Beginning with Time

String Quartet no. 3

2008 / 2014 / 2020

Lawrence Kramer

Beginning with Time: String Quartet no. 3

This quartet takes its title from a seemingly casual phrase in "To a Reason," one of the prose poems in Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations:*

> A tap of your finger on the drum precipitates all the sounds and begins the new harmony.
>
> One step of yours is the rise of a human race and its onward march.
>
> Your face turns away: the new love! Your face turns back: the new love!
>
> "Change our fate, sift out the plagues, beginning with time," the children sing to you. "Raise no matter where the substance of our fortunes and our wishes," they beg of you.
>
> Arrival from always, you who will go everywhere.
>
> (Translation by the composer)

Like the poem, the music imagines a search for arrival on the understanding that to arrive at one's destination is always to reach the point of a new departure. But this is no abstact formula; the reason for the search is a desire for a future worth hoping for--something that seems all too timely as I write this note in 2020. The hope defies cynicism, which is why Rimbaud places its expression in the song of the children, all of us being such children when we ask our for fate to be changed, "beginning with time."

The quartet presents its search as a process of starting over, of revisiting what has been in order to carry it forward in changed form. Beginning with time is beginning again. A great deal of music operates on just this principle, so the quartet also constitutes a reflection in which music ponders its own basis in endless arrival and departure. That is doubly so with this music, which was written and rewritten over a period of twelve years.

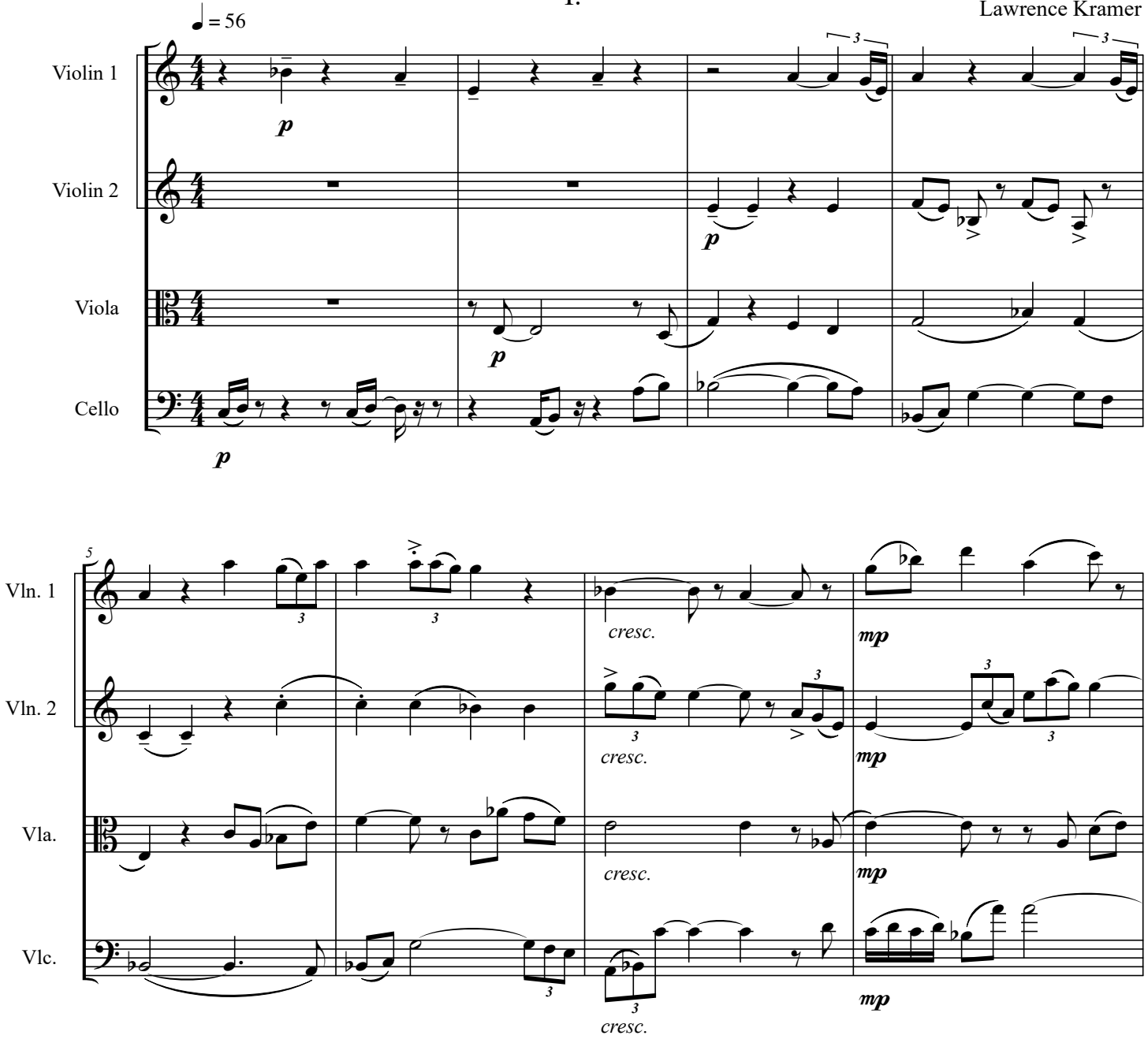
The quartet is accordingly in two movements, an Adagio and an Allegretto, which do not occur in sequence but instead *re*cur in alternation to make five segments. The first instance of each movement is fragmentary. The second instance of the Adagio is almost complete but it cannot find a way to end. Only after the second instance of the Allegretto finds its full form can the final instance of the Adagio do likewise. The Adagio is essentially the same each time it recurs, but it is also not the same because each recurrence changes which instrument plays what part, thus transforming the sonority and texture and sometimes the melody or harmony. This movement is in a constant state of flux, poised between lyrical contemplation and swirls of energy. The Allegretto is more concerned with finding its melodic identity. Its first instance breaks off too soon; the second reclaims it (with some shifting of parts) as a point of departure.

The process evoked by the quartet is in principle endless, but its music cannot be, and so runs its course in some 20 or 21 minutes.

Beginning with Time

I.

Lawrence Kramer



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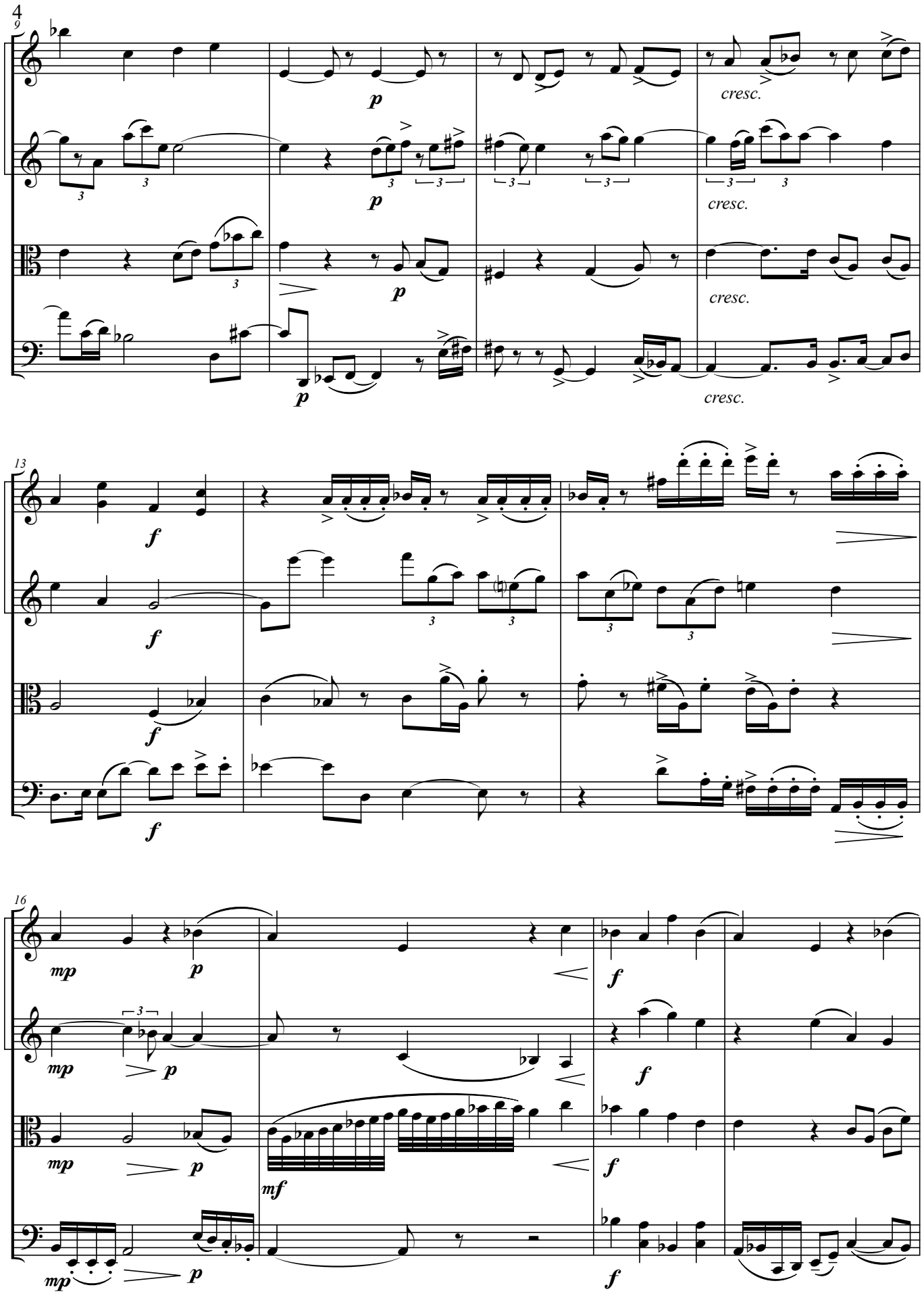
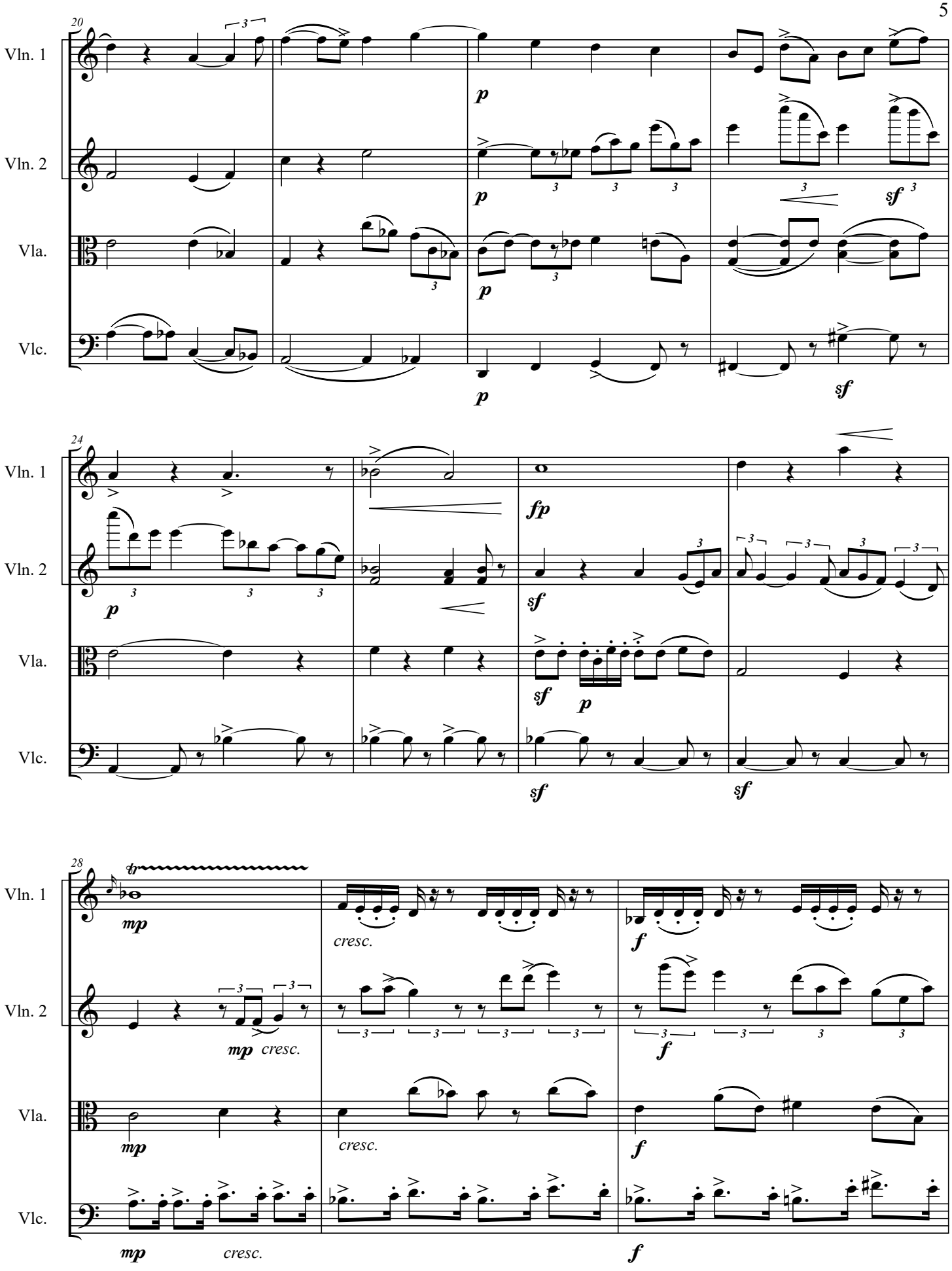

