# *Imperatives*

*for string quartet*

*Part for violin II*

*Nigel Morgan*

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# *Imperatives*

## *for string quartet*

***Nigel Morgan***

**About The Piece**

Imperatives are 'doing words' that carry with them a task, a situation, a request, a dream. Creative practitioners are keen on such words and often use them to initiate a starting point, an emotional state, a characteristic. Their very singularity can lend an elegance, economy and directness to an artist's thoughts and actions. Visual artists use them frequently as titles, authors too, but musicians perhaps less frequently.

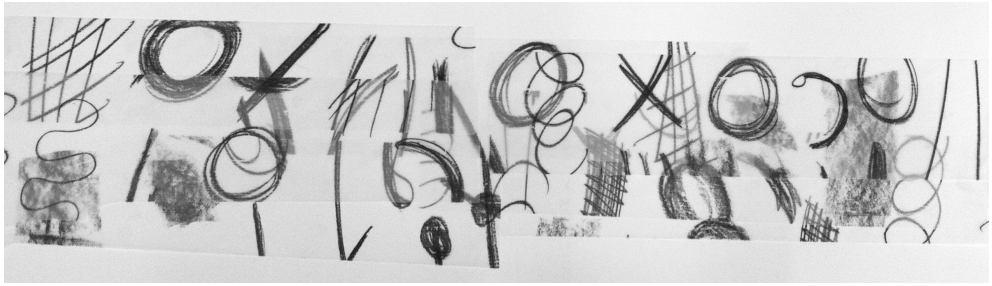
In a similar spirit the composer has gathered a list of imperatives, and choosing *isolate* from the list, reacted to it by deciding to 'isolate' one instrument from the quartet as a soloist. The structural device of the isorhythm is employed. Beloved of vocal composers of the 14th Century, Lassus, Dunstable, and Okeghem, the isorhythmic motet became a popular form. This was often based on a plainchant that acted as a thread onto which further threads (parts / voices) were stitched or woven. Thus the first movement of *Imperatives* was created to feature a middle section in which the second violin holds the thread against a background weave of a string trio. The outer movements 'look' similar, and indeed in their rhythmic ordering they are. But the pitch content is entirely different.

The idea of a solo set against a backdrop of the remaining instruments in a quartet is the dominant theme of the entire work. Each instrument takes a turn as a solo presence against a variety of different backdrops. The movement titles, imperative words, are mostly spur of the moment inventions devised to hang the musical content, but not necessarily to drive it contextually.

The threads from which the first three movements are devised come from random generations of groups of integers. When converted to pitch, they form an asemic text of music. The word *asemic* is used to mean having no semantic content. The letters that make up the pitch collections are known but their ordering, as words and sonic phrases, is mysterious and seemingly beyond reason. In this I have been much influenced by the speculative ordering of found objects into 'a language' by the artist Alice Fox.

*silk sleeve ah no sound*
*jade courtyard ah dust grow*
*empty room cold and still*
*fallen leaf lean on doubled door-bar*
*peer-after that beautiful woman ah*
*where find*
*feel my heart not-yet at-ease*

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
With dust the marble courtyard filled.
No footfalls echo on the floor,
Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door
For she,my pride,my lovely one is lost,
And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.



The final movement departs from ascemic text to that of a celebrated poem from the Chinese. This poem remembers the deceased courtesan Lu-fu-jen beloved of the Han emperor Wu-ti. In his grief he once ordered a sorcerer with an imperative: to *summon* her back to life. His poem is about what is missing, about silence and stillness, emptiness, dust and fallen leaves, and above all an anguished longing. The 'thread' is the text itself, first in Chinese (with a character by character translation) then in two translations into English, by H.A.Giles and by Arthur Waley.

罗袂兮无声
玉墀兮尘生。
虚房冷而寂寞
落叶依于重扃。
望彼美之女兮安得
感余心之未宁。

The sound of her silk skirt has stopped.
On the marble pavement dust grows.
Her empty room is cold and still.
Fallen leaves are pilled against the doors.
Longing for that lovely lady
How can I bring my aching heart to rest?

Whilst solo / background is a constant this duality is amplified by a simplicity of rhythmic utterance. In each movement there are only ever two rhythmic strands present at any one time, and when the quartet do play *tutti*, there is usually just one strand, the music appearing to be choral-like, four voices singing / playing as one.

The music is dedicated to the Spektral Quartet of Chicago, USA, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of quartet playing.

**Notes for performance**

The pitch range or compass for each instrument sits by and large within that found in Baroque music for stringed instruments. The music is either homogeneous in four parts or features a solo instrument with accompaniment. Dynamics and expressive markings have been kept to a minimum to encourage performers to view such instructions as a guide, no more. In the first and third movements the solos for 2nd violin and viola respectively might be played with a Baroque simplicity of bowing action, short precise bow strokes and articulation, little or no vibrato. The second and fourth movements suggest a more expressive and full-bodied tone and delivery.

