the Art of Conversation

seven dialogues for string quartet

Karim Al-Zand

(2007)

PROGRAM NOTE:

The Art of Conversation was commissioned by the Laguna Beach Music Festival and written for the Enso String Quartet as a work both for the ensemble's regular concerts and for their many "outreach" programs, designed to introduce audiences to aspects of chamber music-making. From its earliest origins, the string quartet has been regarded as the perfect medium for dynamic and refined musical interaction, often likened to a lively "conversation" among companions. Using this analogy, a full presentation of *The Art Of Conversation* features short spoken dialogues, performed by the quartet, which alternate with the seven movements of the piece. Each conversation parallels the type of musical "discourse" featured in the subsequent movement. The spoken material is omitted in a concert version of the piece, but listeners will quickly identify the sort of group dynamic being played out in each movement: the first has the instruments cooperating, the second is a monologue for the first violin, the third features two distinct duos, and so on. In terms of musical material, the piece is cast as a loose set of variations.

August 2007

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

In the full version of this piece, short dialogues are performed by the quartet between each movement. In a traditional concert performance, the dialogues are omitted, in which case the program note above may be used. The dialogues are available separately and can also be included in the individual parts.

DURATION:

Discursus 1 Colloquy
Discursus 2 Monologue
Discursus 3 Dialogues
Discursus 4 Non Sequitur
Discursus 5 Recitative
Discursus 6 Cross Talk
Discursus 7 Fugue

Total: ca. 12' (music only)
ca. 18' (music and dialogue)

for the Enso String Quartet

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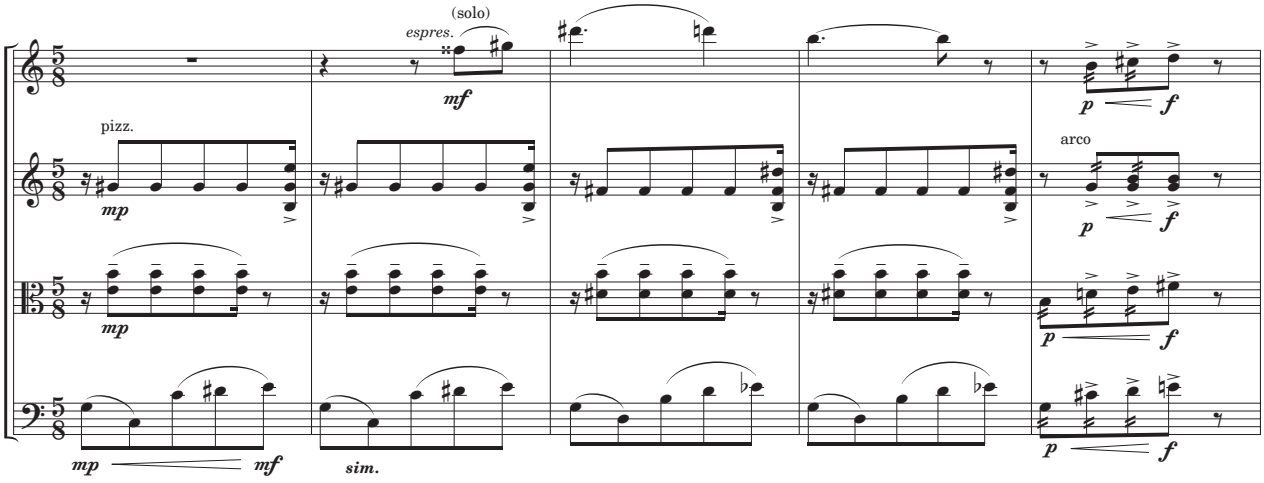
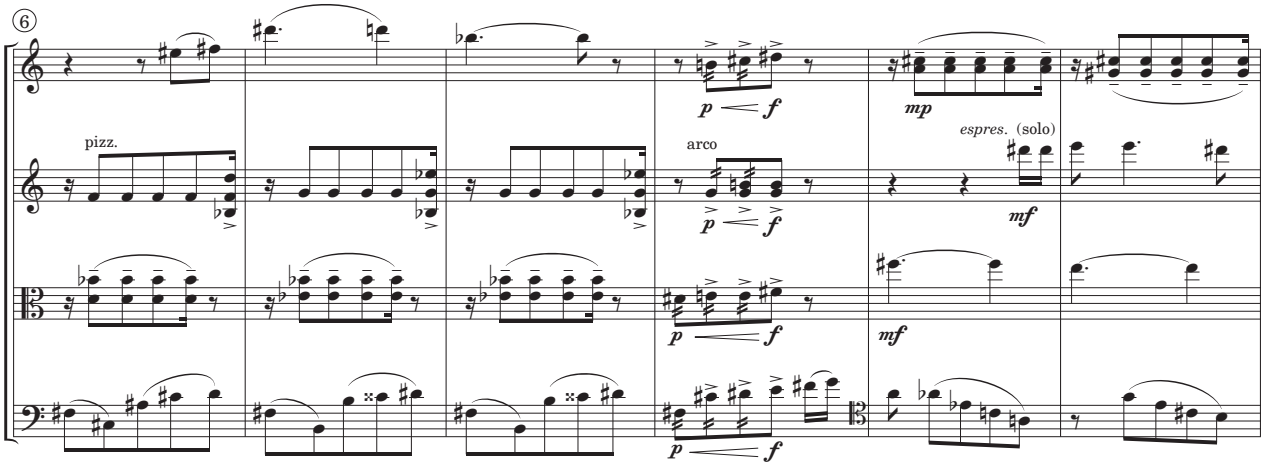
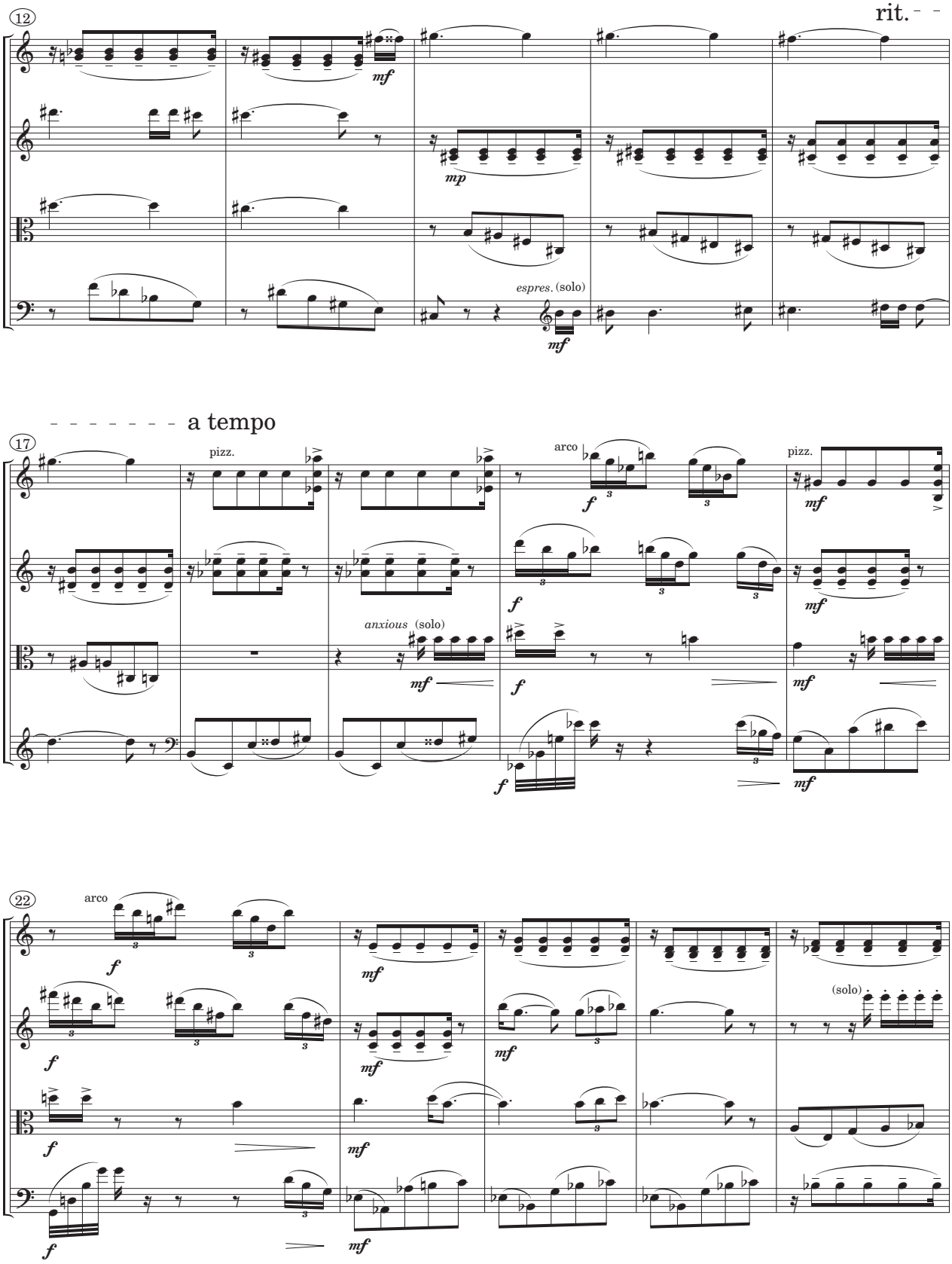
[dialogue 1]

