Elegiac Suite for clarinet and string quartet, op. 55

1. Divisions on UFFINGHAM (Jeremiah Clarke)
2. Déploration
3. Wistful Waltz
4. Marche héroïque

Between 1984 and the present year 2011, my opus 55 subsisted in just what is now the final movement of this Suite of elegiac numbers. The movement had wide circulation in an arrangement for organ under the original title Postludium, so it was only natural that it would occupy the closing slot in the expansion I effected this summer. Now, when I embarked on the present project I simply had amanuensis work in mind, with the middle-aged composer taking his younger self's manuscript and engraving it on computer for promulgation. If I never got around to doing so in the intervening decades, it was because I always felt misgivings about Postludium as a stand-alone work in the chamber music genre. In other words, I was leaving open the possibility that I might someday complement it with more music.

No such scruples obtained when we were talking about a stand-alone work for the organ, though. Over the years I had, in the organ world, ofttimes heard the piece referred to as a funeral march, and my first editorial decision this season was to give the piece a new title, Marche héroïque. The engraving of the single movement complete, I composed these program notes which I'll leave here intact (thus they are subsumed in the present notes rather than superseded by them):

The title Marche héroïque represents a kind of disambiguation. My opus 54 is a jaunty march for concert band just brimming with joie de vivre. Although it is in essentially the same form as the present work, in terms of Affekt it couldn't be more different. The piece was written in the introspective days after I learned of the death of my beloved friend and teacher, Calvin Hampton. So the title serves not just to distinguish this work from its traditional military march predecessor in my œuvre, but also to aver that the work that issued from my pen in those desolate days is pointedly not *any species of funeral march. We are duly sad but do not succumb to grief. Indeed, our loved ones need to be released to their new life, and not to have us clinging intemperately to their souls now departed.*

I used the four musical tones found in Calvin's name (CAHA; H is the way the note we call B-natural is indicated in German notation, by the way). They generate the march's pensive Trio section (the B in the A–B–A form, that is to say) and also figure unexpectedly in the work's expressive Coda on the 'cello.

Speaking of the 'cello, here's a humorous aside. As I was finishing the work in August of 1984, I had to fulfill a commitment to play a wedding in New Jersey. Like most weddings, this one involved considerable down time while I waited in the organ loft to finally play the recessional. I wanted to hear my fledgling work out loud, and felt sure I could make a good case for it on the organ. That meant that the numerous extrovert 'cello solos would naturally get delegated to the pedalboard. My eager feet started to practice those on the "silent" organ, in anticipation of the church's imminent clearing out. Well, not quite silent I found out later, when the pastor asked me what all that clatter of wood from the loft was about during the service! I later made a formal arrangement for organ (after all, my "hero's" chosen instrument) of this composition.

It goes without saying that the Marche is dedicated to Calvin's memory.

In a sense, those notes obtained to clinch my acknowledgment of the Marche as a self-contained offering, but they didn't work. Or you could say they *did* work, but only to foster resistance to what it was they were pronouncing! Before long I found myself collecting material to supplement Marche héroïque, and the three movements that now precede it came into being over the past few weeks.

There is one other elegiac work in my catalogue of chamber music, my opus 43 Sonatine for flute and harp. Its three movements were written in reverse order over as many days. Interestingly, the numbers in the present Suite also emerged in reverse order, but of course the time span now was closer to three decades! The first composition from this summer was the Wistful Waltz, a nostalgic glance back at happier days which I inscribed to the memory of my Aunt Rose. When I went to reckon the metronome markings I found that all but one of them were the same as those in the decades-old Marche. The next piece to inform the Suite, Déploration, also took its tempo marking from the Marche's Trio section. The word in French denotes a kind of ritualized wailing, appropriate to this piece consecrated to my sister Rita's memory. The last number written, but the first encountered in my Elegiac Suite, is a set of variations, which uses, it almost goes without saying, only the tempo markings found in the other movements. (The only new one, that is to say, not found in the old Marche, occurred as I said in the Waltz. There the tactus is a quarter note, and it represents that number's fastest section. But the variations are counted in half notes, and here the same tactus generates a quite *slow* variation.) Needless to say, any slight compunction I might have felt about reconstituting this old opus was obliterated by the time my metronome homework was finished! I am not a better composer now than I was then, but I am a very different one. It seems that the "impulse" to compose supplementary material primarily involved picking up the *pulse* from the three sections (main, trio, coda) of the extant Marche. All the verification I ever needed.

What I have been calling the opening number here, variations, would more likely have been termed Divisions by the contemporaries of Jeremiah Clarke, whose hymn tune UFFINGHAM I am treating. It has to do with less emphasis on melodic variation (although I do provide a good share of that, to be sure) than on rhythmic diminution (shorter note values, or "divisions" of the beat). In such a stylized milieu, the use of pizzicato on the strings comes across more like Baroque lute! I dedicate these variations in the old style to a dear departed friend, the wonderful City Opera tenor Jon Benac.

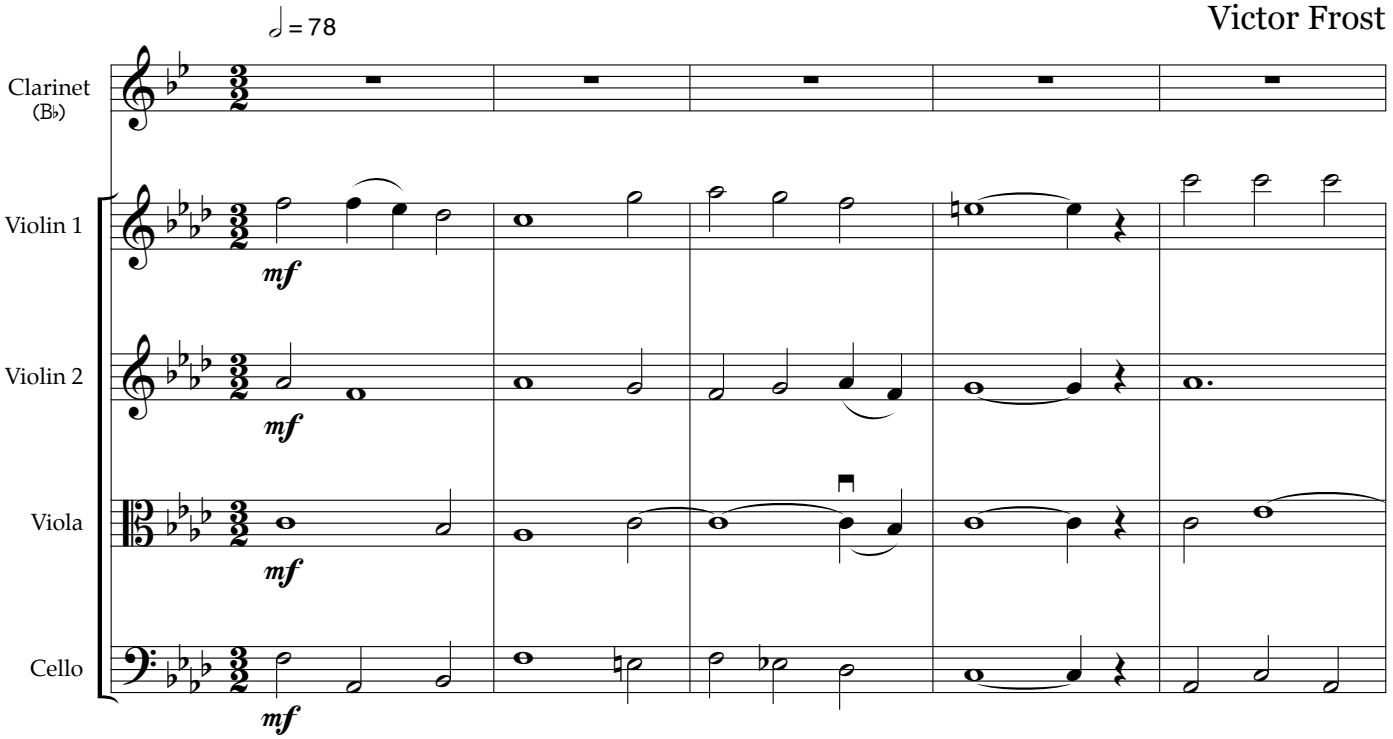
Victor Frost
3 IX 11
New York City

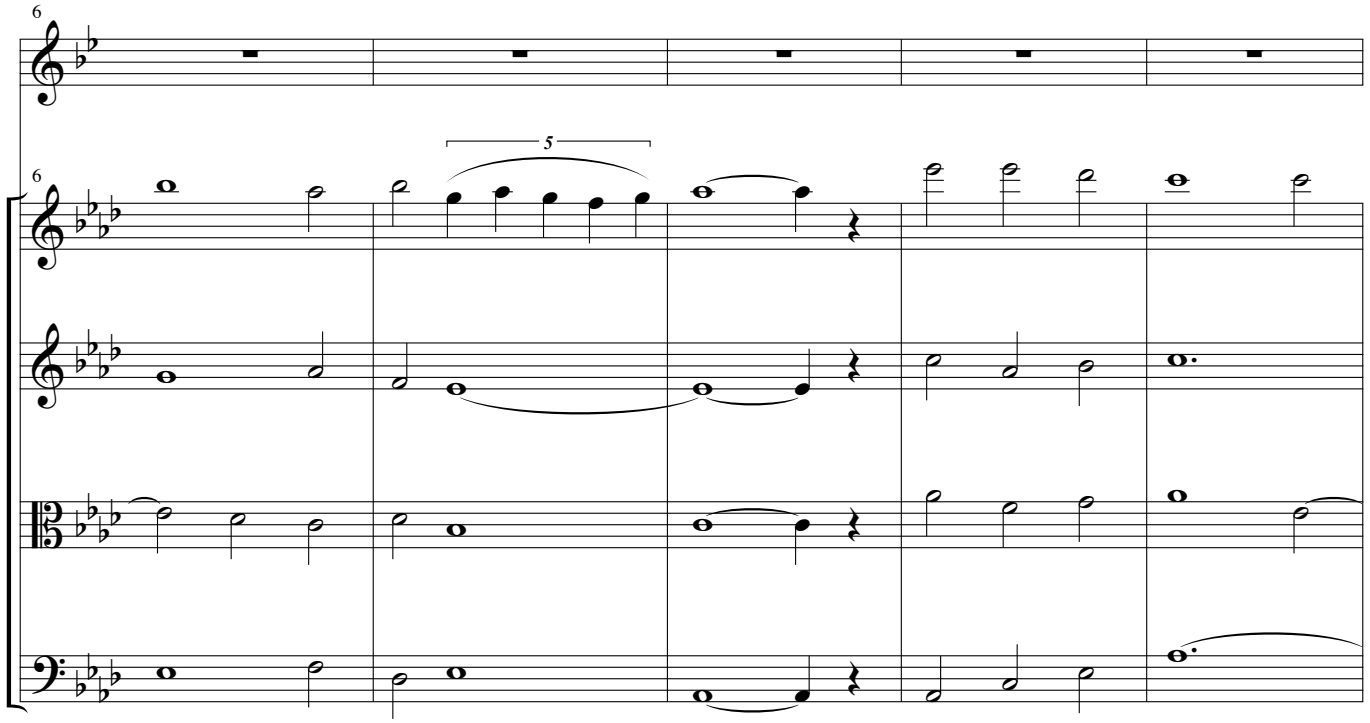
Elegiac Suite

for clarinet and string quartet, op. 55

1. Divisions on UFFINGHAM (Jeremiah Clarke)

Victor Frost





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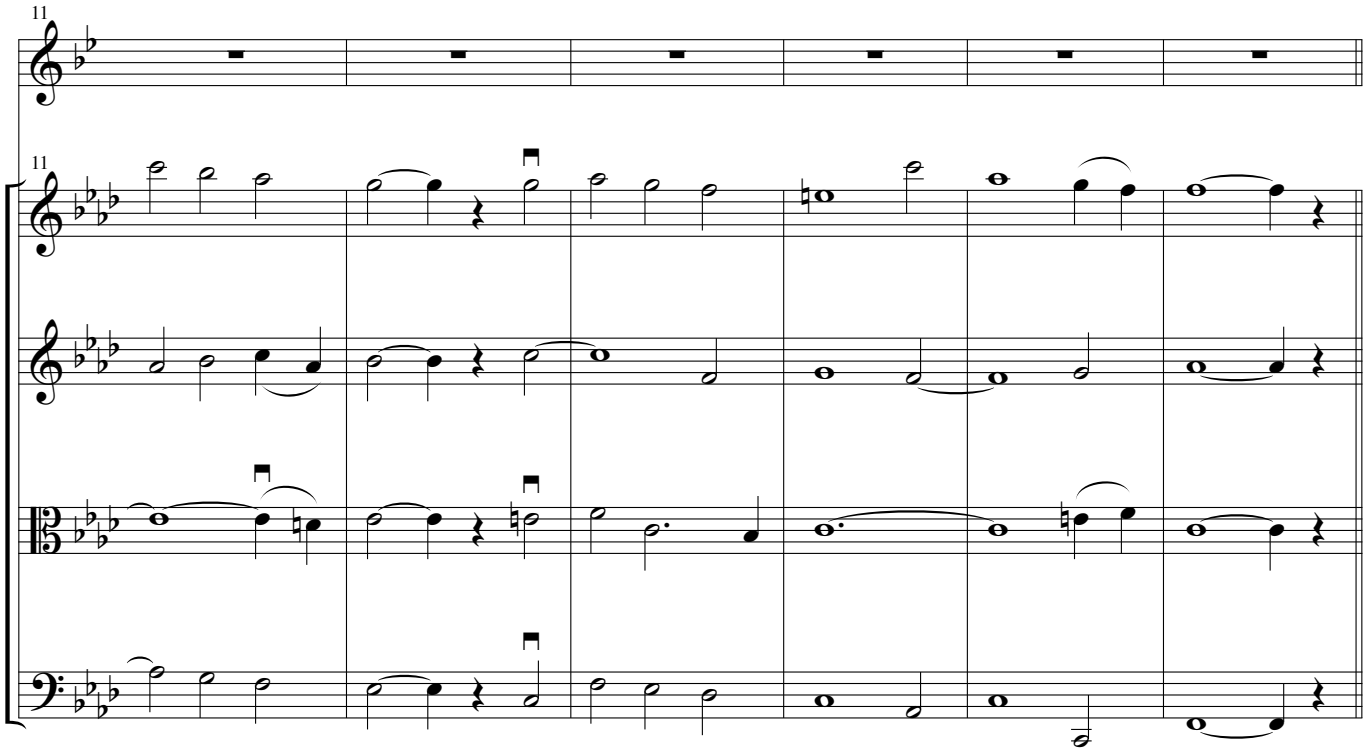
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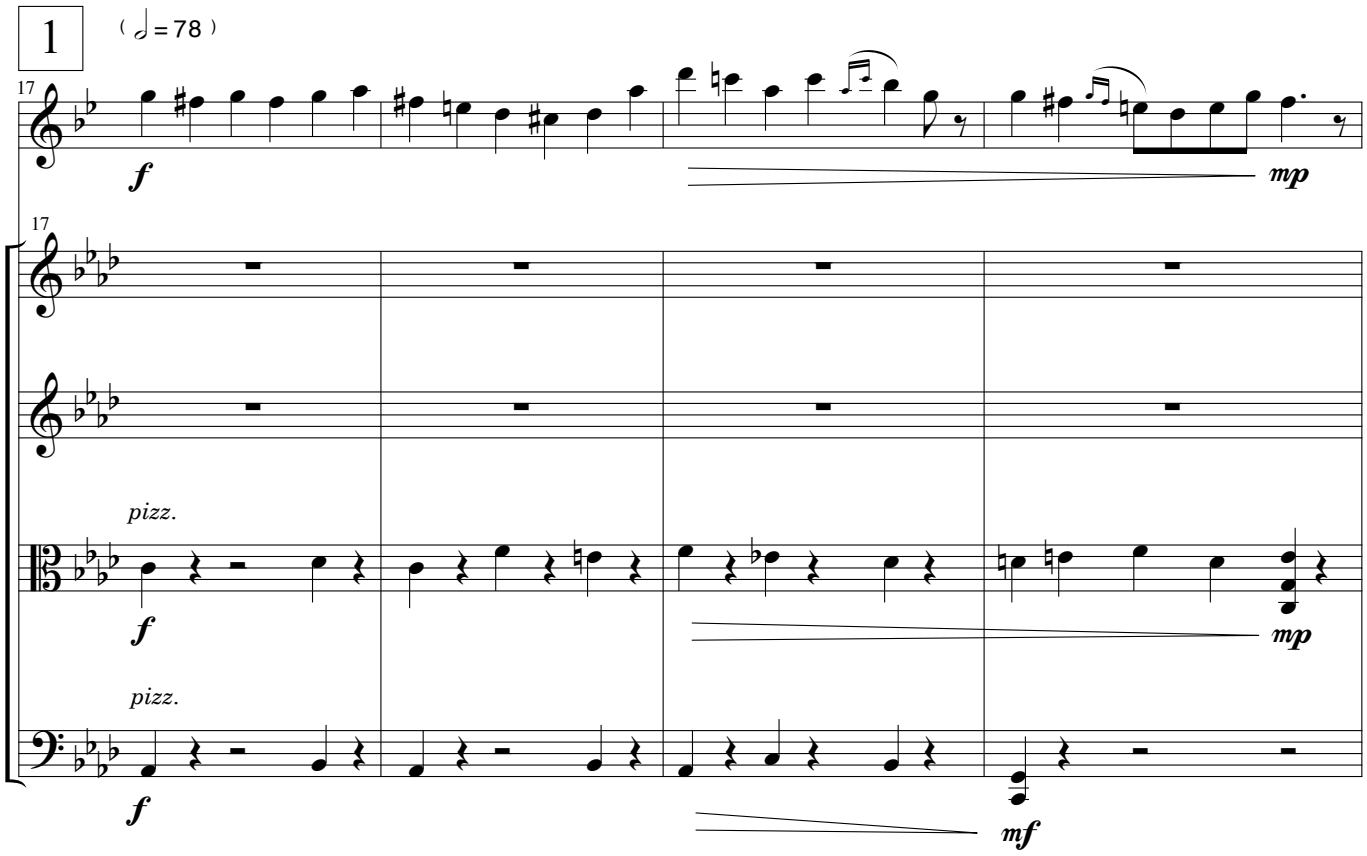
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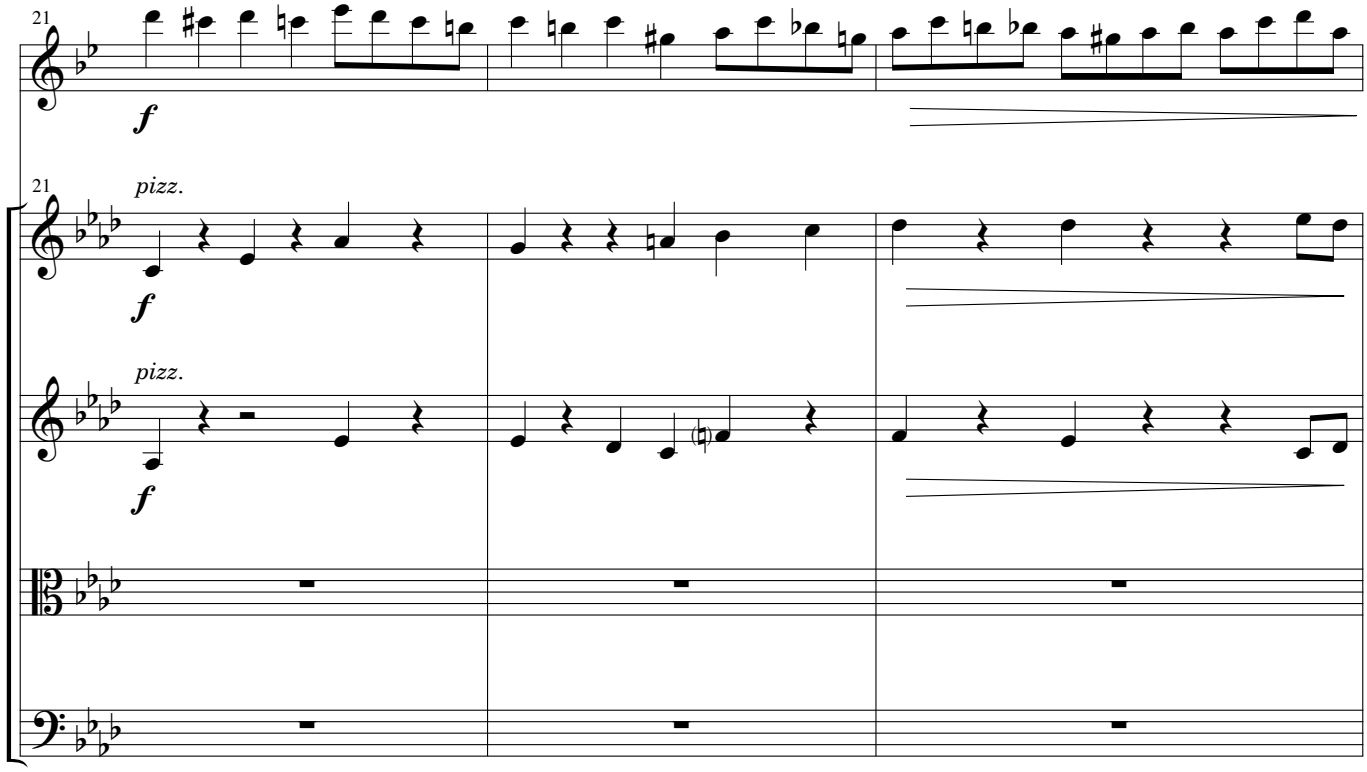
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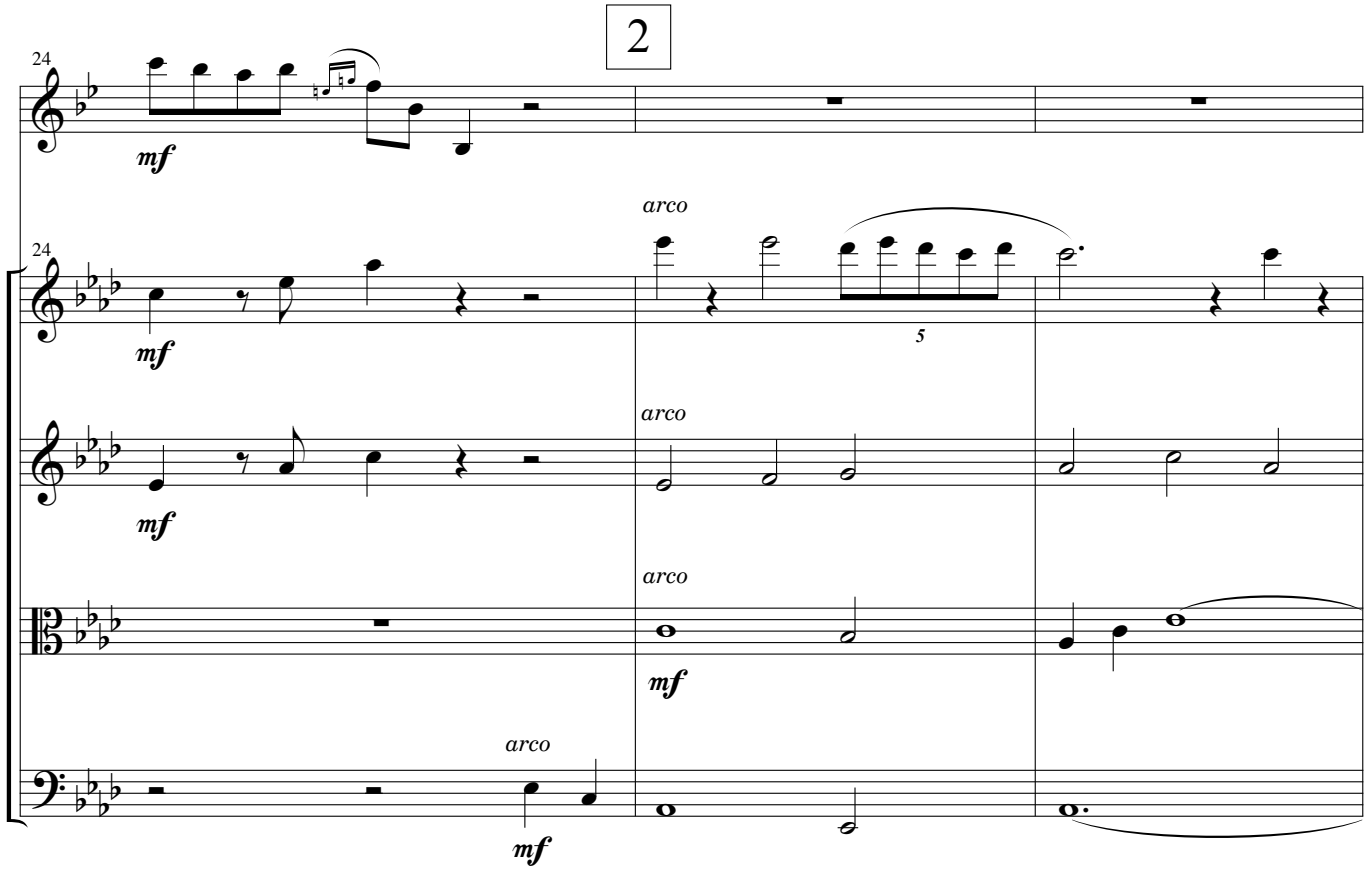
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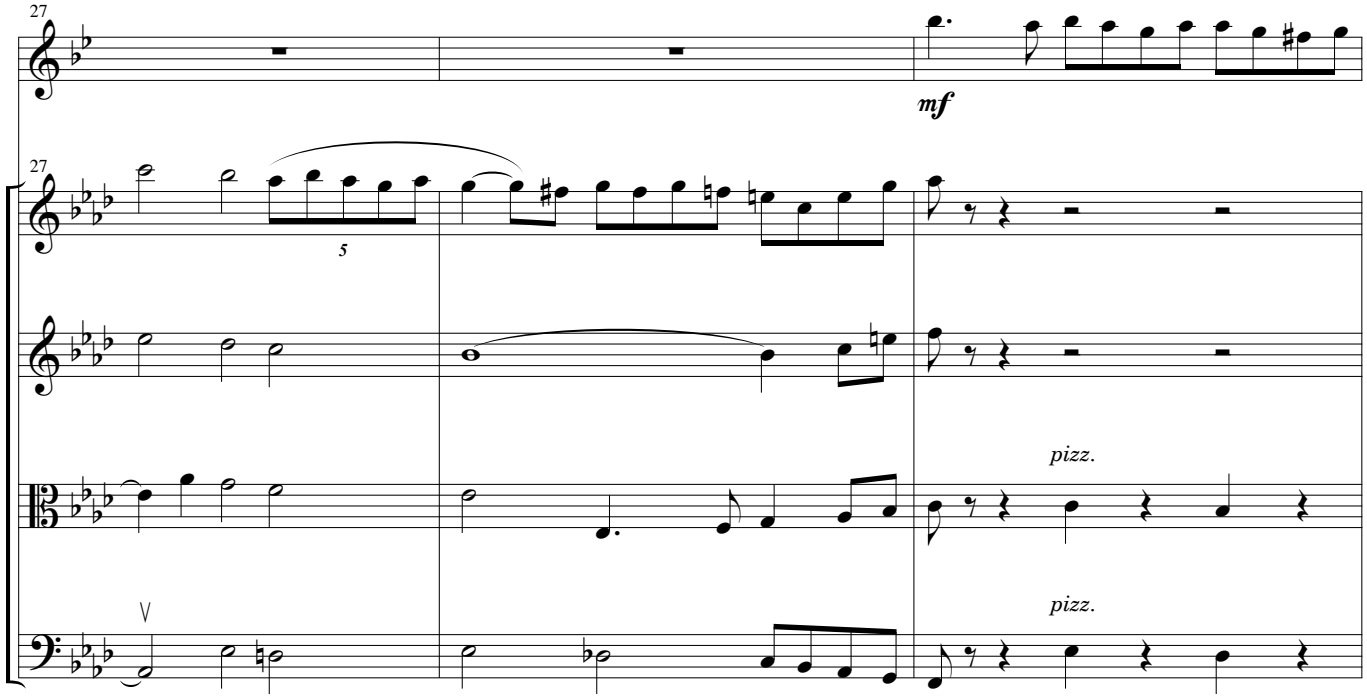
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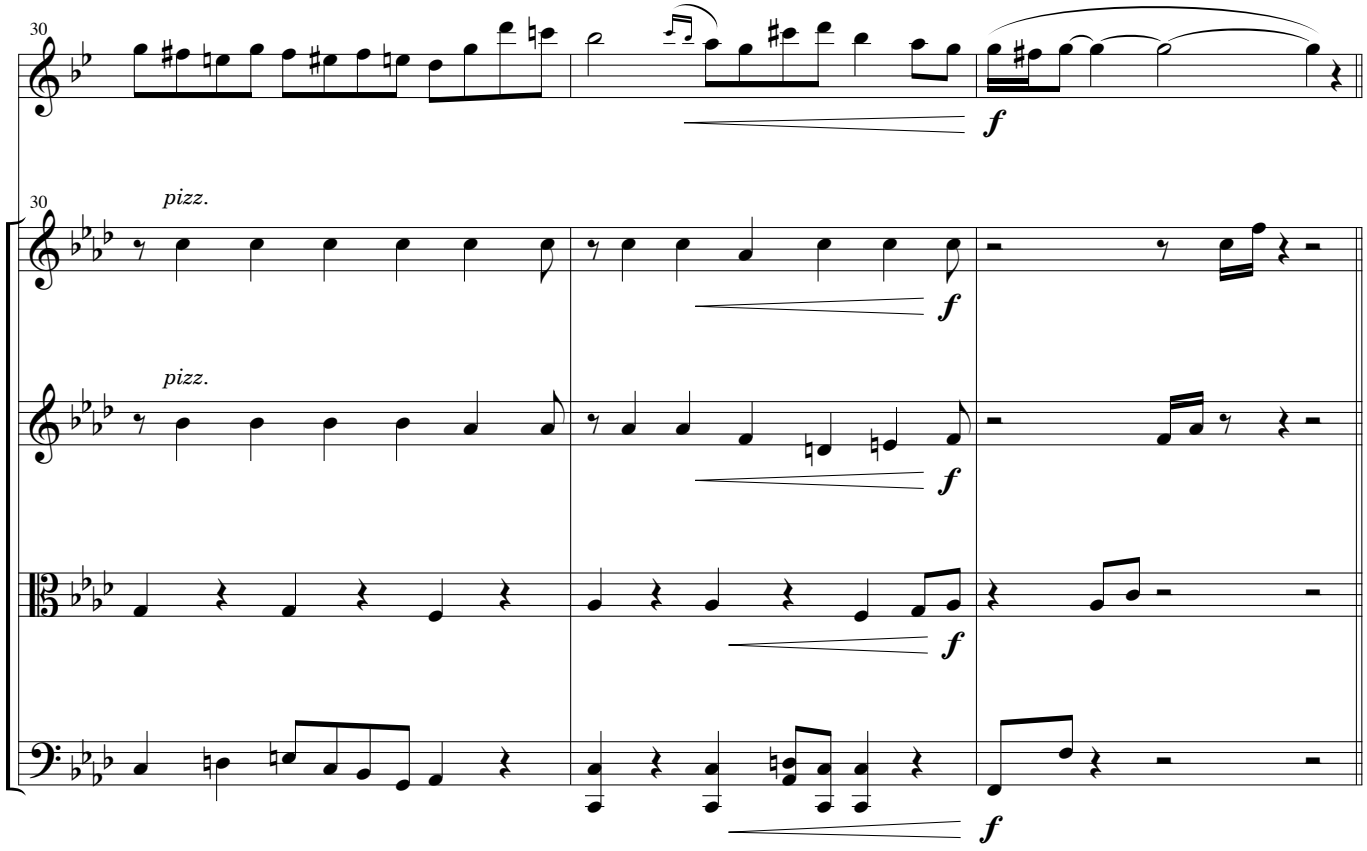
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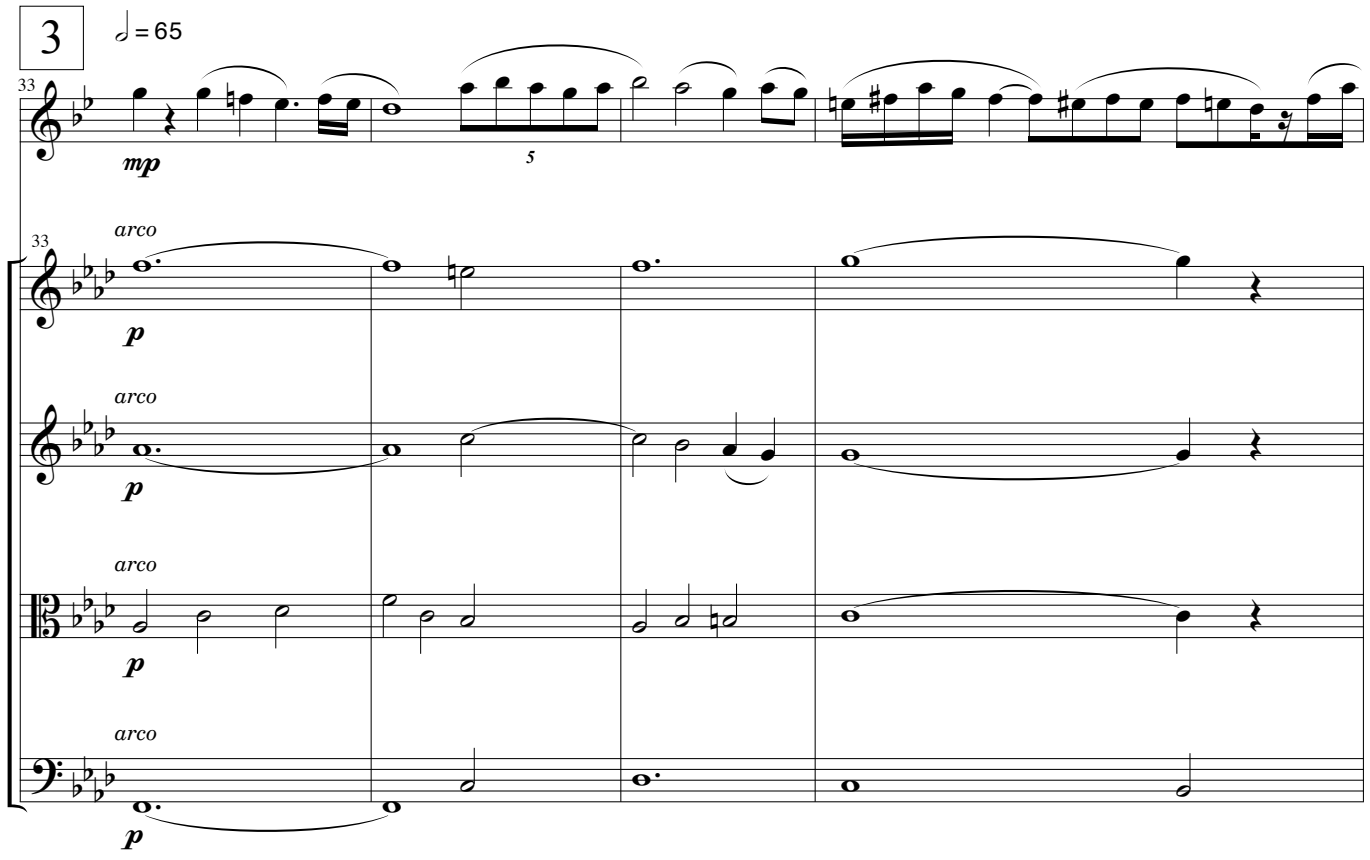
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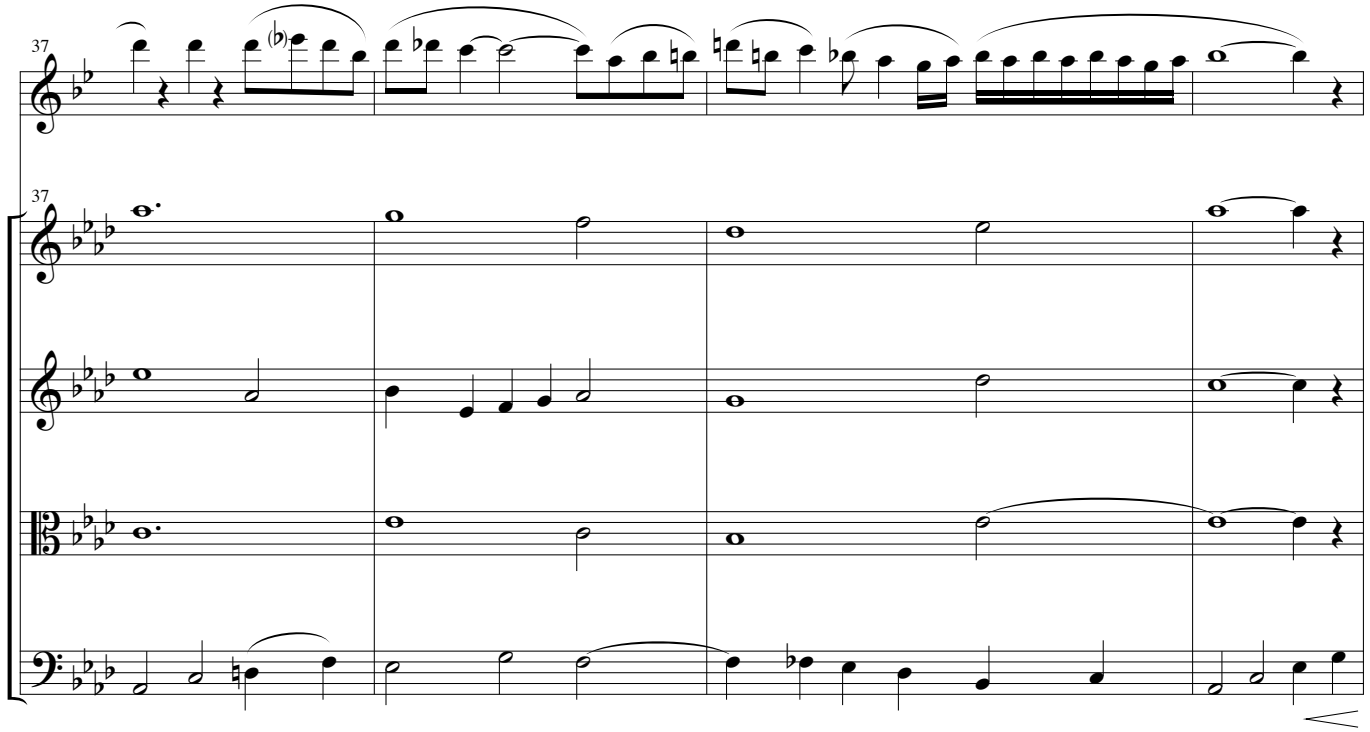
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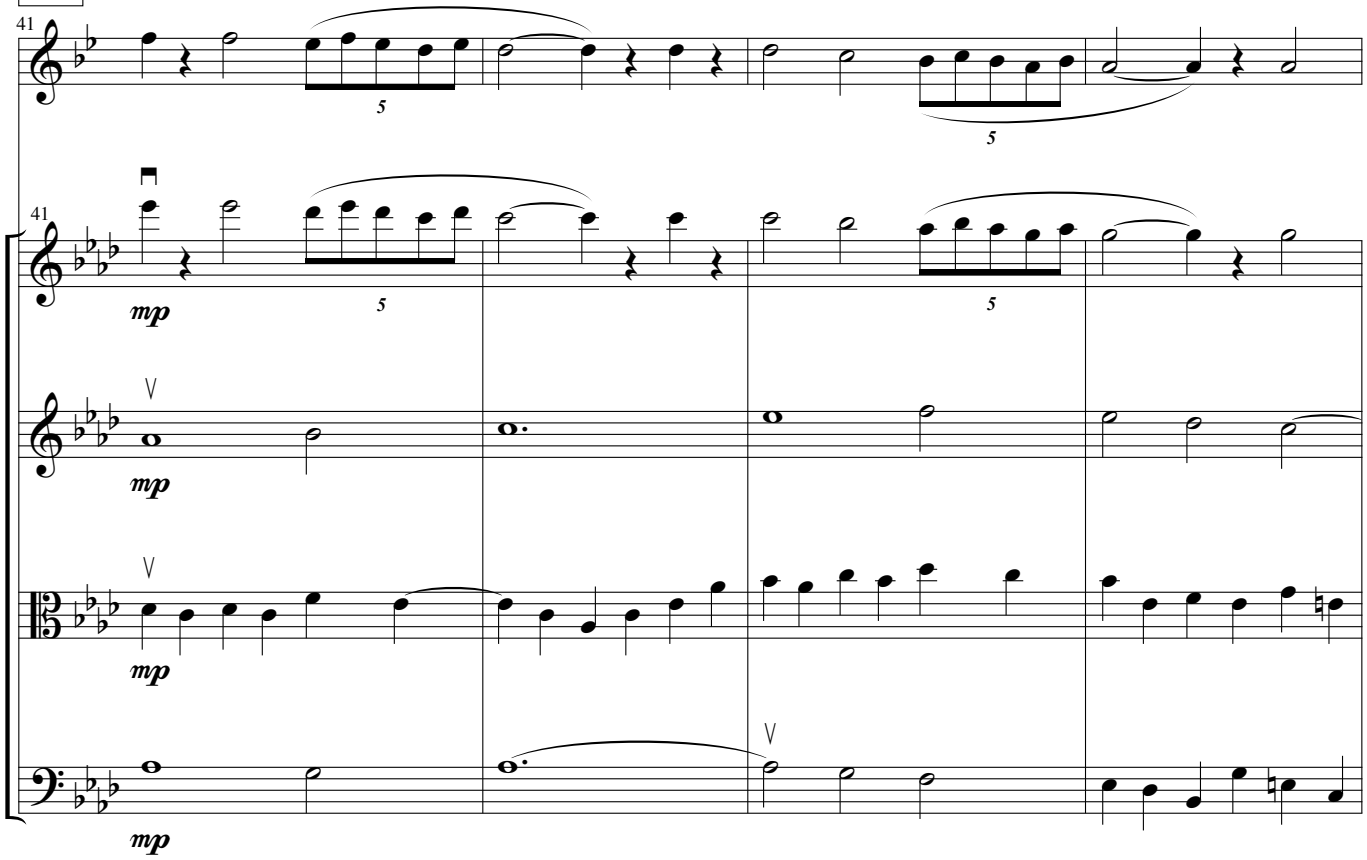

