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Aaron Wong

Songs of Uncertainty

For two sopranos and mixed chamber ensemble

Aaron Wong

Songs of Uncertainty

Poems from *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895)
Stephen Crane

I. lost

A learned man came to me once.
He said, "I know the way - come."
And I was overjoyed at this.
Together we hastened.
Soon, too soon, were we
Where my eyes were useless,
And I knew not the ways of my feet.
I clung to the hand of my friend;
But at last he cried, "I am lost."

II. snow, ice, burning sand

There was, before me,
Mile upon mile
Of snow, ice, burning sand.
And yet I could look beyond all this,
To a place of infinite beauty;
And I could see the loveliness of her
Who walked in the shade of the trees.
When I gazed,
All was lost
But this place of beauty and her.
When I gazed,
And in my gazing, desired,
Then came again
Mile upon mile,
Of snow, ice, burning sand.

III. distant beauty

Places among the stars,
Soft gardens near the sun,
Keep your distant beauty;
Shed no beams upon my weak heart.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness,
Not your golden days
Nor your silver nights
Can call me to you.
Since she is here
In a place of blackness,
Here I stay and wait

IV. in denial

A spirit sped
Through spaces of night;
And as he sped, he called,
"God! God!"
He went through valleys
Of black death-slime,
Ever calling,
"God! God!"
Their echoes
From crevice and cavern
Mocked him:
"God! God! God!"
Fleetly into the plains of space
He went, ever calling,
"God! God!"
Eventually, then, he screamed,
Mad in denial,
"Ah, there is no God!"
A swift hand,
A sword from the sky,
Smote him,
And he was dead.

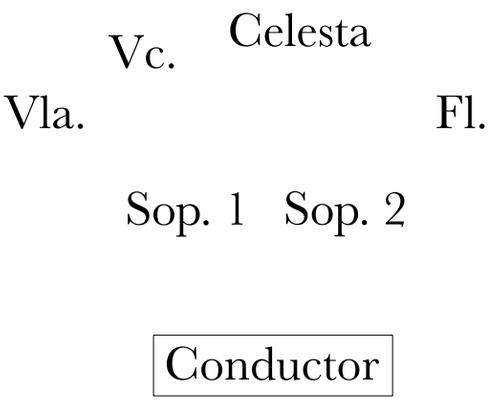
Songs of Uncertainty (2019) is a song cycle in four parts, written for two sopranos and chamber ensemble with text from writer Stephen Crane's poetry collection *The Black Riders and Other Lines*. While the poems date back over a century, its themes remain ever-present. Our search for something idealized and seemingly just out of reach - direction, truth, reassurance, love - can often feel futile within a constantly changing landscape. The songs weave a thread through Crane's reflections on desire, tribulation, and confrontation with the unknown, illuminating some of the consequences of the ways in which we address conflict and doubt.

I. lost
II. snow ice, burning sand
III. distant beauty
IV. in denial

Instrumentation

Two sopranos, flute, celesta, viola, violoncello

Stage diagram



Notes

Singers should use a light and choral vocal quality with limited vibrato.
A short break should follow the first two songs, and the third leads directly into the last.

Duration

15 minutes

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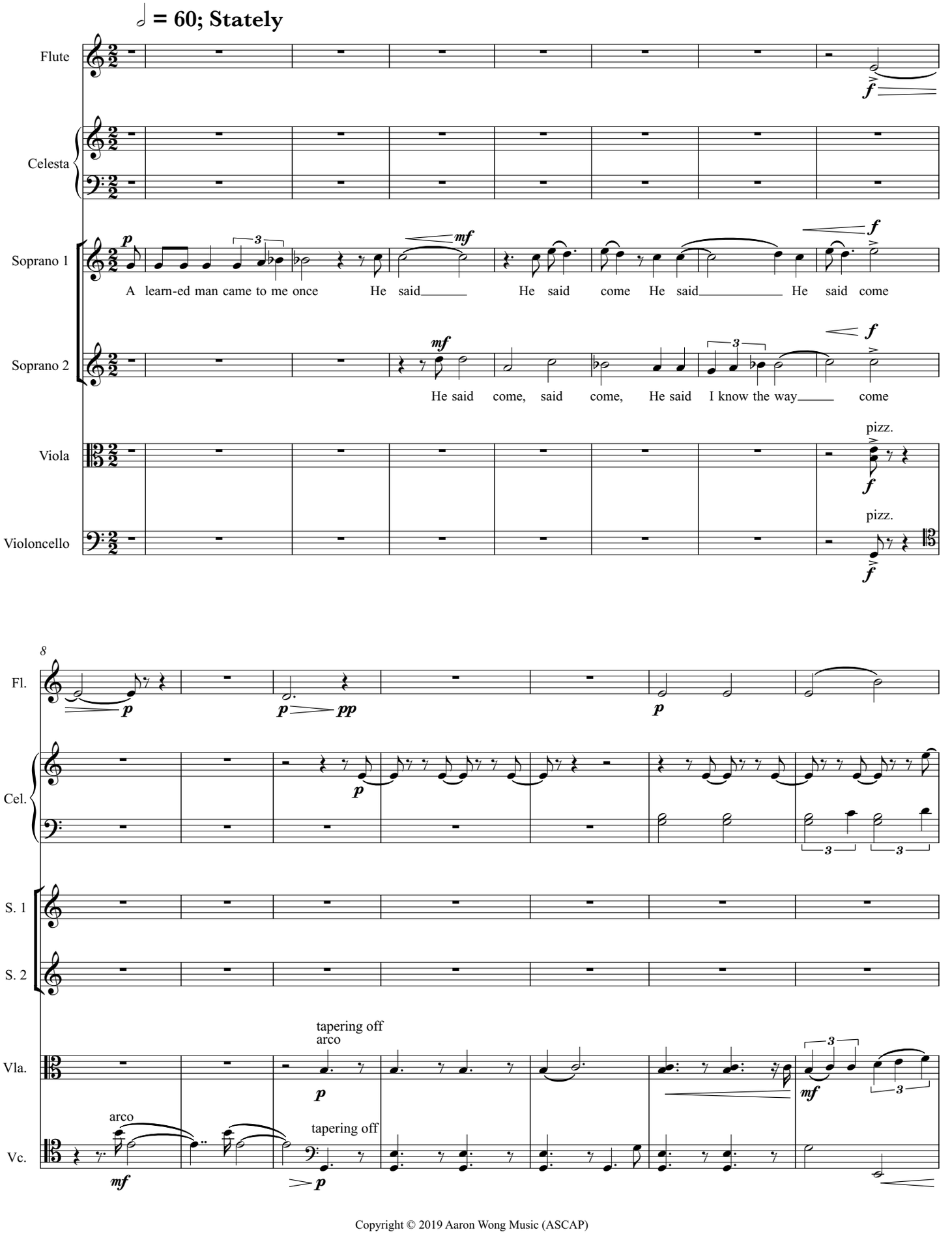
Songs of Uncertainty

I. lost

Stephen Crane

Aaron Wong (2019)



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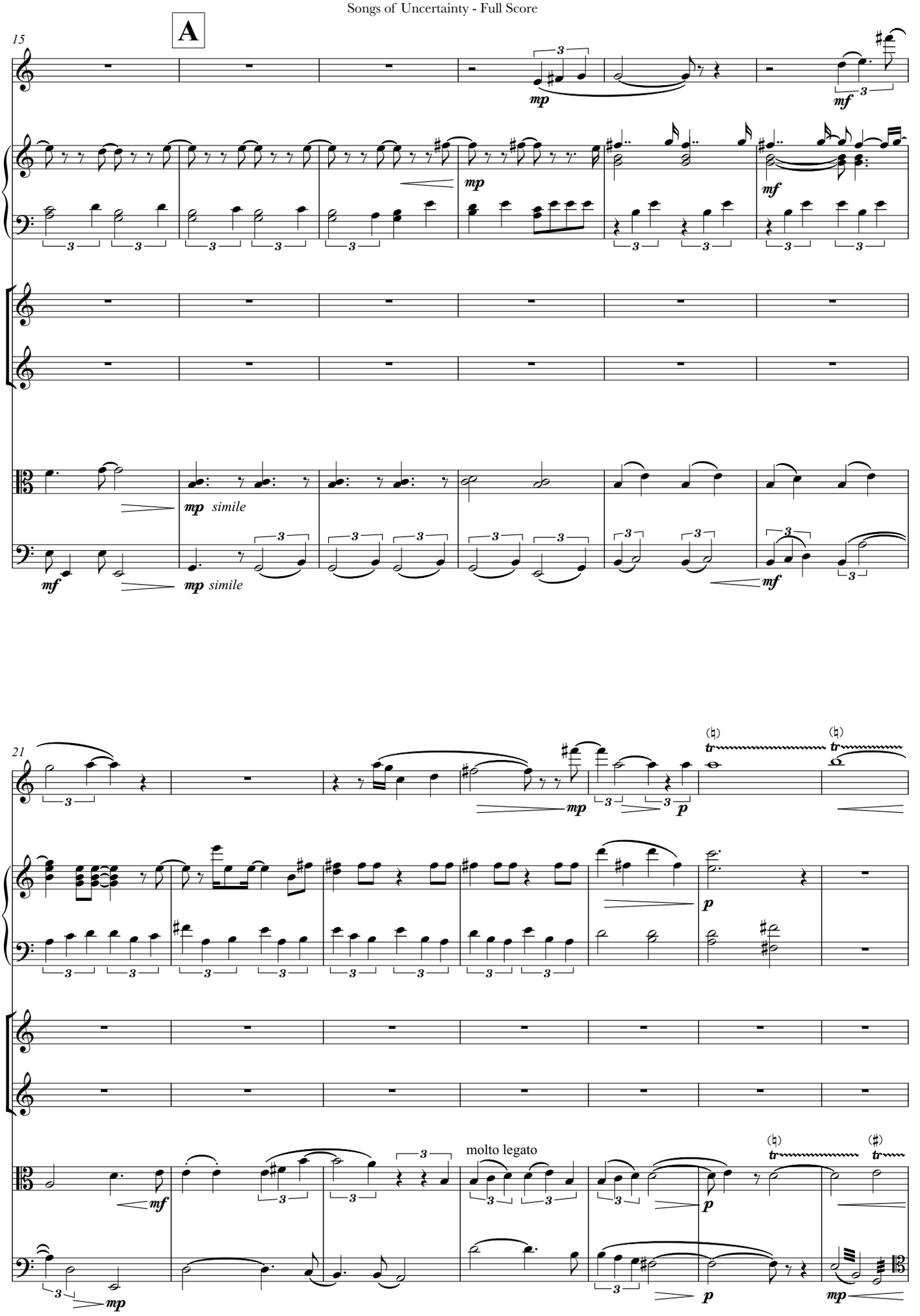
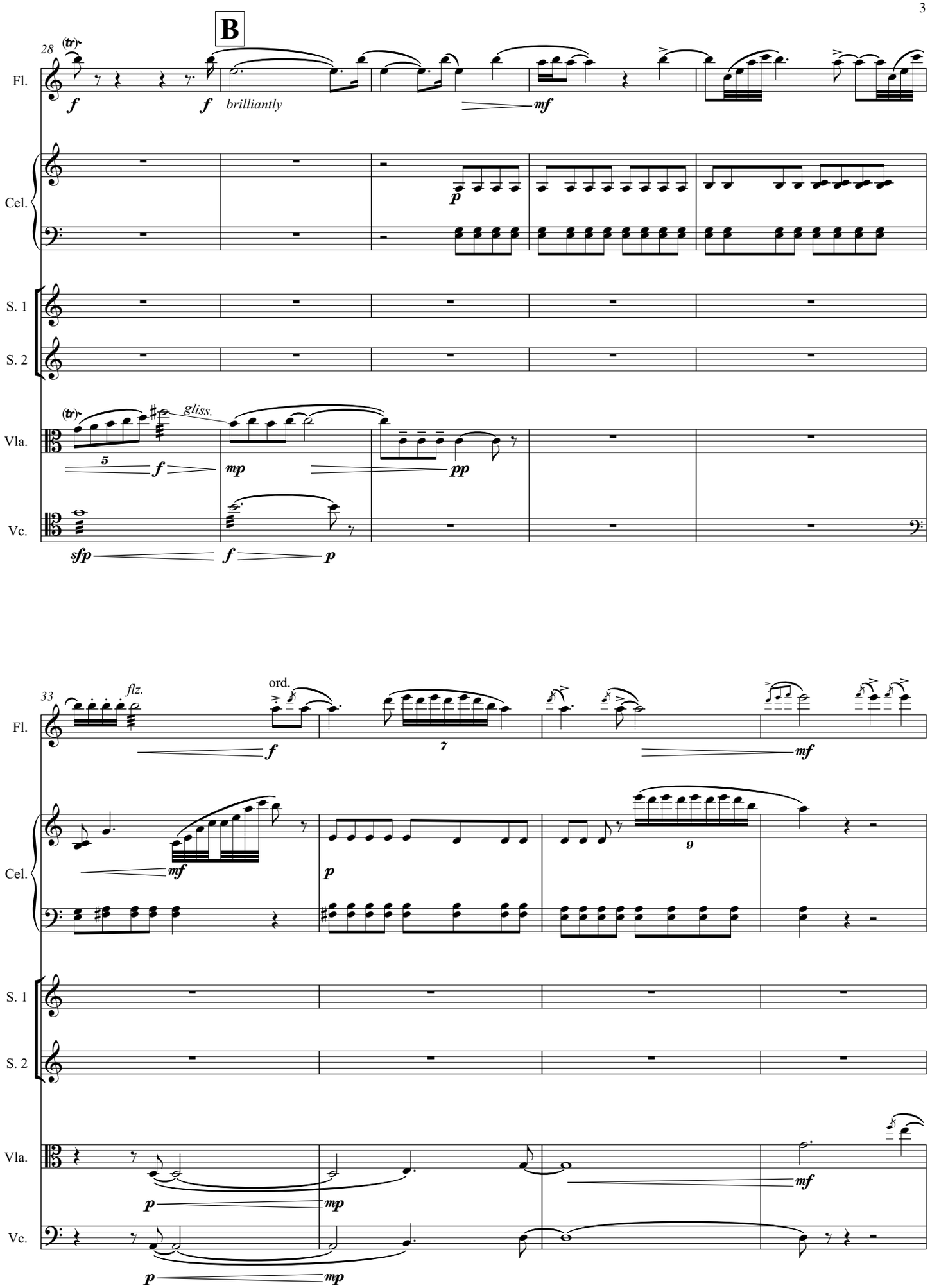

A
15
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mp
mf
mp simile
mf simile
21
molto legato
p


B
28
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
brilliantly
gliss.
33
flz.
ord.

37

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

S. 2

Vla.

Vc.

molto vibr.

C

44

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

S. 2

Vla.

Vc.

