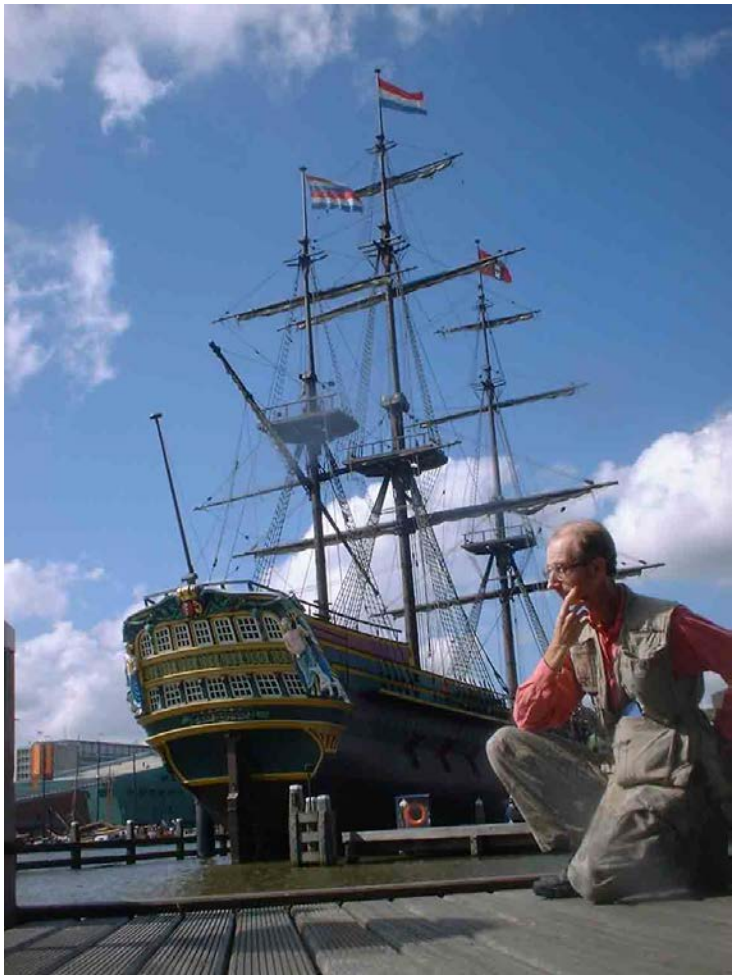
Variations on the Grosse Fuge



for Piano Quintet

Bill Robinson

Variations on the Grosse Fuge
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. I made this letter-size landscape edition in 2022.

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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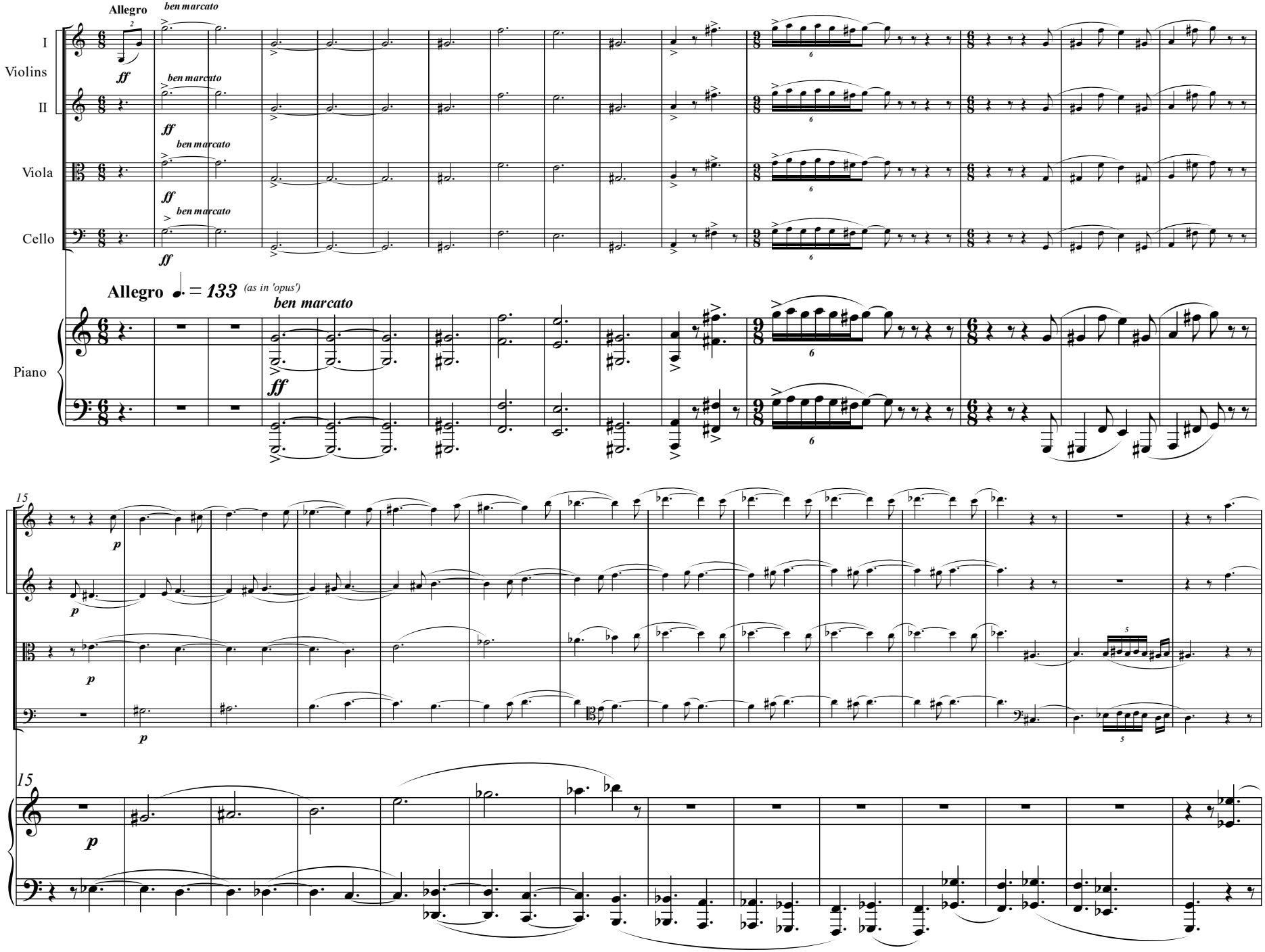
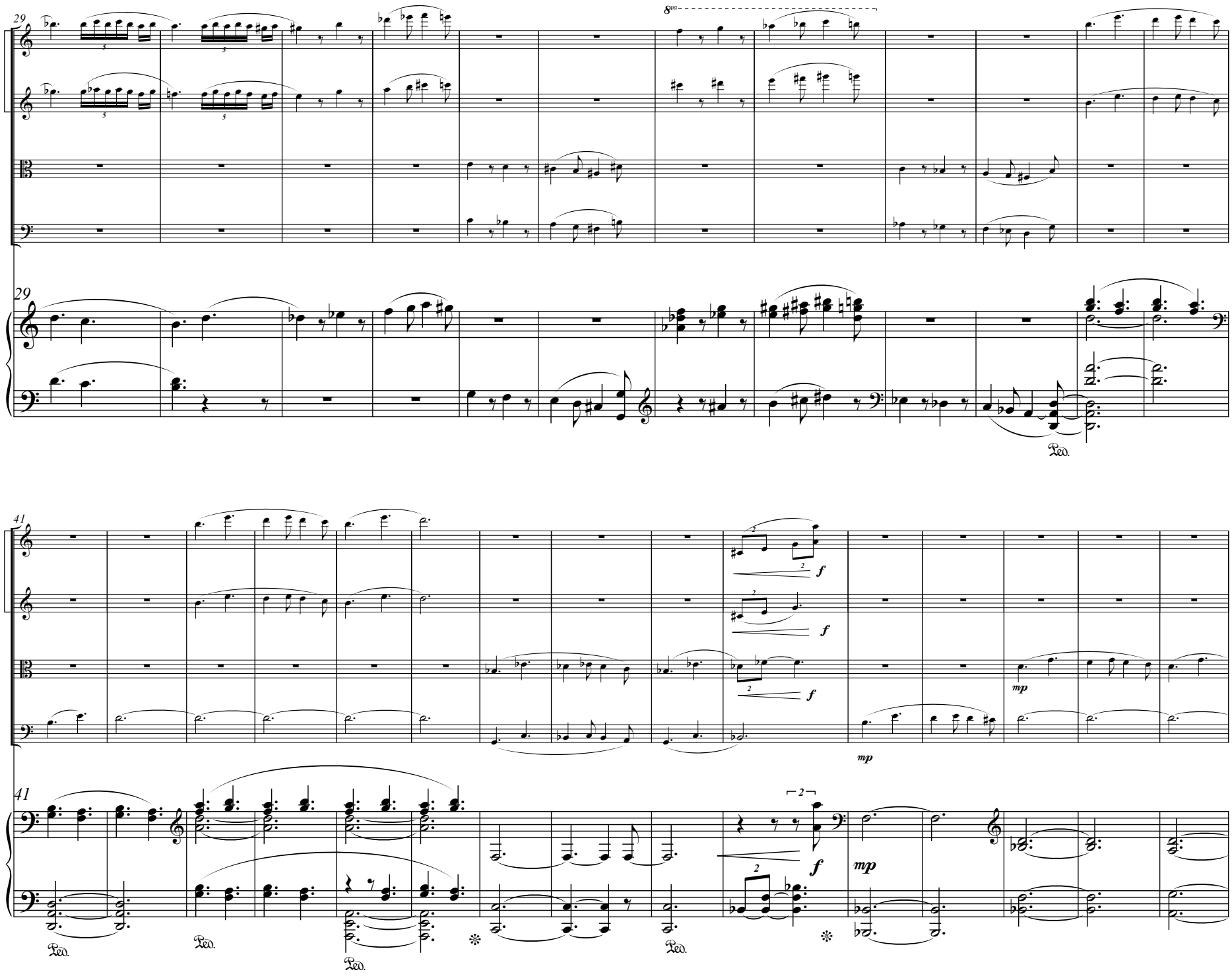
Variations on the Grosse Fuge [18']

