Viola Sonata

"Yin and Yang"

for Viola and Piano

Kun Yan

VIOLA SONATA

“YIN AND YANG”

Based on Chinese traditional music

for Viola and Piano

Kun Yan

(2026)

Duration: ca. 20’30”

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I

Mountains and Rivers

II

Sorrow and Joy

III

Right and Wrong

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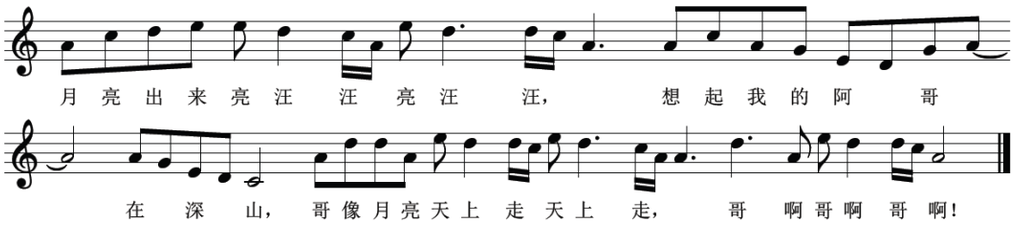
Composer's Notes

Viola Sonata "*Yin and Yang*" brings together elements of Chinese folk tradition, poetic imagery, and theatrical expression within a contemporary chamber music framework. Inspired in part by Paul Hindemith's imaginative transformation of German folk songs in *Der Schwanendreher*, the sonata treats several Chinese sources not as direct quotations but are developed as themes while retaining their symbolic associations with landscape, memory, culture, and human experience.

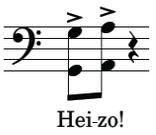
'Mountains and Rivers'

The first movement, *Mountains and Rivers*, draws on folk songs from southwestern China that evoke natural landscapes and the rhythms of everyday life. One of the central ideas is adapted from the Yunnan folk song *A Small River Flows*, whose lyrical pentatonic contour suggests tender longing, memory, and the quiet persistence of nature.

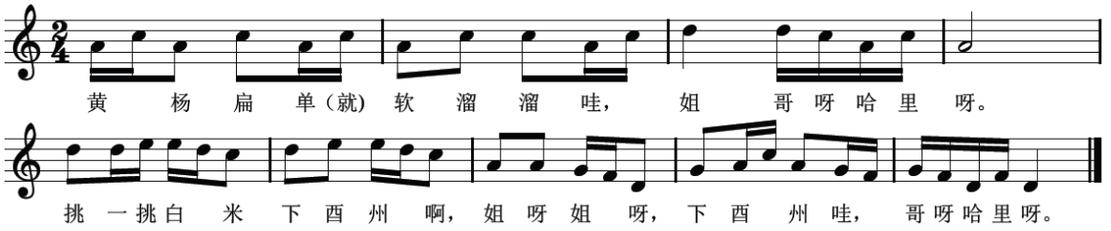


(Translation: *The moon rises, shining bright; I think of my beloved deep in the mountains. My love moves like the moon across the sky, across the sky. Oh my love!*)

Contrasting this fluid character is a short ascending gesture inspired by the hauling chants of Sichuan boatmen, symbolizing human effort and communal strength.

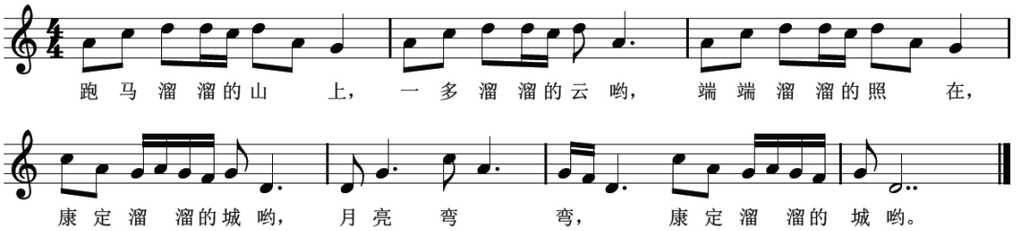


The main theme of the movement develops from *The Boxwood Shoulder Pole*, a lively folk song from Sichuan characterized by buoyant rhythm and rustic vitality.



(Translation: *The flexible boxwood carrying pole sways; brother and sister set off together, carrying white rice down to Youzhou. Sister, dear sister, down to Youzhou, brother!*)

In the central section, the widely known *Love Song of Kangding* appears in transformed rhythms, suggesting both the geographical remoteness of the western Sichuan plateau and the vibrant song-and-dance traditions associated with its people.



(Translation: *On the roaming horse mountain, a drifting cloud floats by; brightly it shines down upon the town of Kangding. The moon bends gently over the town of Kangding*)

'Sorrow and Joy'

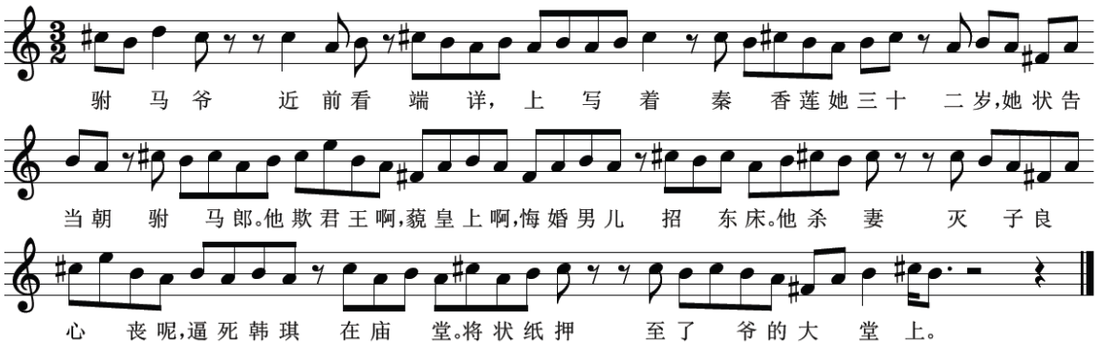
The second movement, *Sorrow and Joy*, unfolds in response to the Song-dynasty poem *Immortals at the Magpie Bridge*, which tells of two lovers separated by celestial decree and reunited only once each year.

纤云弄巧，飞星传恨，银汉迢迢暗度。
Slender clouds weave their charms,
Falling stars carry longing,
Across the Milky Way's far-off shadows they meet in secret.
金风玉露一相逢，便胜却人间无数。
When autumn's golden wind and jade-pure dew bring them together once,
That single meeting surpasses countless bonds on earth.
柔情似水，佳期如梦，忍顾鹊桥归路。
Tenderness flows like water;
Their promised night feels like a dream.
How can they bear to look back toward the magpies' bridge as they part?
两情若是久长时，又岂在朝朝暮暮。
Yet if two hearts remain true over time,
Why must they cling to every dawn and dusk?

Its musical structure follows an expressive trajectory of longing, reunion, and renewed separation. Contrapuntal textures allow multiple emotional states to coexist, while subtle chromatic inflections disturb the pentatonic environment, creating a sense of fragile balance.

'Right and Wrong'

The finale, *Right and Wrong*, introduces dramatic material inspired by the Peking opera *The Case of Chen Shimei*, whose narrative centers on justice, accusation, and moral conflict.



(Translation: *Prince Consort, step forward and examine this carefully: it states that Qin Xianglian, thirty-two years of age, brings a charge against the current imperial son-in-law for deceiving the emperor and showing contempt for the throne, for breaking his marriage vows in pursuit of another bride, for attempting to kill his wife and eliminate his heirs without conscience, and for driving Han Qi to death in the court; this written petition is now presented before this tribunal*.)

Recurring refrain passages suggest the persistence of judgment, while contrasting episodes evoke reflection and transformation through references to ritual sound worlds. Resonant piano sonorities imitate Chinese temple bells, chant-like lines recall Buddhist recitation, and extended viola techniques draw inspiration from the timbres of traditional Chinese instruments such as the *sheng* and *guqin*.

Earlier musical ideas return cyclically in transformed forms, linking the three movements into a continuous expressive journey. Rather than resolving opposition, the sonata allows contrasting energies to interact and evolve, creating a dialogue between tradition and invention, memory and imagination.

March 2026 Kun Yan

Viola Sonata '*Yin and Yang*'

for Viola and Piano

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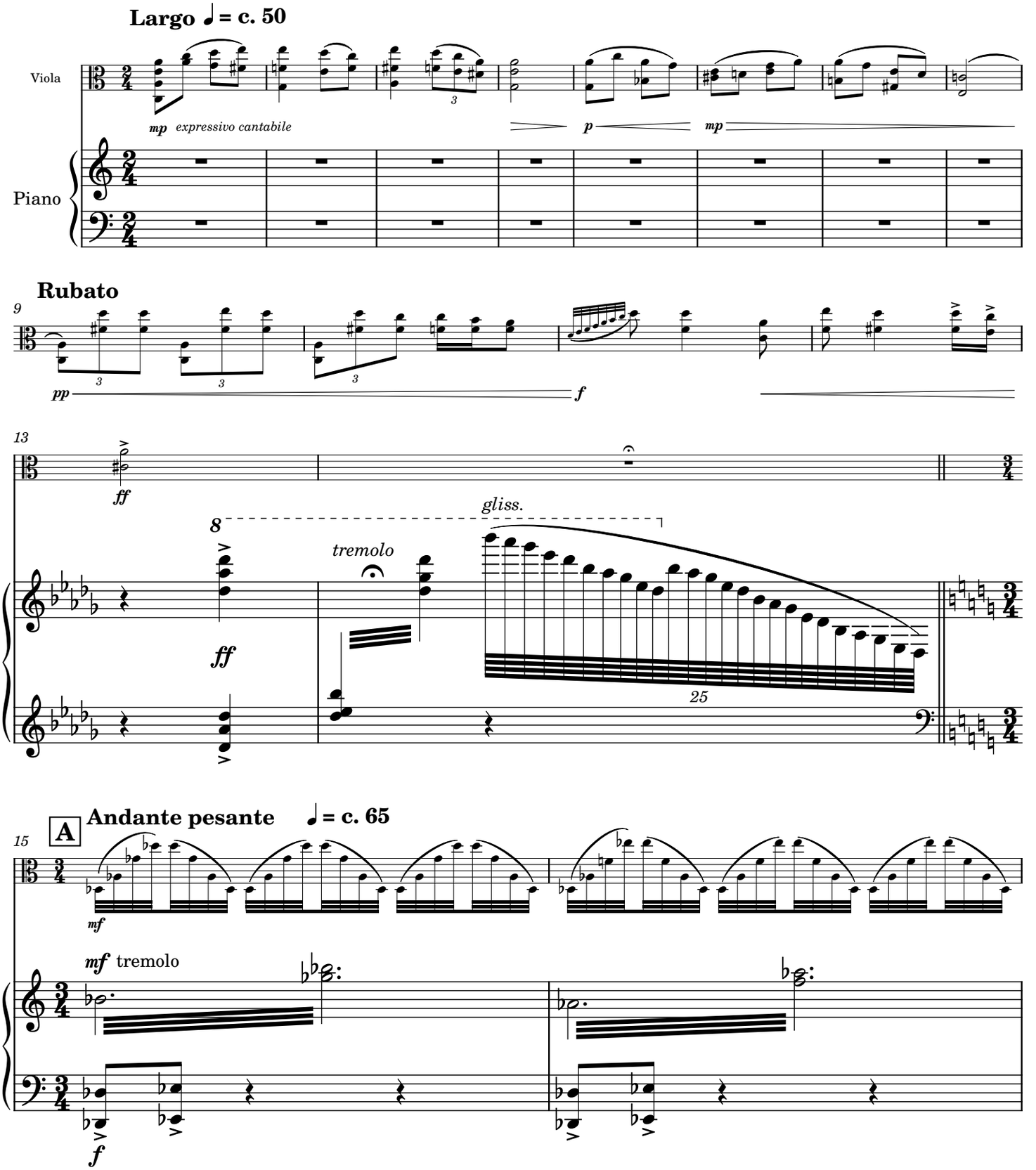
I. Mountains and Rivers



