Quartet for the Beginning of a Time

David Rosenboom

(for creative string quartet)

written for

Isaura String Quartet

2019

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Program Note

Quartet for the Beginning of a Time is about a time collapsing and a time emerging, a contemplation about the nature of change in the evolution of life, our lives, and our times.

Performing Instructions

Apply expressive and creativity sensibility to the elasticity of phrasing and bowing in all parts. Accidentals carry through each bar for the octave in which they are first introduced. Courtesy accidentals are added in a few places.

Notations enclosed within brackets, [ ], showing notes without stems, are to be interpreted creatively in their own individual times, against the regular time progression of the synchronized standard notations, but executed within the duration of the regular time frame encompassed by the brackets. Notes with harmonic articulation symbols enclosed in brackets, [ ], between rehearsal numbers (2) and (4) are only examples. In these places, players are to improvise a free array of any/all natural harmonics in any order on the open string indicated.

Sections marked **CS1** through **CS12** present *configuration spaces* of possibilities for the quartet together and for each performer individually. In those that contain staff lines, the quartet moves forward as a group. In those without staff lines, each player may move among a field of notation symbols individually. These notations mark possible events and relations among events that will be manifested as each player finds and chooses their own pathway through them. The general motion is forward in time from left to right. The time devoted to each configuration space is approximately 22 - 23 seconds. The temporal position and relative time lengths of notations are proportional to their graphical position and the space they occupy.

In configuration spaces **CS1** and **CS2** players execute fast intense improvisations with each three-note group enclosed by brackets, [ ]. The quartet moves from each group to the next together.

Configuration space **CS3** involves a *moving window improvisation*. Each player superimposes a window over their line enclosing three notes at a time. They improvise with these three notes vigorously. Gradually, but not too slowly, the window slides forward. As it moves, notes are dropped out and new notes are added. The window moves forward within the time frame of the notation system. Spacing between notes indicates relative temporal density.

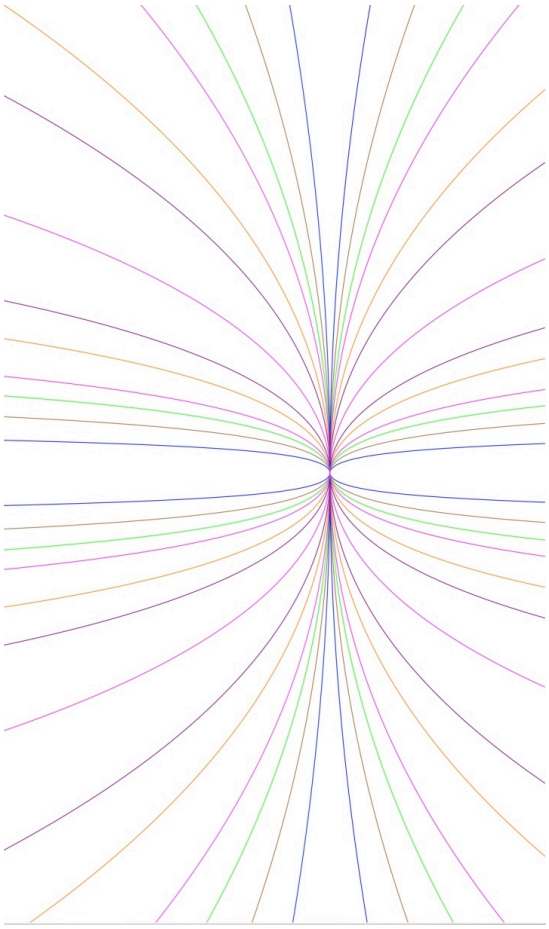
Configuration spaces **CS4**, **CS5**, **CS6**, **CS7**, **CS9**, **CS10**, and **CS11** present fields of special notation symbols. Players may move among these symbols individually as described above, with a general time progression mapped on the horizontal axis from left to right, and relatively low to relatively high frequencies mapped on the vertical axis. The meanings of the non-standard symbols are described in a legend. In **CS12**, players move forward synchronously.

When players reach the end of configuration space **CS7**, at the end of a long diminuendo, they suddenly freeze their positions, with bows held on strings, motionless. The intention is that all sound disappears suddenly, like light disappearing at the horizon of a black hole, and motion is not perceivable. Players hold their positions as indicated in the space marked **CS8**. Then, a sudden, very loud, snap pizzicato on open G strings marks the collapse of a time and a time emerging. Players instantly freeze their positions again, with bows back on strings, until configuration space **CS9** begins. In order to avoid the audience presuming that the piece has ended during **CS8**, players must use their theatrical skills to hold the audience's attention fixed on them during the black silences.

Note on Form

Musical parameters in *Quartet for the Beginning of a Time* follow the forms of sets of catenaries—curves formed by gravity when flexible cords hang freely from pairs of fixed points—laid on their sides horizontally along a progression of emerging time. The amounts of space between pairs of sides of various catenaries are related to degrees of diffuseness or clarity applied to particular musical parameters: clarity of tonal reference dissolving into atonal fields and re-emerging later, clarity of perceivable pitch evolving into and out of relatively non-pitched sounds, independence versus synchronicity among players, relational simultaneities, temporal densities and speeds, and shifting *complexodynamics* of simple versus compound time forms and melodic shapes. When an initial set of closing catenary curves reaches a dense horizon, ahead of a point where they meet at a common center of gravitational focus, sounds and motion stop suddenly. A short, loud sound marks the singular point, φ, where the set of closing catenaries and a set of reopening catenaries touch. Sounds and motion remain imperceptible briefly until they re-emerge after the opening catenary curves cross another density horizon. These expanding curves guide musical forms that articulate a new time. An endlessly rising harmonic progression leads into and out of this process, linking back to the complex dynamics of human interactions within an evolving universe.

φ
↓

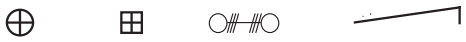


Legend for Non-Standard Notations

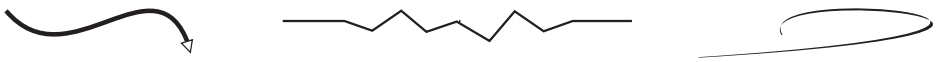
Quartet for the Beginning of a Time

Symbols for the onsets of sounds. Circles represent sounds that are relatively gentle in nature. Squares are for sounds that may be more harsh. The degree to which a circle or square is filled in with black correlates to the relative sharpness of a sound's onset or attack.

Symbols for increasing or decreasing aspects of a sound's timbre or other chosen acoustic qualities. These do not refer to loudness or pitch. Open triangles are for relatively subtle qualities. Solid black triangles are for degrees of more extreme changes.



Symbols for special effects particular to each player and their instrument. Circles are for relatively light effects. Squares are for stronger effects. Two circles with tremelo marks indicate rapid alteration of two effects. The partial triangle indicates increasing extremeness of sustained effects.



Curved lines with arrow heads indicate wide ranging, strong glissandi. Jagged line symbols are for relatively intense, sustained noise forms without percevable pitch identity. (Sounds produced with sawing motions of bow over-pressure may be one, though not the only, example of how to produce these.) Sweeping curved shapes are for bow swirls, quasi-circular, light (possibly sul tasto), motions on strings, while damping them to prevent any sense of pitch. These are used in relatively quiet sections.

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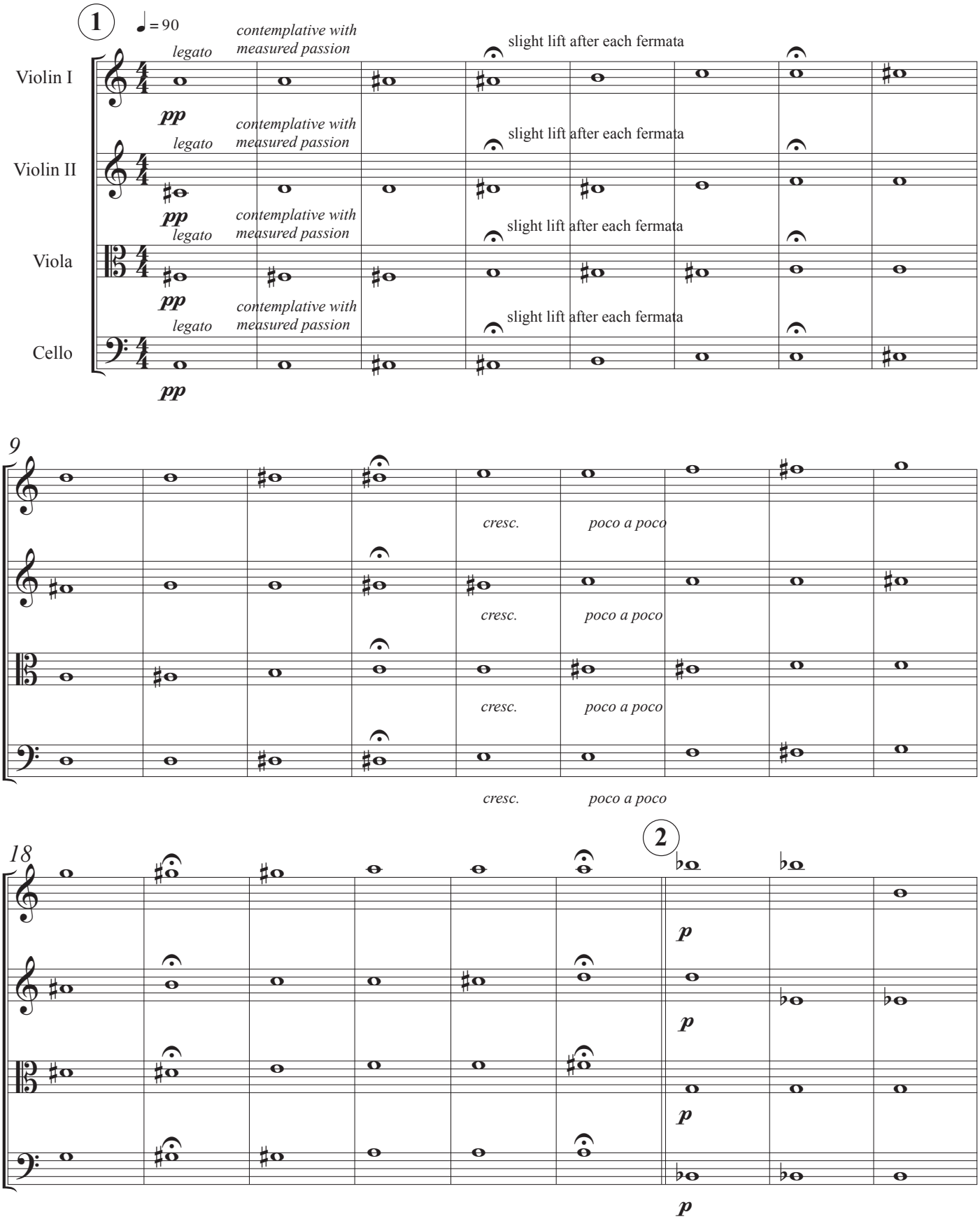
Score

