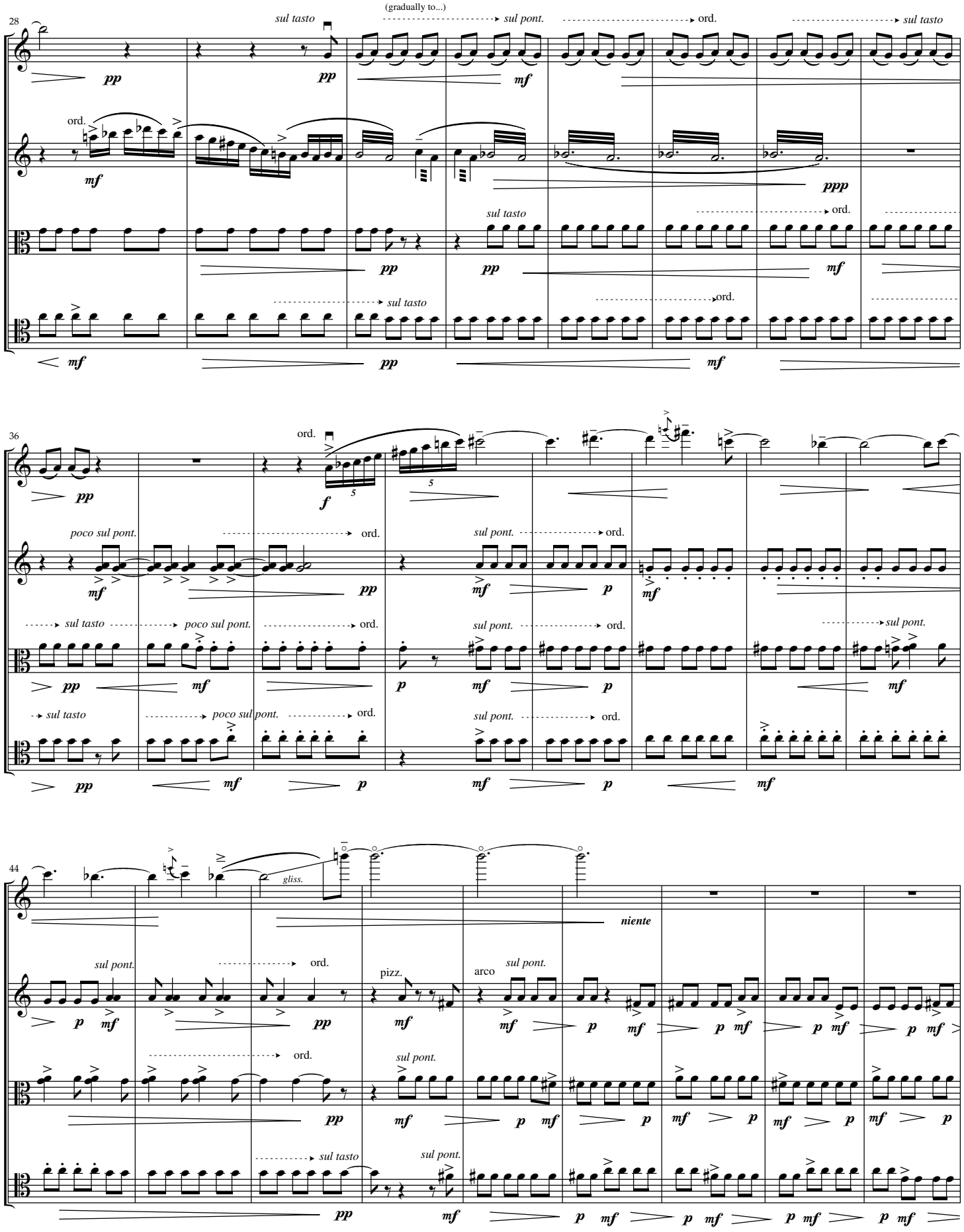
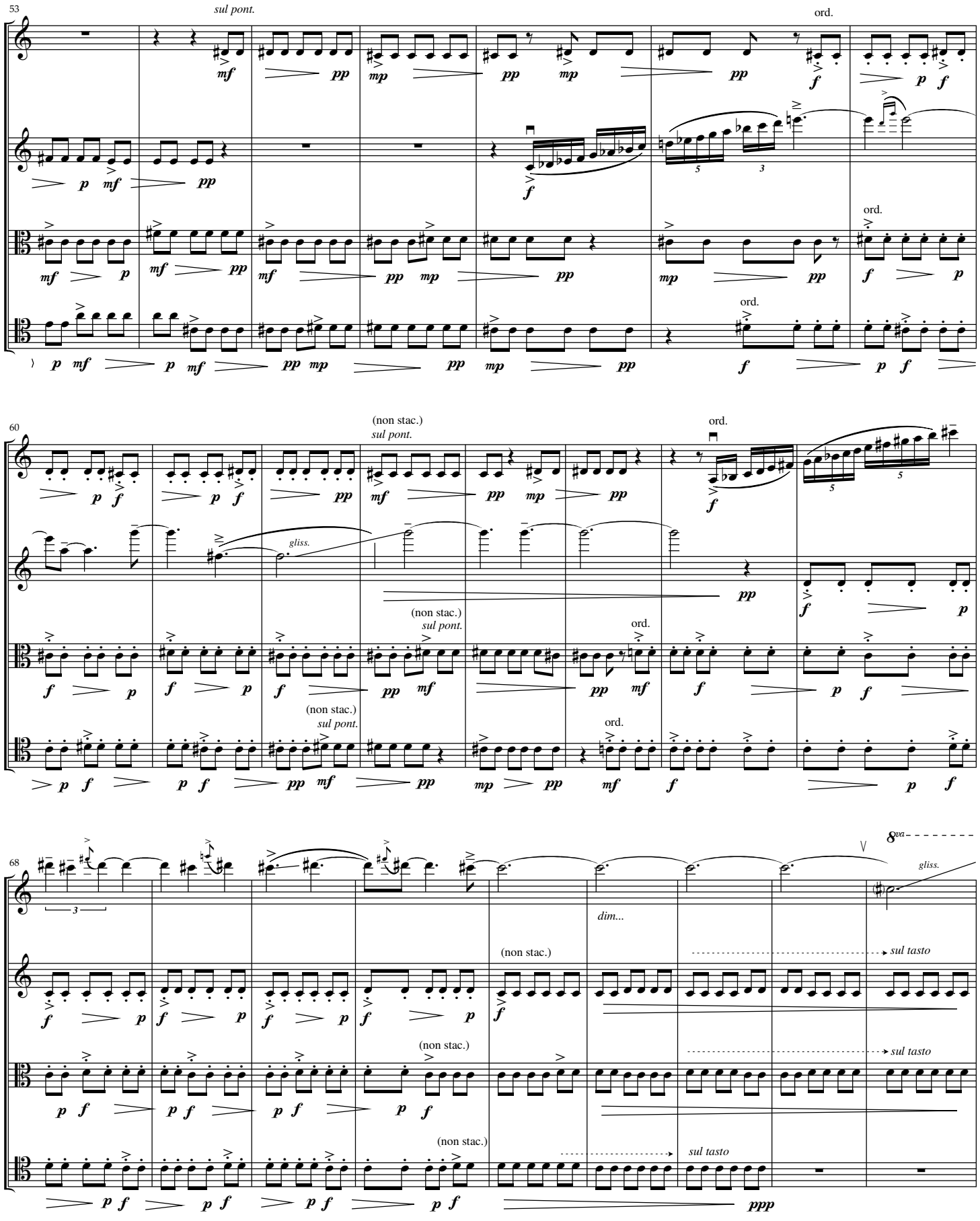
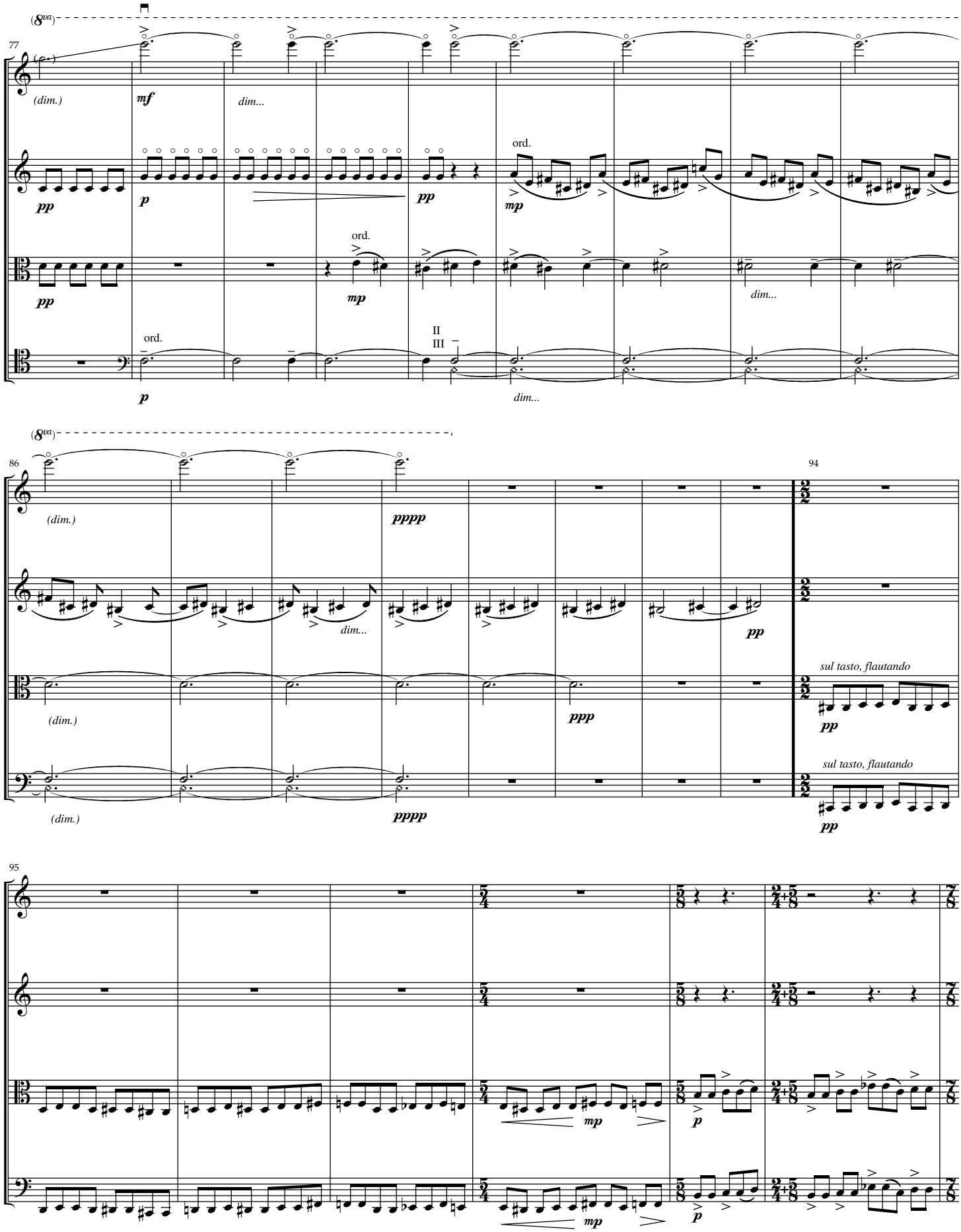
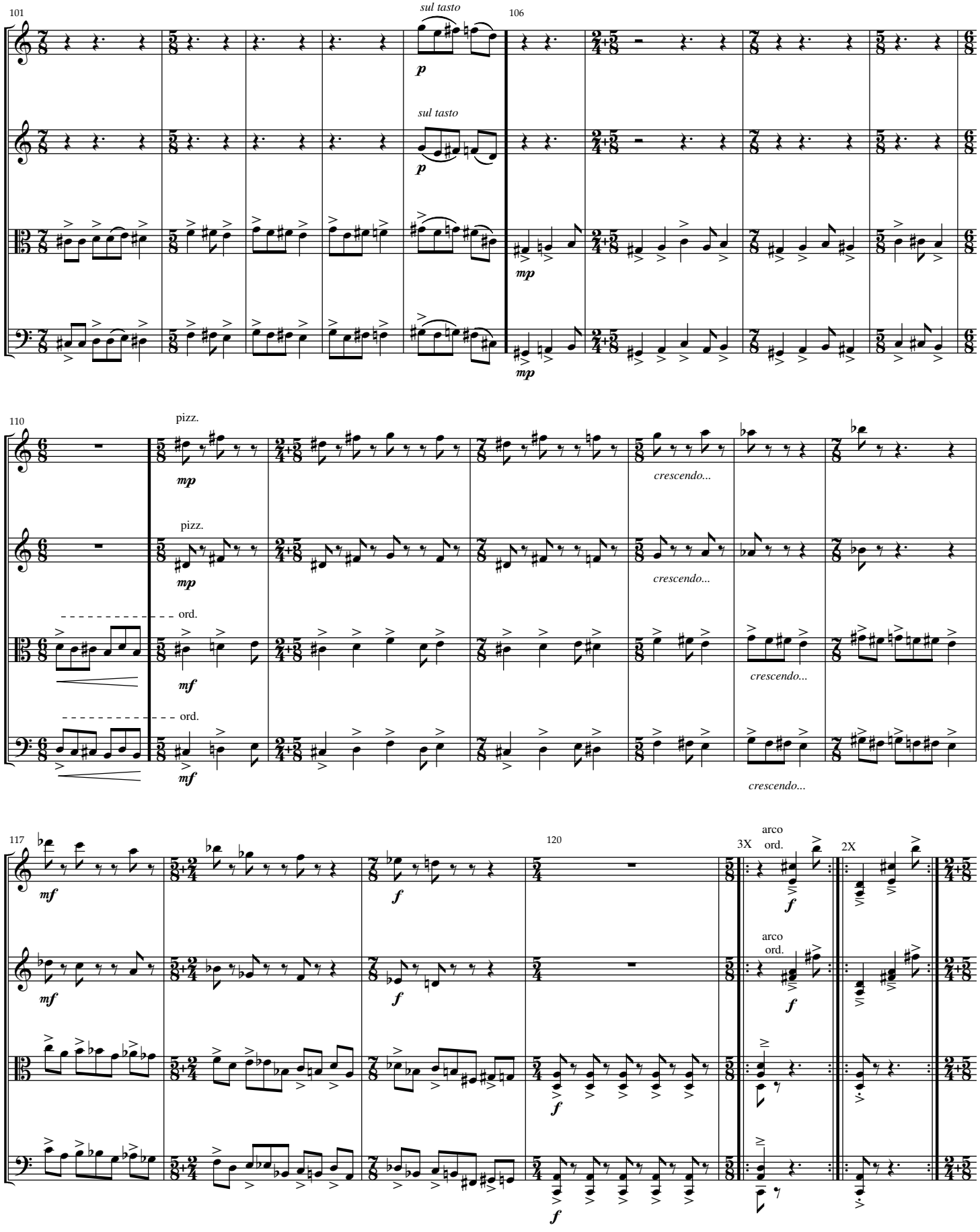
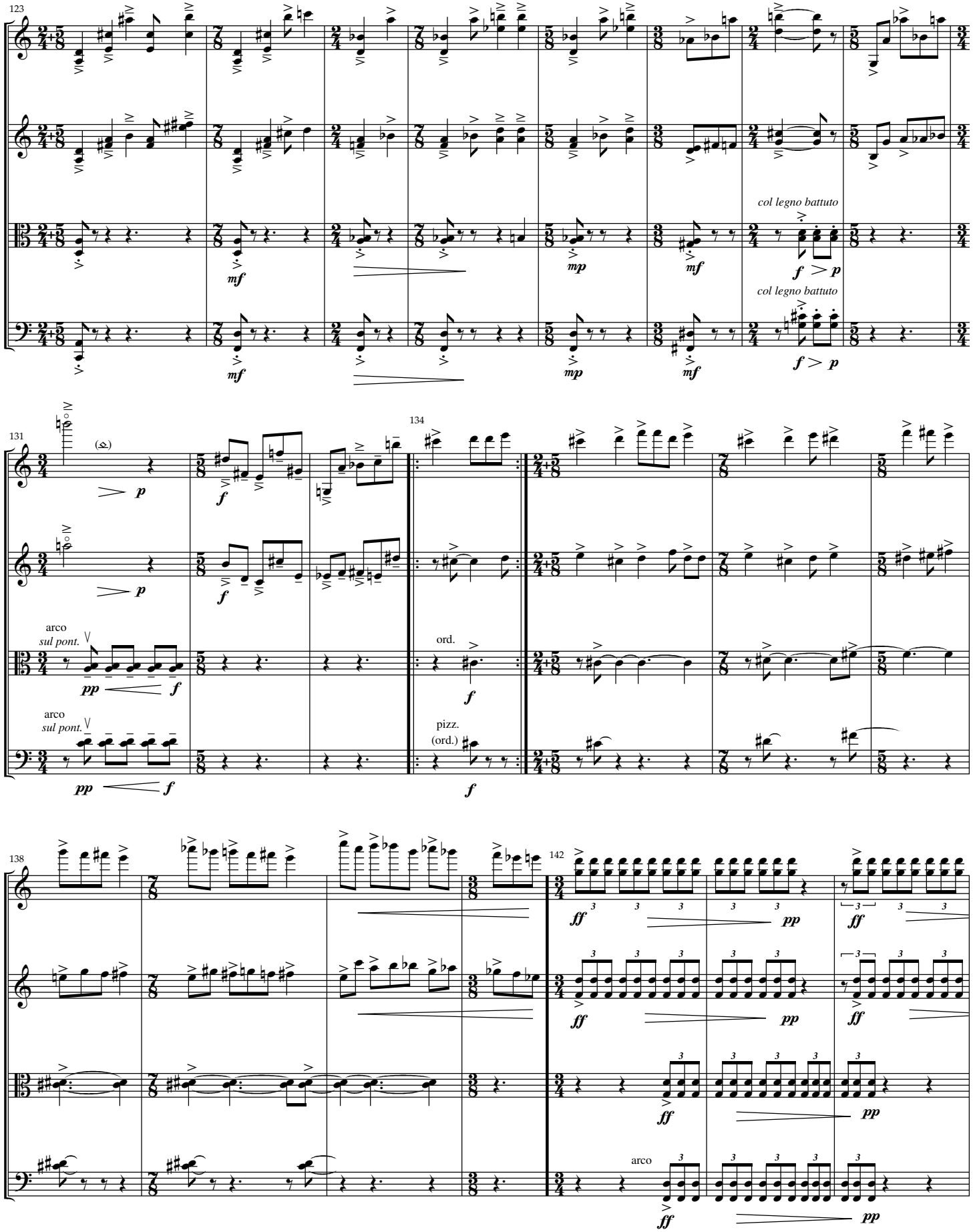
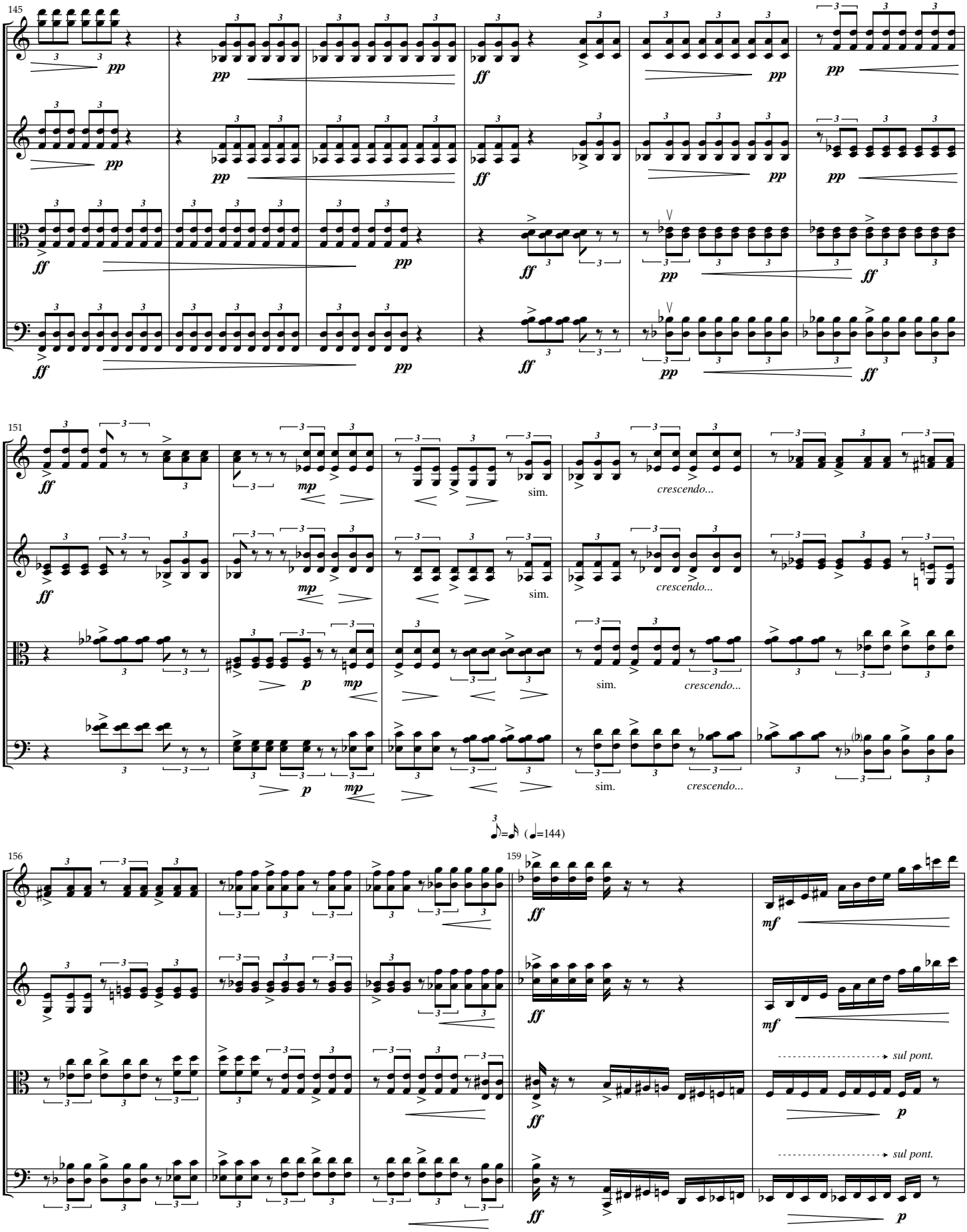

