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Fugue Quartet in A minor

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區顥曦 Au Hohei

Fugue Quartet in A minor

for string quartet

2017

(~2.5 minutes)

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Fugue Quartet in A minor **Au Hohei**

This fugue quartet is an unusual experimental work of the composer. The composer used composition methods and techniques other than his usual style. But still, it shares some similarities and connections with his other works, including the rapid use and fusion of different pentatonics, and it shares the same fundamental motif, i.e. the first three notes of the subject, 'l, s, m', with the composer's trombone concerto.

Although a fugue is a very old and rigorous type of composition, this fugue tries to sound modern and agitating while embracing the fundamental fugal ideas. This contemporary fugue is in four voices with two themes and two countersubjects, with only the first theme receives complete exposition and is treated as the subject of the fugue. The themes and countersubjects are correlated and linked by the fundamental motif 'l, s, m', and they transform and penetrate the whole fugue while countering one another, every passage of this fugue is formed by them. There are four instruments but they are not always representing the four voices respectively. Sometimes two of them act as a single voice, playing in unison, heterophony or dialogues, and the combinations switch overtime. Moreover, there are a few dramatic and cadenza-like passages which do not seem to be belonged to a fugue, including the cello solo at the exposition, the harmonious trio after the exposition and the agitating unison coda. They exist for the overall aesthetics, without destroying the fugal structure.

The subject first appears in the 1st violin, and when the 2nd violin answers, the 1st violin plays the first countersubject, i.e. repeated pedal notes with octave replacements (bar 9). The subject is then played again by the joint voice from the viola and the cello, with the 2nd violin playing the countersubject, and the 1st violin introducing a new theme, i.e. an inversion of the fundamental motif (bar 17). The final answer in the exposition is played by the bass voice.

After some developments, an unexpected trio in parallel major anticipated in (bar 62). Contrasting to the overall agitating atmosphere, it is harmonious and pastoral. Yet it is still based on the fundamental motif 'l, s, m' and the three voices are counterpoints to each other. The trio soon ends and the music goes back to the normal fugal passages.

The development and mid-entries start by the two violins' dialogue on the subject (bar 86), and is followed by the second theme and countersubject's echoes. The fugue moves to more and more distant tonal centres and establishes greater and greater tensions. The fugue arrives at its

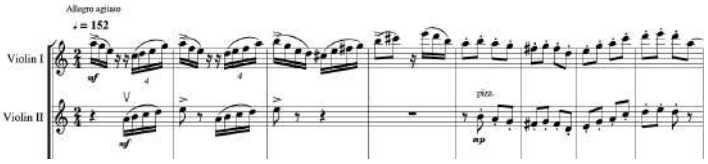
darkest and most intense part (bar 116), in which the second theme becomes more and more dominative and overpowered the subject. The subject and first countersubject completely disappear and a new countersubject is introduced by the 1st violin, i.e. fast descending sextuplets (bar 120). After the long intense dissonant passage, the first countersubject starts to return on the cello (bar 124) and the 1st violin starts to lead the second theme back to tonic (bar 127-130).

The subject eventually returns after the long disappearance together with the new second countersubject. It is interrupted by a stretto immediately and features the second theme. A subdominant entry (bar 155) is placed at the end of the final entries and followed by a long phrase of second theme leading to the coda. The coda is an agitating unison of the subject, together with the first countersubject in the last phrase. The fugue ends in Picardy third in A.

This fugue offers a wide variety in melodic colours. Pentatonic is the key melodic element of this fugue and could be hear everywhere. However, it is often not used directly with just the five notes but instead, treated with many added notes and fusions with other types of melodies. Therefore, although there is nearly no pure pentatonic passage, its melodic colour exists in every phrase throughout this fugue.

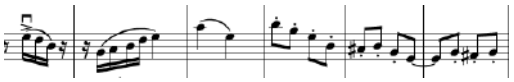
The following is a graphical list showing the subjects and countersubjects of this fugue:

Subject, 1st theme:



(Bar 1, 1st vln.)

