Mosaics

String Quartet no. 7

2015, 2025

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This composition originated during work on an *a capella* setting of a short lyric by Walt Whitman, "Twilight." It occurred to me in mid-stream that the piece would also have a nice sound on string quartet, so I began making the new version. It then occurred to me that the fragmentary nature of the poem invited further treatment as well. The result is this quartet, a series of seven short movements that constitute a series of variations without a theme. Each movement is conceived as a kind of mosaic in itself. At the same time, by rearranging (reinterpreting, recasting, reframing) elements shared with the others, each movement also adds itself as a tile to the larger mosaic. The music alternates between contemplative slow movements or passages and lively, spirited ones, seeking to reconcile the impulses that underlie them. The "Twilight" movement, no. 5, forms both a long-awaited point of arrival and a necessary point of departure. The poem (in its entirety) reads:

> The soft voluptuous opiate shades,
> The sun just gone, the eager light dispell'd—(I too will soon be gone, dispell'd,)
> A haze—nirwana—rest and night—oblivion.

The music both yields to this evocation and resists it. The poem is one of Whitman's frequent portrayals of oblivion as a quasi-erotic bliss. The beauty of its language is captivating, but I don't want to believe what it's telling me. "Mosaics" is a musical expression of this contradiction.

Composed 2015, revised 2025. Duration: 18 minutes.

Mosaics

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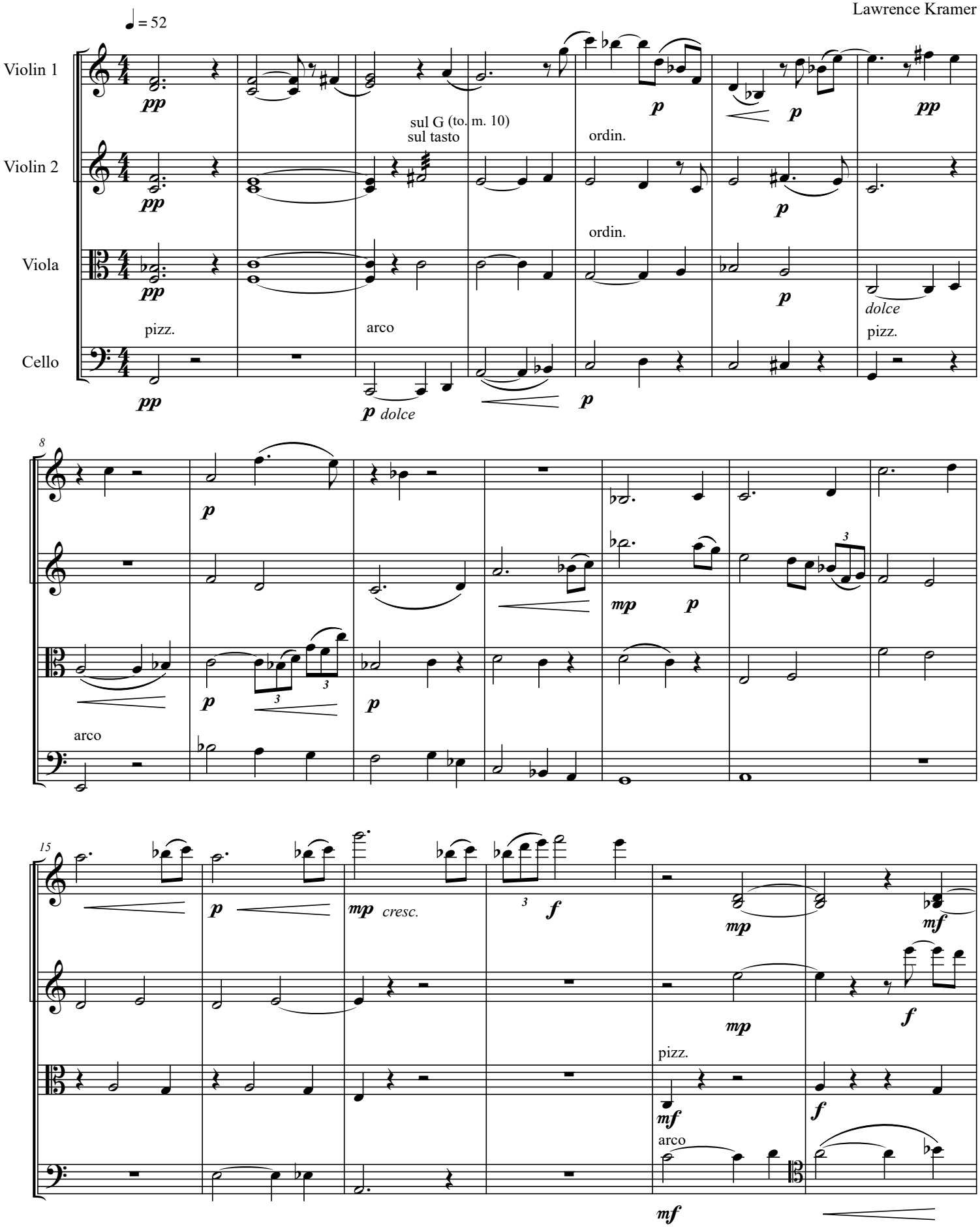

