Variations on the Grosse Fuge

for Piano Quintet

Bill Robinson

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for Piano Quintet

January 6—March 22, 1987 (synth version), Las Cruces, New Mexico
revised 2003-2005, revised and arranged 2007
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.

In 2003 I started using Finale which allowed synthesis, and so put a recording on my first CD in September 2003. 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. During the orchestration I recomposed some sections and made several improvements.

From that score in turn comes this 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 at the NC Museum of Art in January 2009 by the Ciompi Quartet with Randall Love as the pianist.

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.

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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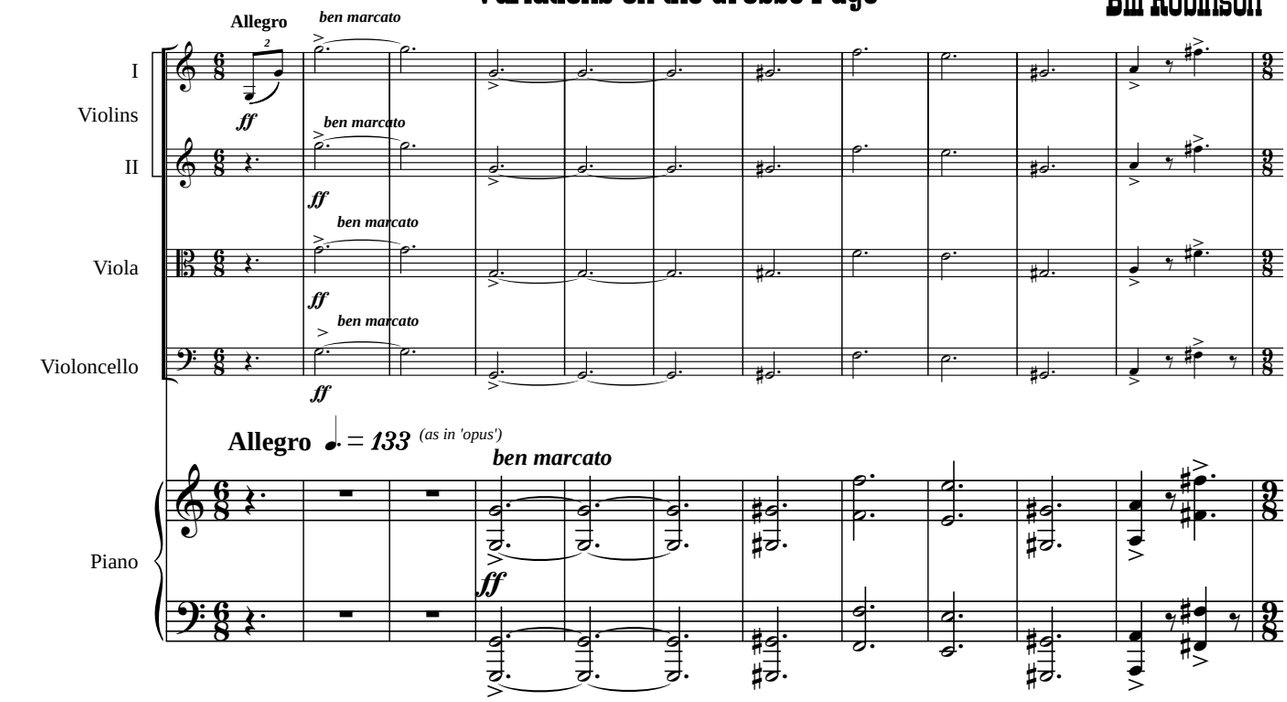
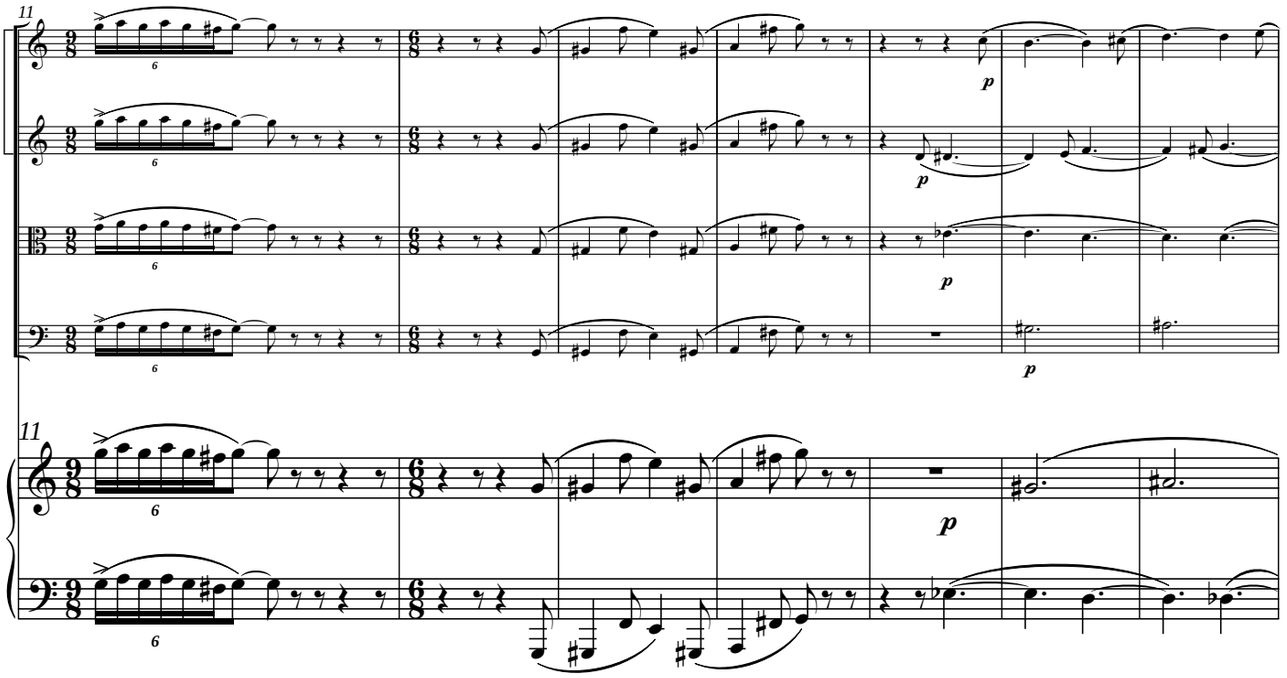
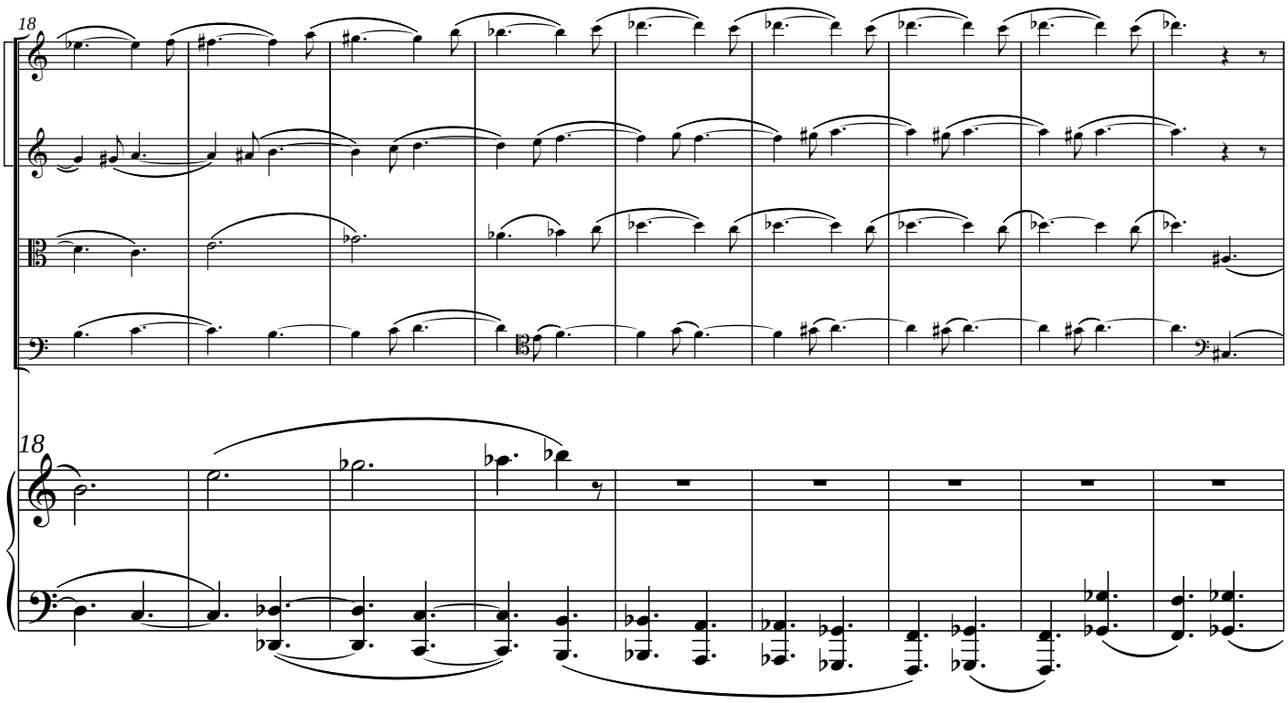
[18']

Bill Robinson







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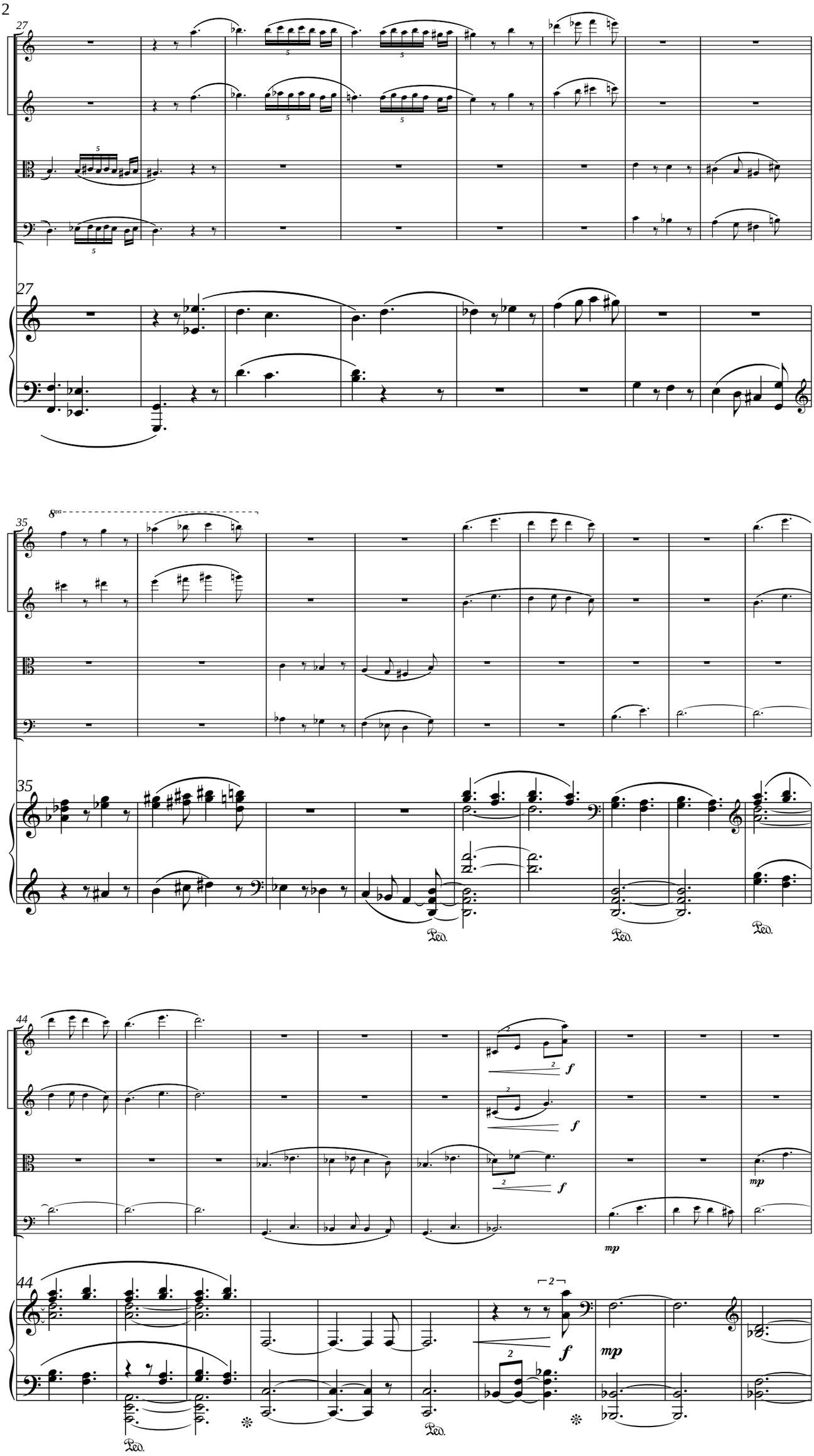
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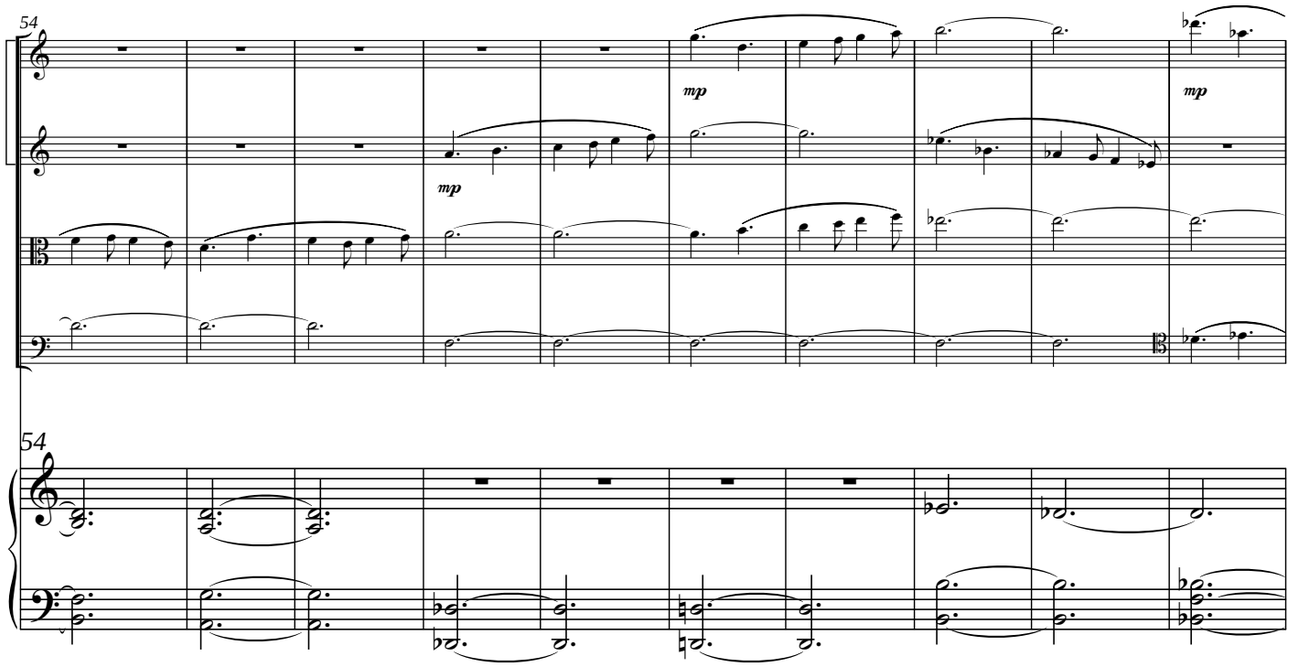
27
8va
35
35
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
44
44
f
f
f
mp
mp
f
Ped.
Ped.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mp
mp
mp
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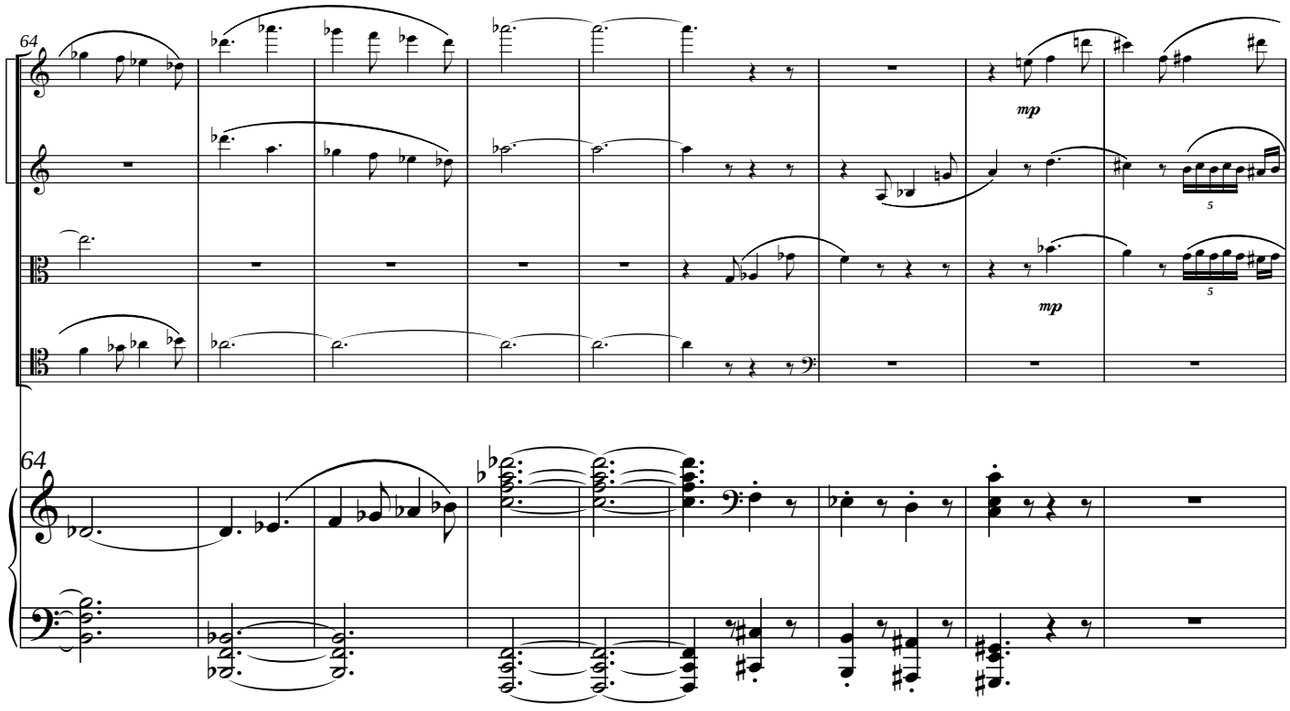
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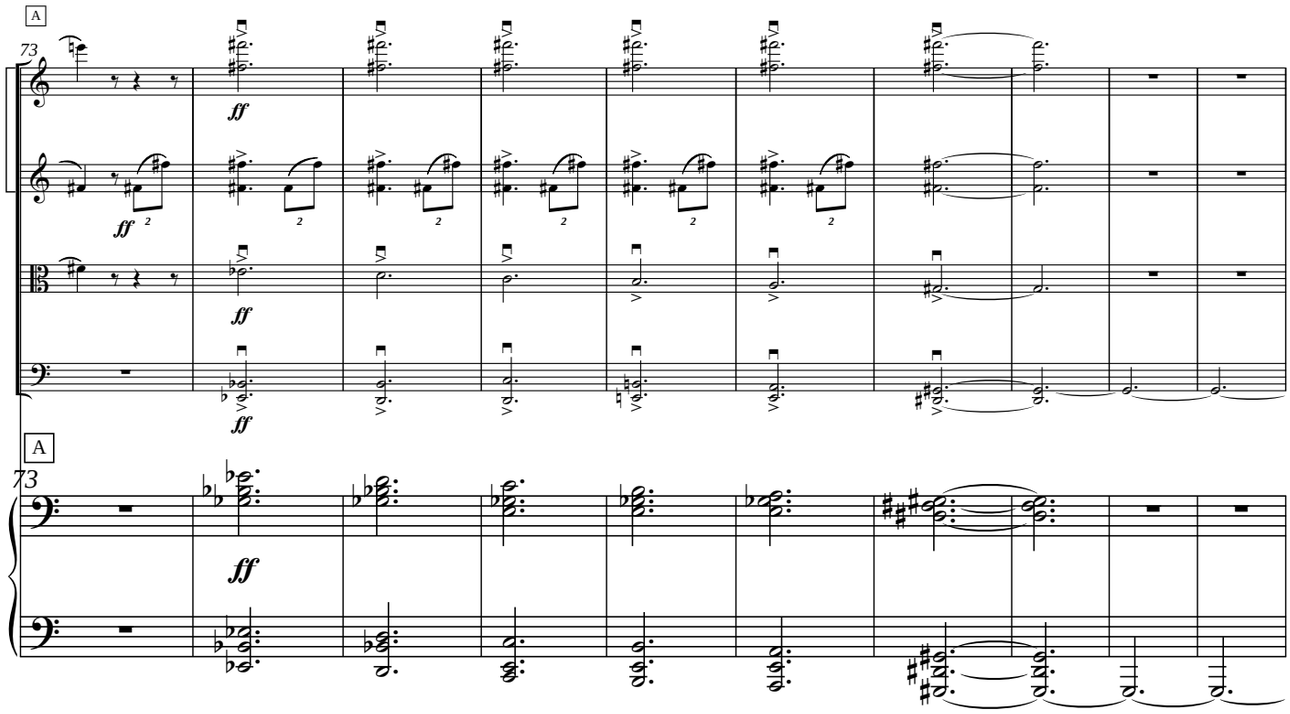
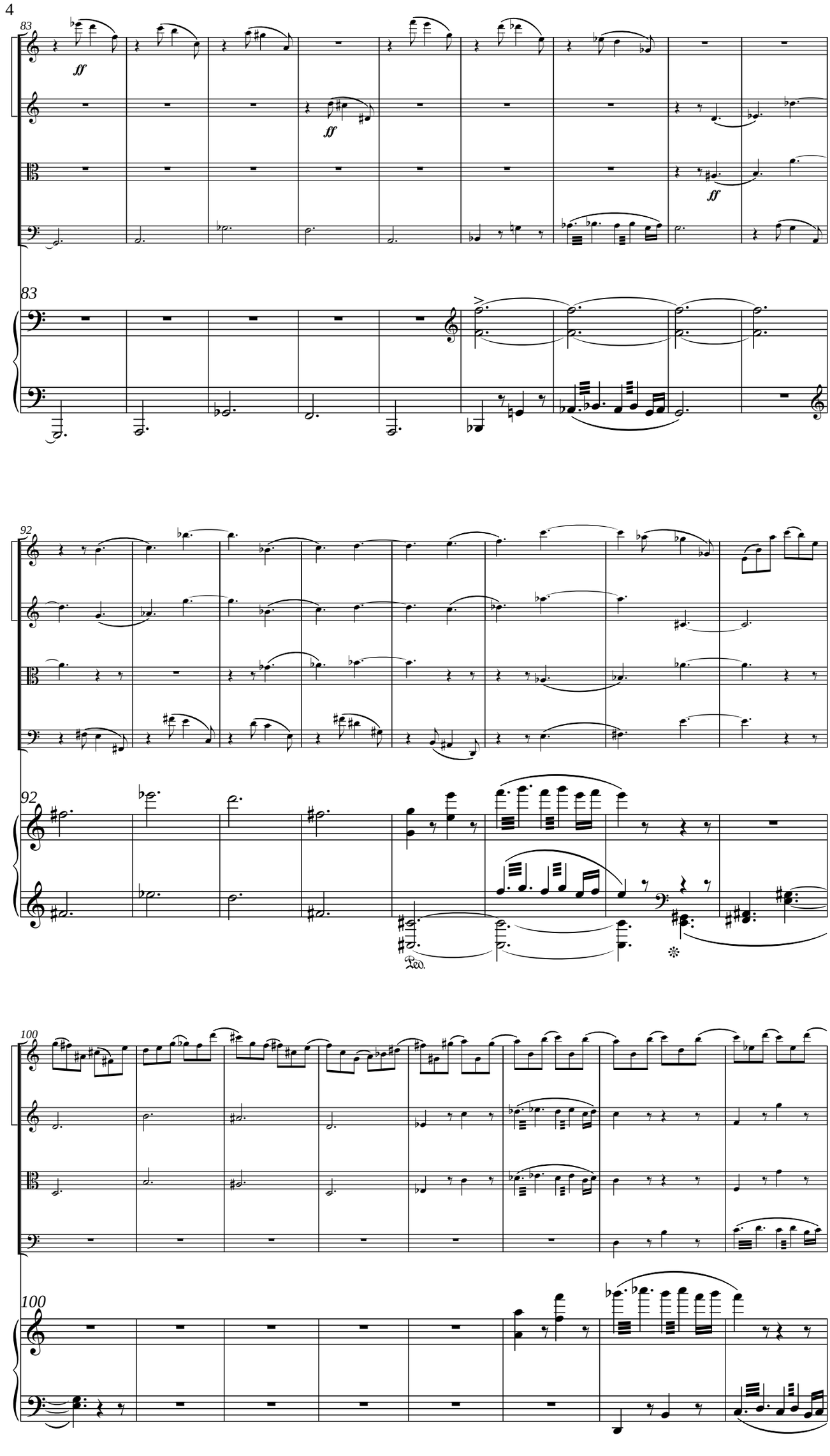
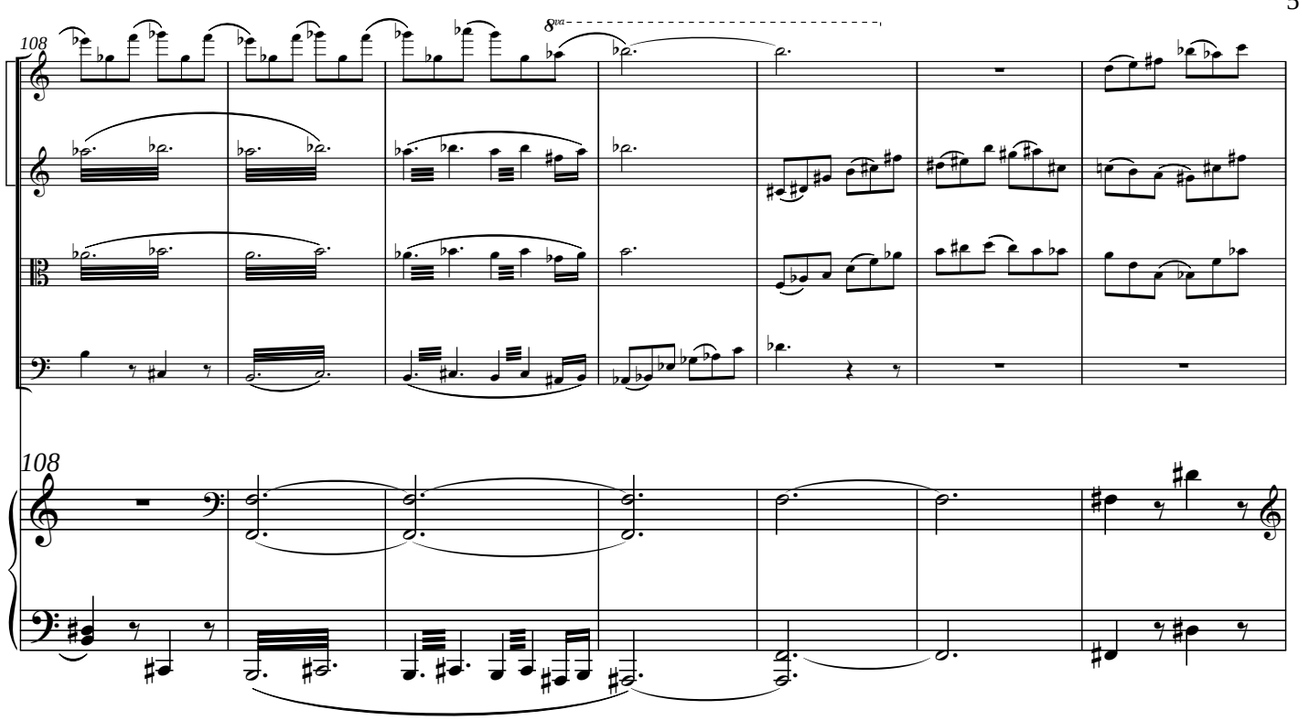
mp
mp
5
5
64


