FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY

(1809–1847)

Oktett

für vier Violinen, zwei Violen und zwei Violoncelli

Octet

for four Violins, two Violas and two Violoncellos

op. 20

MWV R 20

herausgegeben von / edited by

Ralf Wehner

Urtext der Leipziger Mendelssohn-Ausgabe

Urtext from the Leipzig Mendelssohn Edition

BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL

WIESBADEN · LEIPZIG · PARIS

Studienpartitur PB 5202

Printed in Germany

Aufführungsdauer

etwa 30 Minuten

Performing Time

approx. 30 minutes

Stimmen KM 2297 käuflich lieferbar
Parts KM 2297 available for sale

Preface

The Octet op. 20 presented here ranks among the most well-known works by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (1809-1847). It was composed mainly in late summer 1825, about a year before the Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and bears eloquent testimony to the adolescent's impressive progress on his path to shaping his characteristic style. The autograph score, which is preserved today in the Library of Congress in Washington, D. C., was completed on 15 October 1825. Shortly thereafter, the young composer offered it to his violin teacher Eduard Ritz as a gift for his friend's 23rd birthday. Mendelssohn wrote this singular work – singular on its own merits as well as in the composer's entire oeuvre – at a time when he was particularly sensitive to the impact made on him by two different events: his sojourn in Paris in the spring of 1825, marked by a wealth of encounters with musically open-minded individuals, and his family's relocation to Berlin's Leipziger Strasse 3 a few months later, which afforded new possibilities of music-making. All of this sparked the 16-year-old's creativity in a way that put everything he had composed until then – the already respectable amount of about 150 works – in the shade. Years later, Mendelssohn still had pleasant memories of the harmonious ambience of those days, as we know from Robert Schumann's Memoirs: "His favorite piece from his early years was undoubtedly the Octet; he recalled with delight the wonderful period in which it was written."[1]

The particular originality of the work's third movement, a lightly scurrying Scherzo, already attracted the attention of Mendelssohn's contemporaries. Even Felix's otherwise critical sister Fanny praised it as "truly successful."[2] In a little biography, Fanny elaborated on the Octet as follows: "He wanted to set to music the stanza in Faust:

Wolkenflug und Nebelflor
Erhellen sich von oben,
Luft im Laub und Wind im Rohr
Und Alles ist zerstoben.

(Flight of clouds and veil of mist / Are lighted from above. / A breeze in the leaves, a wind in the reeds, / And all is blown away.) [...] To me alone he told his idea: the entire piece is to be played staccato and pianissimo, with shivering tremulandos and the gentle lightning flashes of trills. Everything is new and strange, yet so appealing and familiar – one feels so close to the world of spirits, swept up into the air. Indeed, one feels half inclined to snatch up a broomstick so as to follow the airy legion. At the end, the first violin soars upward, as light as a feather – and all is blown away."[3]
Mendelssohn himself had a particular affinity for this movement, which he considered very successful from the very beginning. This is underscored not only by the fact that the Scherzo was the only movement that was not subjected to any appreciable changes during the course of the printing, but also by the fact that it went on to establish a transmission tradition of its own, outside the framework of the Octet. This was in the form of an orchestration, with wind parts, that was performed several times as part of the Symphony No. 1 op. 11.

During Mendelssohn's stay of several months in Paris in the winter of 1831/32, the Octet was one of the pieces that made it into the final selection of music that he wanted to present to a larger public. Towards the end of the year 1831, Mendelssohn asked his sister to send him the parts. At the same time, the composer began negotiating with music publishers and soon came to an

agreement with Breitkopf & Härtel to have the Octet published in parts as well as in an arrangement for piano four-hands. After a fundamental revision of the work, the composer sent the engraver's master of the string version to Leipzig on 19 April 1832. The piano duet arrangement had not yet been completed on account of health problems, and was sent later. Both editions were printed in early 1833. They bore the opus number 20 and were dedicated to his friend Eduard Ritz, who had since passed away.

Once printed, the striking work was quickly disseminated. Mendelssohn's Octet thus ranks among those works of the composer that had already achieved widespread recognition and a secure place in musical life during the composer's lifetime, and that were also regularly featured on concert programs throughout the rest of the 19th century, after Mendelssohn's death. The piece established itself in the repertoire in spite of – or perhaps because of – its exceptional status in the history of this genre. Louis Spohr referred to this with the words: "An octet for stringed instruments by Mendelssohn-Bartholdy belongs to a completely different artistic genre, in which the two quartets do not concertize as separate entities and alternate antiphonally, but in which all eight instruments play together."[4] Mendelssohn reinforced this particular characteristic of the work by adding a preliminary remark ("Nota") for the printing. Although it was still missing in the original score of 1825, he instructed that it should be added as a preface to the individual parts: "This Octet must be played in all parts in the style of a symphony; the *Pianos* and *Fortés* must be executed with great precision and shaped more distinctly and individually than is otherwise customary in pieces of this genre."

The present score is based on the musical text of the *Leipziger Ausgabe der Werke von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy* (Series III, Vol. 5), which was prepared after a critical examination of the main source (the eight parts of the Breitkopf print of 1833) and after comparison with the other available sources. The volume of the Complete Edition also contains an extensive critical commentary with a detailed description and evaluation of the sources, the documentation on the first edition of 1825, and further information on the printing and early reception of the work. The piano version, a delightful piece with a rewarding sound and writing style, was also published in a critical new edition (Series III, Vol. 5A).

Leipzig, Spring 2007 — Ralf Wehner

1 Robert Schumann, *Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. Nachgelassene Aufzeichnungen*, ed. by the Städtisches Museum Zwickau, arranged by Georg Eismann, Zwickau (Saxony), 1947, p. 3.
2 Sebastian Hensel, *Die Familie Mendelssohn. 1729-1847. Nach Briefen und Tagebüchern*, Berlin, 1879, Vol. I, p. 154.
3 Ibid.
4 Louis Spohr, *Lebenserinnerungen*, first published in unabridged form from the autographic memoirs, ed. by Folker Göthel, Tutzing, 1968, Vol. 2, p. 134.

Oktett

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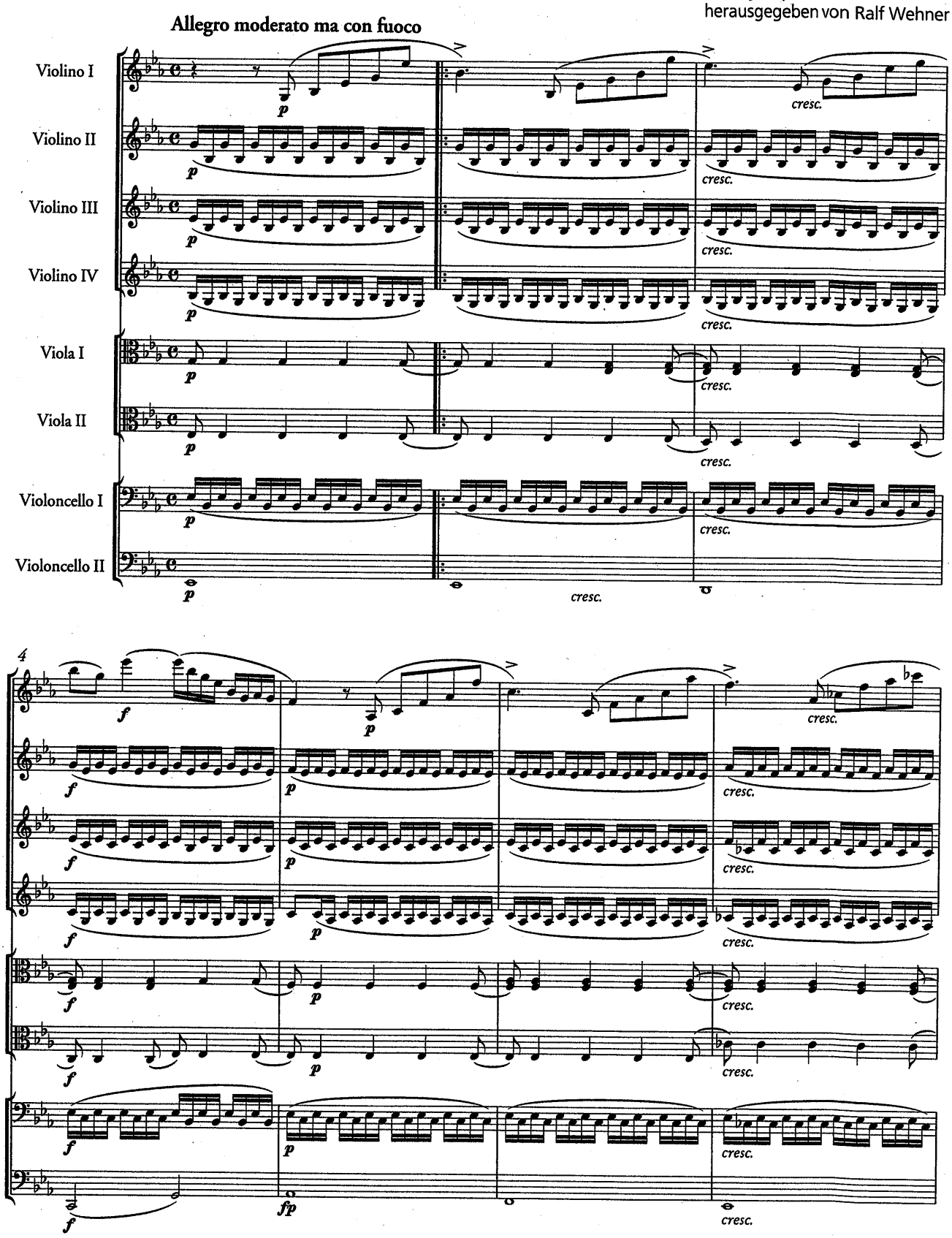
Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy op. 20 MWV R 20

