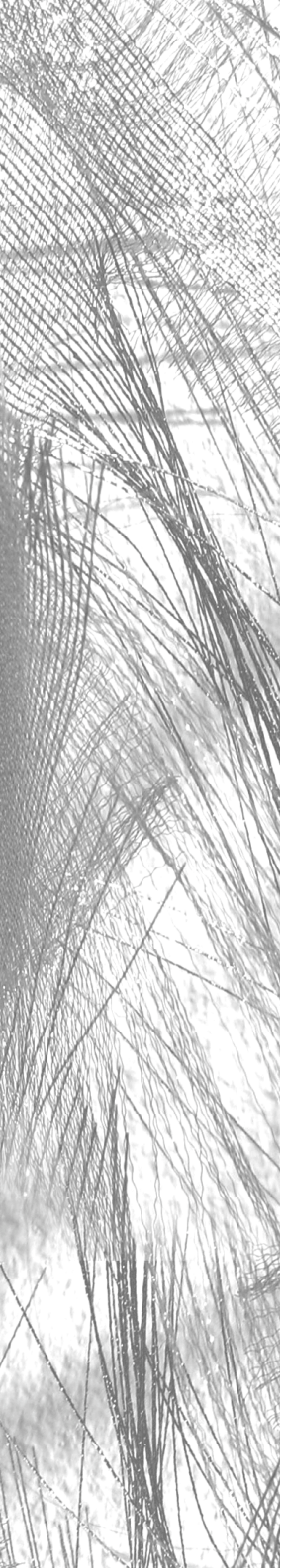

Objects of Curiosity (SuperCity)

For String Quartet (with digital media)

Nigel Morgan

Scenario from Will Alsop's SuperCity exhibition 2005
at the Urbis Centre for Urban Culture

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About the Music

In the past twenty years the medium of the string quartet has been reimagined thanks to the Kronos Quartet. They have inspired a new generation of string players who have commissioned new work, made collaborations with musicians from other cultures, explored improvisation and devised work, adopted amplification, sound projection and electronic treatments, and most recently worked with digital visual media and communications technology.

Objects of Curiosity is composed to suit this new kind of string quartet, but does not altogether rule out more traditional approaches to the medium.

The genesis of what is an expanding collection of single movement works for strings (with or without external / additional performance elements) comes from the work of the architect Will Alsop who, like the Kronos with the string quartet, has re-defined many people's experience of architecture. Alsop's often visionary work is not just about buildings: it focuses a concern for the whole environment and the quality of lives people lead. This is often first expressed in a web of collaborative practice using painting, sculpture, music, poetry, documentary, and the latest in digital visualization. In his 2005 exhibition SuperCity at Manchester's Urbis Centre for Urban Culture Alsop presents a vision for the future of the North of England, a SuperCity development stretching from Hull to Liverpool.

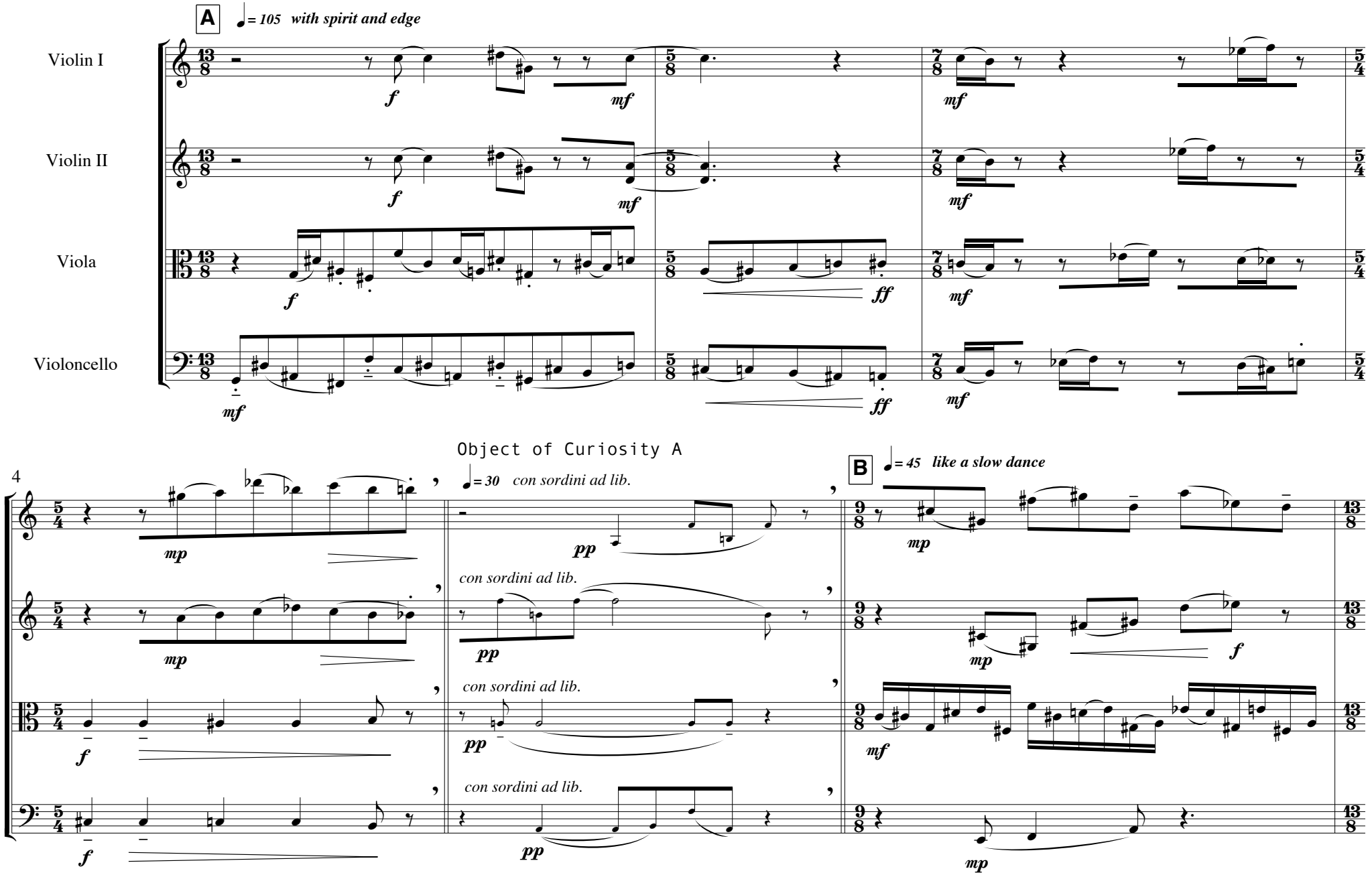
> *Just the concept of SuperCity is a departure from traditional urban planning, the exhibition is a departure from traditional exhibition shows – instead of architectural models, presented here are the windows into the experiences the SuperCity could contain. Will Alsop sometimes refers to his buildings as "objects of curiosity"(and wonder) – structures that are meant to inspire people and animate the landscape. The giant sculptural forms found throughout the exhibition are not answers to what the future will be like, but objects to encourage dreams of what could be, and, most importantly, encourage the spectator to ask "what if . . . ?"*

The notion of Alsop's 'objects of curiosity' and the Urbis exhibition has provided a kind of scenario – as well as a subtitle – for this quartet piece. The music explores a variety of tempos and *'affections'* punctuated with sequence of backdrops, when the music drops into real-time to be filled with 'objects of curiosity'. These real-time backdrops may be realized in a number of different ways – depending on circumstance, resources and performers' intentions.

- a sequence of visuals of objects of curiosity that have some kind of link to them (exhibits in an imaginary museum, forms under magnification, etc);
- a sequence of sonic objects, curious and not immediately identifiable;
- a combination of both visual and sonic objects mentioned above;
- improvised or devised sonic objects produced live by members of the quartet or guest improvising musician or musicians;

In the SuperCity quartet the 'objects of curiosity' are presented as scored musical material in small type – to be played as though a distant musical presence, literally a backdrop against images and sounds from the SuperCity exhibition. In amplified performances this musical material should be imaginatively projected and electronically treated. The backdrops may even be pre-recorded and 'dropped in' to enable the performers to devise their own 'objects' in the sonic foreground.

