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GREG SIMON (2016)

for Sophia Han

Atacameños

(Voices of the Atacama)

for violin solo

I. Mano del Desierto
II. Desierto Florido
III. Culpeo
IV. ALMA (alma)

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Atacameños for solo violin

In the northern end of Chile, about 800 miles from Santiago, sits the Atacama Desert. This desert — the driest on the planet — isn't well-known outside South America, and most who recognize its name might conjure a mental image of desolation, a lifeless expanse supporting little in the way of life. They wouldn't be wrong: the Atacama is inhabited by very few animals, even fewer humans. For a few decades in the 20th century, the desert saw a boom of nitrate mining towns, but as technology moved past the need for nitrate those have largely been abandoned. The Atacama is a tapestry of ghost towns, dead zones, and the occasional lone creature seeking survival.

In my creative work, I often dance around the concept of loneliness. I remain ever fascinated by the natural and historic offerings of Chile, where my mother was born. The Atacama is a touchstone for both — treasured by Chileans even in its bleakness, and the setting for a thousand meditations on loneliness through landform, creature, and the desert itself. For some of the Atacama's few denizens, loneliness is a curse: it means a work of art without a viewer, a ghost town without a guardian from vandals, a lone man without a community. But many others experience not a curse but a blessing: not loneliness, but solitude. Intrinsic in the solitary nature of desert life is freedom, independence, and uniqueness. Only in the Atacama can you find a phenomenon like the *desierto florido,* or a creature like the *culpeo.* It is this solitude that shapes the paradoxical life of the desert, at once lonely and free, desolate and colorful.

I have wanted to write about the Atacama for years, but never found the right project — until my dear friend Sophia Han asked me for a violin solo. A soloist is lonely, yet strong and intimate in her solitude. The violin demands an unparalleled focus and vulnerability from its performer, as if the two are in private dialogue with one another. Any violin solo is a study in loneliness — what a fitting medium to give voice to figures of an arid desert, themselves lessons in isolation.

Atacameños is a quartet of portraits from the Atacama desert. The work is dedicated to Sophia Han.

I. Mano del Desierto

The Mano del Desierto ("Hand of the Desert") is a statue designed by sculptor Mario Irarrázabal, built of iron and concrete. The 36-foot-tall sculpture is of a hand rising from the desert, buried in the sand to its heel, with all five fingers reaching skyward. The Mano stands on the Western edge of the desert, open and unguarded, about a quarter mile from the highway. Its exposure makes it a popular destination for travelers through the Desert. The same exposure makes the Mano a target for vandals, and it is not uncommon to see the sculpture marked with graffiti and personal engravings.

II. Desierto Florido

In the rare years when rainfall in the Atacama is higher than normal, the desert will undergo a phenomenon called *desierto florido* ("flowering desert"). The normally barren desert plays host to a variety of seeds and bulbs, which lay quietly buried during normal years, lacking the water to sprout. Higher rainfall will cause these seeds to germinate, and by September the desert will become a carpet of colorful flowers, accompanied by a surge in wildlife around the desert. The display usually lasts about two months, before the blossoms disappear and their seeds once again lay dormant.

III. Culpeo

Culpeo is another name for the Andean fox. Resembling a cross between a fox and a coyote, the culpeo grows to about 30 pounds and is one of the Atacama's only predator mammals. Outside of mating, the culpeo is a solitary creature, driven in the desert by a constant search for food. Culpeos are extremely fast, cunning, and ravenous — they are opportunistic predators, feeding on anything from rodents and berries to domestic livestock and wild guanacos nearly five times their size.

IV. ALMA (alma)

ALMA stands for the Atacama Large Millimeter Array, a collection of 66 high-distance radio telescopes built on the high-altitude Chajnantor plateau. ALMA takes advantage of the Atacama's dry climate and typically clear skies to observe celestial bodies, producing images at a resolution 5 times better than the Hubble telescope. ALMA represents an international collaborative effort between Chile, the European Union, and five additional countries; scientists hope it can help provide us with more information about the birth of stars and the early days of the universe. "Alma" is also the Spanish word for "soul".

