Variations on the Grosse Fuge

for

String Quartet and Orchestra

Bill Robinson

Variations on the Grosse Fuge
for String Quartet and Orchestra

January 6—March 22, 1987 (synth version), Las Cruces, New Mexico
revised 2003-2005, revised and orchestrated 2007, edited 2014 and 2024
duration: about 18 minutes

in memoriam Ben Marcato

While a student at Eastman School of Music in 1973-74, I listened every other night to Beethoven's opus 133 string quartet *Grosse Fuge* with a couple of friends for at least two months. (The alternate nights were usually spent with *Hammerklavier*.) As a result this string quartet was branded on my brain, which may not have been the best thing for my early composition style—which tended to the too noisy and too crowded with notes, not to mention horribly hard to play.

I went to NTSU (now UNT) in Denton Texas in the fall of 1974, and started working on a string quintet/string orchestra piece that would be a variation on the *Grosse Fuge*—re-writing the piece in my own idiom and with significant differences. After about two years of work, it was premiered at my senior composition recital in 1977. The performance was rather rough, and the recital failed; I left school without a degree. (I returned to NTSU in the early '80s and got a BM in 1984.)

I took a break from composing in the fall of 1985 to start work on an experiment in transcendental physics. After moving to Las Cruces New Mexico in the fall of 1986, my project was at a standstill, and I livened up my life in a desert trailer slum by composing a completely new variation on the *Grosse Fuge*, disposing of the string quintet and using instead five synthesizers. I had written new and arranged older works for five synths. With this experience, but not having a synth or any electronic equipment myself, I simply imagined what I would like the piece to be like and designed it for live performance. The composition took from January 6 to March 22, 1987. I could neither find performers nor afford equipment to sequence or record the synth scores I'd written.

I revised the score in January 2005 but still did not have a performable piece. I then realized in early 2007 that a string quartet could take on the most difficult passages, leaving more playable material for an orchestra with a reasonable skill level. A decent college orchestra should be able to play this work; the quartet will have to be of professional quality. During the orchestration I recomposed some sections and made several improvements. In late 2014, I revised the layout of the orchestral score and extracted a fresh set of parts.

There is also a version for piano quintet where the string quartet takes on considerably more material. As a result, it is not simply a version with piano taking orchestral parts, but rather is a unique and separate rendition. Not surprisingly, considerable skill for all performers is required for the chamber version. The piano quintet was premiered by the Ciompi Quartet with Randall Love, piano, at the NC Museum of Art in January 2009.

With no apology, this music is intense, hypercomplex, and maybe just a little crazy—as such not so different from the original; but if a focused listener someday can achieve some familiarity with the music, I do hope that the sweat required for its production will have been worthwhile.

The instrumentation is winds in pairs (flute 2 doubles piccolo), four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, string quartet, and strings.

Whoever tells a lie cannot be pure in heart—and only the pure in heart can make a good soup. *---L. v. B.*

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[C score] ♩. = 133 *(as in 'opus')*

Variations on the Grosse Fuge

[18']

Bill Robinson

Allegro

1 Flute
2 (dbl. Picc.)
1 Oboe
2
1 Clarinet in B♭
2
1 Bassoon
2
1 Horns in F
2
3
4
1 Trumpet in B♭
2
1 Trombones
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timpani
I Violins
II
Quartet
Viola
Violoncello

Allegro ♩. = 133

I Violin
II
Viola
Violoncello
Double Bass

ben marcato *(Picc.)* *ff*

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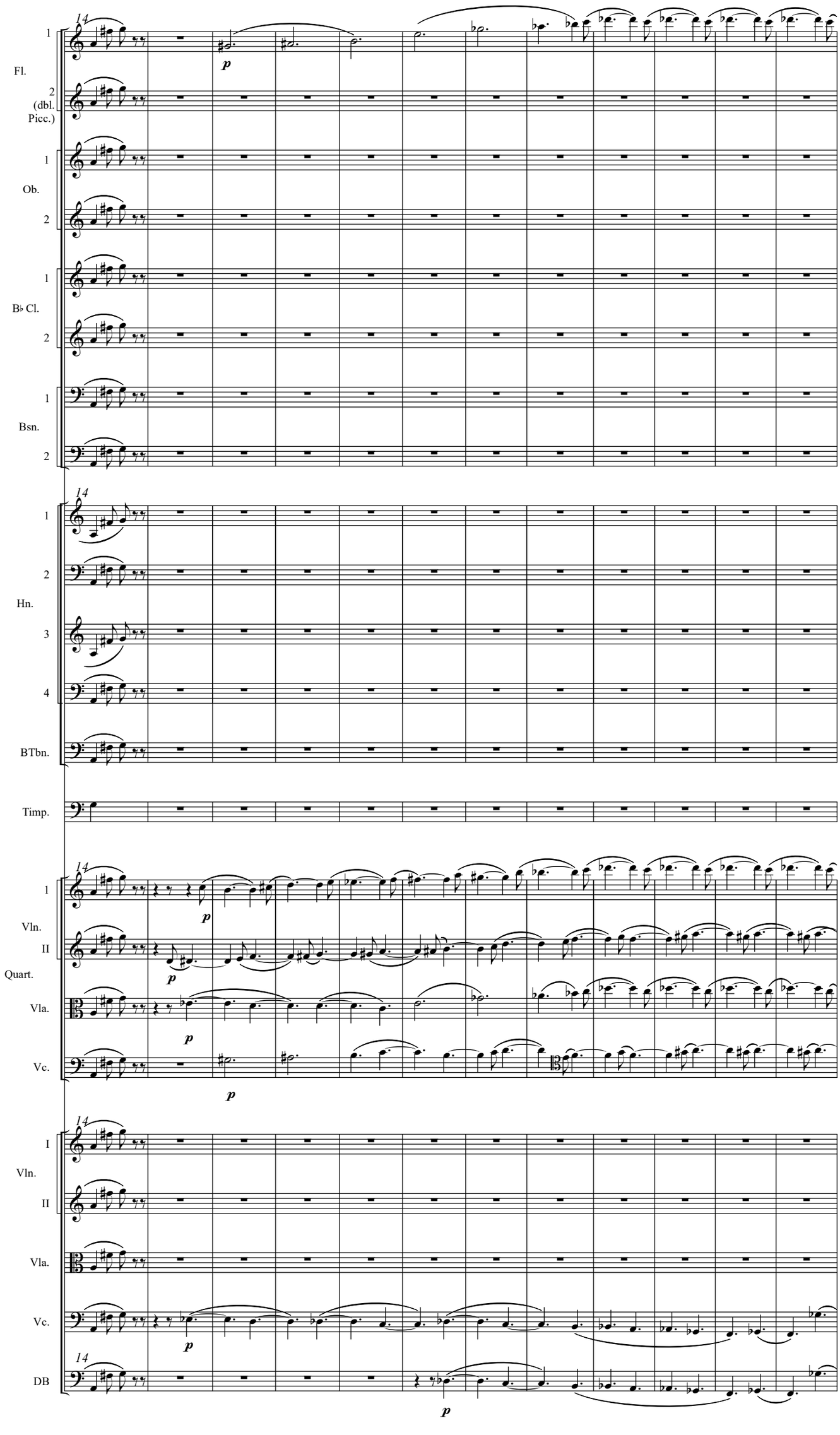
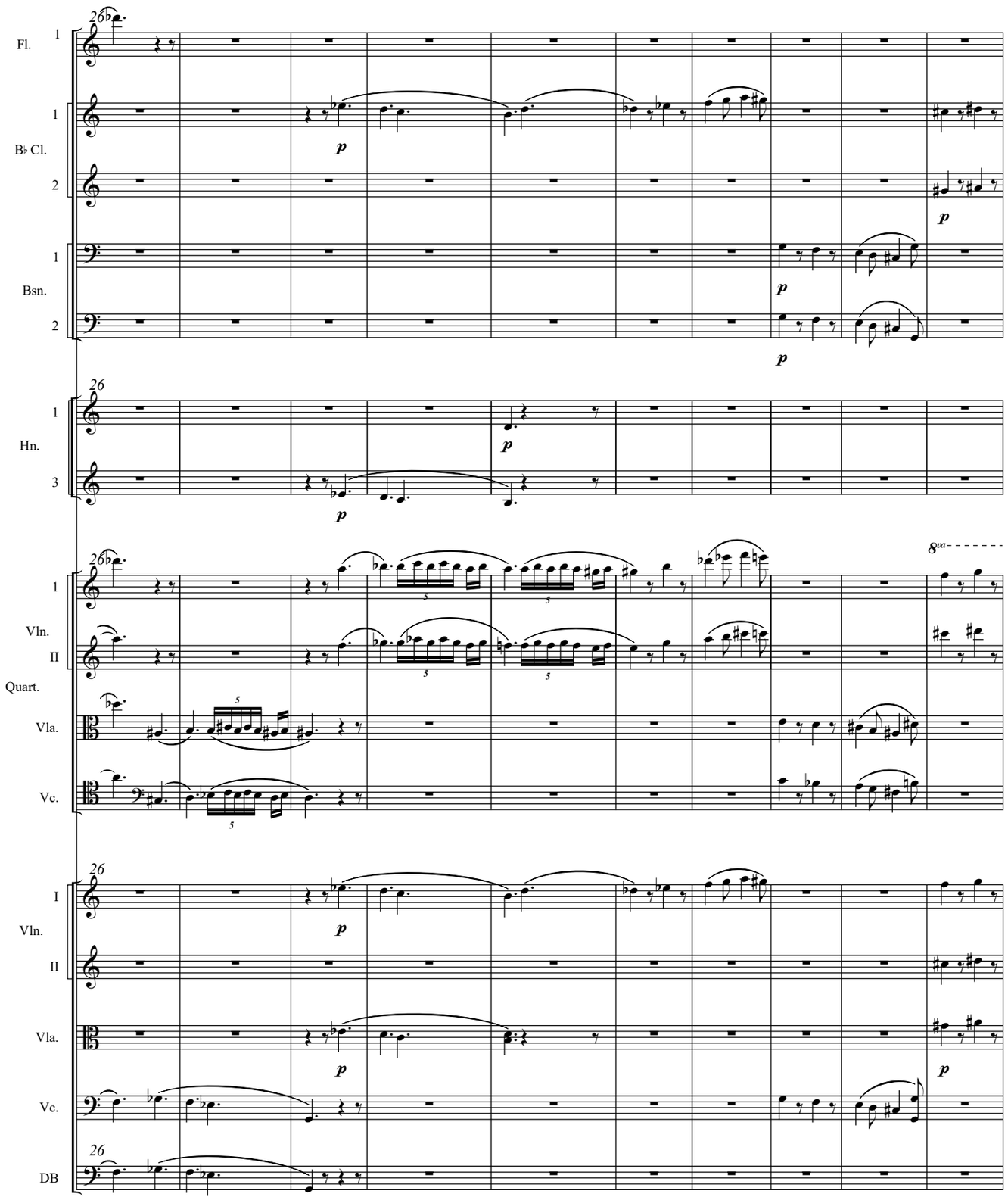
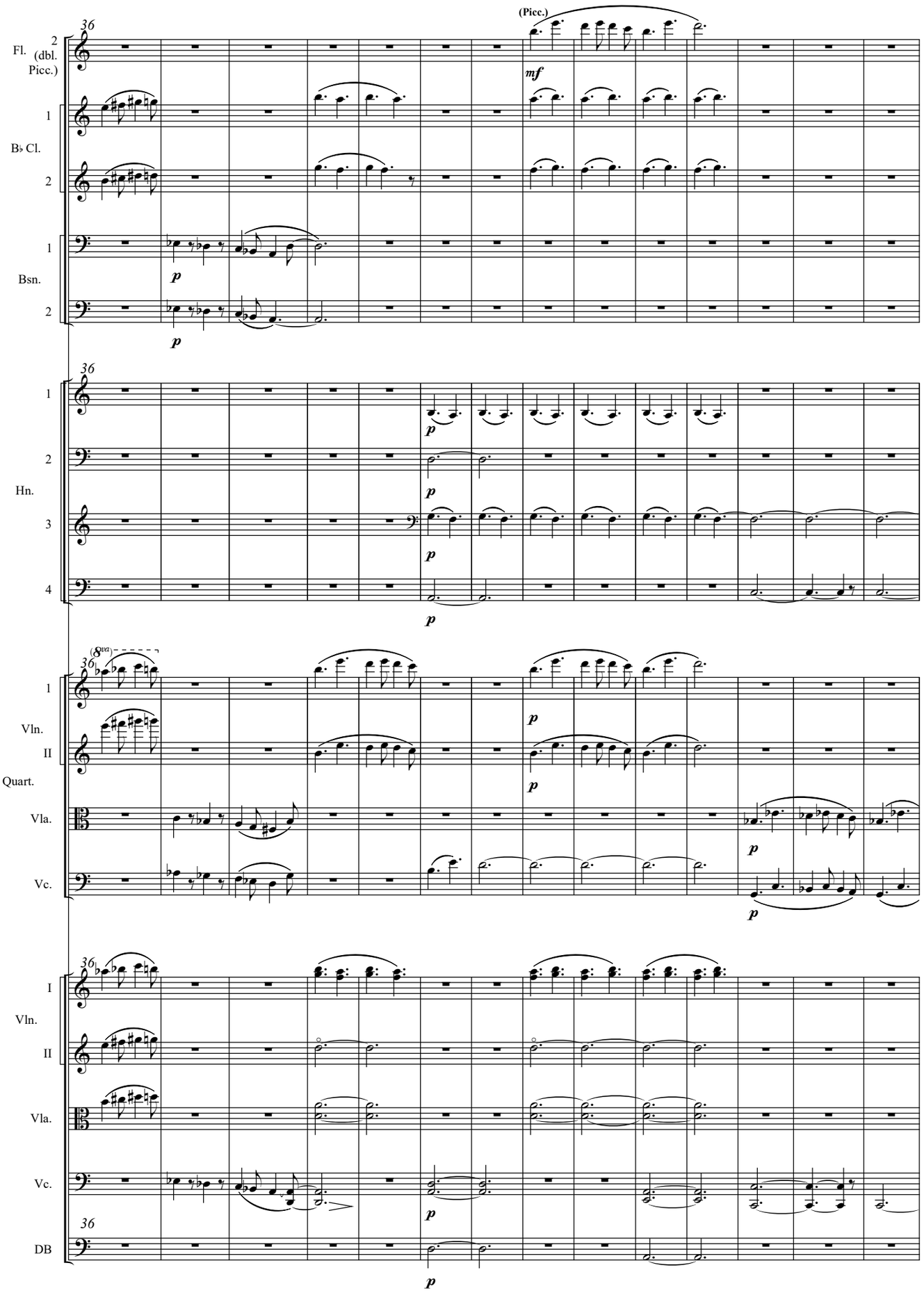
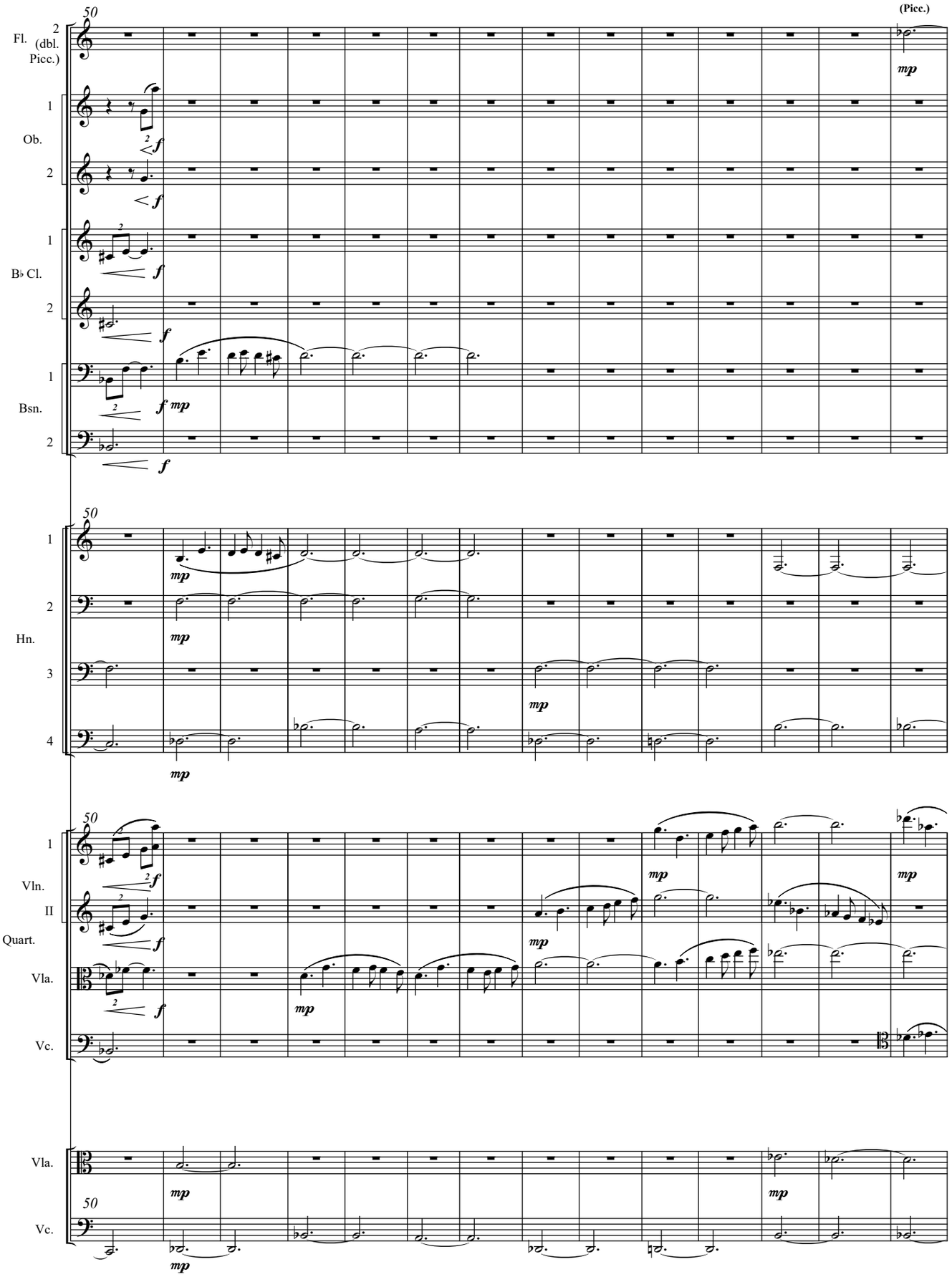
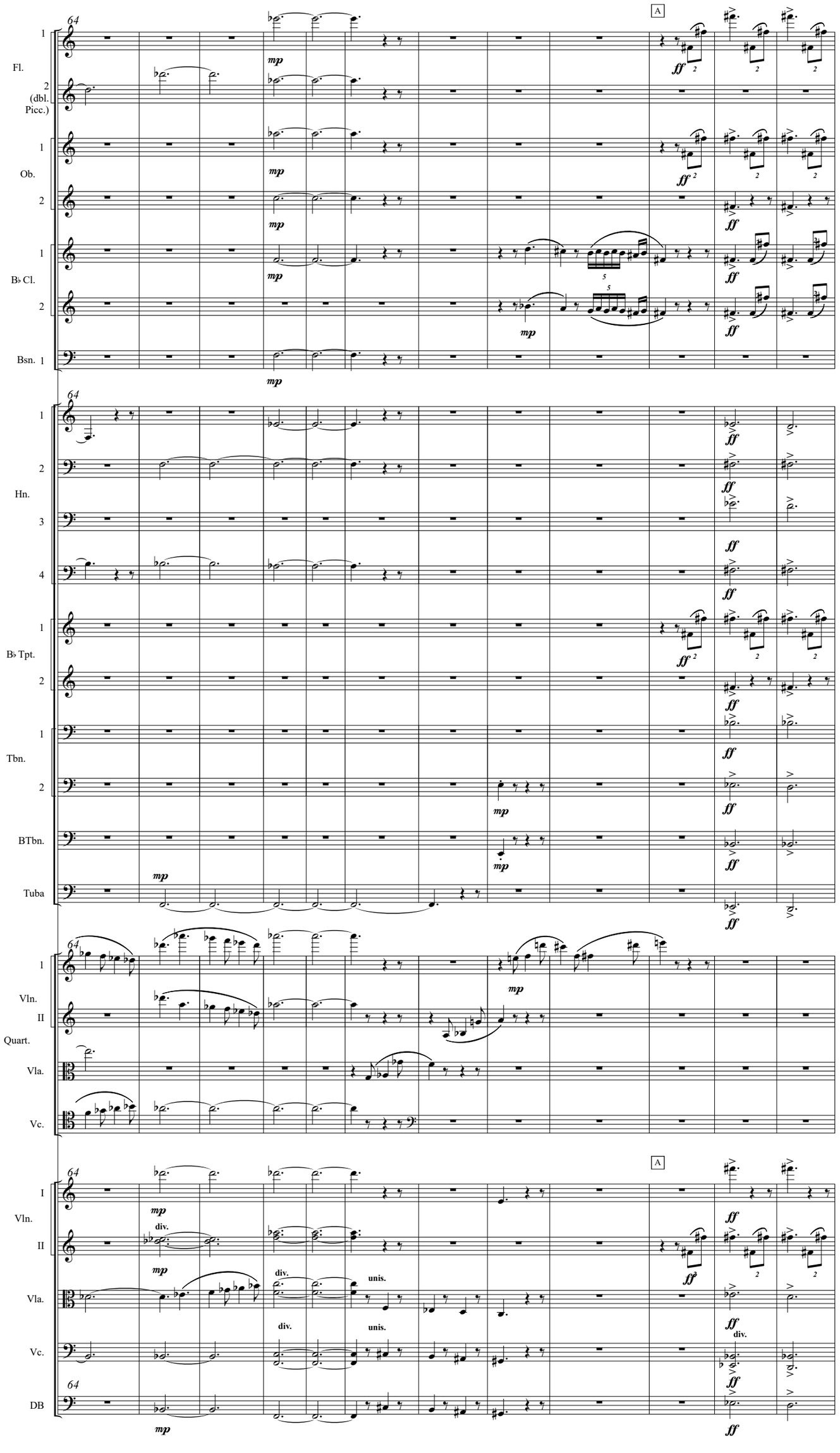
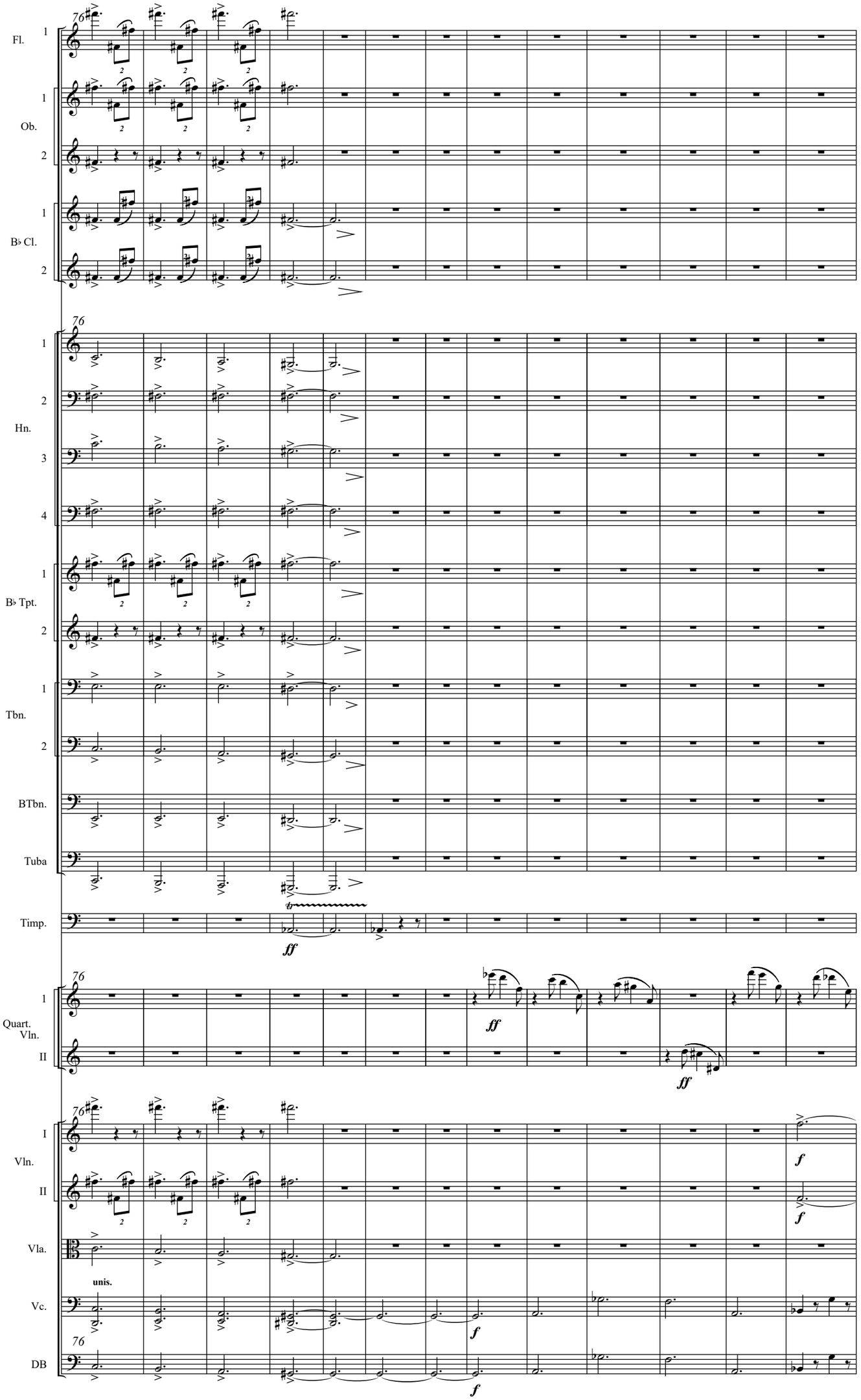

14
1
Fl.
2
(dbl.
Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
p
14
1
2
Hn.
3
4
BTbn.
Timp.
14
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
p
p
14
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
p
14
DB
p

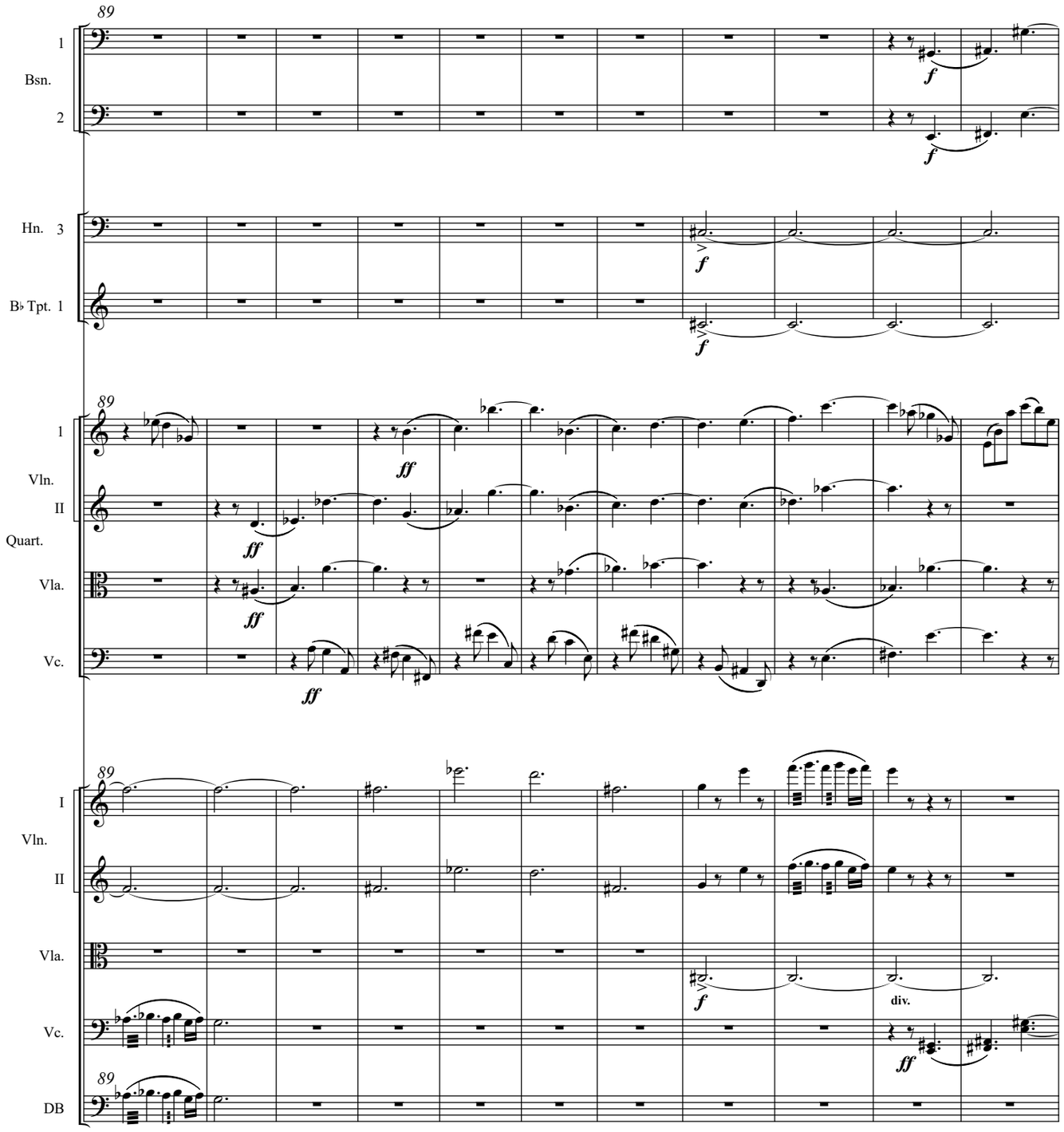

26
Fl.
1
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
p
26
1
Hn.
3
p
26
8va
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
5
26
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
26
DB
p