herausgegeben von Ralf Wehner



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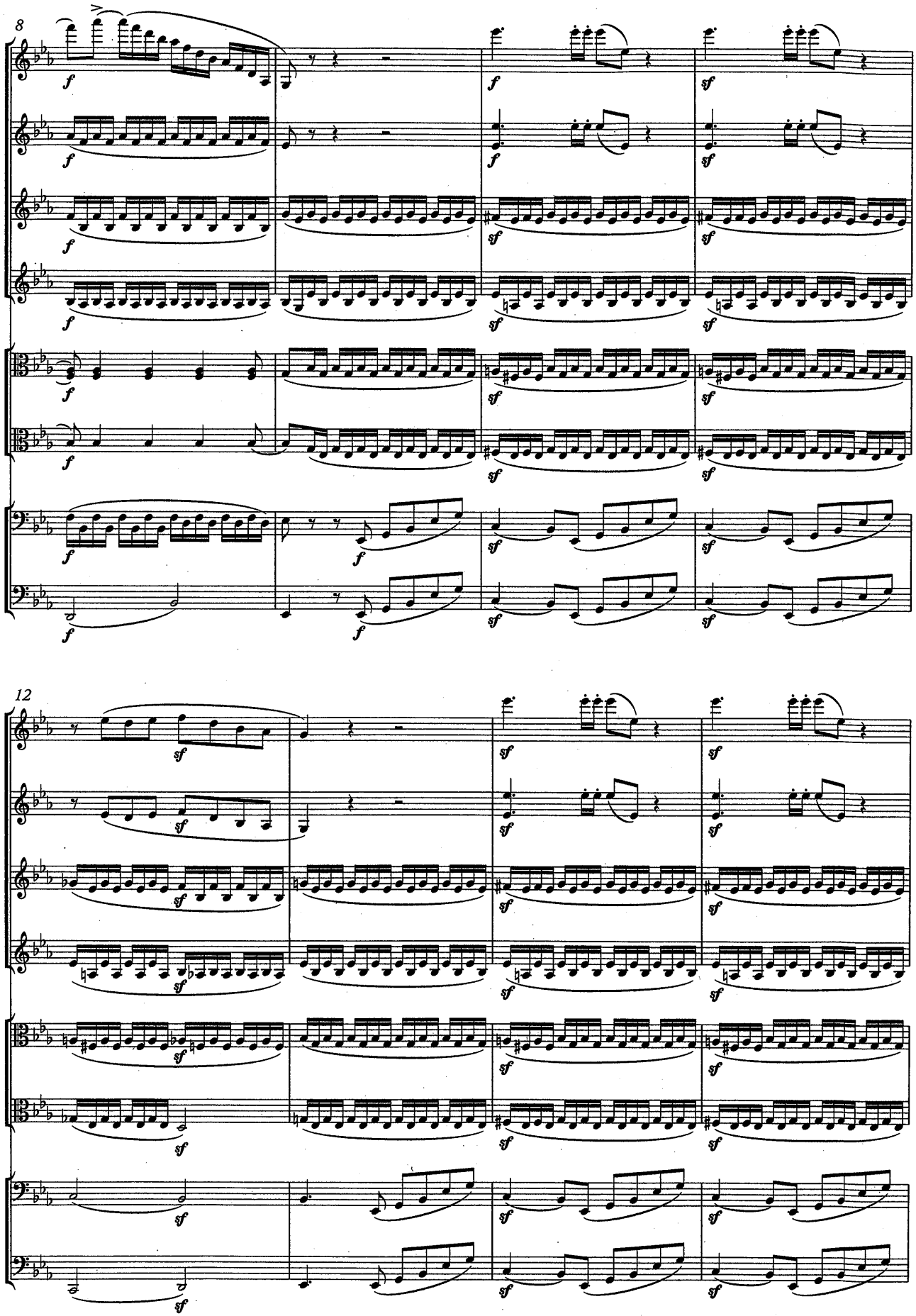
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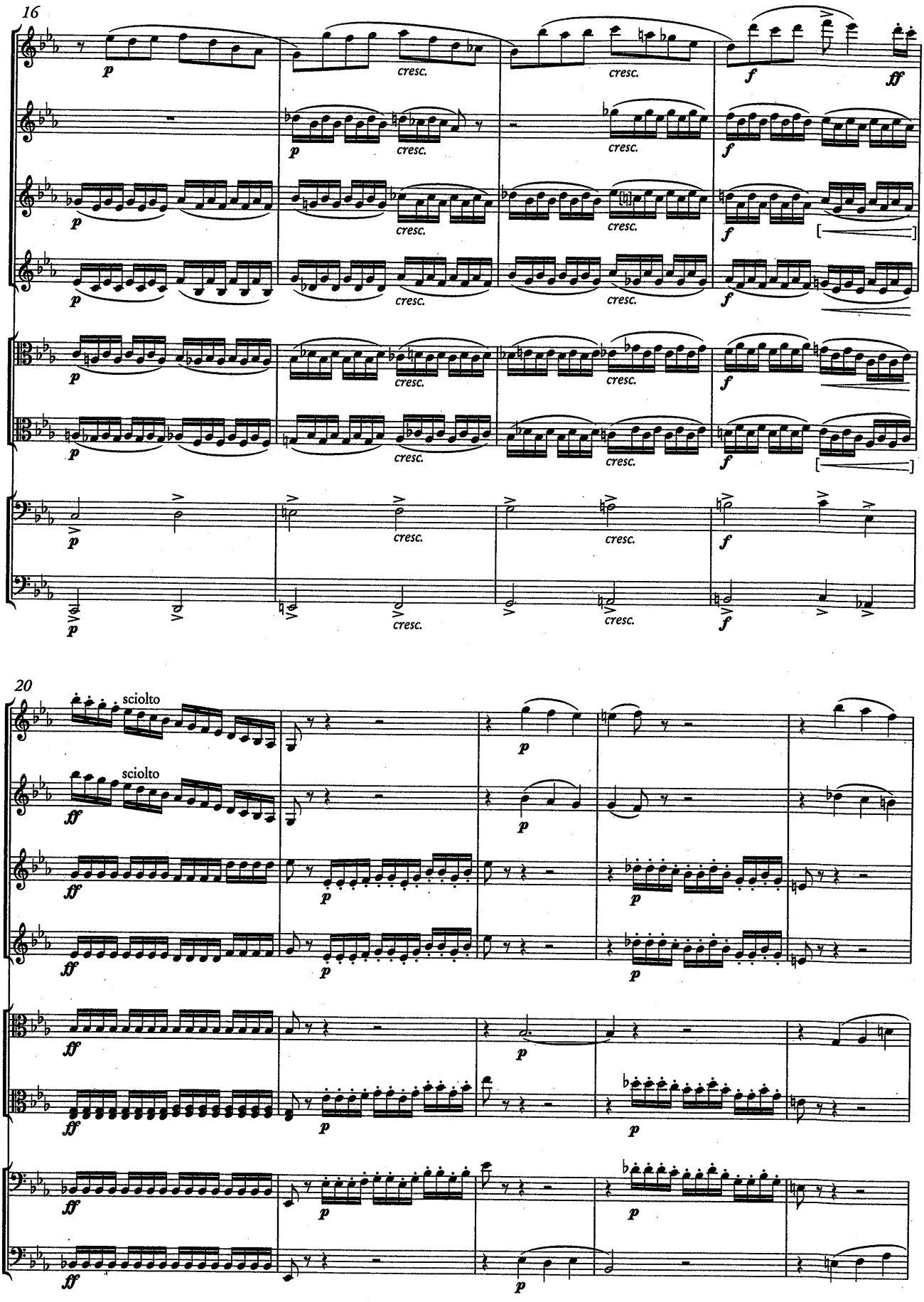
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20
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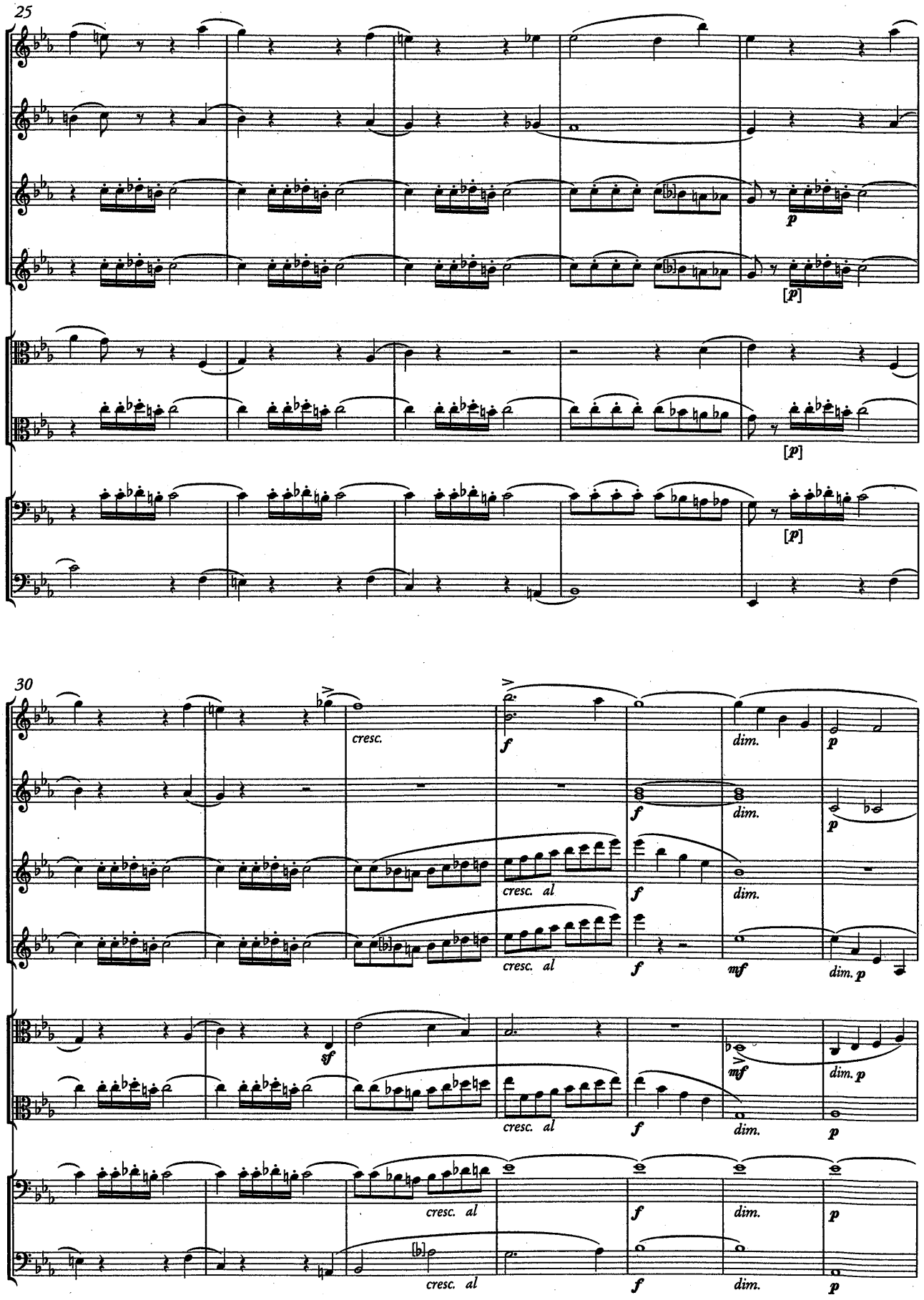