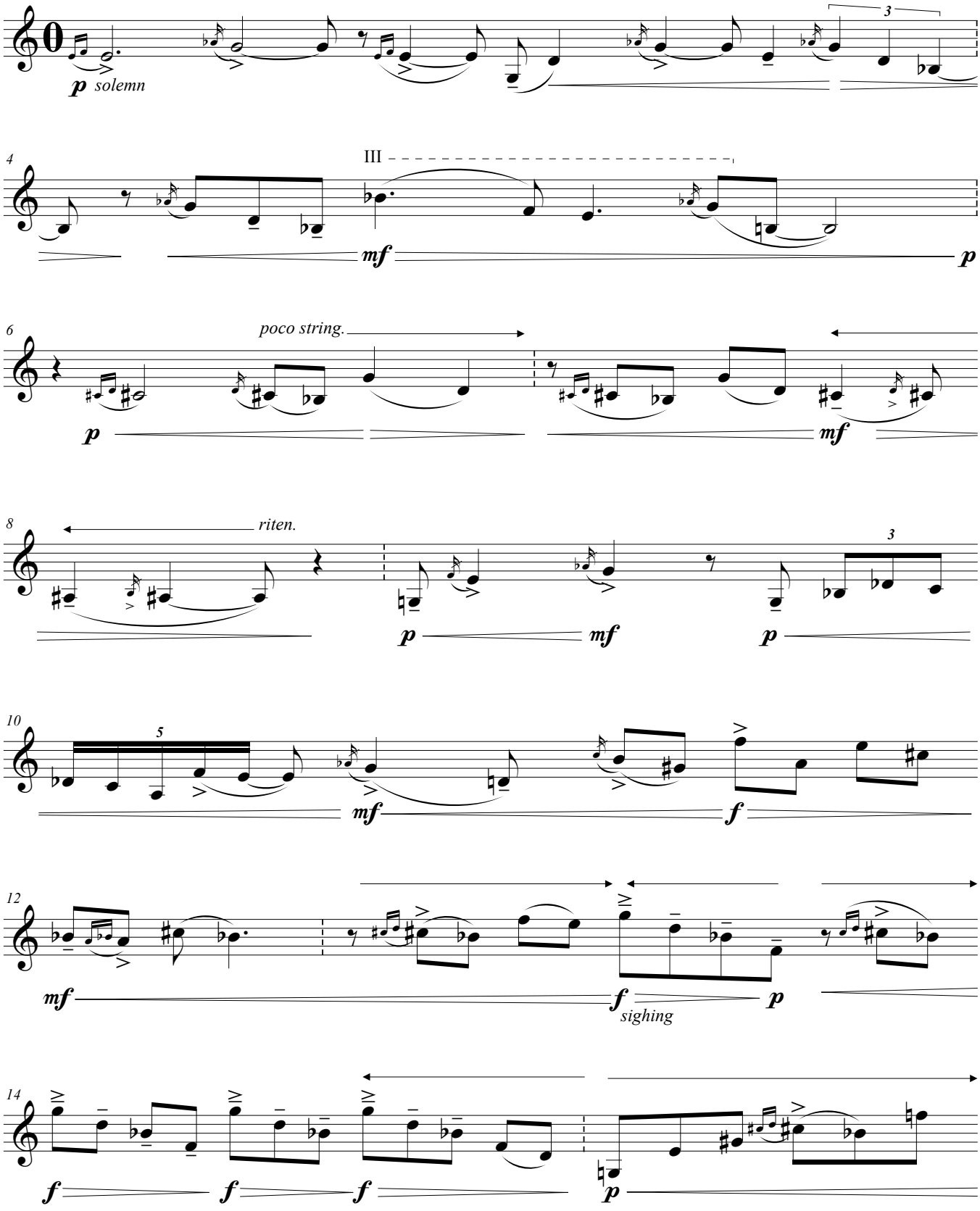
for Sophia Han

Atacameños

I. Mano del Desierto

Greg Simon

Barren and Expansive



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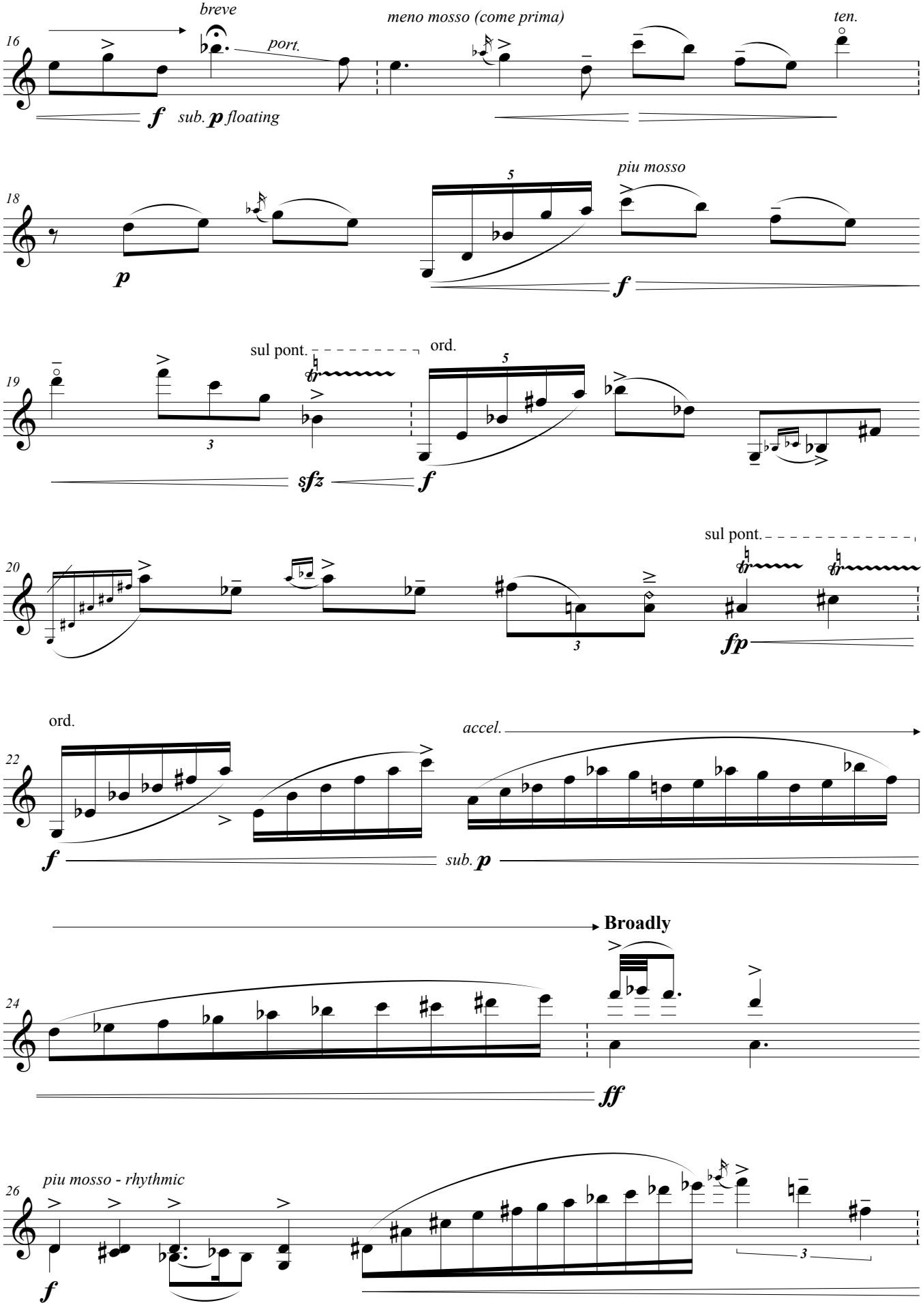
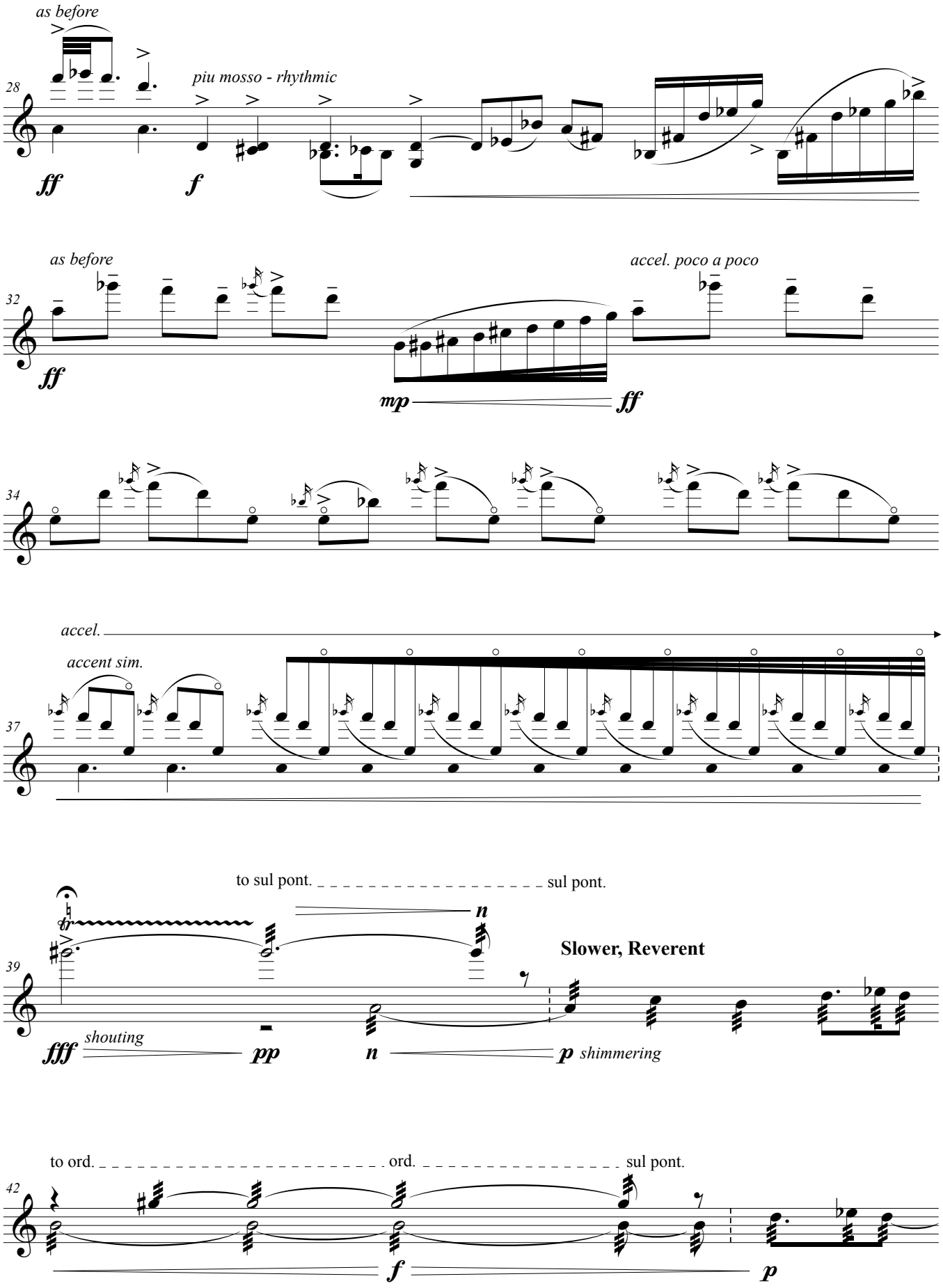
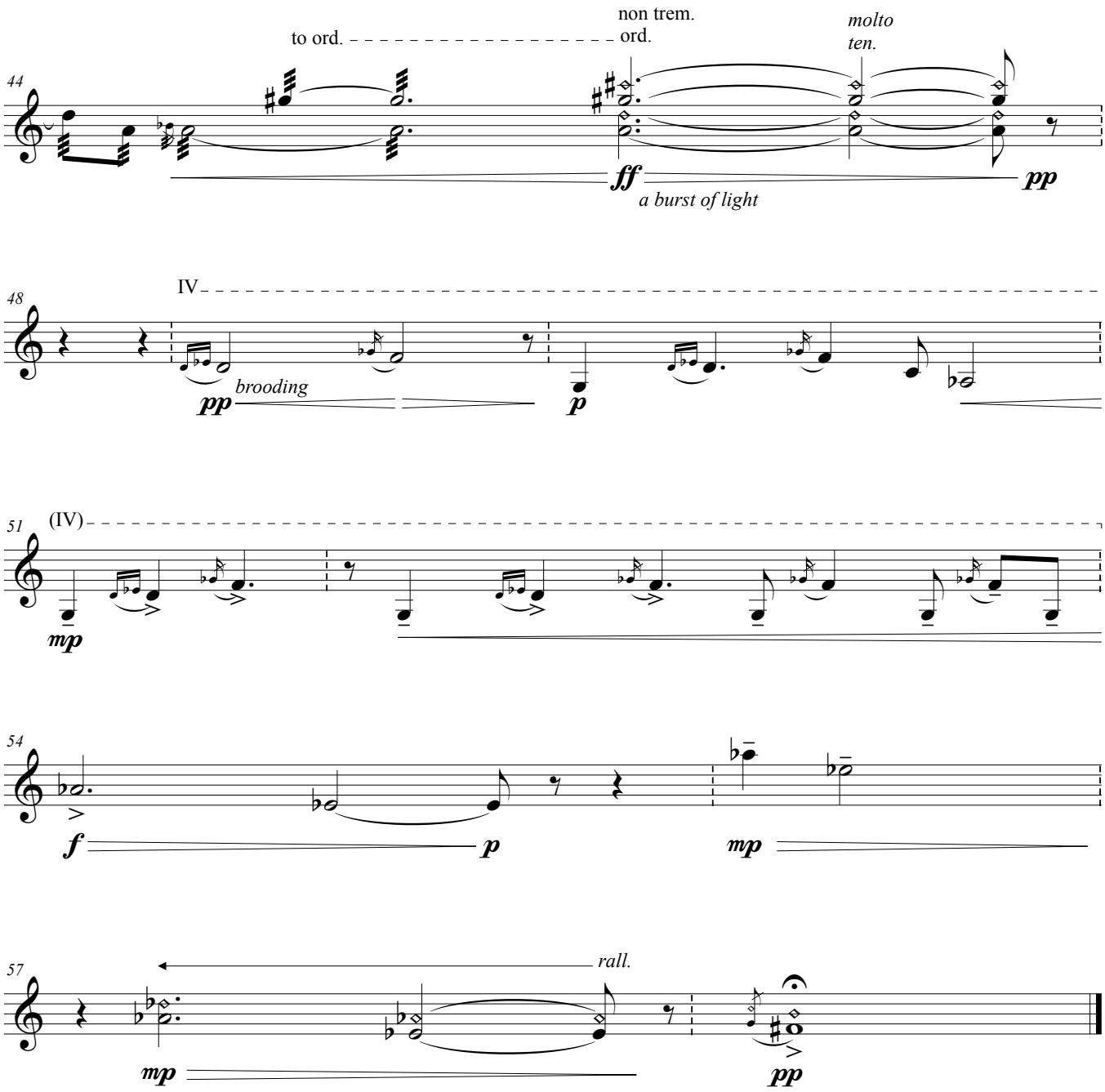

16
breve
port.
meno mosso (come prima)
ten.
f
sub. p floating
18
piu mosso
p
f
19
sul pont.
ord.
sfz
f
20
sul pont.
fp
22
ord.
accel.
f
sub. p
24
Broadly
ff
26
piu mosso - rhythmic
f


as before
28
piu mosso - rhythmic
ff
f
as before
32
accel. poco a poco
ff
mp
ff
34
accel.
accent sim.
37
to sul pont.
sul pont.
n
39
Slower, Reverent
fff
shouting
pp
n
p
shimmering
to ord.
ord.
sul pont.
42
f
p


44
to ord.
non trem.
ord.
molto
ten.
ff
a burst of light
pp
48
IV
pp
brooding
p
51
(IV)
mp
54
f
p
mp
57
rall.
mp
pp

Atacameños

II. Desierto Florido

Greg Simon

♩ = 160 **Gliding**

flautando

pp *ghostly*

cresc. poco a poco

6

gradually to ord.

p *swaying gently*

10

cresc.

16

ord.