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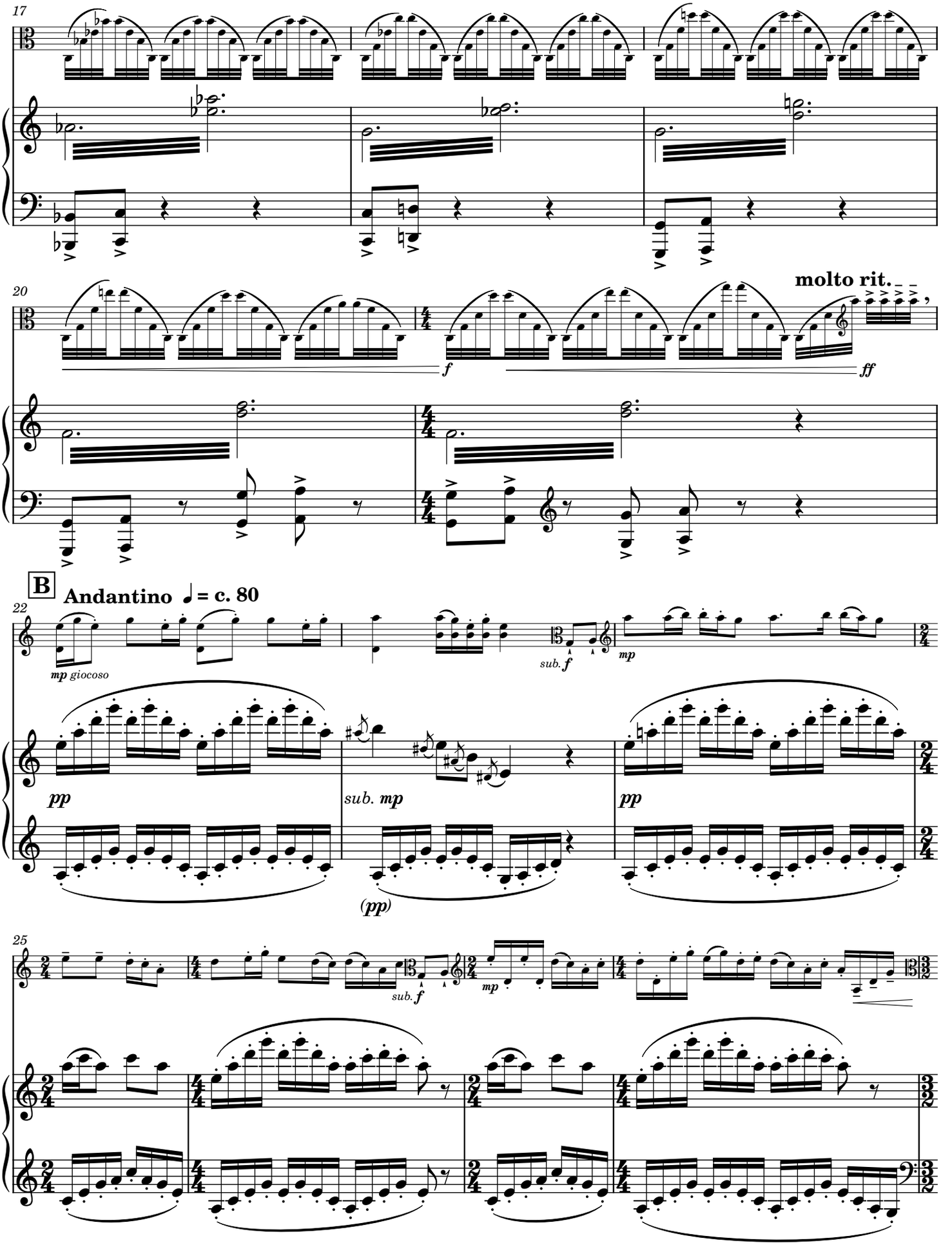
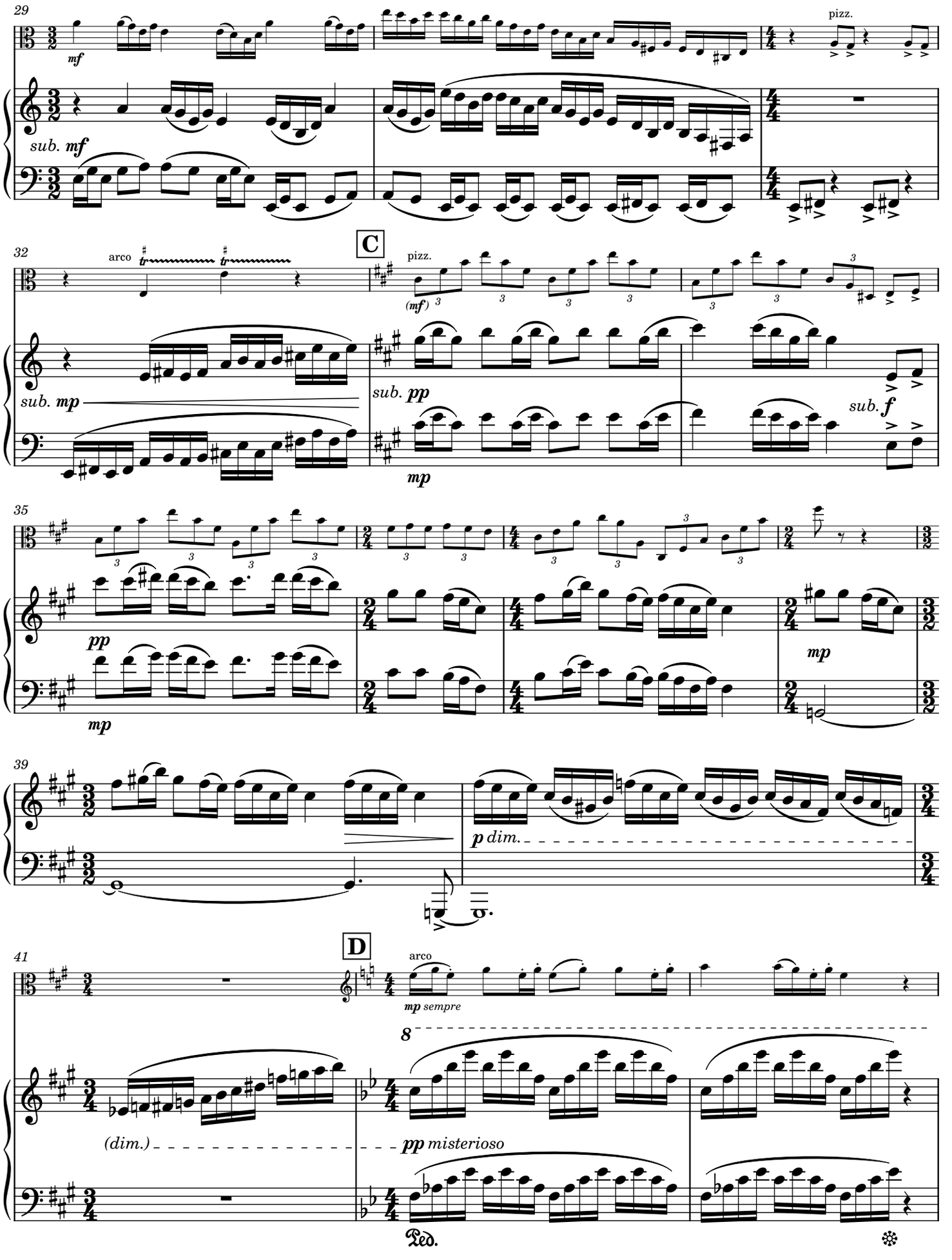
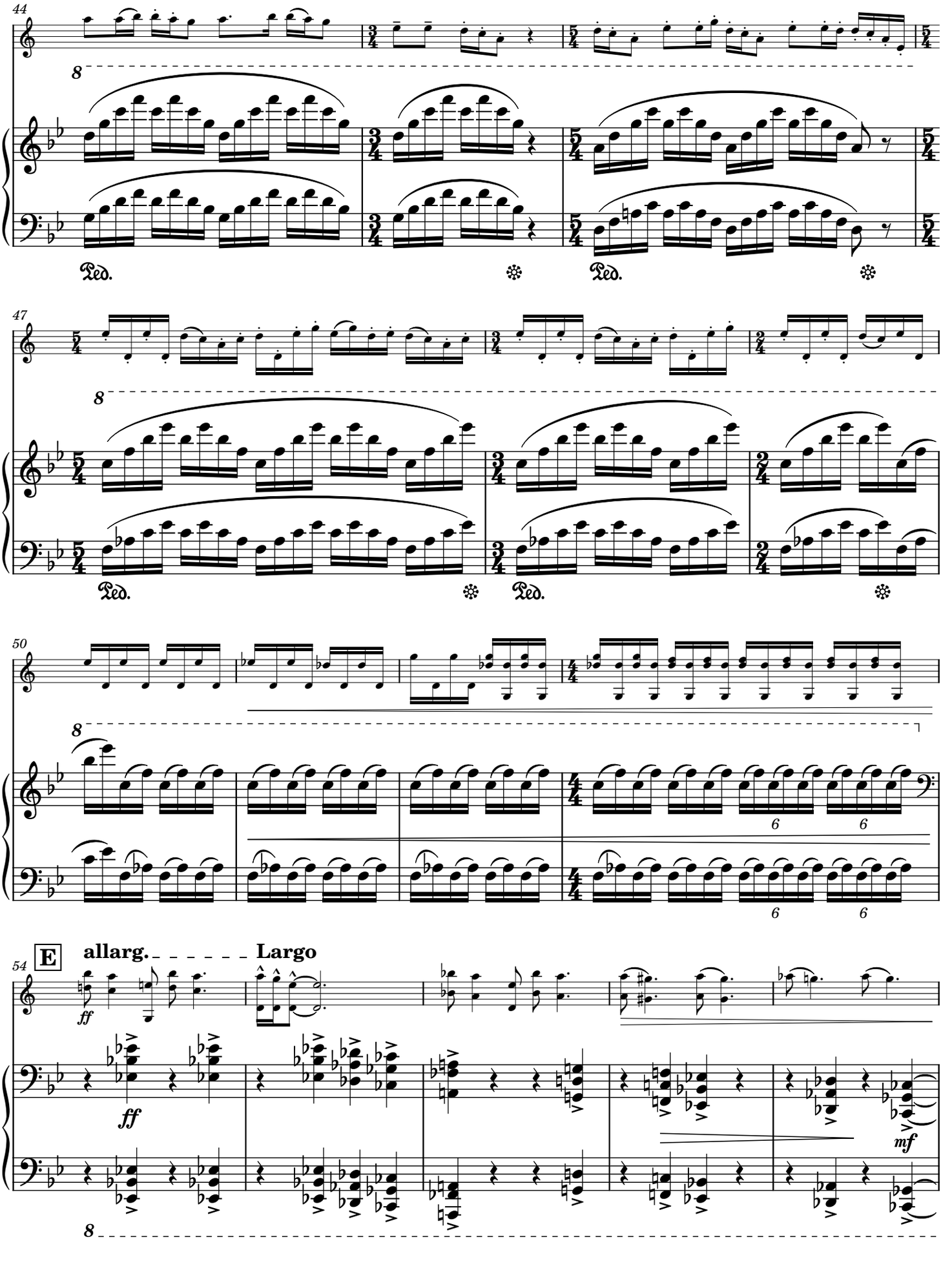
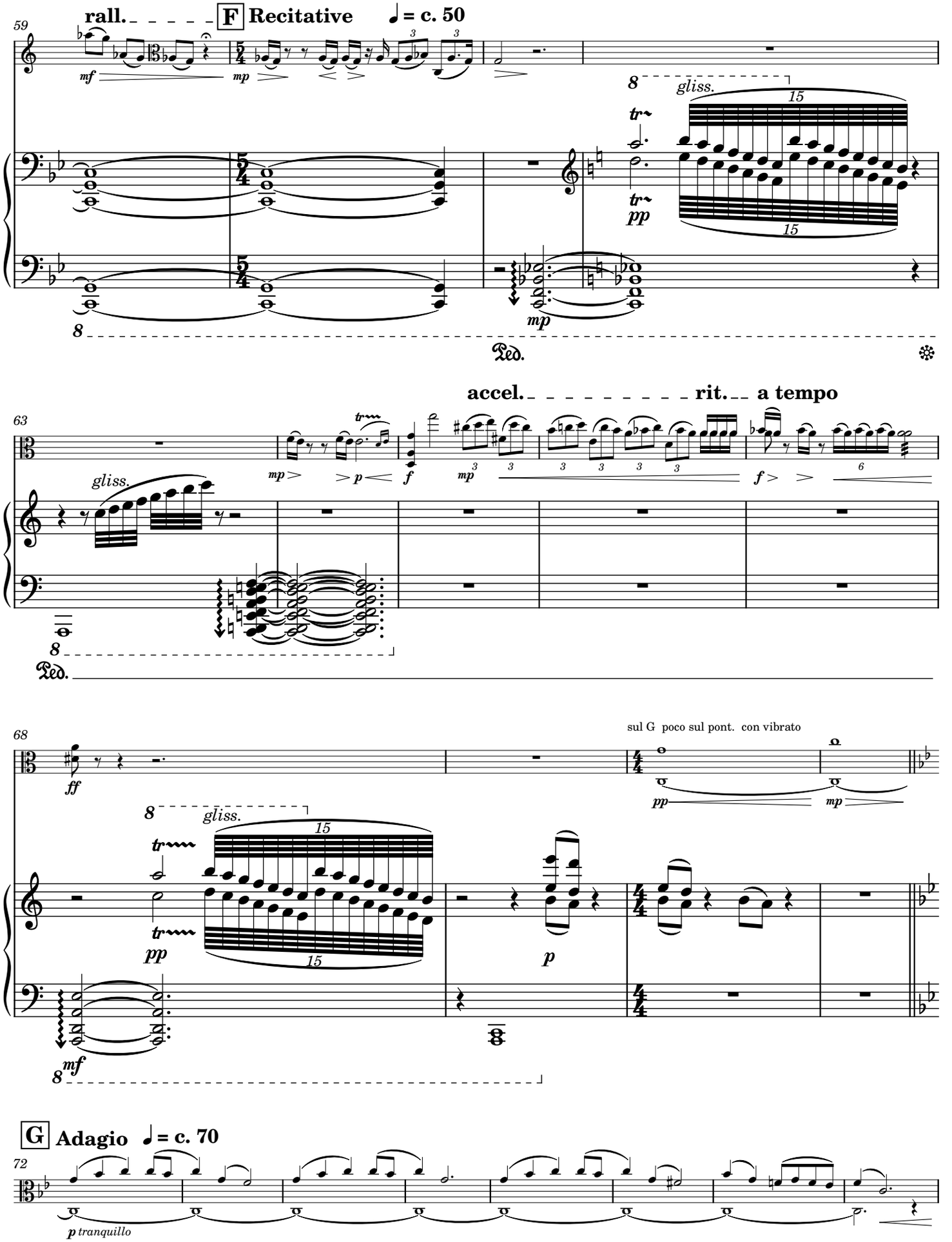
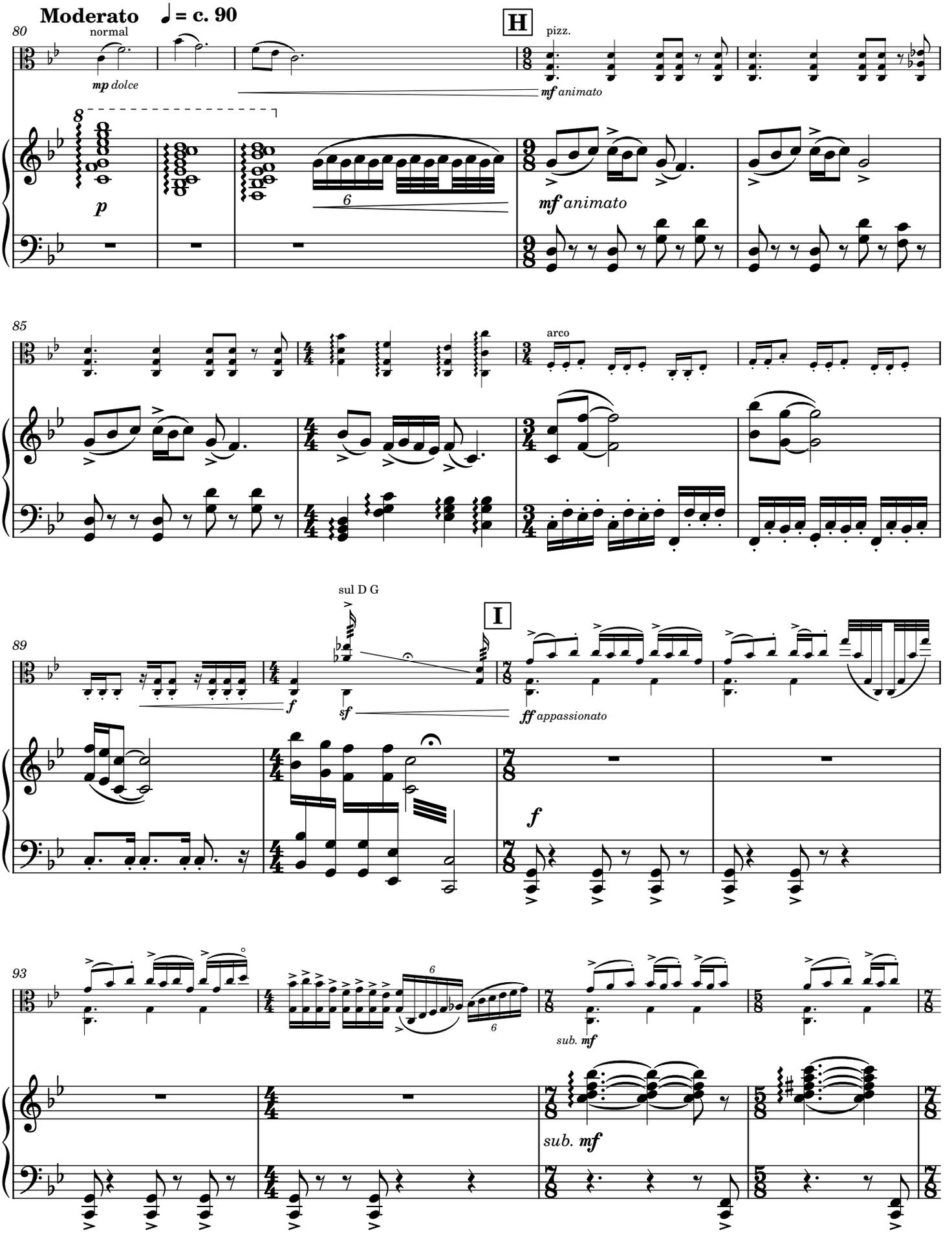
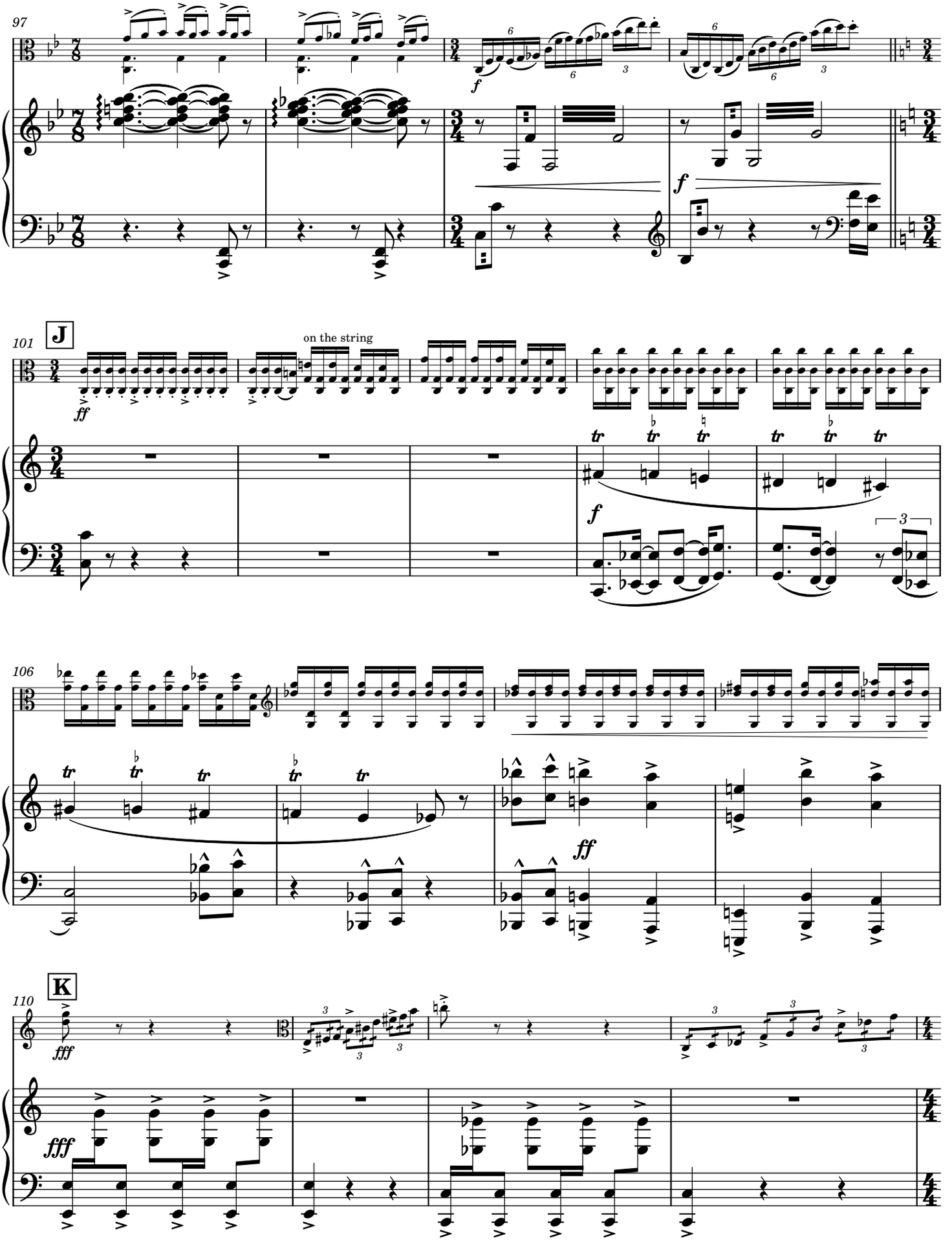