Bill Robinson



© 2007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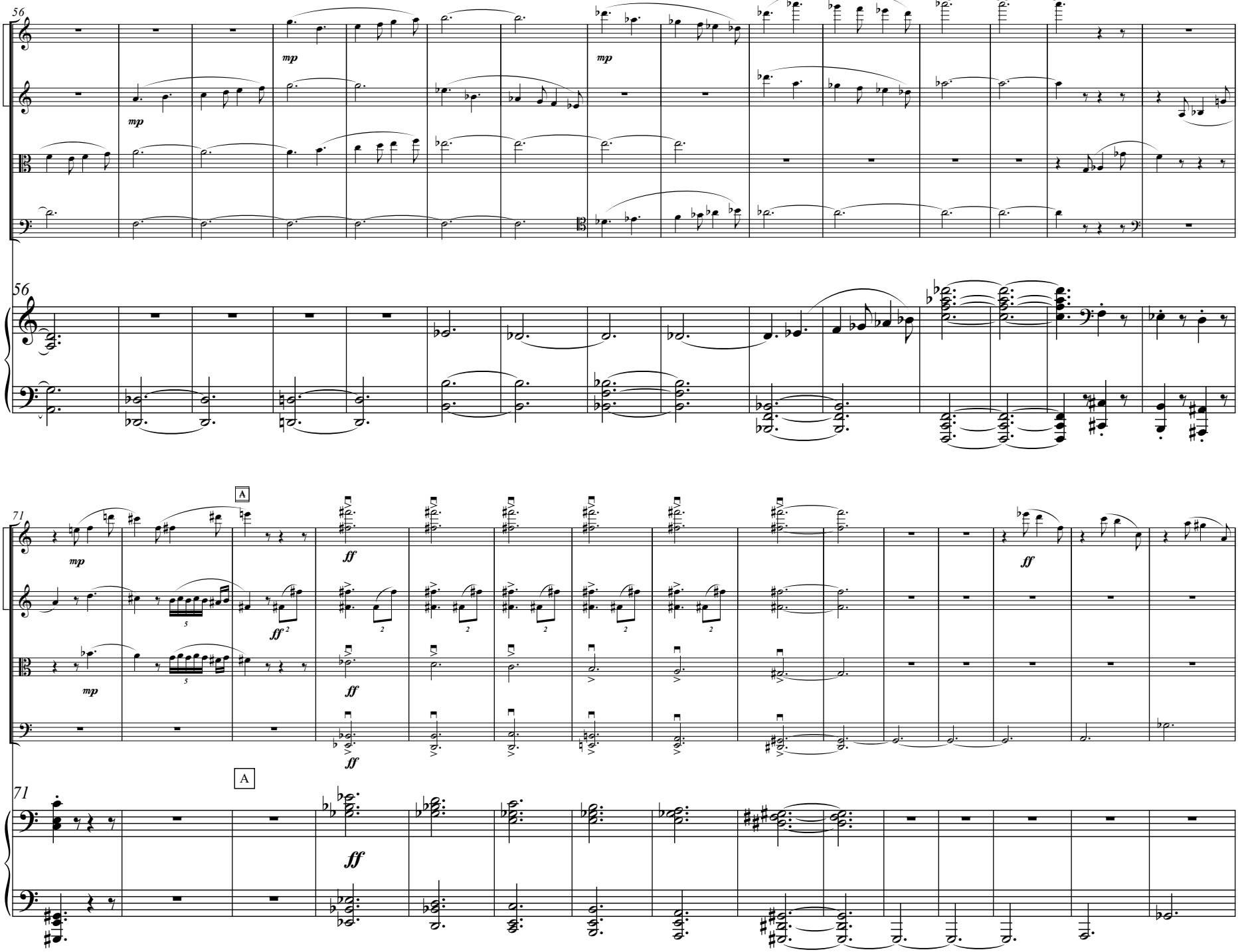
8va
Ped.
41
f
mp
Ped.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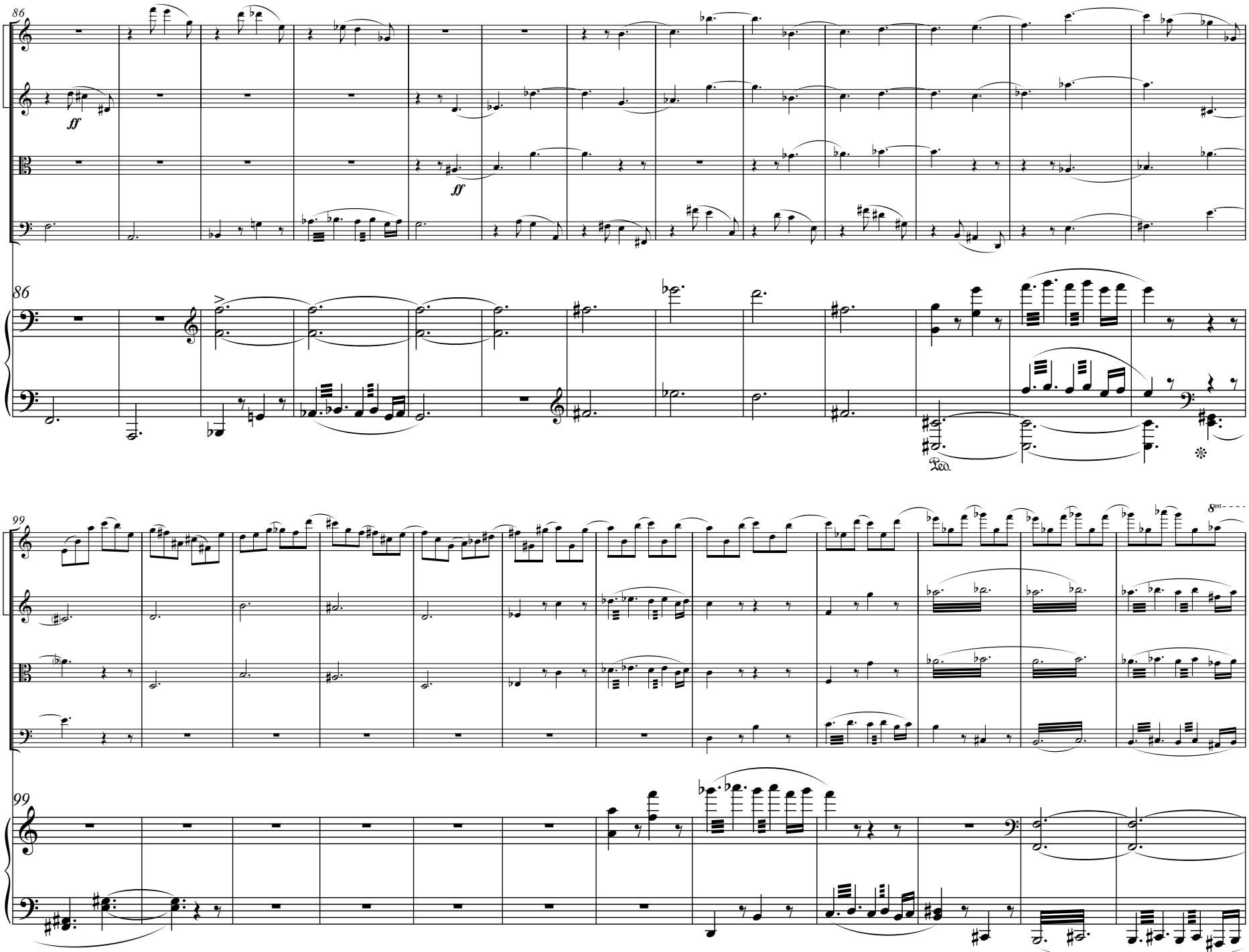
mp
mp
mp
56
71
A
mp
ff
ff
mp
ff
ff
71
A
ff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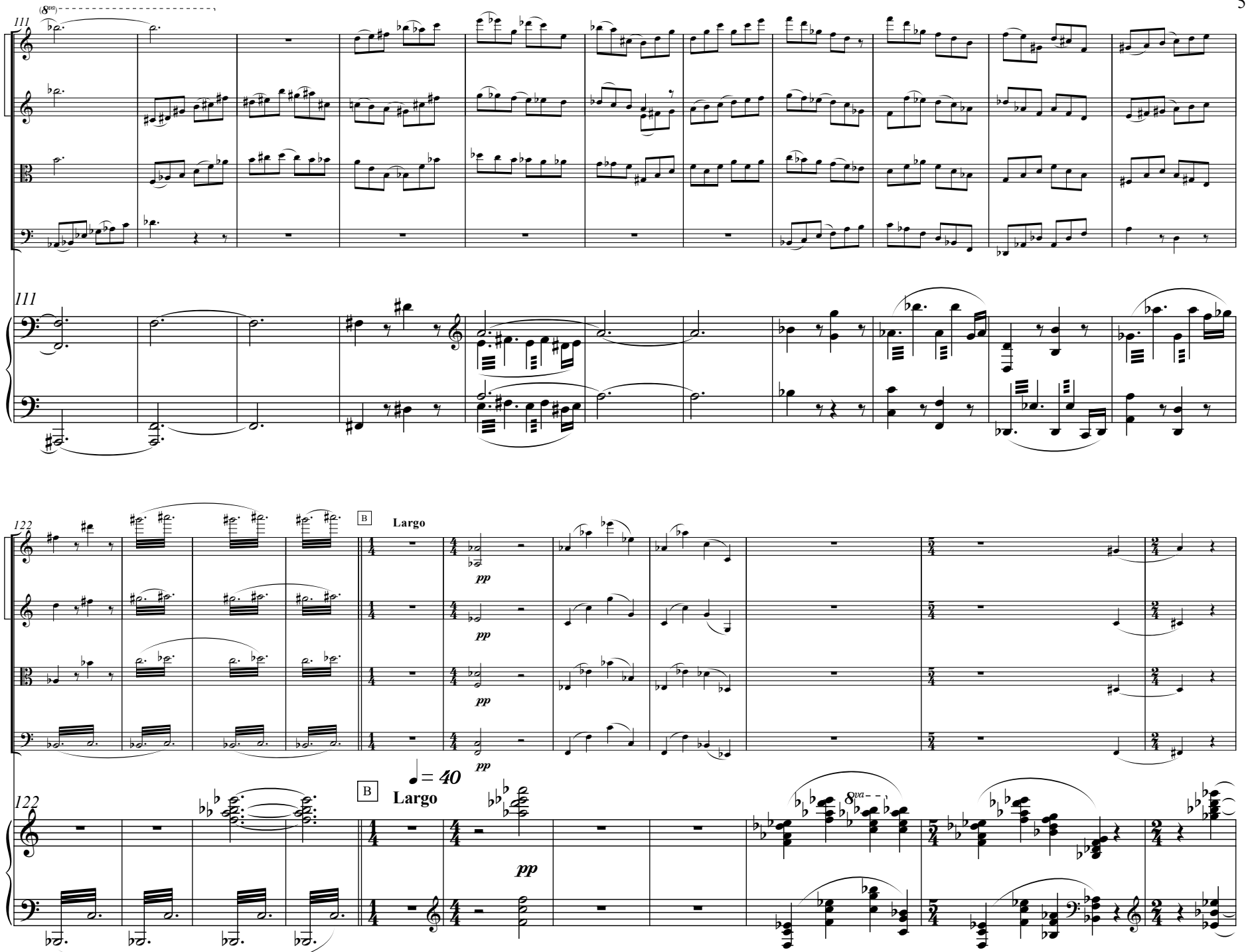
ff
ff
86
Ped.
99
8va
99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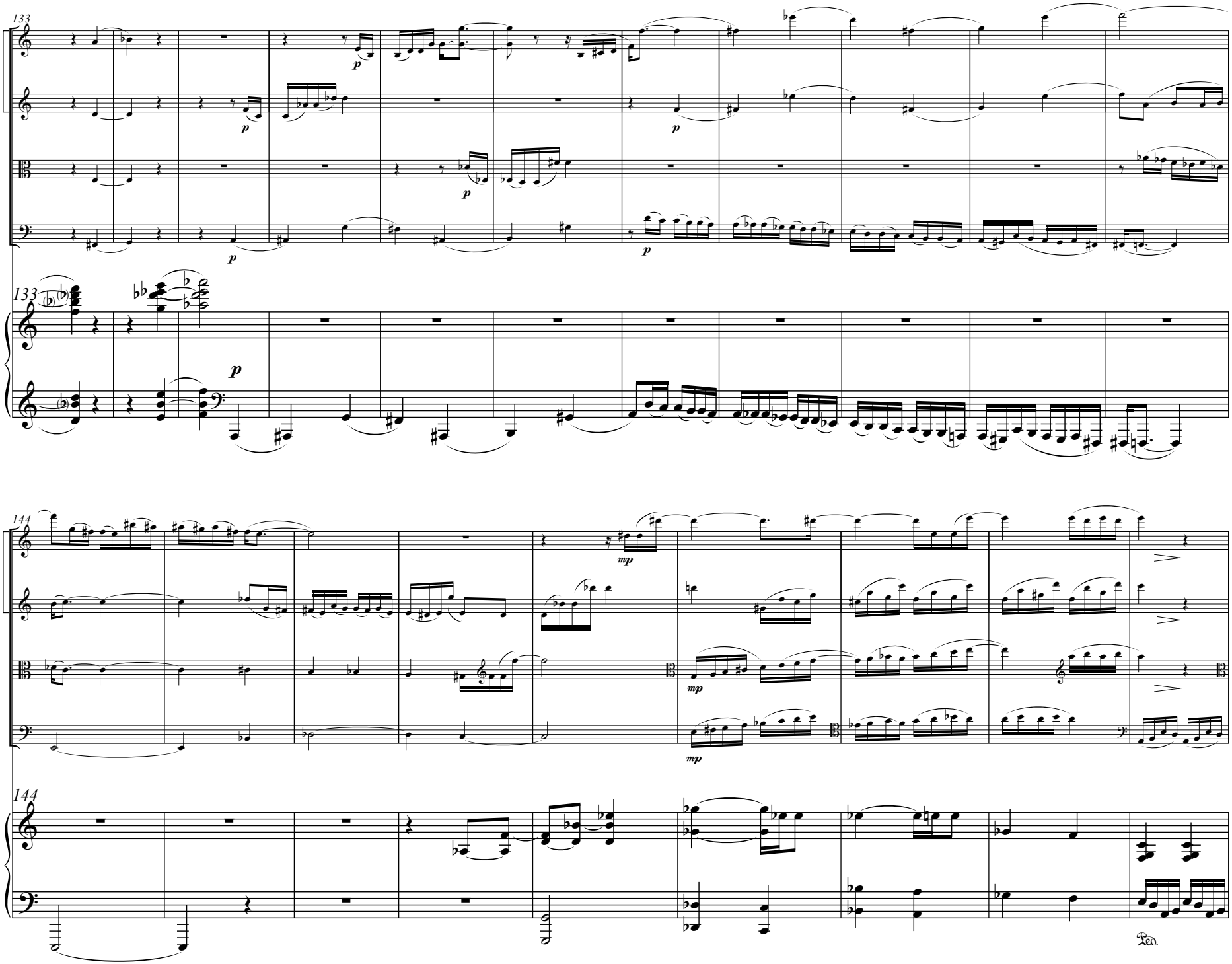
(8va)
111
122
B
Largo
pp
pp
pp
pp
122
B
Largo
♩= 40
pp
8va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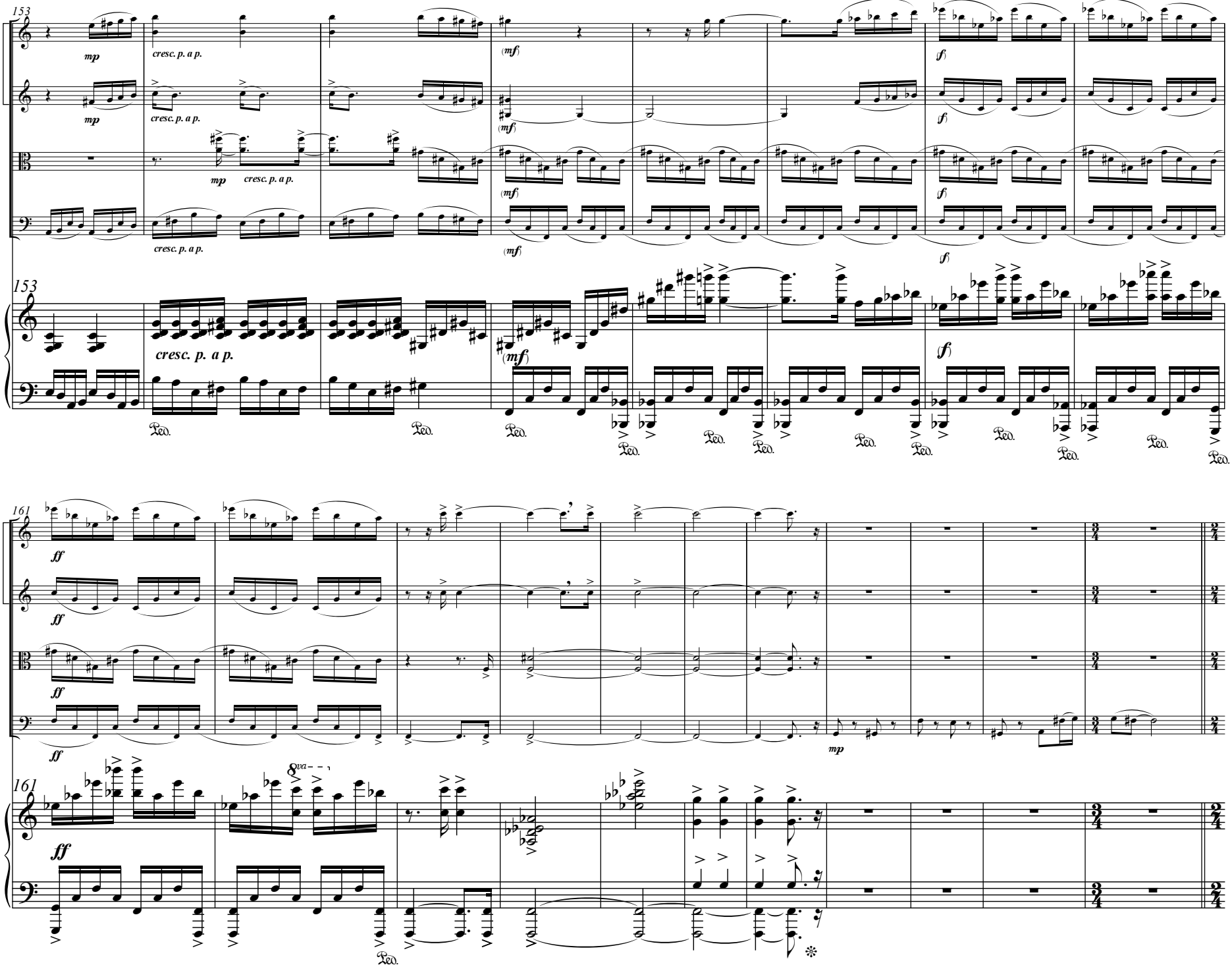
p
133
p
144
mp
mp
mp
144
Ped.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mp
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
(f)
153
cresc. p. a p.
(mf)
(f)
Ped.
161
ff
mp
8va
161
ff
Ped.