piu ***p***

21

mp

26

30

mf *piu espress.*

35

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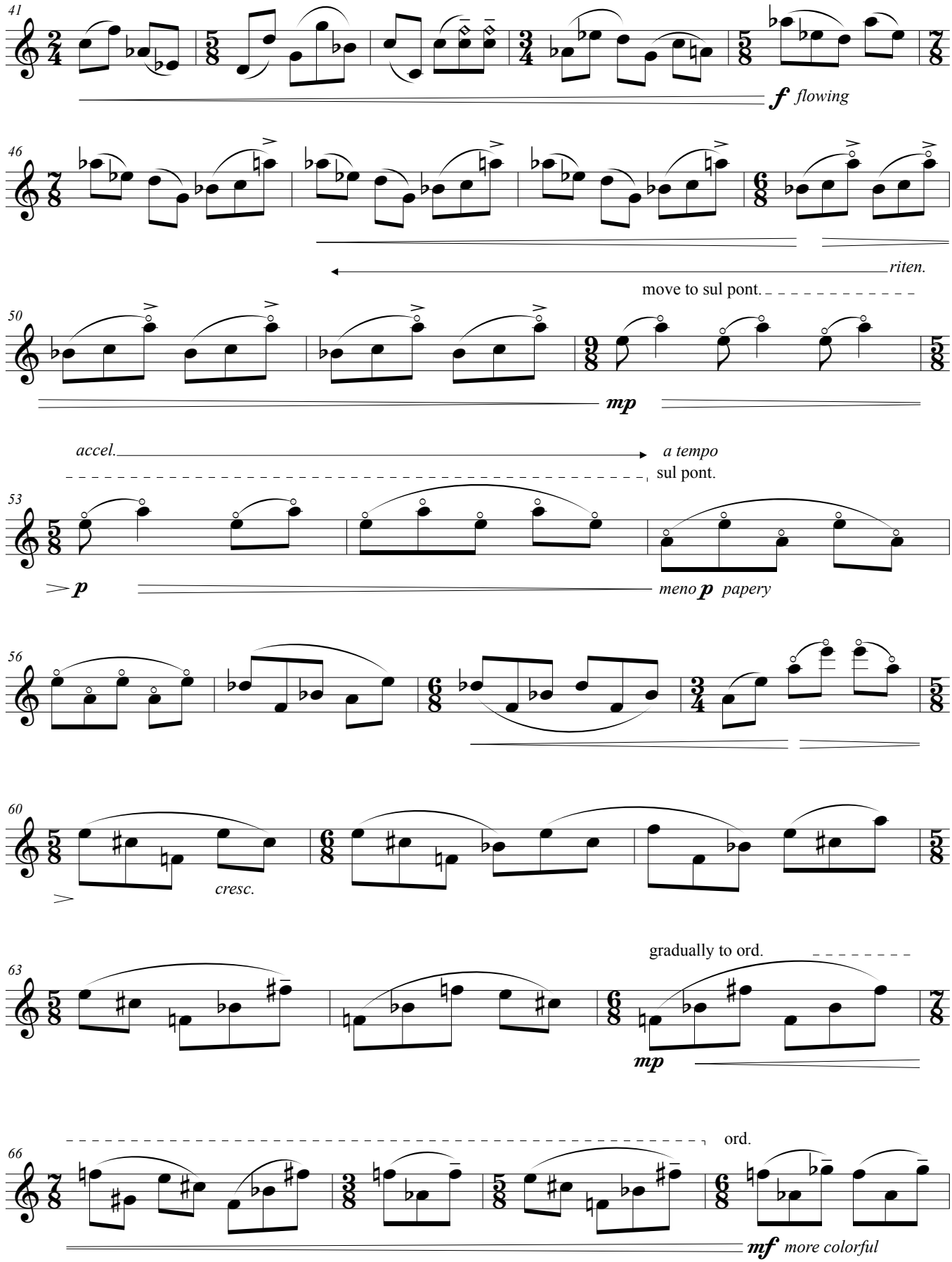
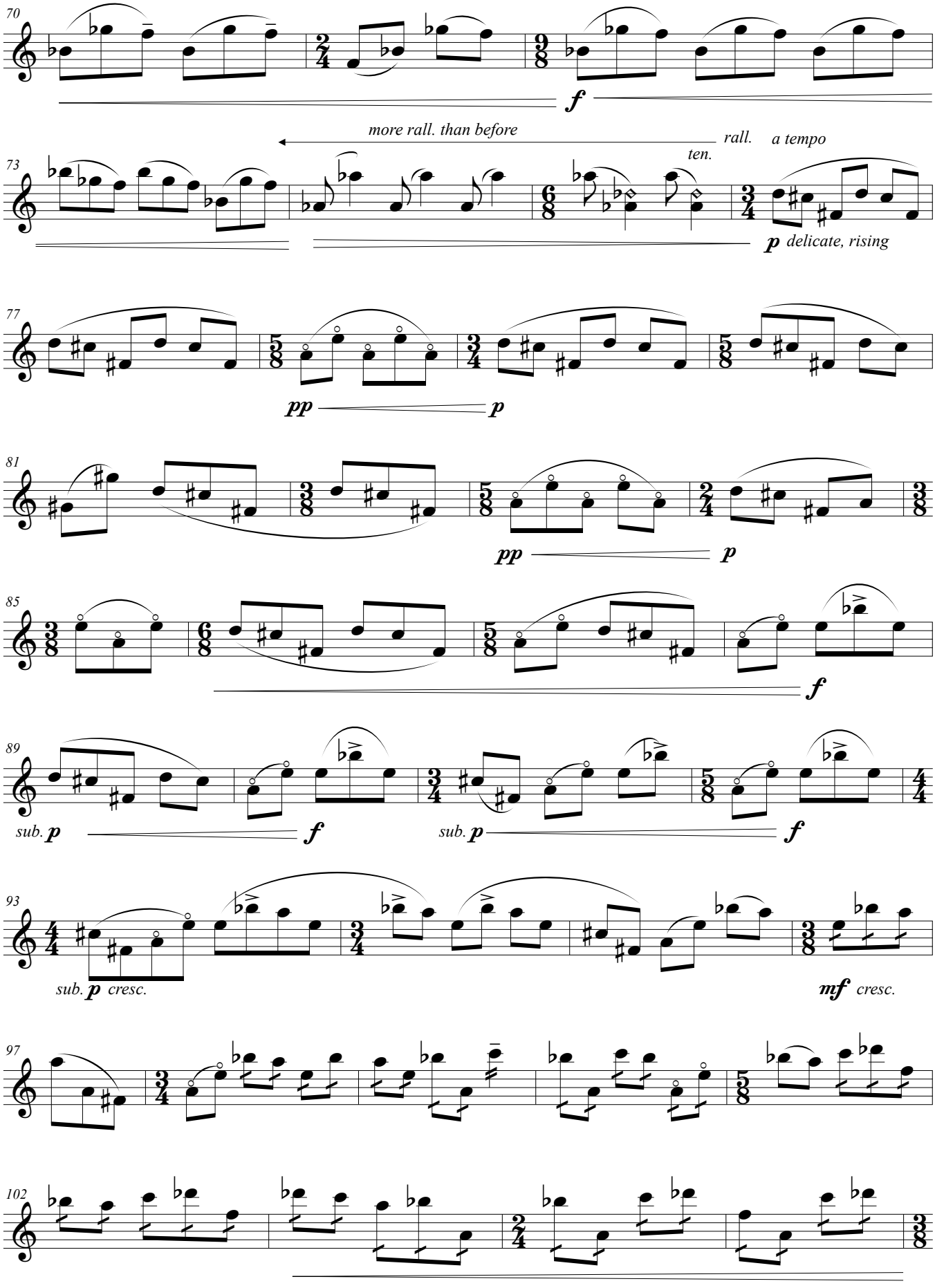
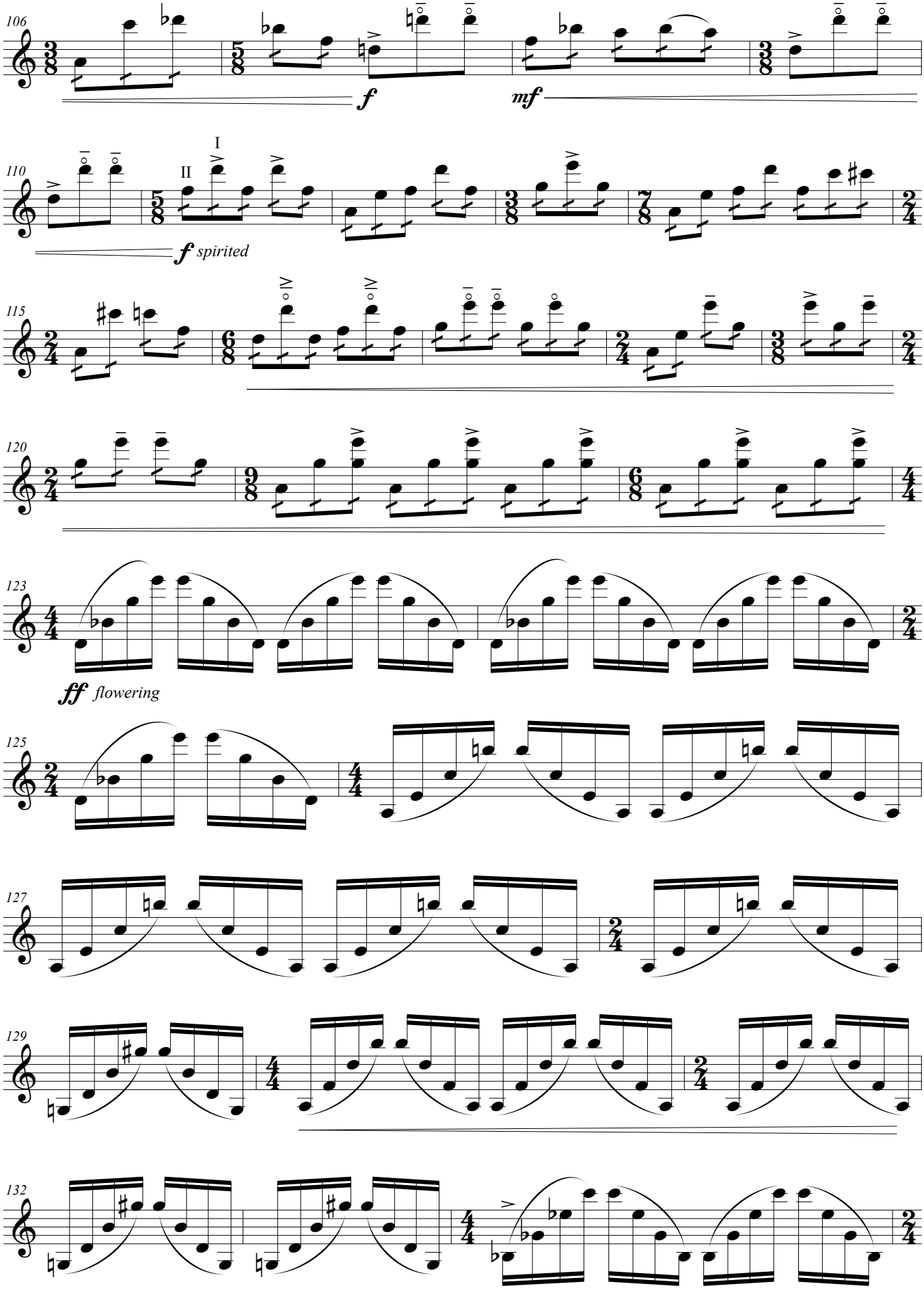
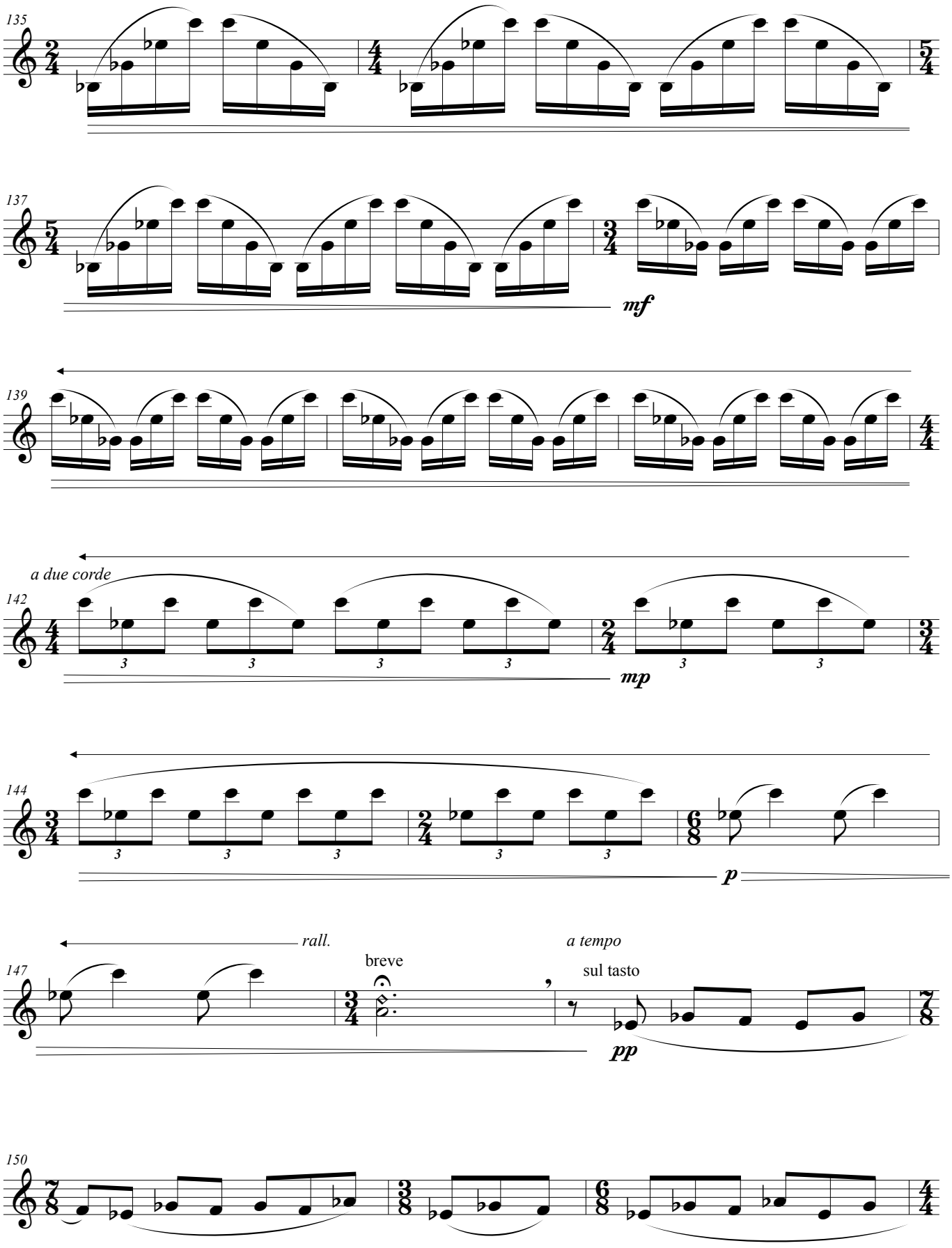
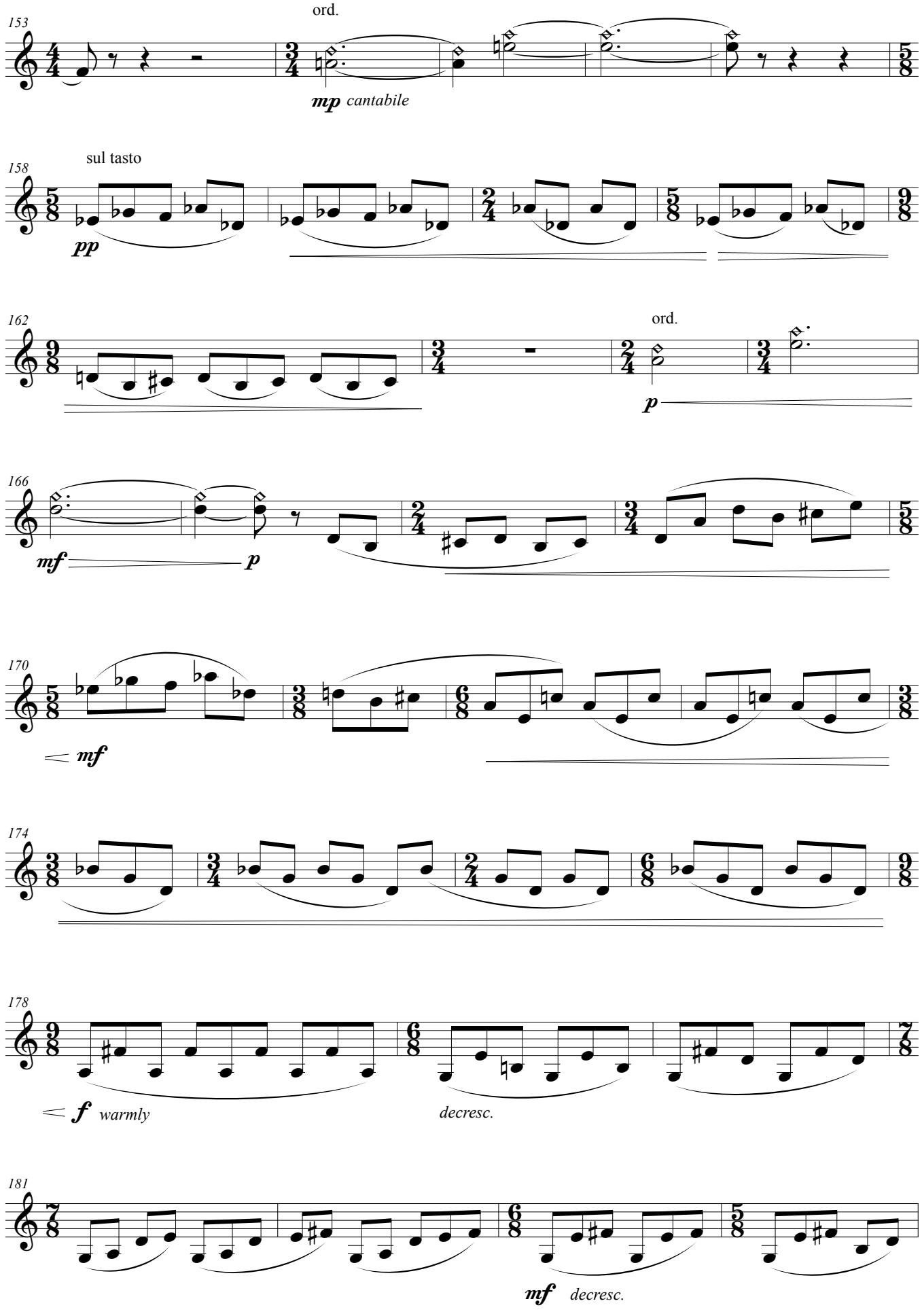
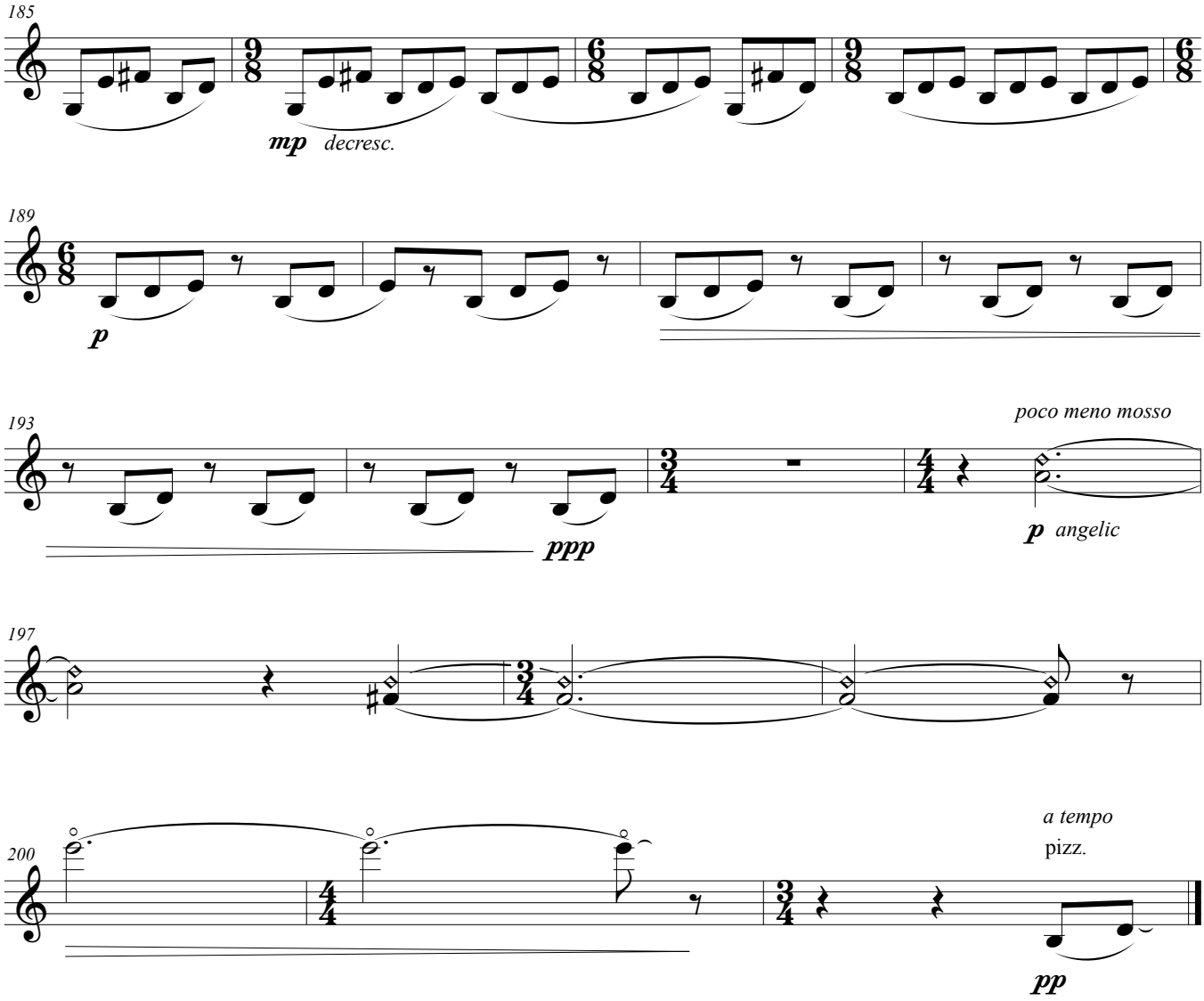

