Beginning with Time

String Quartet no. 3

2008 / 2014 / 2020

Lawrence Kramer

Beginning with Time: String Quartet no. 3

The title of this quartet comes from "To a Reason," a prose poem from Arthur Rimbaud's *Illuminations* (1886):

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

The poem intimates that we are all children who plead in song for a change of fate. Moved by music--a tap on the drum that releases a world of sound--we ask for the change to begin with a sifting out, the separation of the scourges of time from its potential to incubate "the new harmony" and "the new love."

My quartet aims to give musical form to this sifting out. It answers to what may be the primary feature of our relationship to time: the wish to have *enough* time, time enough for our feelings and hopes and desires and plans to be fulfilled, to come out right. The quartet reorders its musical time to accommodate that wish. Its two movements occur in a five-part alternation rather than a two-part sequence. Both have a slow basic tempo but they pace themselves in contrasting, complemengary ways. The first movement is volatile and tends to quicken its note motion. The second movement is tranquil and tends to linger. The recurrences of these movements relive them, reshape them, and expand the time allotted to them. Within this large pulsation, each movement eventually finds the time it wants and needs, both in itself and as the complenent of the other.

The first movement aims to reconcile longimg and urgemcy, soaring amd swirling, in summoning up the "arrival of always": transfigured time. The second movement aims to reconcile an affinity for tender melody with a pensive flow of counterpoint offset by chordal passages. The first movement is essentially the same each time we hear it, but it is also new because its recurrences change which instrument plays what part, thus transforming the texture and sonority and sometimes the melody and harmony. The second movement changes differently. Upon returning it recalls its first occurrence but only to leave it behind. As time passes, it becomes clear that neither movement can arrive amywhere, let alone go everywhere, without the help of the other. Only when the returning second movement comes to rest can the first movement, which has already returned once, return again and do the same. Only together can the can the two movements plead fully for a time, a someday, in which the wishes of the children might be granted.

The pains and possibilities of time also shaped the composition of this quartet, which extended over a period of twelve years.

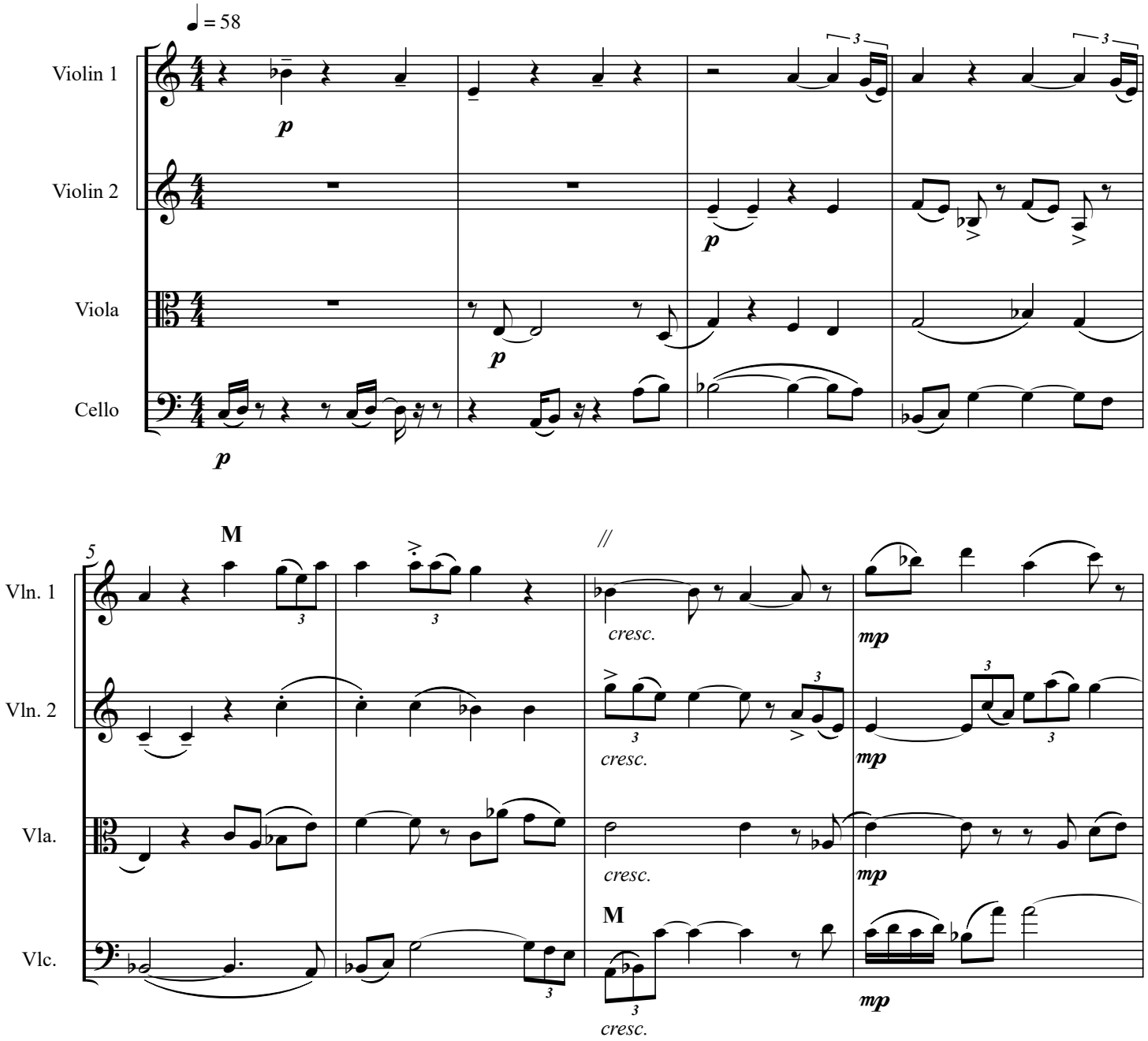
Duration: 20-21 minutes.

Performance note: where the marking is needed, the main voice is indicated by a boldface capital **M,** canceled where necessary by a double slash //. At times the main voice moves rapdily from one instrument to another.

Beginning with Time

I.

