Celestial Dances

for string quartet

Nick DiBerardino

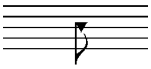
About *Celestial Dances*:

This piece originated as an exploration of a specific and, it is hoped, a relatively novel timbral technique. In the first measure of the work, the viola plays a triplet figure indicated by triangular noteheads. As specified below, these noteheads signify that the player should use very light finger pressure, on the same order as the pressure ordinarily used to produce harmonics. In this piece, however, the performers are asked to apply that pressure instead to the non-harmonic nodes of each string, resulting in a soft, scratchy, whirring tone in which the fundamental pitches are audible, but timbrally obscured.

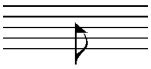
Much of the architecture of the work is designed around this technique. Because there are only six first-position non-harmonic nodes on each string, the technique is inherently restrictive in the pitch domain. That means that many of the piece's harmonies are constructed around fixed subsets of notes as determined by the available hexachords. Much of the voice leading is also conceived around these limitations: many different figurations of the hushed triplet gesture are explored, but all are constrained by the fact that only a few notes are available on any given string. Timbrally, great care has been taken to construct a sound world that both compliments and augments the ethereal nature of this finger pressure technique, so that fleeting harmonic glissandos and other techniques like snap pizzicato and col legno battuto all form a synergistic whole with its scratchy, distorted character.

The broad narrative of the piece is also built around the possibilities of this technique. The first twenty-four measures introduce its strange, delicate sound and also present the first of two main motivic sources in the work. The highest pitches articulated by the violins in this section outline a descending major third (from G sharp to E) which is reiterated (preceded the second time by an A natural) and then followed by an ascending fifth (E to B). This motivic material recurs, as one example, in the "weird, whispered waltz" (m. 64), where it functions as the melody. The second motive of the piece appears in the Violin I part (mm. 27-28), articulating material that was derived from the harmonic series of each string so that it could be played across the quartet in harmonics (as occurs at the end of the piece, in mm. 303-306). Both motives recur frequently, often at their original pitch level as just another of many examples, see the suddenly sparse section in mm. 116-144, which articulates the piece's first motive in parallel motion across very high pizzicato chords. But these motives are rarely "developed" in a traditional sense in this piece. Instead, the approach here is kaleidoscopic: motives recur across the work in very different contexts, each of which imbues the material with new and different meaning. This piece does develop material, of course, but not its motives; it focuses instead on the possibilities offered by the finger pressure technique. It asks, most basically, whether the strangely timbred music of the opening can coexist with more traditional musical sounds and gestures, like the piece's waltz or its *molto espressivo* material in m. 266. The hope here is that the piece's ultimate outburst of lyricism will be all the more powerful in contradistinction to the strange and reserved materials of its outset.

Special Noteheads and Indications:



– signifies a note to be played with very light finger pressure comparable to the pressure used to produce a harmonic. In the context of this piece, these noteheads always indicate that such pressure is to be applied to a non-harmonic node of any given string. The result should be a scratchy, whirring tone quality in which the fingered pitch is audible, but somewhat timbrally obscured. When playing passages in this timbre, great care should be taken to balance timbral distortion with pitch clarity. Ideally, a balance will be struck wherein the notated pitches are audible but as timbrally distorted as possible.



– signifies a passage to be played so that only the sound of the bow running across the strings can be heard. The indicated pitches in these passages are just rough suggestions of where one might place the fingers in order to produce this effect; these suggestions may readily be ignored when a better way to produce the pitchless brushing sound desired.

– signifies a smooth transition from one type of playing to another. One such transition might be from *ordinario* playing to *sul ponticello* playing, but the score will make clear what each specific arrow means. If the arrow occurs without technique indications around it, then the noteheads underneath should make the indication clear: often, such arrows are used to indicate a transition from light finger pressure to normal finger pressure, as signified by the corresponding noteheads.

Duration: c. 8 minutes
Spring 2012

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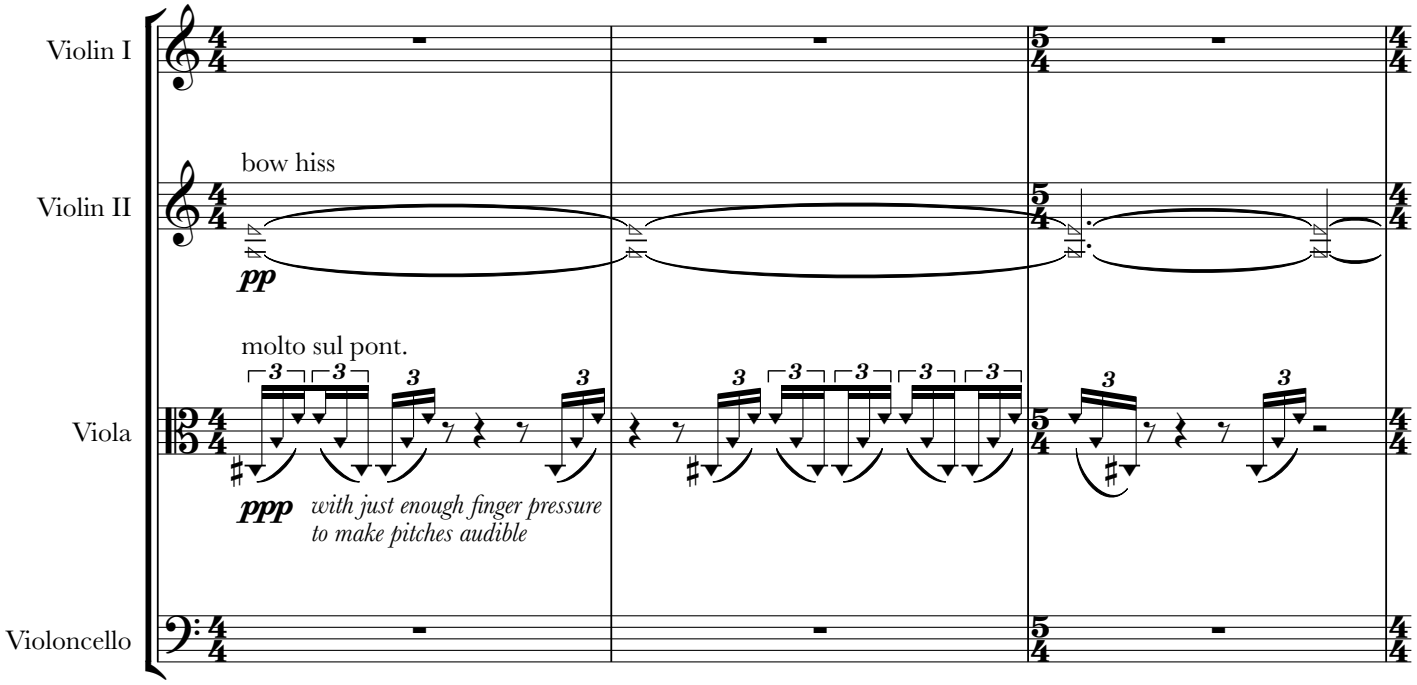
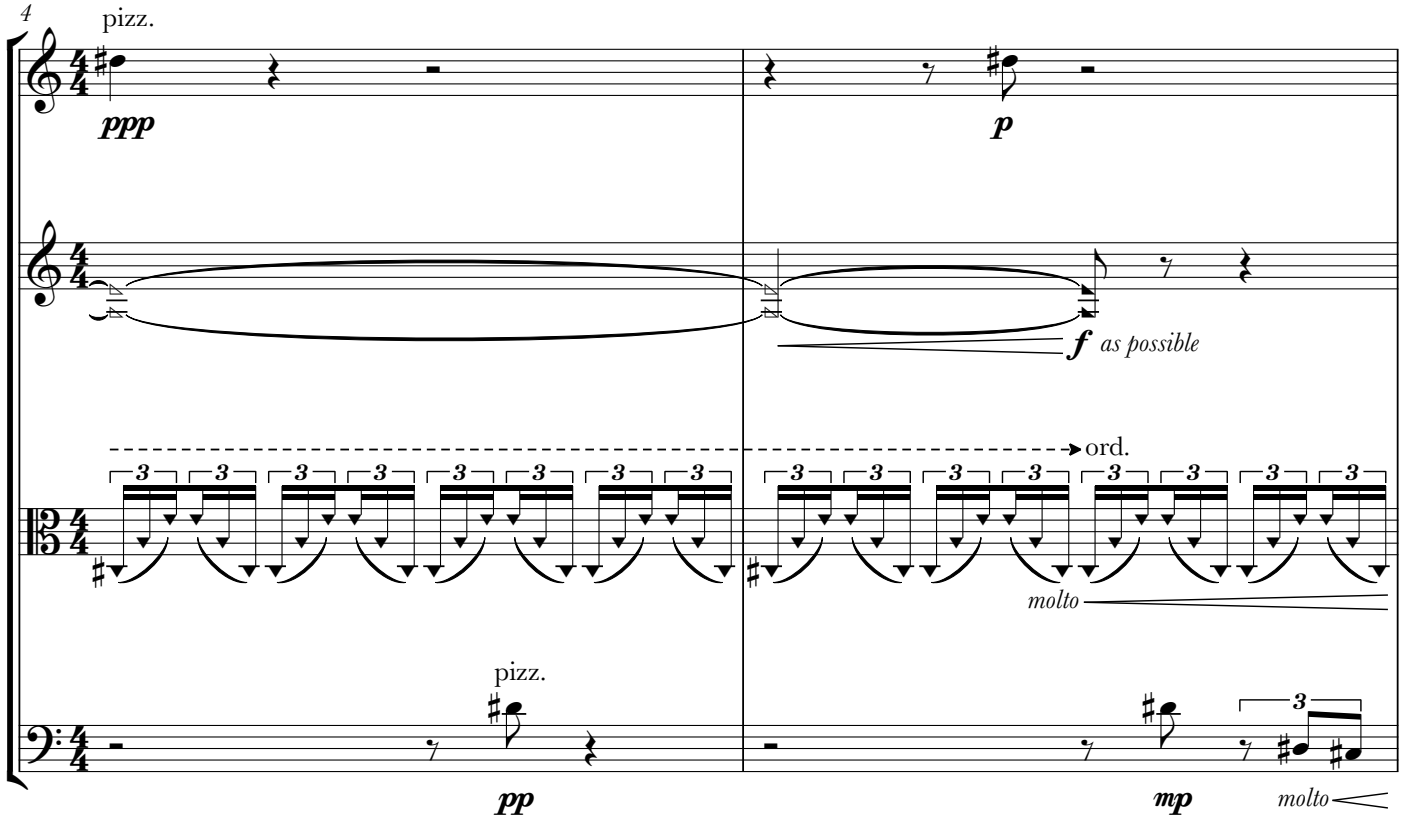
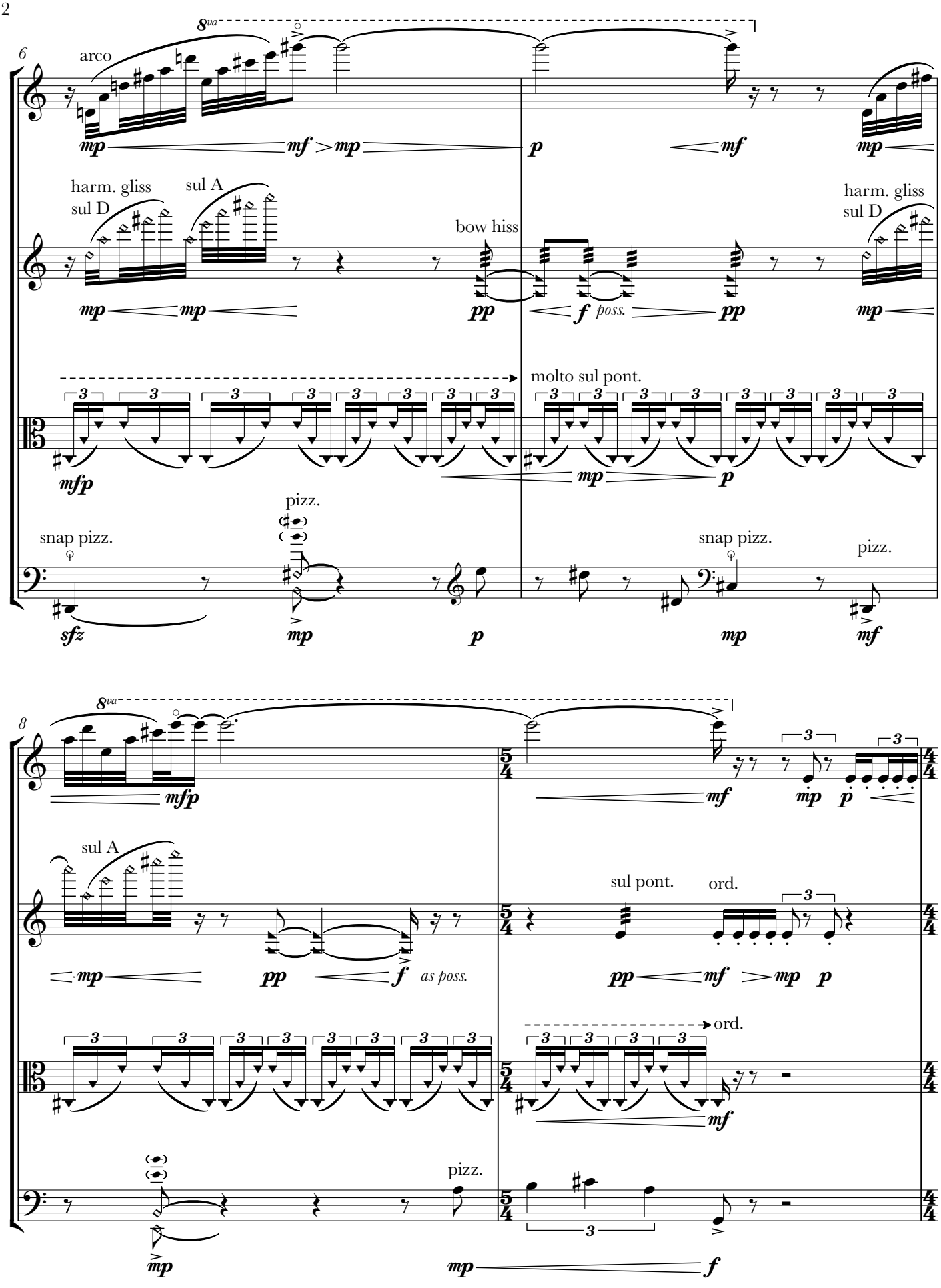
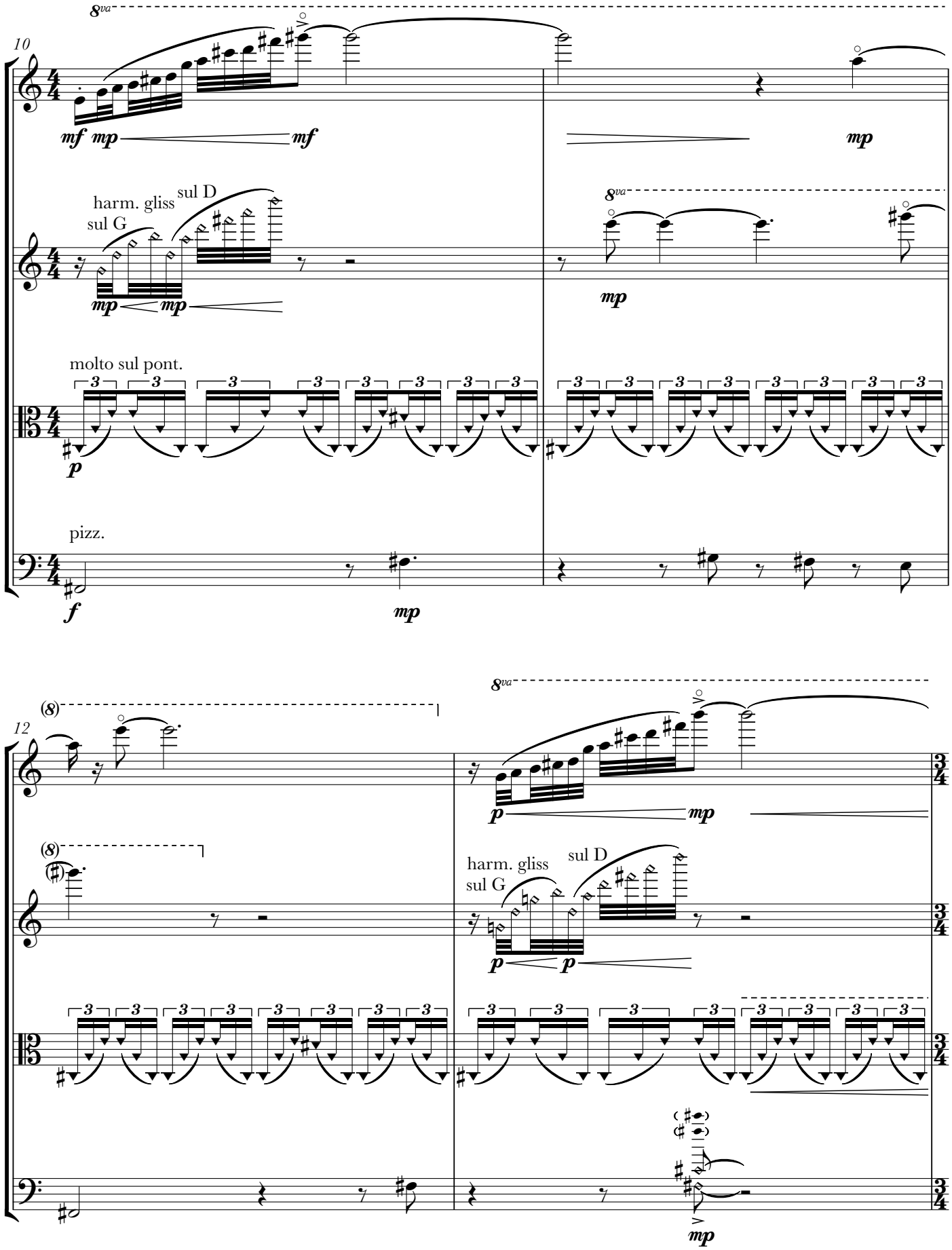
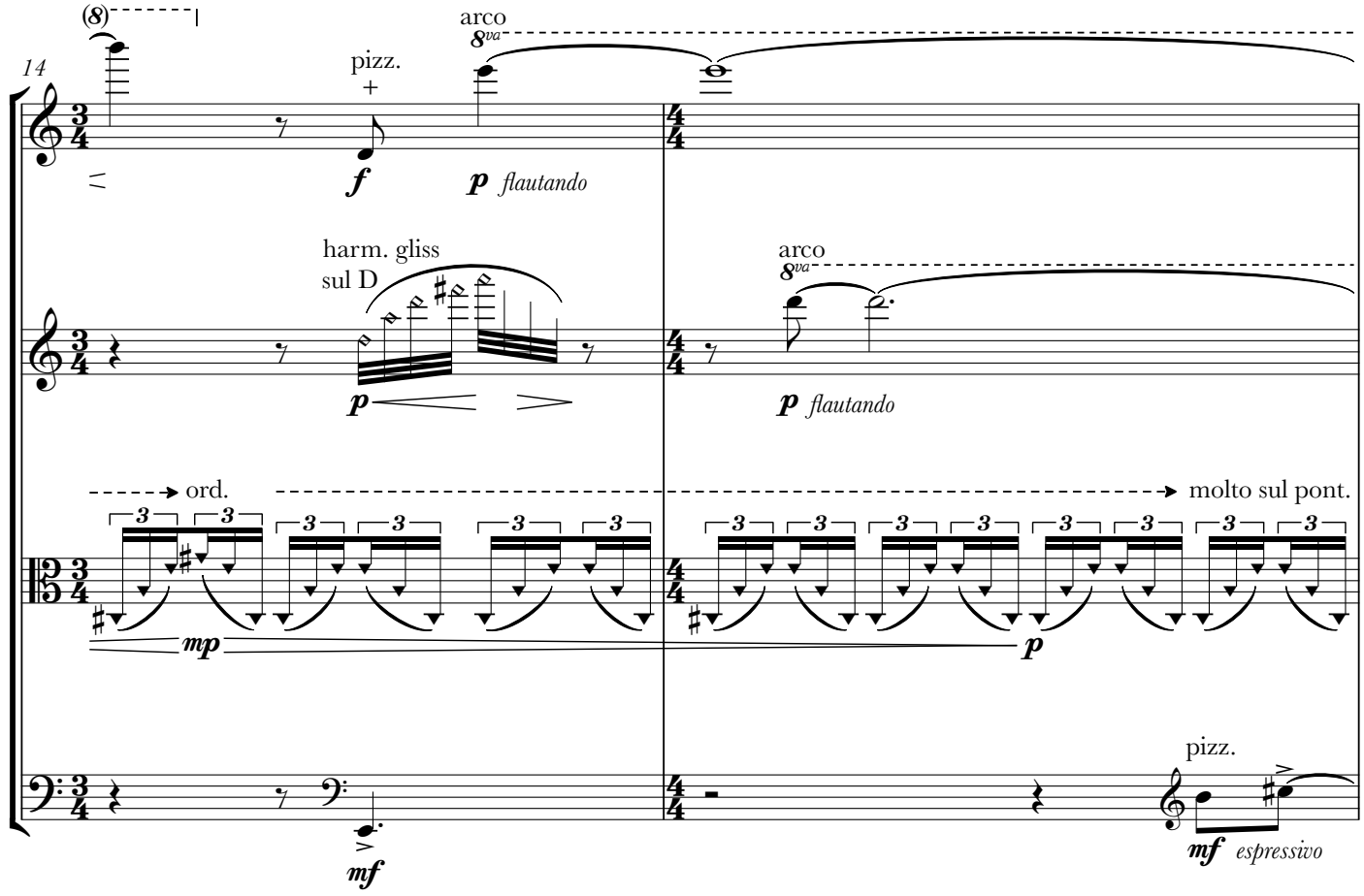
Hushed and ethereal, but always with a sparkling sense of energy ♩ = c. 80

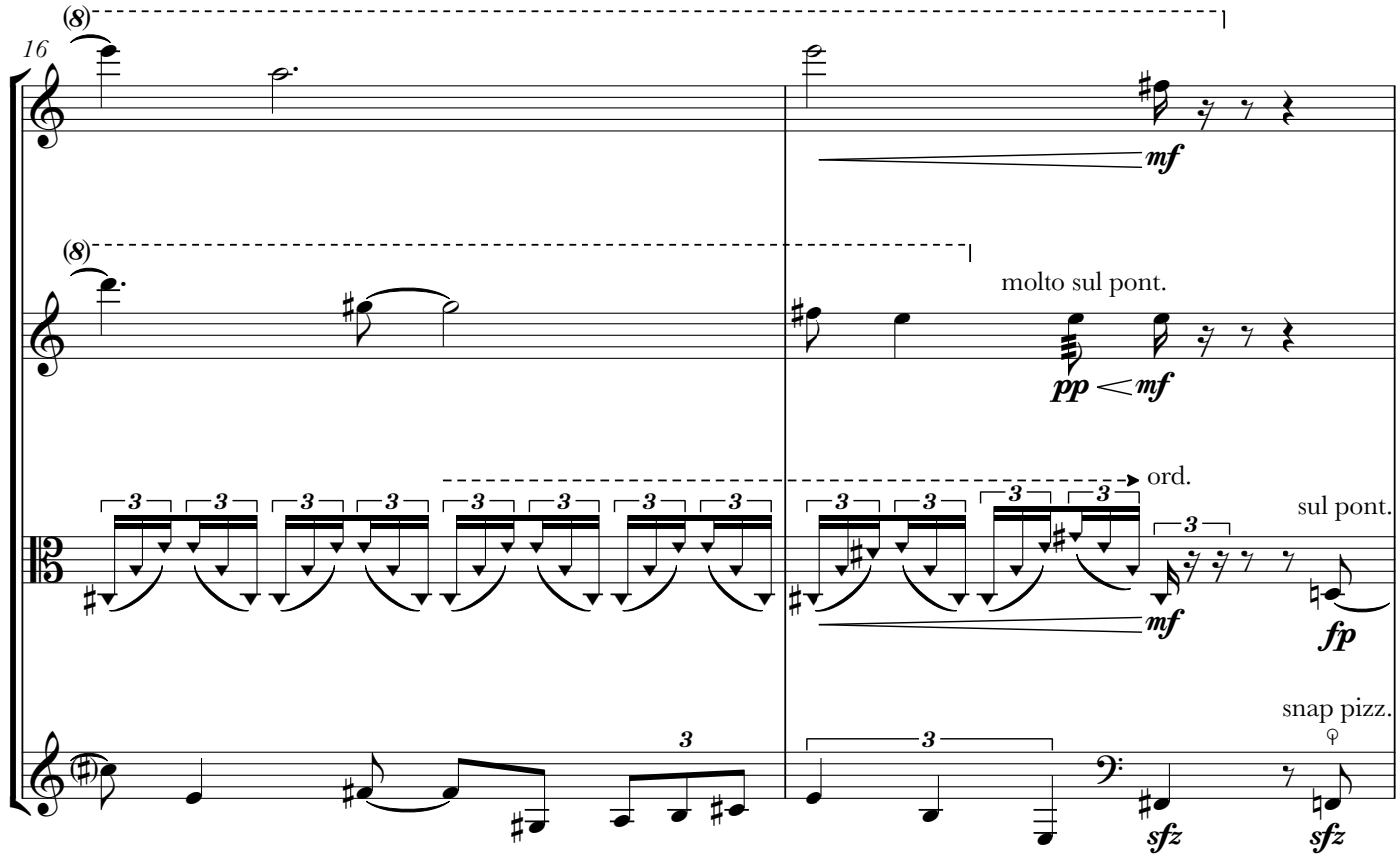


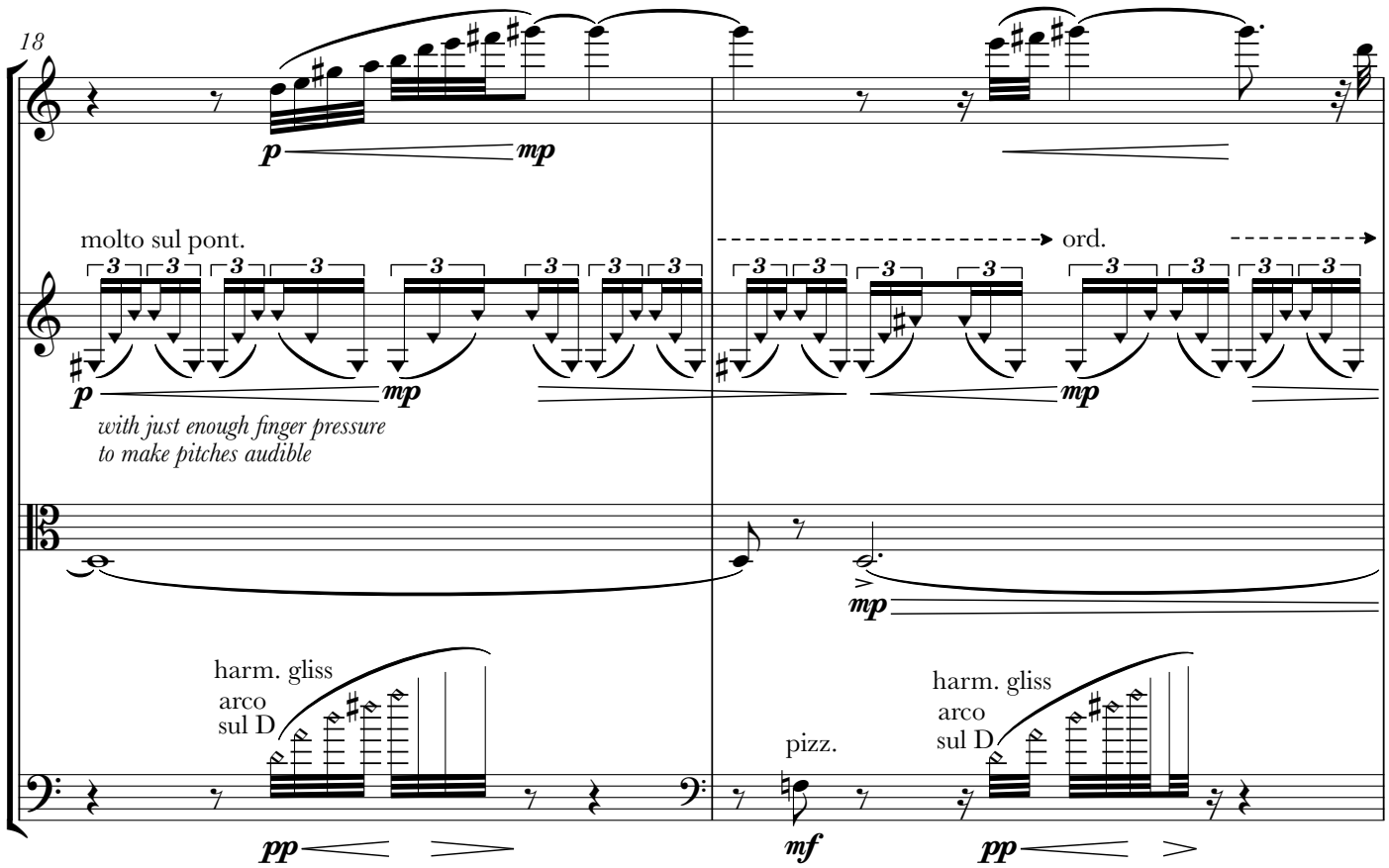


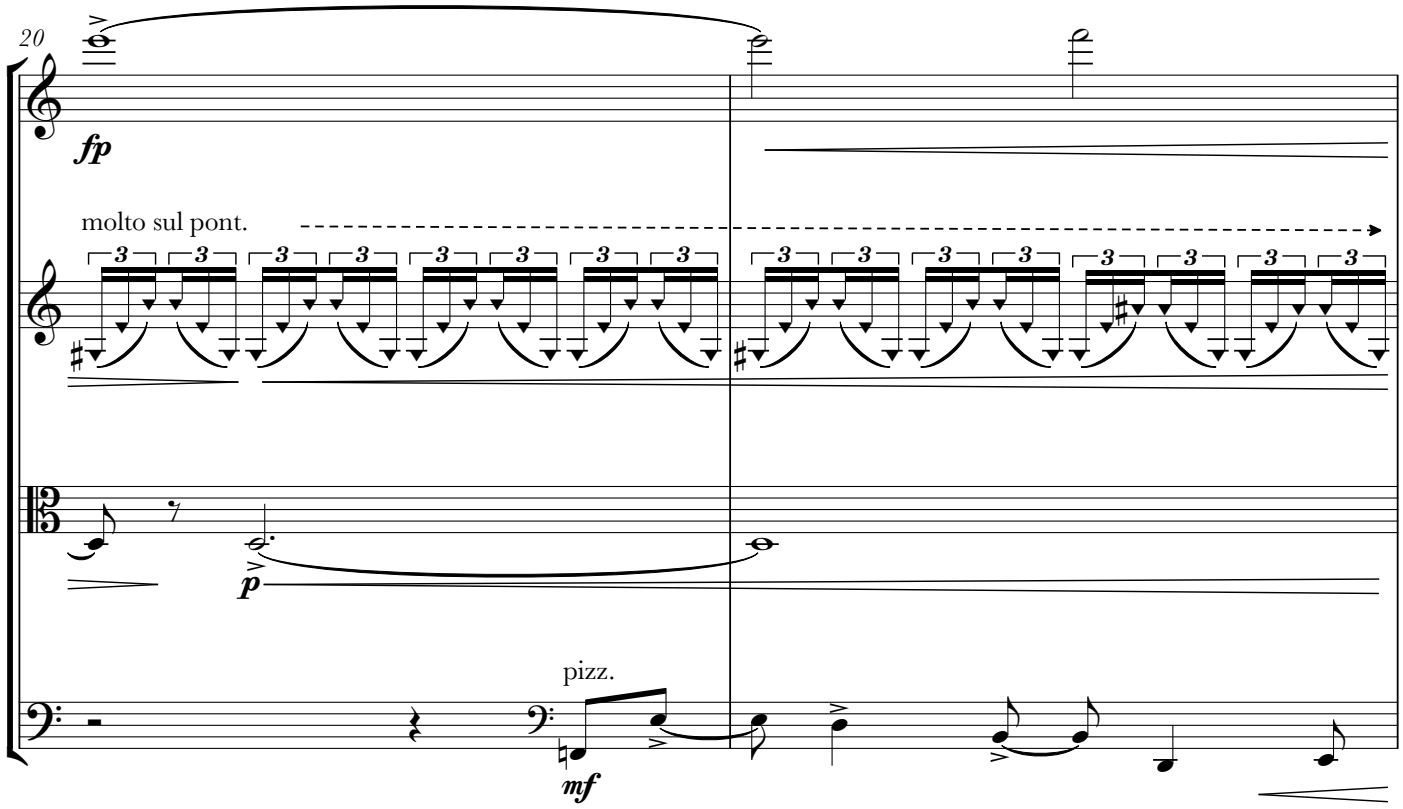

6
8va
arco
mp
mf
mp
p
mf
mp
harm. gliss
sul D
sul A
bow hiss
harm. gliss
sul D
mp
mp
pp
f poss.
pp
mp
molto sul pont.
mfp
mp
p
pizz.
snap pizz.
snap pizz.
pizz.
sfz
mp
p
mp
mf
8
8va
mfp
mf
mp
p
sul A
sul pont.
ord.
mp
pp
f as poss.
pp
mf
mp
p
ord.
mf
pizz.
mp
mp
f