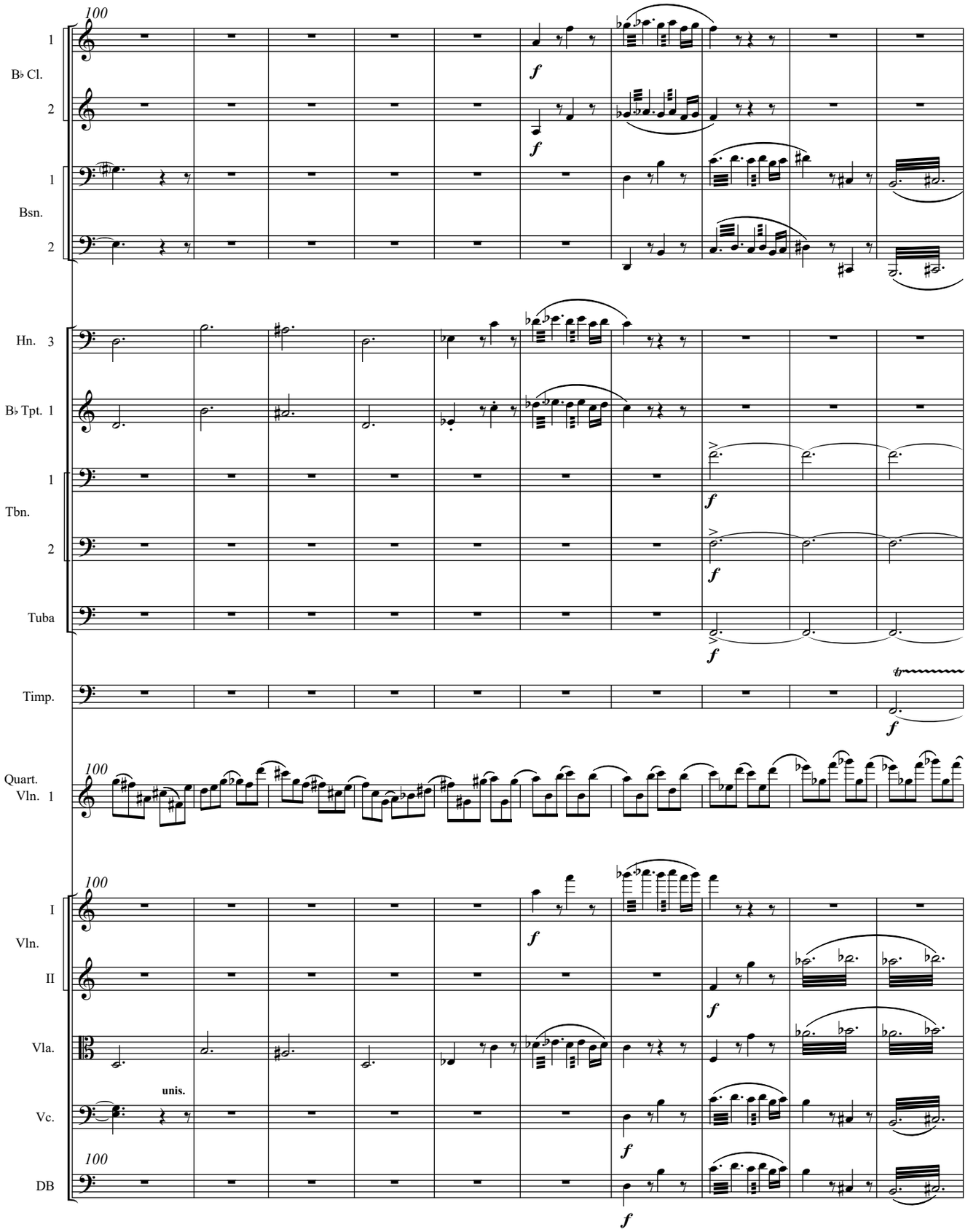

36
(Picc.)
Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)
1
B♭ Cl.
2
mf
p
1
Bsn.
2
p
36
1
2
Hn.
3
4
p
(8va)
36
1
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
p
36
I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
p

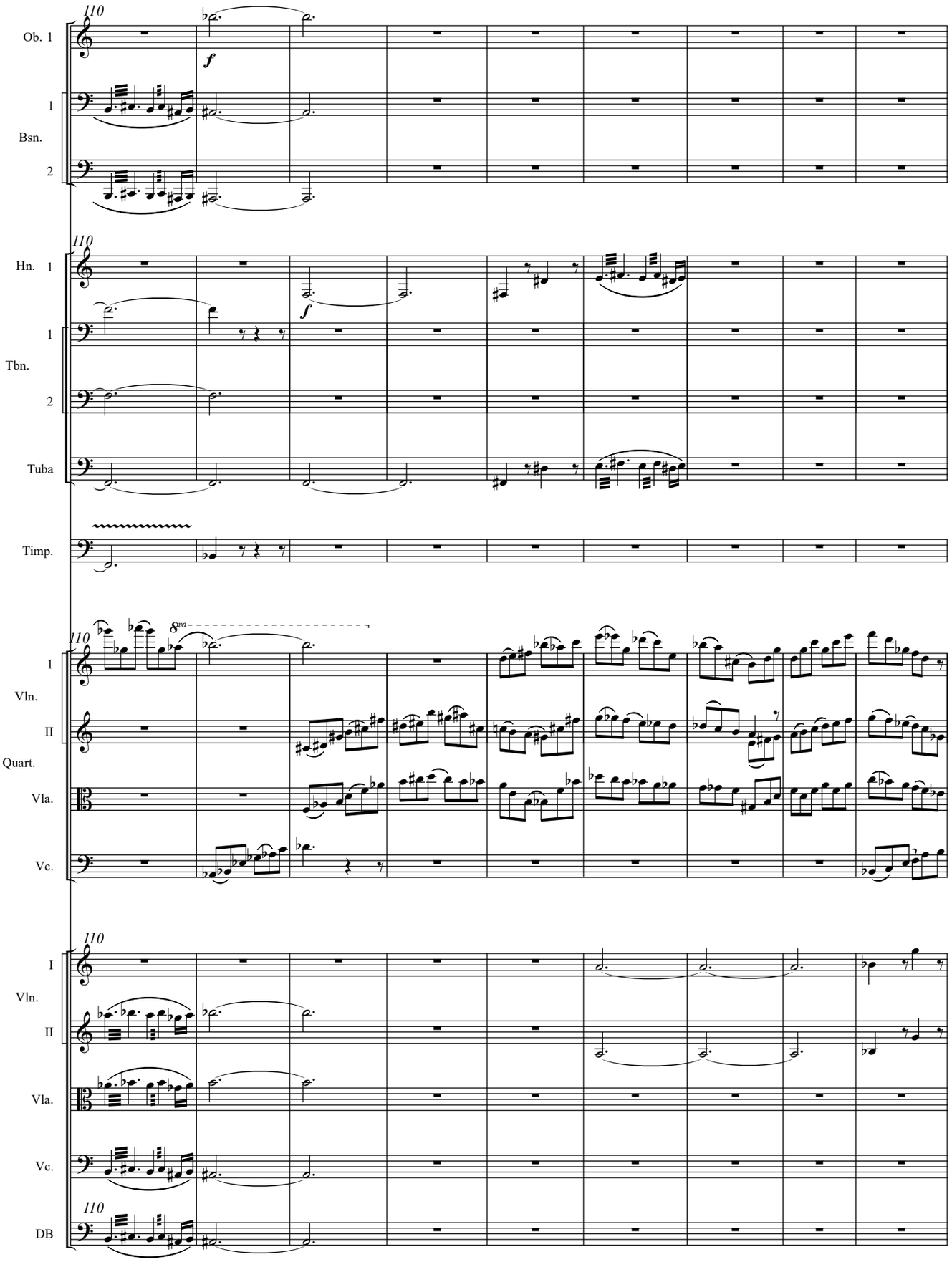

50
(Picc.)
Fl. (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
mp
f

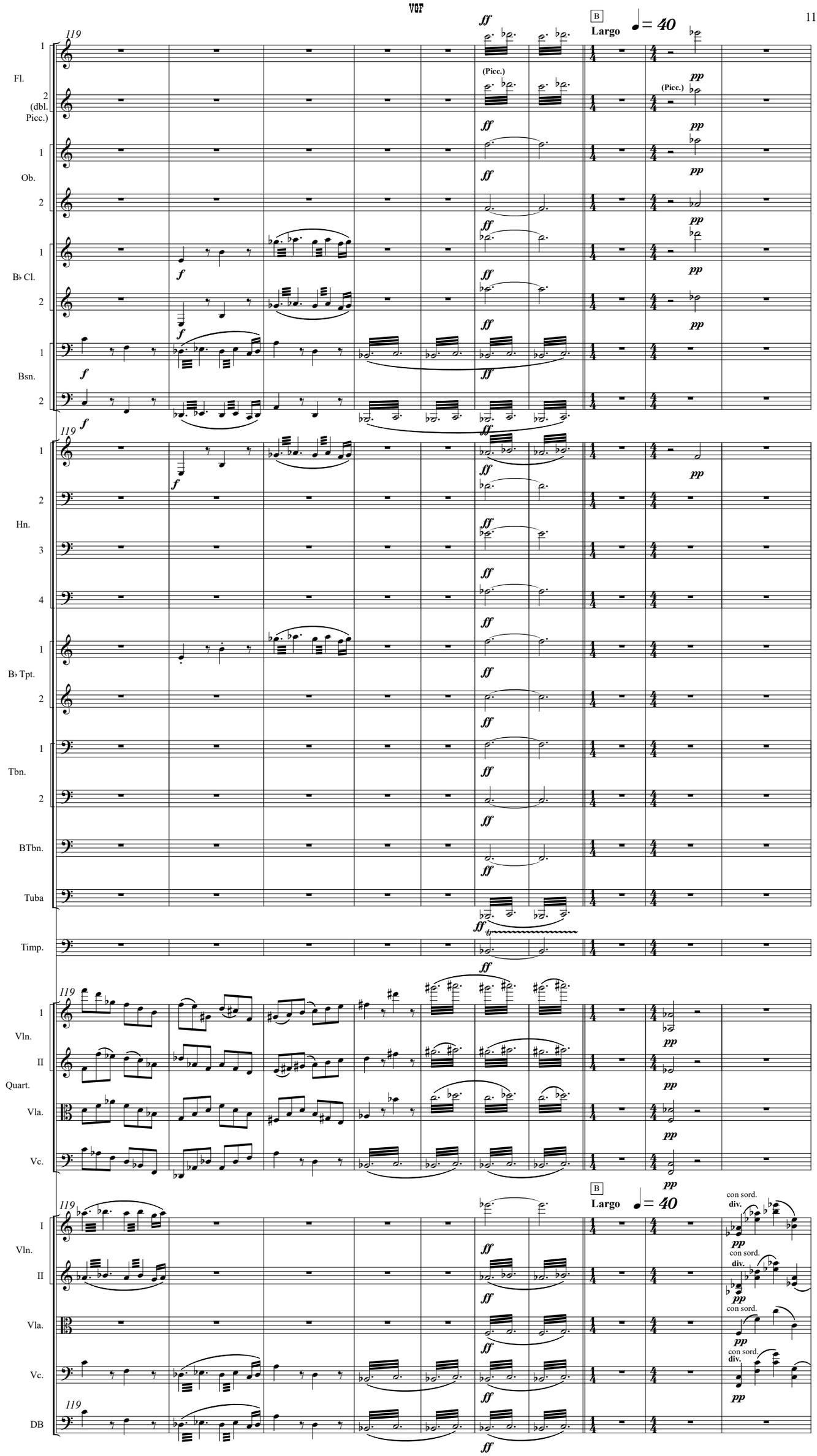

64
A
Fl.
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
mp
ff
div.
unis.

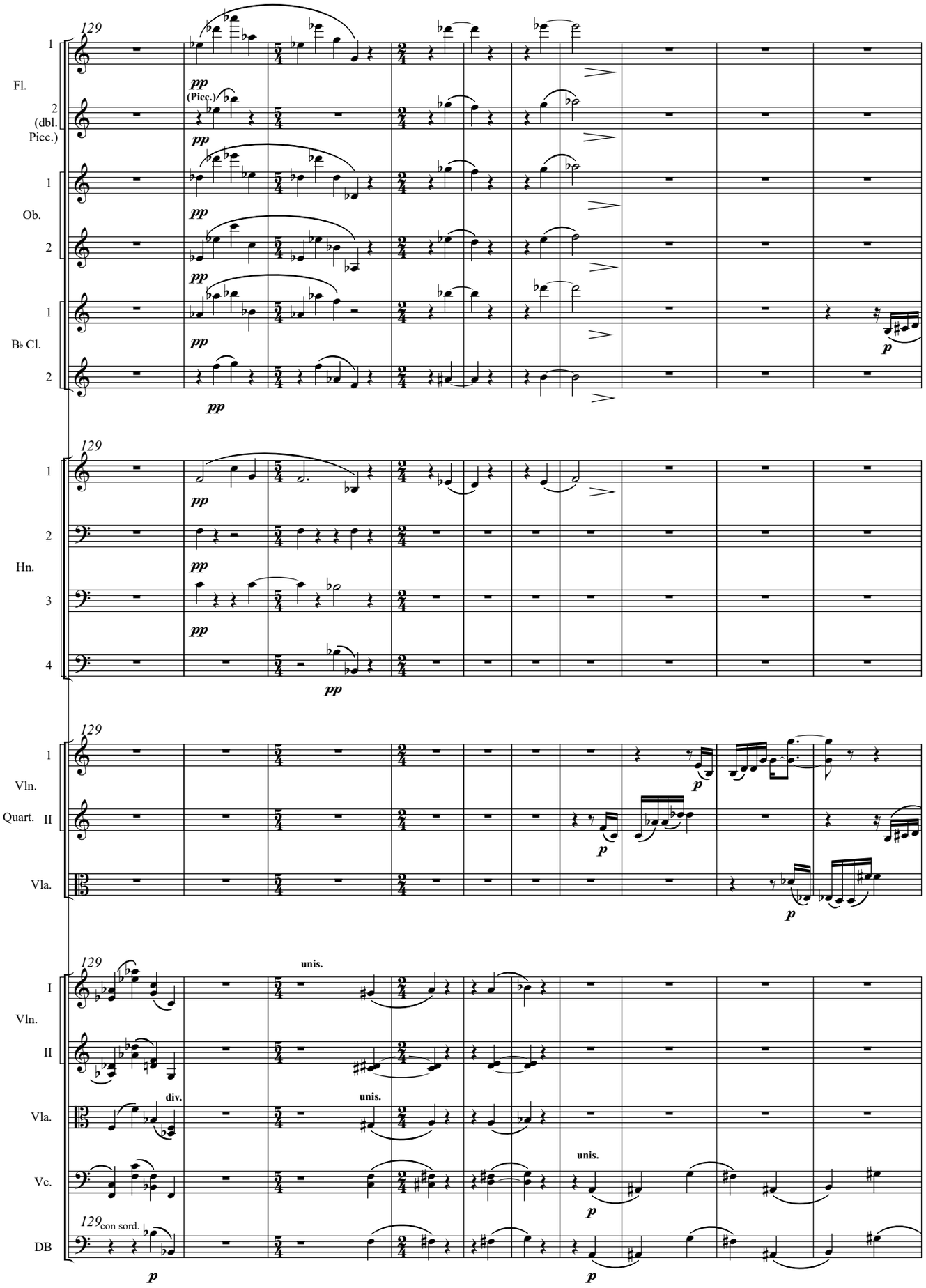

Fl.
1
Ob.
1
2
B♭ Cl.
1
2
Hn.
1
2
3
4
B♭ Tpt.
1
2
Tbn.
1
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Quart. Vln.
I
II
Vln.
I
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
76
ff
f
unis.

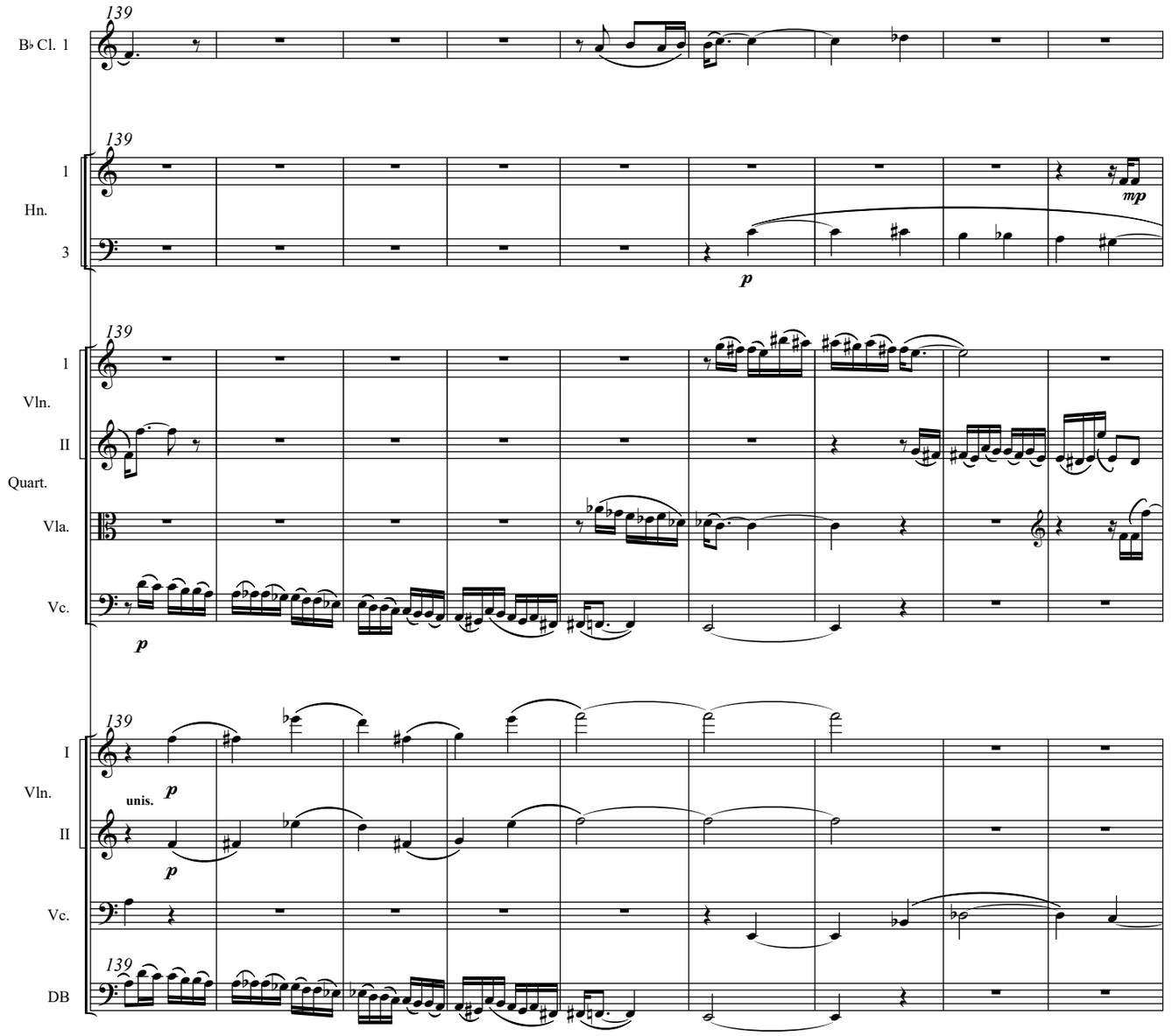

89
1
Bsn.
2
f
f
Hn. 3
B♭ Tpt. 1
f
f
89
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
ff
ff
ff
ff
89
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
f
div.
ff
89

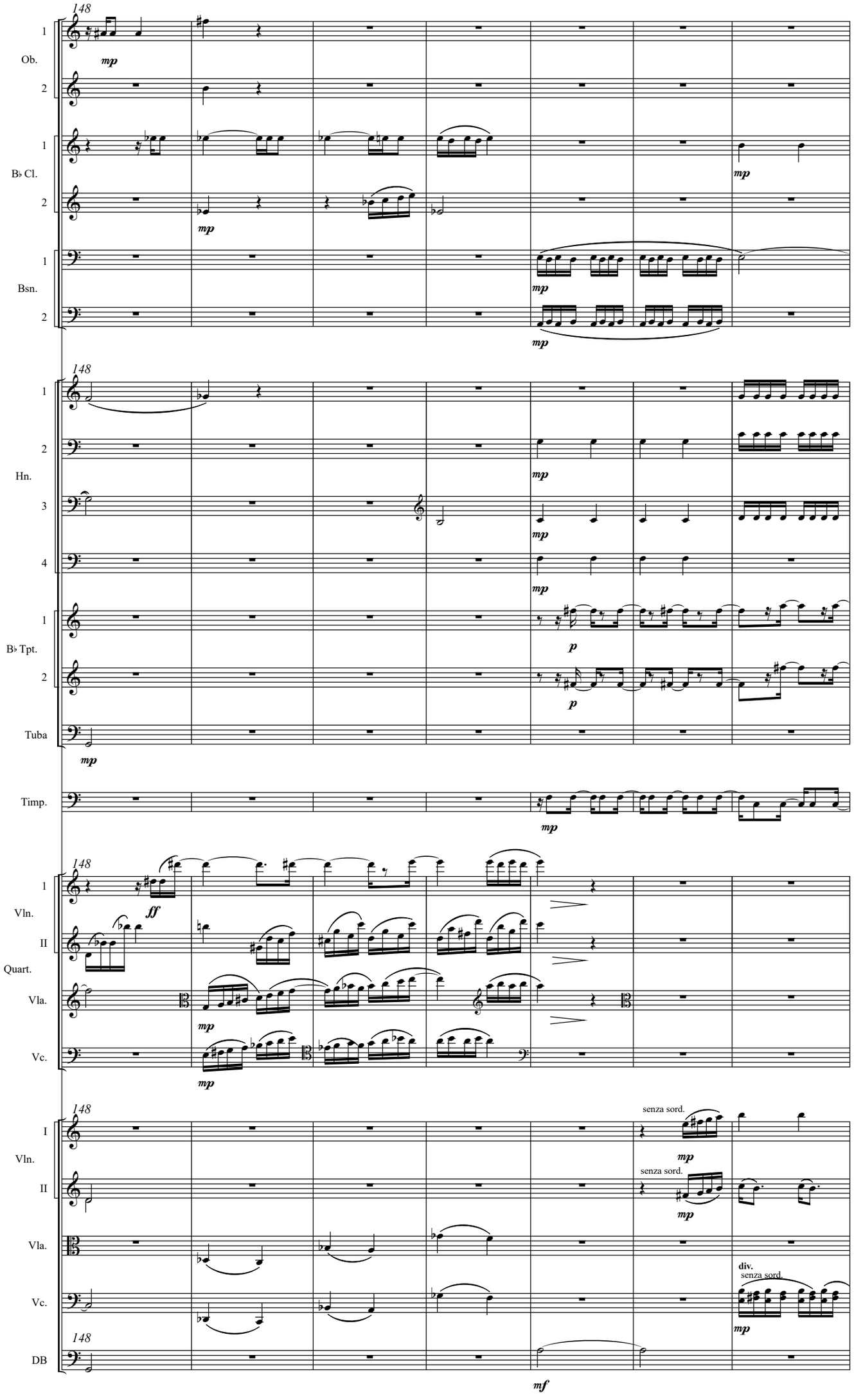

100
1
B♭ Cl.
2
f
f
1
Bsn.
2
Hn. 3
B♭ Tpt. 1
1
Tbn.
2
Tuba
f
f
f
Timp.
f
100
Quart.
Vln. 1
100
I
Vln.
II
f
f
Vla.
unis.
Vc.
f
100
DB
f
f

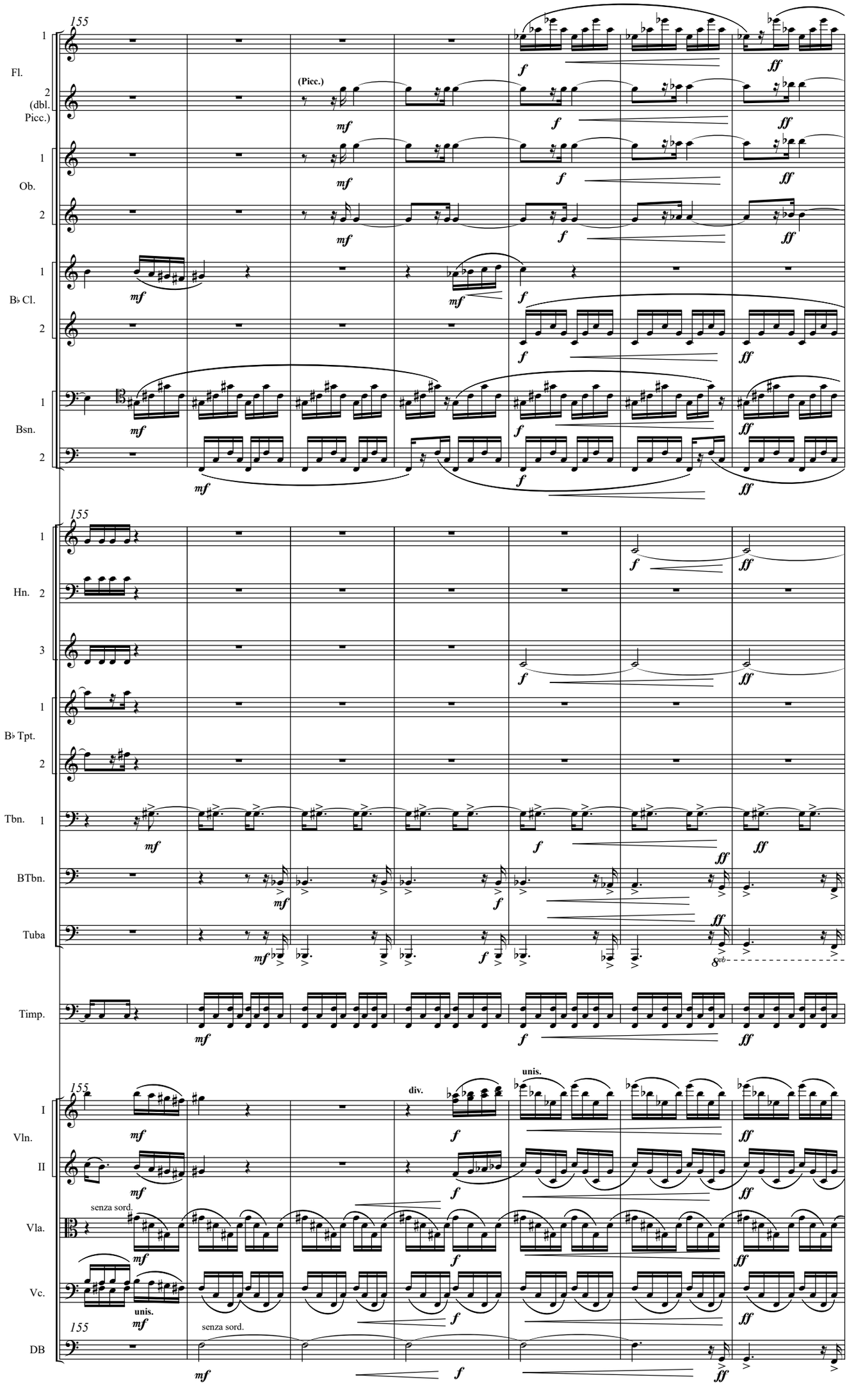

110
Ob. 1
f
1
Bsn.
2
110
Hn. 1
f
1
Tbn.
2
Tuba
Timp.
110
8va
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
110
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
110
DB

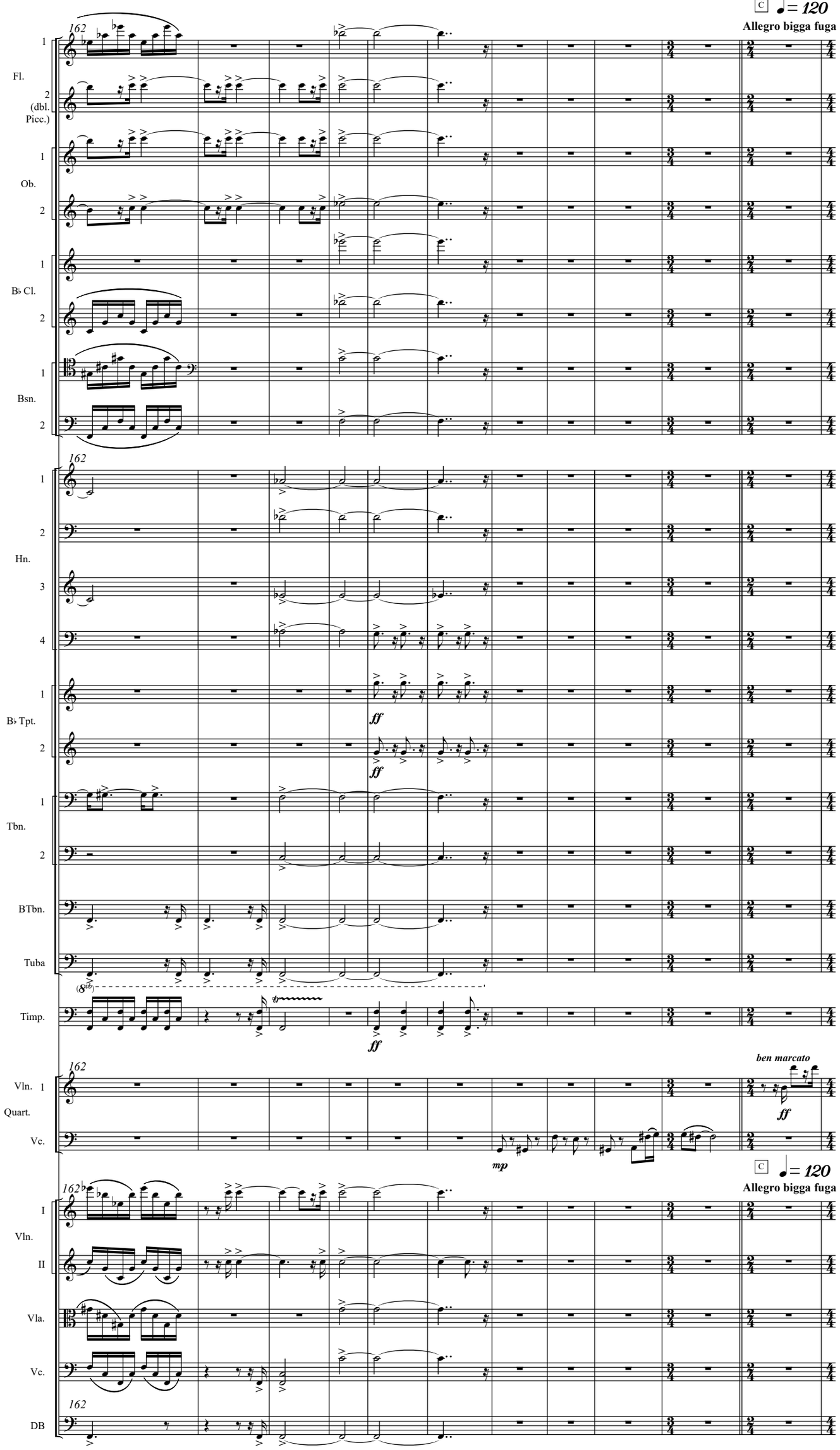

119
B
Largo
♩= 40
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
(Picc.)
con sord.
div.
ff
pp
f

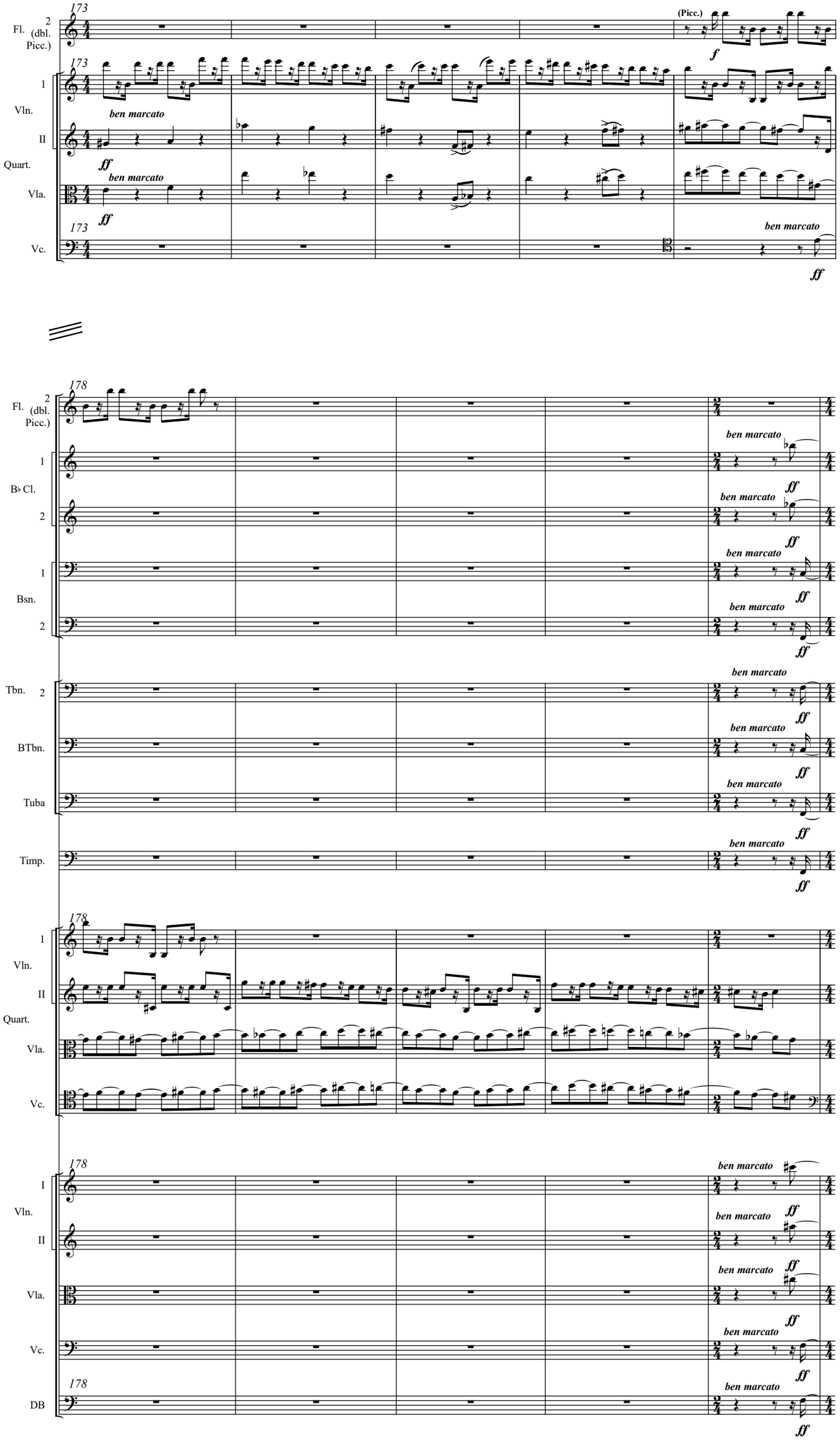

129
Fl.
1
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
1
2
B♭ Cl.
1
2
pp
(Picc.)
p
129
Hn.
1
2
3
4
pp
129
Vln. Quart.
1
II
Vla.
p
129
Vln.
I
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.
div.
con sord.
p

