Mosaics

String Quartet no. 7

2015, 2026

Lawrence Kramer

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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 2025-26. Duration: 19 minutes.

For notes marked "col legno tratto," use enough hair so that the pitch is discernible.

Mosaics

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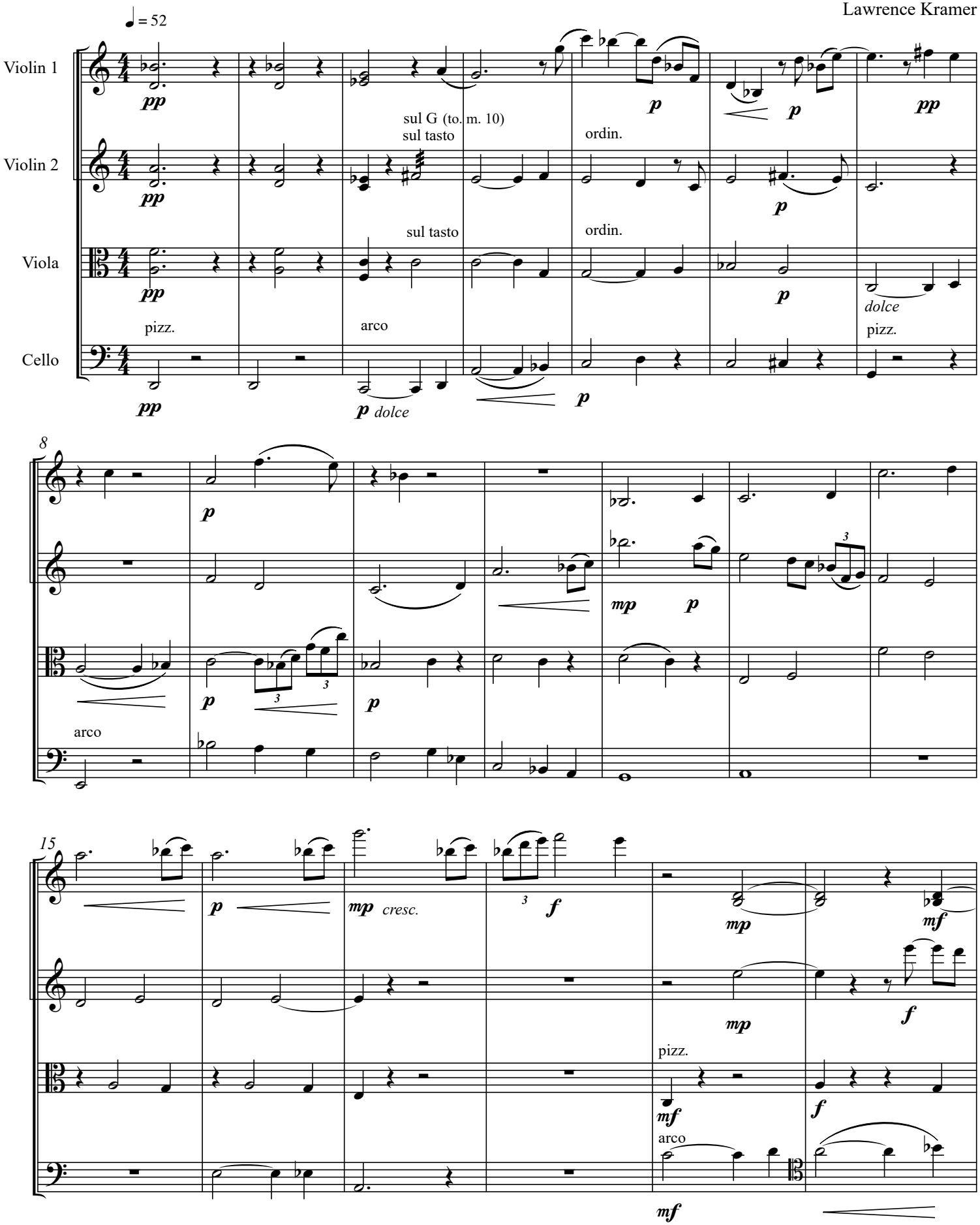
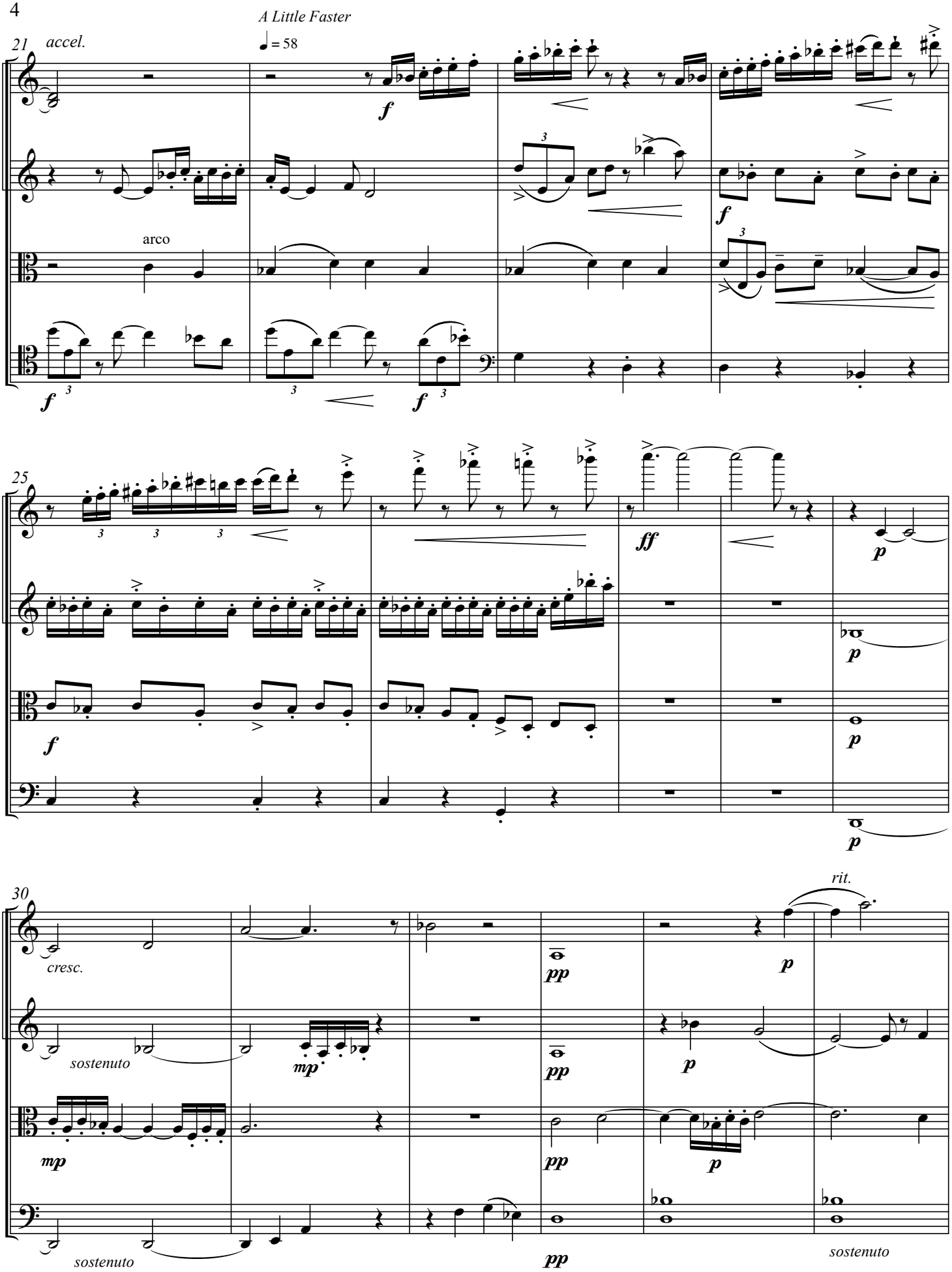
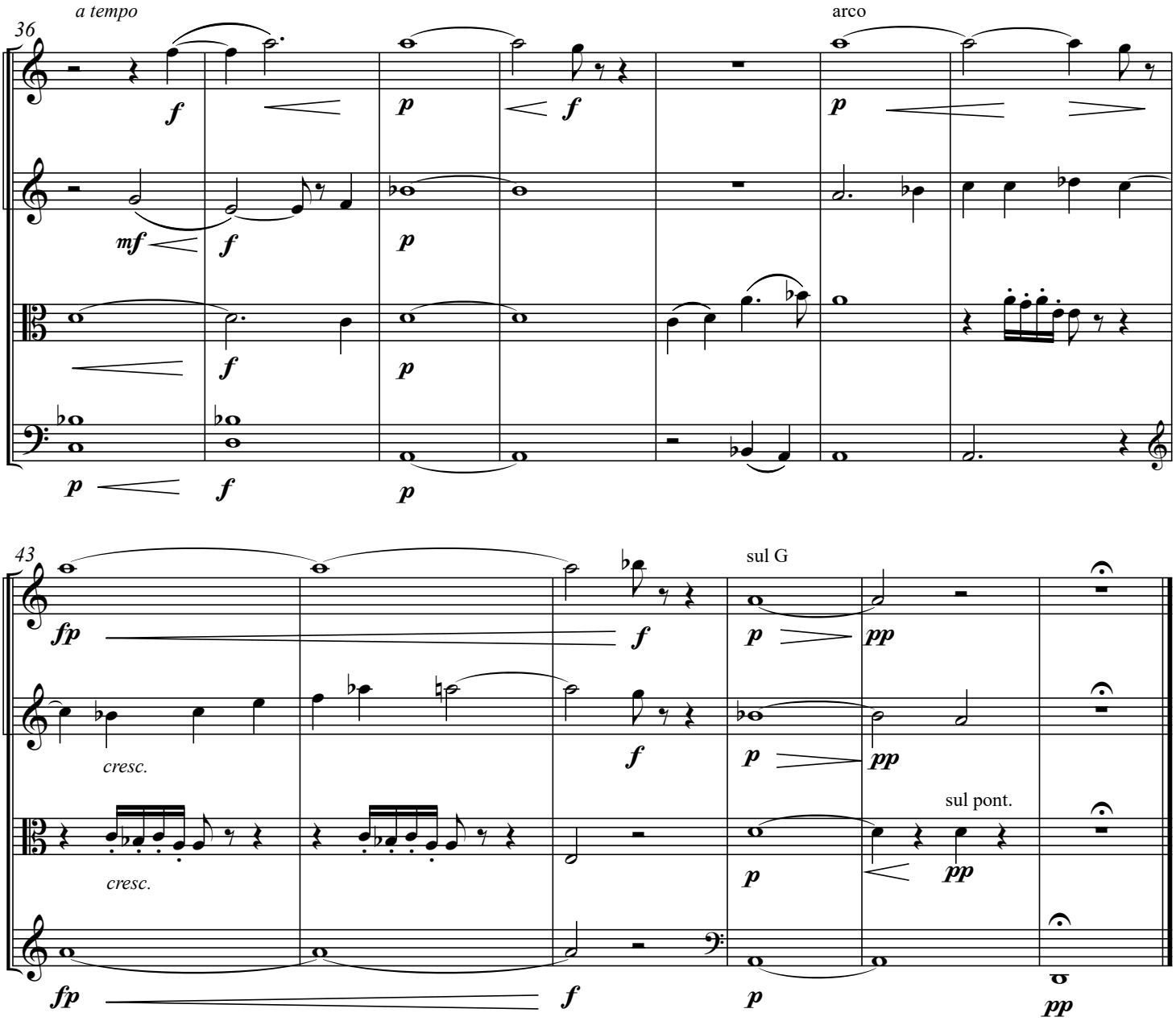
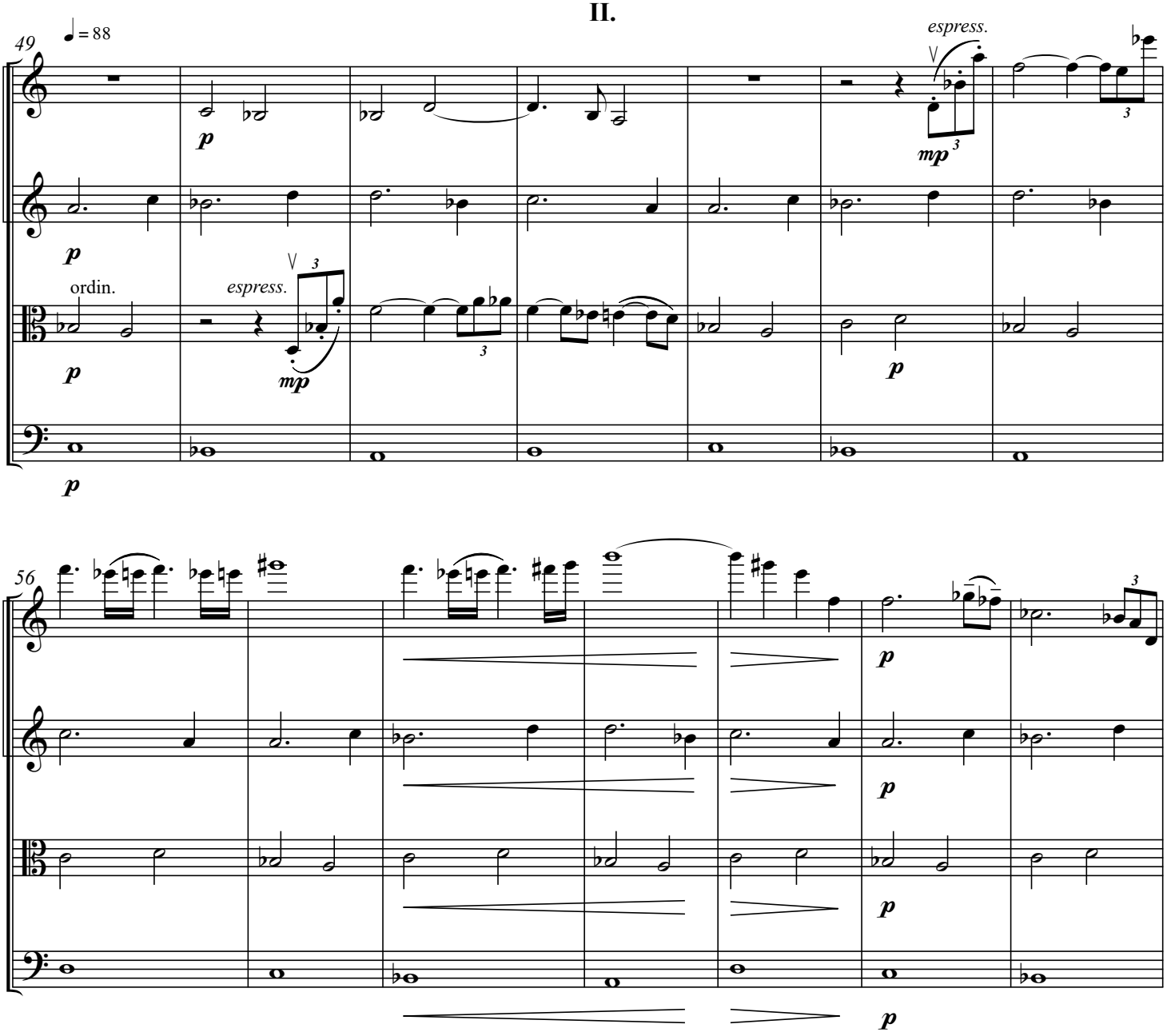


