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At Summer's End

for string orchestra

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At Summer's End (2018)

Program Notes

If spring brings relief at the end of winter (with the reappearance of leaves, animals coming out of hibernation, birds migrating back from their haunts away from the cold), the season remains one of fledgling youth and preparation. Summer is the culmination: light, warmth, confidence, a time to harvest abundant and delicious fruits. Be it in New England or on the Atlantic coast of France, where I grew up, the end of the summer is in many ways an ideal time. The heat abates, the season still displays all of its glorious and lush trappings, but none of its harshness. Yet, there is something bittersweet about this comfortable, pleasant moment, as the thought of the upcoming cold, darkness, scarcity, and renewed hardships of winter gradually looms. During the last week of summer vacation (in France, school might resume as late as September 10), I also remember the waves signaling this change, increasing in height as the equinox neared, making the water muddier as the rougher ocean picked up more sand.

In life too, we may experience a moment like this, when we know – from watching the life cycles of others – that we are at a moment of height, that we can take in what we have gleaned, but that an inevitable descent is due. As we brace for this, at the end of this summer of sorts, we can still indulge for a few more days in the dream of a world that is warmly disposed toward us.

Although *At Summer's End* involves serious moments, thanks to their brevity and frequently propelling motion, the mood never become too ponderous: the connection to a youthful spirit is kept and the piece ends in a moment of optimism.

Descriptive Notes

The piece begins with the low strings in unison introducing a melodic motive that will return throughout.[1] The grave tone of this chant evokes a spoken pronouncement, a prayer, an incantation by a religious leader, or perhaps a ballad – a bard's retelling of a national epic. The higher strings take over the narration (m. 10), now evoking how the identity of this people is tied up with a history of plight and vulnerability, a keen sense of the wounds of history, and the expectation of more hardships to come. The continued presence of the bass suggests strength and resilience as well as the richness and depths of this people's cultural roots.

This swiftly transitions to a new section with pizzicato (plucked) strings (m. 32), creating a new mood, somewhere between playfulness and mystery. To me, the athletic sound of a *tutti pizzicatto* texture such as this also suggest travel by horse, which reinforces the imagery of an epic narrative set in early medieval times. Over this, a solo violin playing *arco* (bowed, not plucked) reprises the plaintive, melancholic idea of the beginning (m. 39). While the solo continues, a harmonically-complex chorale is introduced in the background, softly, in a high, icy register (m. 73). The chorale gradually takes precedence, acquiring the characteristics of an anthem (m 88). Its concluding Picardy cadence (ending with a major chord instead of the expected minor chord) emphasizes once more the medieval setting (m. 98-99).

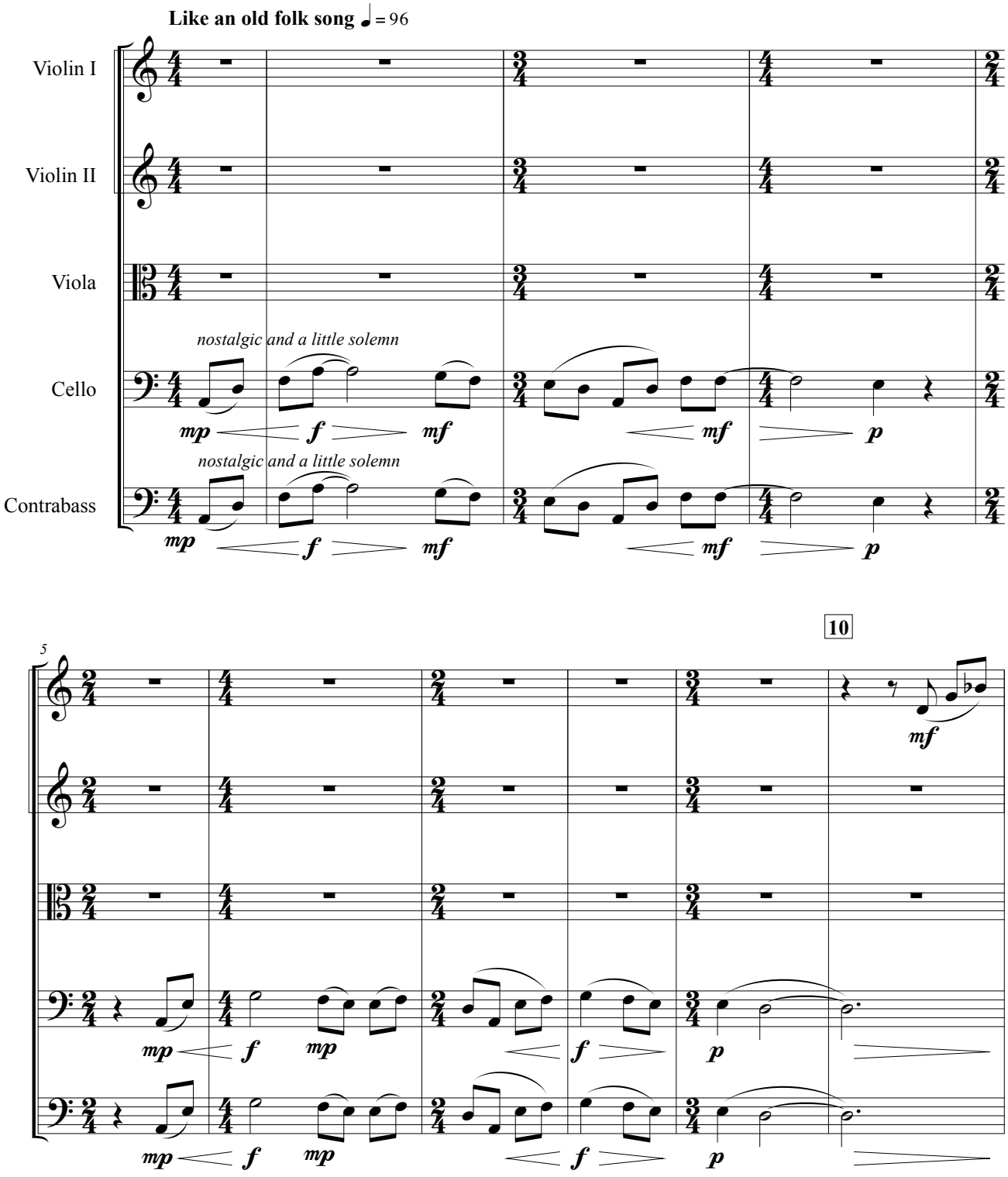
The next section (m. 100) uses the opening melodic theme once more, but this time in a very different, Baroque guise, perhaps reminiscent of Handel. The leisurely affect (mood) of this light, elegant, stylized aristocratic dance is short-lived, as first violins and basses bring back the opening chant (m. 104) and then the anthem (m. 113). The anthem is at first stated using tentative-sounding chalky harmonies, before gradually coming back to life as it returns to the Picardy cadence (m. 125). The sprightly Baroque music and the chant alternate, resolving in favor of clarity and weightlessness, with the strings evaporating (m. 146) like dew in the sun

[1] The motive begins with an anacrusis (a pickup) consisting of ascending leap, followed by two ascending skips. The anacrusis leads to a metrically accented note which is held longer, followed by two descending steps of shorter rhythmic value. In subsequent iterations of the motive, the size of the intervals may be modified, but the shape remains.