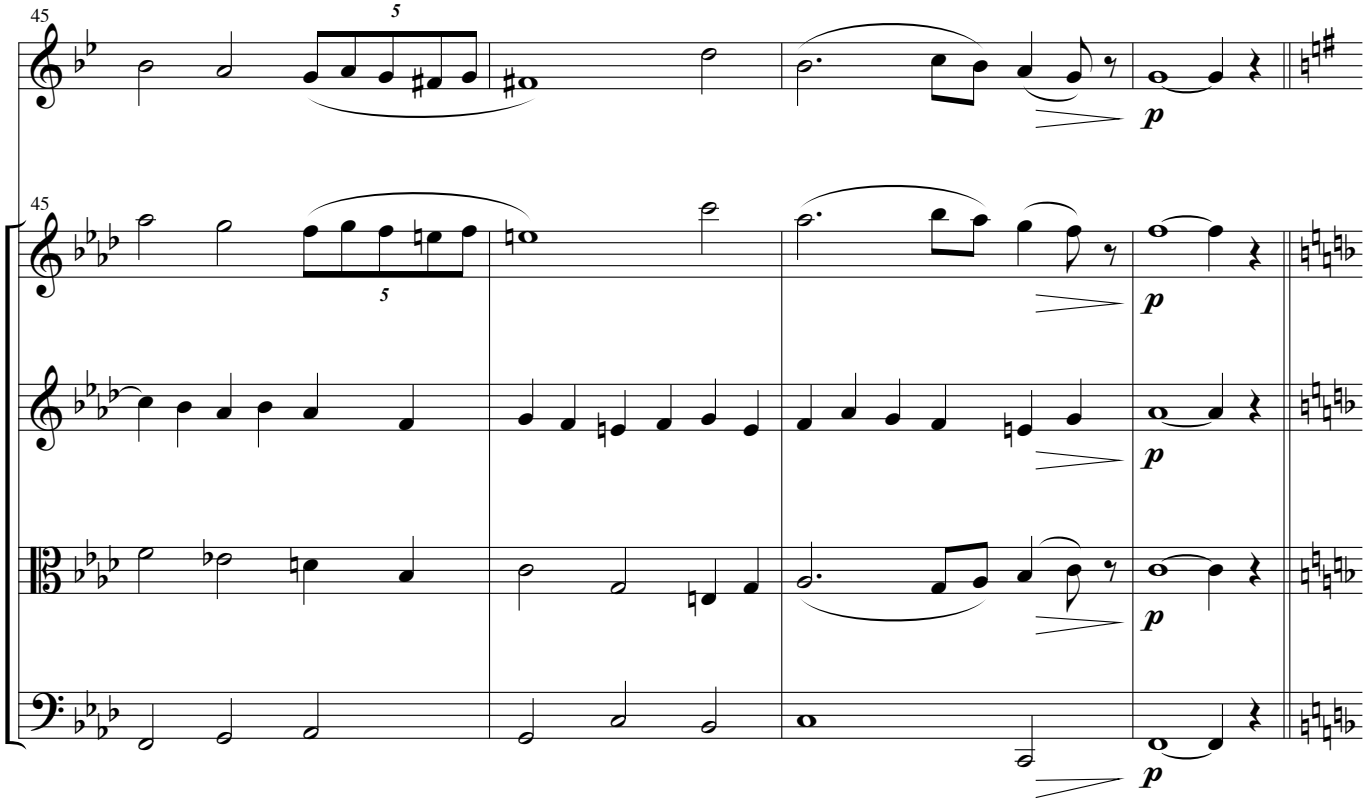

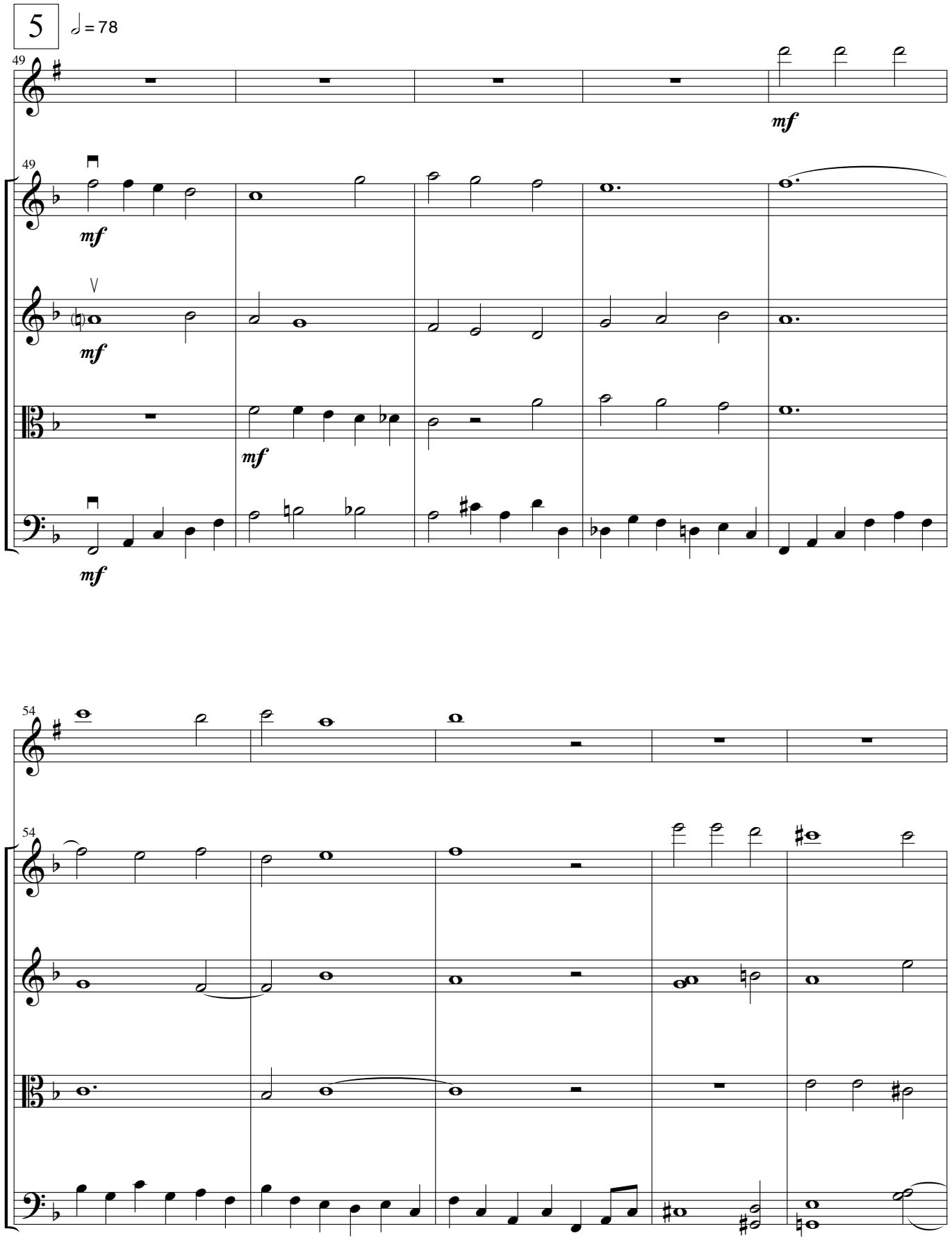
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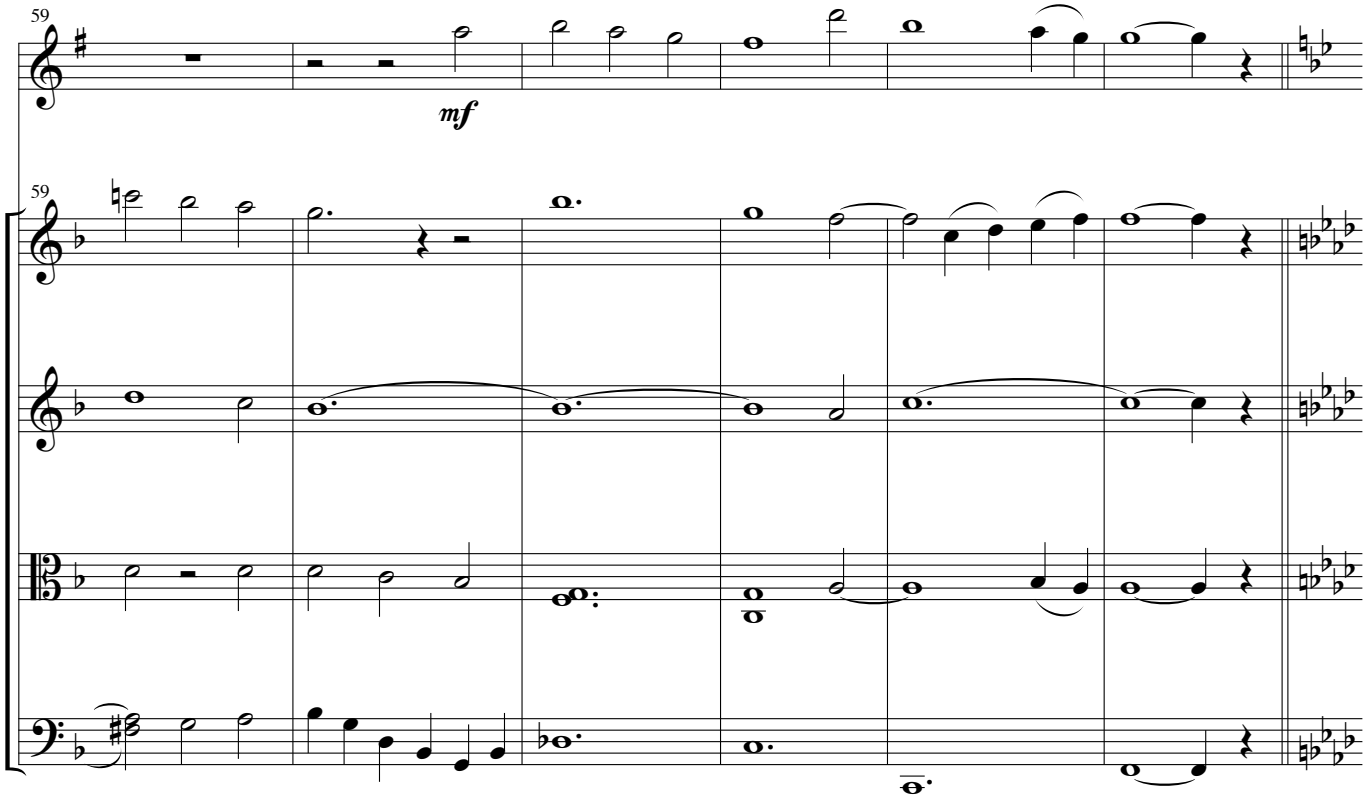
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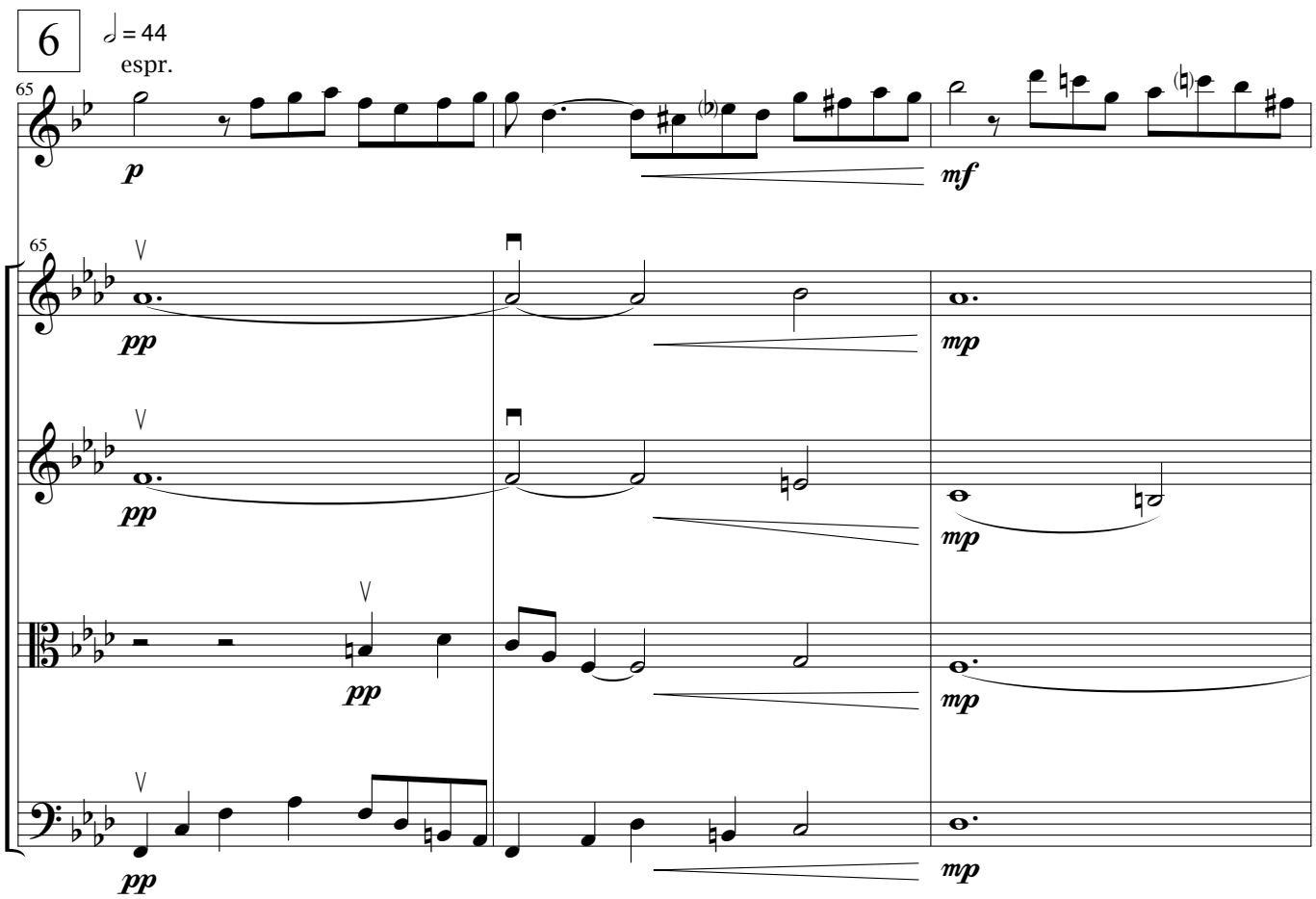
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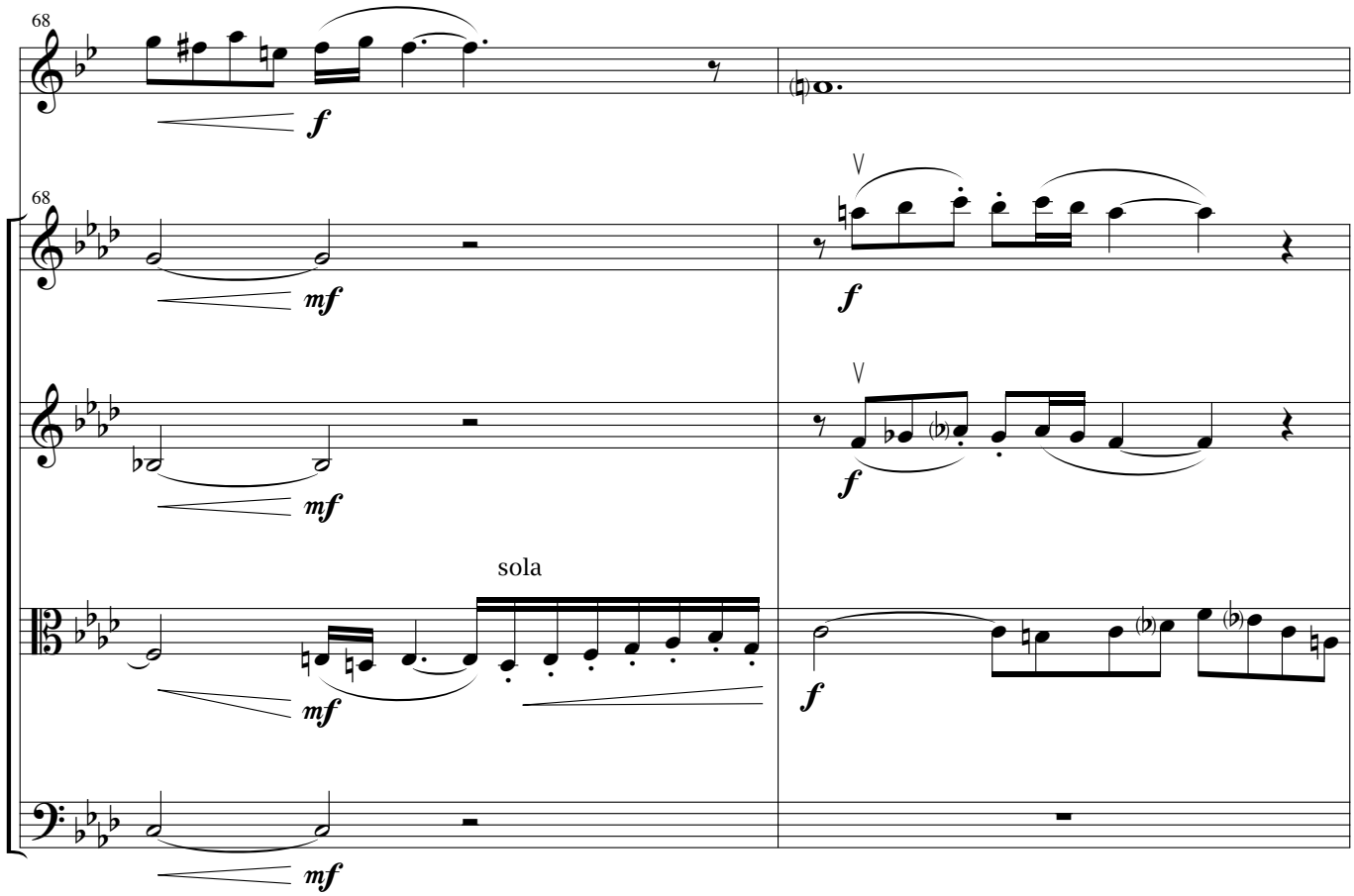
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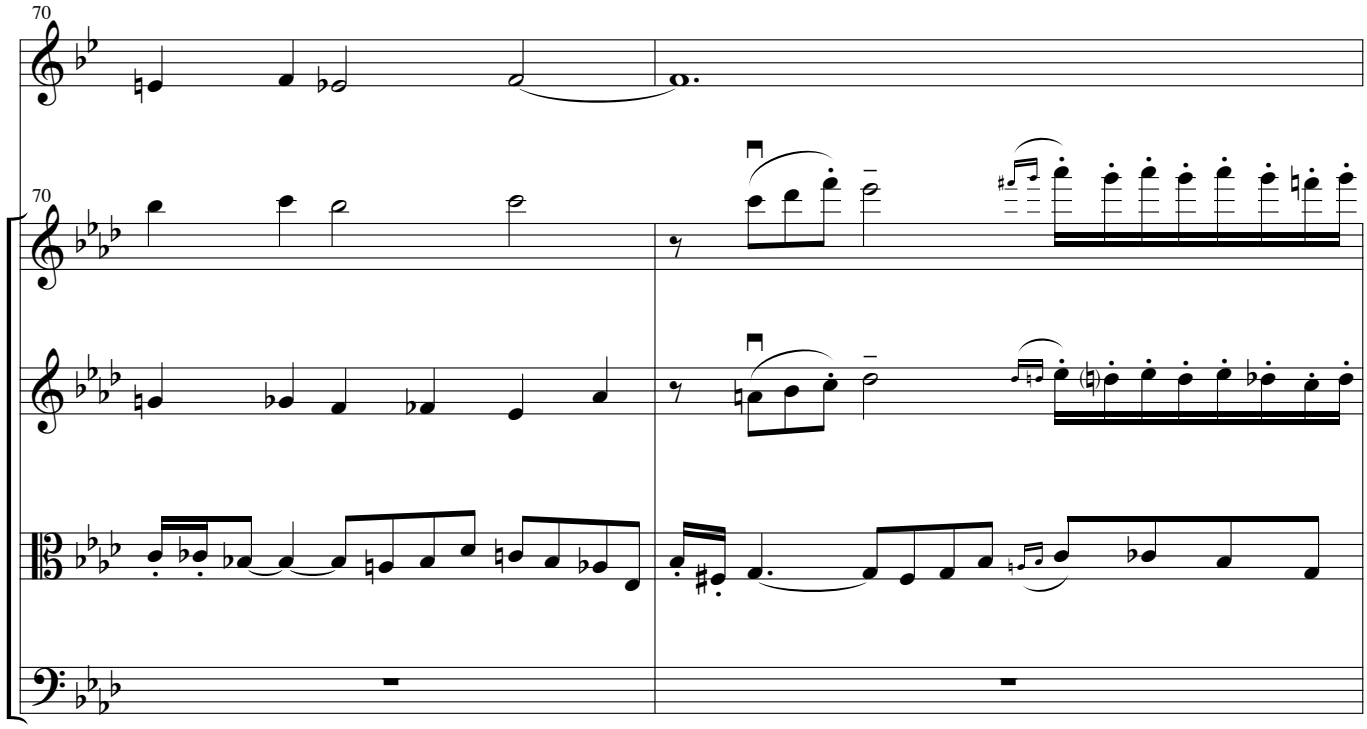
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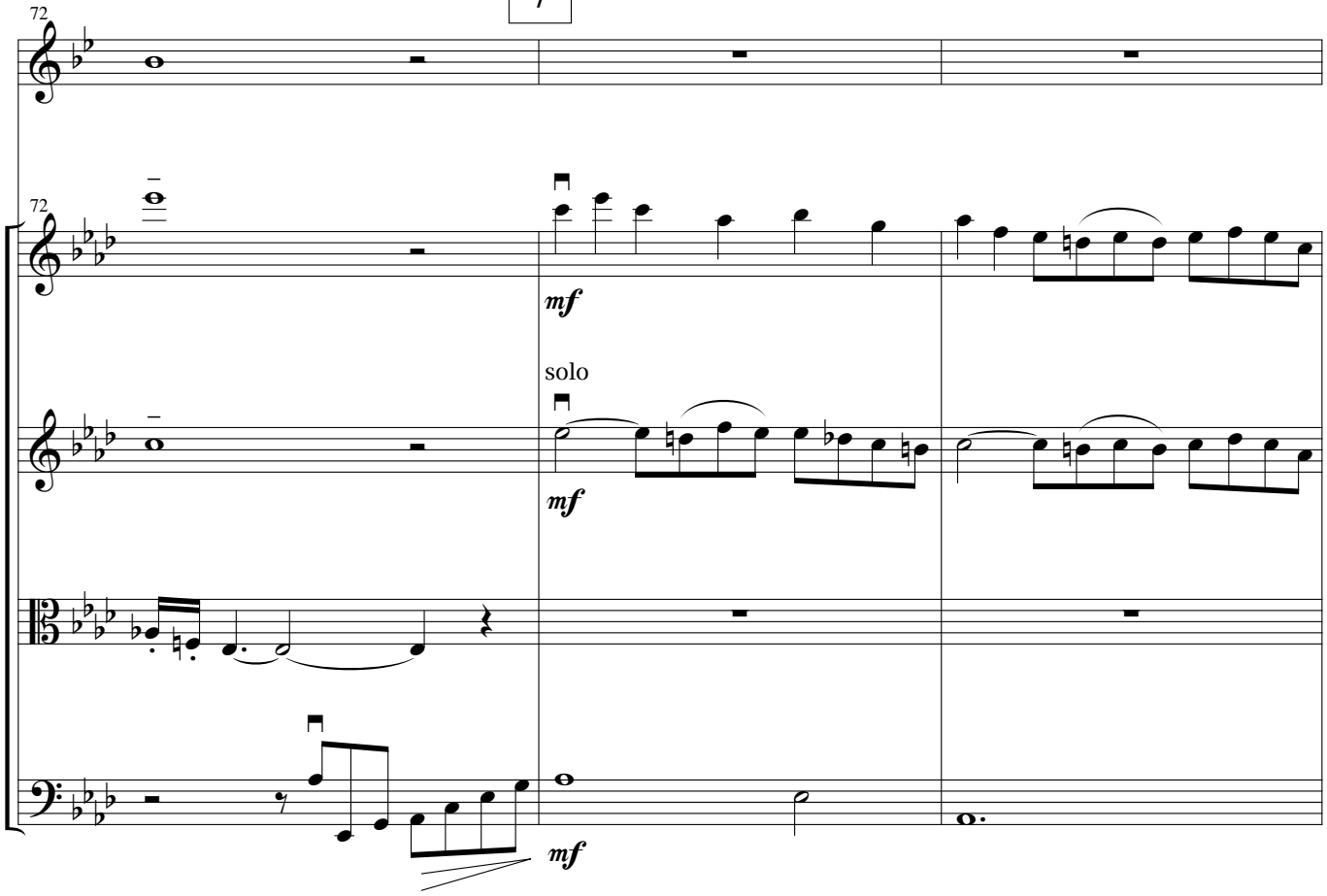