A
73
ff
ff
ff
ff
A
73
ff


83
ff
ff
ff
83
92
92
Ped.
100
100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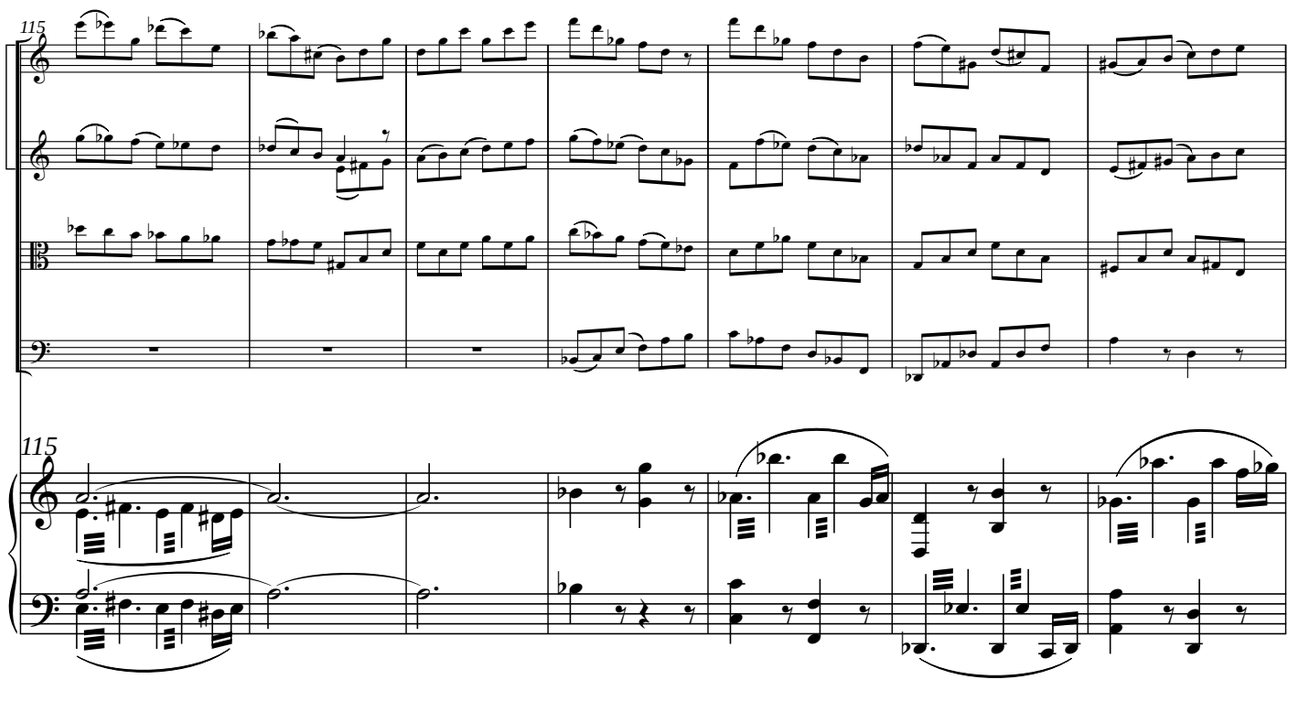
8va
108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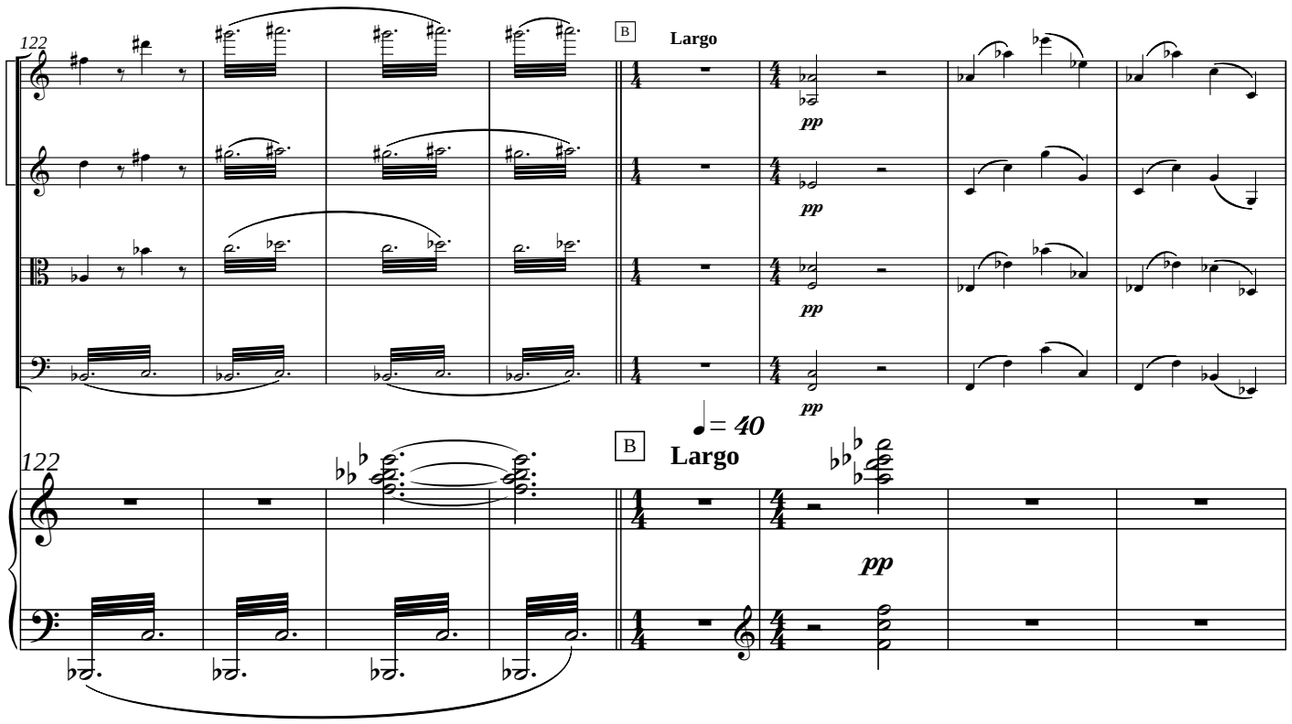
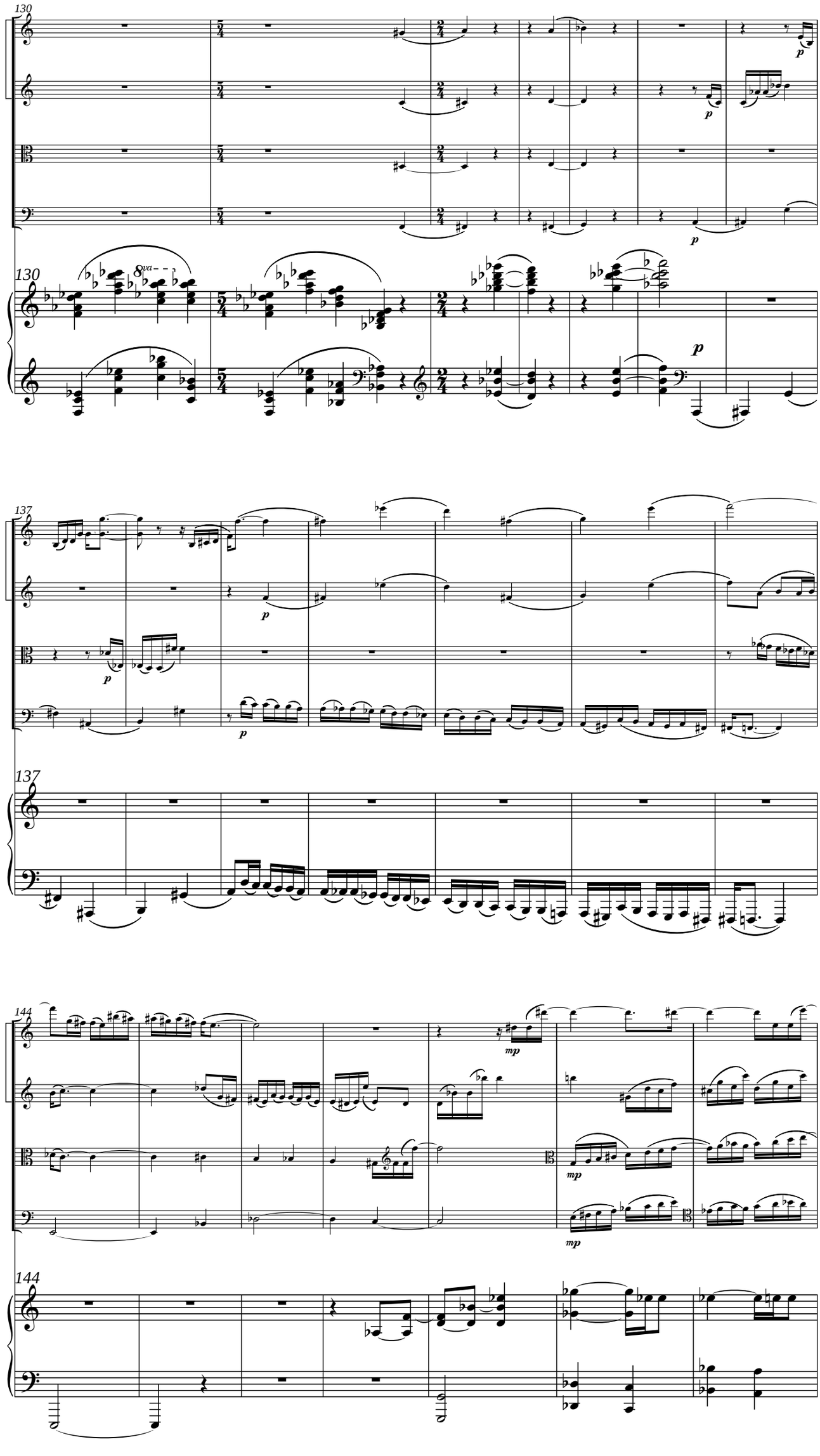

122
B
Largo
pp
pp
pp
pp
♩= 40
B
Largo
122
pp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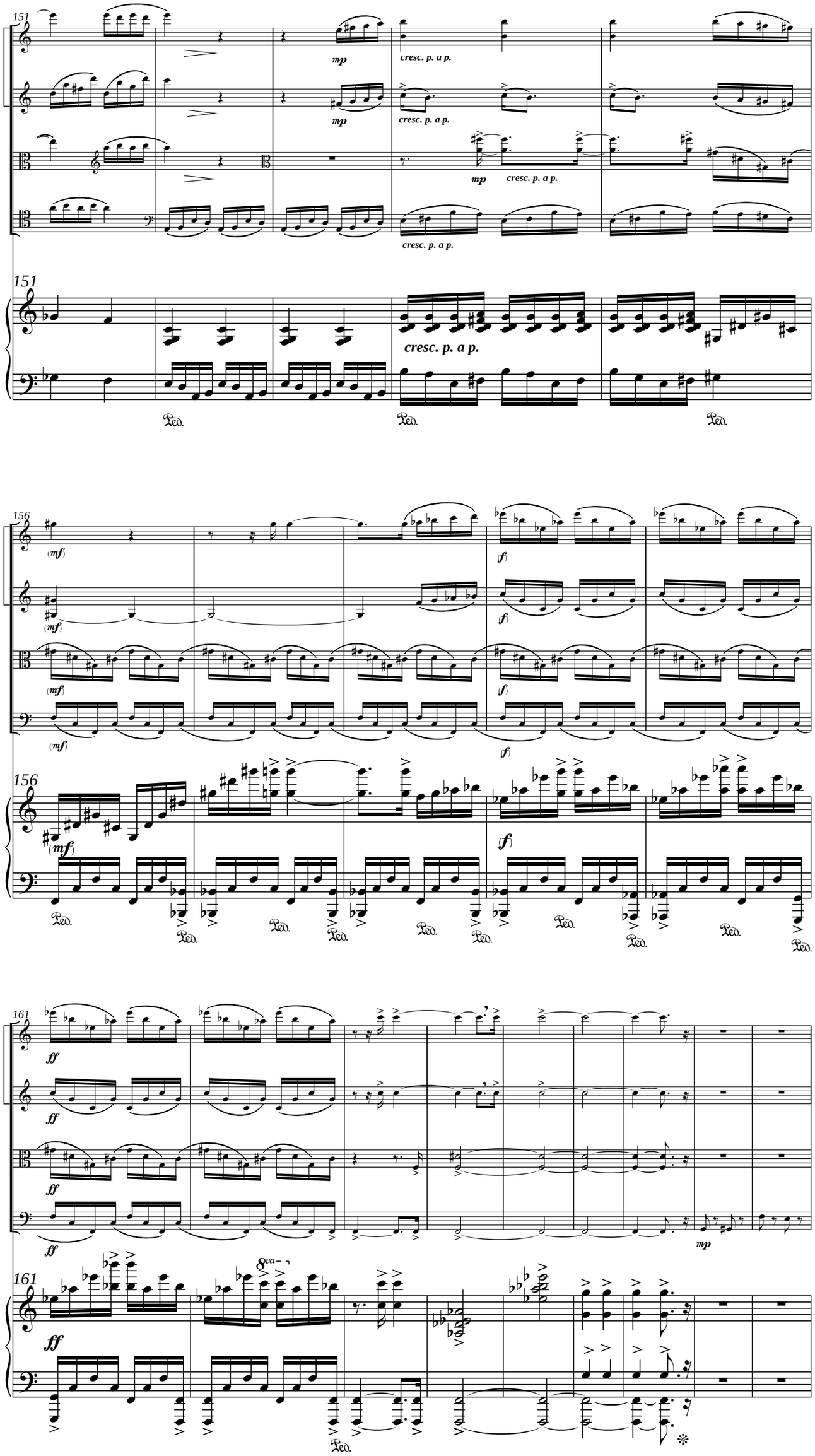
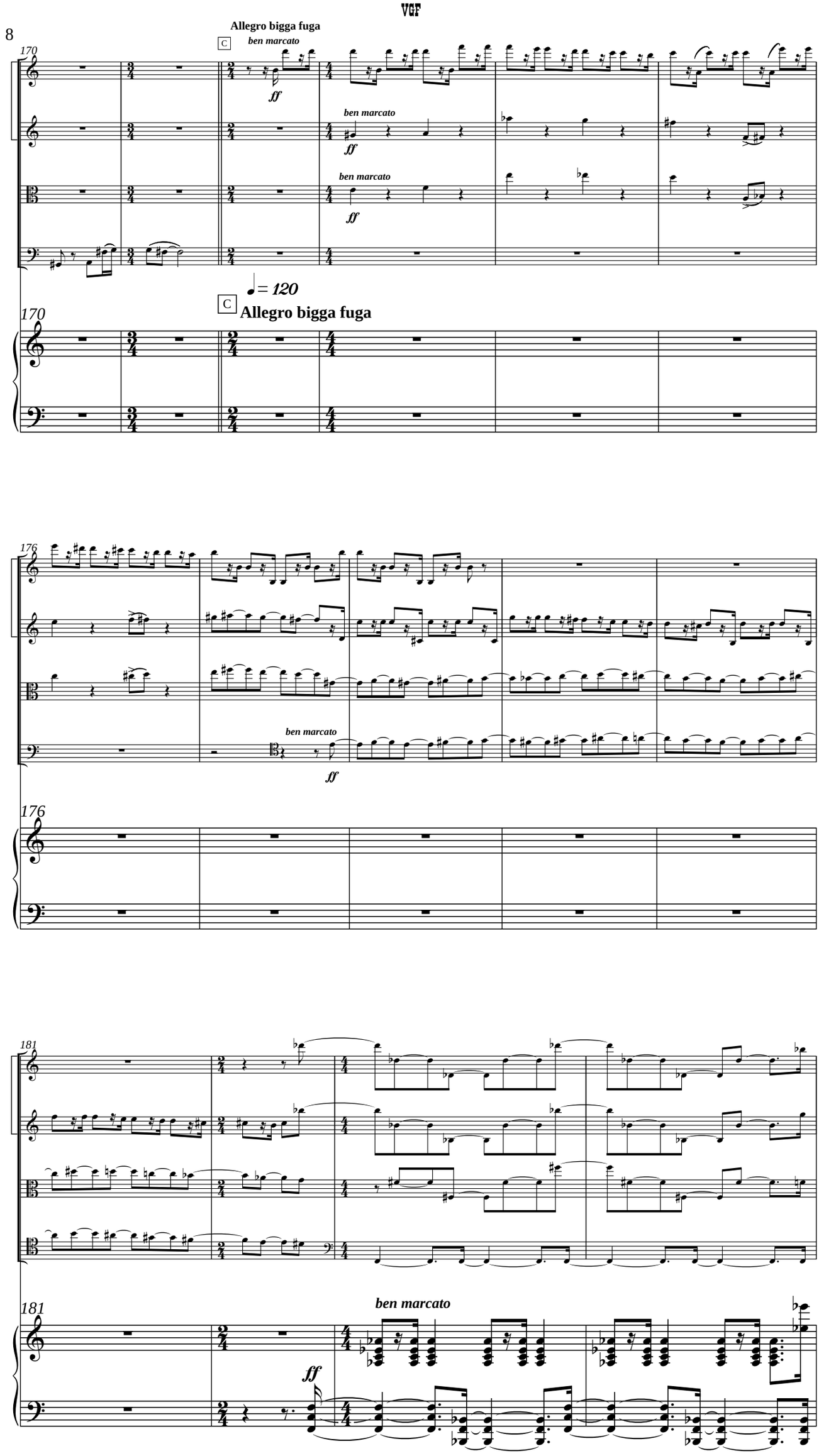
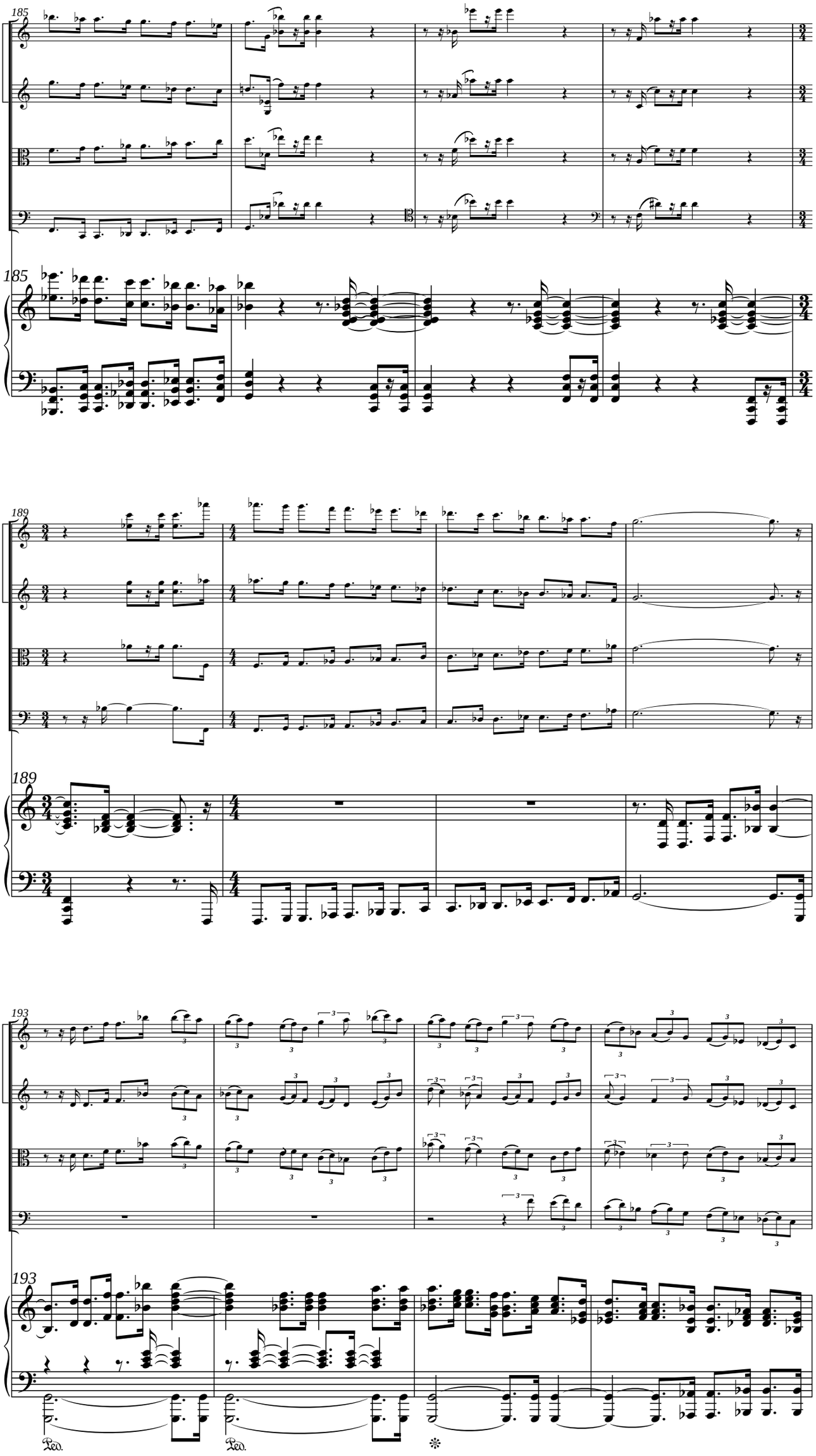
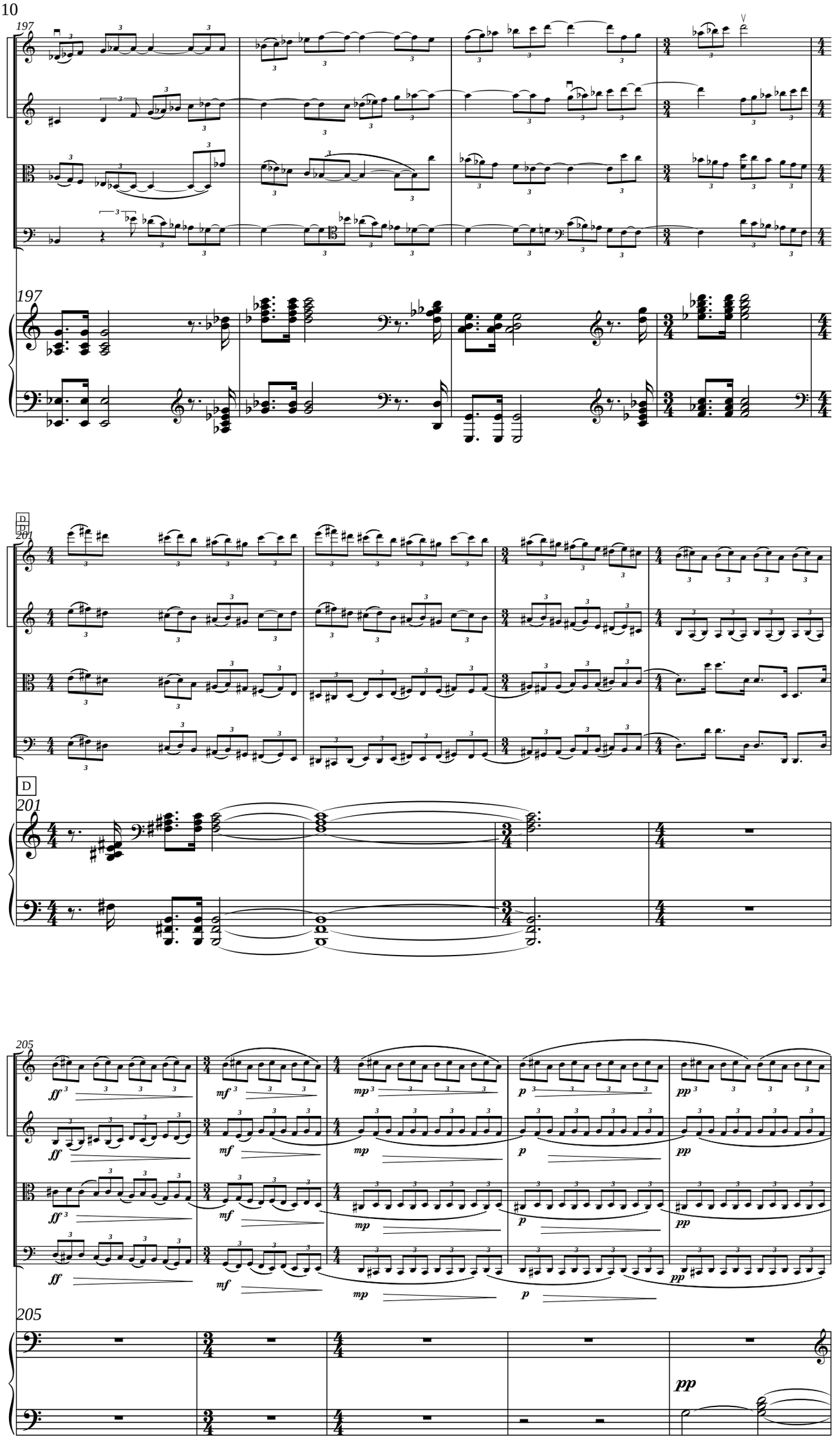
8va
p
137
p
144
mp