28
sul tasto
(gradually to...)
sul pont.
ord.
sul tasto
ord.
sul tasto
ord.
sul tasto
ord.
36
ord.
poco sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
sul tasto
poco sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
sul tasto
poco sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
44
gliss.
niente
sul pont.
ord.
pizz.
arco
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
sul tasto
sul pont.


53
sul pont.
ord.
ord.
ord.
60
(non stac.)
sul pont.
ord.
gliss.
(non stac.)
sul pont.
ord.
(non stac.)
sul pont.
ord.
68
8va
gliss.
dim...
(non stac.)
sul tasto
(non stac.)
sul tasto
(non stac.)
sul tasto

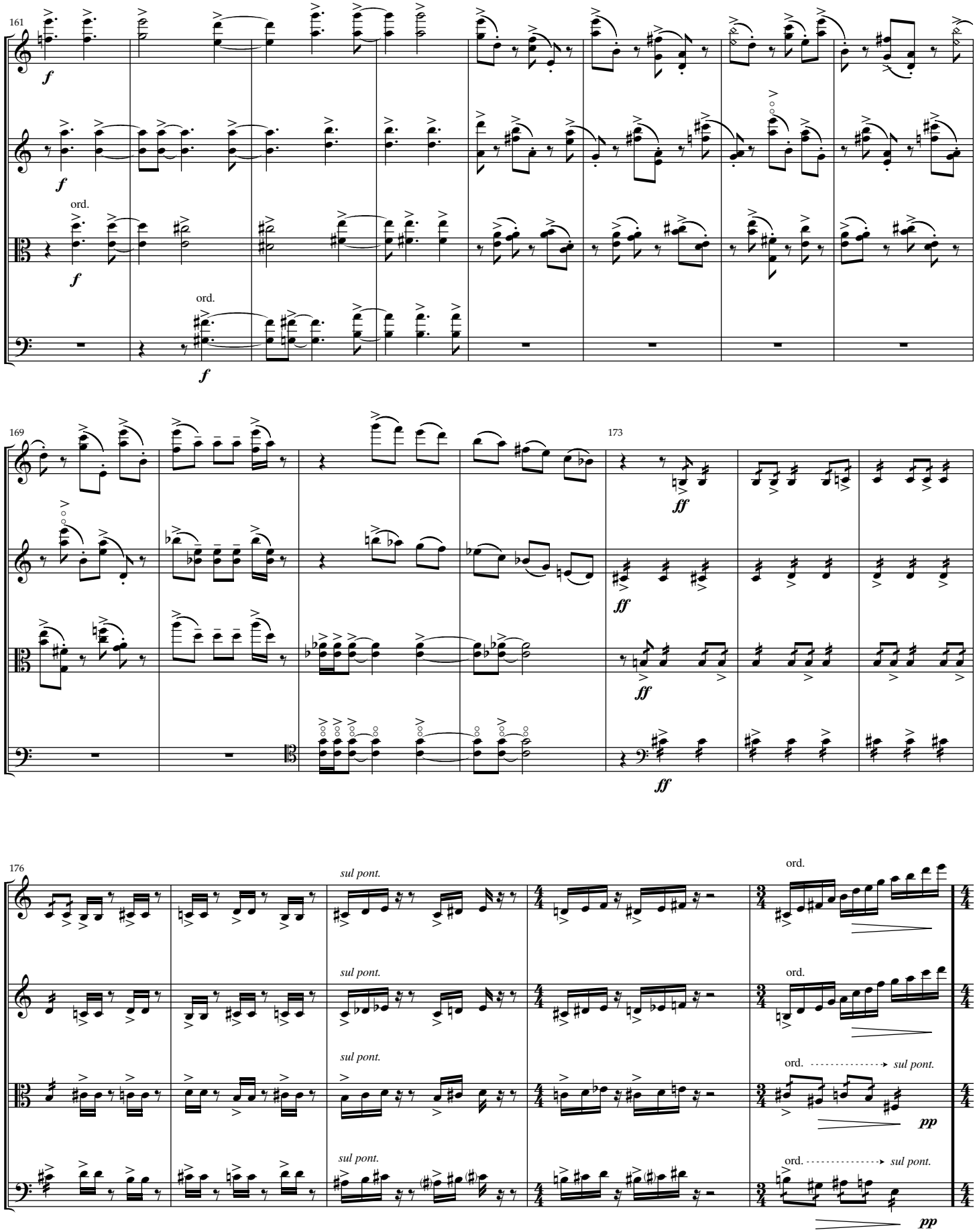

(8va)
77
(dim.)
mf
dim...
pp
p
pp
ord.
mp
ord.
mp
pp
ord.
p
II
III
dim...
dim...
(8va)
86
(dim.)
pppp
dim...
pp
(dim.)
ppp
sul tasto, flautando
pp
(dim.)
pppp
sul tasto, flautando
pp
94
95
mp
p
mp
p

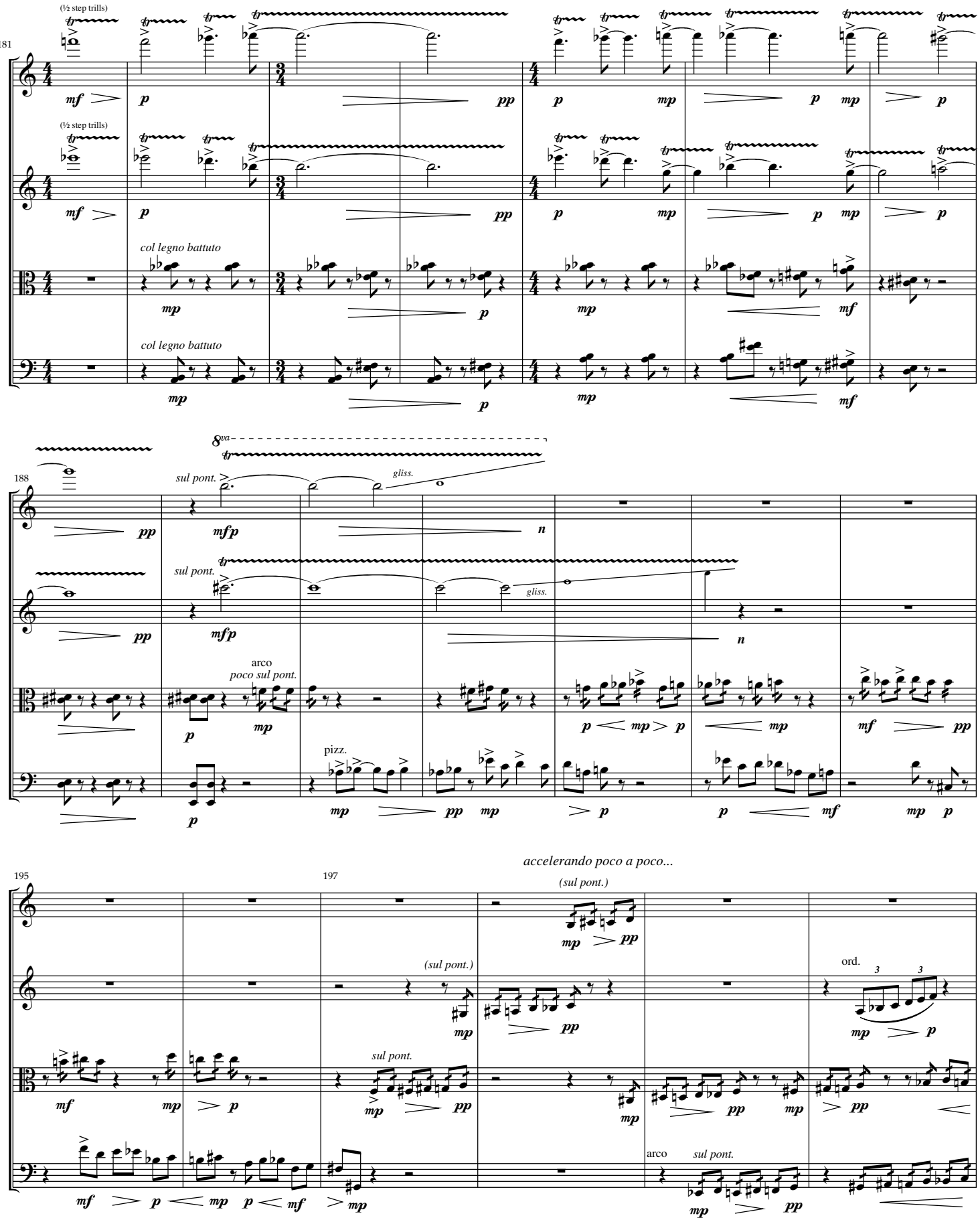

101
sul tasto
106
sul tasto
110
pizz.
pizz.
ord.
ord.
crescendo...
117
120
3X
arco
ord.
2X
arco
ord.

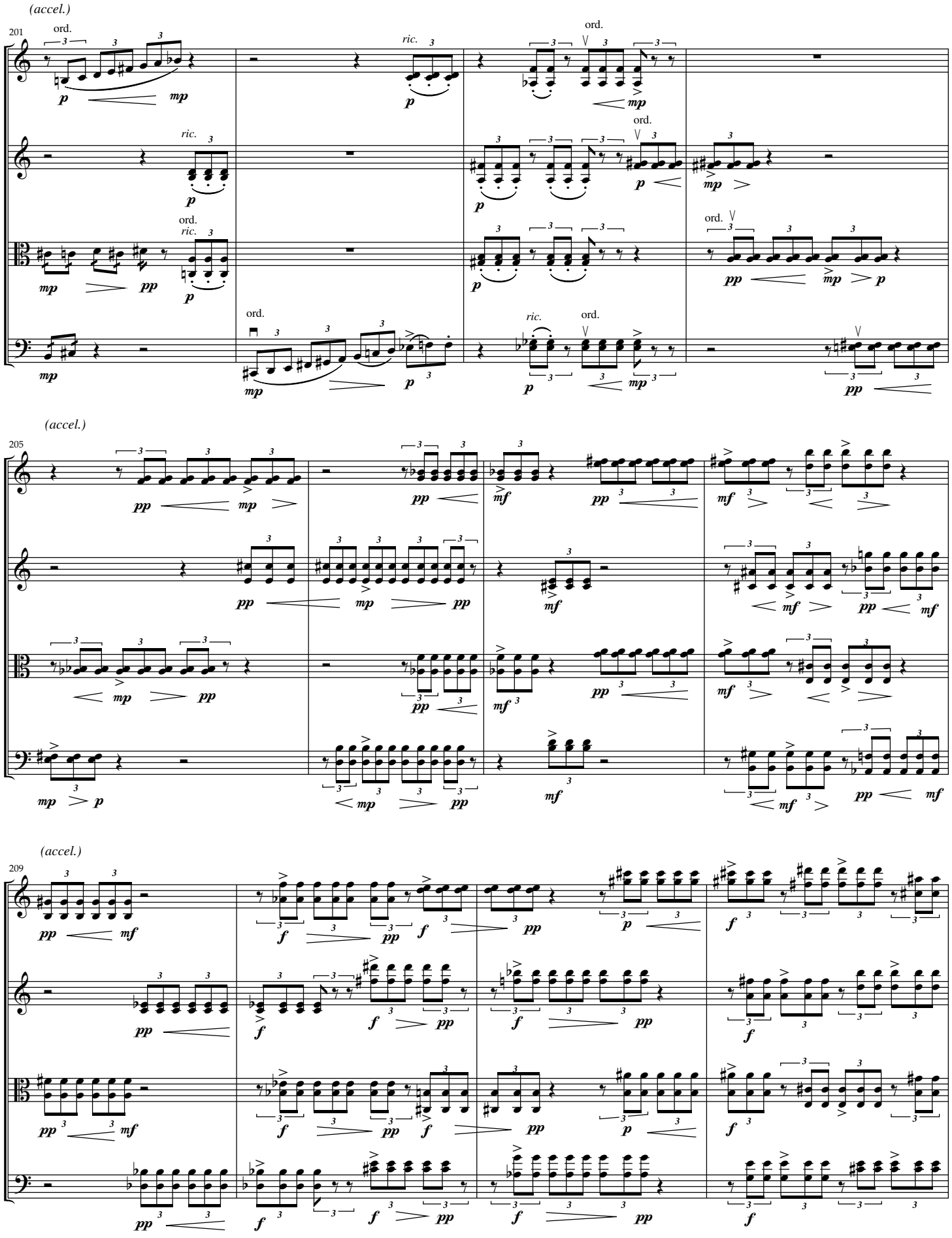

123
col legno battuto
col legno battuto
131
134
arco
sul pont.
ord.
arco
sul pont.
pizz.
(ord.)
138
142
arco

