HENRY COWELL

String Quartet No. 5

★ Score (Peters 6117)

Set of Parts (Peters 6118)

High Fidelity Recording: Columbia ML-5788
Stereo Recording: Columbia Stereo MS-6388

duration: 19 minutes

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NEW YORK - LONDON - FRANKFURT

Im Auftrag der *Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation of the Library of Congress* komponiert im Frühjahr und Sommer 1956 in New York.

Die erste öffentliche Aufführung fand im Oktober 1956 durch das Juilliard Streichquartett im Coolidge Auditorium der Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. statt, nachdem es schon vorher auf der Arbeitstagung für Kritiker, organisiert von der *American Symphony Orchestra League* in Cleveland, gespielt worden war.

Das Werk besteht aus fünf Sätzen: Lento, Allegro, Andante, Presto und Largo-Allegro.

Henry Cowells fünftes Streichquartett ist in einer verhältnismässig komplizierten Weiterentwicklung eines Stiles geschrieben, den er seit etwa 1941 ausbaute. Er schrieb nämlich, ausgehend vom amerikanischen Choralgesang des 18. Jahrhunderts, eine Reihe von neobarocken Choralkompositionen, kombiniert mit *fuguing tunes* (d.h. Chorälen, die nicht einfach Note gegen Note gesetzt sind, sondern, zugleich mit einem etwas lebhafterem Zeitmass, von einfachen Imitationen Gebrauch machen), und machte mit diesen Werken seinen Namen weiteren Kreisen bekannt. Diese Art des dreistimmigen, modalen Choralgesangs und der *fuguing tunes* beruhte auf alter, ländlicher Uebung, und verbreitete in dieser Form manche Melodien der englischen und schottischen Reformierten von Neuengland aus nach Süden und nach Westen. Dass diese Tradition eine musikalische Stileigentümlichkeit lebendig erhielt, die sich in ihren europäischen Wurzeln über dreihundert Jahre zurückverfolgen lässt, von einer viel grösseren Menge von Amerikanern geliebt und gepflegt wurde, als alle anderen, bis die Verbreitung des Radios in den frühen 1930er Jahren unsere Musikübung grundlegend änderte, ist eine Tatsache, der sich die ganz anders erzogenen städtischen Musiker Amerikas überhaupt nicht bewusst sind.

Cowell würde gern wissen, was die amerikanischen Komponisten wohl aus dieser feinen, alten Musik hätten machen können, wenn sie sie nicht infolge der musikalischen Anschauungen des 19. Jahrhunderts für primitiv und abseitig gehalten hätten. Als Antwort auf diese Frage versuchte Cowell in seinen *Hymns and Fuguing Tunes* Elemente dieser früheren Musik auf verschiedene Weise in das 20. Jahrhundert zu verpflanzen. Bis heute (1962) schrieb er vierzehn dieser zweisätzigen Stücke für verschiedene instrumentale und vokale Kombinationen, und führte diese Form auch in grösseren Werken ein, sei es als selbständige Sätze, sei es als Teile von solchen, wie z.B. in der Violinsonate (1945), in sieben seiner fünfzehn Symphonien, und in einer Reihe ausgedehnter Kammermusikwerke, wie der vorliegenden Komposition. Ohne eine Melodie wörtlich zu übernehmen, hat er das diatonisch/modale Material in einer Reihe verschiedener Techniken abgewandelt, wie sie die westliche Musik seither entwickelt hat, mit entschiedener Richtung auf eine immer mehr dissonante und chromatische Behandlung. Die Musik ist aber nie atonal, denn Cowell glaubt, dass die Möglichkeiten, die in der ausserordentlichen Vielgestaltigkeit der in der Welt vorhandenen Tonsysteme verborgen liegen, noch bei weitem nicht erschöpft sind.

Das vorliegende Quartett ist grundsätzlich diatonisch gehalten, bewegt sich aber frei zwischen verschiedenen Modi und Tonarten und macht in einigen Teilen von ständiger Modulation ausgiebigen Gebrauch. Der Kontrapunkt ist harmonisch ausgerichtet, er basiert entweder auf Quarten oder Terzen, oder auch auf Sekunden. Irgendeine aussermusikalische Bedeutung liegt dem Werk nicht zu grunde, über das der Komponist sagt: "Es ist nur Musik, die ich gerade einmal Lust hatte zu schreiben."

Das beginnende *Lento* ist eine stark veränderte Choralmelodie, in der alle Stimmen zugleich eintreten, tief im Bass und hoch im Sopran, sich dann gegenseitig am Ende der Phrasen nähern, um sich schliesslich am Ende des Satzes unisono abwärts zu wenden.

Der zweite Satz, *Allegro,* ist auf schnelle, dicht aufeinander folgende Nachahmungen aufgebaut. Kräftig und entschieden im Charakter, macht er energischen Gebrauch vom Kontrapunkt in der Sekunde.

Der dritte Satz, *Andante,* milde im Vergleich zum vorigen, bringt eine ruhige, diatonische Melodie, farbig begleitet von sanften Akkorden in Sekunden.

Das folgende *Presto* ist ein lebhaftes Scherzo in unsymmetrischem Rhythmus. Seine typischen Viertaktphrasen setzen sich aus zwei 6/8, einem 9/8, und wieder einem 6/8 Takt zusammen, d.h. sie bilden Einheiten von 2 plus 2 plus 3 plus 2 Schlägen. Der Satz beginnt in e-moll, aber schon die ersten vierzehn Takte bringen eine Reihe schneller Modulationen und berühren G-mixolydisch, e-dorisch, h-dorisch, A-dur, fis-moll, A-mixolydisch, wieder fis-moll, und wenden sich schliesslich nach fis-phrygisch. Die Harmonie ist teils auf Terzen aufgebaut, teils auf Sekunden, wie z.B. in den schnellen chromatischen Läufen.

Der letzte Satz schliesslich ist in der Art eines Chorals mit *fuguing tune* geschrieben. Das beginnende *Largo* ist eine Erweiterung des ersten Satzes, mit dessen auf Terzen aufgebauter Harmonie sich unversehens modale Elemente in Form von Quintenparallelen und modalen Durchgangsnoten verbinden. Die schnellers *fuguing tune* kehrt zweimal zum langsameren Tempo einer Choralzeile zurück, gewinnt aber schliesslich die notwendige Energie, um unter Entwicklung von Themen aus den vorangegangenen Sätzen das Werk zu einem kraftvollen Abschluss zu führen.

Cowell's String Quartet No. 5 was commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation of the Library of Congress. Written in New York City during the spring and summer of 1956 it had its first public performance by the Juilliard String Quartet at Coolidge Auditorium, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in October 1956. It was revised and published in 1962. The work is in five movements: *Lento; Allegro; Andante; Presto; Largo-Allegro marcato.*

The Fifth Quartet is a comparatively elaborate development from the styles of eighteenth-century American hymnody that Cowell began about 1941 to build into the series of neo-Baroque hymns, paired with fuguing tunes, which are now widely associated with his name. This rural religious tradition carried the three-part modal hymns and the fuguing tunes of the earliest English and Scottish Reformation churches first to New England, from where it spread into the South and West. Until the radio radically changed our country music in the early 1930's, this tradition, perpetuating musical styles whose history can be traced back more than 300 years in Europe, was loved and actively practiced by more tens of thousands of Americans than any other—a fact of which sophisticated musicians in American cities were entirely unaware.

Cowell wondered what this fine old music might have become in the hands of American composers if nineteenth-century musical conventions had not taught them to consider it crude and strange. So, by way of answering the question, each of his hymns and fuguing tunes is a different experiment in carrying forward, into twentieth-century music, elements drawn from this early music. To date (1962), Cowell has written fourteen of these two-movement pieces, for different instrumental or vocal combinations, and he has also used the forms in larger works, as independent movements or parts of movements—for instance, in the Violin Sonata (1945), in seven of his fifteen symphonies, and in a number of full-length chamber works, of which this is one. The diatonic modal materials (but no actual tunes) are developed by means of a variety of related techniques that were acquired by Western music subsequent to the tradition's arrival in this country, and the treatment has proven to be increasingly dissonant and even chromatic in Cowell's hands. But the music is never atonal, since Cowell believes that the possibilities inherent in the immense variety of tonal systems in the world are far from having come to an end.

The present quartet is diatonic, but there is free interchange among modes and keys, and constantly flowing modulation in certain parts of the work. The counterpoint is harmonic, quartal or tertial in some places, secundal in others; it is sometimes dissonant and other times consonant. There is no extra-musical connotation. The composer says of the work: "It is just some music I felt I wanted to write."

The opening *Lento* is a much-modified hymn, in which the voices start together, low in the bass and high in the treble, moving toward each other as they approach the ends of phrases, and descending together into unison at the end of the movement.

The second movement, *Allegro*, is a rapid *stretto*, vigorous and definite in mood; it makes energetic use of secundal counterpoint.

The third movement, *Andante*, is gentle by contrast: a soft diatonic melody is colored by still softer chords in seconds.

The *Presto* is a rapid scherzo in asymmetrical rhythm, whose typical four-measure phrase contains two bars of 6/8, one of 9/8 and one of 6/8 again. That is to say, the typical phrase consists of a pattern of 2 plus 2 plus 3 plus 2 beats. This movement opens in E minor, but within the first fourteen measures the music overflows, in a series of rapid modulations, into G Mixolydian, E Dorian, B Dorian, A major, F# minor, A Mixolydian, F# minor again, and F# Phrygian. The harmonic basis may be tertial, or secundal as in the rapid chromatic runs.

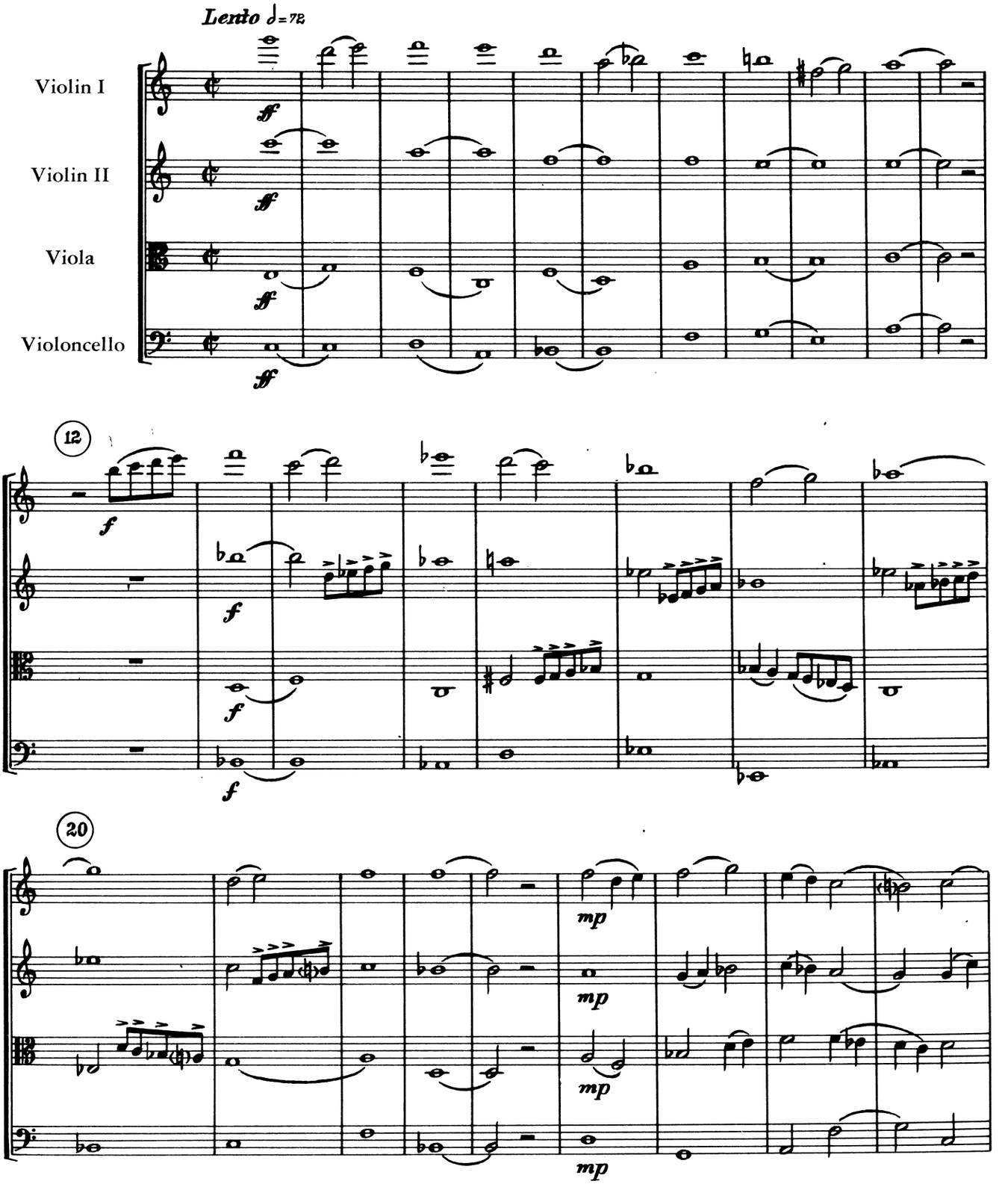
The last movement is in the manner of a hymn-and-fuguing tune. Its *Largo* is a development of the opening movement, whose tertial harmony unexpectedly borrows forbidden behavior from modal harmony, in the form of consecutive fifths and modal passing tones. The faster fuguing tune reverts twice to the slower pace of a hymn phrase before it acquires the momentum that carries its development of themes from earlier movements forcefully ahead to the work's conclusion.

