Steven Lamphear

Erosion

For Two String Quartets

In Full Score

About the piece:

This piece, composed between September of 2010 and April of 2011 while studying with C. P. First at the University of Alabama, was largely inspired by early twentieth-century French Impressionist composers and their depictions of the sea. For this piece, I decided not to utilize the "musical painting" techniques which those French masters had used to such great effect, but to explore the concept of erosion through musical transformations. Erosion therefore develops in an almost programmatic way, with masses of consonant sonorities and recurring motives being chipped away at by recurring dissonance in much the same way that, for instance, the constant barrage of waves on rock can alter natural coastal topography over time.

The beginning introduces the different "characters," as the listener hears large, consonant masses of sound (soon to be fully realized in the A section) struggling to form under the constant assault of dissonant forces. Eventually the consonant masses are fully realized as the A section begins. The listener may also hear the germinative motive of the piece (an ascending fifth, filled in by the stepwise ascent of a third followed by a leap of a third) struggling to form; it is hinted at through the sul pont. notes in section A before finally asserting itself through the first violin of the first quartet in measures 39-41. This motive is spun out through the B section with only hints of the dissonance to come (created by the temporal displacement of voice-leading resolutions) before we begin to see the dark undercurrent swelling in the next section. The entirety of the C section (built around a 12-tone row) resembles the formation of a large, dangerous wave, which crashes into the D section, leaving the consonant harmonies from the A section disfigured (the bass voice and direction of motion are similar, but the harmonies have become dissonant, tritone-based sonorities rather than the consonant harmonies heard previously) and the main motive warped (the fifth has now been stretched to an octave, and the half-step in the middle is no longer going from scale degree 2 to b3, but now from 4 to b5). Following the climax of sections D and E, the motive itself has become part of the waves, which dissipate into the G section, wherein a new, consonant sound-mass emerges, heralding the conclusion of the piece.

–Steven Lamphear, April 2011

Approximate duration: 6 minutes

Performance notes:

- This piece may be performed in two different ways, depending upon available forces, with preference given to the first option:

  1. If two string quartets are available, they should be positioned in diagonal lines, with Quartet I opening toward stage right (the audience's left) and Quartet II opening toward stage left (the audience's right), leaving the center of the stage empty, with cellos toward the middle and back of the stage and first violins toward the sides near the front of the stage. This arrangement allows for greater perception of antiphonal effects in the violins while keeping the heavier-weighted lines comparatively centered. An optional conductor may be placed between and in front of the quartets.

  2. If only one string quartet is available, the Quartet I parts may be pre-recorded using a click-track (note that this click track will require pre-mapped changes in tempo) and played back through speakers while a conductor (with an in-ear monitor containing the click track) leads the quartet in a live performance of the Quartet II parts. In this configuration, the panning of the recording should place the first violin on the audience's left and the cello on the audience's right (with the second violin and viola taking their respective places between the two), while the seating arrangement of the in-concert performers should place the first violin on the audience's right and the cello on the audience's left. The performers should be spaced far enough apart so that the amount of stereo separation (discerned by a centrally-located audience member) between the pre-recorded instruments is similar to the amount of separation between the in-concert performers.

- "Z" denotes an unmeasured, rapid tremolo (similar to a buzz roll in percussion notation).

