Steven Snowden

Appalachian Polaroids

String Quartet

Appalachian Polaroids

Program Notes:

Appalachian Polaroids was initially inspired by the controversial portrait photography of Shelby Lee Adams (b. 1950). Though sometimes criticized for perpetuating the hillbilly stereotype of rural Appalachia, I feel that his photographs often illuminate the quiet resilience of these remote mountain communities. As a native of the Ozark Mountain countryside, I have always felt a strong connection with my neighbors to the East. In *Appalachian Polaroids,* I chose to create my own *musical* portrait of the unique mix of hardship and joy that comes with living an isolated rural life.

This piece begins with a 1976 field recording of Sheila Kay Adams (no relation to Shelby Lee) singing the popular folk song *Black is the Color* in Asheville, North Carolina. The quartet quietly enters as an integrated component of the recording, playing with the wood of their bows to create a slightly noisy effect, similar to the tape hiss present in the old equipment used to record Sheila's stunning voice. Their sound gradually becomes more brilliant until the group finally emerges with crowing figures reminiscent of Appalachian fiddle playing. However, they also carry with them remnants of Sheila's own unique singing style. These attributes, (which include sliding/scooping to and from certain pitches and a subtle yodeling effect at the ends of phrases) expand as the piece progresses and eventually exert their influence on large-scale aspects of melody, rhythm and even form.

Performance Notes:

In performance, the recording does *not* need to be played on a full-sized audio system. In fact, I have found that even playing it back on the built-in speakers of an iPhone or iPod can be sufficient in many situations. If the quartet is playing in a large hall, they may need small battery powered speakers for additional amplification.

Whatever the performance situation, care should be taken to balance the ensemble with the recording for the first 16 measures so that the players are perceived to be accompanying the recording. From measures 17-25 the recording becomes more like a fifth member of the quartet, with the ensemble's dynamic level only occasionally overwhelming it.

All Glissandi should be executed roughly over the entire duration of the first note to which they are attached. However, the ensemble is free to adjust that according to their own interpretation.

"Doit" markings indicate an effect that mimics the subtle yodel that often ends Sheila's phrases in the recording. This can be achieved by firmly fingering approximately a minor third above the current pitch as the bow is lifted off the string. Immediately following that, quickly slide up a fifth or more. All of this occurs after the bow has been lifted off of the string, so it is a fairly quiet and subtle effect.

Appalachian Polaroids

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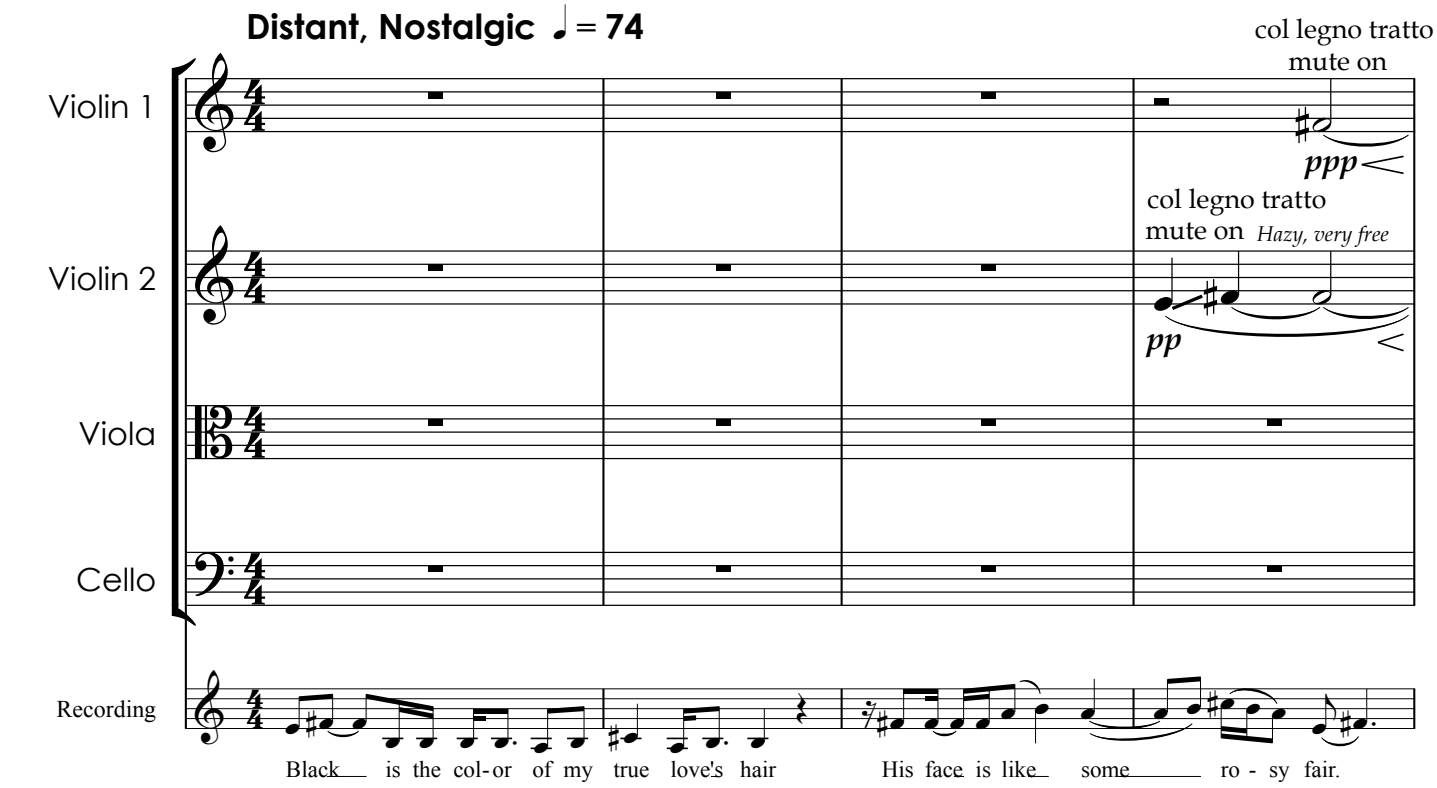

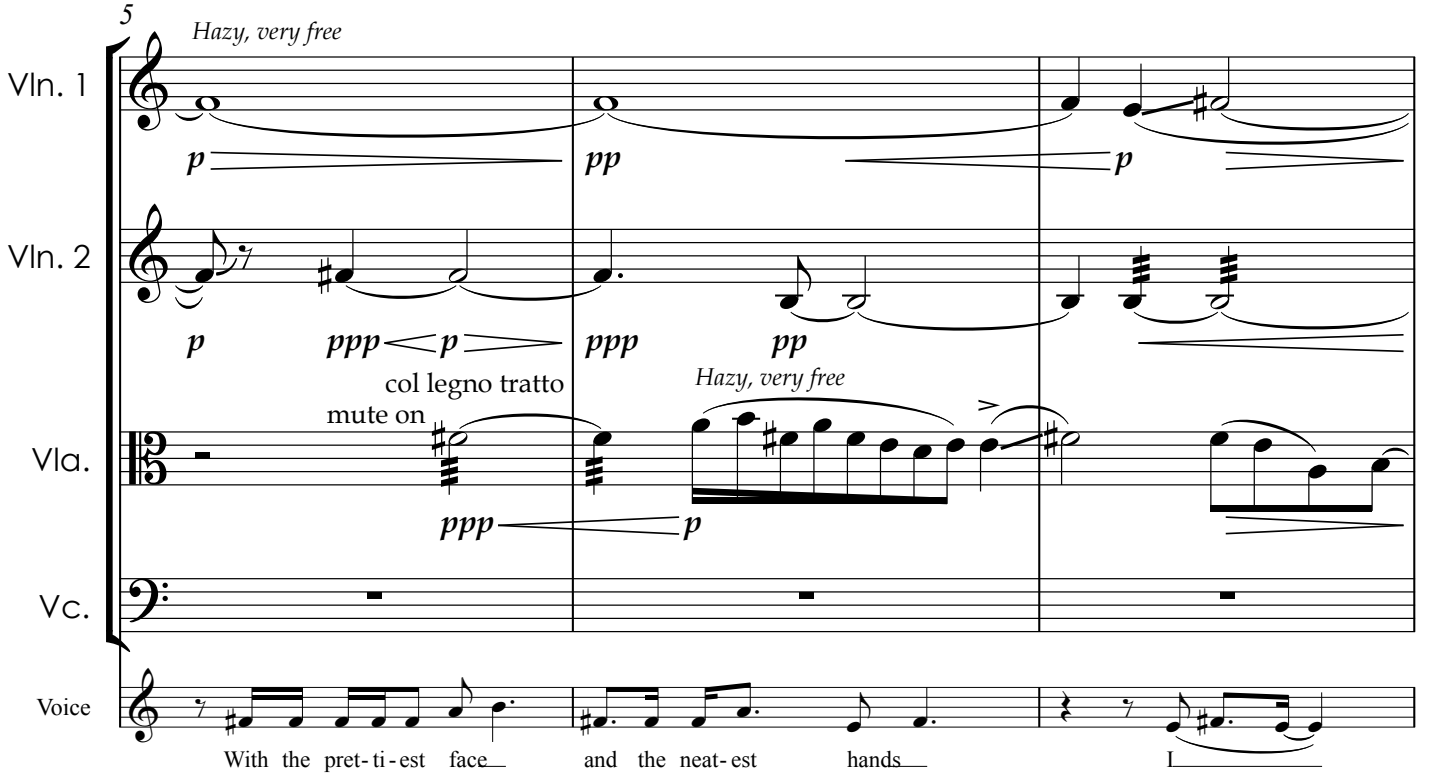

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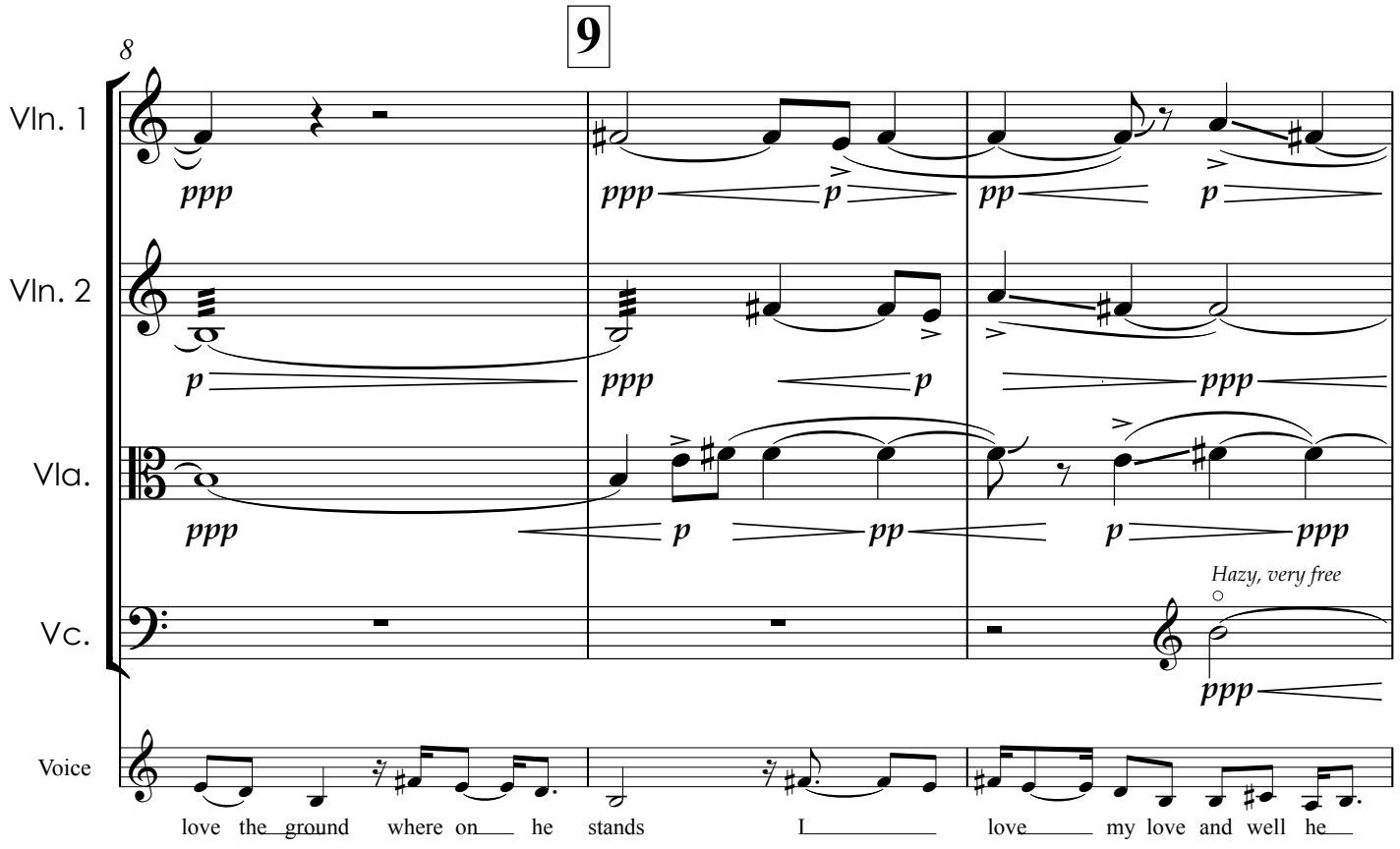
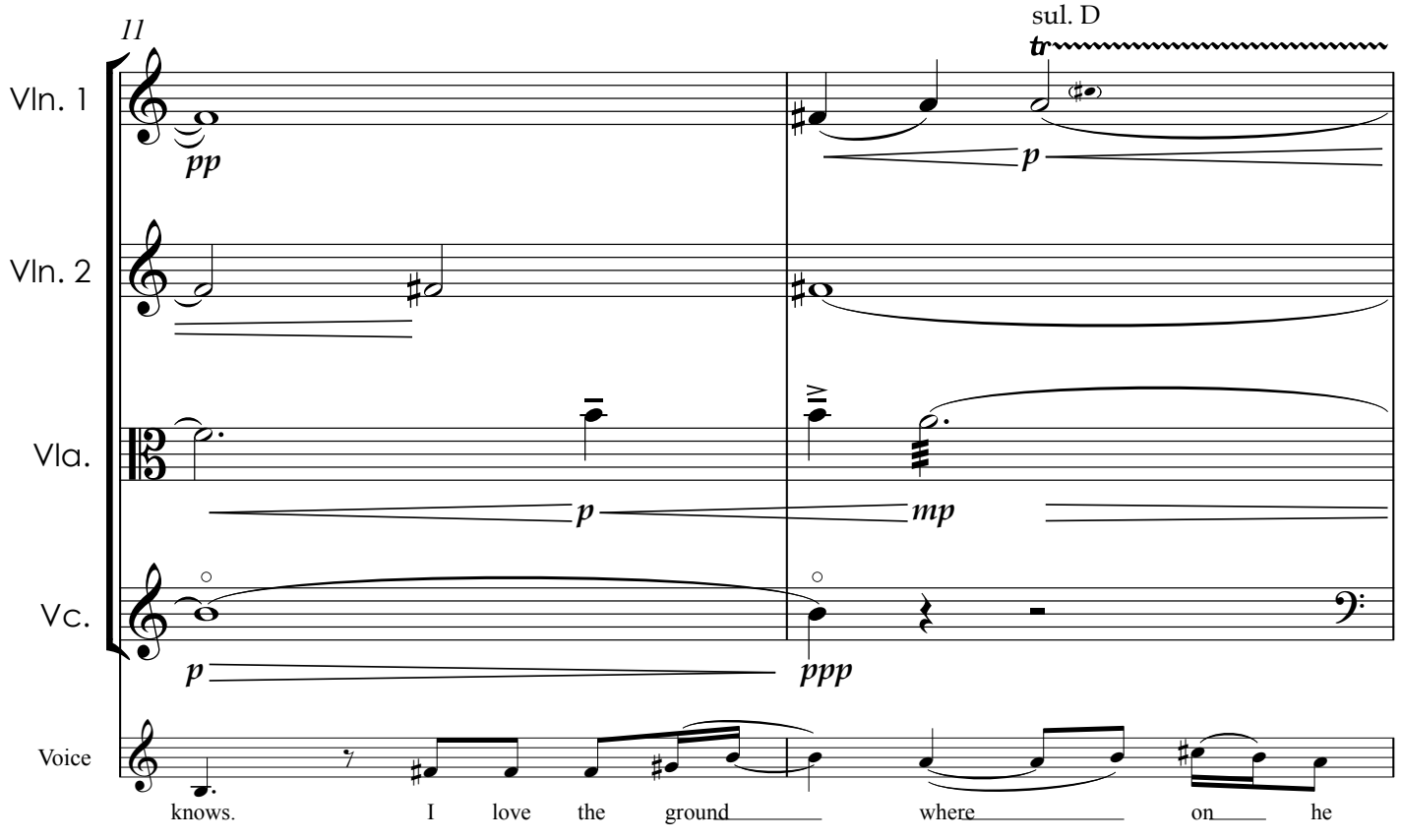
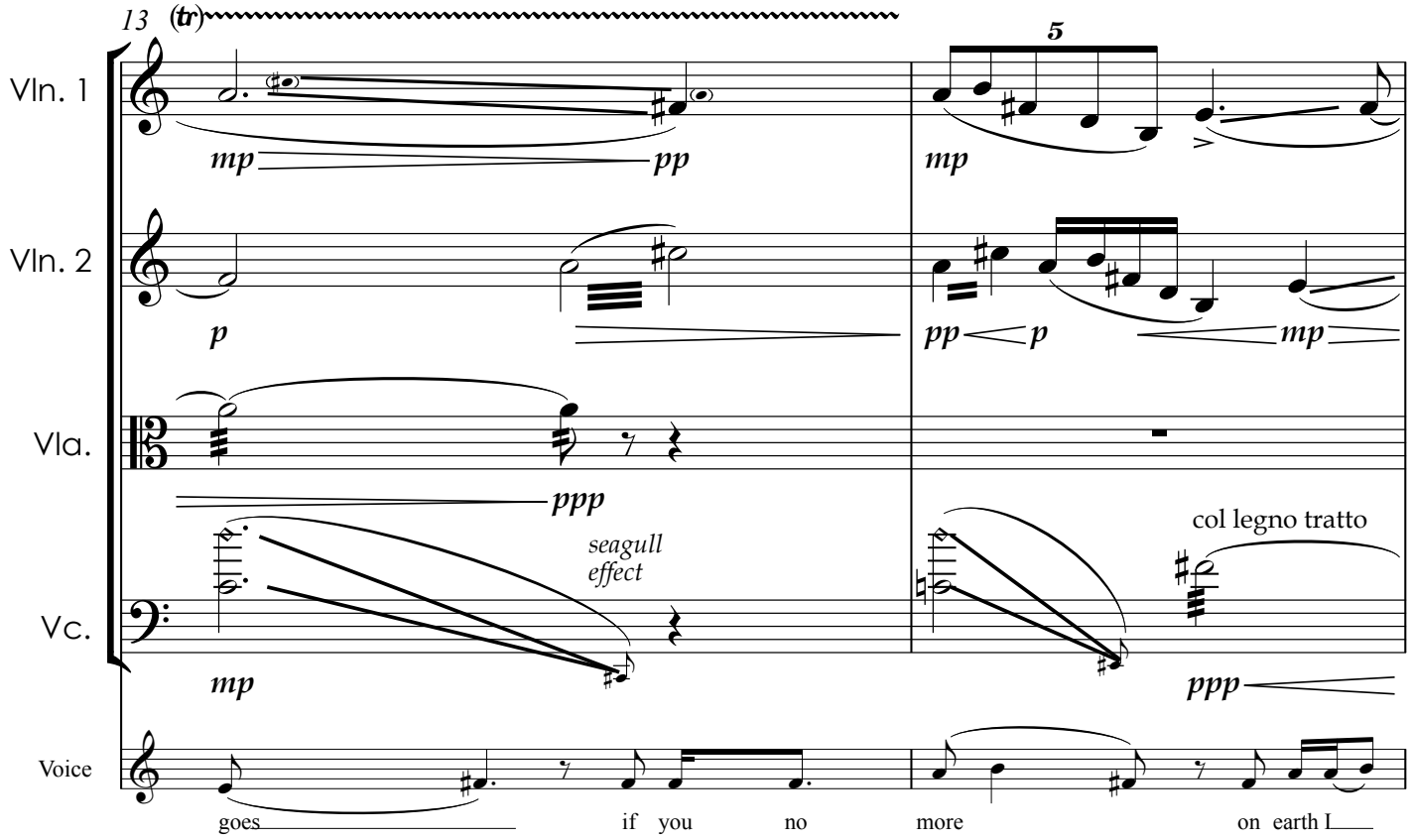
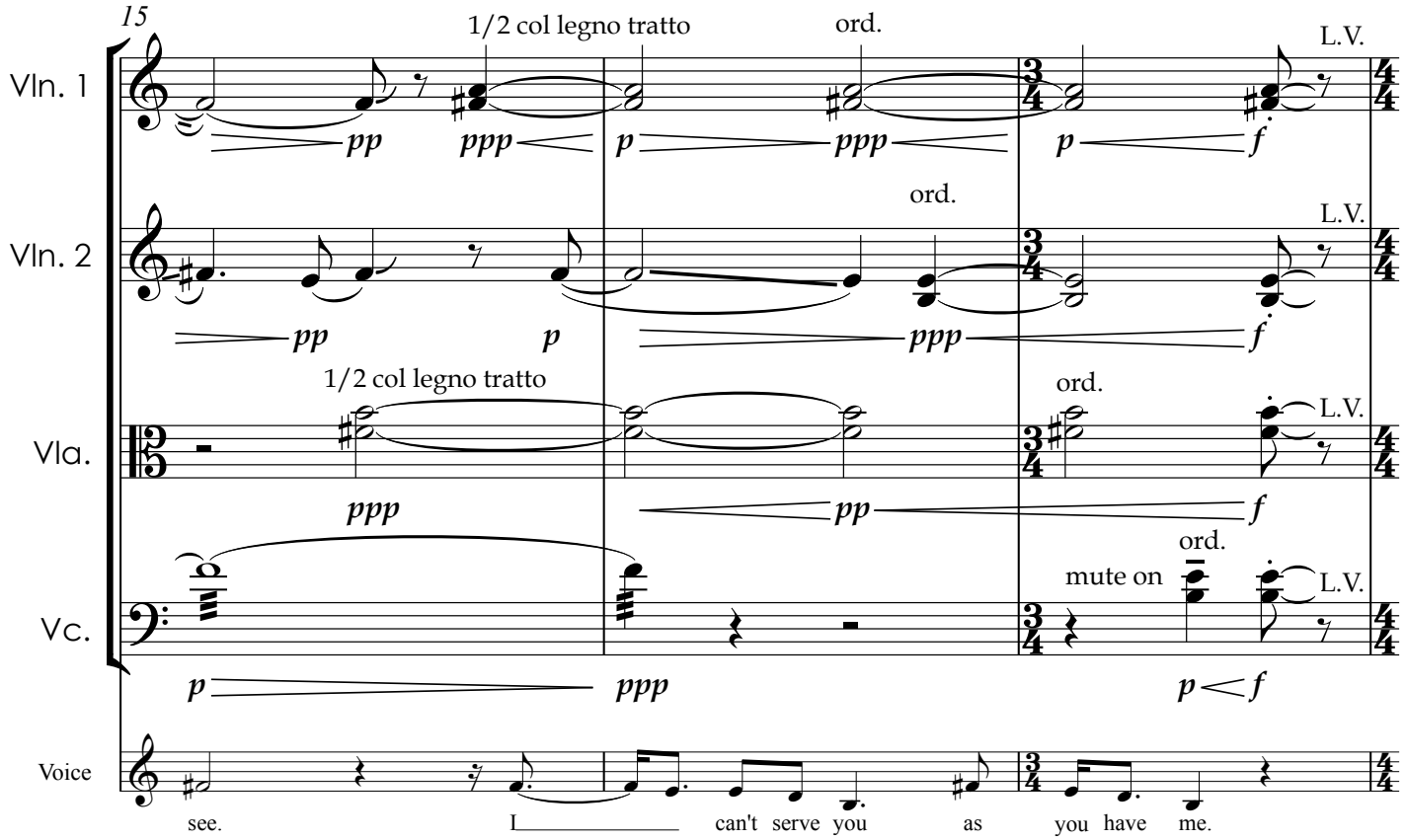
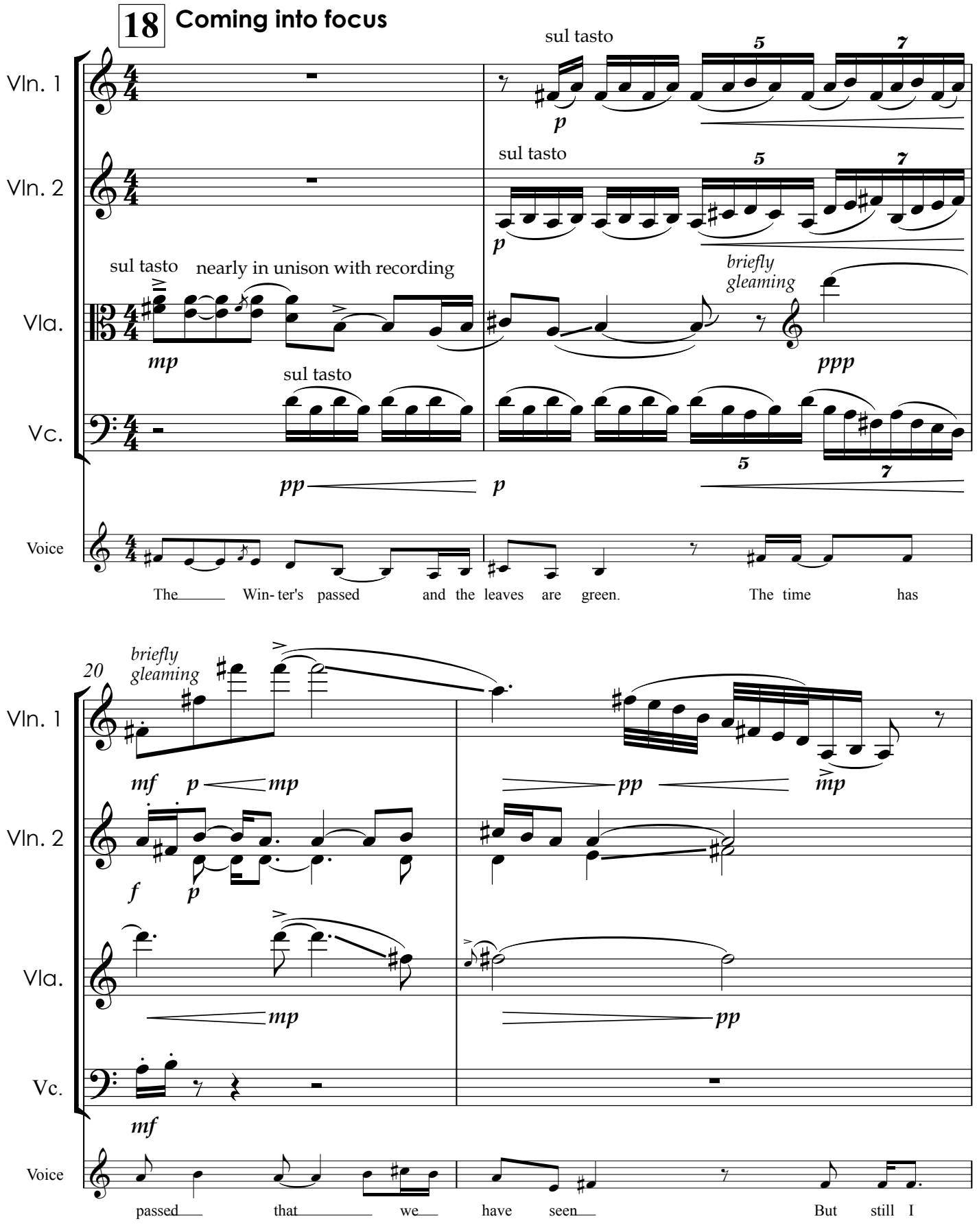
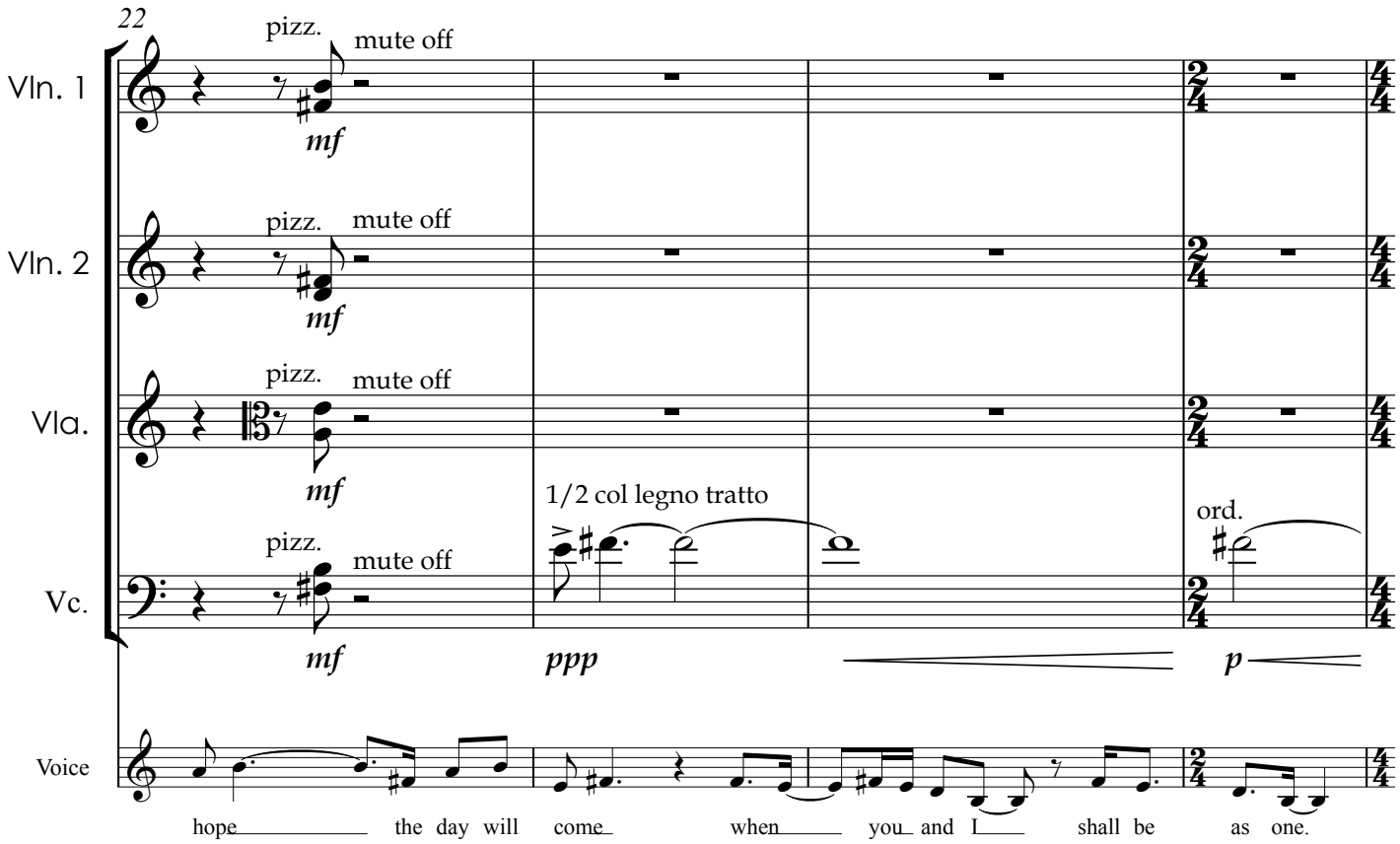