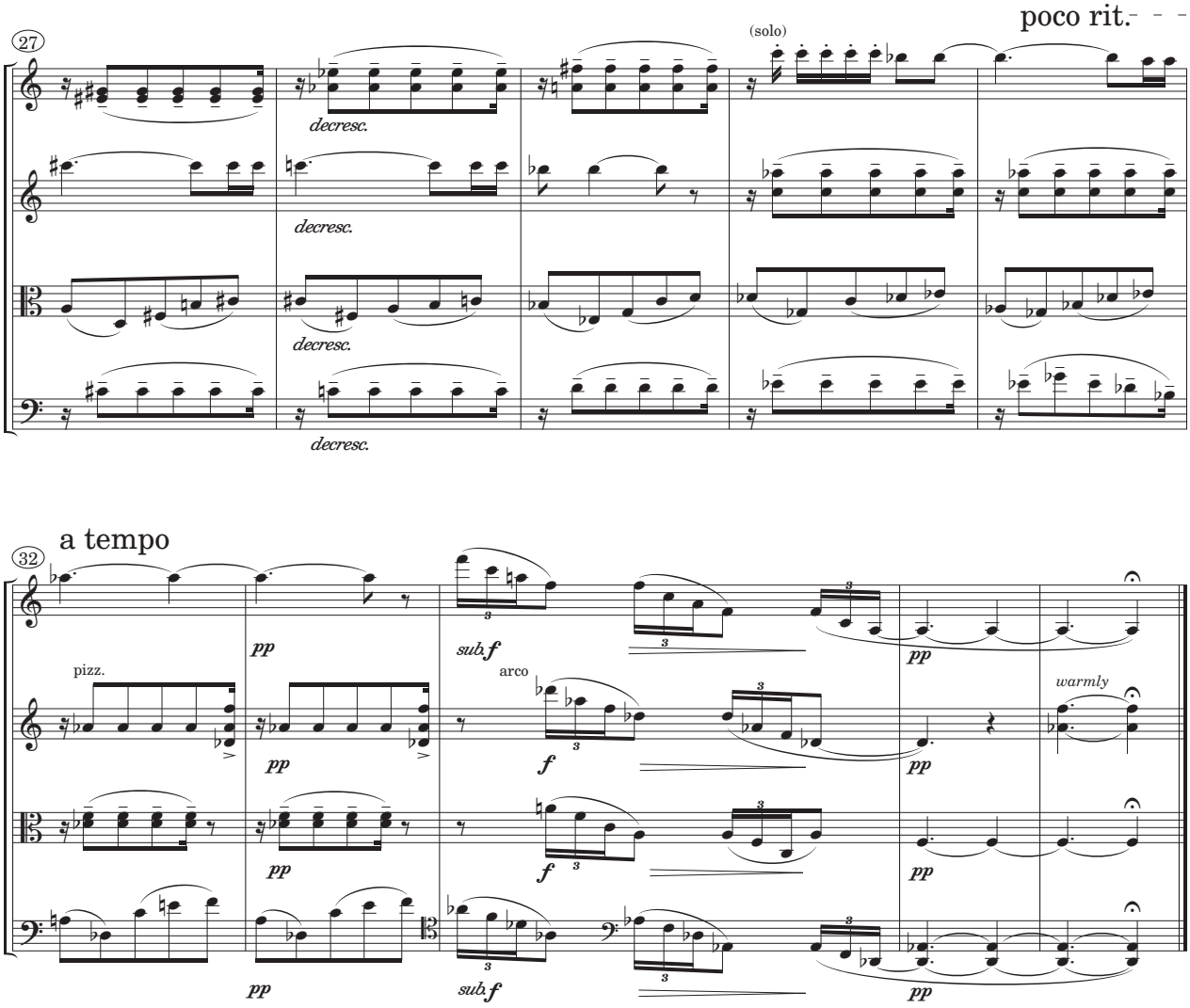
Discursus I: COLLOQUY

Swiftly; flowing breezily ♪= 168





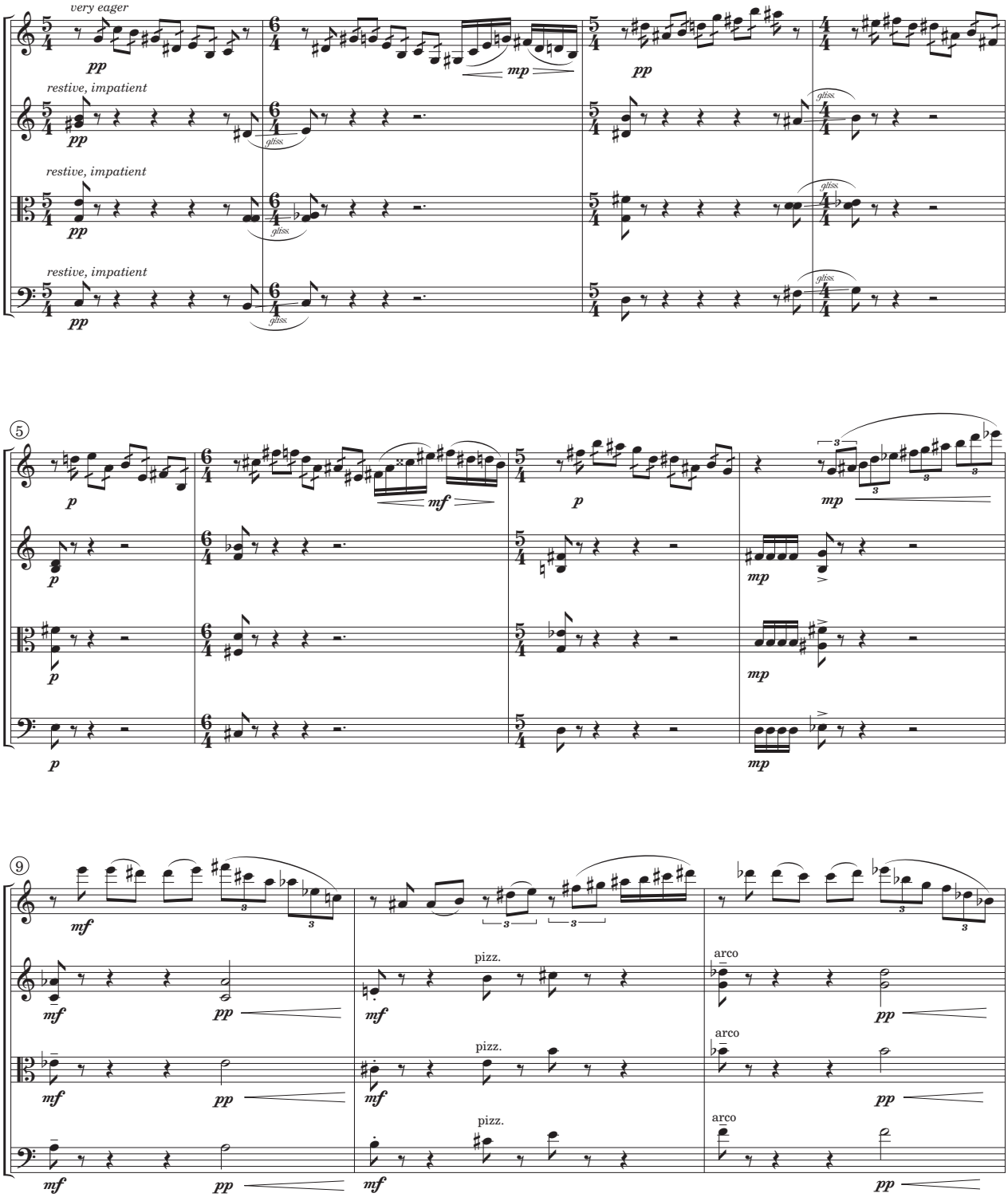

12
rit.
mf
mp
espres. (solo)
mf
a tempo
17
pizz.
arco
f
mf
pizz.
mf
f
anxious (solo)
mf
f
mf
f
mf
22
arco
f
mf
(solo)
f
mf
mf
f
mf

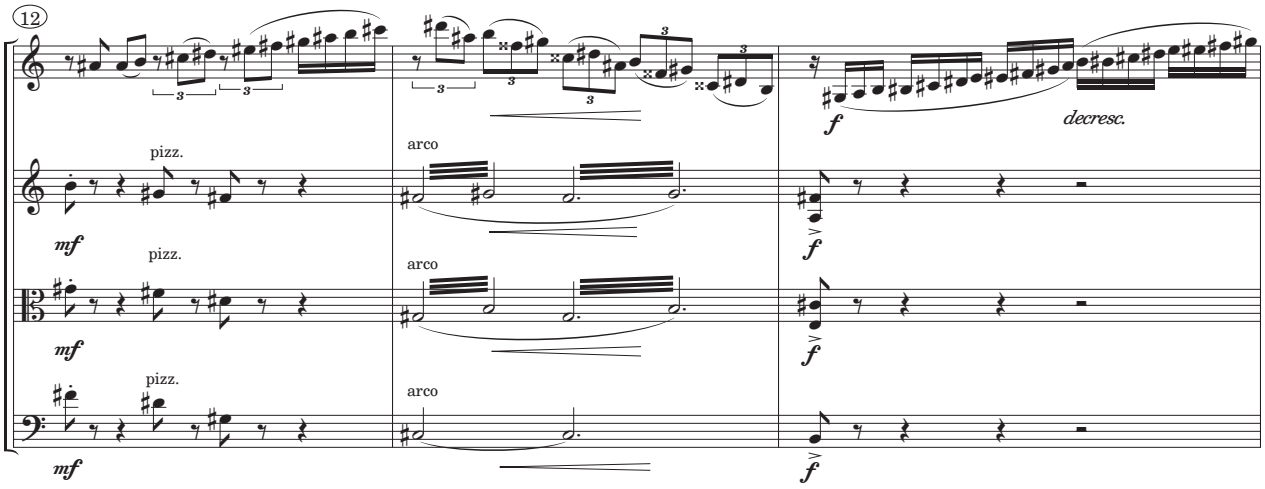

poco rit.
27
(solo)
decresc.
decresc.
decresc.
decresc.
a tempo
32
pizz.
arco
warmly
pp
sub f
f

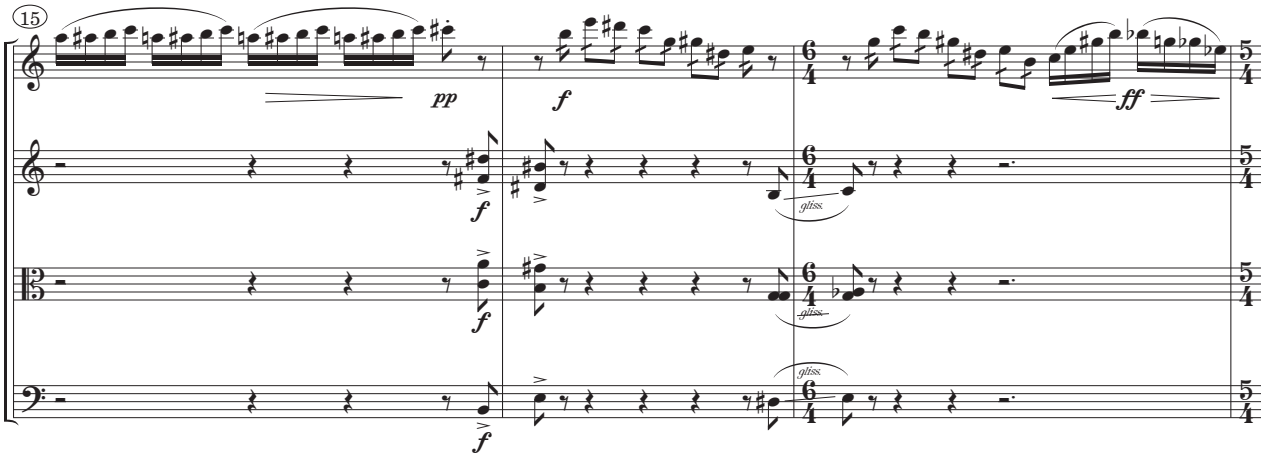
[dialogue]

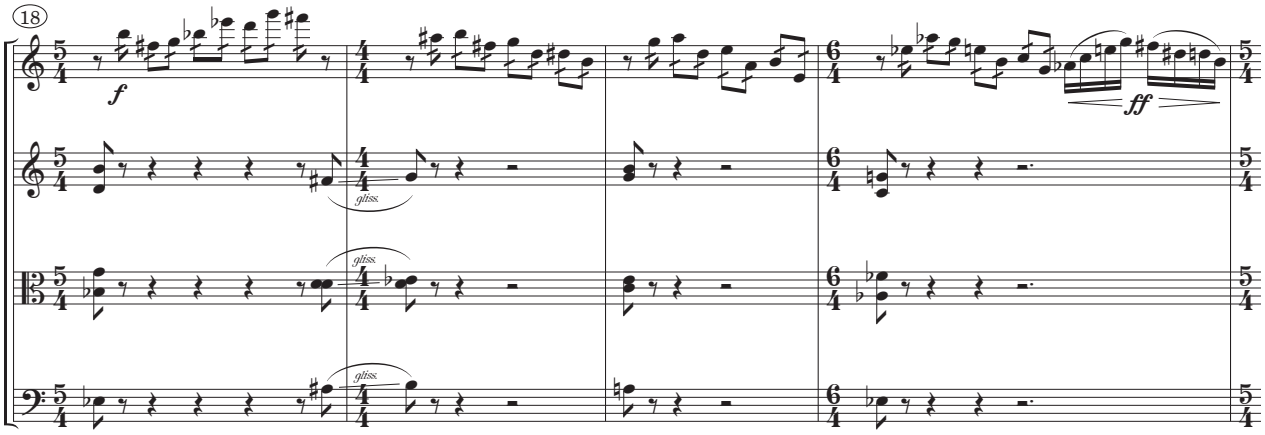
Discursus II: MONOLOGUE

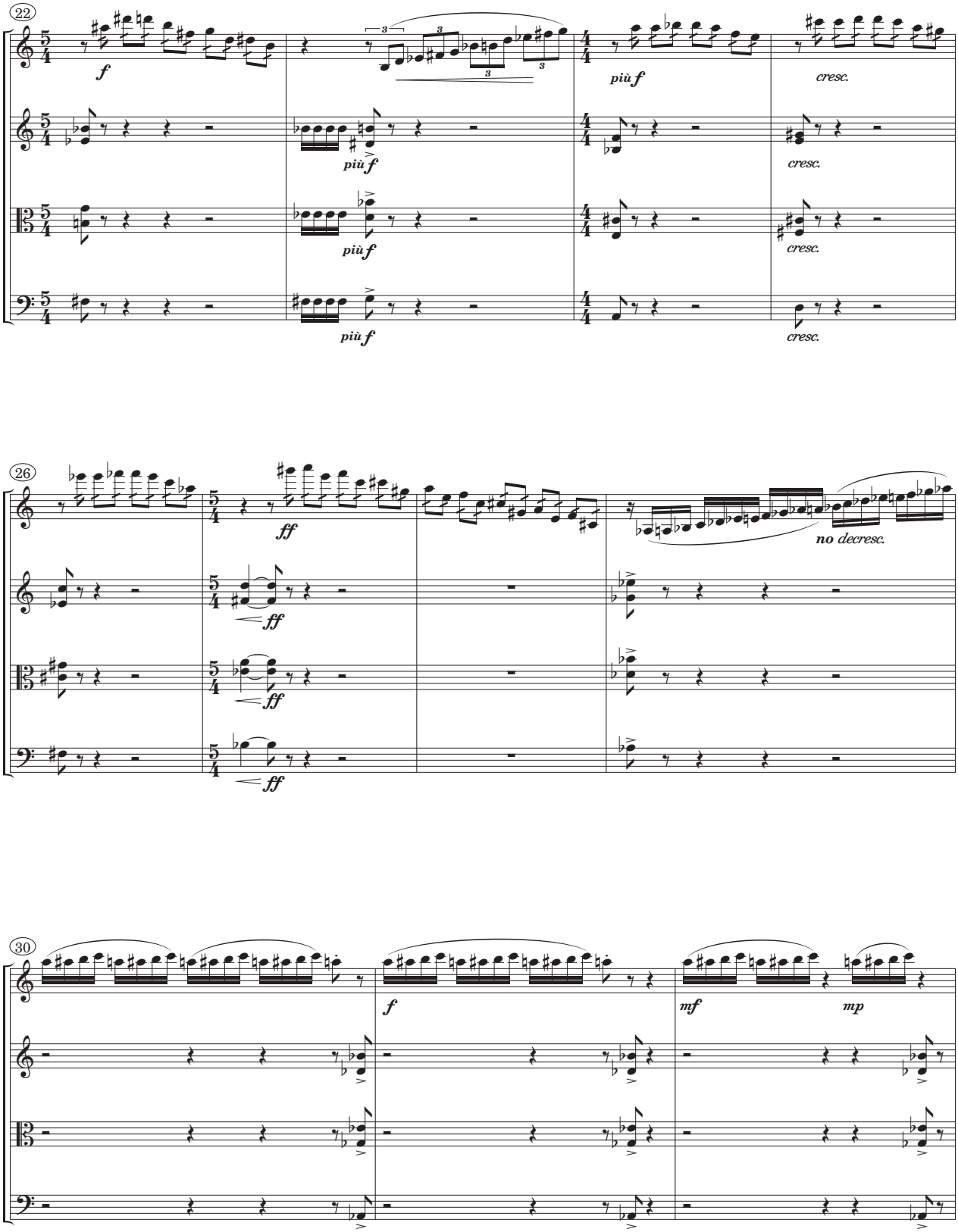
Extremely swiftly; excited ♩= 168



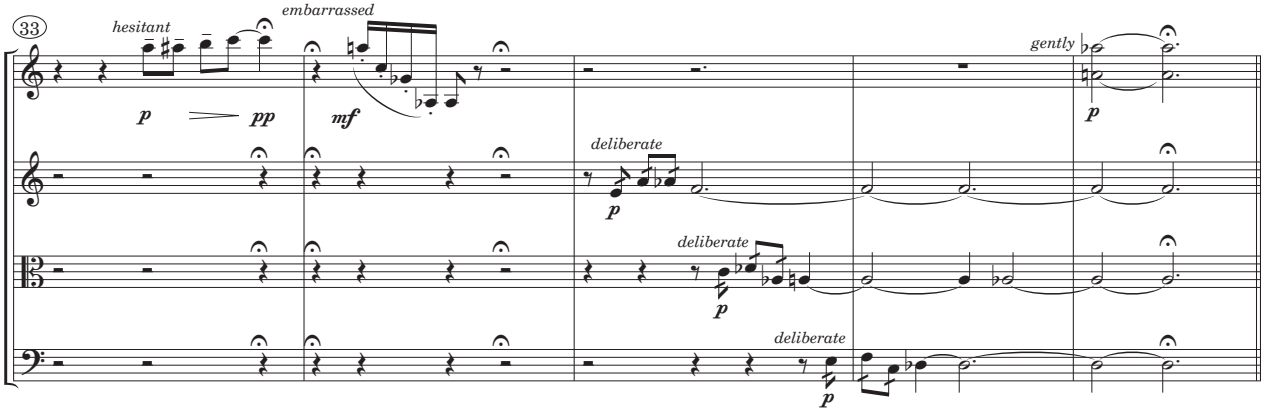

12
pizz.
arco
mf
f
decresc.