p confidently

He said come come He said

p confidently

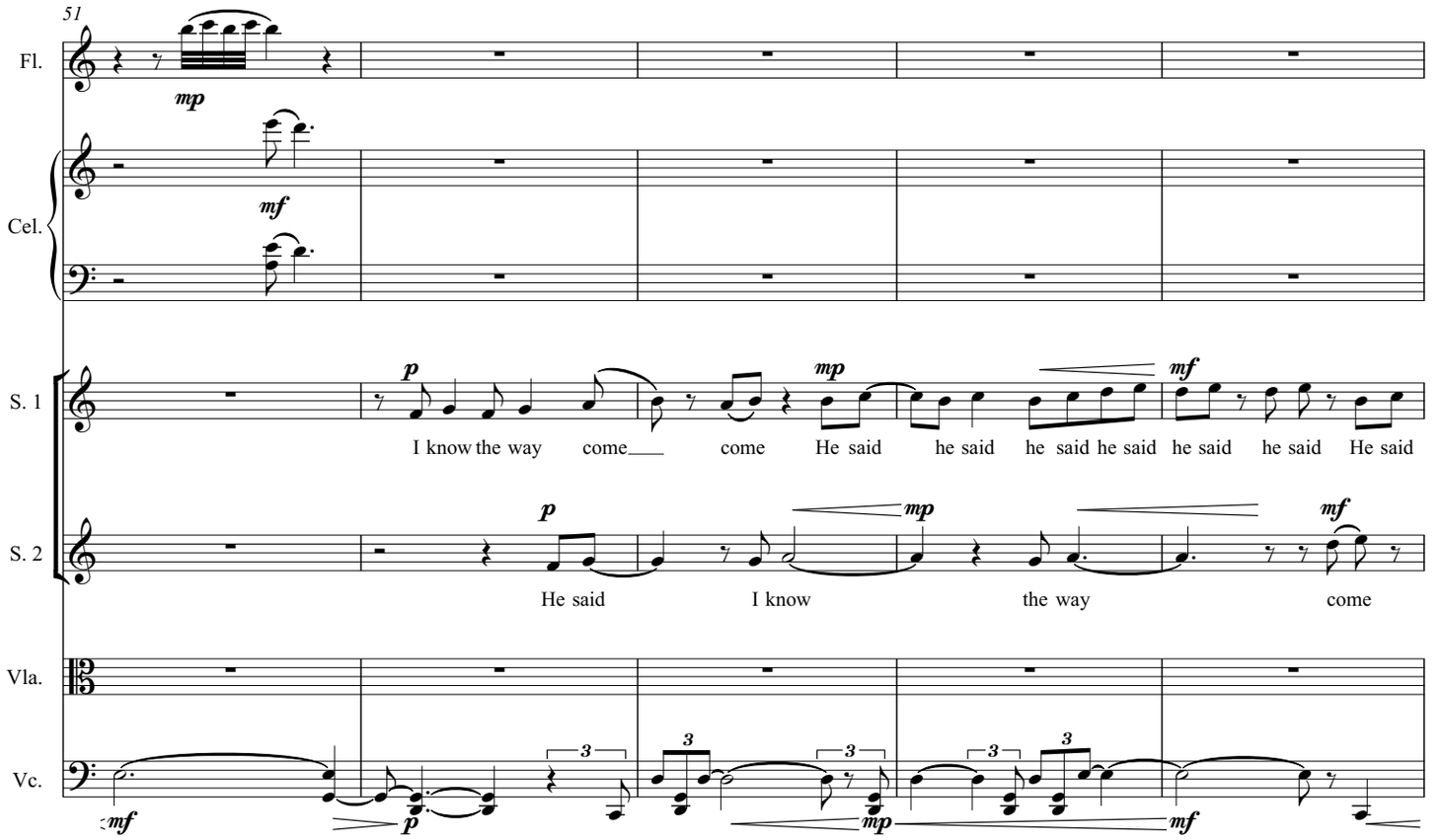
I know the way

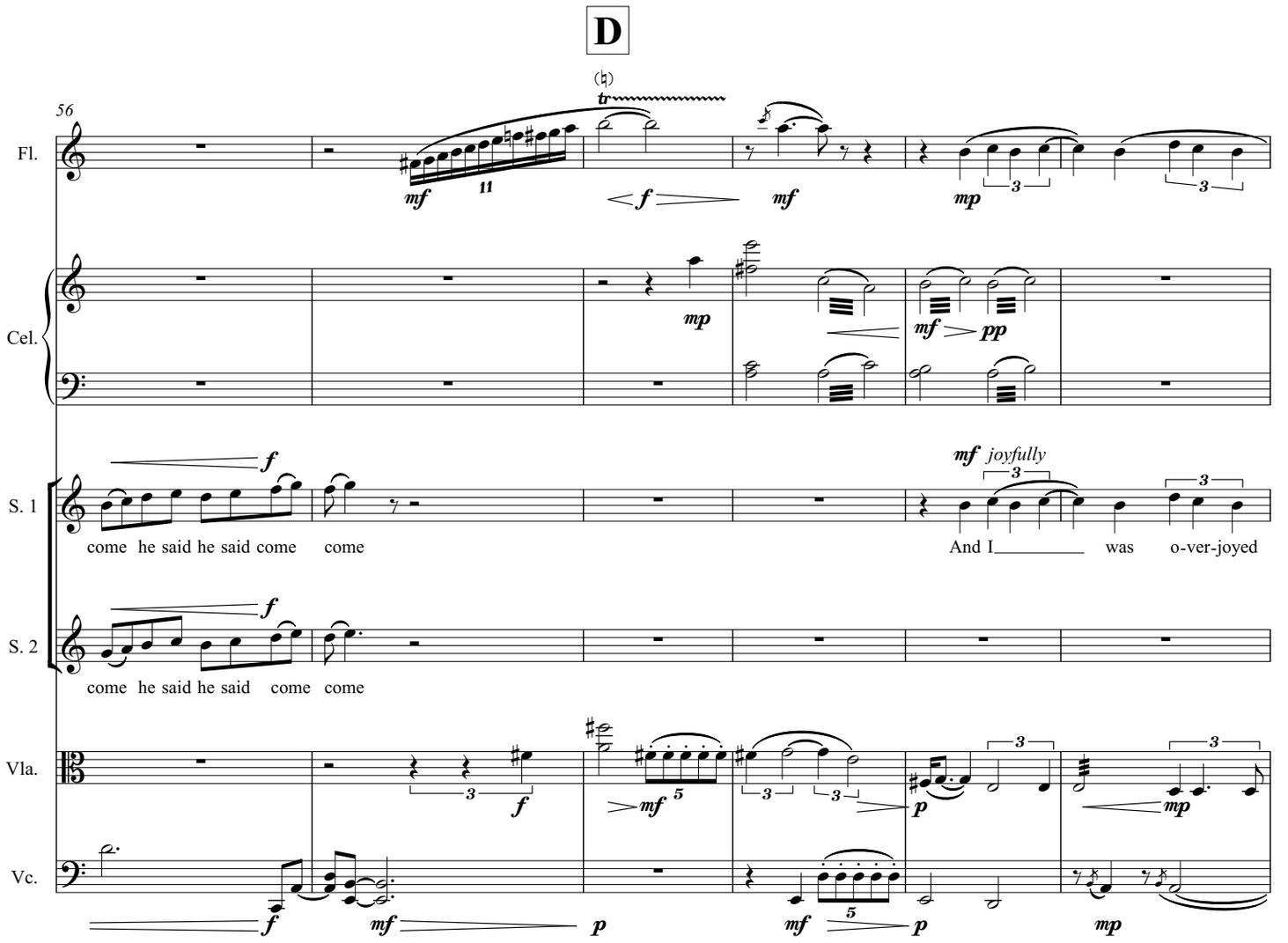
p

He said

increasing in speed

molto legato


51
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
I know the way come come He said he said he said he said he said he said He said
S. 2
He said I know the way come
Vla.
Vc.


D
56
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
come he said he said come come
And I was o-ver-joyed
joyfully
S. 2
come he said he said come come
Vla.
Vc.

62

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

at this I was o - ver - joyed, o - ver - joyed, was

S. 2

with a dark color

He said come, He said come, o - ver - joyed, o - ver joyed, I

Vla.

Vc.

67

E

senza vib.

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

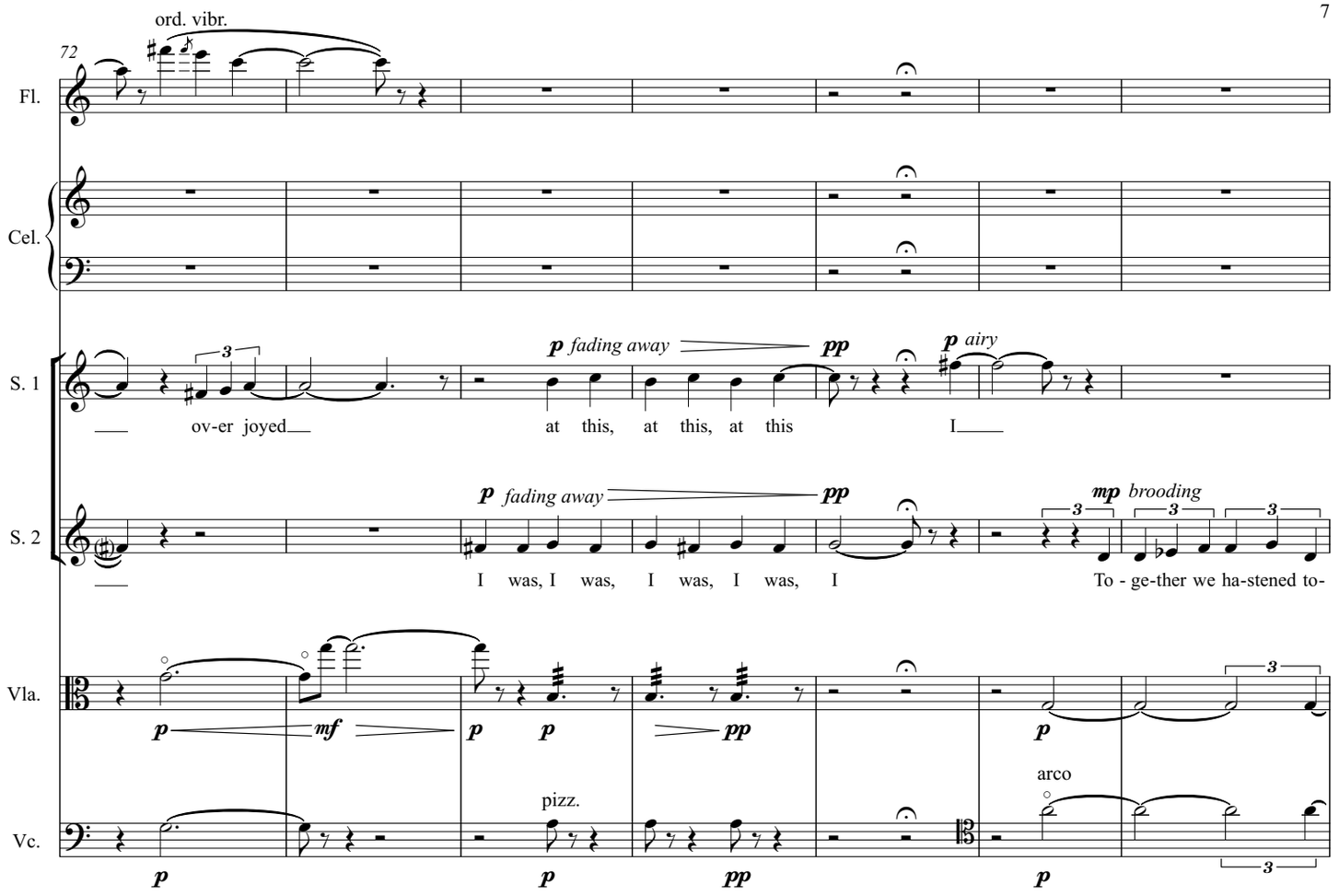
o - ver - joyed, o - ver-joyed, o - ver - joyed O O

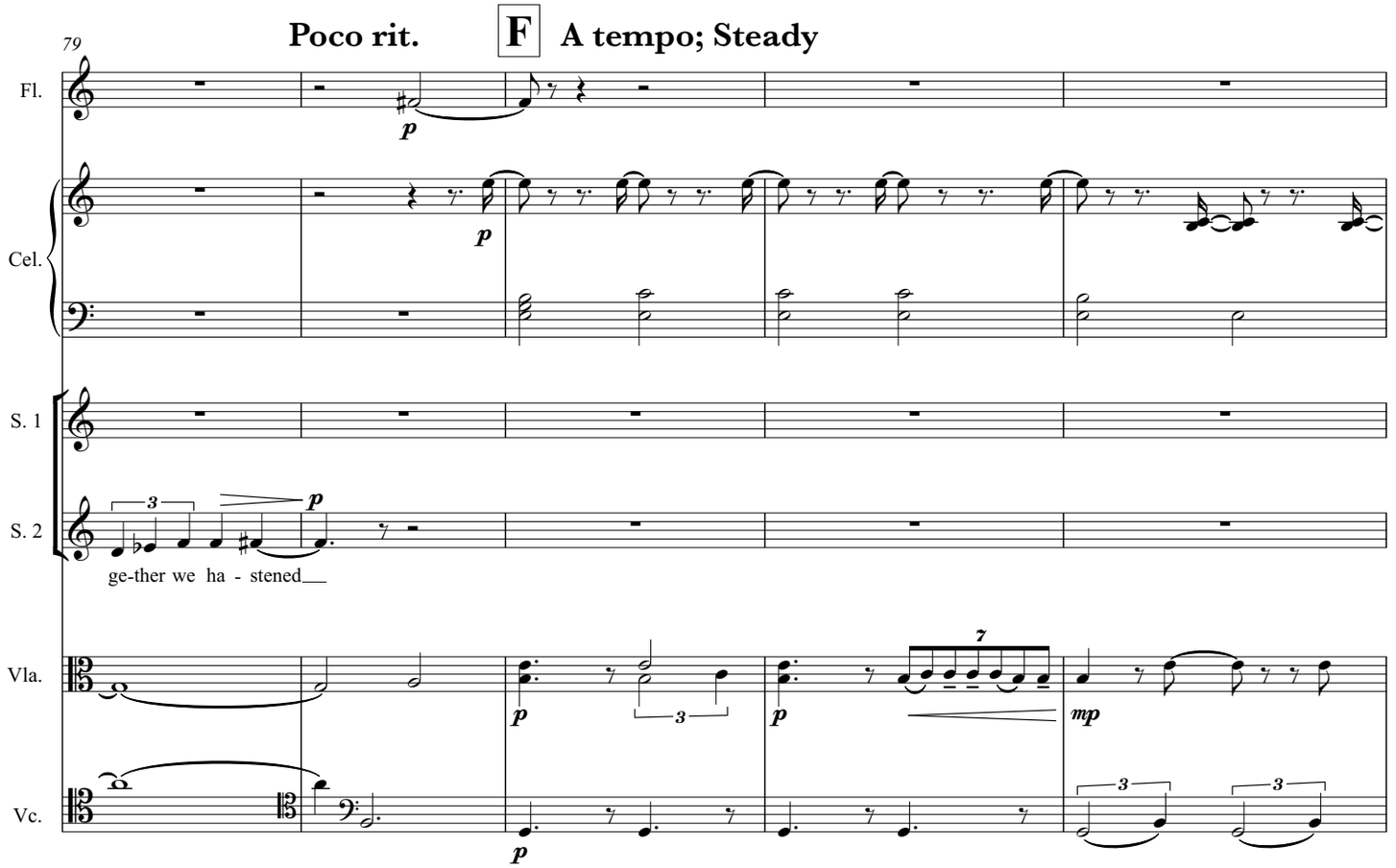
S. 2

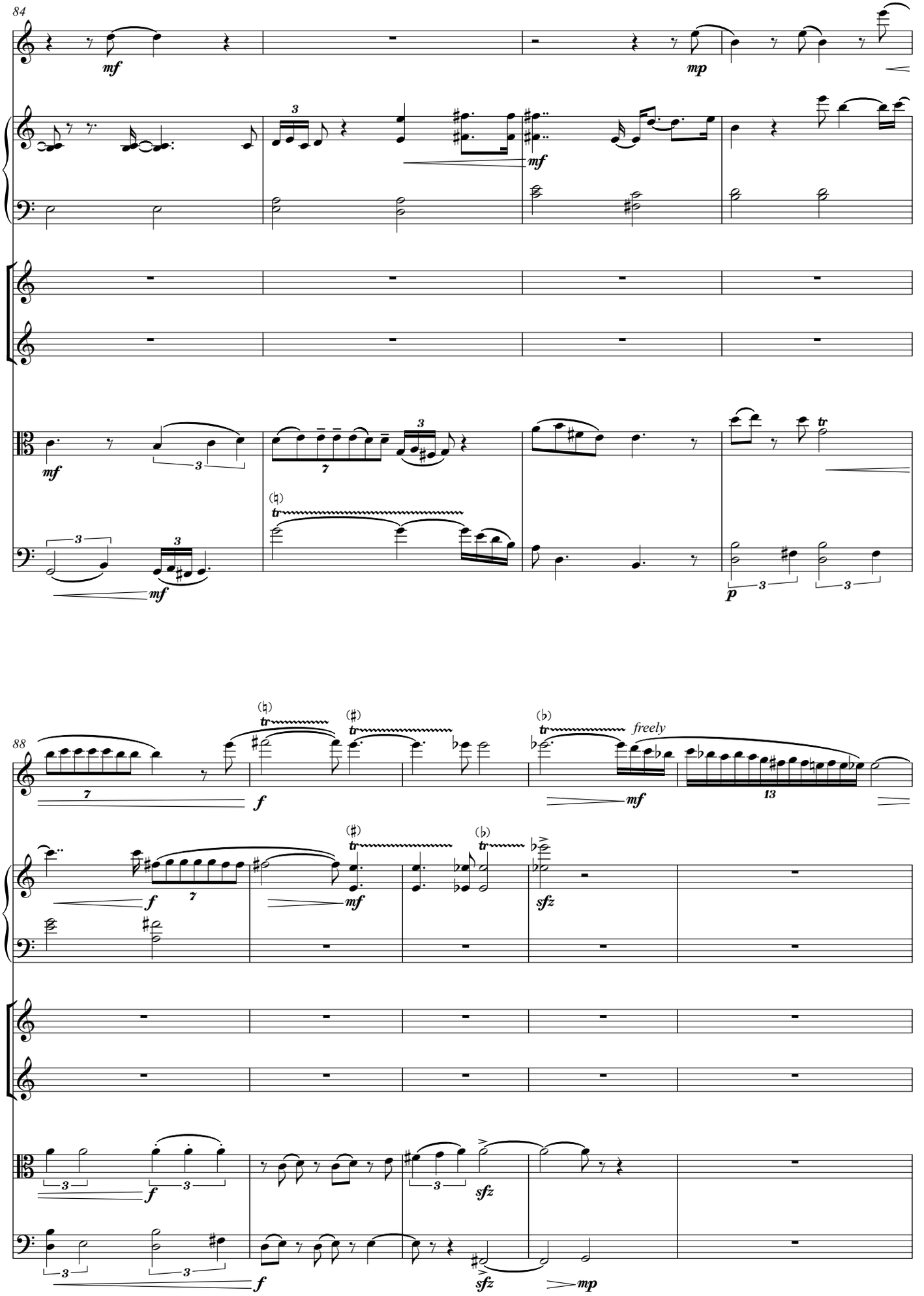
o - ver - joyed, o - ver-joyed, I was I was O

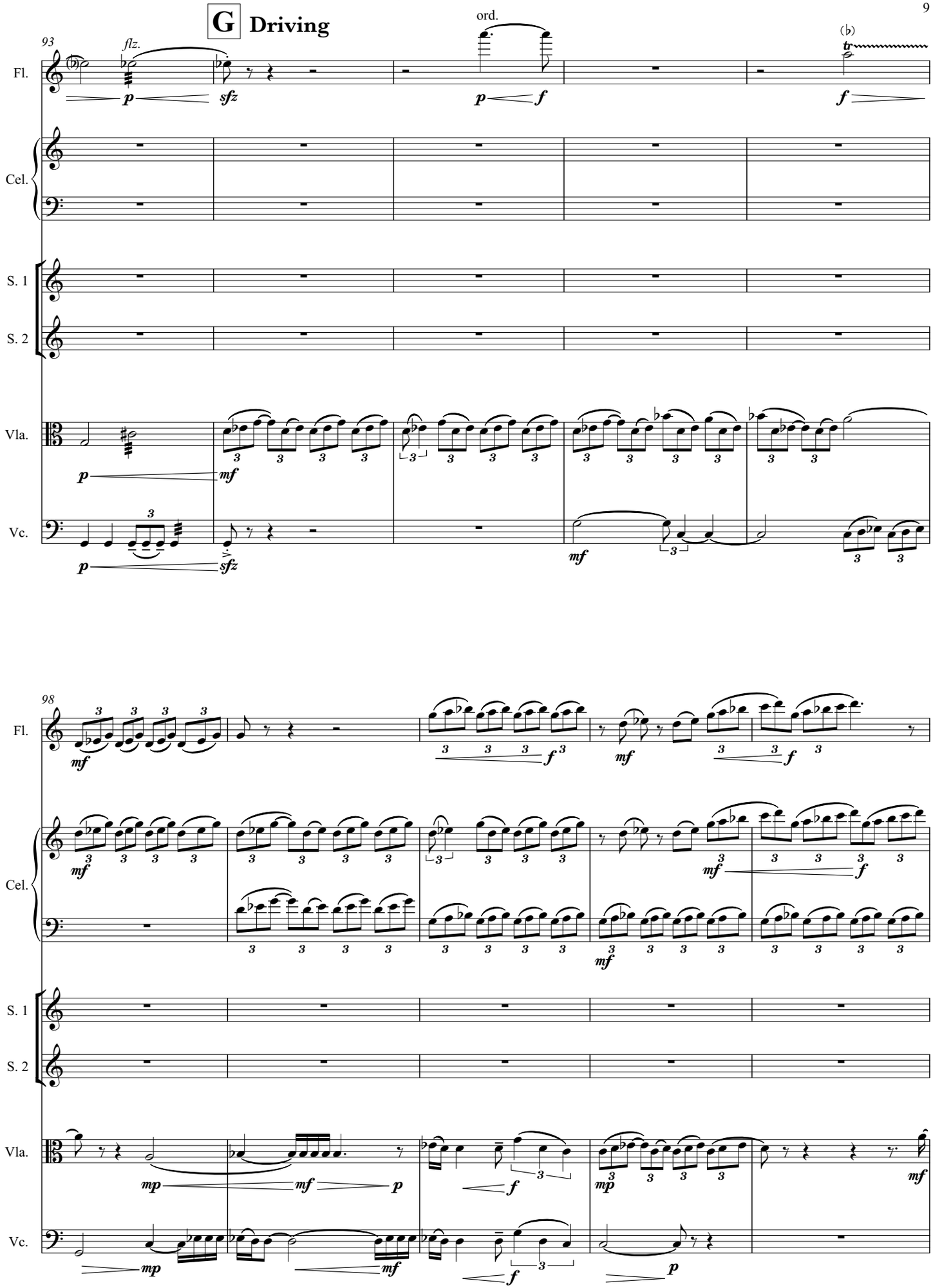
Vla.