VGF

C

Allegro bigga fuga

172

ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

ff

ben marcato

ff

C

172

Allegro bigga fuga

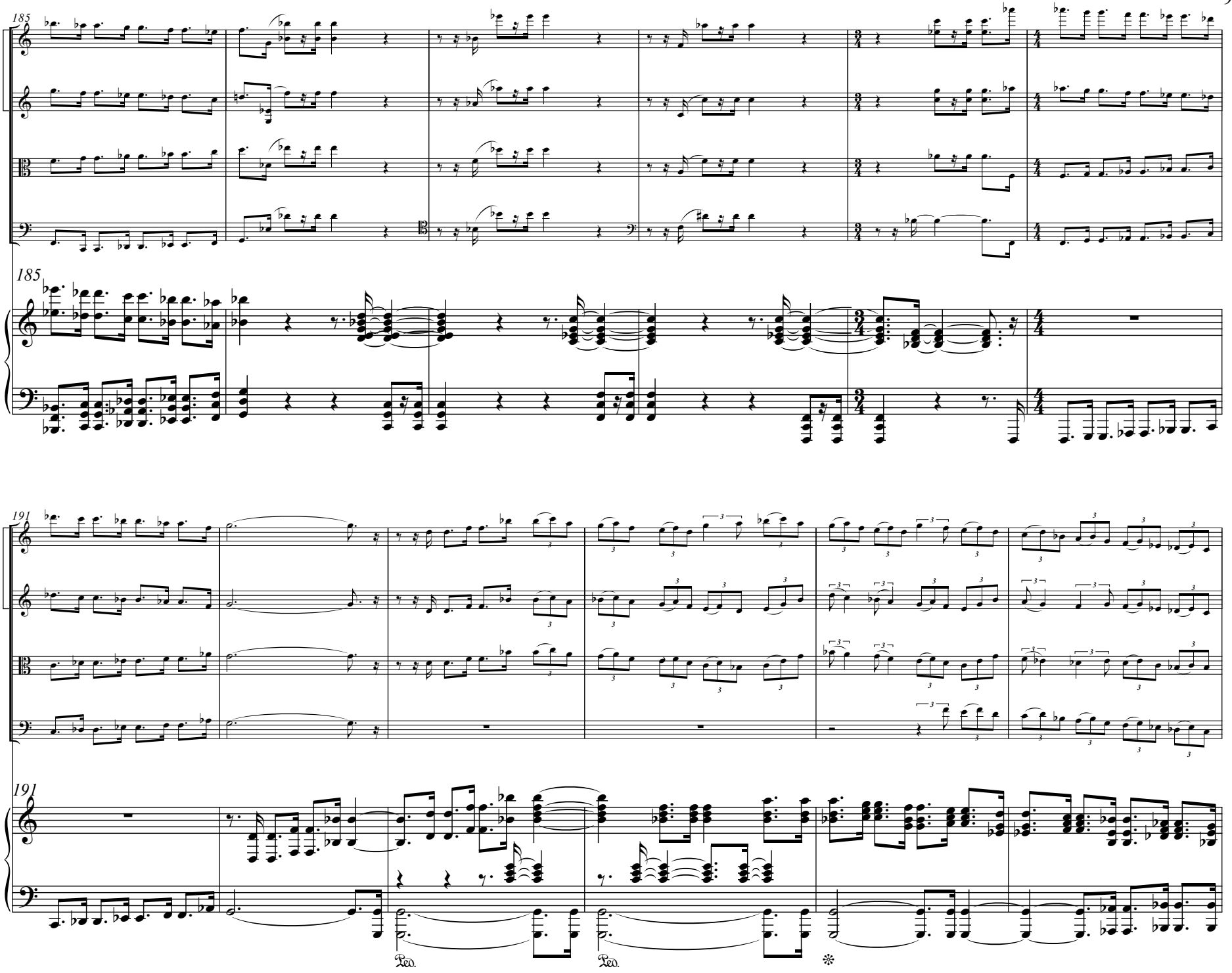
♩ = 120

179

179

ben marcato

ff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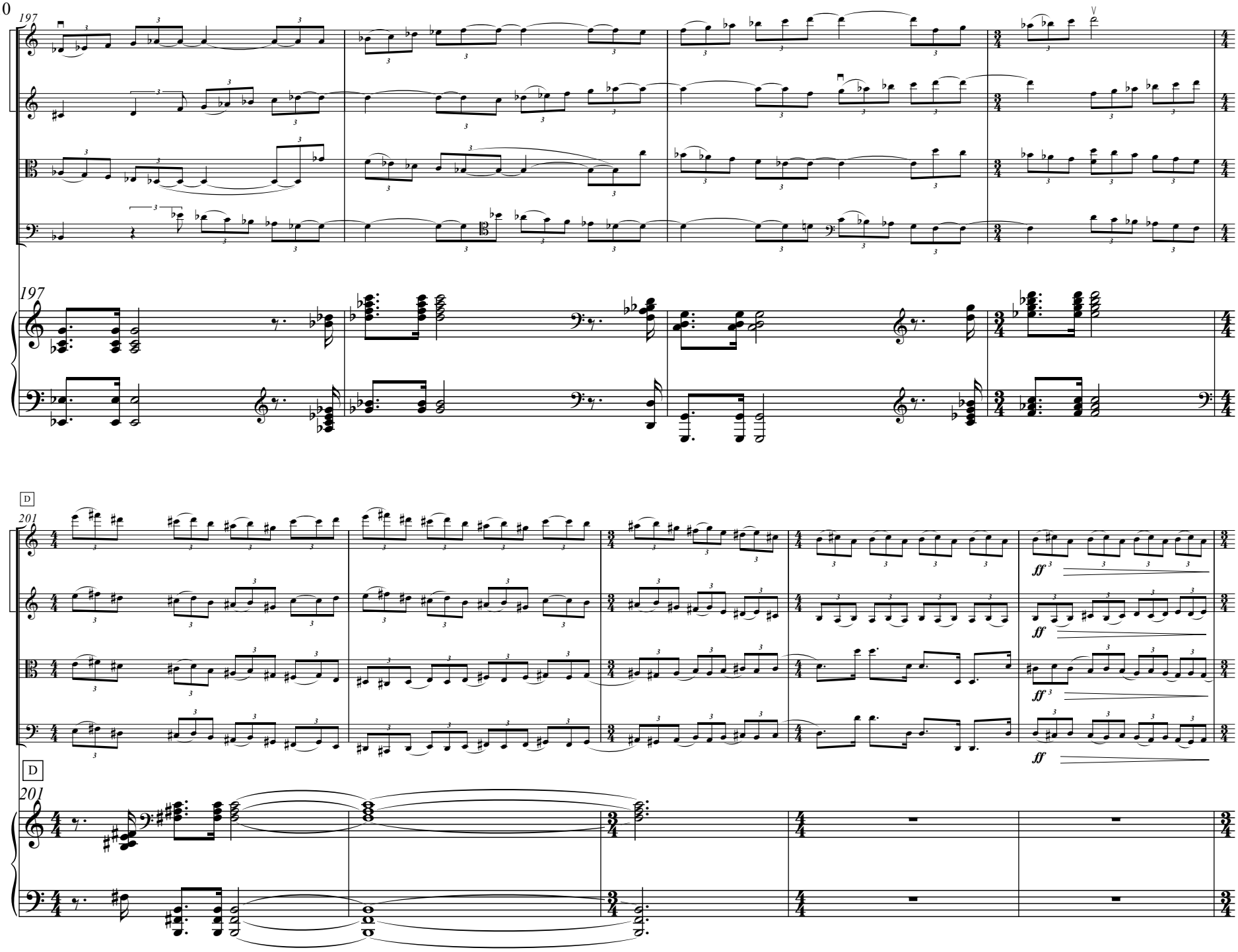
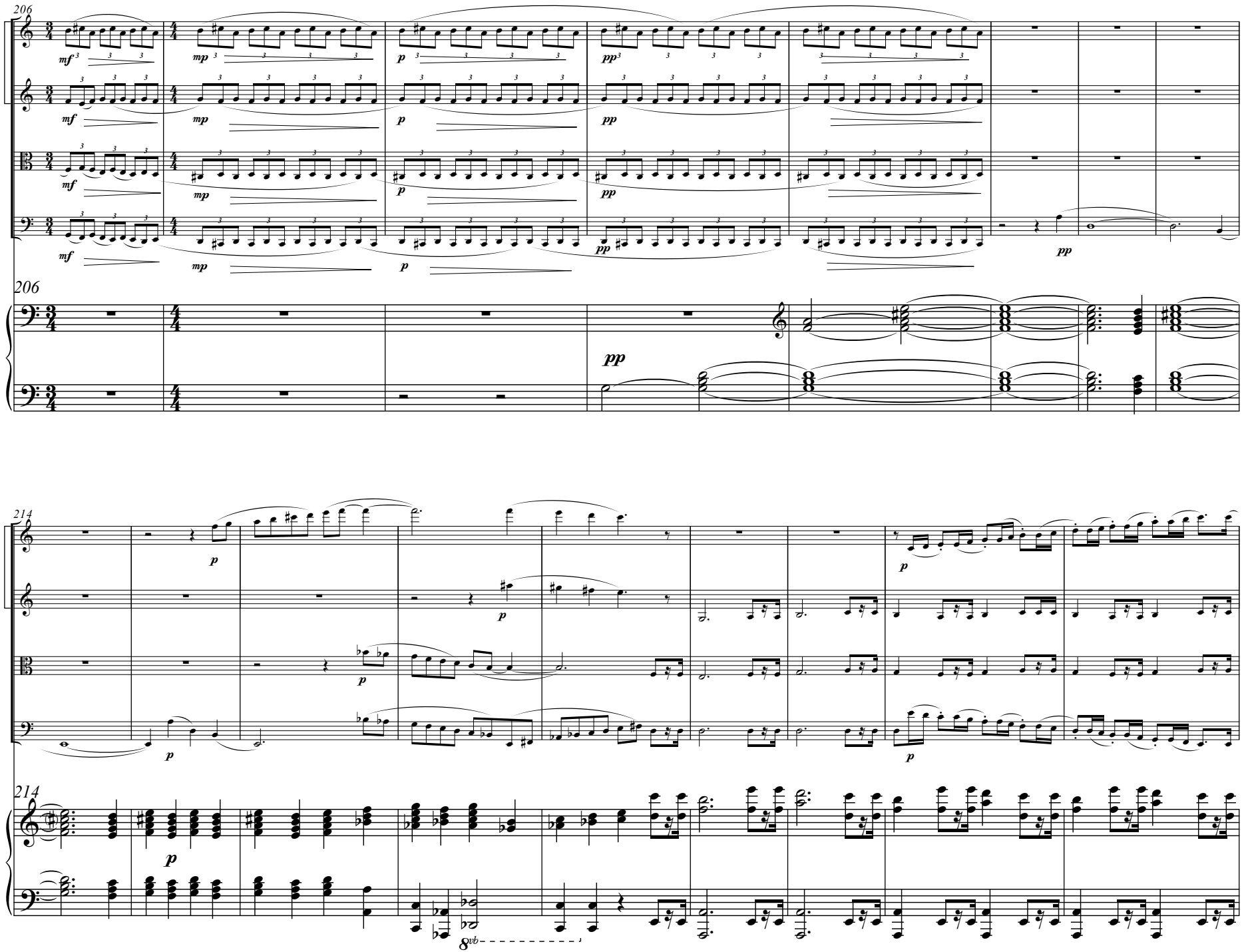
185
191
191
Ped.
Ped.