Quartet for the Beginning of a Time

David Rosenboom



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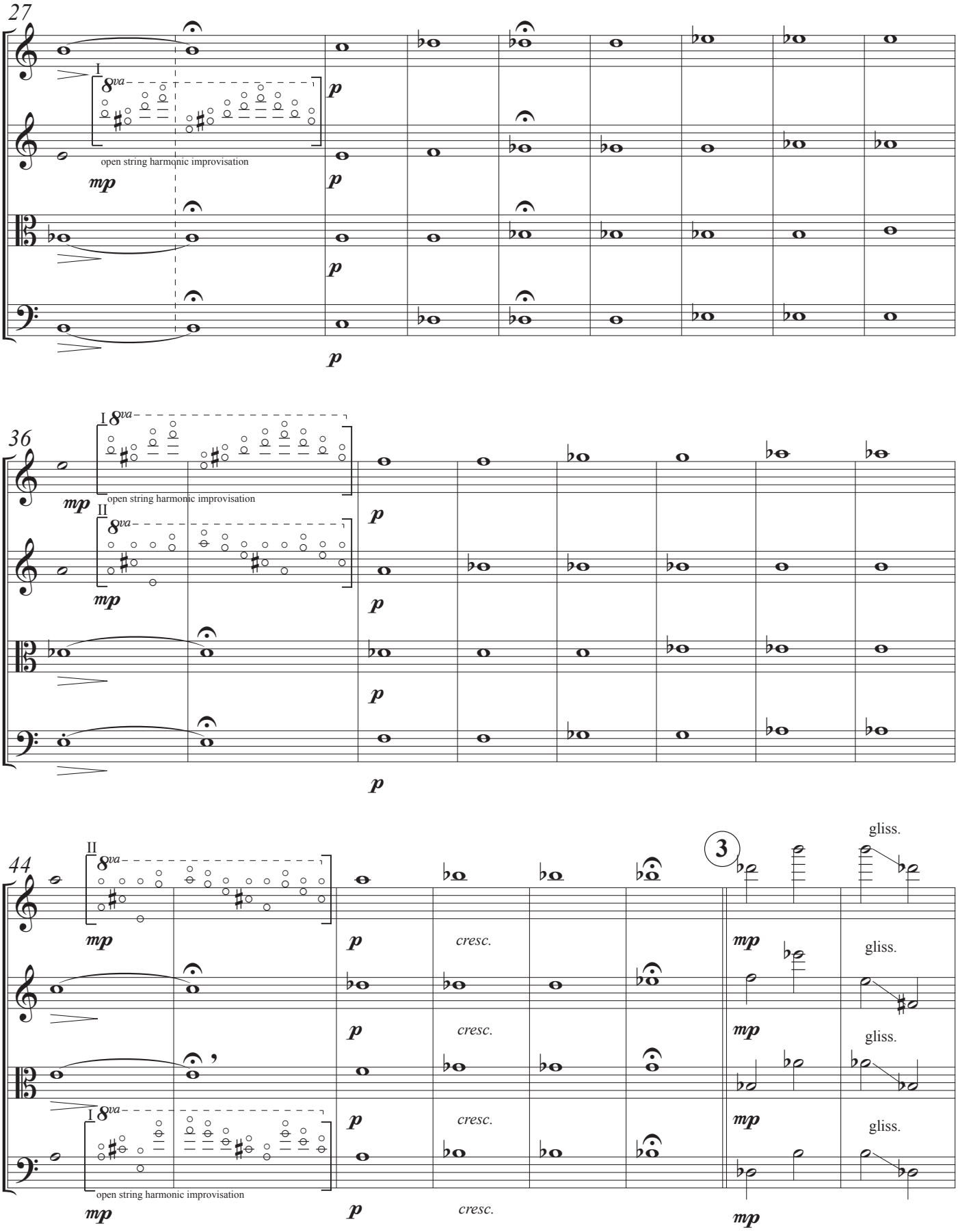
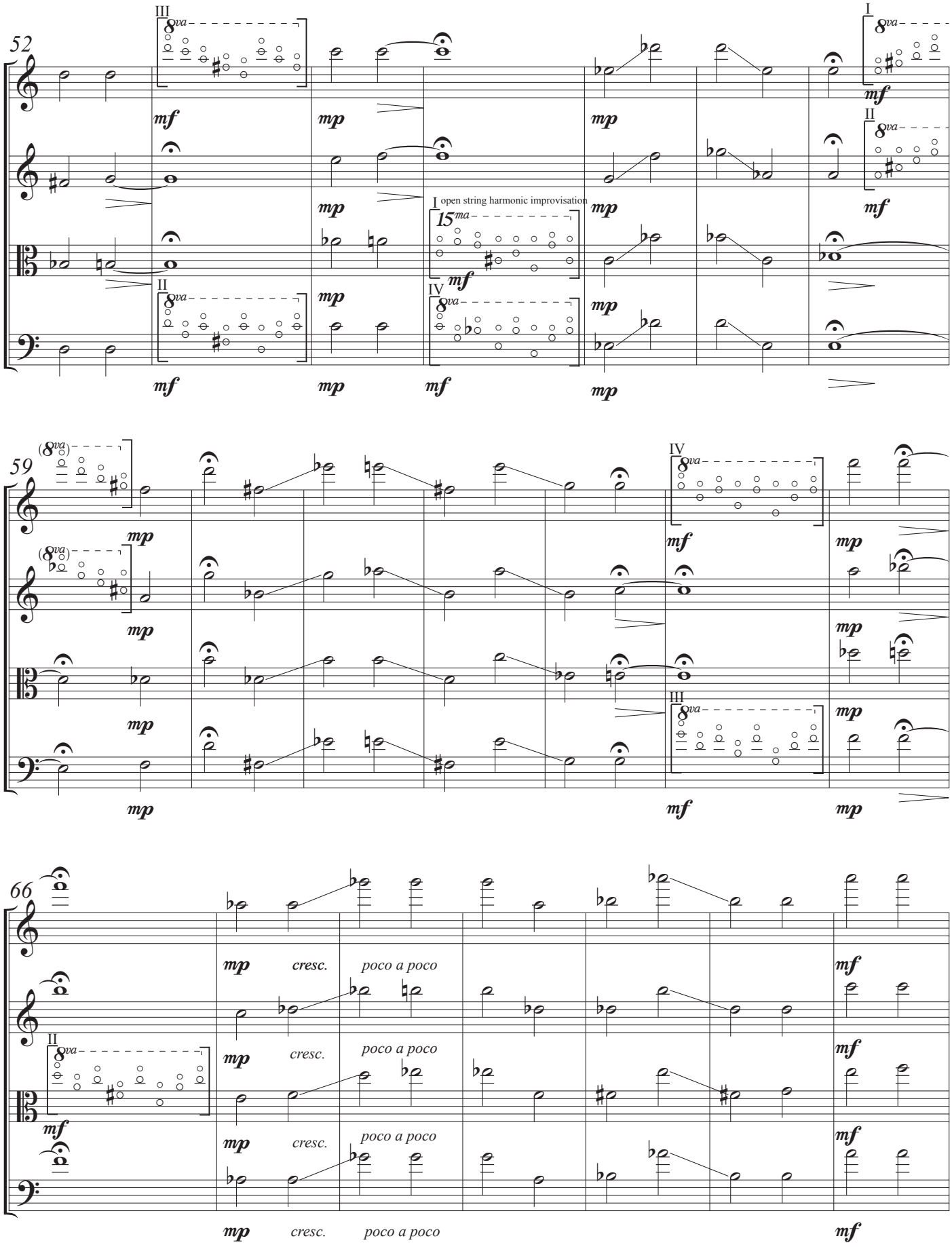