15
pp
f
ff
gliss.


18
f
ff
gliss.


22
f
più f
cresc.
26
ff
no decresc.
30
f
mf
mp

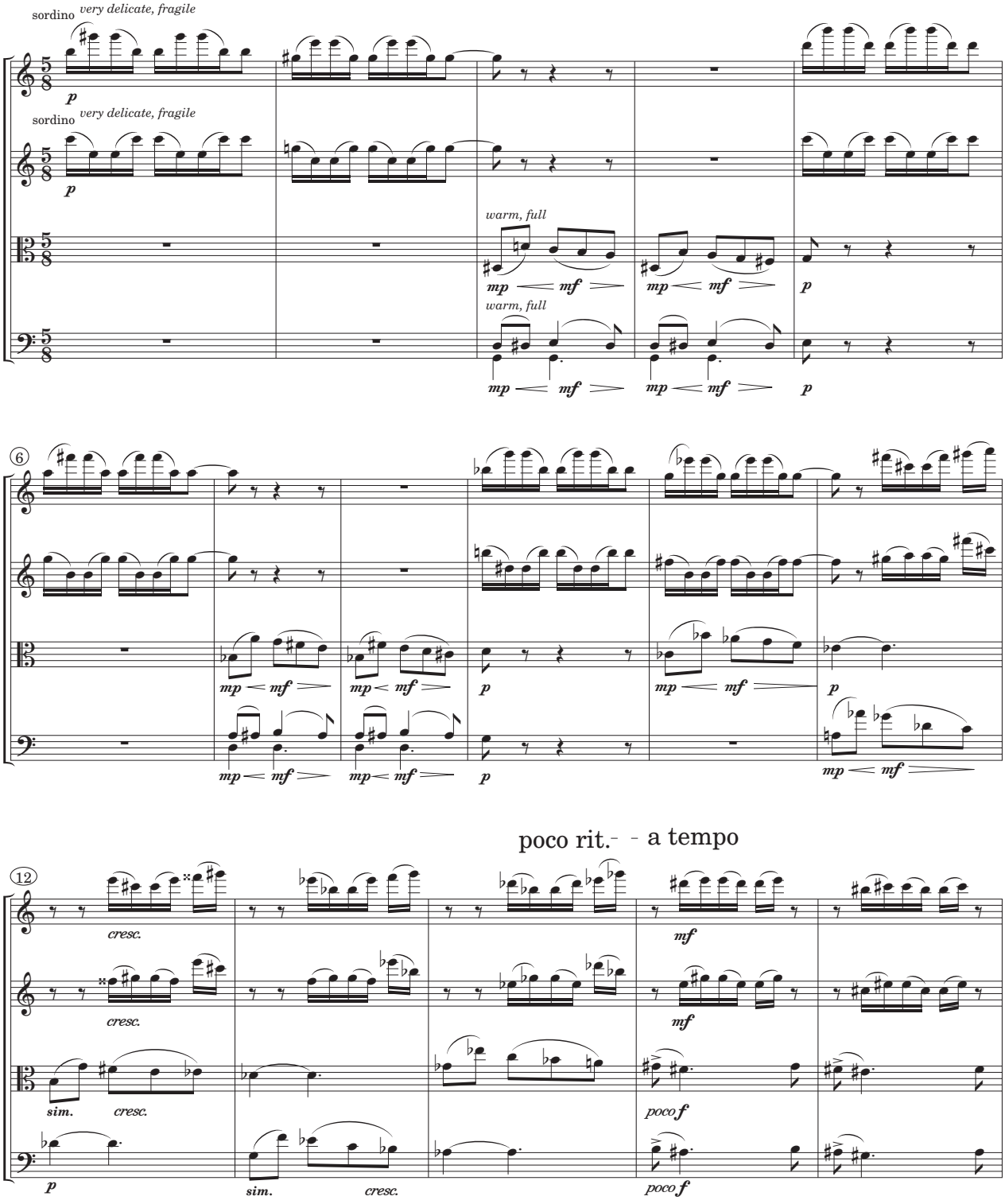
Slower molto rit. a tempo (a tempo)

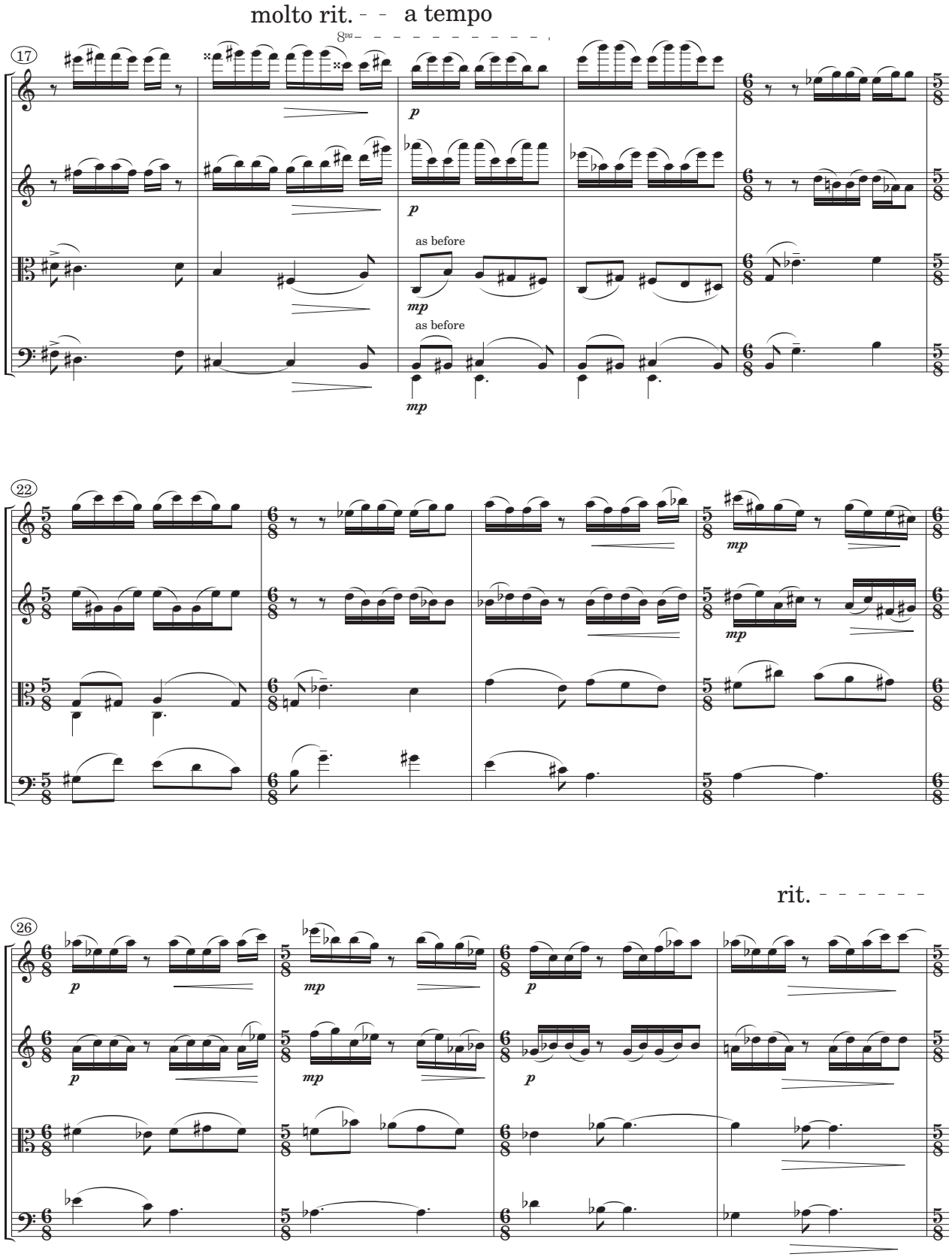


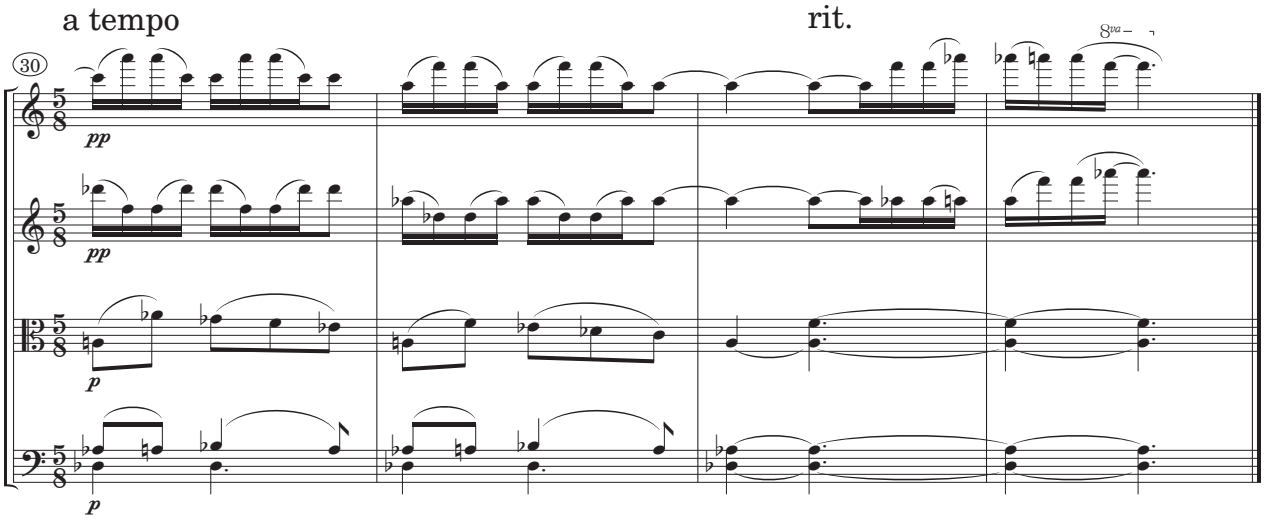
[dialogue]

Discursus III: DIALOGUES

Moderately; magical but serene ♪= 112 (𝅗𝅥=56)



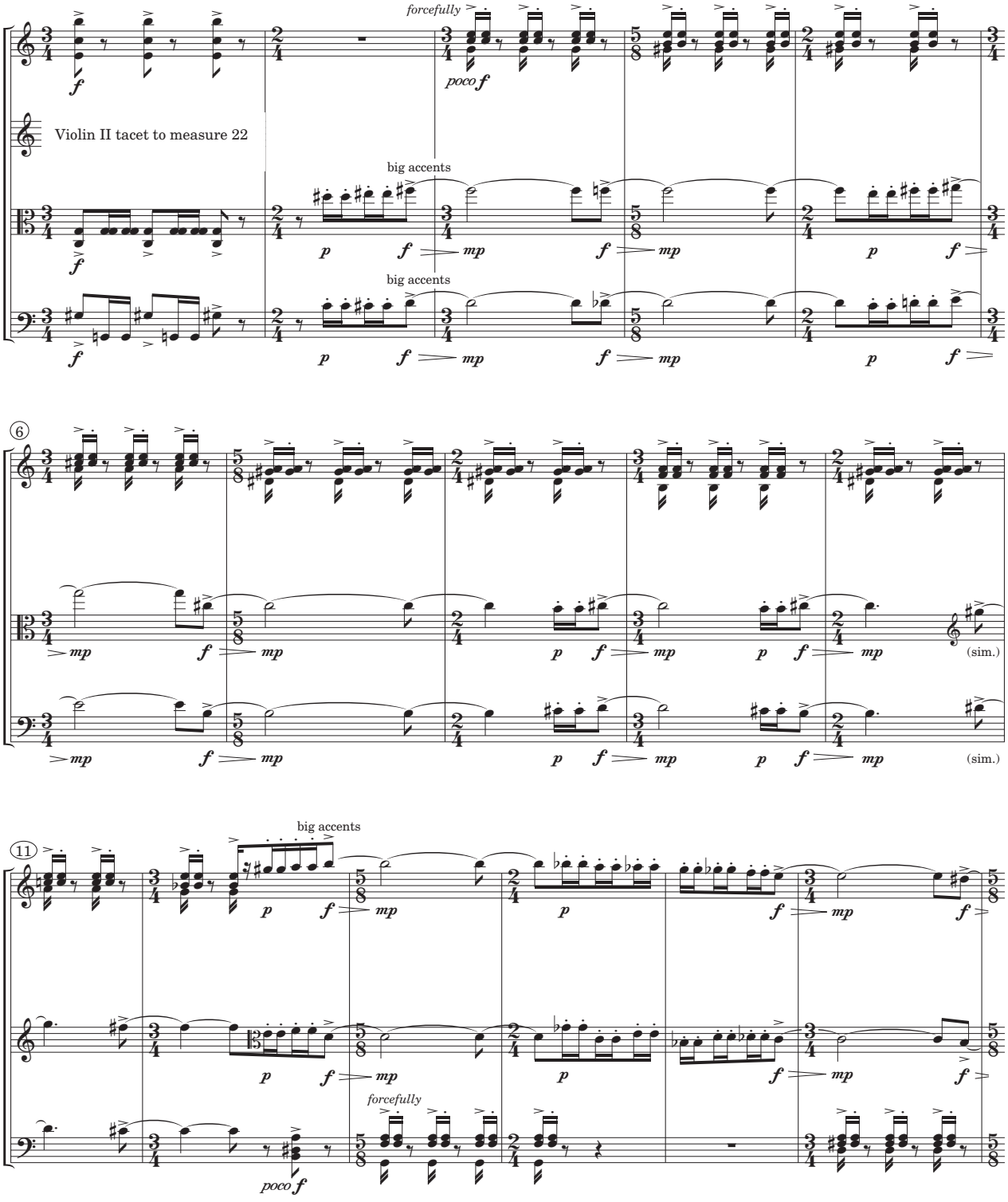

molto rit.
a tempo
8va
17
p
p
as before
mp
as before
mp
22
mp
mp
rit.
26
p
mp
p
p
mp
p