sciolto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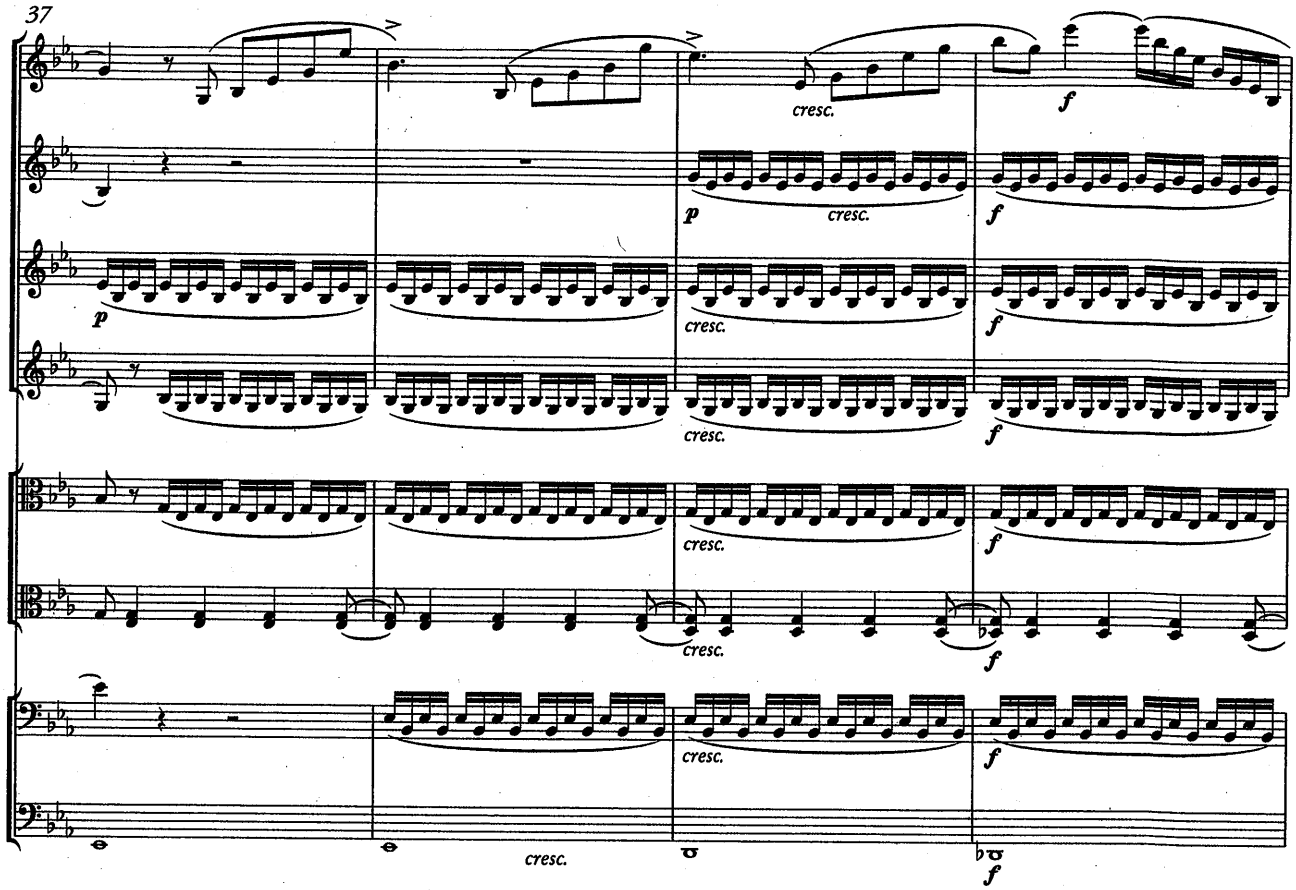
p
[p]
[p]
[p]
30
cresc.
f
dim.
p
f
dim.
p
cresc. al
f
dim.
cresc. al
f
mf
dim. p
sf
mf
dim. p
cresc. al
f
dim.
p
cresc. al
f
dim.
p
cresc. al
f
dim.