For the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation

STRING QUARTET No. 5

I

HENRY COWELL



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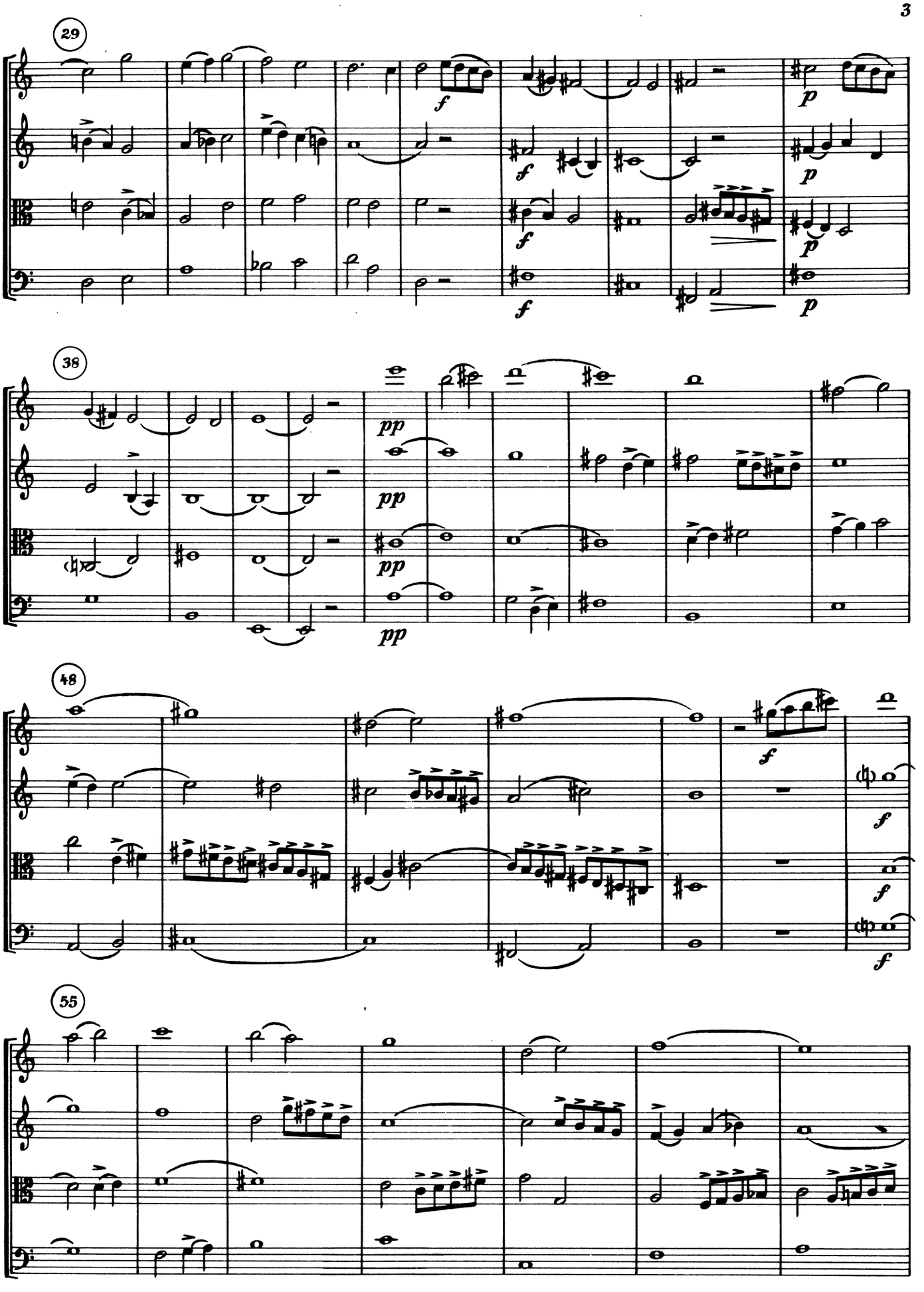
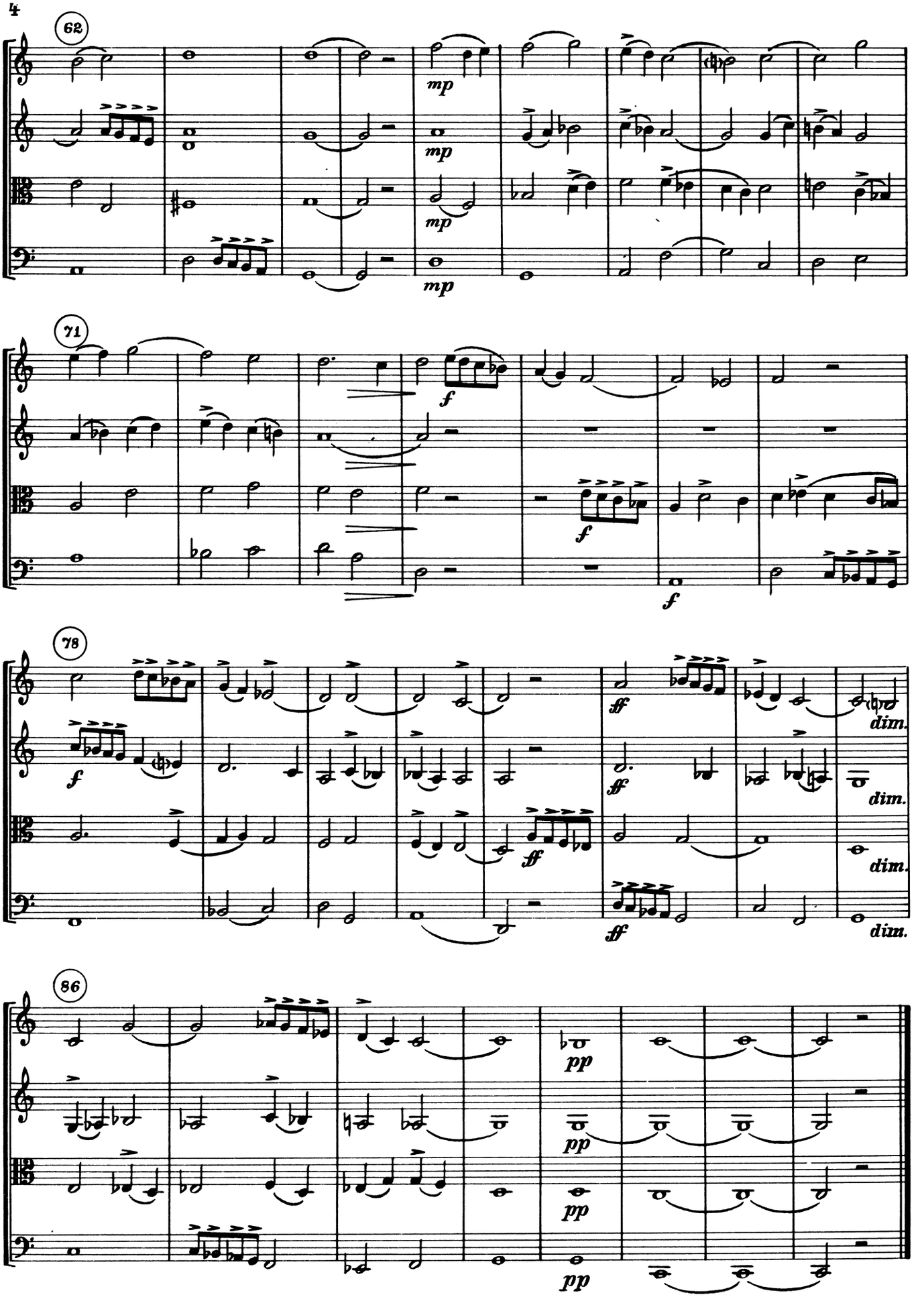
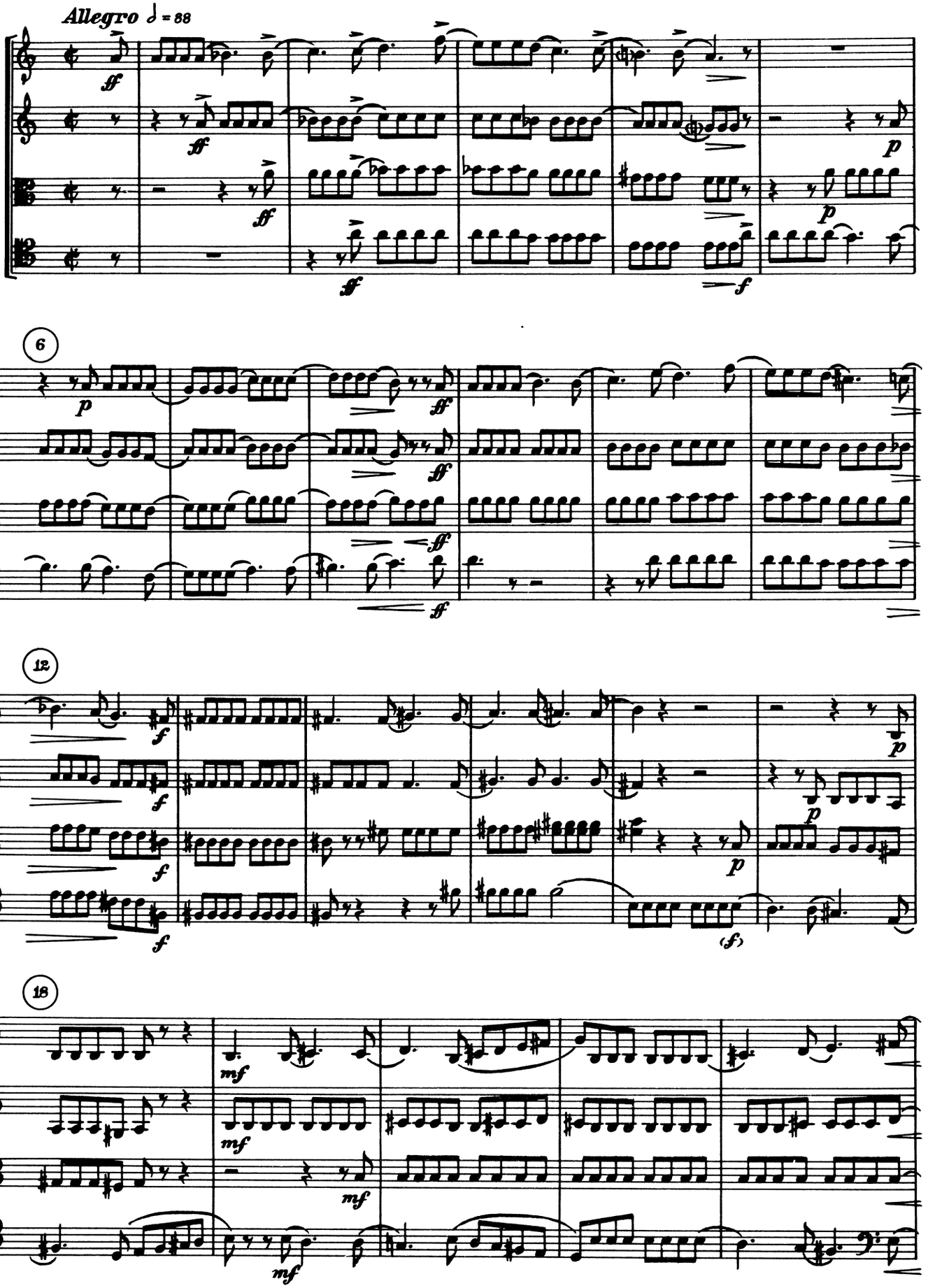
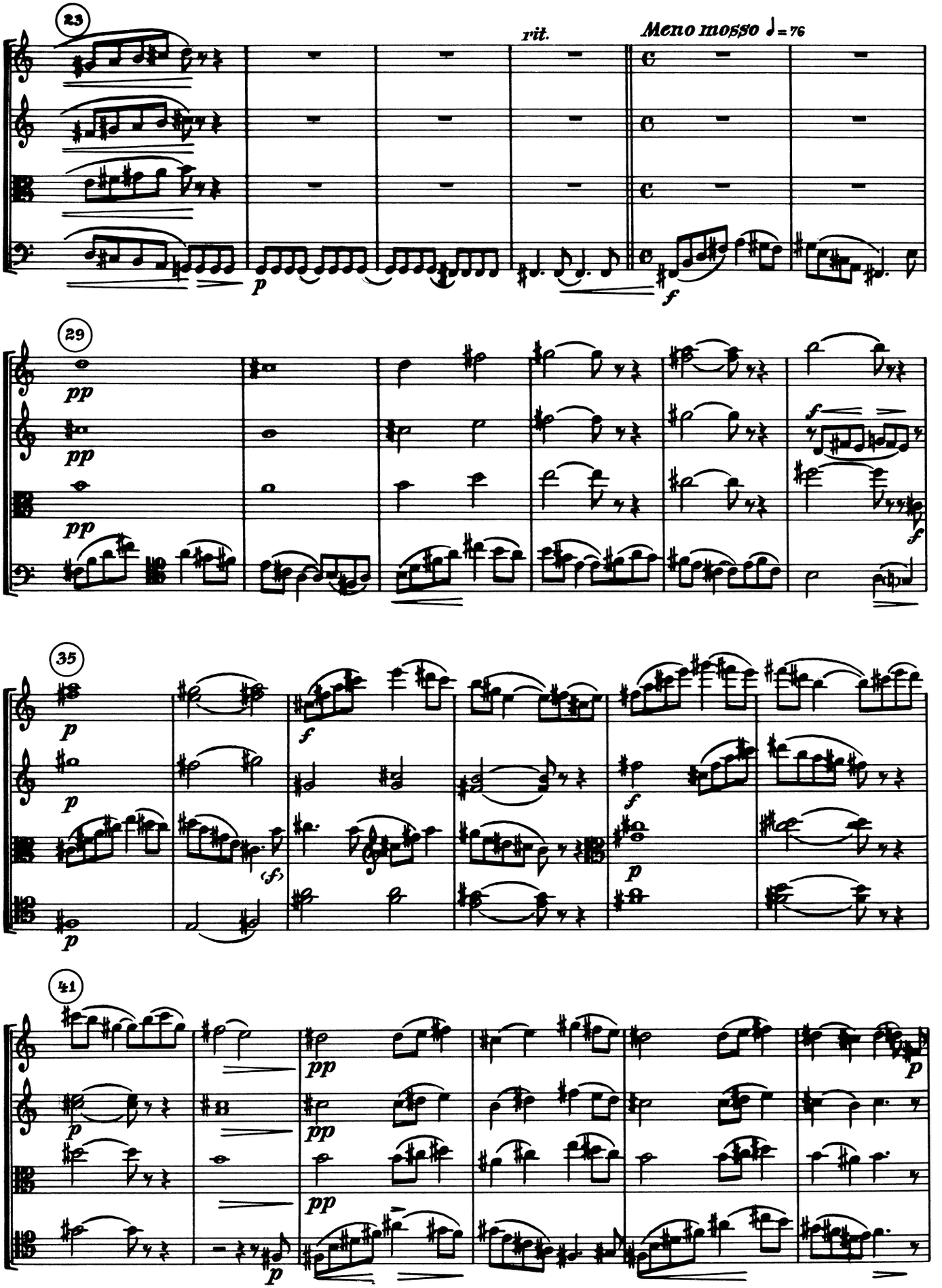
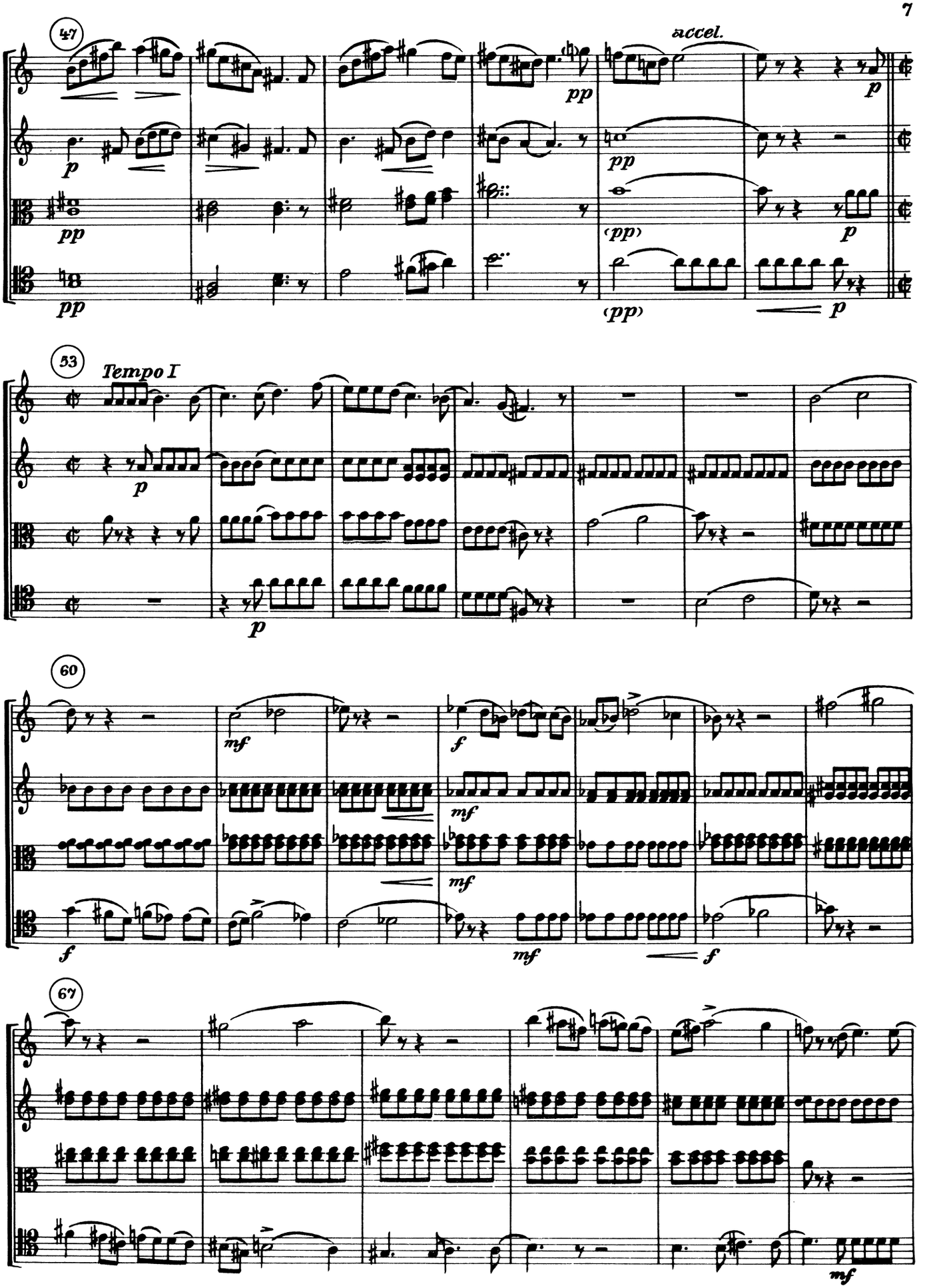