9
8
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
ppp
p
pp
Hazy, very free
love the ground where on he stands I love my love and well he

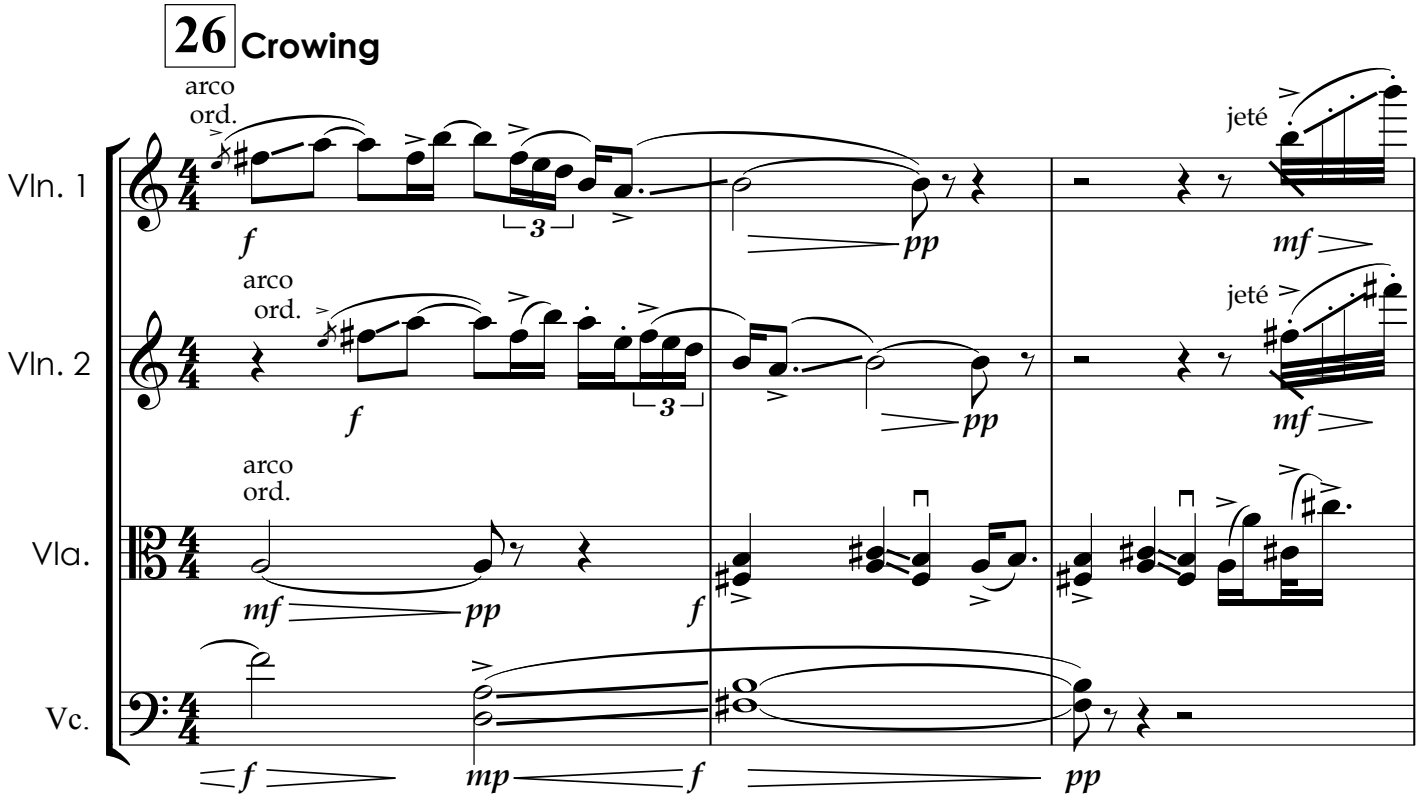

11
sul. D
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
pp
p
mp
ppp
knows. I love the ground where on he

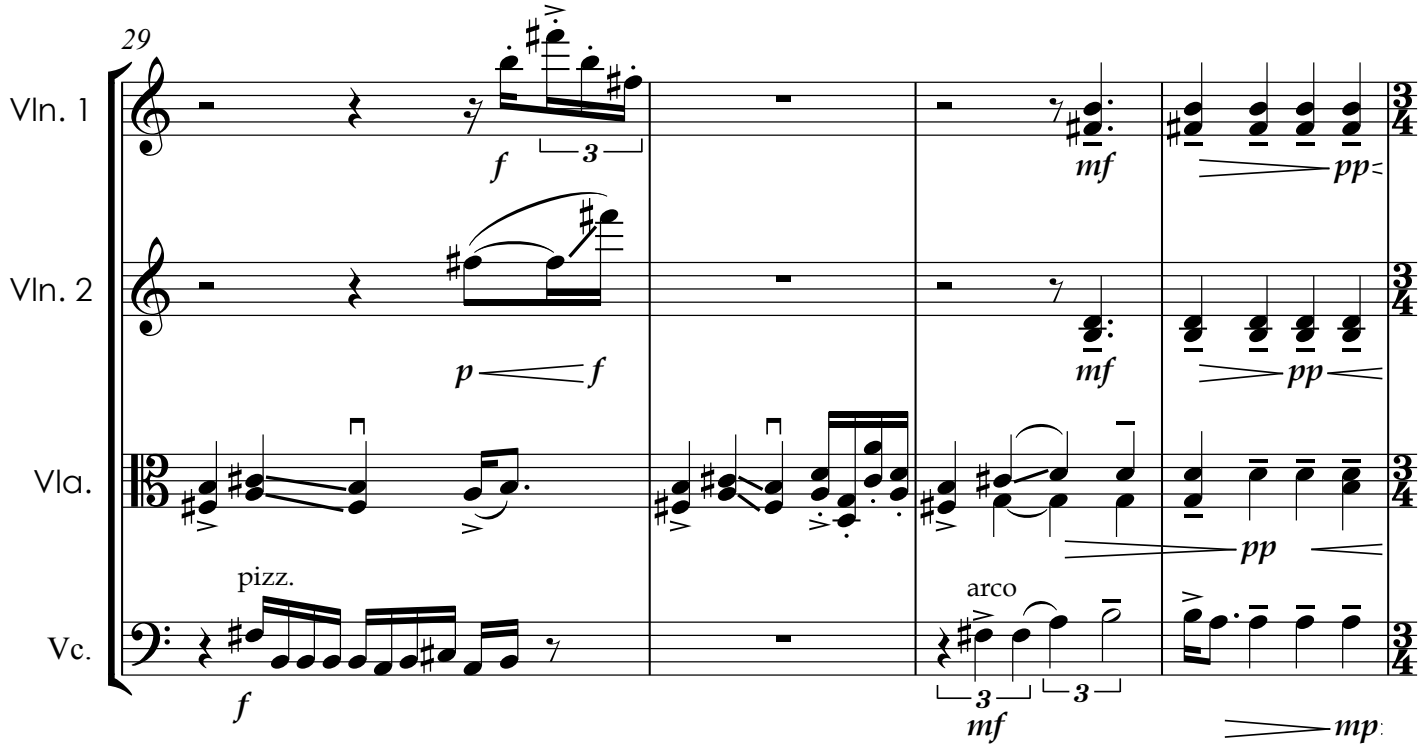

13
(tr)
5
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
mp
pp
p
ppp
seagull effect
col legno tratto
goes
if you no more on earth I

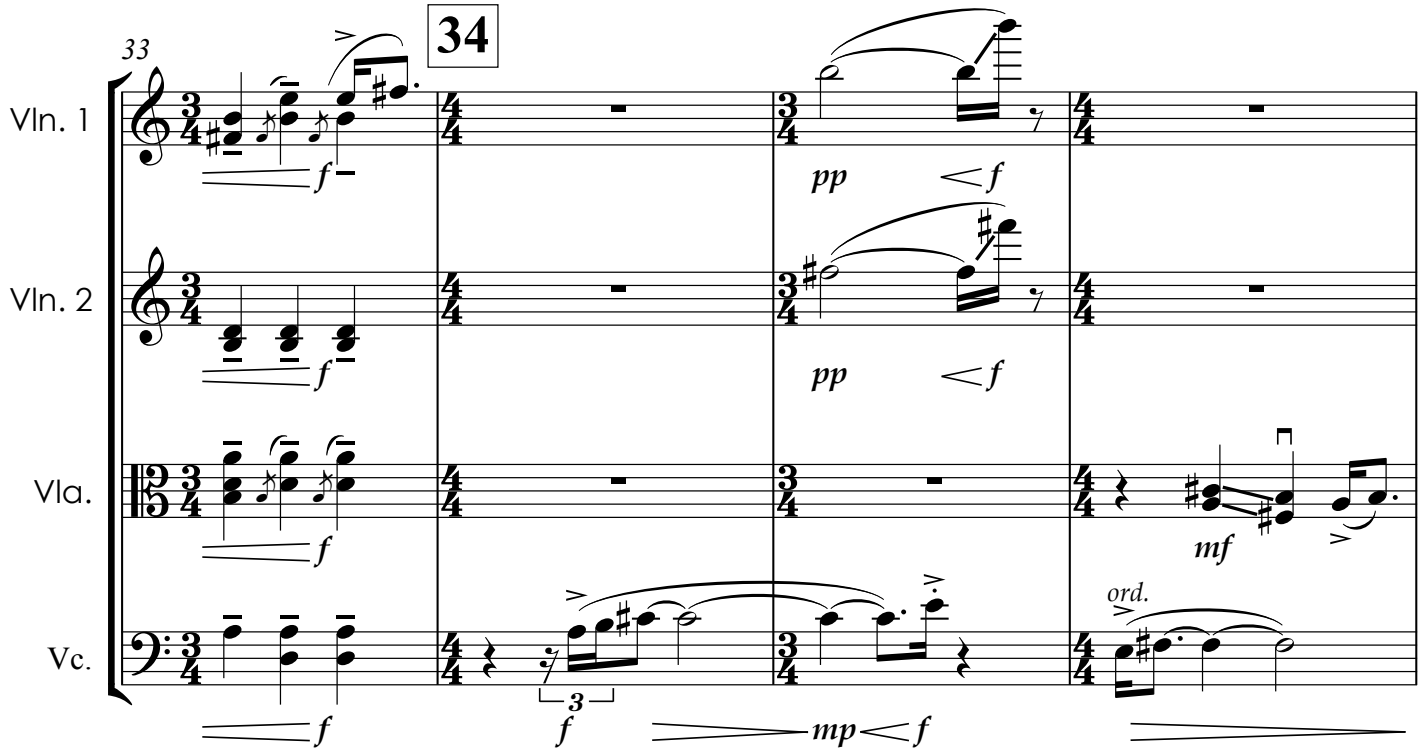

15
1/2 col legno tratto
ord.
L.V.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
pp
ppp
p
f
mute on
see. I can't serve you as you have me.

