Steven Snowden

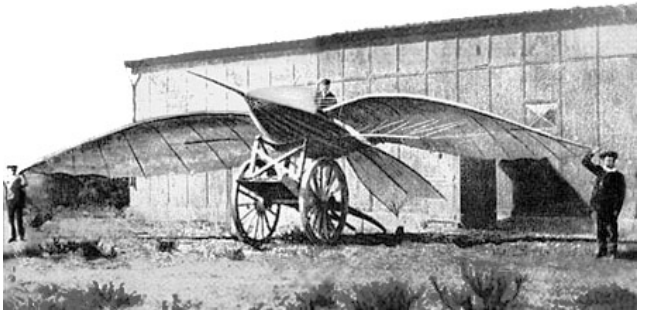
Under the Radar

Viola Quartet
2009

Under the Radar
Viola Quartet

While the history of manned flight provides countless tales of tenacious inventors and spectacular failures, one in particular caught my attention while I was writing this piece. Jean Marie Le Bris, a retired French sea captain, designed and built a manned gliding machine based on the physiological proportions of the albatross. He dubbed his glider *L'Albatros artificial* (the Artificial Albatross) and it was to become his life's obsession.

In December of 1856, Le Bris mounted his glider on a horse-drawn cart and ordered his driver to speed down a country road into to the wind. Seated atop the Artificial Albatross, Le Bris unhooked the restraining rope and broke free of the cart. However, the unfortunate driver became entangled in the rope and dangled perilously below the glider as it soared 300 feet above the ground. After sailing about 600 feet, Le Bris's machine crash-landed in a nearby field. Both Le Bris and the driver escaped without injury and the glider suffered only minor damage. His next attempt however, resulted in severe damage to the Artificial Albatross and a broken leg for Le Bris. Despite this failure and the many that followed, Le Bris never gave up and is now recognized as an important (though eccentric) figure in the development of modern manned flight.



From one perspective, *Under the Radar* is a programmatic portrayal of Le Bris's relentless tenacity. Musical textures and ideas build to a feverish intensity over and over, but each one, destined for failure, falls short of reaching a culminating climax. From another perspective though, this piece is about giving violas a chance to play in a style far removed from much of their traditional literature. With *Under the Radar* I wanted to write something that was the direct opposite of typical viola music. Rather than a slow and somber dirge, I chose cast the violas into the role of athletic and melodramatic rockstars.

Approximate duration – 6 min.

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Under the Radar

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very intense ♩~ **54** *but with no discernible pulse*

Viola 1

Viola 2

Viola 3

Viola 4

attacca

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vla. 4

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* This symbol signifies intensity of vibrato. (both rate and depth)

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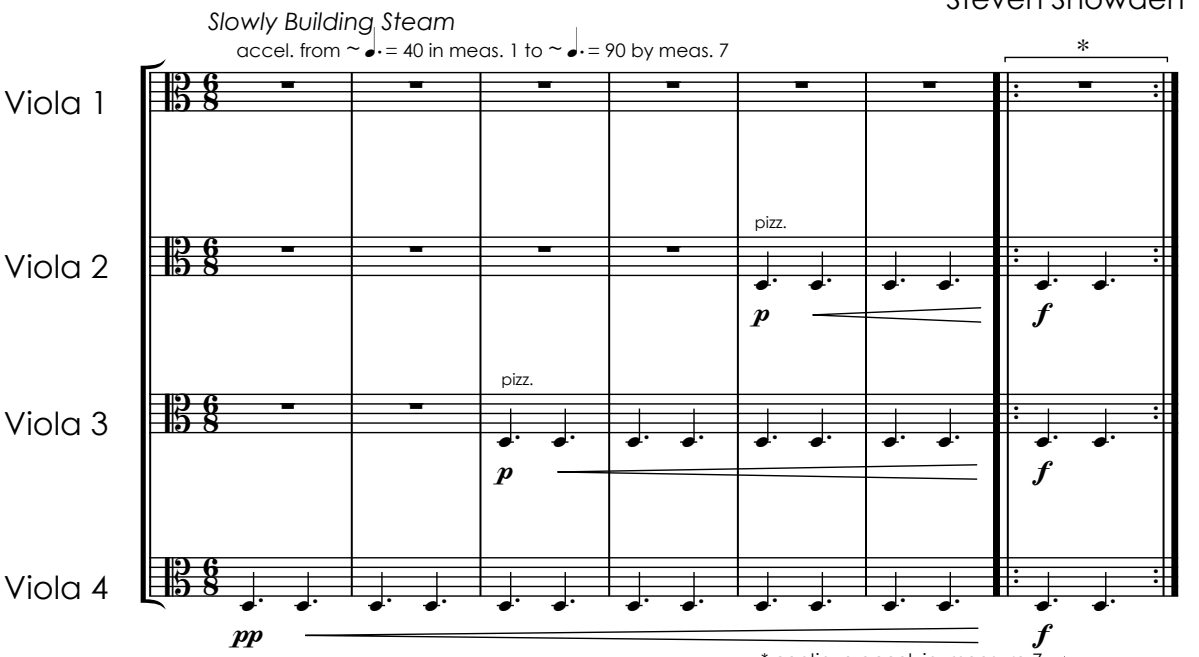