10

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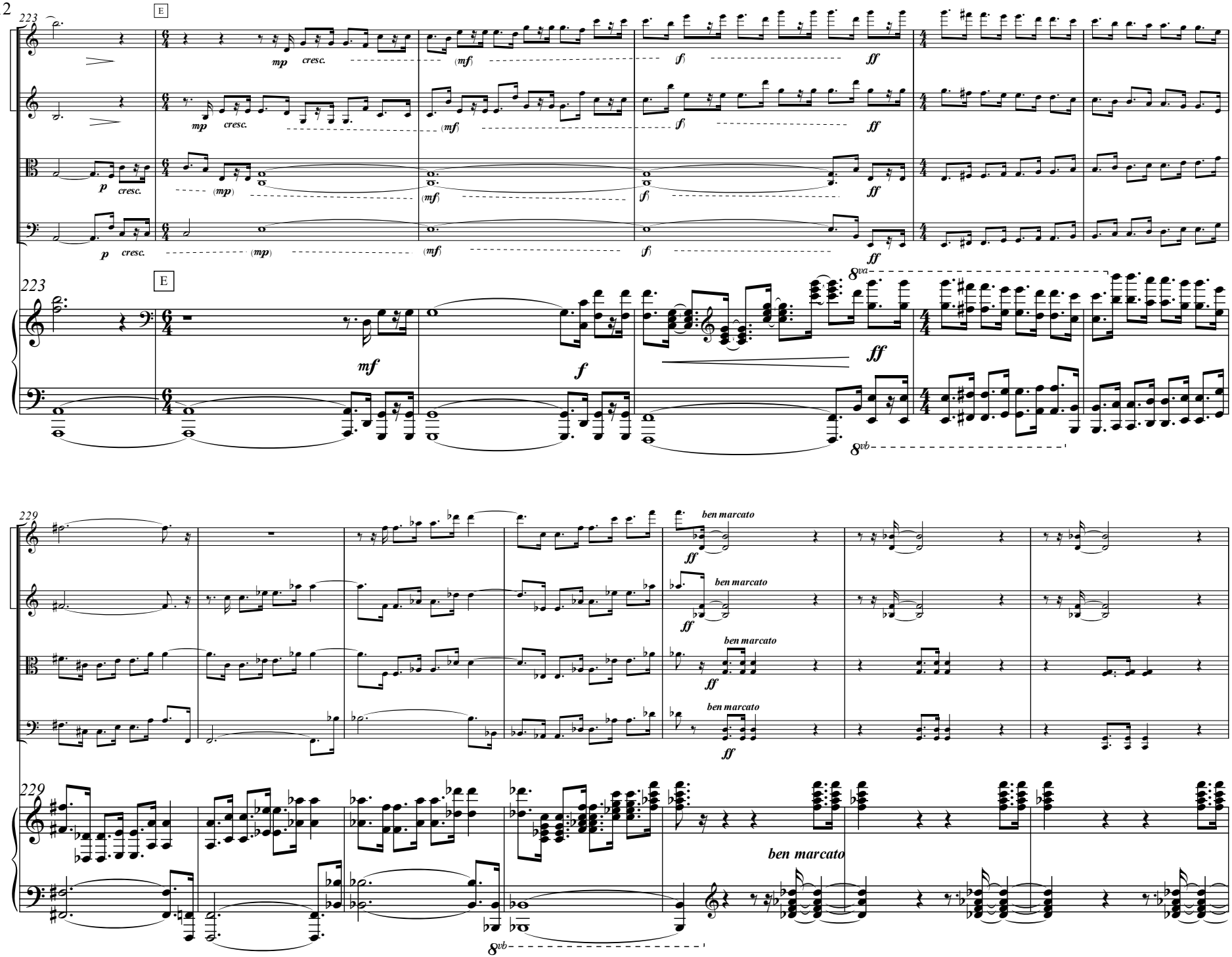
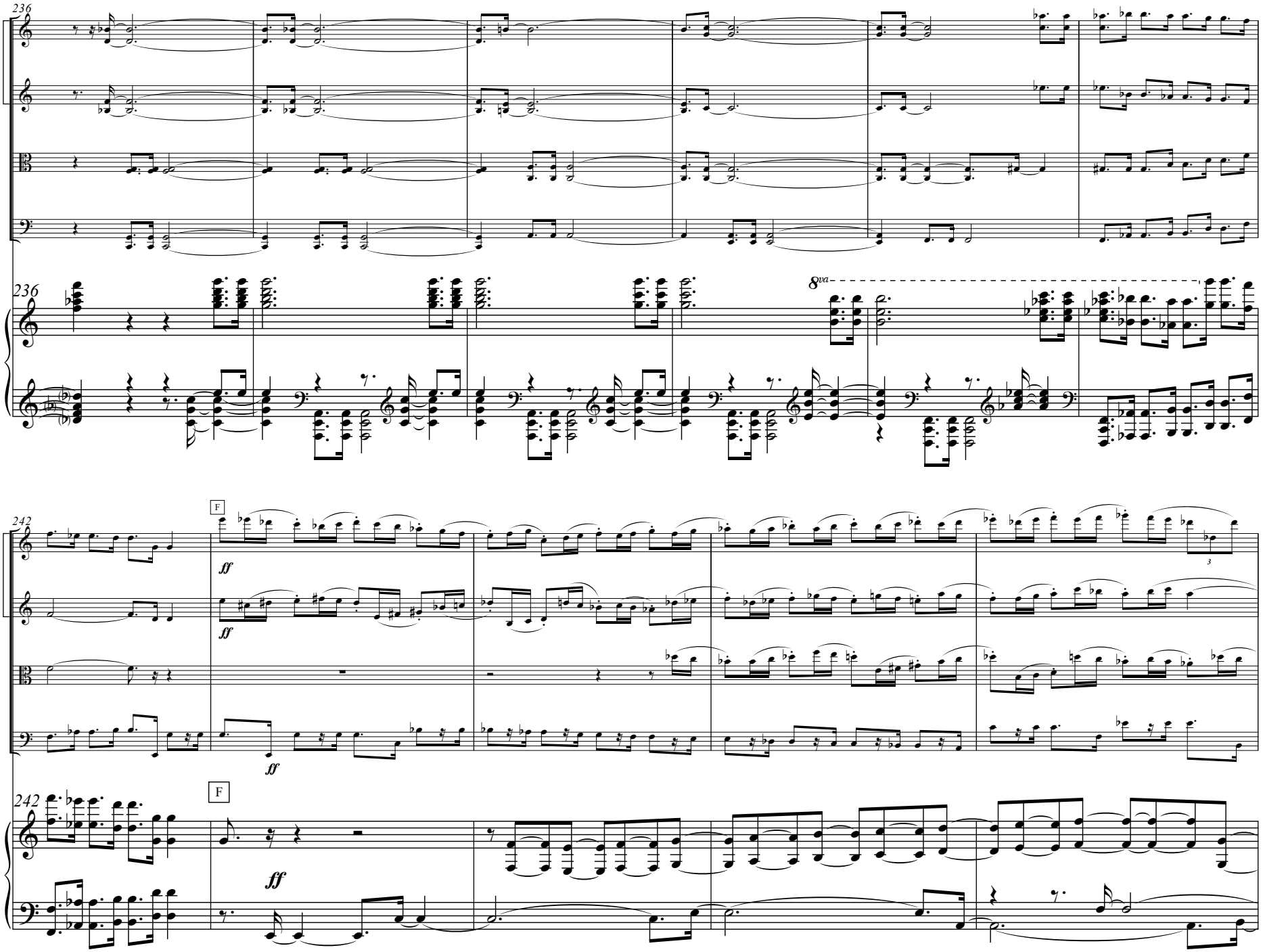
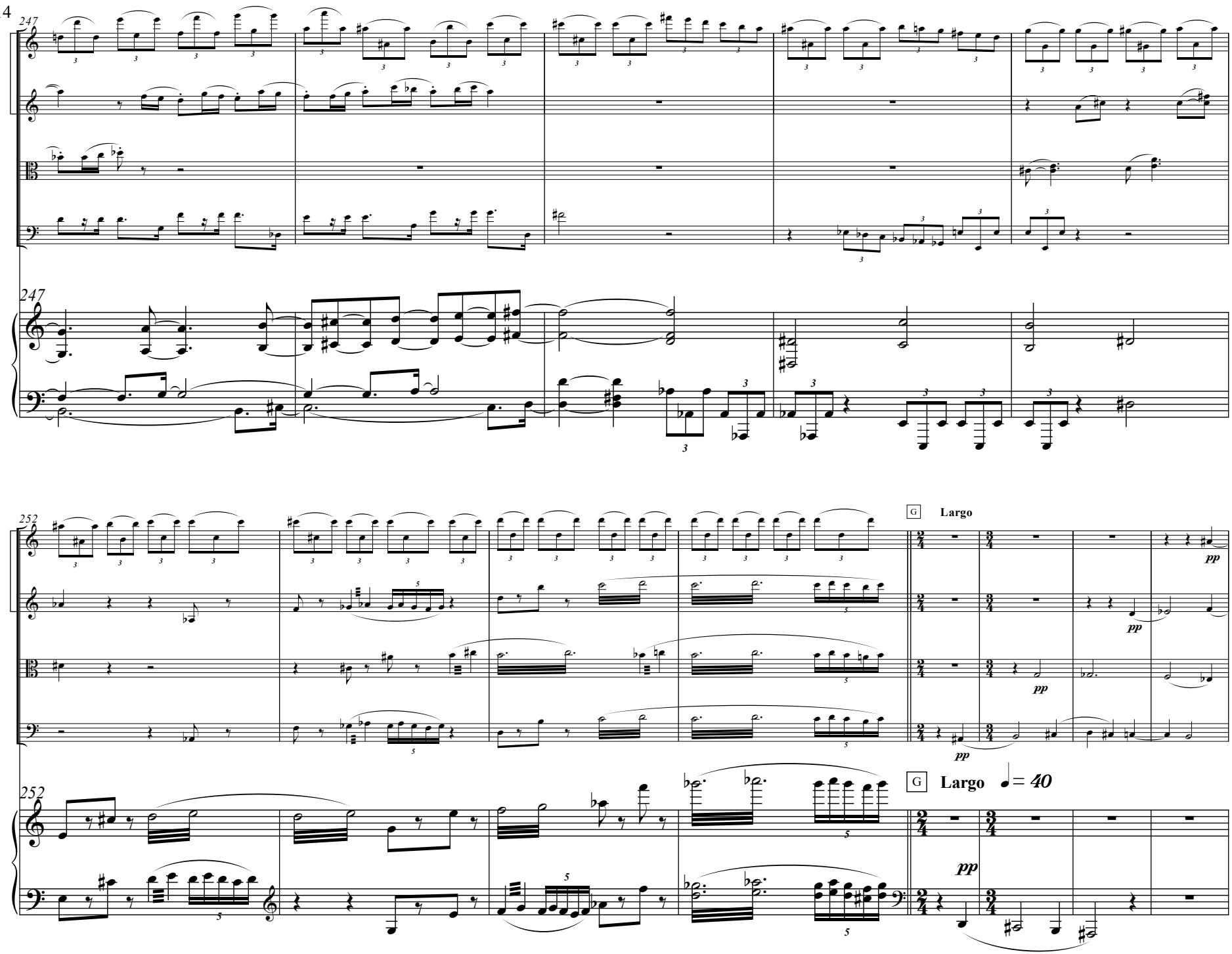
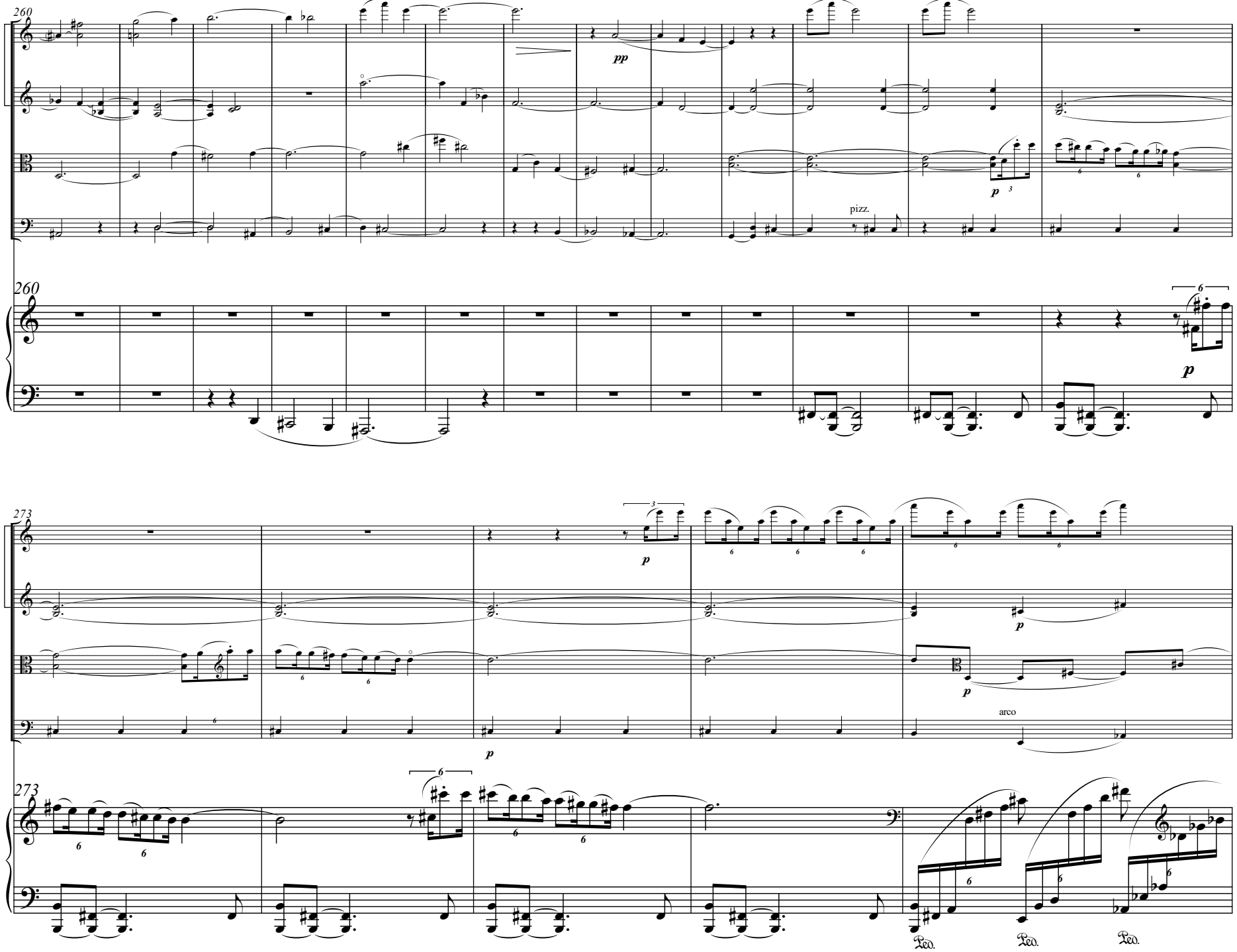
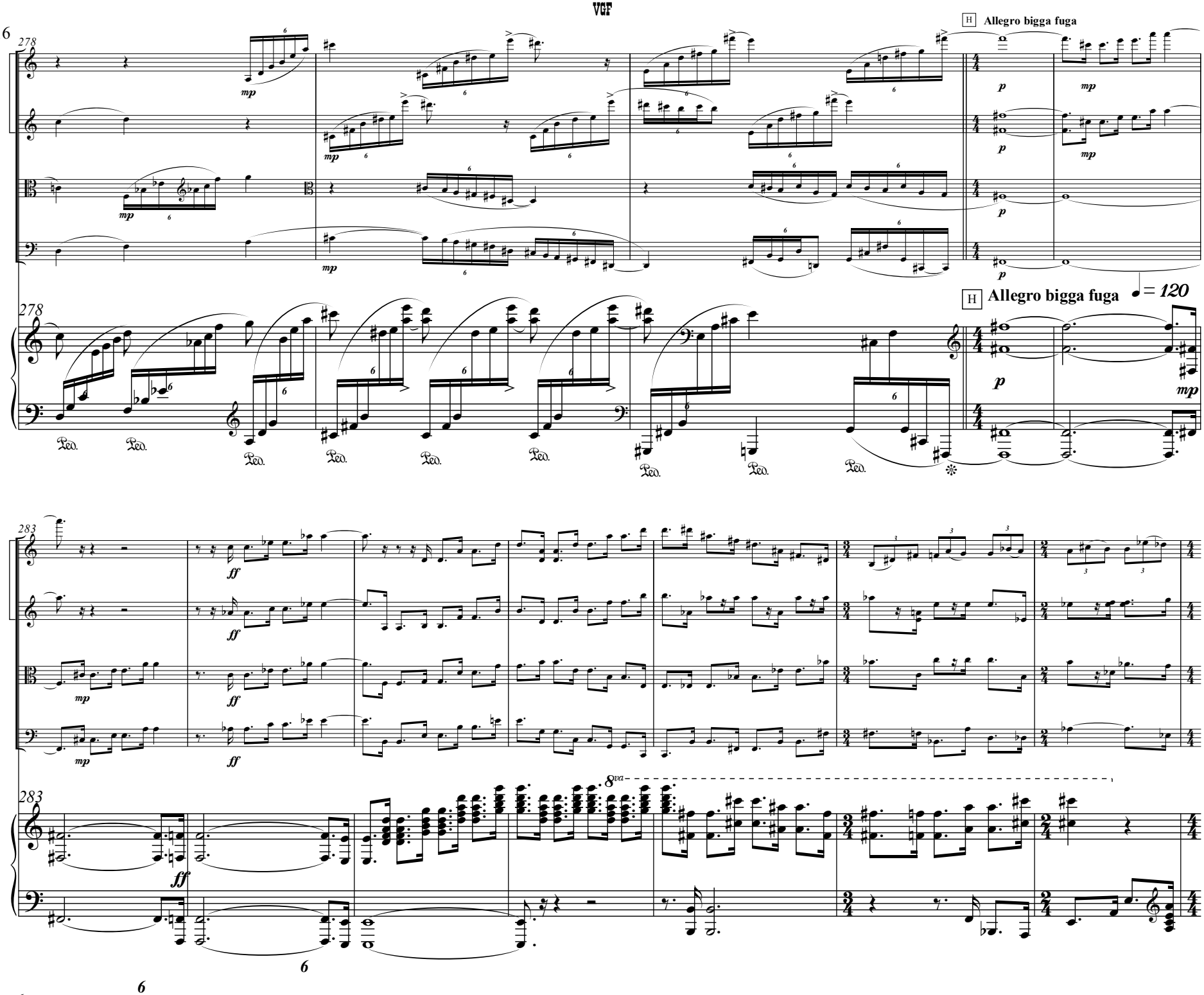
mf
mp
p
pp
206
pp
214
p
214
p
8vb
3
3
3

