QUARTET

from TOUCHED BY MACHINE?

For String Quartet

Viola

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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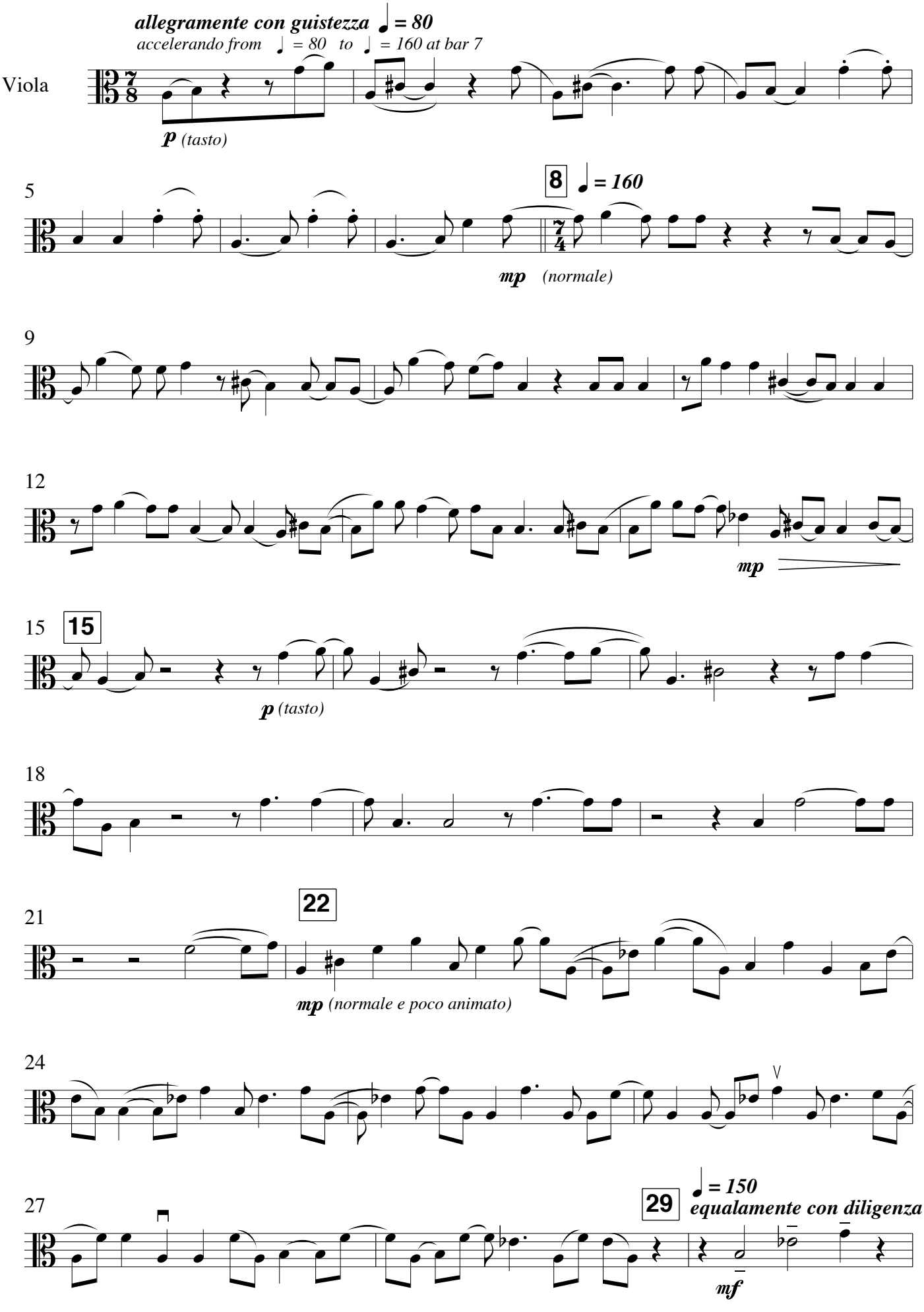
I. Continuum