151
mp
cresc. p. a p.
151
cresc. p. a p.
Ped.
156
(mf)
(f)
156
(mf)
(f)
Ped.
161
ff
mp
161
ff
8va
Ped.


Allegro bigga fuga
ben marcato
ff
ben marcato
ff
ben marcato
ff
170
♩ = 120
C
Allegro bigga fuga
170
176
ben marcato
ff
176
181
ben marcato
ff
181


185
185
189
189
193
193
Ped.
Ped.
*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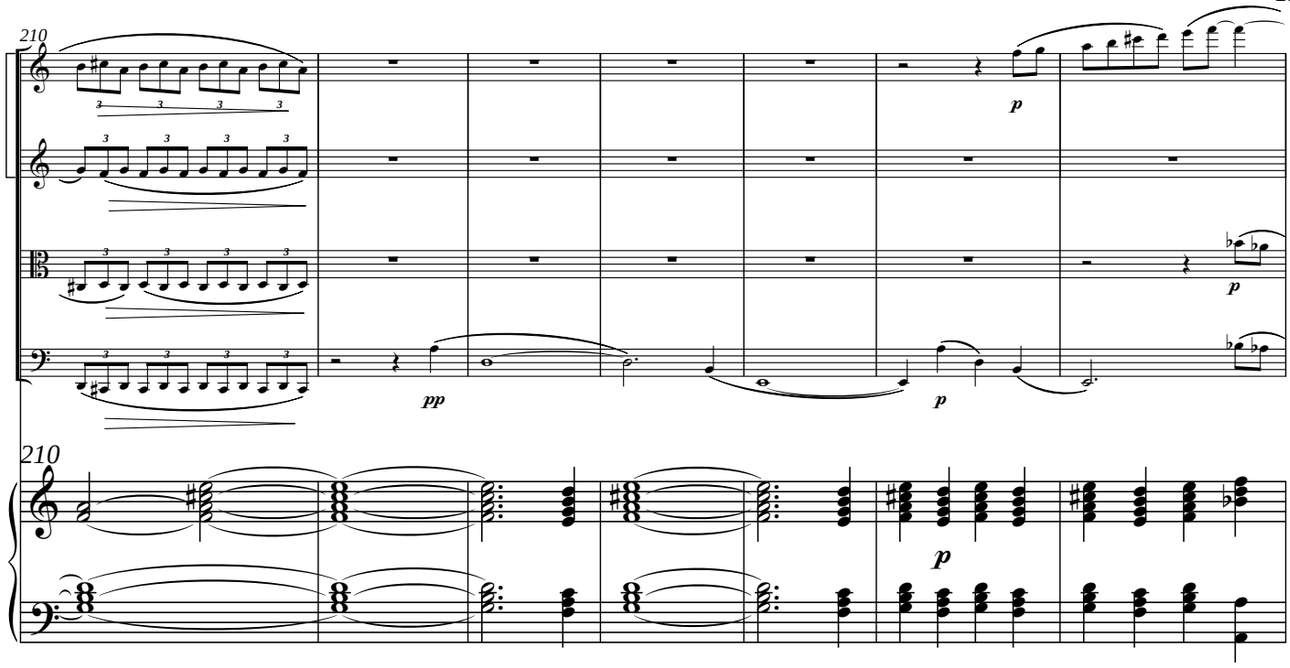
197
D
201
D
201
205
205
ff
mf
mp
p
pp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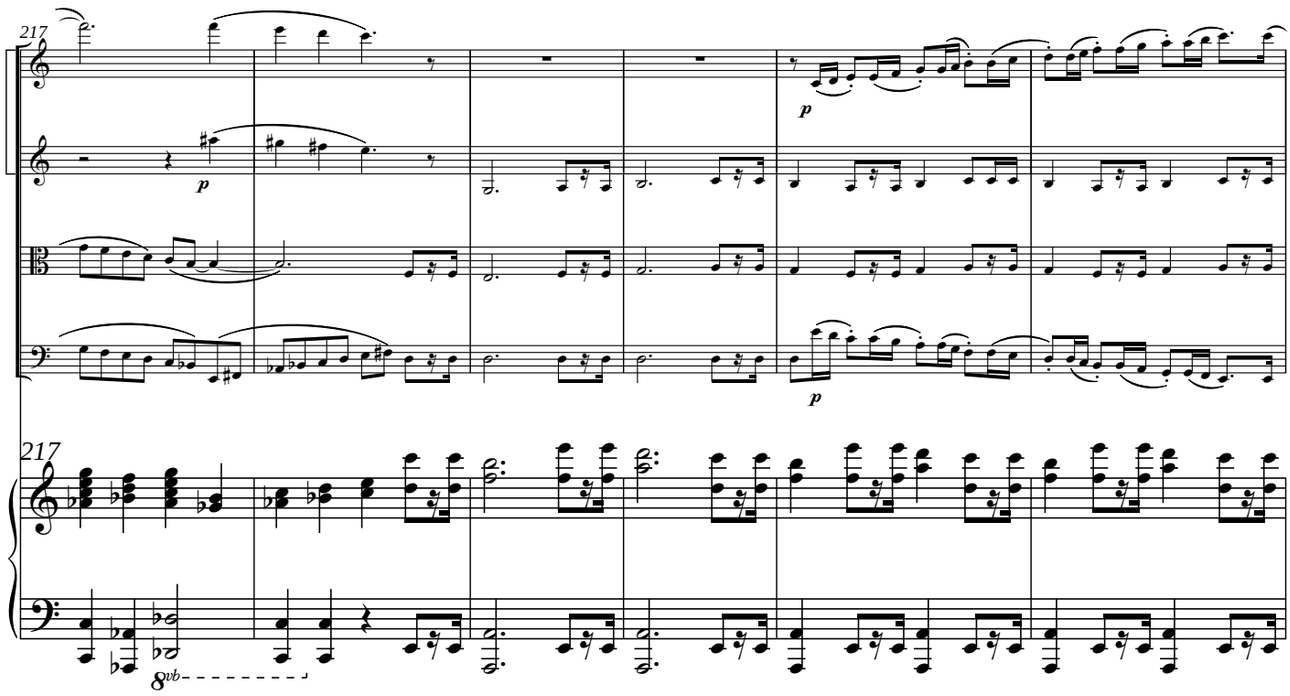
pp
p
p
210
p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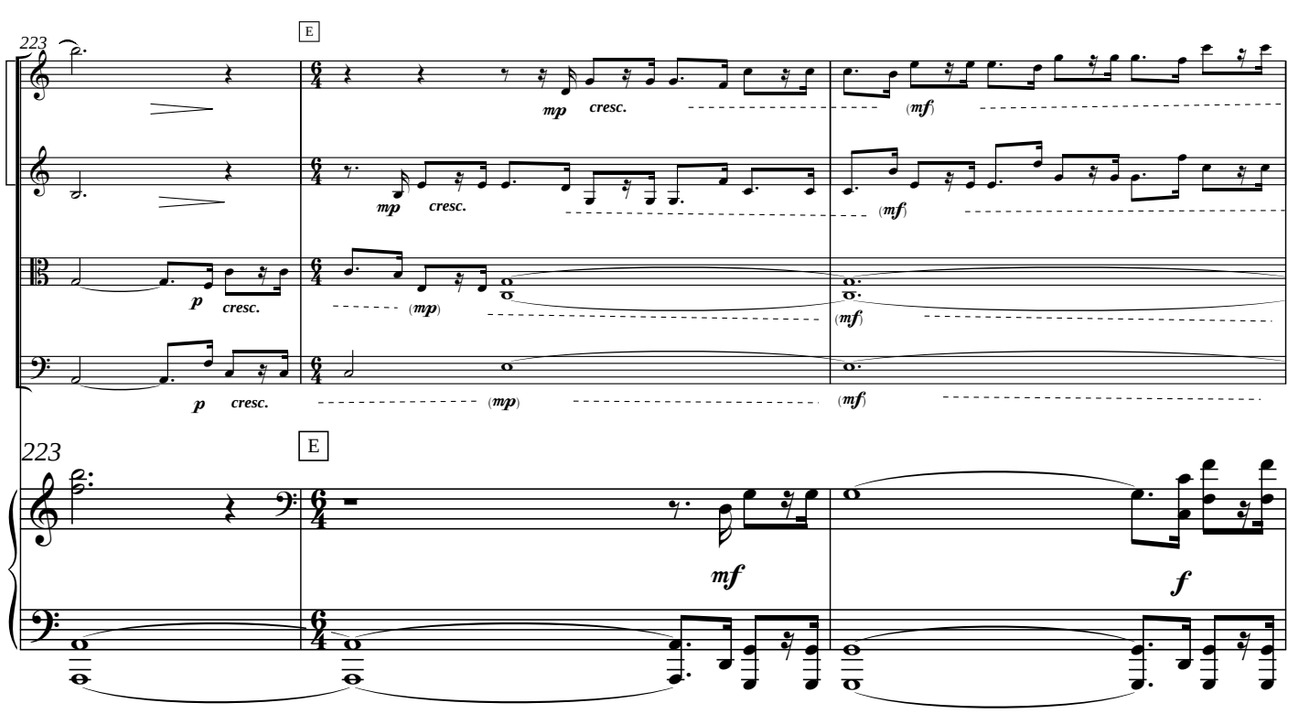
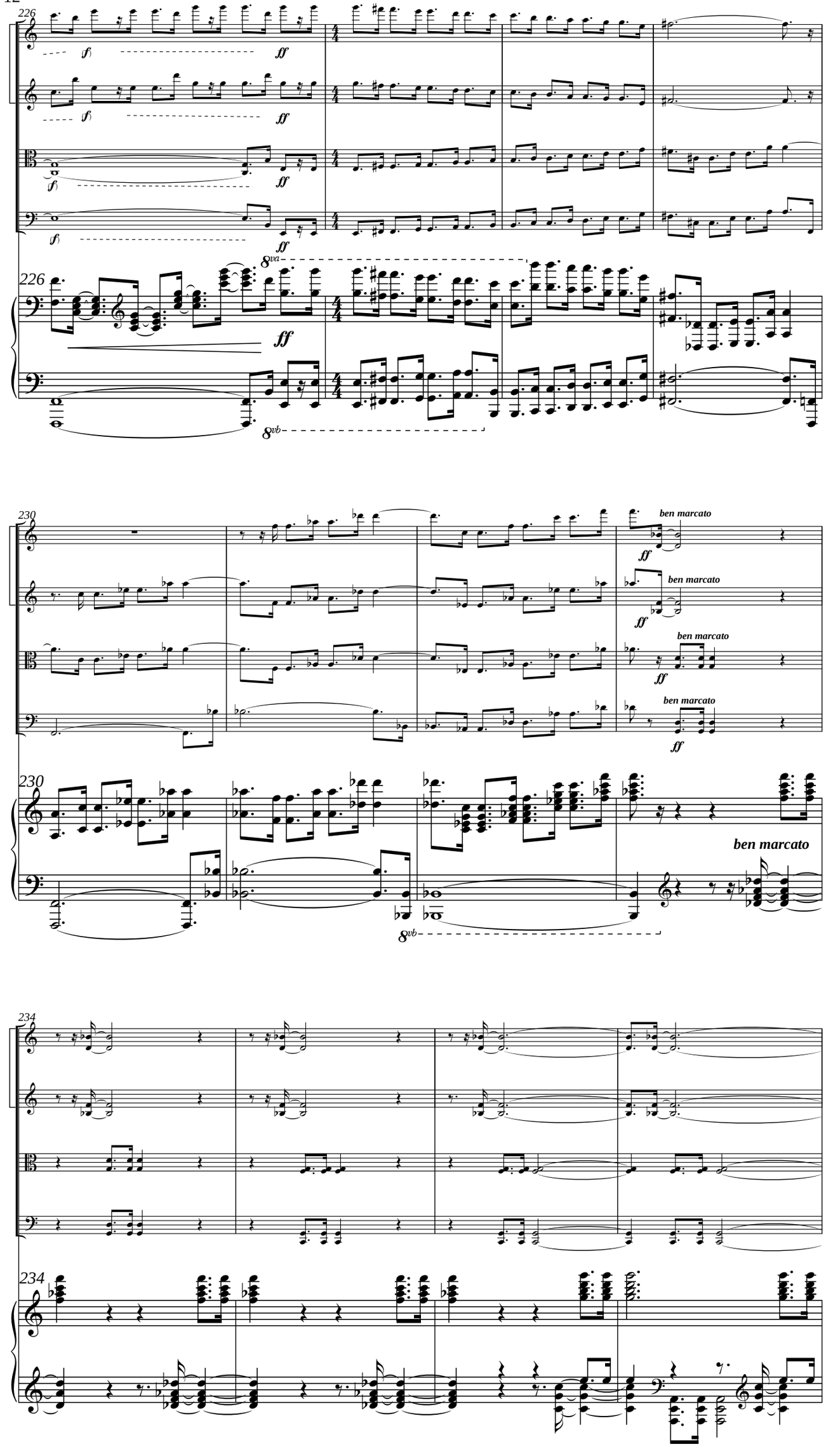
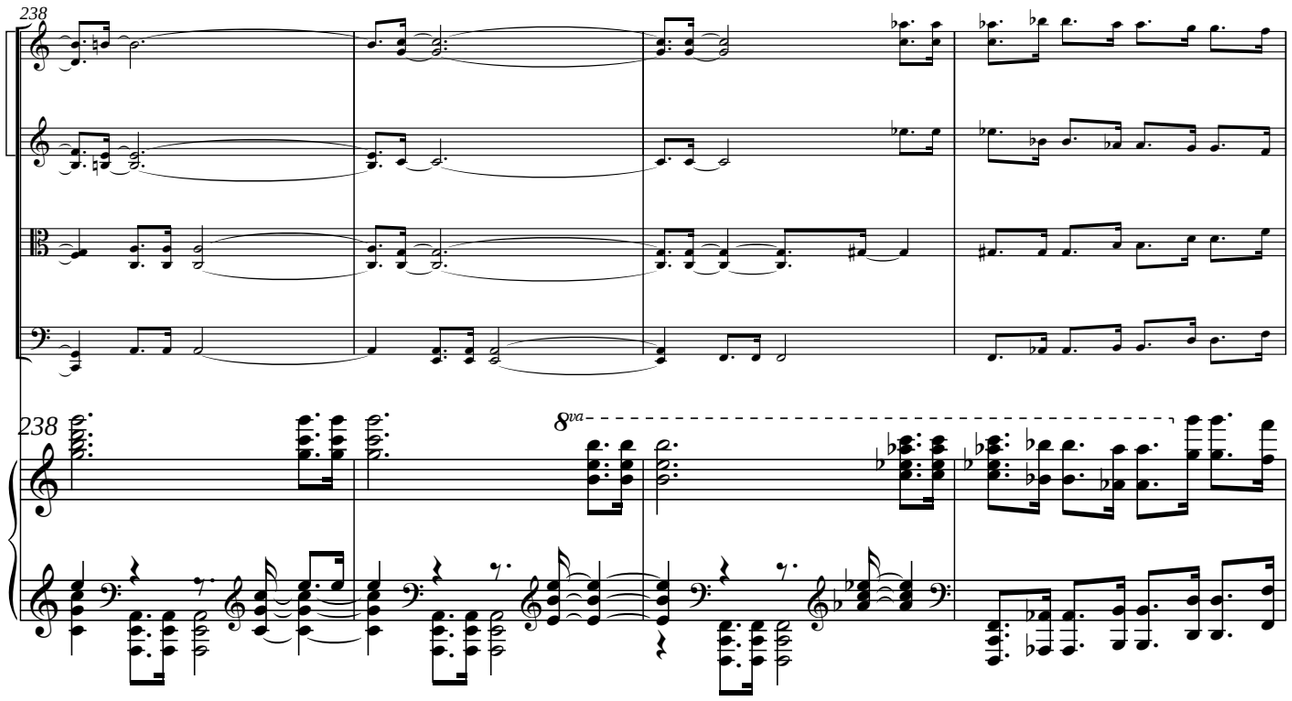
p
p
p
217
8vb