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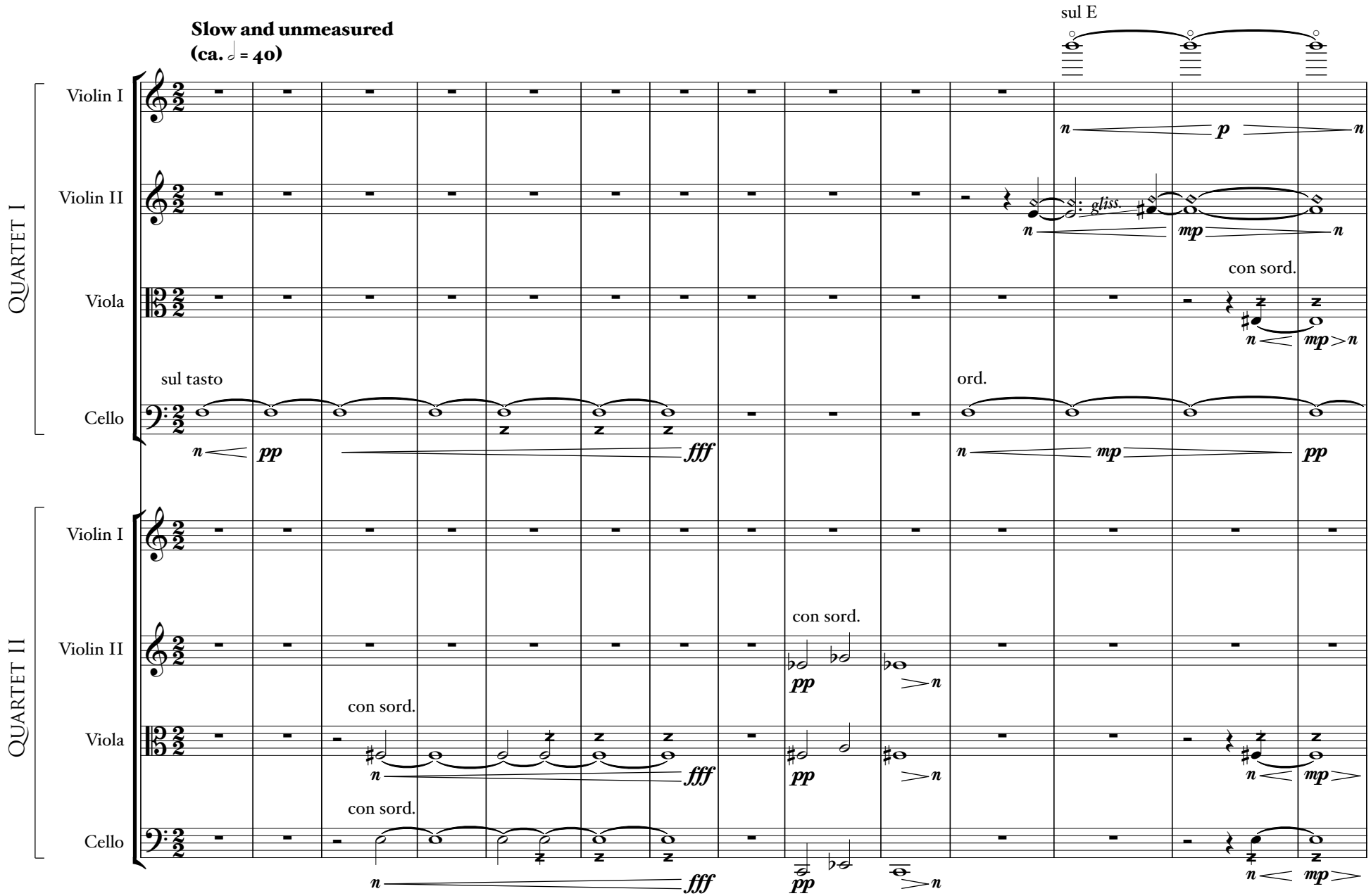
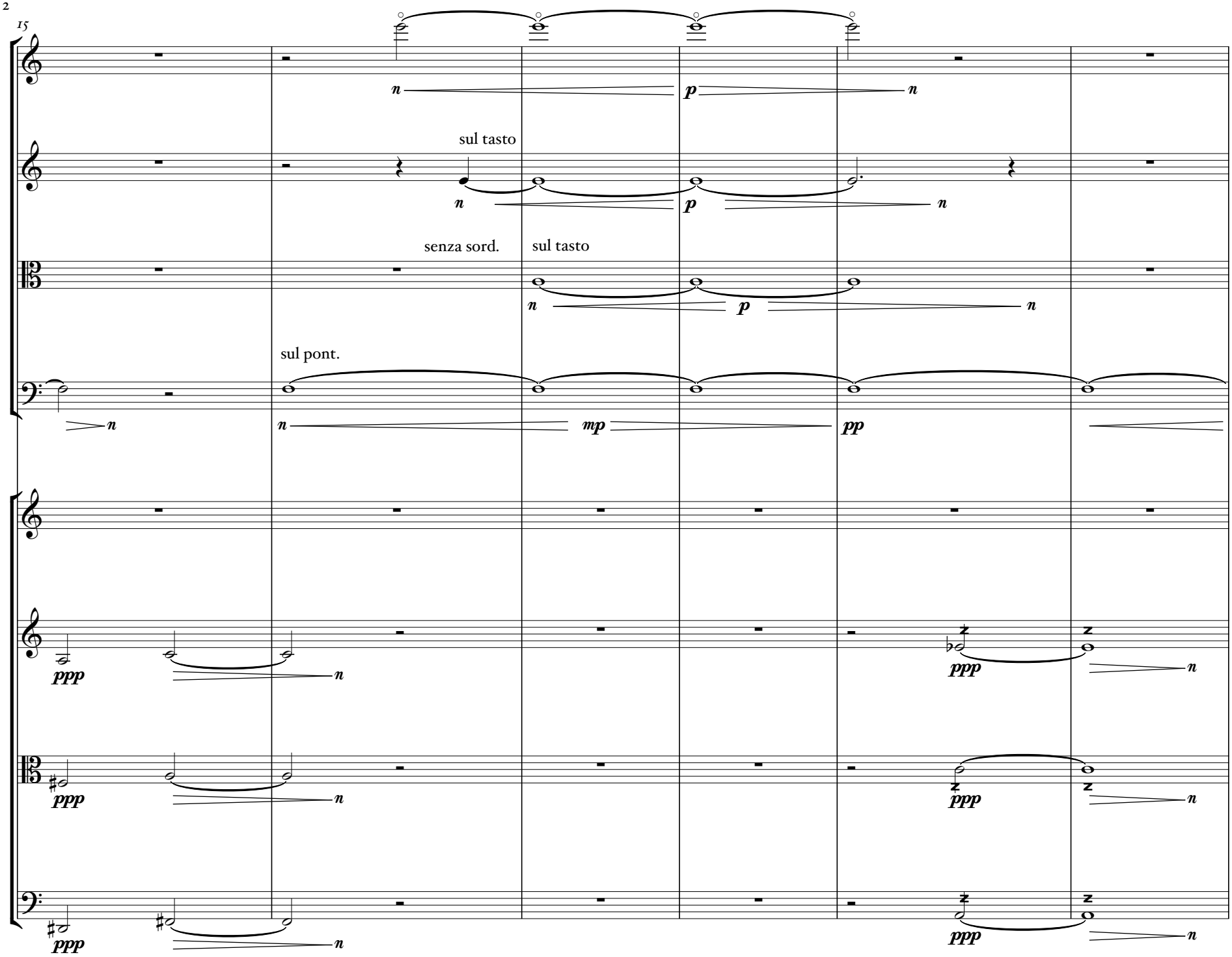
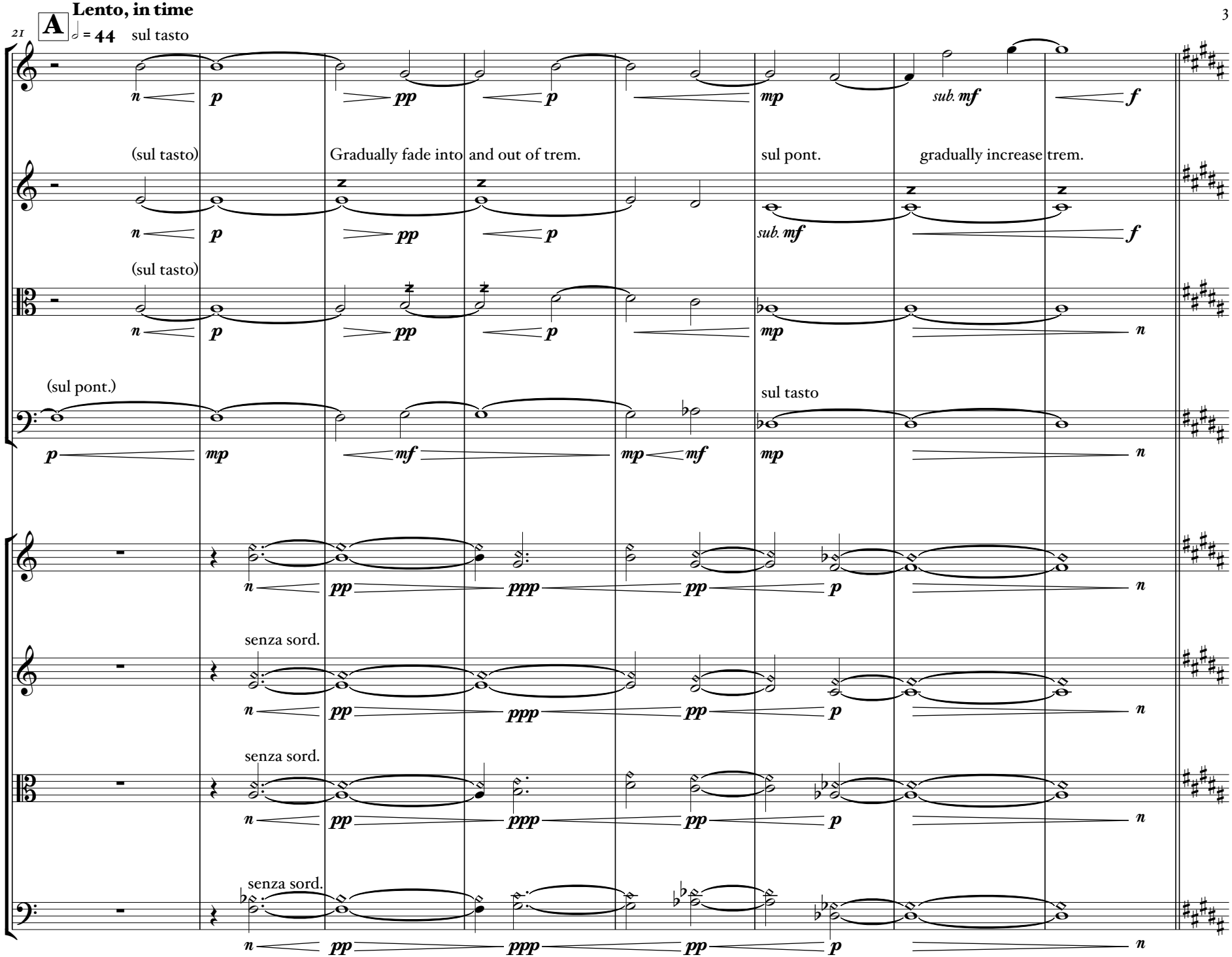
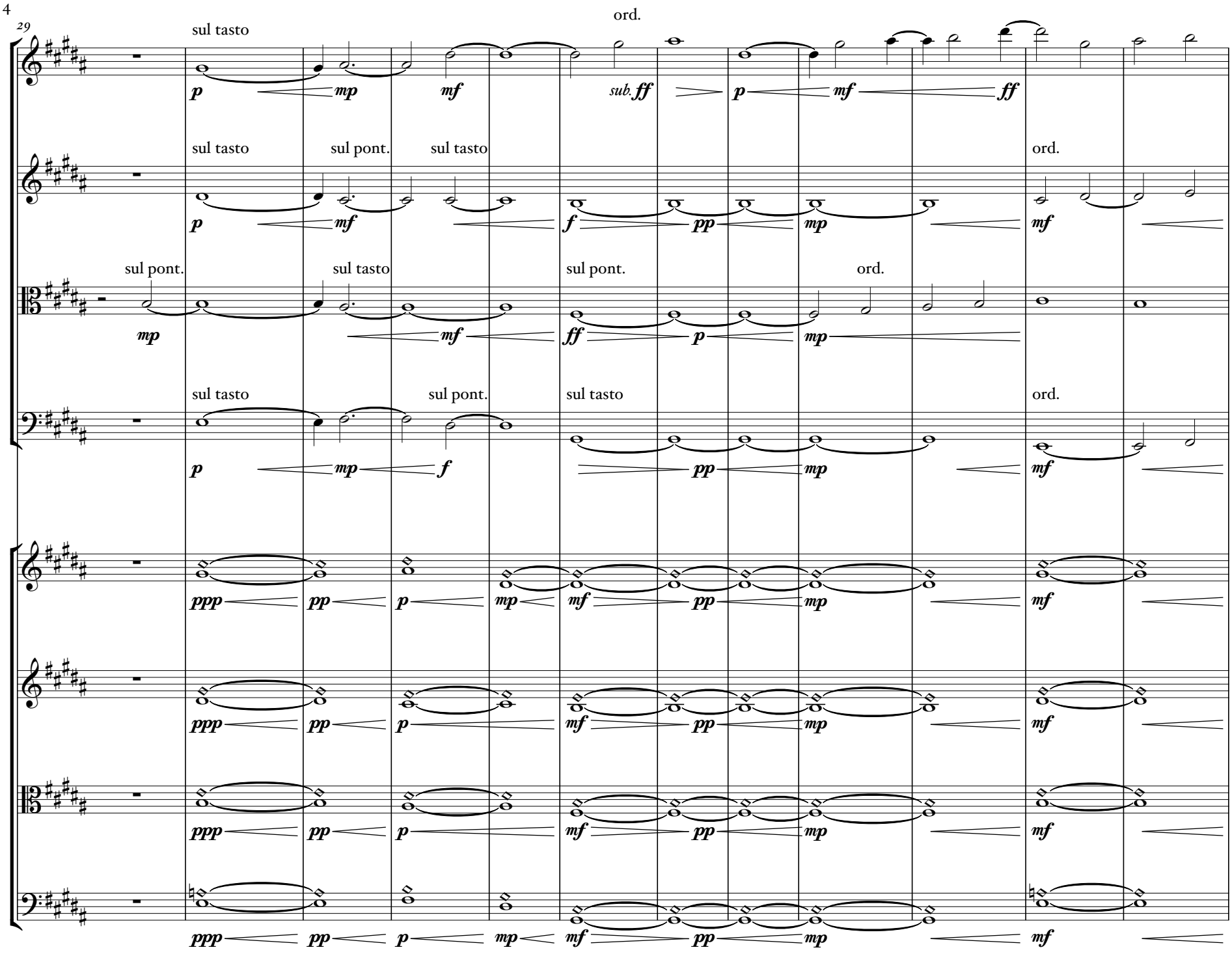
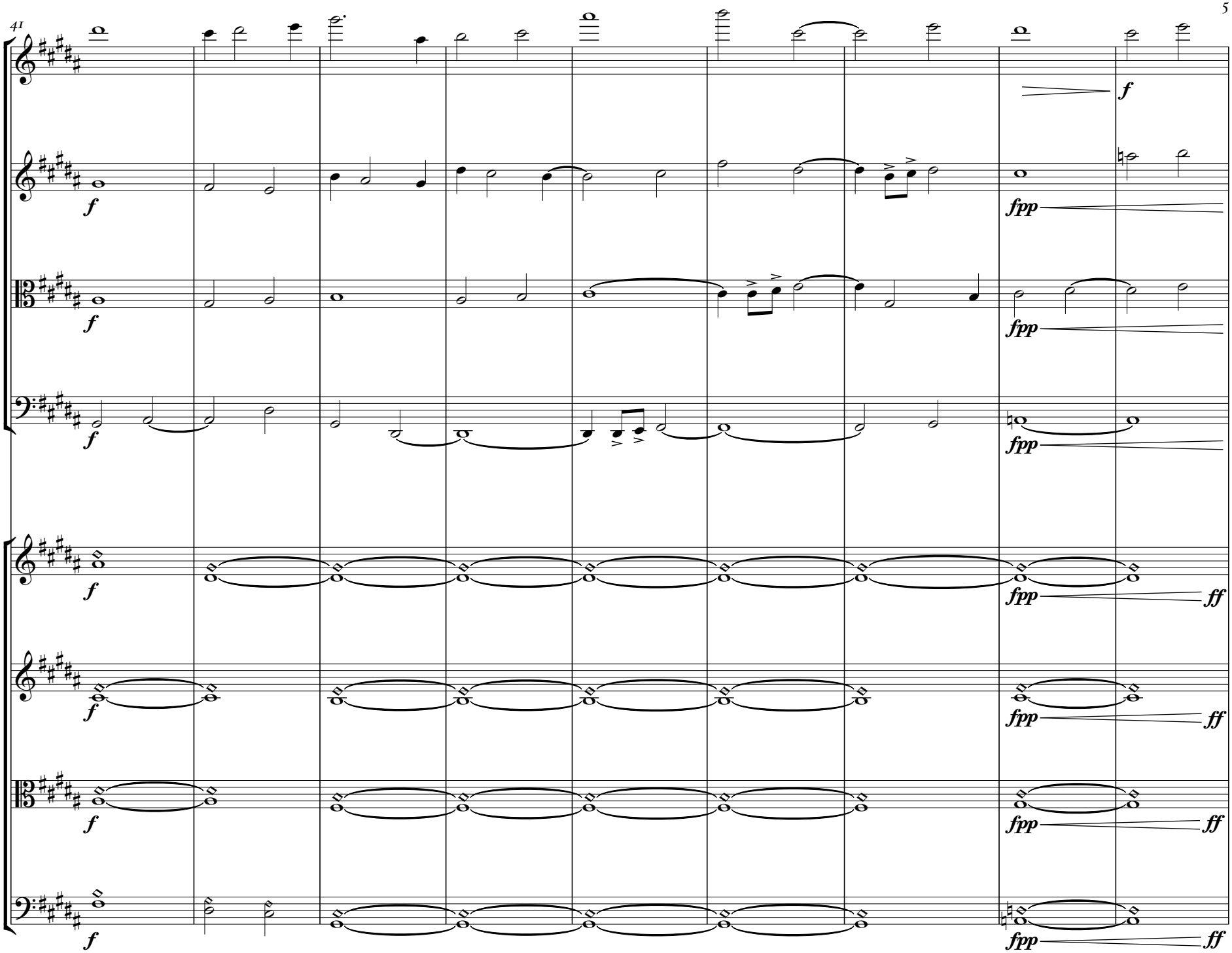