41
f flowing
46
riten.
move to sul pont.
50
mp
accel.
a tempo
sul pont.
53
p
meno p papery
56
60
cresc.
63
gradually to ord.
mp
66
ord.
mf more colorful


70
f
more rall. than before
rall.
a tempo
ten.
73
p delicate, rising
77
pp
p
81
pp
p
85
f
89
sub. p
f
sub. p
f
93
sub. p cresc.
mf cresc.
97
102


106
f
mf
110
II
I
f spirited
115
120
123
ff flowering
125
127
129
132


135
137
mf
139
a due corde
142
mp
144
p
rall.
147
breve
a tempo
sul tasto
pp
150

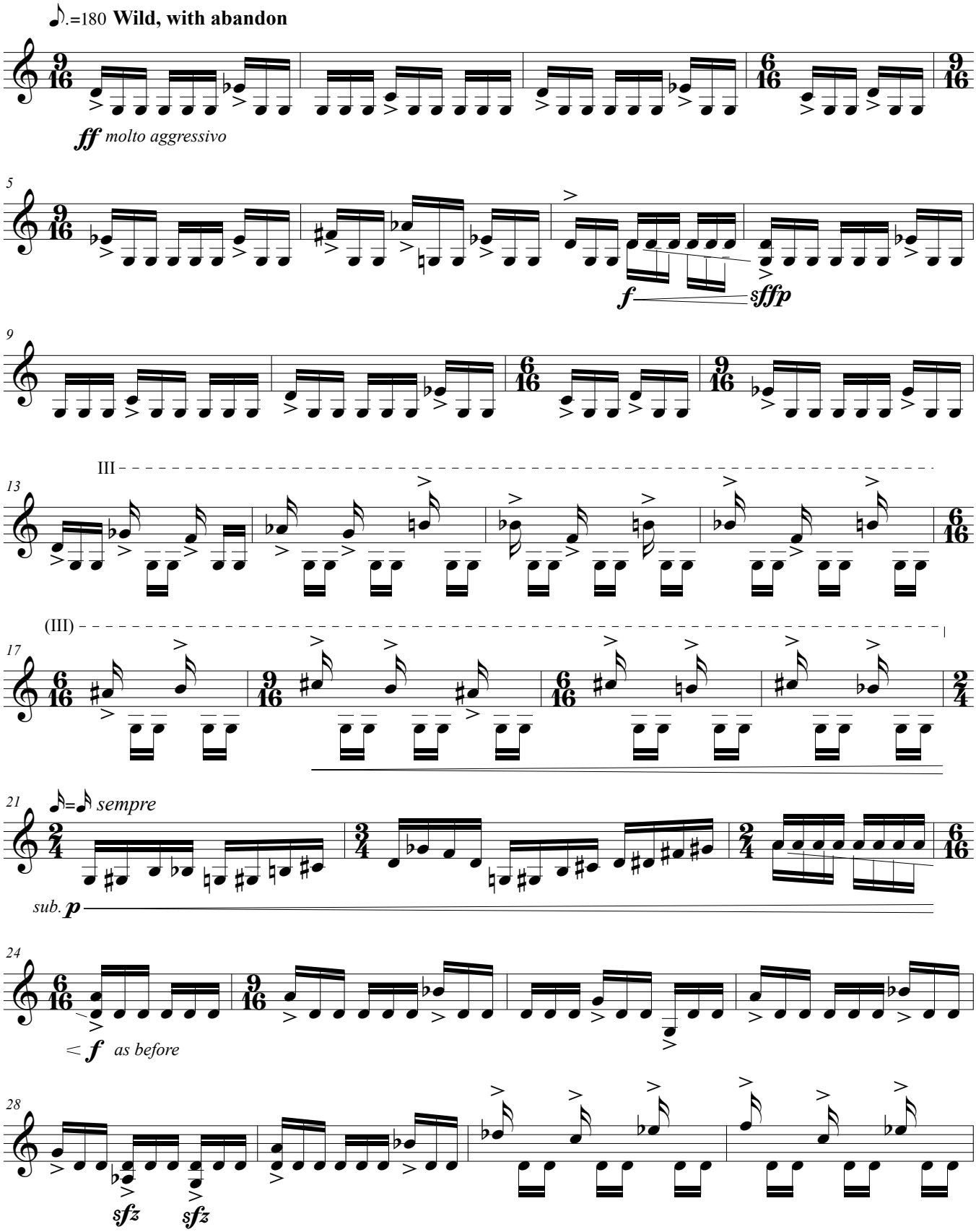

153
ord.
mp cantabile
158
sul tasto
pp
162
ord.
p
166
mf
p
170
mf
174
178
f warmly
decresc.
181
mf decresc.