AT SUMMER'S END

for string orchestra

Francis KAYALI



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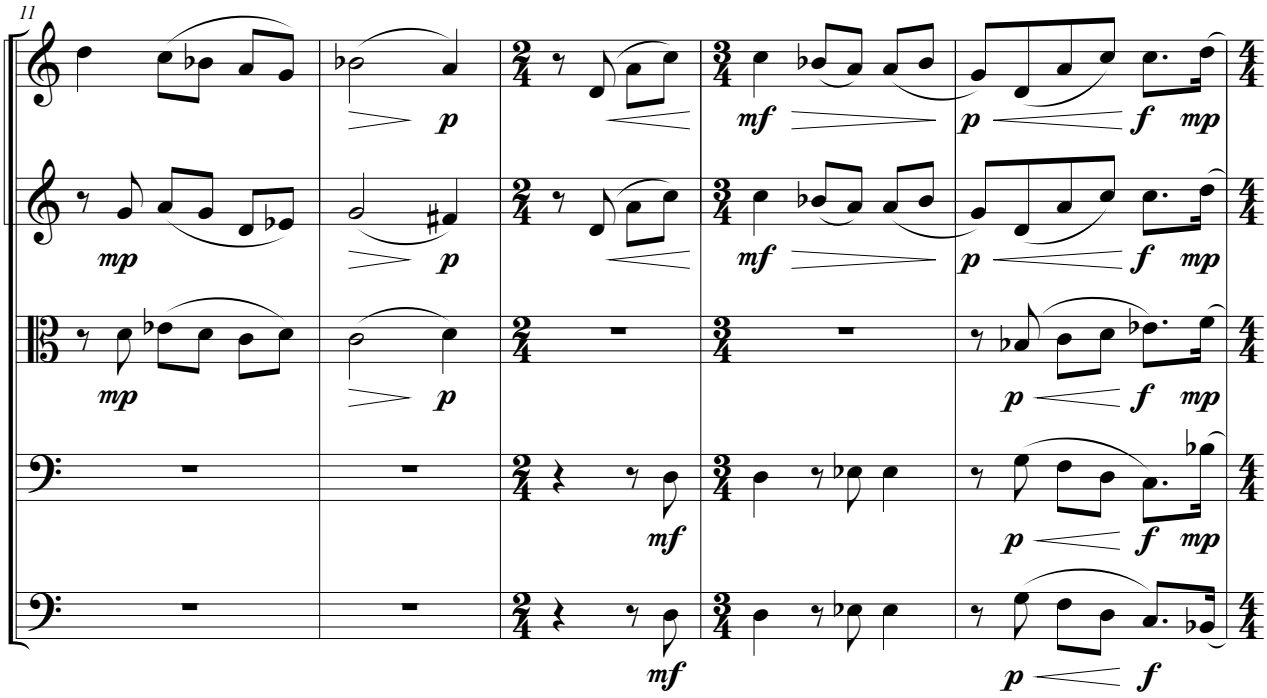
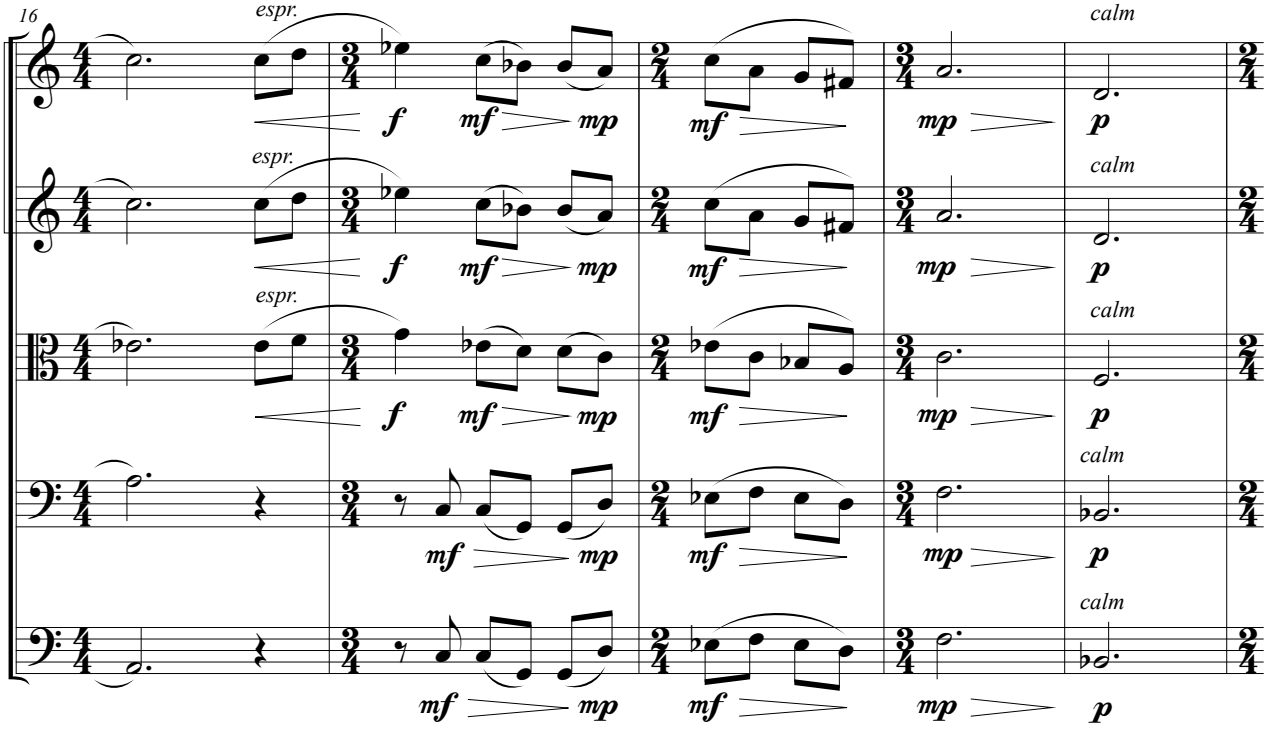
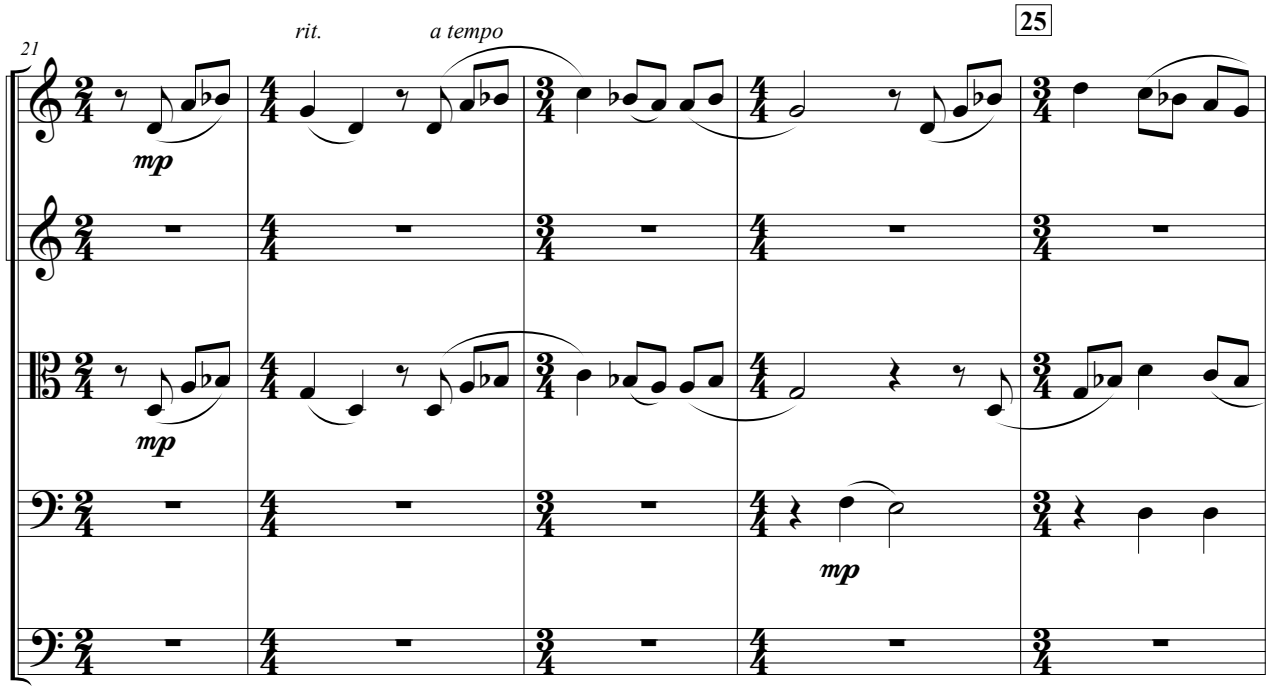
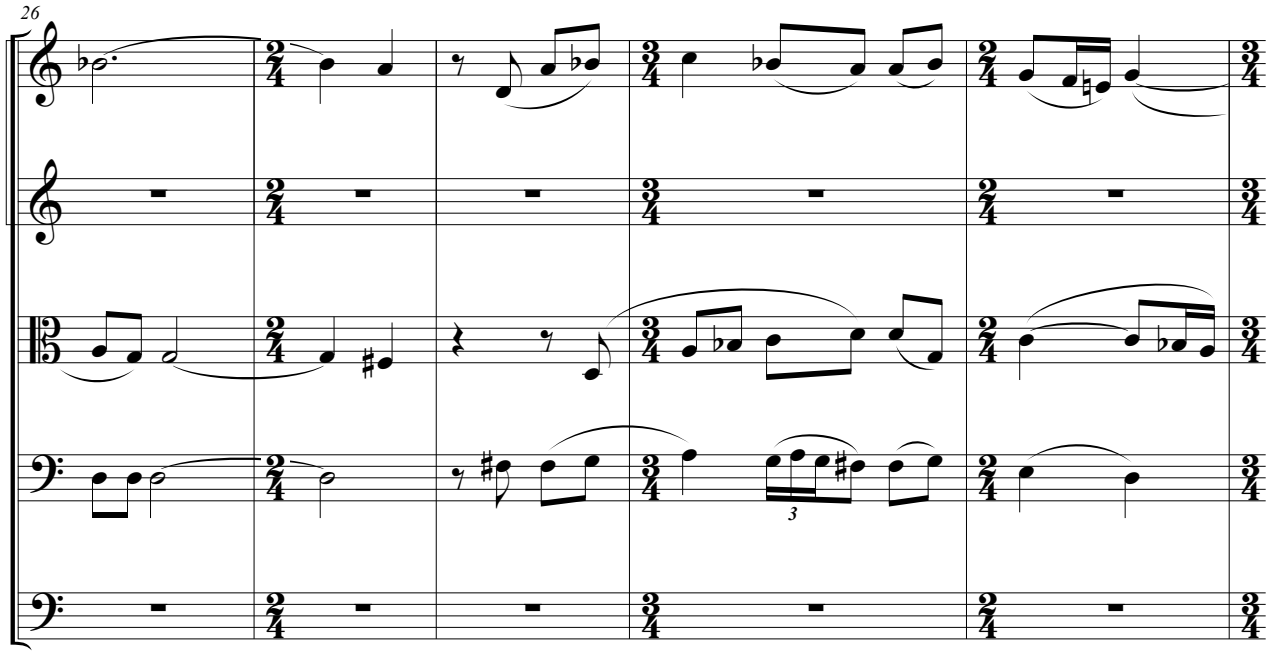
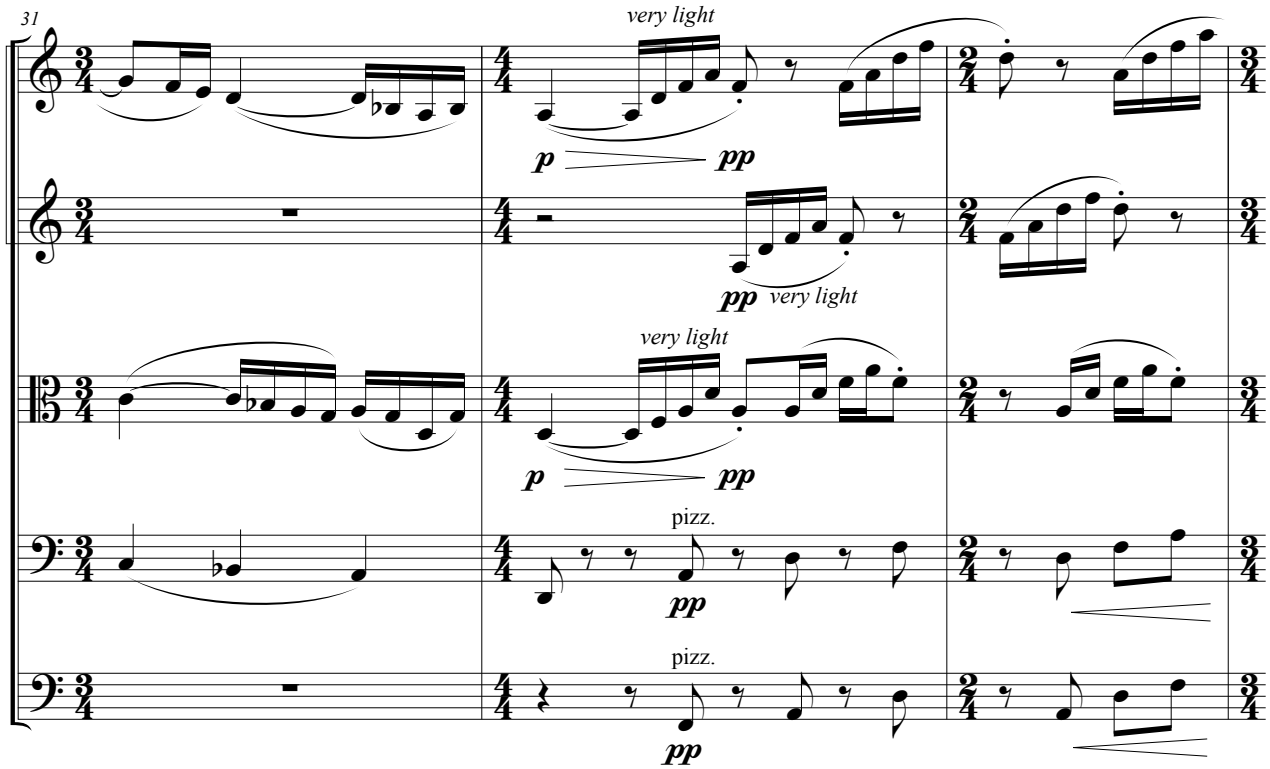
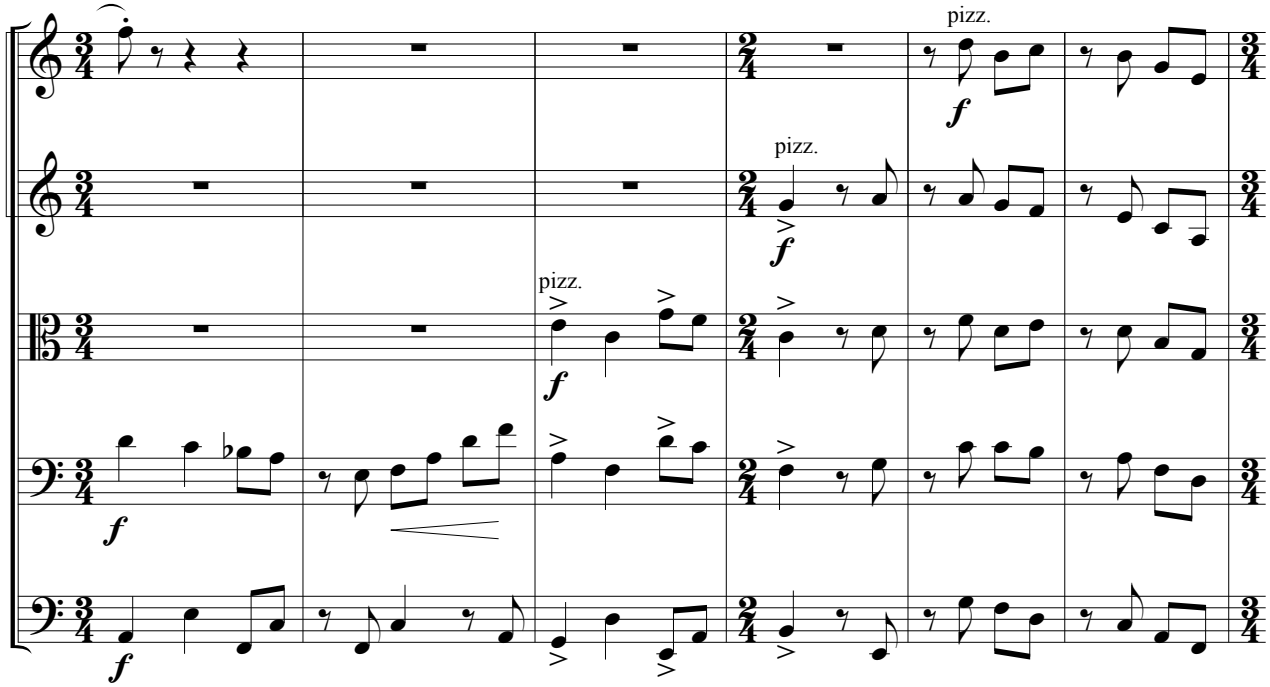