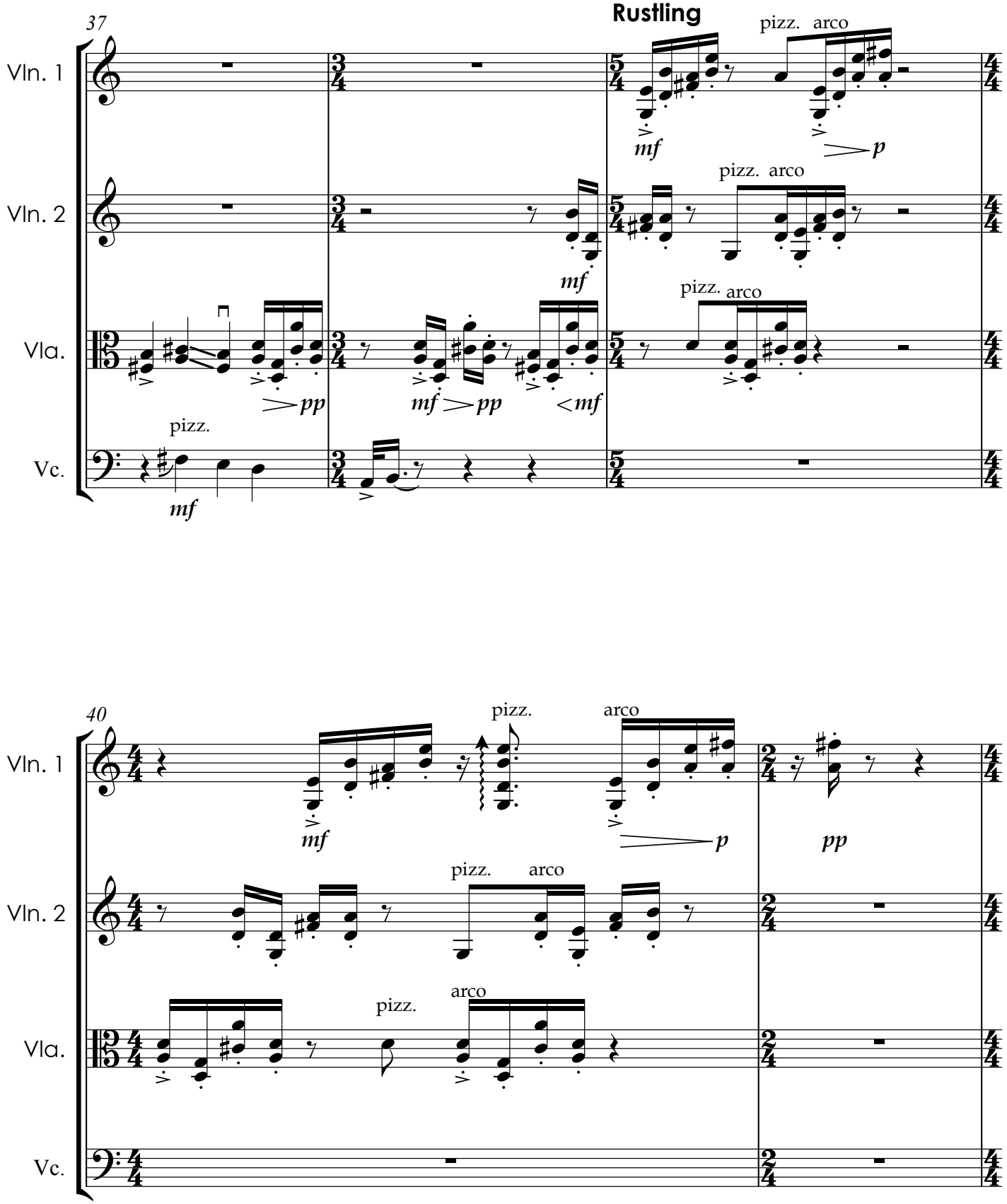

18 Coming into focus
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
sul tasto
nearly in unison with recording
briefly gleaming
The Win- ter's passed and the leaves are green. The time has
20
passed that we have seen But still I

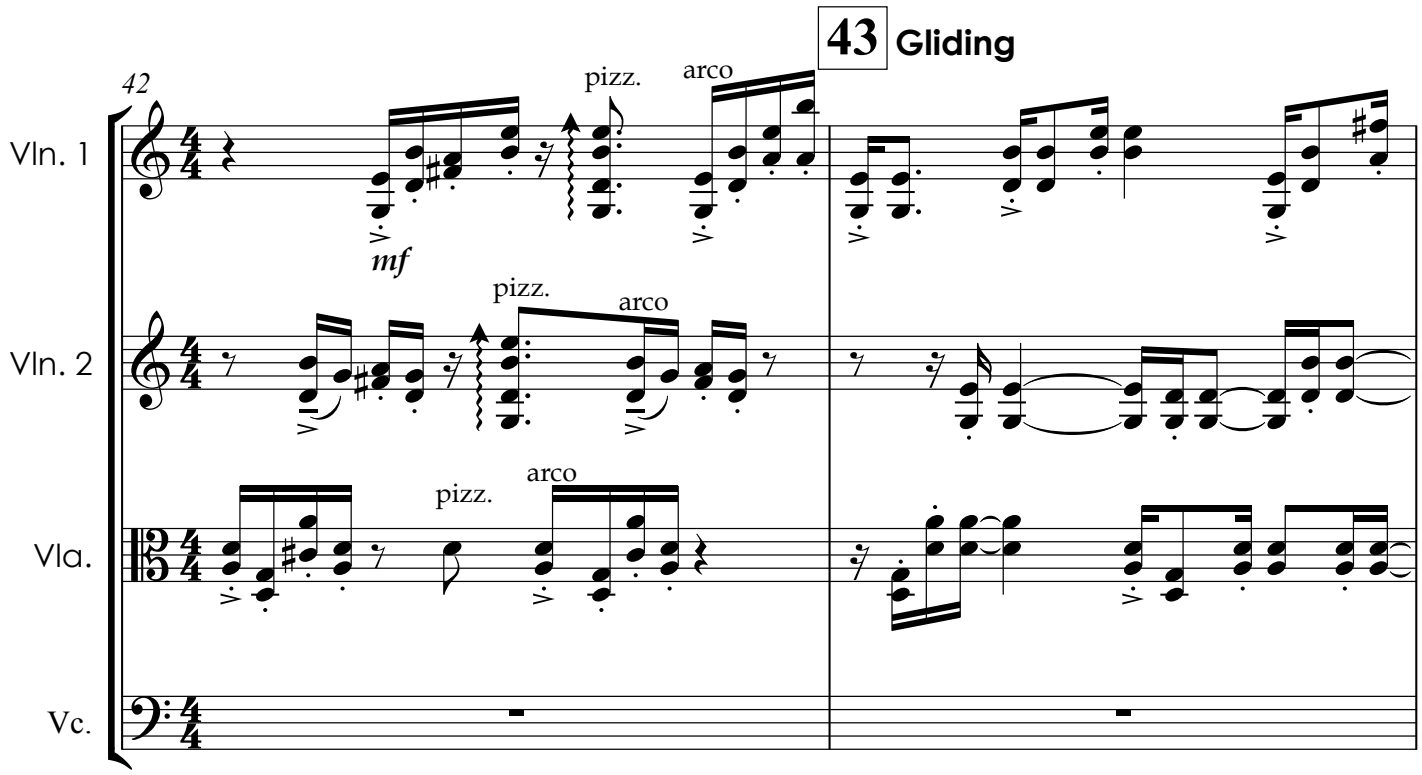

22
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Voice
pizz.
mute off
mf
1/2 col legno tratto
ord.
ppp
p
hope the day will come when you and I shall be as one.

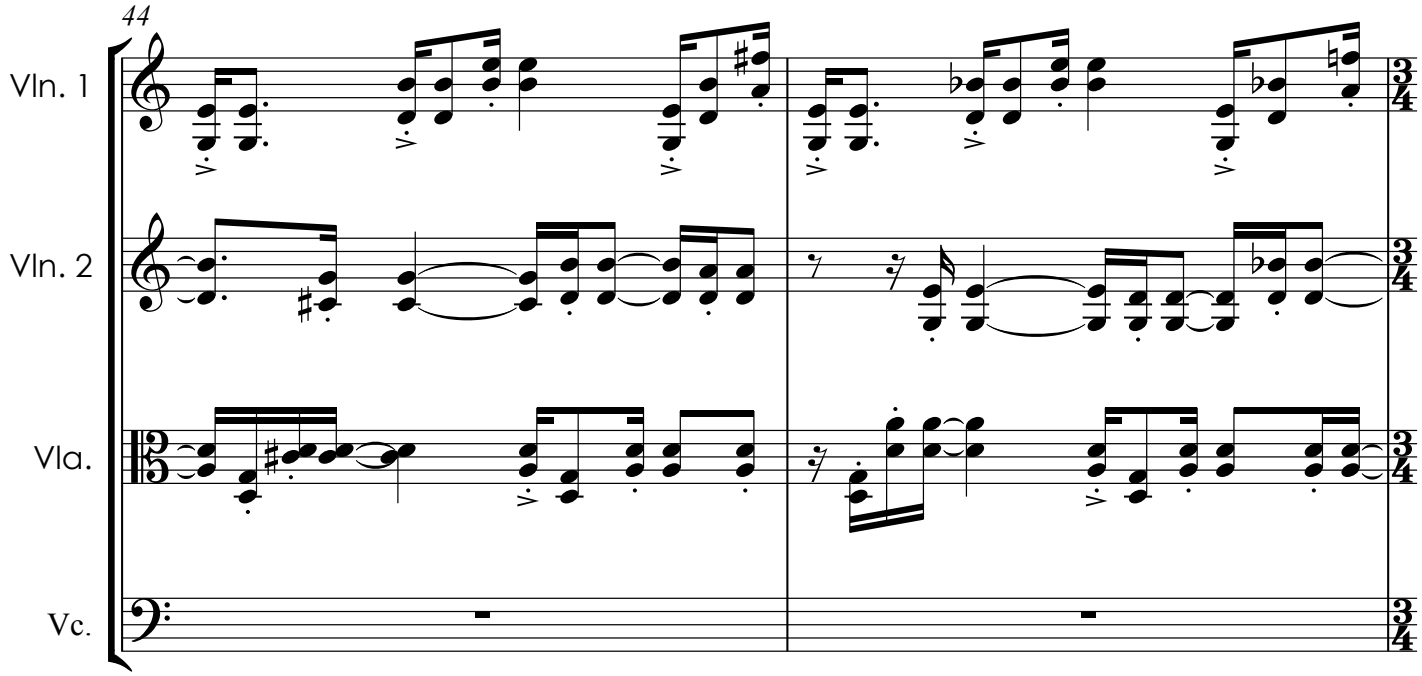

26 Crowing
arco
ord.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
jeté
f
pp
mf
mp

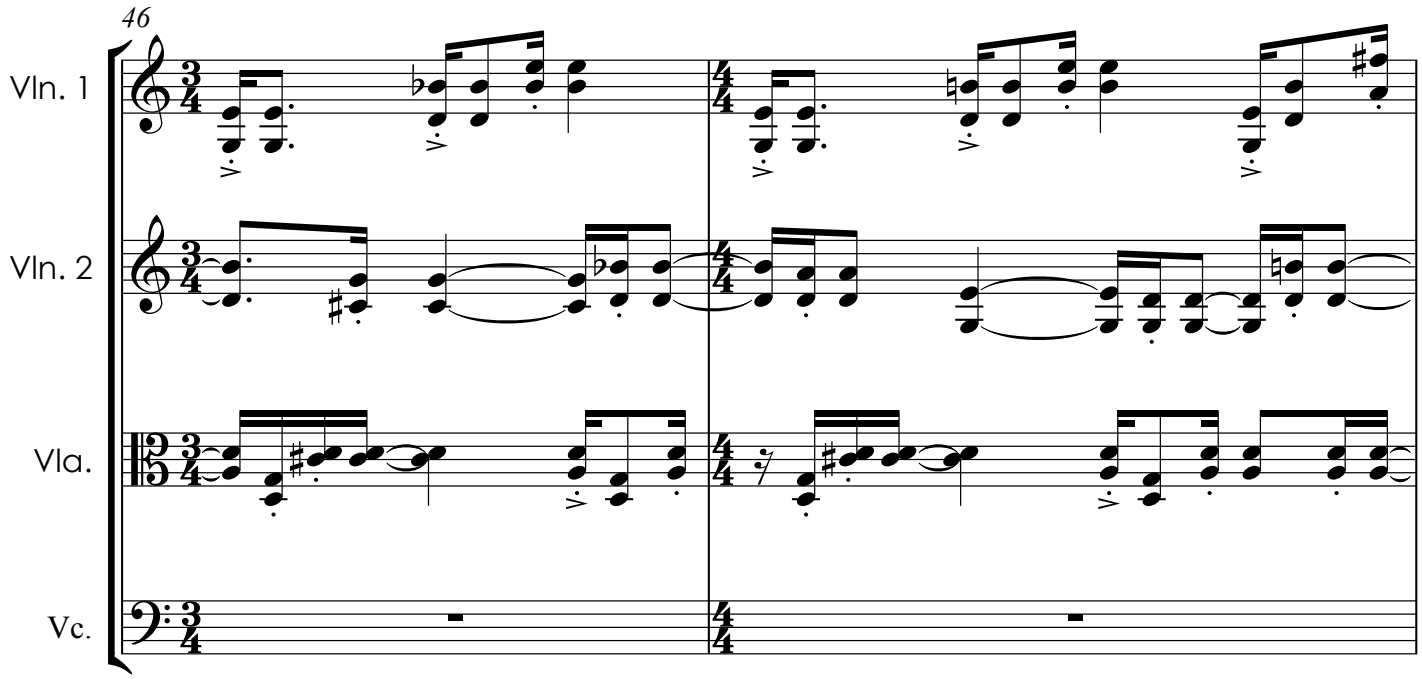

29
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
arco
ord.

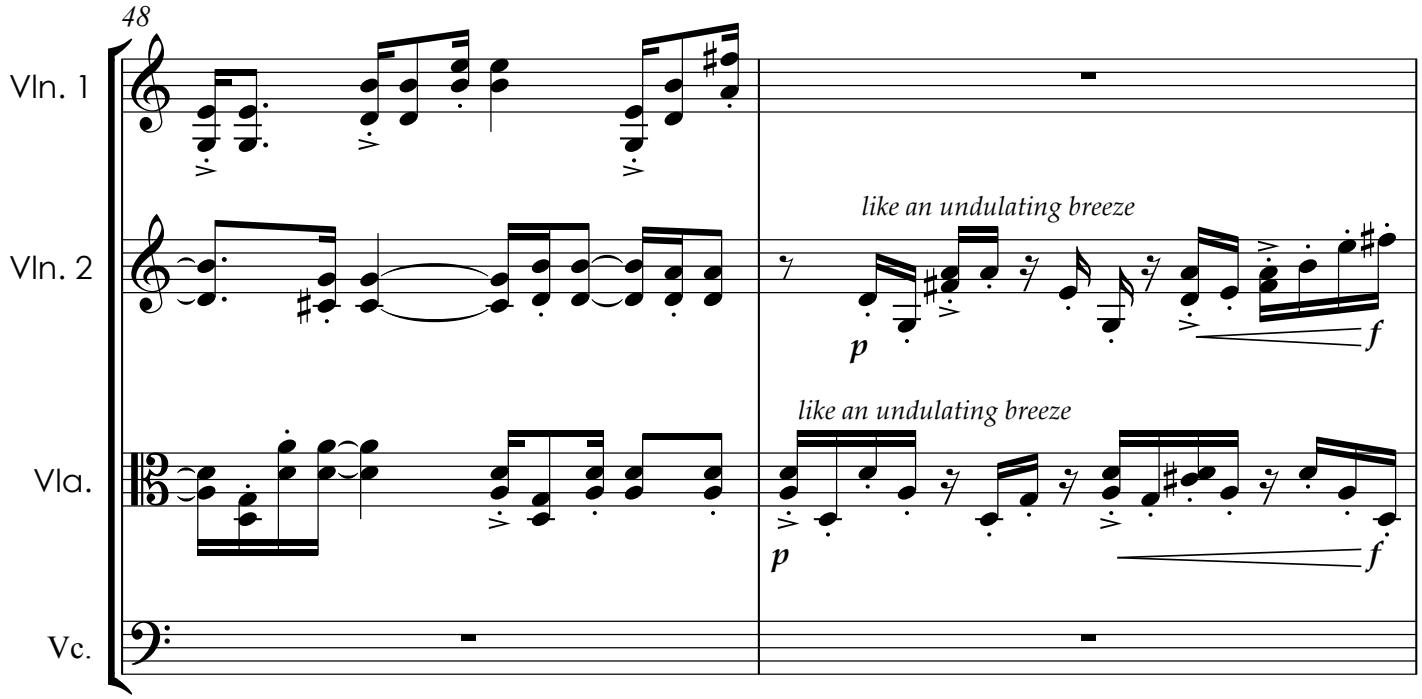

33
34
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
ord.

