String Quartet No. 1

Elegies for Tom

A response to Thomas Hardy's poem Afterwards

I - *Delicate-filmed, as new-spun silk*

- 1st Interlude*

II - *An eyelid's soundless blink*

- 2nd Interlude

III - *Nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm*

- 3rd Interlude

IV - *Full-starred heavens that winter sees*

- 4th Interlude

V - *A new bell's boom*

* Each interlude includes voice, singing *The Mower* by Philip Larkin. These can be omitted, and the piece played as a five-movement work for quartet only.

Written for the Ligeti Quartet and Lotte Betts-Dean

Duration: c. 21' (15' without interludes)

Arthur Keegan

02.11.23

Programme Note

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My first string quartet is a companion piece to the song cycle *Elegies for Emma* which I was writing at the same time. The 'Tom' of the title is the poet Thomas Hardy (whose first wife was Emma Gifford). Its five-movement structure follows the Hardy poem *Afterwards* in which Hardy (aged 77 at the time of its publication) reflects on his own legacy, hoping he would be seen in posterity as someone who cared for the natural world.

Each movement is a response to the atmosphere, mood and imagery conjured by specific lines from each stanza. These lines demonstrate Hardy's curious taste for unusual but evocative imagery. For example (my favourite), 'an eyelid's soundless blink'.

The interludes between movements include a vocal line, singing Larkin's poem 'The Hedgehog'. Larkin was a huge fan of Hardy's poetry and his poem (in homage) riffs on a line from Hardy's *Afterwards*, reflecting, extending and developing – with somewhat gruesome imagery – the tale of a hedgehog and the kindness which is at the heart of *Afterwards*.

The piece can be played with or without the interludes.

www.arthurkeegan.co.uk @arthur_keegan_music

Note to performers:

It's preferred that the audience have the movement titles in the programme or that they are read out in advance. If possible, printing the poems in the programme is desirable.

Poetry

Afterwards

When the Present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May month flaps its glad green leaves like wings,
Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk, will the neighbours say,
"He was a man who used to notice such things"?

If it be in the dusk when, like an eyelid's soundless blink,
The dewfall-hawk comes crossing the shades to alight
Upon the wind-warped upland thorn, a gazer may think,
"To him this must have been a familiar sight."

If I pass during some nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm,
When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn,
One may say, "He strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm,
But he could do little for them; and now he is gone."

If, when hearing that I have been stilled at last, they stand at the door,
Watching the full-starred heavens that winter sees,
Will this thought rise on those who will meet my face no more,
"He was one who had an eye for such mysteries"?

And will any say when my bell of quittance is heard in the gloom,
And a crossing breeze cuts a pause in its outrollings,
Till they rise again, as they were a new bell's boom,
"He hears it not now, but used to notice such things"?

- Thomas Hardy

The Mower

The Mower stalled, twice, kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed, it had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, even fed it once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help.

Next morning I got up and it did not
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other we should be kind
While there is still time.

- Philip Larkin (text © Philip Larkin. Reproduced by agreement with Faber and Faber Ltd.)

Dedicated to Neal Farwell

Writing this piece was possible because of the

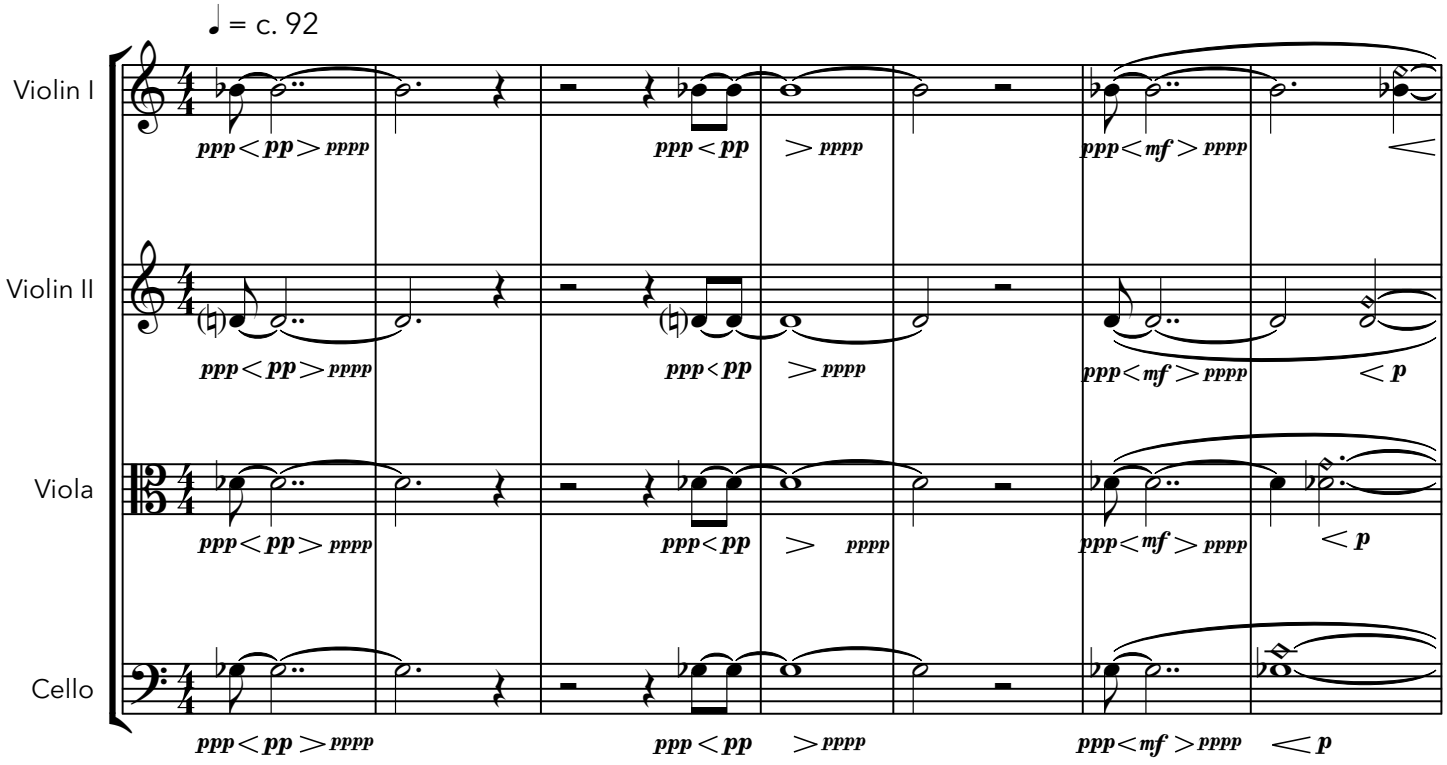
Paul Hamlyn Foundation Award for Artists 2020

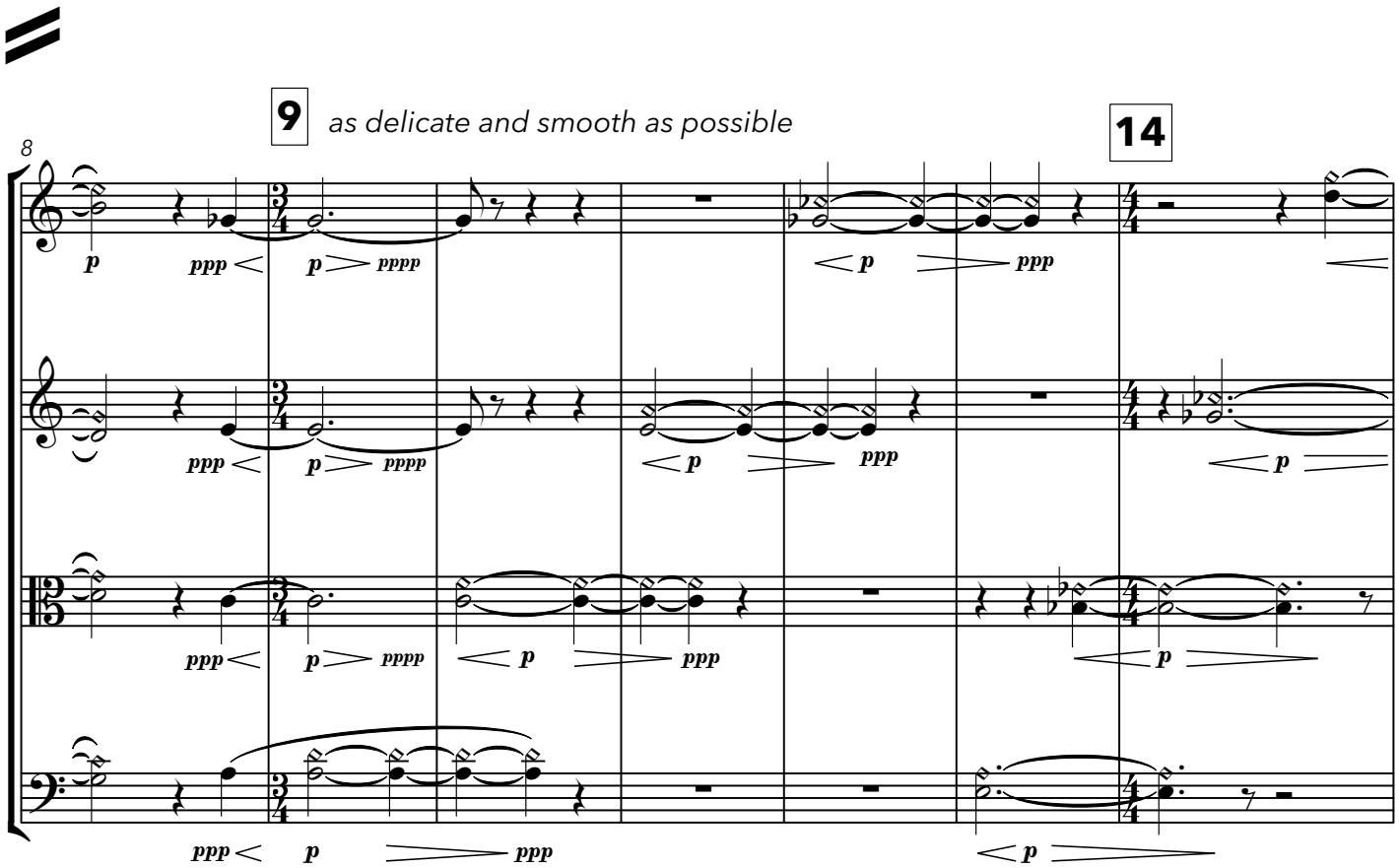
Special thanks to the Ligeti Quartet and Lotte Betts-Dean for their hard work, advice and ideas throughout the development process.

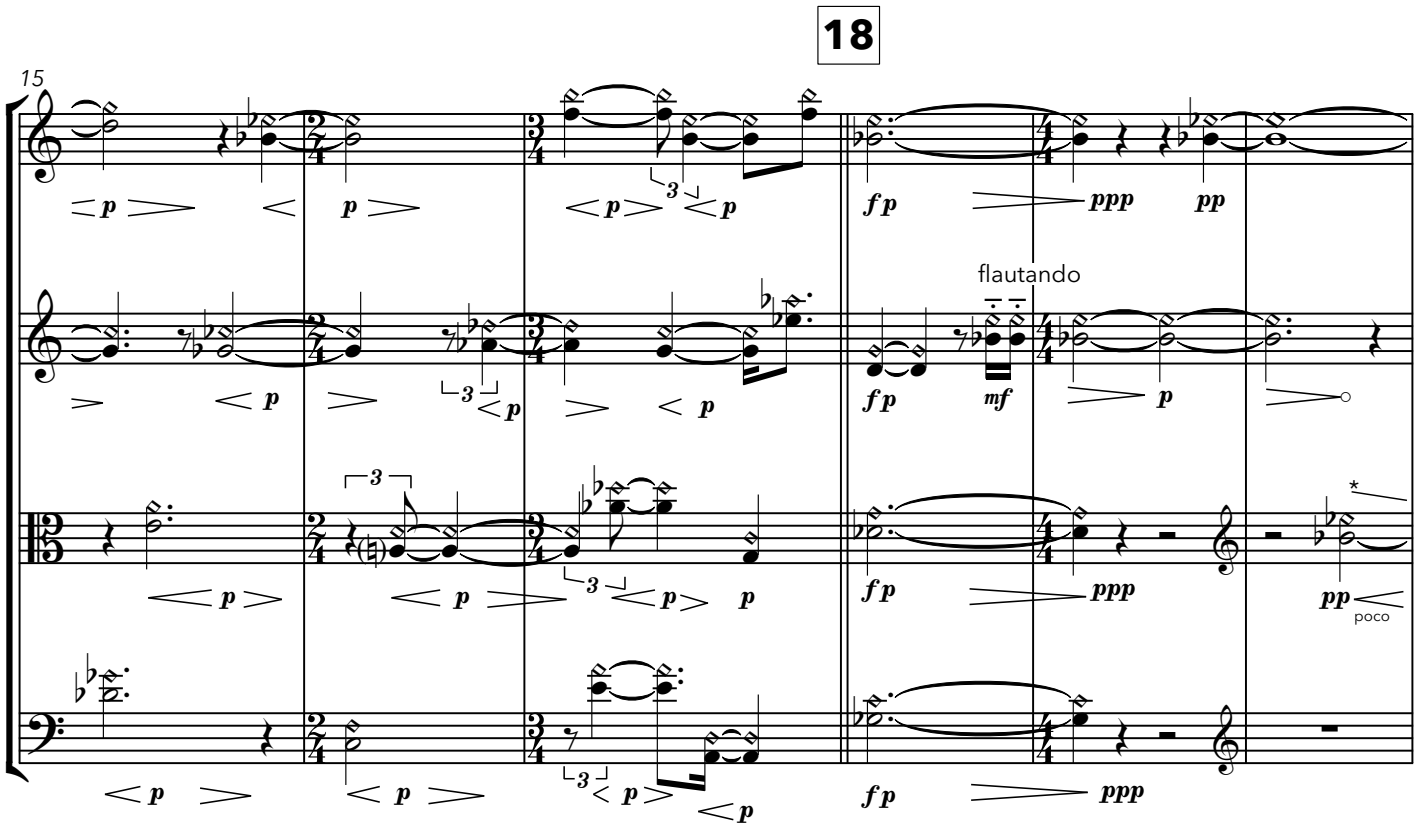
String Quartet no. 1: Afterwards, Elegies for Tom