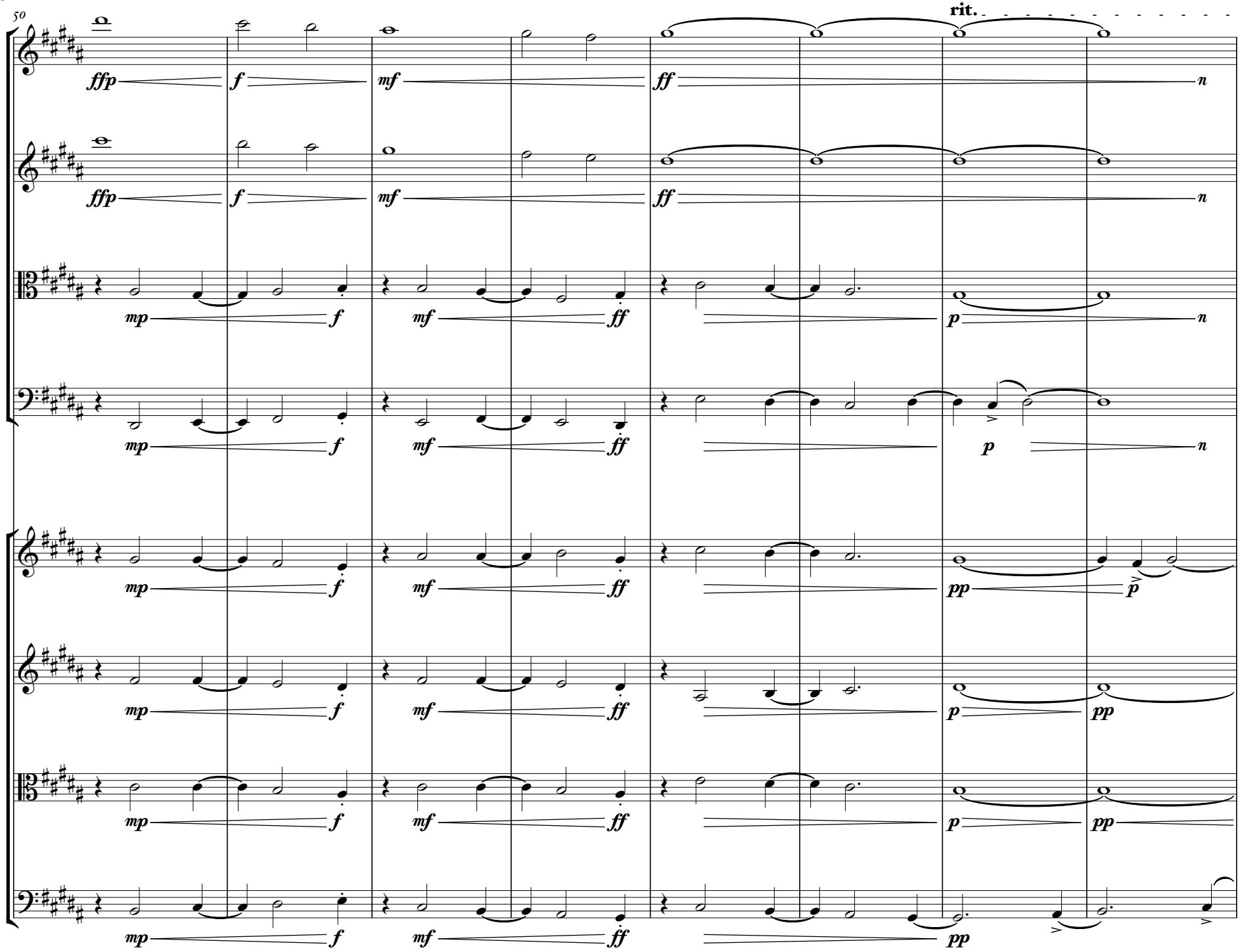

15
sul tasto
senza sord.
sul tasto
sul pont.

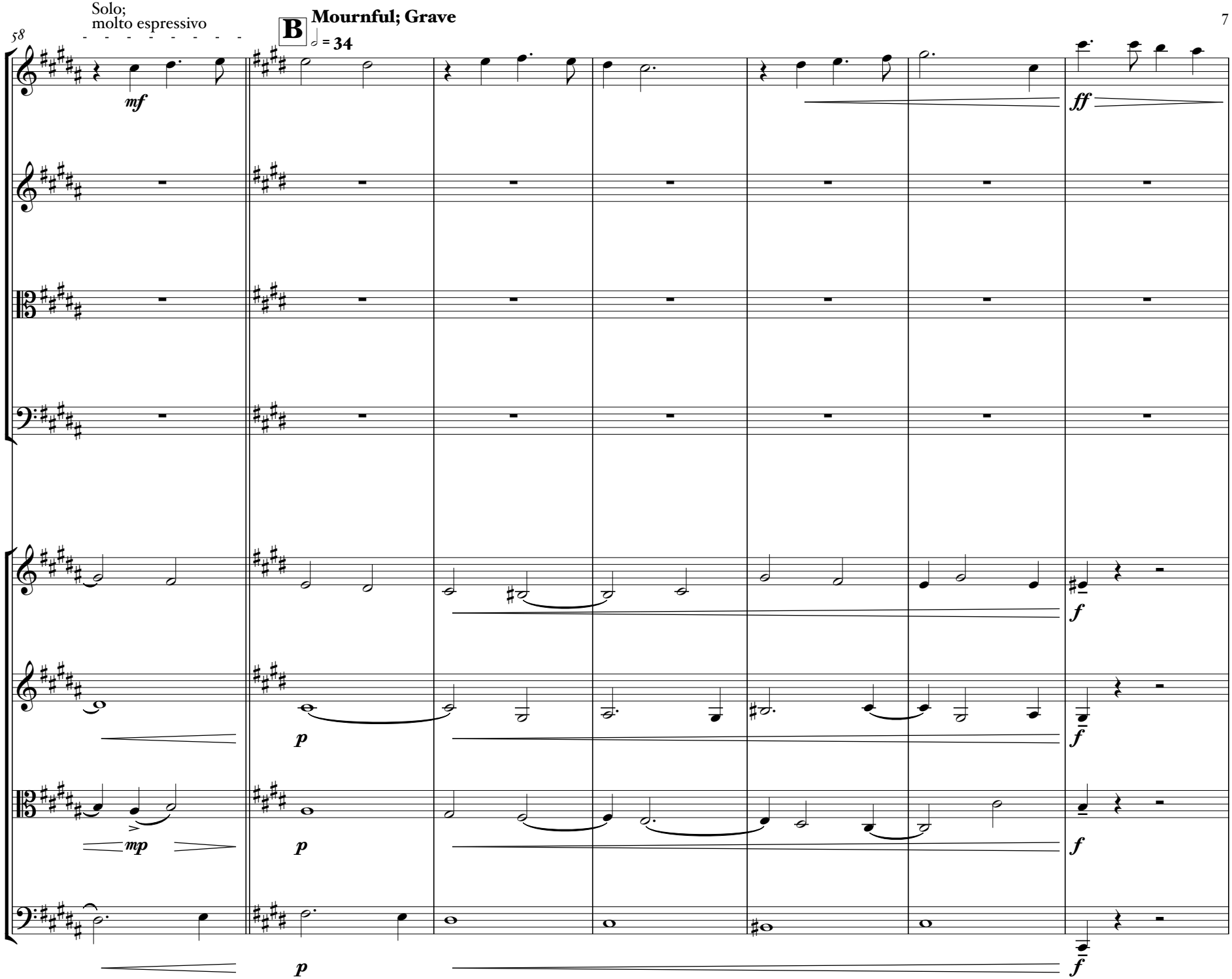

A
Lento, in time
♩ = 44
21
sul tasto
(sul tasto)
Gradually fade into and out of trem.
sul pont.
gradually increase trem.
(sul tasto)
(sul pont.)
sul tasto
senza sord.
senza sord.
senza sord.

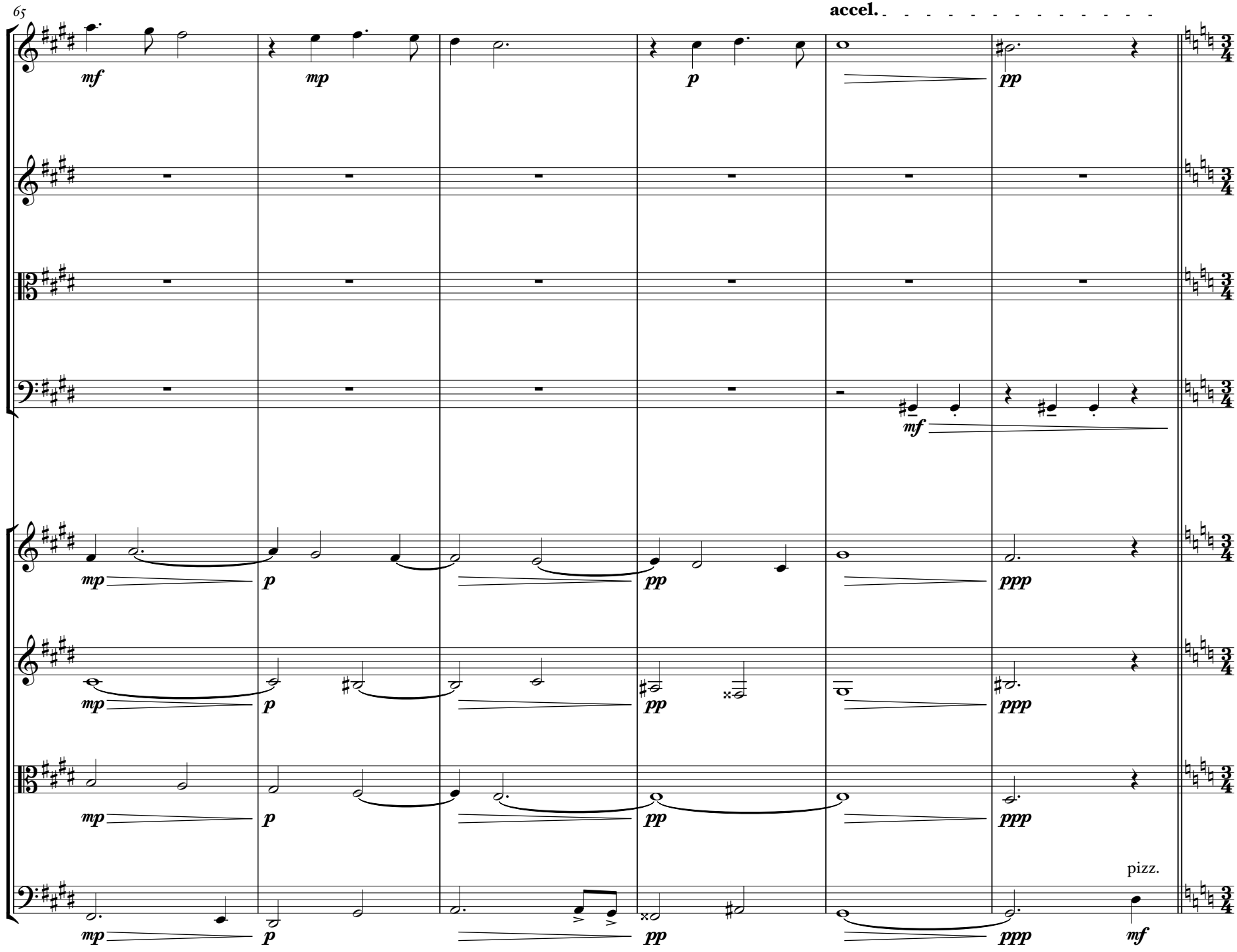

29
sul tasto
ord.
sub. ff
sul tasto
sul pont.
sul tasto
ord.
sul pont.
sul tasto
sul pont.
ord.
sul tasto
sul pont.
sul tasto
ord.