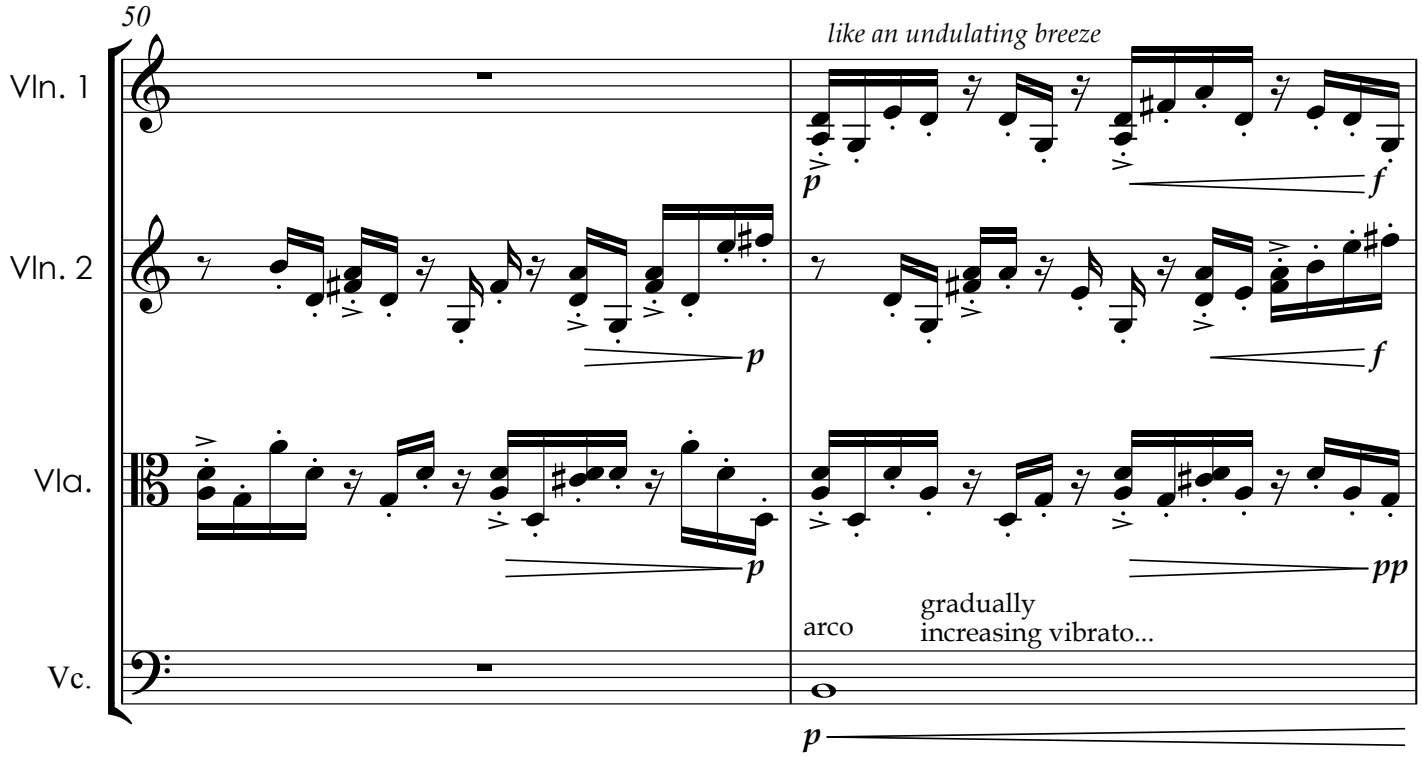

37
Rustling
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
arco
mf
p
pp
40

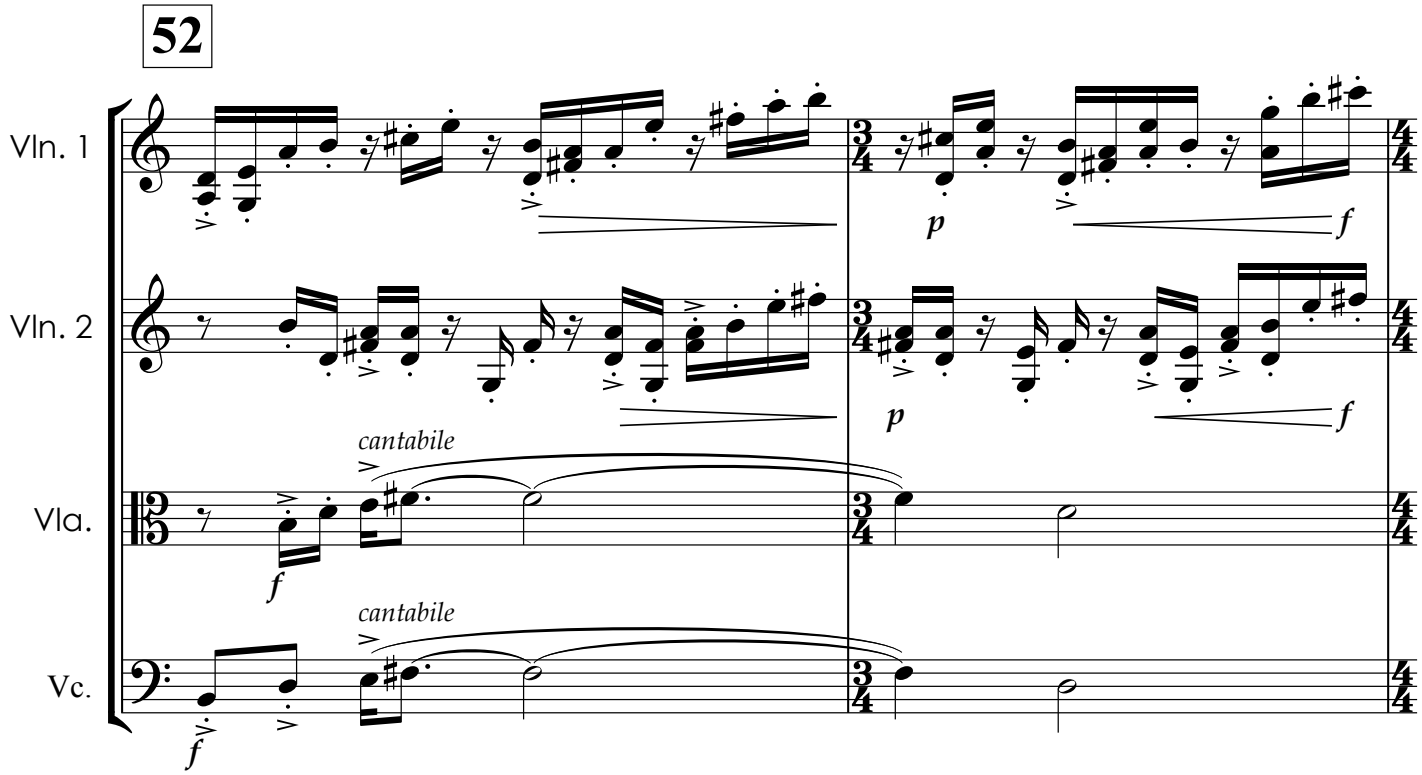

43 Gliding
42
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
arco
mf

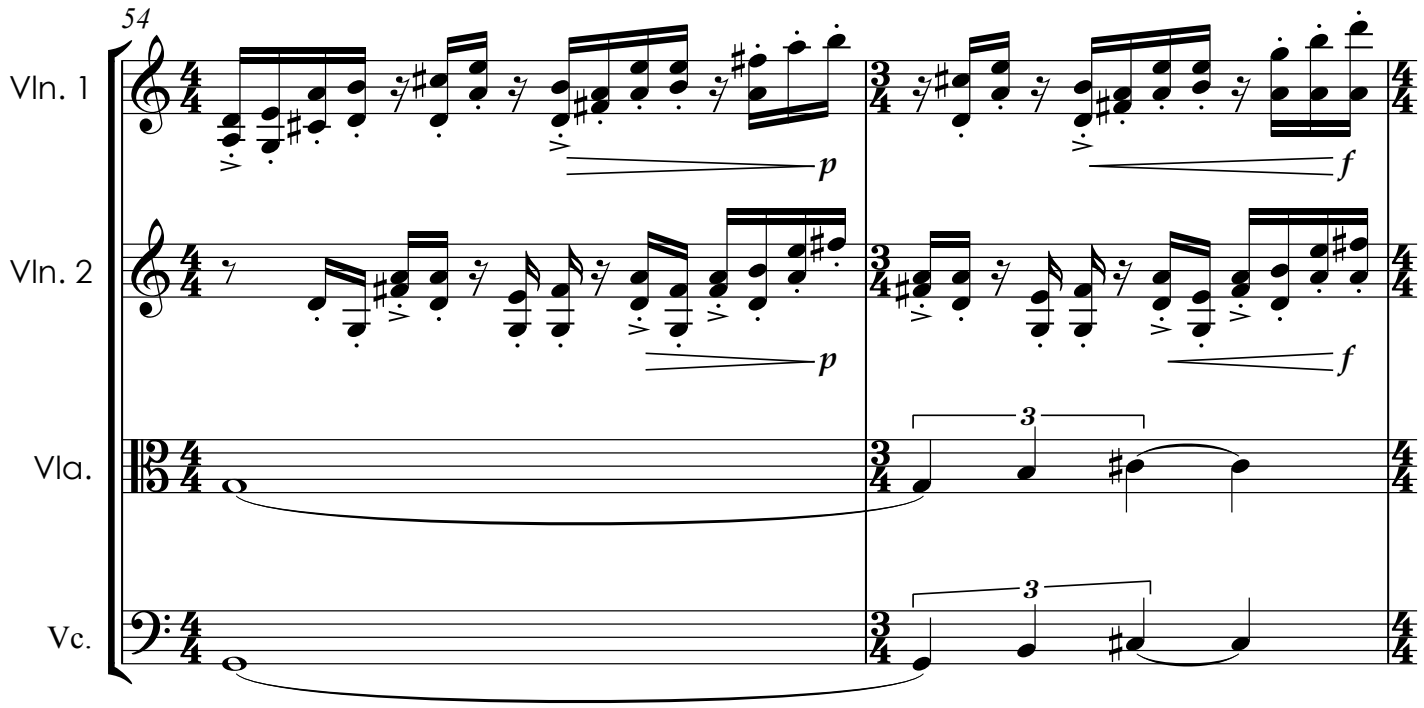

44
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

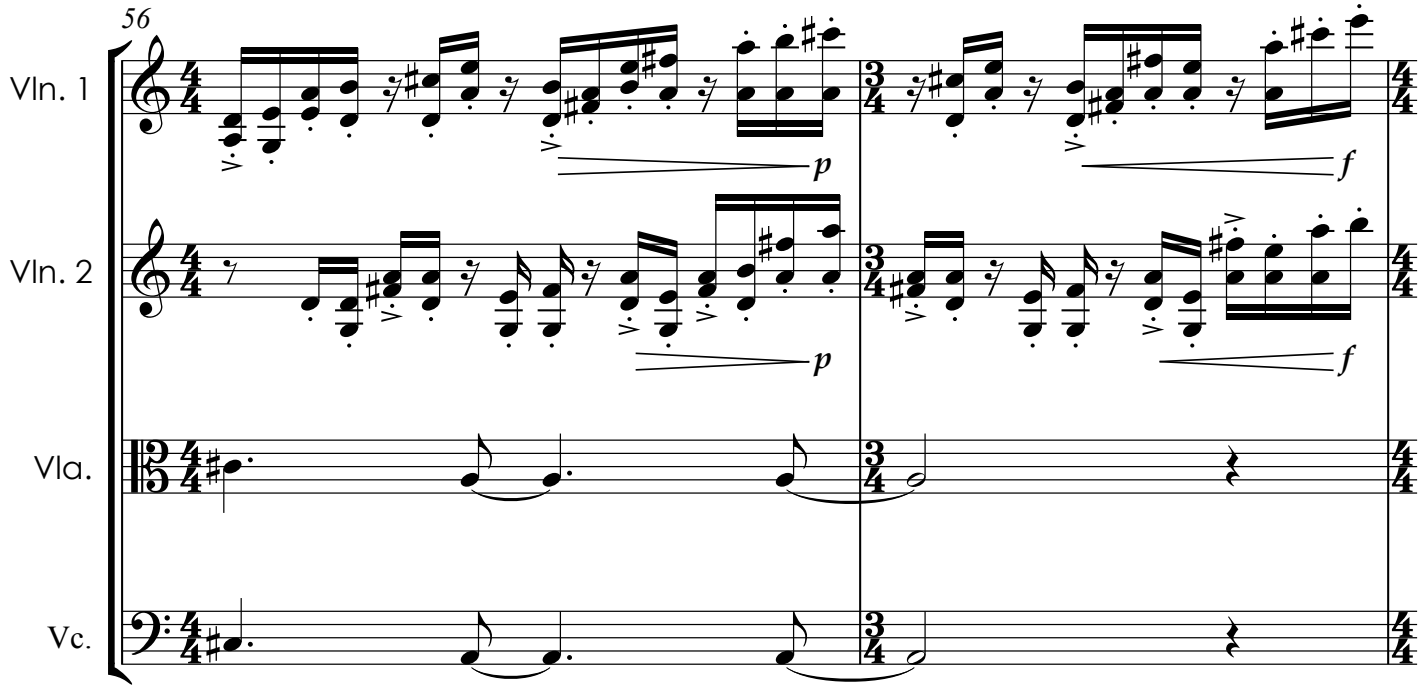

46
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

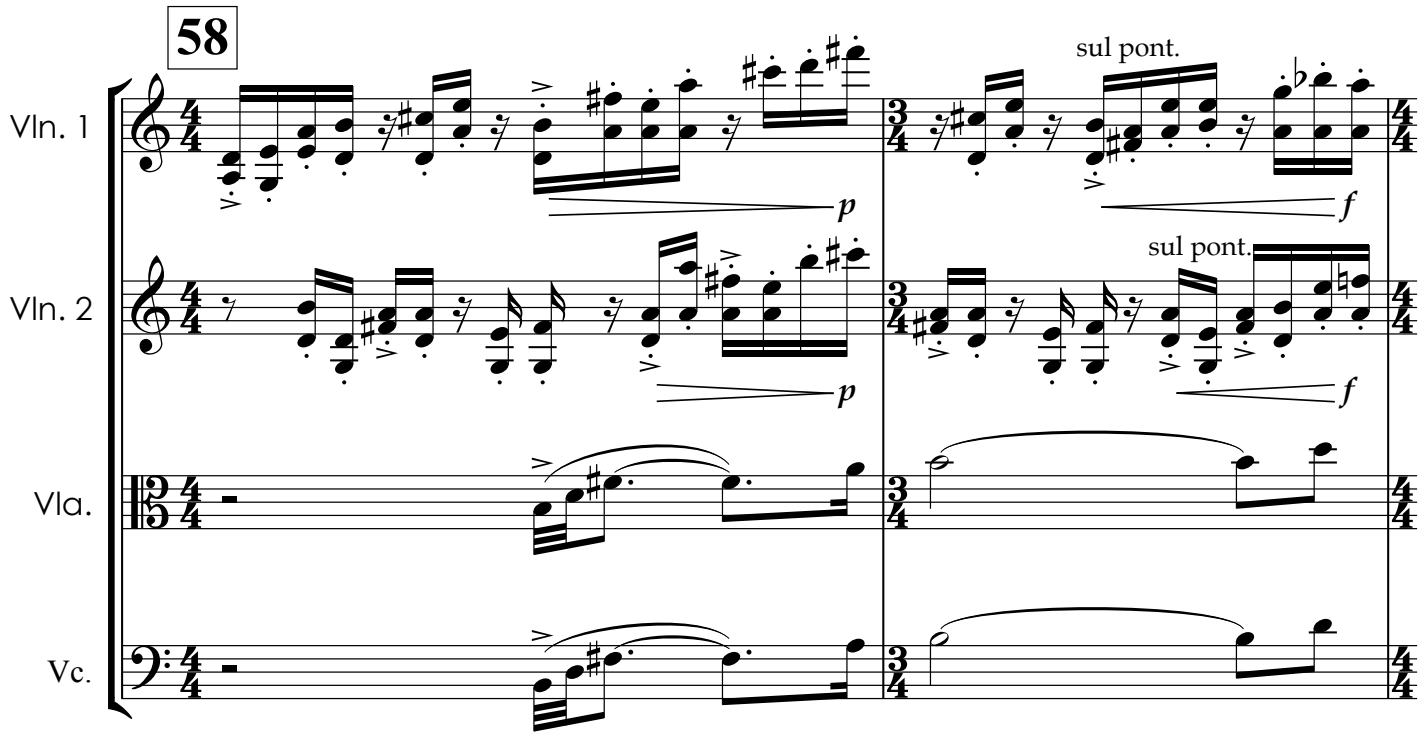

48
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
like an undulating breeze
p
f
Vla.
like an undulating breeze
p
f
Vc.

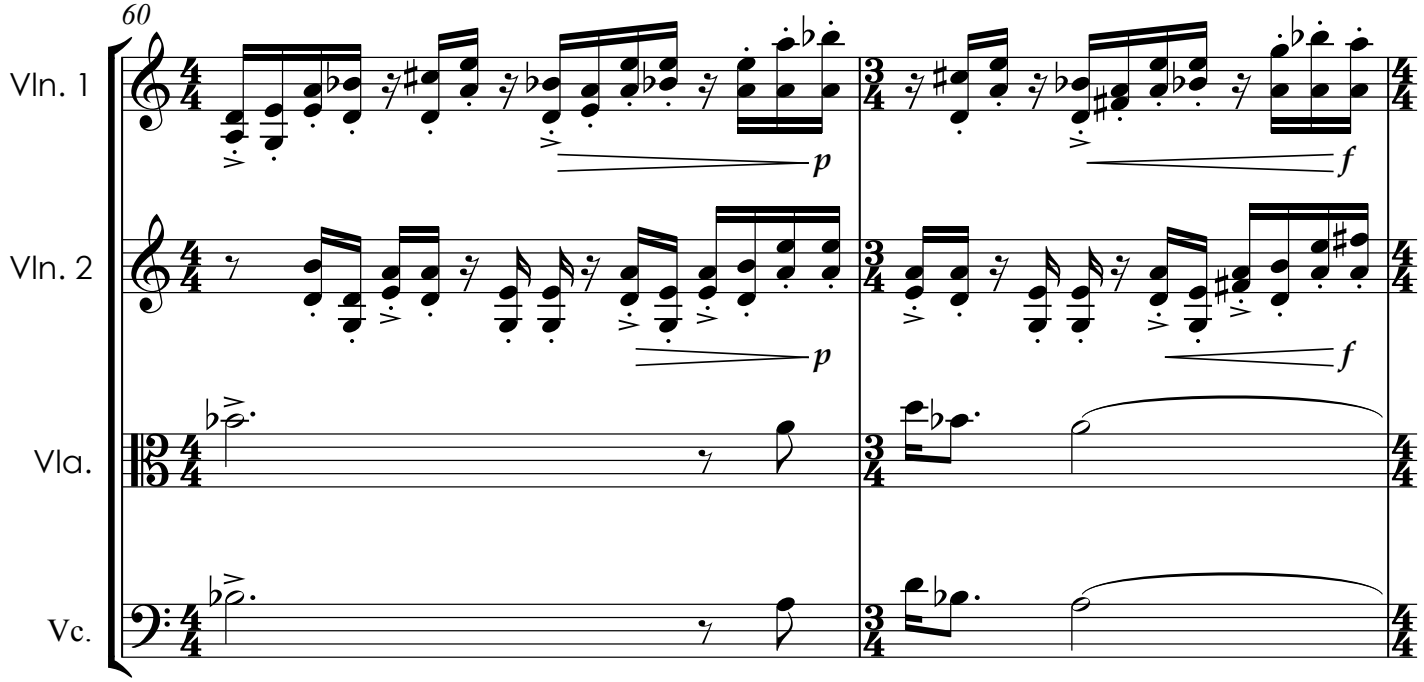

50
like an undulating breeze
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
arco
gradually
increasing vibrato...


52
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
cantabile
cantabile


54
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f
3


56
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f


58
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
sul pont.
sul pont.
p
f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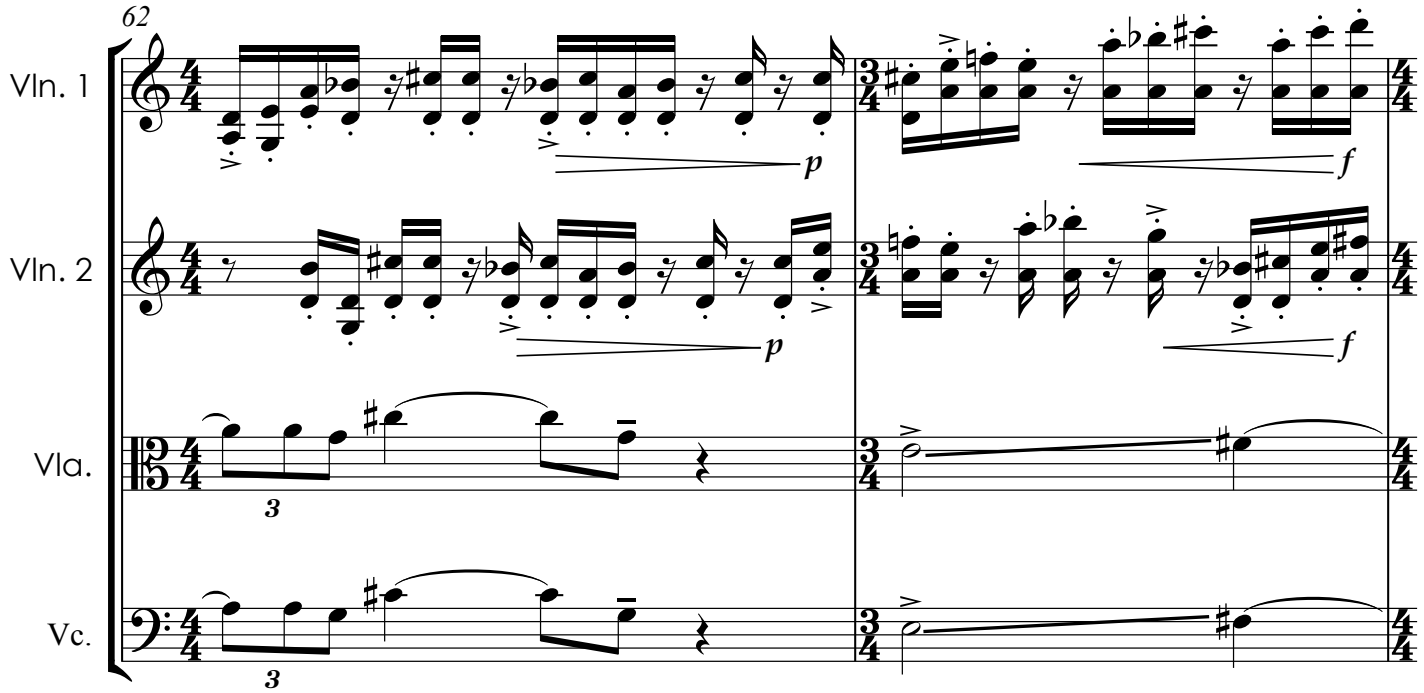
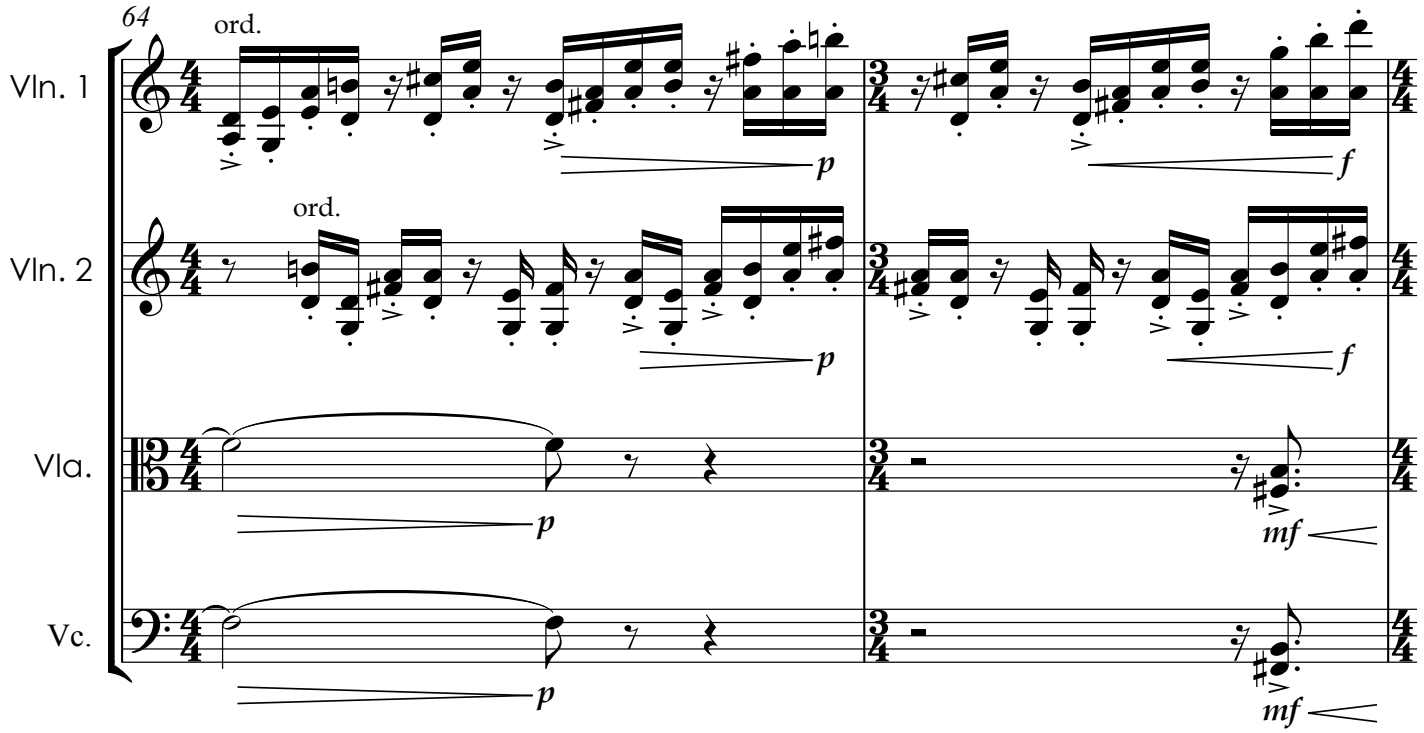
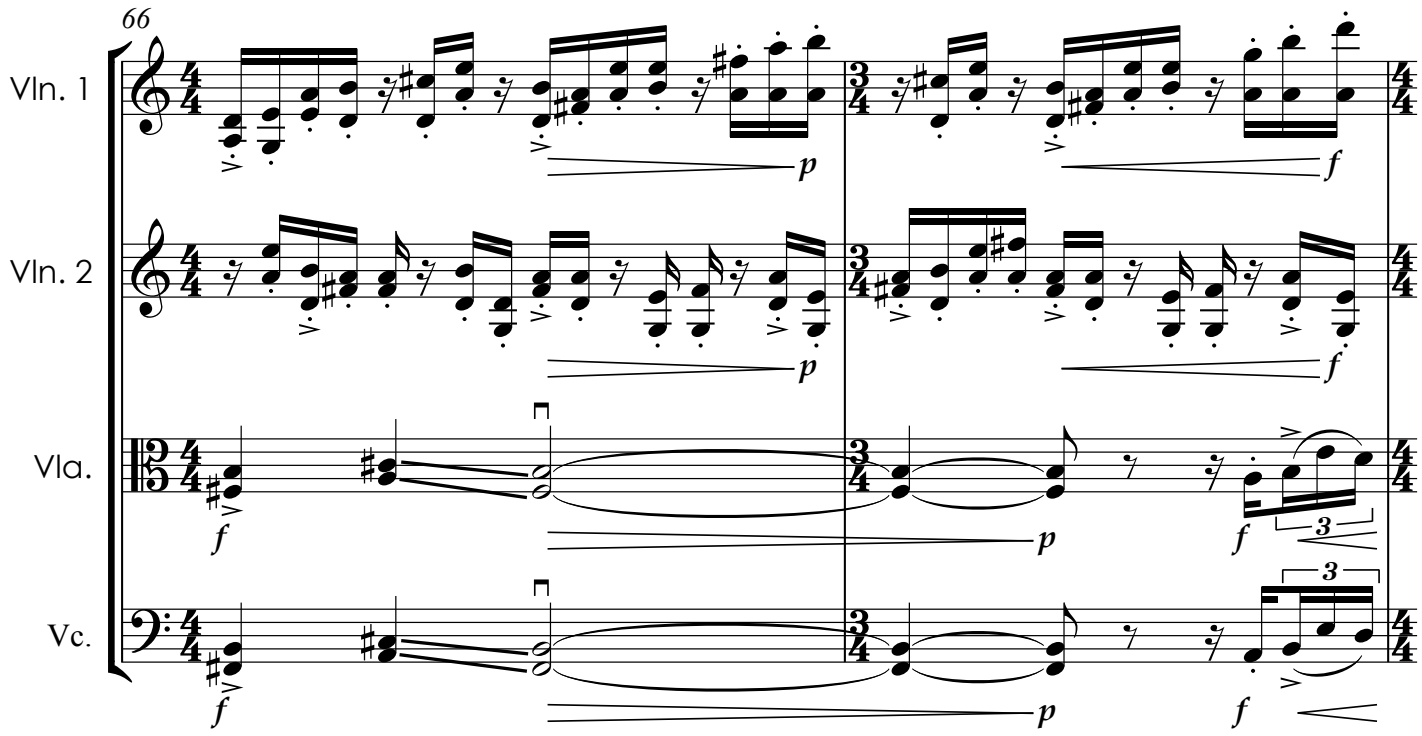
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f


