QUARTET

from TOUCHED BY MACHINE?

For String Quartet

Violoncello

Nigel Morgan

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About the piece

Between 1988 and 1991 Nigel Morgan created a sequence of four works, DUO (trombone/horn and percussion), TRIO (violin, clarinet and piano), QUARTET (string quartet) and EDGE (wind quartet). These pieces, forming a CD-length concert called *TOUCHED BY MACHINE?*[1], were part of a sustained project to explore computer-assisted composition using the tools of the MIDI studio.

QUARTET is the result of interaction with a suite of software tools. Such tools allow music to be assembled in a way that has similarities to the process engaged by some visual artists when creating a series of related images. Once the components of a 'design' have been assembled a free application can begin using practiced and improvised gestures. So too in music composition: the composer can interact with simulated performance and experiment with different aspects, emphasis and structure before creating a notated score. In composing QUARTET the element of pre-composition lies in the preparation of data for the software applications to store, process and then call up on-cue during an improvisation.

In creating QUARTET the composer worked with Emile Tobenfeld's *Programmable Variations Generator* in Movement 1, *Fingers* in the latter parts of Movement III and IV, and *Tunesmith* in Movement V. David Zicarelli's *M* software was used for Movements II and the first part of III. Zicarelli's software is one of the most successful attempts to create a device that enables multi-part composing through improvisation. It has now become part of the IRCAM co-development MAX-MSP.

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[1] This title comes from an article by Stephen Travis Pope called *Touched by Machine? – Composition and Performance in the Digital Age*. This text presents responses from composers who were asked the following questions: How have new technologies changed the process of composition and performance? What new possibilities are aesthetically and artistically relevant? How do the new tools allow us to use musical material differently?

Computer Music Journal: vol 19. No.3. Cambridge MA. MIT Press.

Aside from the technical aspects of QUARTET's composition there is an important extra-musical element to consider. This originates from the composer's interest in the artist Bridget Riley, in particular her ability to engage the viewer actively in her monochrome paintings and then later her work with colour stripes. In these paintings squares, circles and lines are woven together into an optical symmetry that allows the pictorial space to oscillate and 'dance'. Riley has described how the source of this approach came from her mother who was '*. . . a great looker . . . who constantly described everything she could . . . the play of sunlight on a glass . . . the depth of texture in the sea and sky . . .*' In Riley's work the abstract shape becomes a living and vibrating expression of the natural world. It is the viewer's position in, and movement across, the pictorial space that appears to make the image 'move' playfully. The music of all the pieces in the *TOUCHED BY MACHINE?* sequence attempts something of the same, only with sound and the ear rather than the image and the eye. The five movements of QUARTET take their titles from a group of Riley's paintings from the mid 1960s: *Continuum, Shuttle, Fission, Late-Morning, Chant*.

QUARTET was commissioned with funds from the Eastern Arts Association for Sarah Coleman and the Demos Quartet for performance at the Norwich and Norwich Triennial Festival in 1989. It is the third work of a series to focus on professional musicians working in North Norfolk where the composer lived from 1986 to 1990 as Eastern Arts Association Composer in the Community.

Notes for Performance

The nature of this music requires a very particular approach to performance technique and interpretation. This string quartet is viewed predominantly as a democratic community of musicians who work together to create a 'play' of musical elements for the listener to interact with and enjoy. In many parts of the score the music contains long sequences that required a sustained working through of a musical process. Bar 29 to 62 of *Continuum* provides a clear example of such a process. Players are advised to treat such passages with clarity and simplicity of musical expression, focusing on the whole process rather than individual moments. Bowing, dynamics, articulation and expressive markings have been kept to a minimum to give more interpretative space than is usual in a late 20C composition. Such performance indications should be seen as a starting point for rehearsal, no more. That said, the overall sound envisaged for the work is one where lightness and deftness of bow on the string and a minimal use of vibrato common to Early and Baroque music is able to contrast with more expressive modes of playing found in late Classical and Romantic music.

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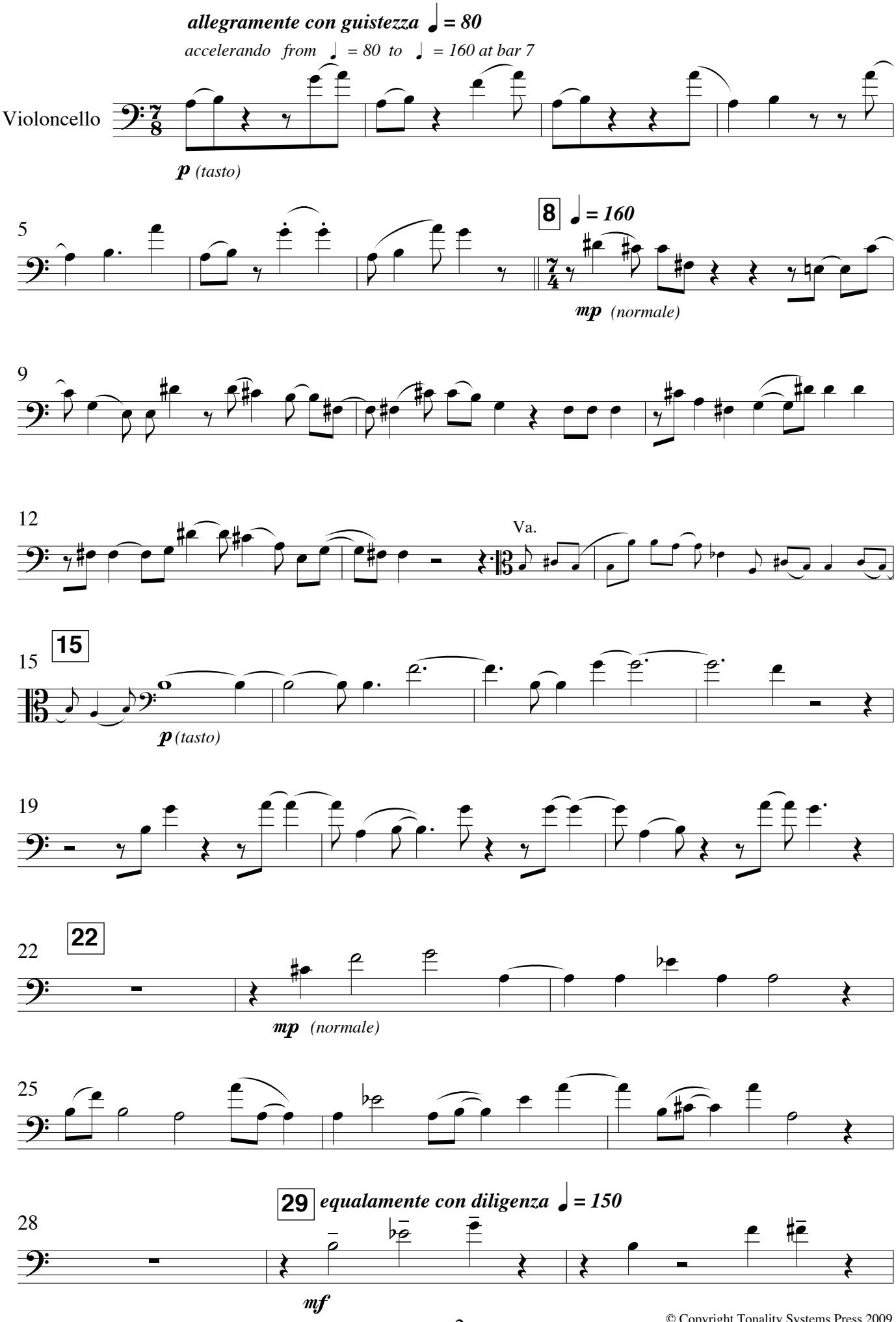
I. Continuum