29
38
48
55

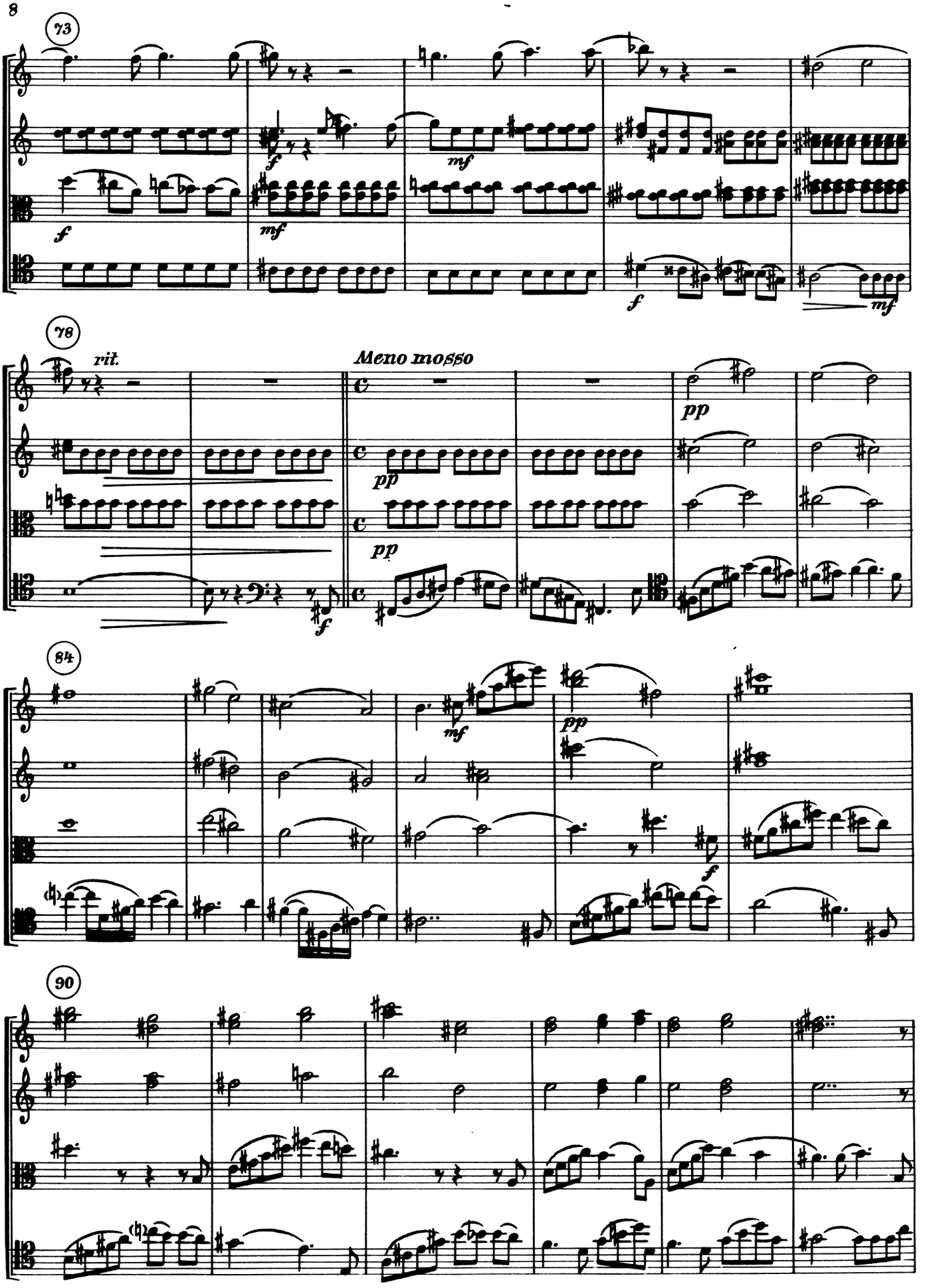

62
mp
mp
mp
71
f
f
f
78
f
ff
ff
ff
dim.
dim.
dim.
86
pp
pp
pp
pp

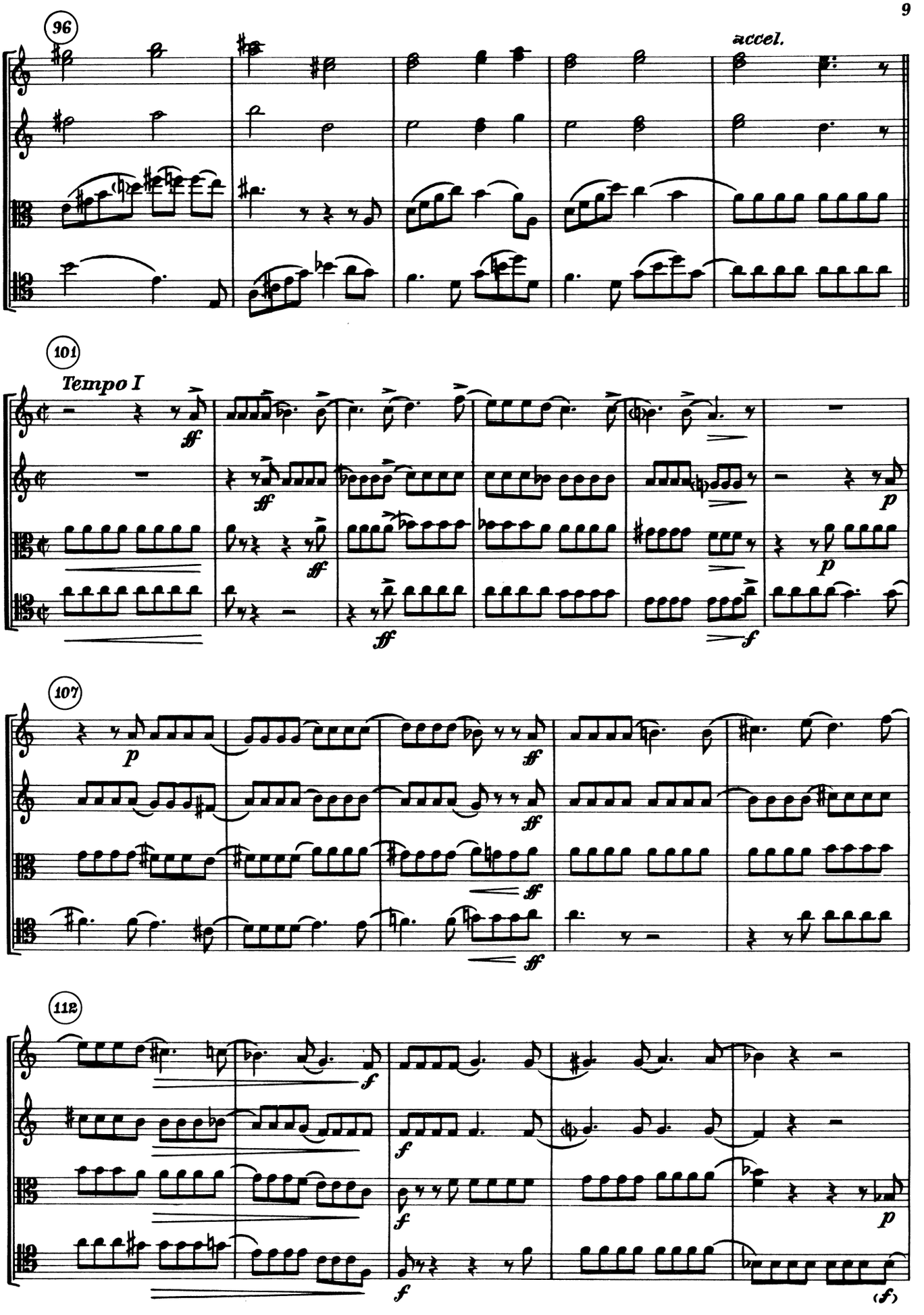
II

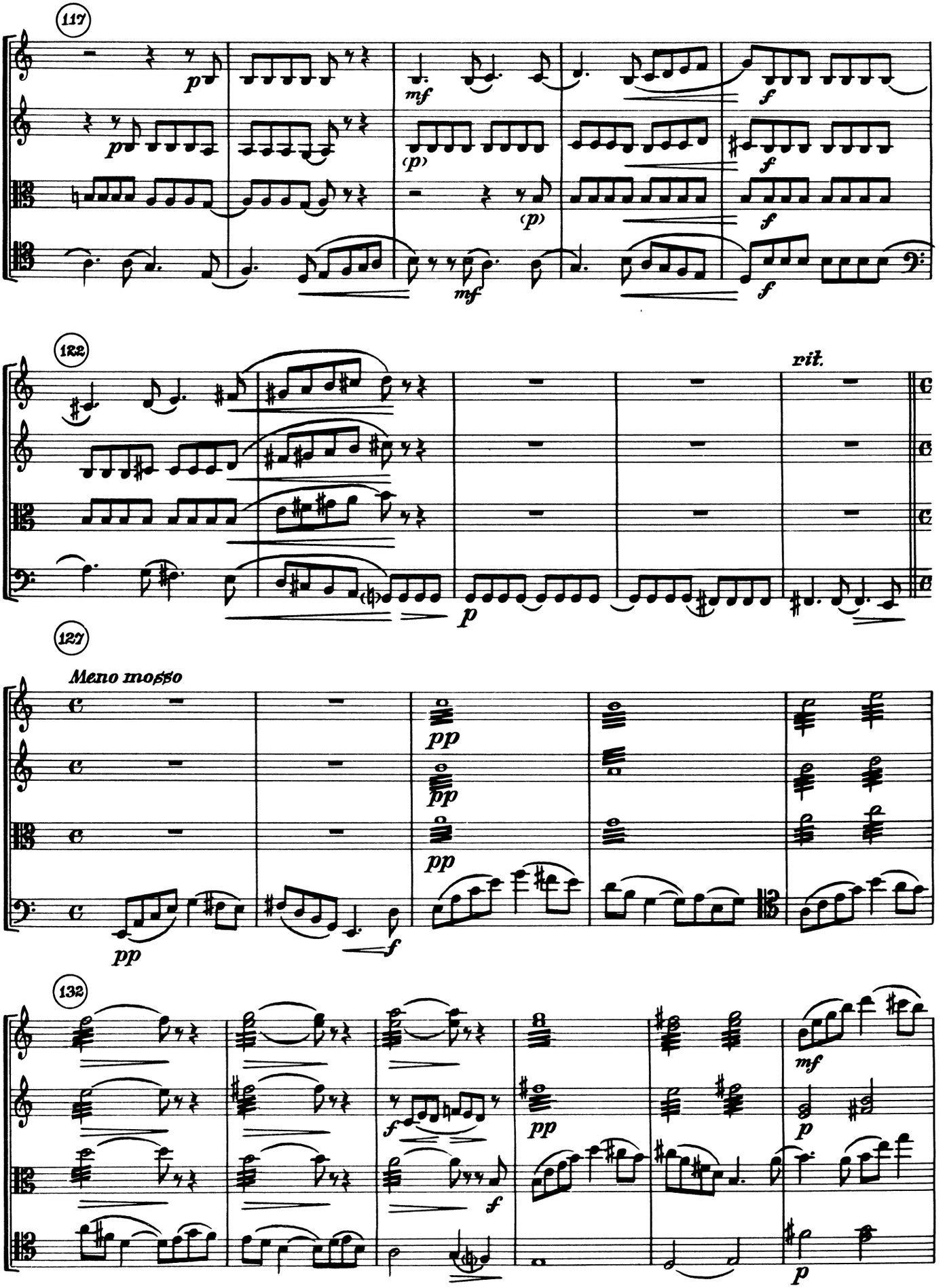


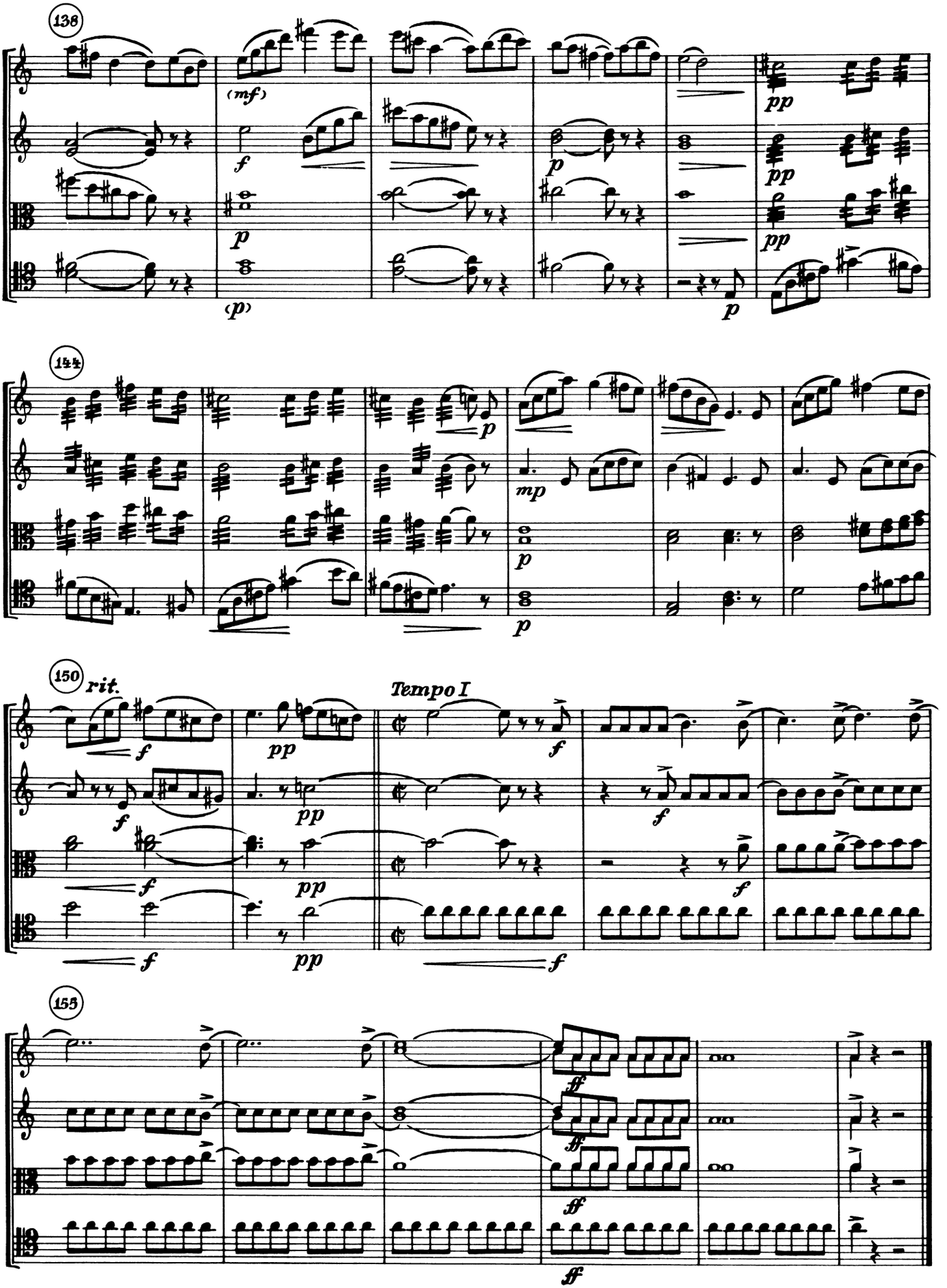

23
rit.
Meno mosso ♩= 76
29
35
41


47