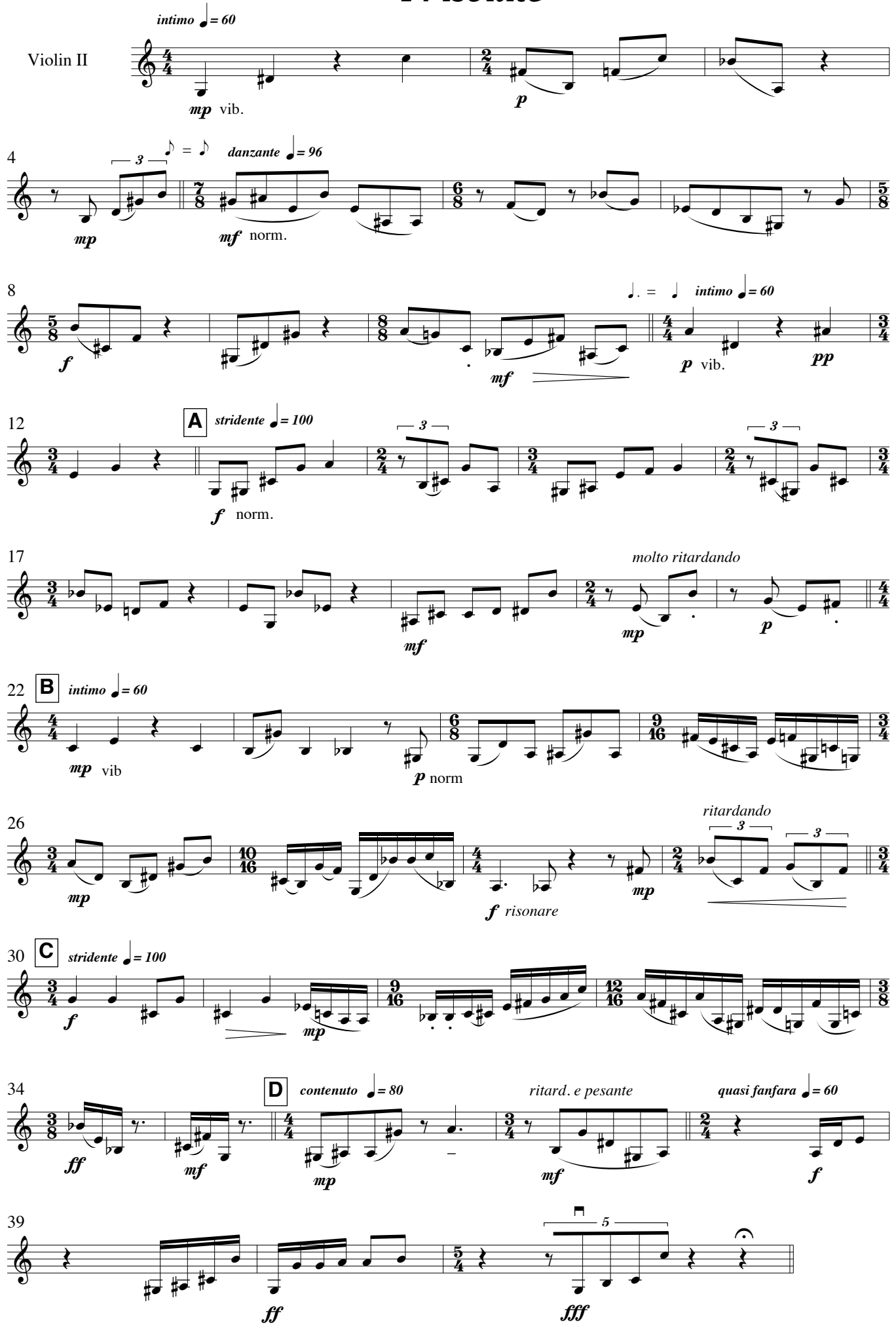
**I – Isolate**
1763, from French *isolé* "isolated" (17c.) + English *-ate*. The French word is from Italian isolato, from Latin *insulatus* "made into an island," from *insula* "island." The French word was used at first in English (*isole*, also isole'd, c. 1750), then after *isolate* became an English word, isolated became its past participle.

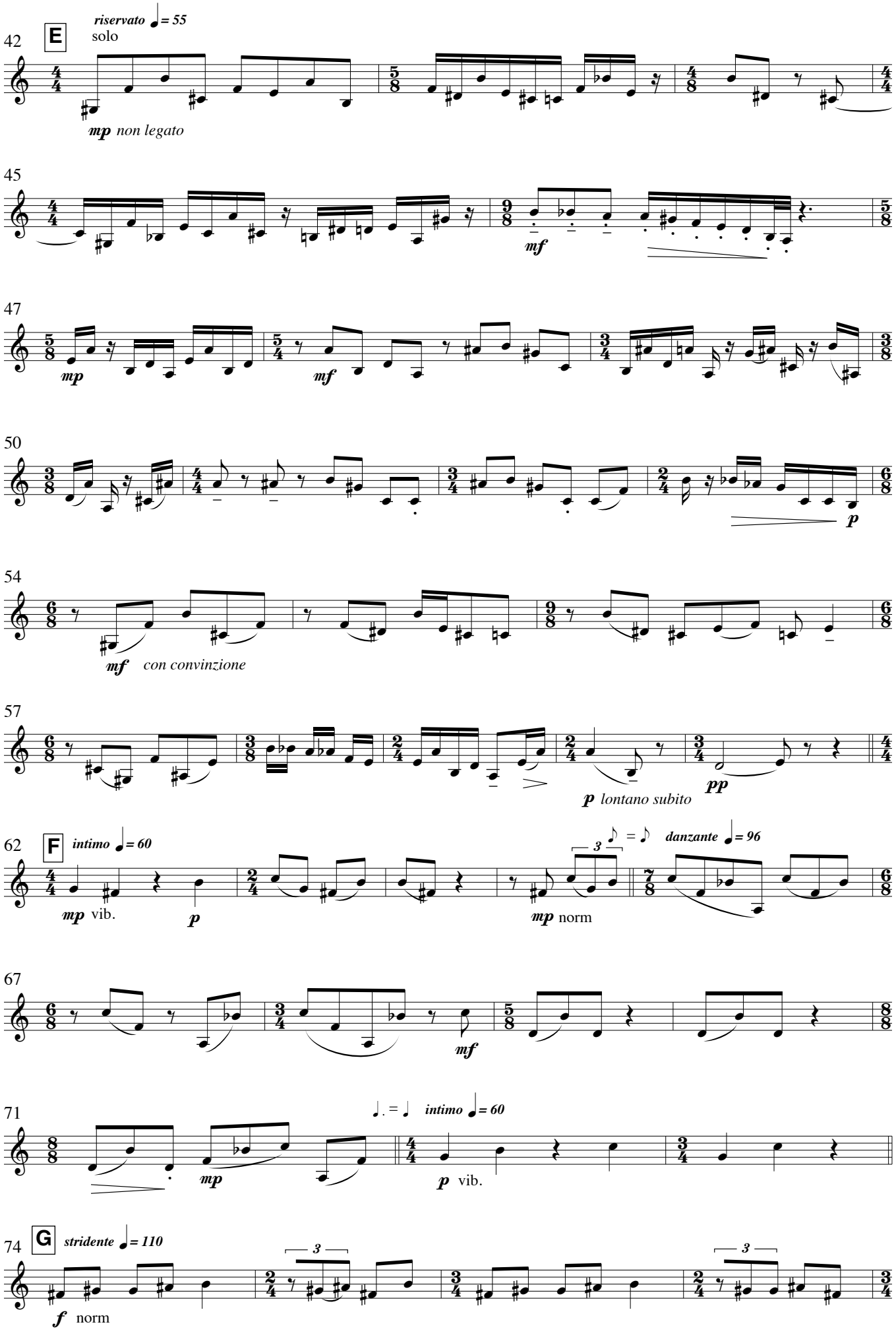
**II – Dispel**
c. 1400, *dispelen*, from Latin *dispellere* "drive apart," from *dis-* "away" + *pellere* "to drive, push". Since the meaning is "to drive away in different directions" it should not have as an object a single, indivisible thing (you can dispel suspicion, but not an accusation).