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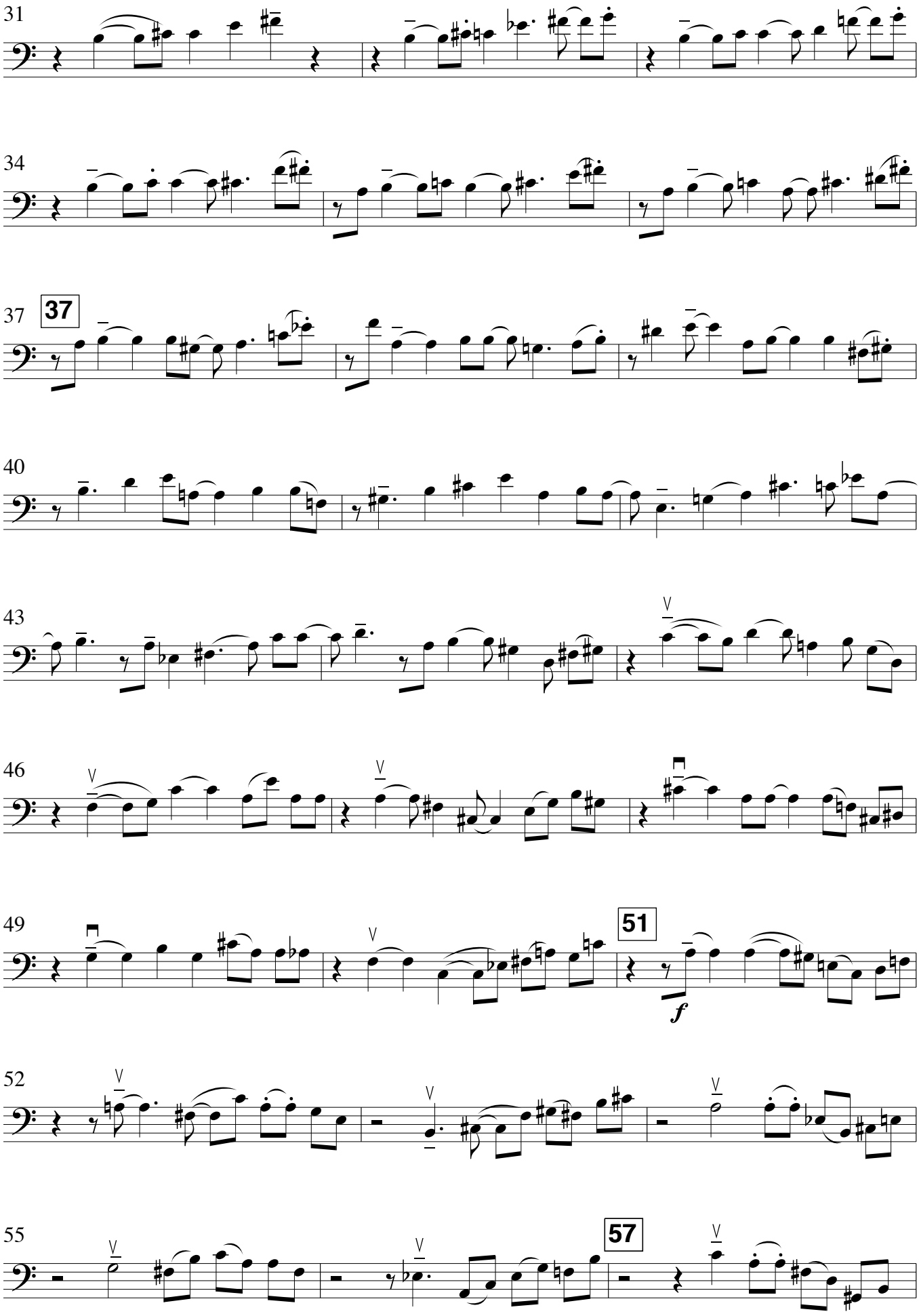
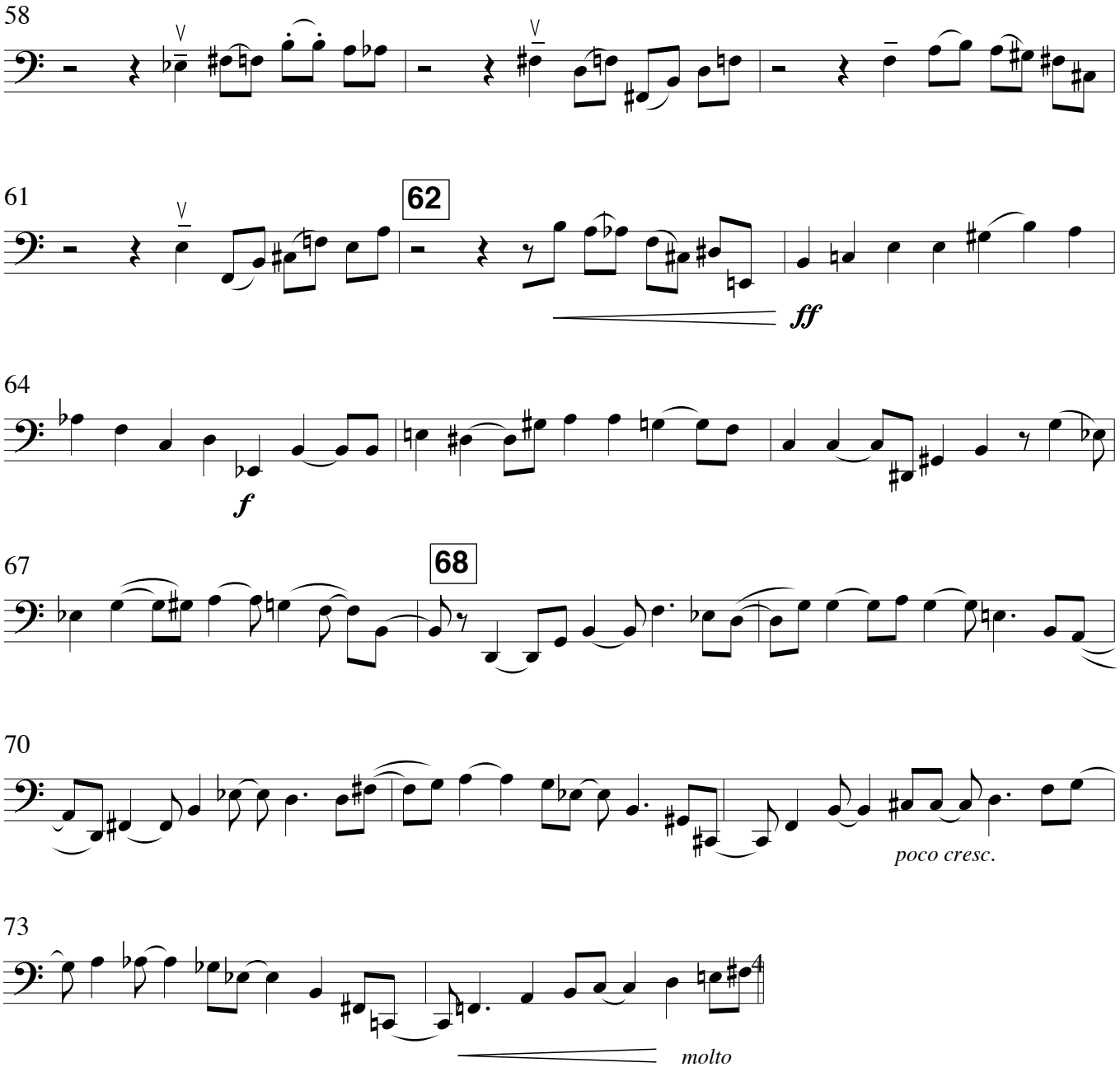