62
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f
3


64
ord.
ord.
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f
mf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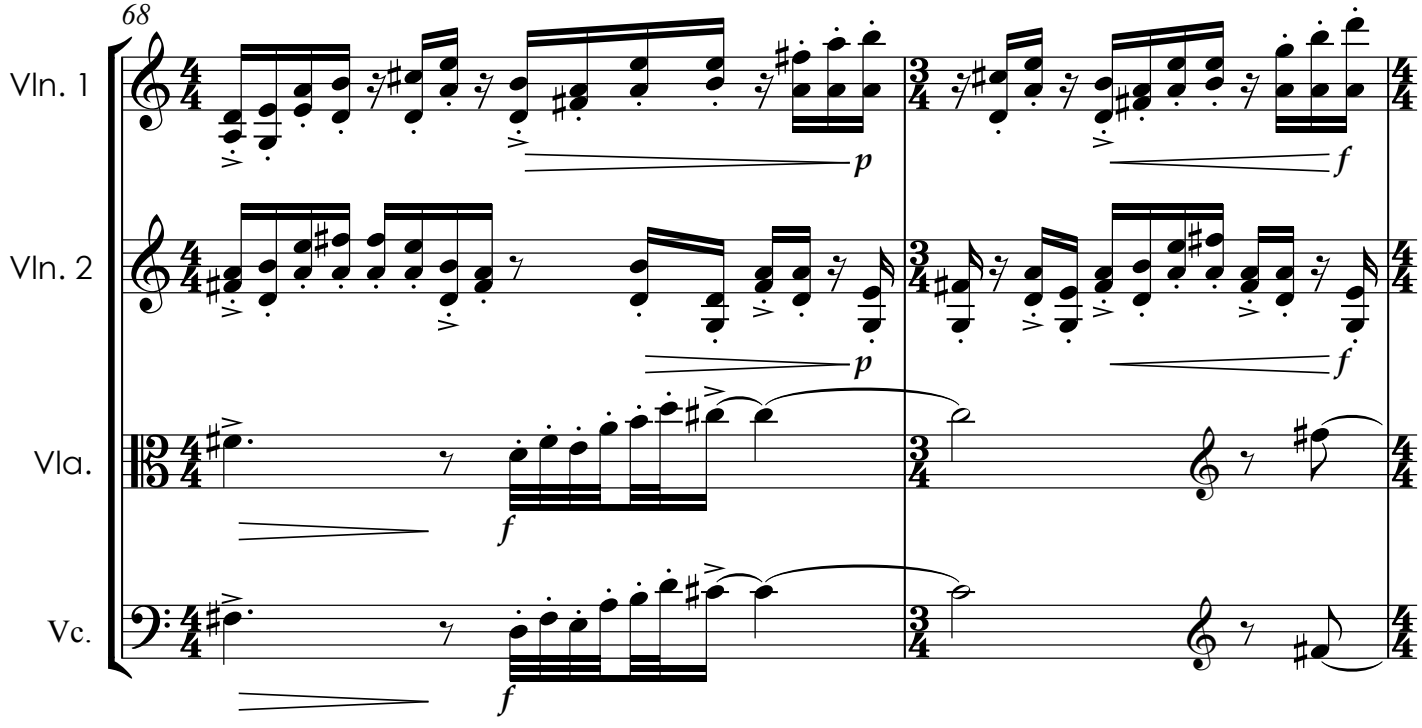
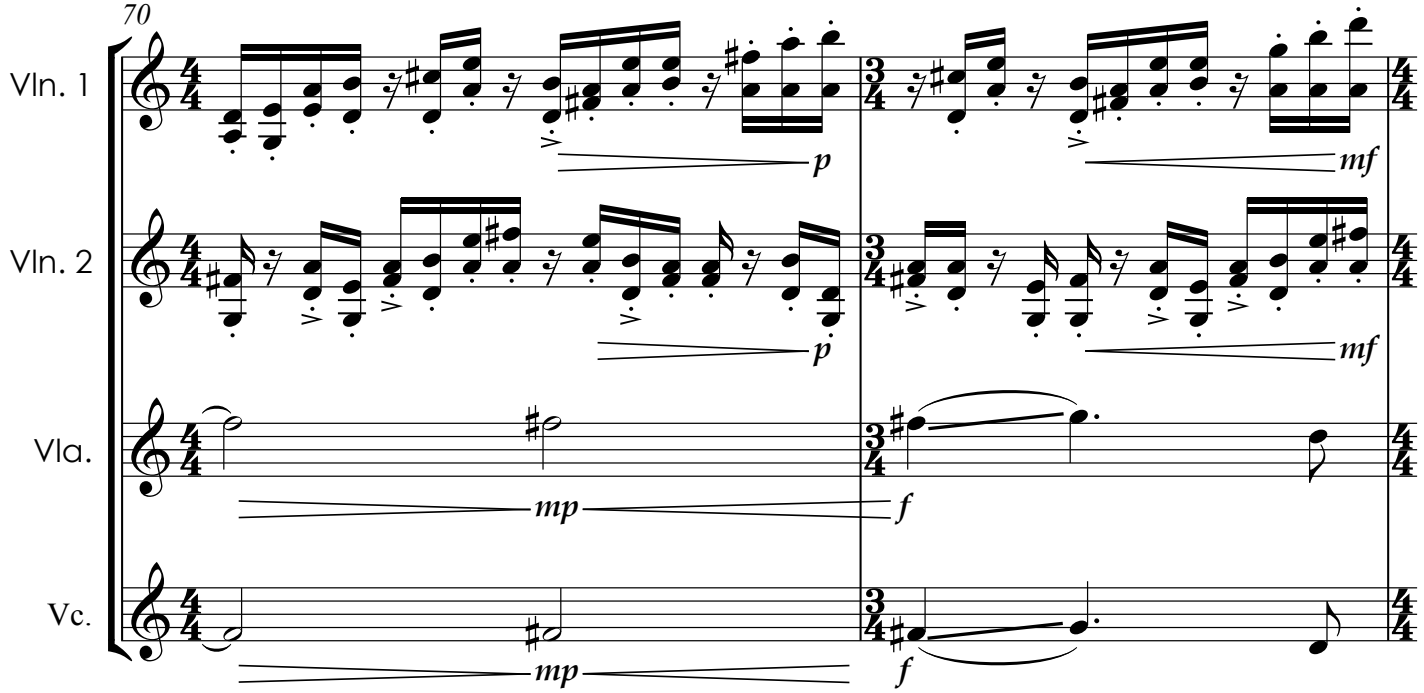
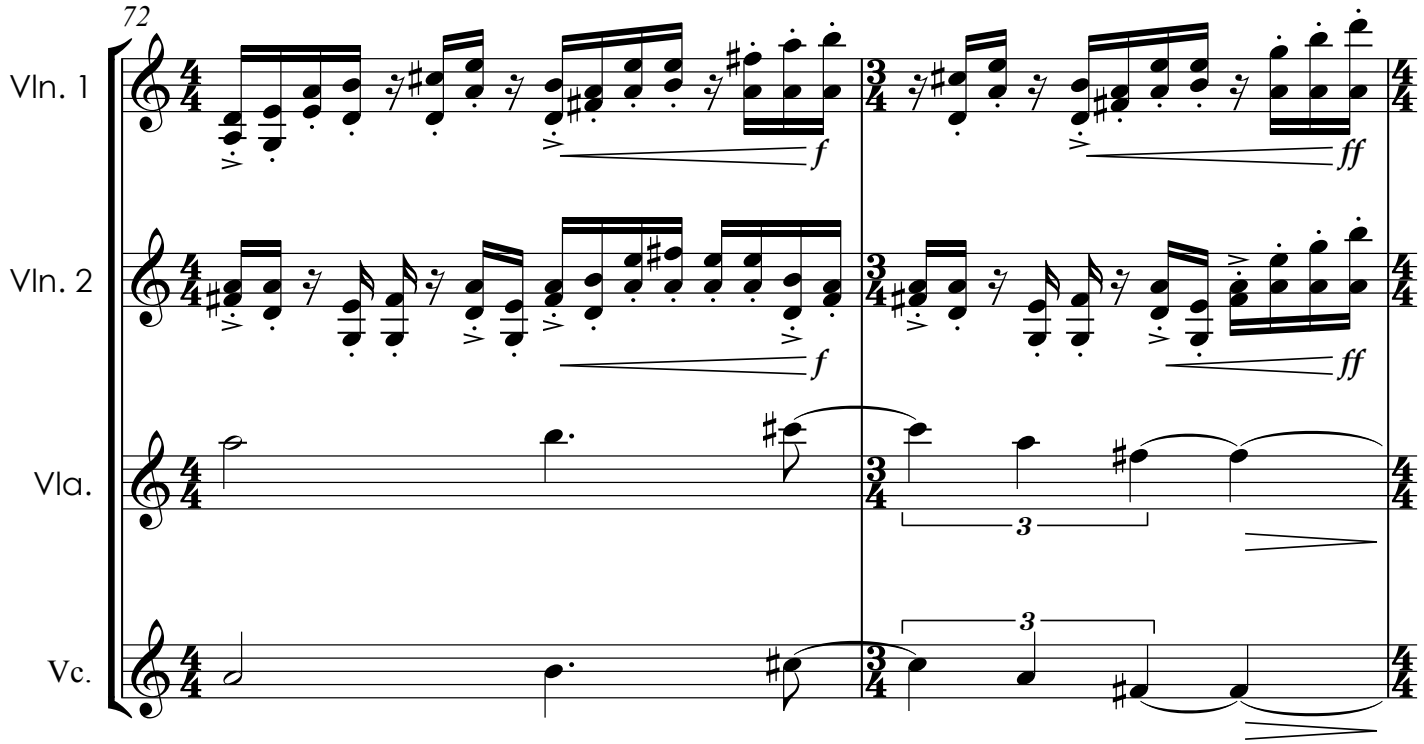
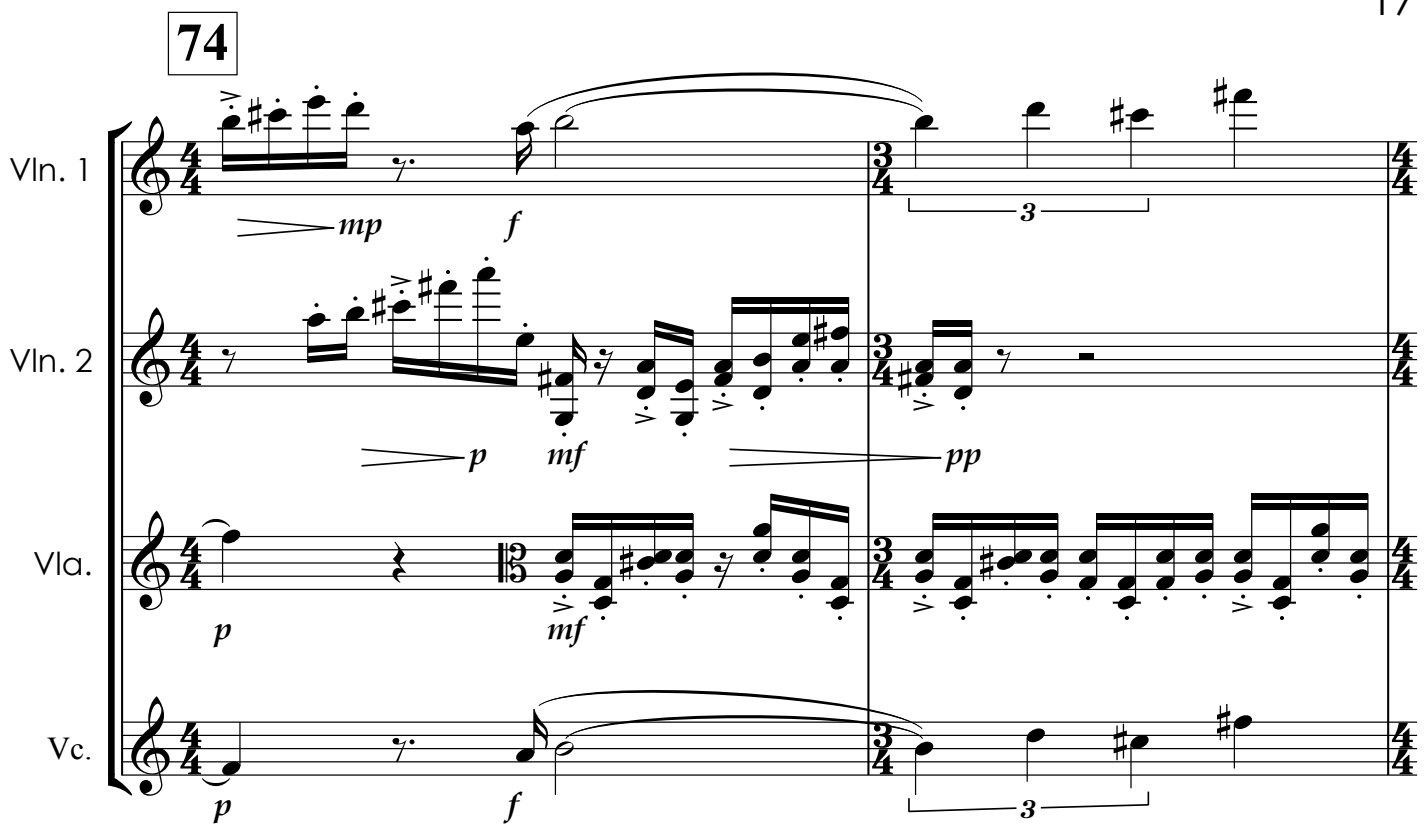
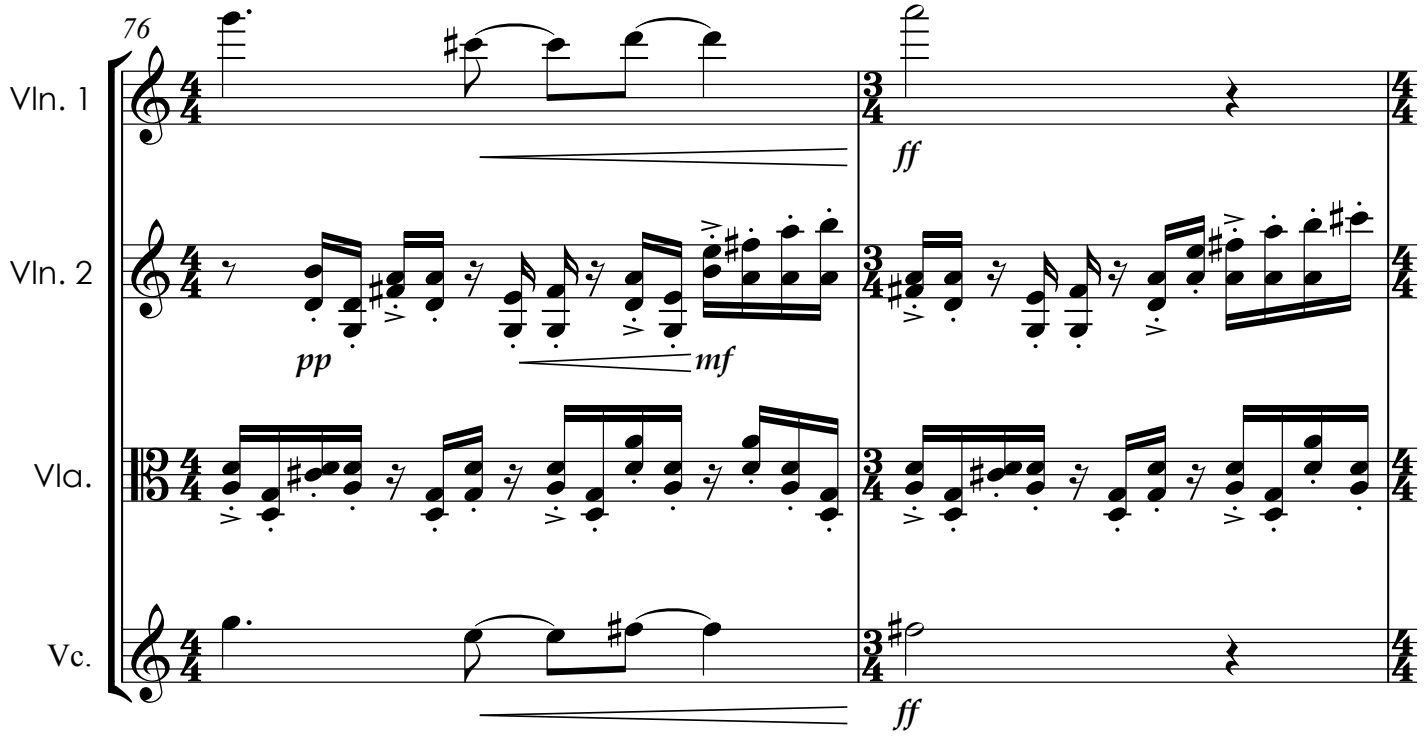
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f
3