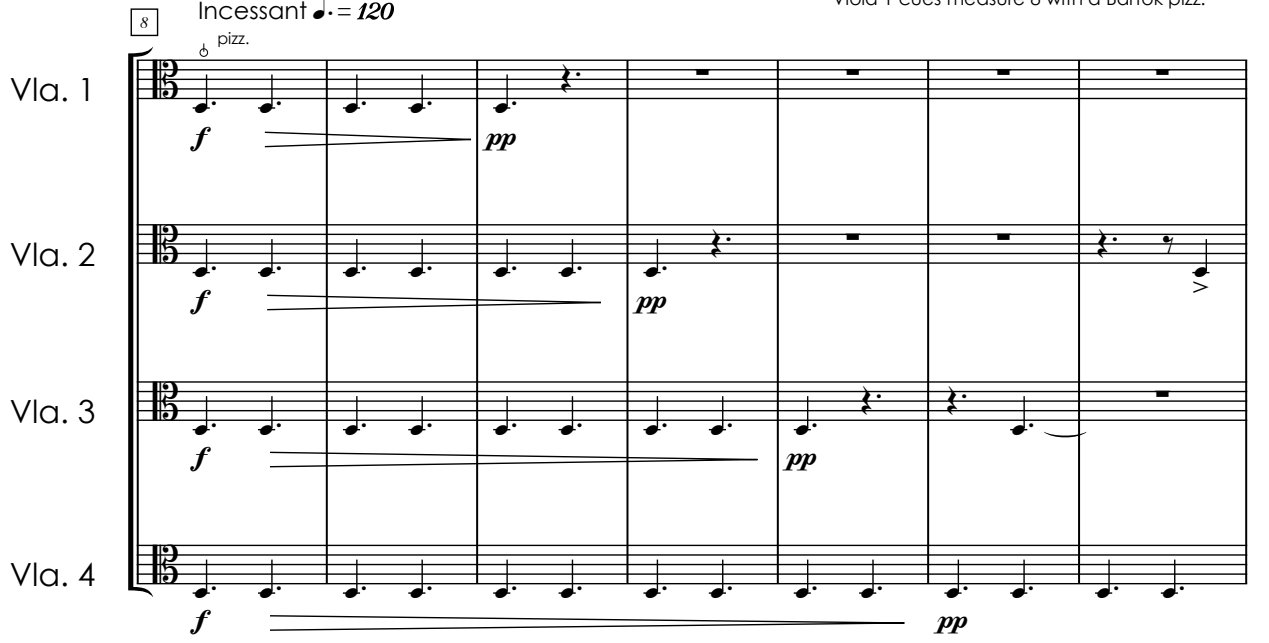

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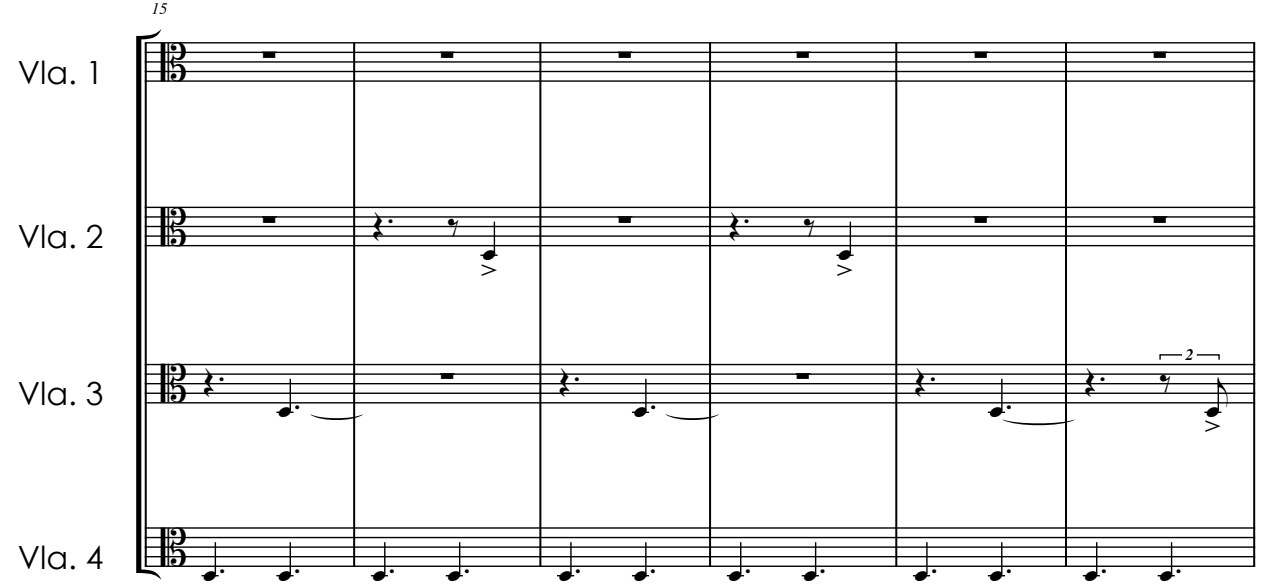
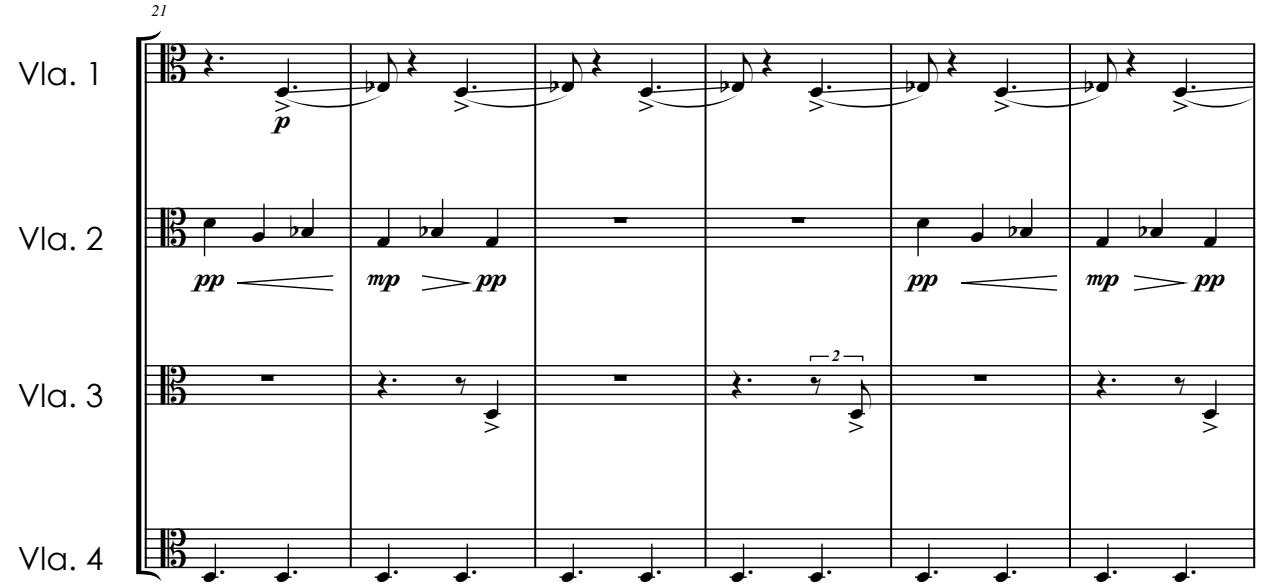