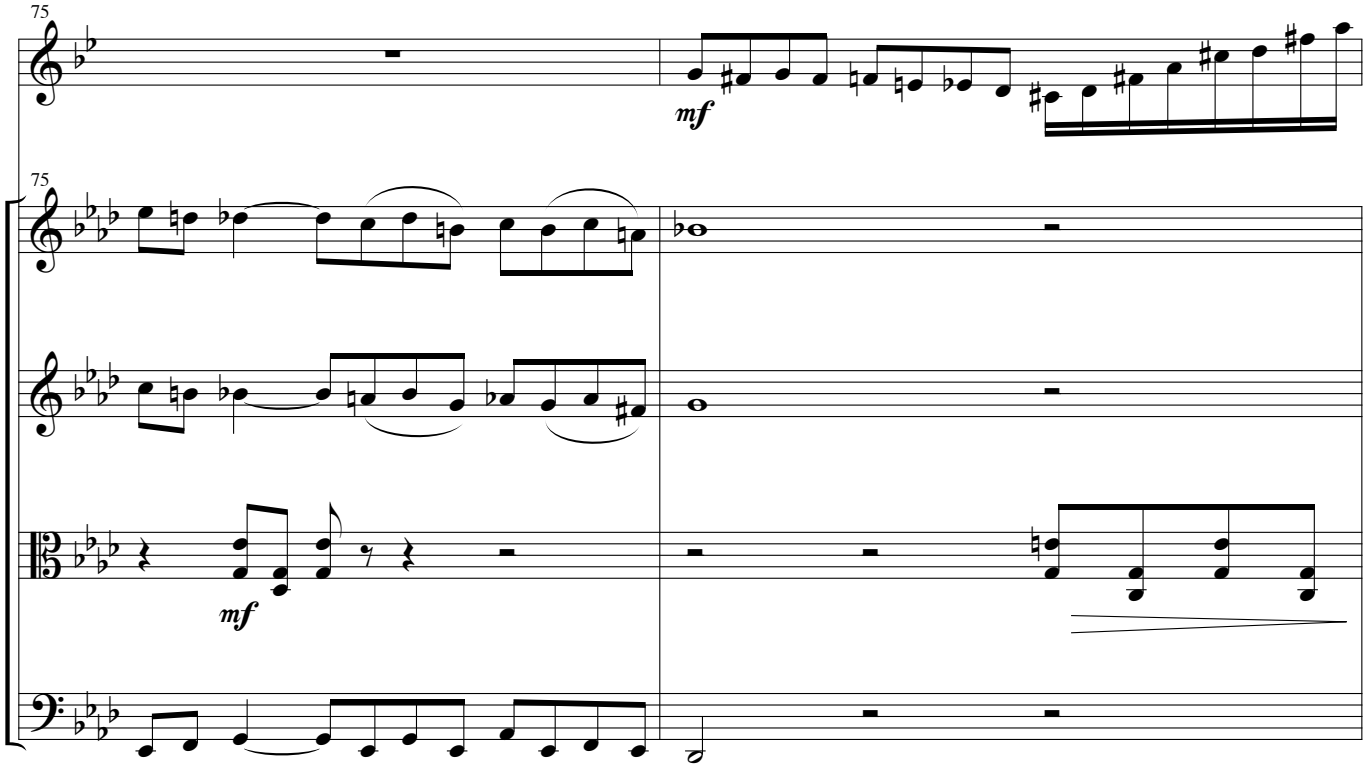

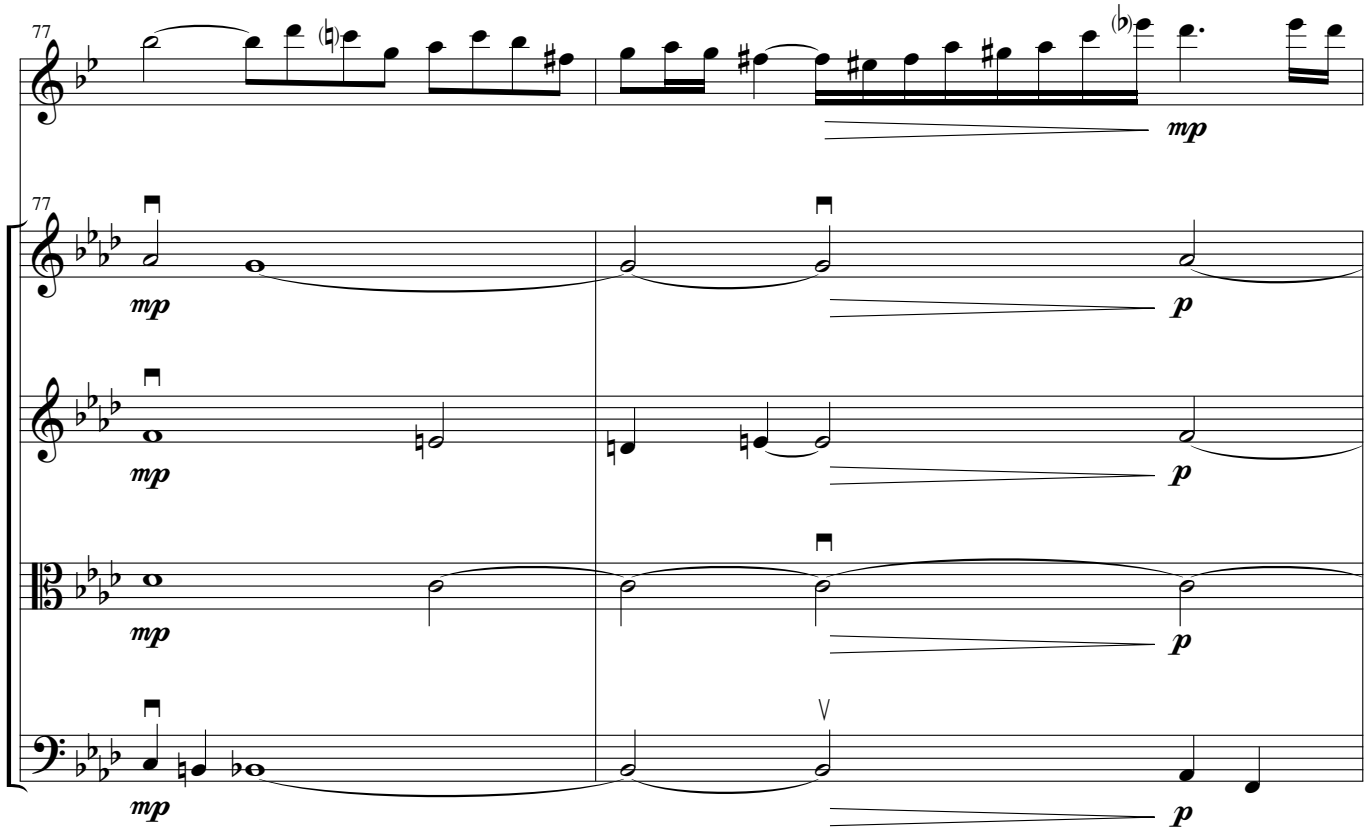
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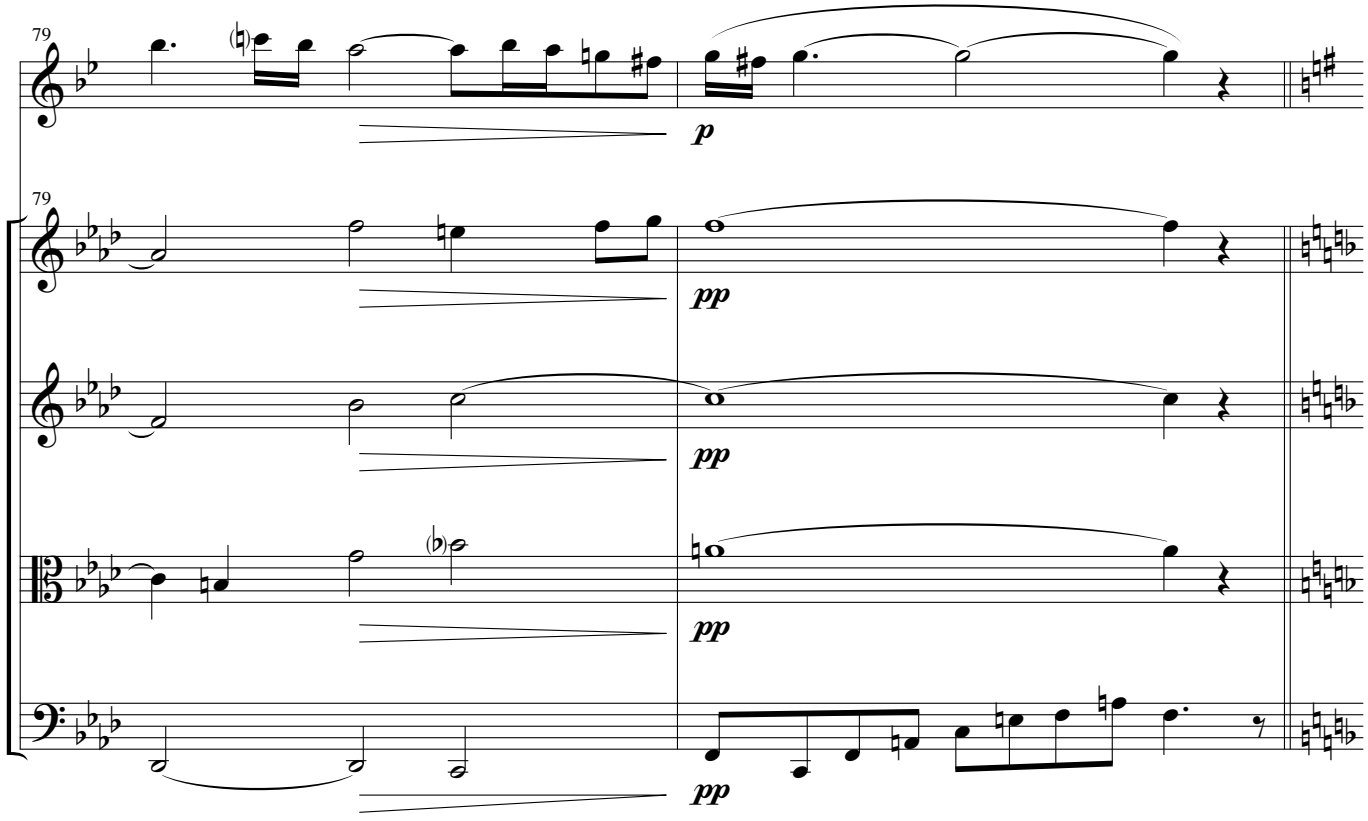
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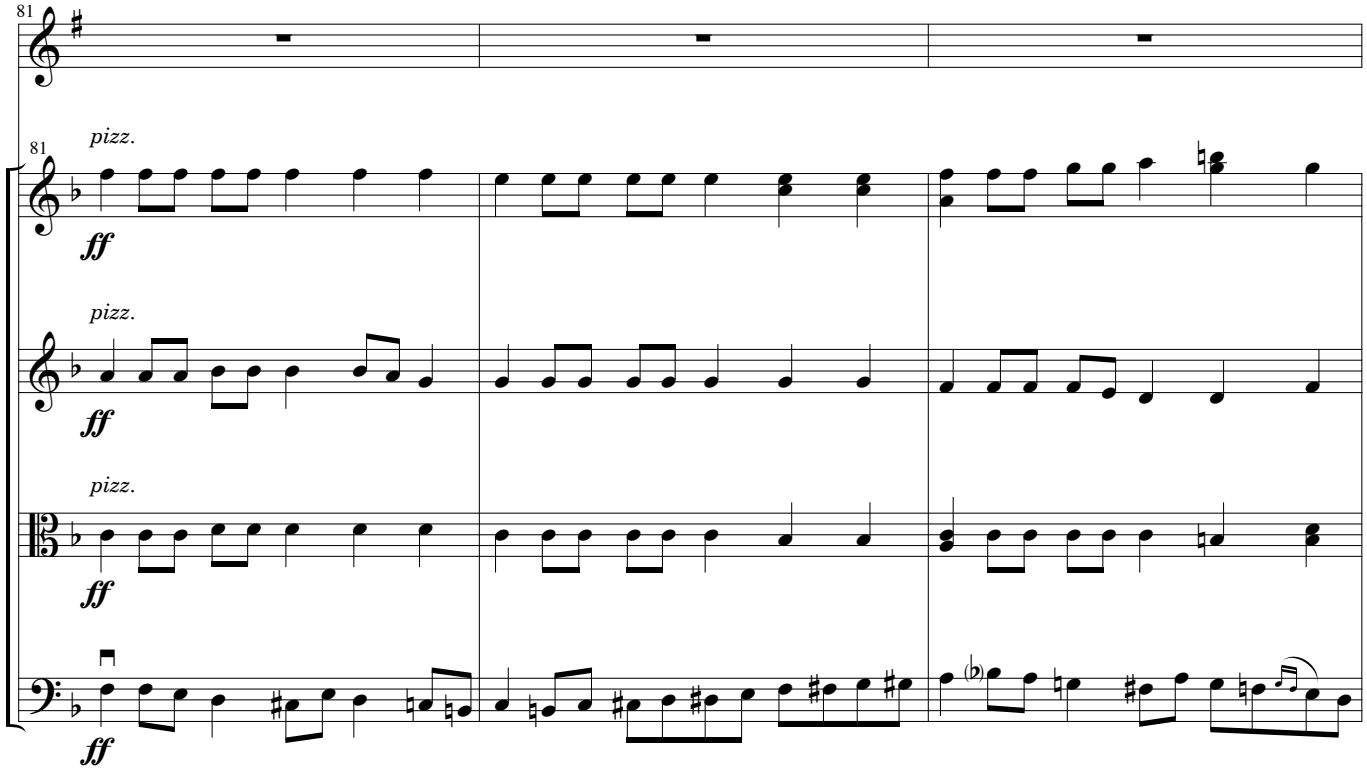
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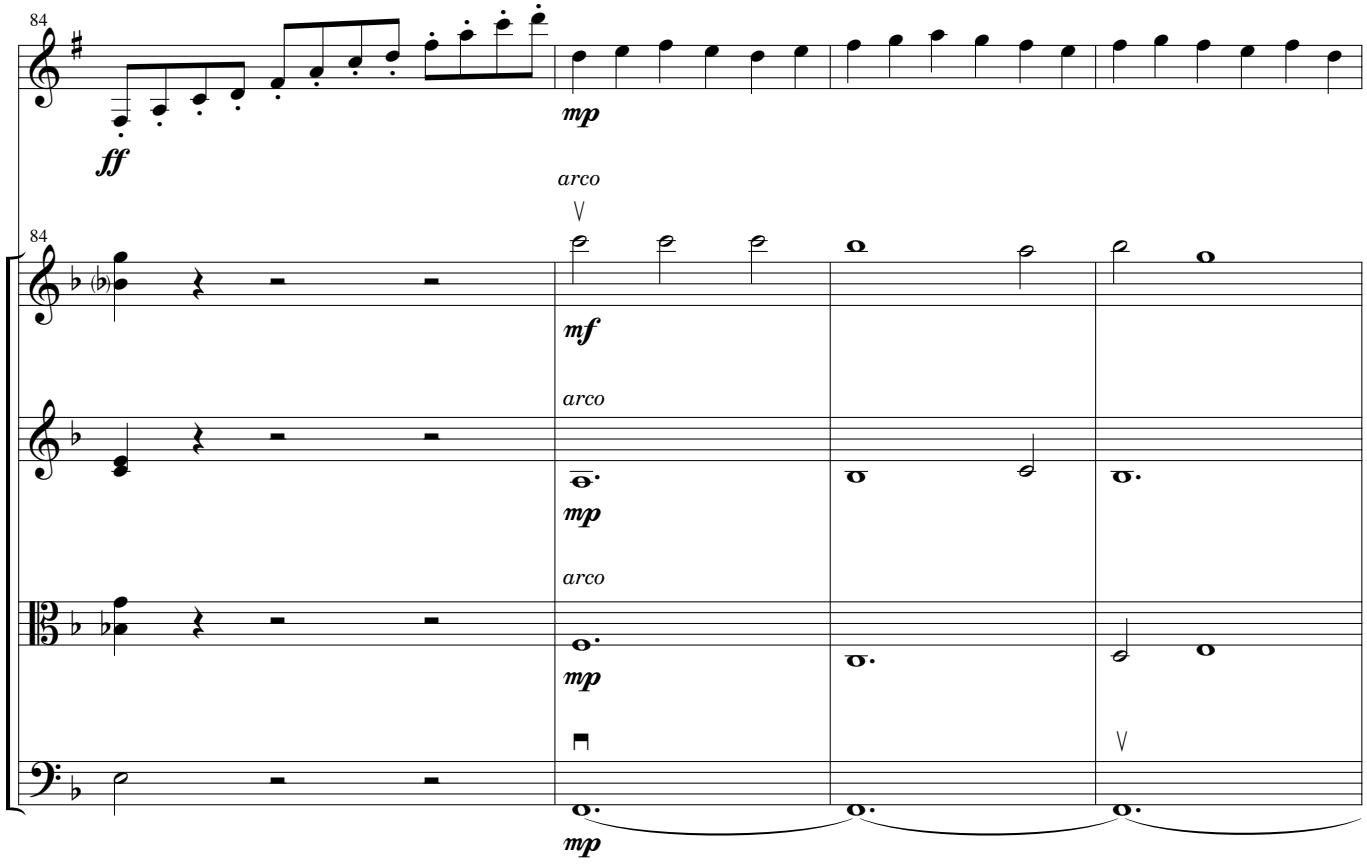
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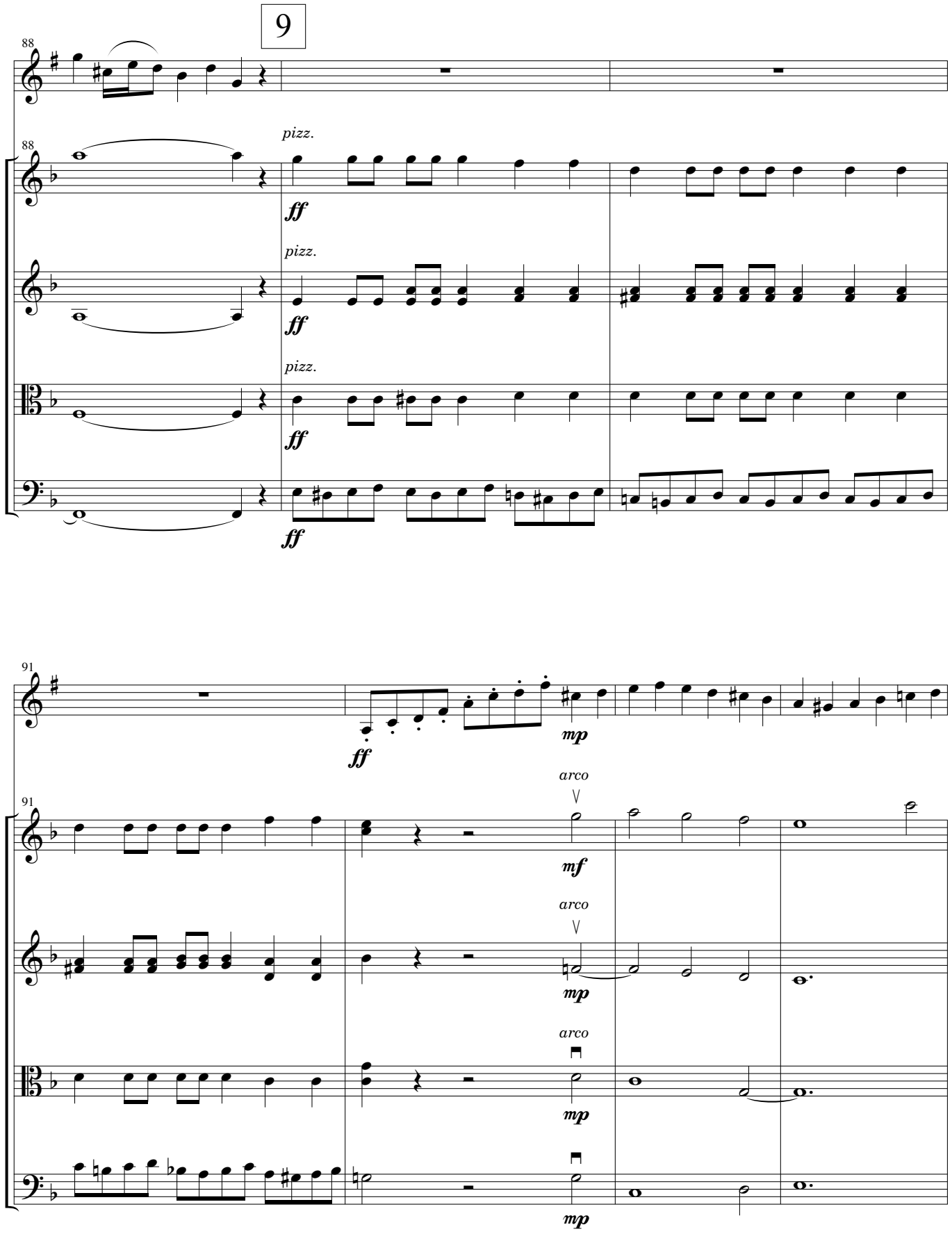
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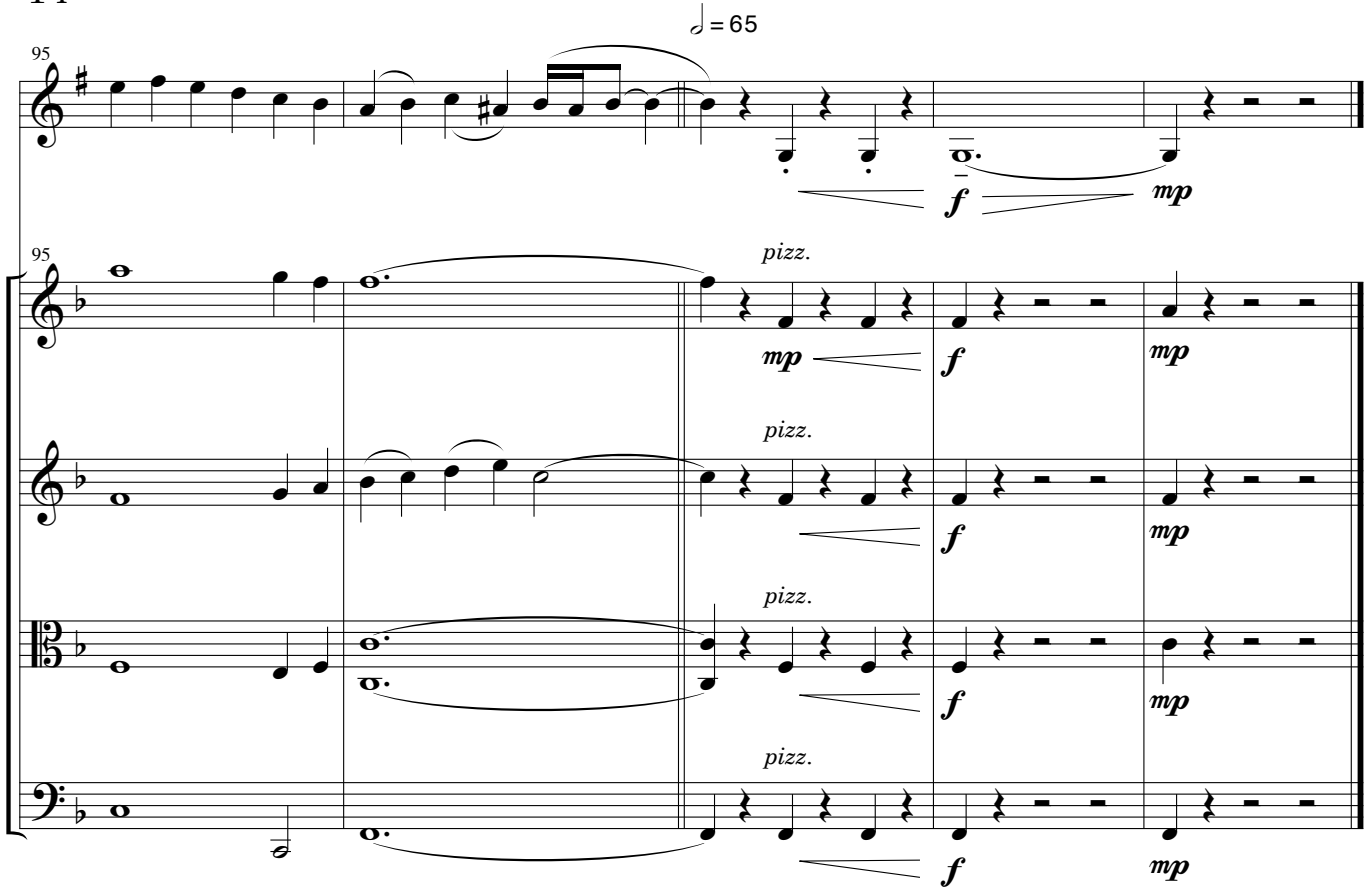
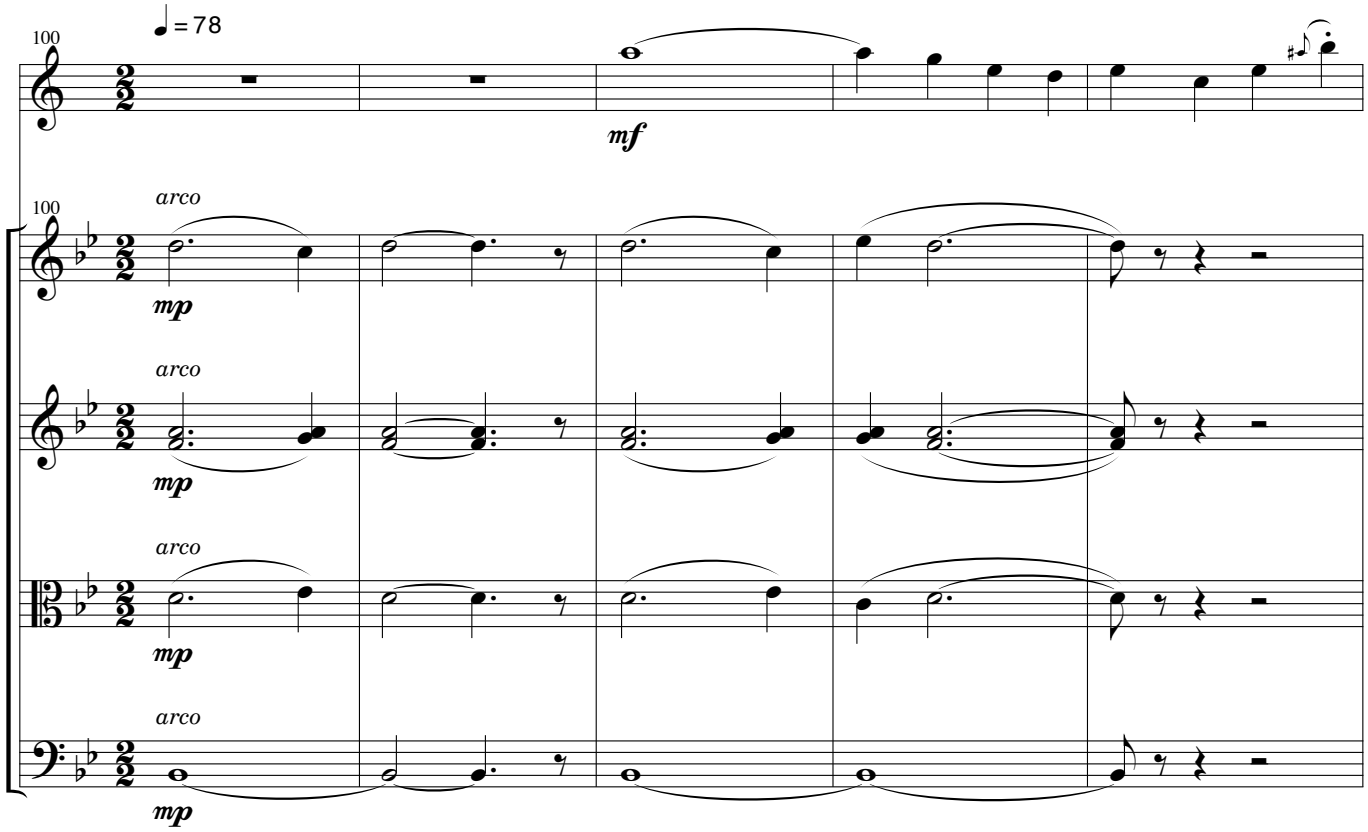
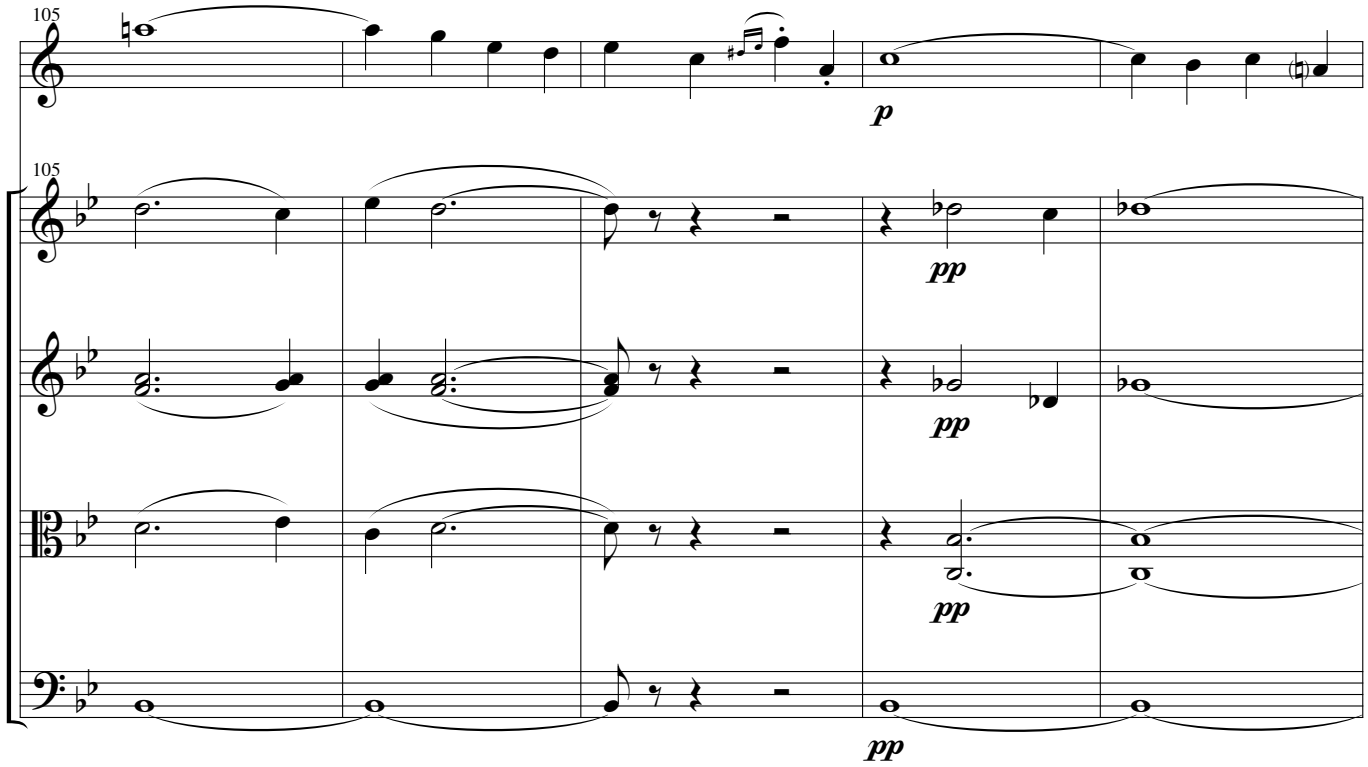


in memoriam Jon Benac

2. Déploration

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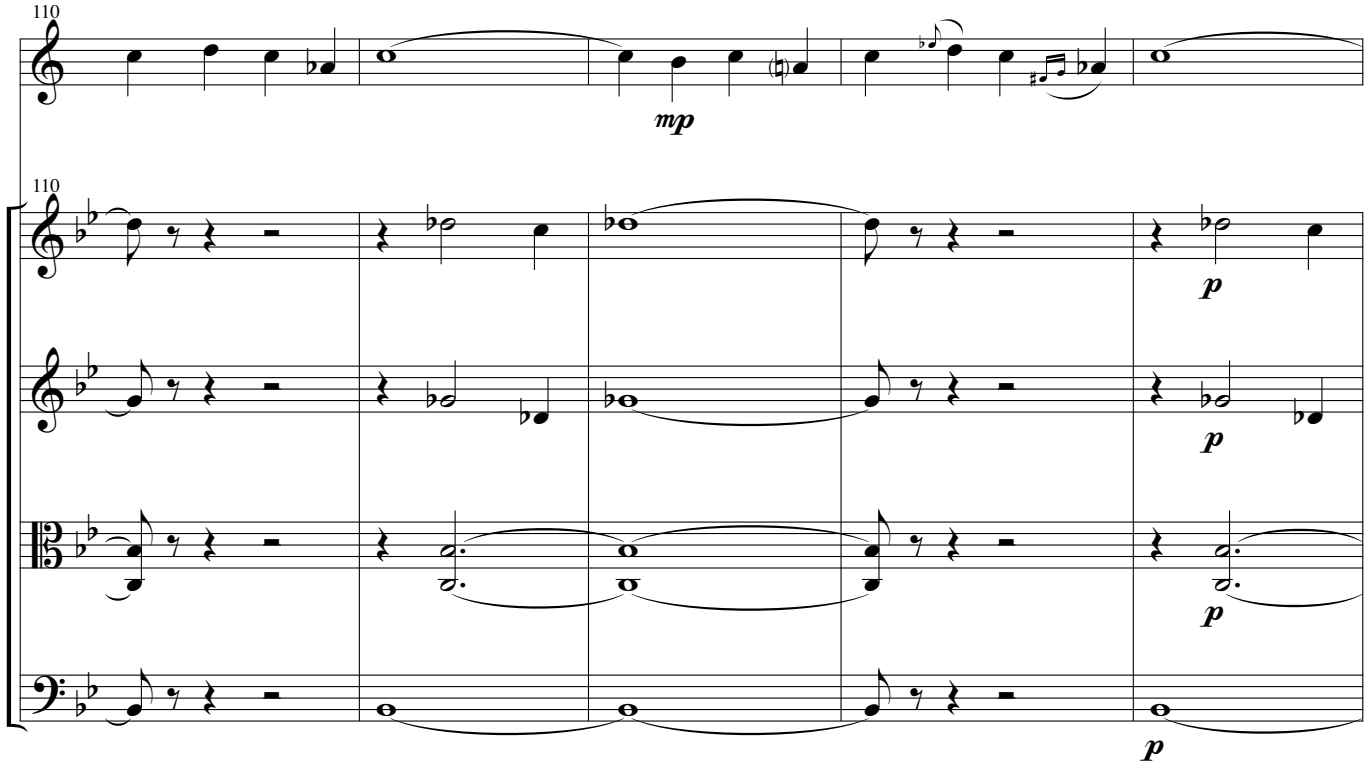
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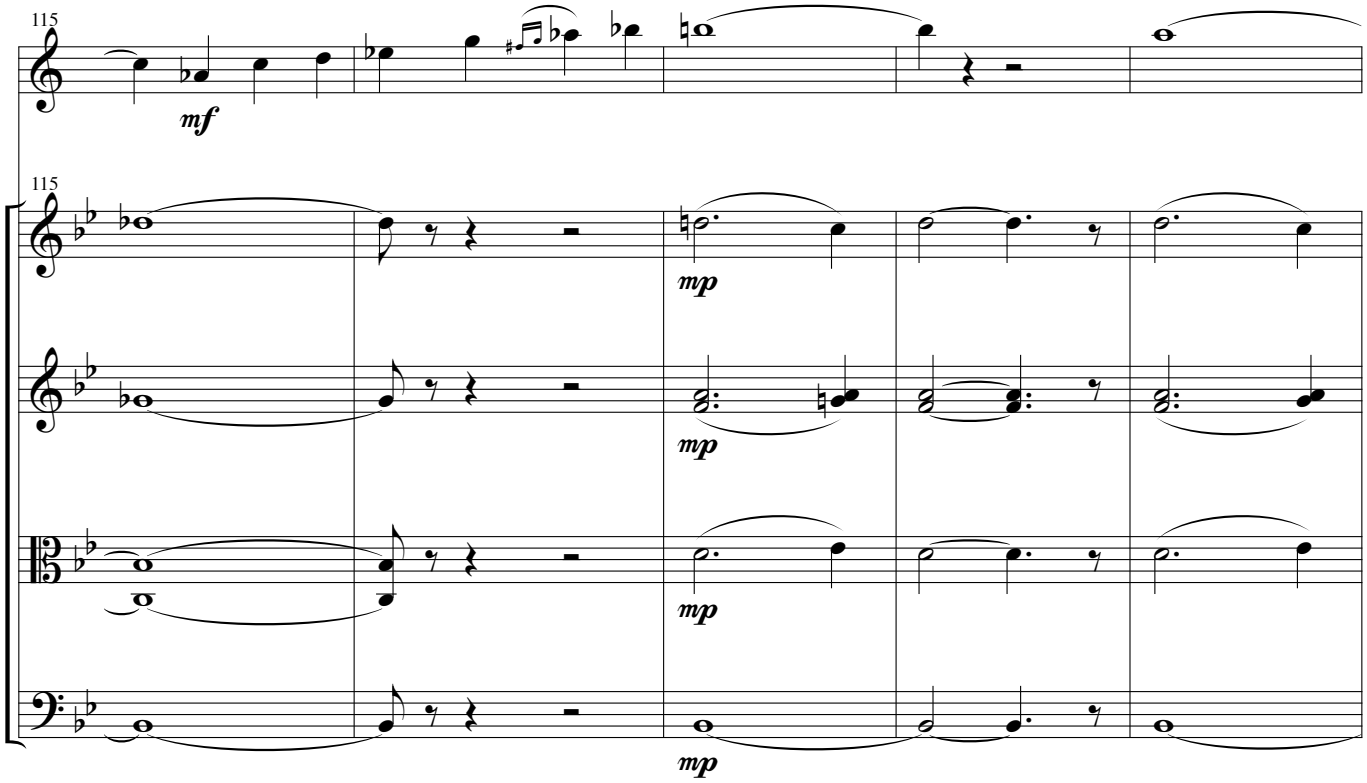