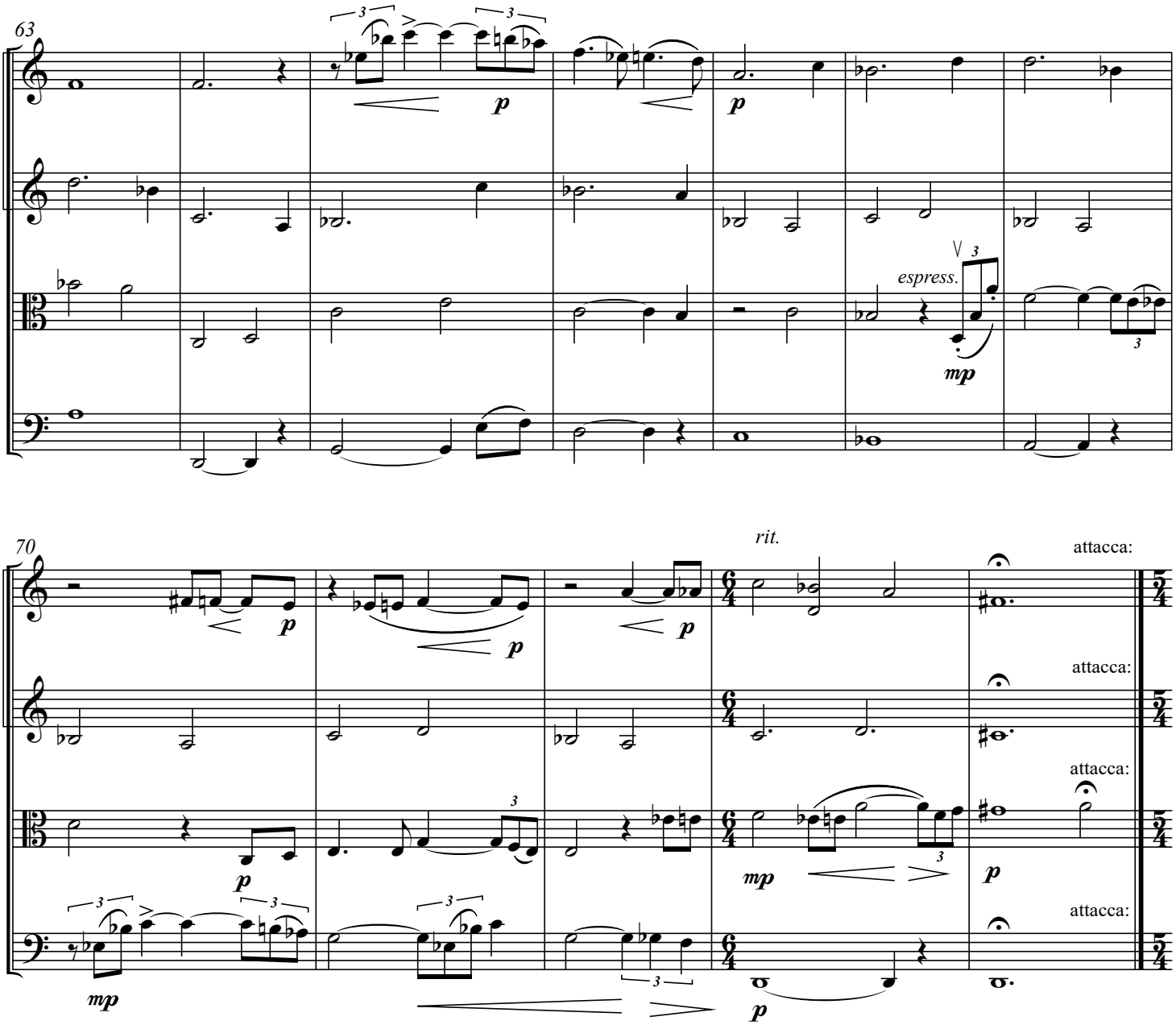
©2025


A Little Faster
♩ = 58
21
accel.
arco
25
30
cresc.
sostenuto
rit.