p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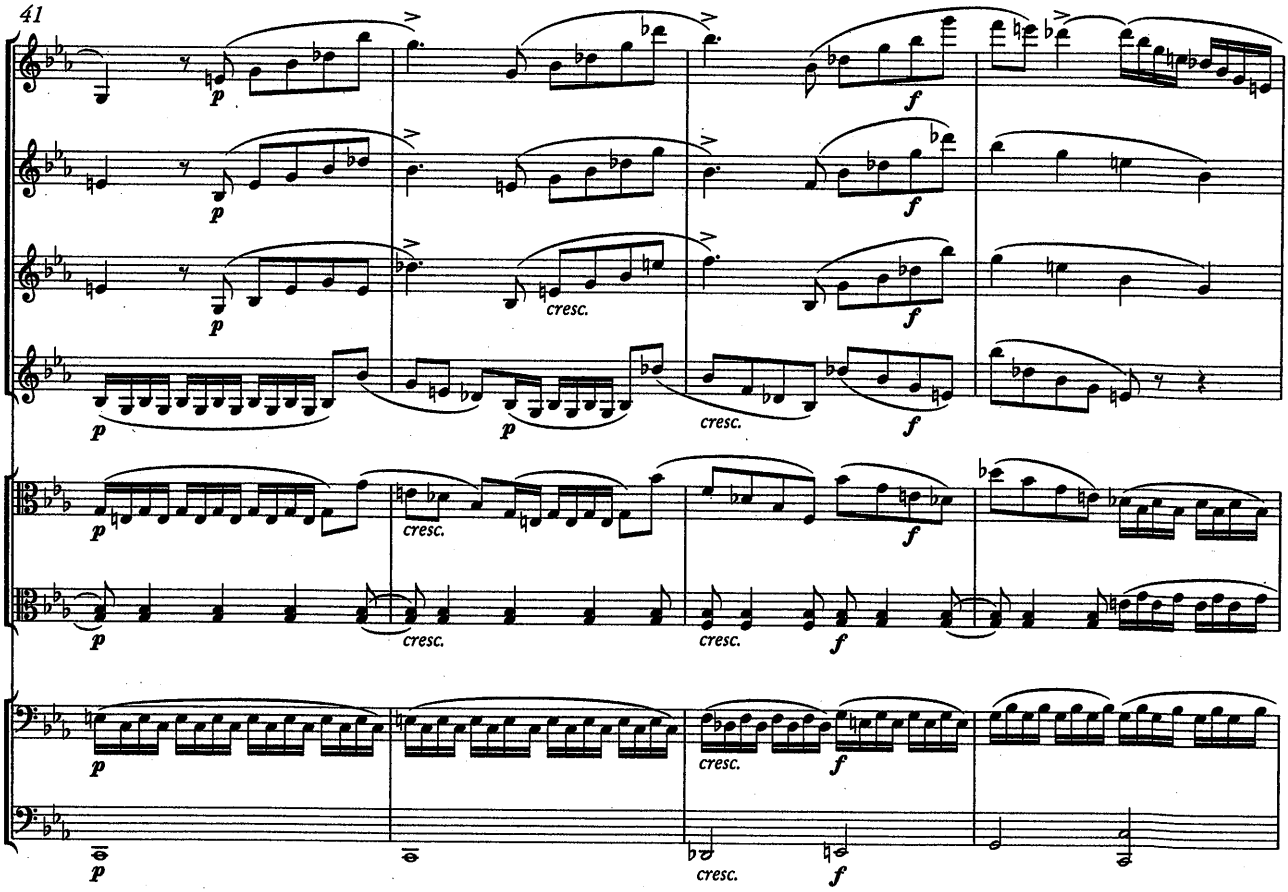
cresc.
p
f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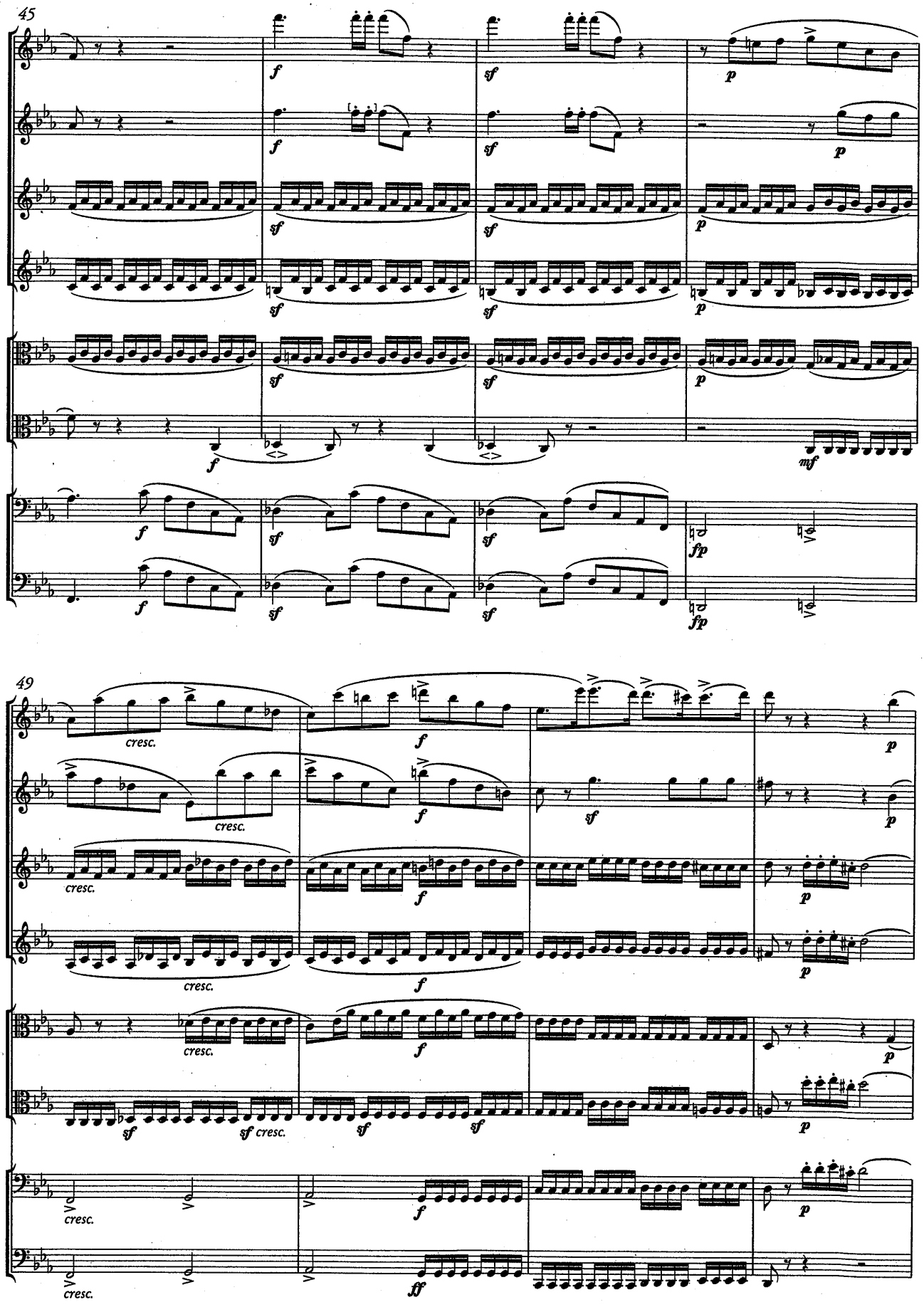
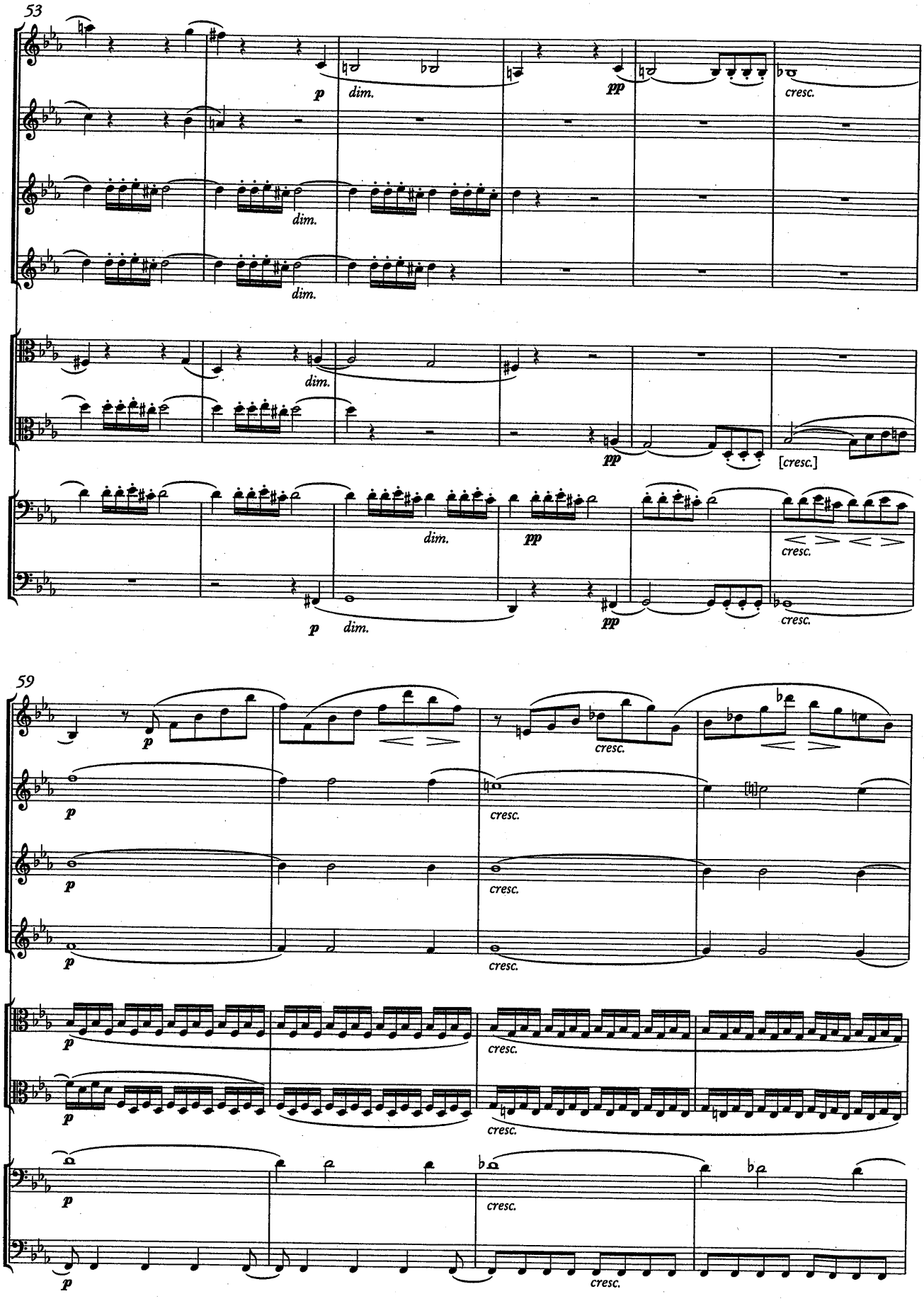
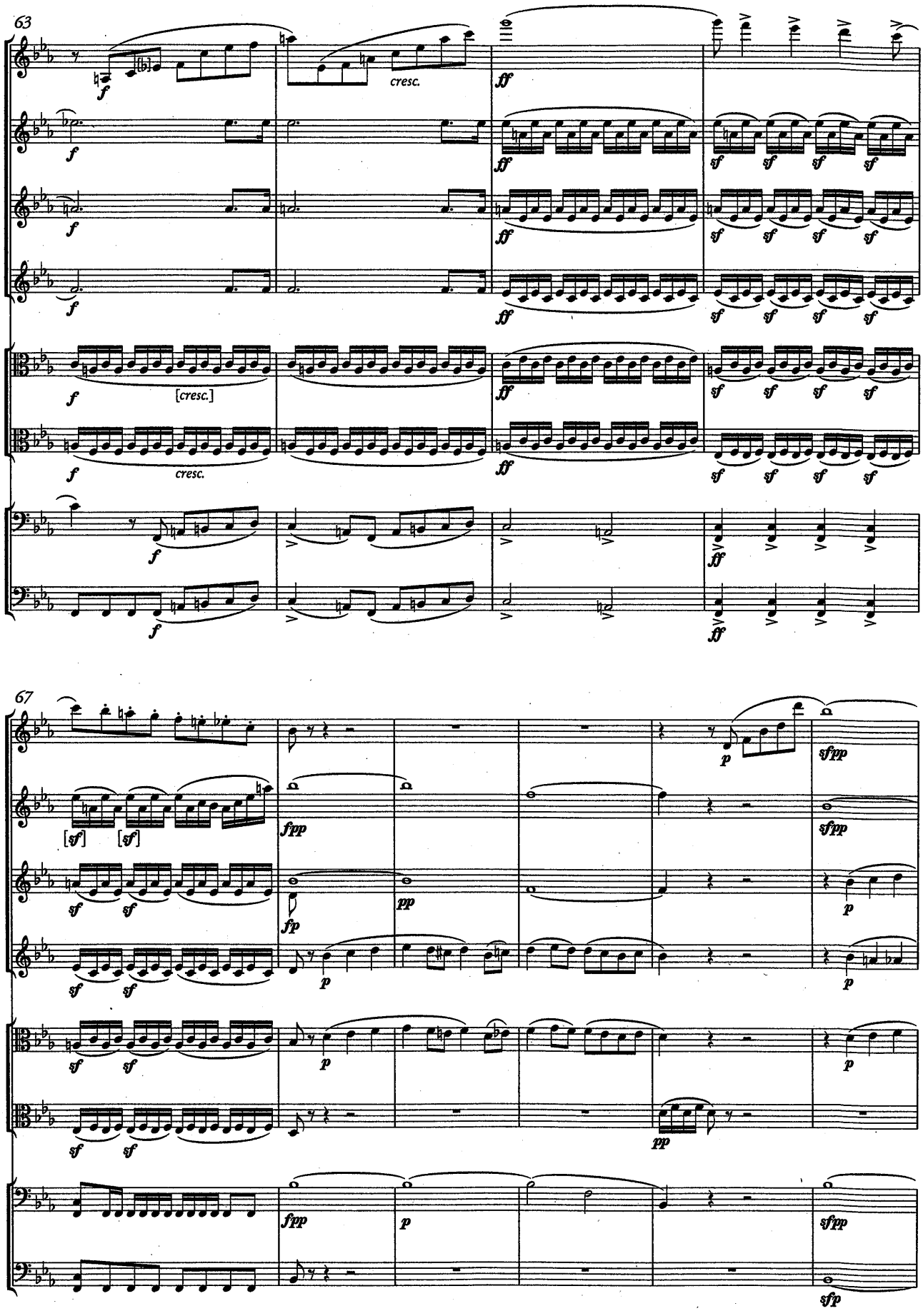
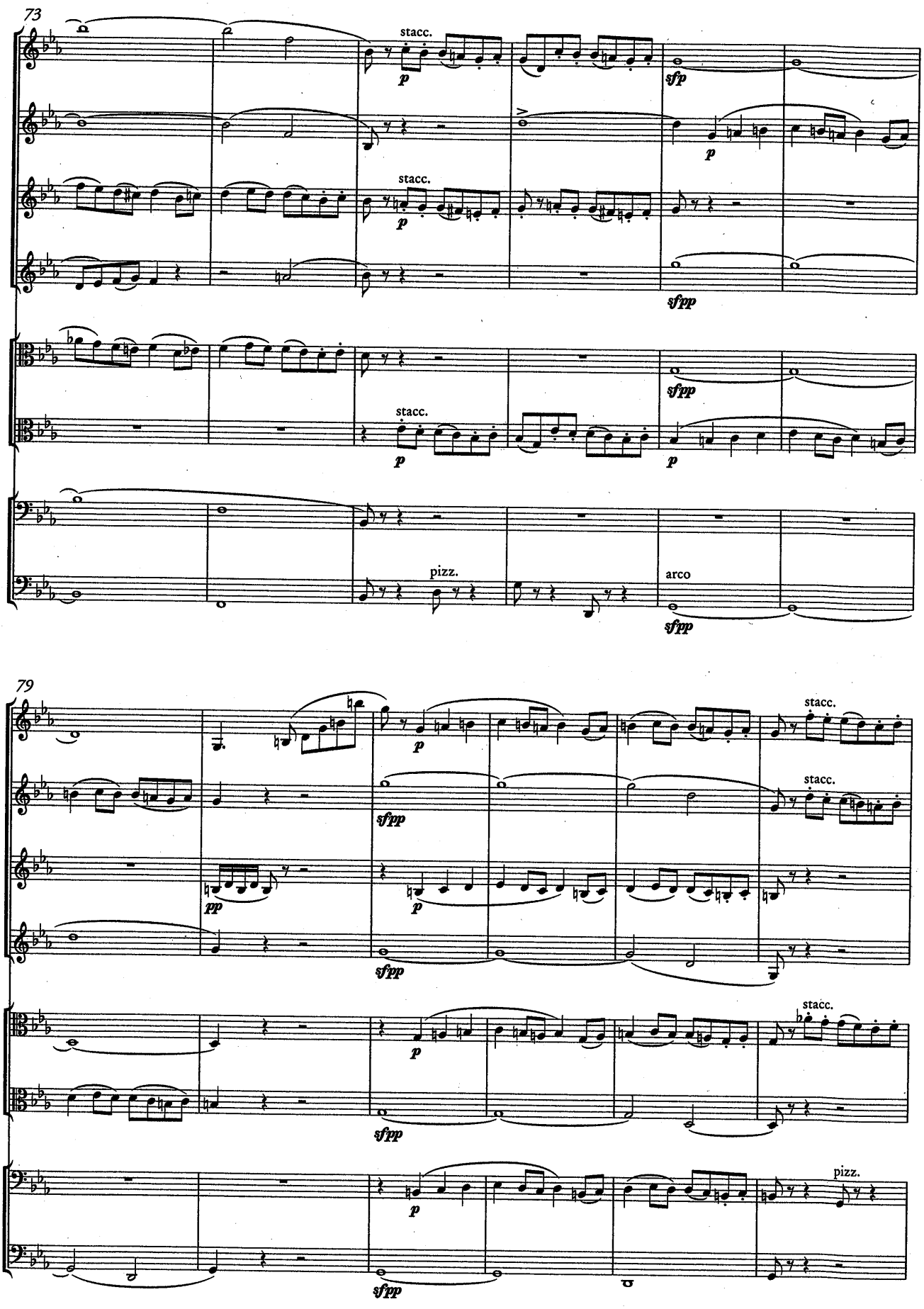
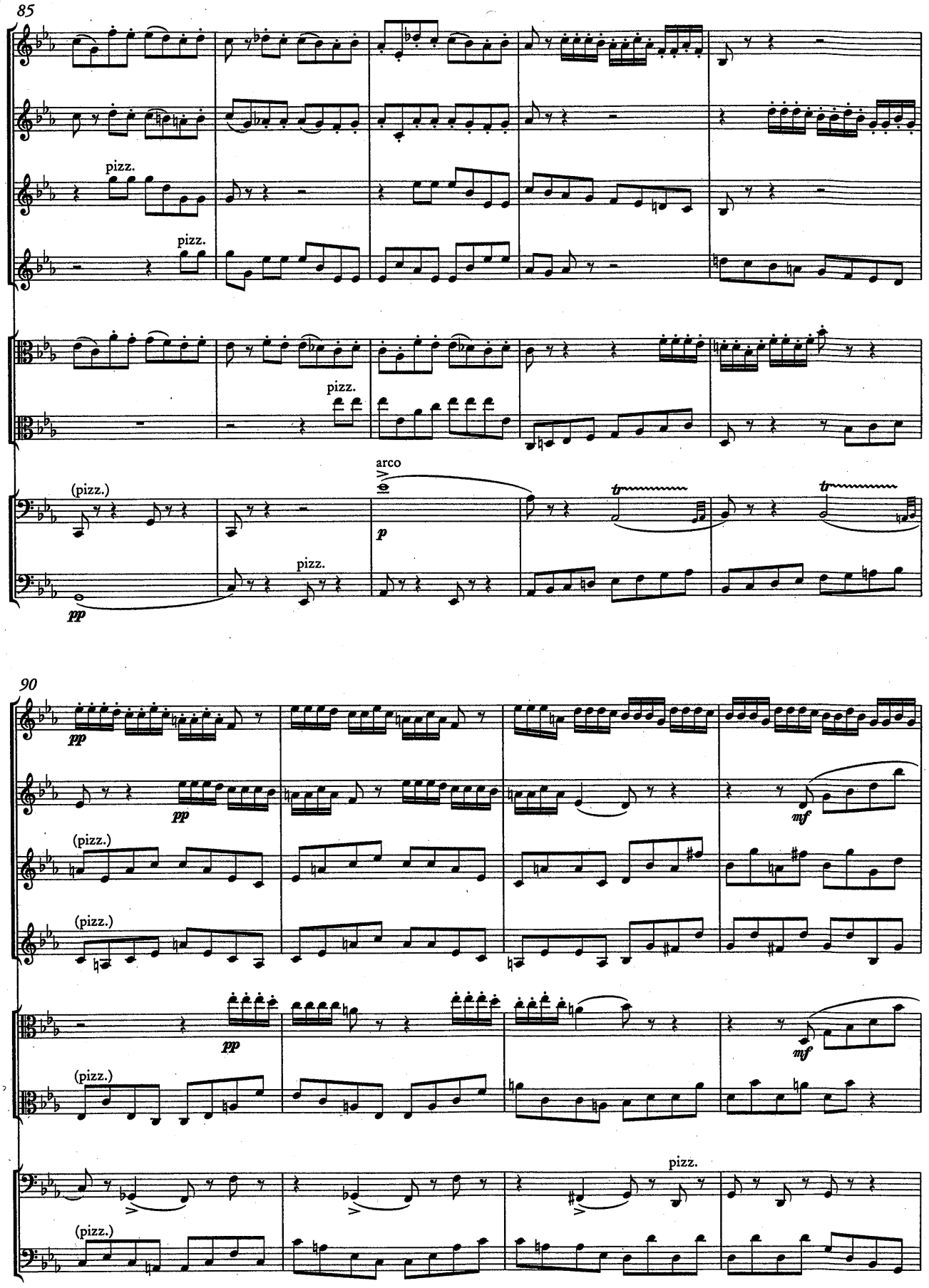
p
cresc.
f