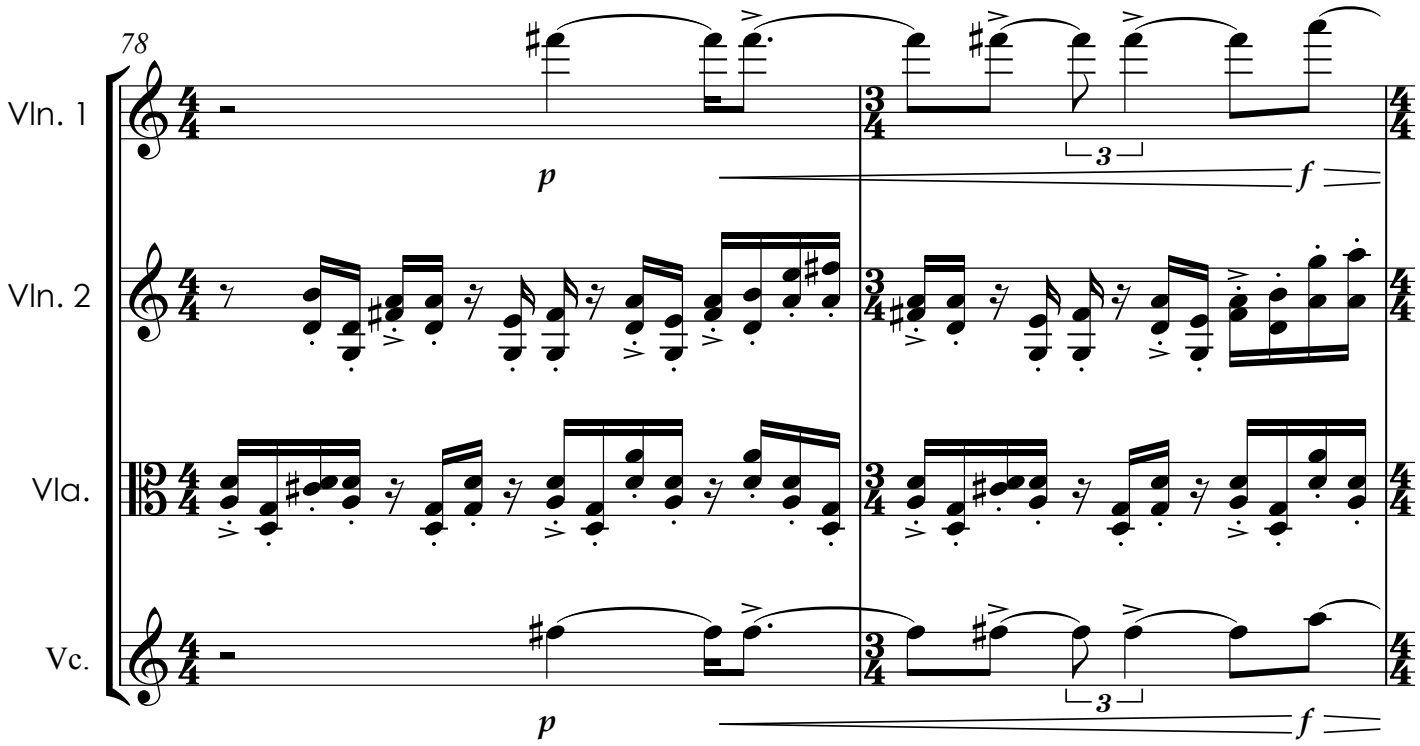

68
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
f

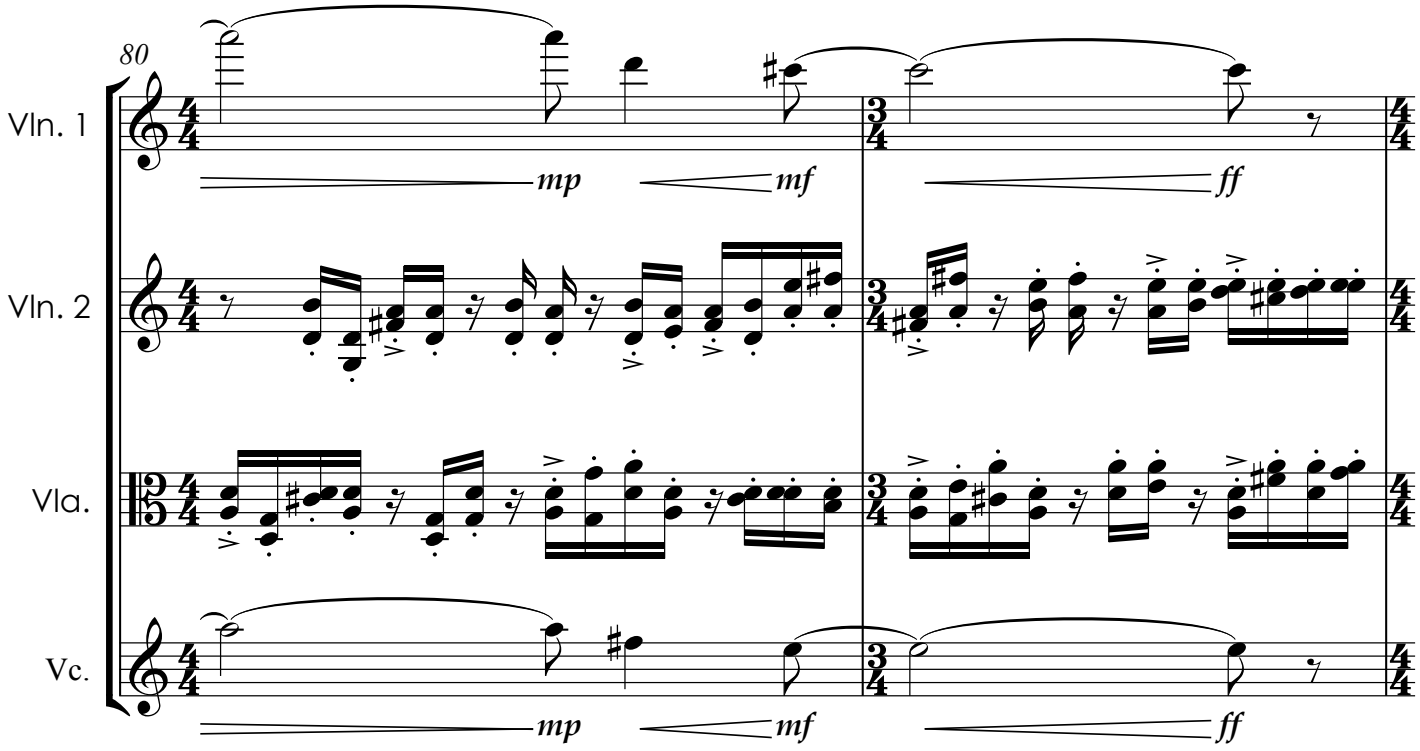

70
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
mf
mp
f

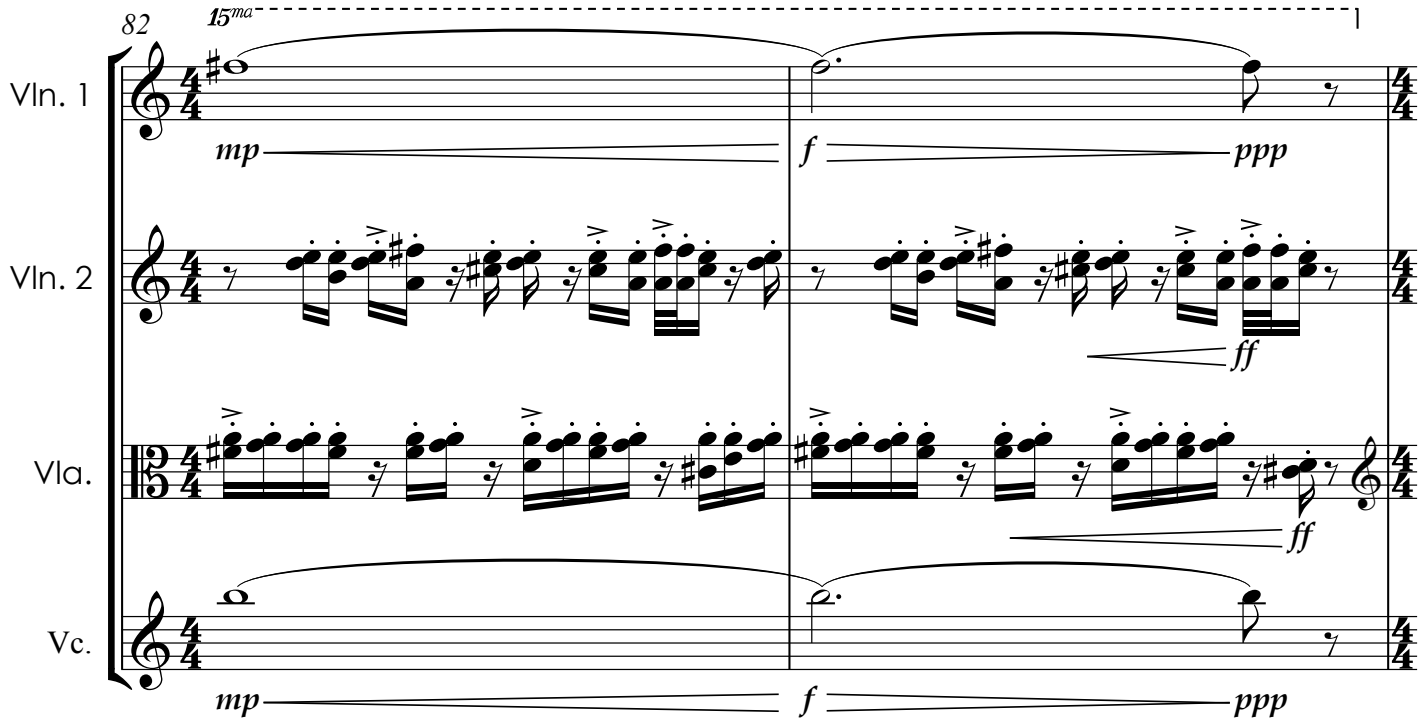

72
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
f
ff
3

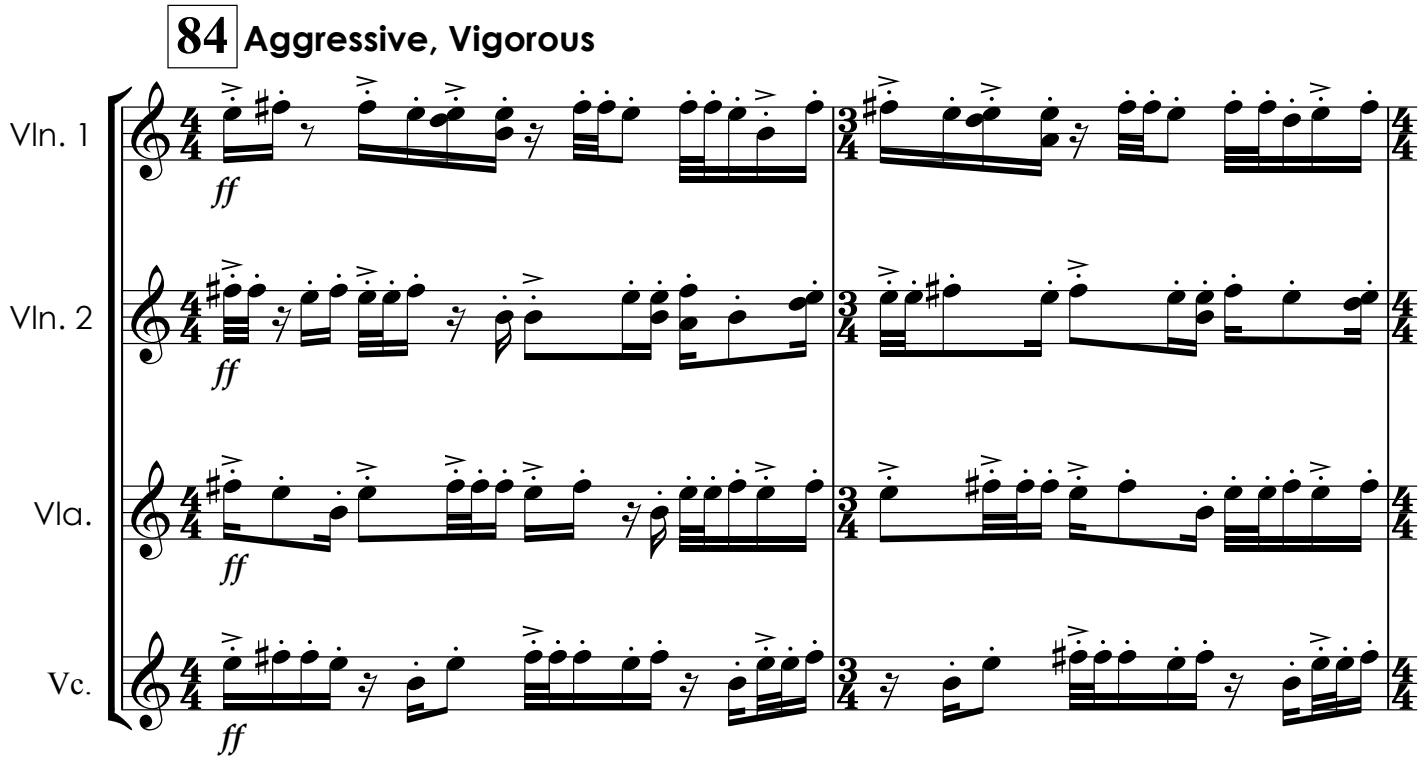

74
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mp
f
p
mf
pp
3

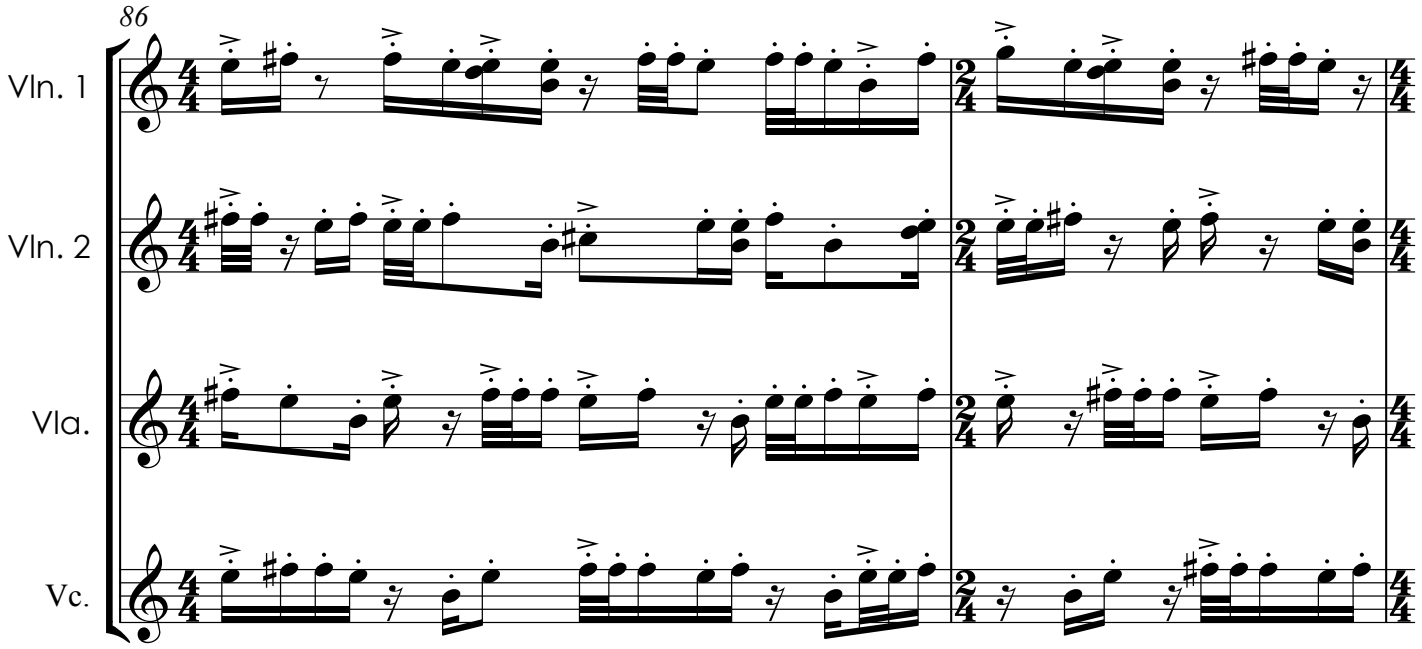

76
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
ff
pp
mf

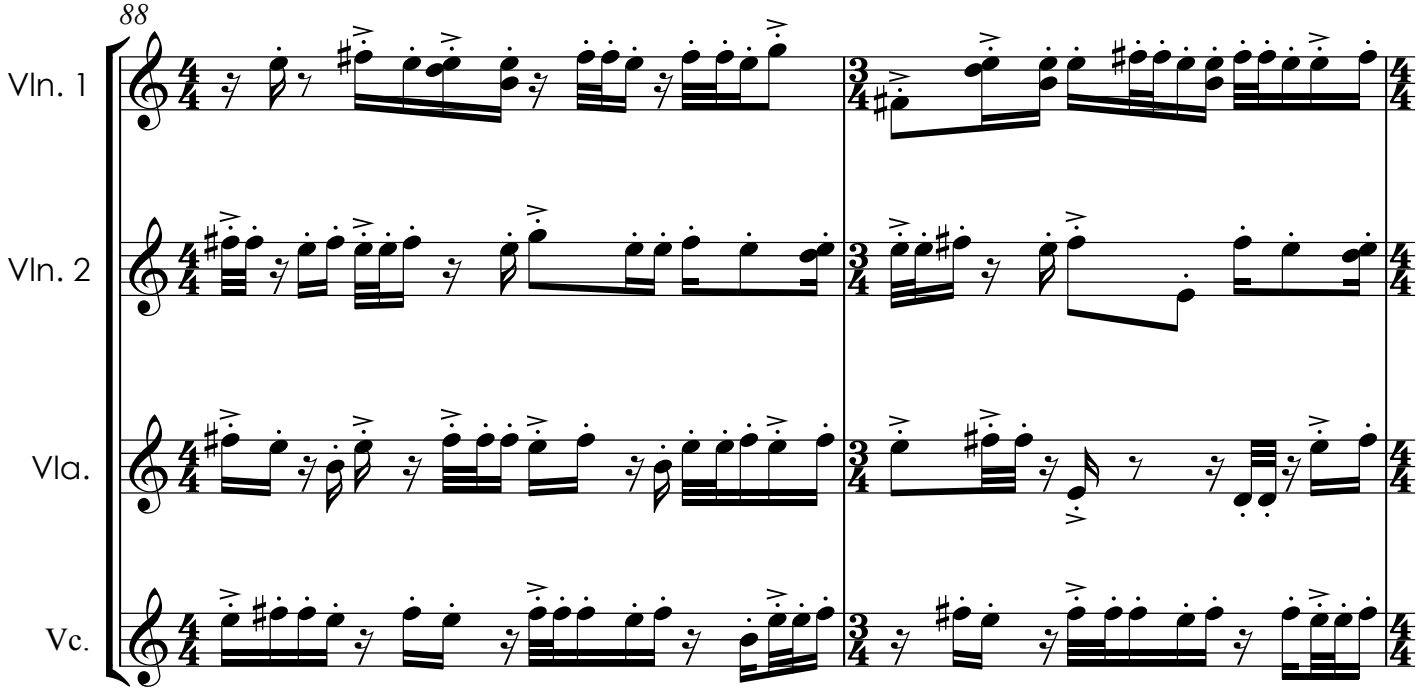

78
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
3
f

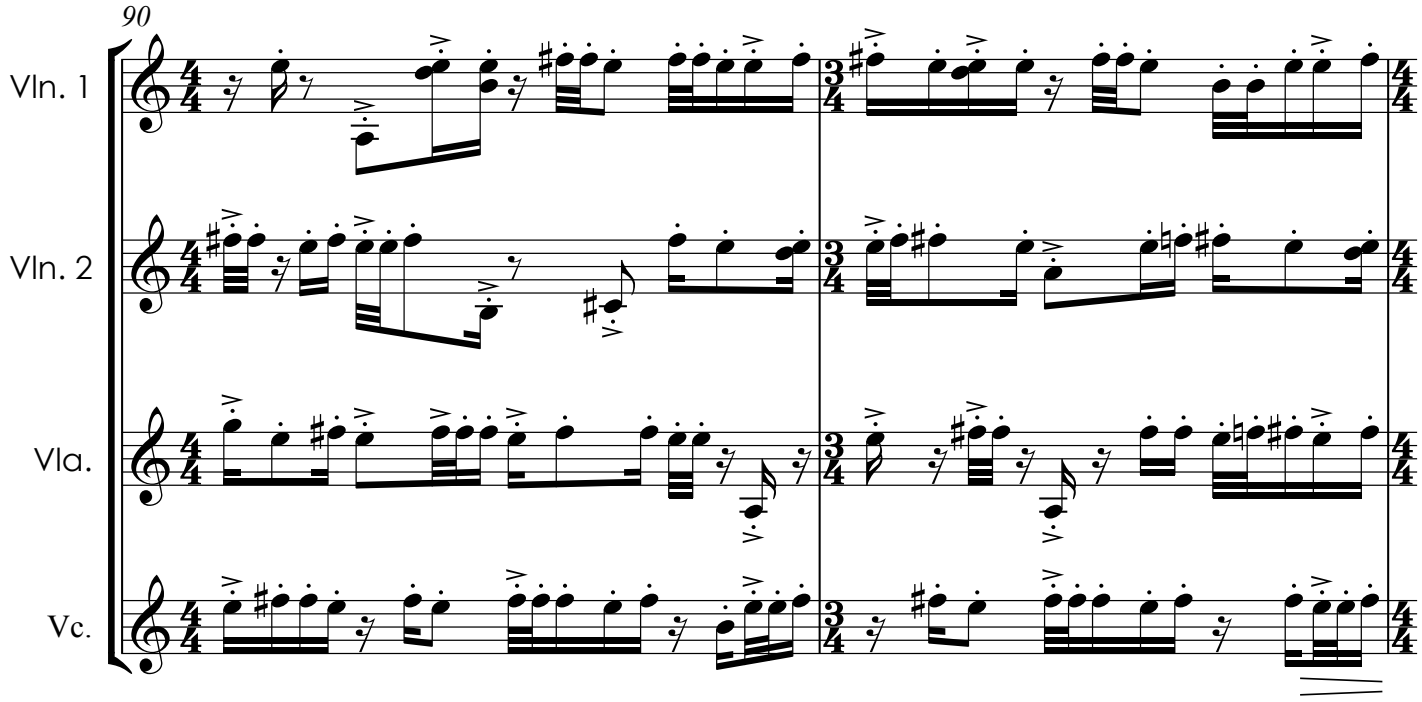

80
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mp
mf
ff

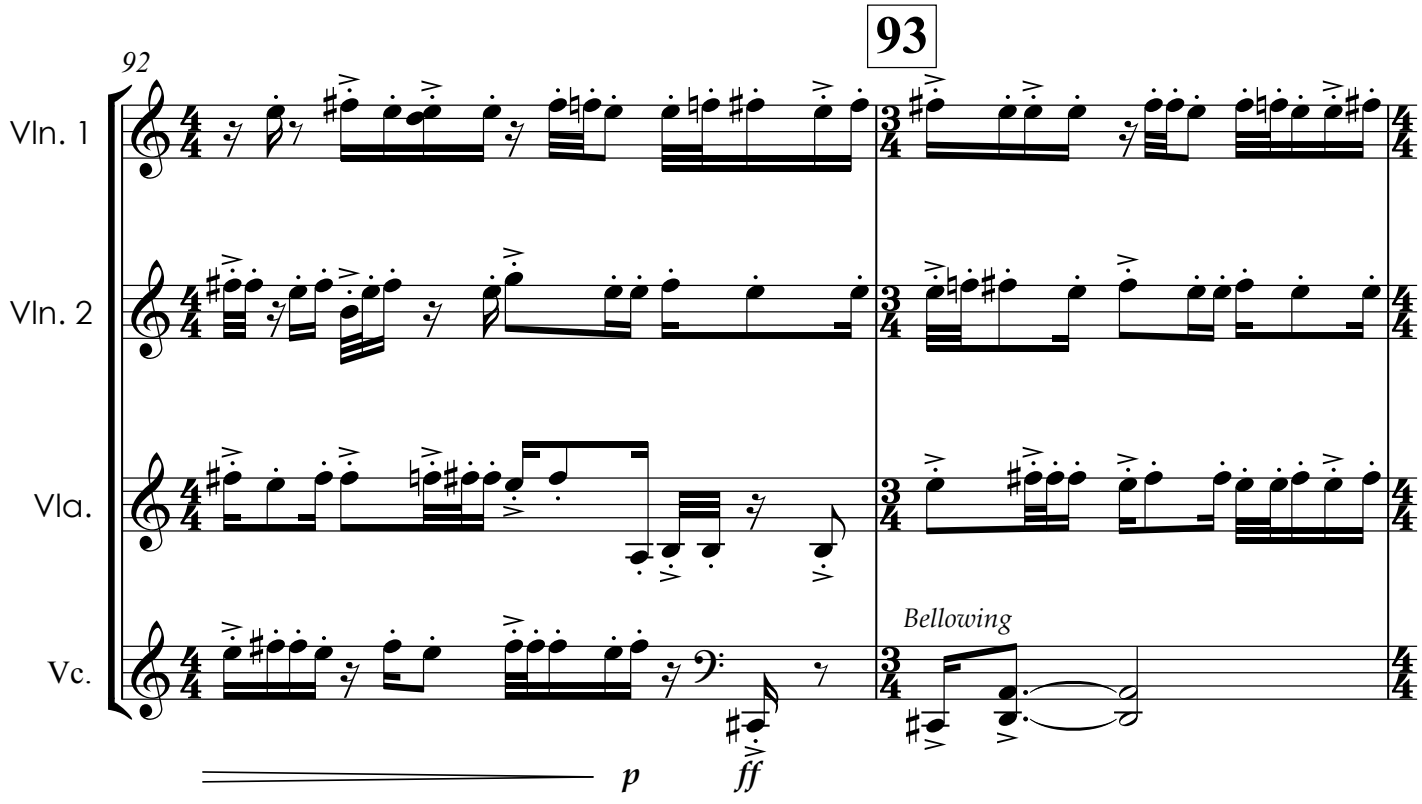