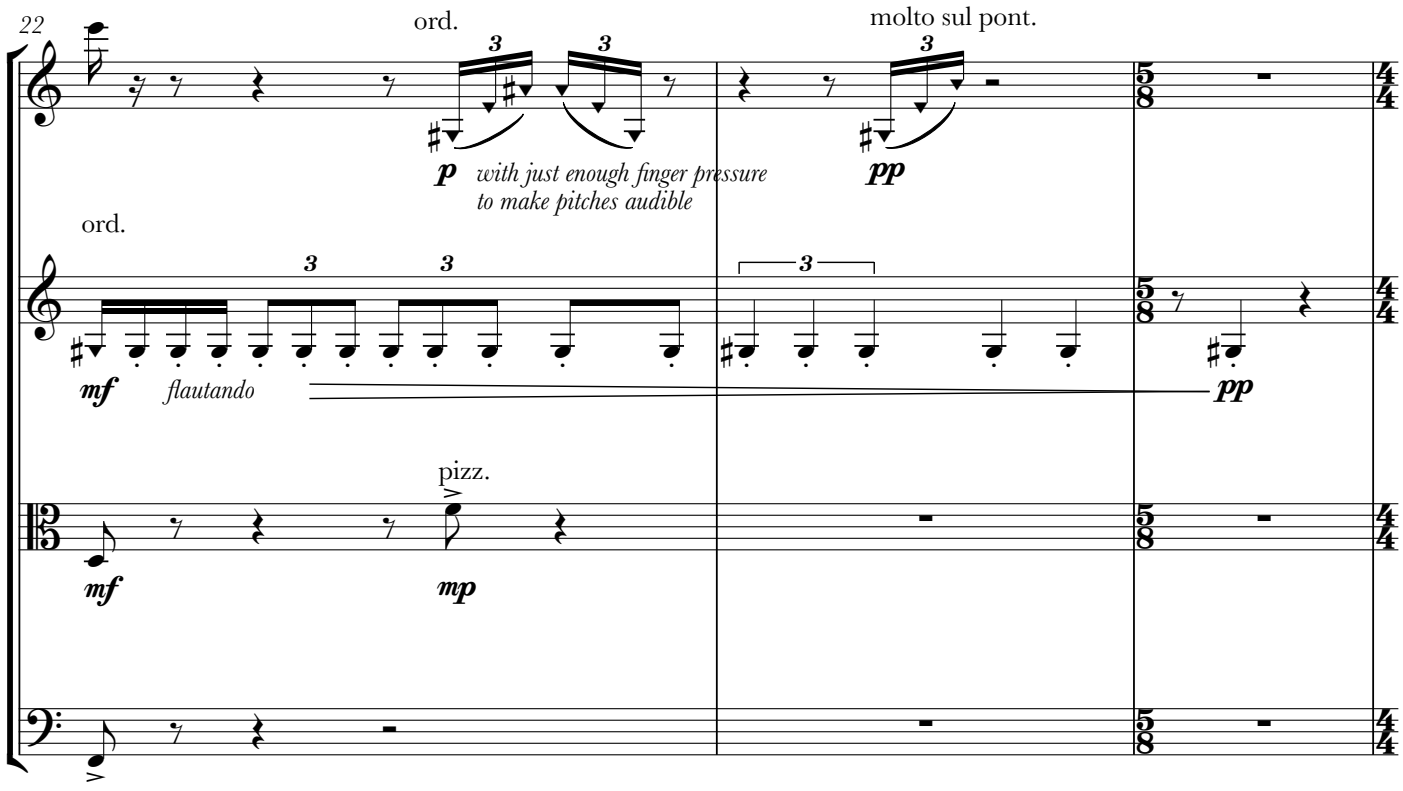

10
8va
mf mp mf
mp
harm. gliss
sul G
sul D
mp mp
8va
mp
molto sul pont.
p
pizz.
f
mp
12
(8)
8va
p mp
(8)
harm. gliss
sul G
sul D
p p
mp

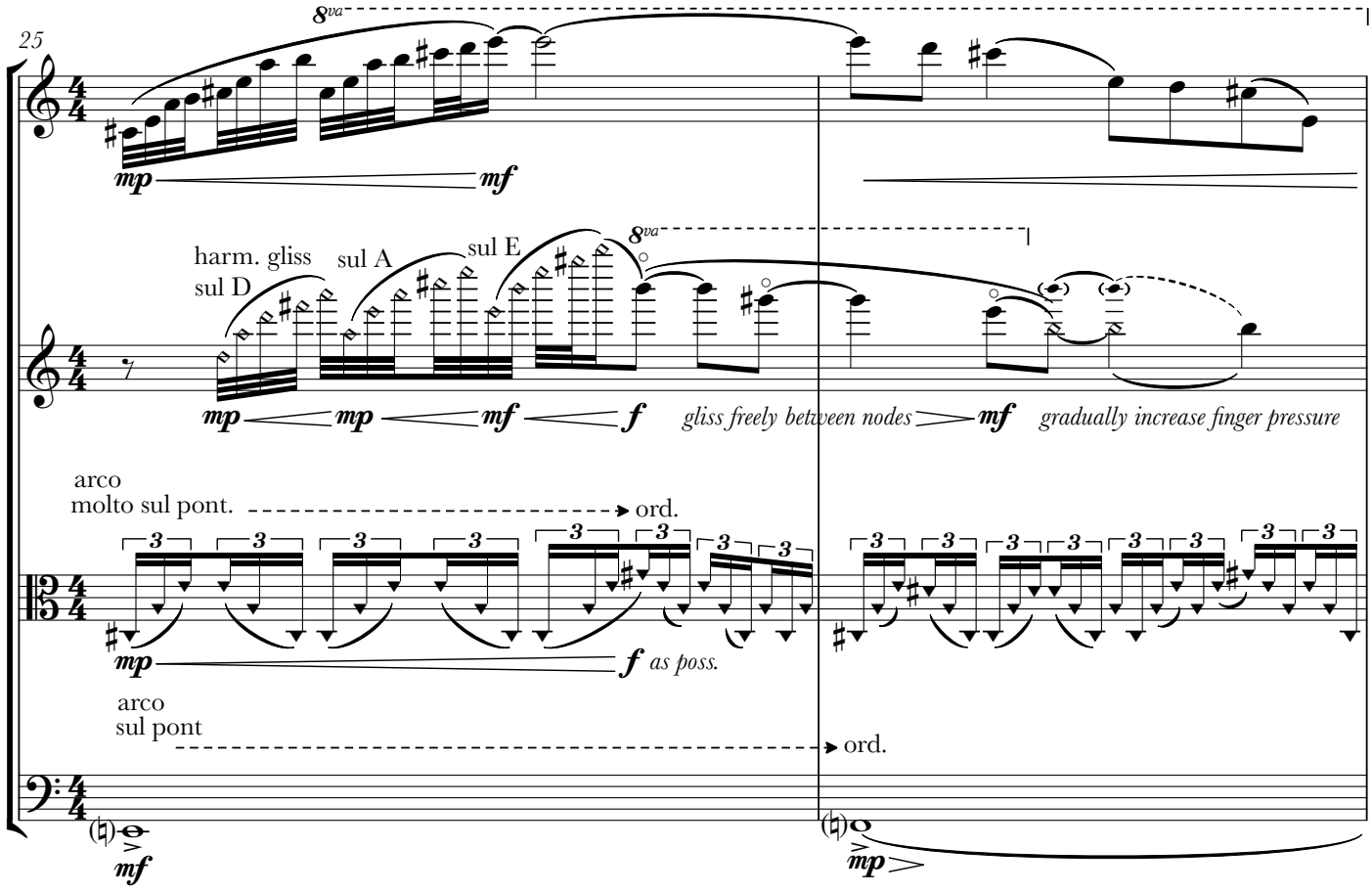

14
(8)
pizz.
+
arco
8va
f
p flautando
harm. gliss
sul D
p
arco
8va
p flautando
ord.
molto sul pont.
3
mp
p
pizz.
mf
mf espressivo

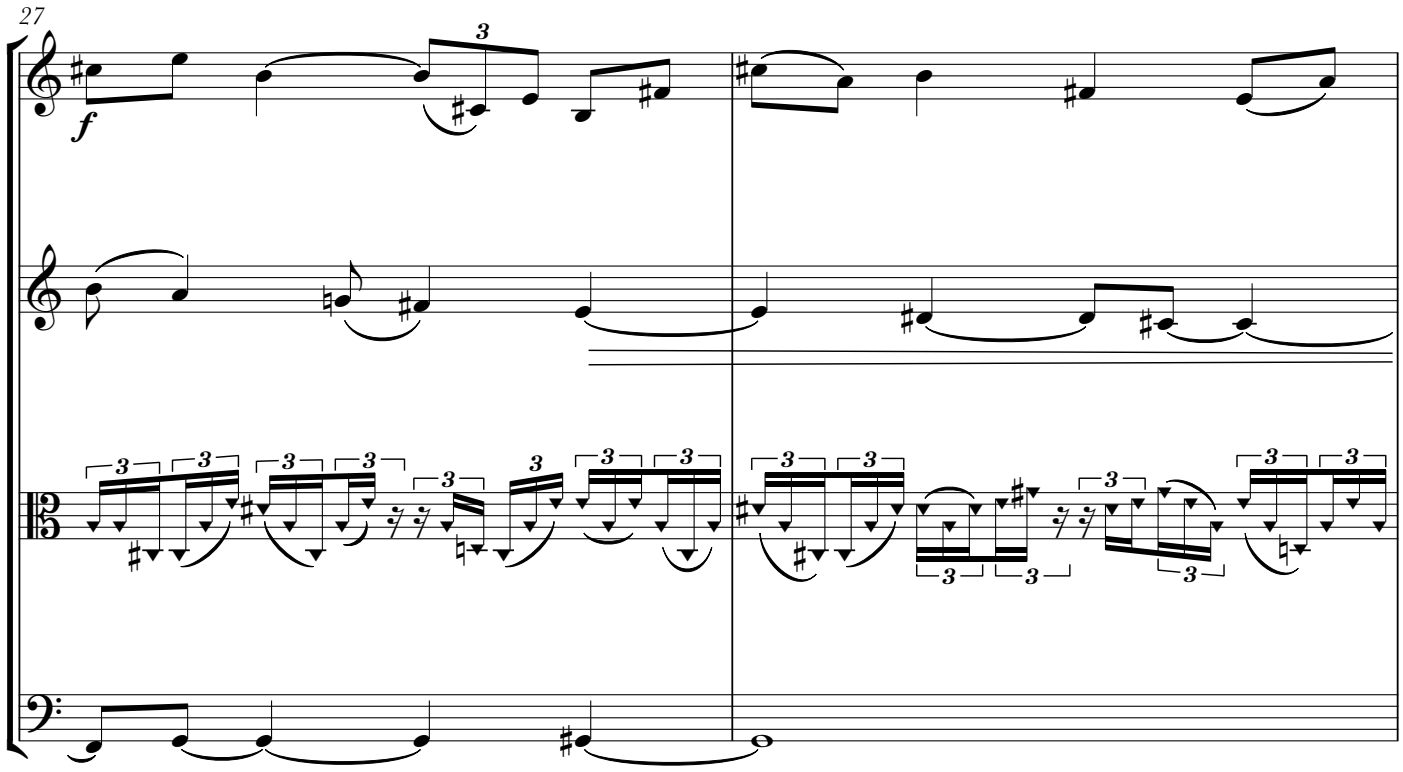

16
(8)
mf
(8)
molto sul pont.
pp
mf
ord.
sul pont.
3
mf
fp
snap pizz.
sfz
sfz

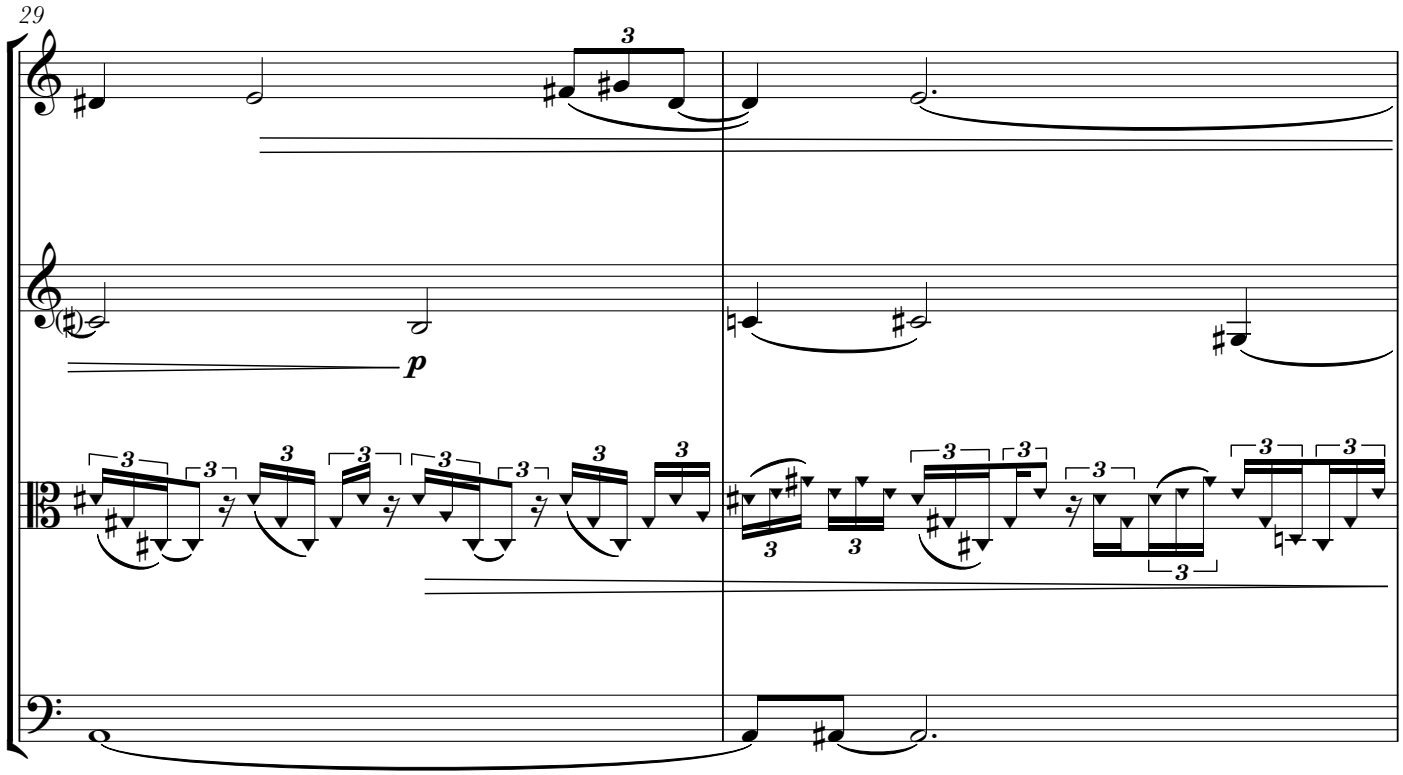

18
p
mp
molto sul pont.
ord.
p
mp
mp
with just enough finger pressure
to make pitches audible
harm. gliss
arco
sul D
pizz.
harm. gliss
arco
sul D
pp
mf
pp

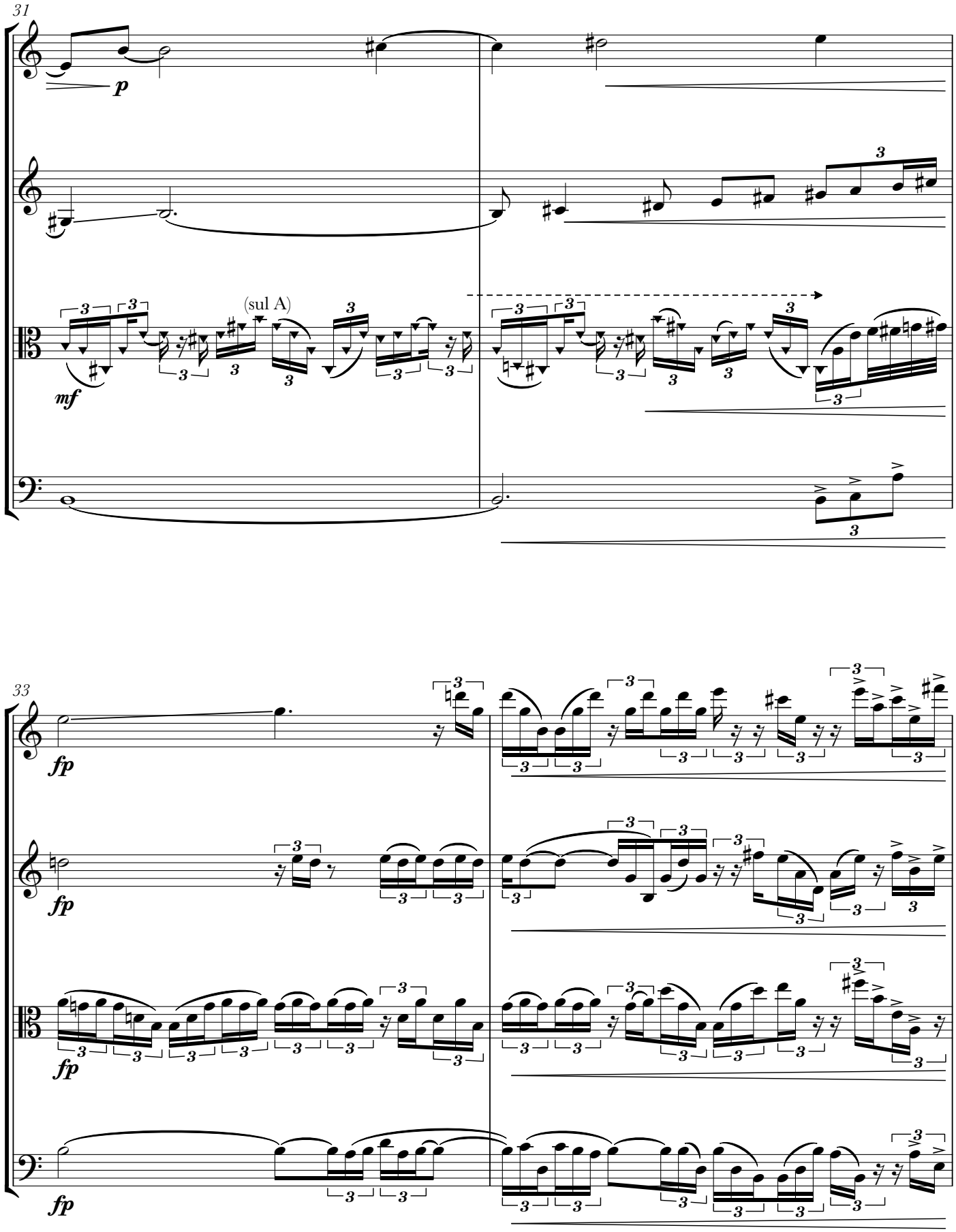

20
fp
molto sul pont.
p
pizz.
mf

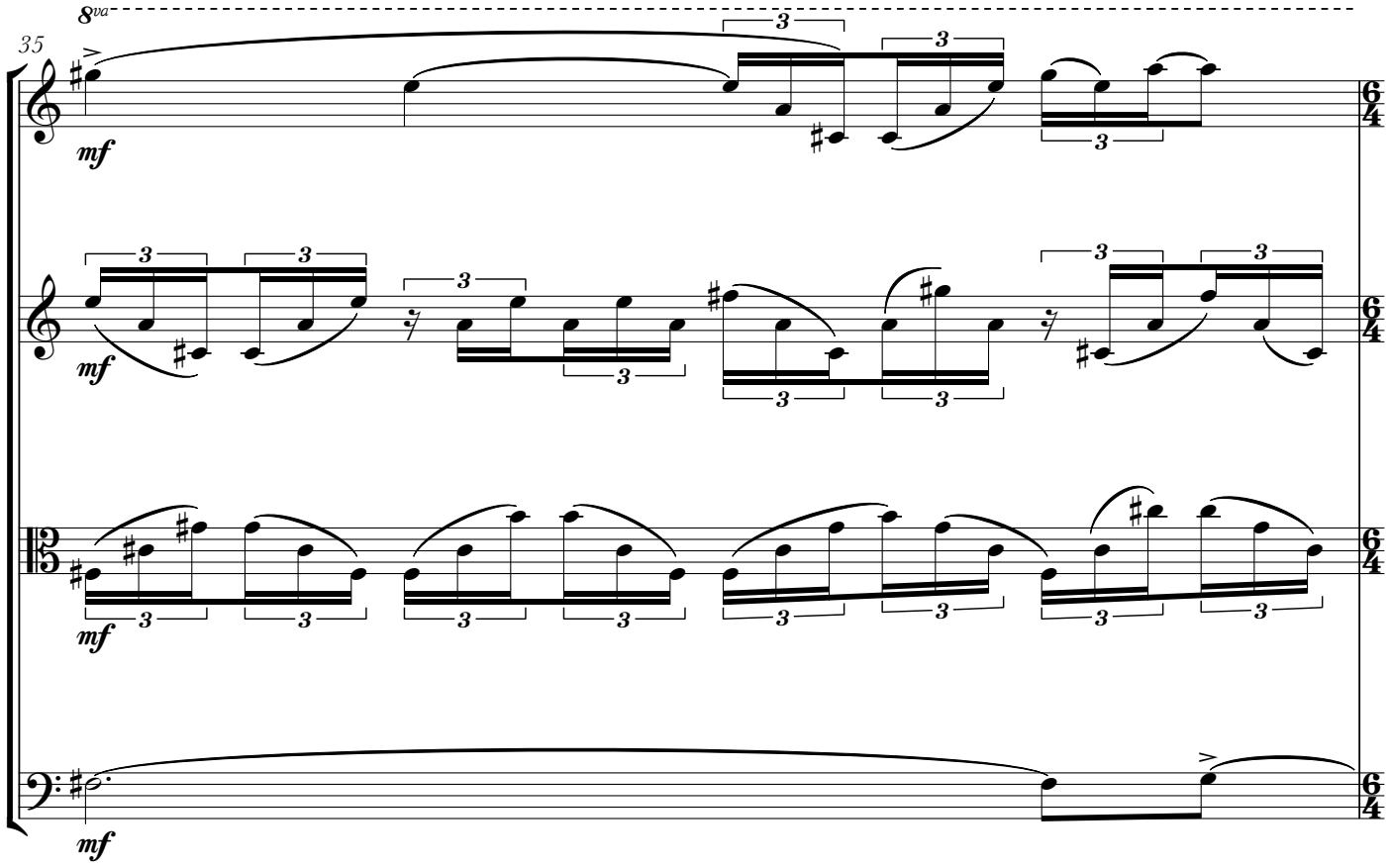

22
ord.
molto sul pont.
p
with just enough finger pressure
to make pitches audible
pp
ord.
mf
flautando
pp
pizz.
mf
mp

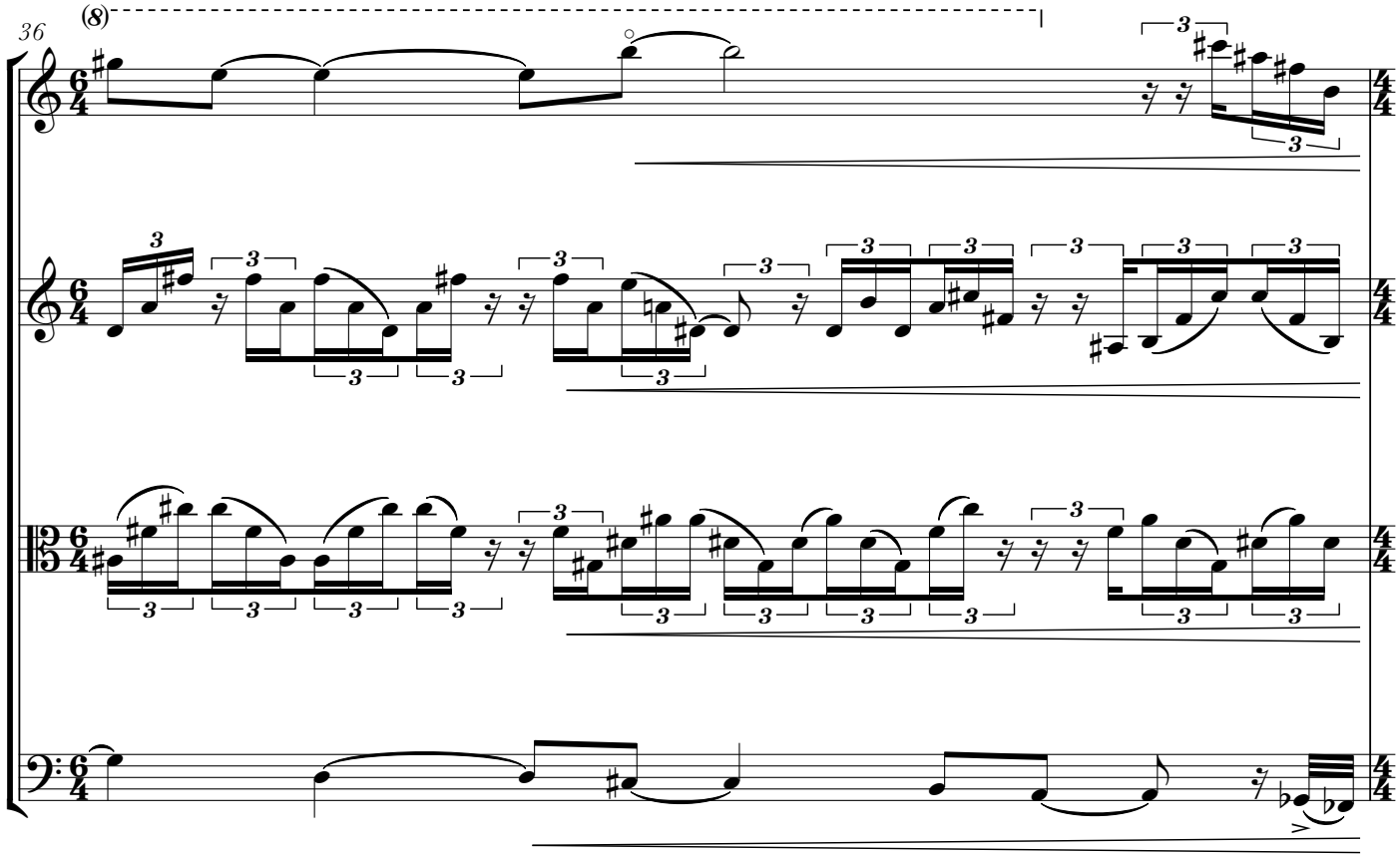

25
8va
mp
mf
harm. gliss
sul D
sul A
sul E
8va
mp
mp
mf
f
gliss freely between nodes
mf
gradually increase finger pressure
arco
molto sul pont.
ord.
mp
f
as poss.
arco
sul pont
ord.
mf
mp