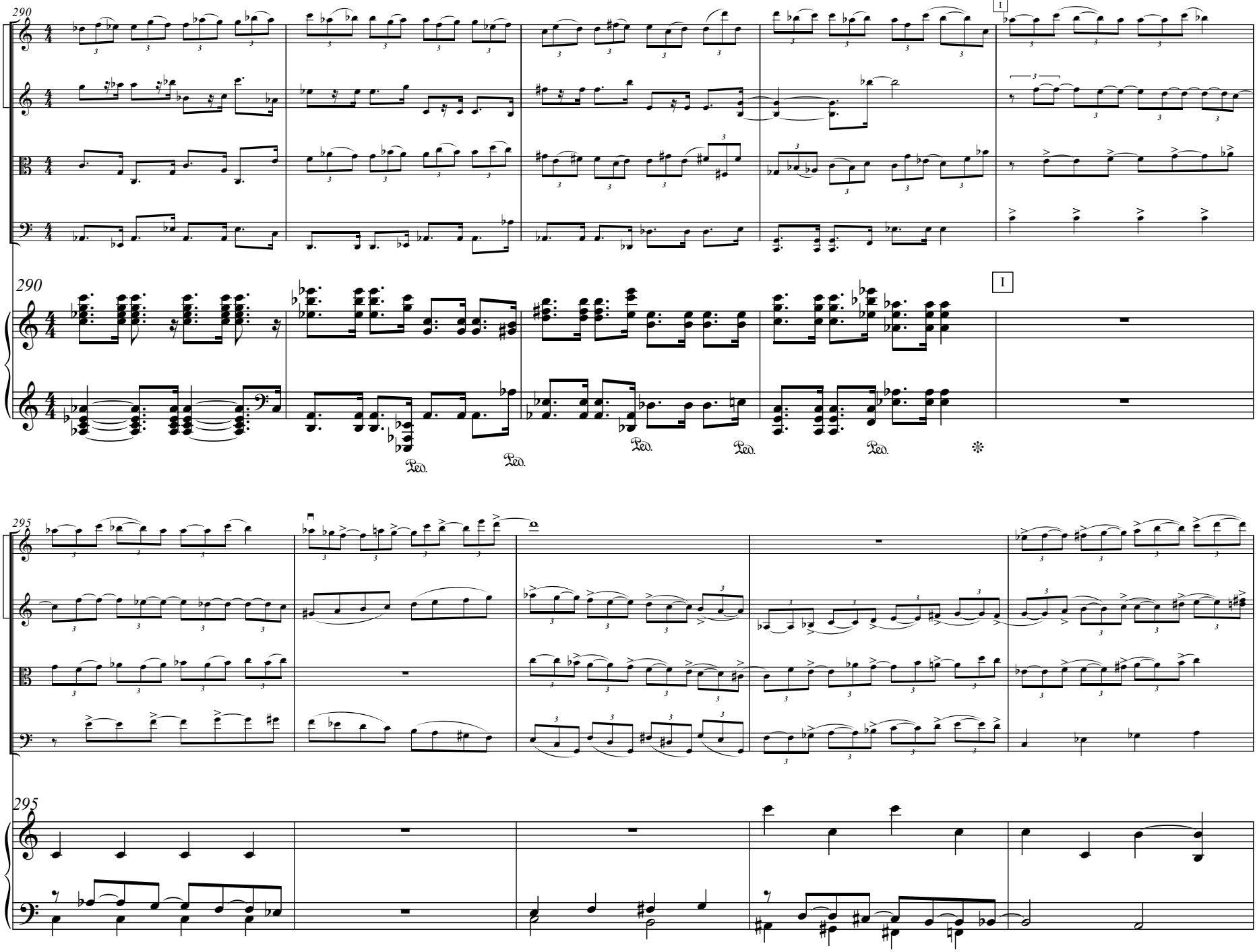

223
E
mp cresc.
(mf)
f
ff
p cresc.
(mp)
mf
8va
8vb
229
ben marcato

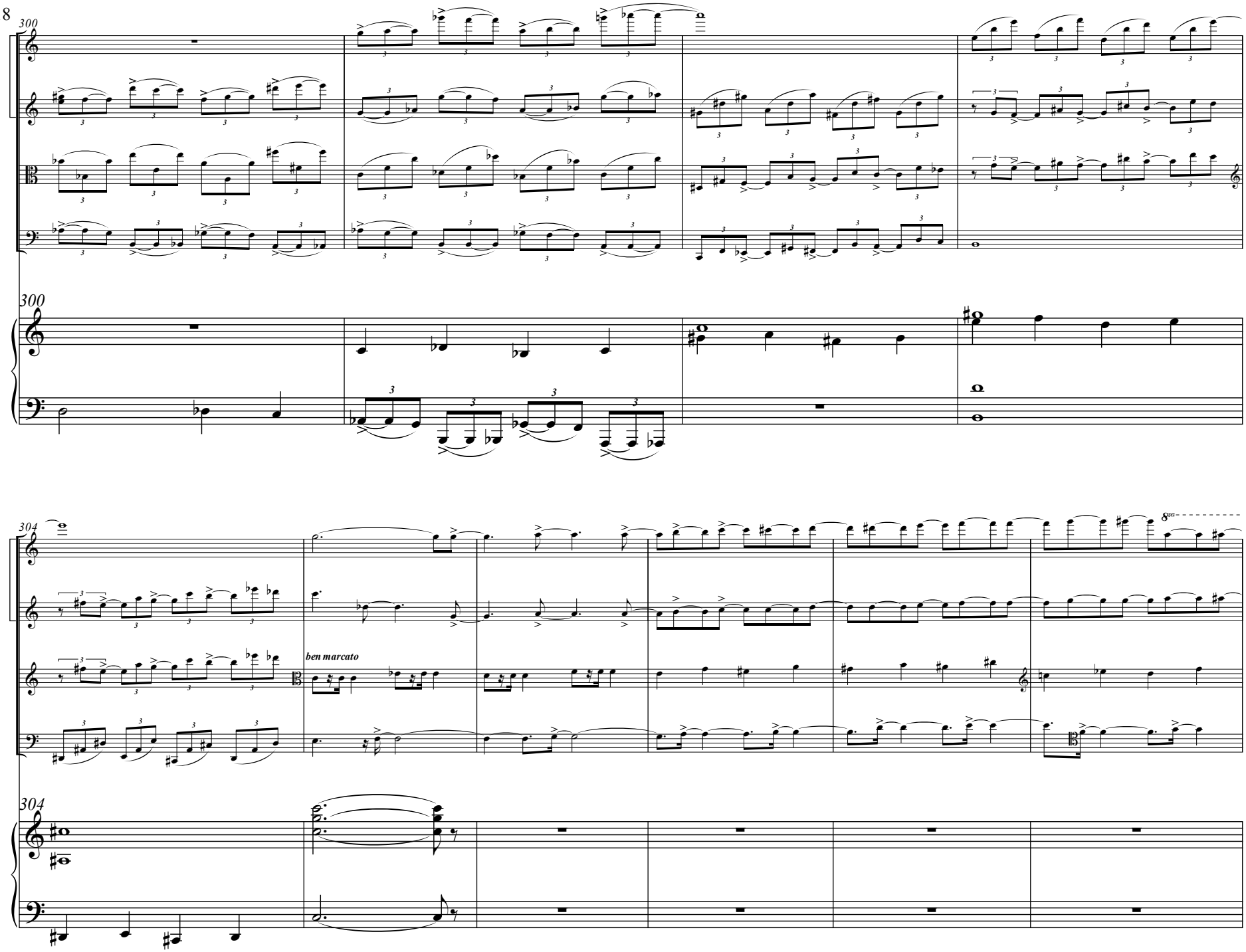

236
236
8va
242
F
ff
ff
242
F
ff

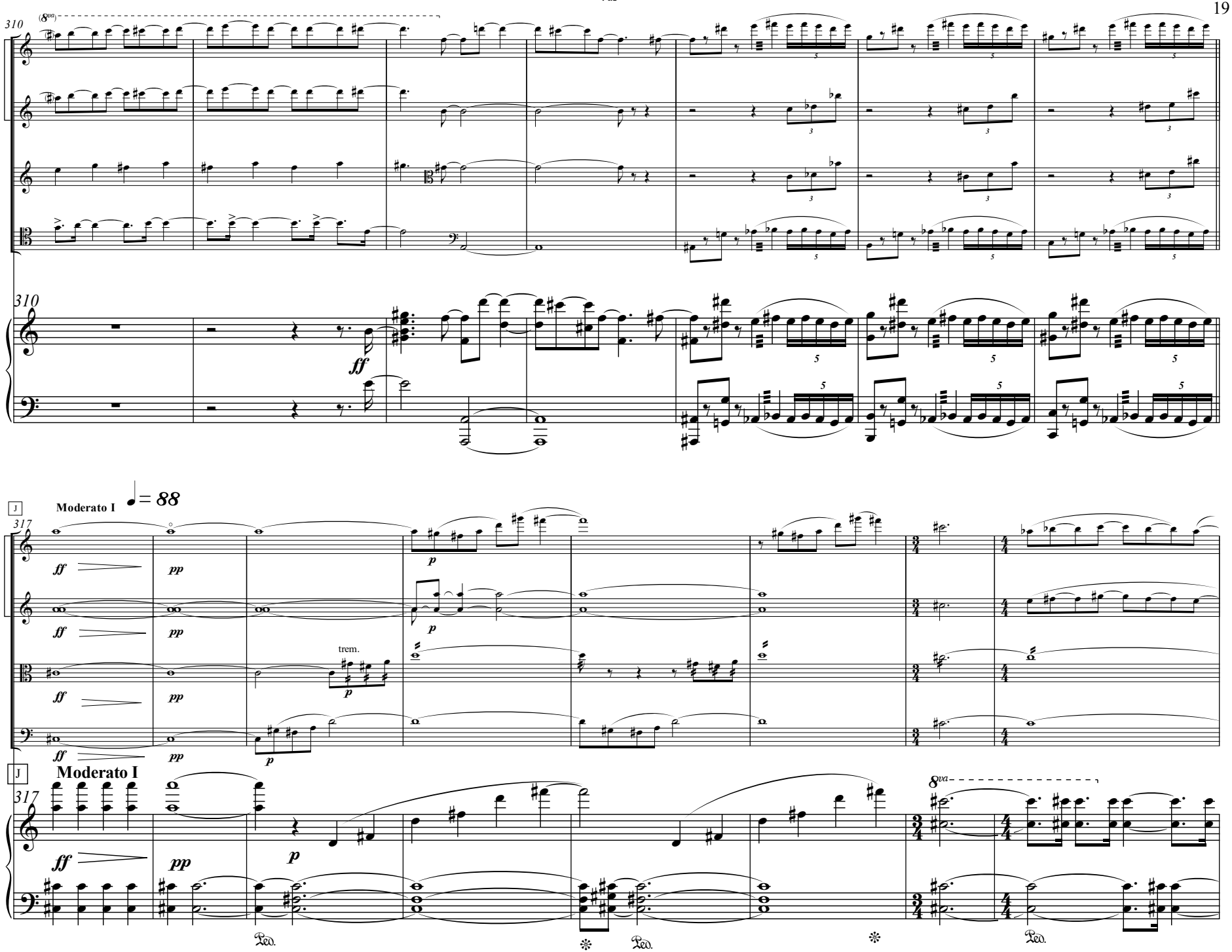

247
247
252
252
G
Largo
pp
pp
pp
pp
G
Largo
= 40


260
pp
pizz.
p
260
p
273
p
p
arco
273
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.