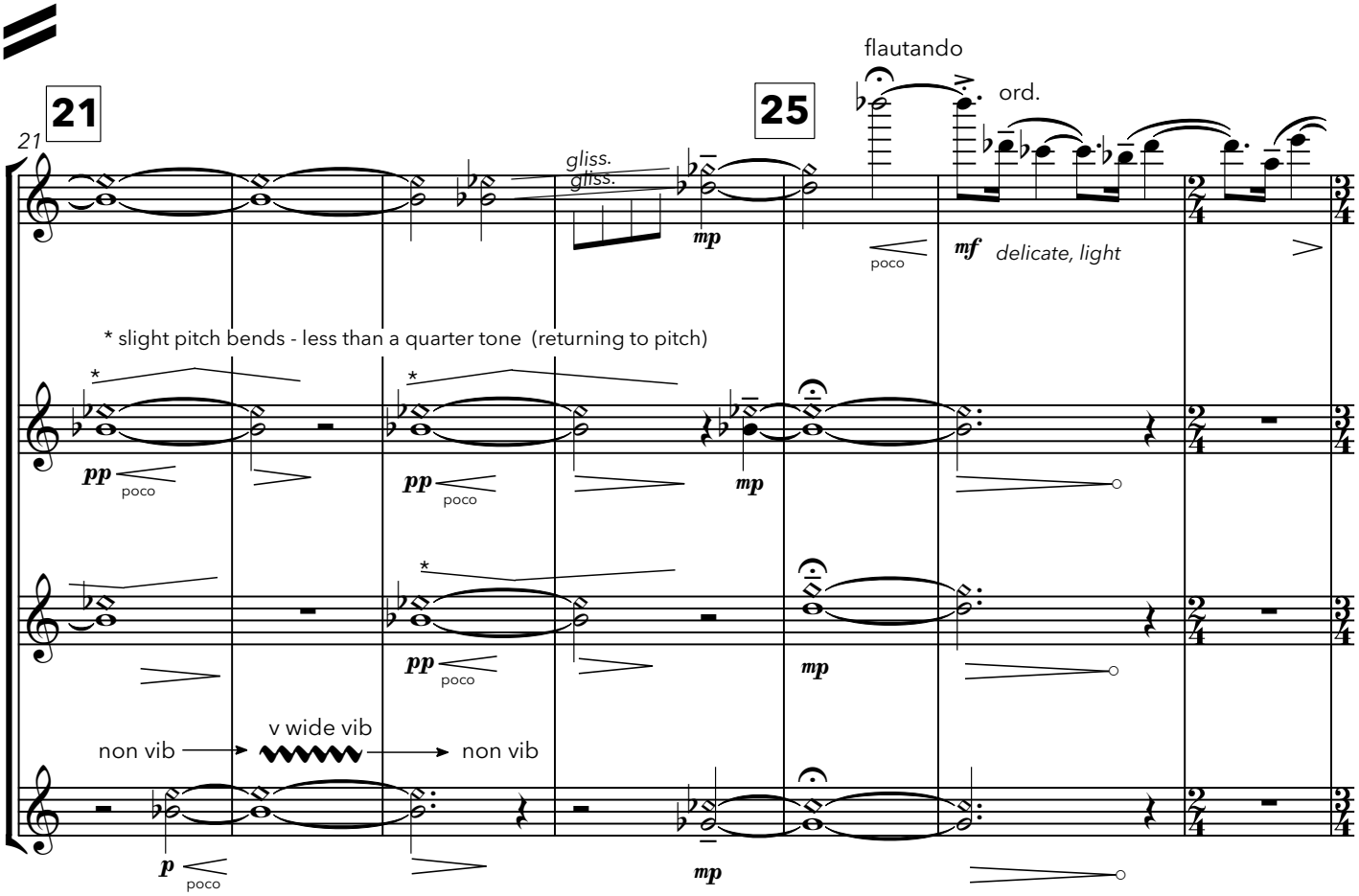
I - *Delicate-filmed as new-spun silk*

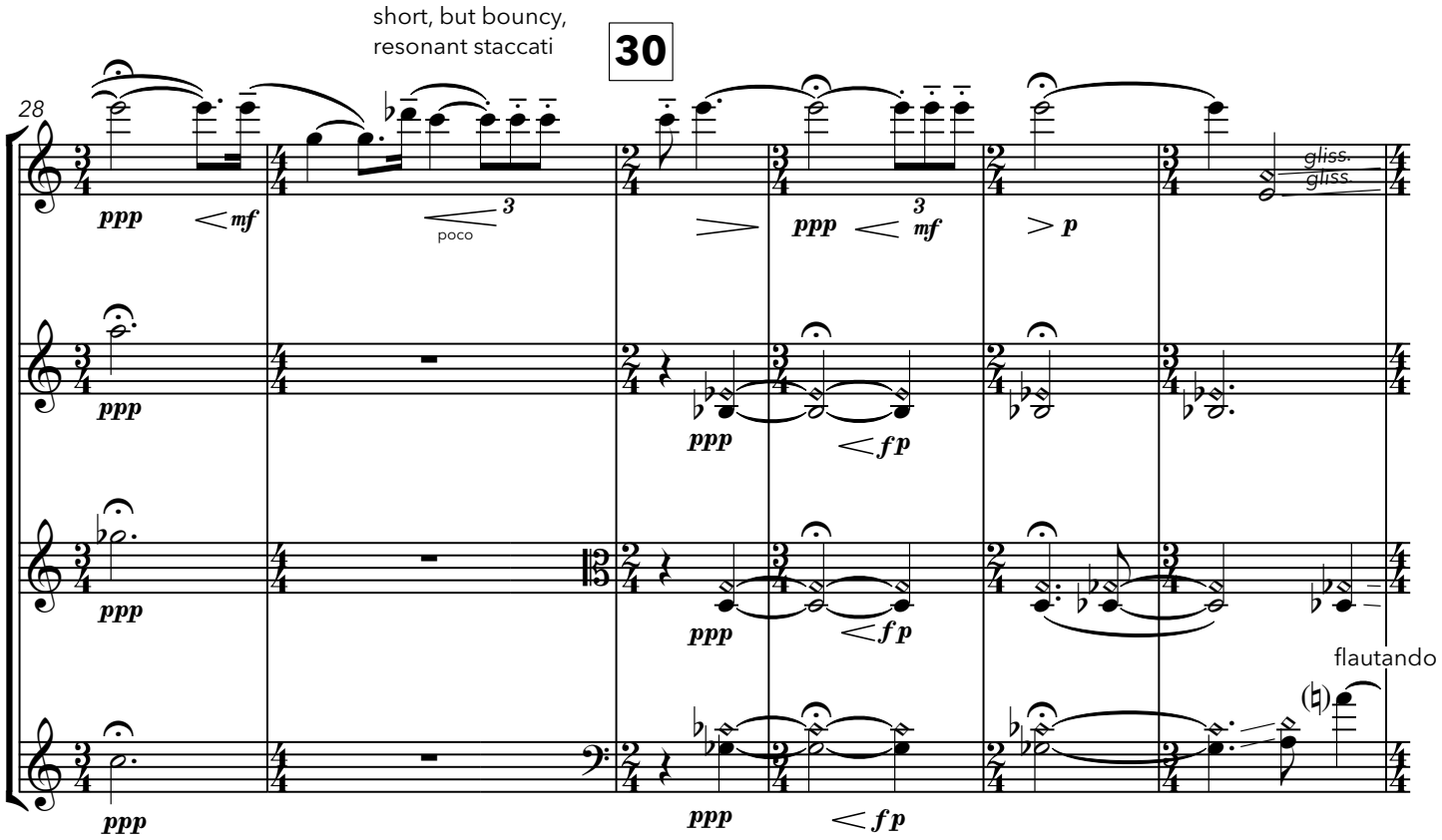
Arthur Keegan

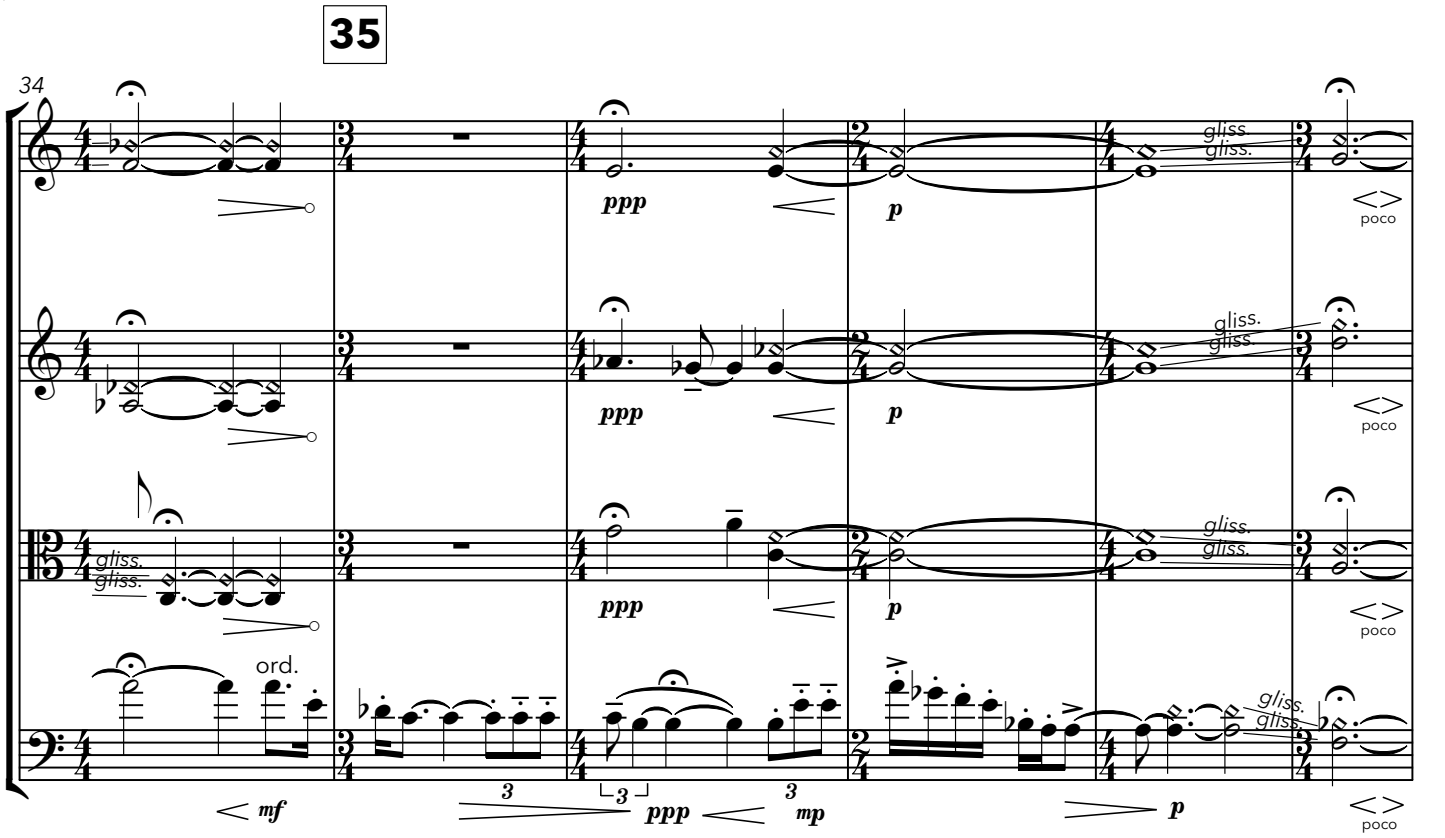


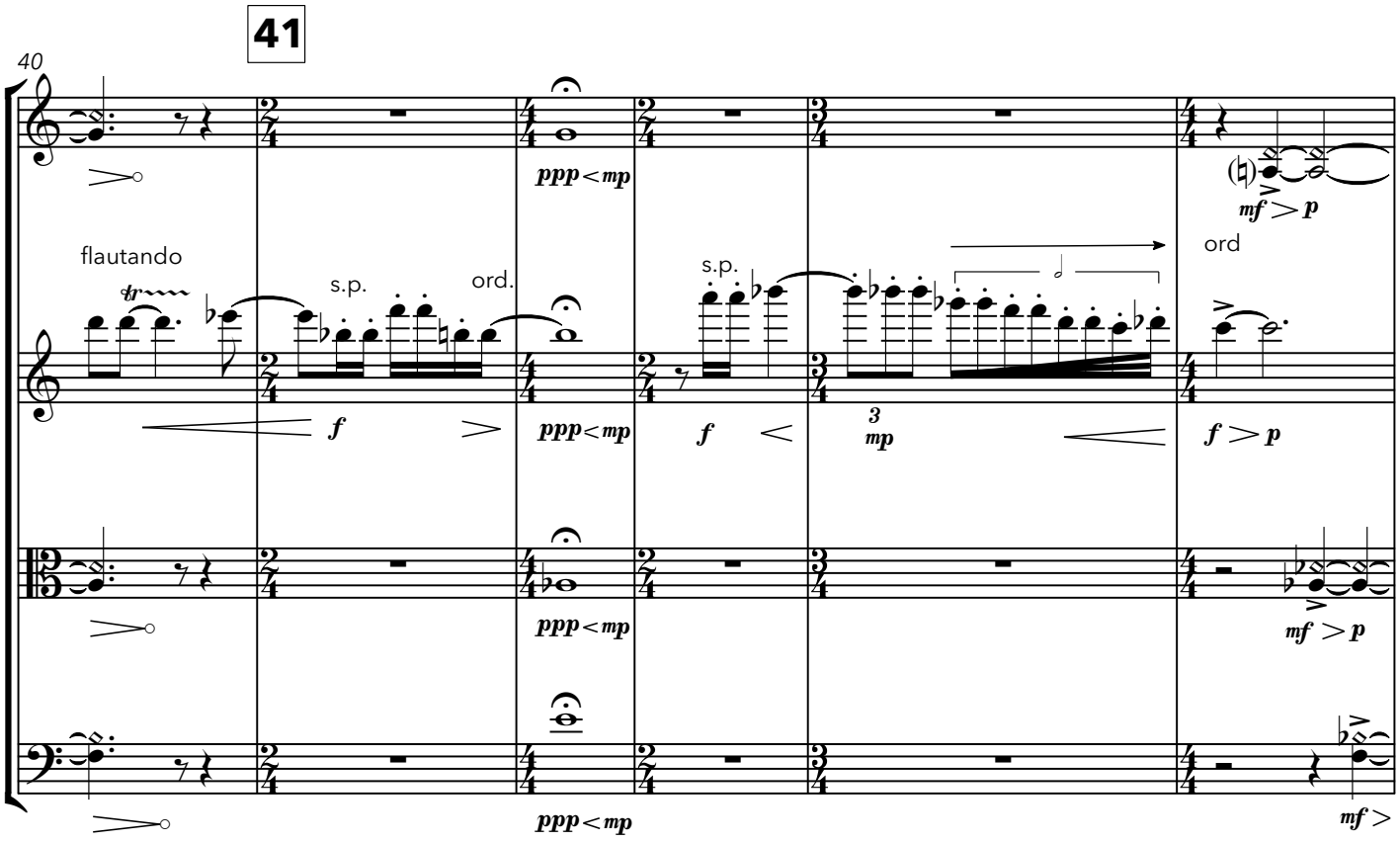


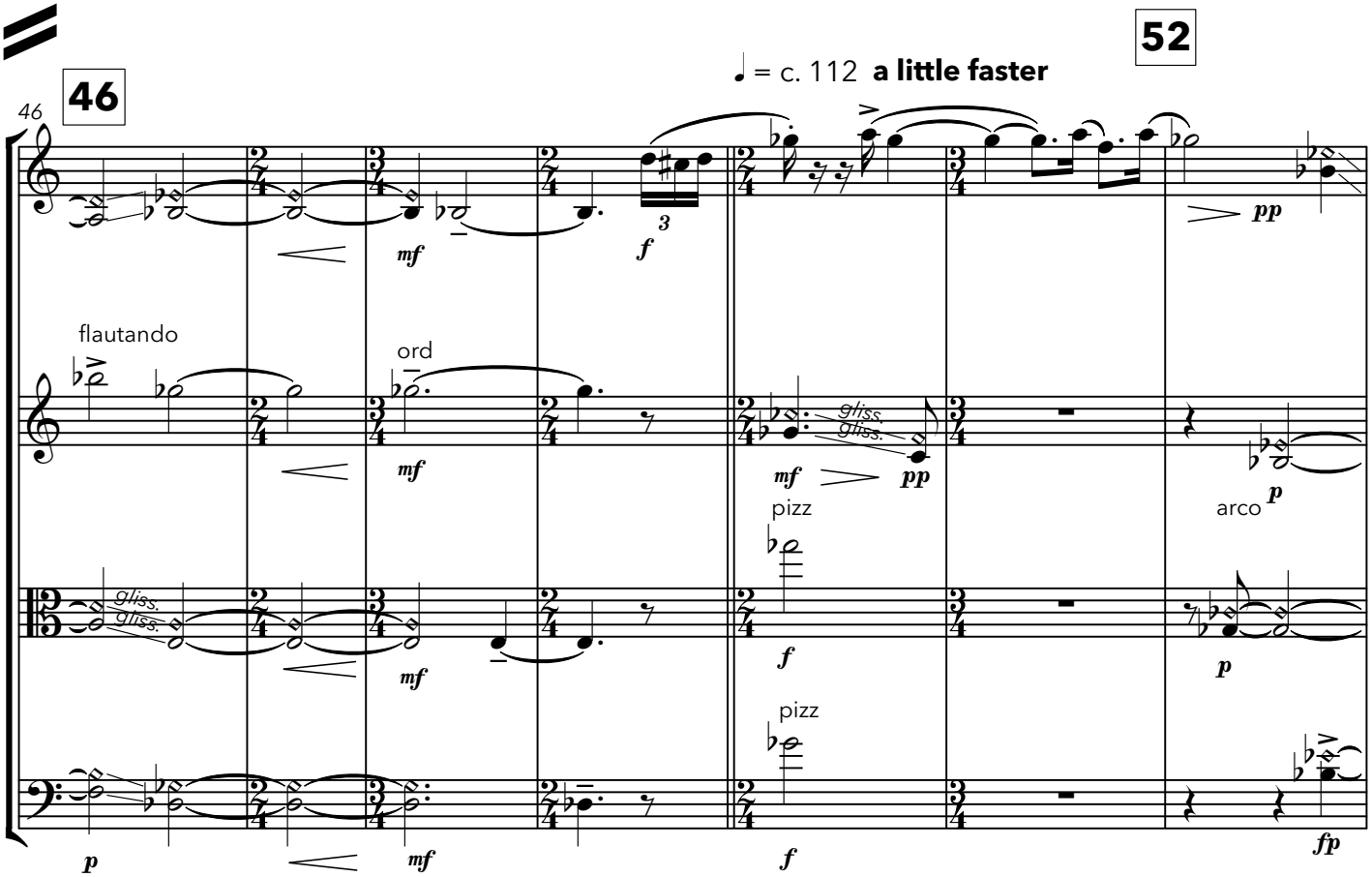

18
15
flautando
poco

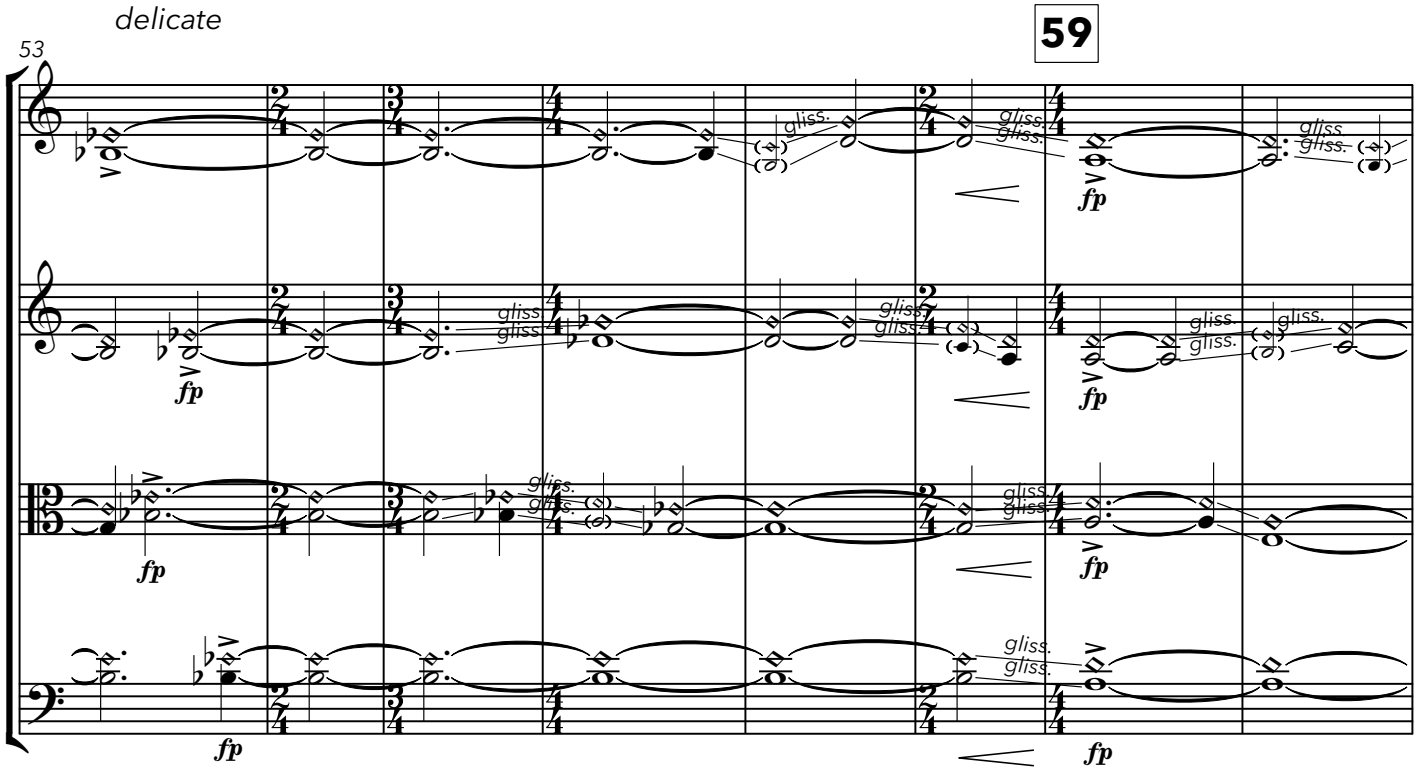

21
25
21
flautando
ord.
gliss.
gliss.
poco
mf delicate, light
* slight pitch bends - less than a quarter tone (returning to pitch)
non vib
v wide vib
non vib

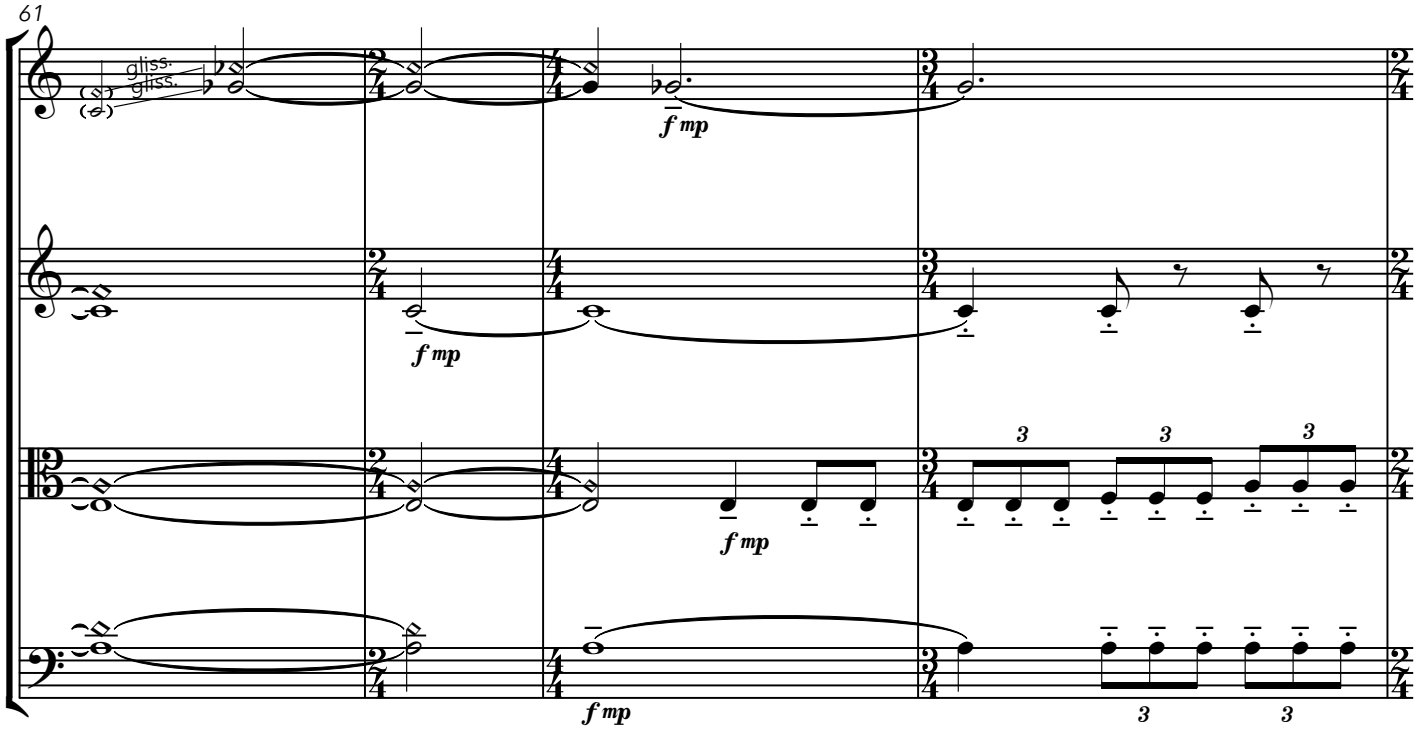

short, but bouncy,
resonant staccati
30
28
poco
flautando


35
34
ord.
poco


41
40
flautando
s.p.
ord.
s.p.
ord
ppp < mp
f
mf > p

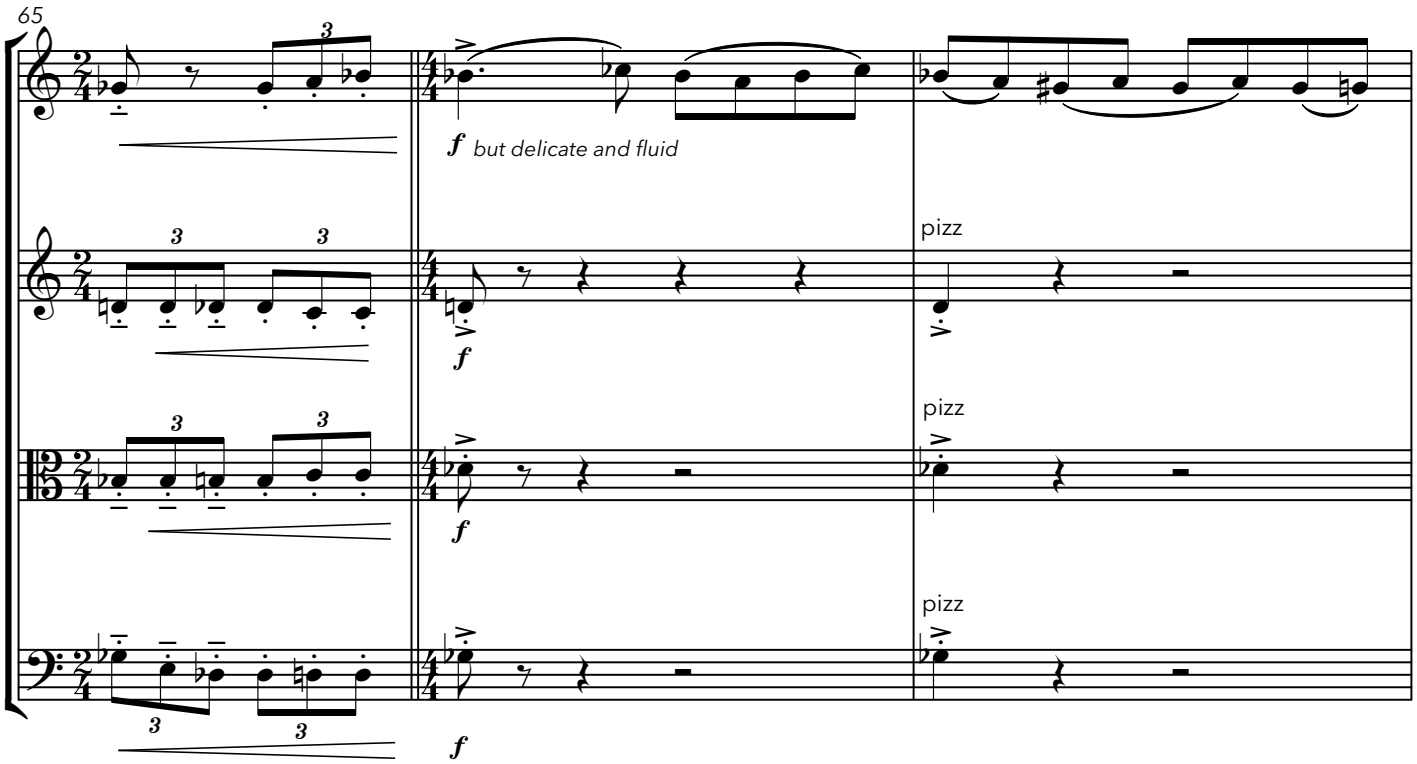

46
52
♩ = c. 112 a little faster
46
flautando
ord
pizz
arco
gliss.
mf
f
pp
p
fp


delicate
53
59
gliss.
fp

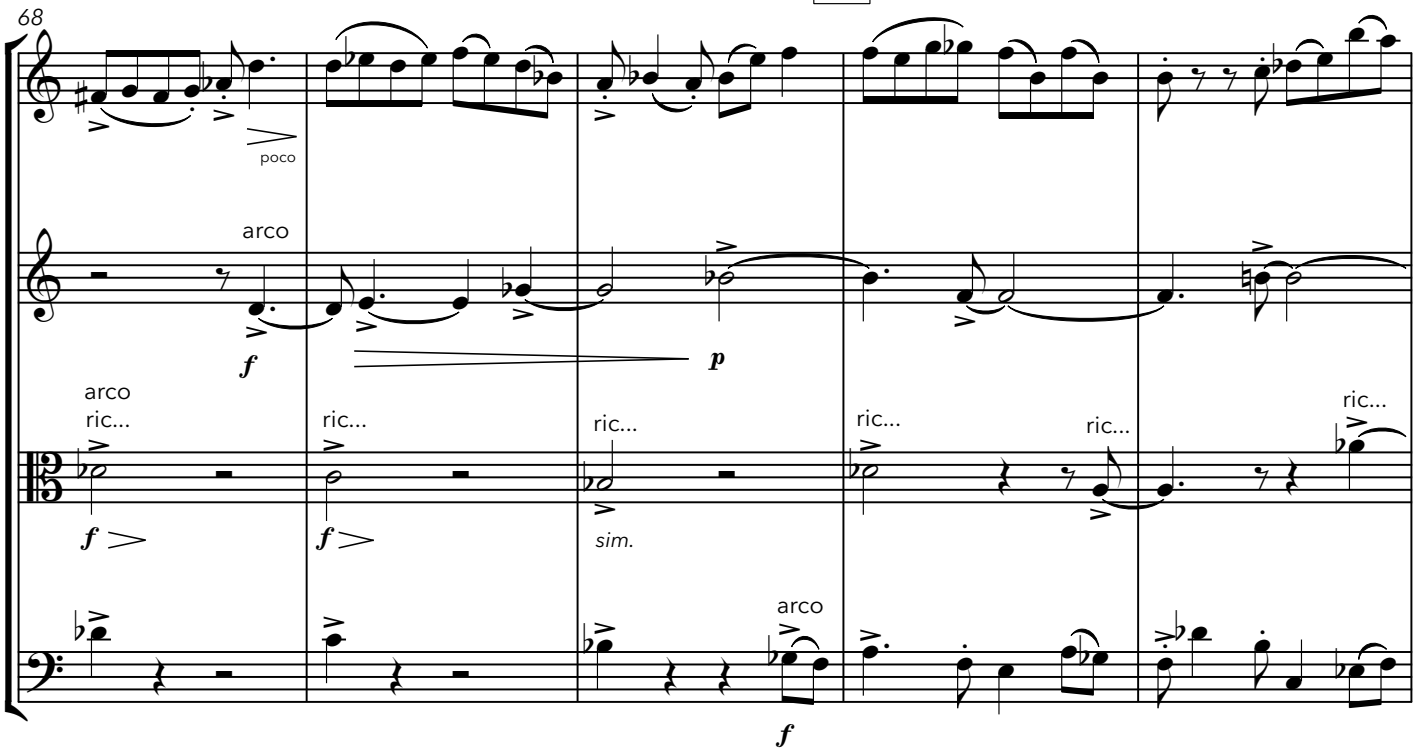

61
gliss.
f mp
3

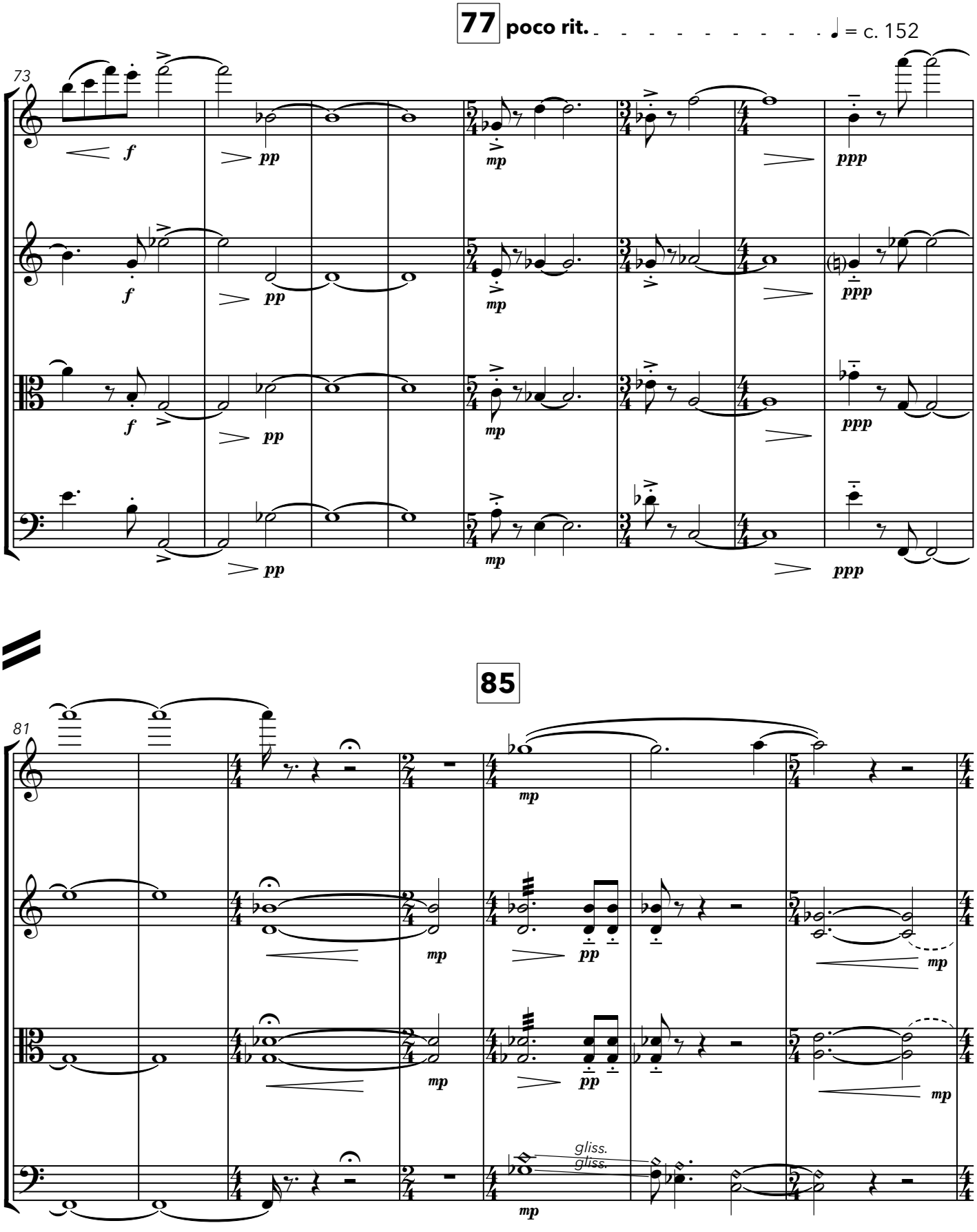
66

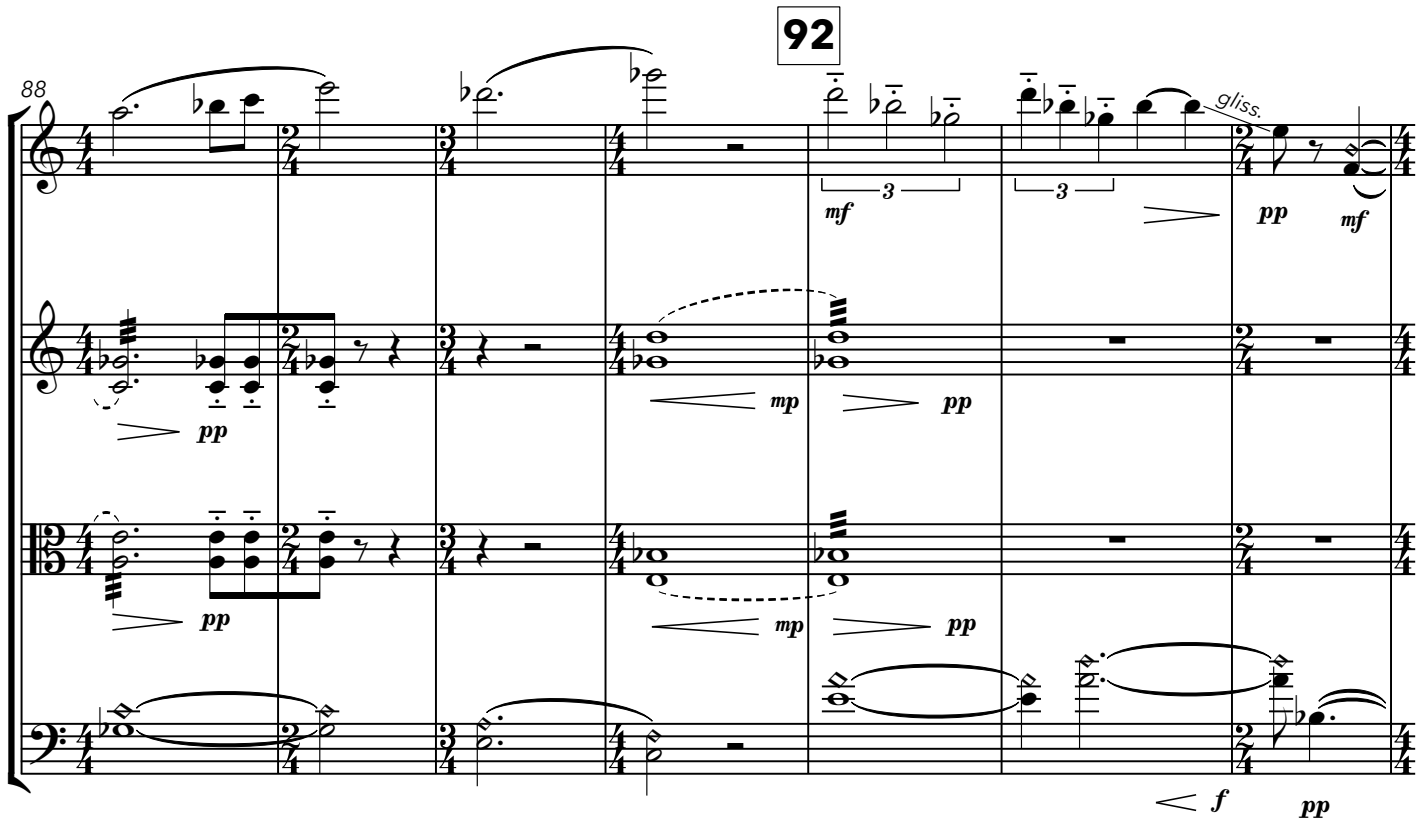
♩ = c. 168 **snappy, ritmico, but fluid**