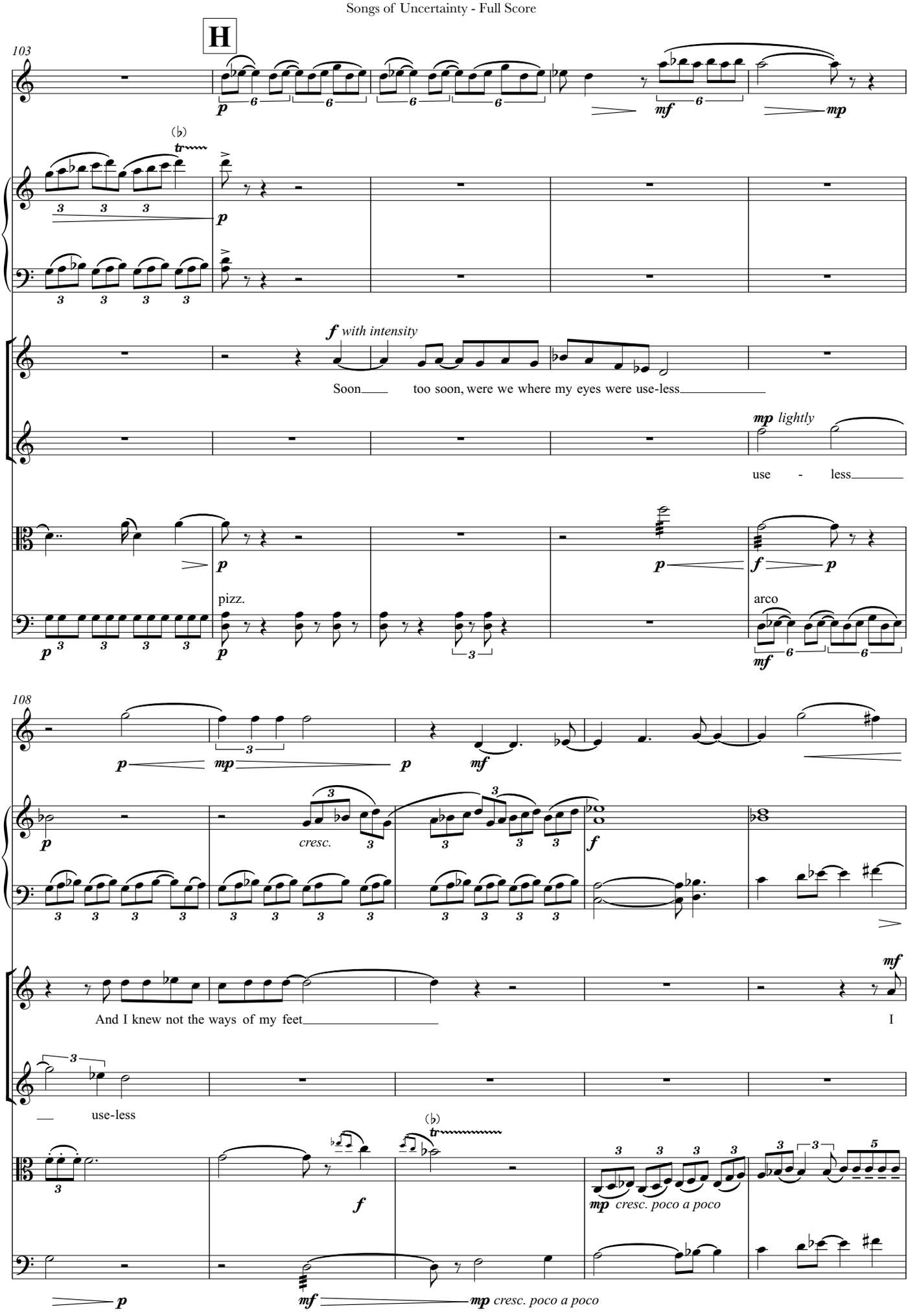
Vc.


ord. vibr.
72
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p fading away
pp
p airy
ov-er joyed
at this, at this, at this
I
p fading away
pp
mp brooding
I was, I was, I was, I was, I
To - ge-ther we ha-stened to-
p
mf
p
p
pp
p
pizz.
arco
p
p
pp
p


Poco rit.
F
A tempo; Steady
79
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p
p
ge-ther we ha - stened
p
p
mp
p
p


84
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mf
mp
mf
mf
mf
p
88
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
f
mf
freely
13
f
mf
sfz
f
sfz
f
sfz
mp


G Driving
93
flz.
ord.
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
98


H
103
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
with intensity
Soon too soon, were we where my eyes were use-less
lightly
use - less
pizz.
arco
108
cresc.
And I knew not the ways of my feet
I
use-less
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco

I

113

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

clung to the hand of my friend But at last he cried

S. 2

I clung But at last he cried

Vla.

Vc.

118

Fl.

furiously

Cel.

S. 1

He cried I am lost am lost

S. 2

He cried cri - ed lost lost

Vla.

furiously

Vc.

furiously

123

Fl.

Cel.

f *furiously*

S. 1

S. 2

Vla.

Vc.

126

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

I am lost

S. 2

I am lost

Vla.

Vc.

130 **J**

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

mf expressivo, con rubato

I I I am lost I I I am lost

p in tempo

S. 2

mf expressivo, con rubato

I am I am lost I I I I am

p in tempo

Vla.

p

sul tasto

p

Vc.

p

137

Fl.

p *fluttering* *pp*

Cel.

p *pp*

S. 1

lost lost I I

S. 2

lost lost lost

Vla.

ord.

p

pp

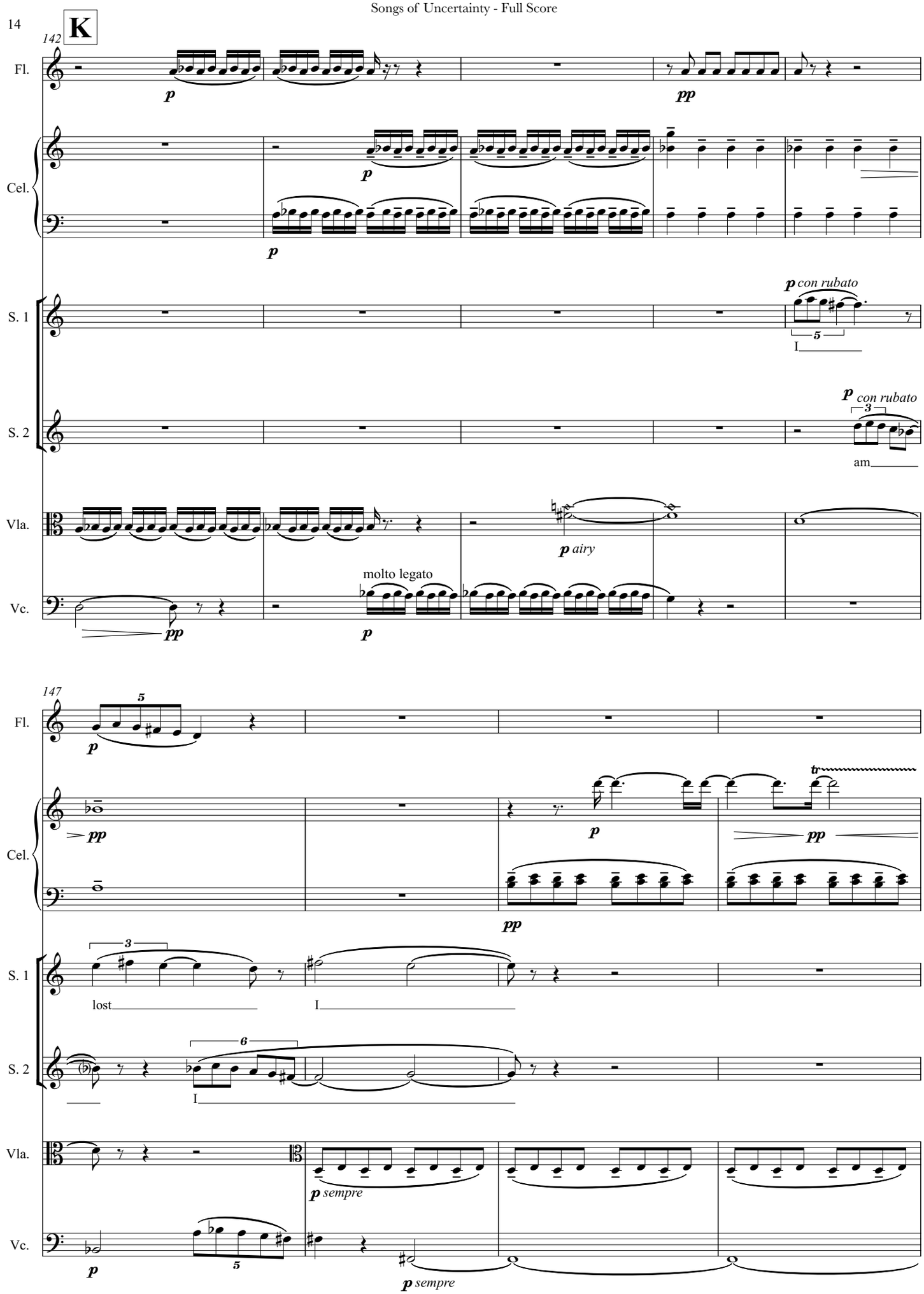
molto legato

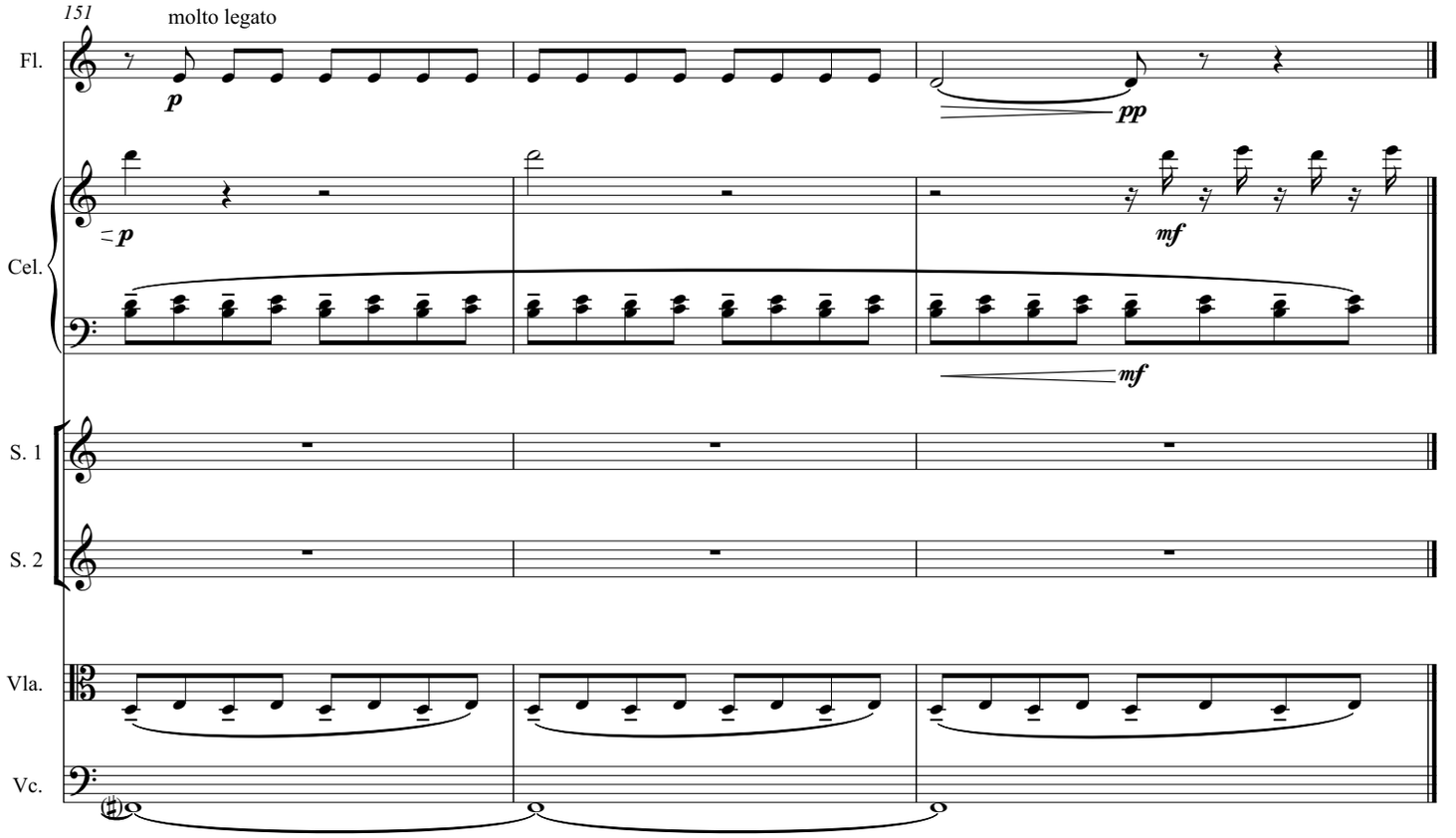
p

Vc.

