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The Trickster Cycle

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Bard

Rron Karahoda
Bard College
Senior Project Artist Statement
Musical Composition

The Trickster Cycle

In this work I have scored a cycle of 4 dances in order to present both the techniques and artistic vision that I have cultivated in the past 3 years. I have chosen to blend the aural language of music with the visual language of movement to better represent the ideas that are at the center of the inspiration surrounding this work. In this work, I present the effect of setting myths of different cultures to music and dance not to reconstruct, deconstruct or retell ancient stories but instead to translate the attitude and problems of the myth into sound and movement, revealing dimensions of these tales that cannot be expressed by words.

The process for producing these works is similar to the idea of creating a character for a work of fiction. This is not to say that the works that are here discussed are programmatic, as they do not directly aim to tell some specific story. Instead, the character that is being created is the character of the composer and the dancer. In order to qualify this statement, consider what a writer does when they create a character. They create a set of personality traits, motivations, and then set them within a circumstance, and then, as a writer follows this character through what becomes known as a story. In this way, by using the foundation of a specific myth, I have identified a set of personality traits and motivations (individual to each examined myth) and thus affected the attitude of the composer (that is, me) to write music as if I were composed of those traits.

Before examining the works individually the title '*The Trickster Cycle*' must be unpacked. I chose to name it thus so as to indicate that the tales being used and 'translated' are the stories of a 'Trickster' God or Goddess from whichever tradition was being called upon. The decision to use a Trickster figure over a reigning figure or a Demigod (or half-human) is that they are unreliable, even as deities and so have more dynamic characters. Within some Indigenous American cultures exists the idea of the sanctified jester, (and idea also found in the works of Tolstoy and other Russian writers) which aims to teach people about their own habits and ideologies through a figure who either exaggerates, or humorously fails at, tasks that embody a certain ideology of their society. These figures are highly respected and give the community a chance at self-revision, because the act of this sanctified jester reveals absurdities and peculiarities of the community, removing a certain fear of self-evaluation. I argue that this fear is a central problem of all proposed changes. It is this attitude towards self-evaluation that is present in my investigation into the attitudes of these myths. The music and dance function as a 'jester-like' performance of human attitudes inherent to the myths being used.

The first work to be examined is the dance entitled *Ever of the Unburdened* which draws upon the story of Prometheus after he has been imprisoned by Zeus. The title is derived from a line of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's poem 'Prometheus' in which Zeus admonishes Prometheus for deigning to make his own choices. Specifically here he asks Prometheus if, in his actions he has ever even lessened the pain of a burdened one. Through readings of Prometheus and instances of this trial, I established a persona that struggles between an authority and an interest in it's own growth. This struggle is represented as a duet between two instruments of a similar nature, each vying for recognition as the primary instrument. A personality unsure of it's own identity (an often debated topic) presents itself through the harmony of the piece which introduces a relationship of the third below the established tonality. These moments are low and sustained against a melody that usually makes leaps and jumps (a behavior indicative of freedom with a slight bit of arrogance), creating friction between an old style with a new one (The sustained rumblings resembling old contrapuntal church songs and the melody being a break from said style). The main melody often comes back, breaking apart as the piece goes on. This serves as the will of the musician to stay as they are, perhaps dreaming of a past self in the face of

oppressive change. The dance itself reflects this with many reverberations and echos present in the body language of the dancer. The dancer is almost fighting themselves as they try to make a decision about the state of their identity. Do they give in to the authority who is presenting them with a complete, yet submissive role? They do not, they are broken, just like the melody and left as such. Their personality is not replaced, but at what cost? Without a new theme to end on, the music and dancer leave possibility for a reconstruction, or an adaptive change in their identity.

The second work is entitled *Let it Come, Let it Go* is a part of a traditional Ashanti way of starting a myth or story. As the music draws it's personality from that of Anansi, a West-African Spider God, it is an appropriate beginning but also reveals a part of Anansi's personality that is present in the music. The major personality of the piece is that of hubris, represented in the music as a work of 7 instruments (the largest in the cycle) written mostly in a Major Key with harmonization at the fourth (A 'perfect' interval) whose general direction is that of an ascending melody. Underneath the whole work is an *ostinato* in the Acoustic Bass constantly pushing forth in a heady, yet off-balance manner. This provides the work with a pulse that snowballs that is drawn into focus by the relatively steady and fanfare-like quality of the melody (often comprised of the rest of the ensemble). Any hint of self-consciousness or harmonic vagueness is met with indifference and lightheartedness. Even as the music enters a Minor key, the music does not really relent, but takes on a softer quality. It quickly comes back to Major, as if it's character never truly changed.

The third dance is entitled *The Crow's Ruin*, and is derived from the plight of The Morrigan, a figure from Celtic Mythology. Her story is a tale of trauma and obsession that takes it's form in the music as a recurring theme that breaks into bitonal versions of the original iteration. As the notes stay largely the same, new keys are introduced on some of the instruments changing their accidentals and introducing doubt into the themes. This mimicks obsession and trauma in that the original theme is some sort of memory that the subject has latched onto. When a traumatic event occurs, it is common for an individual to go over the traumatic memory, each time focusing on some detail as if it were the root cause. This fixation perverts the memory but keeps it recognizably intact. The perversion of the musical theme disorients the listener as they struggle not to remember the theme, but to understand what has changed. As the piece concludes, it is unclear to tell exactly how much of the original work was modified without repeated listens or attentively listening for the changes.

The last dance is entitled *Tempered in Venom* and calls upon the personality of Loki to perform a piece born out of anxiety as well as the tendency for people to adapt to changes in their environment. The myth that is used is that of Loki's imprisonment by the rest of the Gods for his crimes against the God Baldr (signaling the beginning of the end of the world) and is bound to a rock, poison dripping into his eyes for eternity. It is his attitude, presented against the form of a waltz that takes shape in this piece. The waltz, a usually comforting form is here tinted with a sinister aspect. It's positive direction sounds overriding, nothing like it has happened within the rest of the cycle. It plods on, similar to that of the drone and Hubris found in *Let it Come, Let it Go*, but with a different effect. The waltz is the feeling of imprisonment and the threat and pain of poison, whereas Loki is at heart a free entity. The waltz is quickly and often subverted, newer quicker and longer melodies introduced to present the idea of the rebellion, the outcry. They sound as though they restart every time they are introduced, and become a major feature of the piece, becoming the desire to break free, but also a cry of pain as the venom becomes too much to handle. The feeling of imprisonment never really goes away, and so neither Loki nor our audience is given the chance to see these second materials develop but instead bear witness to various attempts to break out, or to subvert the overriding waltz.

Ultimately, the cycle addresses the lives of the audience. Each character shaped their corresponding piece by having a struggle surrounding their will (or in the case of *Let it Come, Let it Go* the effect of no struggle in the will) and present narratives to the audience that are sometimes difficult to express in words, but that provides a moment of reflection so that we may come to know ourselves through the actions of others.

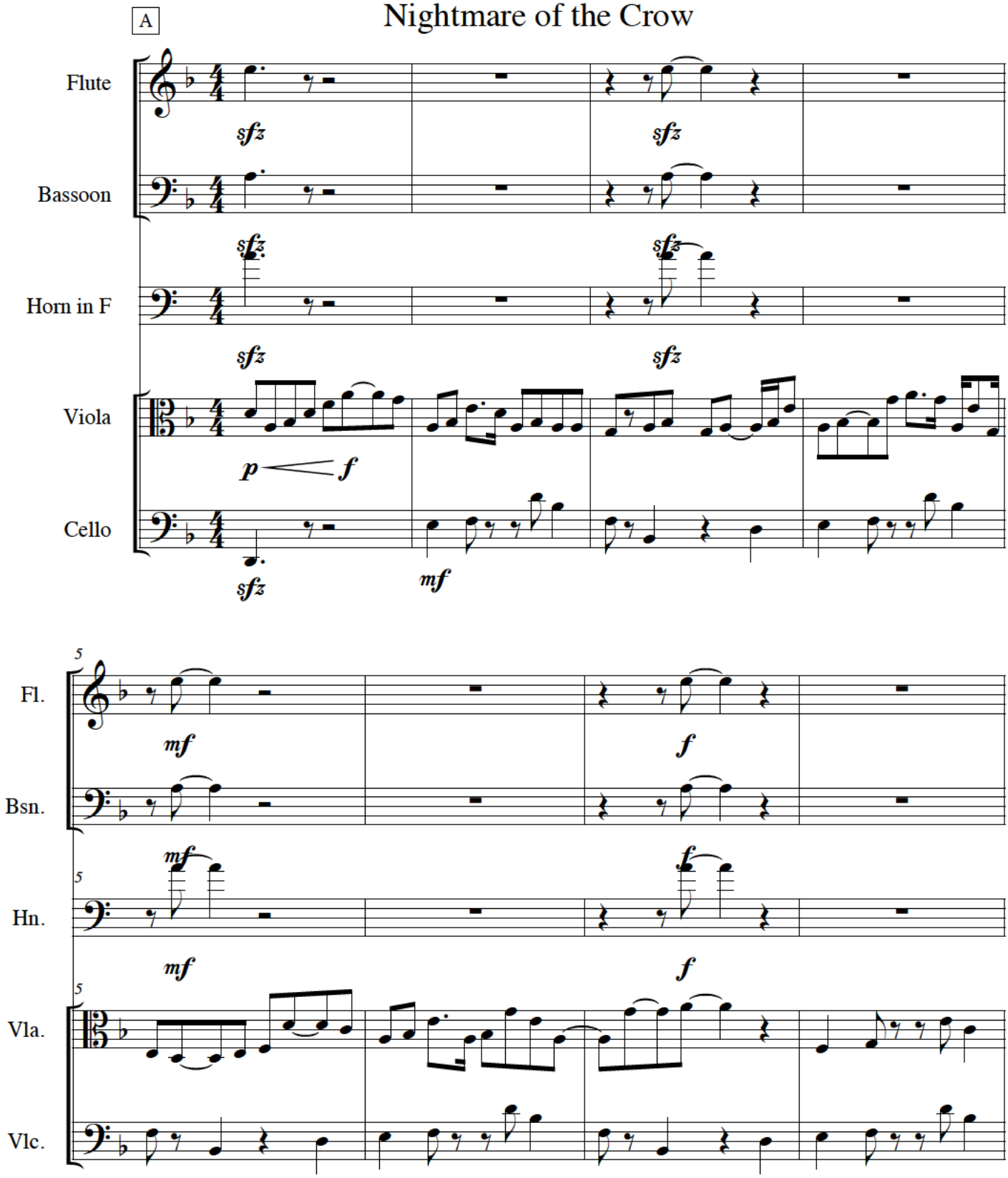
The Crow's Ruin

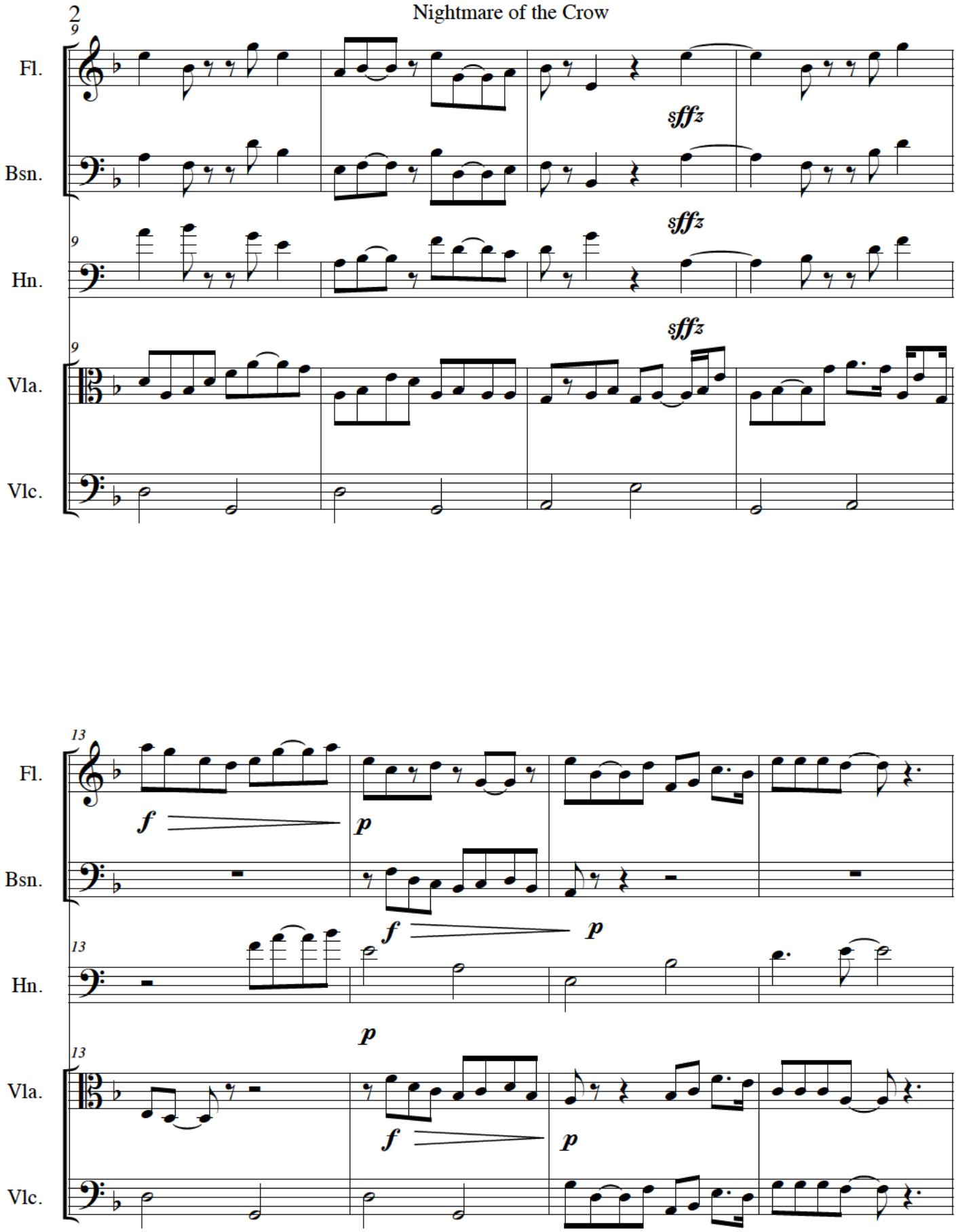
Score

or:

Nightmare of the Crow

Rron Karahoda

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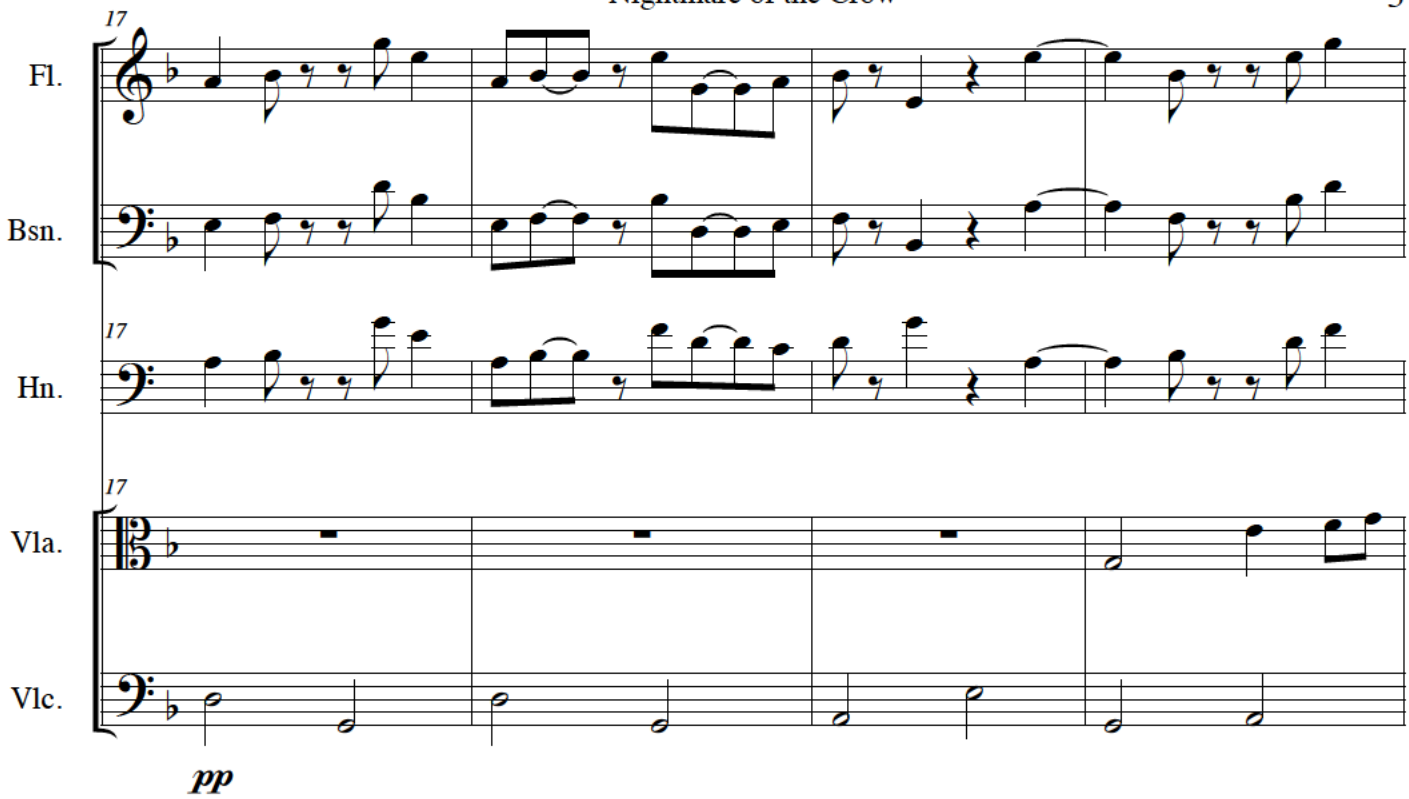
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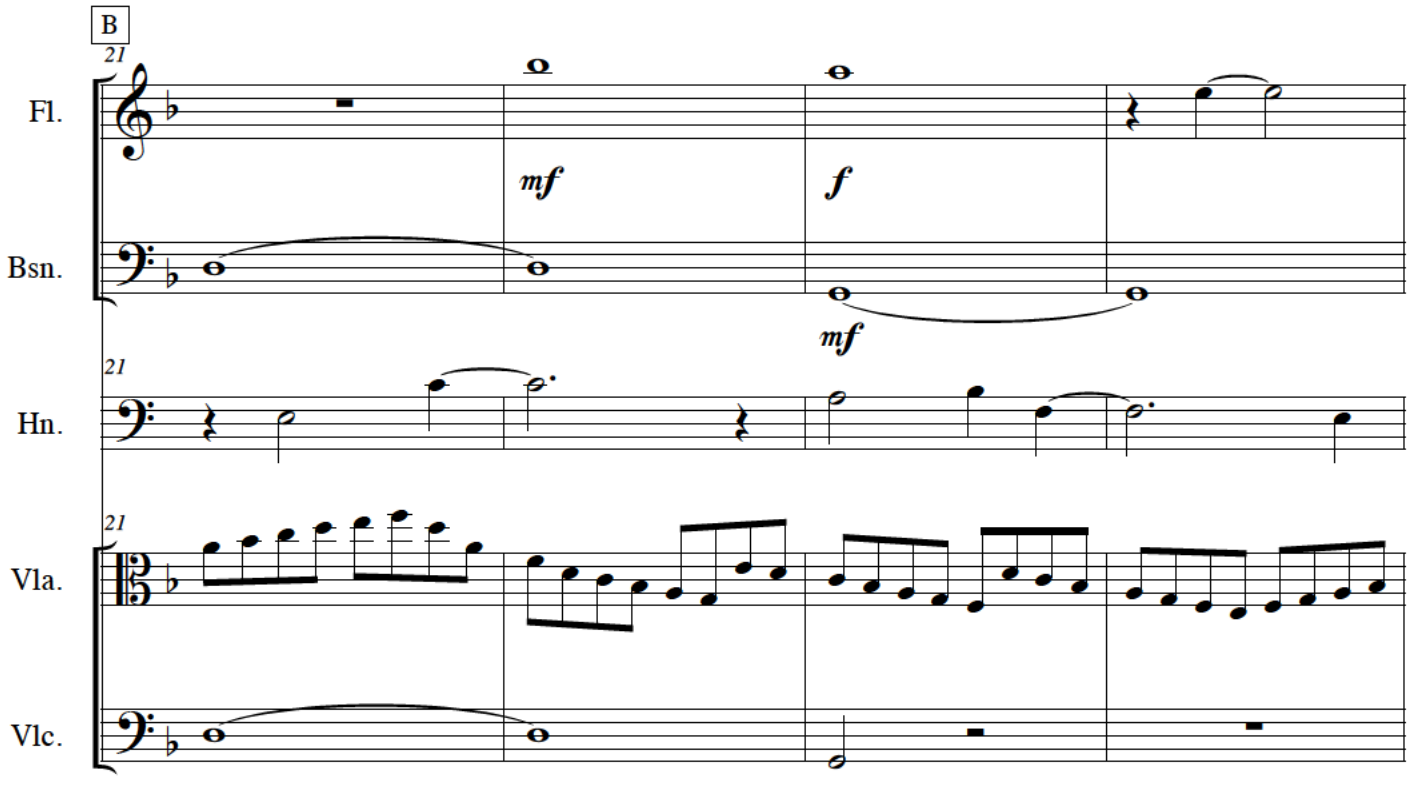
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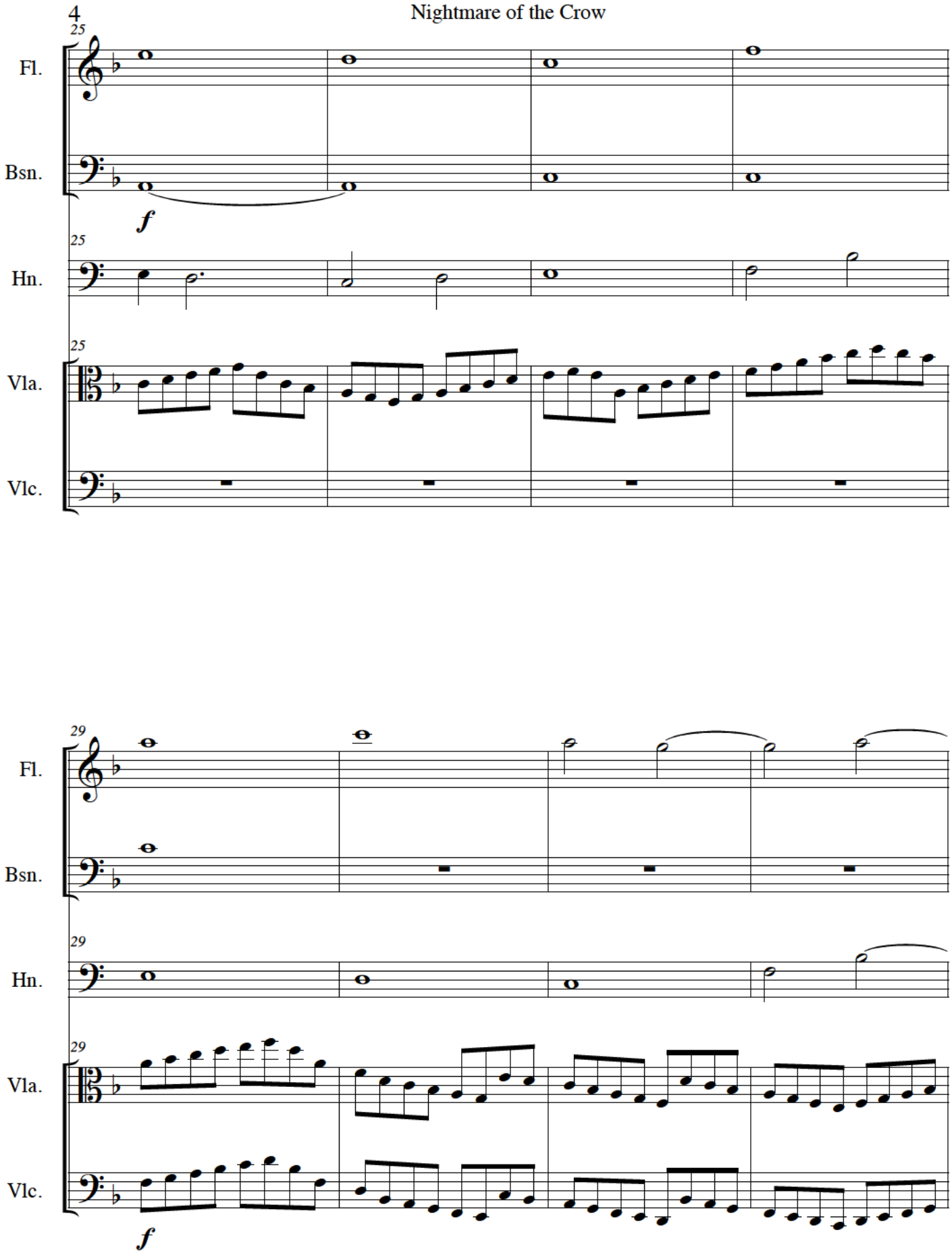
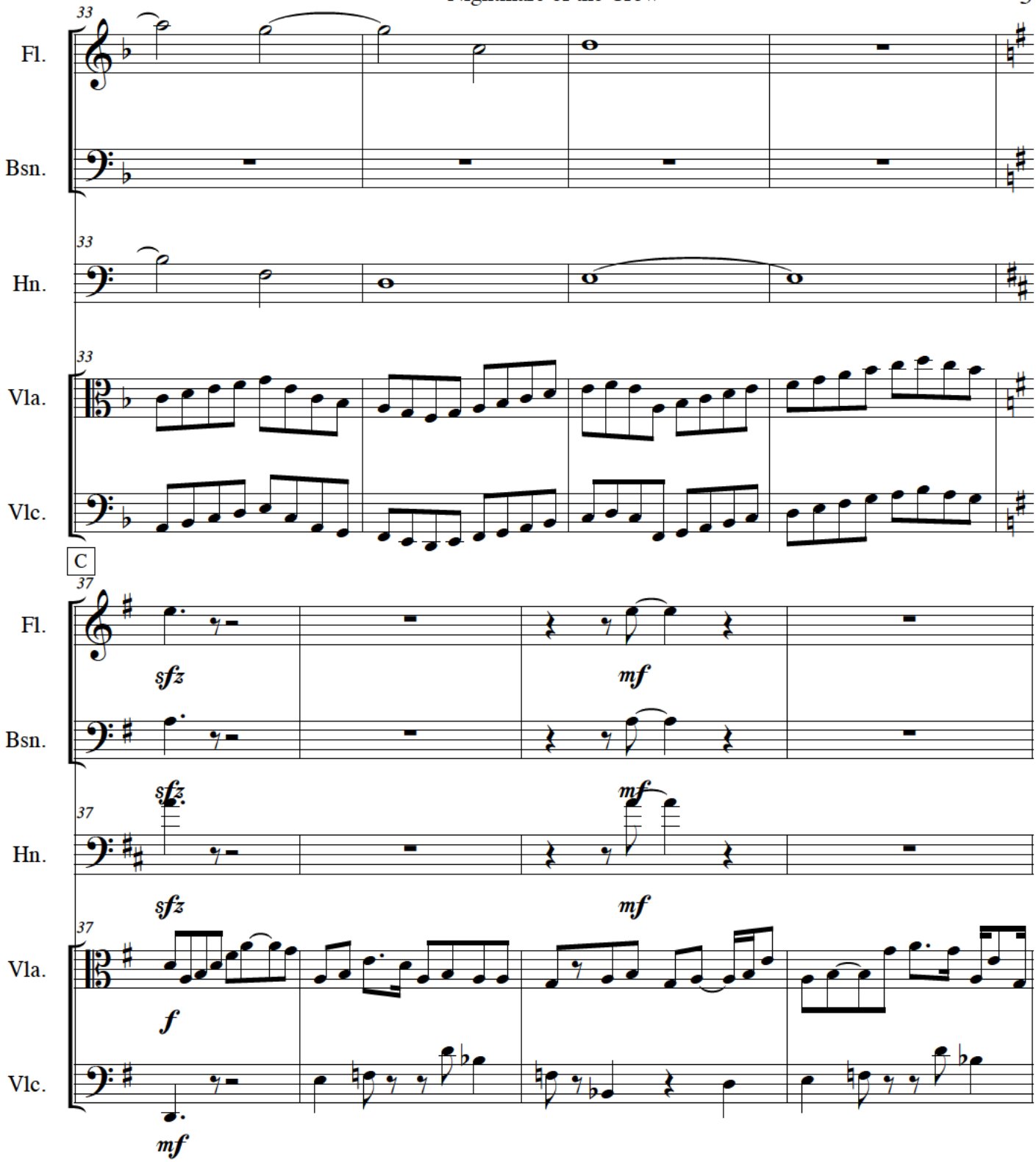
Nightmare of the Crow

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f
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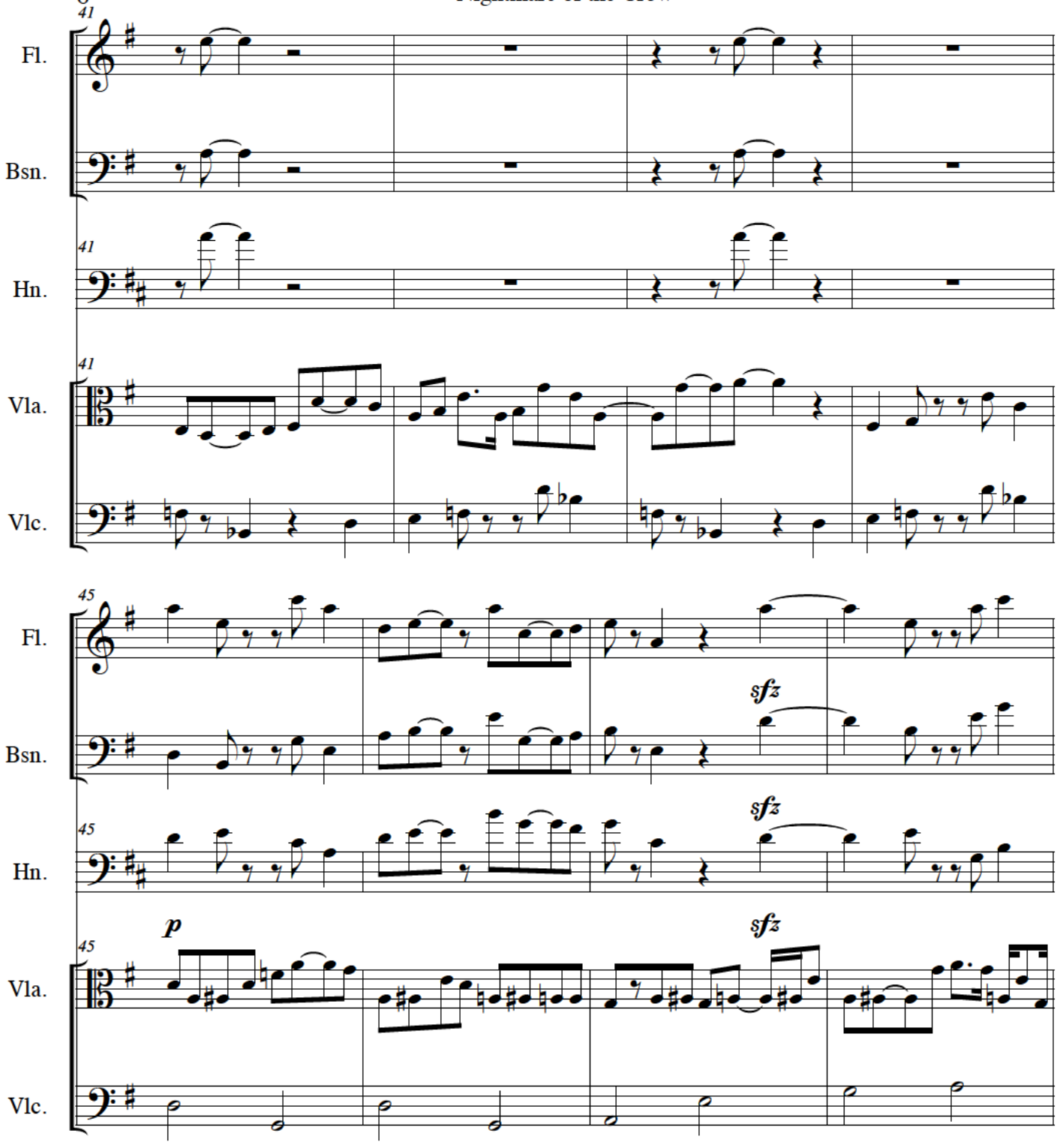
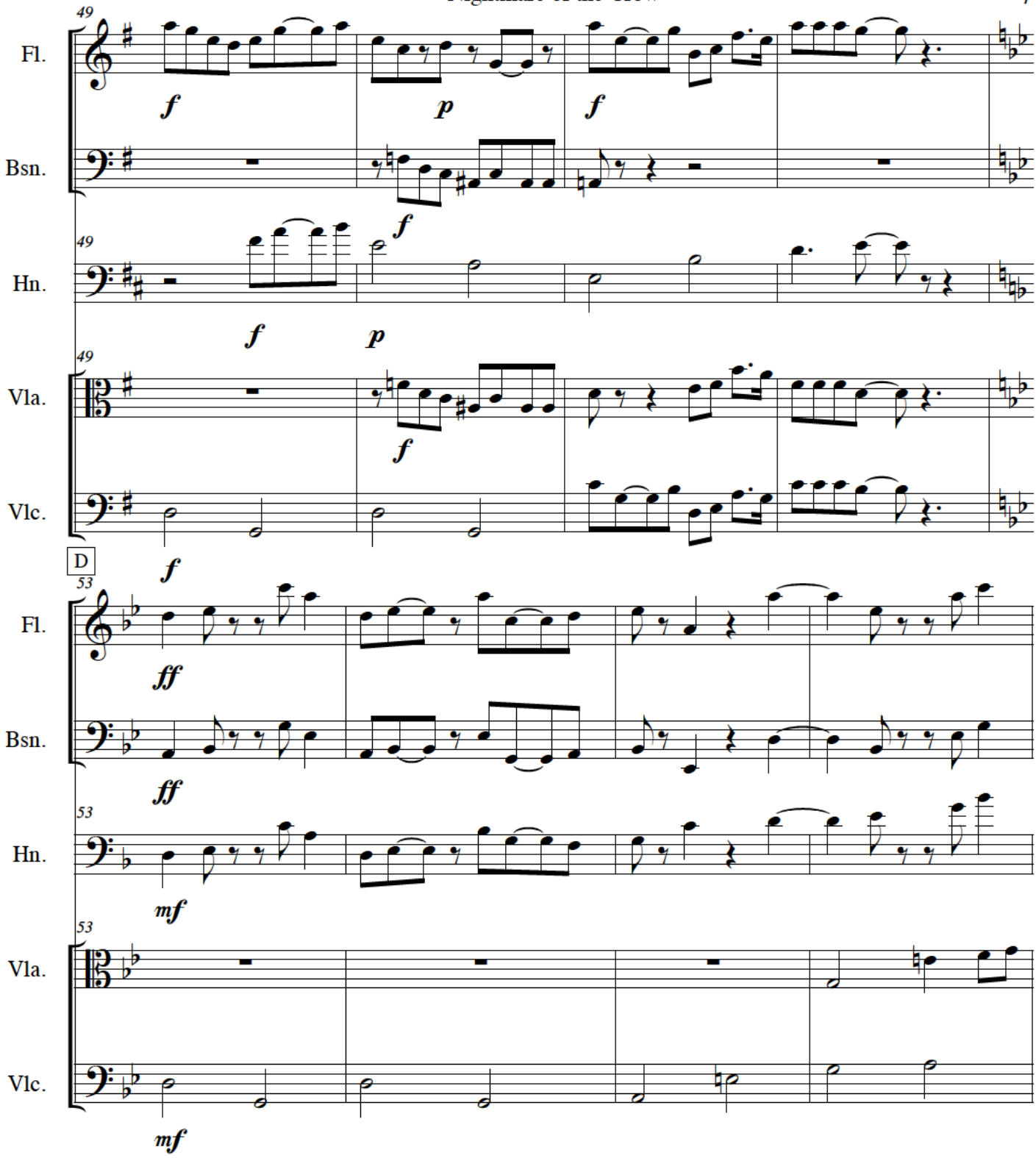
mf