31
34
37
37
40
43
46
49
51
f
52
55
57


58
61
62
ff
64
f
67
68
70
poco cresc.
73
molto

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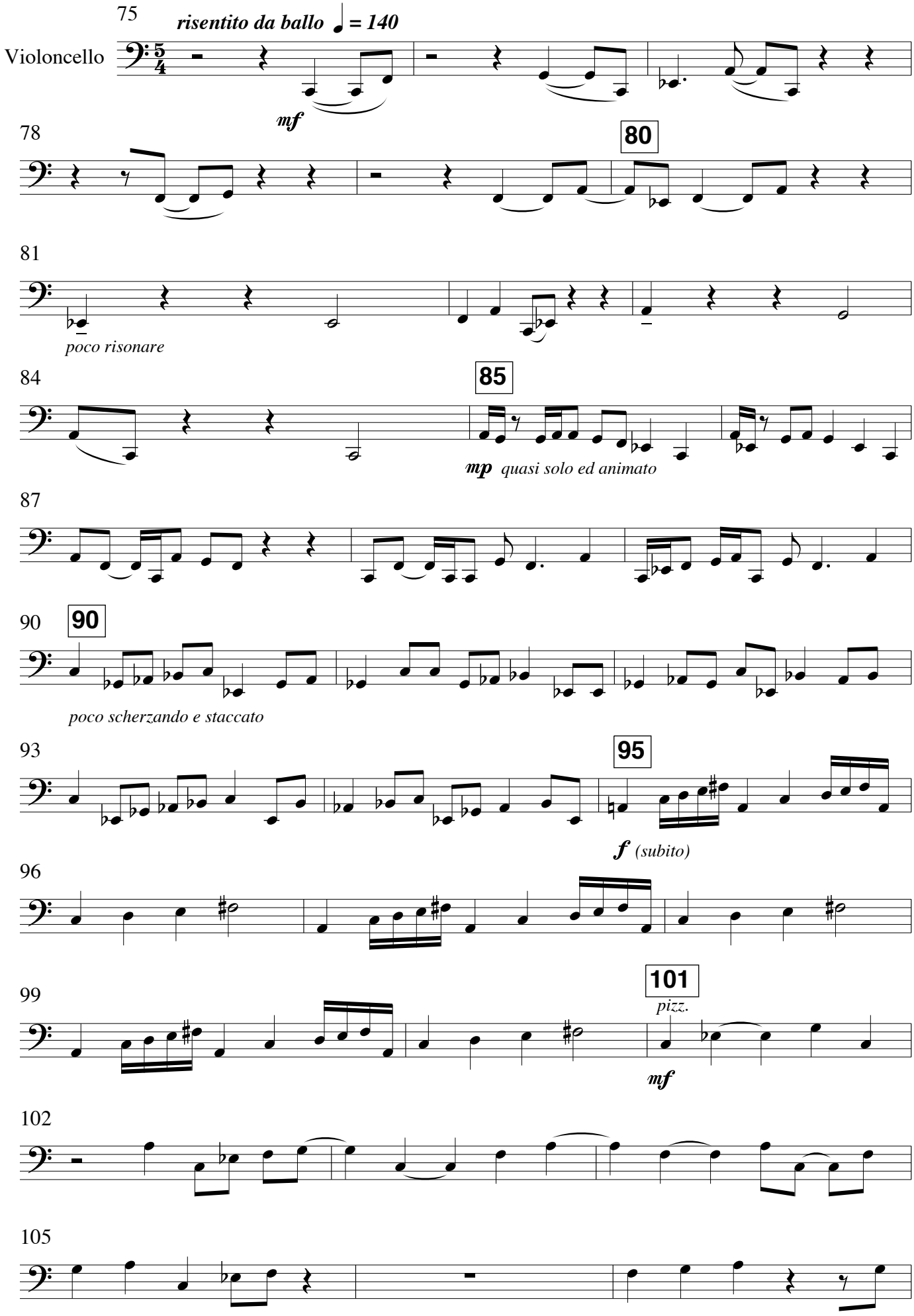
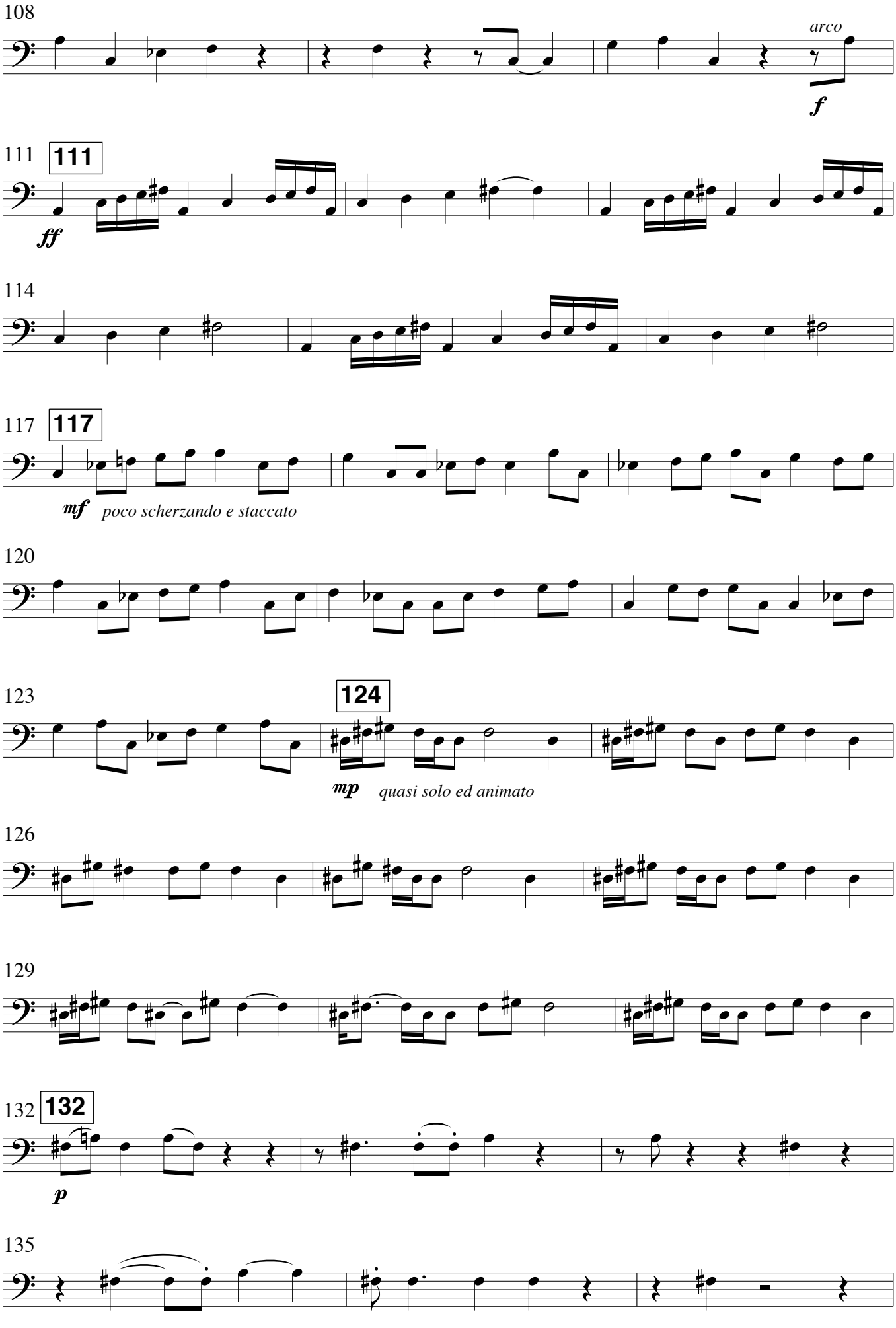
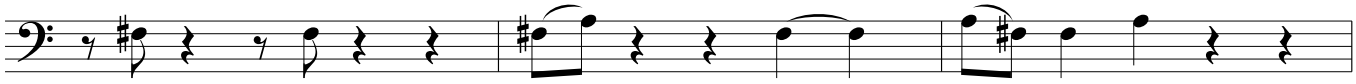
II. Shuttle


