# String Quartet No. 2

## *Etudes*

Karim Al-Zand

(2002)

## PROGRAM NOTE:

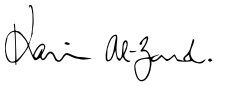
The piece has the subtitle ‘Etudes’ since each movement forms a study of a single string technique. The movements' descriptive titles have double meanings: they refer to both the technique being used and to an instrument which the ensemble as a whole evokes.

*Sourdine* is an 18th century Italian ‘pocket’ violin. The body of the instrument was smaller than the regular violin and it had a relatively soft sound—the word *sordo* literally means ‘mute’ in Italian. *Sordino*, as a musical indication, refers to a device which dampens the sound of an instrument, a mute. In the first movement the quartet uses mutes throughout, both the common orchestral type and a softer ‘practice’ variety.

*Arpeggione* is the name of an early 19th century instrument which was a hybrid of guitar and cello: it had six strings and frets but was played with a bow. The instrument was short-lived, perhaps because it was quite difficult to play and had a relatively small dynamic range. The only well-known piece written for this instrument is a Sonata by Schubert—the so-called ‘Arpeggione’ Sonata—which is now usually performed on cello. One strength of the arpeggione, and the source of its name, was its facility with chord-like passages played in a ‘broken’ fashion, rapidly articulated. The second movement focuses on this string-crossing arpeggio technique.

*Armonica* was the name given by Benjamin Franklin to one of his musical inventions: a mechanized version of the glass harmonica. The glass harmonica is an instrumental form of the wine-glass trick. A thin, delicate pitch can be produced by rubbing the rims of graduated glass bowls in a circular motion. The third movement uses the distinctive sound of string harmonics to create a soft, glassy texture.

Of the four instruments, *Guitarra* is the only one still in common use. This last movement uses plucked strings (*pizzicato*) to evoke the sound of the guitar.



March 2002

Premiere performance: *String Quartet No.2* ‘Etudes’ was written for the Flux Quartet (Tom Chiu and Jesse Mills, violins, Max Mandel, viola, and Darrett Adkins, cello) and premiered at the Rothko Chapel, Houston, TX on April 28 2002.

## DURATION:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1. Slowly; rustling *[Sordina]* | 2' 30" |
| 2. Moderately; shimmering *[Arpeggione]* | 2' 15" |
| 3. Slowly; delicate *[Armonica]* | 3' 15" |
| 4. Quickly; humorous *[Guitarra]* | 3' |
| TOTAL | ca. 11' |

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## *Etudes*

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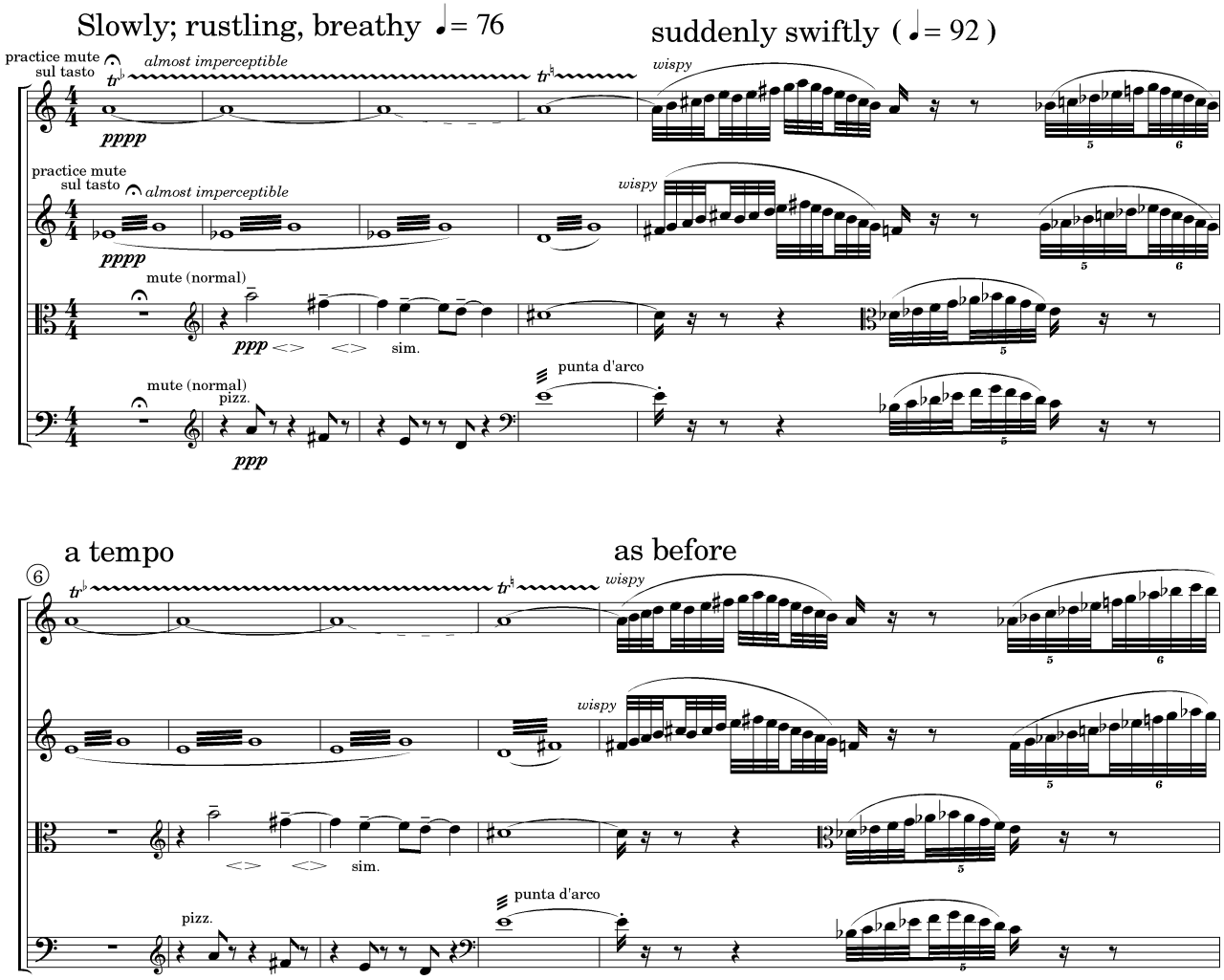
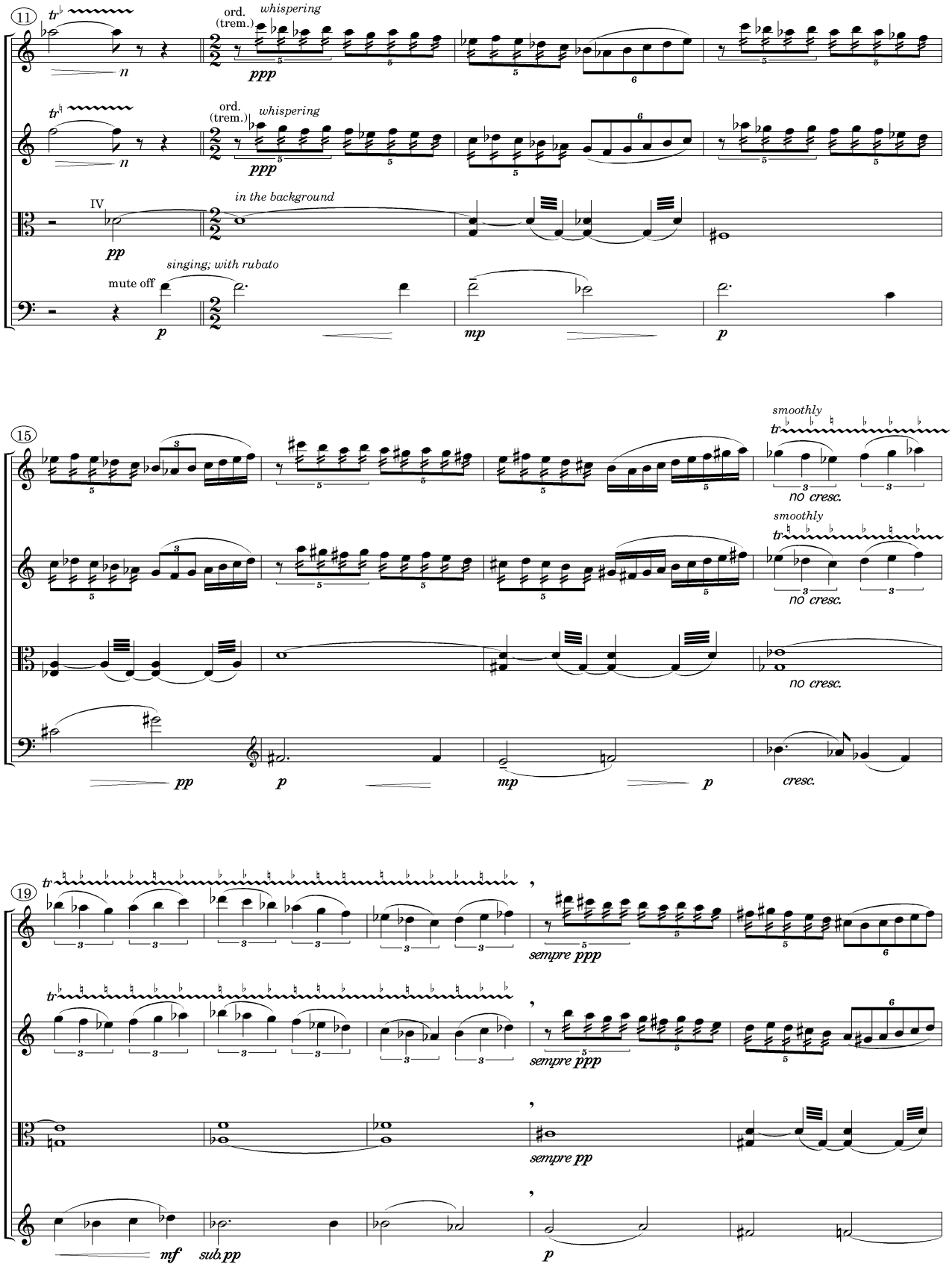
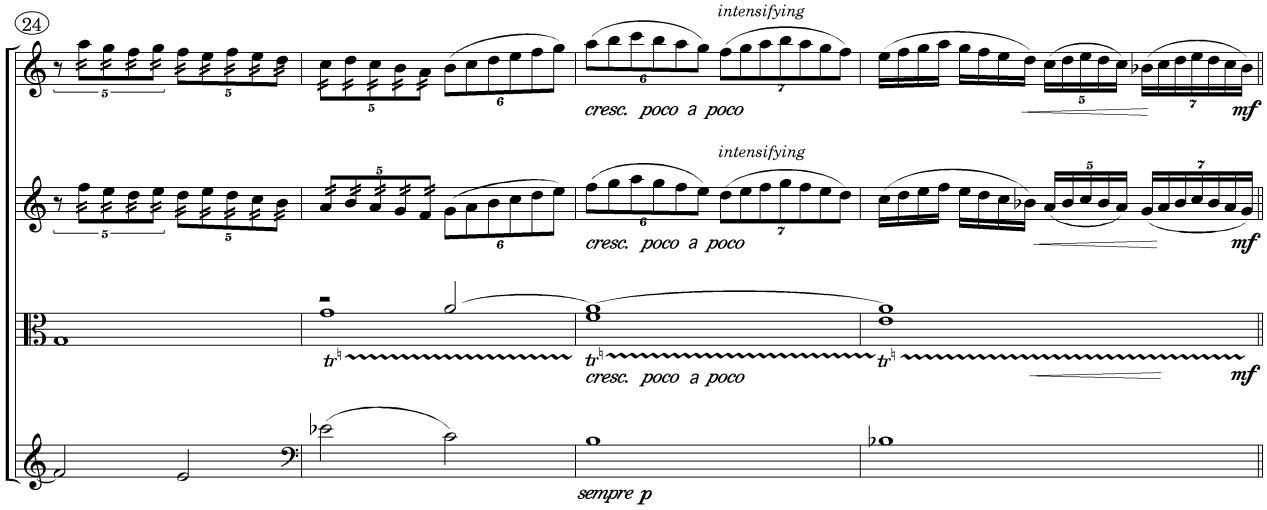
# 1.