11
mp
p
mf
f
mp

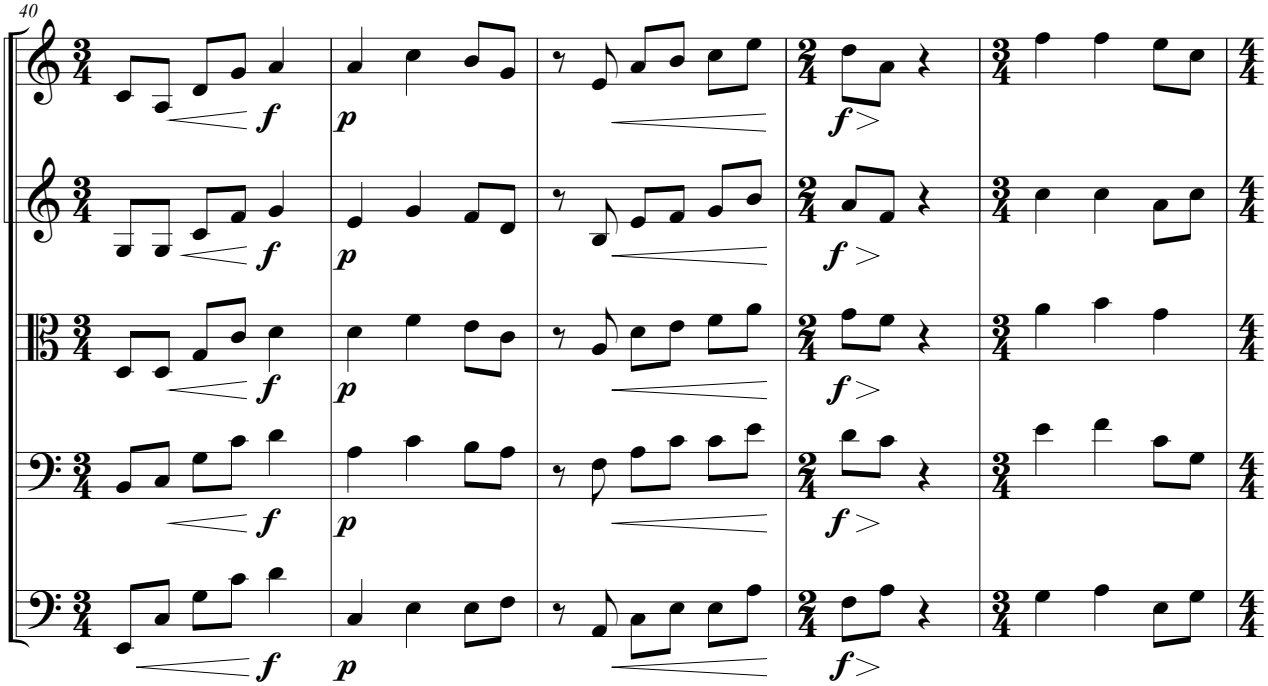

16
espr.
calm
f
mf
mp
p

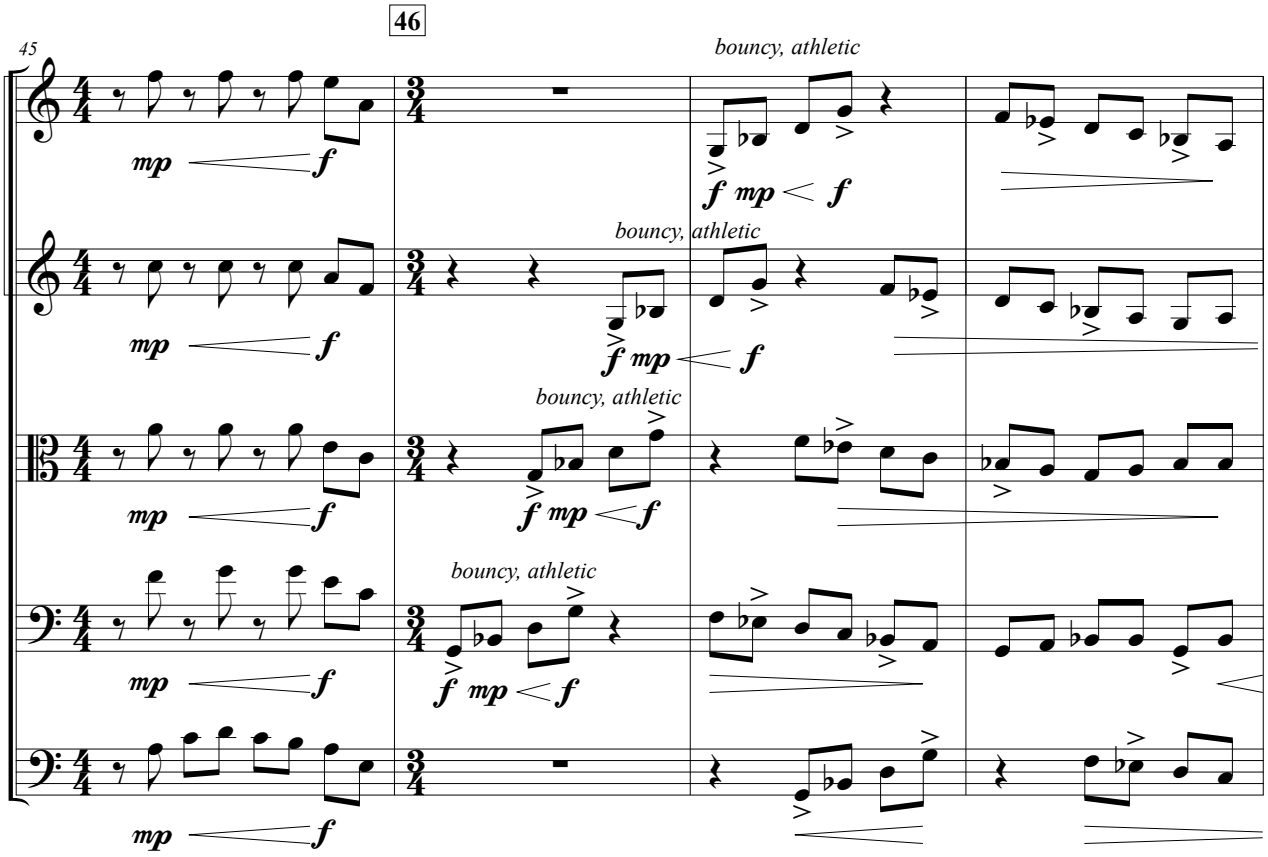

21
rit.
a tempo
25
mp
mp
mp

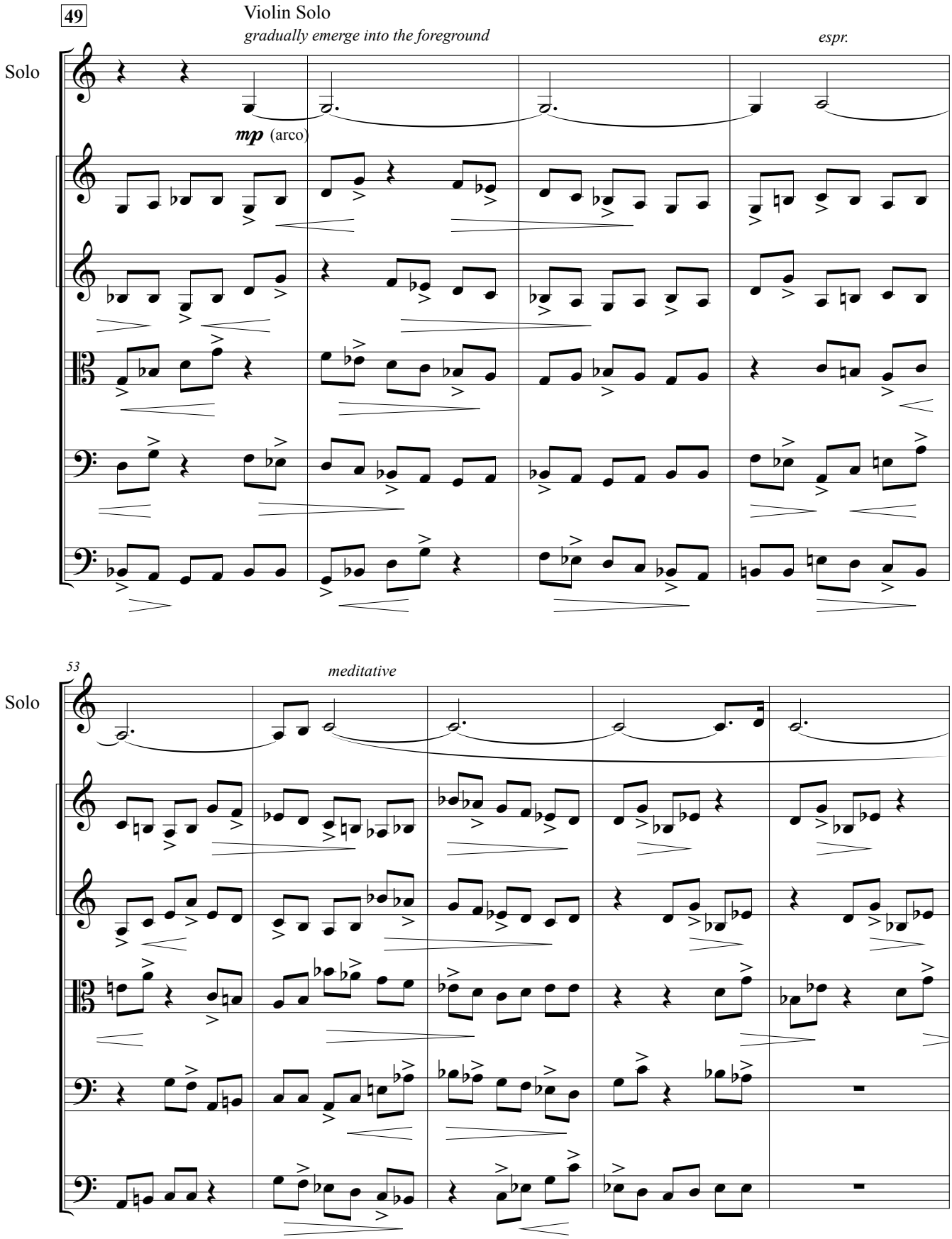

26
3

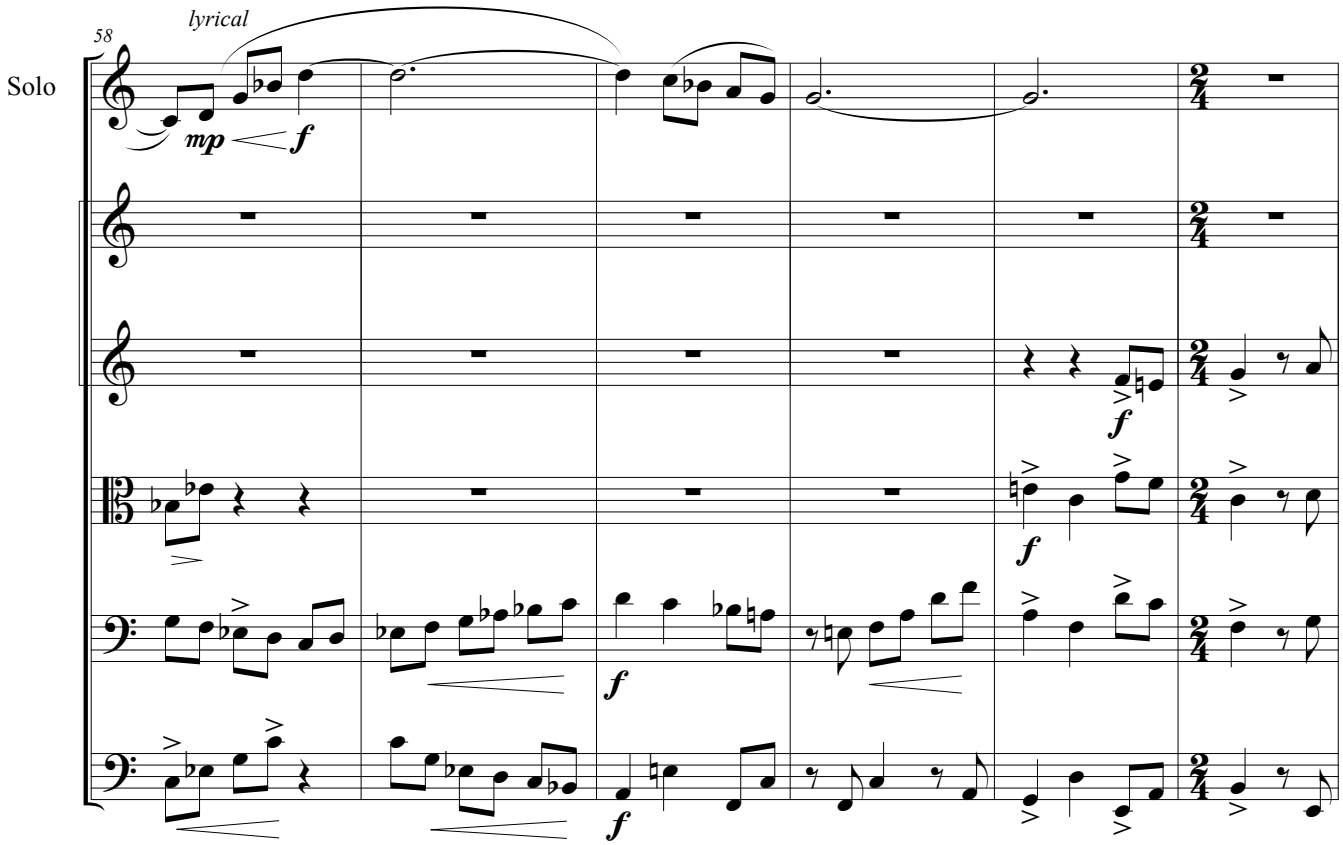

31
very light
p
pp
pp
very light
very light
p
pp
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp

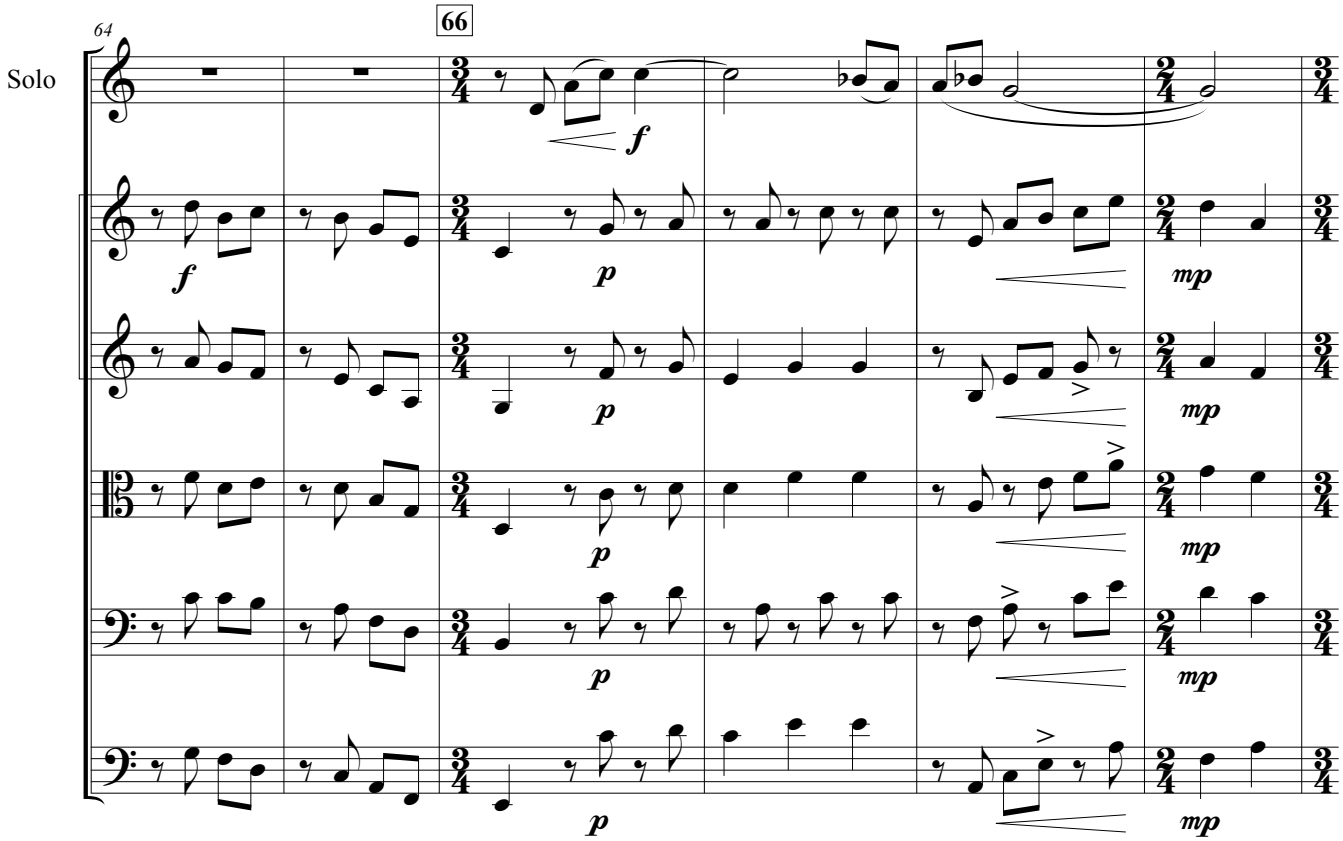

34
Playful and a little faster ♩ = 112
pizz.
f
pizz.
f
pizz.
f
f
f

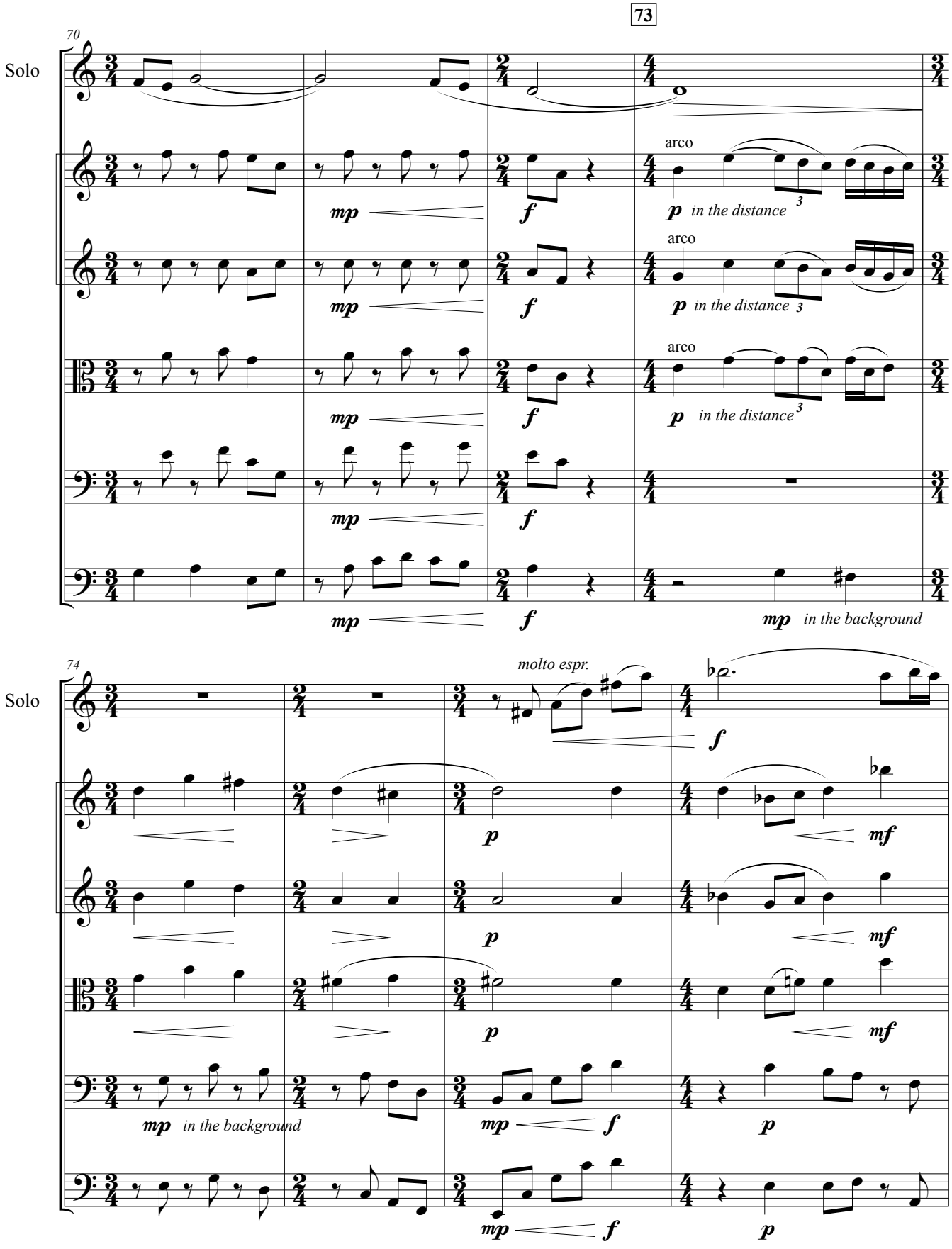

40
f
p
f

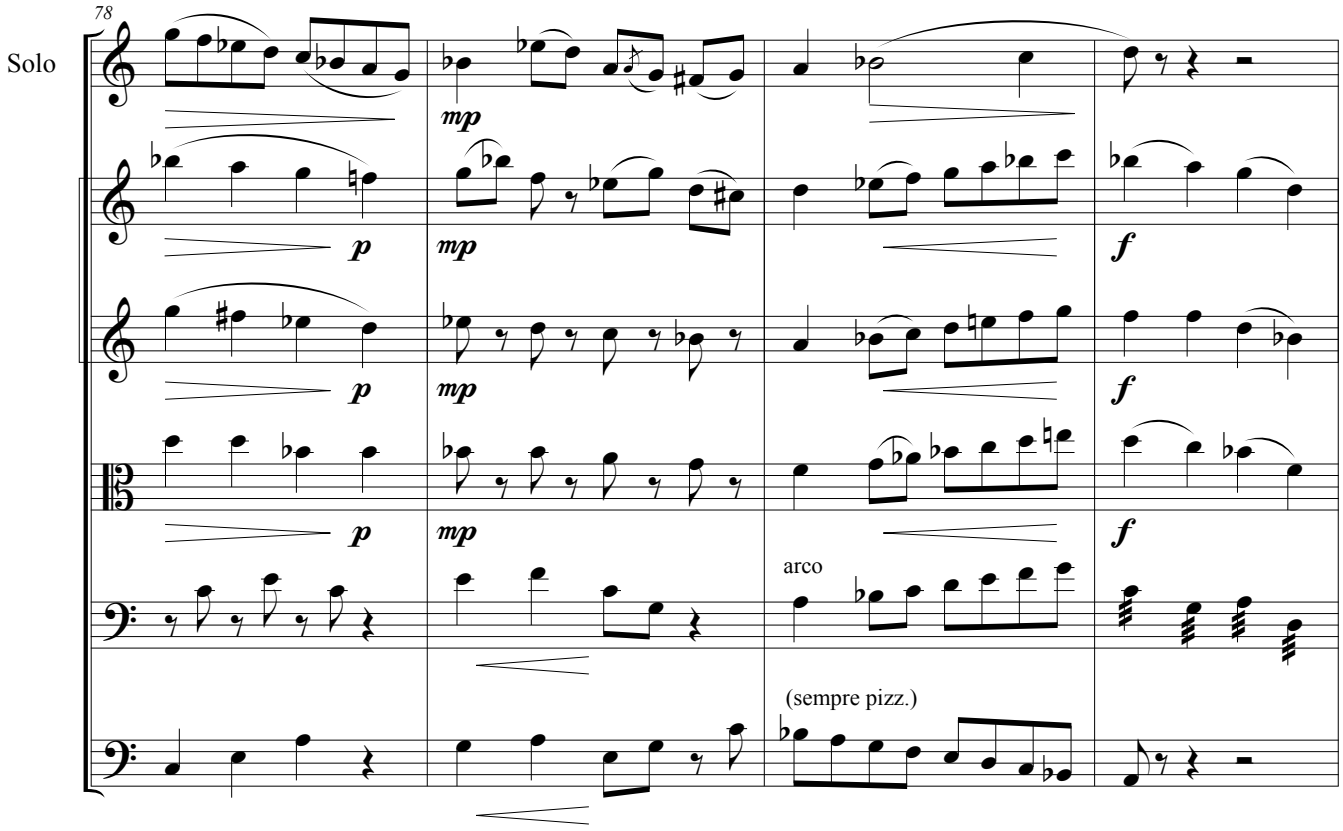

45
46
bouncy, athletic
mp
f
f mp

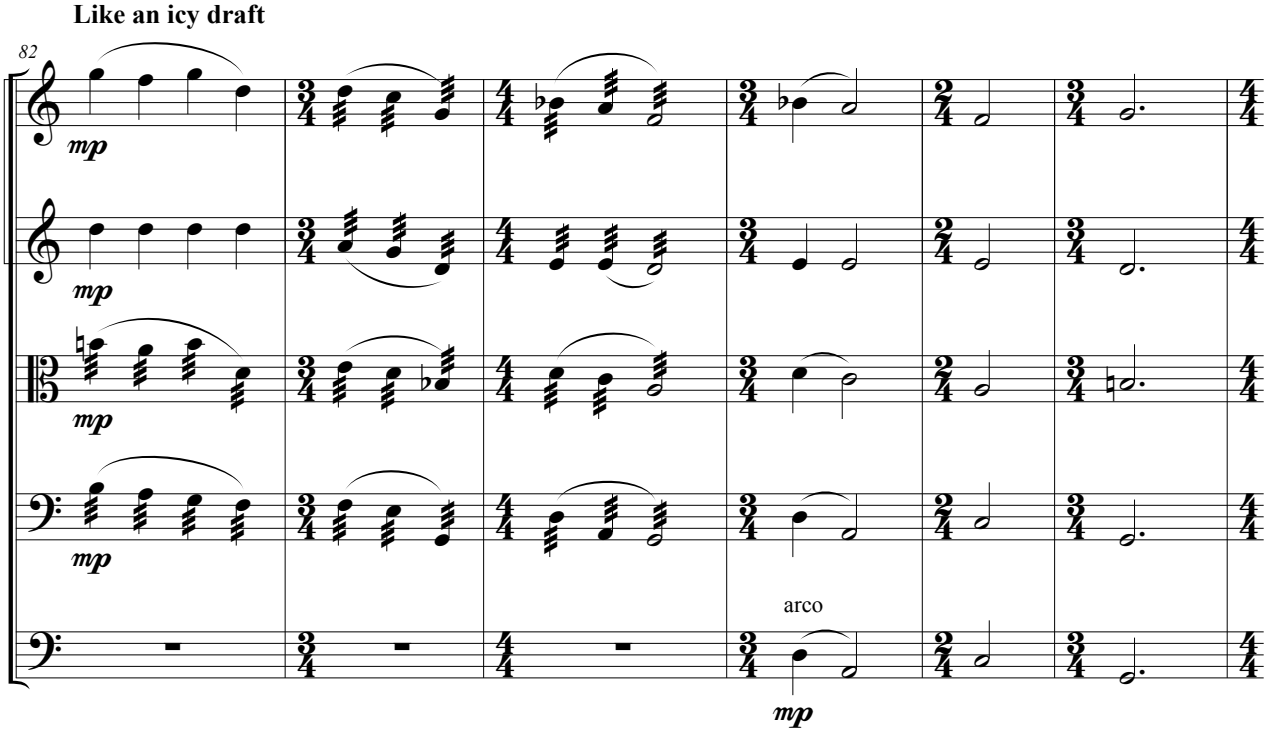

49
Violin Solo
gradually emerge into the foreground
espr.