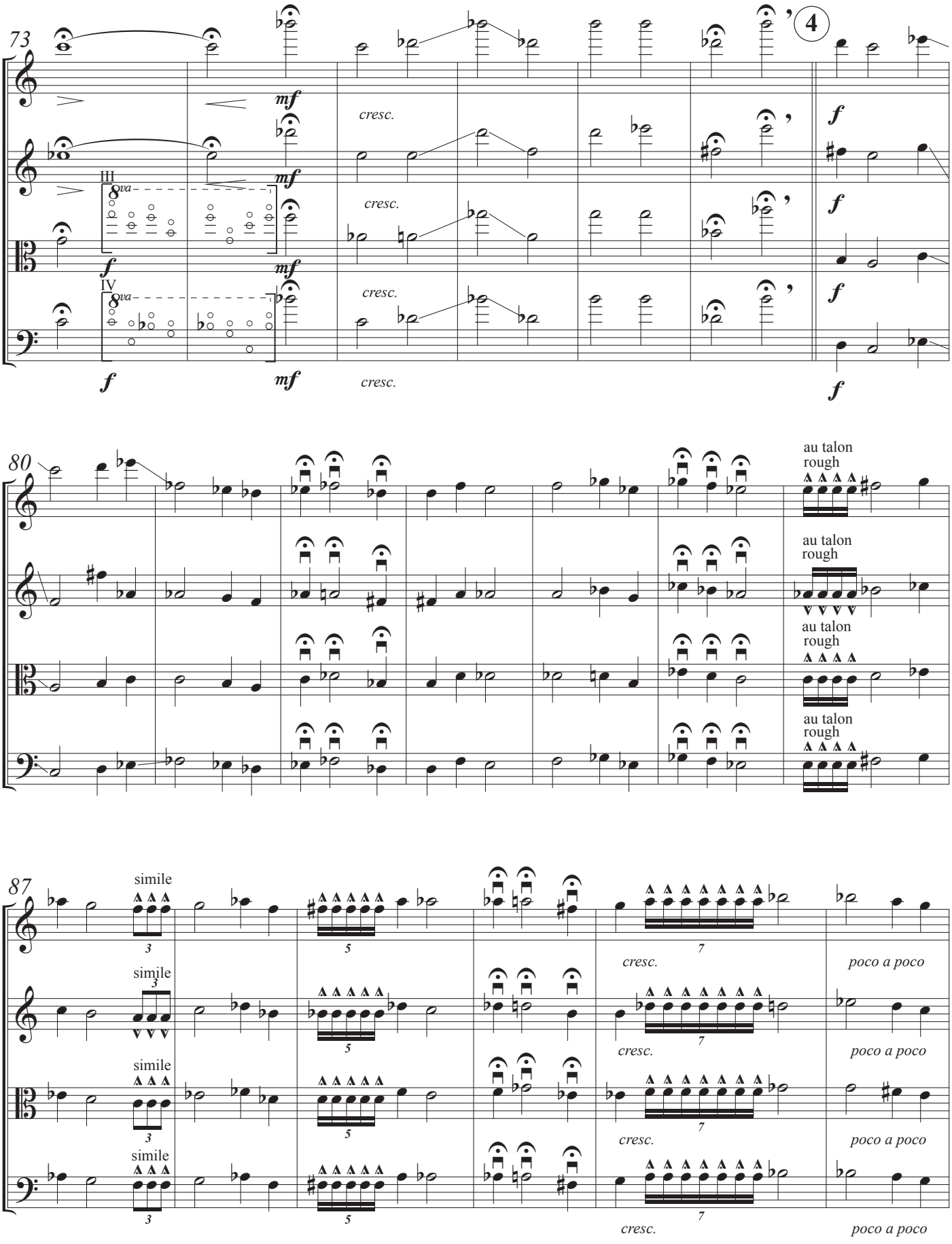
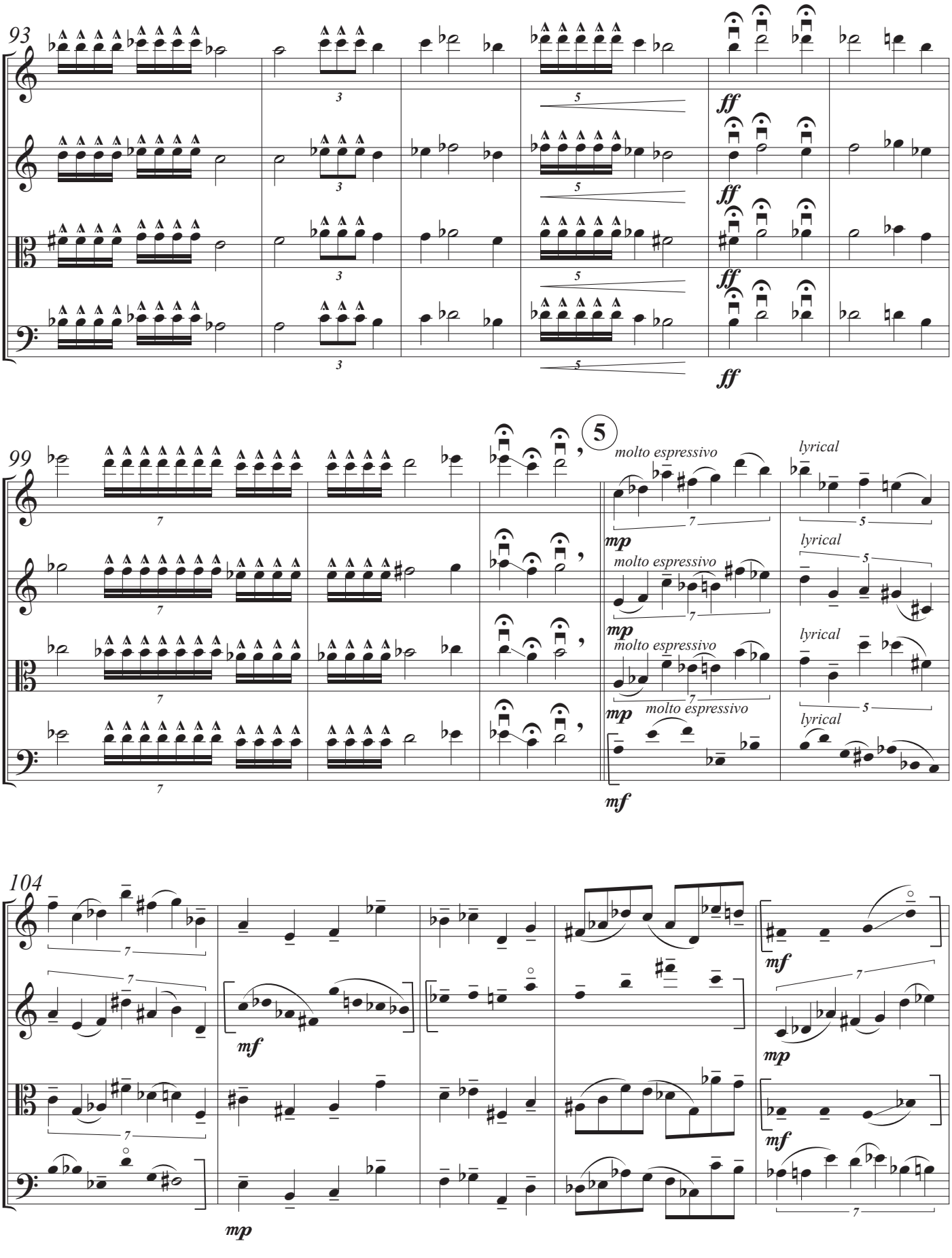
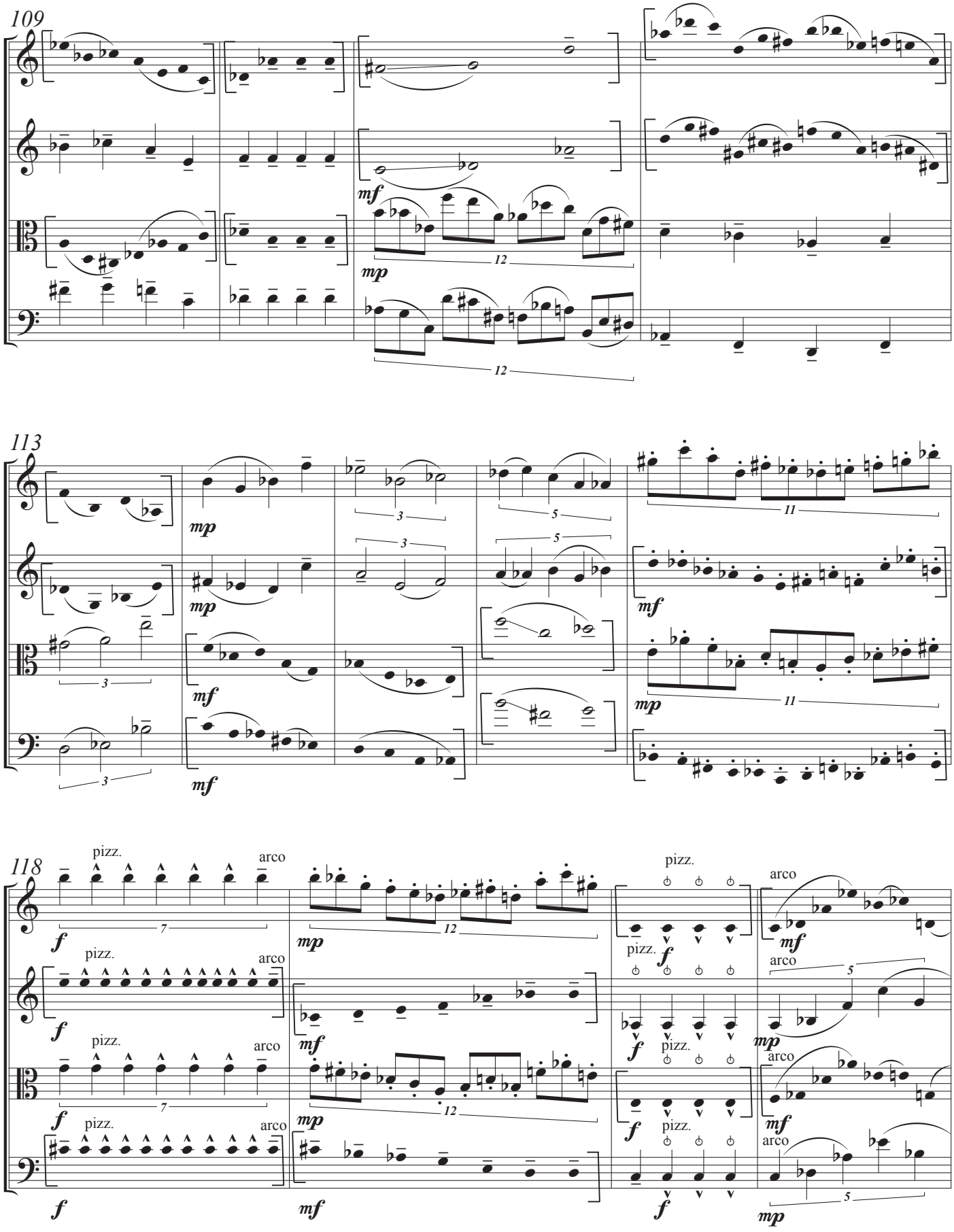
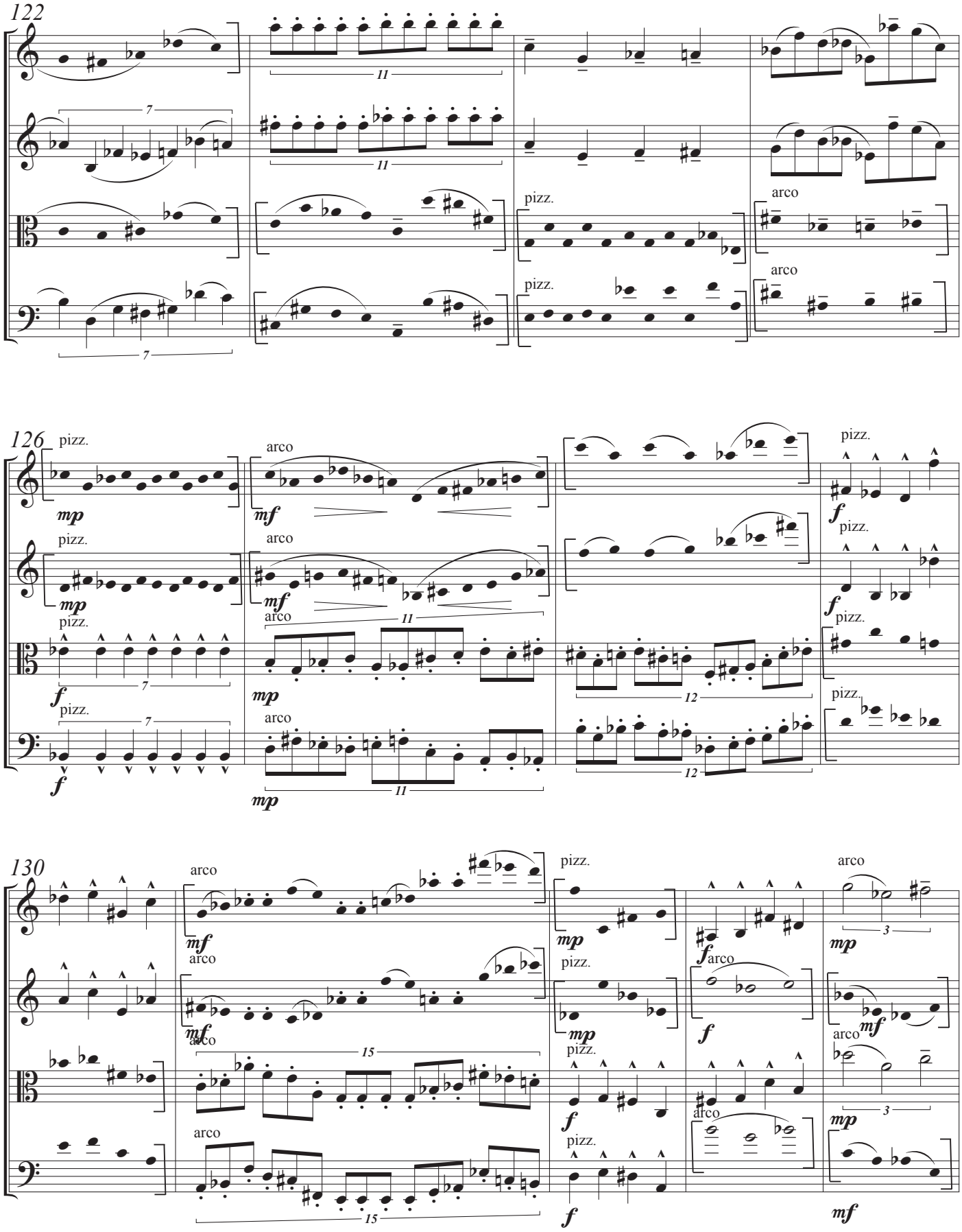