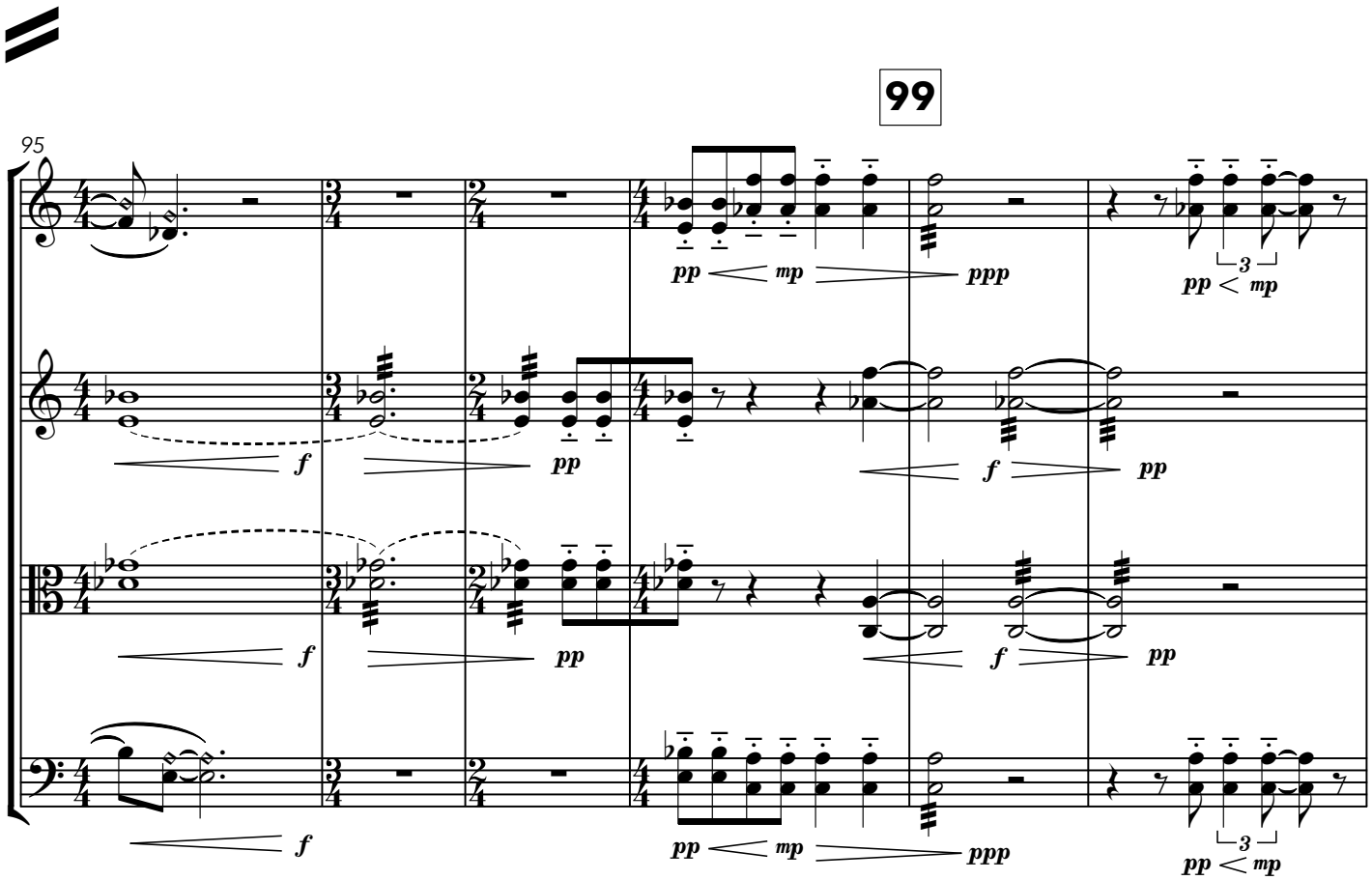


71

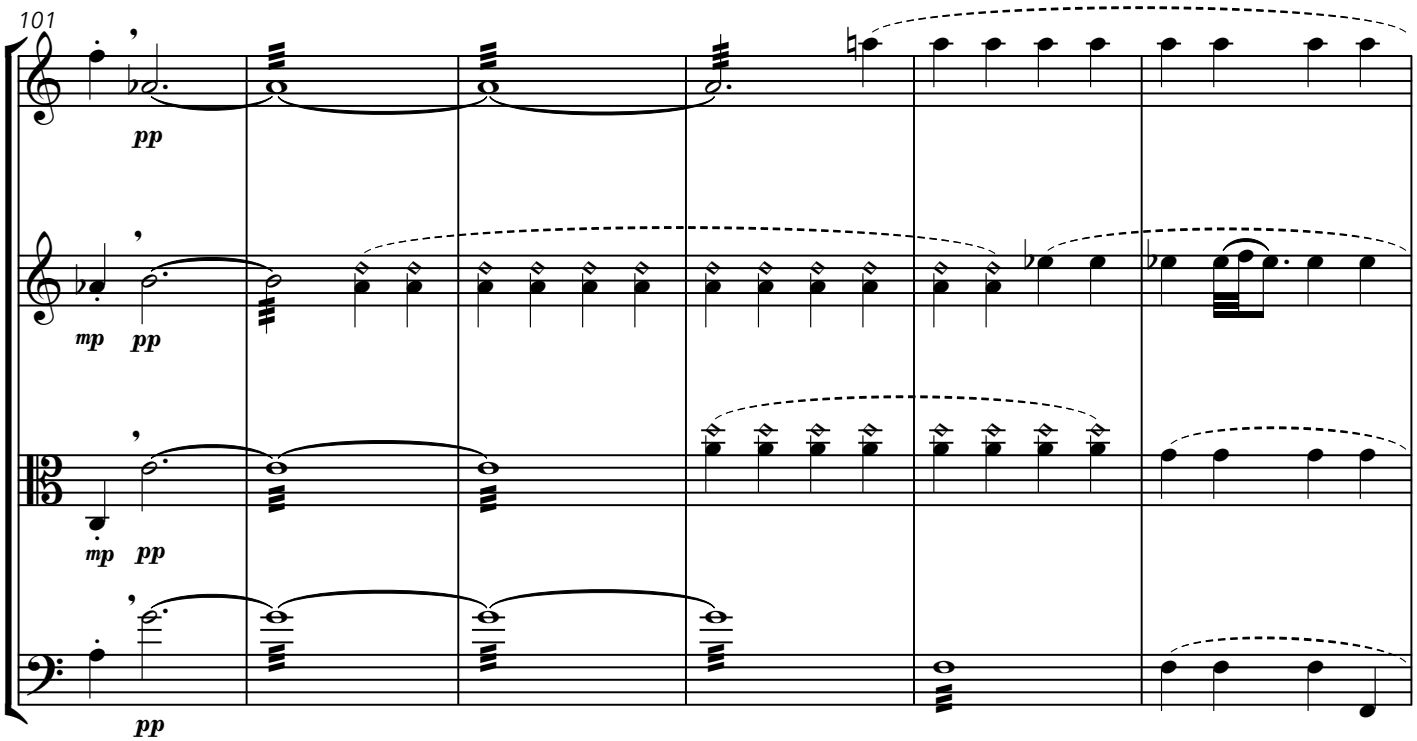



77
poco rit.
= c. 152
73
f
pp
mp
ppp
85
81
gliss.
gliss.


92
88
gliss.
mf
pp
mf
mp
pp
f
pp


99
95
pp
mp
ppp
f
pp
ppp

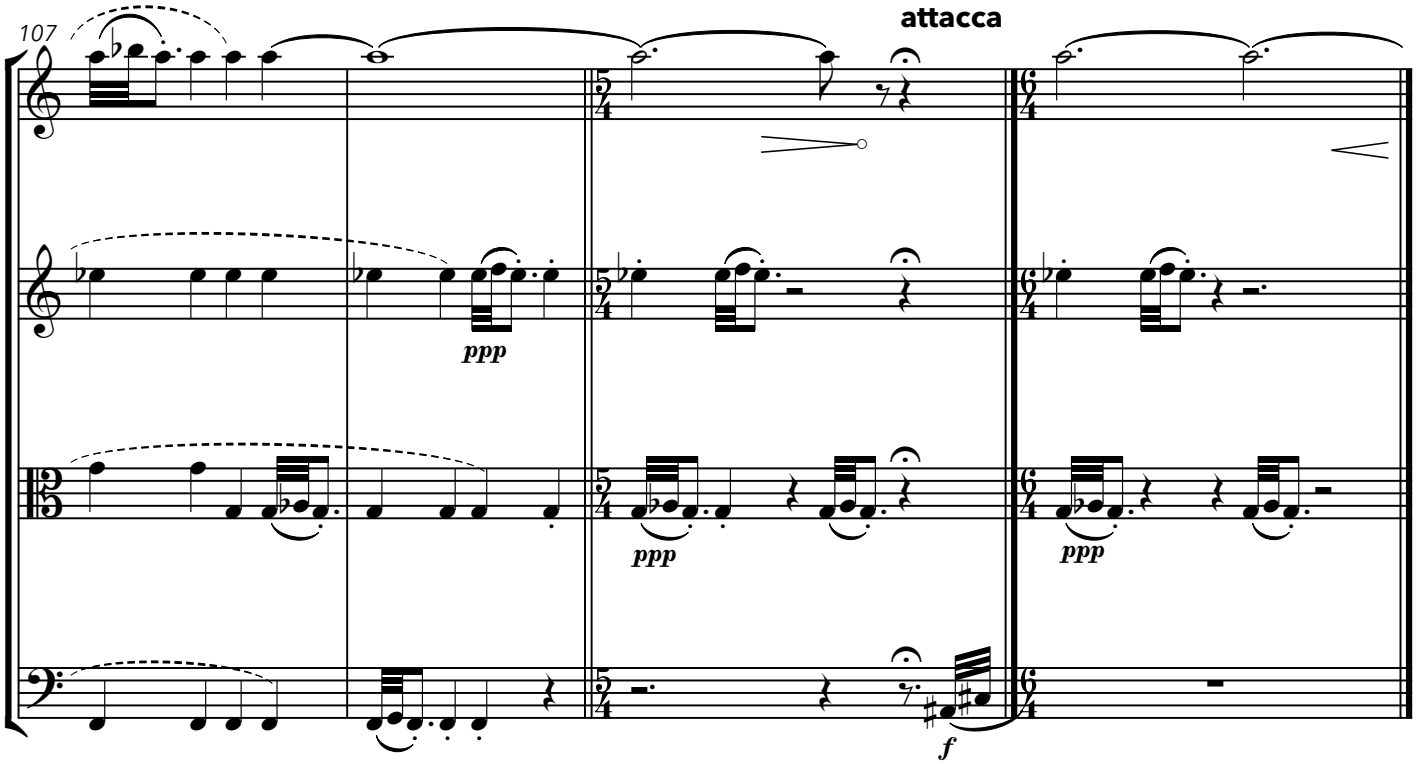
105 **molto rit.**
maintain *PP*



1. ♩ = c. 80
2. ♩ = c. 92

if playing with interludes
1.

if playing without interludes
2.



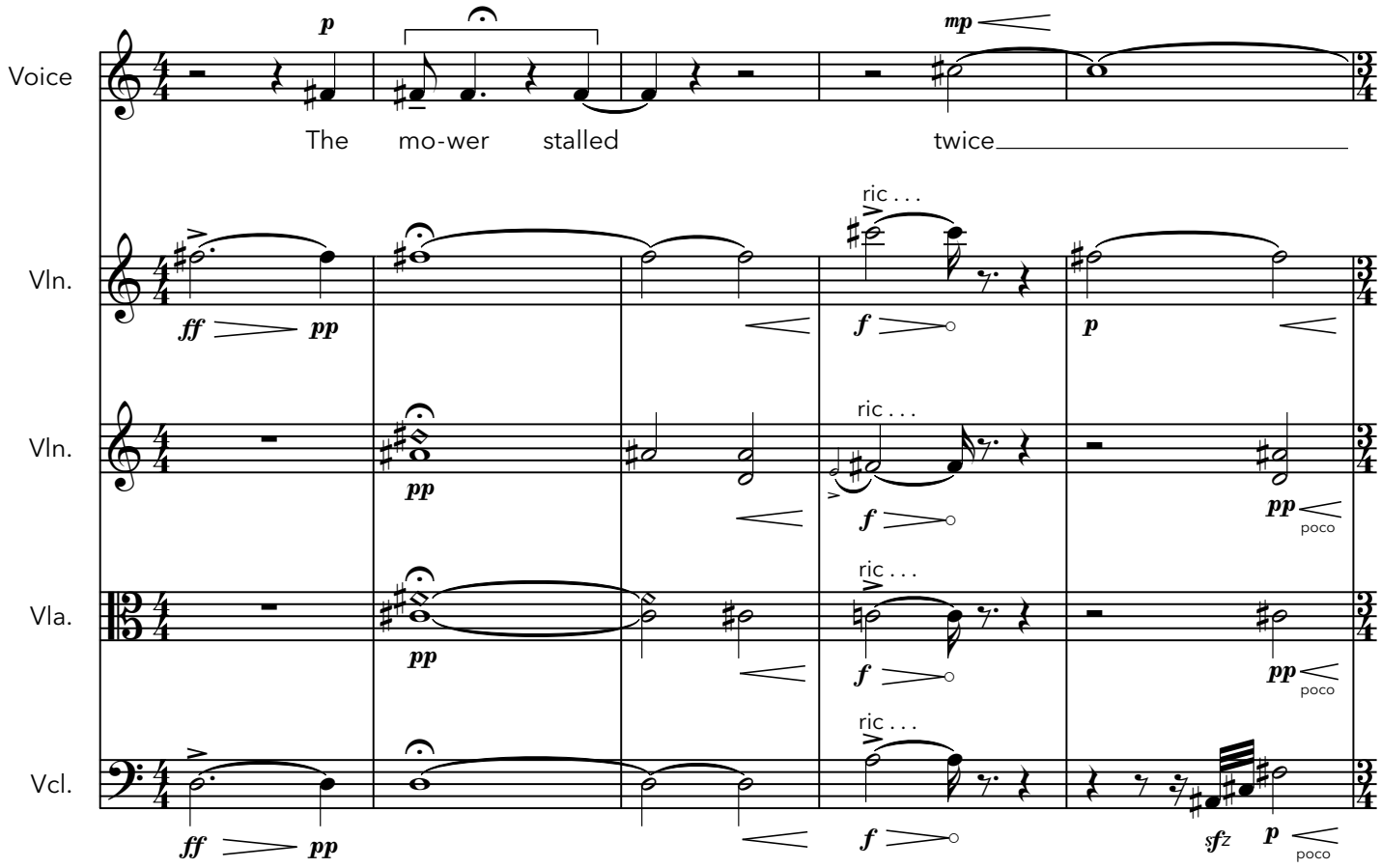
1st Interlude

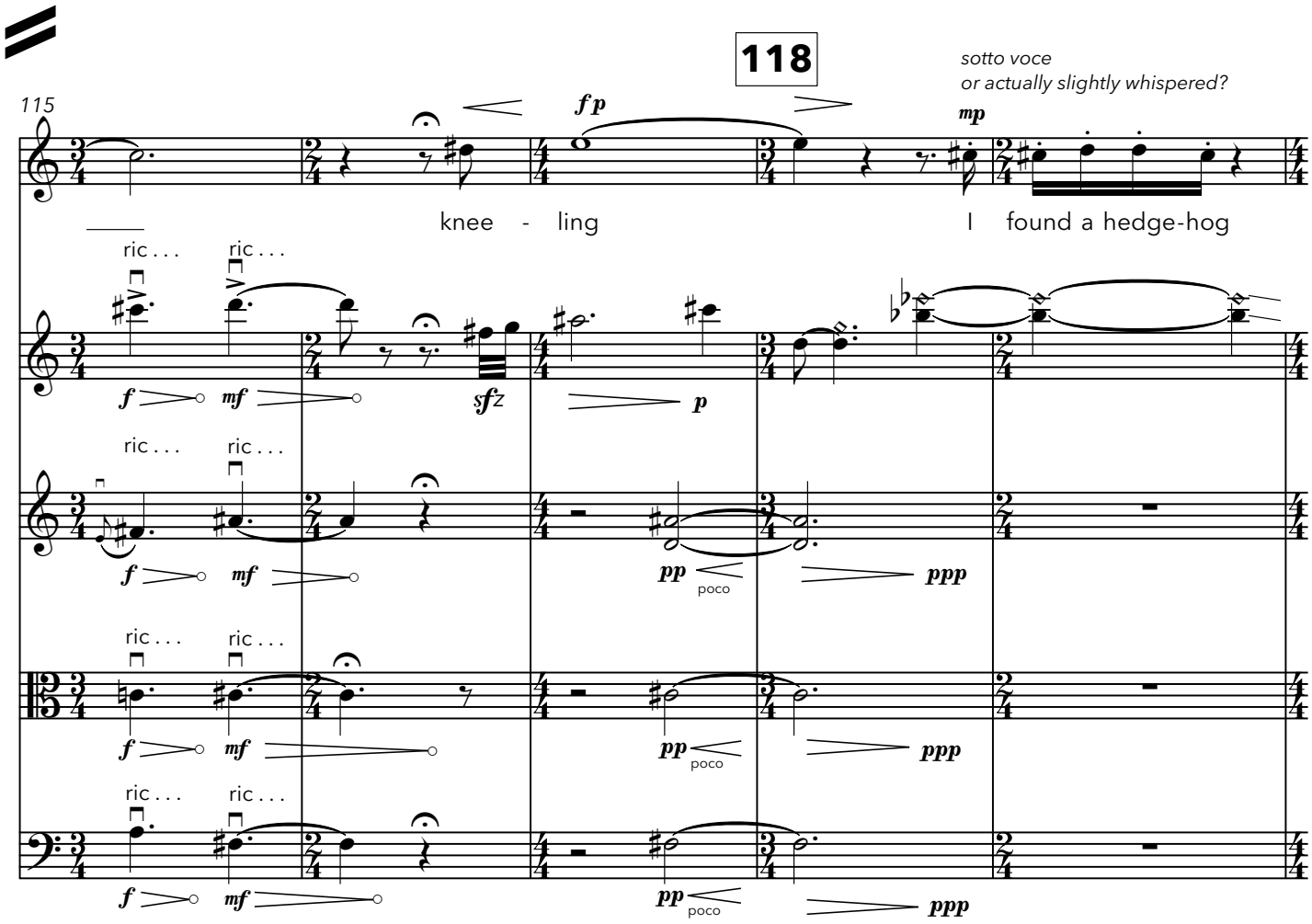
Philip Larkin *

♩ = c. 80

freely
placed - toward spoken

v focussed





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124

molto accel. ♩ = c. 160

120

full voice *s. v.* *full*

jammed a-gainst the blades killed

s.p. ord.

s.p. ord.

s.p. ord.

tempo 1

♩ = c. 80

freely

gentle, dolce

exaggerate tenuto

129

125

(d) killed (d) it

ric . . .

ric . . .

ric . . .

ric . . .

natural harmonic gliss. Linger over nodes slightly. Independent from vln. 2

natural harmonic gliss. Linger over nodes slightly. Independent from vln. 1

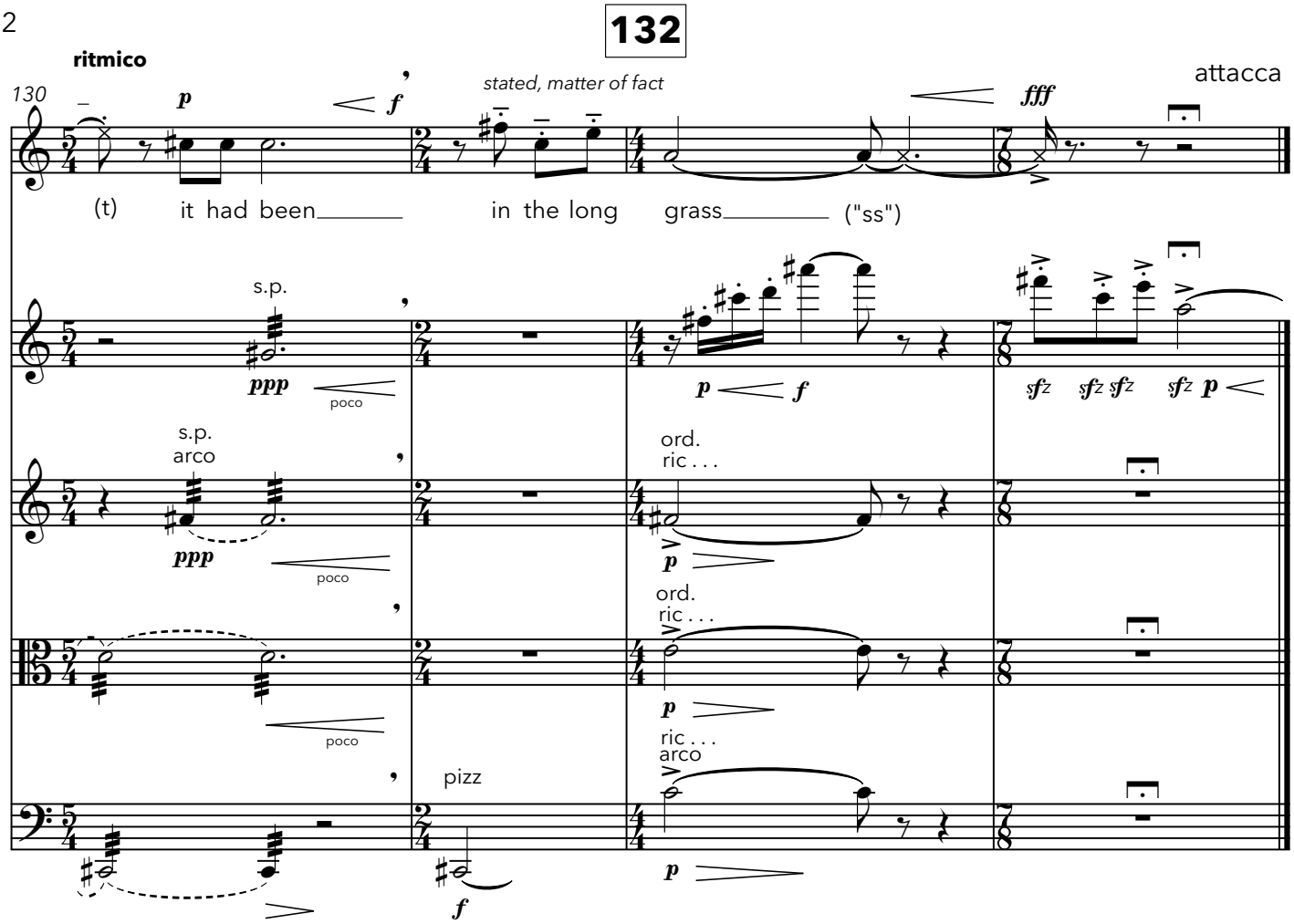
heavily dampen string pizz

heavily dampen strings. Mostly texture but some pitch remains

s.p.

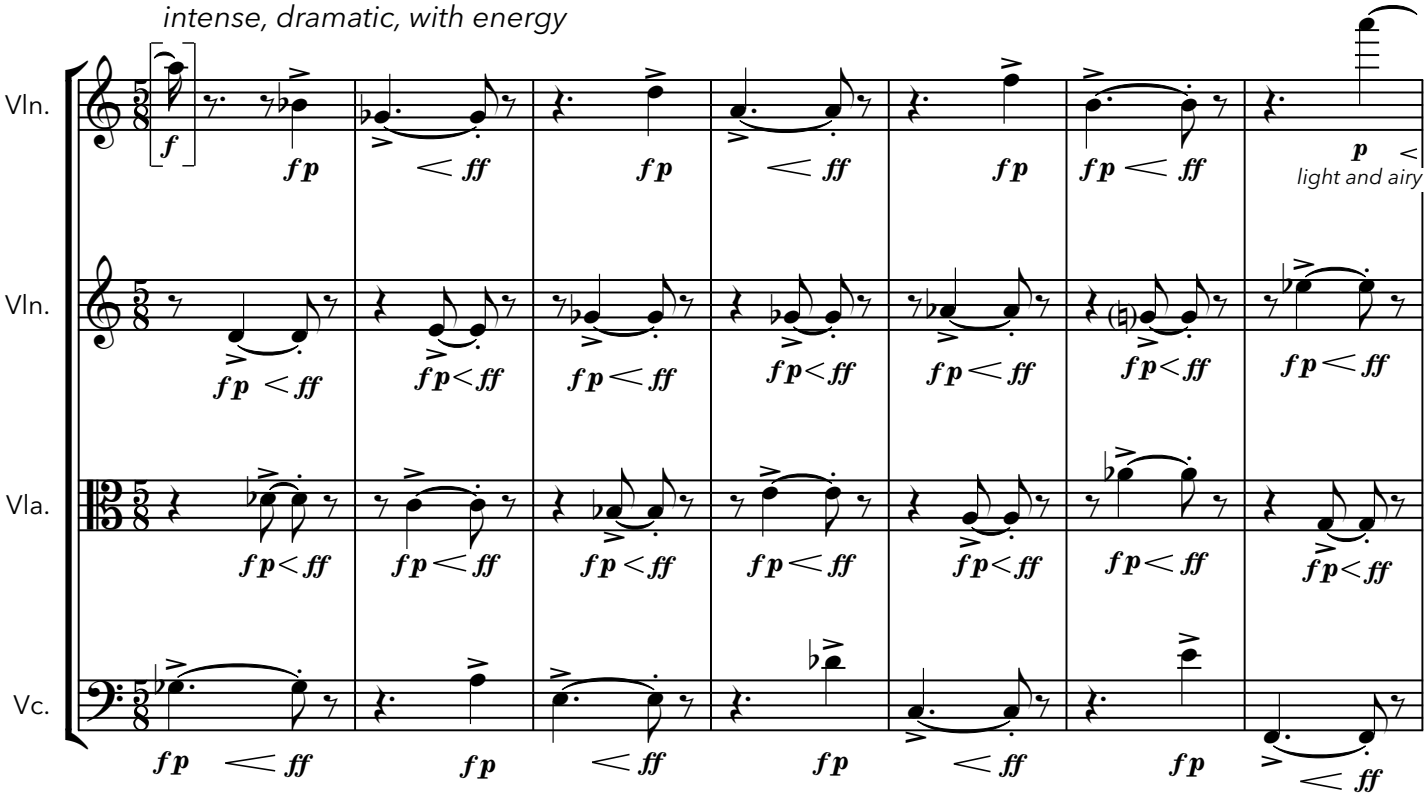
vary bow bosition, speed and dynamic to vary the exposed overtones

slight pitch bends


132
ritmico
130
stated, matter of fact
attacca
(t) it had been in the long grass ("ss")
s.p.
poco
ord.
ric . . .
arco
pizz