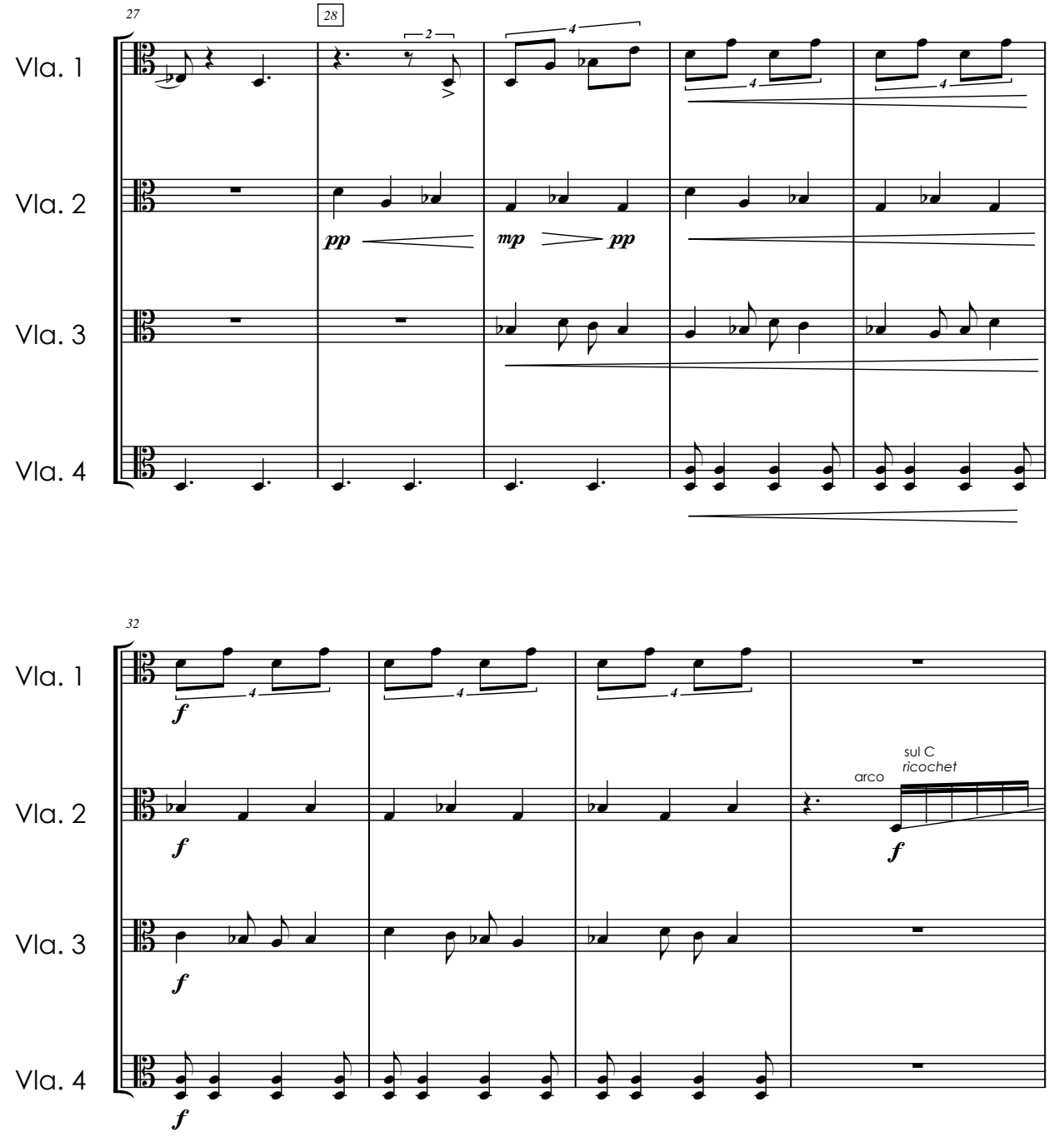
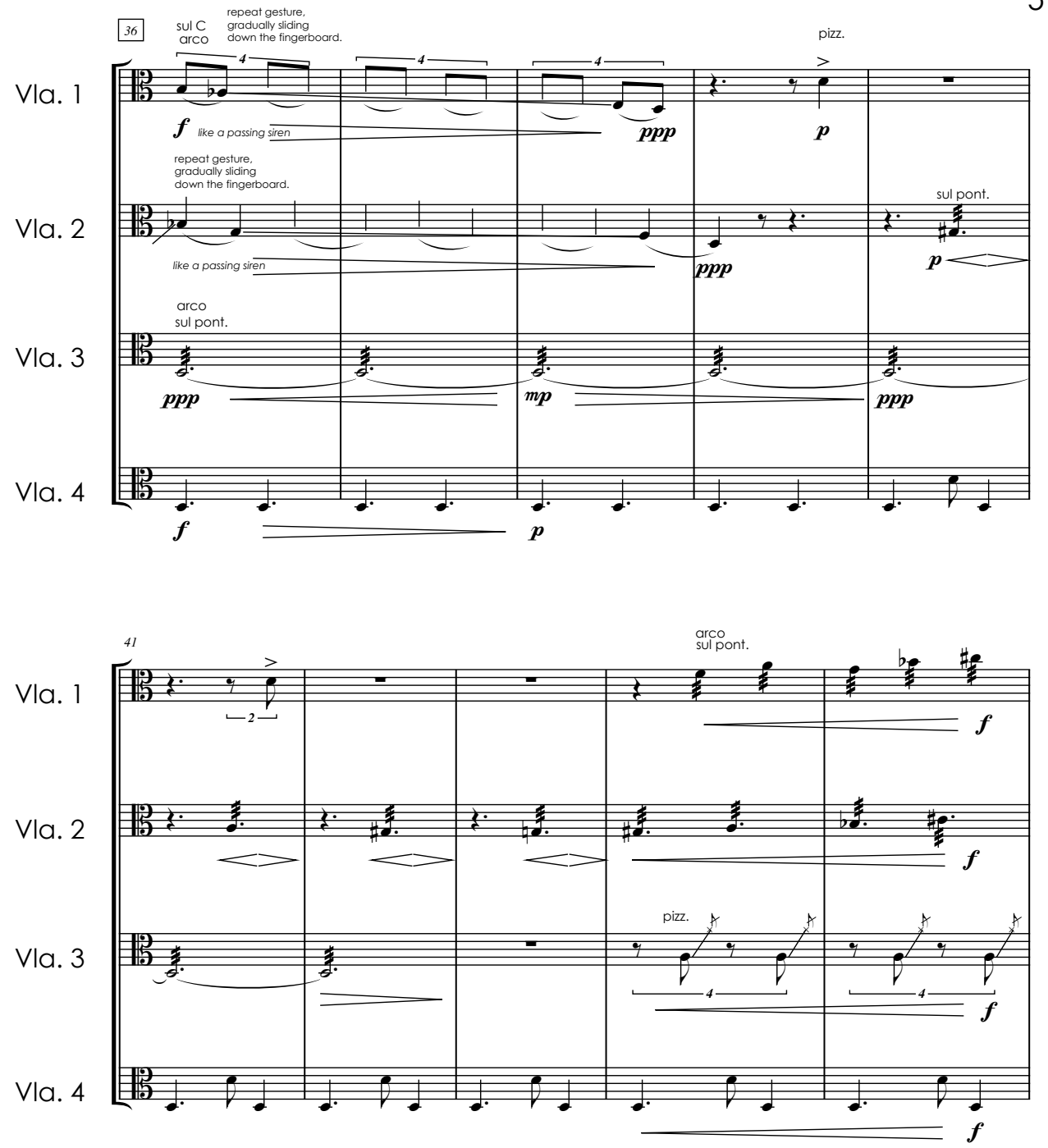
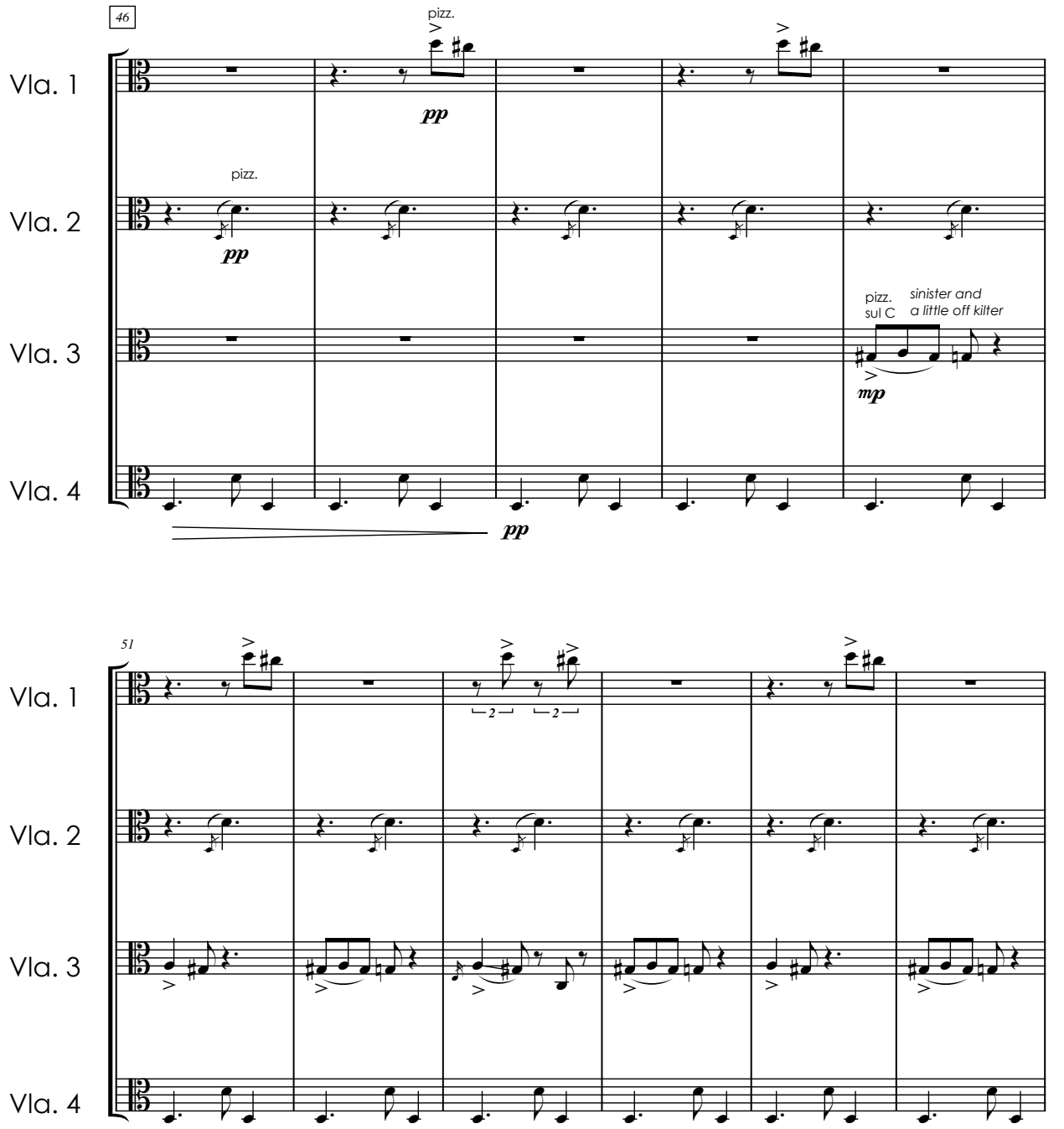
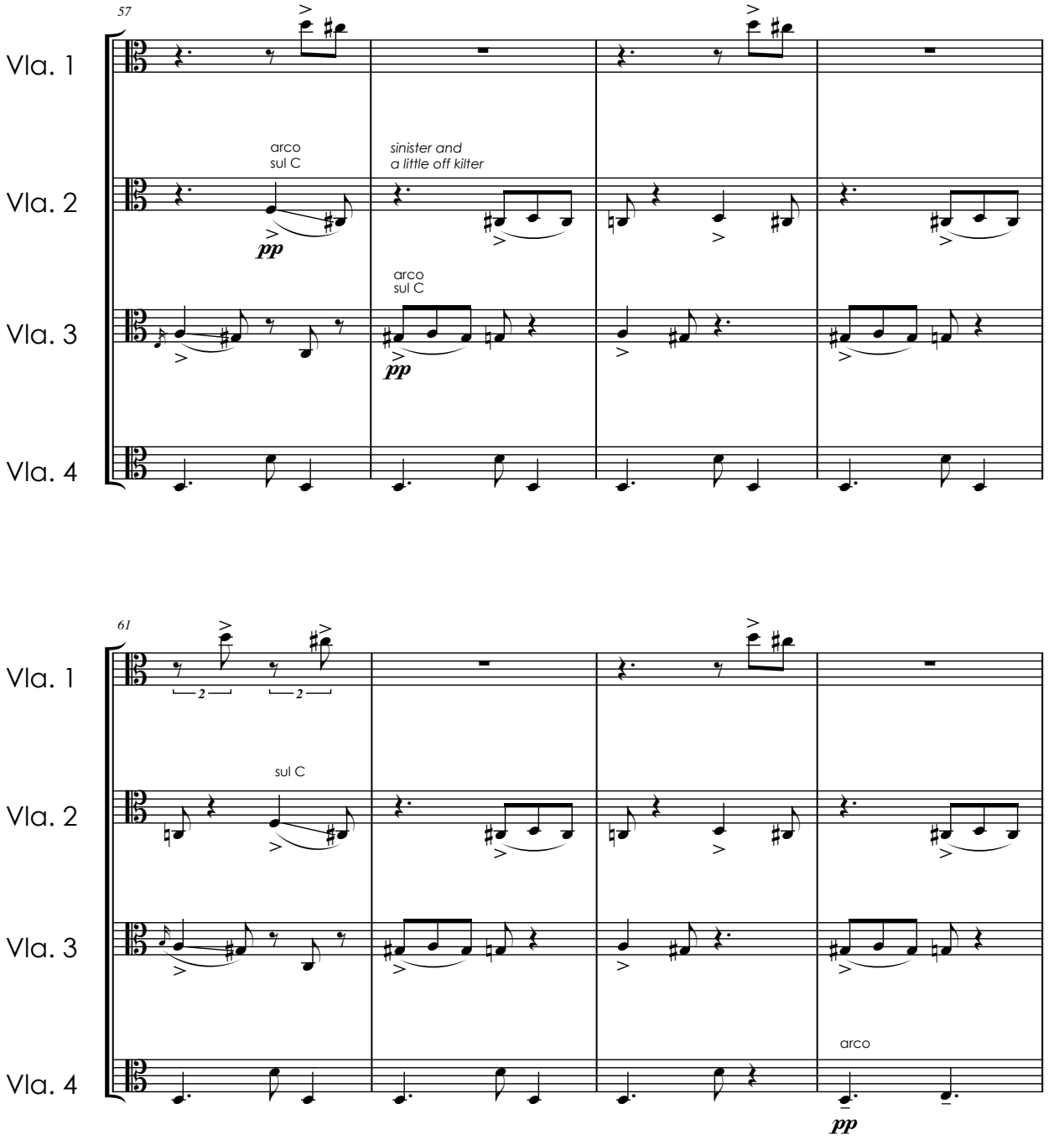