185
mp decresc.
189
p
193
ppp
poco meno mosso
p angelic
197
200
a tempo
pizz.
pp

Atacameños

III. Culpeo

Greg Simon



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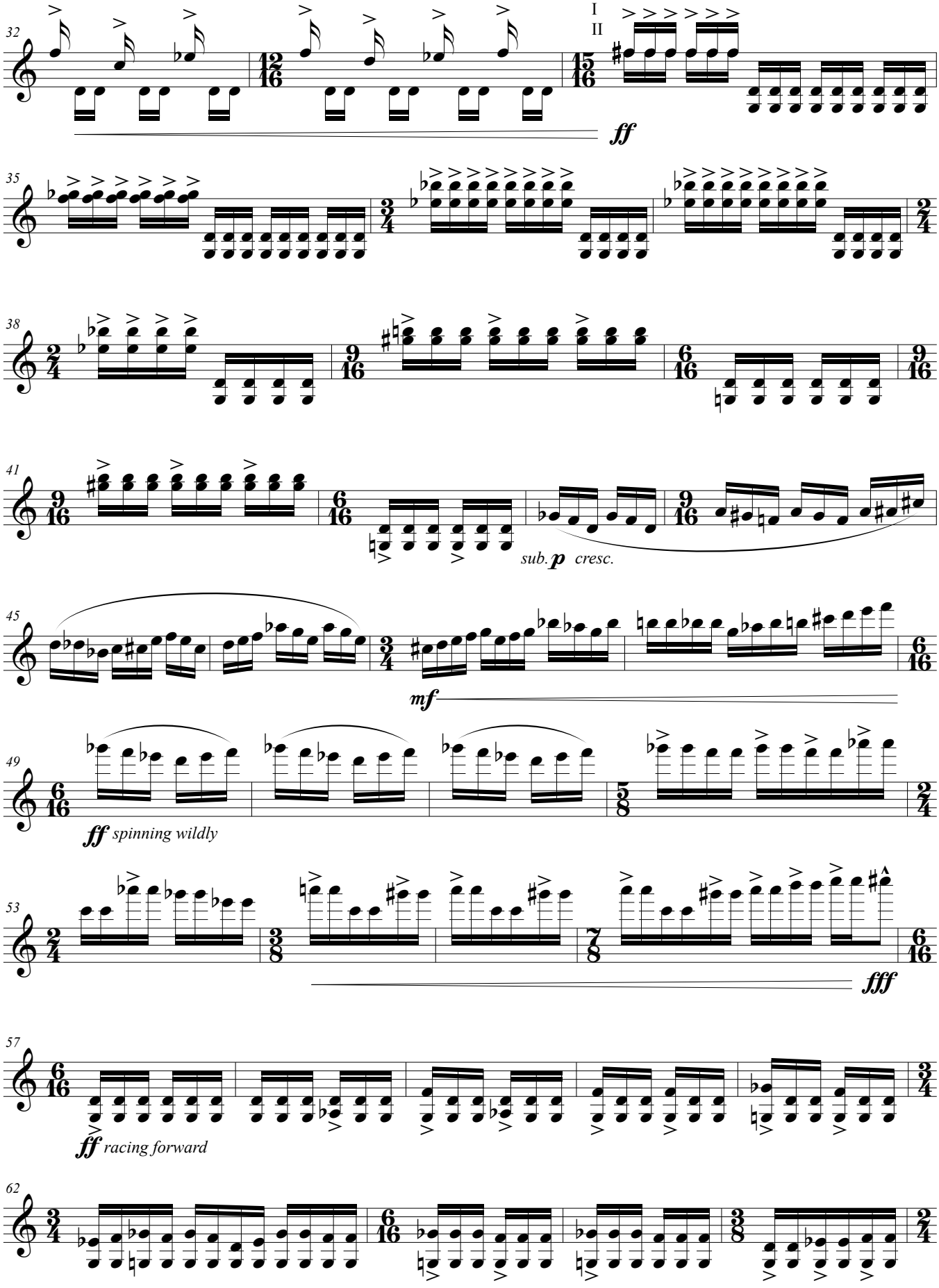