II - *An eyelid's soundless blink*

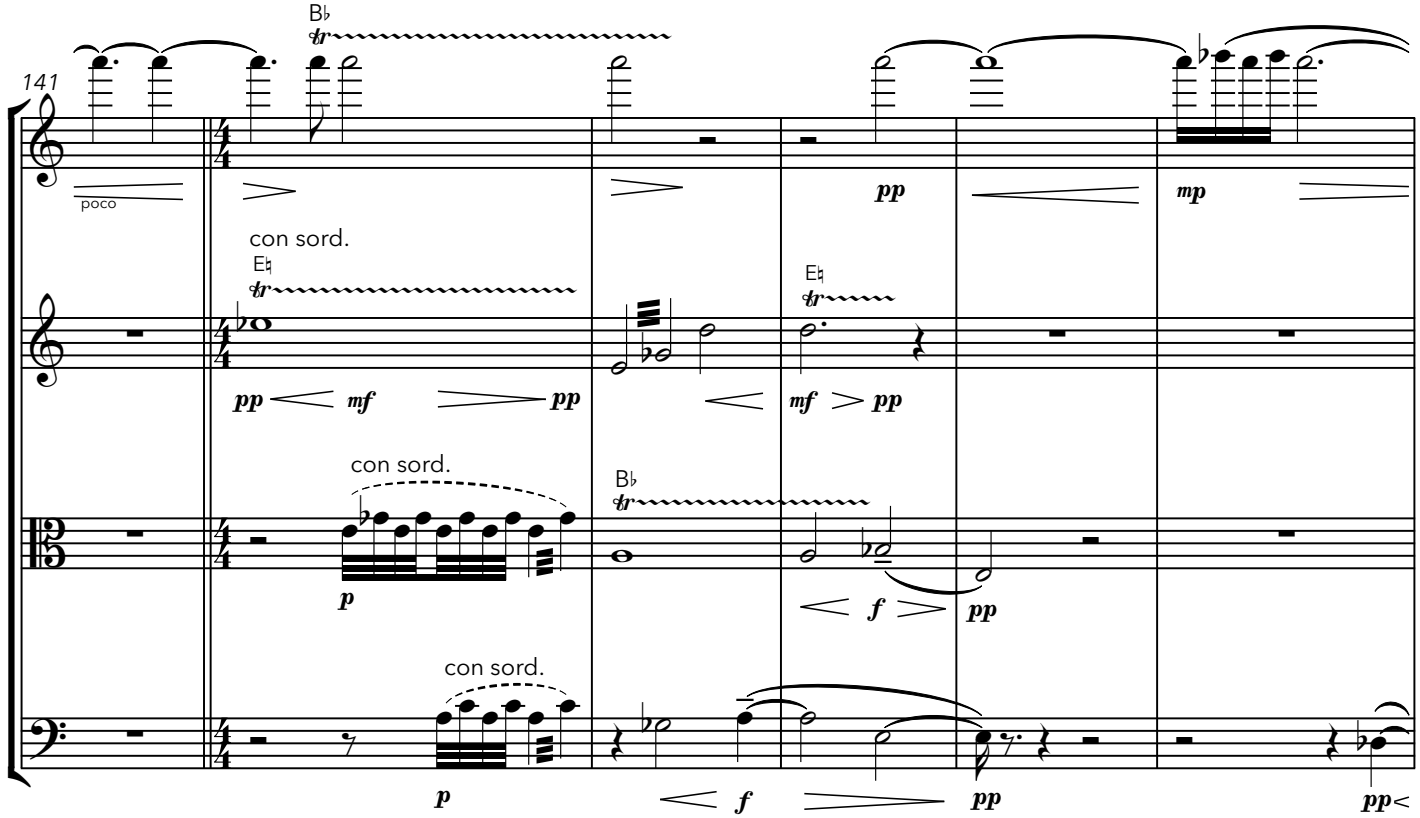
♩ = c. 92
♪ = c. 184
intense, dramatic, with energy

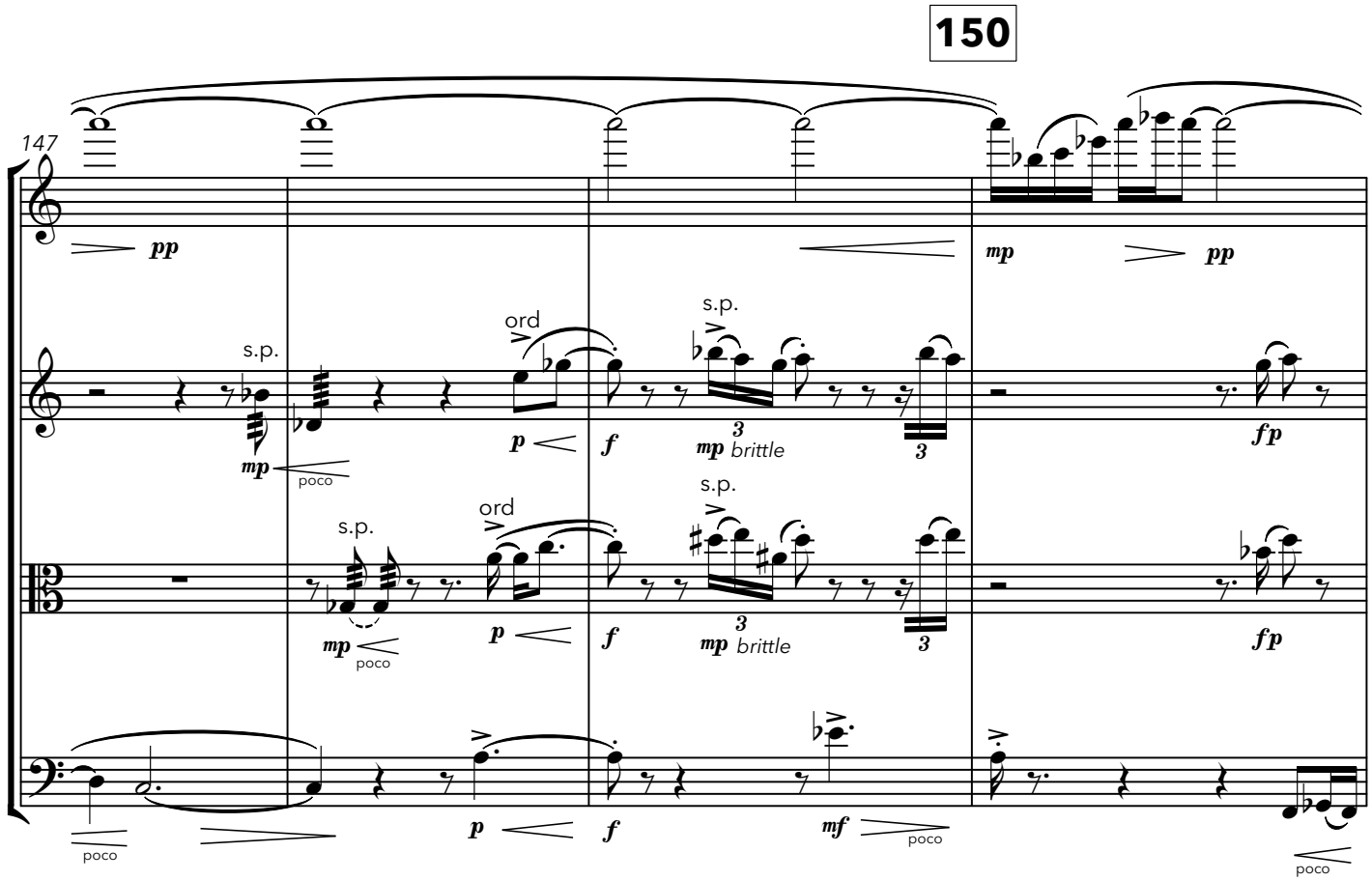


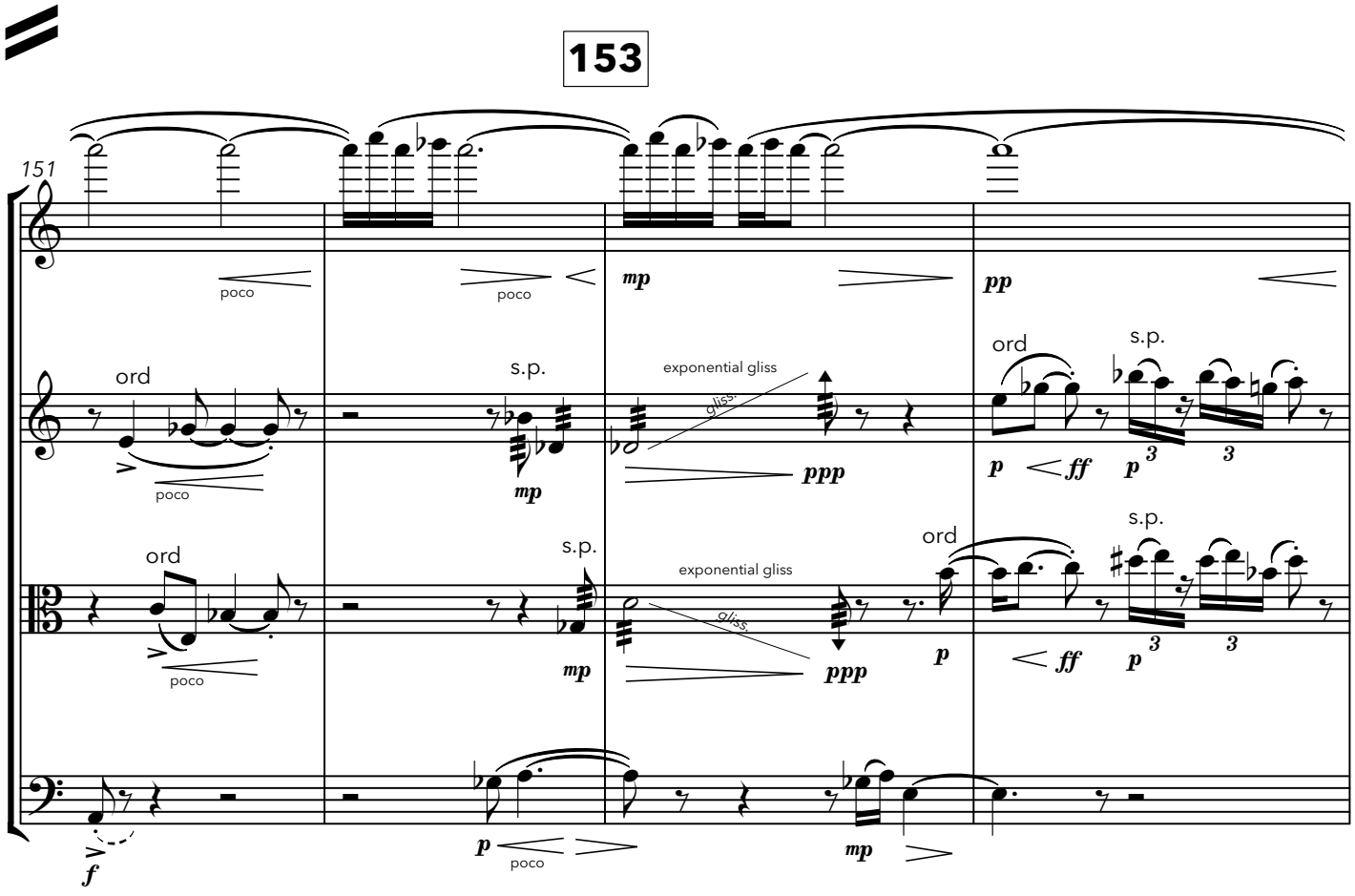
♩ = c. 100
slightly faster

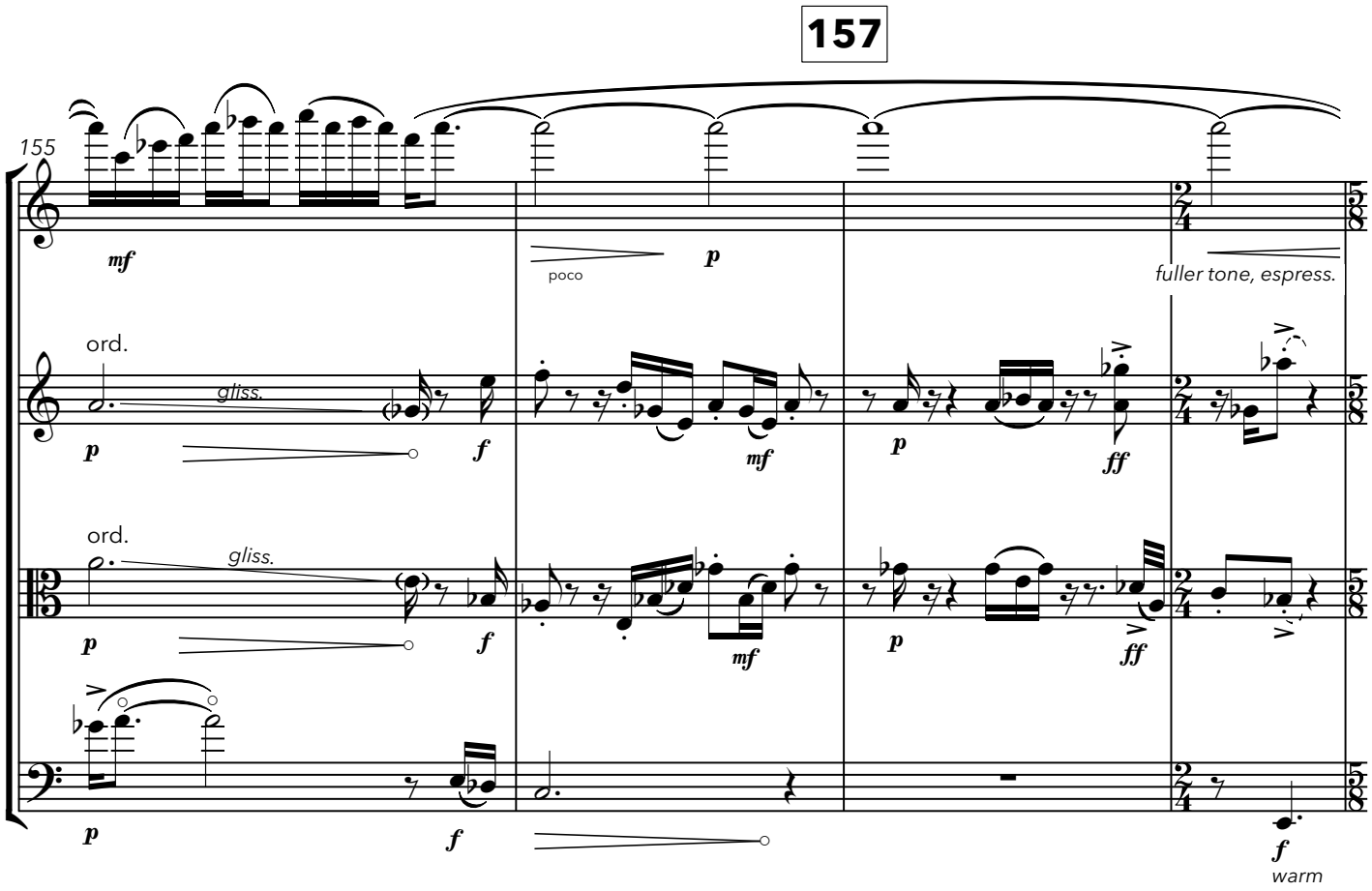
light ensemble texture, delicate
maintain sense of pulse

