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Rhapsody On a Shape-Note Hymn (string orchestra version)

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Author
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RHAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN

"IDUMEA"

(1988)

for string orchestra

Joseph F. Weber

adapted from the original string trio version by Steven Paxton

CREATIVE SPIRIT

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RHAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN was composed by Joseph Weber in 1988. His original version, also available through Creative Spirit, was for a string trio consisting of two violins and double bass. The basis for the work is an American hymn tune called *Idumea*, composed and published by Ananias Davisson (1780–1857, Virginia) and first appearing in his *Kentucky Harmony* (1816) with lyrics by Isaac Watts ("My God, My Life, My Love").

Davisson was a singing school teacher, printer and compiler of shape-note tunebooks, best known for compiling and publishing *Kentucky Harmony*, which is generally considered the first Southern shape-note tunebook. The *Idumea* melody, as well as its harmony, is itself most likely based on the English ballad *Lord Thomas and Fair Ellinder*. In fact, many of Davisson's "compositions" were actually re-worked versions of folksongs from England, Scotland and Ireland, which would have been familiar to the southern church goers, singing school teachers, and camp meeting participants for whom Davisson published his tunebooks.

Variants of *Idumea* are found in at least 29 tunebooks published throughout the 1800's, and it appears that Weber's *Rhapsody* actually utilizes a variant published in William Walker's 1835 *Southern Harmony*, as well as Davisson's own tenor part, published in the 1816 *Kentucky Harmony*. More detailed information on the southern folk hymns can be found in David W. Walker's excellent (and comprehensive) *A Selection of Shape-Note Hymns from Southern United States Tune-Books, 1816-1861* (A-R Editions, 2005). *Idumea* itself gained renewed recognition as part of the soundtrack for the 2003 film *Cold Mountain*, in which it was performed by The Sacred Harp Singers.

JOSEPH F. WEBER (born July 31, 1936, in Antioch, California; died January 21, 1999, in Santa Fe, New Mexico) was a composer, pianist, organist, and teacher. In the 1950's and 1960's he attended the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and San Francisco State College, studying woodwinds, organ, and composition with William O. Smith, Roger Nixon, Wendell Otey, and Raymond White, and receiving private instruction from Harry Partch in Sausalito. It was at San Francisco State College that Weber found himself within a circle of classmates, friends, and fellow composers that included Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Loren Rush, Stuart Dempster, Pauline Oliveros, Morton Subotnick, Ken Benshoof and others—a dynamic group of musical innovators that was behind the creation of the pioneering San Francisco Tape Music Center, and that gestated some of the most important developments in modern American music.

WEBER MOVED TO SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO IN 1979 and soon became active in New Mexico's new music scene, helping to form the Composer's Society of Santa Fe, presenting numerous organ recitals at St. Francis Auditorium (especially of the music of Messiaen), participating in the Tone Roads West Festival, and touring to Mexico City and Guanajuato as music director of the theater troupe *Zona de Teatro*. In 1984 he was awarded special citation by the Santa Fe Council for the Arts for contributions to new music. From 1992 until his death in 1999, he taught composition, music theory, and piano in the Contemporary Music Program at the College of Santa Fe, where he influenced dozens of young composers and musicians with his energy and enthusiasm for music and ideas. According to friends and students, he had the ability to be fiercely opinionated and inspirationally open-minded at the same time. Everyone who met him remembers him.

With so much to be done with one tone, how do we ever get from one tone to the next?

Joseph Weber, 1972, San Francisco

EDITOR'S NOTE: I became "caretaker" of Joseph Weber's musical manuscripts, printed scores, recordings and writings soon after I took over the chairmanship of the Contemporary Music Program at the College of Santa Fe. They had been carefully organized and catalogued by his long-time collaborator, the dancer/choreographer Michele Larsson, and by composers Steve Peters and Paul Botelho. Beginning in 2018, an online archive is being created, as are performing editions of many of Weber's 120+ compositions:

https://joseph-weber.creativespiritonline.com

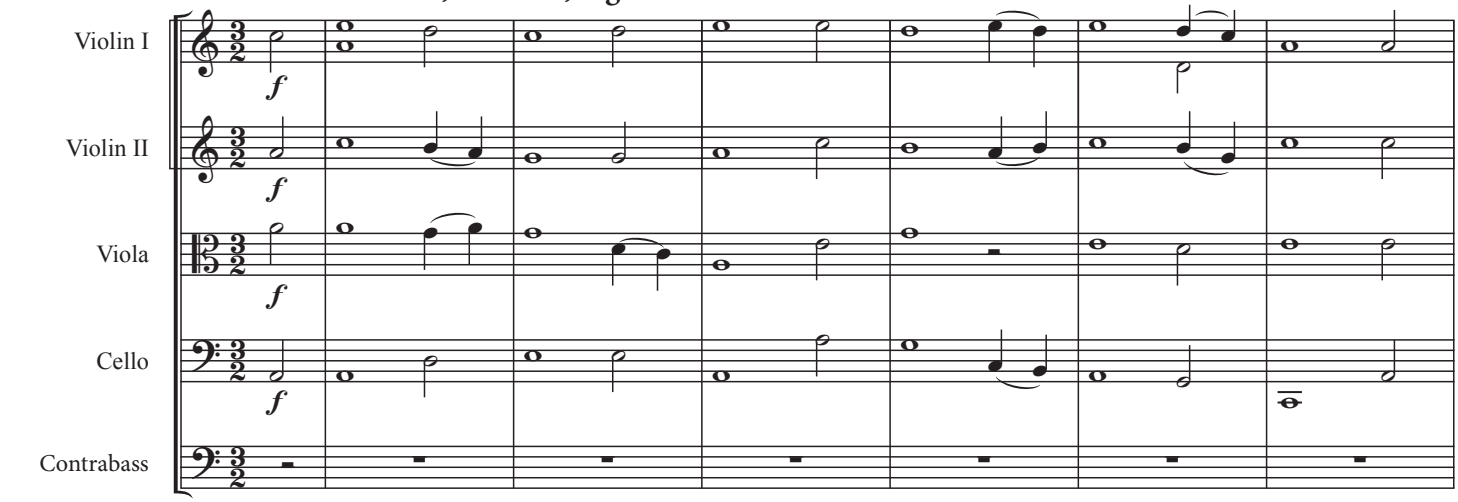
Steven Paxton, Santa Fe, New Mexico

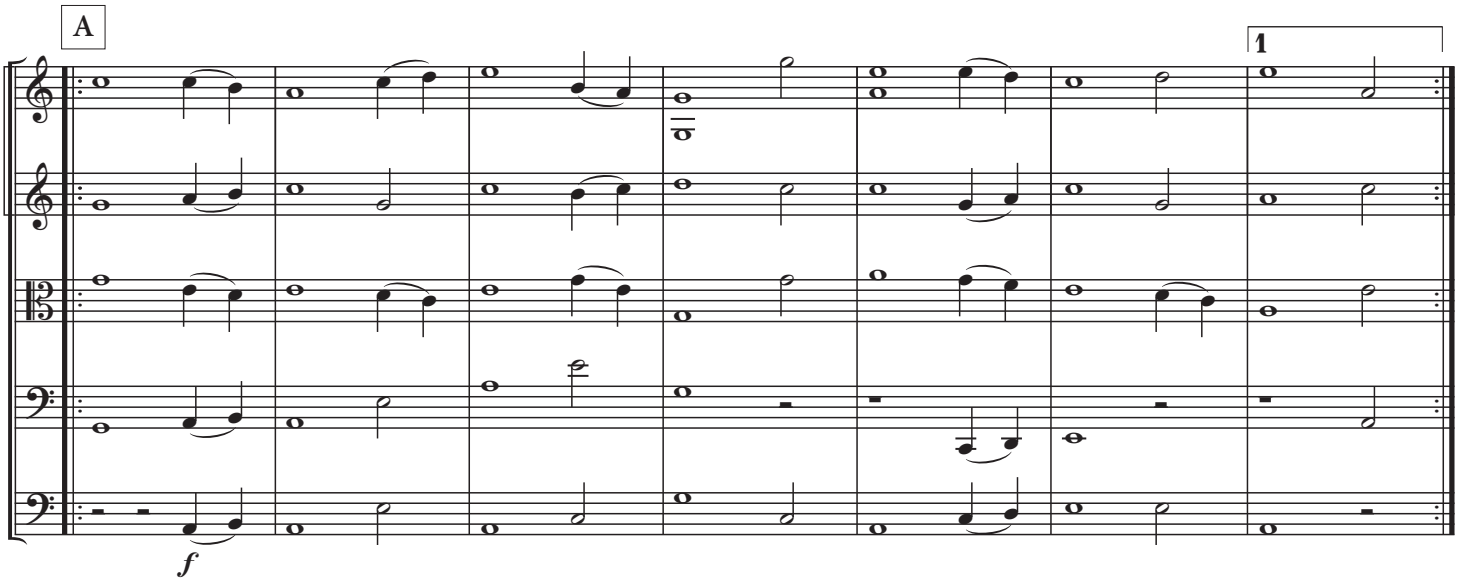
RHAPSODY ON A SHAPE-NOTE HYMN

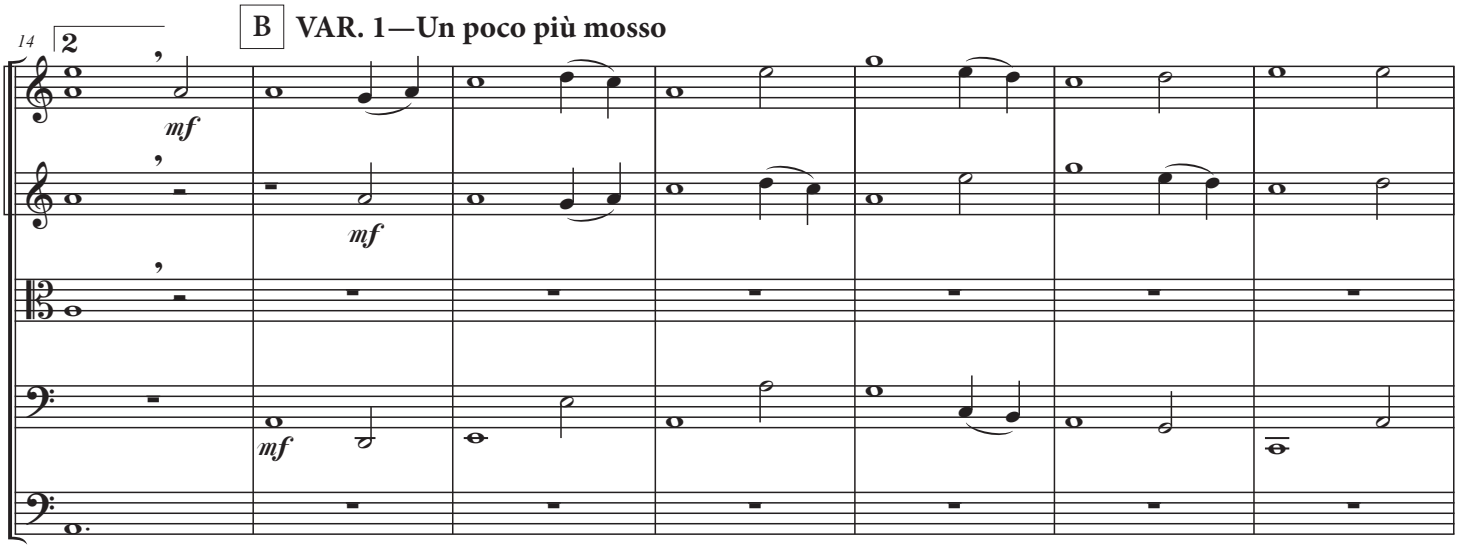
Harmony and melody variant by Ananias Davisson (1816)

JOSEPH WEBER (1988)
adapted for string orchestra by Steven Paxton

♩ = 72 - 80 **Tense, strained, high fervor** *







*Little or no vibrato throughout, slightly nasal and *ruvido*; use open strings whenever possible.