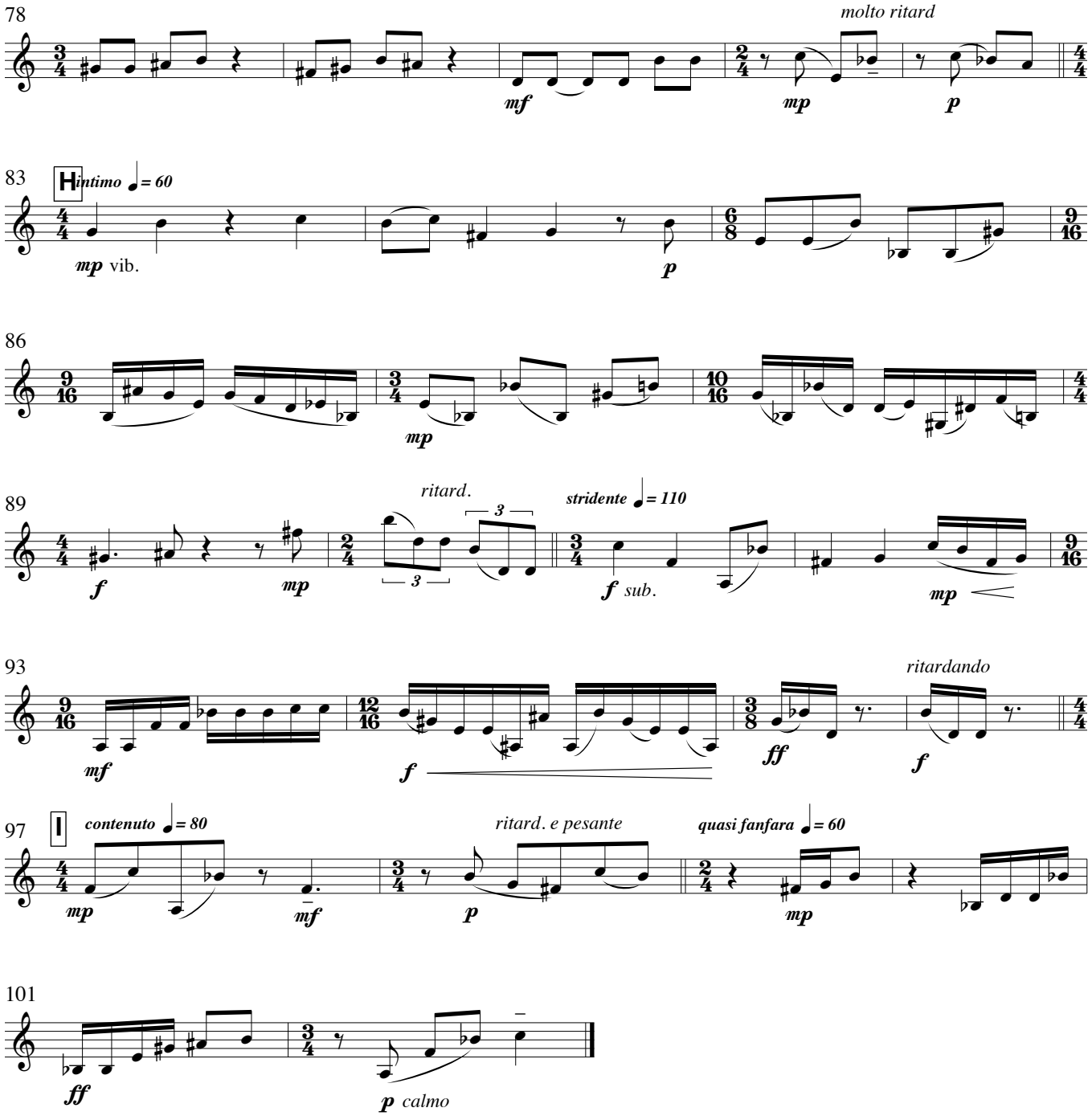
**III – Imbibe**
late 14c., from Old French *imbiber*, embiber "to soak into," from Latin imbibere "absorb, drink in, inhale," from assimilated form of *in-* "into, in, on, upon" + *bibere* "to drink," related to *potare* "to drink," from PIE *po(i)- "to drink". Figurative sense of "mentally drink in" (knowledge, ideas, etc.) was the main one in classical Latin, first attested in English 1550s.

**IV – Summon**
c. 1200, "call, send for, ask the presence of," especially "call, cite, or notify by authority to be at a certain place at a certain time" (late 13c.), from Anglo-French *sumunre* and directly from Old French *somonre*, variant of *sumundre*, *somondre* "summon," from Vulgar Latin *summundre* "to call, cite," from Latin *summonere* "hint to, remind privately," from *sub* "under" + *monere* "warn, advise". In part also from Medieval Latin use of *summonere*. Meaning "arouse, excite to action".