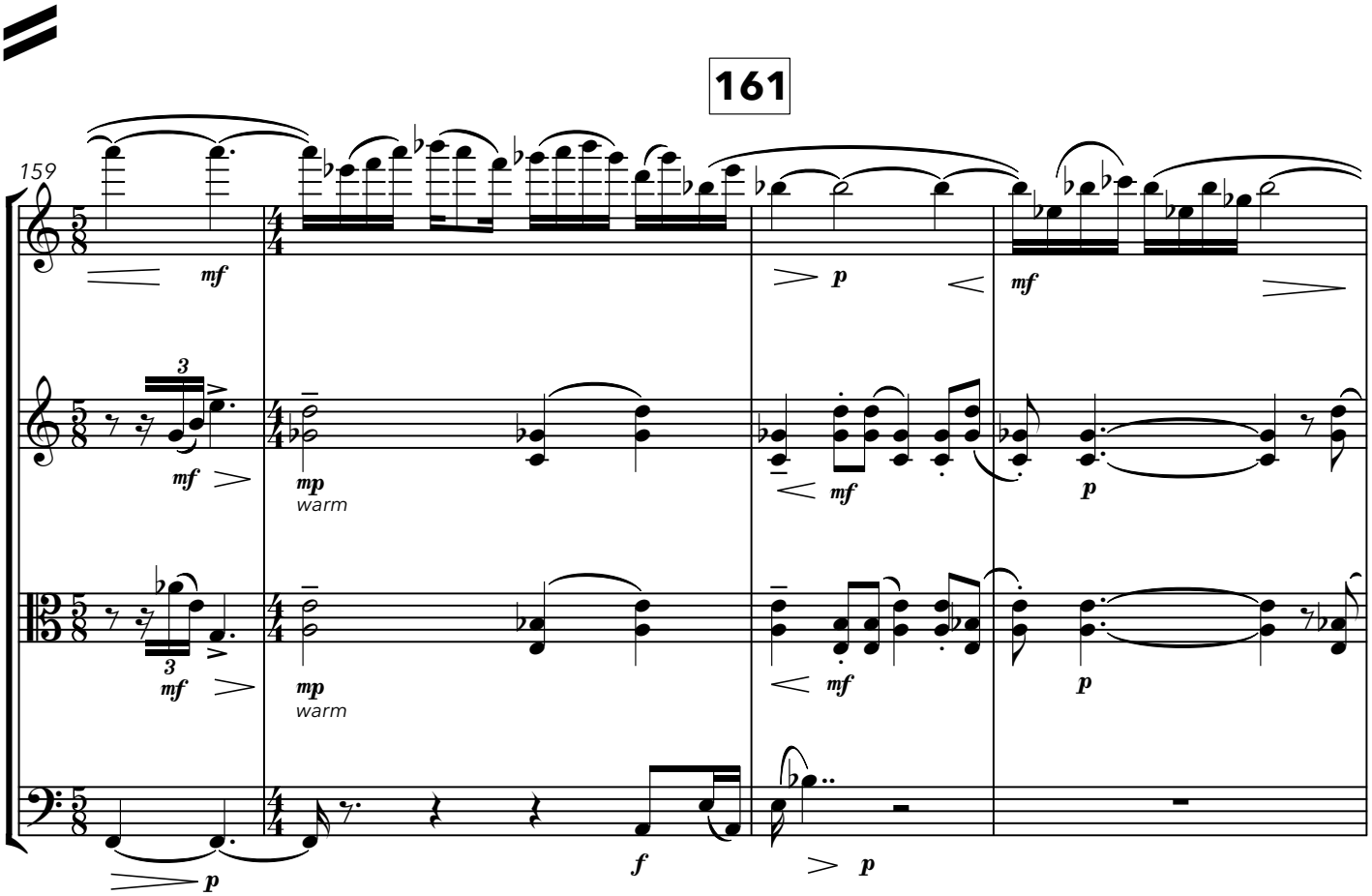
146

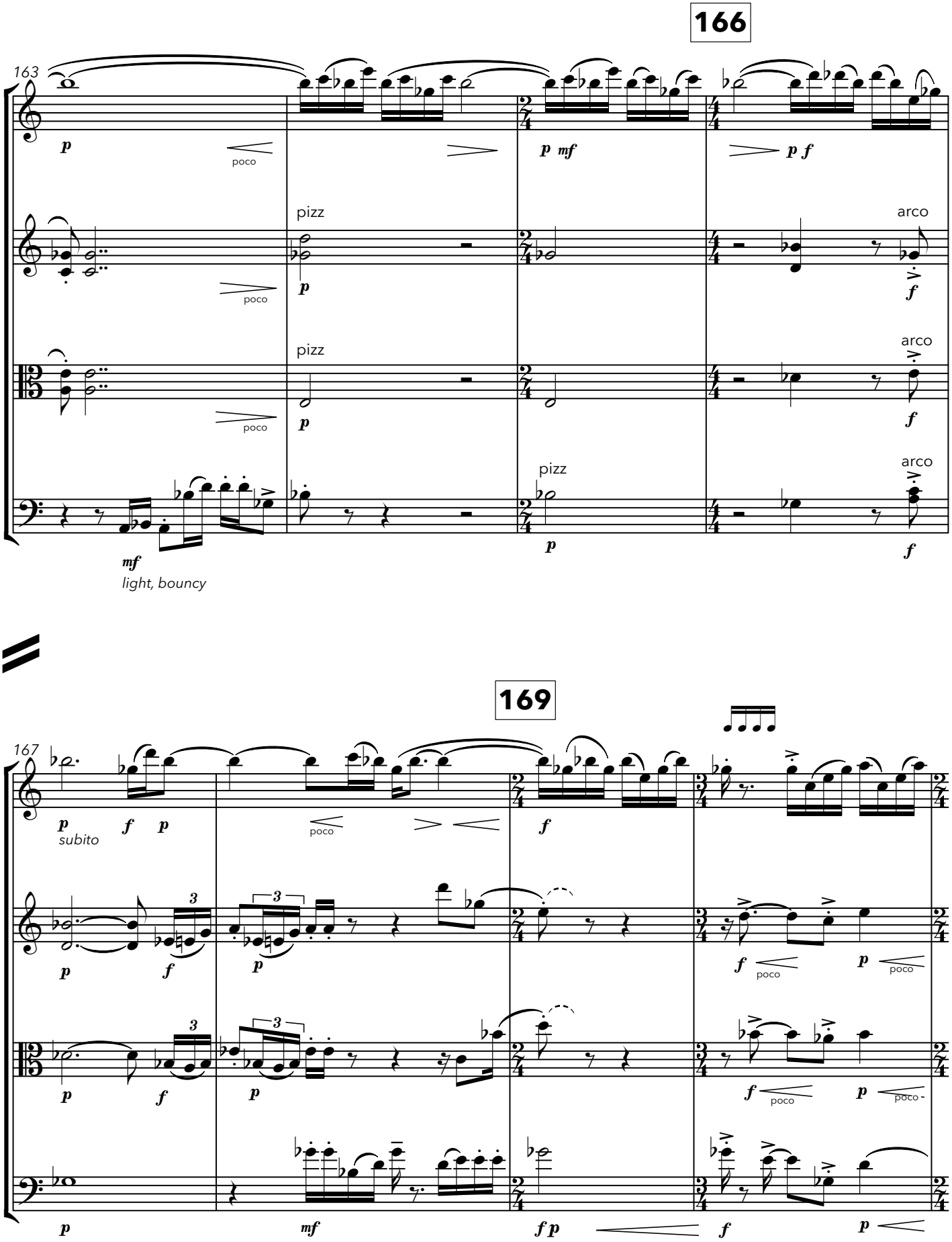


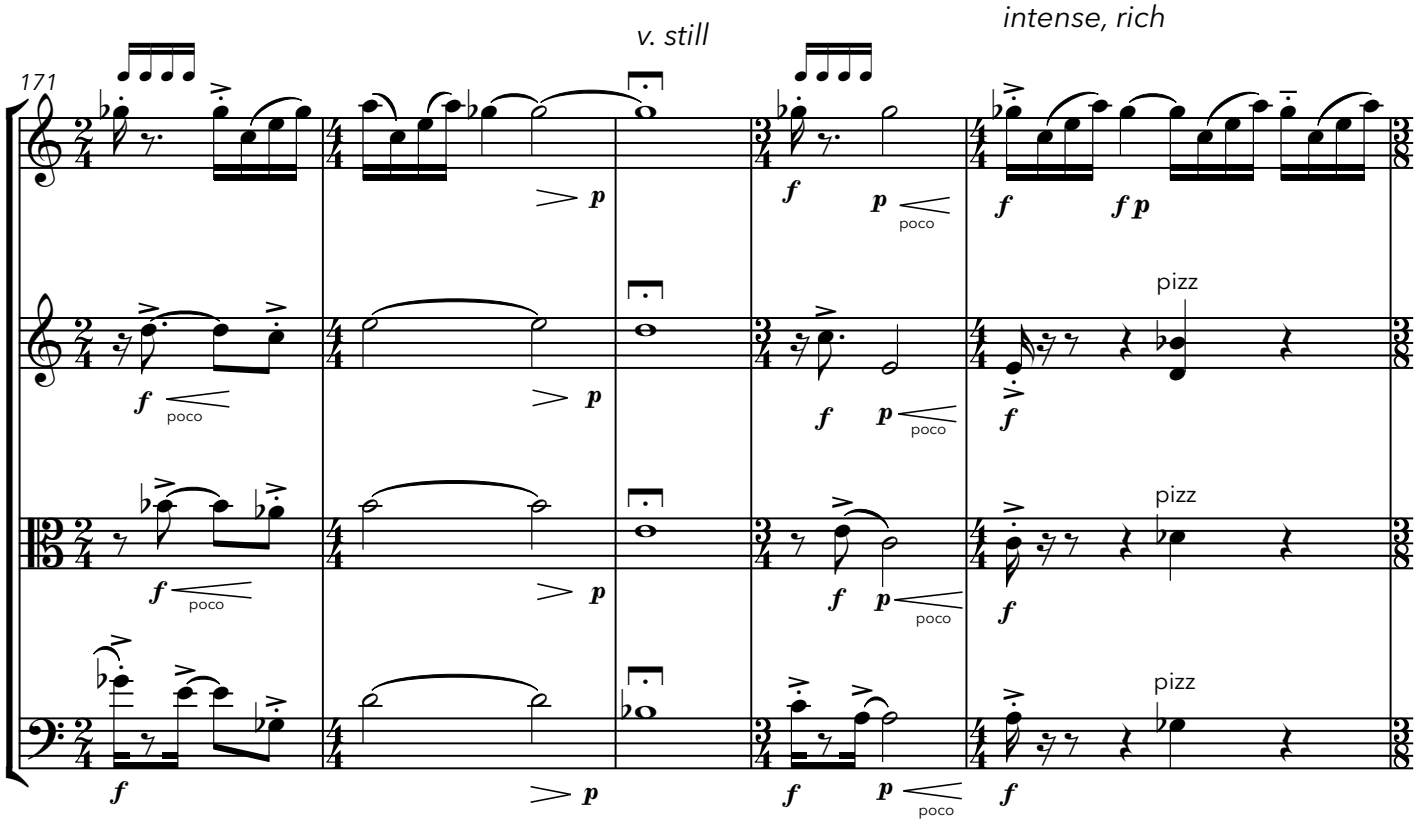

150
147
pp
mp
pp
s.p.
ord
p
f
mp brittle
fp
poco
mf

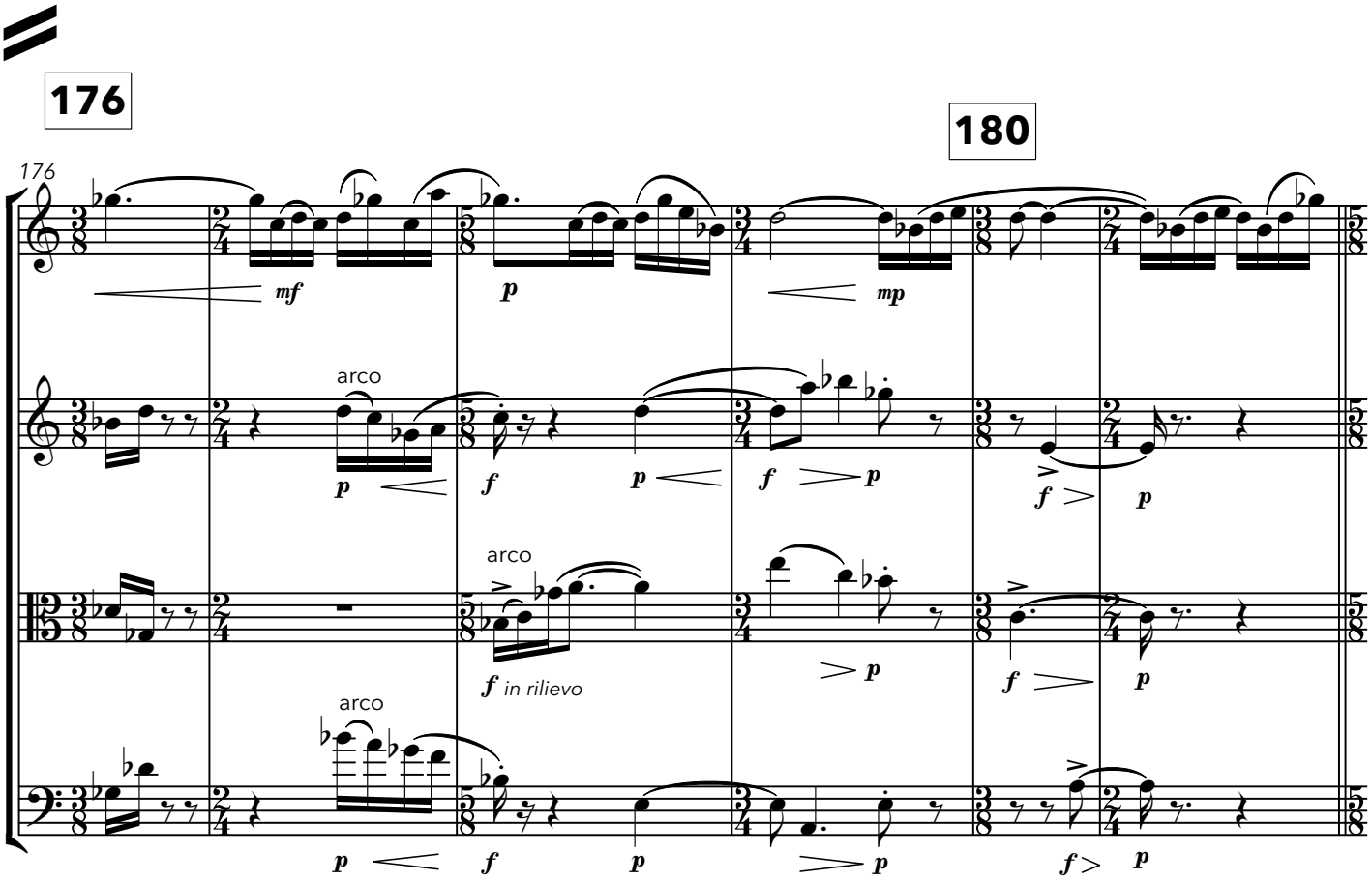

153
151
poco
mp
pp
ord
s.p.
exponential gliss
gliss.
ppp
p
ff
f

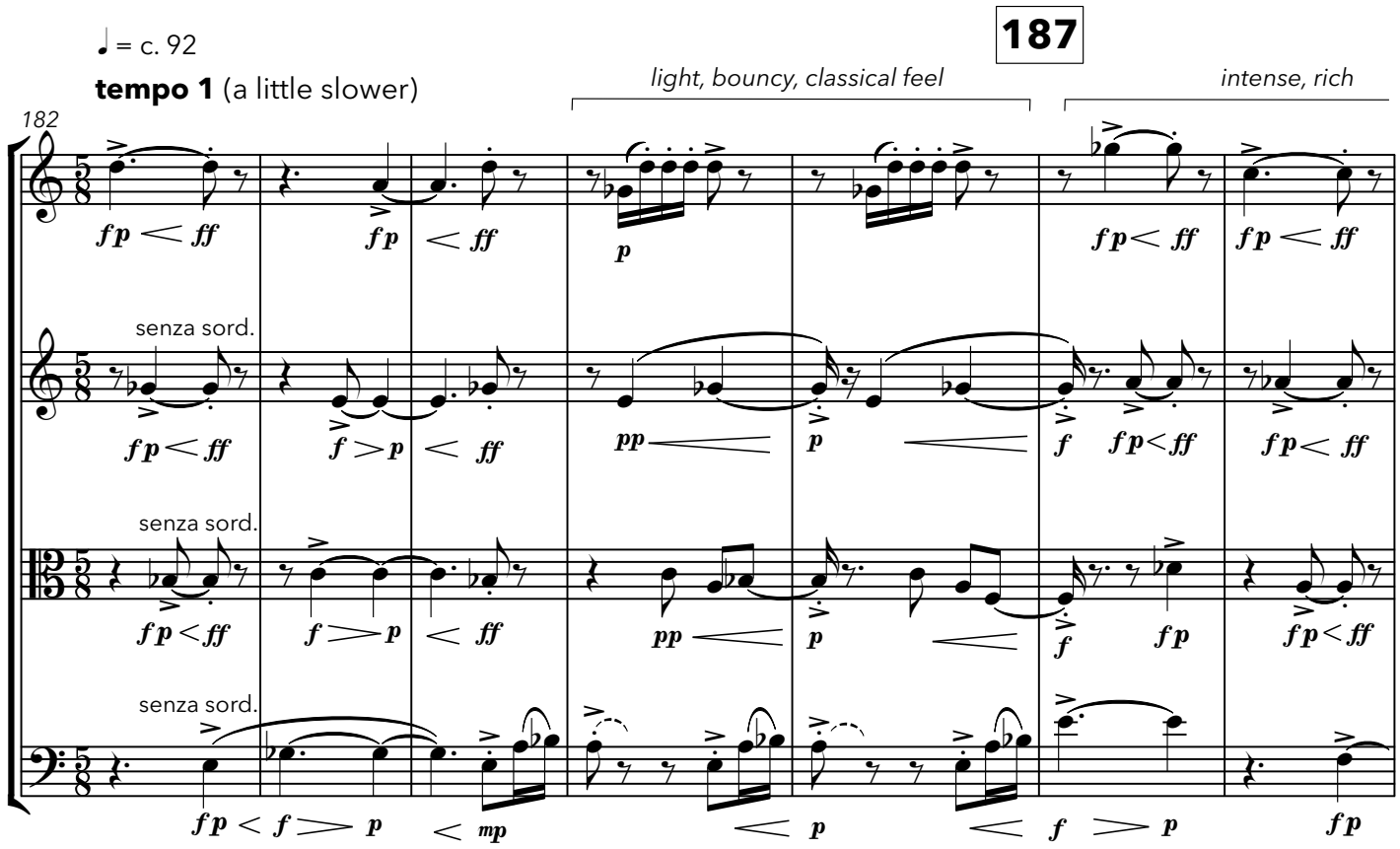

157
155
mf
poco
p
fuller tone, espress.
ord.
gliss.
p
f
mf
p
ff
ord.
gliss.
p
f
mf
p
ff
p
f
f
warm

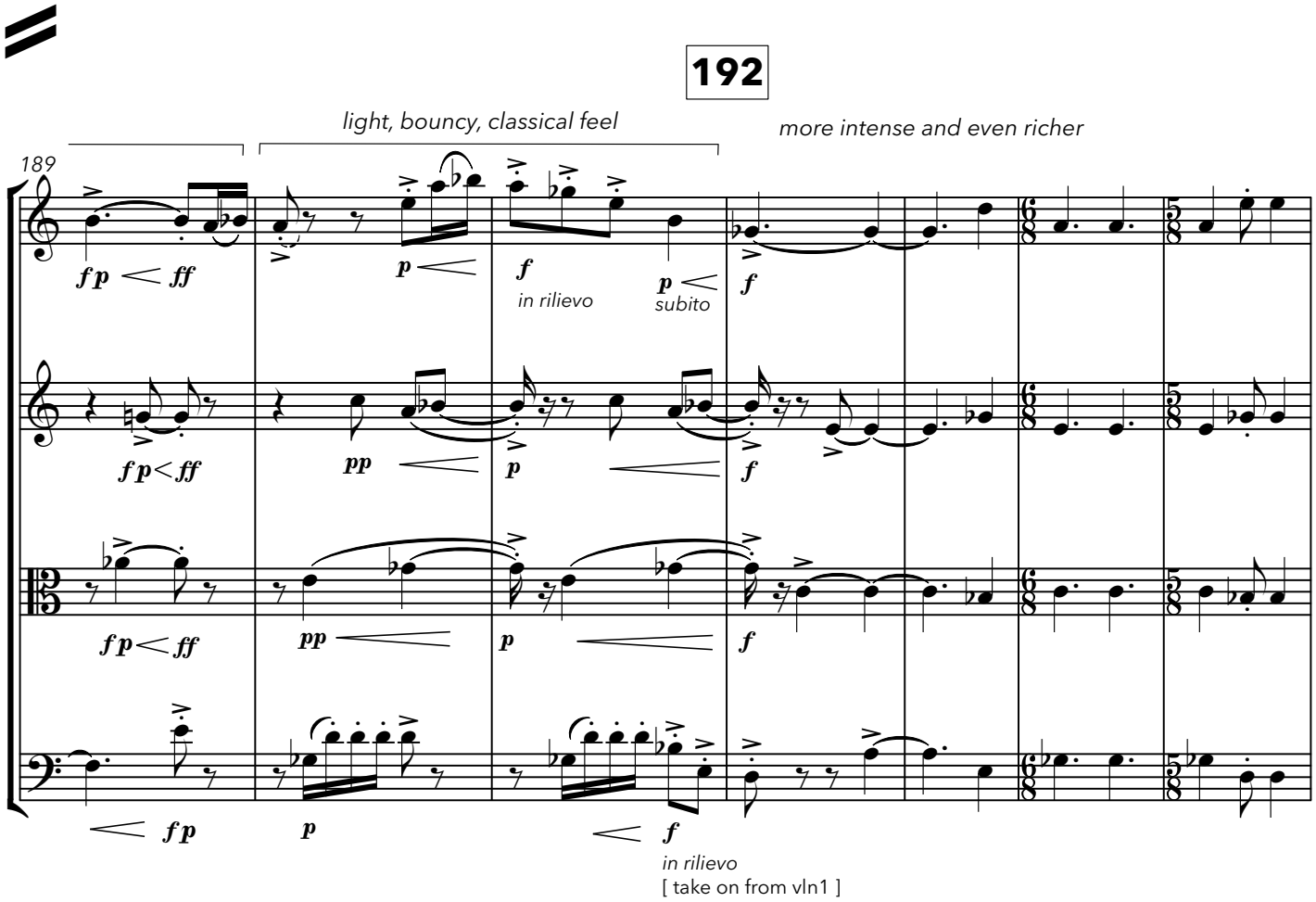

161
159
mf
p
mf
3
mf
mp
warm
mf
p
3
mf
mp
warm
mf
p
p
f
p

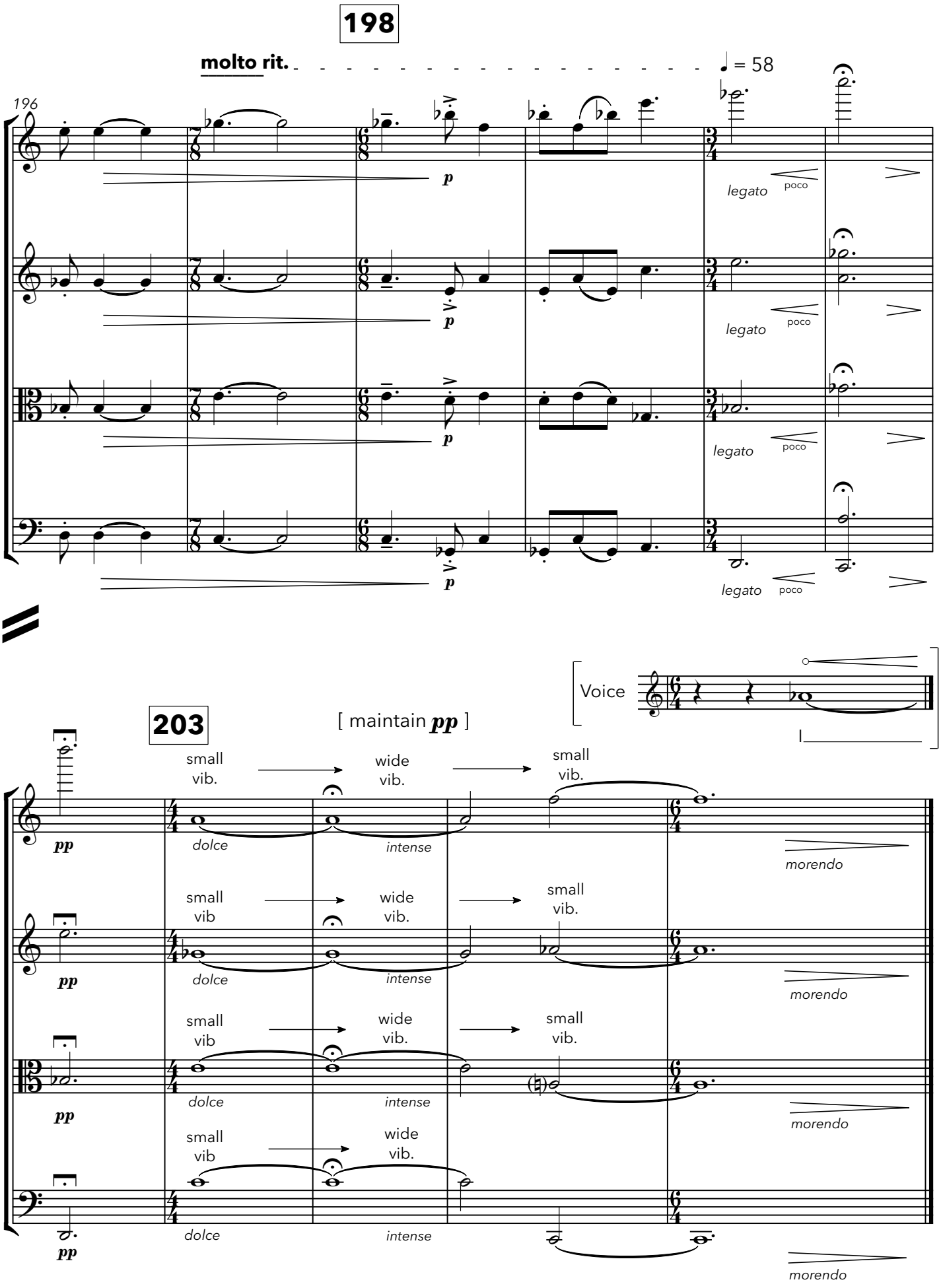

166
163
p
poco
p mf
p f
pizz
arco
p
f
mf
light, bouncy
169
167
p
subito
f
3
mf
f p


171
v. still
intense, rich
pizz
pizz
pizz
poco


176
180
176
arco
arco
arco
in rilievo

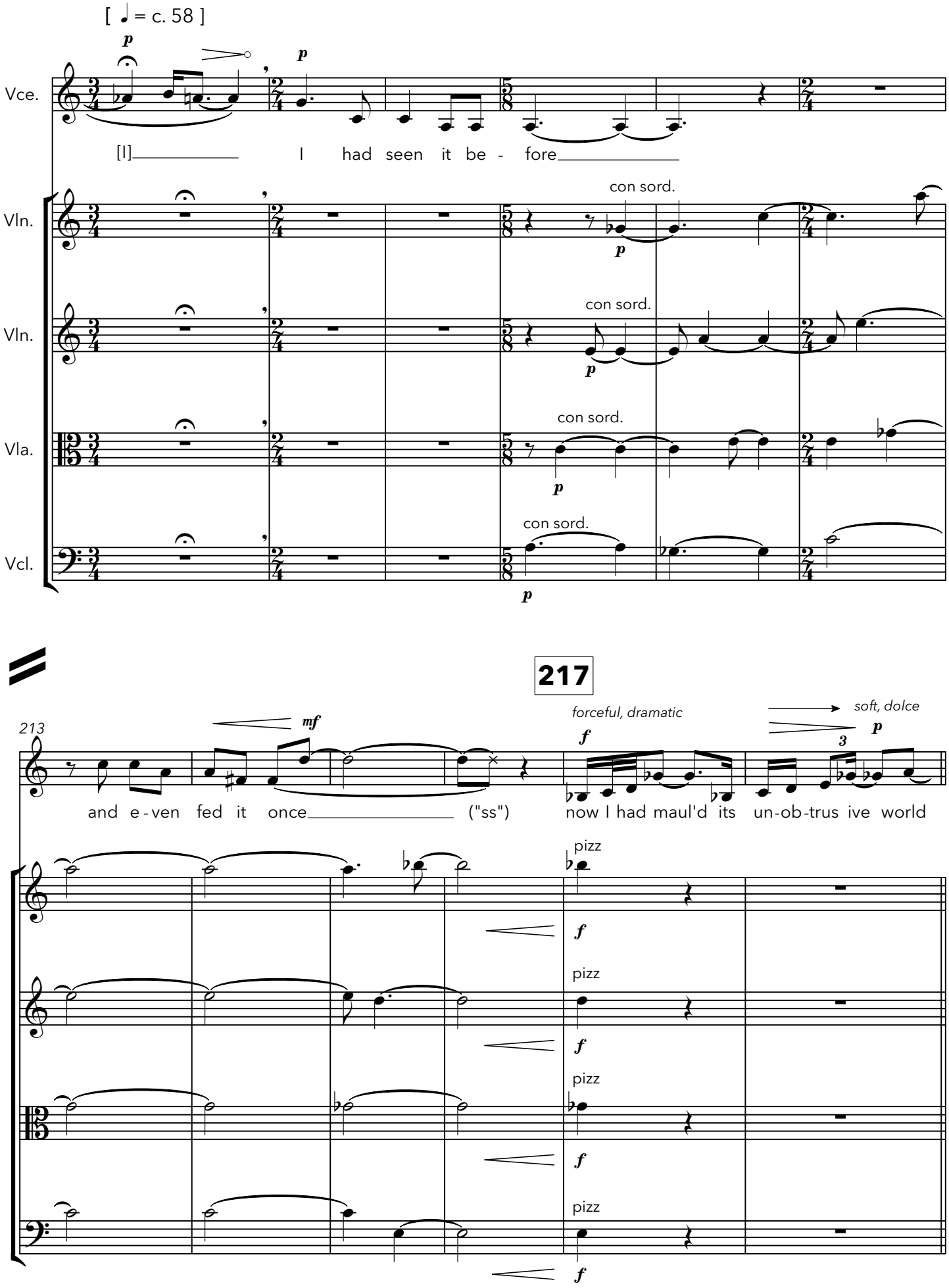

♩ = c. 92
tempo 1 (a little slower)
187
light, bouncy, classical feel
intense, rich
182
senza sord.
senza sord.
senza sord.


192
light, bouncy, classical feel
more intense and even richer
189
in rilievo
subito
in rilievo
[take on from vln1]



If performing with Interludes ***attacca***

2nd Interlude



a little slower

♩ = c. 52

222

219

poco

un - mend - ab - ly

arco

arco

arco

arco

224

223

vacant

mp legato

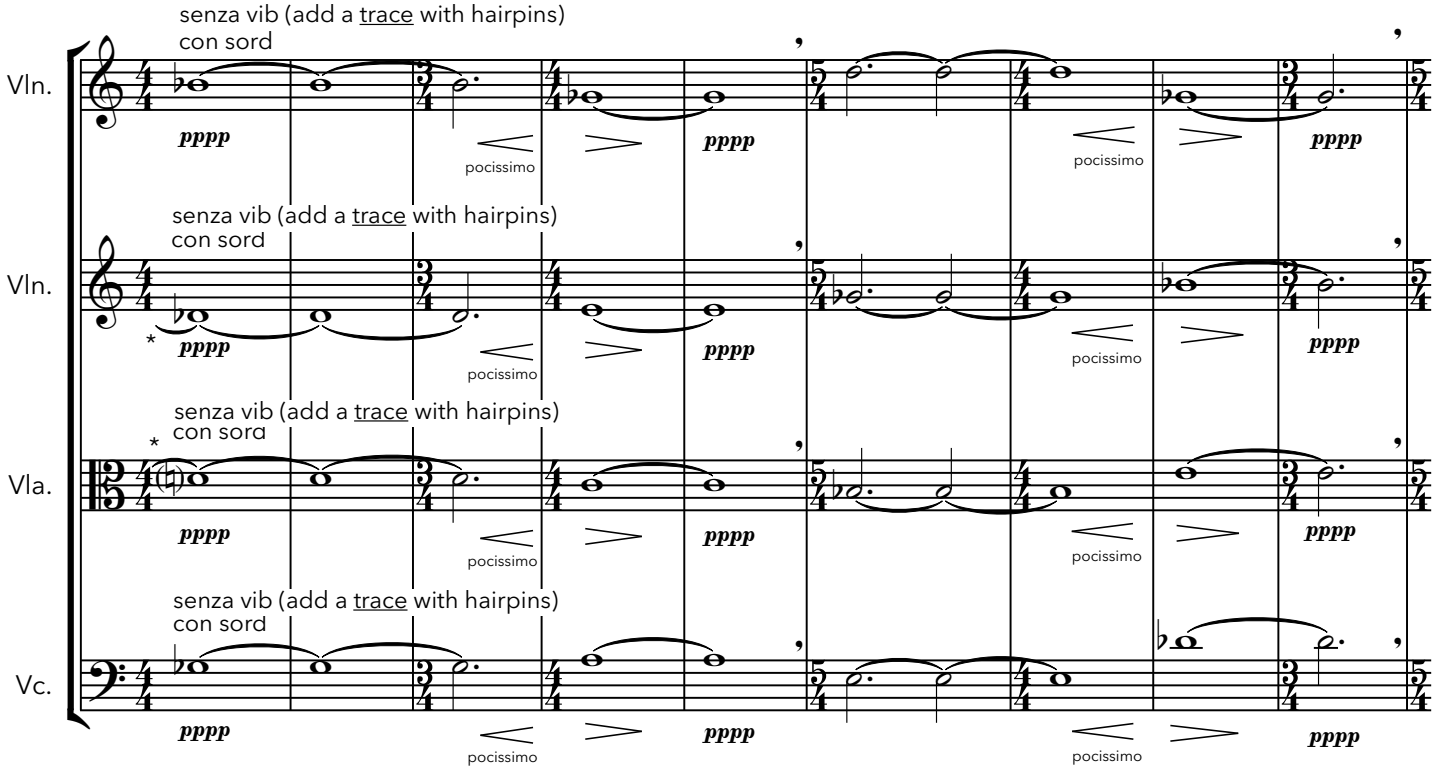
bur - i - al was no help

attacca

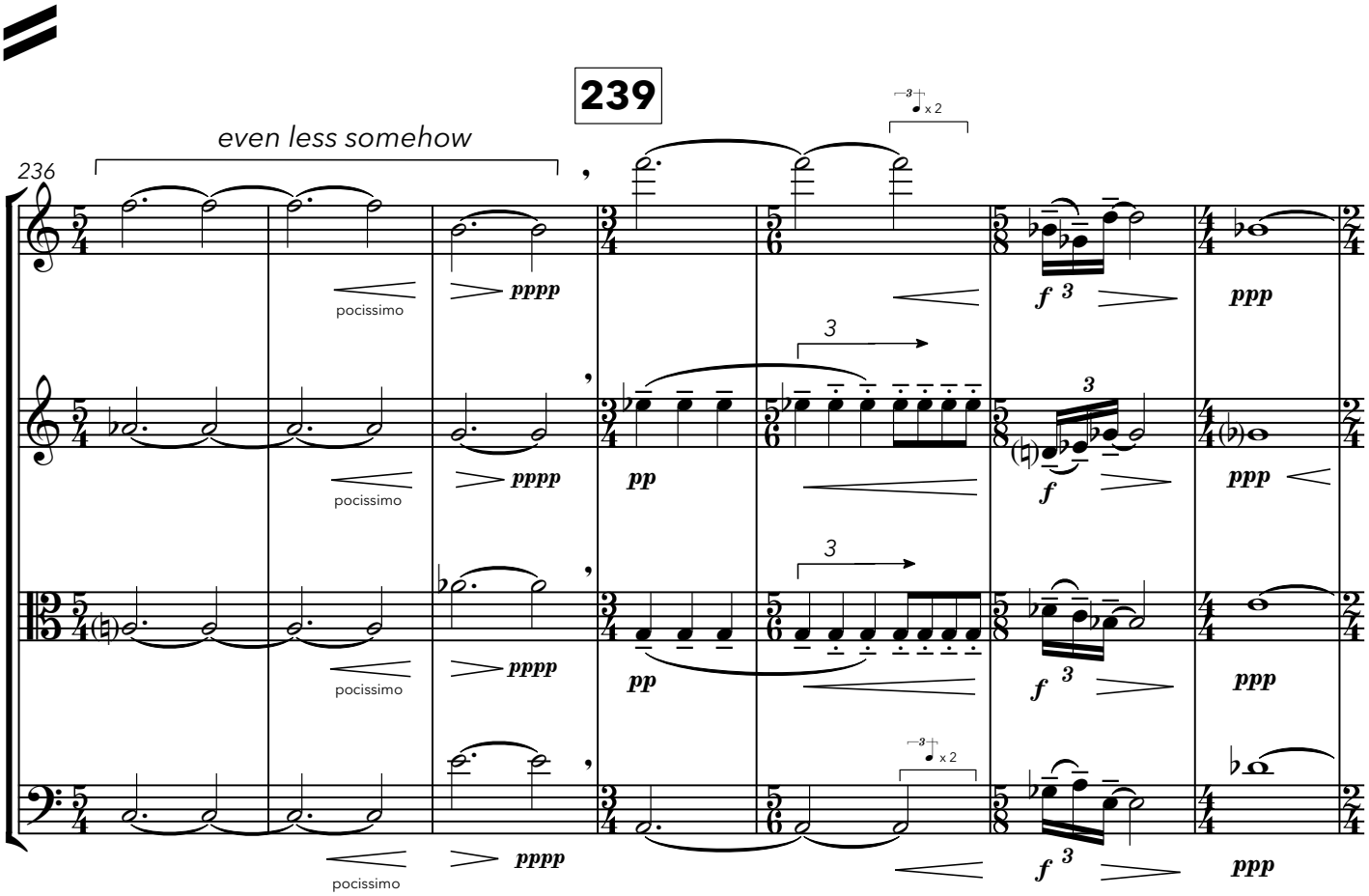
III - *Nocturnal blackness, mothy and warm*