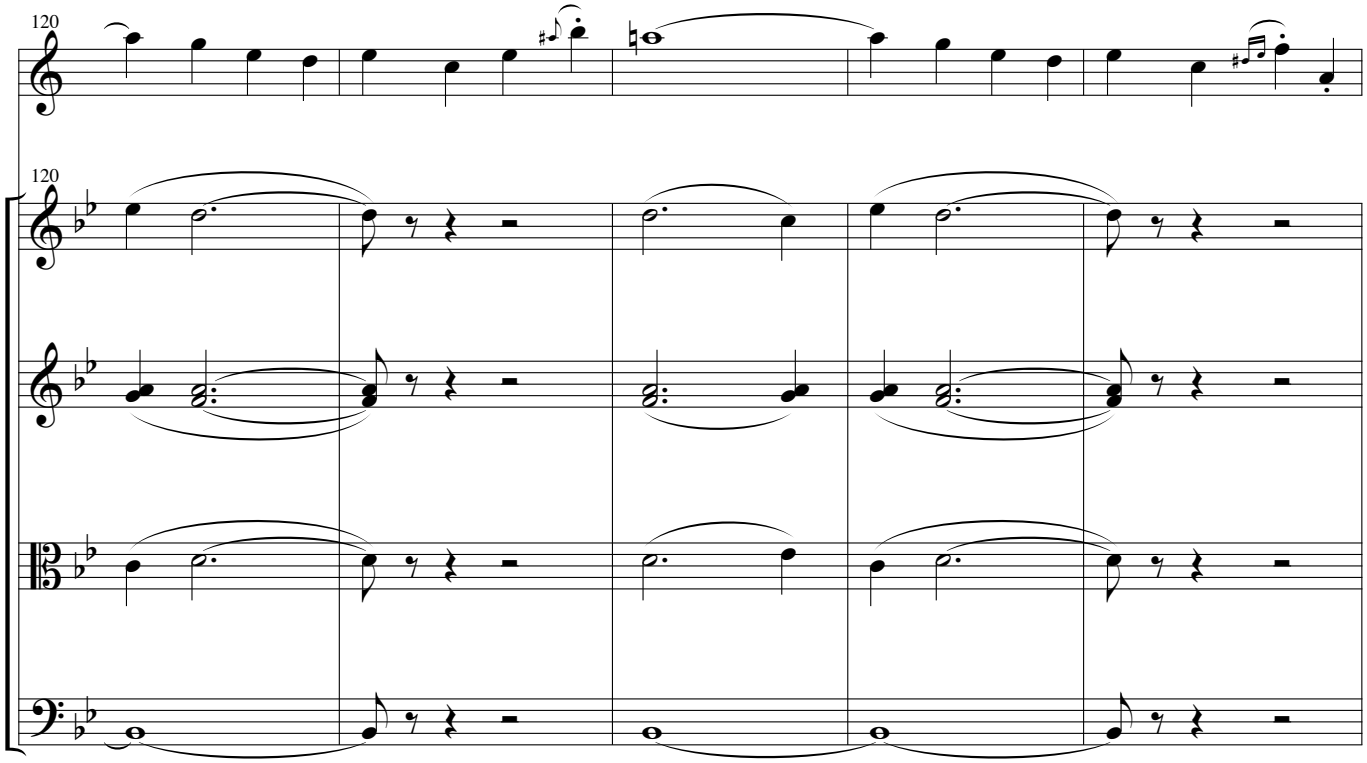

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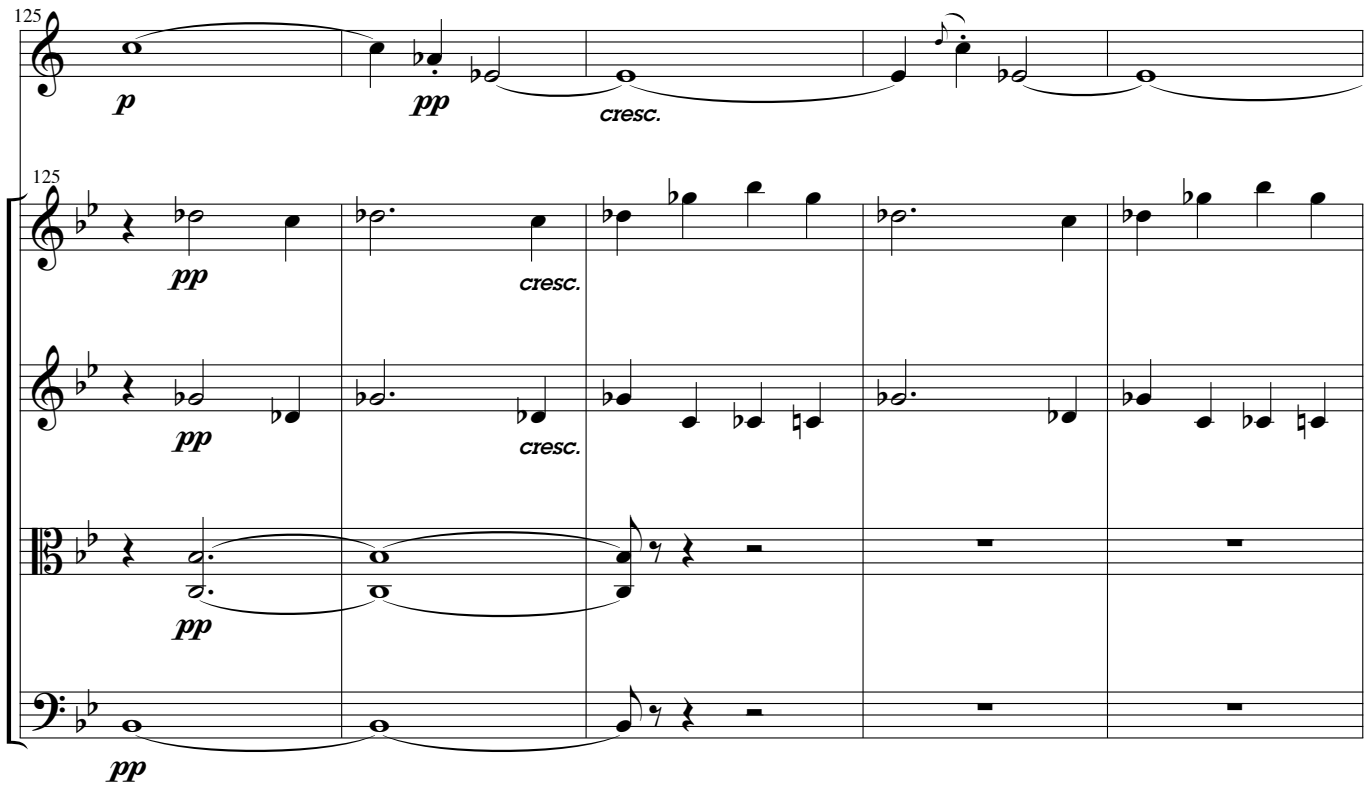
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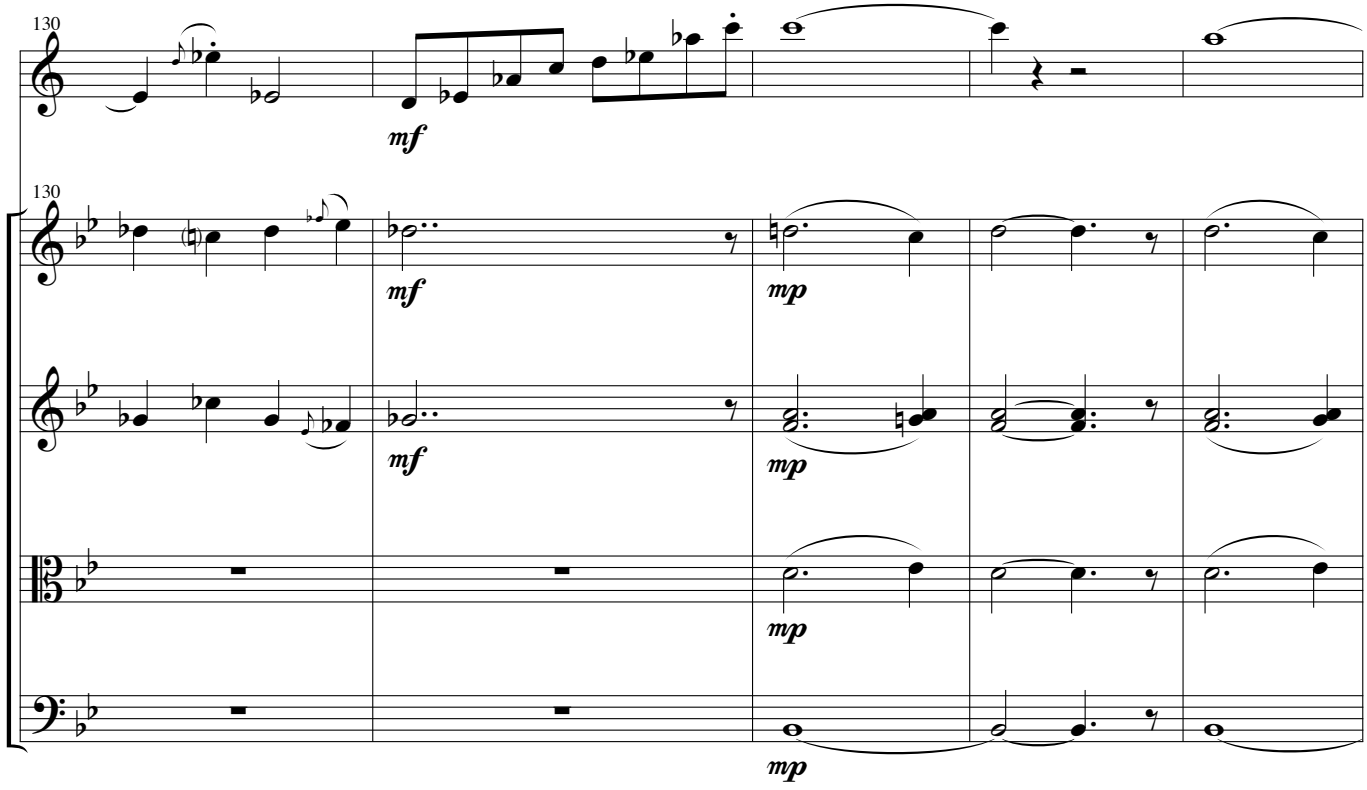
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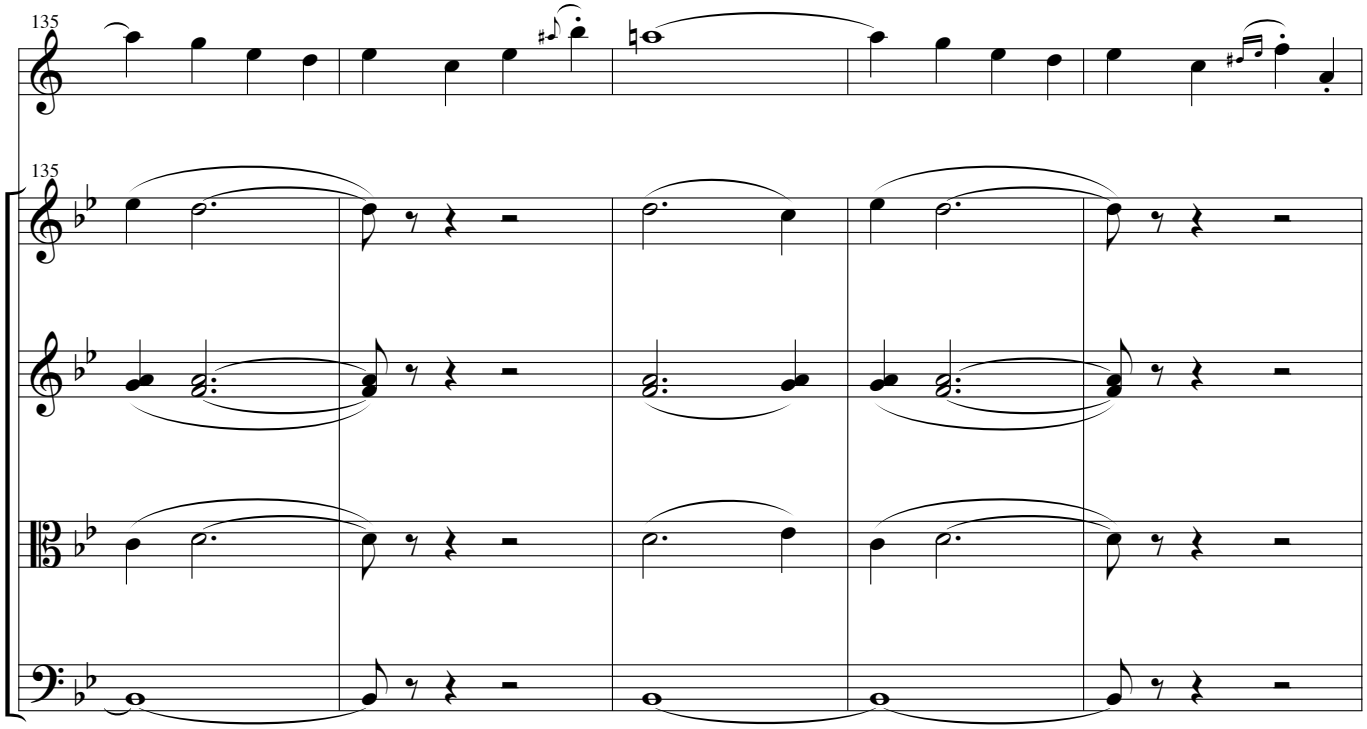

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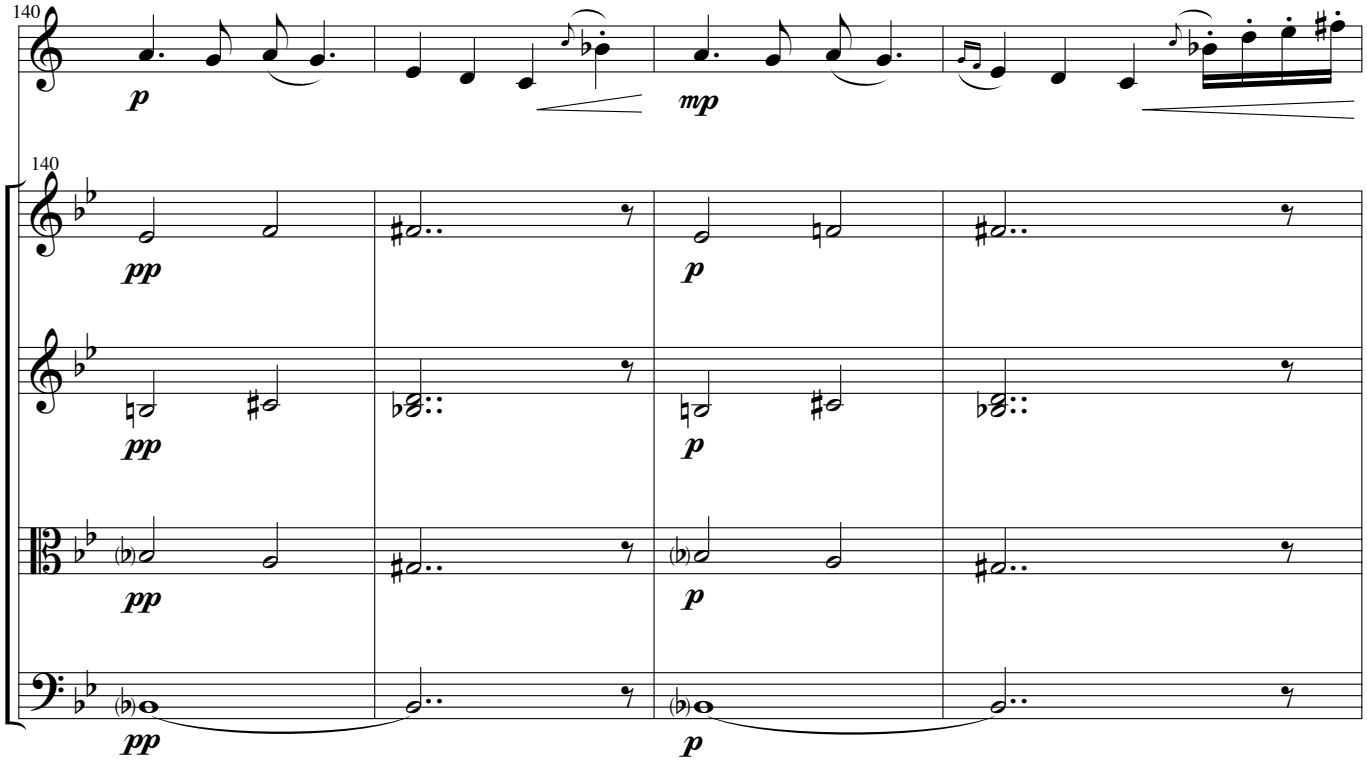

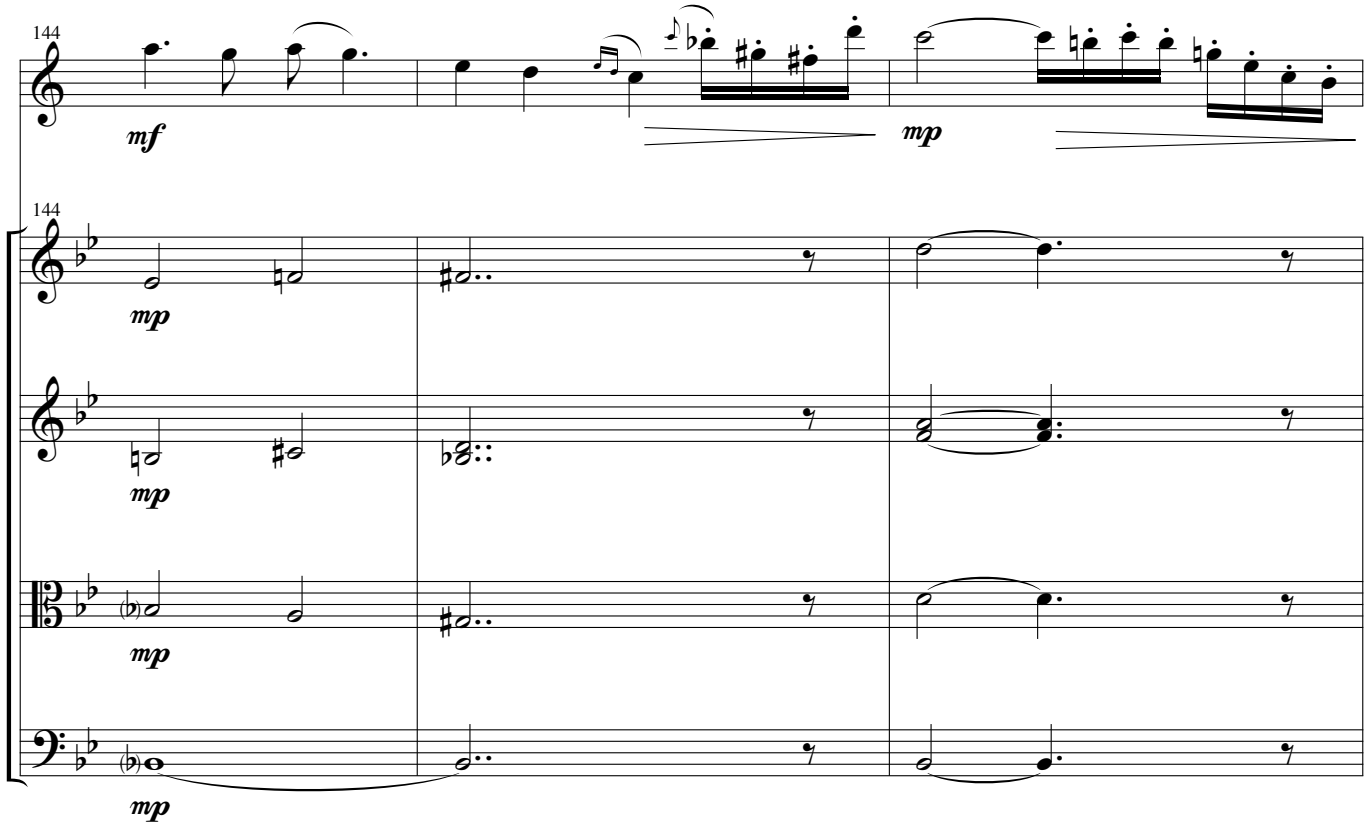

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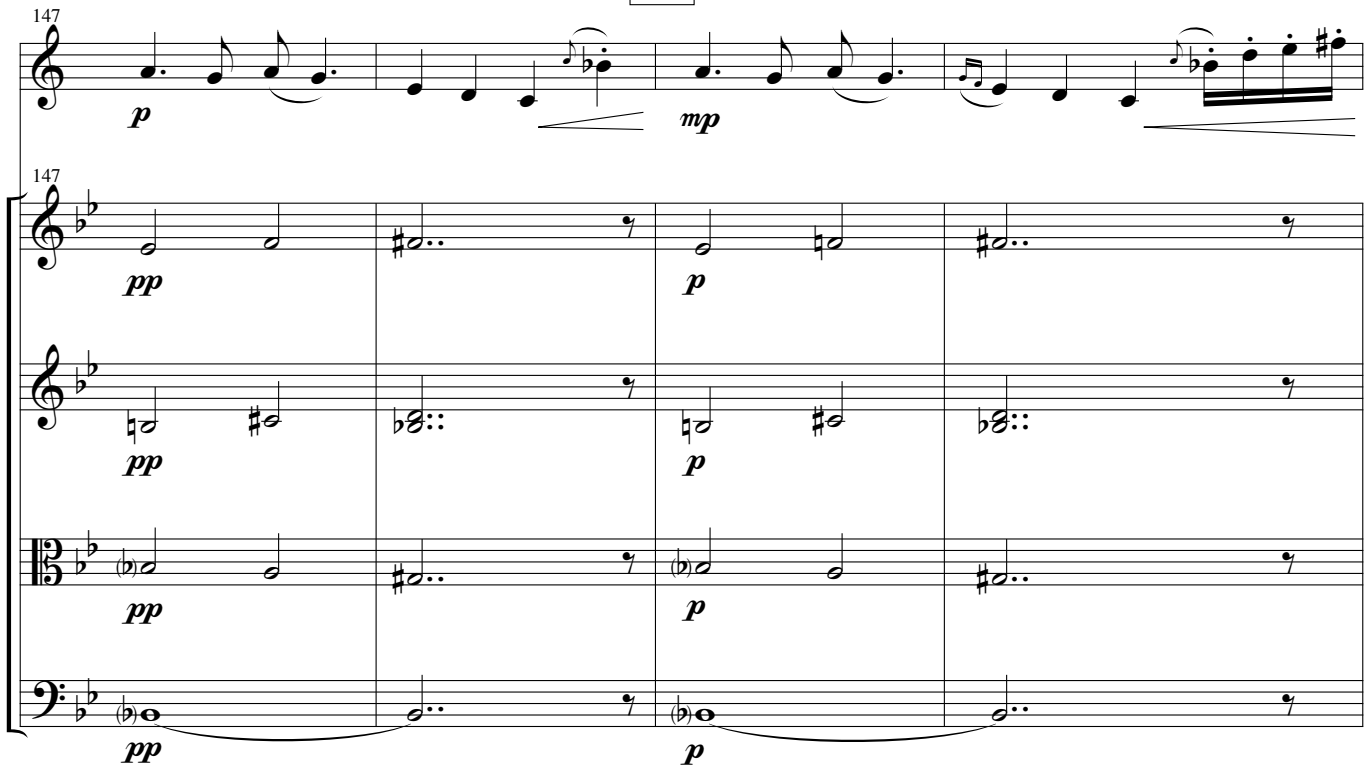

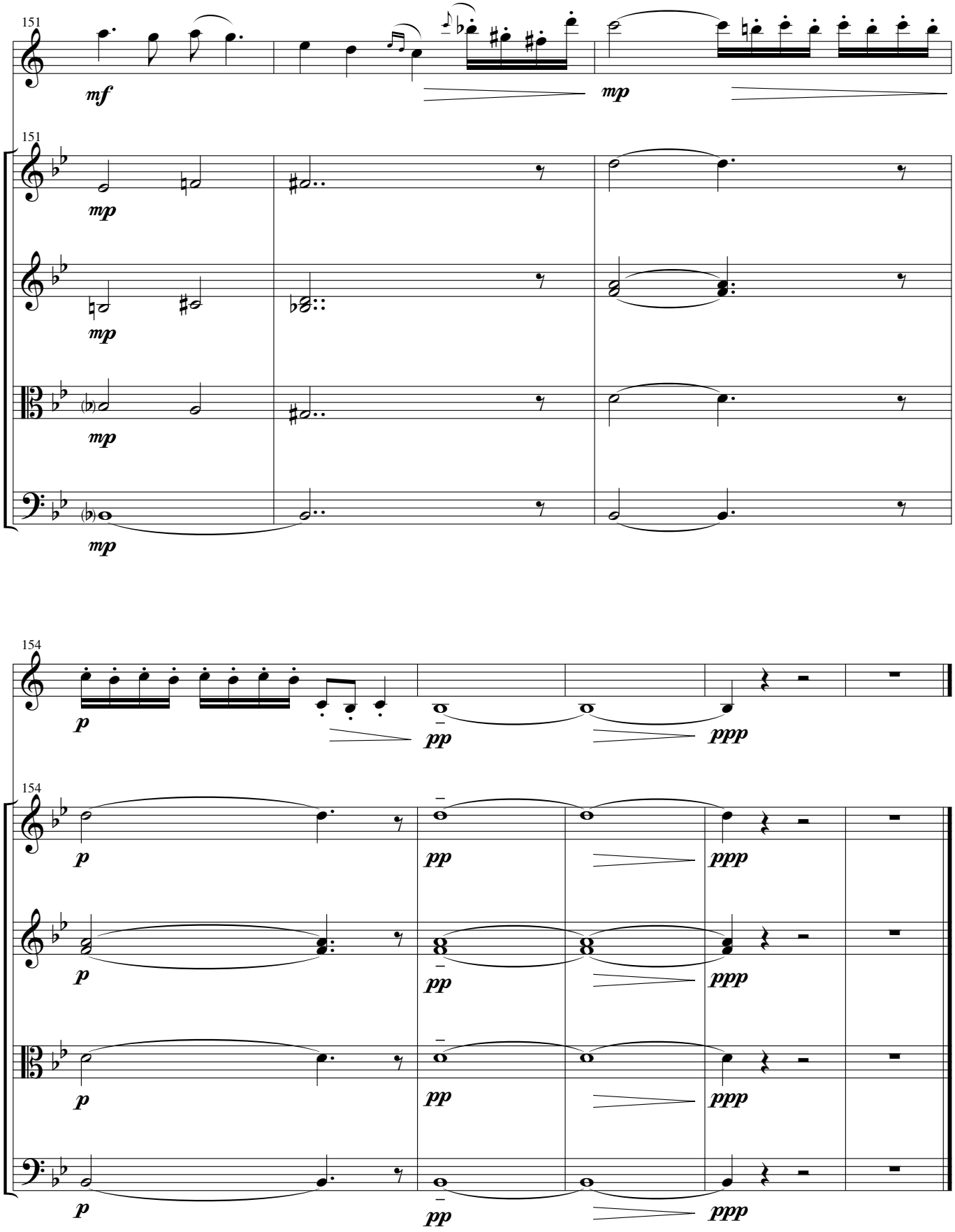
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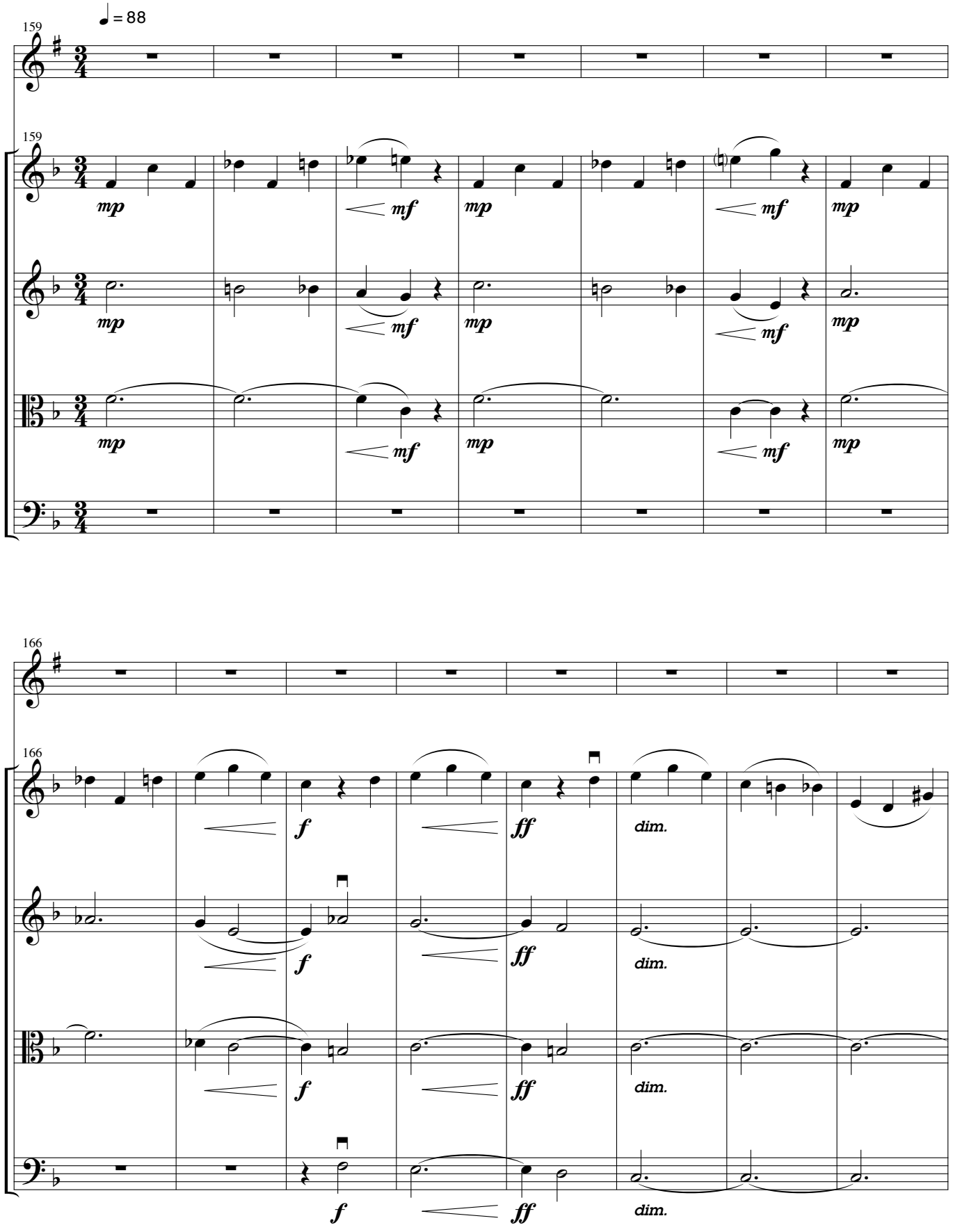

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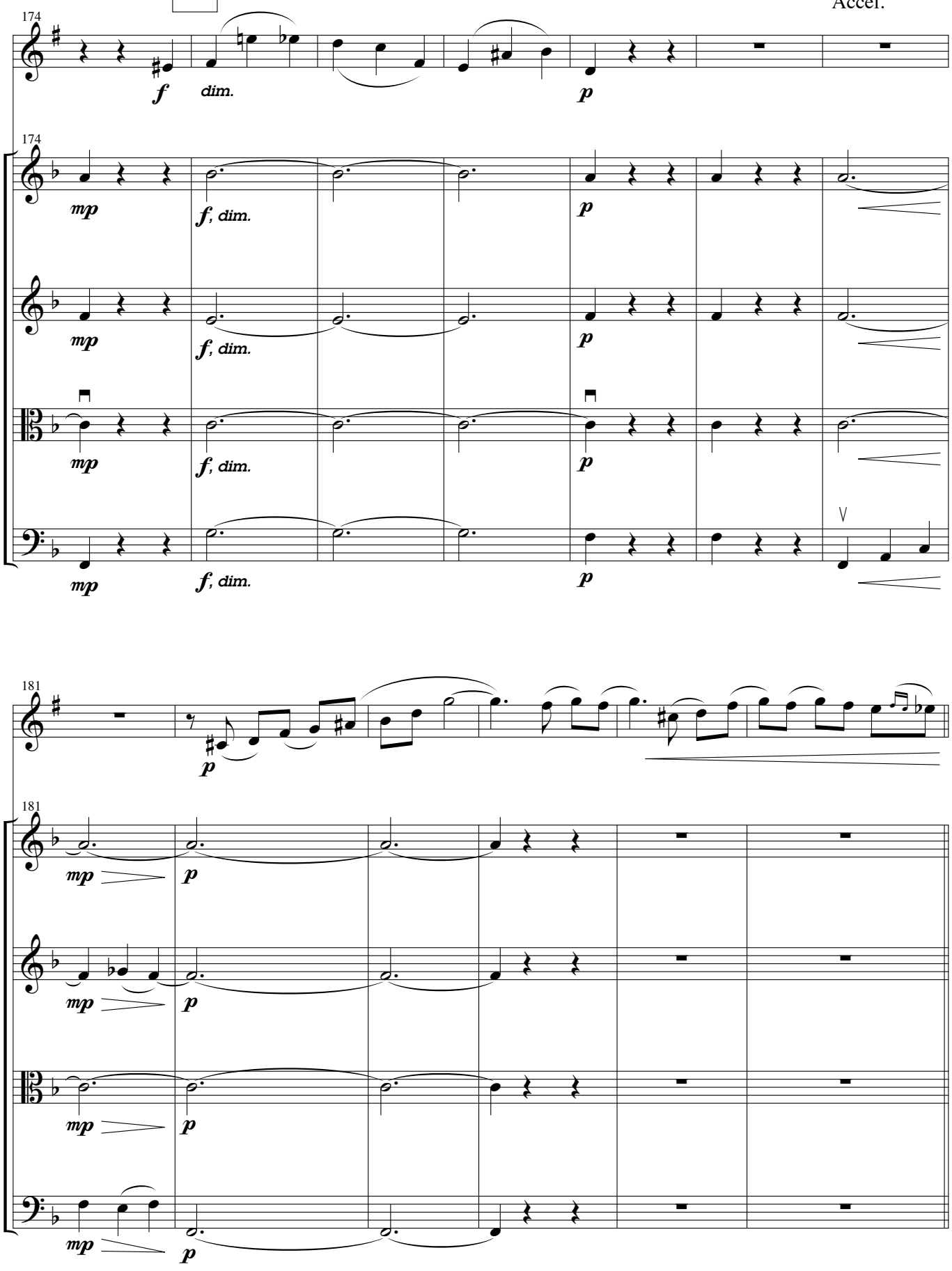
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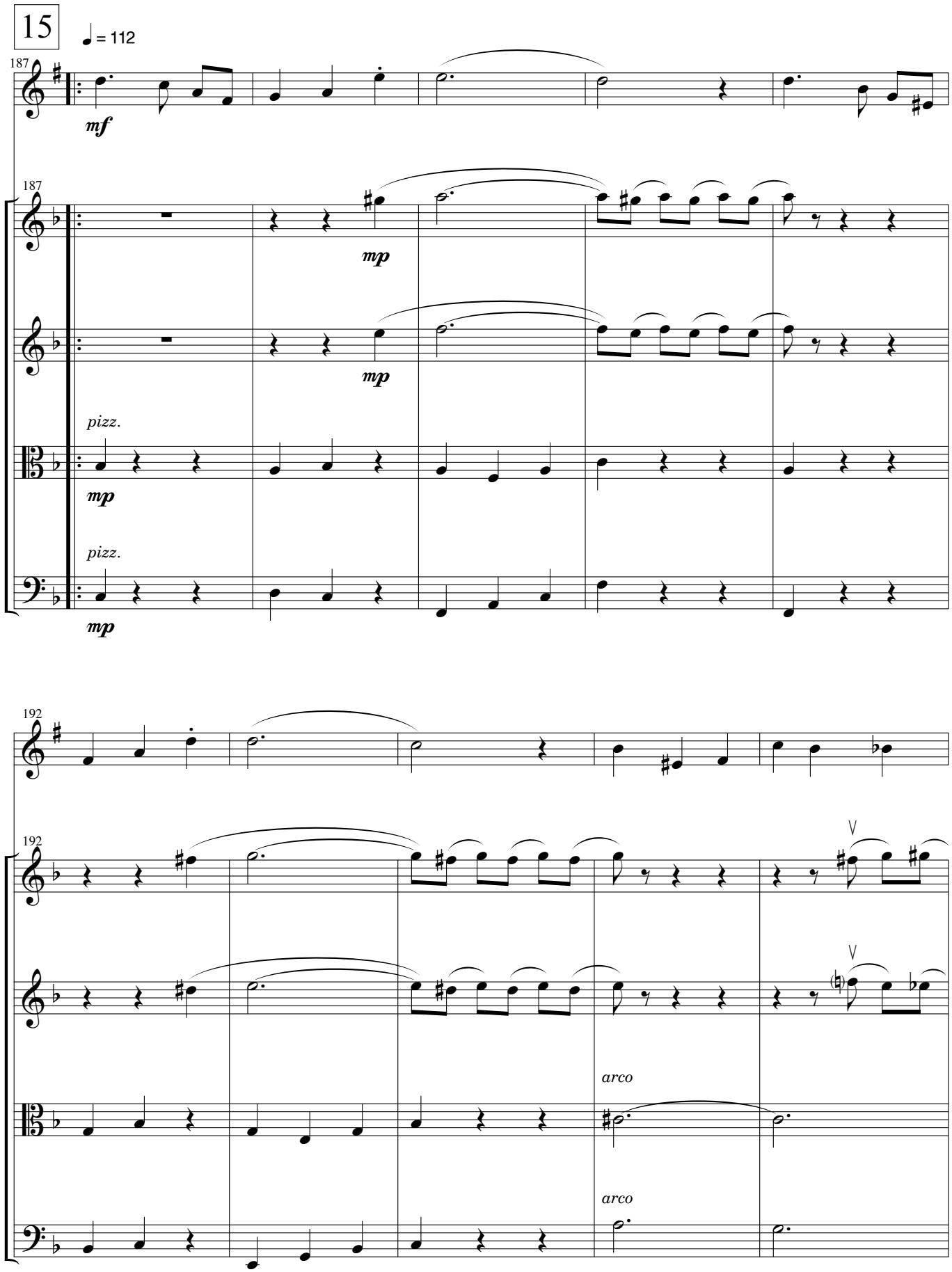
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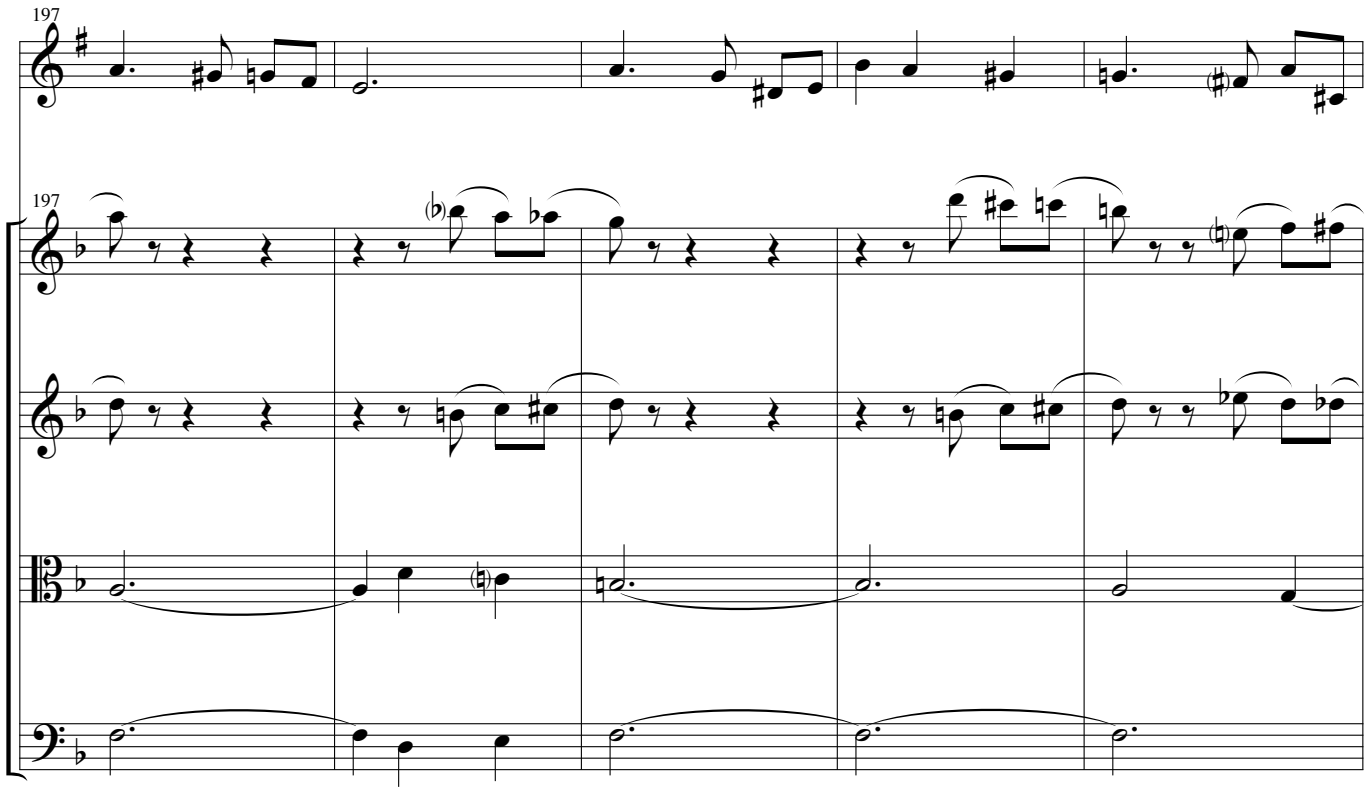