75
risentito da ballo ♩ = 140
Violoncello
mf
78
80
81
poco risonare
84
85
mp quasi solo ed animato
87
90
90
poco scherzando e staccato
93
95
f (subito)
96
99
101
pizz.
mf
102
105

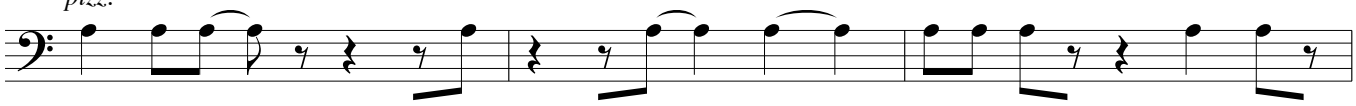

108
arco
f
111
111
ff
114
117
117
mf
poco scherzando e staccato
120
123
124
mp
quasi solo ed animato
126
129
132
132
p
135

138



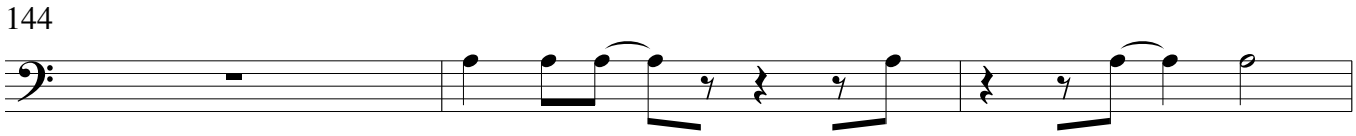
141

141 *pizz.*



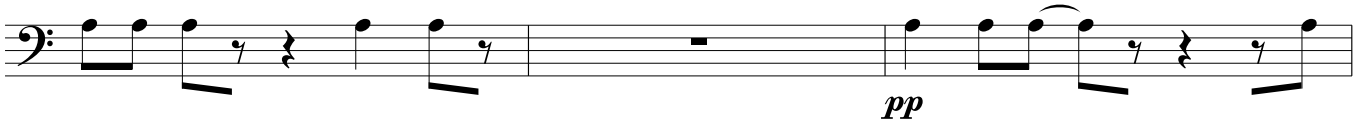
(sul pont)

144



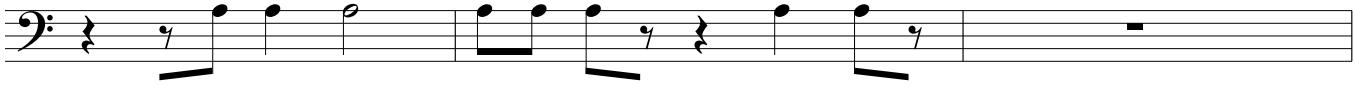
147

148



pp

150



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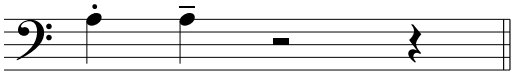

p

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III. Fission

intimo ♩ = 100
con sord.