9
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
cresc.
13
f
16
mp
mf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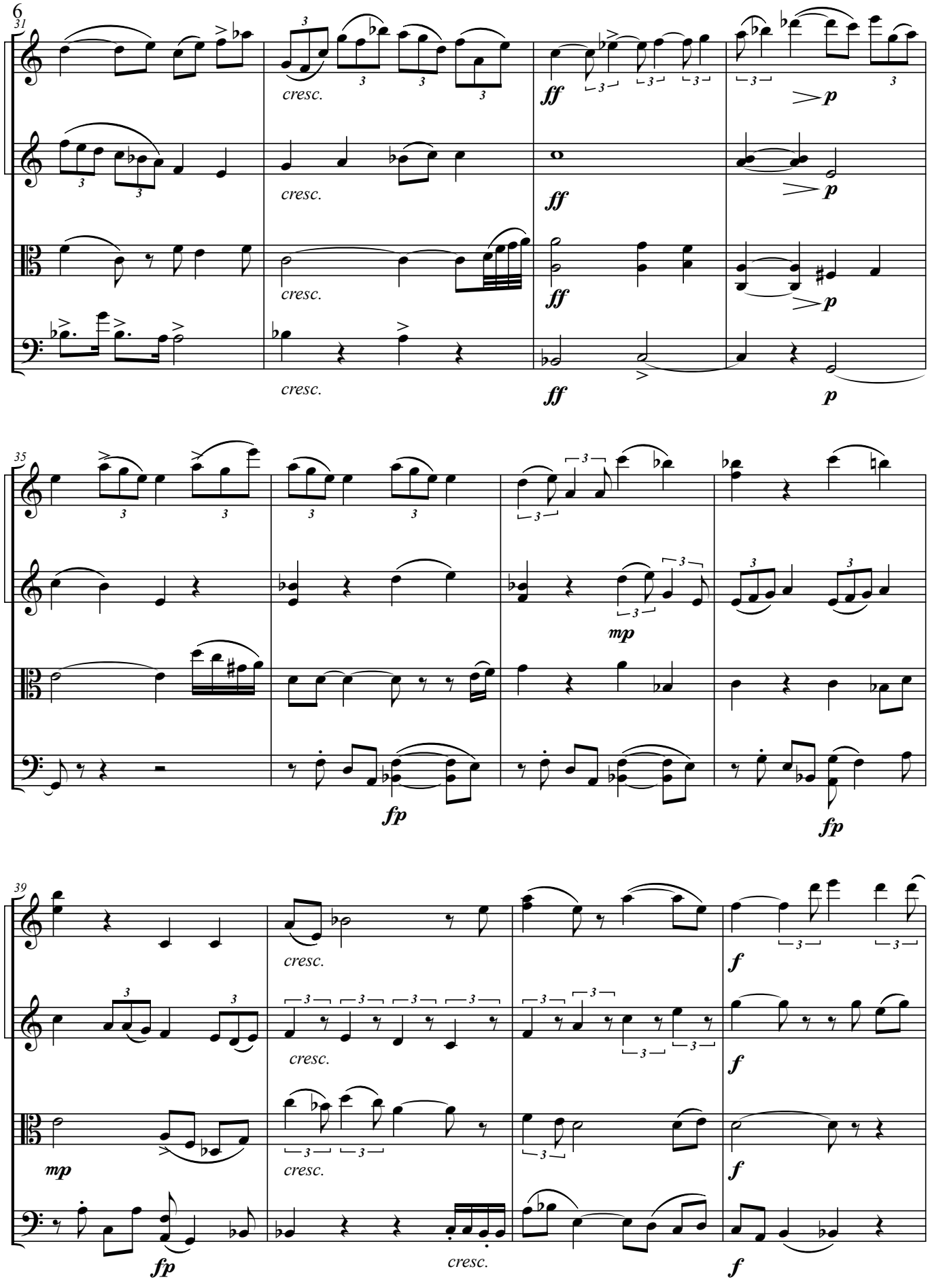
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
sf
24
fp
28
tr
mp
cresc.
f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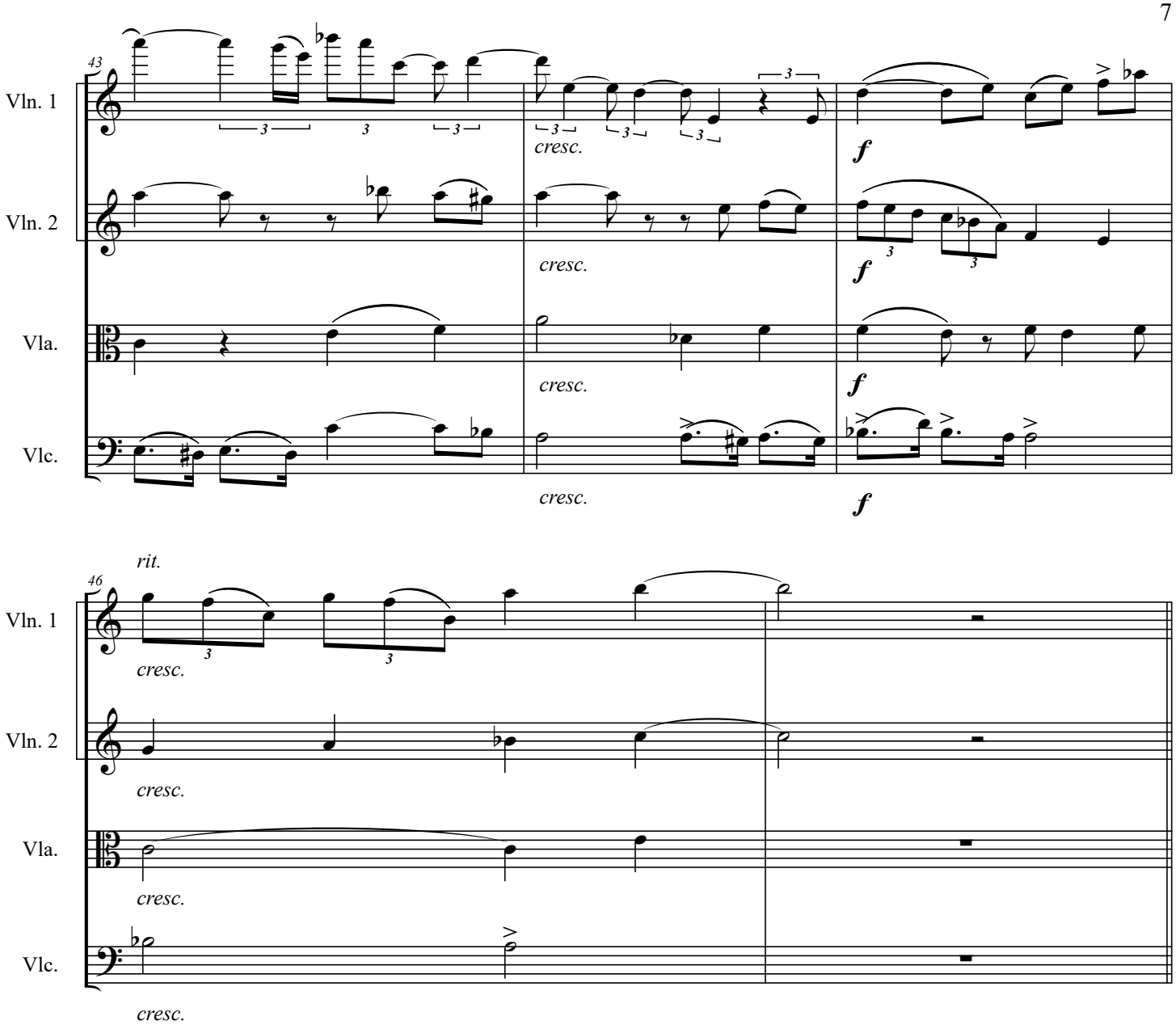
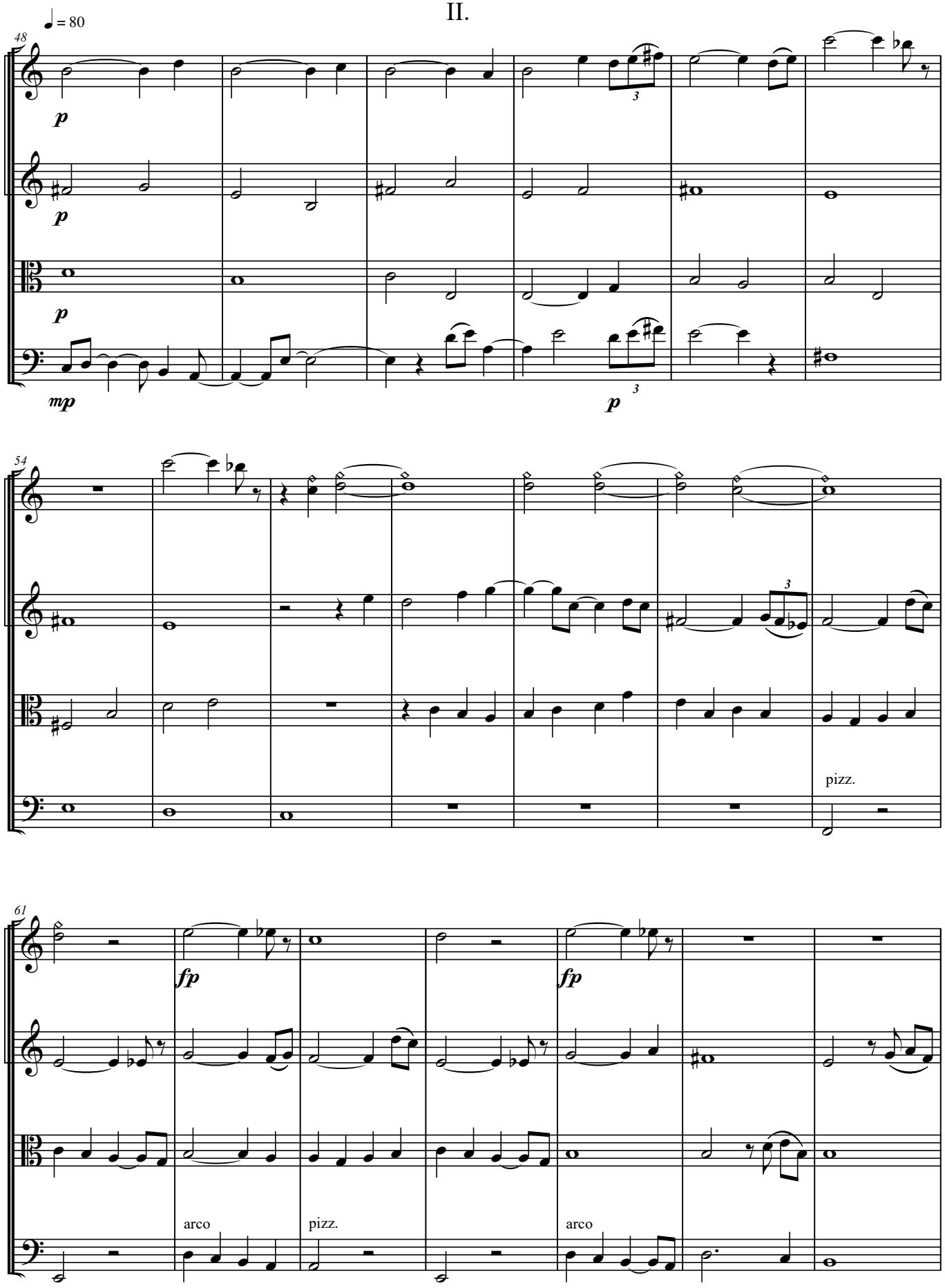
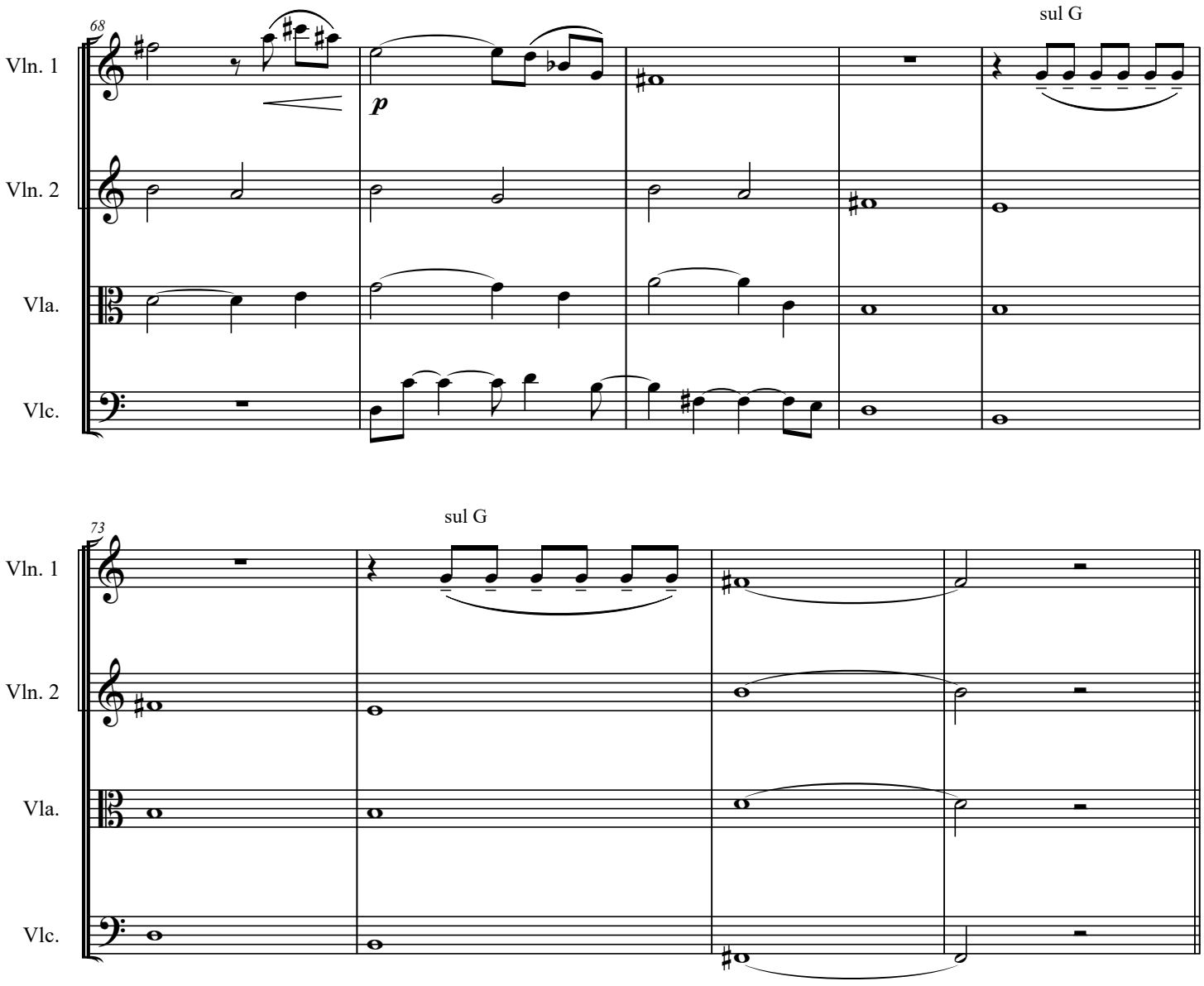
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
cresc.
ff
p
35
mp
fp
39
f