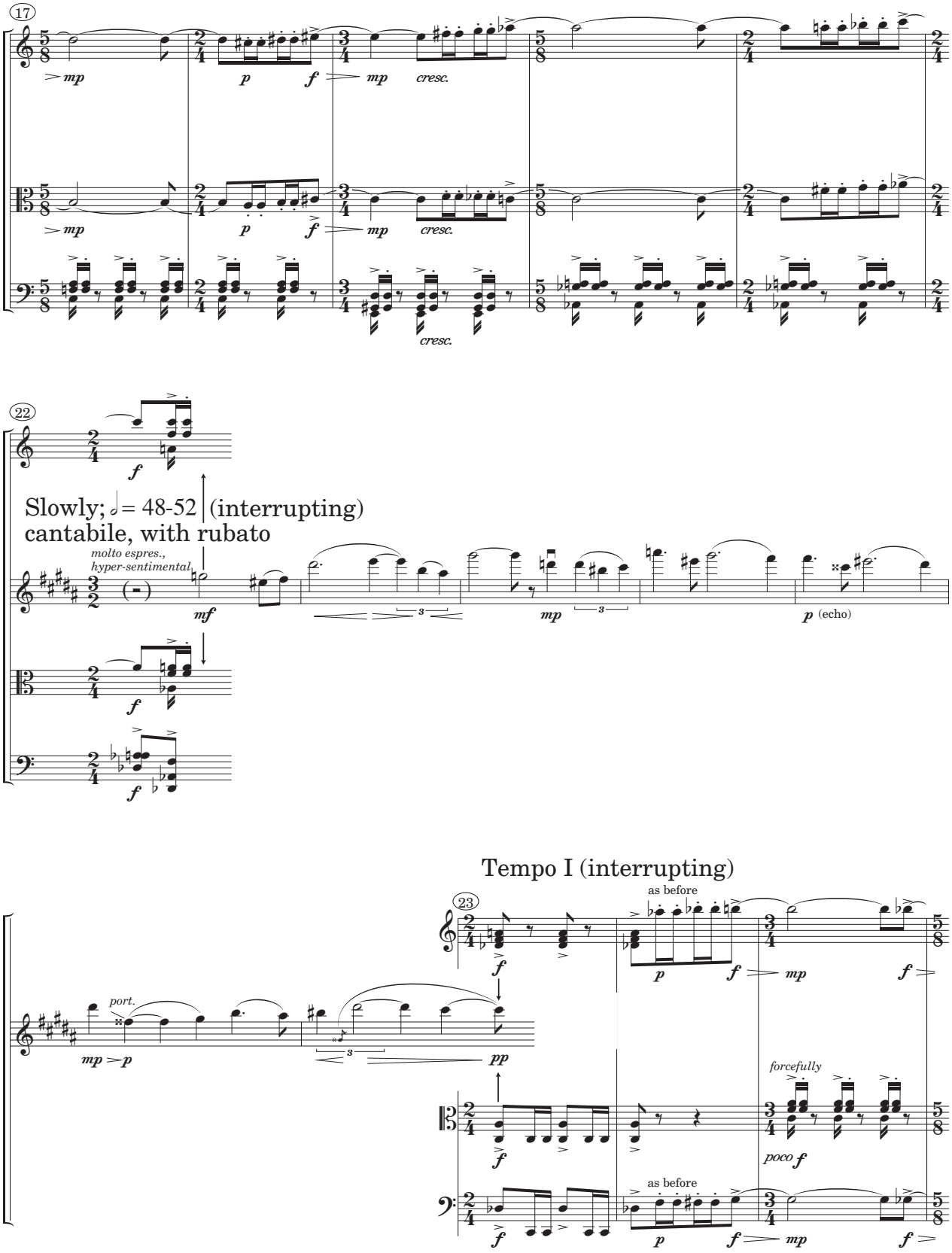

a tempo
rit.
30
8va
pp
pp
p
p

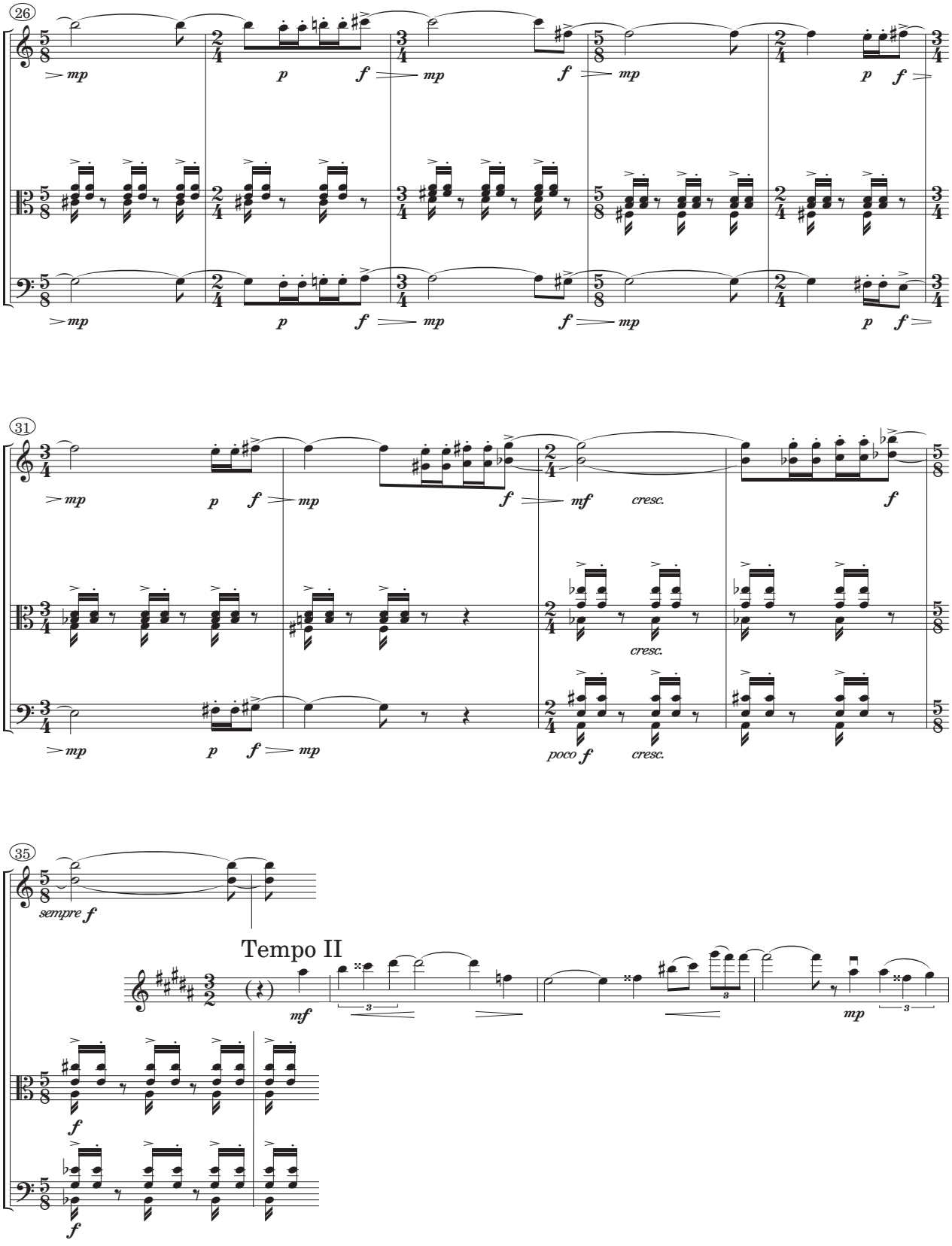
[dialogue]

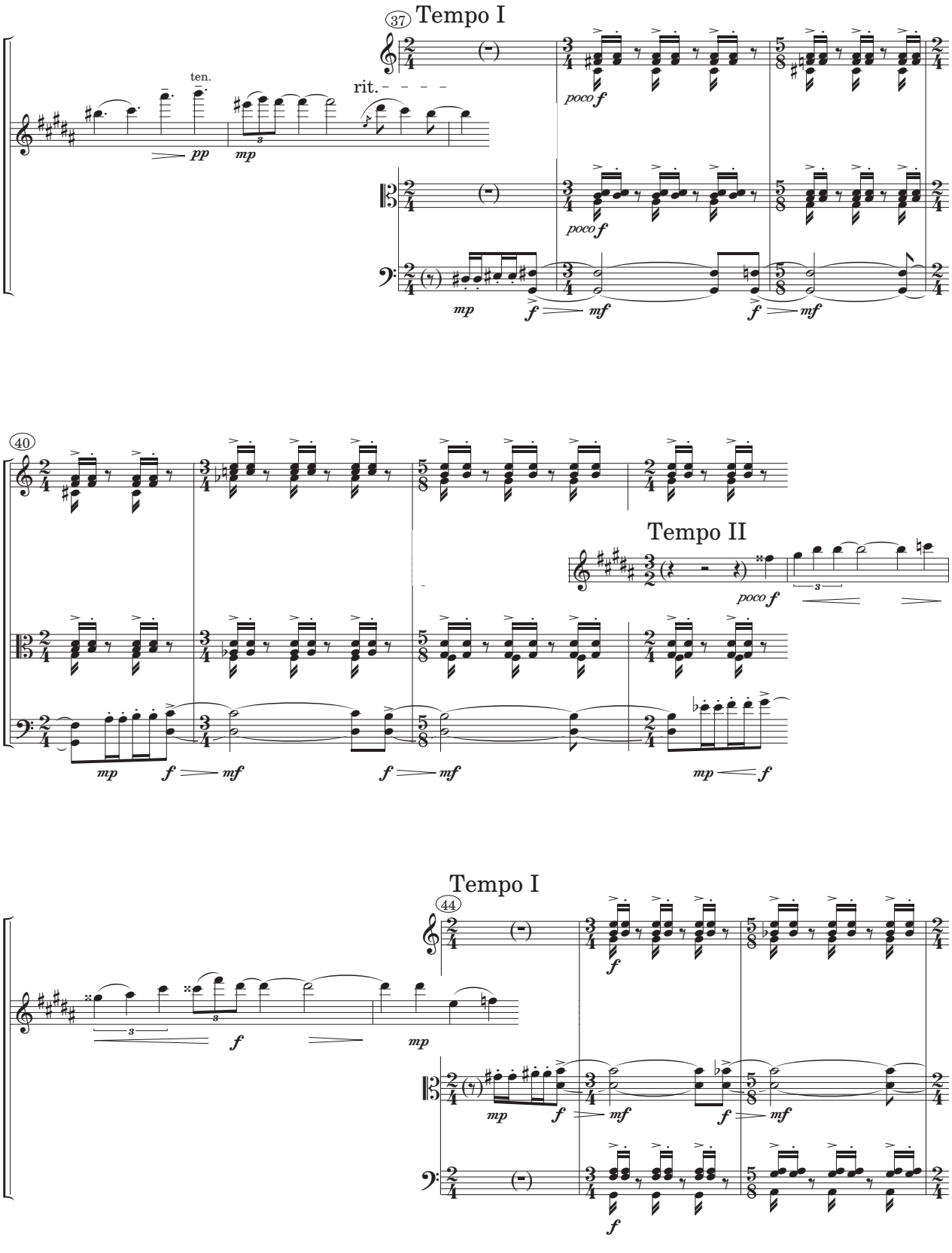
Discursus IV: NON SEQUITUR

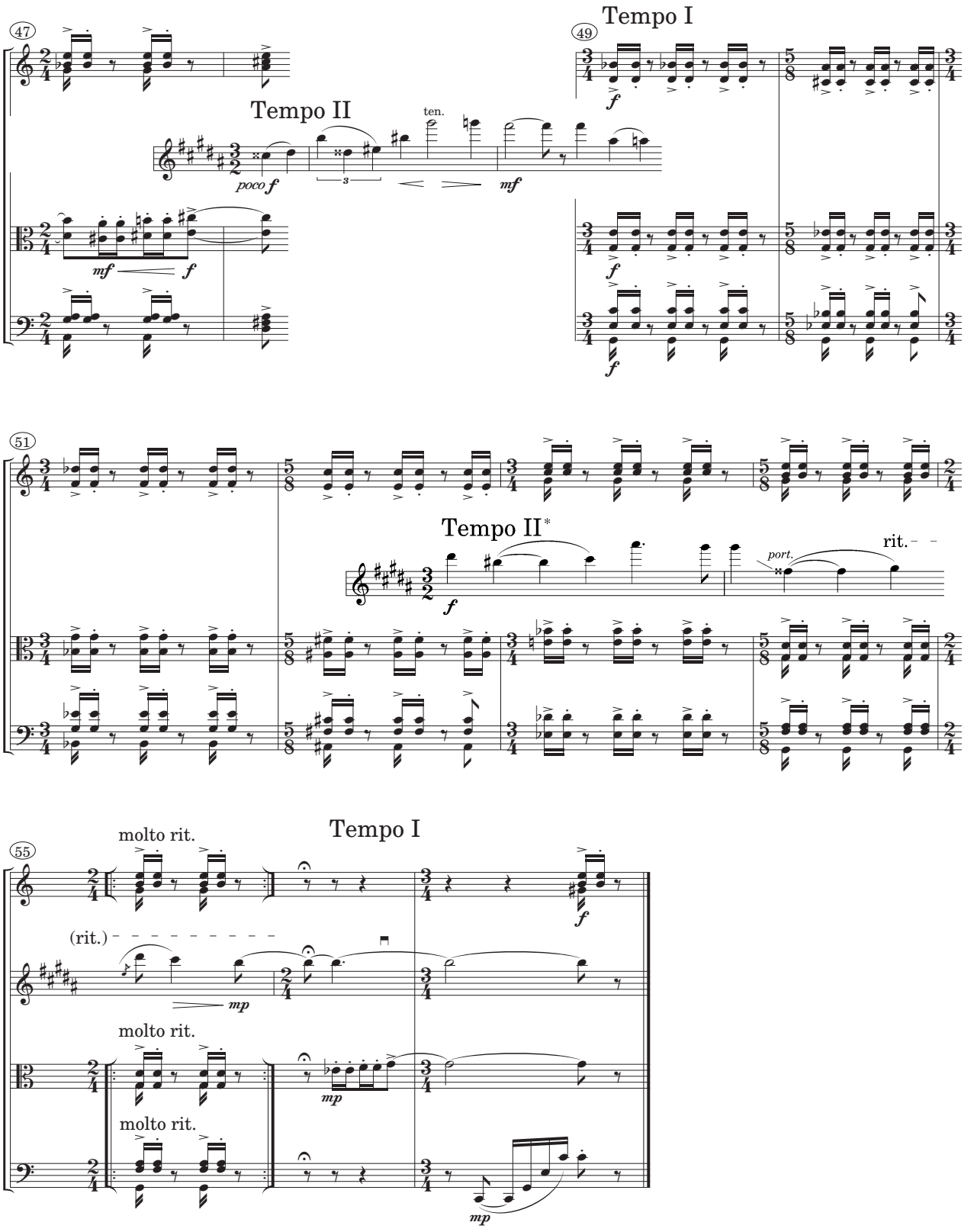
Moderately; determined, march-like ♩= 88