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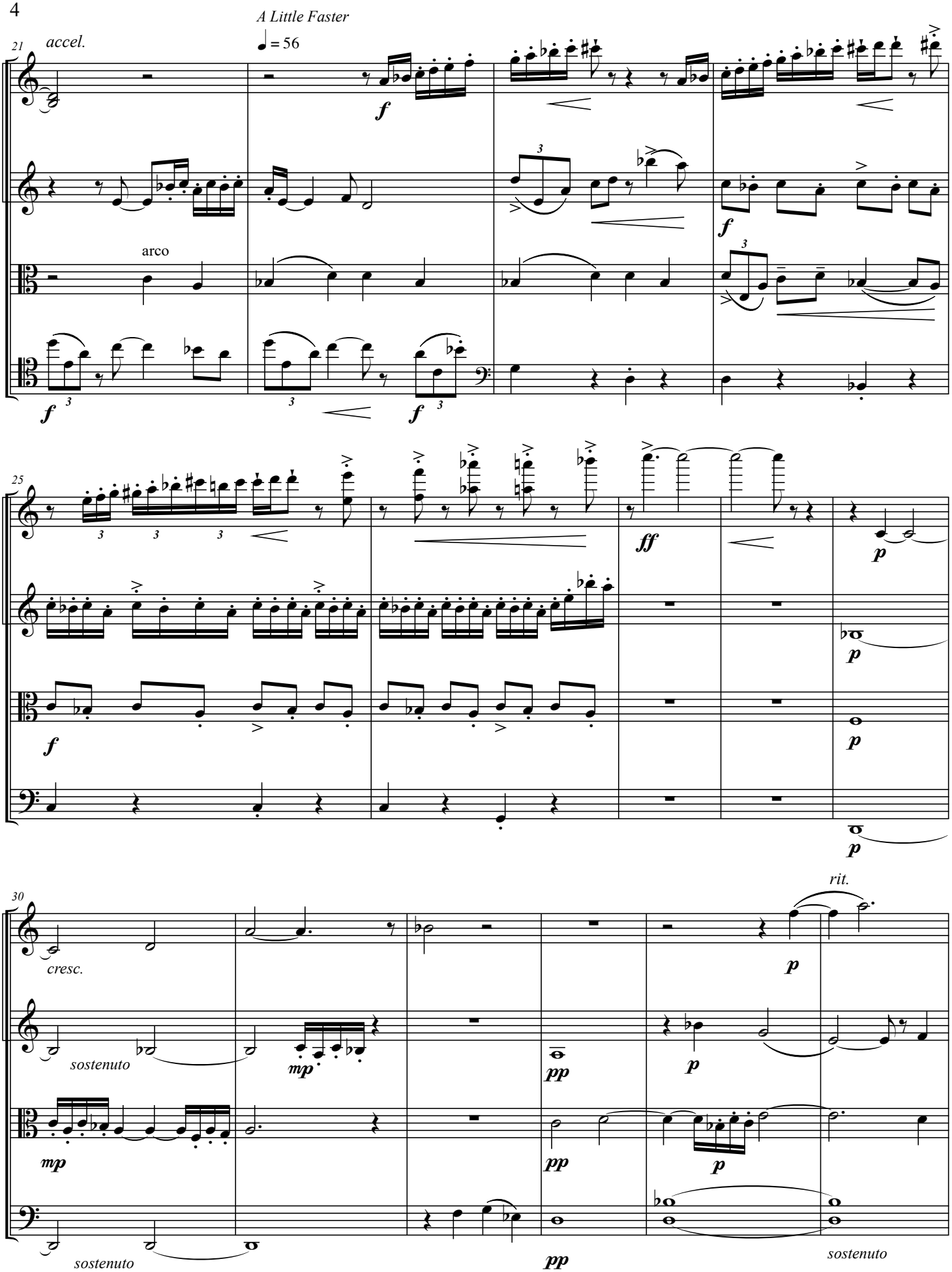
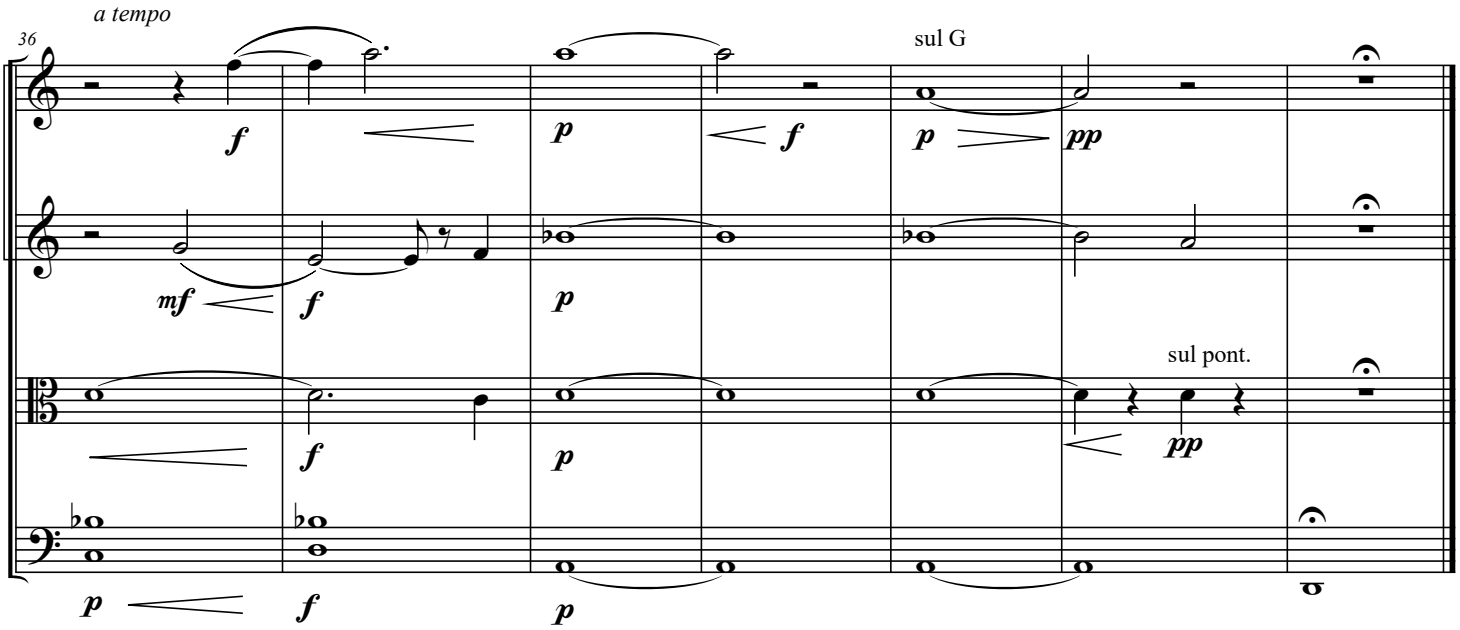