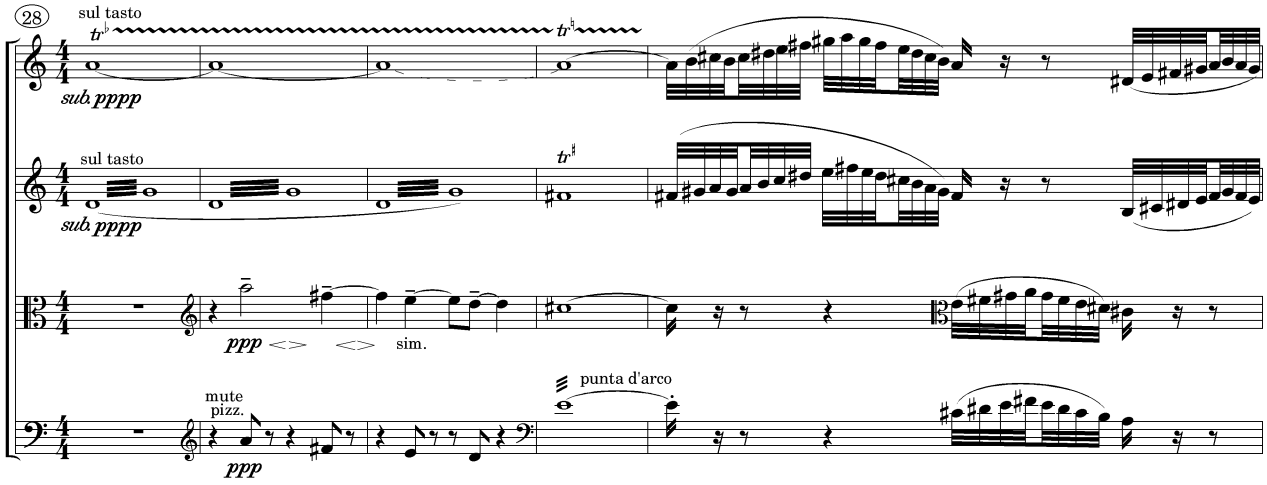


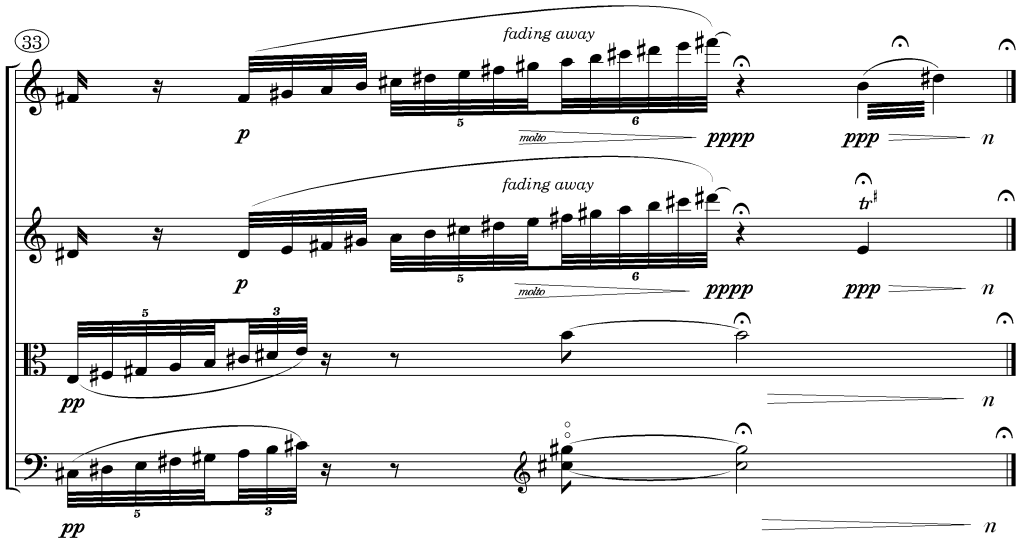
Slightly Slower ( ♩ = 60 )