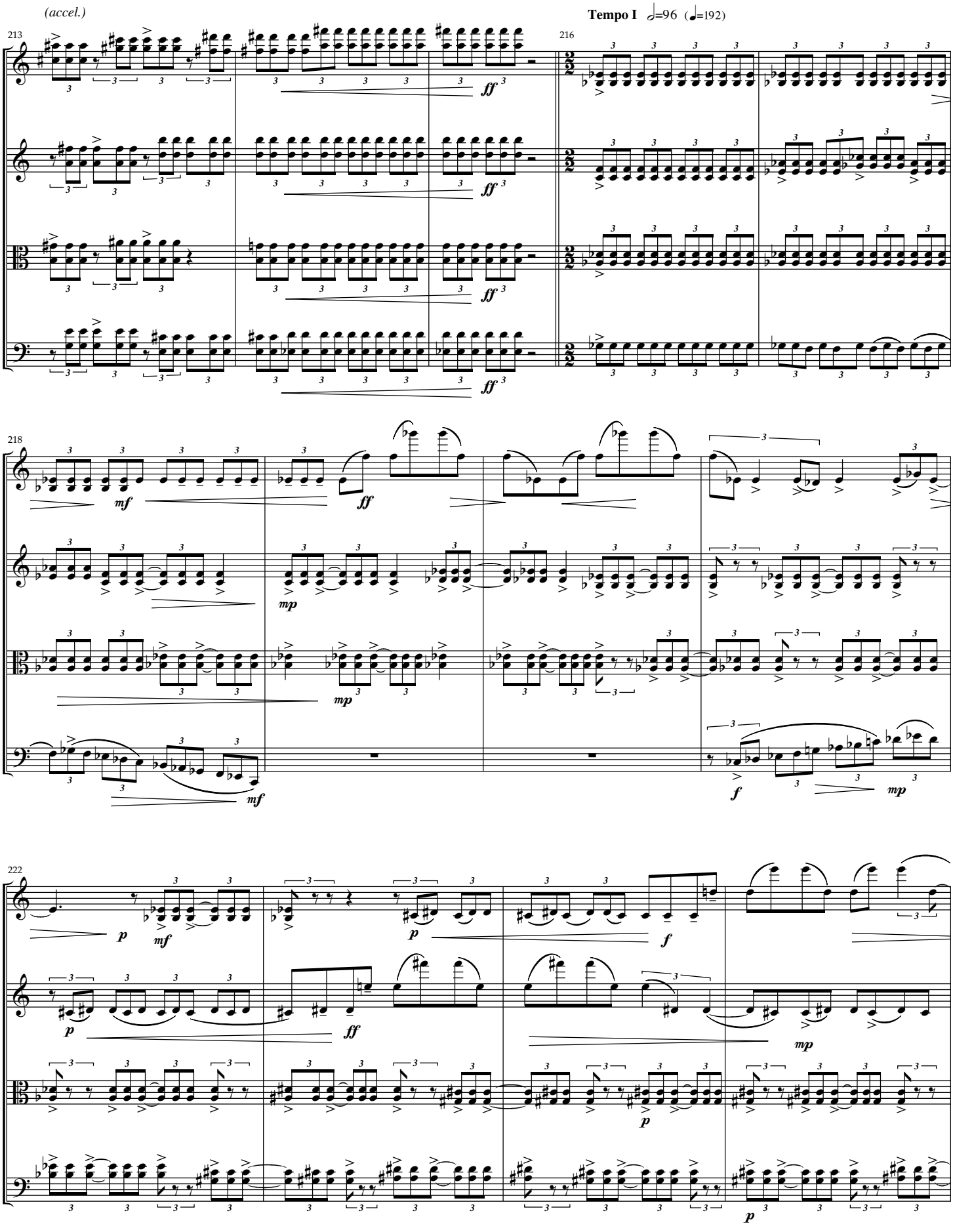


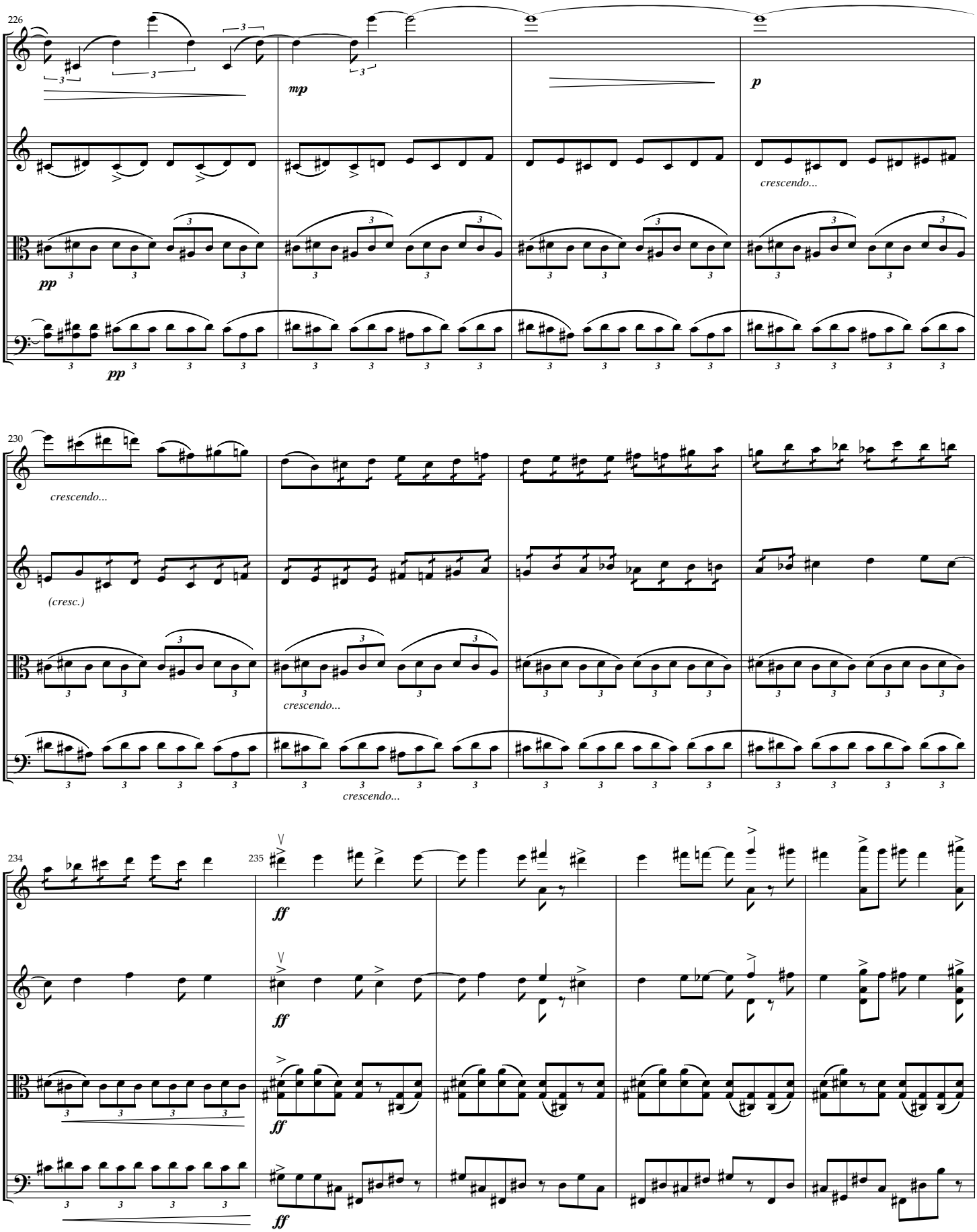
3 = (♩=144)

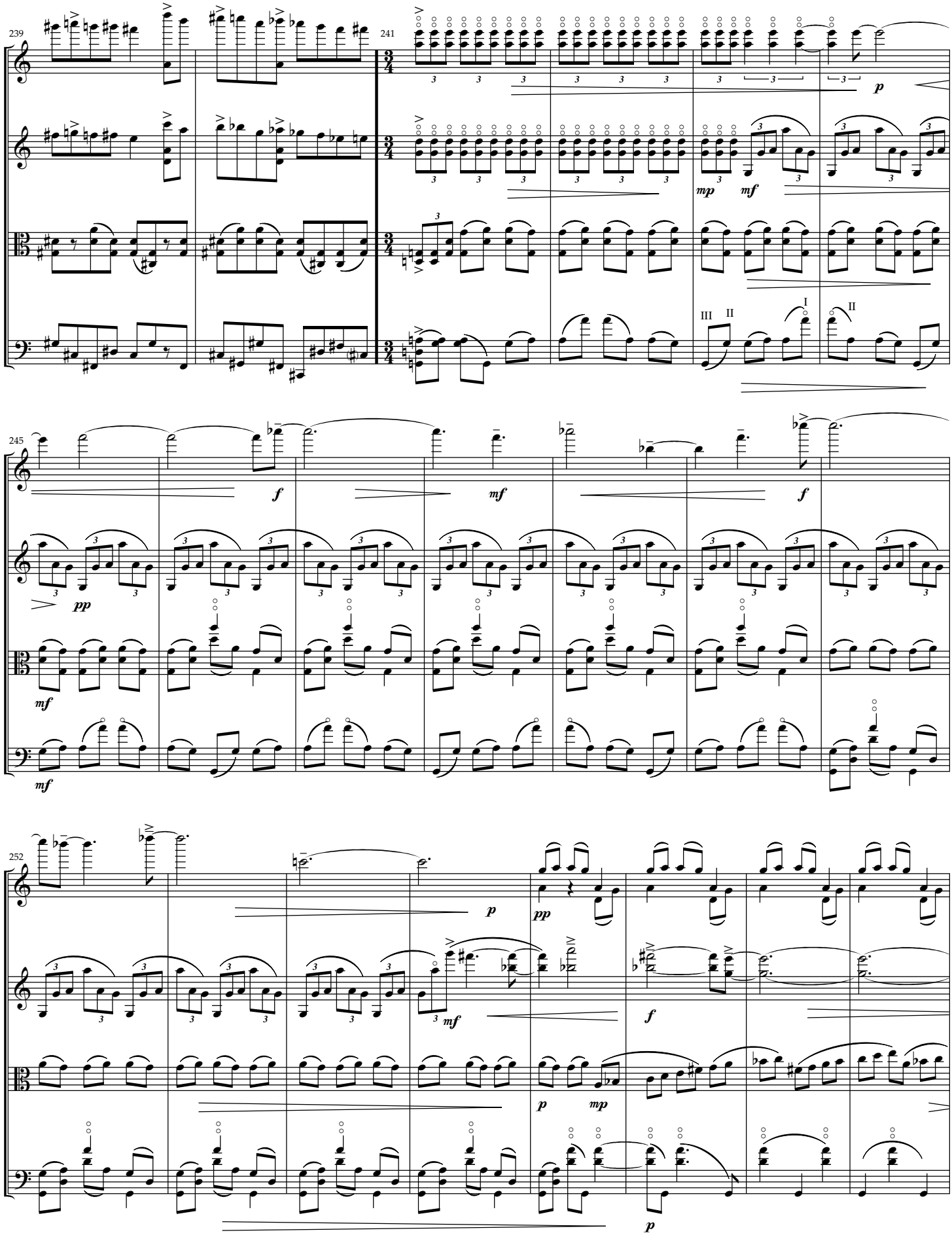

161
ord.
ord.
169
173
176
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.

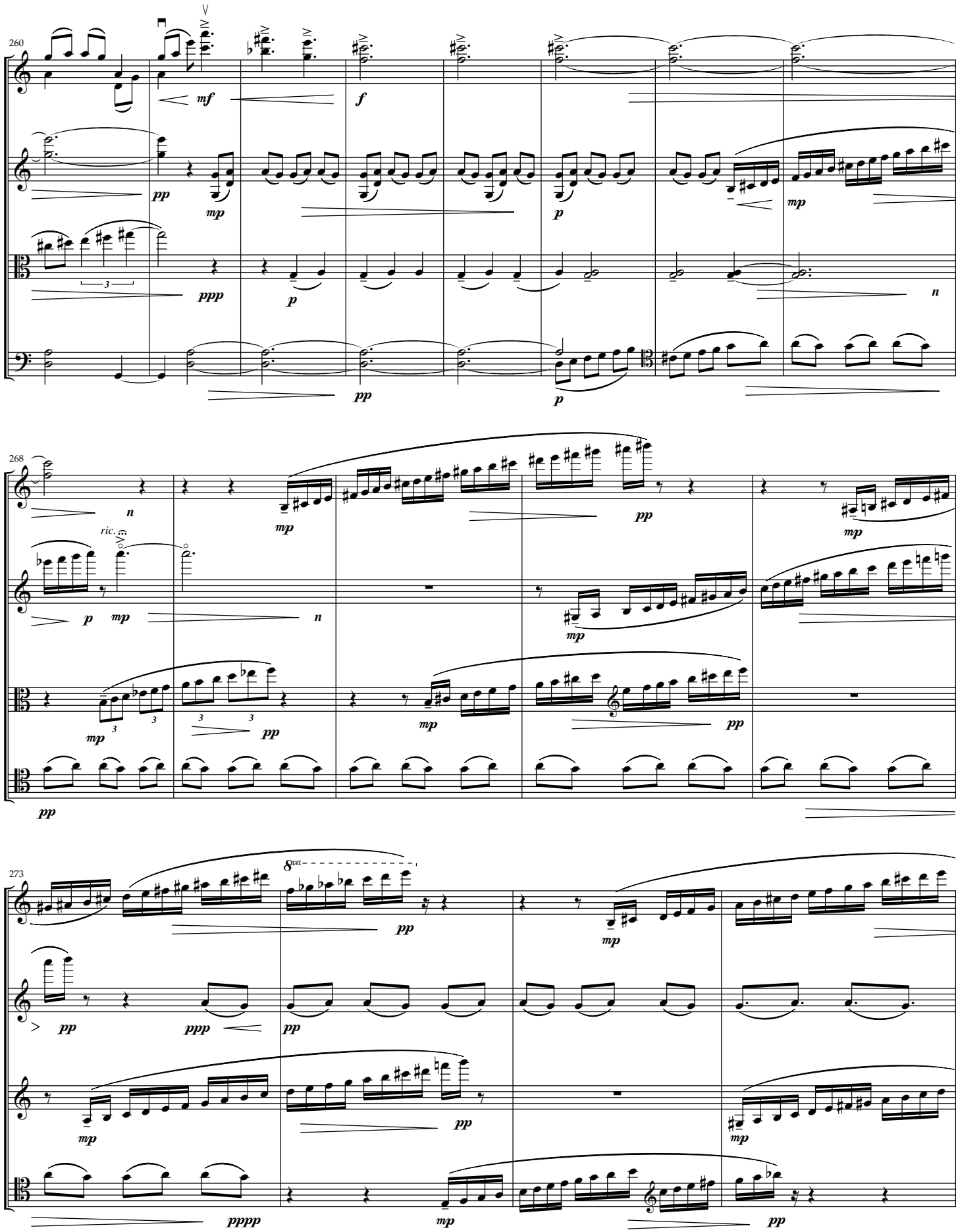

181
(½ step trills)
(½ step trills)
col legno battuto
col legno battuto
188
8va
sul pont.
gliss.
sul pont.
gliss.
arco
poco sul pont.
pizz.
195
197
accelerando poco a poco...
(sul pont.)
(sul pont.)
ord.
sul pont.
arco
sul pont.