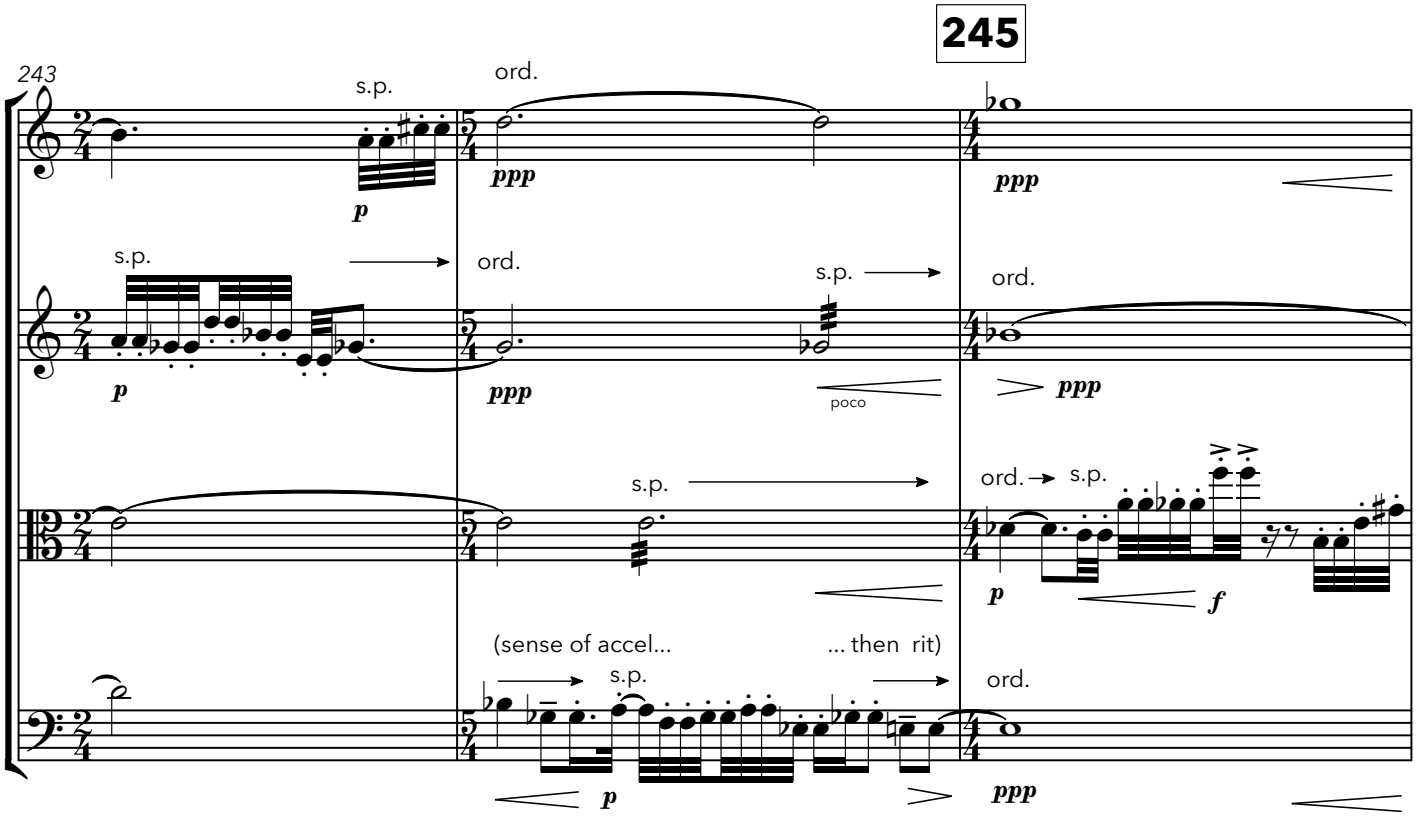
cold & focused

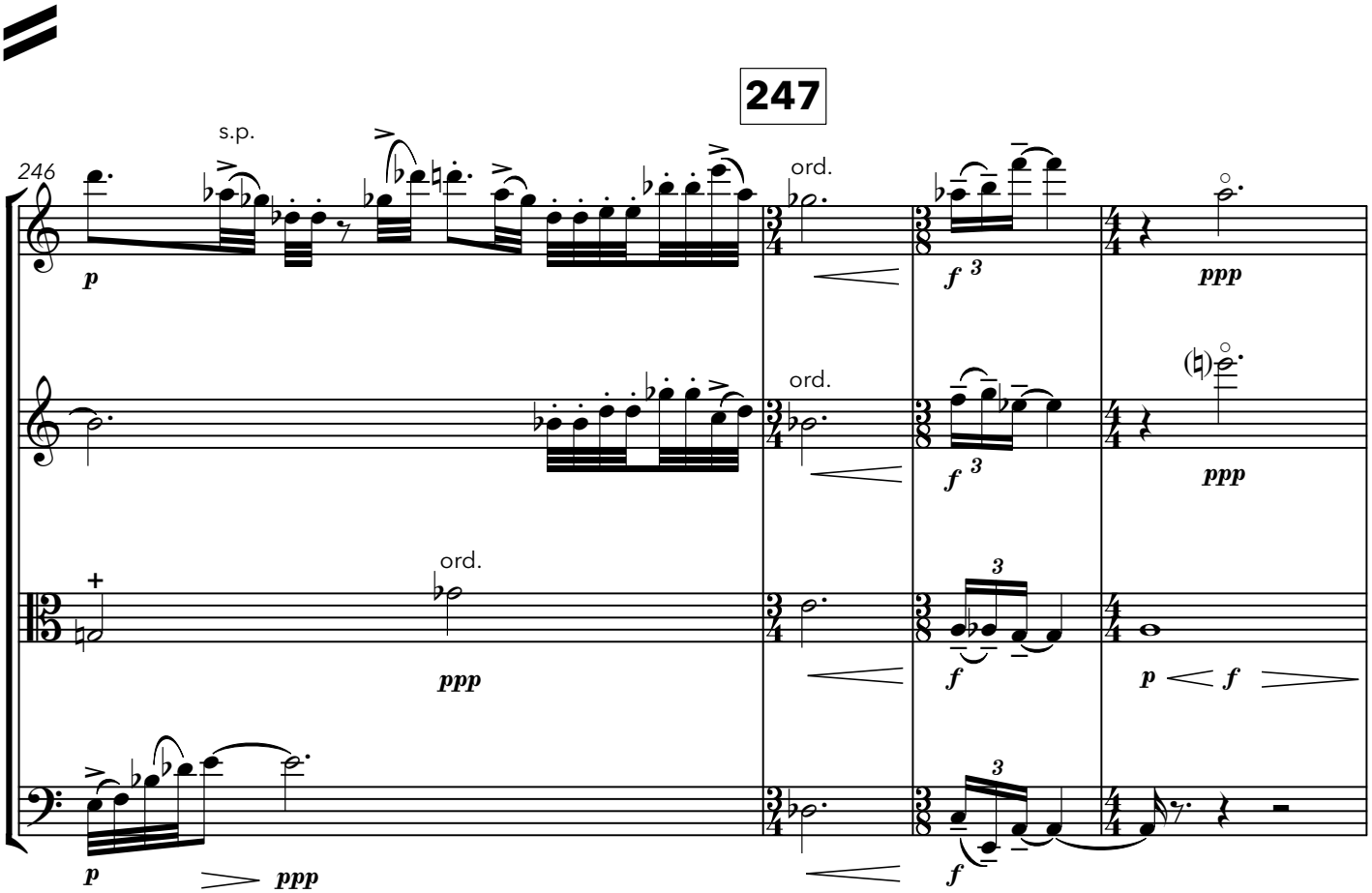
♩ = c. 52 *as quiet as possible, maintain tension, held back (to b 218)*

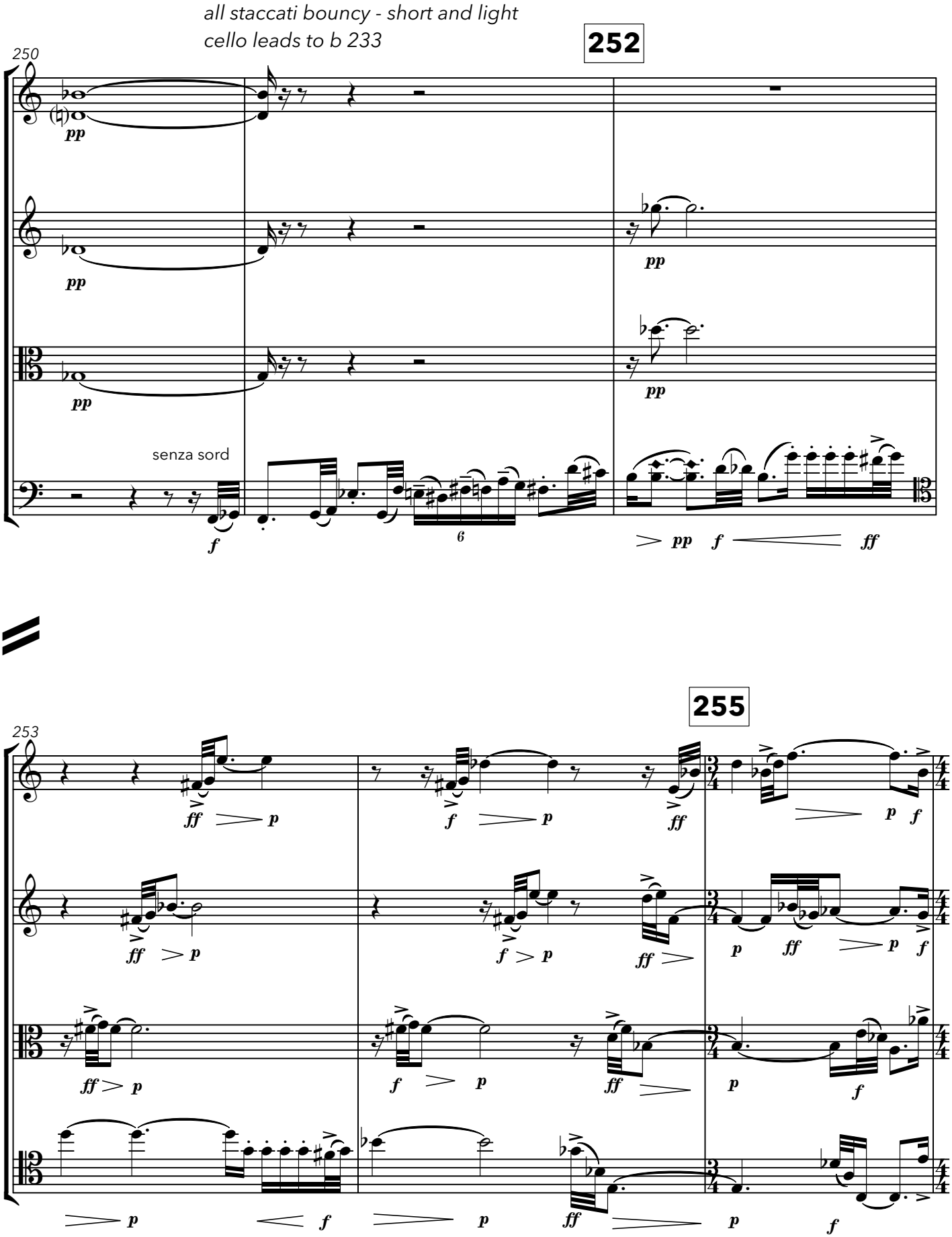


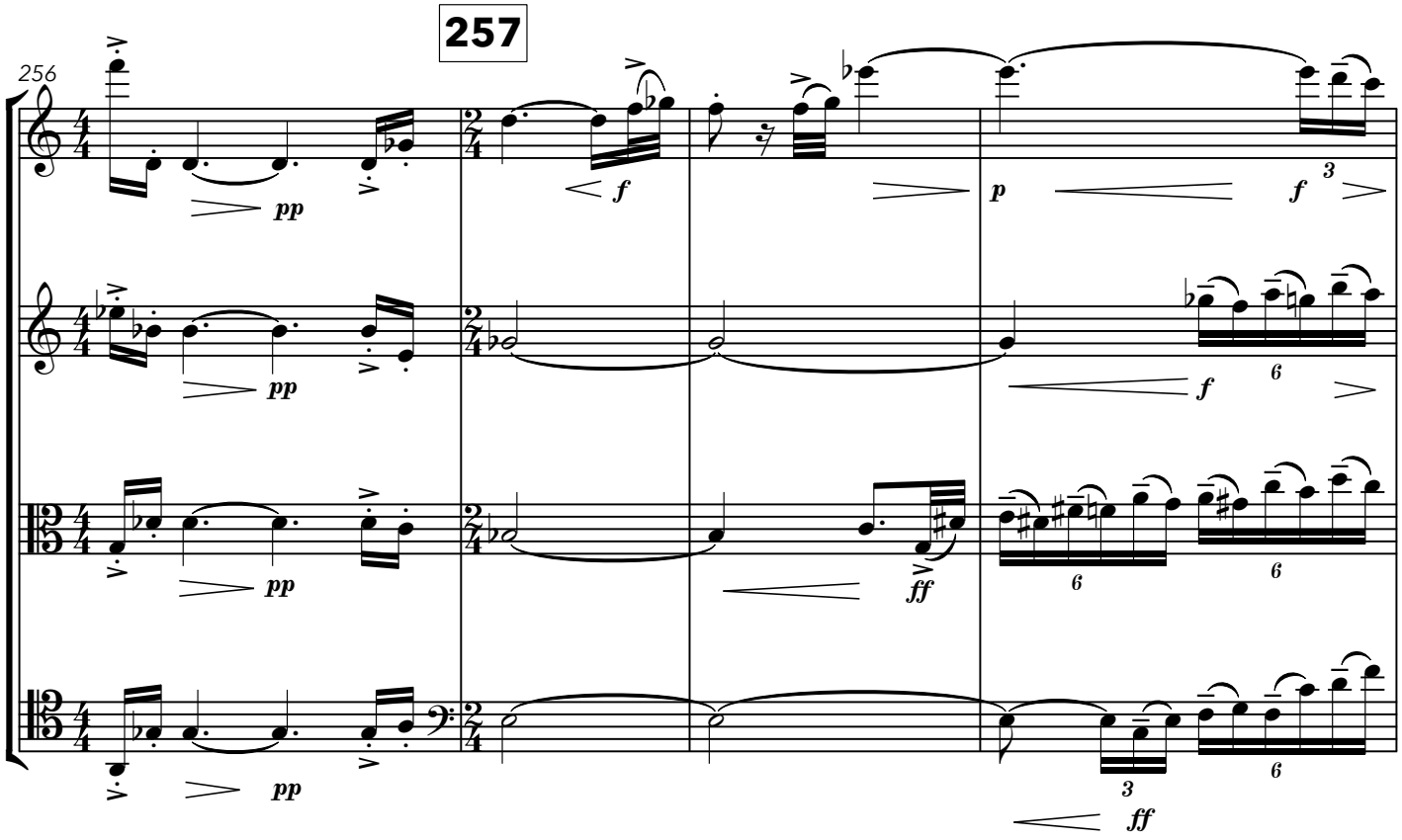
* notes are tied only if playing interludes.

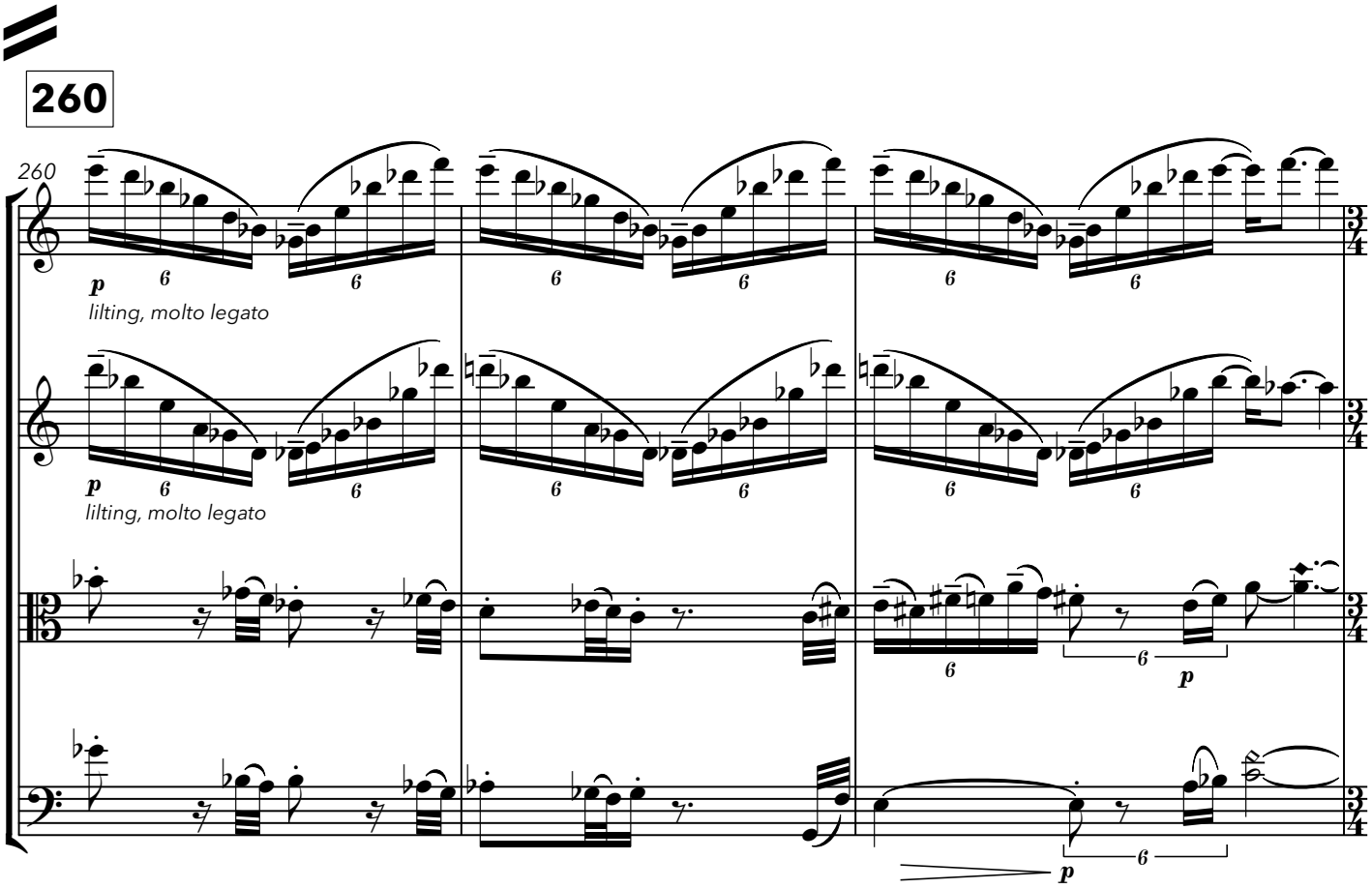


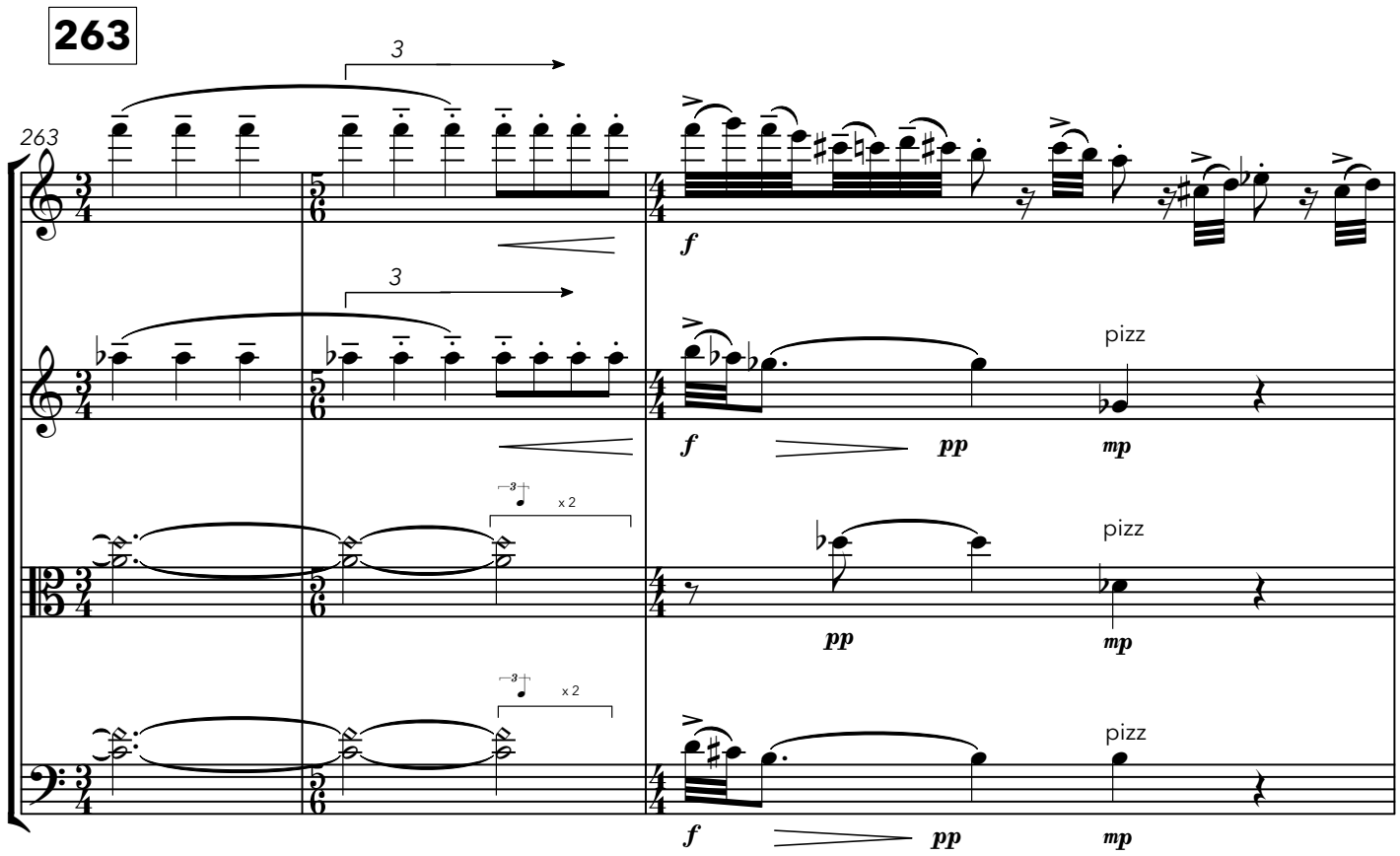

245
243
s.p.
ord.
ppp
p
poco
(sense of accel...
... then rit)

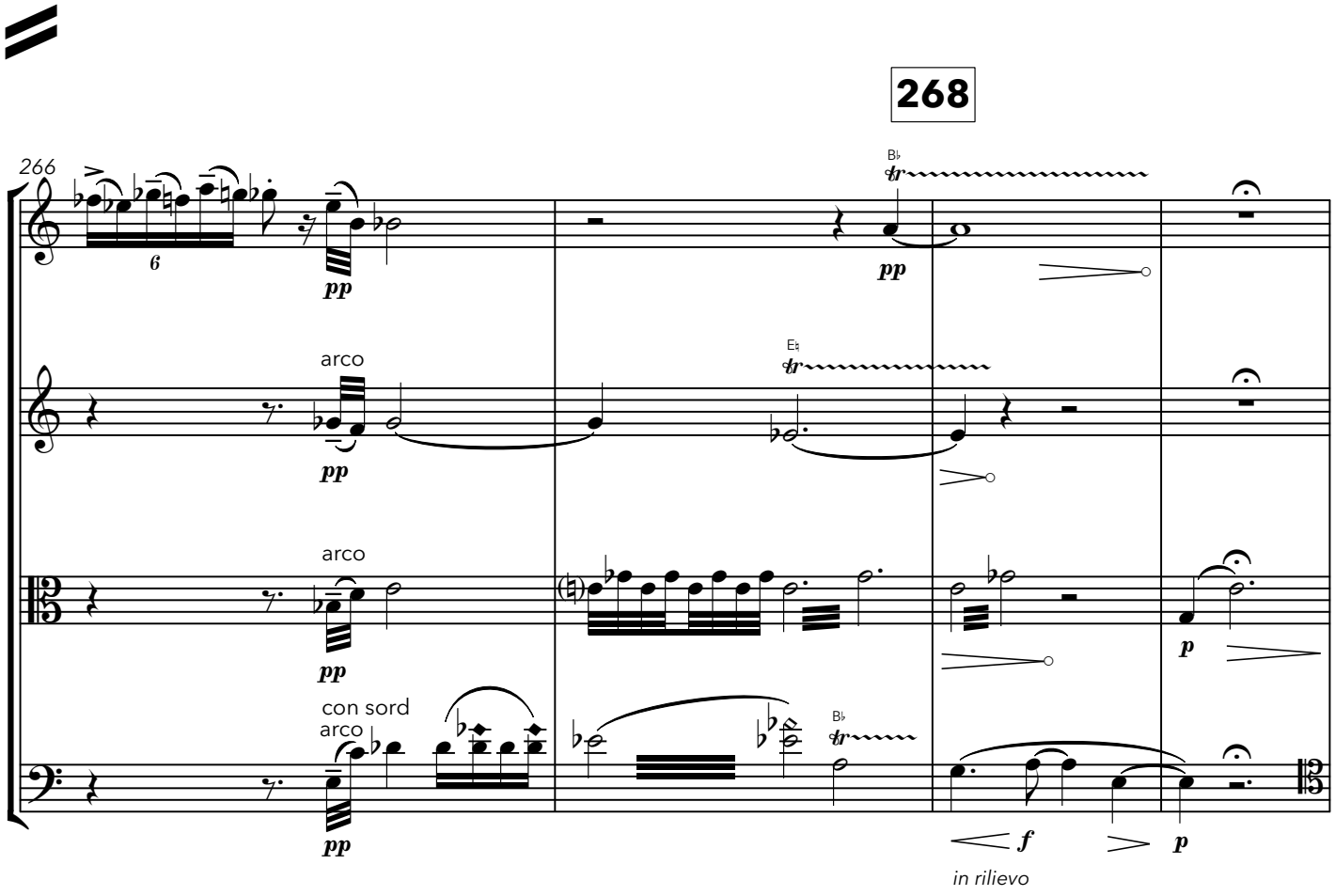

247
246
s.p.
ord.
p
ppp
f
3

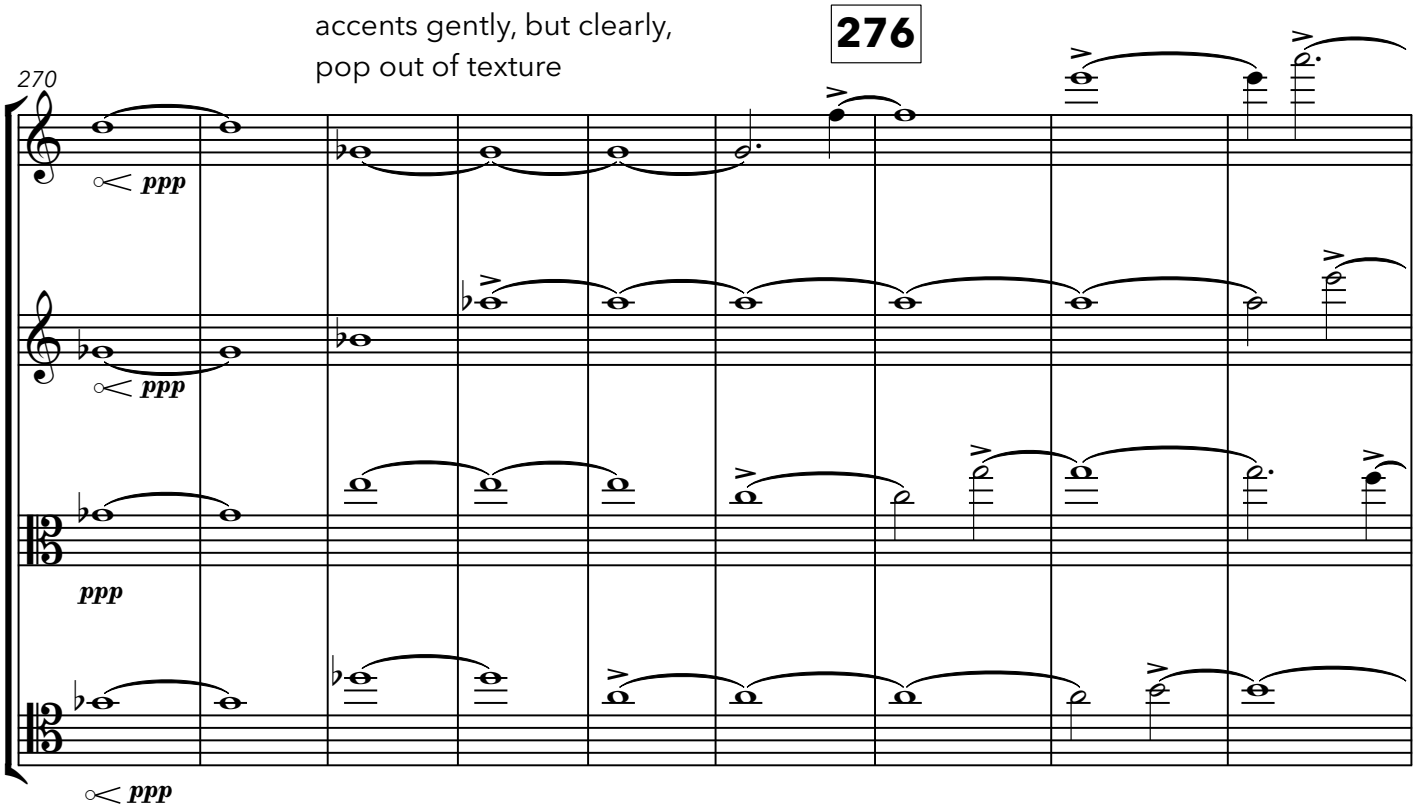

all staccati bouncy - short and light
cello leads to b 233
252
250
senza sord
255
253