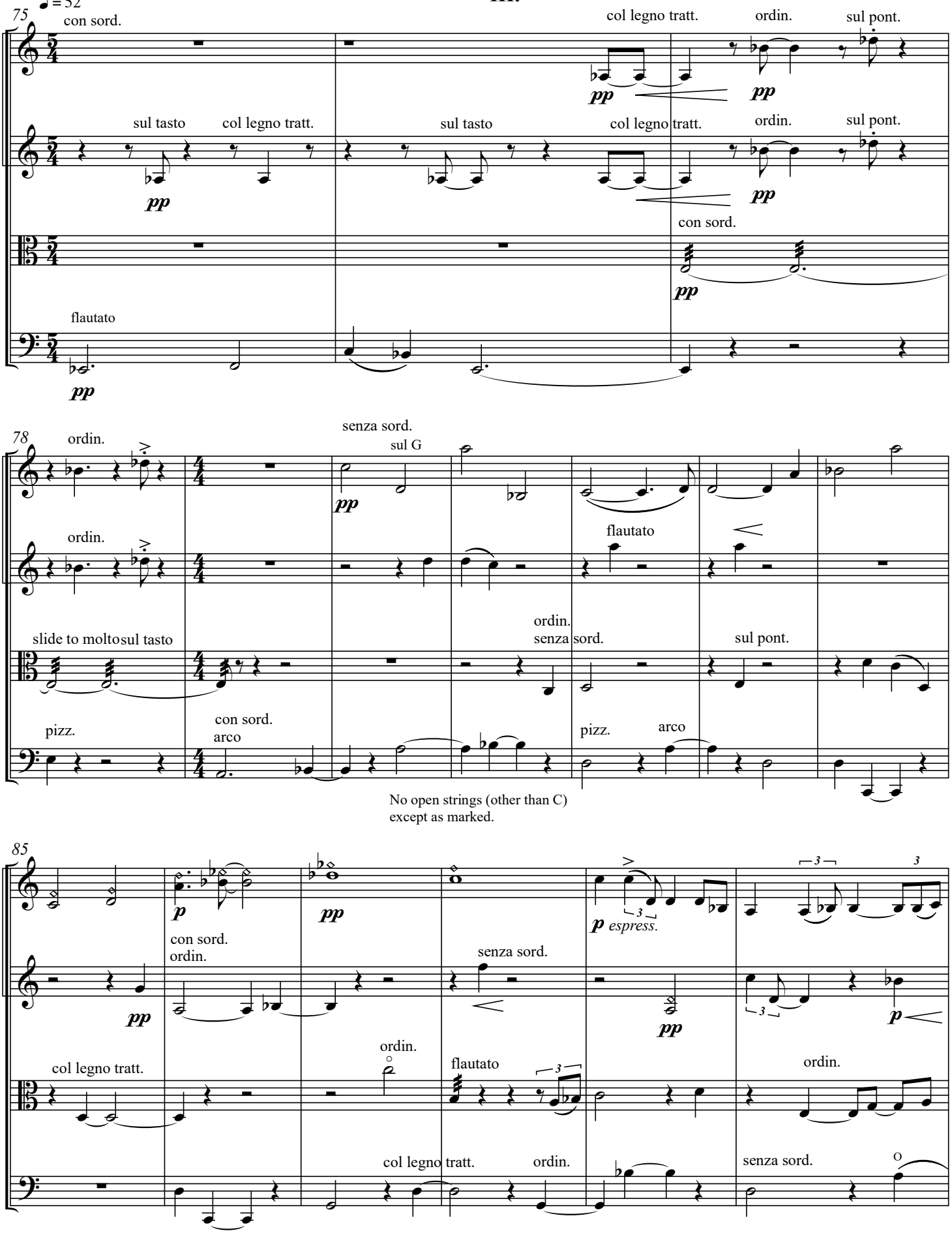

36
a tempo
arco
43
sul G
cresc.
cresc.
sul pont.

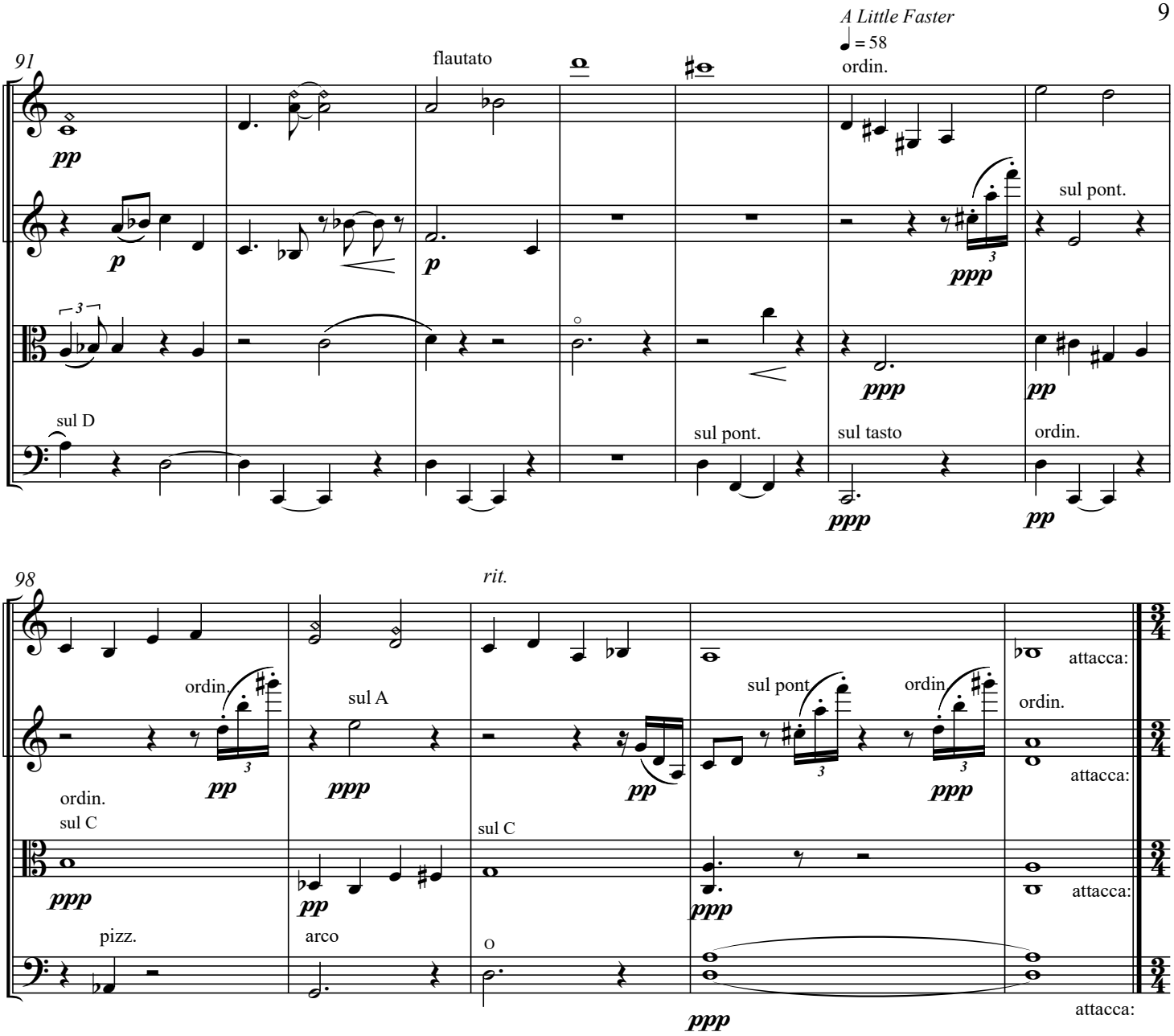
II.



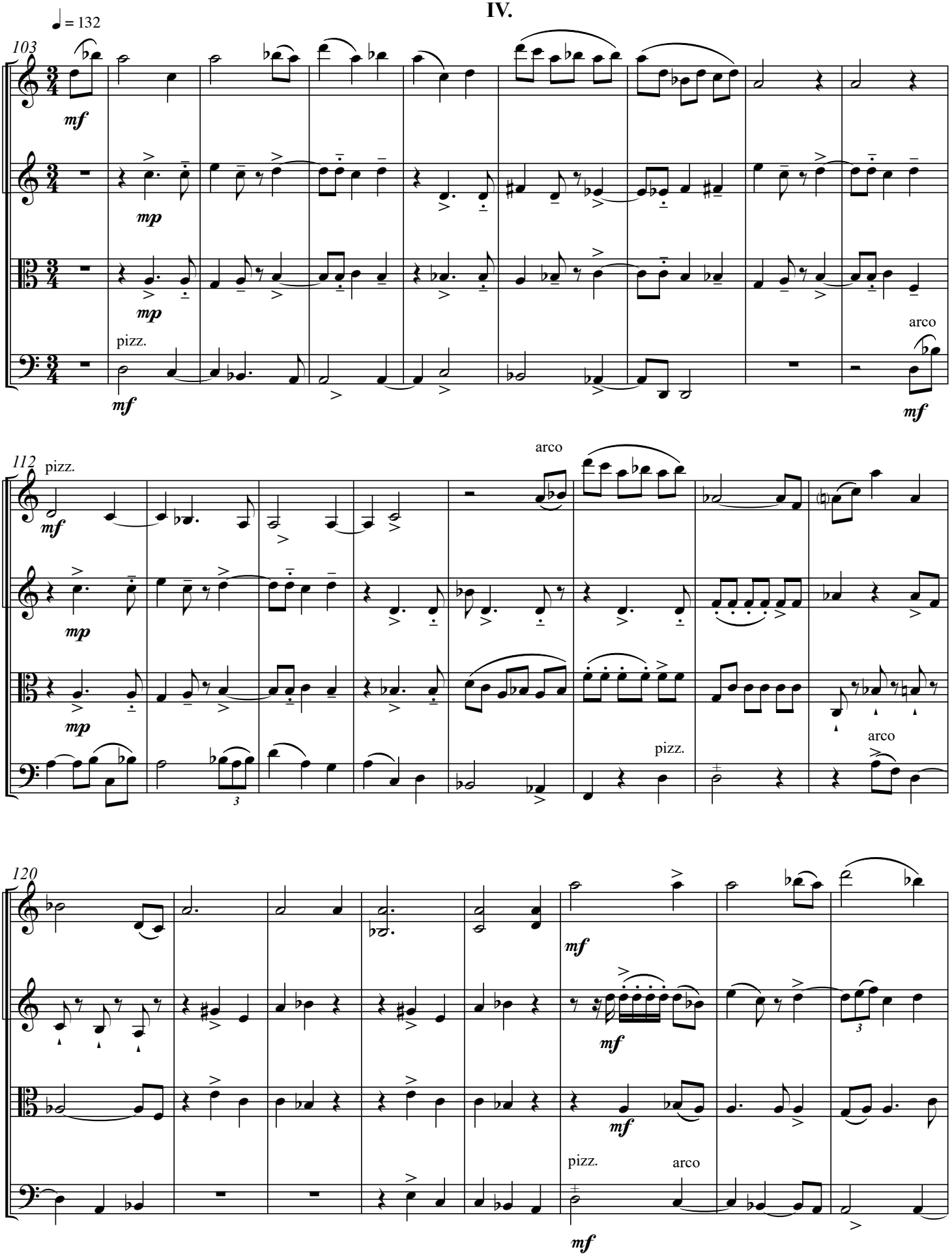

63
espress.
70
rit.
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:

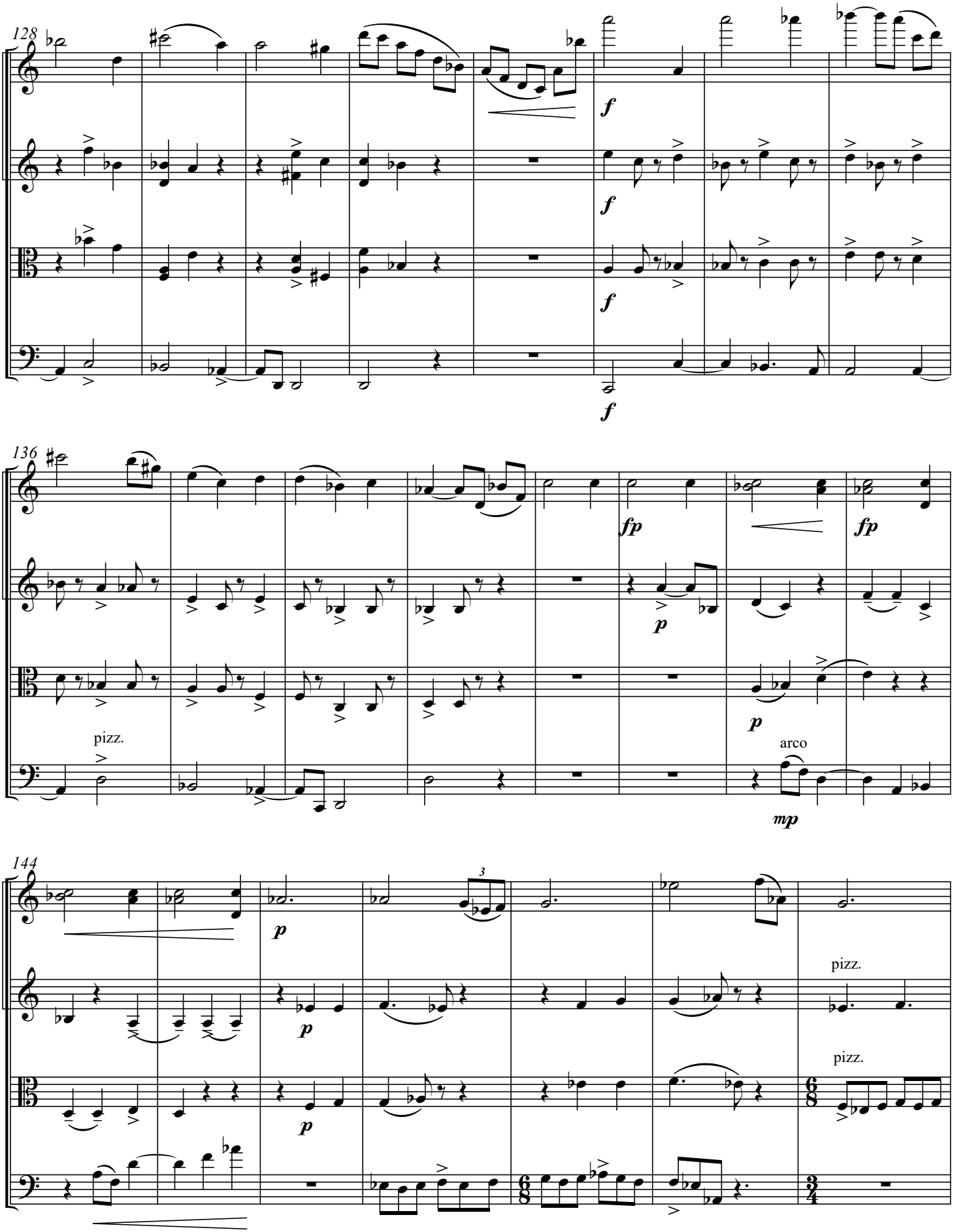
III.

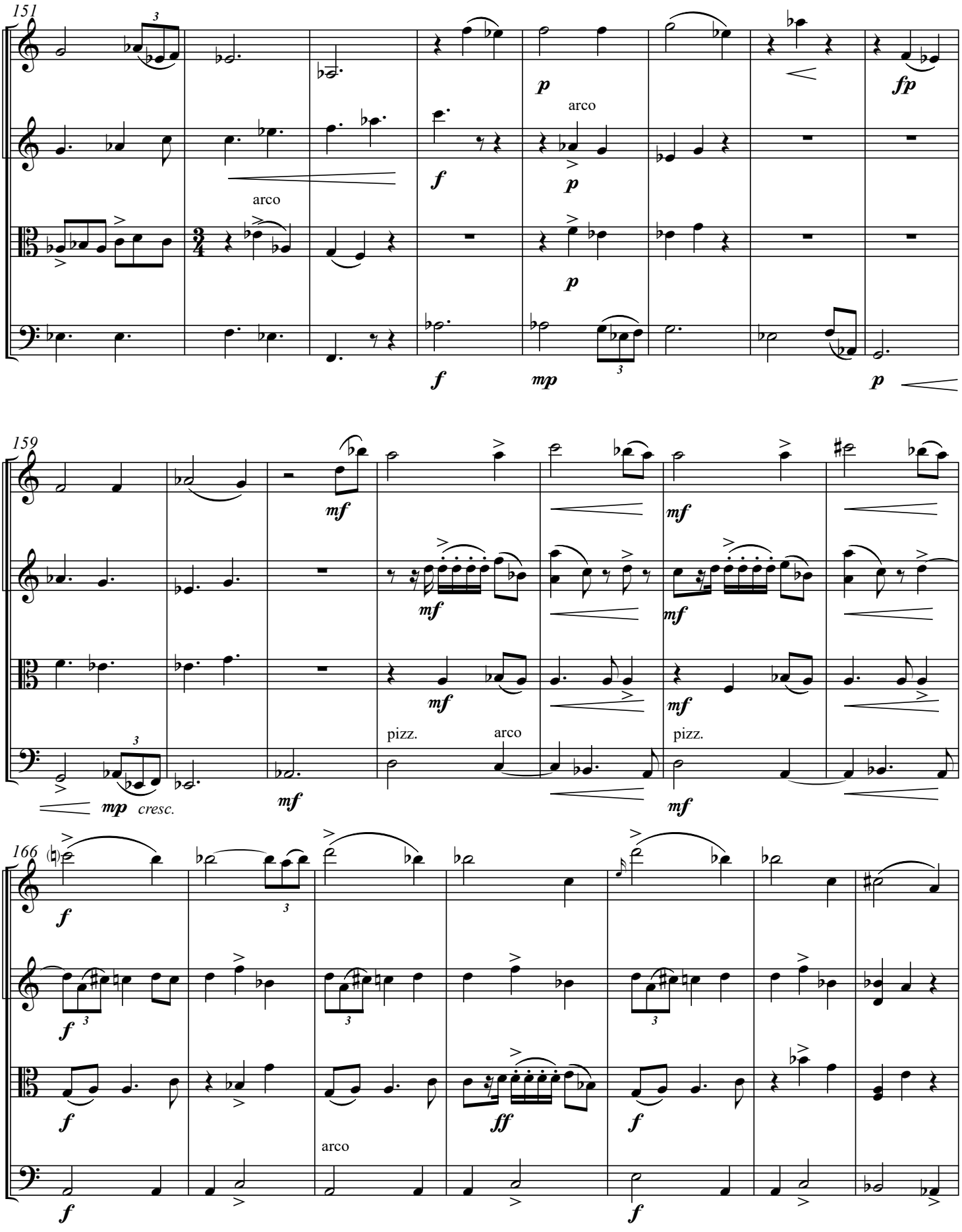

75
♩ = 52
con sord.
col legno tratt.
ordin.
sul pont.
pp
sul tasto
col legno tratt.
sul tasto
col legno tratt.
ordin.
sul pont.
pp
con sord.
pp
flautato
pp
78
ordin.
senza sord.
sul G
pp
ordin.
flautato
slide to molto
sul tasto
ordin.
senza sord.
sul pont.
pizz.
con sord.
arco
pizz.
arco
No open strings (other than C)
except as marked.
85
p
pp
con sord.
ordin.
pp
senza sord.
p espress.
pp
p
col legno tratt.
ordin.
flautato
ordin.
col legno tratt.
ordin.
senza sord.

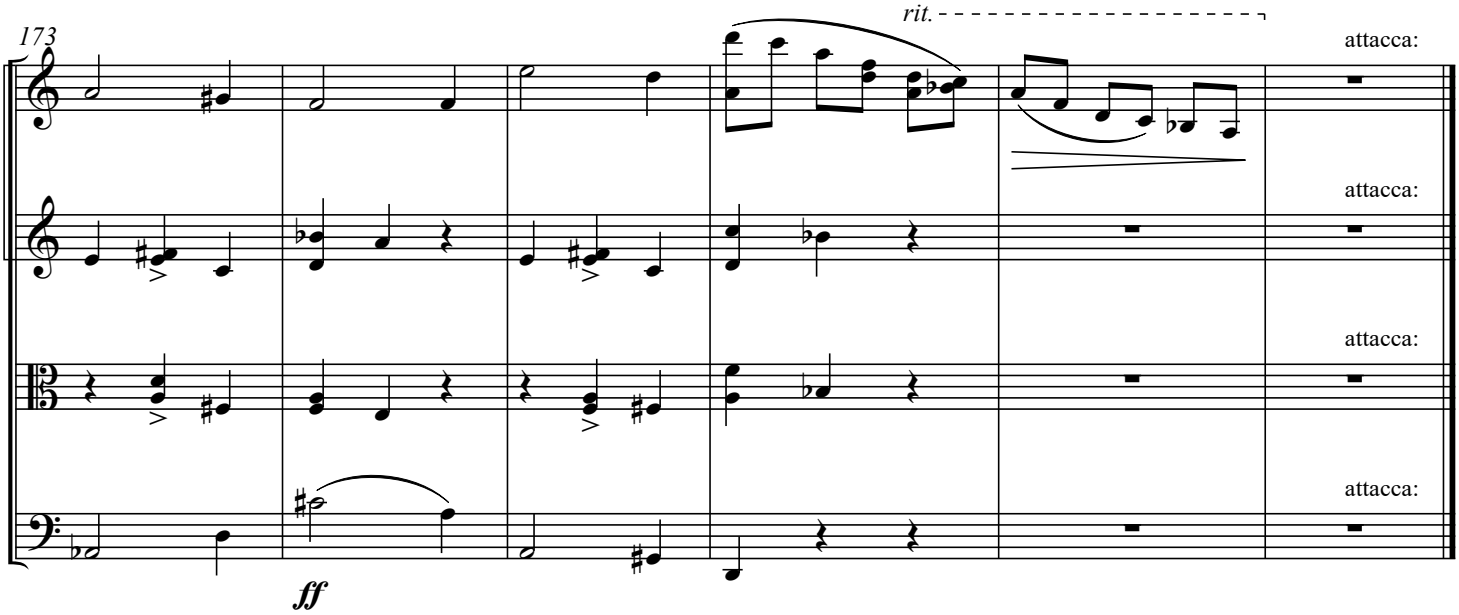

91
flautato
A Little Faster
♩ = 58
ordin.
pp
p
p
sul pont.
ppp
ppp
pp
sul D
sul pont.
sul tasto
ordin.
ppp
pp
98
rit.
ordin.
sul A
sul pont
ordin
ordin.
attacca:
ordin.
sul C
sul C
attacca:
pizz.
arco
attacca:
ppp

IV.