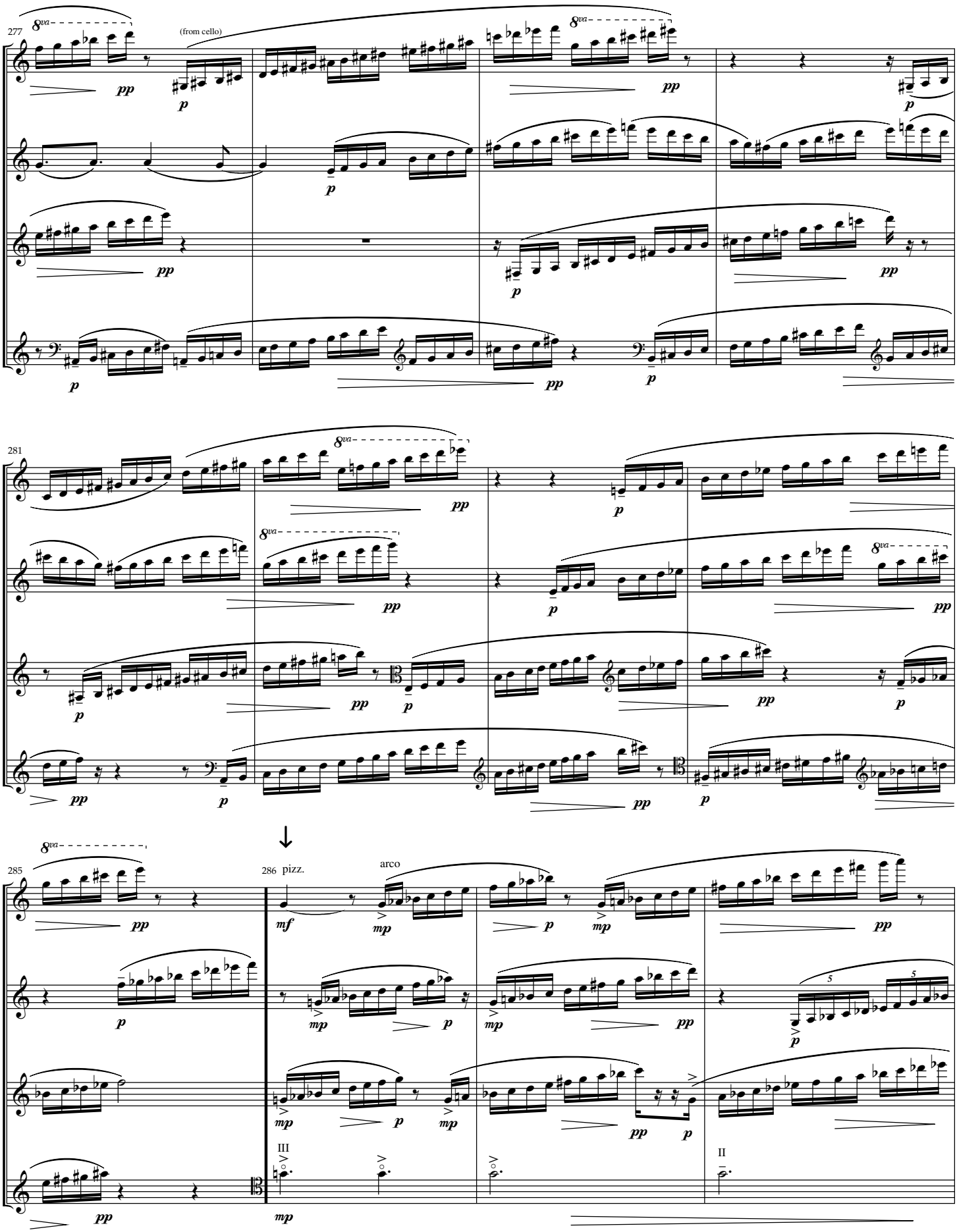

(accel.)
201
ord.
ric.
(accel.)
205
(accel.)
209

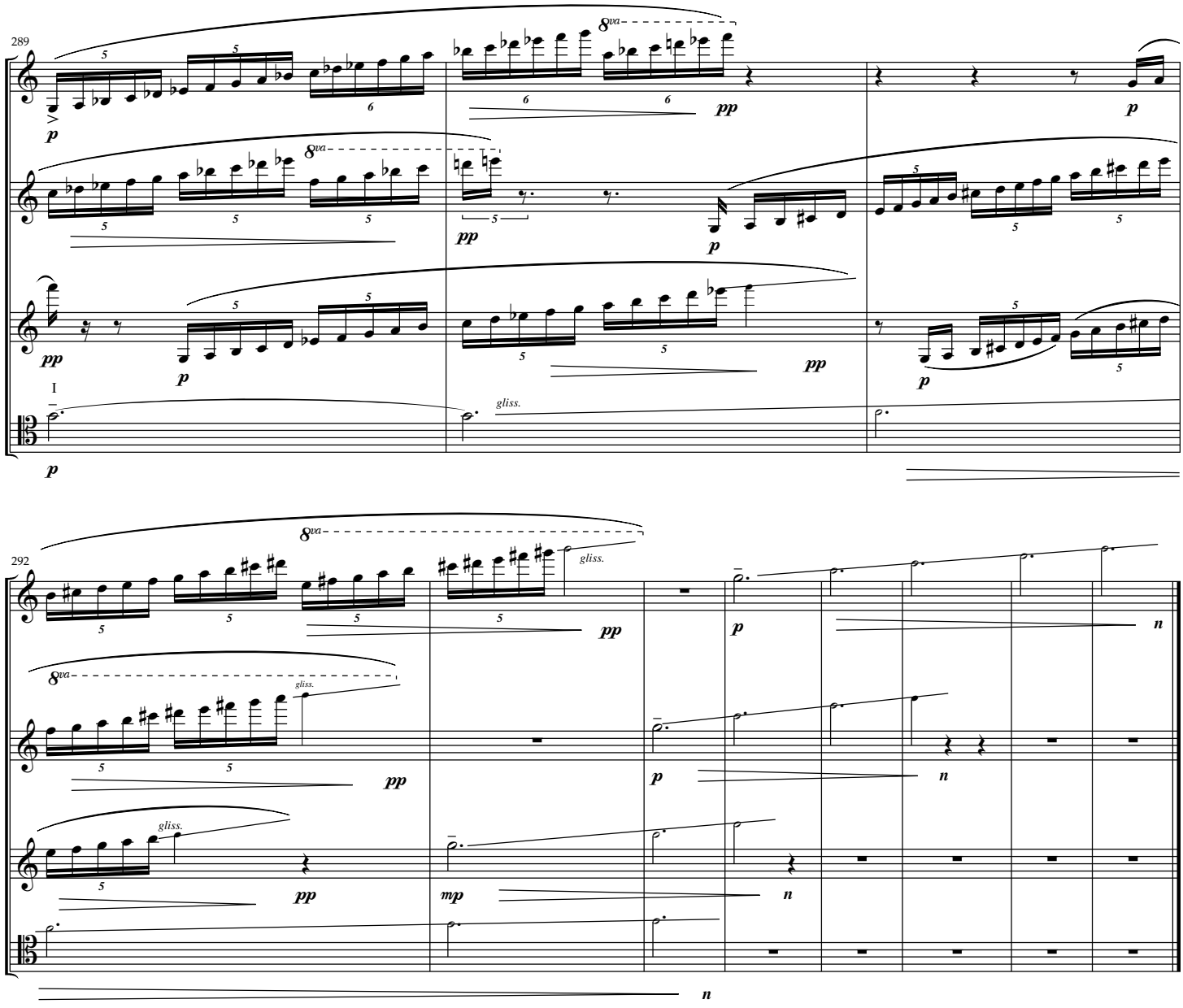

(accel.)
Tempo I 𝅗𝅥=96 (♩=192)
213
216
218
222


226
mp
p
pp
pp
crescendo...
230
crescendo...
(cresc.)
crescendo...
crescendo...
234
235
ff
ff
ff
ff