17
20
molto rit.
f
ff
B
Andantino ♩ = c. 80
22
mp giocoso
sub. f
mp
pp
sub. mp
pp
(pp)
25
sub. f
mp

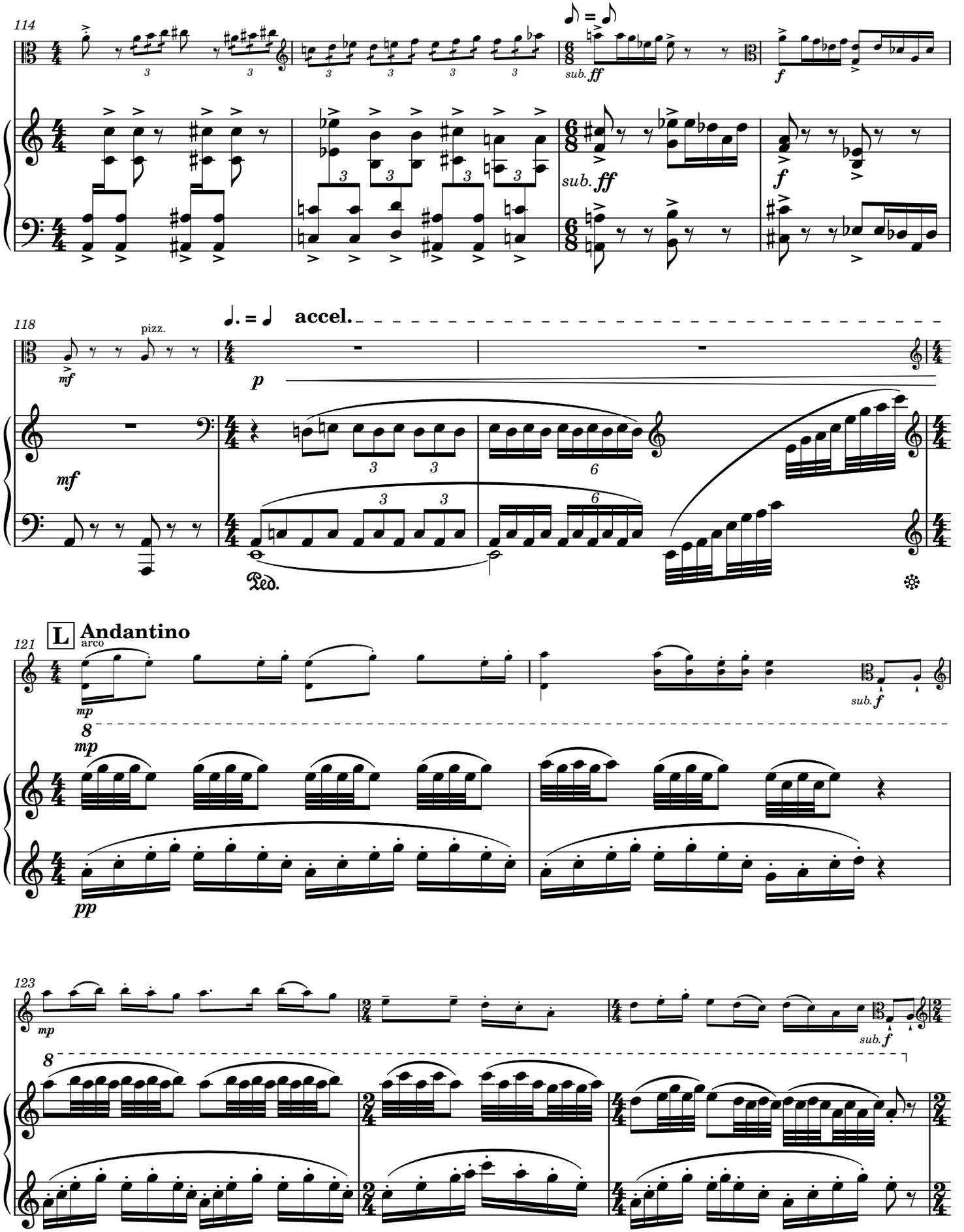

29
mf
pizz.
sub. mf
32
arco
C
pizz.
(mf)
sub. mp
sub. pp
sub. f
mp
35
pp
mp
mp
39
p dim.
41
D
arco
mp sempre
8
(dim.)
pp misterioso
Ped.