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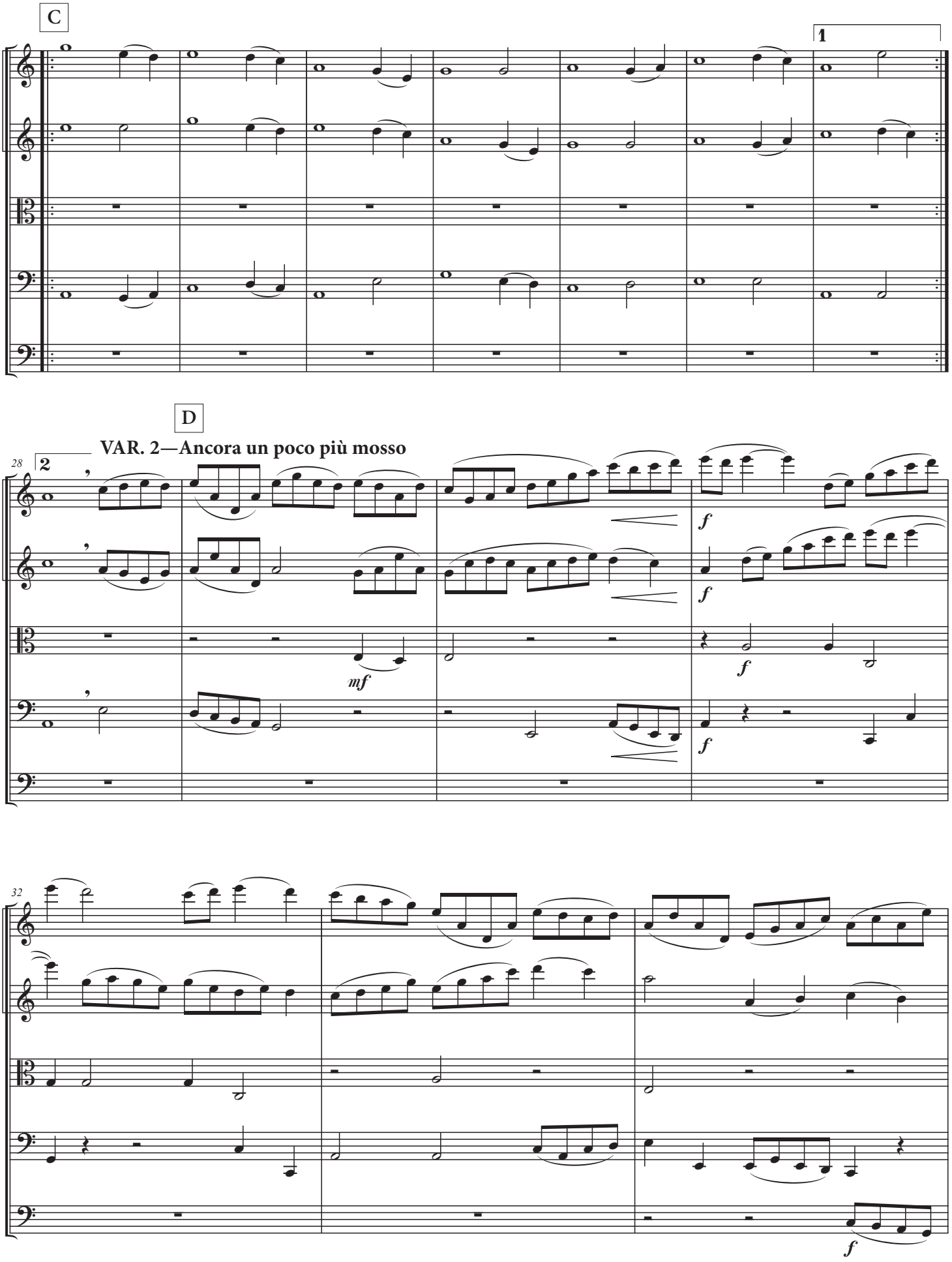
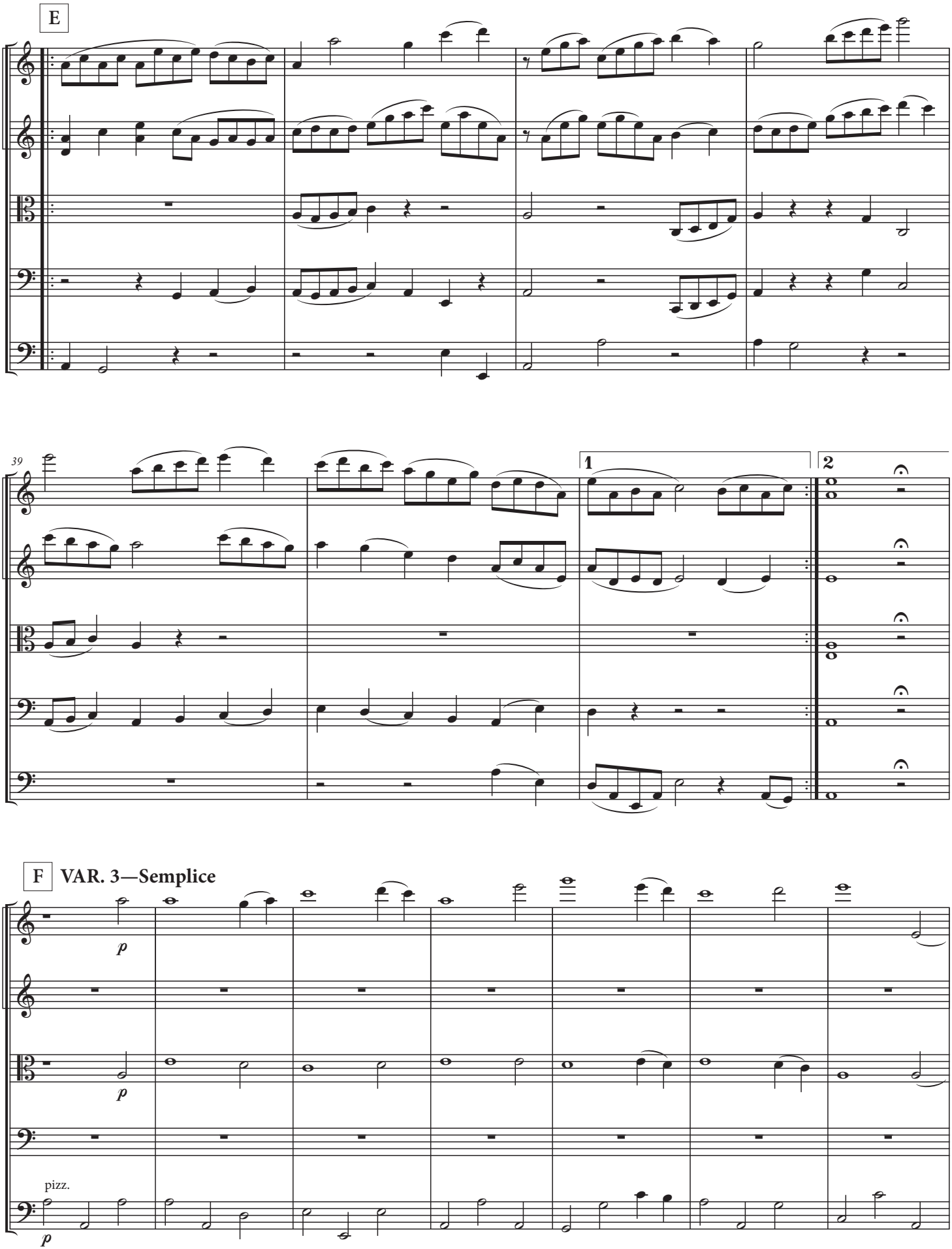
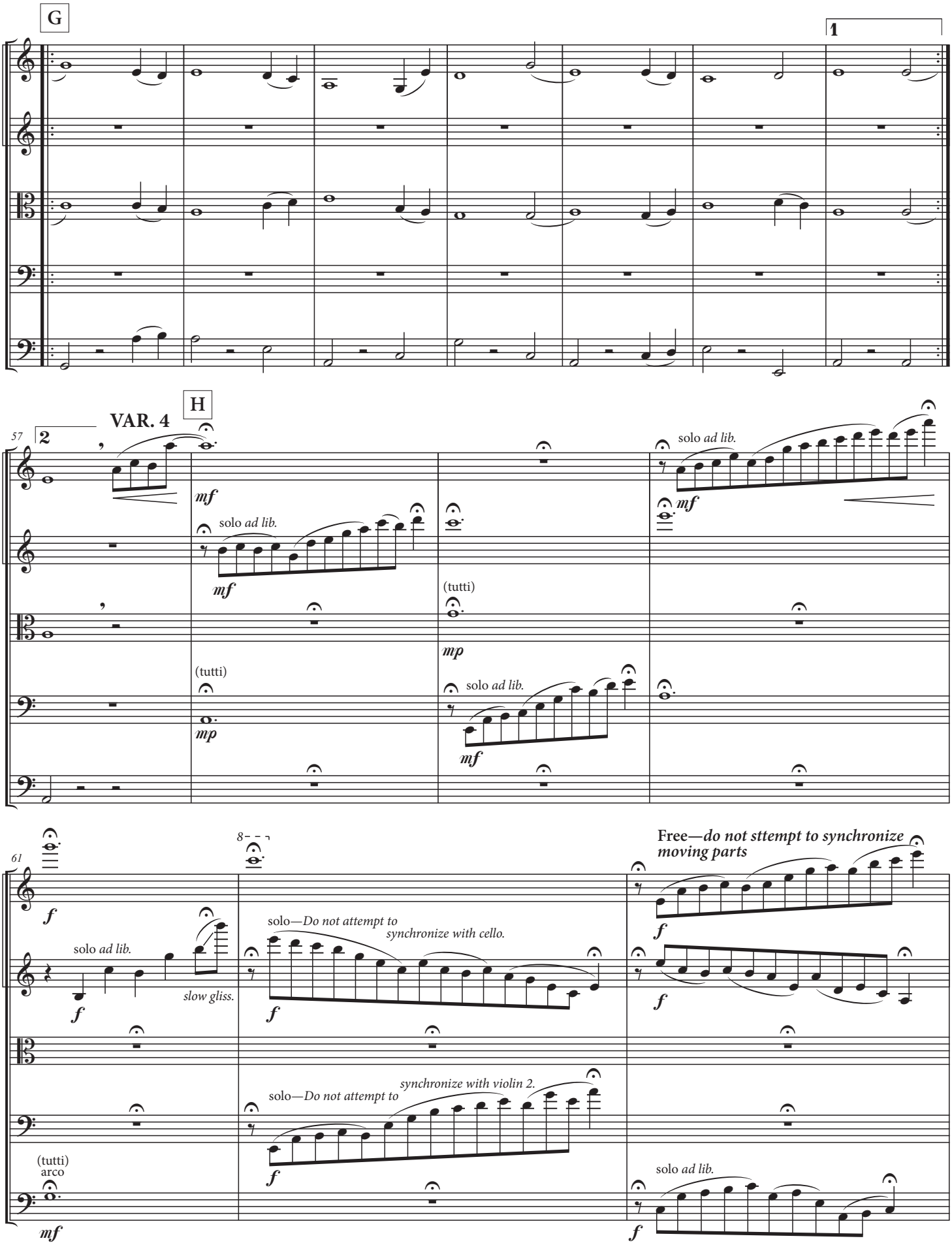