223
E
mp
cresc.
(mf)
p
cresc.
(mp)
(mf)
223
E
mf
f


226
ff
8va
8vb
230
ben marcato
234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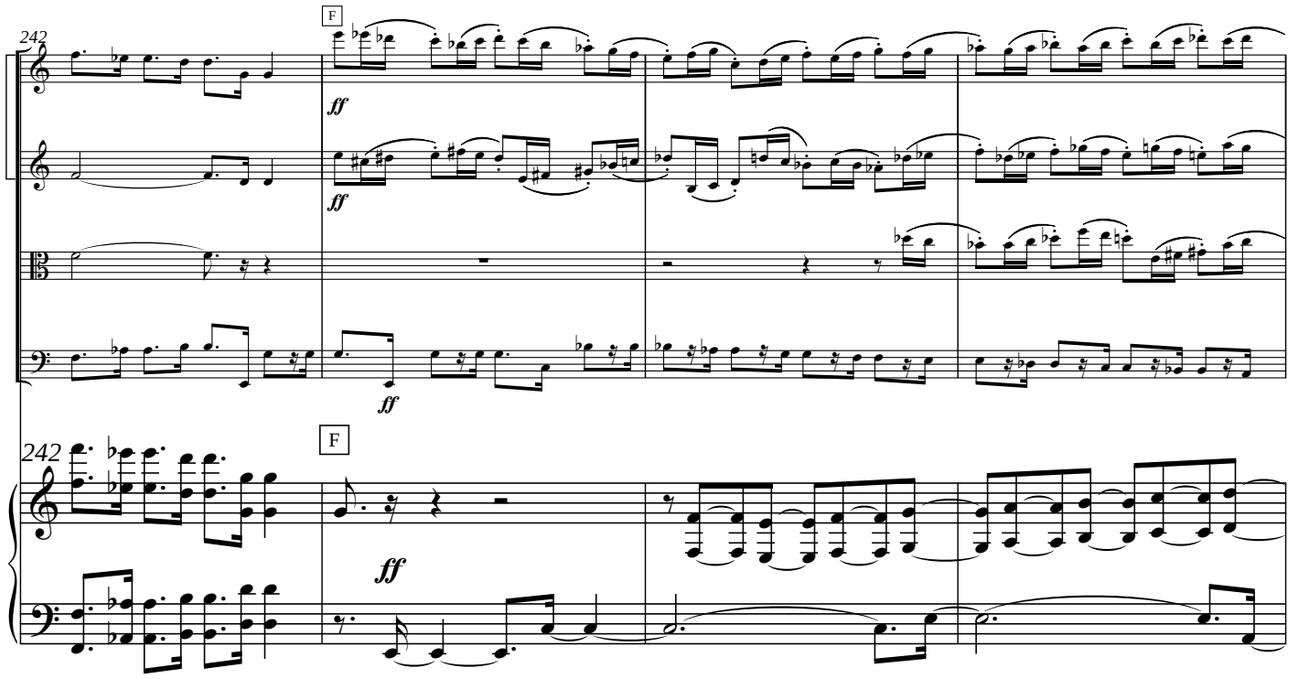
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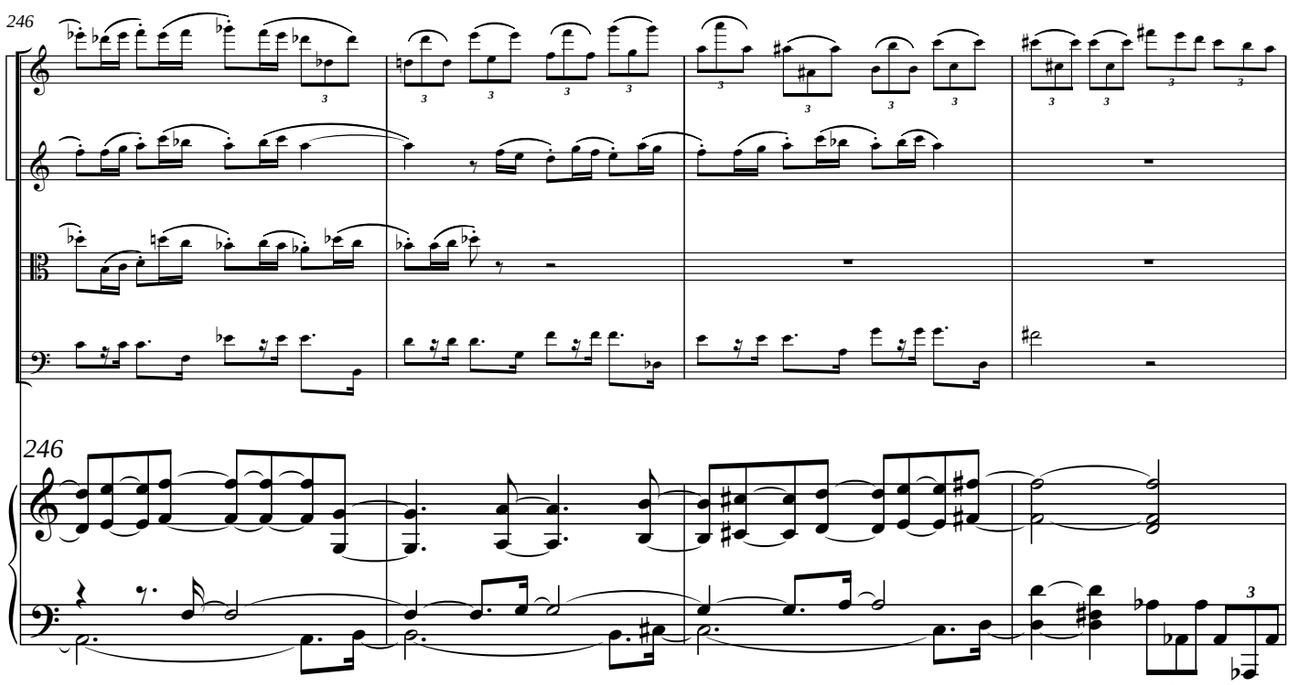
F
ff
ff
242
F
ff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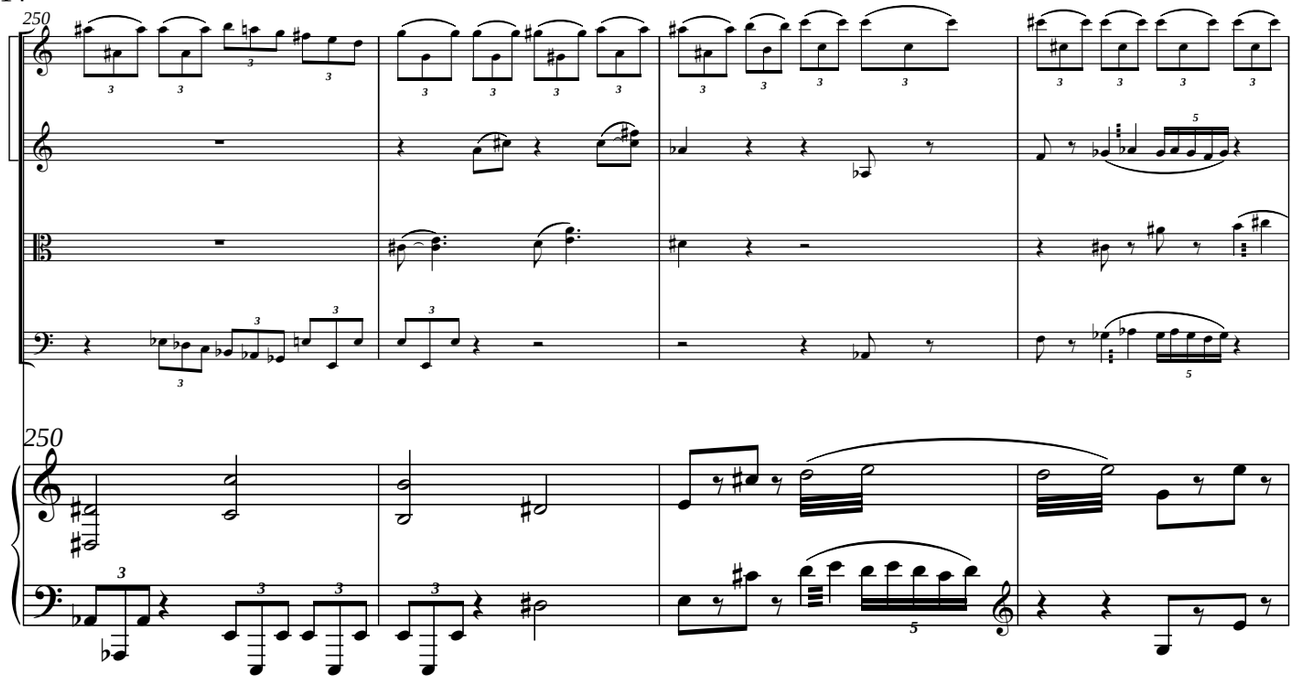
250
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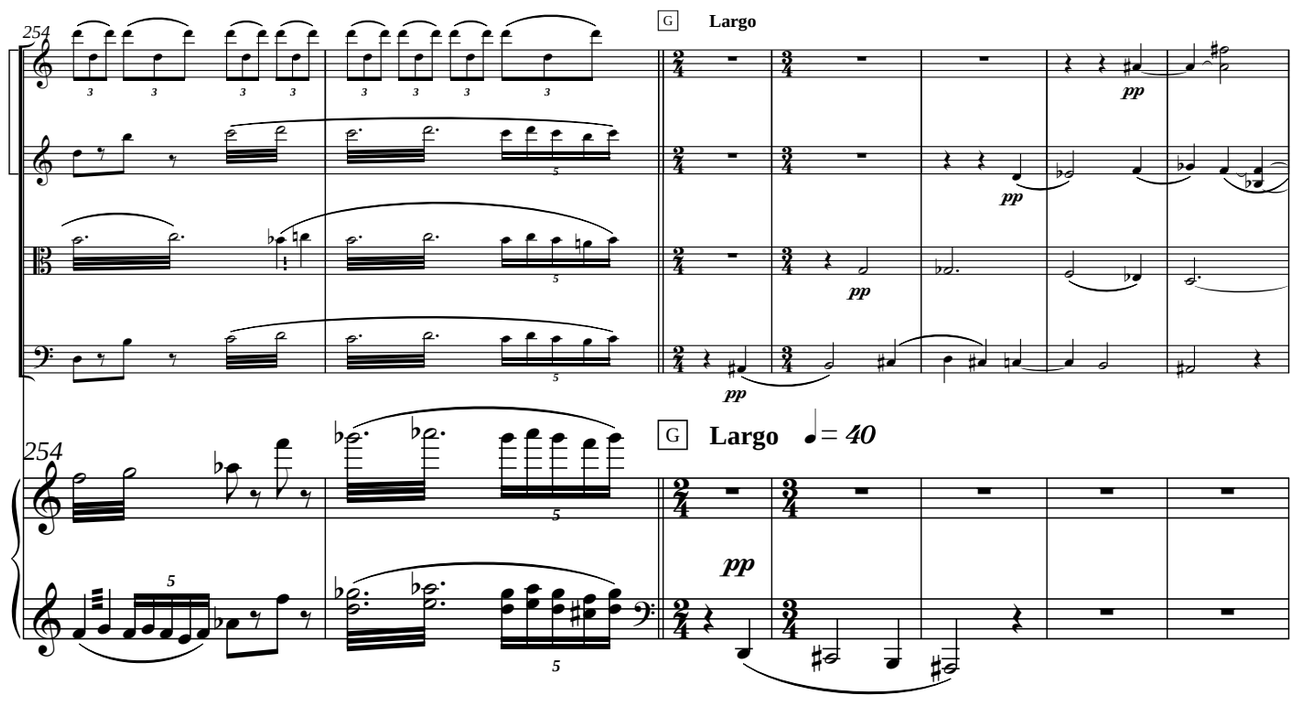
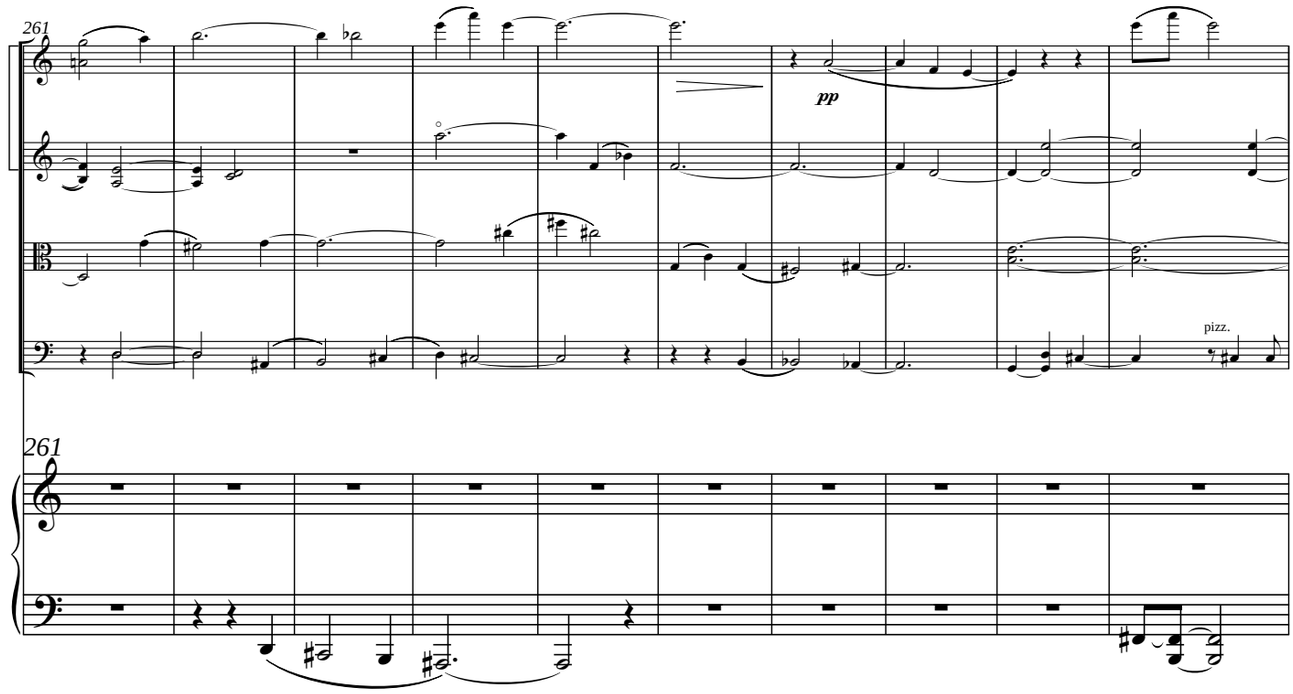
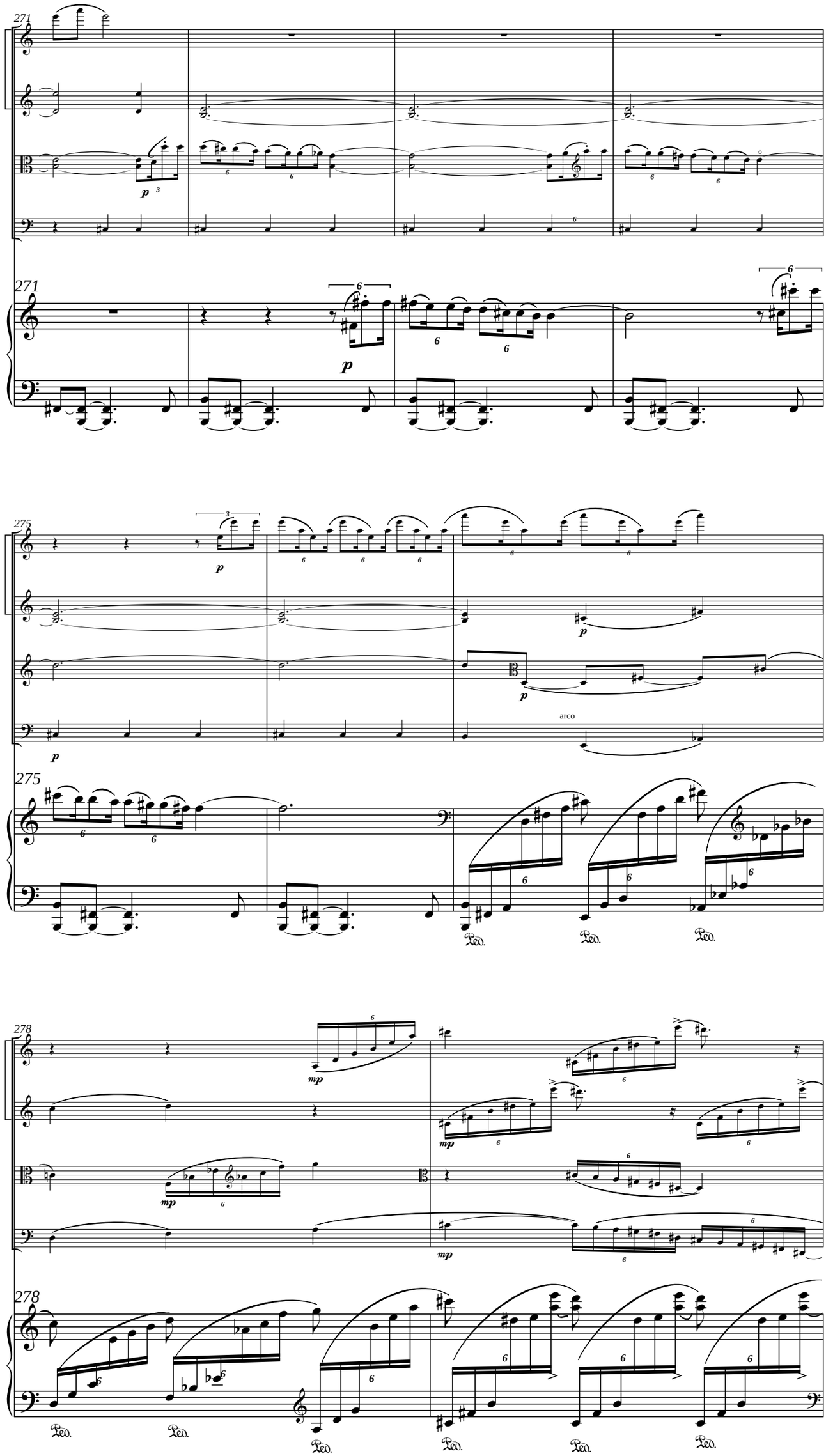
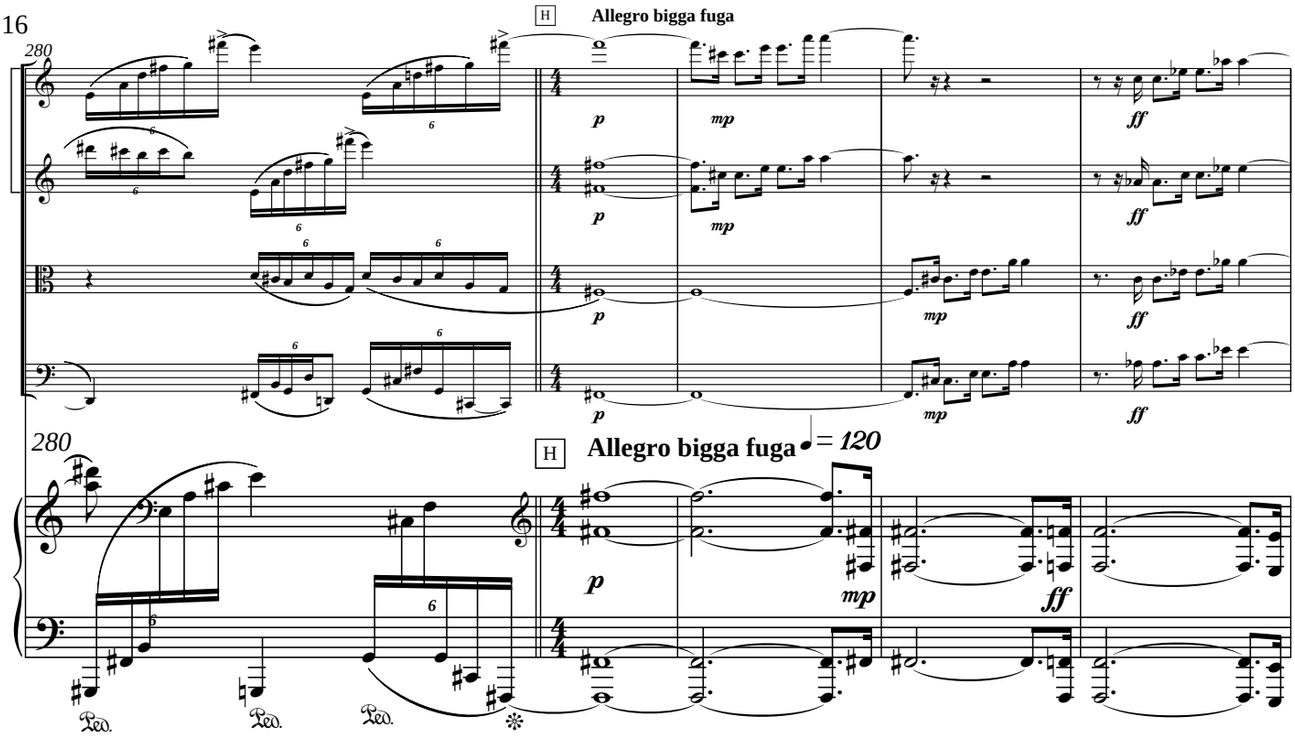

254
G
Largo
pp
254
G
Largo
♩= 40
pp


261
pp
pizz.
261

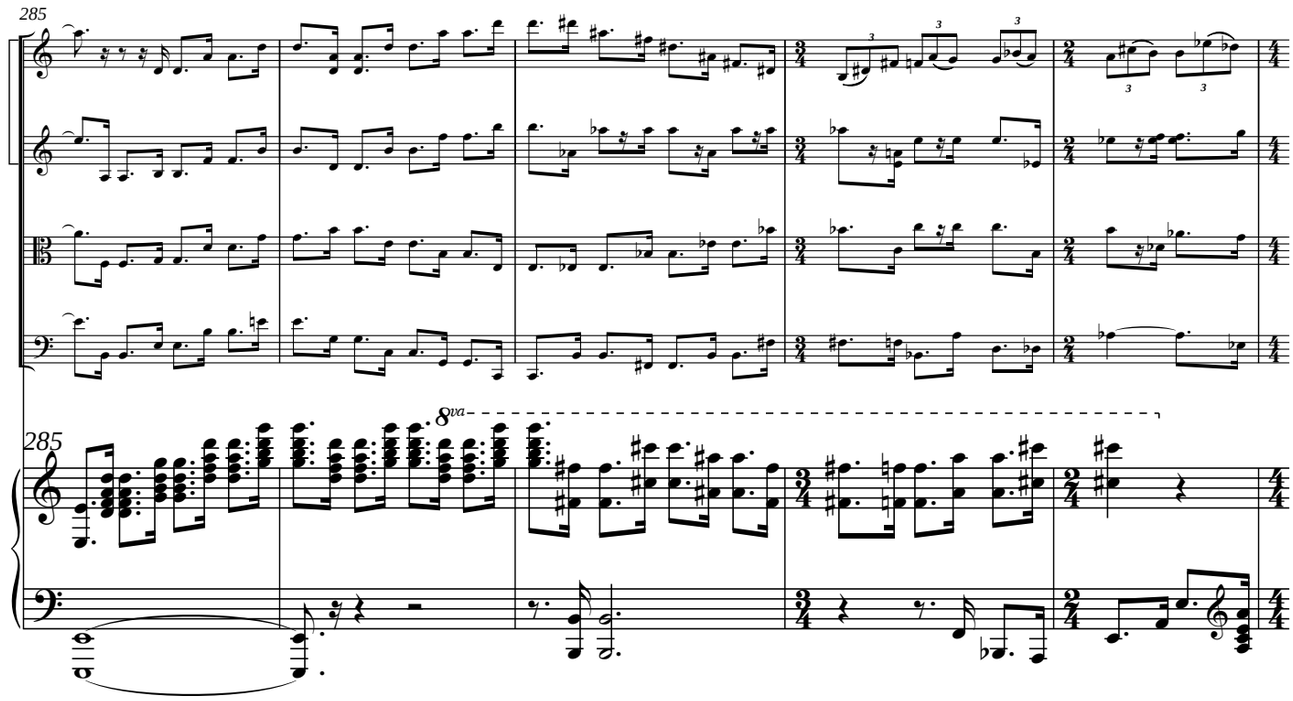

271
p
271
p
275
p
p
arco
275
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
278
mp
mp
mp
278
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