# *I : isolate*


Violin II
intimo ♩= 60
mp vib.
p
4
danzante ♩= 96
mp
mf norm.
8
f
mf
intimo ♩= 60
p vib.
pp
12
A
stridente ♩= 100
f norm.
17
molto ritardando
mf
mp
p
22
B
intimo ♩= 60
mp vib
p norm
26
ritardando
mp
f risonare
30
C
stridente ♩= 100
f
mp
34
D
contenuto ♩= 80
ritard. e pesante
quasi fanfara ♩= 60
ff
mf
mp
mf
f
39
ff
fff


42
E
riservato ♩= 55
solo
mp non legato
45
mf
47
mp
mf
50
p
54
mf con convinzione
57
p lontano subito
pp
62
F
intimo ♩= 60
mp vib.
p
3
♪ = ♪
danzante ♩= 96
mp norm
67
mf
71
♩. = ♩
intimo ♩= 60
mp
p vib.
74
G
stridente ♩= 110
3
3
f norm


78
molto ritard
mf
mp
p
83
H
intimo ♩= 60
mp vib.
p
86
mp
89
ritard.
3
3
stridente ♩= 110
f
mp
f sub.
mp
93
ritardando
mf
f
ff
f
97
I
contenuto ♩= 80
ritard. e pesante
quasi fanfara ♩= 60
mp
mf
p
mp
101
ff
p calmo