27
I
8va
p
open string harmonic improvisation
mp
p
p
p
36
I 8va
mp
open string harmonic improvisation
II
8va
mp
p
p
p
p
44
II
8va
mp
p
cresc.
3
mp
gliss.
p
cresc.
mp
gliss.
p
cresc.
mp
gliss.
I 8va
open string harmonic improvisation
mp
p
cresc.
mp
gliss.

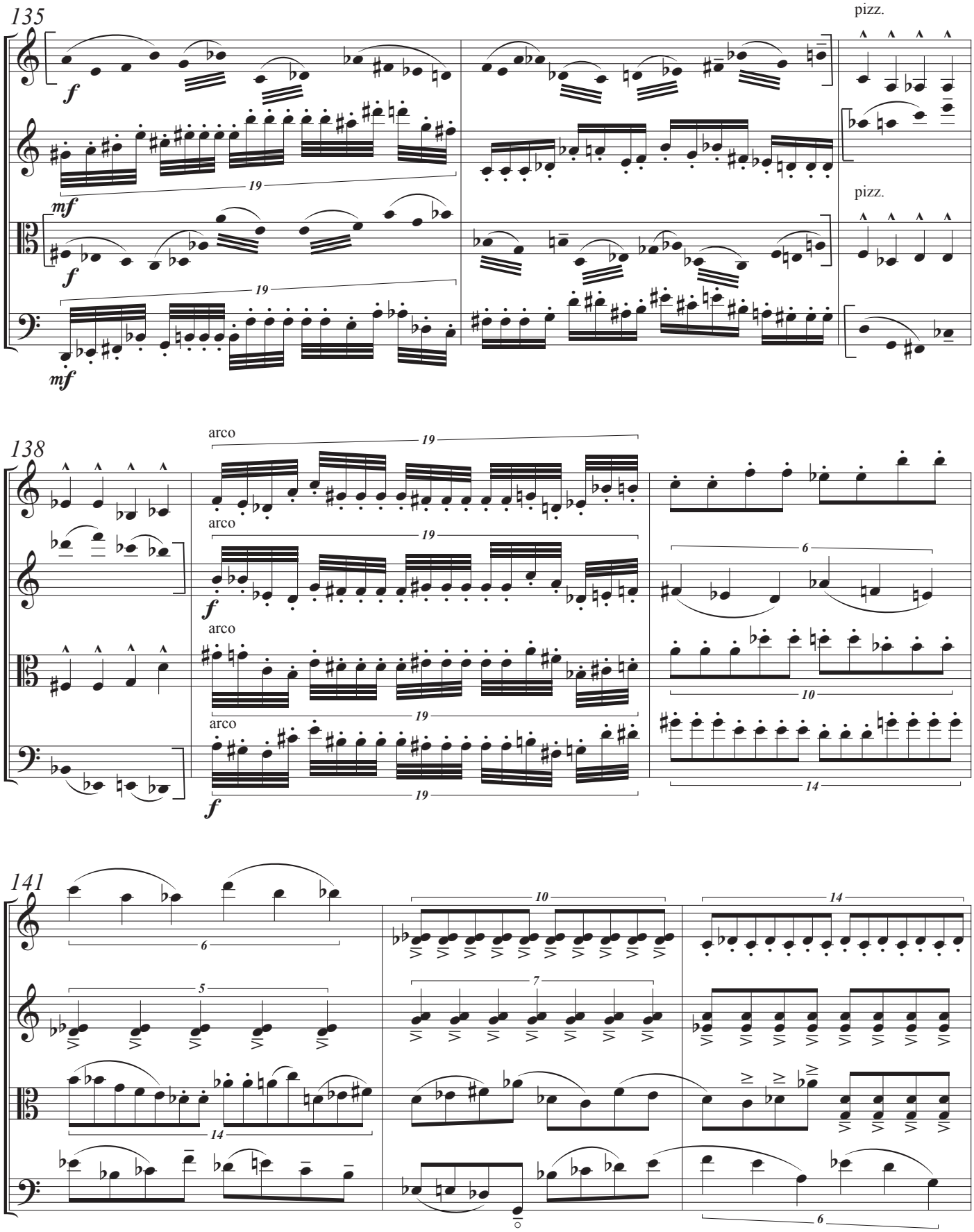

52
III
I
II
I open string harmonic improvisation
IV
59
IV
III
66
II
mf
mp
cresc.
poco a poco

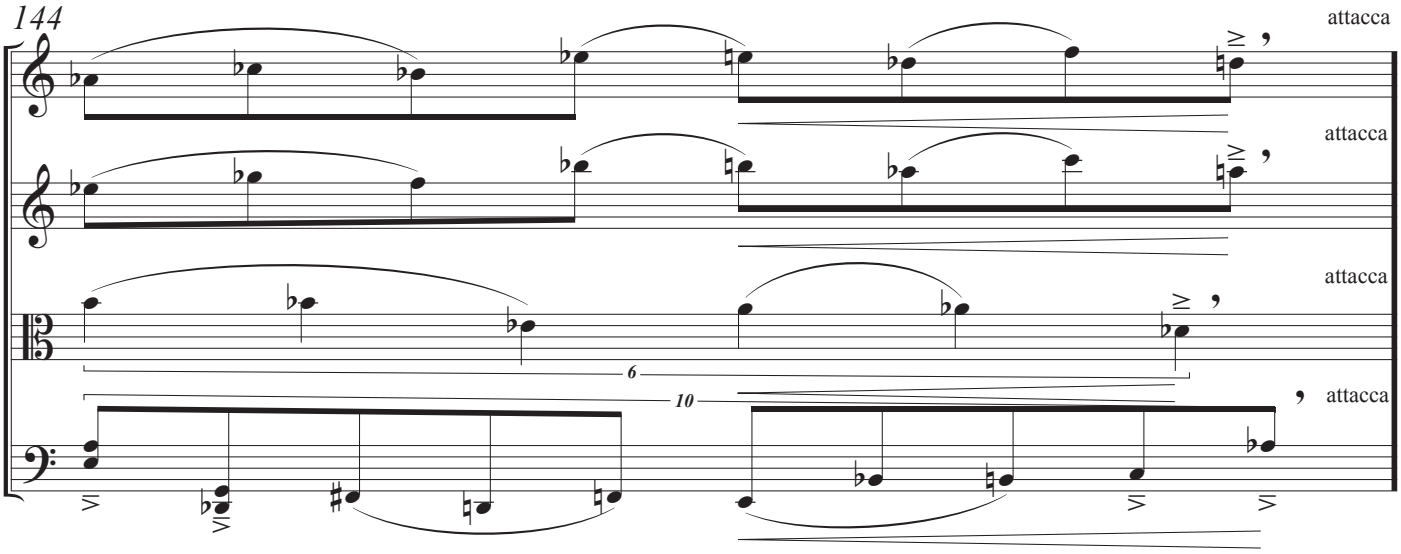

73
4
mf
cresc.
f
III
8va
IV
80
au talon
rough
87
simile
3
5
7
poco a poco


93
ff
99
5
molto espressivo
lyrical
mp
mf
104


109
113
118
pizz.
arco


122
126
130
pizz.
arco
mp
mf
f


135
pizz.
pizz.
138
arco
arco
arco
arco
141


144
attacca
attacca
attacca
attacca
6
10

each configuraton space approxametly 22 - 23 seconds

CS1

145

sustained fast intense improvisation
with each 3-note group

ff

ff

ff

ff

CS2

149

8va

8va

8va

8va

3-note moving window improvisation

increasing temporal density

increasing speed and temporal density

CS3

153

free bowing

legato

diminuendo

free bowing

legato

diminuendo

free bowing

legato

diminuendo

free bowing

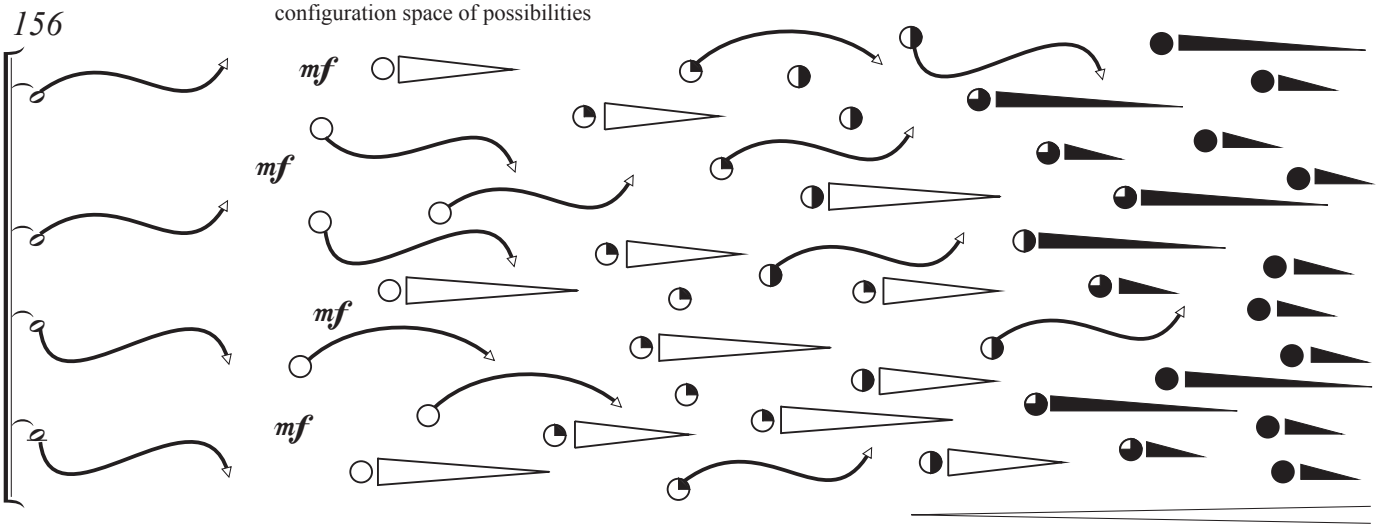
legato

diminuendo

CS4

156

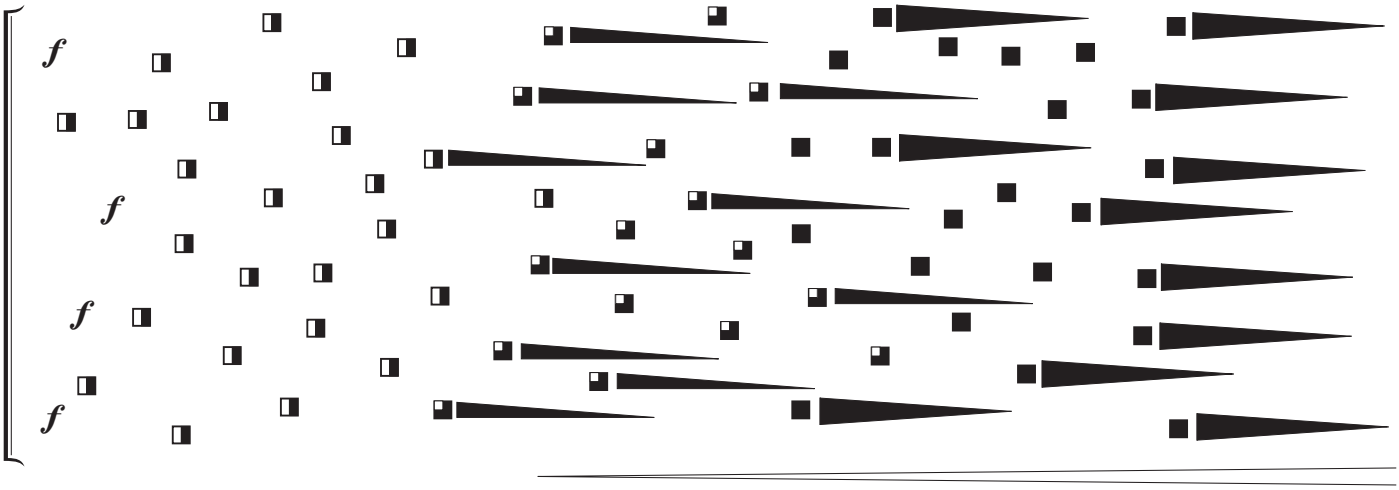
configuration space of possibilities



CS5

160

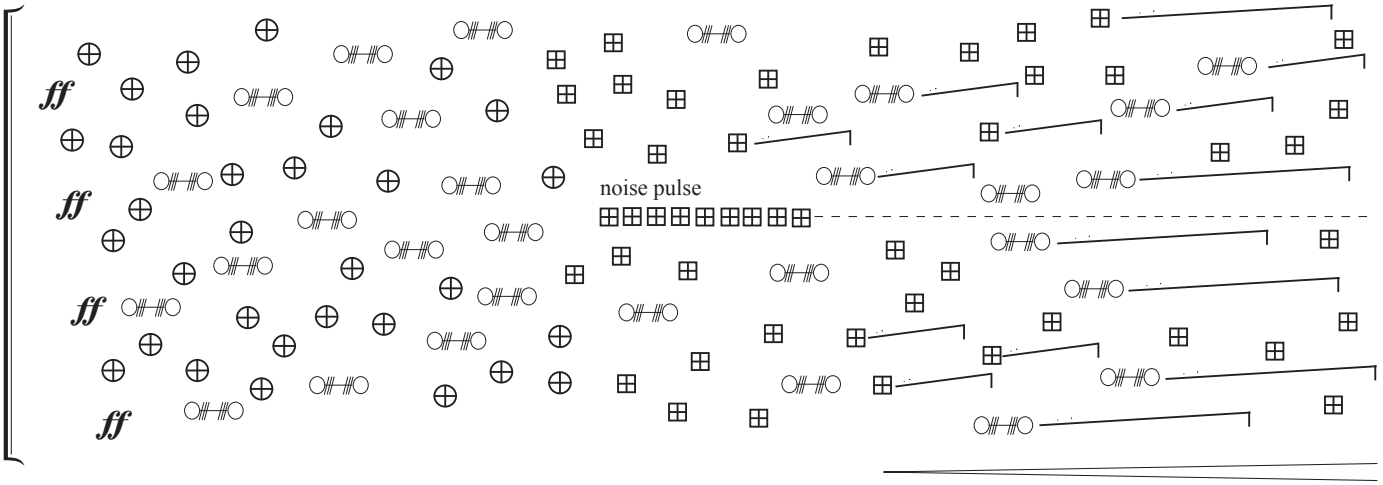
increasing speed and temporal density



CS6

164

loosing perceivable pitch



CS7

168

noise (no pitch) bow swirls fast dense

fff *fff* *fff* *fff*

FREEZE

n

CS8

172

approx. 15" in total silence and frozen position — approx. 13" in total silence and frozen position

bows on strings — *ff* — bows on strings

approx. 15" in total silence and frozen position — approx. 13" in total silence and frozen position

bows on strings — *ff* — bows on strings

approx. 15" in total silence and frozen position — approx. 13" in total silence and frozen position

bows on strings — *ff* — bows on strings

approx. 15" in total silence and frozen position — approx. 13" in total silence and frozen position