Nightmare of the Crow

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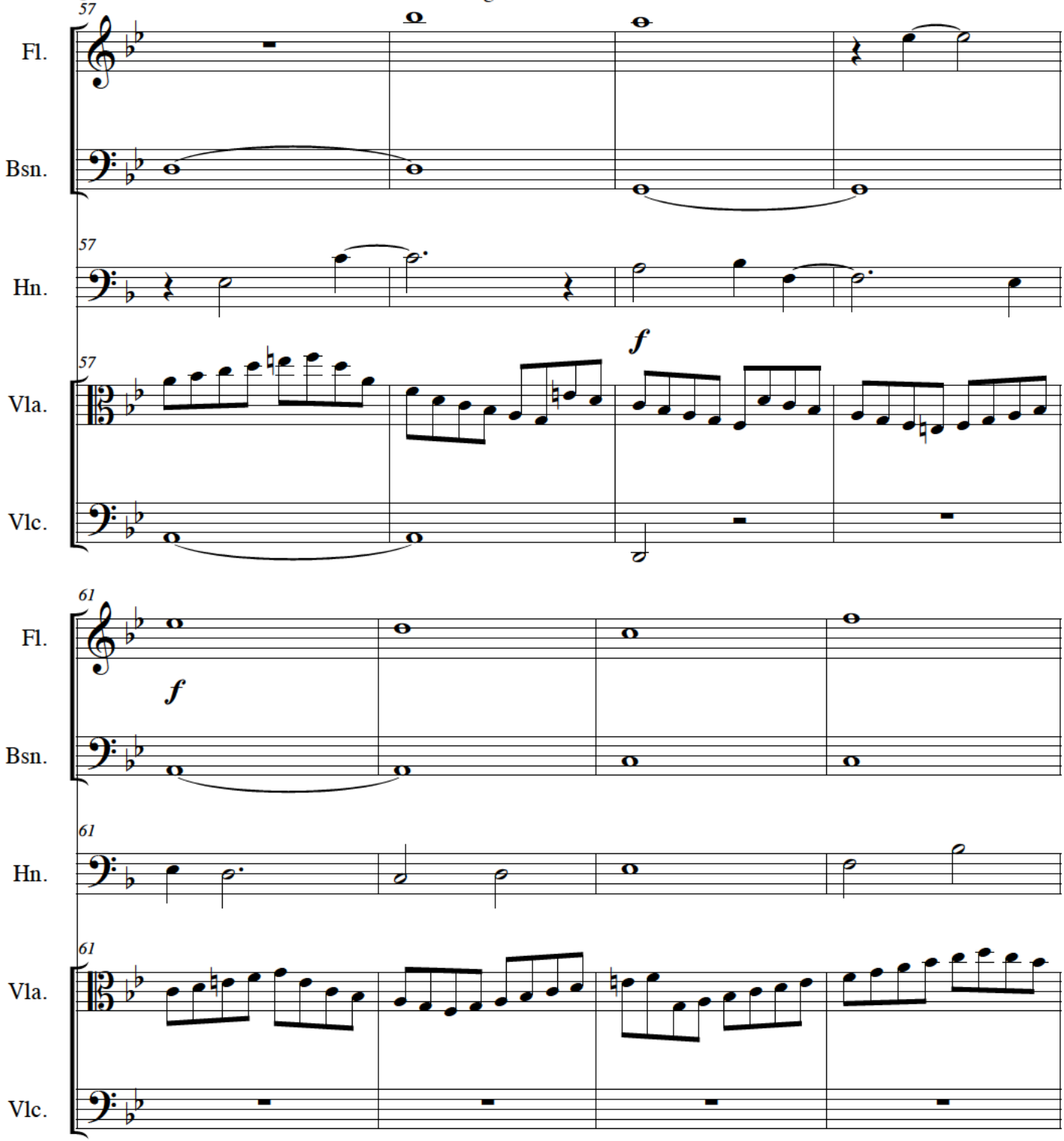
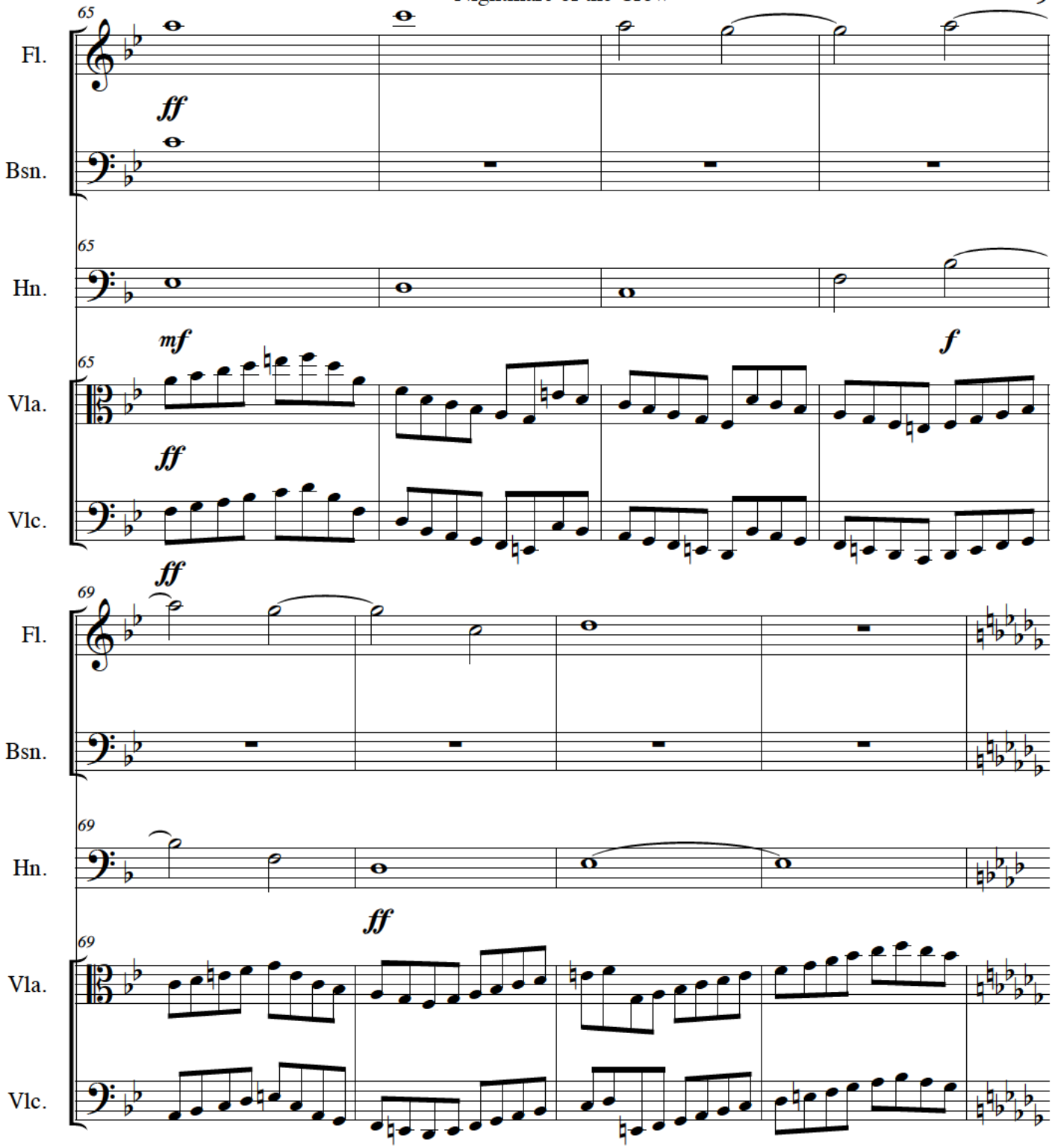
Nightmare of the Crow

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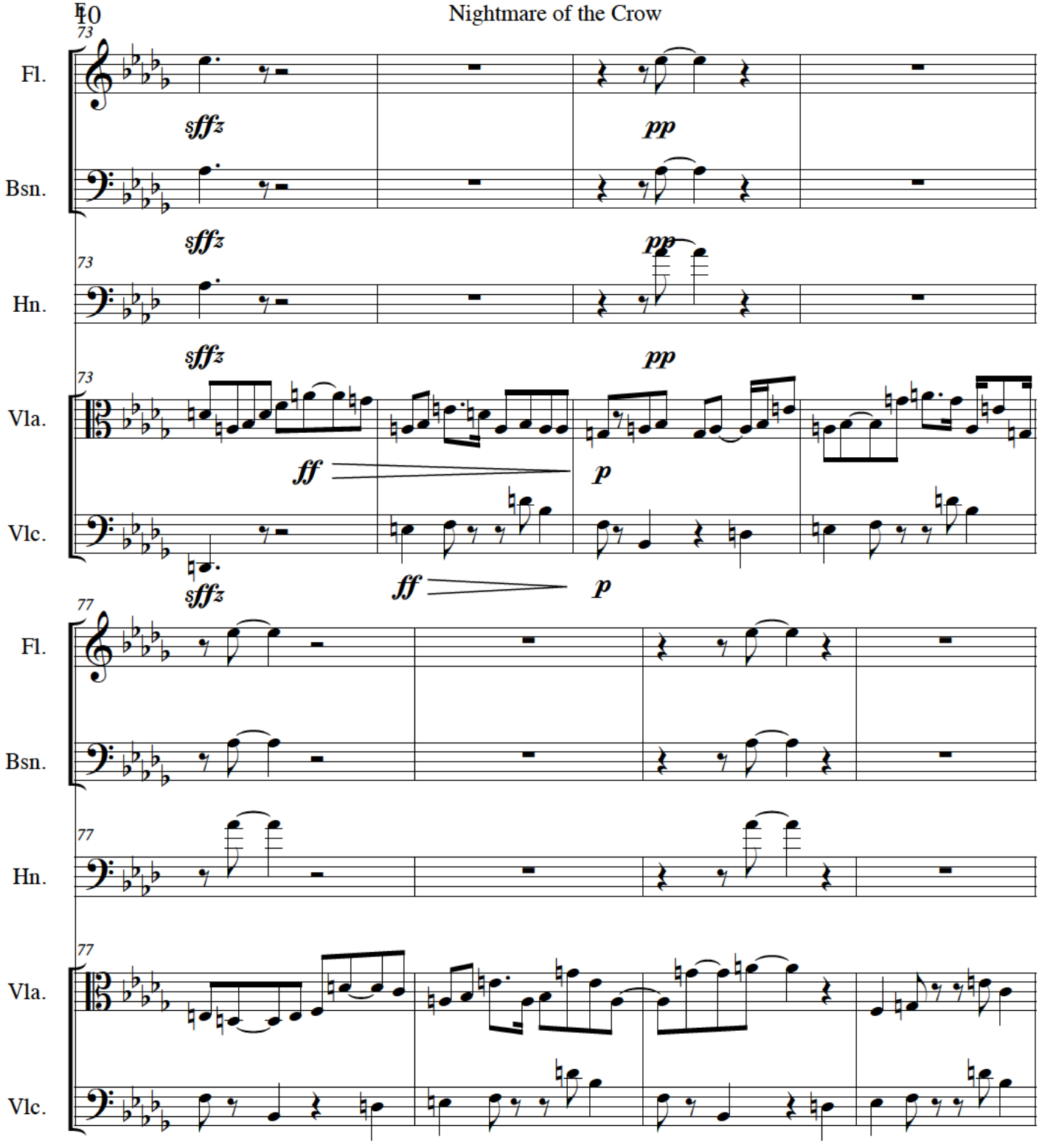
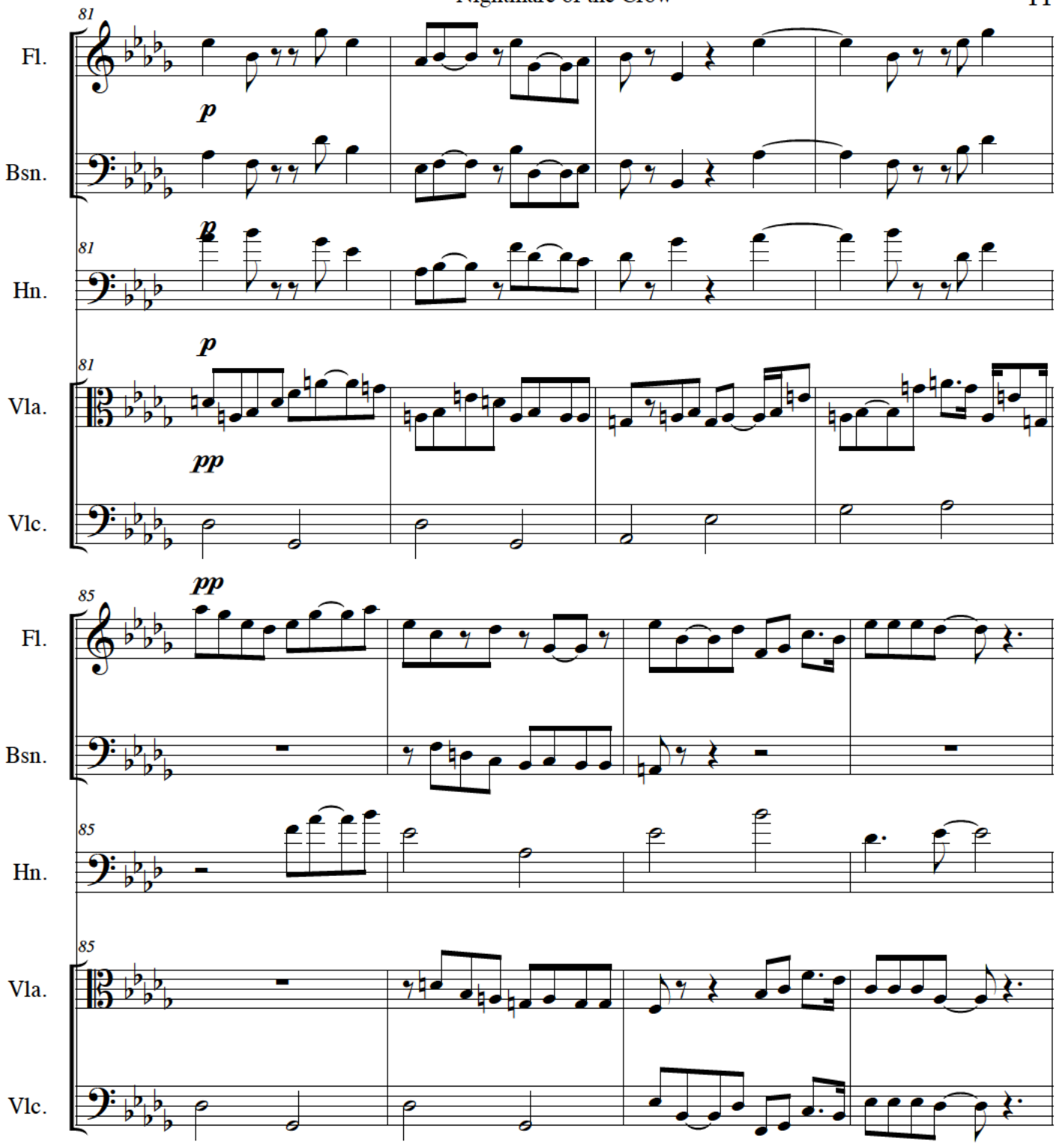
Nightmare of the Crow

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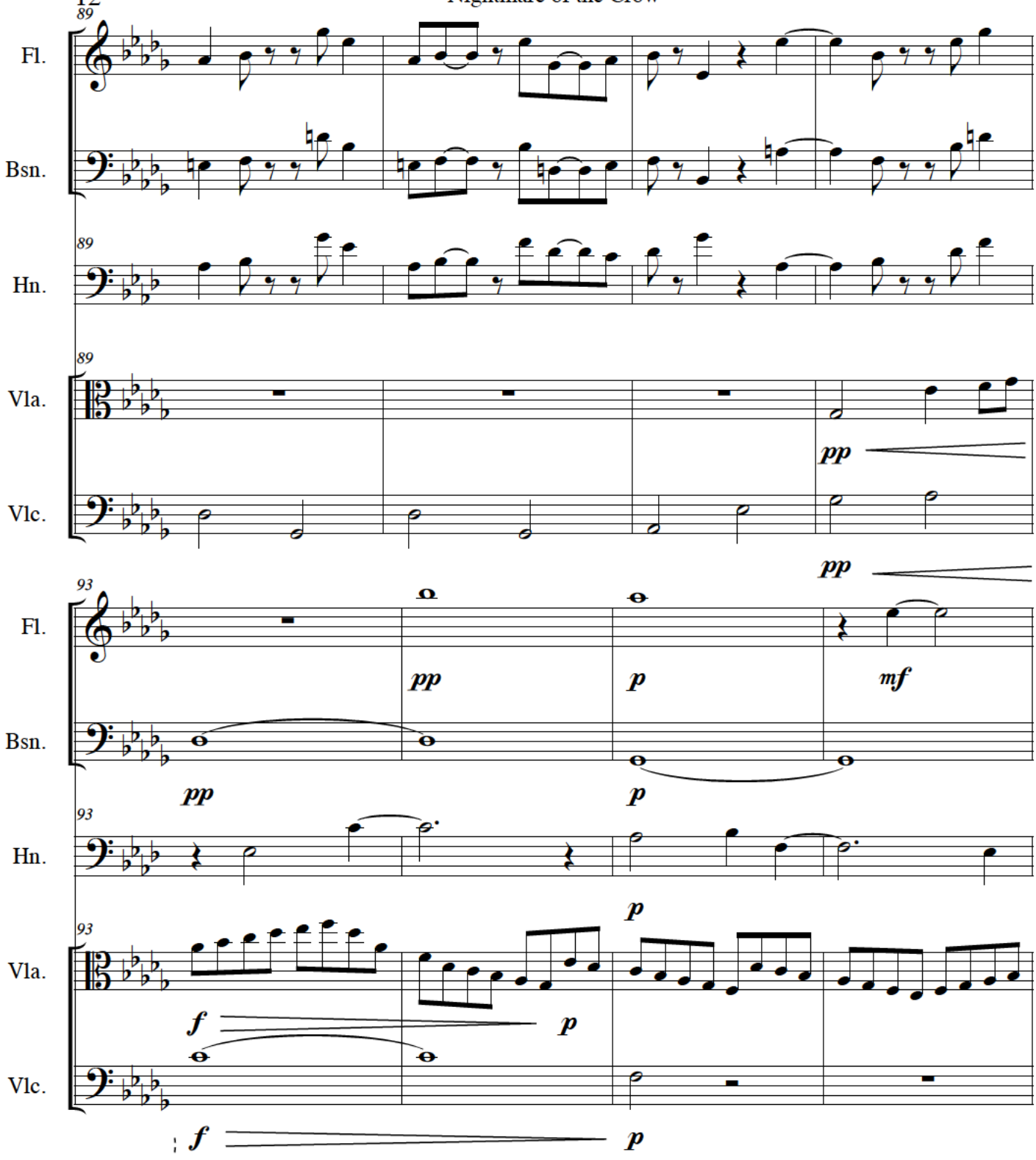
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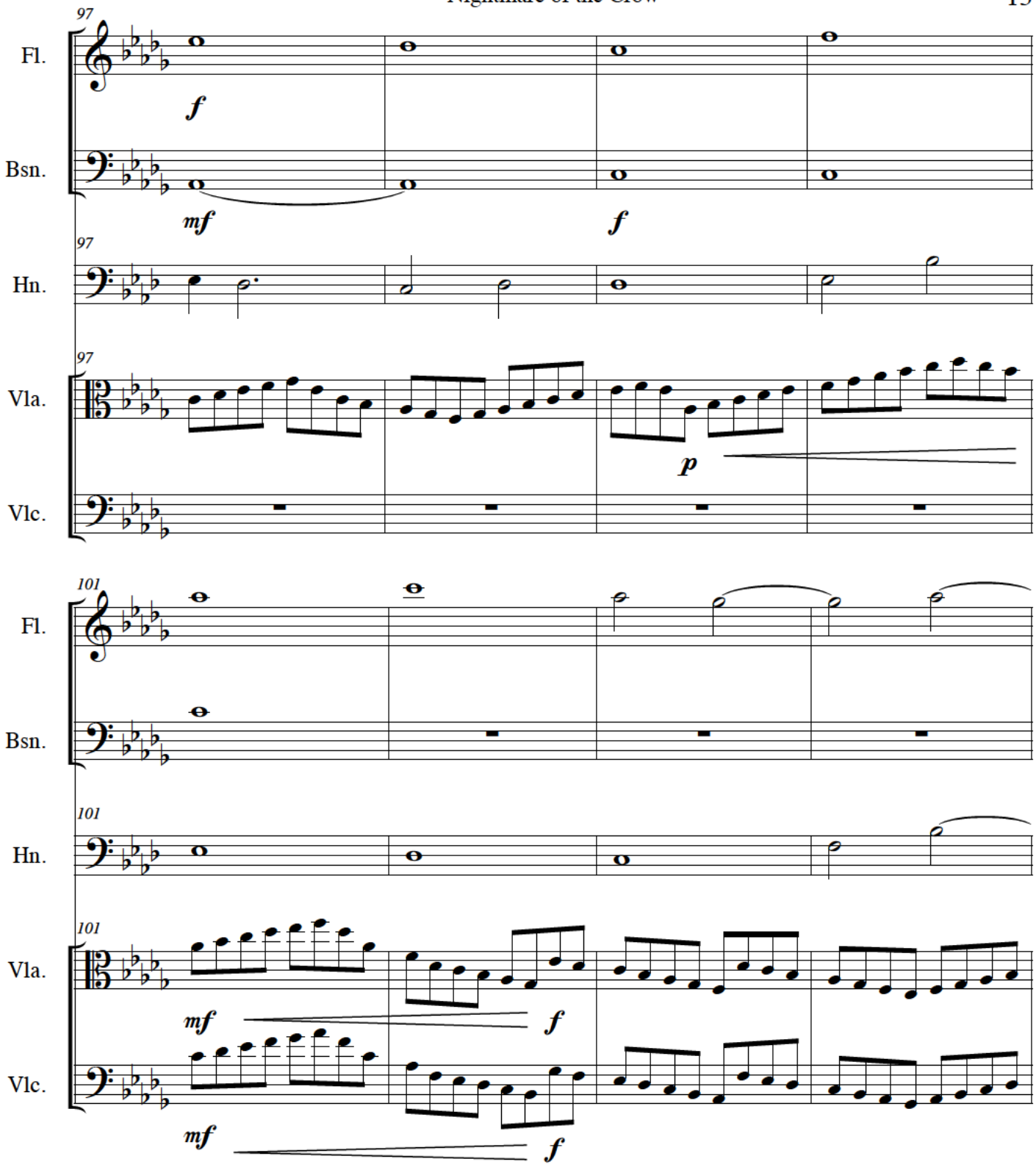
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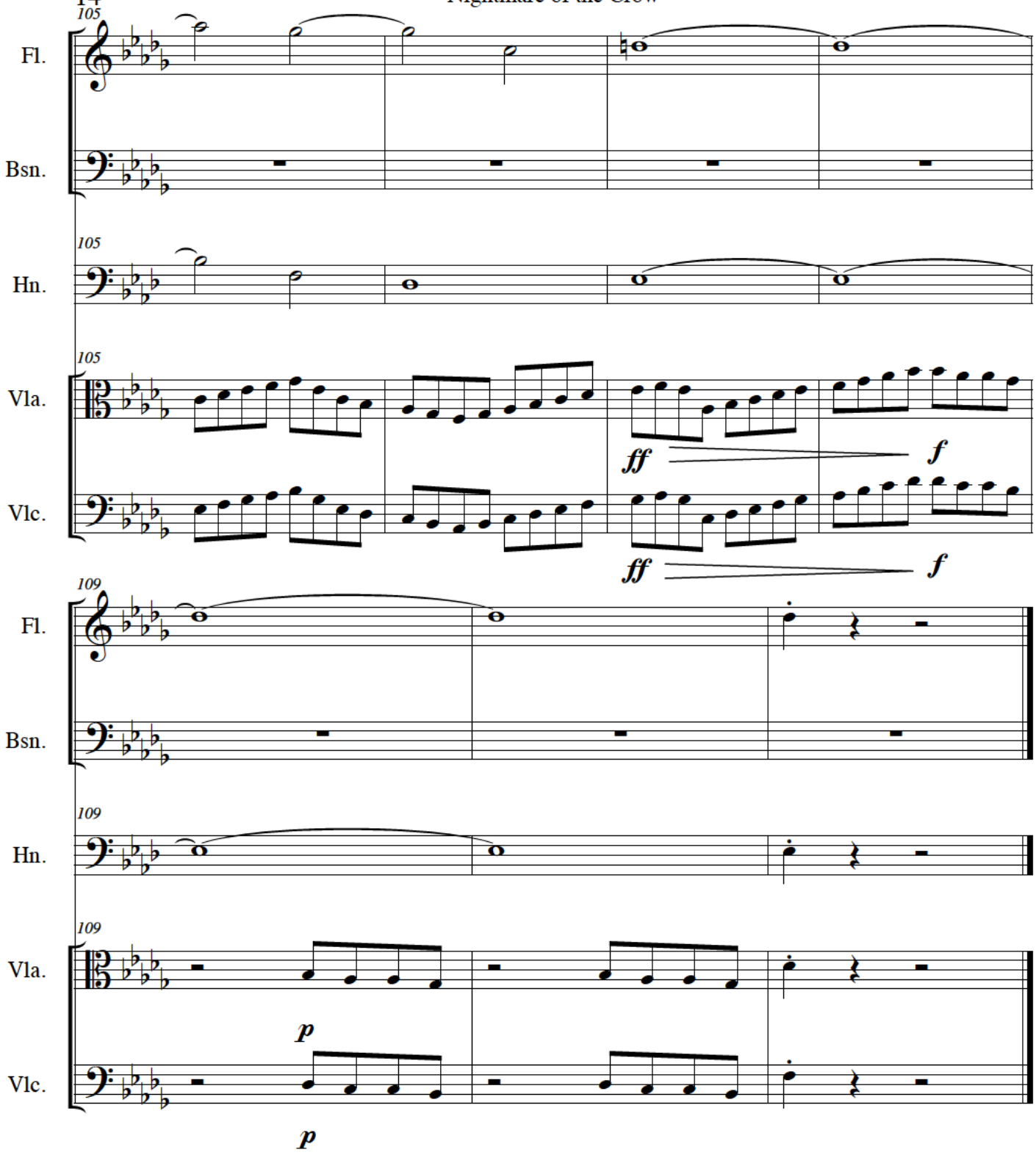
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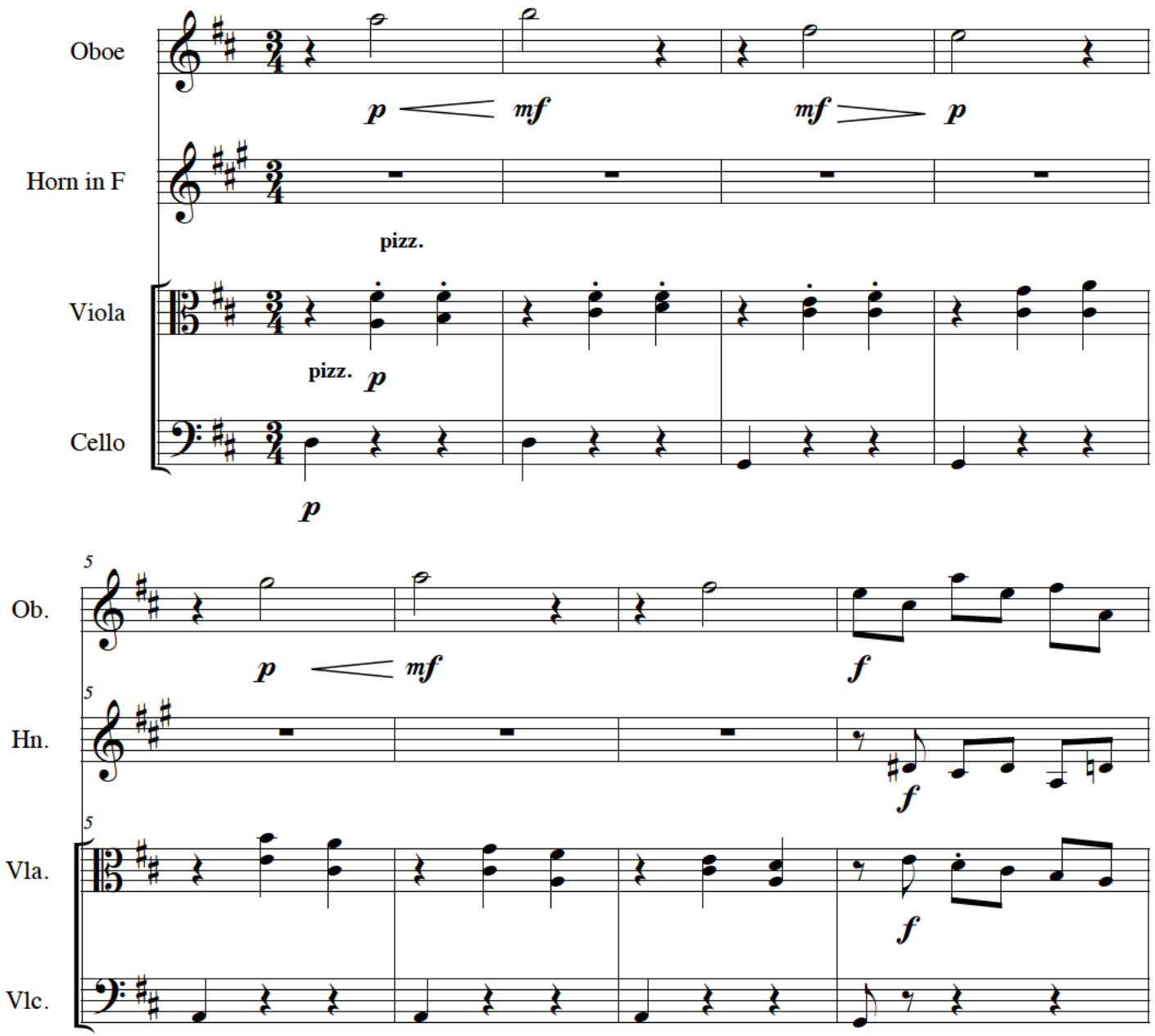
p
p

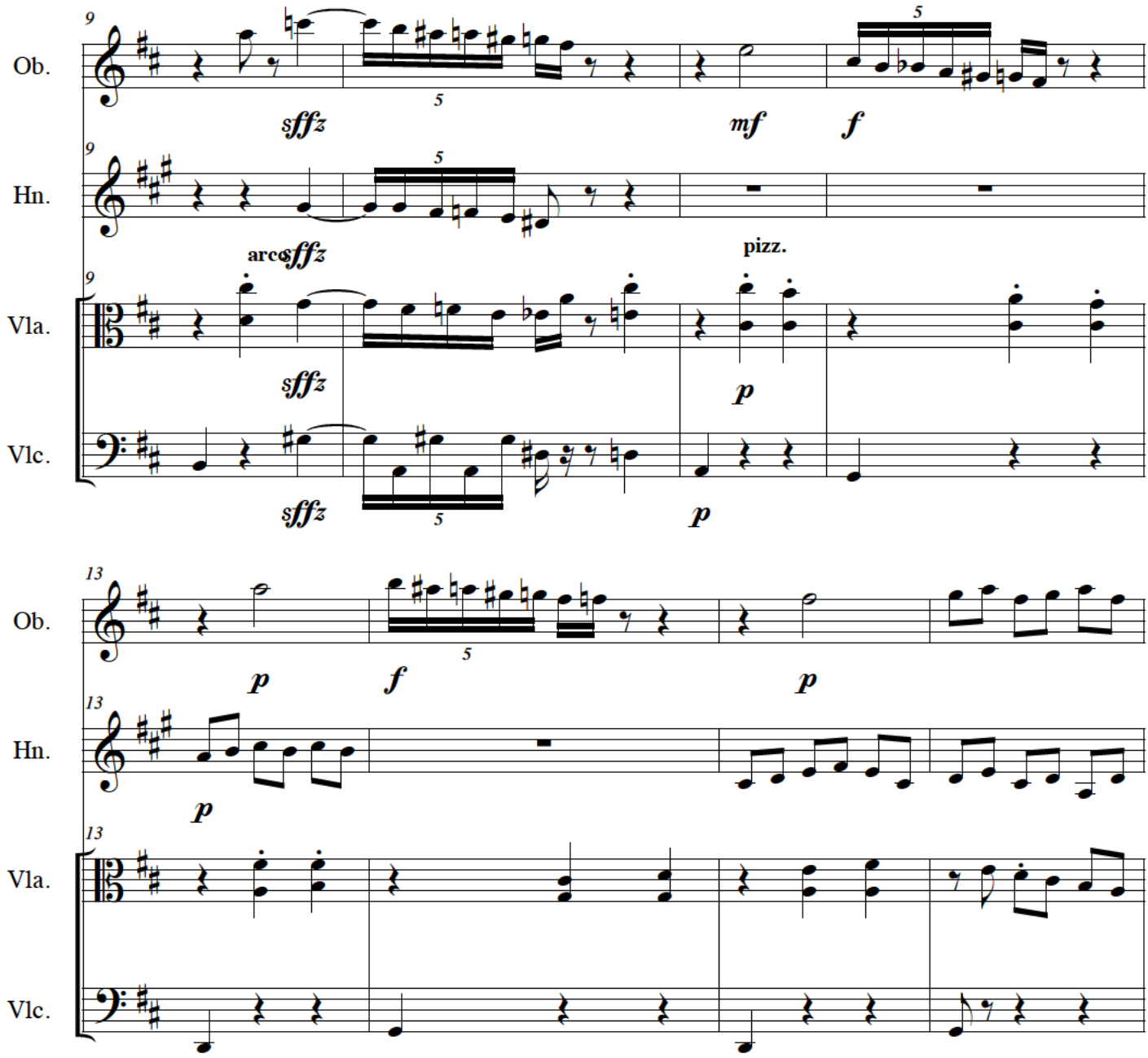
Tempered in Venom, I Quake (All of Creation)