Solo
mp (arco)
53
meditative
Solo

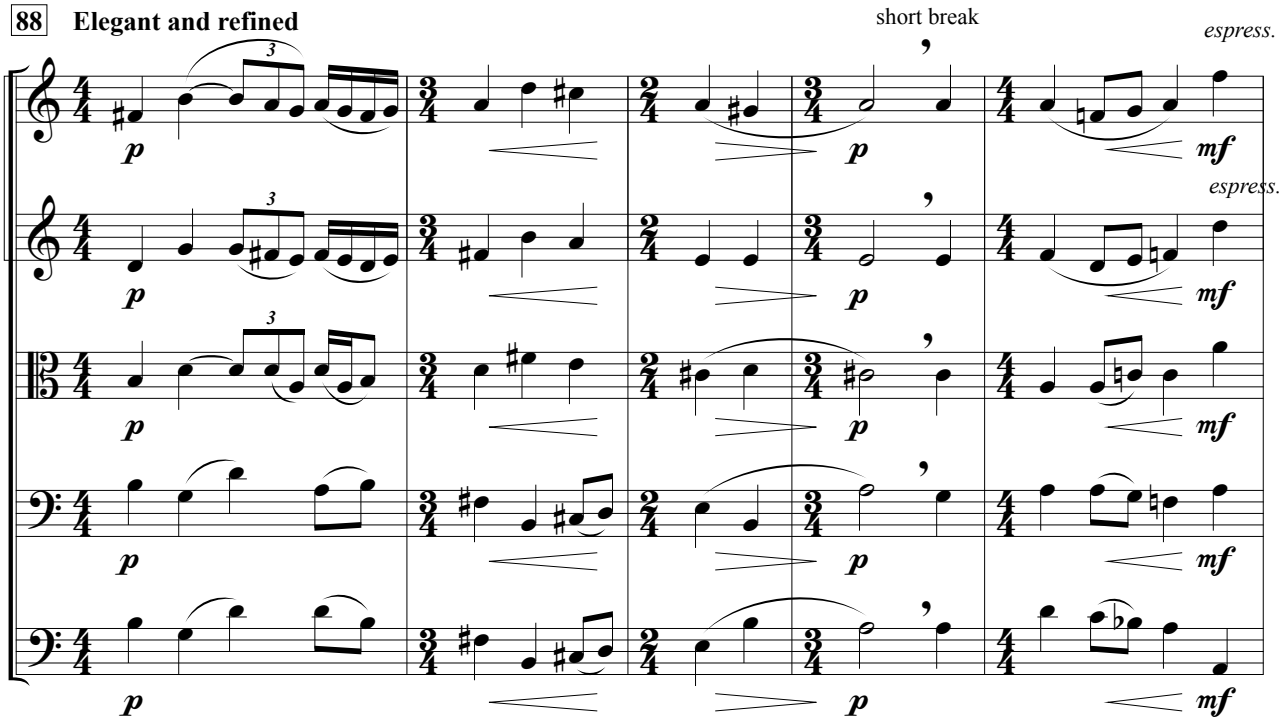

58
lyrical
Solo
mp
f
f
f
f
f

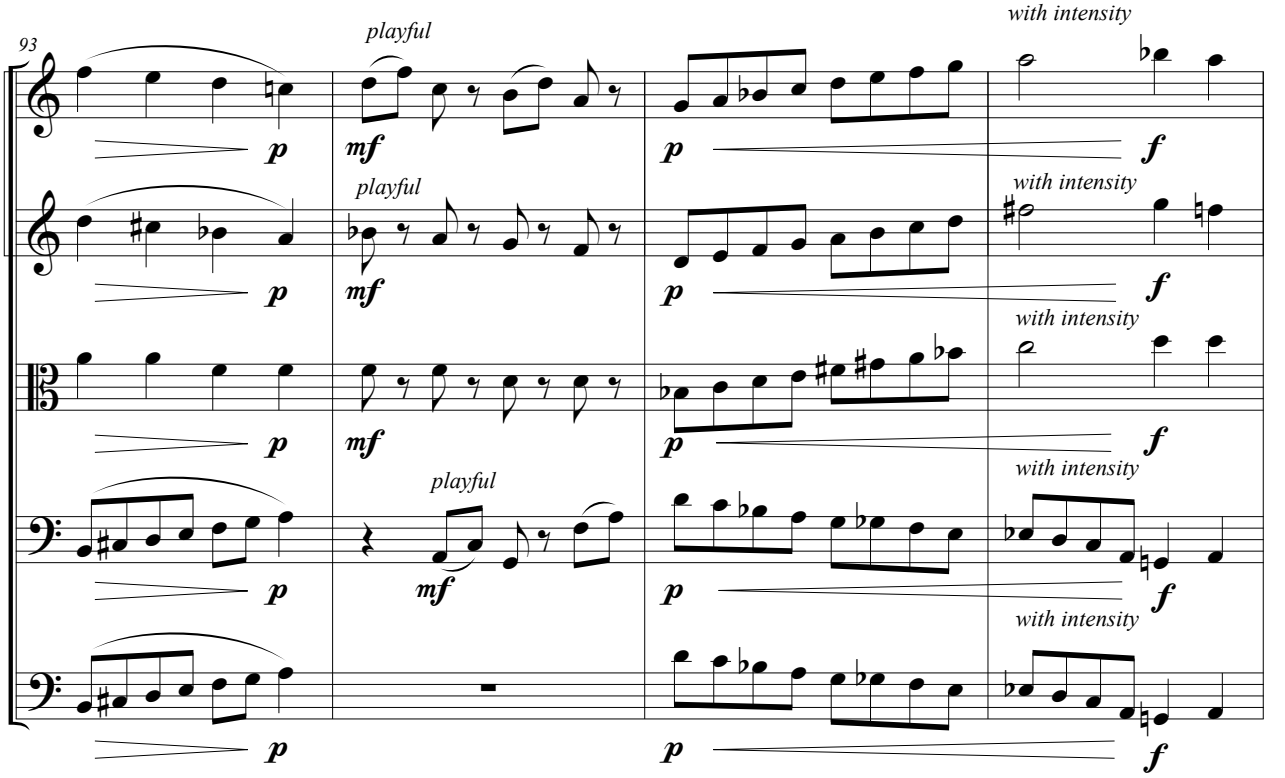

64
66
Solo
f
p
p
p
p
p
mp
mp
mp
mp
mp

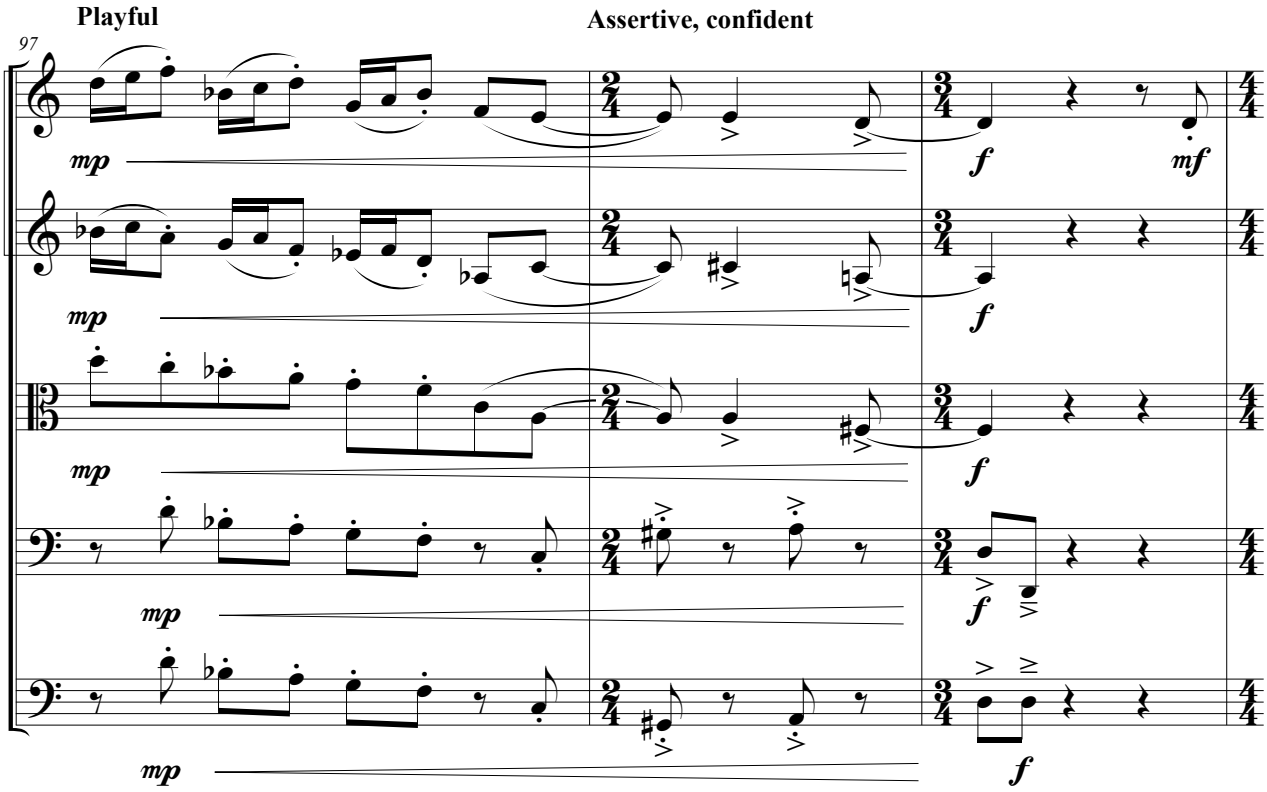

73
70
Solo
arco
p in the distance
mp
f
mp in the background
74
molto espr.
Solo
mf
mp in the background