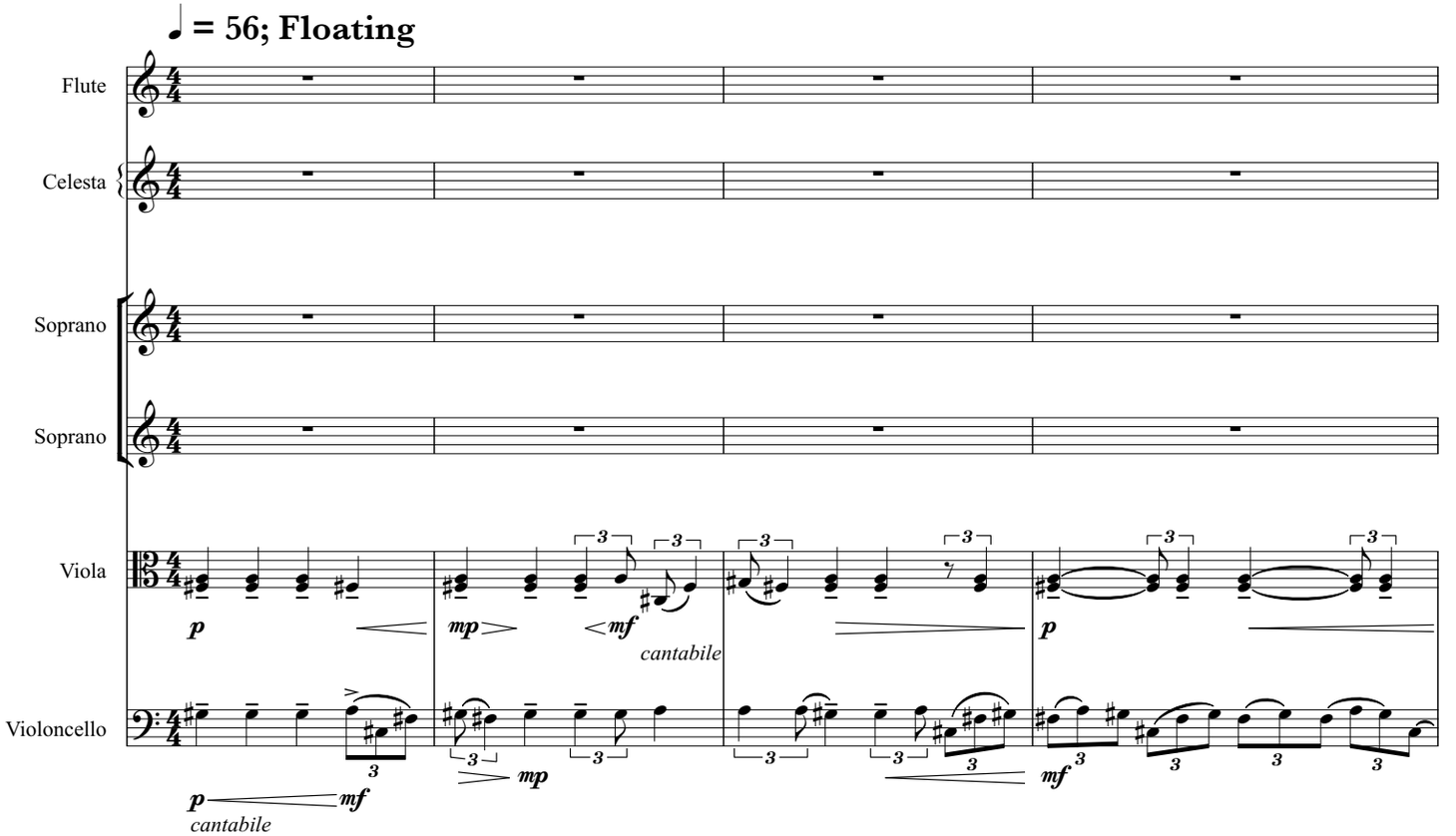
p *p*

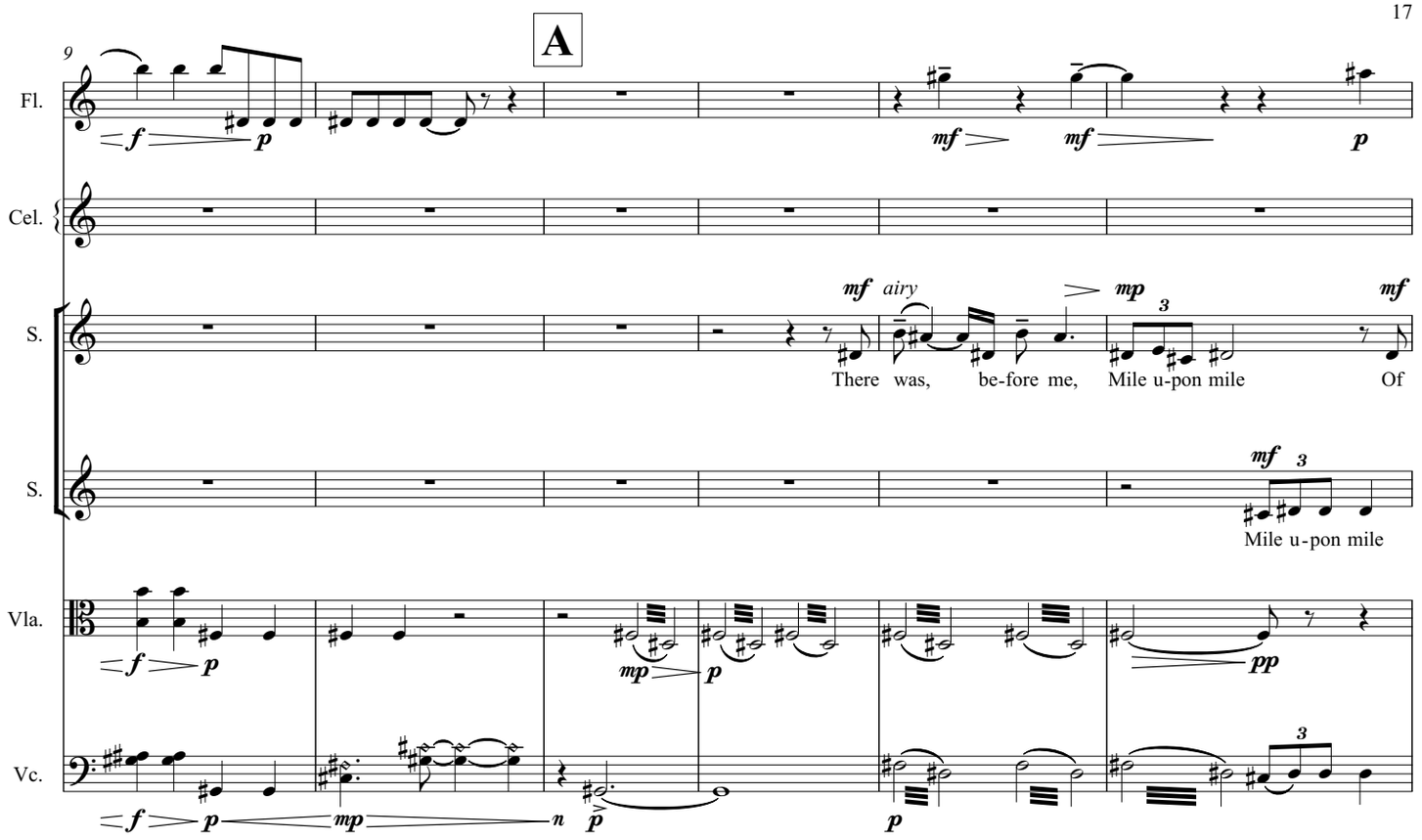
fluttering

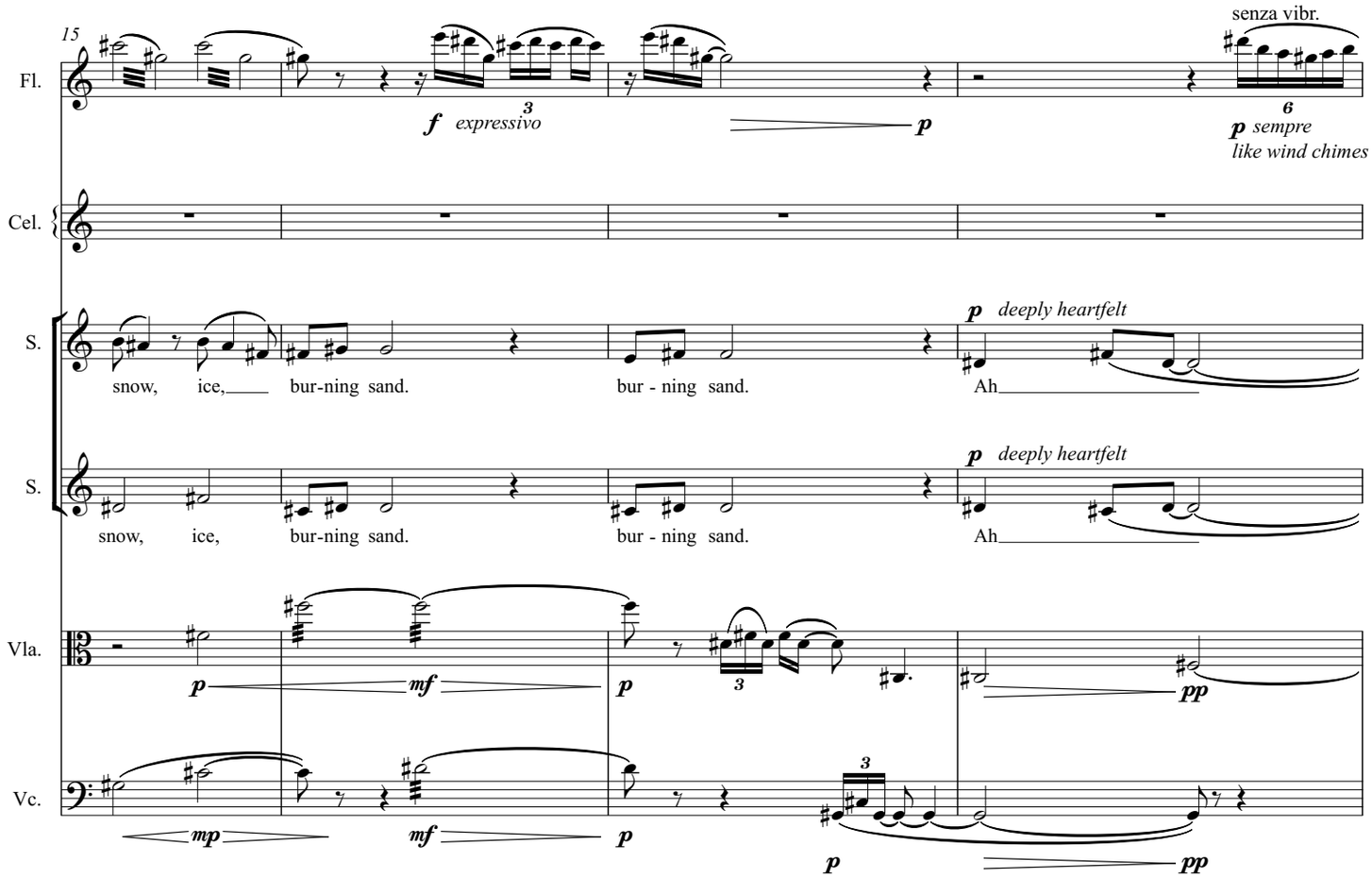

K
142
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
p con rubato
I
am
p airy
molto legato
147
lost
I
p sempre

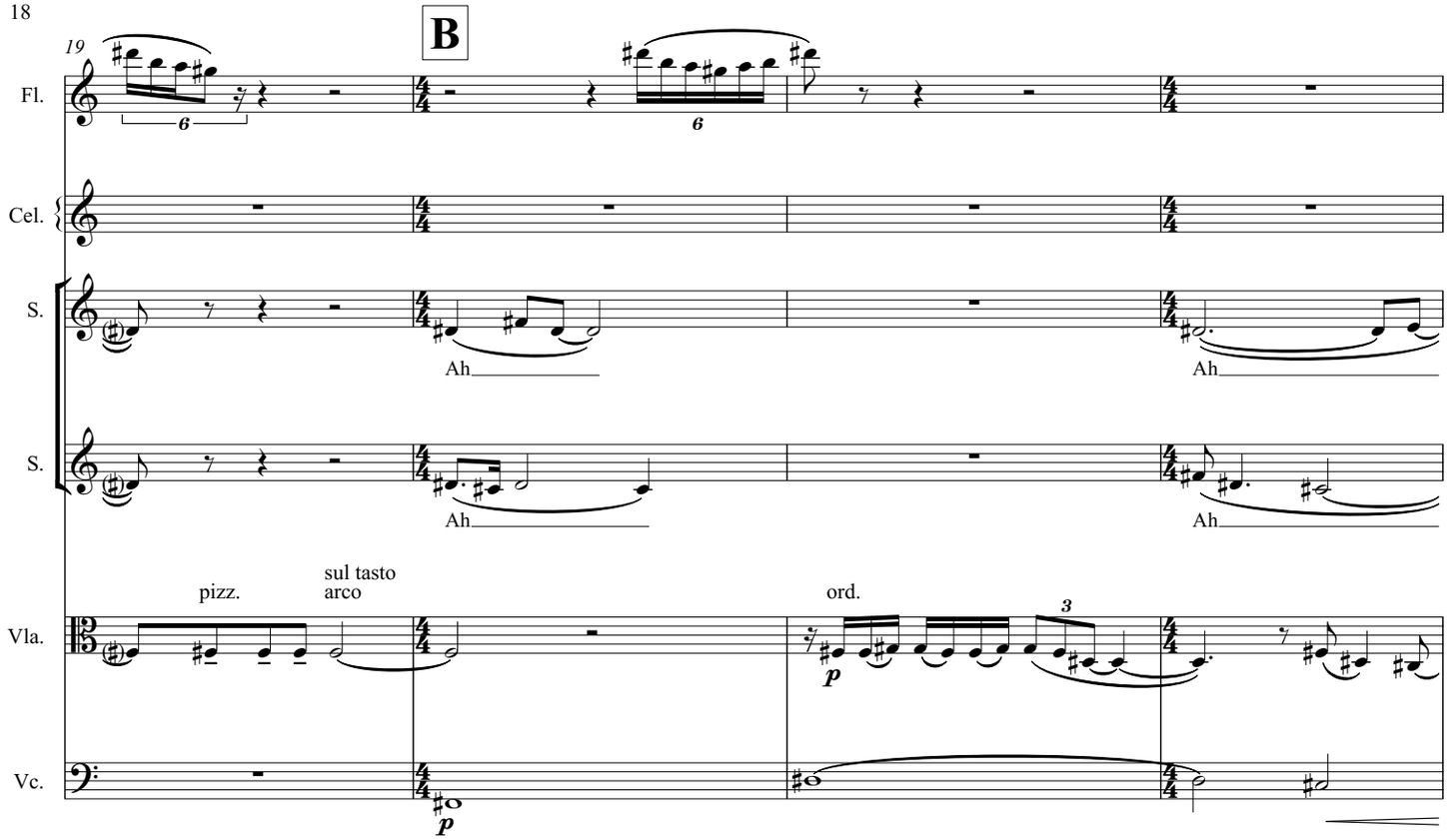

151
molto legato
Fl.
p
pp
Cel.
p
mf
mf
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.

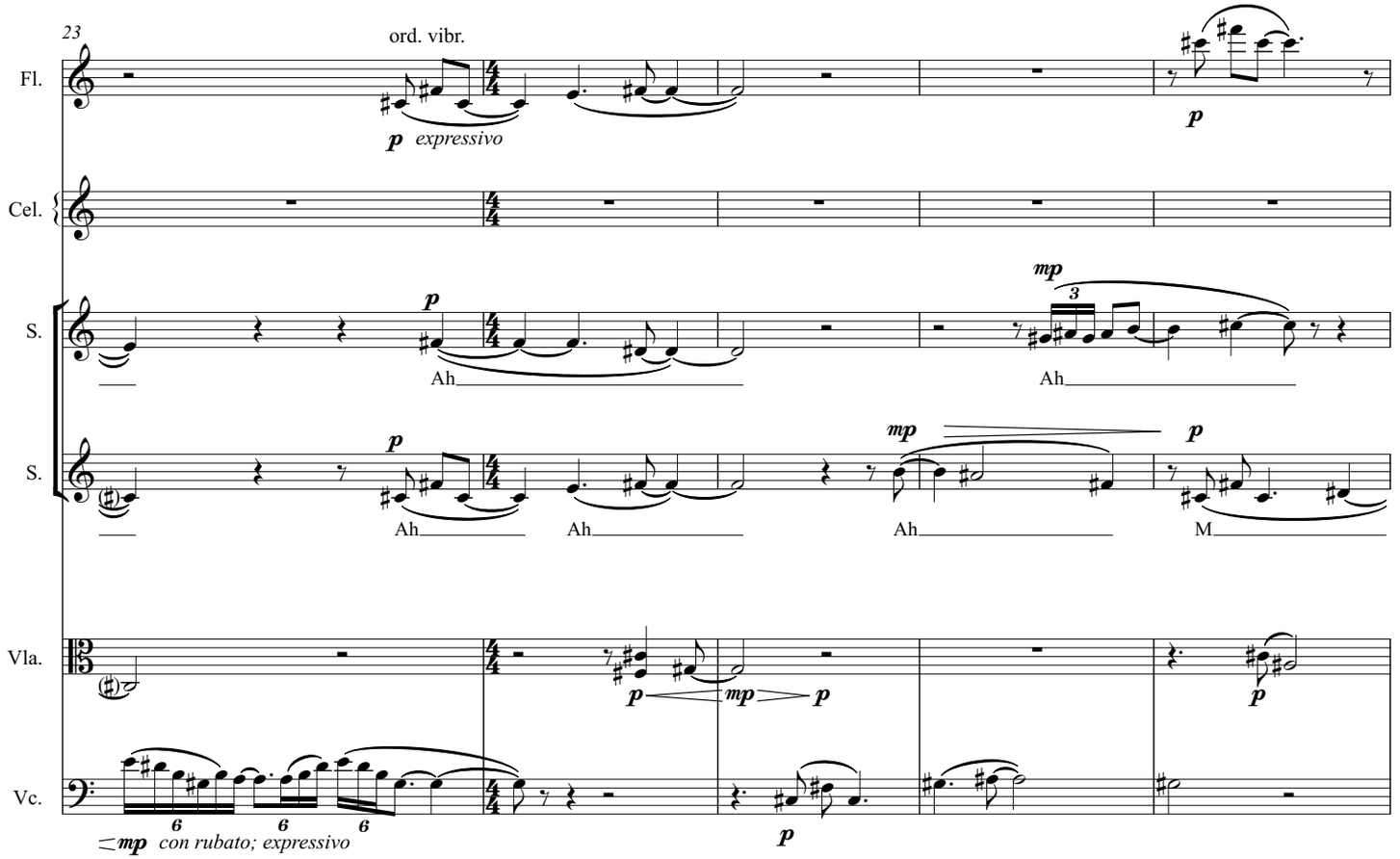
II. snow, ice, burning sand




A
9
Fl.
Cel.
S.
S.
Vla.
Vc.
airy
There was, be-fore me, Mile u-pon mile Of
Mile u-pon mile


15
Fl.
Cel.
S.
S.
Vla.
Vc.
expressivo
senza vibr.
sempre
like wind chimes
deeply heartfelt
snow, ice, bur-ning sand. bur - ning sand. Ah
snow, ice, bur-ning sand. bur - ning sand. Ah


B
19
Fl.
Cel.
S.
Ah
S.
Ah
Ah
pizz.
sul tasto
arco
Vla.
ord.
Vc.


23
ord. vibr.
Fl.
expressivo
Cel.
S.
Ah
Ah
S.
Ah
Ah
Ah
M
Vla.
Vc.
con rubato; expressivo

C

28

Fl.

Cel.

S.

S.

Vla.

Vc.

pp

p floating

mf

mf

p

mf as if on a cloud

M___ Ah___ And yet___ I could look be-yond all this, To a place of in-fi-nite beau-ty;

mp floating

mf

___ M___ Ah_____ Ah And yet be - yond all_ this And

p

mp

p

mf

mp

p expressivo

mp

p

mp

mf

p

34

Fl.

Cel.

S.

S.

Vla.

Vc.

f

mf

I could see the love-li-ness love-li-ness love-li - ness of_____ of

f

I___ of her_____ of her of_____ of_____

mp

f

mp

mp

f

mp

39

Fl.

Cel.

S. her Who walked in the shade of the trees shade of the trees

S. her shade of the trees trees Ah

Vla. expressivo

Vc.