accel.
53
Tempo I
60
67

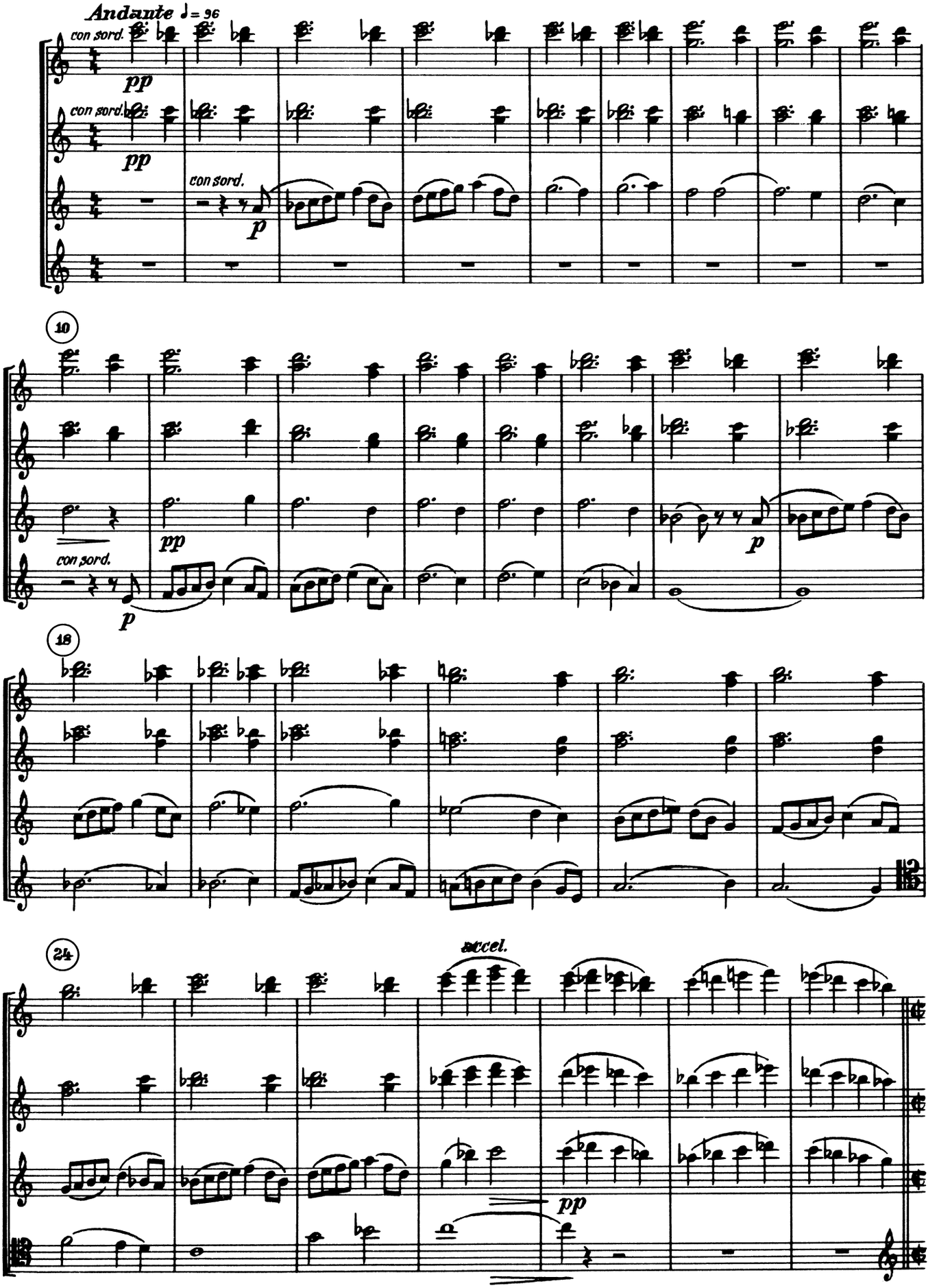

73
78
rit.
Meno mosso
84
90

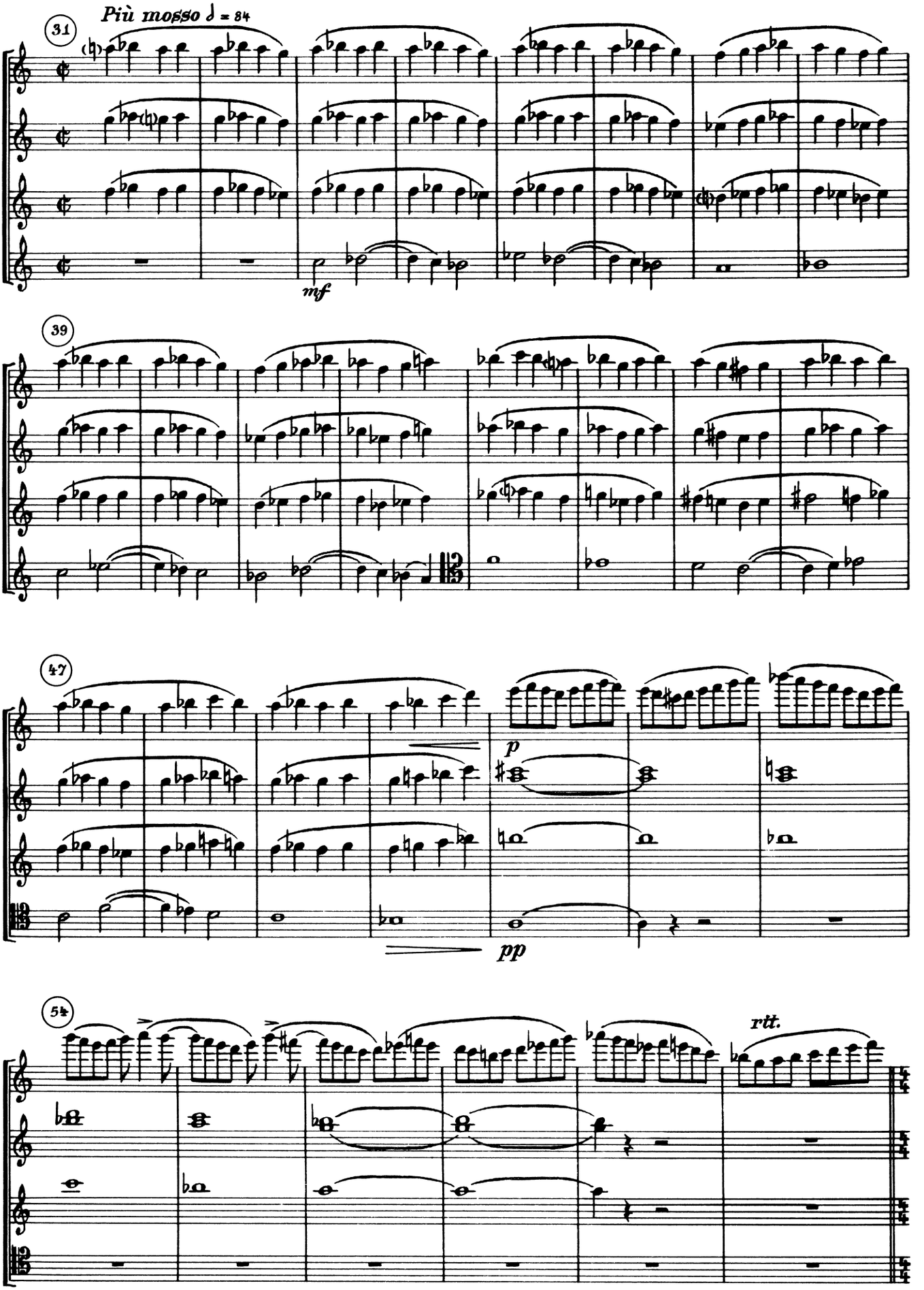

96
accel.
101
Tempo I
107
112

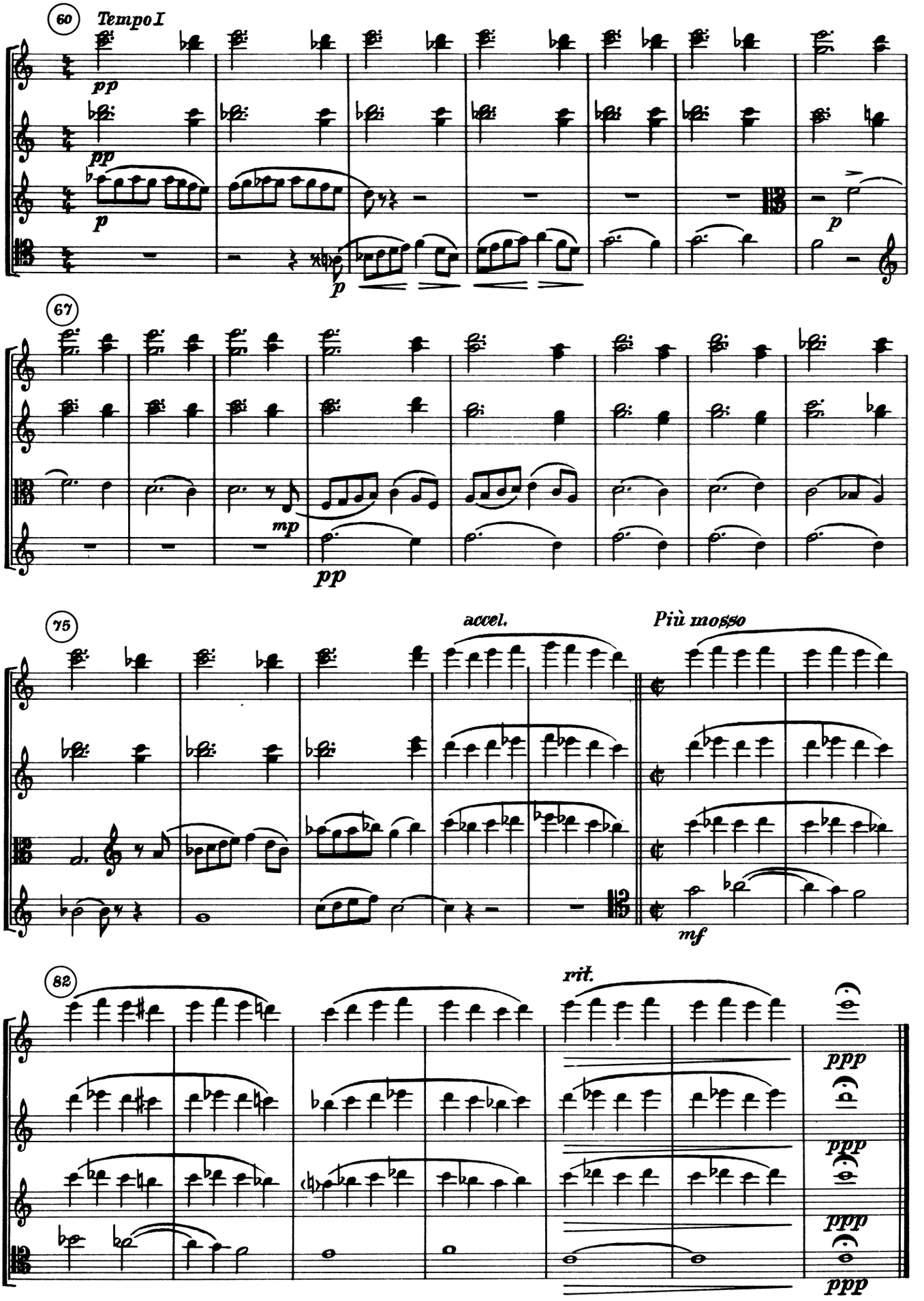

117
122
rit.
127
Meno mosso
132


138
(mf)
f
p
(p)
pp
pp
pp
p
154
p
mp
p
p
150
rit.