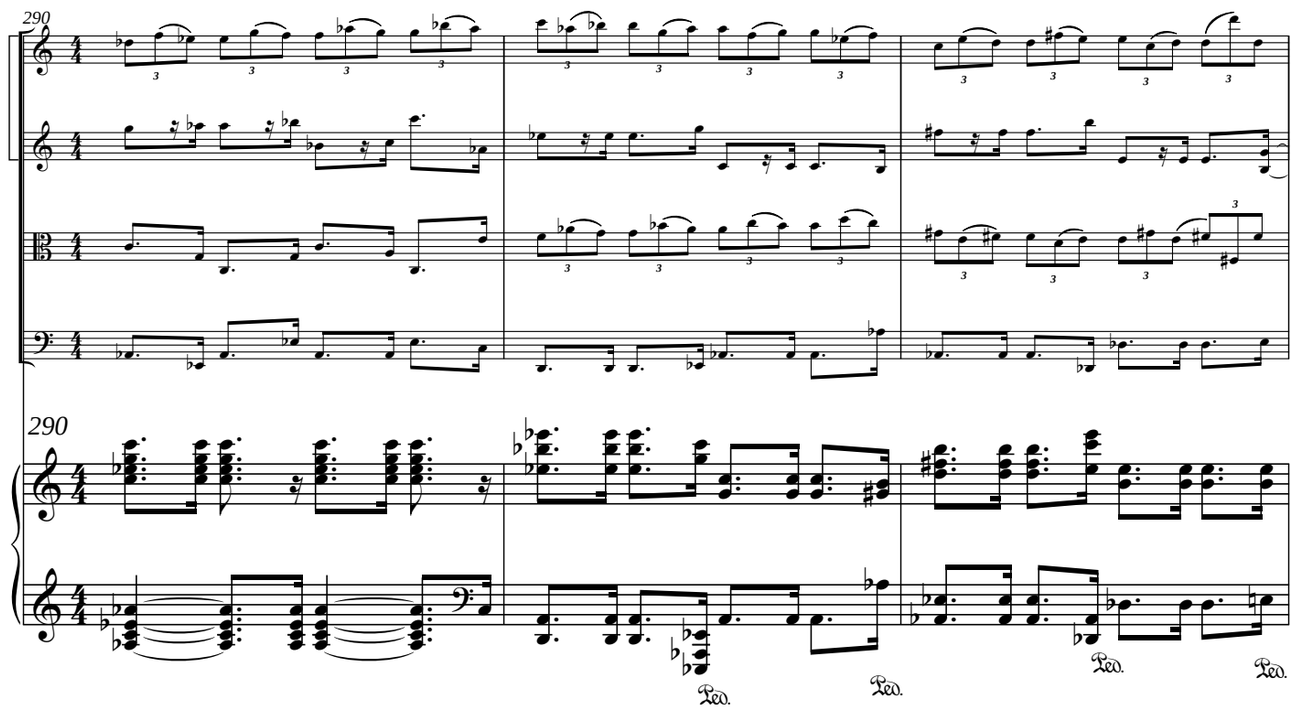
VGF

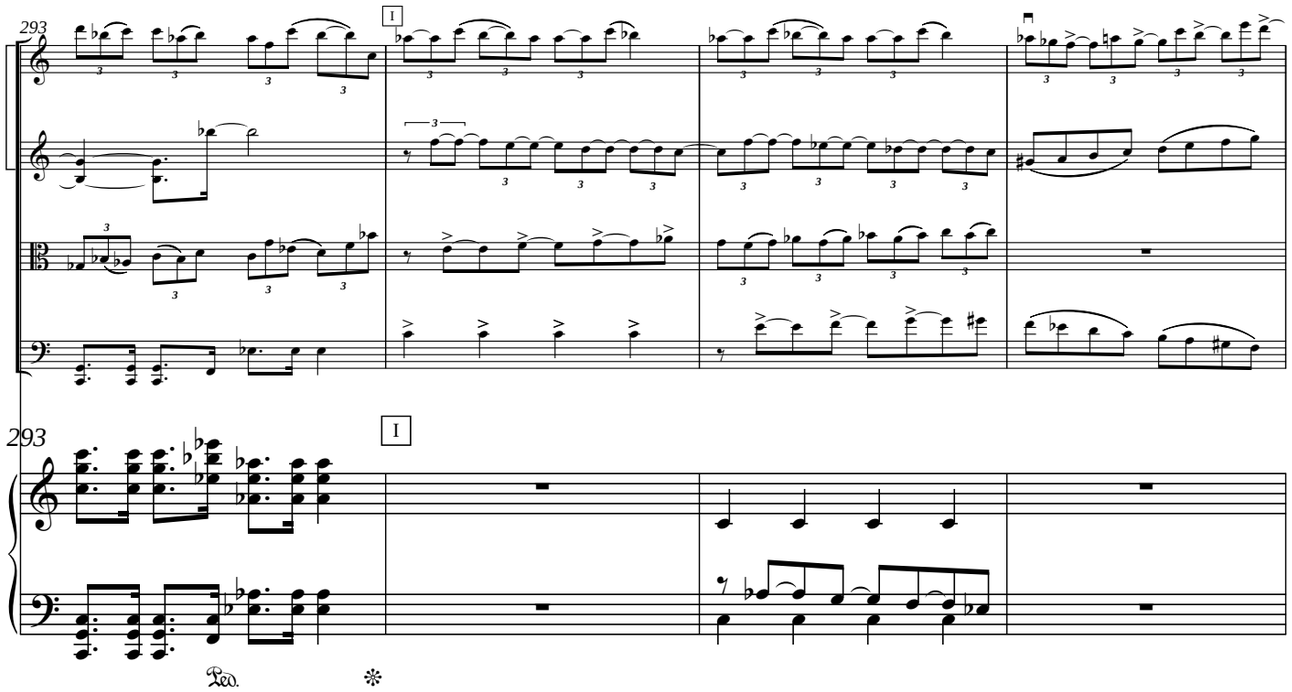
H Allegro bigga fuga

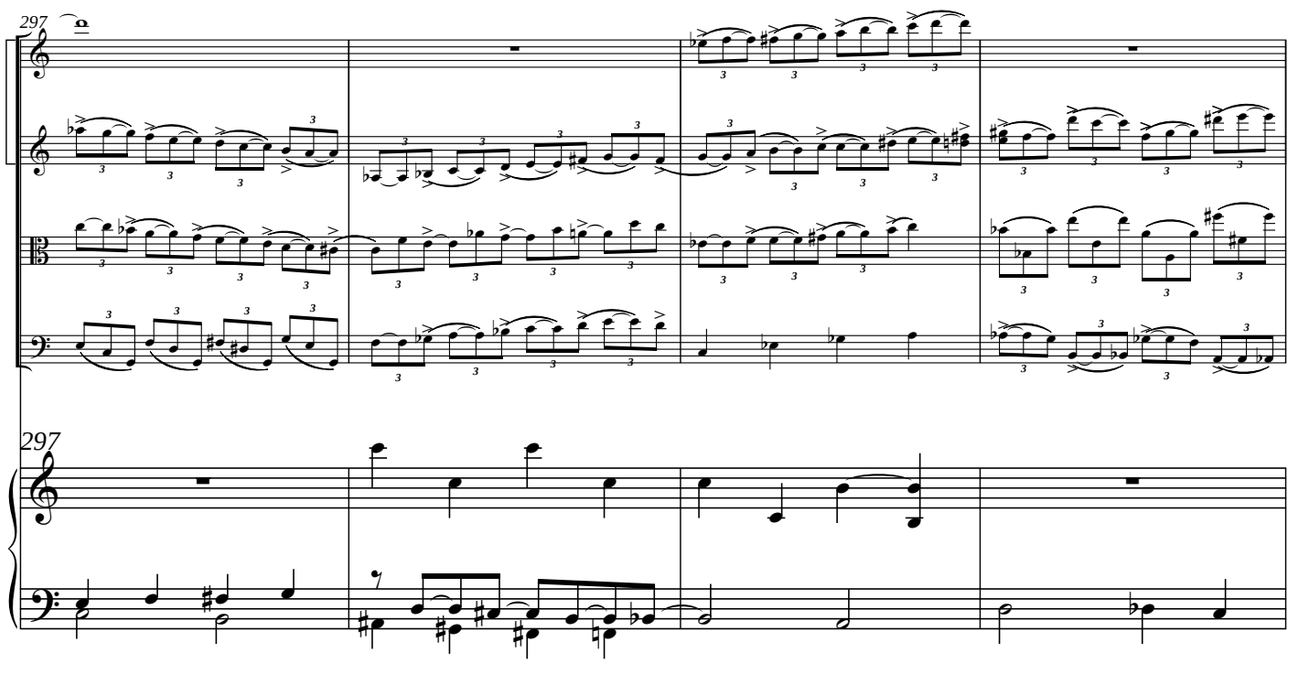


H Allegro bigga fuga ♩ = 120






293
I
293
I
Ped.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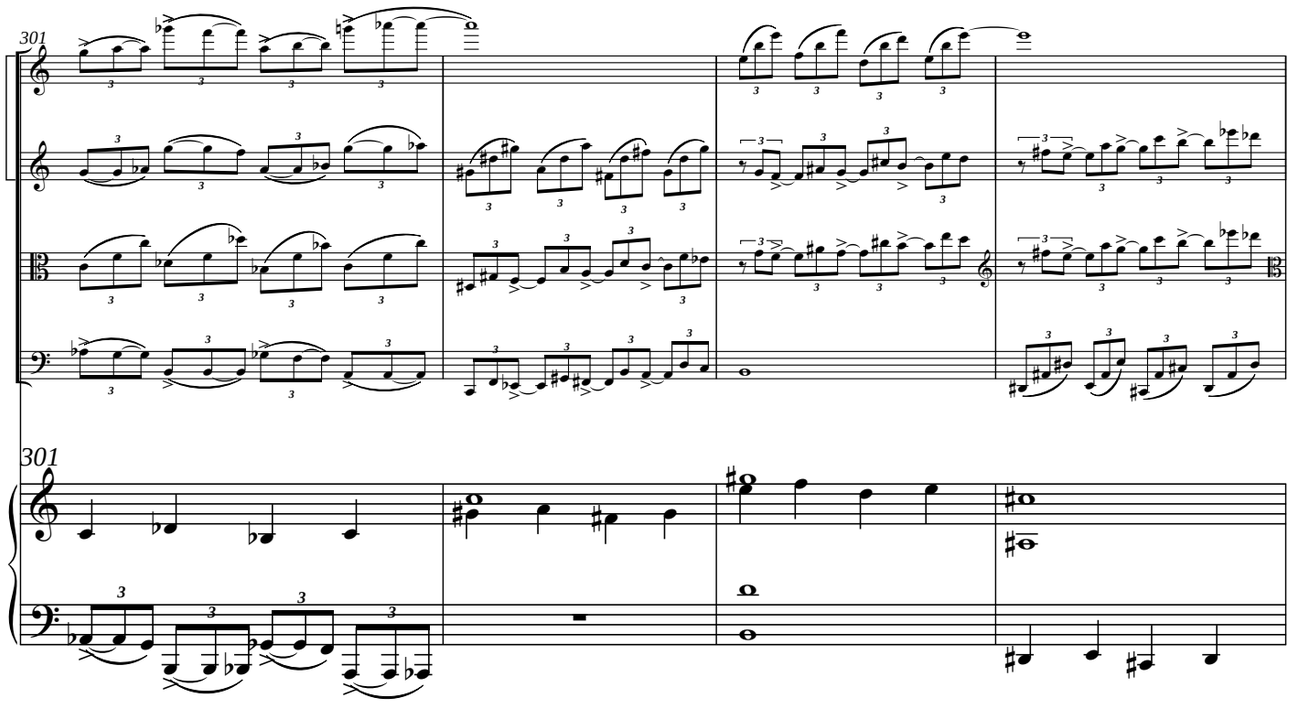
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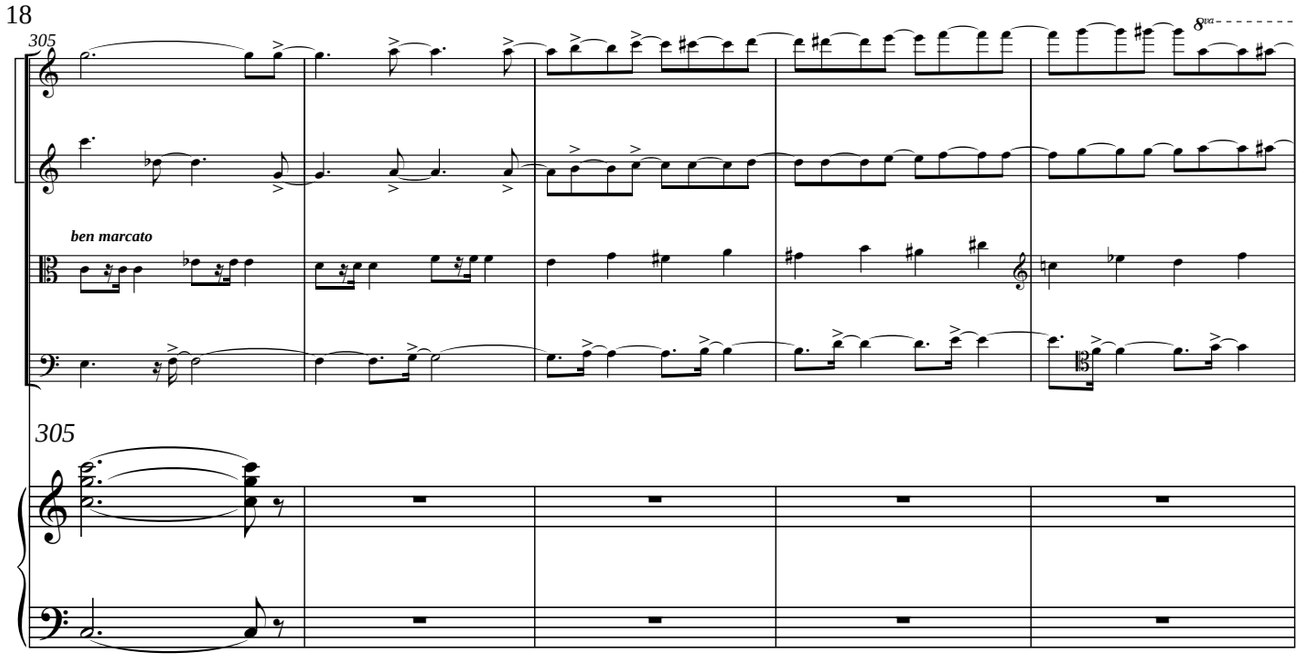
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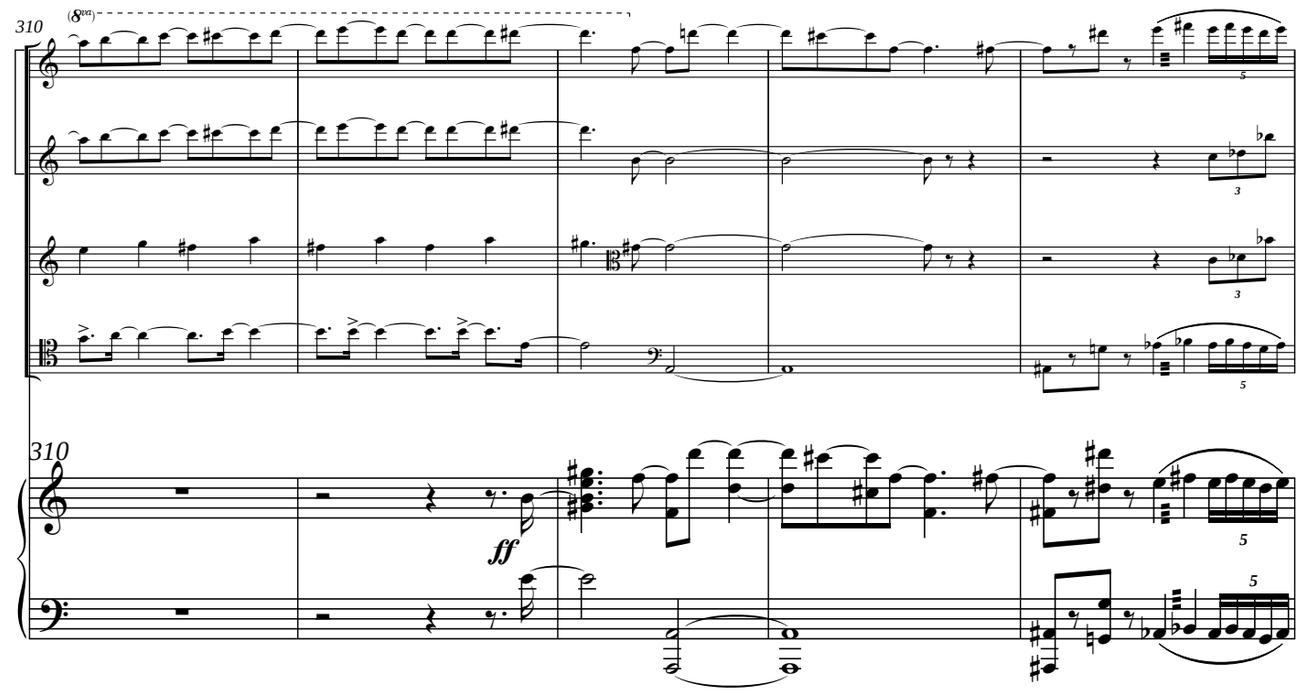
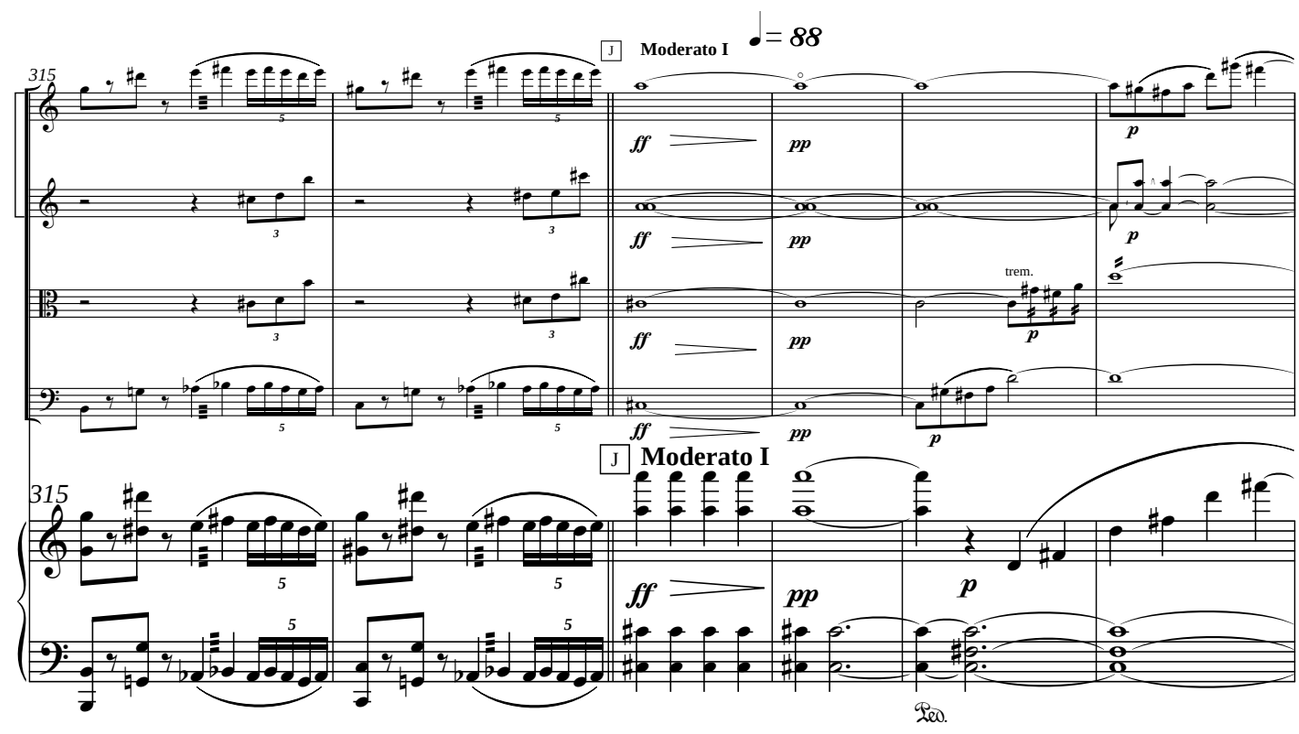
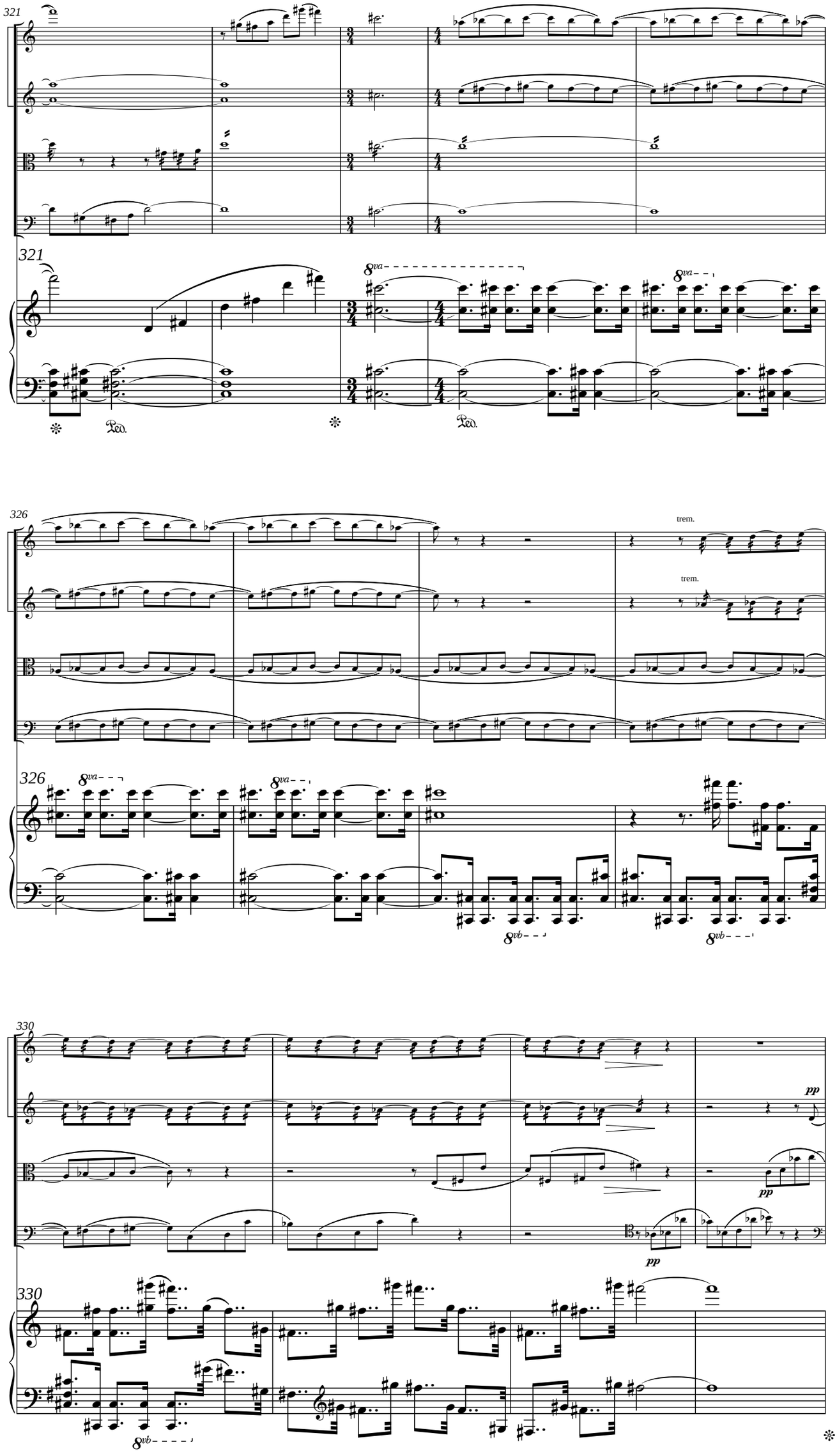
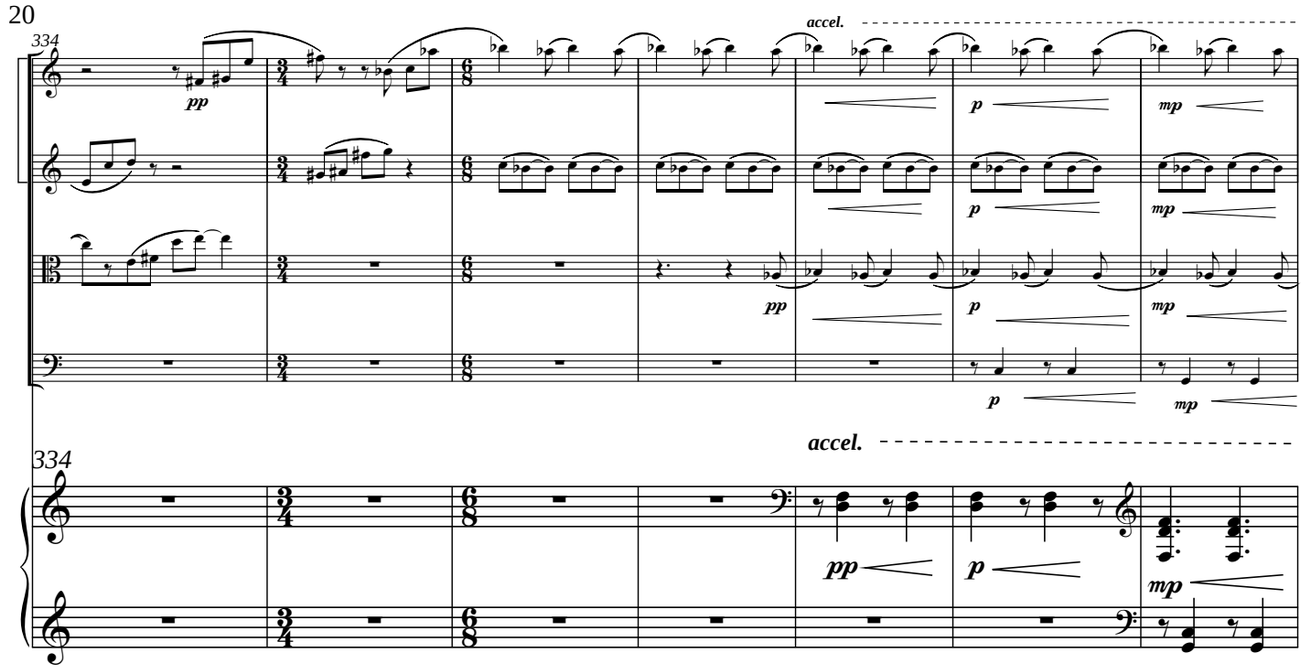
8va
ben marcato
305


310
(8va)
310
ff


315
J
Moderato I
♩= 88
ff
pp
p
trem.
J
Moderato I
315
ff
pp
p
Ped.


321
8va
Ped.
326
trem.
8vb
330
pp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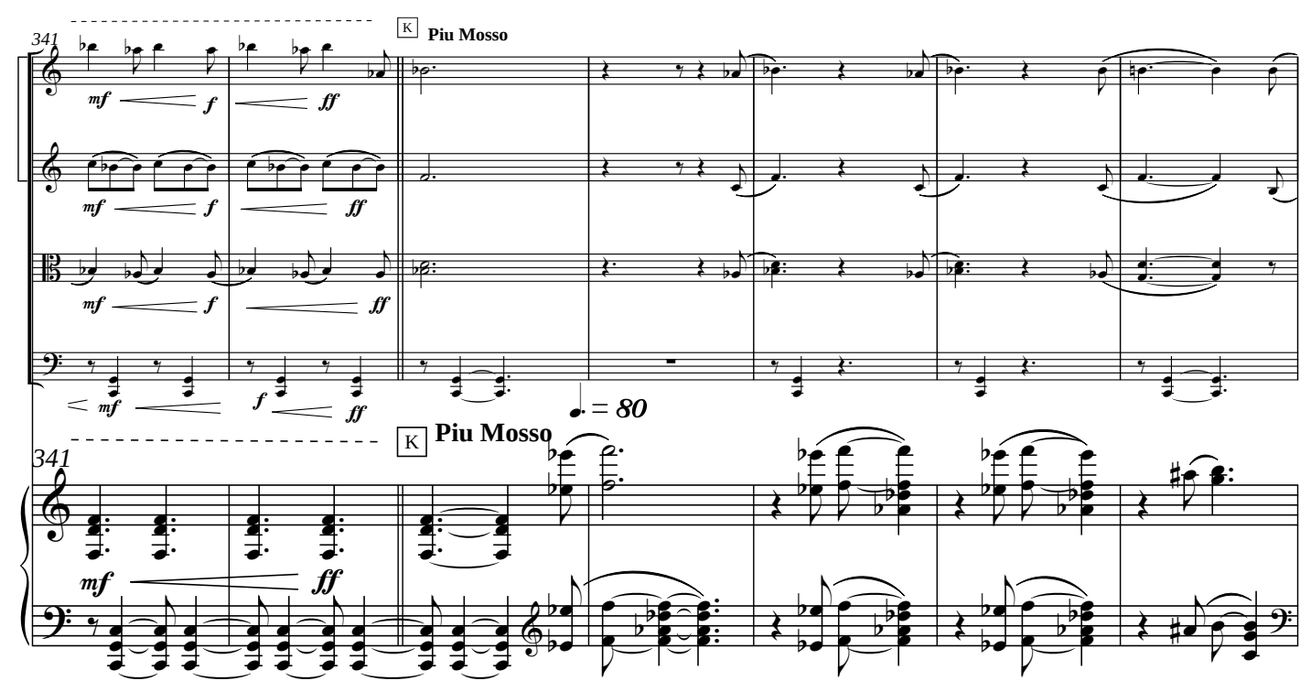
accel.
pp
p
mp