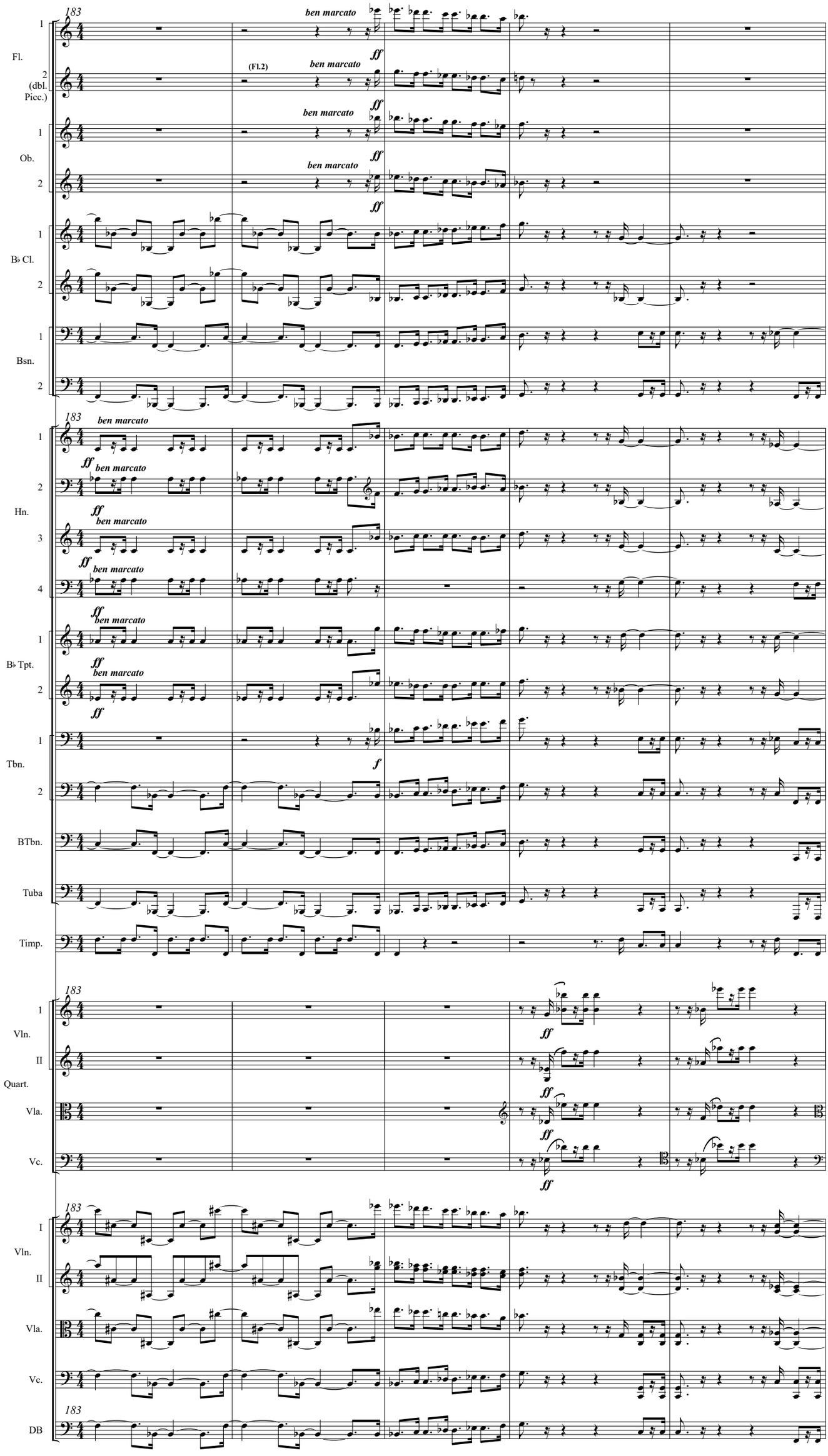

139
B♭ Cl. 1
139
1
Hn.
3
mp
p
139
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
p
139
I
Vln.
II
unis.
p
p
Vc.
139
DB

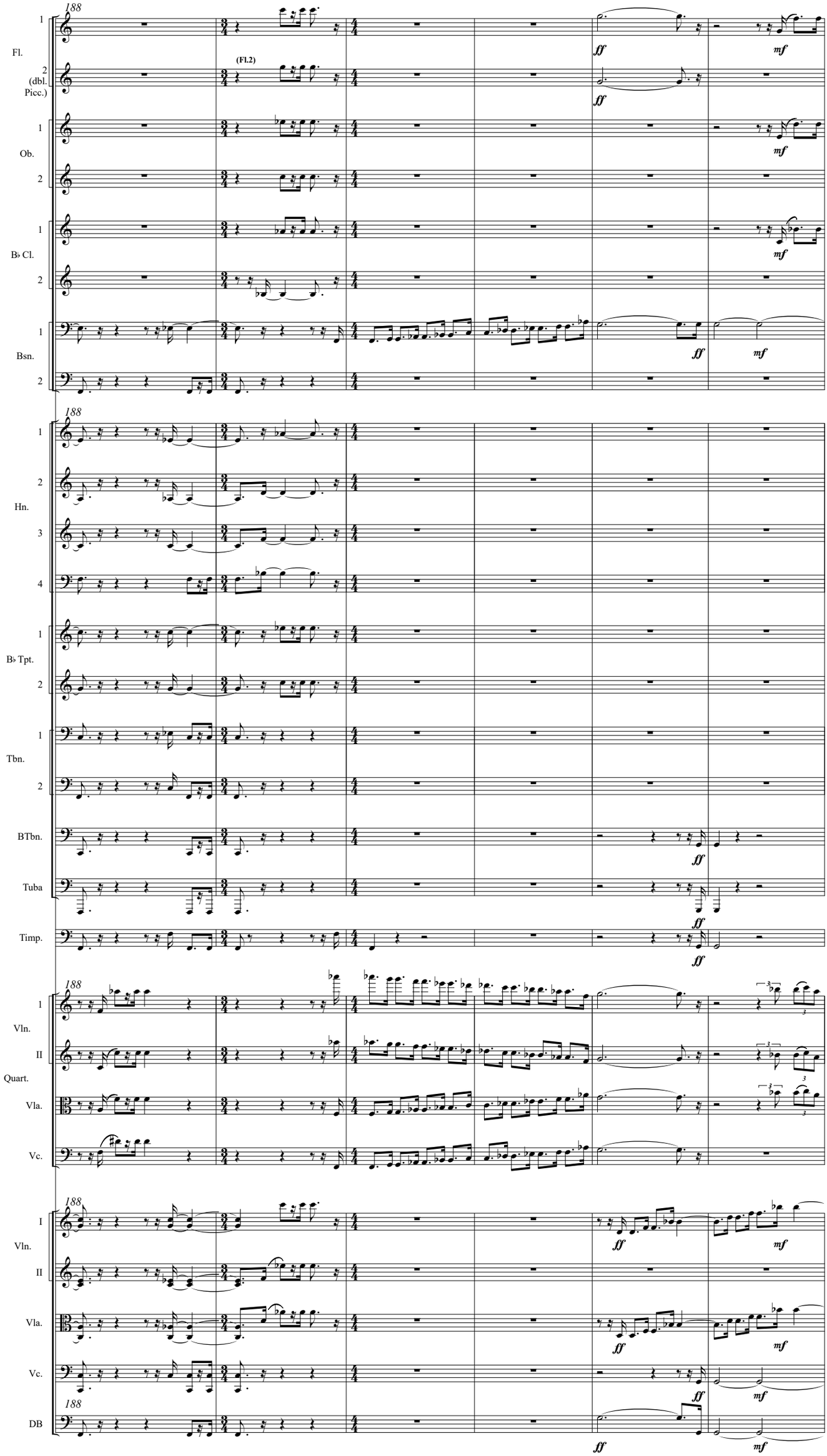

148
1
Ob.
2
mp
1
B♭ Cl.
2
mp
mp
1
Bsn.
2
mp
mp
148
1
2
Hn.
3
4
mp
mp
mp
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
p
p
Tuba
mp
Timp.
mp
148
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
ff
mp
mp
148
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
senza sord.
mp
senza sord.
mp
div.
senza sord.
mp
148
mf

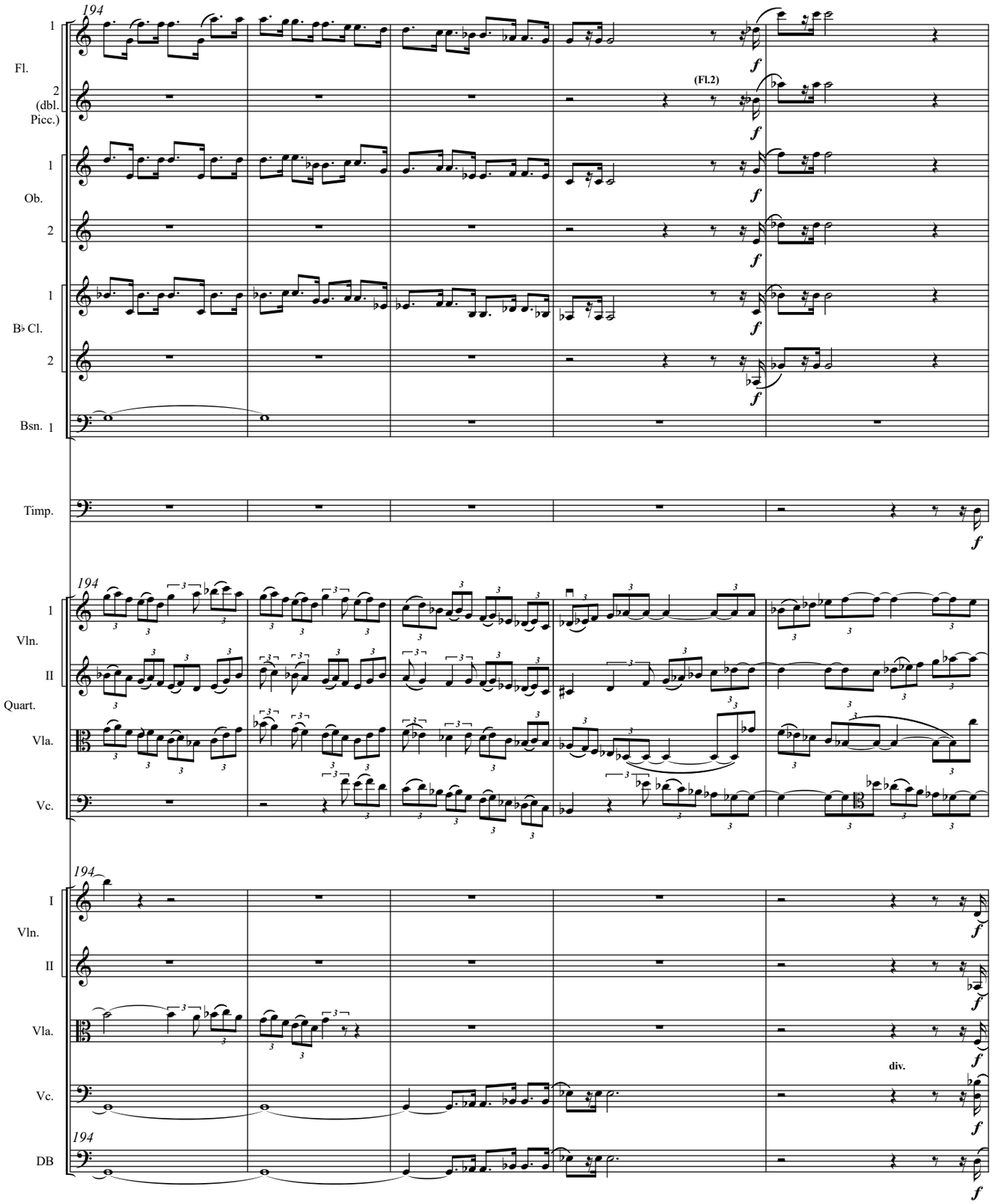

155
Fl.
(Picc.)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
8vb
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.
div.
senza sord.
mf
f
ff

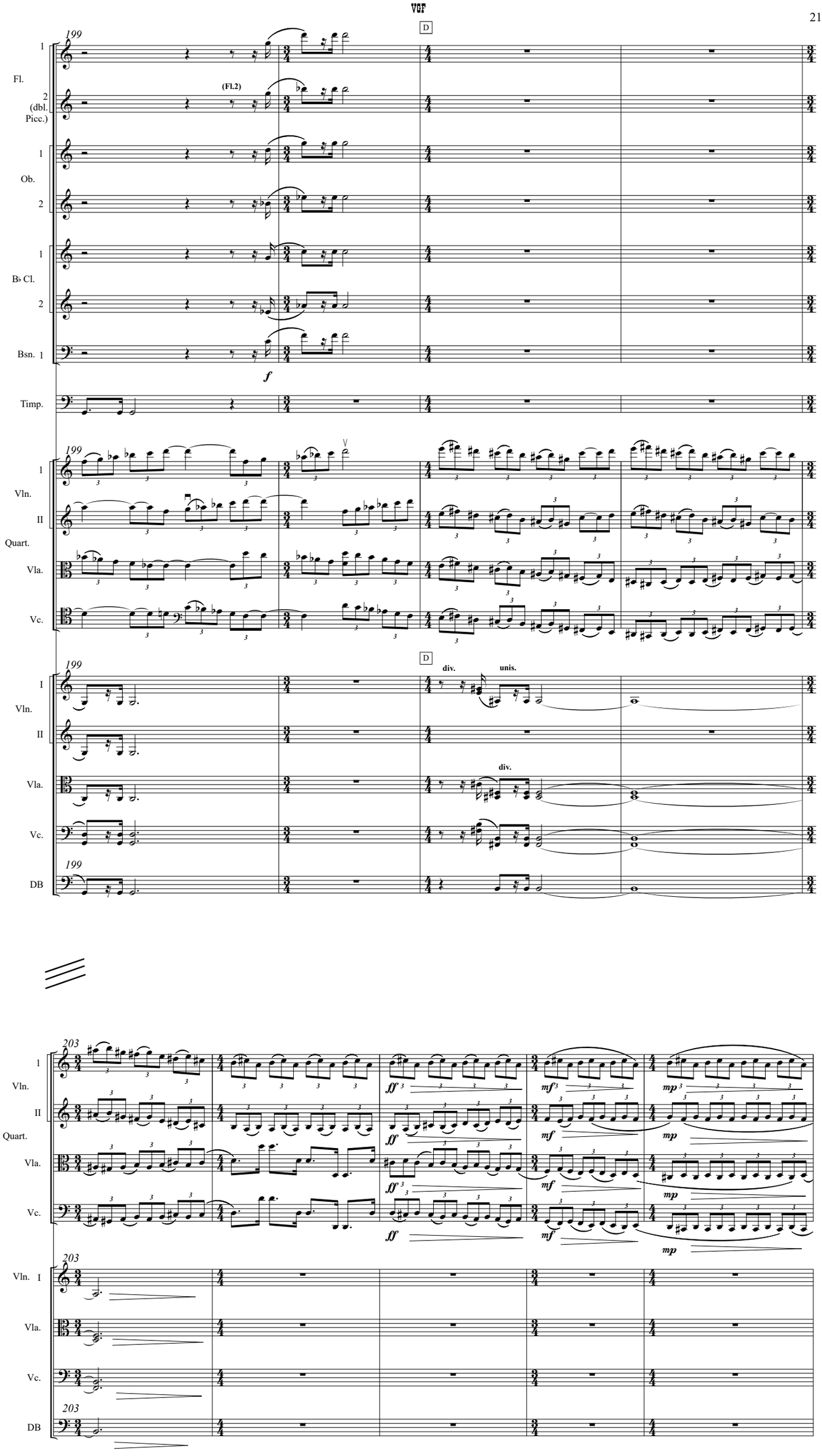

C ♩= 120
Allegro bigga fuga
162
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. 1
Quart.
Vc.
ff
mp
ben marcato
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
DB

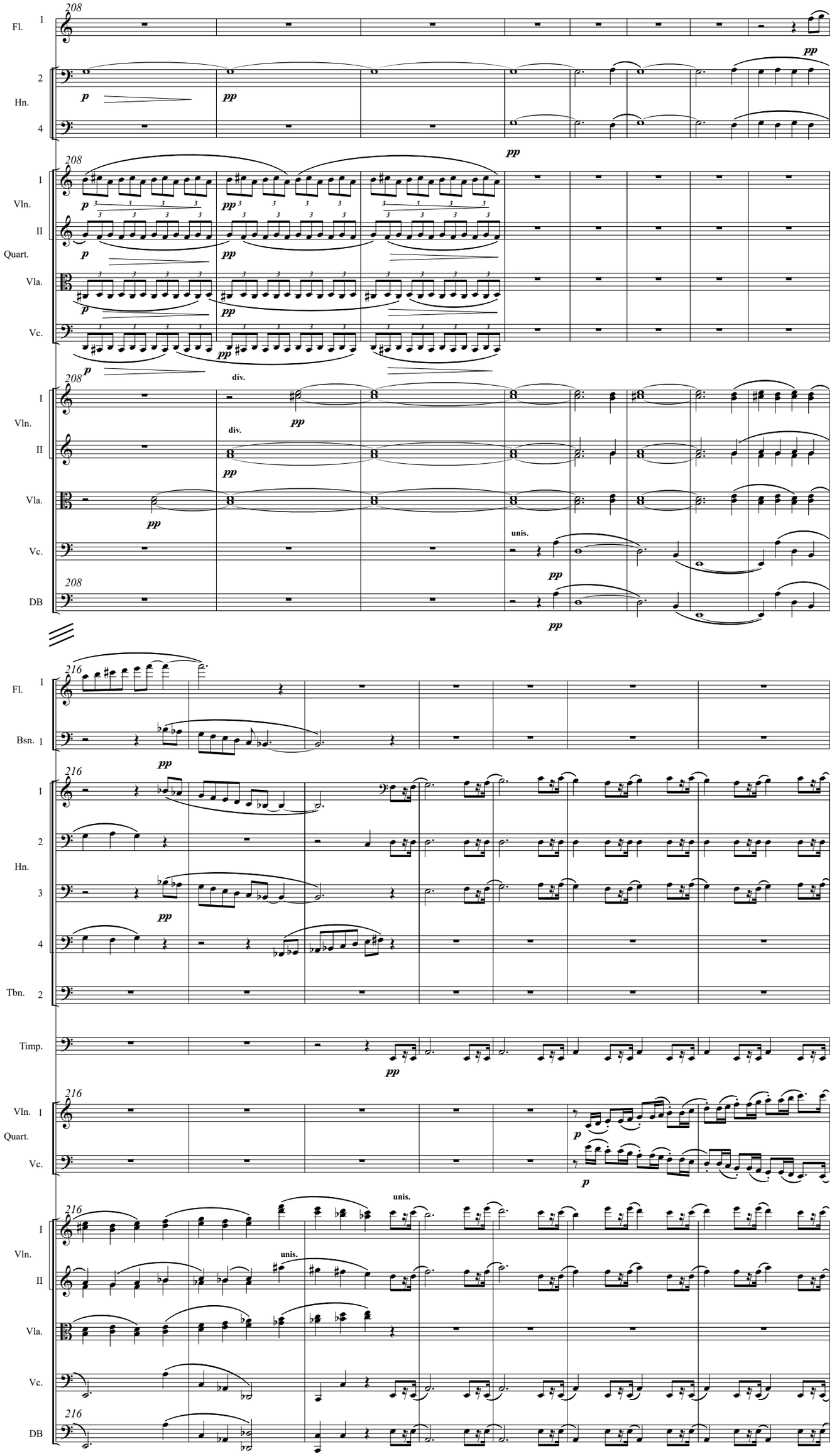

173
Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
f
1 Vln. II
ben marcato
ff
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
178
B♭ Cl. 1 2
Bsn. 1 2
Tbn. 2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
I Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
DB

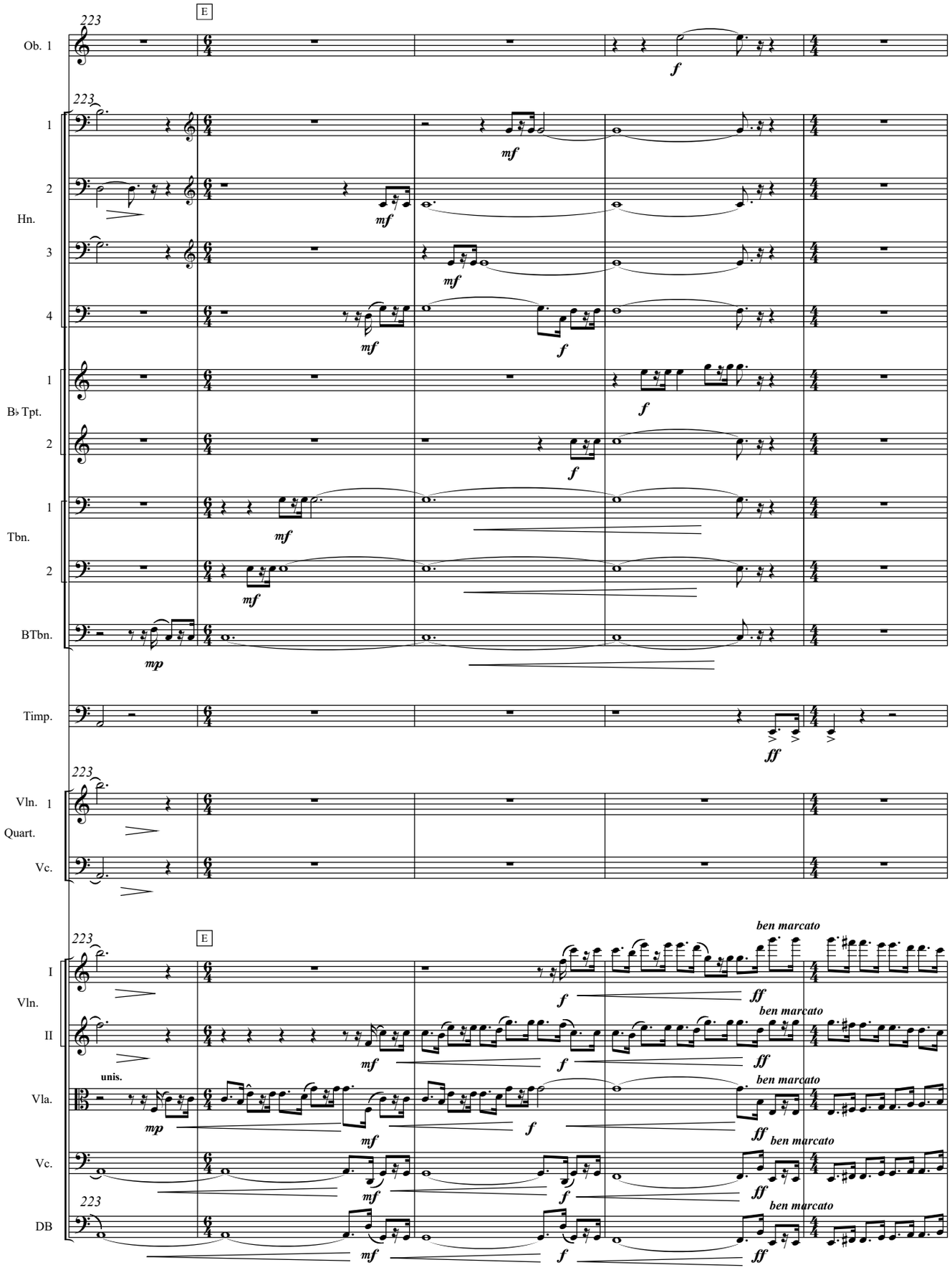

183
ben marcato
ff
(Fl.2)
Fl.
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
f

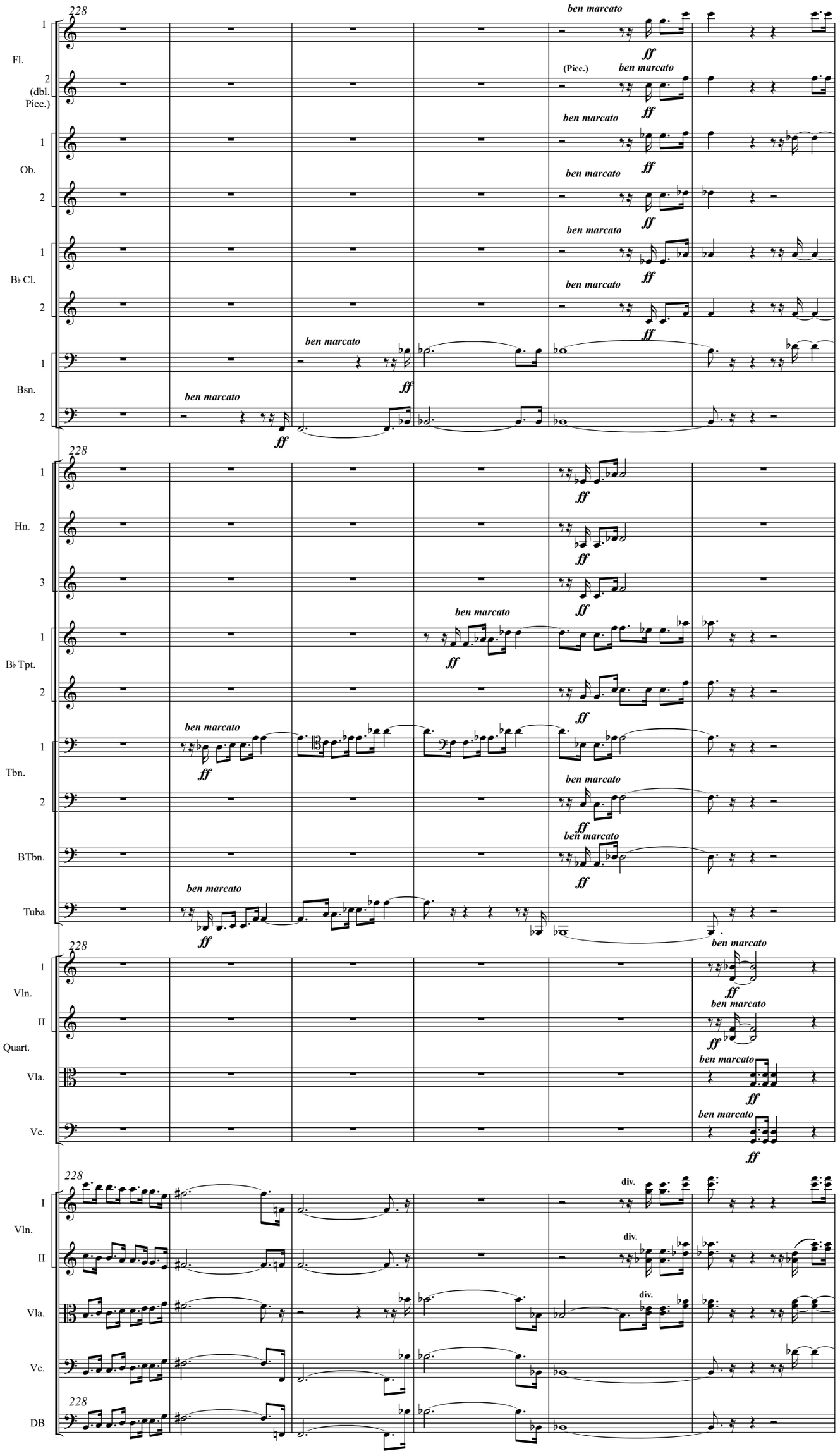

188
Fl.
(Fl.2)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
ff
mf

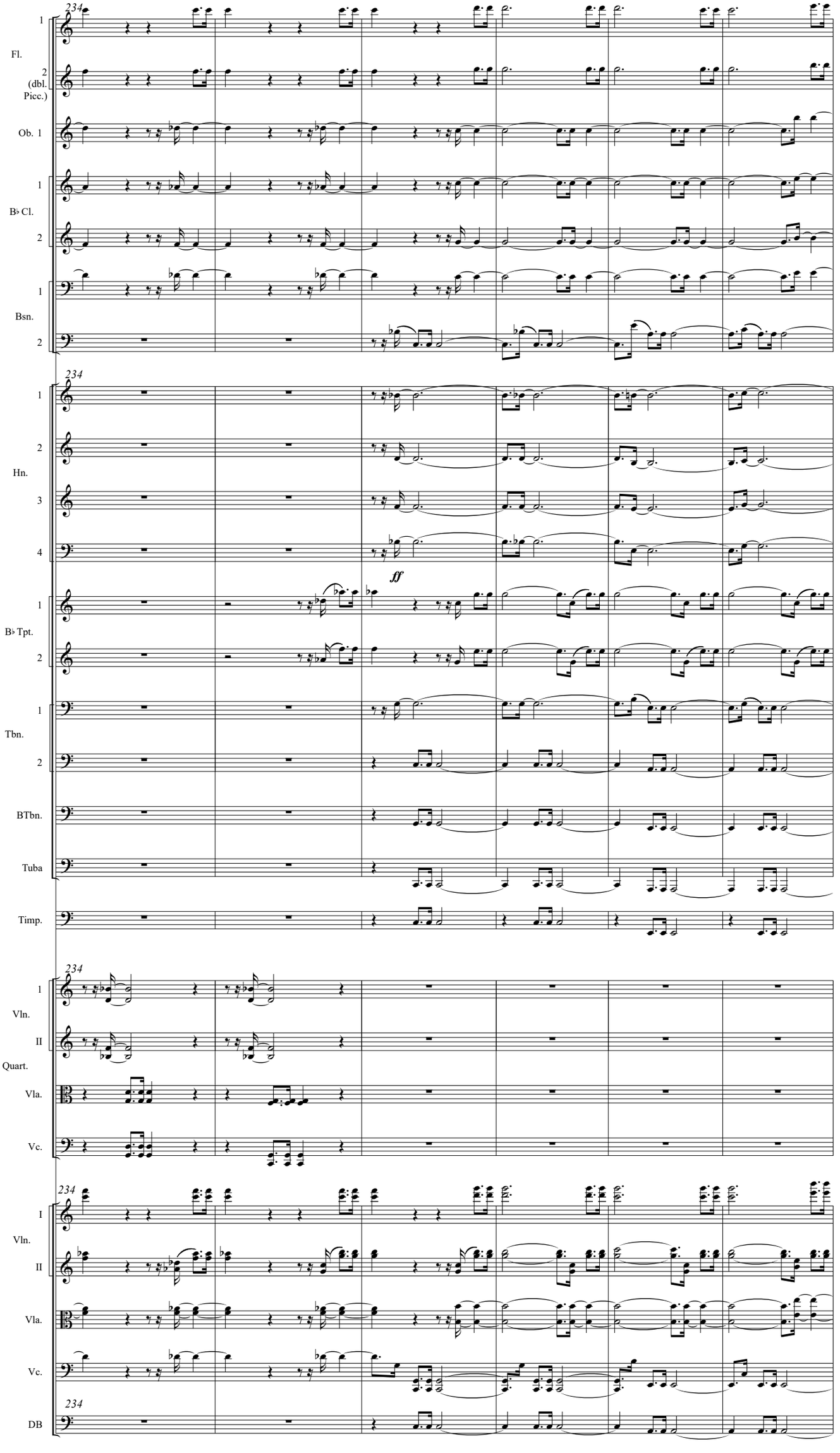

194
1
Fl.
2
(dbl.
Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
Bsn. 1
Timp.
(Fl.2)
f
194
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
194
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
194
DB
div.