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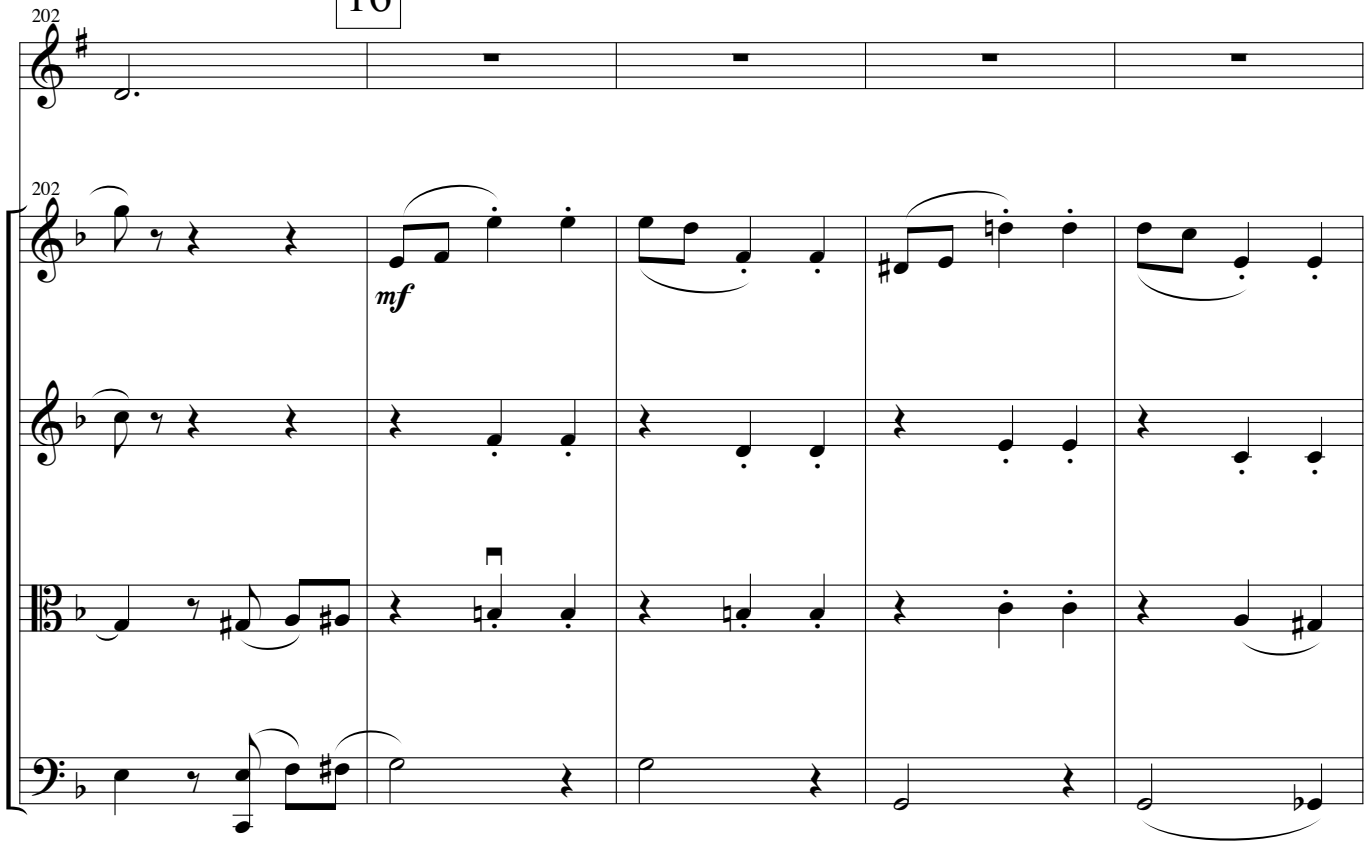
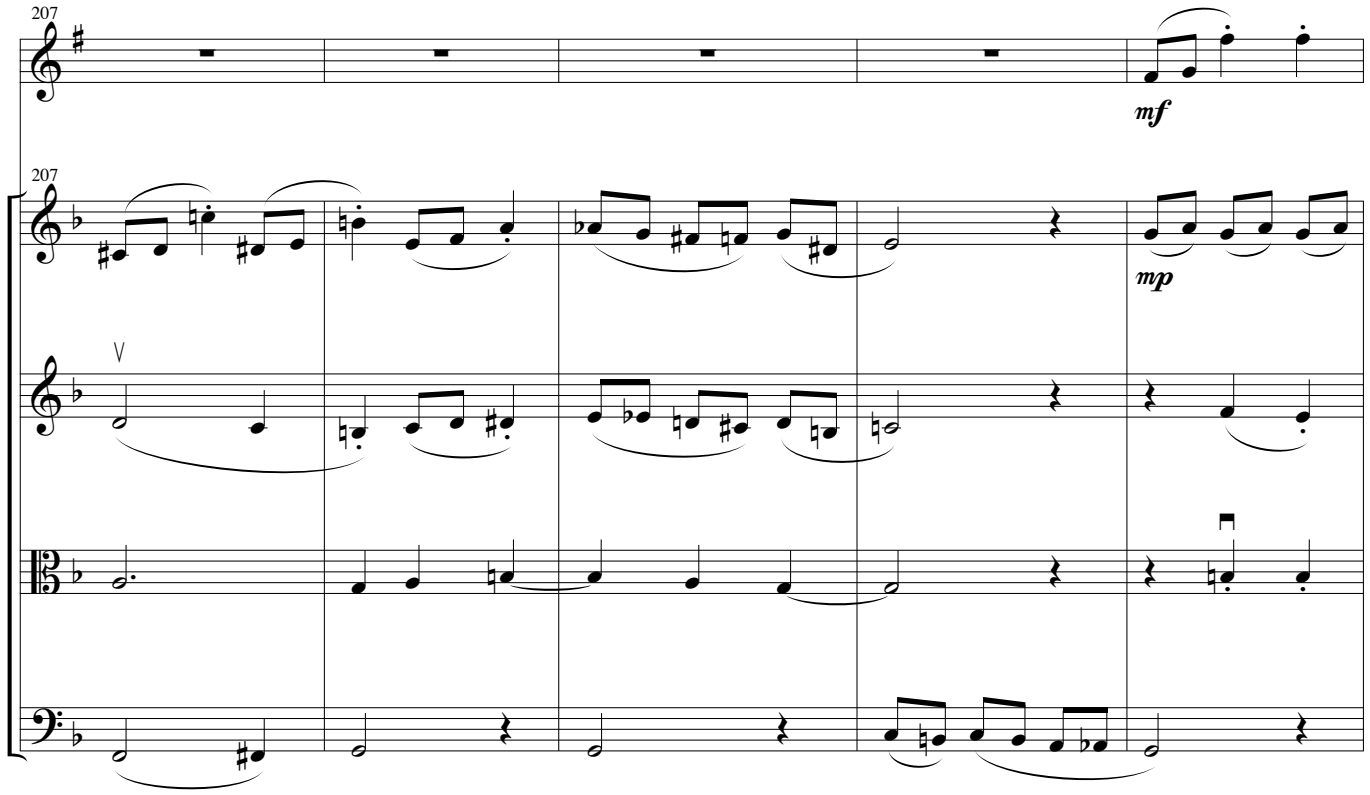
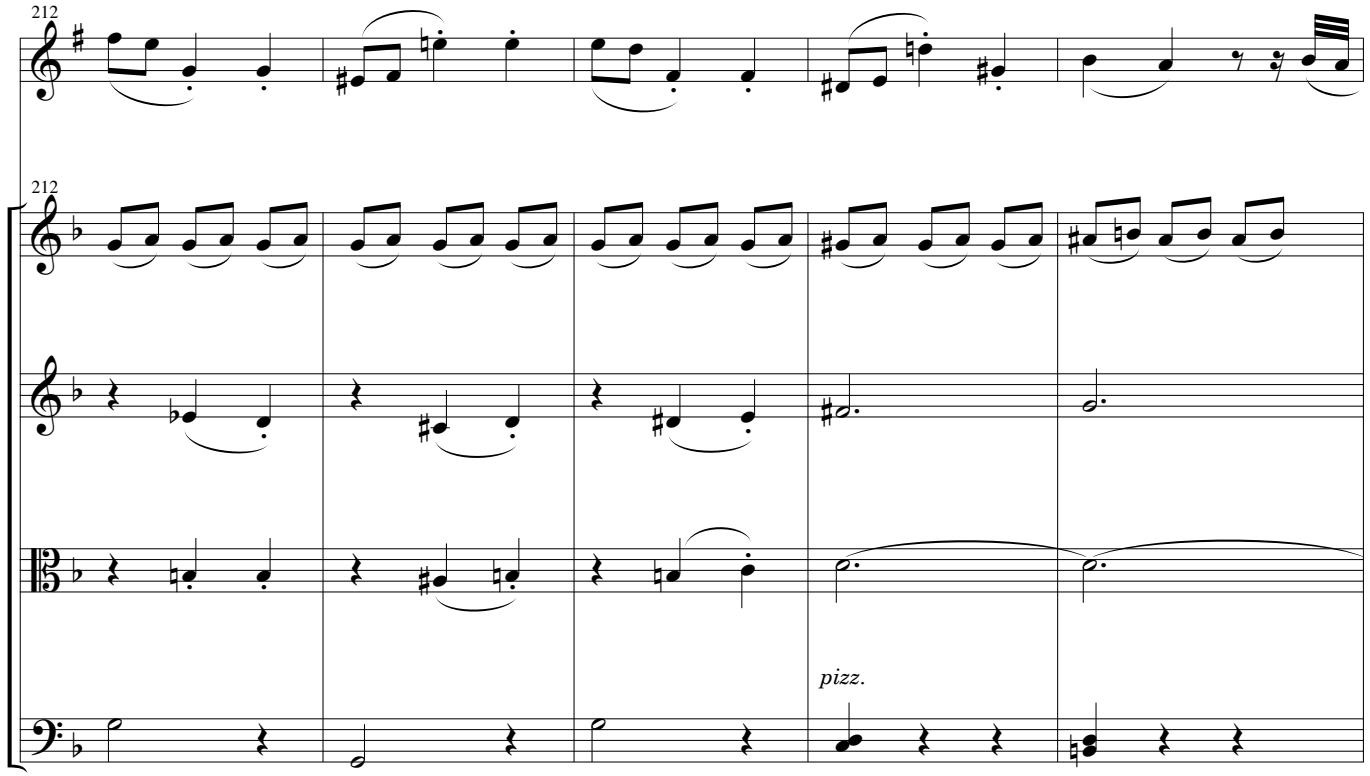
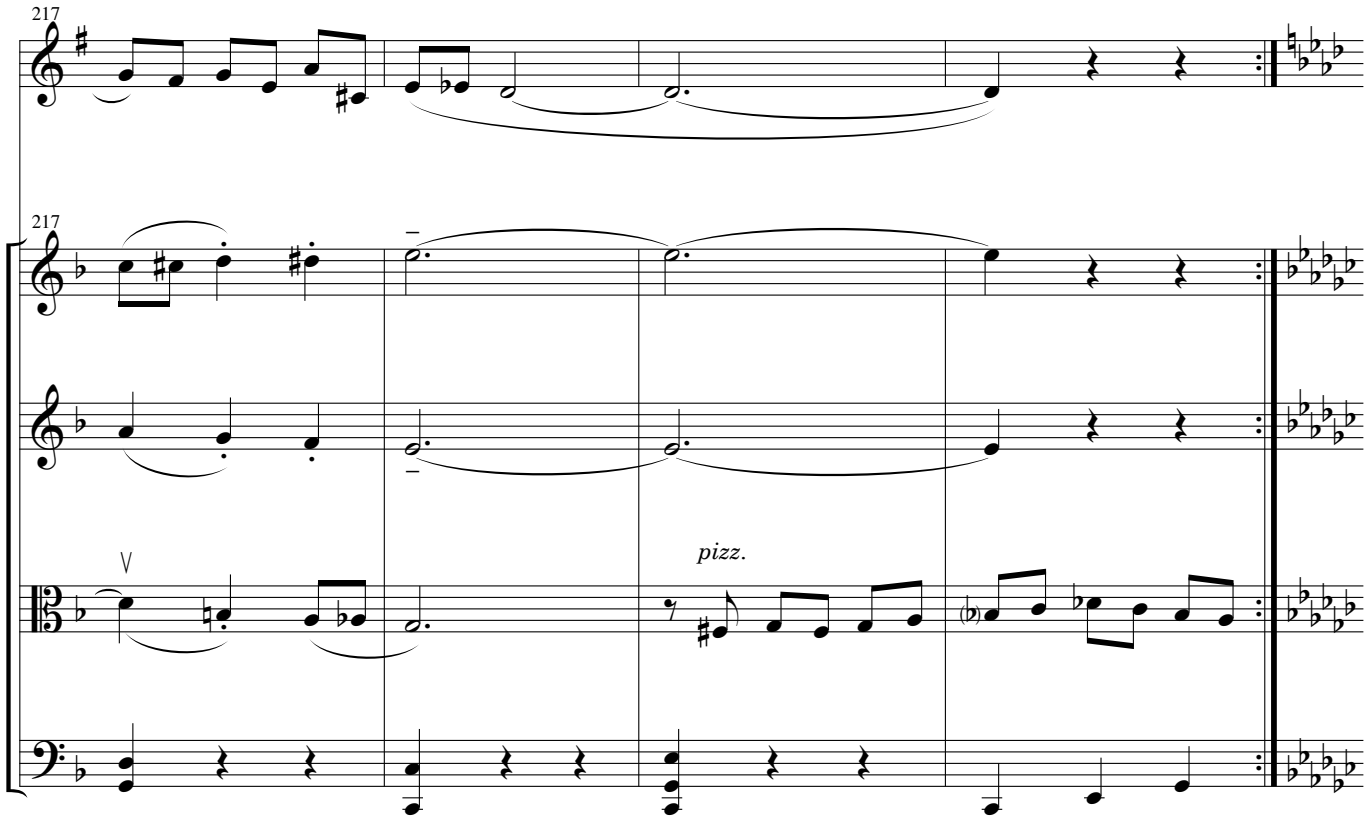



207
mf
207
mp
V


212
212
pizz.



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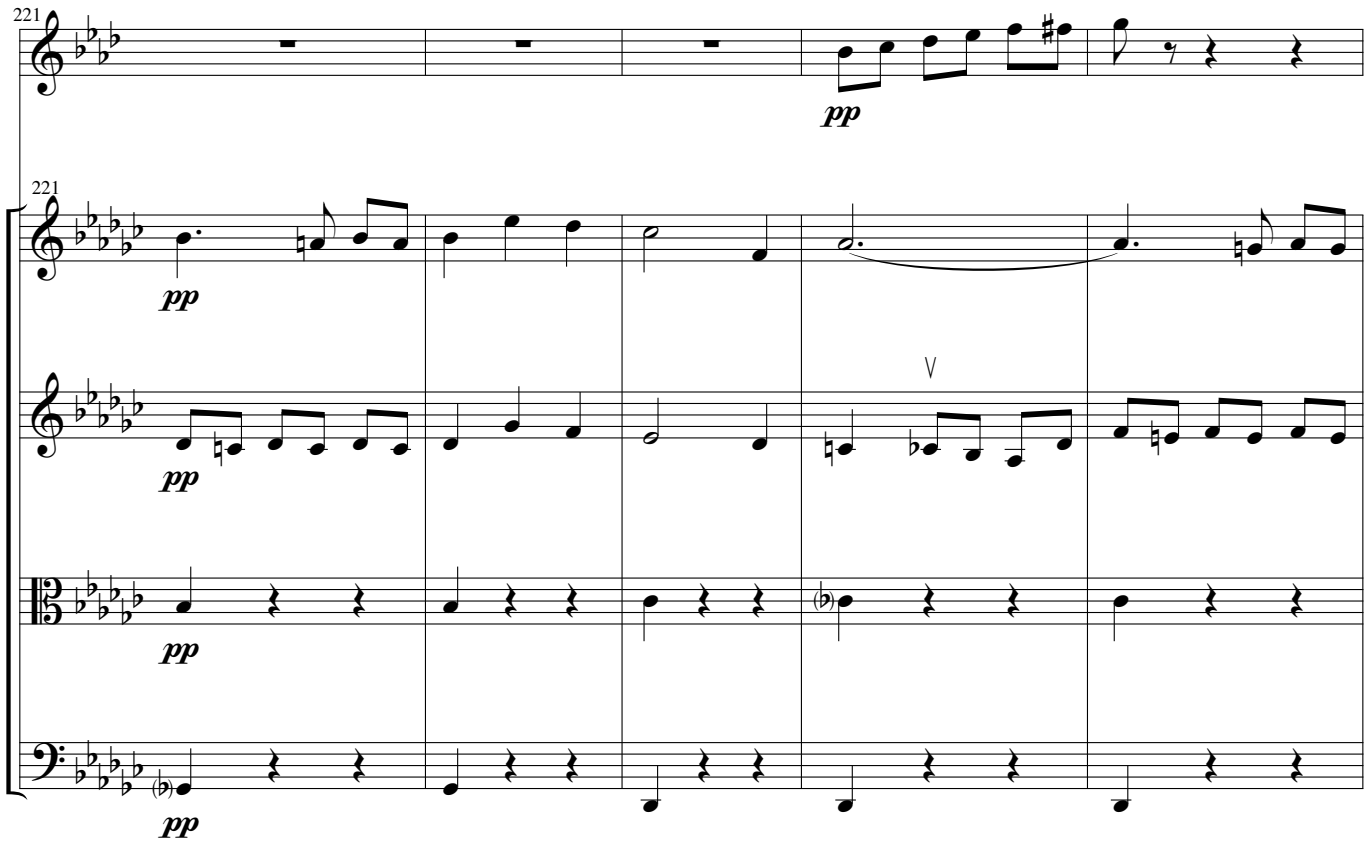

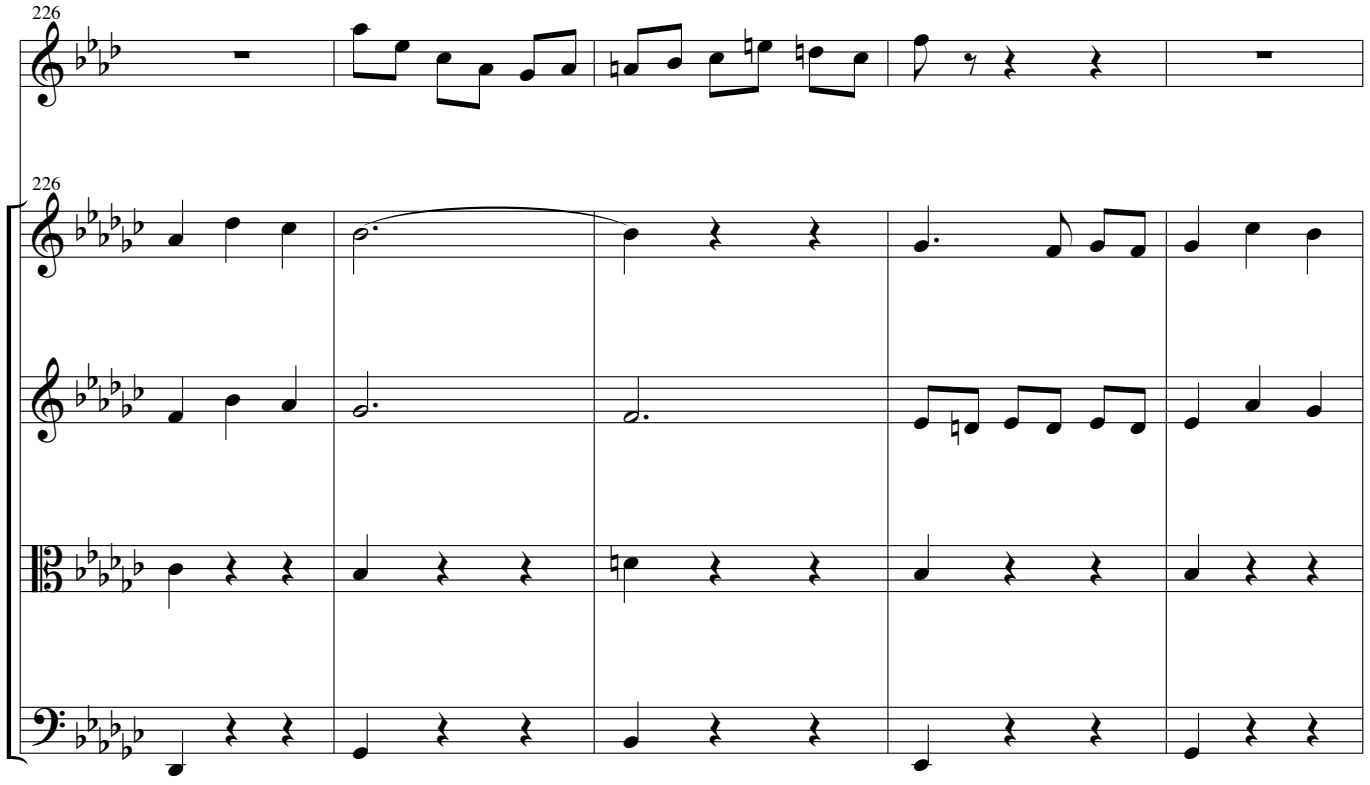

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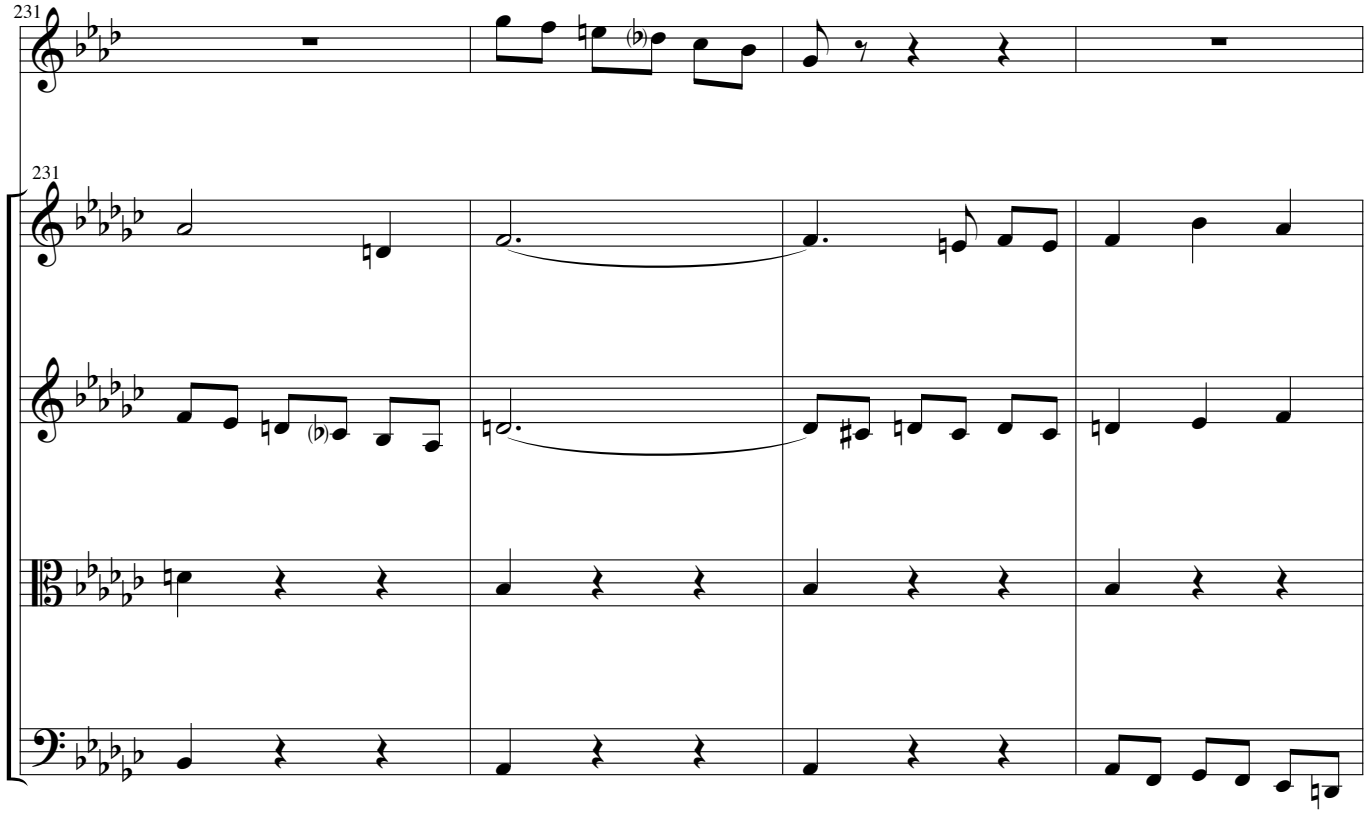