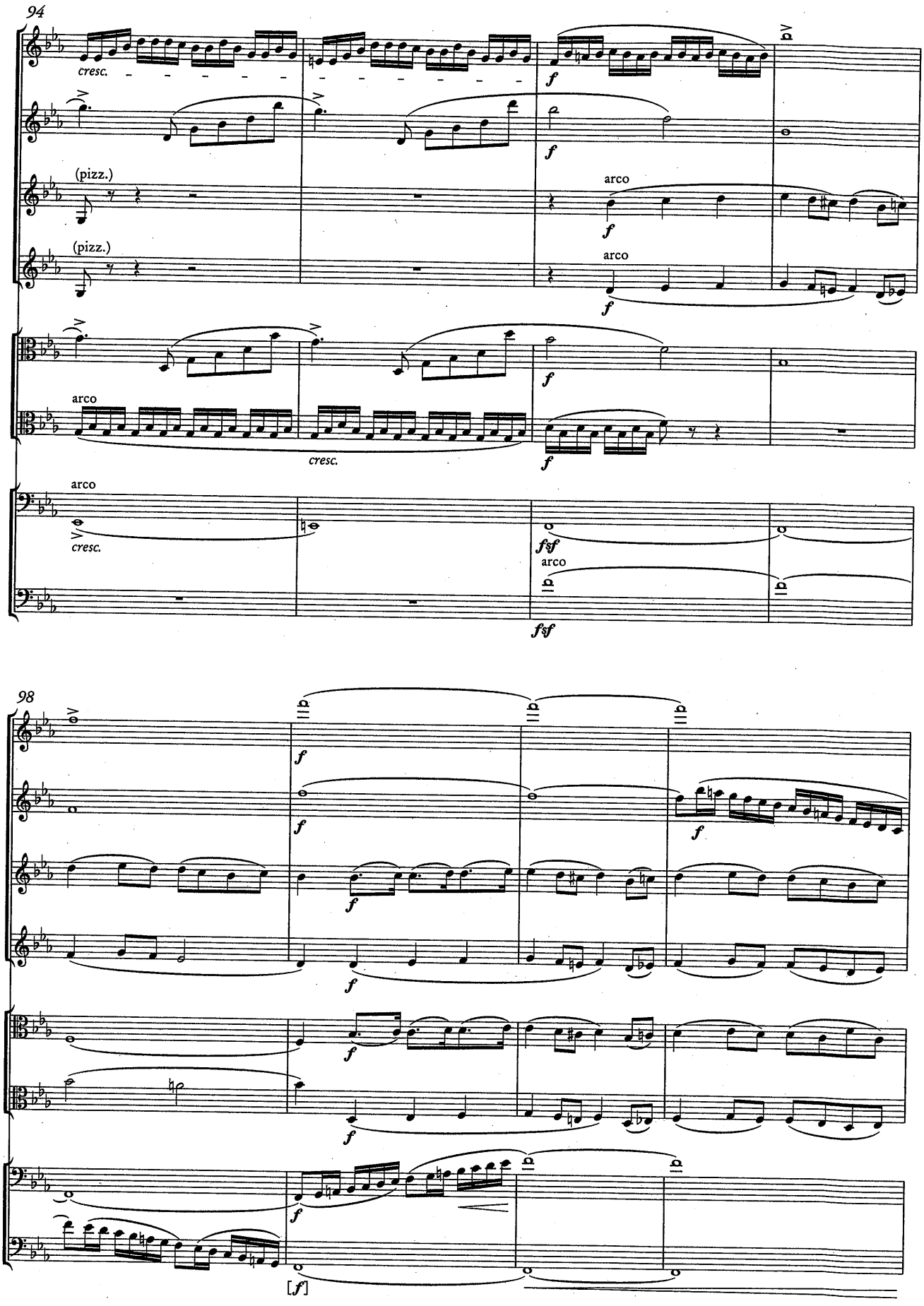

45
f
sf
p
mf
fp
49
cresc.
sf cresc.
ff

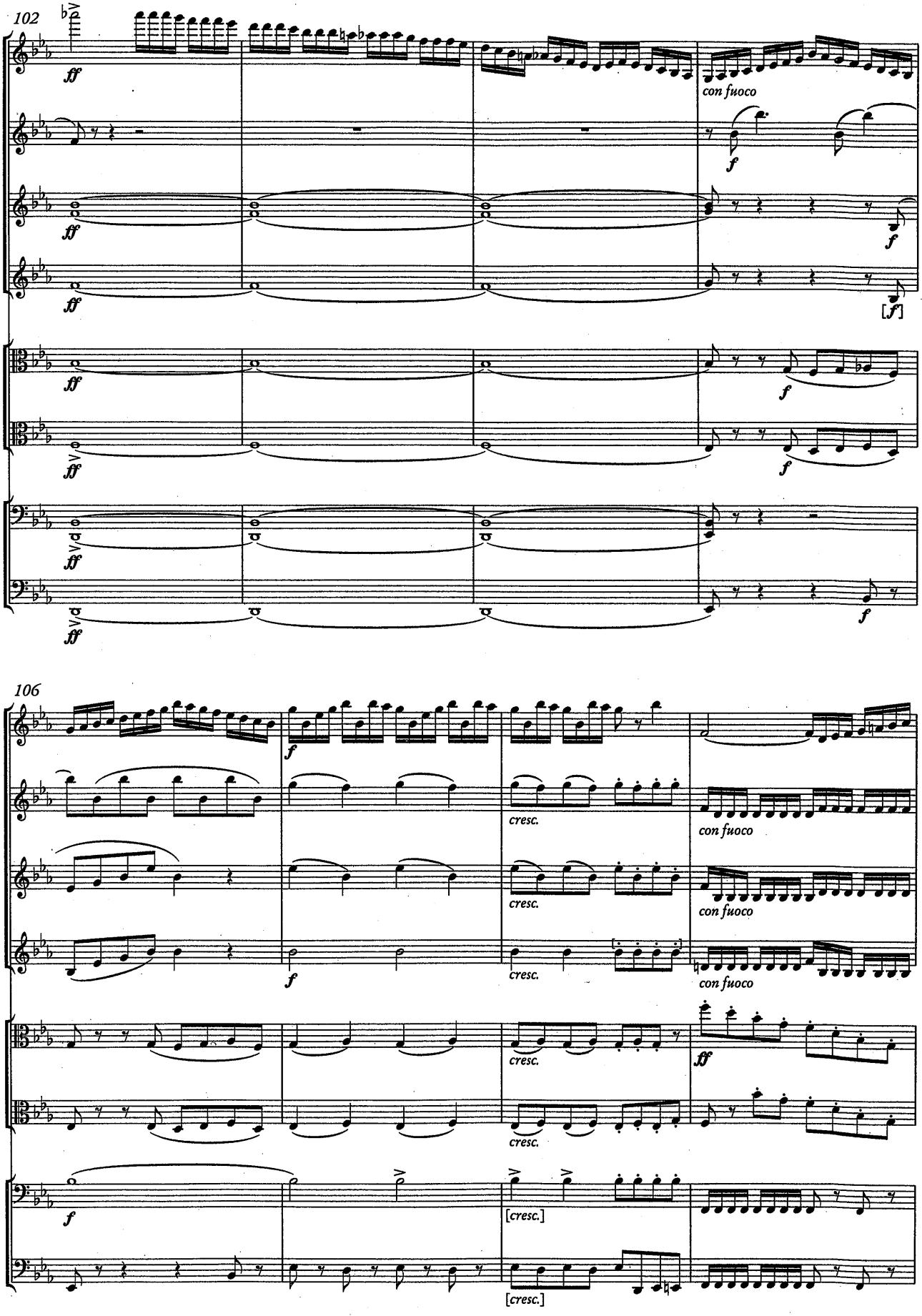

53
p
dim.
pp
cresc.
dim.
dim.
dim.
[cresc.]
dim.
pp
cresc.
p
dim.
pp
cresc.
59
p
cresc.
p
cresc.
p
cresc.
p
cresc.
p
cresc.
p
cresc.