41




50
rit.
ffp
f
mf
ff
n
mp
p
pp


58
Solo;
molto espressivo
B
Mournful; Grave
= 34
mf
ff
f
p
mp


65
accel.
mf
mp
p
pp
mf
mp
p
pp
ppp
mp
p
pp
ppp
mp
p
pp
ppp
mp
p
pp
ppp
pizz.
mf

C **Tense, but Restrained**

ca. ♩ = 72

ca. ♩ = 78

71

p

mp

f

pizz.

col legno battuto

82

ca. ♩ = 86

f

f

f

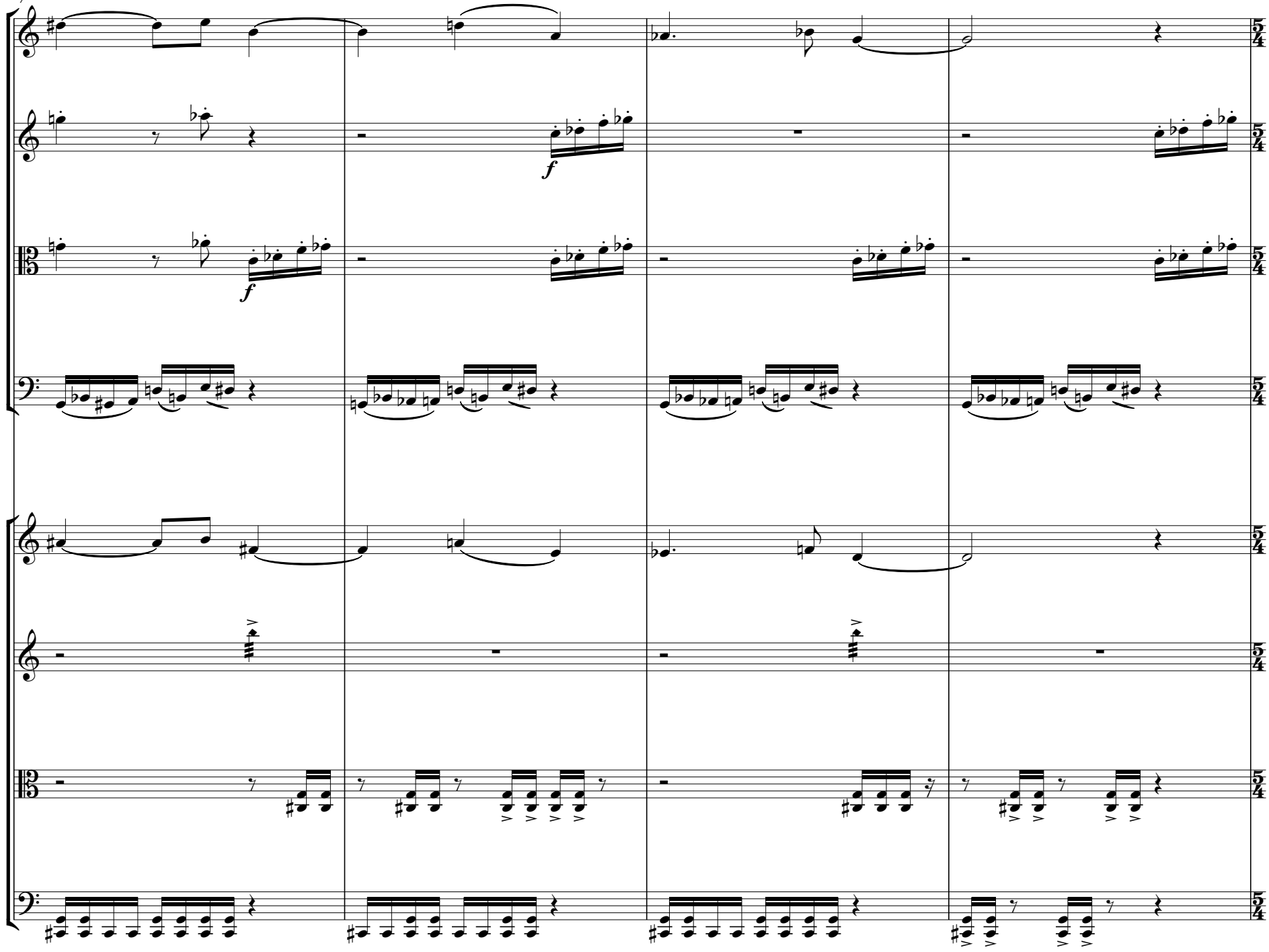
sul E

f

f

87

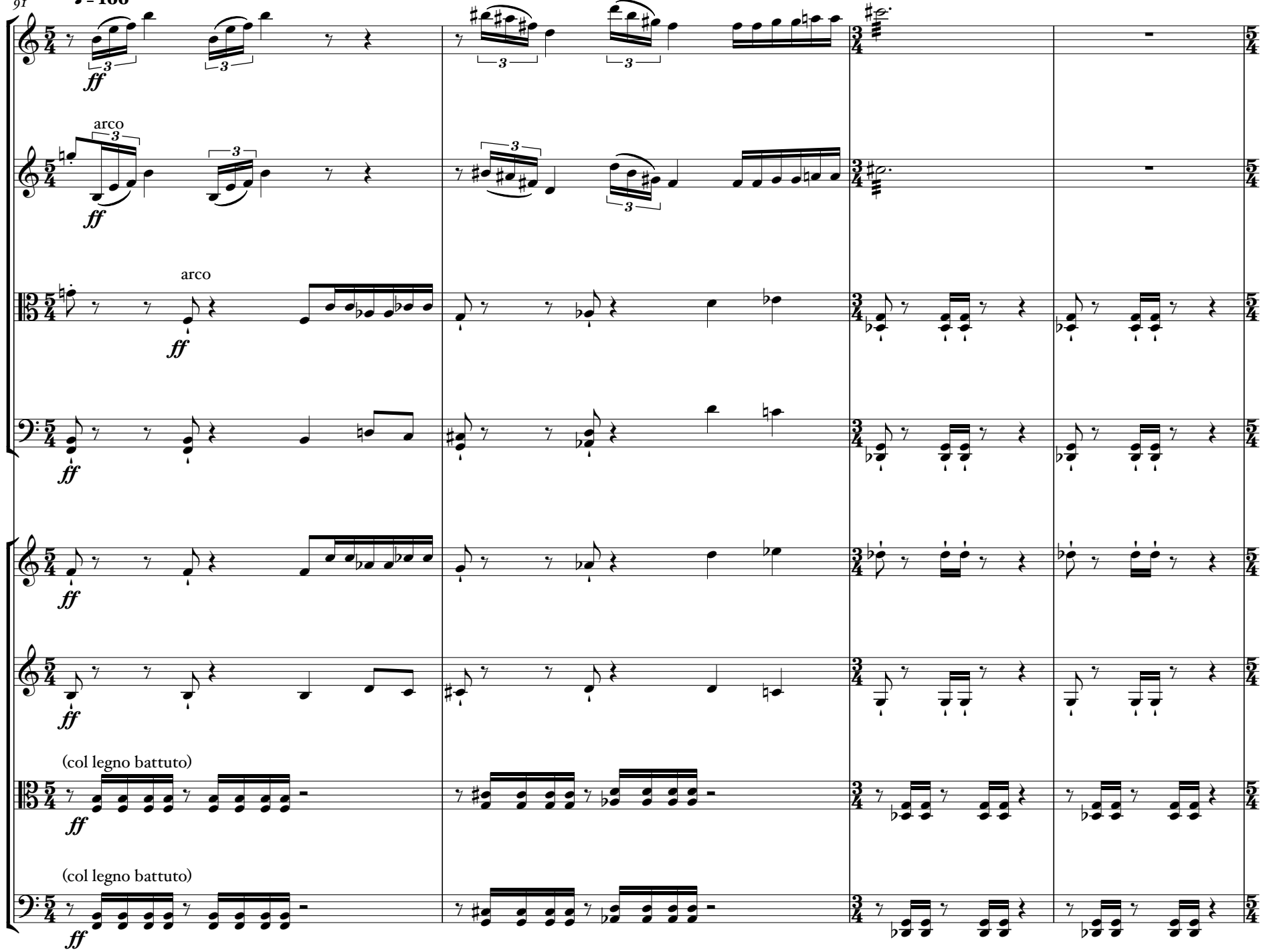
ca. ♩ = 93

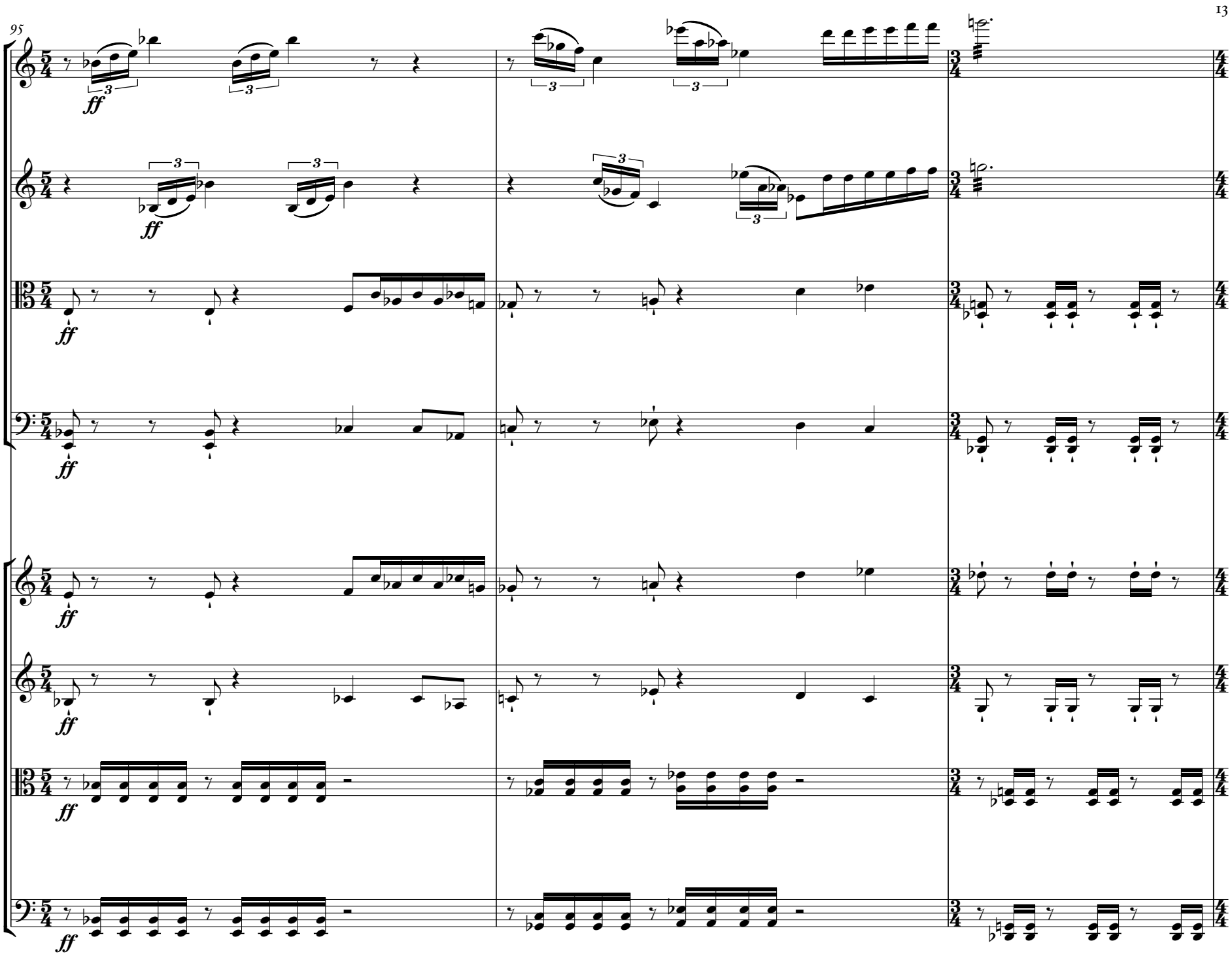


D **Feral and Frenzied**

♩ = 100

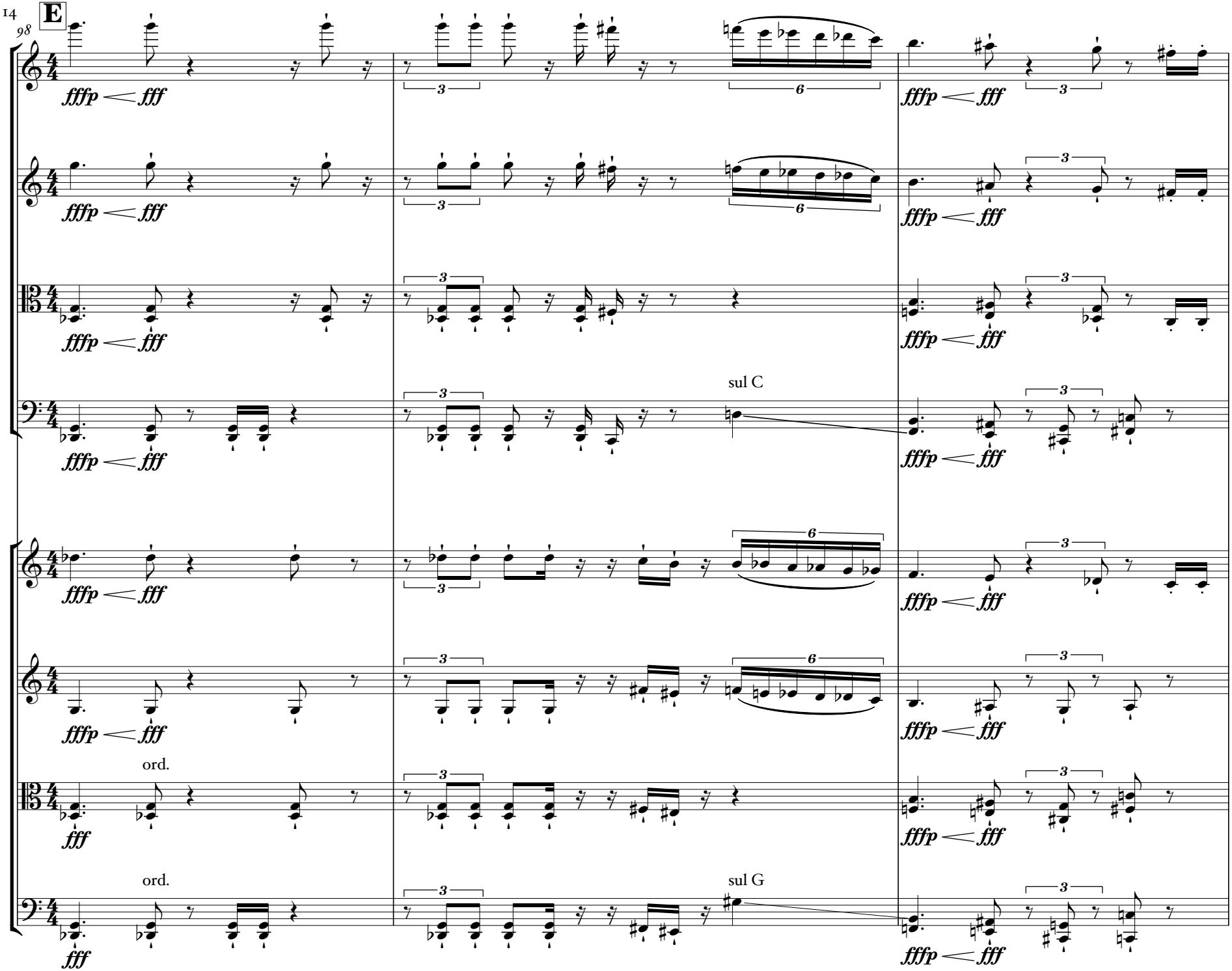
91