Violoncello

154 *mp*

158

162

166

170

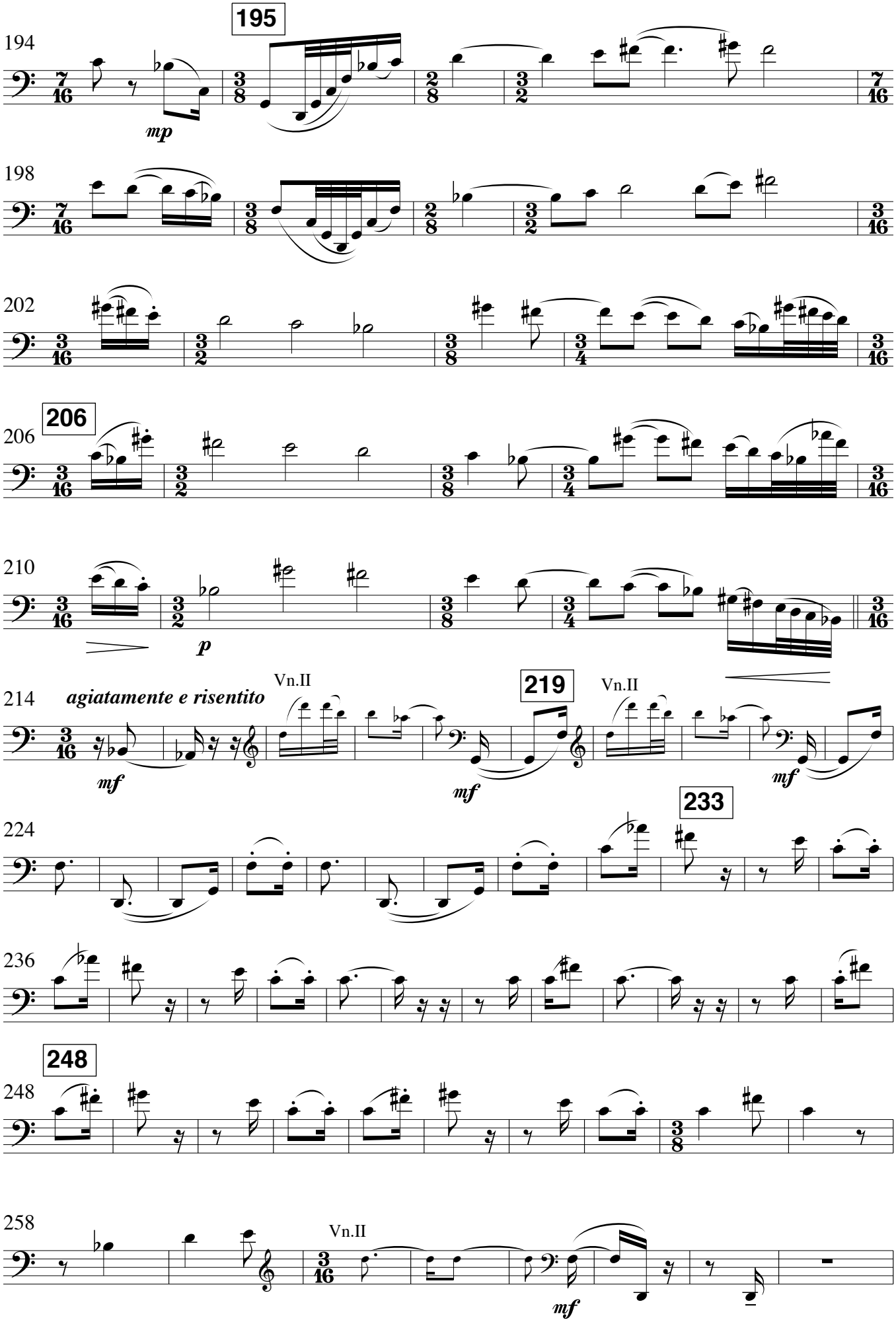
174 *mf*

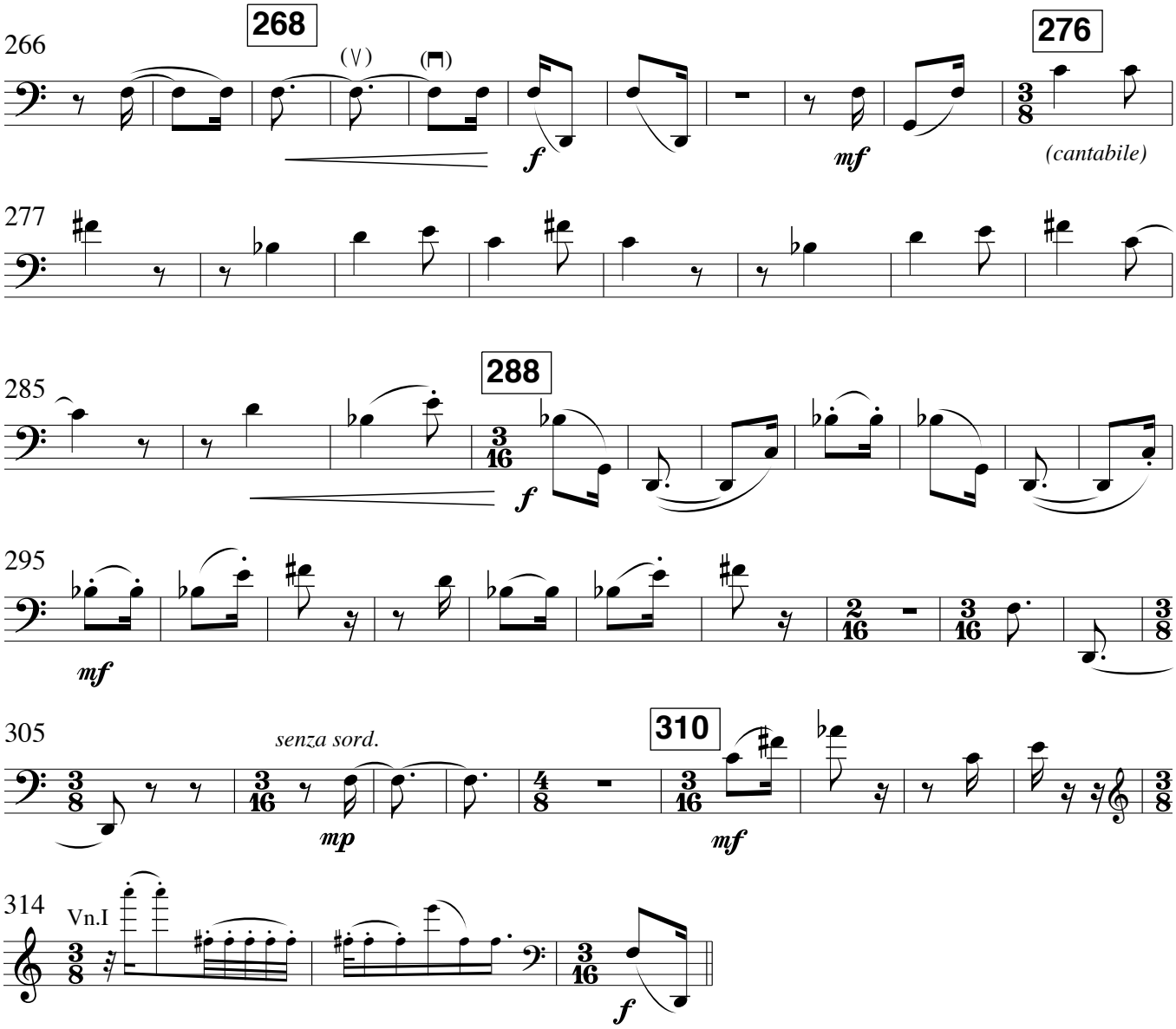
178

182 *intimissimo* *mp*

186 *f*

190 *mf*


194
195
mp
198
202
206
206
210
p
214
agiatamente e risentito
Vn.II
mf
219
Vn.II
mf
224
233
236
248
248
258
Vn.II
mf


266
268
276
(V)
f
mf
(cantabile)
277
285
288
f
295
mf
305
senza sord.
310
mp
mf
314
Vn.I
f