D

43

Fl. very lightly pesante

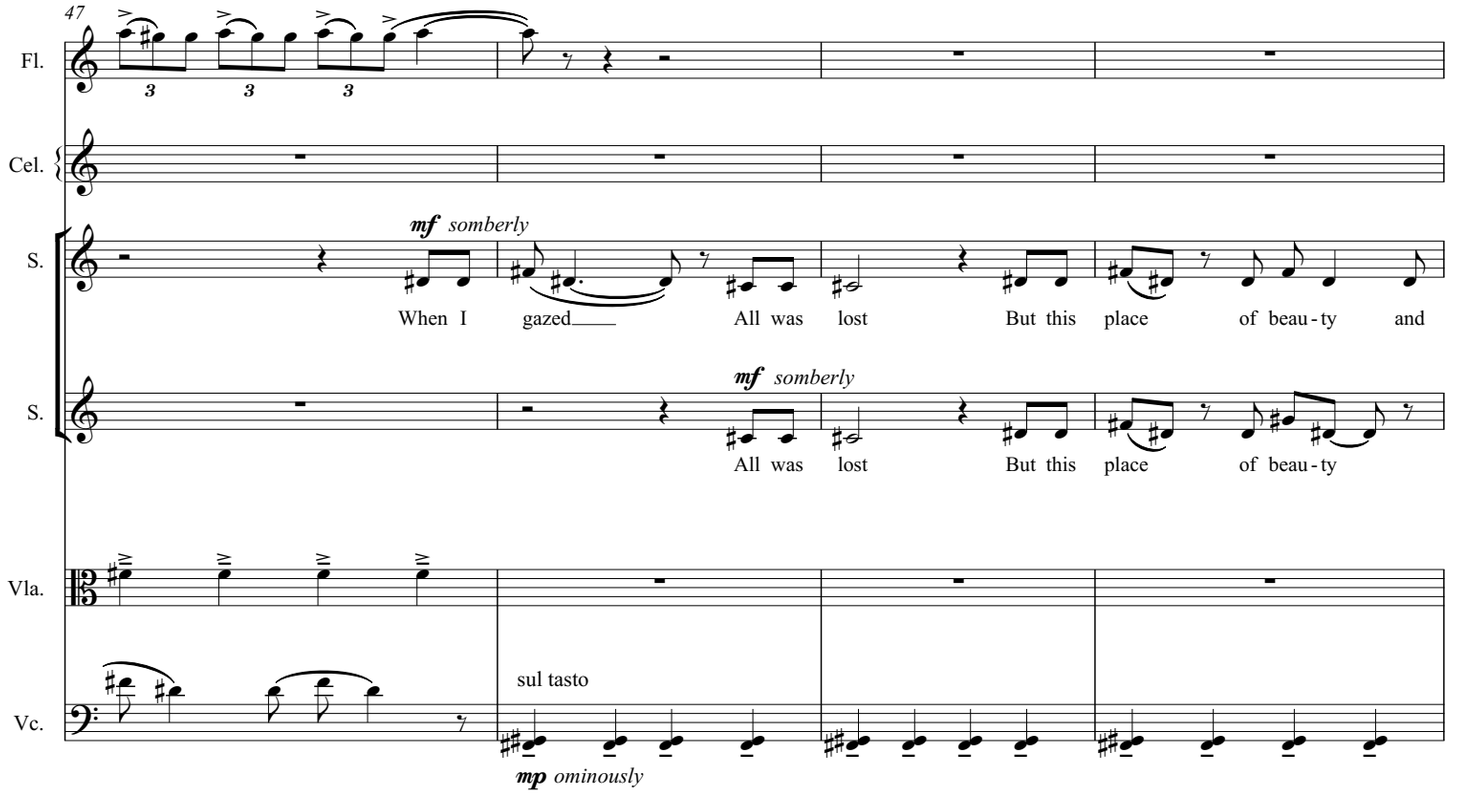
Cel.

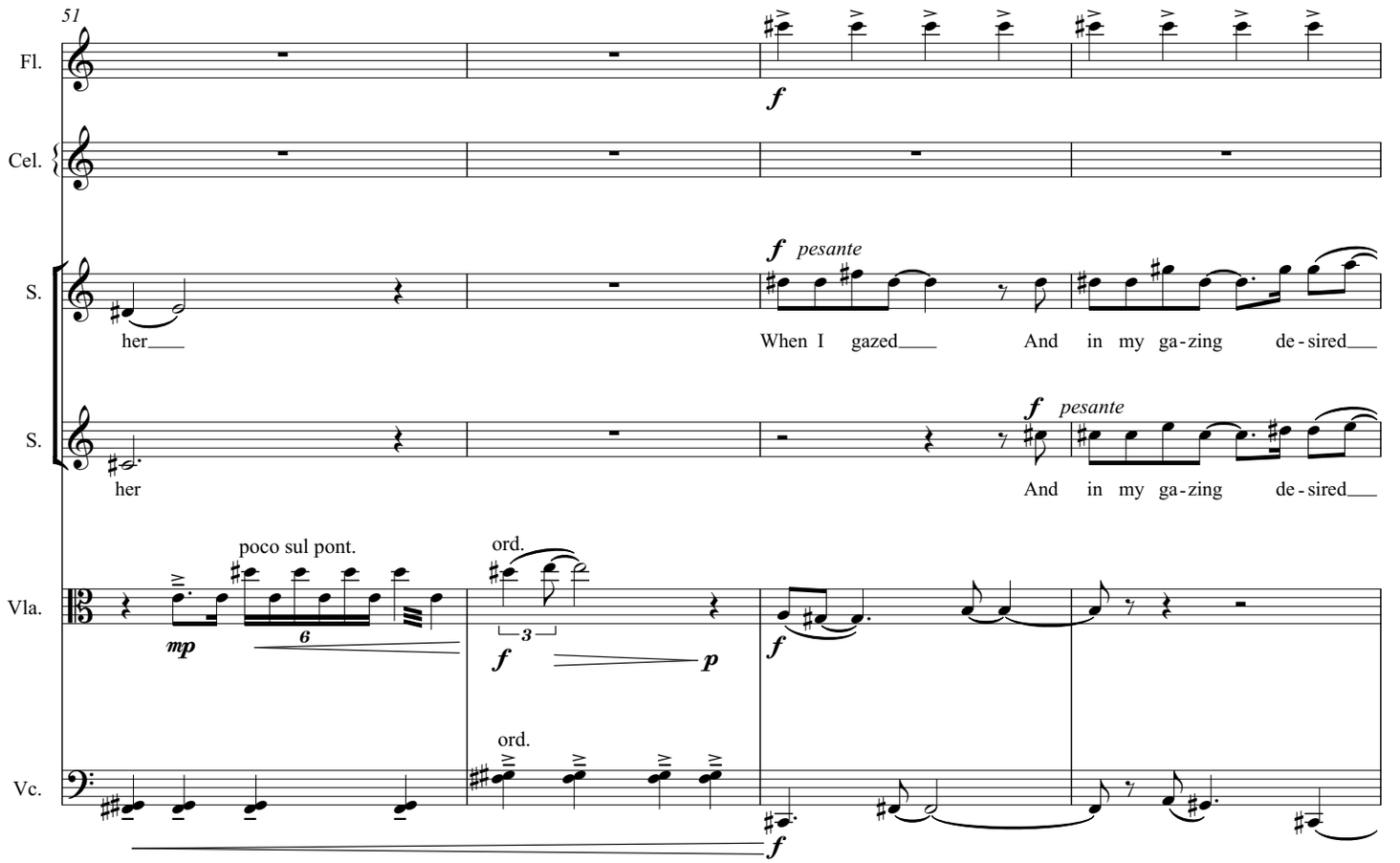
S.

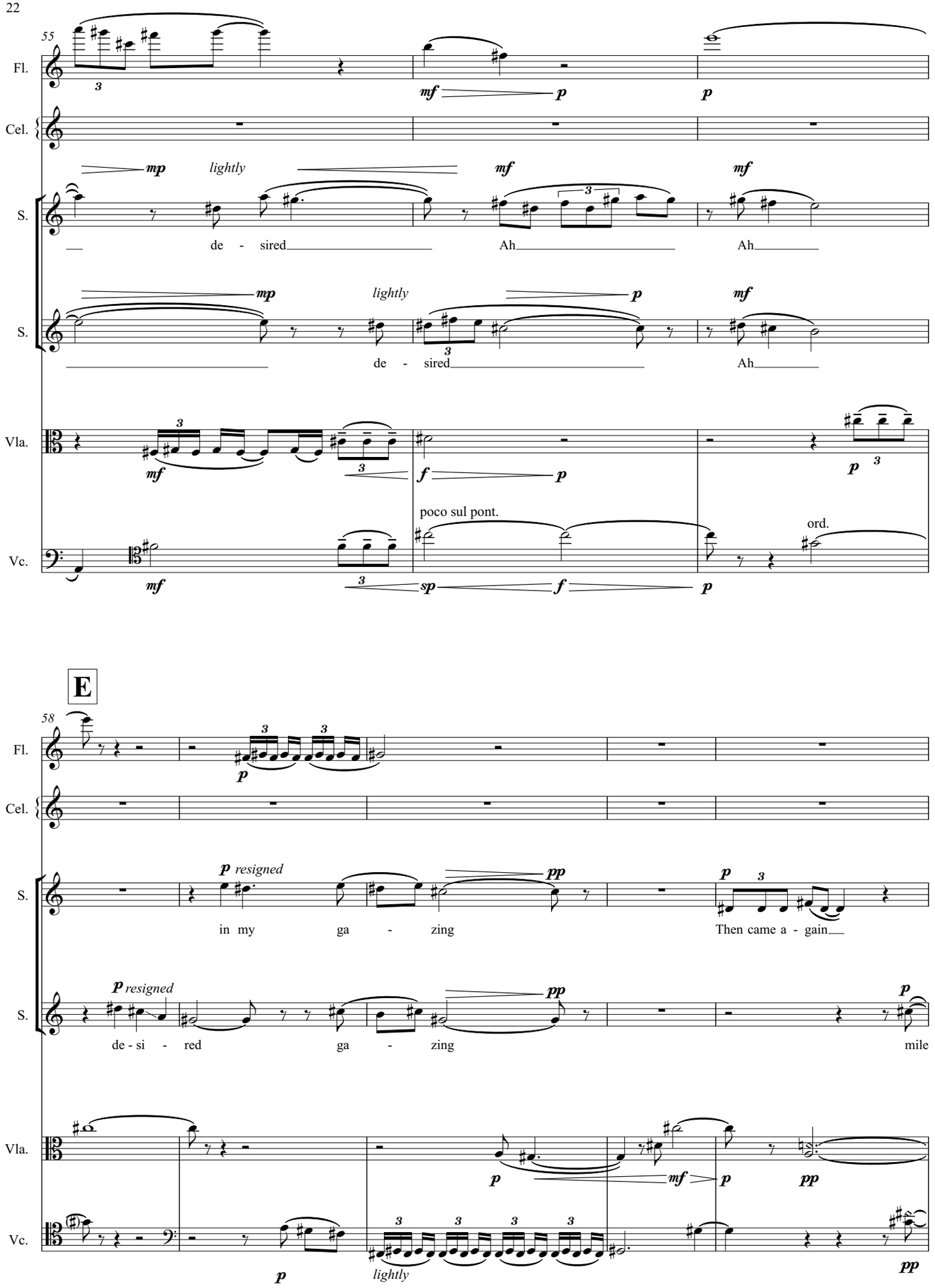
S.

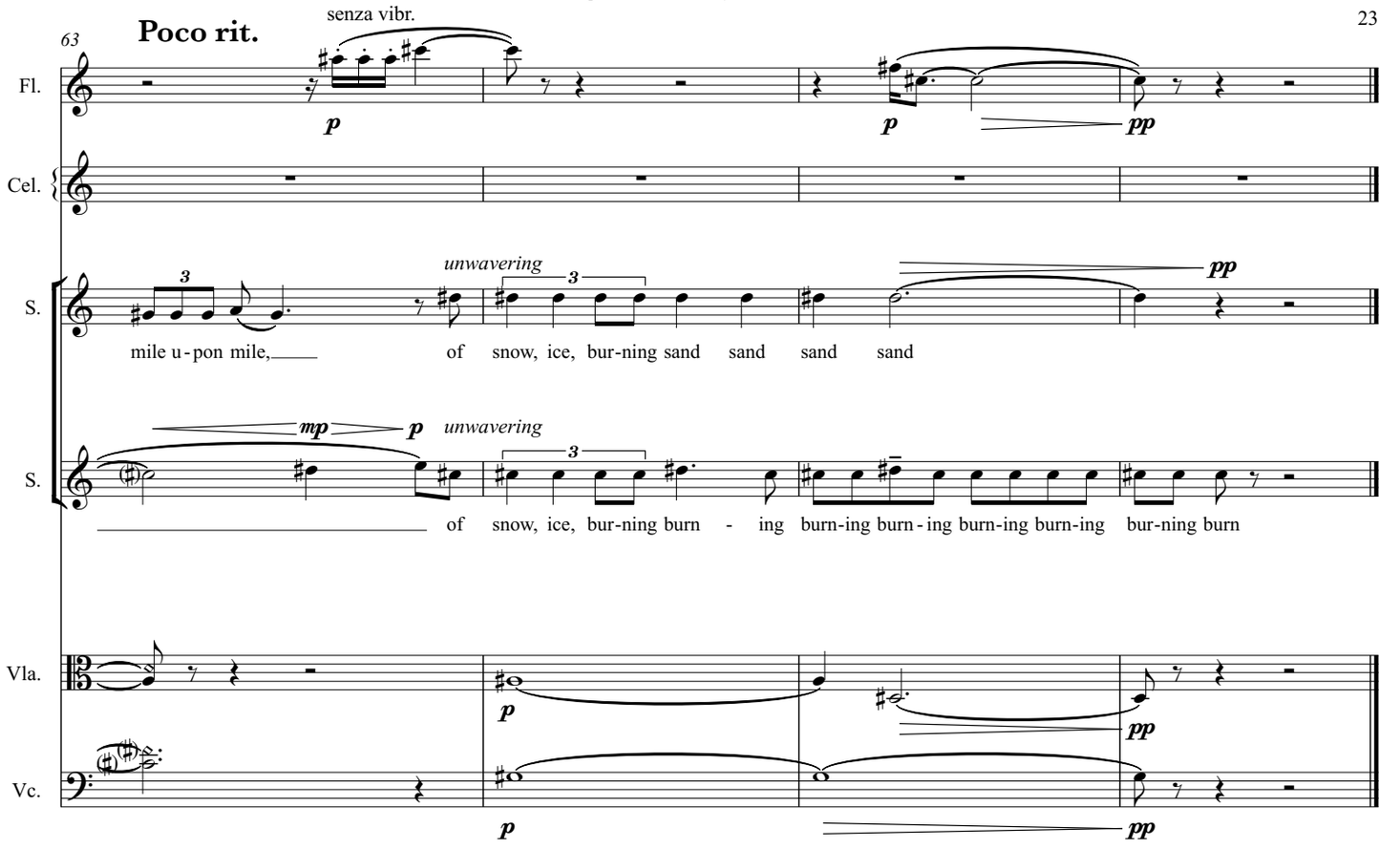
Vla. pesante

Vc. pesante molto expressivo

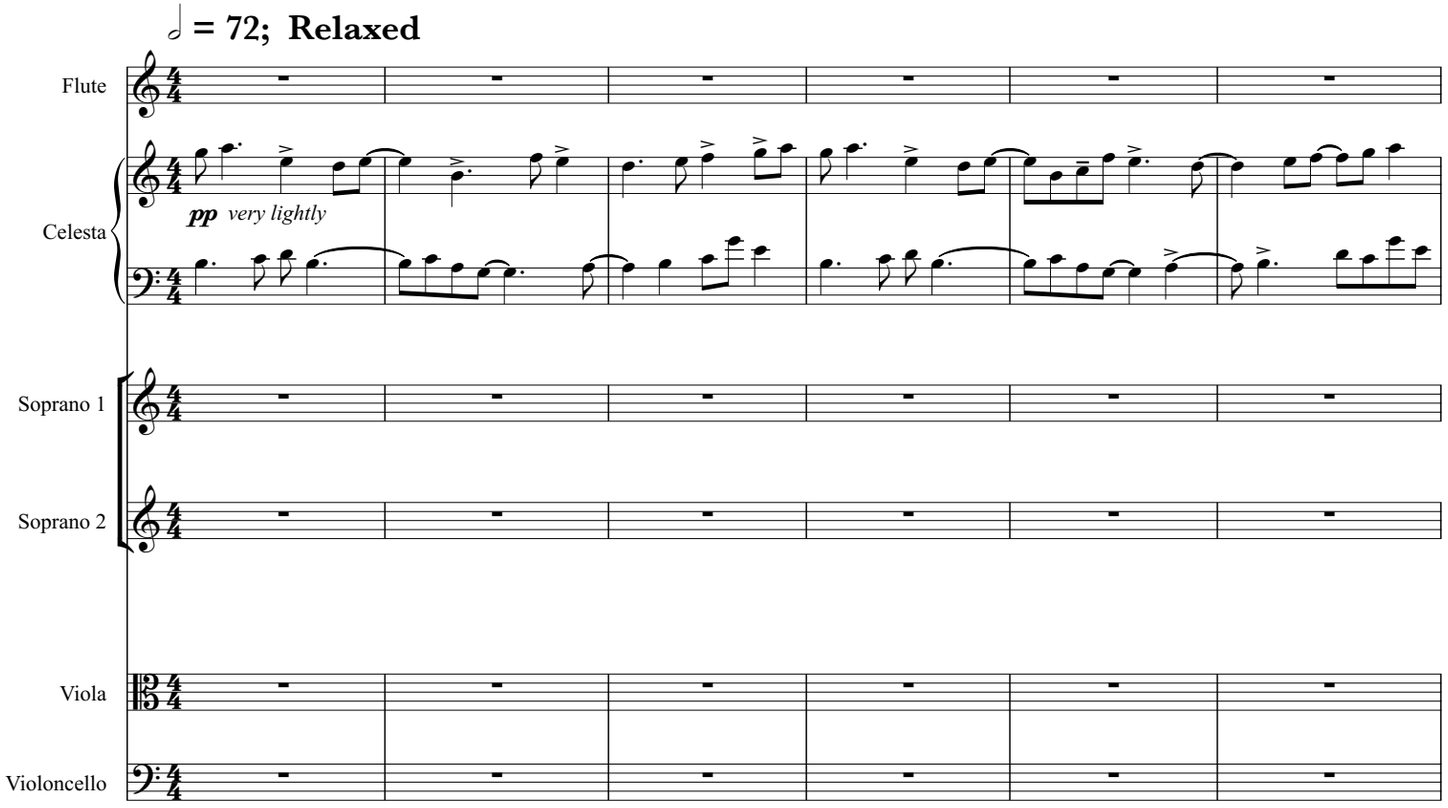

47
Fl.
Cel.
S.
mf somberly
When I gazed All was lost But this place of beau-ty and
S.
mf somberly
All was lost But this place of beau-ty
Vla.
Vc.
sul tasto
mp ominously