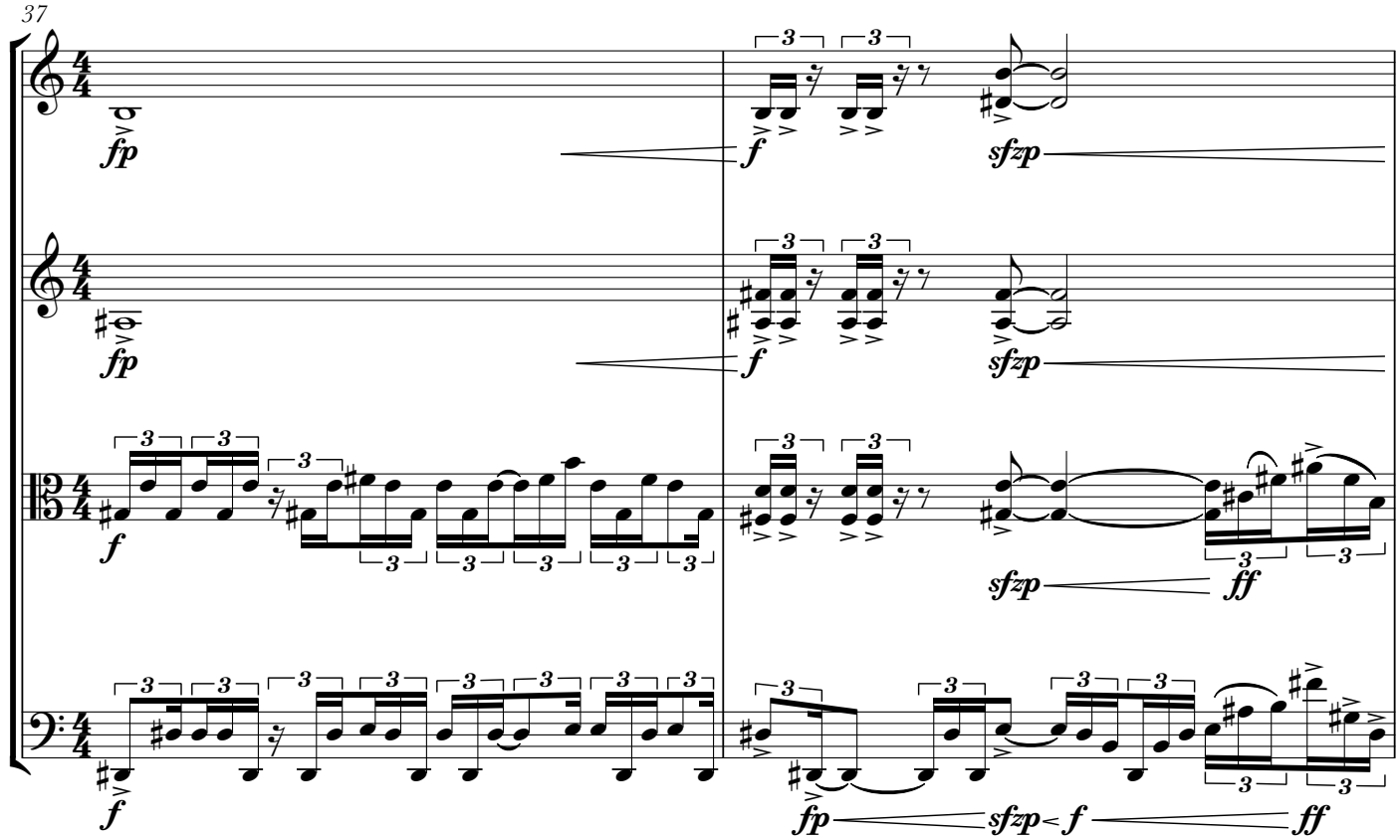

27
f

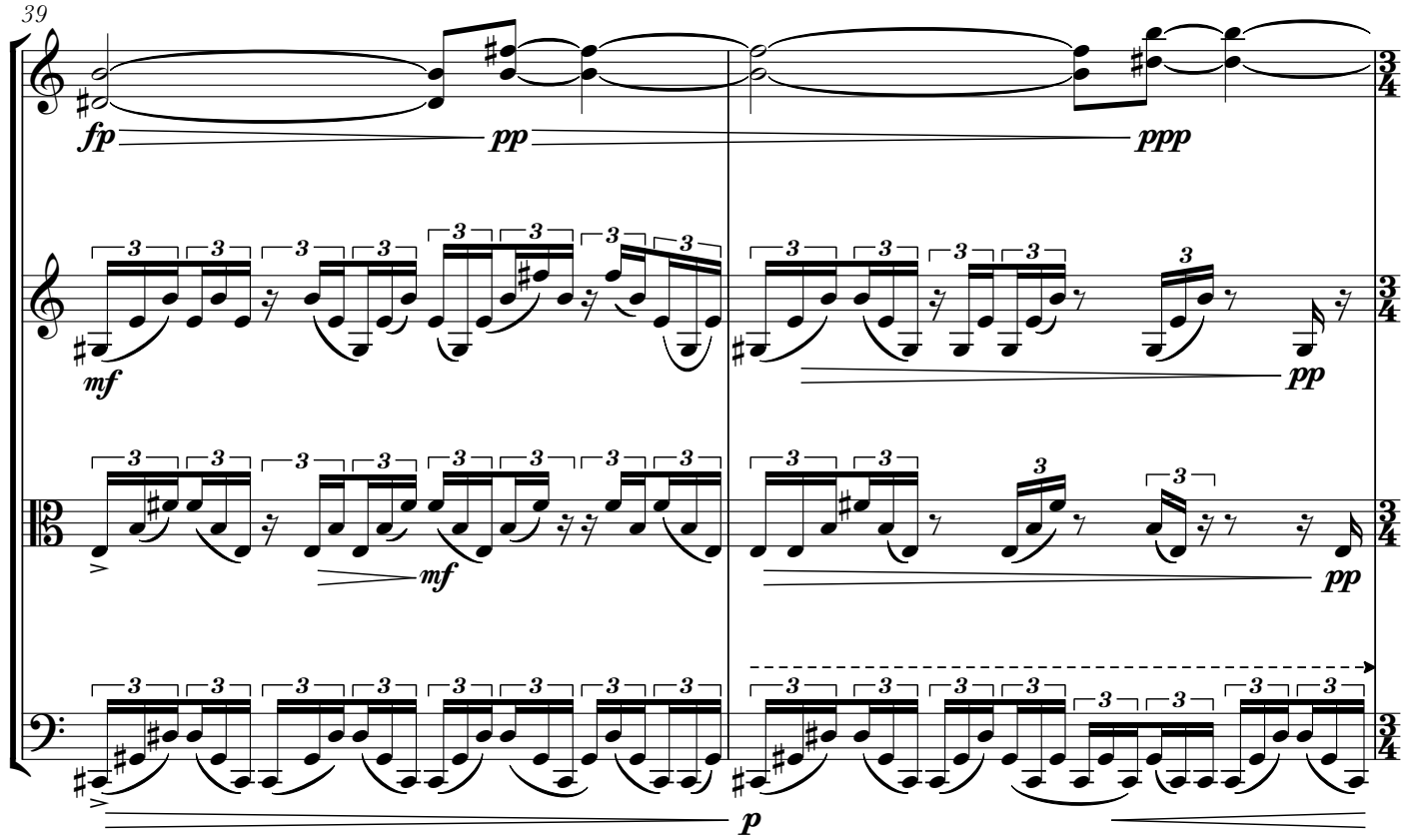

29
p

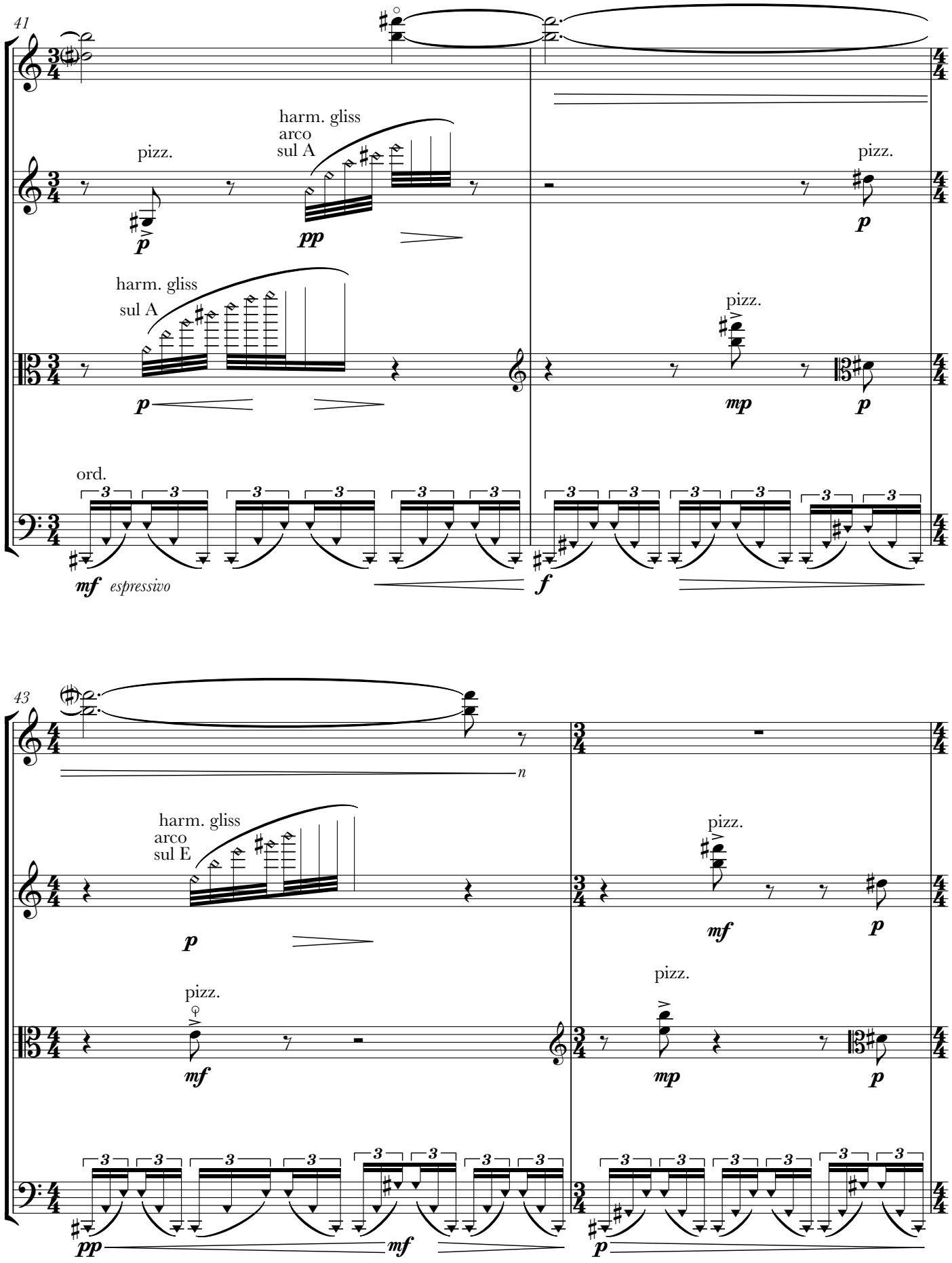

31
p
mf
(sul A)
33
fp
fp
fp
fp

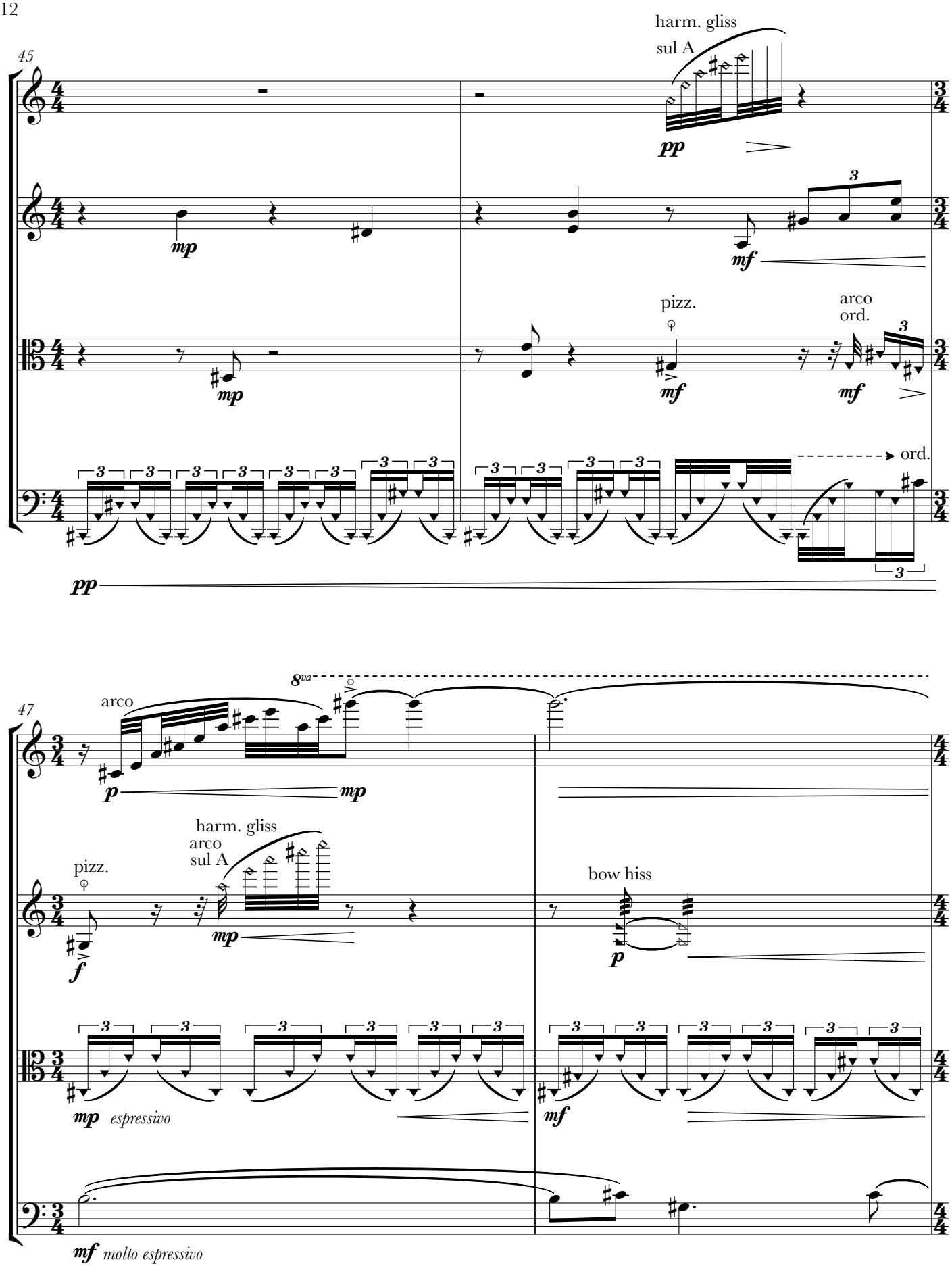

8va
35
mf
mf
mf
mf

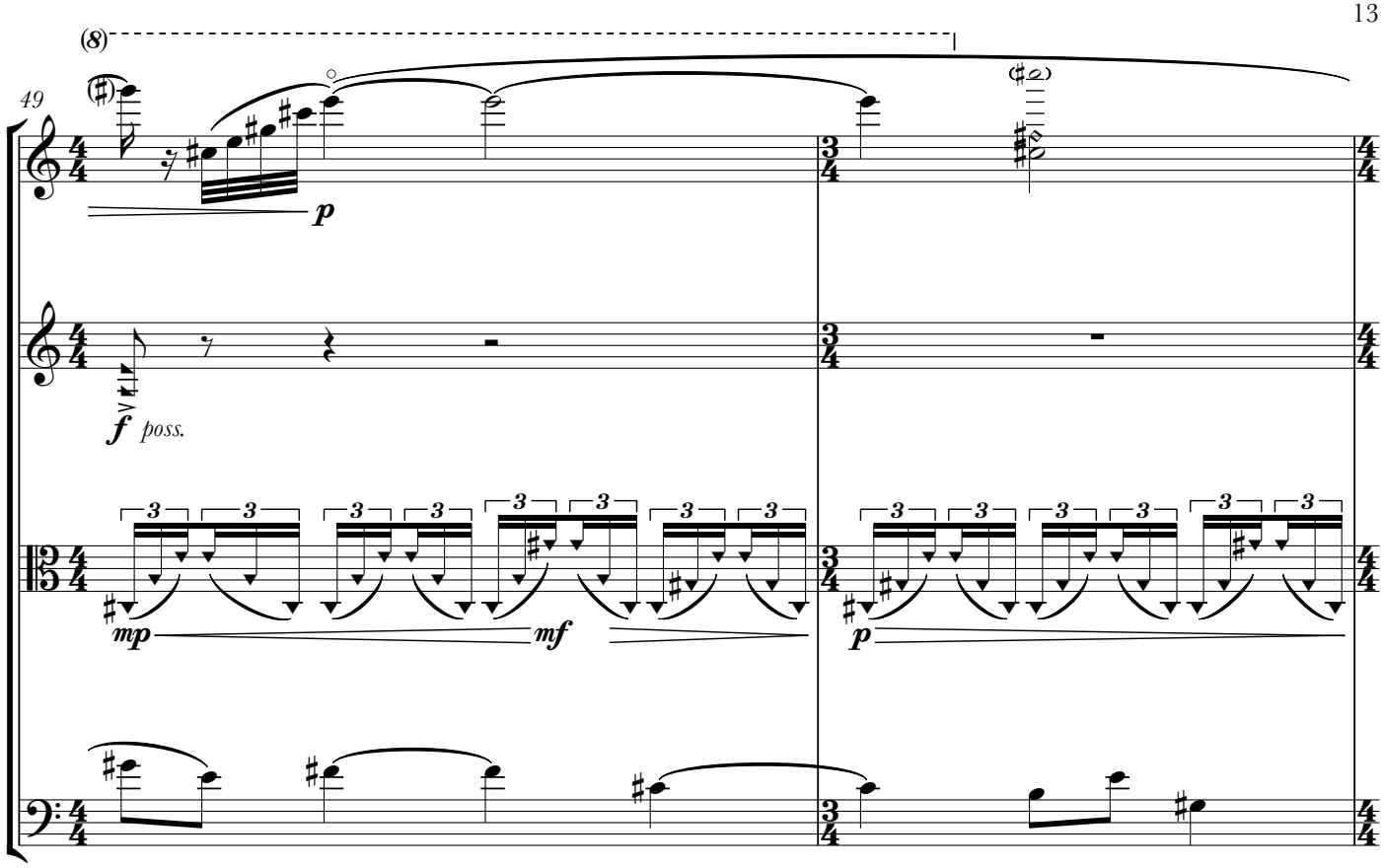

(8)
36

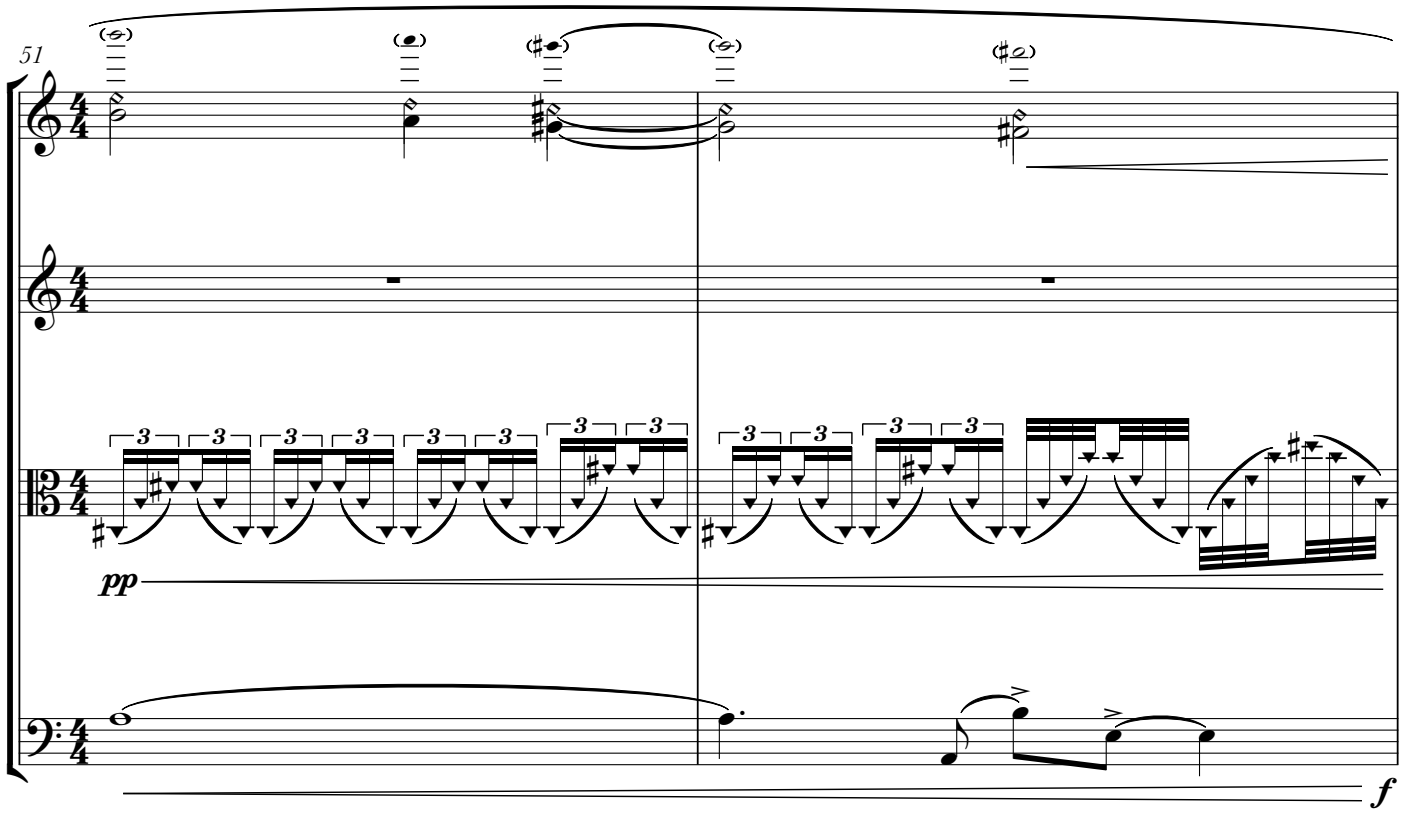

37
fp
f
sfzp
fp
f
sfzp
f
sfzp
ff
f
fp
sfzp
f
ff

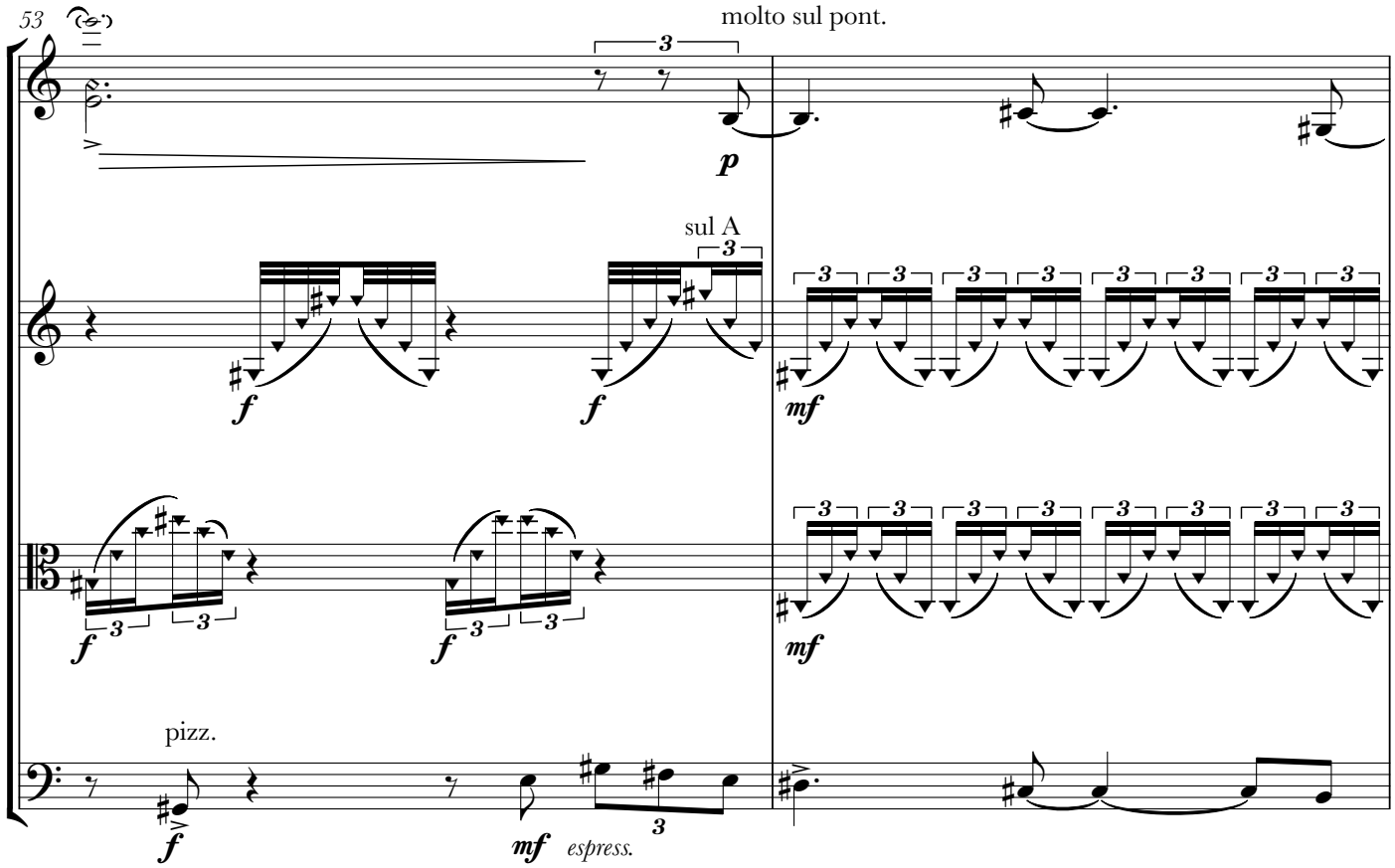

39
fp
pp
ppp
mf
pp
mf
pp
p

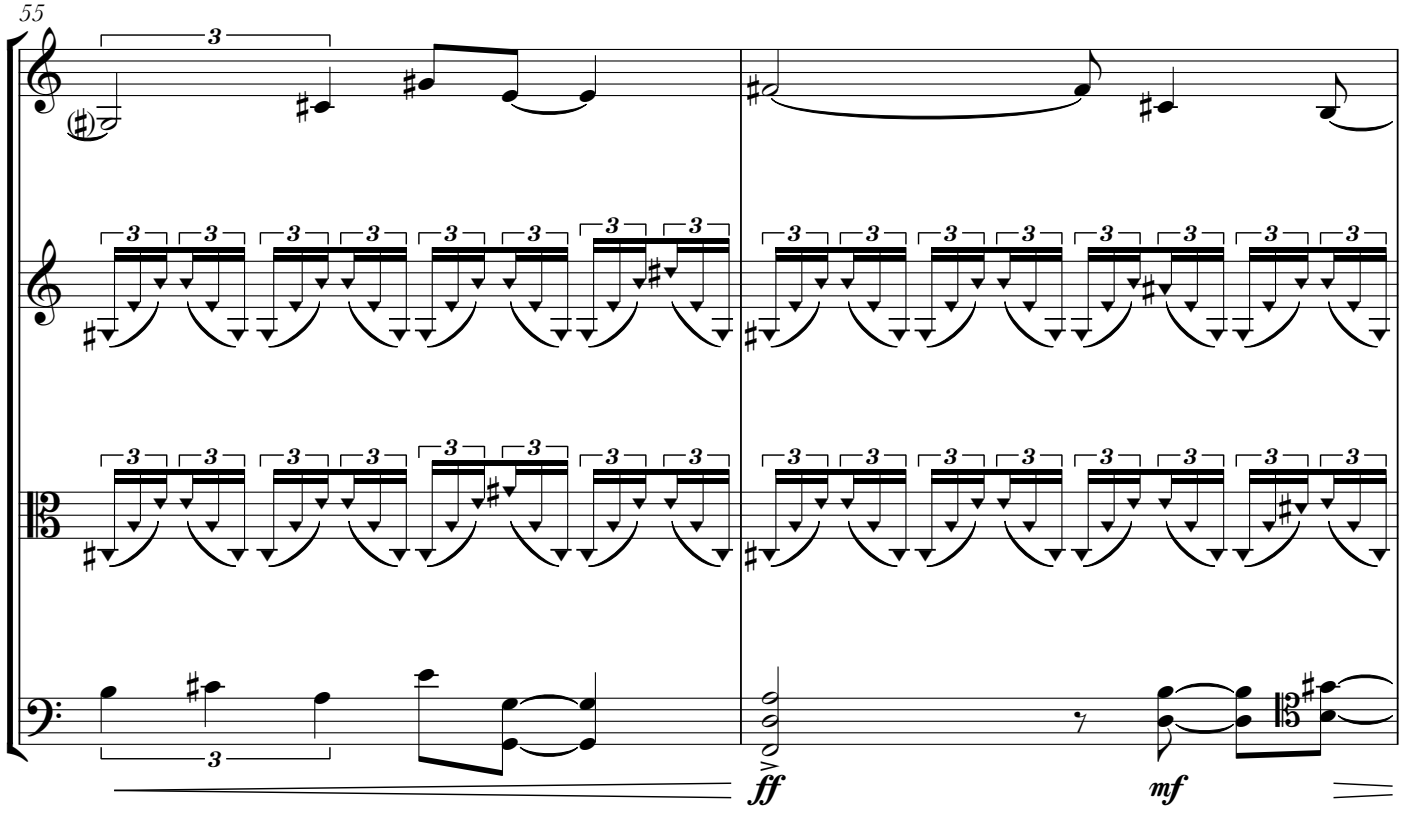

41
pizz.
harm. gliss
arco
sul A
pizz.
harm. gliss
sul A
pizz.
ord.
espressivo
43
n
harm. gliss
arco
sul E
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.