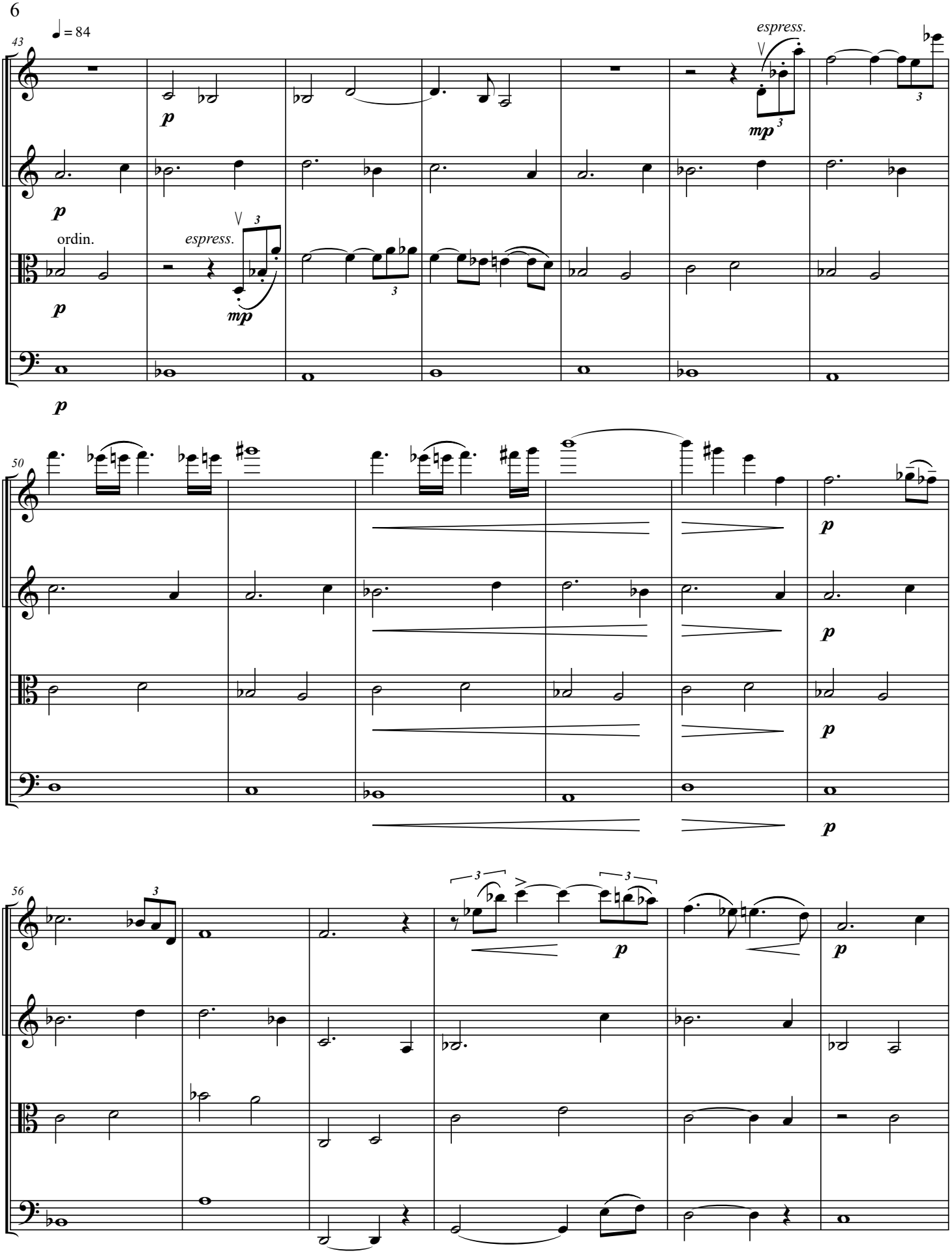
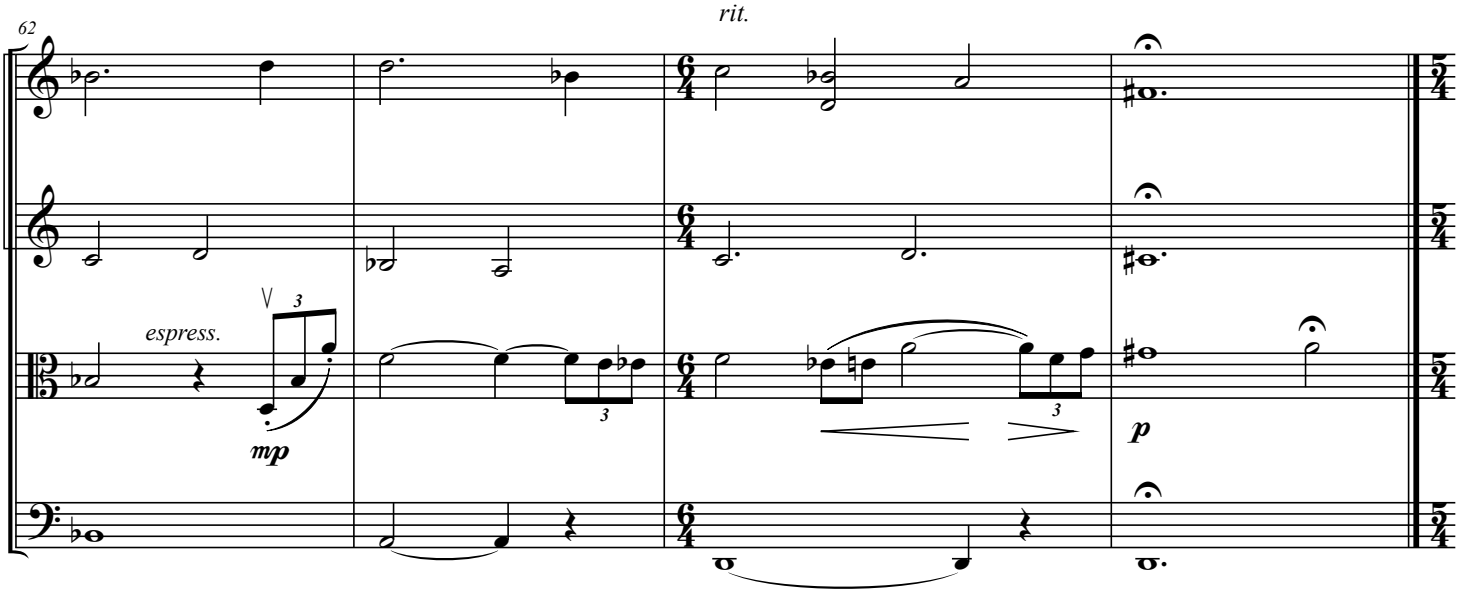
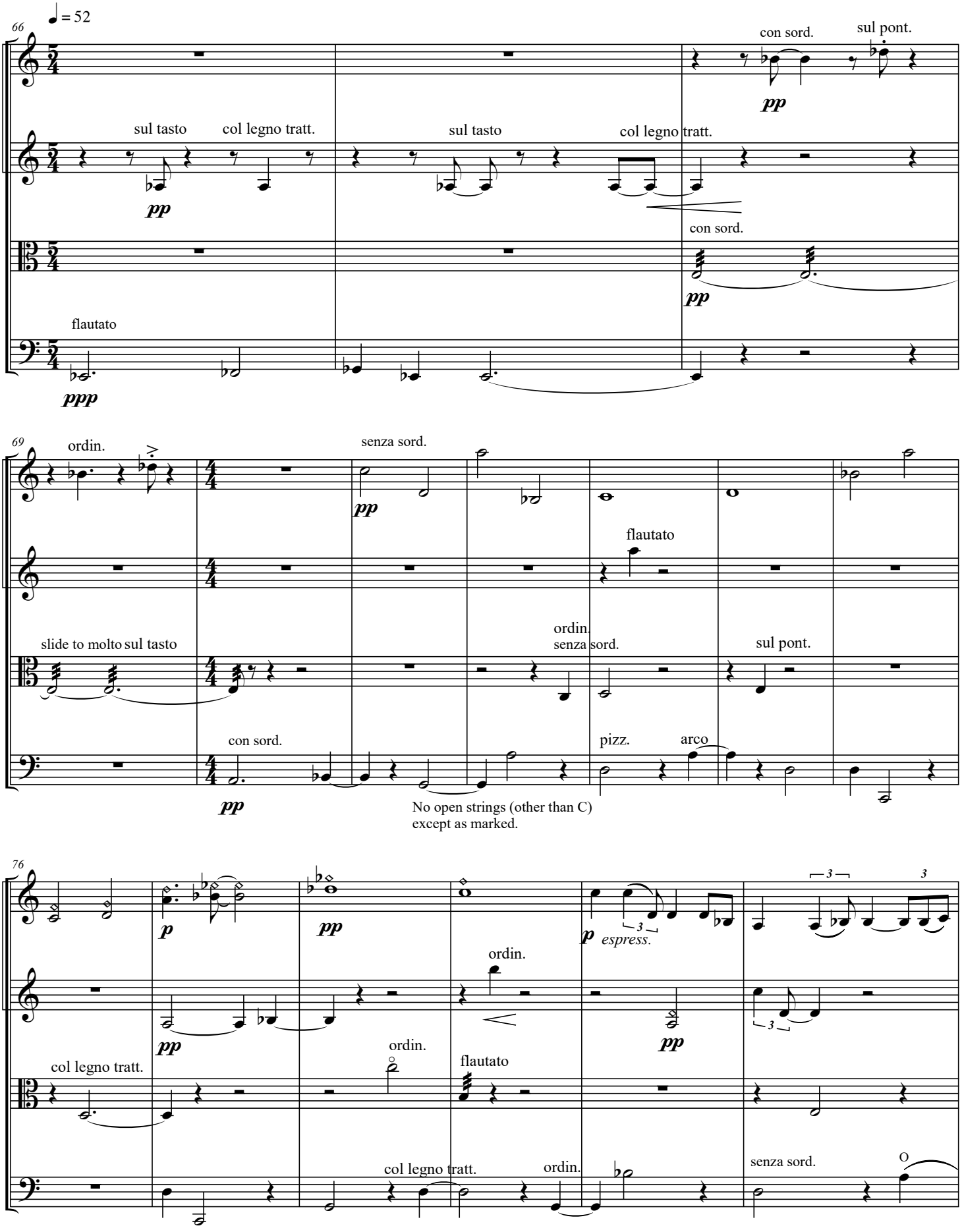
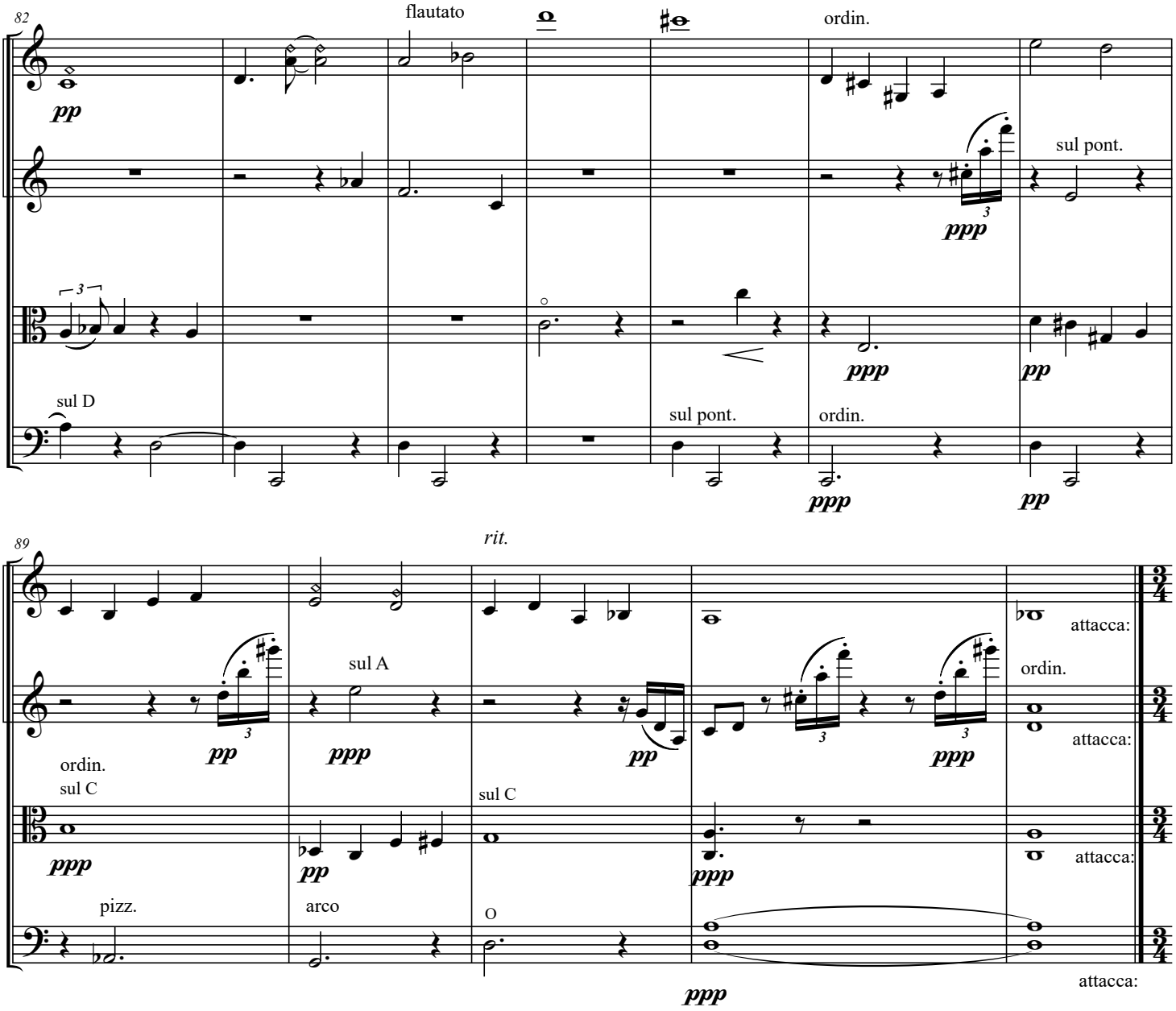