43
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
cresc.
f
rit.
46

II.


♩ = 80
48
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
p
p
mp
p
3
3
54
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
3
pizz.
61
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
fp
fp
arco
pizz.
arco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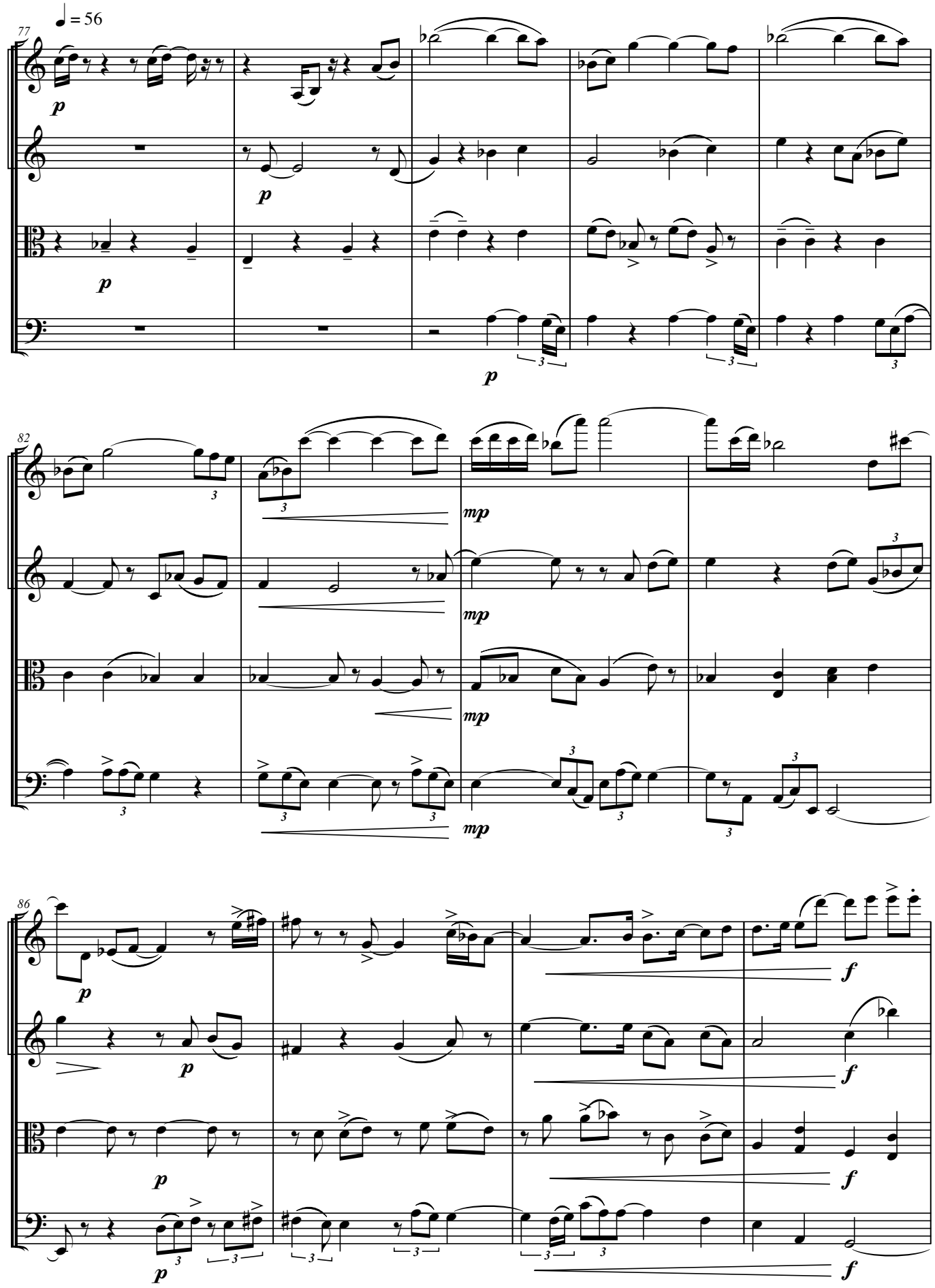
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
sul G
73