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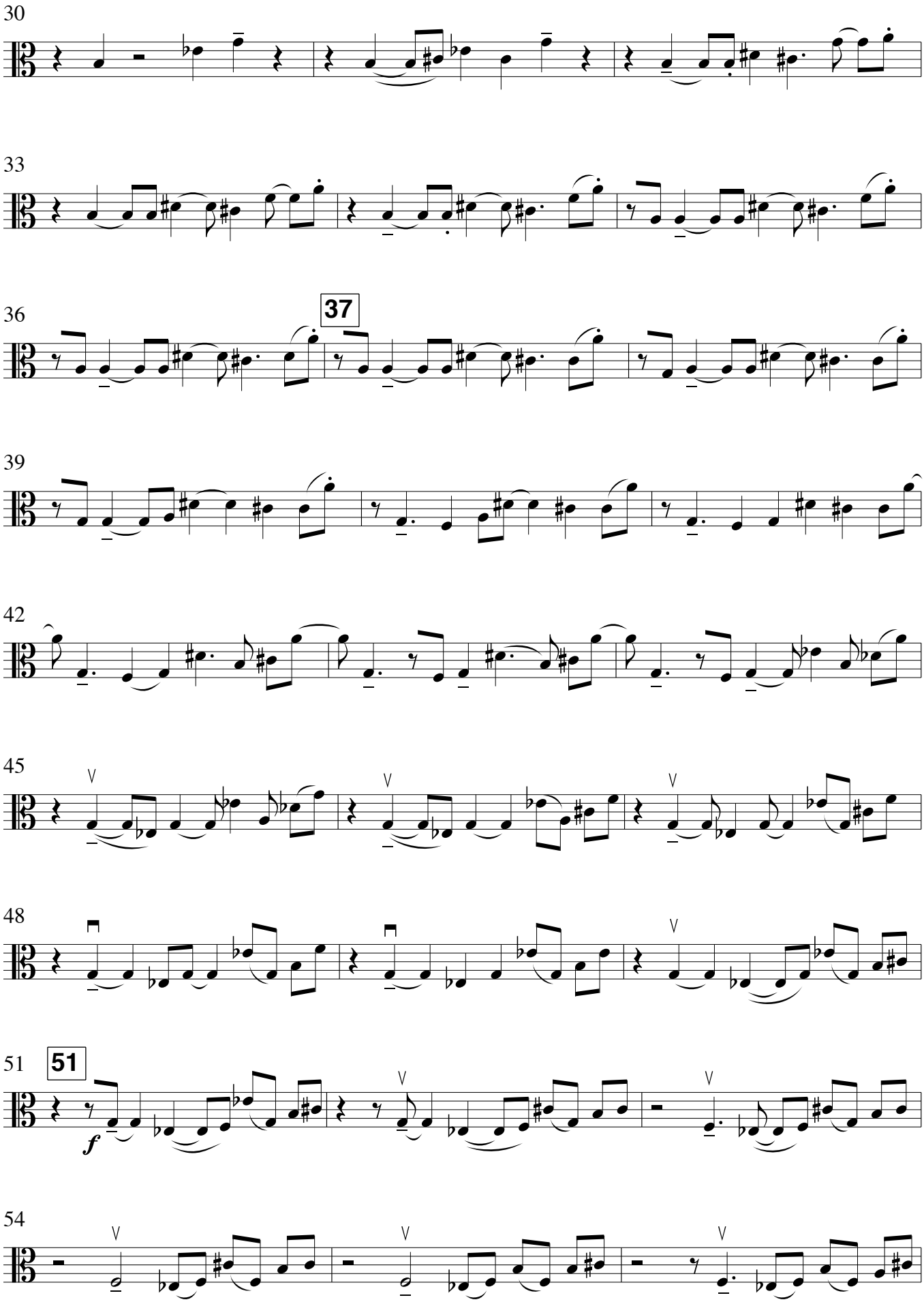
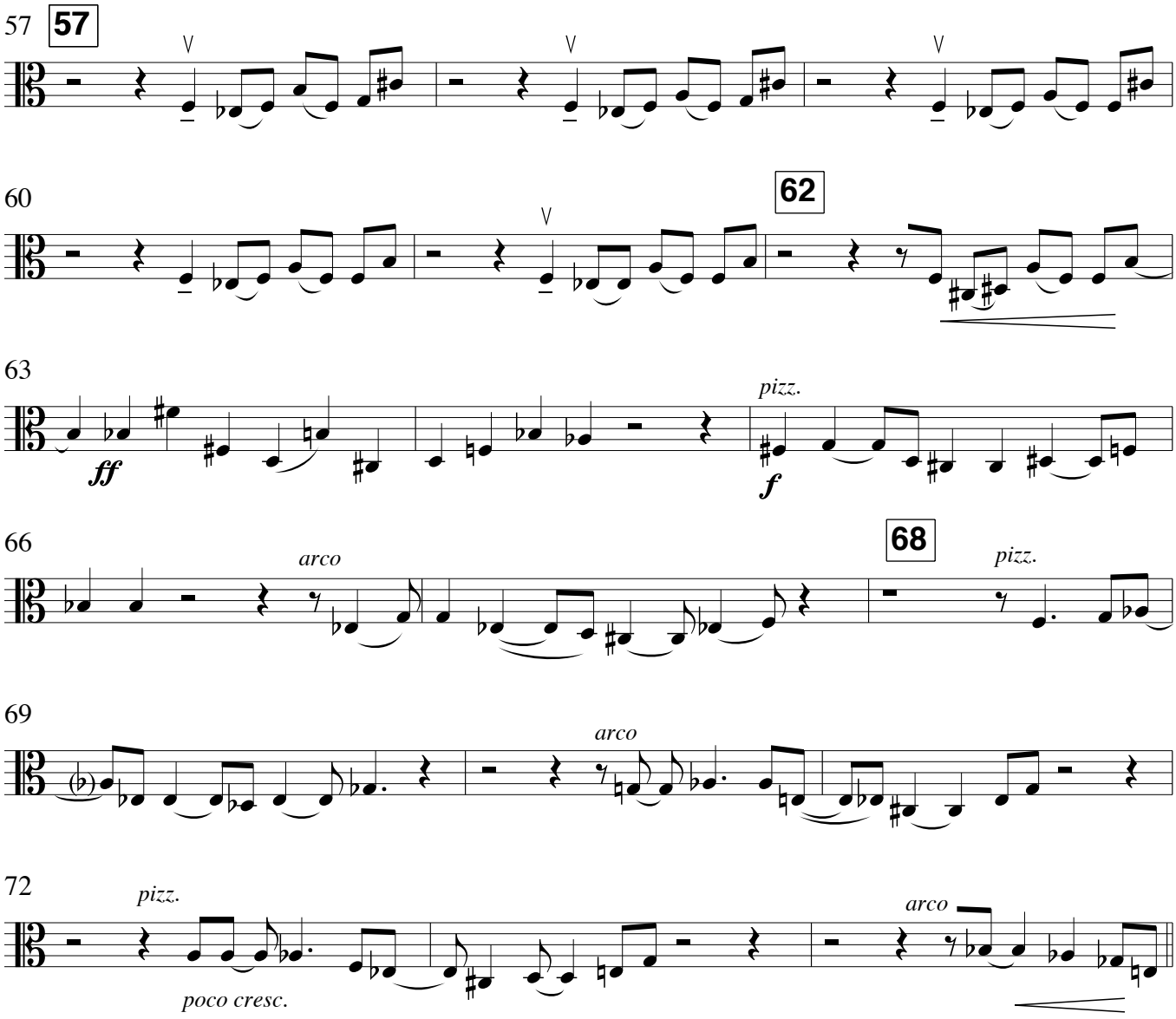