Lawrence Kramer



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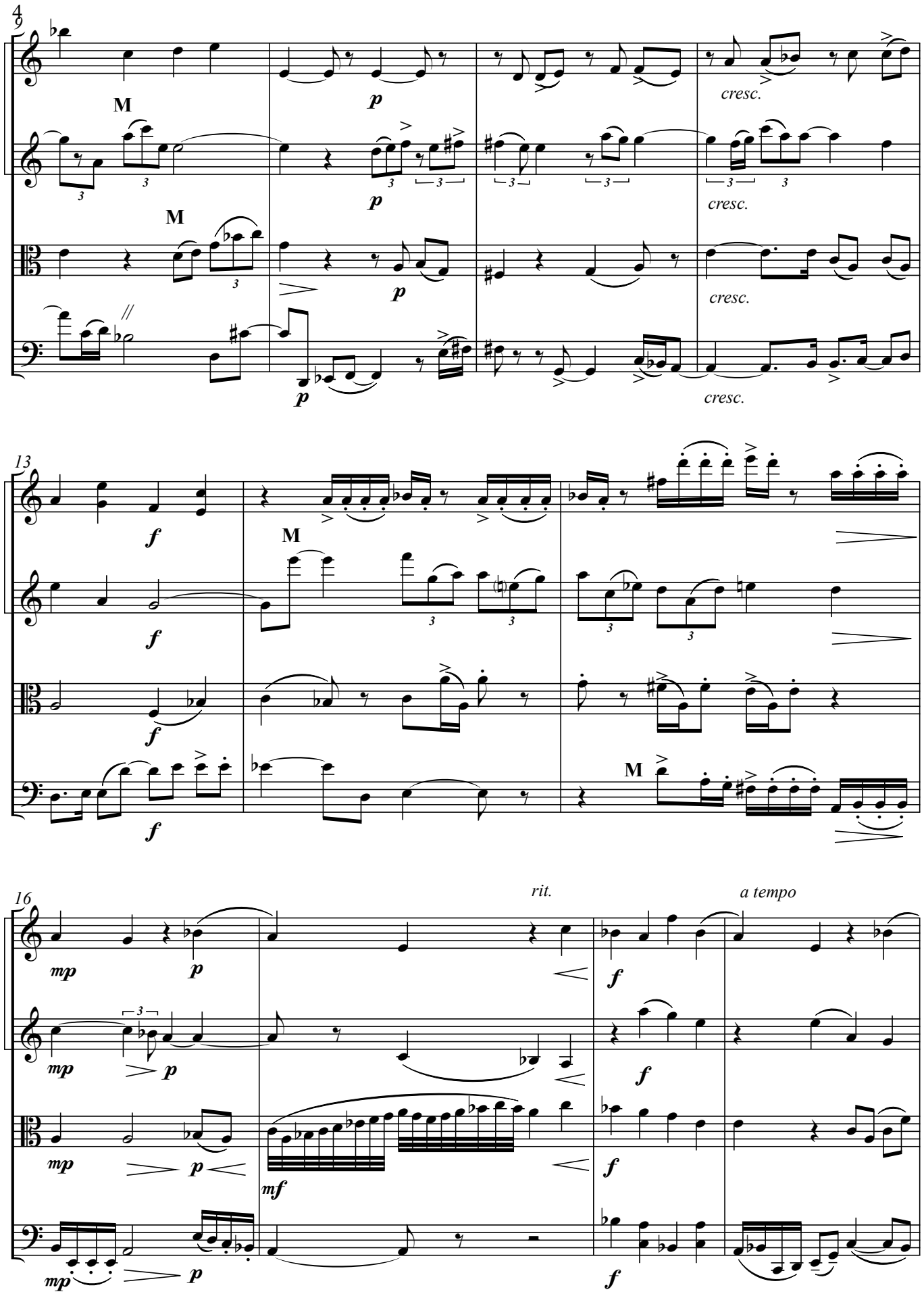
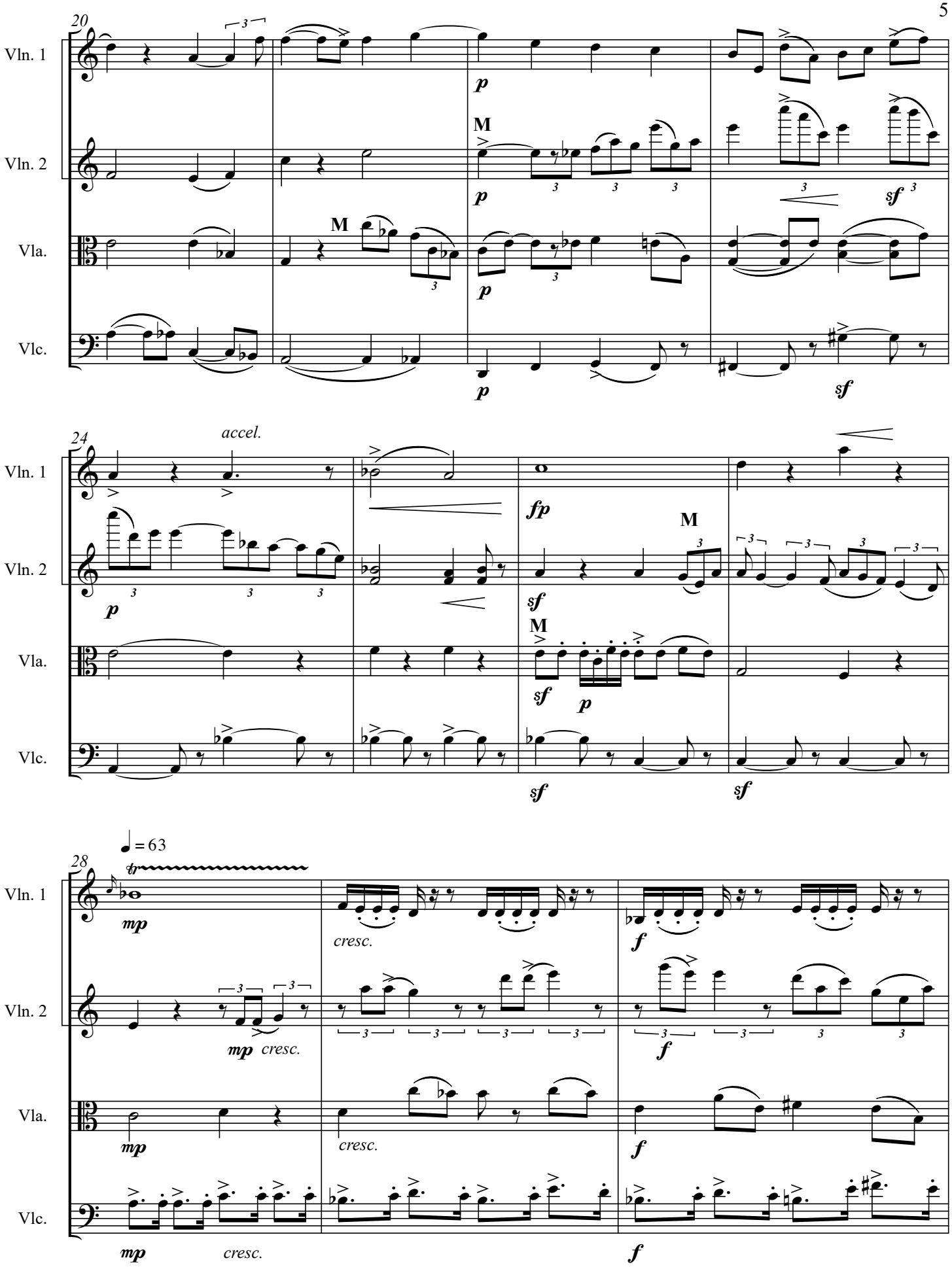
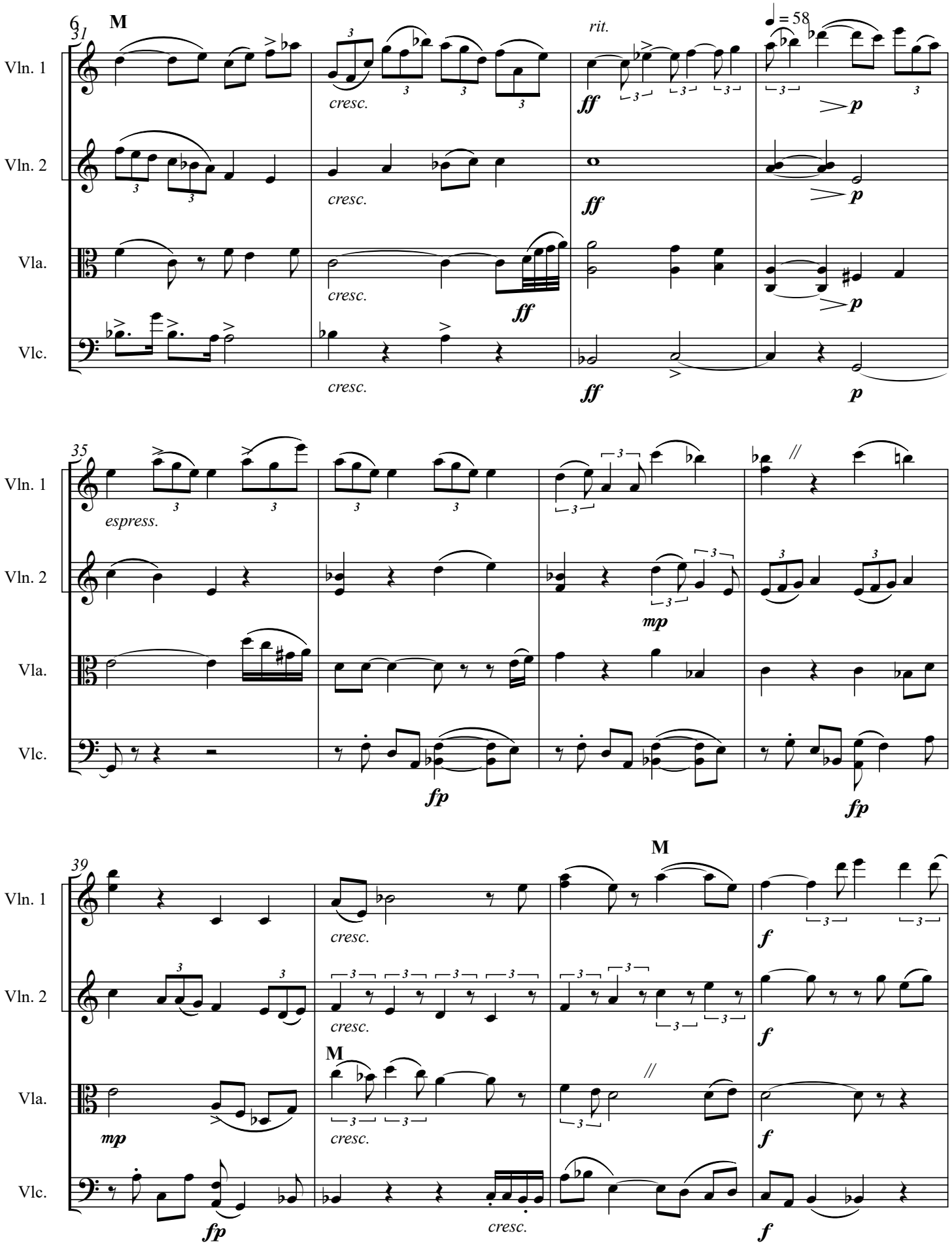
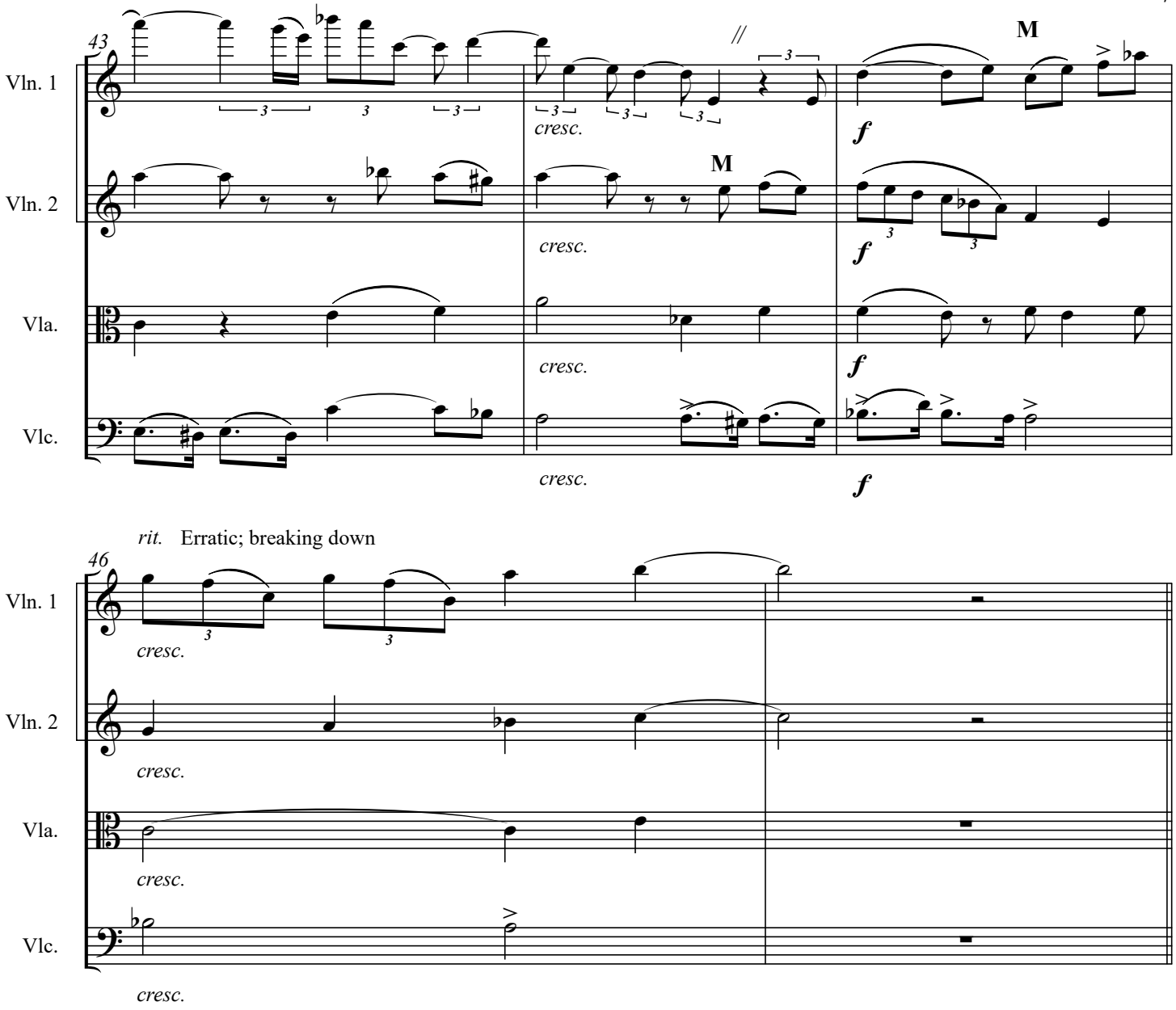

4
9
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
M
p
cresc.
13
f
16
rit.
a tempo
mp
mf

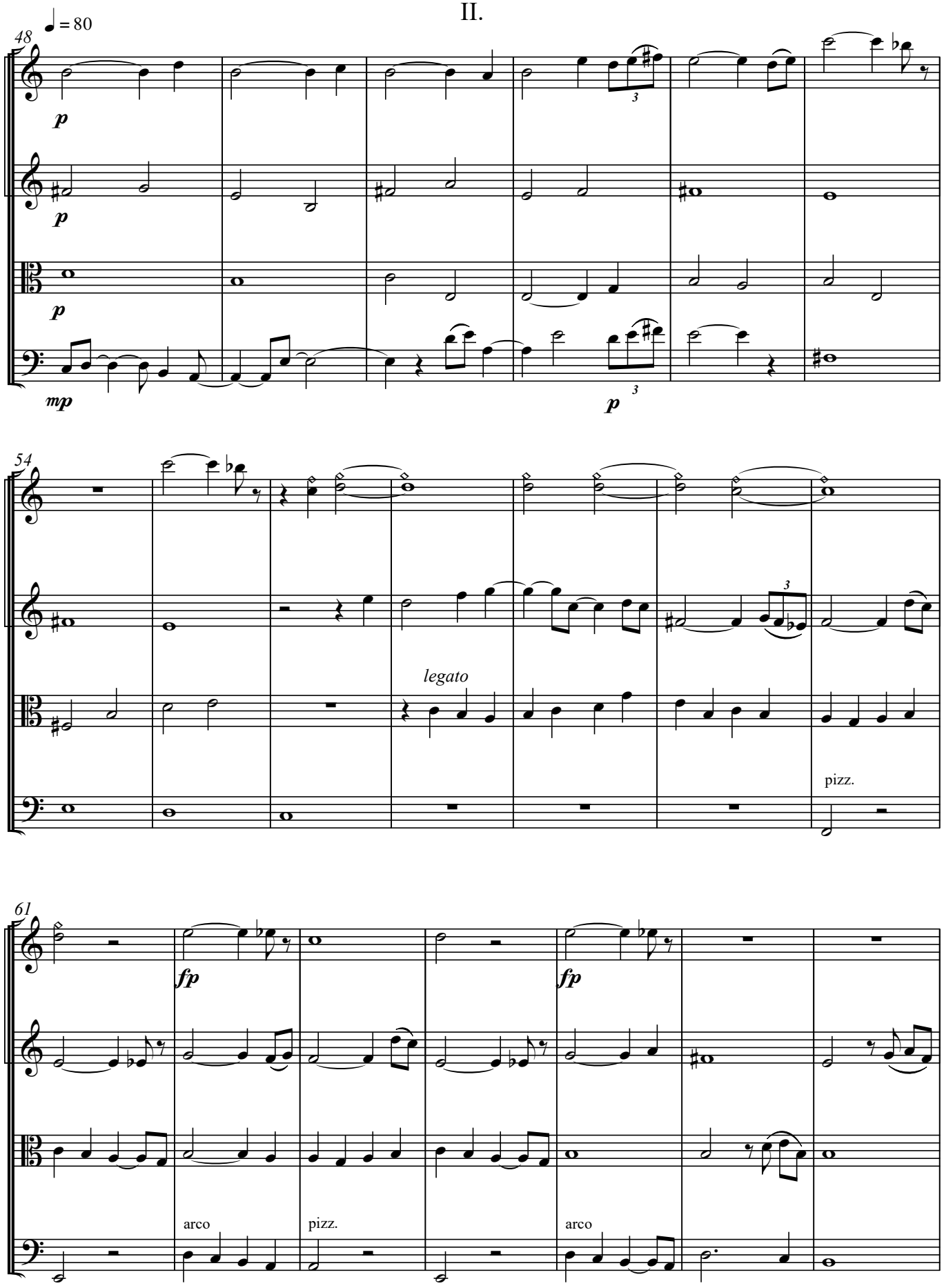

20
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
M
p
sf
24
accel.
fp
sf
28
♩ = 63
mp
cresc.
f