Score

[Subtitle]

Rron Karahoda

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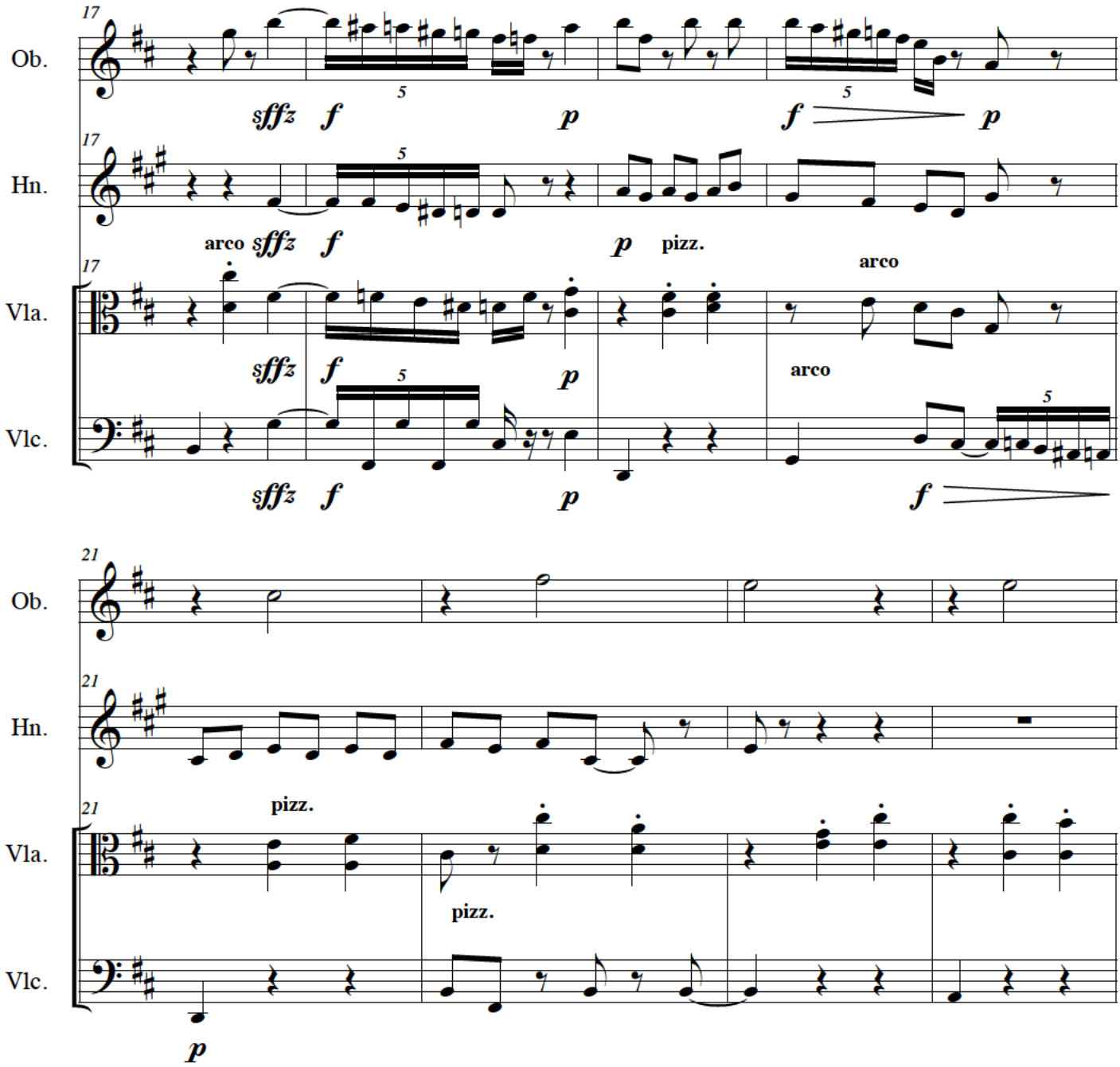
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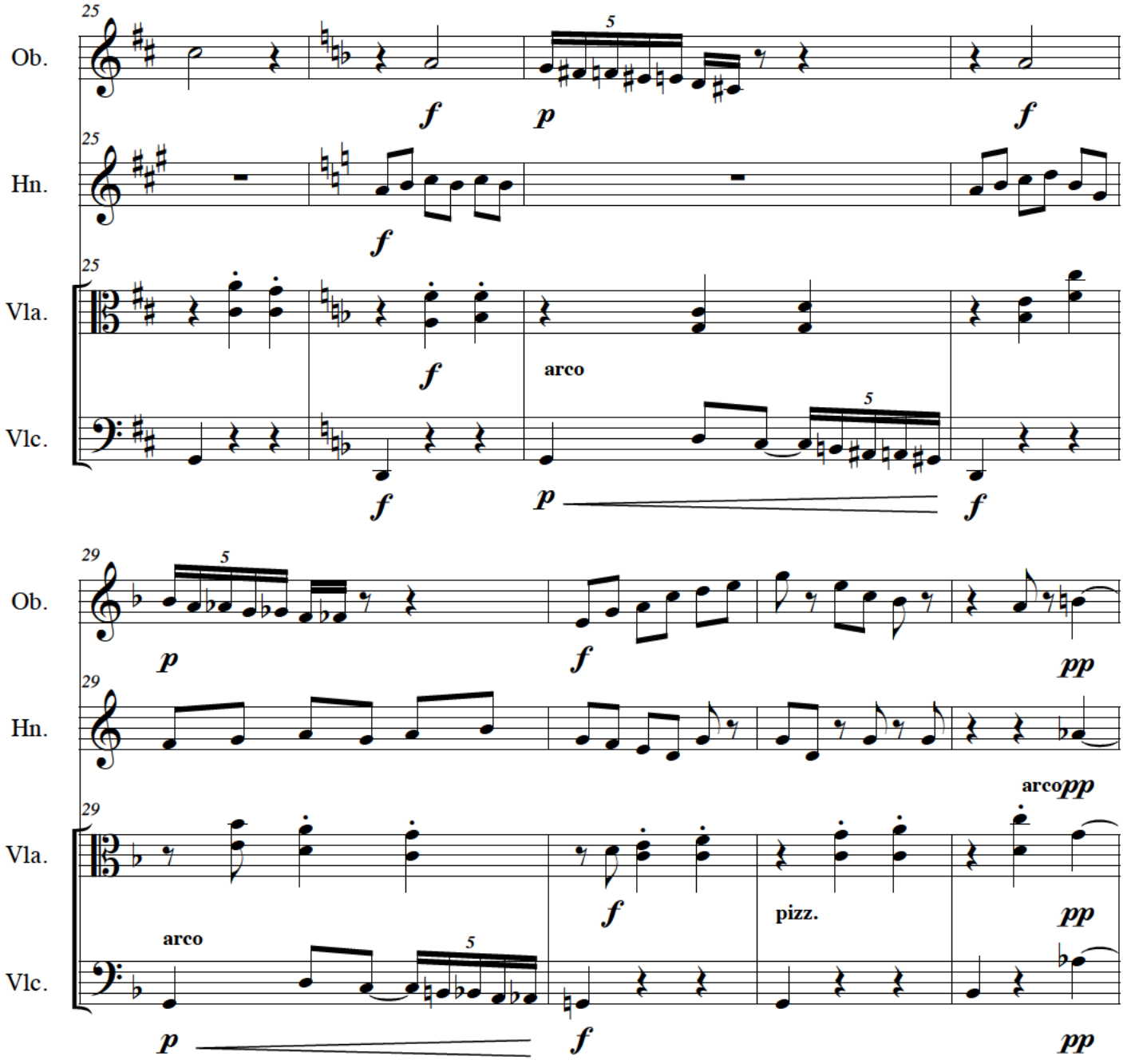
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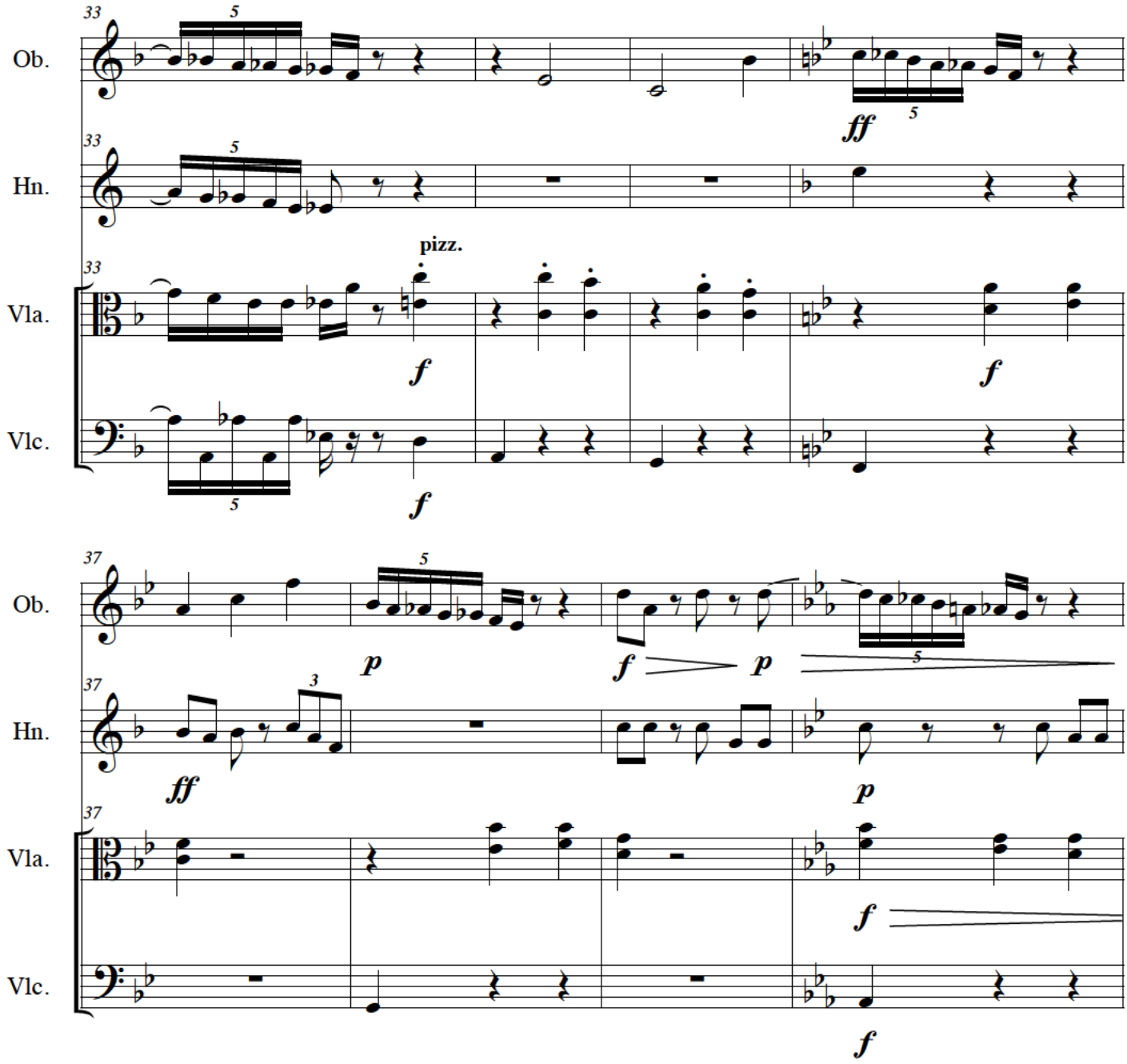
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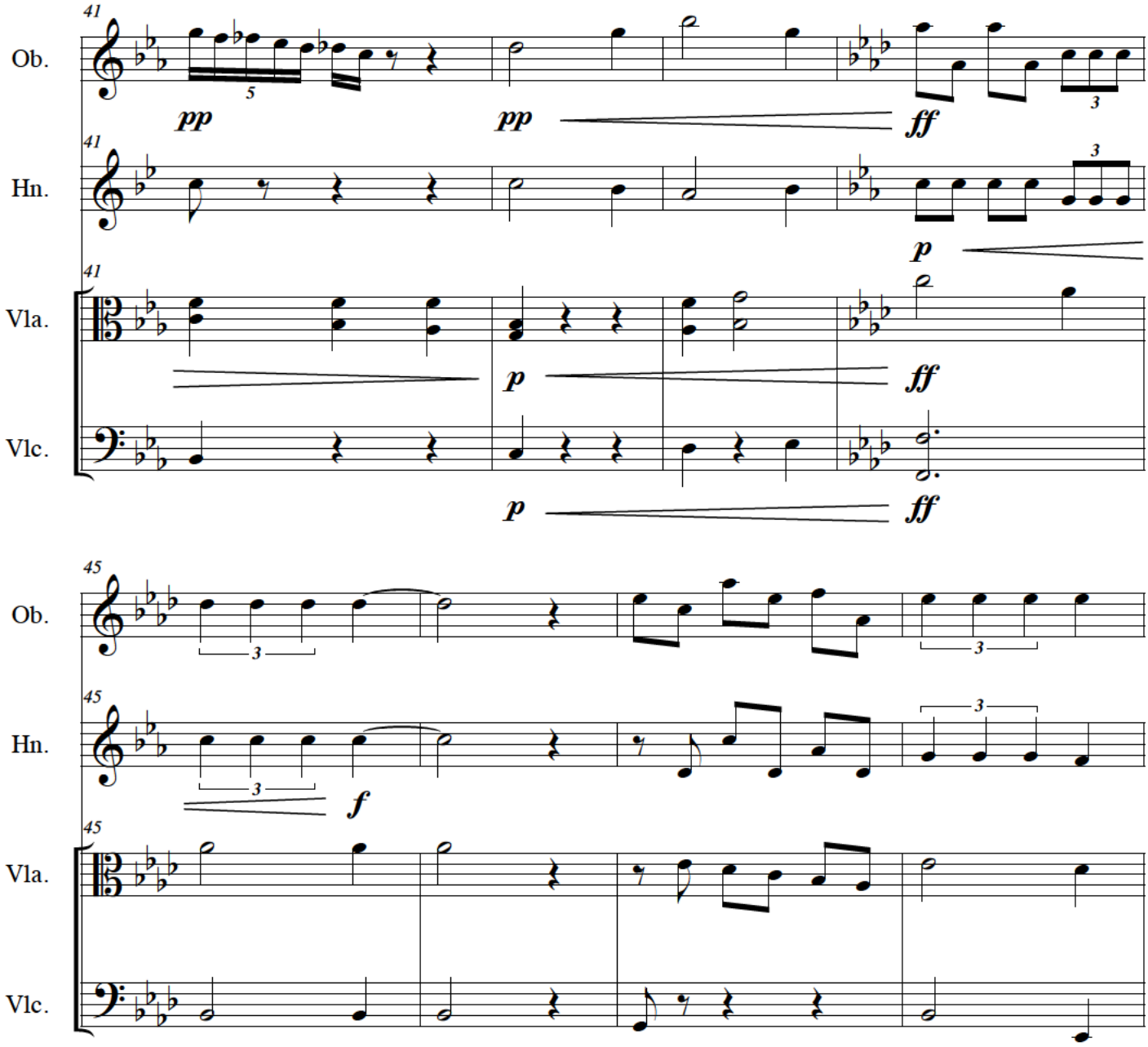
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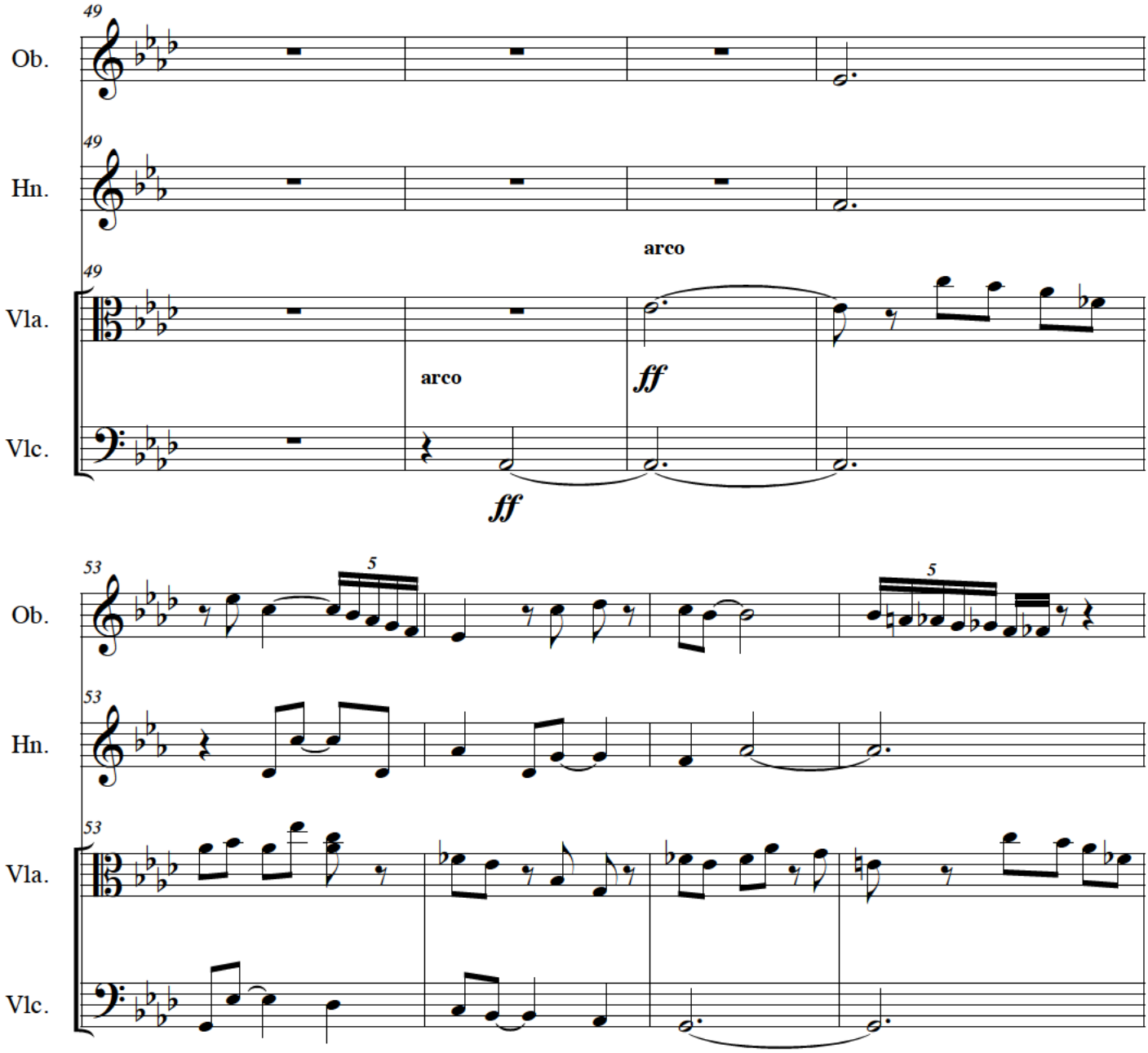
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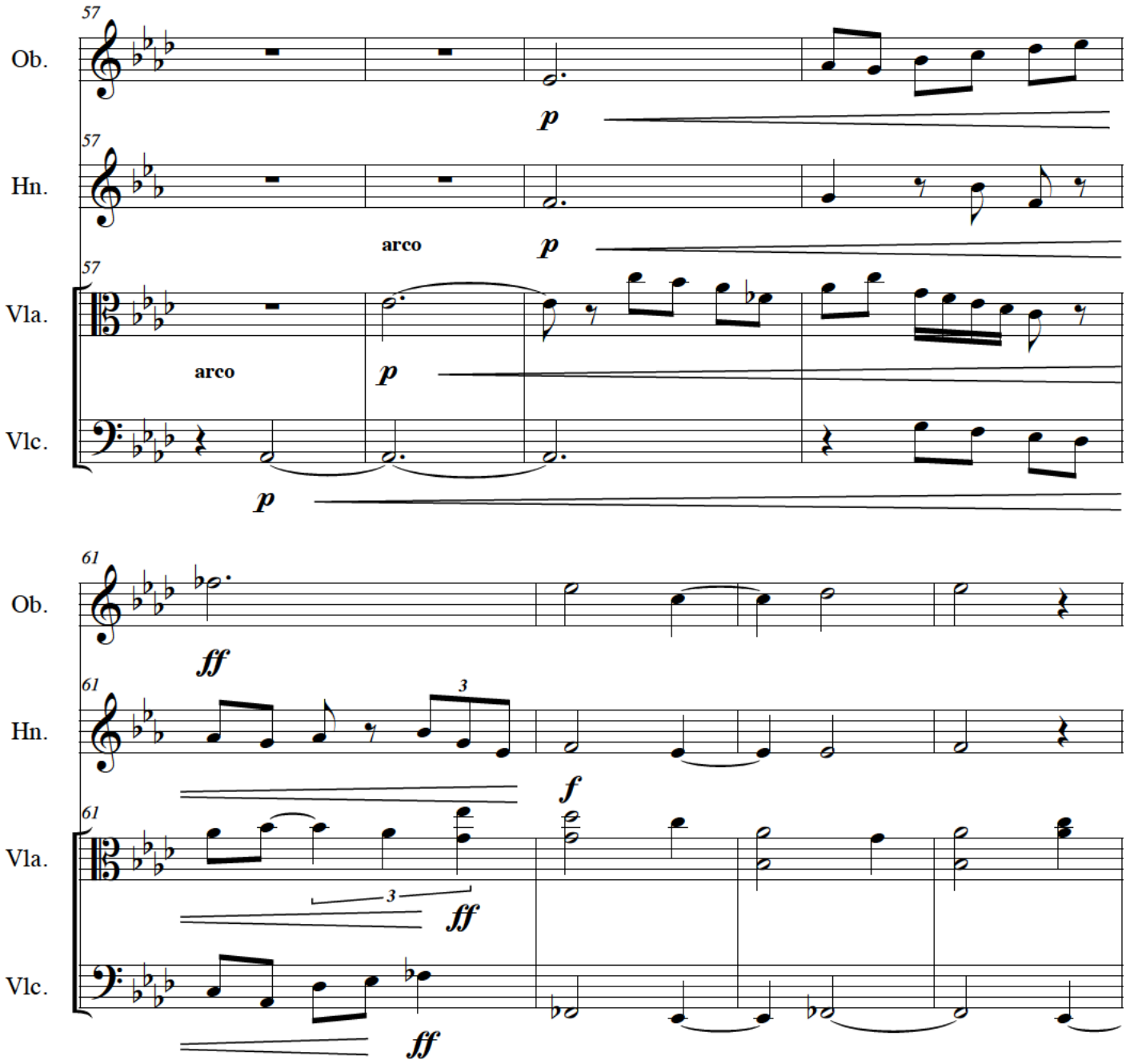
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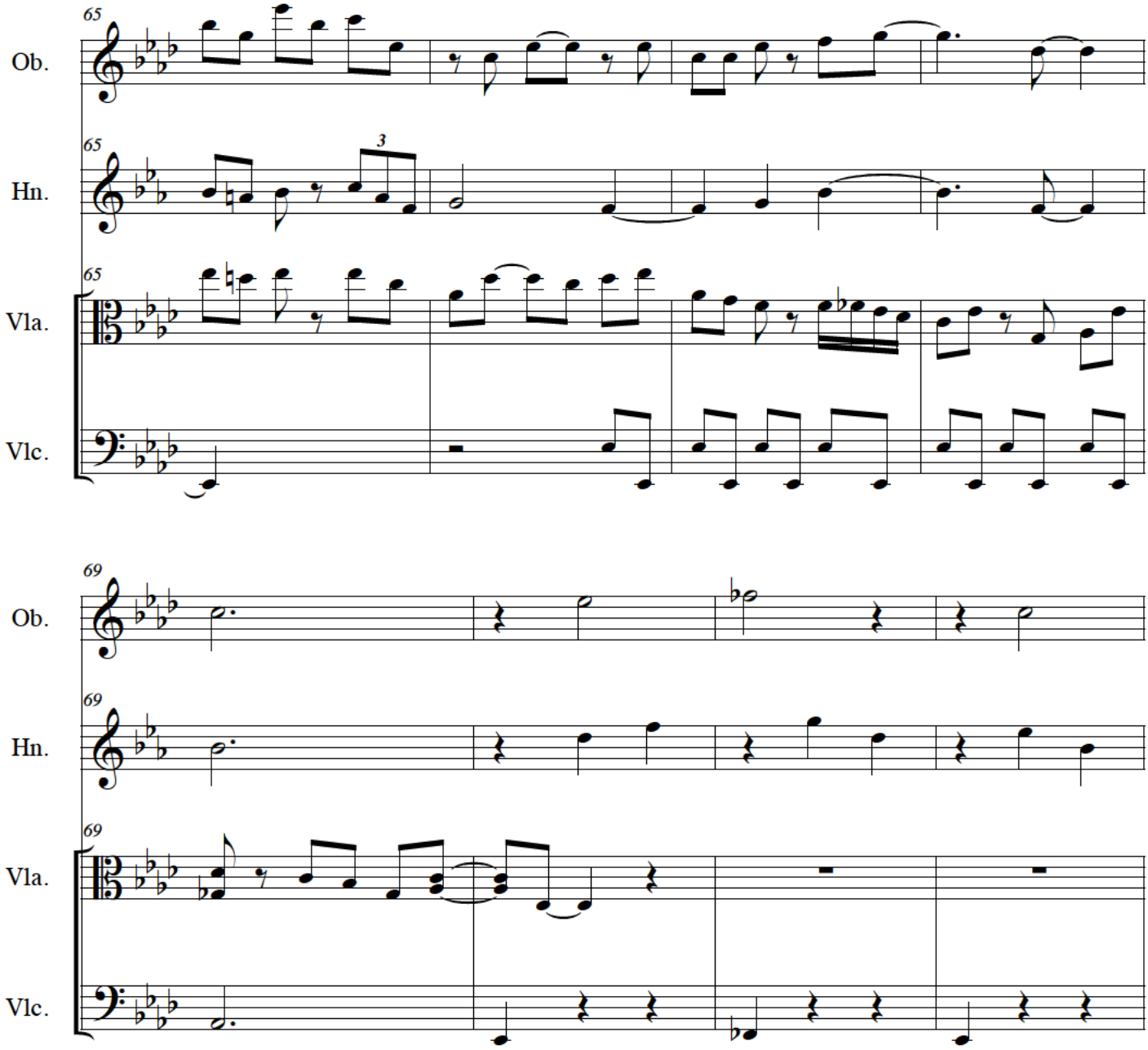
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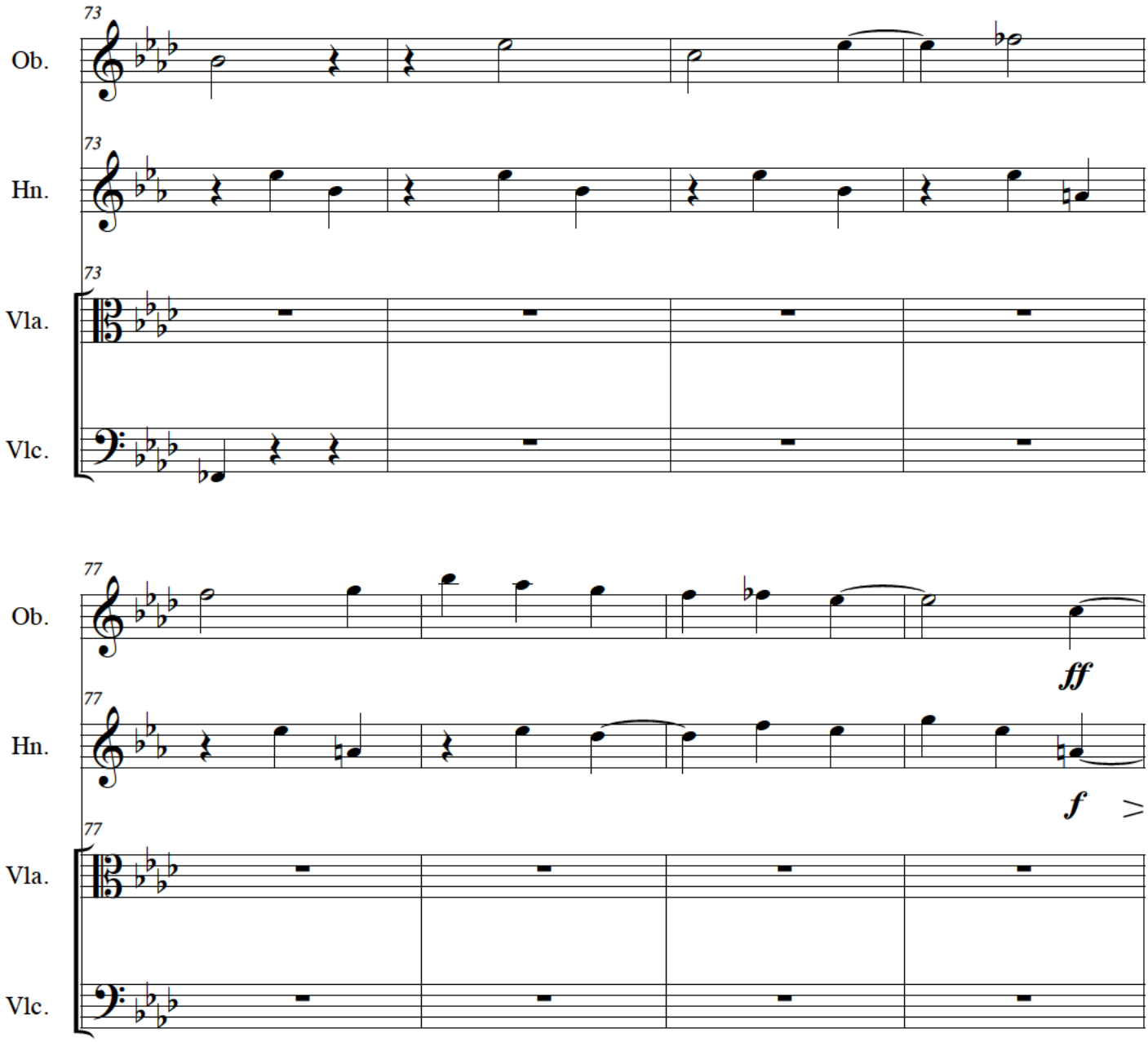