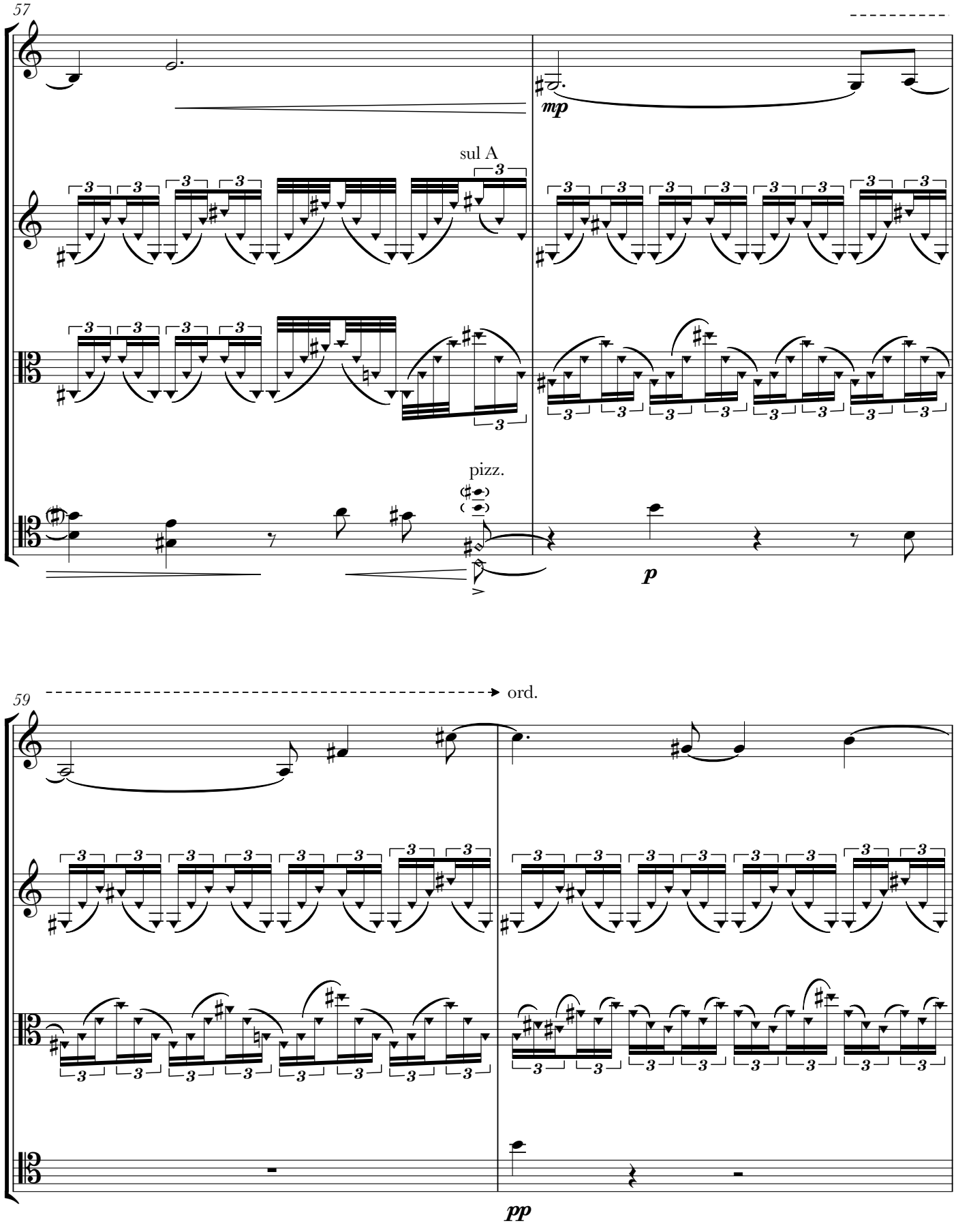

45
harm. gliss
sul A
pp
mp
mf
pizz.
arco
ord.
ord.
pp
47
8va
arco
p
mp
harm. gliss
arco
sul A
pizz.
f
mp
bow hiss
p
mp espressivo
mf
mf molto espressivo

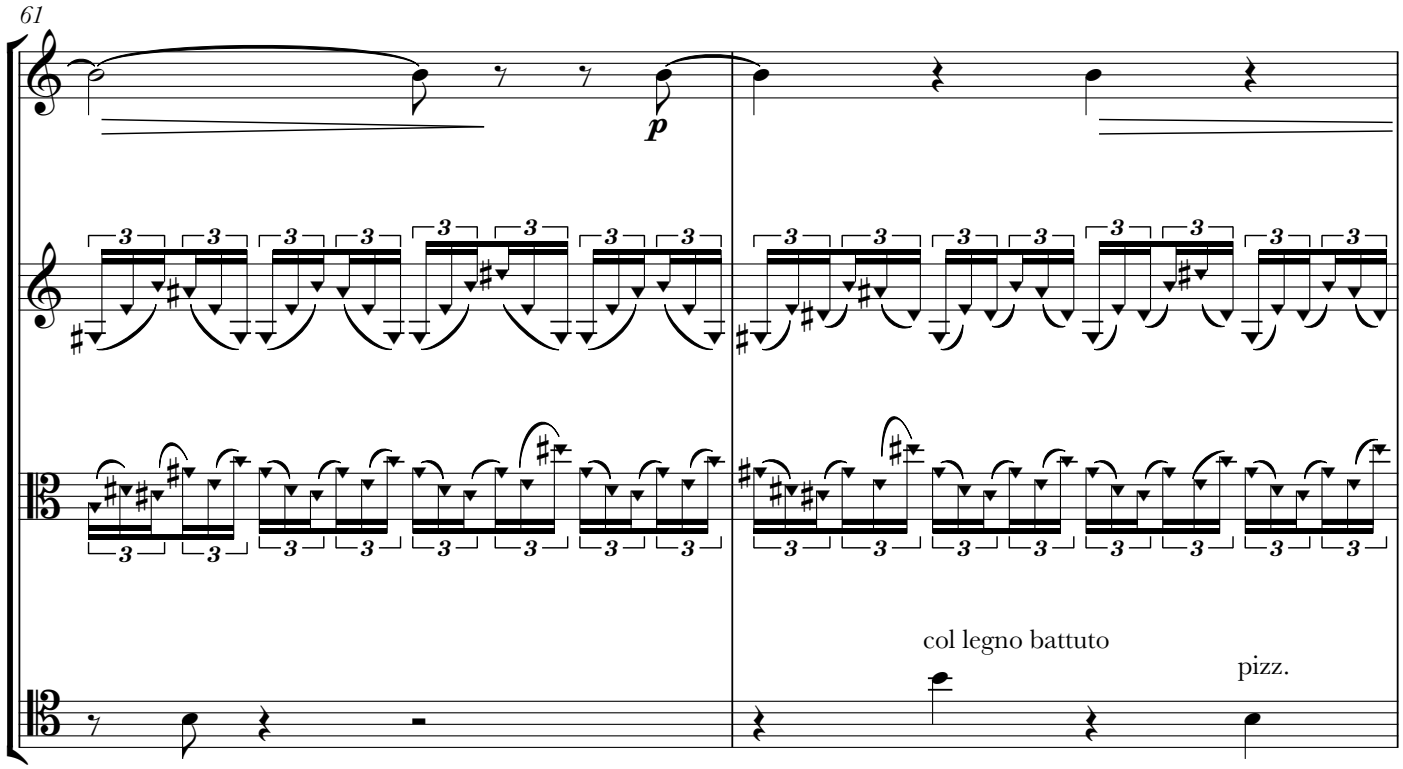

(8)
49
p
f poss.
mp
mf
p

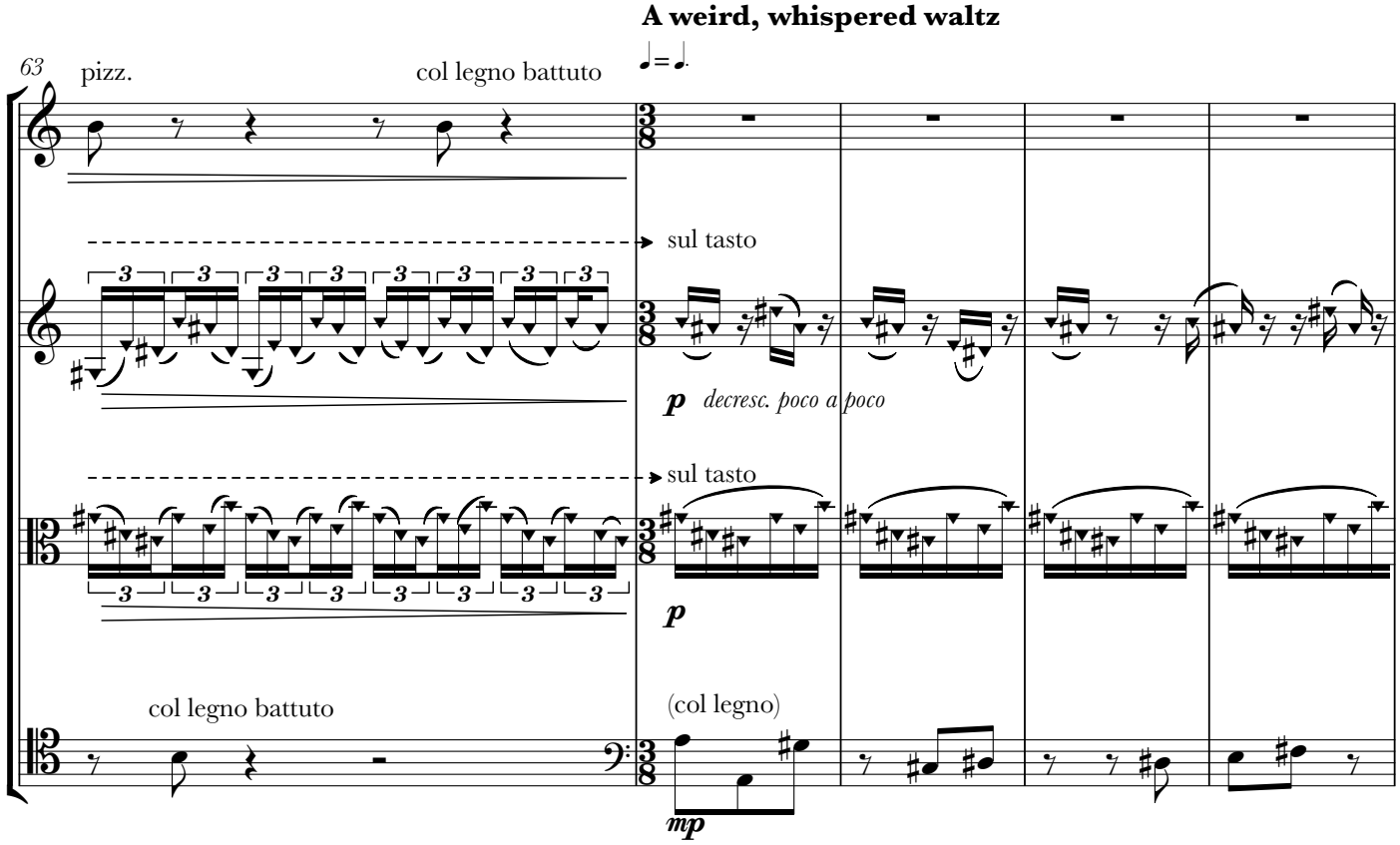

51
pp
f


53
molto sul pont.
sul A
pizz.
espress.

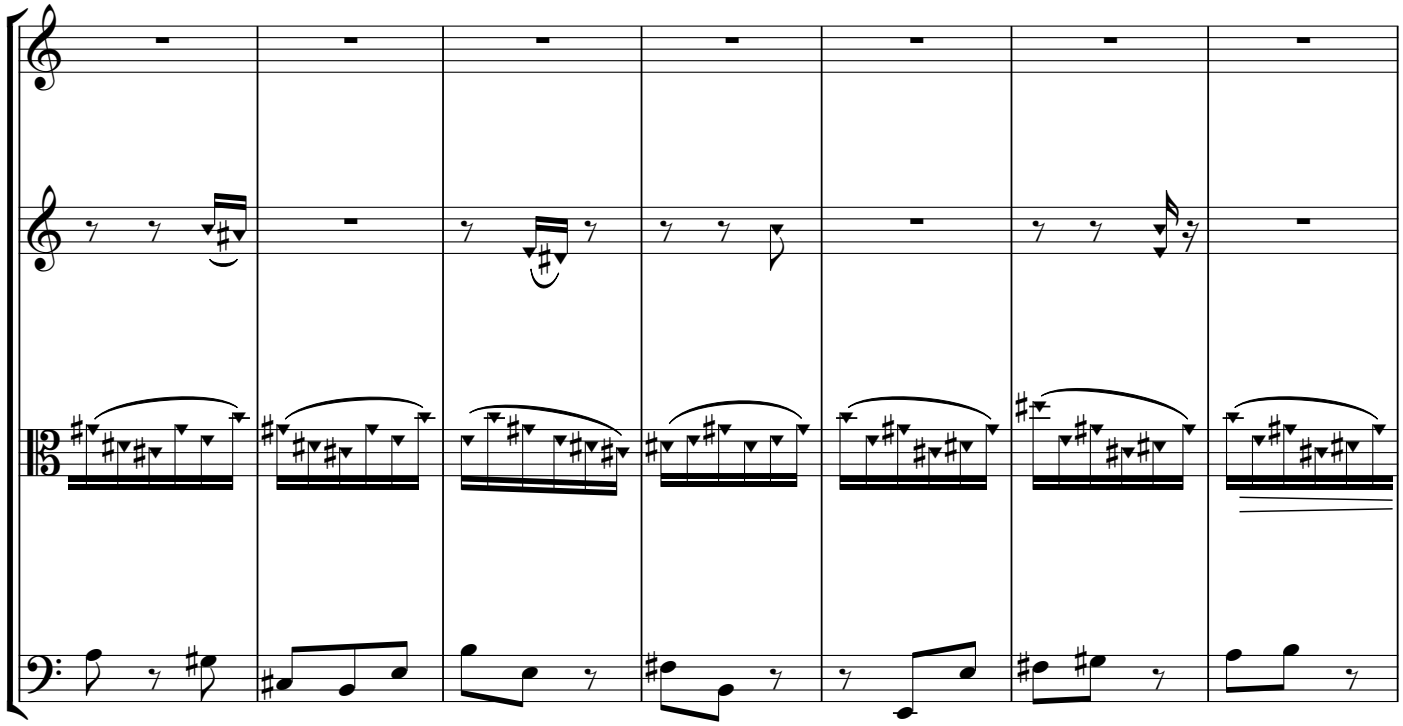

55


57
mp
sul A
pizz.
p
59
ord.
pp


61
p
col legno battuto
pizz.


A weird, whispered waltz
63
pizz.
col legno battuto
sul tasto
p
decresc. poco a poco
sul tasto
p
col legno battuto
(col legno)
mp

68



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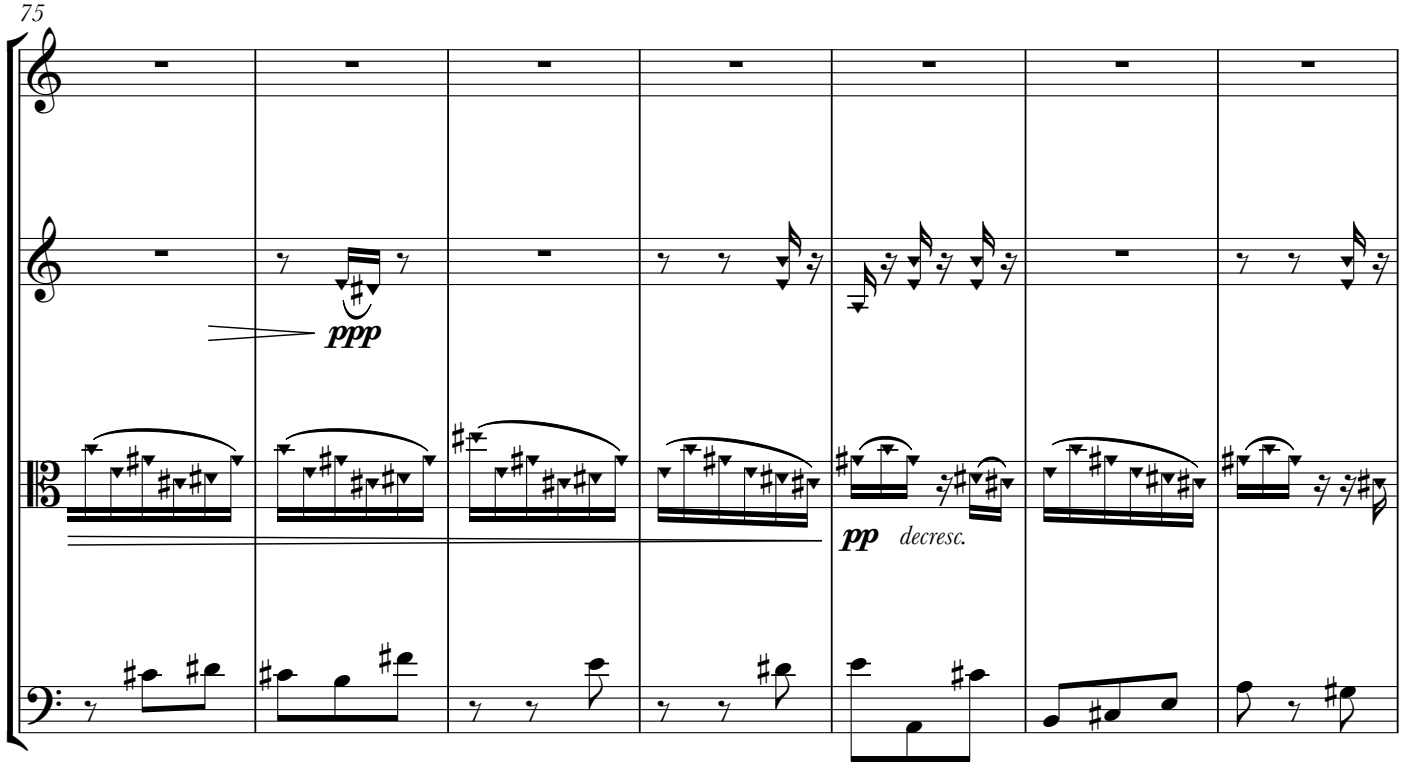
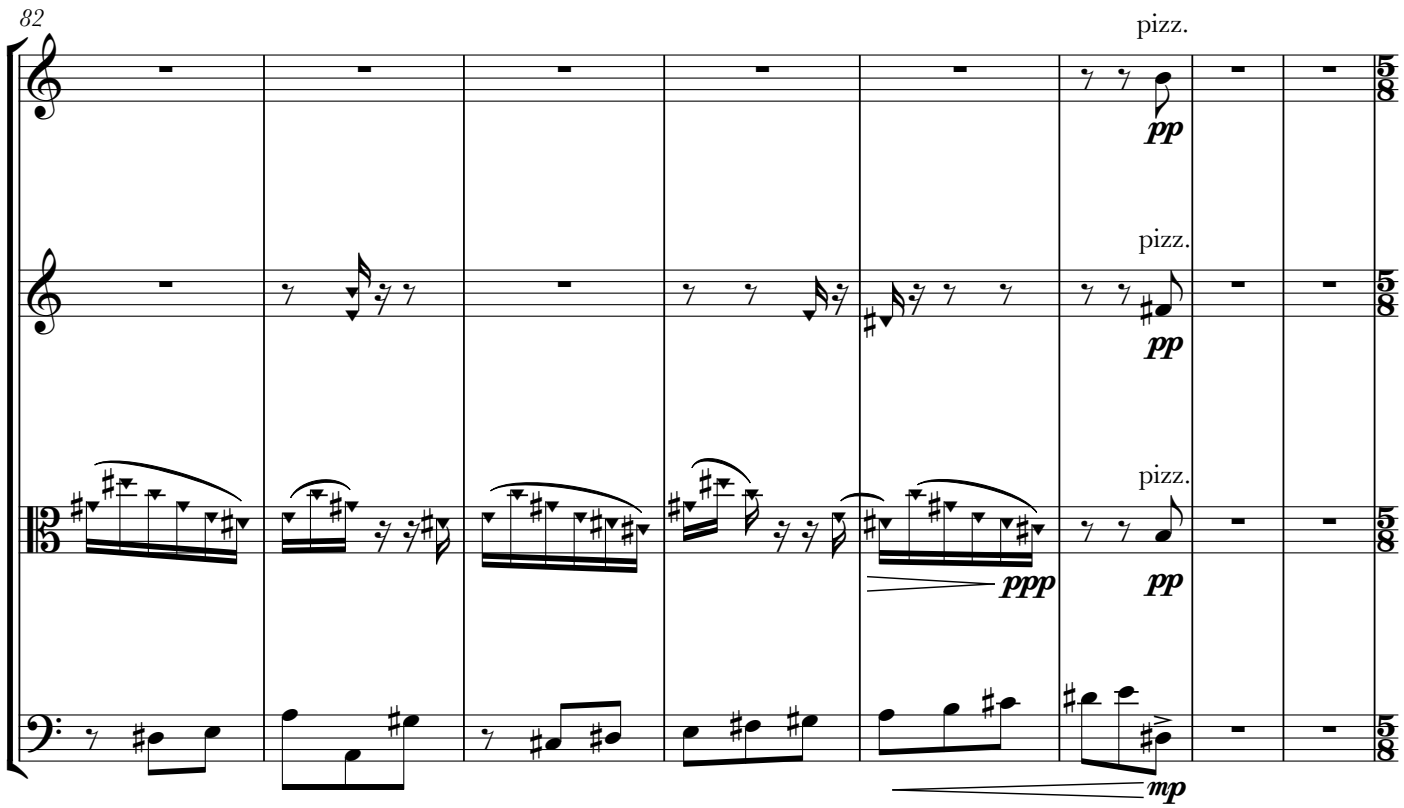
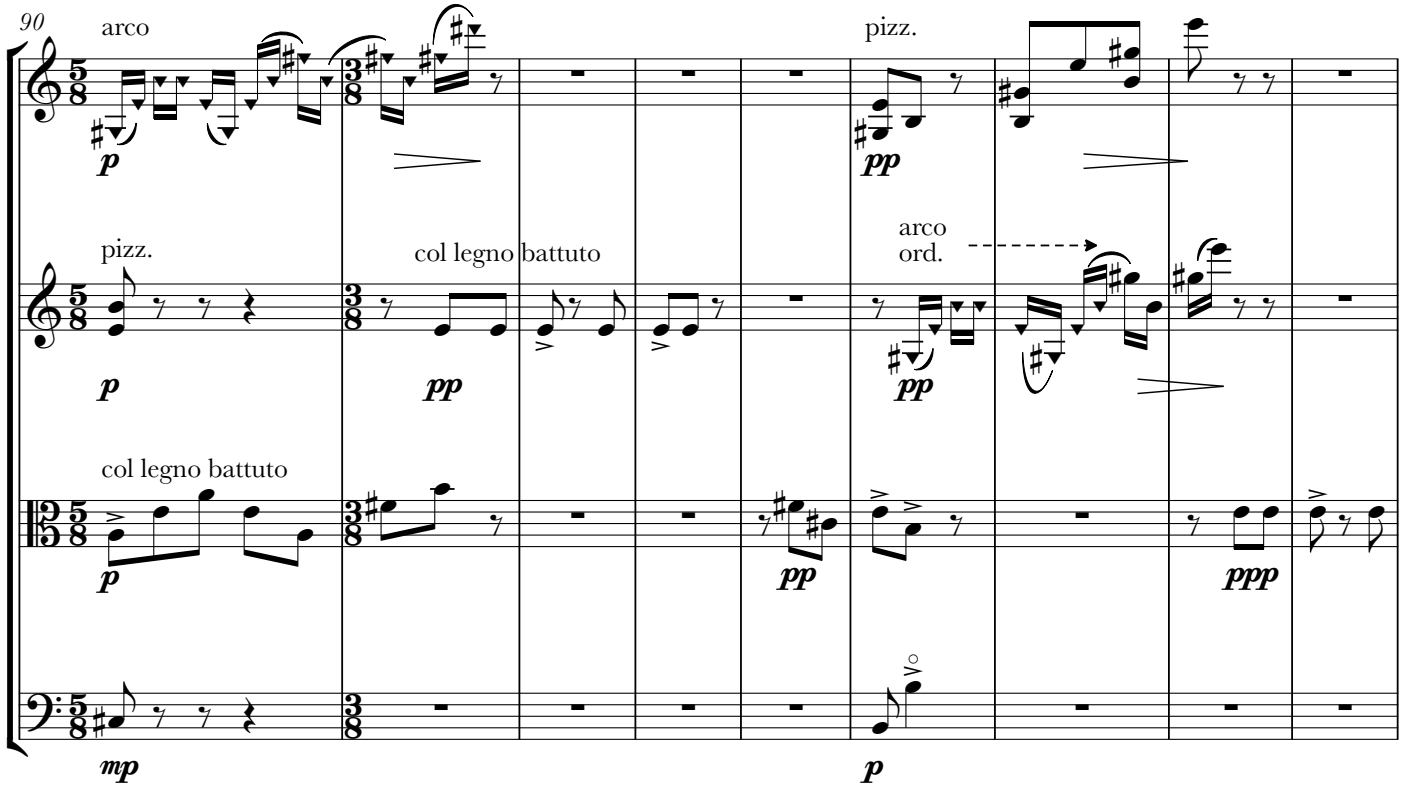
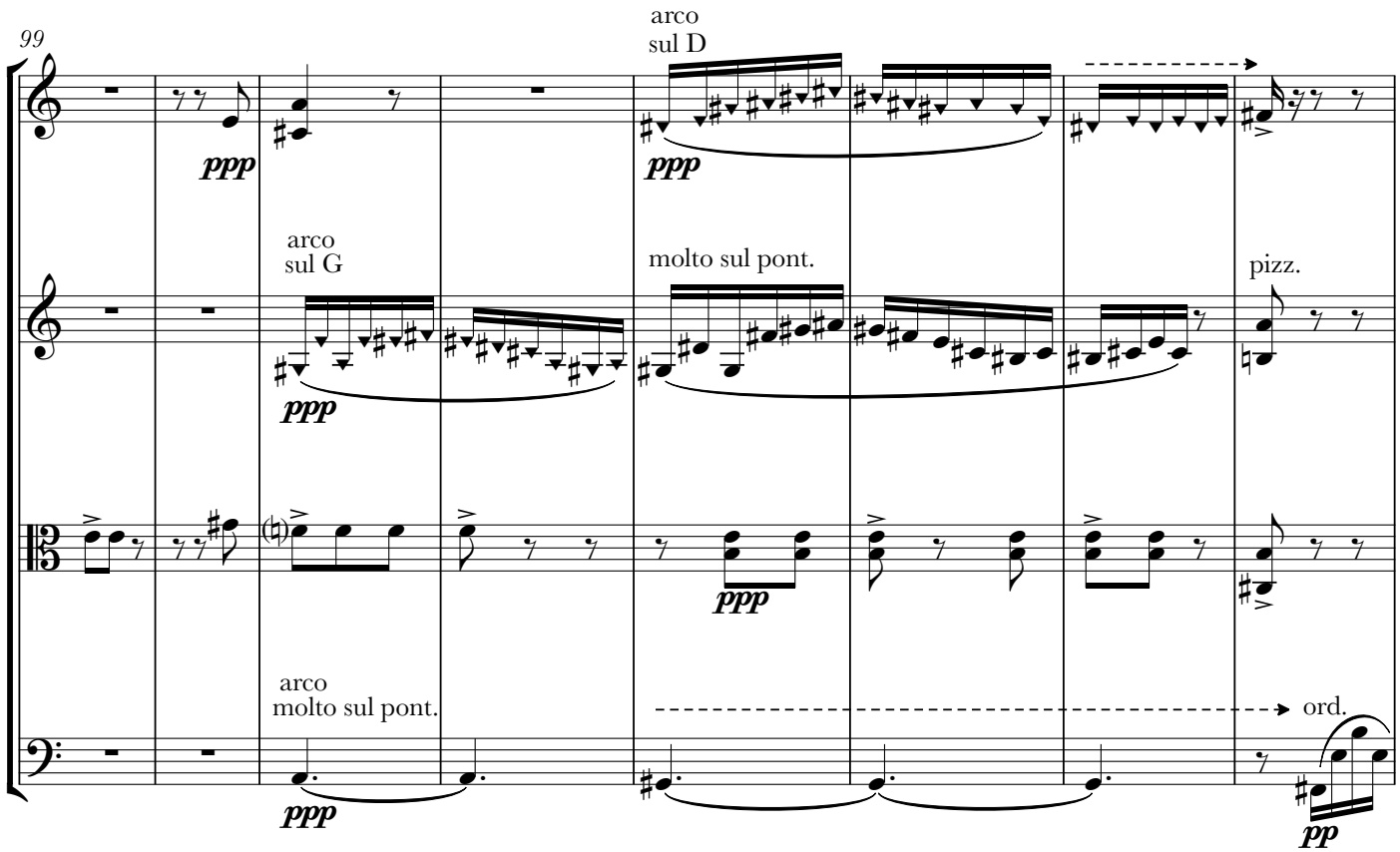
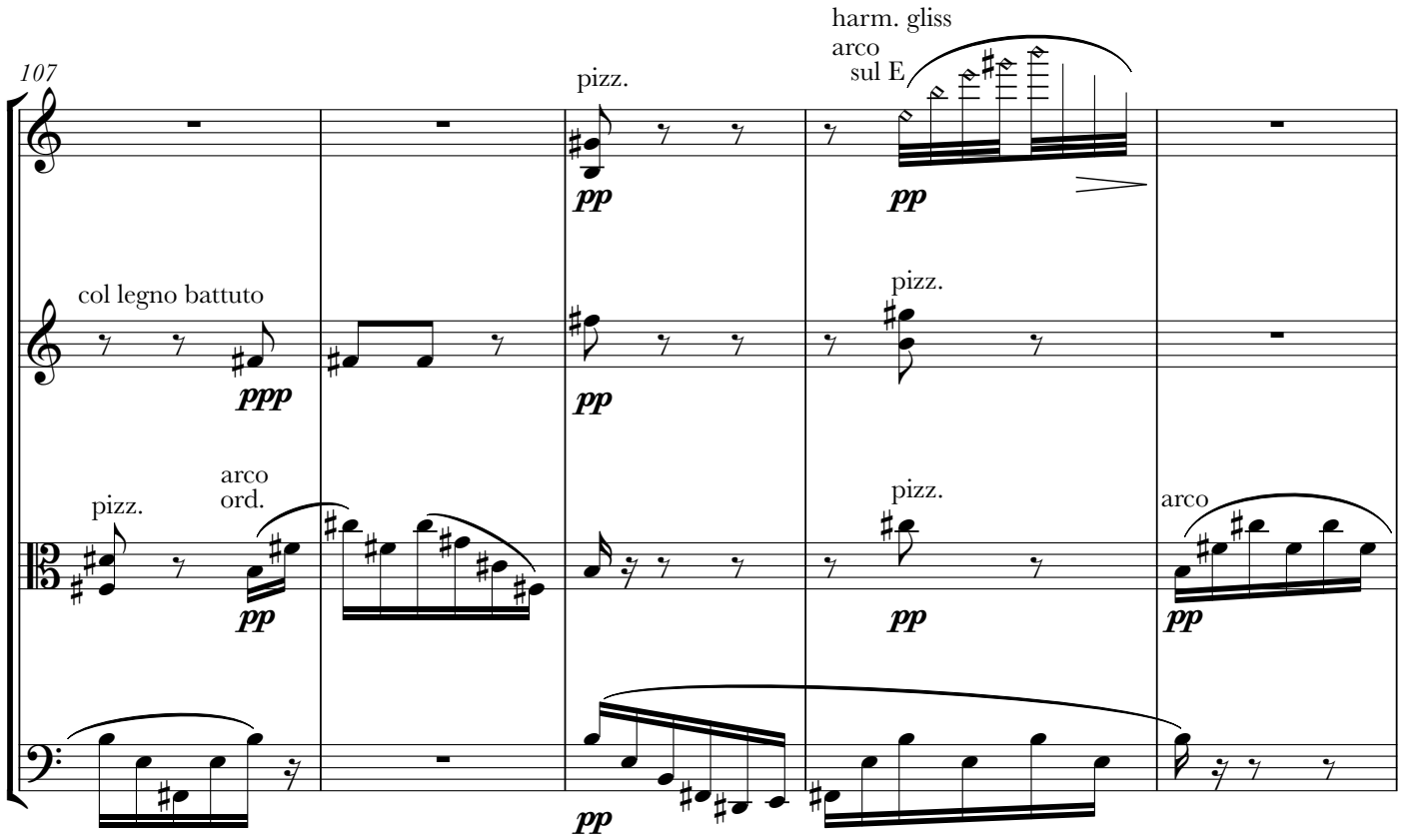
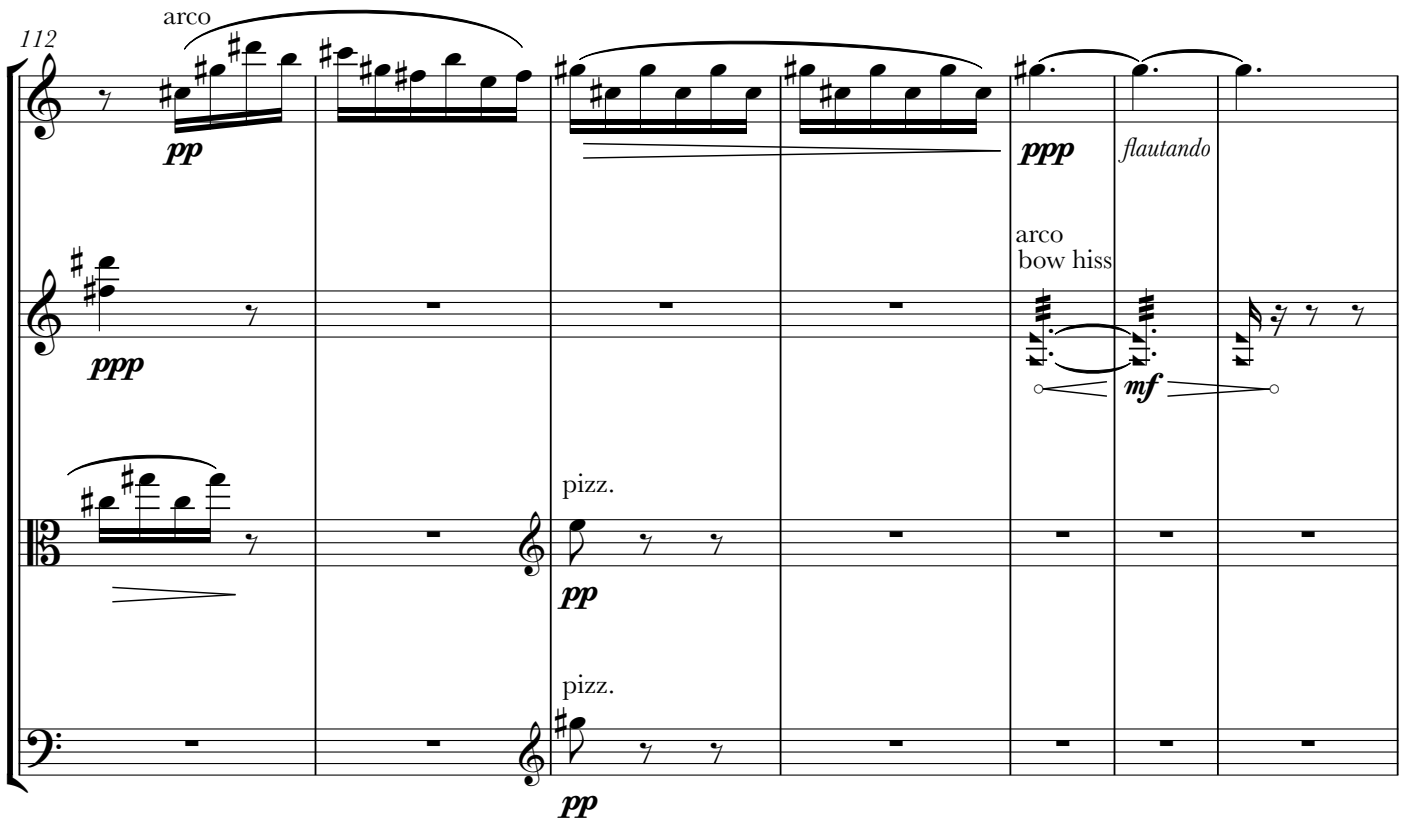