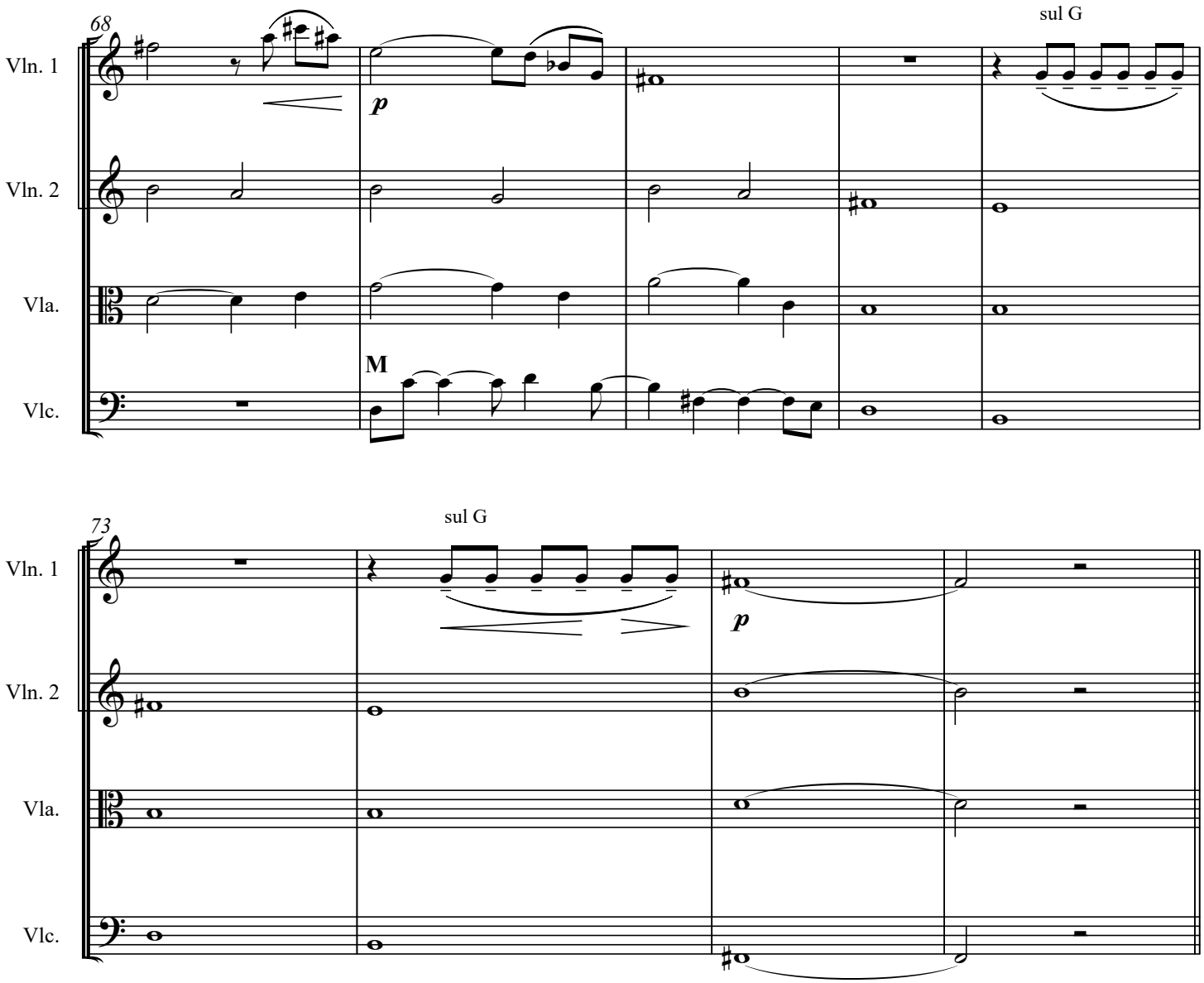

6
31
M
rit.
♩ = 58
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
cresc.
ff
p
35
espress.
mp
fp
39
M
f
mp



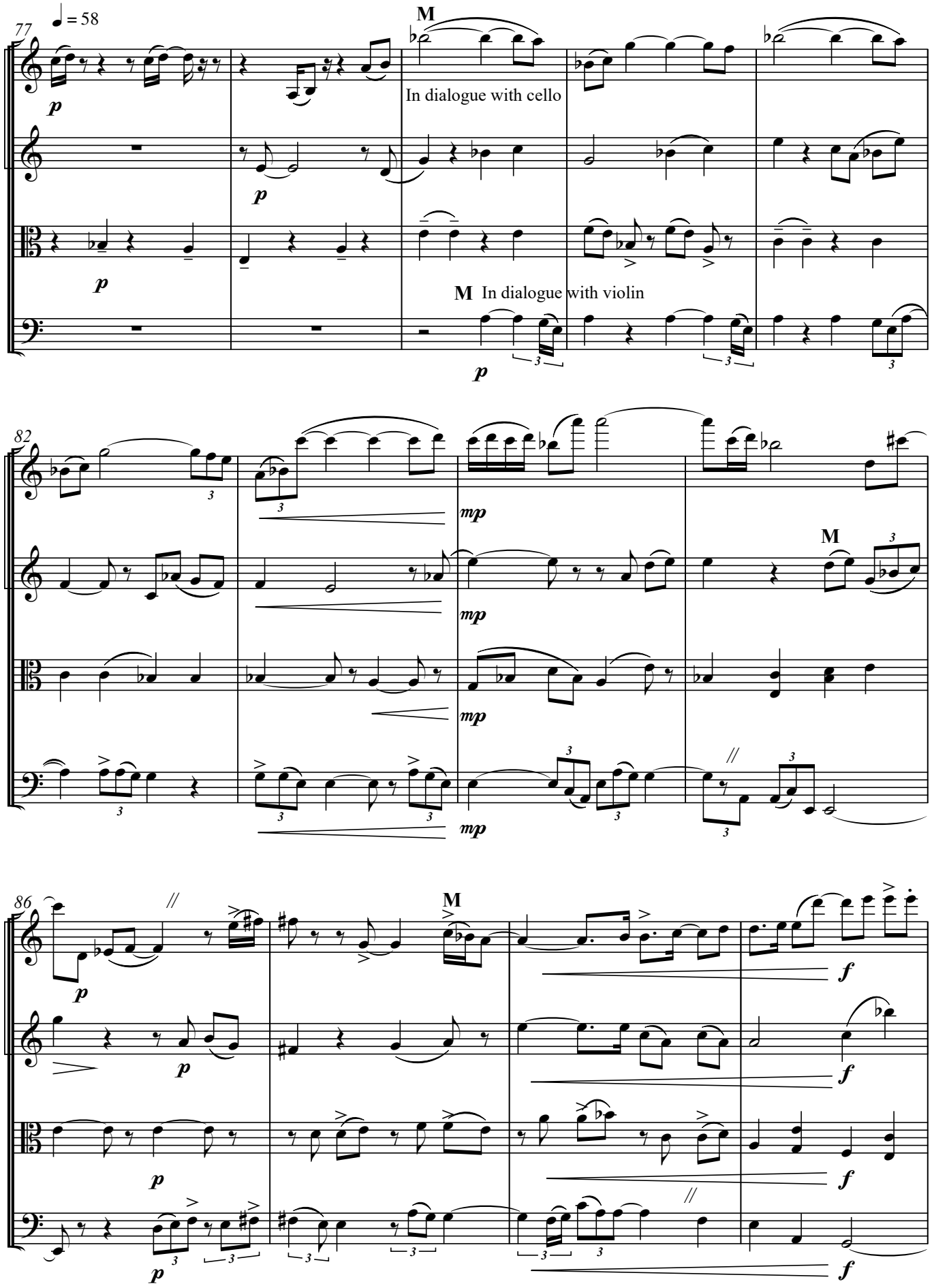
rit. Erratic; breaking down

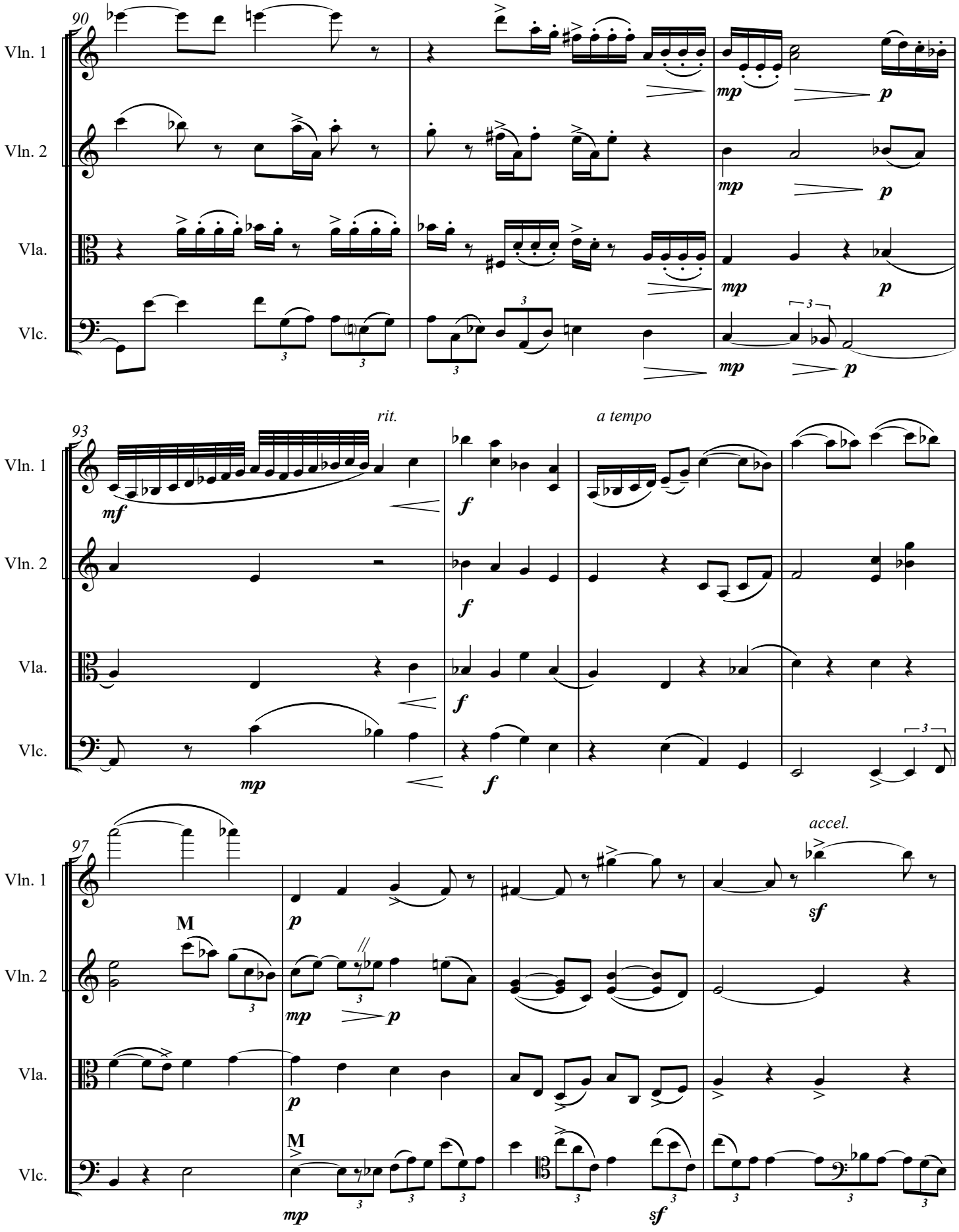
II.