30
33
36
37
39
42
45
48
51
51
f
54


57
57
60
62
63
ff
pizz.
f
66
arco
68
pizz.
69
arco
72
pizz.
poco cresc.
arco

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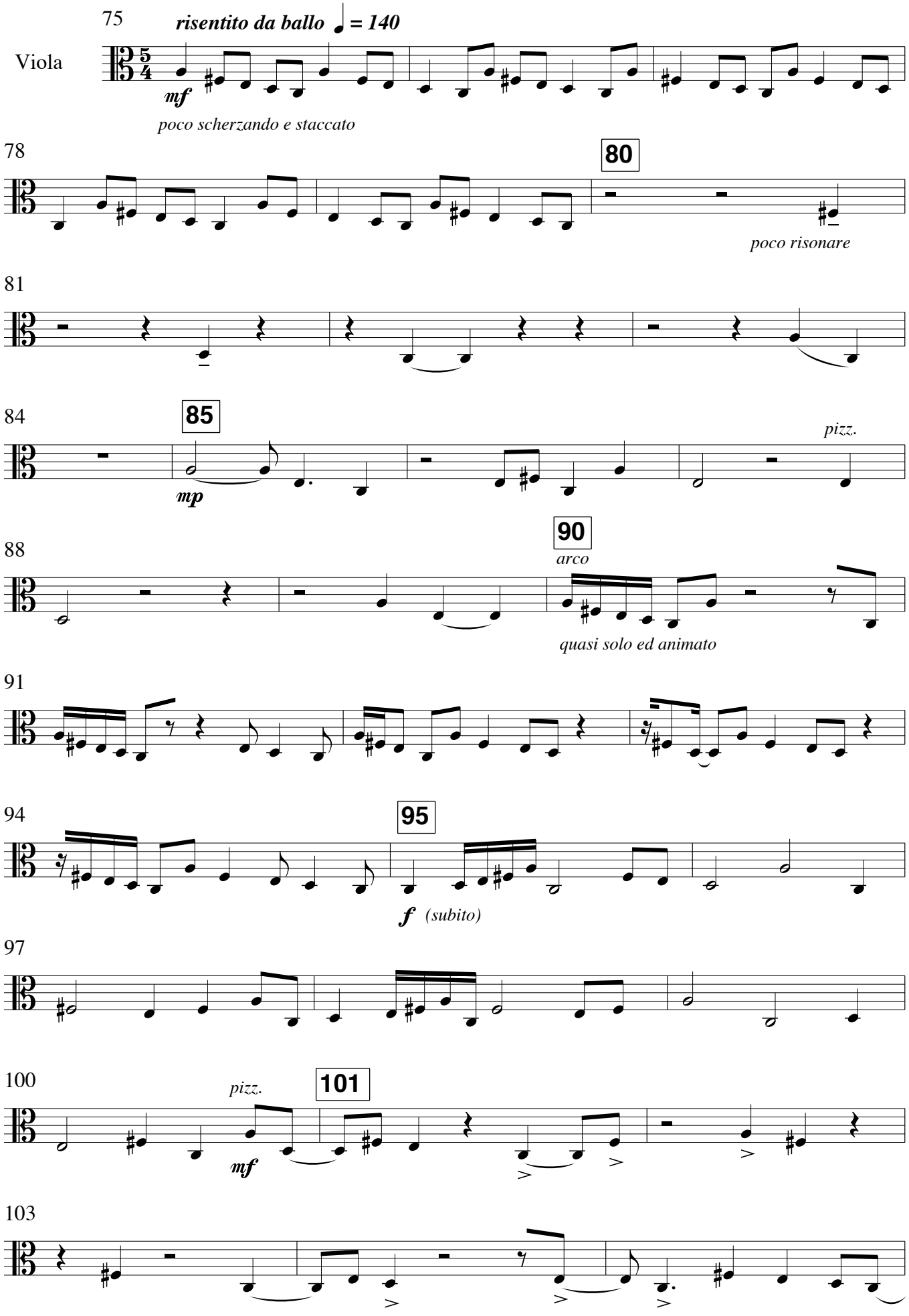
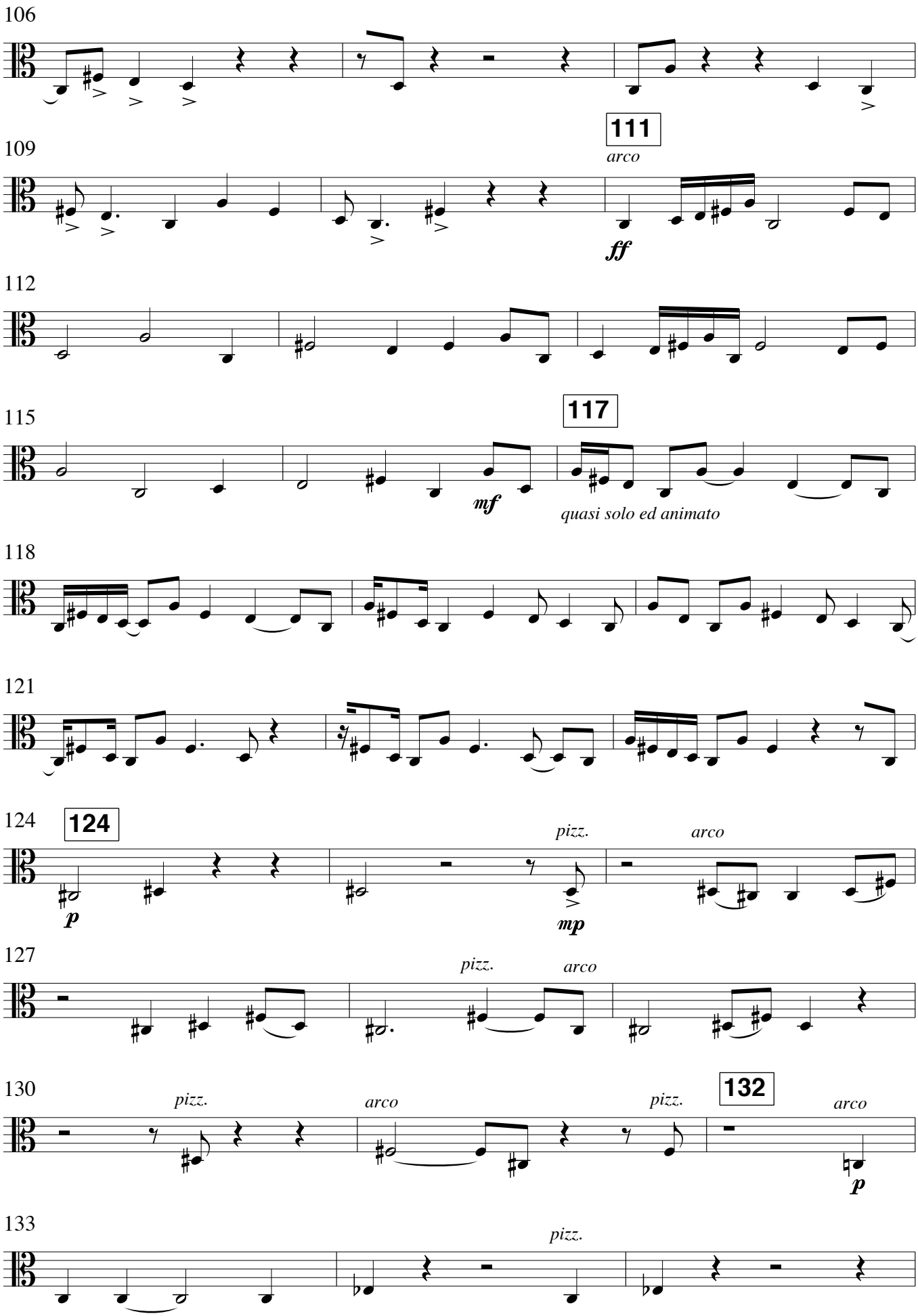
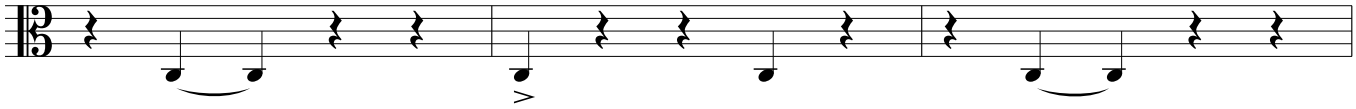
II. Shuttle