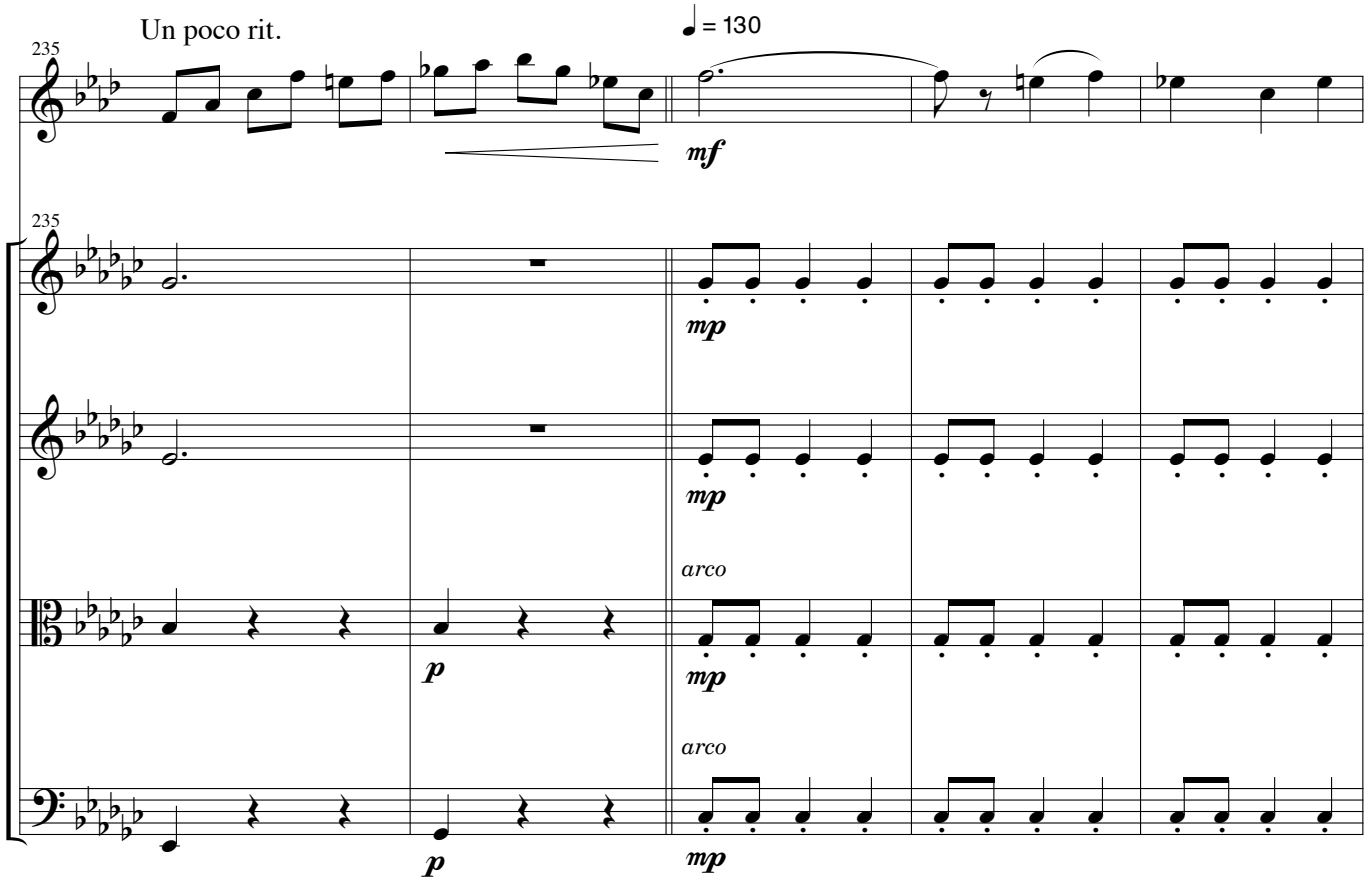

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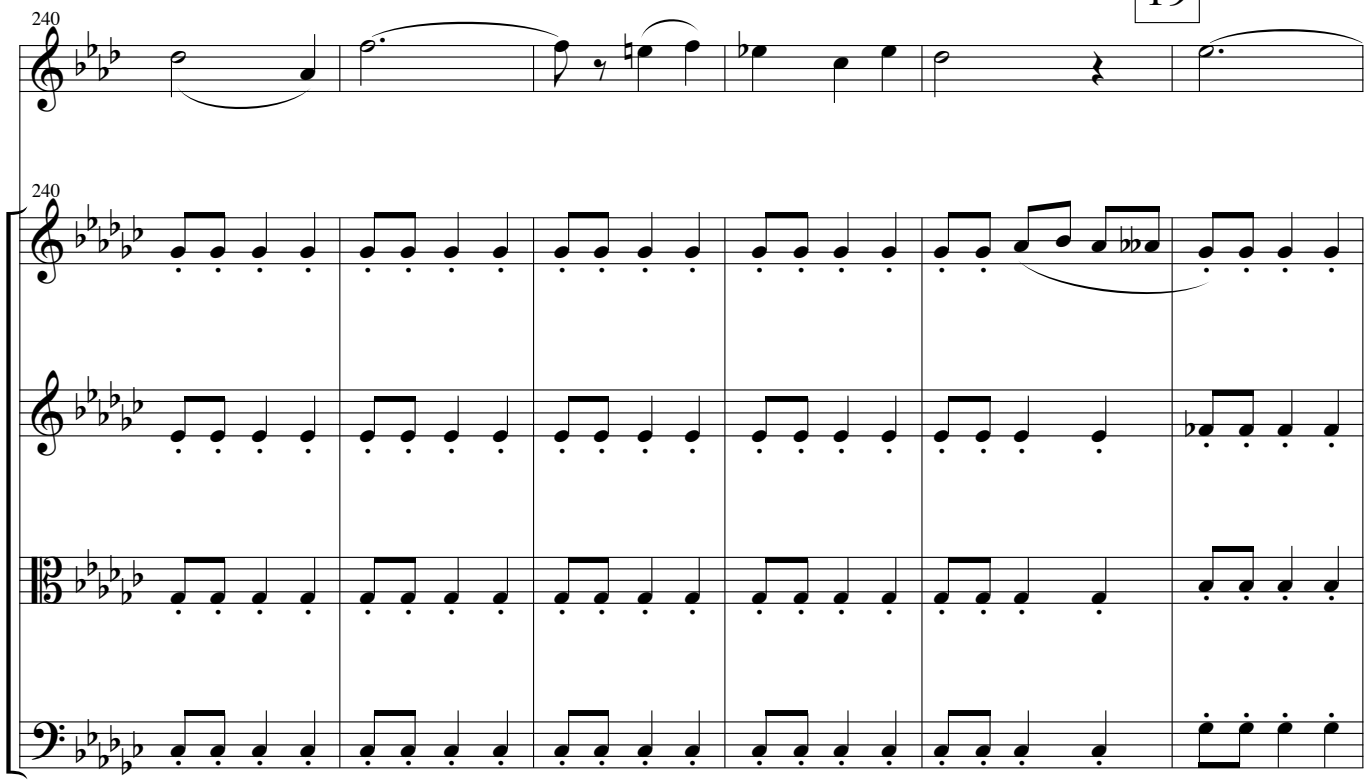
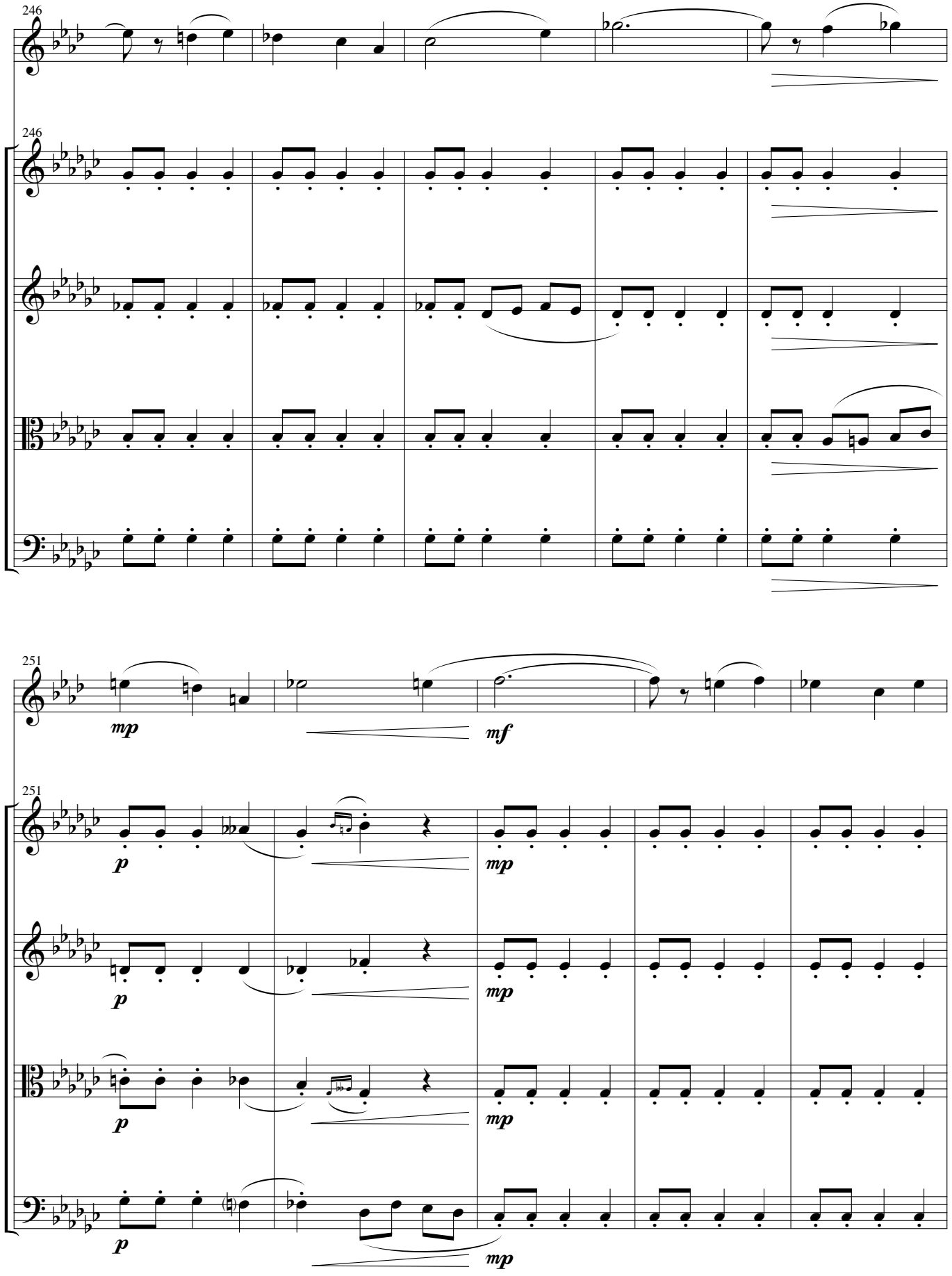
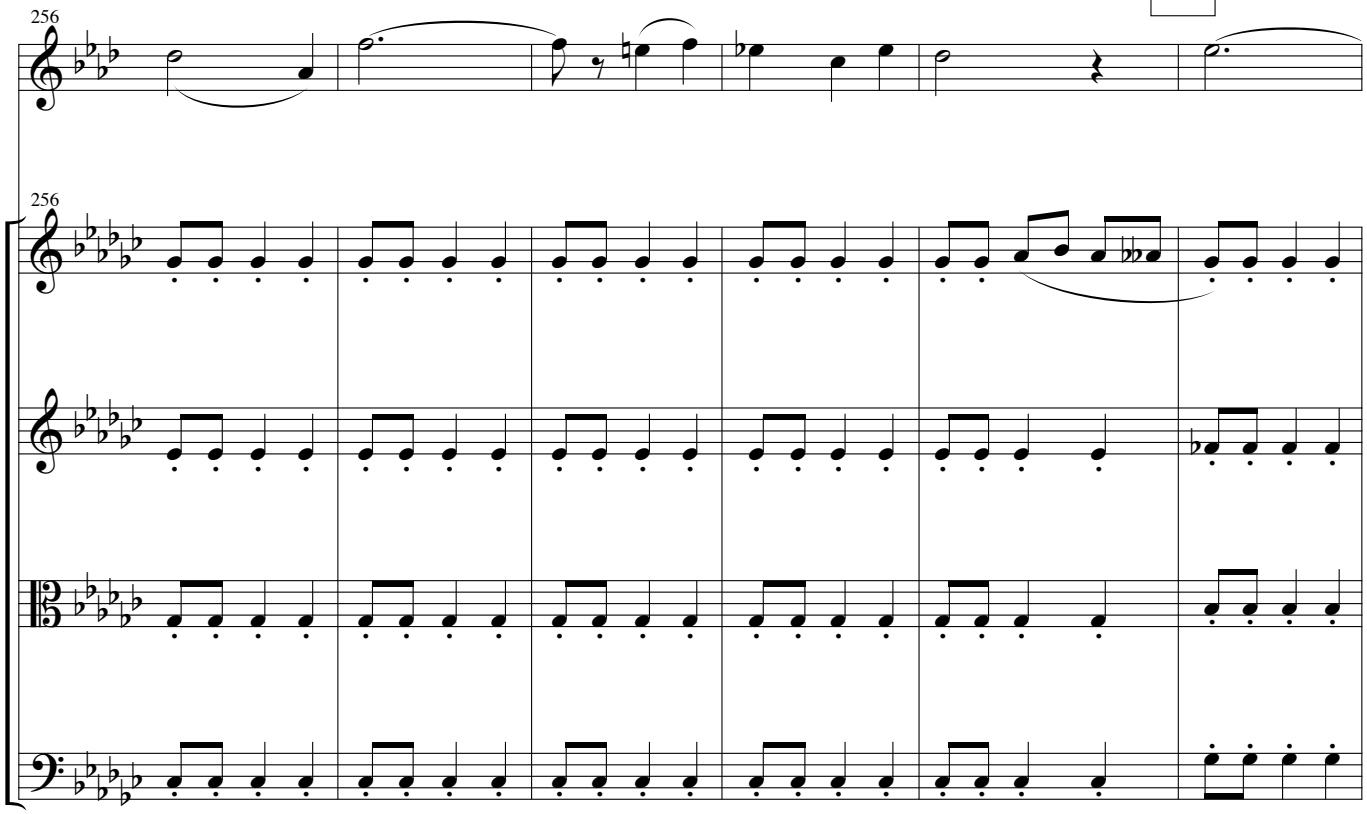


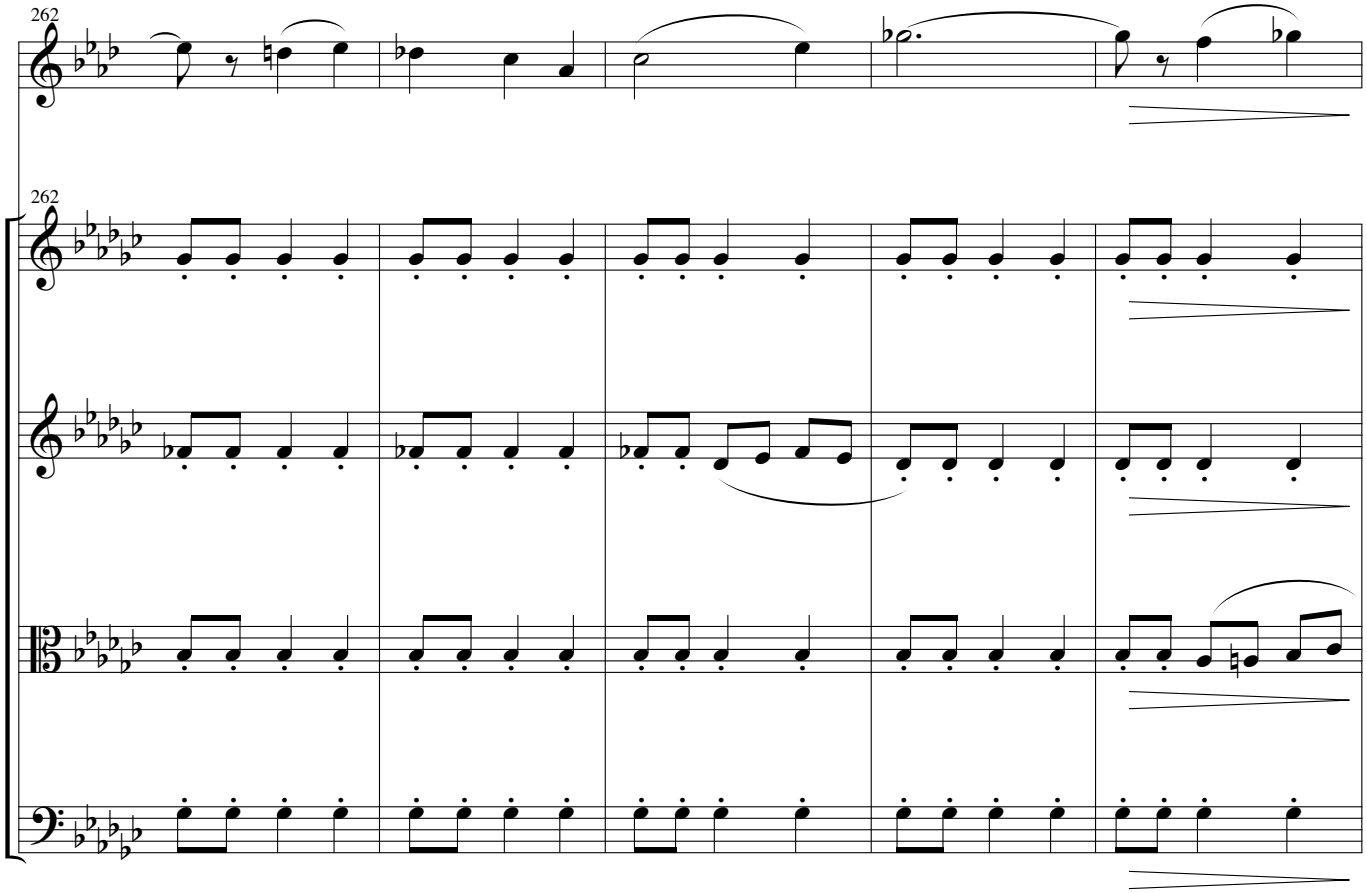

246
246
251
mp
mf
251
p
mp
p
mp
p
mp
p
mp

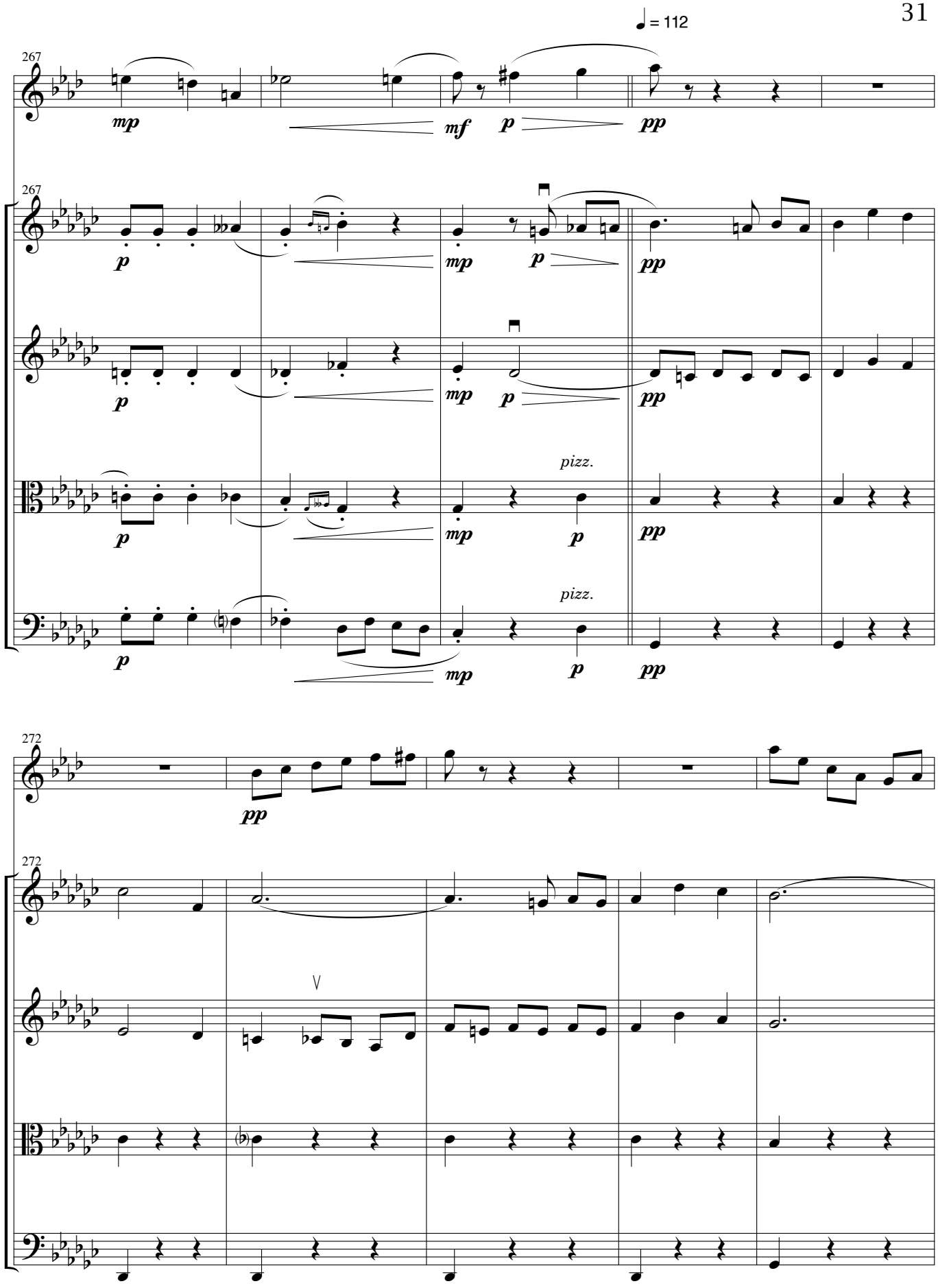
20

256



262




♩ = 112
267
mp
mf
p
pp
267
p
mp
p
pp
p
mp
p
pp
pizz.
p
mp
p
pp
pizz.
p
mp
p
pp
272
pp
272
V

21

277

277

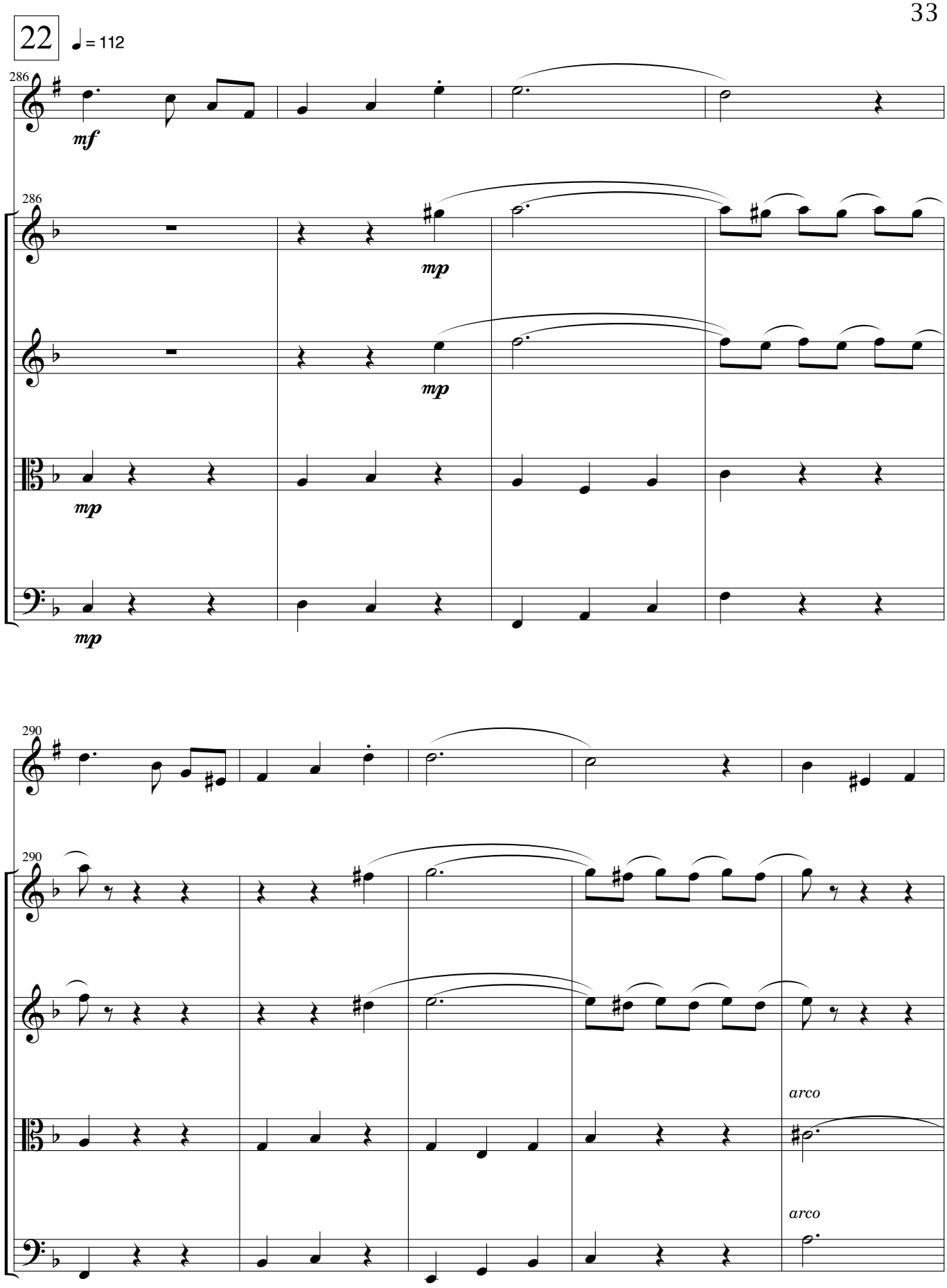
Un poco rit.

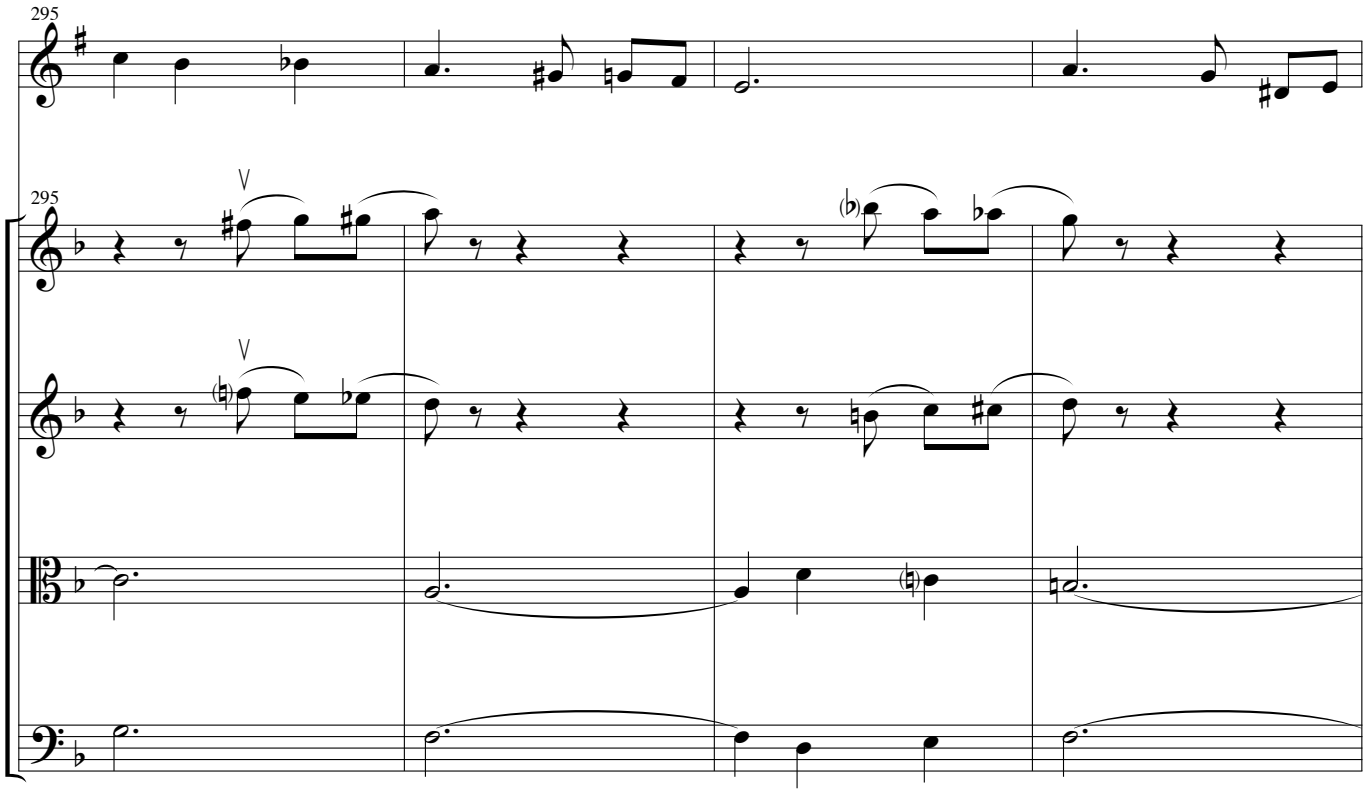
282

282

p

p


22
♩ = 112
286
mf
286
mp
mp
mp
290
290
arco
arco



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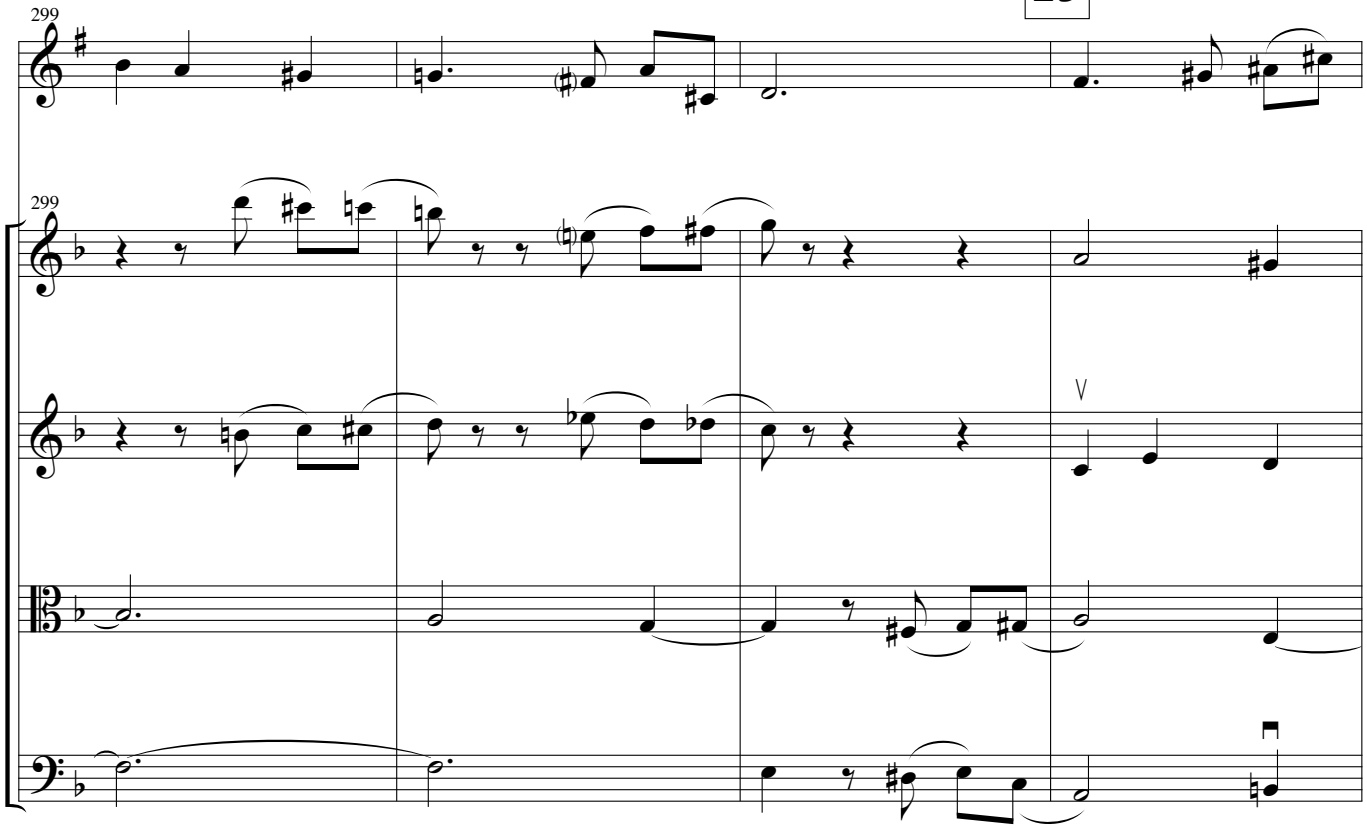
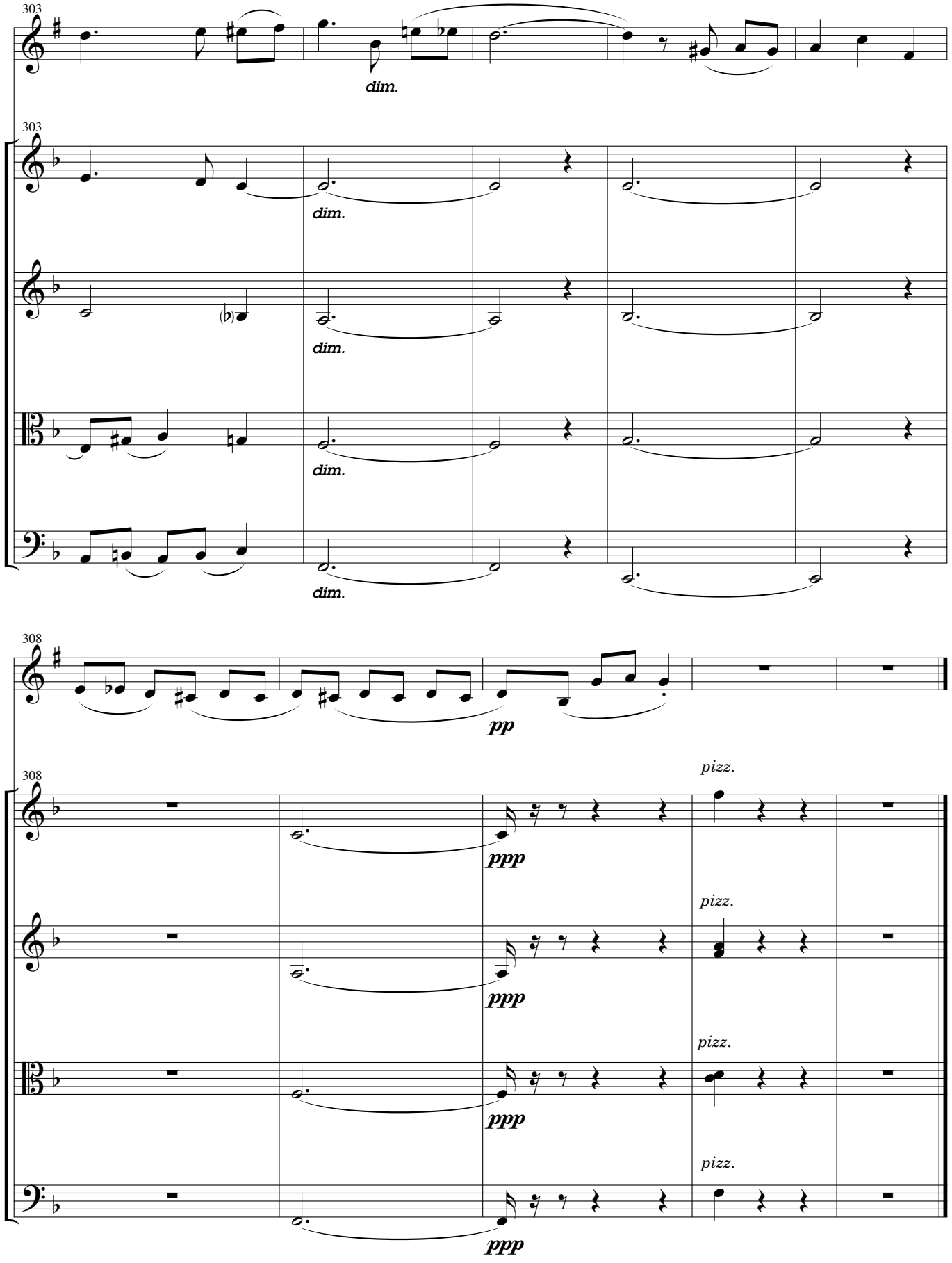
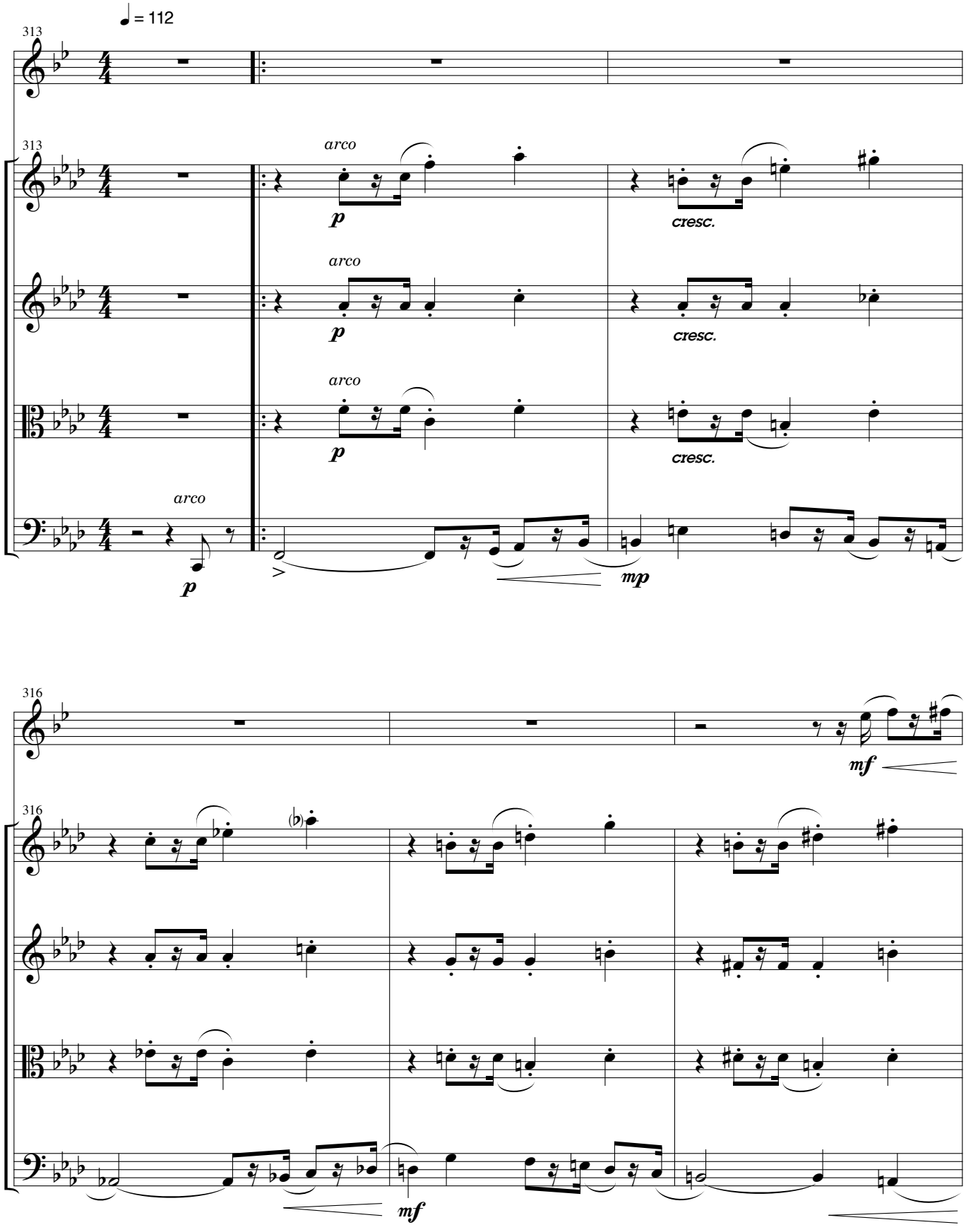
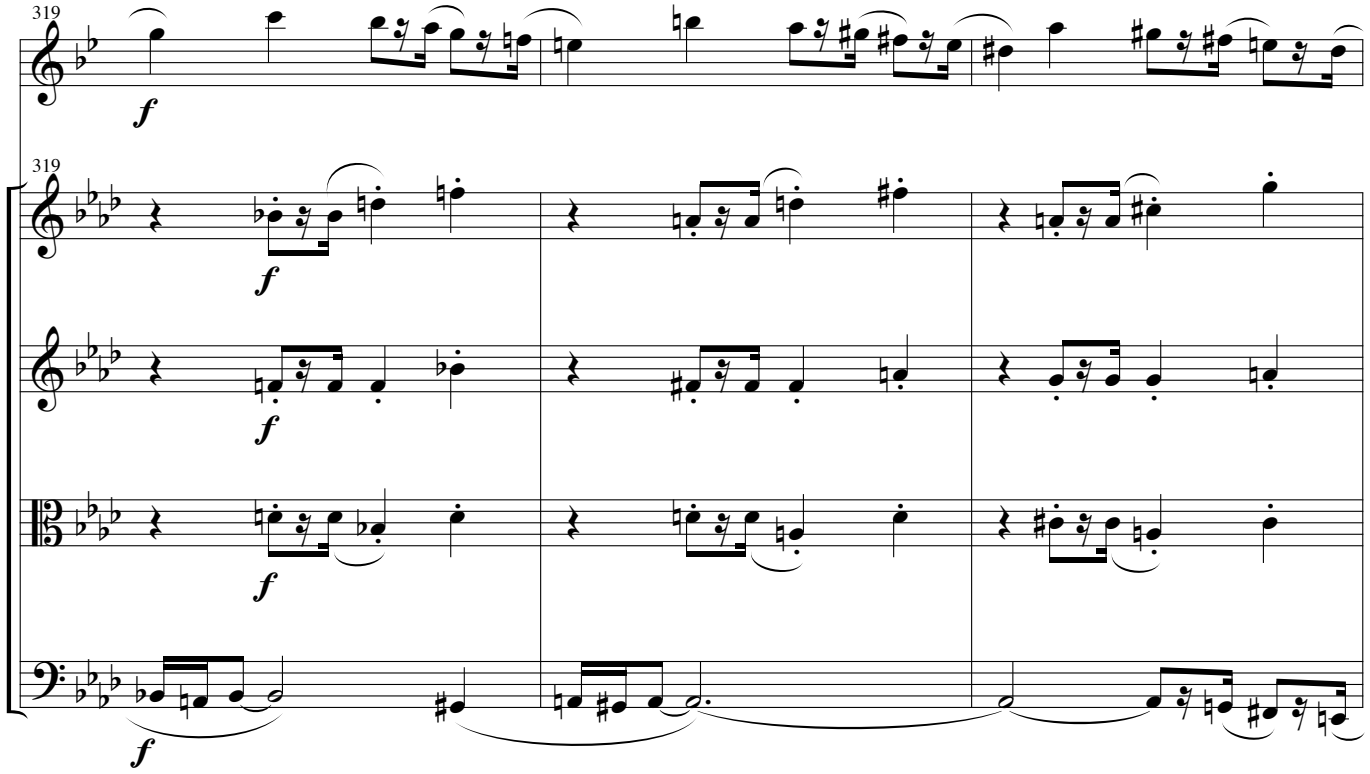



303
dim.
303
dim.
dim.
dim.
308
pp
308
ppp
pizz.
ppp
pizz.
ppp
pizz.
ppp
pizz.