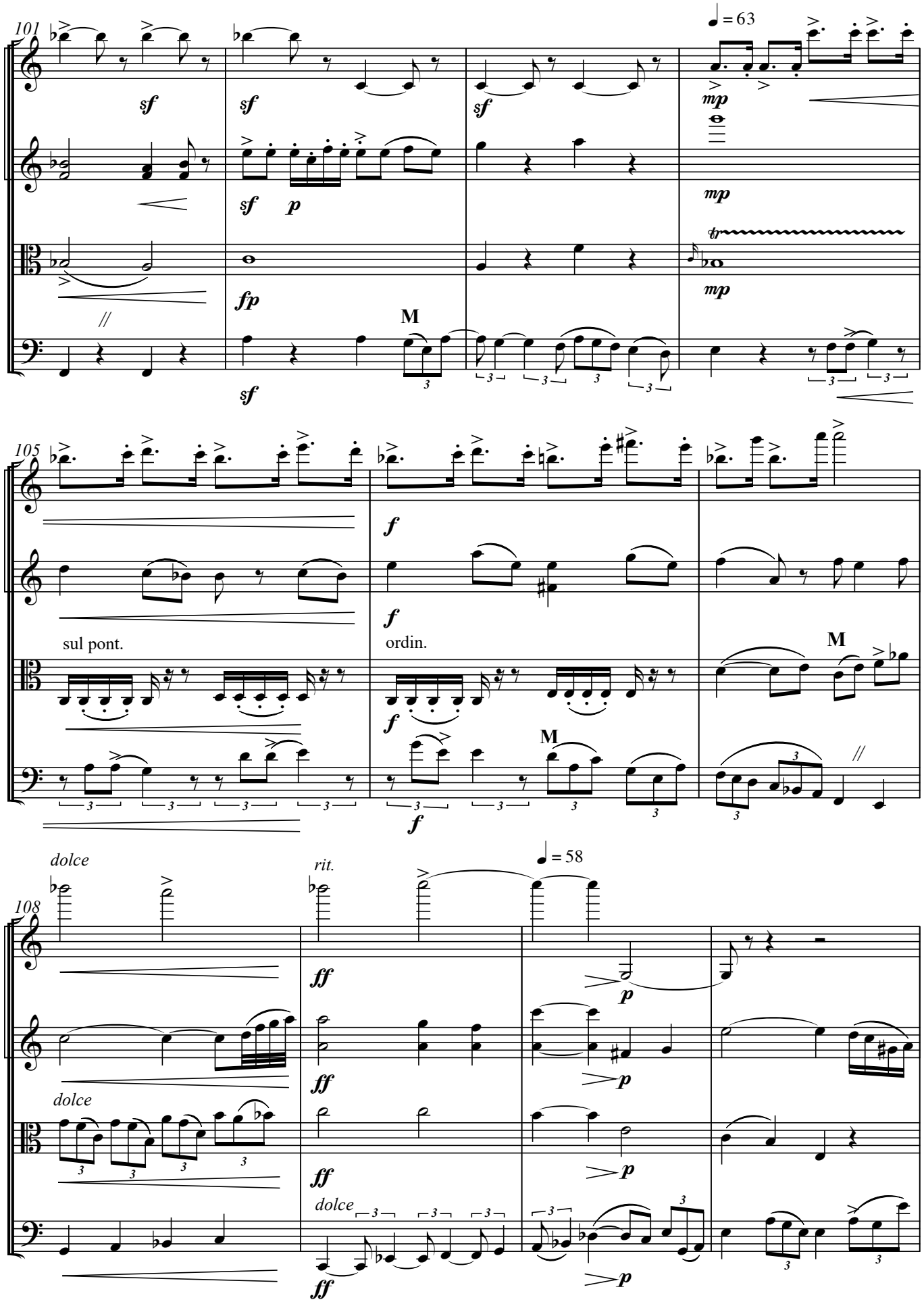

48
♩ = 80
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
p
p
mp
p
3
54
legato
pizz.
61
fp
fp
arco
pizz.
arco

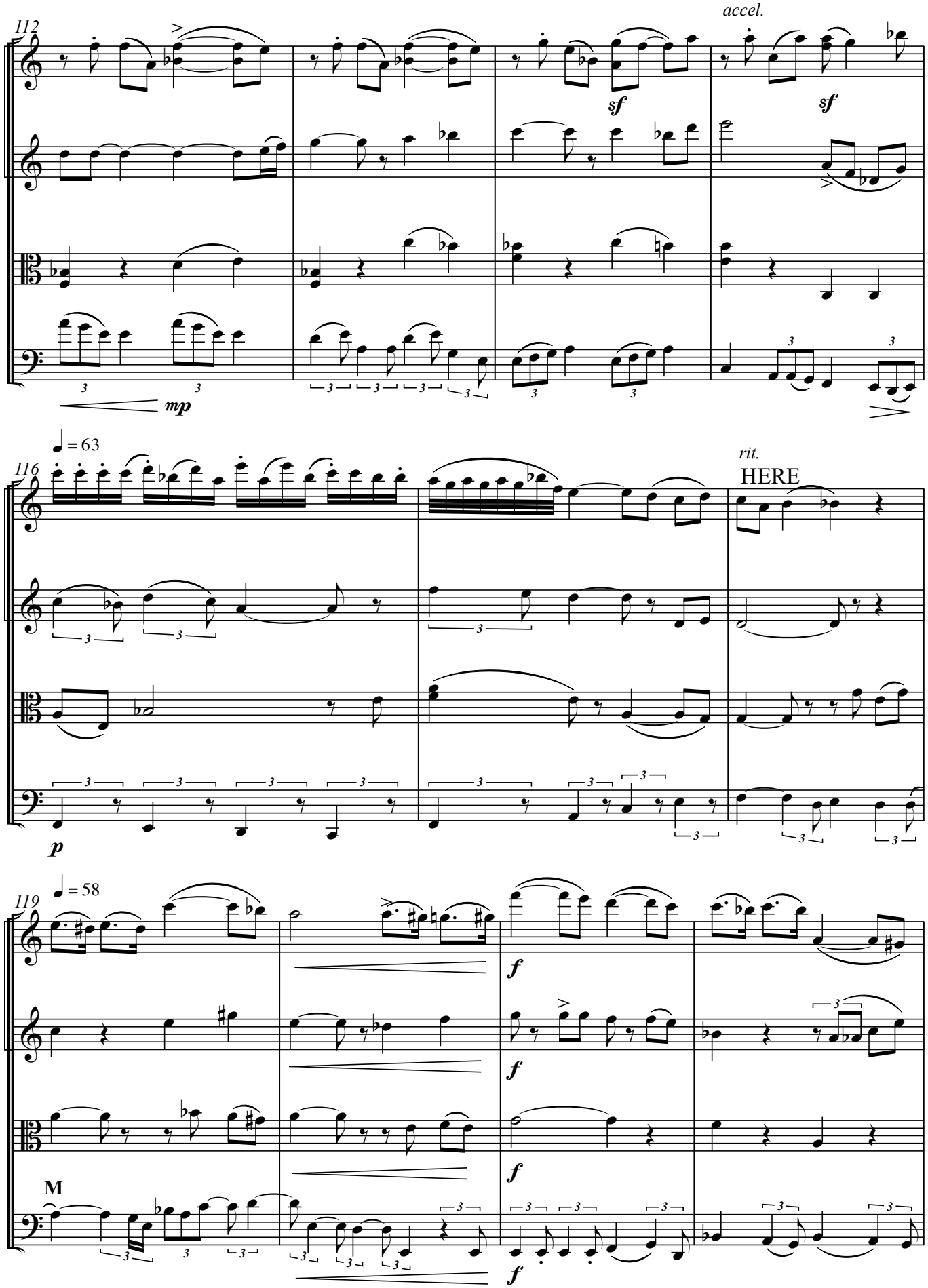

68
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
M
sul G
73
sul G
p

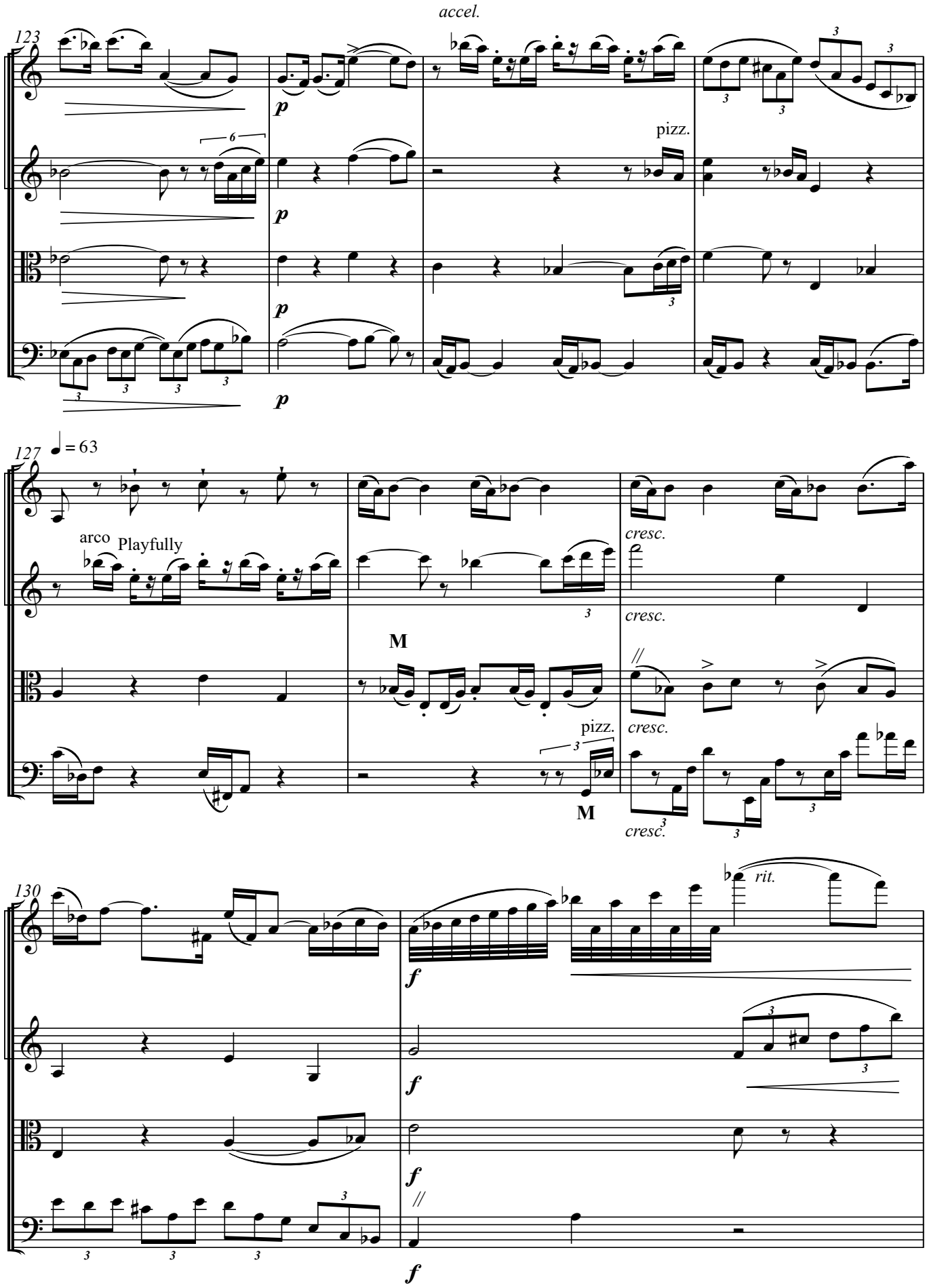
I.

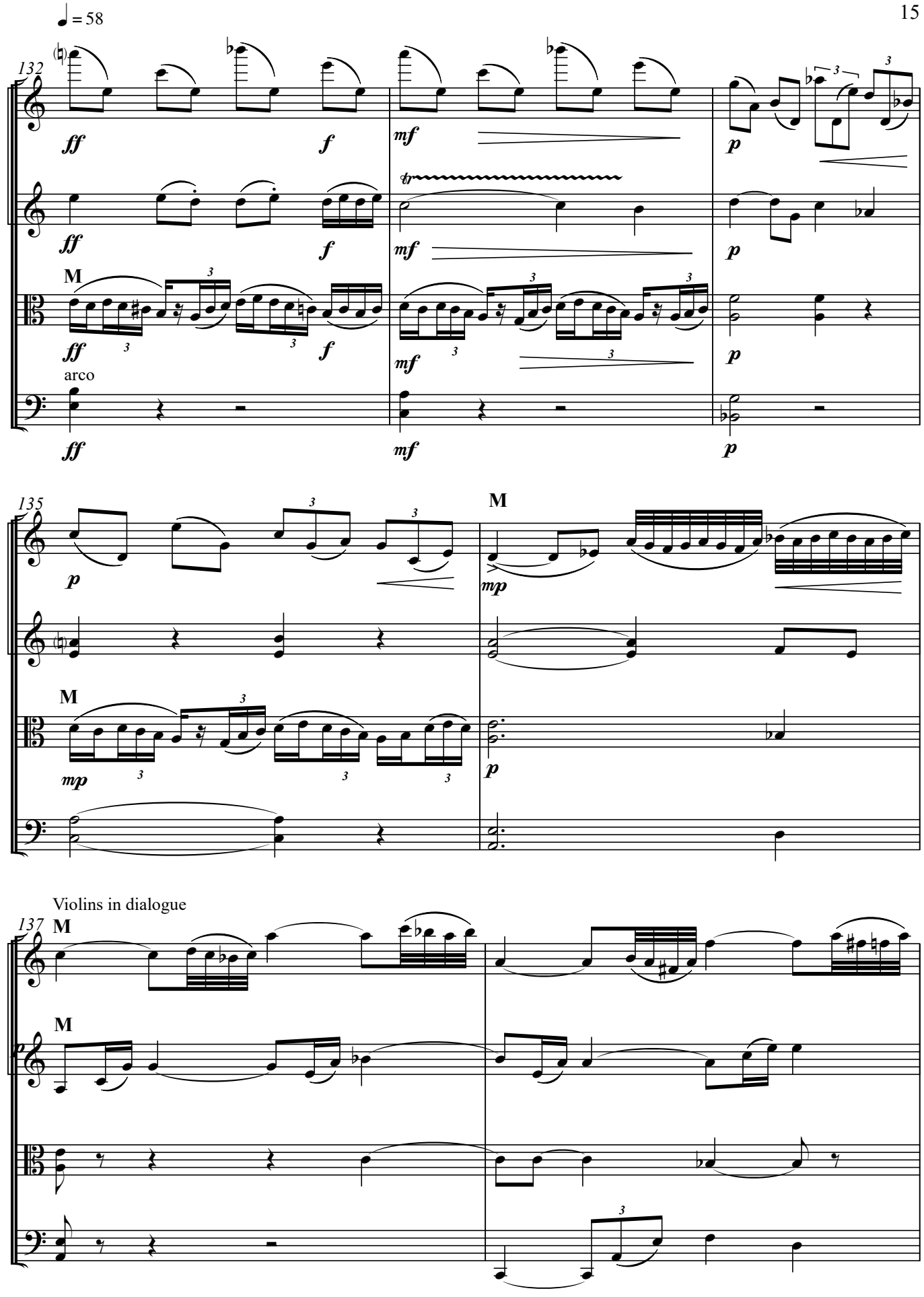

77
♩ = 58
M
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
In dialogue with cello
M In dialogue with violin
82
mp
M
86
M
f