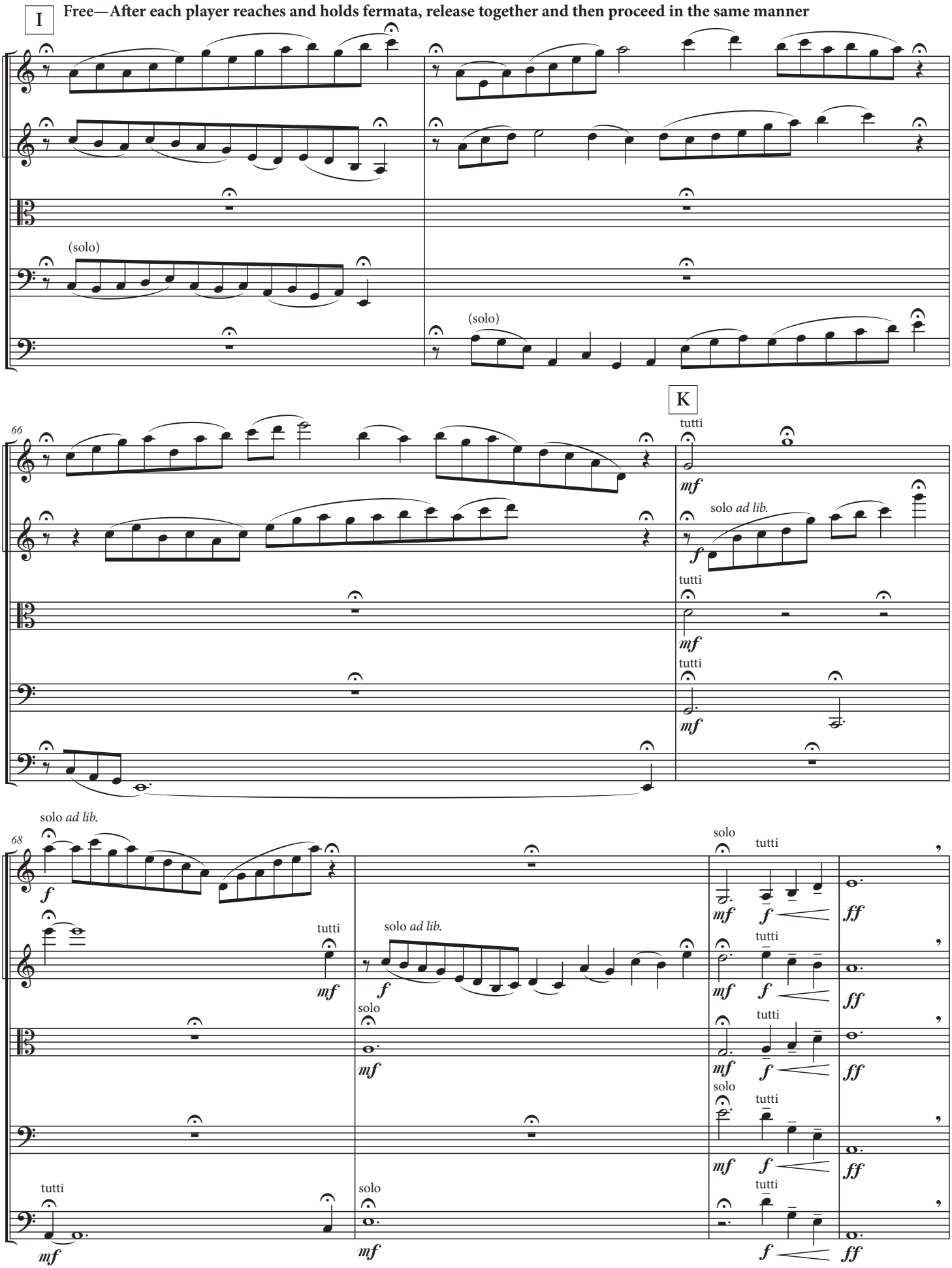
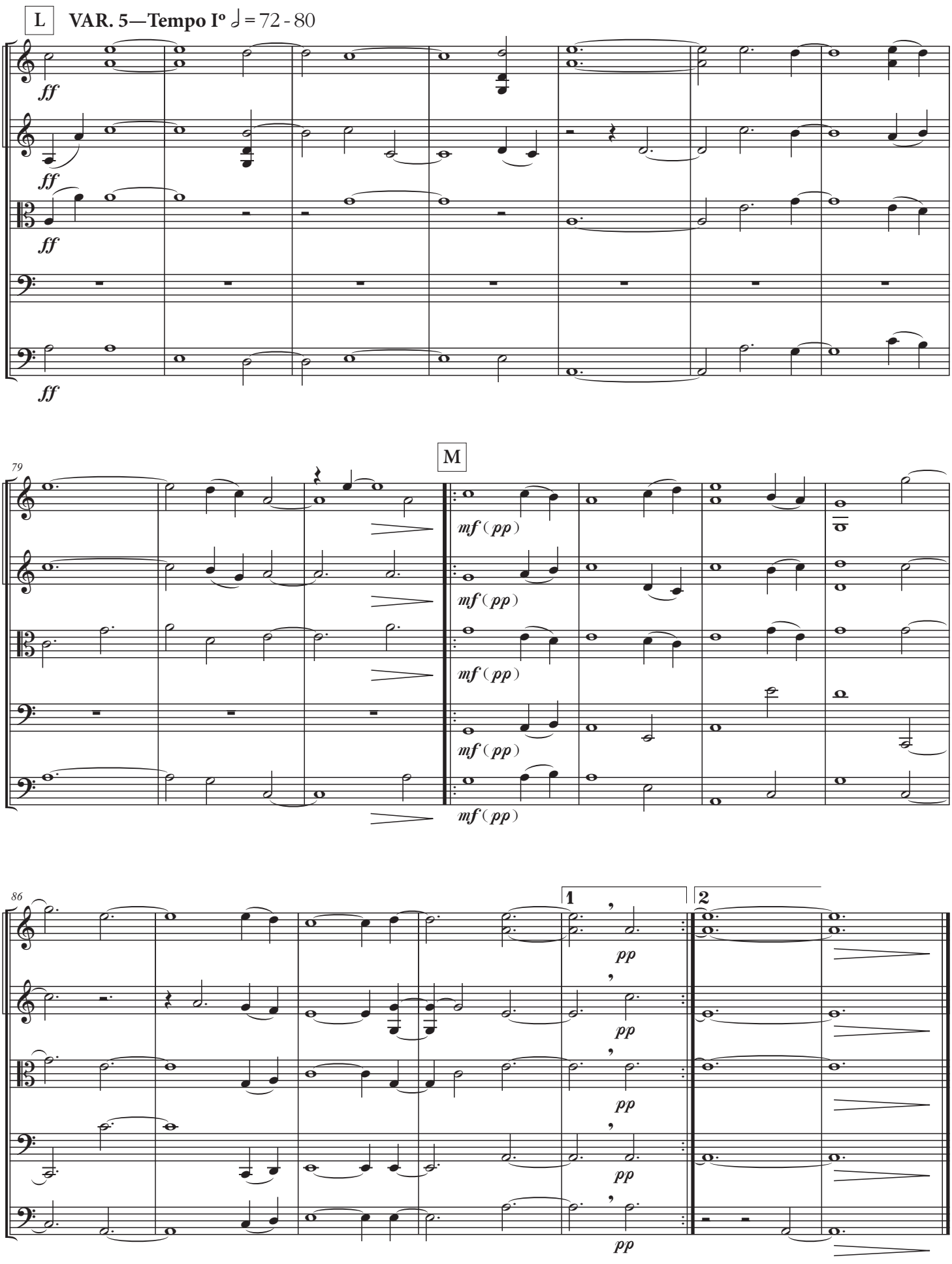

C
1
D
VAR. 2—Ancora un poco più mosso
28
2
mf
f
32
f


E
39
1
2
F
VAR. 3—Semplice
p
p
pizz.
p


G
1
VAR. 4
H
57
2
mf
solo ad lib.
(tutti)
mp
61
f
slow gliss.
8
solo—Do not attempt to synchronize with cello.
synchronize with violin 2.
Free—do not sttempt to synchronize moving parts
(tutti)
arco


I
Free—After each player reaches and holds fermata, release together and then proceed in the same manner
(solo)
(solo)
K
66
tutti
mf
solo ad lib.
f
tutti
mf
tutti
mf
68
solo ad lib.
f
tutti
mf
solo ad lib.
f
solo
mf
tutti
mf
solo
mf
tutti
mf
f
ff
tutti
mf
f
ff
tutti
mf
f
ff
solo
tutti
mf
f
ff
tutti
mf
solo
mf
tutti
f
ff


L
VAR. 5—Tempo Iº ♩ = 72 - 80
ff
M
79
mf (pp)
86
1
2
pp