75
risentito da ballo ♩ = 140
Viola
mf
poco scherzando e staccato
78
80
poco risonare
81
84
85
mp
pizz.
88
90
arco
quasi solo ed animato
91
94
95
f (subito)
97
100
pizz.
101
mf
103


106
111
arco
109
ff
112
115
117
mf
quasi solo ed animato
118
121
124
124
p
pizz.
mp
arco
127
pizz.
arco
130
pizz.
arco
pizz.
132
arco
p
133
pizz.

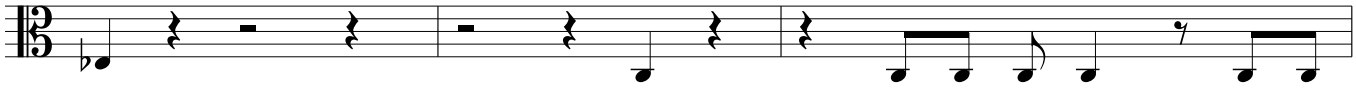
136

arco *pizz.*

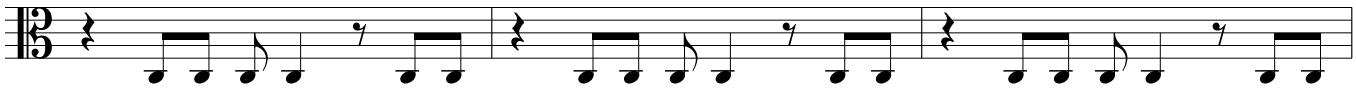


139 **141**

arco

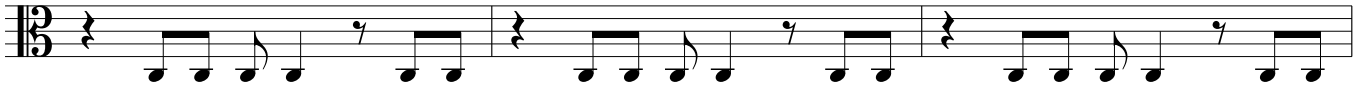


142

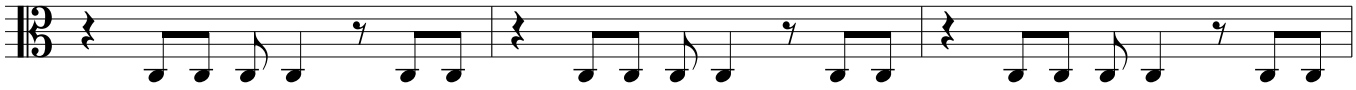


poco a poco sul pont.