A Little Faster
♩ = 56
21
accel.
arco
25
30
cresc.
rit.
sostenuto
sostenuto
sostenuto

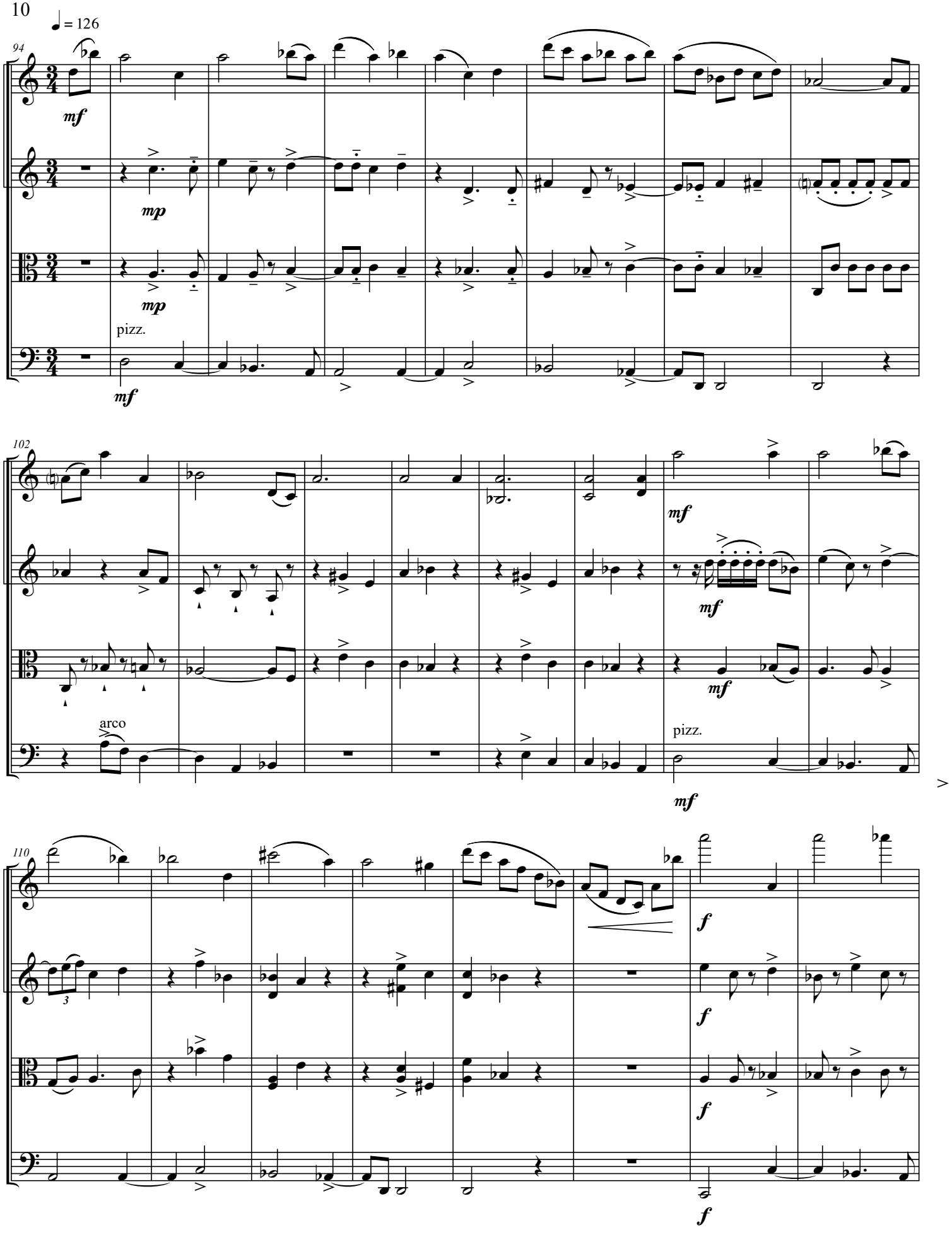

36
a tempo
sul G
sul pont.