sul G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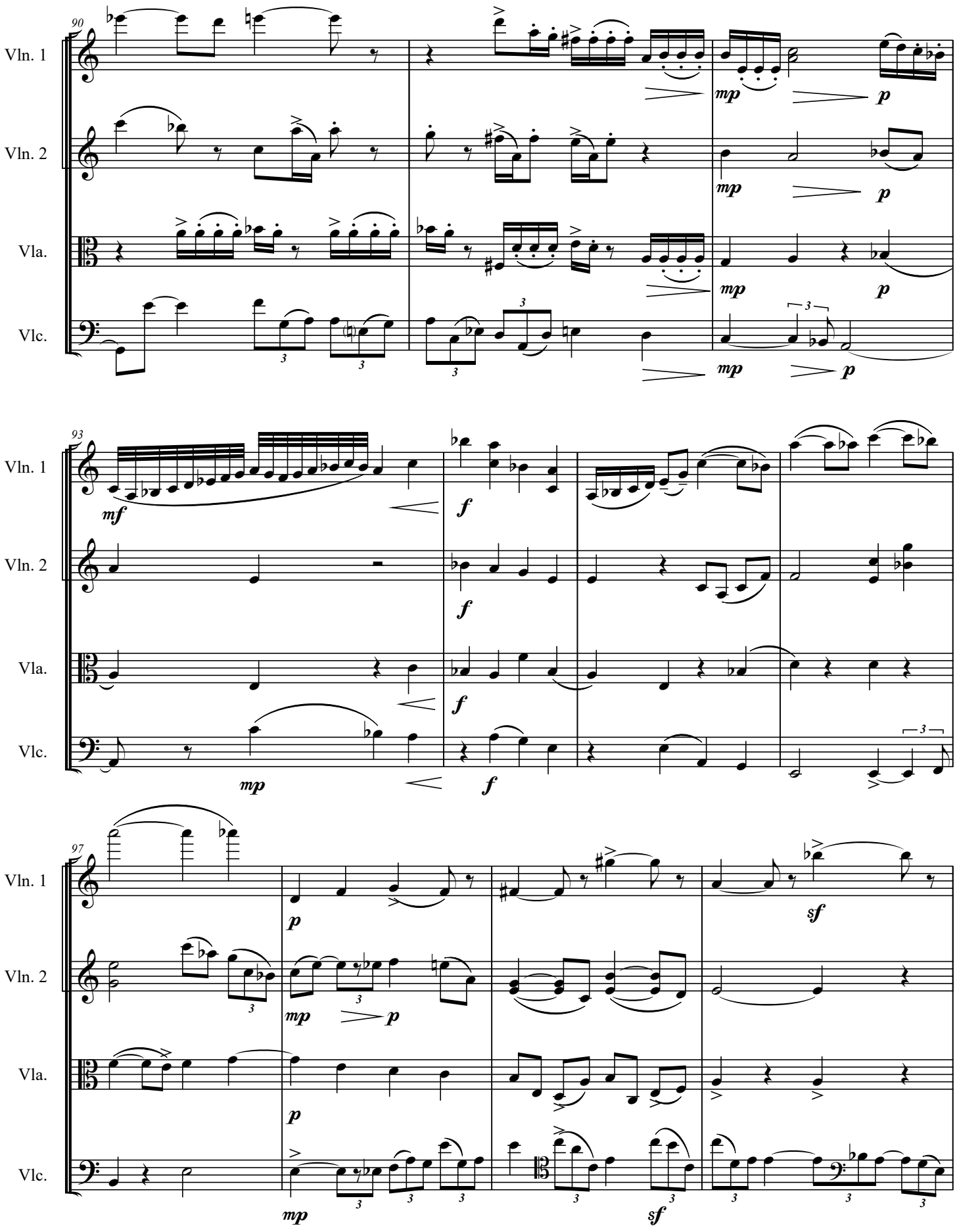
♩ = 56
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
82
mp
86
f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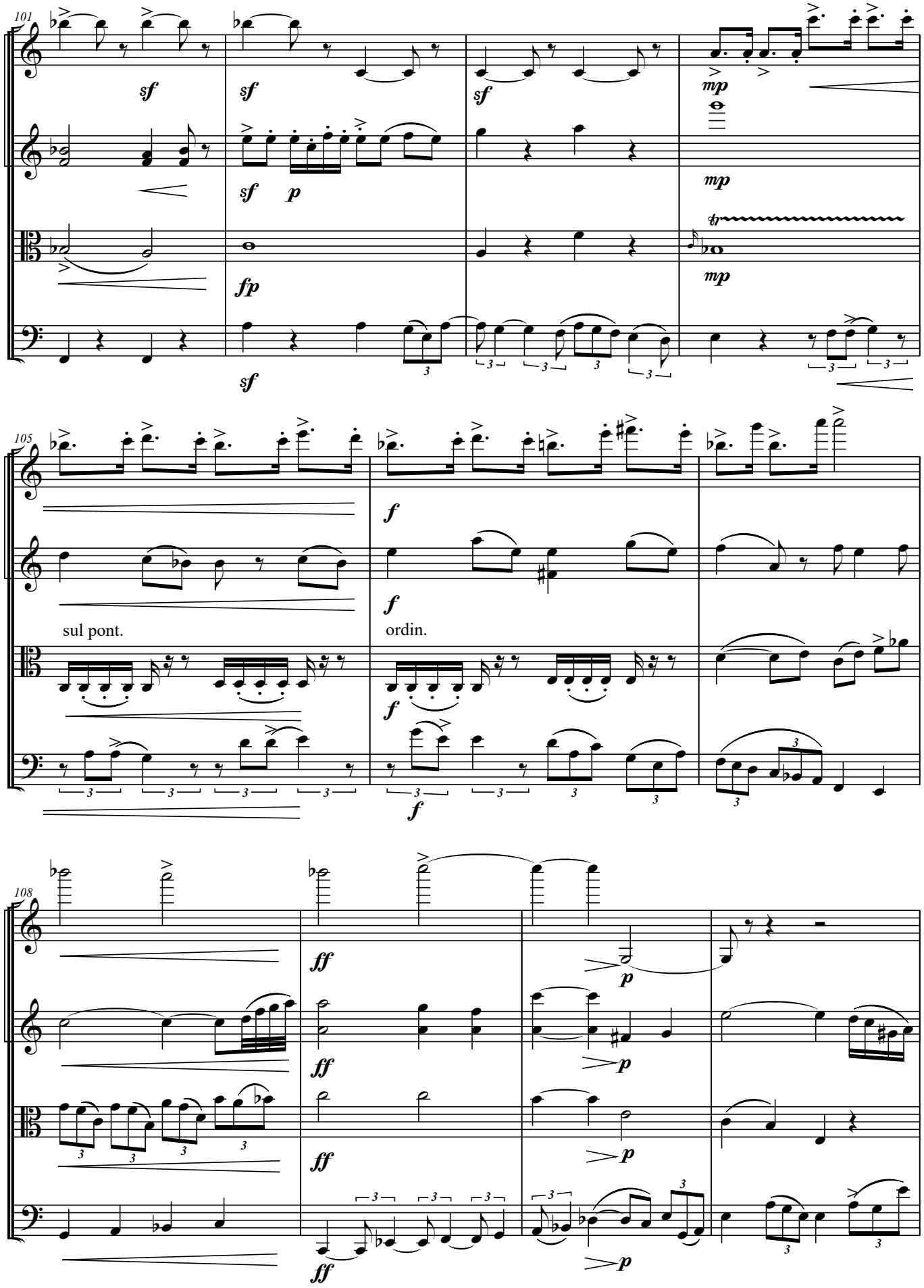
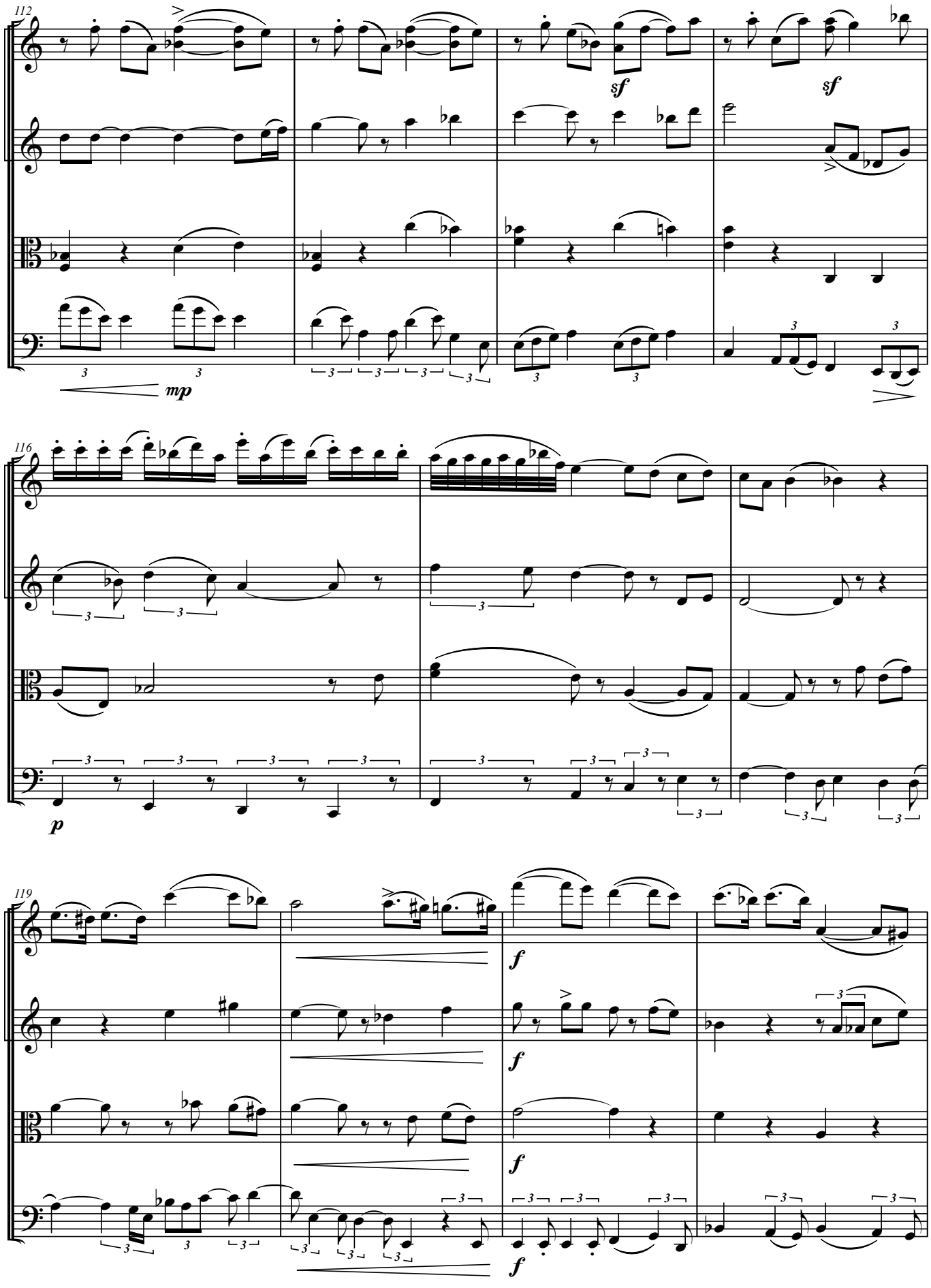
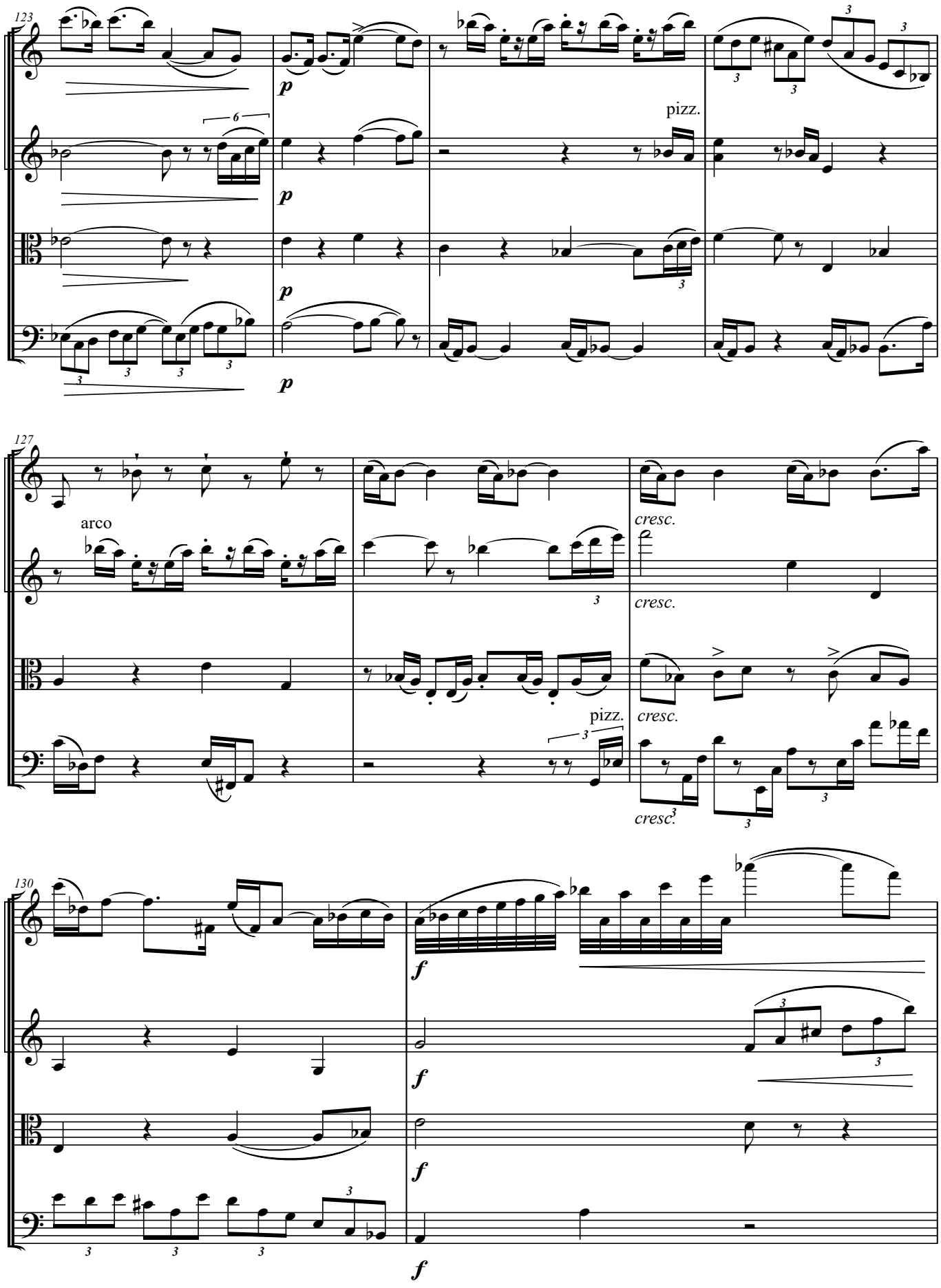
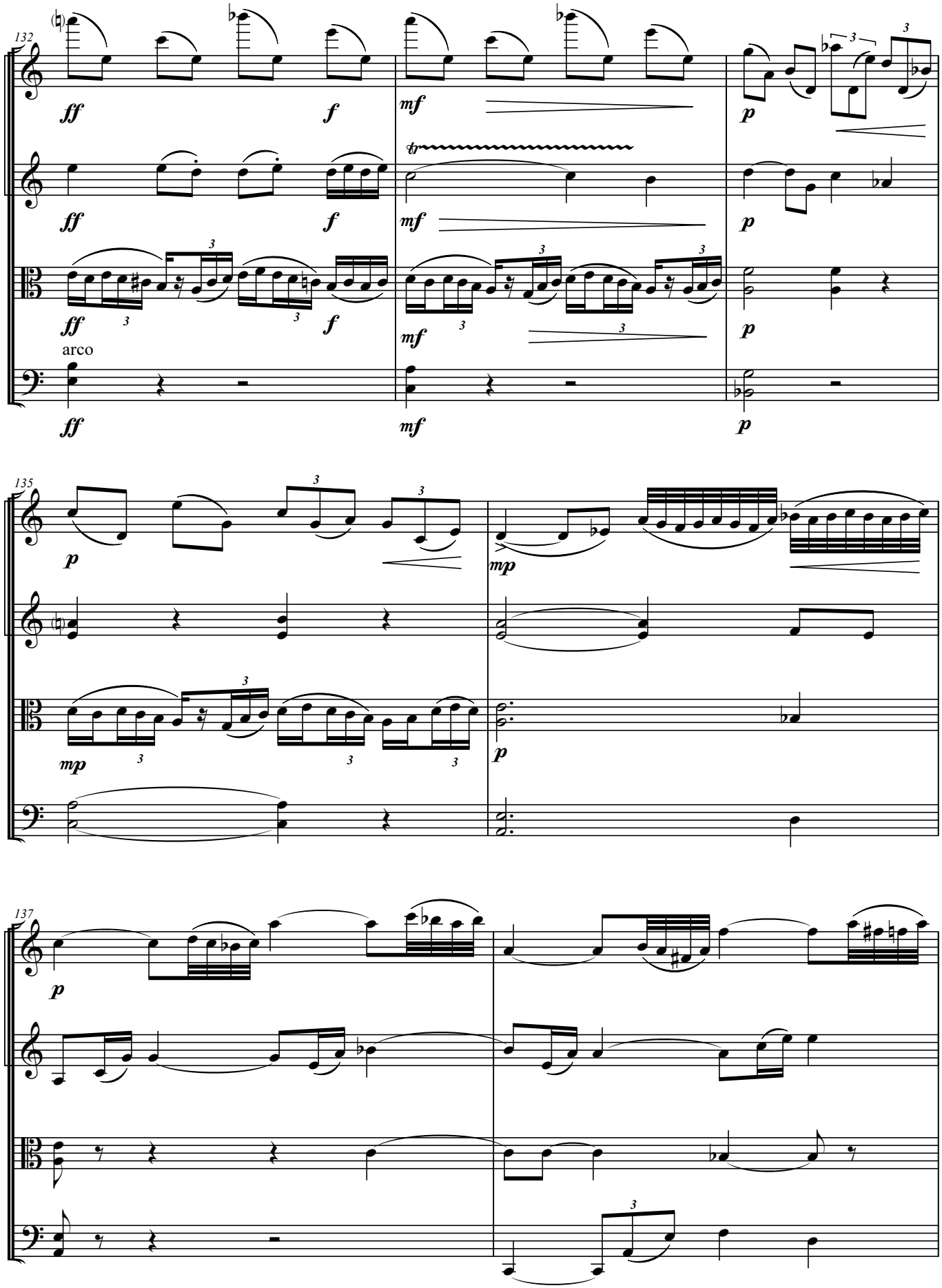
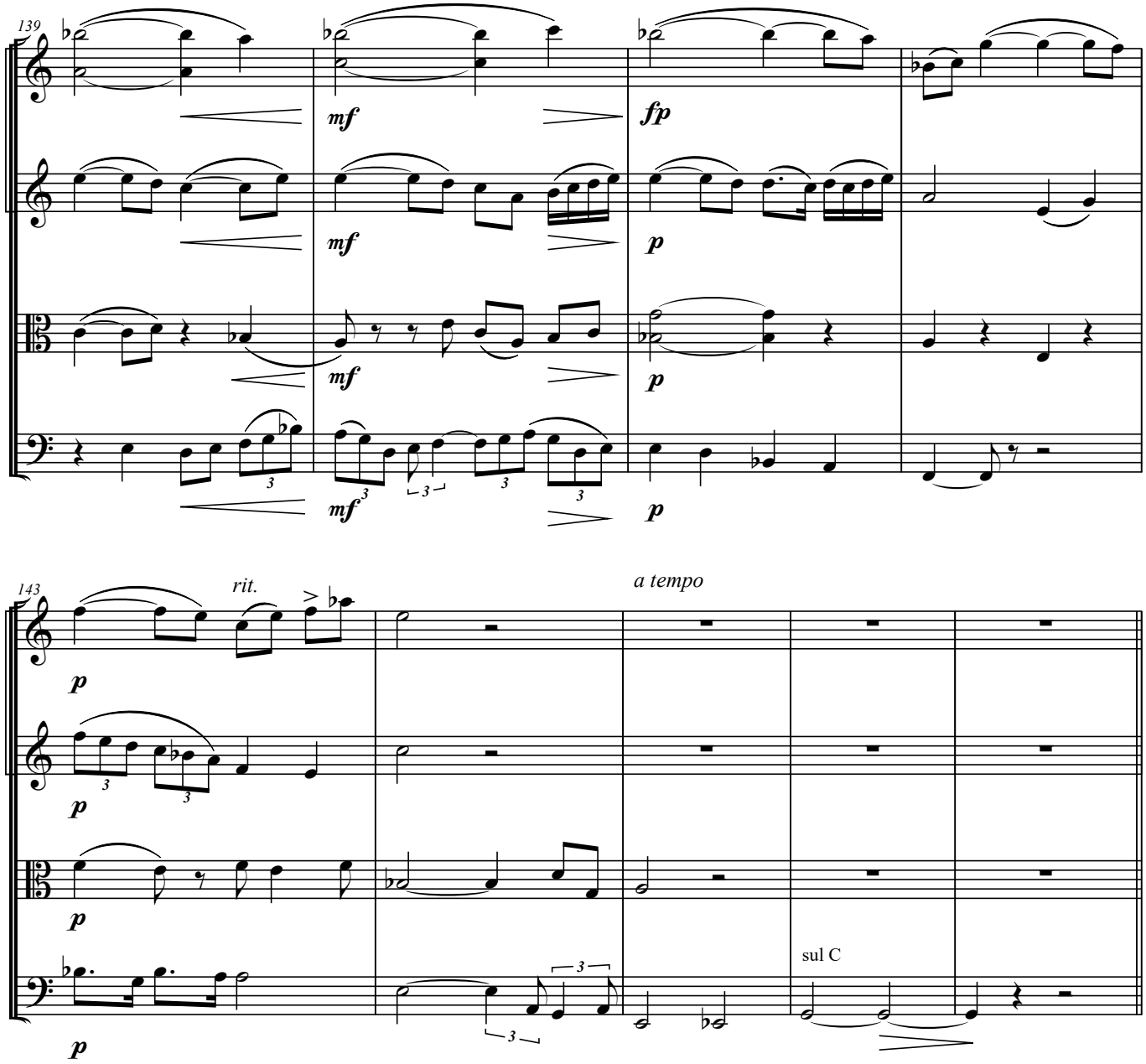
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mp
p
93
mf
f
mp
97
sf