145

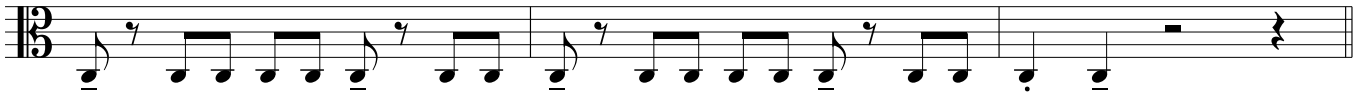


148 **148**



pp

151



p

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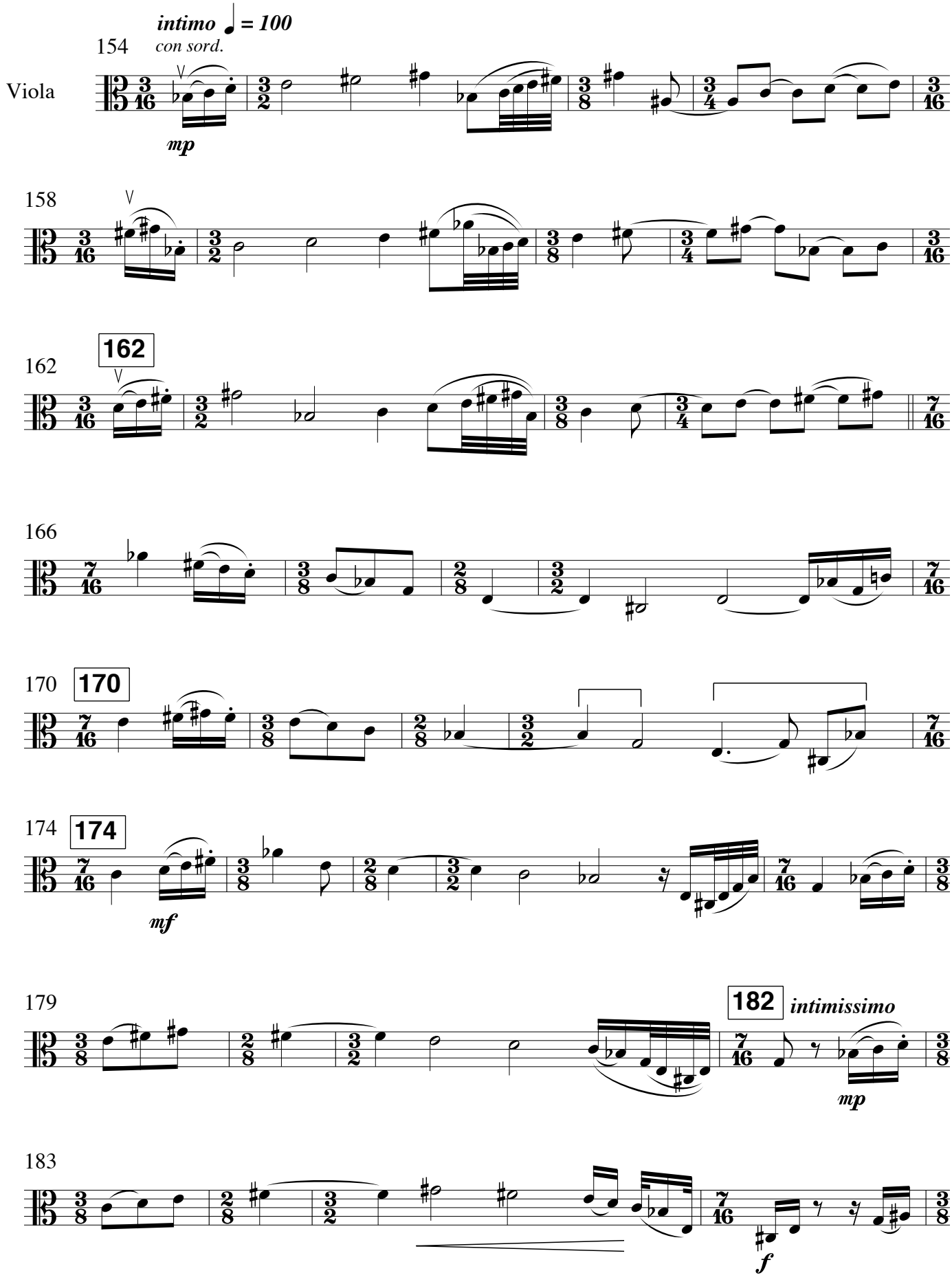
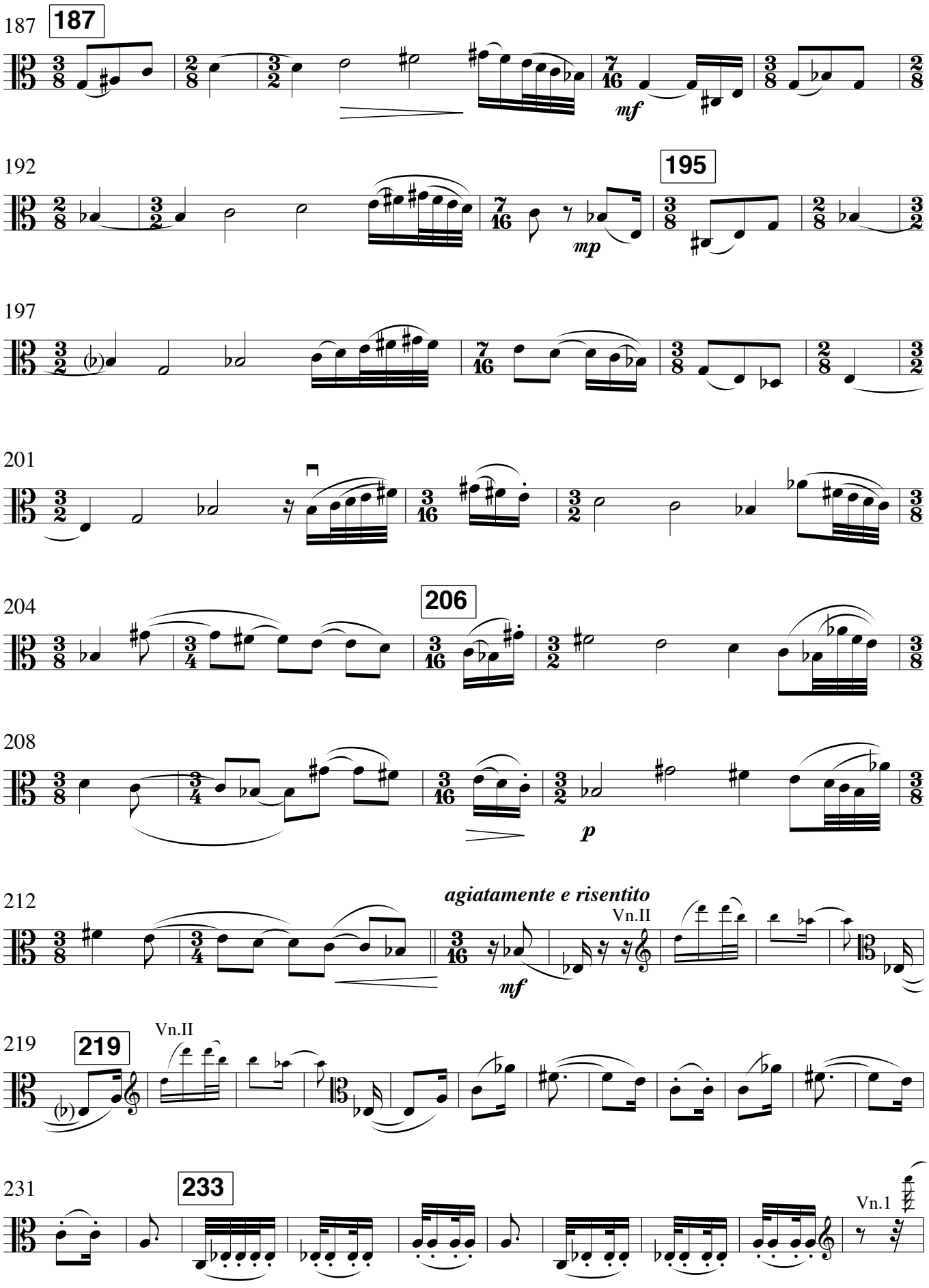
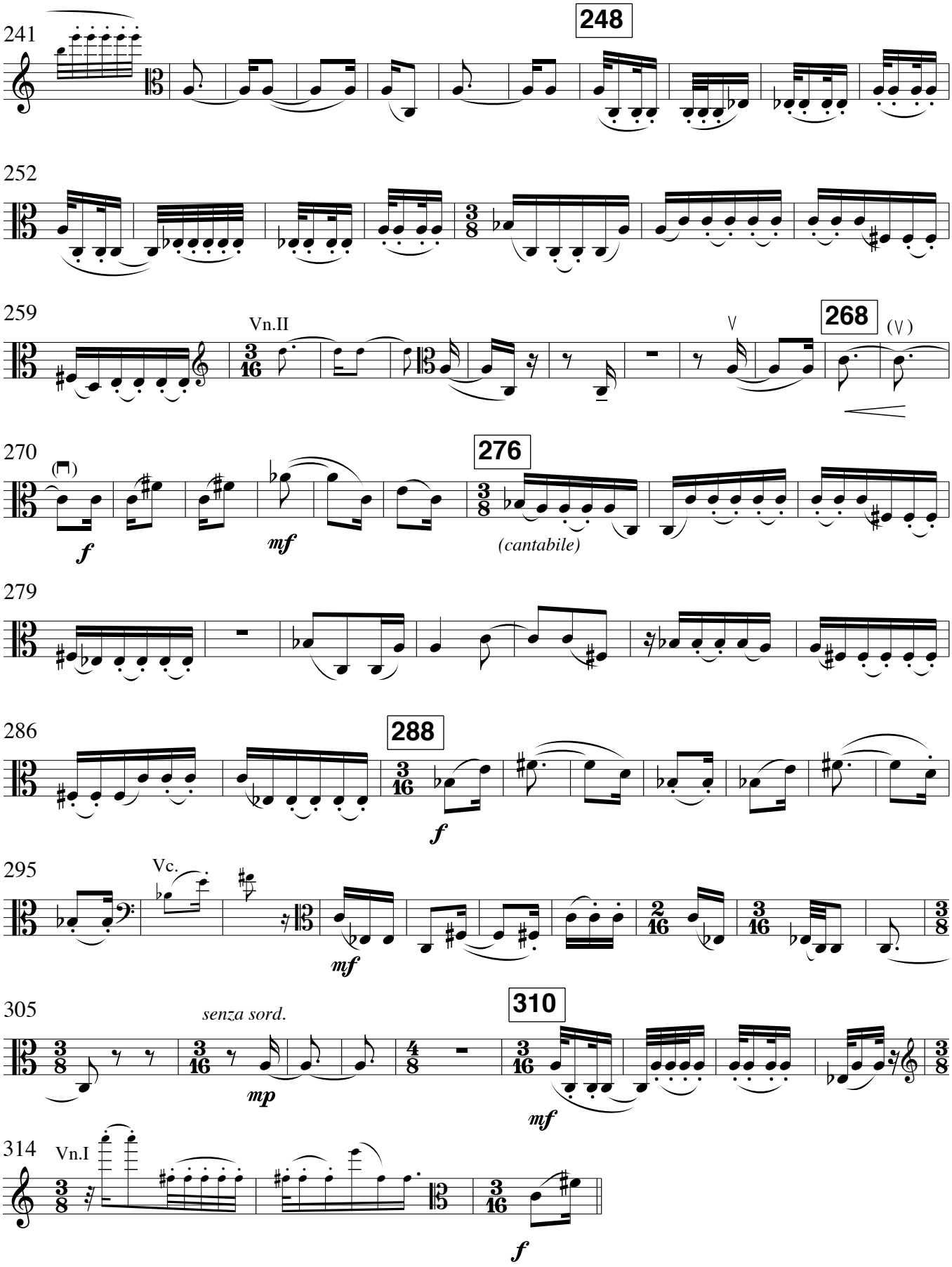
III. Fission