Objects of Curiosity (SuperCity)



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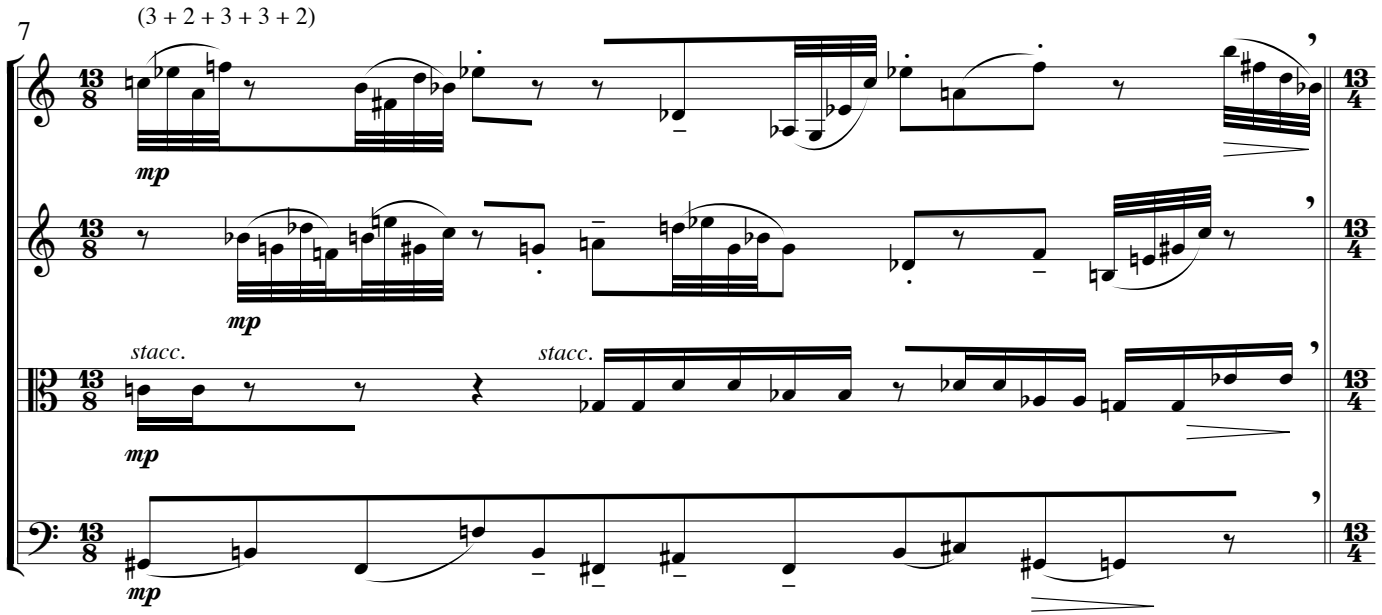
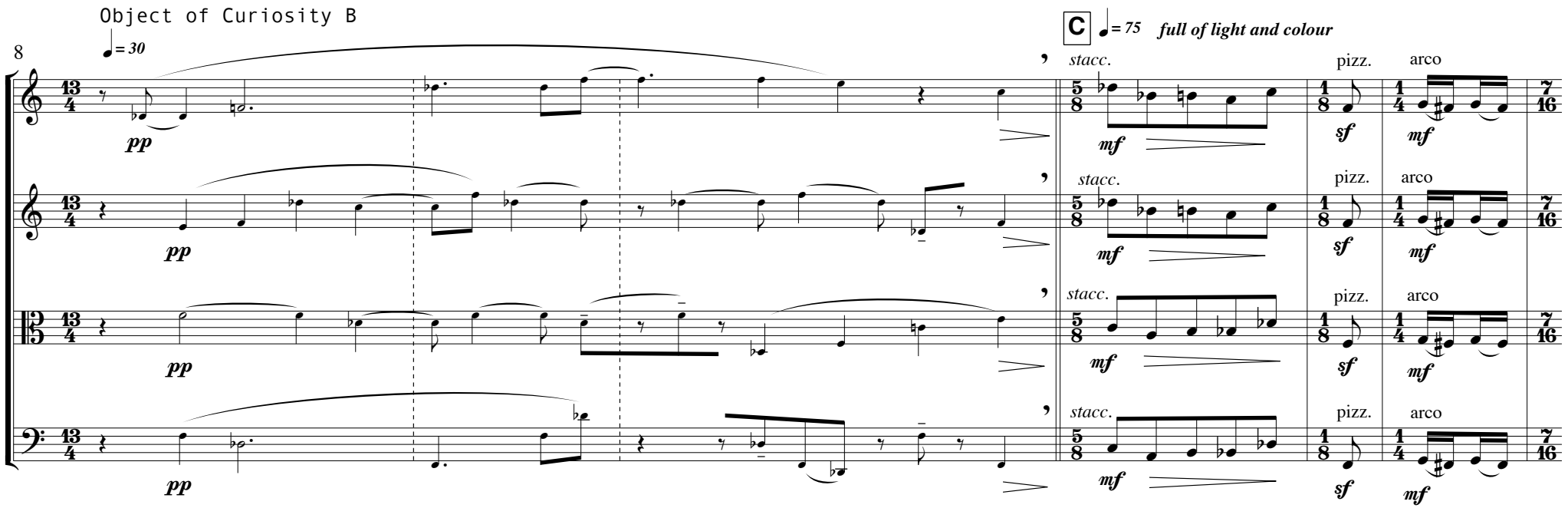
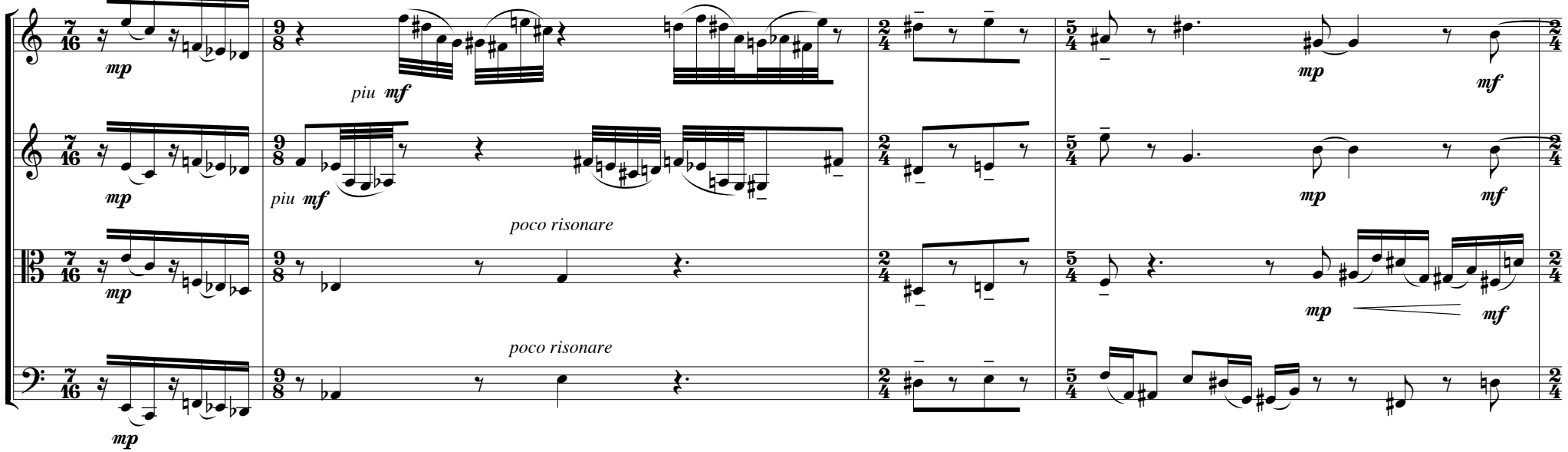

7
(3 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 2)
mp
stacc.


Object of Curiosity B
8
= 30
pp
C
= 75
full of light and colour
stacc.
mf
pizz.
sf
arco