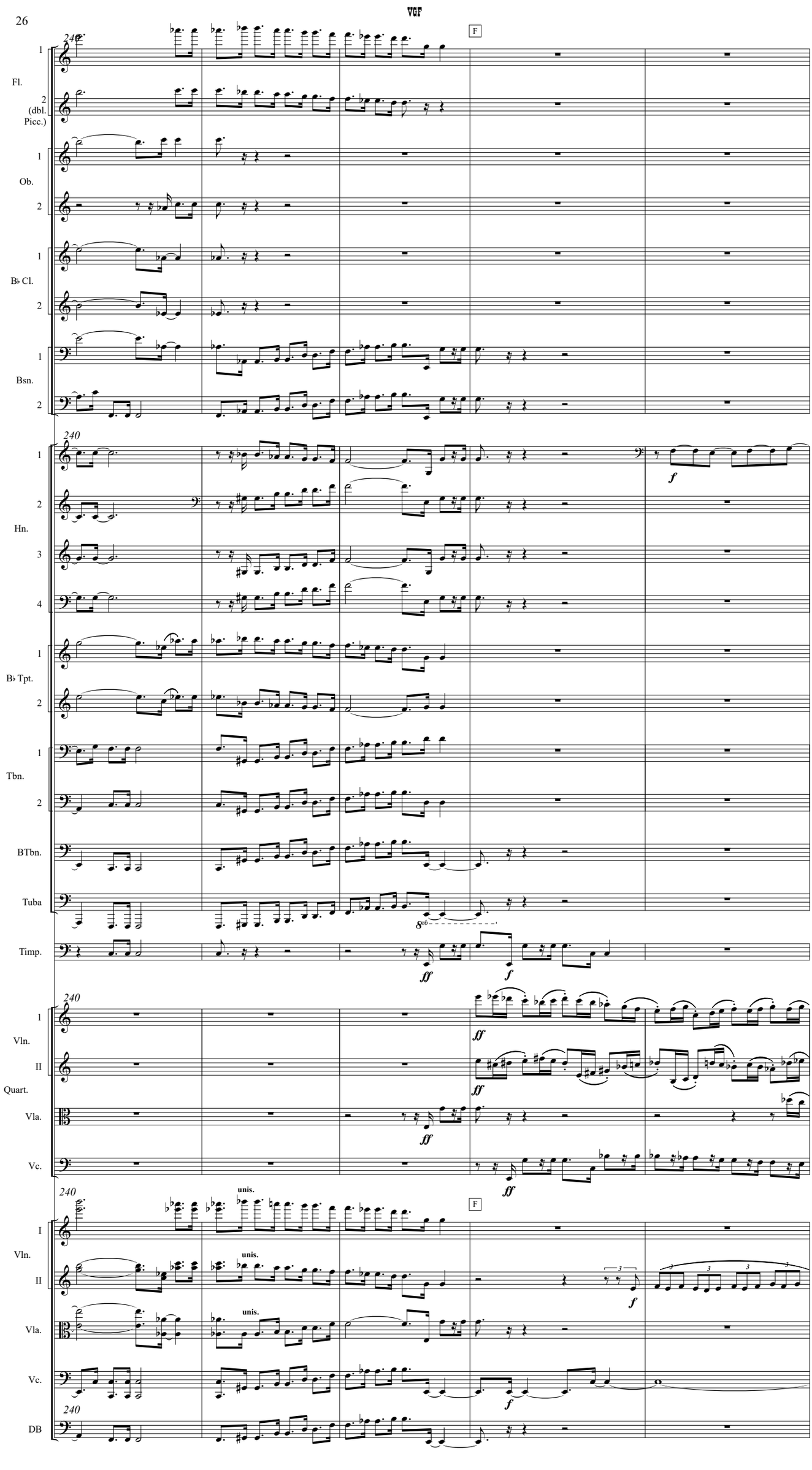

199
D
Fl.
(Fl.2)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Timp.
Vln. I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
div.
unis.
203
mf
mp
ff

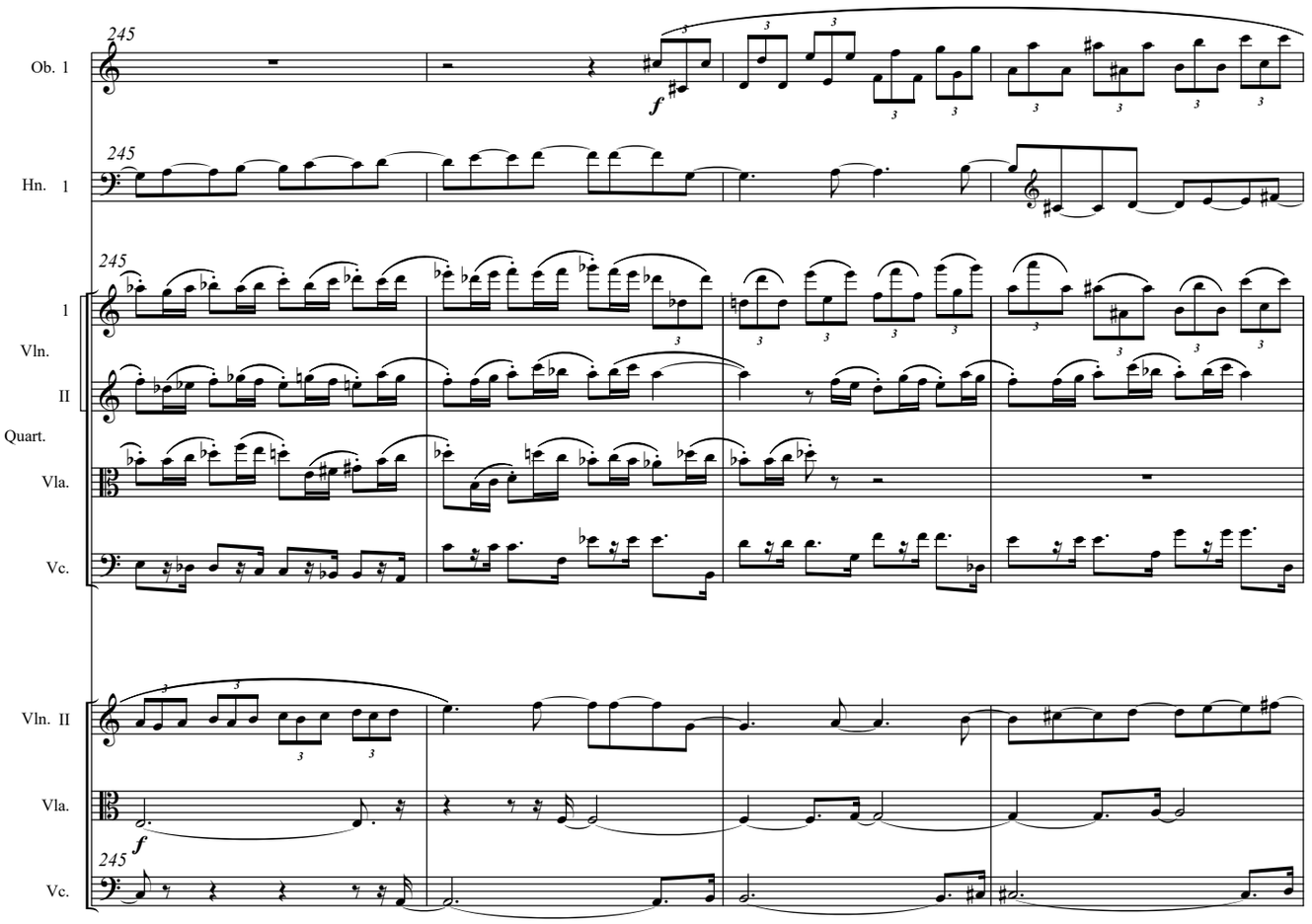

208
Fl. 1
2
Hn.
4
p
pp
Vln. I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
div.
unis.
DB
216
Bsn. 1
3
Tbn. 2
Timp.

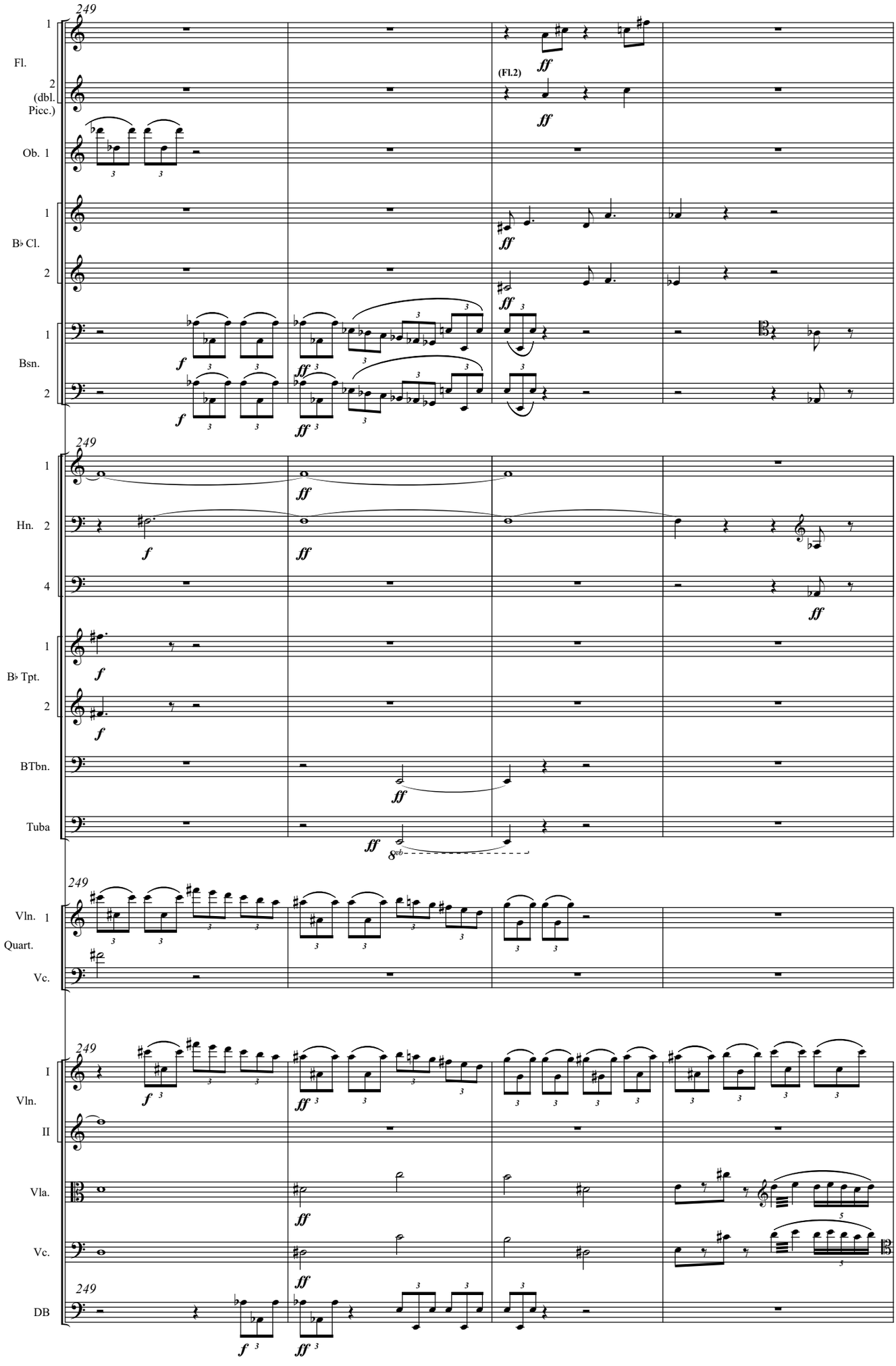

E
223
Ob. 1
1
2
Hn.
3
4
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
1
Tbn.
2
BTbn.
Timp.
Vln. 1
Quart.
Vc.
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.
ben marcato
mf
f
ff
mp

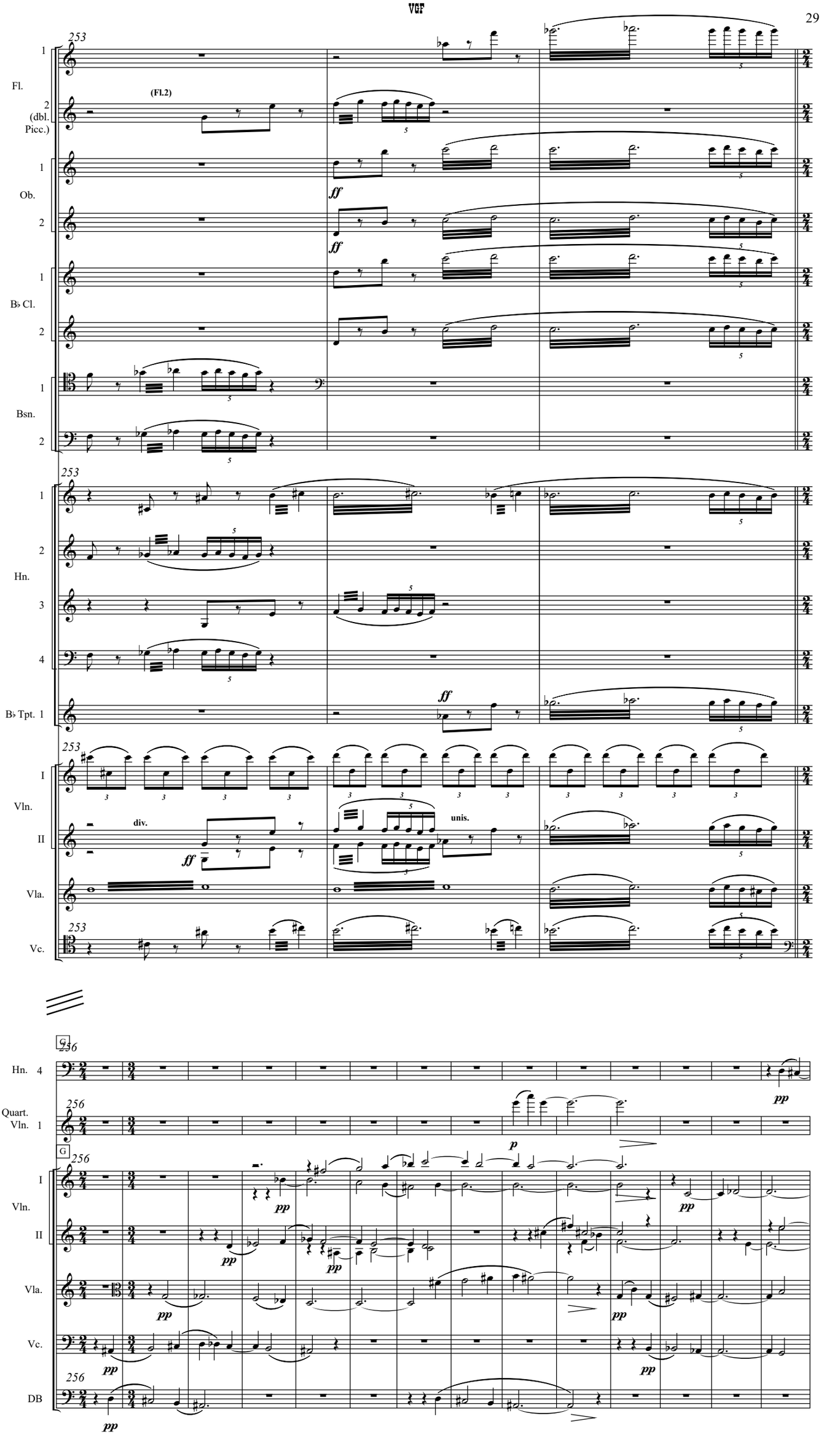

228
Fl.
1
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
1
2
B♭ Cl.
1
2
Bsn.
1
2
Hn.
1
2
3
B♭ Tpt.
1
2
Tbn.
1
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Vln. I
Quart.
II
Vla.
Vc.
Vln. I
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
(Picc.)
ben marcato
ff
div.

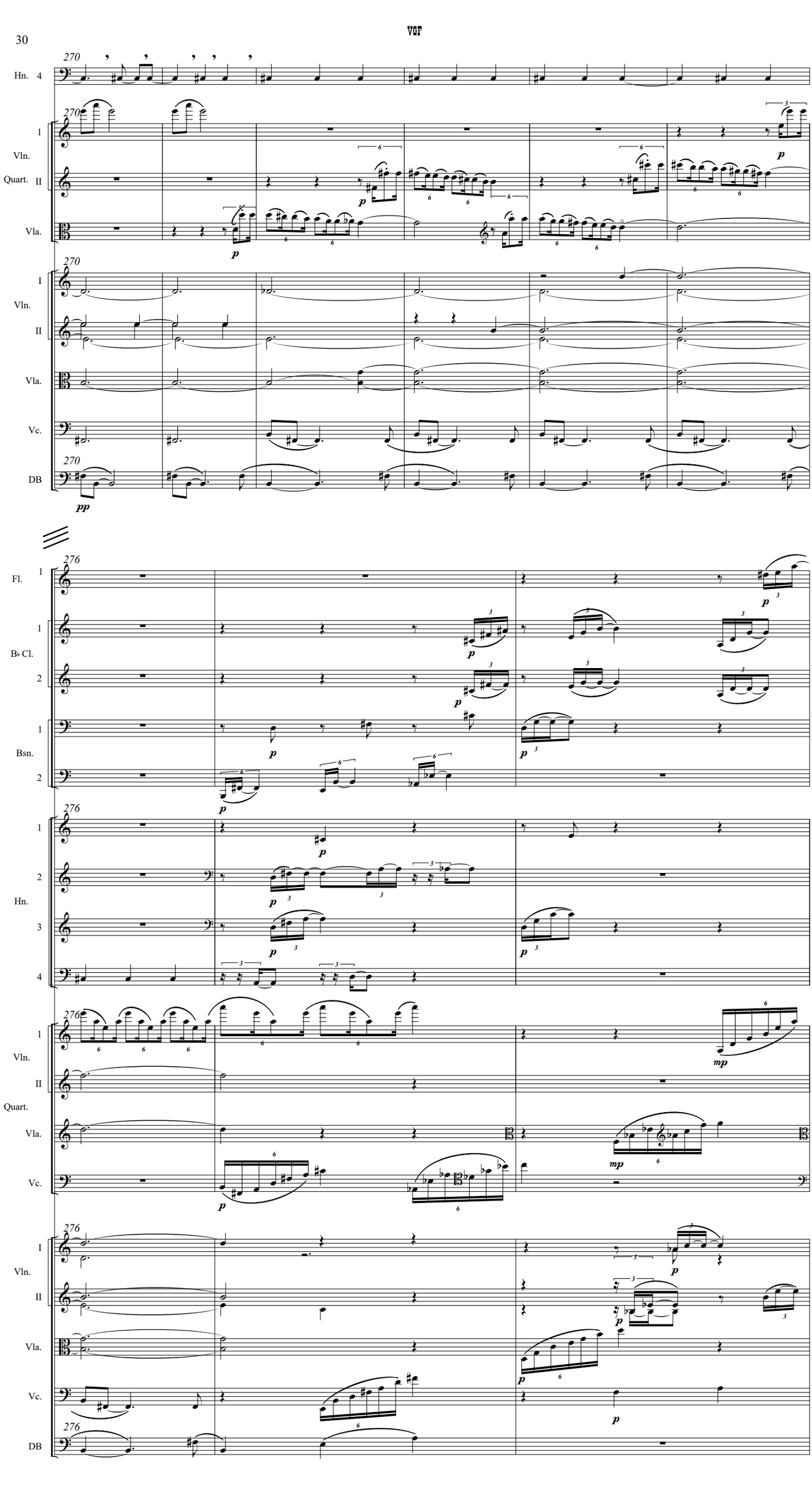

234
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
234
1
2
Hn.
3
4
ff
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
1
Tbn.
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
234
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
234
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
234
DB

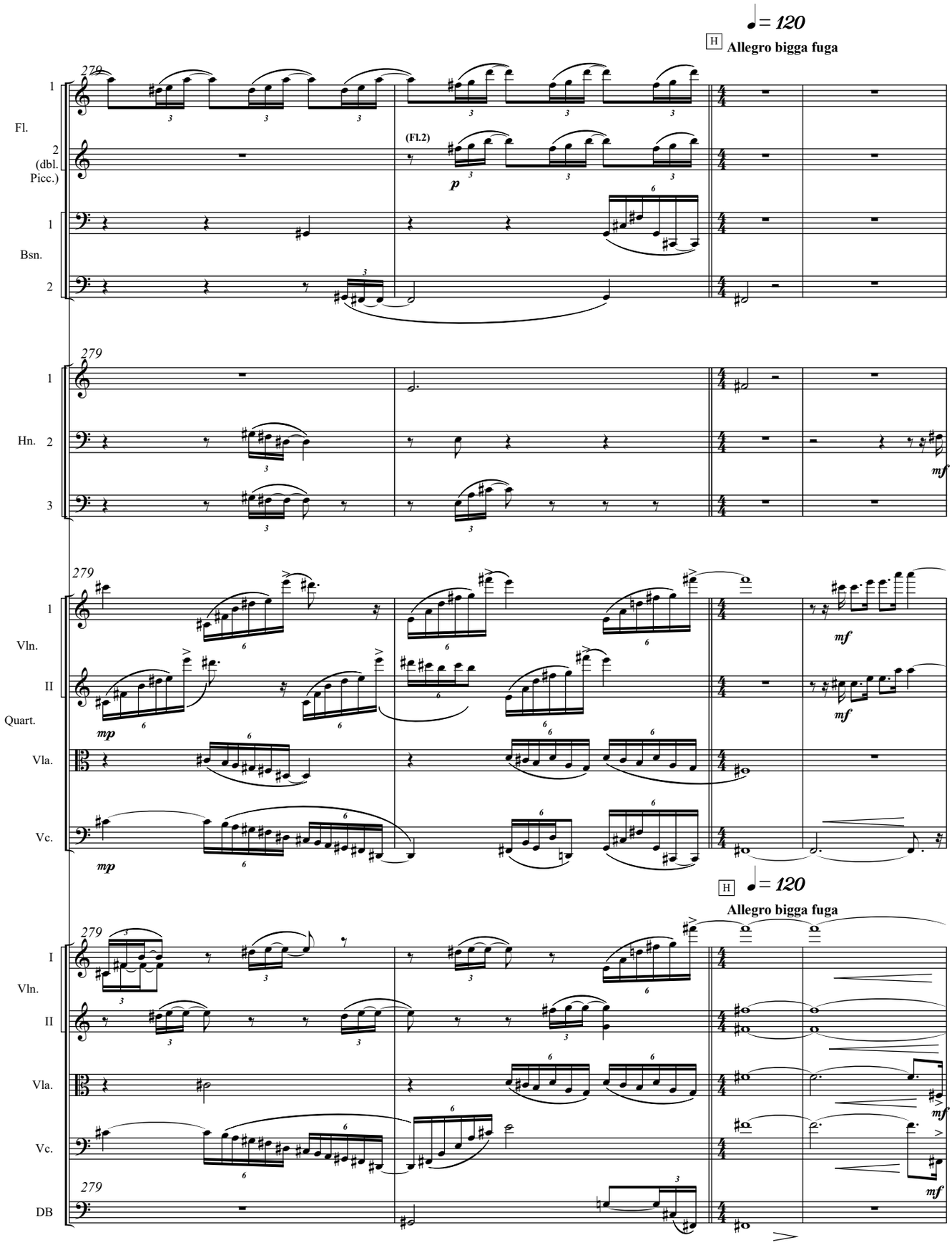

VGF
F
240
Fl.
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.
ff
f
8vb

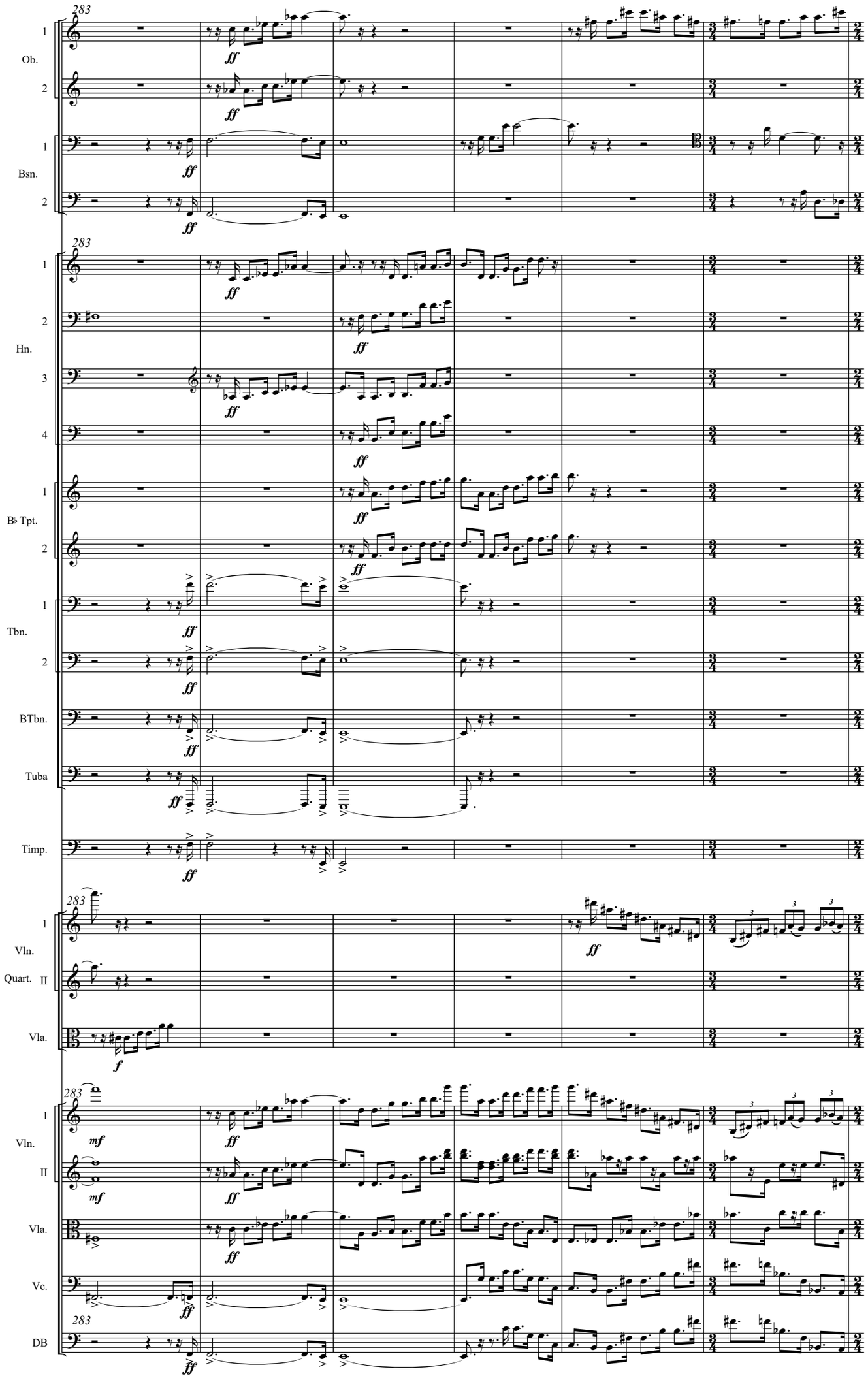

245
Ob. 1
f
245
Hn. 1
245
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
Vln. II
Vla.
f
245
Vc.

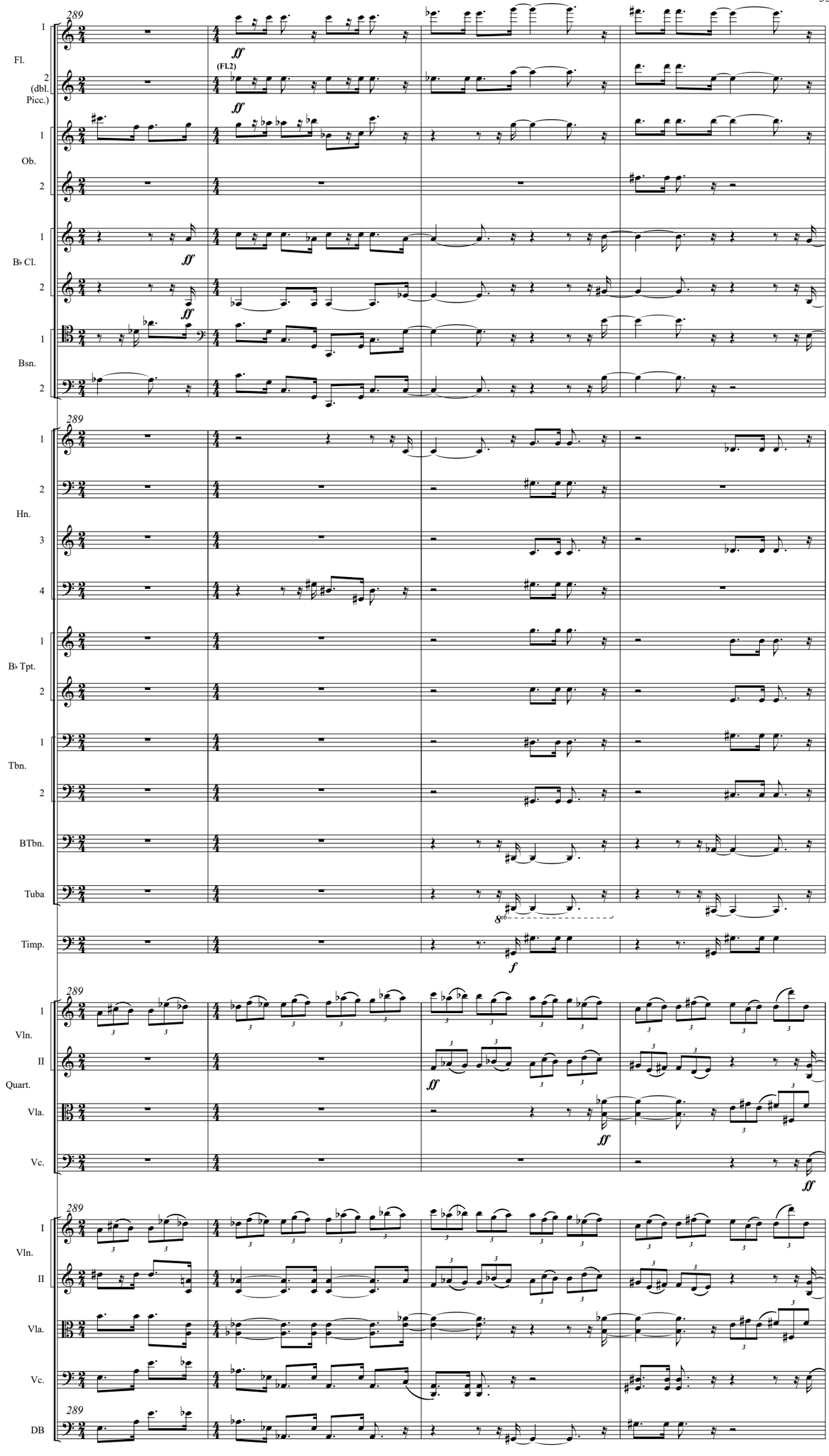

249
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
(Fl.2)
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
BTbn.
Tuba
Vln. 1
Quart.
Vc.
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
DB