# *II : dispel*

*potentoso e magico* ♩ = 60

Violin II

*pp*

quasi sul pont

*staccato sempre*

4

7

11

J

15

18

K

21

25

29

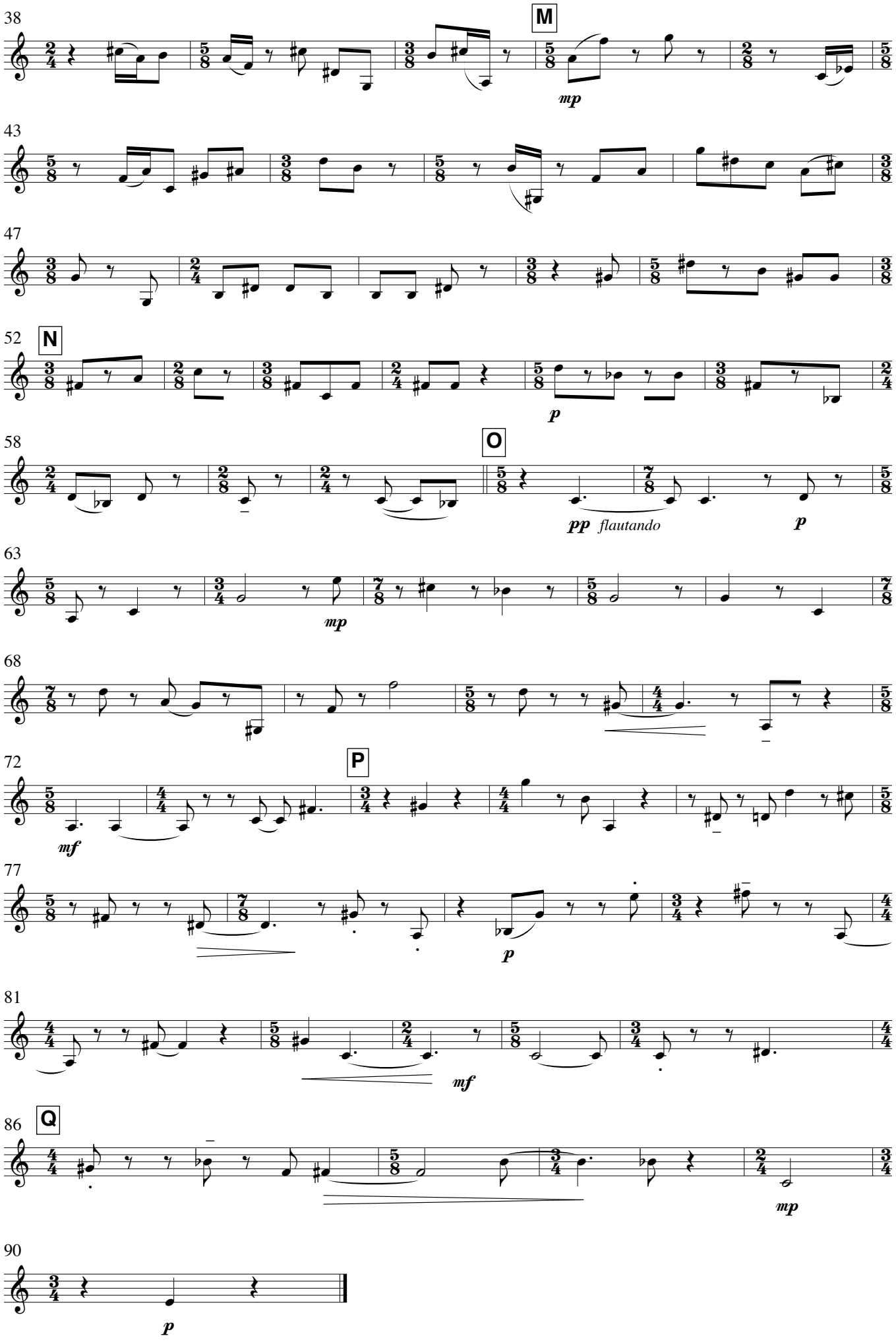
L

*meno staccato*

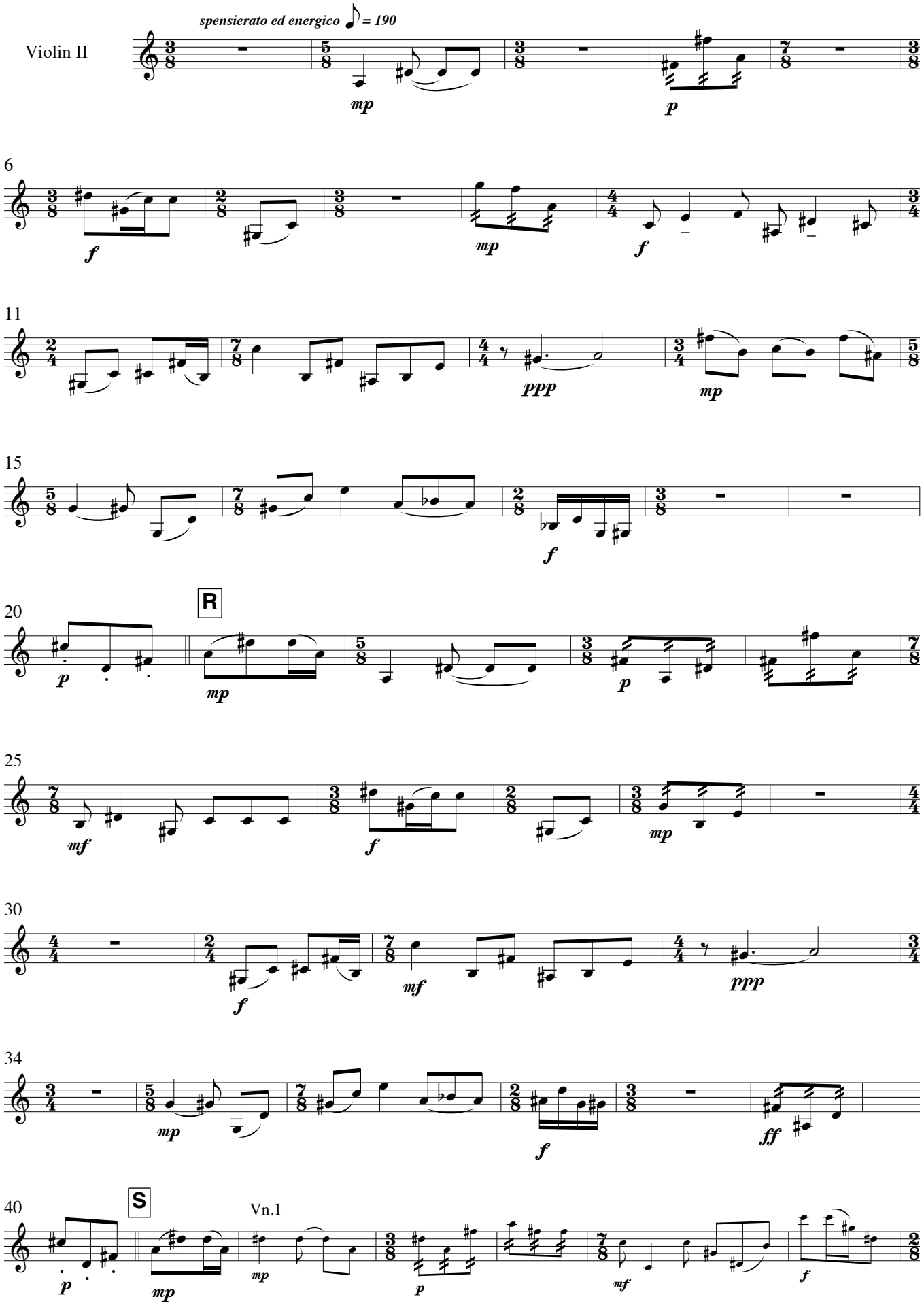
33

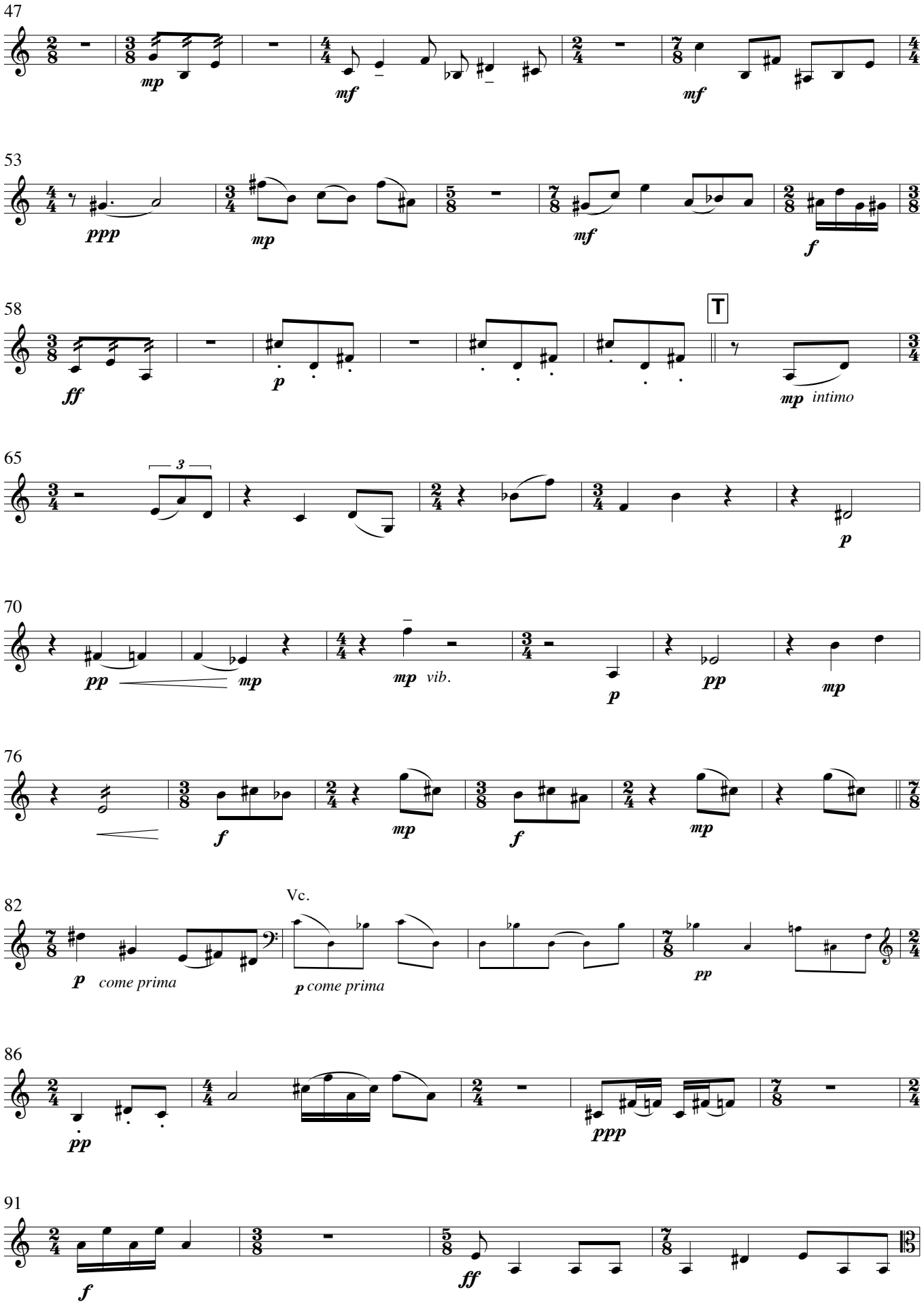
nat.