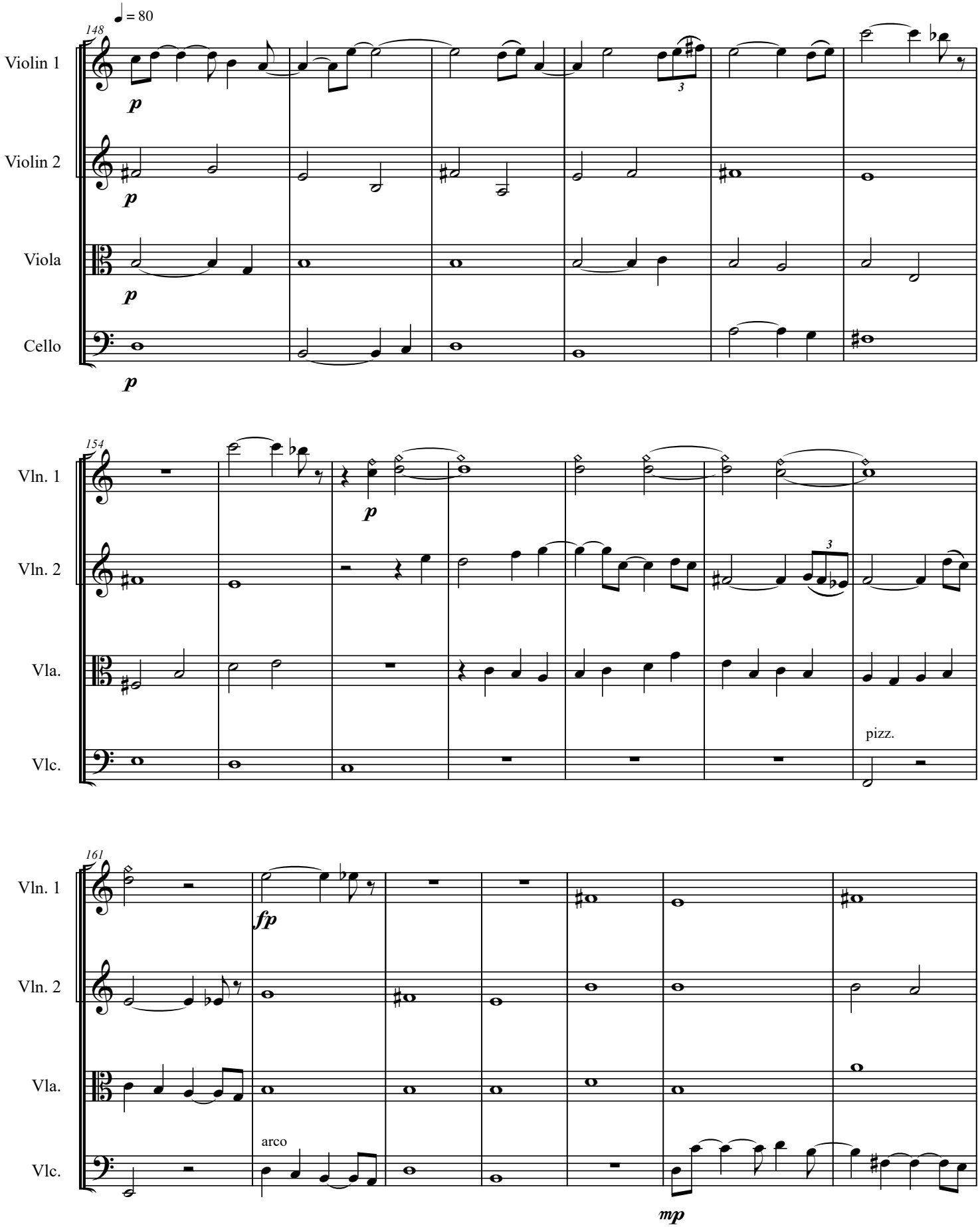

101
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
fp
mp
tr
105
f
sul pont.
ordin.
108
ff
p

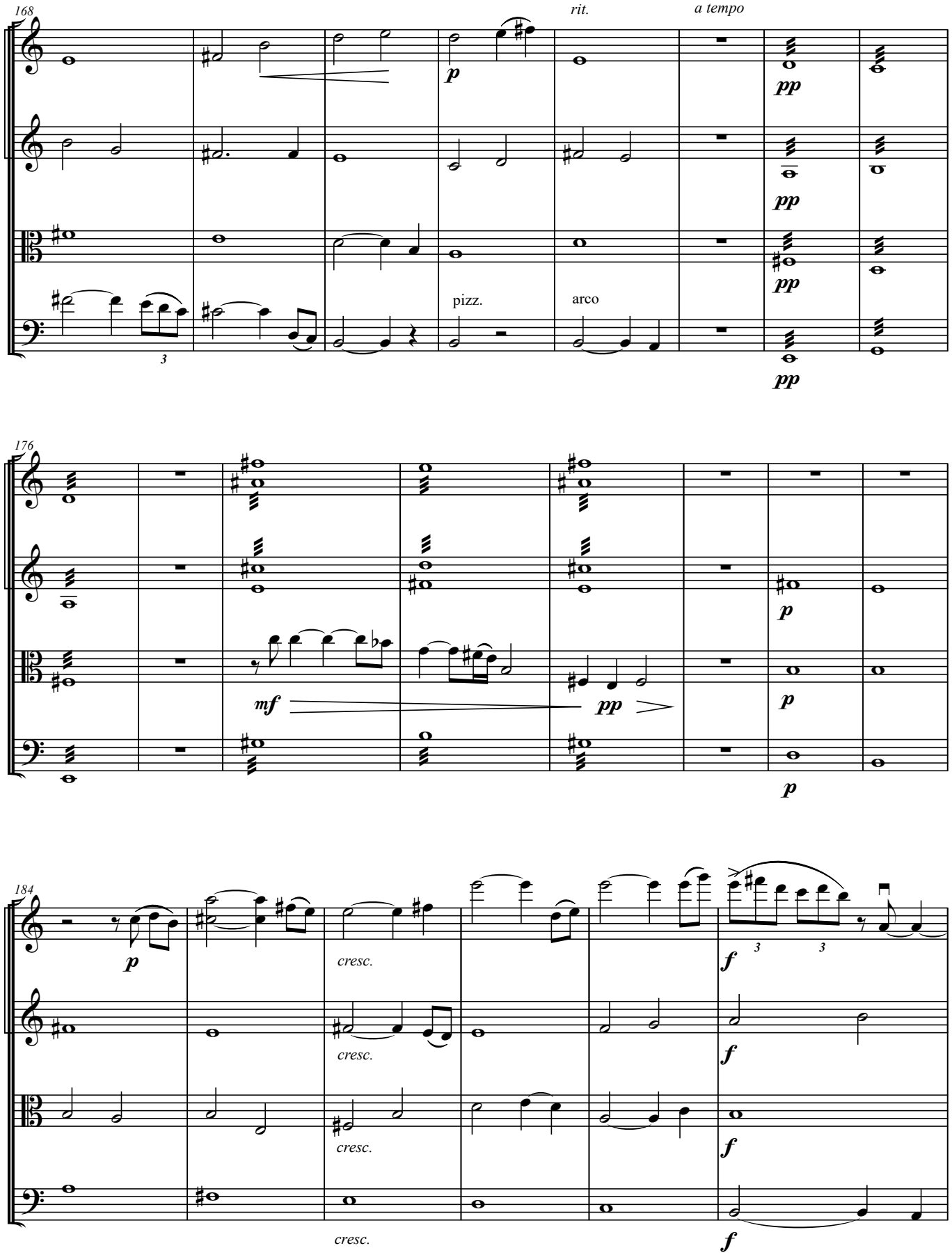

112
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
sf
mp
116
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
119
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
f
f
f
f