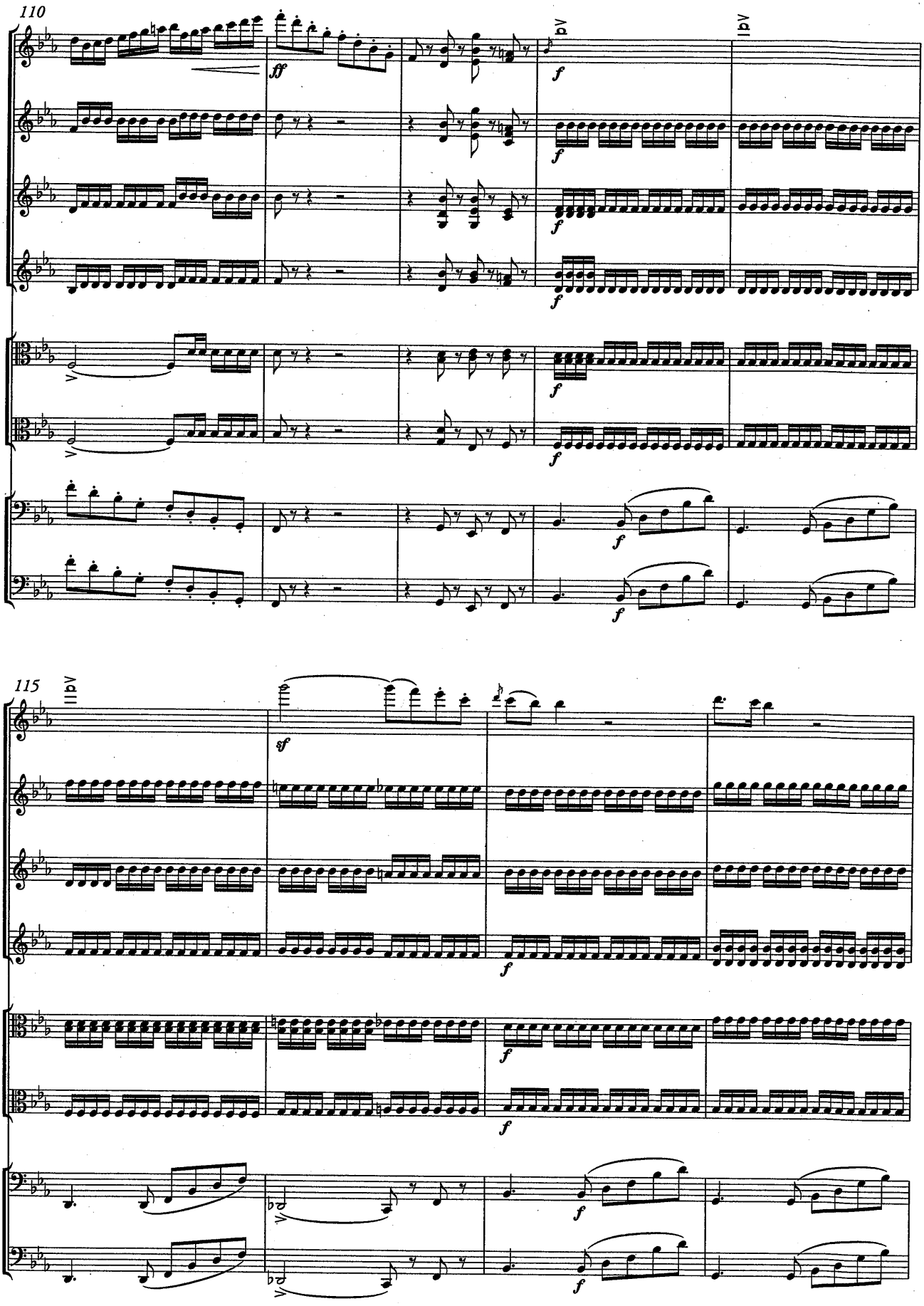

63
f
cresc.
ff
sf
[cresc.]
cresc.
67
[sf]
fpp
fp
pp
p
sfpp
sfp


73
stacc.
p
sfp
p
stacc.
p
sfpp
sfpp
stacc.
p
p
pizz.
arco
sfpp
79
stacc.
p
stacc.
sfpp
pp
p
sfpp
stacc.
p
sfpp
pizz.
p
sfpp


85
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.
arco
(pizz.)
pizz.
pp
p
90
pp
pp
mf
(pizz.)
(pizz.)
pp
mf
(pizz.)
pizz.
(pizz.)


94
cresc.
(pizz.)
arco
(pizz.)
arco
arco
cresc.
arco
cresc.
fsf
arco
fsf
98
[f]