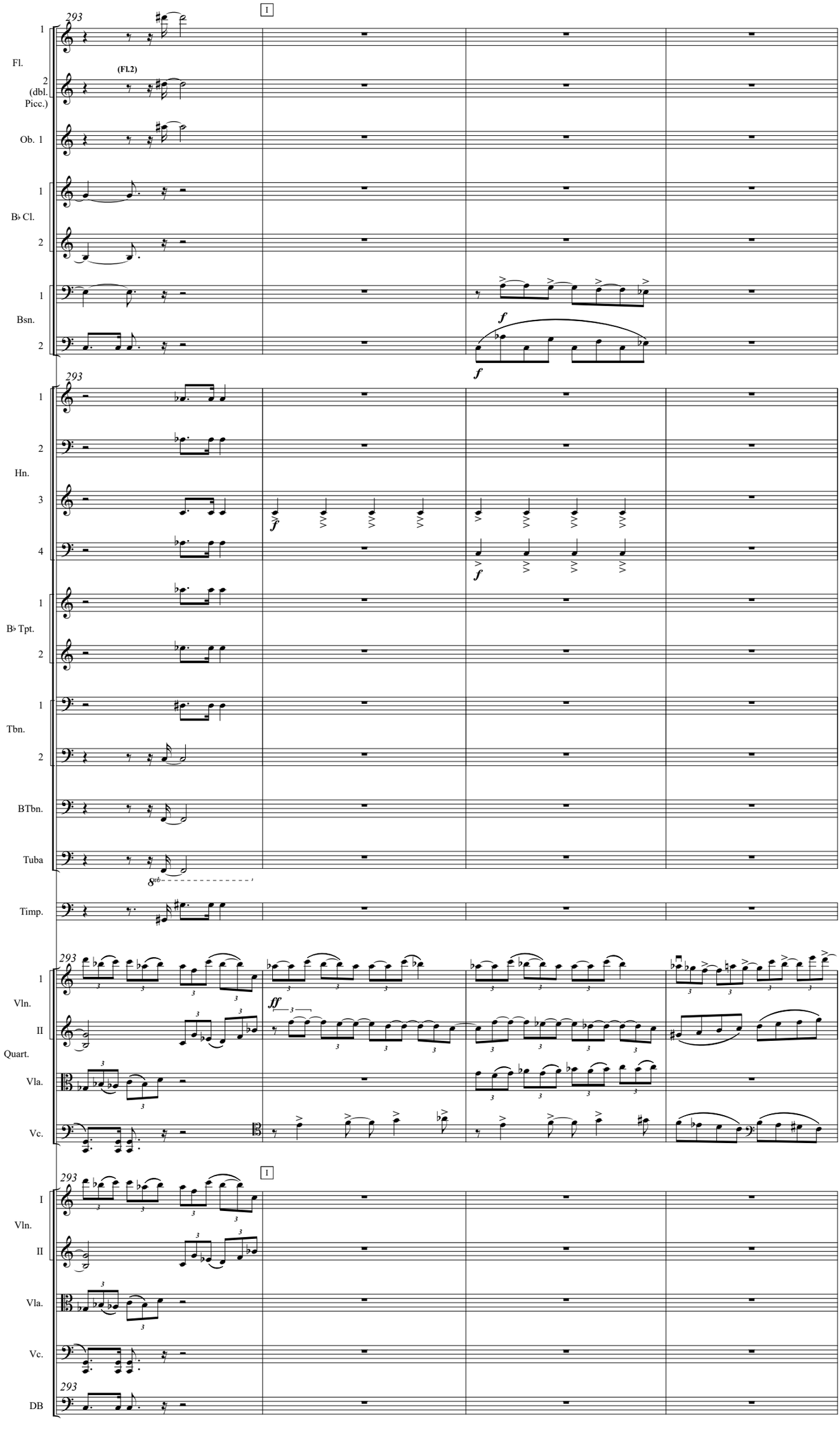

253
Fl.
1
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Fl.2)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
ff
Hn.
3
4
B♭ Tpt. 1
I
Vln.
II
div.
unis.
Vla.
Vc.
G
236
256
Quart. Vln. 1
DB
pp
p

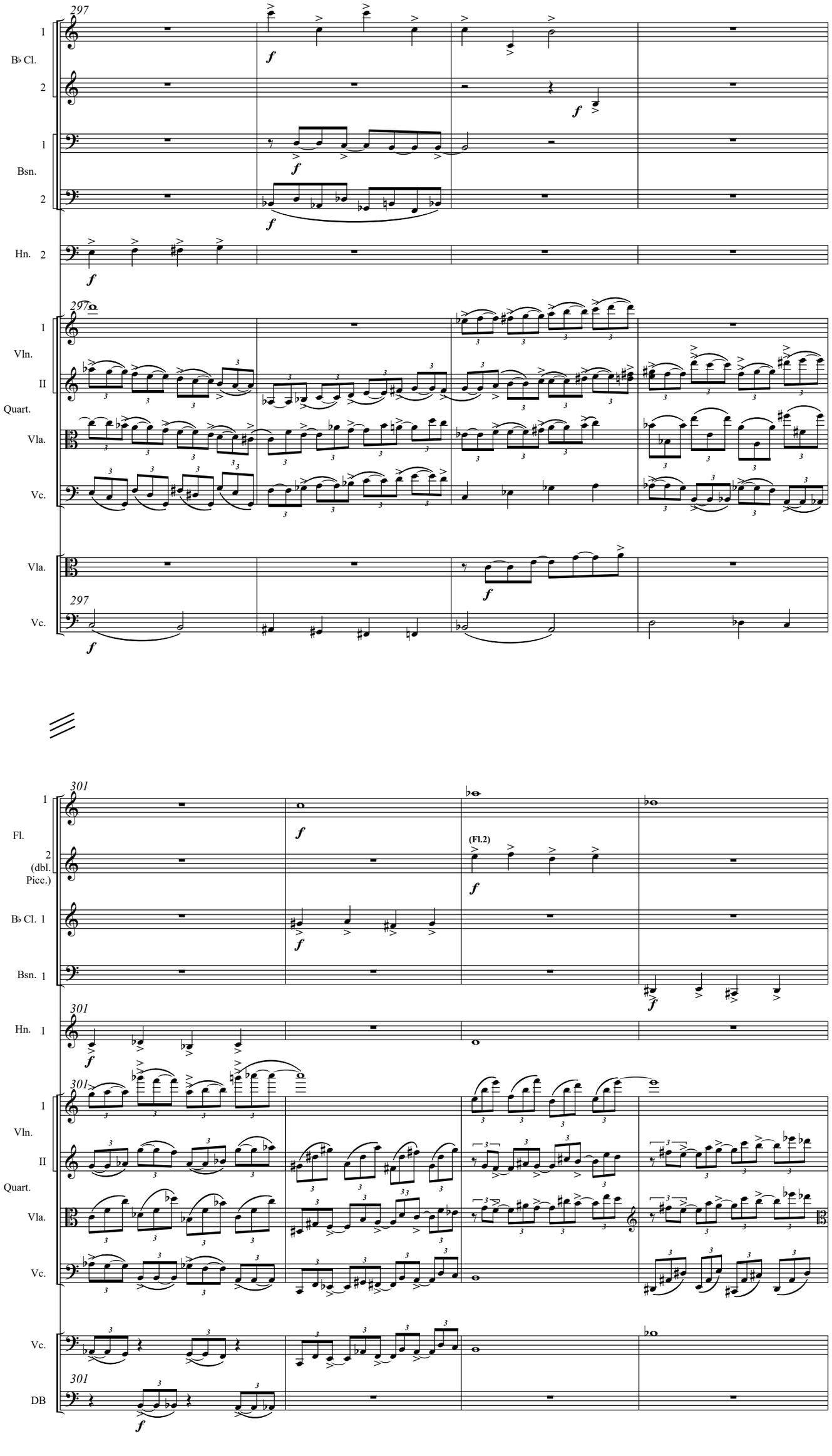

VGF
Hn. 4
I
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
Fl.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
270
276
p
pp
mp

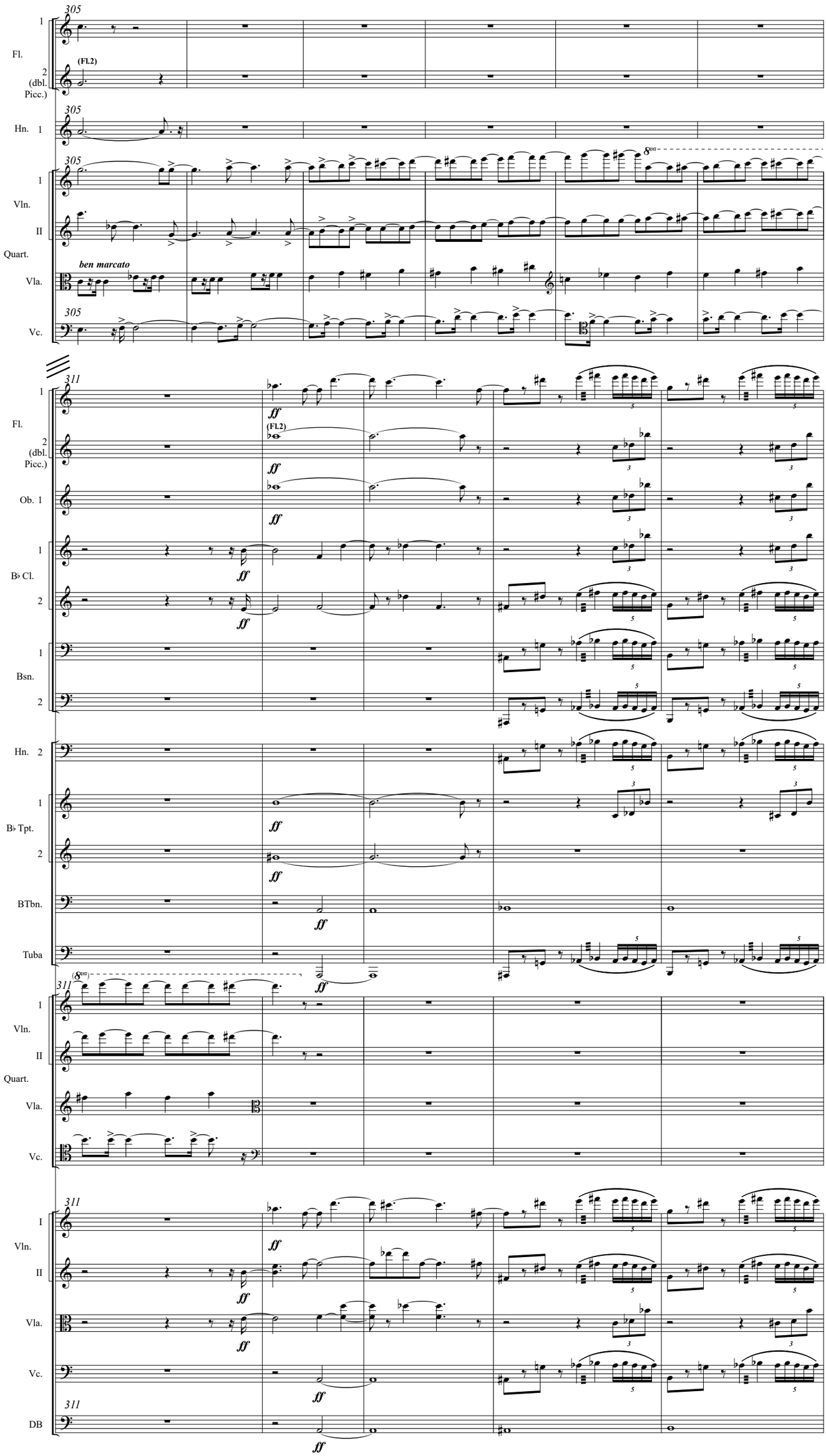

♩= 120
H
Allegro bigga fuga
279
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Fl.2)
p
1
Bsn.
2
279
1
Hn. 2
3
mf
279
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
mp
mf
mf
mp
H
♩= 120
Allegro bigga fuga
279
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
mf
mf
279
DB

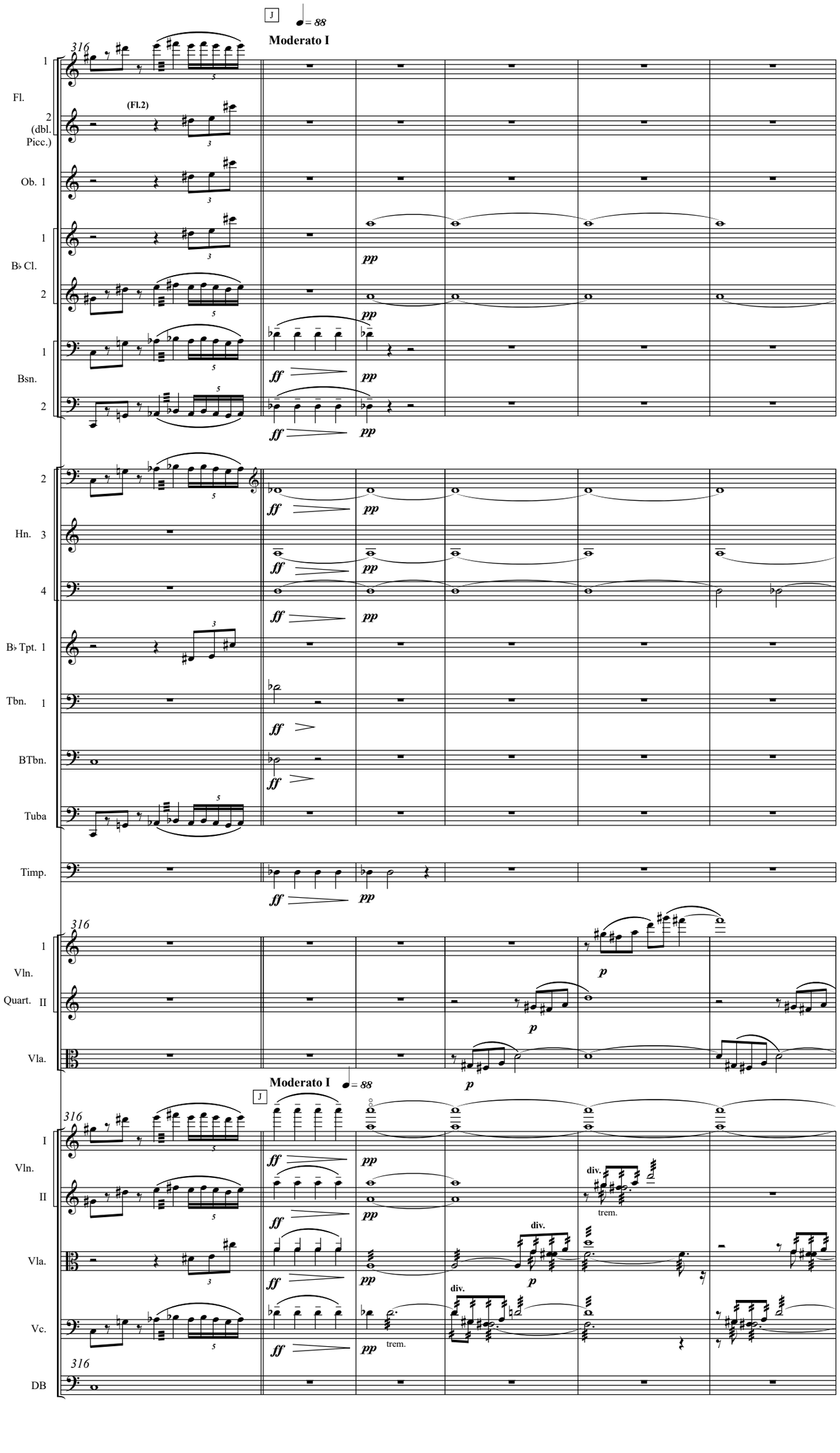

283
1
Ob.
2
ff
1
Bsn.
2
ff
283
1
ff
2
Hn.
ff
3
ff
4
ff
1
B♭ Tpt.
ff
2
ff
1
Tbn.
ff
2
ff
BTbn.
ff
Tuba
ff
Timp.
ff
283
1
Vln.
Quart.
II
ff
Vla.
f
283
I
Vln.
mf
ff
II
mf
ff
Vla.
ff
Vc.
ff
283
DB
ff

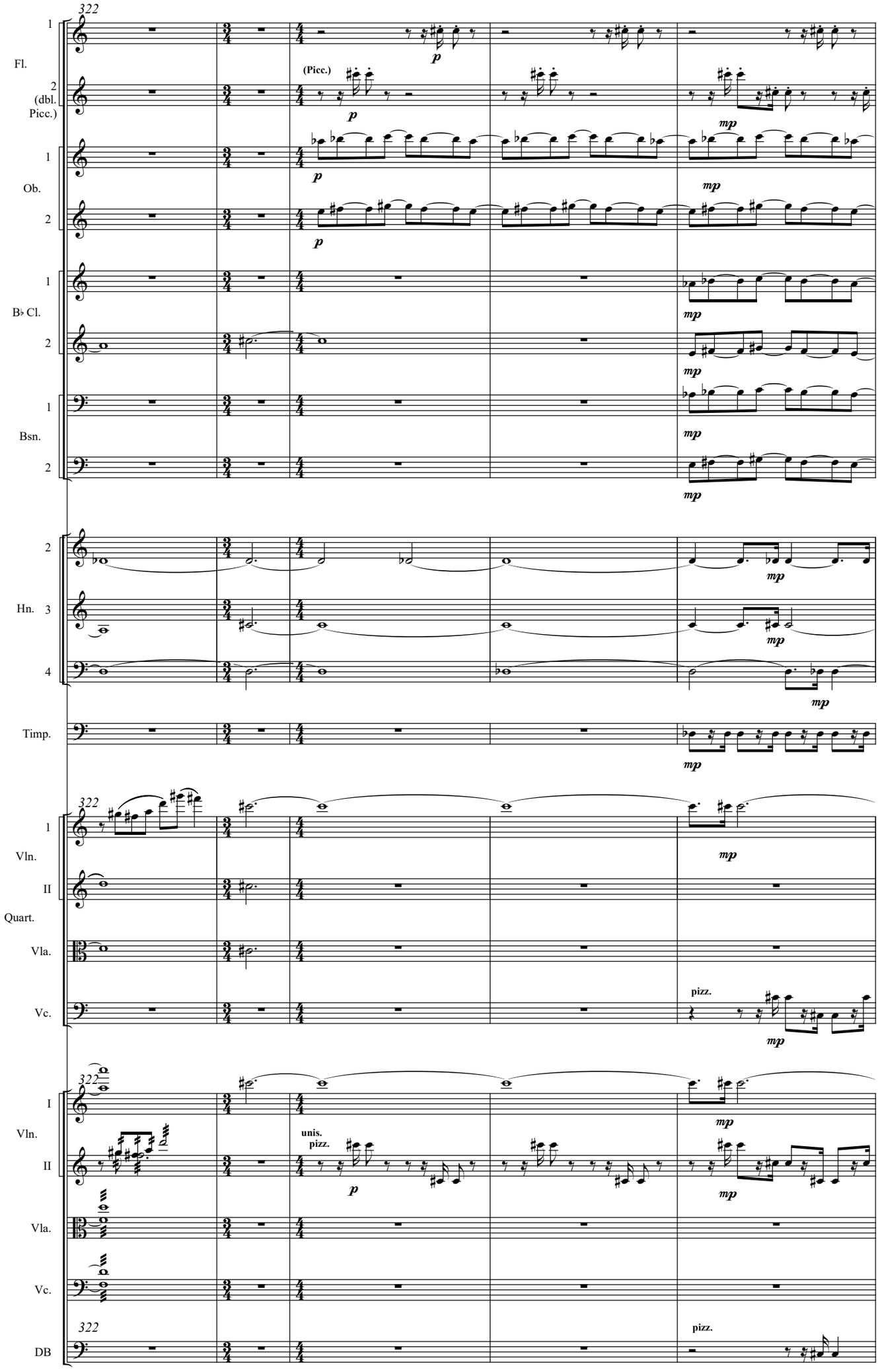

289
Fl.
(FL2)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
ff
f

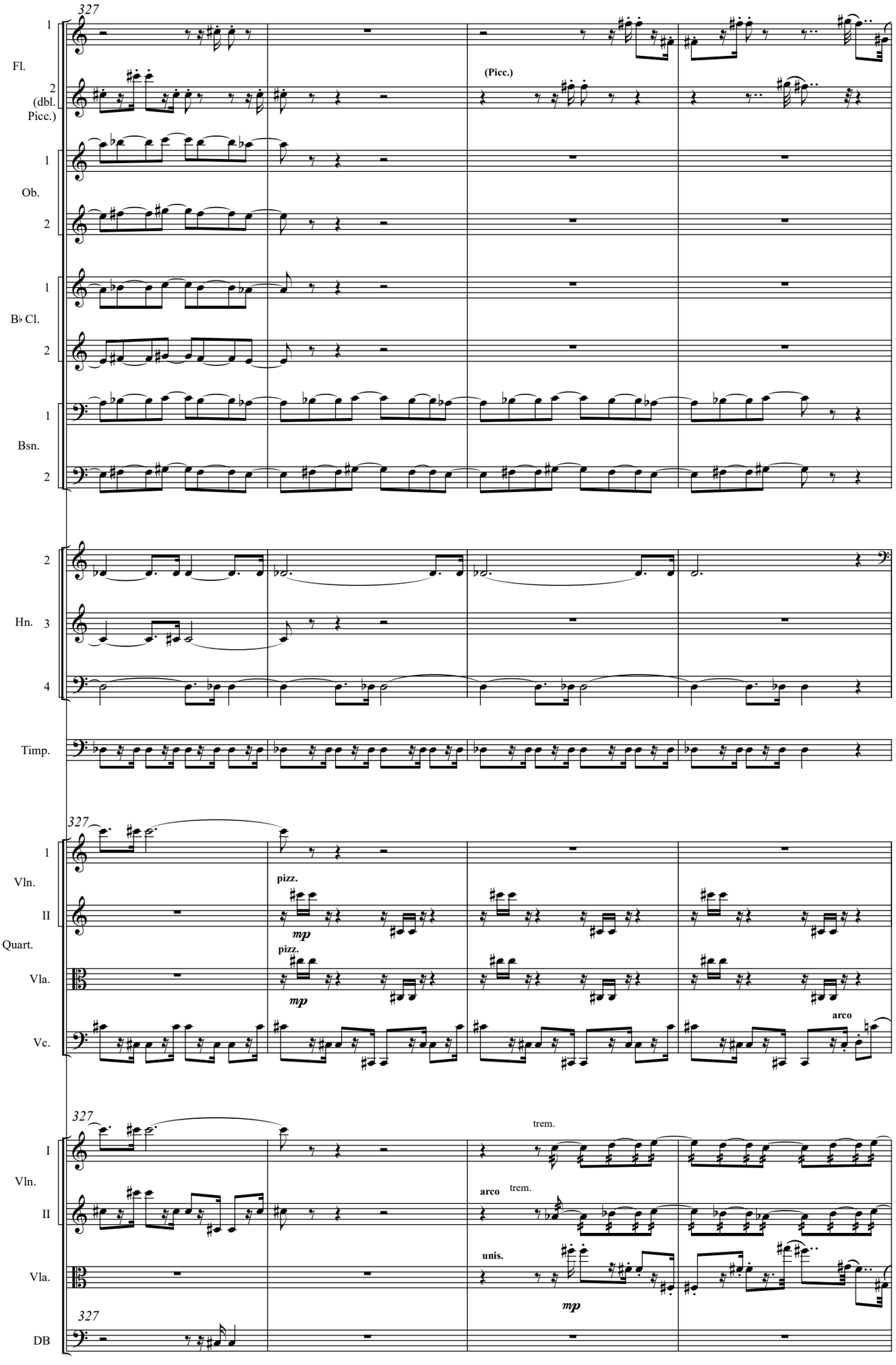

293
I
Fl.
(Fl.2)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
f
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
8vb
Timp.
Vln.
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
ff
DB

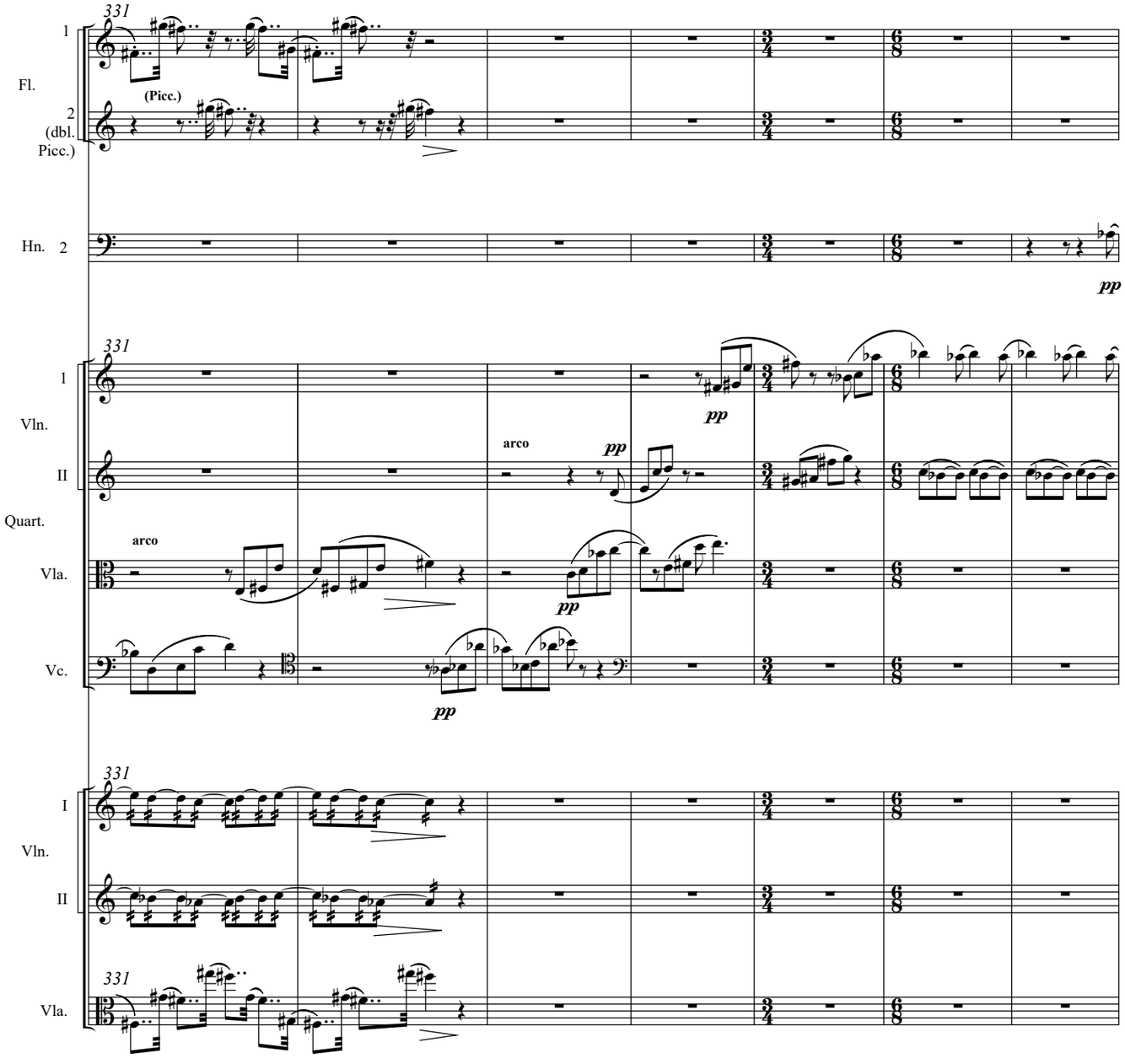

297
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
Hn. 2
297
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
Vla.
297
Vc.
301
1
Fl.
2
(dbl.
Picc.)
B♭ Cl. 1
Bsn. 1
301
Hn. 1
301
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
Vc.
301
DB
(Fl.2)

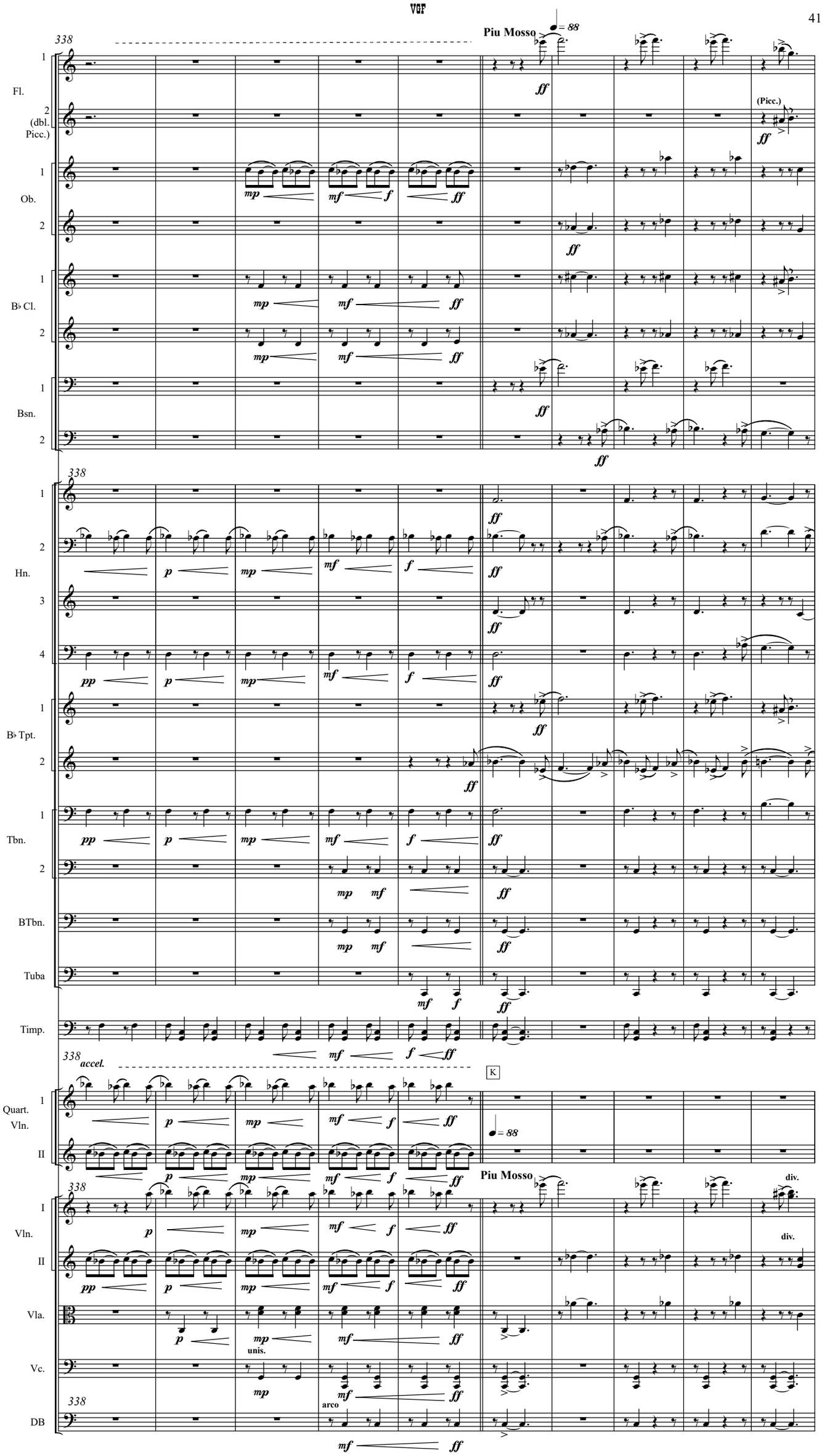

305
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Fl.2)
Hn. 1
Vln. I
II
Quart.
ben marcato
Vla.
Vc.
8va
311
ff
Ob. 1
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn. 2
B♭ Tpt.
BTbn.
Tuba
(8va)
DB