278
H Allegro bigga fuga
mp
p
H Allegro bigga fuga
♩= 120
Ped.
283
ff
8va
6


290
I
290
I
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
295
295


300
300
304
304
ben marcato
8va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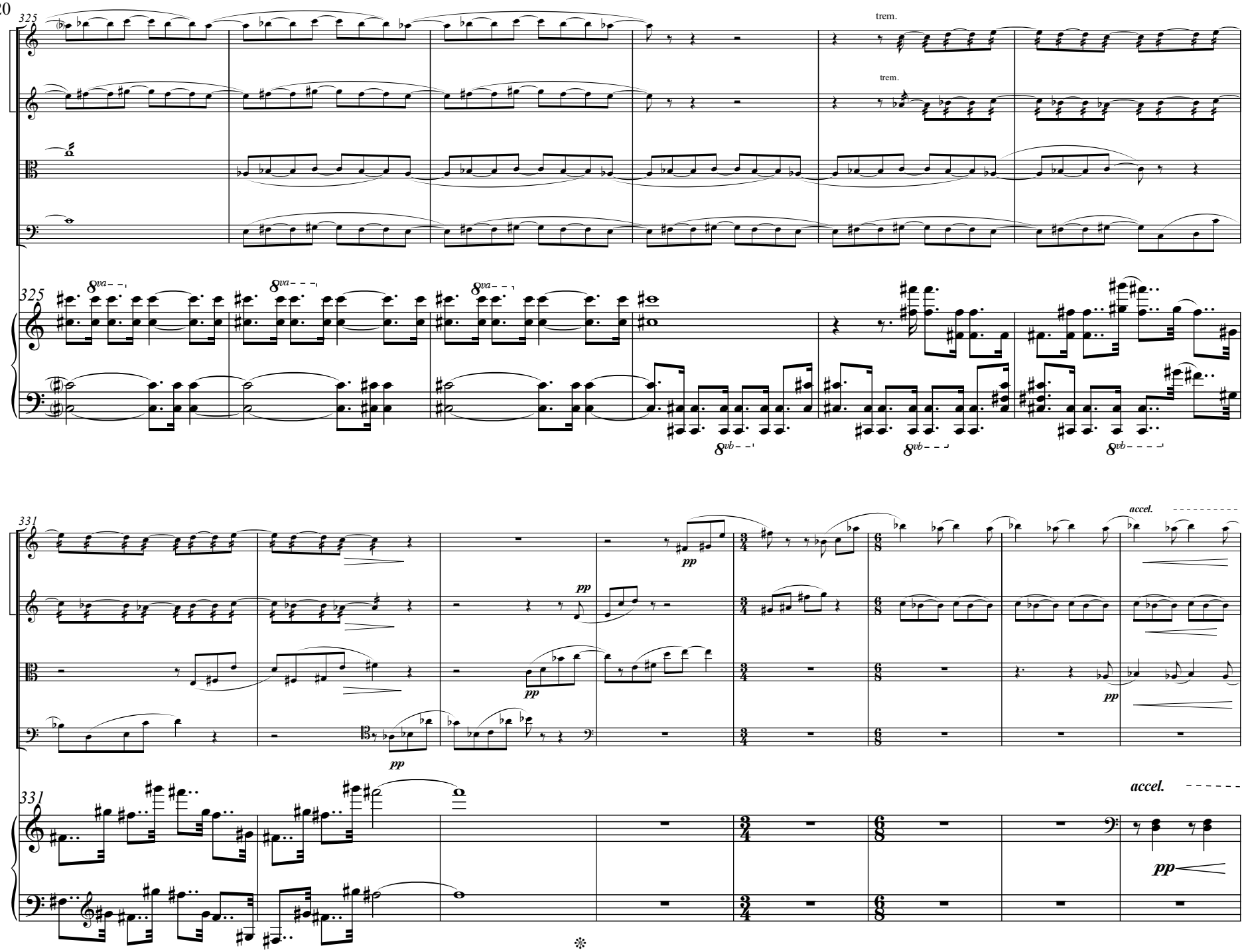
(8va)
ff
Moderato I
♩= 88
317
pp
p
trem.
Ped.
8va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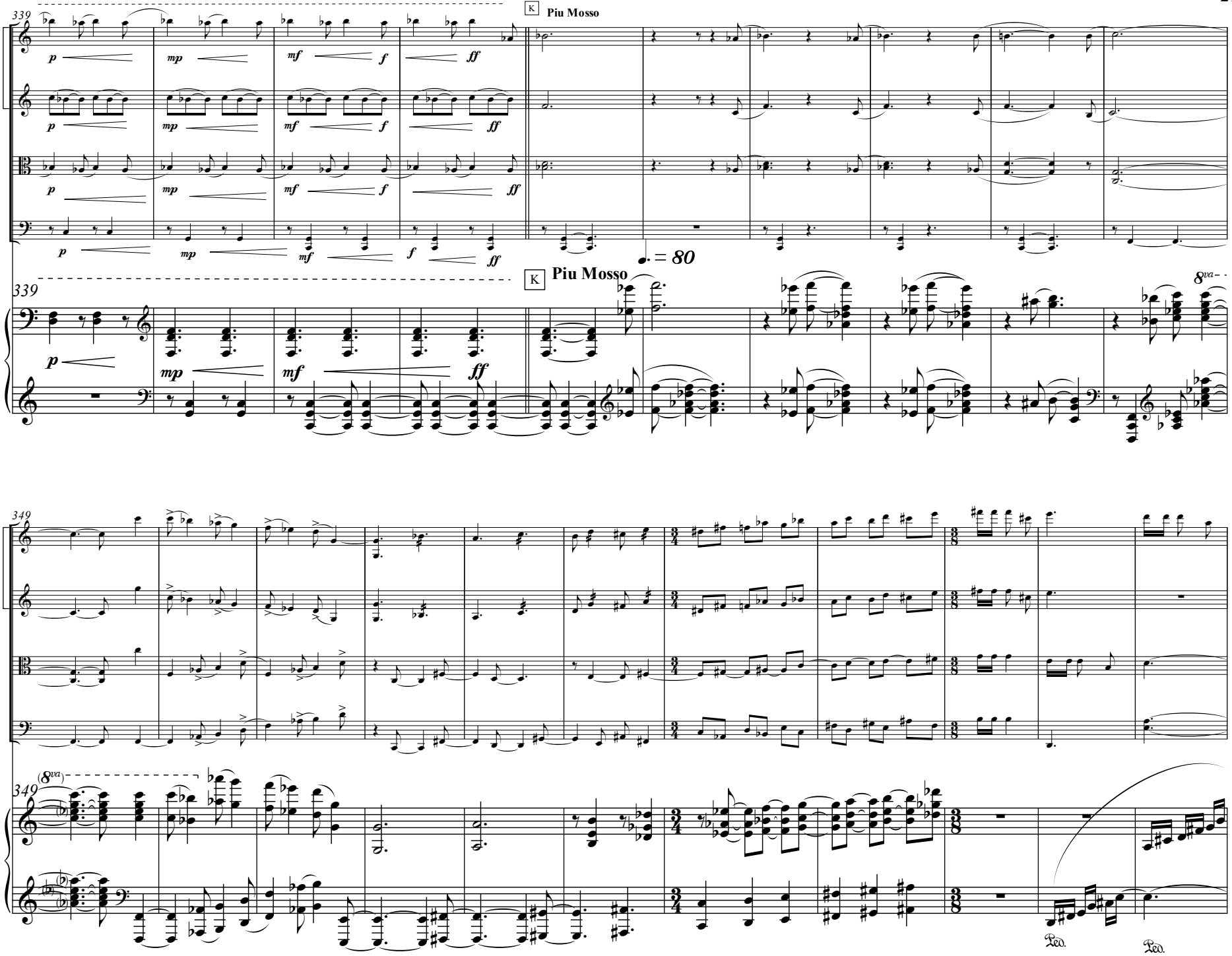
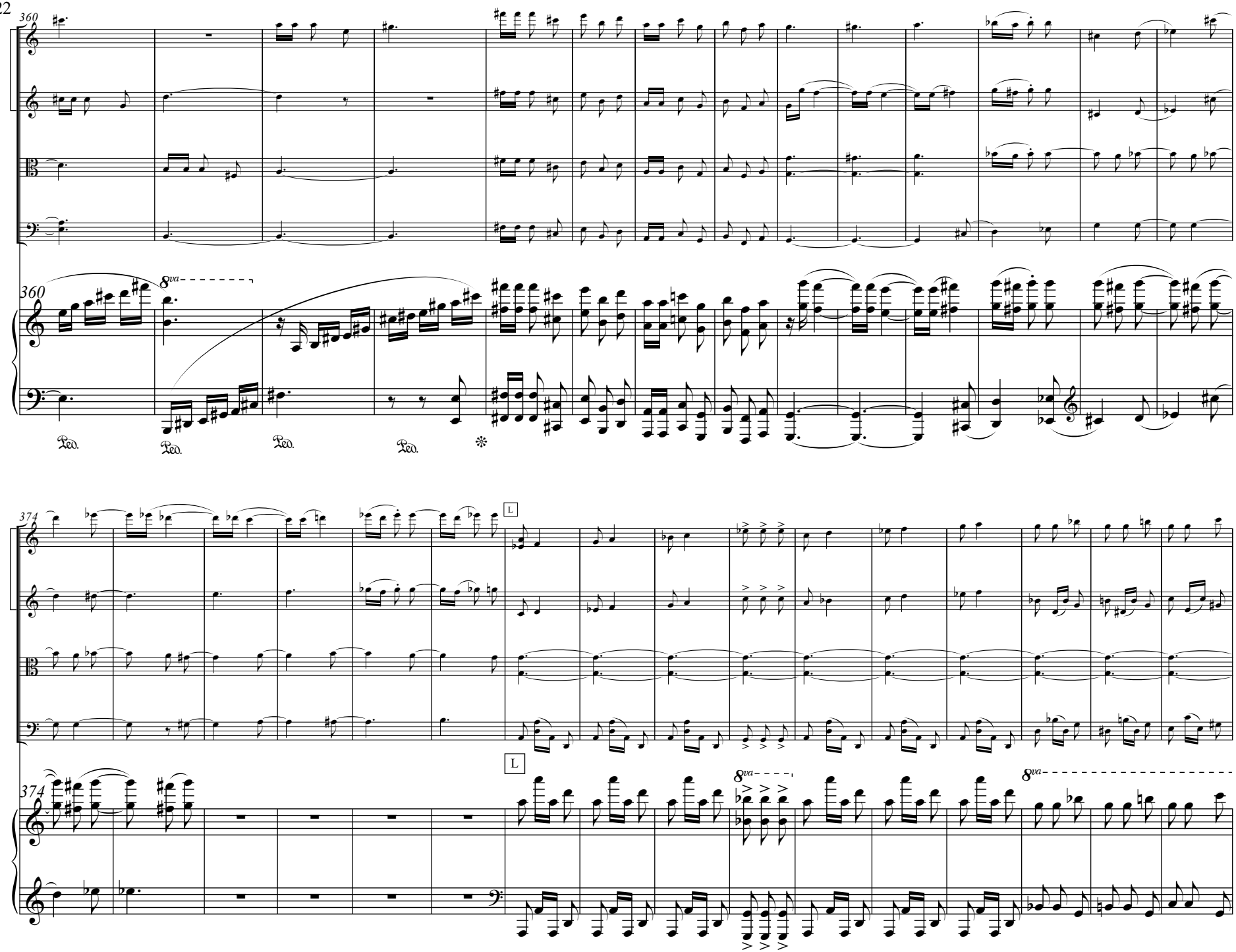
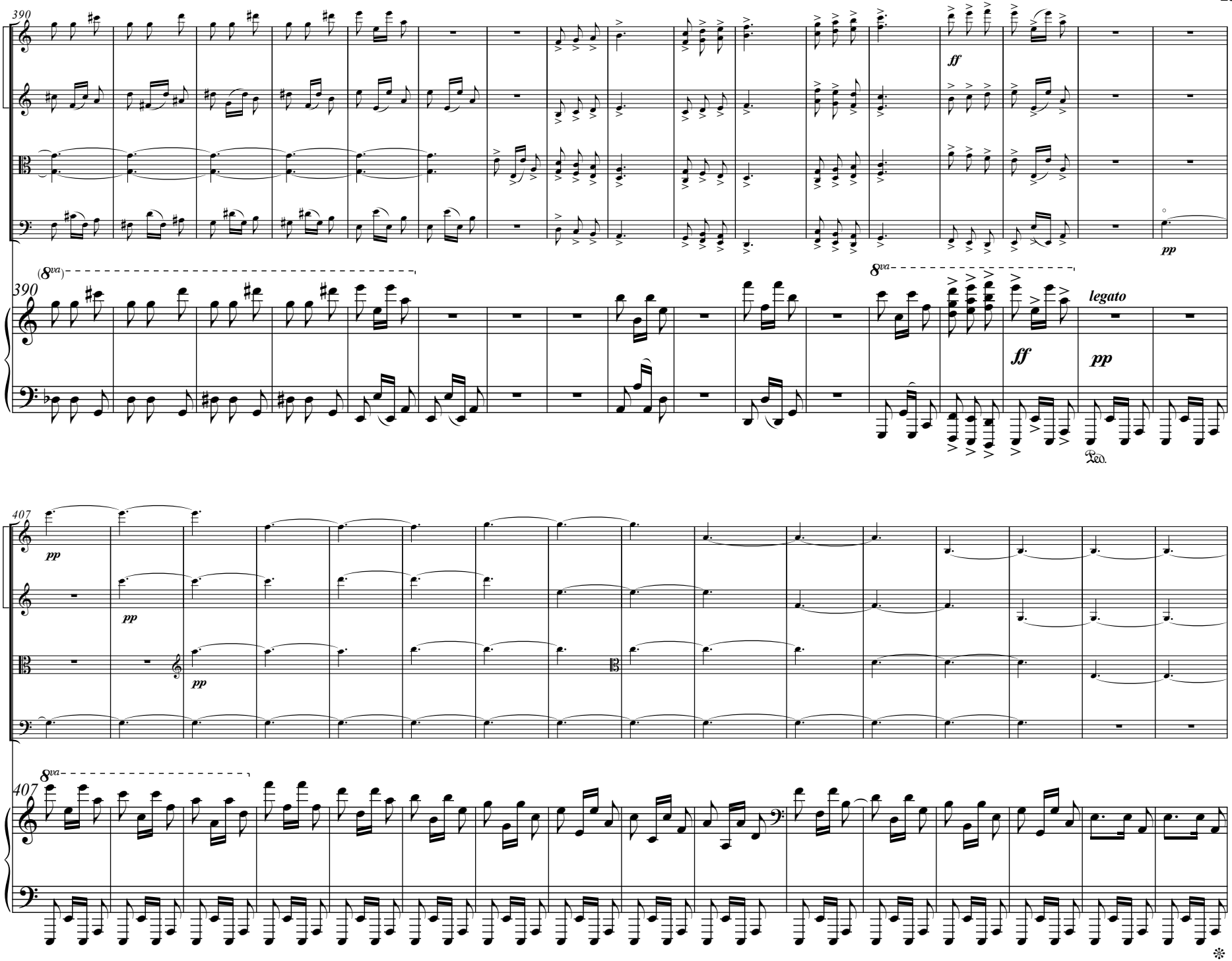
trem.
trem.
8va
8va
8va
8vb
8vb
8vb
331
pp
pp
pp
pp
accel.
accel.
331
pp


339
K
Piu Mosso
p
mp
mf
f
ff
339
K
Piu Mosso
= 80
8va
349
(8va)
349
Ped.
Ped.


360
8va
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
374
L
L
8va
8va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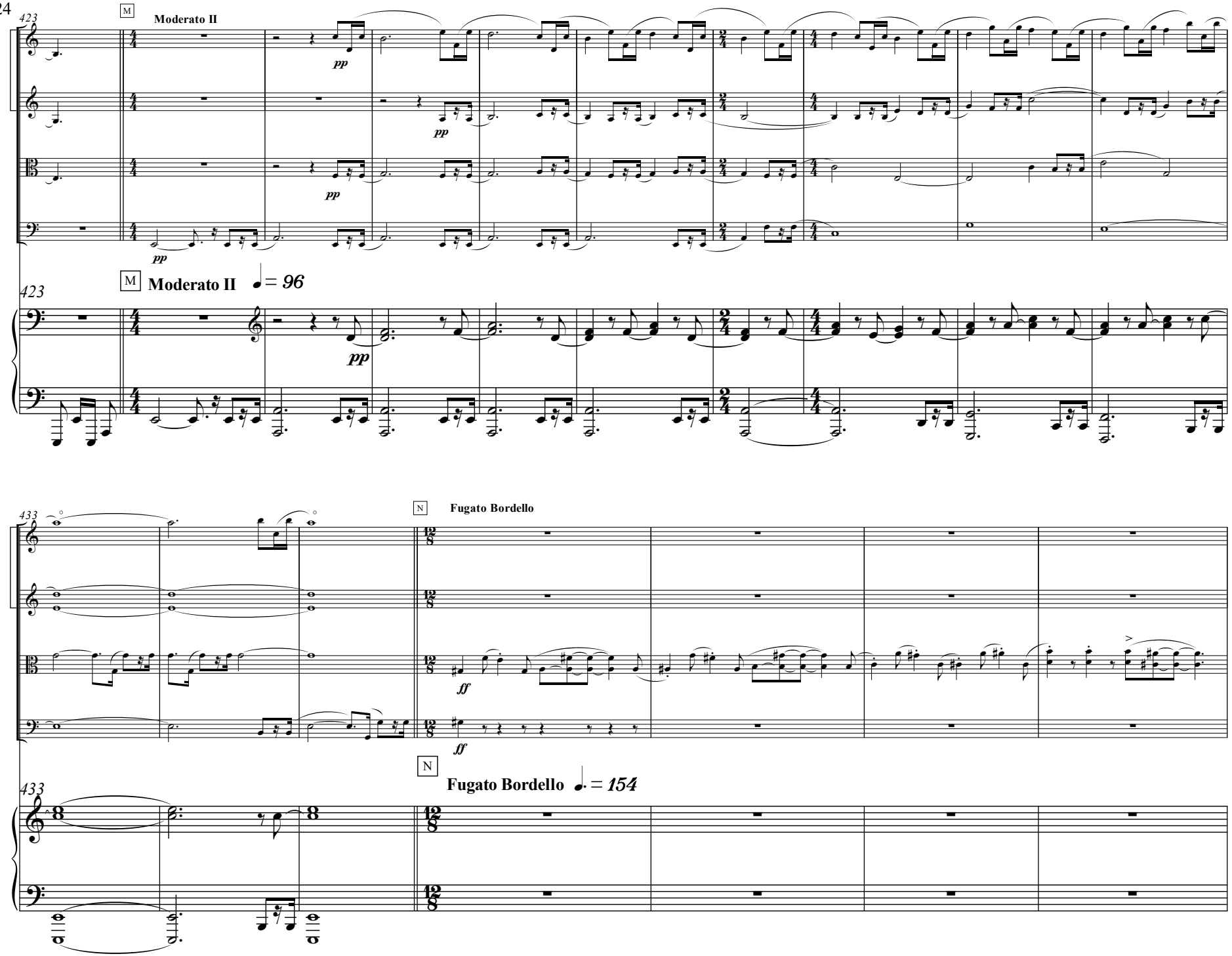
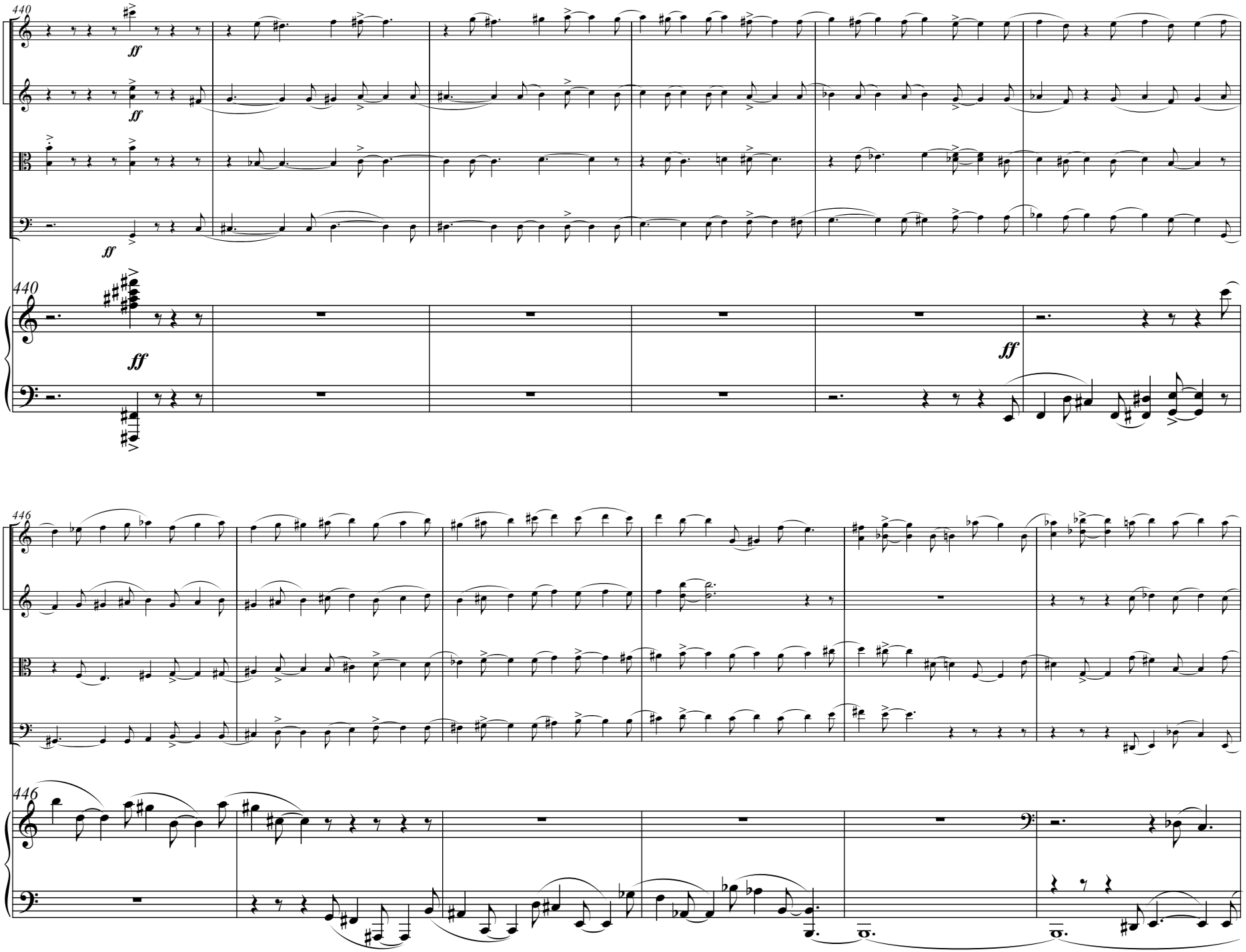
ff
pp
(8va)
8va
legato
Ped.
407
pp
8va