239
241
245
252

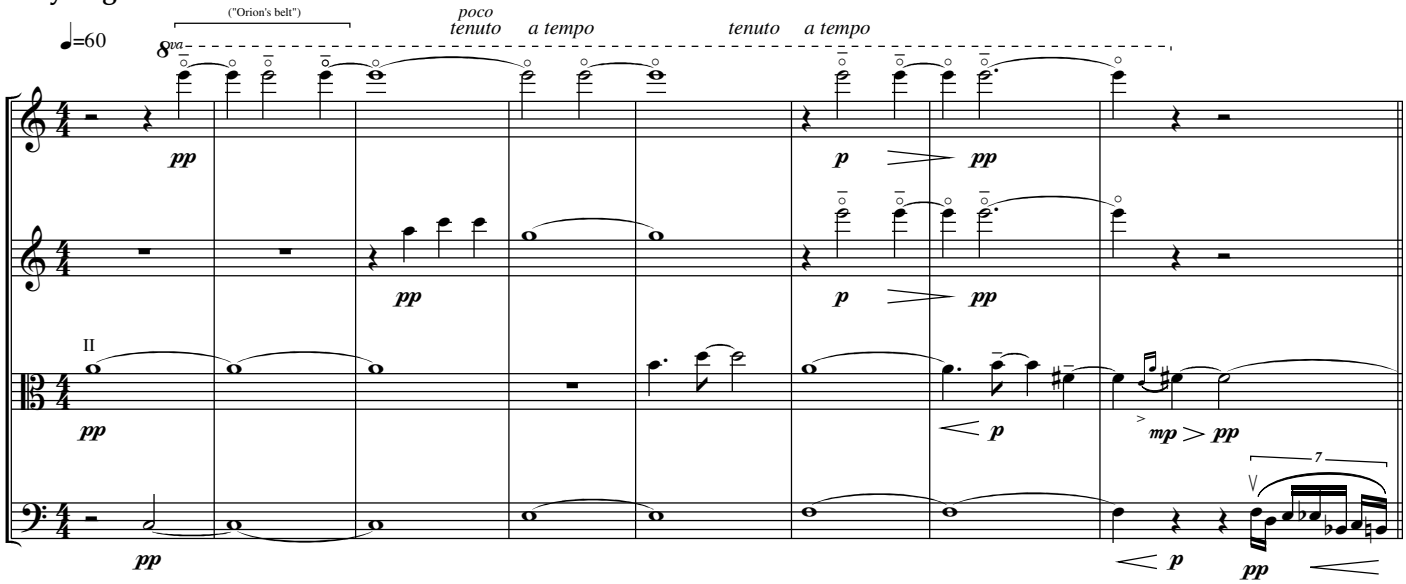

260
mf
f
pp
mp
p
ppp
n
268
ric.
273
8va
pppp

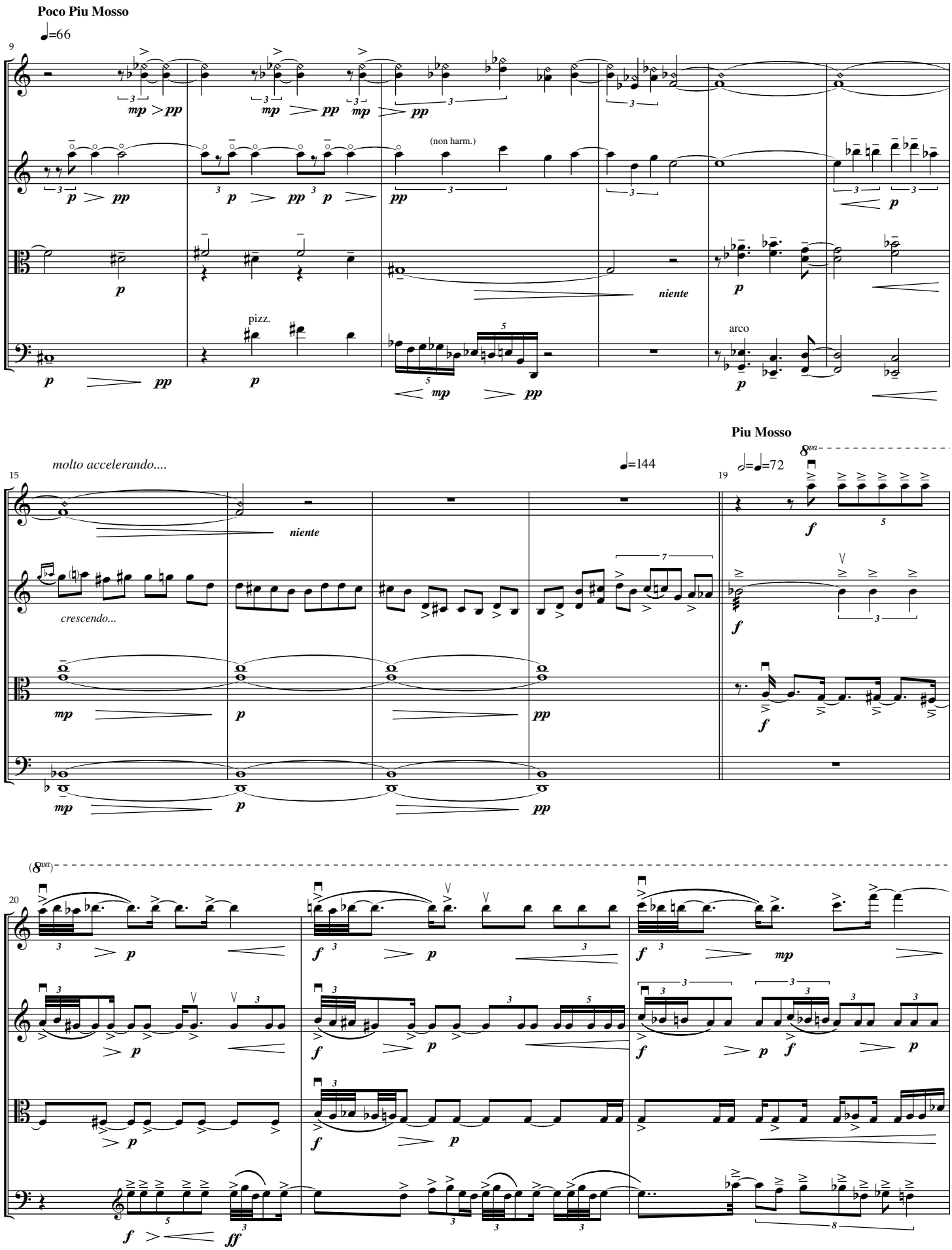

277
8va
(from cello)
pp
p
281
285
286
pizz.
arco
mf
mp
III
II

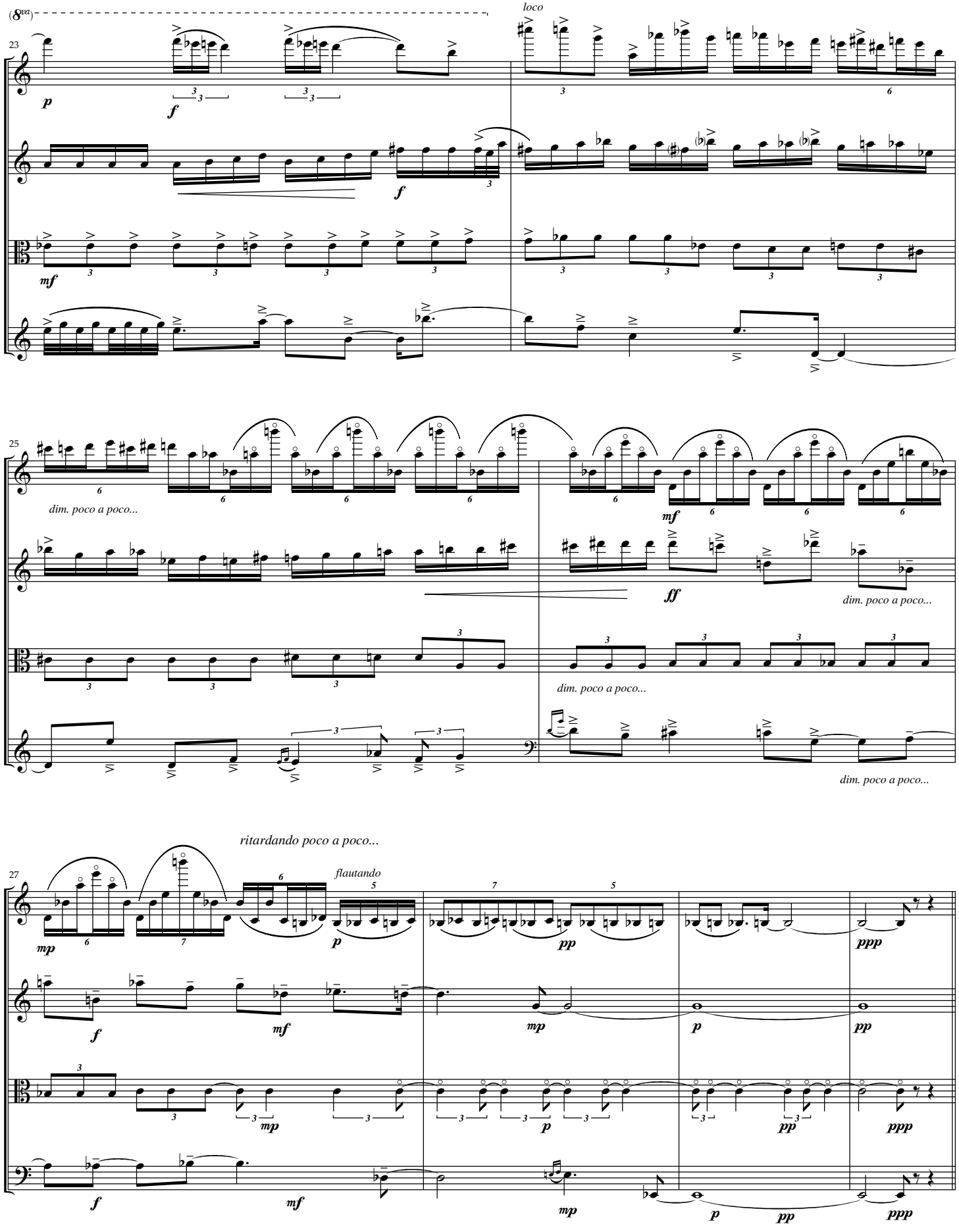


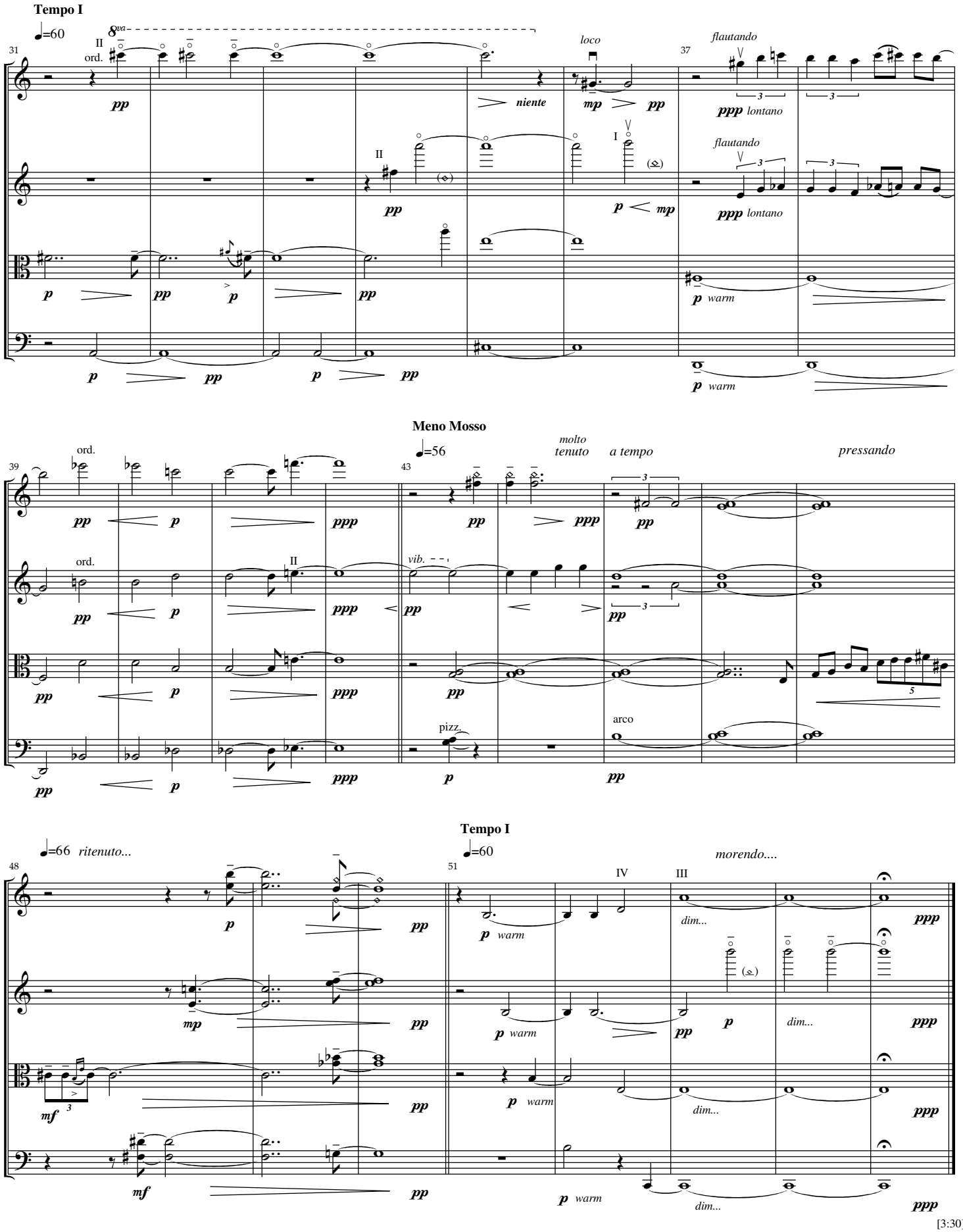
[5:22]

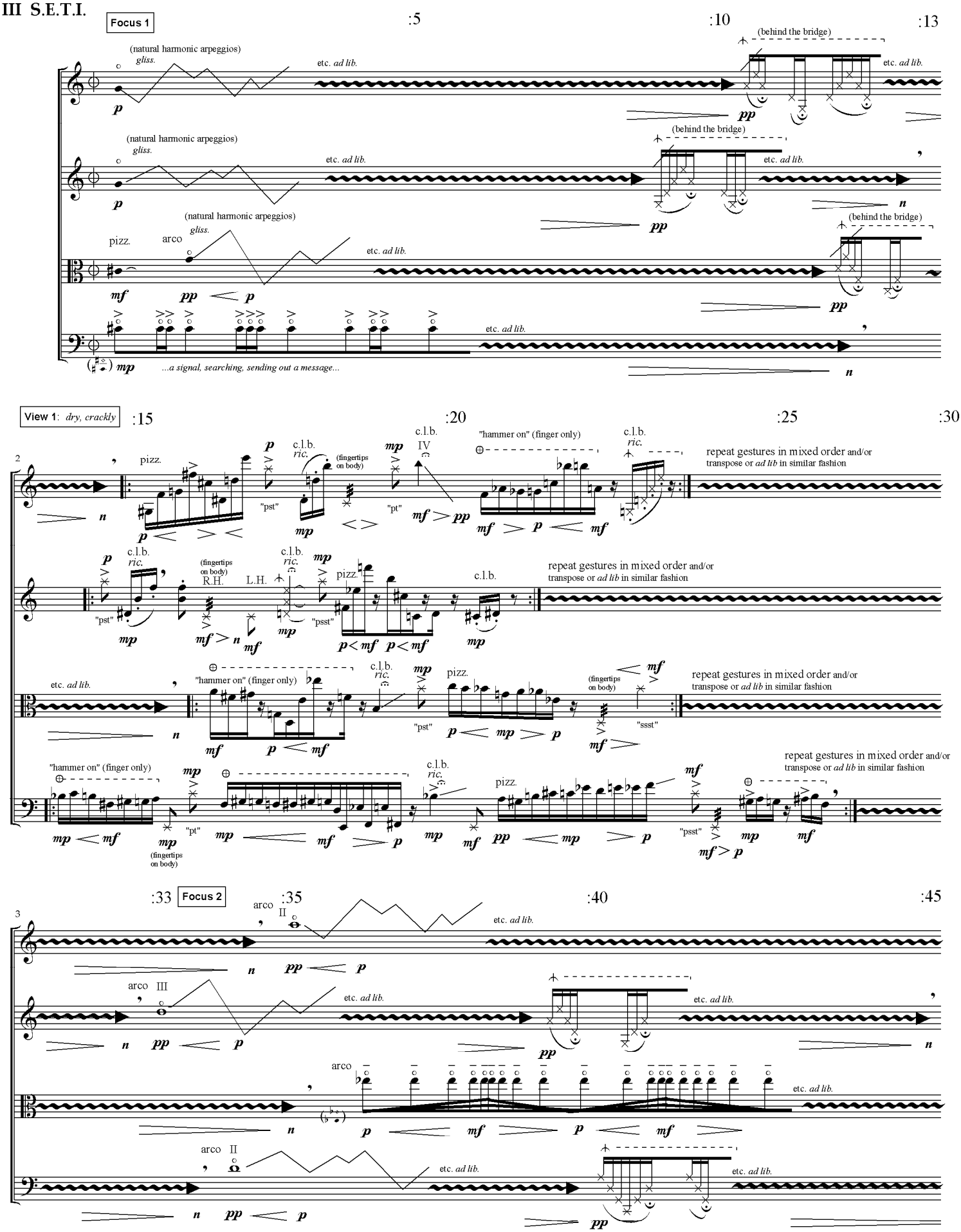
II Starry Night




Poco Piu Mosso
♩=66
(non harm.)
pizz.
niente
arco
molto accelerando....
crescendo...
♩=144
Piu Mosso
𝅗𝅥=♩=72
8va
(8va)


(8va)
loco
23
p
f
f
mf
25
dim. poco a poco...
mf
ff
dim. poco a poco...
dim. poco a poco...
dim. poco a poco...
dim. poco a poco...
ritardando poco a poco...
27
mp
flautando
p
pp
ppp
f
mf
mp
p
pp
f
mf
mp
p
pp
ppp
f
mf
mp
p
pp
ppp


Tempo I
♩=60
8va
ord.
loco
flautando
niente
lontano
warm
Meno Mosso
♩=56
molto tenuto
a tempo
pressando
vib.
pizz.
arco
♩=66 ritenuto...
Tempo I
♩=60
morendo....
dim...
[3:30]


Focus 1
:5
:10
:13
(natural harmonic arpeggios)
gliss.
etc. ad lib.
(behind the bridge)
pizz.
arco
...a signal, searching, sending out a message...
View 1: dry, crackly
:15
:20
:25
:30
c.l.b.
ric.
IV
"hammer on" (finger only)
repeat gestures in mixed order and/or
transpose or ad lib in similar fashion
(fingertips on body)
R.H.
L.H.
"pst"
"pt"
"psst"
"ssst"
:33
Focus 2
:35
:40
:45
II
III

tutti: "sss"/"sshh"/tooth whistle - constantly modulating (until Focus 3)

View 2: *fluid, skitterish*

:50

:55

4

molto sul ponticello very fast (bow as needed)

sul tasto (½ step trills)

molto sul ponticello

1:00

1:05

5

sul tasto

molto sul ponticello

etc. *ad lib.*

1:08

Focus 3

1:12

6

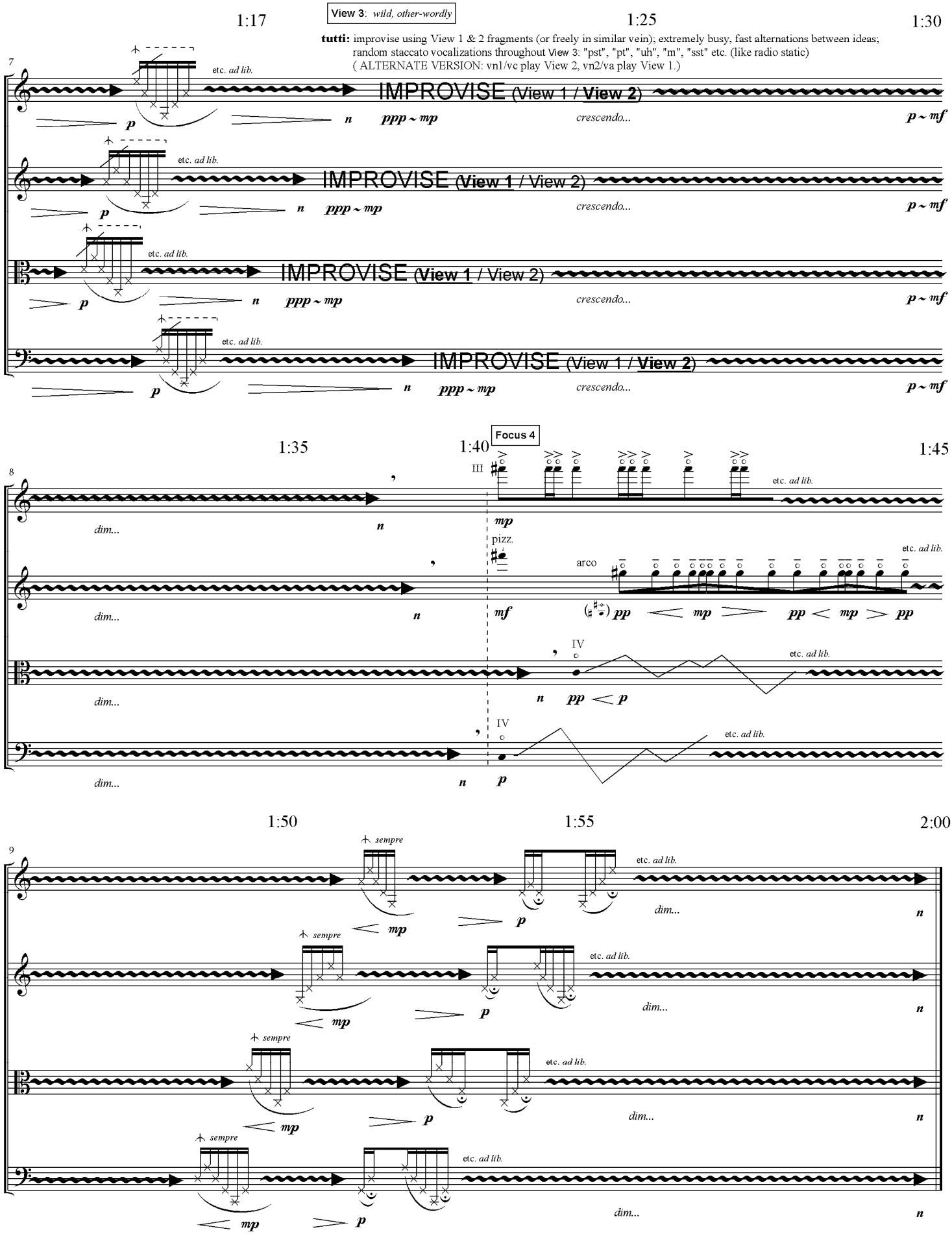
(m.s.p.)

gliss.

ord.

ric.

(narrow shifts ↓↑ to vary harmonics)

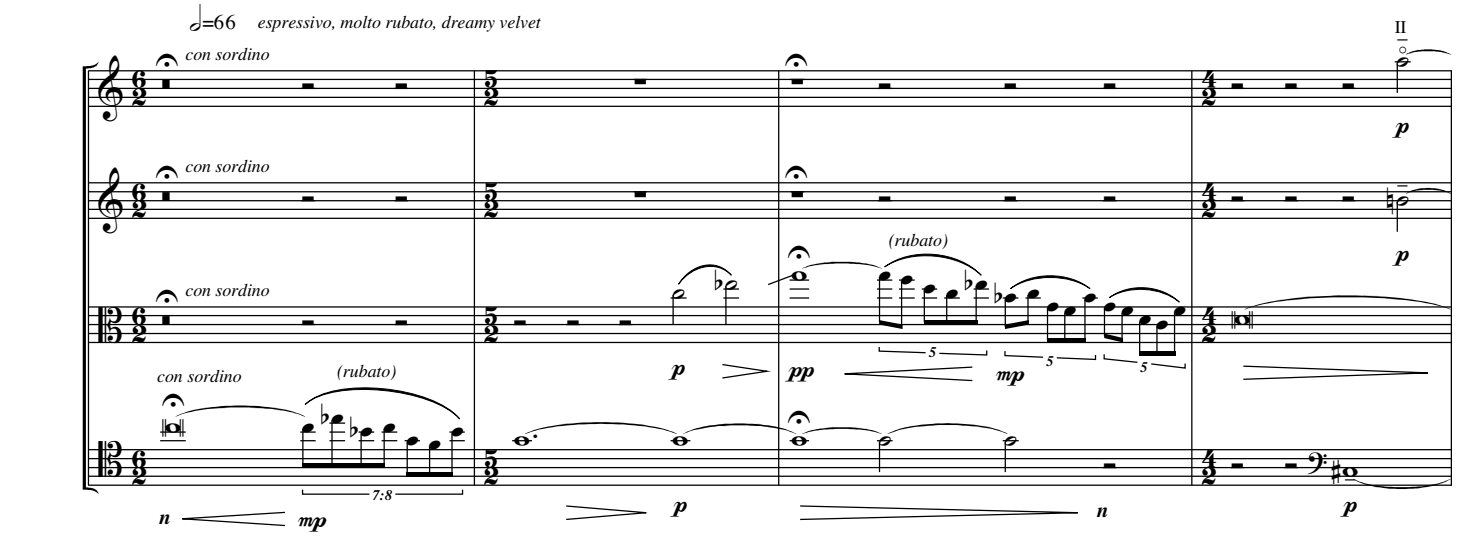

1:17
View 3: wild, other-wordly
1:25
1:30
tutti: improvise using View 1 & 2 fragments (or freely in similar vein); extremely busy, fast alternations between ideas;
random staccato vocalizations throughout View 3: "pst", "pt", "uh", "m", "sst" etc. (like radio static)
(ALTERNATE VERSION: vn1/vc play View 2, vn2/va play View 1.)
7
etc. ad lib.
IMPROVISE (View 1 / View 2)
IMPROVISE (View 1 / View 2)
IMPROVISE (View 1 / View 2)
p
n
ppp ~ mp
crescendo...
p ~ mf
1:35
1:40
Focus 4
1:45
8
III
IV
pizz.
arco
dim...
mp
mf
pp
p
1:50
1:55
2:00
9
sempre
mp
p
dim...