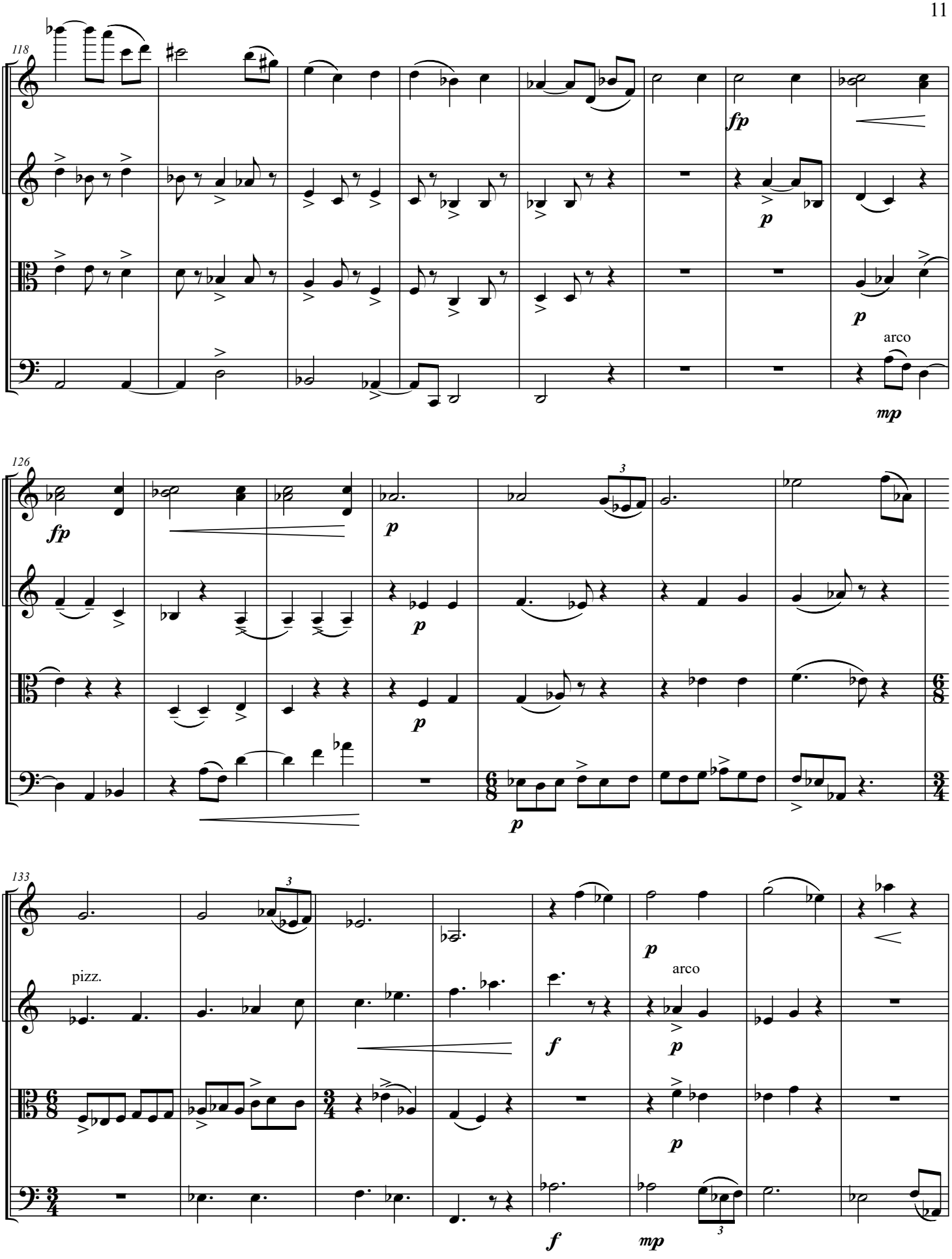

43
♩ = 84
espress.
ordin.
espress.
50
56

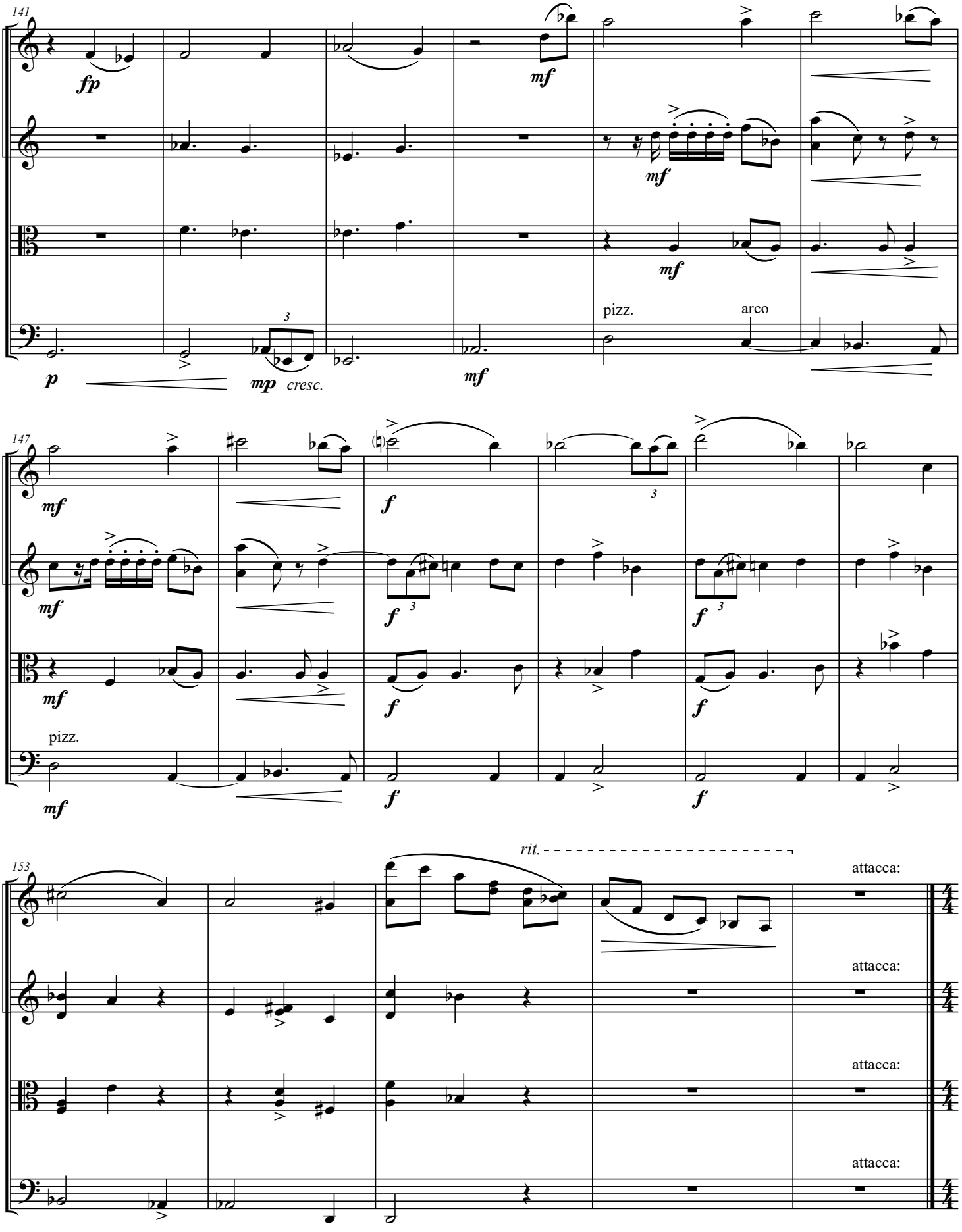

62
rit.
espress.
mp
p


66
♩ = 52
con sord.
sul pont.
pp
sul tasto
col legno tratt.
sul tasto
col legno tratt.
pp
con sord.
pp
flautato
ppp
69
ordin.
senza sord.
pp
flautato
slide to molto sul tasto
ordin.
senza sord.
sul pont.
con sord.
pizz.
arco
pp
No open strings (other than C)
except as marked.
76
p
pp
p
espress.
ordin.
pp
pp
col legno tratt.
ordin.
flautato
col legno tratt.
ordin.
senza sord.

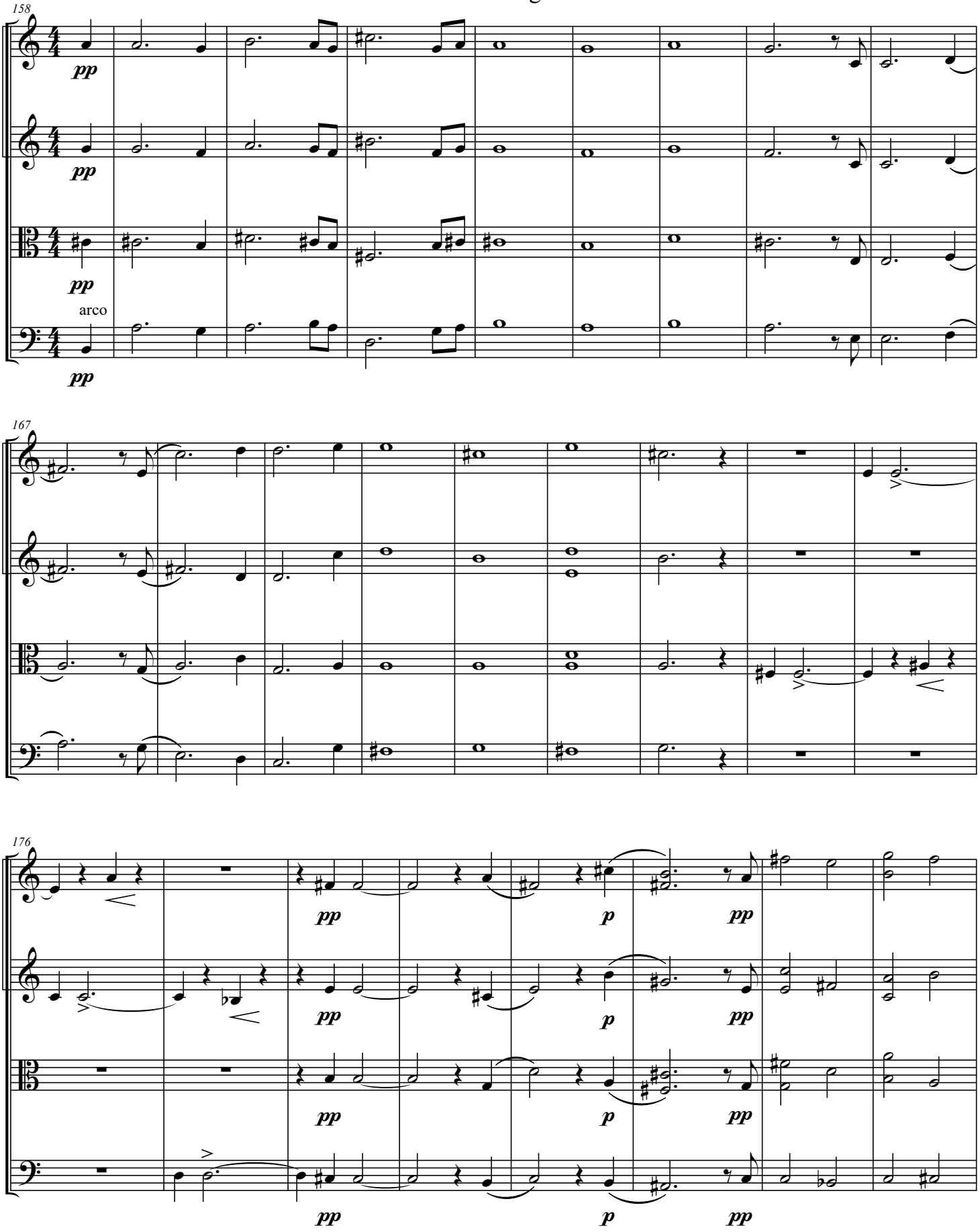

82
flautato
ordin.
pp
sul pont.
ppp
sul D
sul pont.
ordin.
ppp
pp
89
rit.
attacca:
ordin.
sul A
ordin.
sul C
sul C
pizz.
arco
O