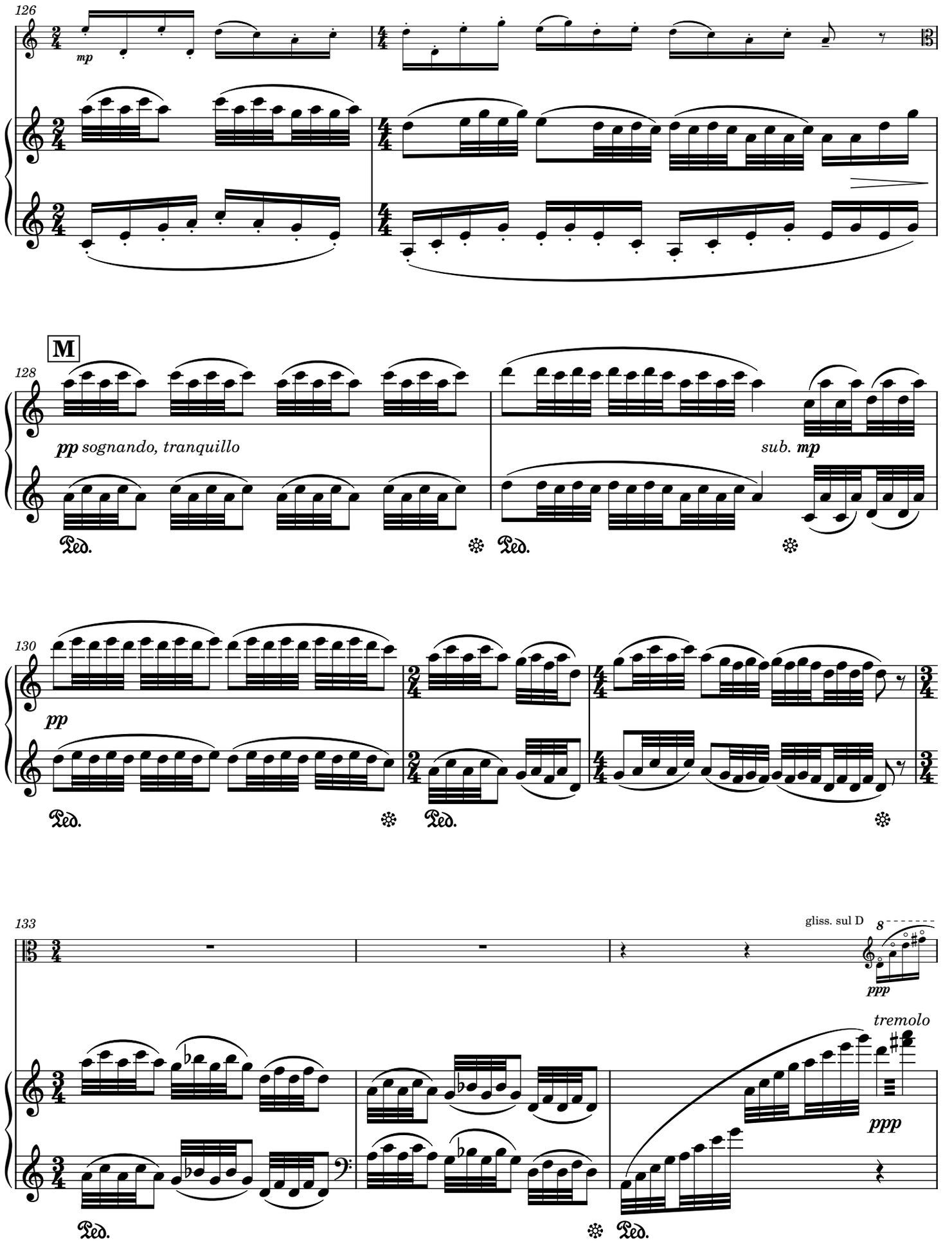

44
8
Ped.
47
8
Ped.
50
8
6
6
54
E
allarg.
Largo
ff
ff
mf
8

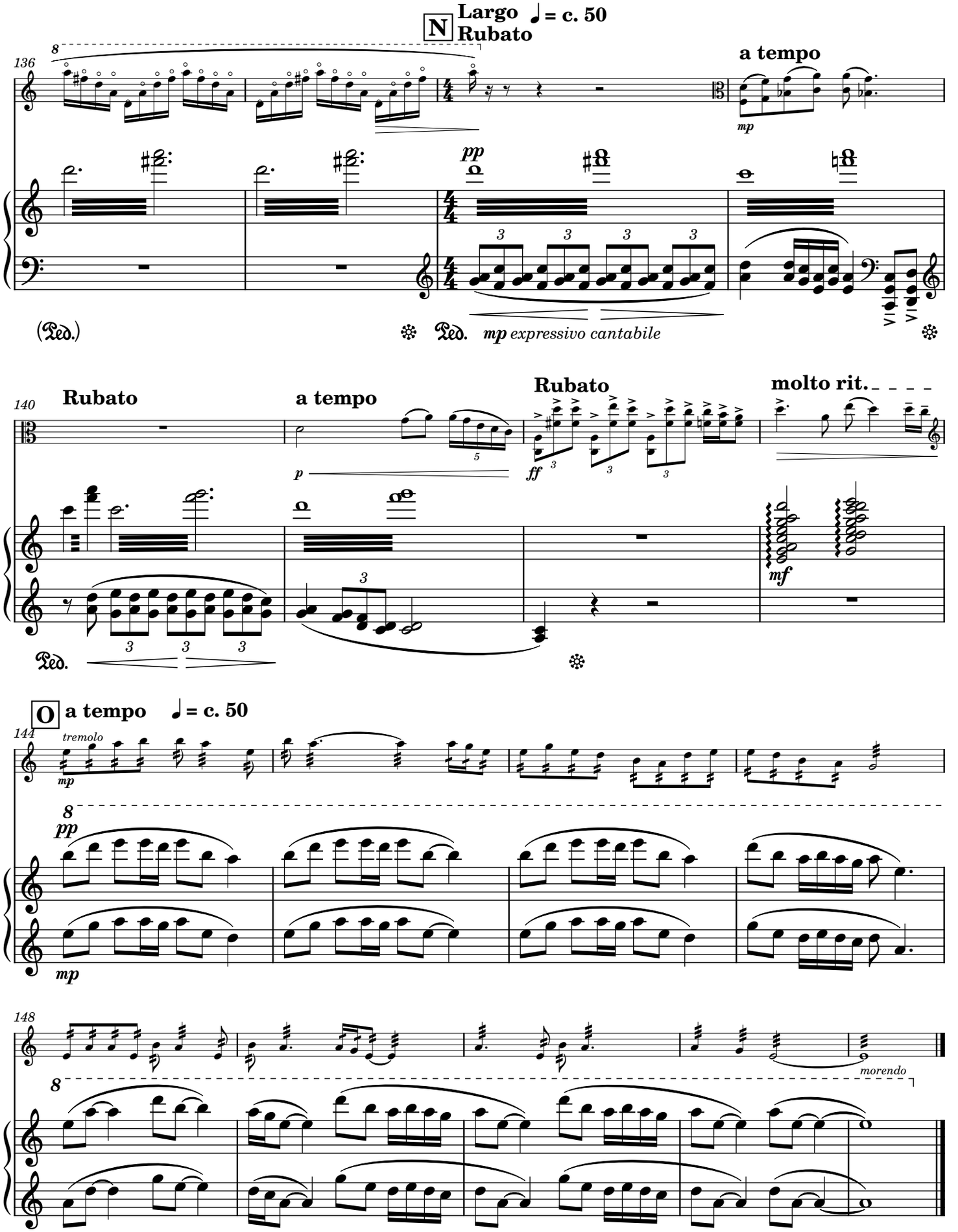

59
rall.
F Recitative
♩ = c. 50
mf
mp
gliss.
15
tr
pp
8
Ped.
63
accel.
rit.
a tempo
gliss.
mp
p
f
mp
f
Ped.
68
sul G poco sul pont. con vibrato
ff
pp
mp
gliss.
15
tr
pp
15
p
8
mf
G Adagio
♩ = c. 70
72
p tranquillo


Moderato
♩ = c. 90
80
normal
mp dolce
H
pizz.
mf animato
p
6
mf animato
85
arco
89
sul D G
I
f
sf
ff appassionato
f
93
6
6
sub. mf
sub. mf


97
101
J
on the string
106
110
K


114
sub. ff
f
sub. ff
f
118
pizz.
mf
p
accel.
mf
Ped.
121
L
Andantino
arco
mp
sub. f
8
mp
pp
123
mp
sub. f
8


126
mp
M
128
pp sognando, tranquillo
sub. mp
Ped.
130
pp
133
gliss. sul D
ppp
tremolo
ppp

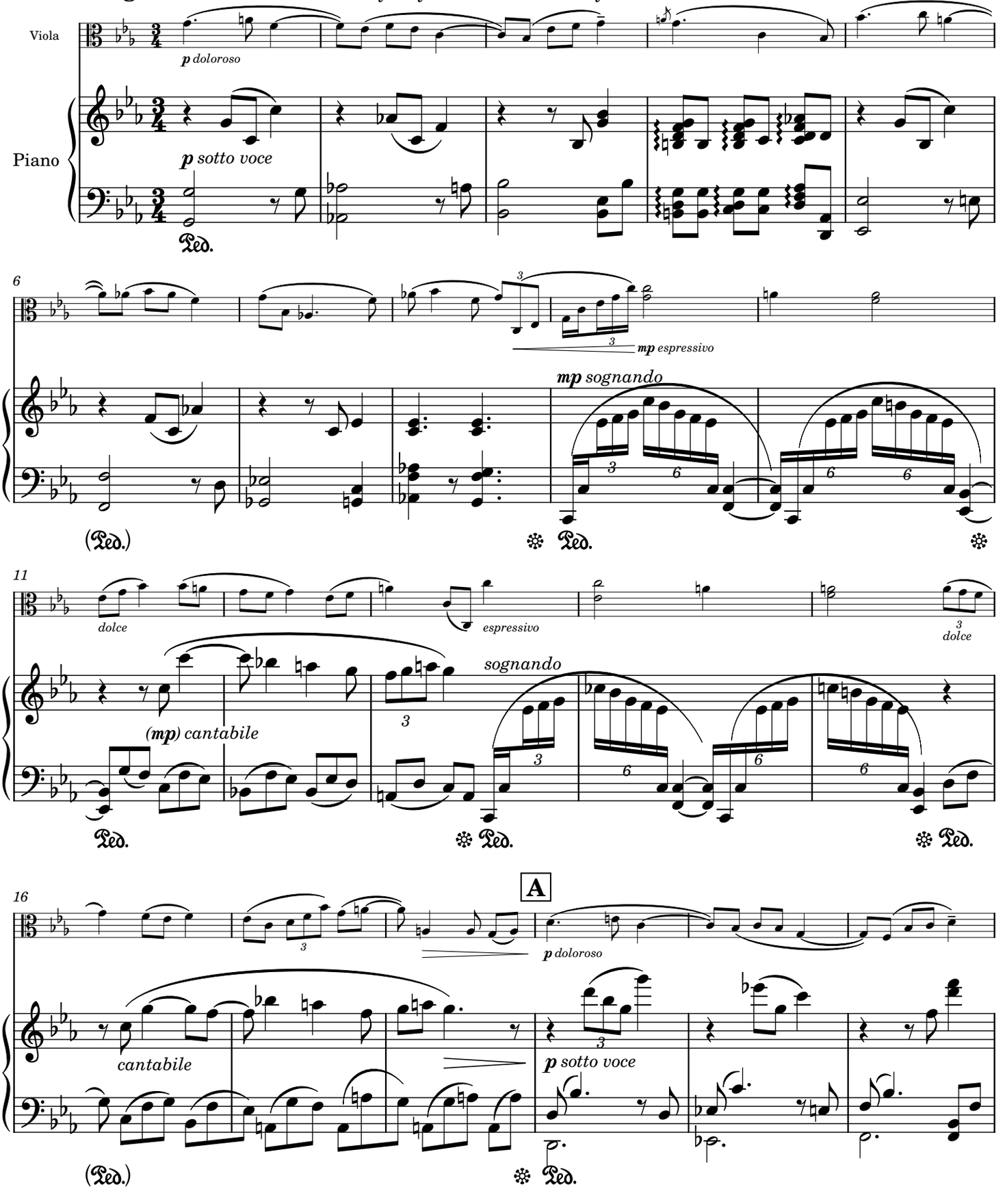

N
Largo
Rubato
♩ = c. 50
136
8
a tempo
mp
pp
(Ped.)
Ped.
mp expressive cantabile
140
Rubato
a tempo
Rubato
molto rit.
p
ff
mf
Ped.
O
a tempo
♩ = c. 50
144
tremolo
mp
8
pp
mp
148
8
morendo