17
22
Slowly; 𝅗𝅥 = 48-52
(interrupting)
cantabile, with rubato
molto espres.,
hyper-sentimental
(echo)
Tempo I (interrupting)
23
as before
port.
forcefully
poco f
as before


26
mp
p
f
31
mf
cresc.
poco f
35
sempre f
Tempo II
mf
mp

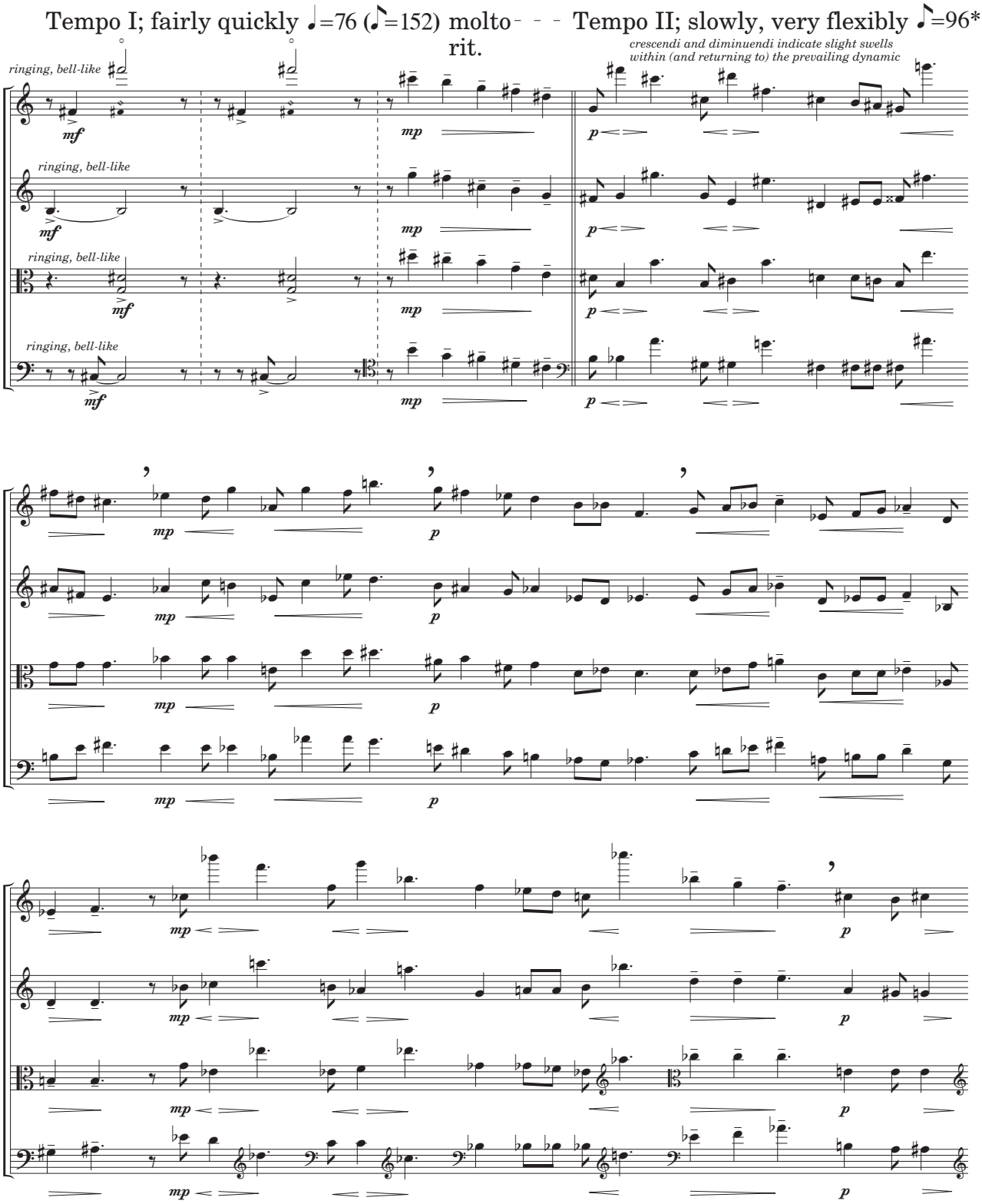

37
Tempo I
ten.
rit.
pp
mp
poco f
mp
f
mf
40
Tempo II
poco f
mp
f
mf
44
Tempo I
f
mp
mf

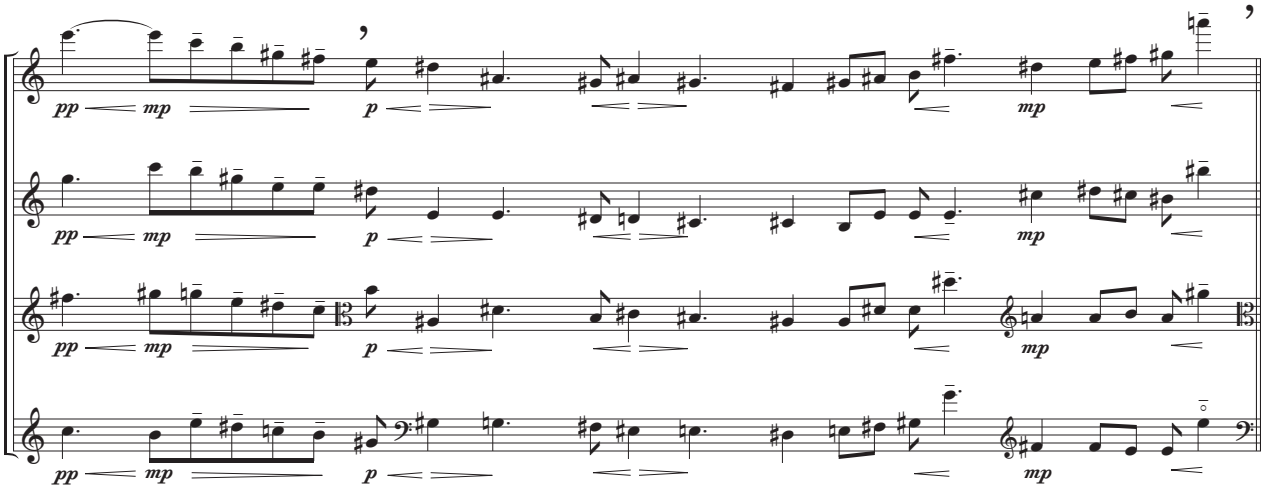


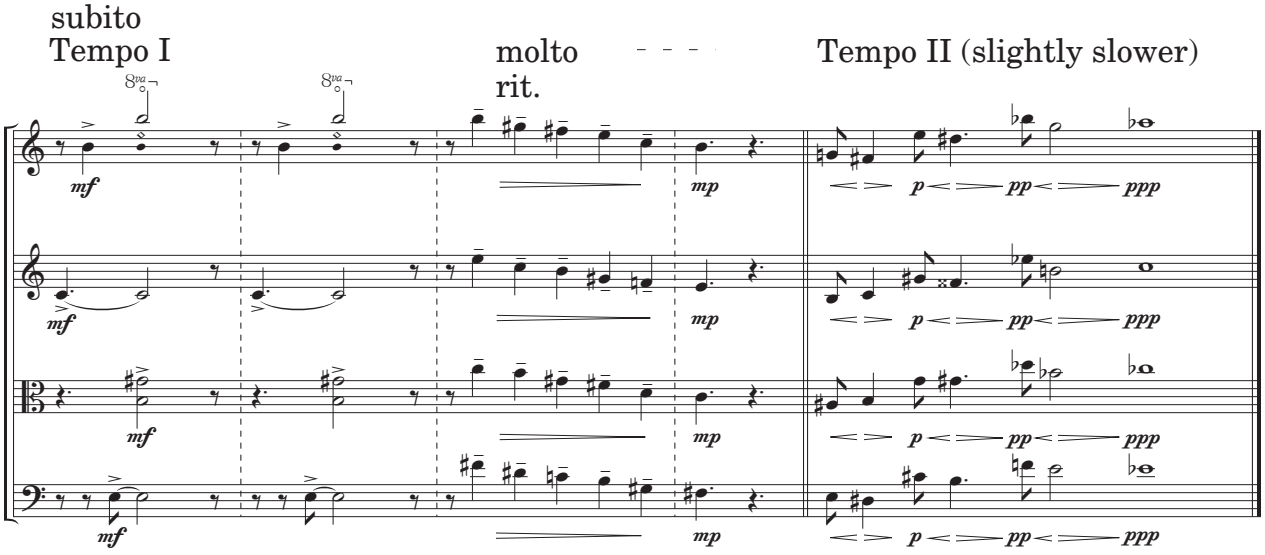
* Violin II enters in Tempo II while Violin I, Viola, and Cello continue in Tempo I. The latter group repeats measure 55 as needed (slowing down) until Violin II reaches the fermata in measure 61. After a brief pause, the full quartet resumes Tempo I.

[dialogue]