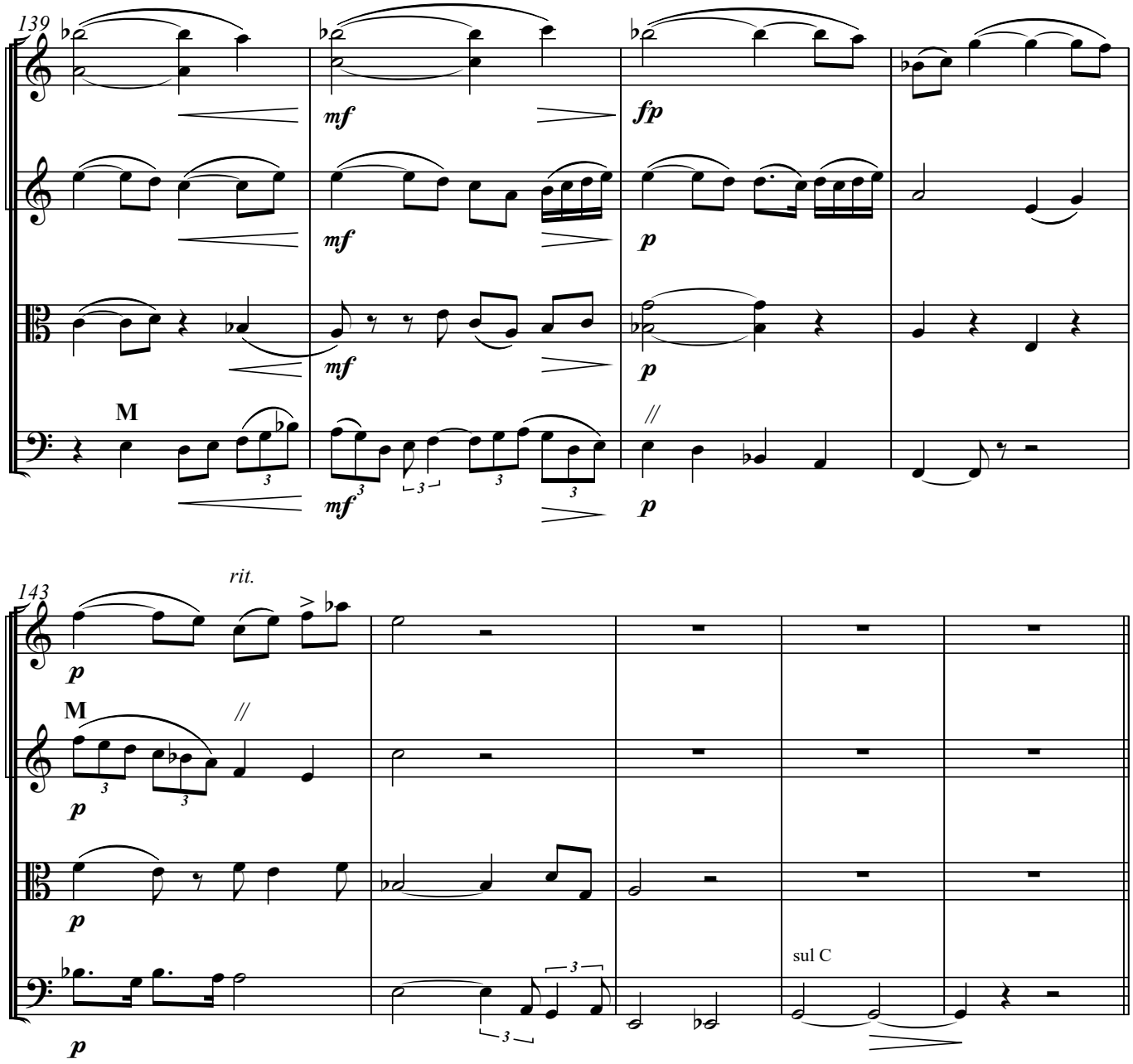

90
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mp
p
93
rit.
a tempo
mf
f
mp
97
M
accel.
sf

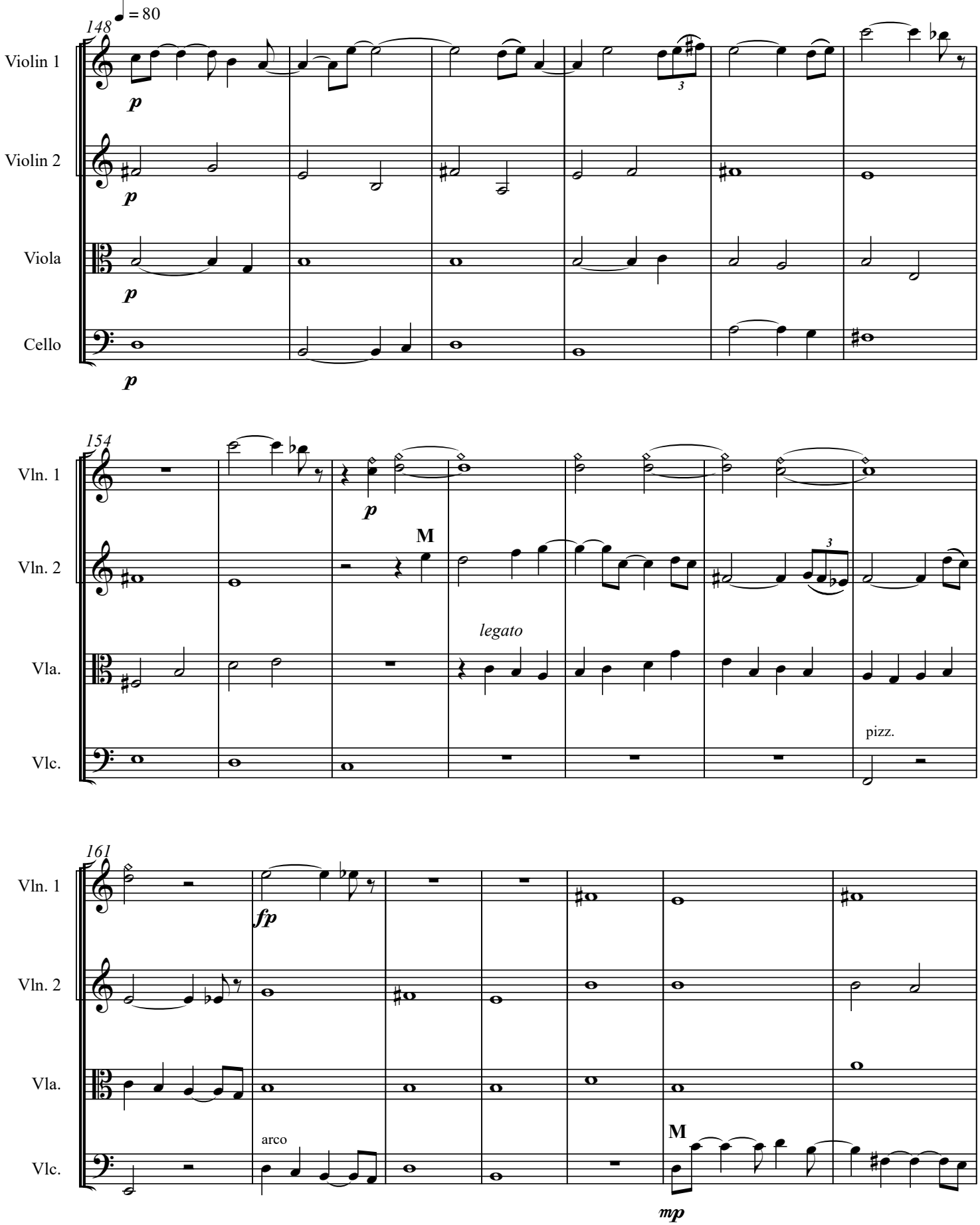

101
♩ = 63
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
fp
mp
M
105
f
sul pont.
ordin.
108
dolce
rit.
♩ = 58
ff
p

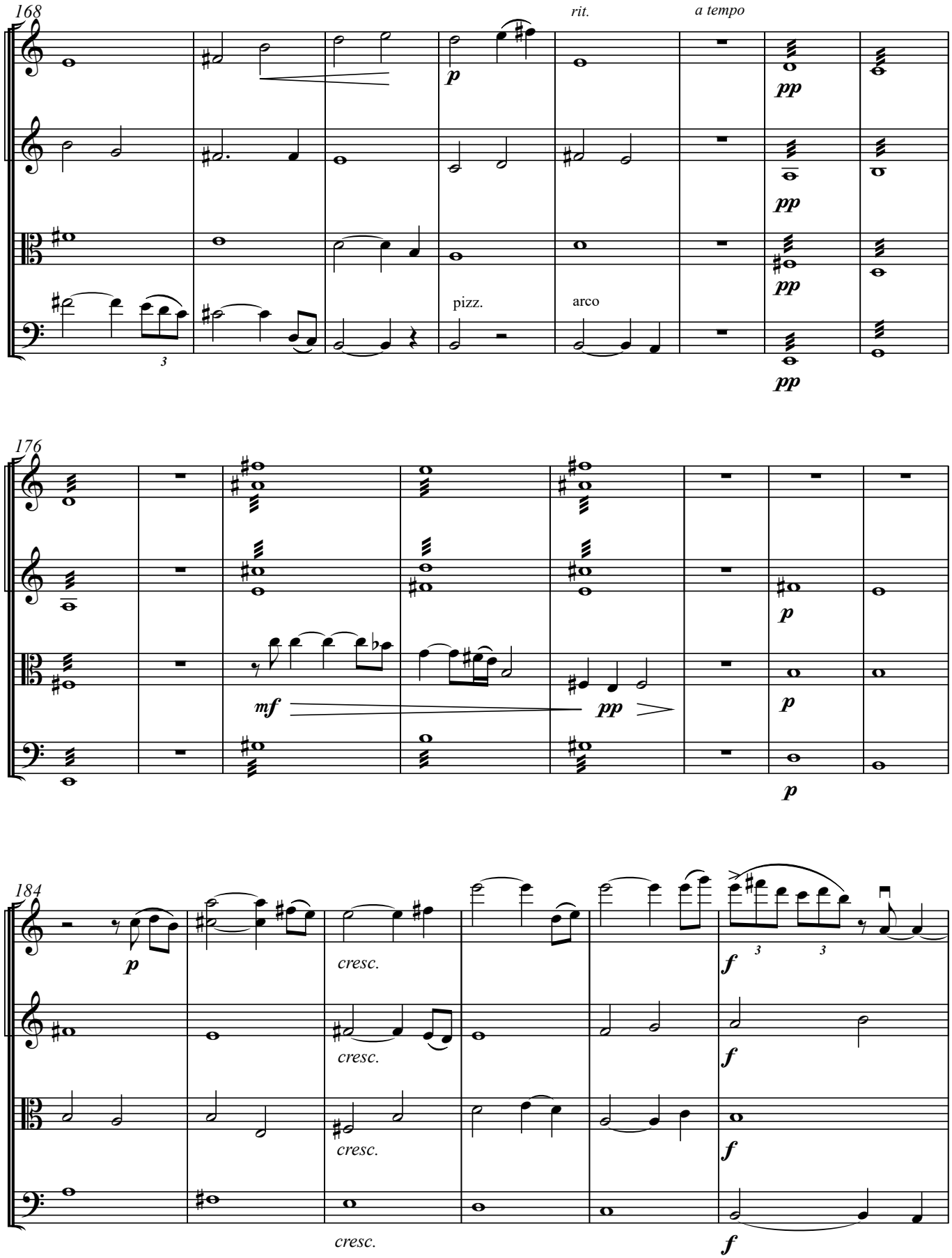

112
accel.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
sf
mp
116
♩ = 63
rit.
HERE
p
119
♩ = 58
f
M