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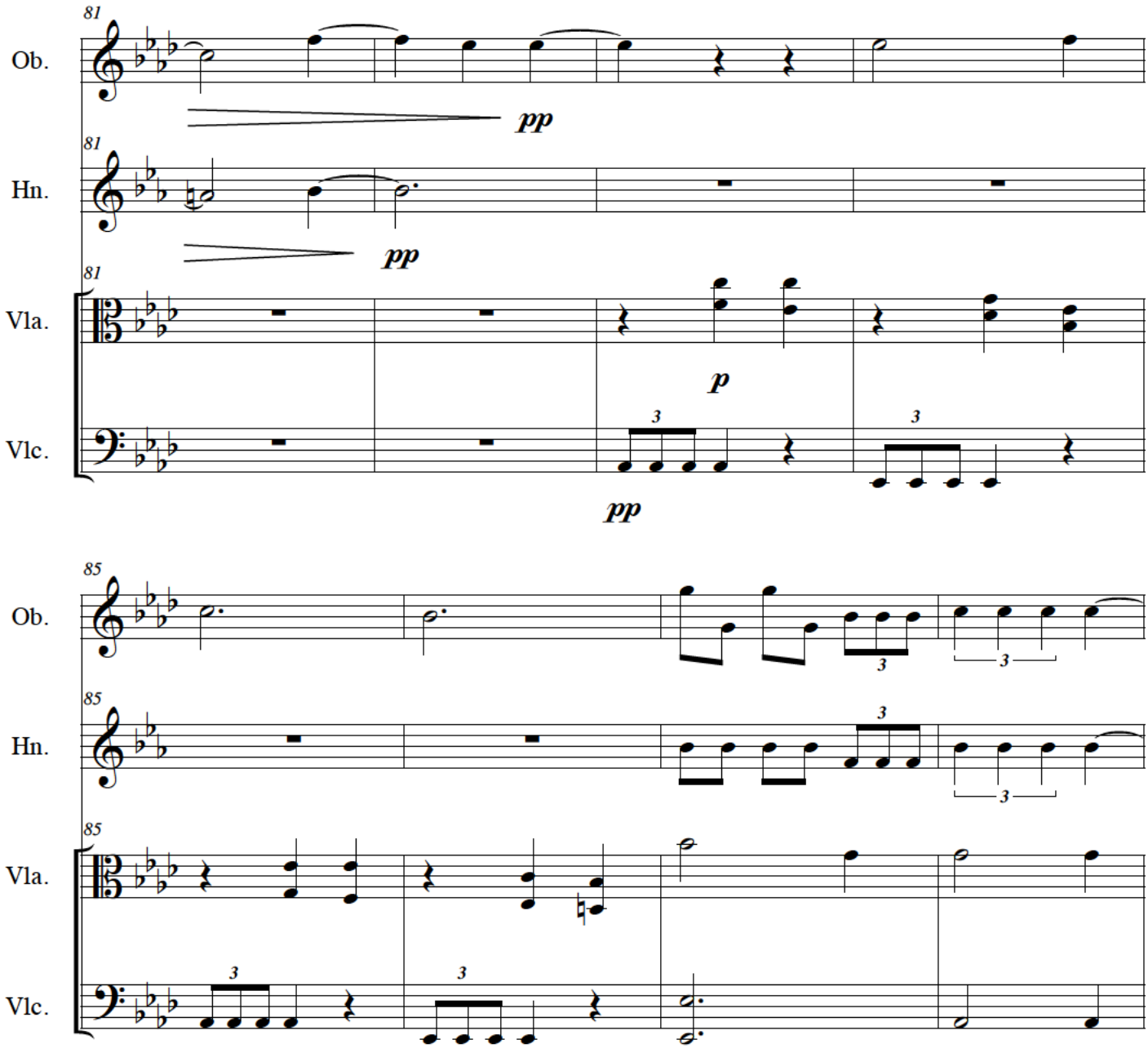
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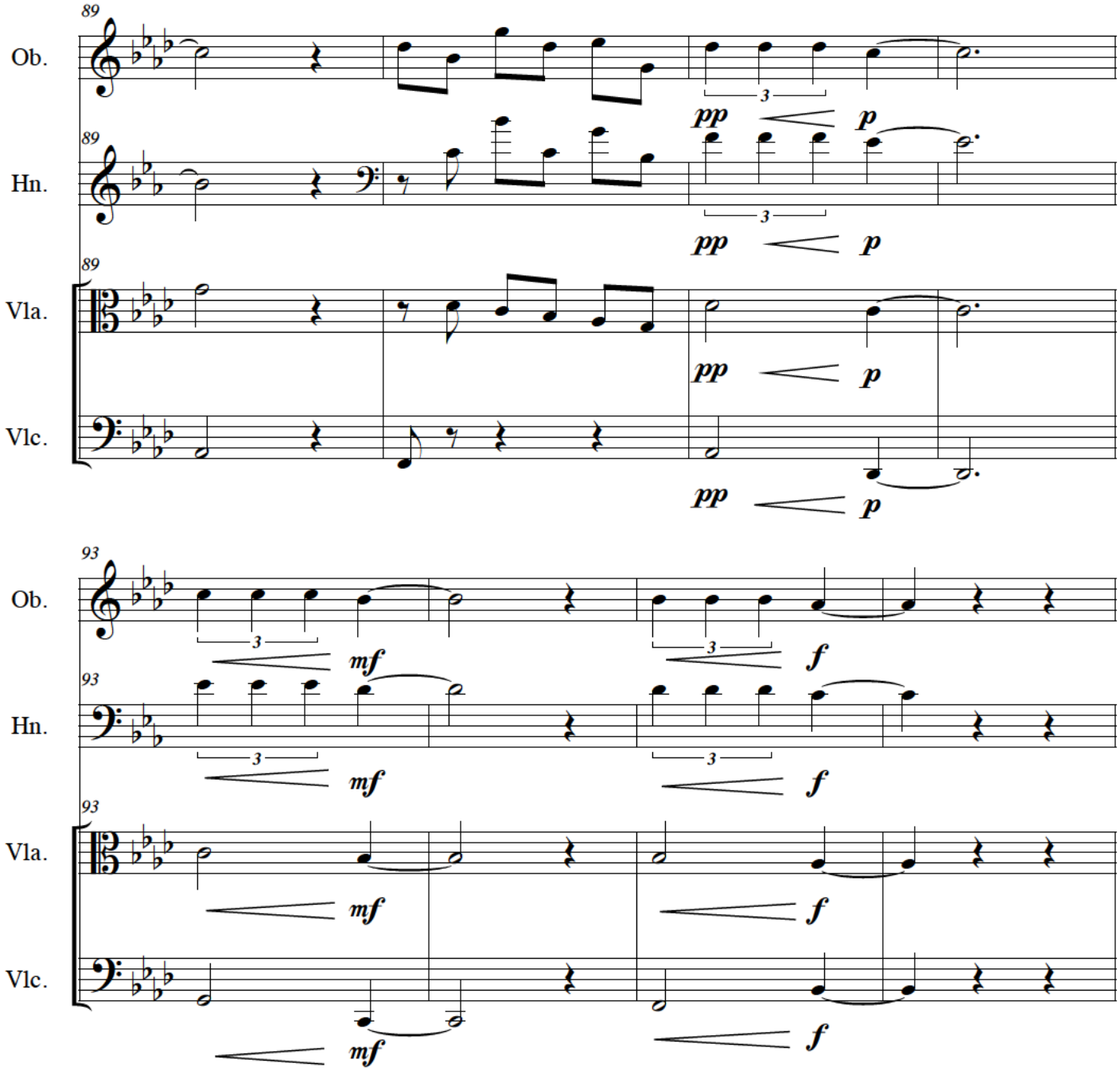
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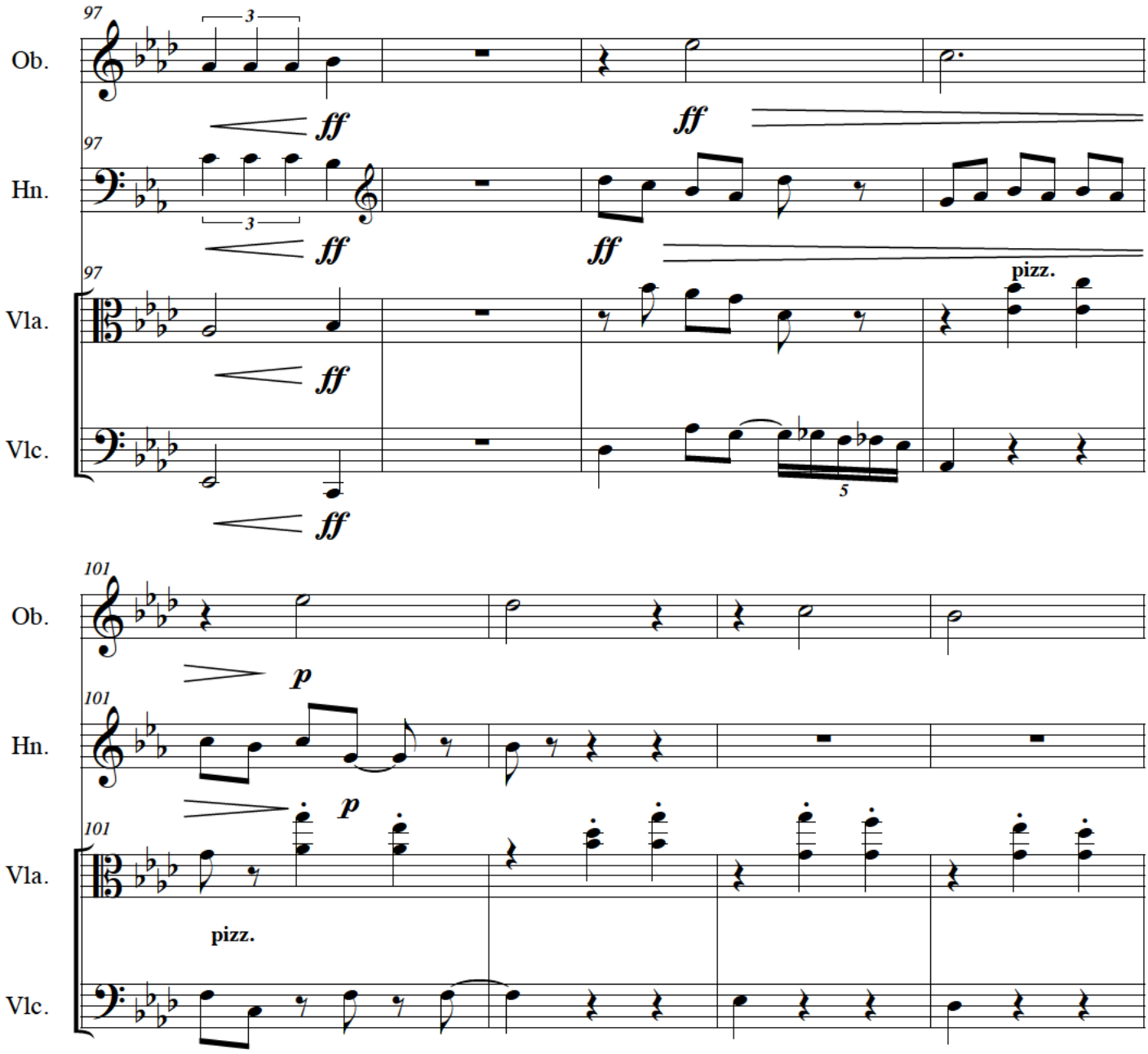
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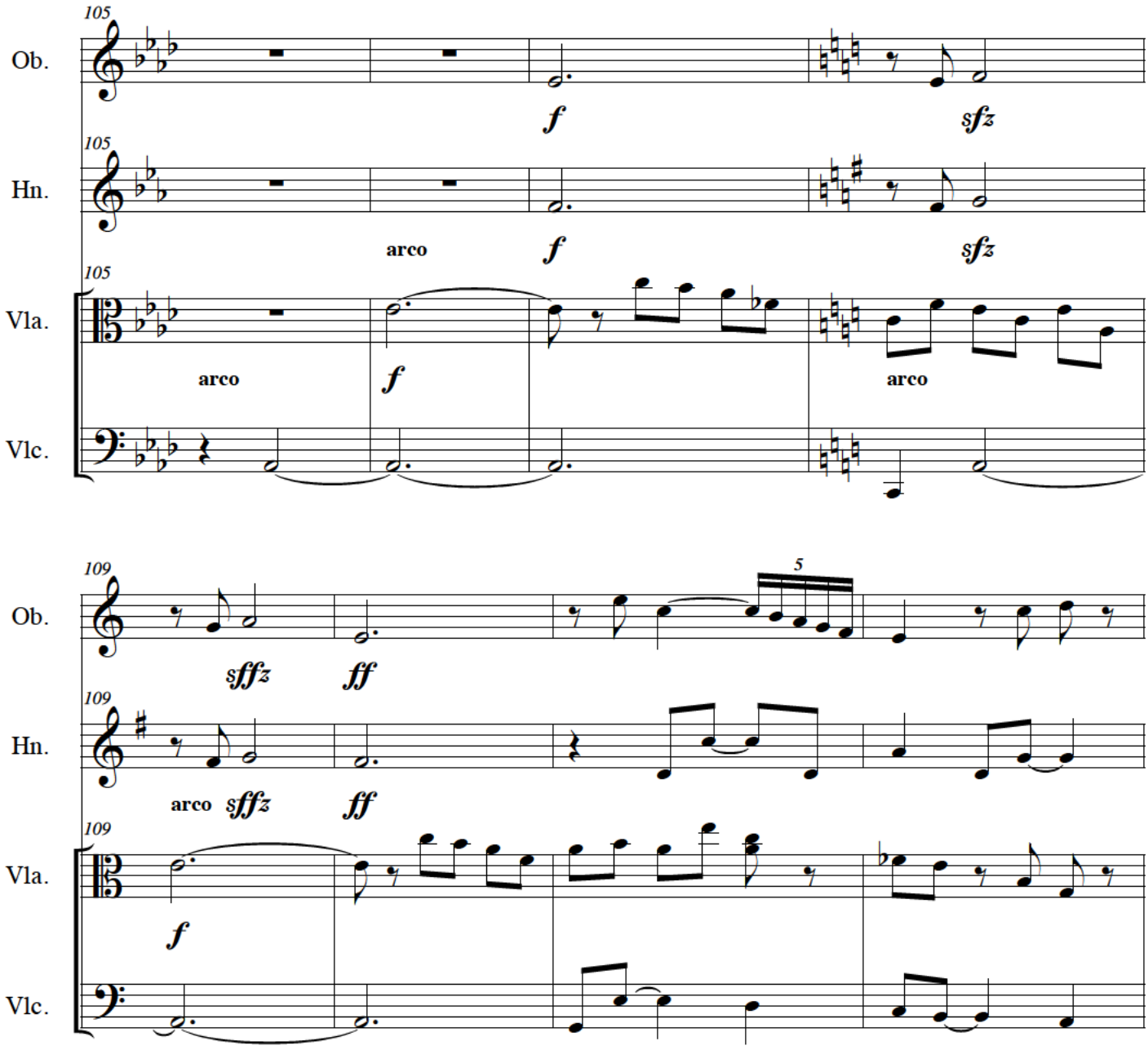
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ff
5
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Hn.
arco sffz
ff
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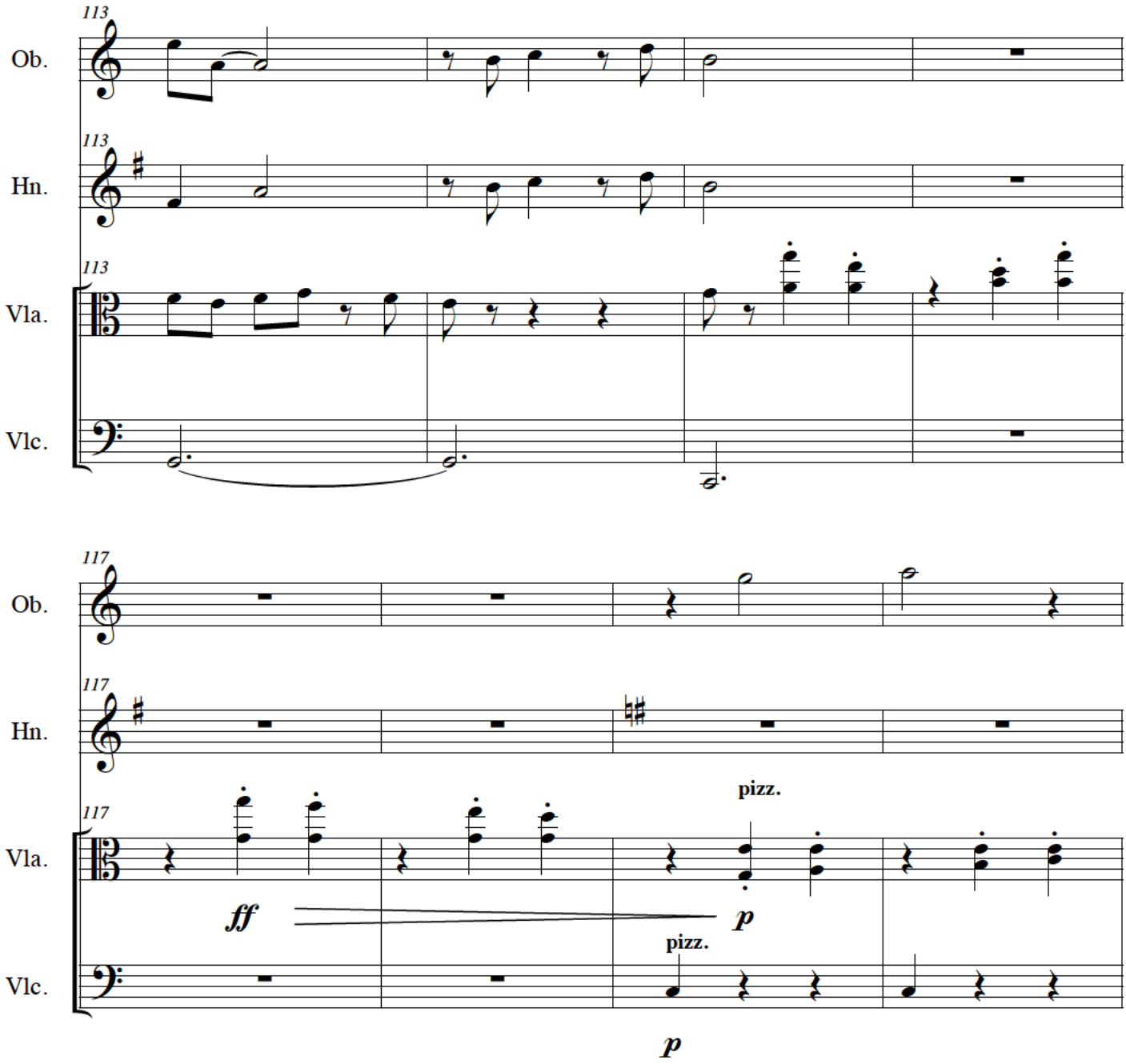
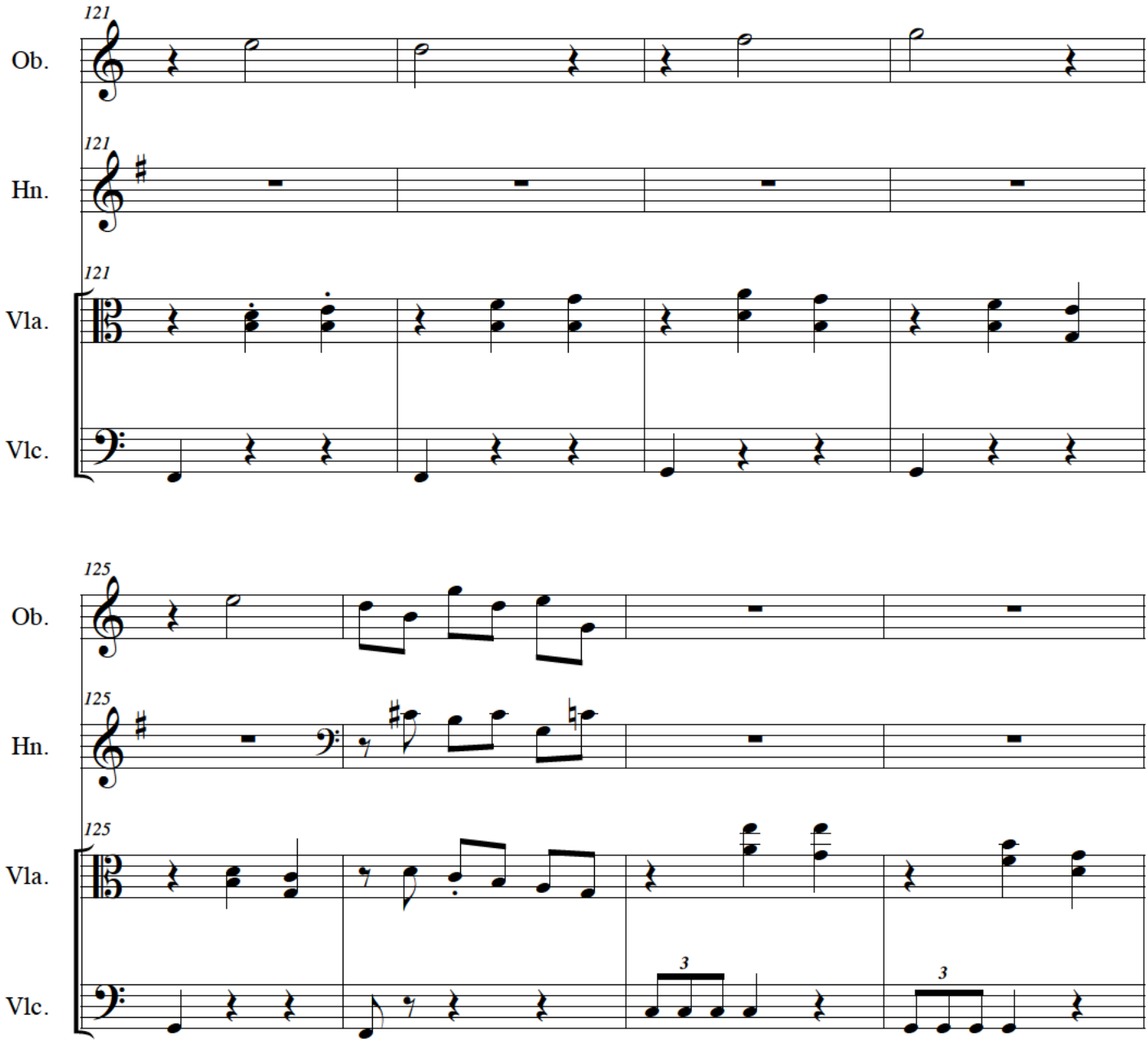
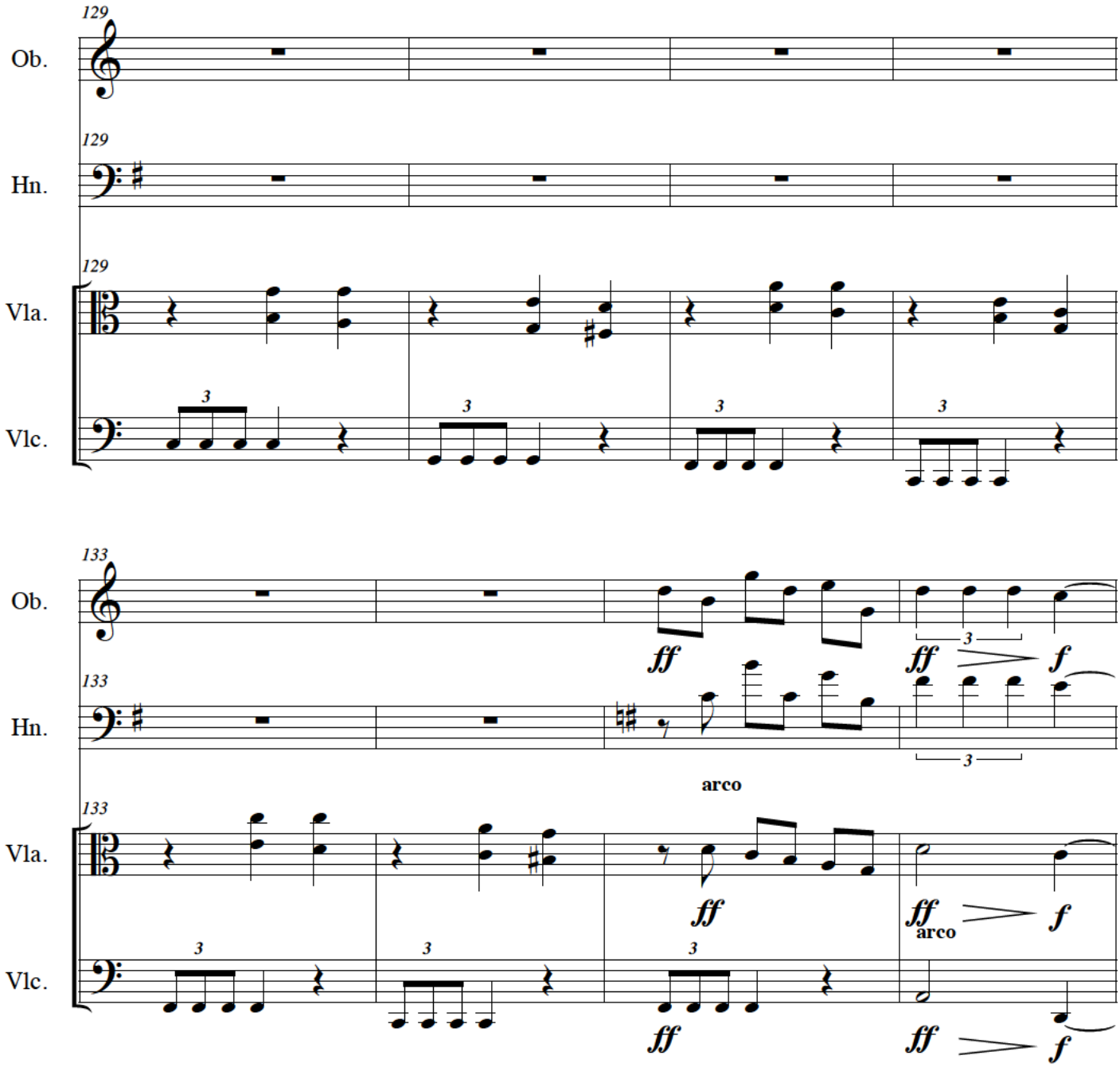
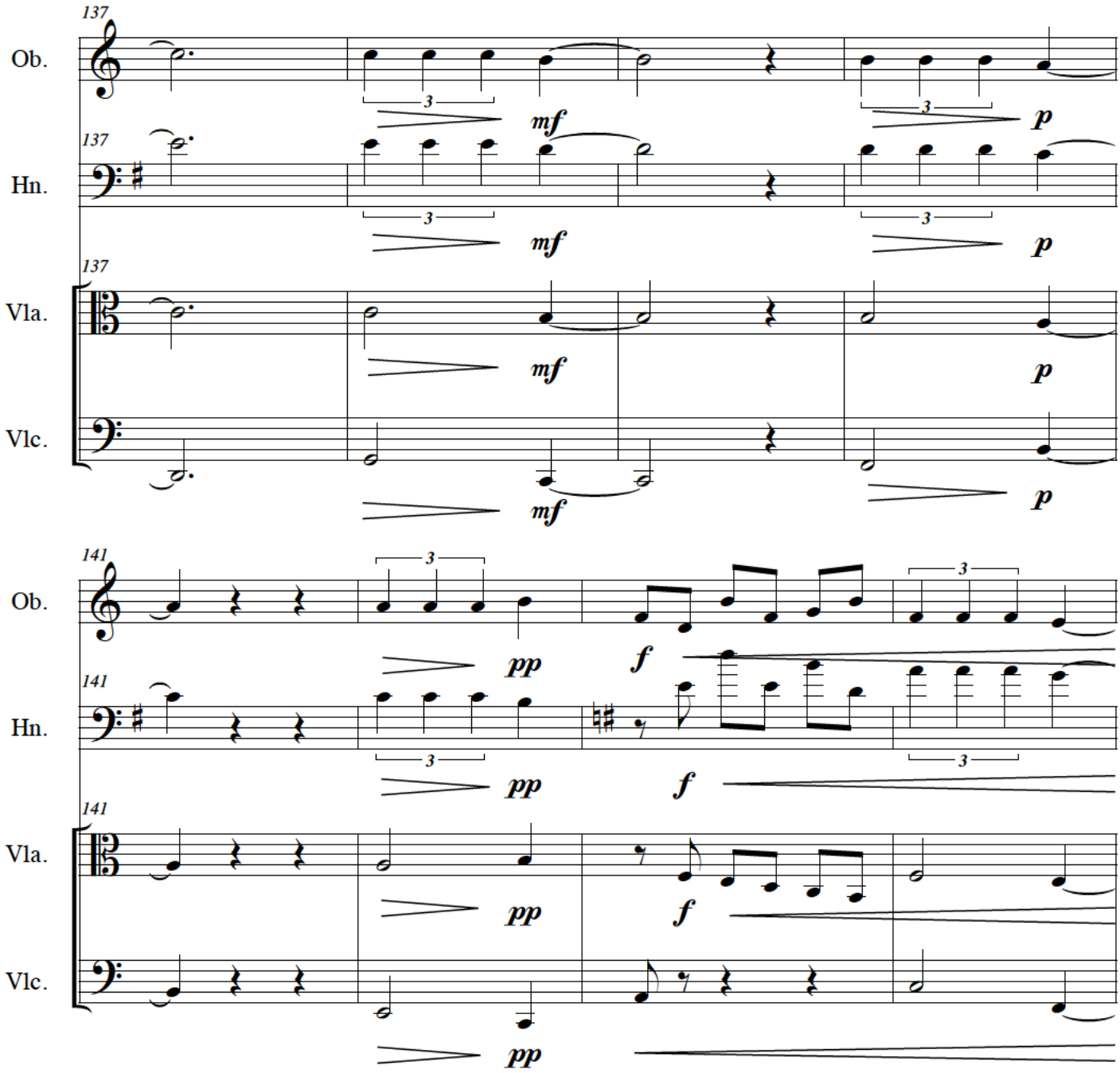
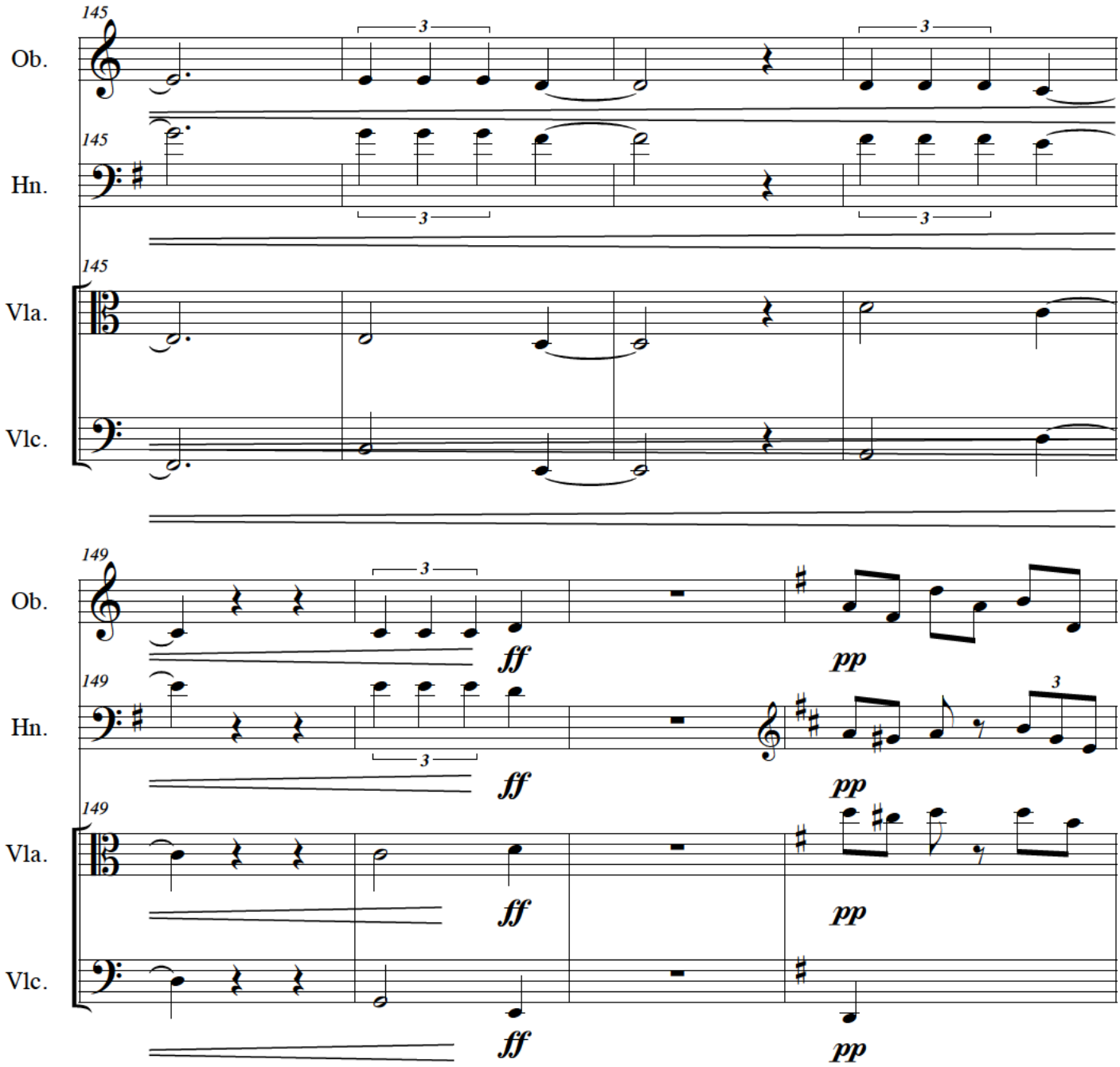
Vla.
f
Vlc.