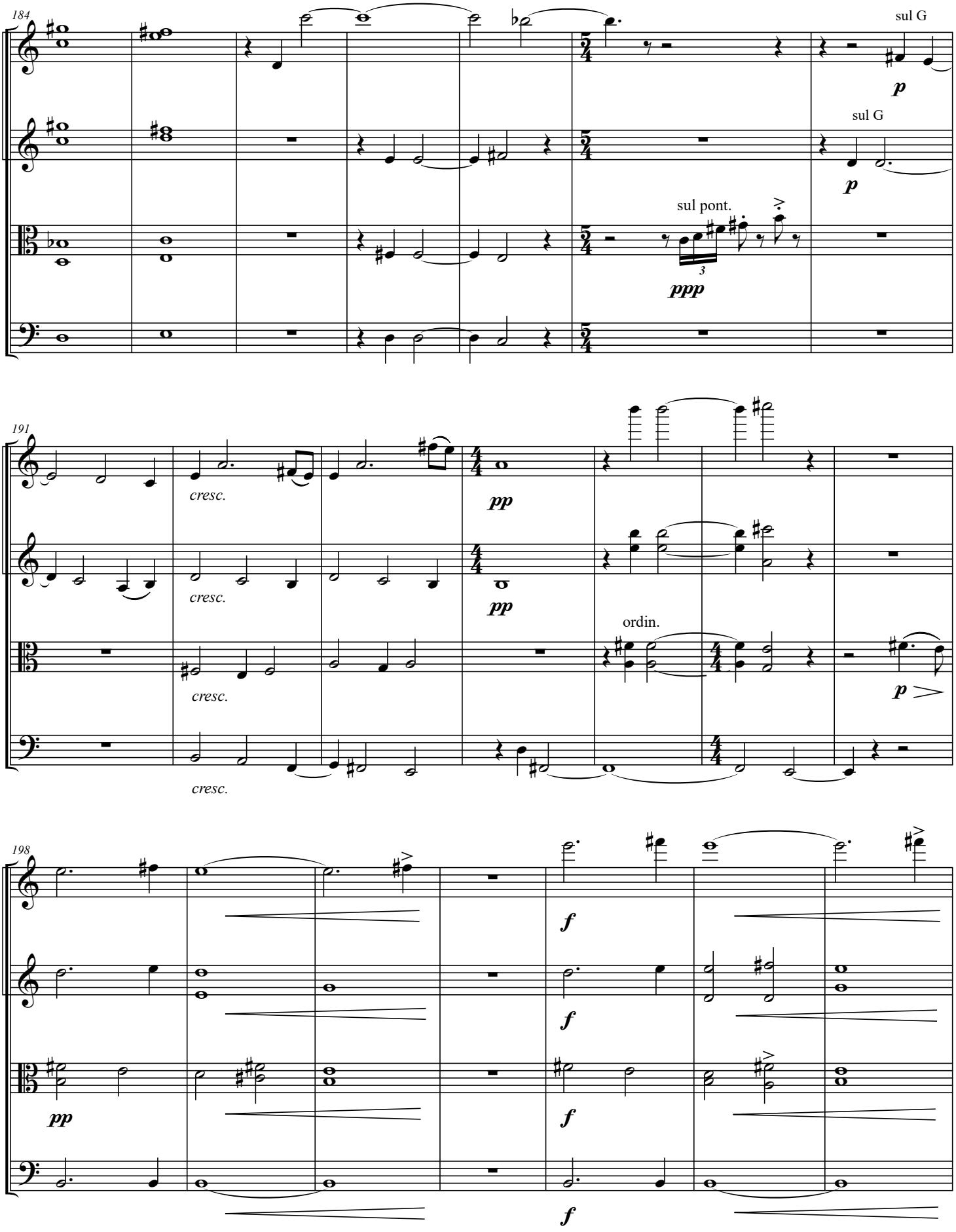

♩ = 126
94
mf
mp
mp
pizz.
mf
102
mf
mf
arco
pizz.
mf
110
3
f
f
f
f

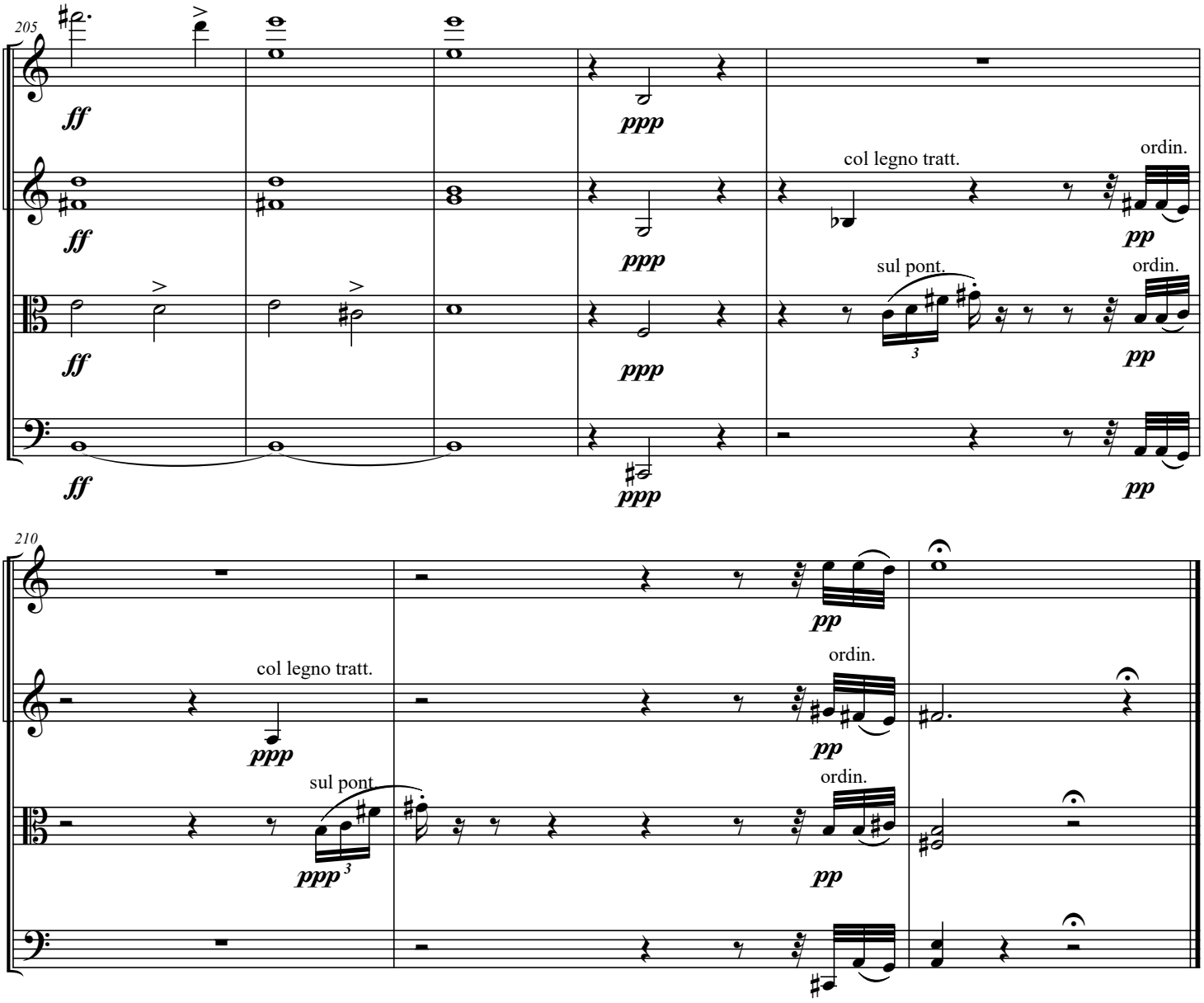

118
fp
p
p
arco
mp
126
fp
p
p
p
p
133
pizz.
p
arco
f
p
p
f
mp

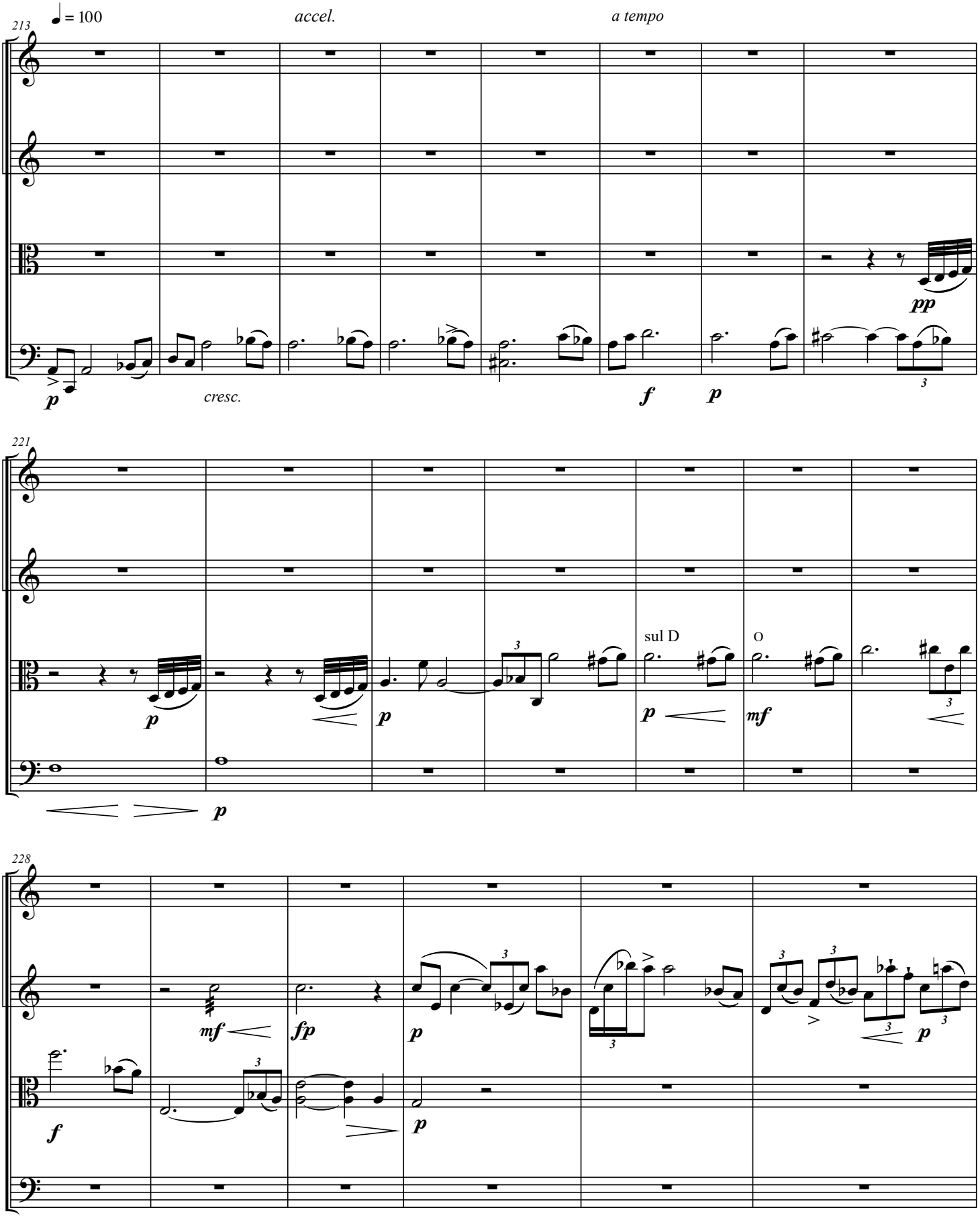

141
fp
mf
mf
mf
p
mp cresc.
mf
pizz.
arco
147
mf
f
mf
f
pizz.
mf
f
153
rit.
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:

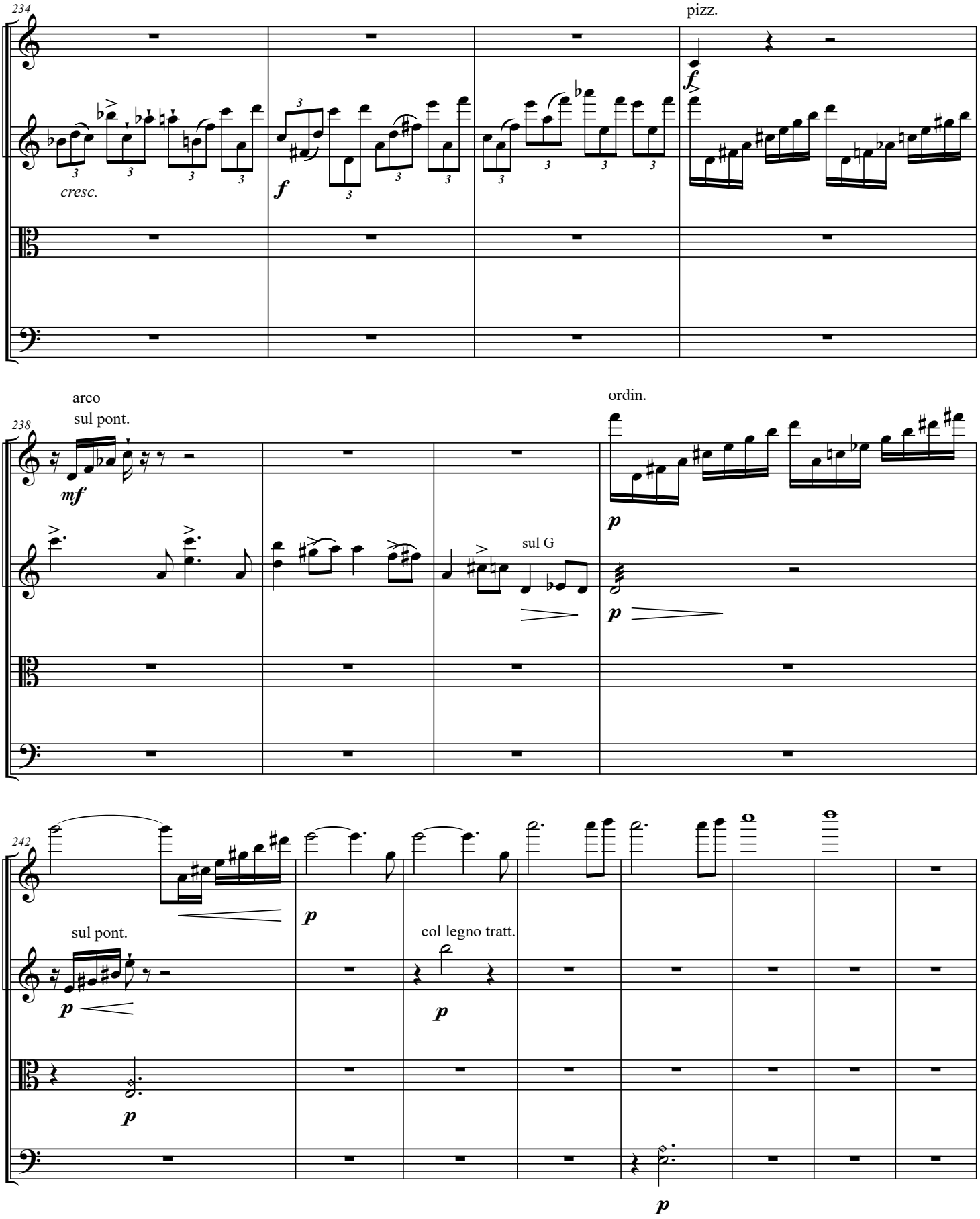
Twilight

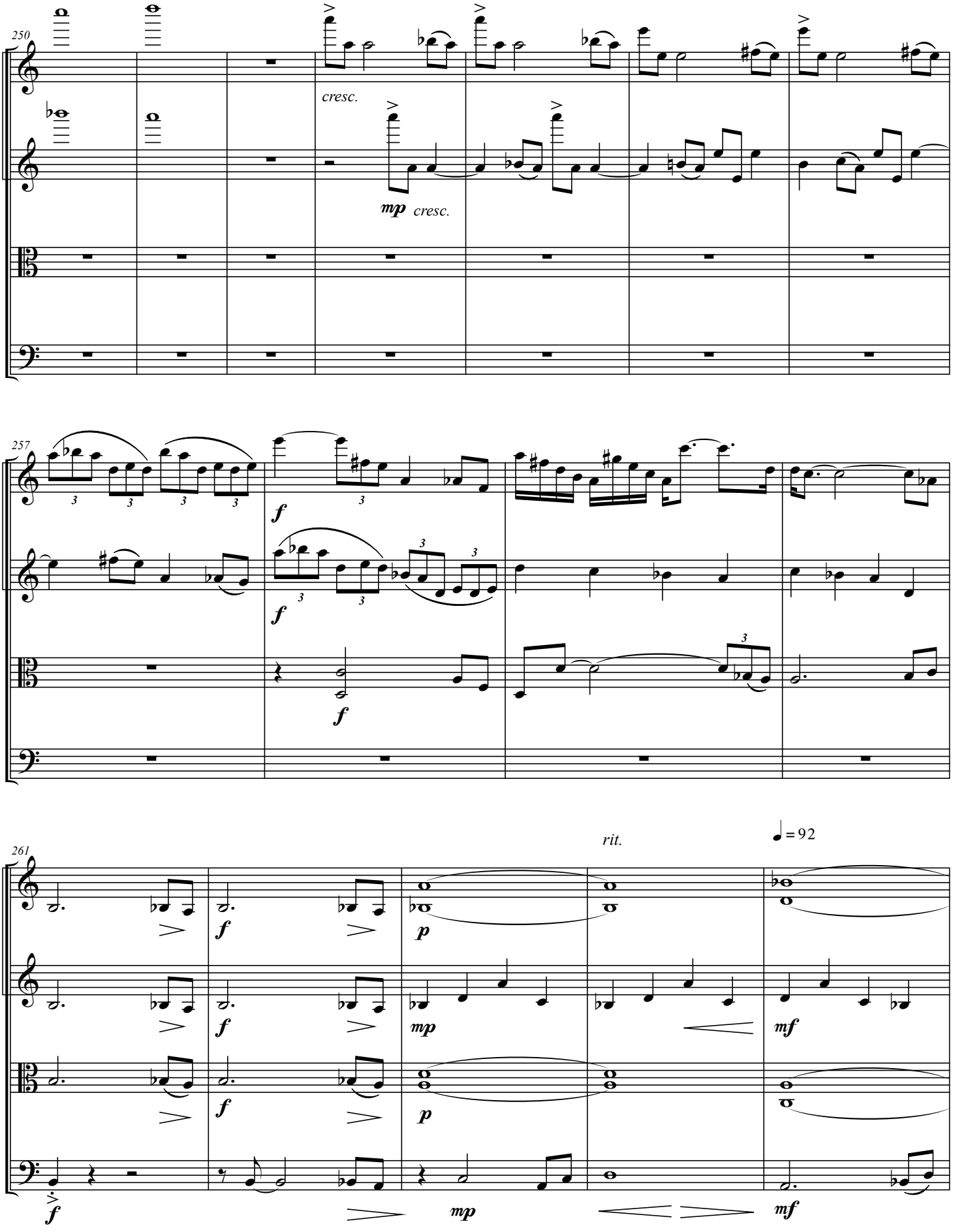


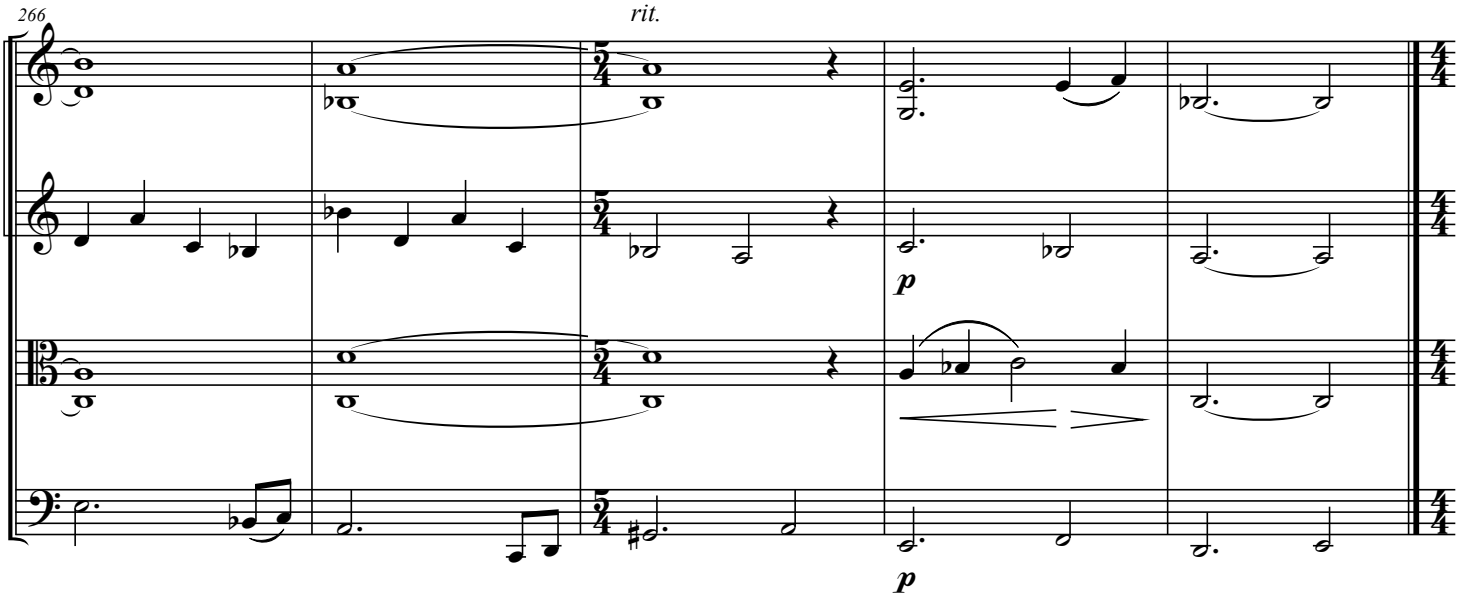

184
sul G
p
sul G
p
sul pont.
ppp
191
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
pp
pp
ordin.
p
198
pp
f
f
f
f