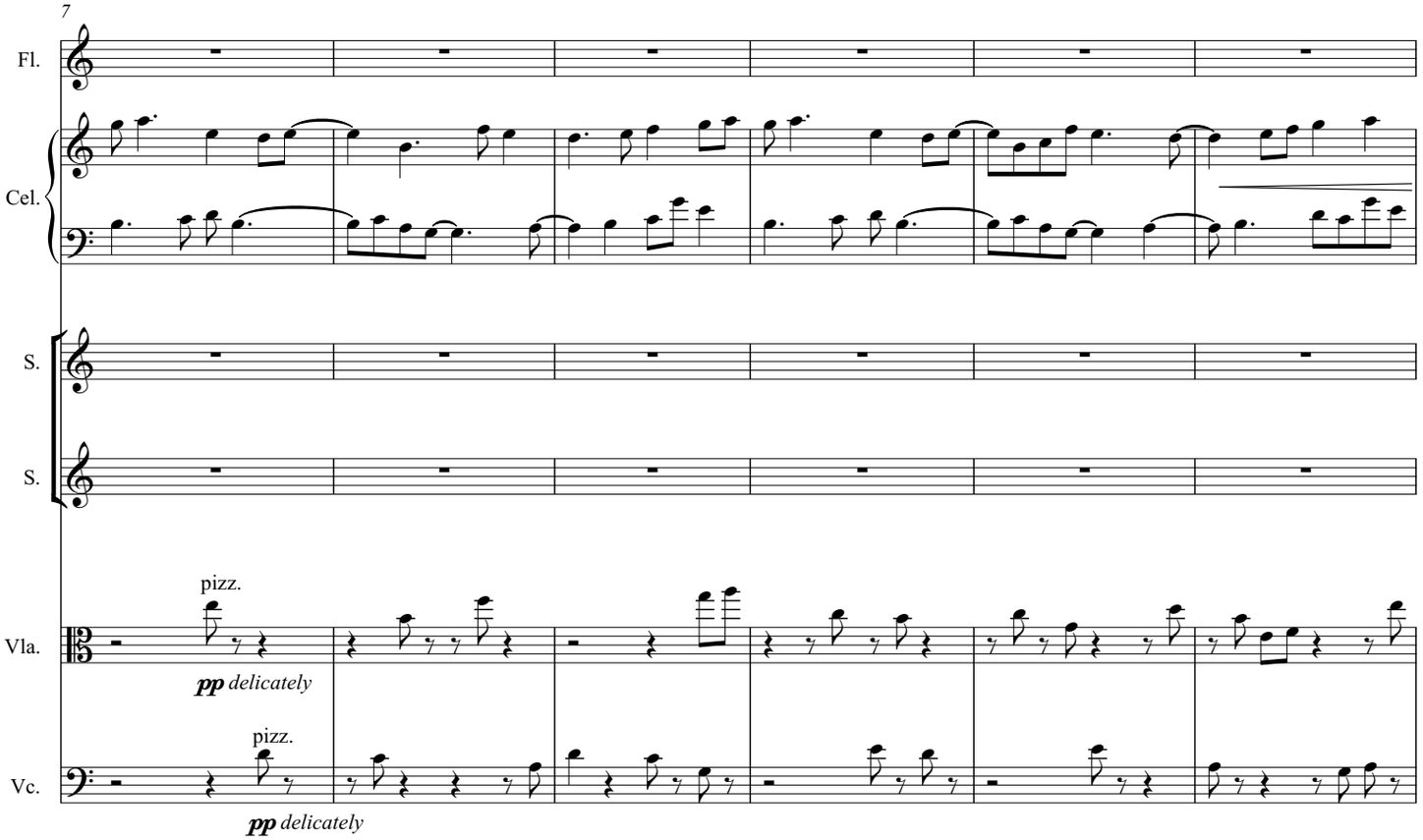

51
Fl.
f
Cel.
S.
f pesante
her
When I gazed And in my ga-zing de-sired
S.
f pesante
her
And in my ga-zing de-sired
Vla.
poco sul pont.
mp
ord.
f
p
f
Vc.
ord.
f


55
Fl.
Cel.
S.
S.
Vla.
Vc.
mp
lightly
mf
mf
de - sired
Ah
Ah
mp
lightly
p
mf
de - sired
Ah
mf
f
p
p
poco sul pont.
ord.
mf
sp
f
p
E
58
p
p resigned
pp
in my ga - zing
p
Then came a - gain
p resigned
pp
p
de - si - red
ga - zing
mile
p
mf
p
pp
p
lightly
pp


63
Poco rit.
senza vibr.
Fl.
Cel.
S.
unwavering
mile u - pon mile,
of snow, ice, bur-ning sand sand sand sand
S.
unwavering
of snow, ice, bur-ning burn - ing burn-ing burn - ing burn-ing burn-ing bur-ning burn
Vla.
Vc.

III. distant beauty





A

13

Fl.

Cel. *mf*

S. *p dreamlike*

Pla - ces a - mong the stars,

S. *p dreamlike*

Pla - ces a - mong the stars,

Vla. *p sempre*

Vc. *p sempre*

19

Fl.

Cel. *p*

p

S. 2

Soft gar-dens near the sun, Keep your dis - tant beau - ty

S. 2

Soft gar-dens near the sun, Keep your dis - tant beau - ty

Vla.

Vc.

B

25

Fl.

Cel.

S.

Shed no bea - - ms u - pon my weak heart

S.

Shed no bea - - ms u - pon my weak heart

Vla.

arco

Vc.

32

Fl.

Cel.

S.

weak heart Since she is here

S.

heart heart O

Vla.

Vc.

arco pizz. arco pizz.

38

Fl.

mf p pp mp expressivo

Cel.

S.

gliss.

in a place of black - ness Not your gol - den days Nor your sil-ver

S.

gliss.

in a place of black - ness black - ness gol - den days sil-ver

Vla.

p mp mf fp

tr

Vc.

arco

mp mf expressivo

C

44

Fl.

p mf mp p

Cel.

p mf unrelenting

p

S.

p

nights Can call me to you

S.

nights

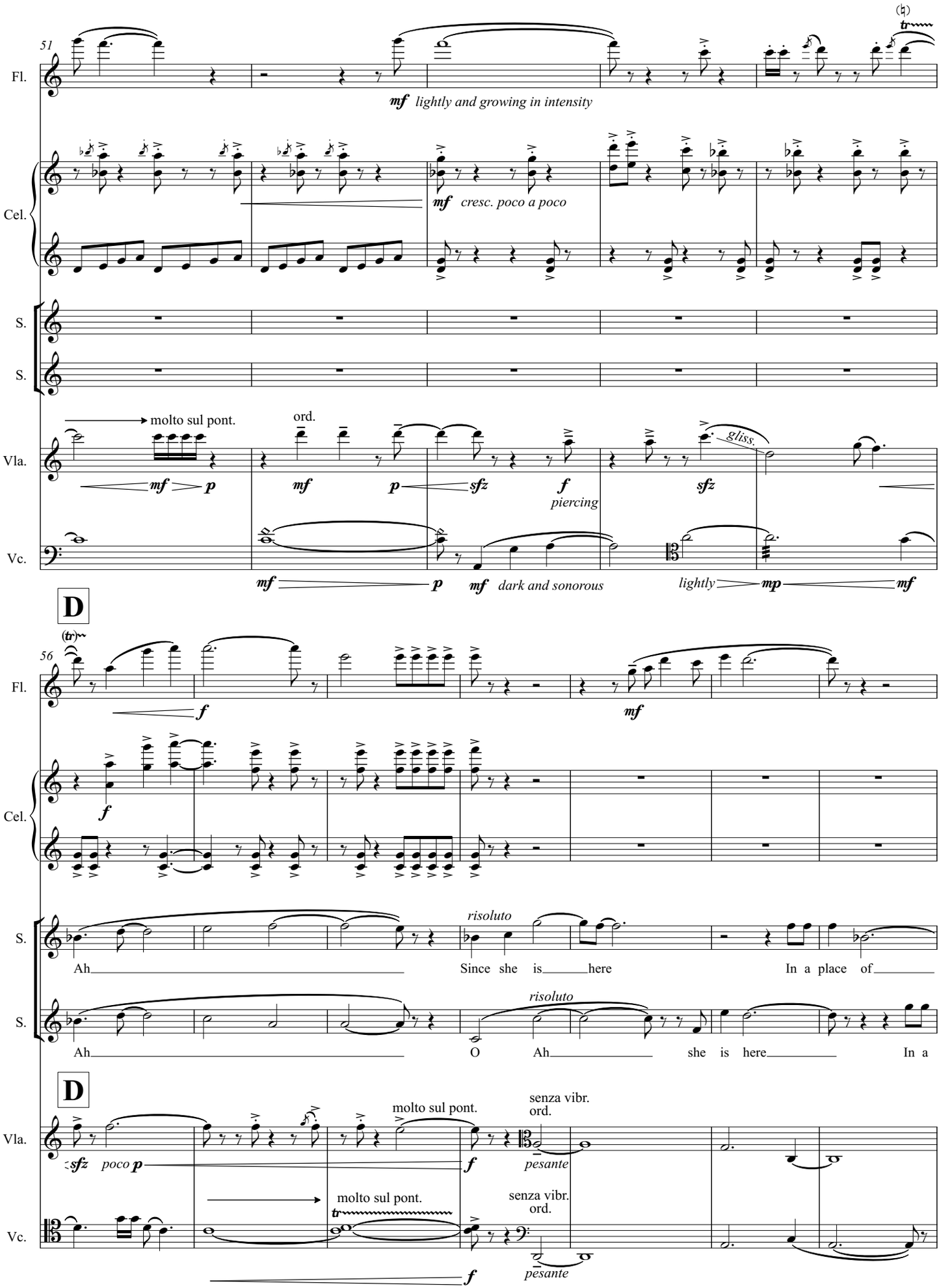
Vla.

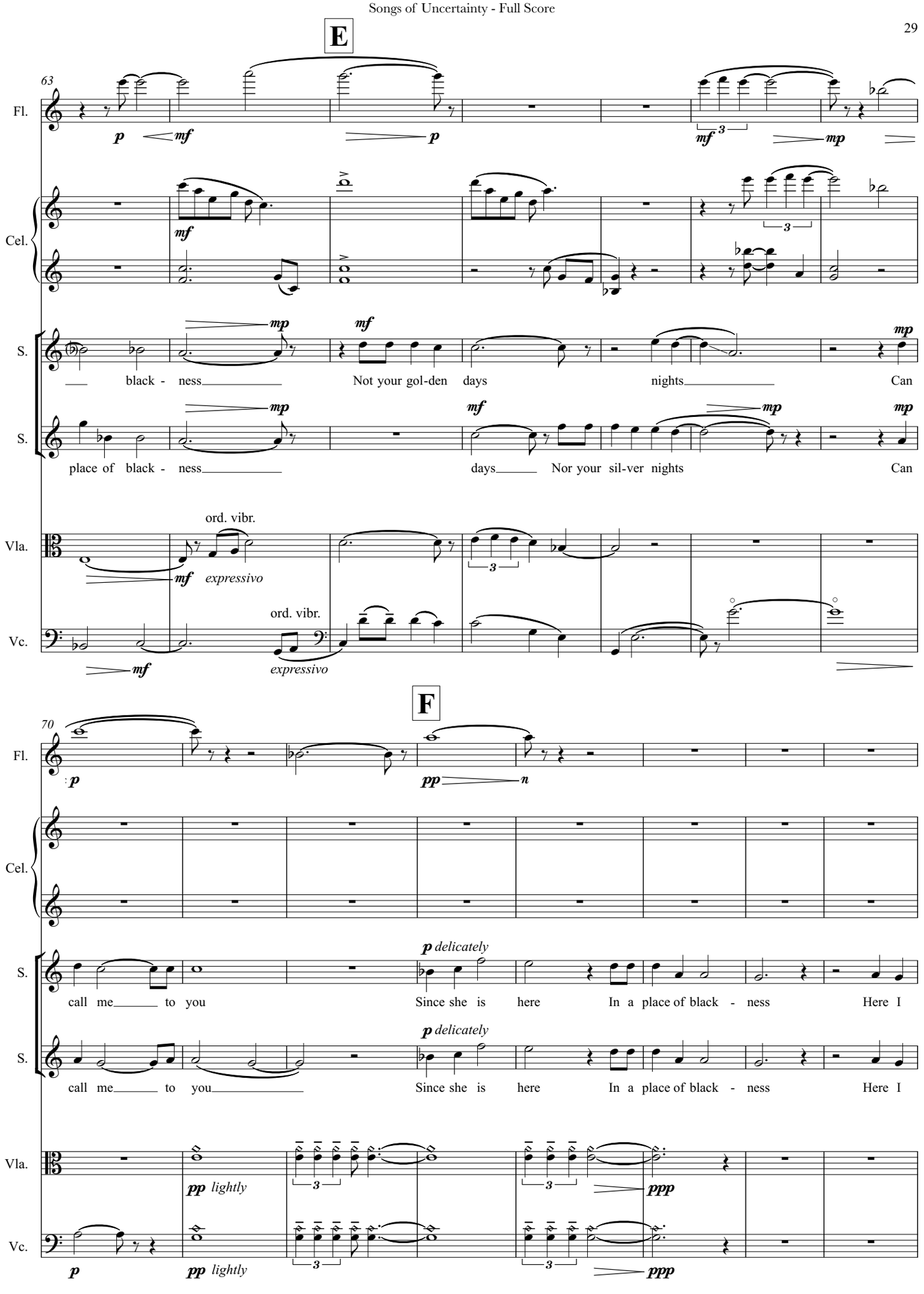
sul pont. ord.

pp p pp f sfp

Vc.

mf pp p sfz mf cantabile


51
Fl.
mf lightly and growing in intensity
Cel.
mf cresc. poco a poco
S.
S.
molto sul pont.
ord.
Vla.
mf p
mf
p
sfz
f
piercing
sfz
gliss.
Vc.
mf p
mf dark and sonorous
lightly
mp
mf
D
56
Fl.
f
mf
Cel.
f
S.
risoluto
Ah
Since she is here
In a place of
S.
risoluto
Ah
O Ah
she is here
In a
D
Vla.
sfz poco p
molto sul pont.
f
senza vibr.
ord.
pesante
Vc.
molto sul pont.
senza vibr.
ord.
f
pesante


E
63
Fl.
Cel.
S.
black - ness
Not your gol-den days
nights
Can
place of black - ness
days
Nor your sil-ver nights
Can
Vla.
ord. vibr.
expressivo
Vc.
ord. vibr.
expressivo
F
70
Fl.
Cel.
S.
call me to you
Since she is here
In a place of black - ness
Here I
call me to you
Since she is here
In a place of black - ness
Here I
Vla.
lightly
Vc.
lightly

78

Fl.

Cel.

p *delicately*

S.

stay and wait wait M

pp

S.

stay and wait wait M

pp

Vla.

mp

p

Vc.

pizz.

p

85

rit.

♩ = 60

Fl.

Cel.

pp *bell-like*

S.

p

Here I stay and

S.

Vla.

molto sul tasto

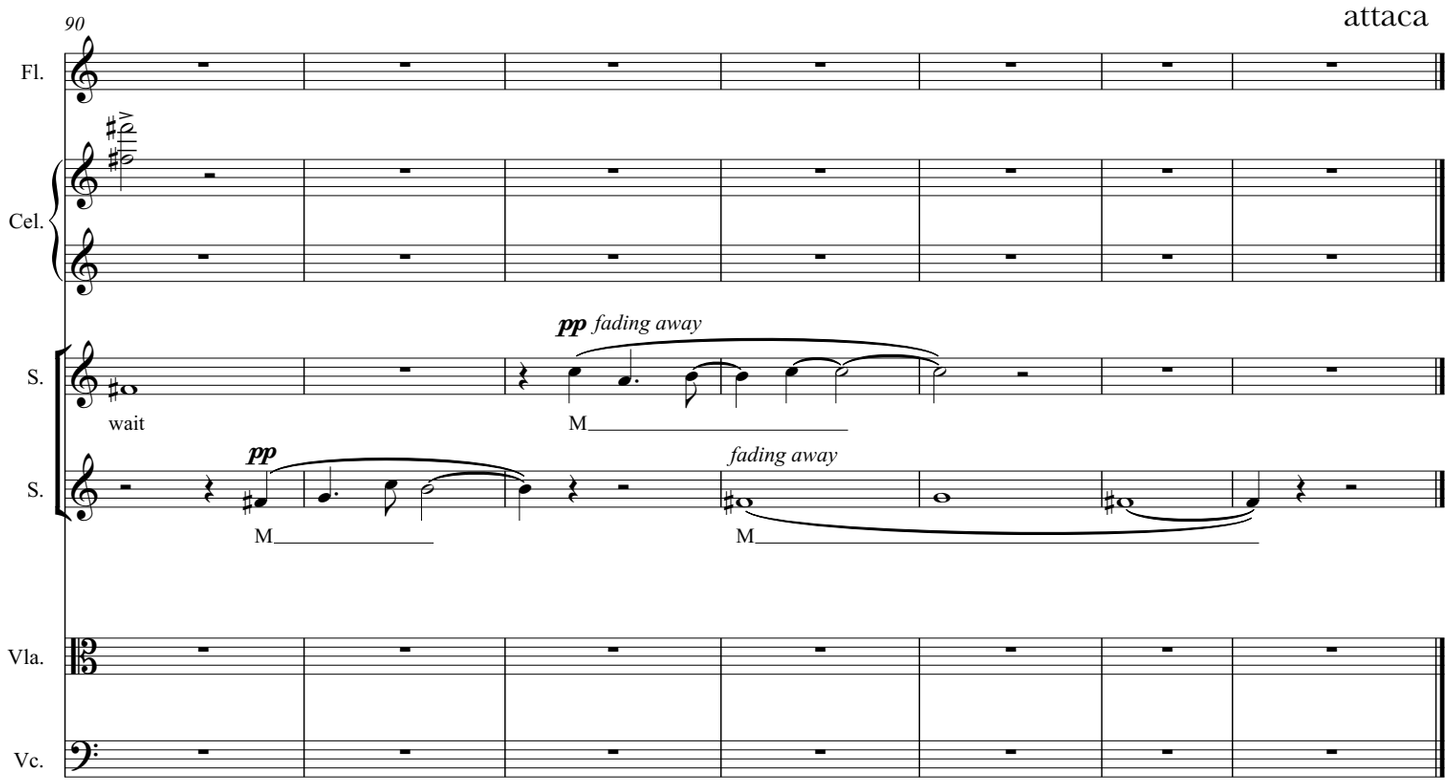
pp

Vc.