f
pp
Tempo I
155
ff
ff
ff

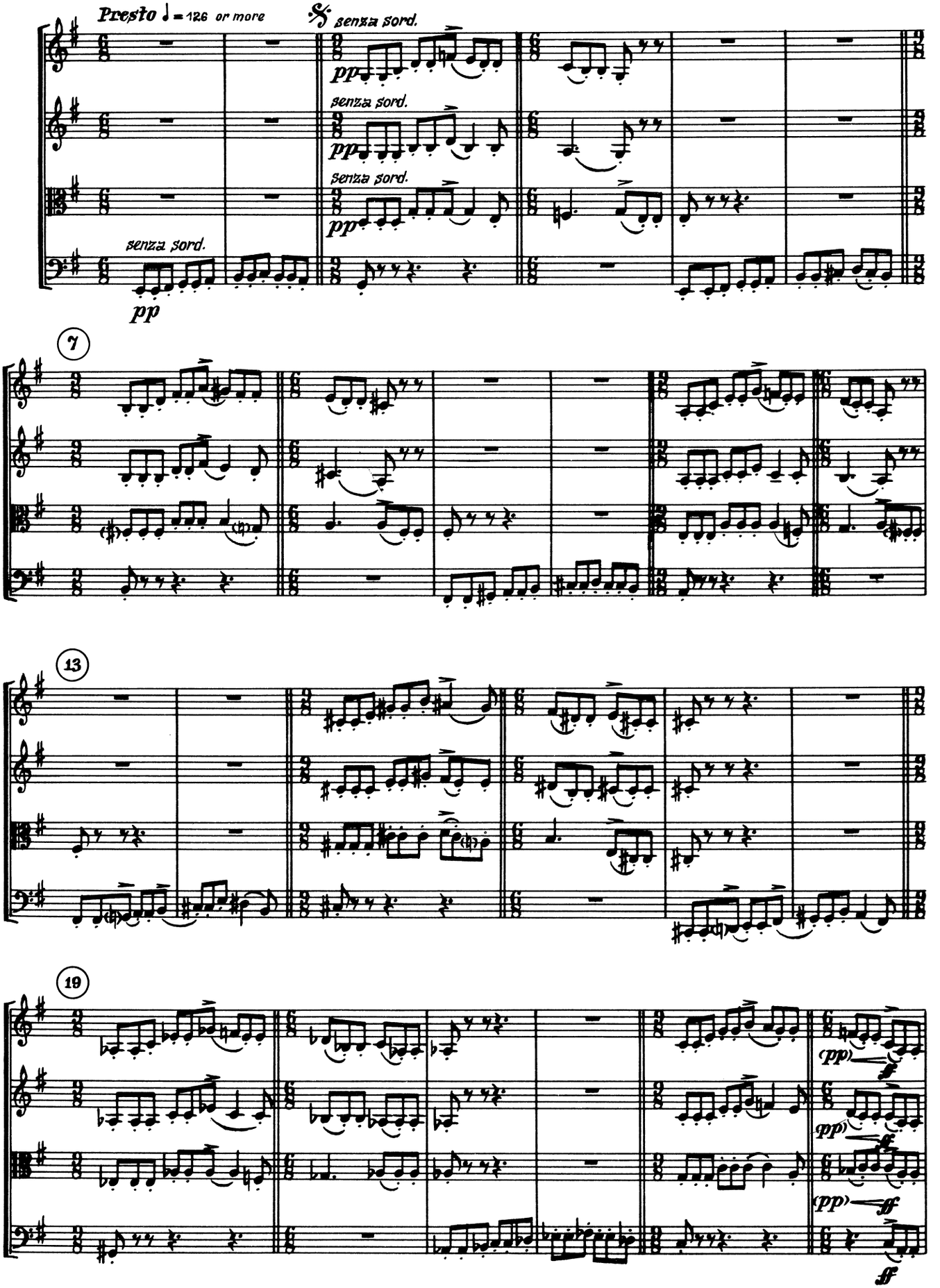
III

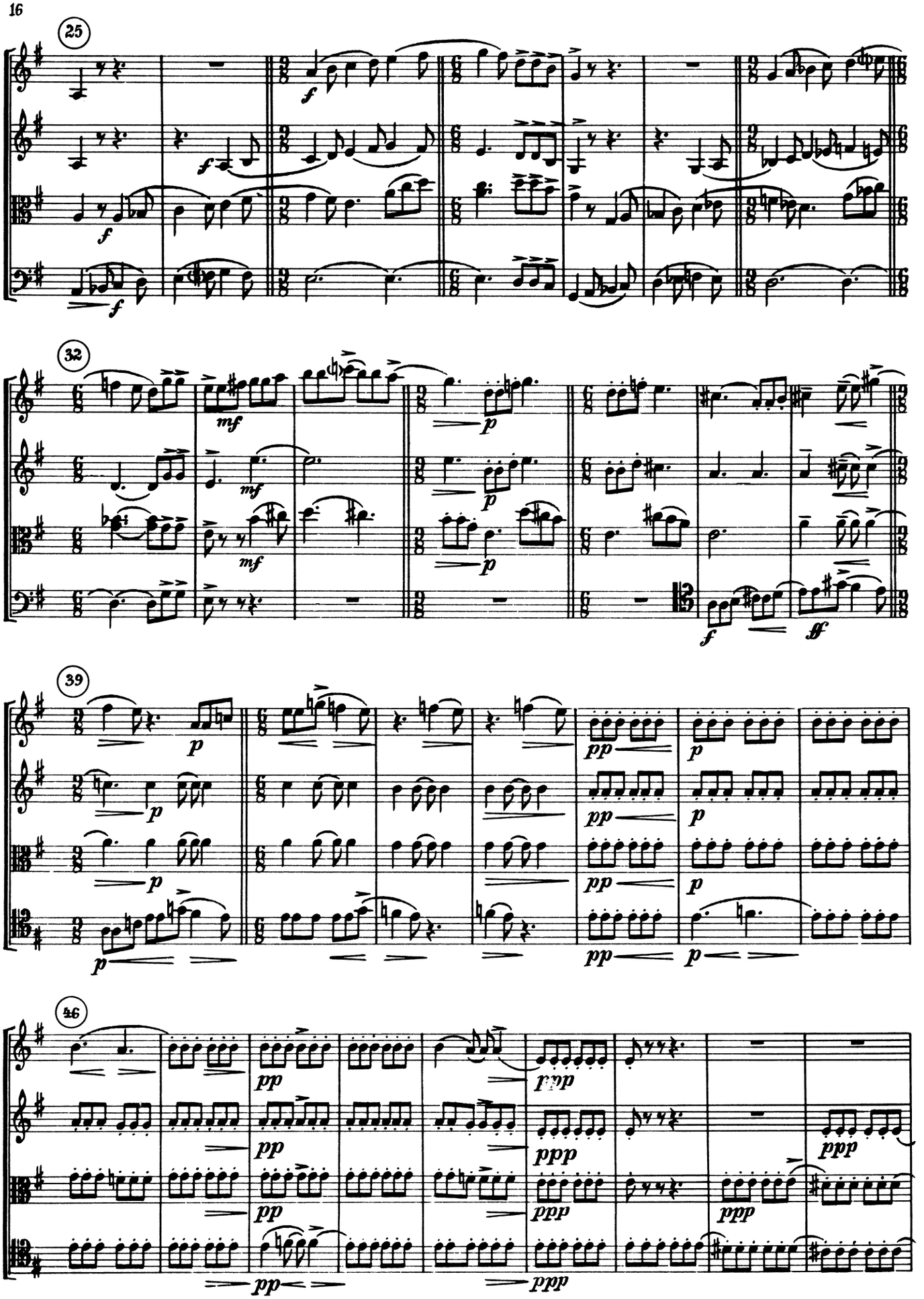

Andante ♩= 96
con sord.
pp
con sord.
pp
con sord.
p
10
pp
con sord.
p
p
18
24
accel.
pp

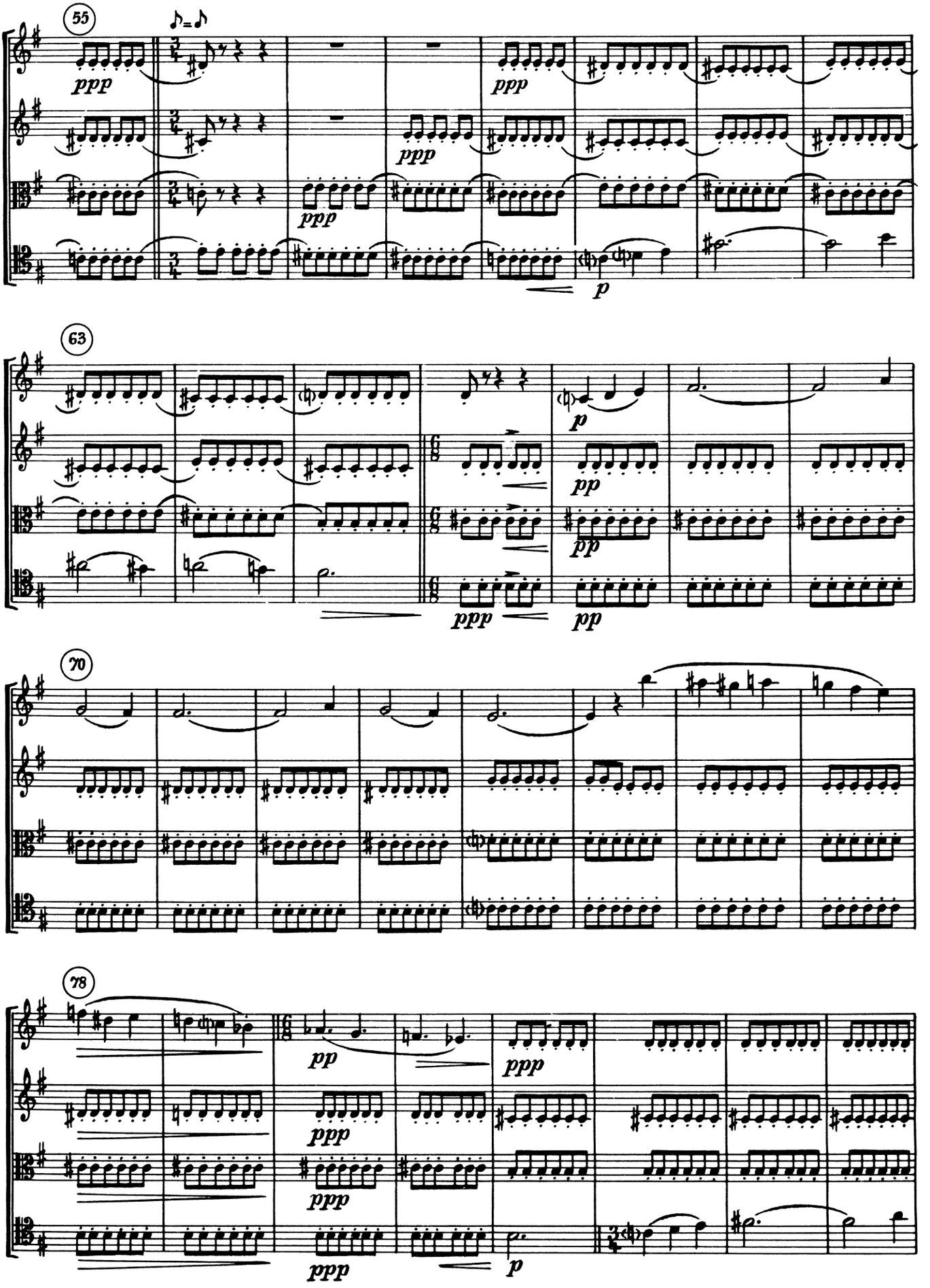

Più mosso ♪ = 84
31
mf
39
47
p
pp
54
rit.