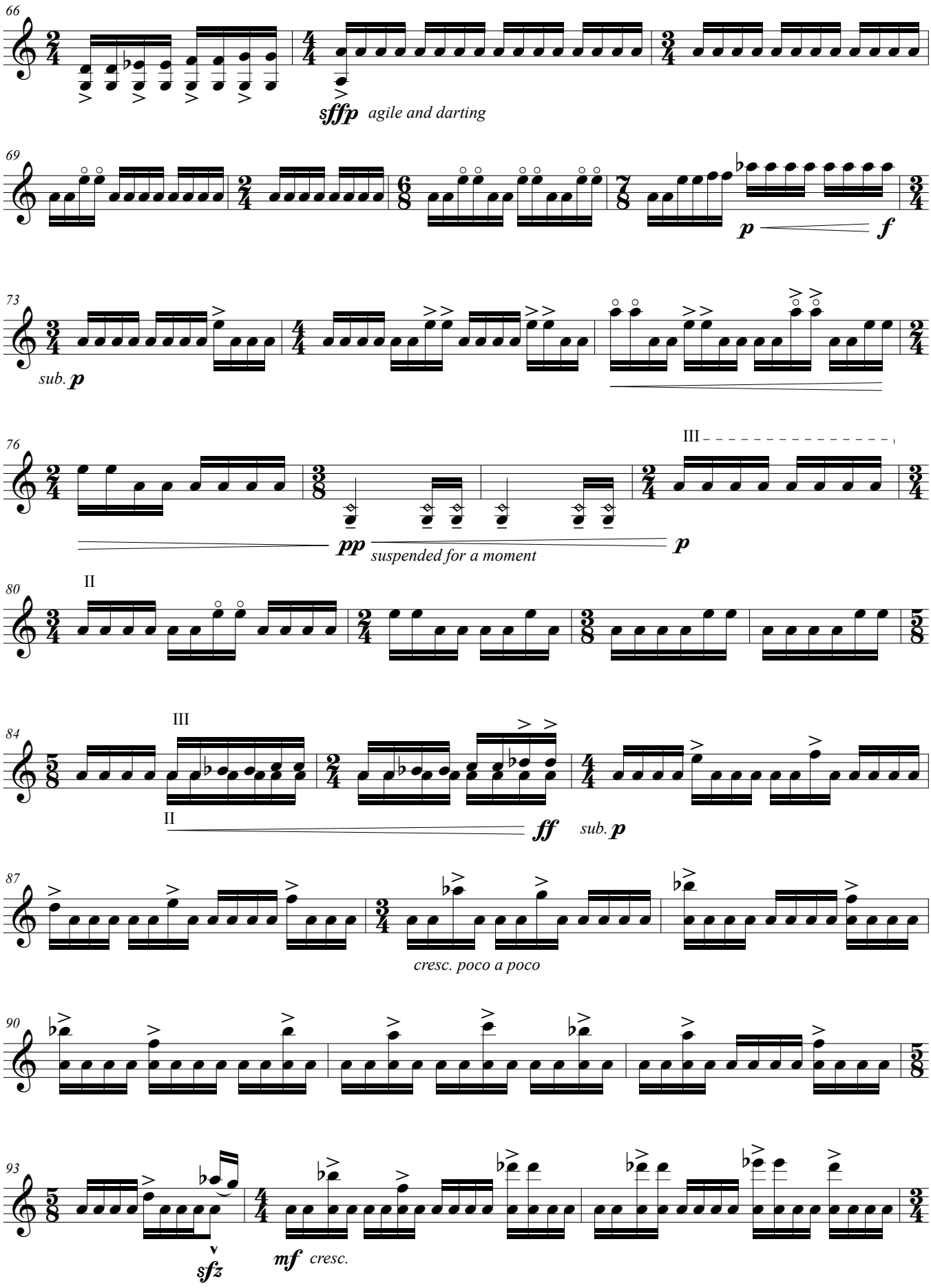
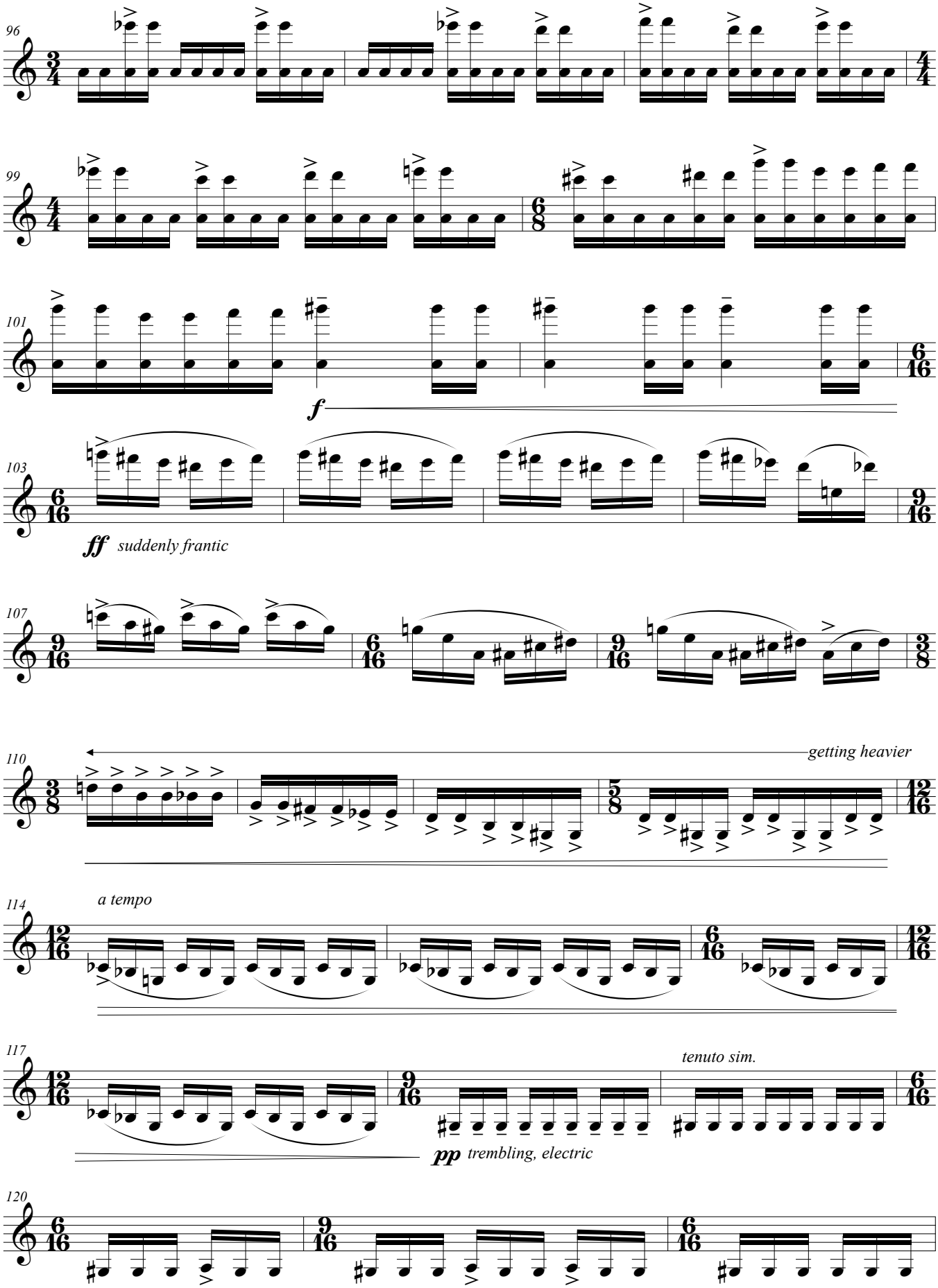
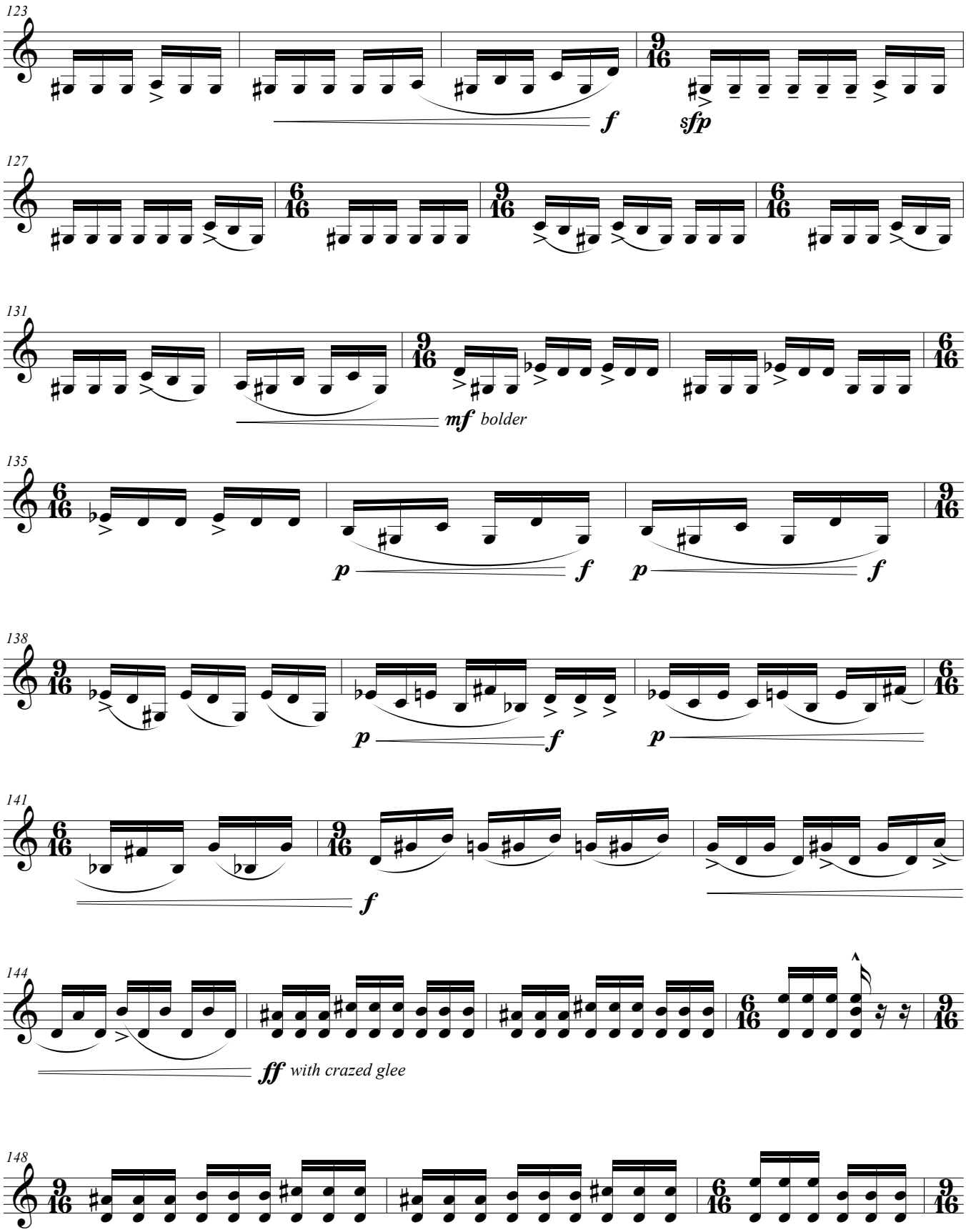
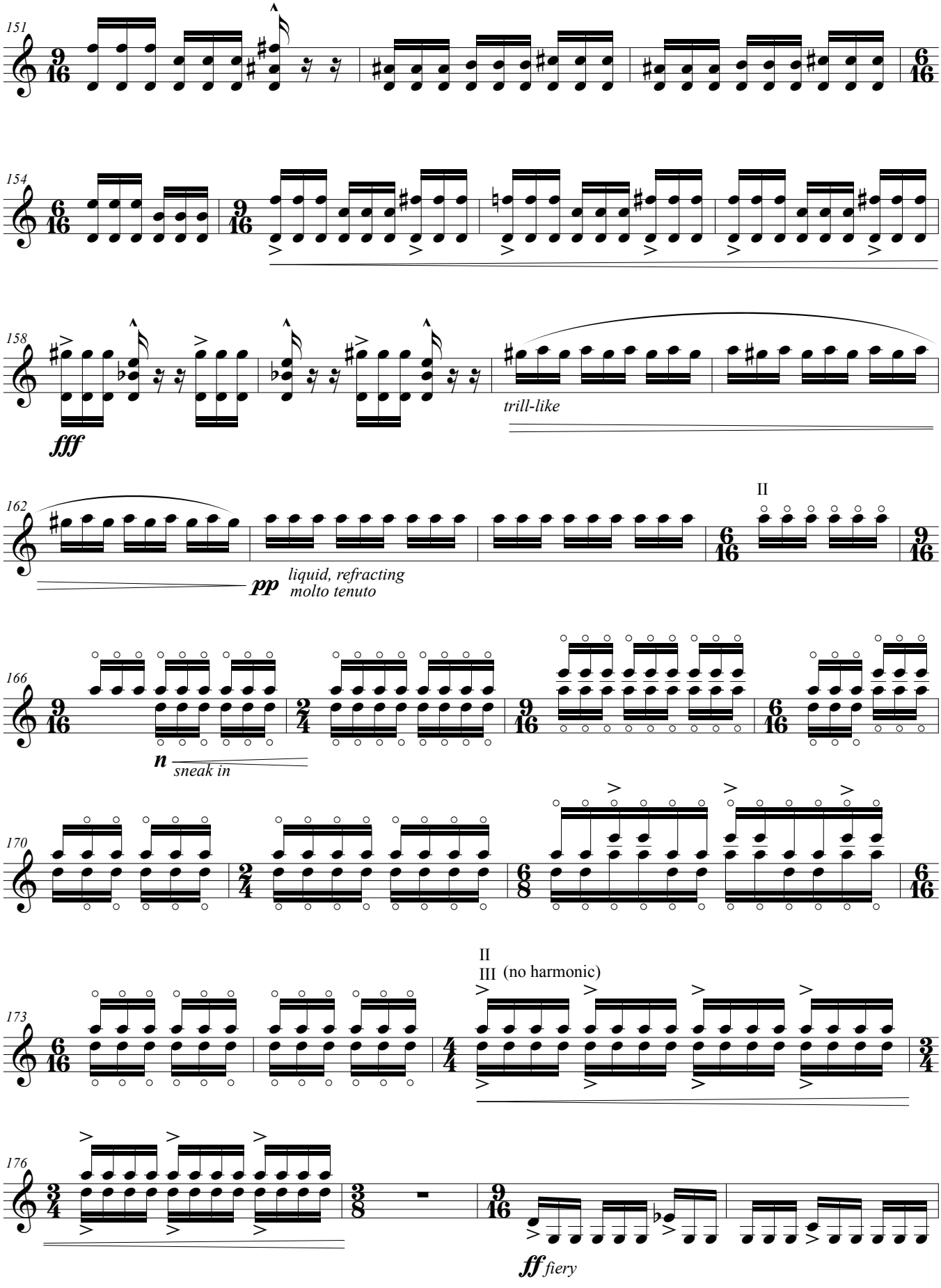
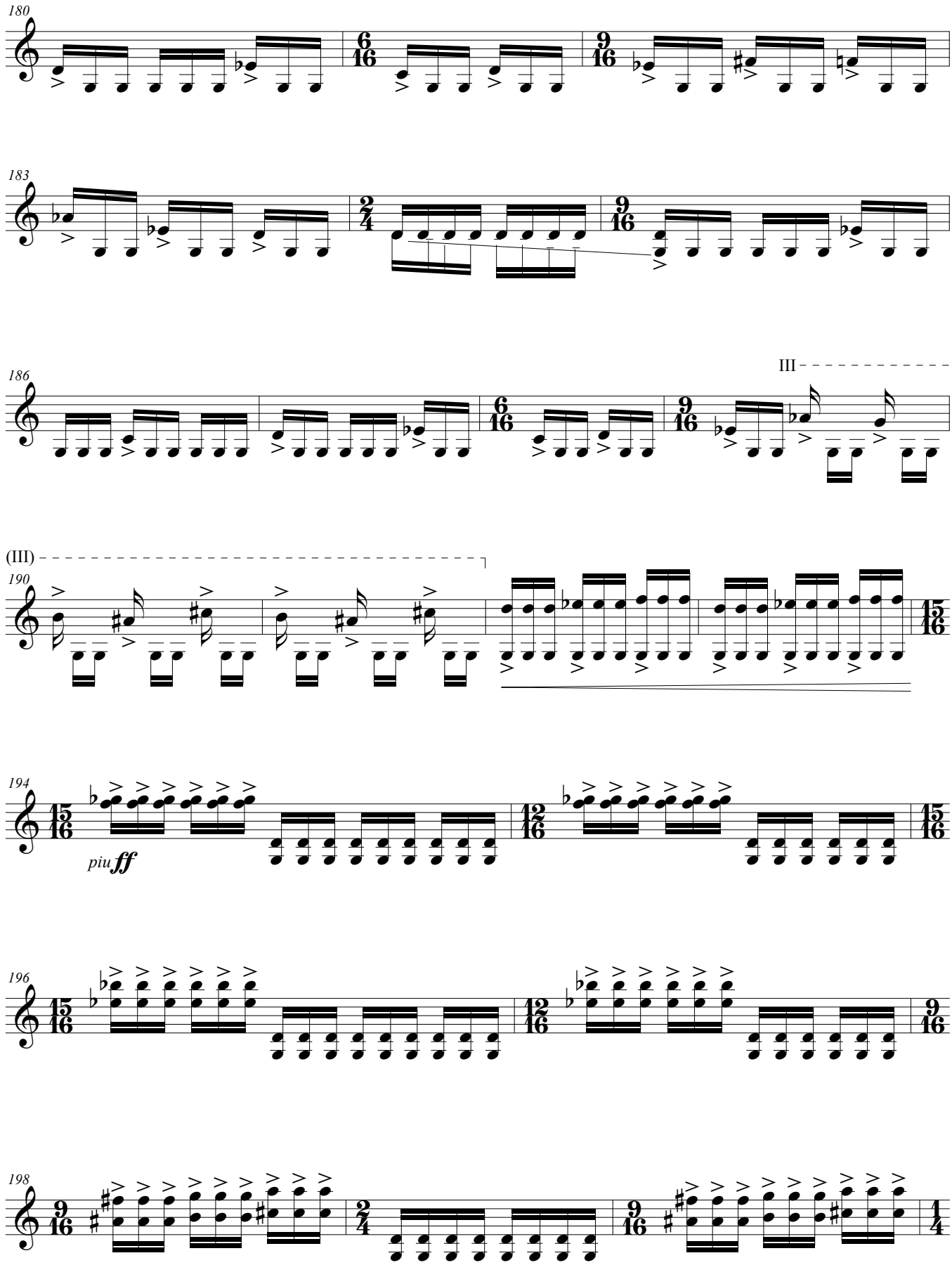