423
M
Moderato II
pp
M
Moderato II
= 96
433
N
Fugato Bordello
ff
N
Fugato Bordello
= 154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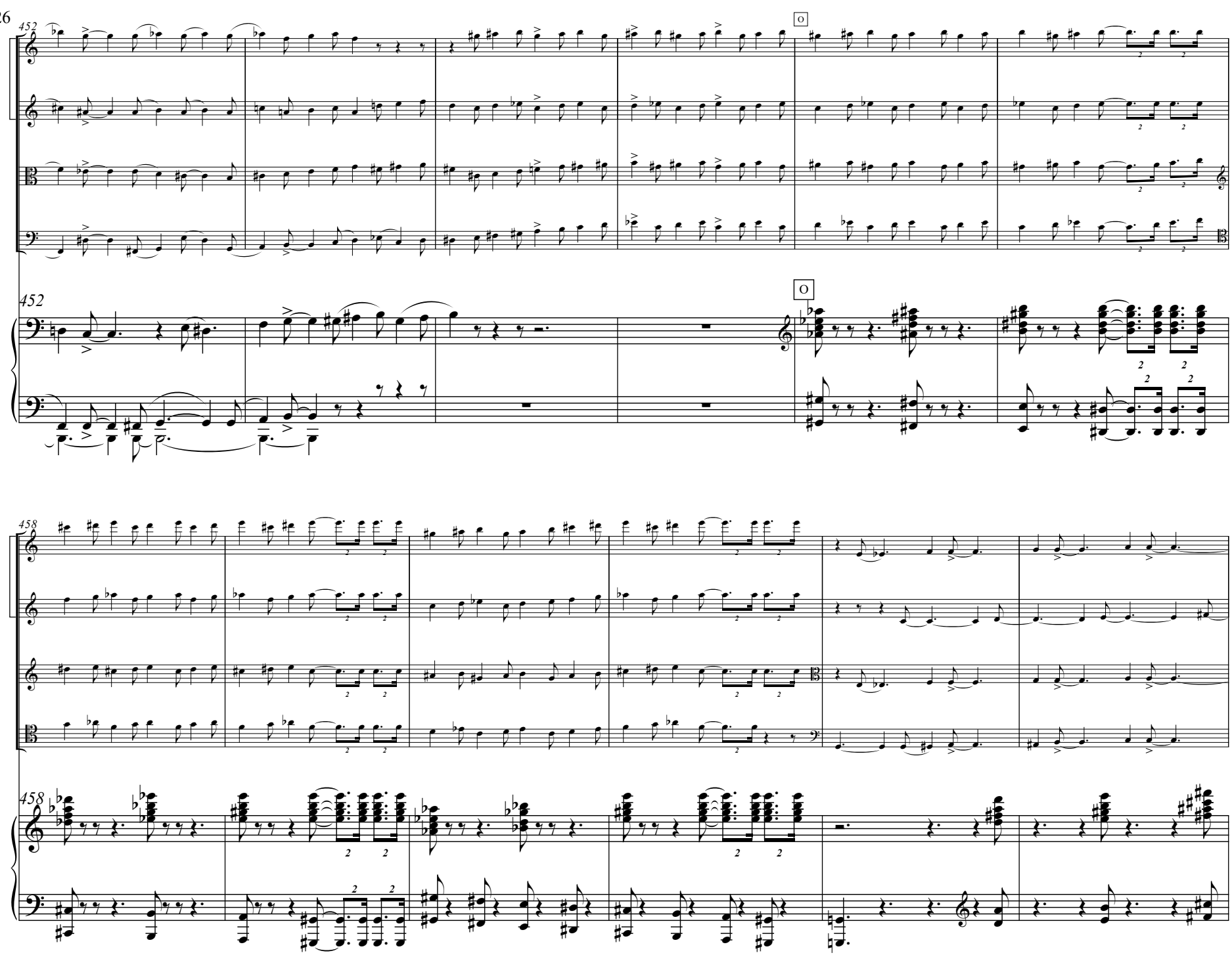
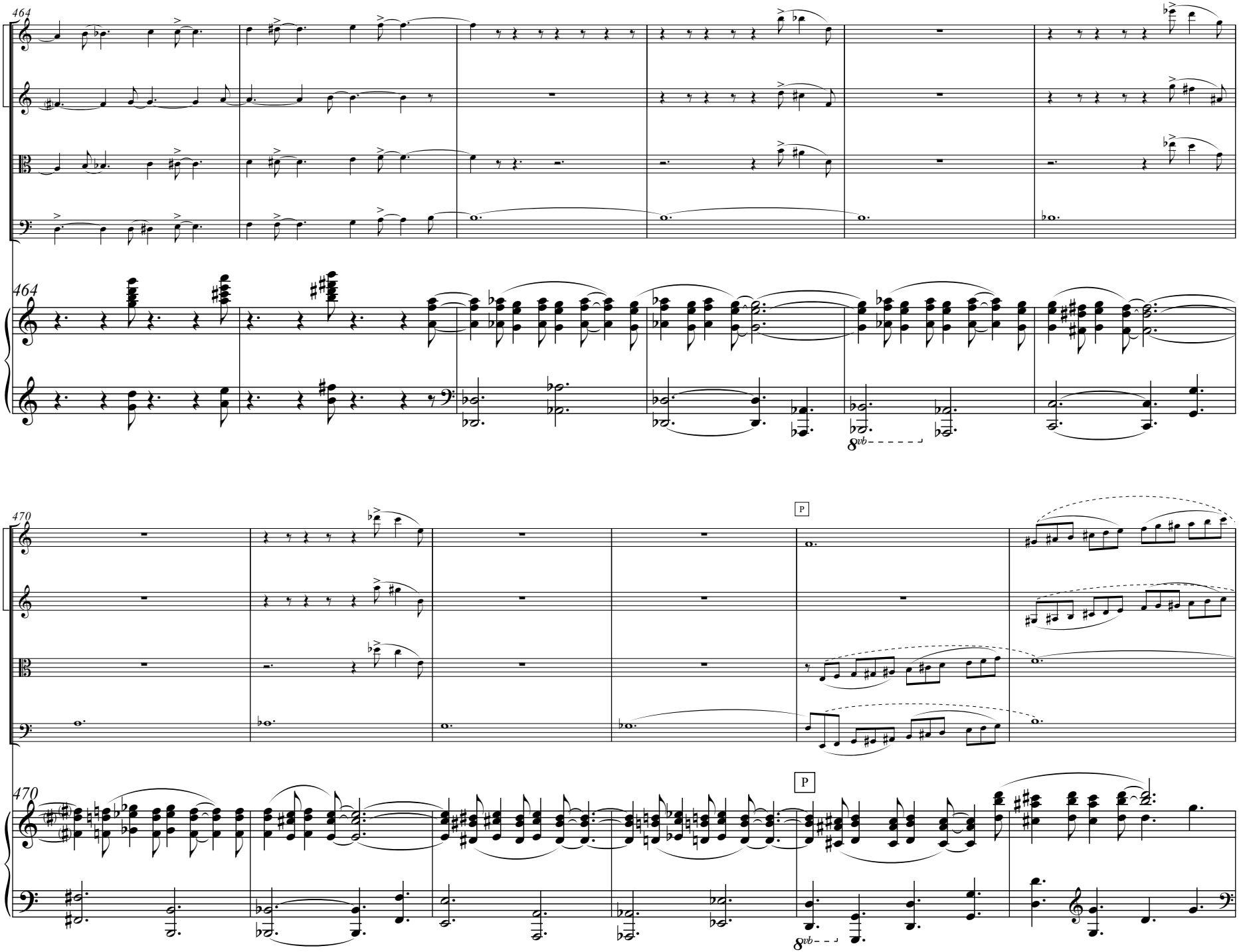
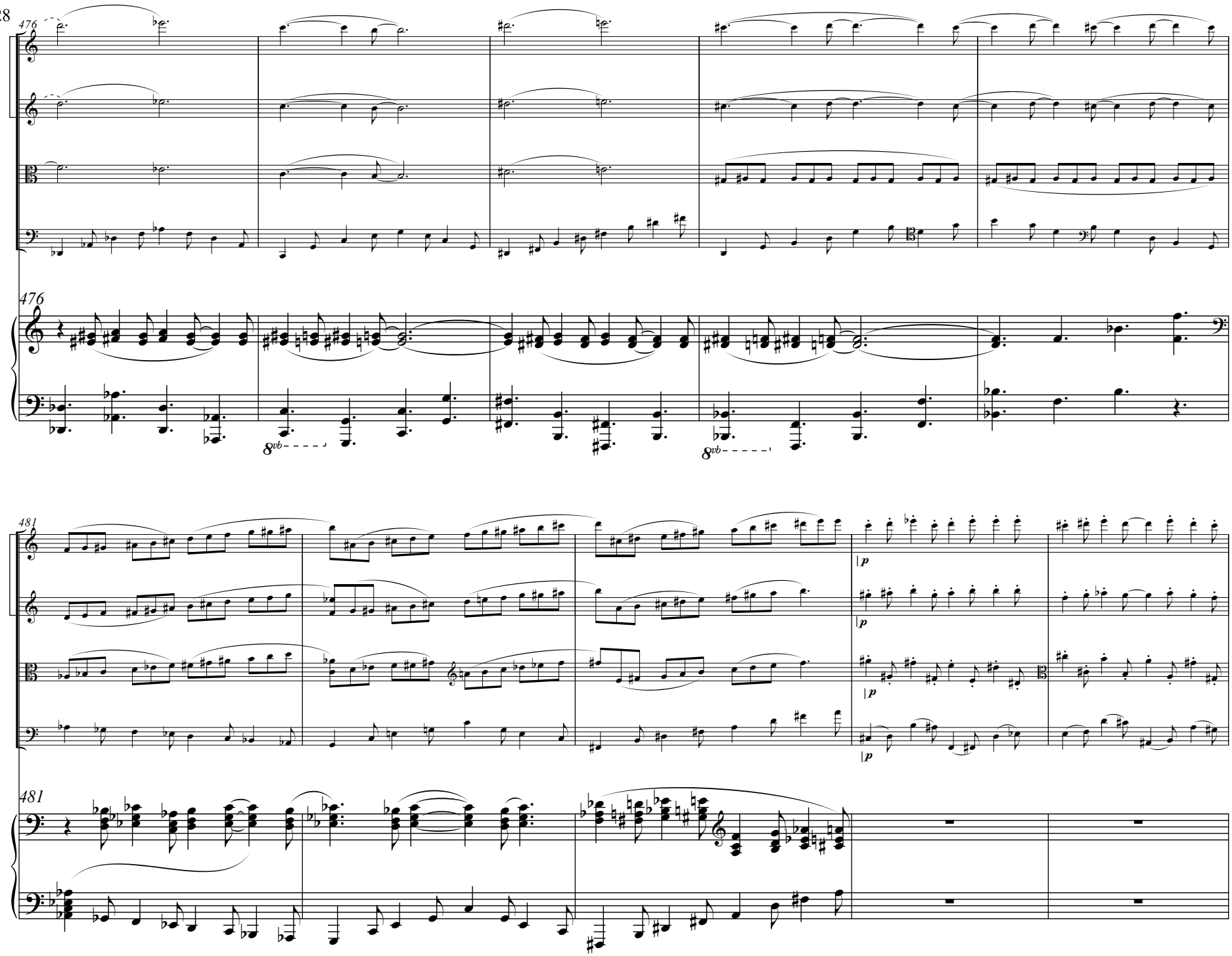
ff
446