82
15ma
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mp
f
ppp
ff

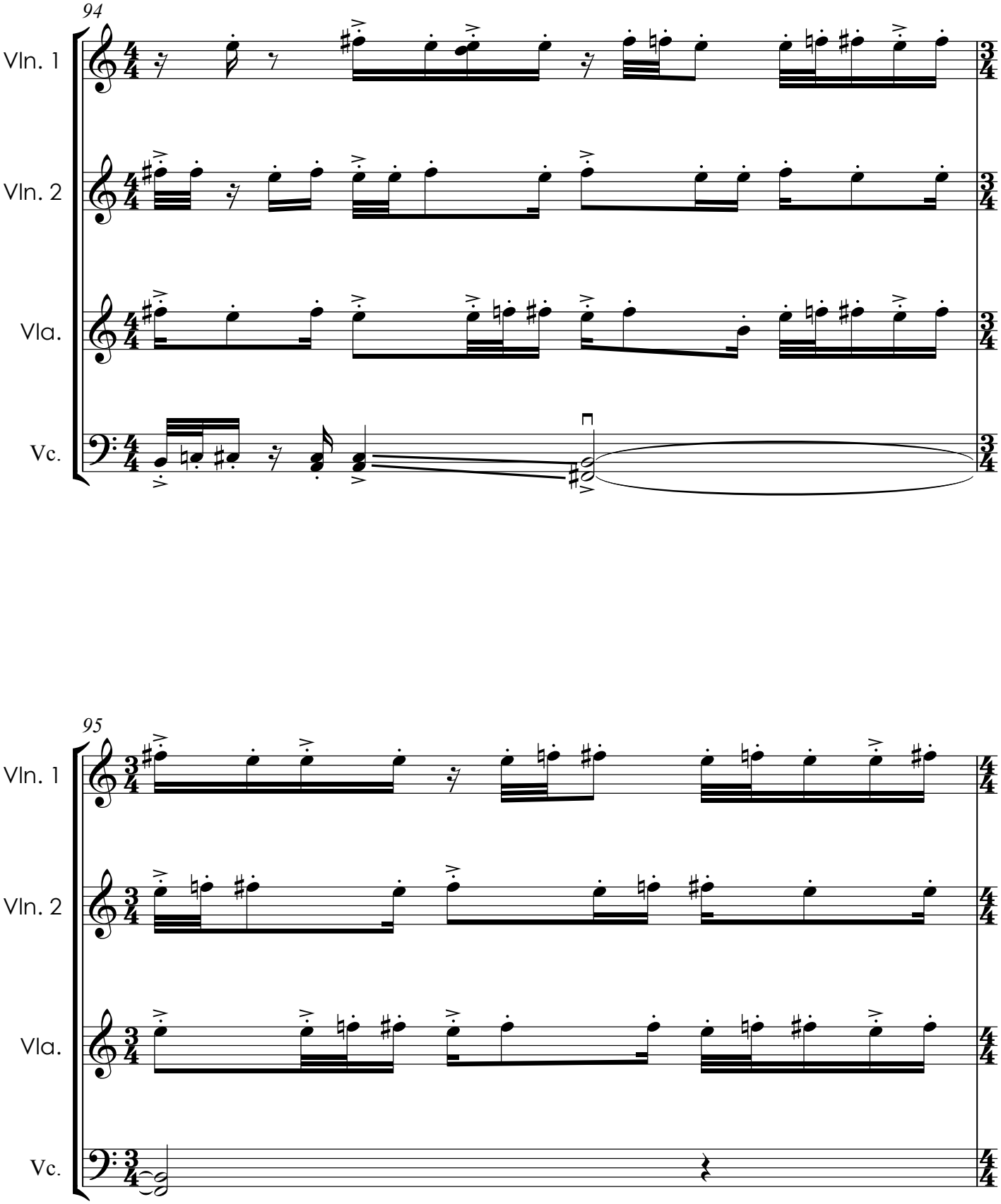

84 Aggressive, Vigorous
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
ff

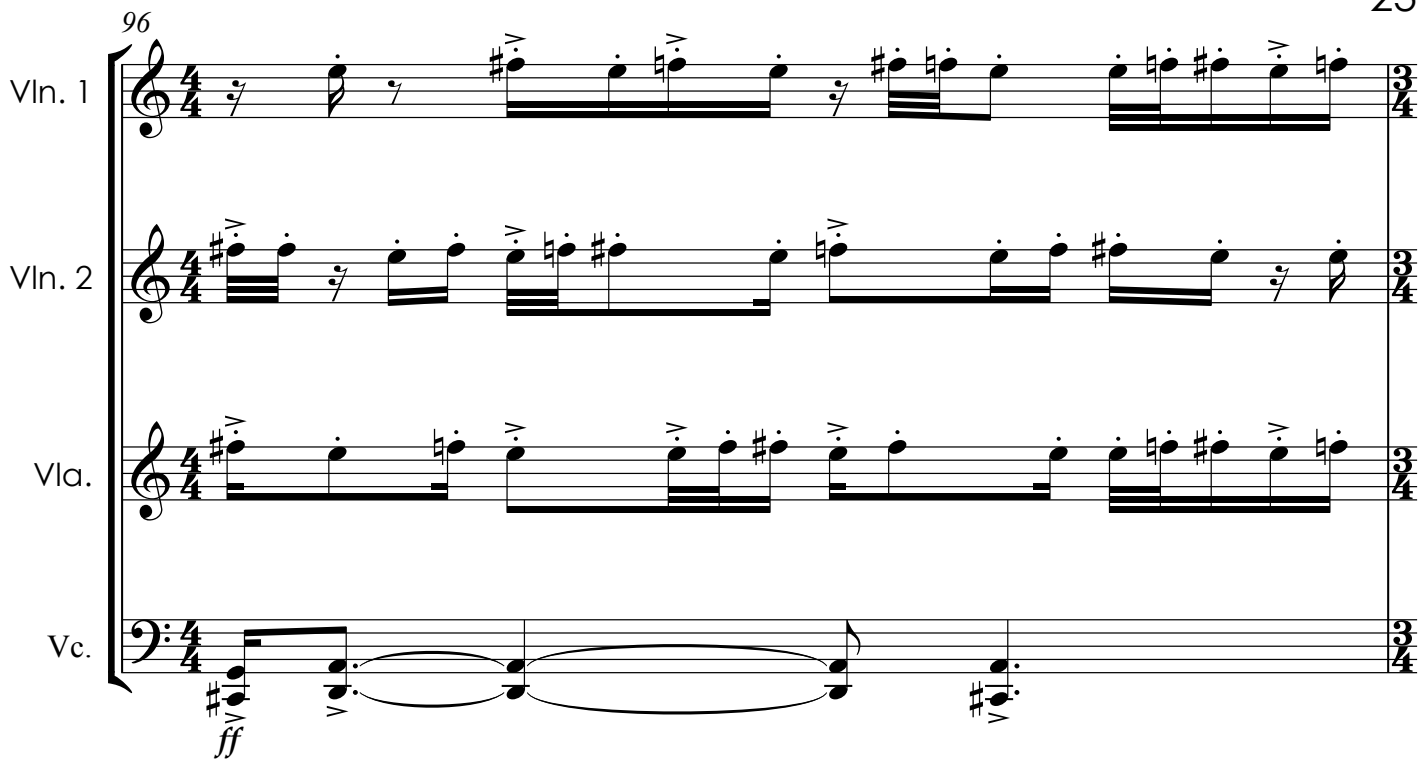

86
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

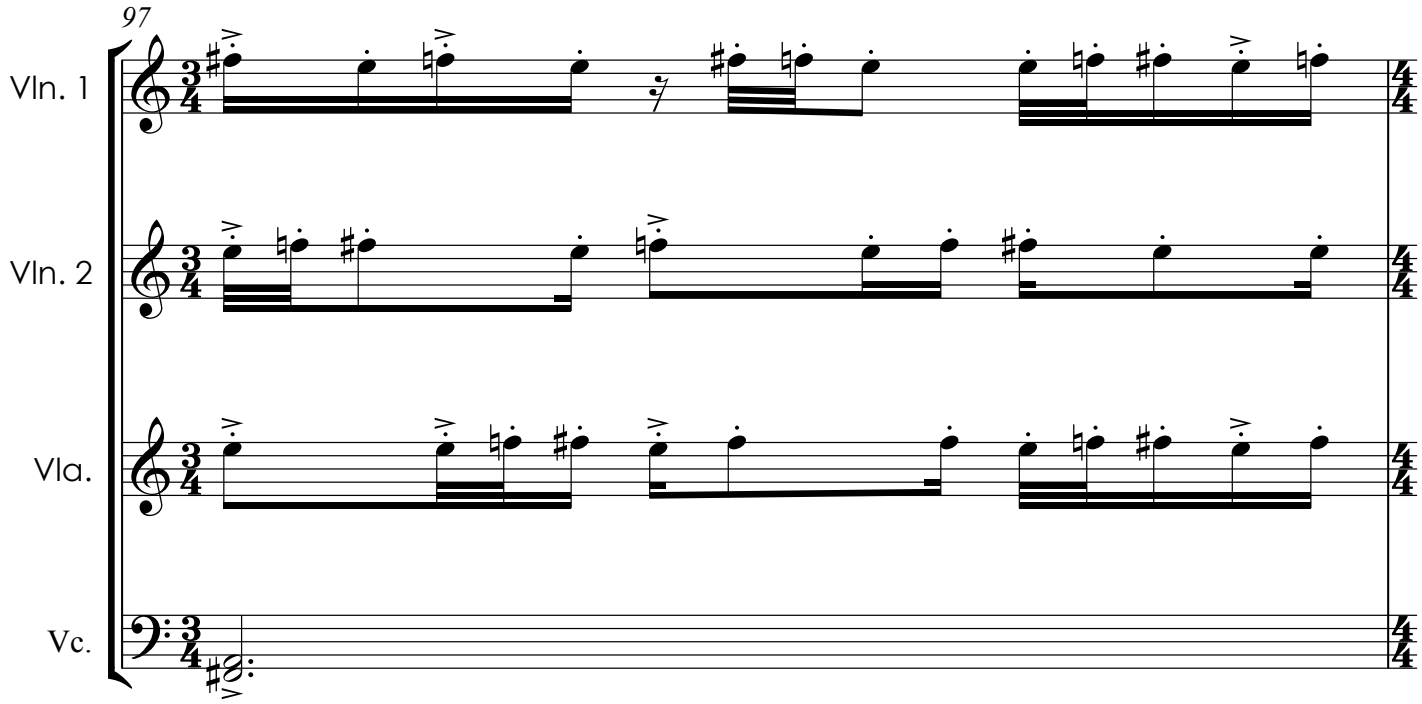

88
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

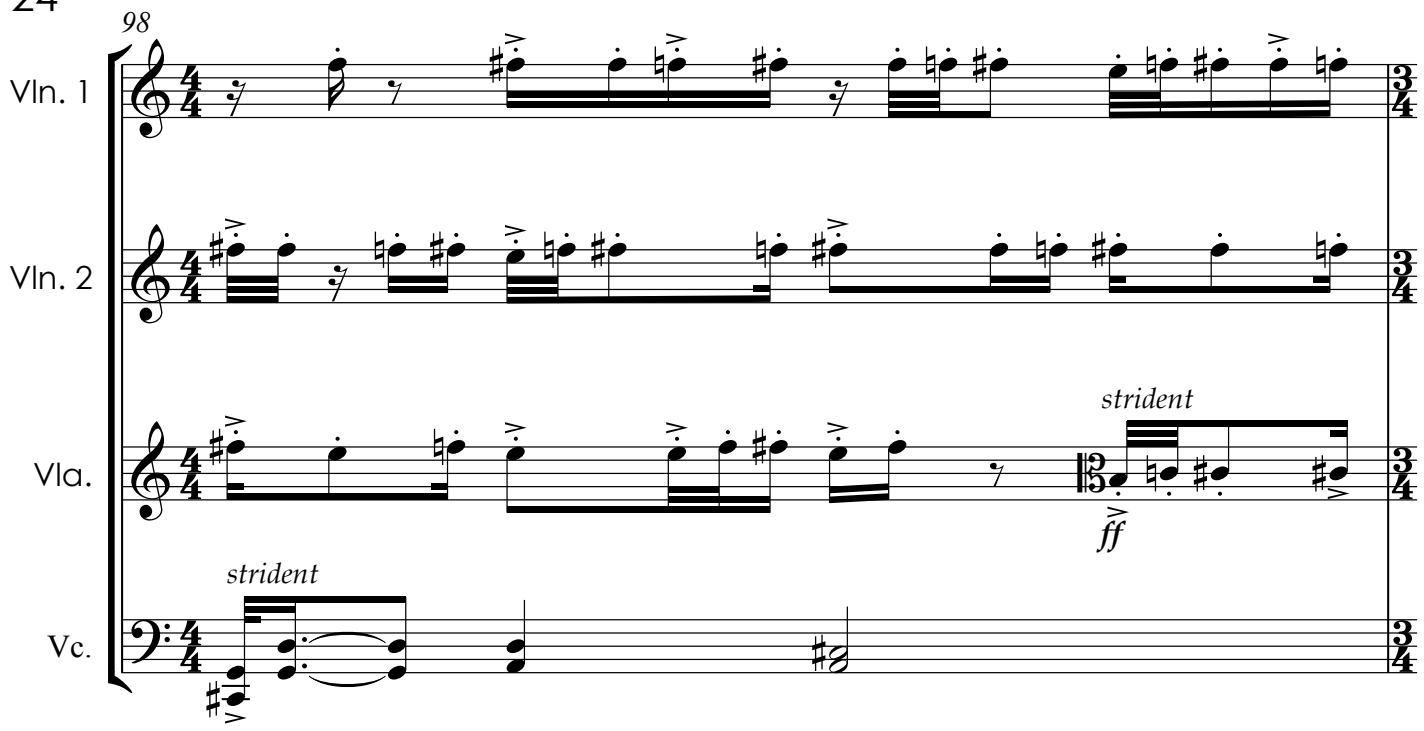

90
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

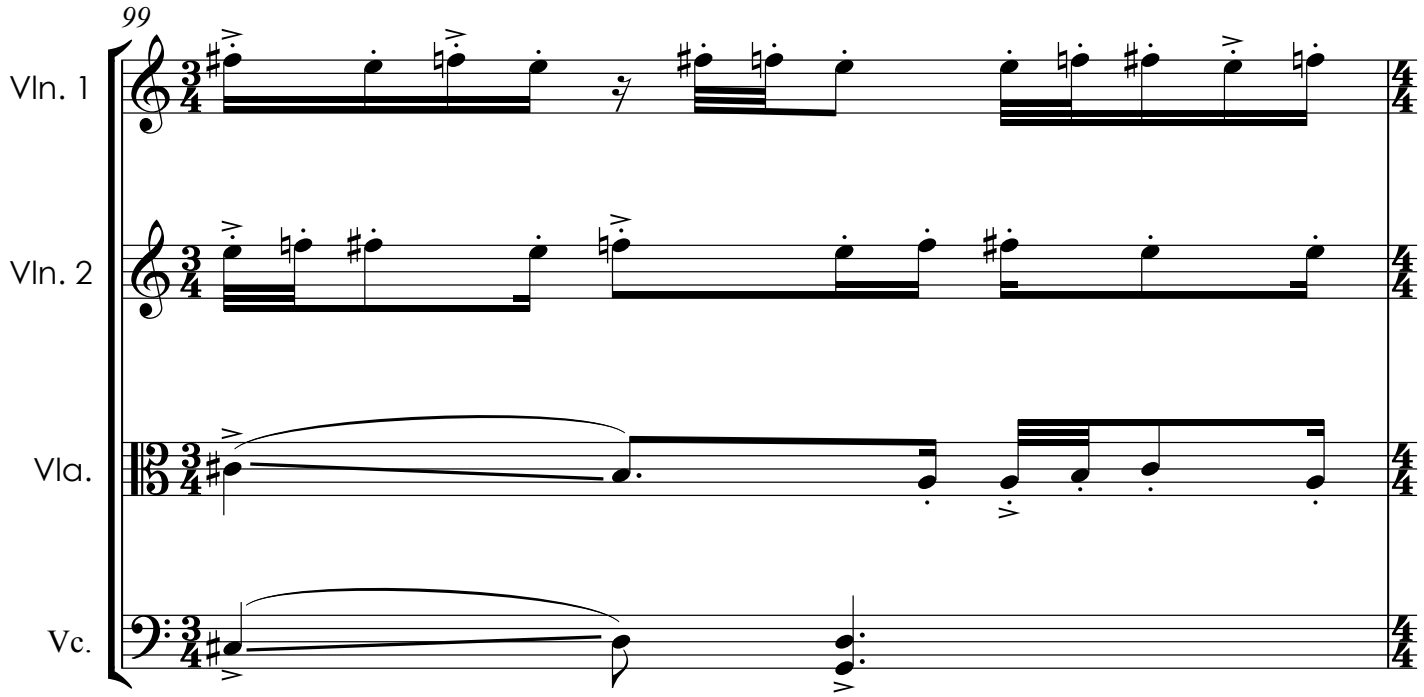

93
92
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Bellowing
p
ff

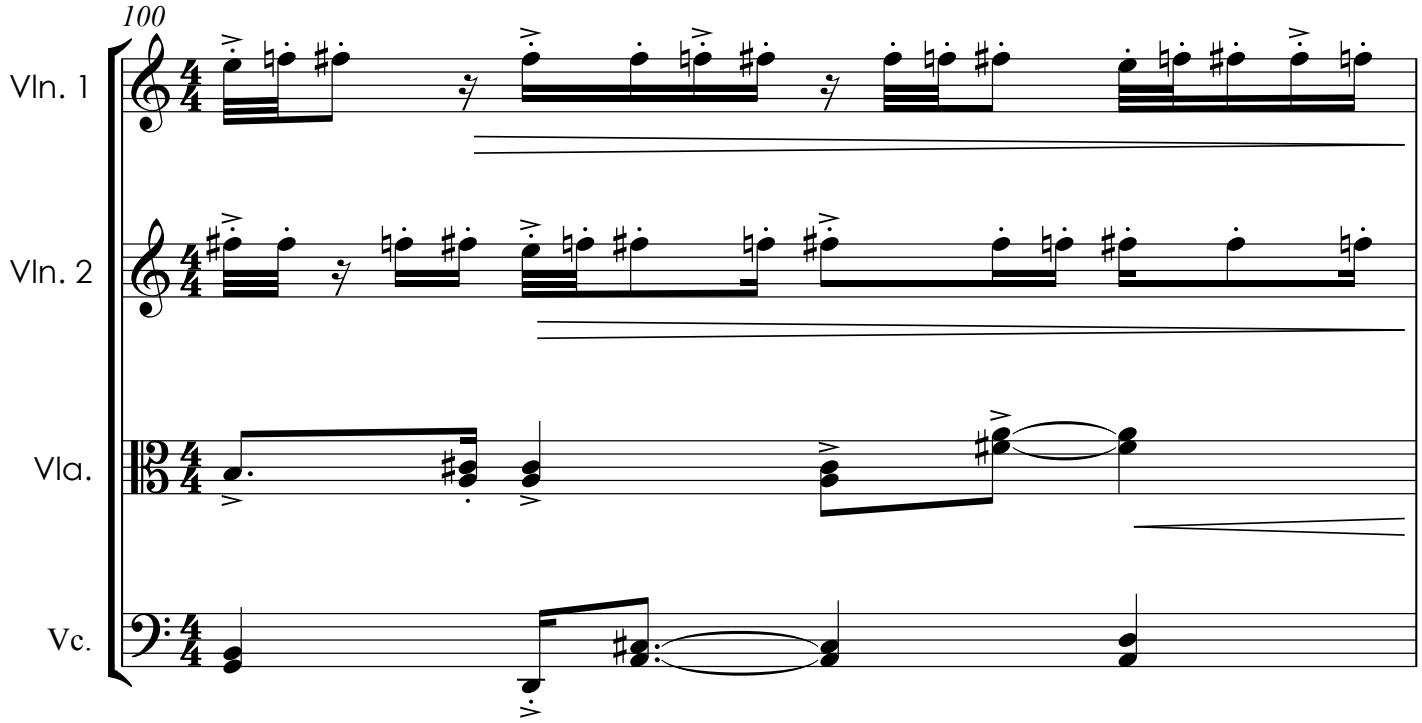

94
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
95
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