32
I
II
ff
35
38
41
sub. p cresc.
45
mf
49
ff spinning wildly
53
fff
57
ff racing forward
62

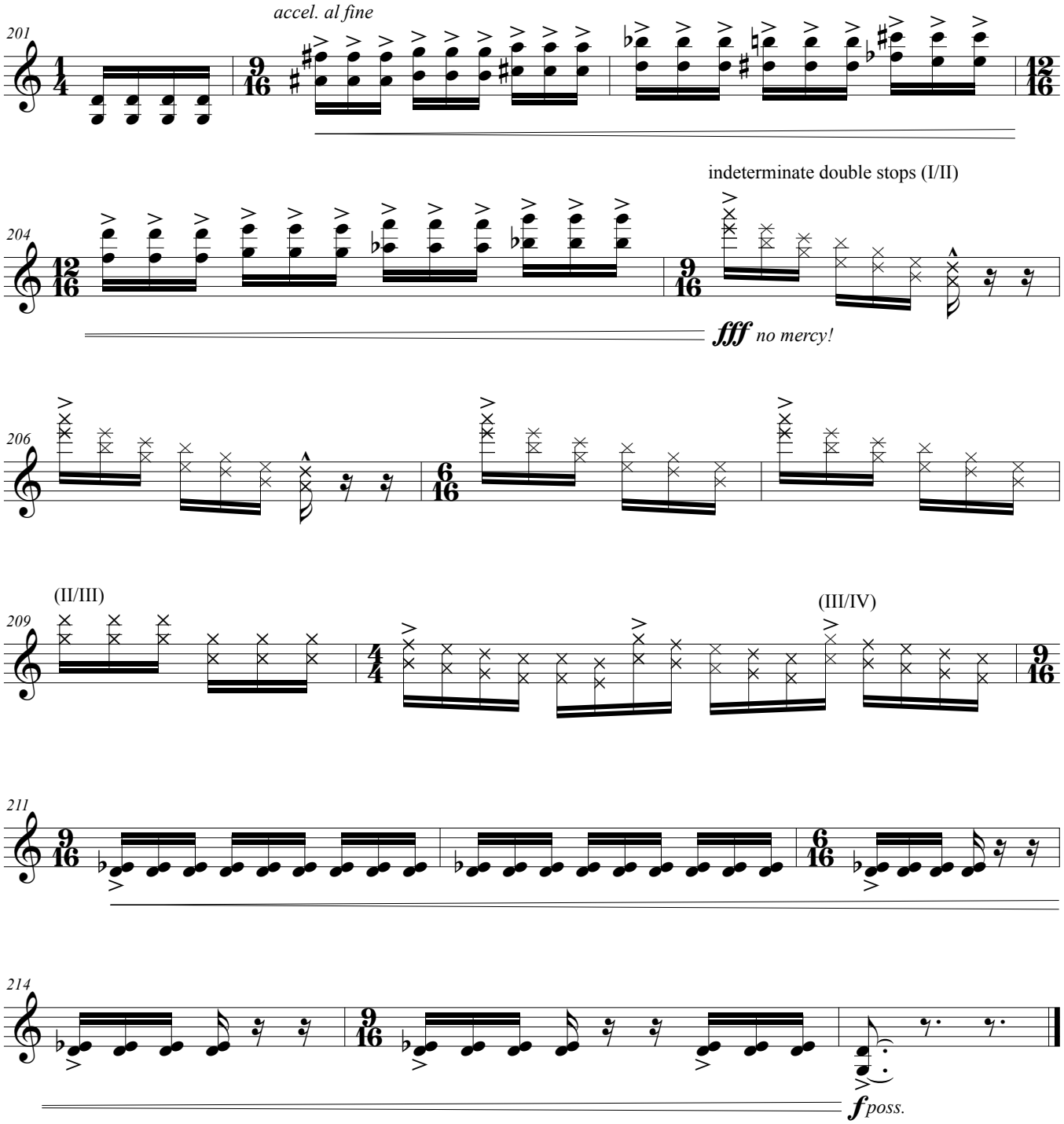

66
sffp agile and darting
69
p
f
73
sub. p
76
III
pp suspended for a moment
p
80
II
84
III
II
ff
sub. p
87
cresc. poco a poco
90
93
sfz
mf cresc.


96
99
101
f
103
ff suddenly frantic
107
110
getting heavier
114
a tempo
117
tenuto sim.
pp trembling, electric
120


123
f
sfp
127
131
mf bolder
135
p
f
p
f
138
p
f
p
141
f
144
ff with crazed glee
148


151
154
158
fff
trill-like
162
II
pp
liquid, refracting
molto tenuto
166
n
sneak in
170
173
II
III
(no harmonic)
176
ff
fiery

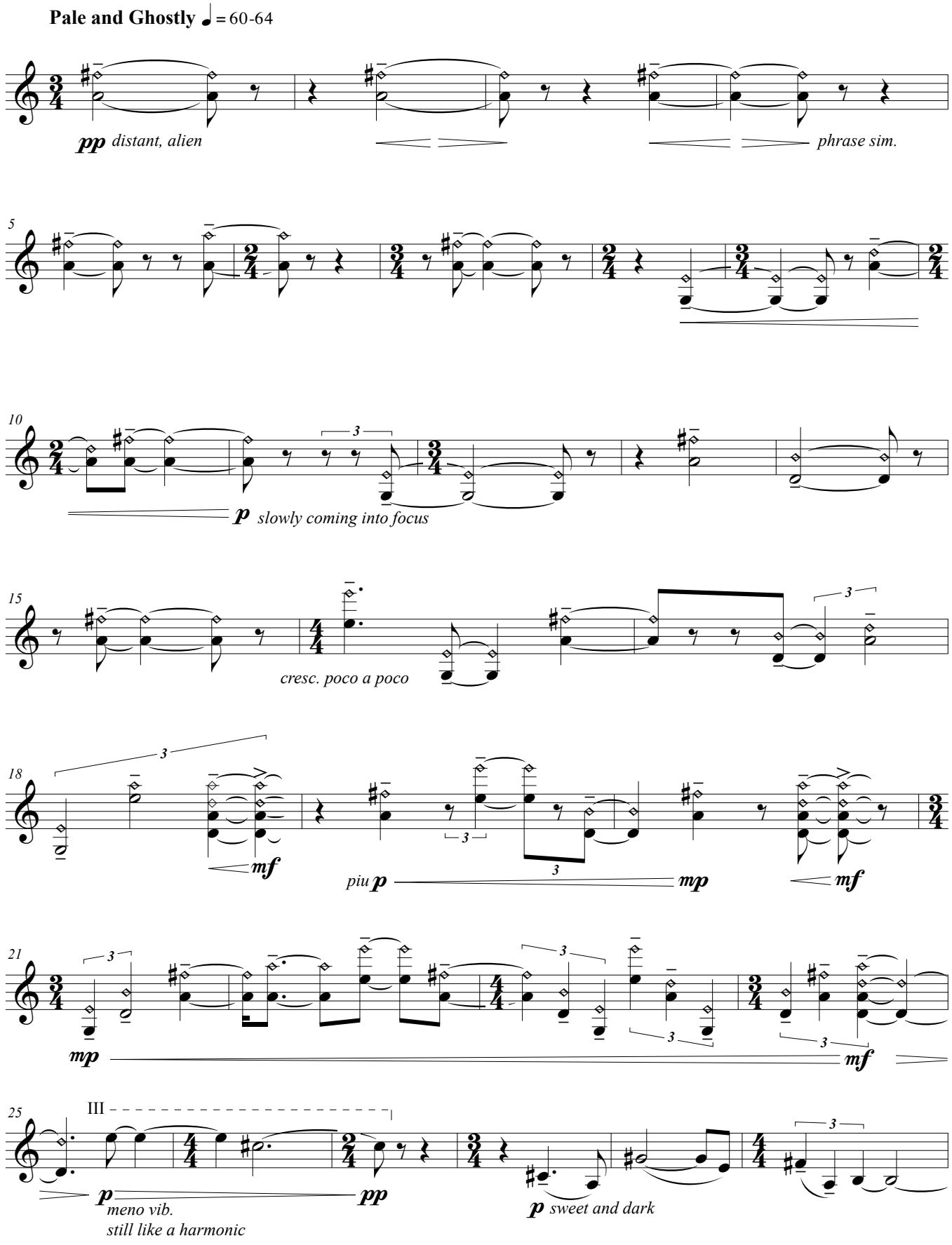

180
183
186
III
(III)
190
194
piu ff
196
198


accel. al fine
201
indeterminate double stops (I/II)
204
fff no mercy!
206
(II/III)
(III/IV)
209
211
214
f poss.