15
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
2

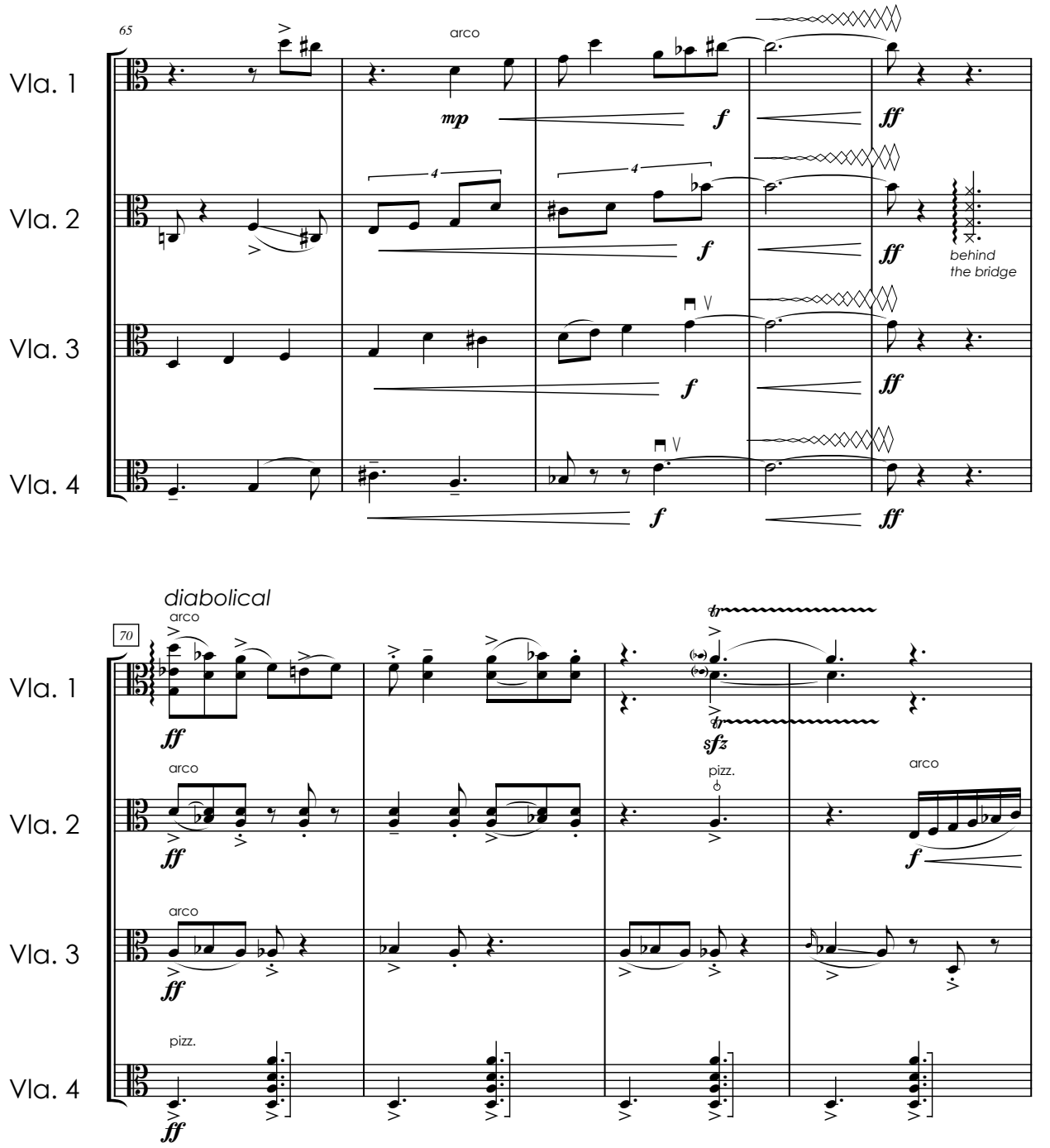

21
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
p
pp
mp
pp
pp
mp
pp
2

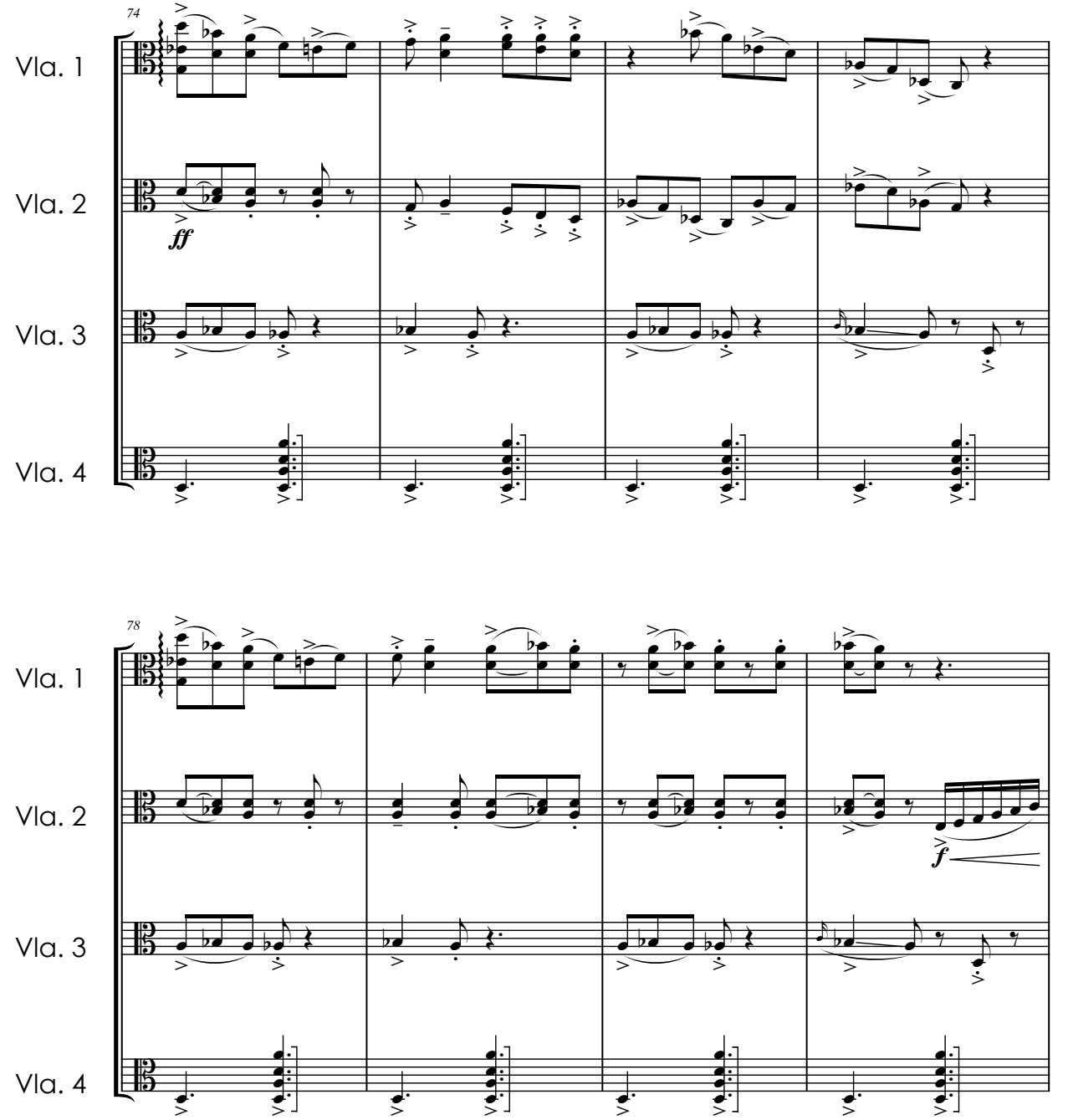

27
28
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
pp
mp
pp
32
f
arco
sul C
ricochet

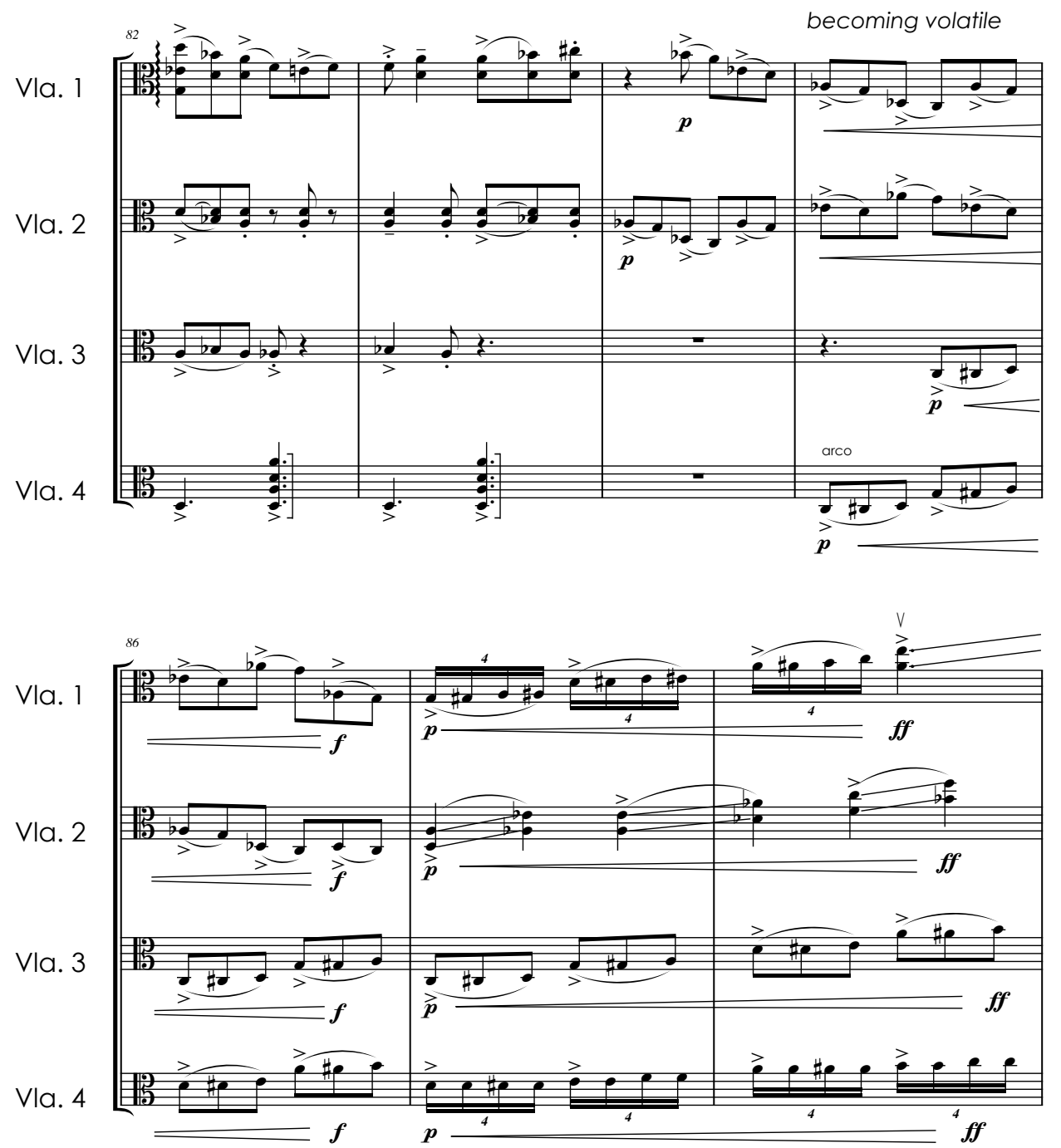

36
sul C
arco
repeat gesture,
gradually sliding
down the fingerboard.
pizz.
Vla. 1
like a passing siren
repeat gesture,
gradually sliding
down the fingerboard.
sul pont.
Vla. 2
like a passing siren
arco
sul pont.
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
41
arco
sul pont.
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
pizz.
Vla. 3
Vla. 4