334
accel.
pp
p
mp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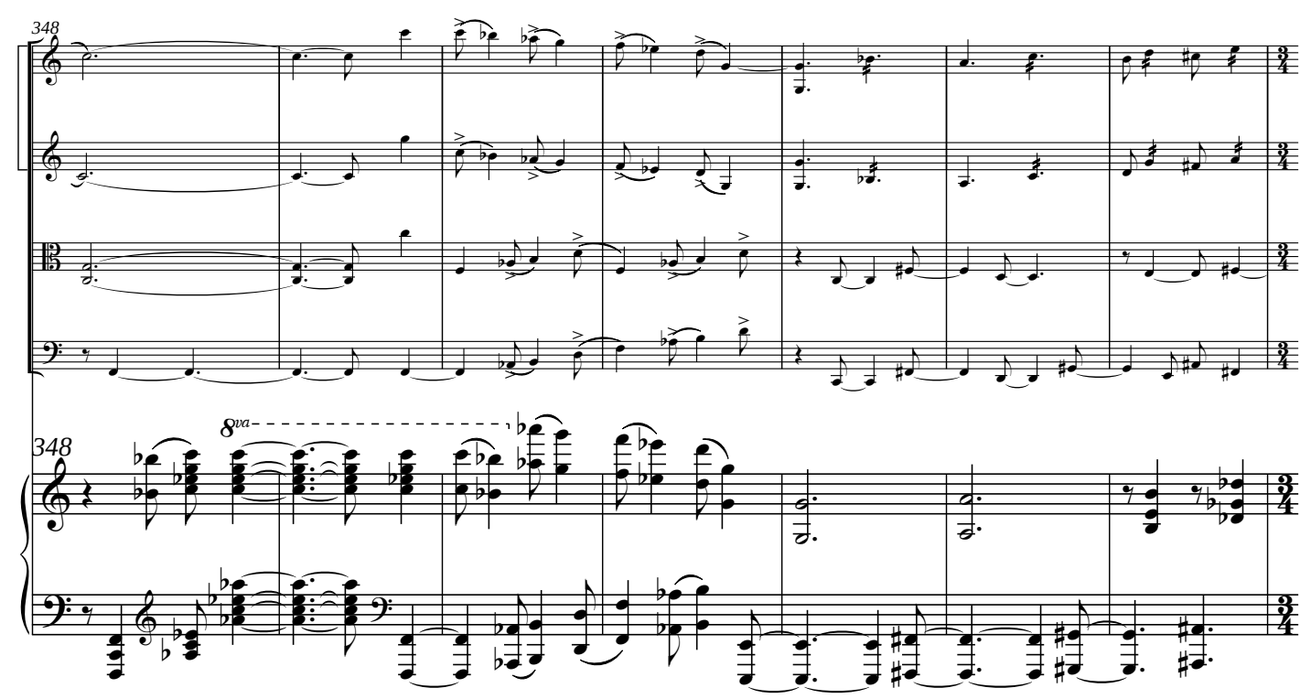
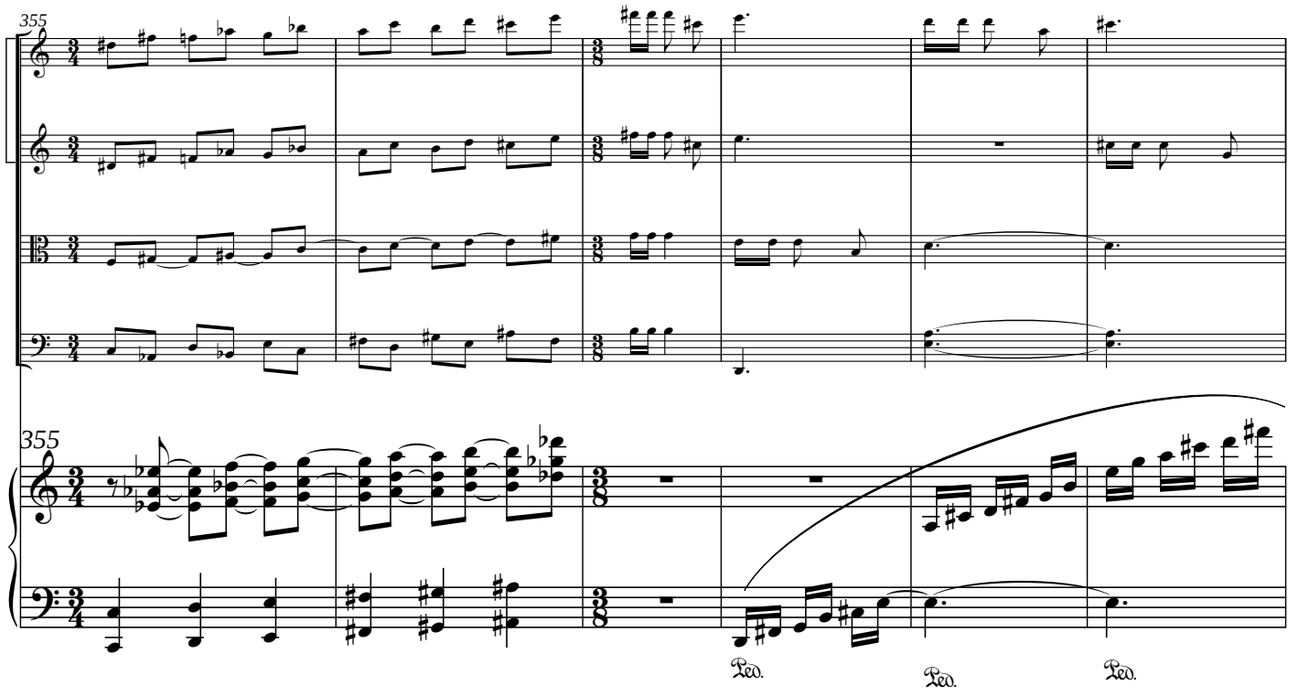
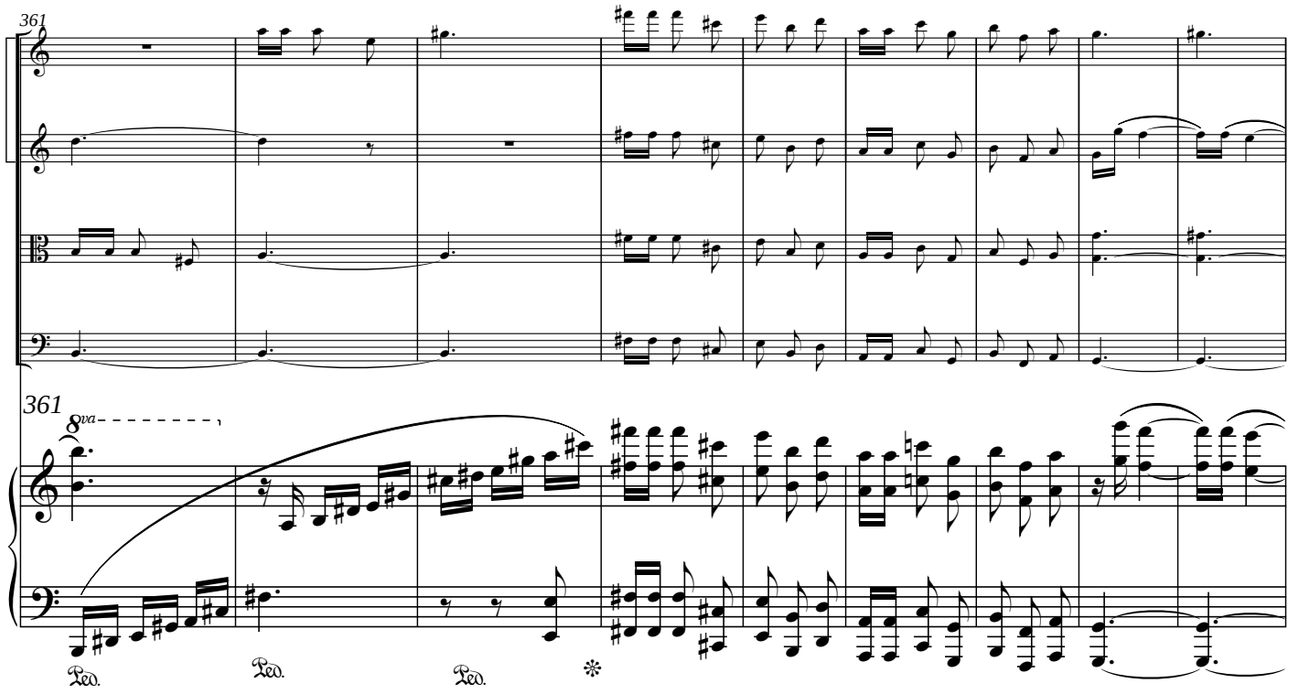
K
Piu Mosso
mf
f
ff
♩. = 80

341
K
Piu Mosso
mf
ff


348
8va

348


355
355
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.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361
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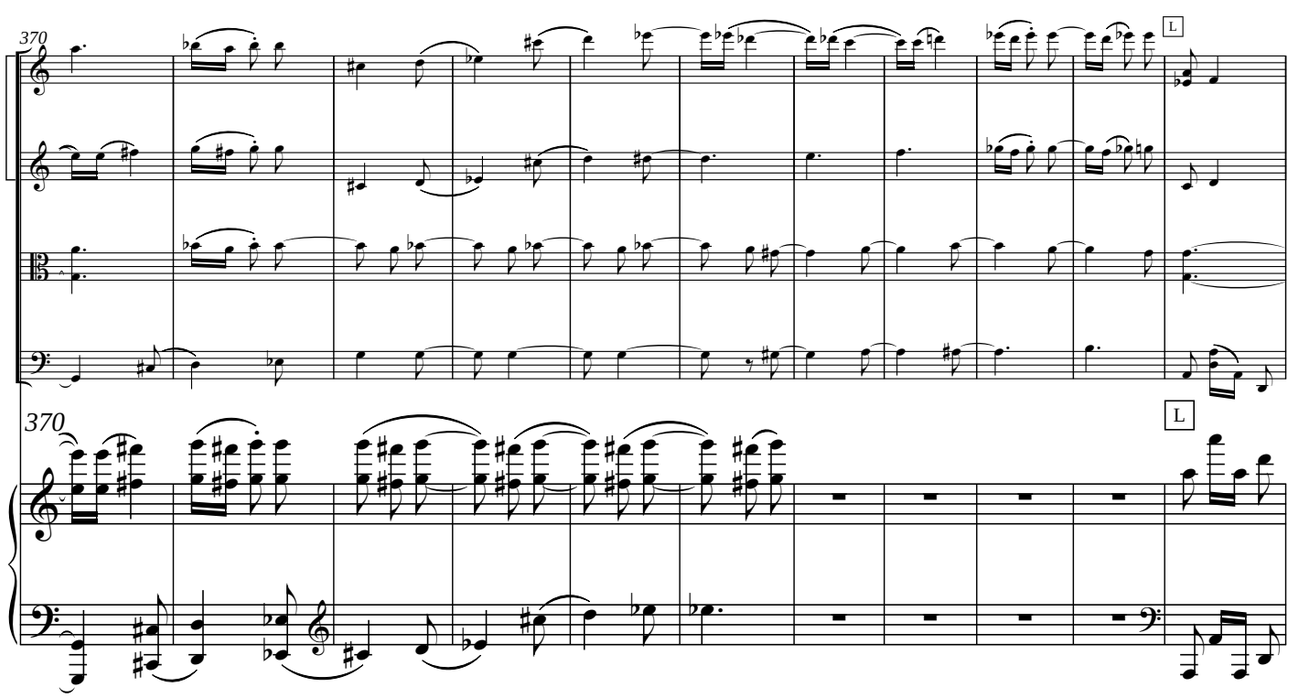
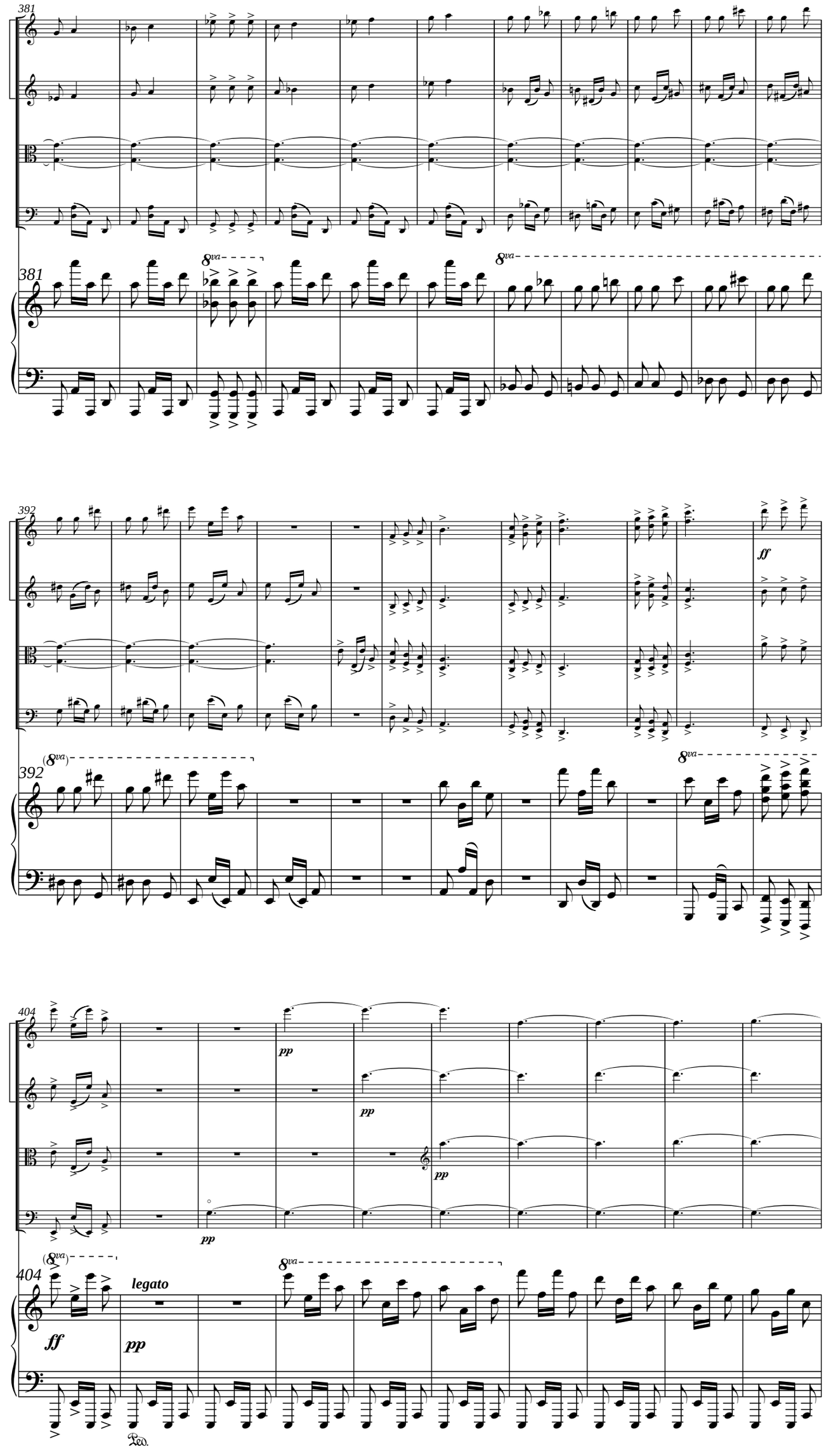
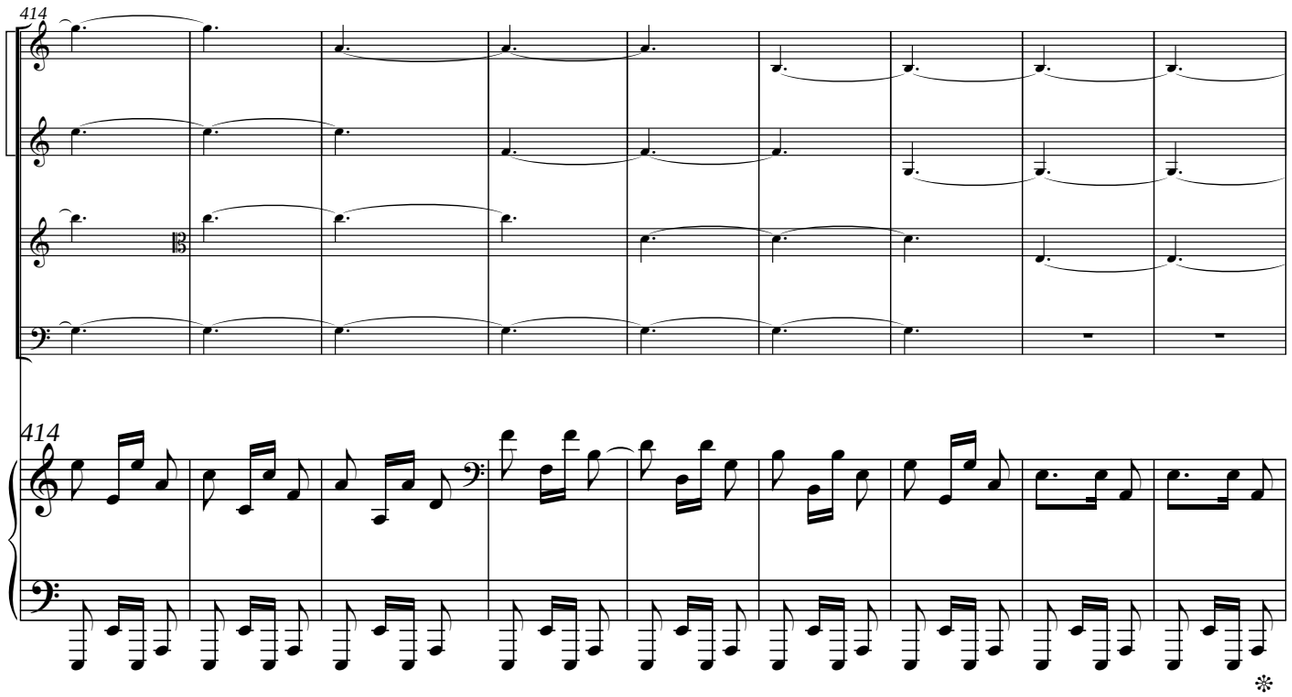
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


370
370
L
L


381
8va
392
(8va)
ff
404
pp
legato
Ped.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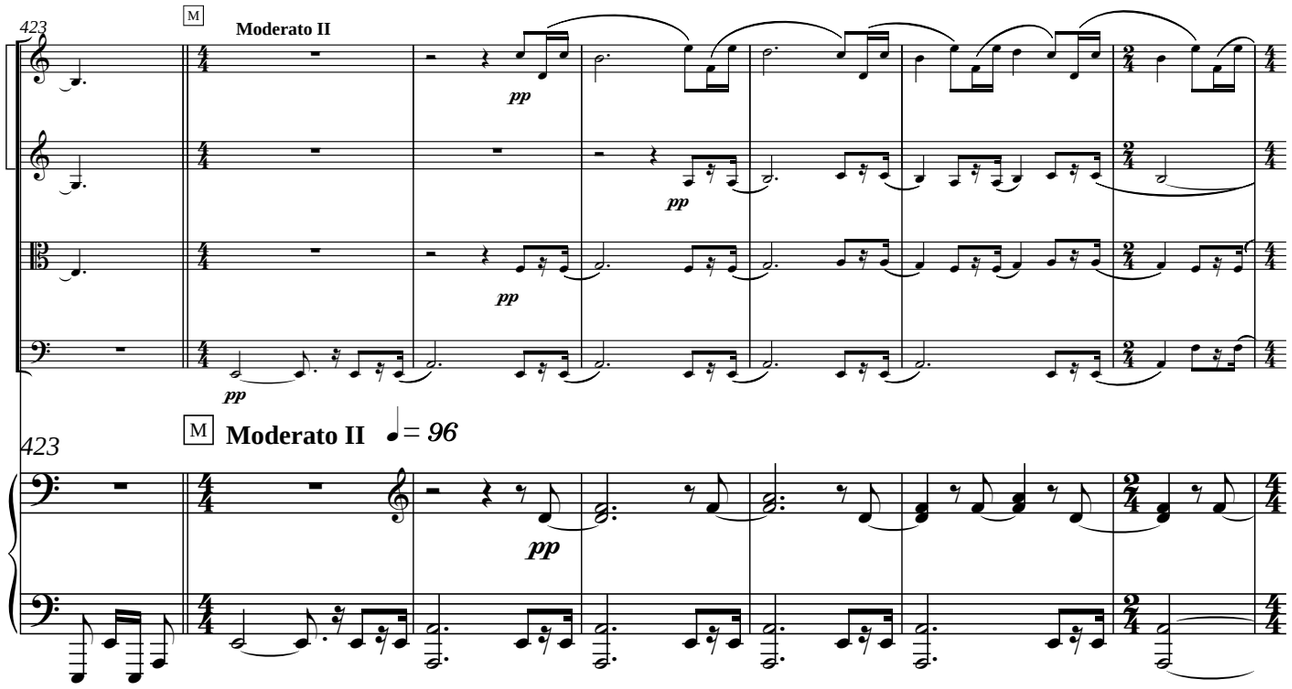
423
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Moderato II
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pp
pp
pp
423
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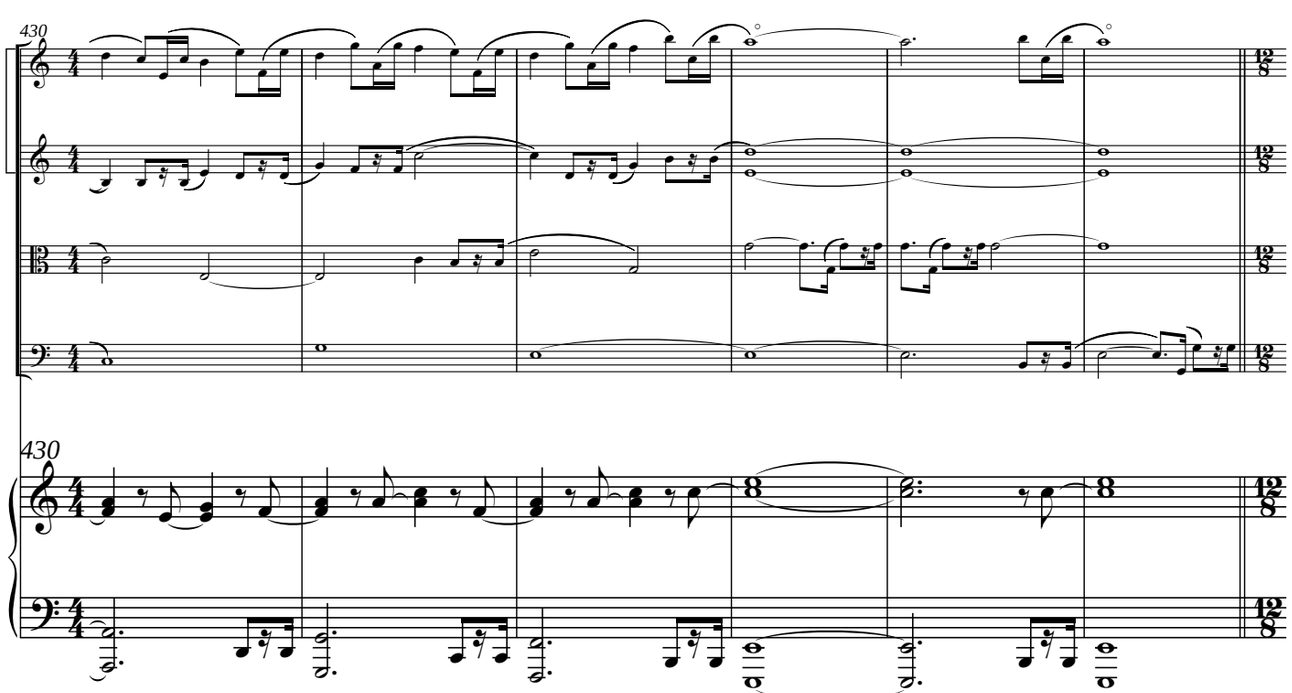
Moderato II
= 96
pp