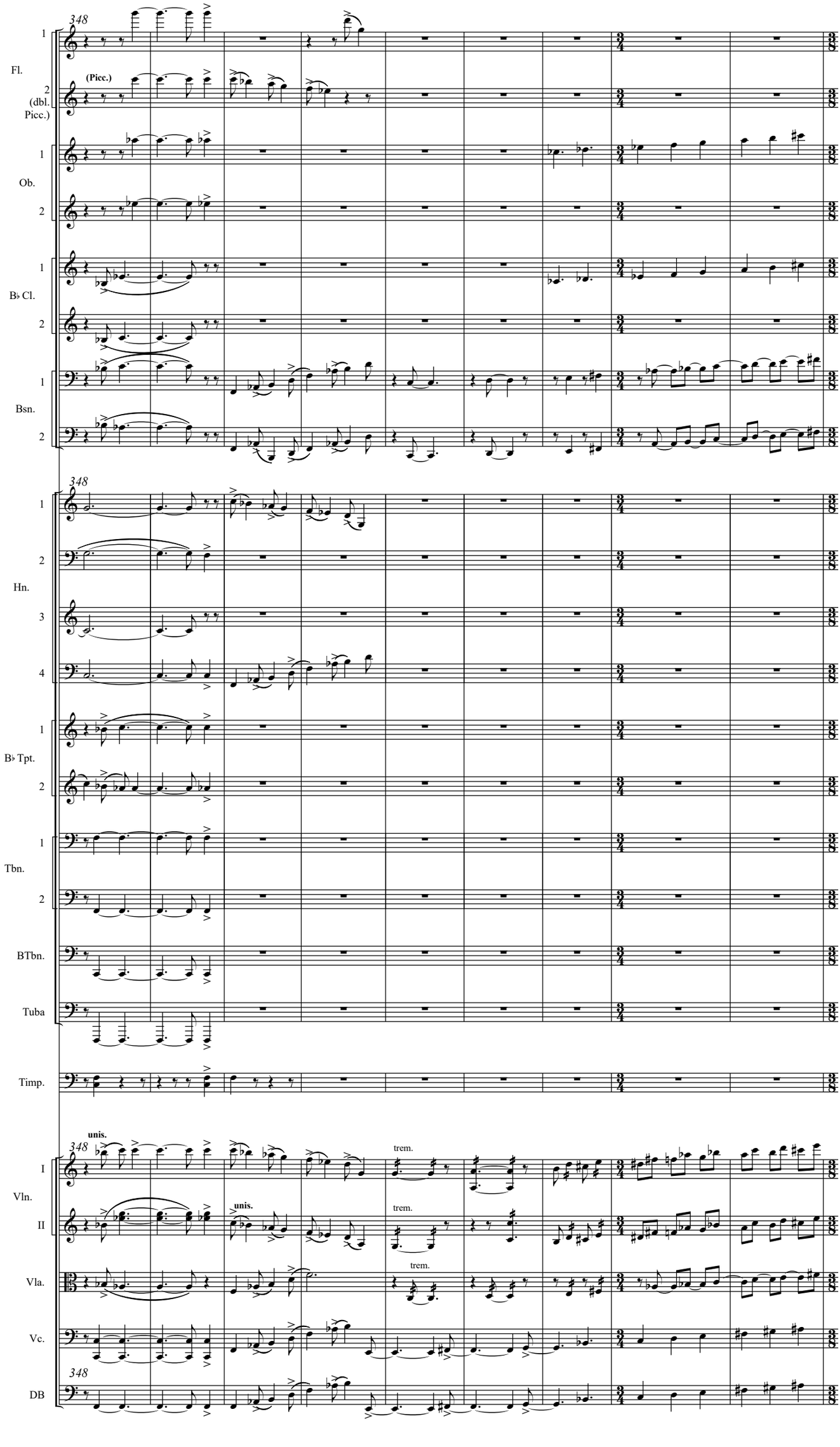

J
♩= 88
Moderato I
316
Fl. 1
(Fl.2)
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
B♭ Cl. 1
2
Bsn. 1
2
Hn. 2
3
4
B♭ Tpt. 1
Tbn. 1
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Quart. II
Vla.
Vln. II
Vc.
DB
pp
ff
p
div.
trem.

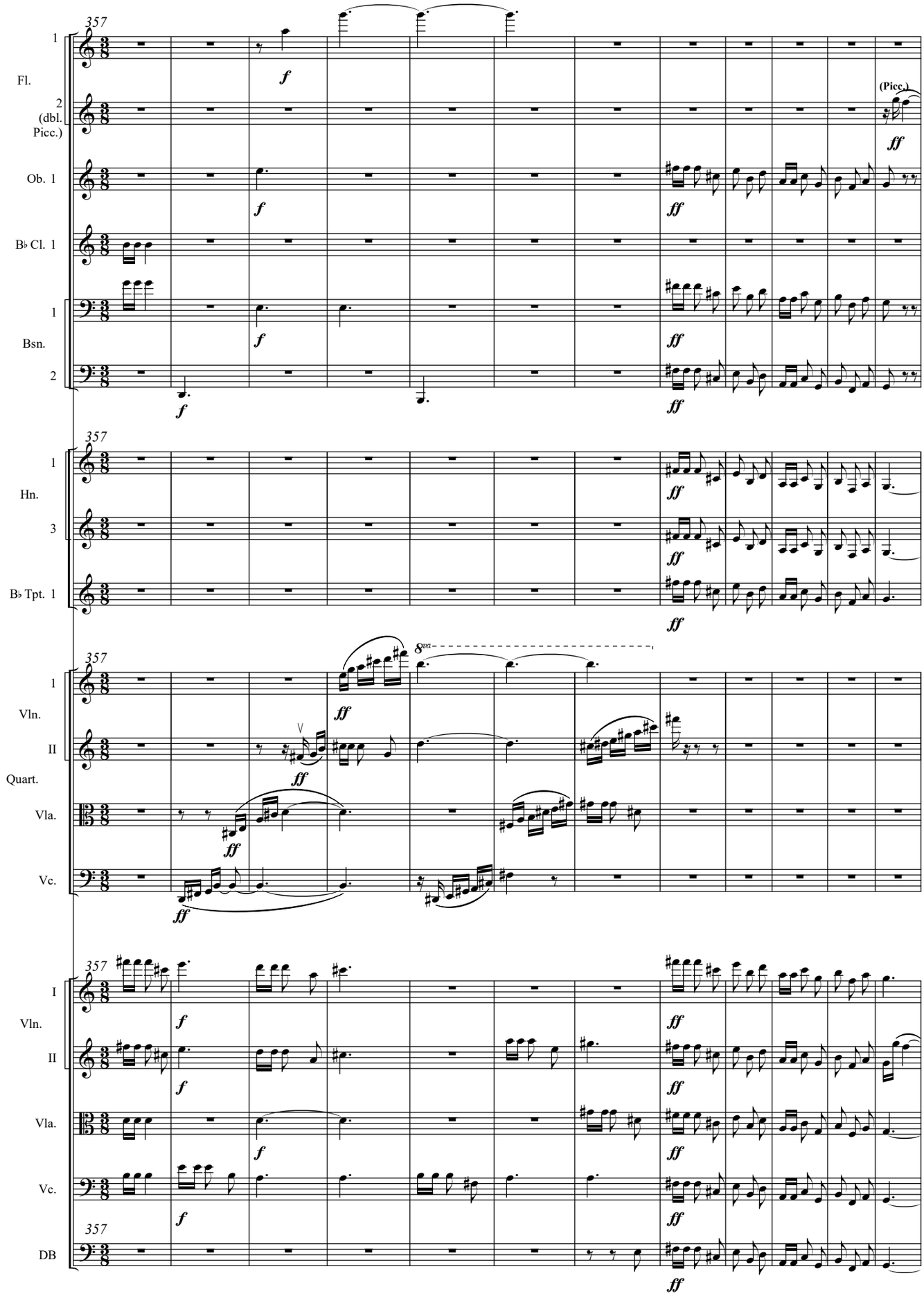

322
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
2
Hn.
3
4
Timp.
322
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
322
I
Vln.
II
unis.
pizz.
Vla.
Vc.
322
DB
pizz.
p
mp

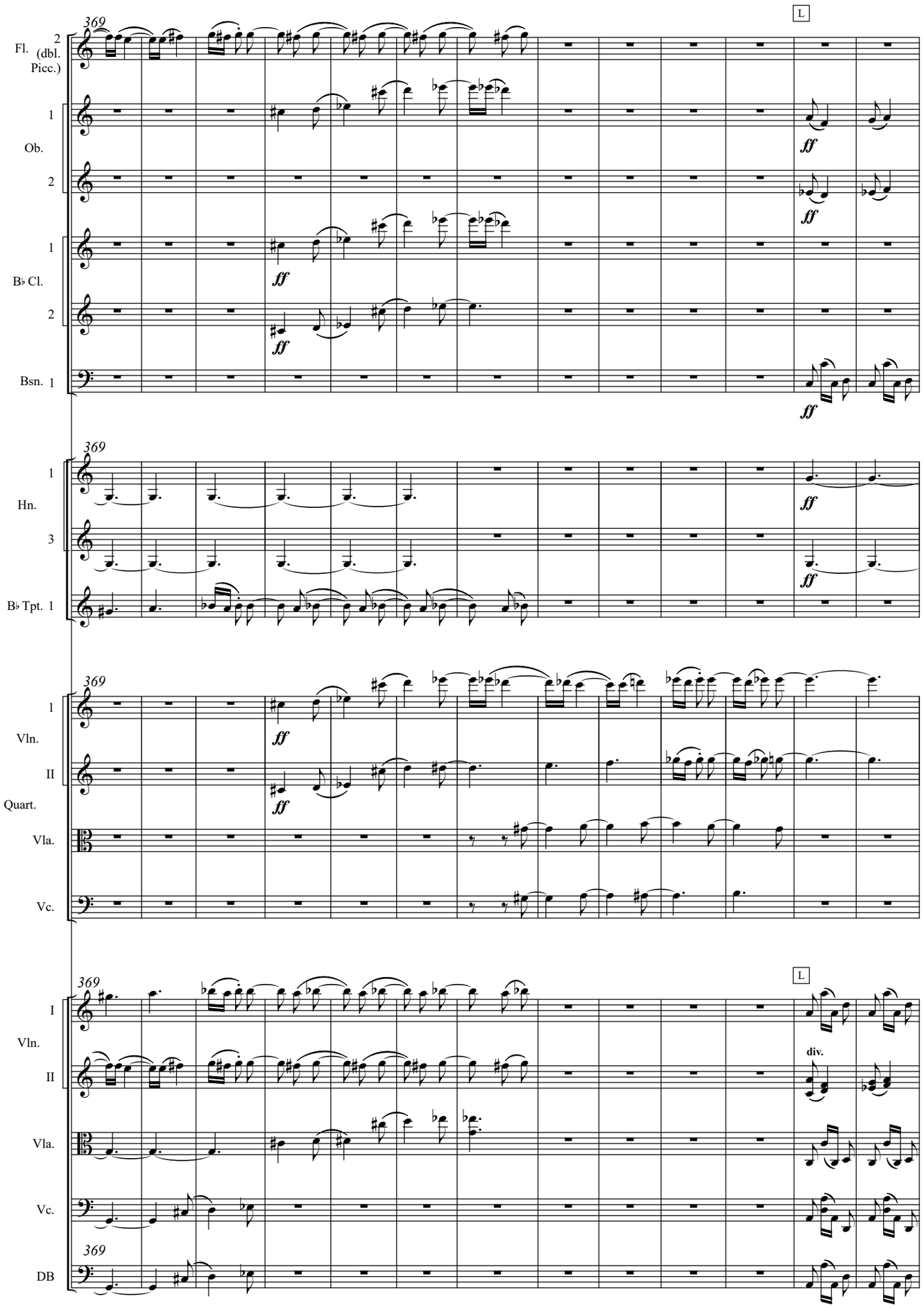

327
Fl.
1
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
Ob.
1
2
B♭ Cl.
1
2
Bsn.
1
2
Hn.
2
3
4
Timp.
327
Vln.
I
II
pizz.
mp
Quart.
pizz.
Vla.
mp
Vc.
arco
327
Vln.
I
II
trem.
arco
trem.
Vla.
unis.
mp
327
DB

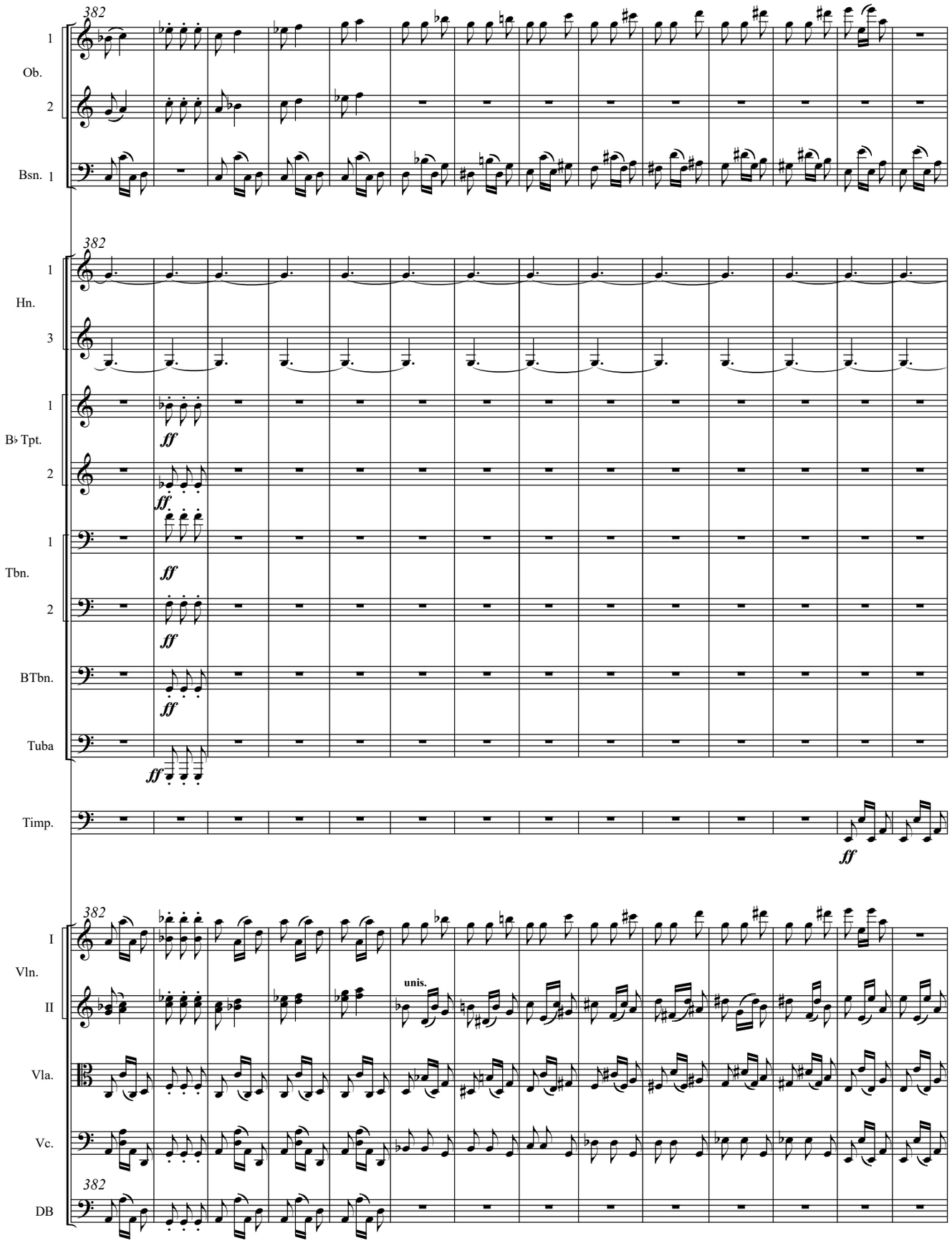

331
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
Hn. 2
pp
331
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
arco
pp
331
I
Vln.
II
Vla.

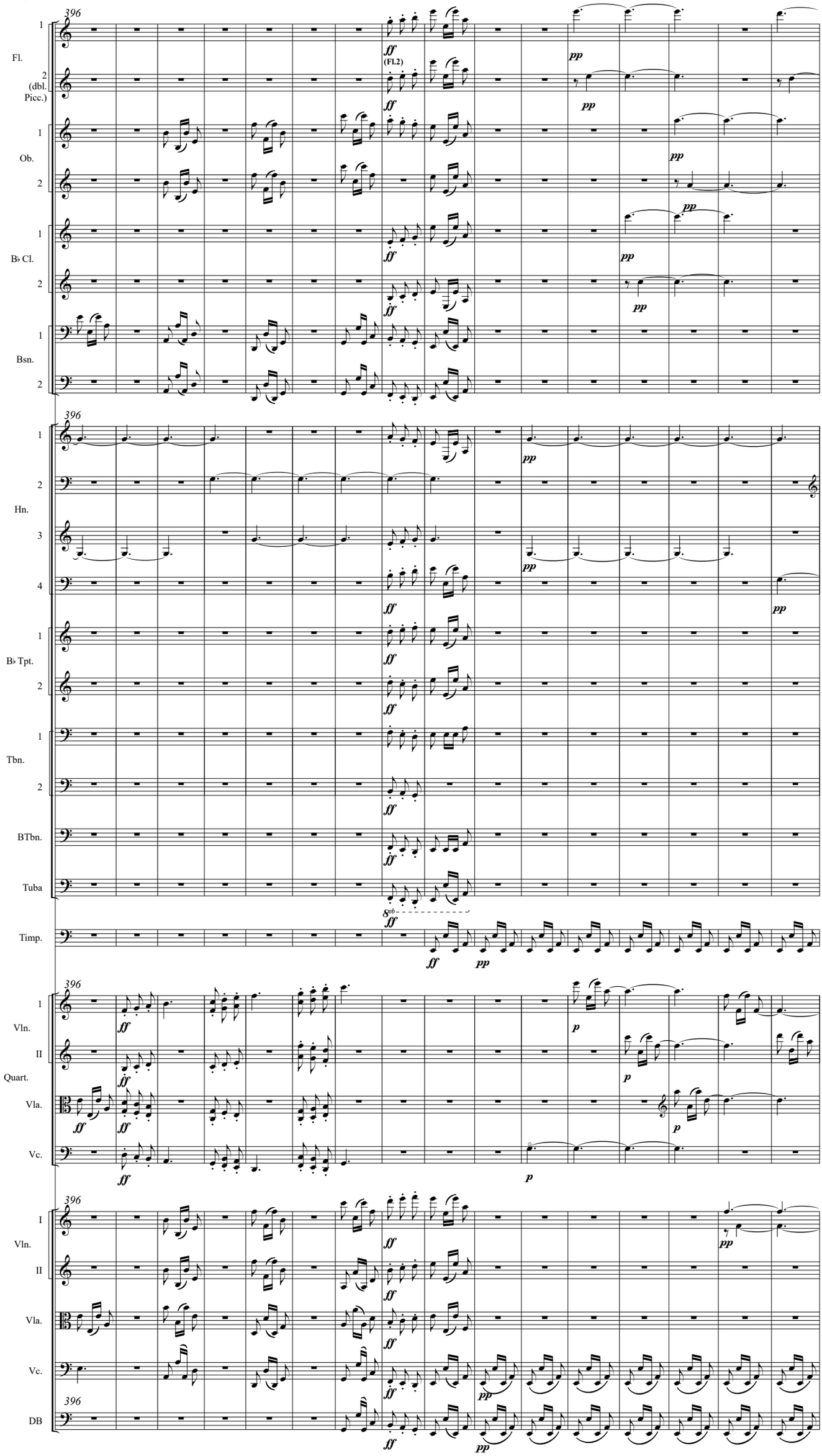

Piu Mosso
♩= 88
338
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
accel.
K
Quart. Vln.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.
arco
div.

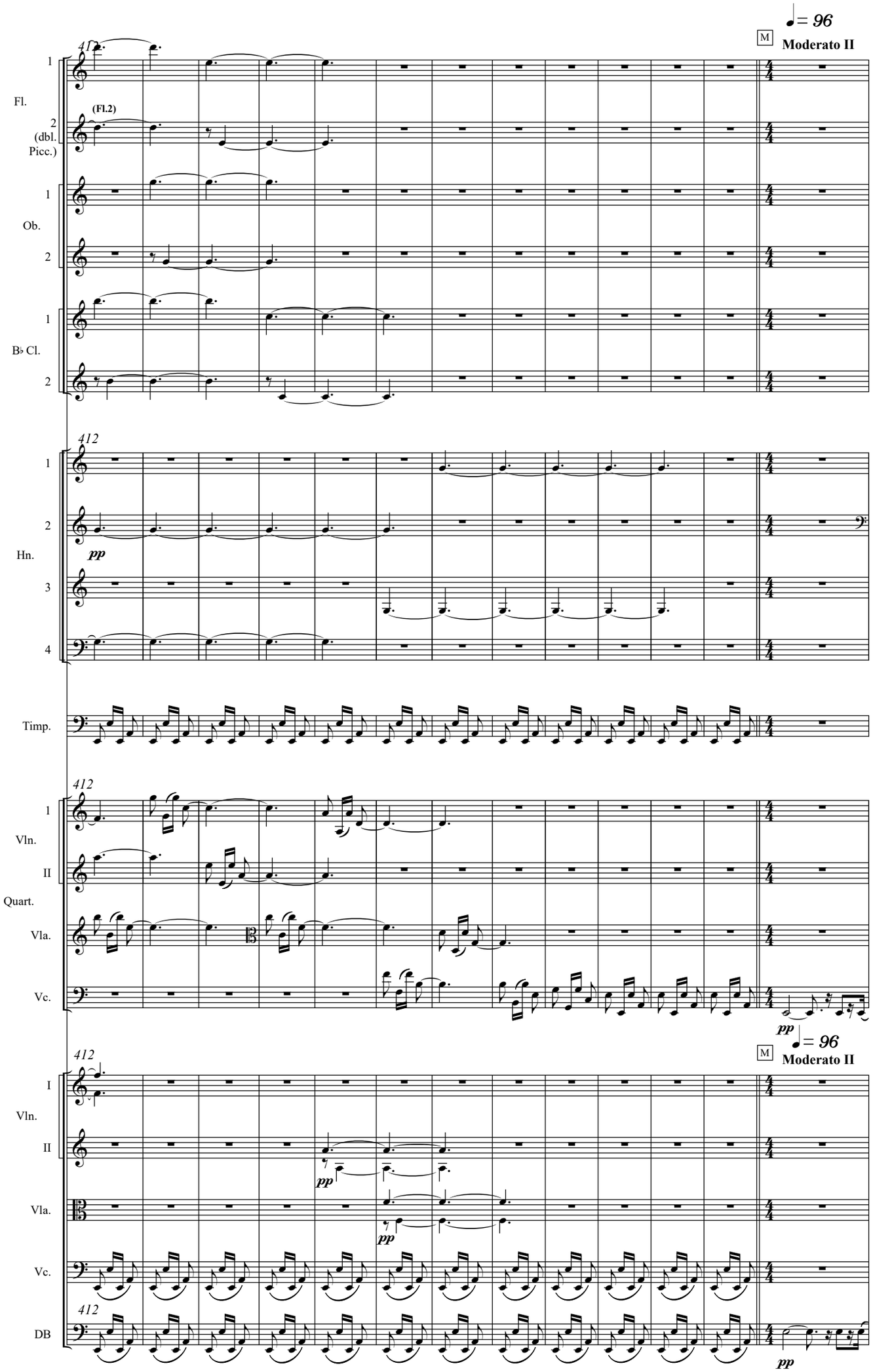

348
1
Fl.
(Picc.)
2
(dbl. Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
348
1
2
Hn.
3
4
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
1
Tbn.
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
unis.
348
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
348
DB
trem.
unis.
trem.
trem.

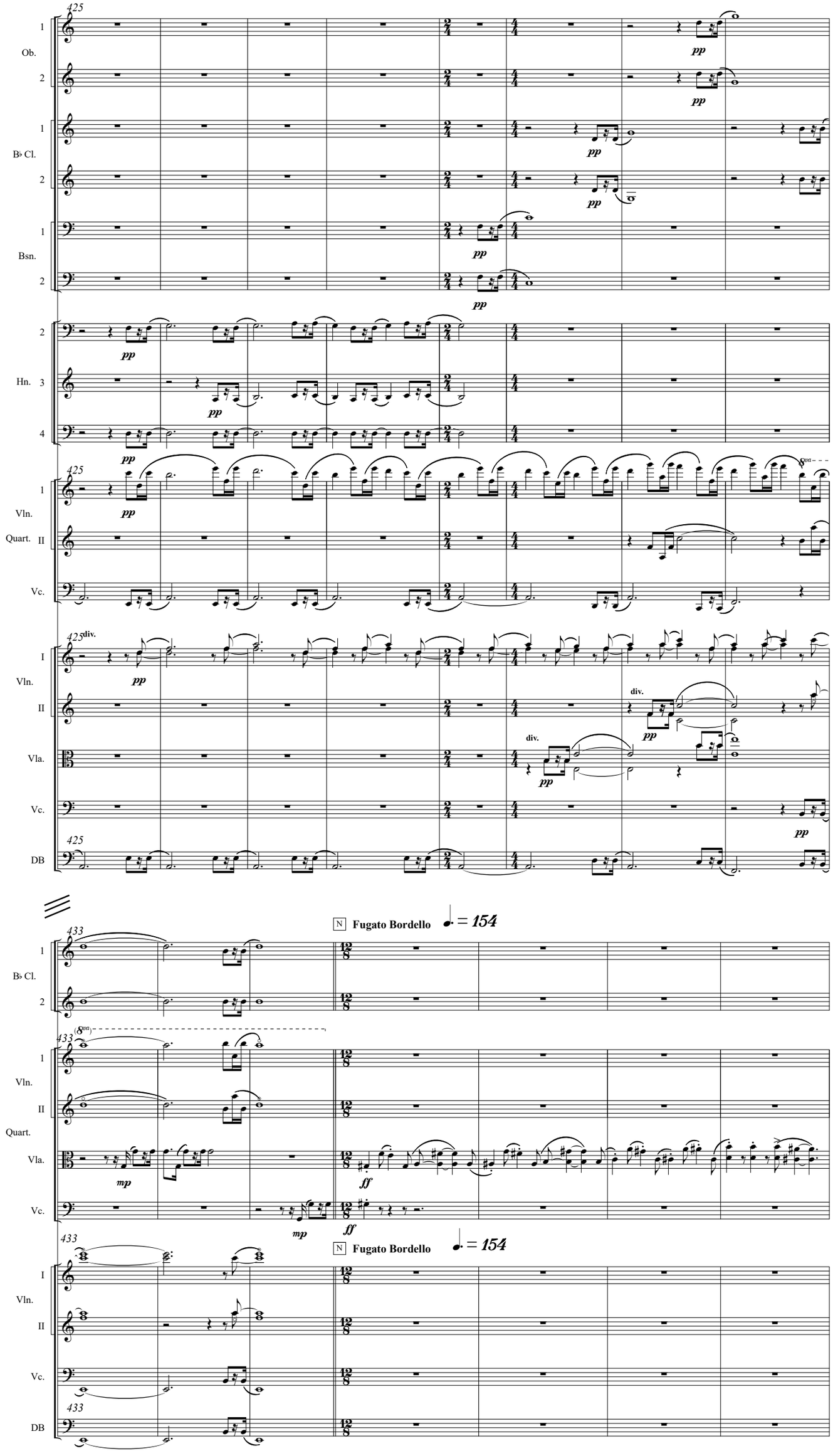

357
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
B♭ Cl. 1
Bsn.
(Picc.)
Hn.
B♭ Tpt. 1
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
8va
f
ff

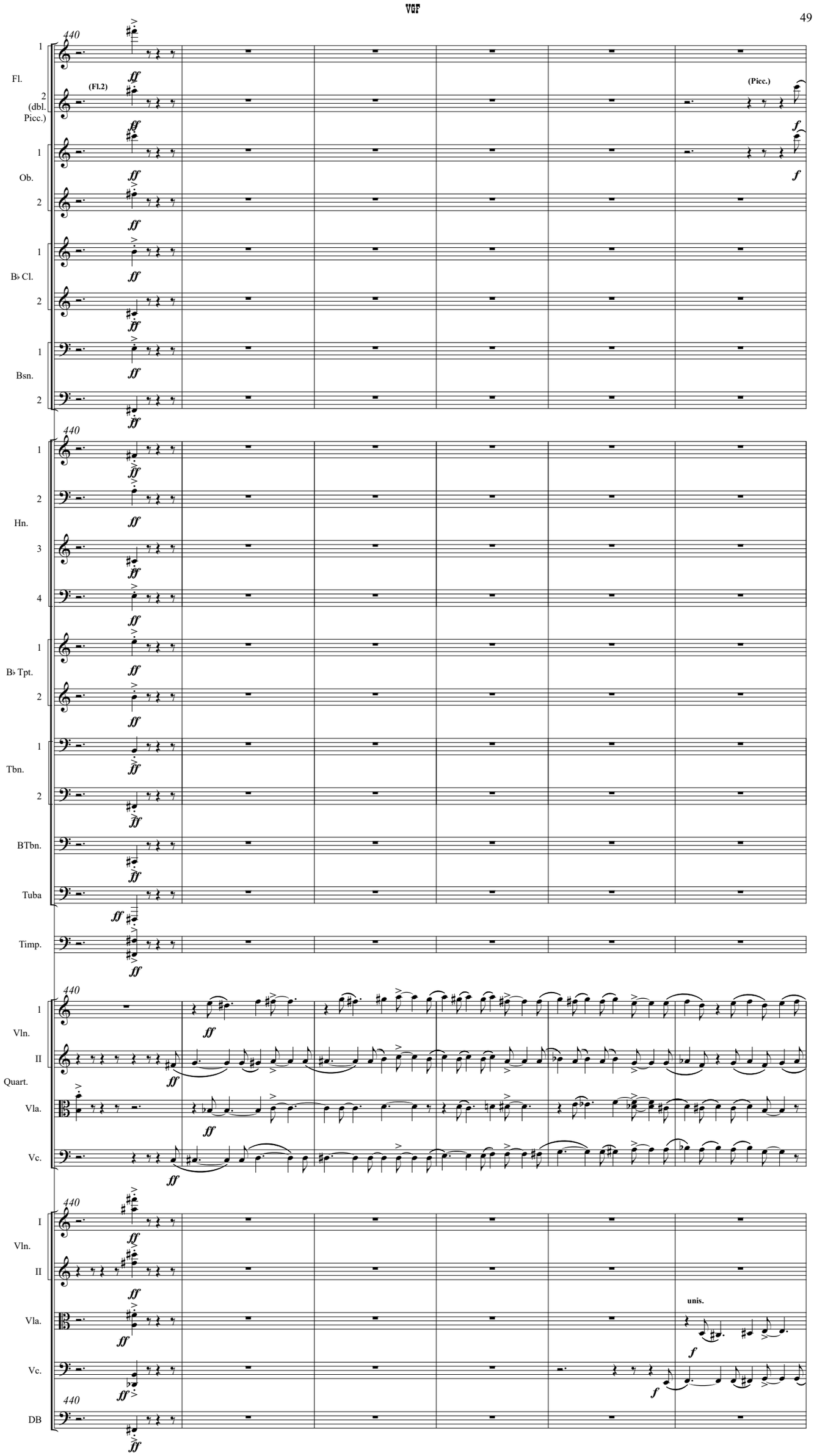

369
L
Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
2
B♭ Cl. 1
2
Bsn. 1
Hn. 1
3
B♭ Tpt. 1
Vln. I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
ff
div.