4. Marche héroïque





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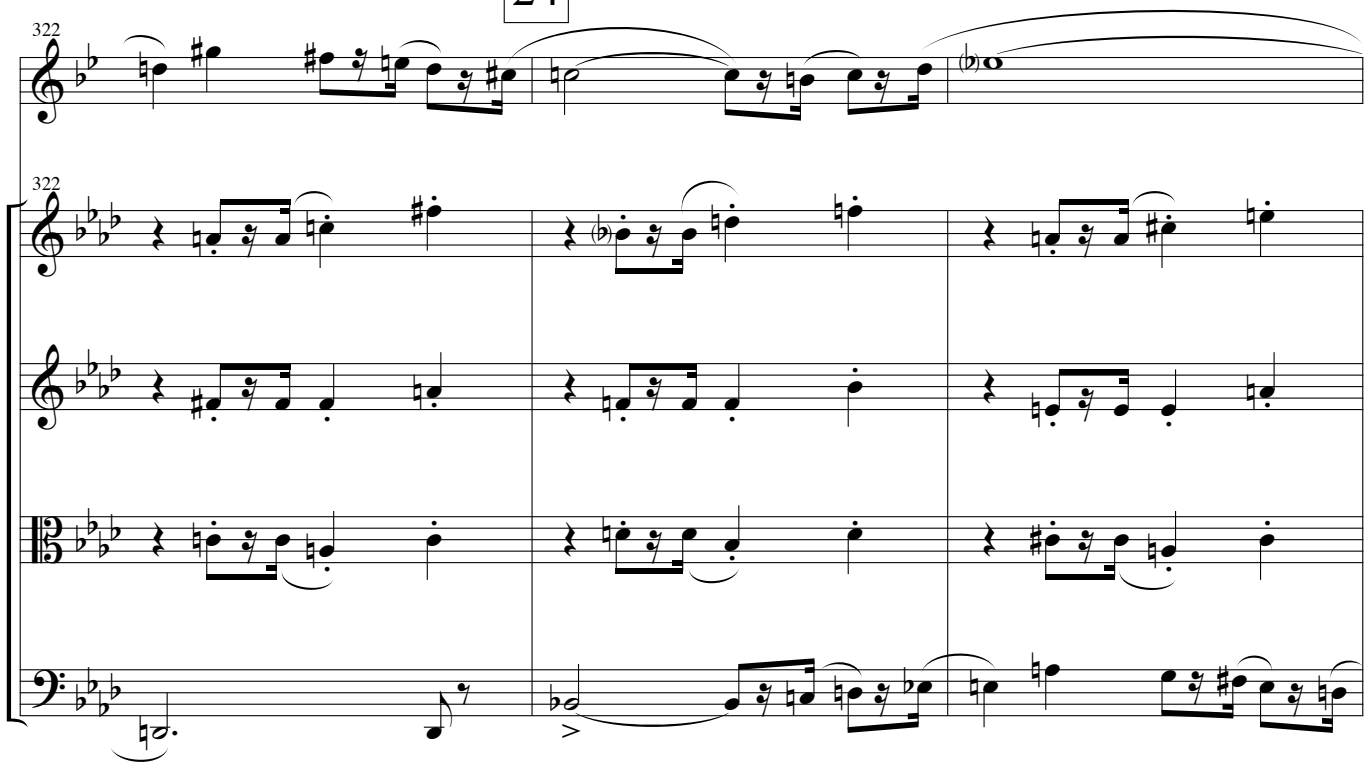
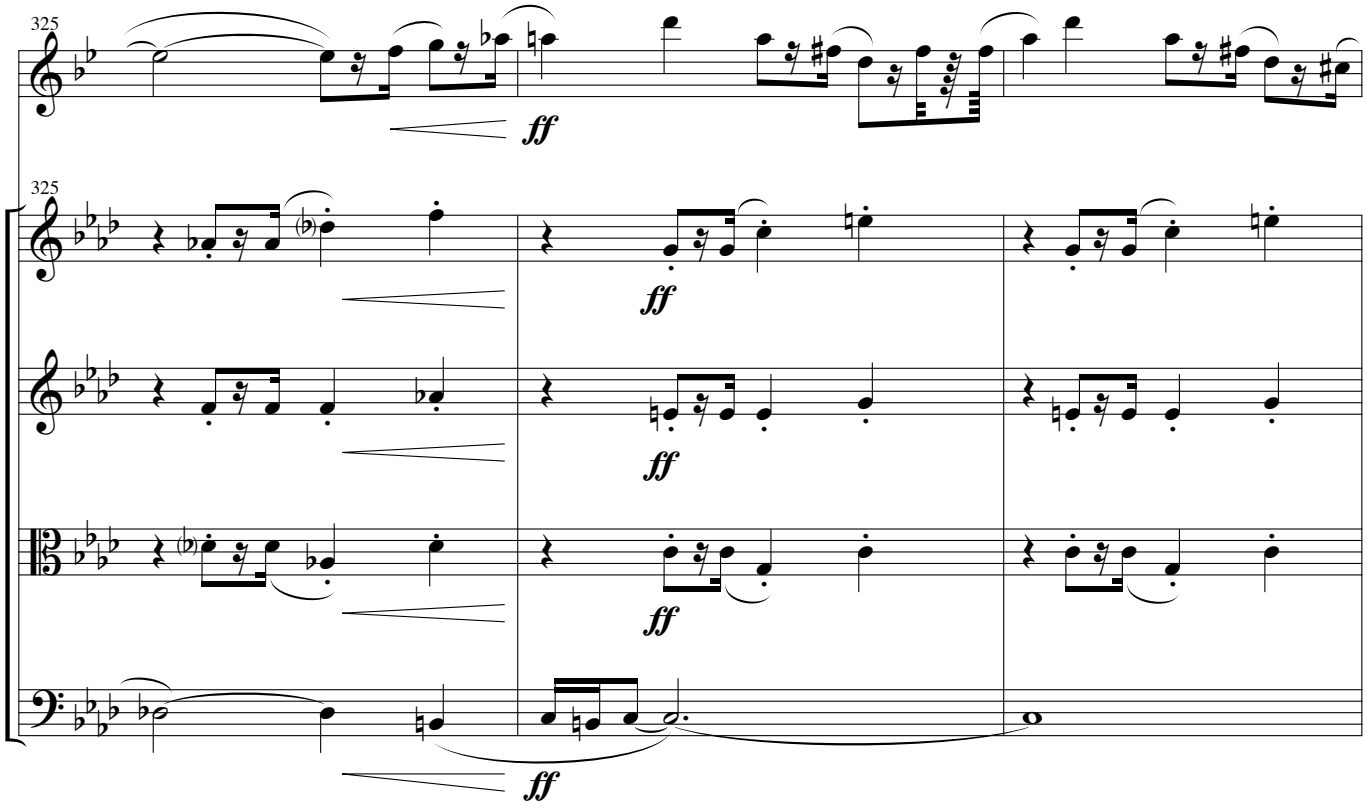
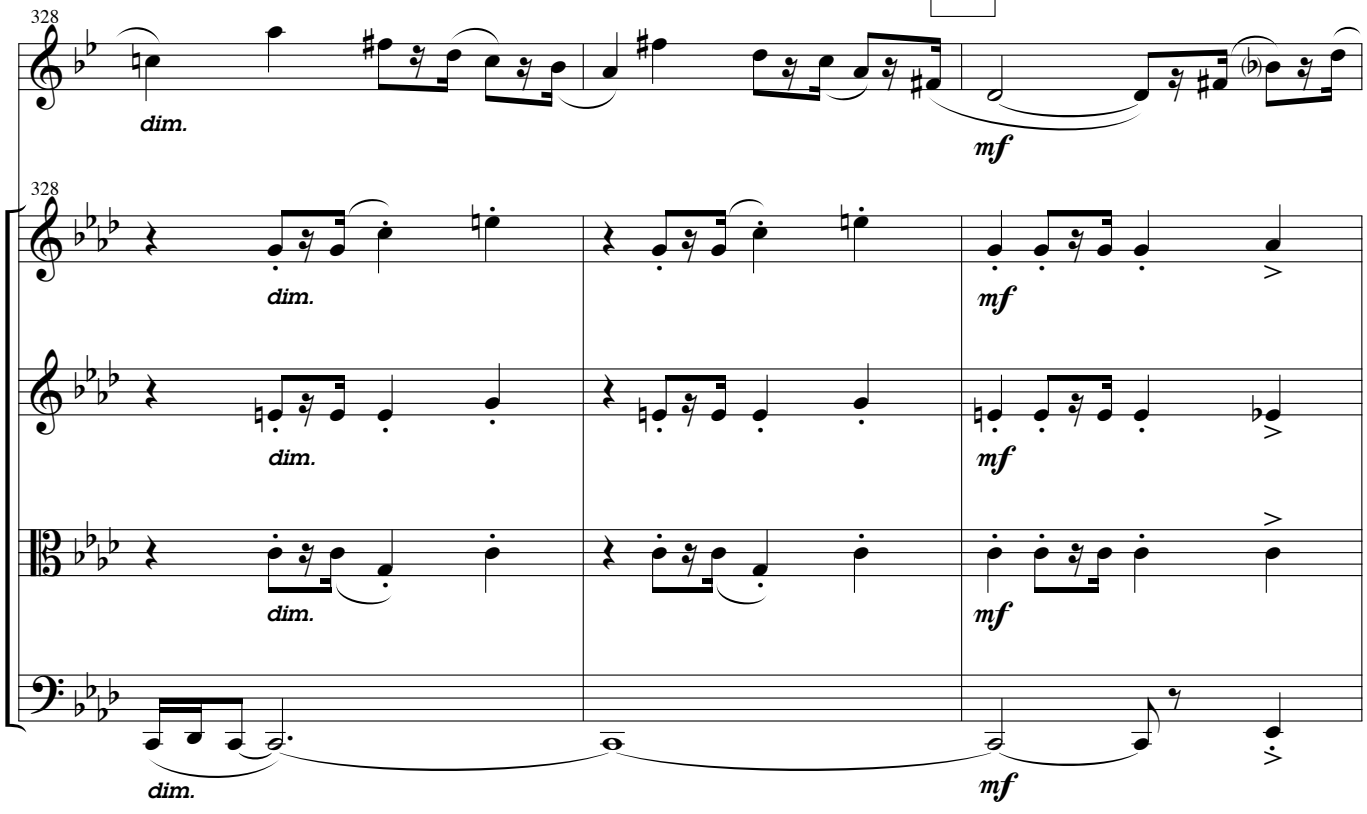
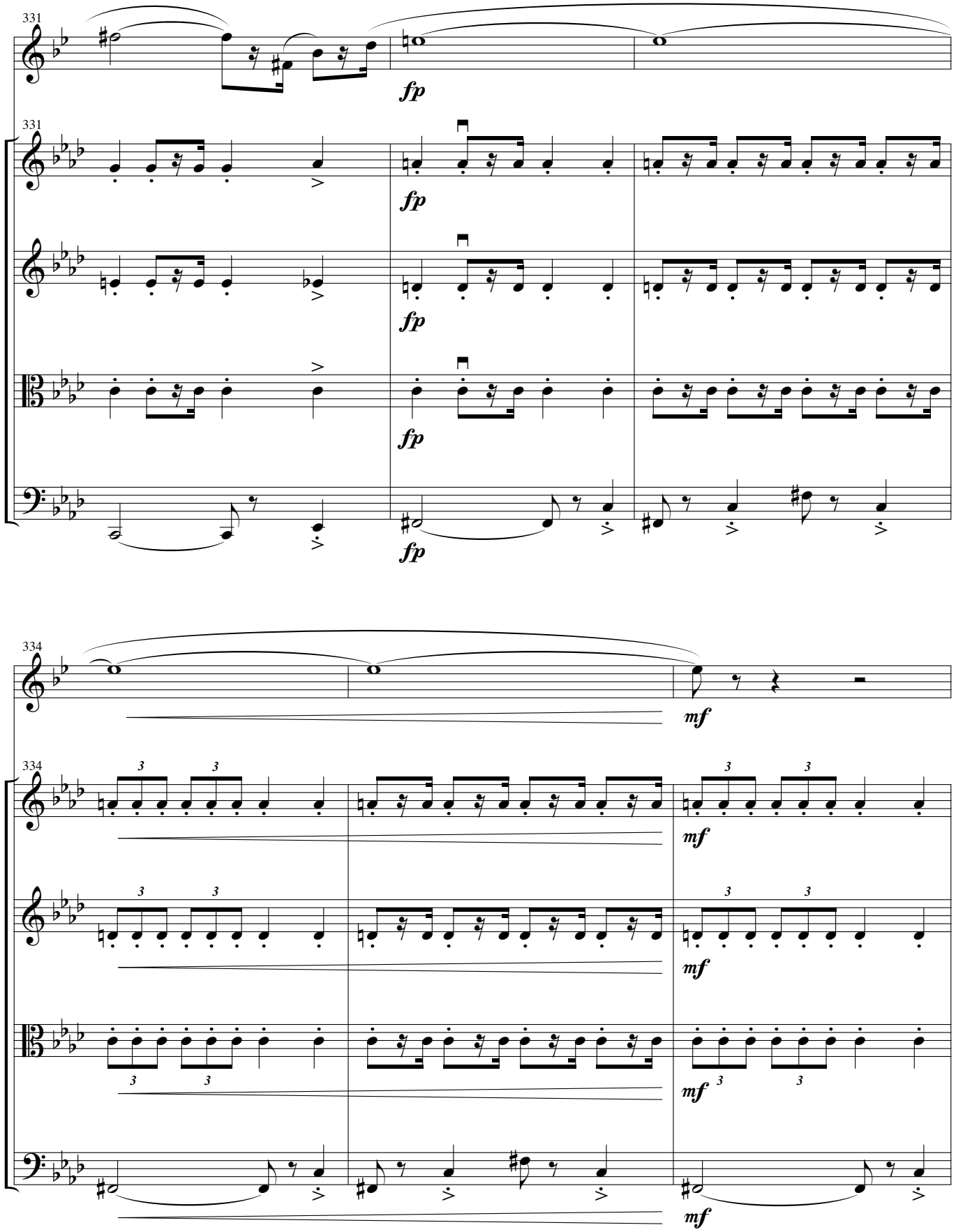