102
ff
con fuoco
f
[f]
106
cresc.
con fuoco
ff
[cresc.]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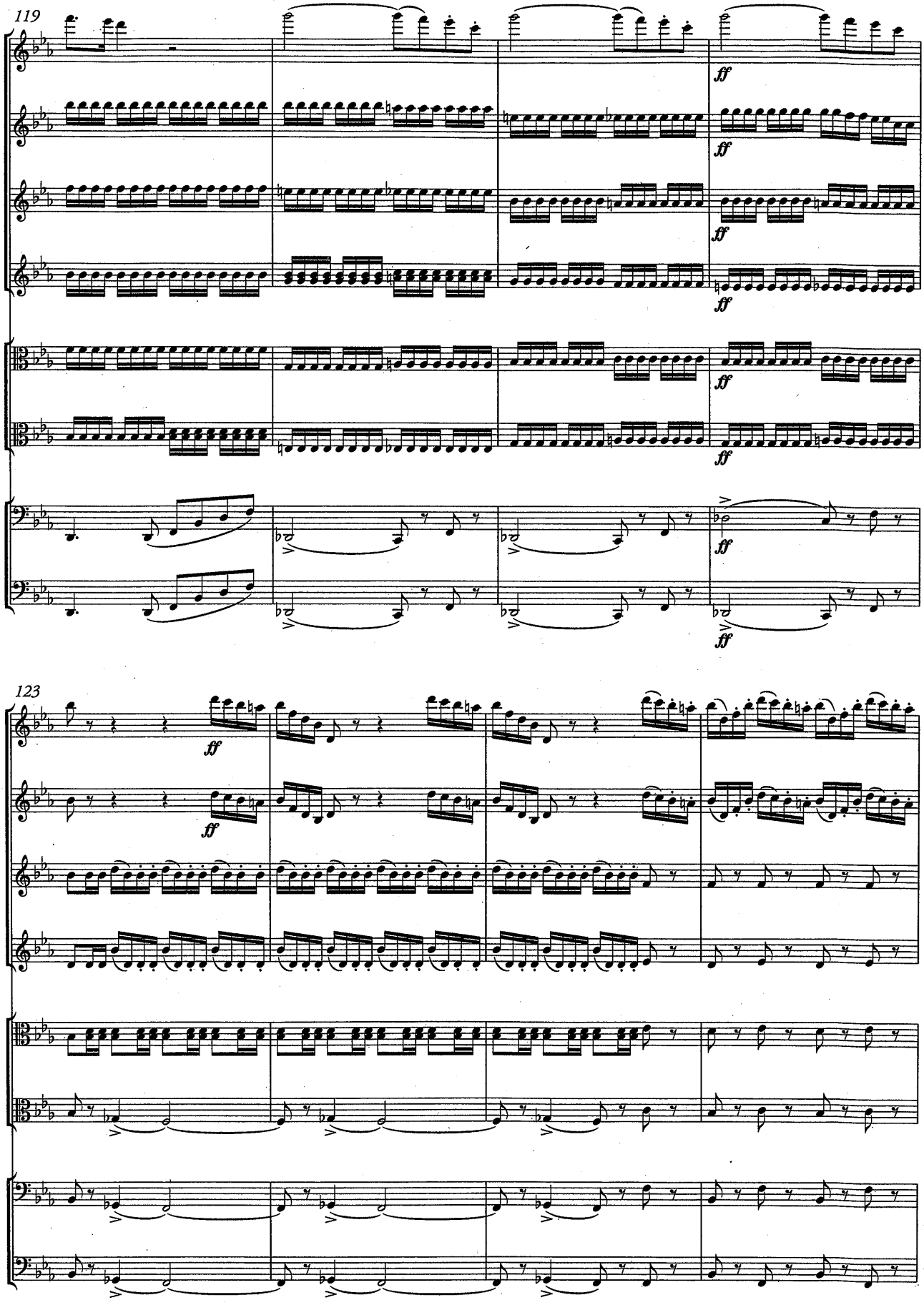
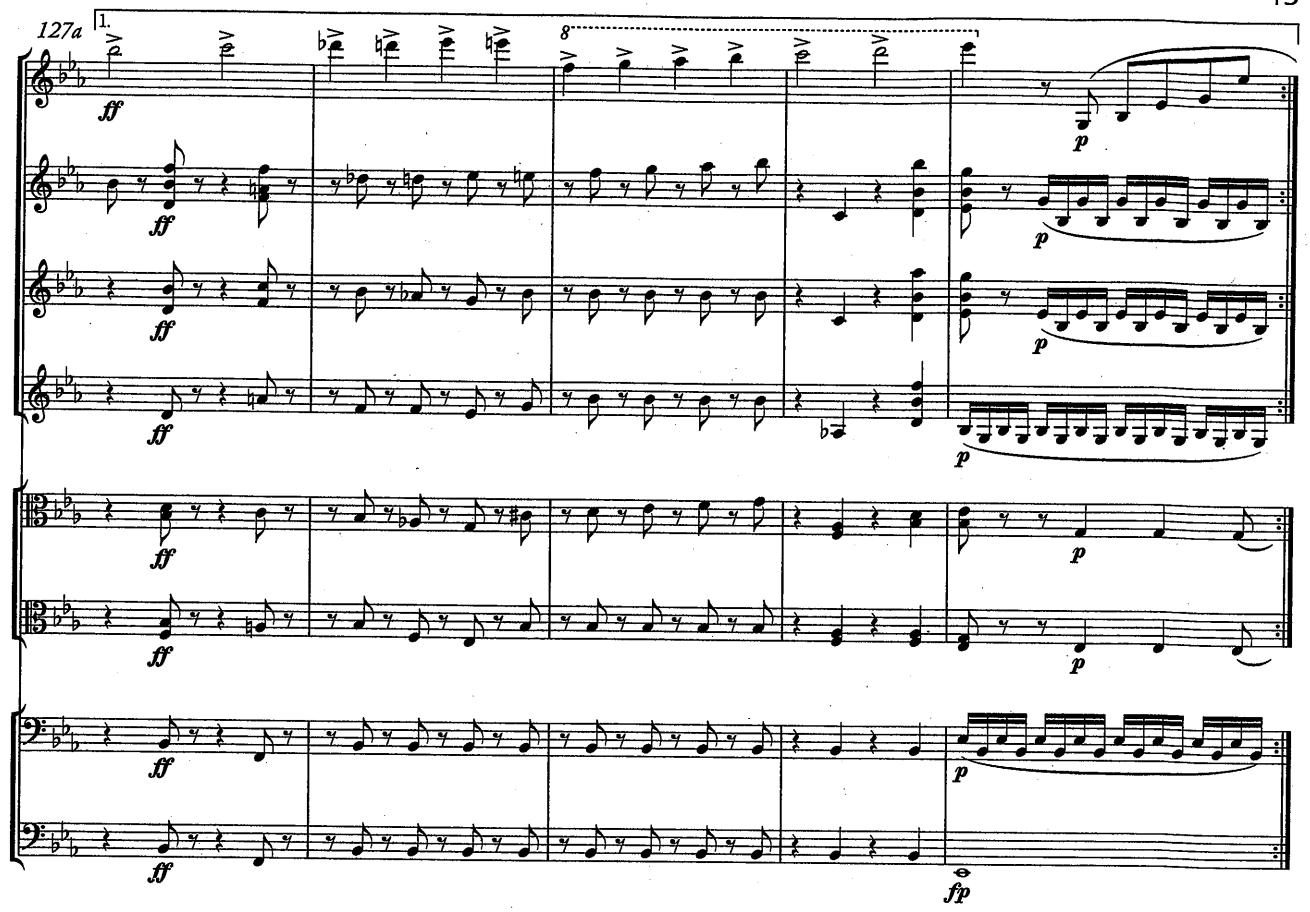
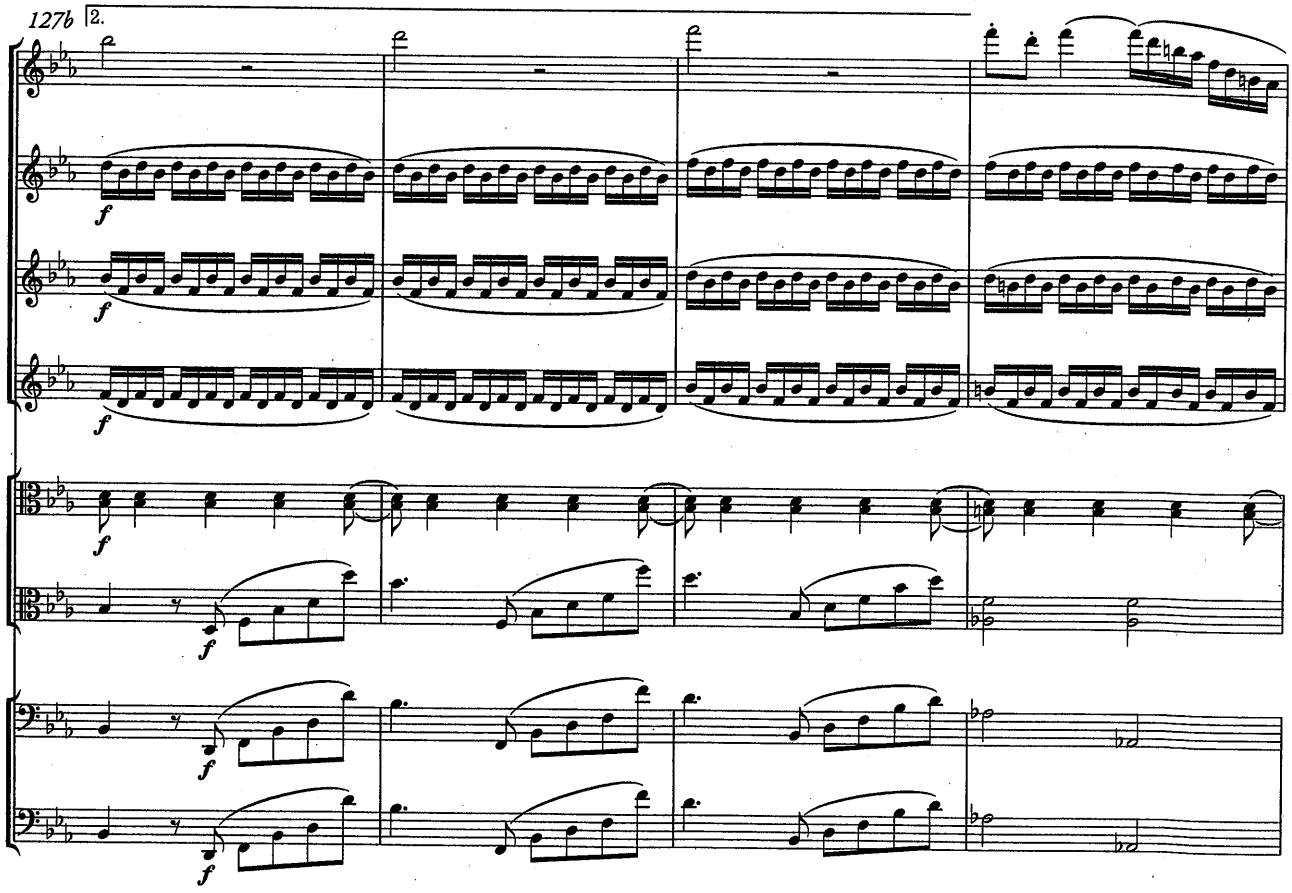
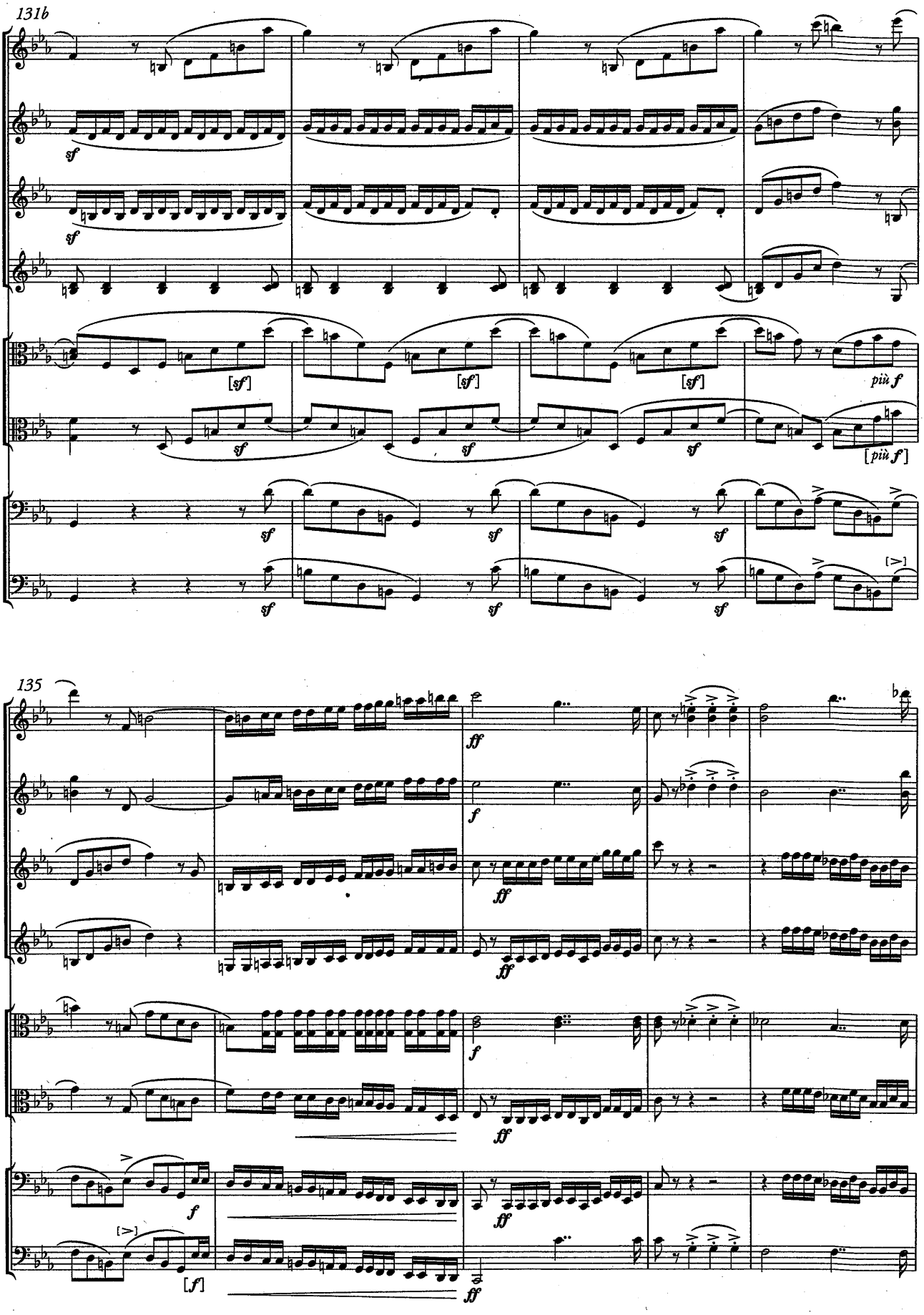
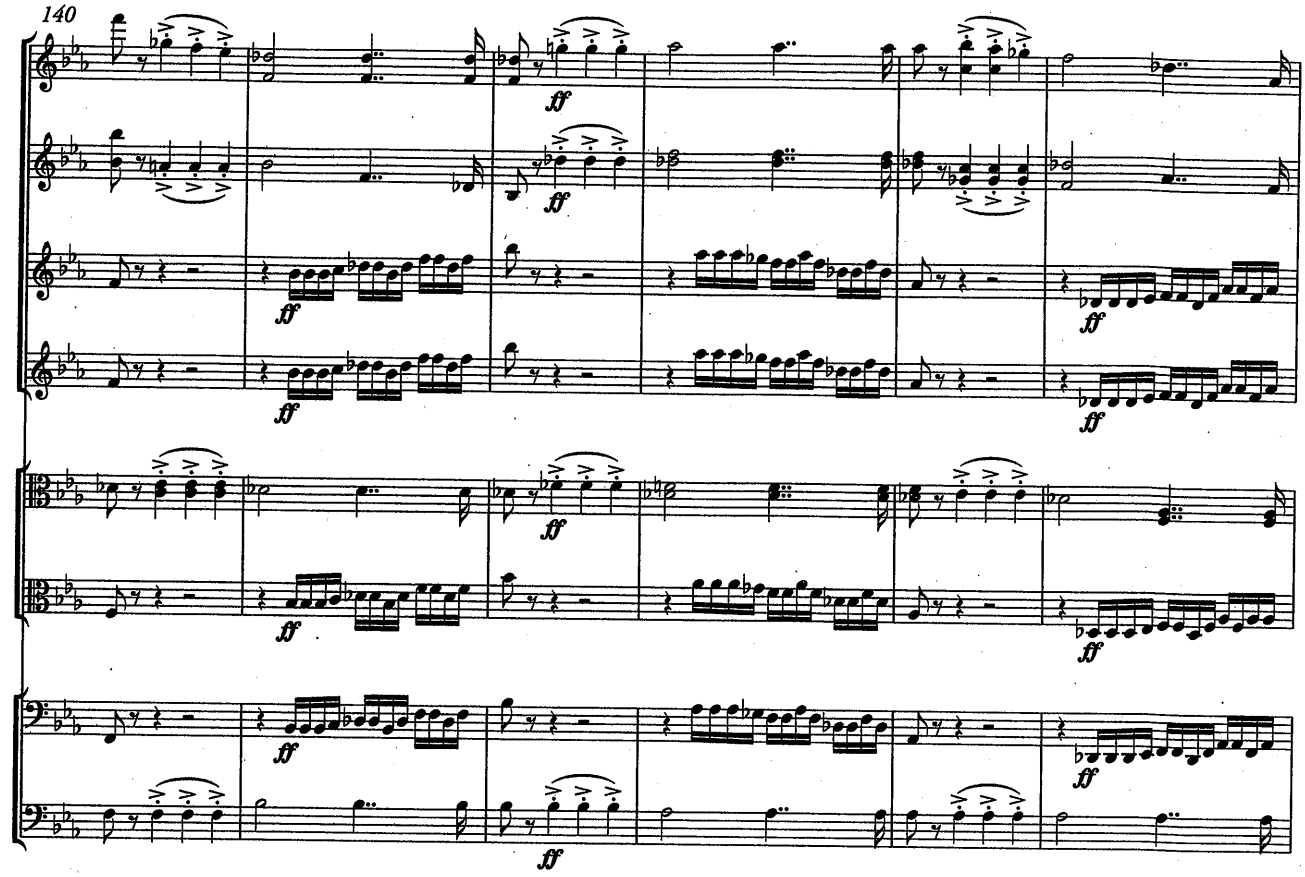