Tempo I as before

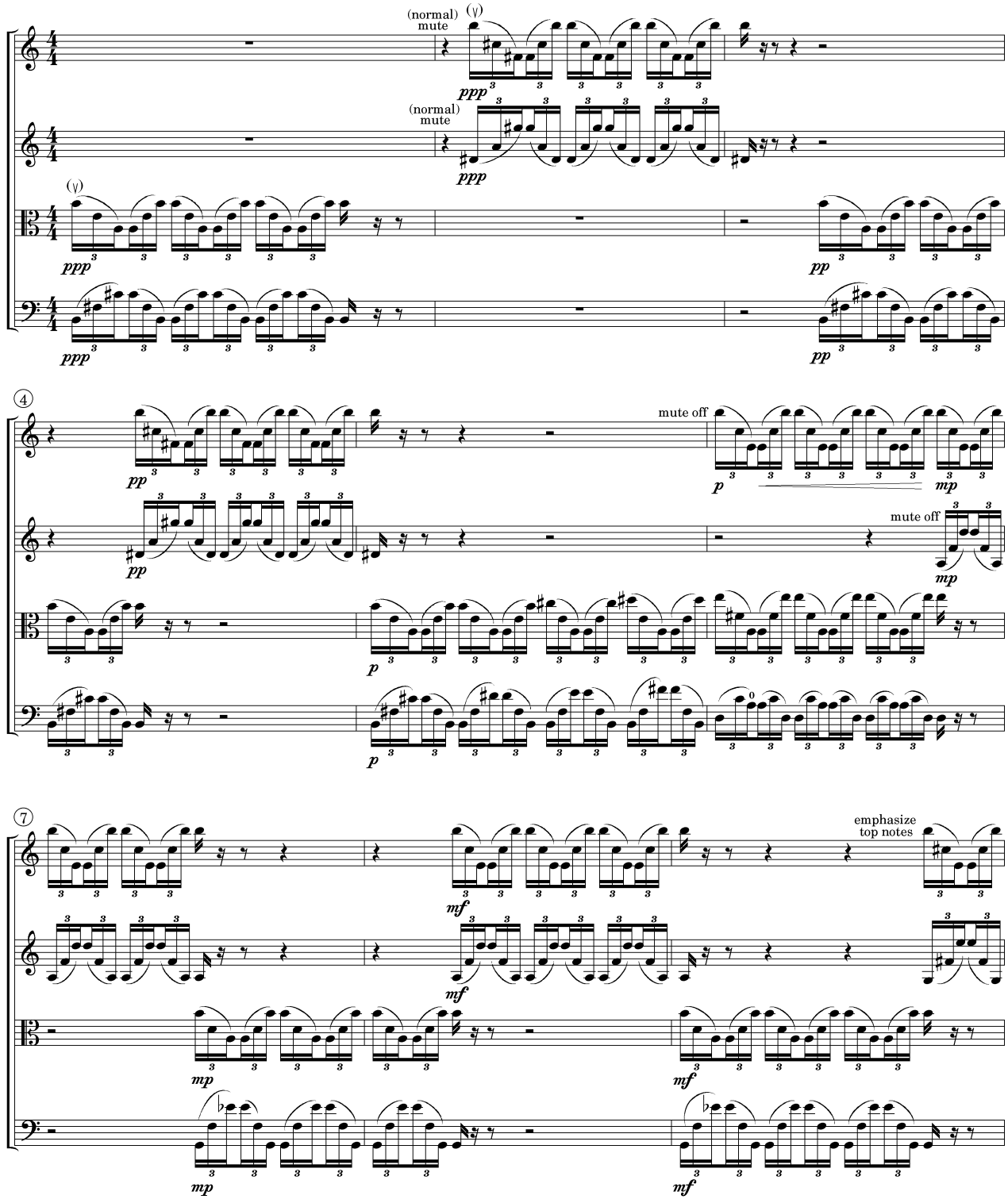


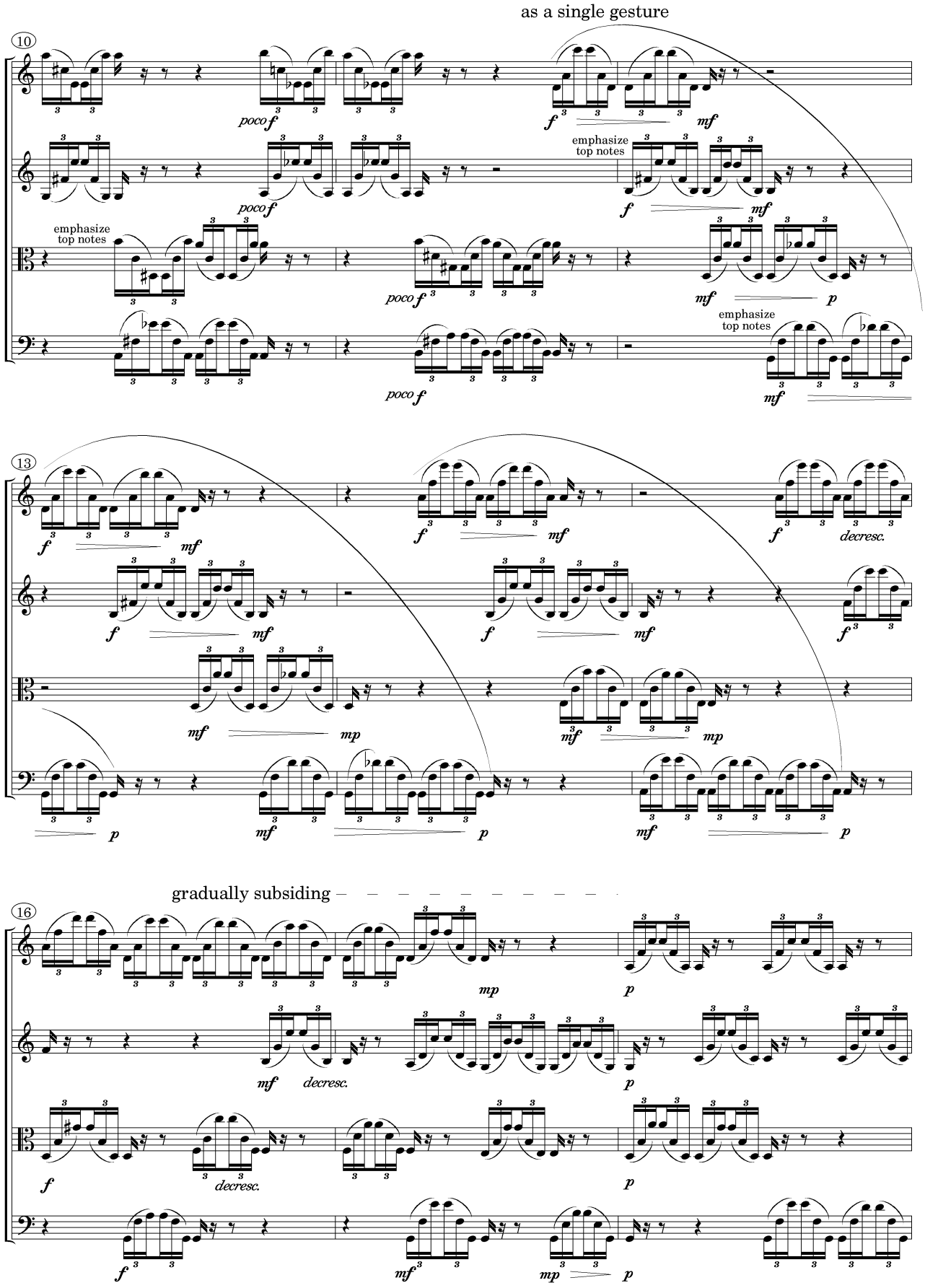



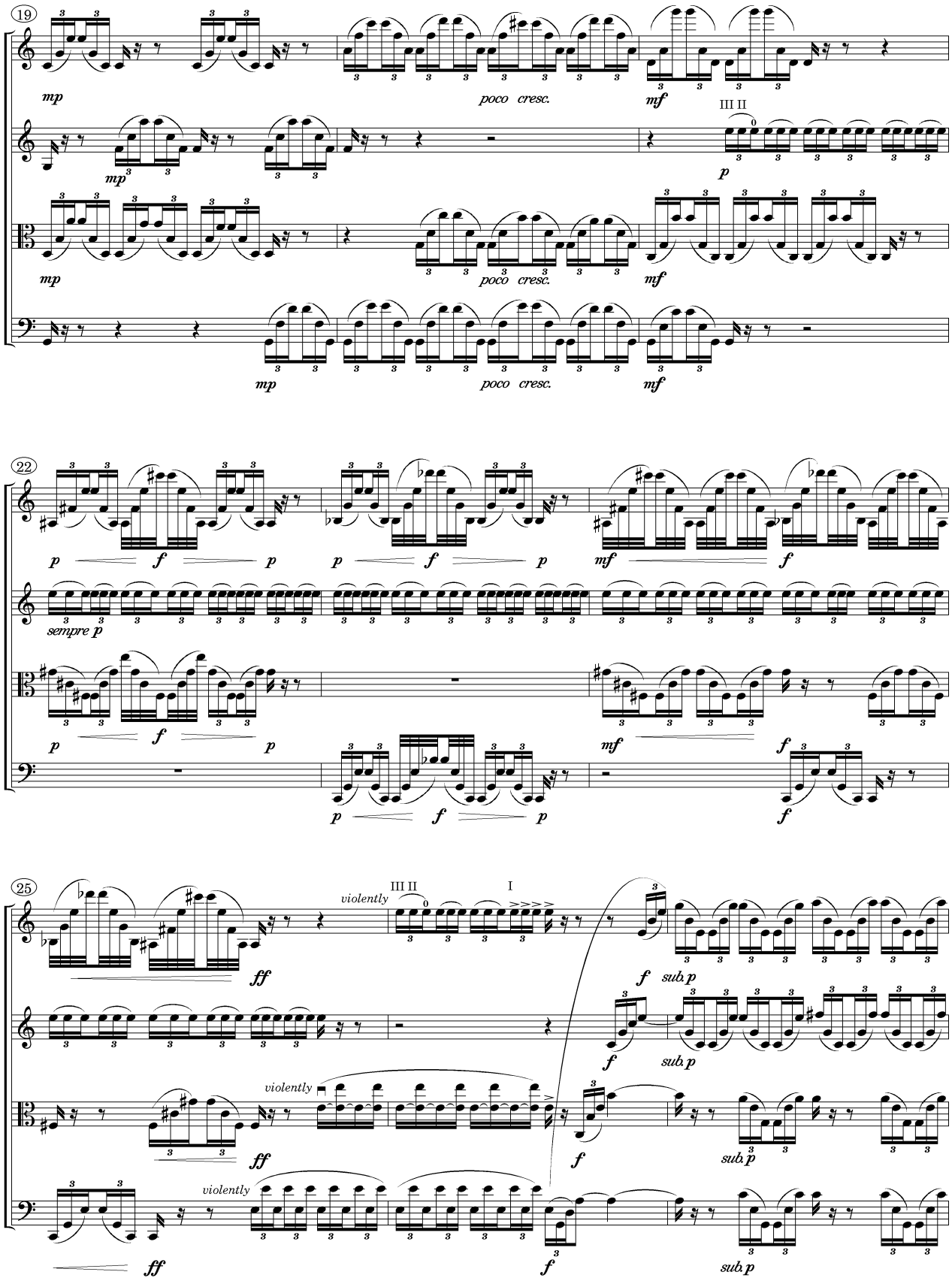

*[sordina]*

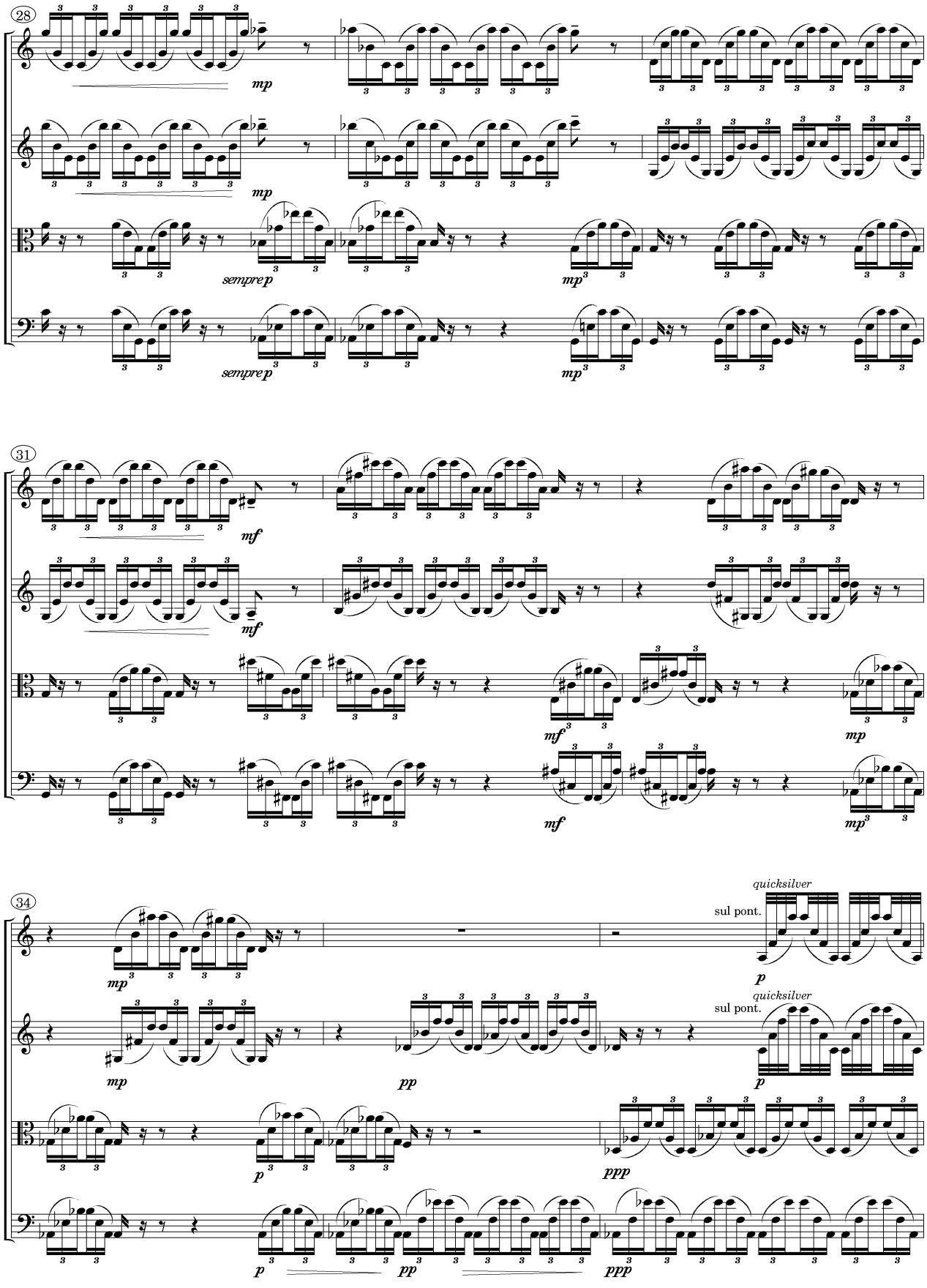
# 2.