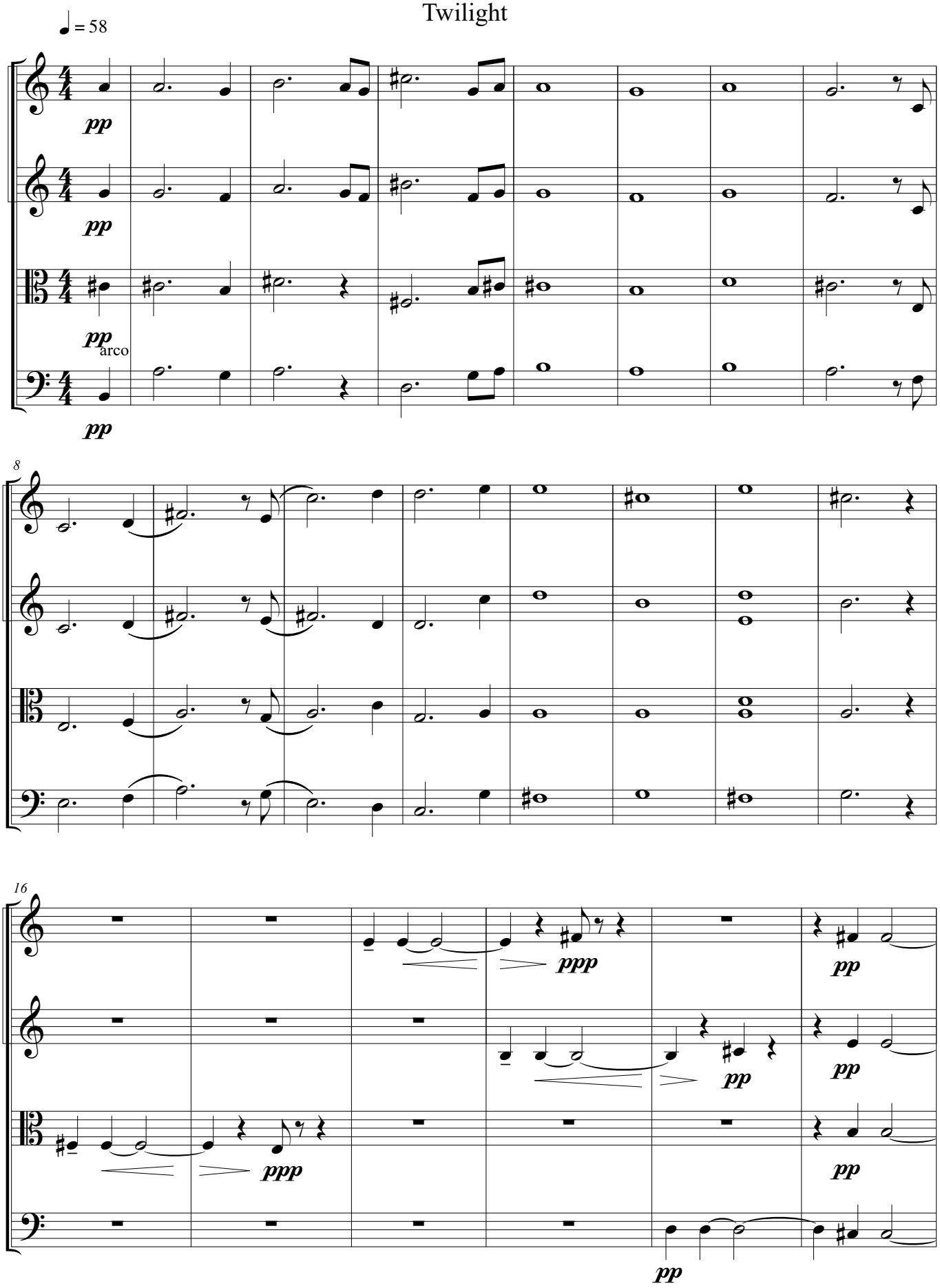

♩ = 132
103
mf
mp
mp
pizz.
mf
arco
mf
112
pizz.
mf
mp
mp
arco
pizz.
arco
120
mf
mf
pizz.
arco
mf