bows on strings — *ff* — bows on strings

CS9

180

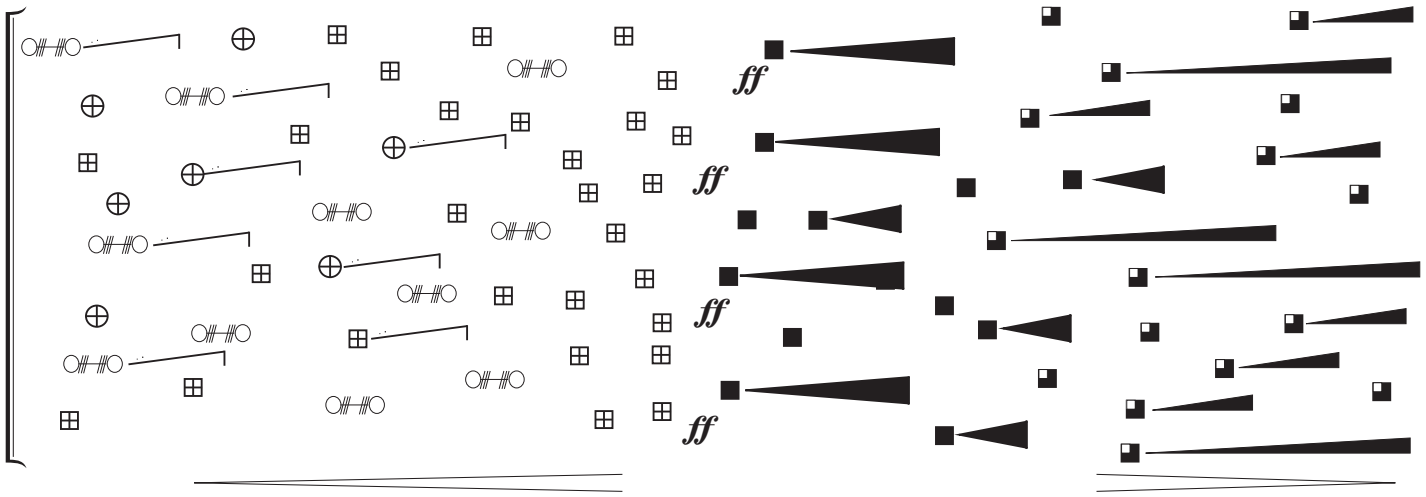
bow swirls noise (no pitch)