;and examples of its transformation:

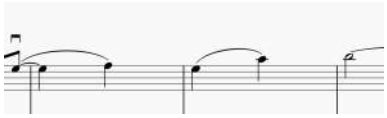


(Bar 47, 2nd vln)

(Bar 86, vlns)

(Bar 108, 2nd vln, vla)

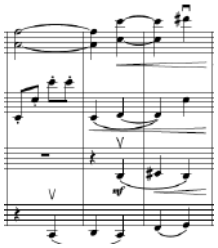
2nd theme:



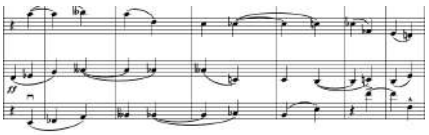
(Bar 17, 1st vln)

;and examples of its transformation:

(Bar 104,Vlc)



(Bar 101)



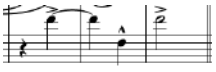
(Bar 119)

1st countersubject:

(Bar 9, 2nd vln)

;and other examples:

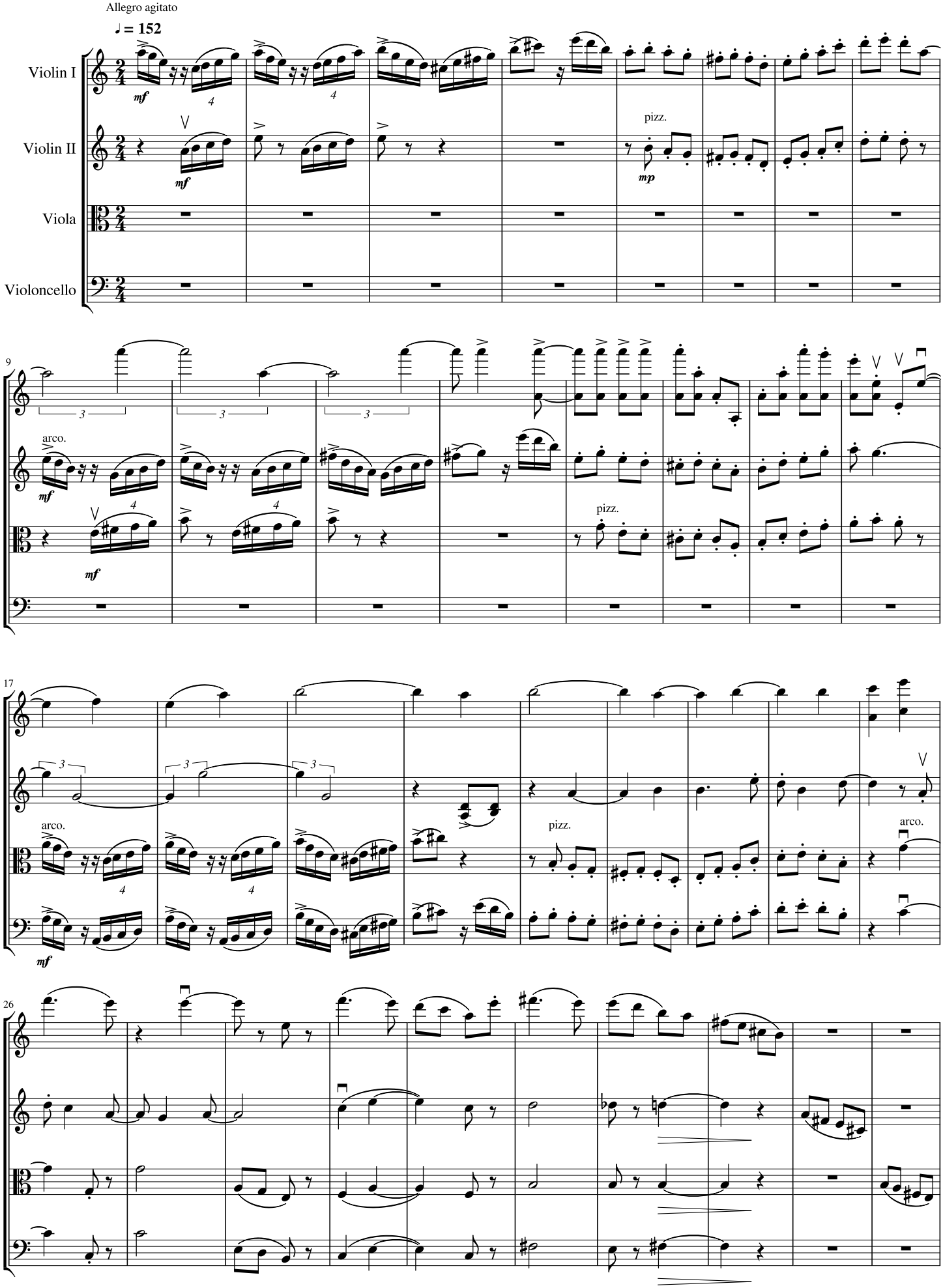
(Bar 78, vlc)