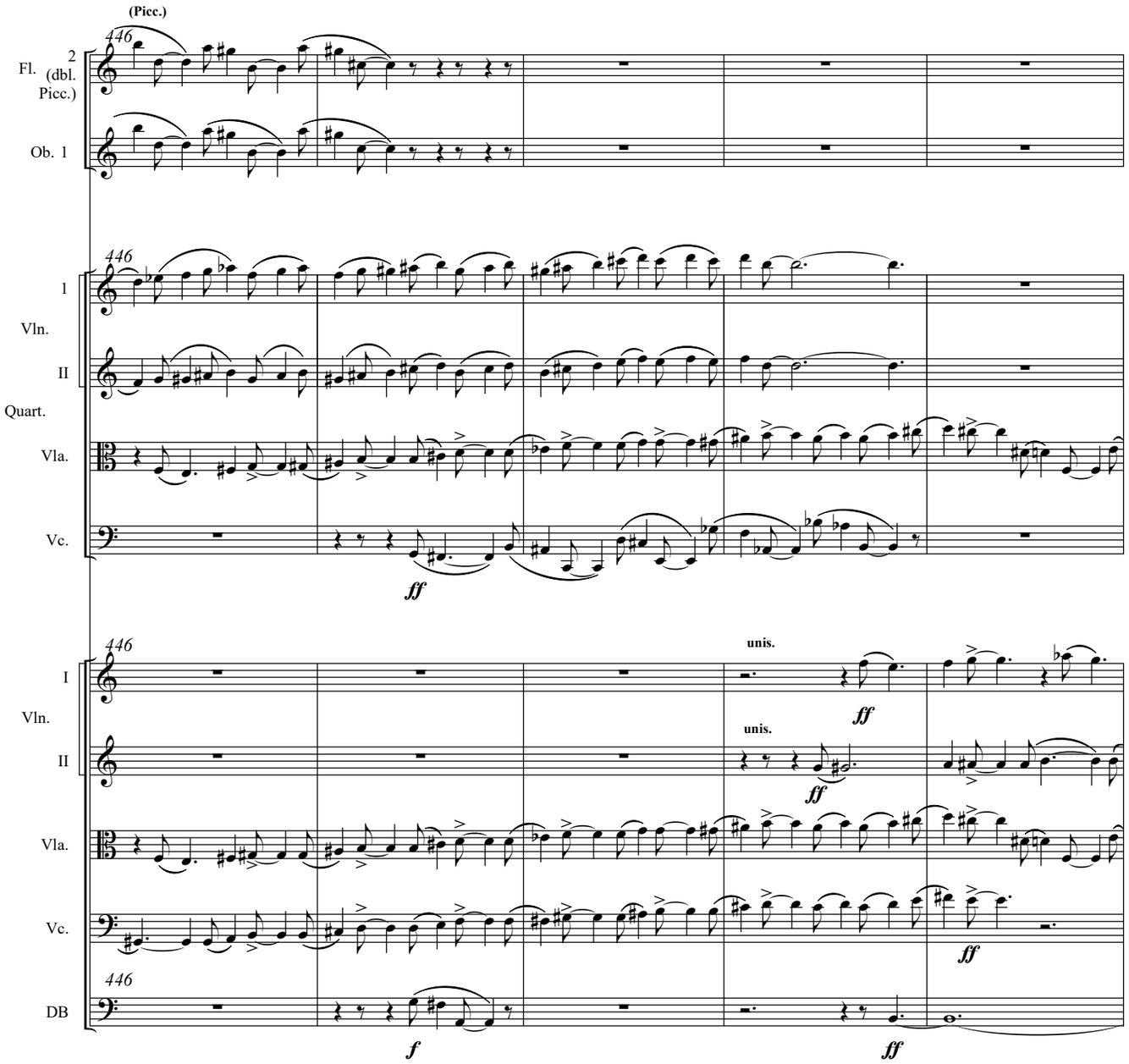

382
1
Ob.
2
Bsn. 1
382
1
Hn.
3
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
1
Tbn.
2
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
ff
382
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.

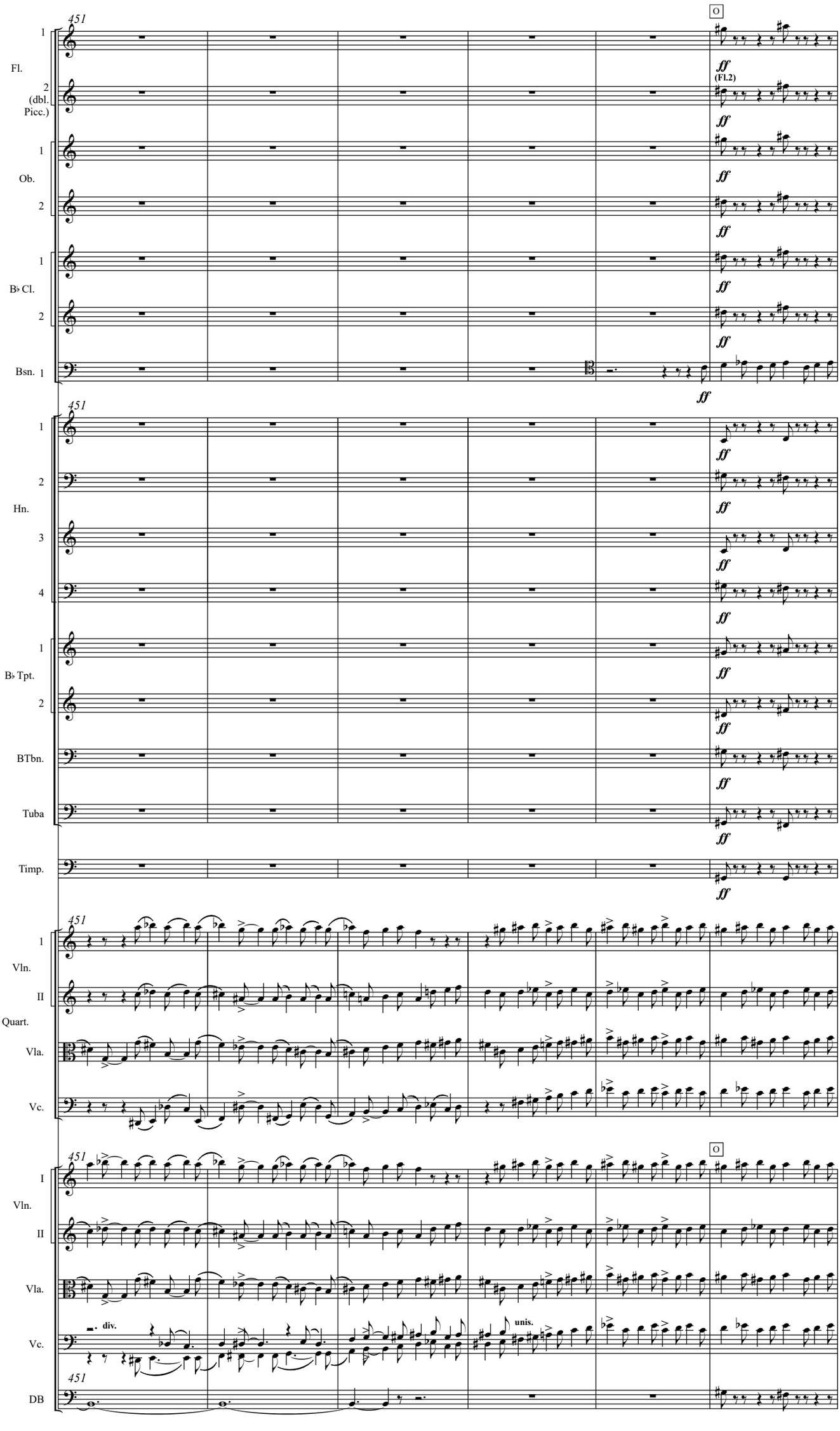

396
Fl.
2 (dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
(Fl.2)
8vb

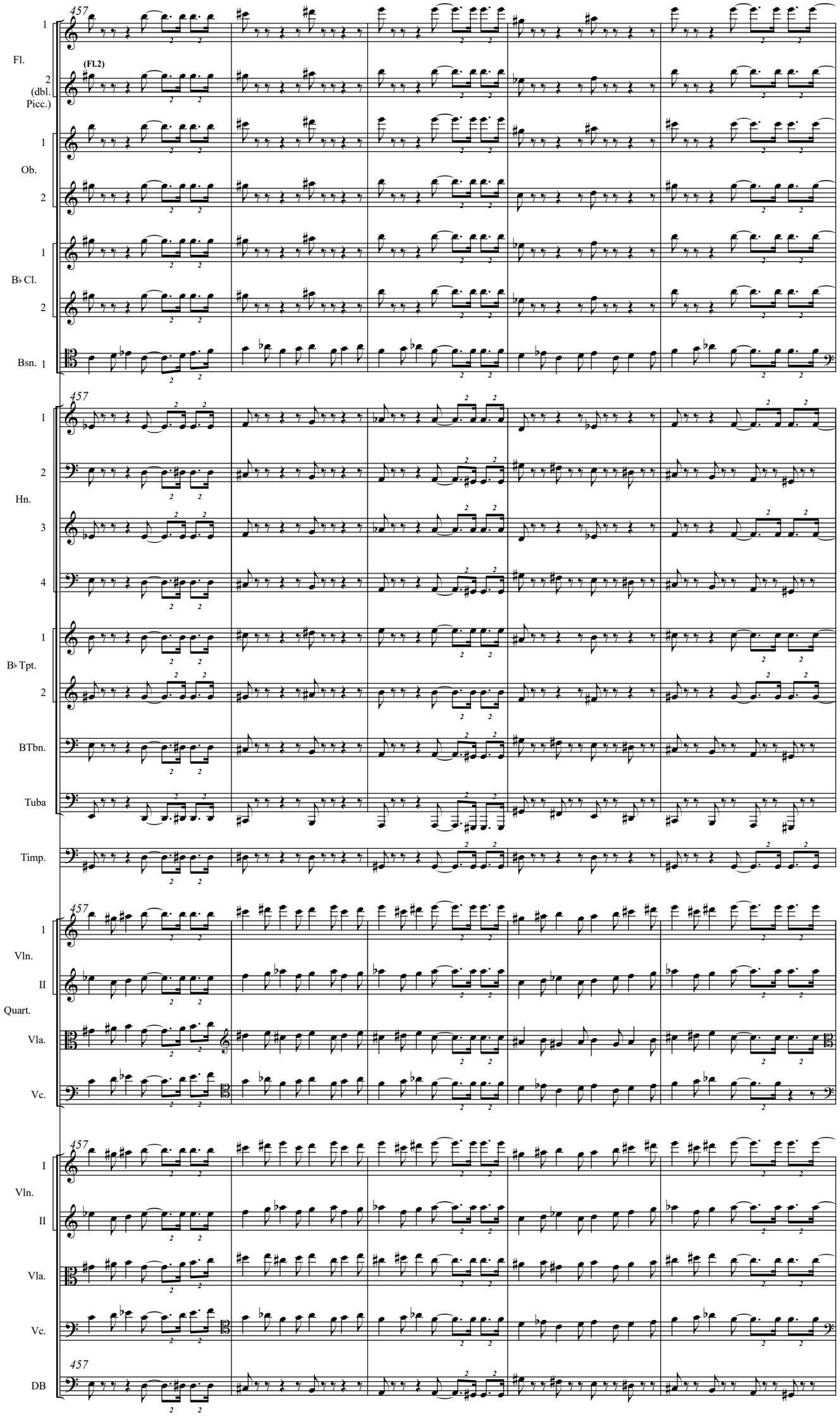

♩= 96
M
Moderato II
412
Fl.
(Fl.2)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Hn.
pp
Timp.
Vln.
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
I
II
DB

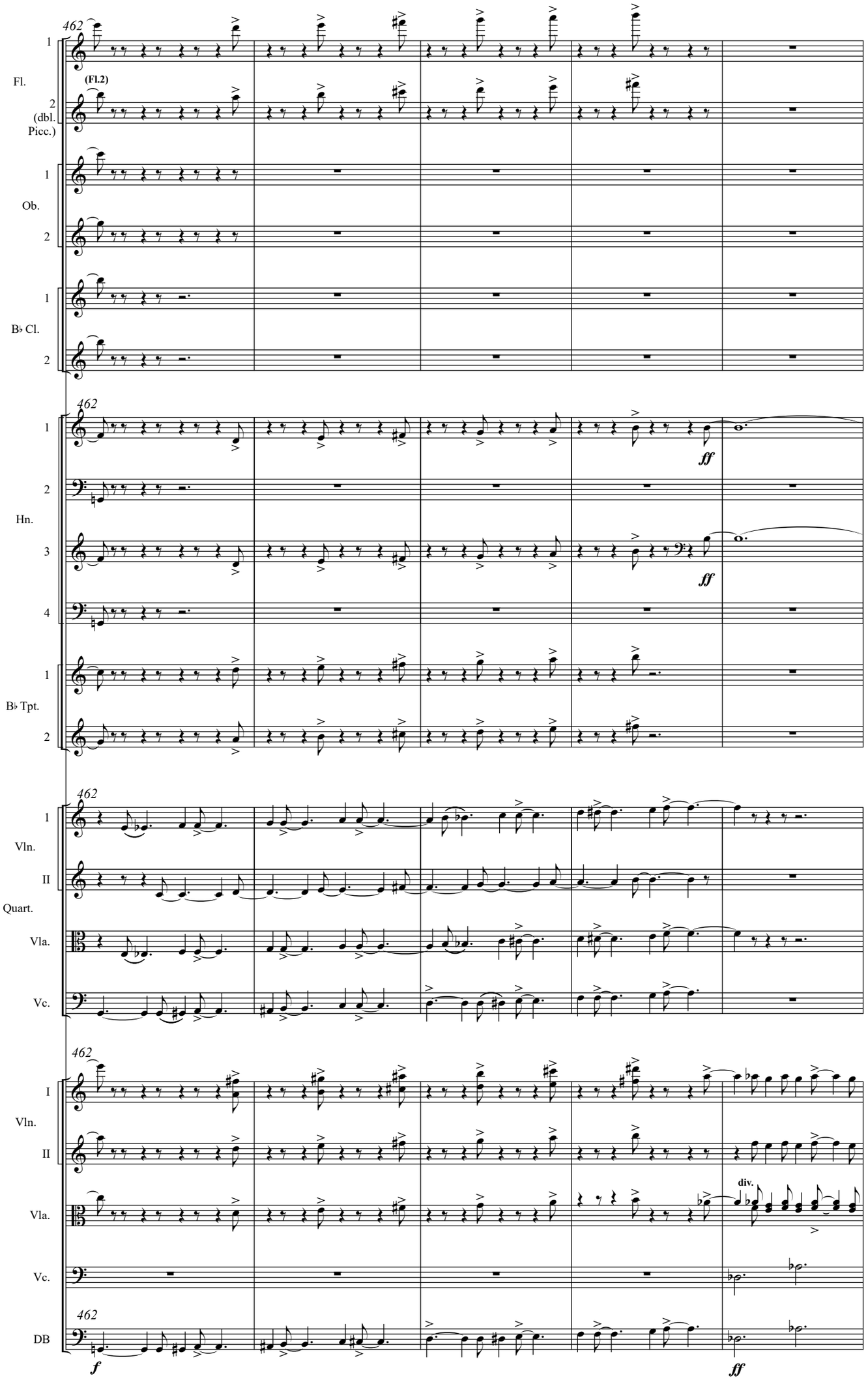

425
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Vln.
Quart.
Vc.
div.
Vla.
DB
pp
8va
433
N Fugato Bordello ♩. = 154
(8va)
mp
ff

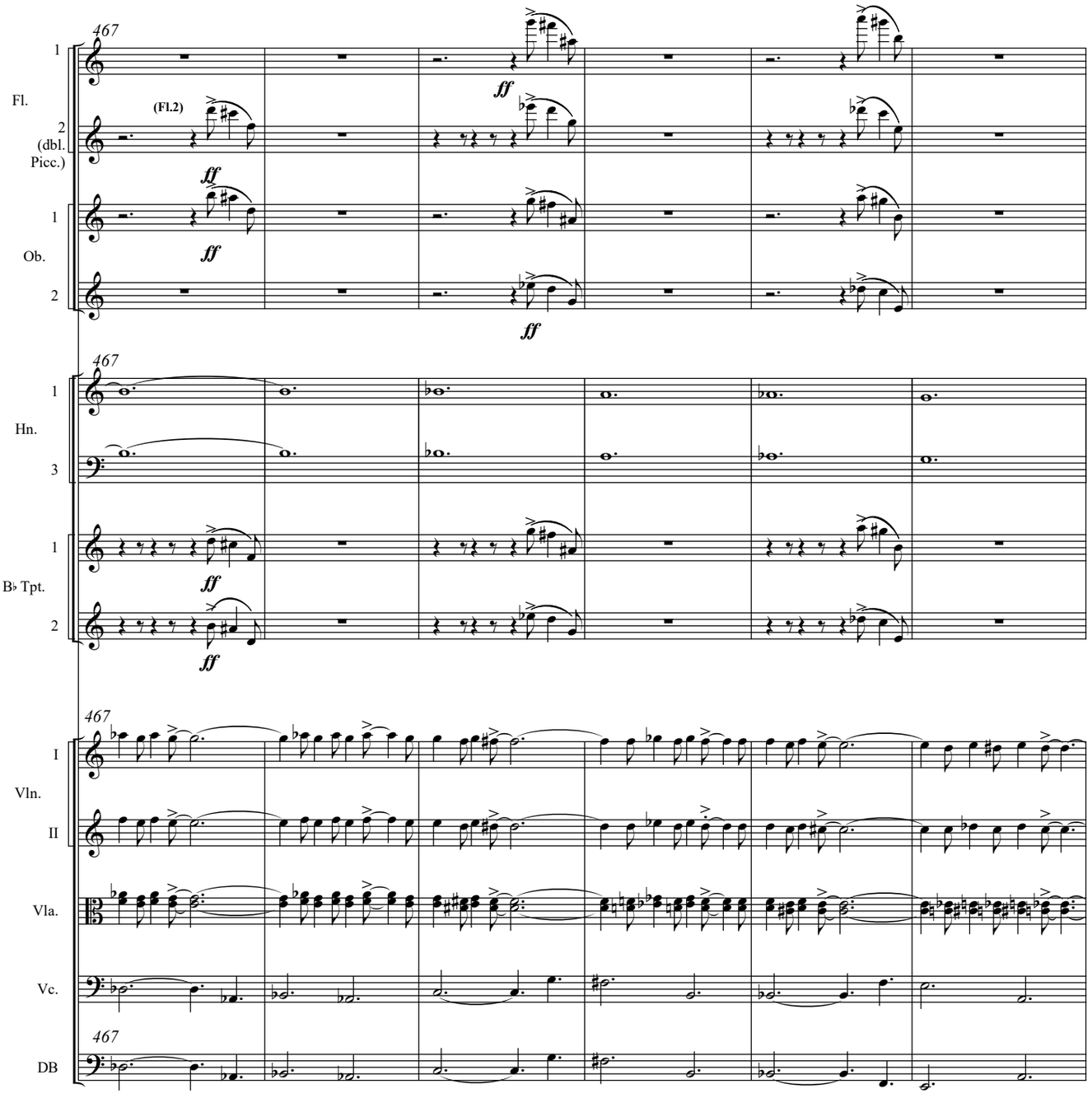

440
Fl.
(Fl.2)
(Picc.)
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln.
I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
unis.

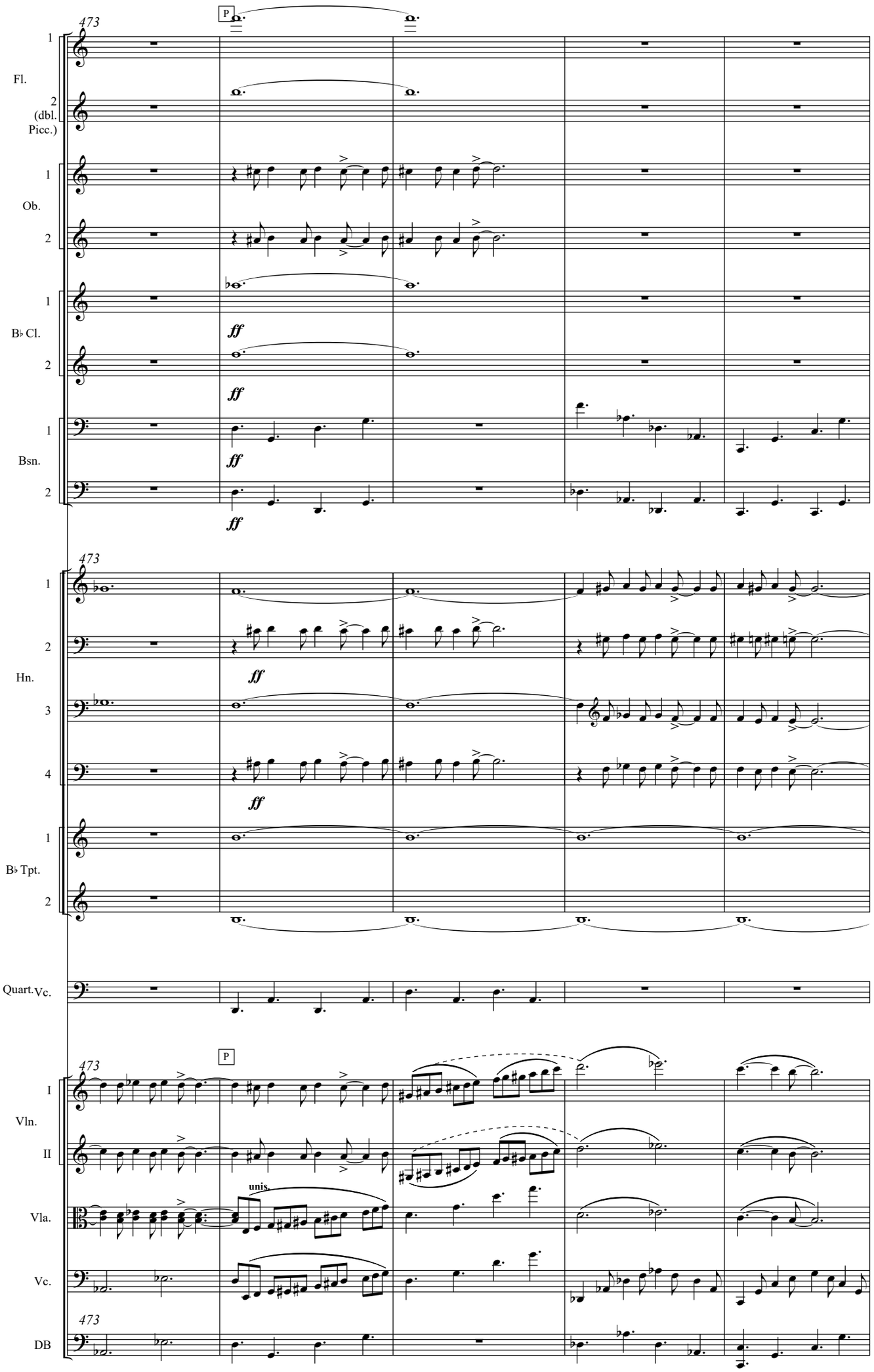

(Picc.)
446
2
Fl. (dbl. Picc.)
Ob. 1
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
ff
I
unis.
DB
f

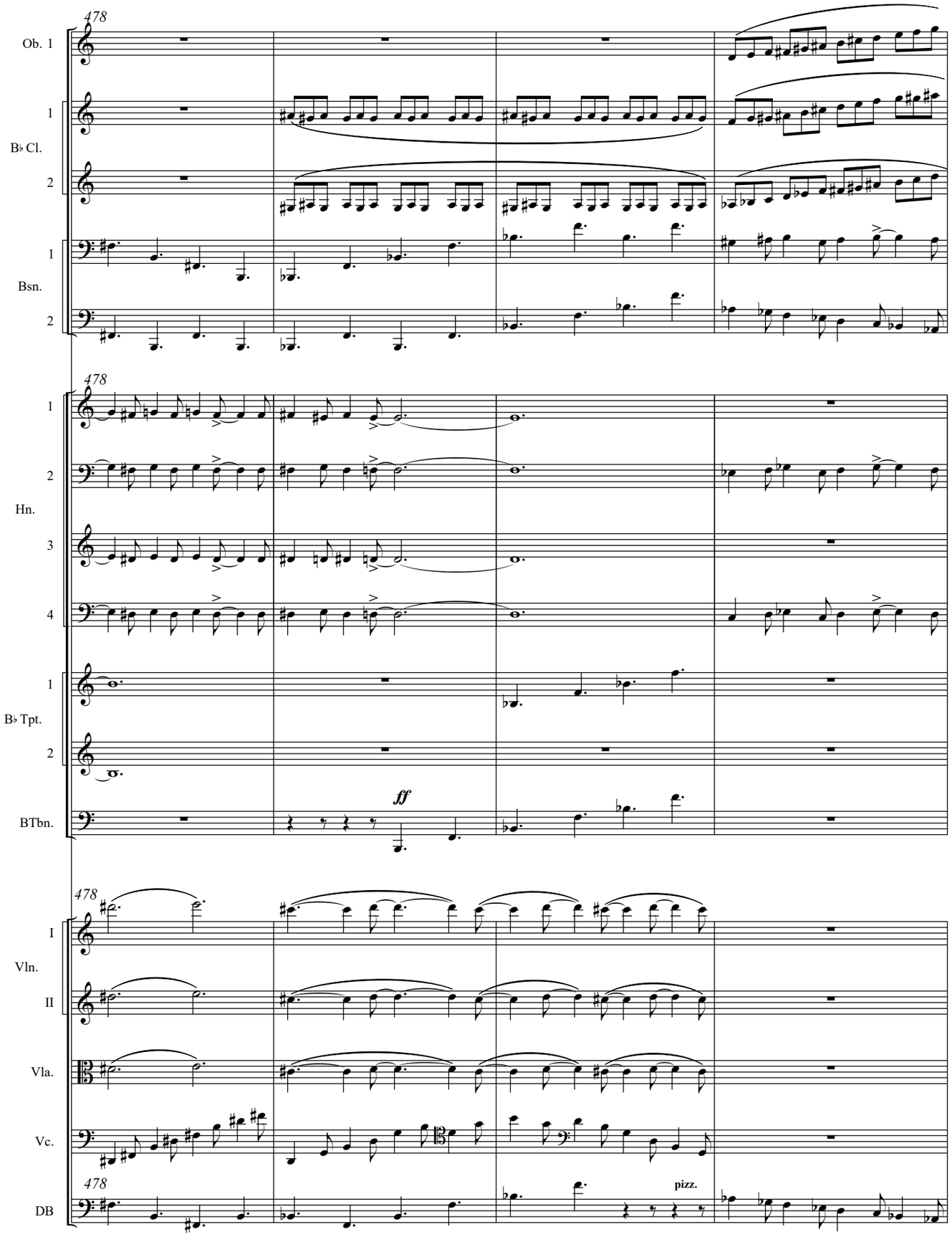

451
O
Fl.
1
2
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
ff
(Fl.2)
Hn.
3
4
B♭ Tpt.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln.
I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
div.
unis.