12



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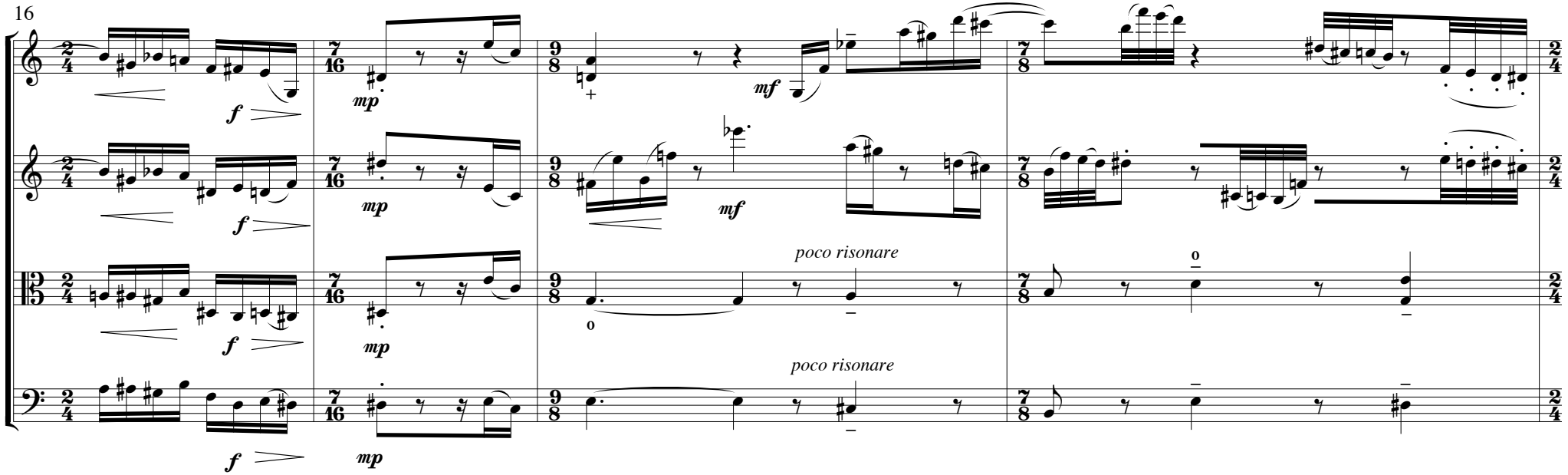
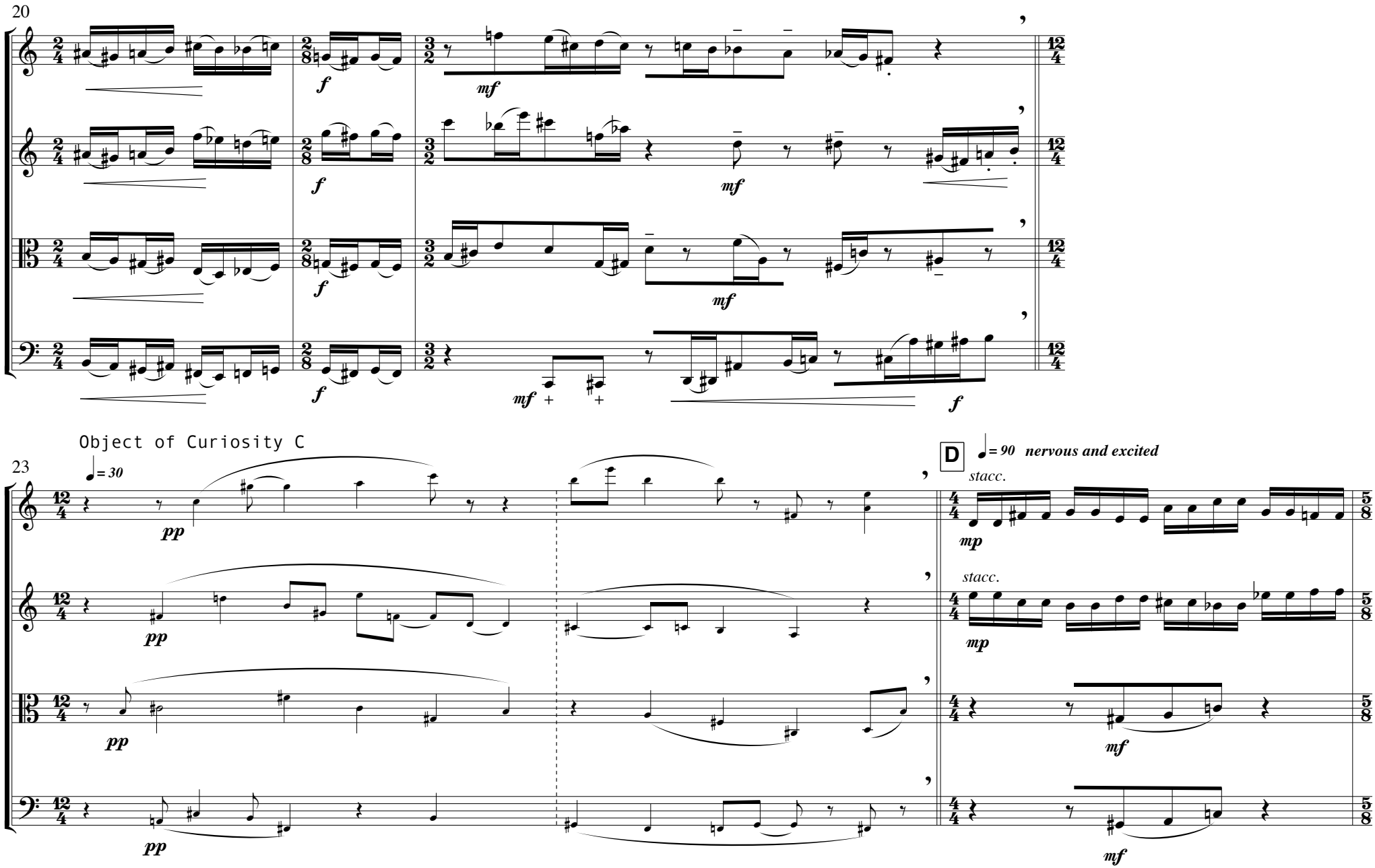