Discursus V: RECITATIVE



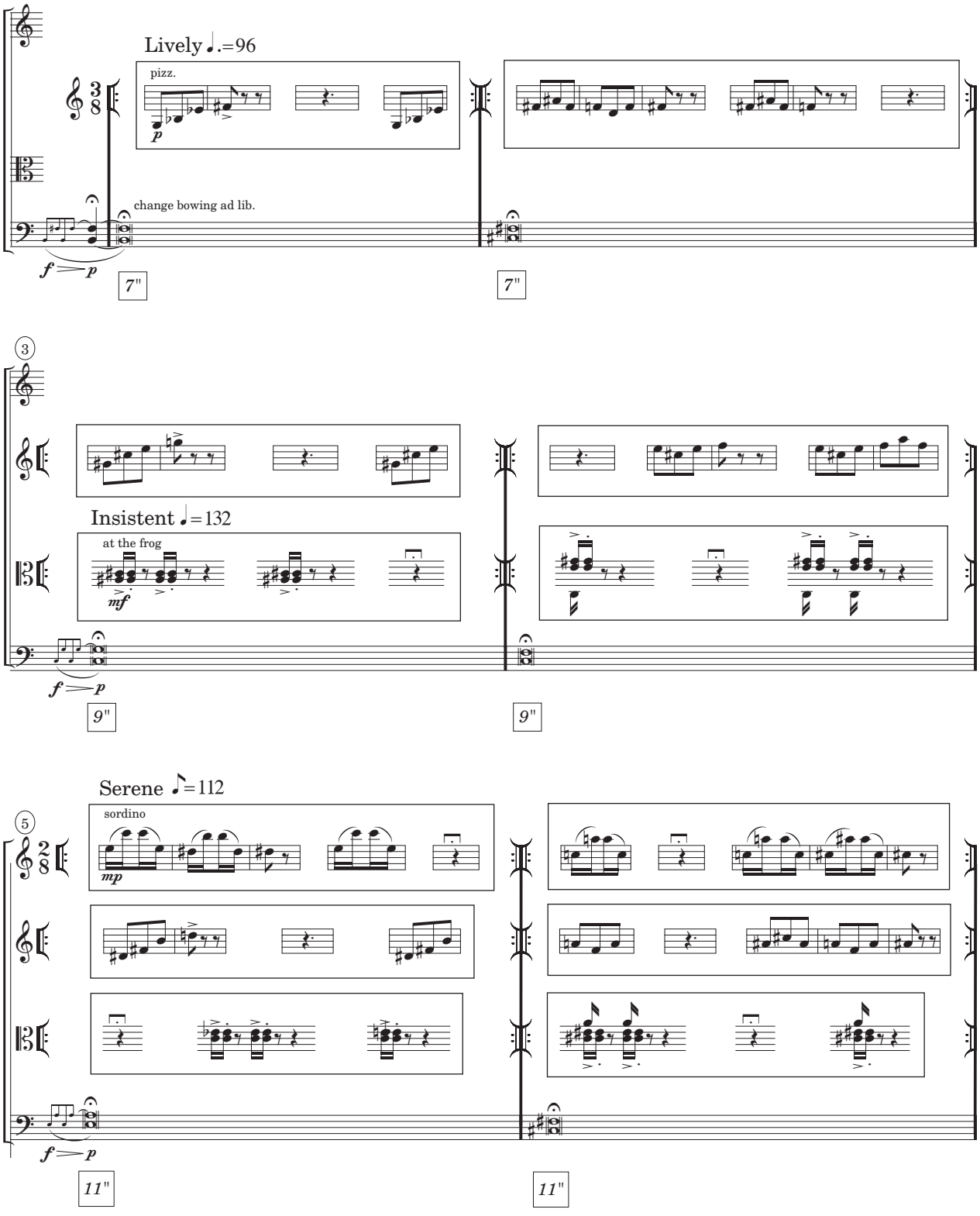


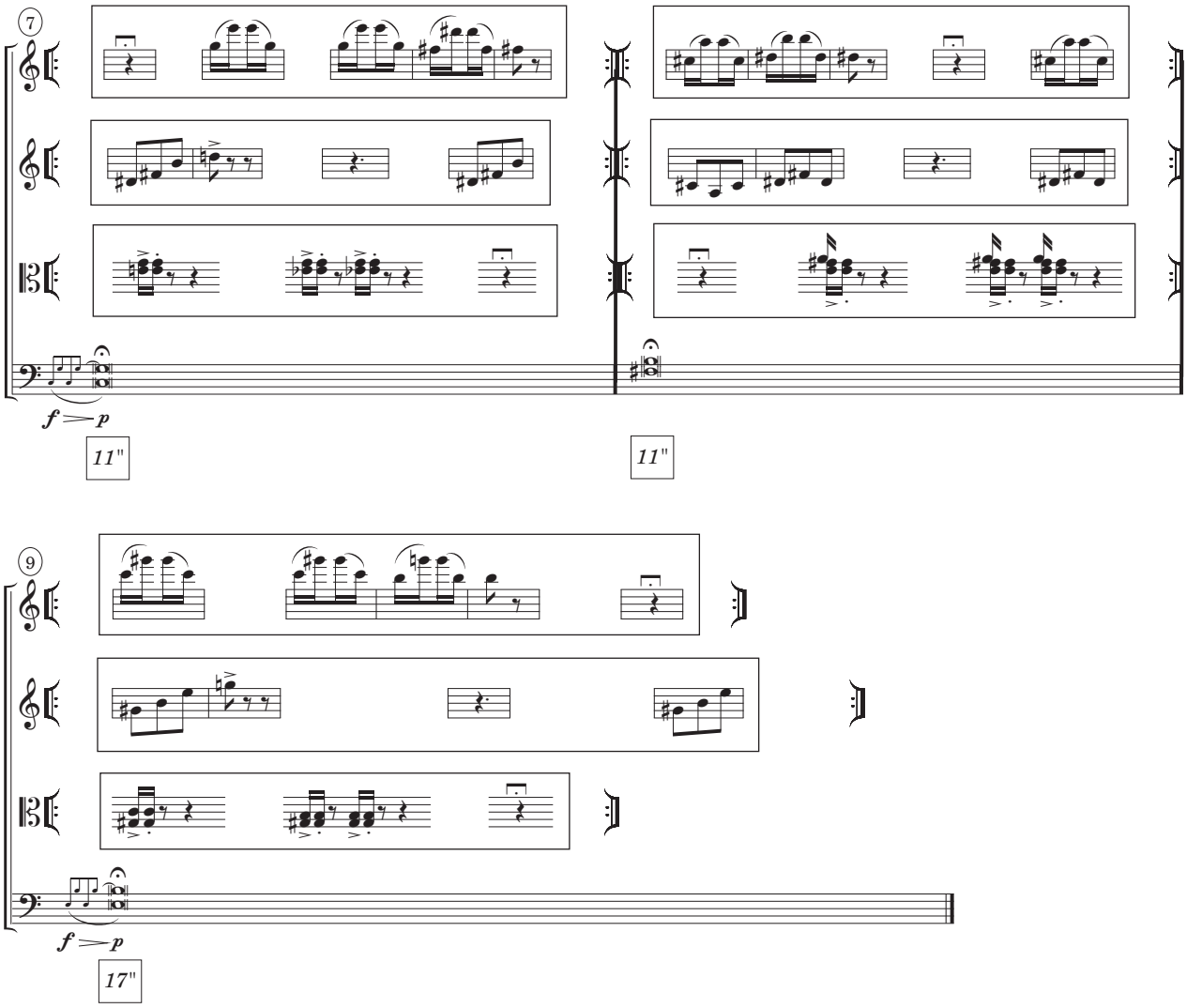


* The large leaps should be very slightly disconnected (i.e., non-legato), taking time to place, as needed. Tempo II should be interpreted very flexibly, with much rubato, all the parts nonetheless moving in lockstep. The overall sound should be light, pure, and mostly unsentimental, notwithstanding subtle warm “swells” on the longer notes.

[dialogue]

Discursus VI: CROSS TALK





Figures within boxes can be played in any order, and repeated any number of times (including more than once in succession). The cello leads: when it moves to the next measure, the rest of the ensemble follows to the next box. The transition from measure to measure shouldn't be precisely coordinated. Complete a figure (do not interrupt it) before moving on. The timings below the cello part are meant only as a guide; generally, the more parts participating, the longer a measure will last.

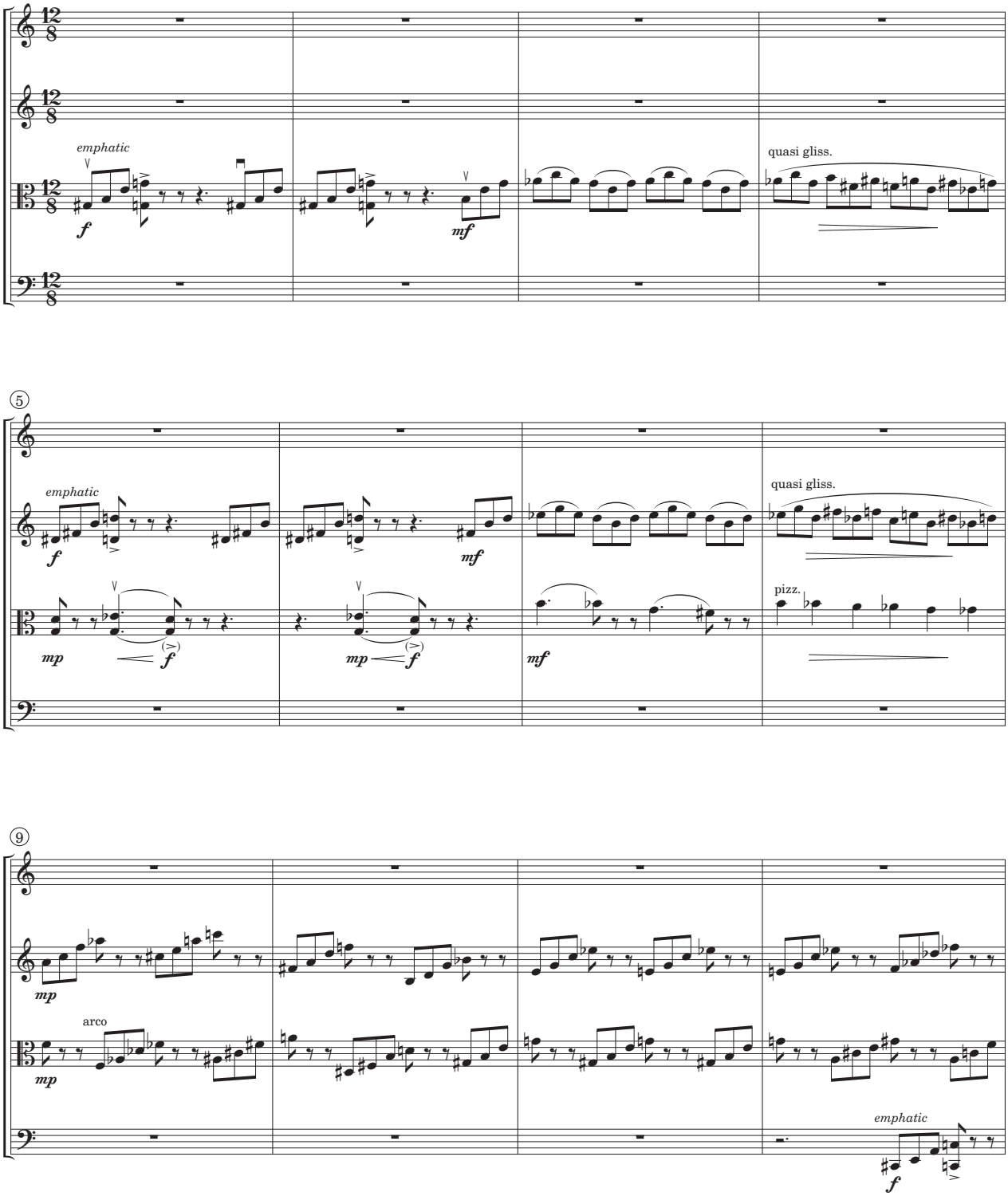
The violin II part should be precisely metric: do not lose the dotted quarter-note pulse, even through rests. The rests in violin 1 need not always be metric, though the tempo and binary pulse should be fairly consistent, especially when playing a sixteenth-note figure. The viola part should be the most unpredictable metrically, the only suggestion of pulse being when the double sixteenth-note figure is repeated. (The sixteenths themselves should all be articulated at the same tempo.)

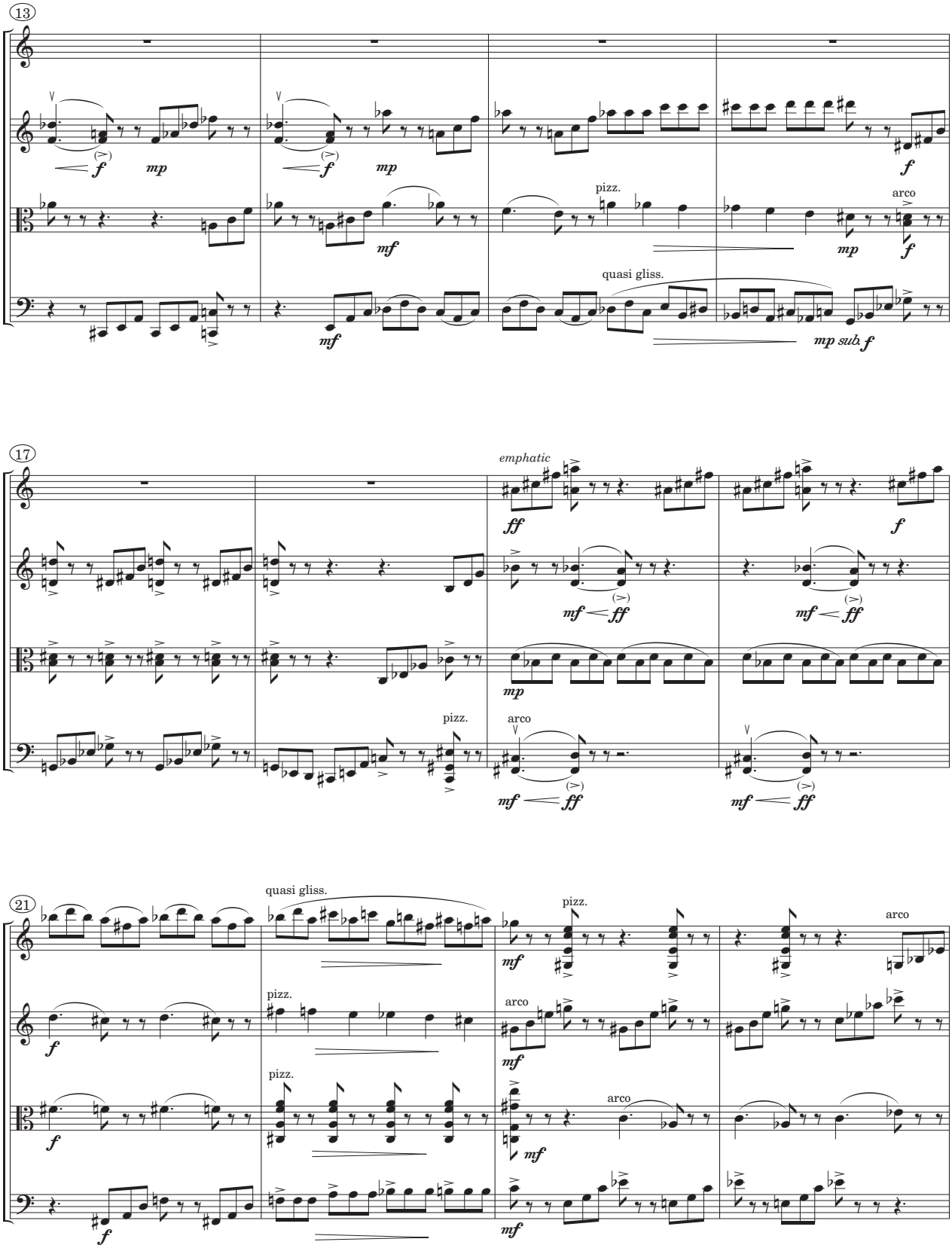
In the last measure, stop playing in the order indicated: viola, violin I, violin II, cello.