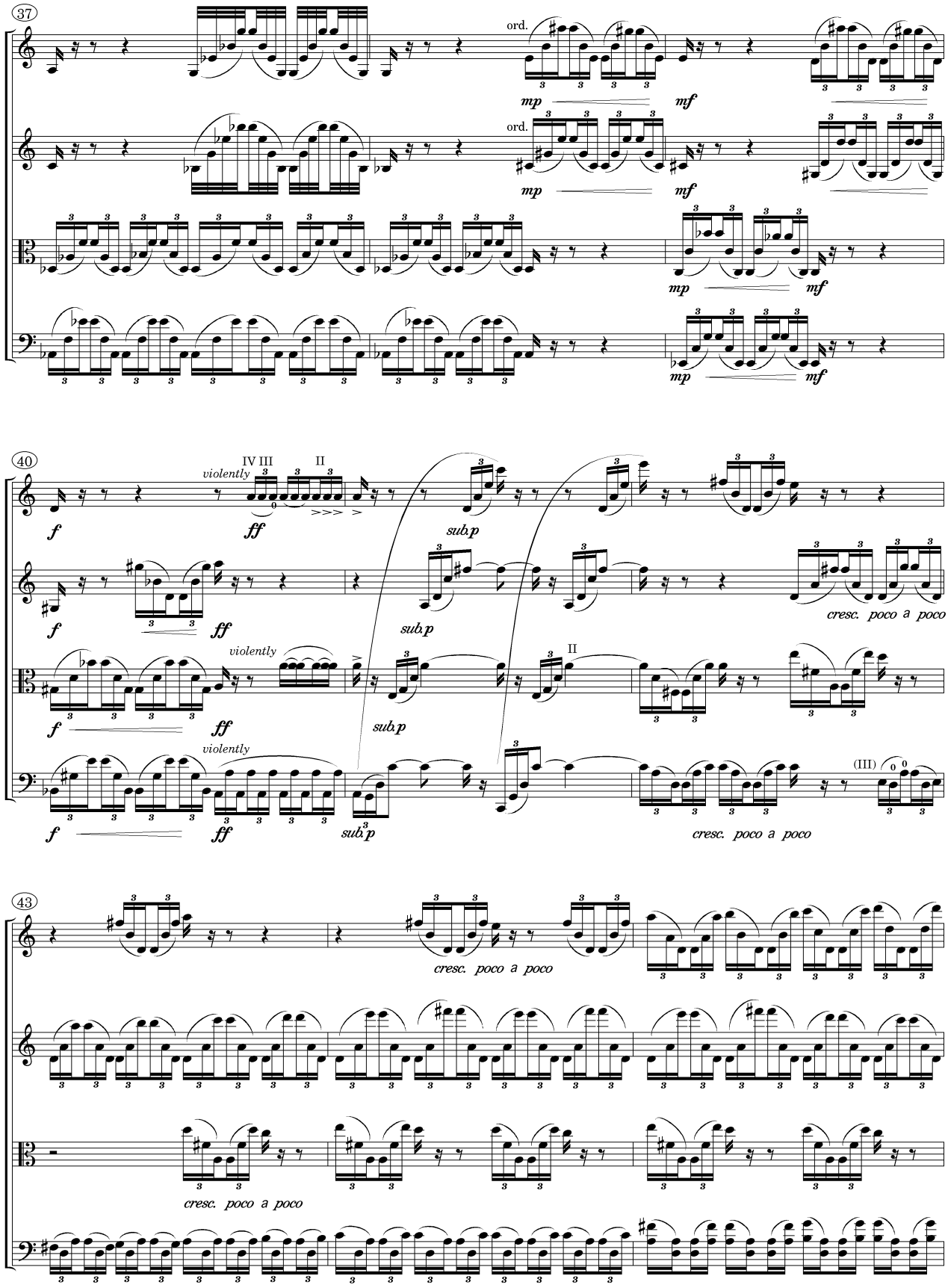
Moderately; shimmering, lush ♩= 92

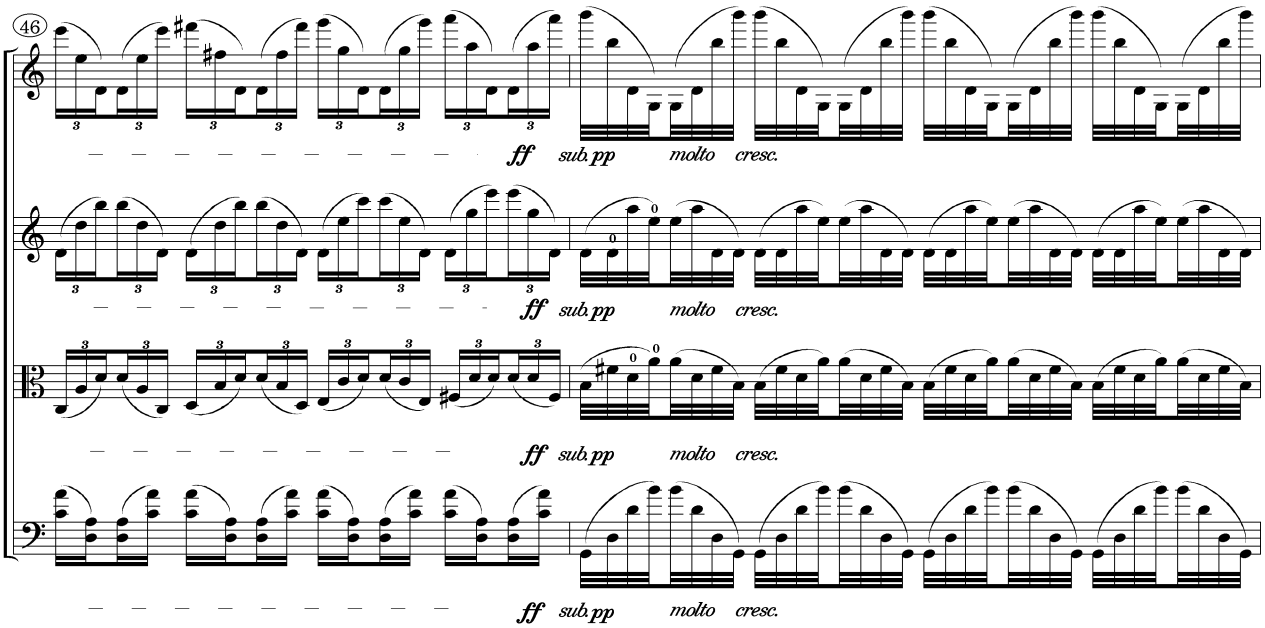


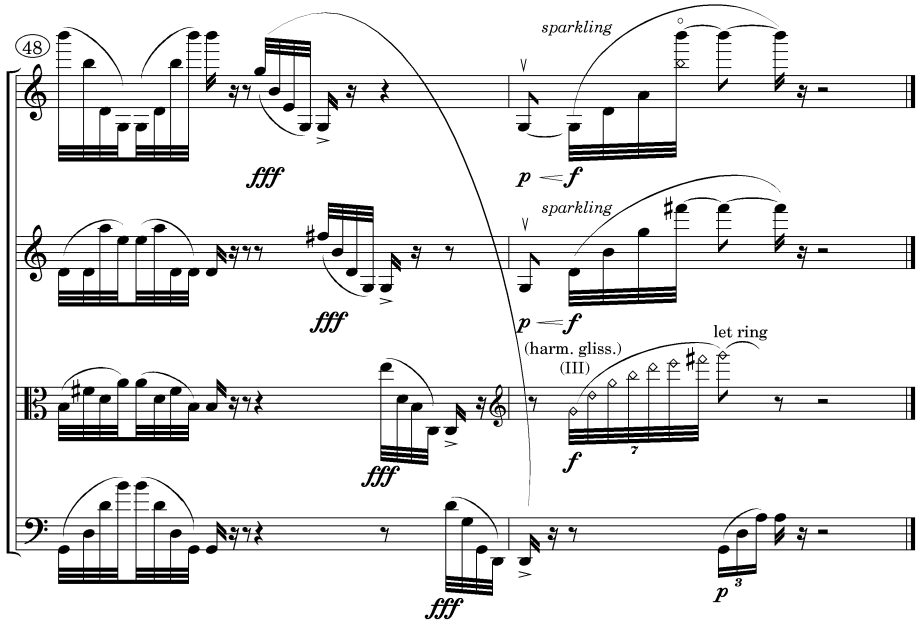

as a single gesture
10
poco f
f
mf
emphasize top notes
13
decresc.
gradually subsiding
16
mp
p
mf
decresc.


19
mp
poco cresc.
mf
III II
p
22
sempre p
25
violently
ff
sub.p


28
mp
mp
sempre p
sempre p
mp
mp
31
mf
mf
mf
mf
mp
mp
34
mp
mp
pp
quicksilver
sul pont.
p
quicksilver
sul pont.
p
p
pp
ppp
ppp

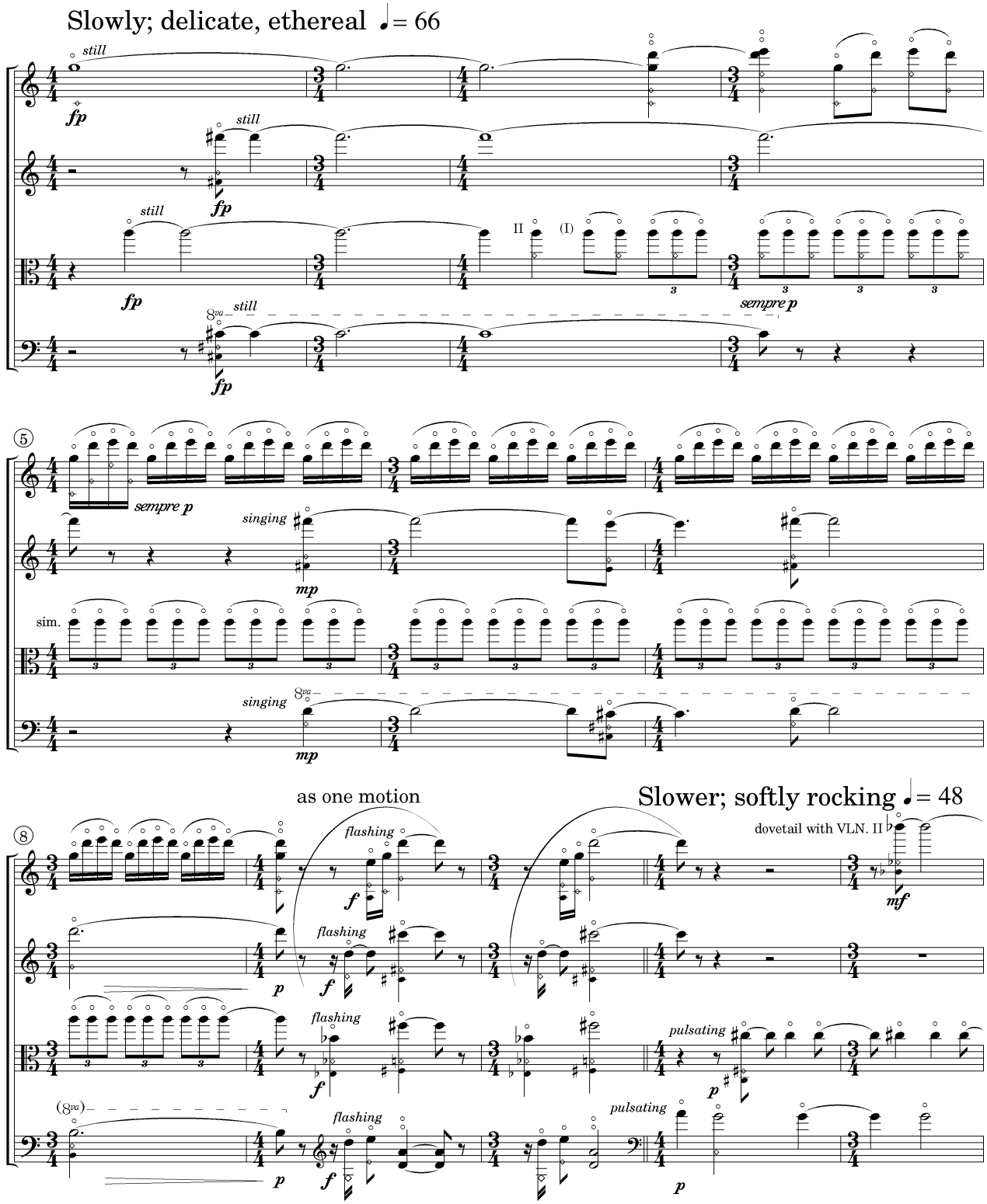

37
ord.
mp
mf
ord.
mp
mf
mp
mf
mp
mf
40
violently
IV III
II
f
ff
sub.p
f
ff
sub.p
cresc. poco a poco
violently
II
f
ff
sub.p
violently
f
ff
sub.p
(III)
cresc. poco a poco
43
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco

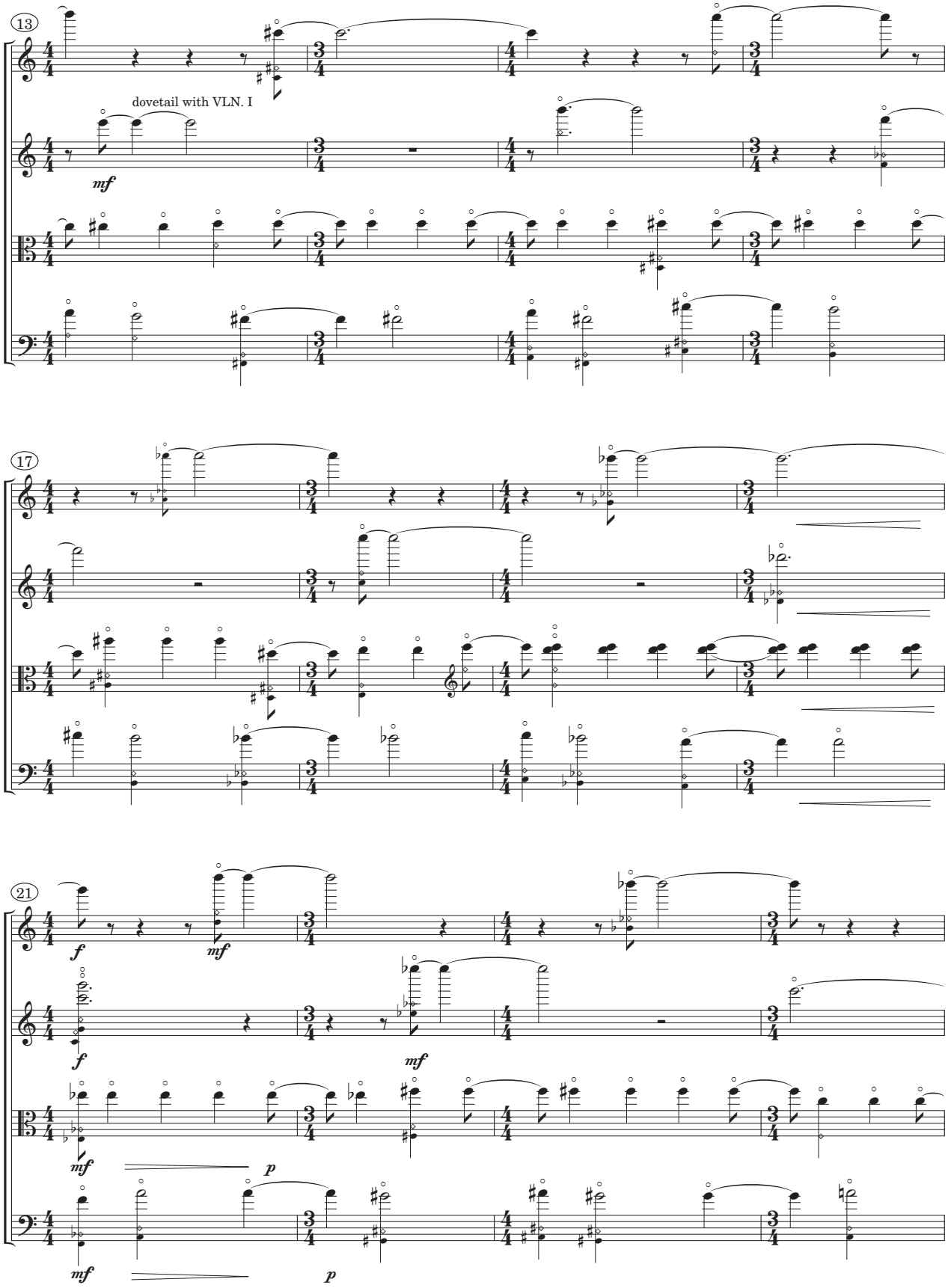

46
ff sub.pp molto cresc.
ff sub.pp molto cresc.
ff sub.pp molto cresc.
ff sub.pp molto cresc.

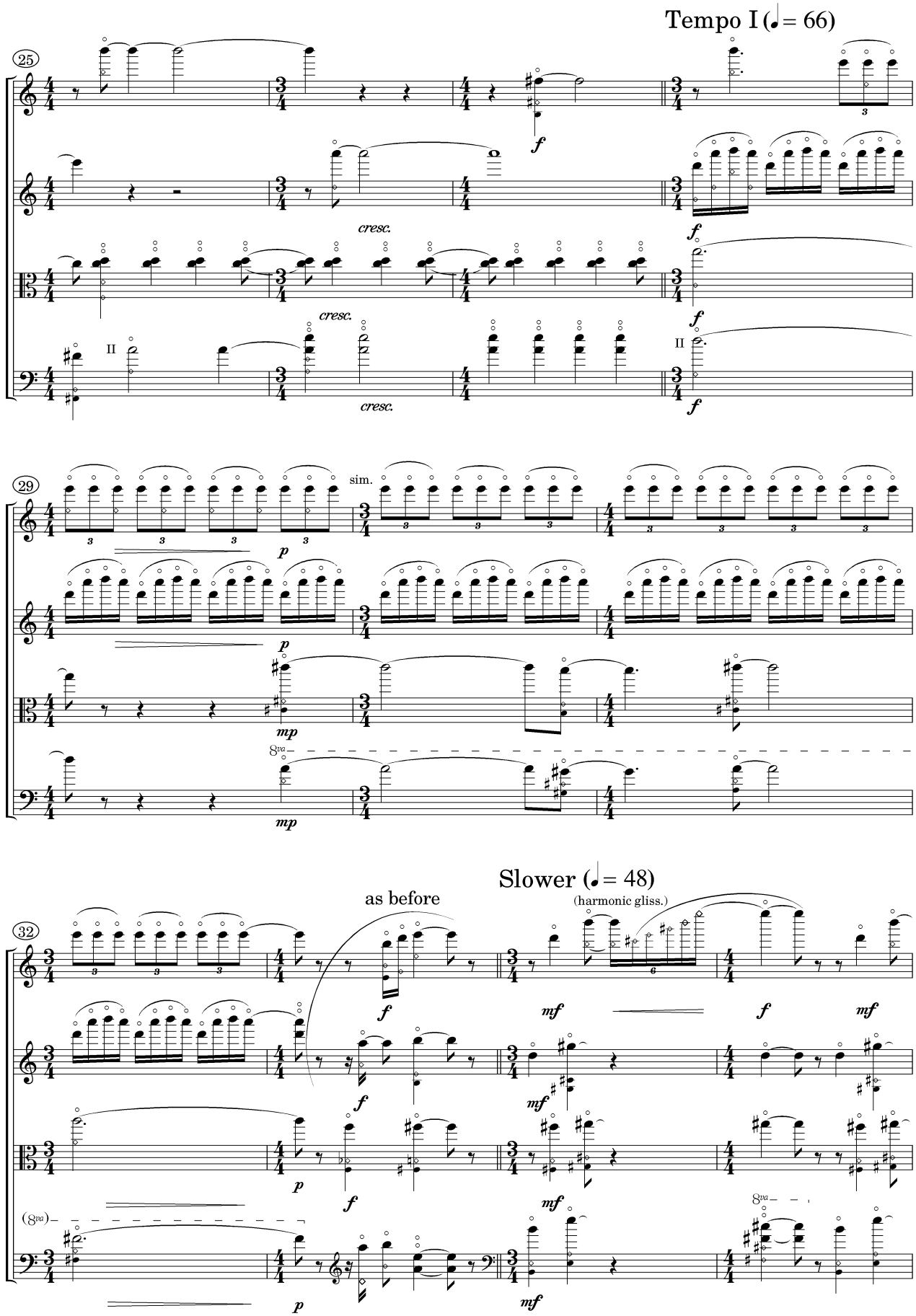

48
fff
sparkling
p f
fff
sparkling
p f
(harm. gliss.)
(III)
let ring
f
fff
fff
p

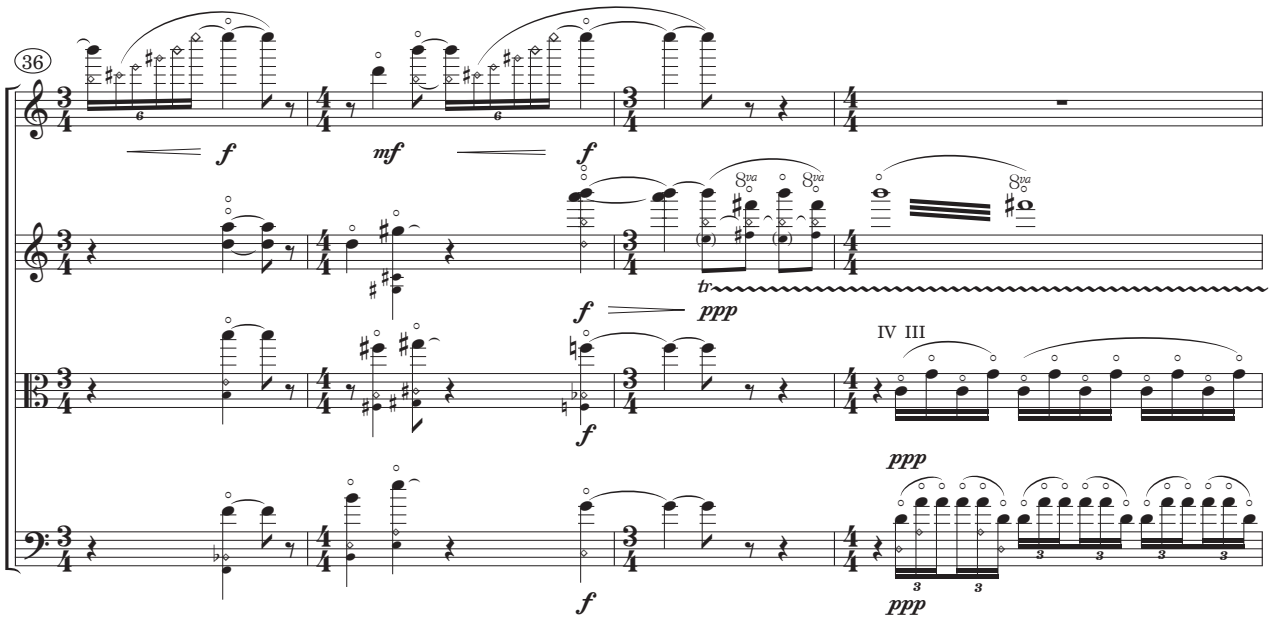
*[arpeggione]*

# 3.

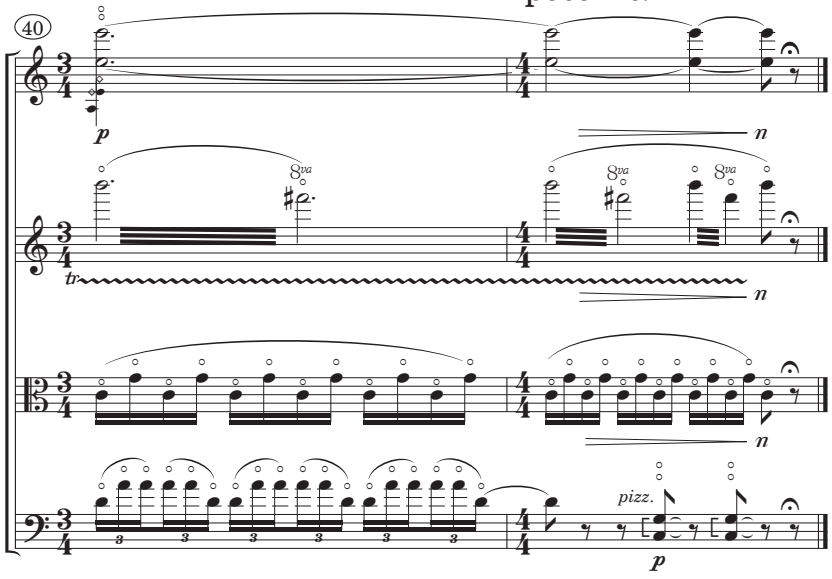

Slowly; delicate, ethereal ♩= 66
still
fp
still
fp
still
fp
II
(I)
sempre p
8va
still
fp
5
sempre p
singing
mp
sim.
singing
8va
mp
as one motion
Slower; softly rocking ♩= 48
8
flashing
f
dovetail with VLN. II
mf
p
flashing
f
flashing
f
pulsating
p
(8va)
flashing
f
pulsating
p


13
dovetail with VLN. I
mf
17
21
f
mf
p


Tempo I (♩= 66)
25
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
II
II
29
sim.
8va
(8va)
Slower (♩= 48)
as before
(harmonic gliss.)
32