f *f* *f* *f*

n

CS10
184

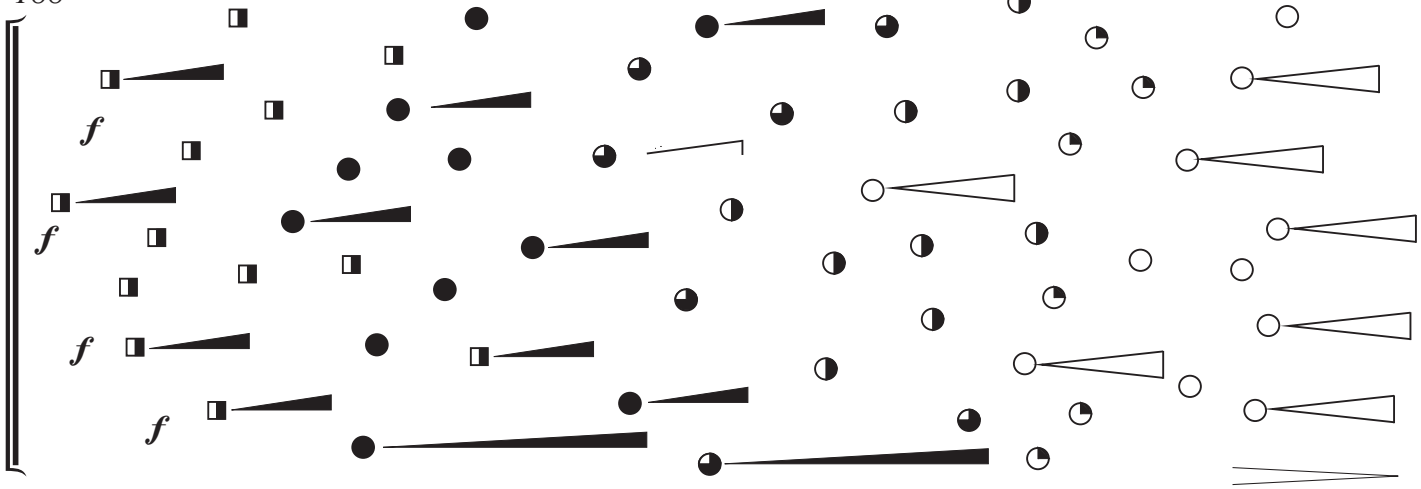
gradually reintroduce pitch



CS11
188

decreasing speed

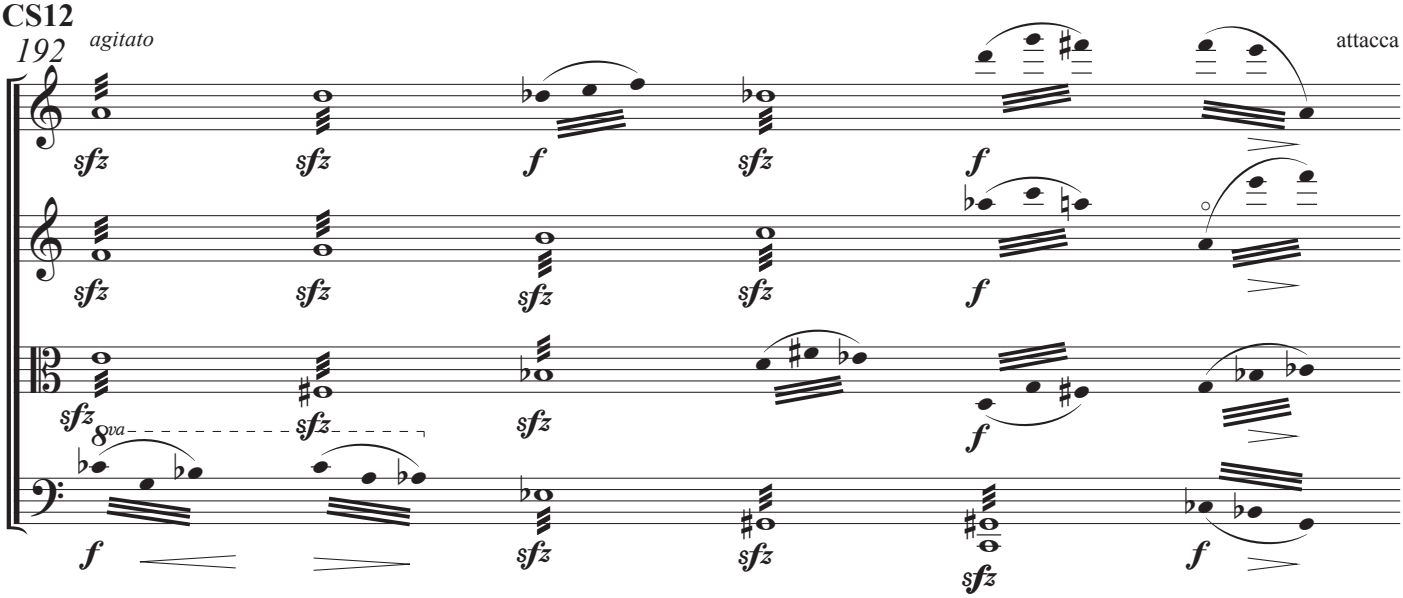
decreasing temporal density

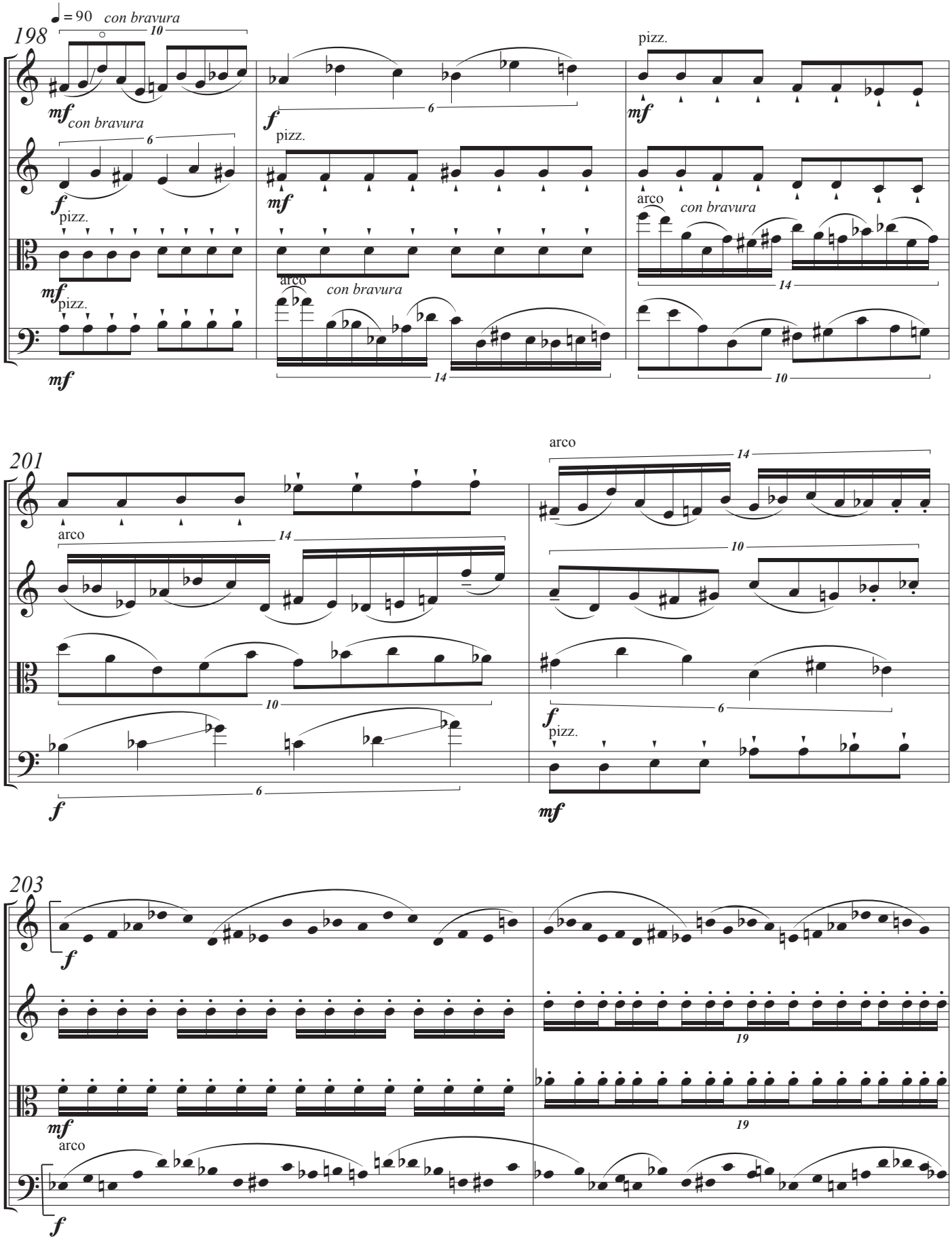


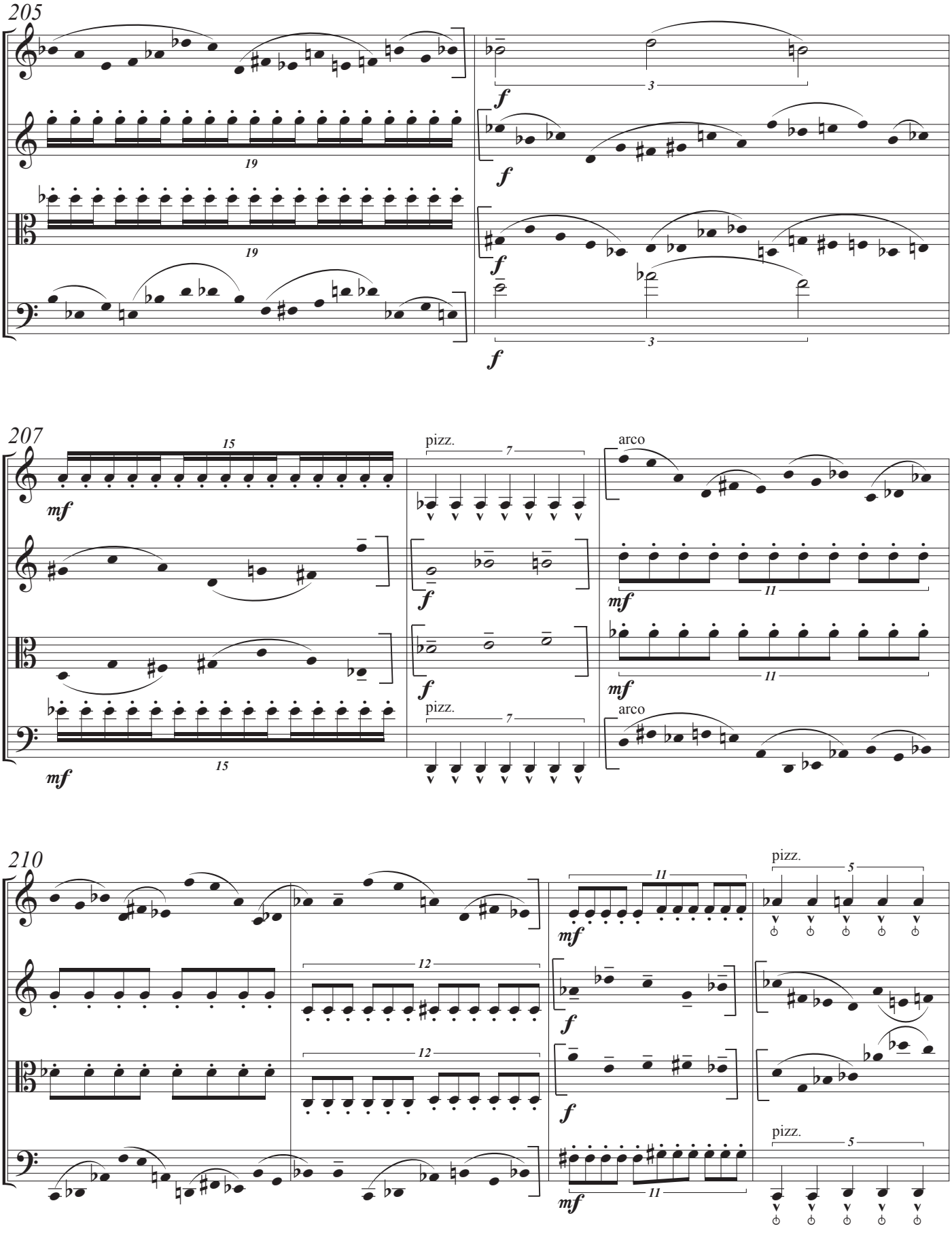
CS12
192

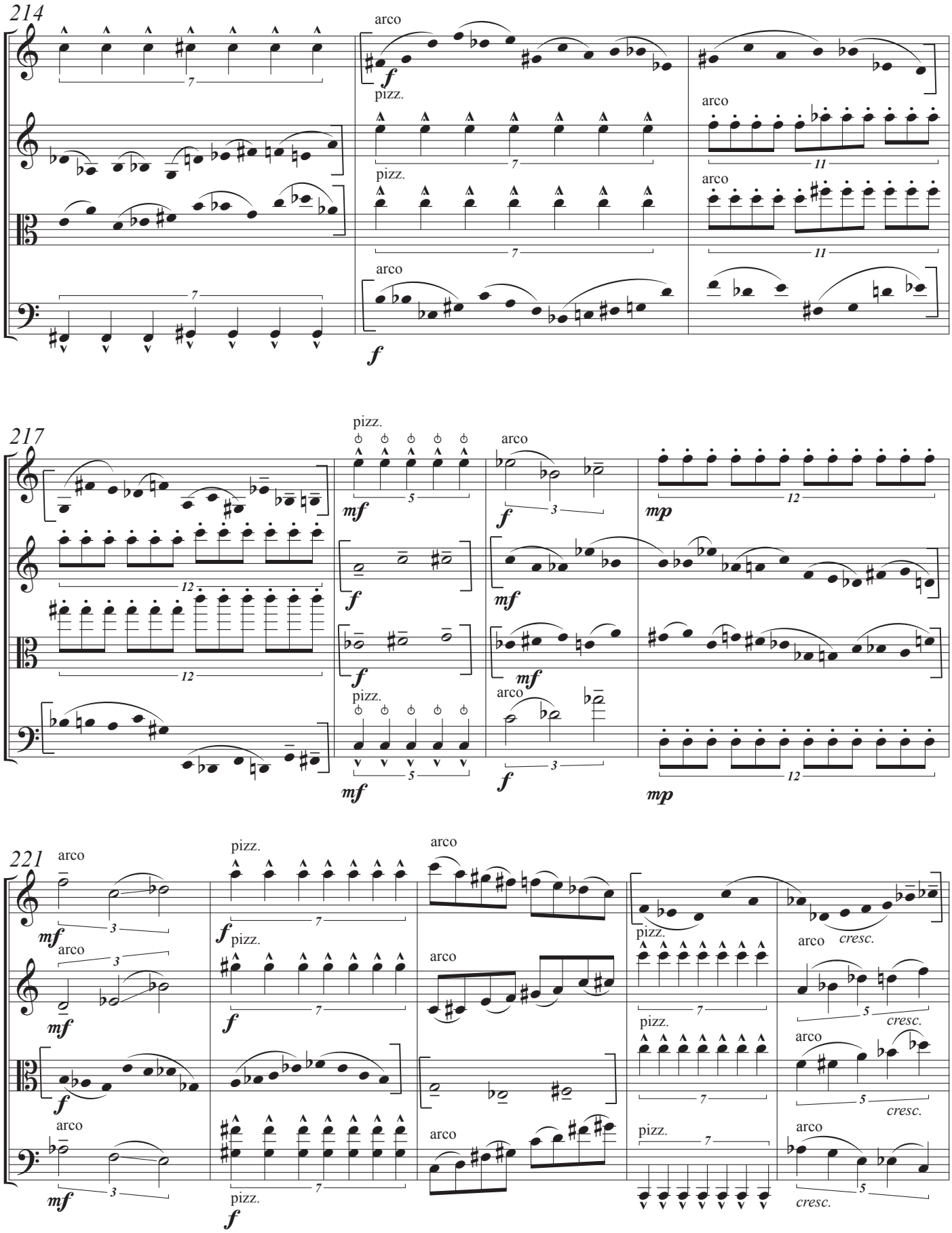
agitato

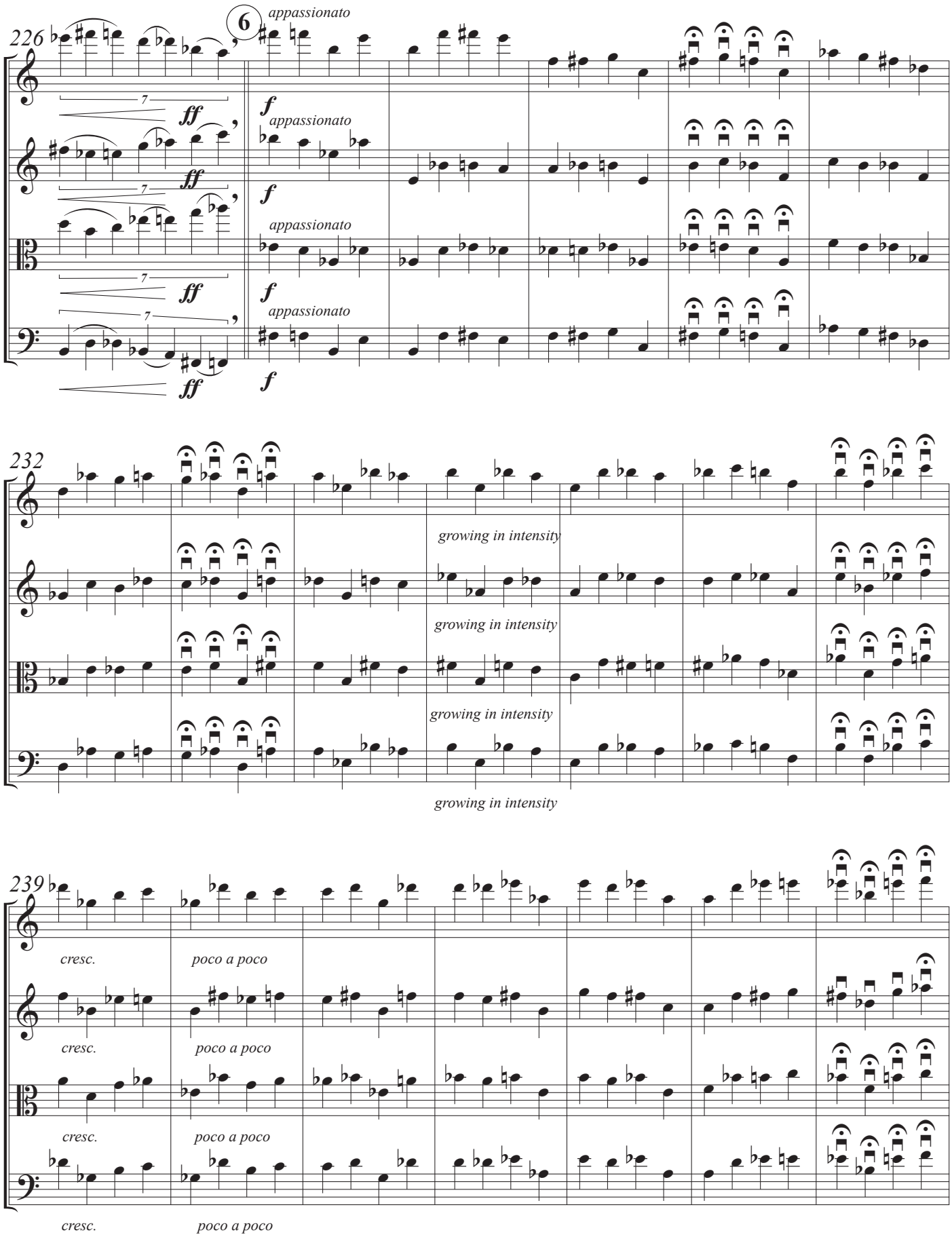
attacca

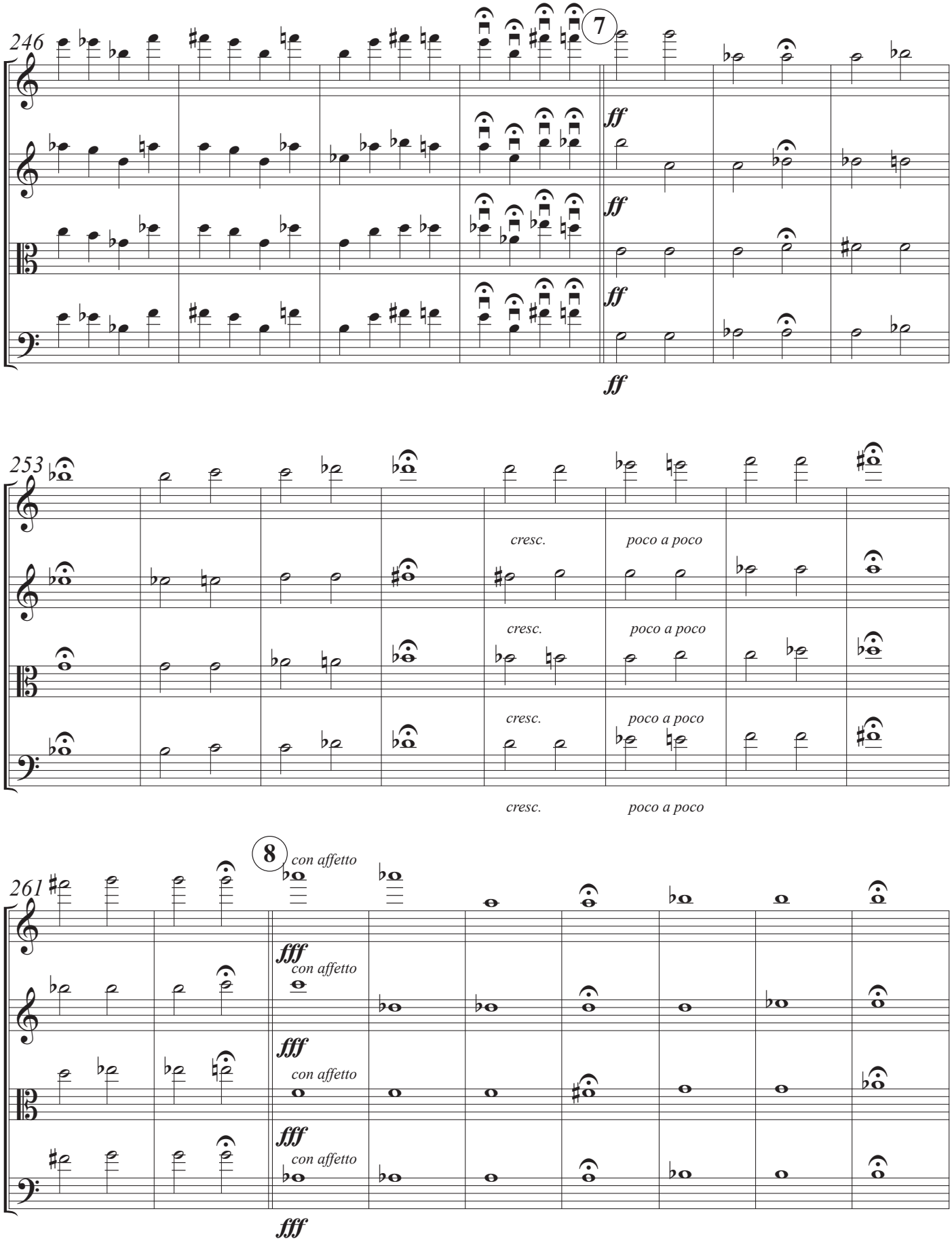