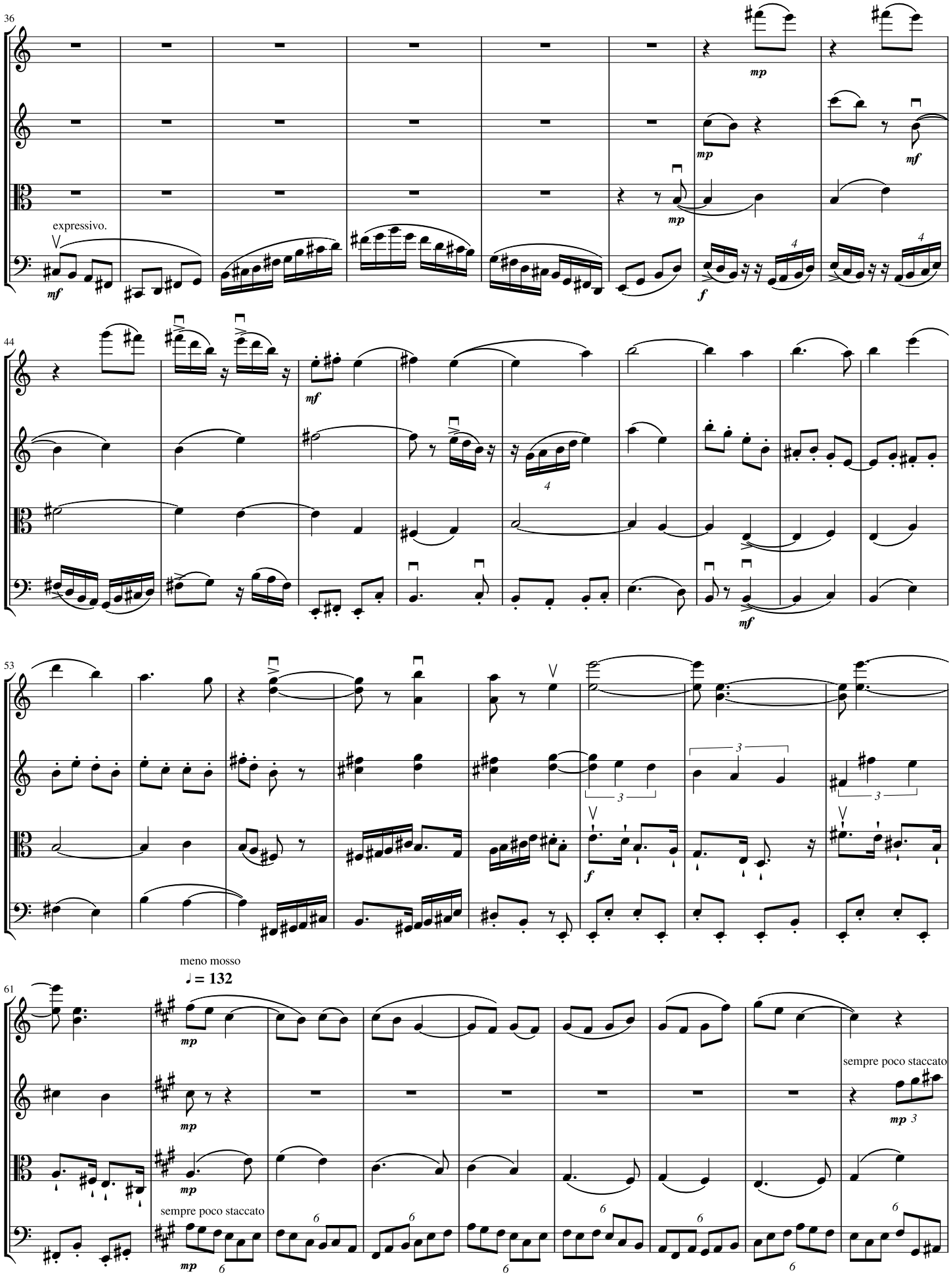