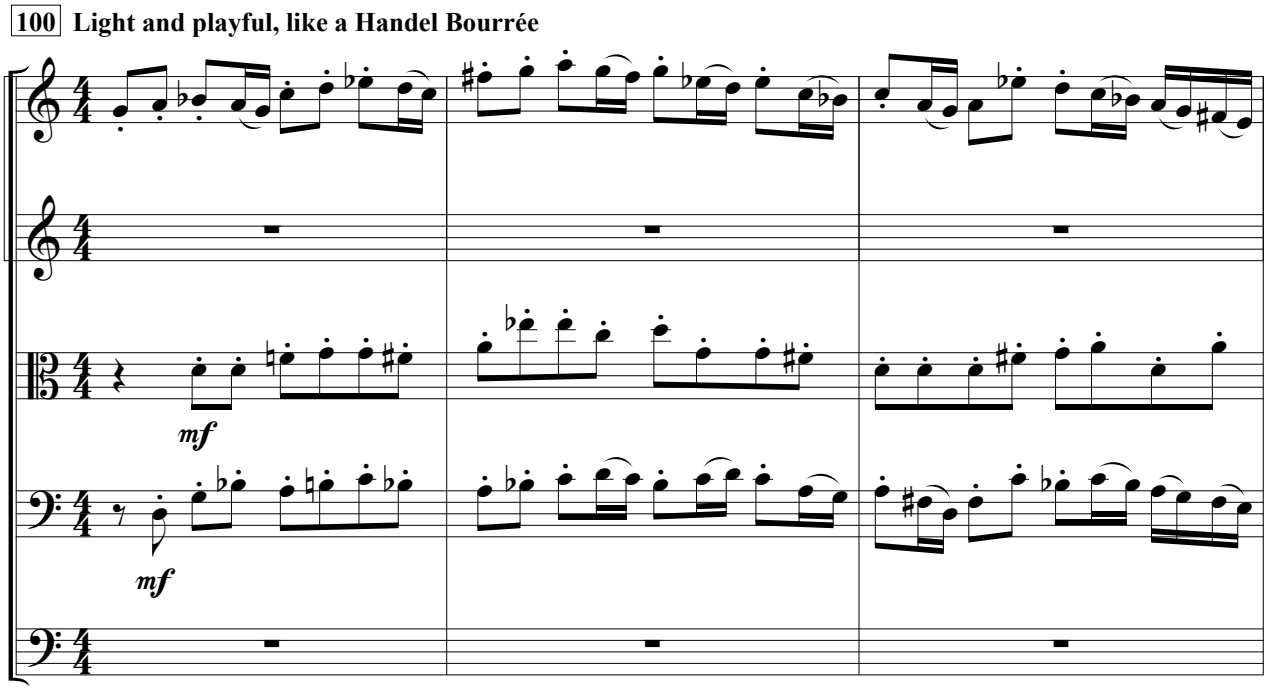

78
Solo
mp
p
mp
f
arco
(sempre pizz.)

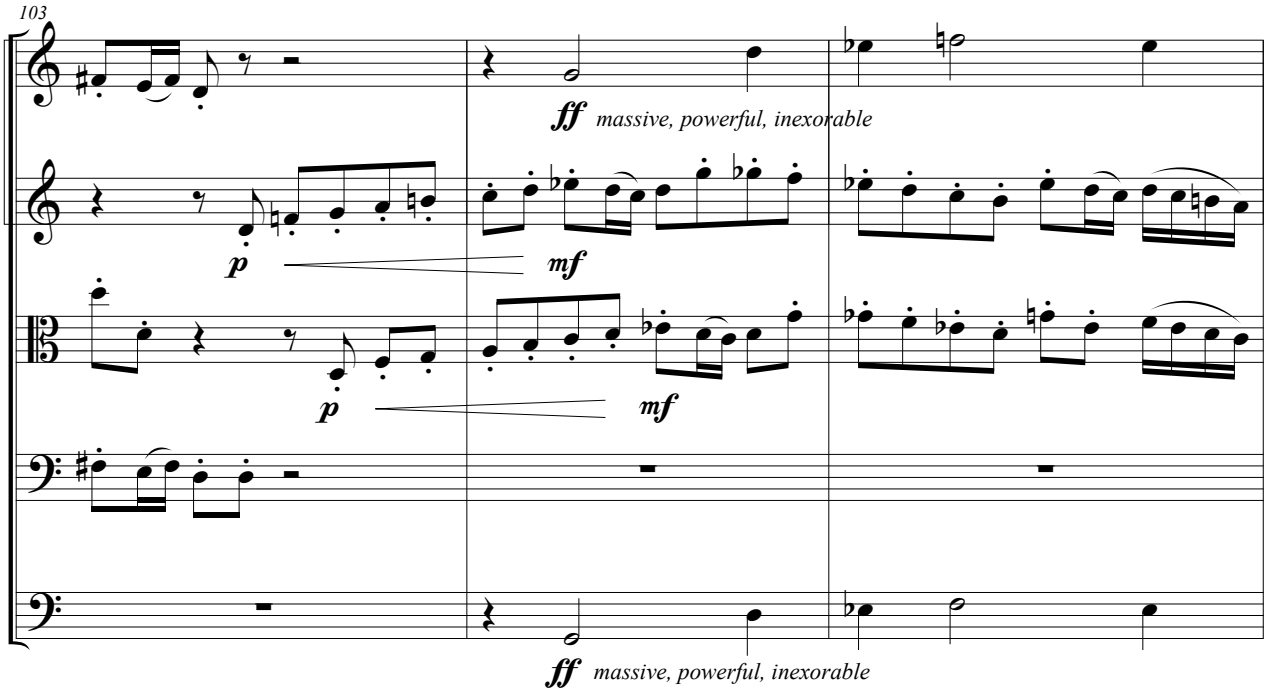

Like an icy draft
82
mp
arco

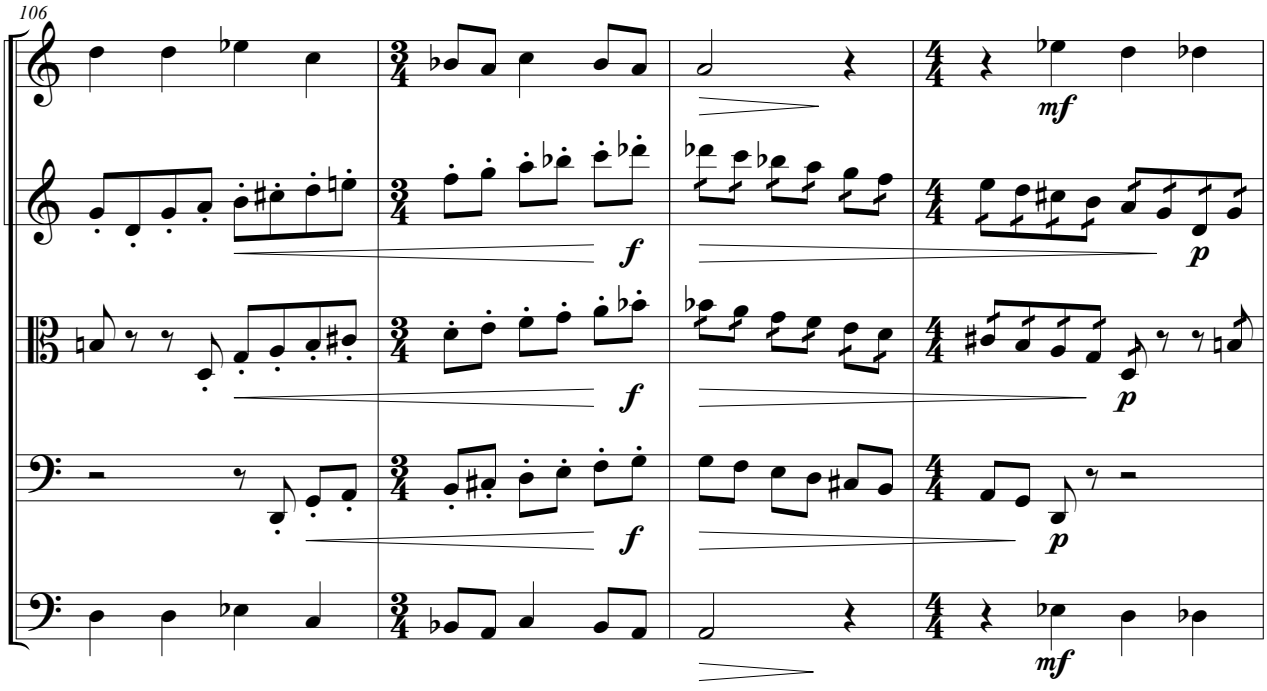

88
Elegant and refined
short break
espress.
espress.

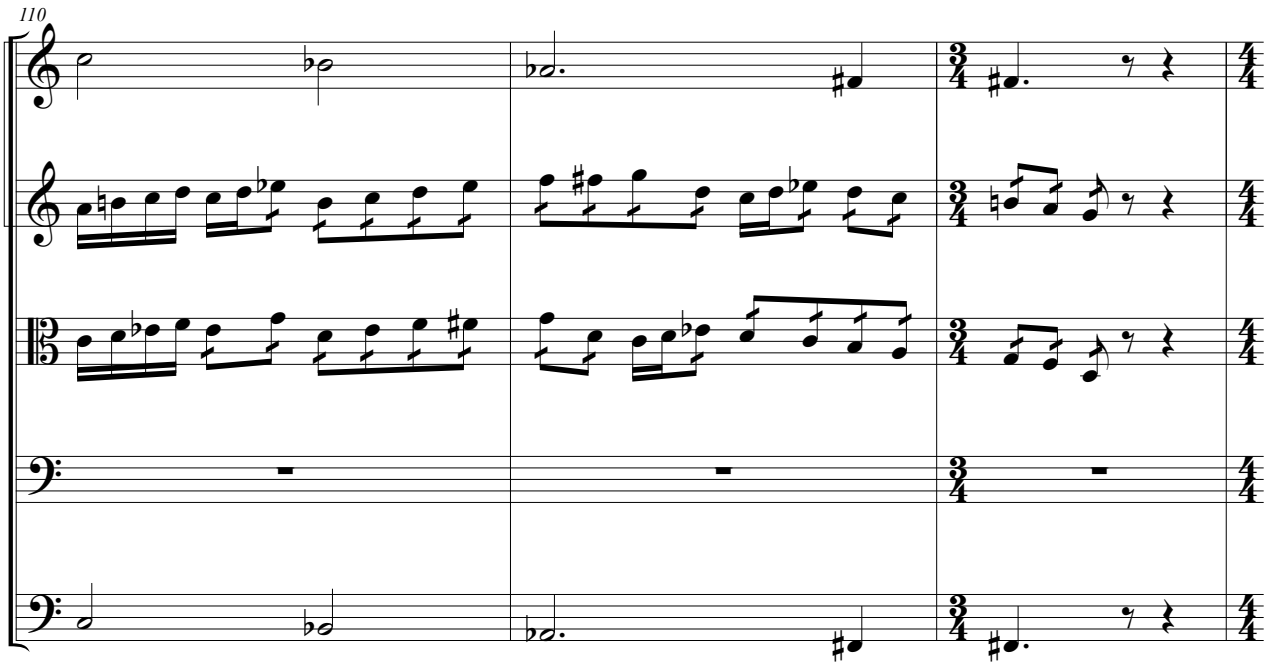

93
playful
playful
playful
with intensity
with intensity
with intensity
with intensity
with intensity