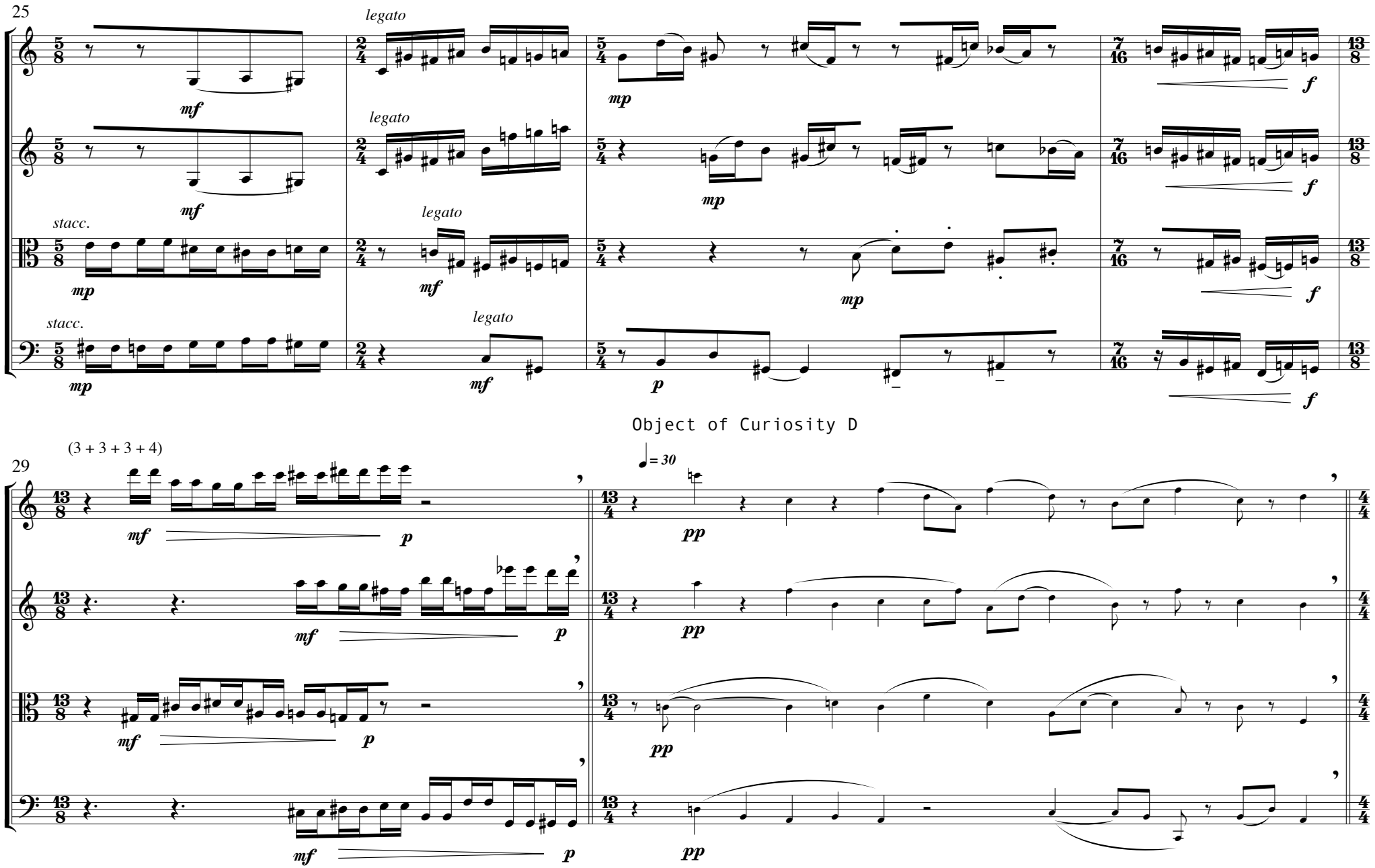
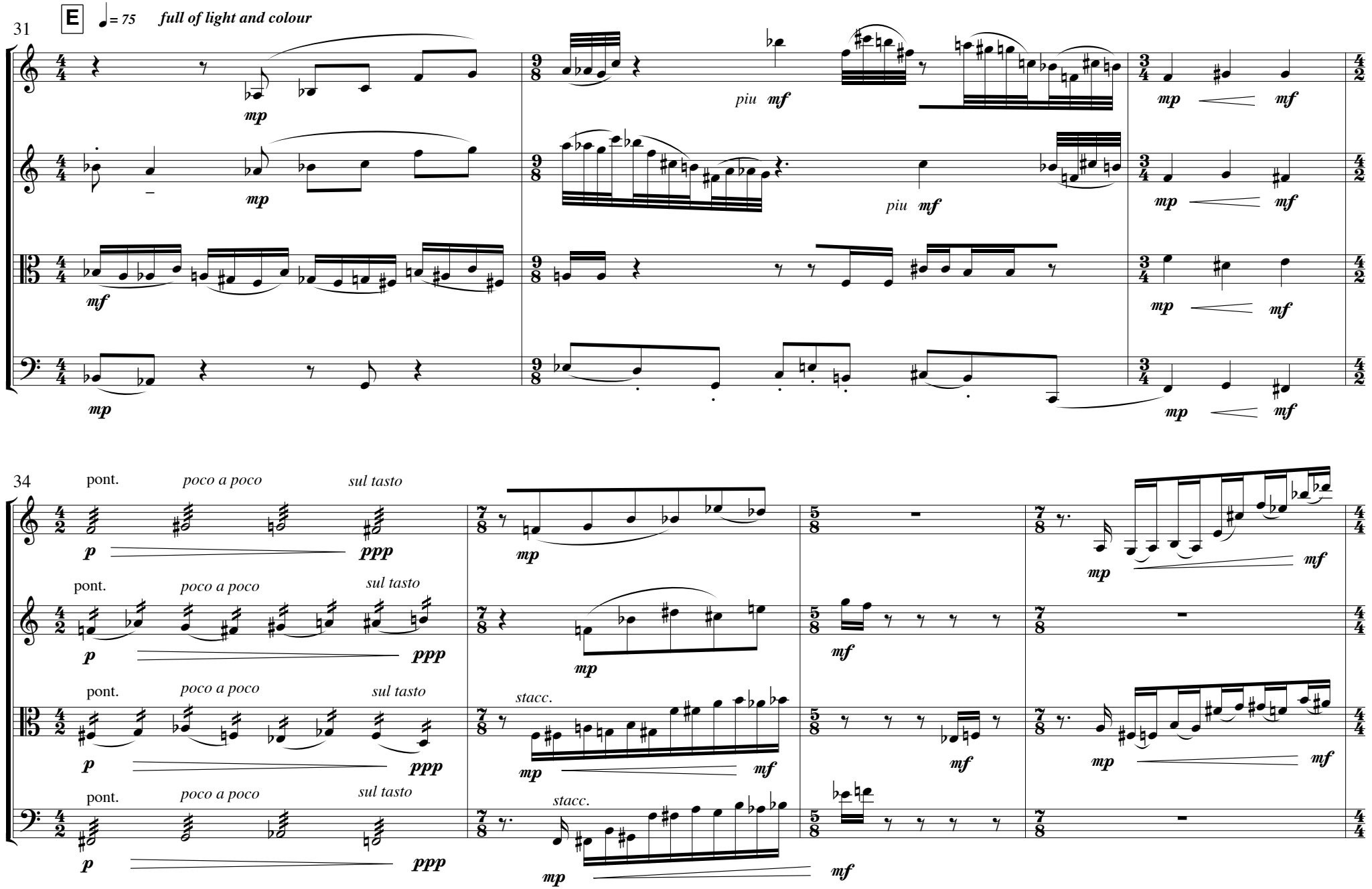
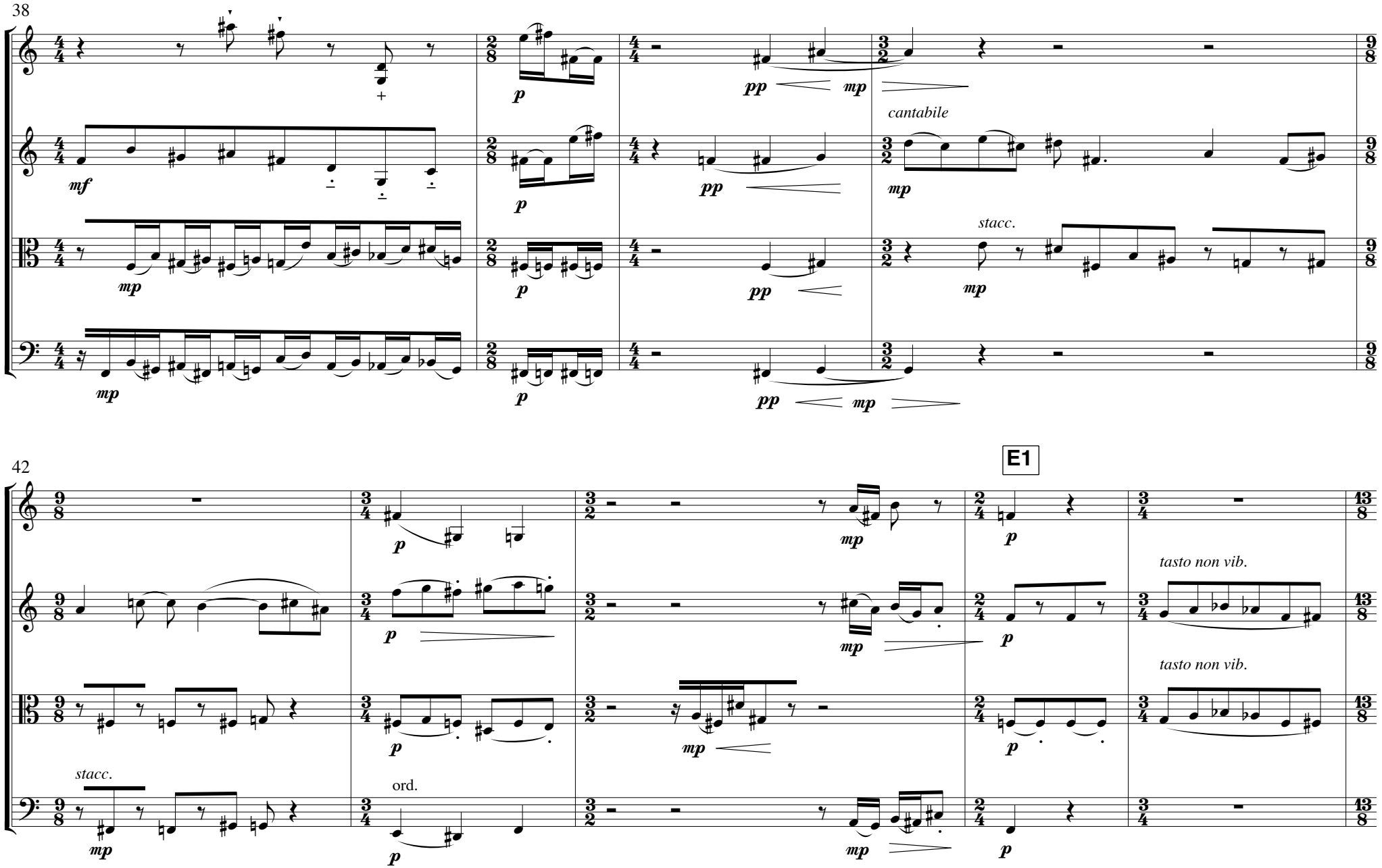