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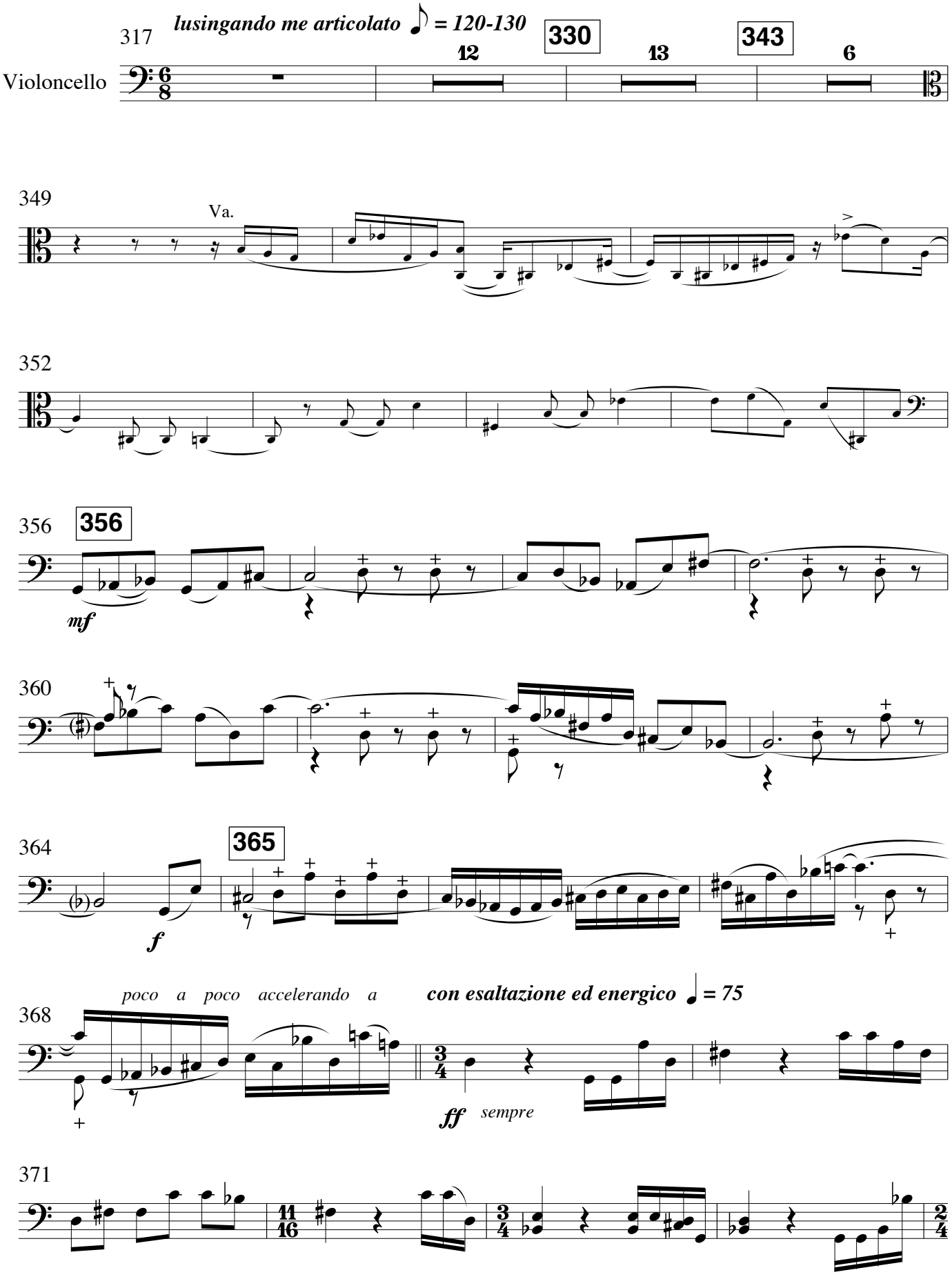
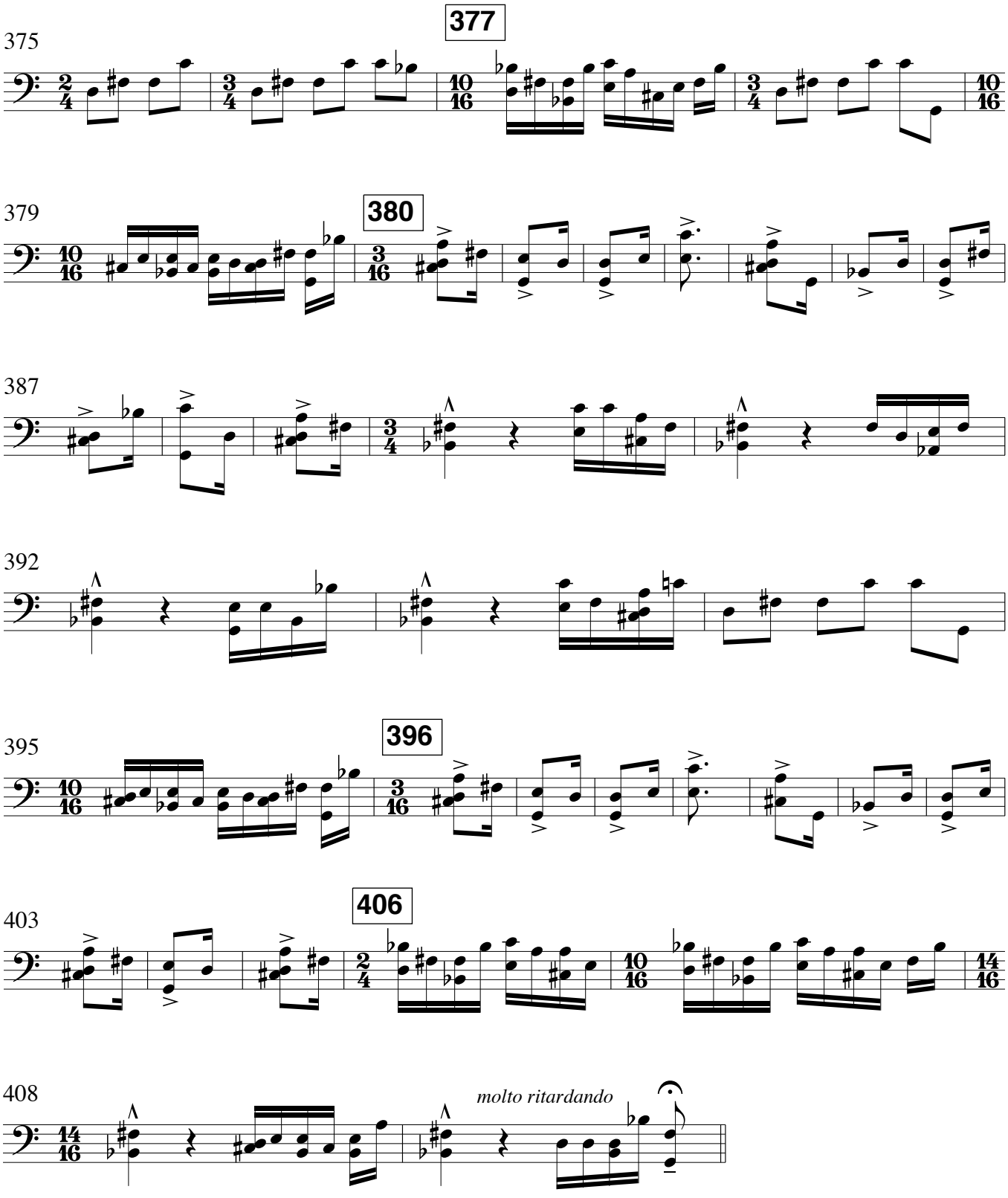