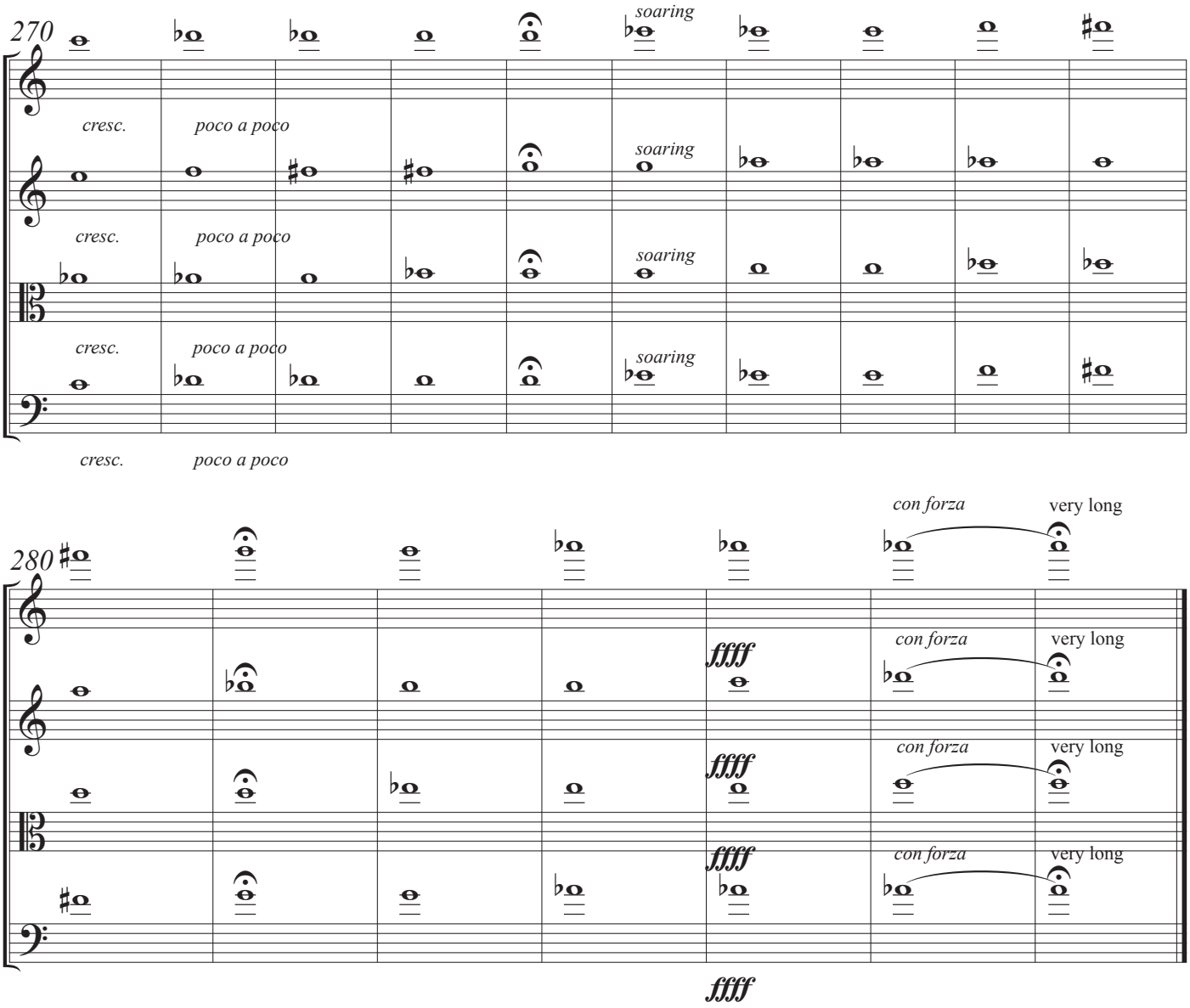

198
♩ = 90
con bravura
pizz.
arco
201
203


205
19
19
3
3
207
15
15
pizz.
7
7
arco
11
11
210
12
12
11
11
pizz.
5
pizz.
5


214
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
arco
217
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
221
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.


226
6
appassionato
7
ff
f
232
growing in intensity
239
cresc.
poco a poco


246
7
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff
253
cresc.
poco a poco
cresc.
poco a poco
cresc.
poco a poco
cresc.
poco a poco
261
8
con affetto
fff
con affetto
fff
con affetto
fff
con affetto
fff


270
soaring
cresc.
poco a poco
soaring
cresc.
poco a poco
soaring
cresc.
poco a poco
soaring
cresc.
poco a poco
280
con forza
very long
fffff
con forza
very long
fffff
con forza
very long
fffff
con forza
very long
fffff