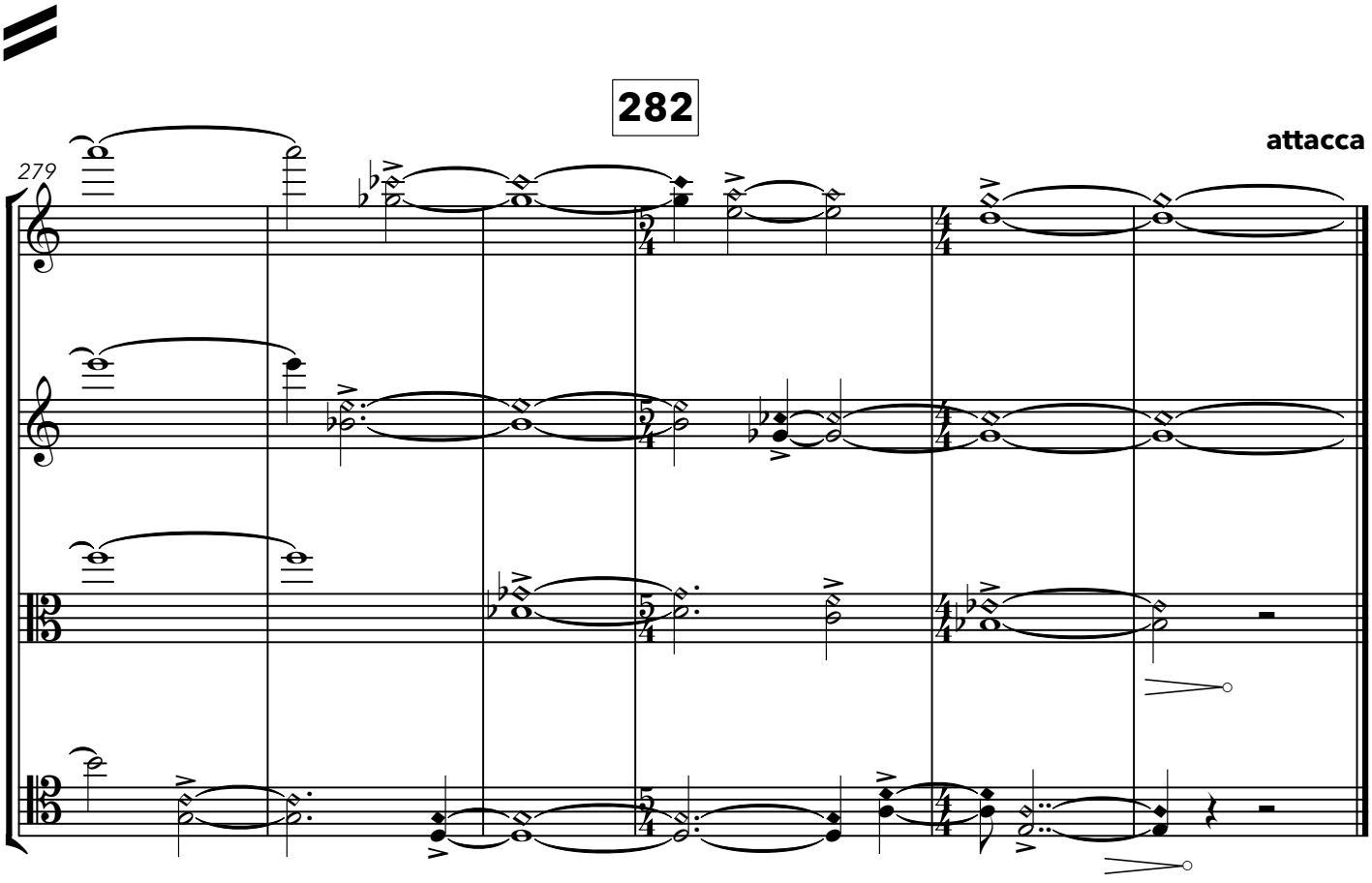

257
256
pp
f
p
f
ff

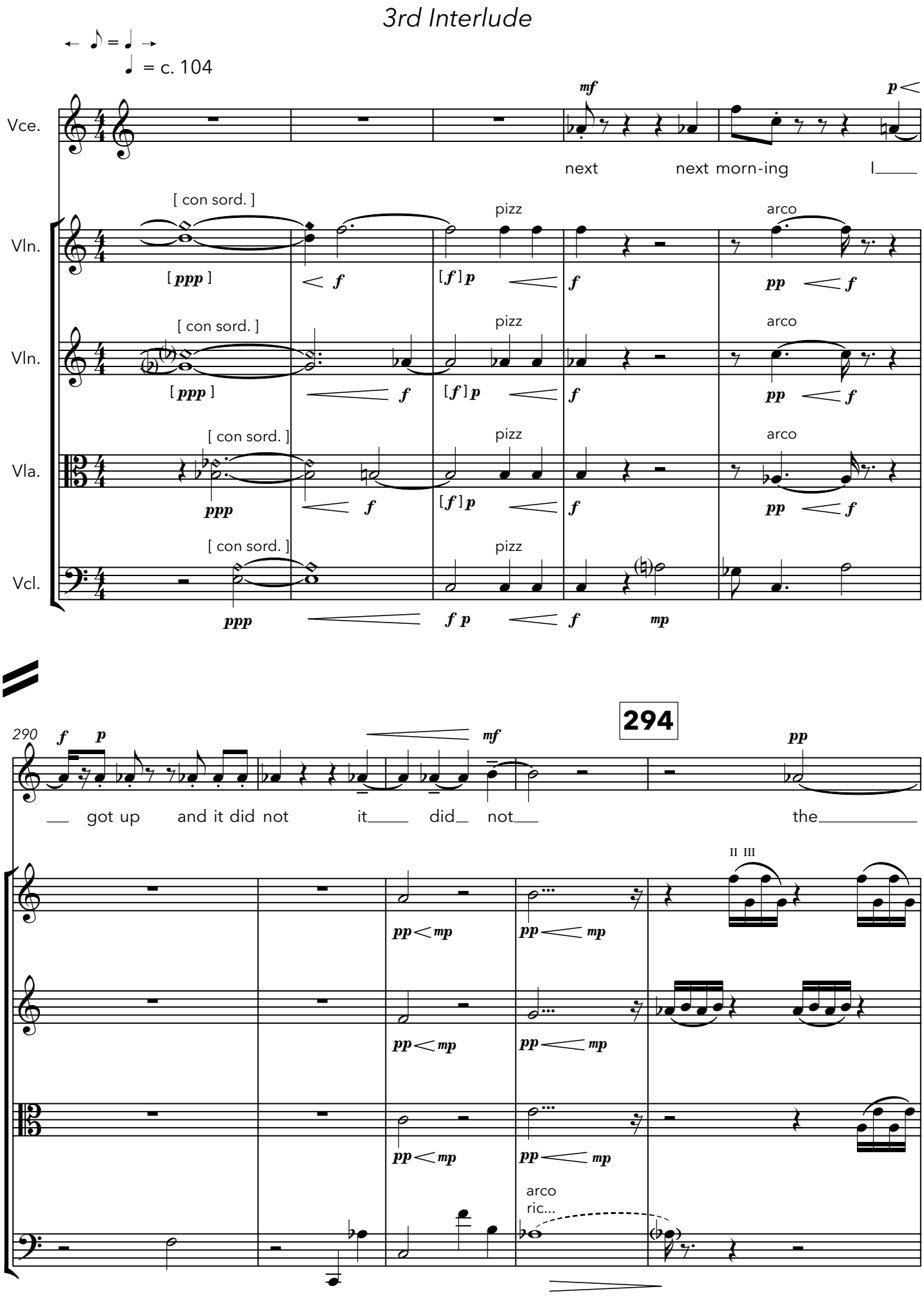

260
260
p
lilting, molto legato
p
lilting, molto legato
p
p

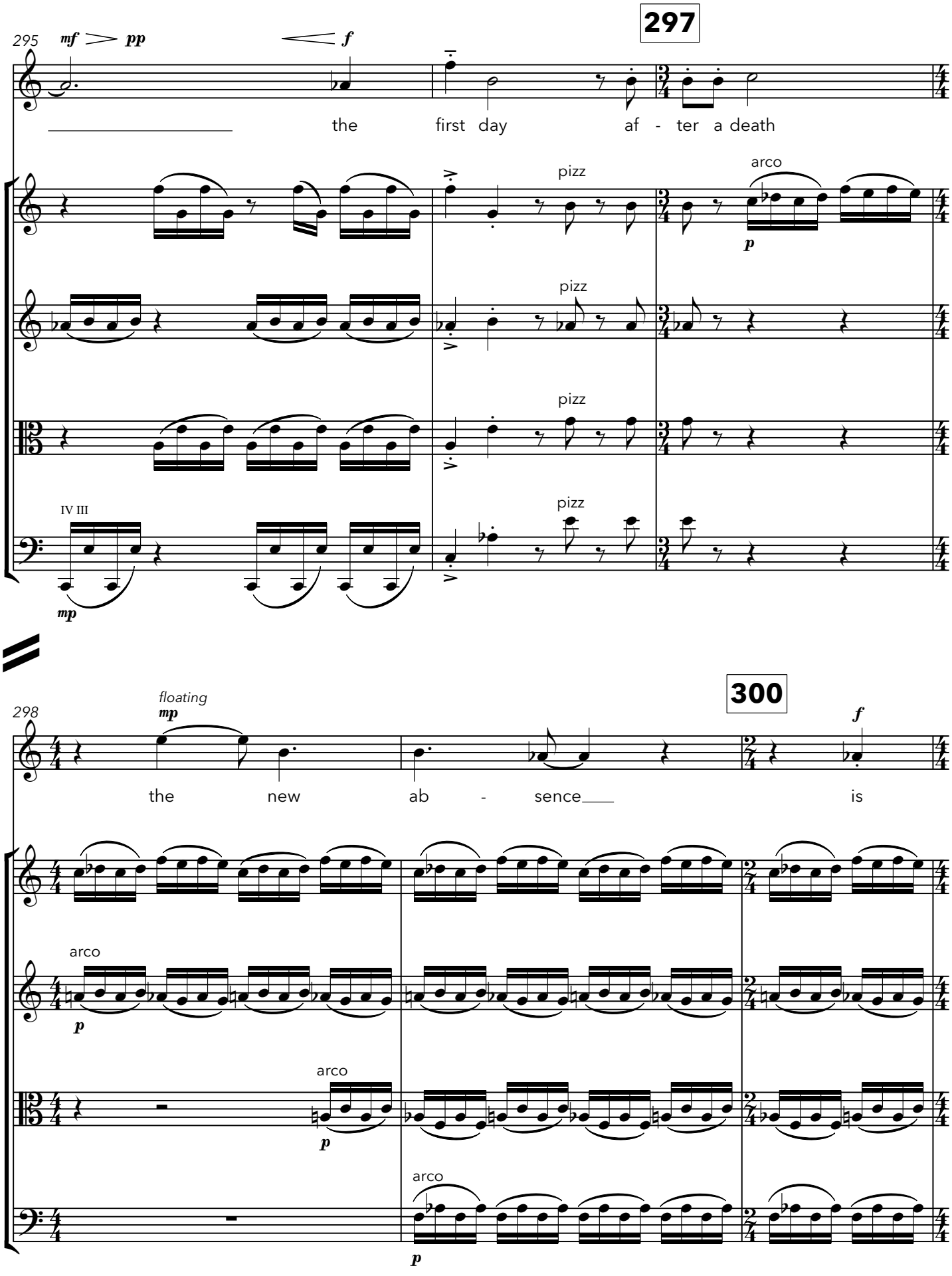

263
263
3
3
f
pizz
pp
mp
x 2
pizz
pp
mp
x 2
pizz
f
pp
mp

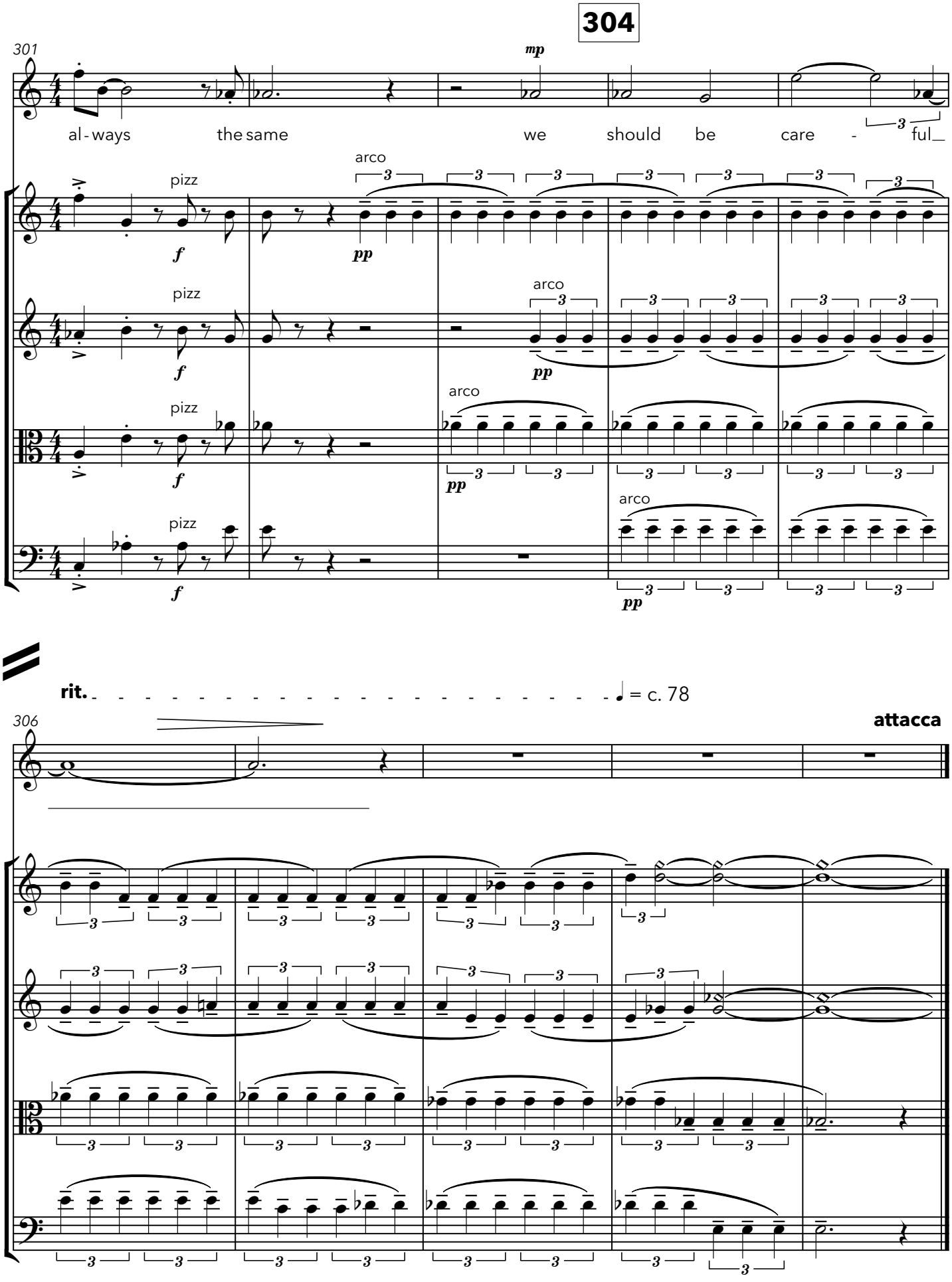

268
266
6
pp
B♭
tr
pp
arco
pp
E♮
tr
arco
pp
p
con sord
arco
pp
B♭
tr
f
p
in rilievo


accents gently, but clearly,
pop out of texture
276
270
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

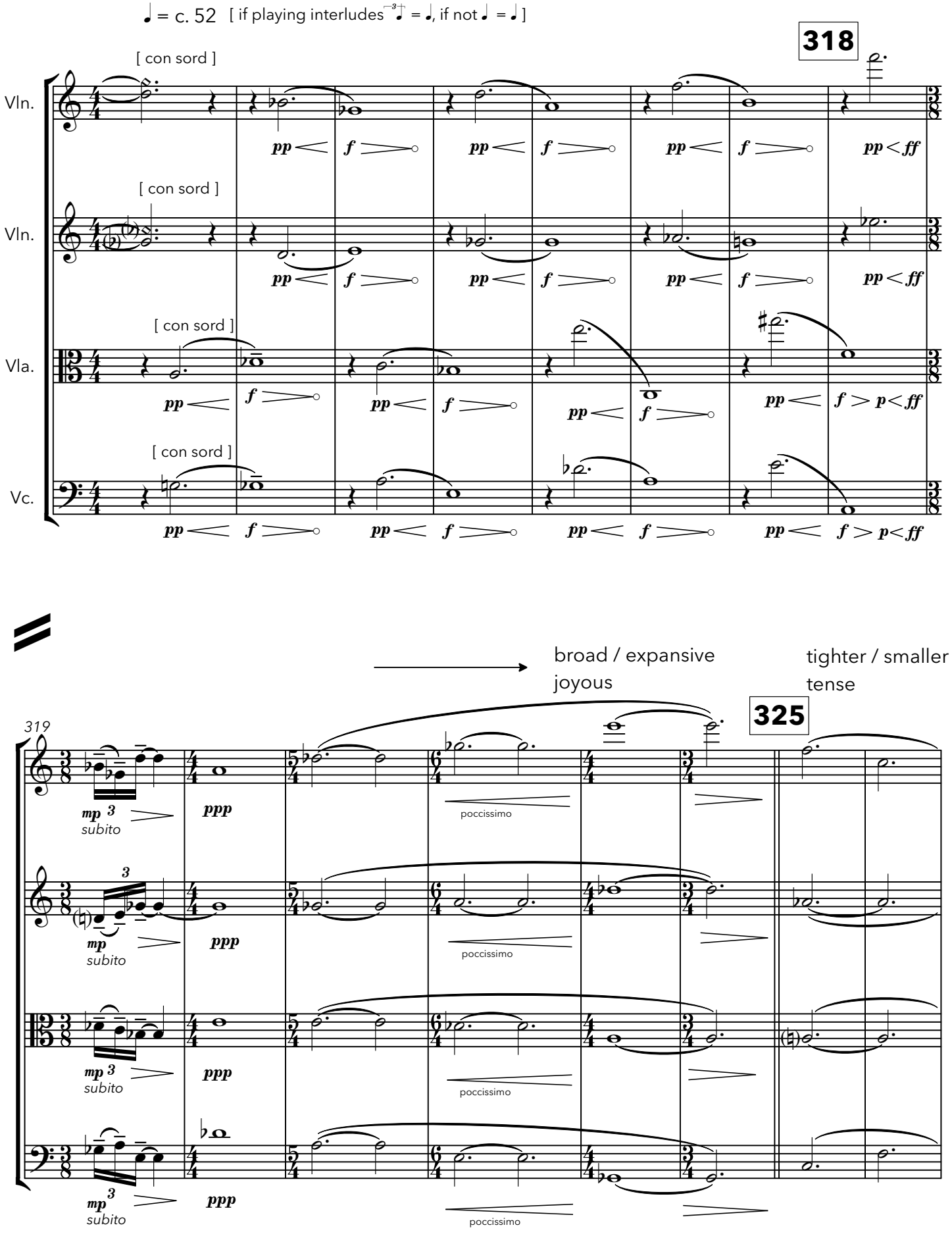

282
attacca
279

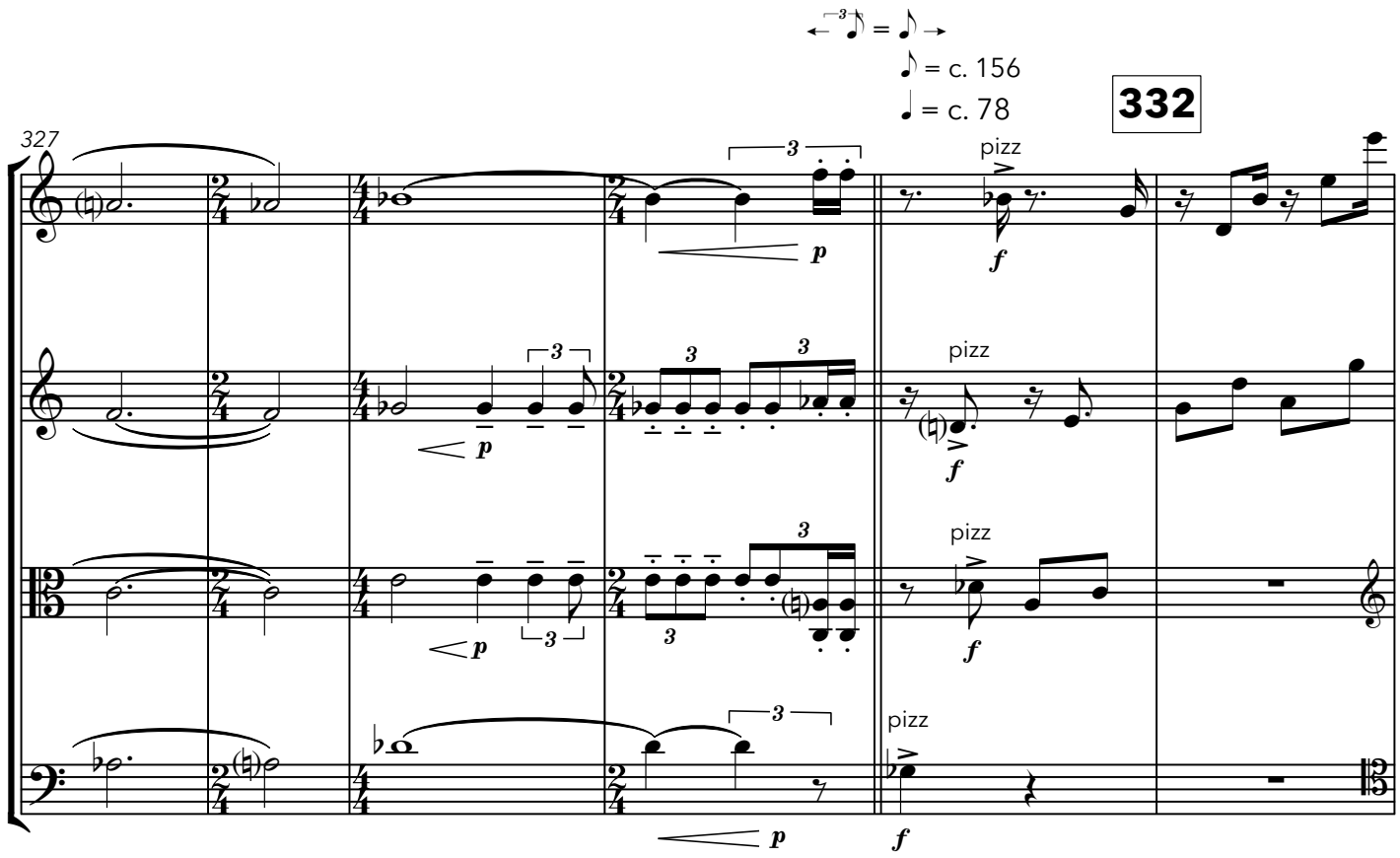

3rd Interlude
♩ = c. 104
Vce.
Vln.
Vln.
Vla.
Vcl.
[con sord.]
pizz
arco
next
next morn-ing
290
294
got up
and it did not
it
did
not
the
II III
arco
ric...