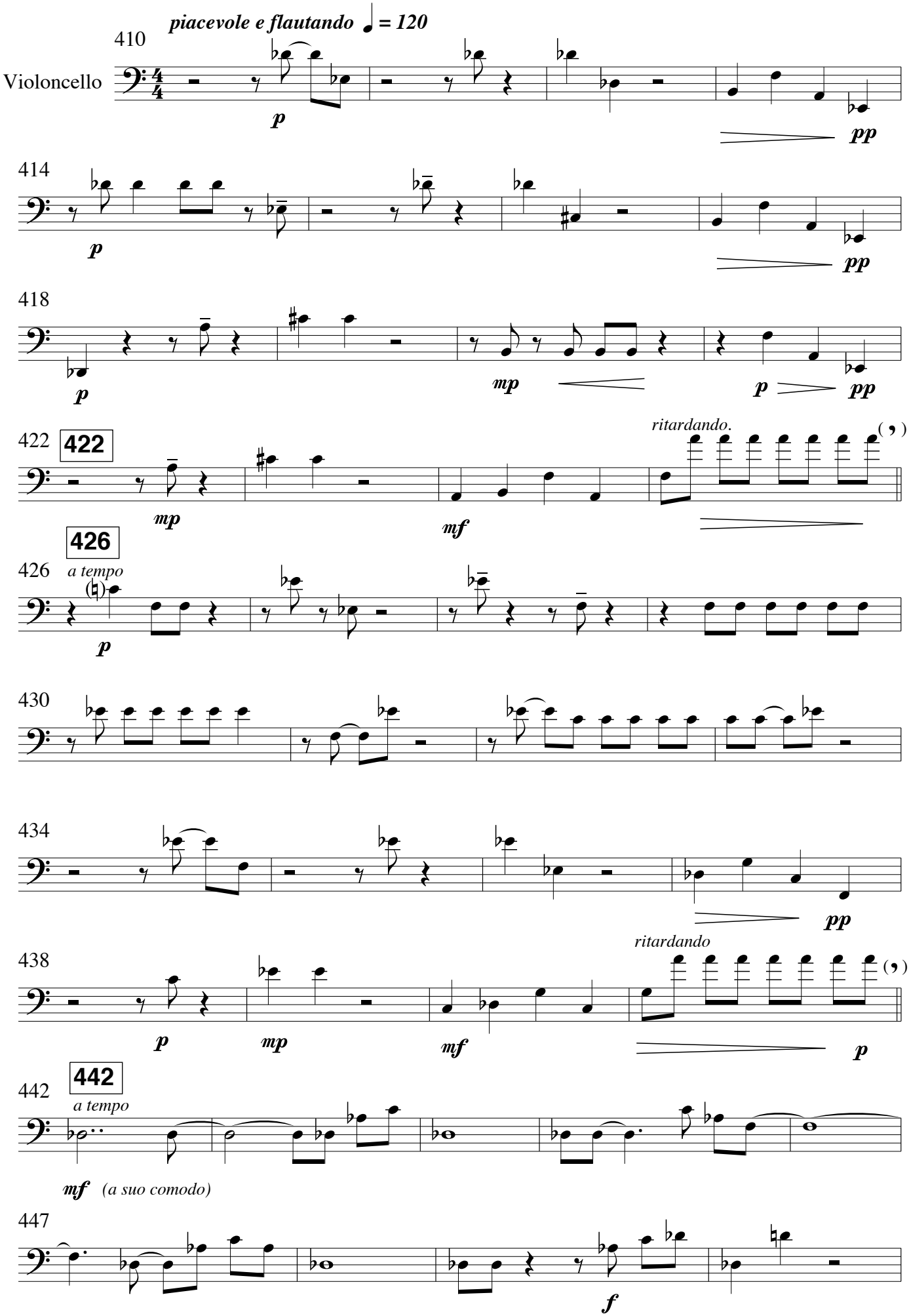
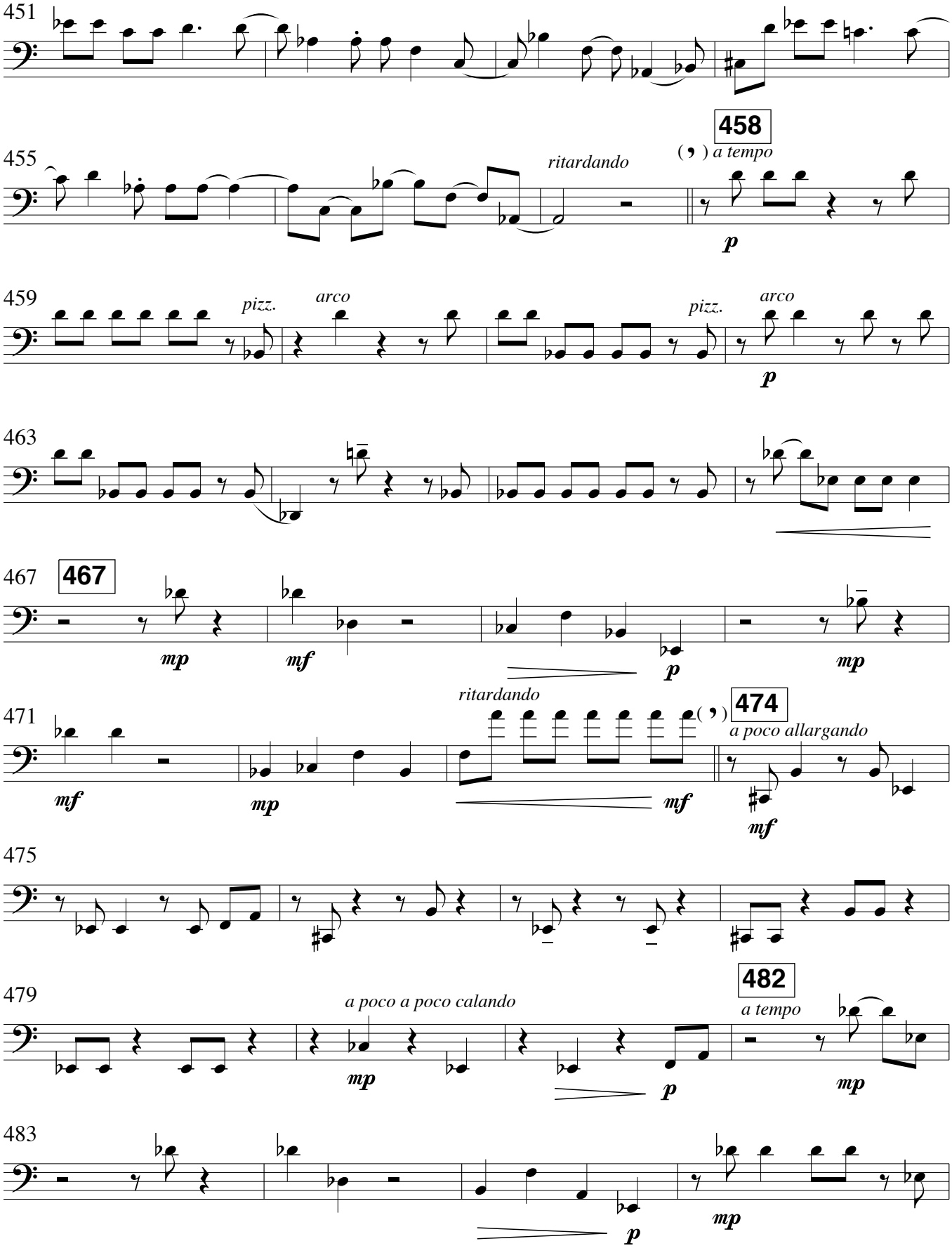
IV. Late Morning