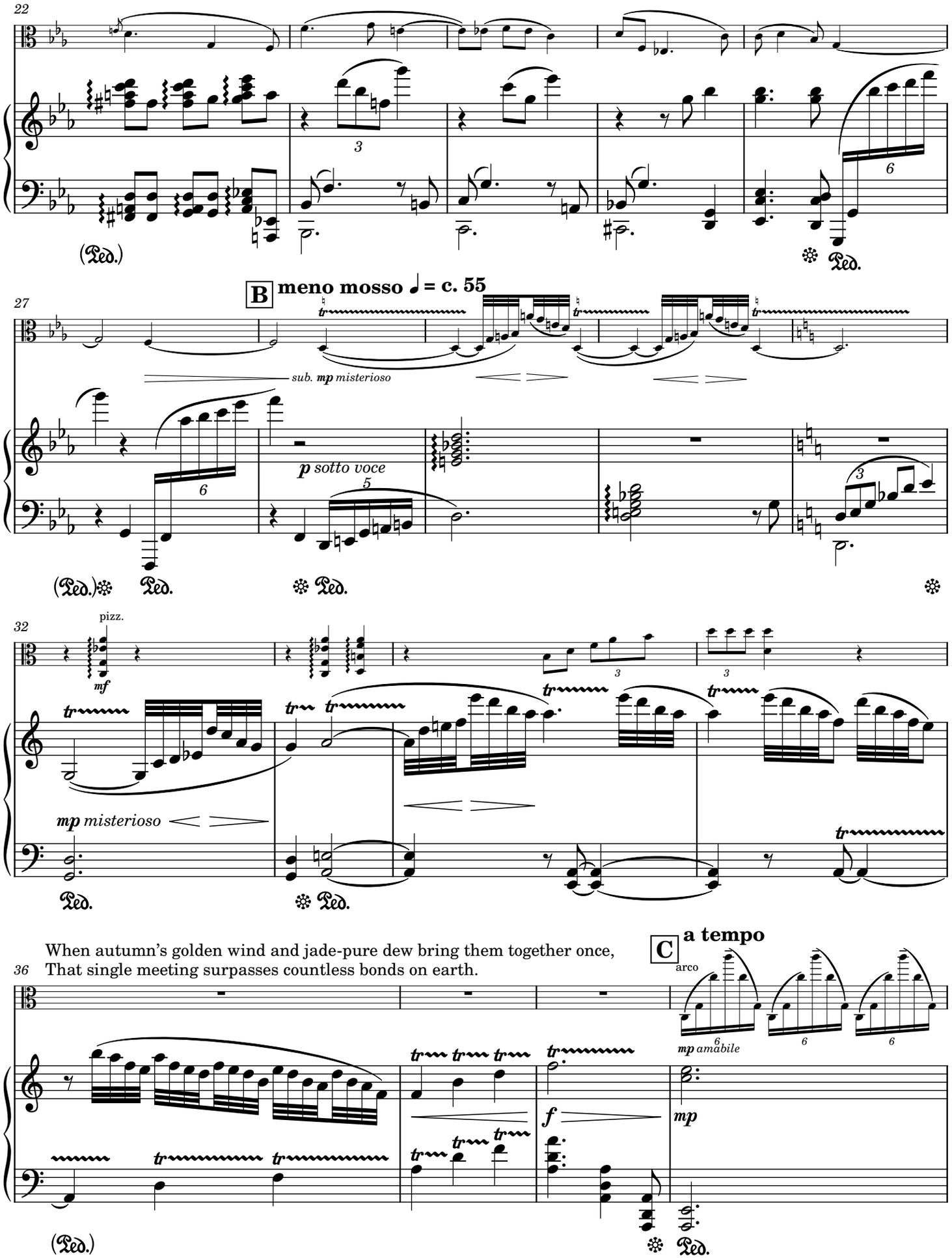
II. Sorrow and Joy

After "*Immortals at the Magpie Bridge*" (《鹊桥仙》)

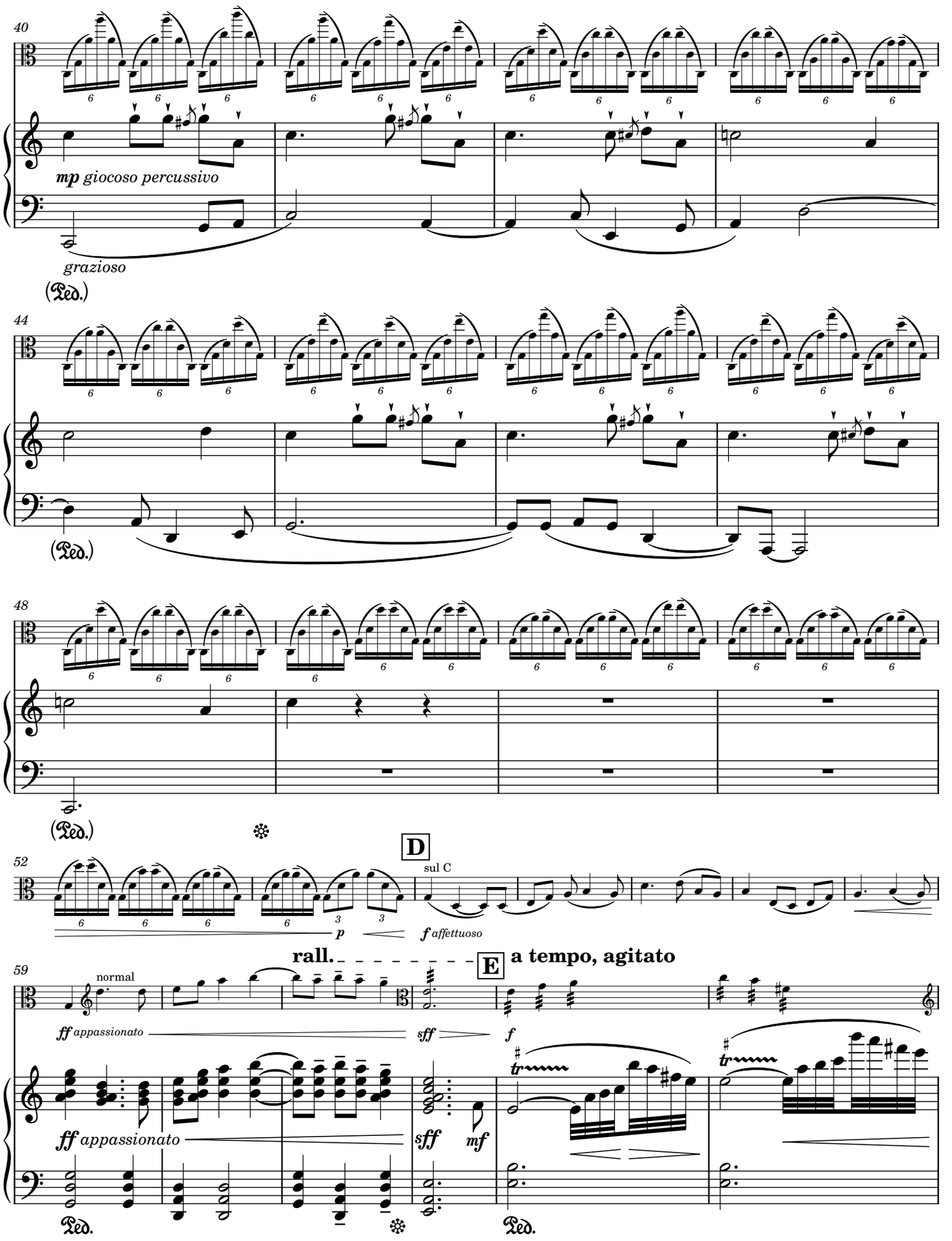
Slender clouds weave their charms,
Falling stars carry longing,
Across the Milky Way's far-off shadows they meet in secret.

Largo ♩ = c. 60



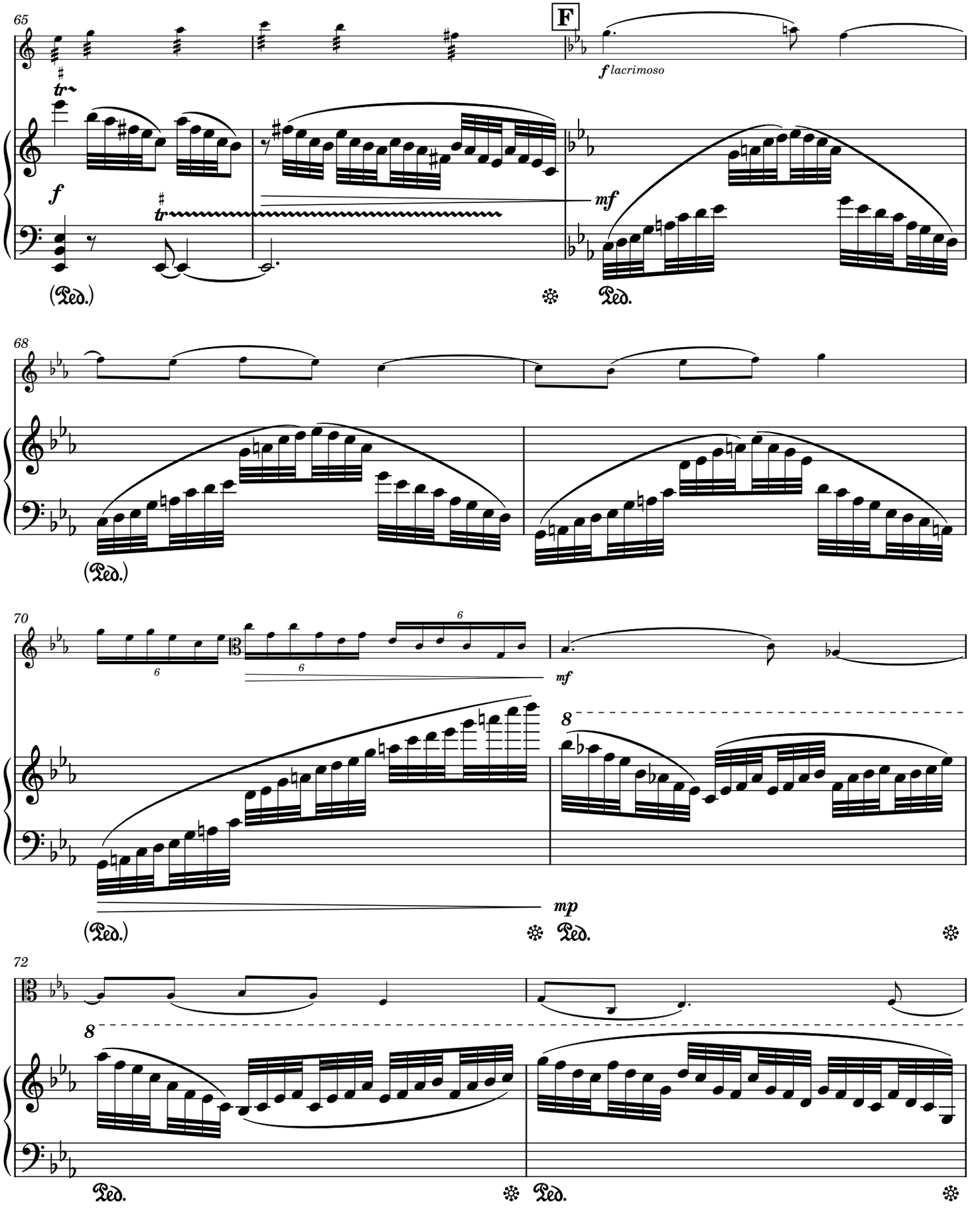


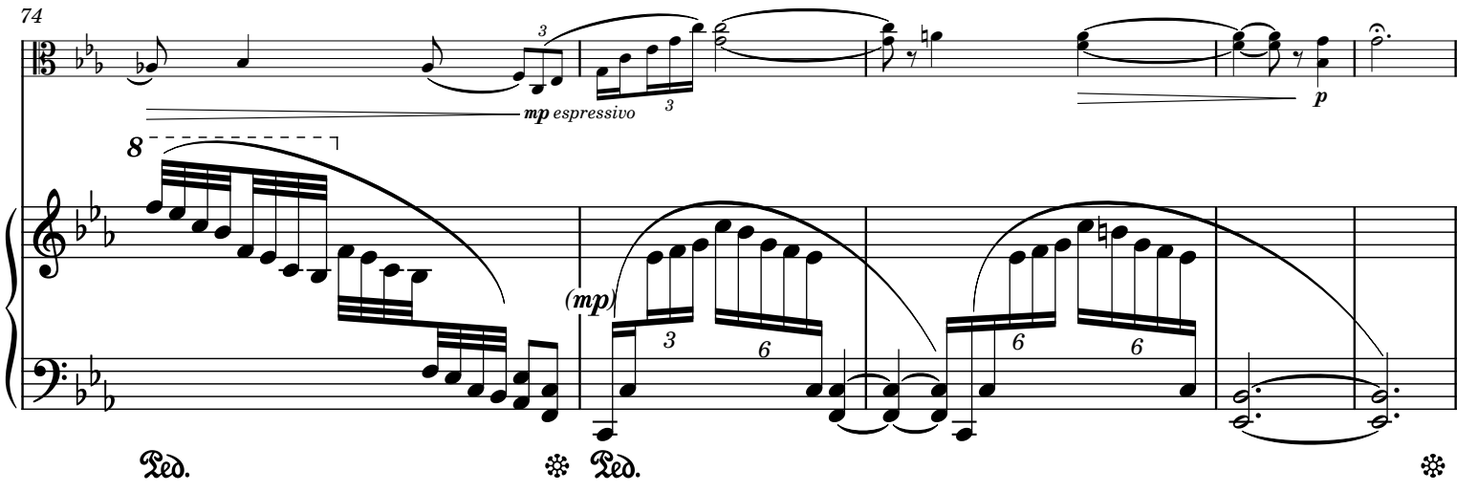
When autumn's golden wind and jade-pure dew bring them together once,
That single meeting surpasses countless bonds on earth.