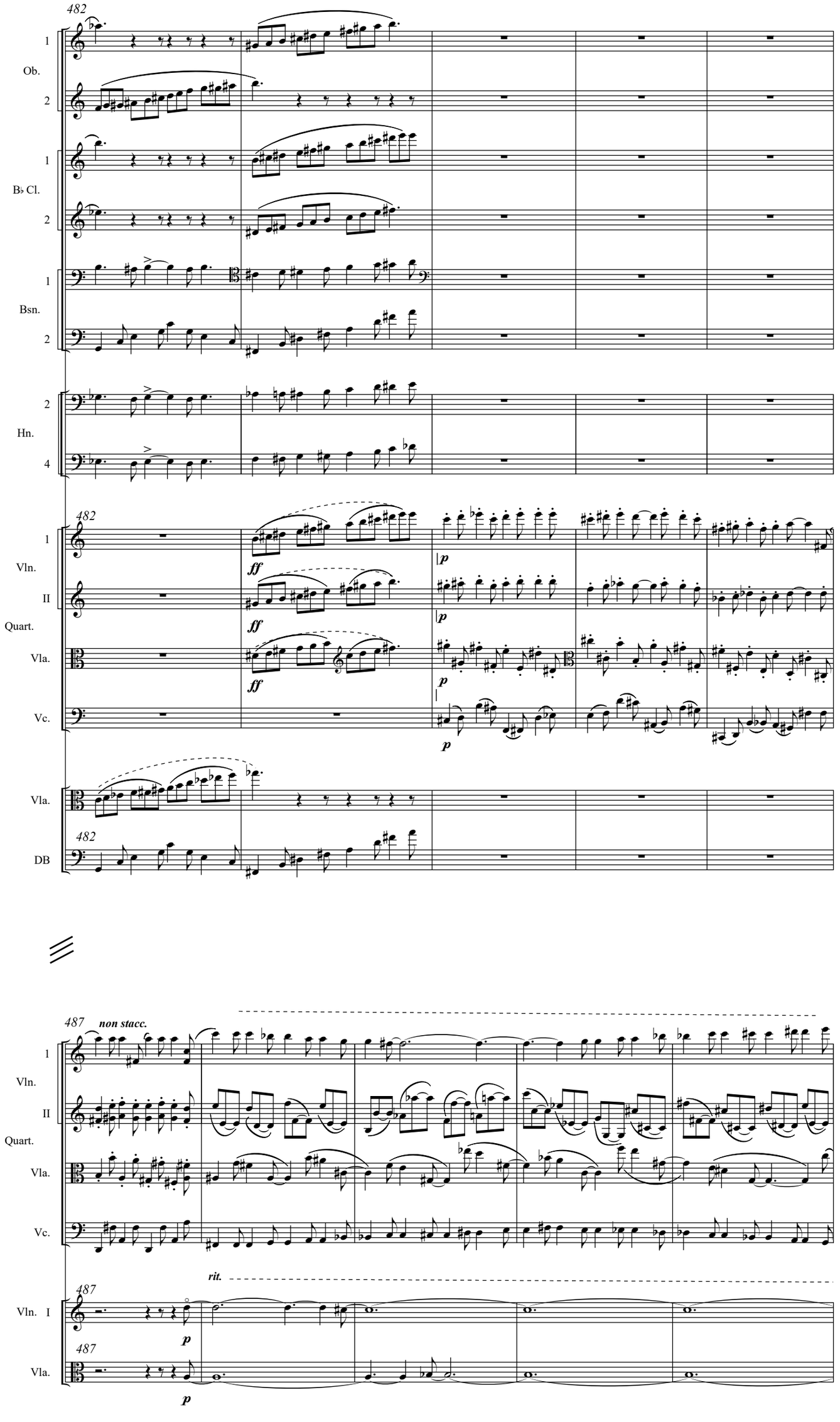

457
(Fl.2)
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln.
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB


462
1
Fl.
(Fl.2)
2
(dbl. Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
462
1
2
Hn.
3
4
ff
ff
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
462
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
462
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
div.
Vc.
462
DB
f
ff

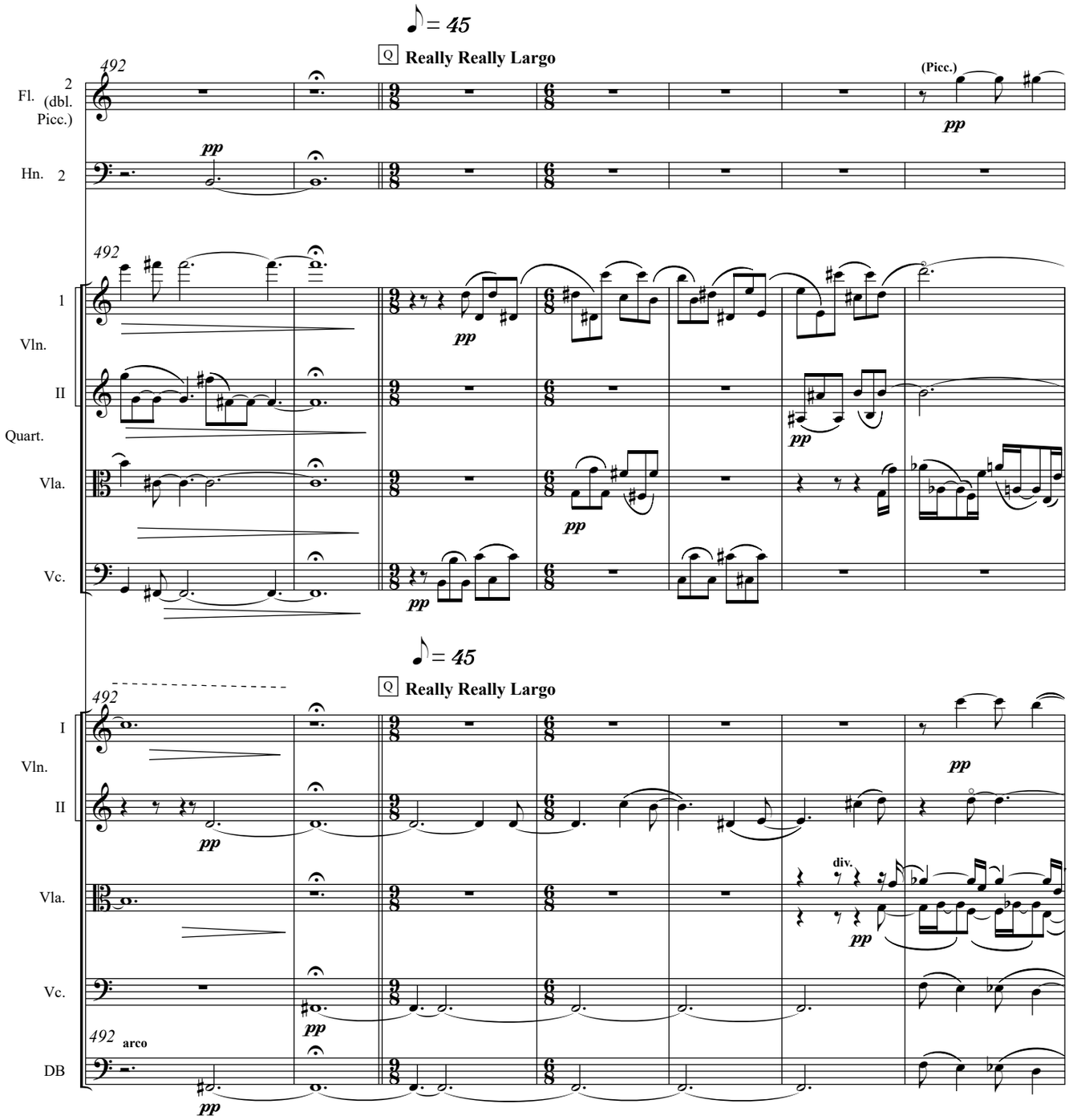

467
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Fl.2)
ff
1
Ob.
2
ff
467
1
Hn.
3
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
ff
467
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
467
DB

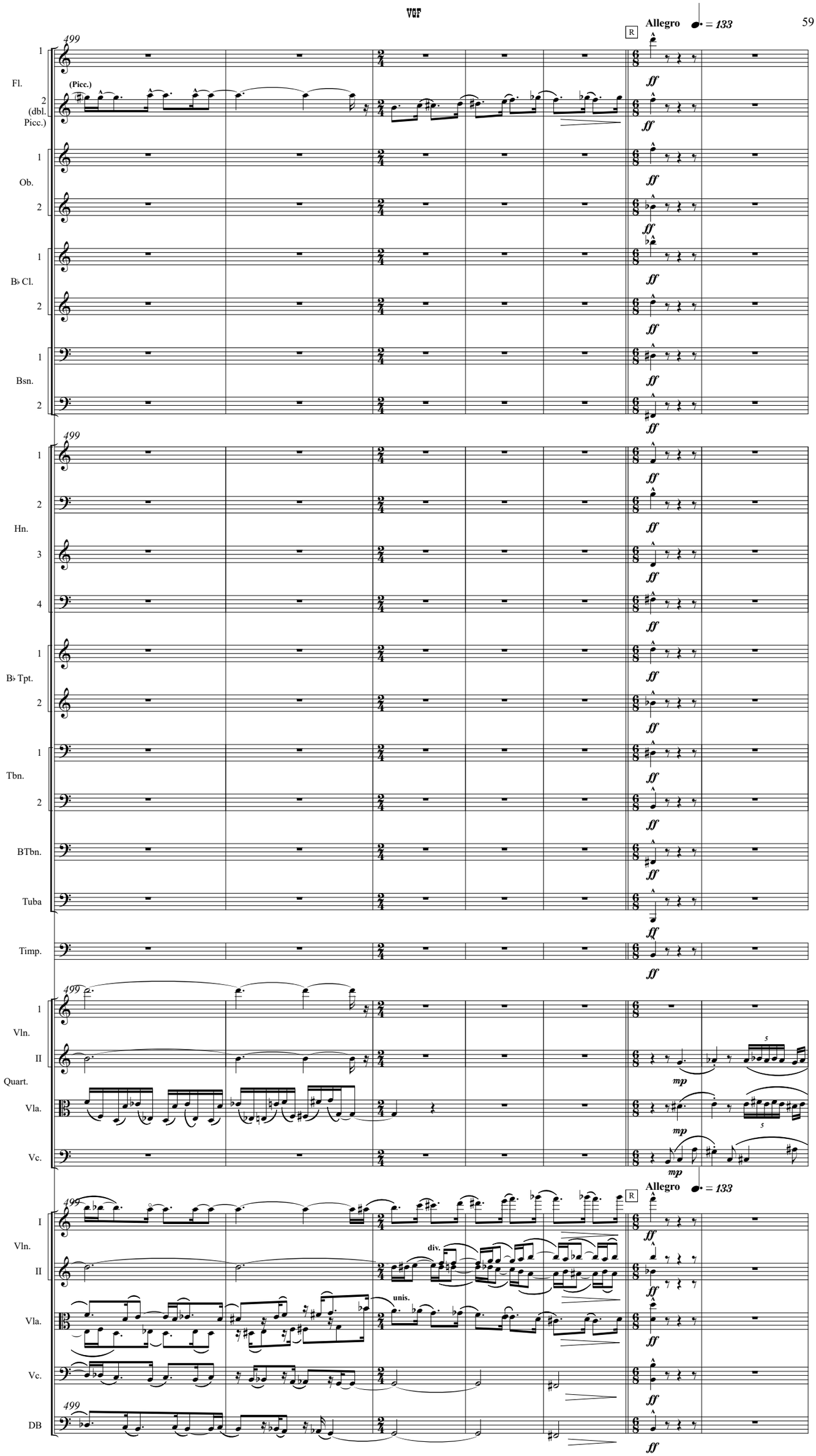

473
P
1
Fl.
2
(dbl. Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
ff
473
1
2
Hn.
3
4
ff
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
Quart.
Vc.
473
P
I
Vln.
II
unis.
Vla.
Vc.
473
DB

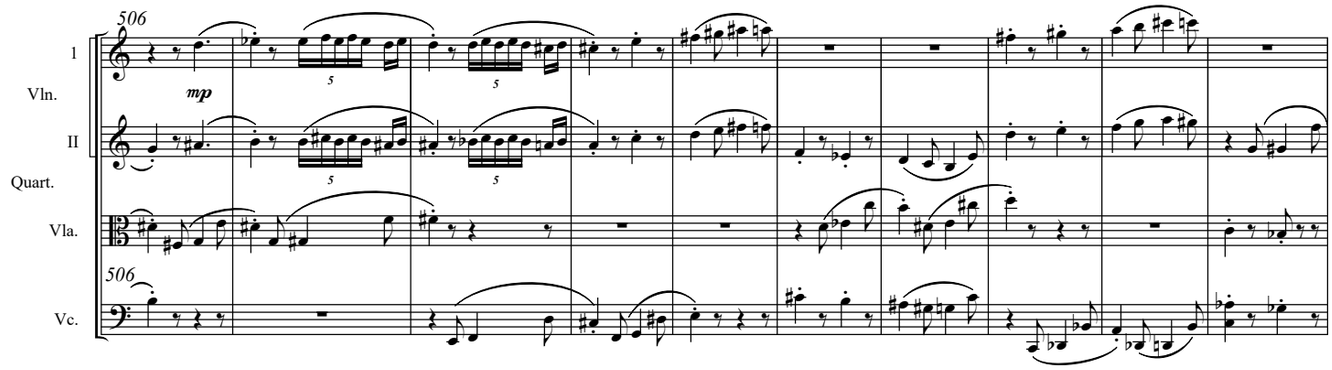

478
Ob. 1
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
478
1
2
Hn.
3
4
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
ff
BTbn.
478
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
478
pizz.
DB

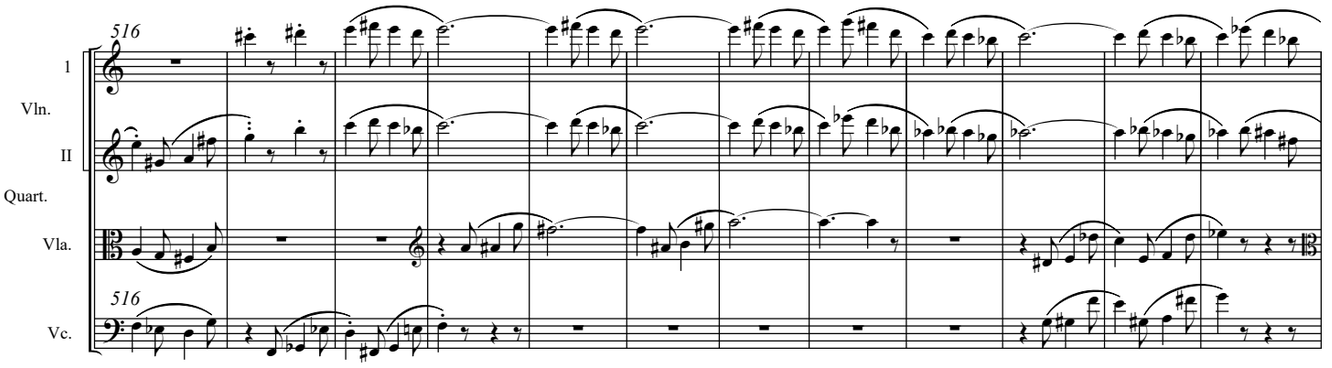

482
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
1
Bsn.
2
2
Hn.
4
482
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
ff
p
Vla.
482
DB

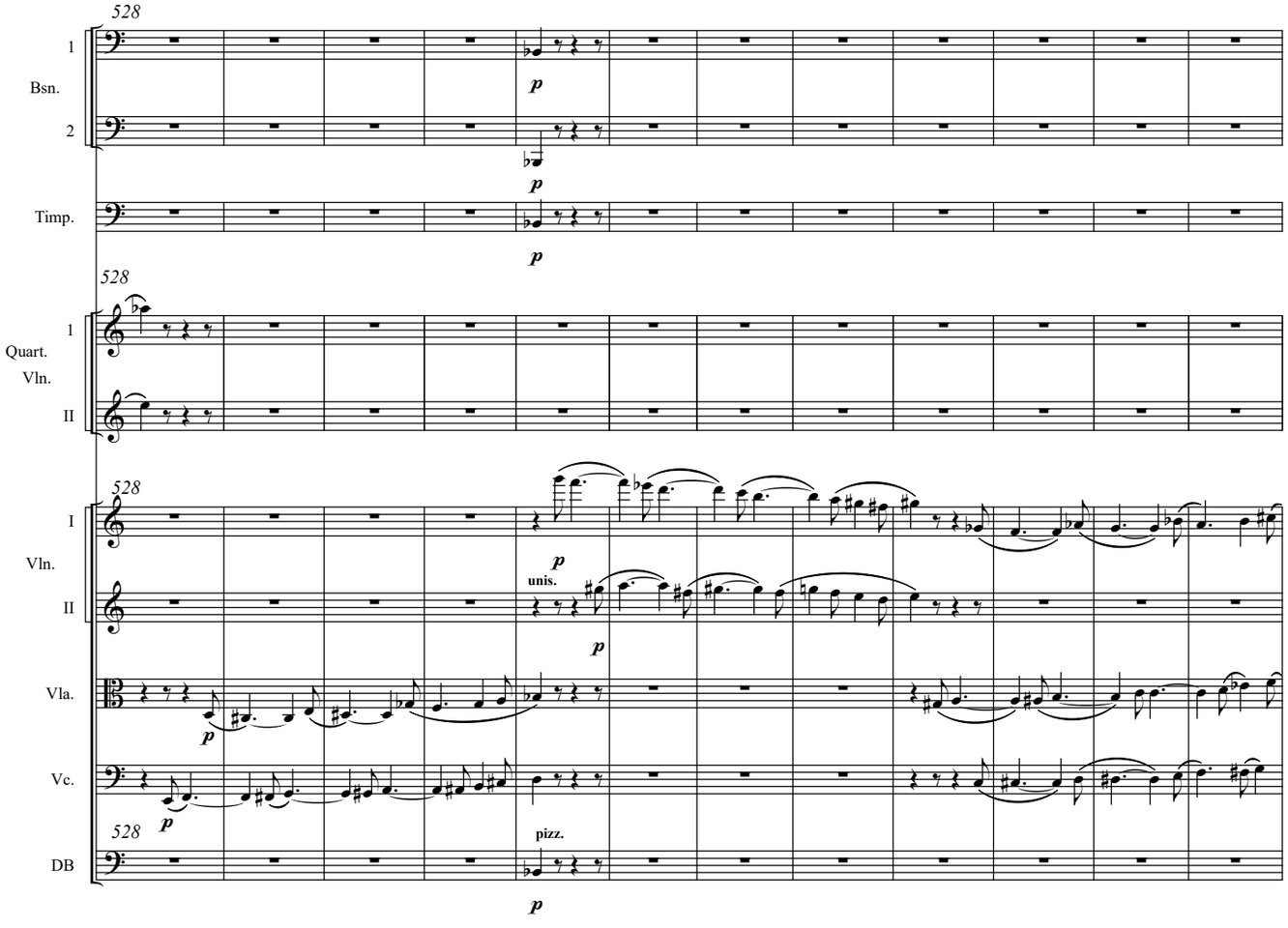
487
non stacc.
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
rit.
487
Vln. I
p
487
Vla.
p

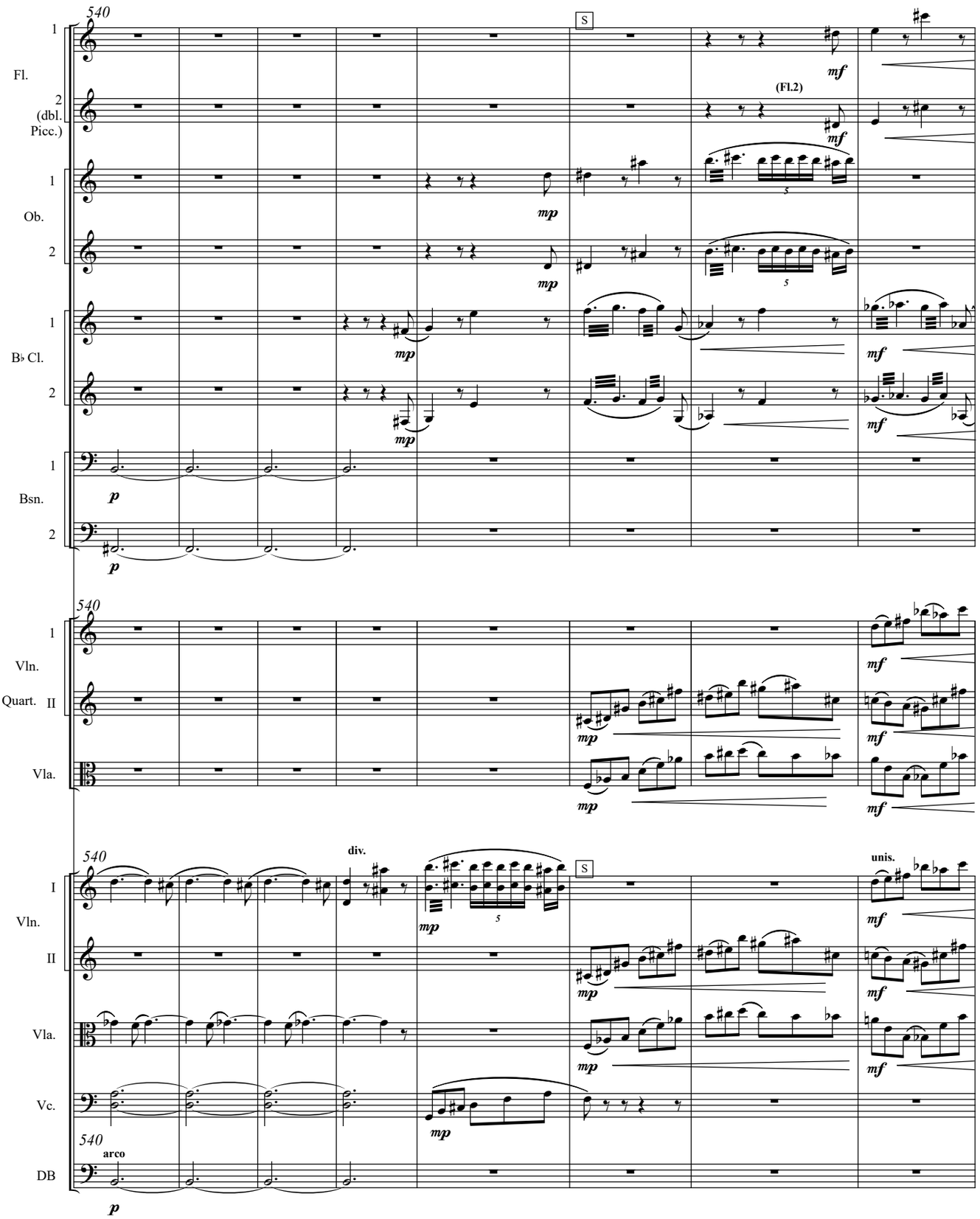

♪ = 45
Q Really Really Largo
492
Fl. 2 (dbl. Picc.)
(Picc.)
pp
Hn. 2
492
1 Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
pp
♪ = 45
Q Really Really Largo
492
I Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
DB
492 arco
div.
pp

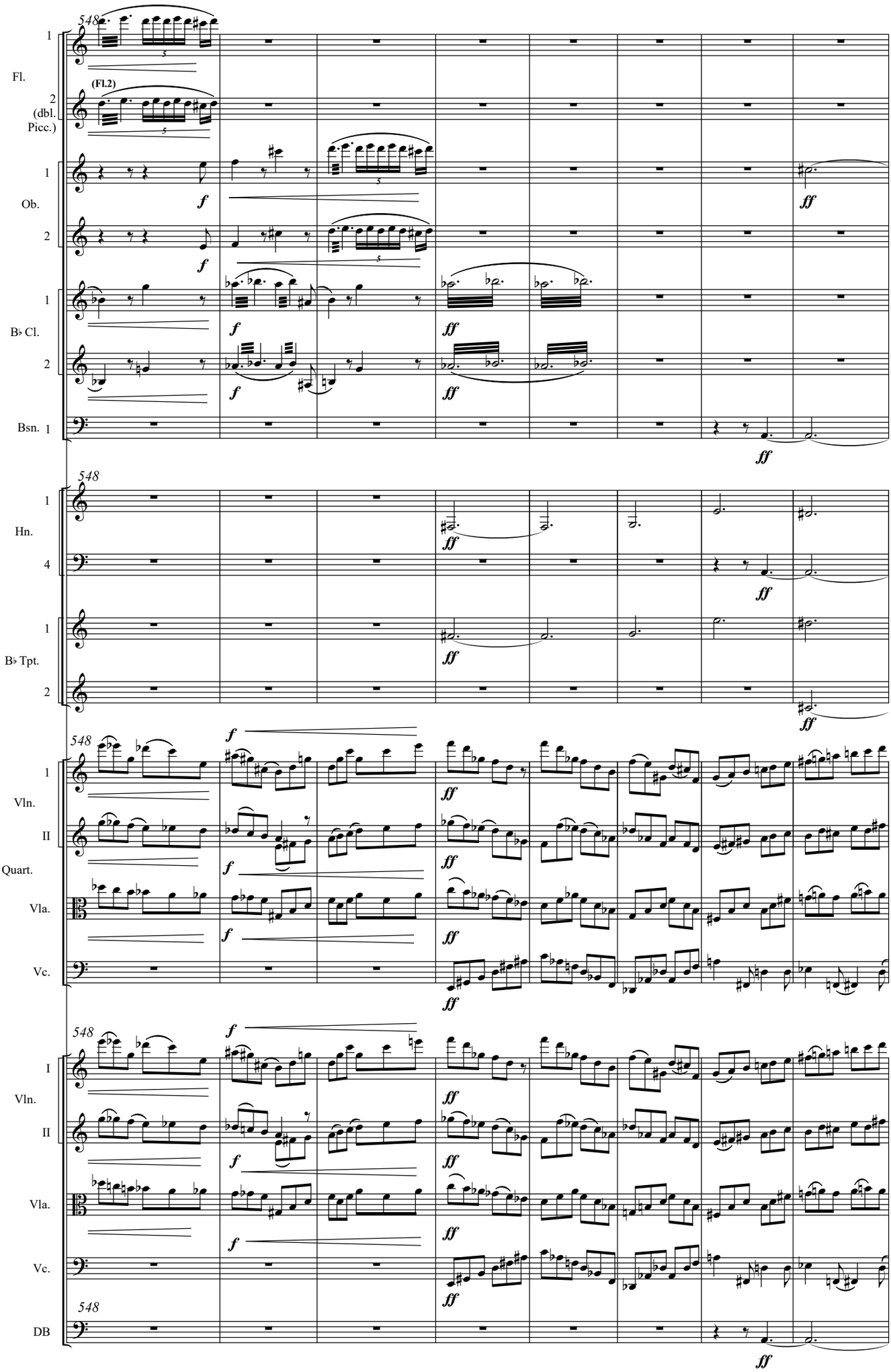

Allegro ♩. = 133
499
(Picc.)
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
div.
unis.
ff
mp

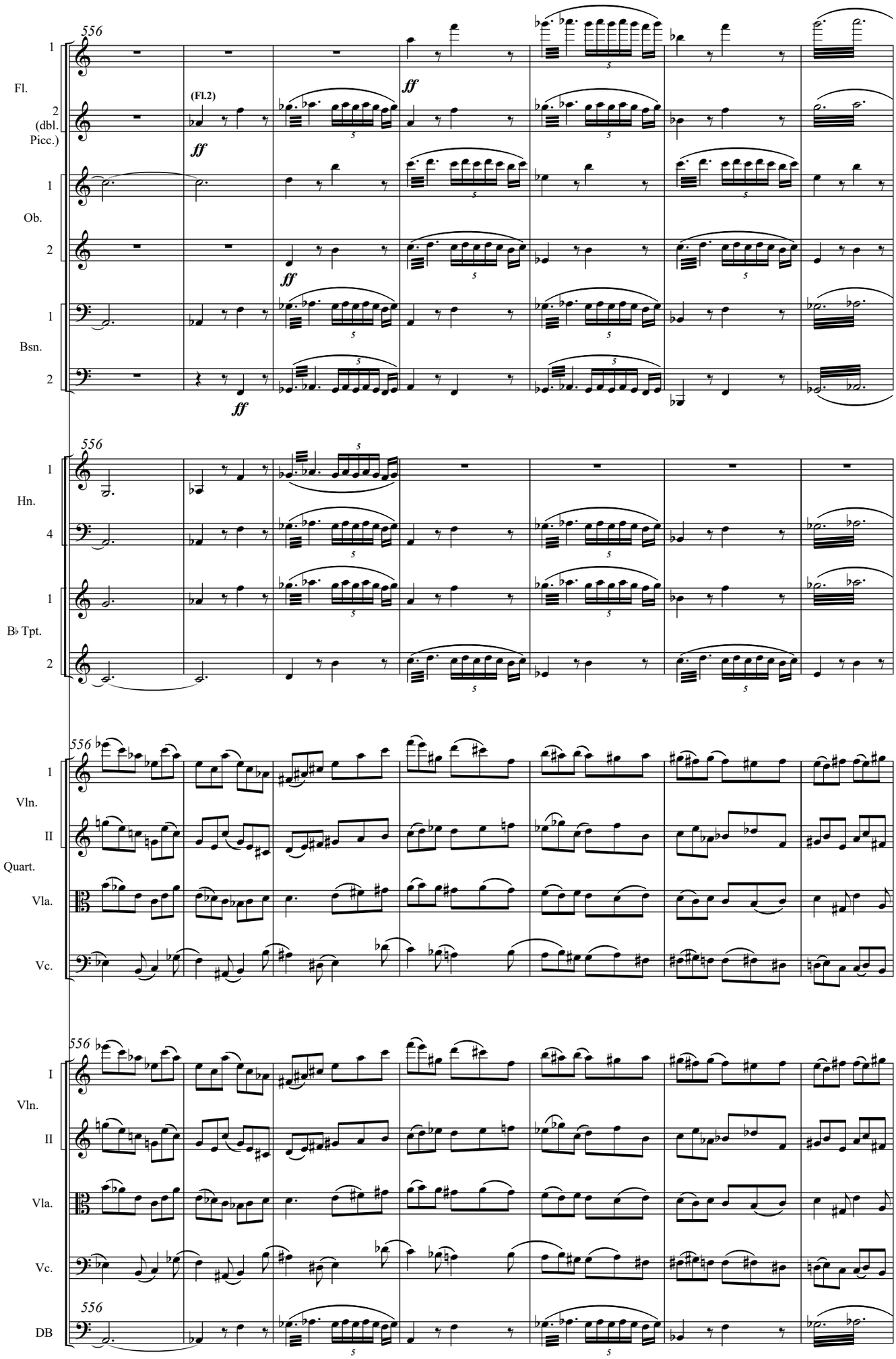

506
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
506
Vc.
mp
5
5

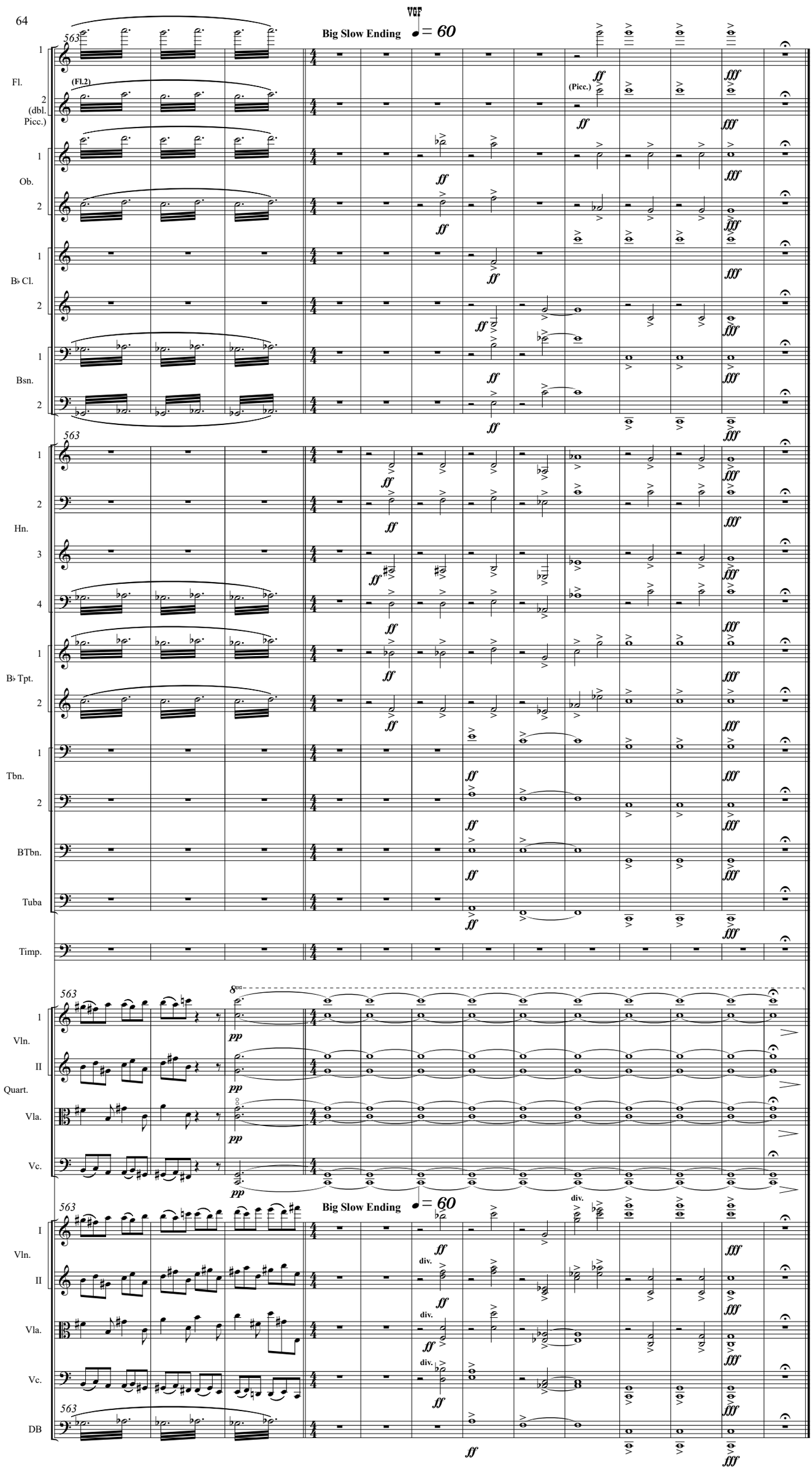

516
1
Vln.
II
Quart.
Vla.
516
Vc.


528
1
Bsn.
2
Timp.
p
528
1
Quart.
Vln.
II
528
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
528
DB
p
unis.
pizz.


540
S
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
(Fl.2)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
div.
unis.
arco
mp
mf
p


548
1
Fl.
(Fl.2)
2
(dbl. Picc.)
1
Ob.
2
1
B♭ Cl.
2
Bsn. 1
f
ff
548
1
Hn.
4
1
B♭ Tpt.
2
548
1
Vln.
I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
548
I
Vln.
II
Vla.
Vc.
548
DB


556
Fl.
1
2
(dbl. Picc.)
(Fl.2)
ff
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
4
B♭ Tpt.
Vln.
I
II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB


VGF
Big Slow Ending ♩ = 60
563
(Fl.2)
(Picc.)
Fl.
(dbl. Picc.)
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
BTbn.
Tuba
Timp.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Quart.
Vla.
Vc.
DB
ff
fff
pp
div.