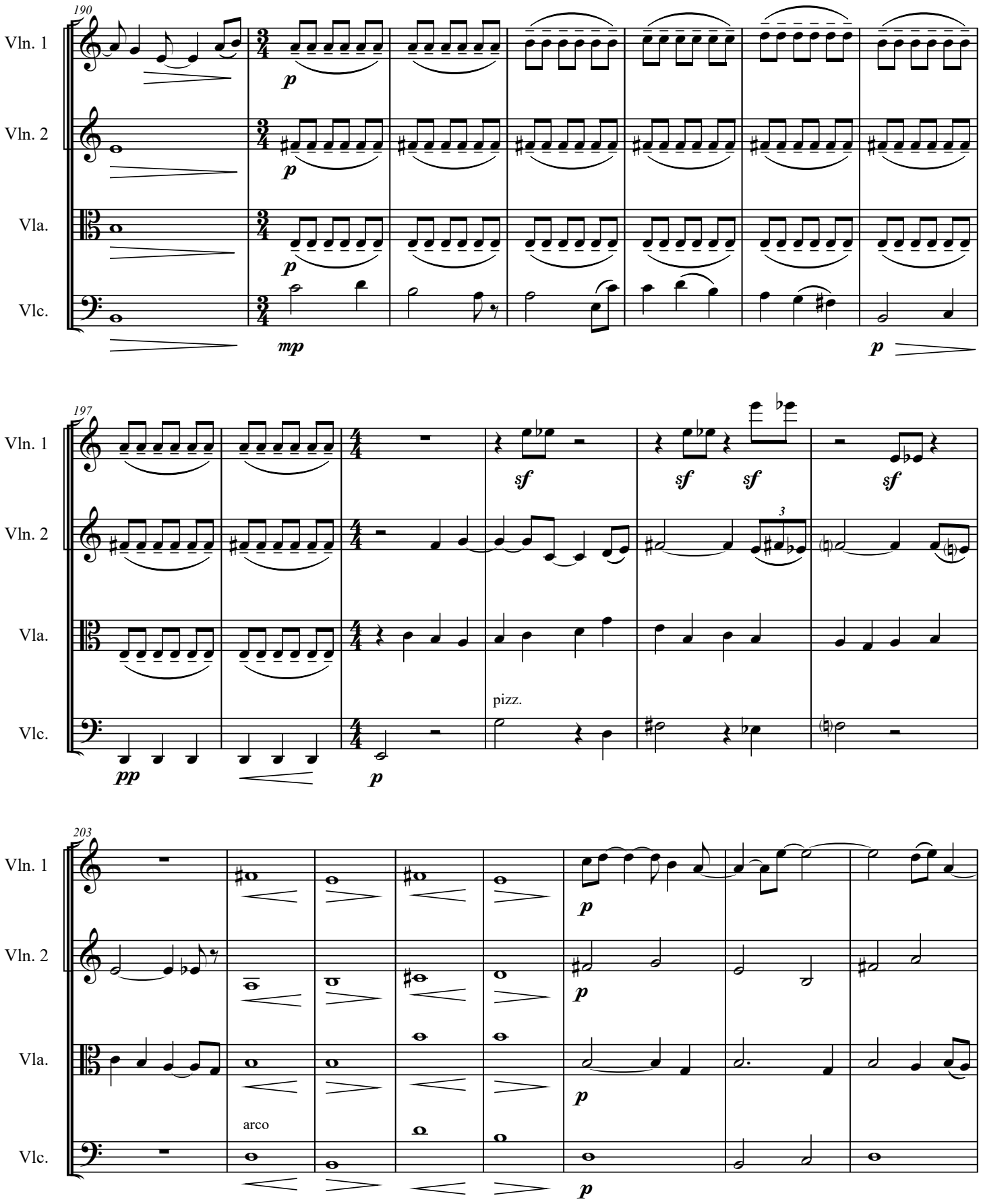

123
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
pizz.
127
arco
cresc.
pizz.
130
f

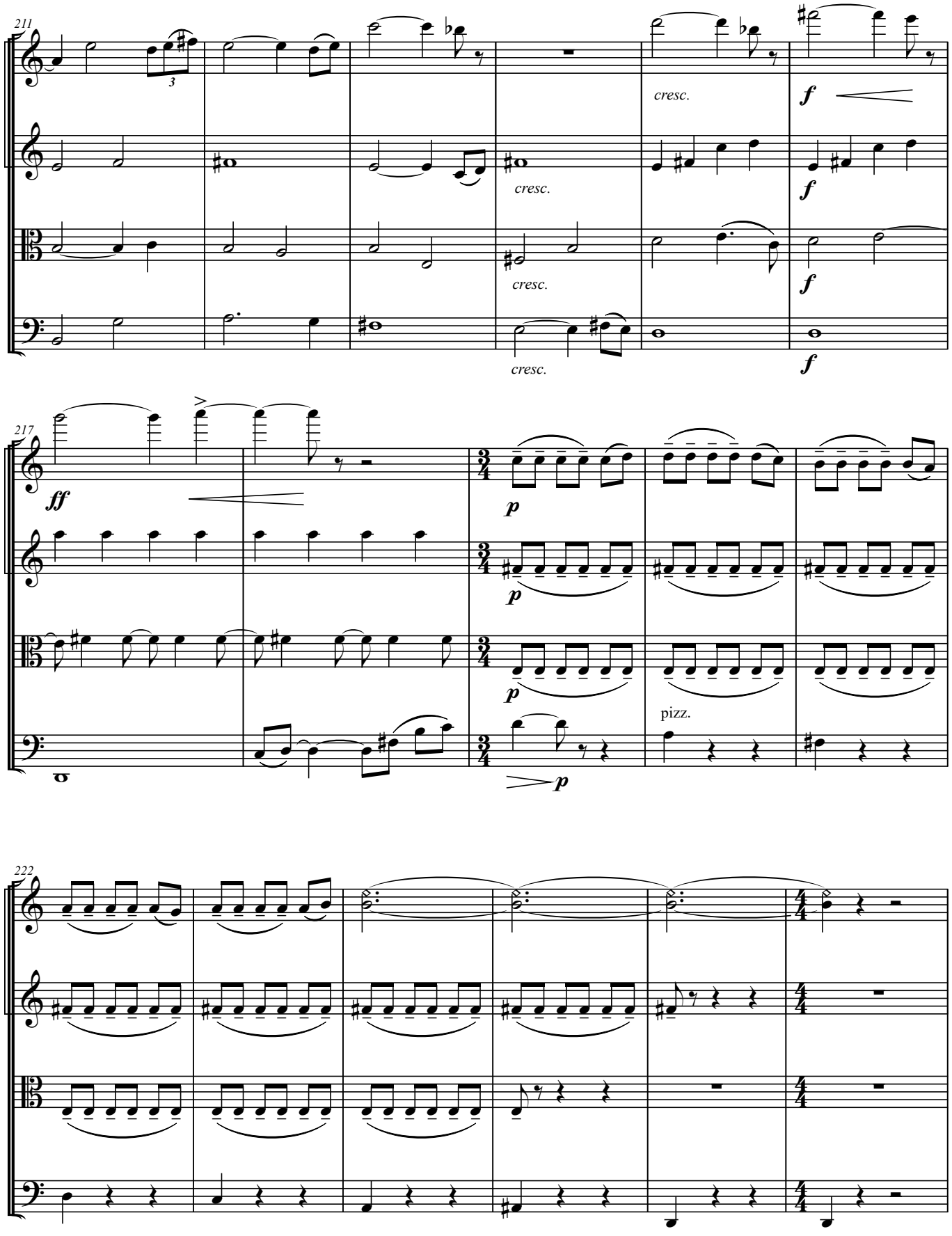

132
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
arco
135
137

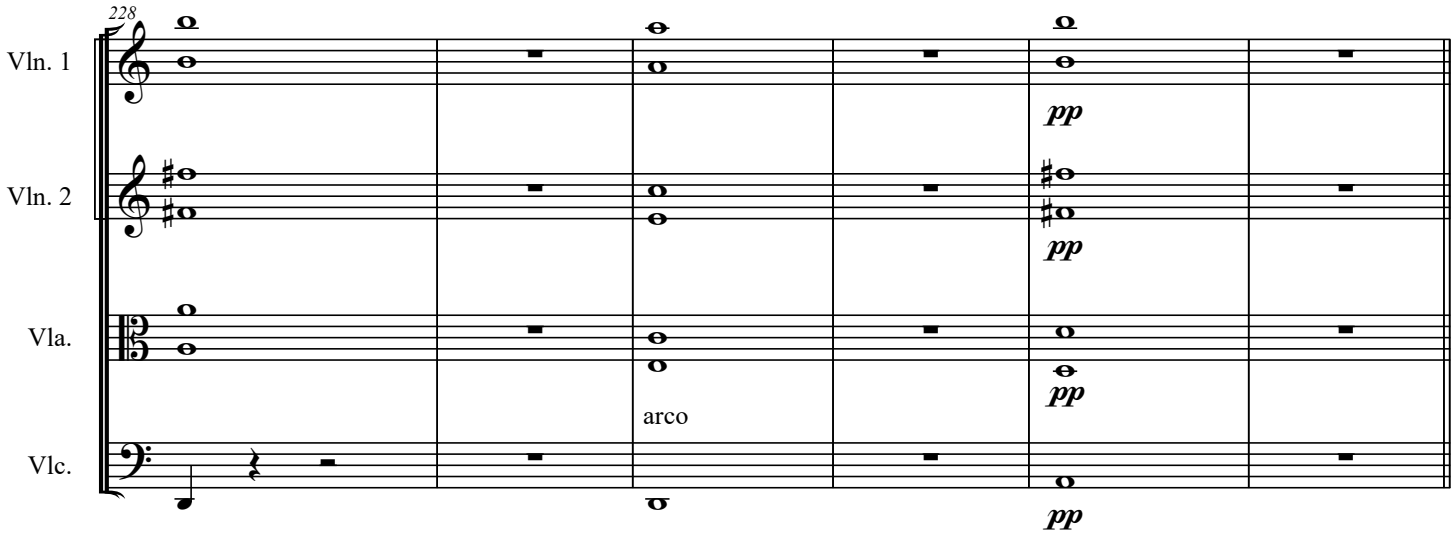

139
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mf
fp
p
143
rit.
a tempo
sul C


148
♩ = 80
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Cello
p
154
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
pizz.
161
fp
arco
mp