430
430

N

436

Fugato Bordello

ff

N

436

Fugato Bordello ♩. = *154*

ff

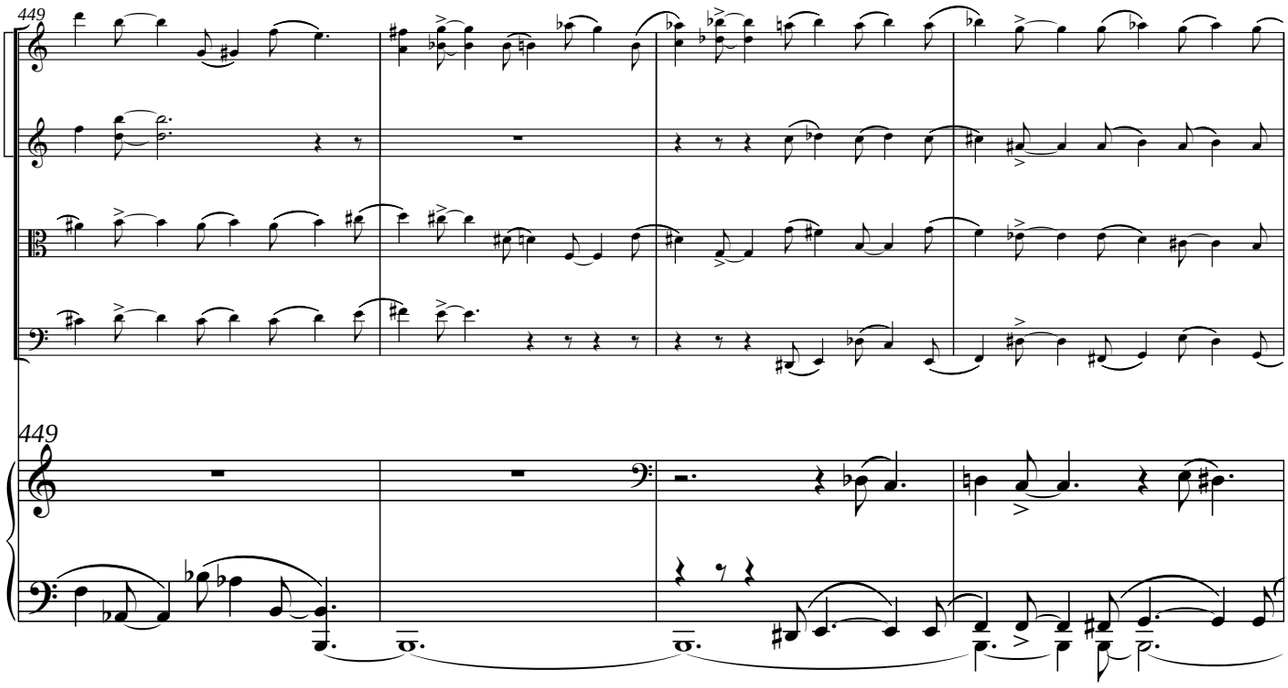
441

441

ff

445

445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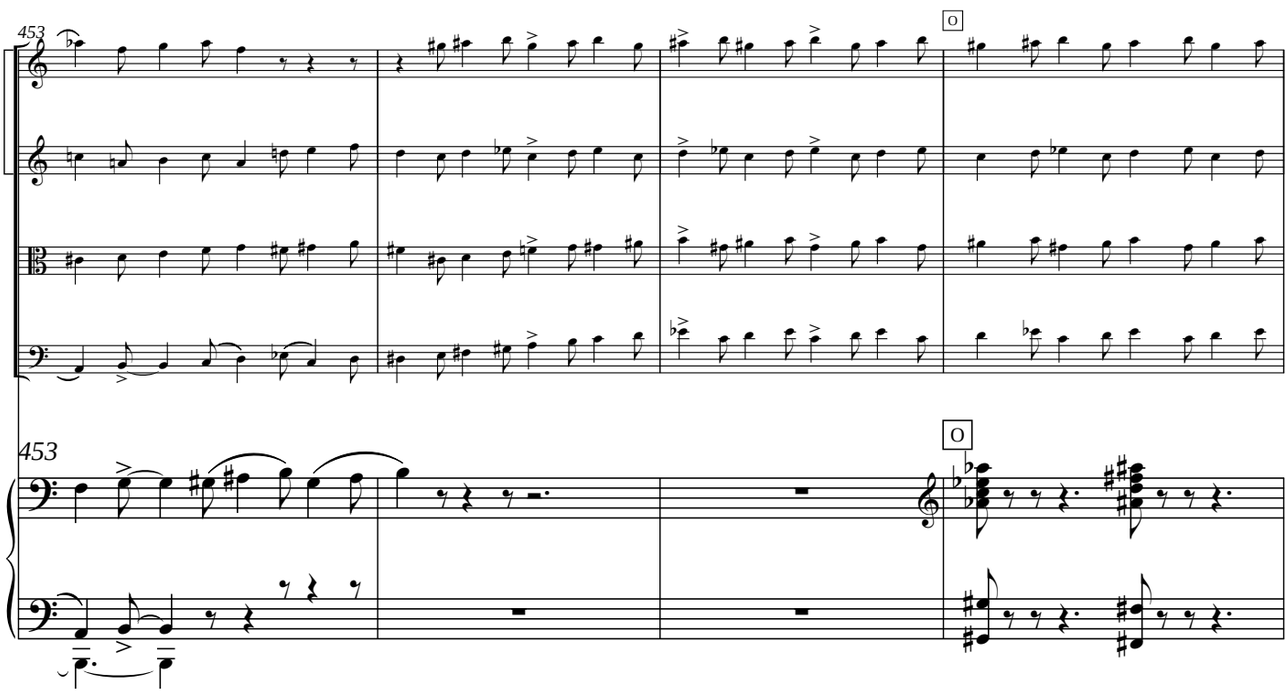
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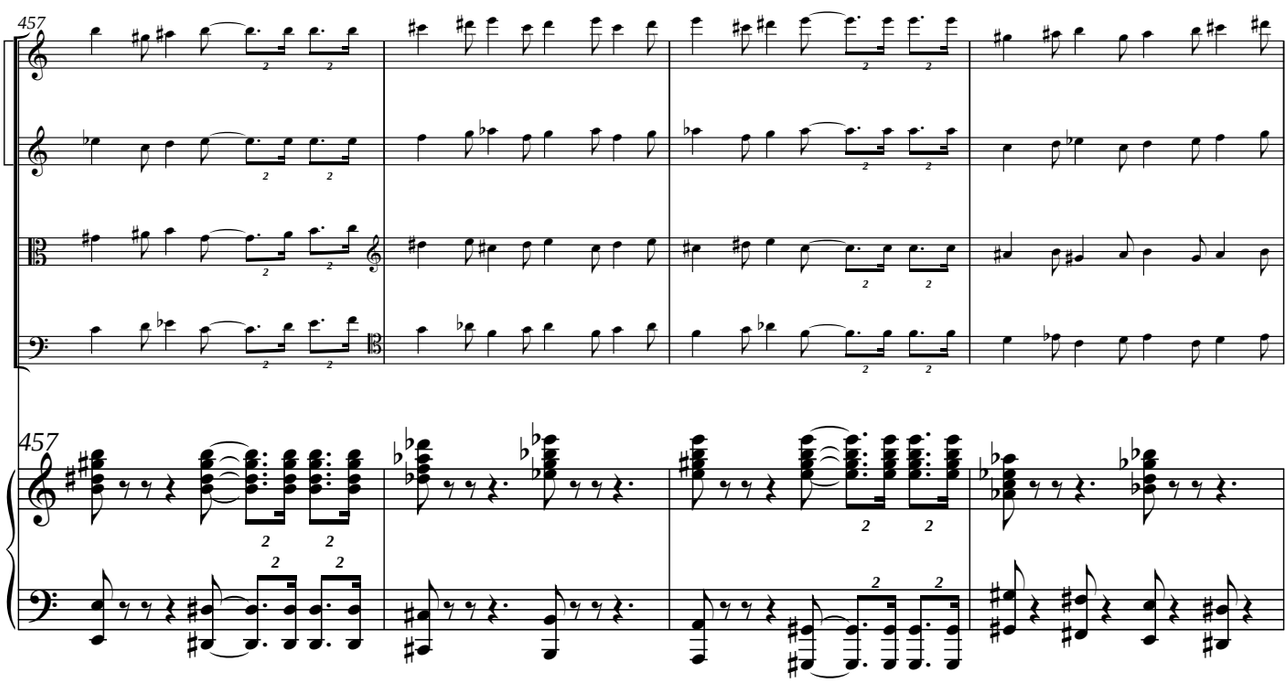
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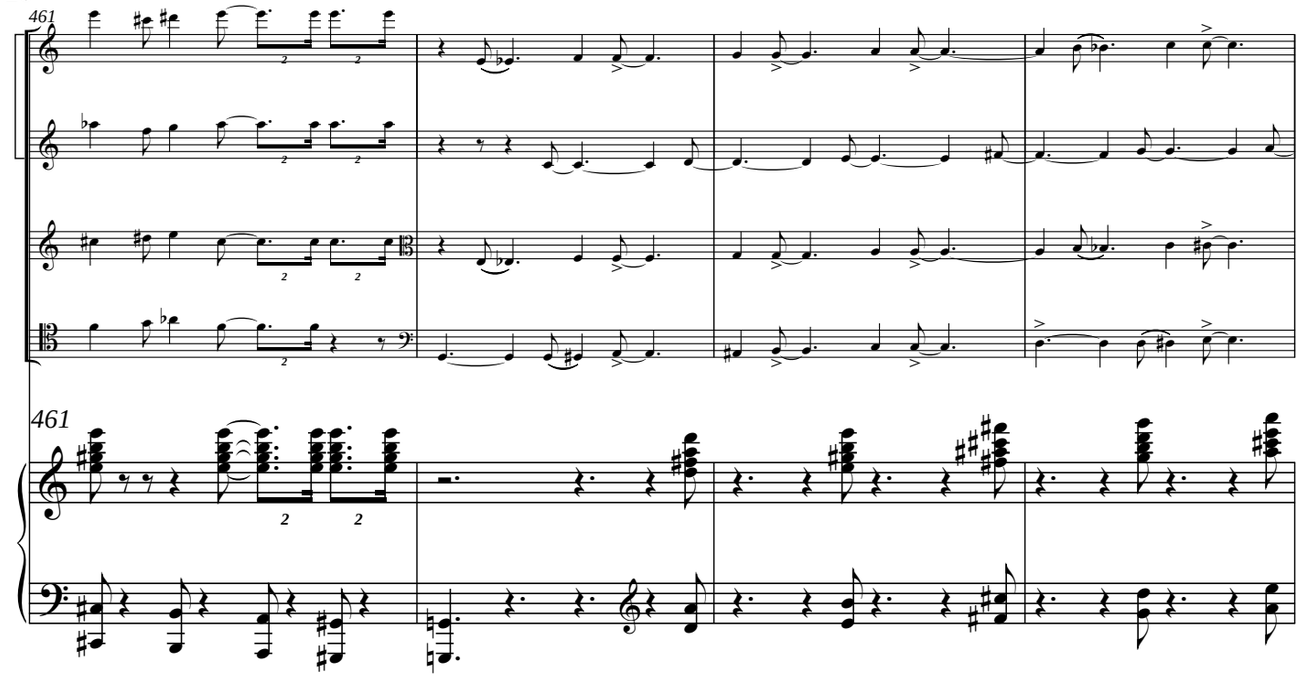
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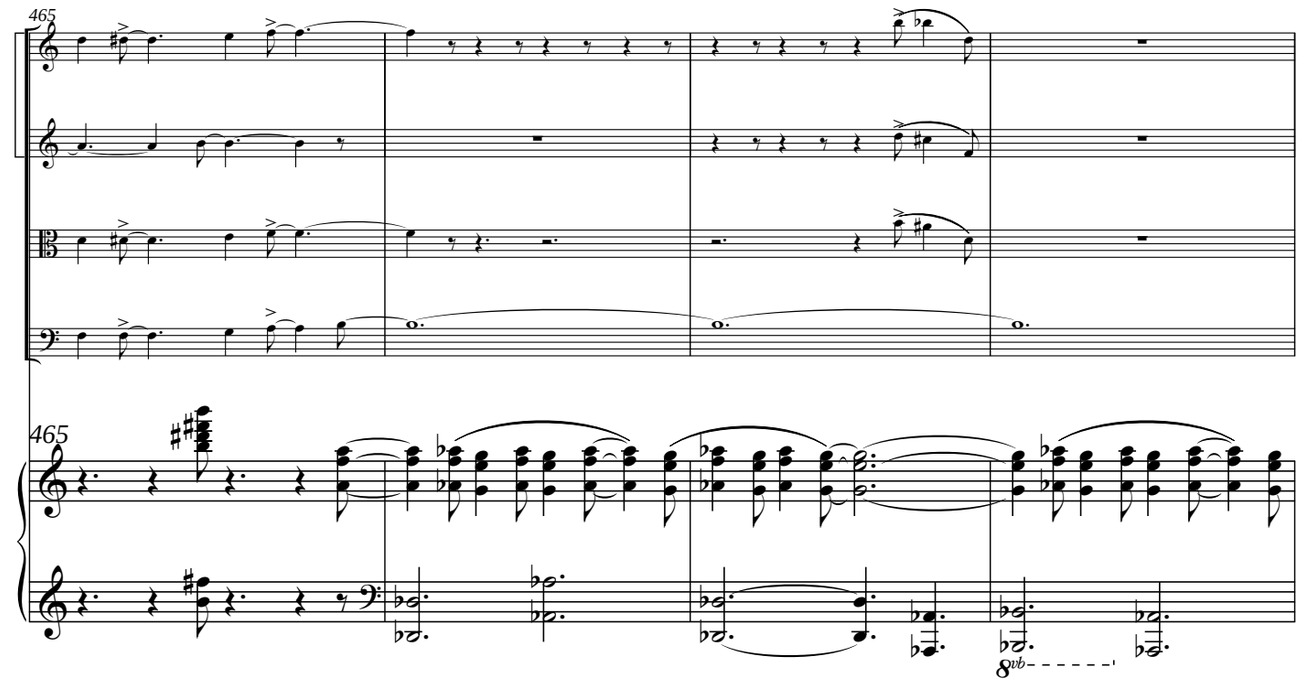
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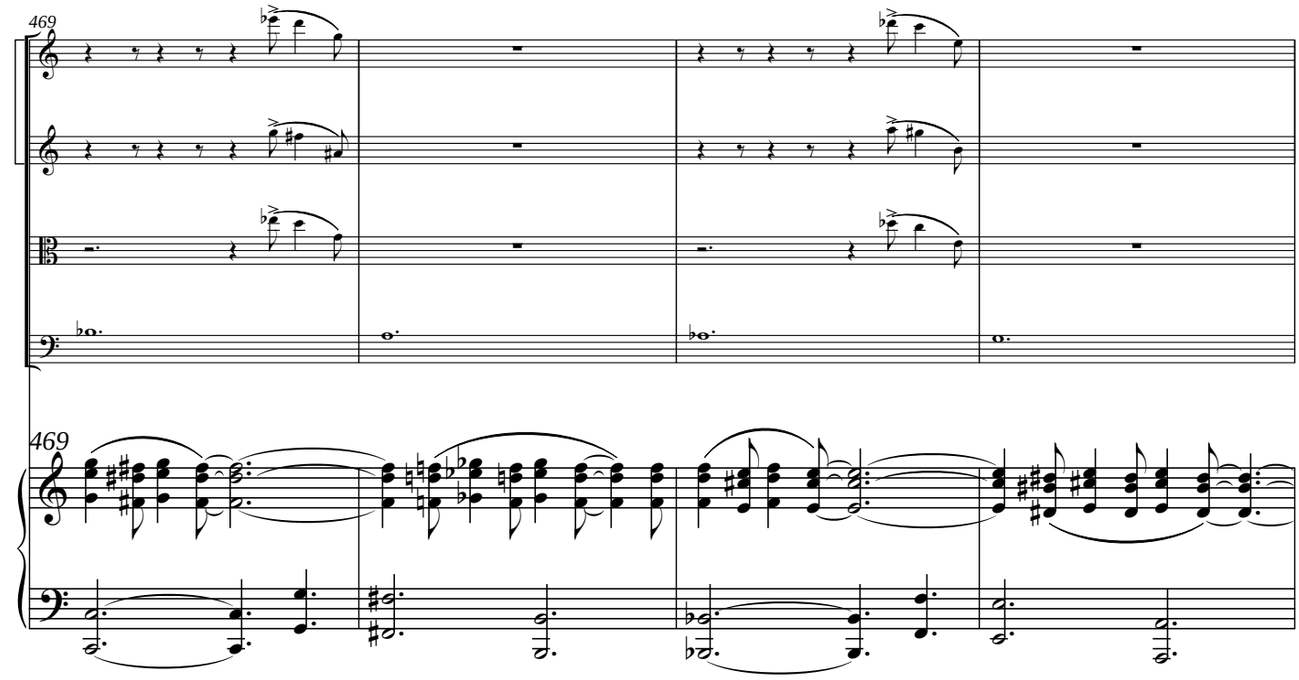
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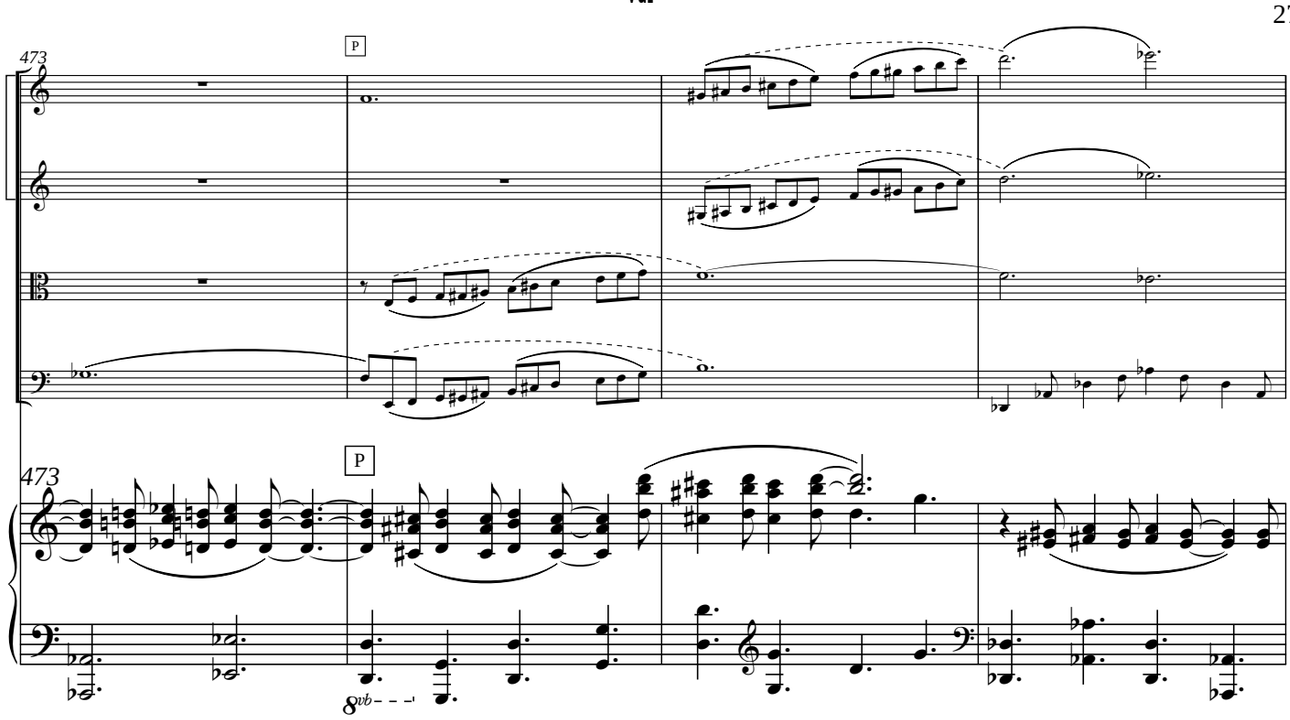
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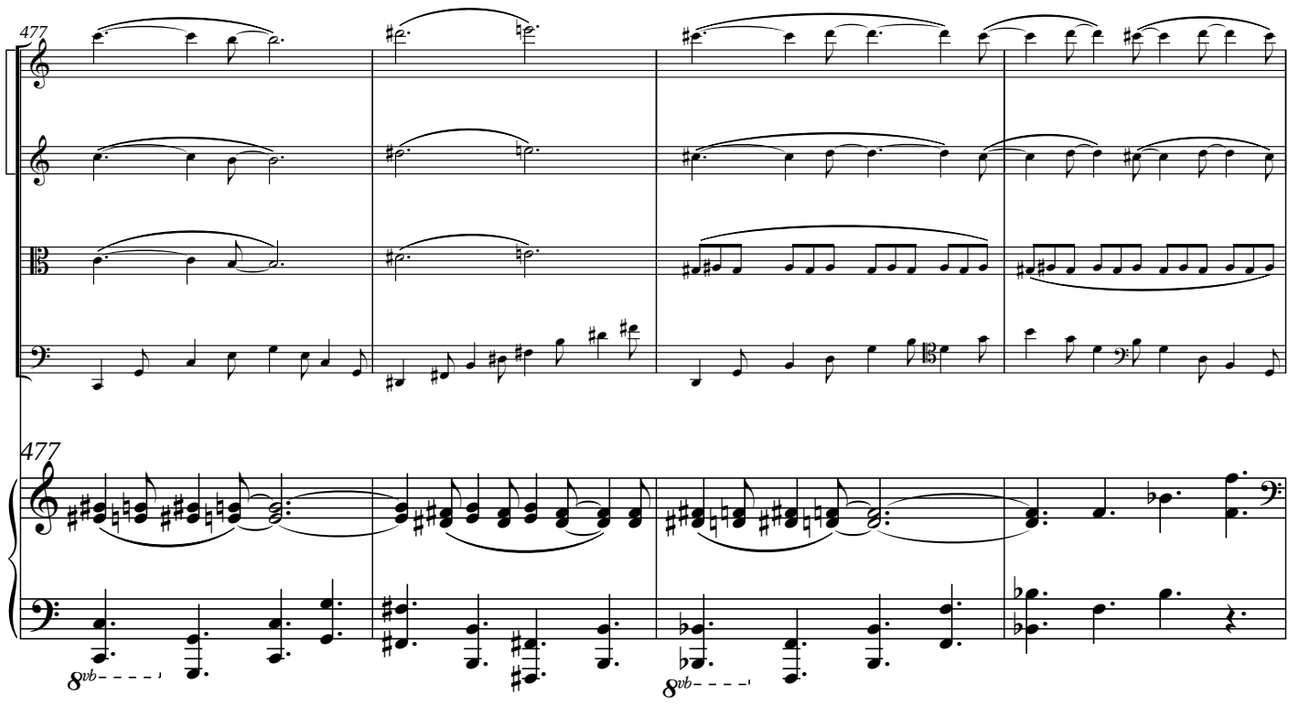
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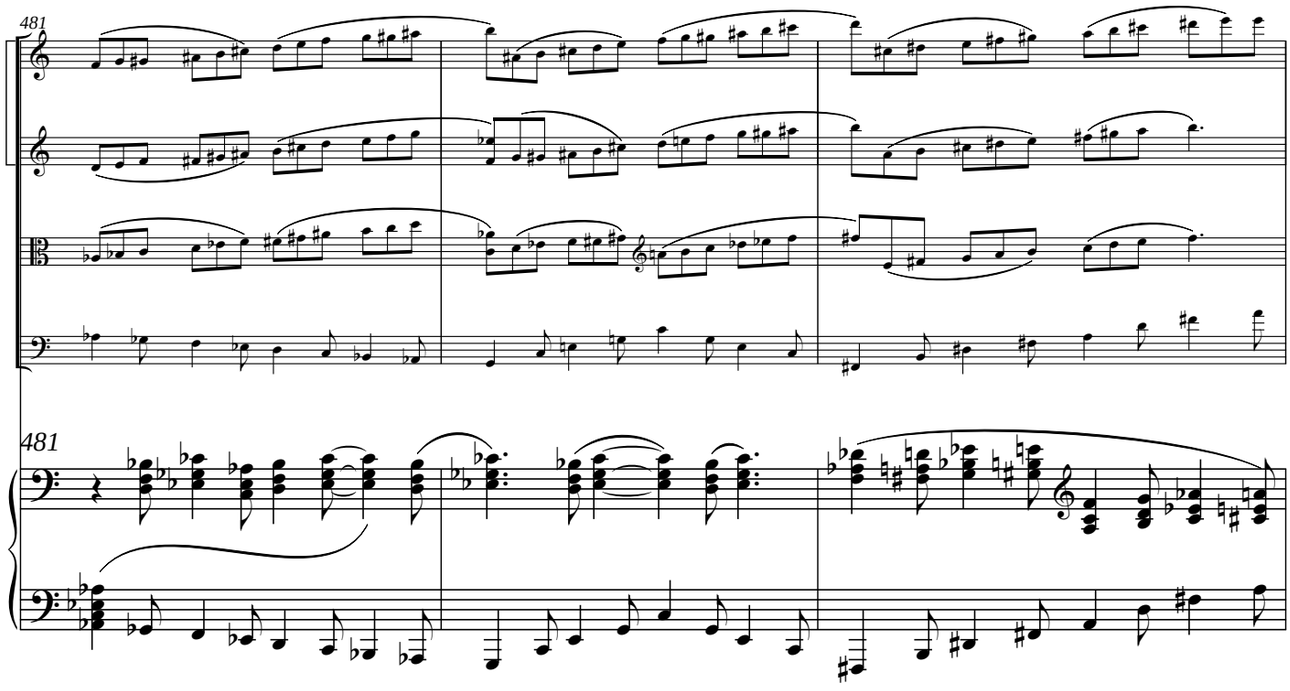
8vb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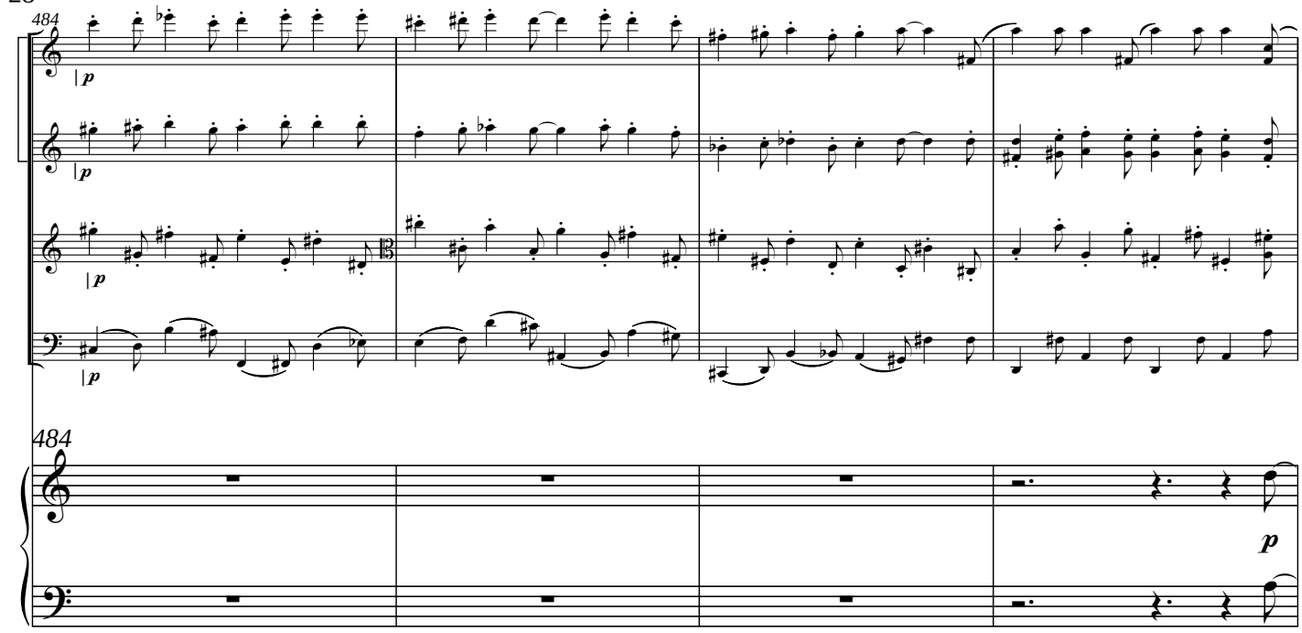
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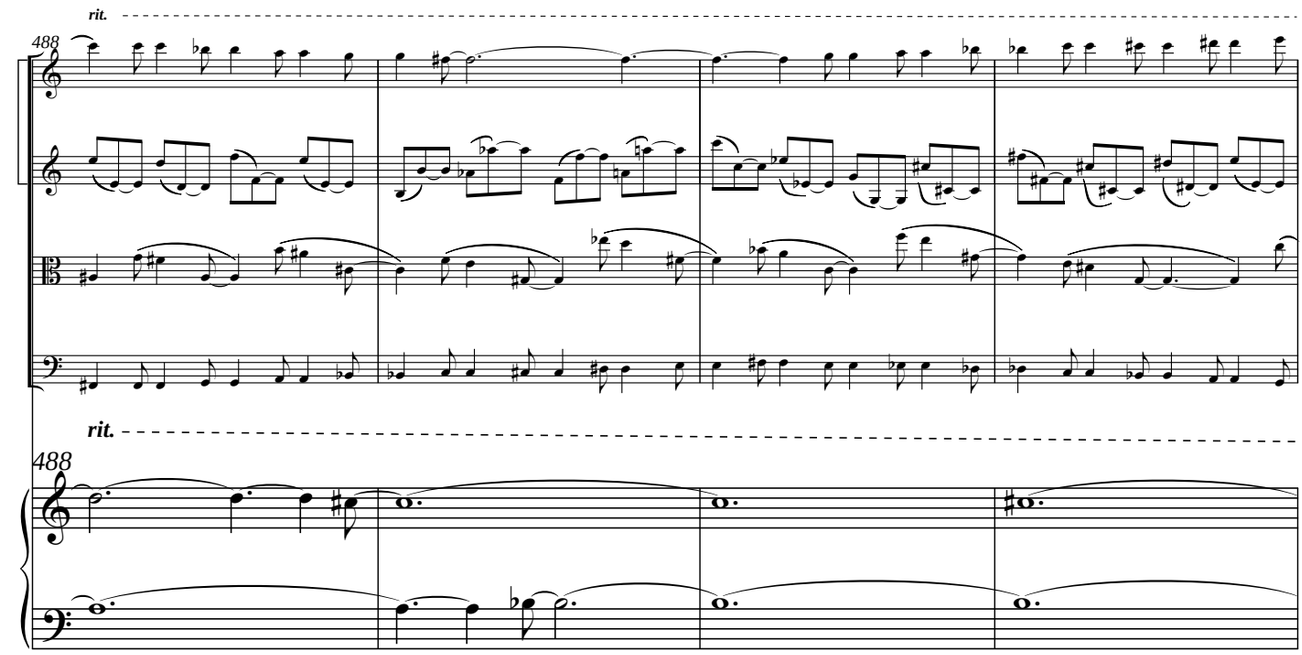
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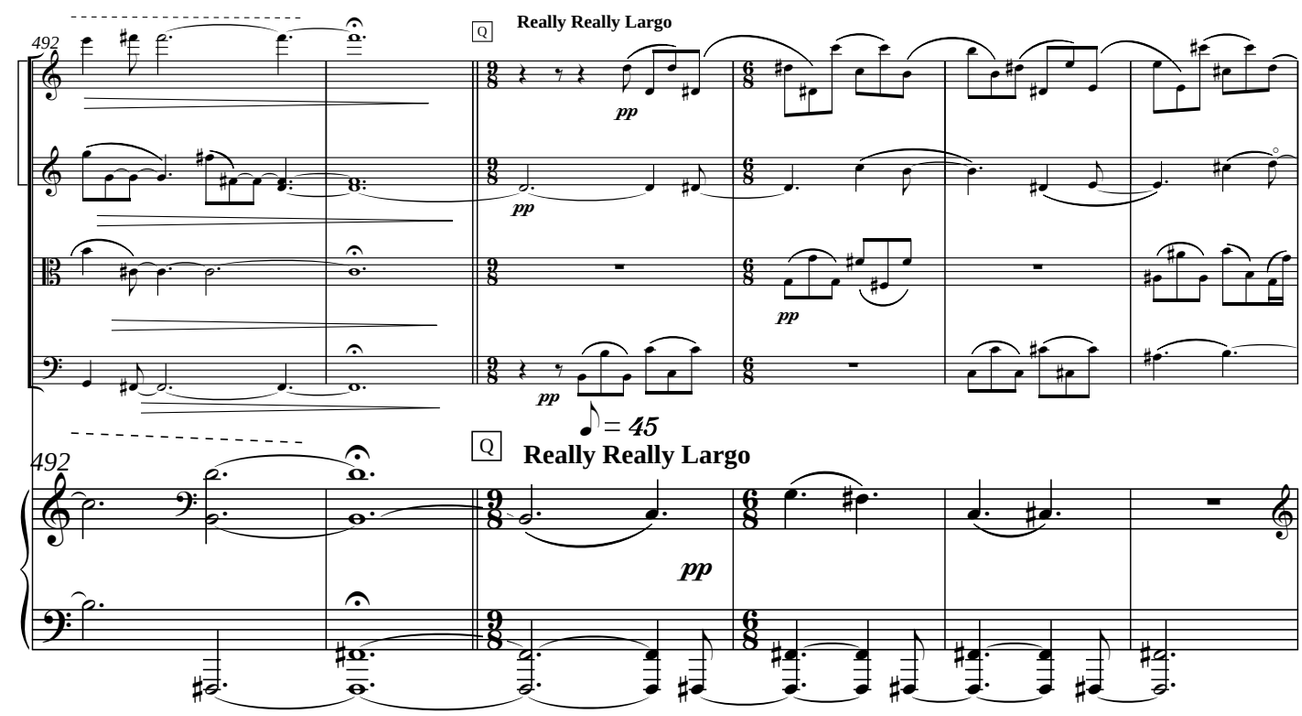
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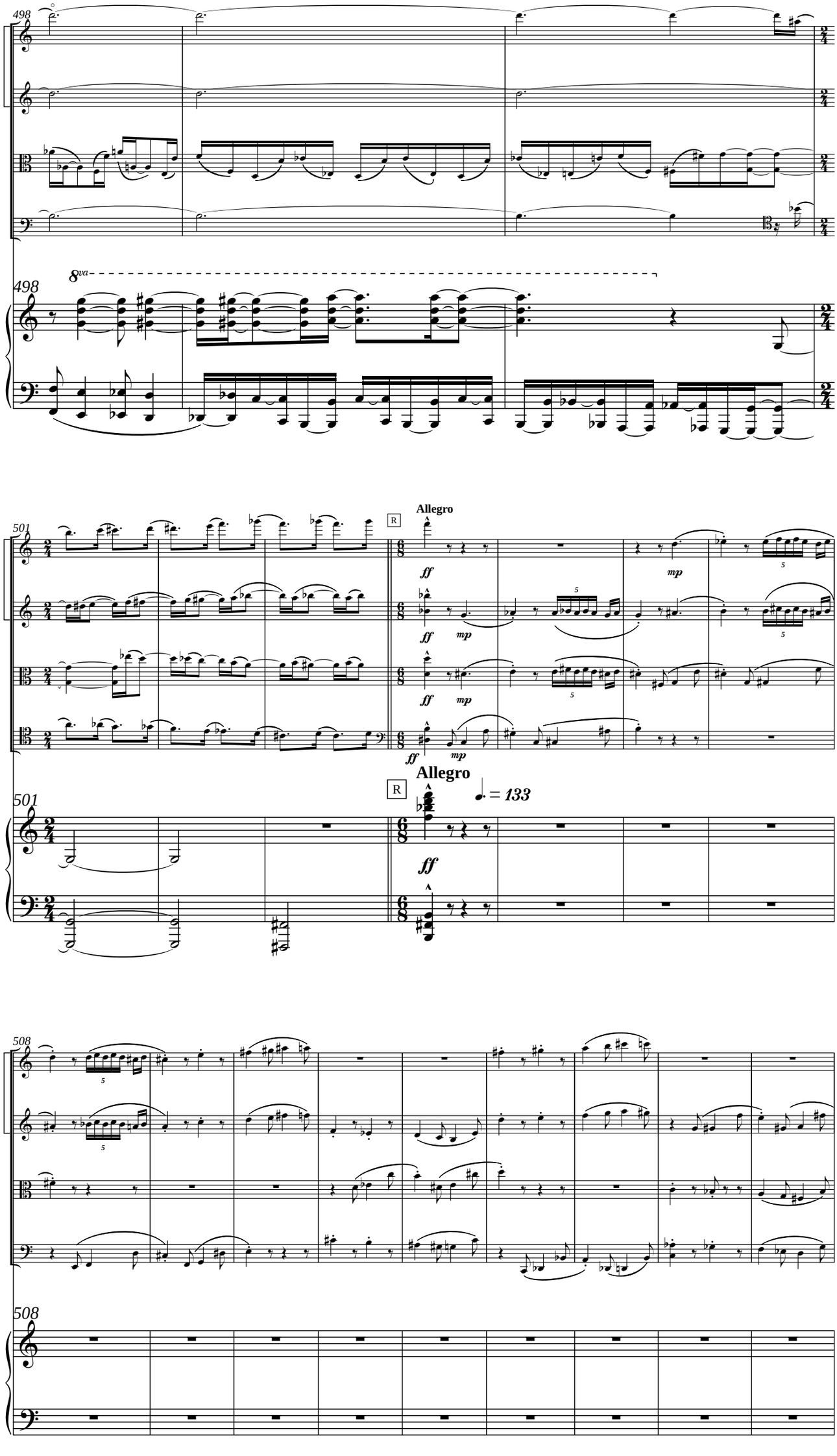
Really Really Largo
pp
pp
pp
pp
= 45
Really Really Largo
492
pp