Atacameños

IV. ALMA (alma)

Greg Simon



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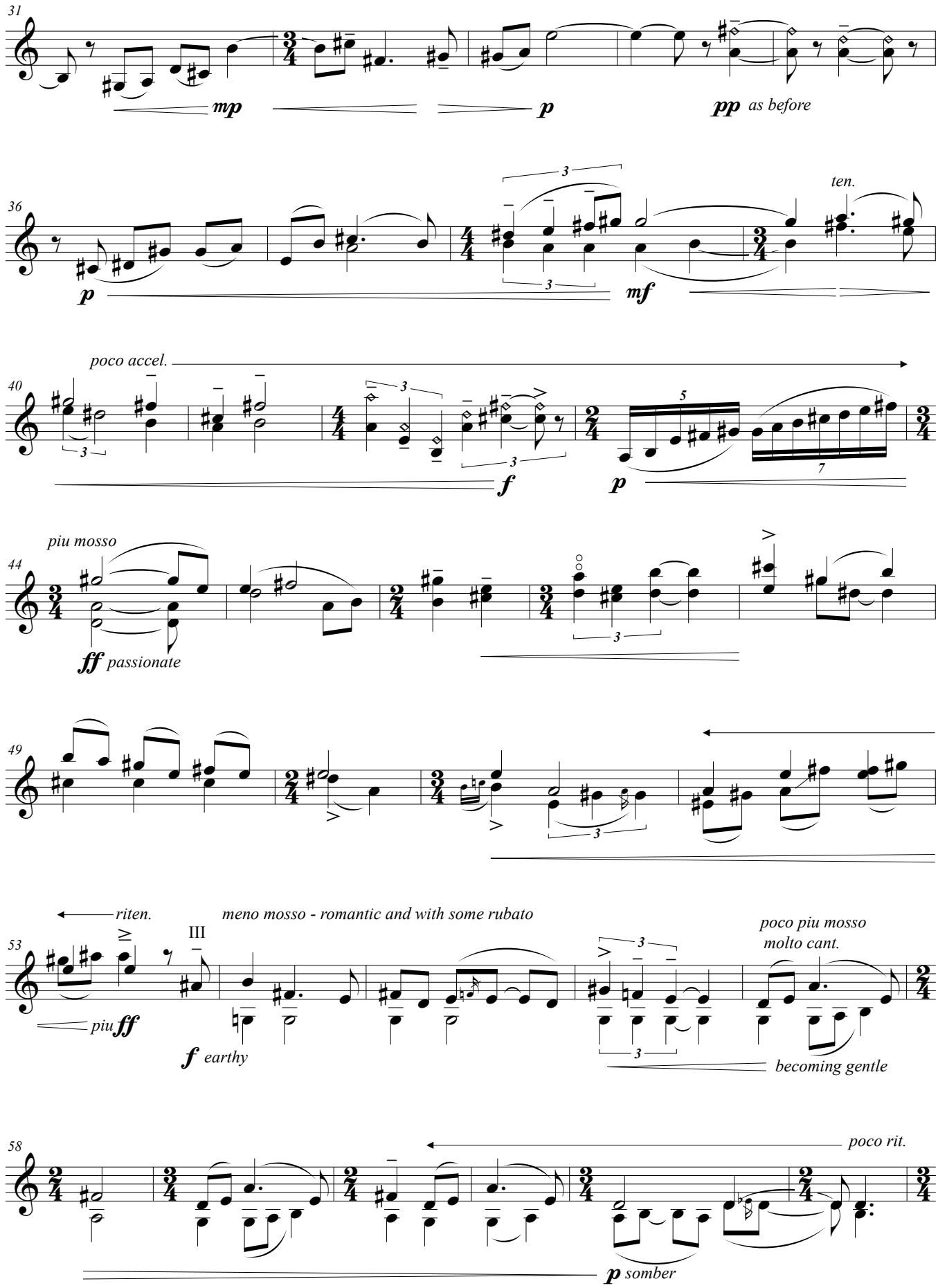
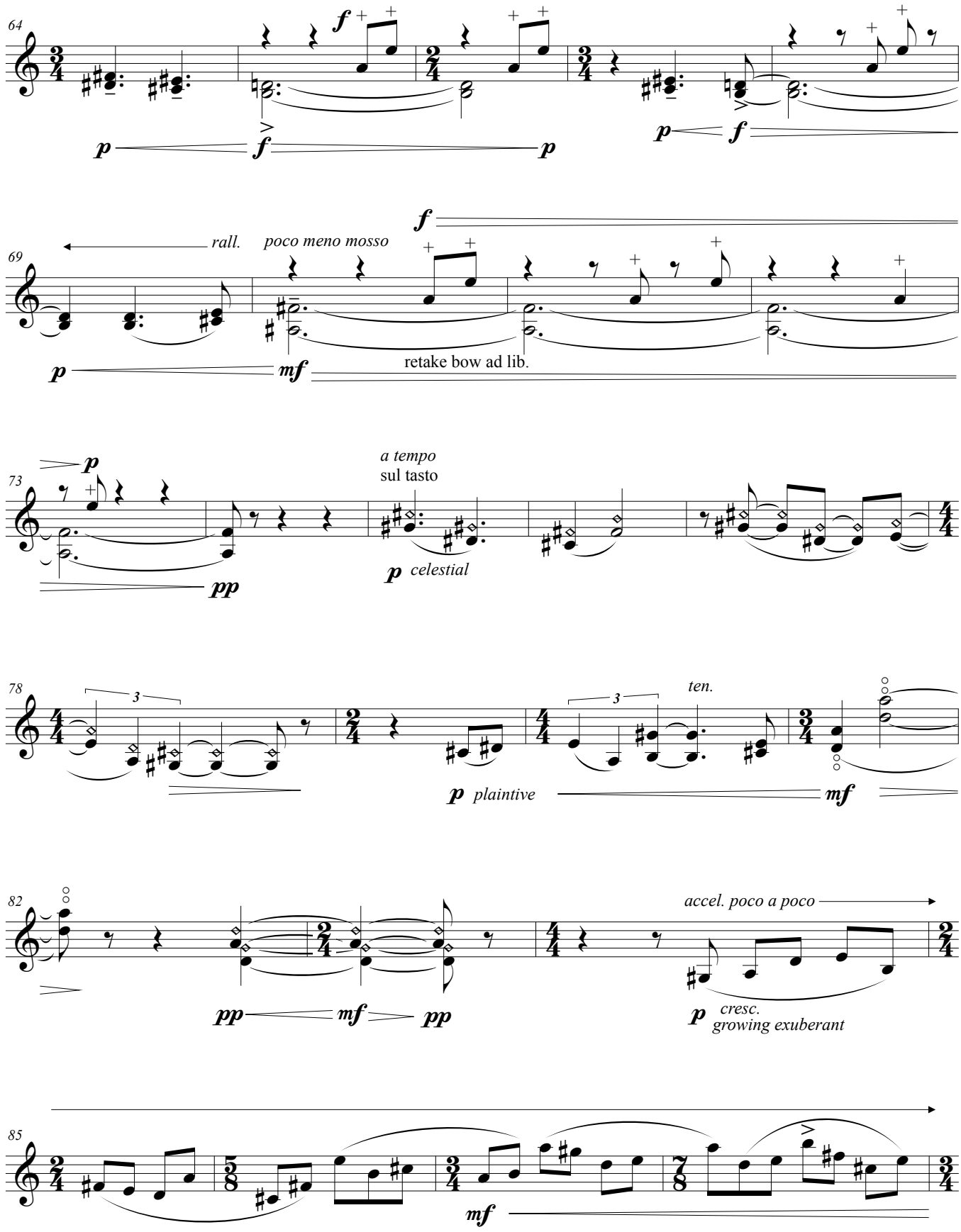
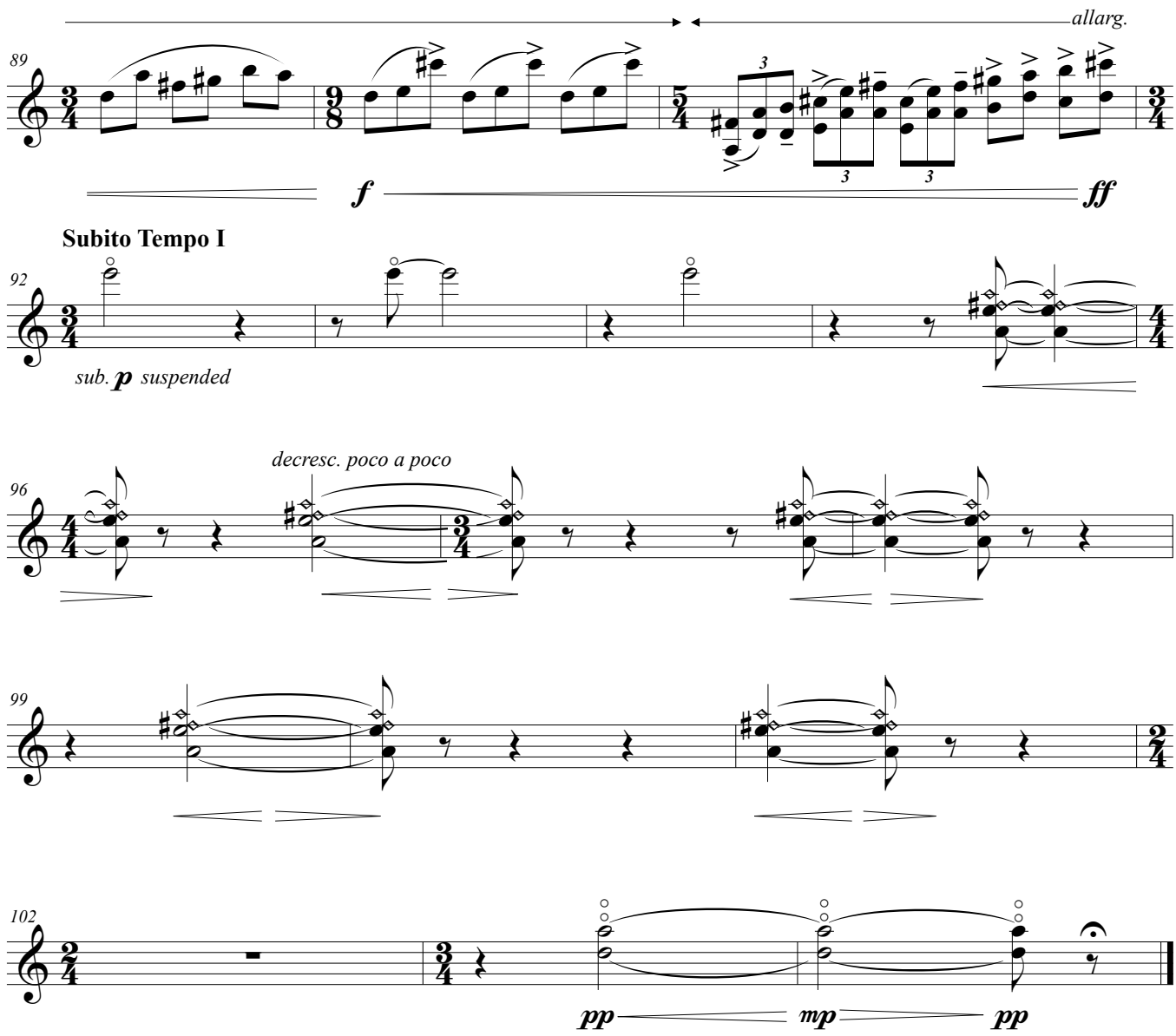

31
mp
p
pp as before
36
p
mf
ten.
poco accel.
40
f
p
piu mosso
44
ff passionate
49
riten.
meno mosso - romantic and with some rubato
53
piu ff
f earthy
poco piu mosso
molto cant.
becoming gentle
58
poco rit.
p somber


64
f
p
f
p
p
f
69
rall.
poco meno mosso
f
p
mf
retake bow ad lib.
73
p
pp
a tempo
sul tasto
p celestial
78
3
3
ten.
p plaintive
mf
82
pp
mf
pp
accel. poco a poco
p cresc.
growing exuberant
85
mf



October 2016
Lincoln, NE