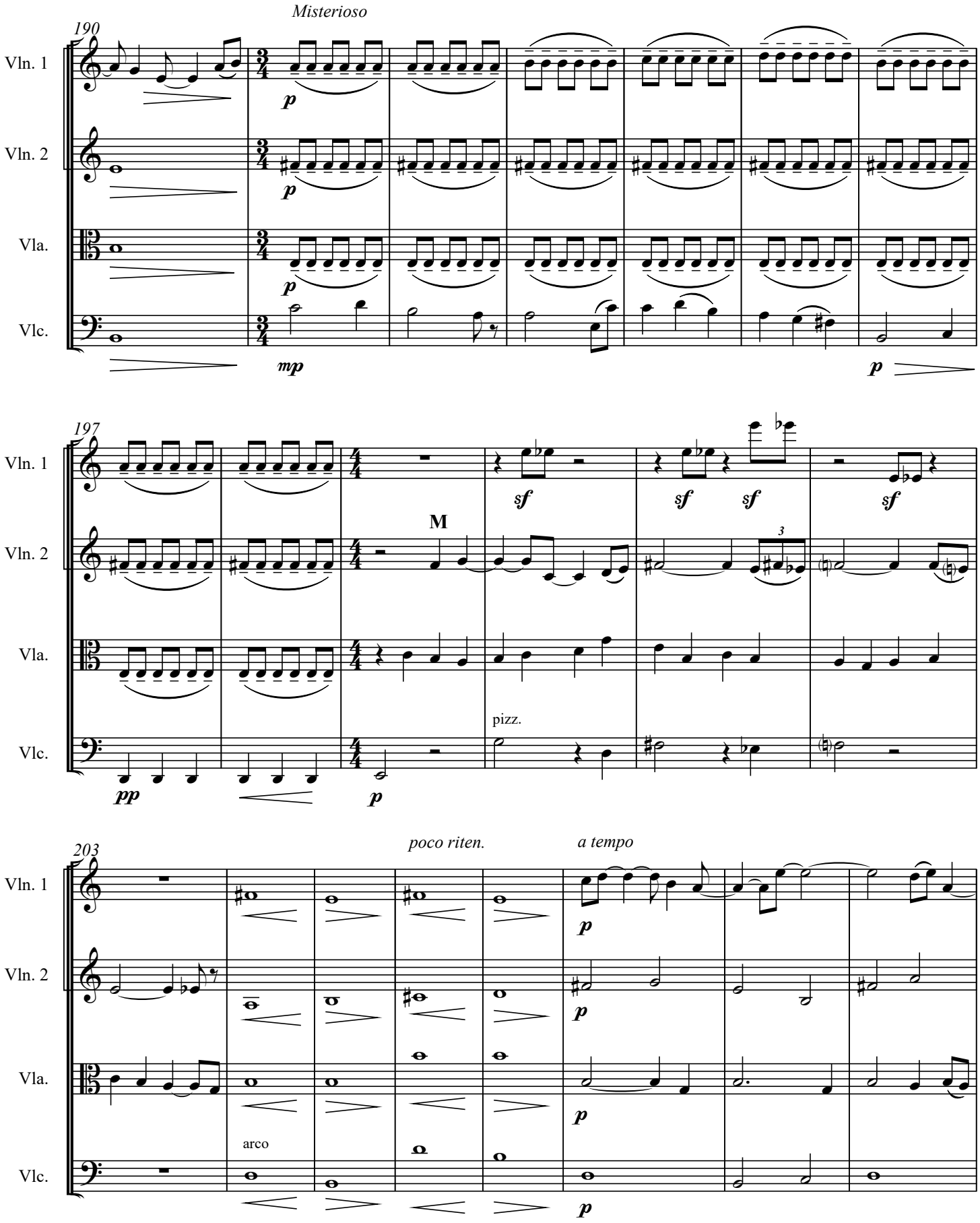

accel.
123
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
pizz.
127
♩ = 63
arco
Playfully
cresc.
M
pizz.
130
rit.
f

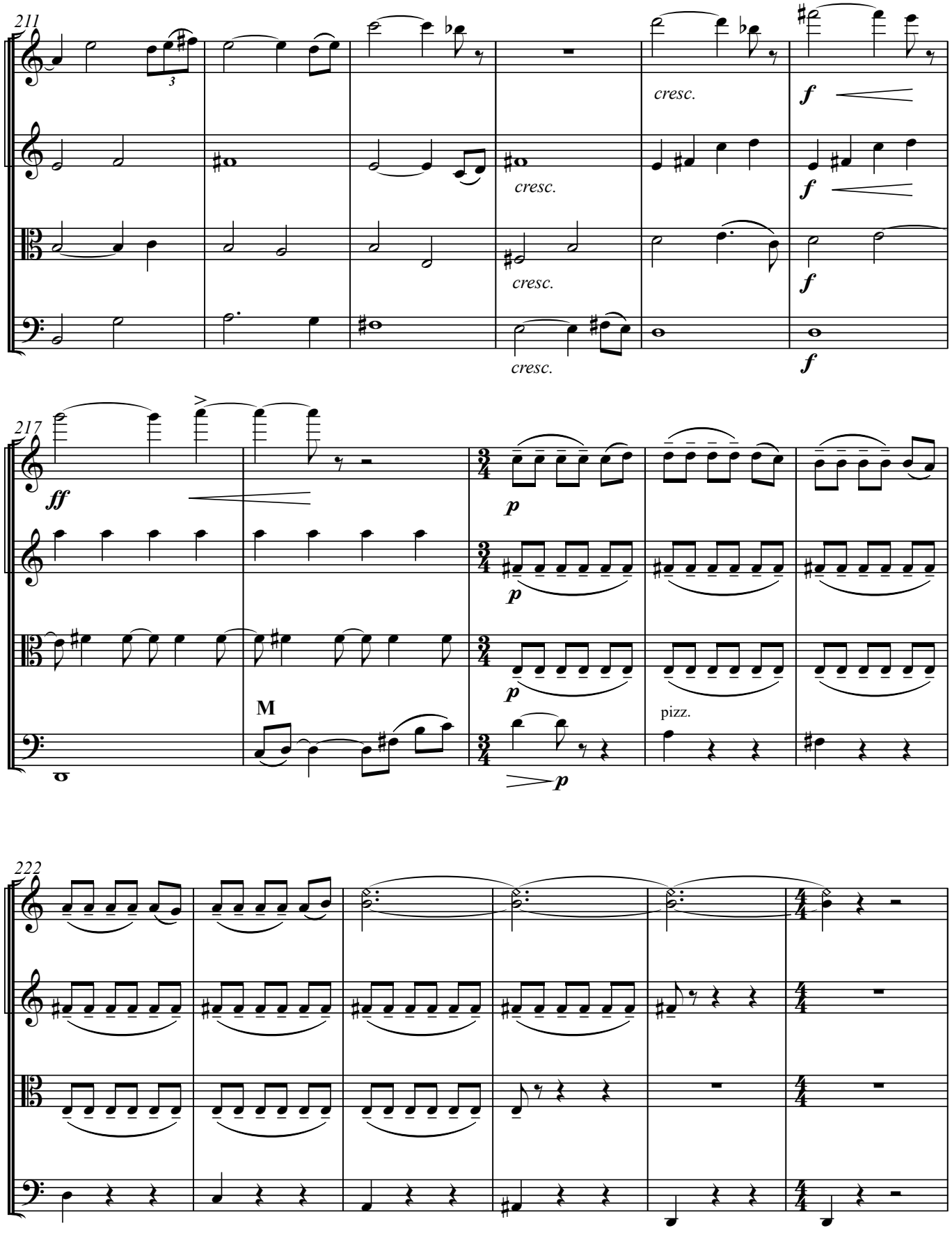

♩ = 58
132
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
ff
f
mf
p
M
arco
135
mp
Violins in dialogue
137

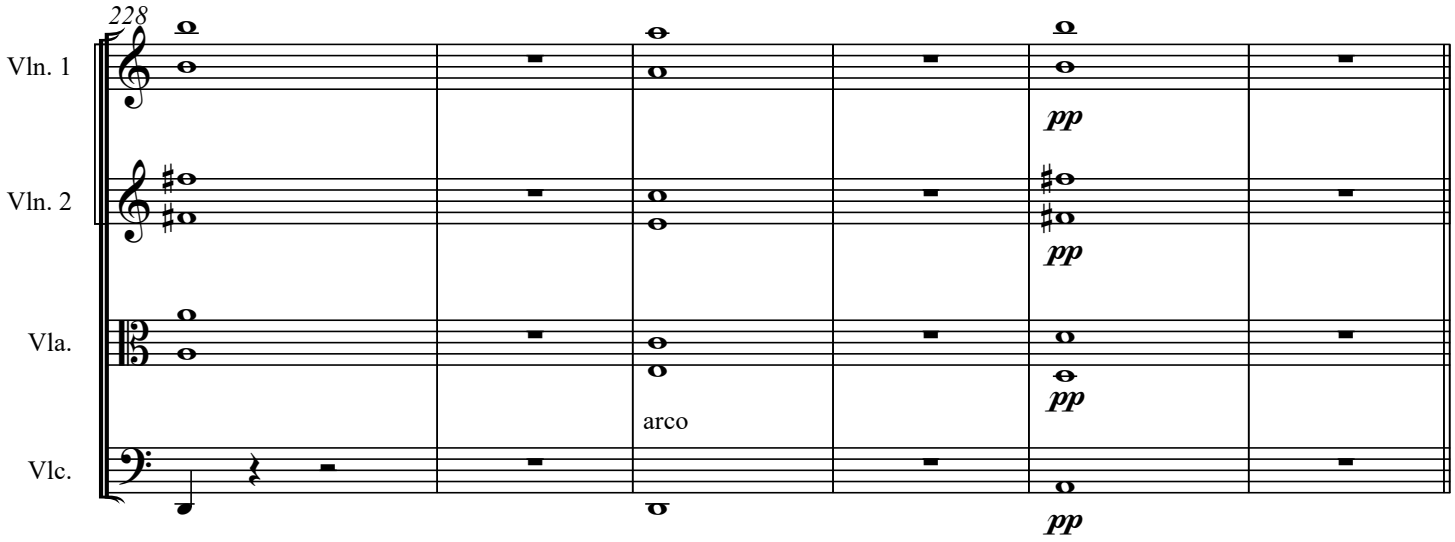

139
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mf
fp
p
M
143
rit.
sul C


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

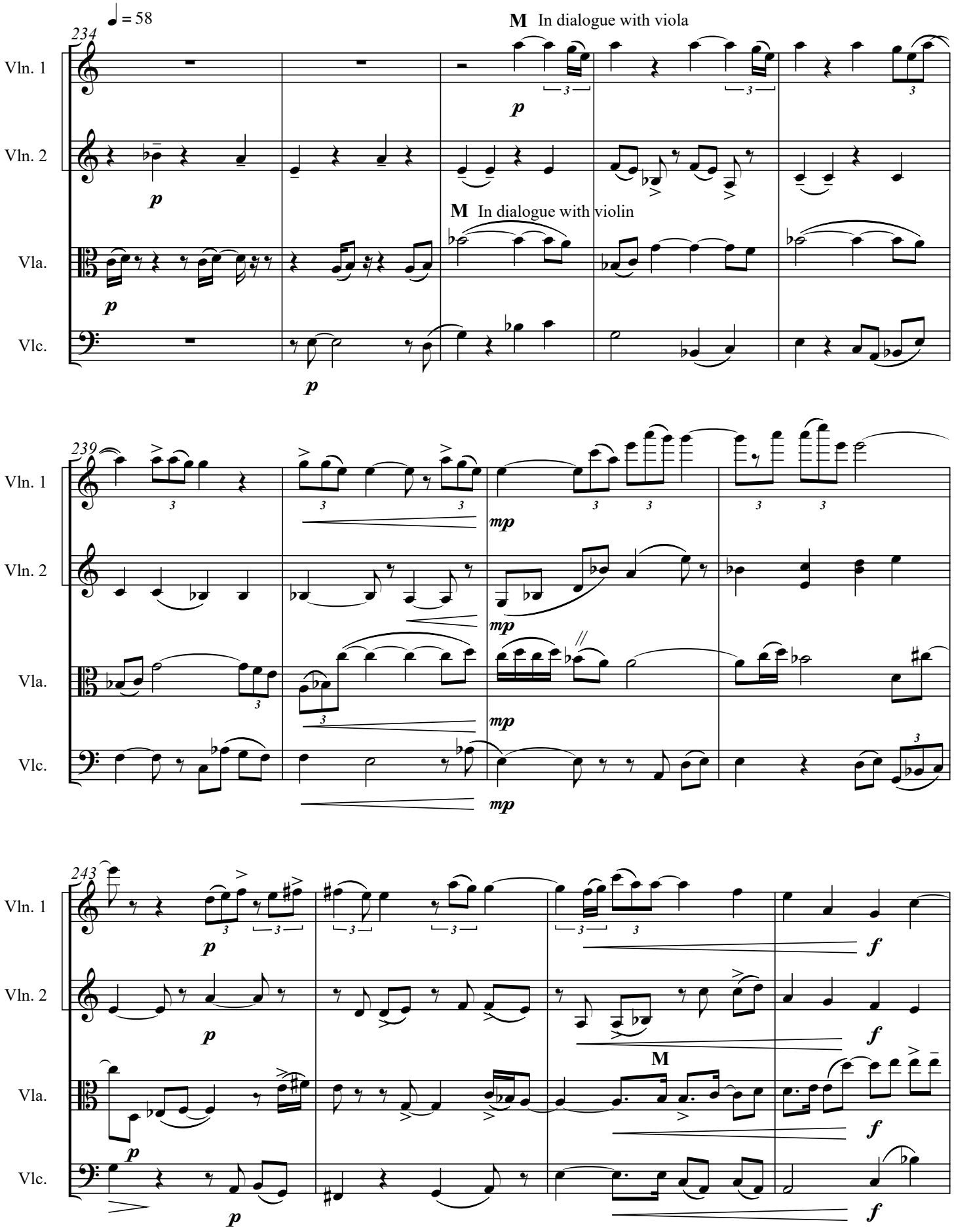

168
rit.
a tempo
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
pizz.
arco
176
184
cresc.