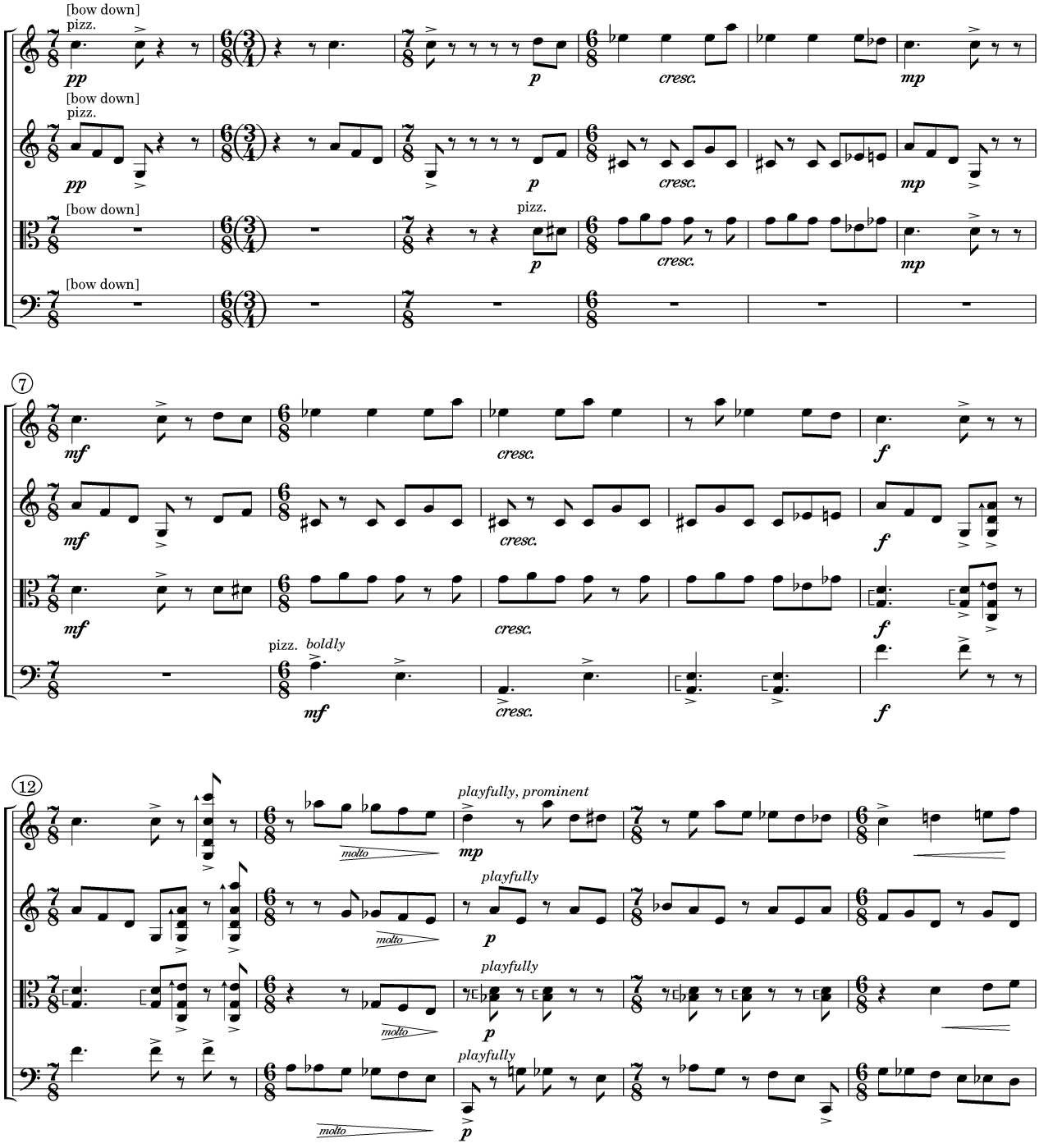

poco rit.