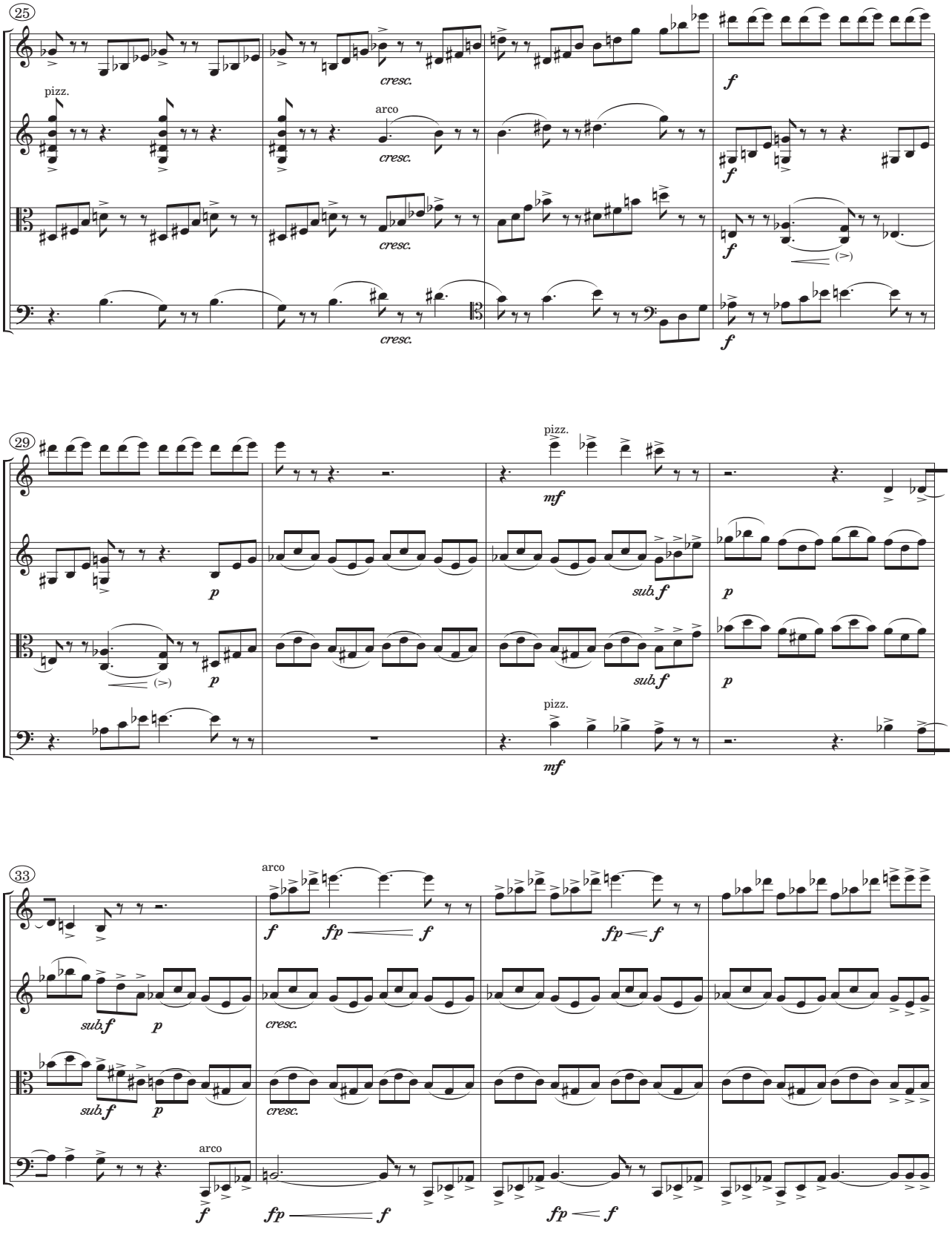
[dialogue]

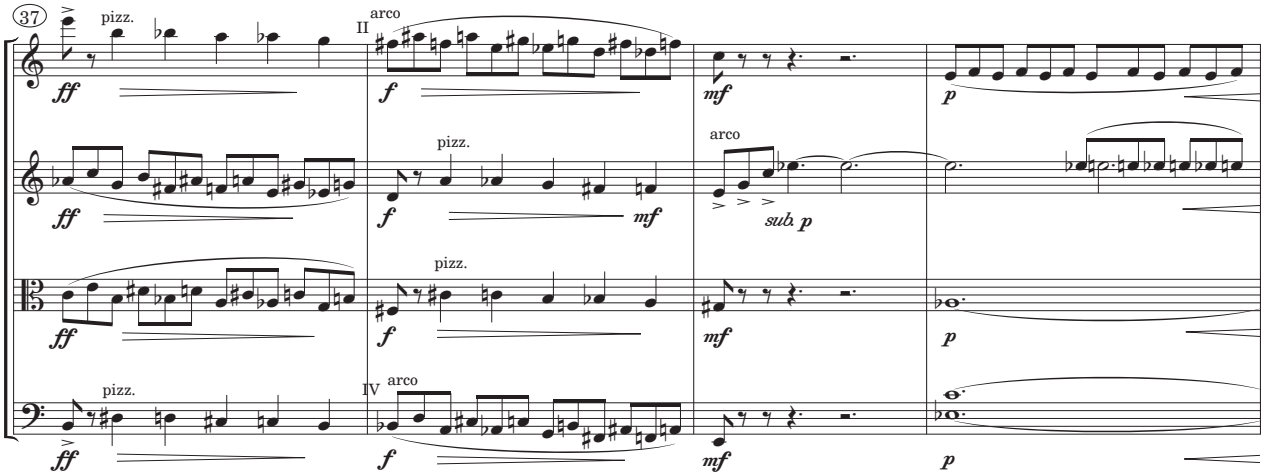
Discursus VII: FUGUE

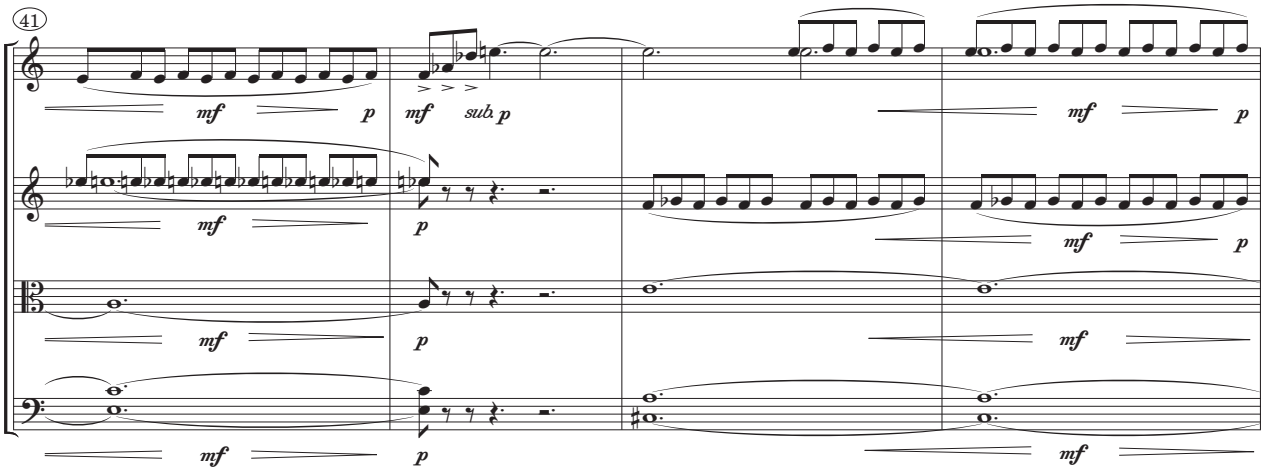
Extremely Fast; intense and vigorous ♩.=176+