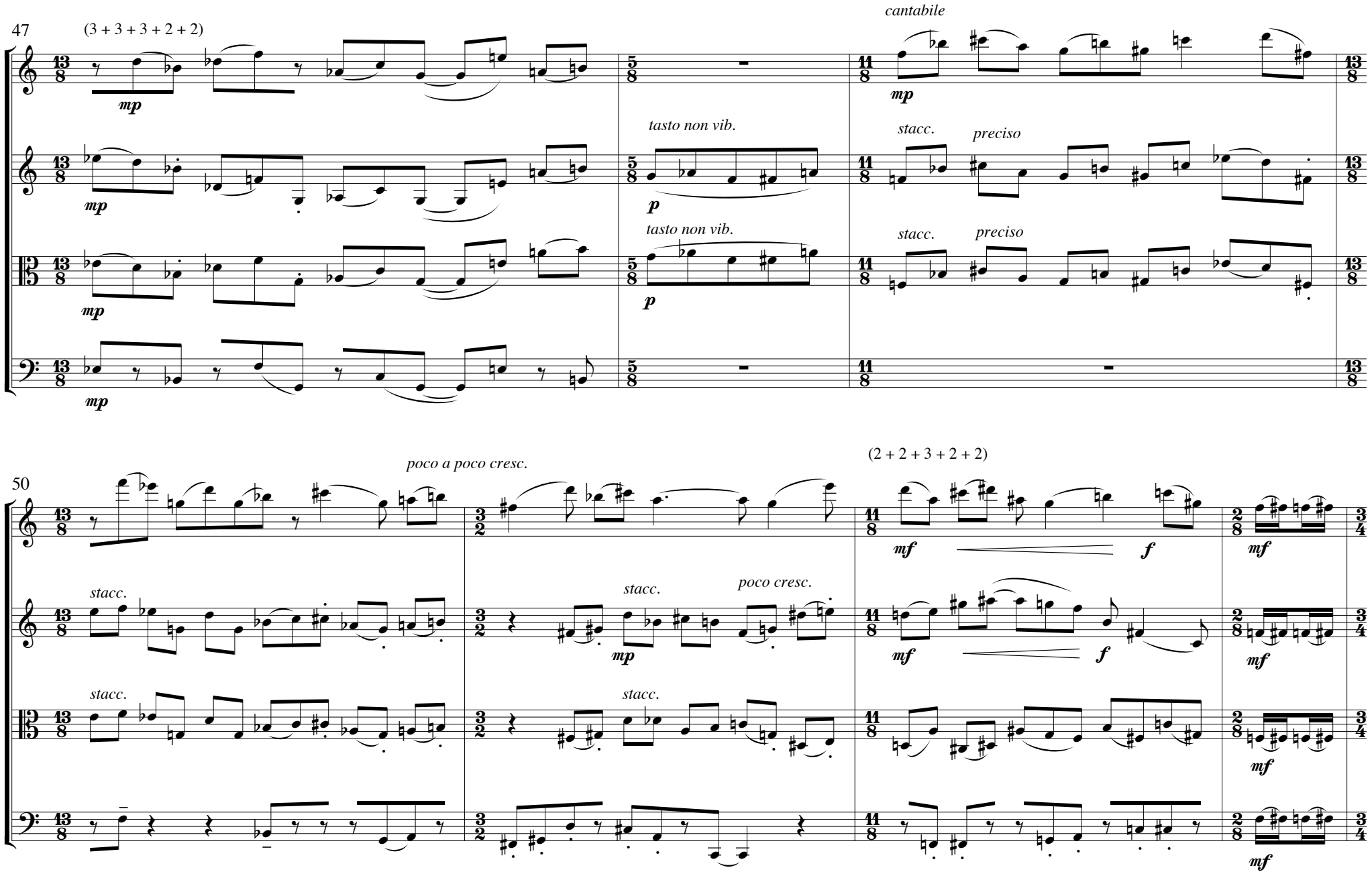

20
f
mf
23
Object of Curiosity C
= 30
pp
D
= 90 nervous and excited
stacc.
mp
mf

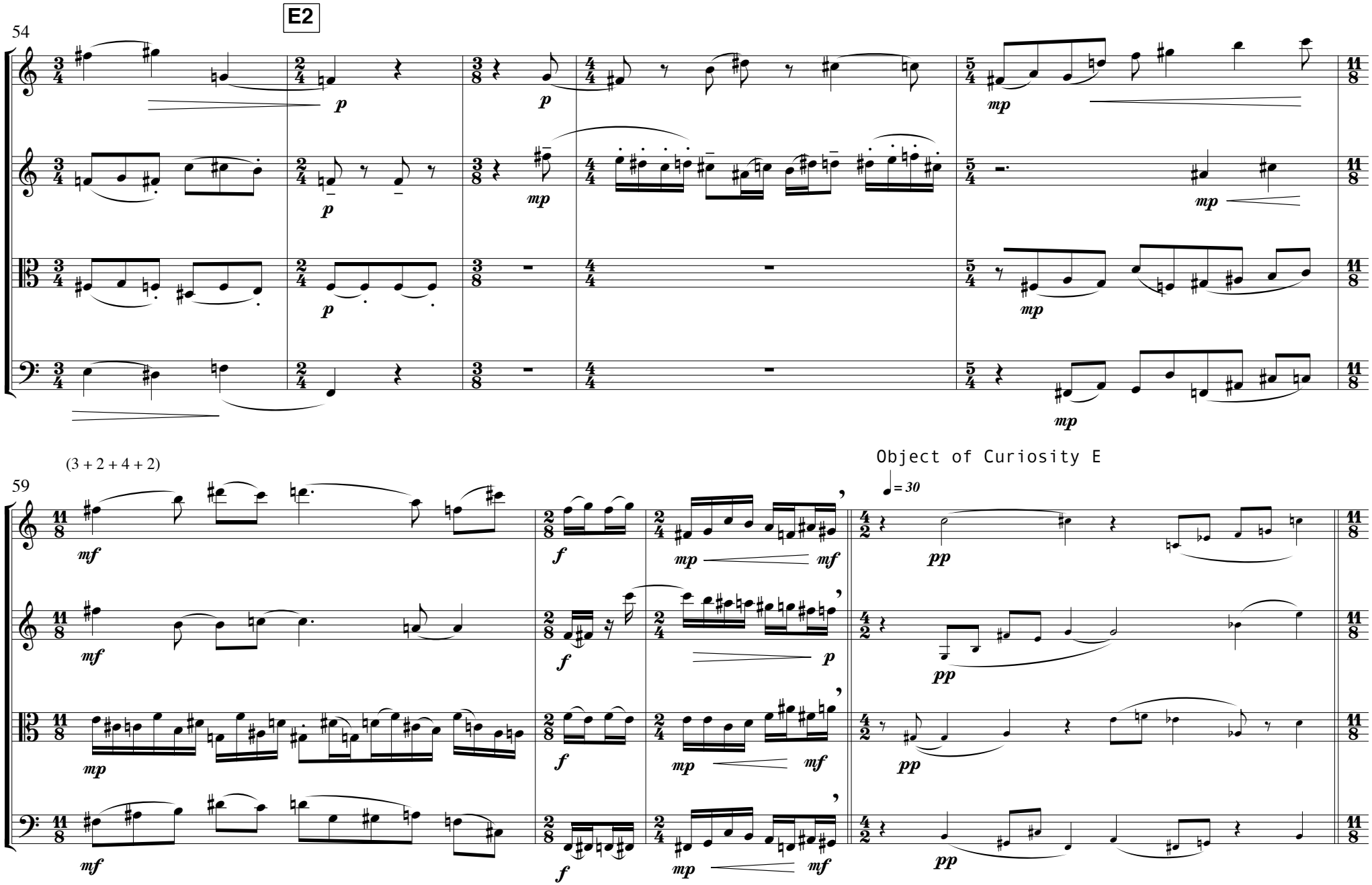


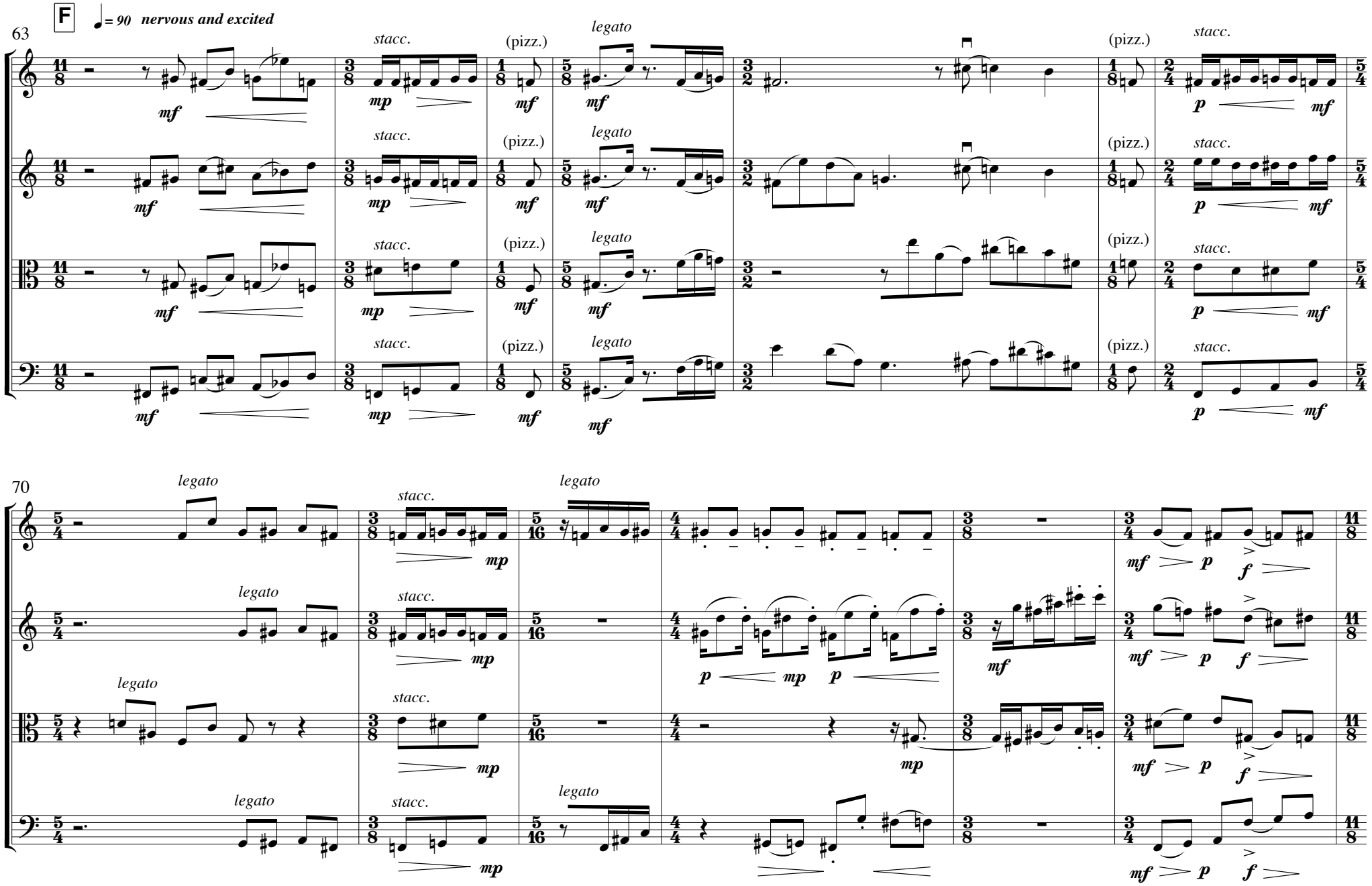
Object of Curiosity D

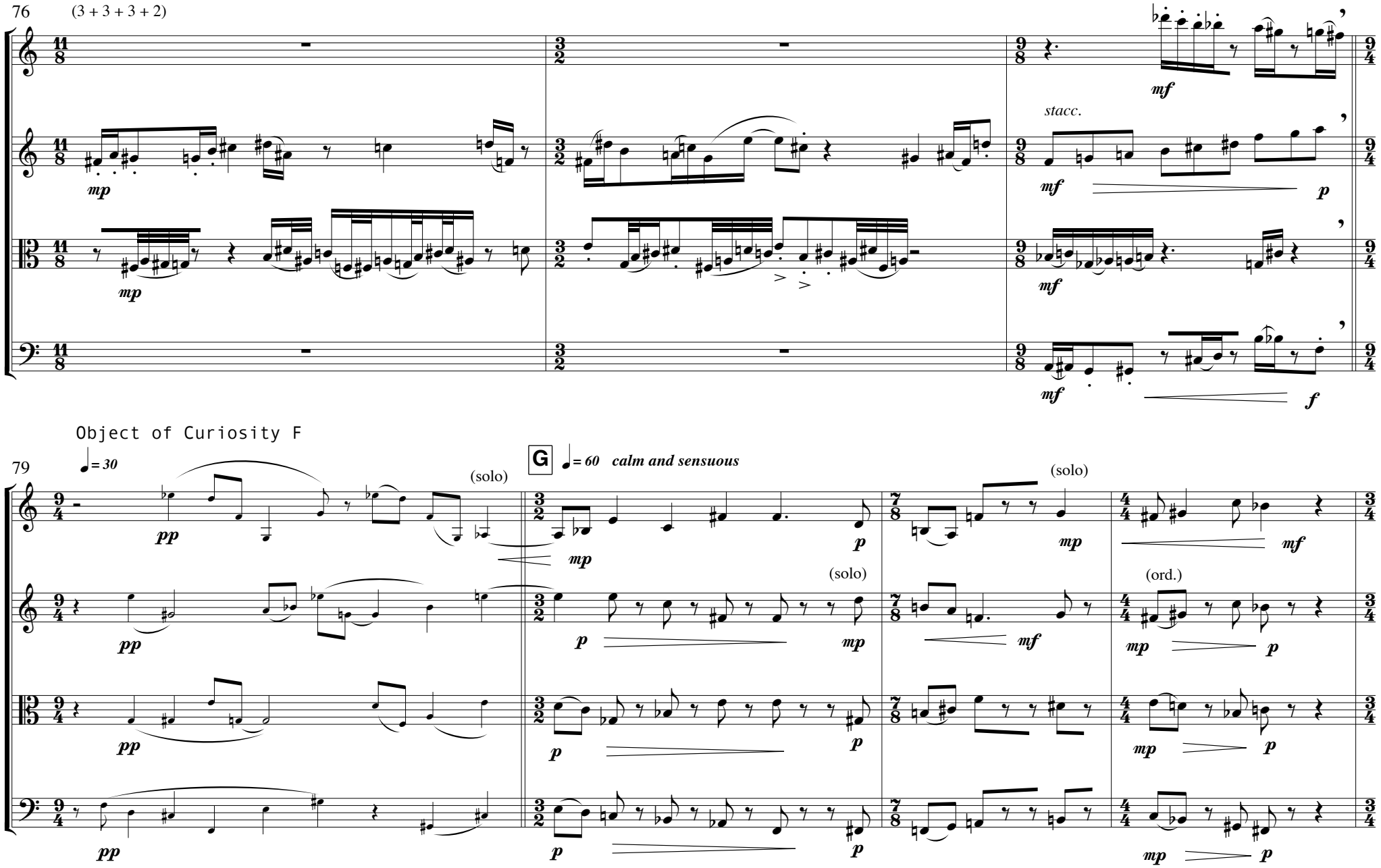

31
E
♩= 75
full of light and colour
mp
mf
piu mf
34
pont.
poco a poco