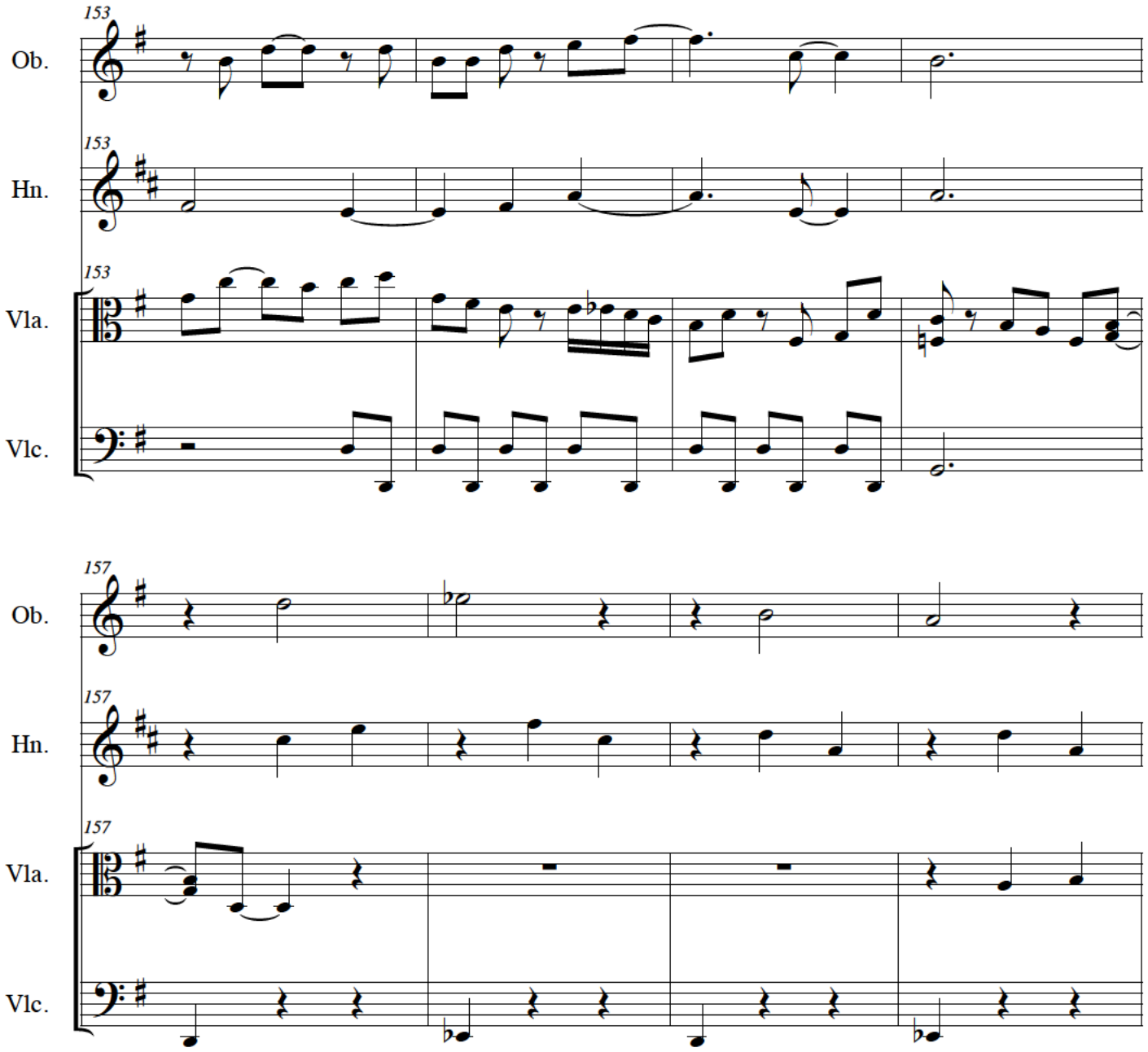

113
Ob.
113
Hn.
113
Vla.
Vlc.
117
Ob.
117
Hn.
117
Vla.
ff
pizz.
p
pizz.
Vlc.
p

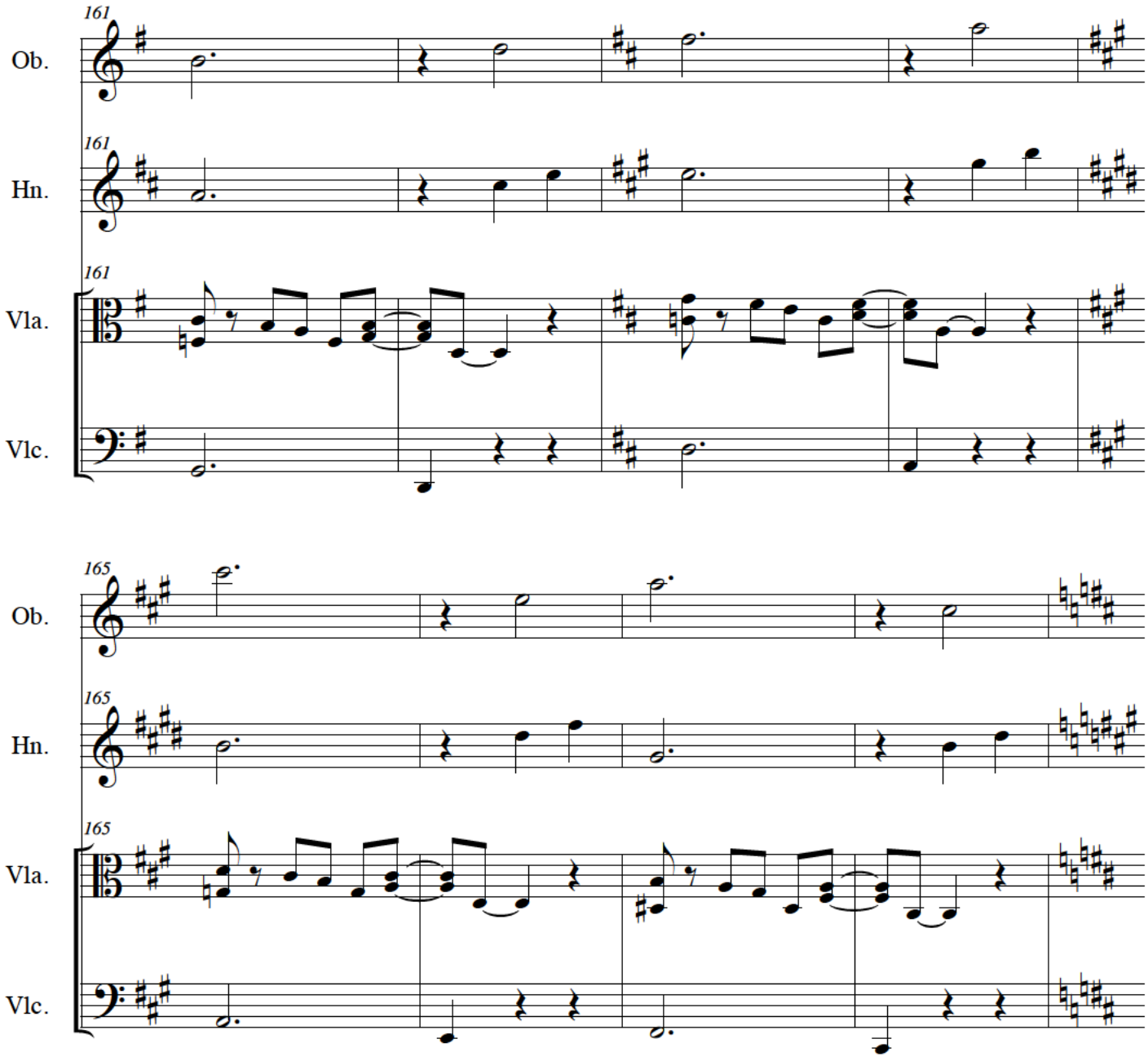

121
Ob.
121
Hn.
121
Vla.
Vlc.
125
Ob.
125
Hn.
125
Vla.
3
3
Vlc.

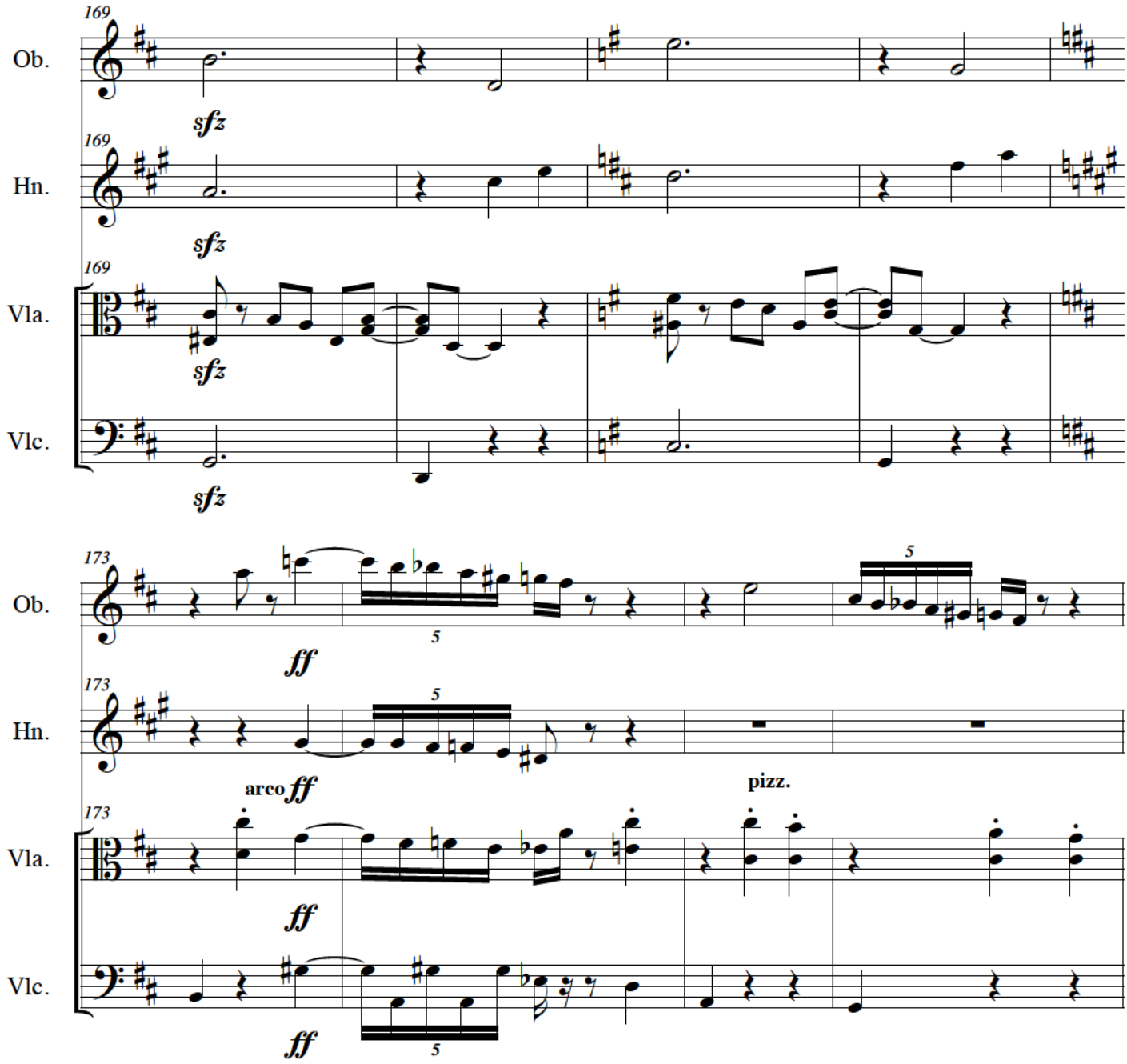

129
Ob.
129
Hn.
129
Vla.
Vlc.
3
133
Ob.
ff
ff
f
133
Hn.
arco
133
Vla.
ff
ff
arco
f
Vlc.
ff
ff
f

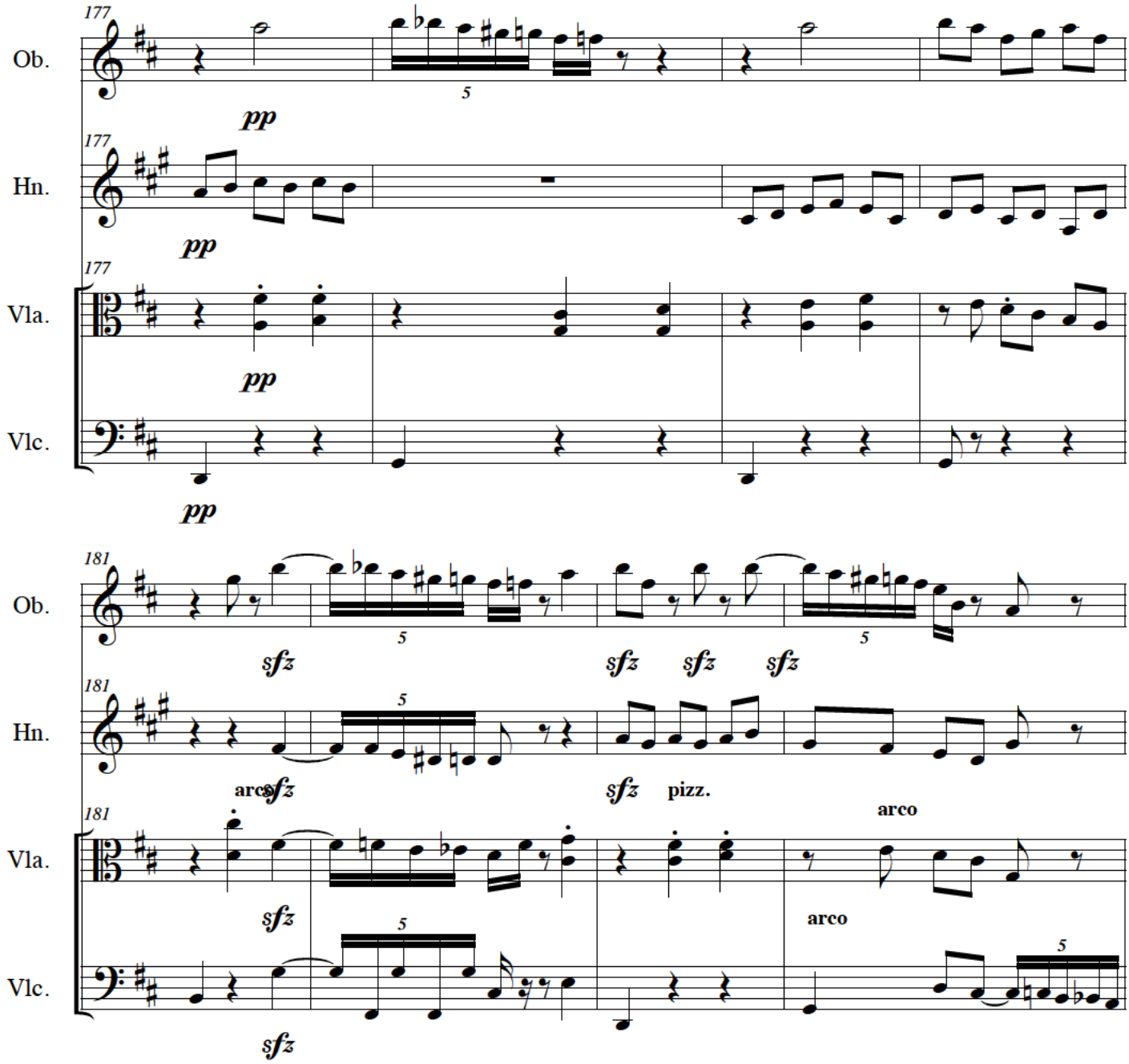

137
Ob.
Hn.
Vla.
Vlc.
mf
p
141
pp
f

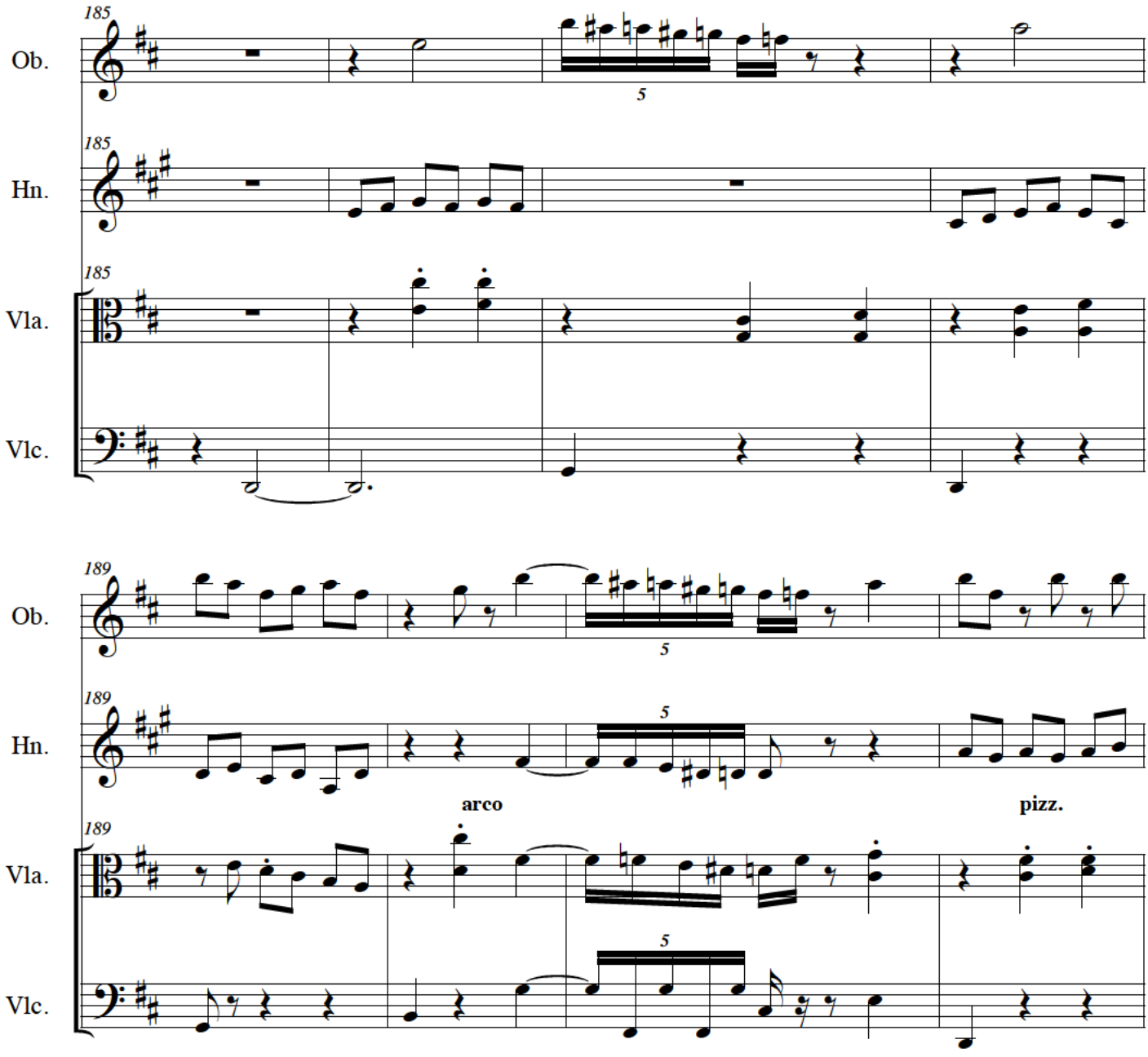

145
Ob.
Hn.
Vla.
Vlc.
3
149
ff
pp

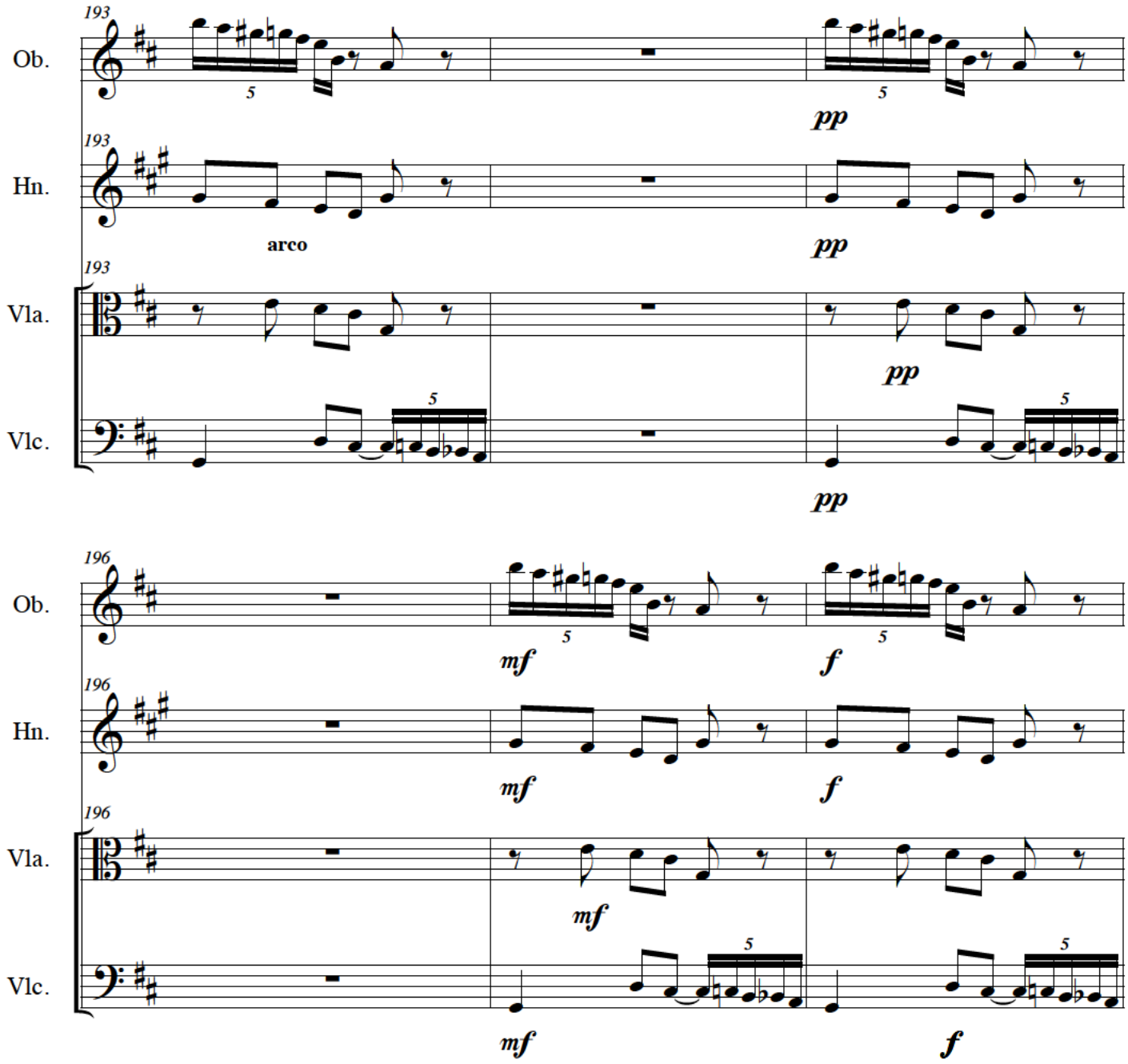

153
Ob.
153
Hn.
153
Vla.
Vlc.
157
Ob.
157
Hn.
157
Vla.
Vlc.

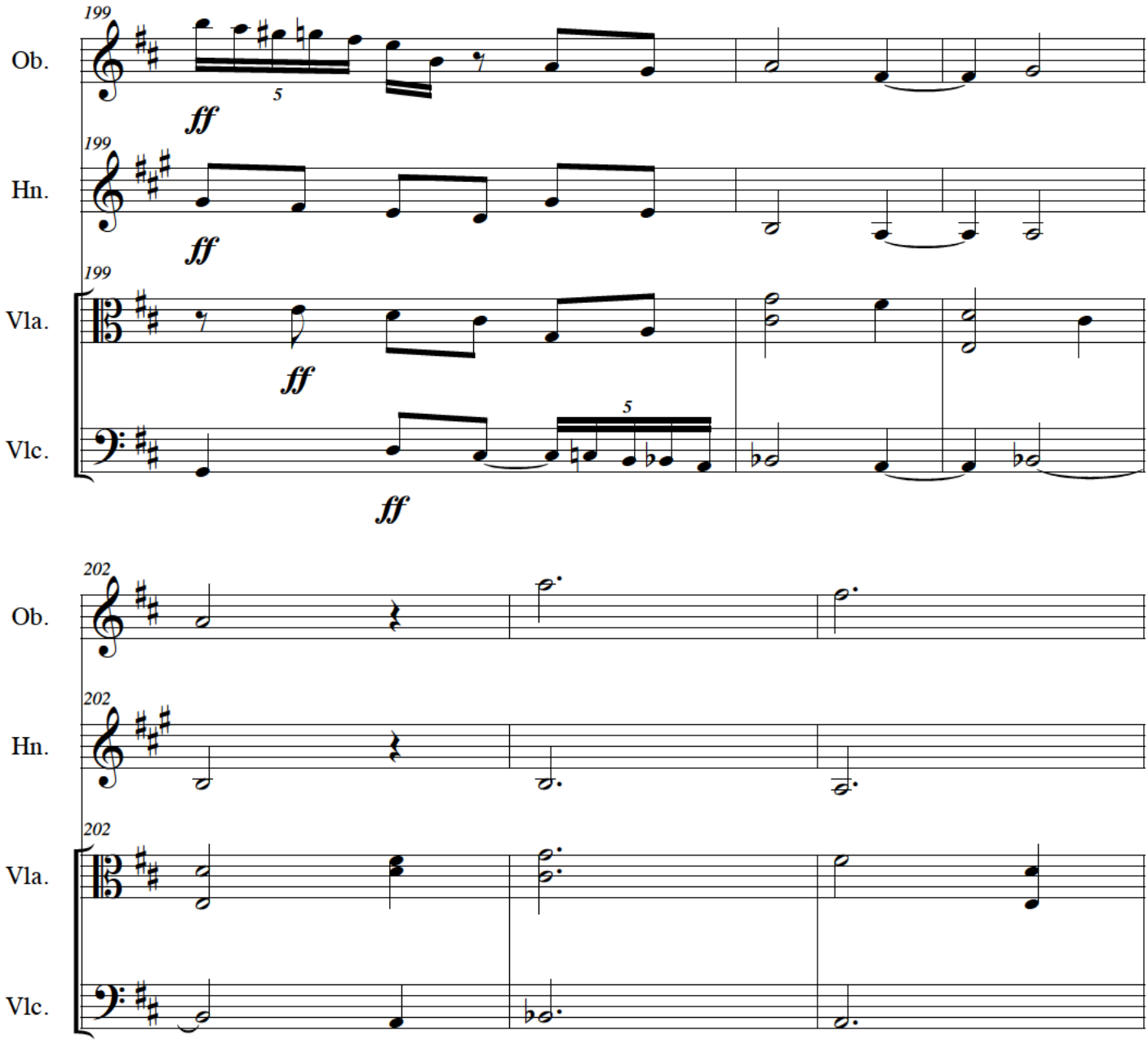

161
Ob.
161
Hn.
161
Vla.
Vlc.
165
Ob.
165
Hn.
165
Vla.
Vlc.

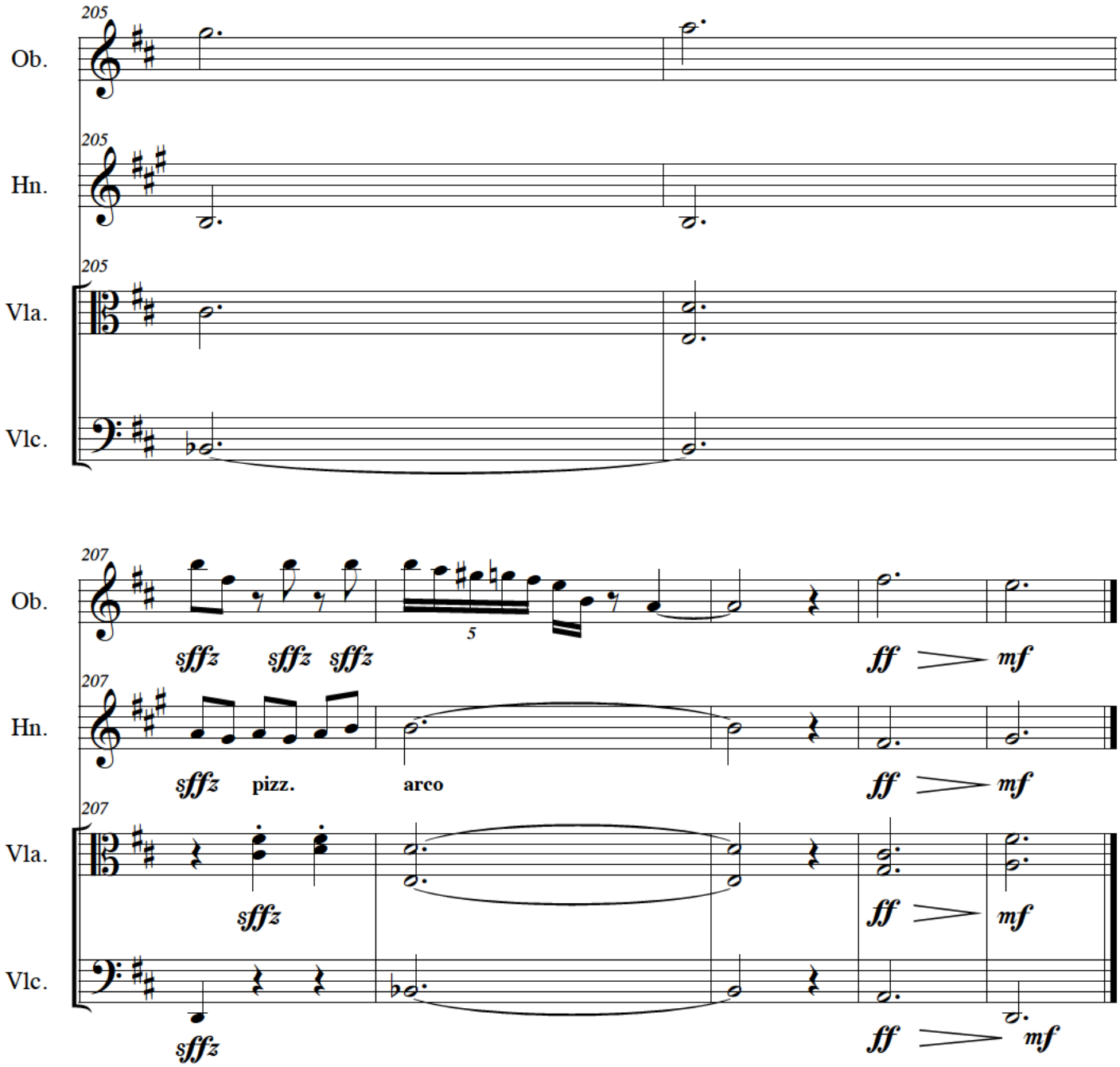

169
Ob.
sfz
169
Hn.
sfz
169
Vla.
sfz
Vlc.
sfz
173
Ob.
ff
5
5
173
Hn.
arco ff
5
pizz.
173
Vla.
ff
Vlc.
ff
5


177
Ob.
pp
177
Hn.
pp
177
Vla.
pp
Vlc.
pp
181
Ob.
sfz
sfz
sfz
sfz
181
Hn.
arco
sfz
sfz
pizz.
181
Vla.
sfz
arco
arco
Vlc.
sfz


185
Ob.
Hn.
Vla.
Vlc.
5
189
arco
pizz.


193
Ob.
Hn.
Vla.
Vlc.
arco
pp
196
mf
f


199
Ob.
5
ff
199
Hn.
ff
199
Vla.
ff
Vlc.
5
ff
202
Ob.
202
Hn.
202
Vla.
Vlc.

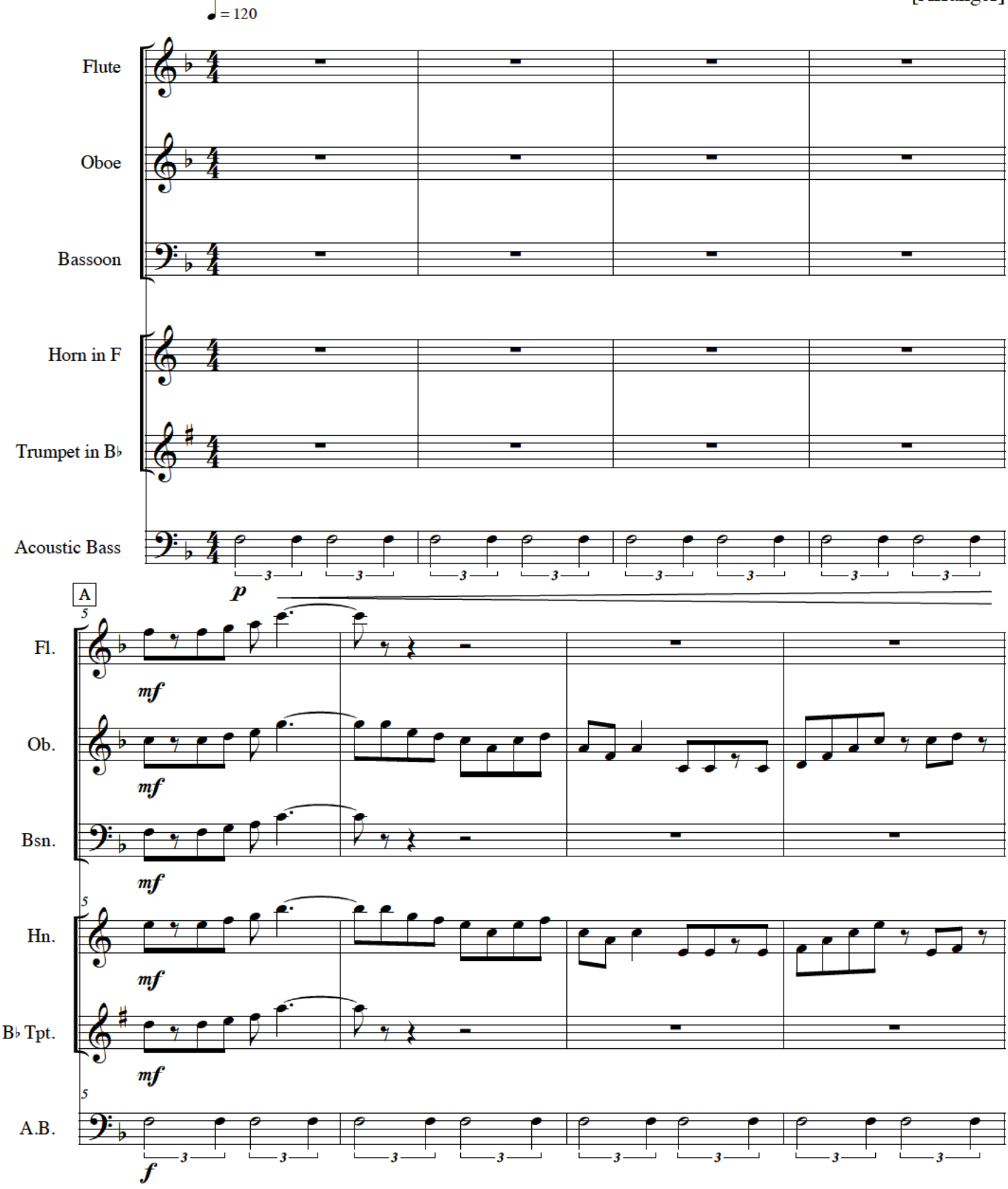

205
Ob.
205
Hn.
205
Vla.
Vlc.
207
Ob.
sffz sffz sffz
5
ff mf
207
Hn.
sffz pizz. arco
ff mf
207
Vla.
sffz
ff mf
Vlc.
sffz
ff mf