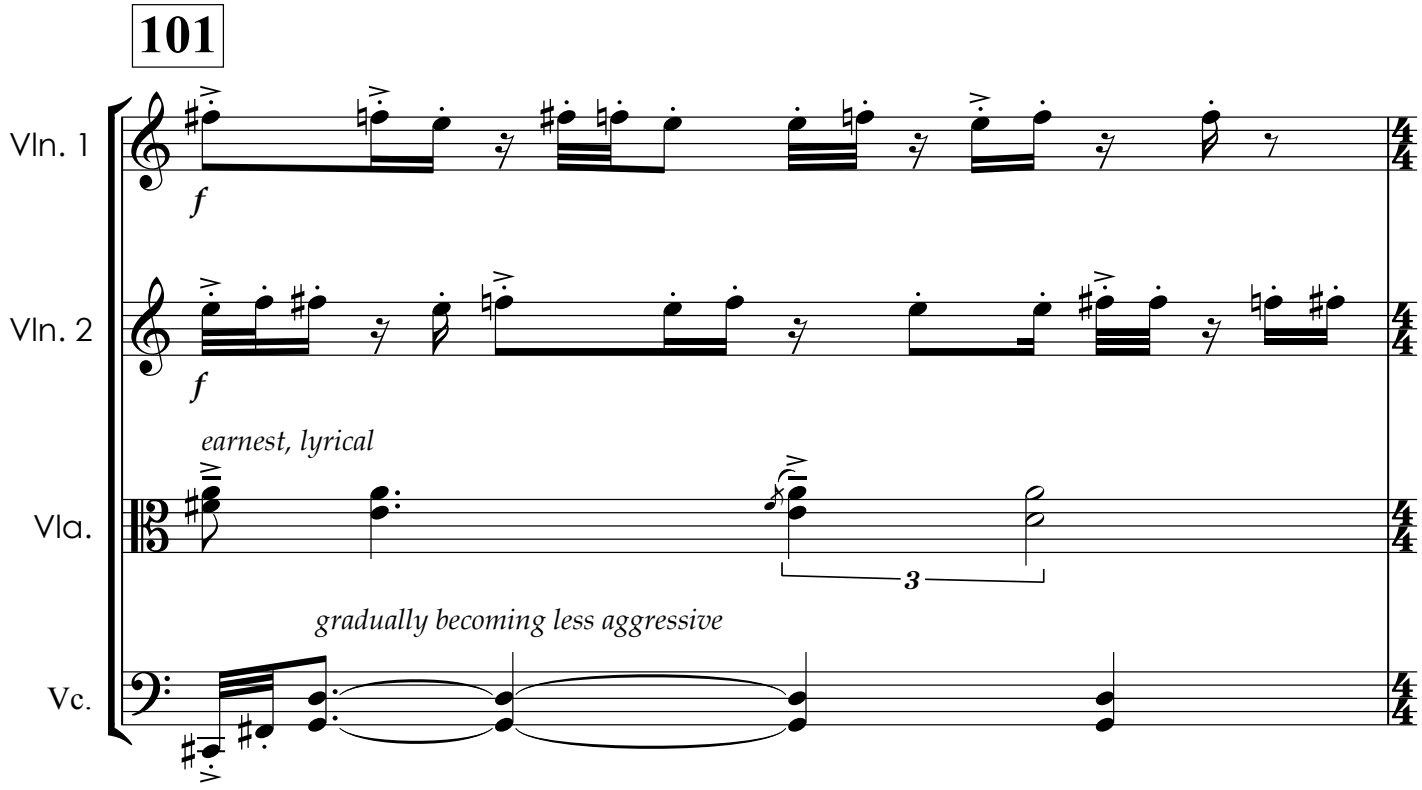

96
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
ff

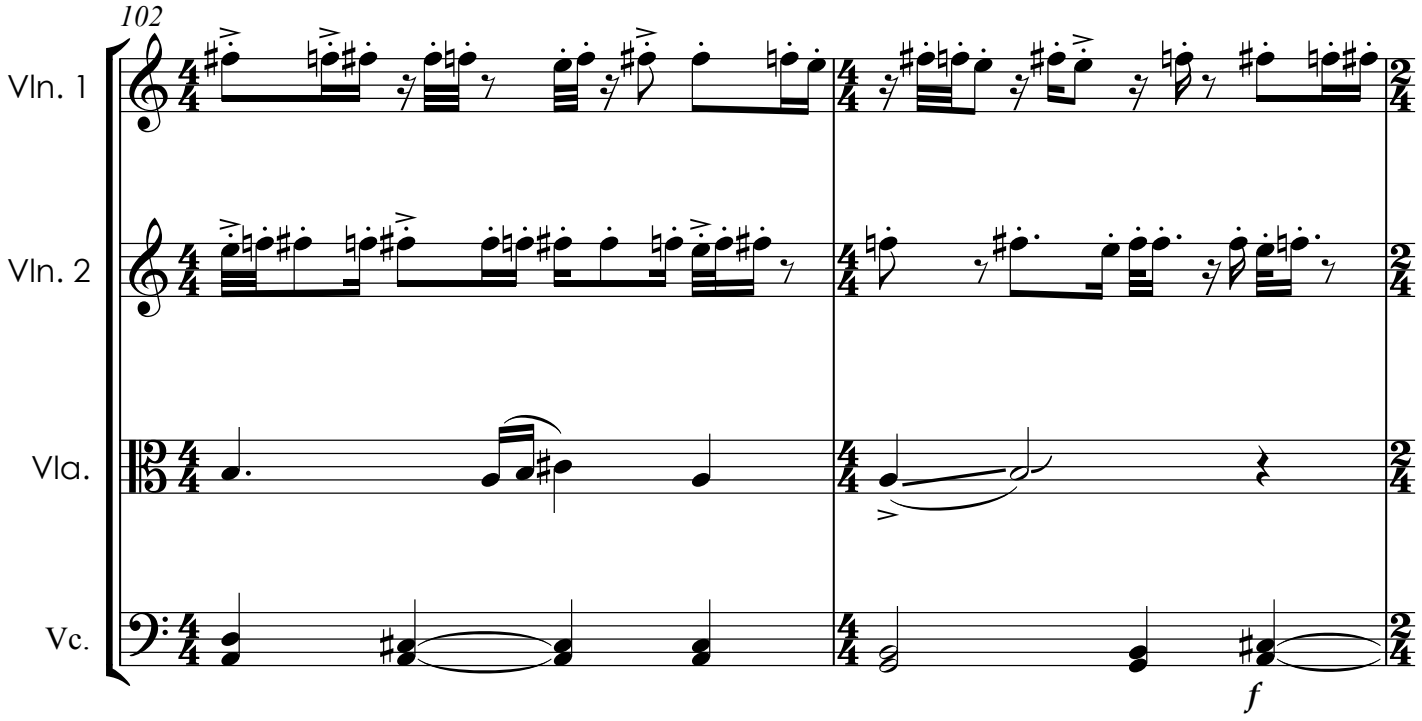

97
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

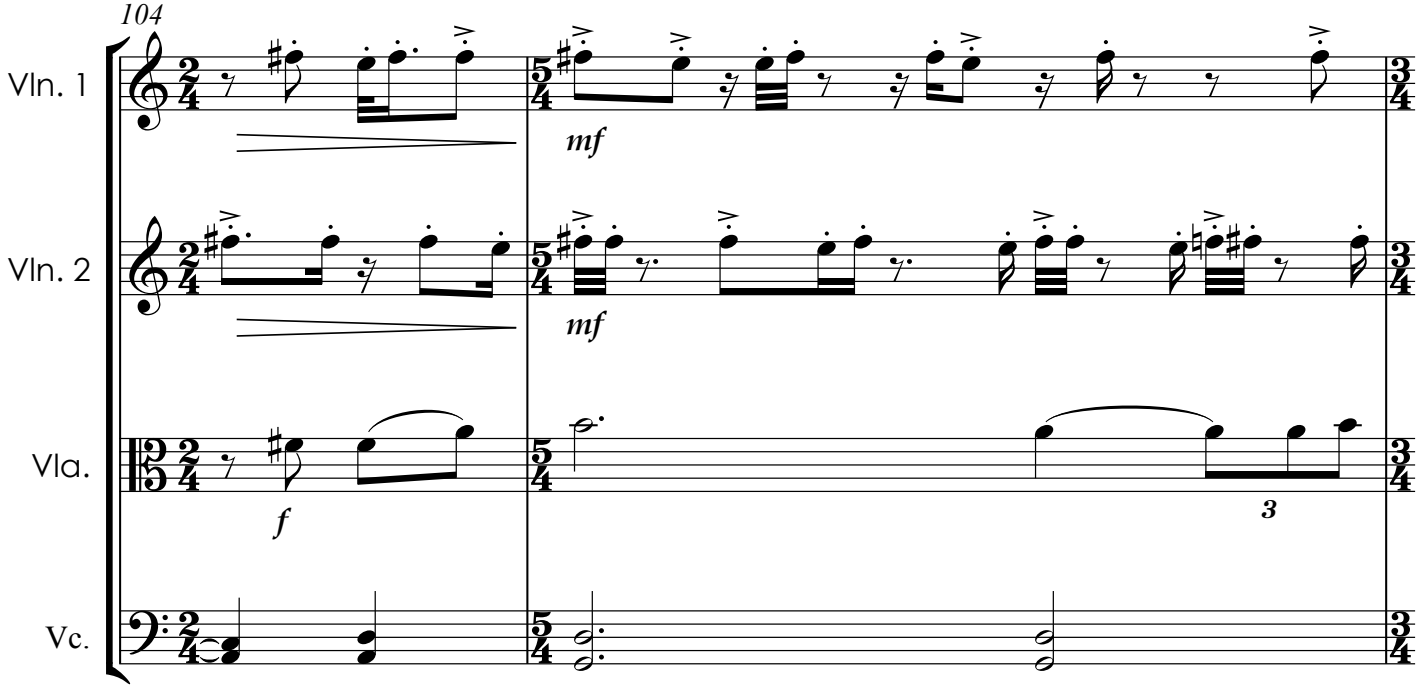

98
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
strident
strident
ff

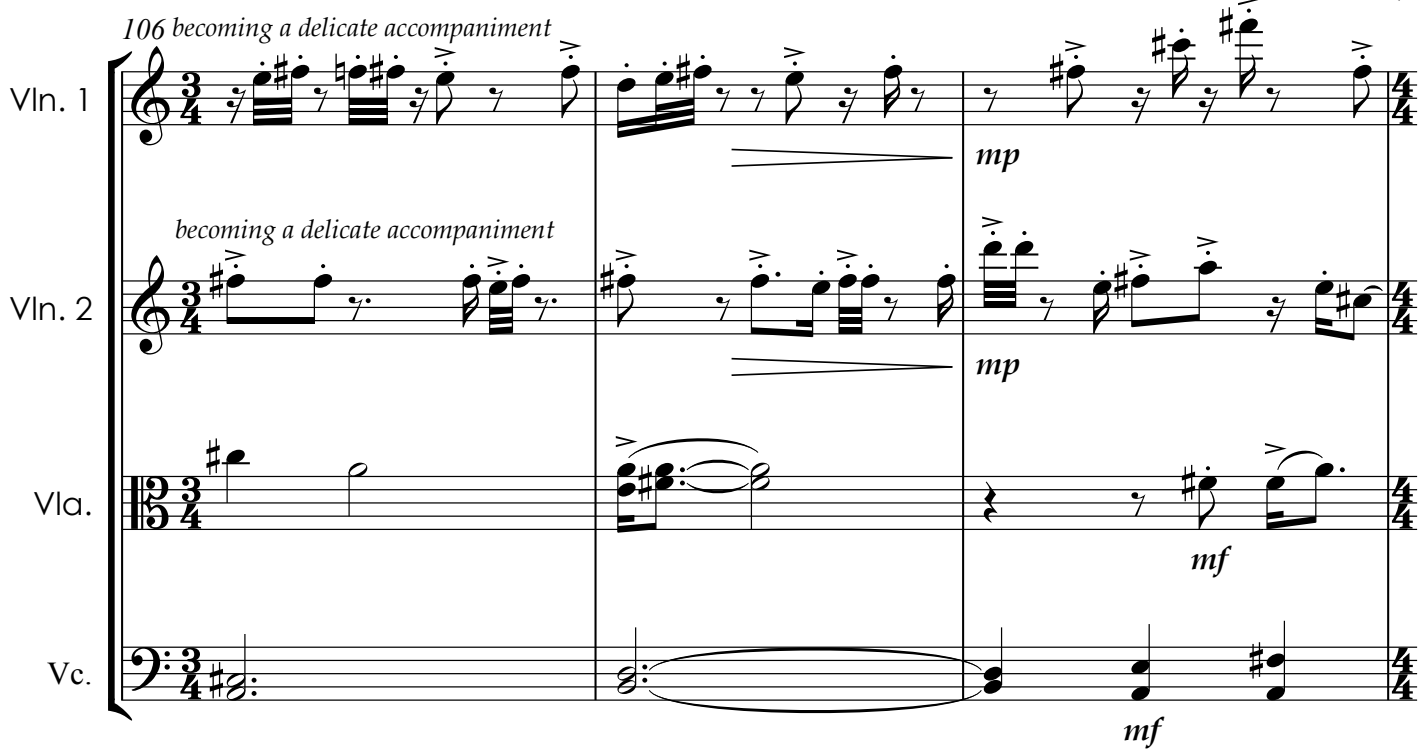

99
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

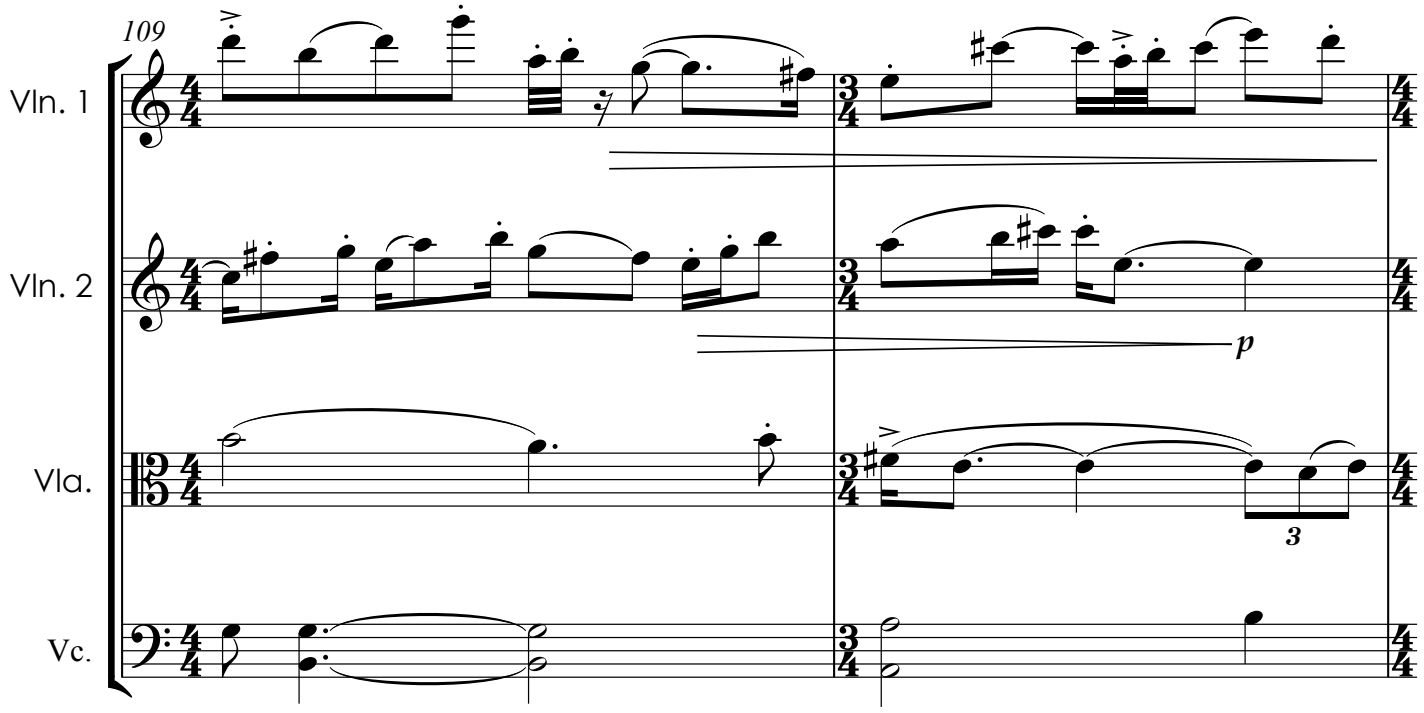

100
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.

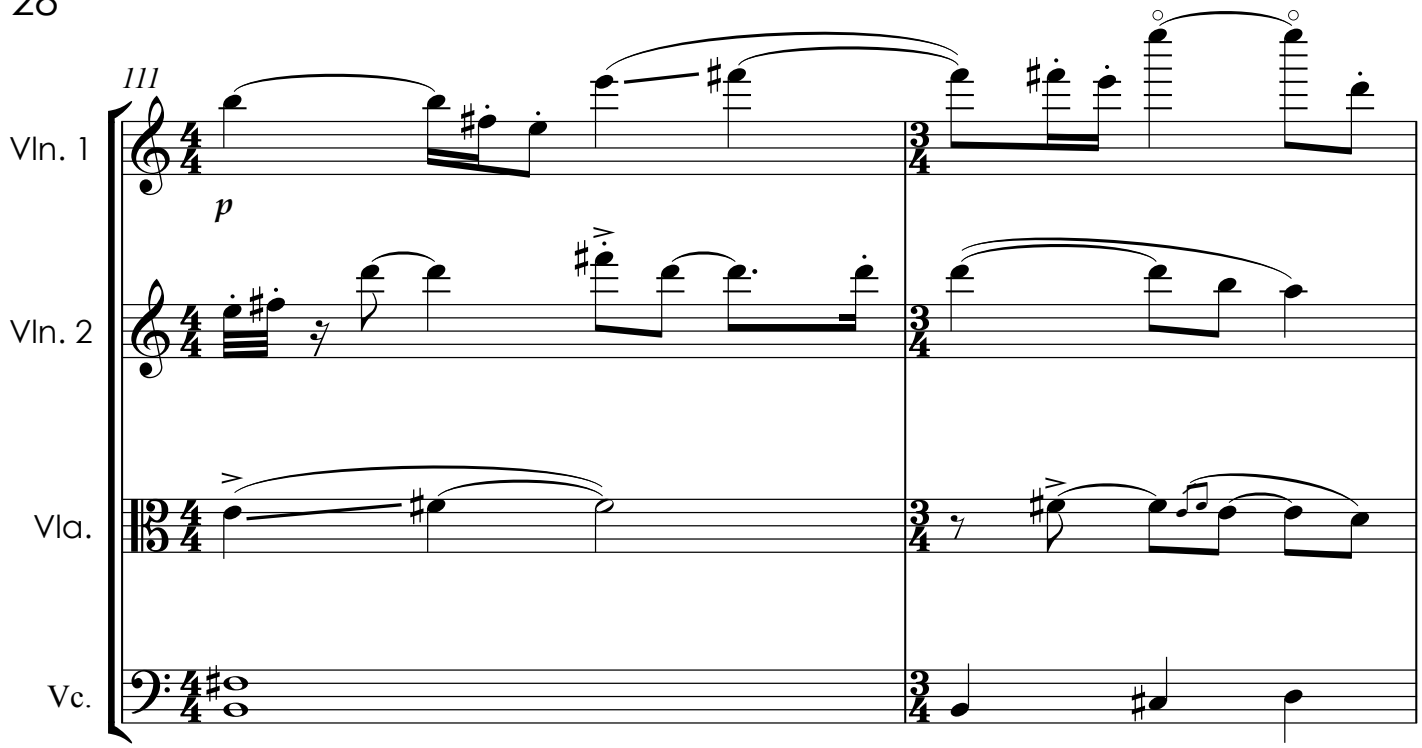

101
Vln. 1
f
Vln. 2
f
earnest, lyrical
Vla.
3
gradually becoming less aggressive
Vc.

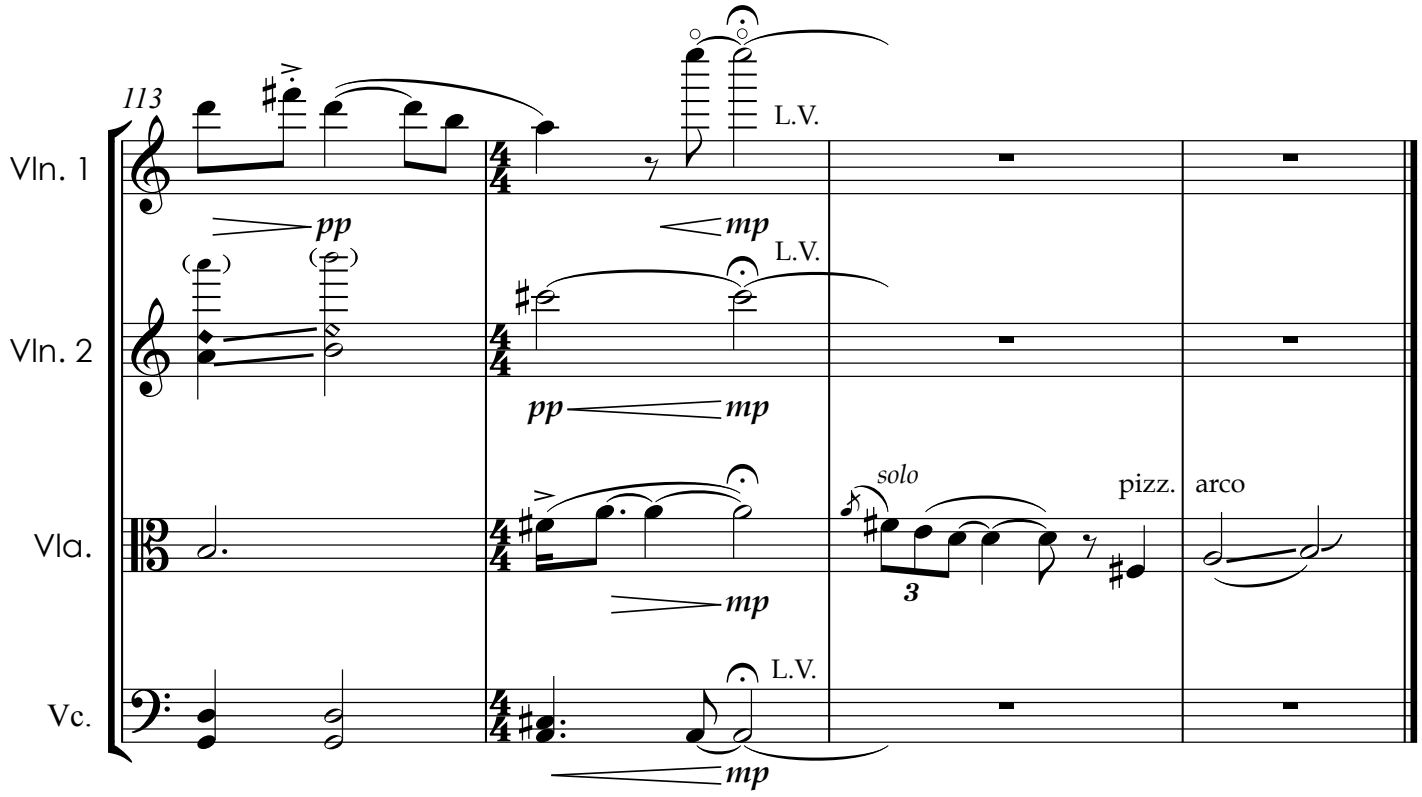

102
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
f


104
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mf
mf
f
3


106 becoming a delicate accompaniment
Vln. 1
mp
becoming a delicate accompaniment
Vln. 2
mp
Vla.
mf
Vc.
mf


109
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
p
Vla.
3
Vc.


111
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p


113
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
pp
mp
L.V.
solo
pizz.
arco
3