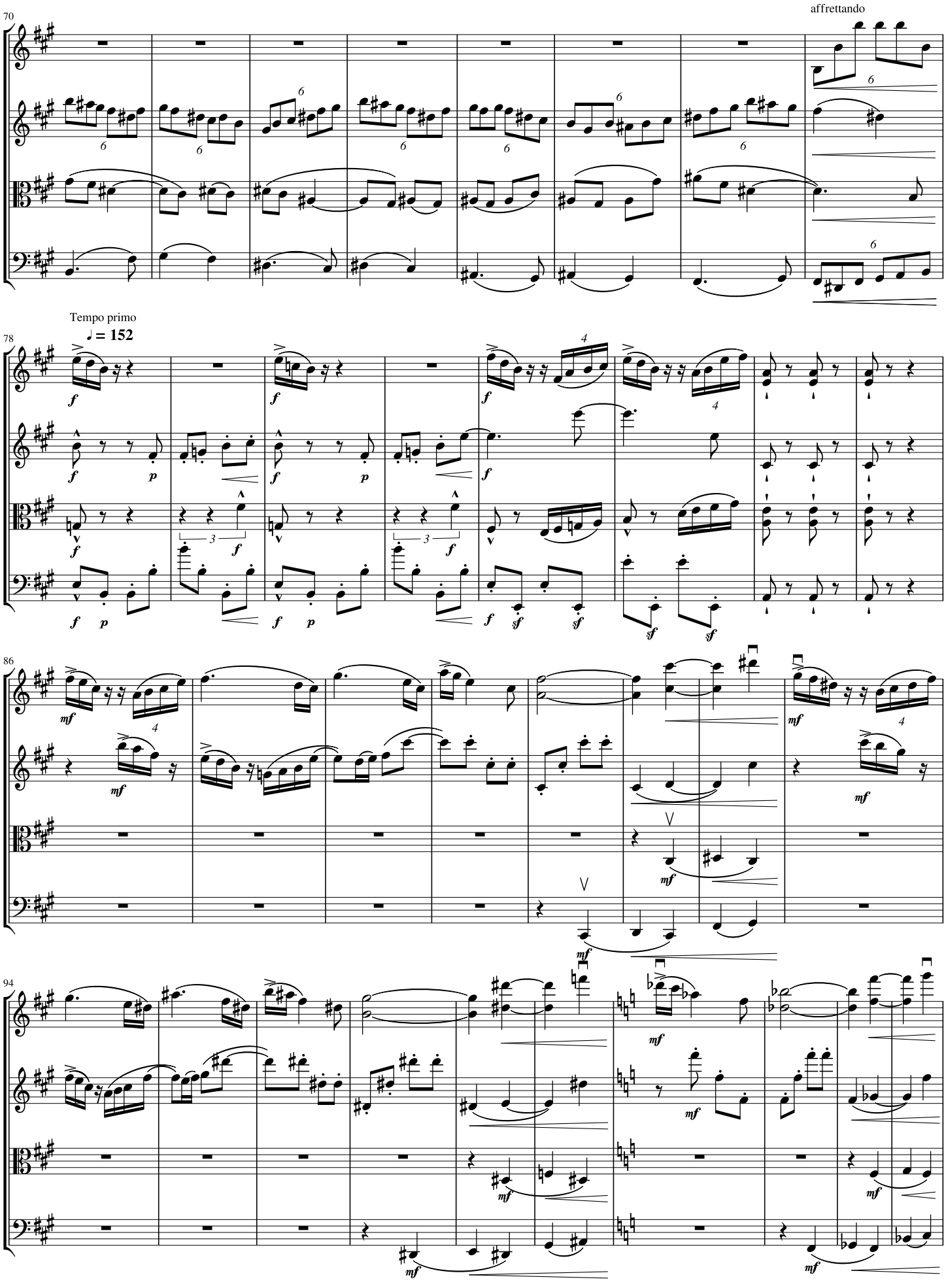
(Bar 124, vlc)