Playful
Assertive, confident
97
mp
f
mf


100
Light and playful, like a Handel Bourrée
mf

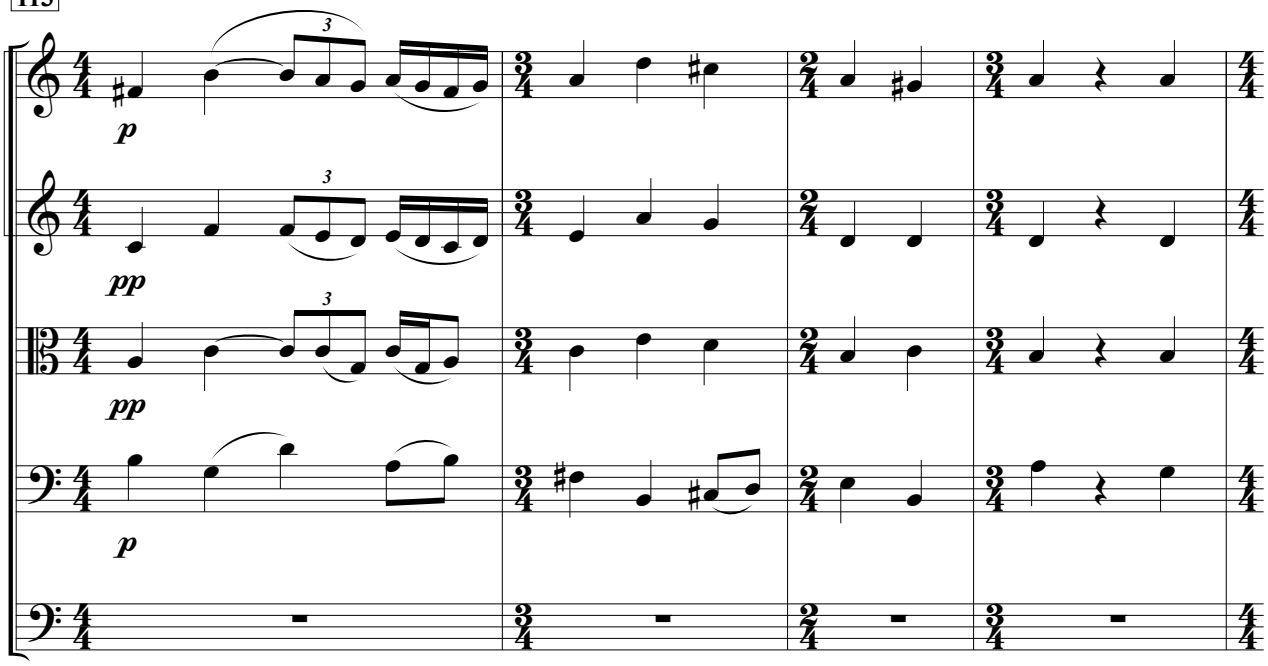

103
ff massive, powerful, inexorable
p
mf
p
mf
ff massive, powerful, inexorable

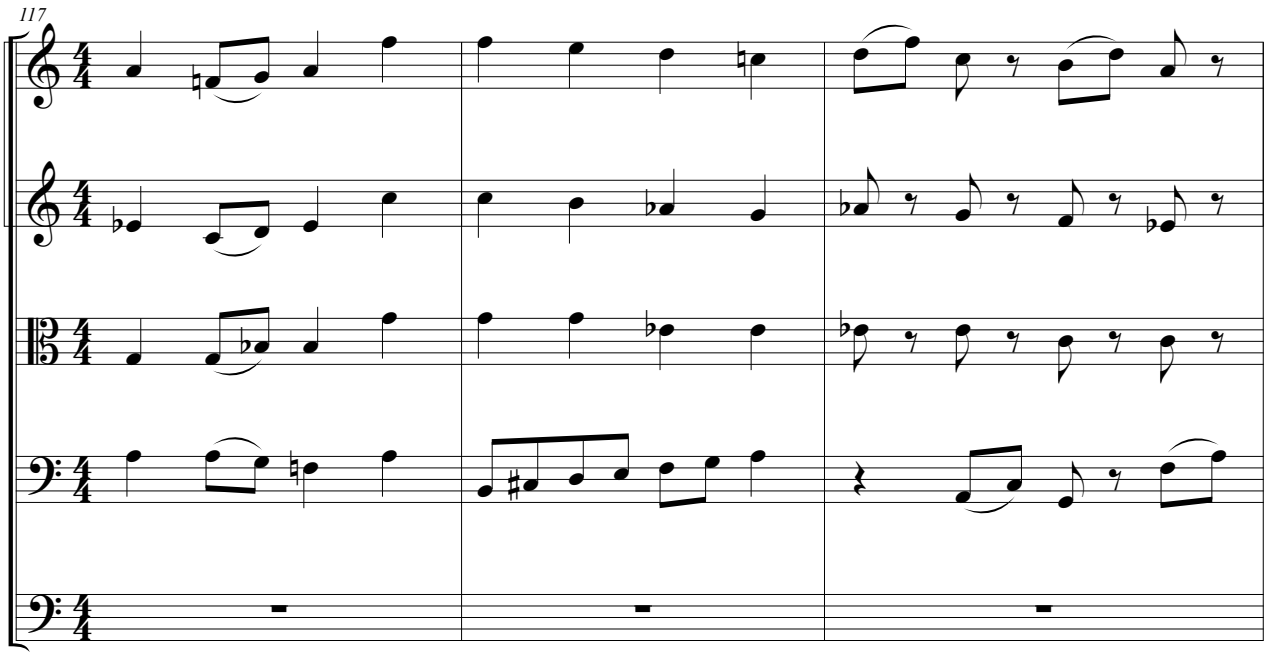

106
mf
f
p
f
p
f
p
mf



Poco meno mosso ♩ = 96

113 **Distant, pale and chalky (senza vib., senza espr.)**

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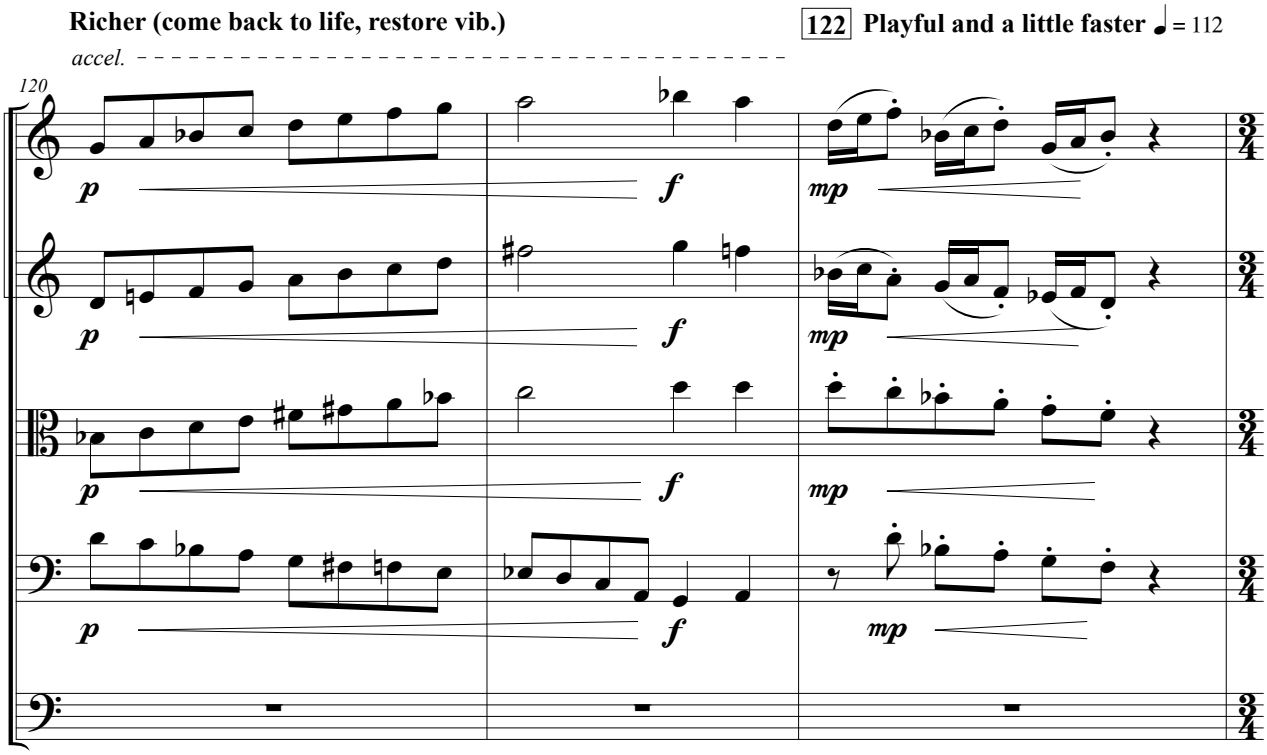
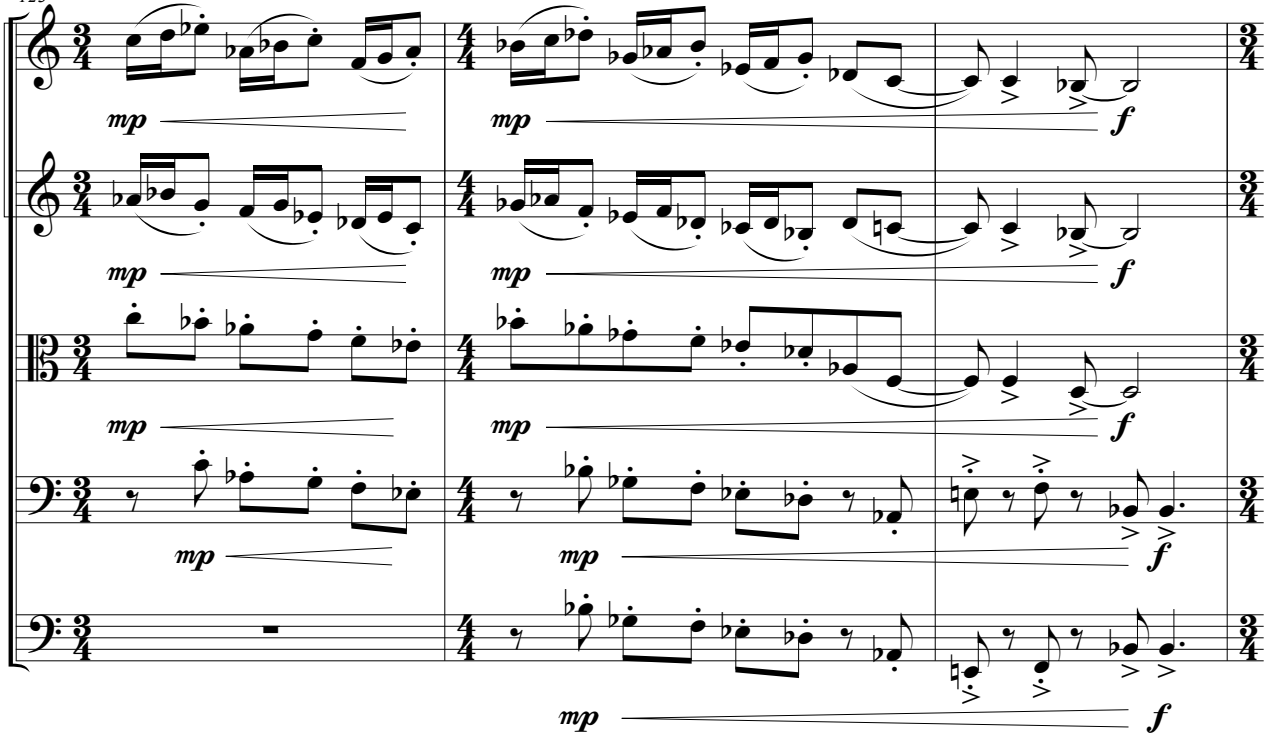
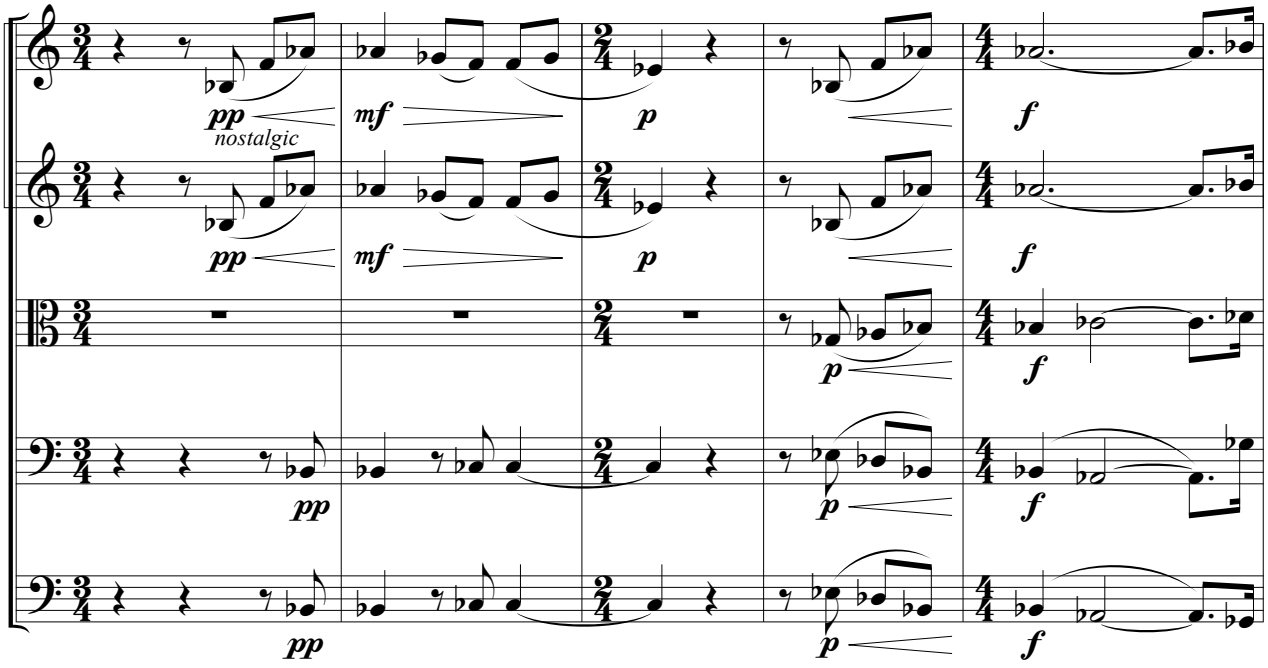