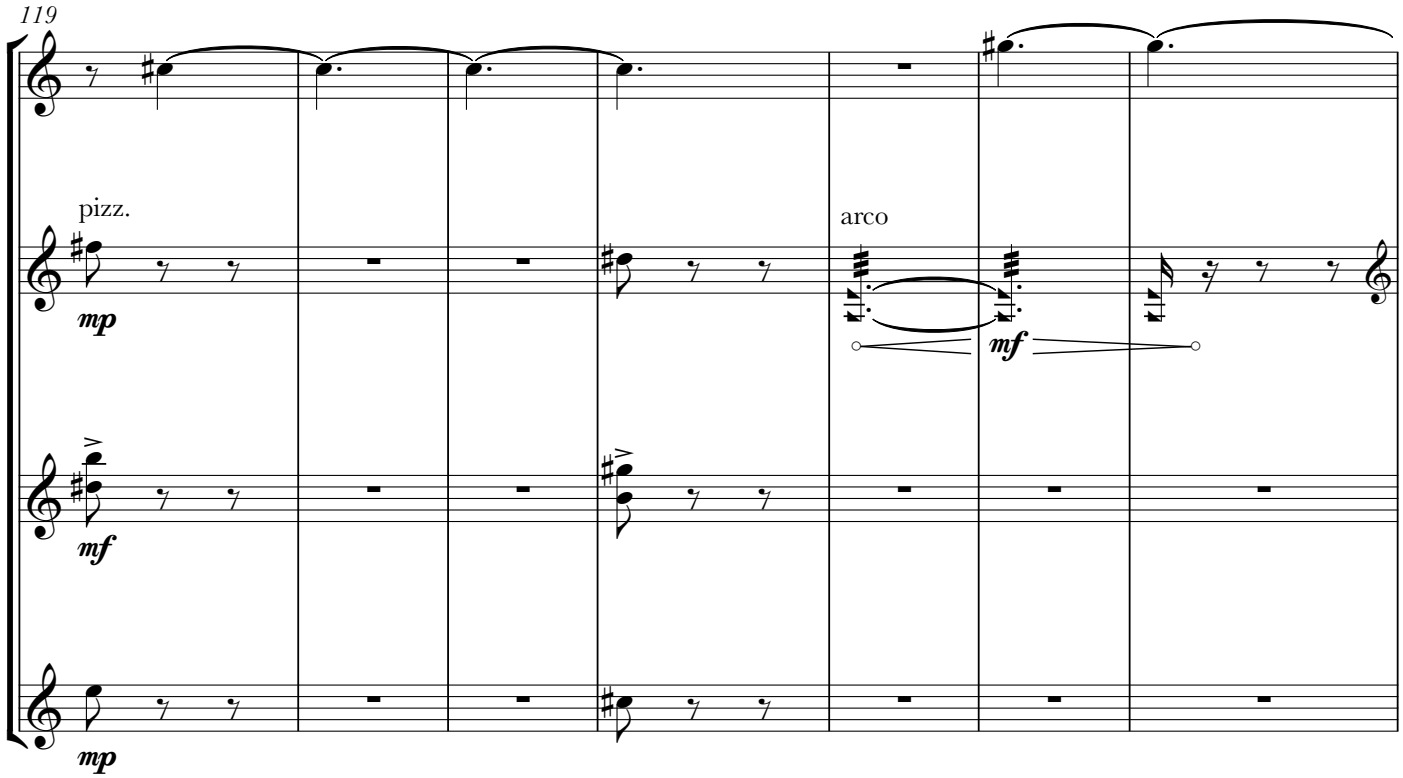

82
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp
pizz.
ppp
pp
mp

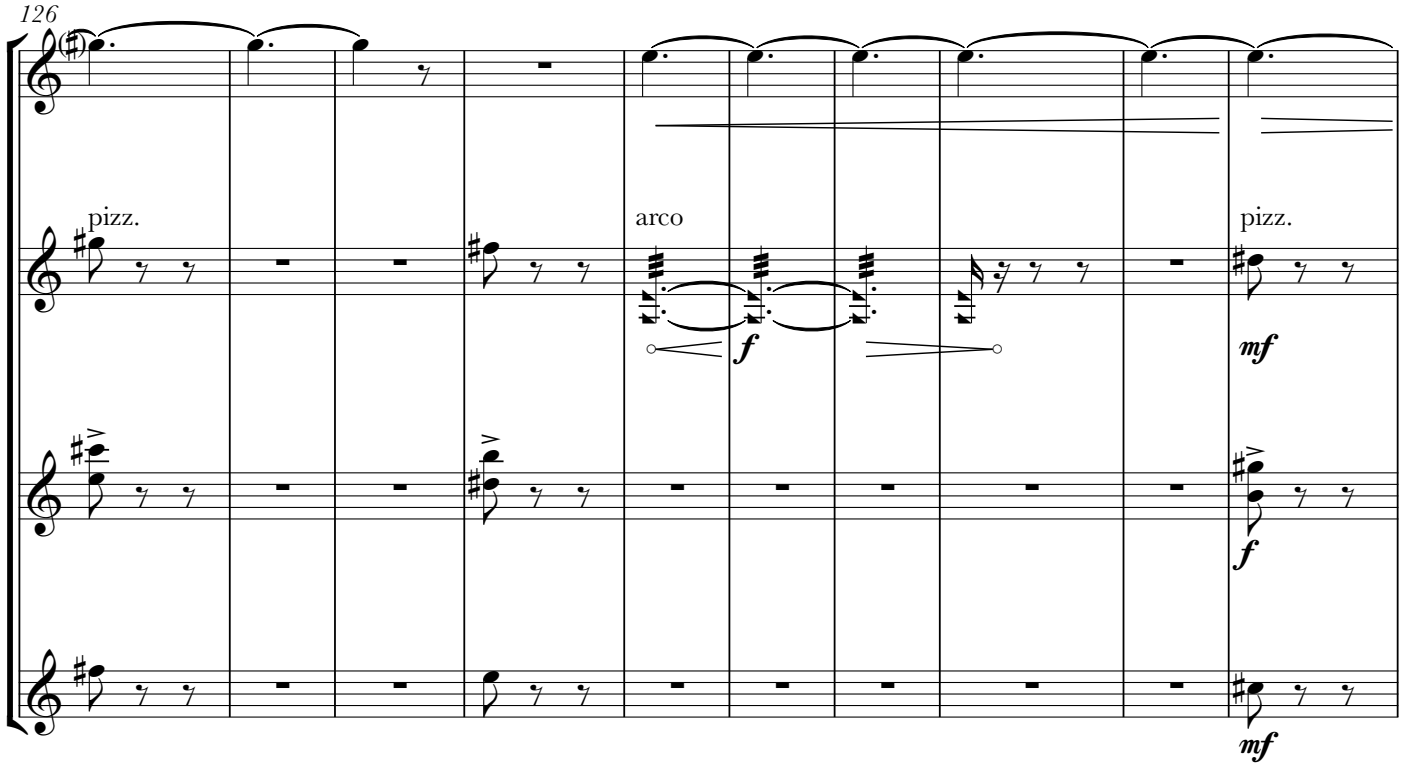

90
arco
p
pizz.
pp
pizz.
p
col legno battuto
pp
arco
ord.
pp
col legno battuto
p
pp
ppp
mp
p

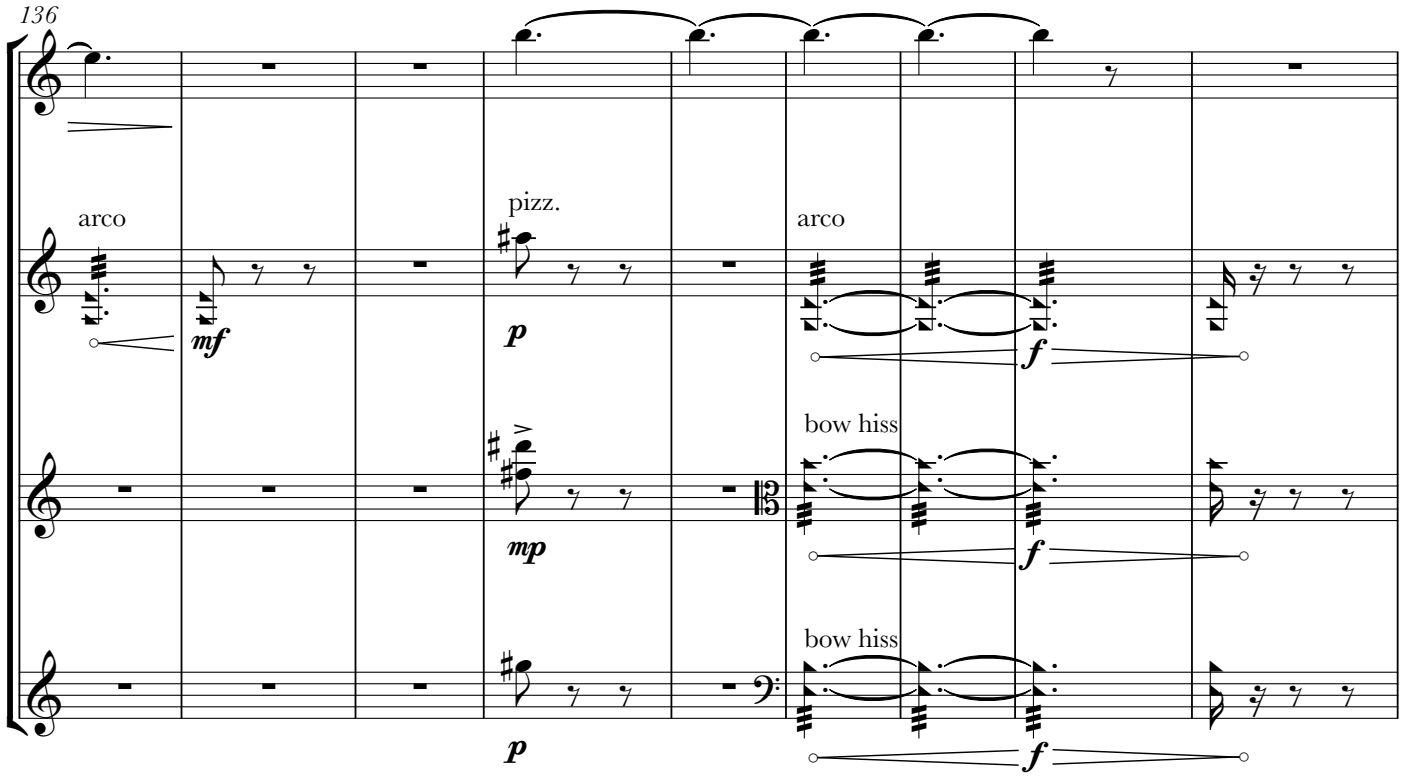

99
arco
sul D
ppp
arco
sul G
molto sul pont.
pizz.
arco
molto sul pont.
ord.
pp

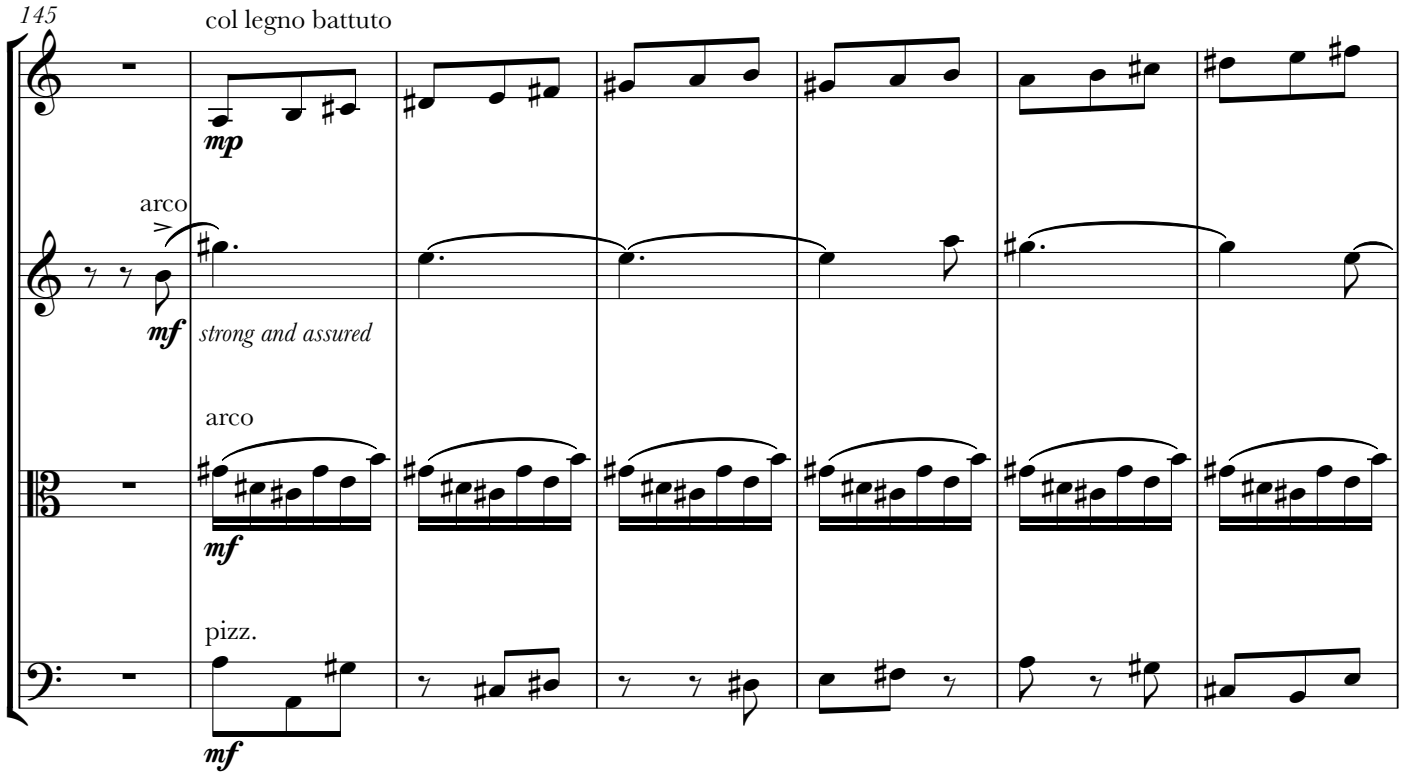

107
harm. gliss
arco
sul E
pizz.
col legno battuto
arco
ord.
pizz.
arco
pp

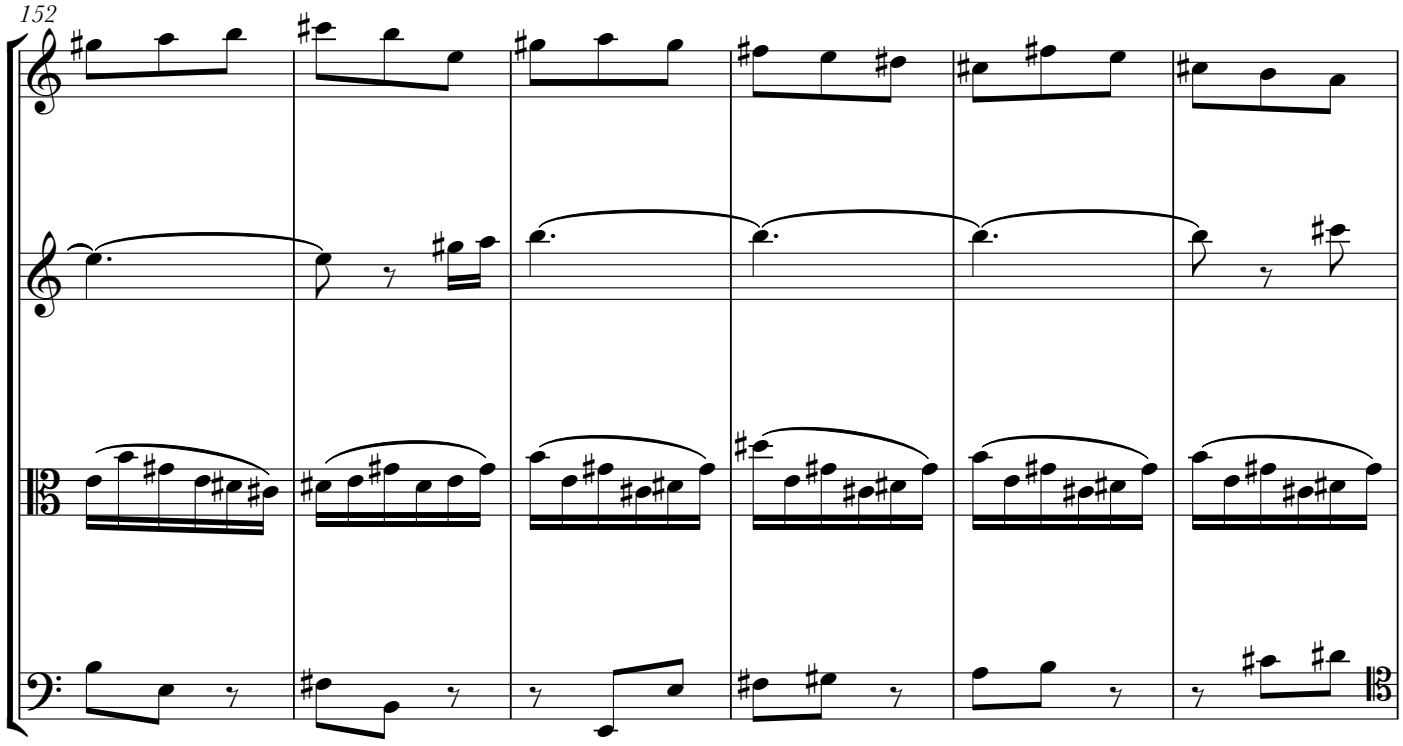

112
arco
pp
ppp
flautando
arco
bow hiss
mf
ppp
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp

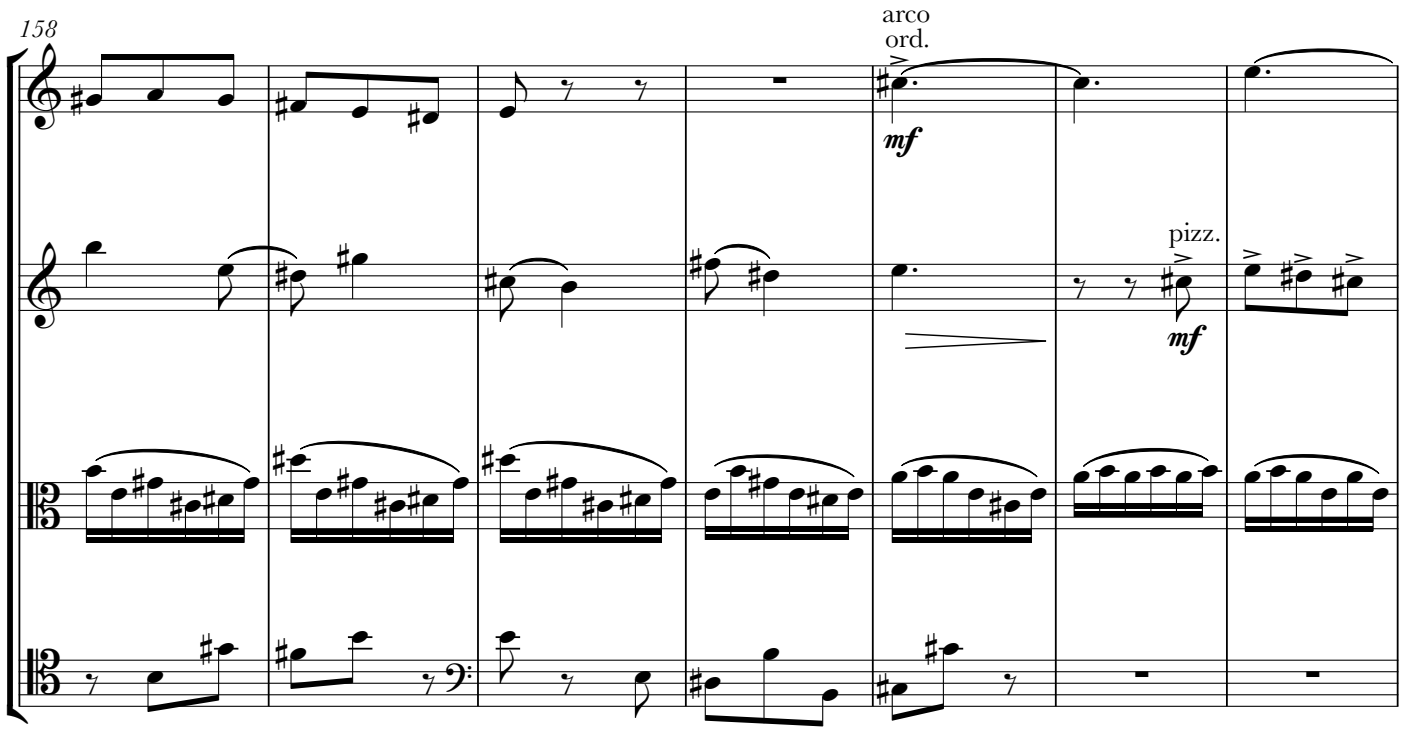

119
pizz.
mp
arco
mf
mf
mp

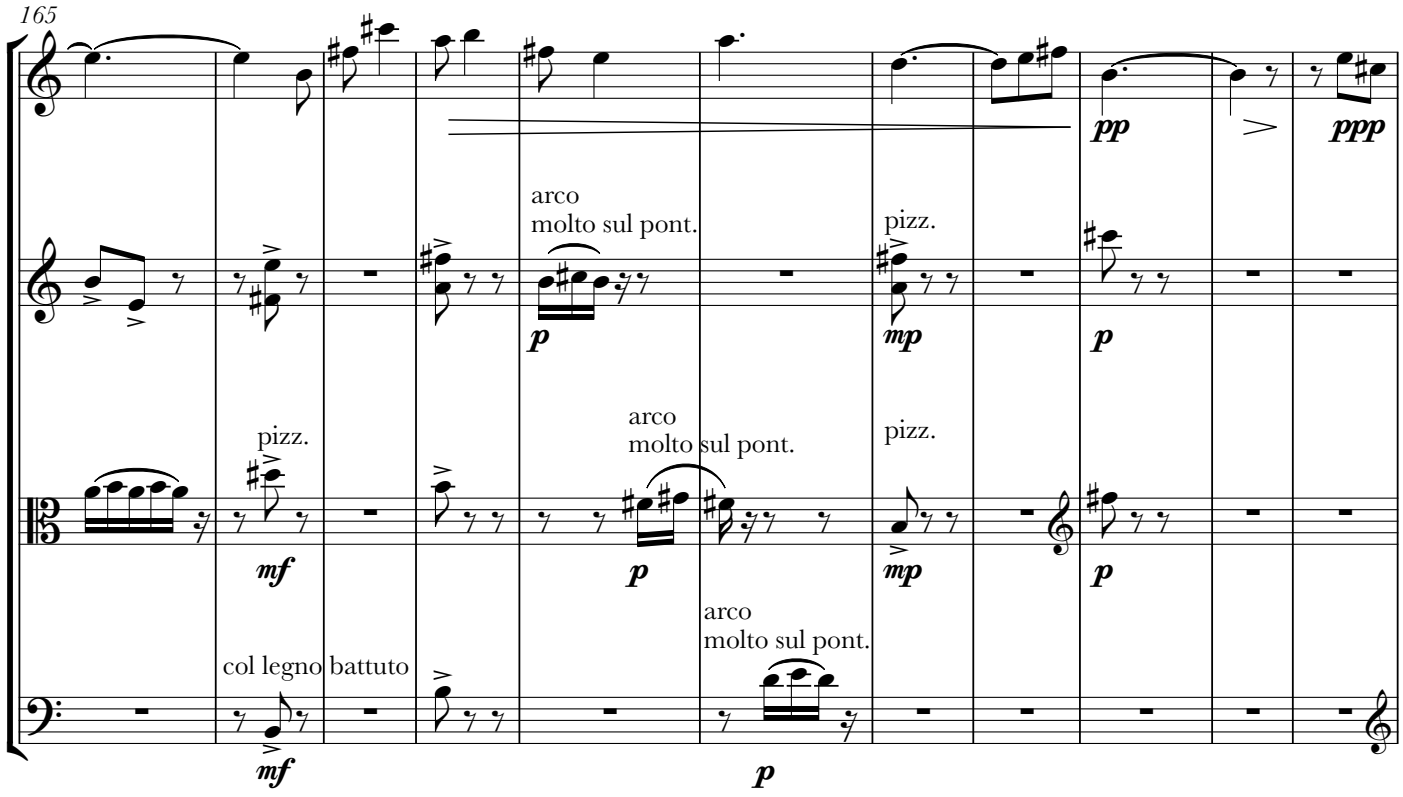

126
pizz.
arco
pizz.
f
mf
f
mf

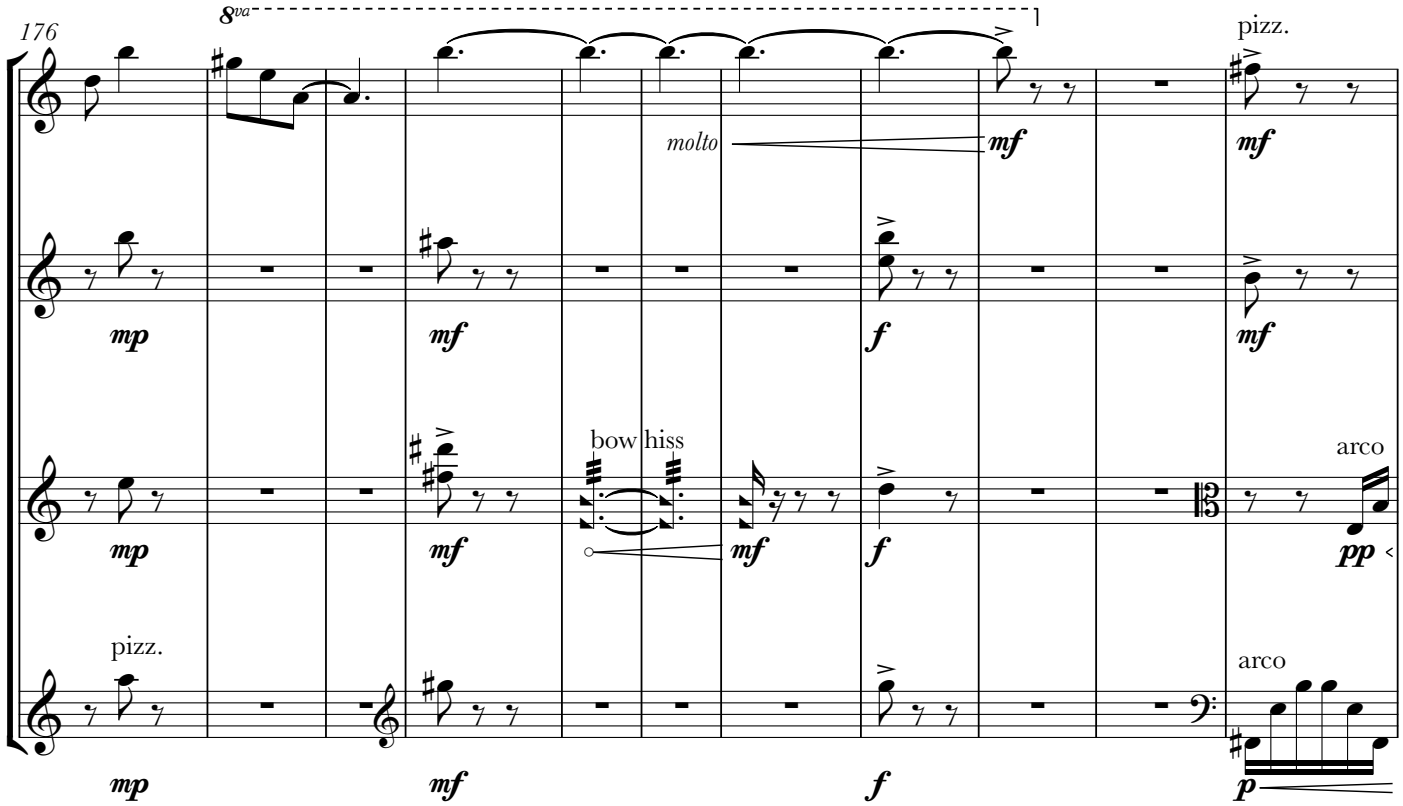

136
arco
pizz.
arco
mf
p
f
bow hiss
mp
f
bow hiss
p
f

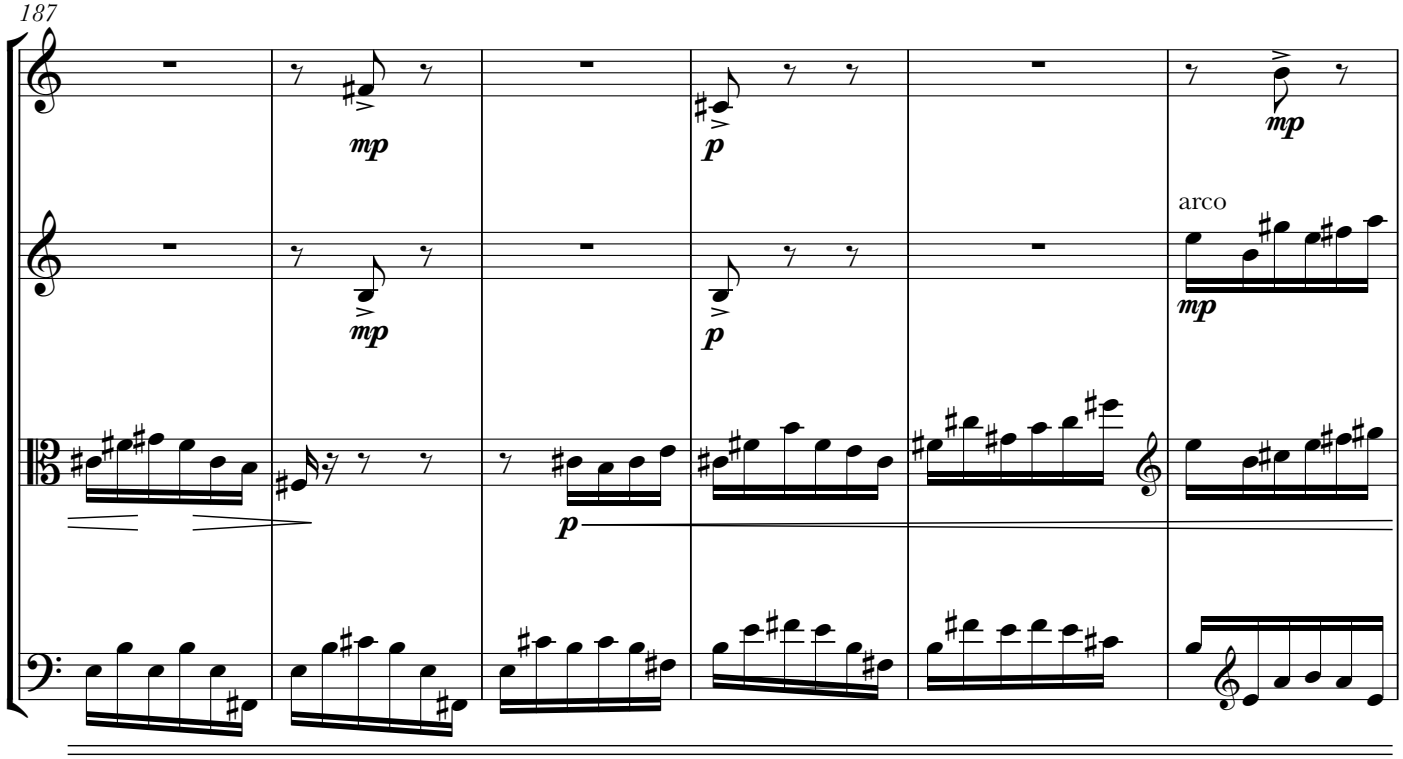

145
col legno battuto
mp
arco
mf
strong and assured
arco
mf
pizz.
mf

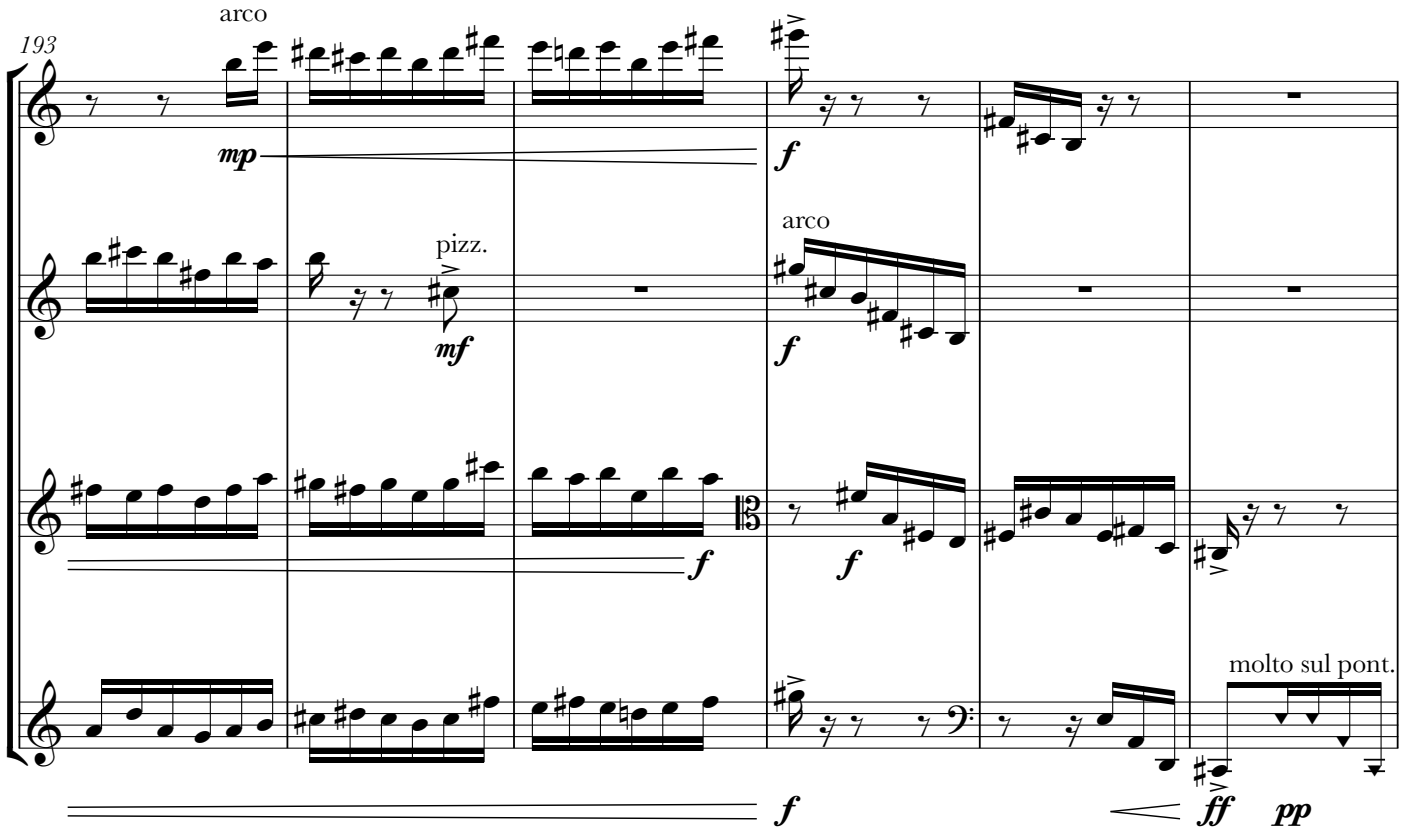

152


158
arco
ord.
mf
pizz.
mf

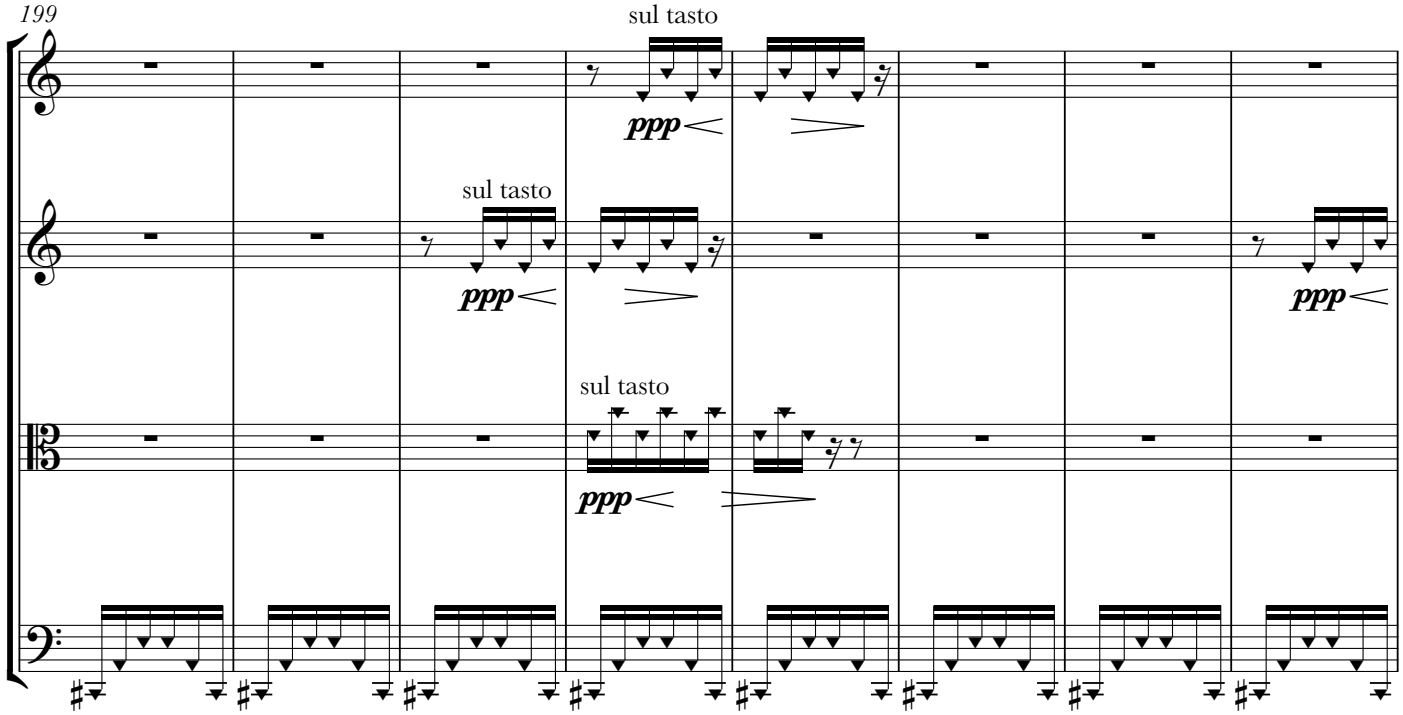

165
pp
ppp
arco
molto sul pont.
p
pizz.
mp
p
pizz.
mf
arco
molto sul pont.
p
pizz.
mp
p
col legno battuto
mf
arco
molto sul pont.
p