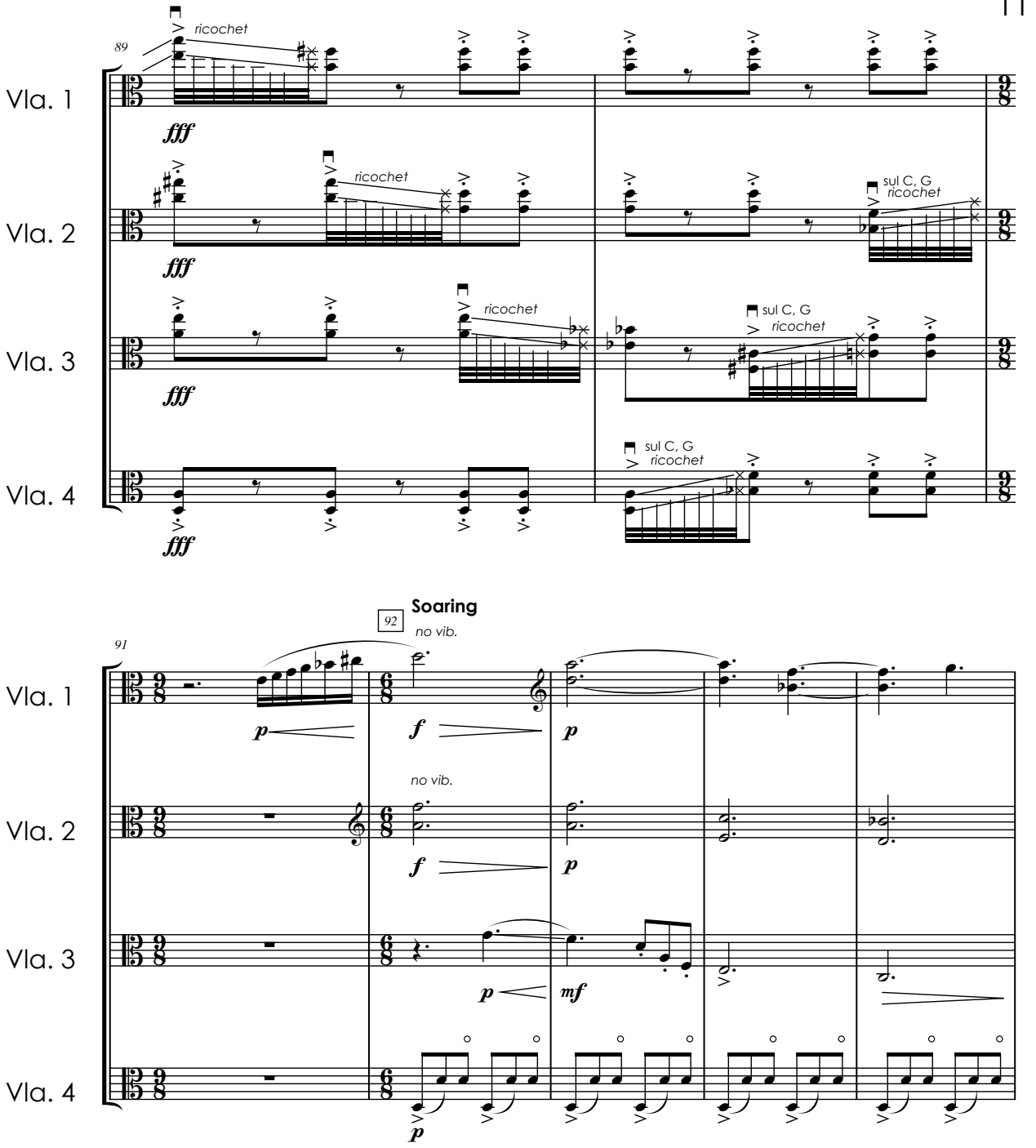

46
pizz.
Vla. 1
pp
pizz.
Vla. 2
pp
pizz.
sul C
sinister and
a little off kilter
Vla. 3
mp
Vla. 4
pp
51
Vla. 1
2
2
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4

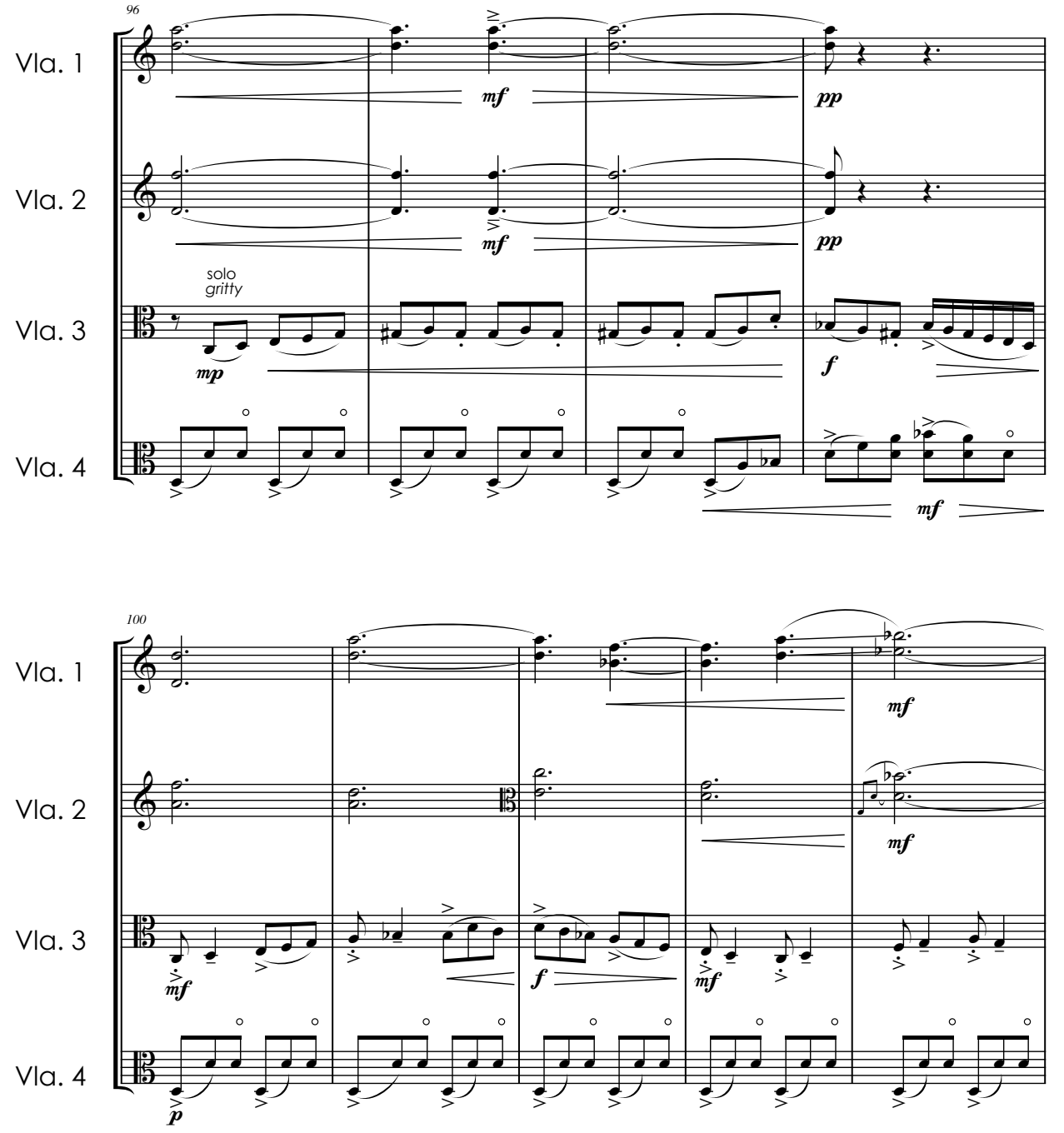

57
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
arco
sul C
pp
sinister and
a little off kilter
arco
sul C
pp
61
2
2
sul C
arco
pp