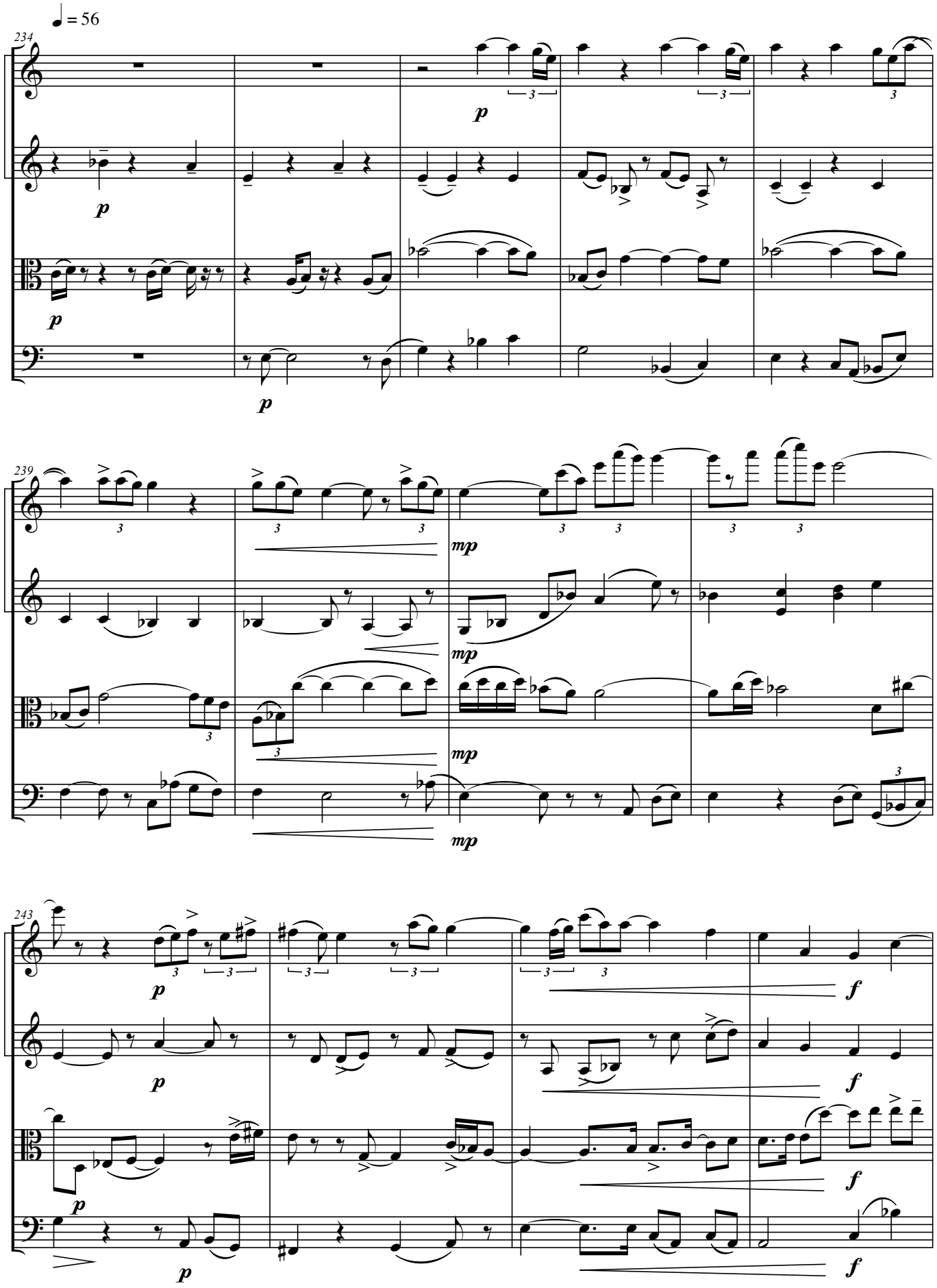

168
rit.
a tempo
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
pizz.
arco
176
184
cresc.

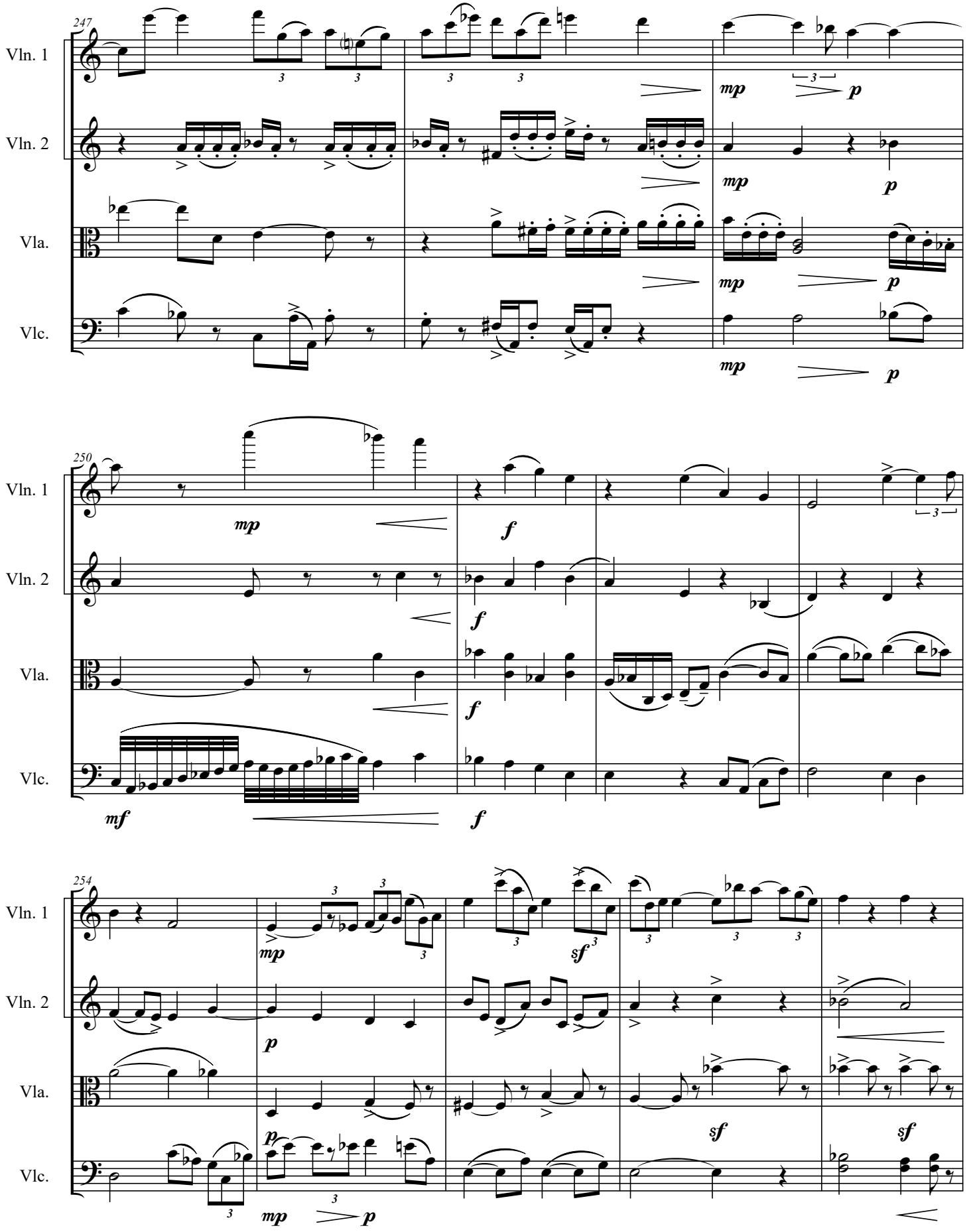

190
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
mp
197
sf
pizz.
pp
3
203
arco


211
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
3
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f
f
217
ff
p
p
p
p
pizz.
222


228
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
pp
pp
pp
arco
pp

I.

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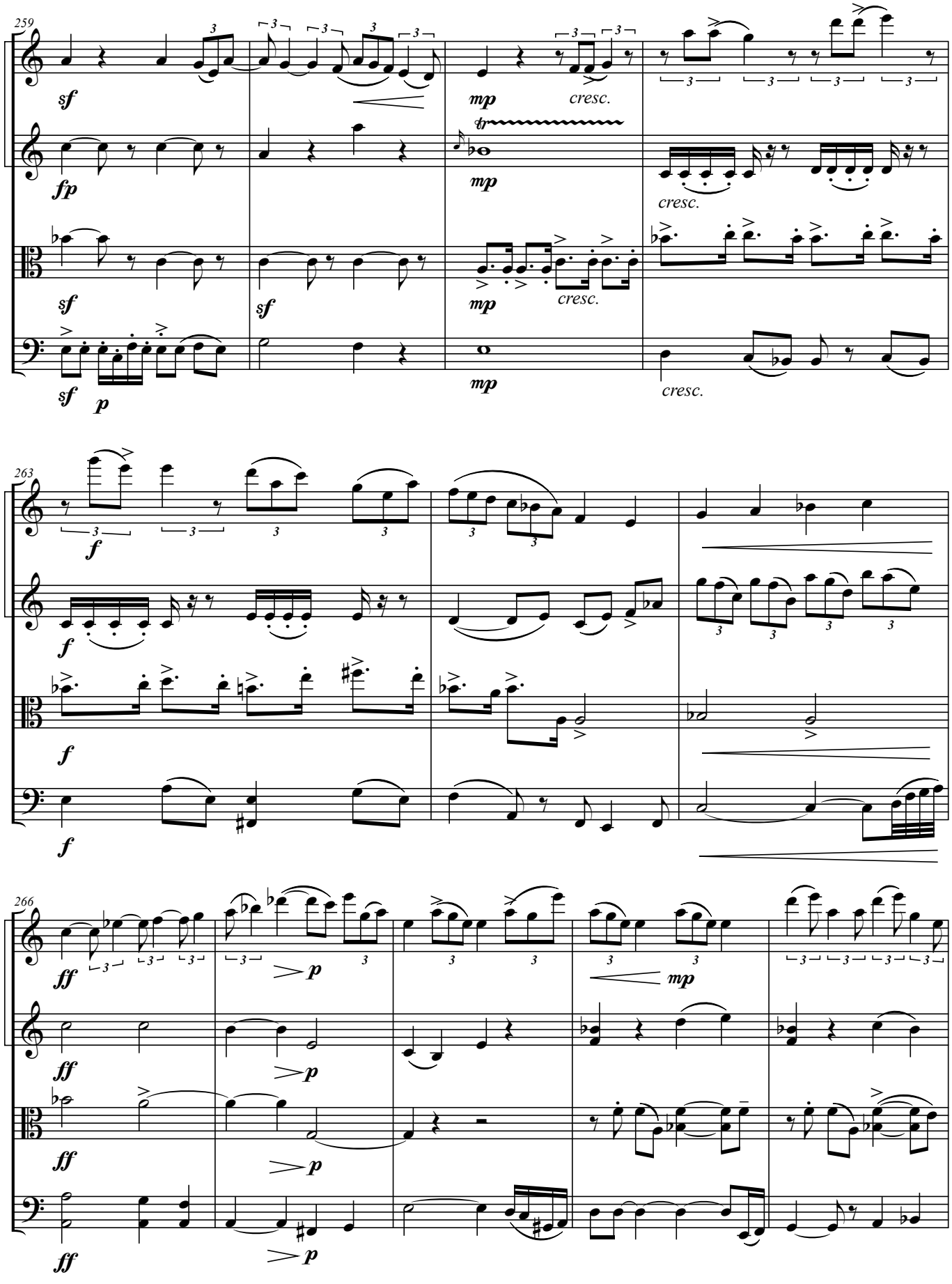
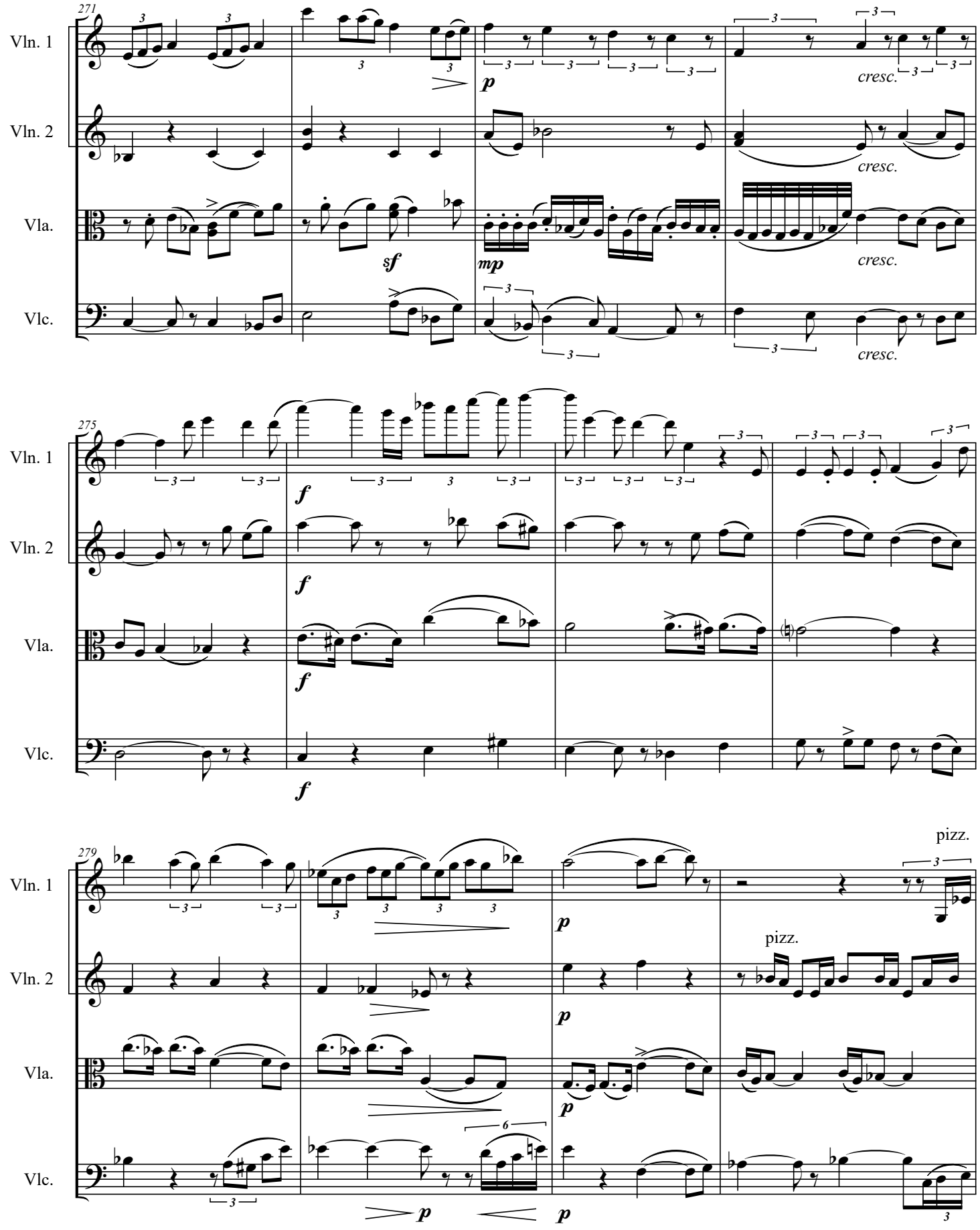
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mp
p
250
mf
f
254
sf