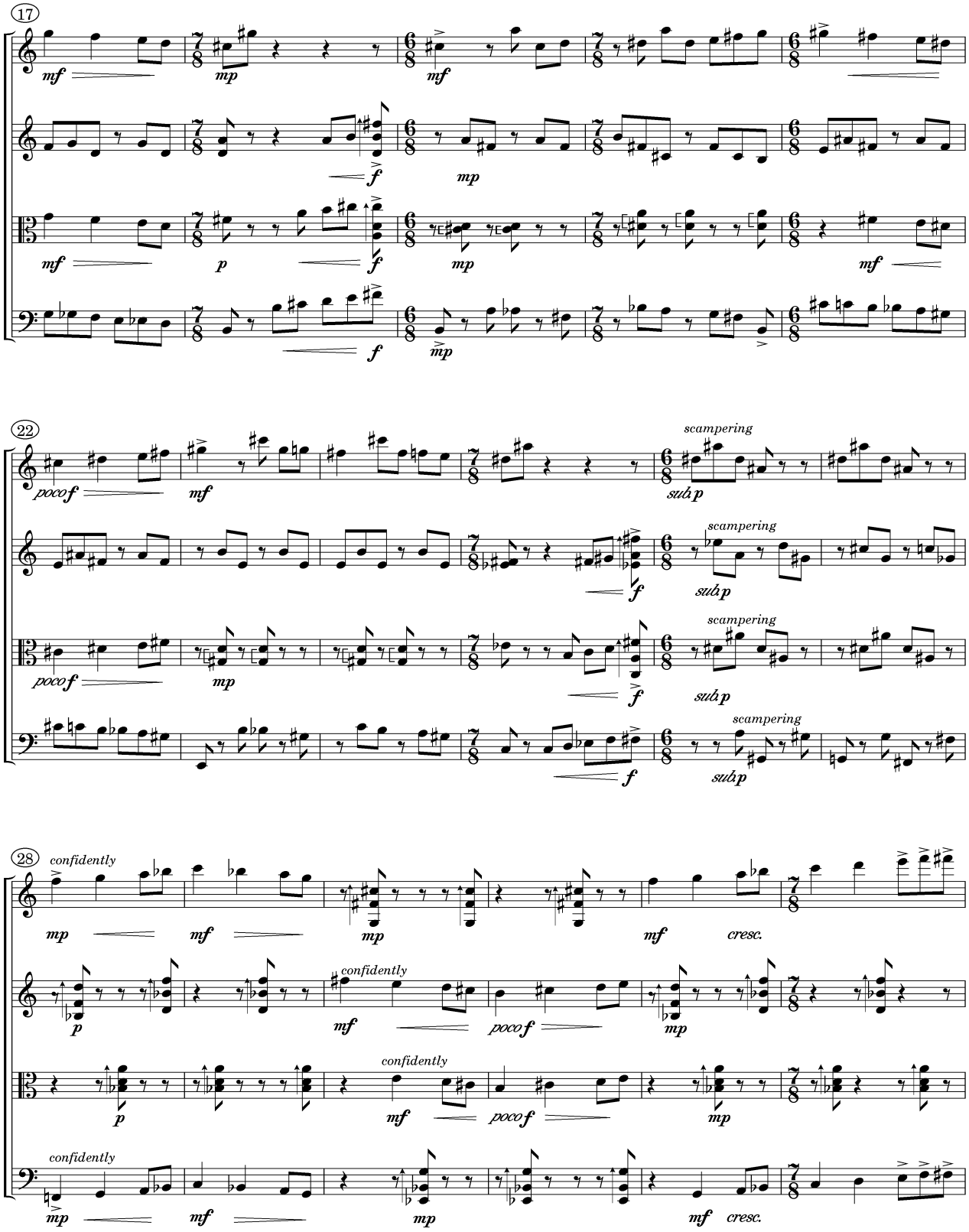


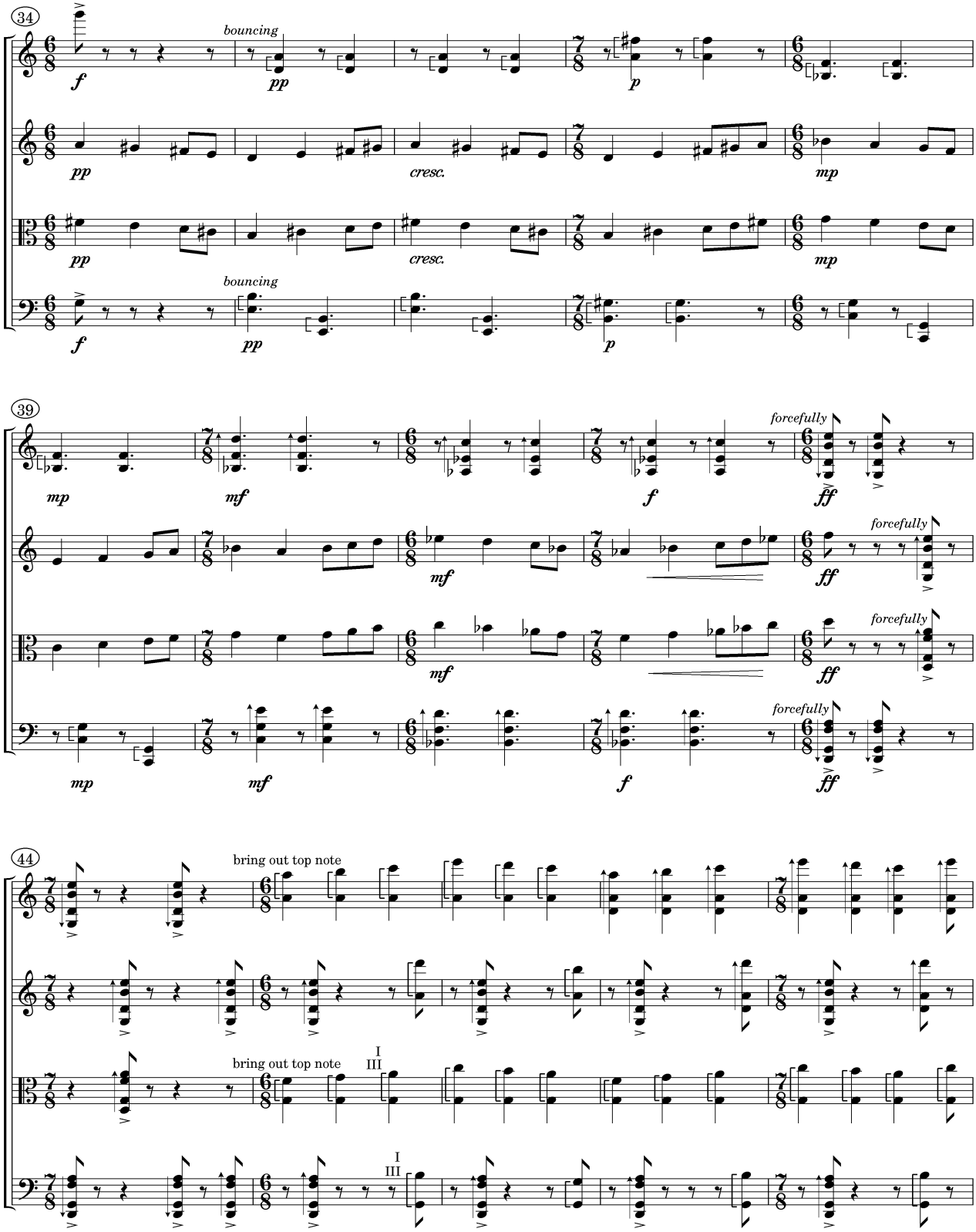

*[armonica]*

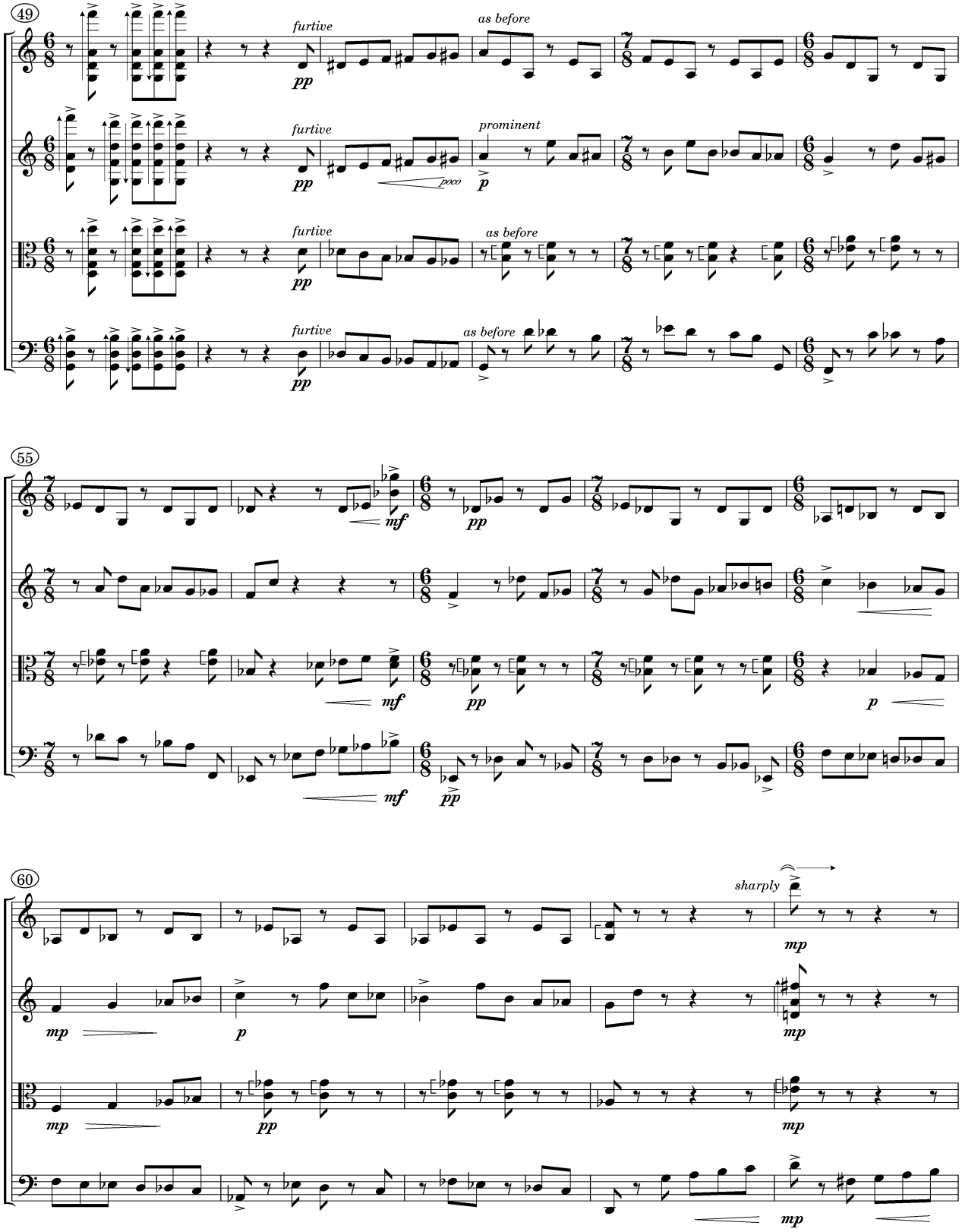
# 4.

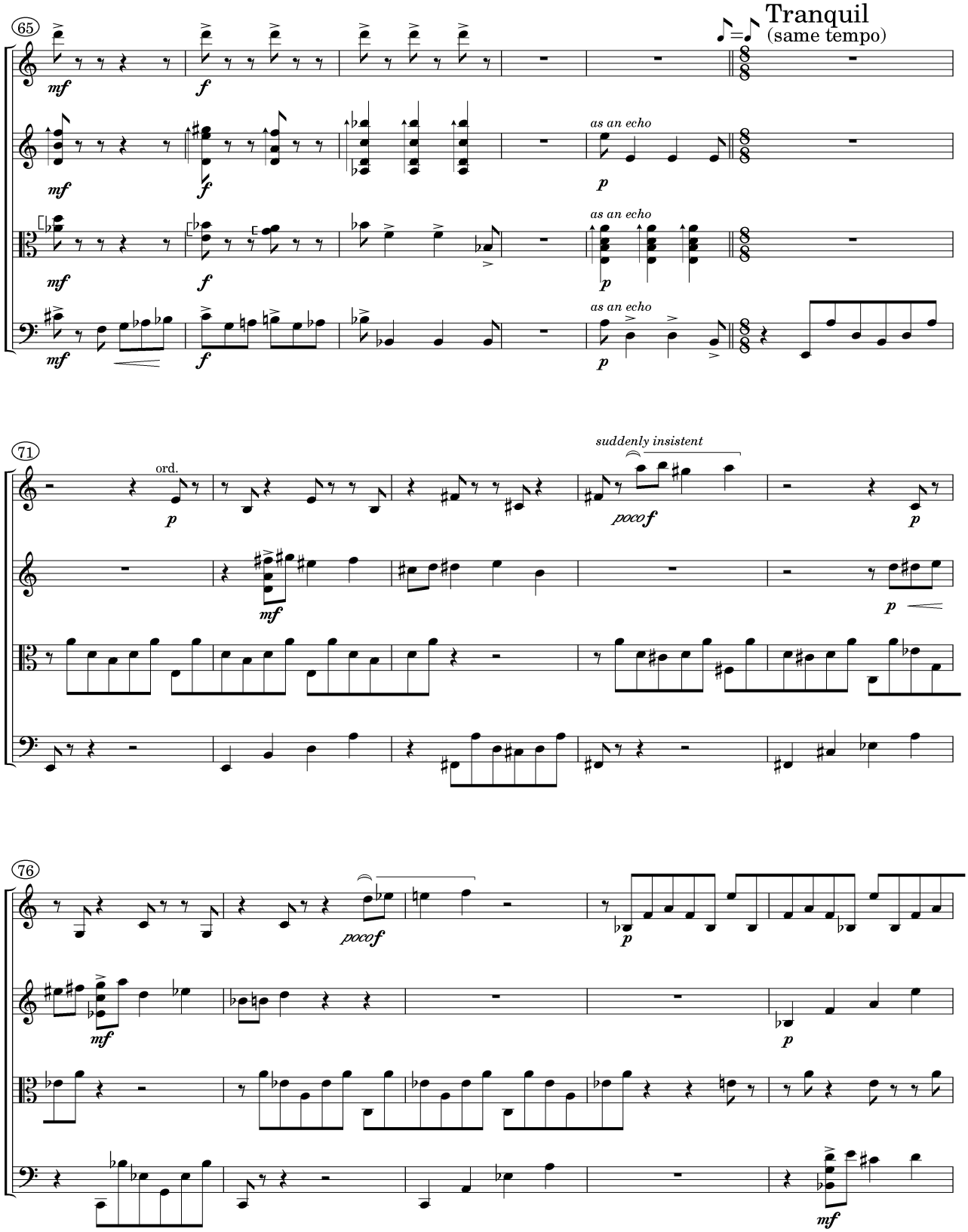
Quickly; humorous, lively ♩.= 96 (♪= 288)