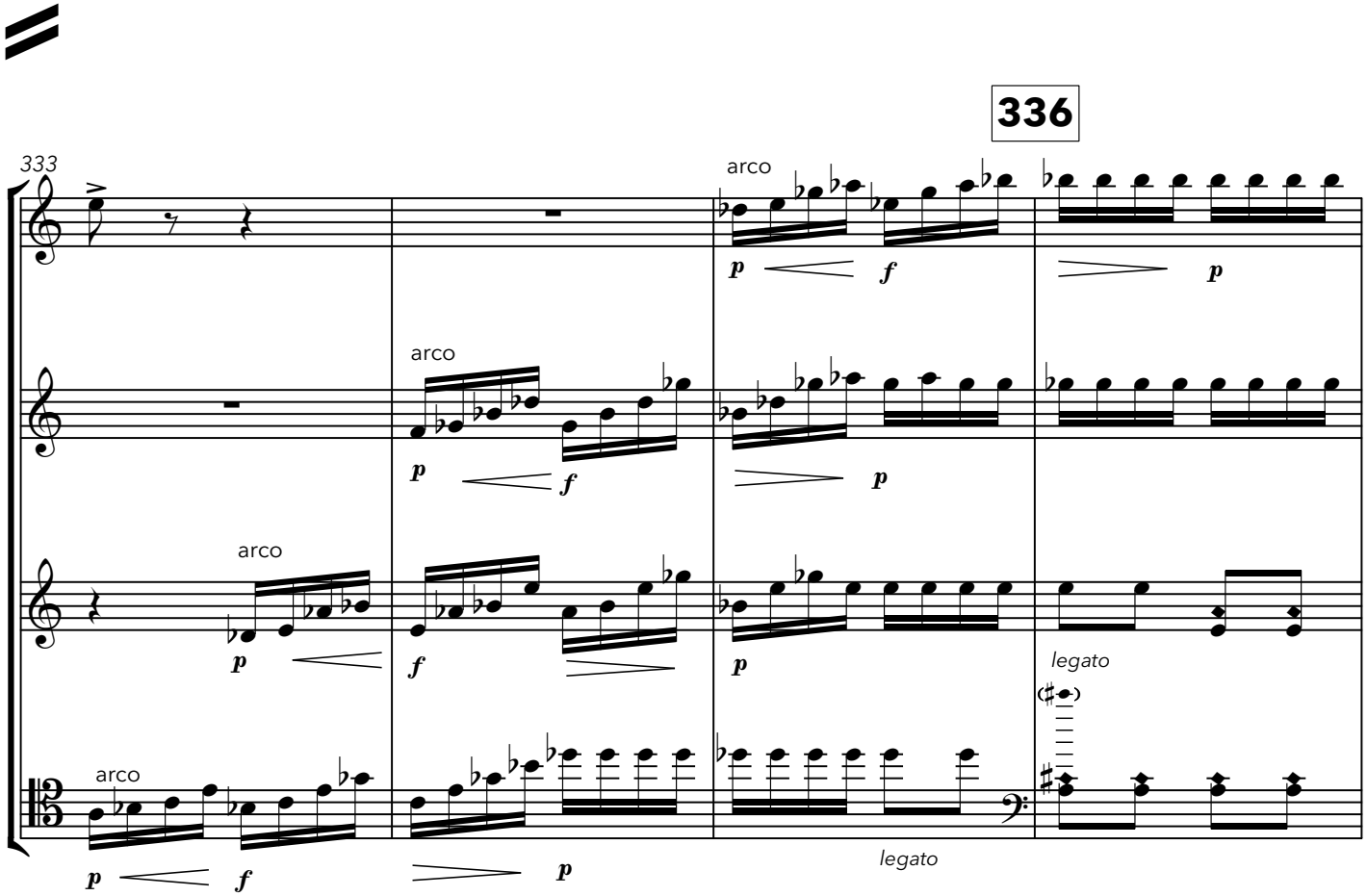

297
295
mf
pp
f
the first day af - ter a death
pizz
arco
p
pizz
pizz
IV III
pizz
mp
300
298
floating
mp
f
the new ab - sence is
arco
p
arco
p
arco
p

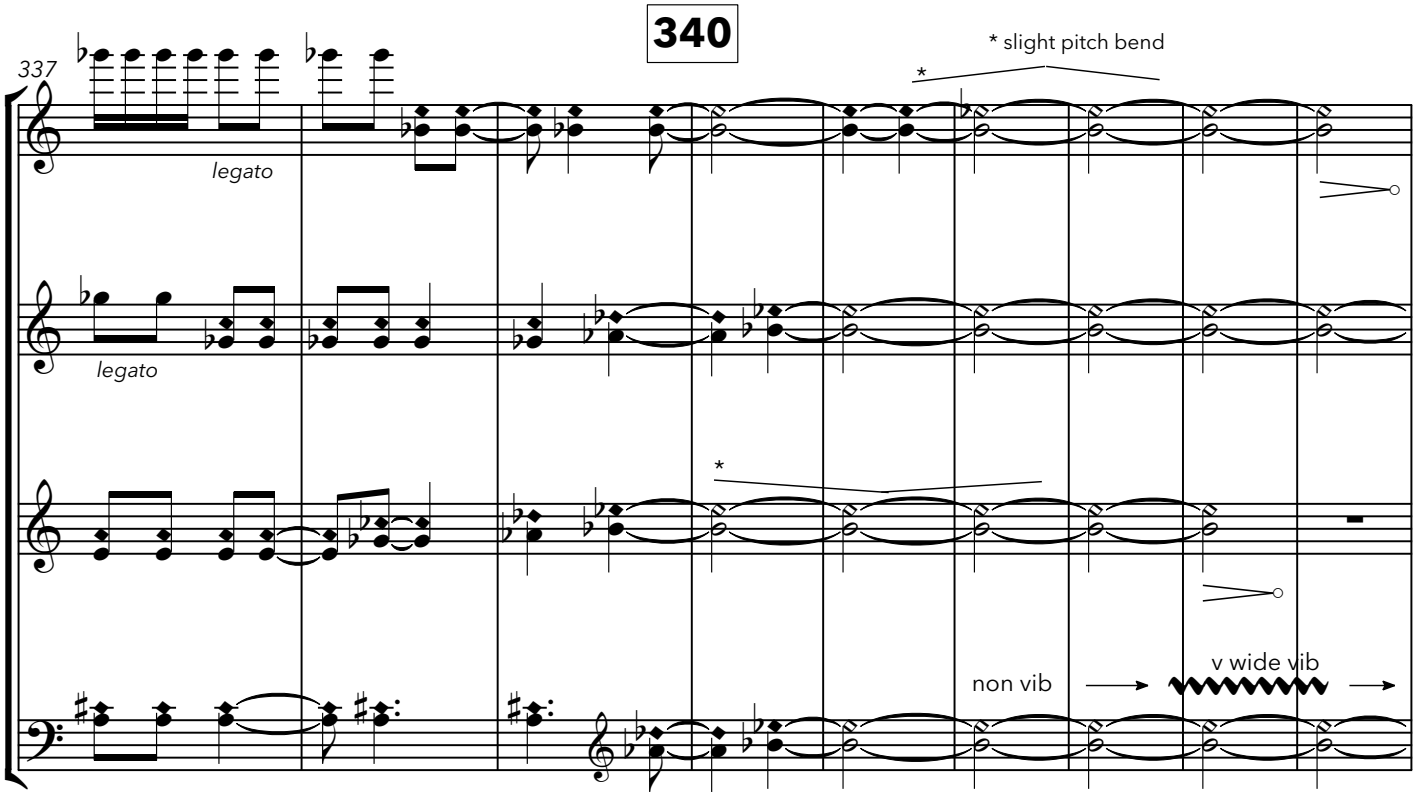

304
301
mp
al - ways the same we should be care - ful
pizz
arco
f
pp
rit.
= c. 78
306
attacca

IV - *Full-starred heavens that winter sees*

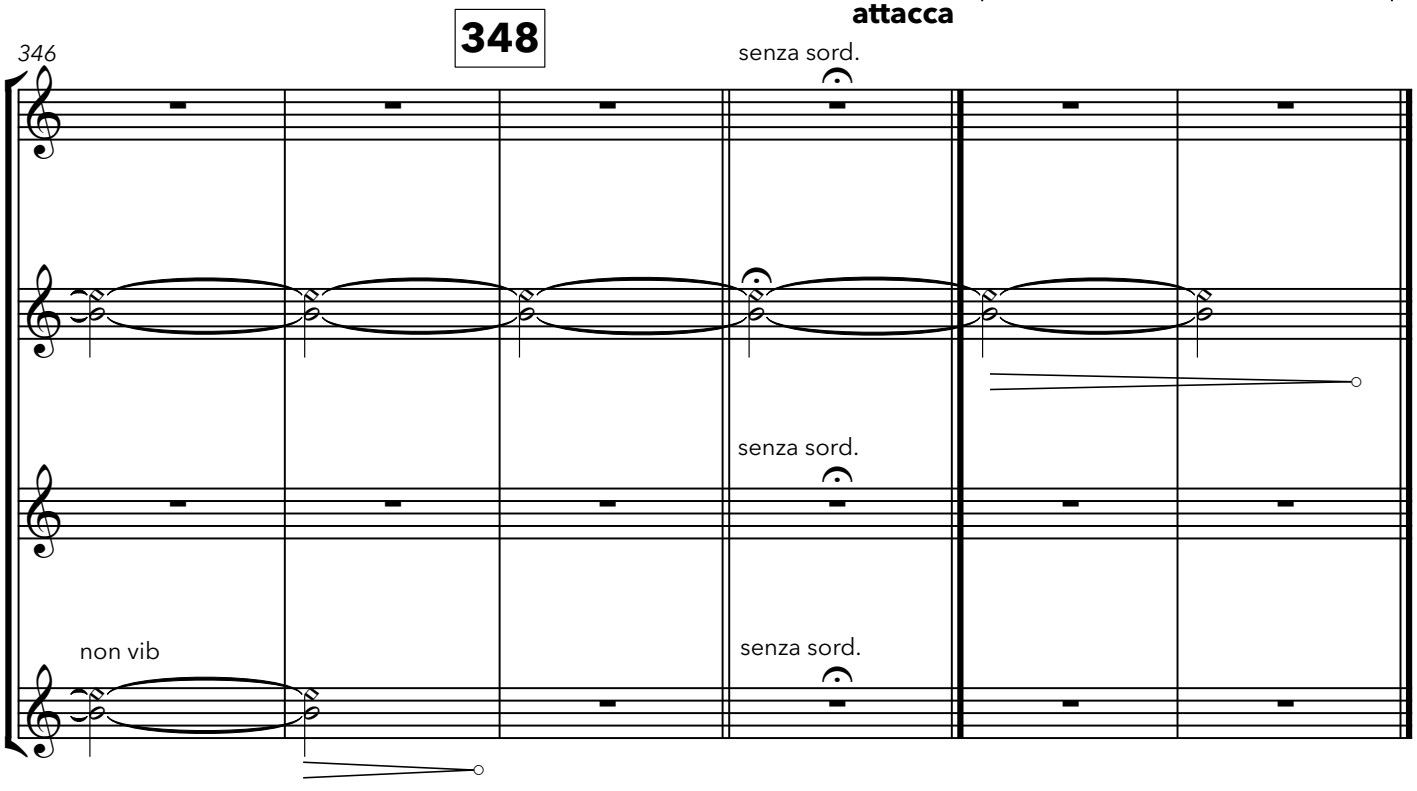


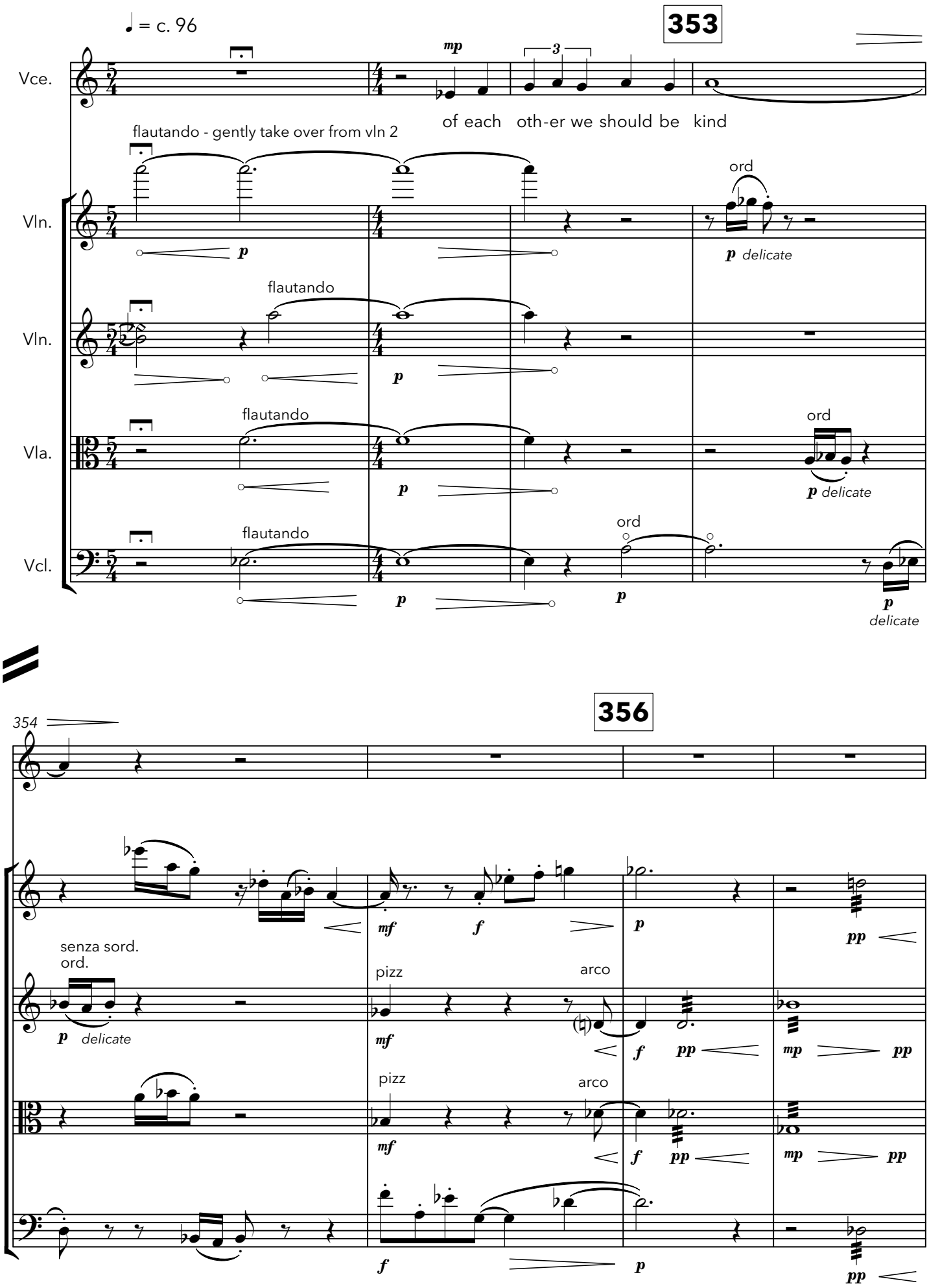

♪ = c. 156
♩ = c. 78
332
327
pizz
arco
p
f

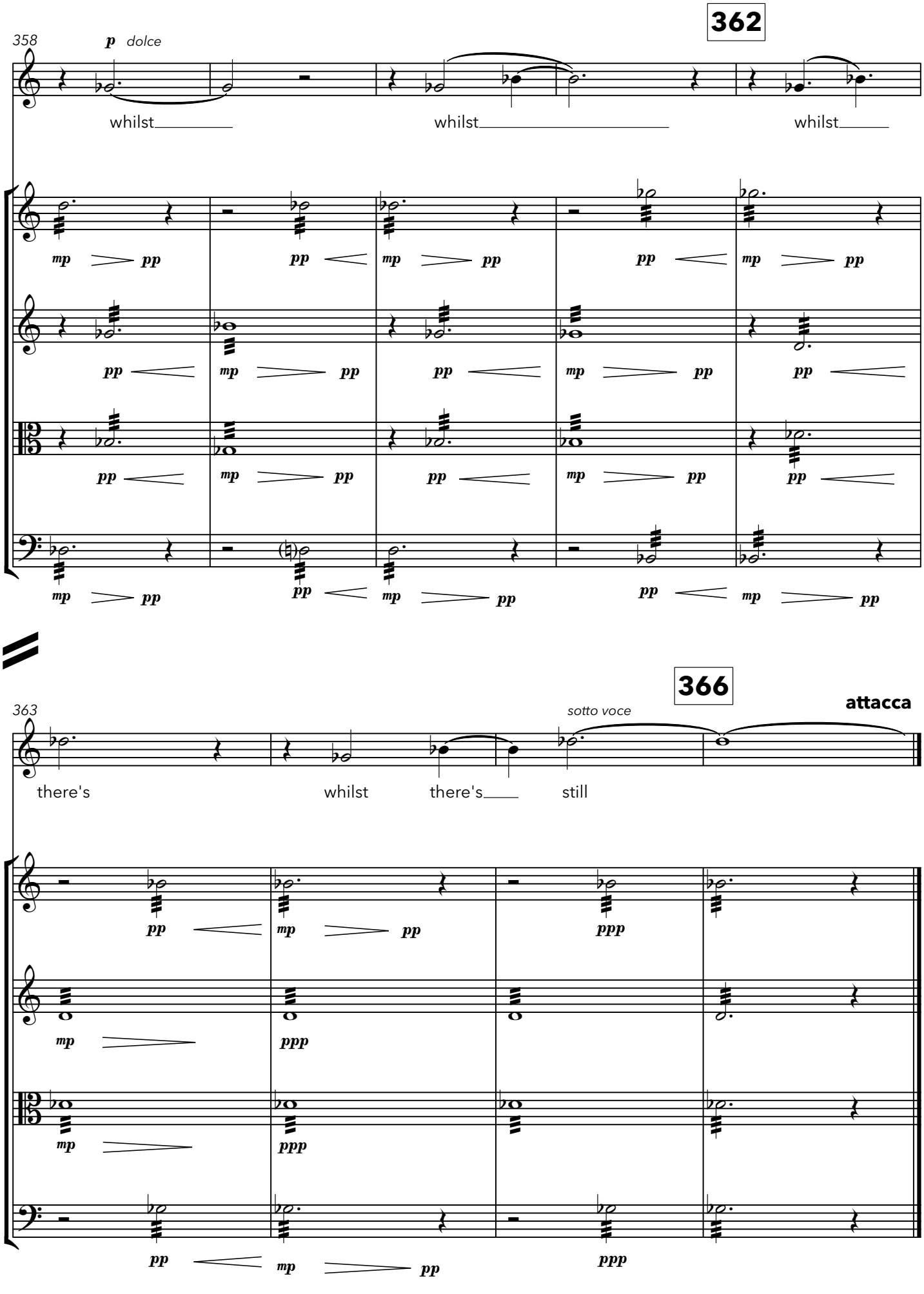

336
333
arco
legato
p
f



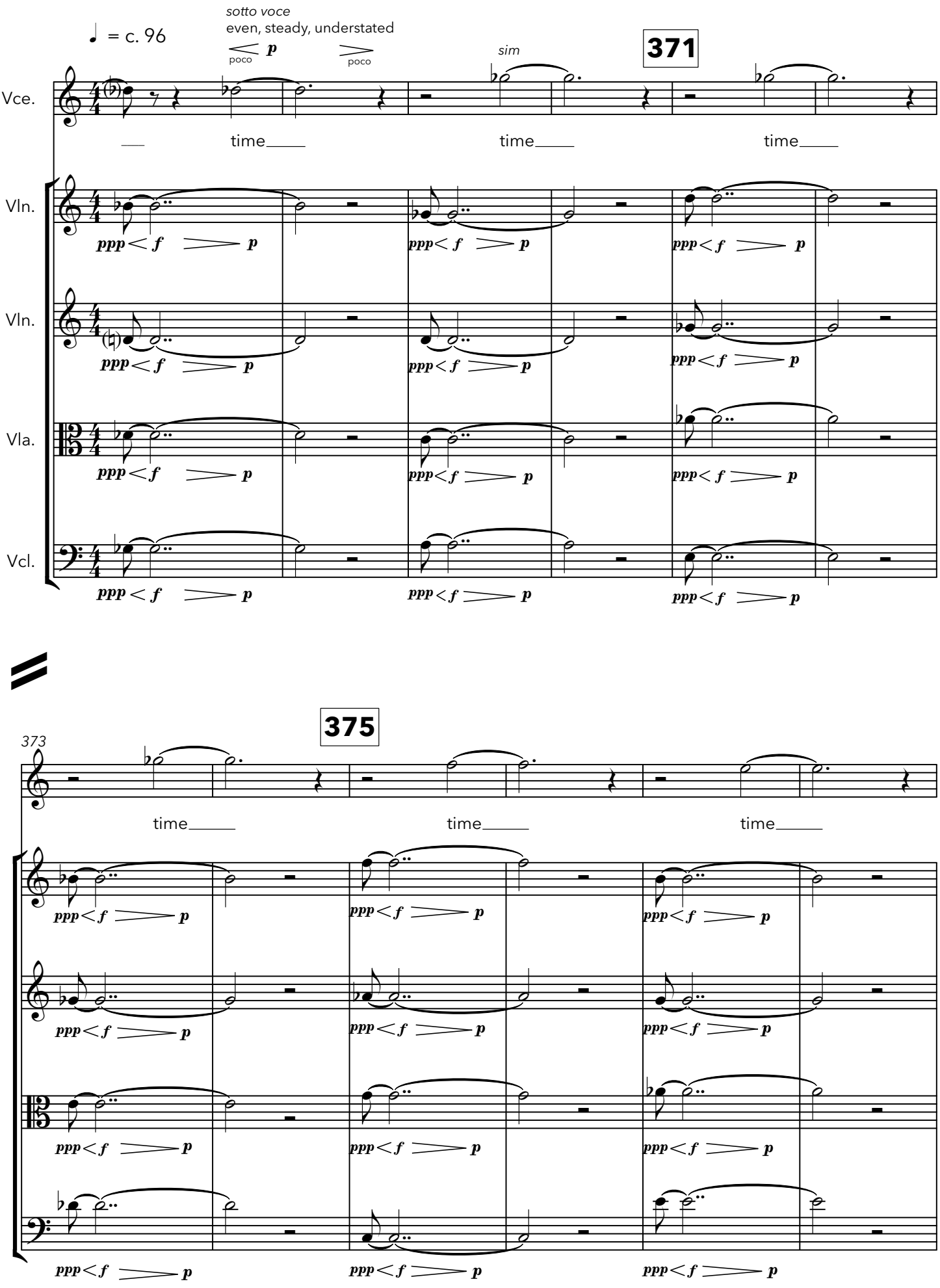
1. if playing with interludes
2. if playing without interludes

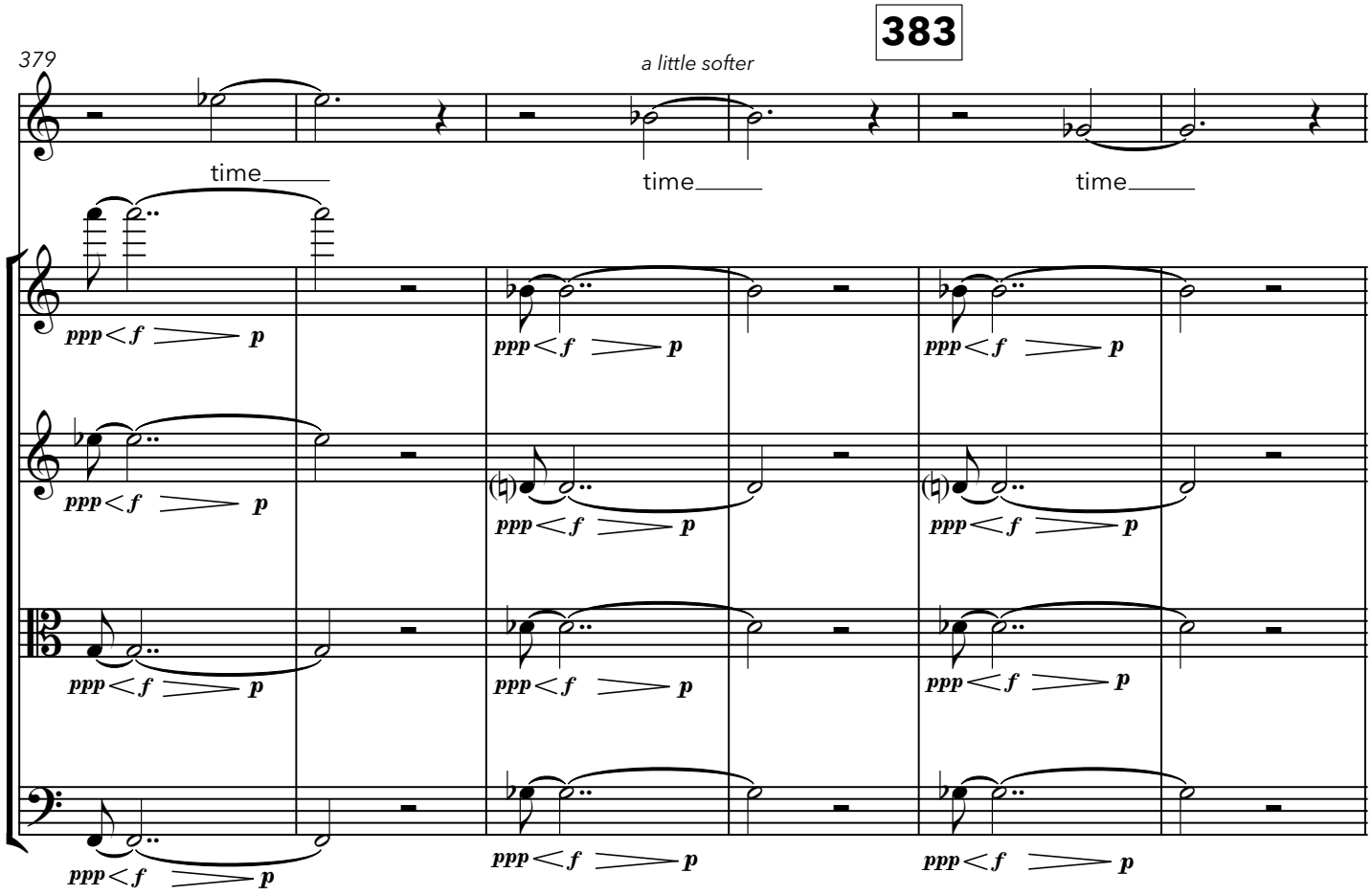



♩ = c. 96
353
Vce.
mp
3
of each oth-er we should be kind
flautando - gently take over from vln 2
ord
Vln.
p
p delicate
flautando
Vln.
p
flautando
ord
Vla.
p
p delicate
flautando
ord
Vcl.
p
p
p
delicate
354
356
senza sord.
ord.
p delicate
pizz
arco
mf
f
p
pp
mp
pp
pizz
arco
mf
f
pp
mp
pp
f
p
pp


362
358
p dolce
whilst
whilst
whilst
366
363
sotto voce
attacca
there's
whilst
there's
still

V - *A new bell's boom*

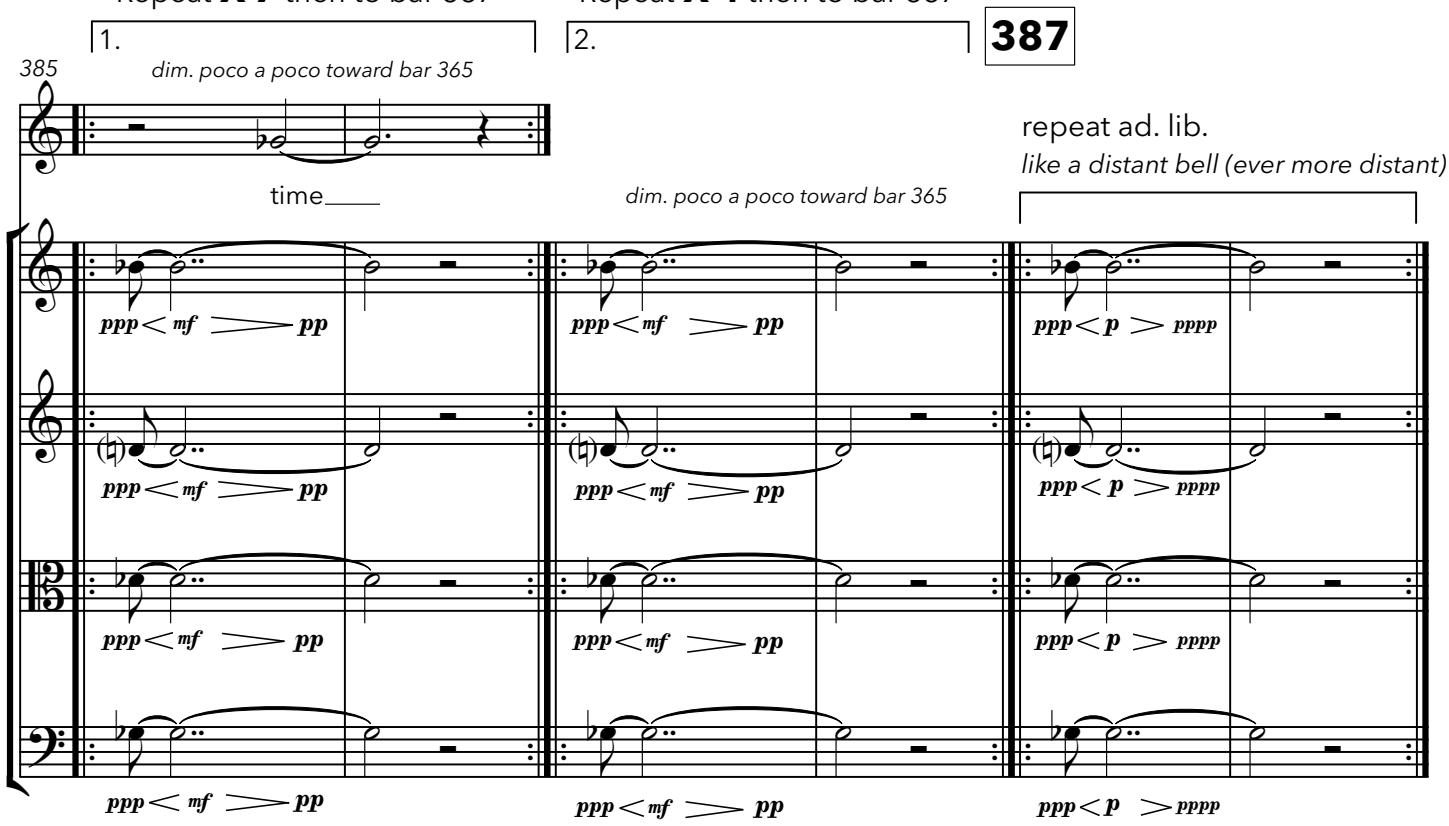




1. = if with singer

2. = if quartet alone

in both versions play bar 387

Repeat **X 7** then to bar 387

Repeat **X 4** then to bar 387