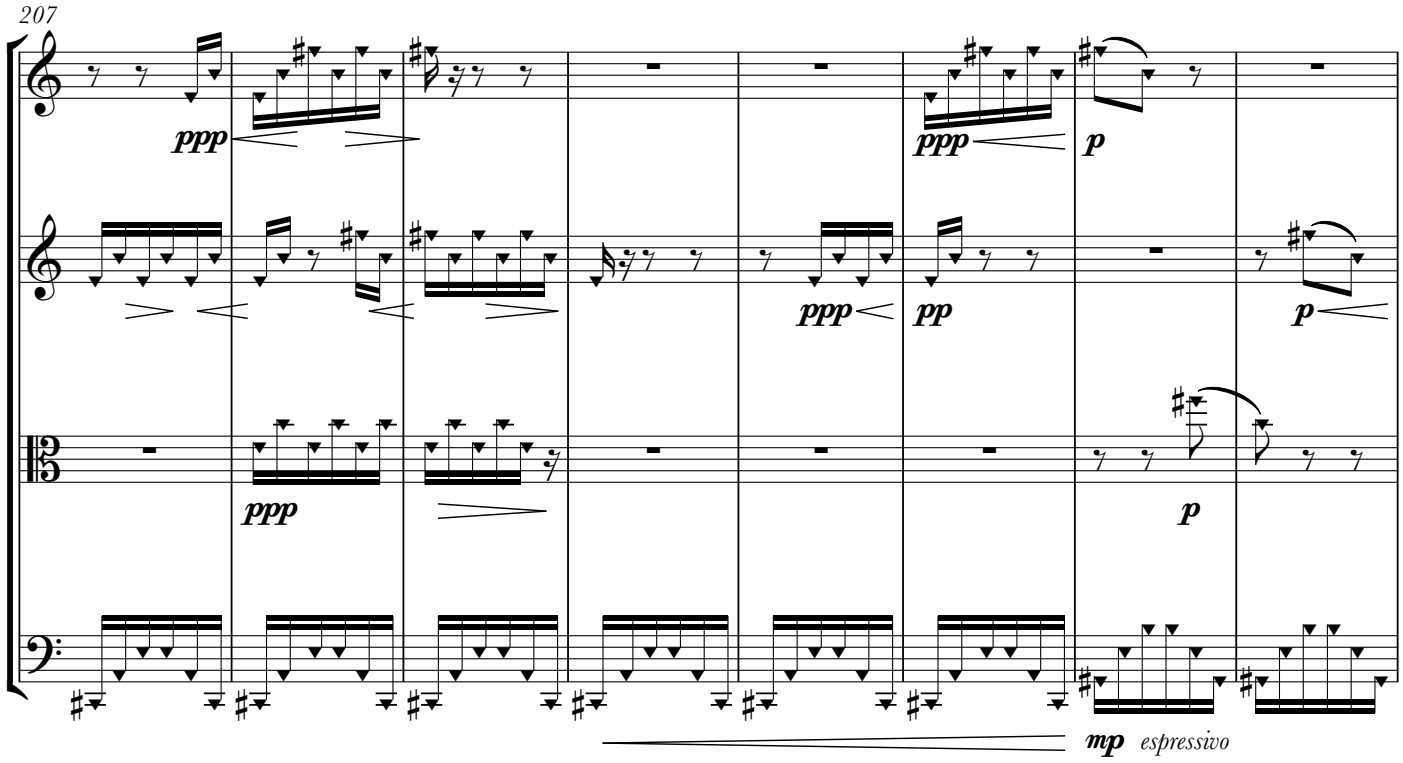

176
8va
molto
pizz.
bow hiss
arco
pizz.
arco

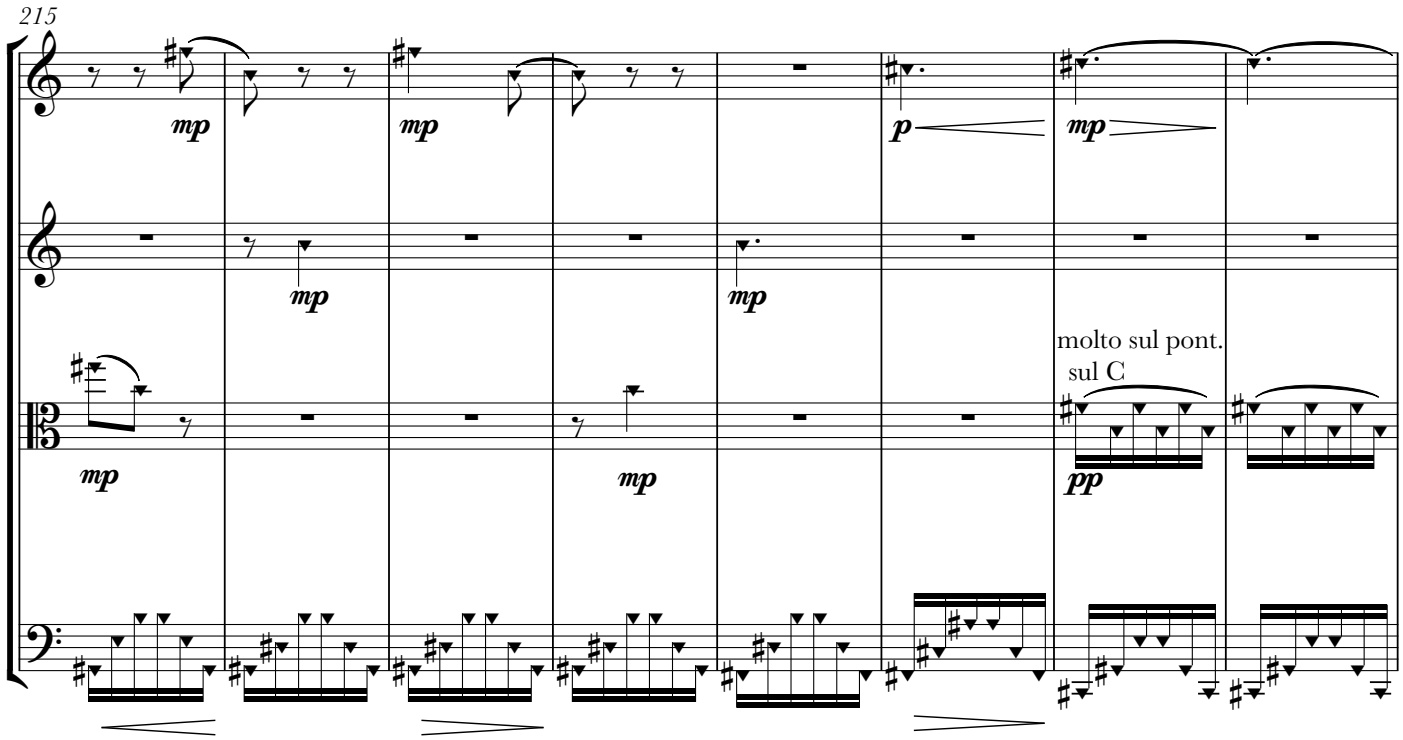

187
arco

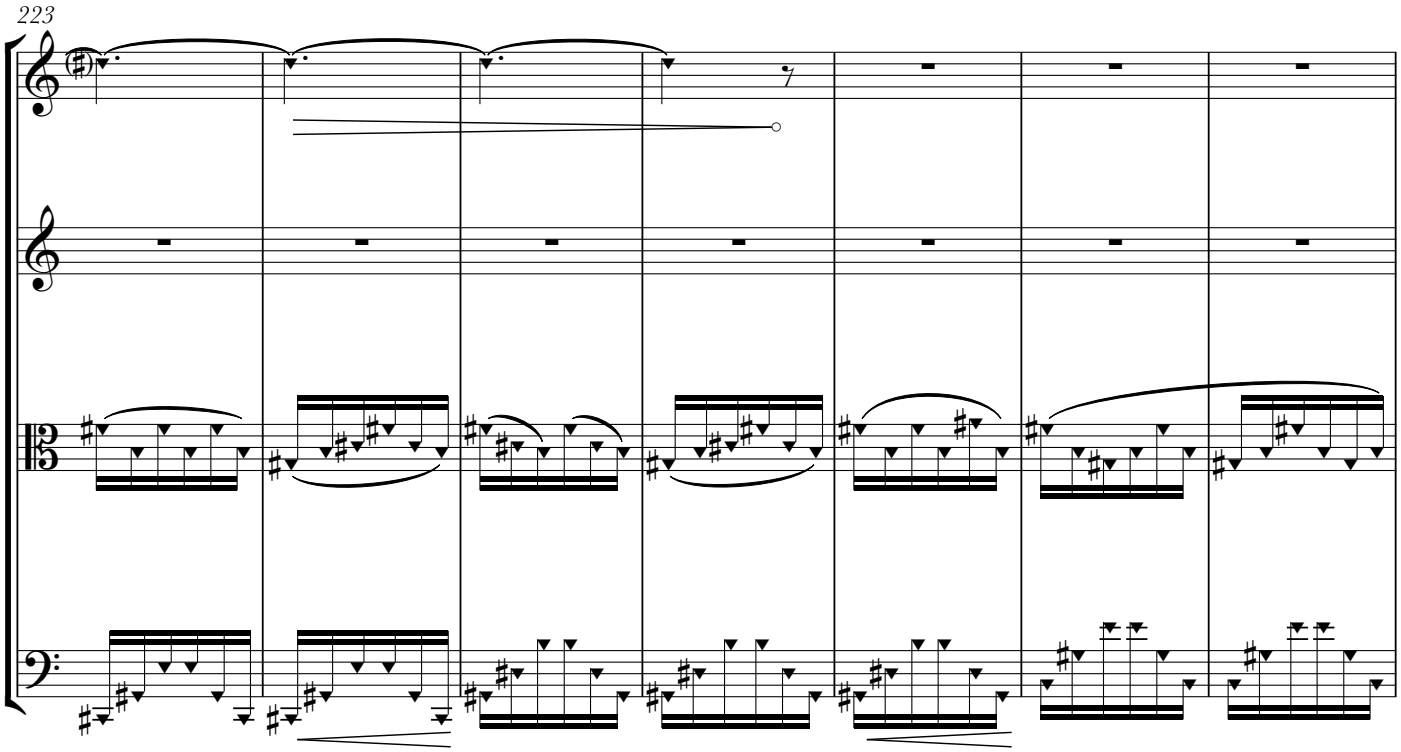


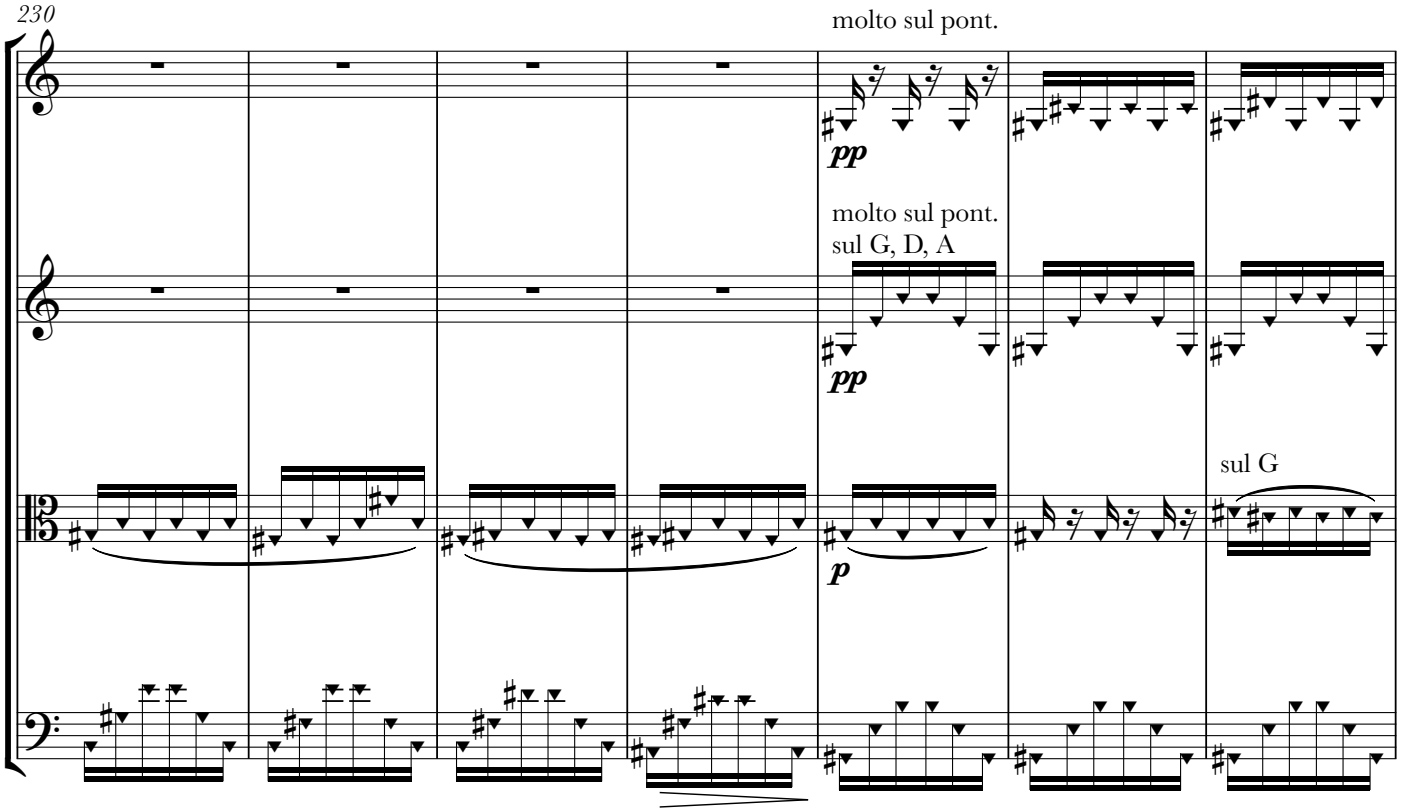
With a subterranean momentum

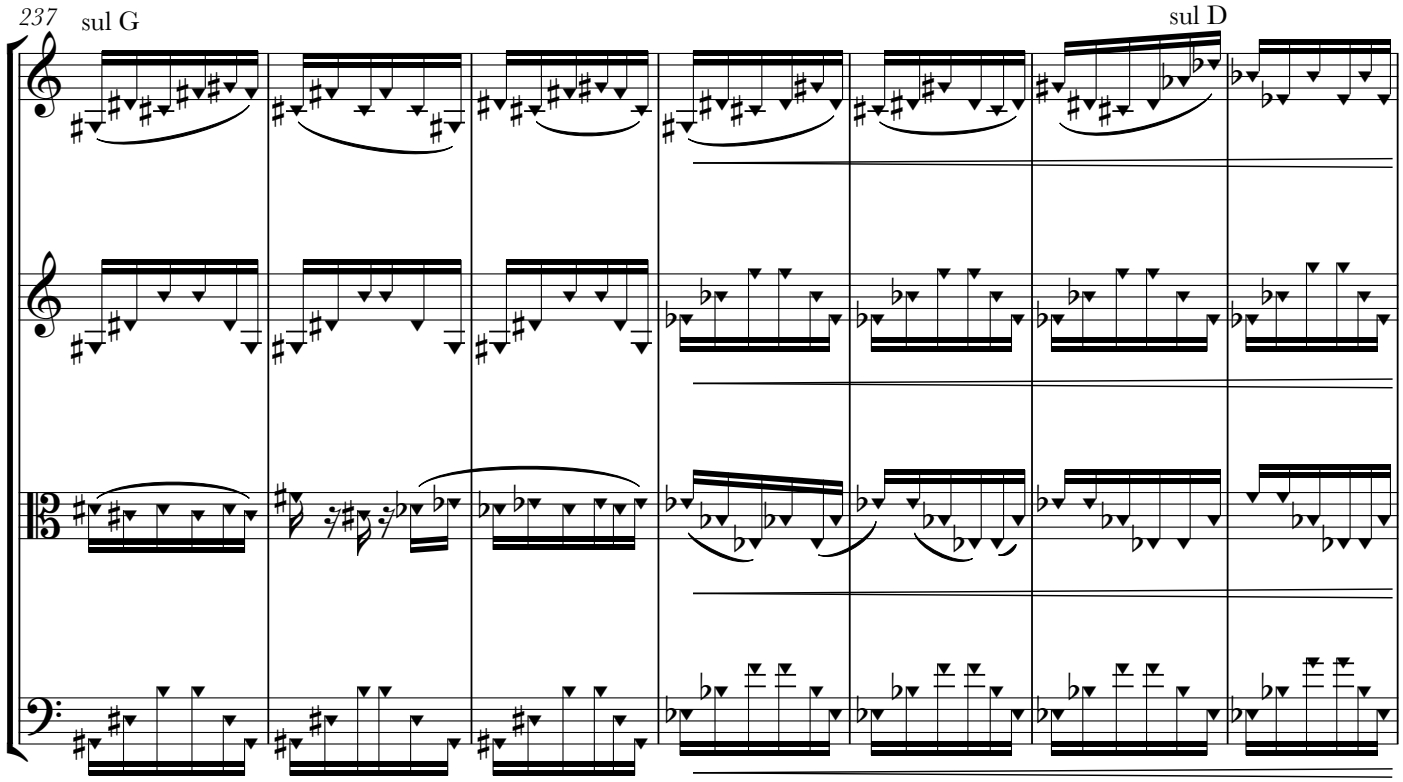



207
ppp
ppp
ppp
pp
p
p
p
ppp
mp espressivo

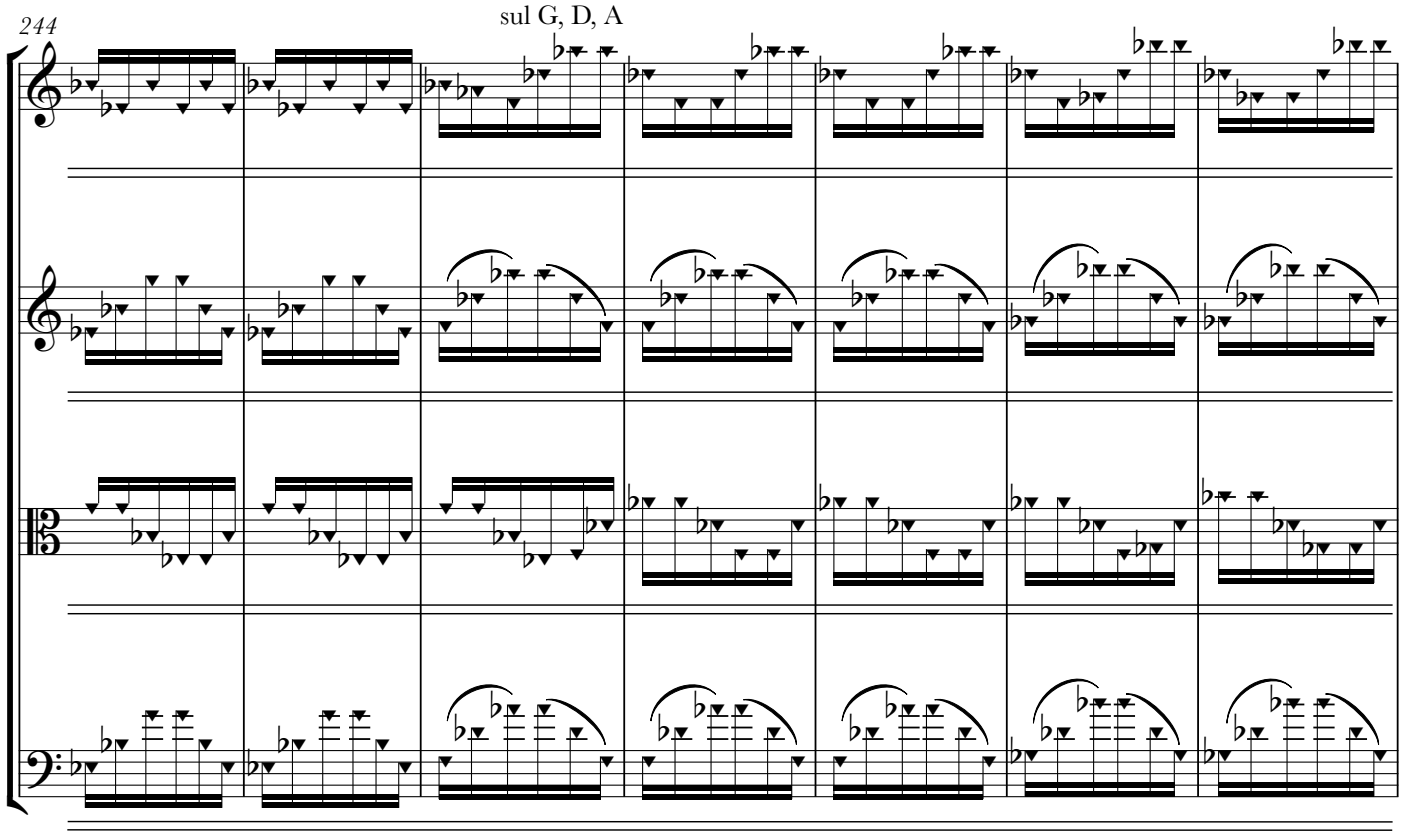

215
mp
mp
p
mp
mp
mp
mp
mp
molto sul pont.
sul C
pp

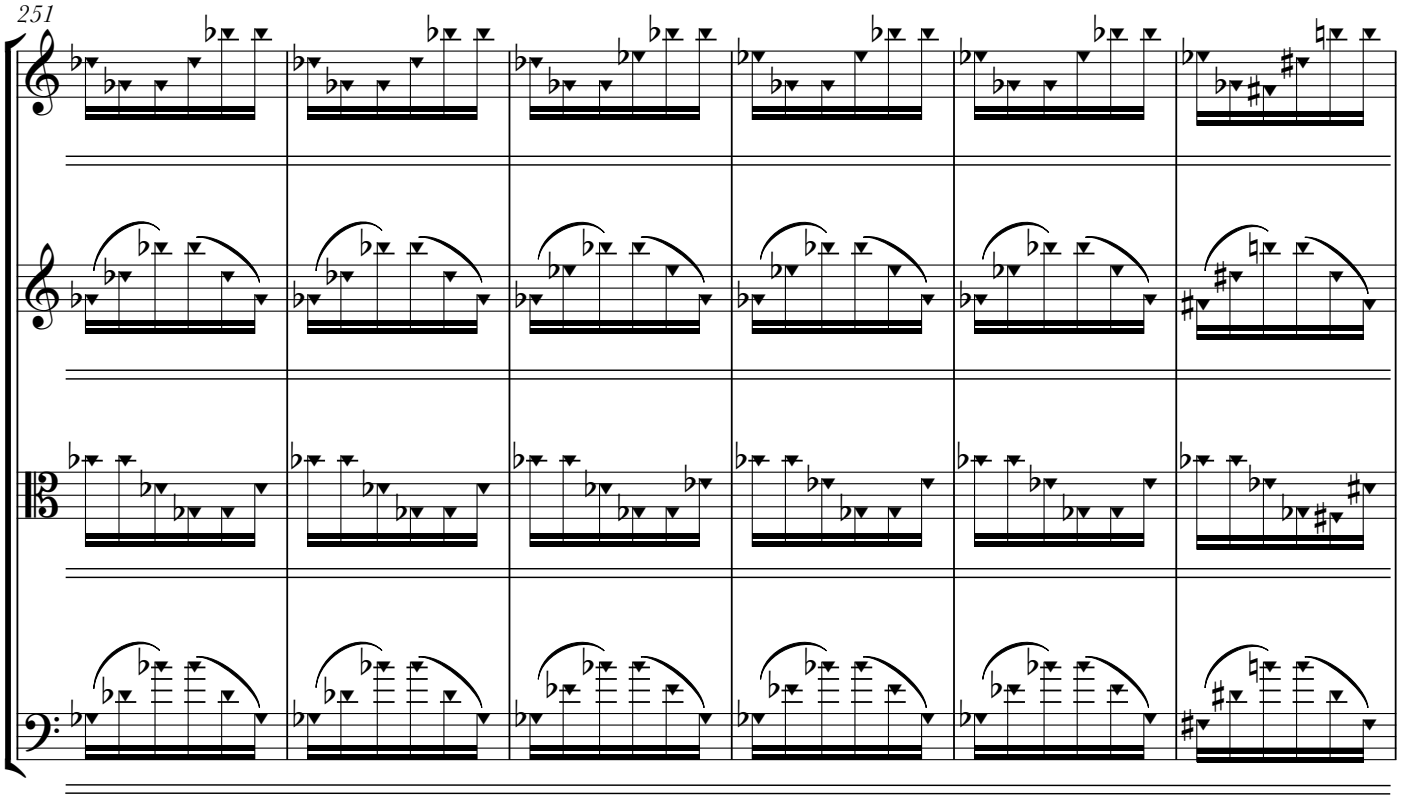

223

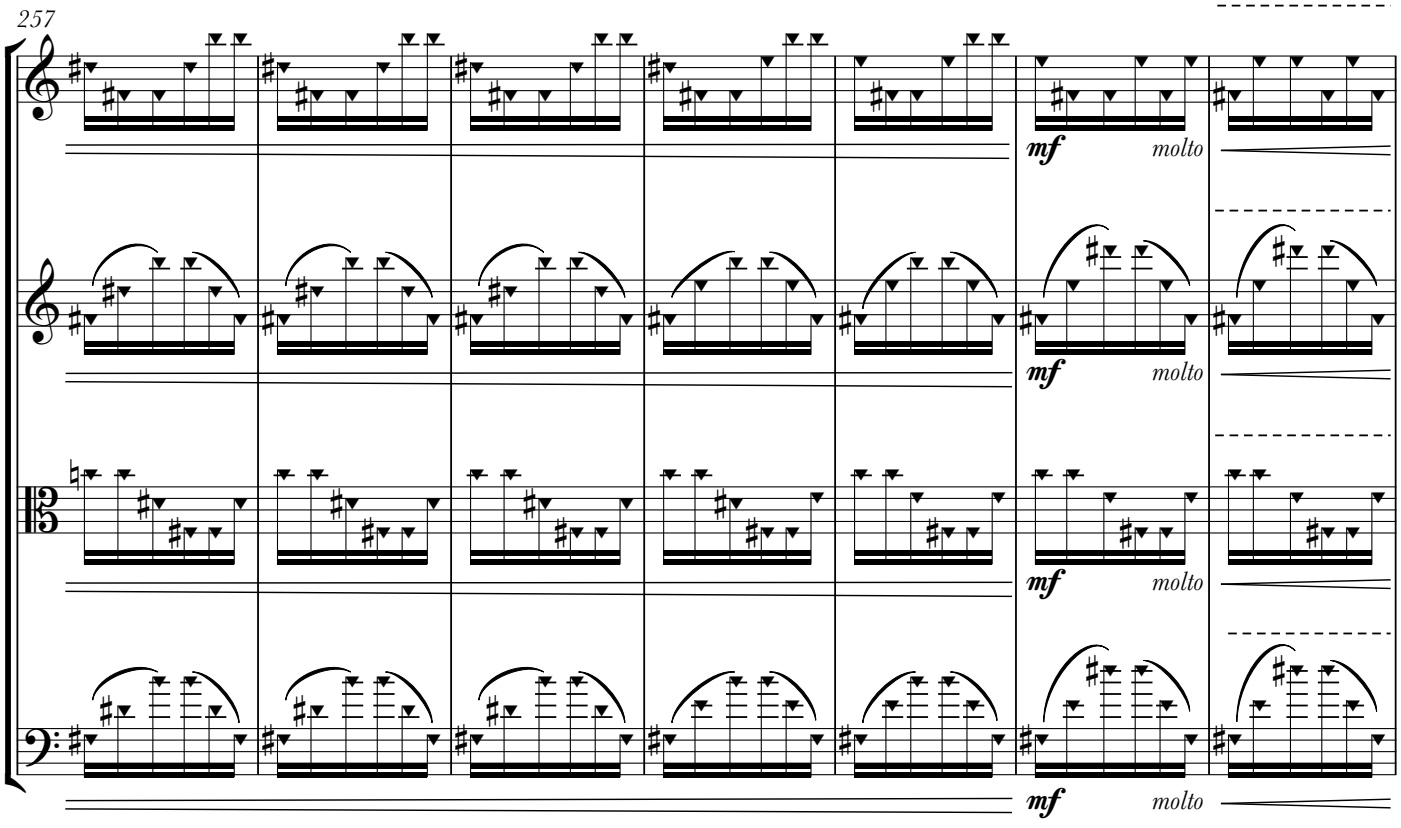

230
molto sul pont.
pp
molto sul pont.
sul G, D, A
pp
sul G
p

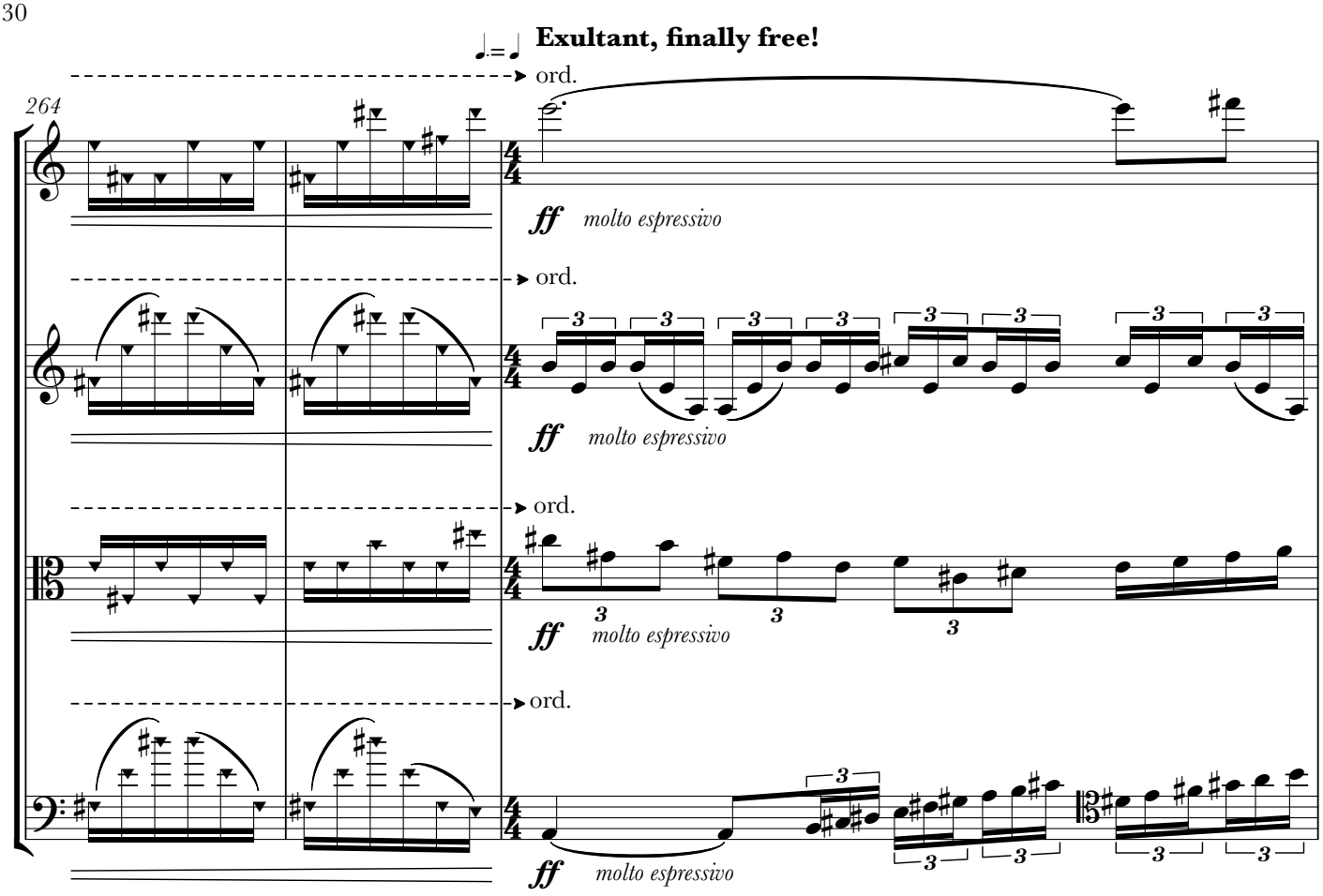


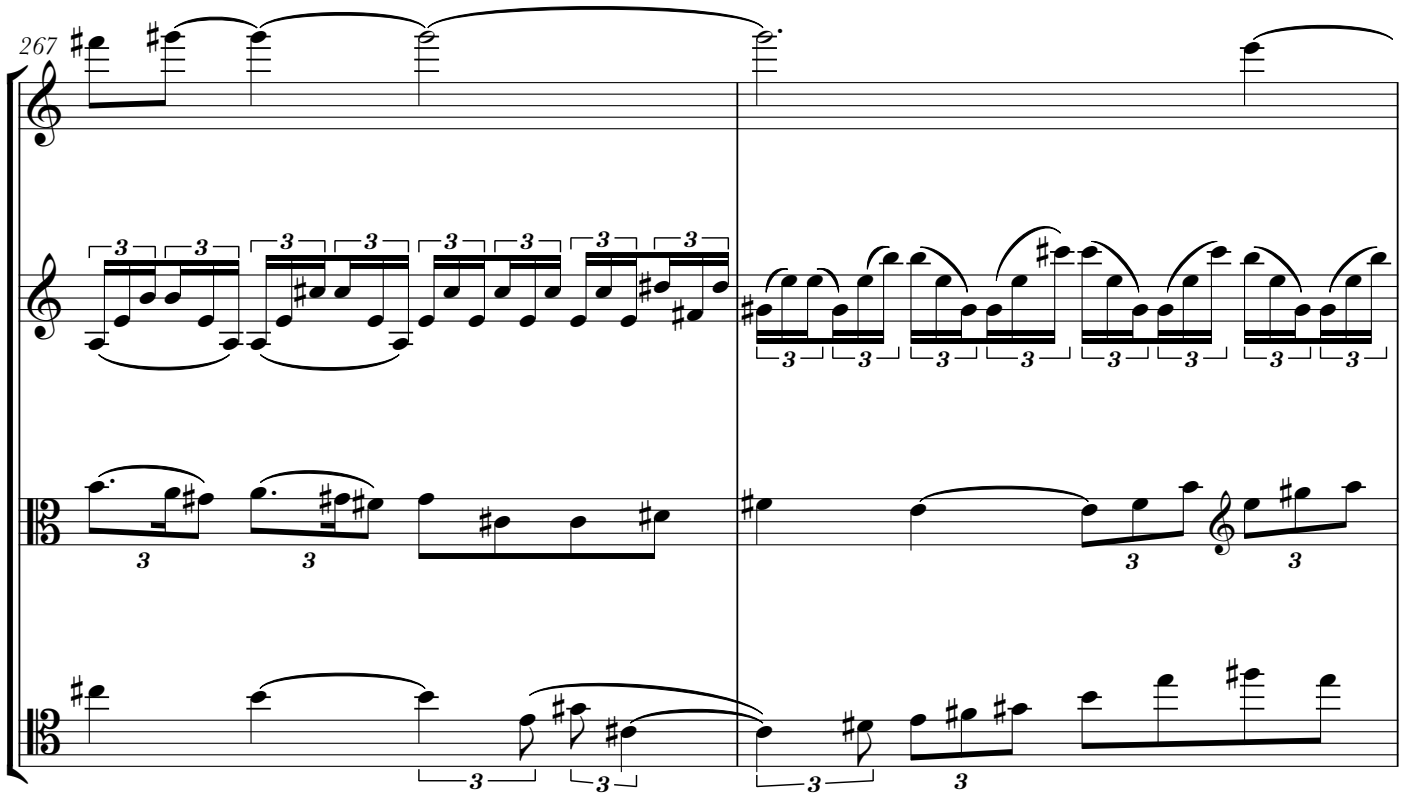
Straining against the timbral constraints with increasing vigor




251


257
mf
molto
mf
molto
mf
molto
mf
molto


Exultant, finally free!
264
ord.
ff molto espressivo
ord.
ff molto espressivo
ord.
ff molto espressivo
ord.
ff molto espressivo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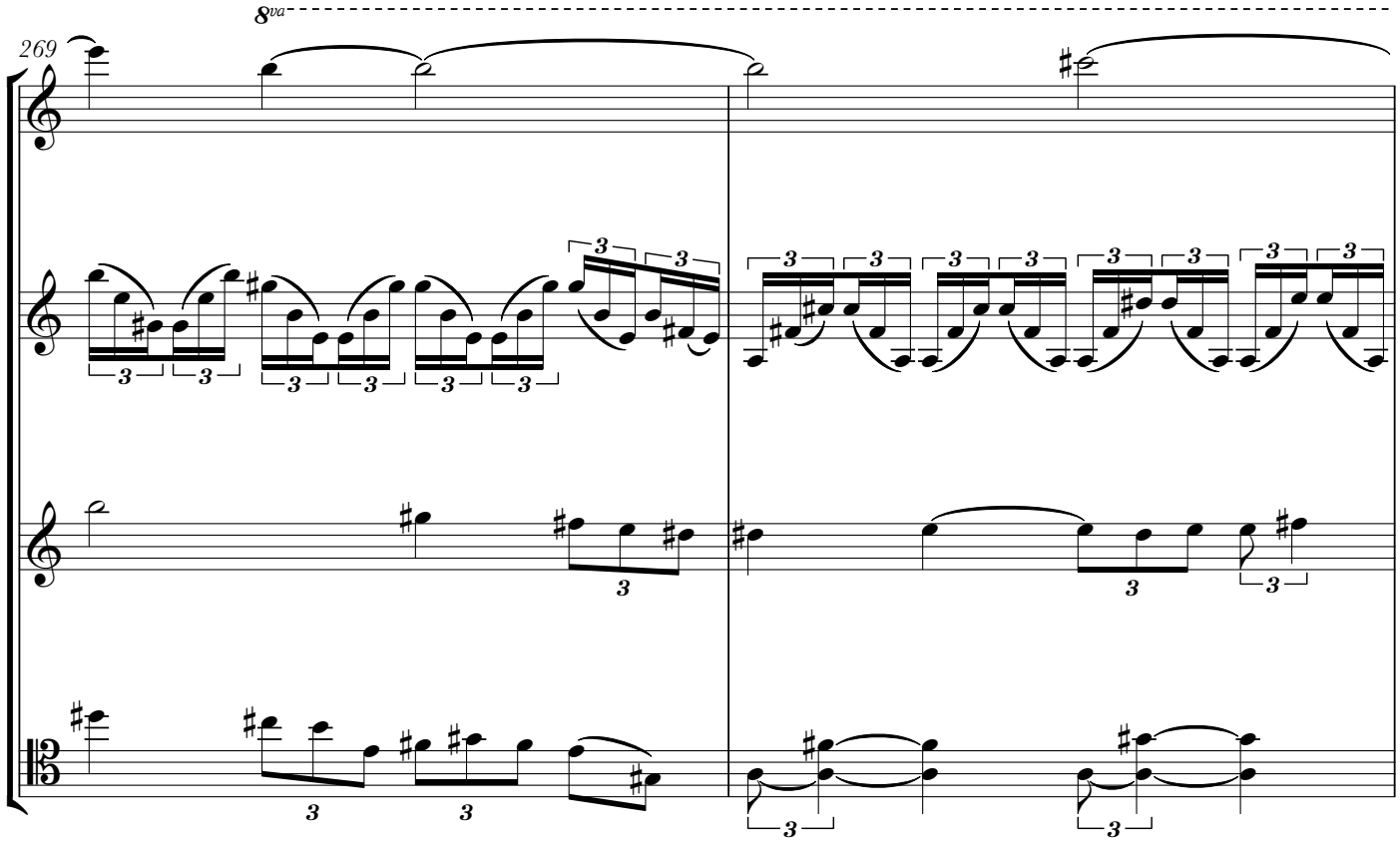
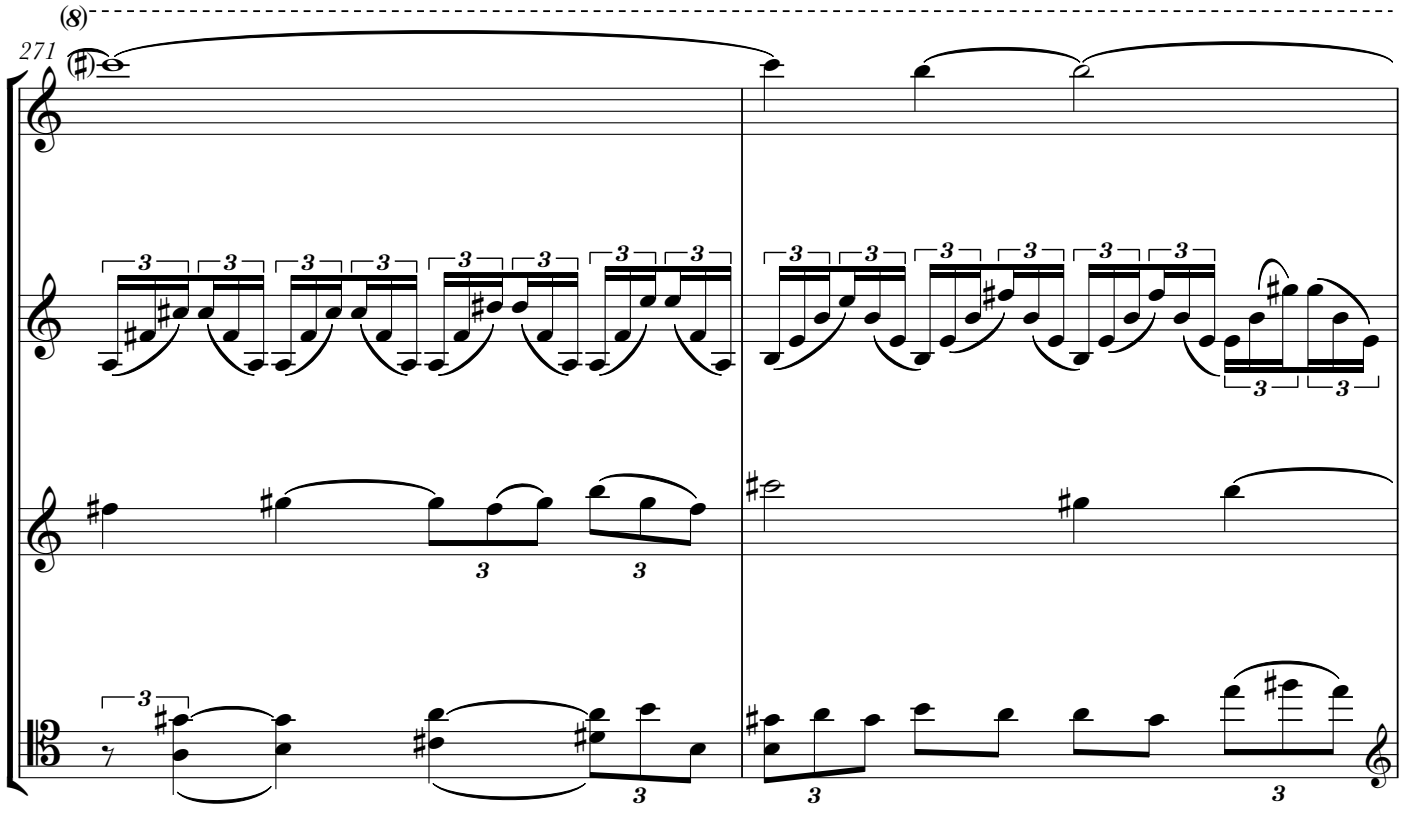