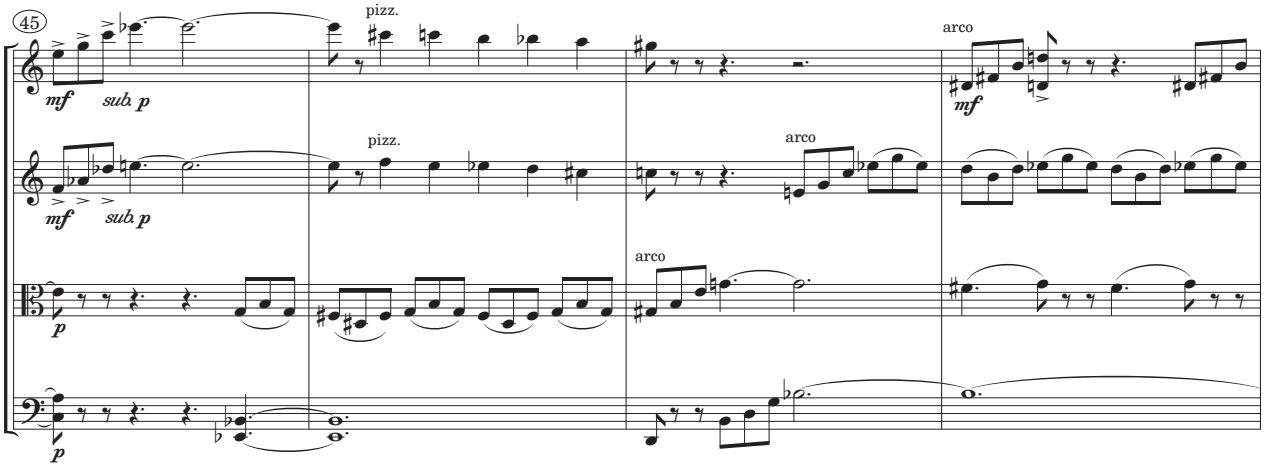


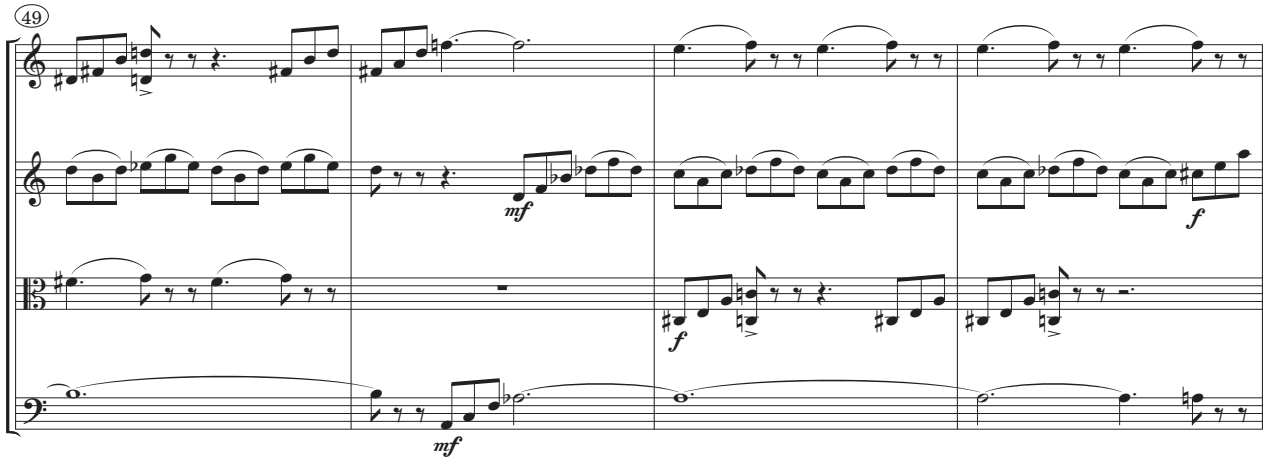

13
pizz.
arco
quasi gliss.
17
emphatic
pizz.
arco
21
quasi gliss.
pizz.
arco

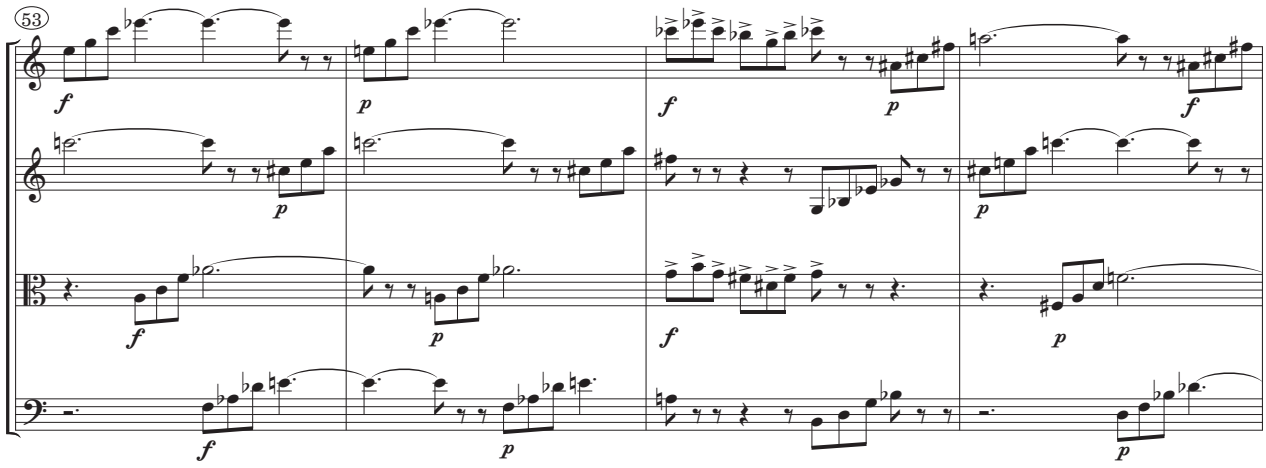

25
pizz.
arco
cresc.
f
29
mf
p
sub.f
33
fp
arco

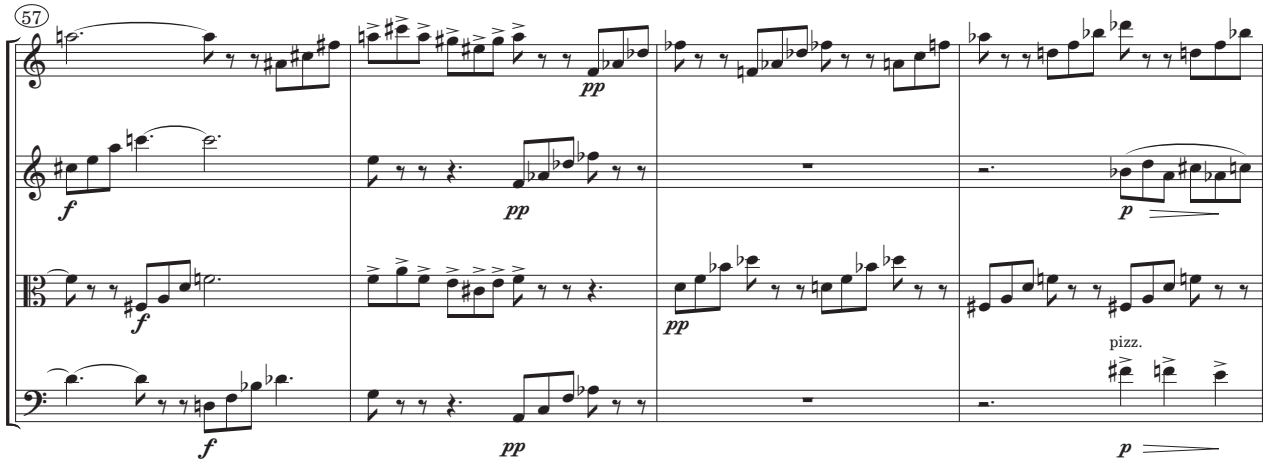

37
pizz.
II
arco
ff
f
mf
p
arco
sub. p
IV

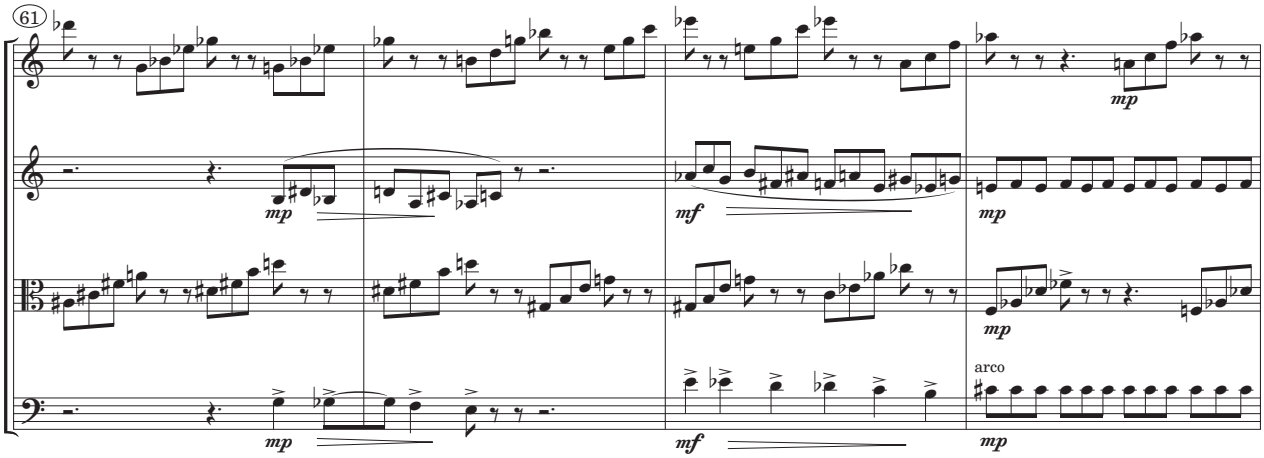

41
mf
p
sub. p

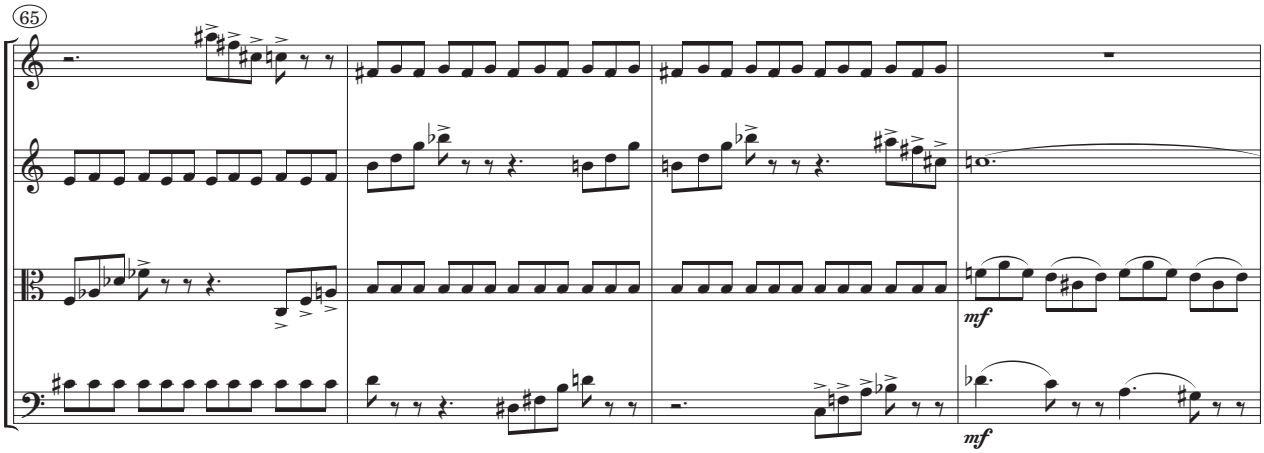

45
mf
sub. p
pizz.
arco
p

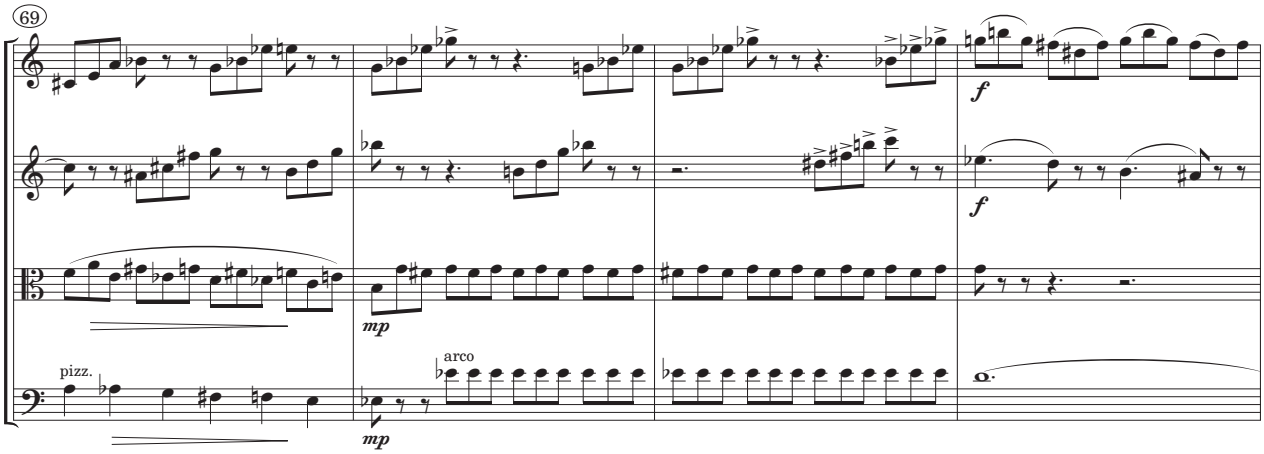

49
mf
mf
f
f

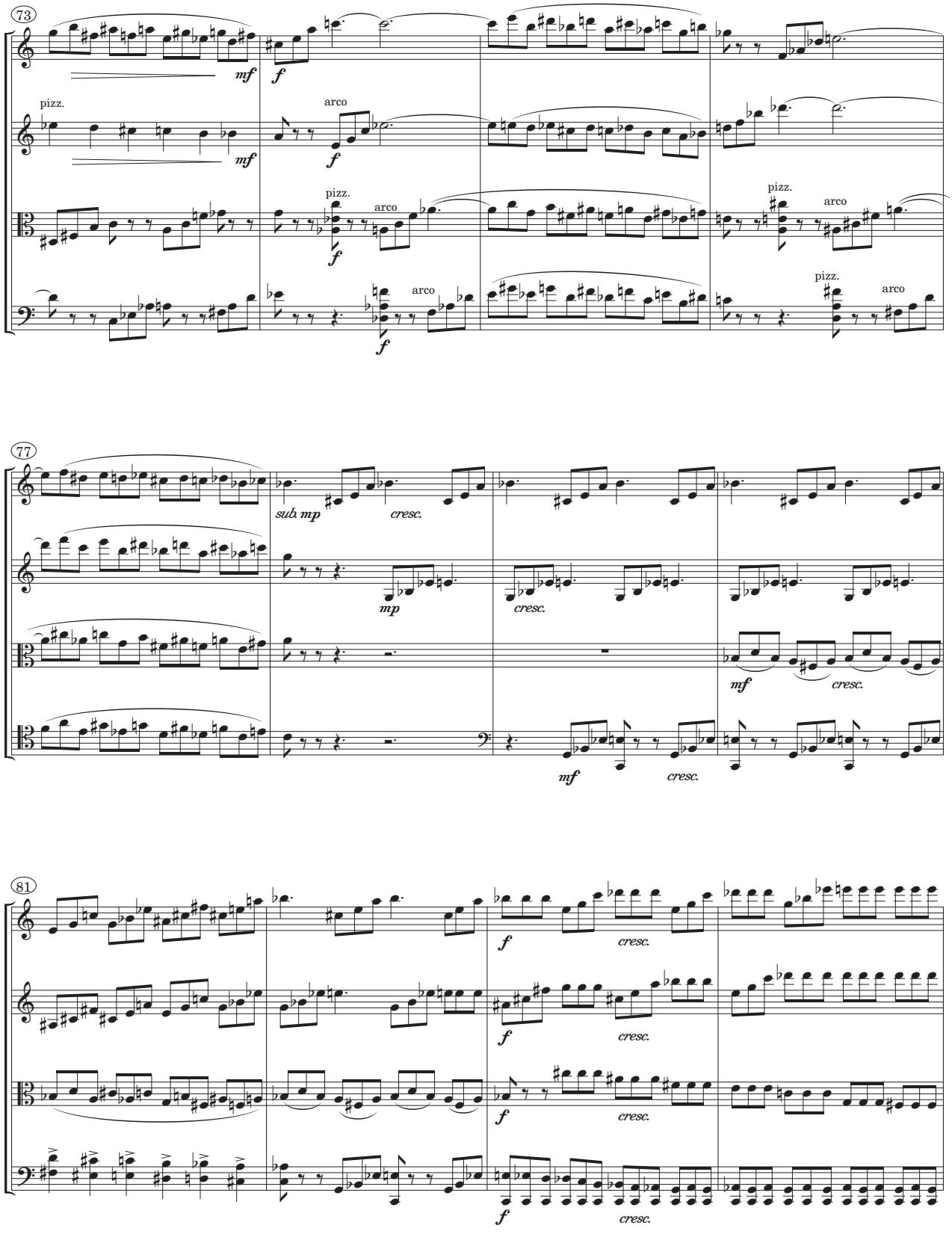

53
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
f
p
p

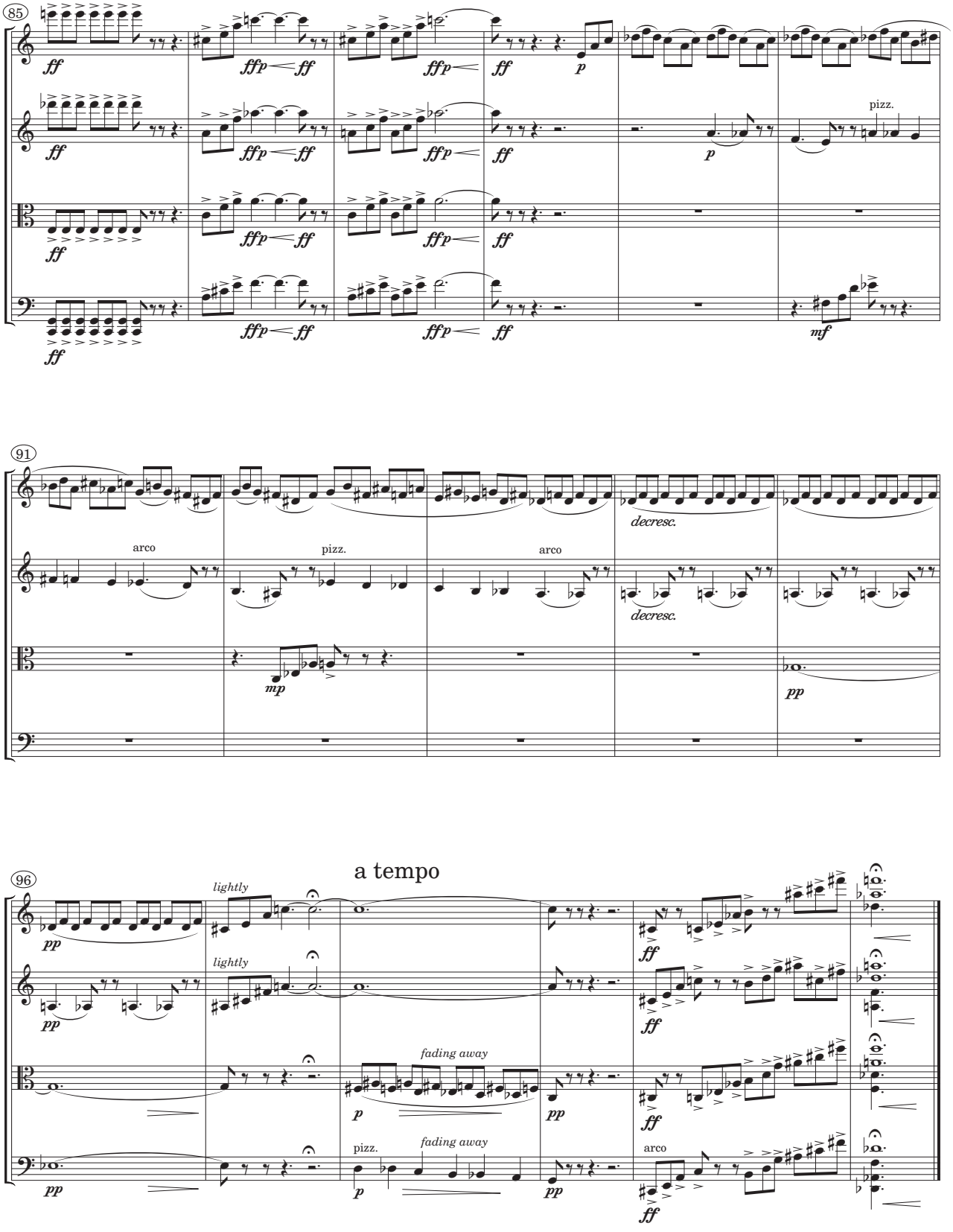

57
pp
f
pp
p
f
pp
pp
f
pp
pizz.
p


61
mp
mf
mp
mp
mf
arco
mp


65
mf
mf


69
f
f
mp
pizz.
arco
mp


73
pizz.
arco
77
sub. mp
cresc.
mp
mf
81
f


85
ff
ffp
ff
p
pizz.
mf
91
arco
pizz.
decresc.
mp
pp
96
a tempo
lightly
fading away
arco