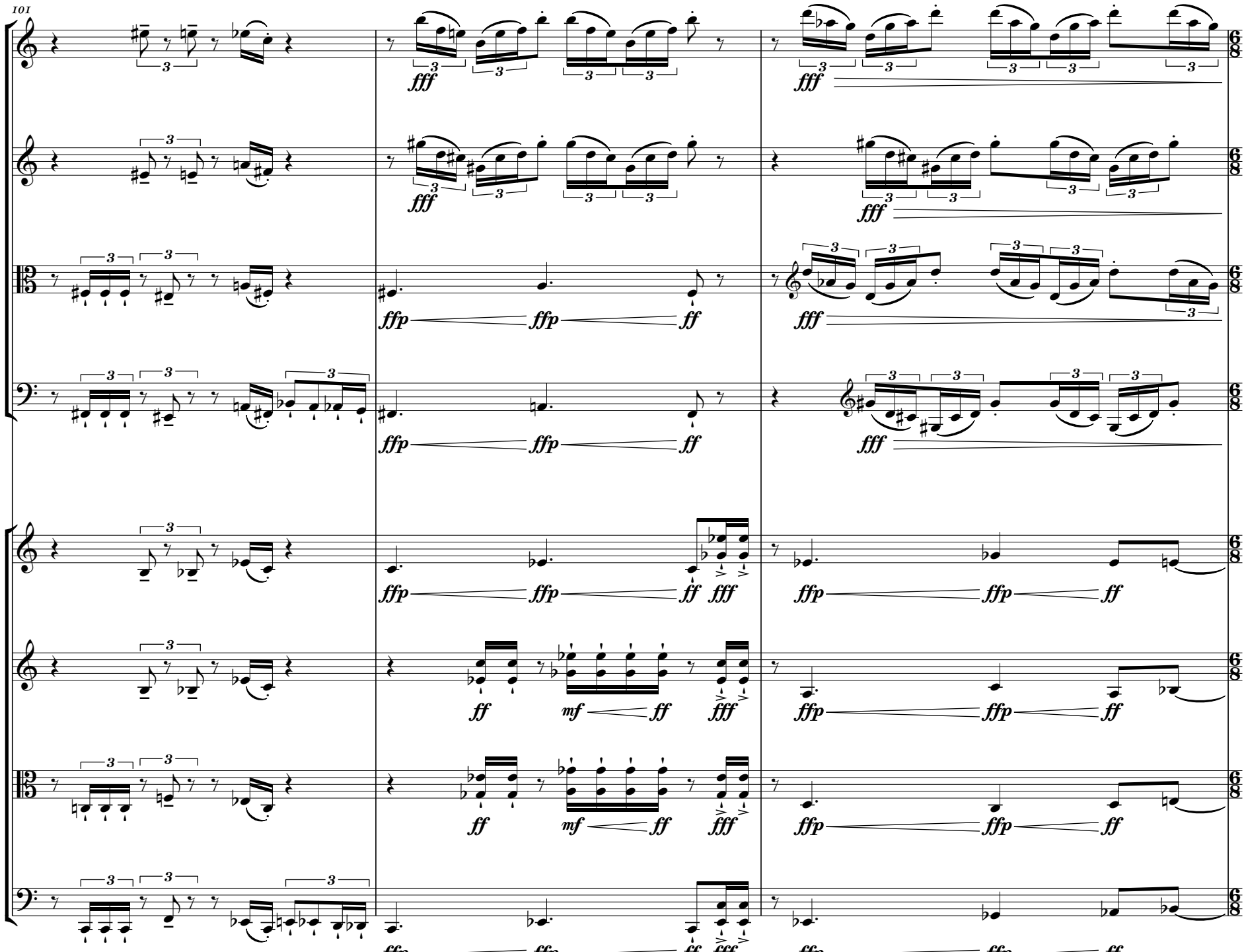



95
ff

98

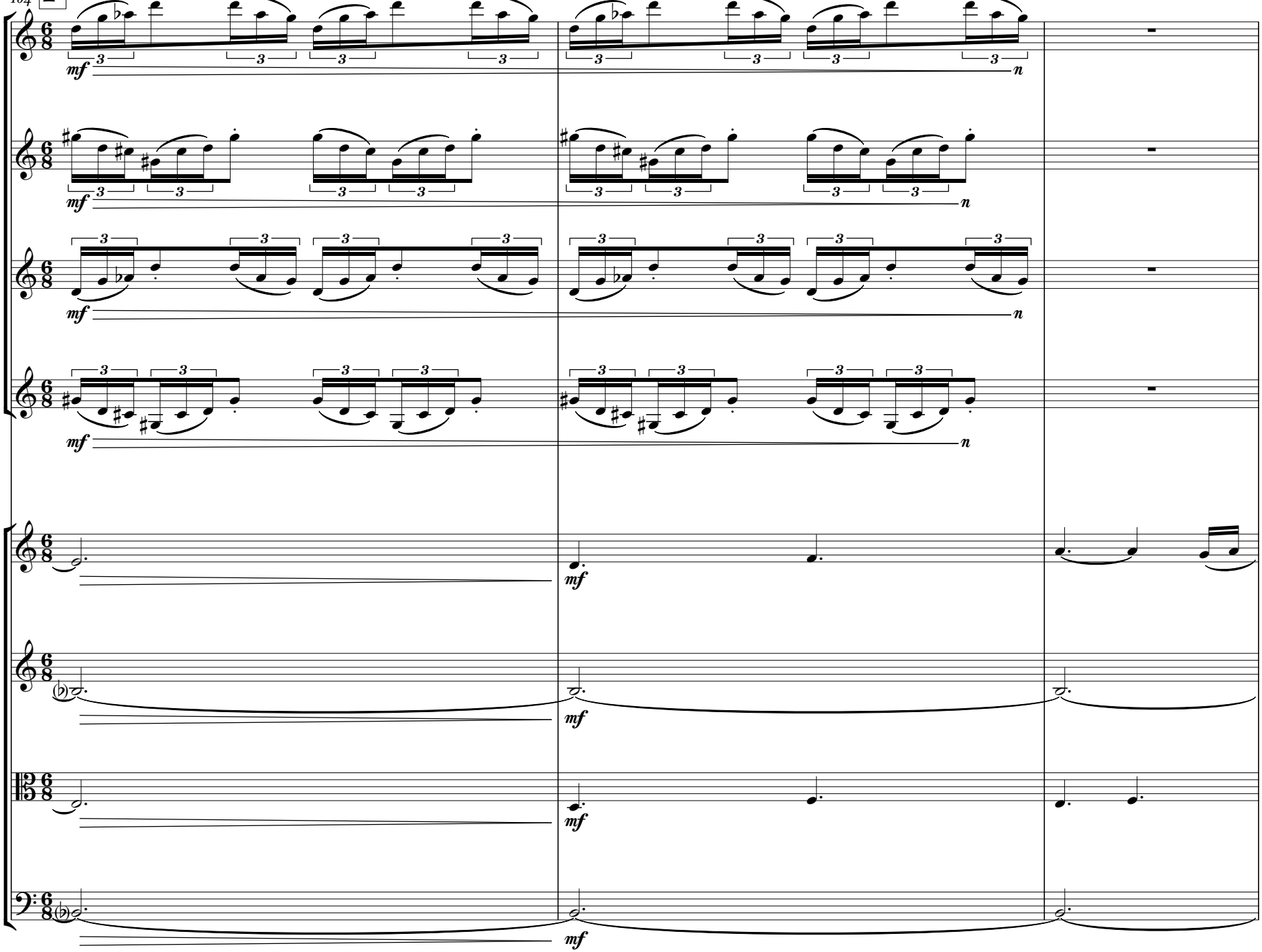
E

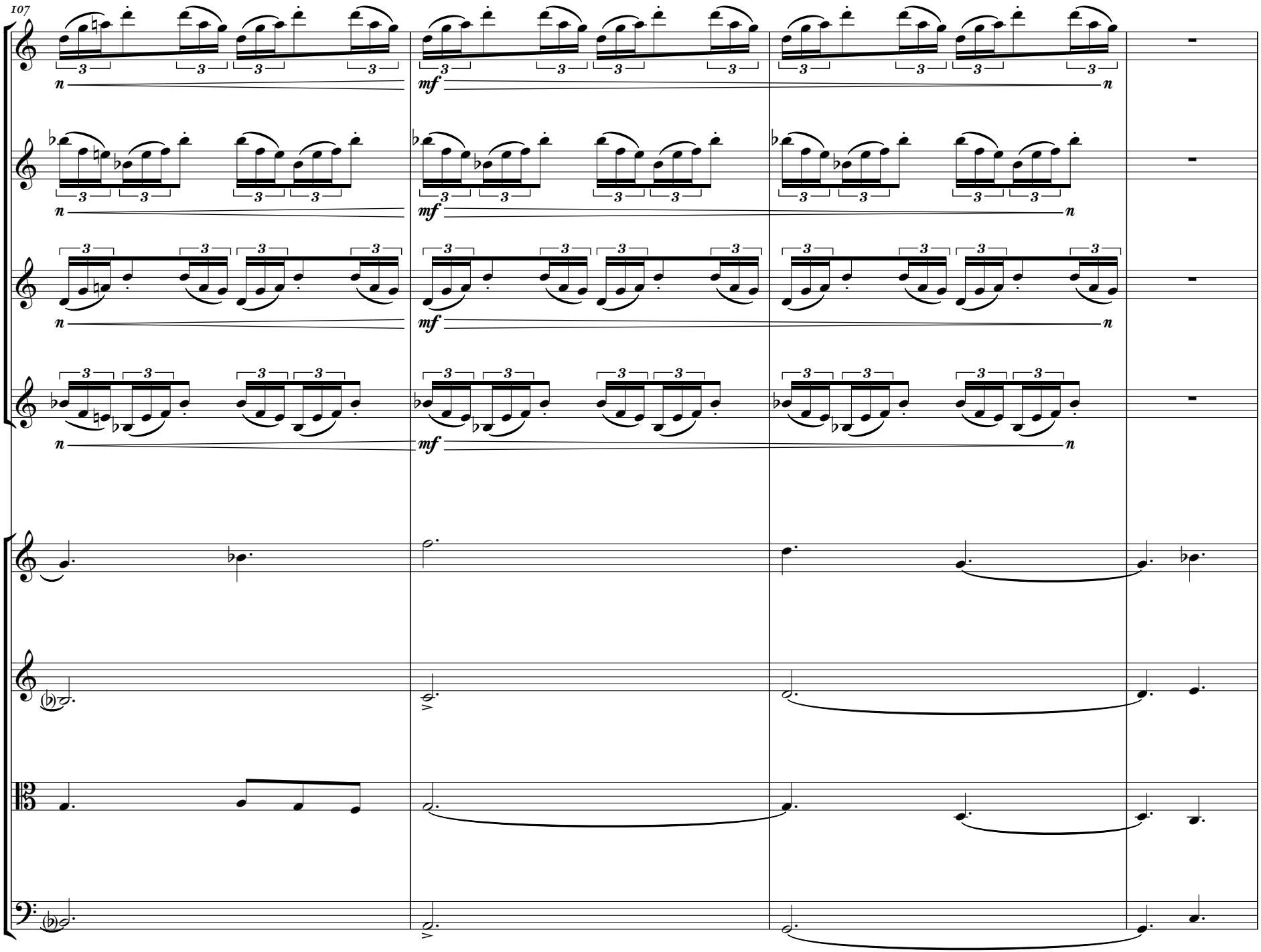


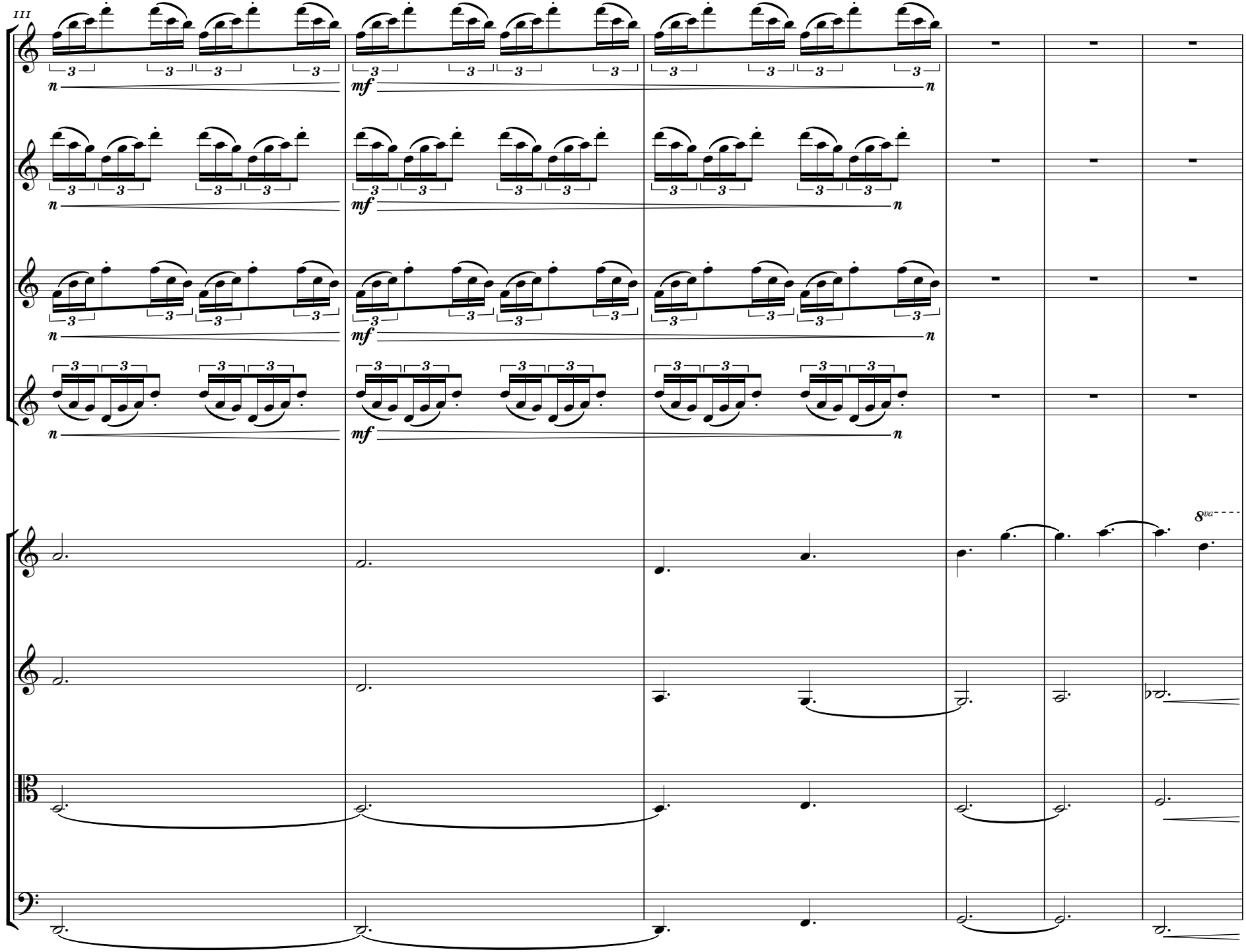

101
fff
ffp
ff
mf
fff

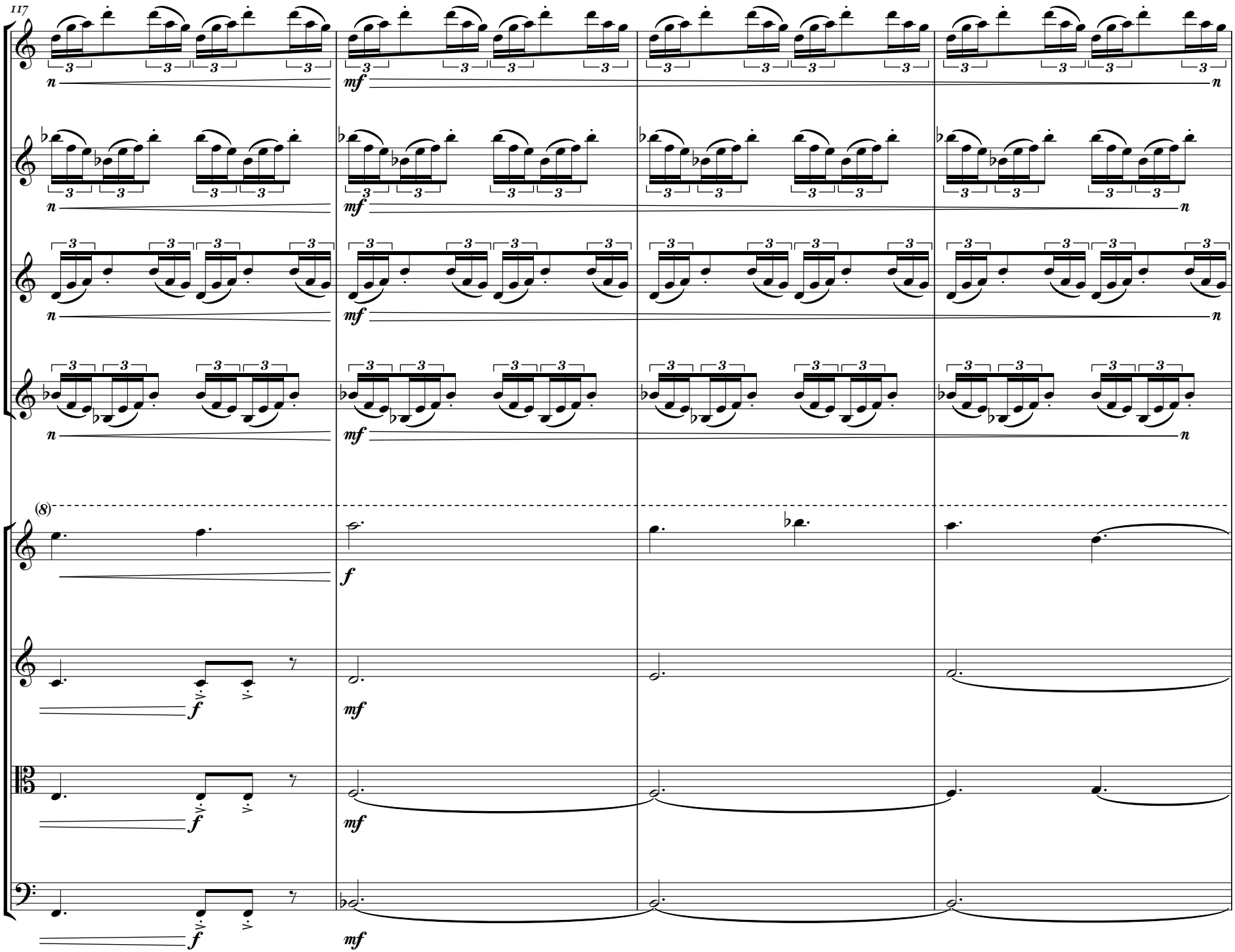
104

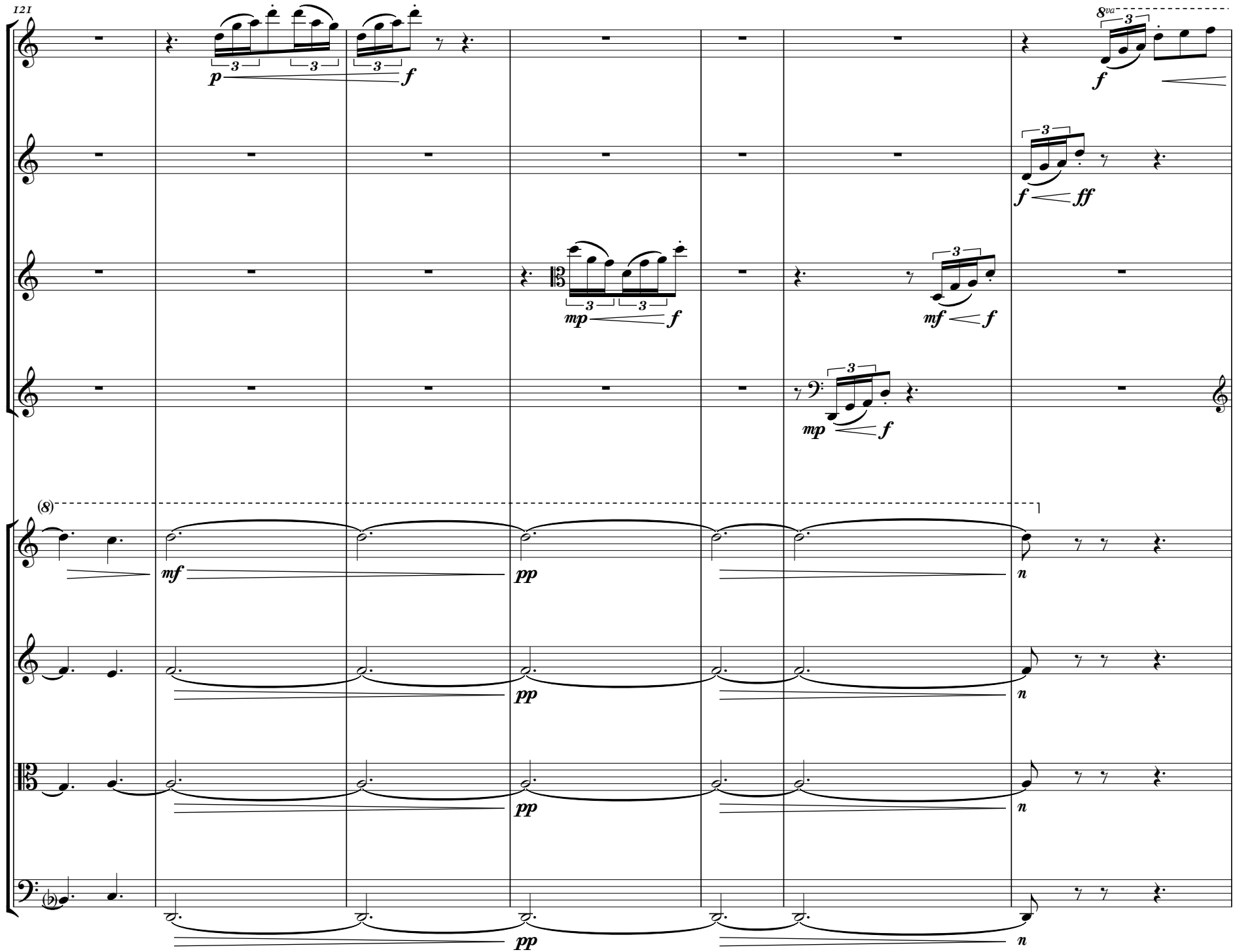