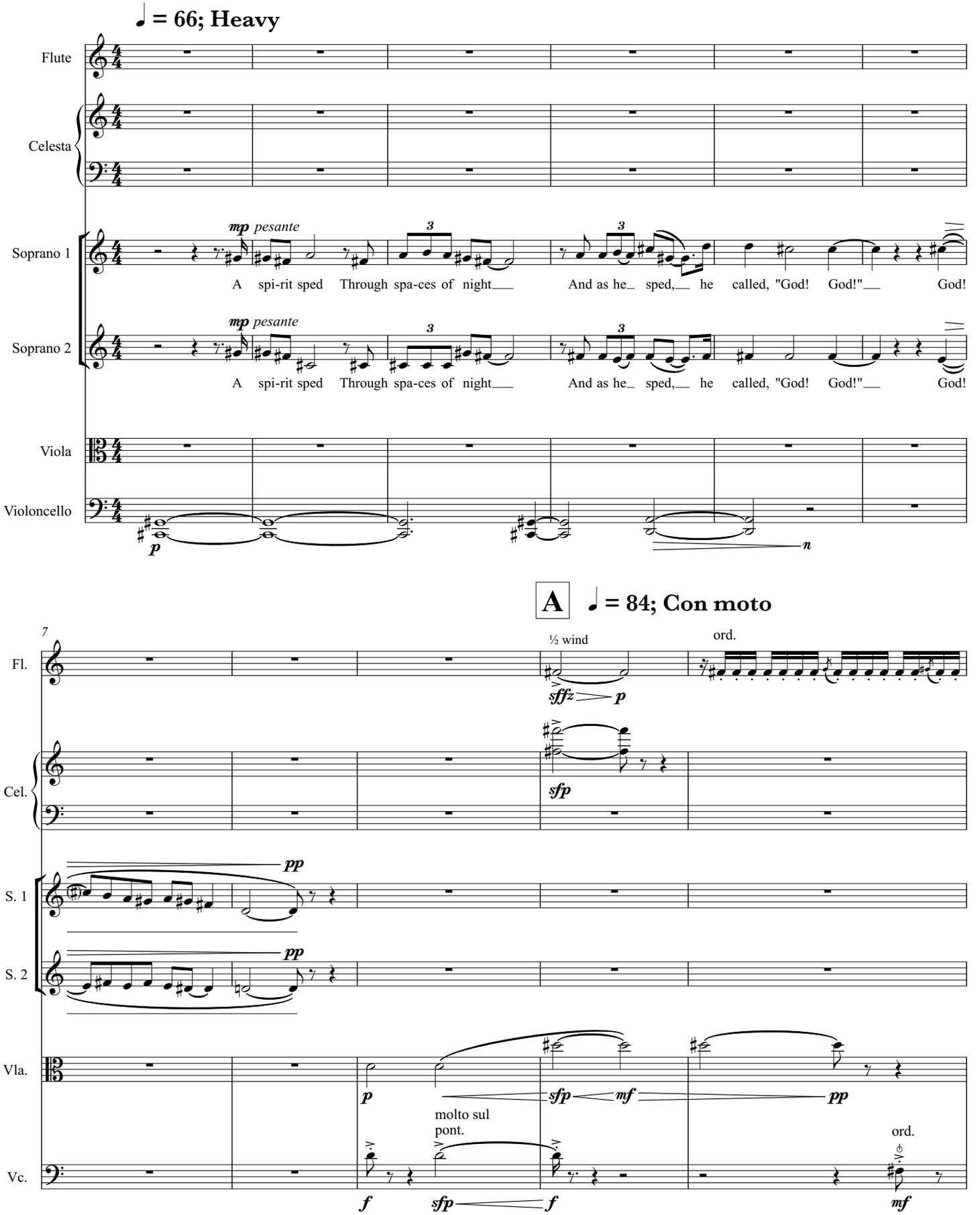
arco

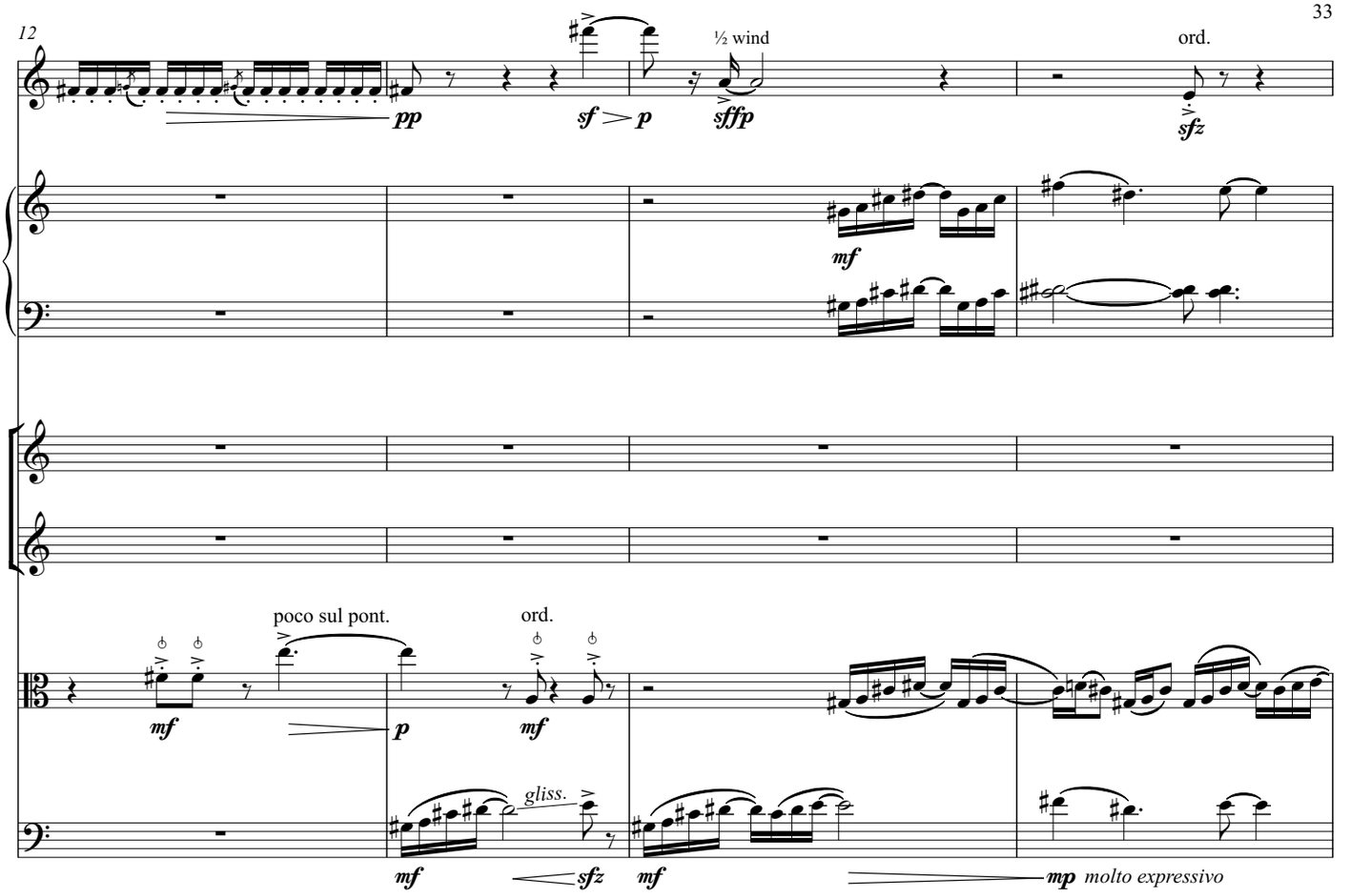
molto sul tasto

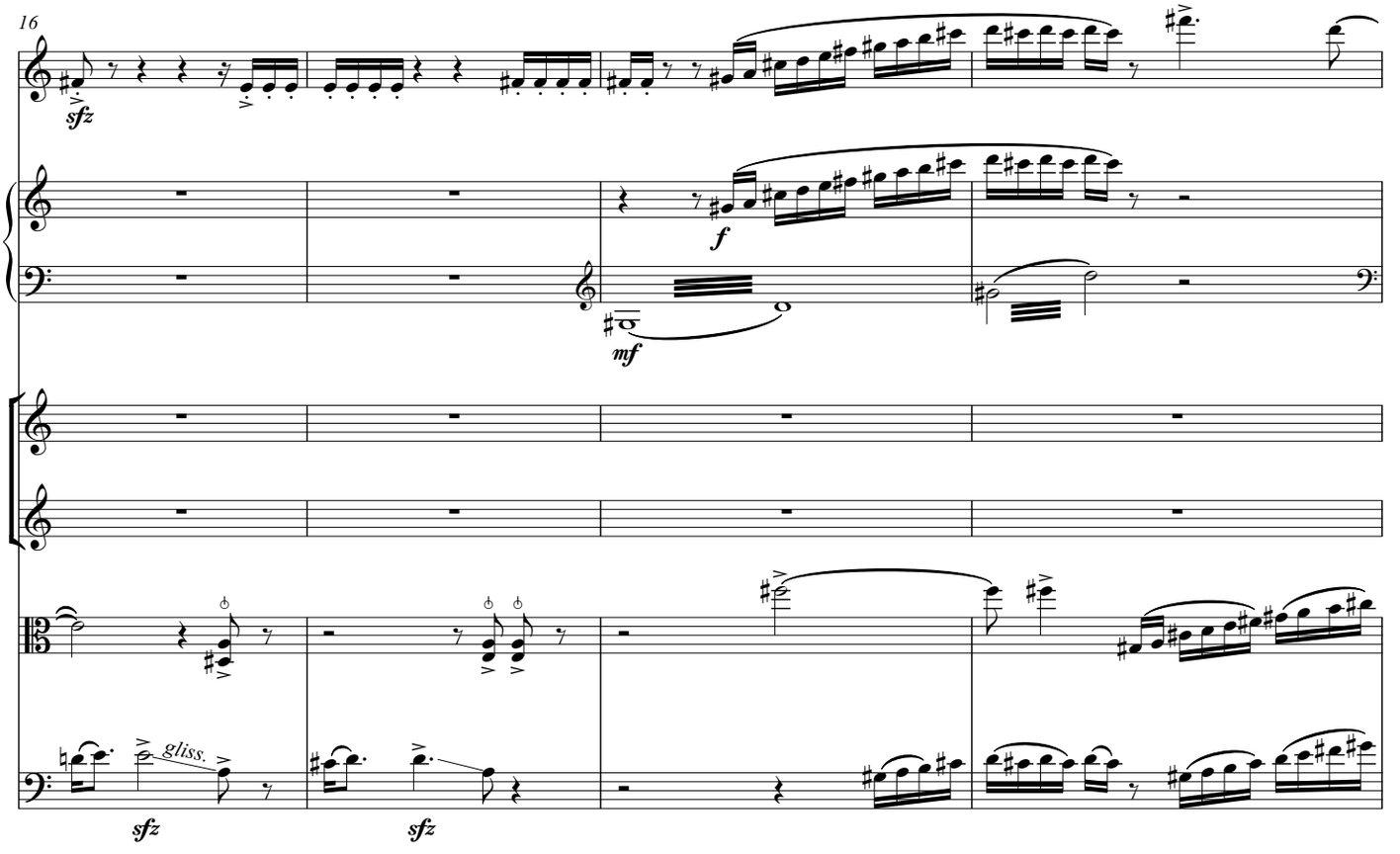
pp

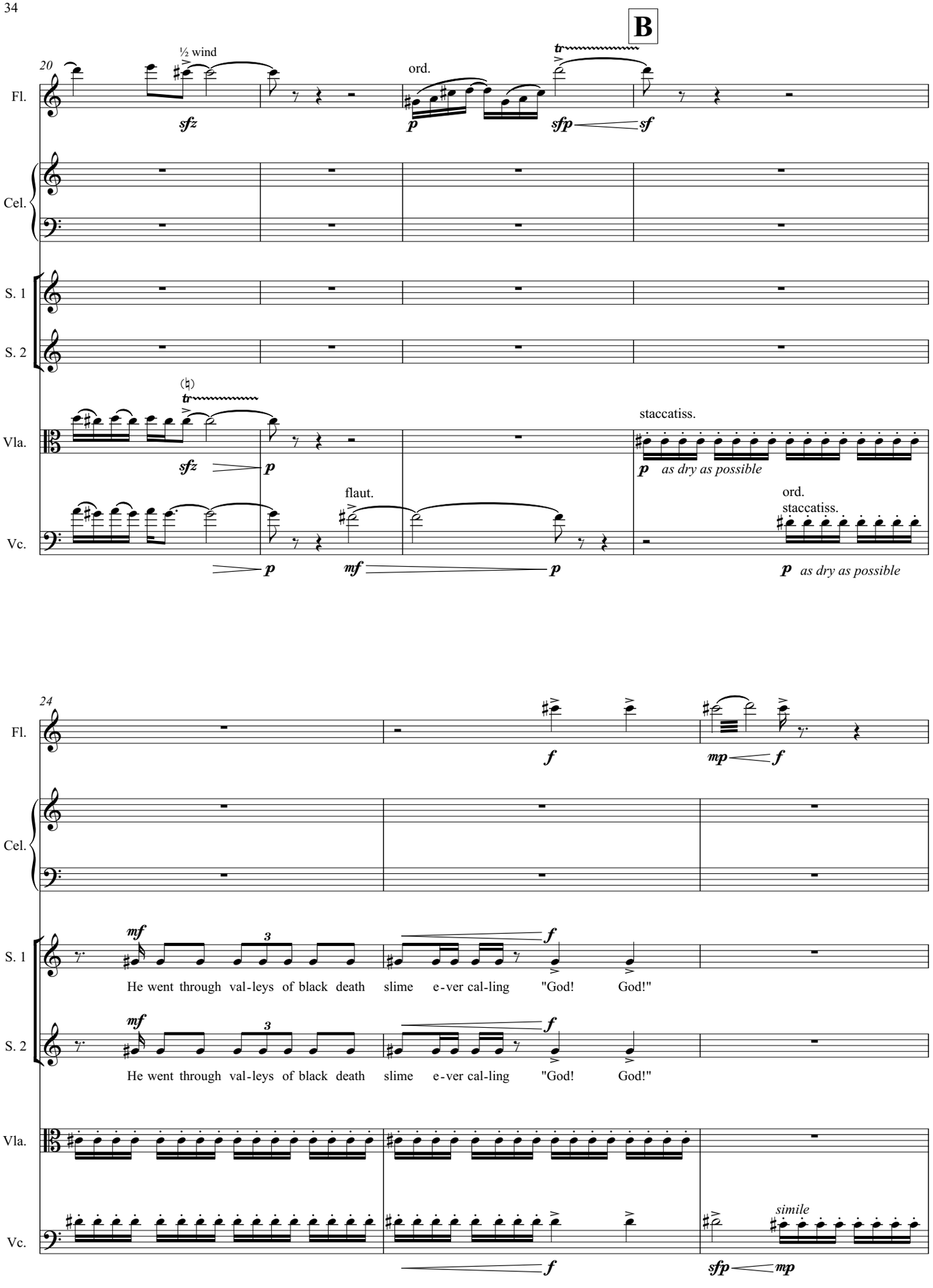

90
attaca
Fl.
Cel.
S.
S.
Vla.
Vc.
pp fading away
wait
M
pp
fading away
M
M

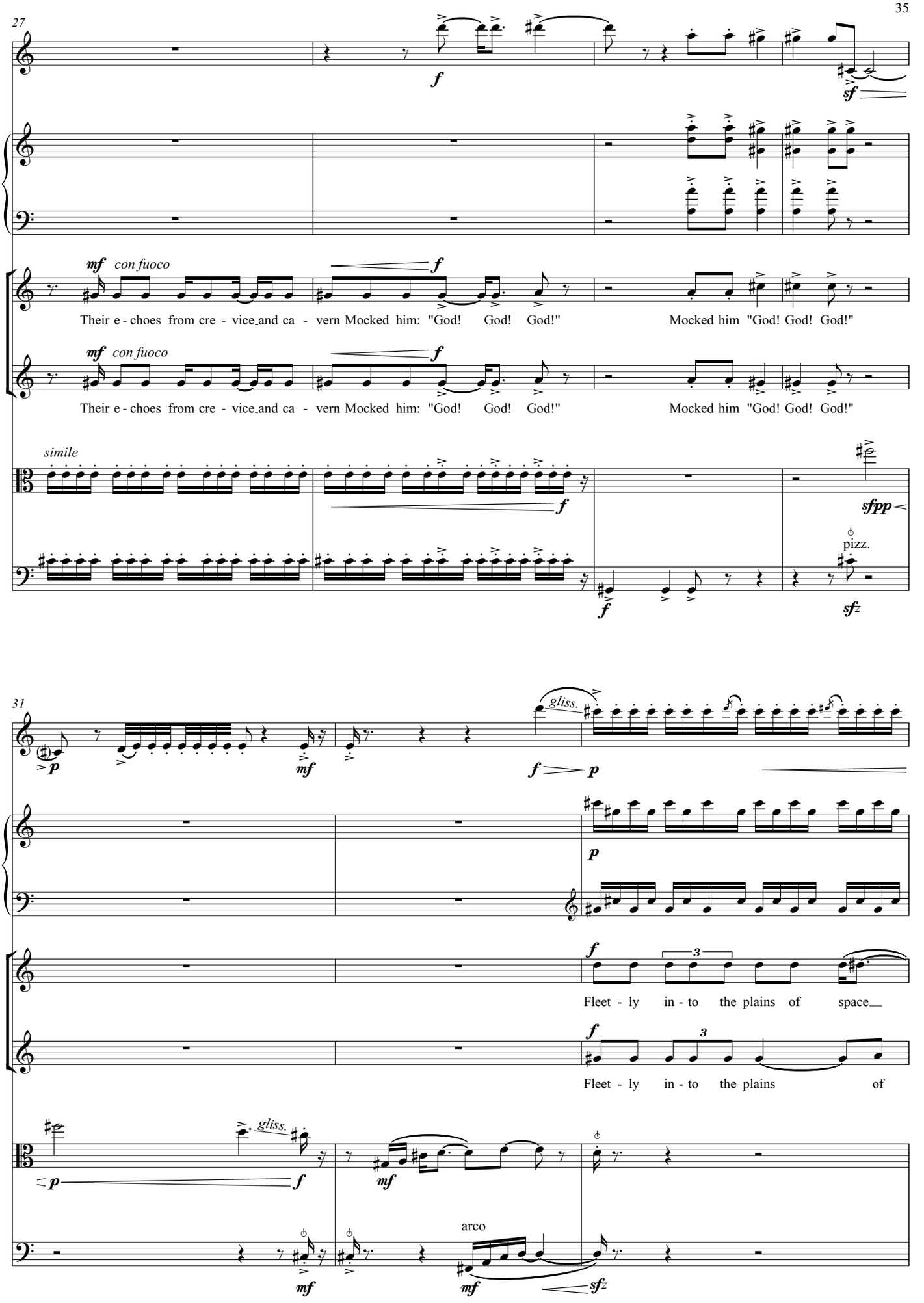
IV. in denial

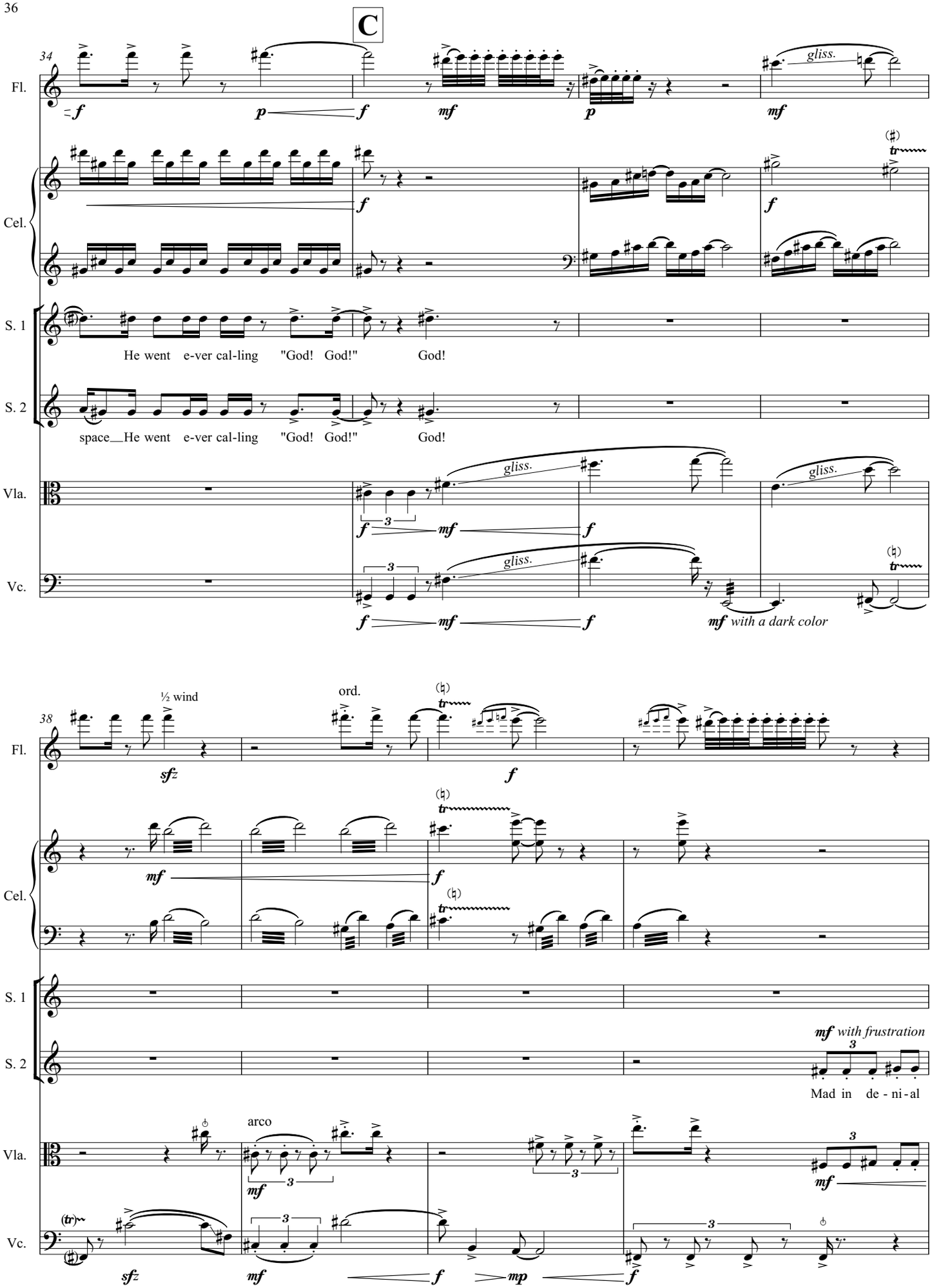

♩ = 66; Heavy
Flute
Celesta
Soprano 1
mp pesante
A spi-rit sped Through spa-ces of night And as he sped, he called, "God! God!" God!
Soprano 2
mp pesante
A spi-rit sped Through spa-ces of night And as he sped, he called, "God! God!" God!
Viola
Violoncello
p
n
A
♩ = 84; Con moto
7
Fl.
½ wind
sffz p
ord.
Cel.
sfp
S. 1
pp
S. 2
pp
Vla.
p sfp mf pp
molto sul pont.
Vc.
f sfp f
ord.
mf


12
Fl.
pp
sf
p
½ wind
sffp
ord.
sfz
Cel.
mf
S. 1
S. 2
poco sul pont.
ord.
Vla.
mf
p
mf
Vc.
gliss.
mf
sfz
mf
mp molto expressivo


16
Fl.
sfz
Cel.
f
mf
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
gliss.
sfz
sfz


B
20
½ wind
ord.
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
staccatiss.
as dry as possible
flaut.
ord.
staccatiss.
as dry as possible
24
He went through val-leys of black death slime e-ver cal-ling "God! God!"
He went through val-leys of black death slime e-ver cal-ling "God! God!"
simile


27
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
mf con fuoco
f
Their e - choes from cre - vice and ca - vern Mocked him: "God! God! God!"
Mocked him "God! God! God!"
simile
sfpp
pizz.
sfz
31
gliss.
p
mf
Fleet - ly in - to the plains of space