VGF
452
O
452
O
458
458


464
464
8vb
470
P
470
P
8vb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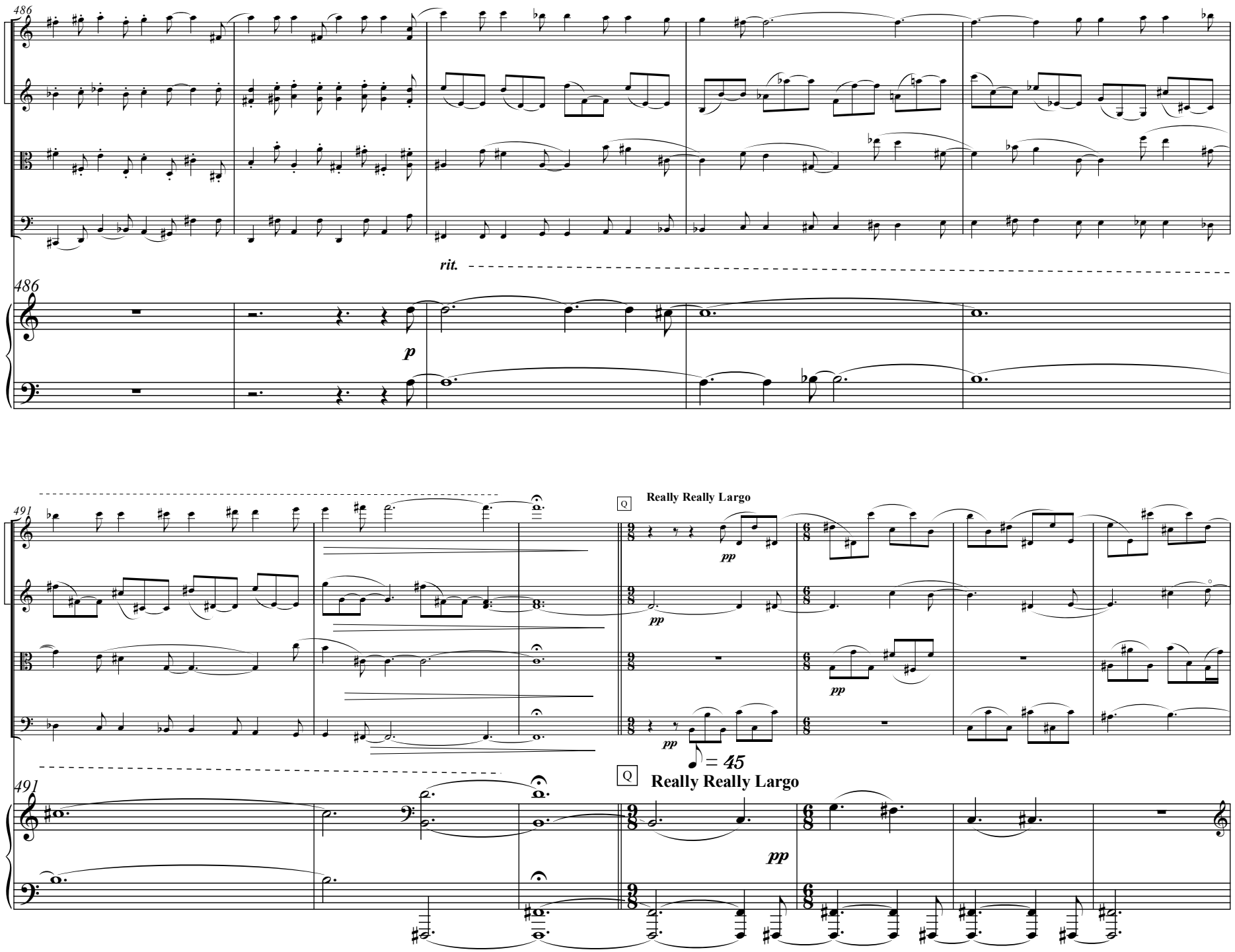
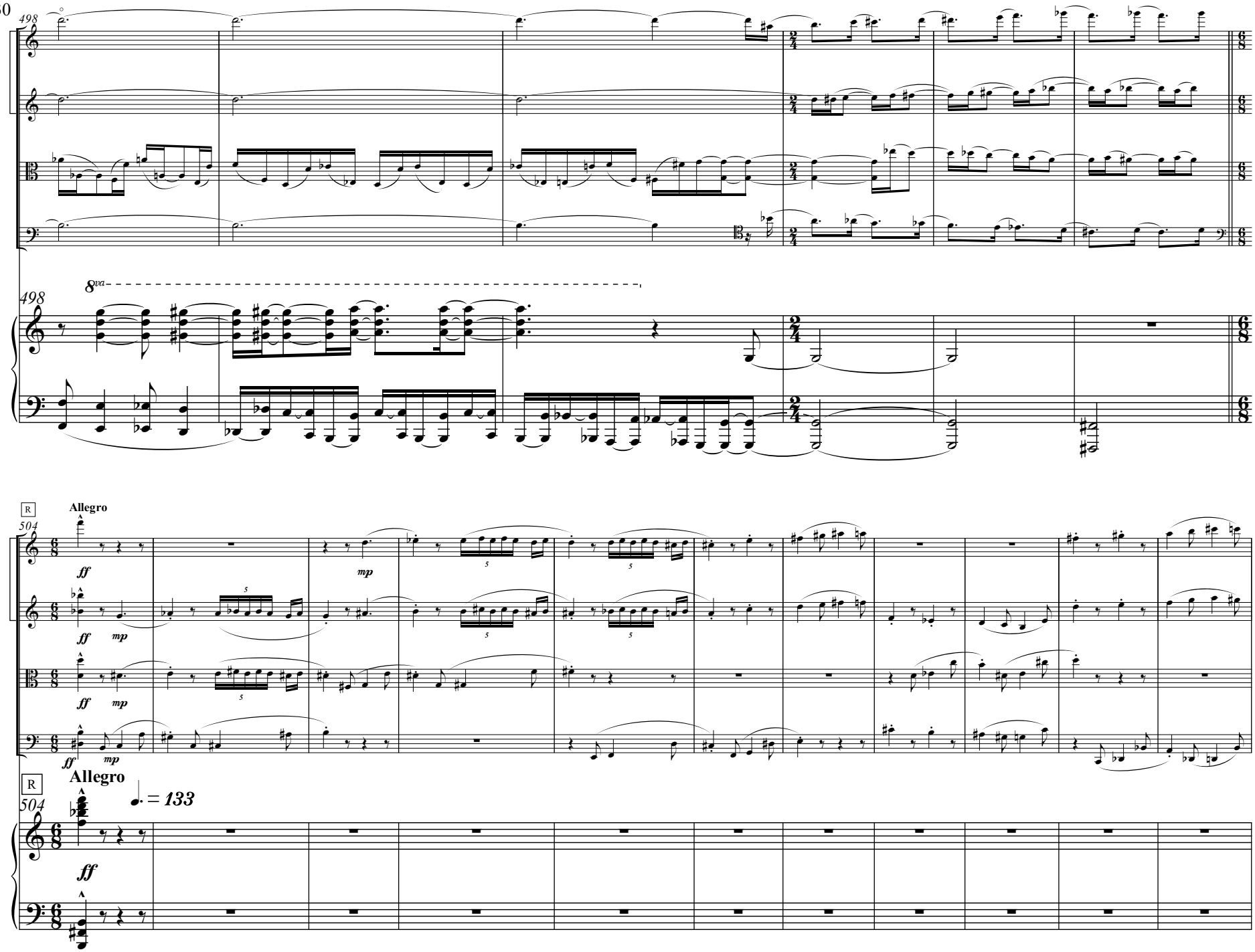
476
8vb
8vb
481
481
p
p
p
p


rit.
486
rit.
p
491
Q
Really Really Largo
pp
= 45
Q
Really Really Largo
pp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8va
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R
504
Allegro
ff
mp
R
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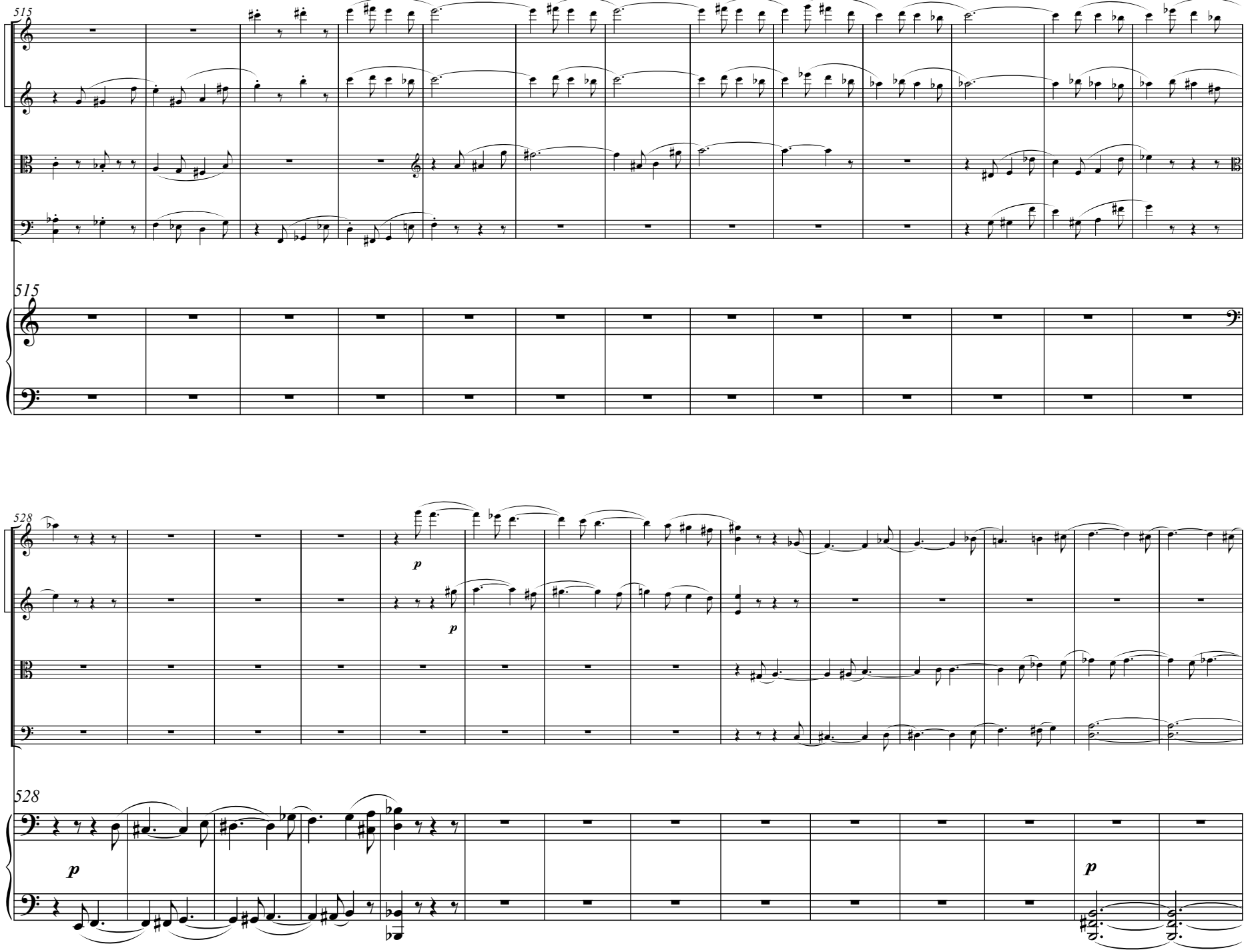
♩. = 133
ff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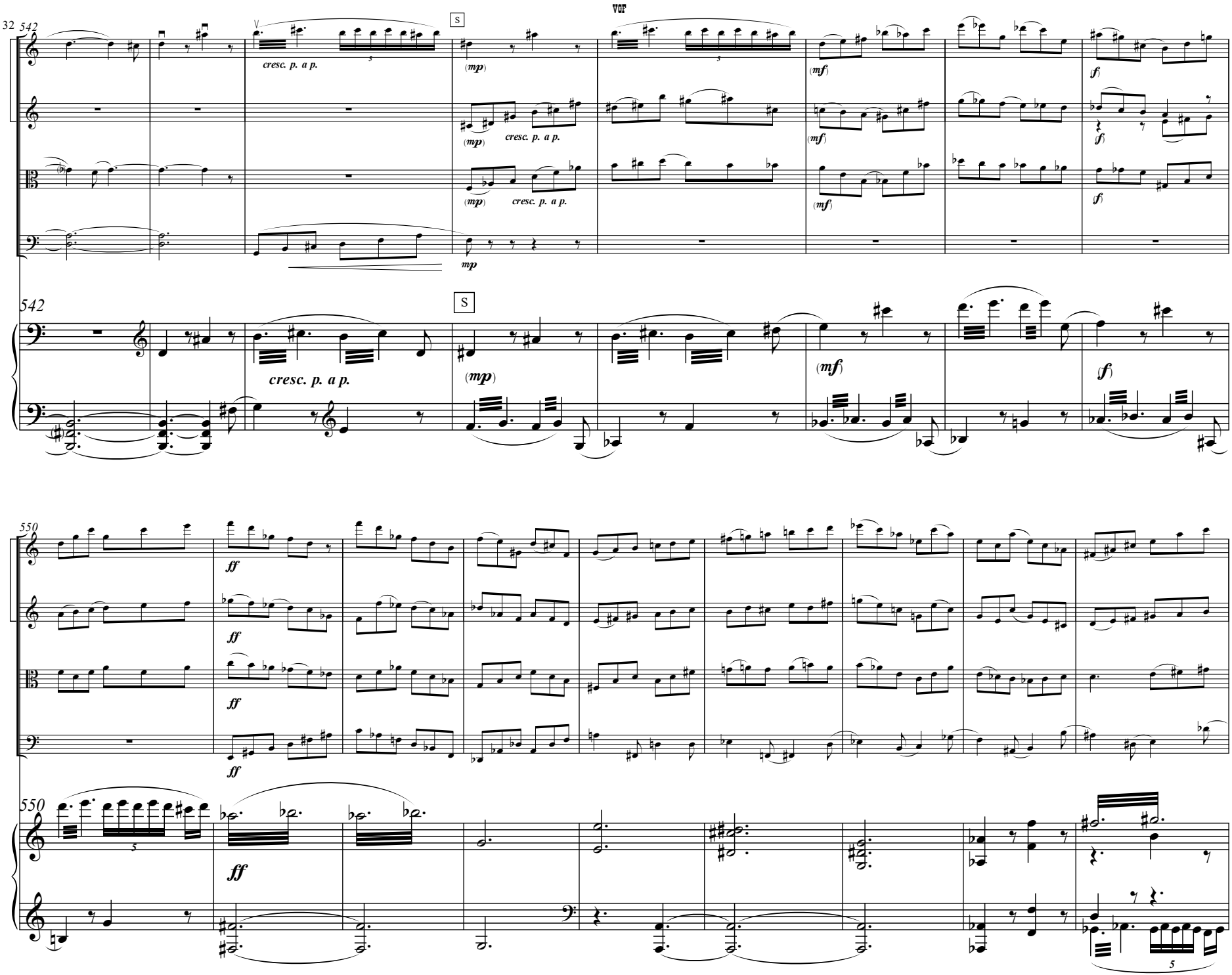
528
528
p
p
p
p


542
S
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
(mf)
(f)
mp
542
S
cresc. p. a p.
(mp)
(mf)
(f)
550
ff
550
ff

559

559

Big Slow Ending

566

566 Big Slow Ending ♩= 60