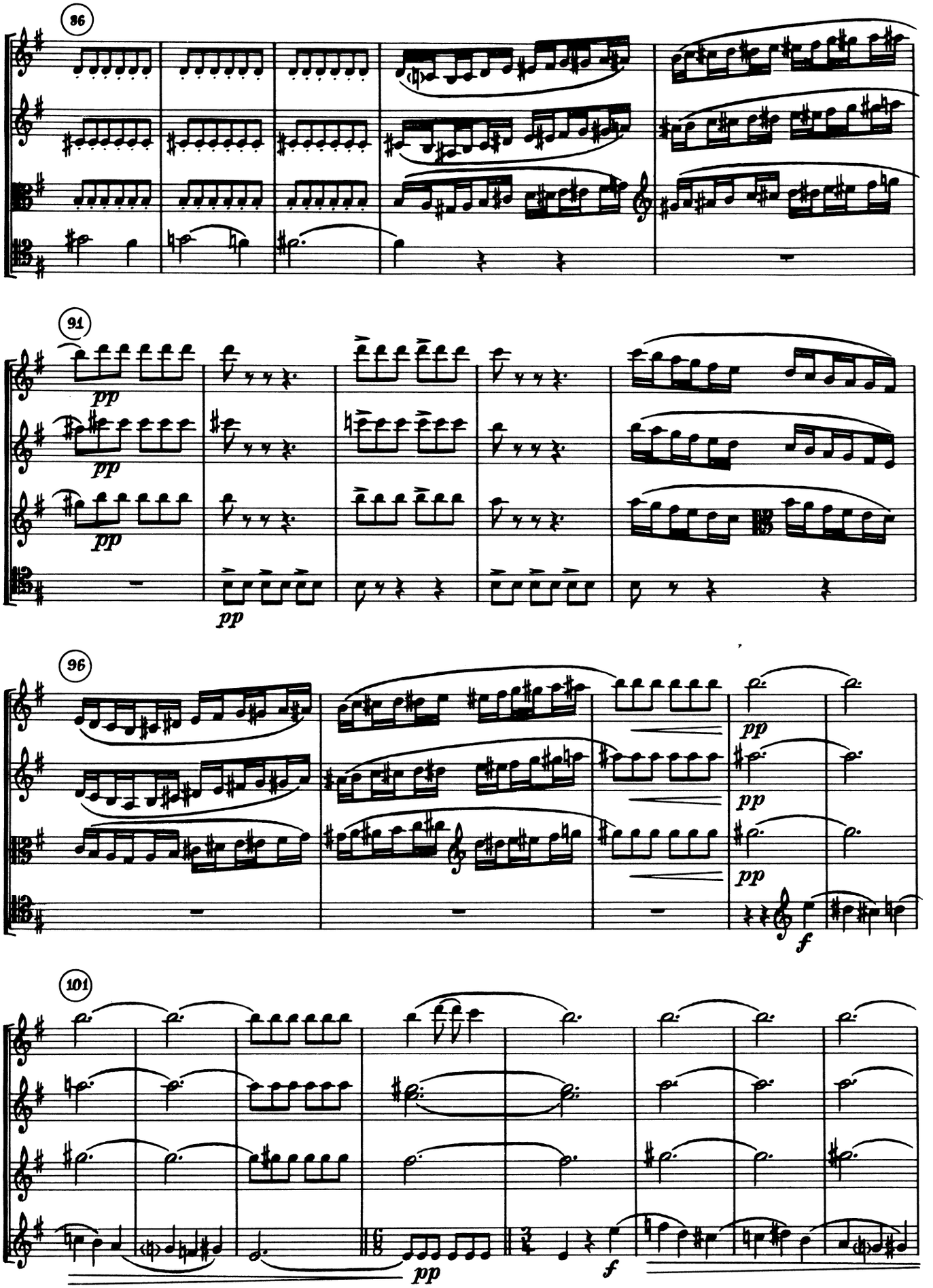

60
Tempo I
pp
pp
p
p
p
67
mp
pp
75
accel.
Più mosso
mf
82
rit.
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

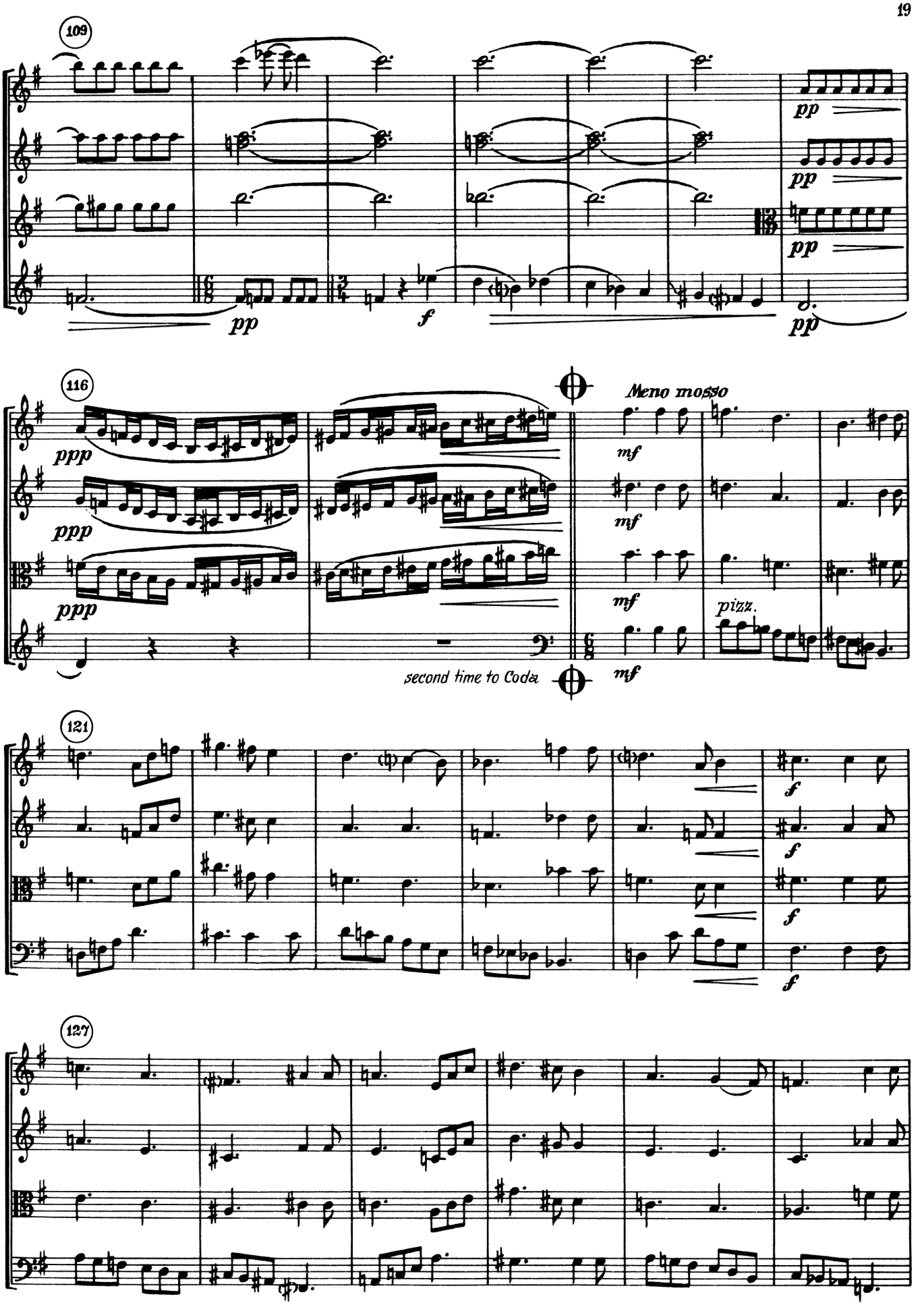
IV

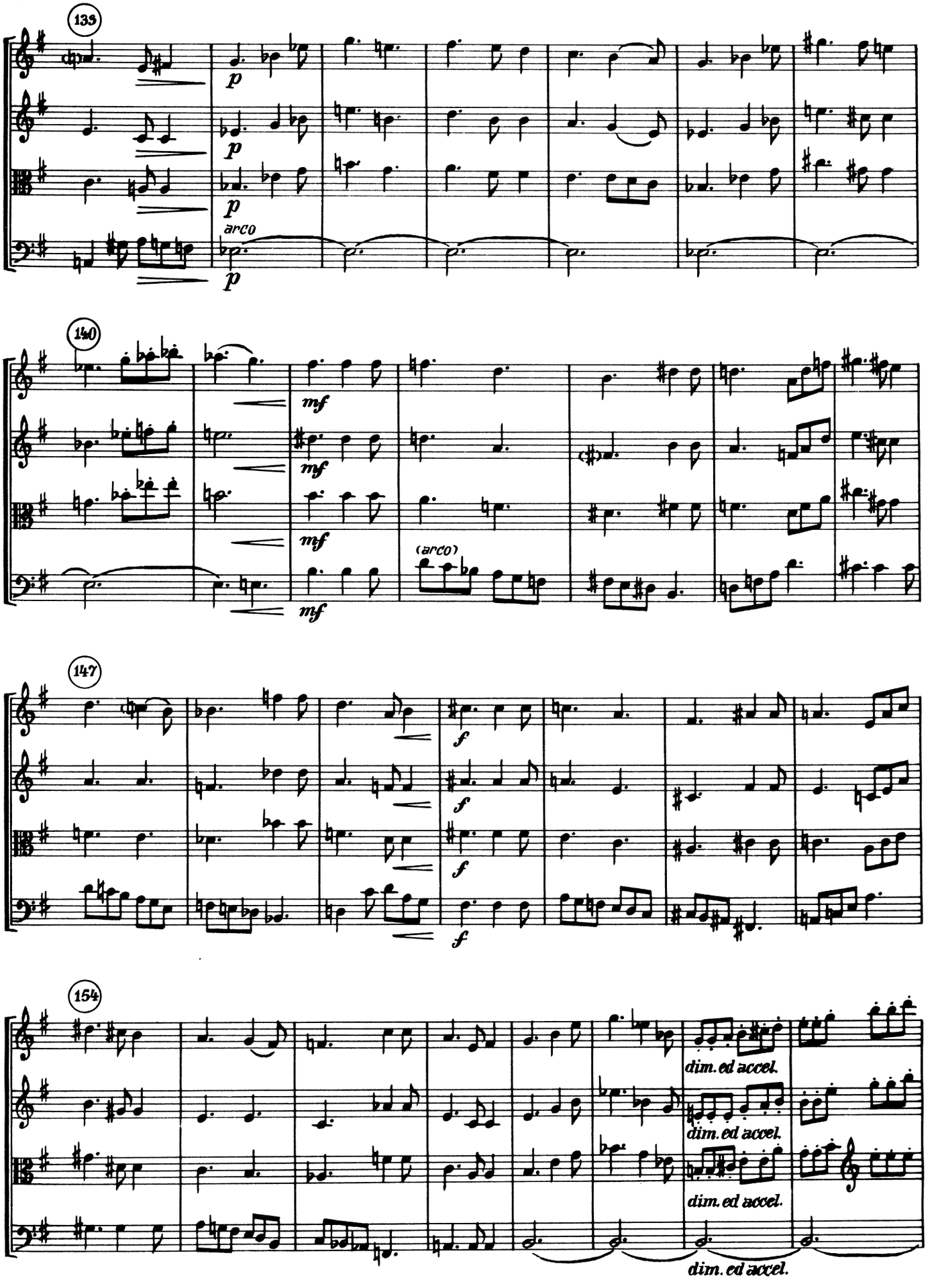

Presto ♩= 126 or more
senza sord.
pp
senza sord.
pp
senza sord.
pp
senza sord.
pp
7
13
19
(pp)
ff
(pp)
ff
(pp)
ff
ff

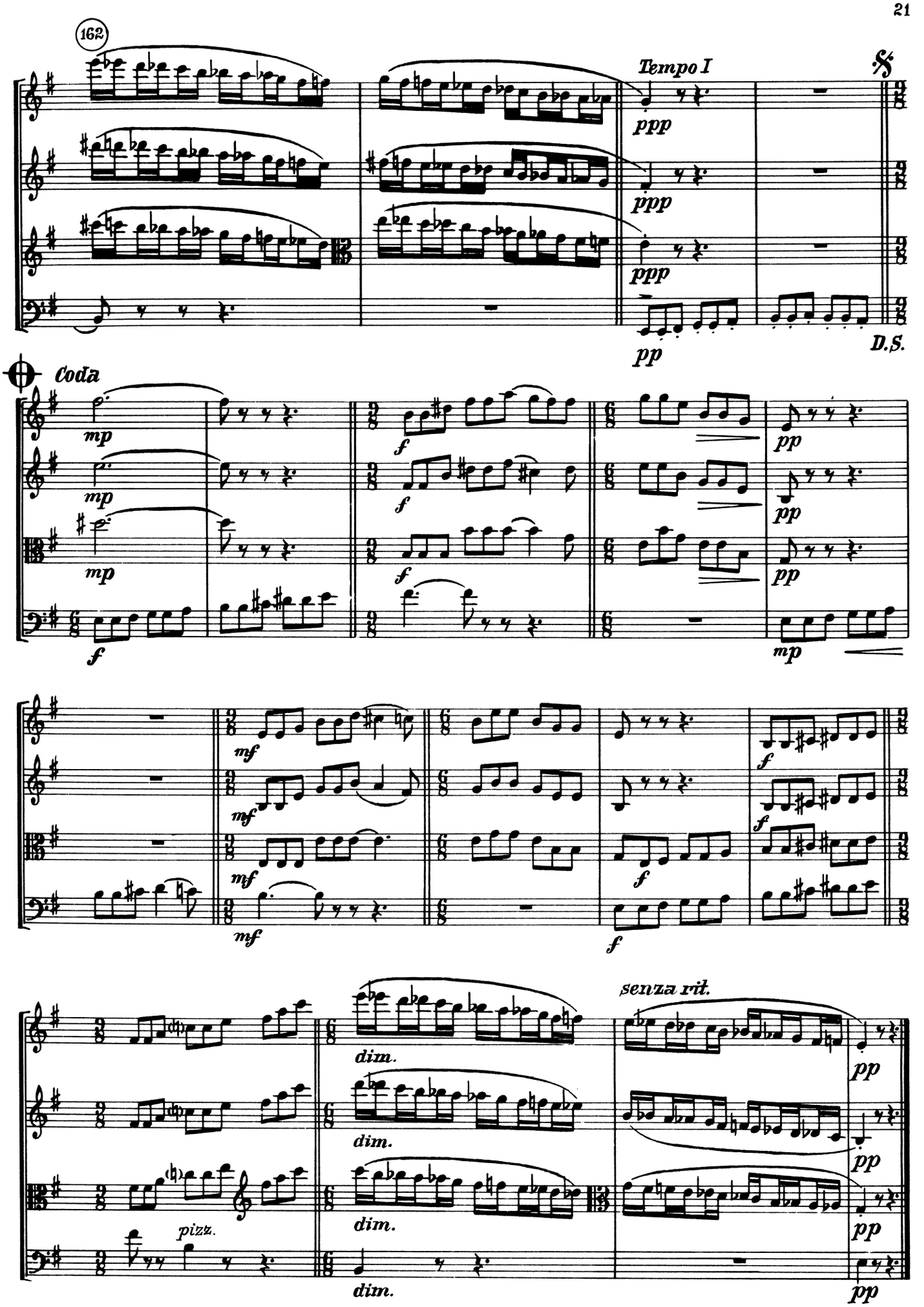

25
32
39
46


55
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
p
63
p
pp
pp
ppp
pp
70
78
pp
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp
p