Fleet - ly in - to the plains of
arco


C
34
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
S. 2
Vla.
Vc.
gliss.
He went e-ver cal-ling "God! God!" God!
space He went e-ver cal-ling "God! God!" God!
mf with a dark color
38
½ wind
ord.
arco
mf with frustration
Mad in de - ni - al

42

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

S. 2

Fleet-ly Mocked him de - ni - al

Vla.

Vc.

46

D

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

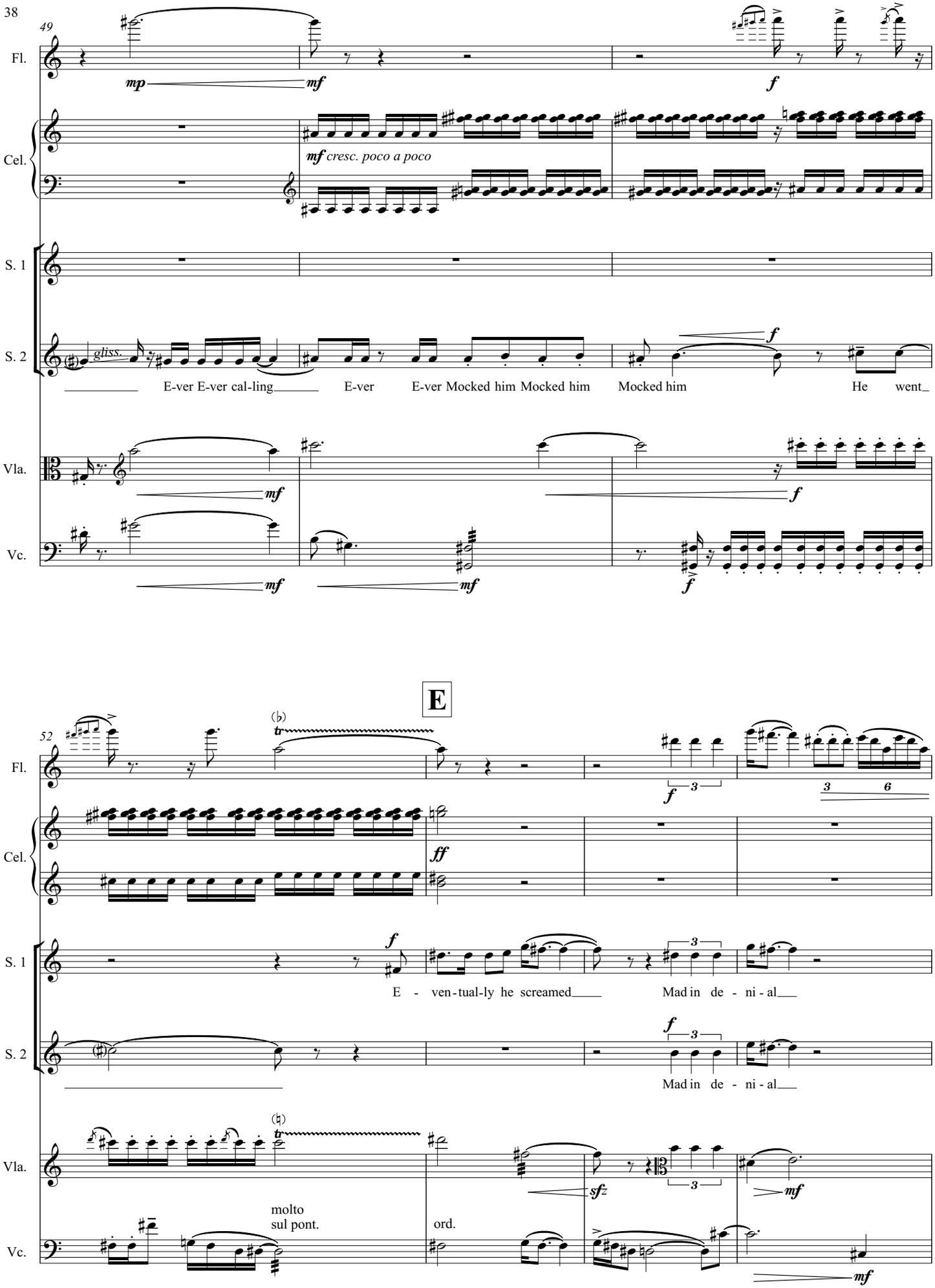
S. 2

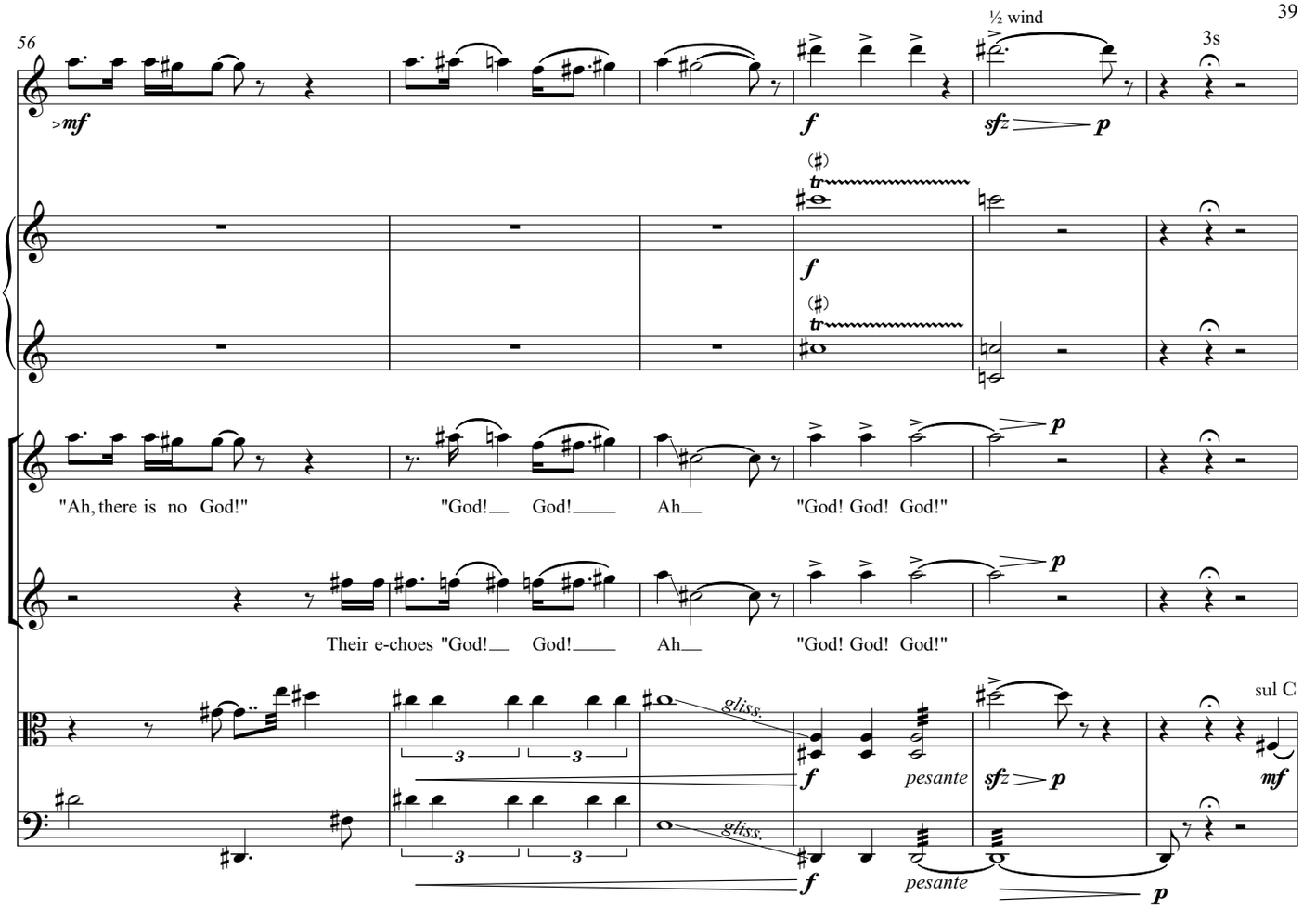
Mocked him Mocked him val - leys cre-vice and ca - vern black death Mocked him Mocked him

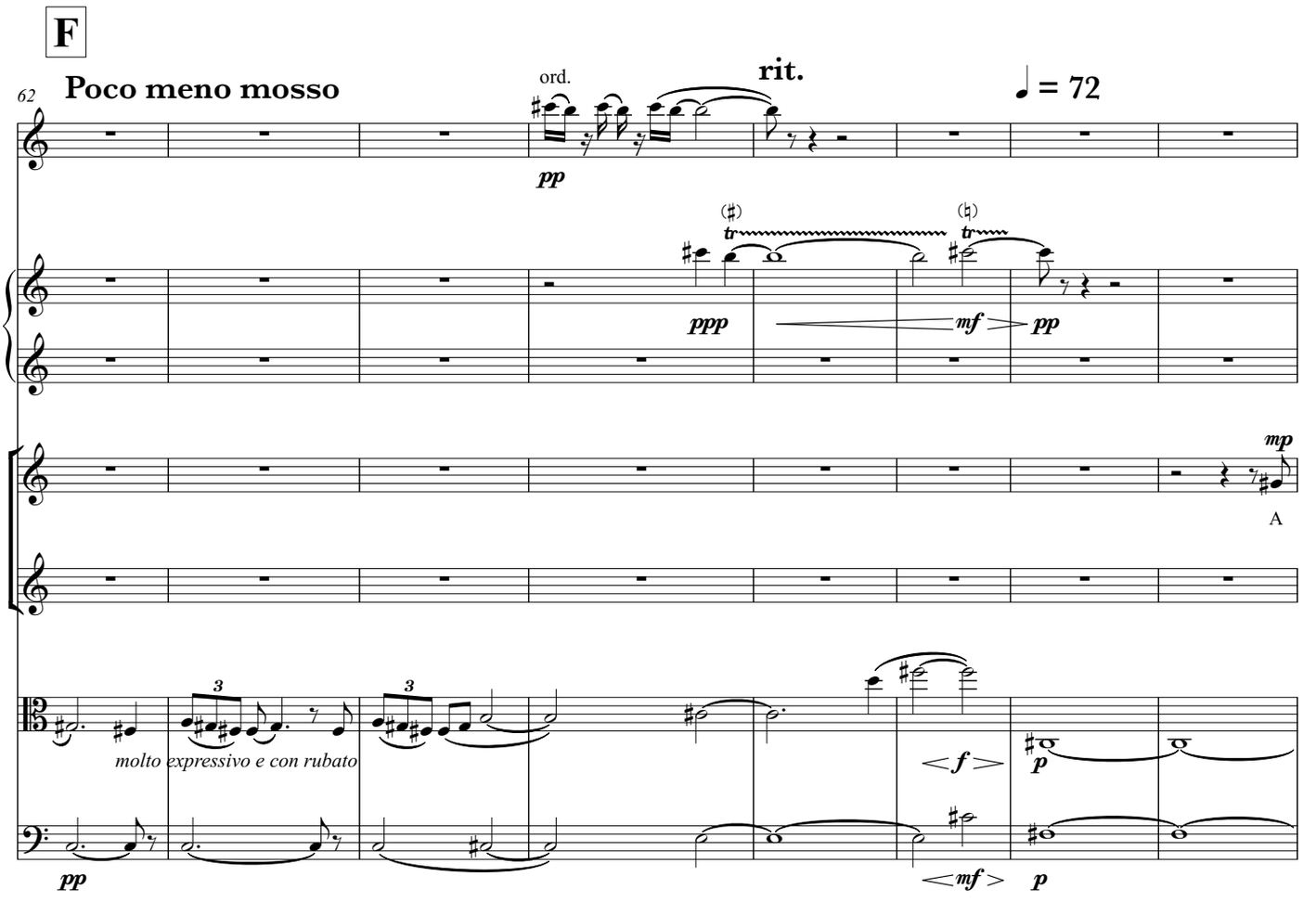
Vla.

gliss.

Vc.


49
Fl.
mp
mf
f
Cel.
mf cresc. poco a poco
S. 1
S. 2
gliss.
E-ver E-ver cal-ling
E-ver
E-ver Mocked him Mocked him
Mocked him
He went
Vla.
Vc.
E
52
tr
ff
E - ven-tual-ly he screamed
Mad in de - ni - al
Mad in de - ni - al
sfz
molto
sul pont.
ord.


56
½ wind
3s
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
"Ah, there is no God!"
"God! God! Ah "God! God! God!"
S. 2
Their e-choes "God! God! Ah "God! God! God!"
Vla.
Vc.
gliss.
pesante
sul C


F
62
Poco meno mosso
ord.
rit.
♩ = 72
Fl.
Cel.
S. 1
A
S. 2
Vla.
molto expressivo e con rubato
Vc.

G

70

Fl.

Cel.

pp sempre

S. 1

p

swift hand, A sword from the sky, Smote him, And he was dead.

S. 2

p

sky, Smote him, dead.

Vla.

sul tasto

pp

Vc.

sul tasto

pp

75

Fl.

Cel.

S. 1

dead. dead. dead.

S. 2

dead. dead. dead.

Vla.

gliss.

ppp

Vc.

gliss. *gliss.*

ppp