40
mp giocoso percussivo
grazioso
(Ped.)
44
(Ped.)
48
(Ped.)
52
D
sul C
p
f affettuoso
rall.
E
a tempo, agitato
59
normal
ff appassionato
sff
f
ff appassionato
sff
mf
Ped.
Ped.

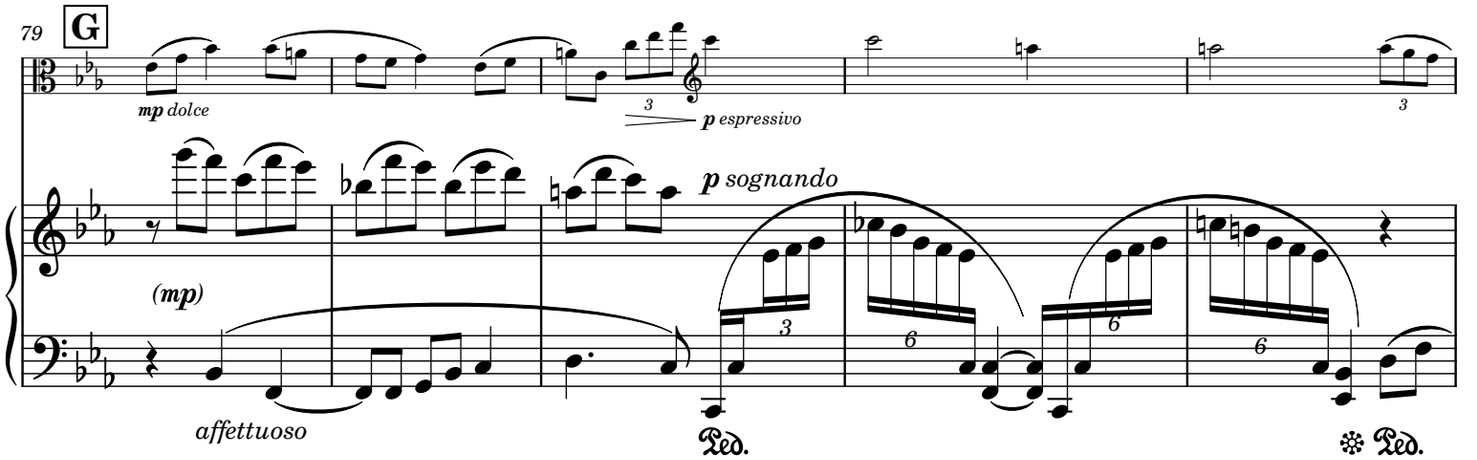
14

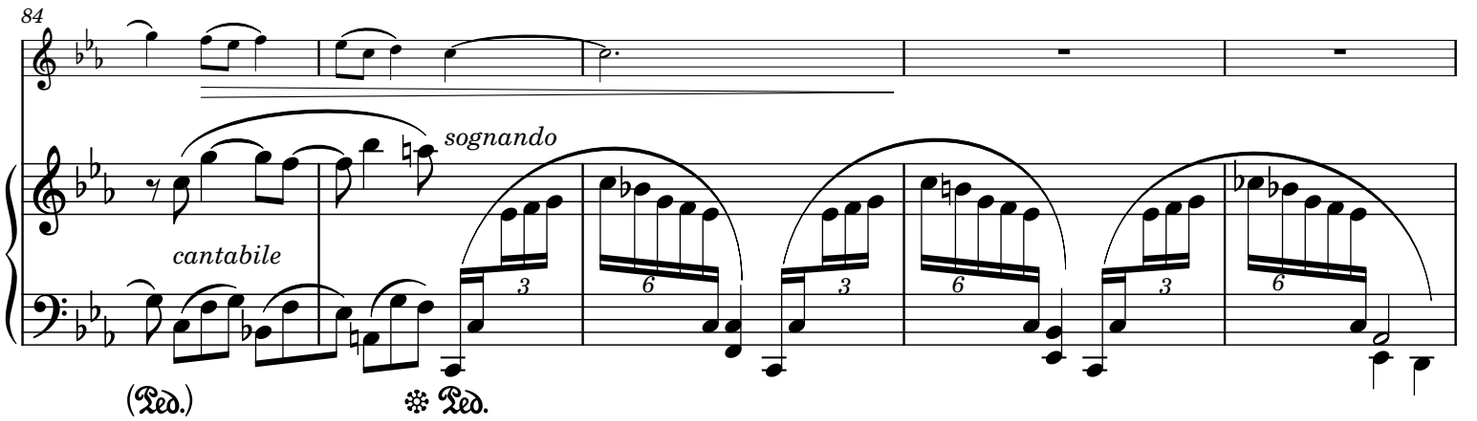
Tenderness flows like water;
Their promised night feels like a dream.
How can they bear to look back toward the magpies' bridge as they part?

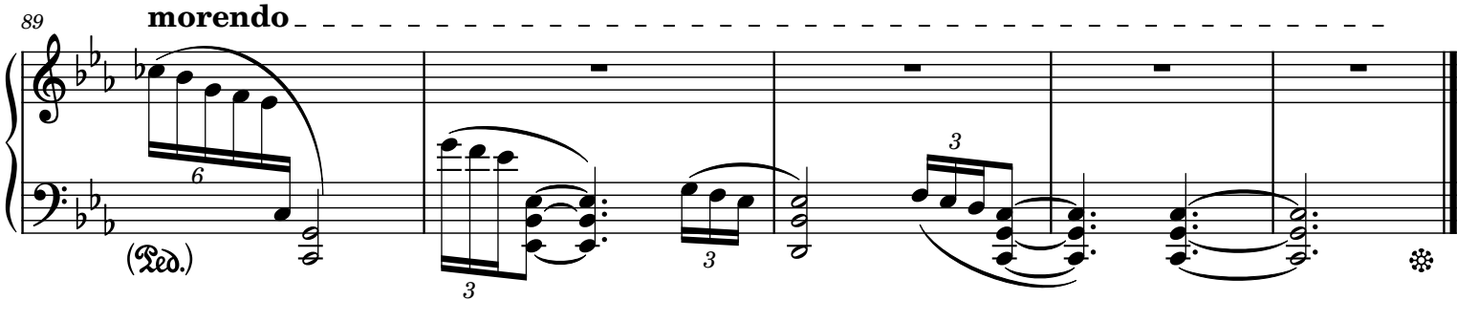




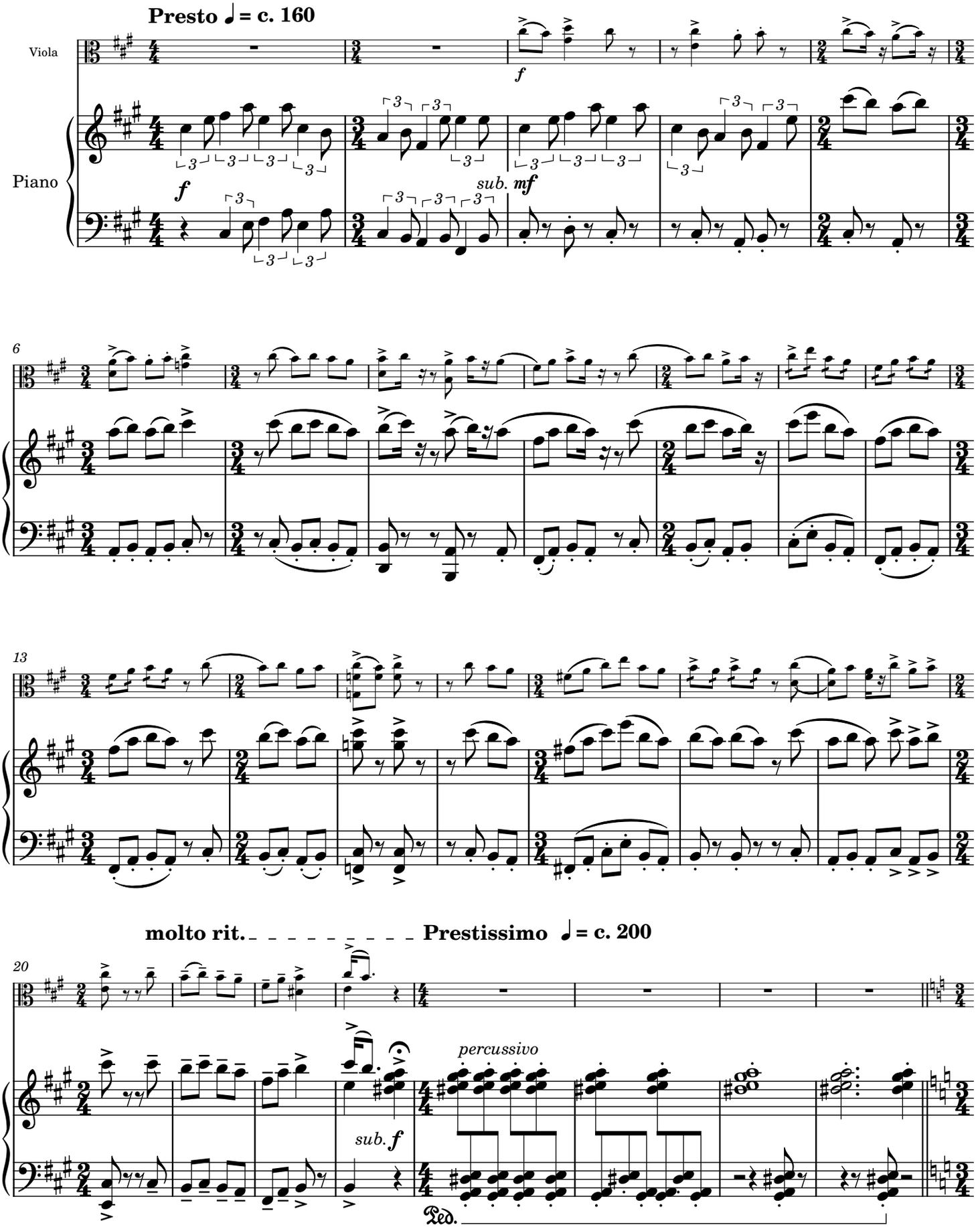
Yet if two hearts remain true over time,
Why must they cling to every dawn and dusk?