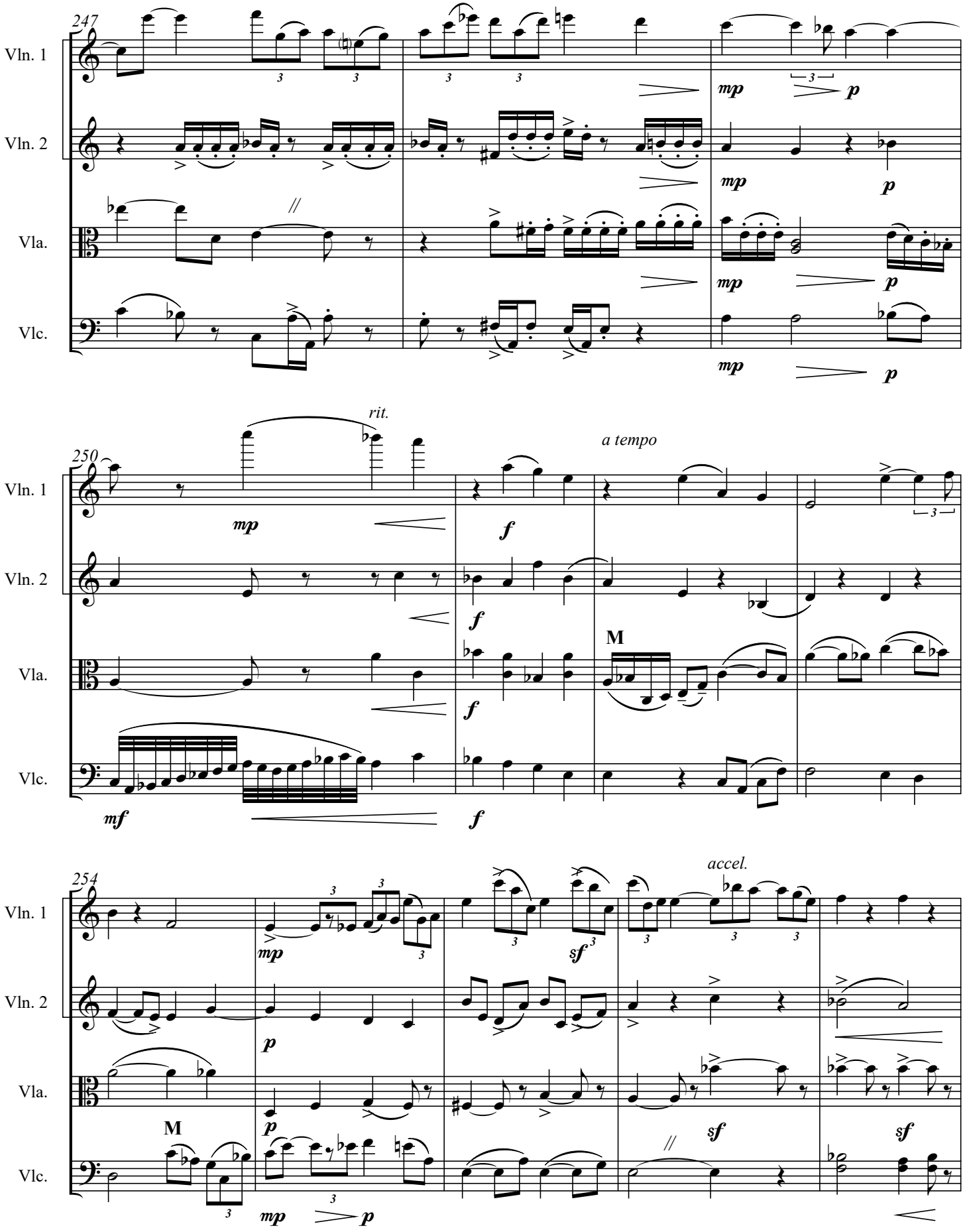

Misterioso
190
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
mp
197
M
sf
pizz.
pp
203
poco riten.
a tempo
arco

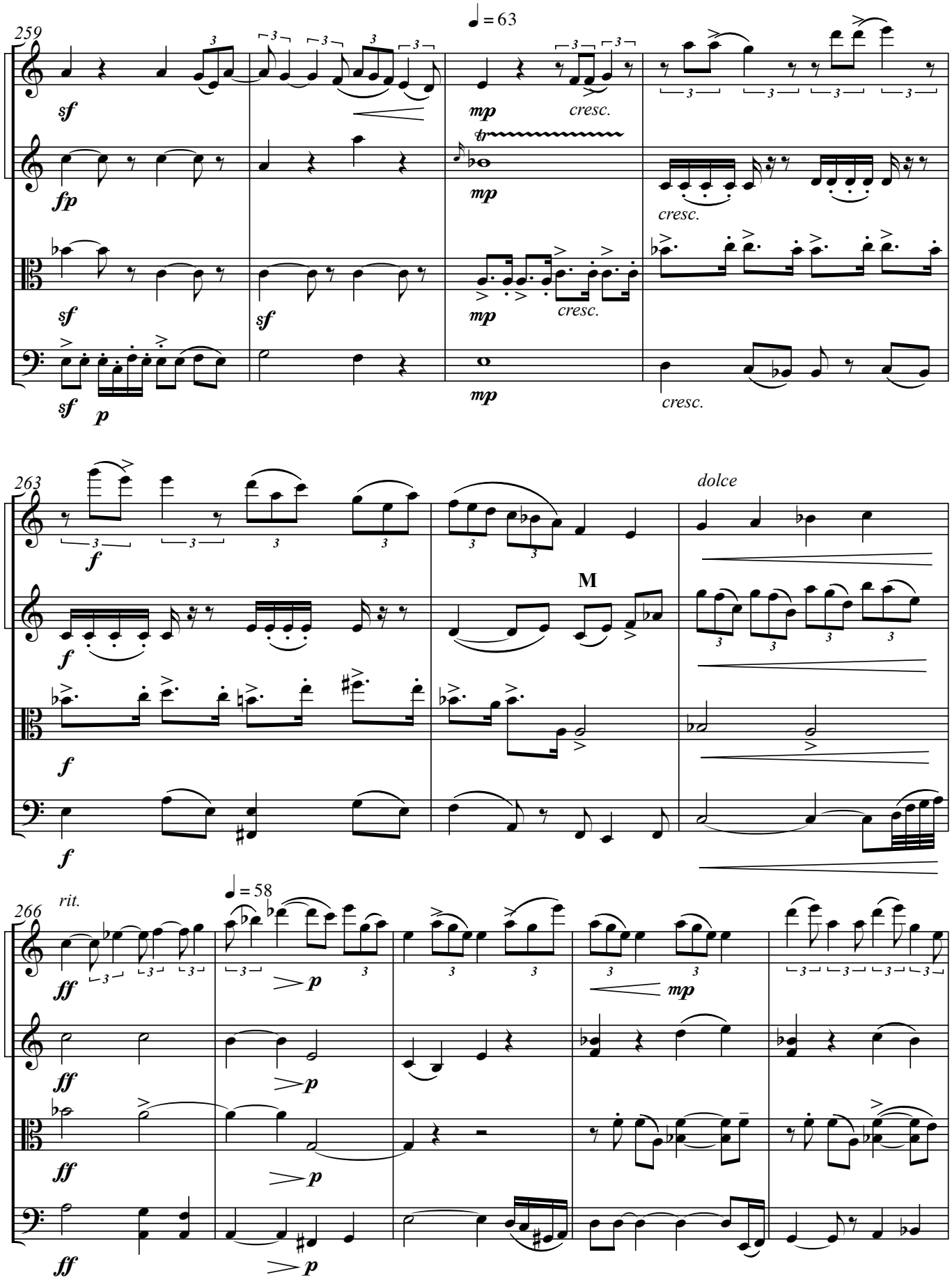

211
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
3
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f
f
217
ff
p
p
p
p
M
pizz.
222