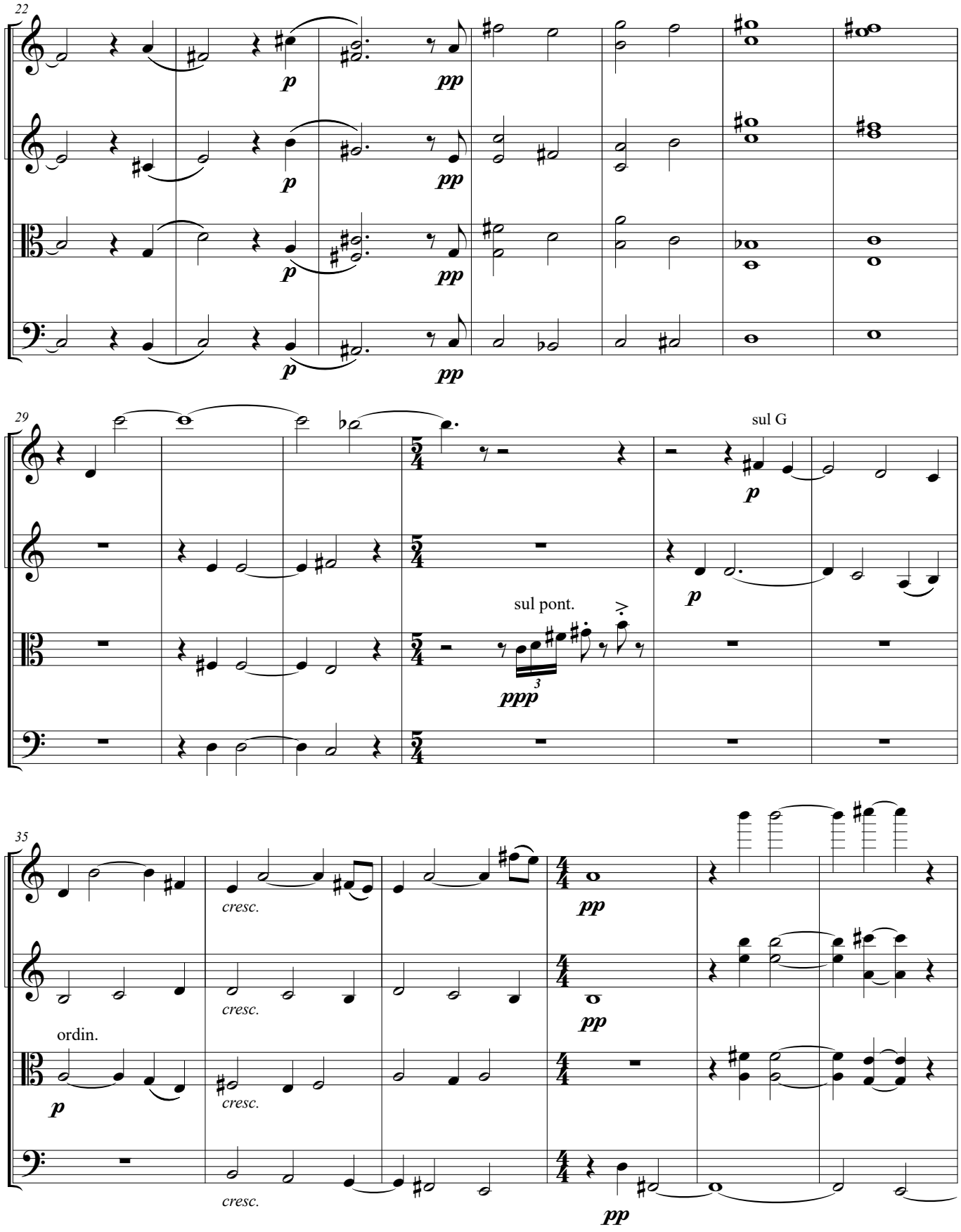

128
f
f
f
f
136
fp
p
fp
p
pizz.
arco
mp
144
3
p
p
p
pizz.
pizz.
6/8
6/8
3/4

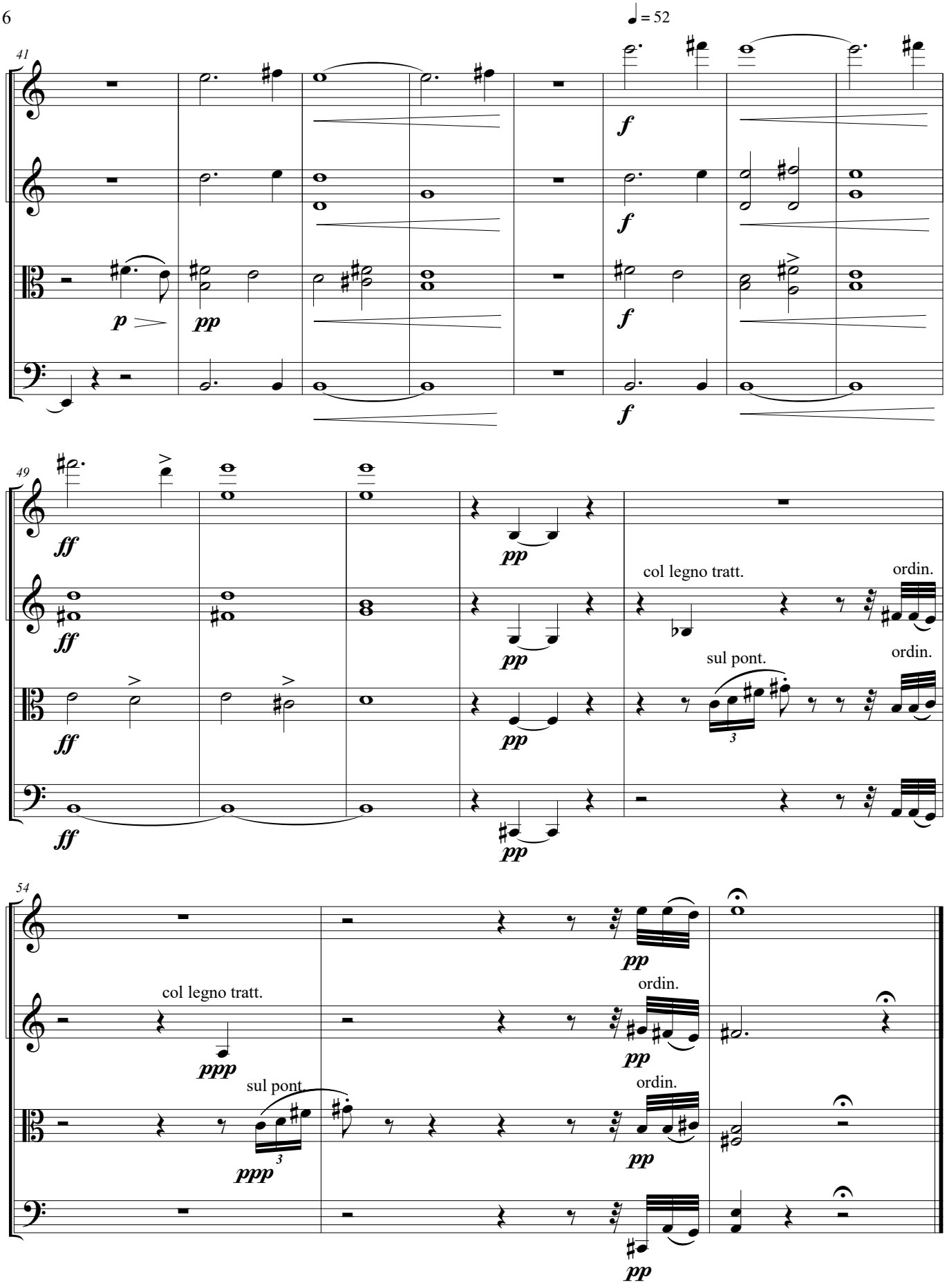

151
arco
arco
159
pizz.
arco
pizz.
166
arco


173
rit.
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:
attacca:
ff