intimo ♩ = 100
154
con sord.
Viola
mp
158
162
162
166
170
170
174
174
mf
179
182
intimissimo
mp
183
f


187
187
mf
192
195
mp
197
201
204
206
208
p
212
agiatamente e risentito
Vn.II
mf
219
219
Vn.II
231
233
Vn.1


241
248
252
259
Vn.II
268
(V)
270
276
(cantabile)
279
286
288
295
Vc.
305
senza sord.
310
314
Vn.I

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IV. Late Morning

317 ***lusingando me articolato*** ♪ **= 120-130**

Viola

10

Vn.II

329

330

mf

332

336

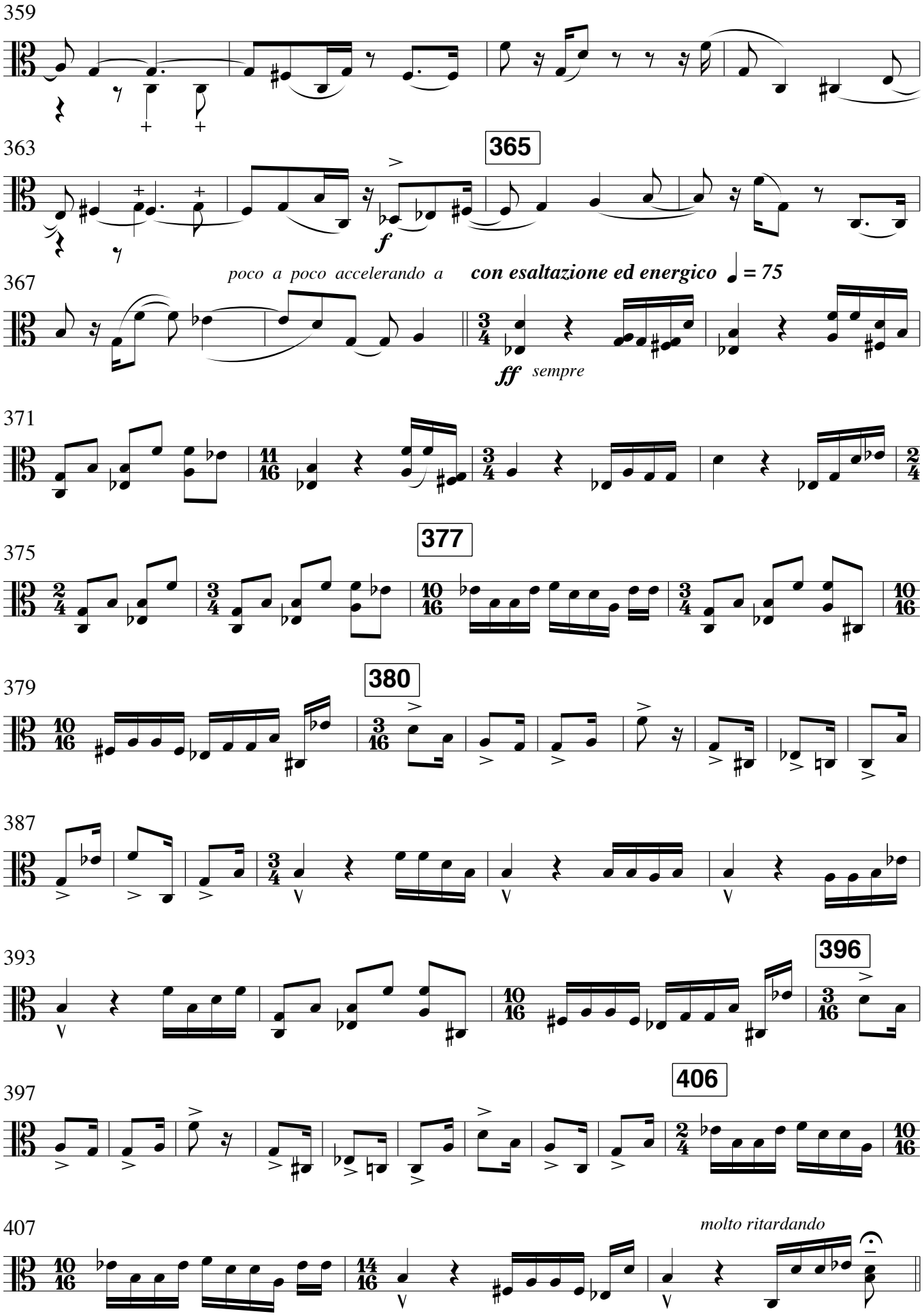
340

343 **343**

347

351

355 **356**


359
363
365
f
367
poco a poco accelerando a
con esaltazione ed energico
= 75
ff sempre
371
375
377
379
380
387
393
396
397
406
407
molto ritardando