sul tasto
p
ppp
stacc.

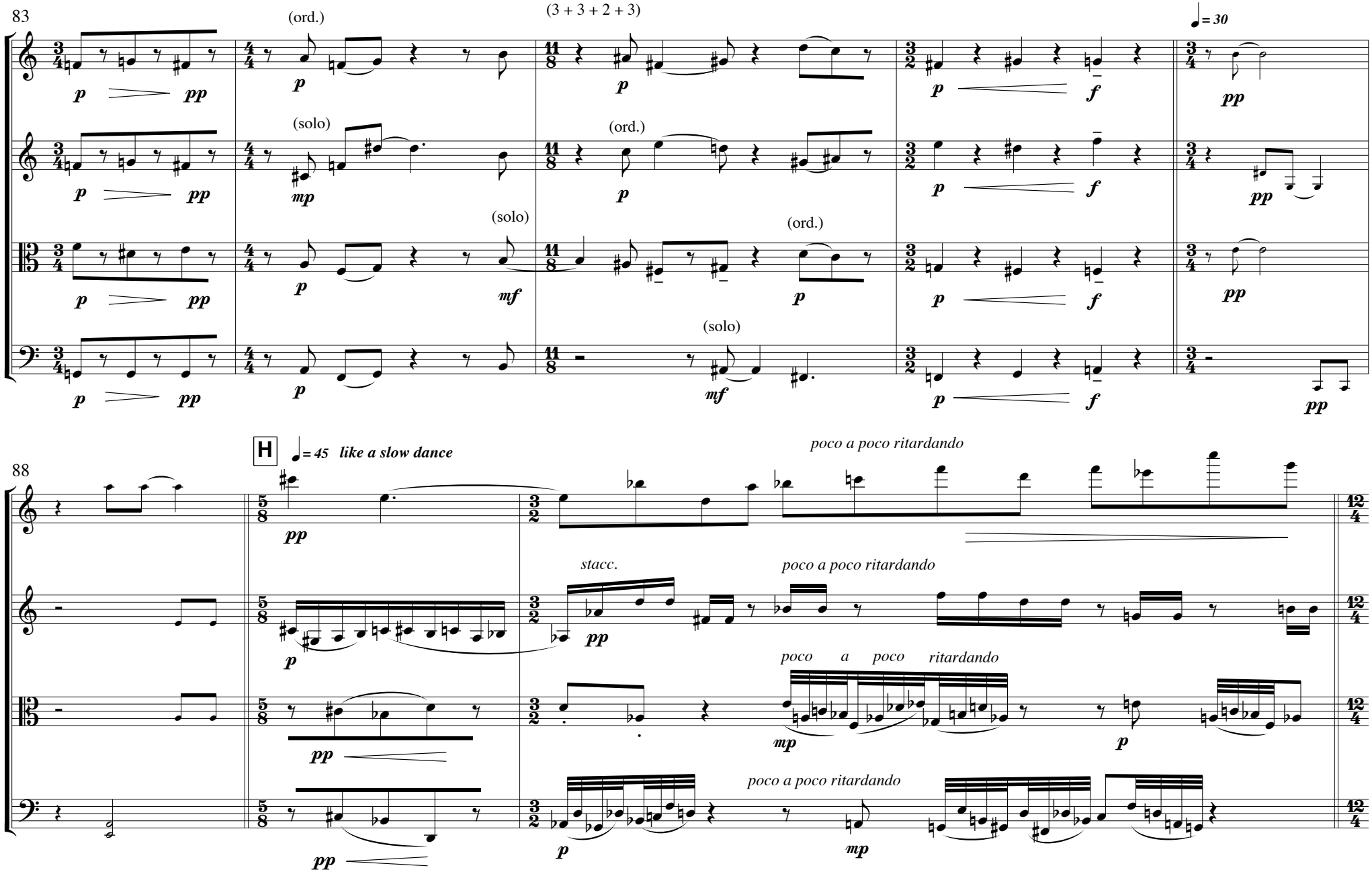

38
cantabile
stacc.
42
E1
tasto non vib.
tasto non vib.
stacc.
ord.

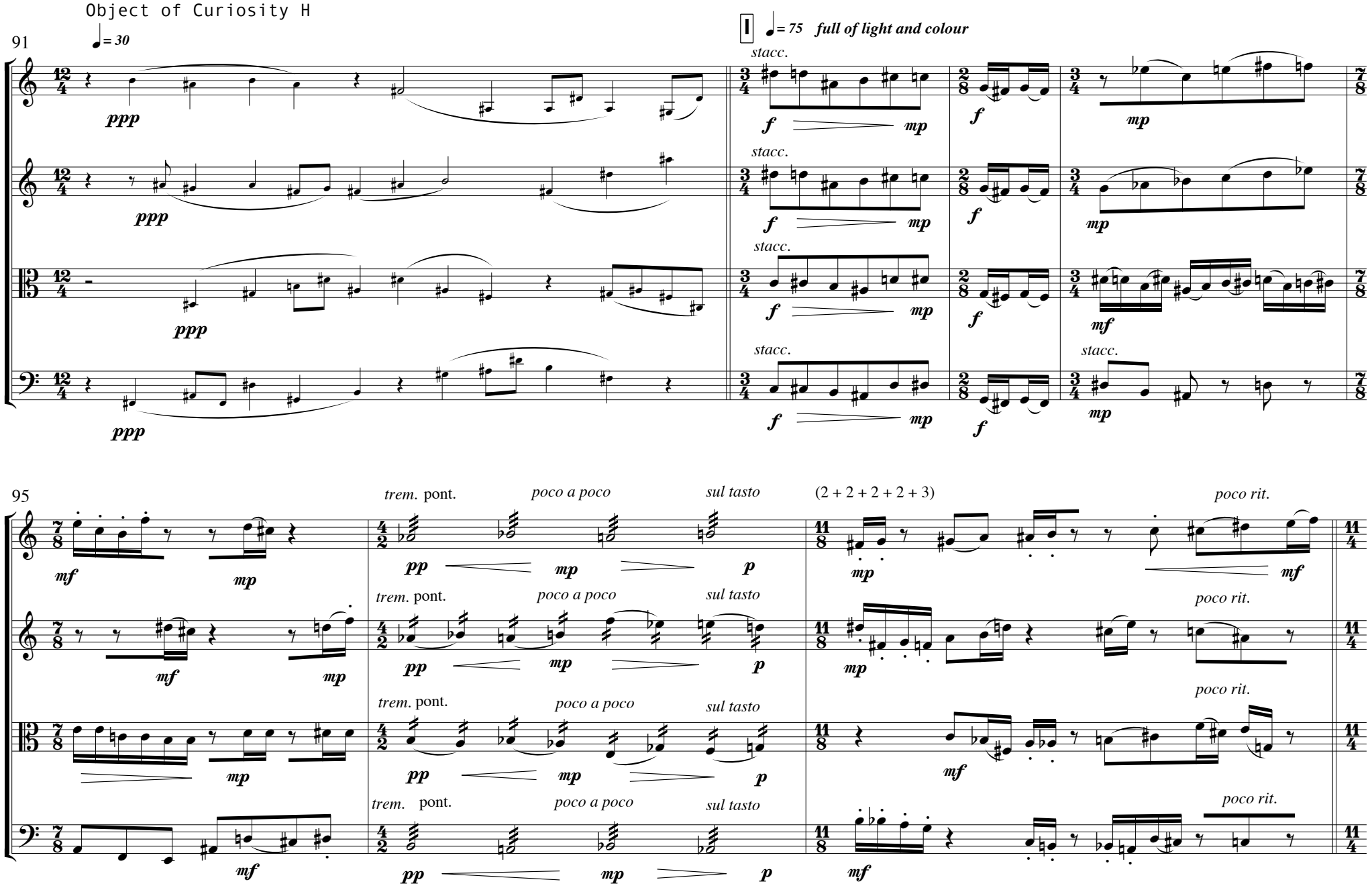

47
(3 + 3 + 3 + 2 + 2)
cantabile
mp
tasto non vib.
p
stacc.
preciso
50
poco a poco cresc.
(2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2)
mf
f
poco cresc.