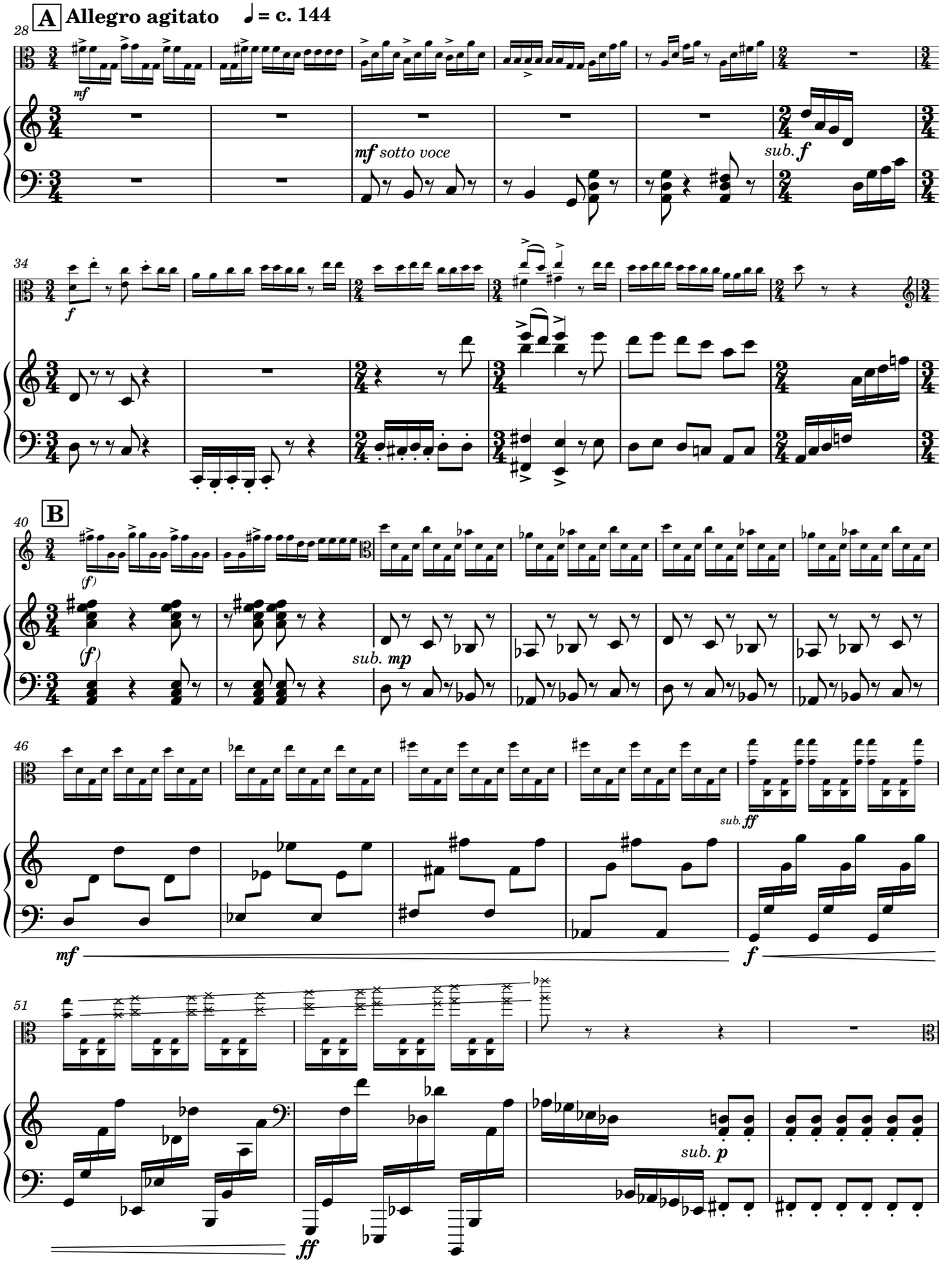


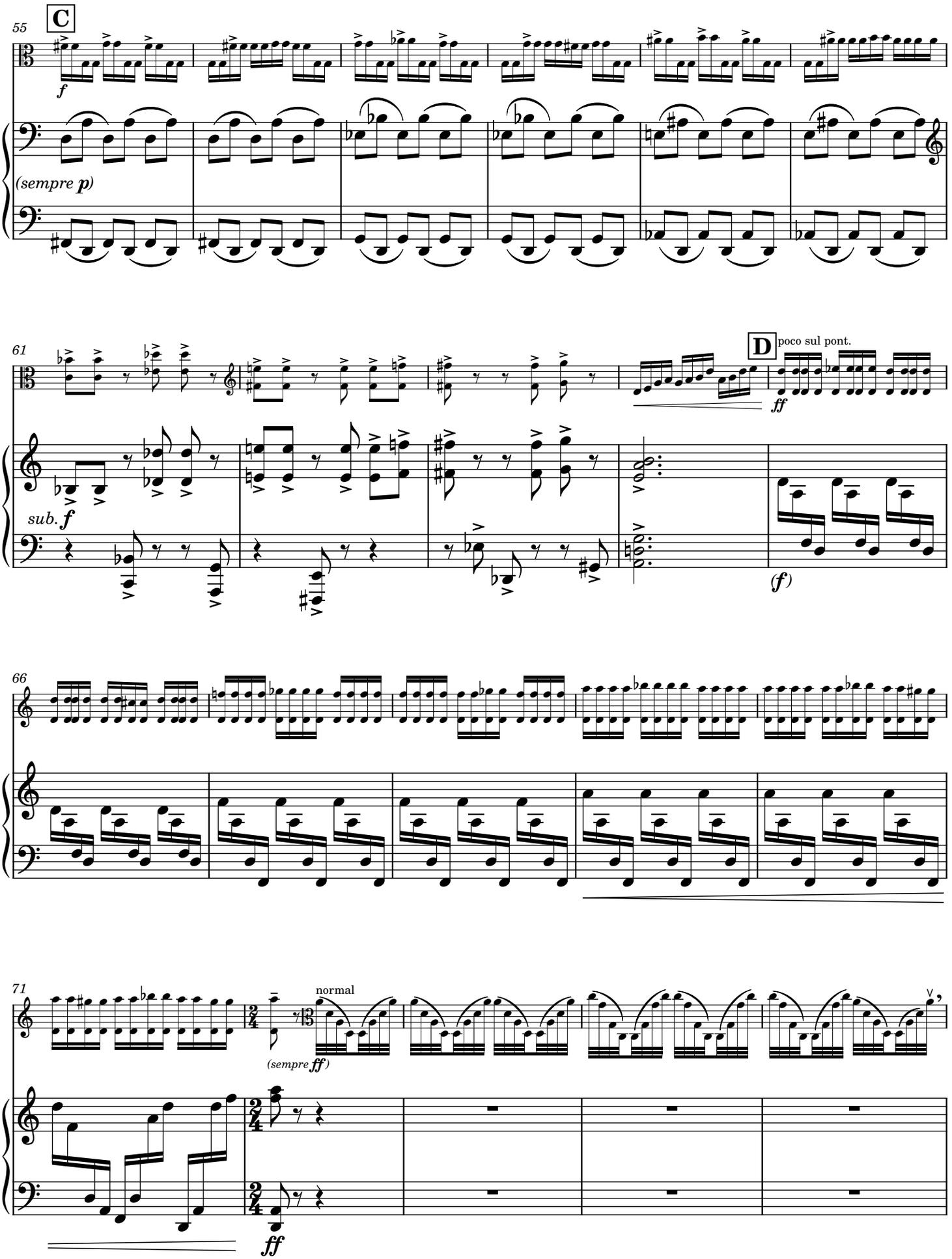


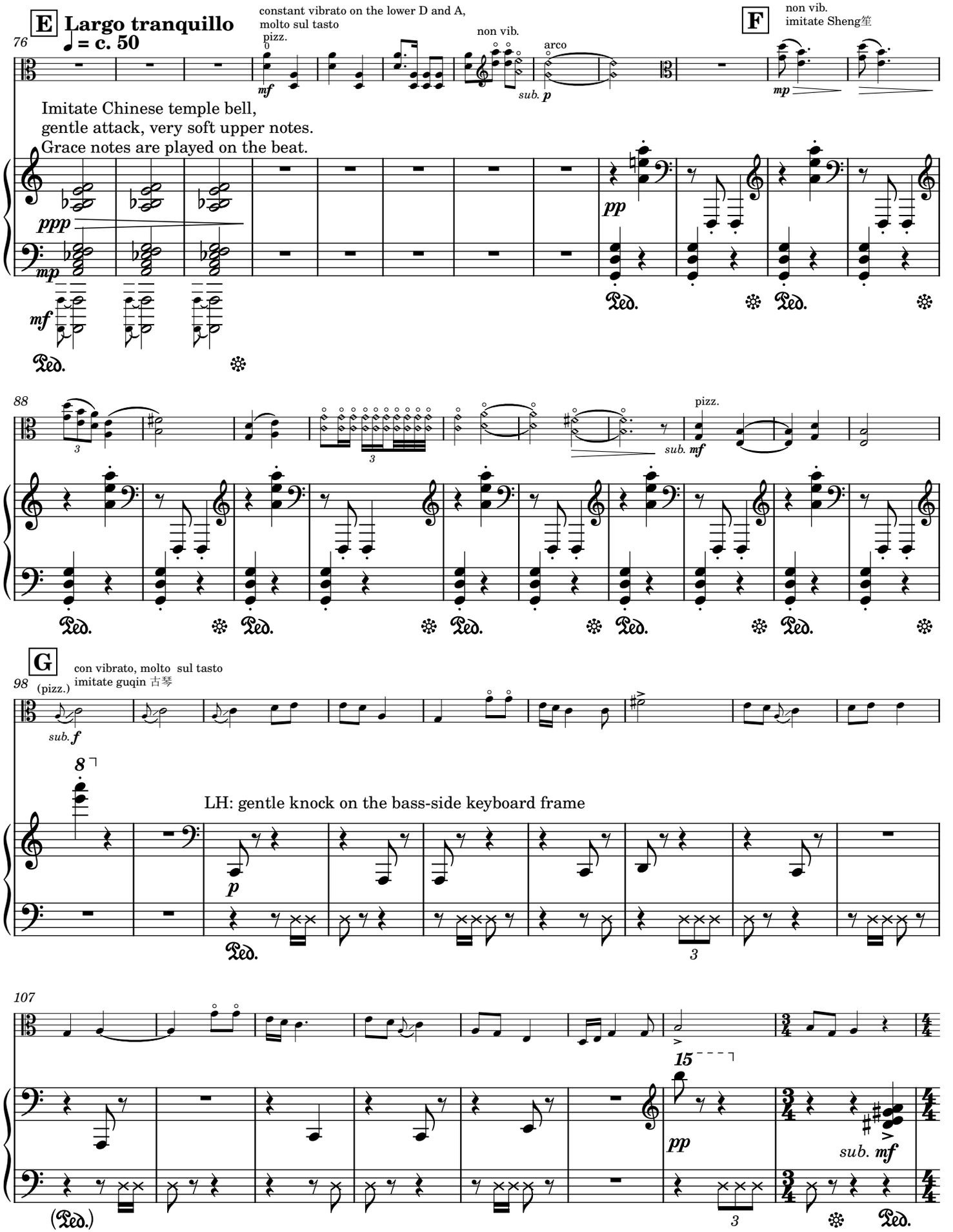


III. Right and Wrong




A
Allegro agitato
♩ = c. 144
28
mf
mf sotto voce
sub. f
34
f
B
40
(f)
sub. mp
46
sub. ff
mf
f
51
ff
sub. p


55
C
f
(sempre p)
61
D
poco sul pont.
ff
sub. f
(f)
66
71
normal
(sempre ff)
ff


E
Largo tranquillo
♩ = c. 50
76
constant vibrato on the lower D and A,
molto sul tasto
pizz.
non vib.
arco
sub. p
F
non vib.
imitate Sheng笙
mp
Imitate Chinese temple bell,
gentle attack, very soft upper notes.
Grace notes are played on the beat.
ppp
mp
mf
pp
Ped.
88
pizz.
sub. mf
G
98
(pizz.)
con vibrato, molto sul tasto
imitate guqin 古琴
sub. f
LH: gentle knock on the bass-side keyboard frame
p
107
15
pp
sub. mf
(Ped.)

H **Prestissimo** ♩ = c. 200

Moderato ♩ = c. 120

115

arco

percussivo

(Ped.)

mf

p *mf*

I **Fugato**

121

arco

f

(mf)

8

127

J

sub. mf marcato

f

(mf)