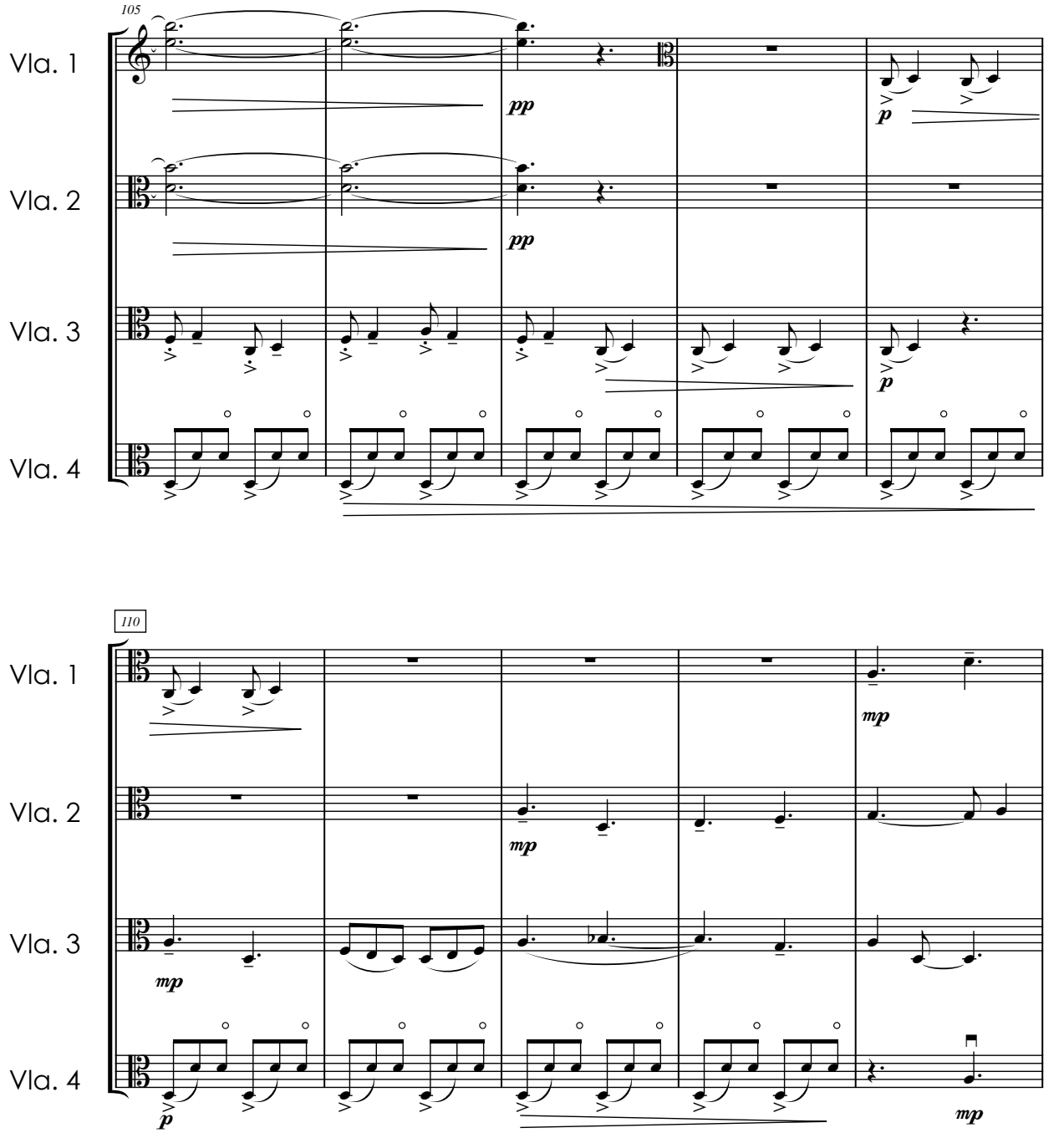

65
arco
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
mp
f
ff
4
behind
the bridge
diabolical
70
arco
pizz.
sfz

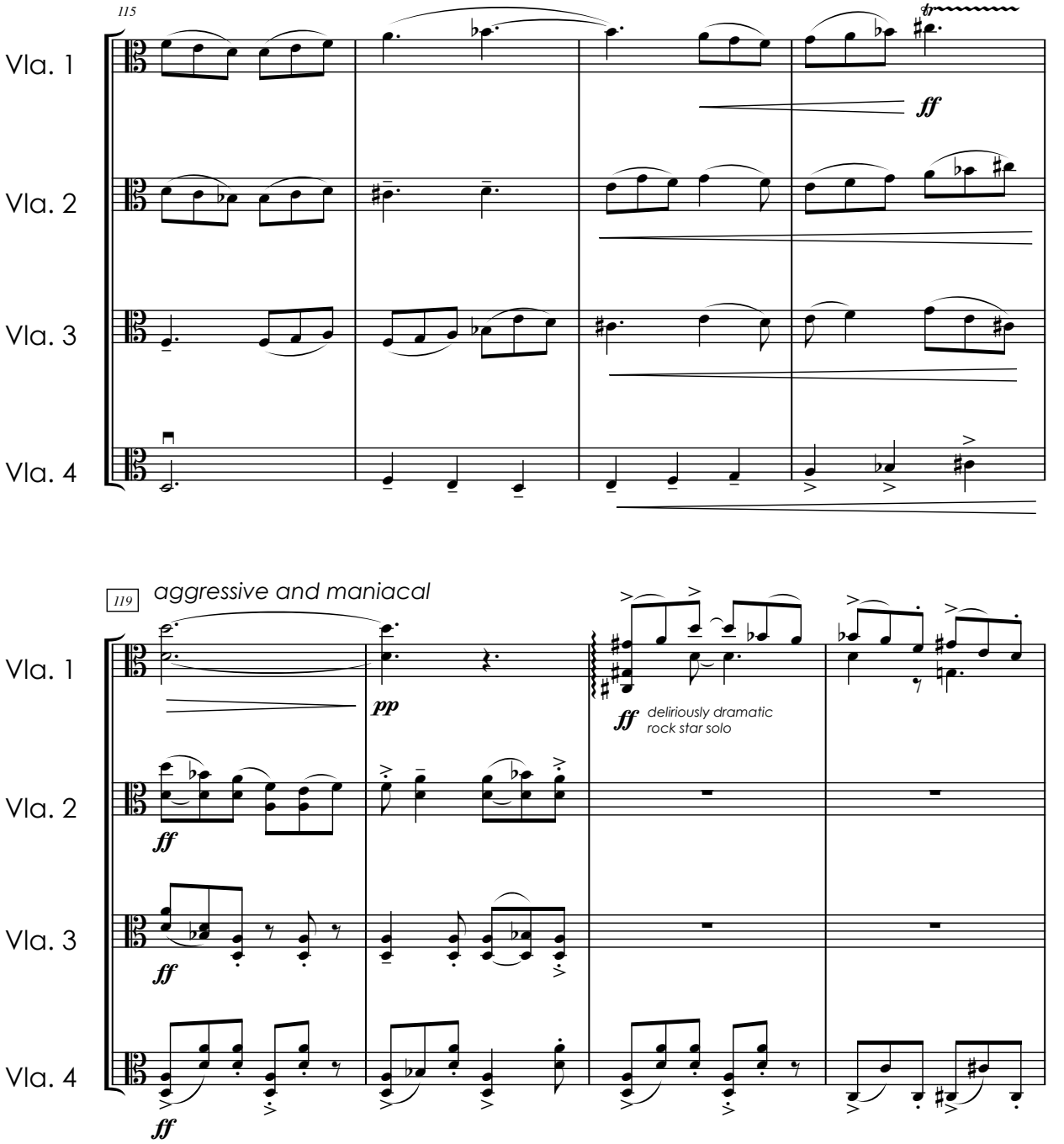

74
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
ff
78
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
f

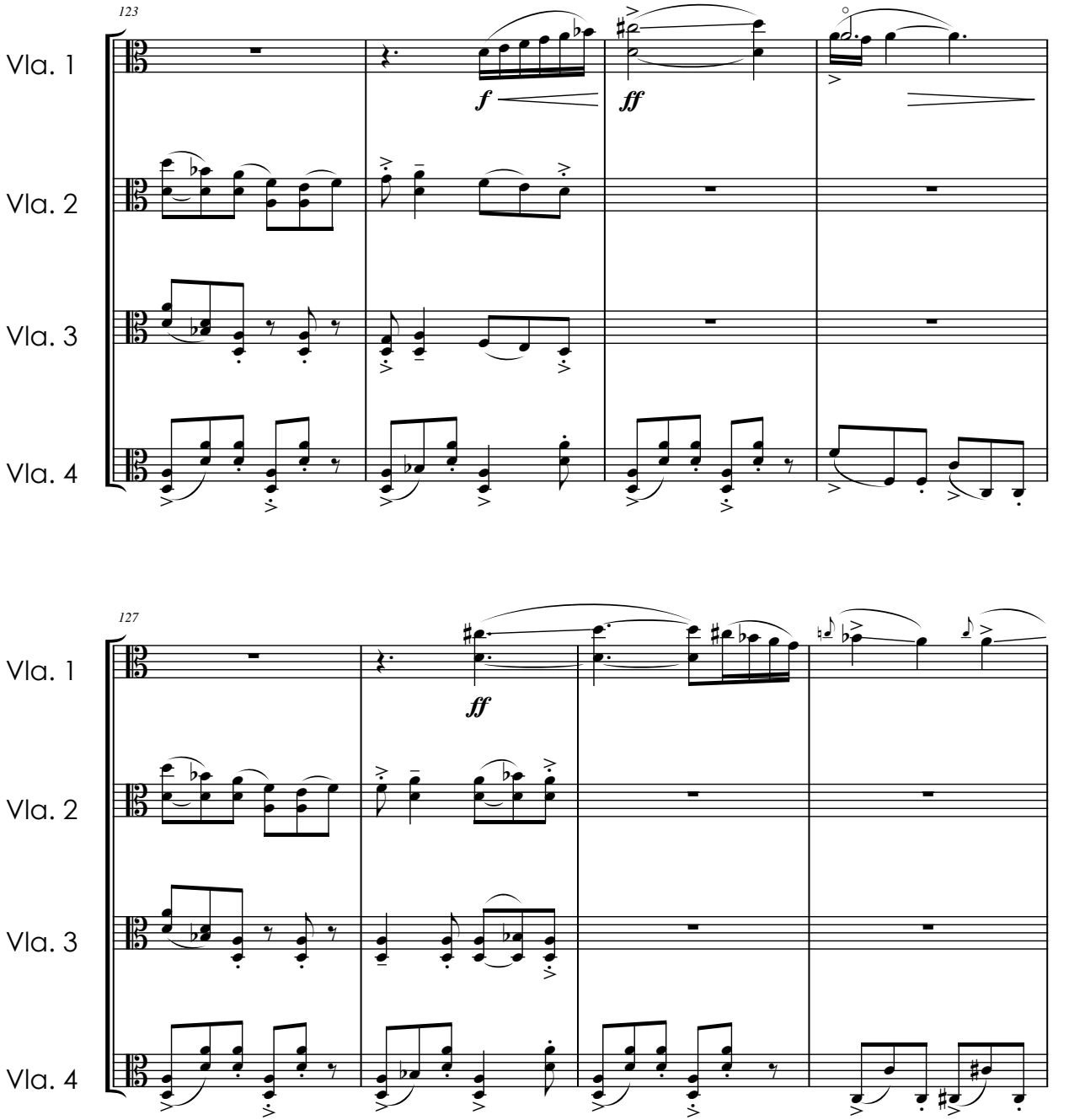

becoming volatile
82
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
arco
86
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4