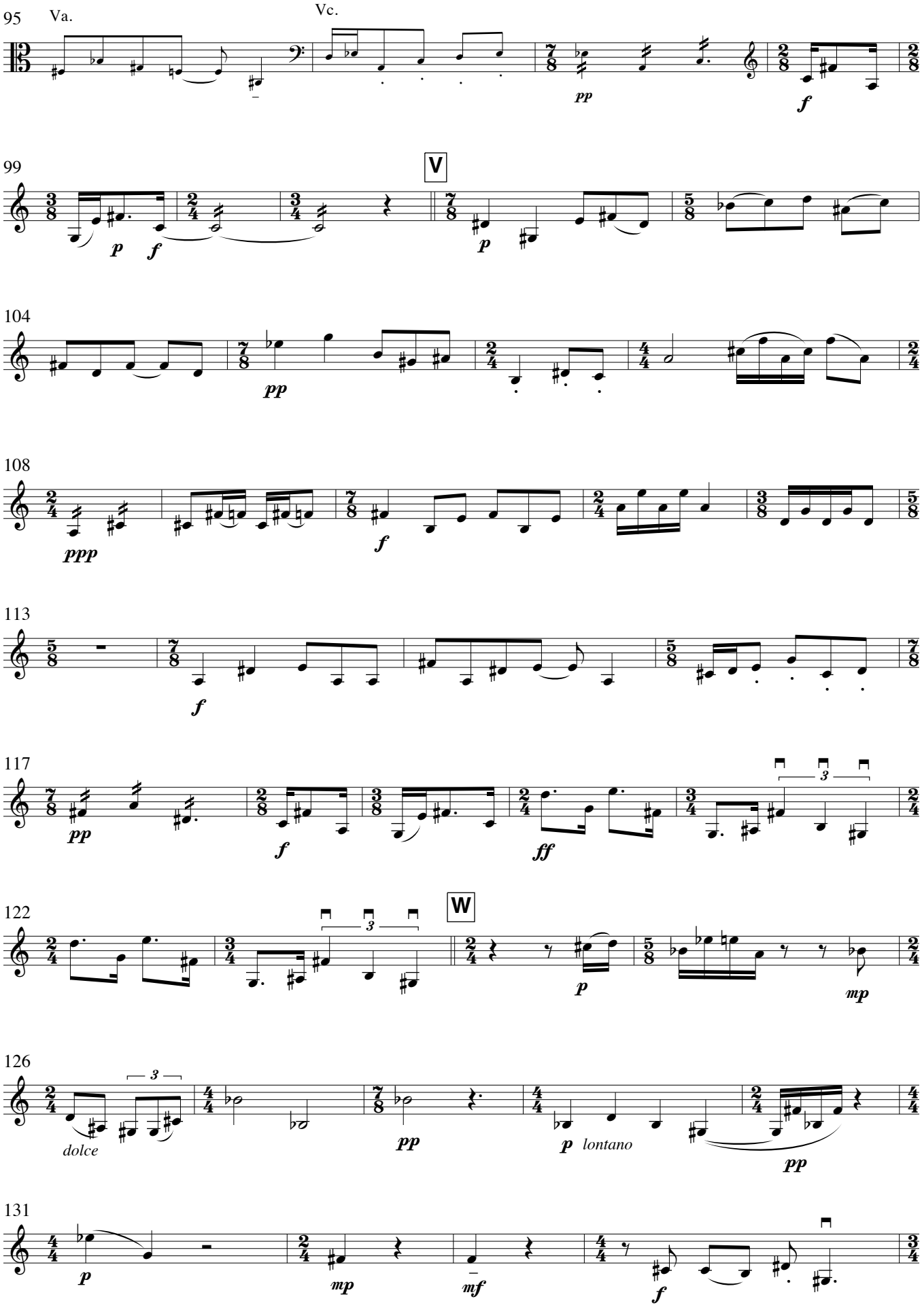
*p*

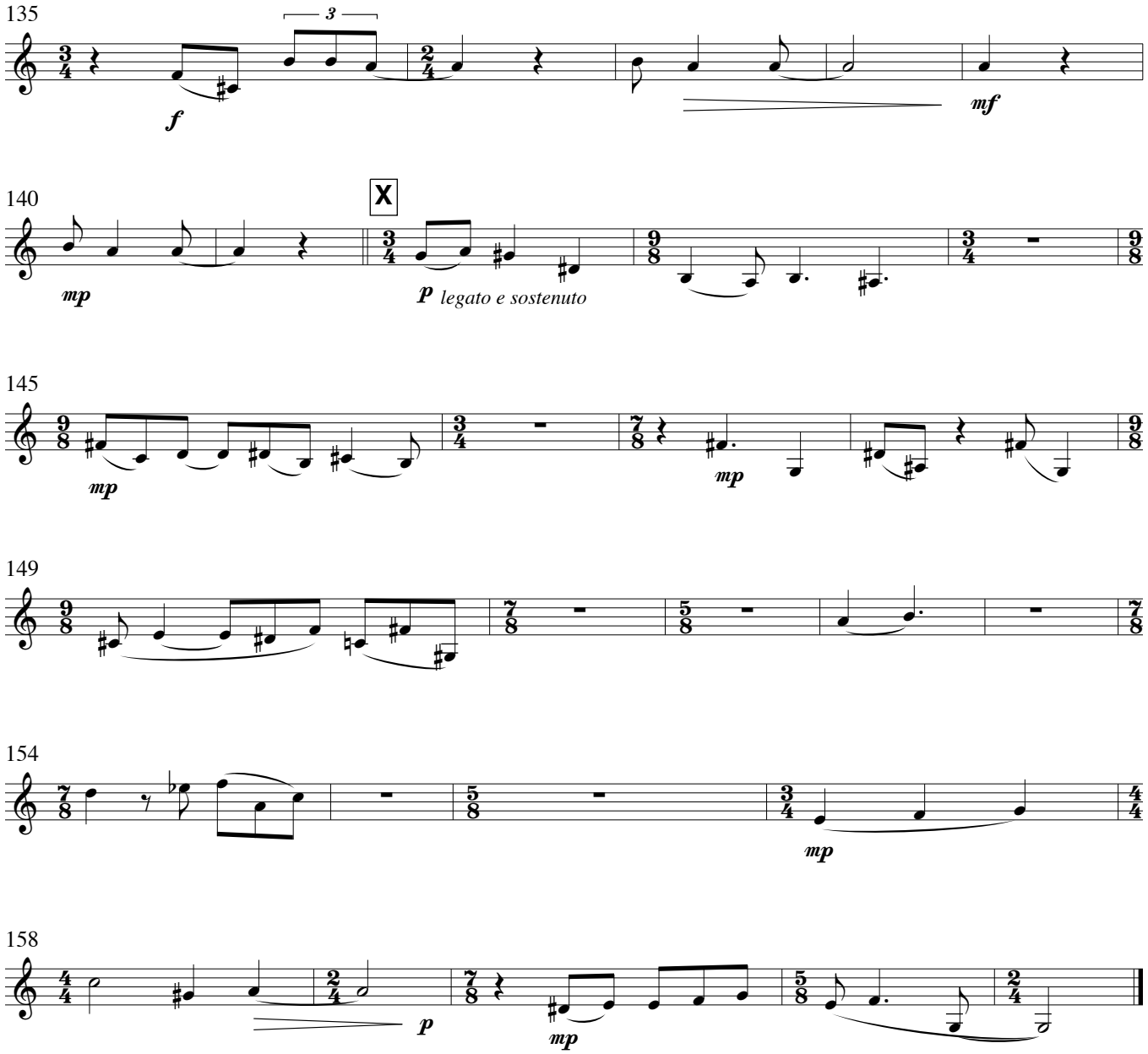

38
M
mp
43
47
52
N
p
58
O
pp flautando
p
63
mp
68
72
P
mf
77
p
81
mf
86
Q
mp
90
p

# *III : imbibe*

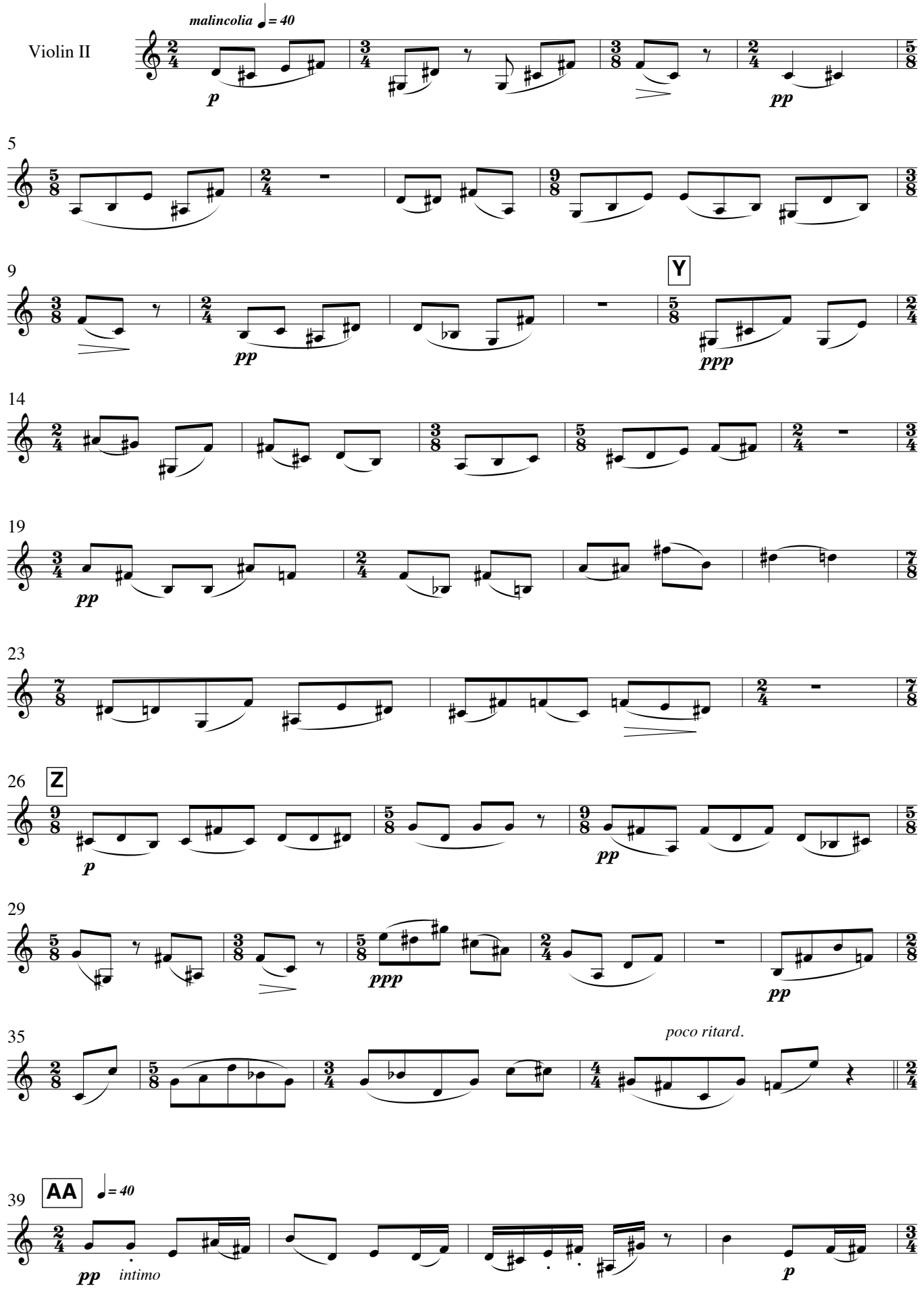

spensierato ed energico ♪ = 190
Violin II
mp
p
6
f
mp
f
11
ppp
mp
15
f
20
R
p
mp
p
25
mf
f
mp
30
f
mf
ppp
34
mp
f
ff
40
S
Vn.1
p
mp
mp
p
mf
f

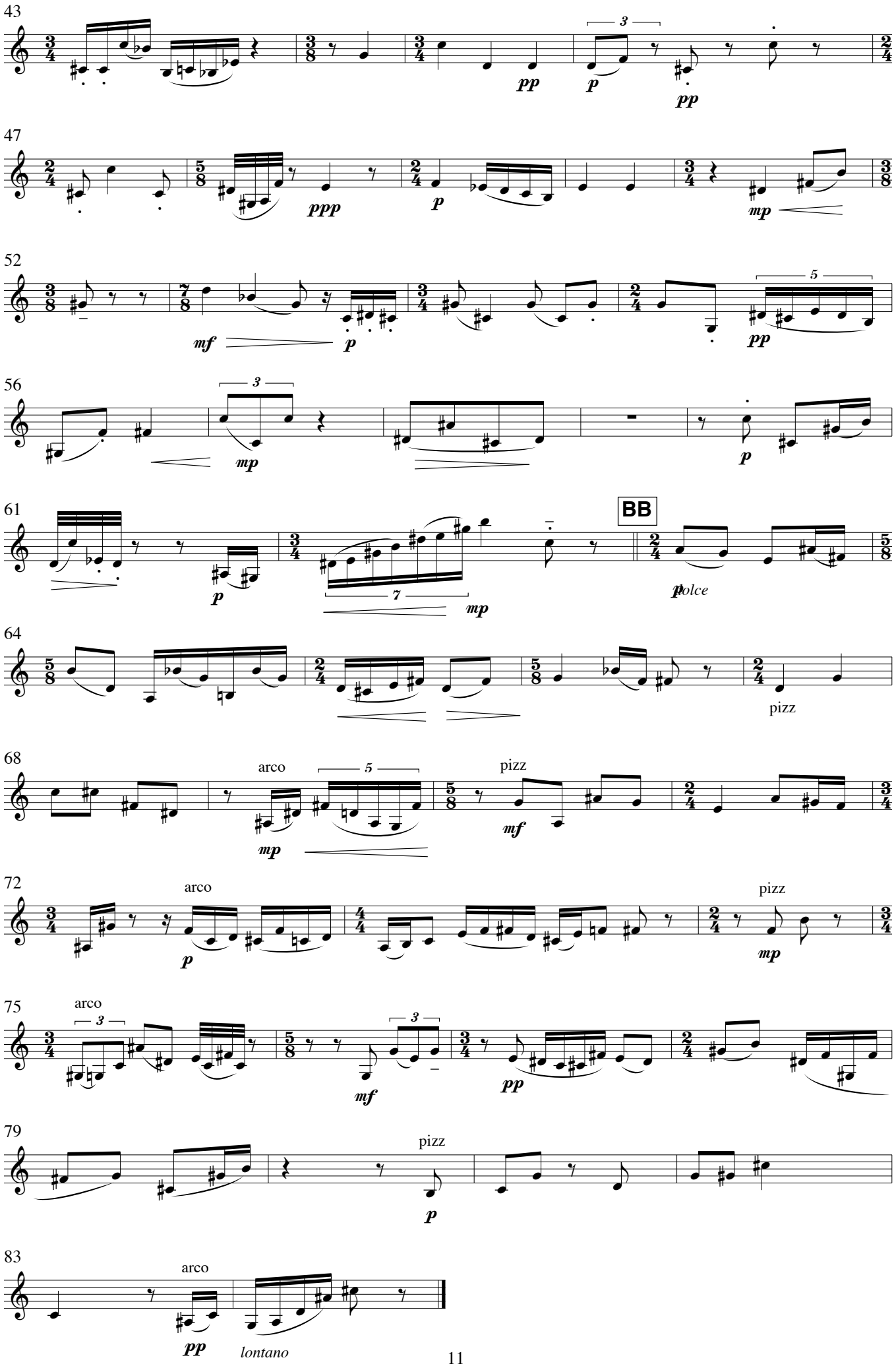

47
mp
mf
mf
53
ppp
mp
mf
f
58
ff
p
T
mp intimo
65
3
p
70
pp
mp
mp vib.
p
pp
mp
76
f
mp
f
mp
82
Vc.
p come prima
p come prima
pp
86
pp
ppp
91
f
ff


95
Va.
Vc.
pp
f
99
V
p
f
p
104
pp
108
ppp
f
113
f
117
pp
f
ff
3
122
W
3
p
mp
126
3
dolce
pp
p
lontano
pp
131
p
mp
mf
f


135
3
f
mf
140
X
mp
p legato e sostenuto
145
mp
mp
149
154
mp
158
p
mp

# *IV : summon*


Violin II
malincolia ♩= 40
p
pp
5
9
Y
pp
ppp
14
19
pp
23
26
Z
p
pp
29
ppp
pp
35
poco ritard.
39
AA
♩= 40
pp
intimo
p


43
pp
p
pp
47
ppp
p
mp
52
mf
p
pp
56
mp
p
61
p
mp
BB
p dolce
64
pizz
68
arco
mp
pizz
mf
72
arco
p
pizz
mp
75
arco
mf
pp
79
pizz
p
83
arco
pp
lontano