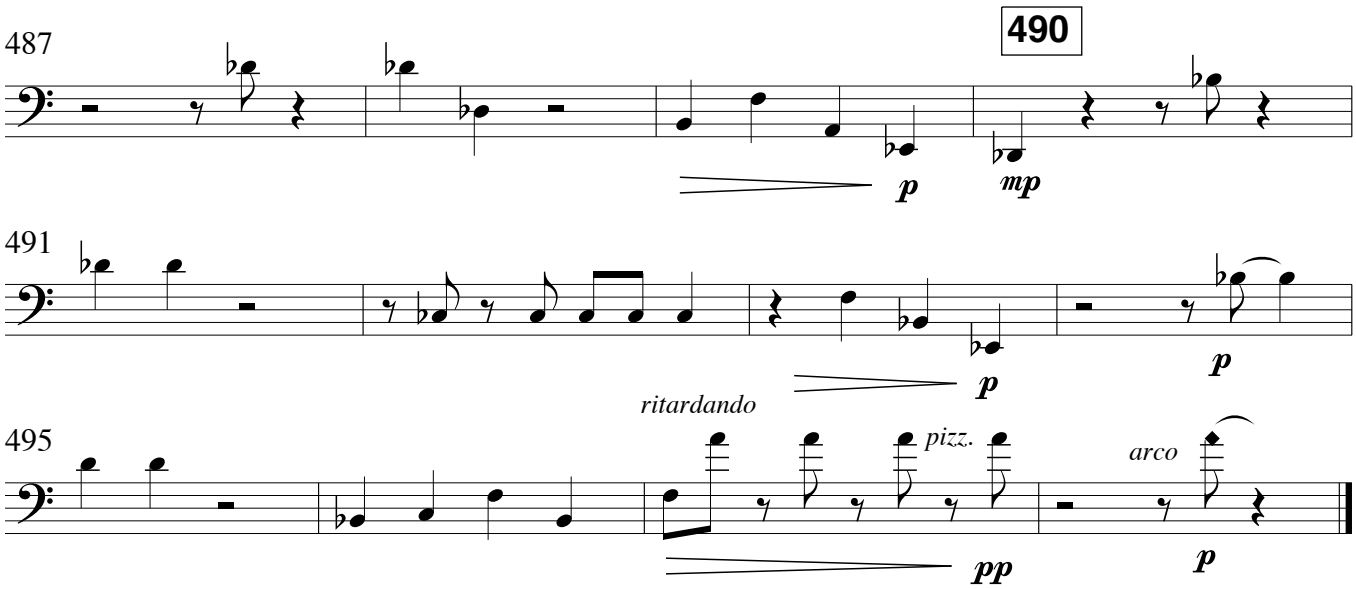



377
375
380
379
387
392
396
395
406
403
408
molto ritardando

V. Chant


piacevole e flautando ♩ = 120
Violoncello
410
p
pp
414
p
pp
418
p
mp
p
pp
422
422
mp
mf
ritardando.
426
426
a tempo
p
430
434
pp
438
ritardando
p
mp
mf
p
442
442
a tempo
mf (a suo comodo)
447
f


451
455
458
( ) a tempo
ritardando
p
459
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
p
463
467
467
mp
mf
p
mp
471
ritardando
474
( )
a poco allargando
mf
mp
mf
mf
475
479
a poco a poco calando
482
a tempo
mp
p
mp
483
p
mp


487
490
p
mp
491
p
p
ritardando
495
pizz.
arco
pp
p