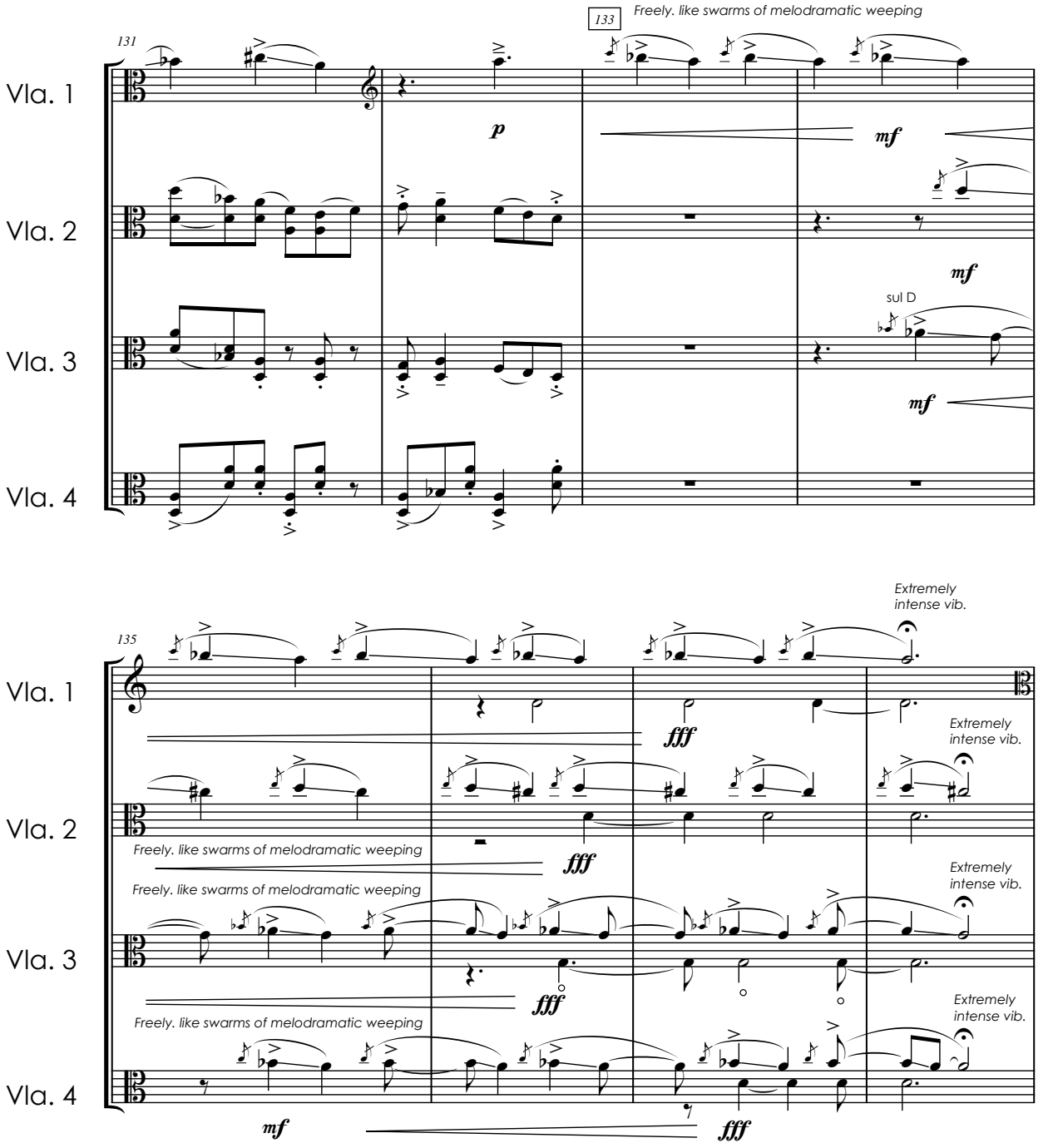

89
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
ricochet
fff
sul C, G
91
92
Soaring
no vib.
p
f
mf

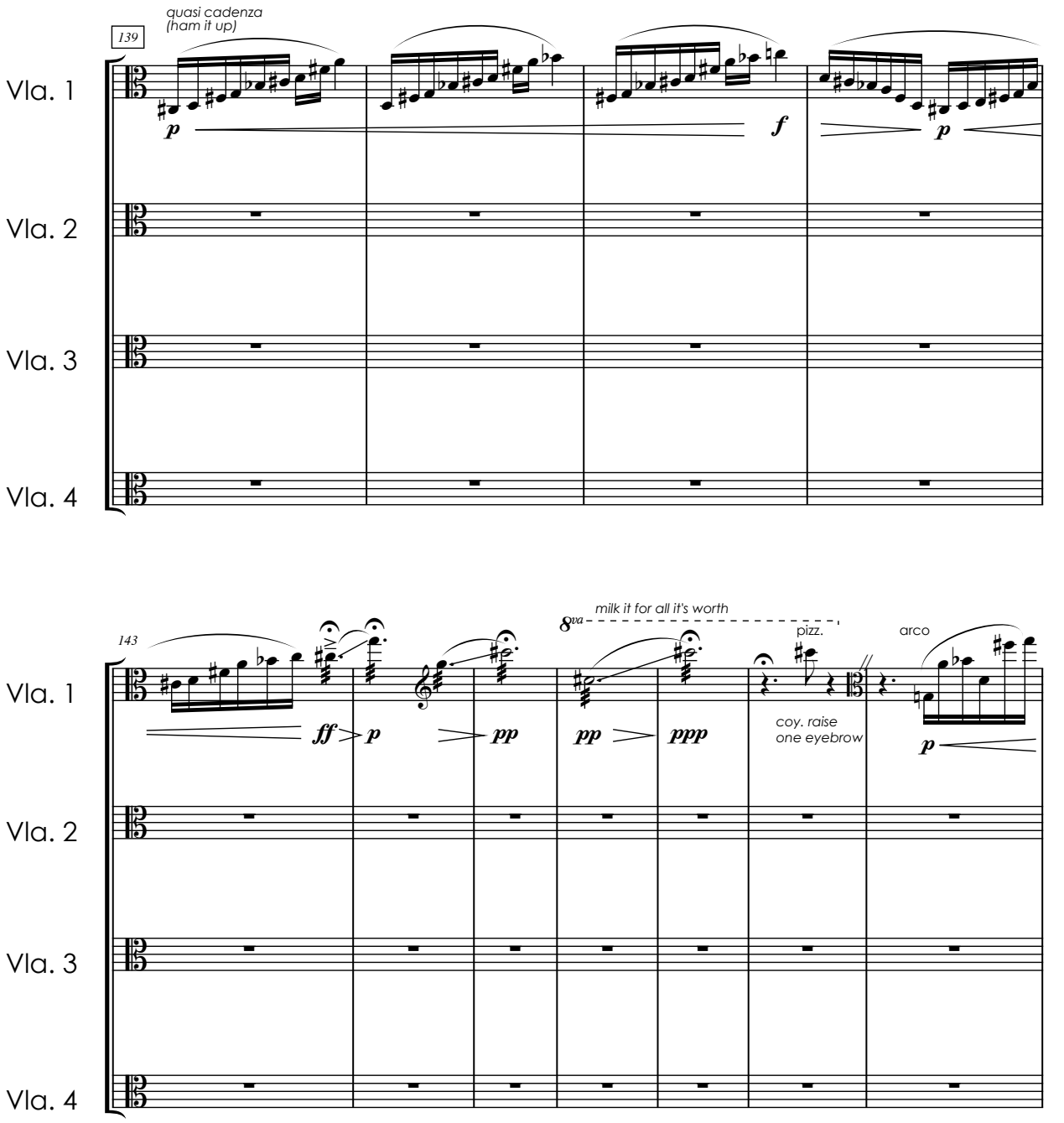

96
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
mf
pp
mf
pp
solo
gritty
mp
f
mf
100
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
mf
mf
mf
f
mf
p


105
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
pp
pp
p
p
110
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
mp
mp
mp
p
mp


115
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
ff
119
aggressive and maniacal
pp
ff
deliriously dramatic
rock star solo

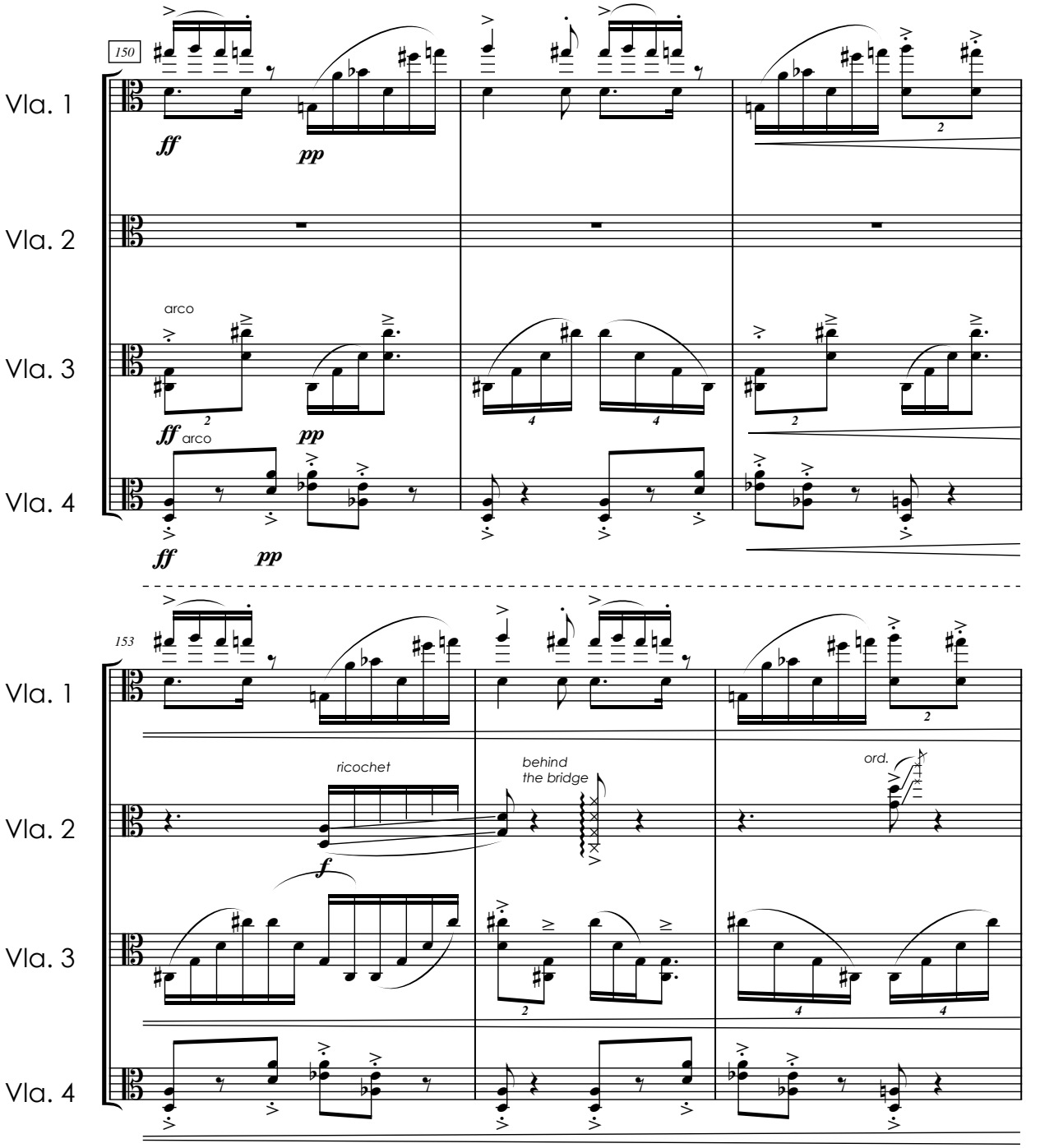

123
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
f
ff
127
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
ff