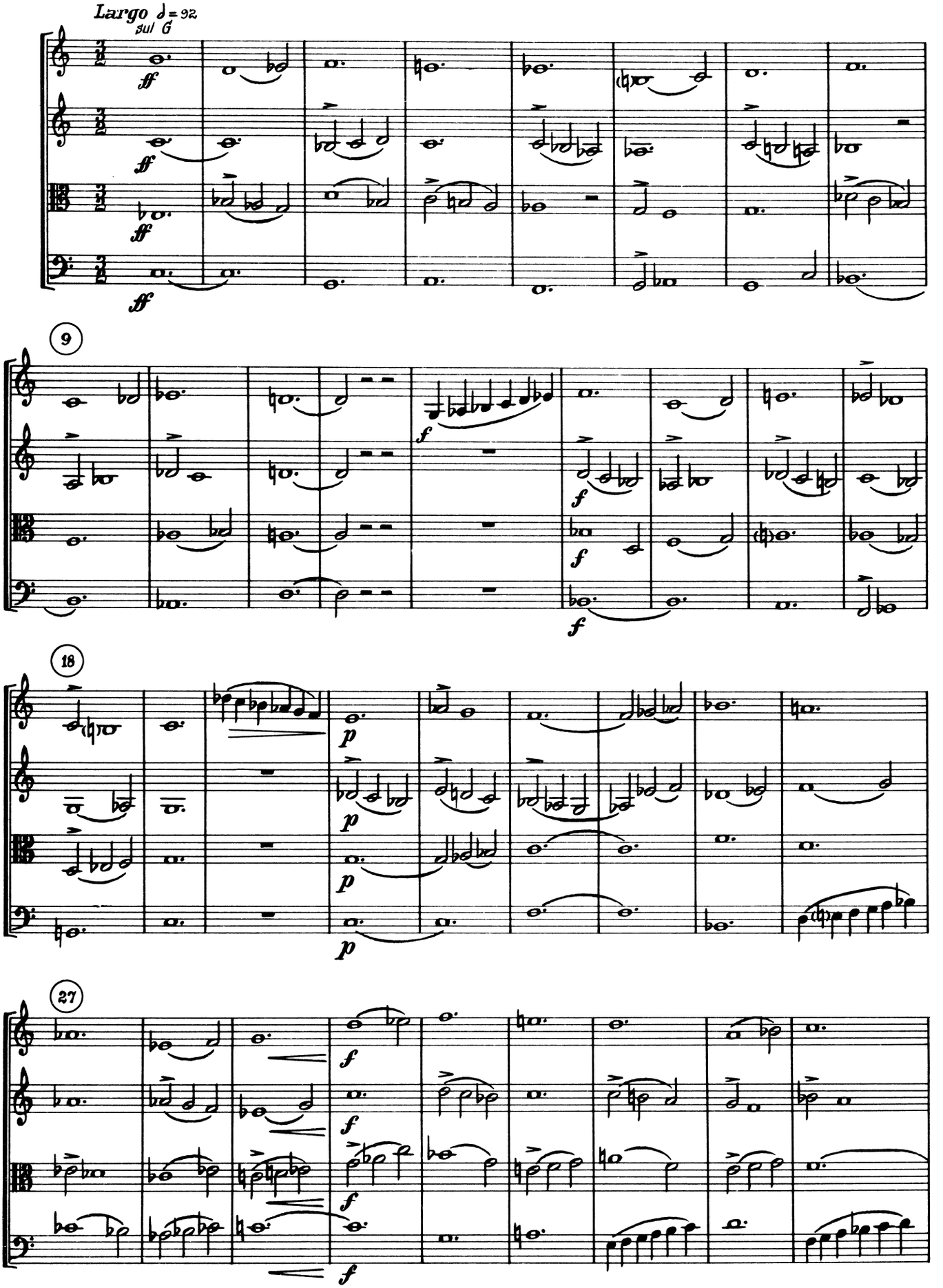

86
91
pp
pp
pp
pp
96
pp
pp
pp
f
101
pp
f

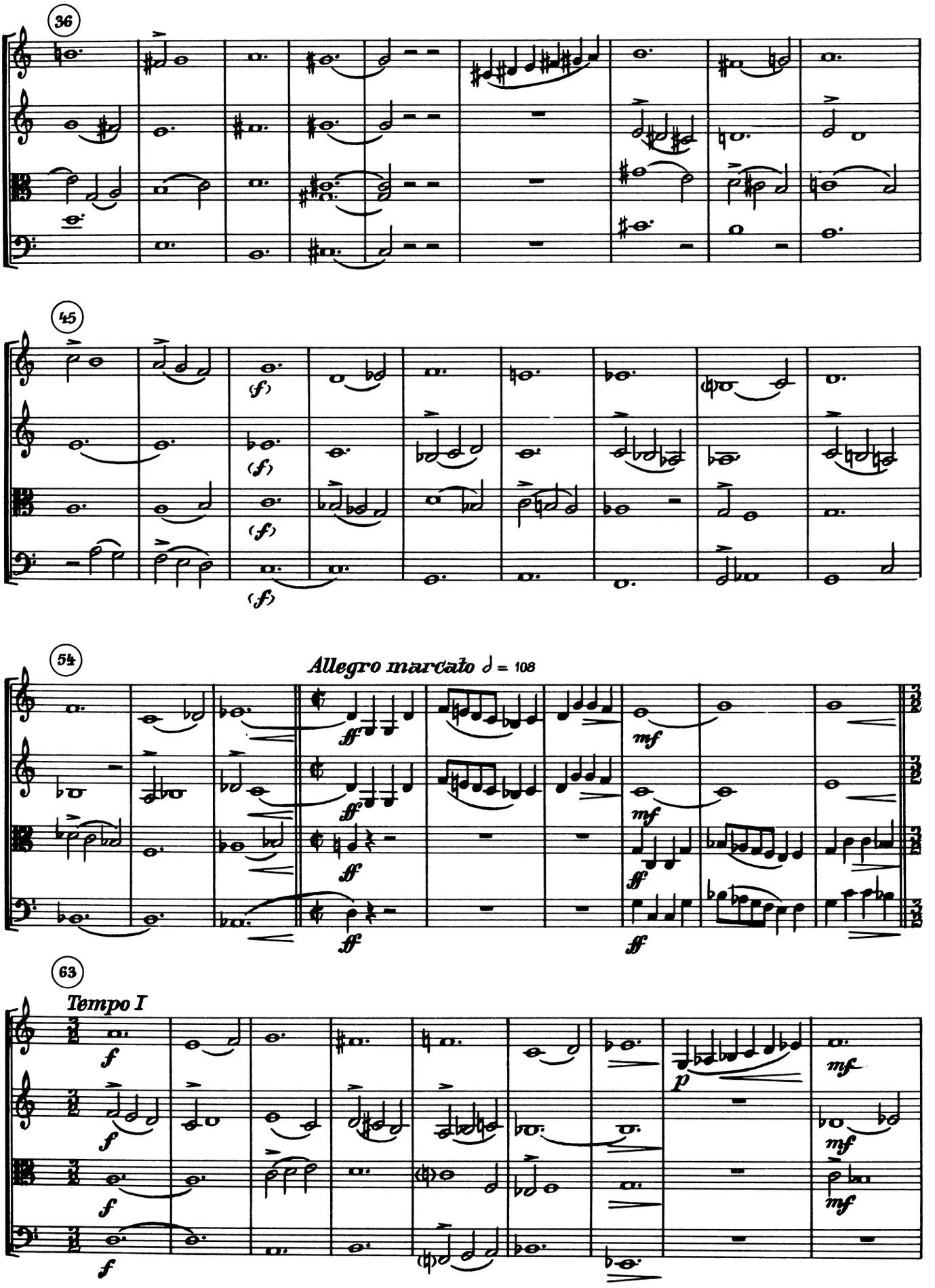

109
pp
pp
f
pp
pp
116
ppp
ppp
ppp
Meno mosso
mf
mf
mf
pizz.
mf
second time to Coda
121
f
f
f
f
127

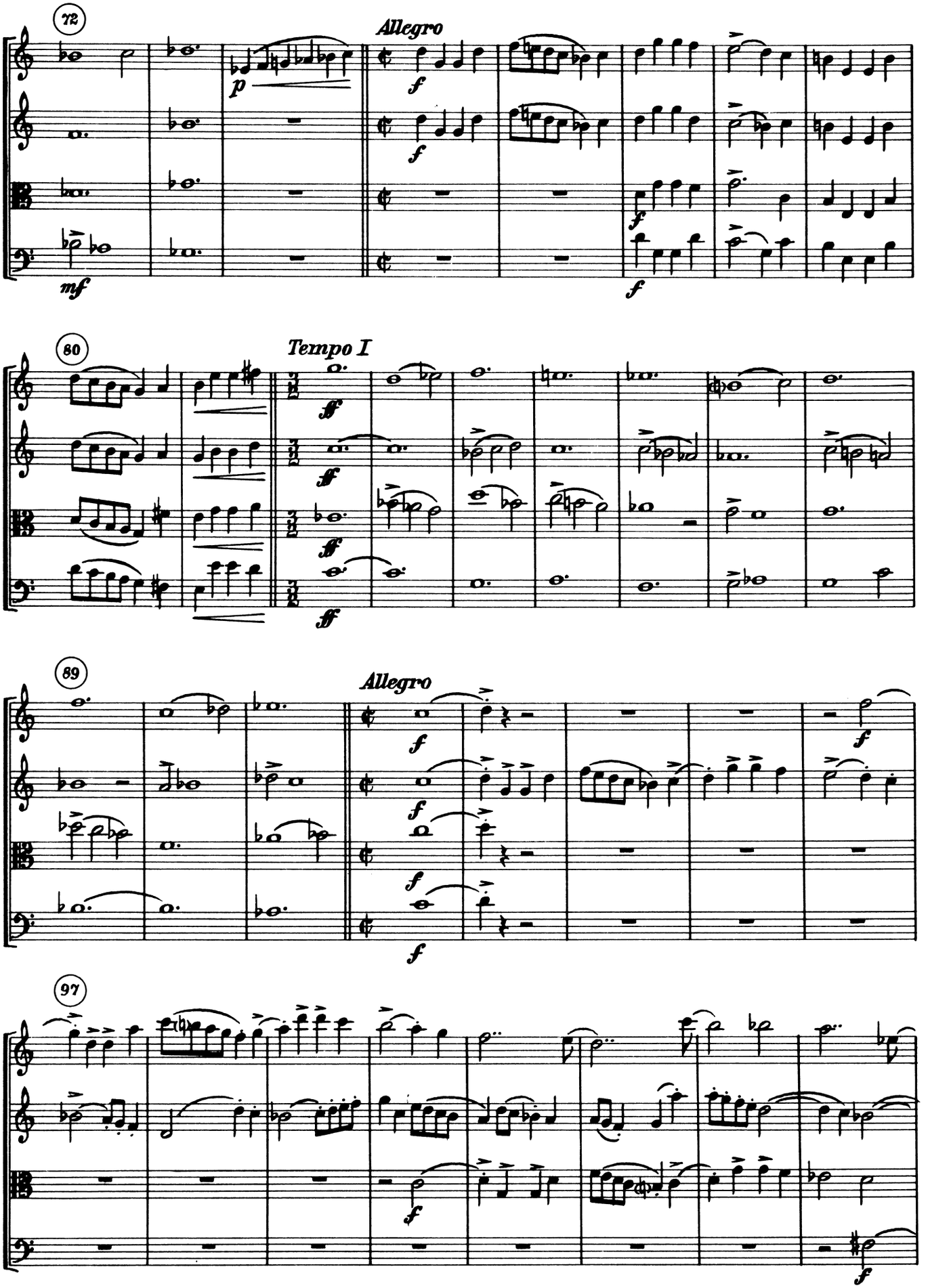

135
p
p
p
arco
p
140
mf
mf
mf
(arco)
147
f
f
f
154
dim. ed accel.
dim. ed accel.
dim. ed accel.
dim. ed accel.

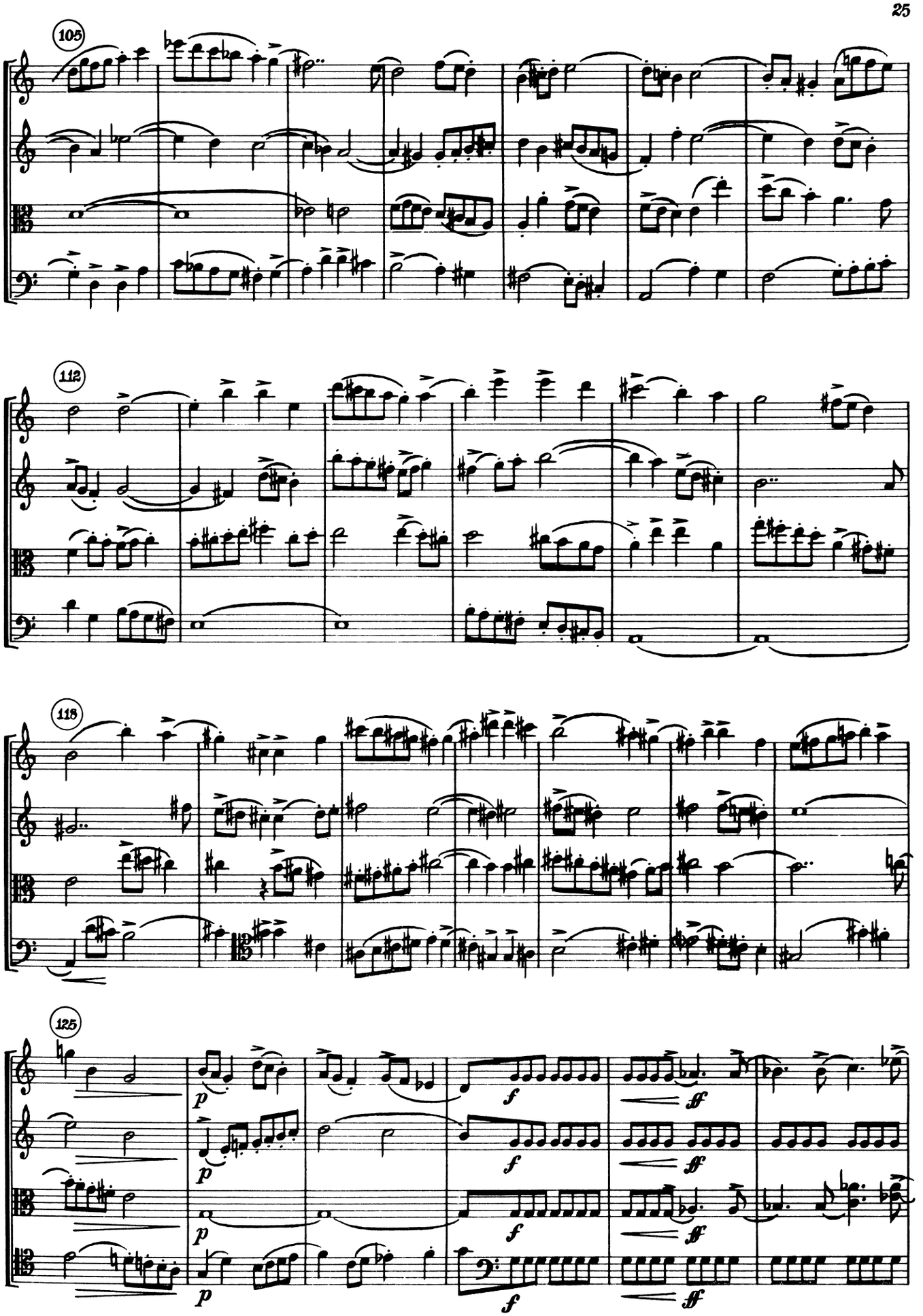

162
Tempo I
ppp
ppp
ppp
pp
D.S.
Coda
mp
mp
mp
f
f
f
f
pp
pp
pp
mp
mf
mf
mf
f
f
f
senza rit.
dim.
dim.
dim.
dim.
pizz.
pp
pp
pp
pp