IV Wintu Dream Song

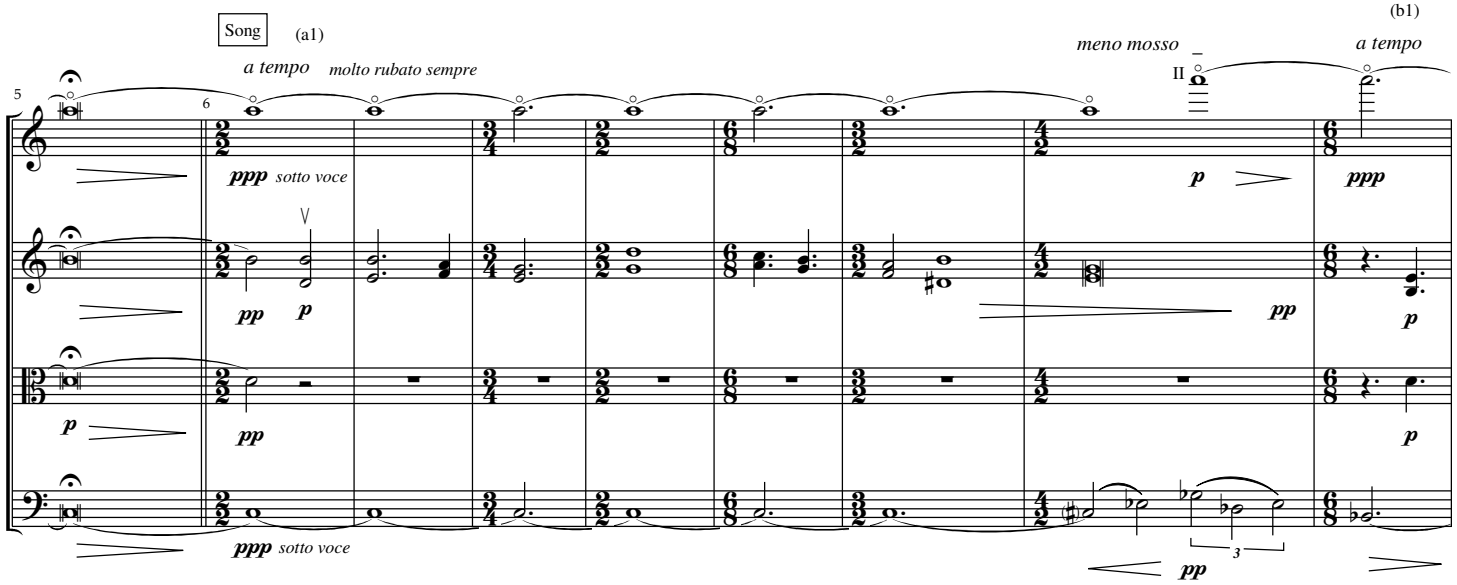
It is above that you and I shall go;
Along the Milky Way you and I shall go;
Along the flower trail you and I shall go;
Picking flowers on our way you and I shall go.

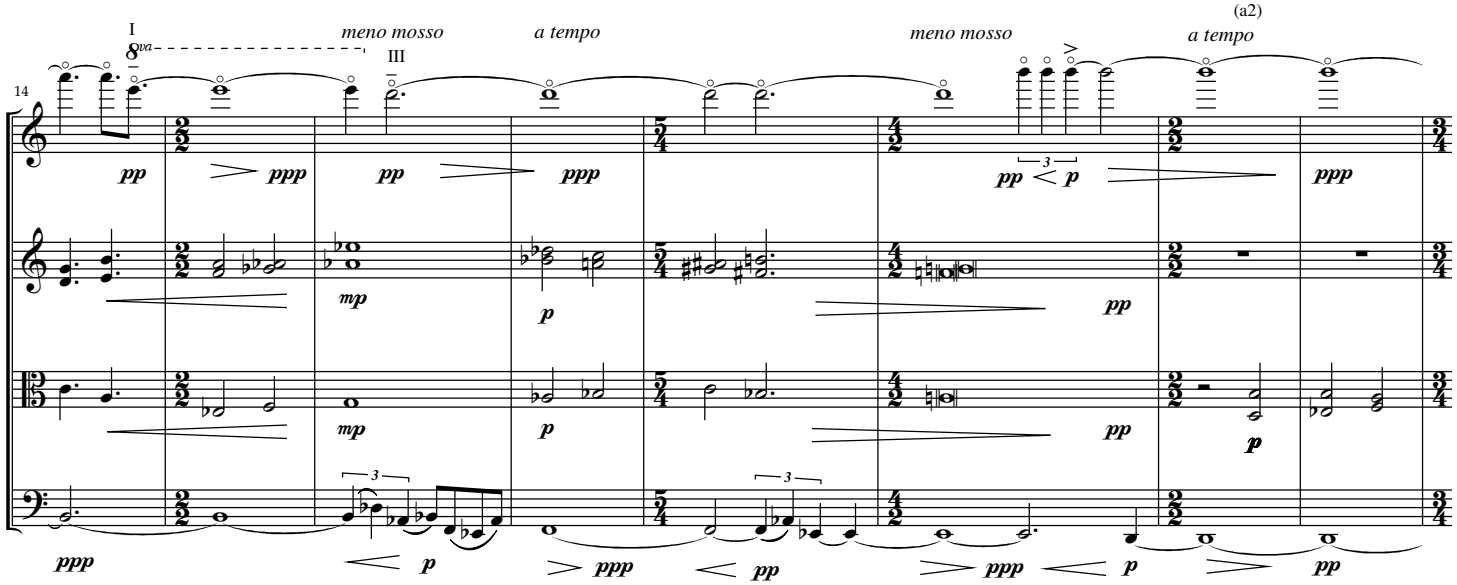
song form: a b a b a c d
(in recap.: a b a c d)