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V. Chant

410 *piacevole e flautando* ♩ = 120

Viola

p *pp*

414

p *pp*

418

p *mp* *p* *pp*

422 **422**

ritardando

mp *mf*

426 **426** *a tempo*

mp *(a suo comodo)*

430

434

438 *ritardando*

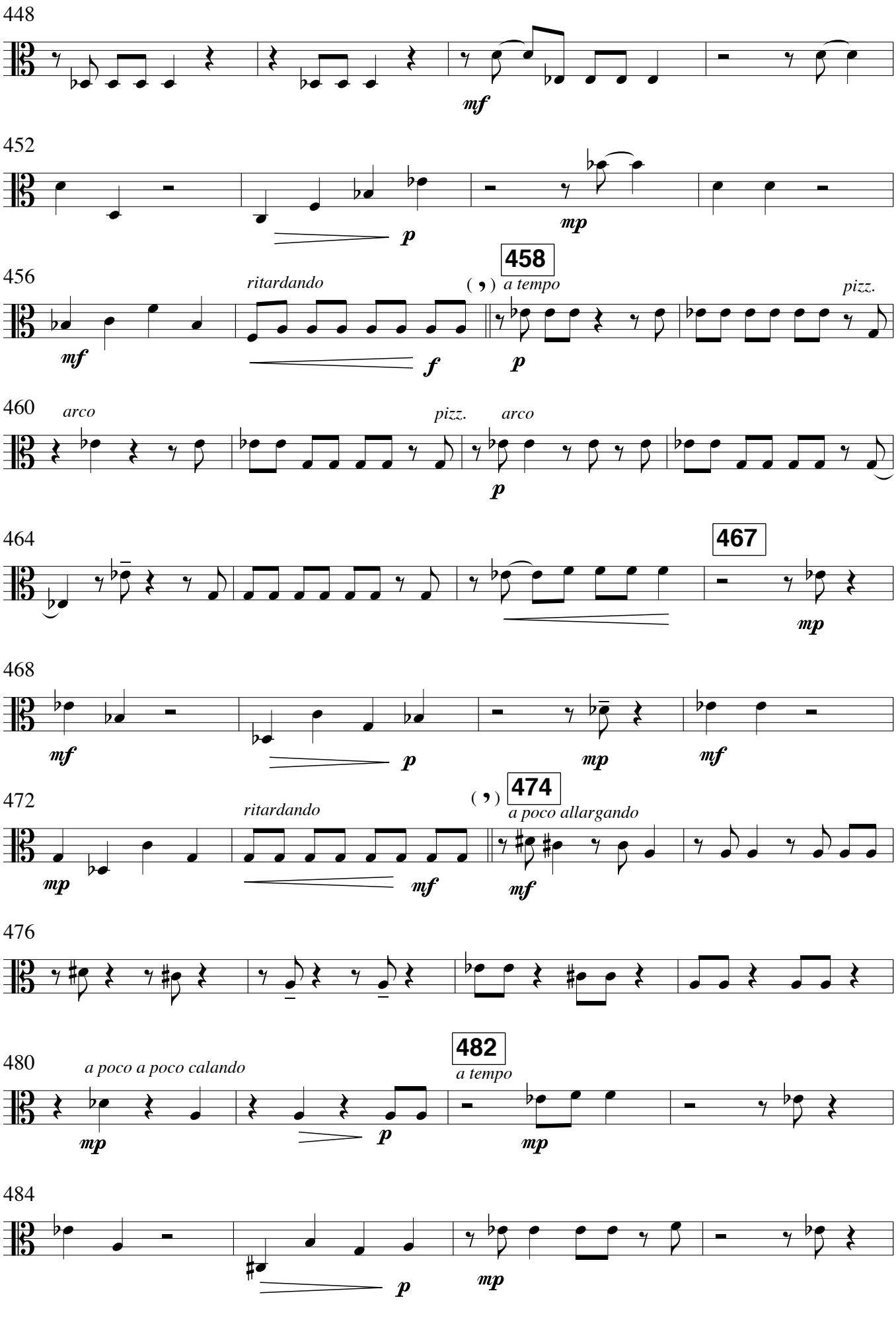
mf

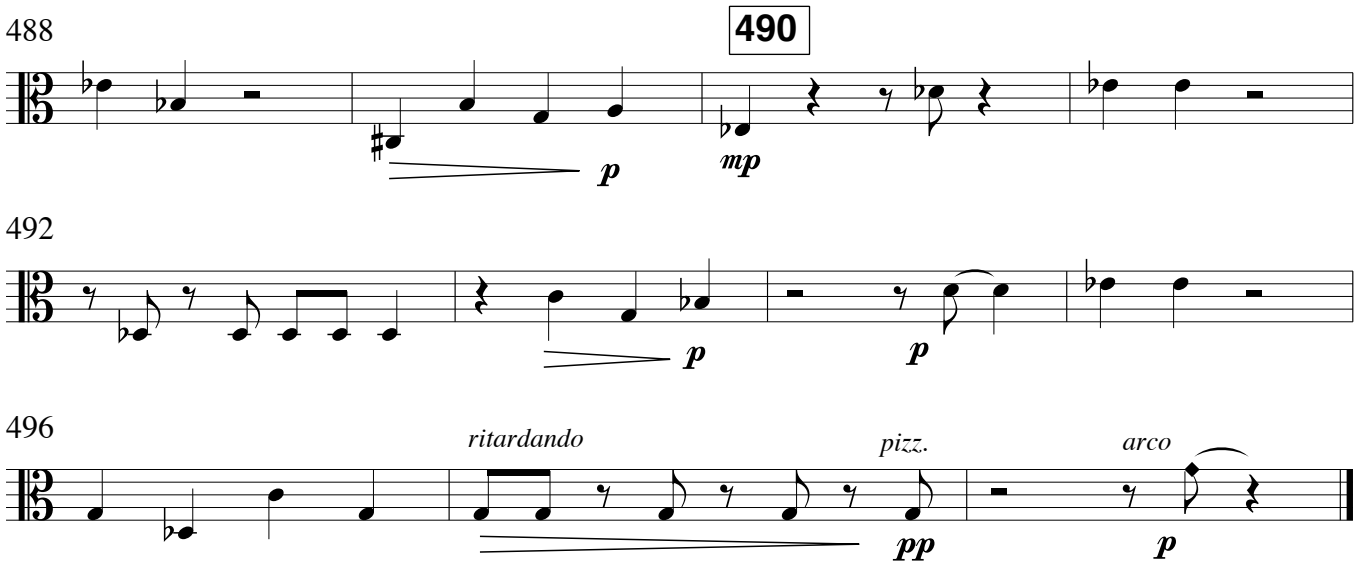
442 **442** *a tempo*

pizz. *arco*

mp

446


448
mf
452
p
mp
458
456
ritardando
(,) a tempo
pizz.
mf
f
p
460
arco
pizz.
arco
p
464
467
mp
468
mf
p
mp
mf
472
ritardando
(,)
474
a poco allargando
mp
mf
mf
476
480
a poco a poco calando
482
a tempo
mp
p
mp
484
p
mp


488
490
p
mp
492
p
p
496
ritardando
pizz.
arco
pp
p