F ♪ = ♪




107
n
mf
n
mf
n
mf
n
mf
n

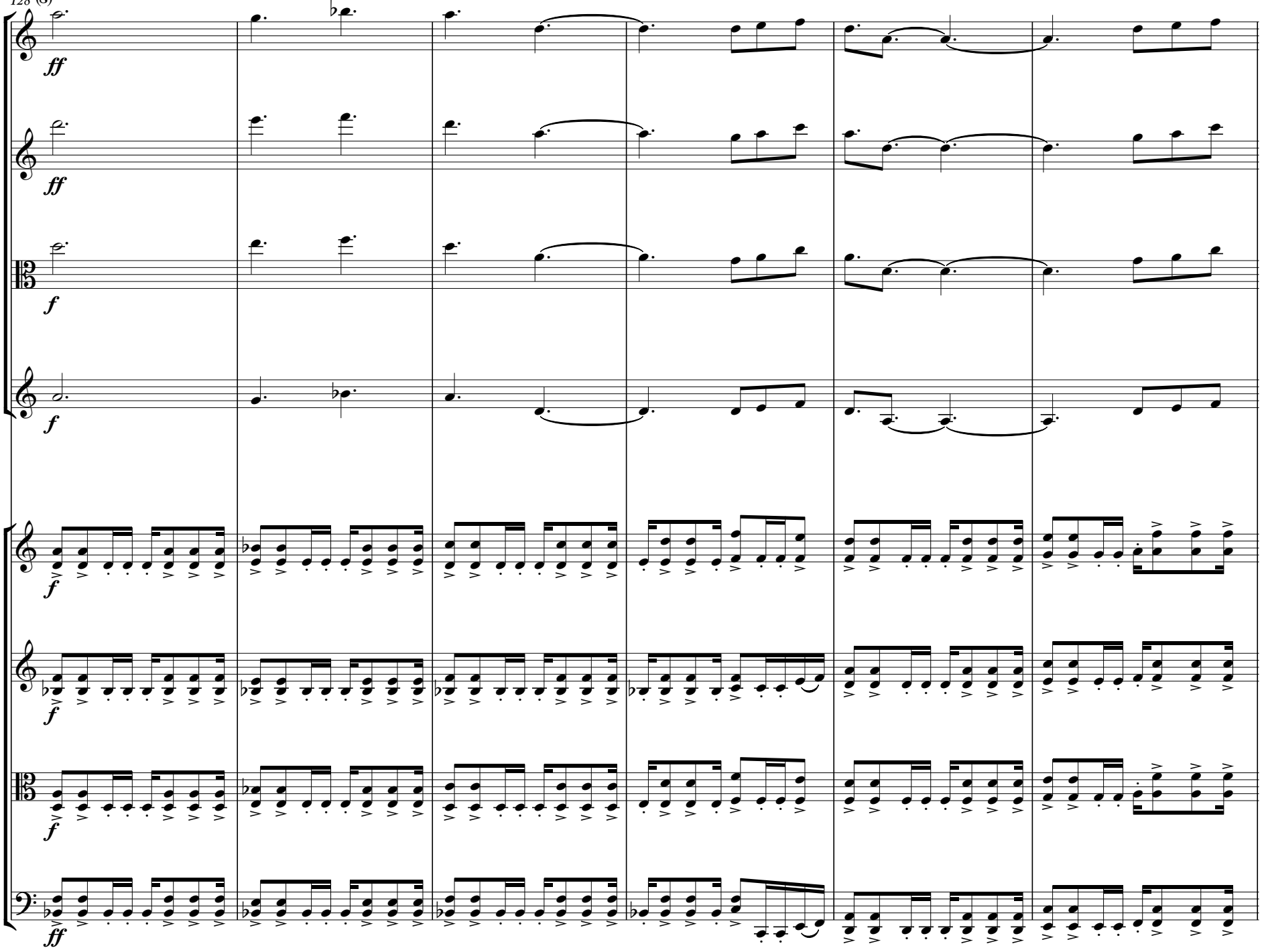

III
n
mf
n
8va

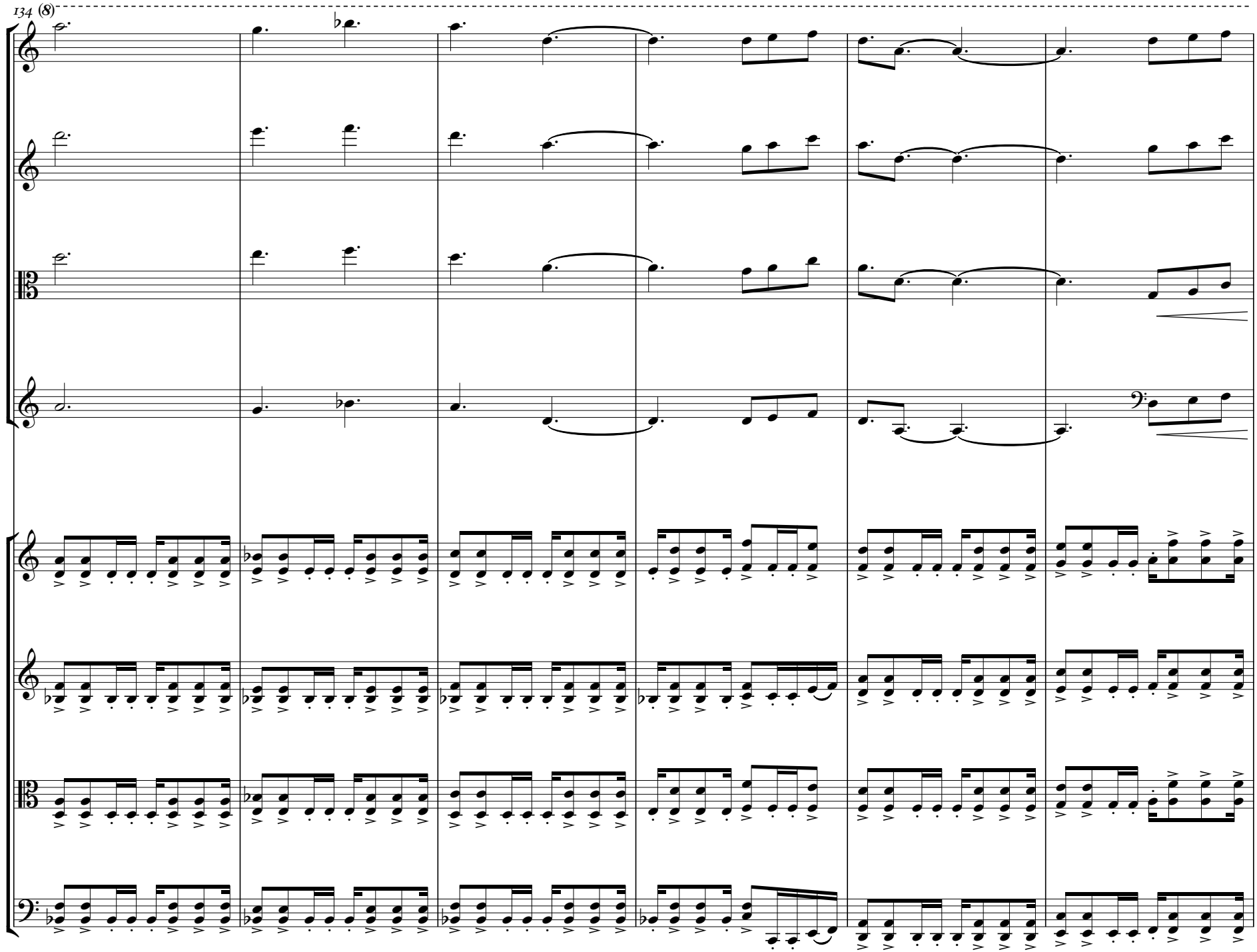

117
n
mf
n
mf
n
mf
n
mf
(8)
f
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf


121
p
f
8va
f
f
ff
mp
f
mf
f