Let it come, Let it go

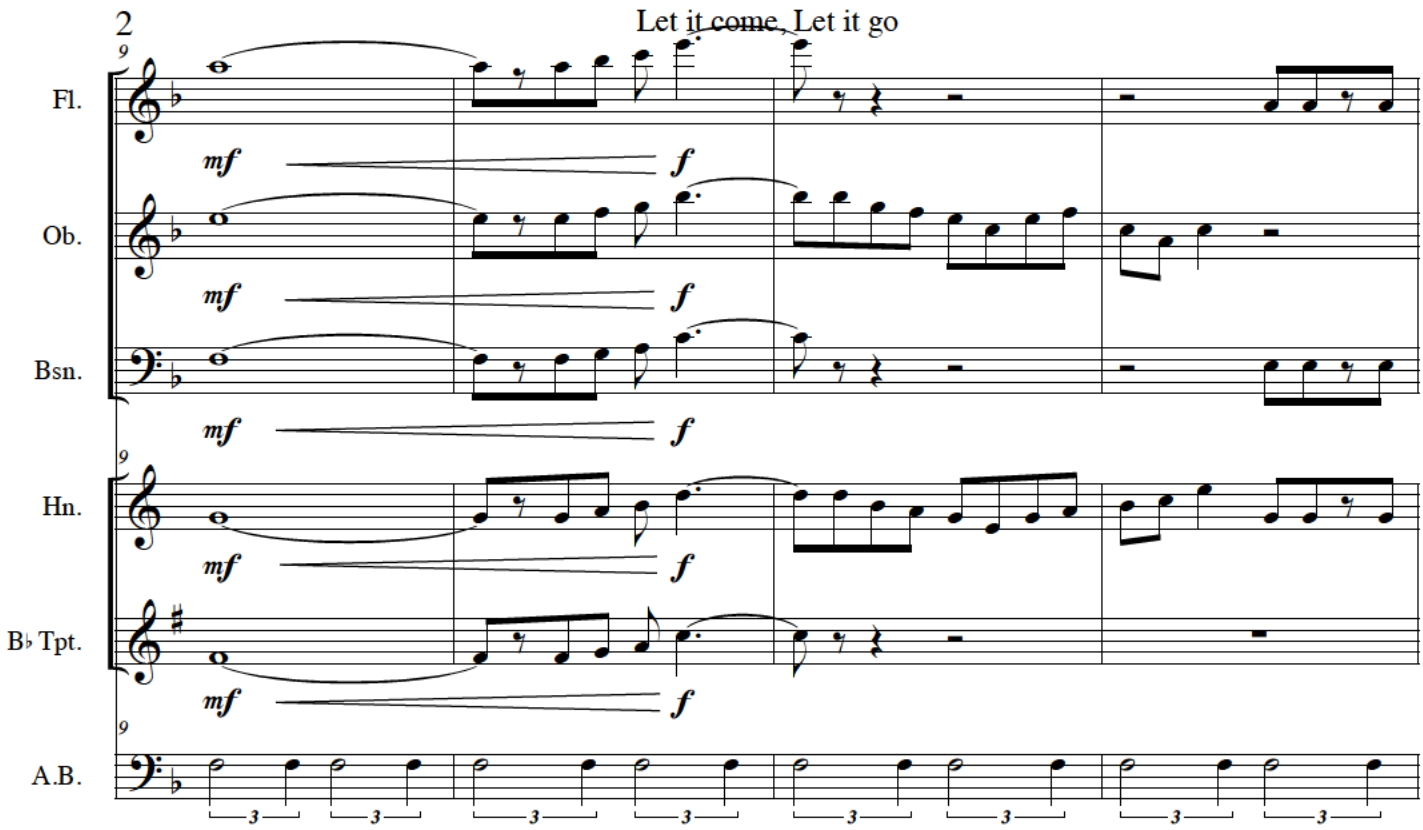
Score

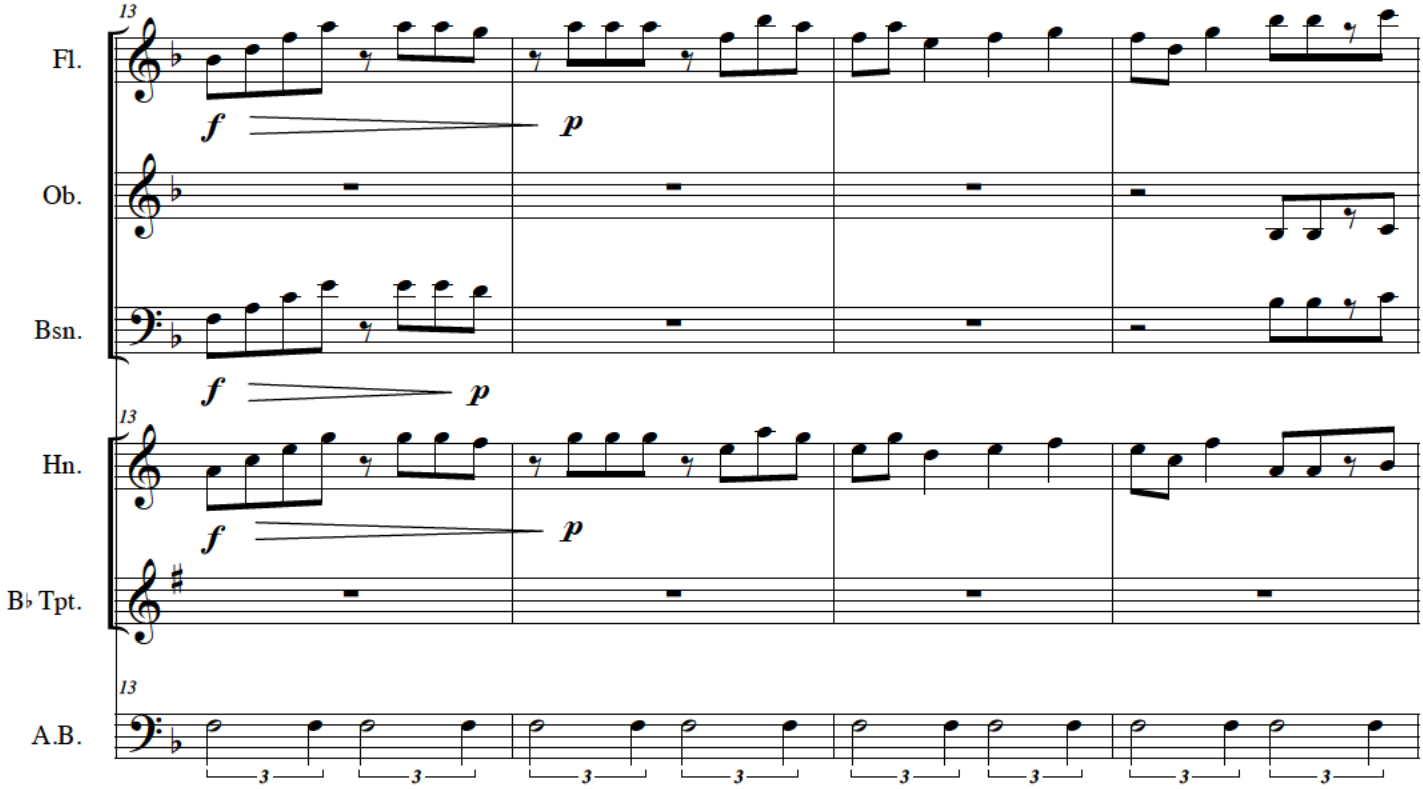
[Subtitle]

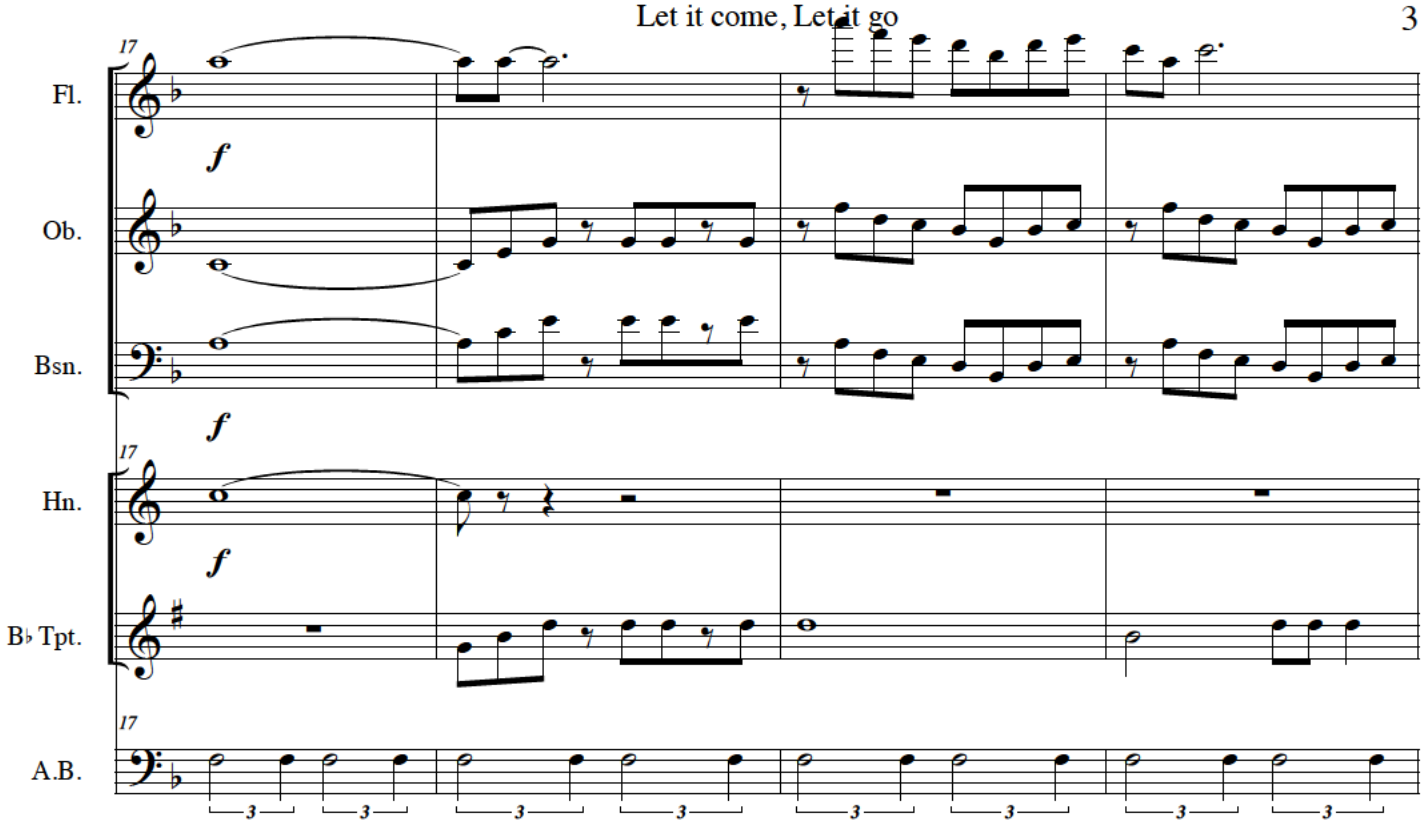
Rron Karahoda
[Arranger]

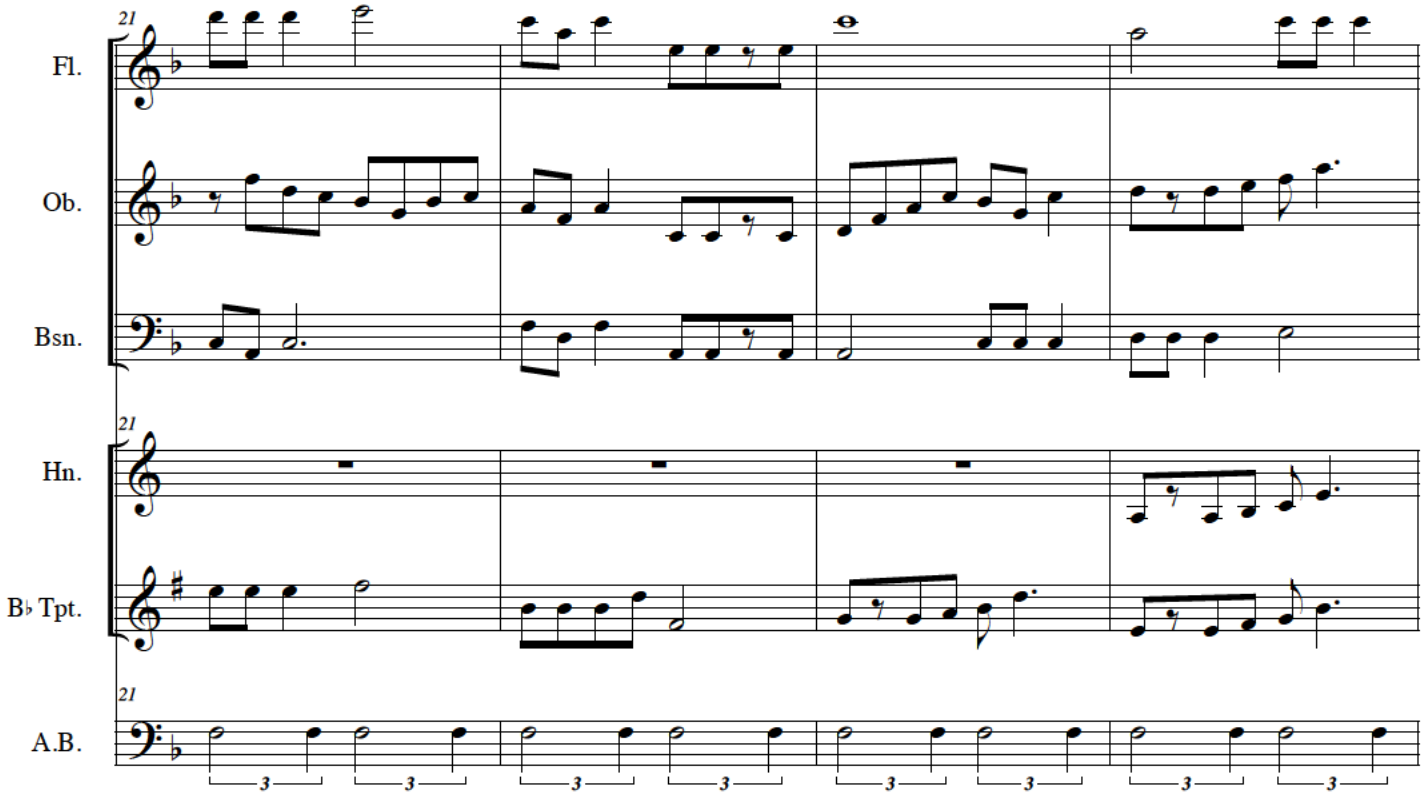


Let it come, Let it go

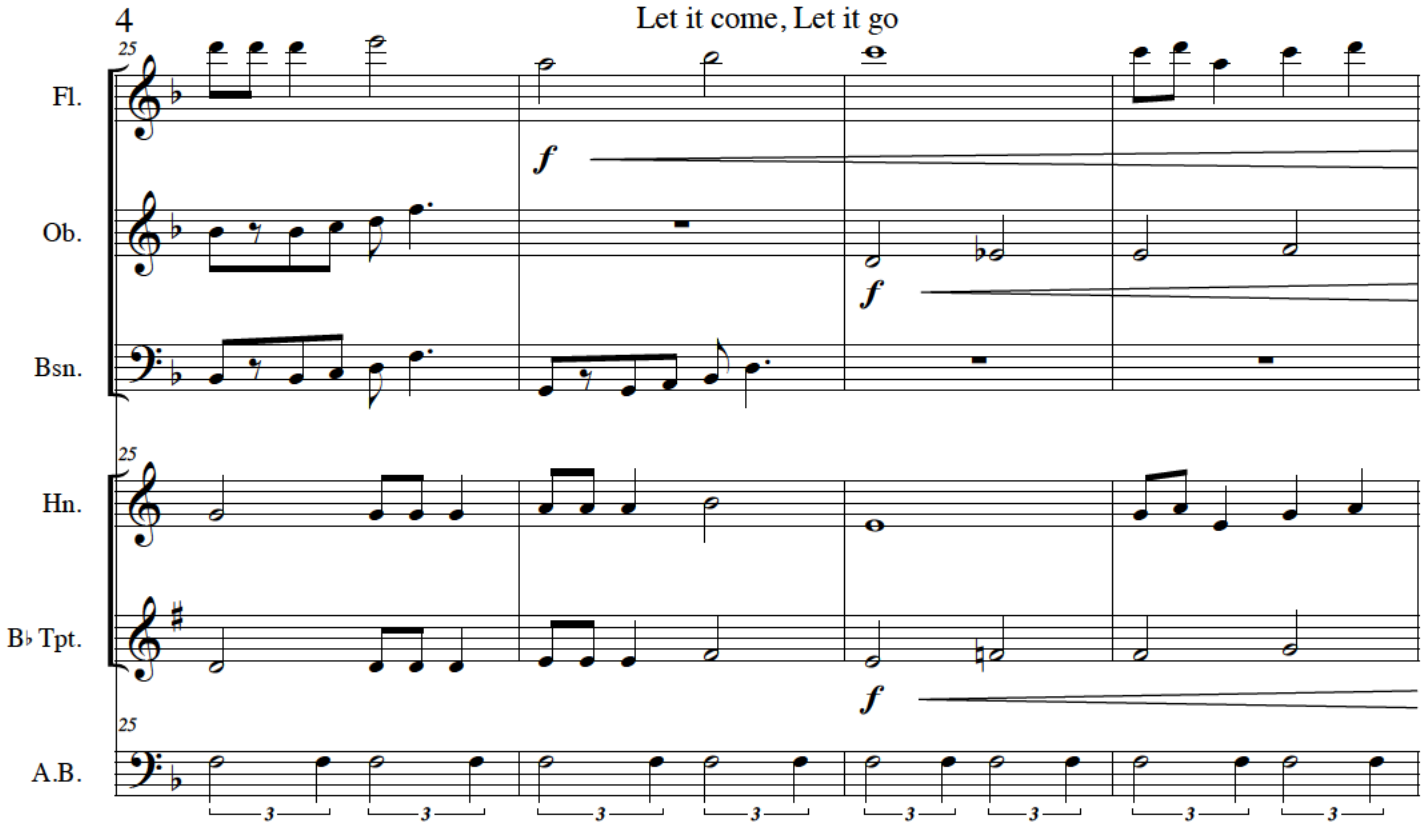


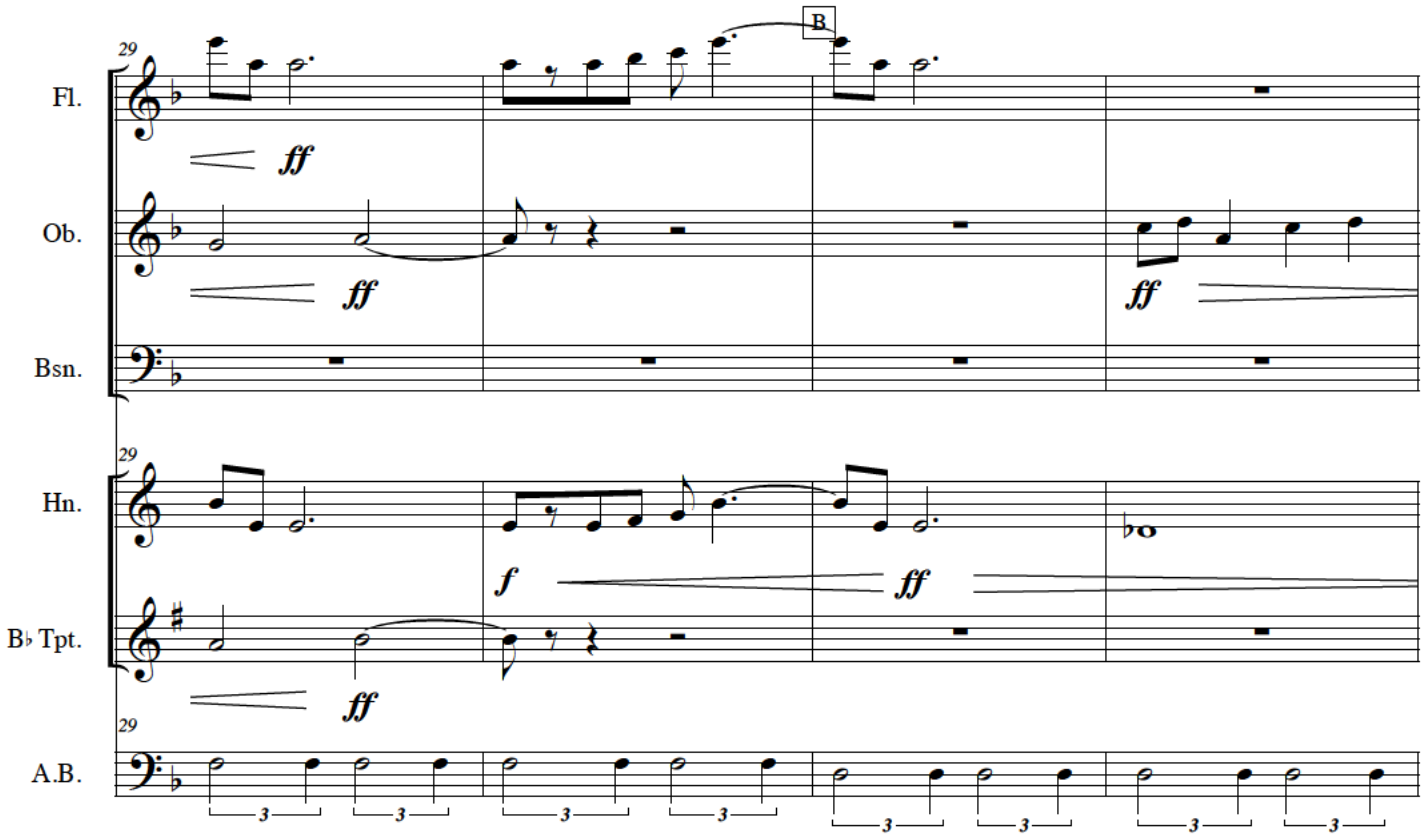


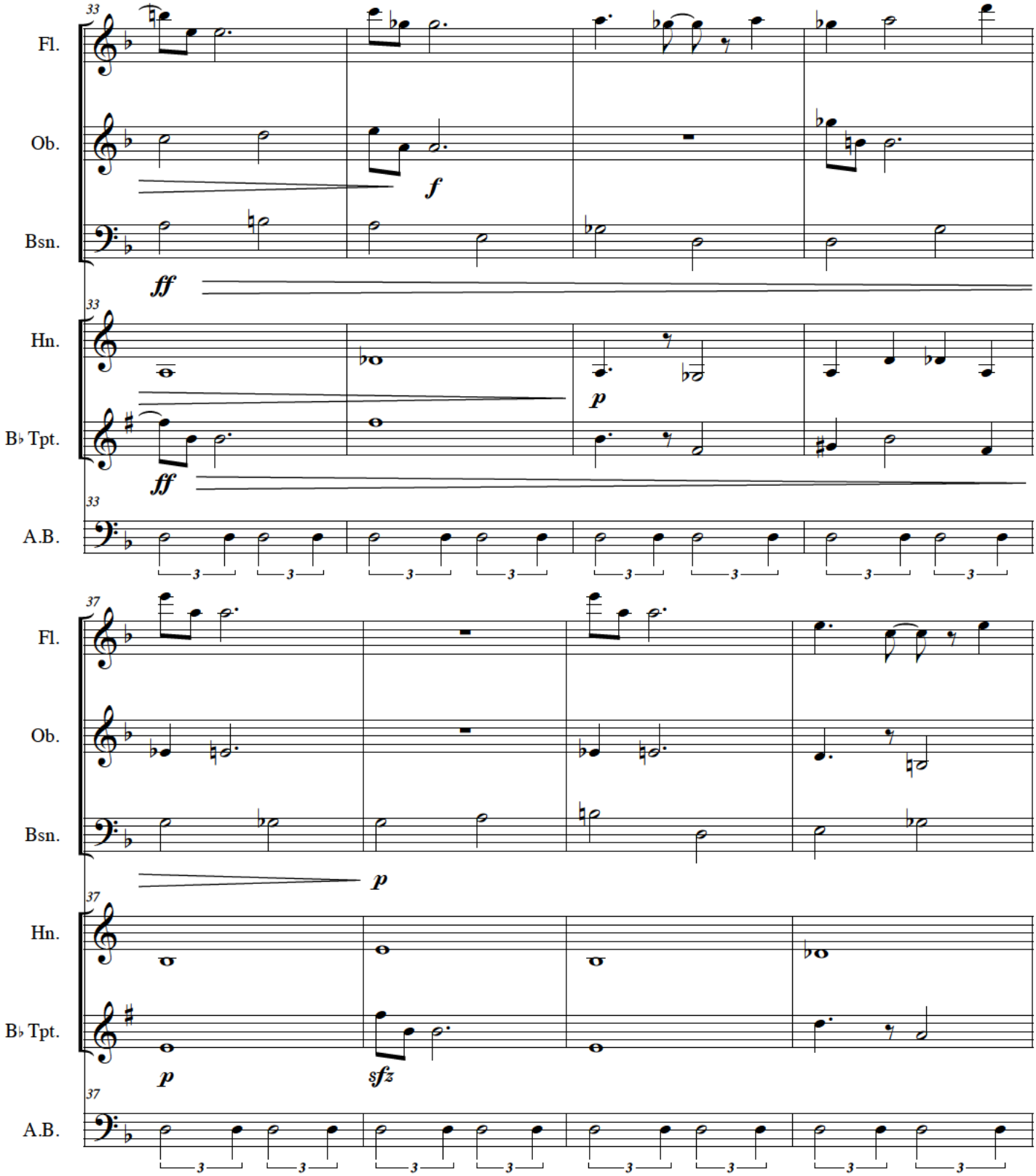

17
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
f


21
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.

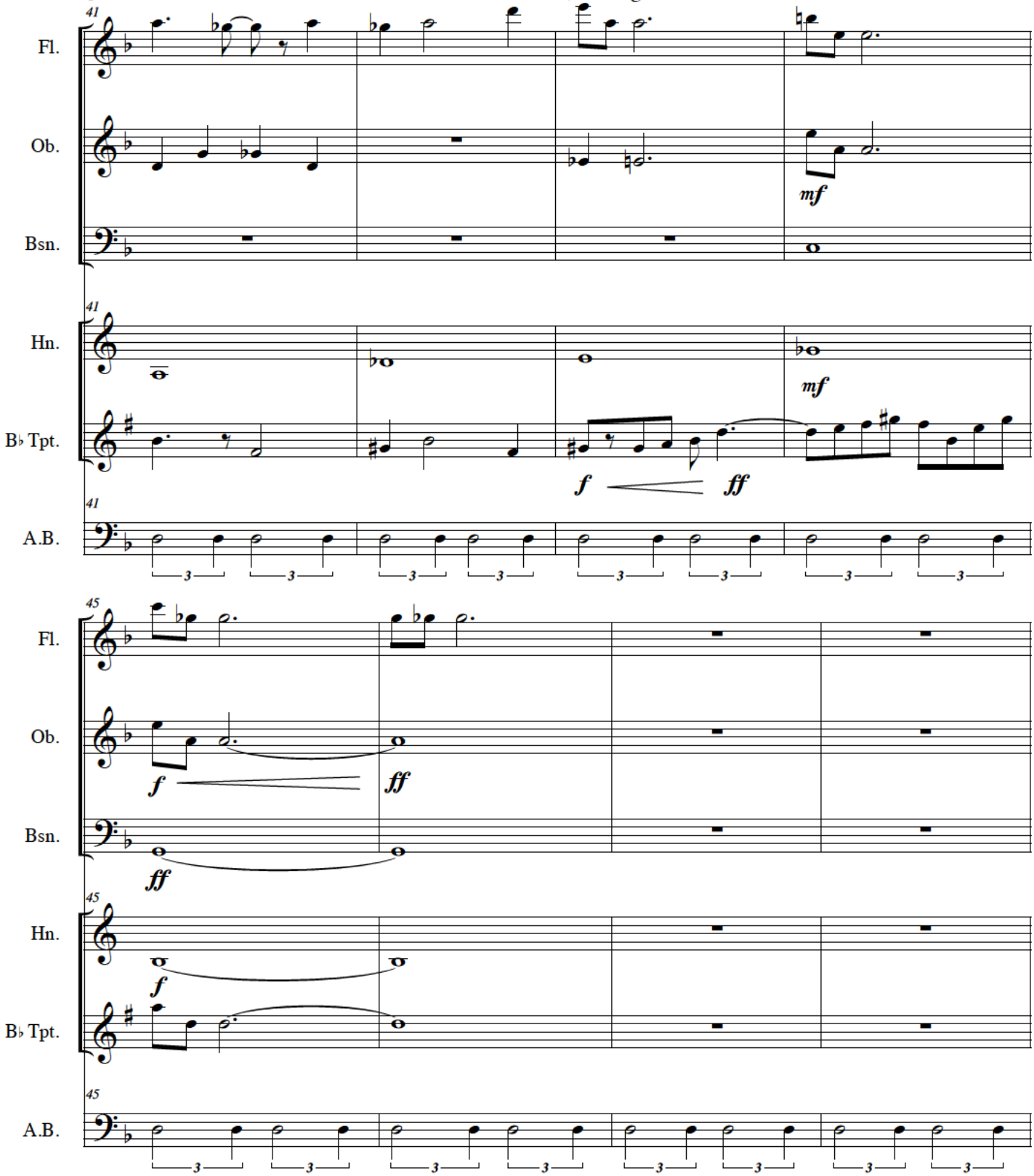
Let it come, Let it go

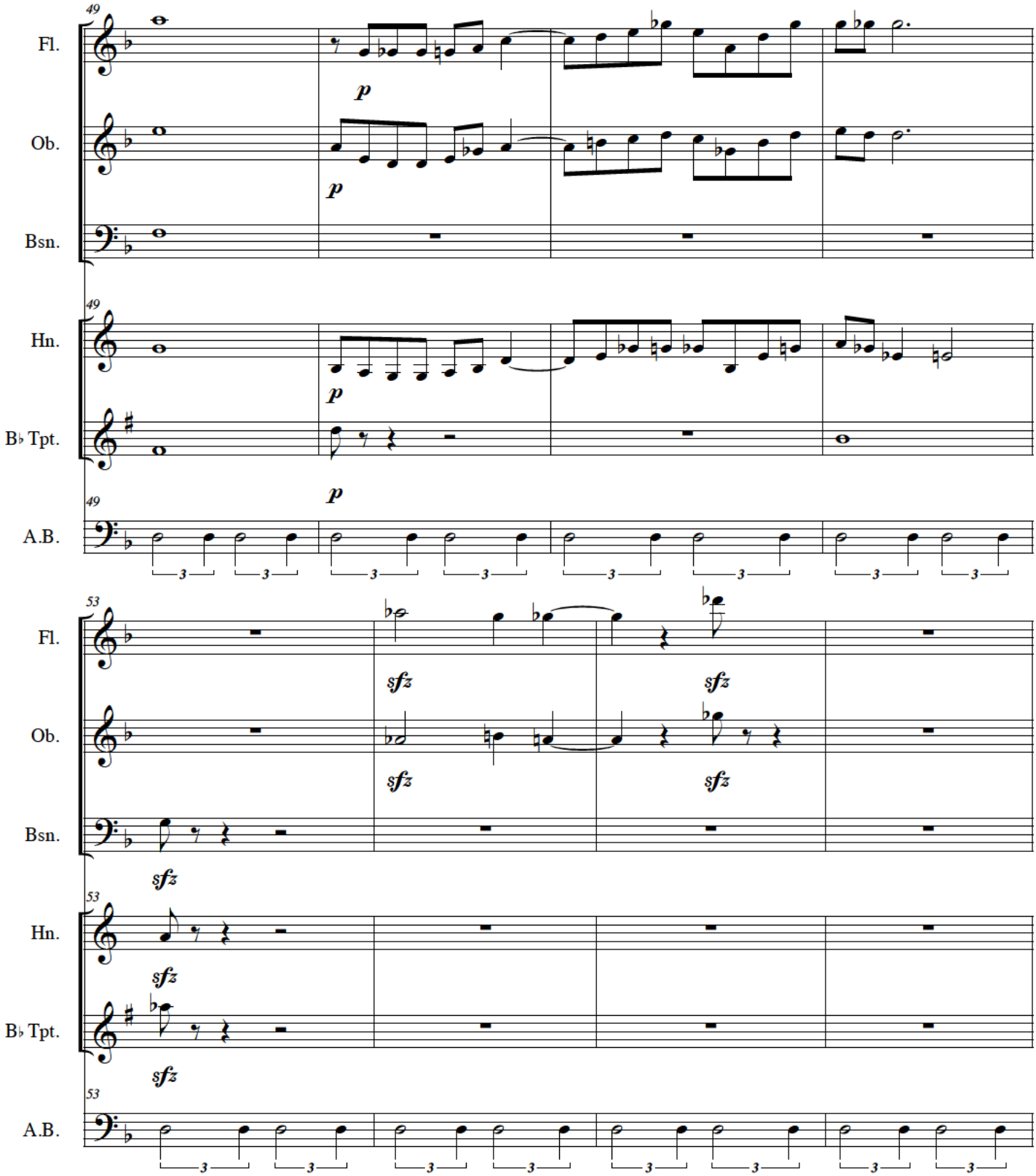




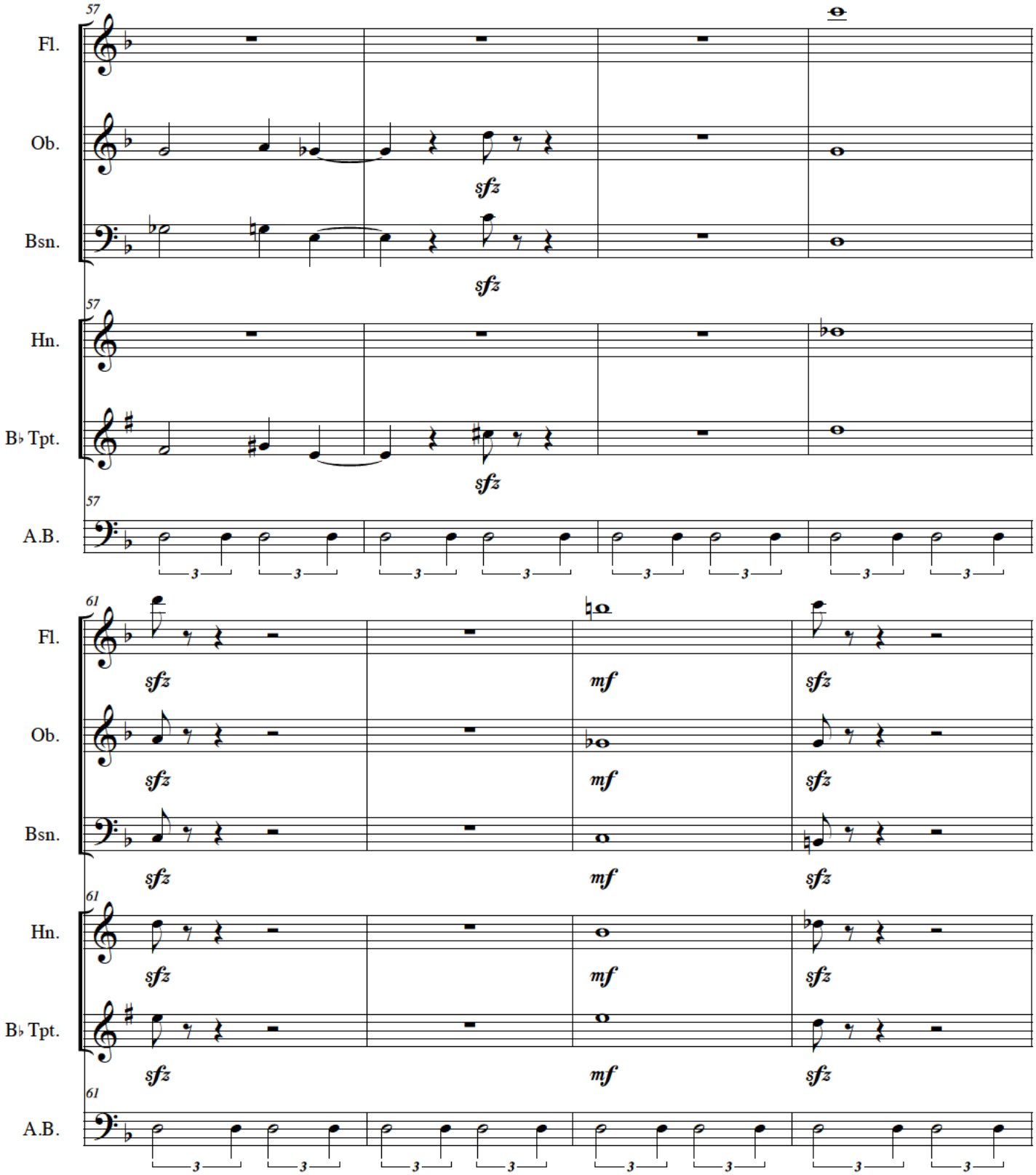

33
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
f
ff
33
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
p
ff
33
A.B.
37
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
p
37
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
p
sfz
37
A.B.