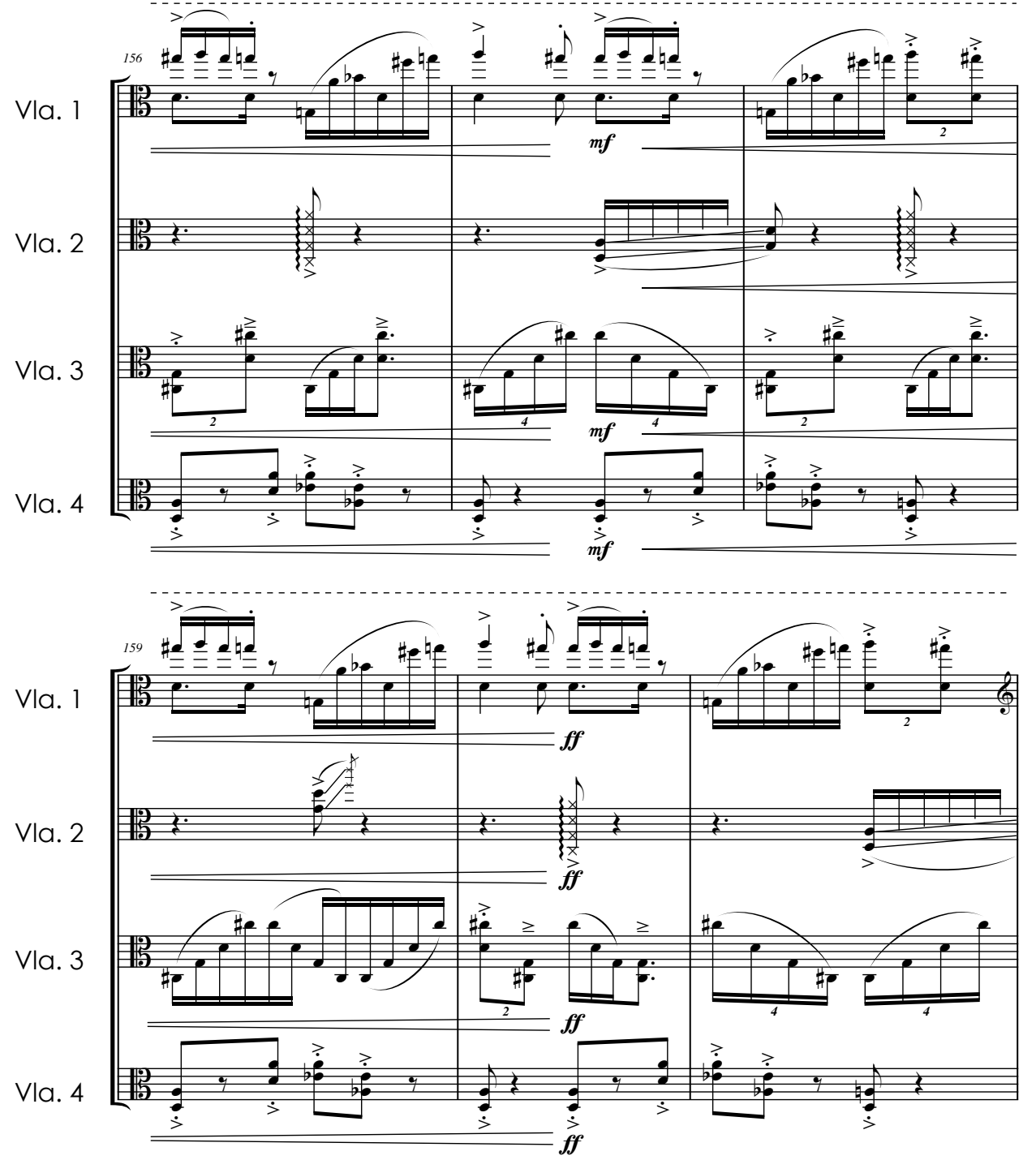

131
133
Freely. like swarms of melodramatic weeping
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
p
mf
mf
sul D
mf
135
Extremely intense vib.
fff
Extremely intense vib.
Freely. like swarms of melodramatic weeping
fff
Extremely intense vib.
Freely. like swarms of melodramatic weeping
fff
Extremely intense vib.
Freely. like swarms of melodramatic weeping
mf
fff

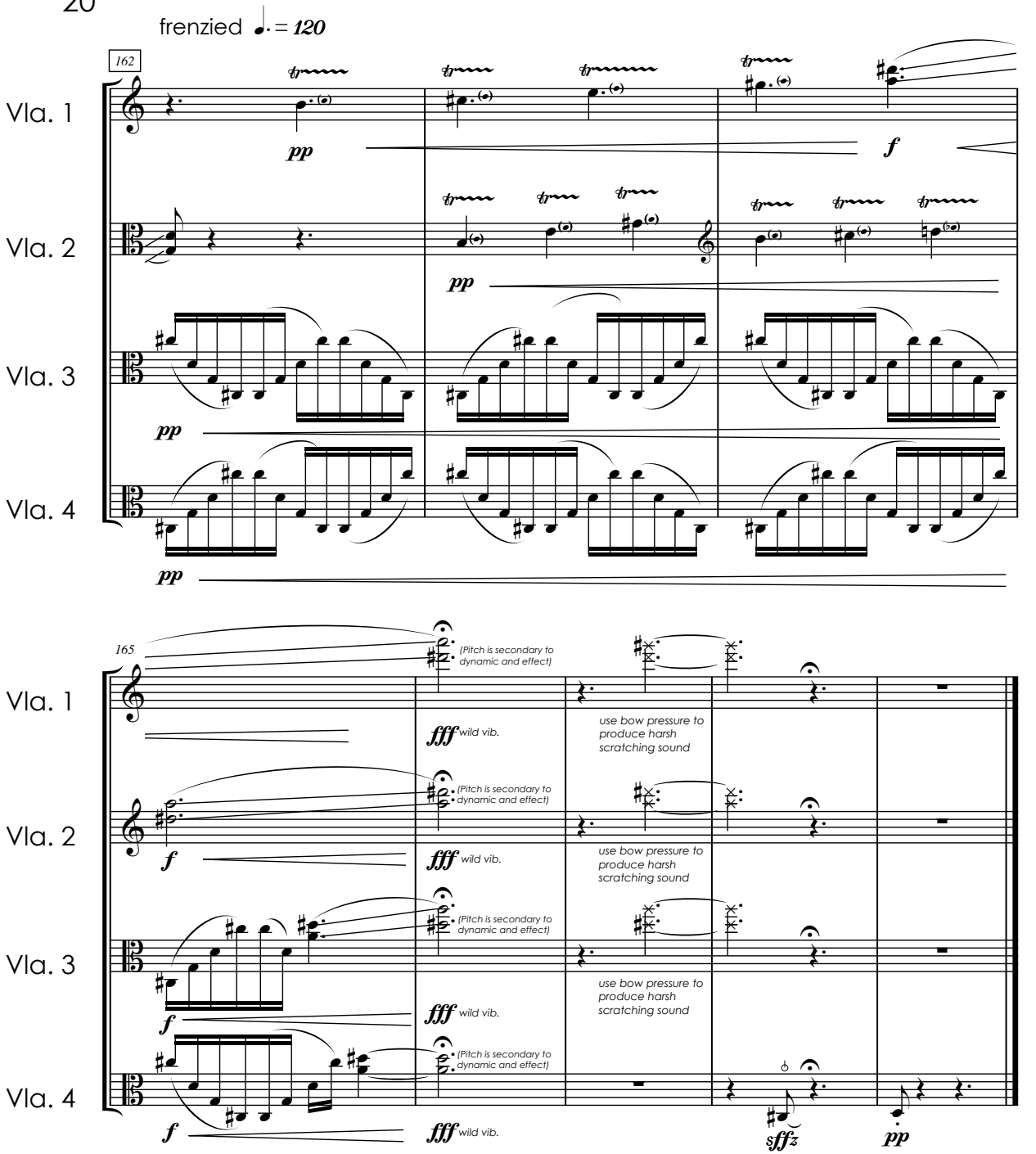

139
quasi cadenza
(ham it up)
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
p
f
p
143
8va
milk it for all it's worth
pizz.
arco
ff
p
pp
pp
ppp
coy. raise
one eyebrow
p

♩. = 60 with deranged anticipation

accel. poco a poco




156
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
mf
159
ff


frenzied ♩. = 120
162
Vla. 1
Vla. 2
Vla. 3
Vla. 4
pp
f
165
(Pitch is secondary to dynamic and effect)
fff wild vib.
use bow pressure to produce harsh scratching sound
sffz
pp