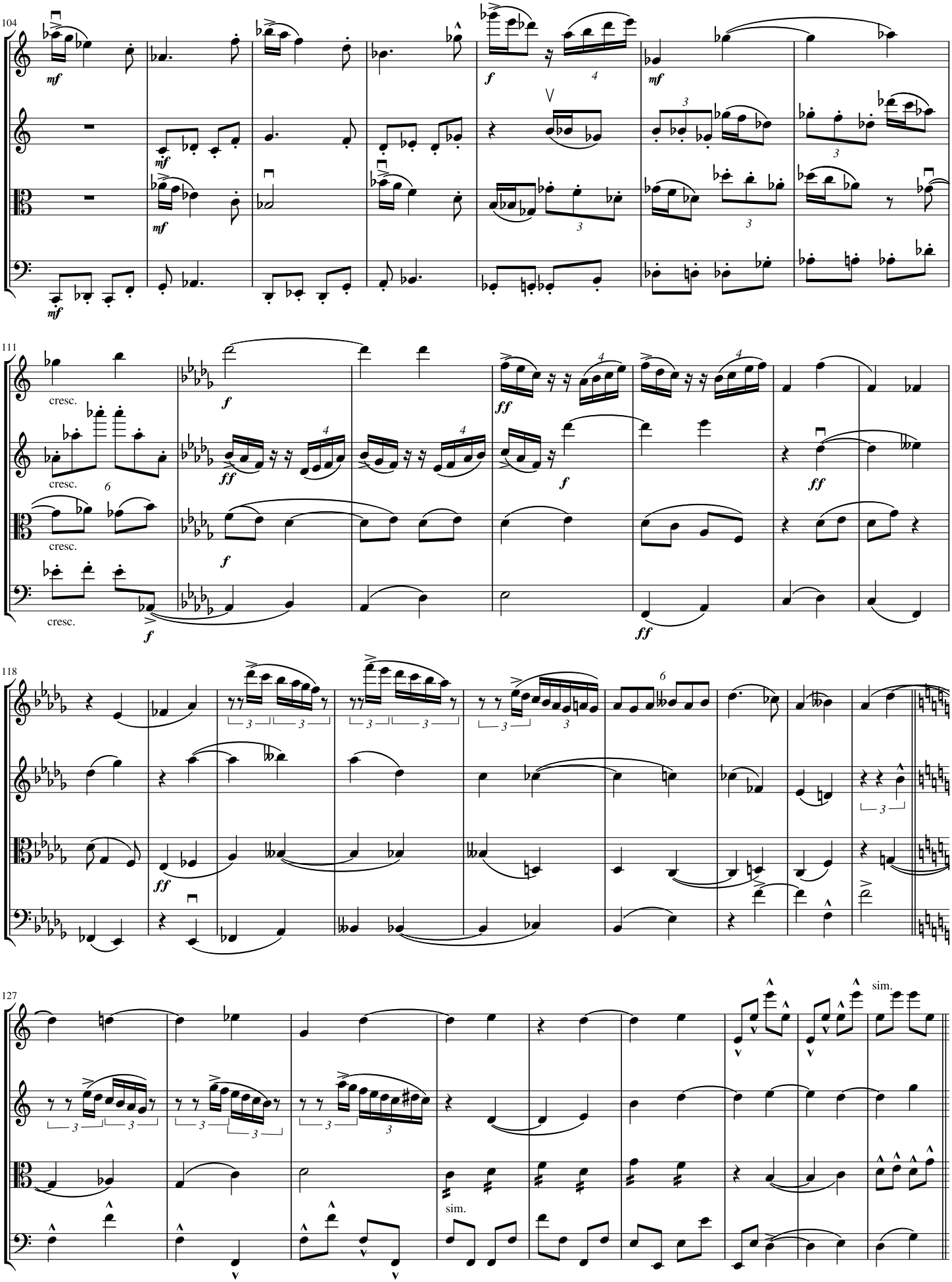
2nd countersubject:

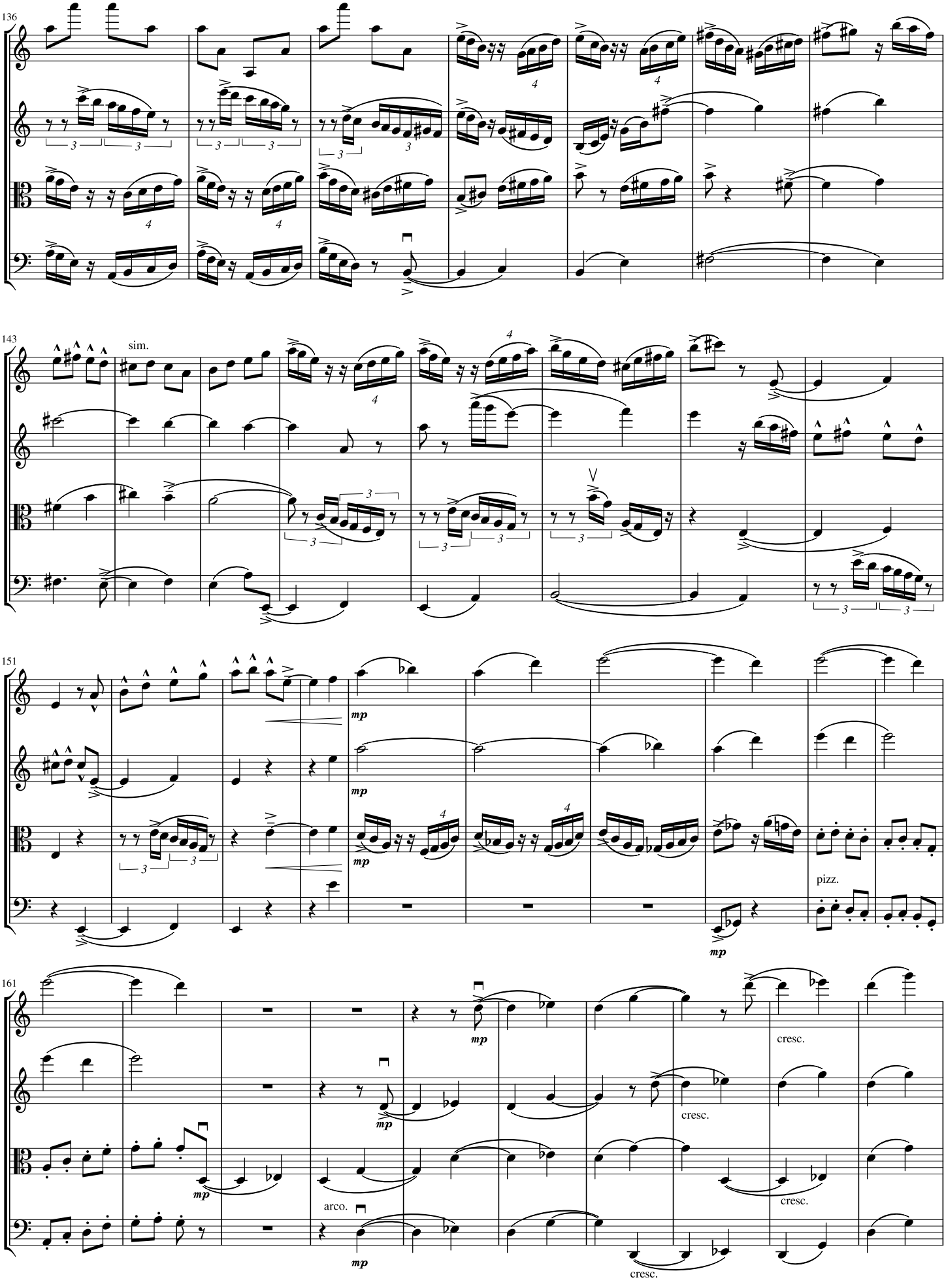
(Bar 120, 1st vln)