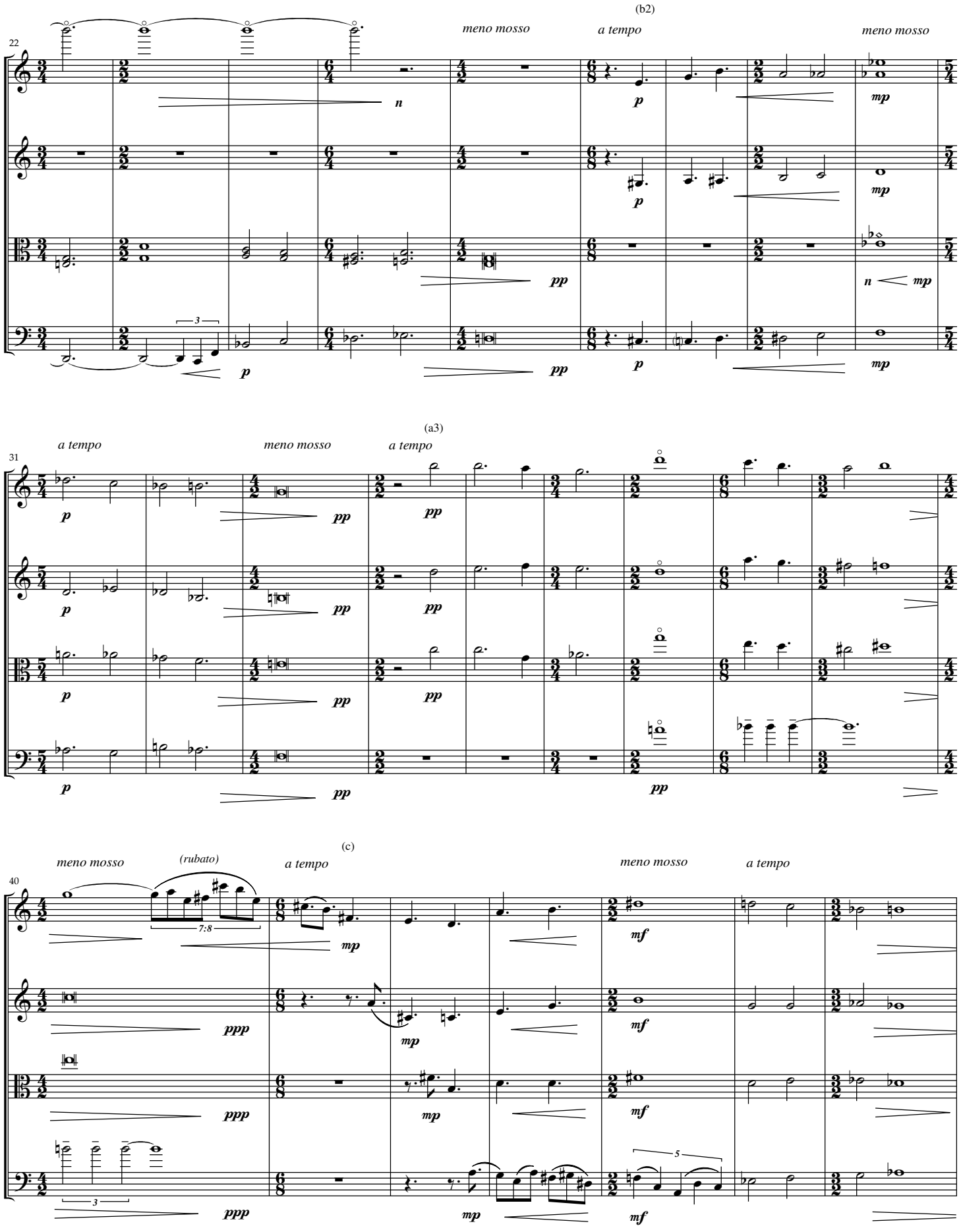
Introduction

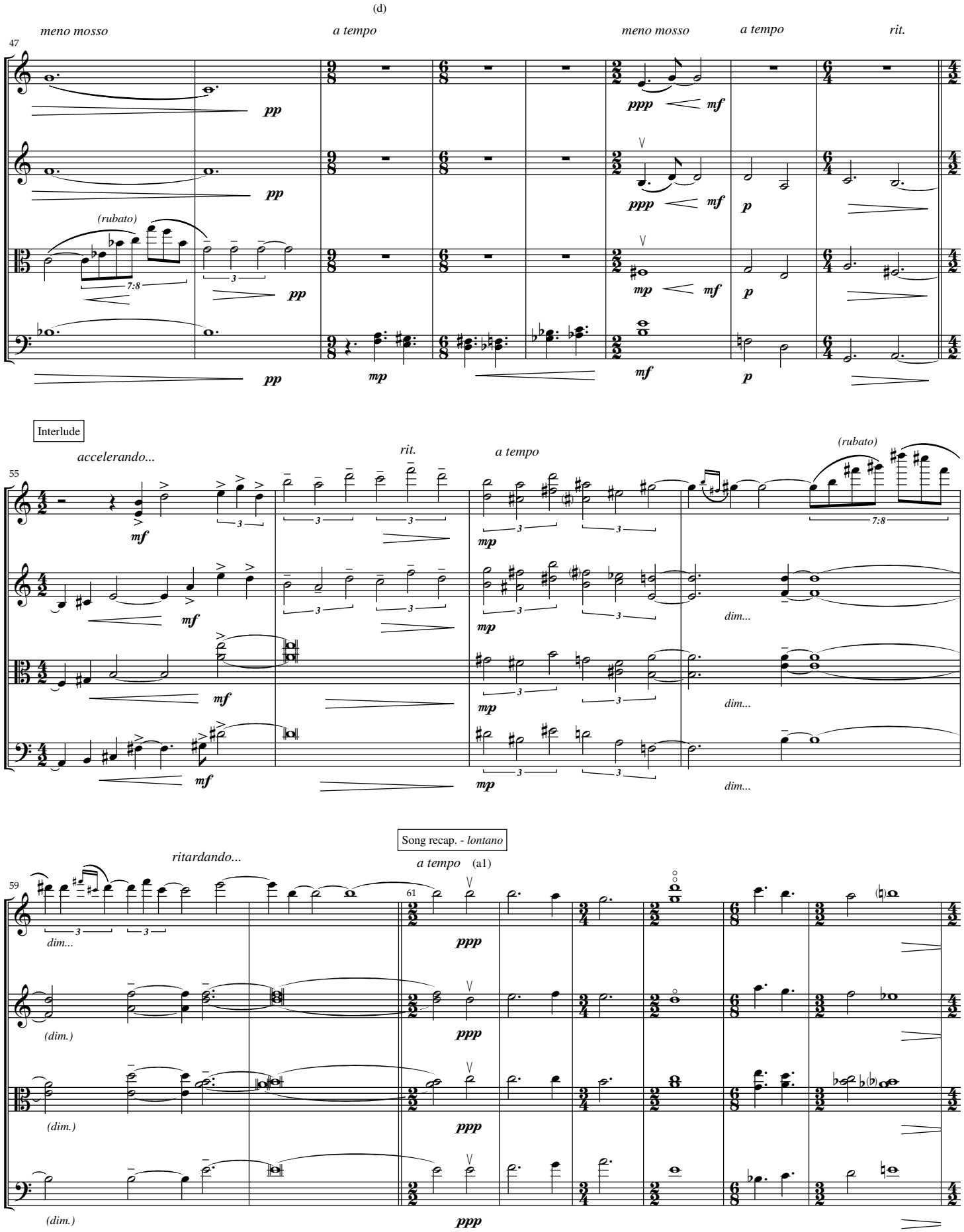


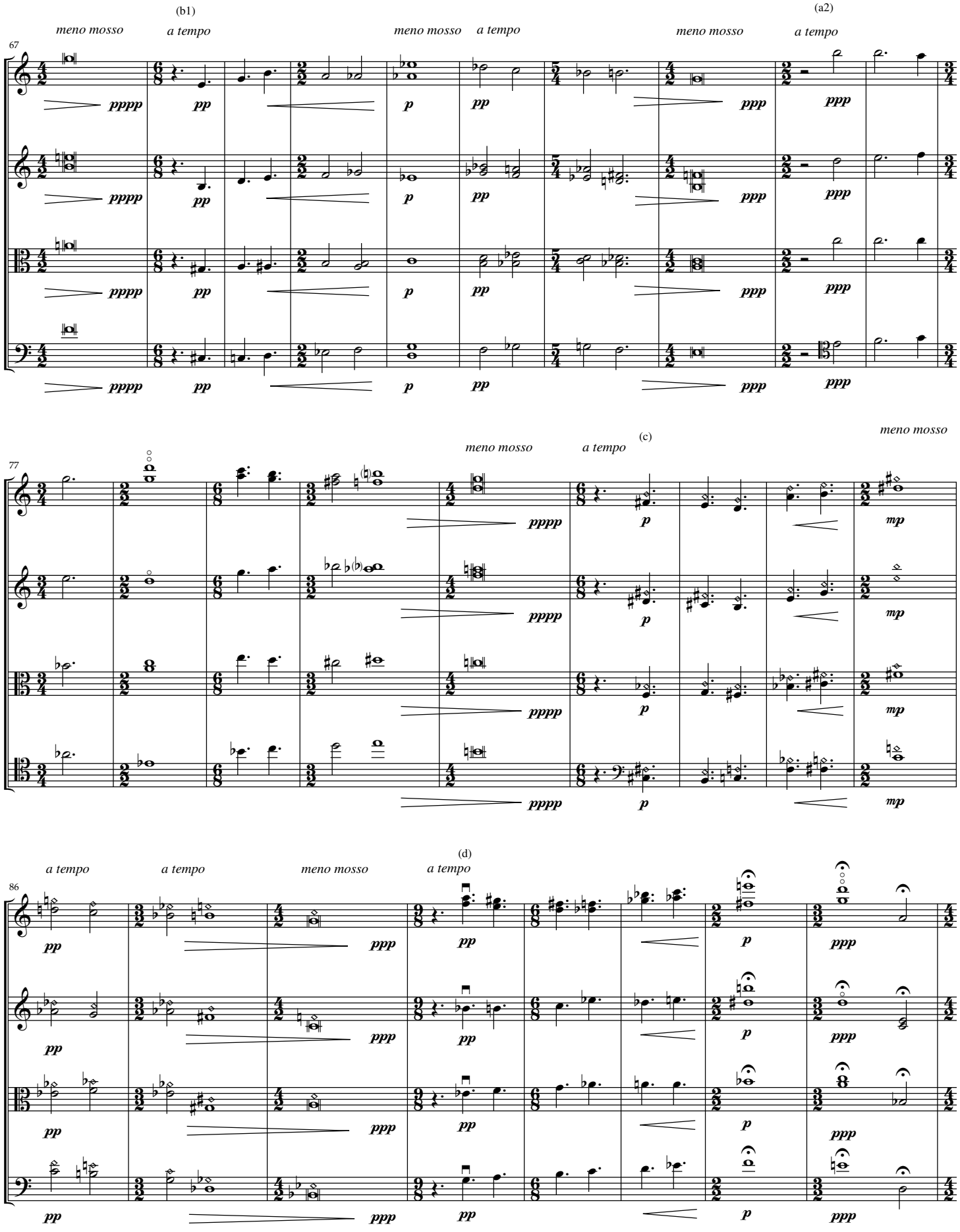
Song

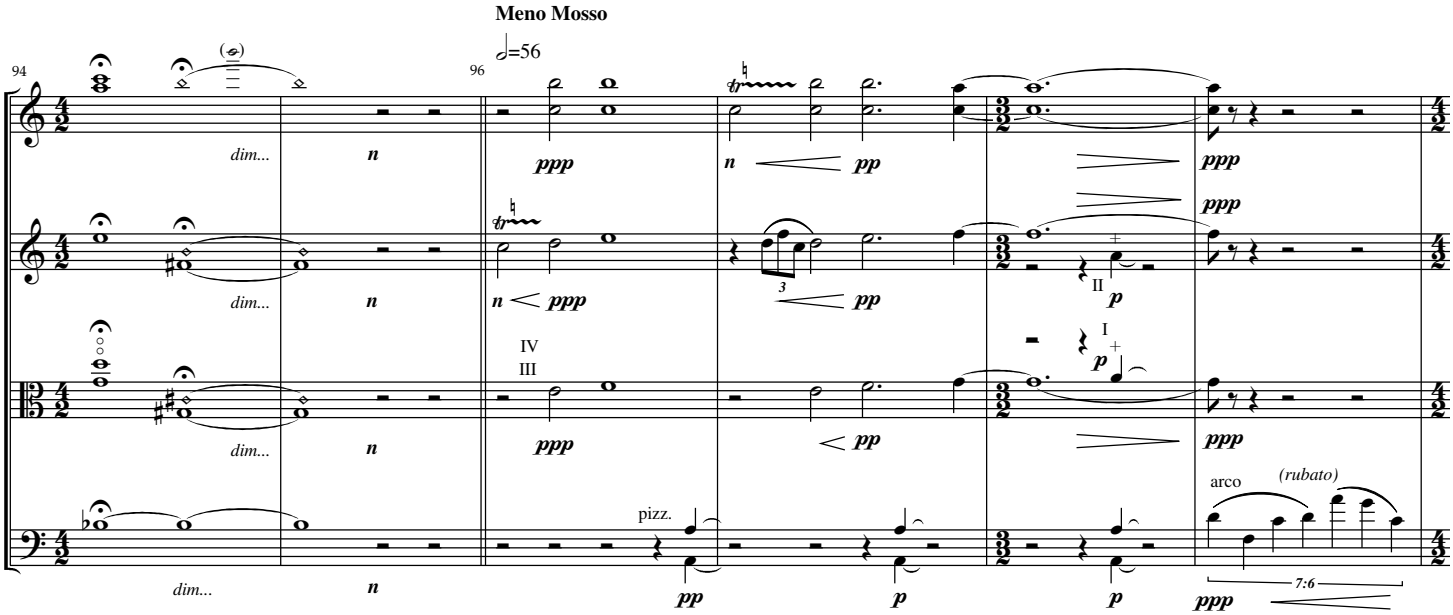


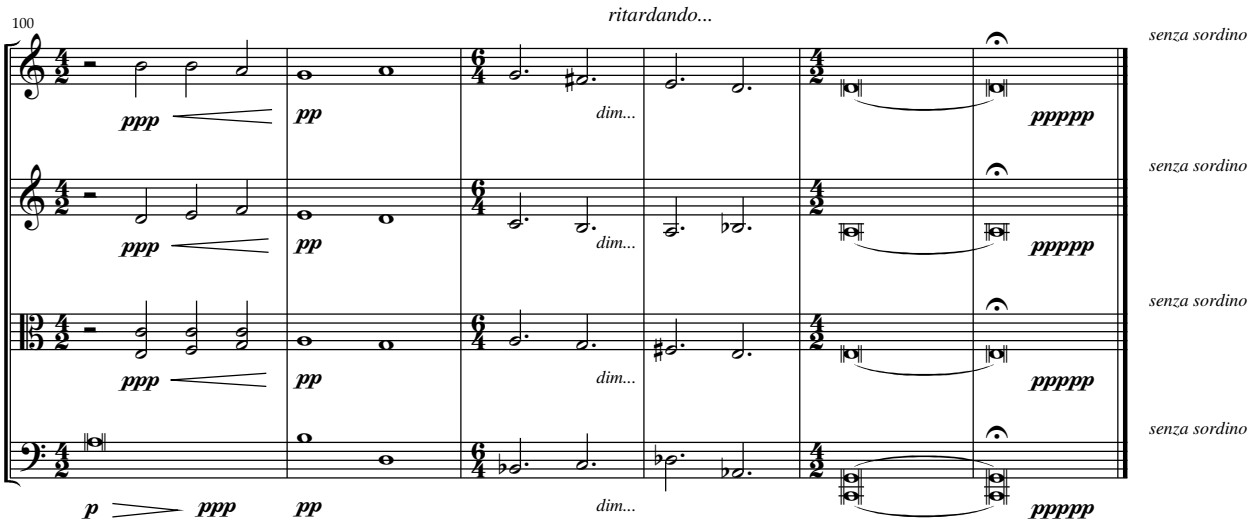



(b2)
22
meno mosso
a tempo
meno mosso
(a3)
31
a tempo
meno mosso
a tempo
(c)
40
meno mosso
(rubato)
a tempo
meno mosso
a tempo


(d)
meno mosso
a tempo
meno mosso
a tempo
rit.
47
pp
ppp
mf
p
(rubato)
7:8
3
mp
Interlude
accelerando...
rit.
a tempo
(rubato)
55
dim...
Song recap. - lontano
ritardando...
a tempo
(a1)
59
61
(dim.)

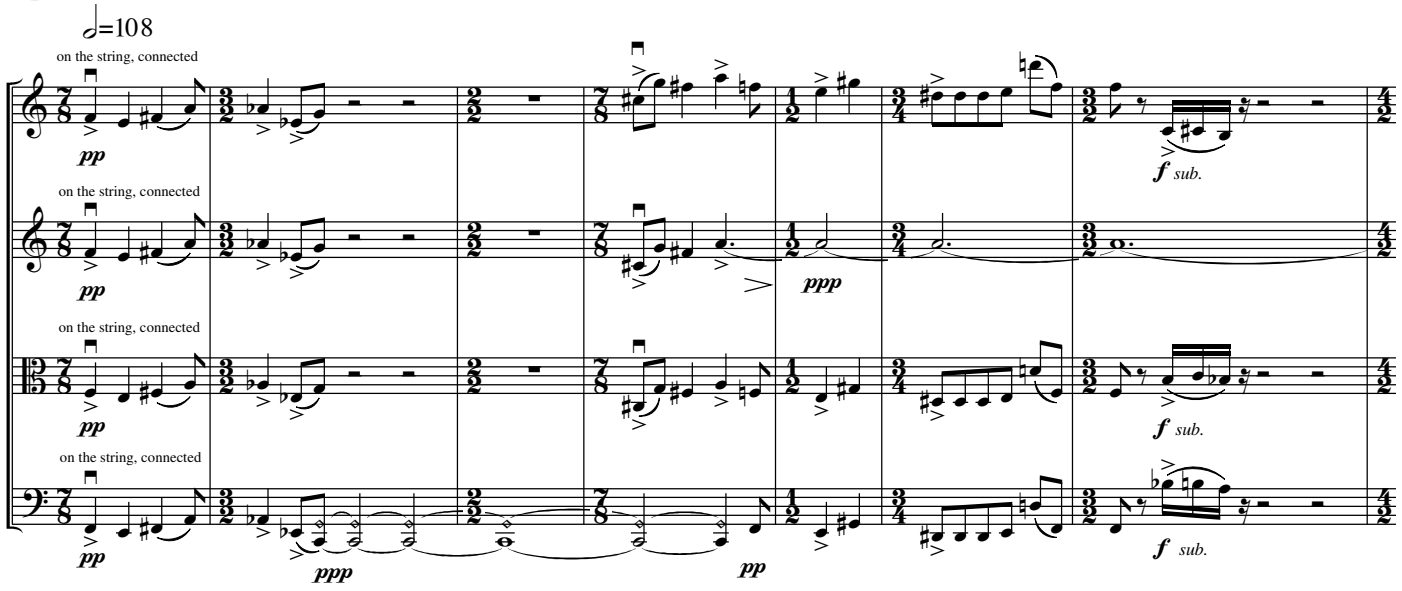

(b1)
(a2)
(c)
(d)
meno mosso
a tempo
67
77
86
pppp
ppp
pp
p
mp

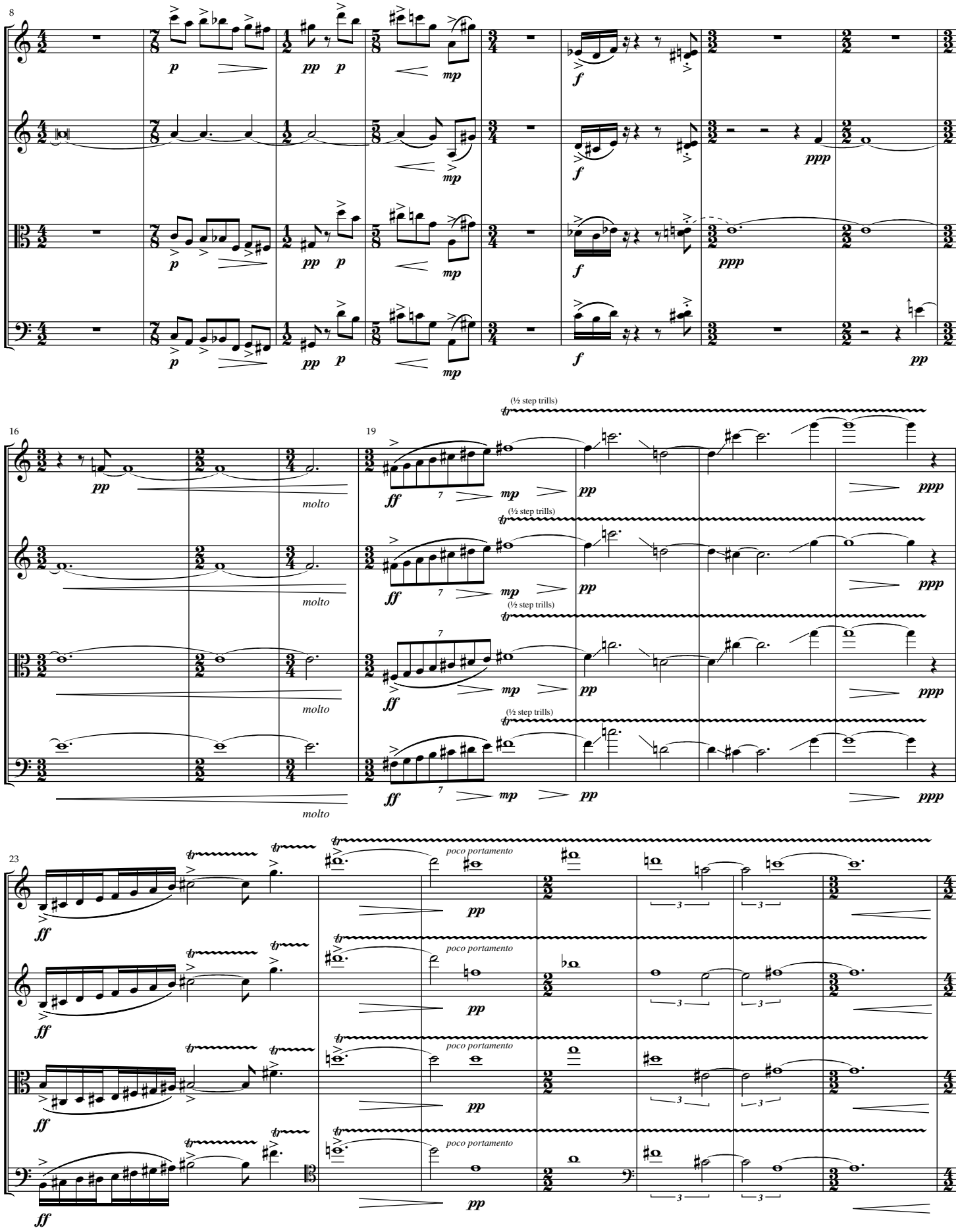


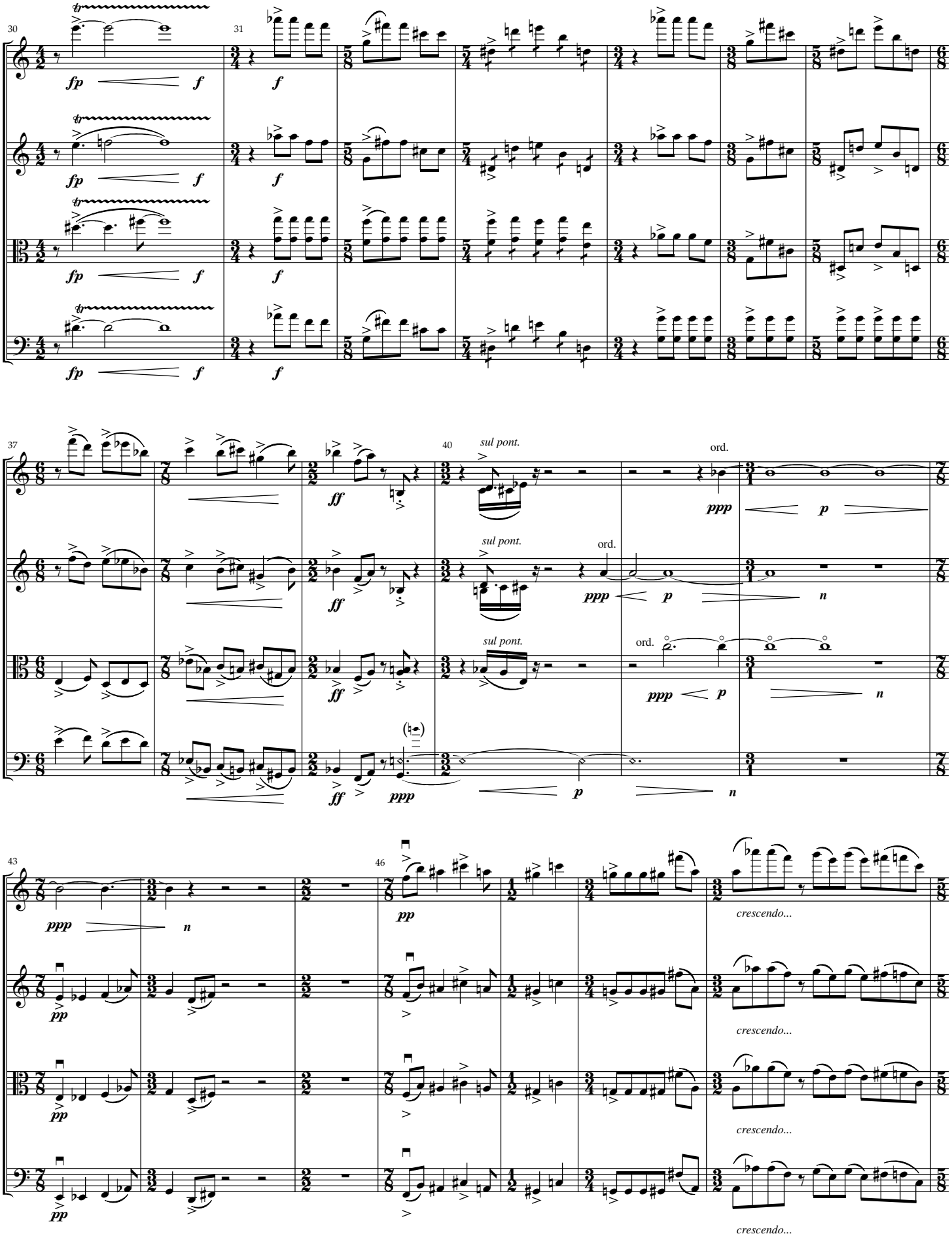


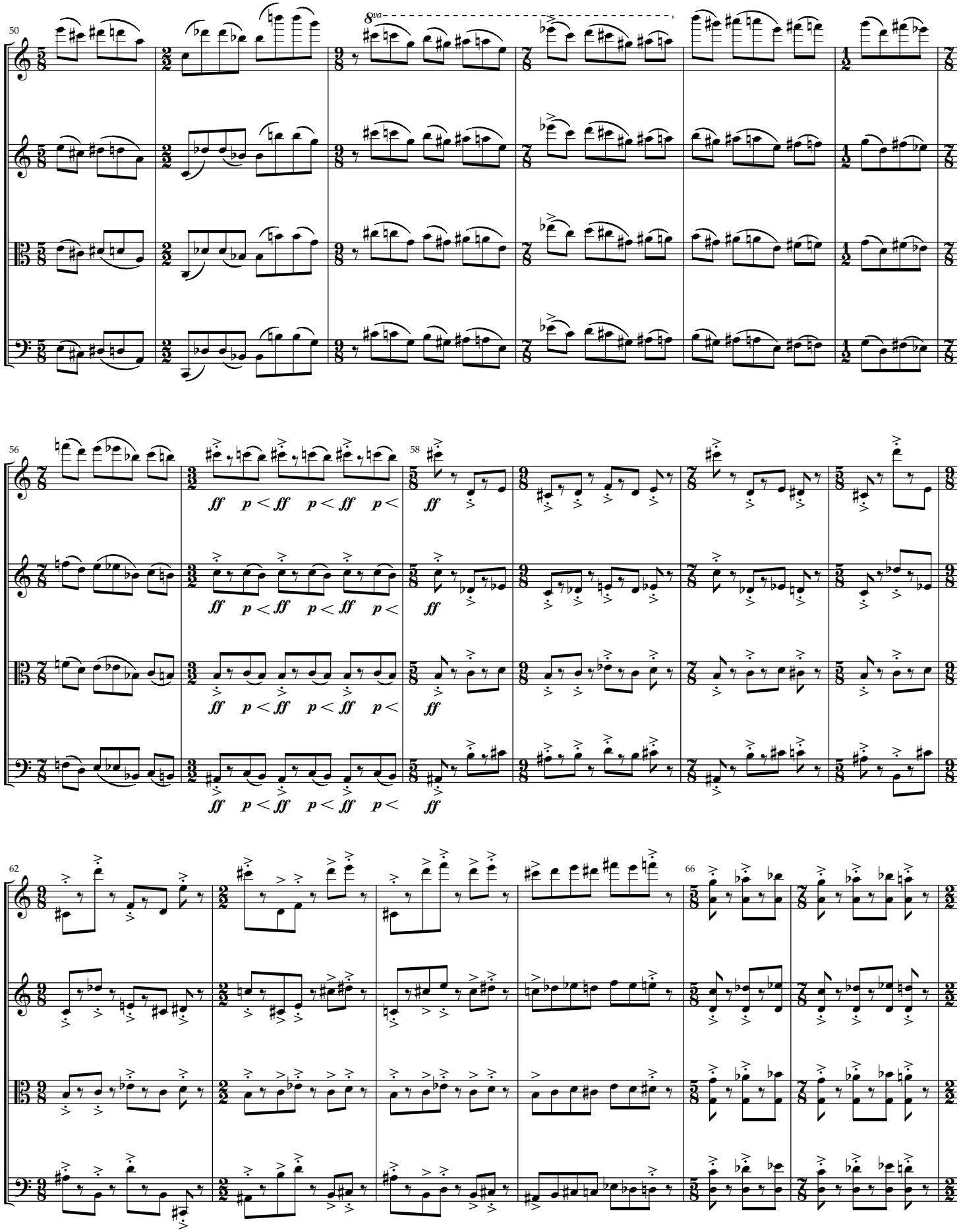
[4:20]