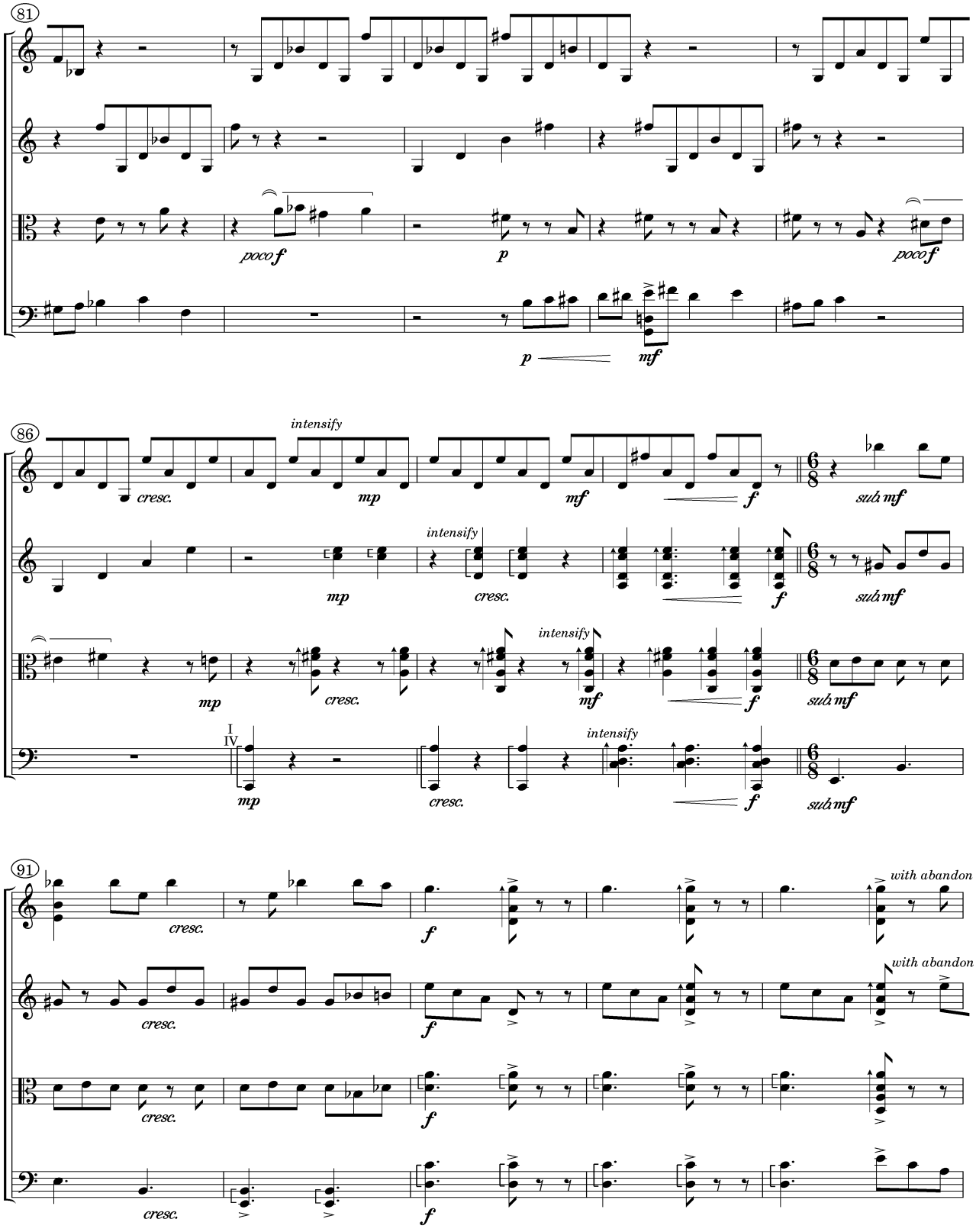


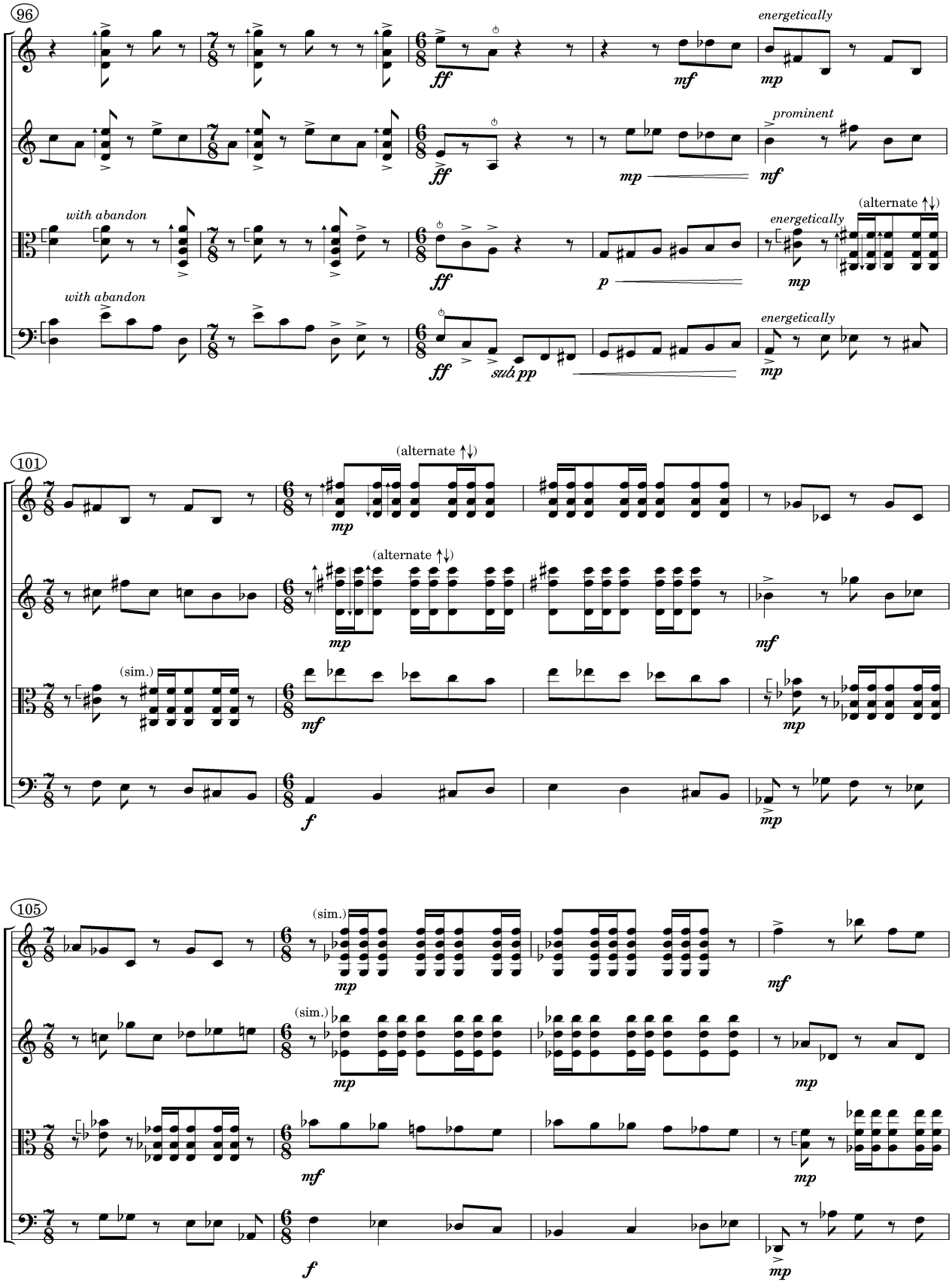

17
22
28
confidently
scampering
cresc.

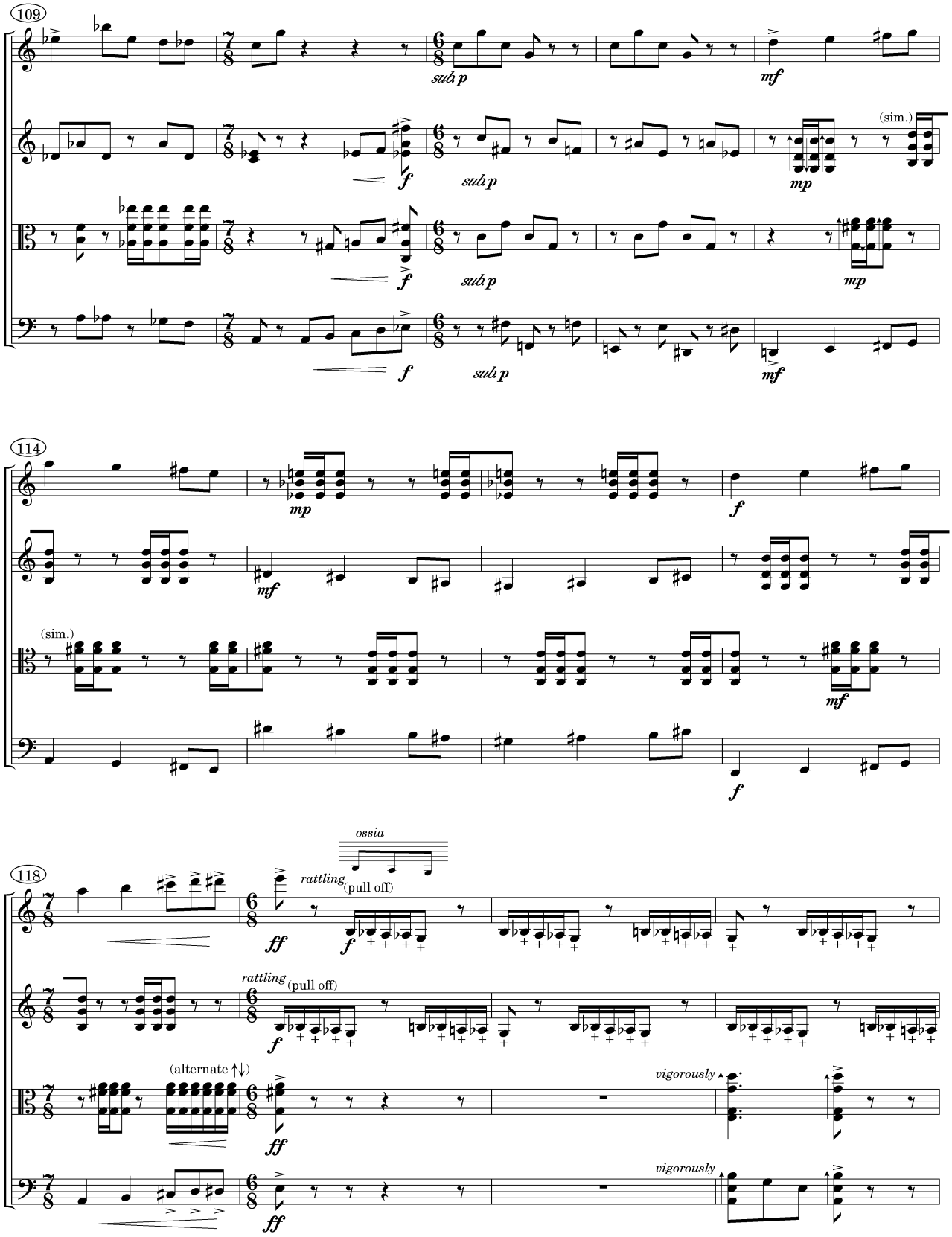

34
bouncing
f
pp
p
cresc.
mp
39
mf
f
forcefully
ff
44
bring out top note
I
III

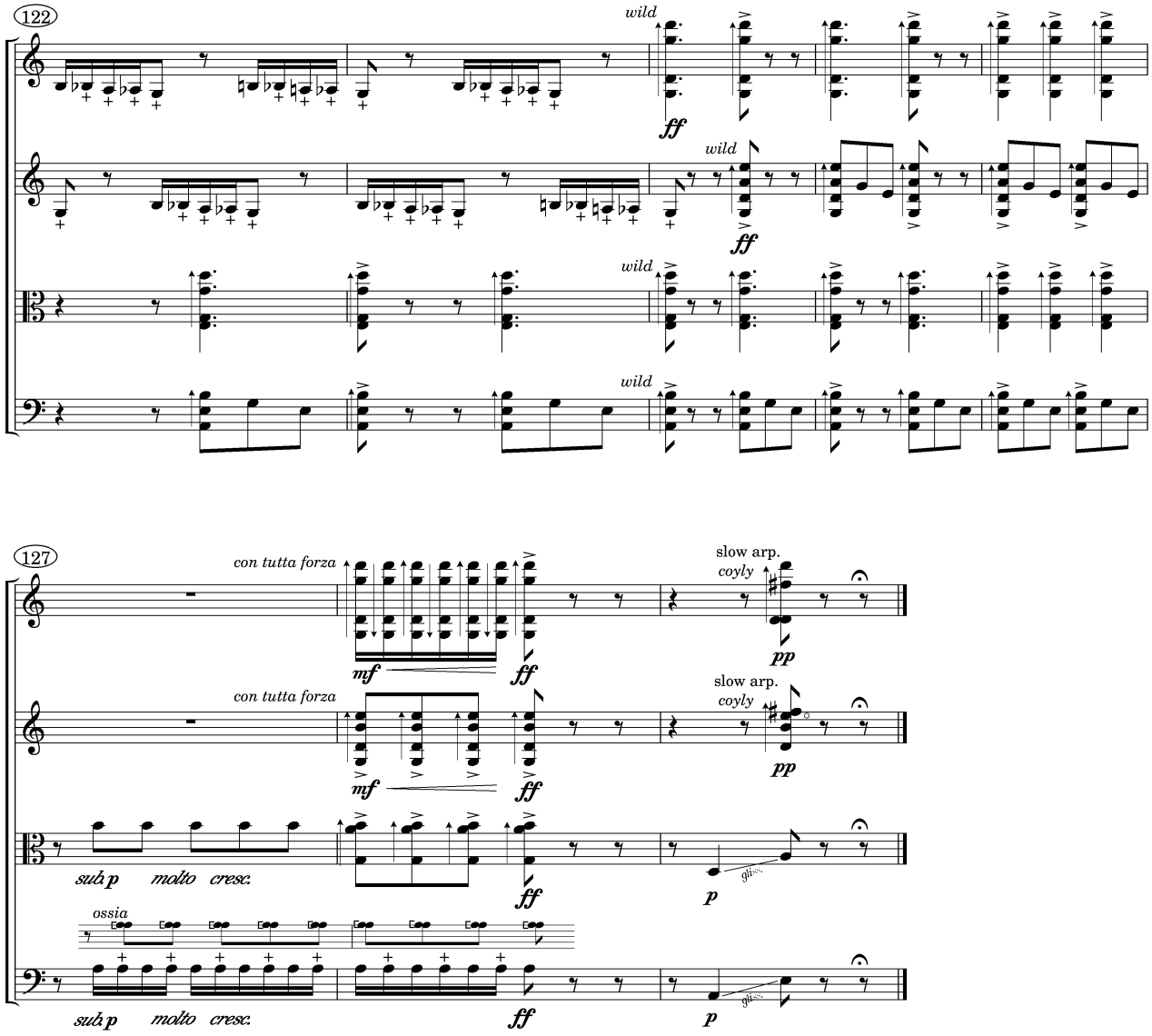

49
furtive
pp
as before
furtive
pp
poco
prominent
p
furtive
pp
as before
furtive
pp
as before
55
mf
pp
mf
pp
p
60
sharply
mp
mp
p
mp
mp
pp
mp
mp


65
Tranquil
(same tempo)
as an echo
71
ord.
suddenly insistent
76


81
poco f
p
poco f
p
mf
86
intensify
cresc.
mp
mf
f
sub. mf
intensify
mp
cresc.
f
sub. mf
intensify
mp
cresc.
mf
f
sub. mf
I
IV
mp
cresc.
intensify
f
sub. mf
91
cresc.
f
with abandon
cresc.
f
with abandon
cresc.
f
cresc.
f


96
energetically
ff
mf
mp
prominent
with abandon
(alternate ↑↓)
sub pp
101
(sim.)
f
105


109
sub. p
mf
(sim.)
f
sub. p
mp
f
sub. p
mp
f
sub. p
mf
114
mp
f
mf
(sim.)
mf
f
118
ossia
rattling
(pull off)
ff
f
rattling
(pull off)
f
(alternate ↑↓)
ff
vigorously
vigorously
ff


122
wild
ff
wild
ff
wild
wild
127
con tutta forza
mf
ff
slow arp.
coyly
pp
con tutta forza
mf
ff
slow arp.
coyly
pp
sub. p
molto cresc.
ff
p
ossia
sub. p
molto cresc.
ff
p

*[guitarra]*