Richer (come back to life, restore vib.)
accel.
120
122 Playful and a little faster ♩ = 112
p
f
mp

123

Assertive, confident

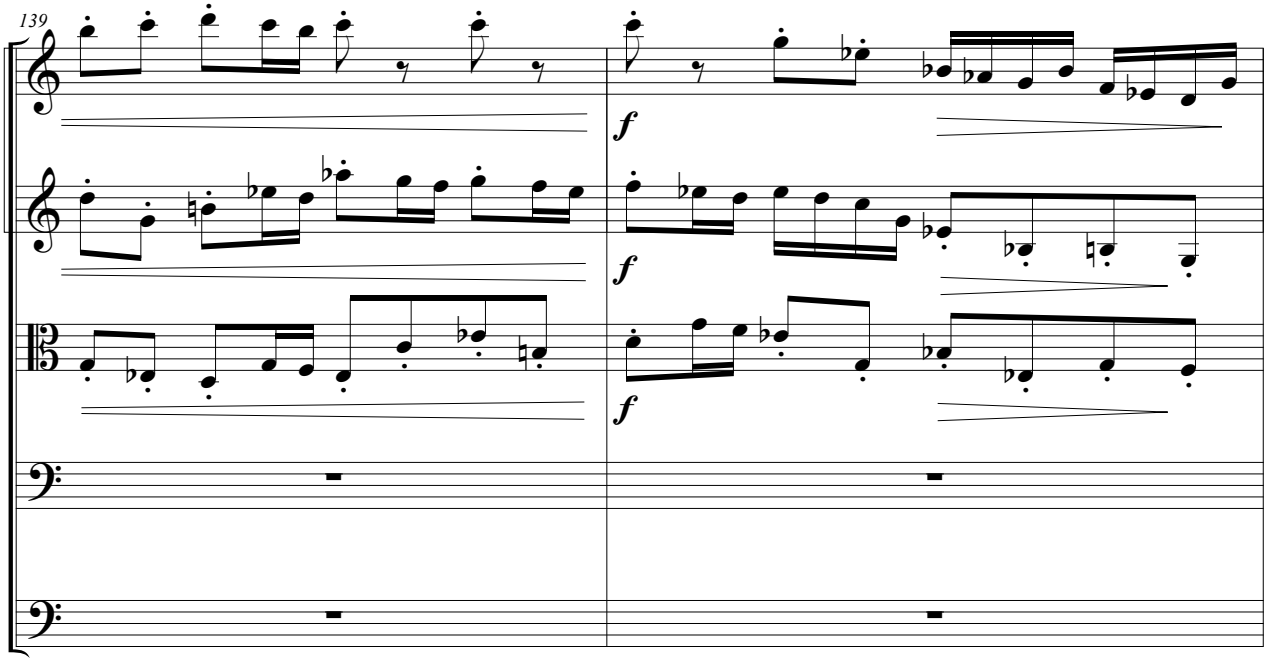


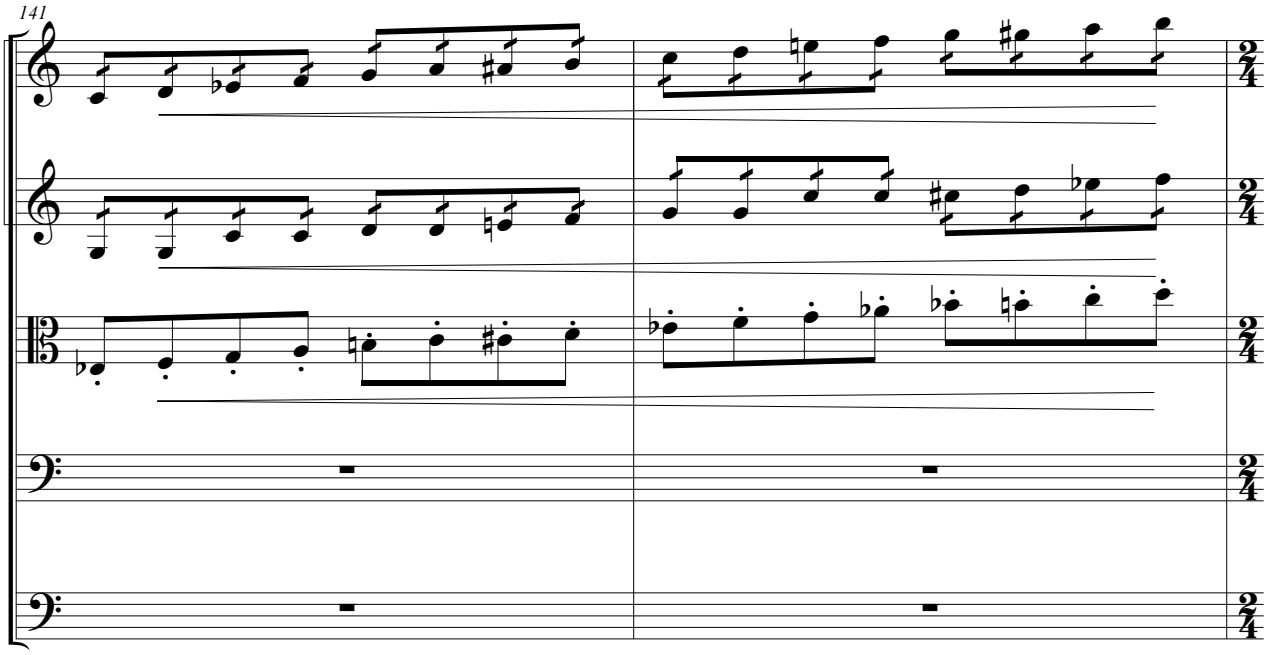
126 Nostalgic



131
molto espr.
molto espr.
molto espr.
f > mp mf mp
mf
mf mp

135
136
Playful
calm
mp
p
lead in


139
f
f
f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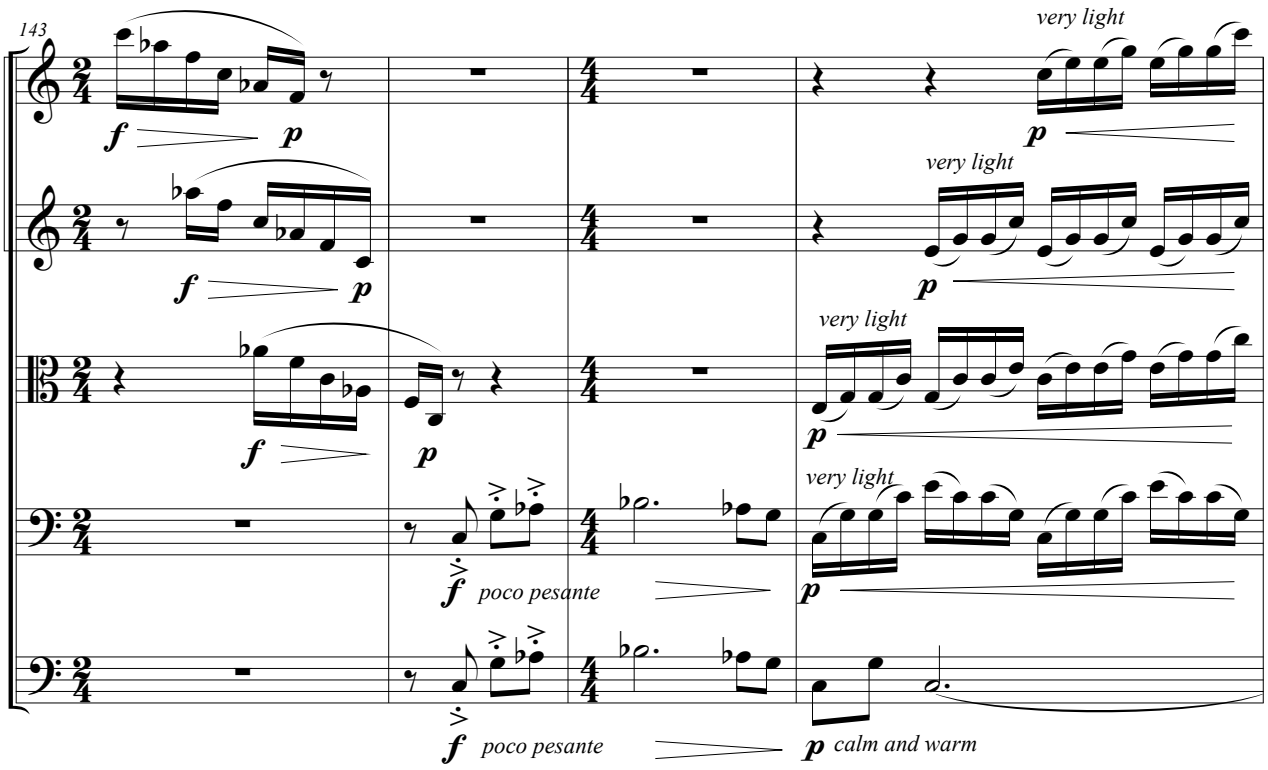
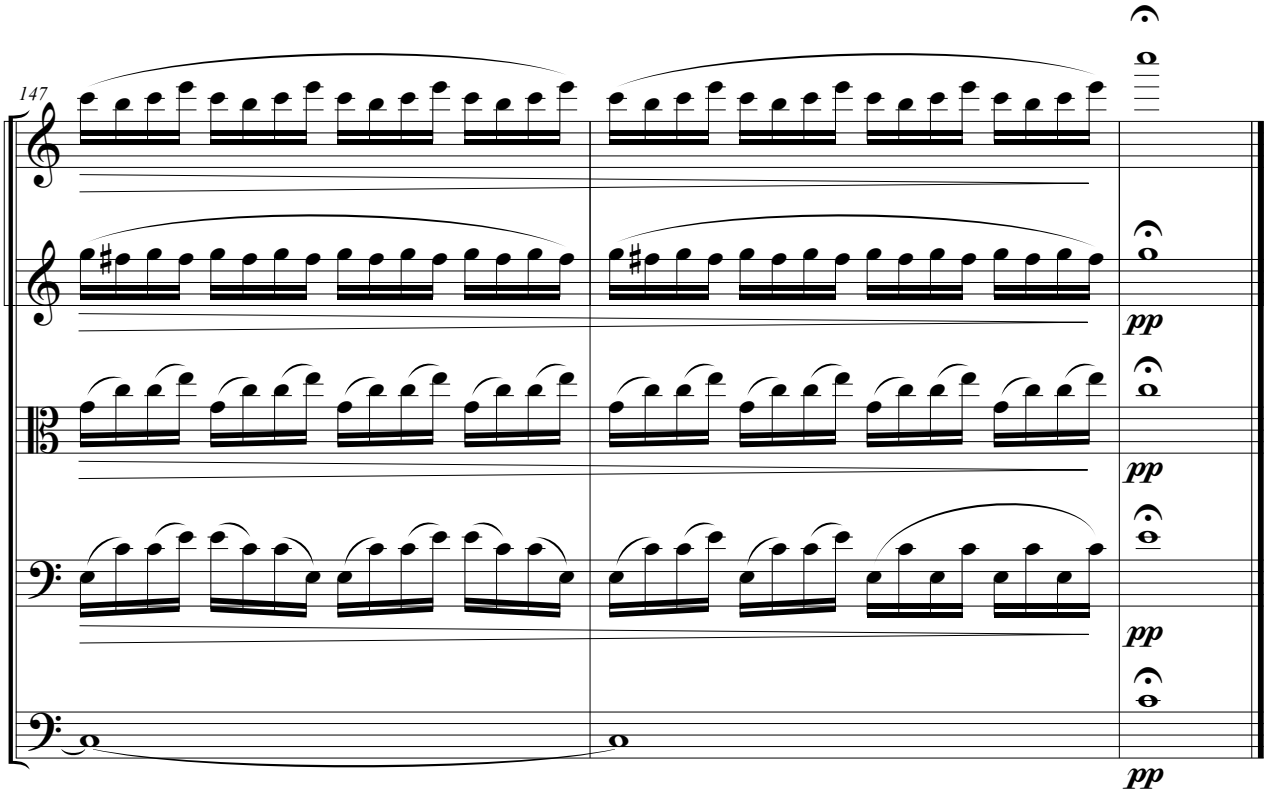

143
very light
very light
very light
very light
poco pesante
poco pesante
calm and warm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