8

132

f

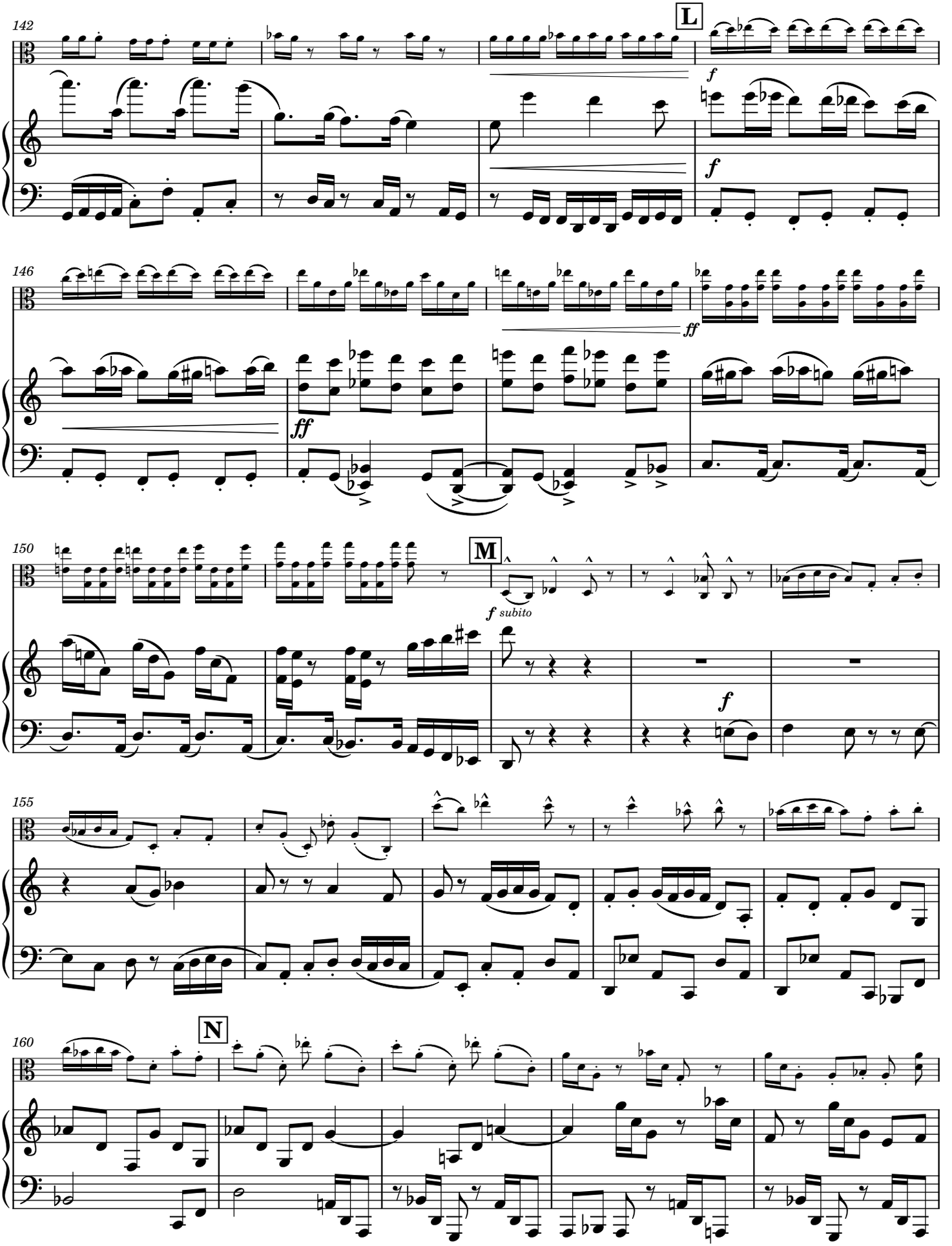
137

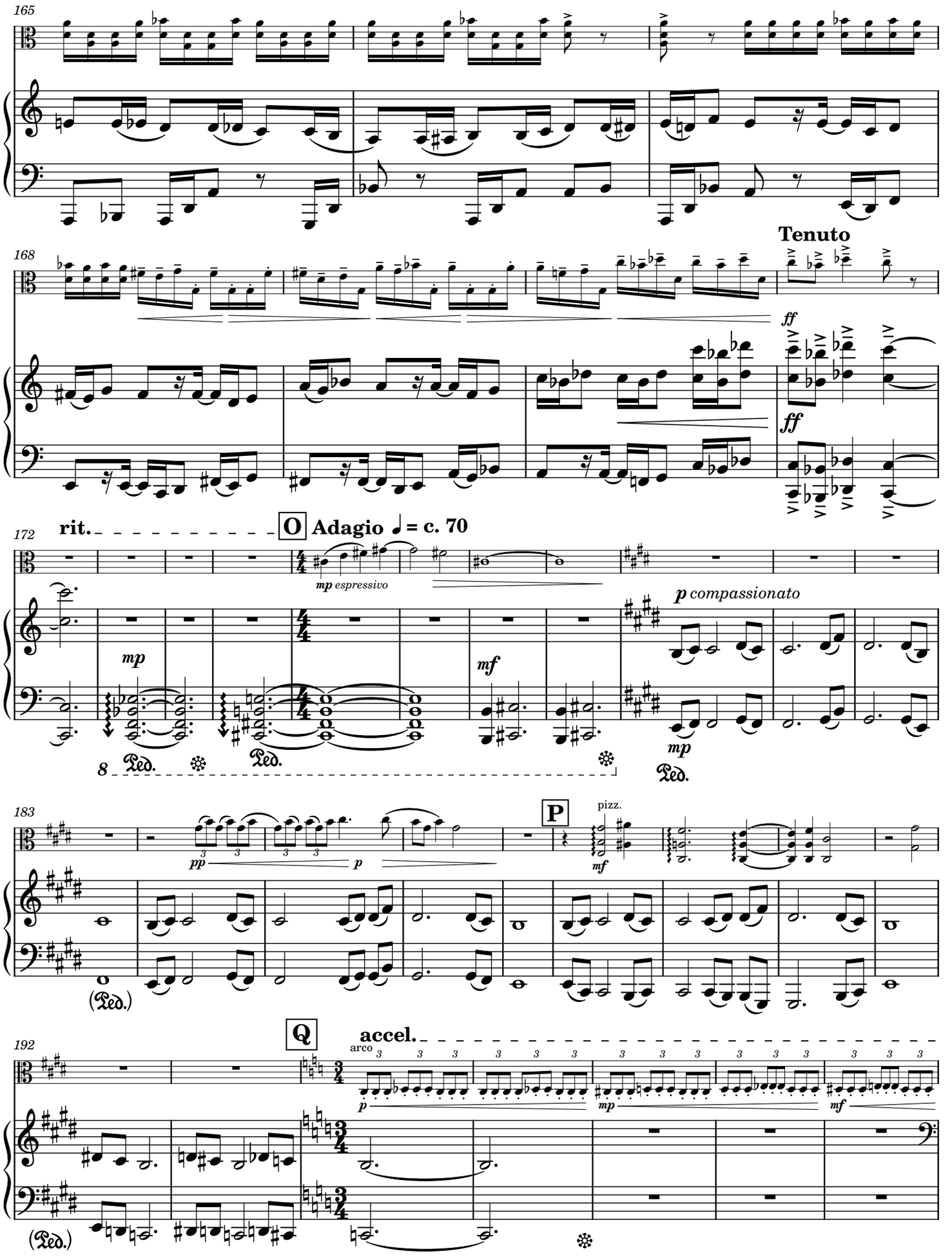
K

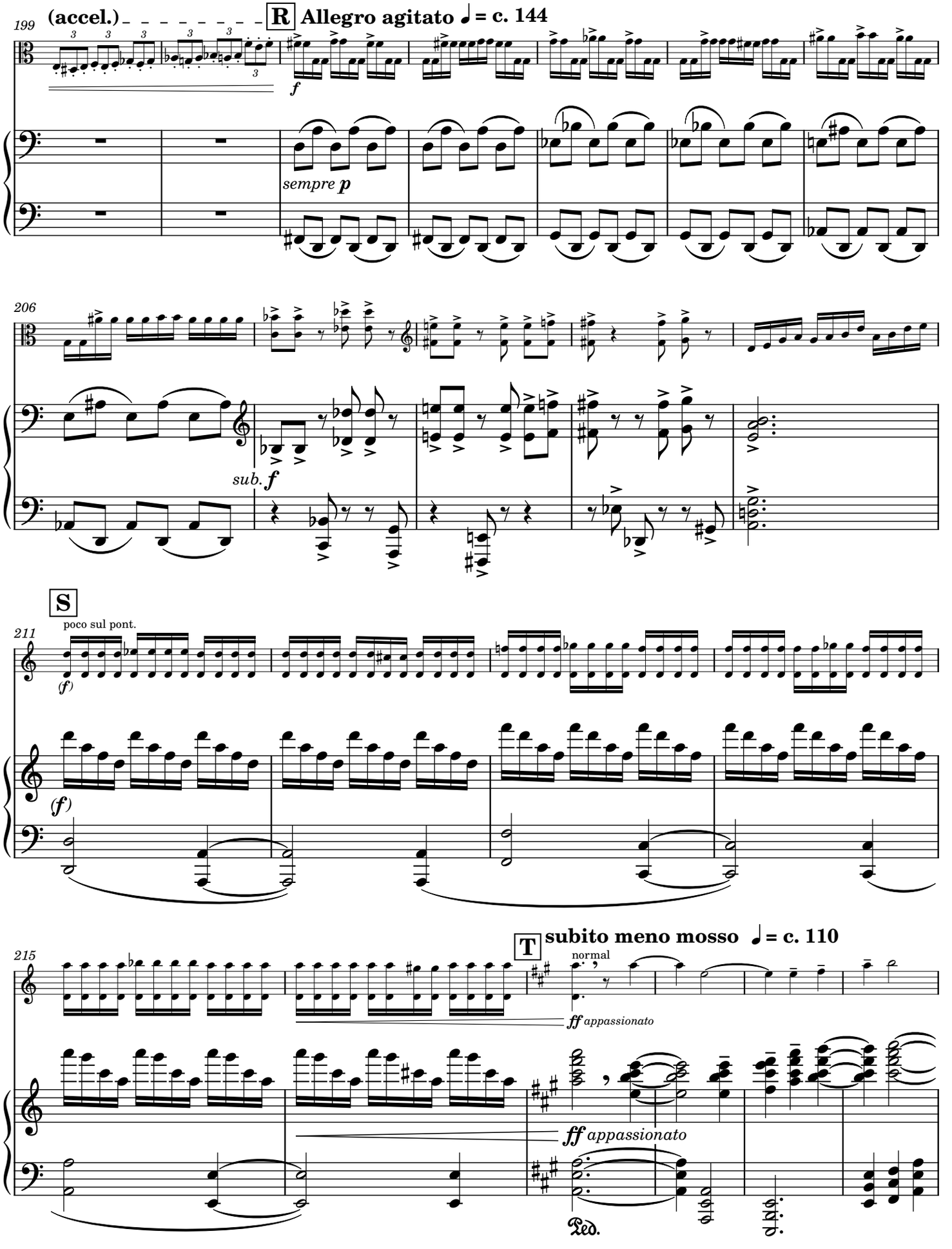
mf agitato

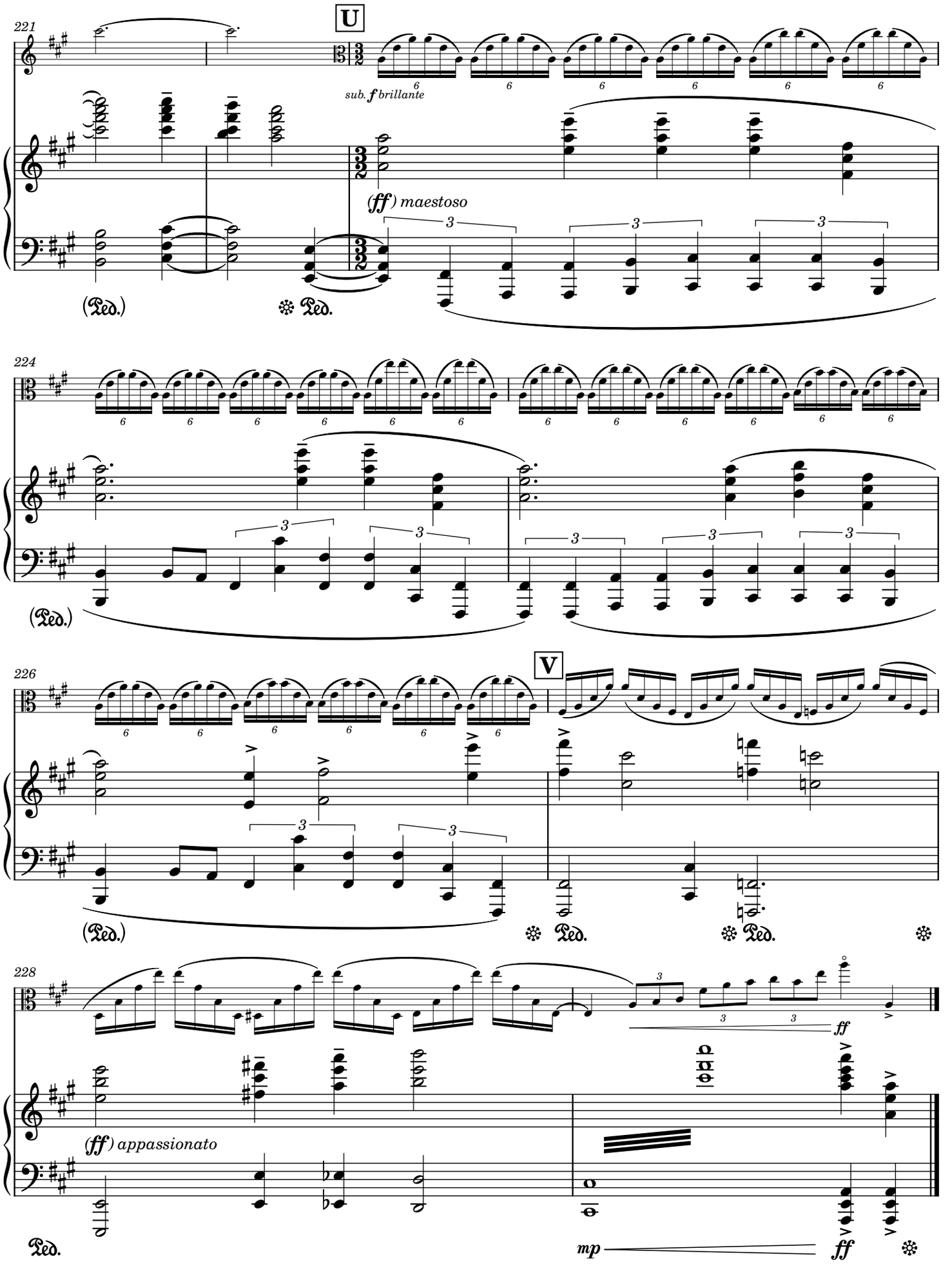
sub. mf

sub. f


142
L
f
f
146
ff
ff
150
M
f subito
f
155
160
N


165
168
Tenuto
ff
ff
172
rit.
O
Adagio ♩ = c. 70
mp espressivo
mp
mf
p compassionato
mp
Ped.
8
183
P
pizz.
pp
p
mf
(Ped.)
192
Q
accel.
arco
p
mp
mf
(Ped.)


199
(accel.)
R
Allegro agitato ♩ = c. 144
f
sempre p
206
sub. f
S
poco sul pont.
211
(f)
(f)
215
T
subito meno mosso ♩ = c. 110
normal
ff appassionato
ff appassionato
Ped.


221
U
sub. f brillante
(ff) maestoso
(Ped.)
Ped.
224
(Ped.)
226
V
(Ped.)
Ped.
Ped.
228
(ff) appassionato
Ped.
mp
ff

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