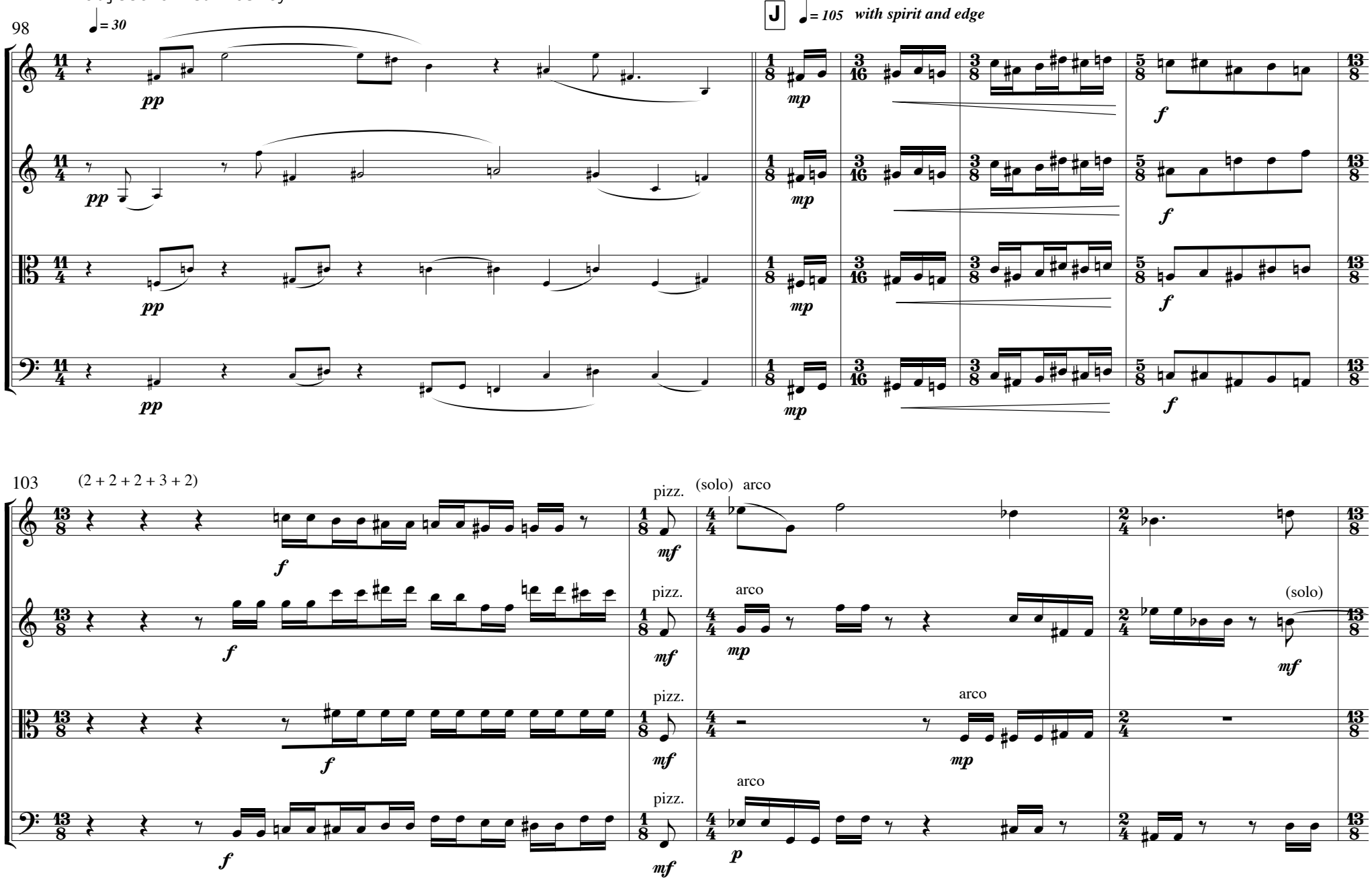

54
E2
(3 + 2 + 4 + 2)
59
Object of Curiosity E
= 30

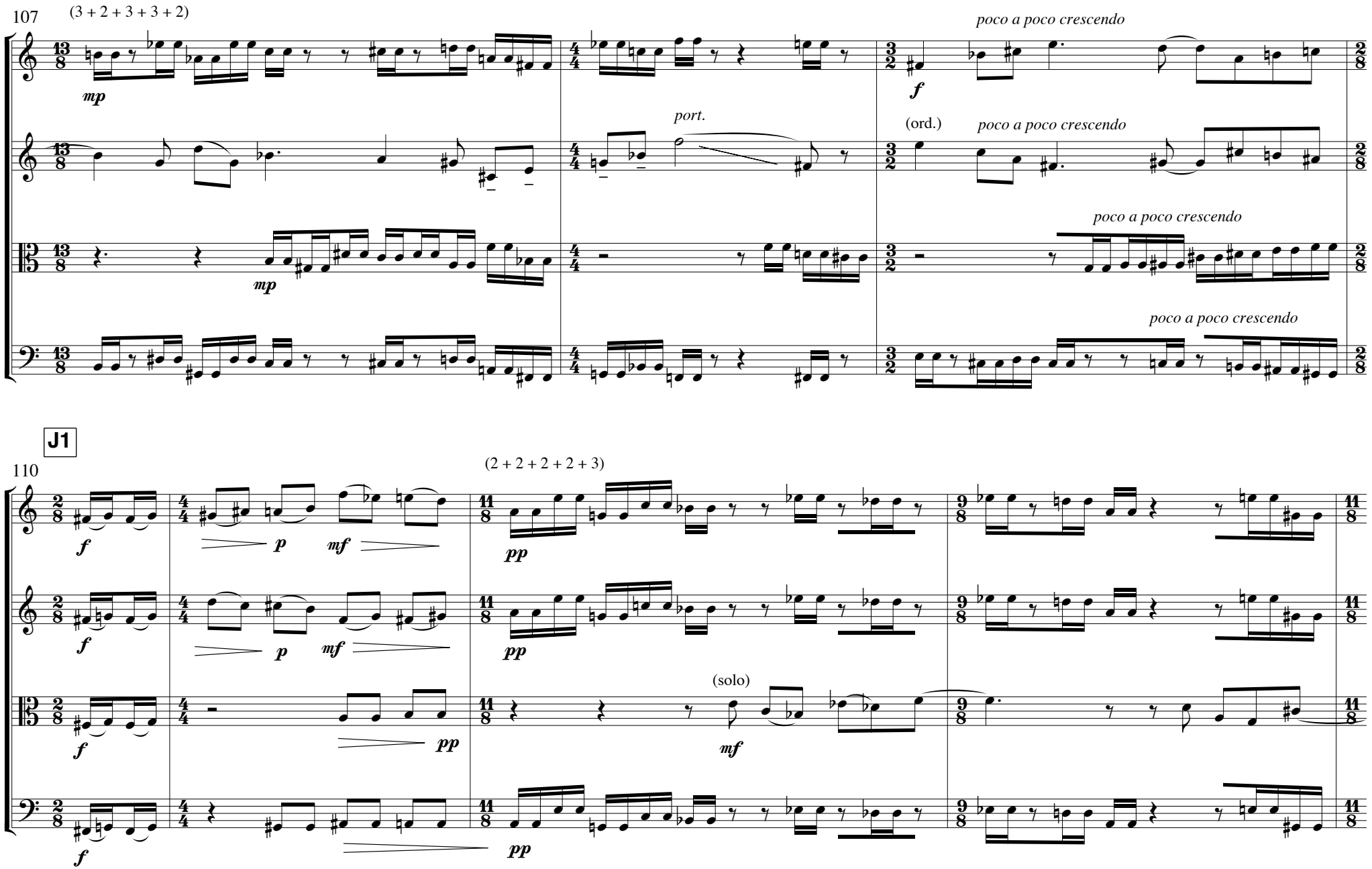

F
♩= 90 nervous and excited
63
stacc.
(pizz.)
legato
70
legato
stacc.