498
8va
498
501
Allegro
R
ff
mp
501
Allegro
R
♩. = 133
ff
508
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517

517

527

527

p

p

p

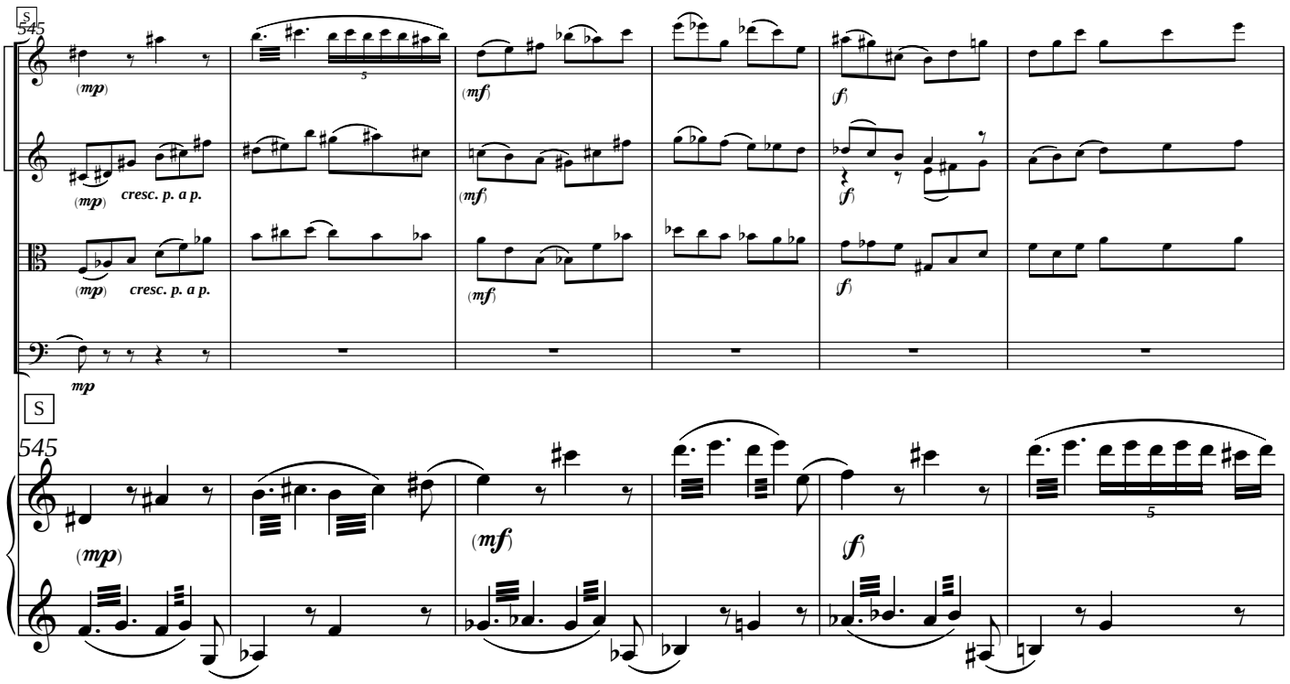
536

536

cresc. p. a p.

cresc. p. a p.

p


S
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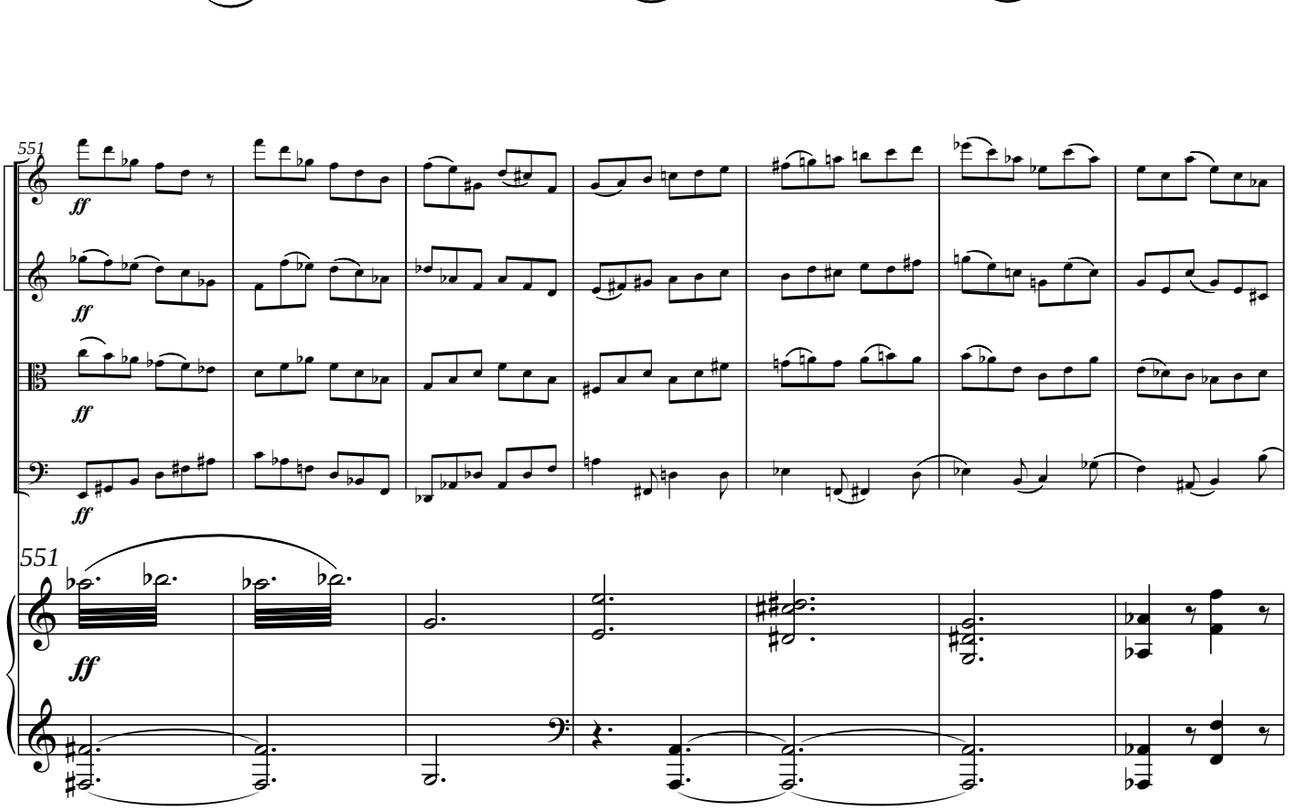
(mp)
(mf)
(f)
cresc. p. a p.


S
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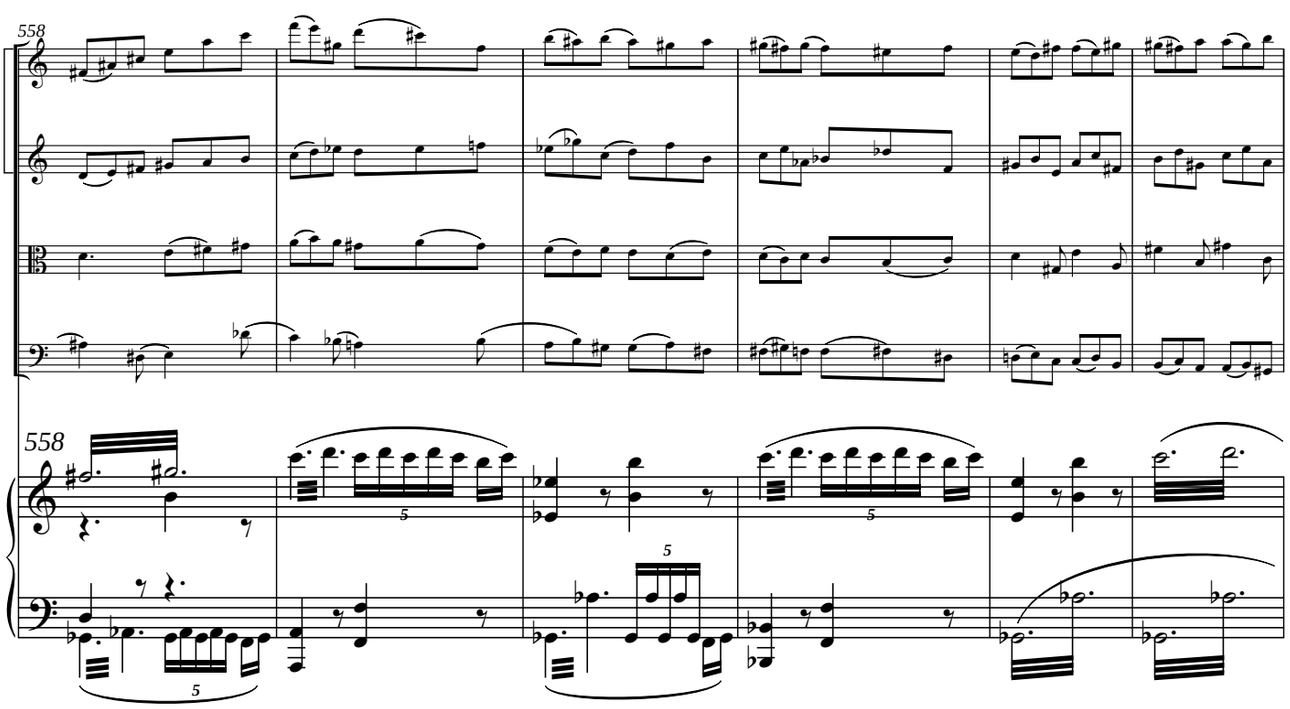
(mp)
(mf)
(f)
5

551
ff

551
ff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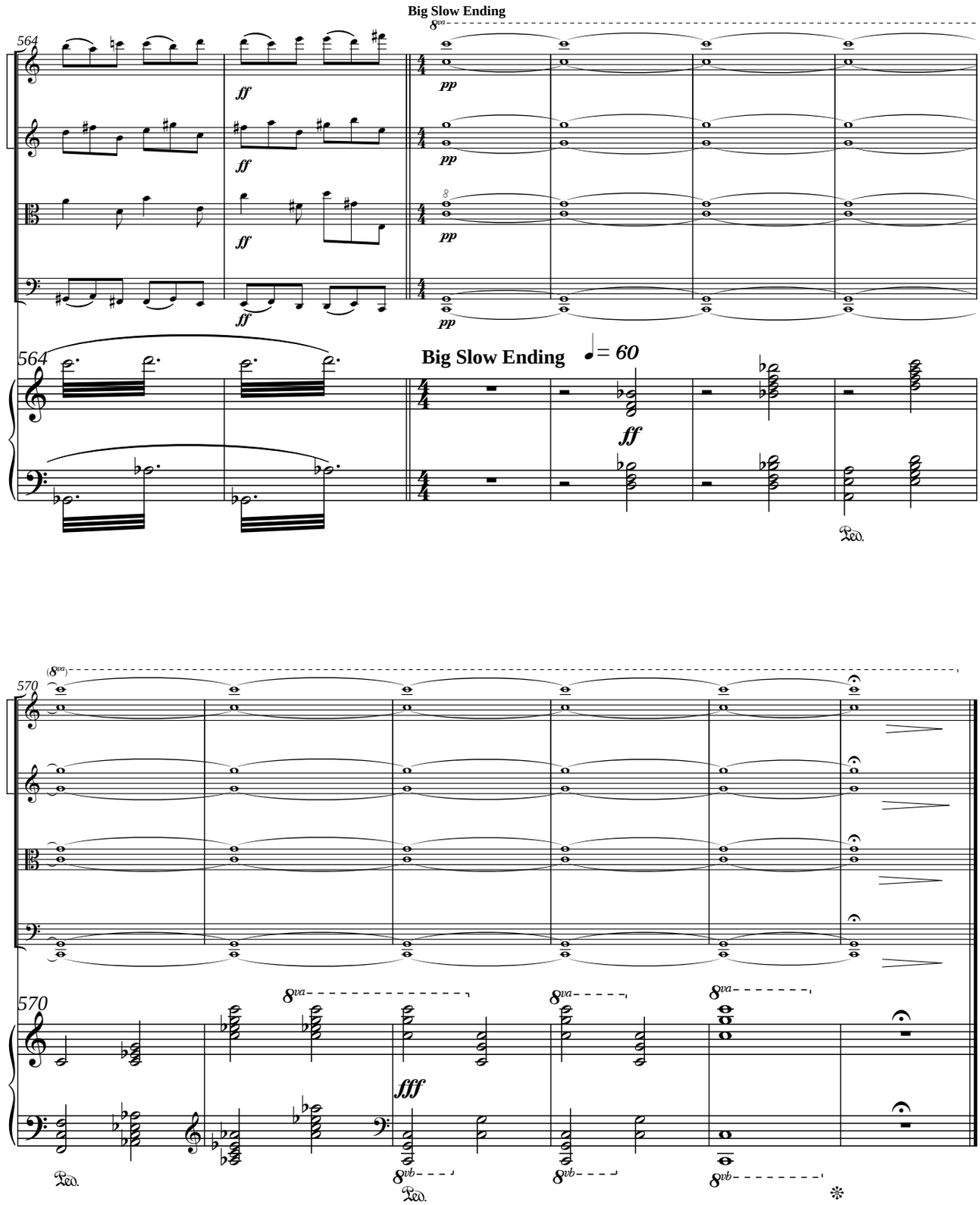
Big Slow Ending
564
ff
pp
Big Slow Ending
♩= 60
570
fff