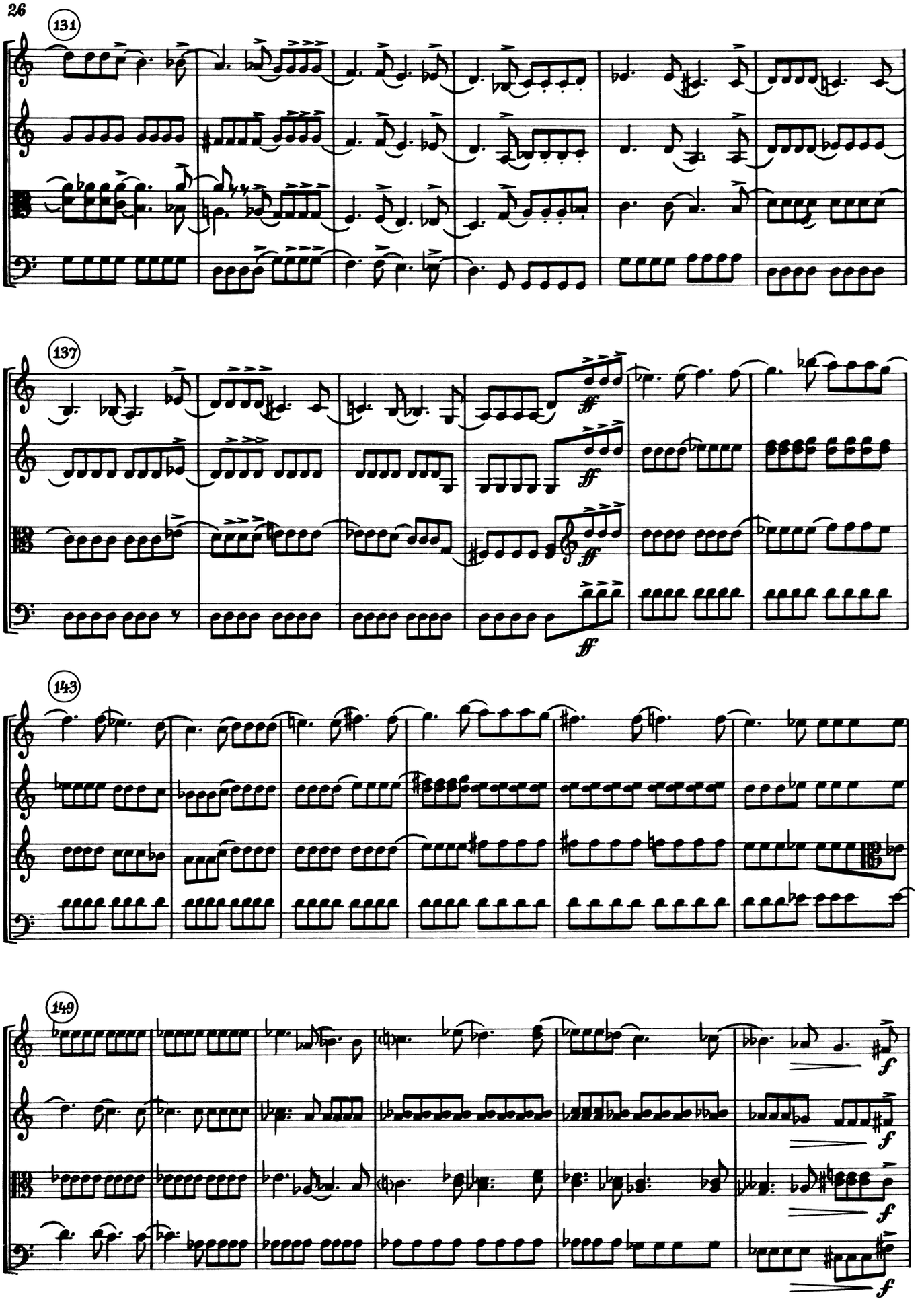
V

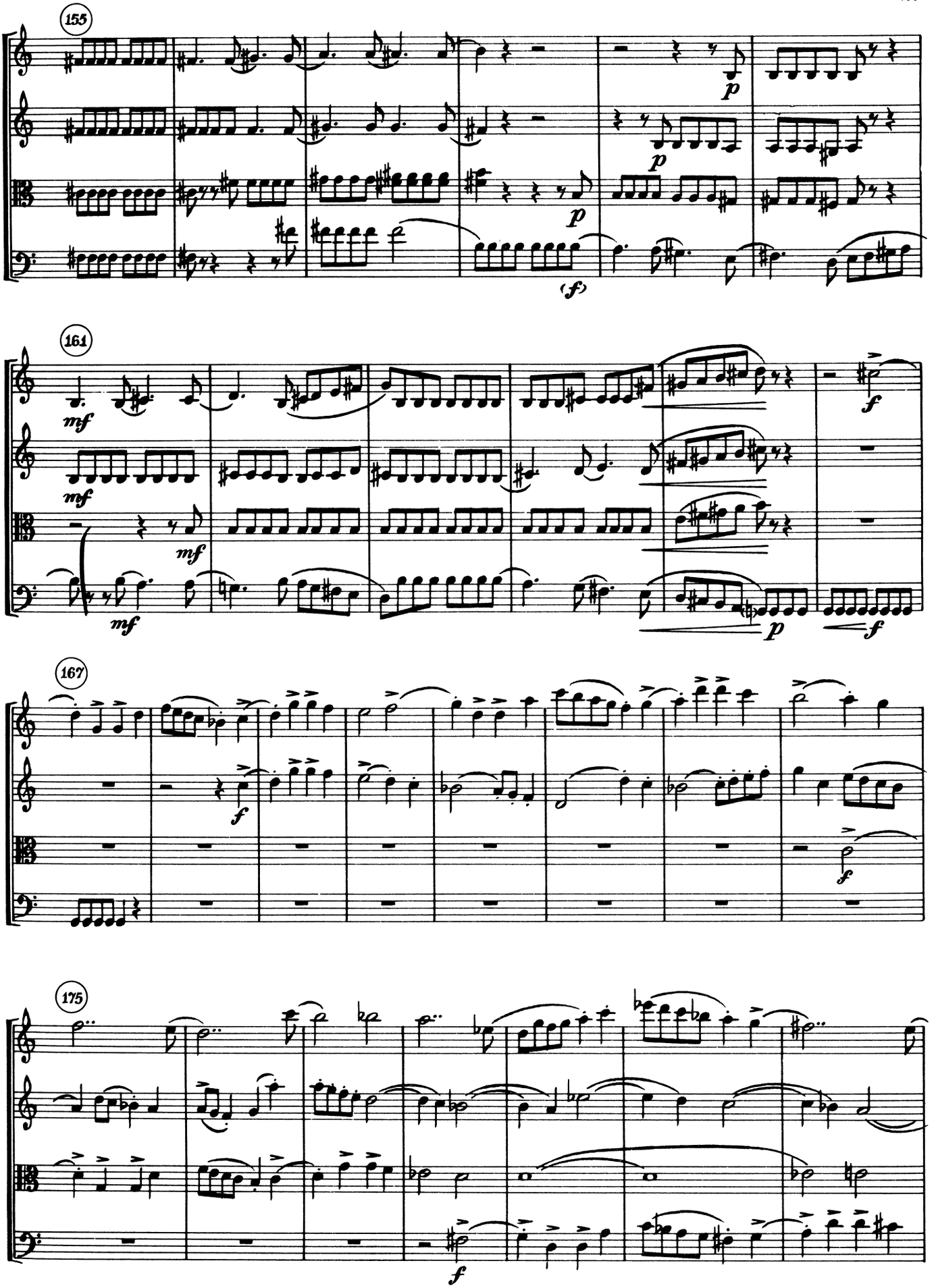


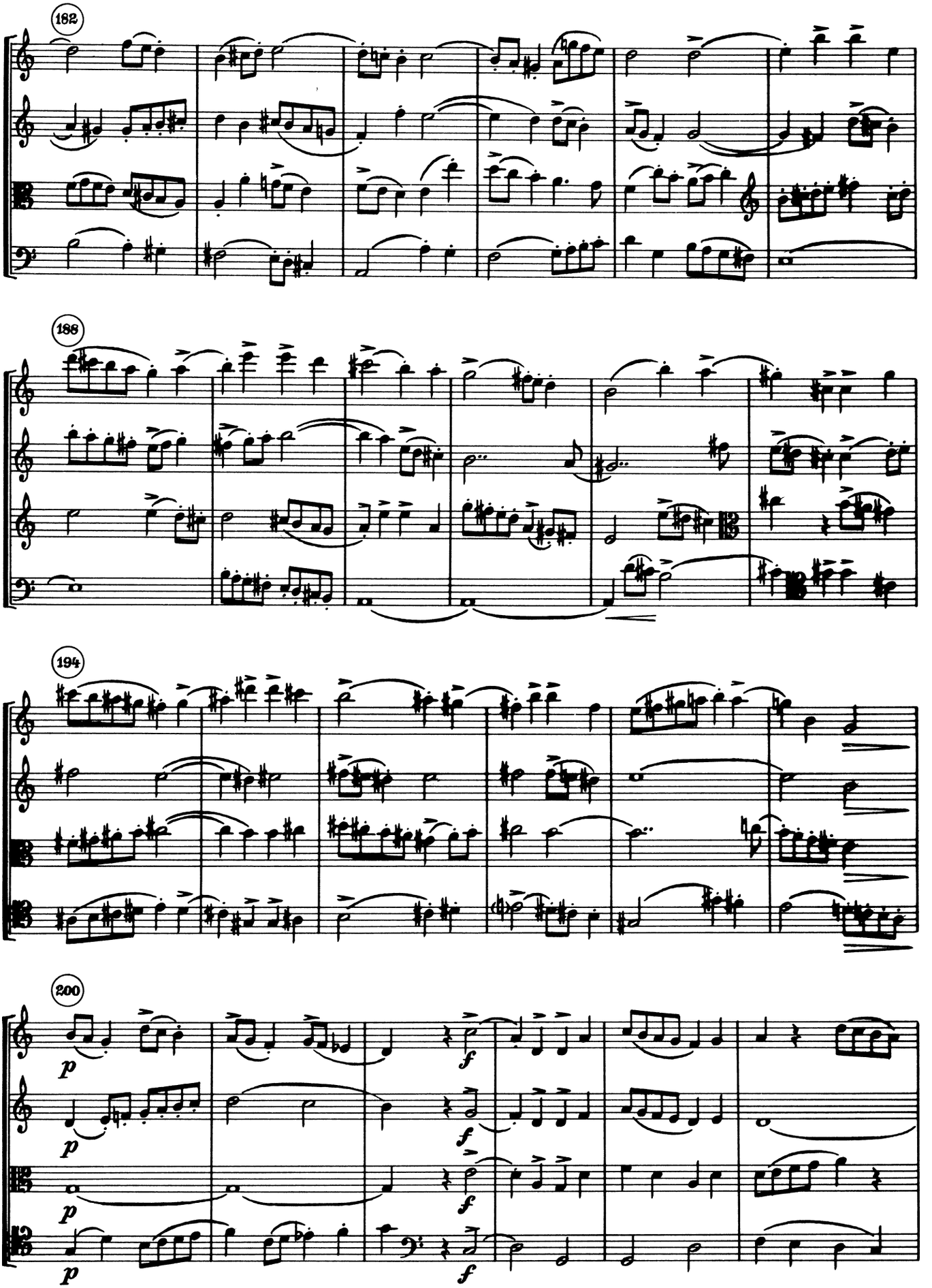

36
45
54
Allegro marcato ♪ = 108
63
Tempo I

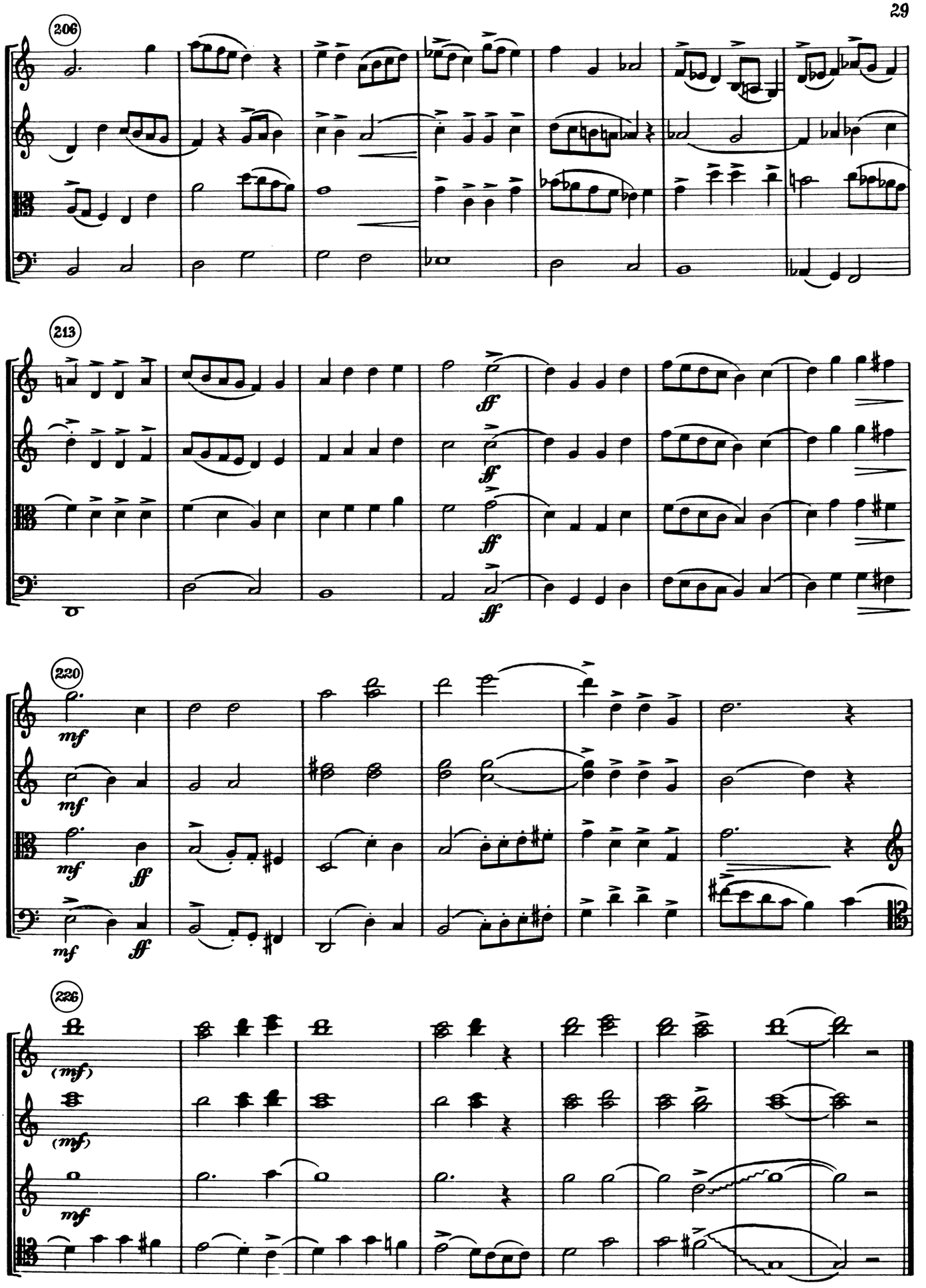

72
Allegro
p
f
mf
80
Tempo I
ff
89
Allegro
97


105
112
118
125
p
f
ff


131
137
143
149
ff
f


155
161
167
175


182
188
194
200
p
f


206
213
220
226
mf
ff
(mf)

HENRY Cowell was born March 11, 1897, in San Francisco, and spent his childhood near that city, where the Celtic and American folksongs of his parents and the music of Asiatic playmates became equally natural to him. Before he was nine he had shared a neighbor's enthusiasm for Gregorian chant, had heard *Il Trovatore* once and the Chinese opera several times, and had begun (at 5) and abandoned (at 8) a violin prodigy's career. His first formal training in composition began with Charles Seeger when he was 16. He had already written music for two pageants based on Celtic myths and had given, on March 10, 1912, the first public performance of piano compositions using broad chords of massed seconds—the "tone-clusters" that were to bring him early fame in Europe and America. In Cowell's orchestral music too they are found consistently, from the early 20's to his recent symphonies, where they contribute to the evocative magic of certain slow movements.

Between 1923 and 1933 he made five tours of Europe with programs of his own compositions: such diverse personalities as Bartok and Prunières in Paris, Schnabel in Berlin and Kandinsky in Dessau sponsored his concerts. For more than twenty-five years he also made annual tours of the United States.

The hymn-and-fuguing-tune series associated with Cowell's name was initiated when, about 1941, he recognized in William Walker's shaped-note collection of three-part modal folk hymns the same "primitive" music he had heard on visits to Kansas and Oklahoma. He began to wonder what might have happened to this widespread native idiom if it had been allowed to develop naturally into twentieth century music, and he has so far produced ten attractive two-movement answers to this question, in addition to innumerable small pieces. Four of his symphonies (No. 4, No. 7, No. 9, No. 10) incorporate hymns and fuguing tunes and draw on country song styles for their slow movements. Cowell's characteristic scherzos and intermezzos often reflect the dance styles of the Celtic-American tradition, using jigs and reels much as European composers used the minuet. The diatonic modal idiom may be handled with much dissonance (No. 6, No. 7) or with little, but the music all bears the imprint of Cowell's strong individuality.

From the Pacific Coast of California it was inevitable that a composer should look equally eagerly to Europe and to the Orient, seeing Occidental music as only one of many traditions within a world-wide art. So Cowell devoted almost as many years to the serious study of other musical systems as he did to harmony and counterpoint, and in 1931 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for the study of non-European music at the University of Berlin. One may find among his compositions many short pieces based on classic Arabic, Indonesian and African rhythms and forms, along with sets and suites like *Toccanta* and the larger integrations of his 5th and 11th Symphonies.

By his highly creative appropriation of basic forms and ideas from other parts of the world Cowell has, not for the first time in his career, significantly widened the horizons of Western symphonic art.

His work for the dissemination and understanding of twentieth century music of every sort is legendary, from the founding of *New Music Editions* for the circulation of experimental scores in 1927, to his recently-ended four-year period as President of the American Composers Alliance. He married in 1941, and he and his wife now divide their time between New York City and the wild mountain ledge in the Catskills that they consider their home. Cowell has been a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters since 1951, and in 1953, the Quaker college at Wilmington, Ohio, surprised this most unacademic of composers by making him an honorary Doctor of Music.