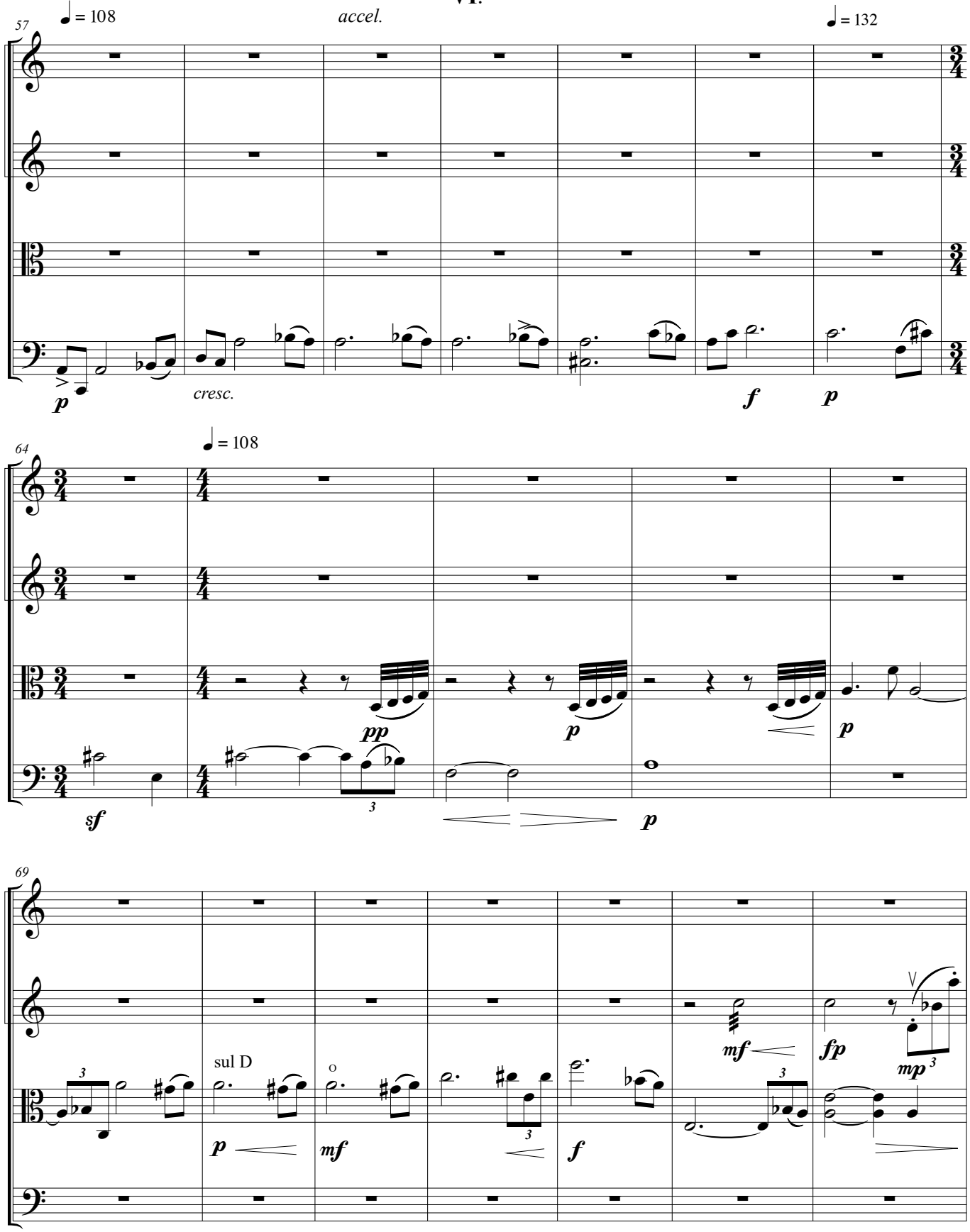
V.
Twilight

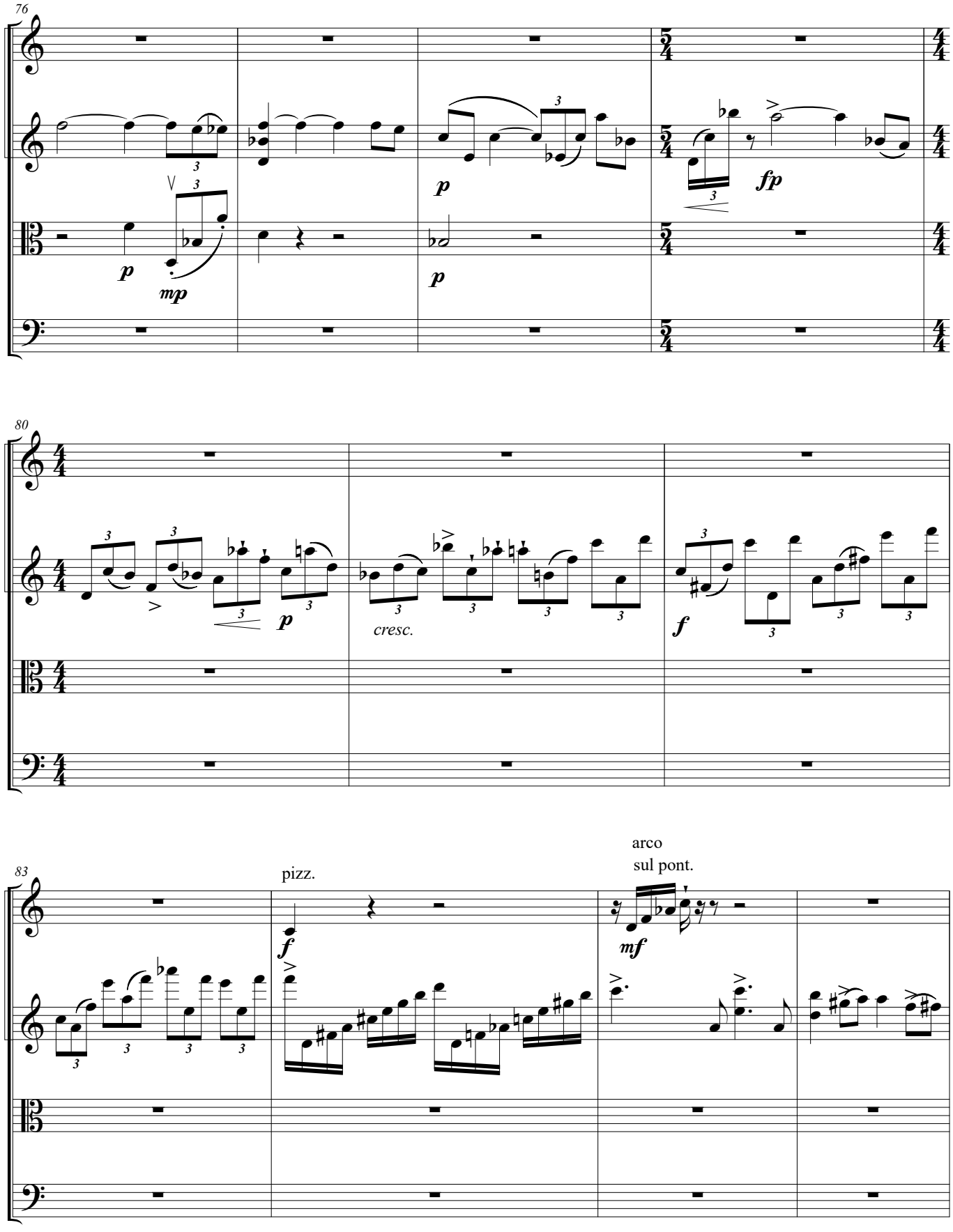


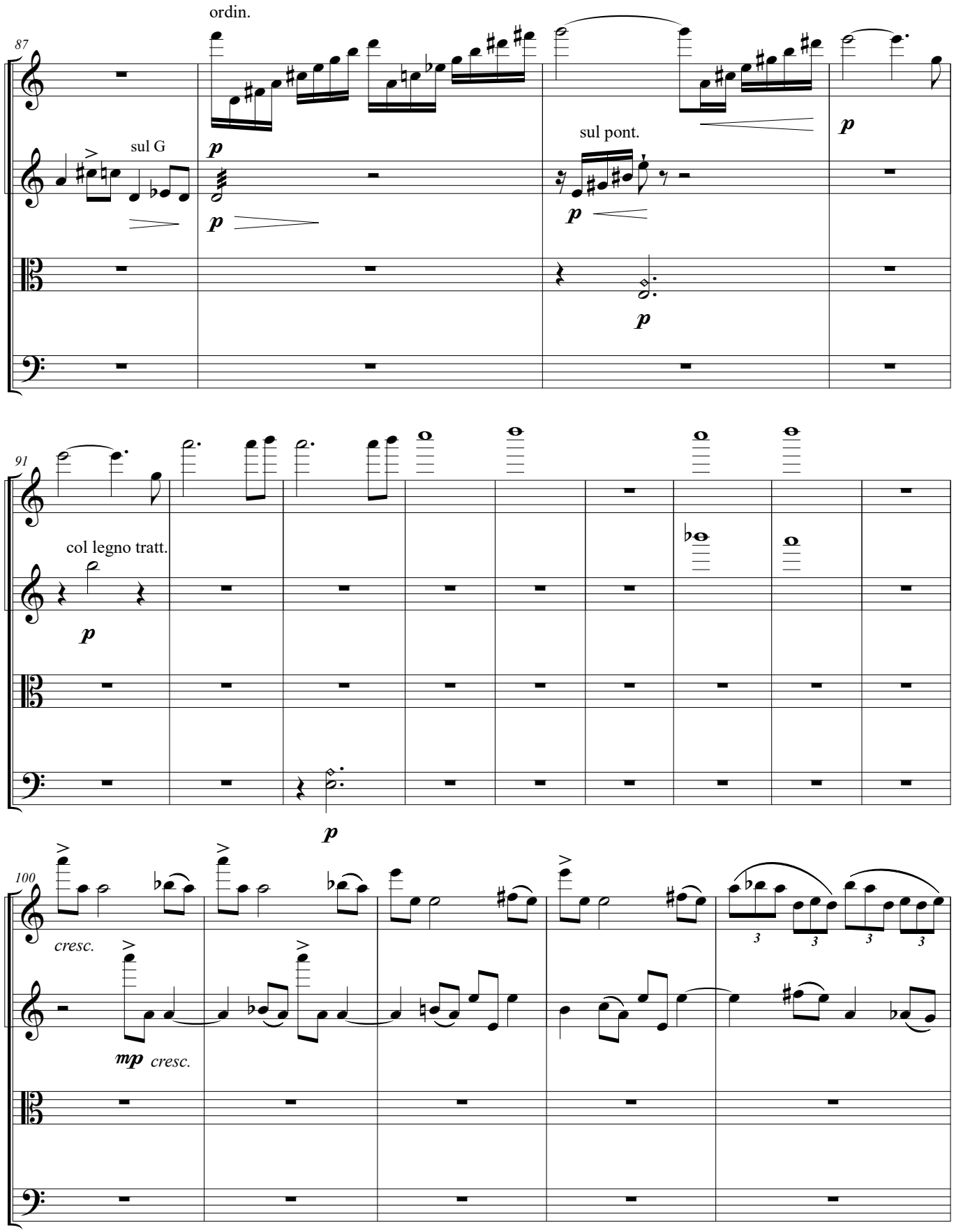

22
p
pp
29
sul G
sul pont.
ppp
35
cresc.
ordin.
pp

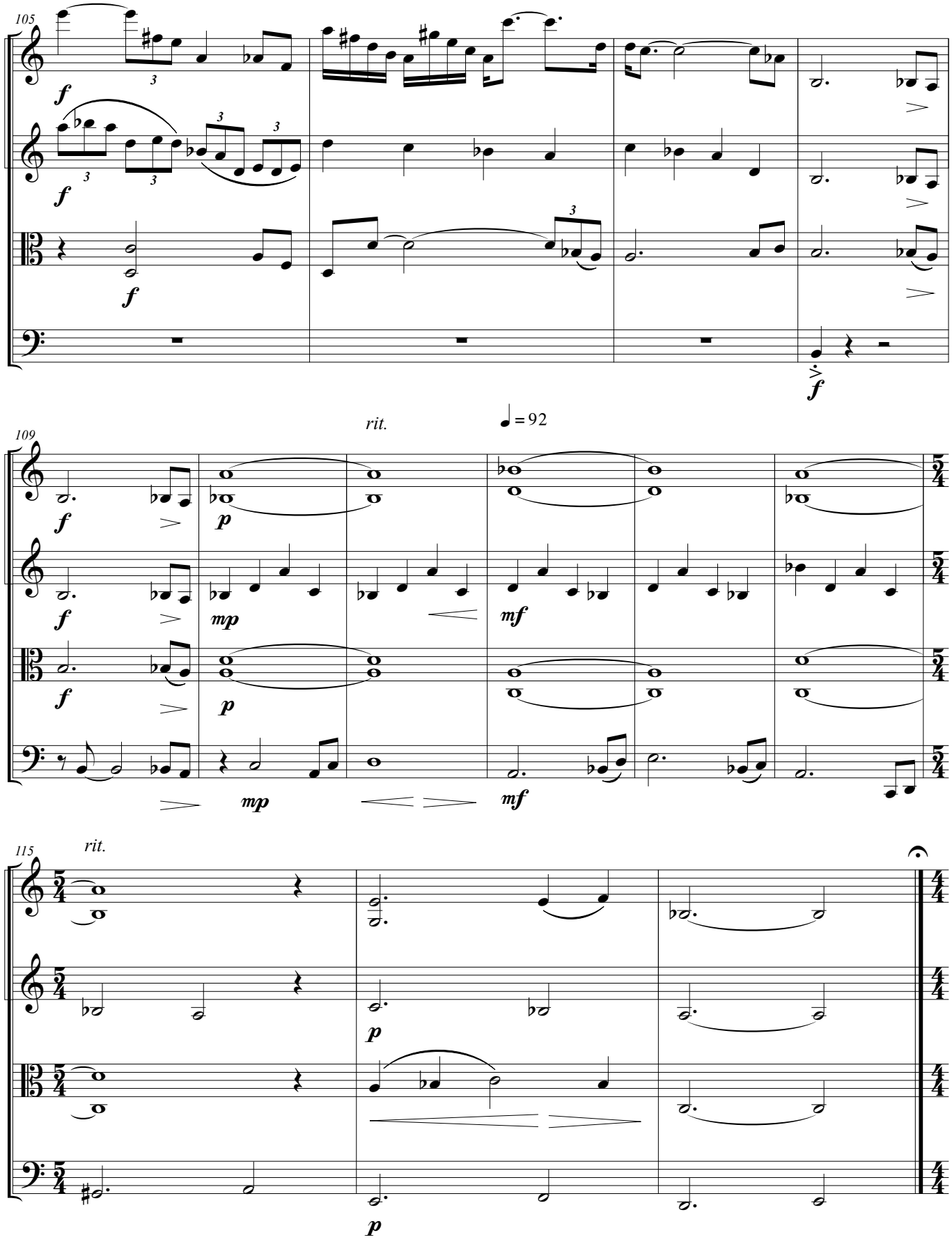

♩ = 52
41
f
p
pp
49
ff
col legno tratt.
ordin.
sul pont.
54
ppp
sul pont.

VI.