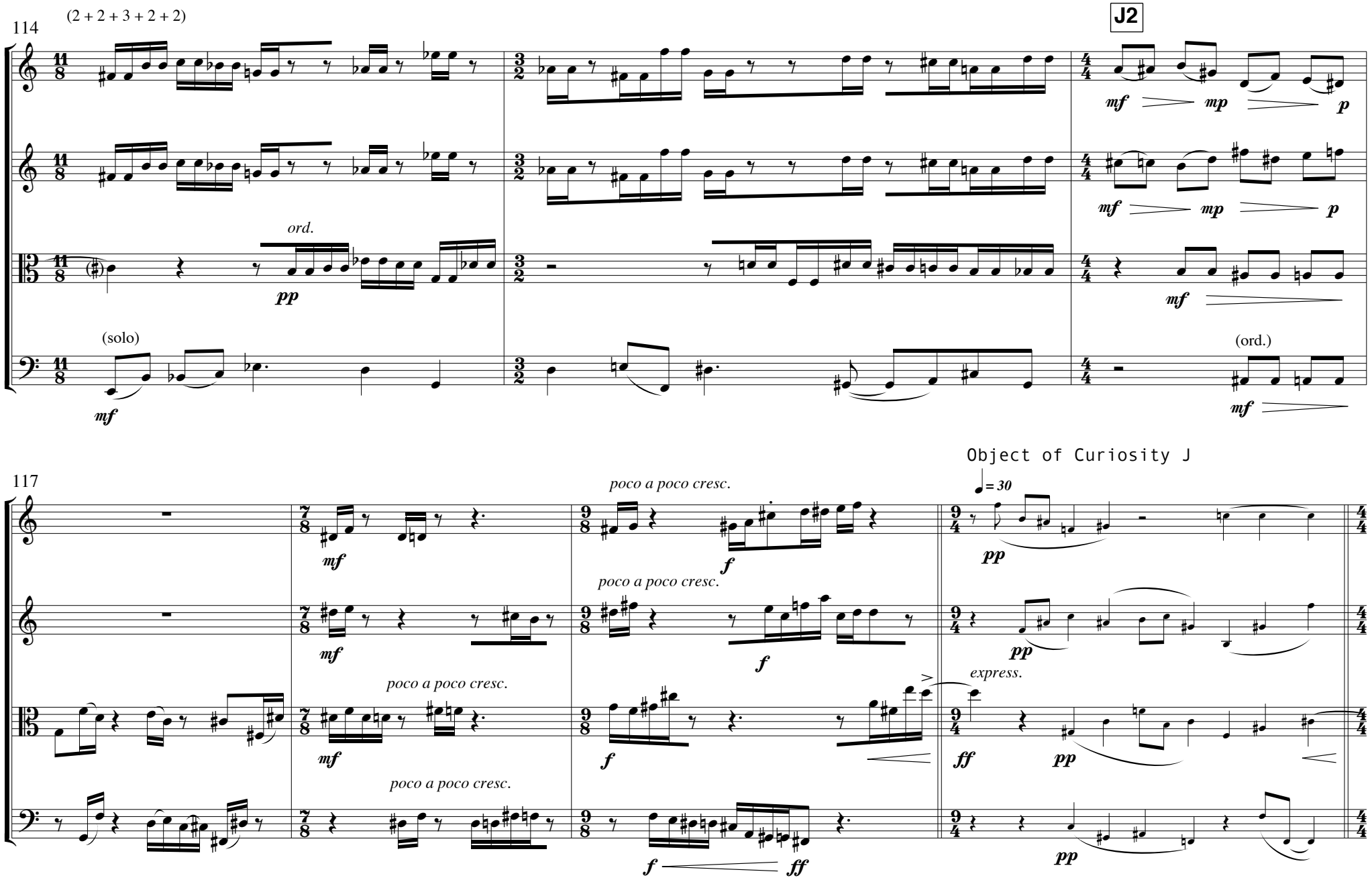

76
(3 + 3 + 3 + 2)
stacc.
Object of Curiosity F
79
G
= 30
= 60
calm and sensuous
(solo)
(ord.)

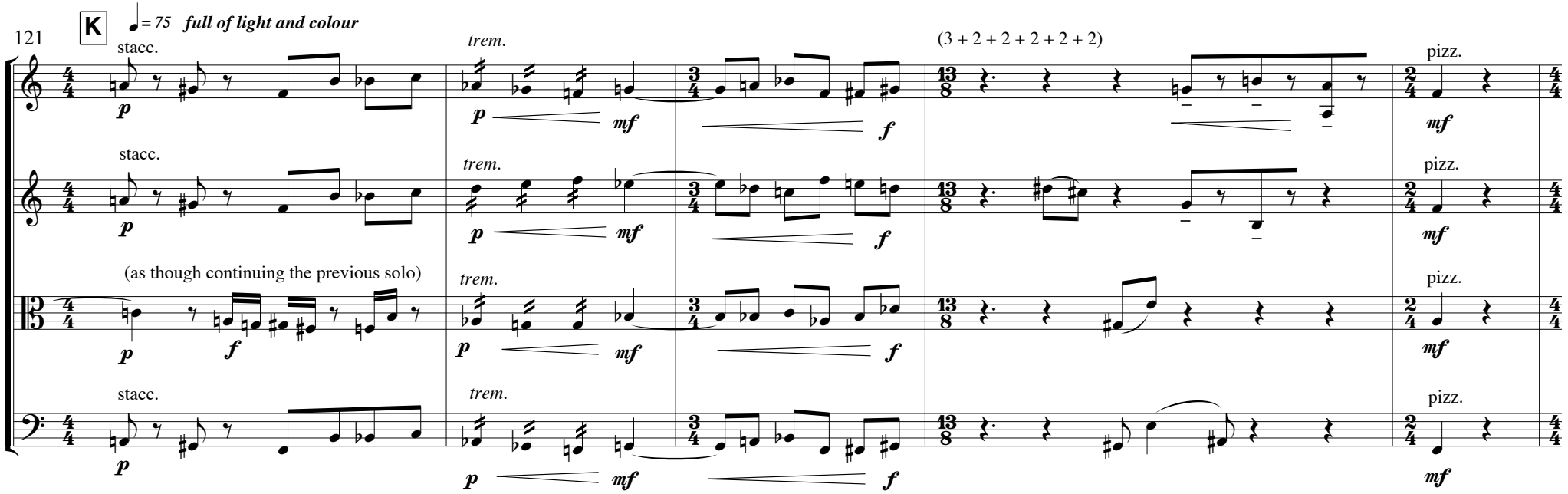

83
(ord.)
(3 + 3 + 2 + 3)
= 30
(solo)
(ord.)
(solo)
(ord.)
(solo)
H
= 45 like a slow dance
88
poco a poco ritardando
stacc.
poco a poco ritardando
poco a poco ritardando
poco a poco ritardando

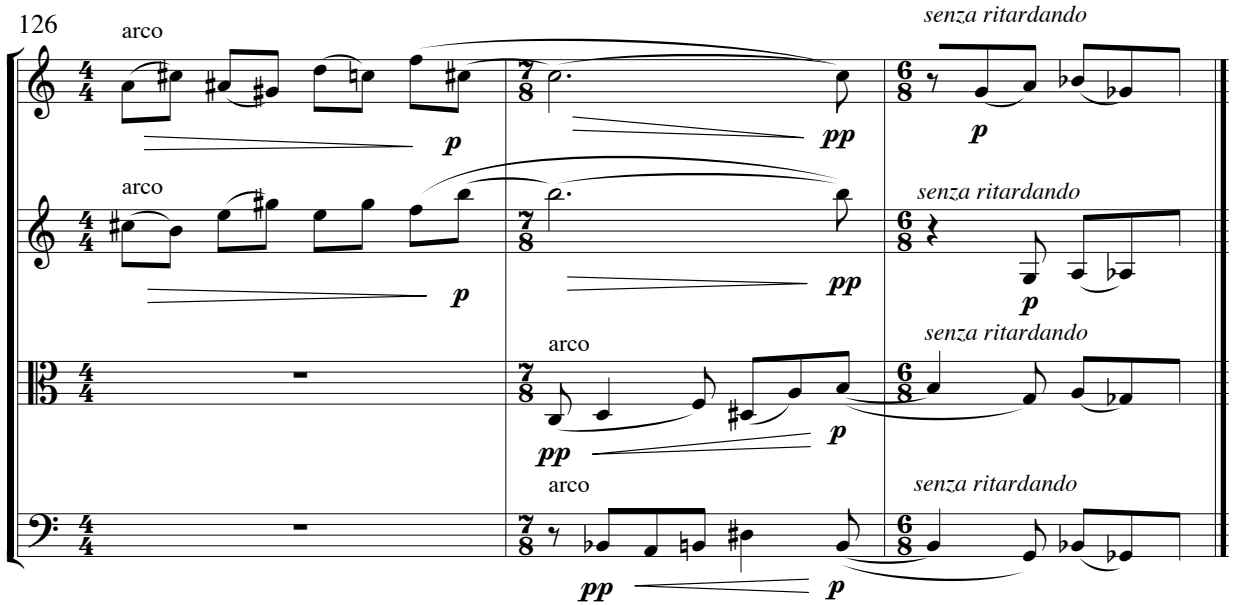

91
♩= 30
I
♩= 75 full of light and colour
stacc.
95
trem. pont.
poco a poco
sul tasto
(2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3)
poco rit.


98
= 30
J
= 105 with spirit and edge
pp
mp
f
103
(2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 2)
pizz.
(solo) arco
mf
arco
(solo)
p


107
(3 + 2 + 3 + 3 + 2)
mp
port.
f
(ord.)
poco a poco crescendo
J1
110
(2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3)
pp
(solo)
mf


114
(2 + 2 + 3 + 2 + 2)
J2
ord.
(solo)
(ord.)
117
poco a poco cresc.
Object of Curiosity J
♩= 30
express.





for the Kronos String Quartet

January - February 2005