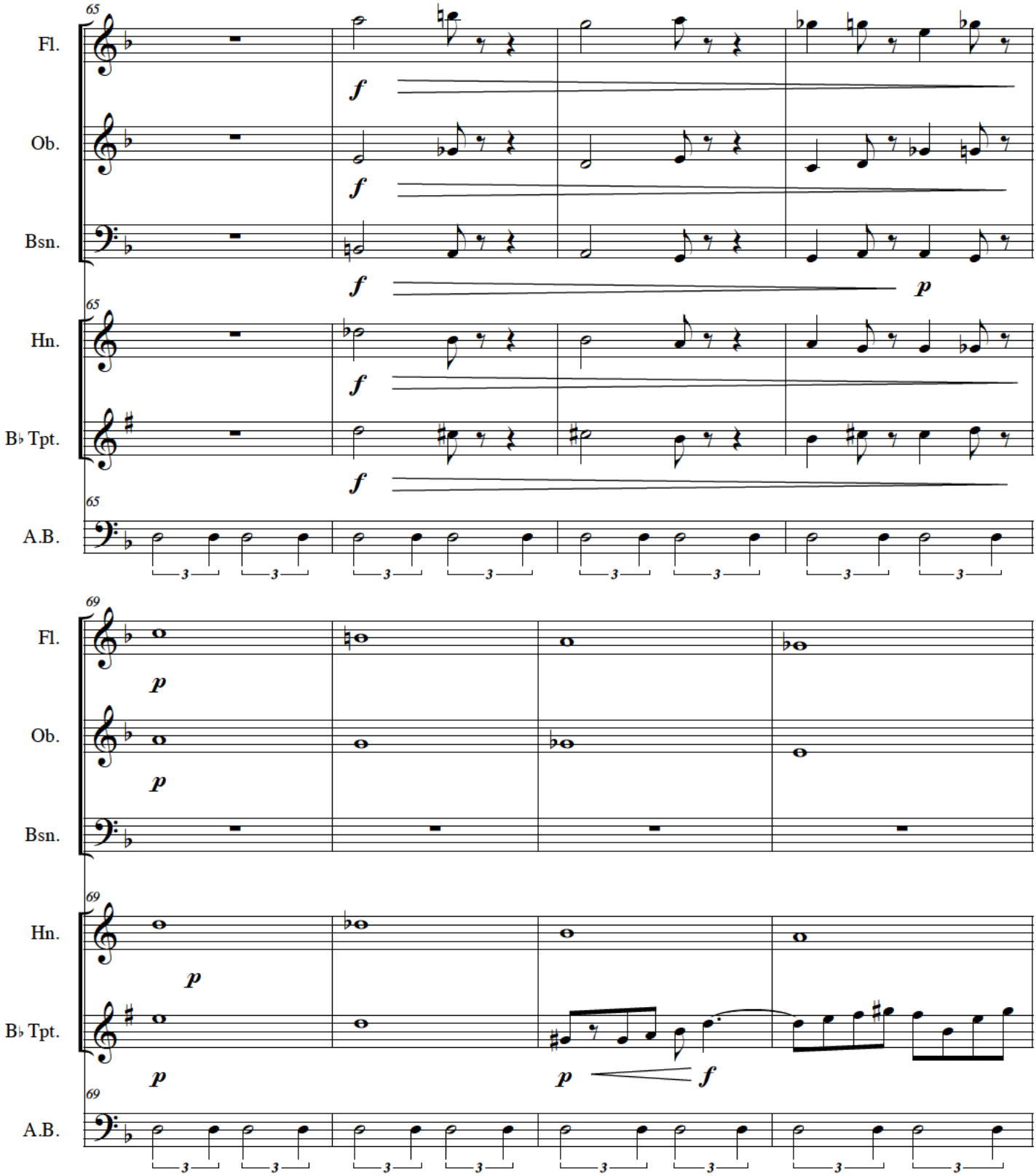
Let it come, Let it go

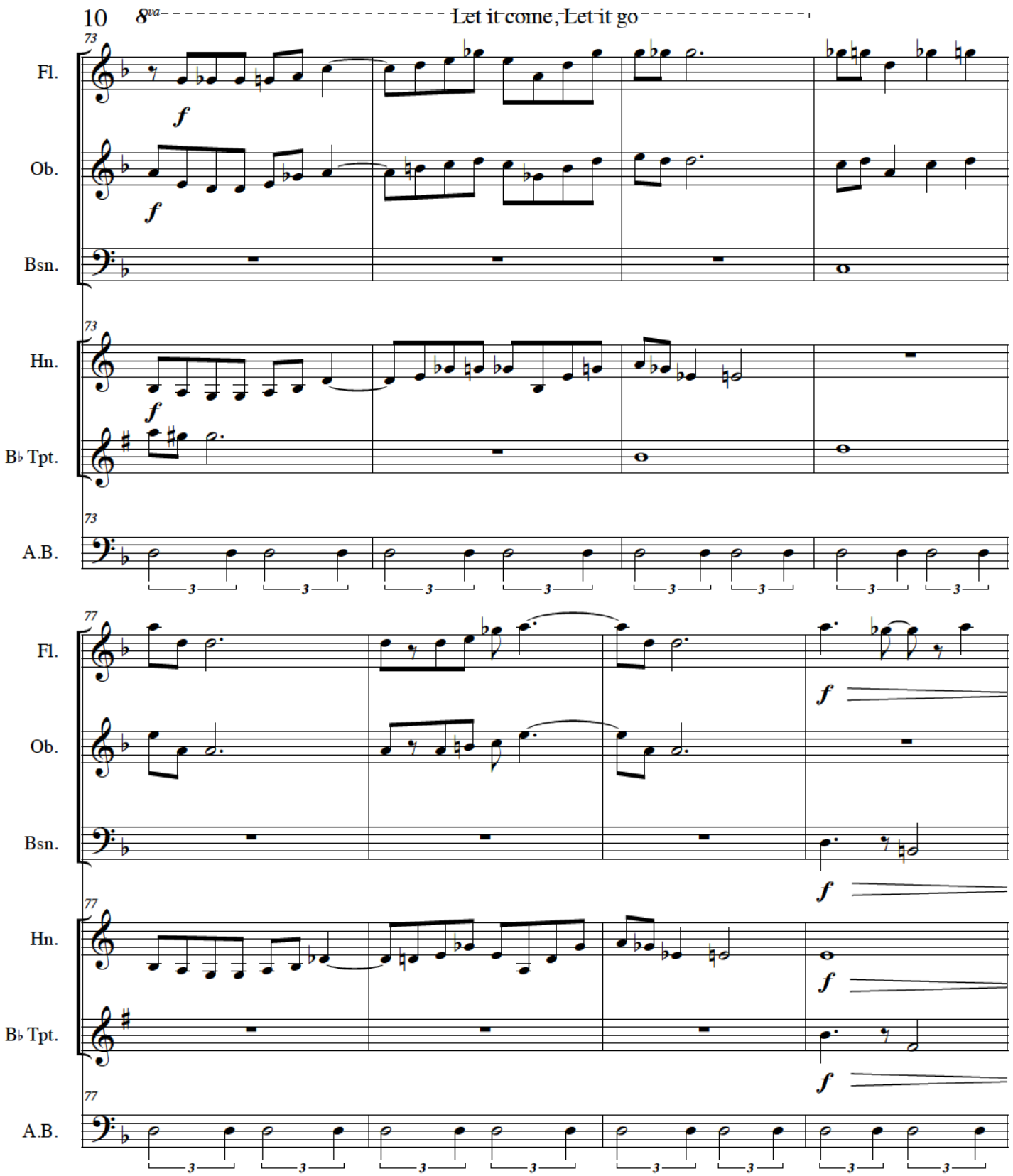


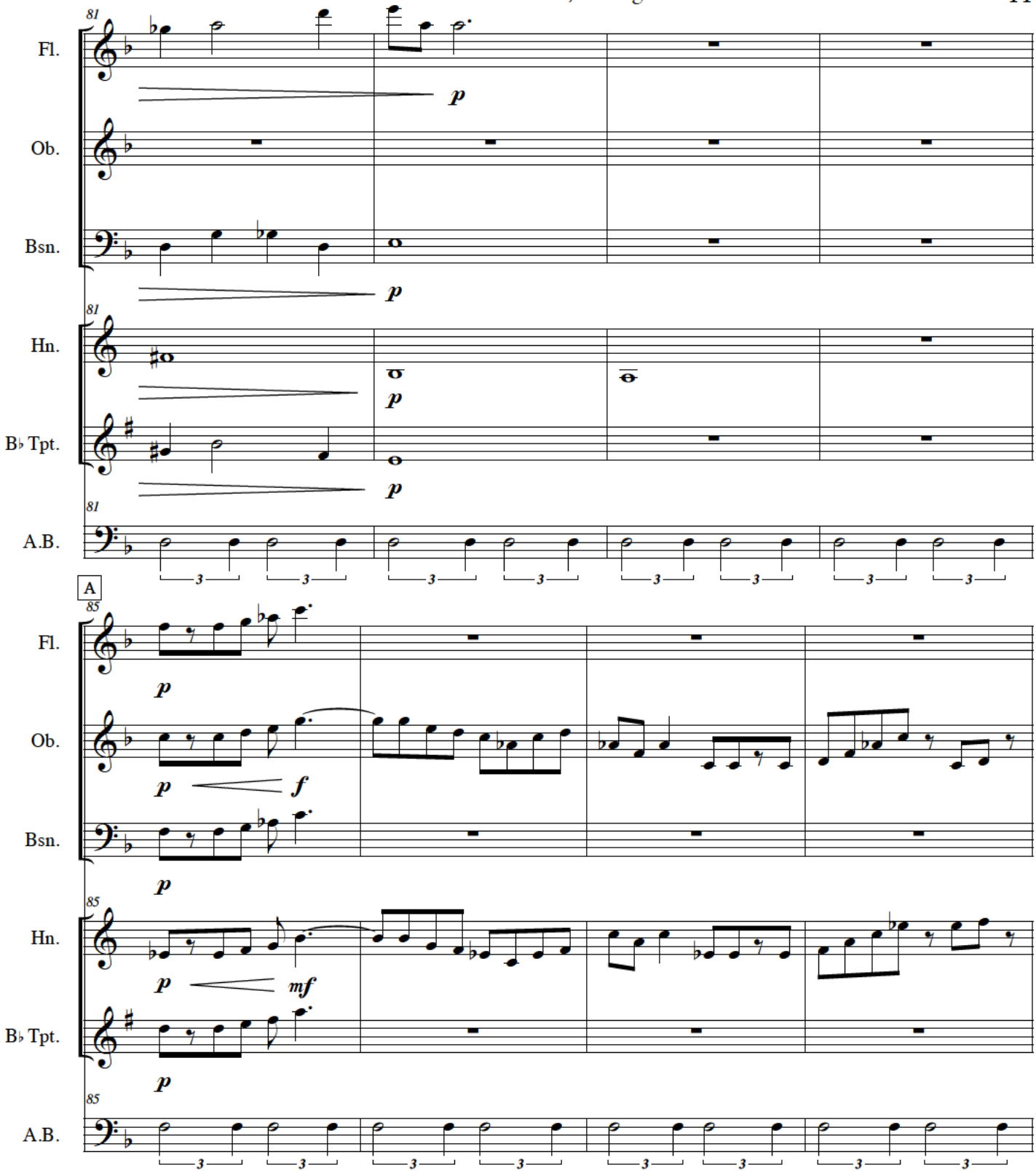

49
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
p
53
sfz

Let it come, Let it go

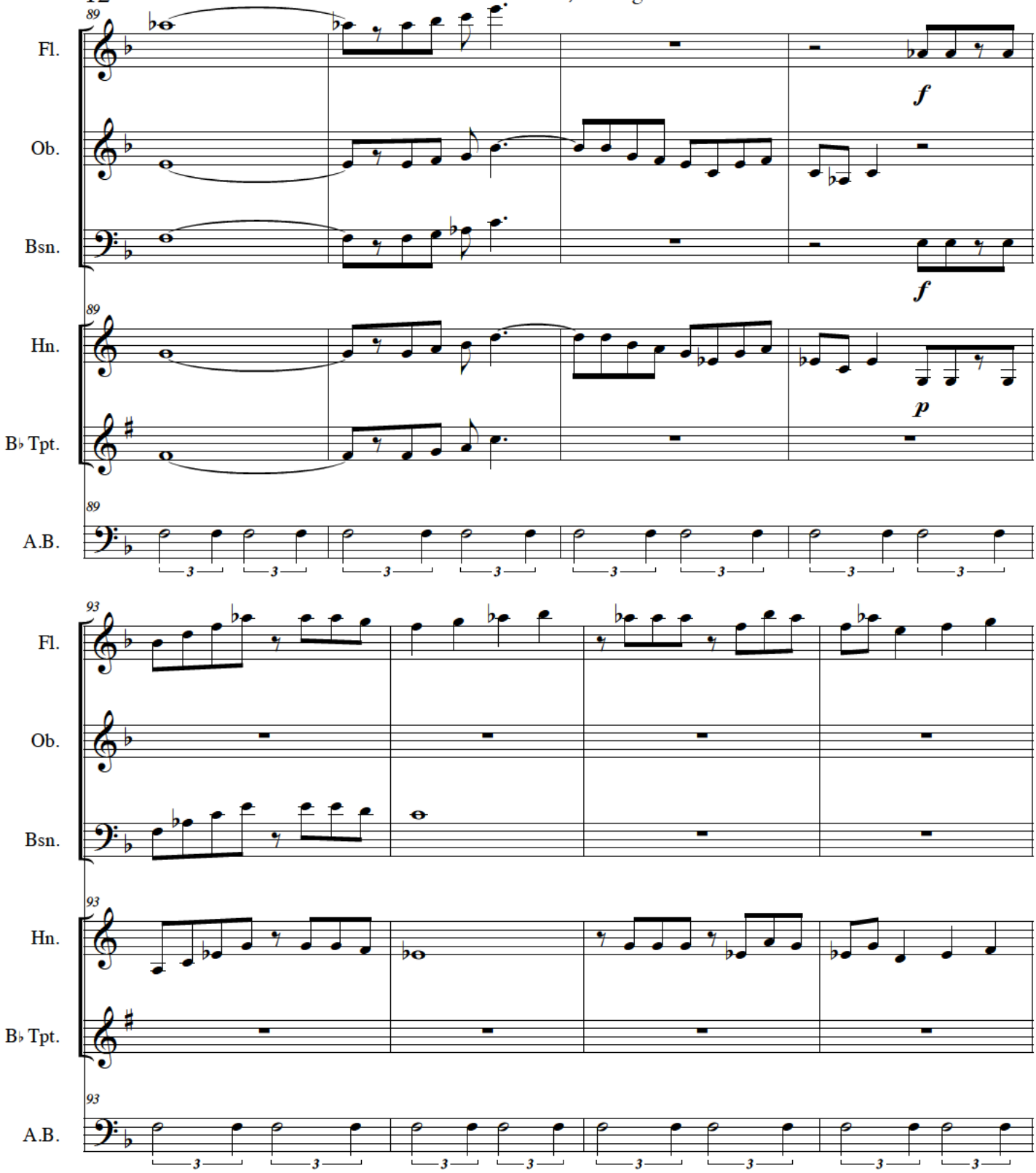


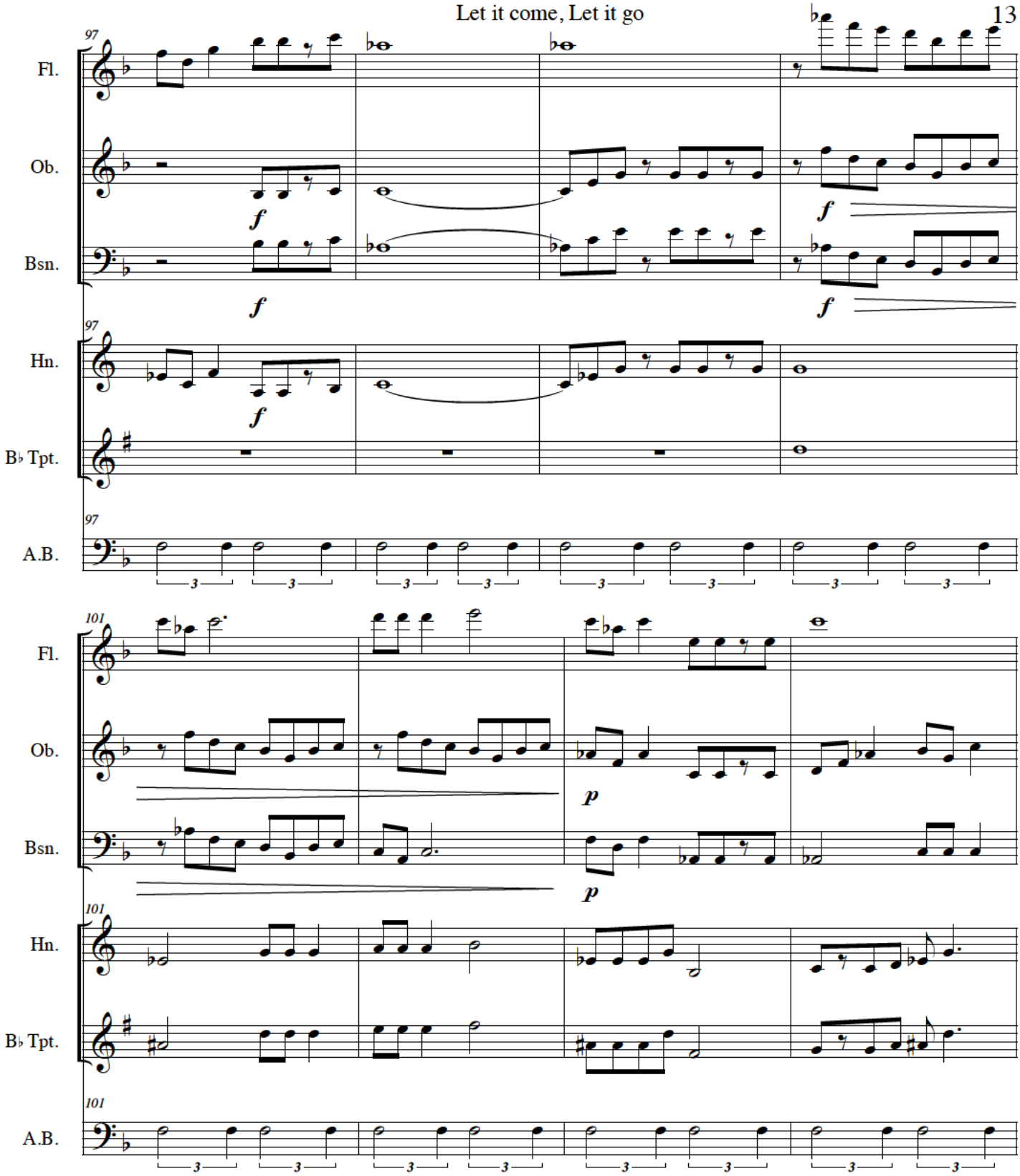

65
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
f
p
69
3


10
8va
Let it come, Let it go
73
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
f
77
3

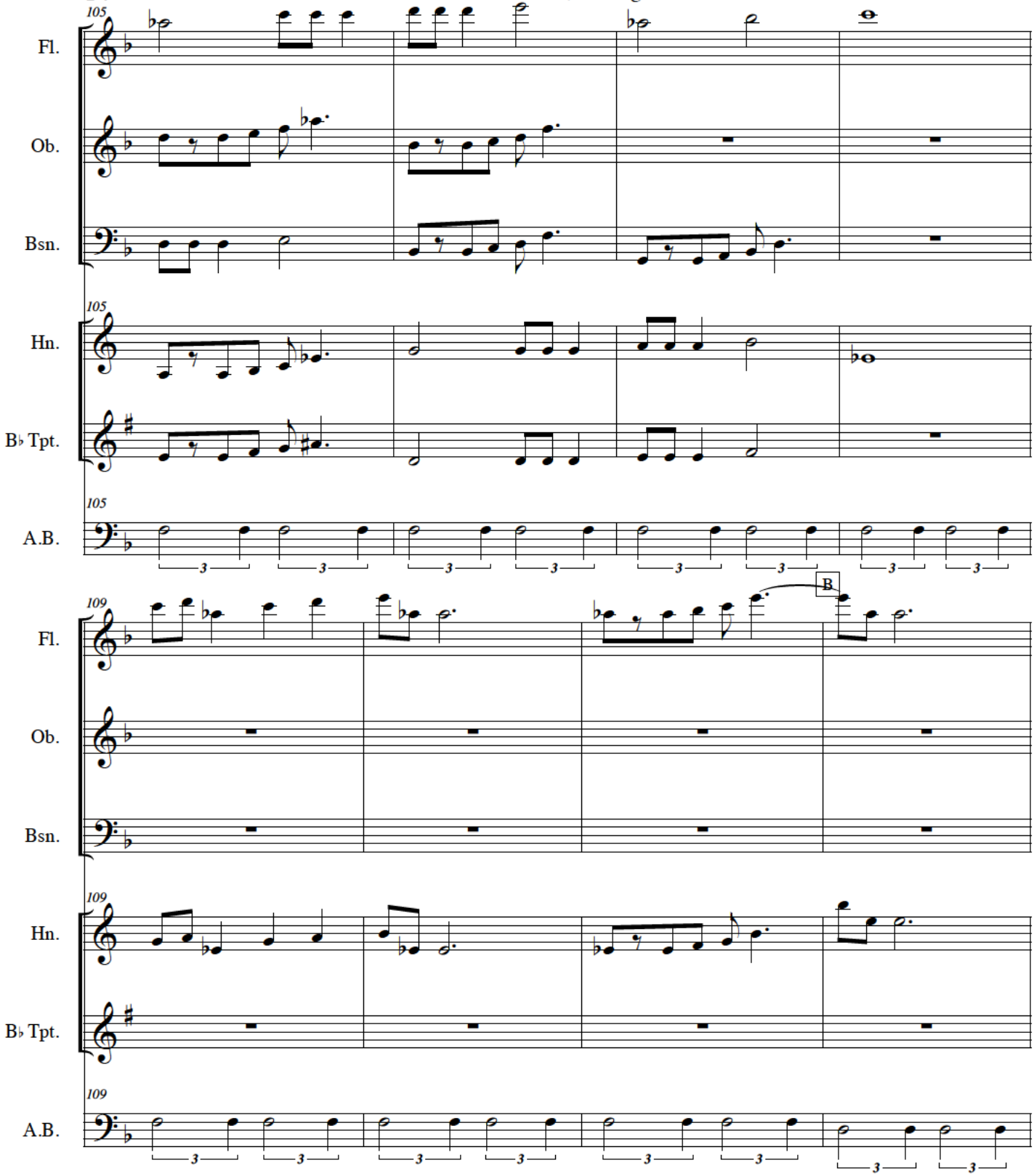

81
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
p
A
85
f
mf

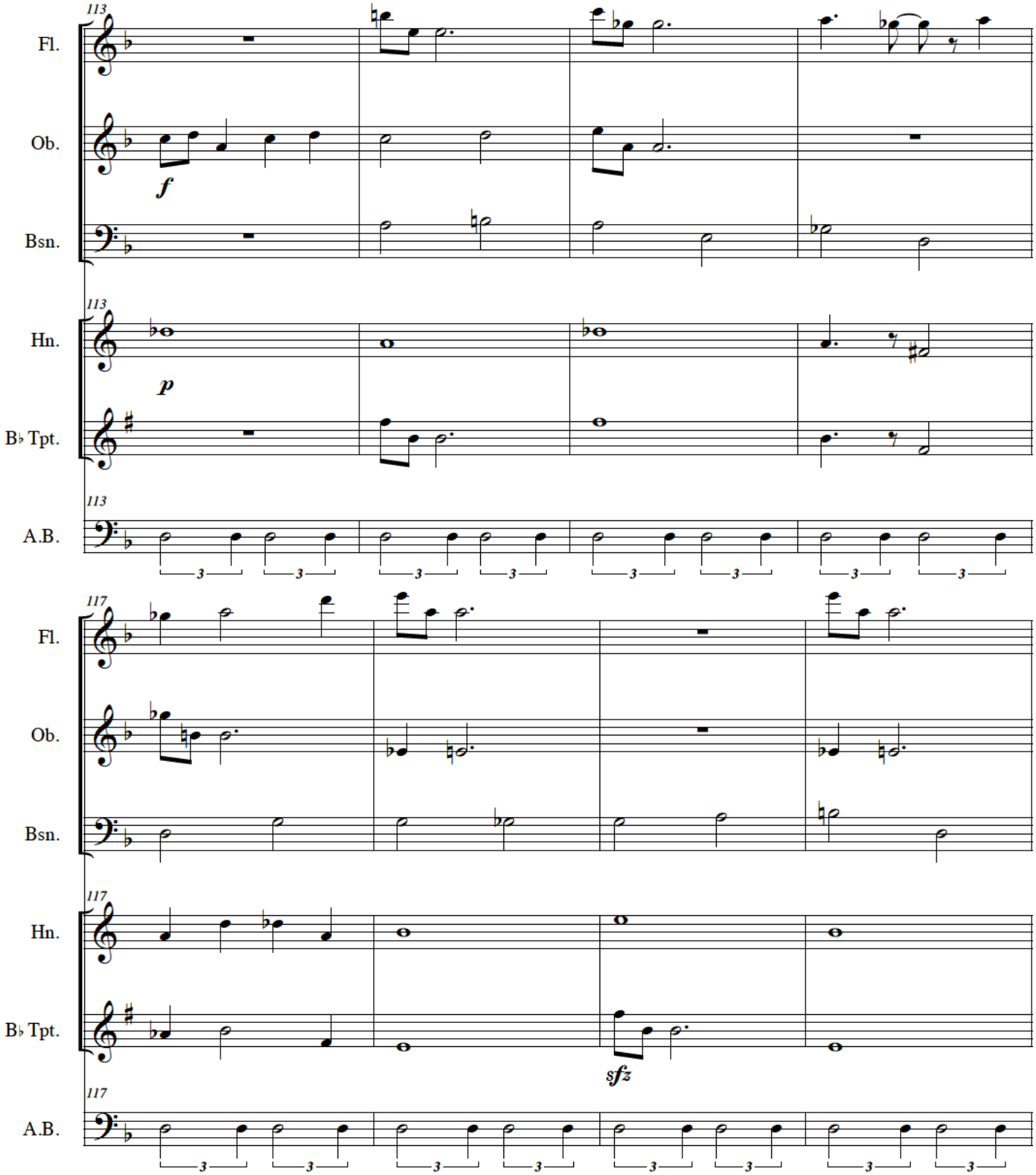
Let it come, Let it go



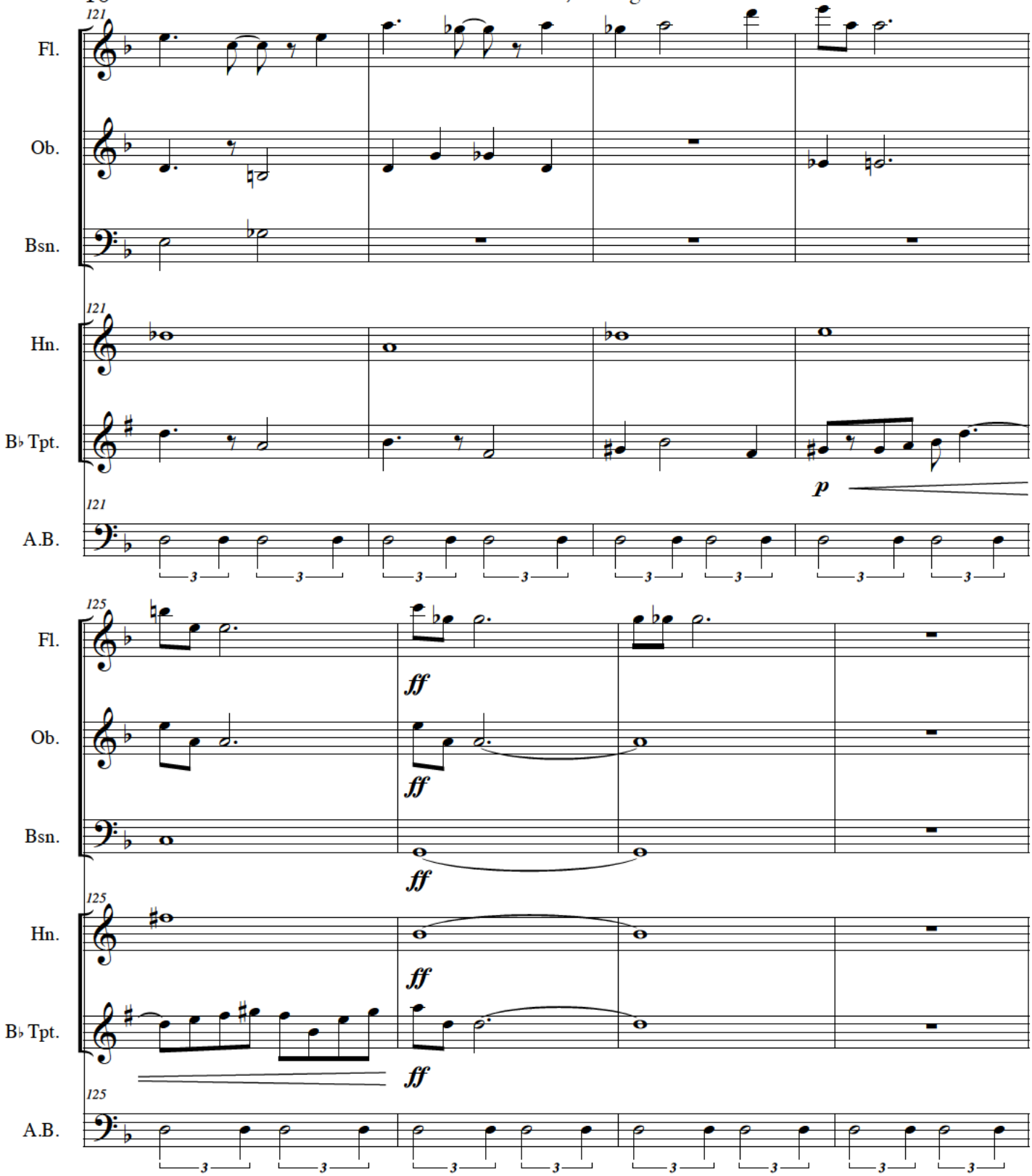

97
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
f
97
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
97
A.B.
101
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
p
101
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
101
A.B.