8va
269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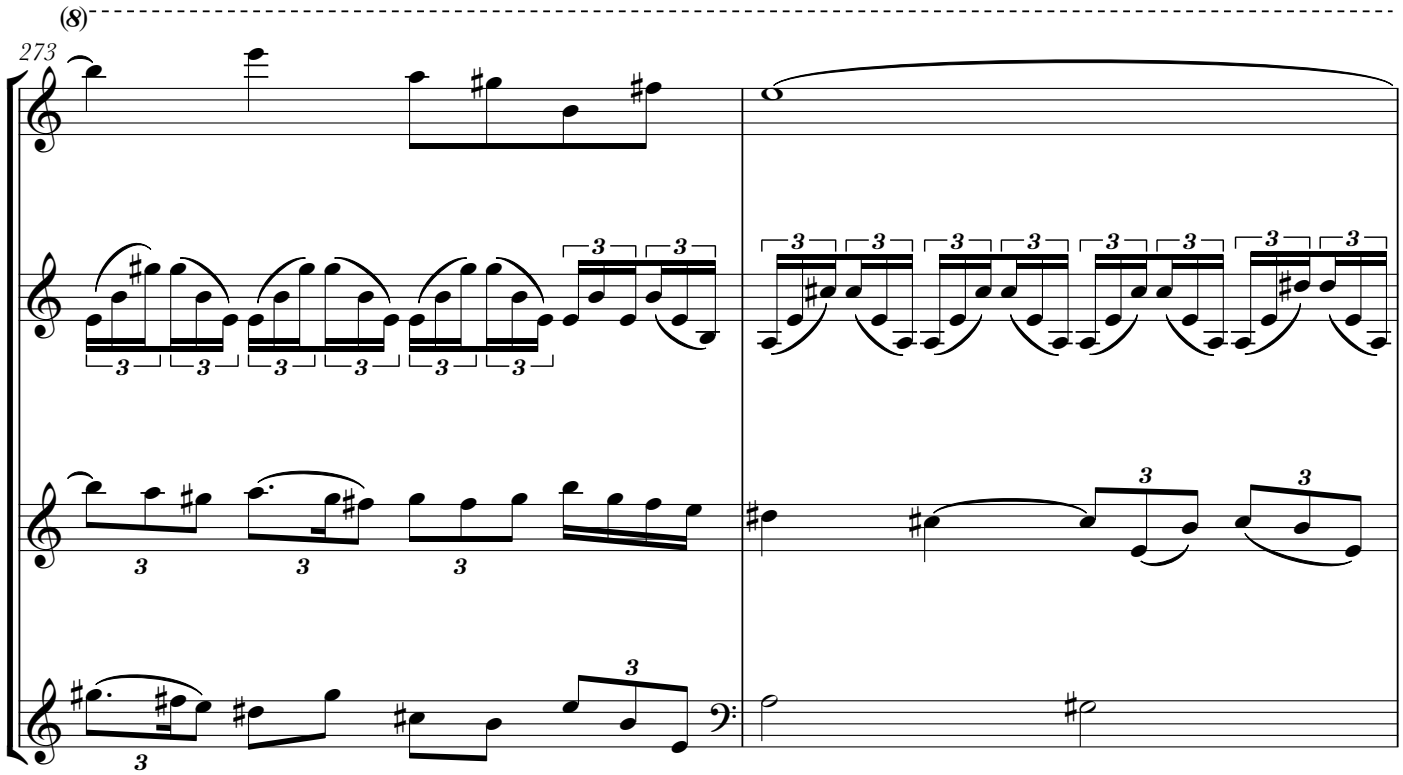
271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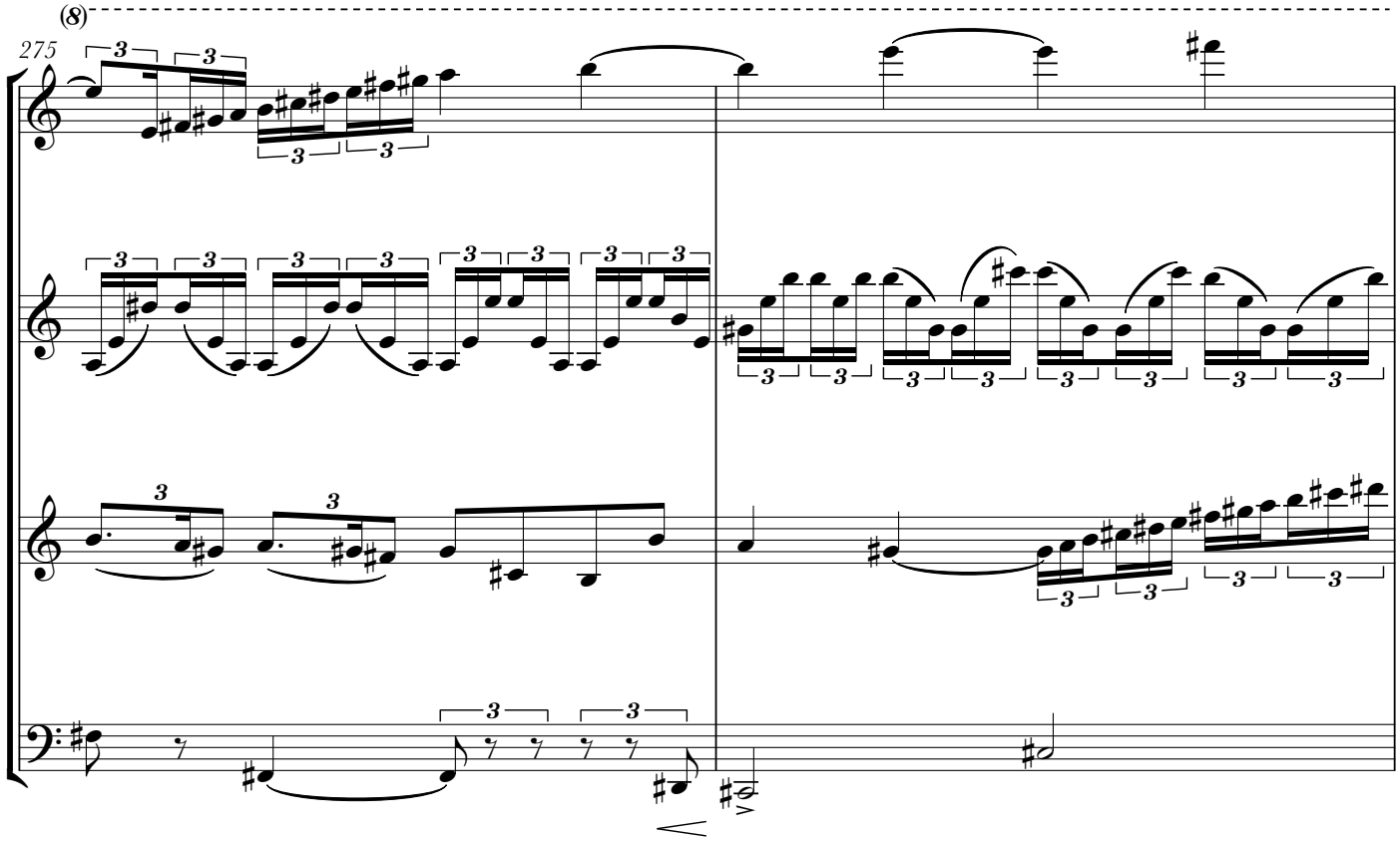
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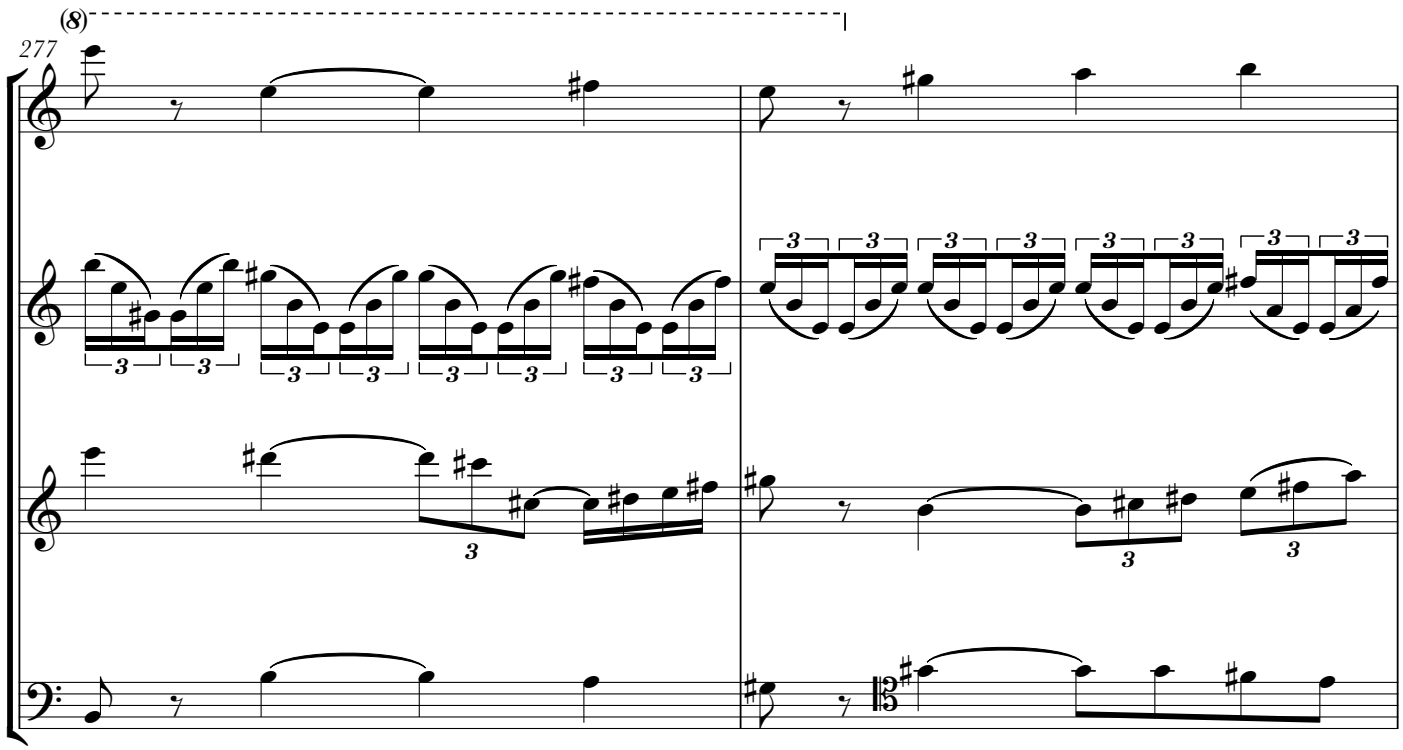
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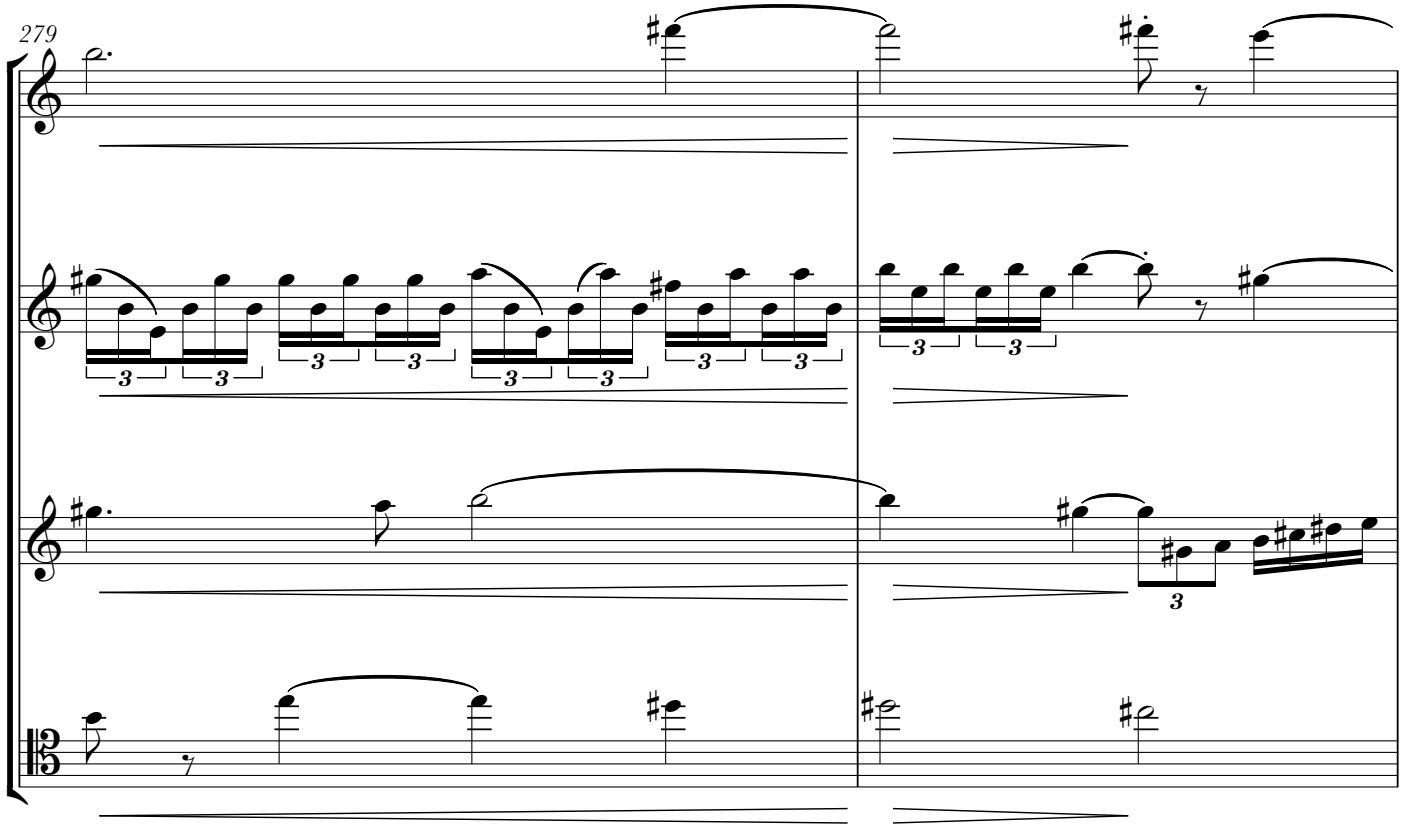
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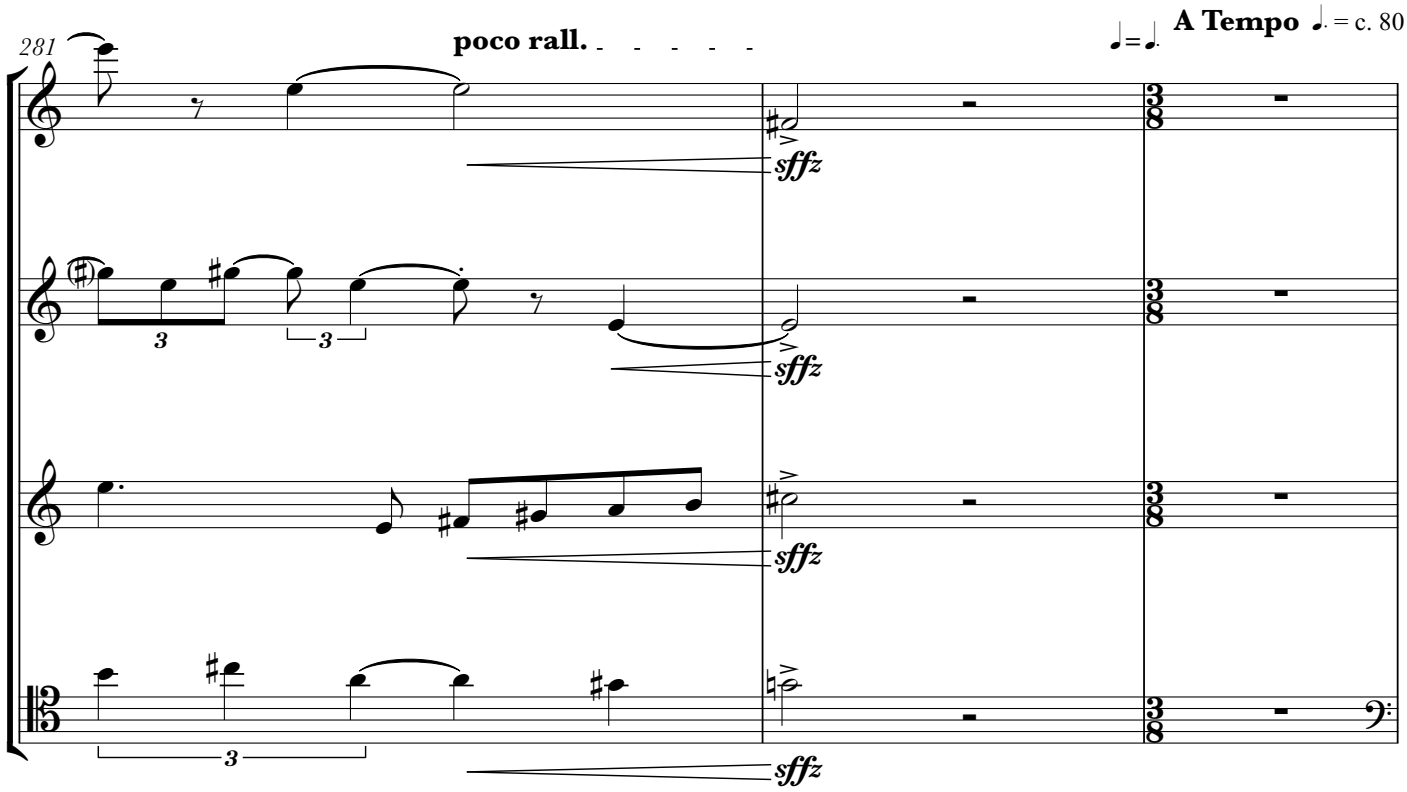
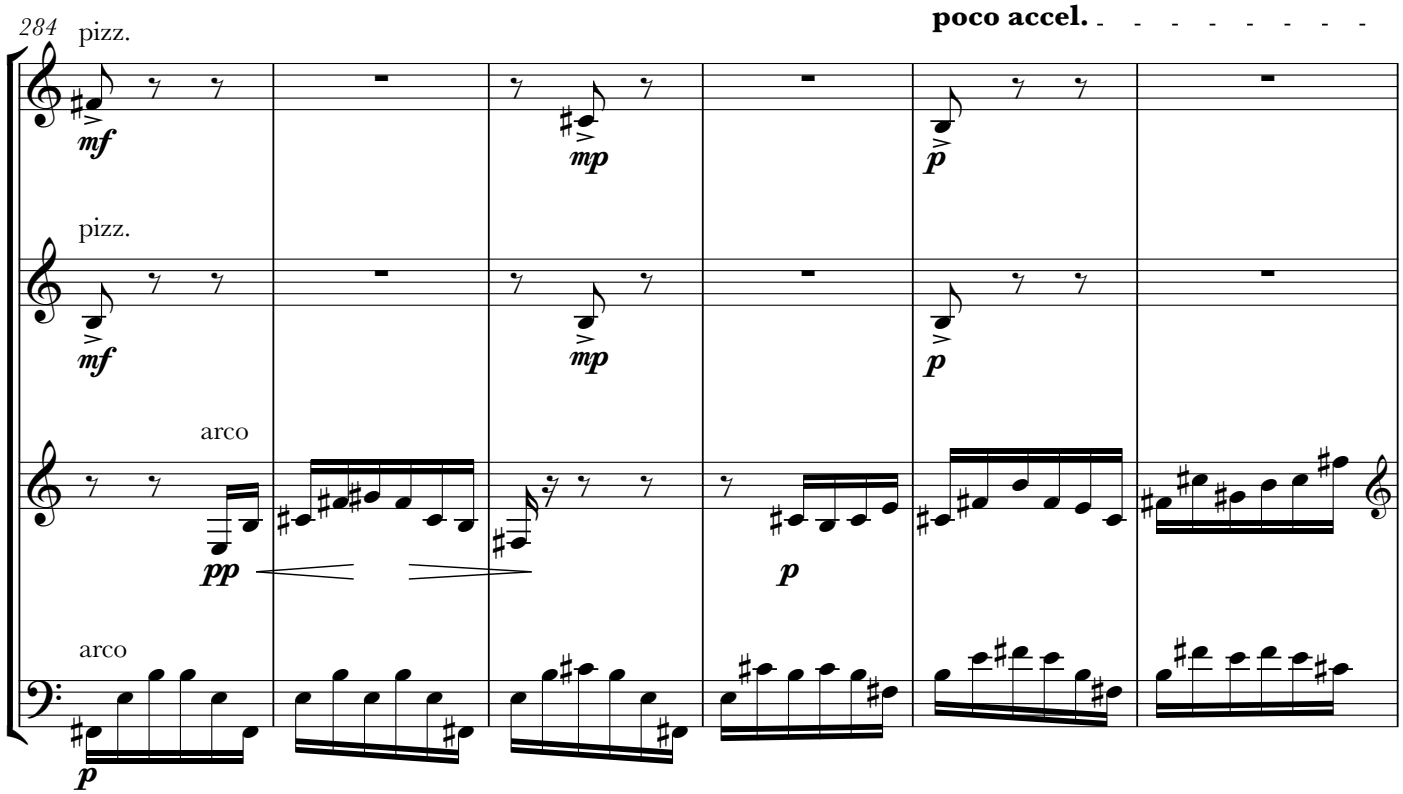
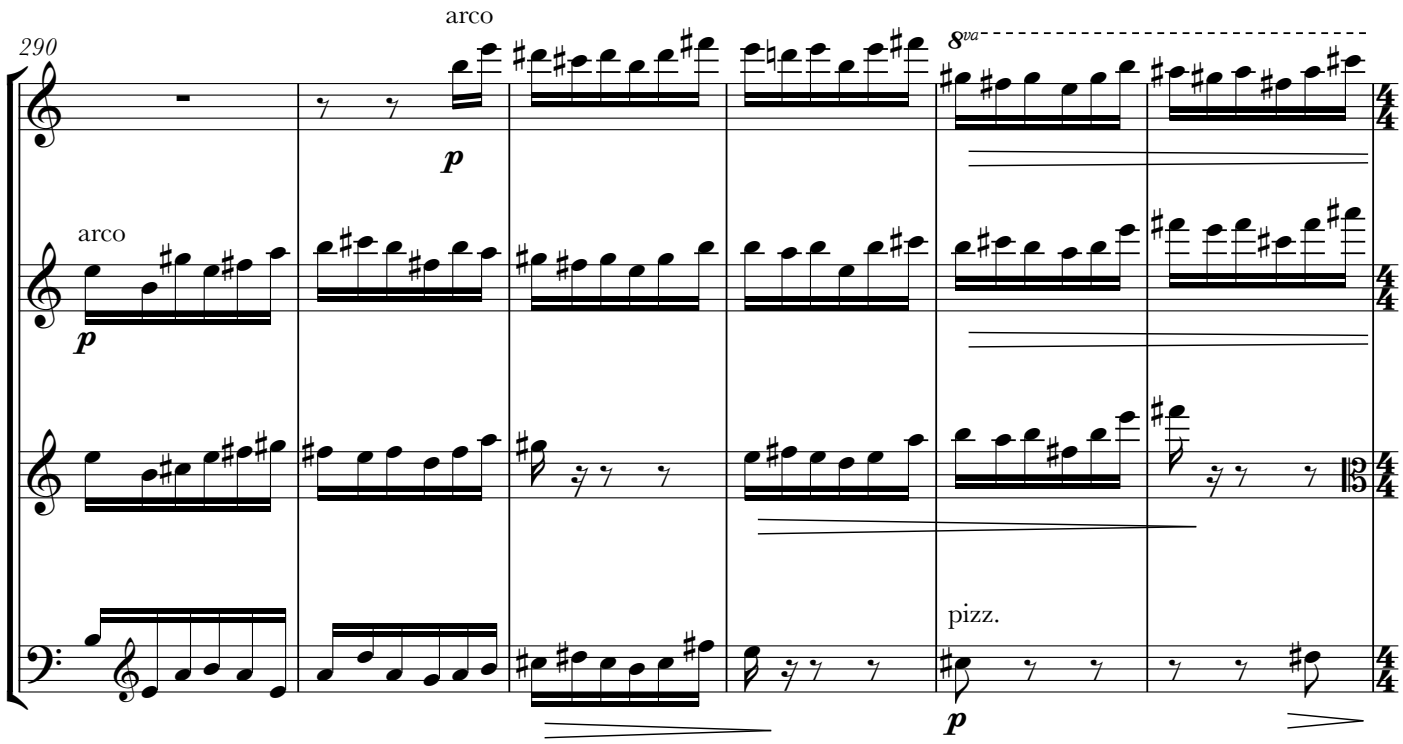

281
poco rall.
A Tempo ♩. = c. 80
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
3
3
3


284
pizz.
poco accel.
mf
mp
p
pizz.
mf
mp
p
arco
pp
p
arco
p


290
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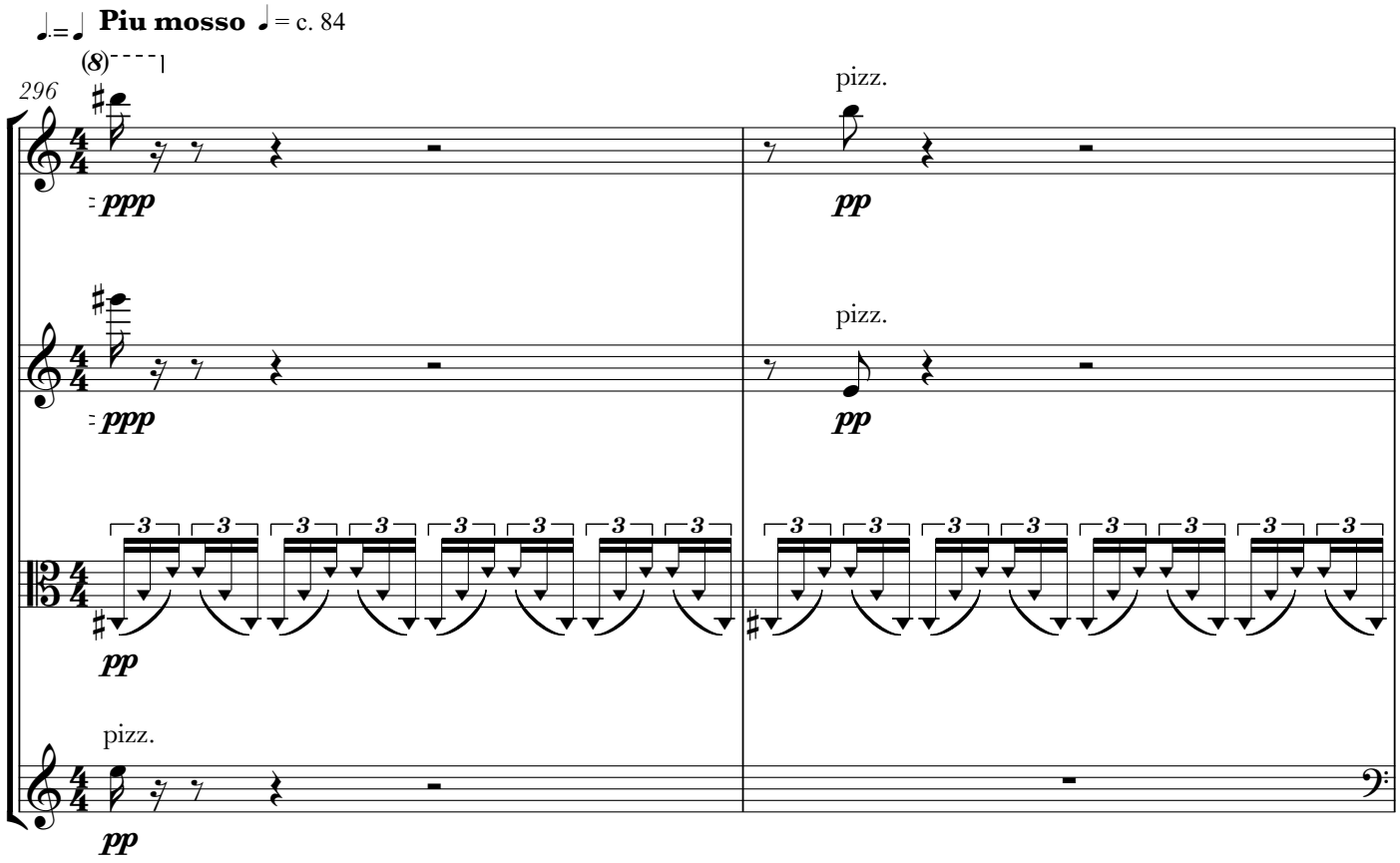
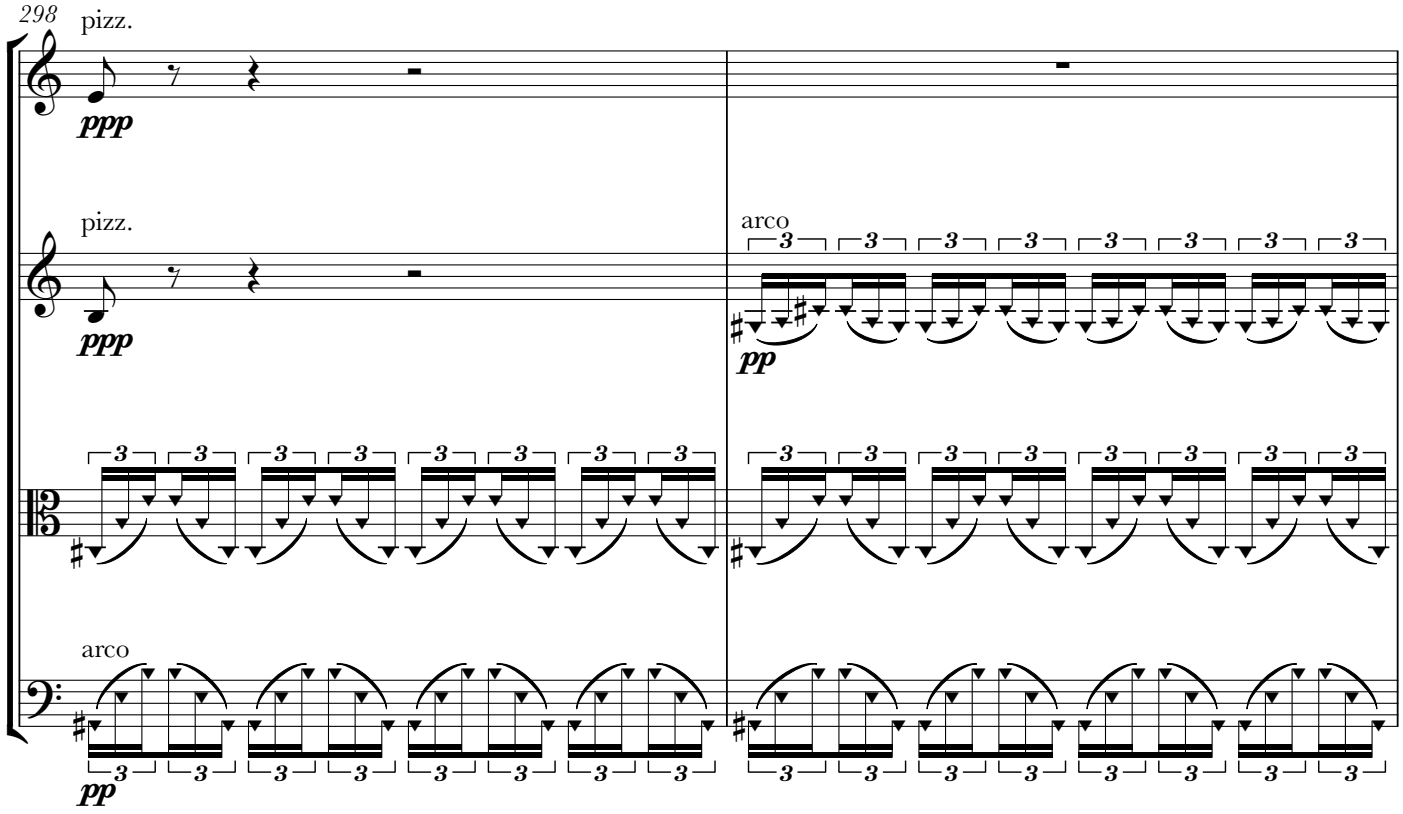
arco
8va
pizz.


Piu mosso ♩= c. 84
296
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.


298
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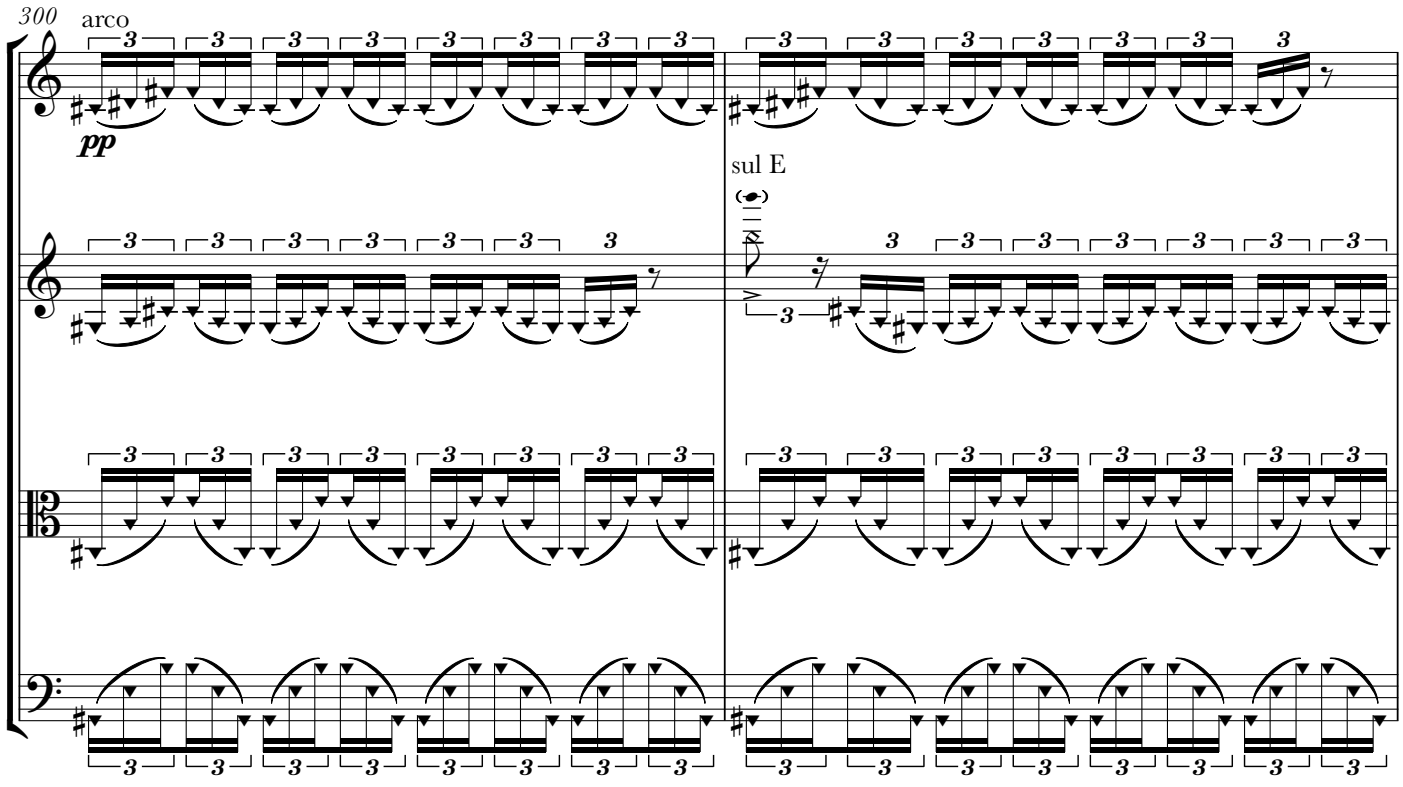
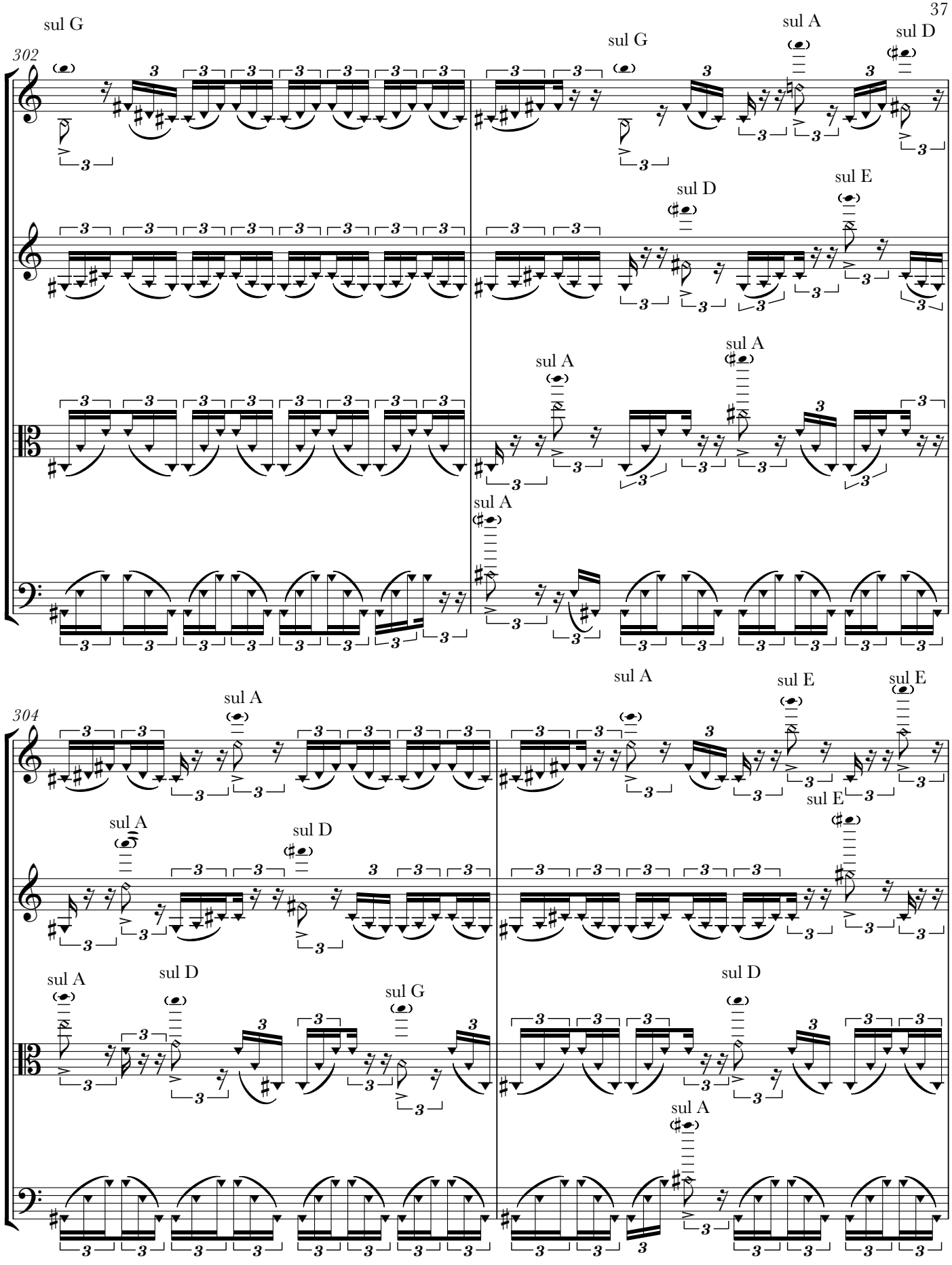
ppp
pizz.
ppp
arco
pp
arco
pp


300
arco
pp
sul E


302
sul G
sul G
sul A
sul D
sul D
sul E
sul A
sul A
sul A
304
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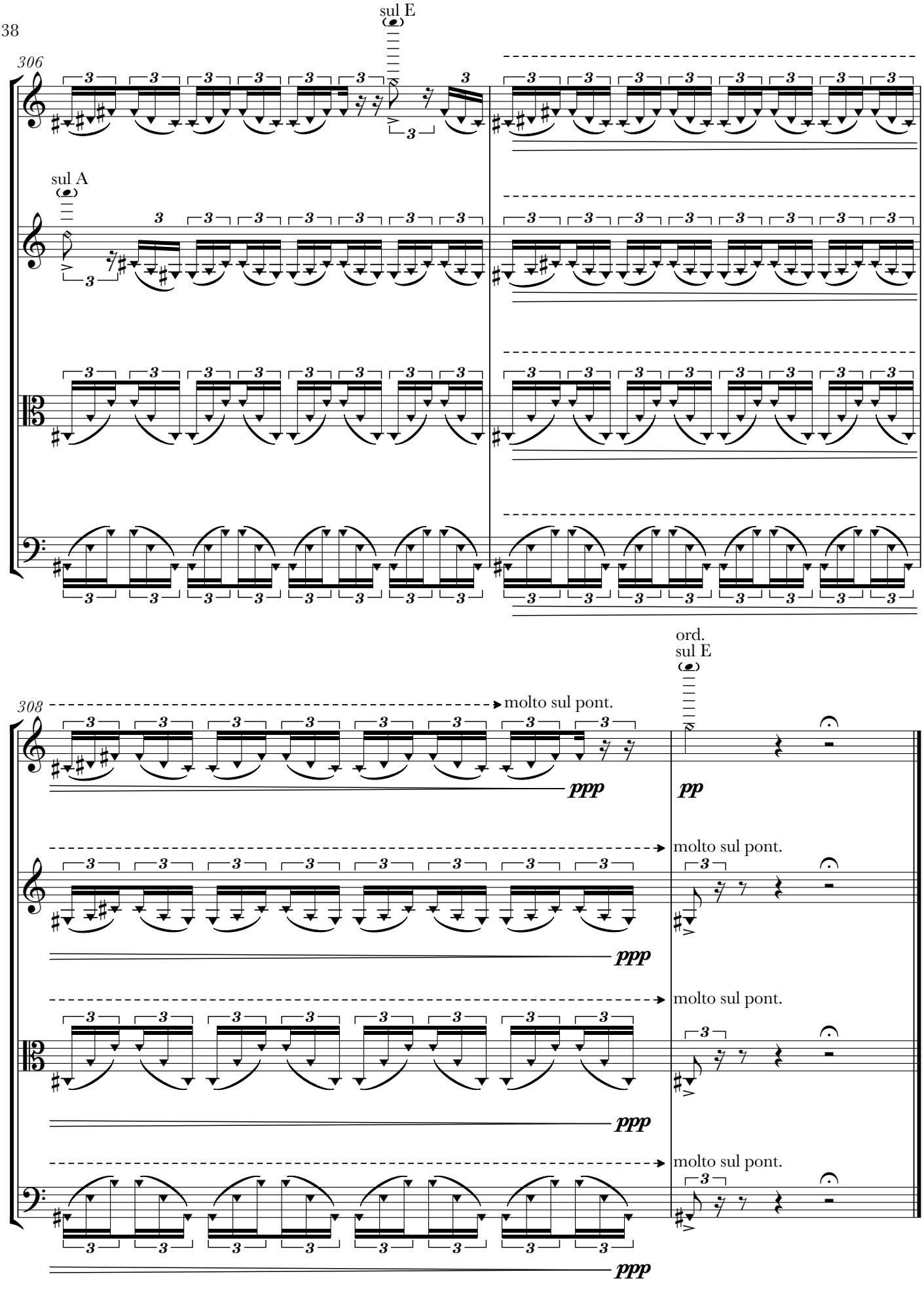
sul A
sul D
sul G
sul D
sul A


306
sul E
sul A
308
molto sul pont.
ord.
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ppp
pp