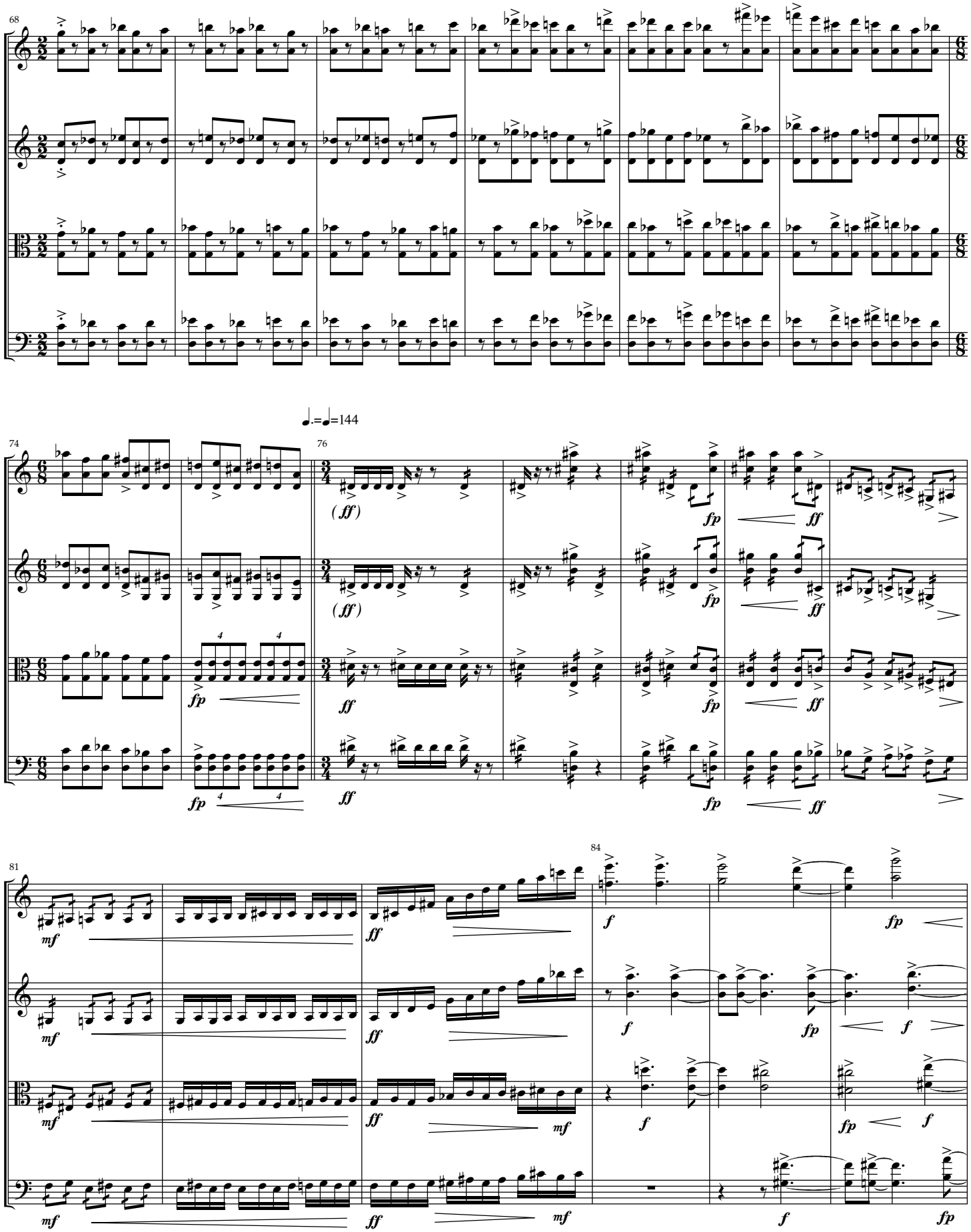
V Supernova

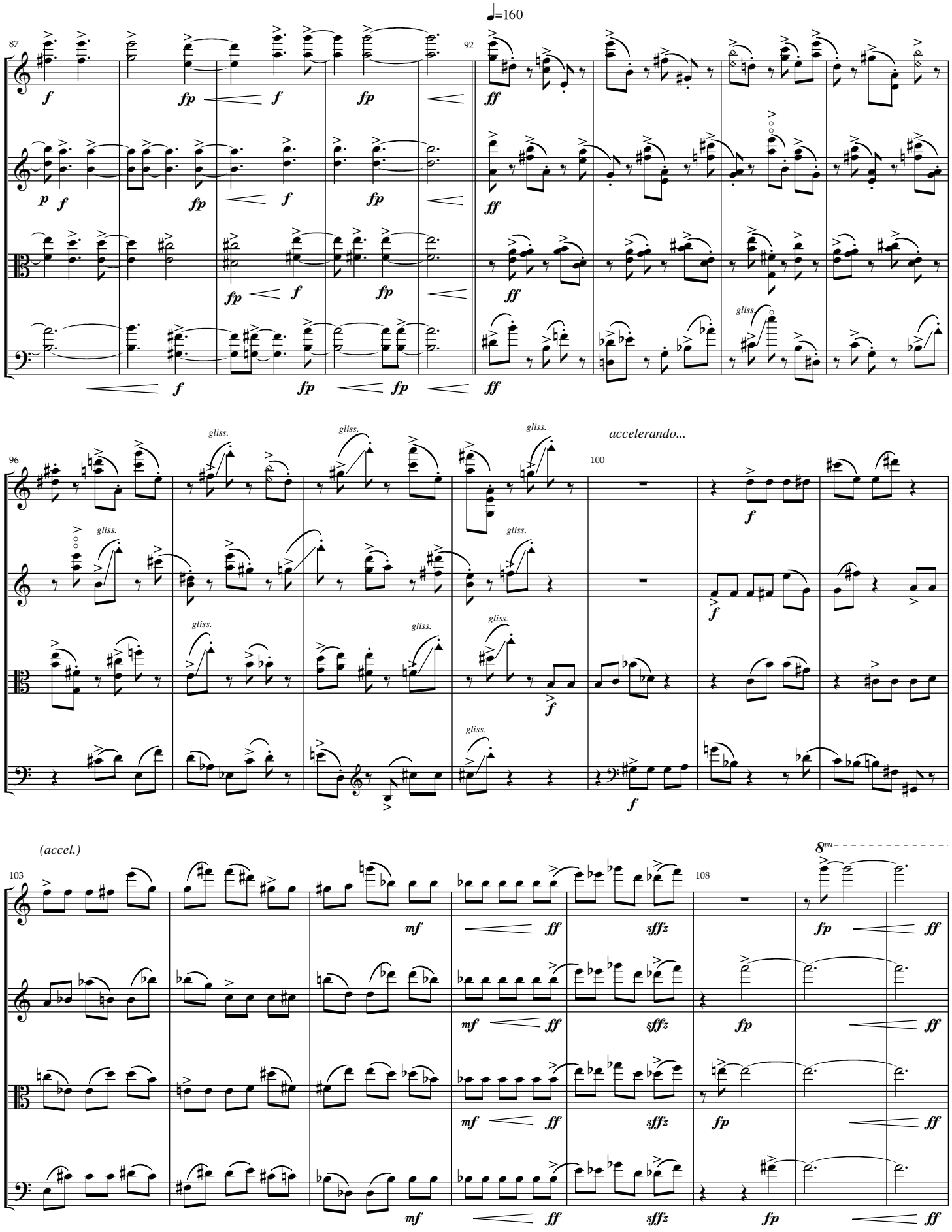


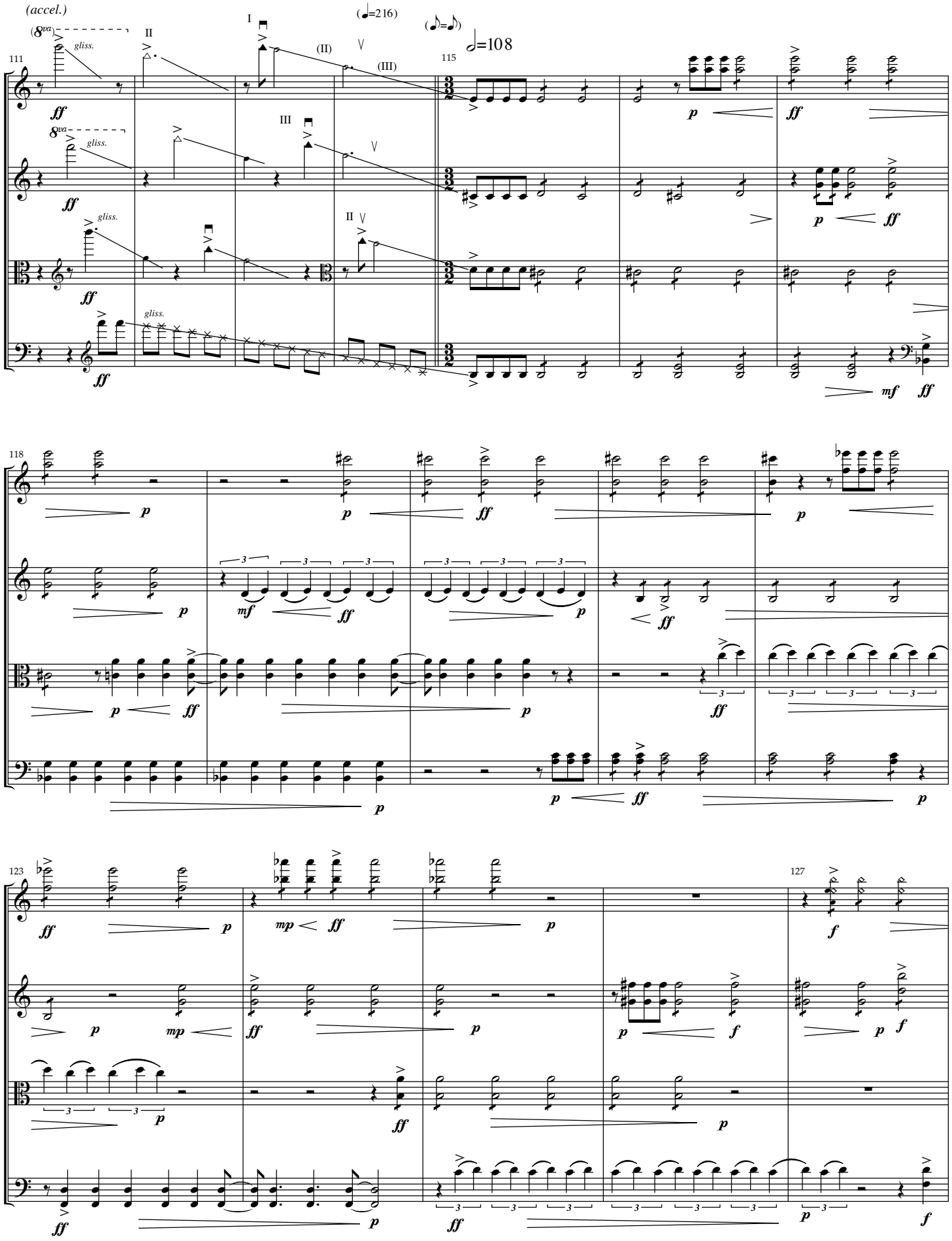

8
16
19
23
molto
(½ step trills)
poco portamento

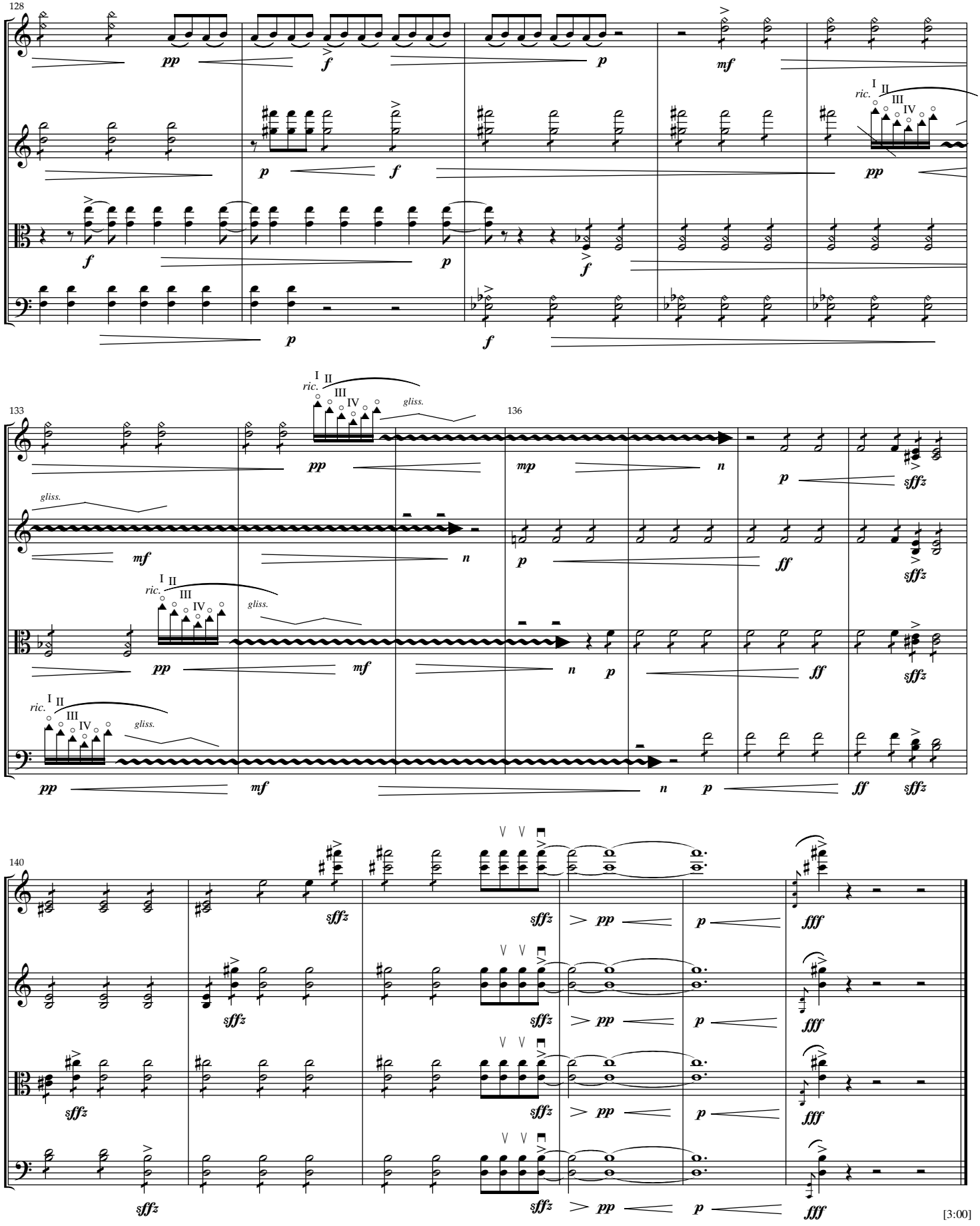

30
31
37
40
43
46
fp
f
ff
pp
ppp
p
n
sul pont.
ord.
crescendo...


50
8va
56
58
ff p < ff p < ff p <
62
66


68
74
76
81
84
♩.=♩=144
(ff)
fp
ff
mf
f


♩=160
87
92
96
100
103
108
accelerando...
(accel.)
gliss.
8va


(accel.)
(8va)
gliss.
I
II
III
(II)
(III)
(♩=216)
(♪=♪)
♩=108
111
115
118
123
127
ff
p
mf
mp
f


128
133
136
140
ric.
gliss.
[3:00]