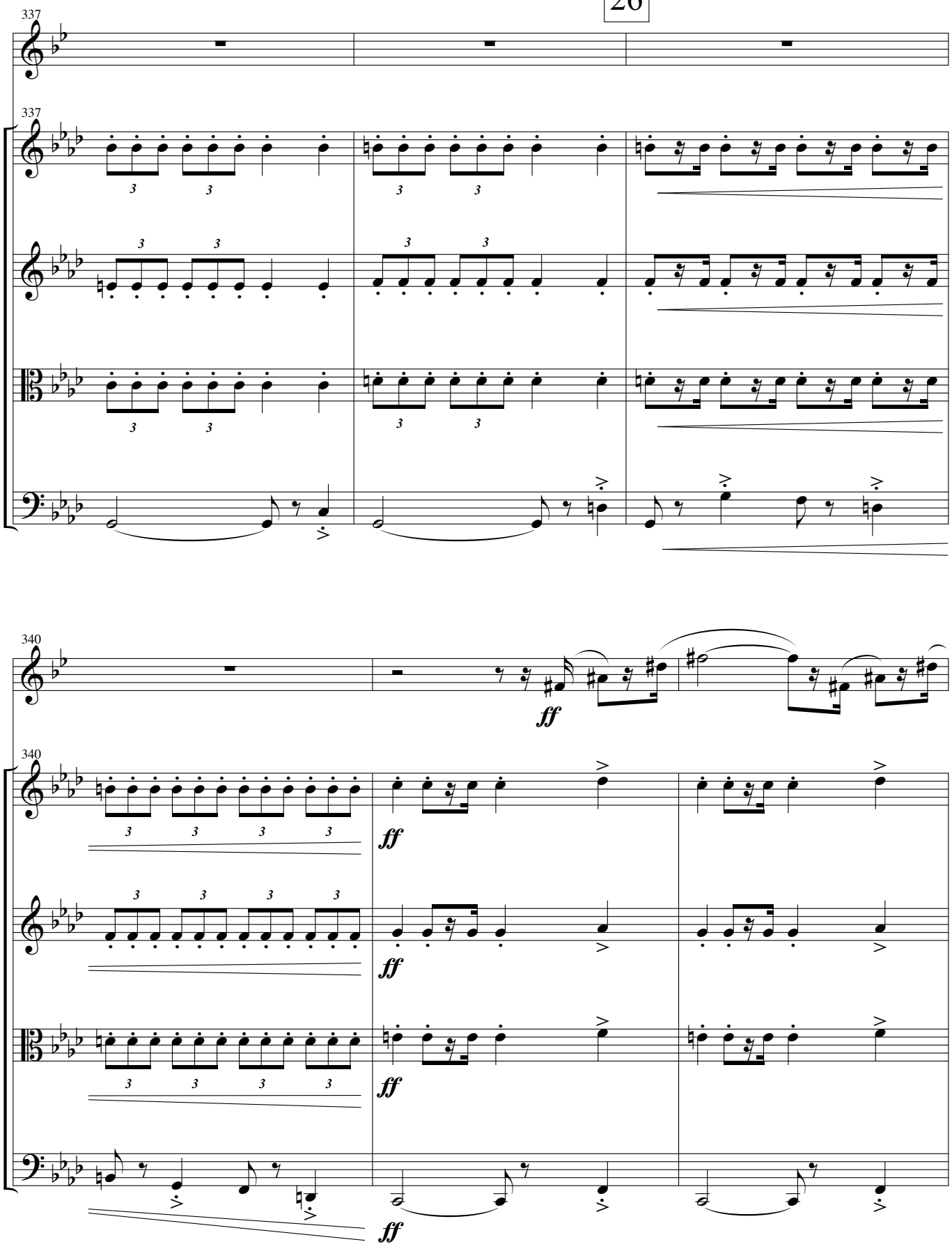


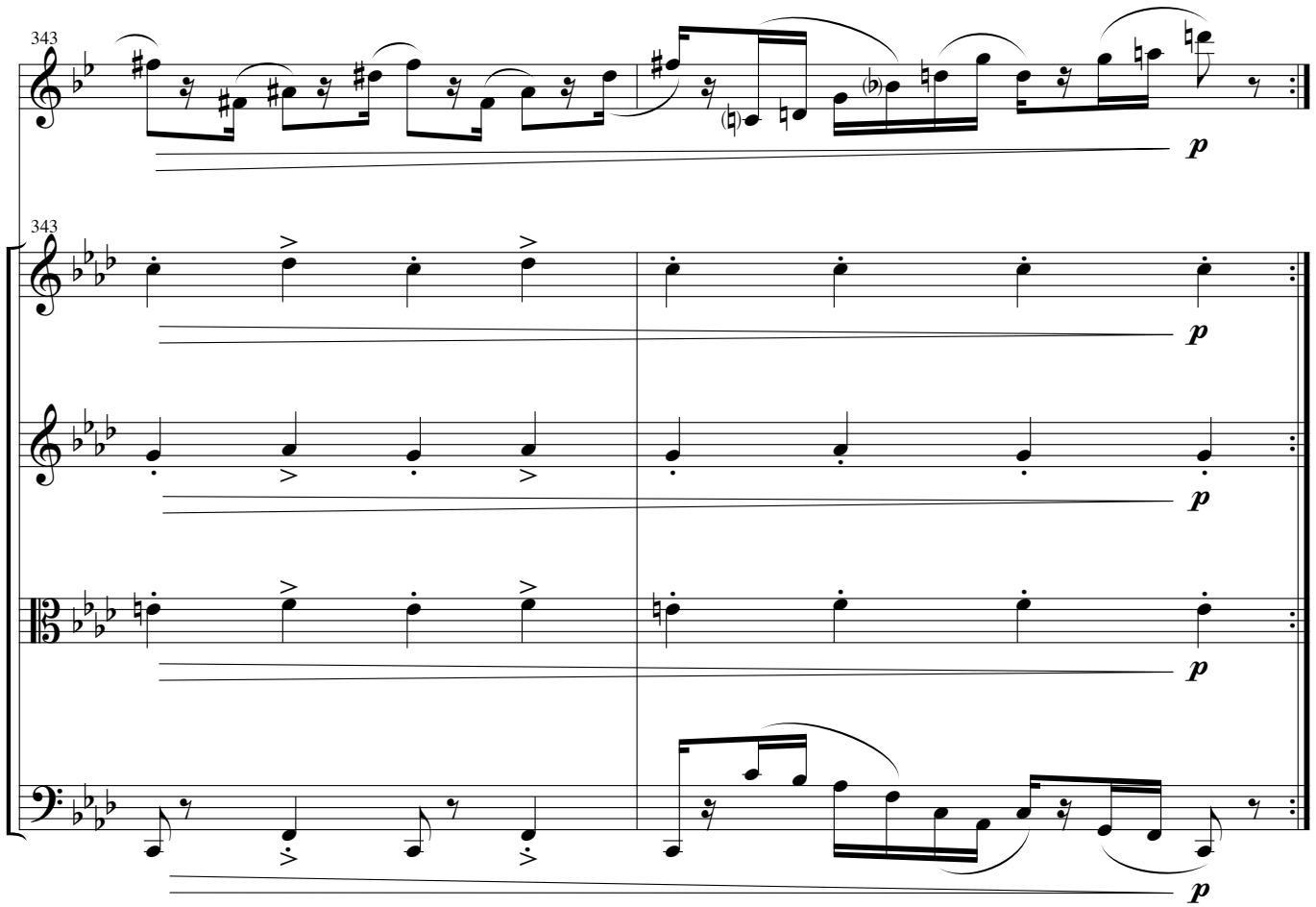
25

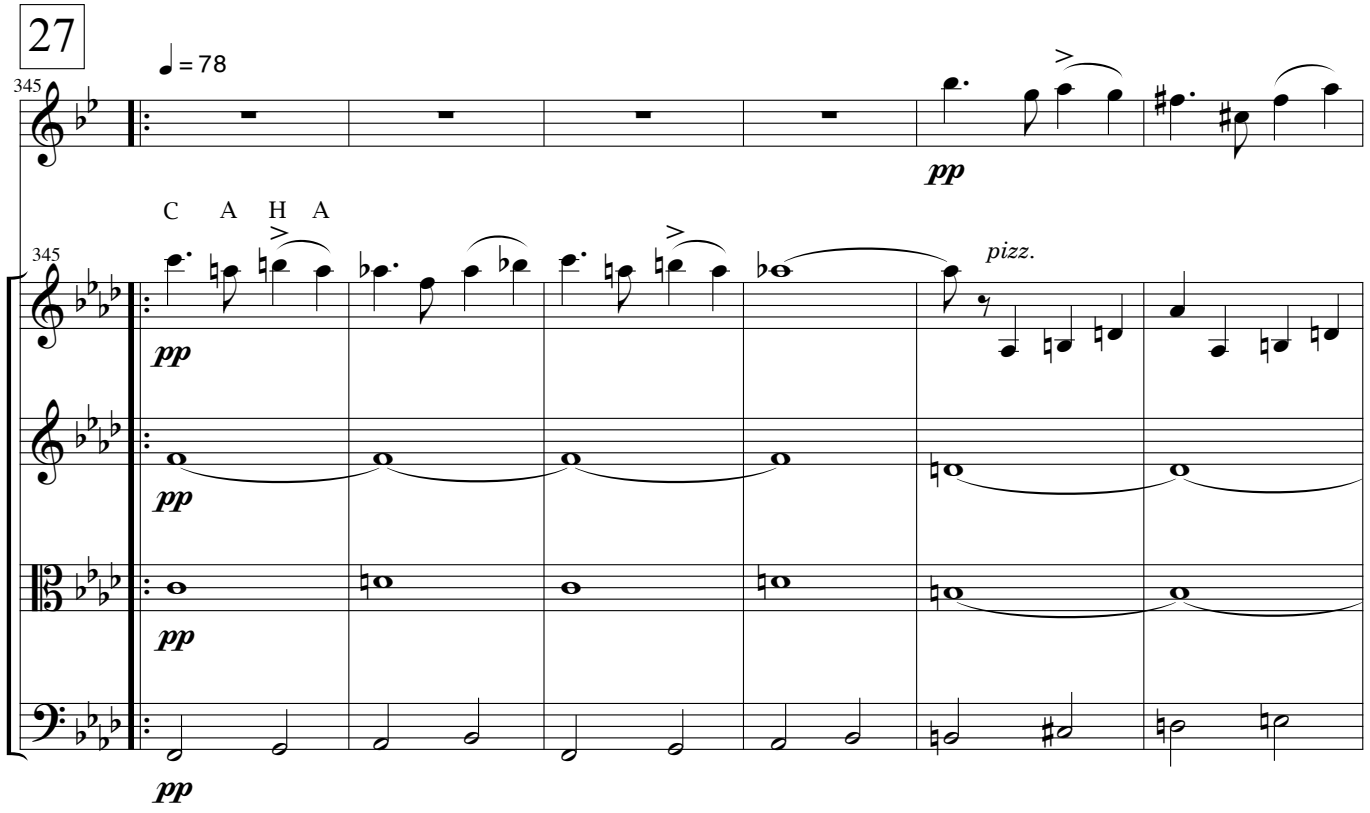



331
fp
331
fp
fp
fp
334
mf
334
mf
mf
mf
mf

26




343
343
p
p
p
p


27
♩ = 78
345
pp
C A H A
345
pizz.
pp
pp
pp
pp

28

351

351

arco

357

desolato

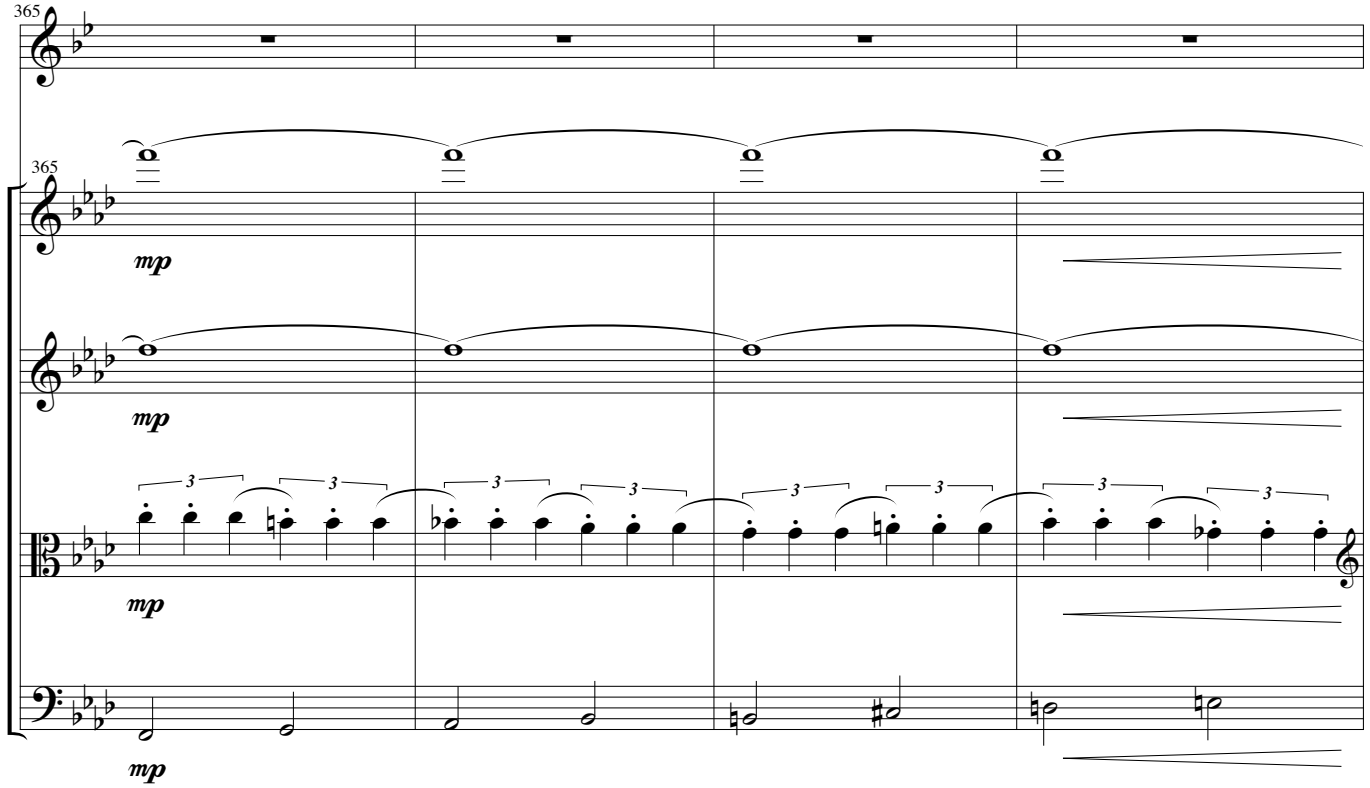
pp

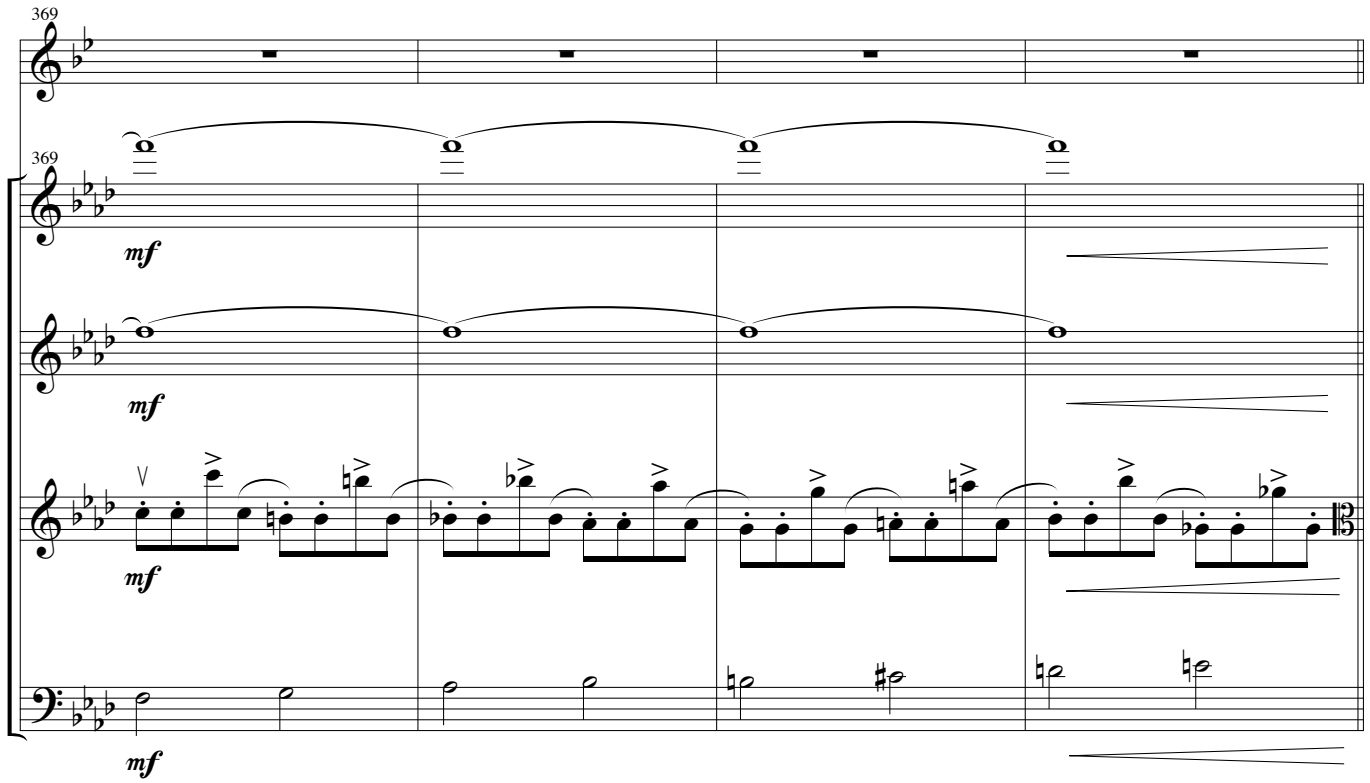
357

ritornando al

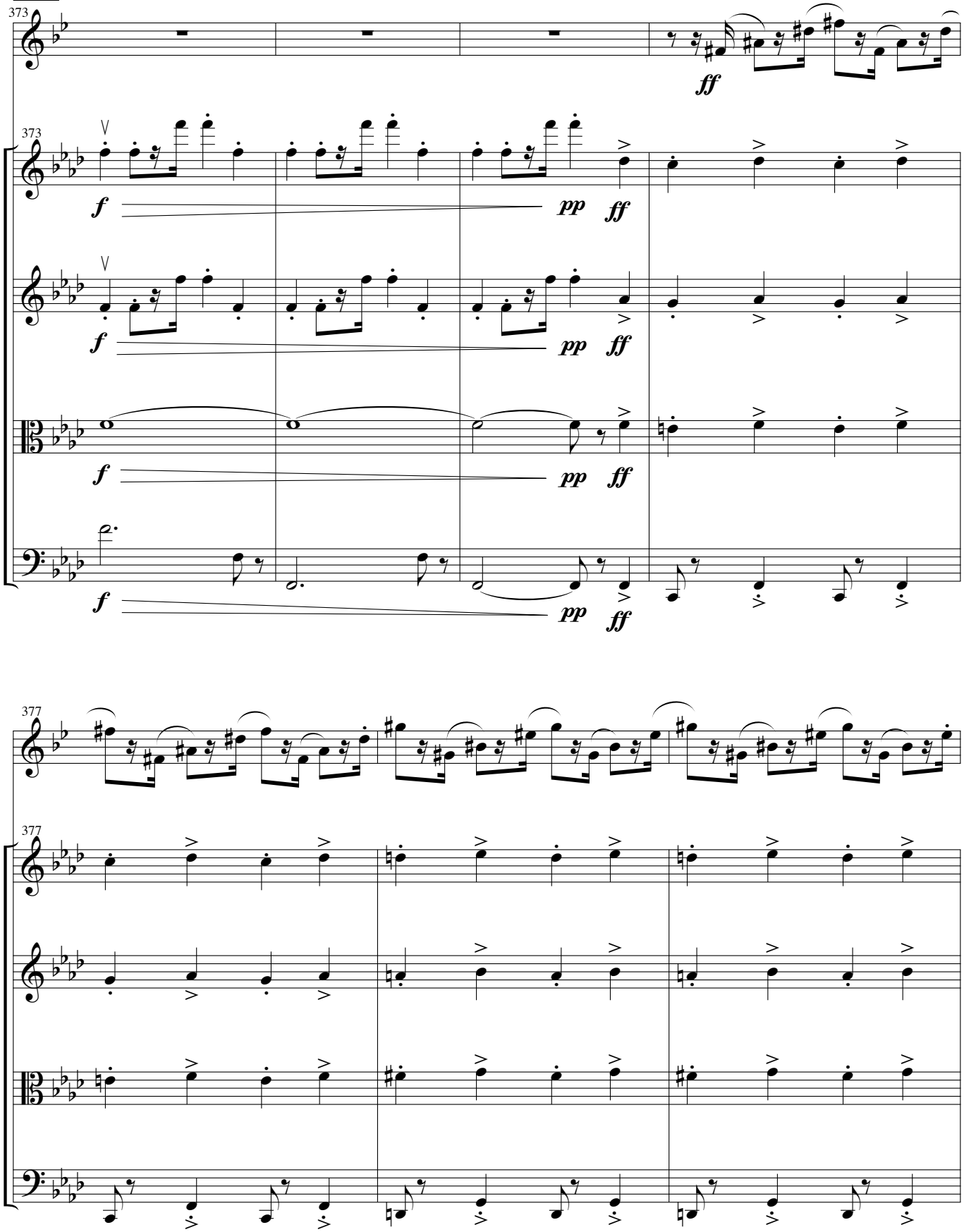
sola

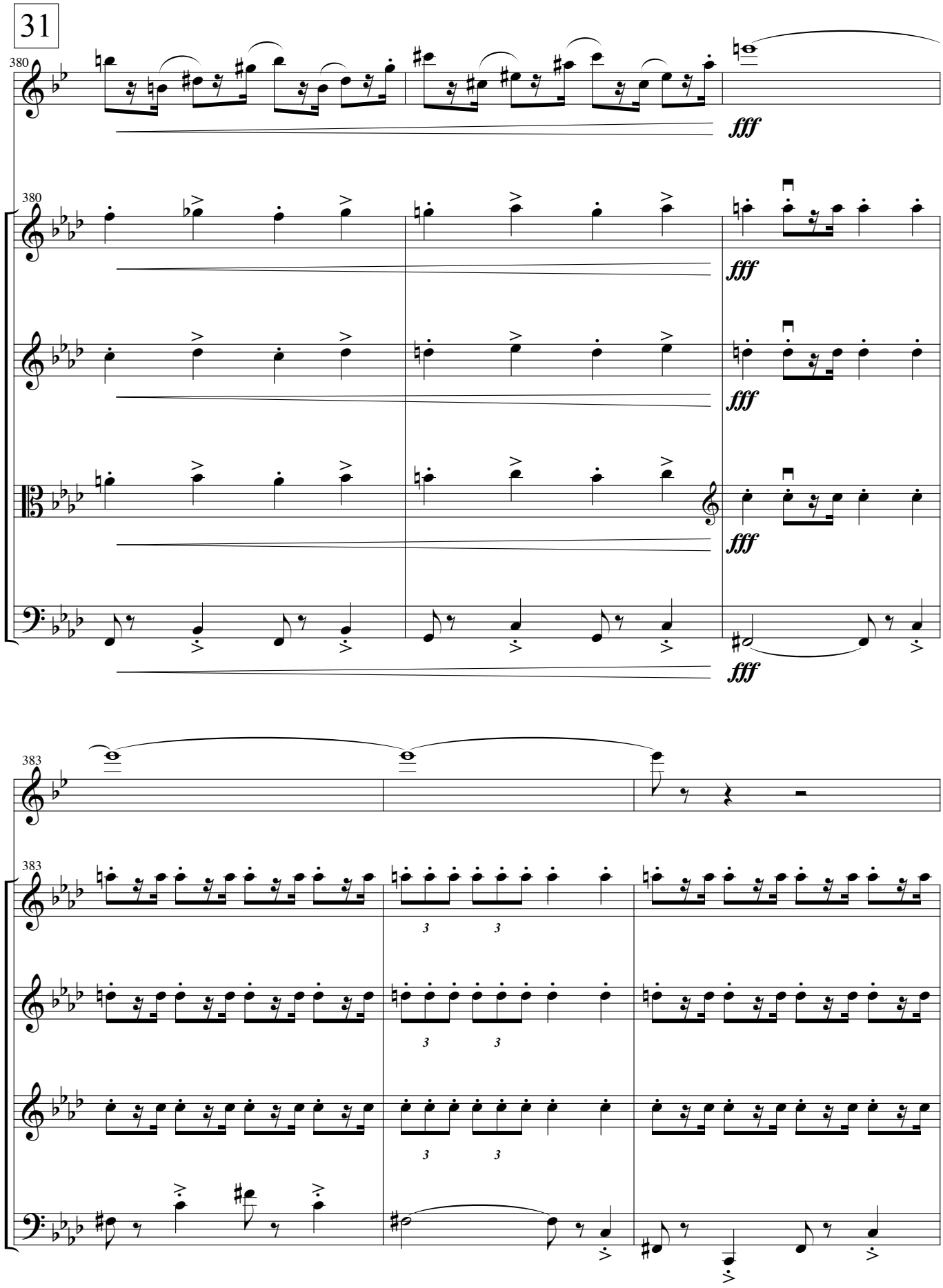
29

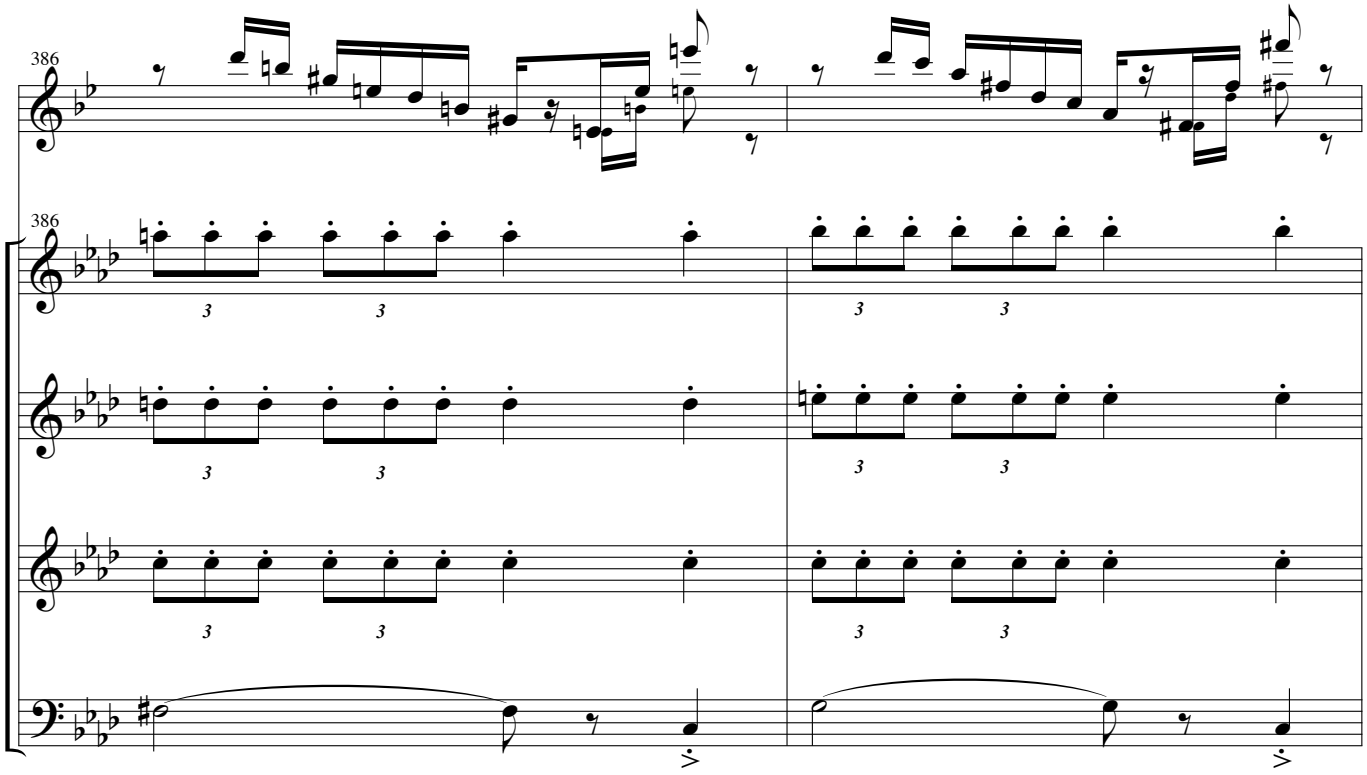




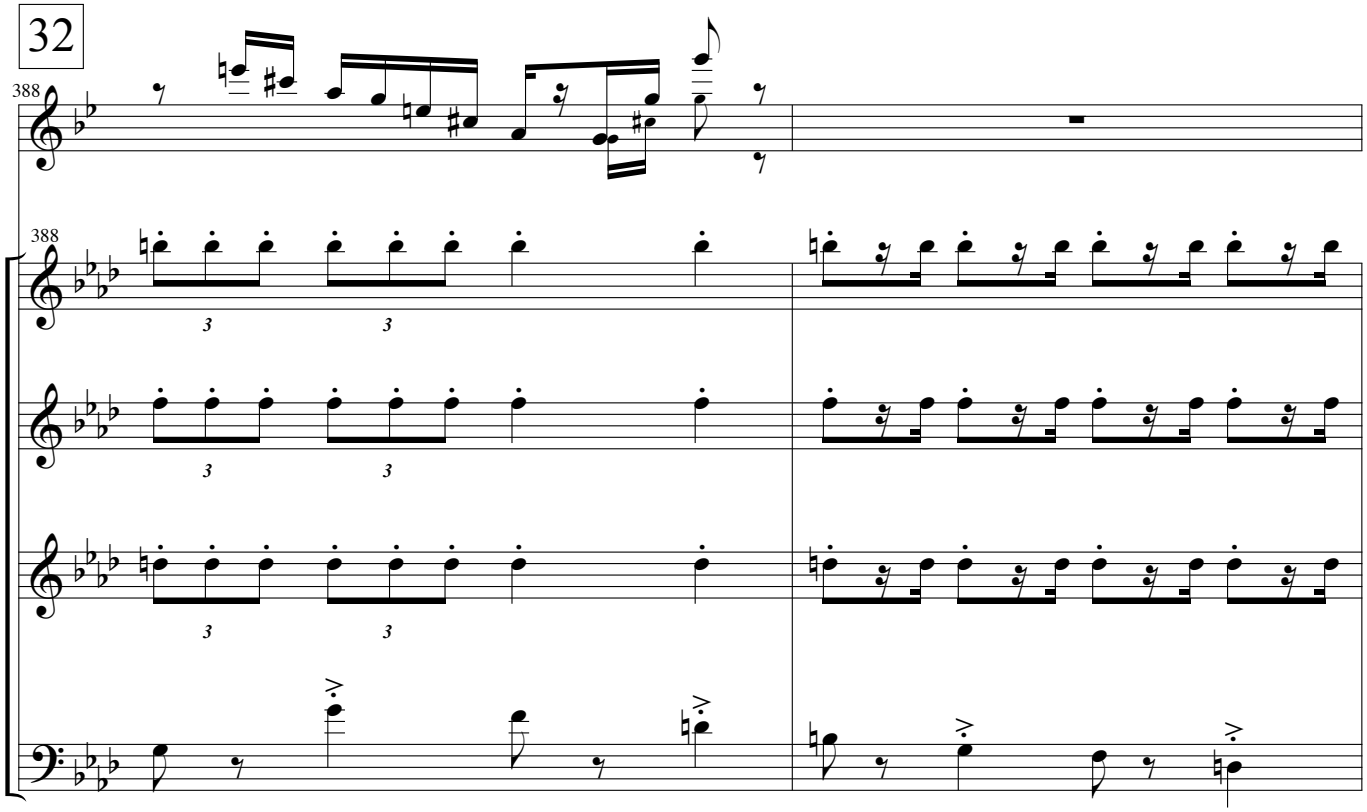
30 Tempo I

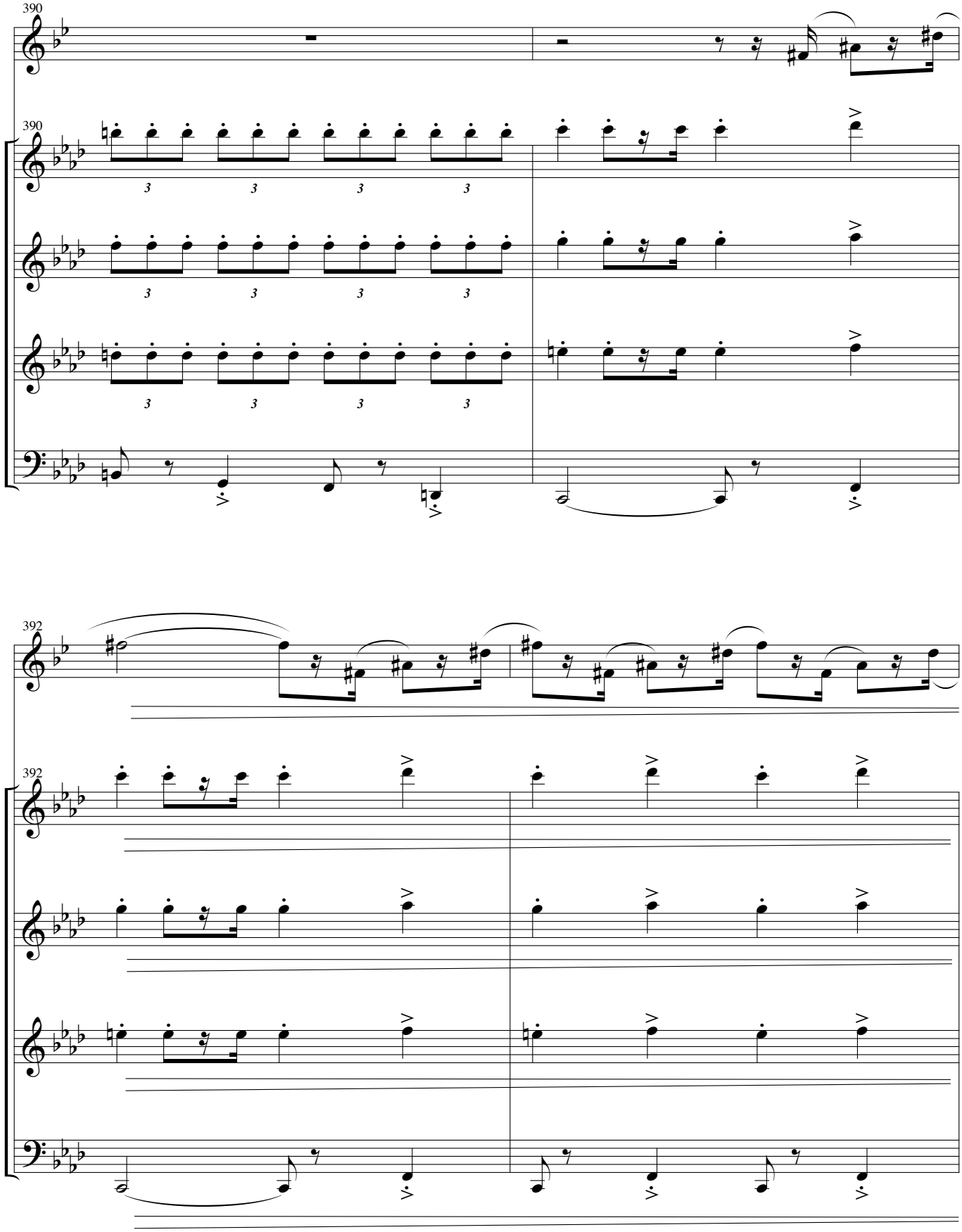


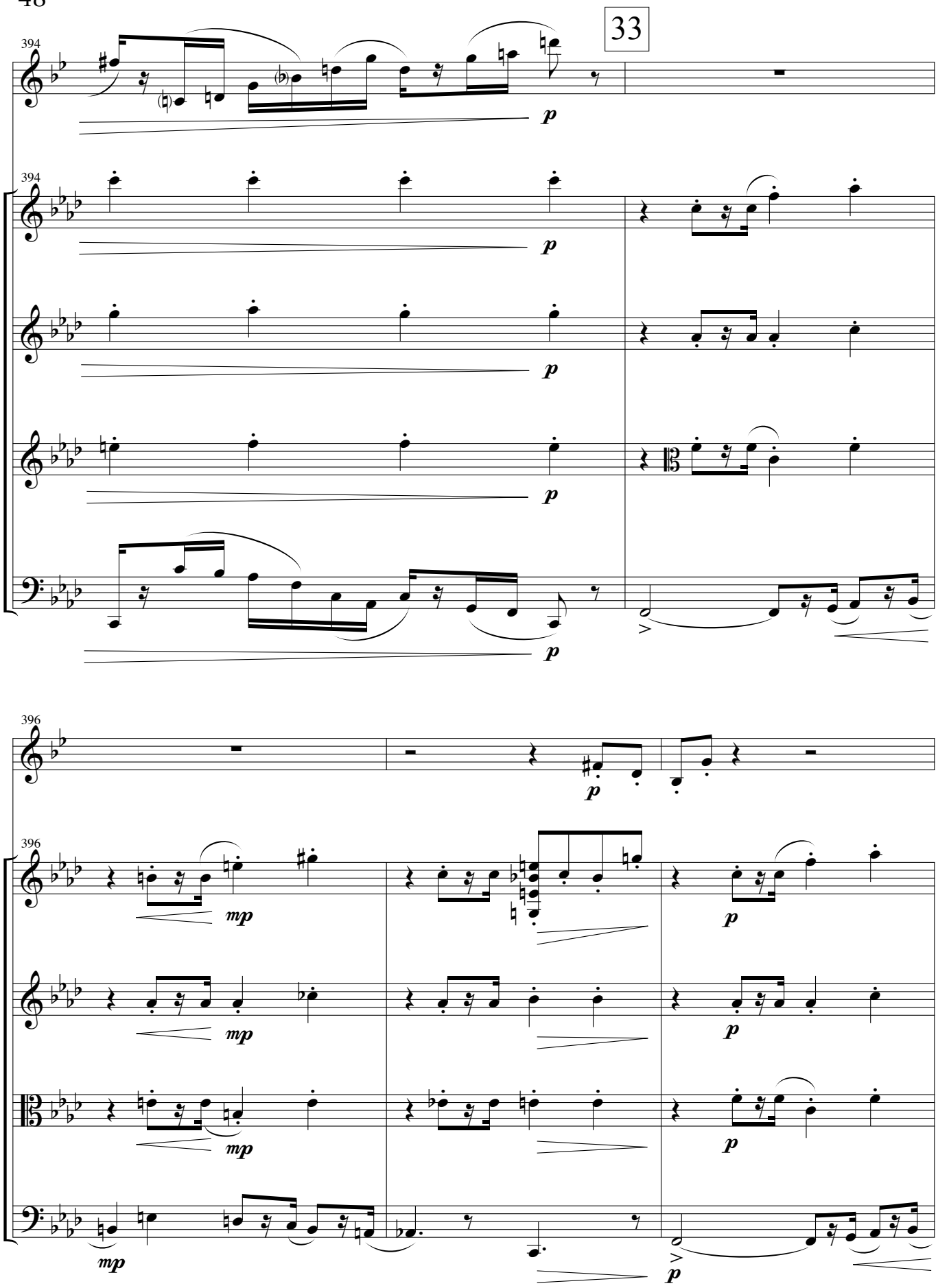

31
380
fff
383
3

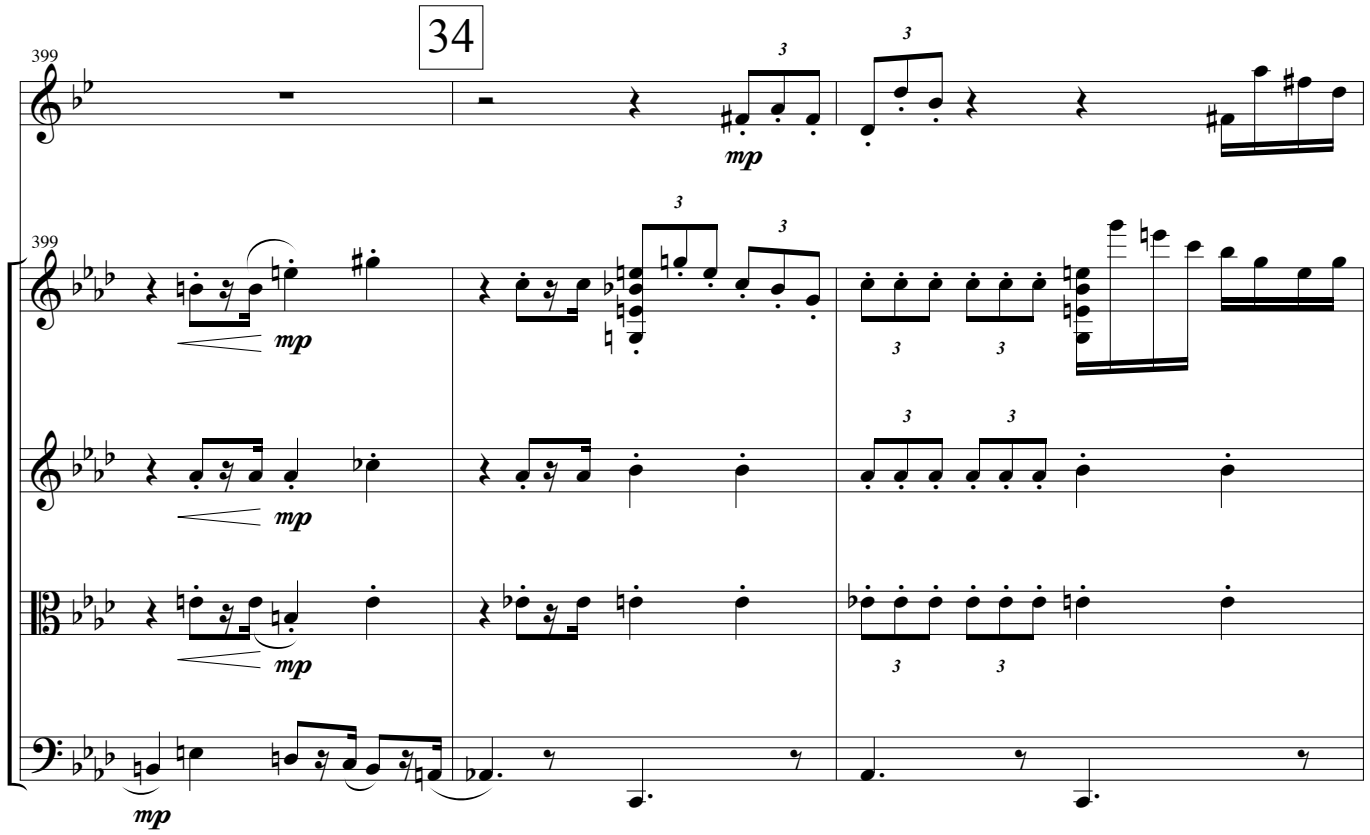


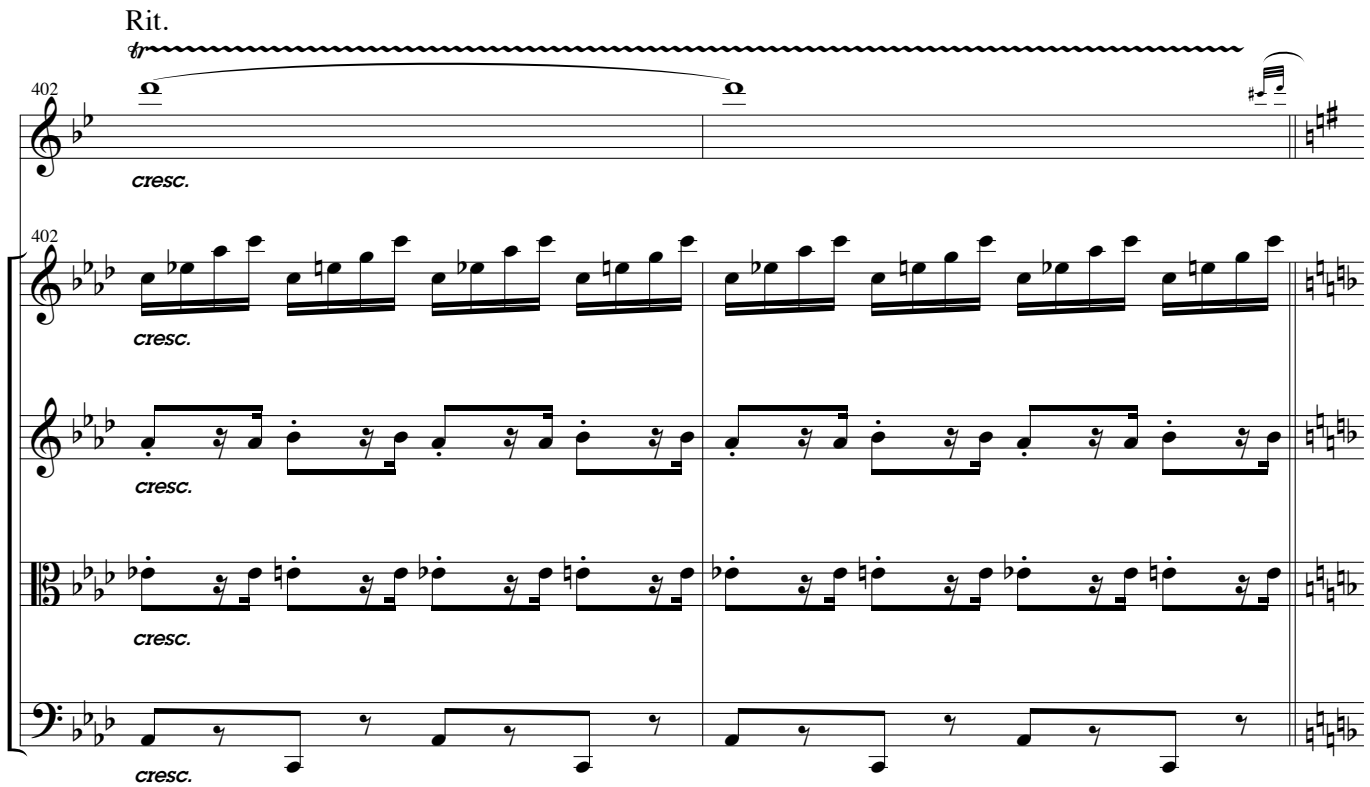
32

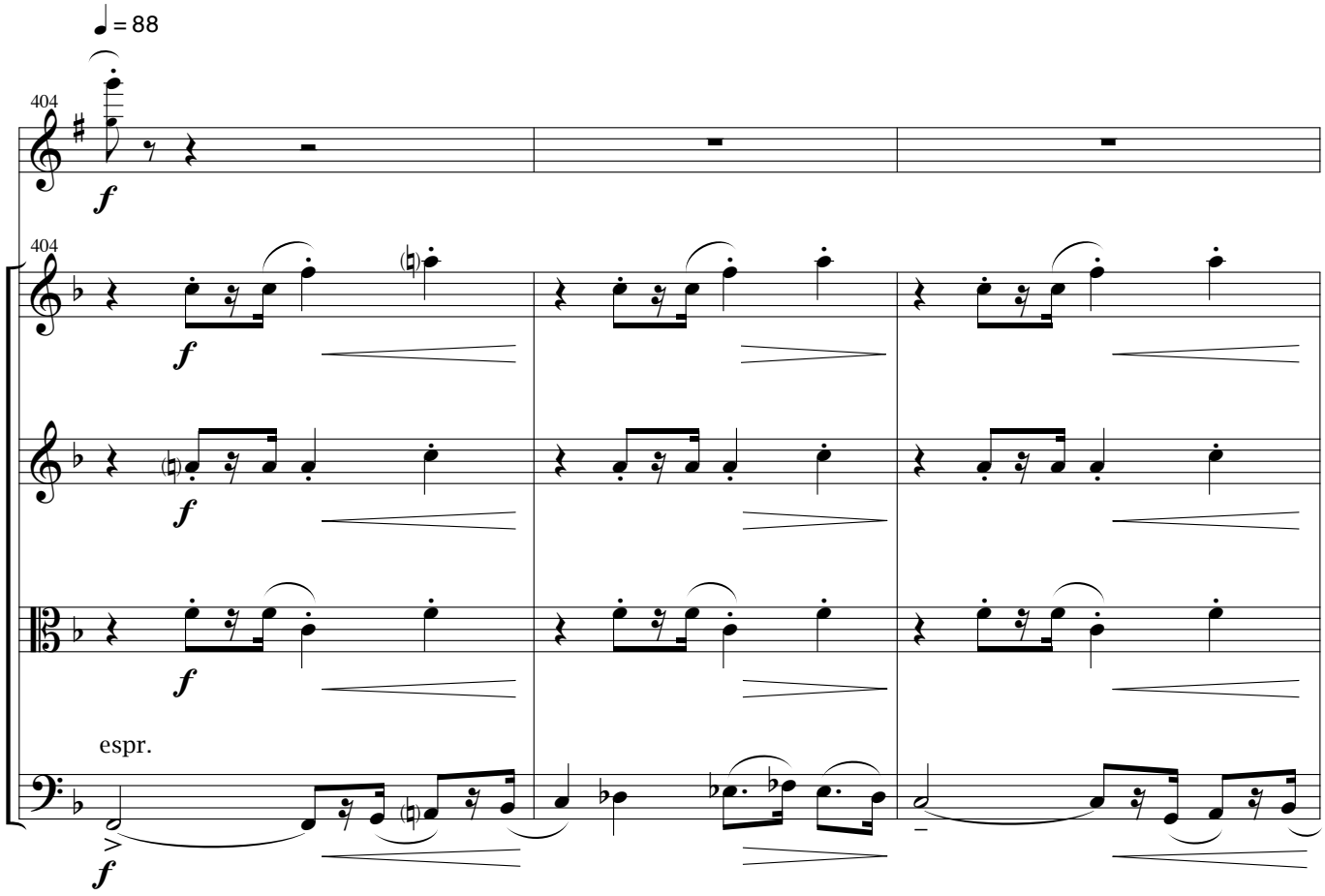



390
390
392
392


33
394
394
396
396
p
mp


34
399
399
mp
mp
mp
mp
3
3
3
3
3
3
3
3


Rit.
tr
402
402
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.



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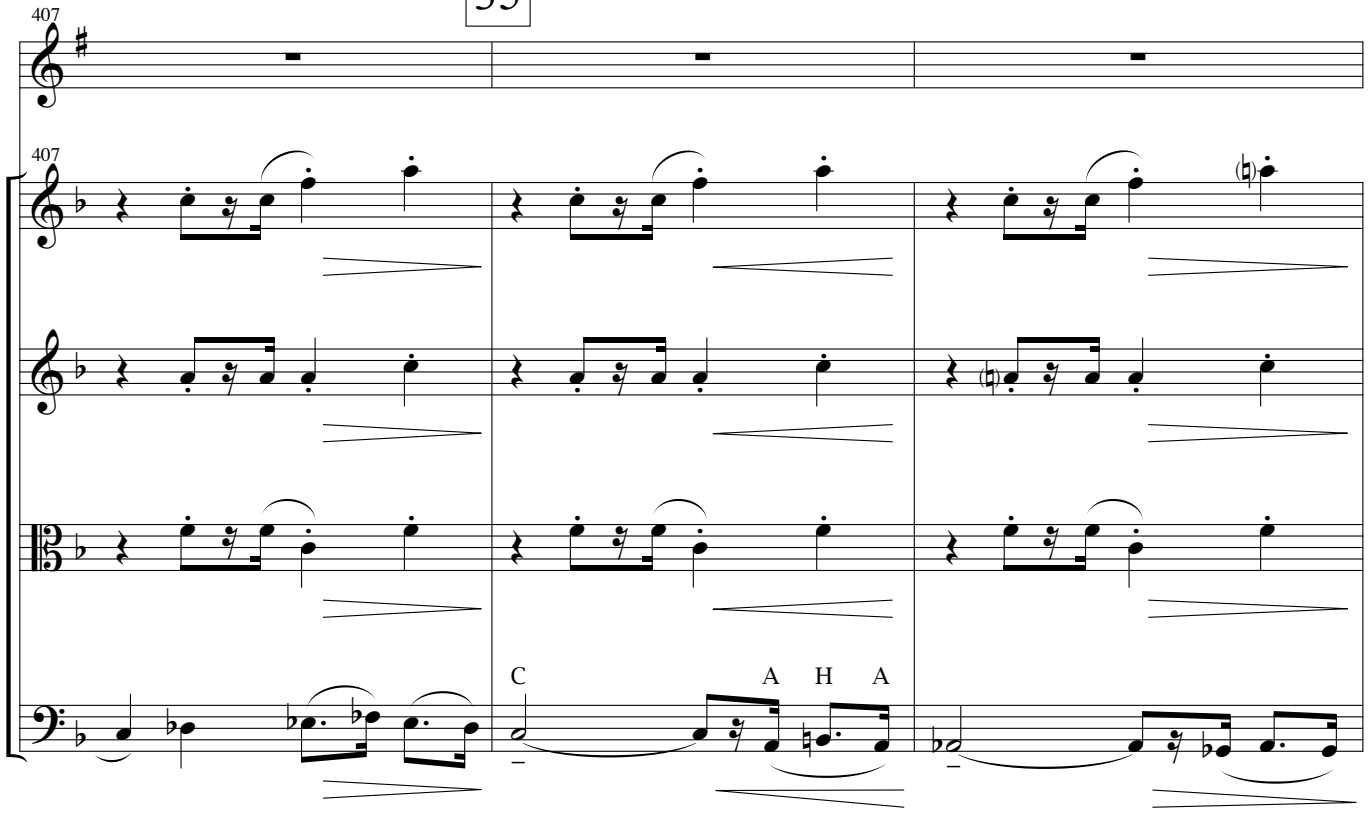

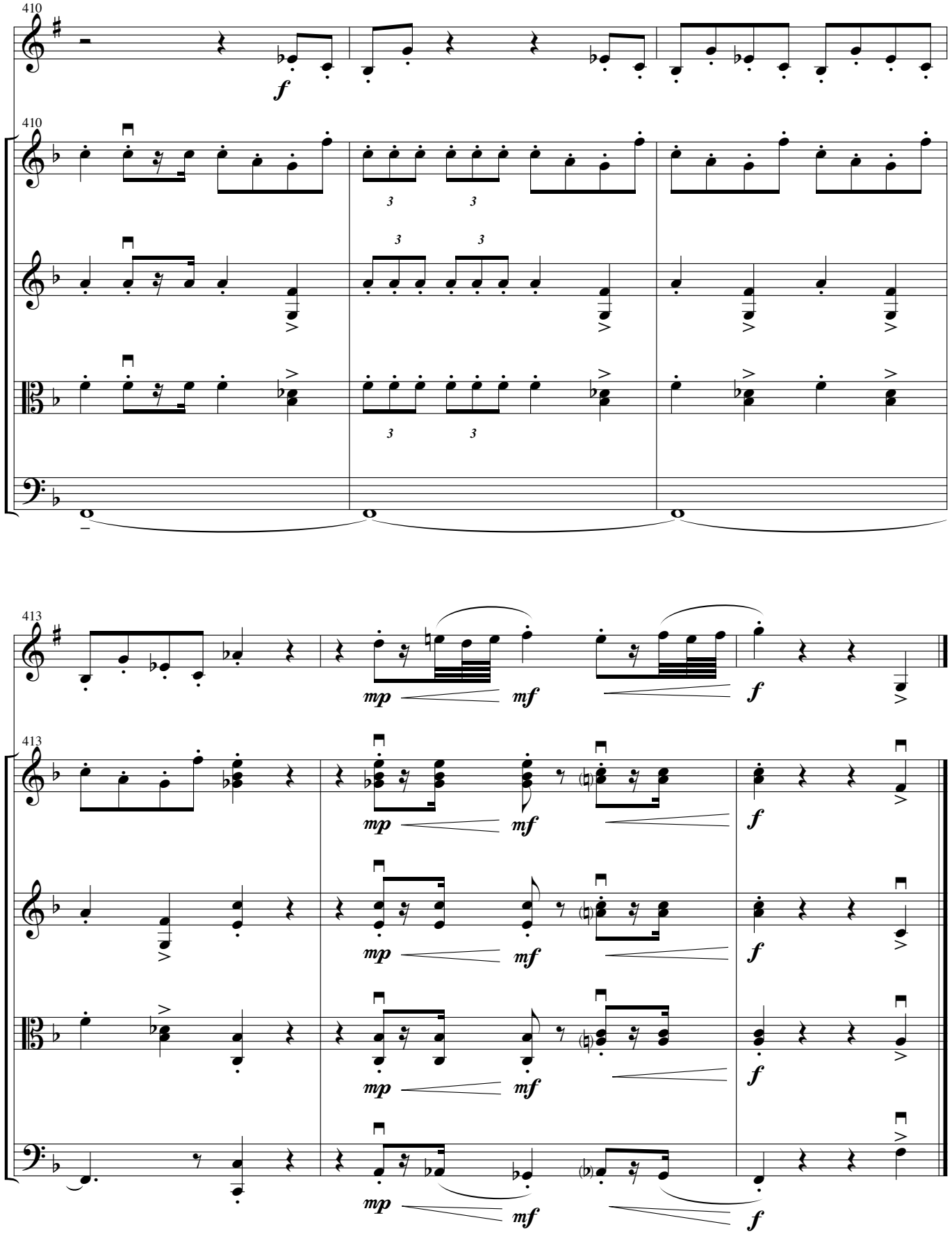
410
f
410
3
3
3
3
3
3
413
mp
mf
f
413
mp
mf
f
mp
mf
f
mp
mf
f
mp
mf
f

Performance notes

1. The fact that I wrote the theme and each of the variations ("divisions") to fill up sixteen mm. does not necessarily imply seamless musical continuity. The transitions from one to the next should be worked out in a way that proves convincing to the ensemble. There can even be pauses *within* a given variation when I am passing the melody (or, sometimes, instrument with the most active figuration) around.

2. Except perhaps at the very end, Déploration needs a giusto tempo in keeping with its ritualistic nature. As to dynamics, I seem to want to have it both ways: sometimes terraced dynamics, but other times I do allow myself dynamic swells, particularly in the solo instrument.

3. In the Wistful Waltz there is a natural tendency to want to stretch the mm. 251 and 252 with their unexpected harmonic shift. But the effect must be judged very carefully. The music for 267 and 268 is identical, but these mm. are leading someplace quite different! Cf. the un poco rit. I inscribe in m. 235 with the analogous (but hardly parallel!) one in m. 284.

4. Generally speaking, the principal sections of Marche héroïque should be giusto: main, m. 313; trio, m. 345; coda, m. 404. Such will make the exceptions more …exceptional: the accelerando (m. 361) from the trio tempo back to the main march one; and the rit. (m. 402) from the latter into the tempo of the coda. The beginning of the trio is quite unprepared, and a slight pause leading into it could be countenanced. At rehearsal **30**, the tempo has been re-established for the main march, but it really asserts itself only three mm. later, with the ***ff*** incursion at the upbeat to m. 376. Yes, a slight pause in attaining that upbeat might be effective. But then it's squarely back to giusto for a long haul! The clarinet soloist should play either all or none of the small-sized alternative notes between mm. 386 and 388.