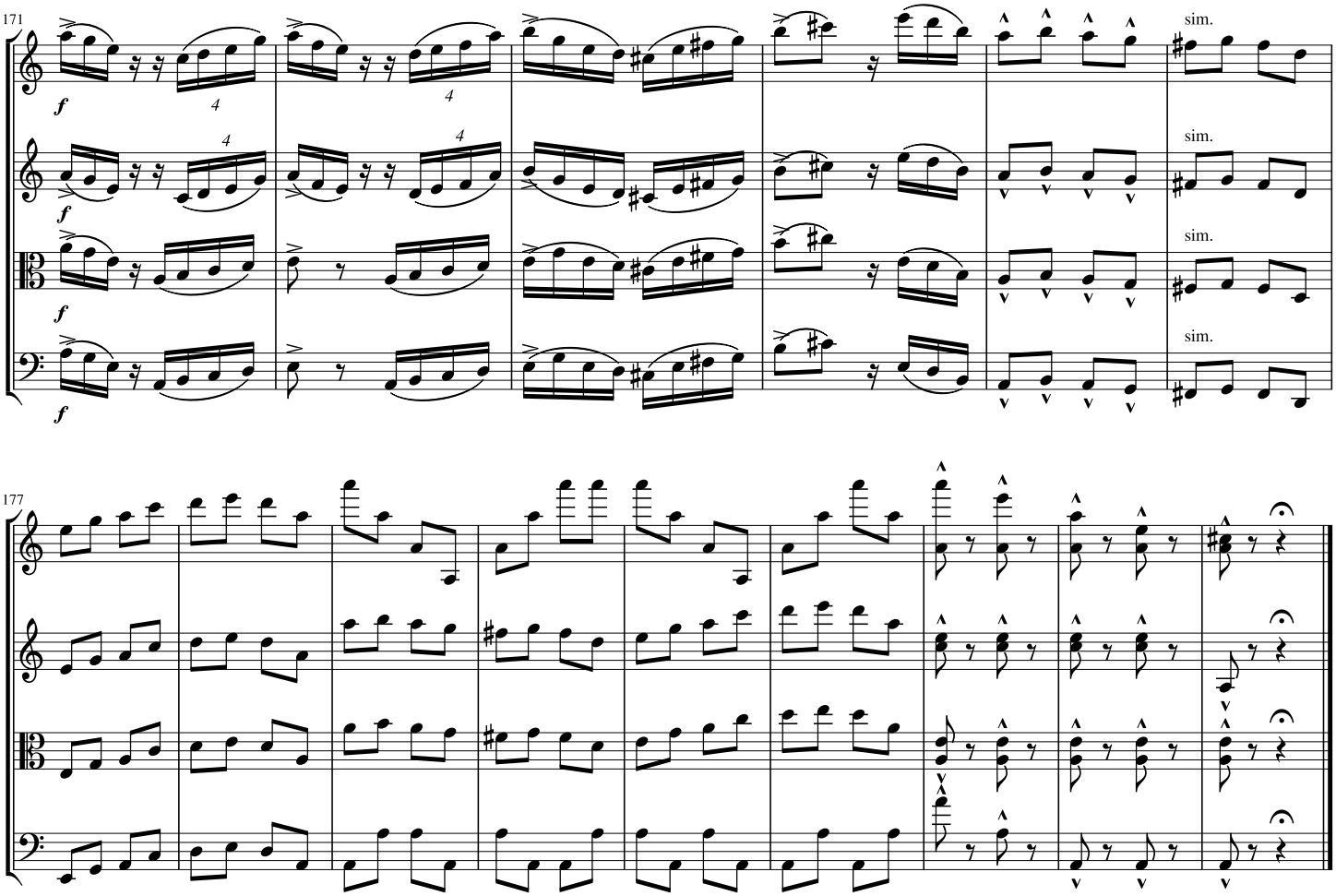

Allegro agitato
♩ = 152
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
mf
mp
pizz.
arco.
9
17
26


36
expressivo.
mf
mp
mp
mf
f
44
mf
4
mf
53
3
3
3
f
meno mosso
♩ = 132
61
mp
mp
mp
sempre poco staccato
6
6
6
6
6
sempre poco staccato
mp 3


70
affrettando
Tempo primo
♩ = 152
78
86
94


104
mf
f
111
cresc.
ff
118
127
sim.


136
143
sim.
151
mp
pizz.
161
cresc.
arco.


171
f
4
sim.

177