mp
f
(8)
mf
pp
n
pp
n
pp
n
pp
n

G

128 (8)

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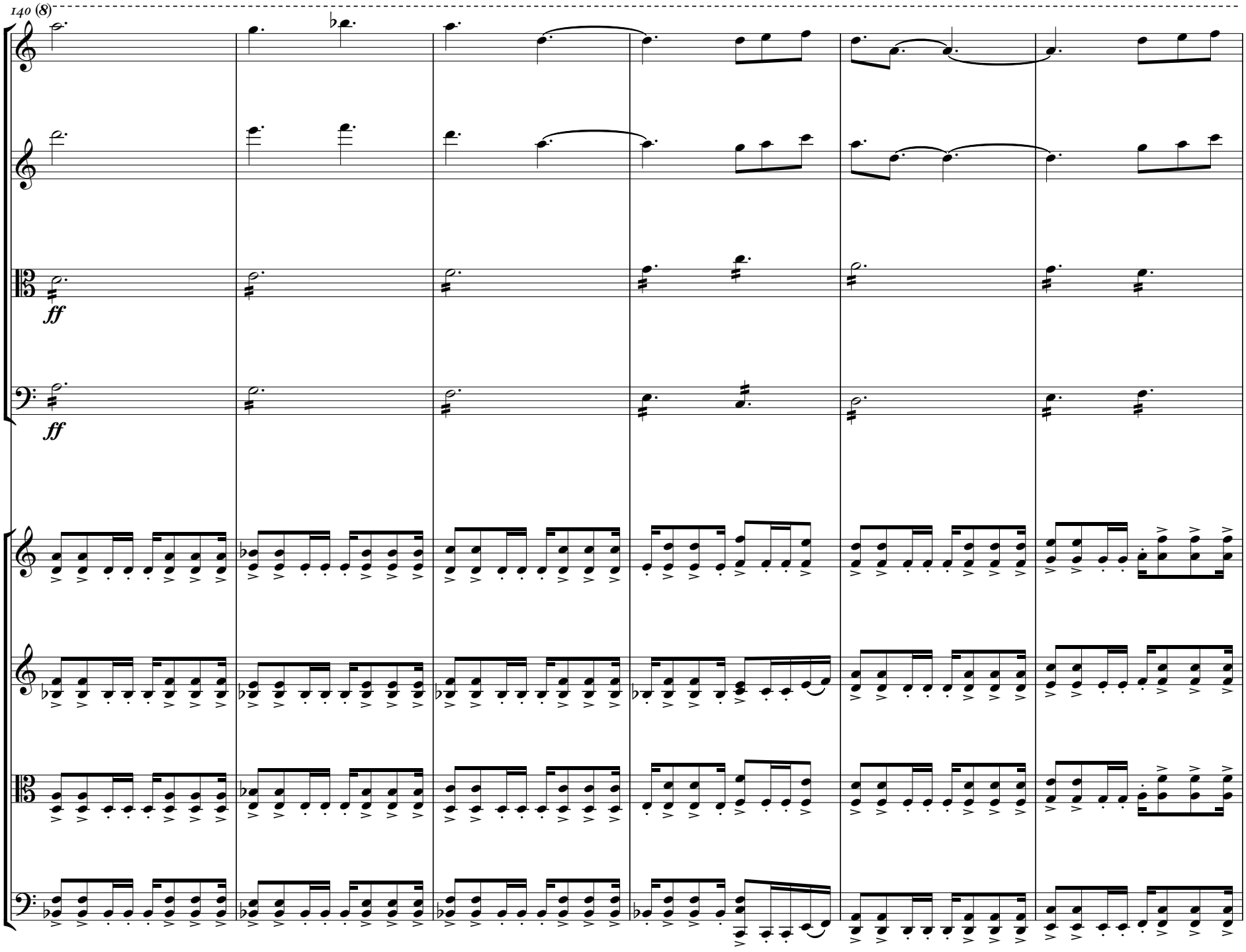
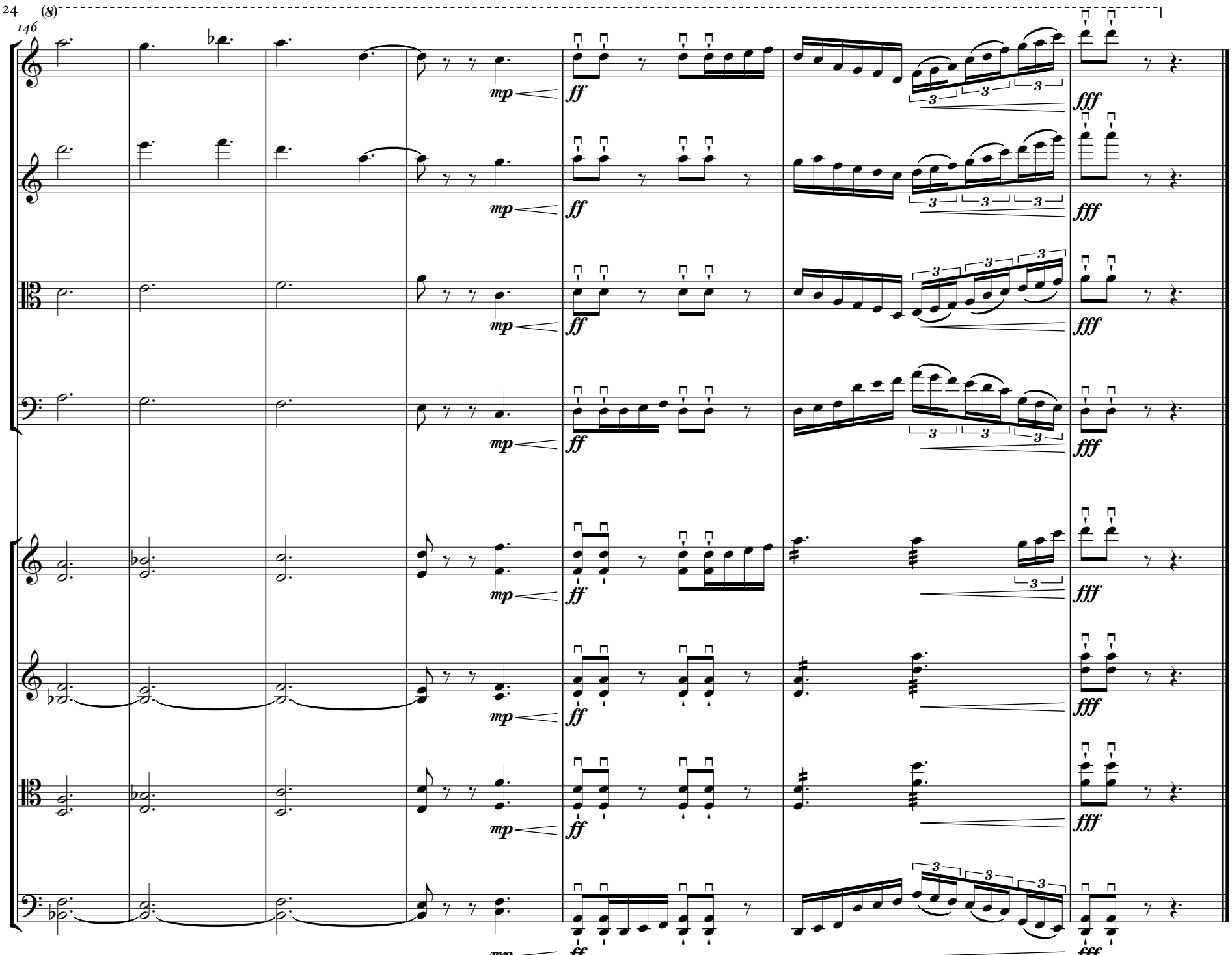

140 (8)
ff
ff


(8)
146
mp
ff
fff
3

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