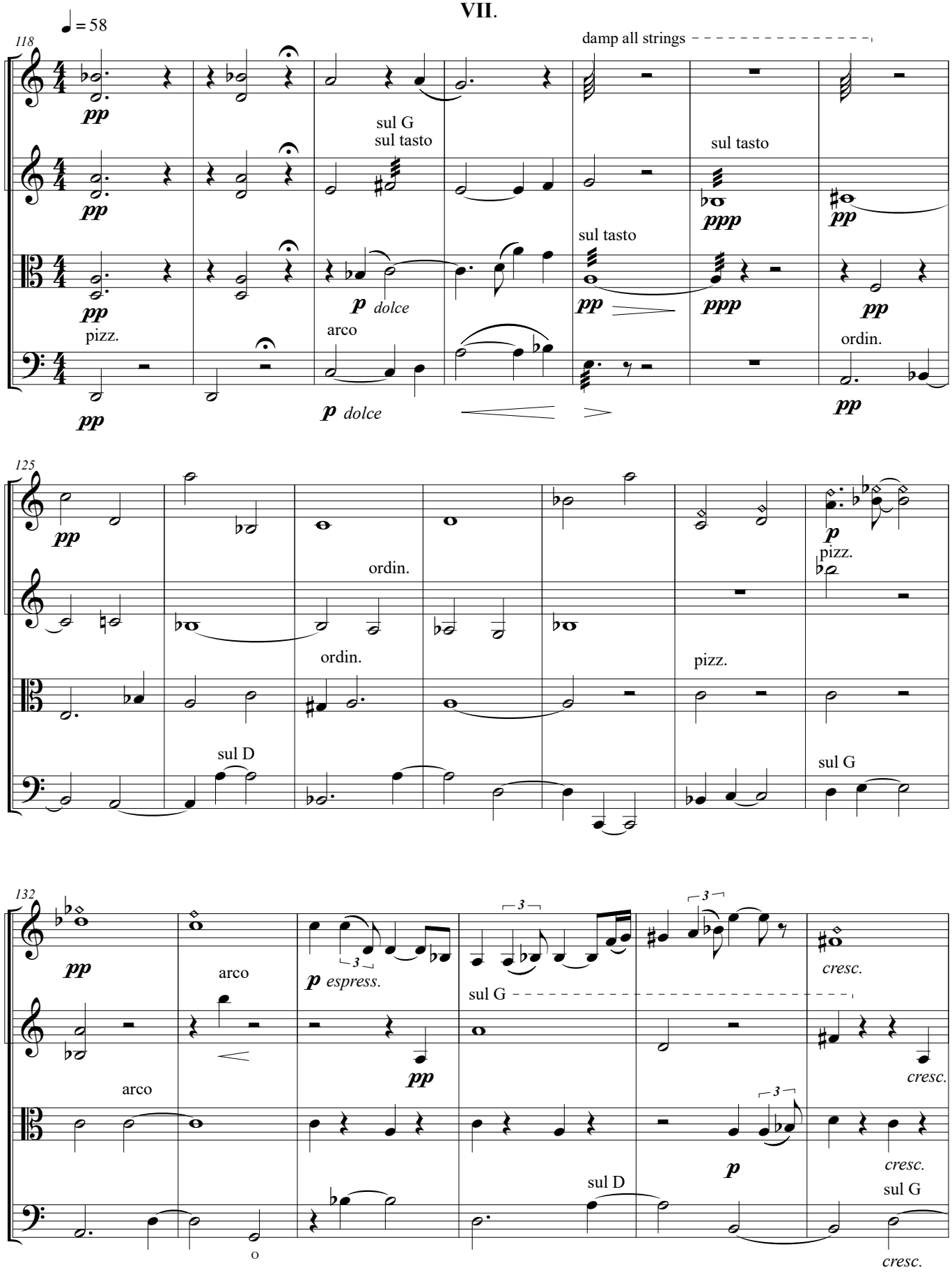

57
♩ = 108
accel.
♩ = 132
p
cresc.
f
p
64
♩ = 108
pp
p
p
sf
p
69
sul D
o
p
mf
f
mf
fp
mp

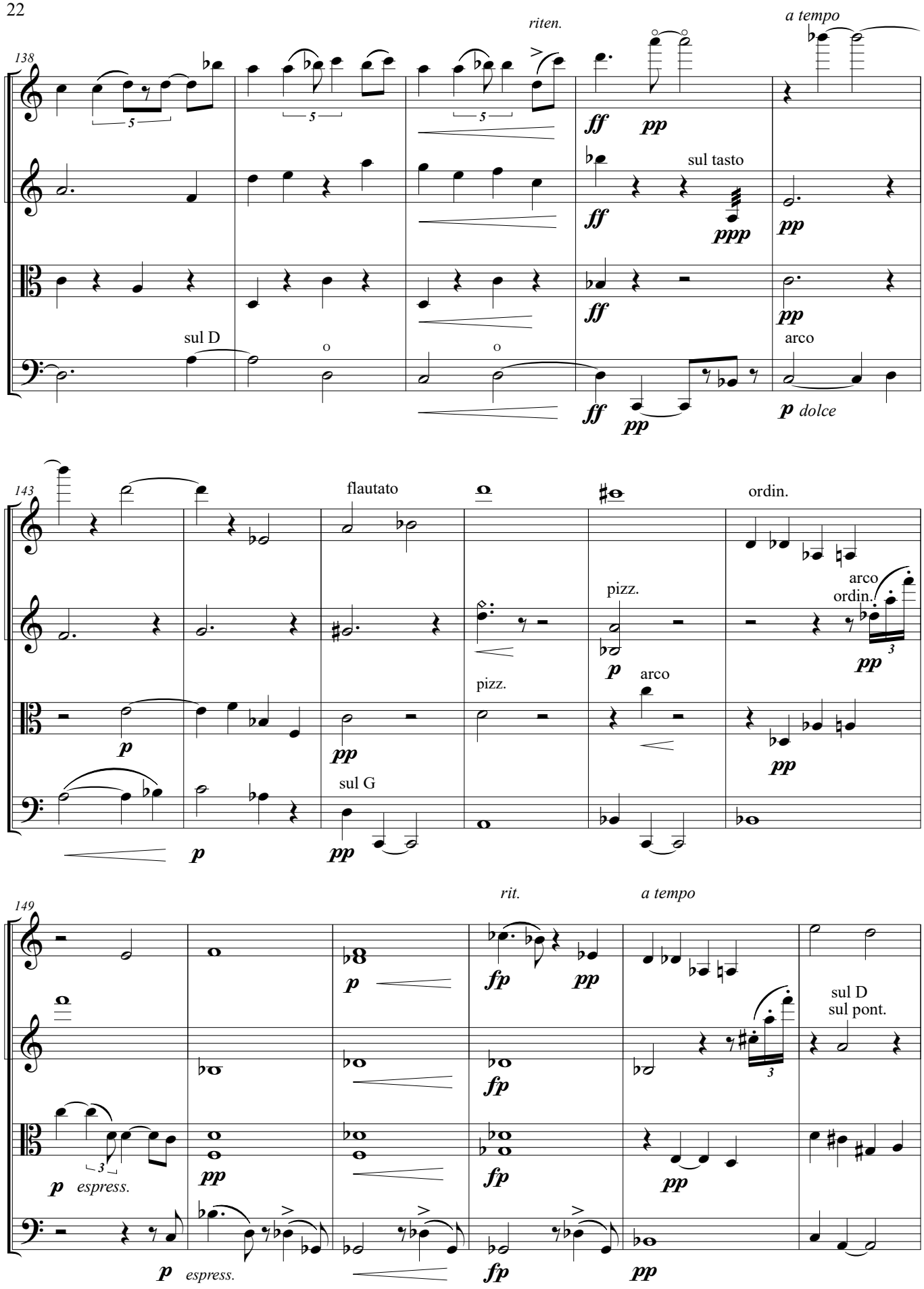

76
p
mp
p
fp
80
p
cresc.
f
83
pizz.
f
arco
sul pont.
mf

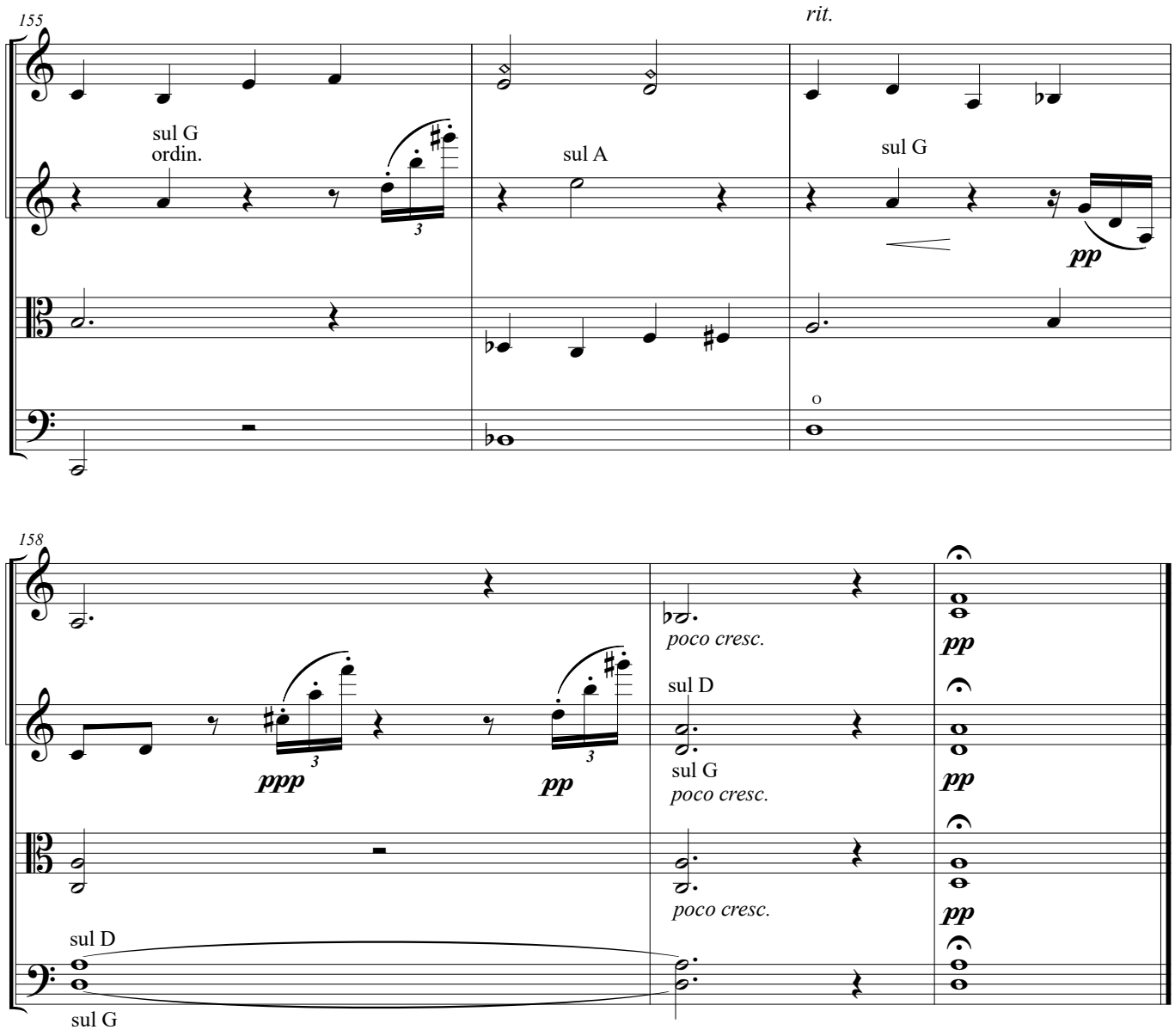

87
ordin.
sul G
p
p
sul pont.
p
p
p
91
col legno tratt.
p
p
100
cresc.
mp cresc.
3
3
3
3


105
109
rit.
♩ = 92
115
rit.

VII.


118
♩ = 58
damp all strings
pp
sul G
sul tasto
sul tasto
ppp
sul tasto
p dolce
arco
pizz.
ordin.
125
ordin.
ordin.
pizz.
sul D
sul G
132
p espress.
arco
sul G
cresc.
arco
sul D
sul G
cresc.


138
riten.
a tempo
sul tasto
sul D
arco
dolce
143
flautato
ordin.
pizz.
arco
ordin.
sul G
149
rit.
a tempo
espress.
sul D
sul pont.


155
rit.
sul G
ordin.
sul A
sul G
pp
o
158
ppp
pp
poco cresc.
sul D
sul G
poco cresc.
poco cresc.
pp
pp
pp
sul D
sul G