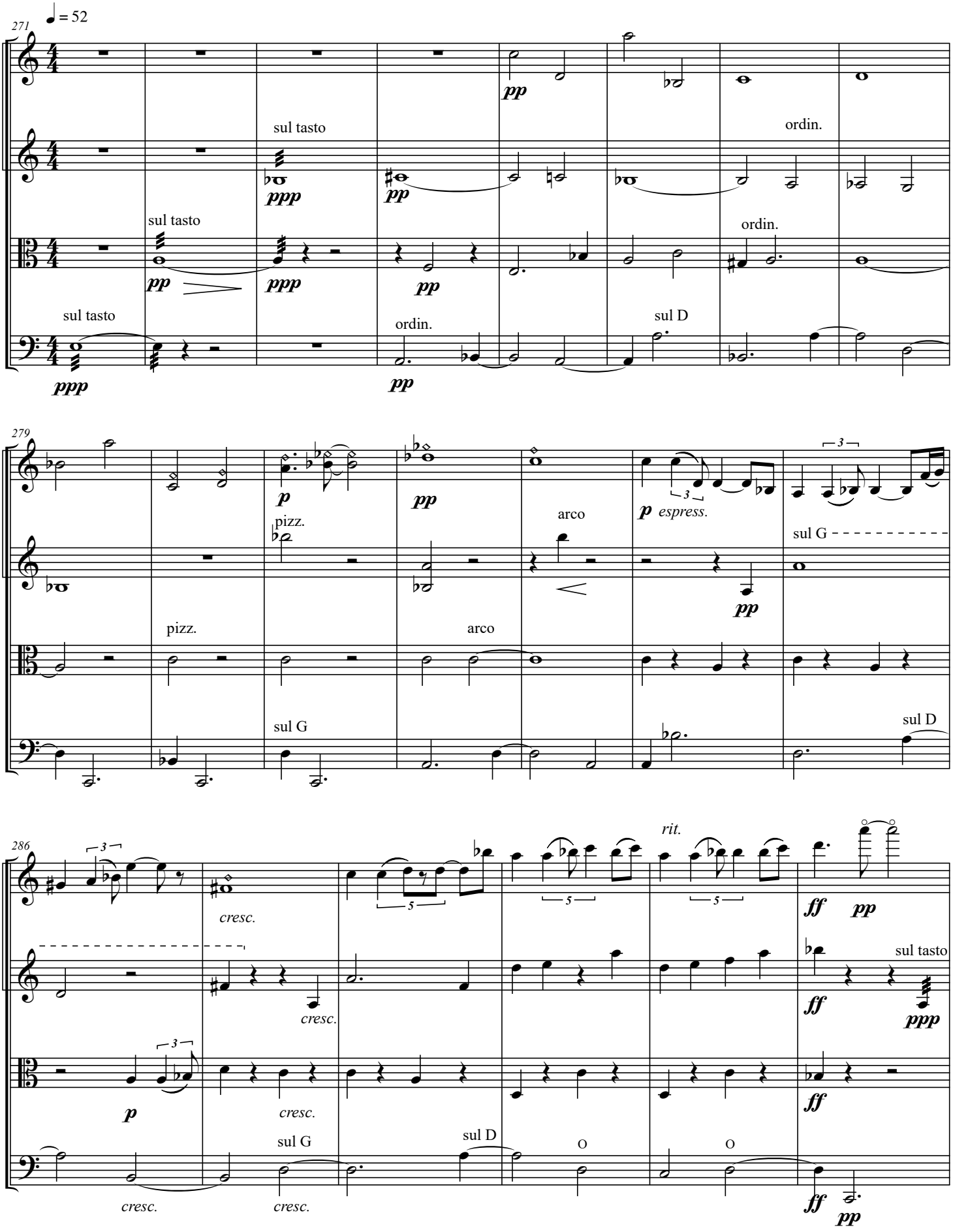

205
ff
ppp
col legno tratt.
ordin.
pp
sul pont.
3
210
col legno tratt.
ordin.
sul pont.
ppp
3

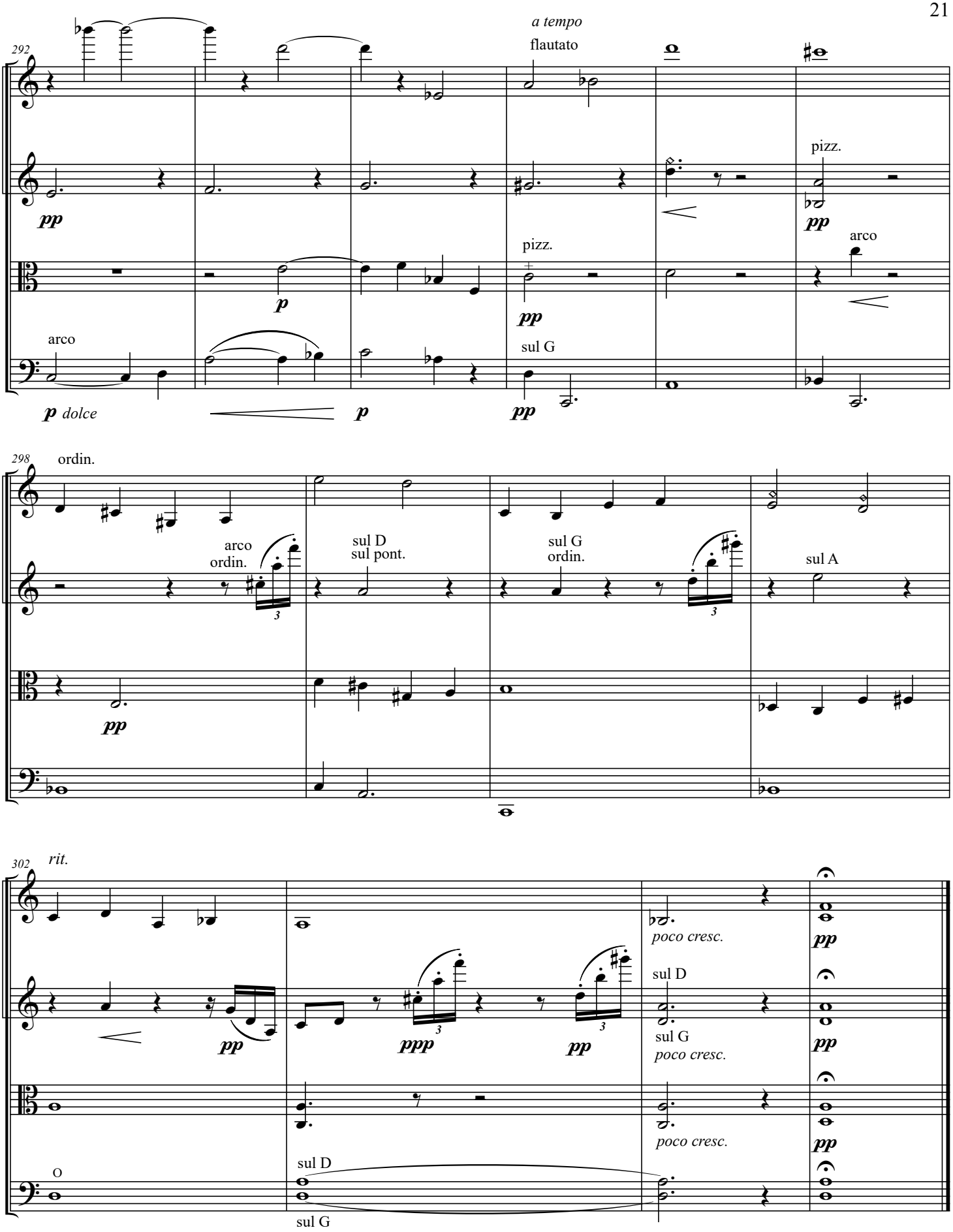

♩ = 100
accel.
a tempo
213
p
cresc.
f
p
pp
221
p
p
sul D
O
p
mf
p
228
mf
fp
p
f
p
p


234
pizz.
cresc.
f
arco
sul pont.
238
mf
ordin.
p
sul G
242
sul pont.
col legno tratt.


250
cresc.
mp cresc.
257
f
f
f
261
rit.
♩ = 92
f
f
p
mp
mf
f
f
p
f
mp
mf


266
rit.
p
p


271
♩ = 52
sul tasto
ordin.
sul D
279
pizz.
arco
espress.
sul G
286
rit.
cresc.
sul tasto
ff
pp
ppp


292
a tempo
flautato
pizz.
pizz.
arco
arco
sul G
298
ordin.
arco
ordin.
sul D
sul pont.
sul G
ordin.
sul A
302
rit.
poco cresc.
sul D
sul G
poco cresc.
poco cresc.
sul D
sul G