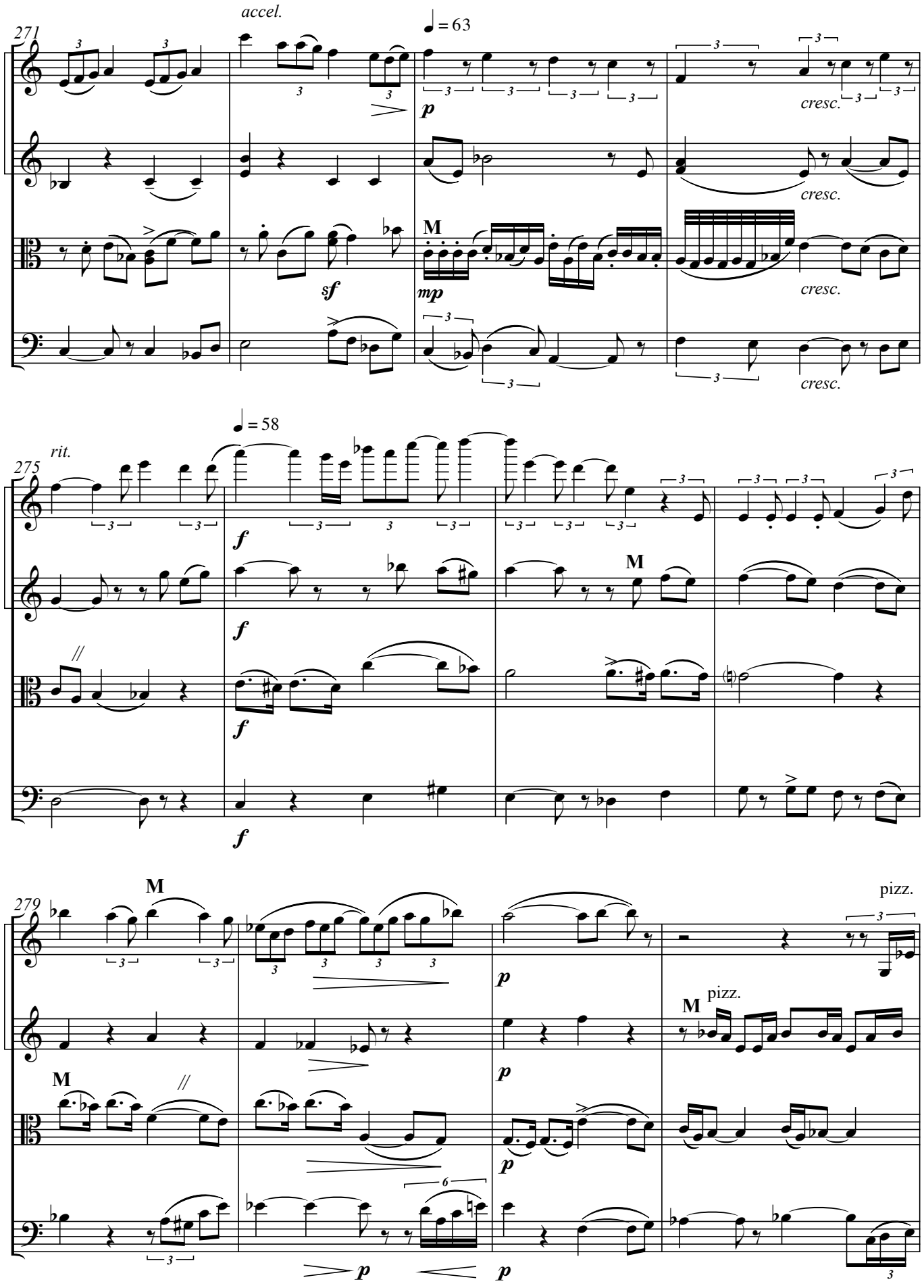

228
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
pp
pp
pp
arco
pp

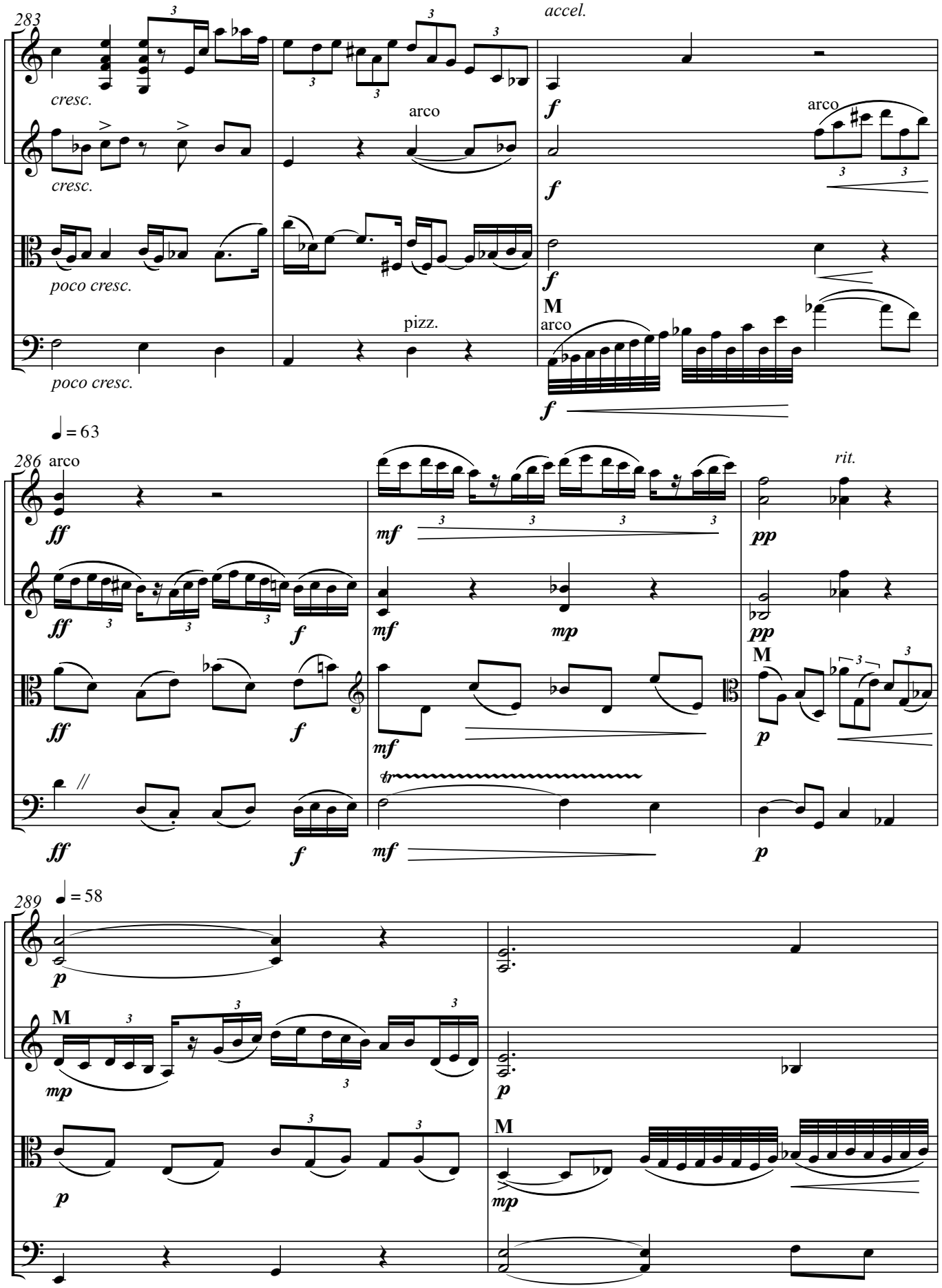
I.

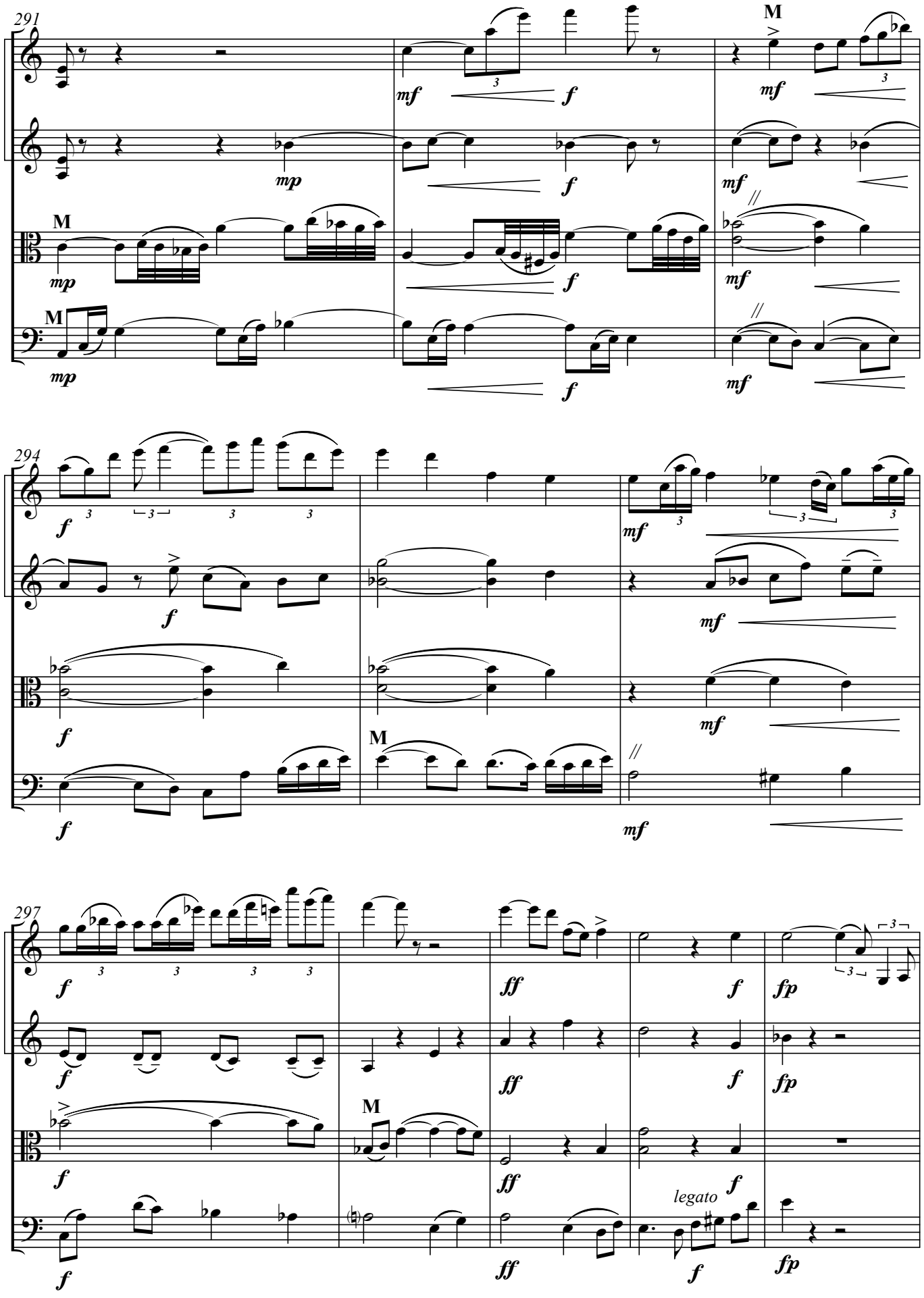

♩ = 58
234
M In dialogue with viola
M In dialogue with violin
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
239
mp
243
f
M

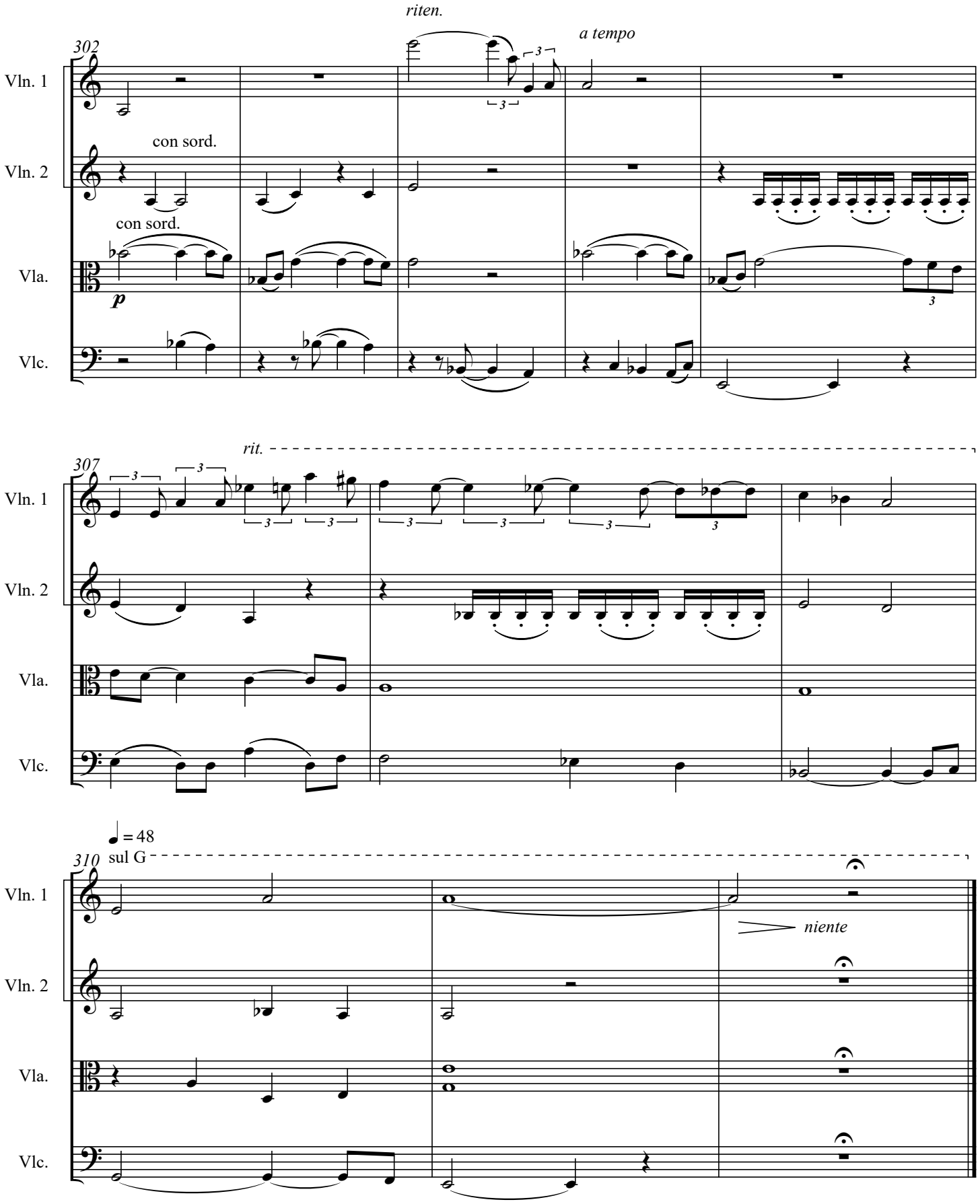

247
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
mp
p
250
rit.
a tempo
mf
f
M
254
accel.
sf


259
♩ = 63
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
sf
fp
mp
cresc.
tr
p
263
dolce
M
f
266
rit.
♩ = 58
ff


271
accel.
♩ = 63
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
p
cresc.
M
sf
mp
275
rit.
♩ = 58
f
279
pizz.
p


283
accel.
Vln. 1
cresc.
Vln. 2
arco
cresc.
arco
Vla.
poco cresc.
M
Vlc.
pizz.
arco
poco cresc.
= 63
286
arco
rit.
289
= 58
M


291
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
M
mp
mf
f
294
297
ff
fp
legato


riten.
a tempo
302
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
con sord.
con sord.
Vla.
p
Vlc.
rit.
307
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
♩ = 48
310
sul G
Vln. 1
niente
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.