Let it come, Let it go



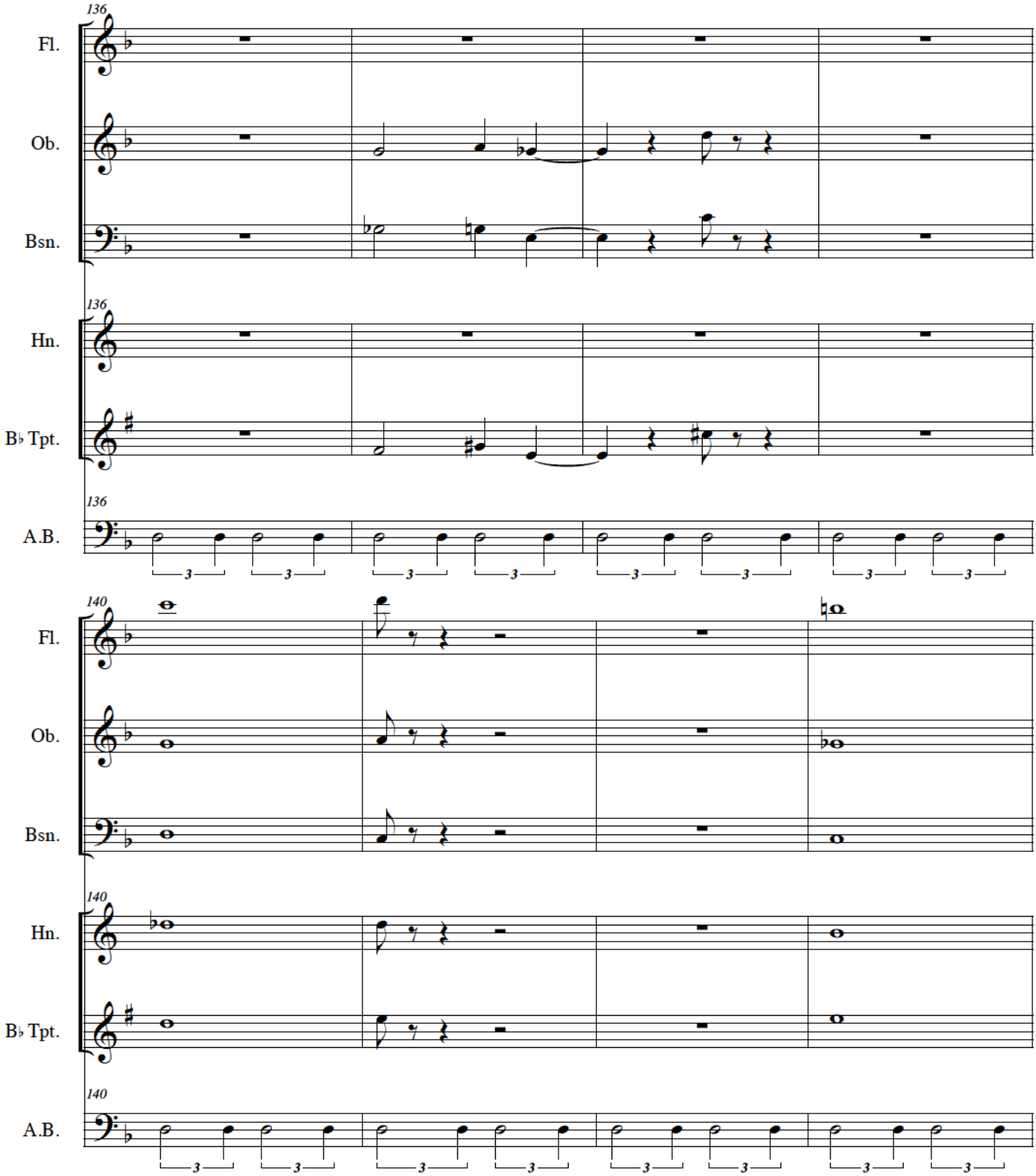

113
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
f
p
117
sfz

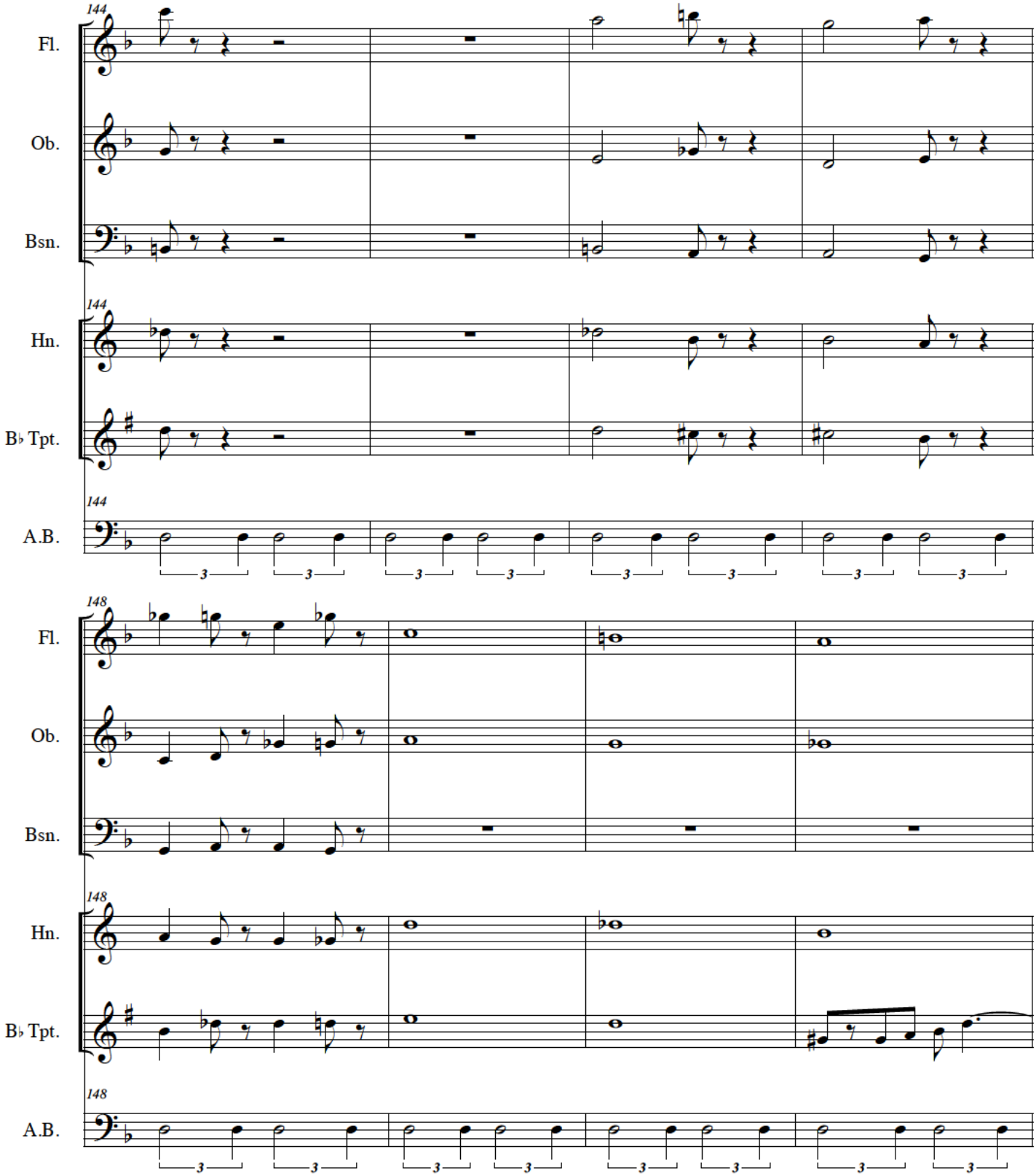
Let it come, Let it go

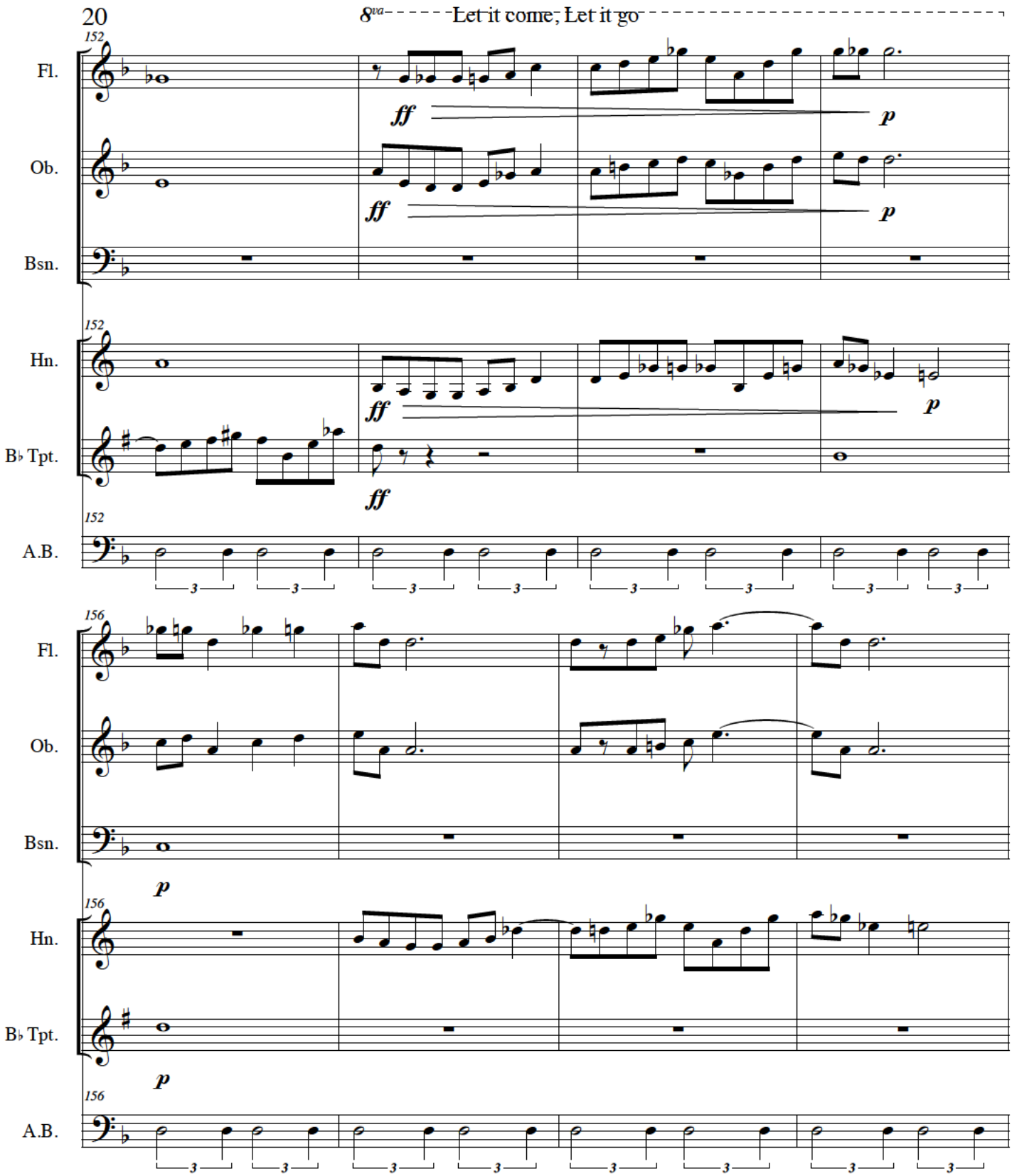


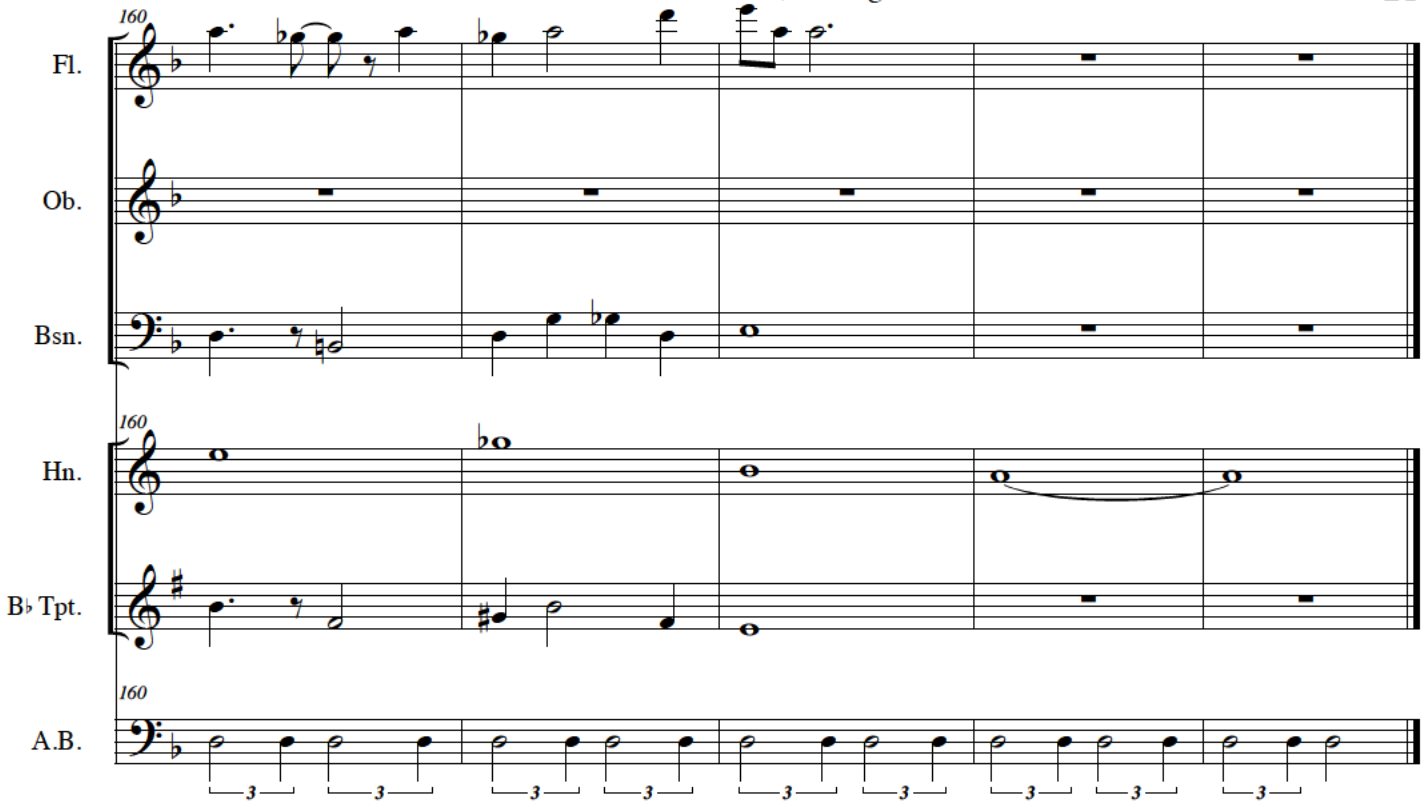
8va
129
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
p
ff
(8va)
132

Let it come, Let it go




144
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
144
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
144
A.B.
148
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
148
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
148
A.B.


8va
Let it come; Let it go
152
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
A.B.
ff
p
156

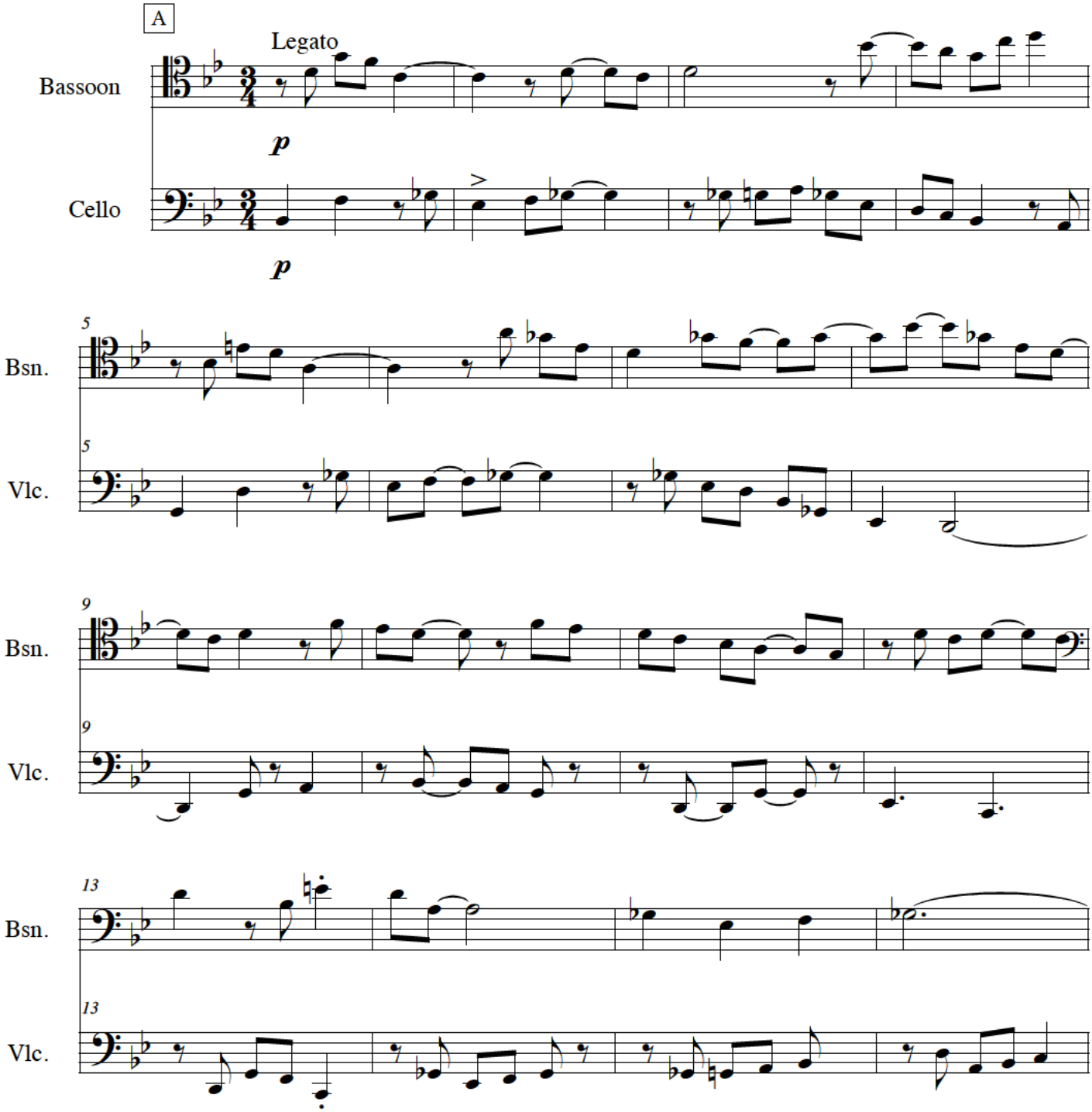

160
Fl.
Ob.
Bsn.
160
Hn.
B♭ Tpt.
160
A.B.

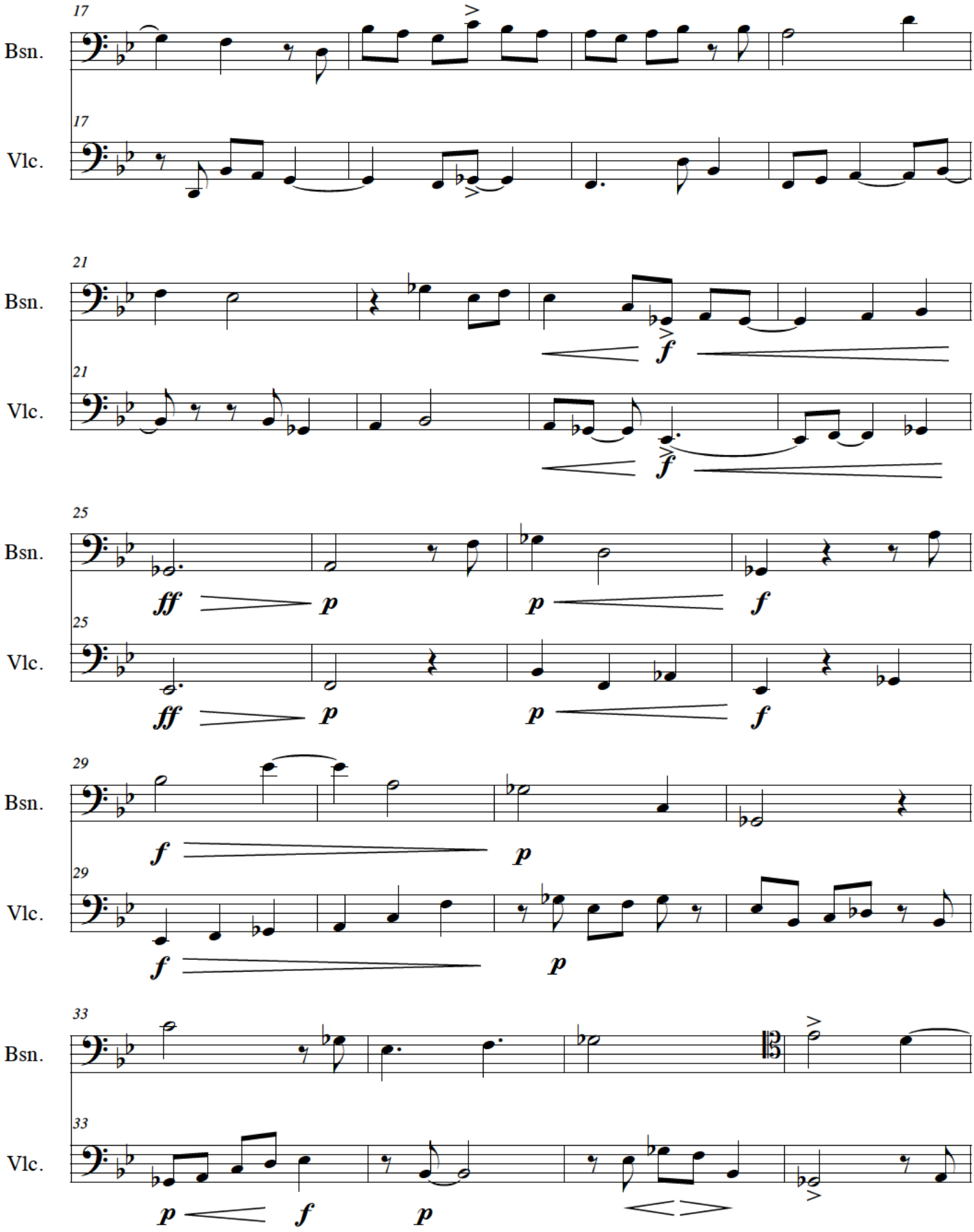
Ever, of the Burdened

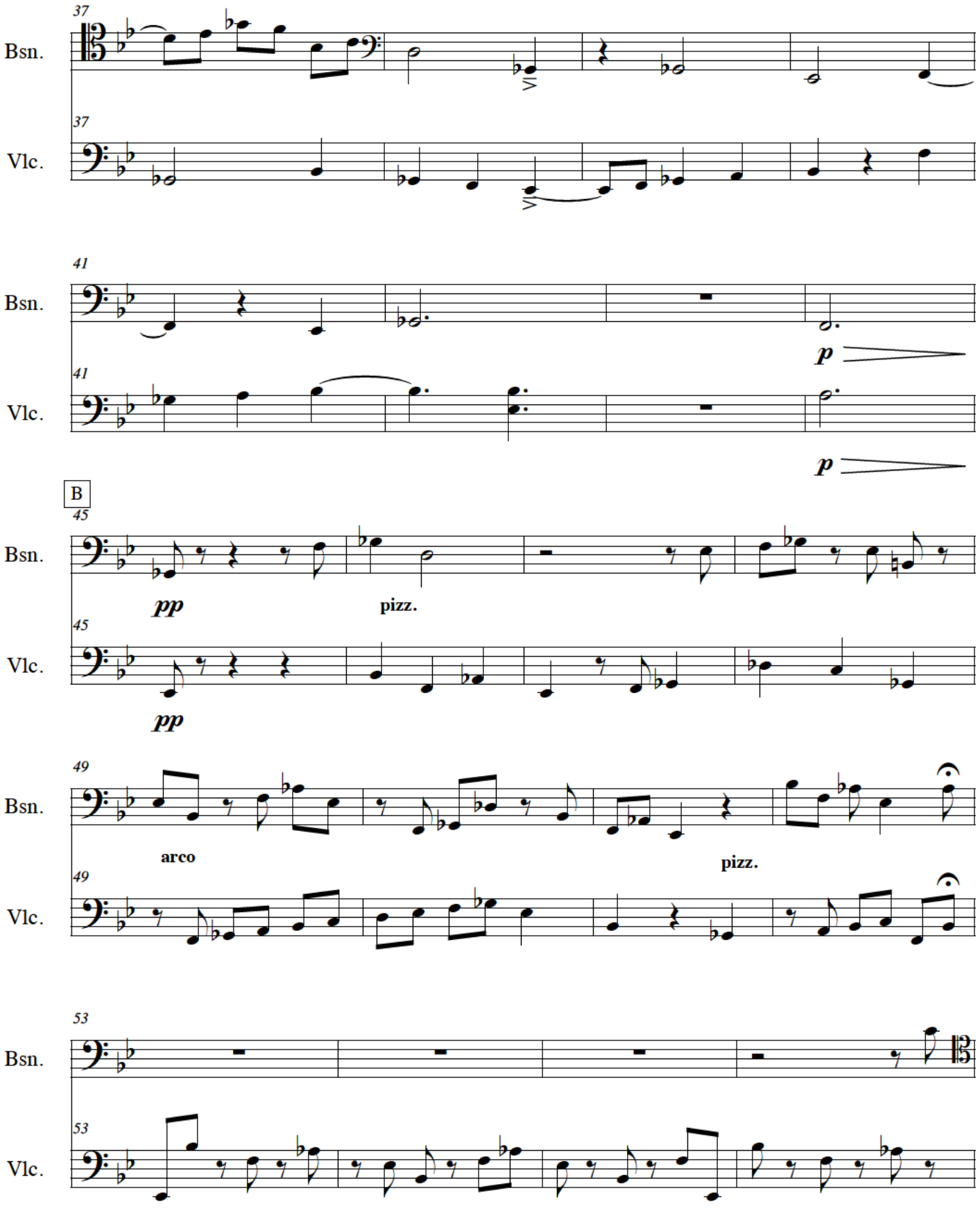
Score

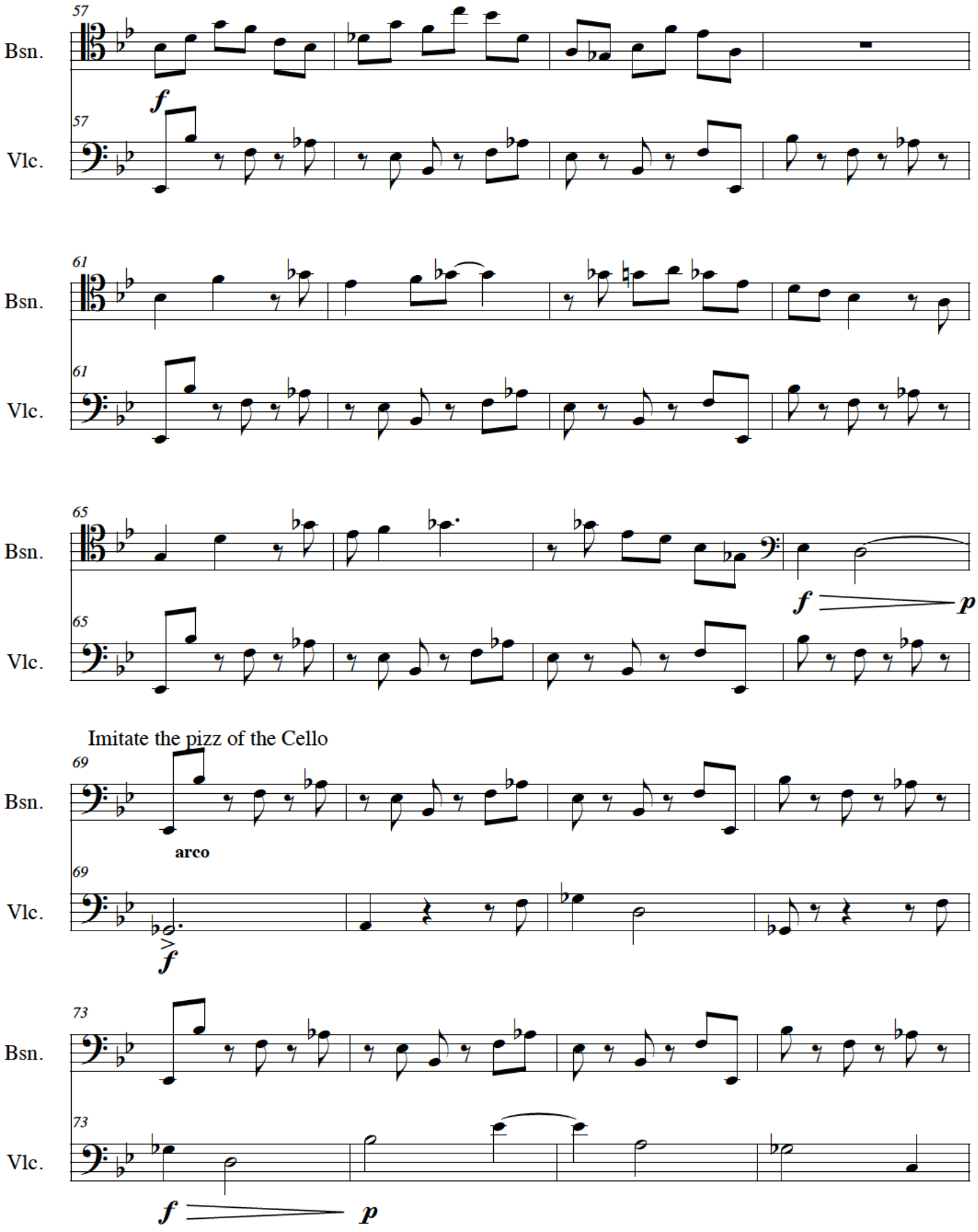
[Subtitle]

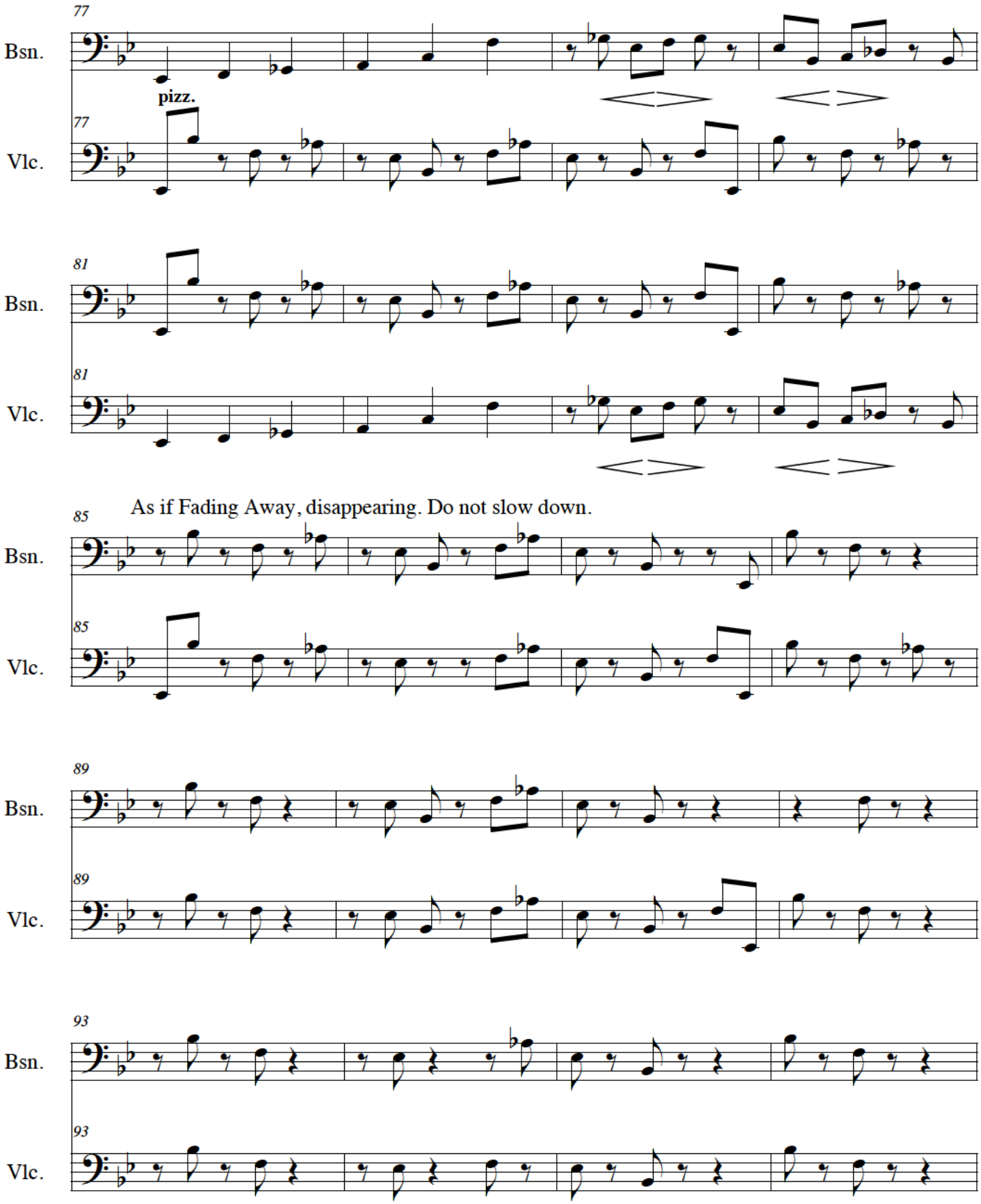
Rron Karahoda

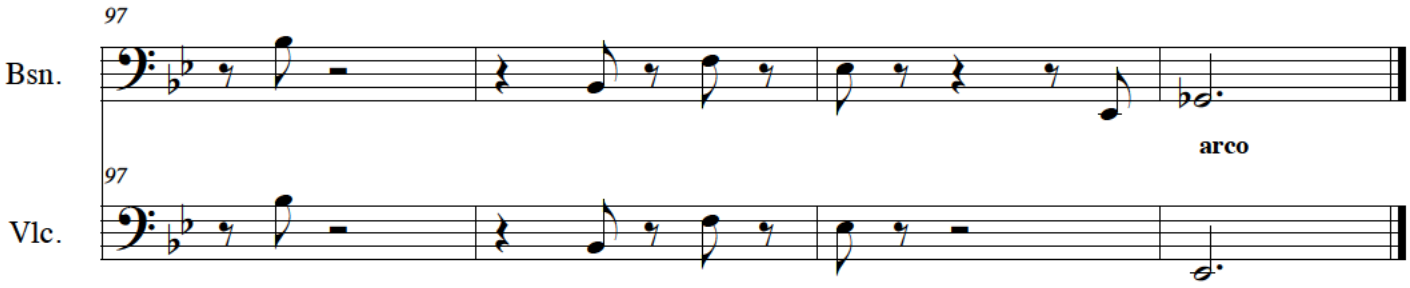



17
Bsn.
17
Vlc.
21
Bsn.
f
21
Vlc.
f
25
Bsn.
ff
p
p
f
25
Vlc.
ff
p
p
f
29
Bsn.
f
p
29
Vlc.
f
p
33
Bsn.
33
Vlc.
p
f
p


37
Bsn.
37
Vlc.
41
Bsn.
p
41
Vlc.
p
B
45
Bsn.
pp
pizz.
45
Vlc.
pp
49
Bsn.
arco
pizz.
49
Vlc.
53
Bsn.
53
Vlc.


57
Bsn.
f
57
Vlc.
61
Bsn.
61
Vlc.
65
Bsn.
f
p
65
Vlc.
Imitate the pizz of the Cello
69
Bsn.
arco
69
Vlc.
f
73
Bsn.
73
Vlc.
f
p


77
Bsn.
pizz.
77
Vlc.
81
Bsn.
81
Vlc.
As if Fading Away, disappearing. Do not slow down.
85
Bsn.
85
Vlc.
89
Bsn.
89
Vlc.
93
Bsn.
93
Vlc.


97
Bsn.
97
Vlc.
arco