259
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
fp
mp
cresc.
tr
p
263
f
266
ff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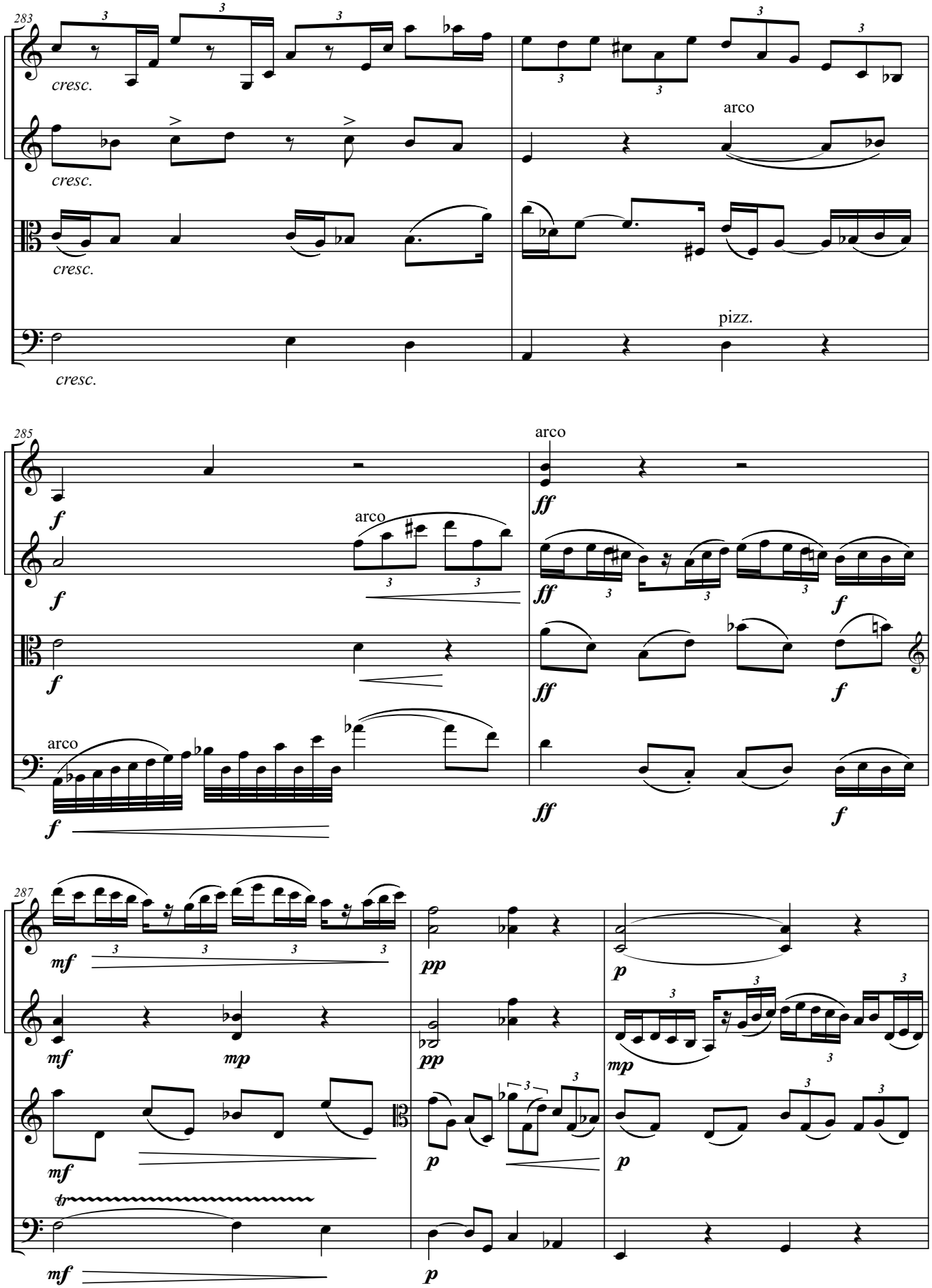
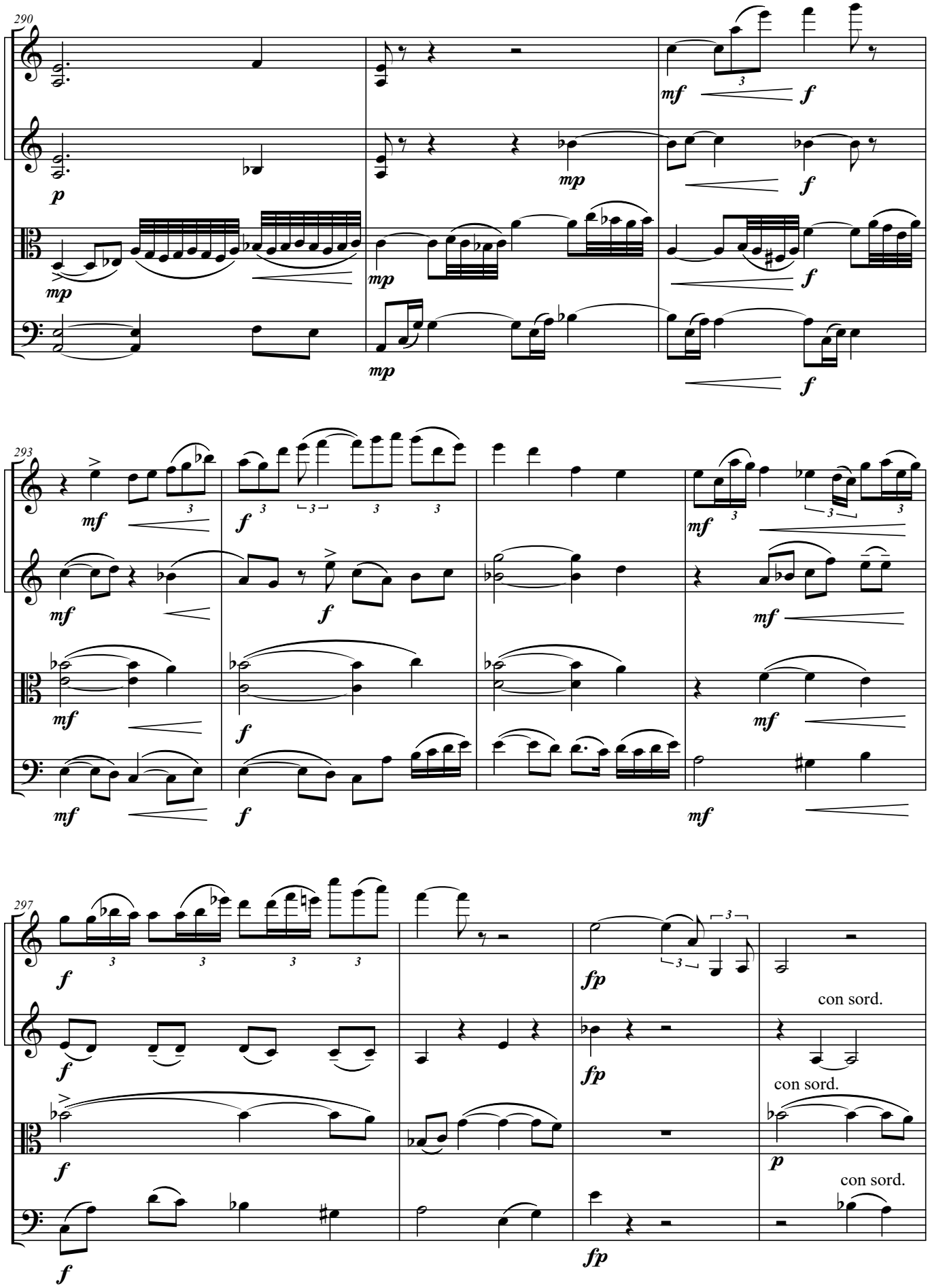
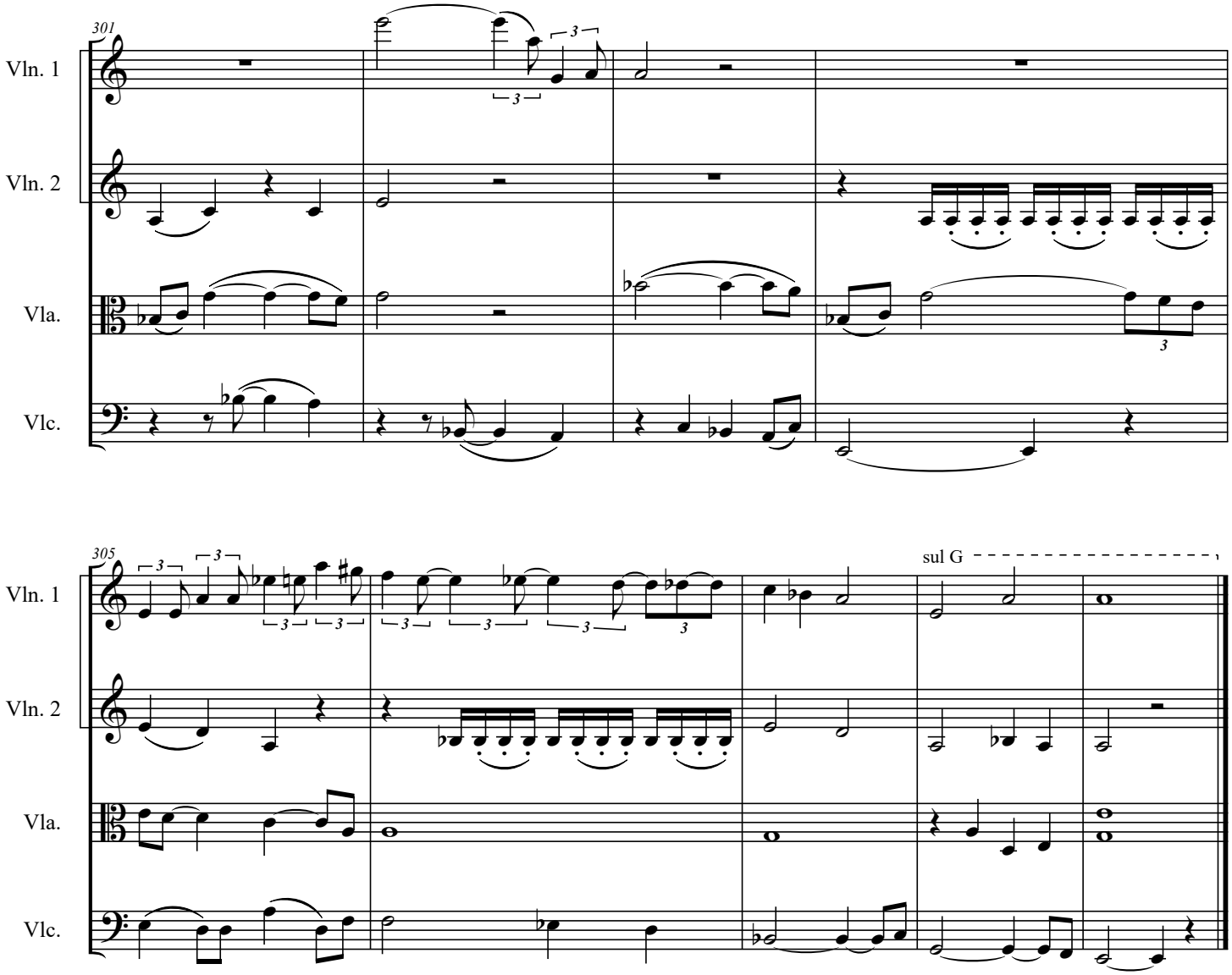
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
cresc.
sf
mp
275
f
279
pizz.


283
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
cresc.
arco
pizz.
285
arco
f
ff
287
mf
mp
pp
p
tr


290
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
293
297
con sord.
con sord.
con sord.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Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
305
sul G