119
ff
123
ff


127a
1.
8
ff
p
fp


127b
2.
f


131b
sf
[sf]
più f
[più f]
135
ff
f
[f]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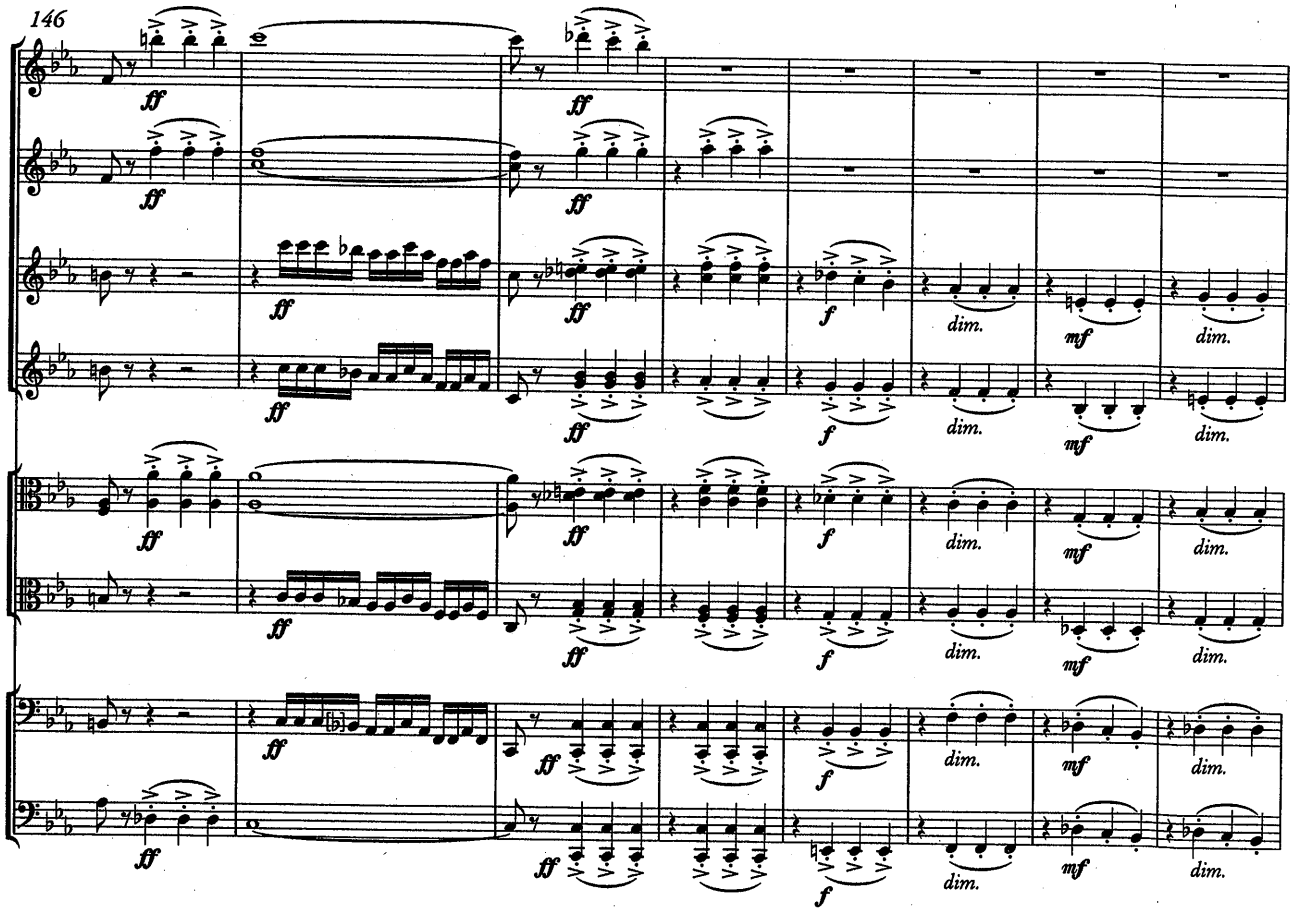
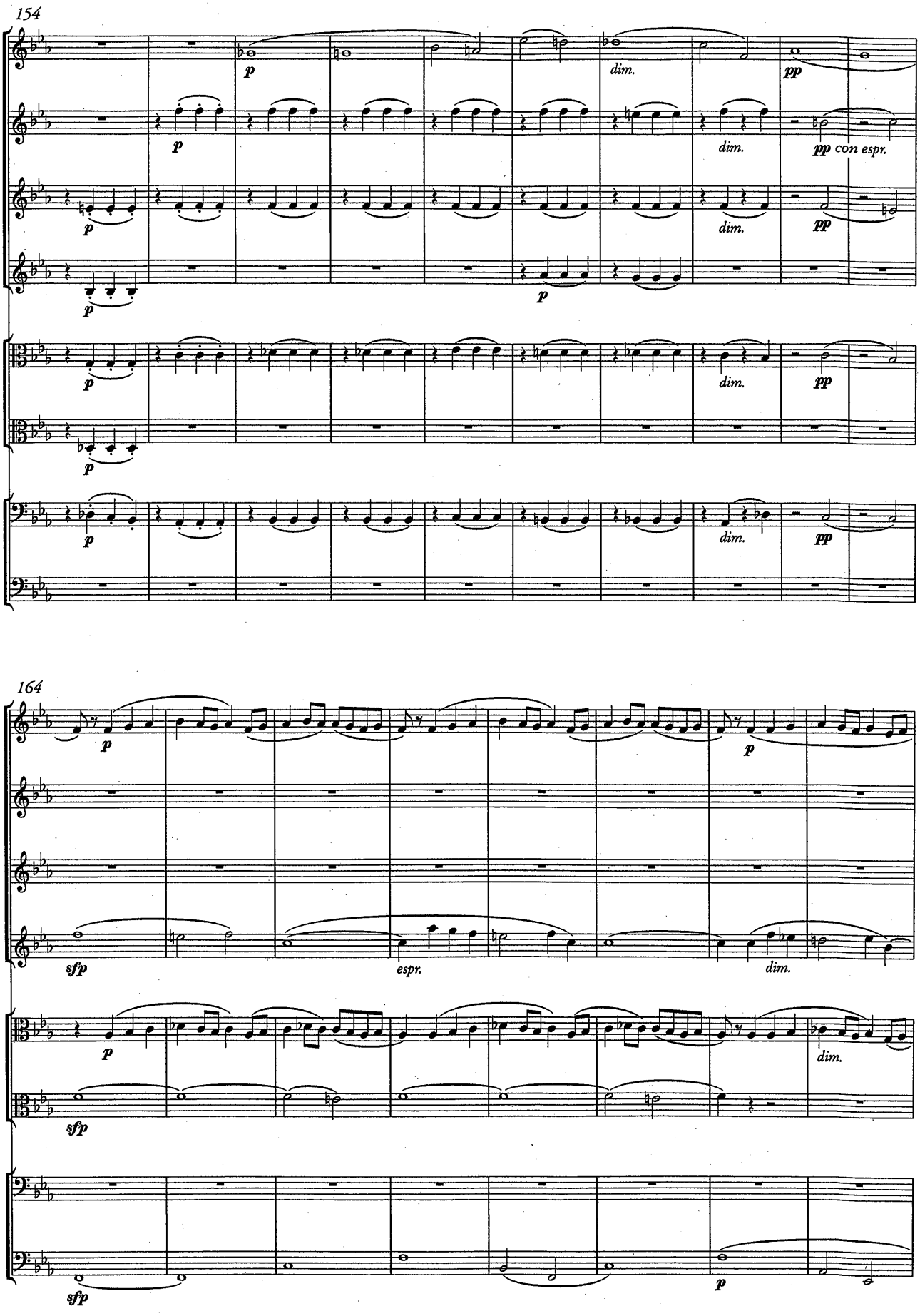
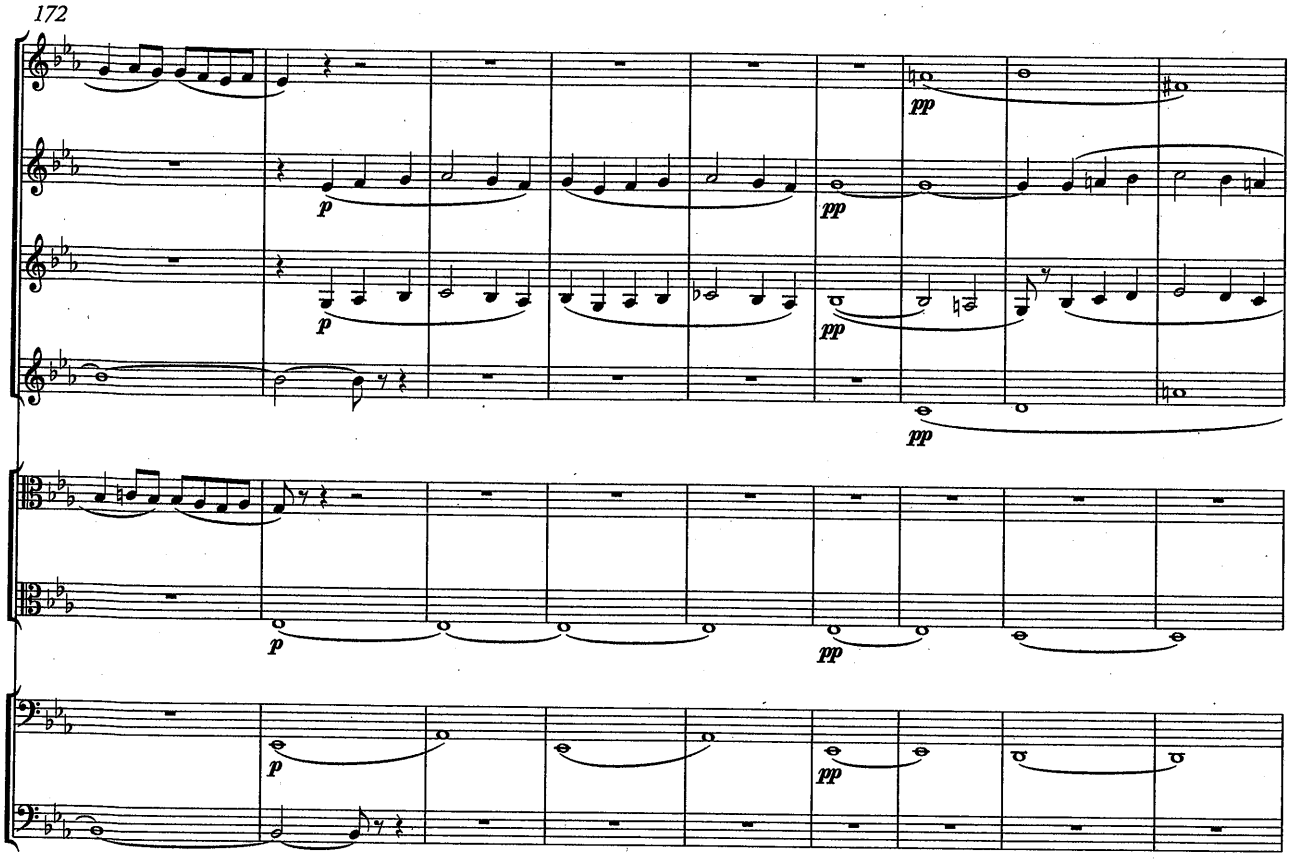
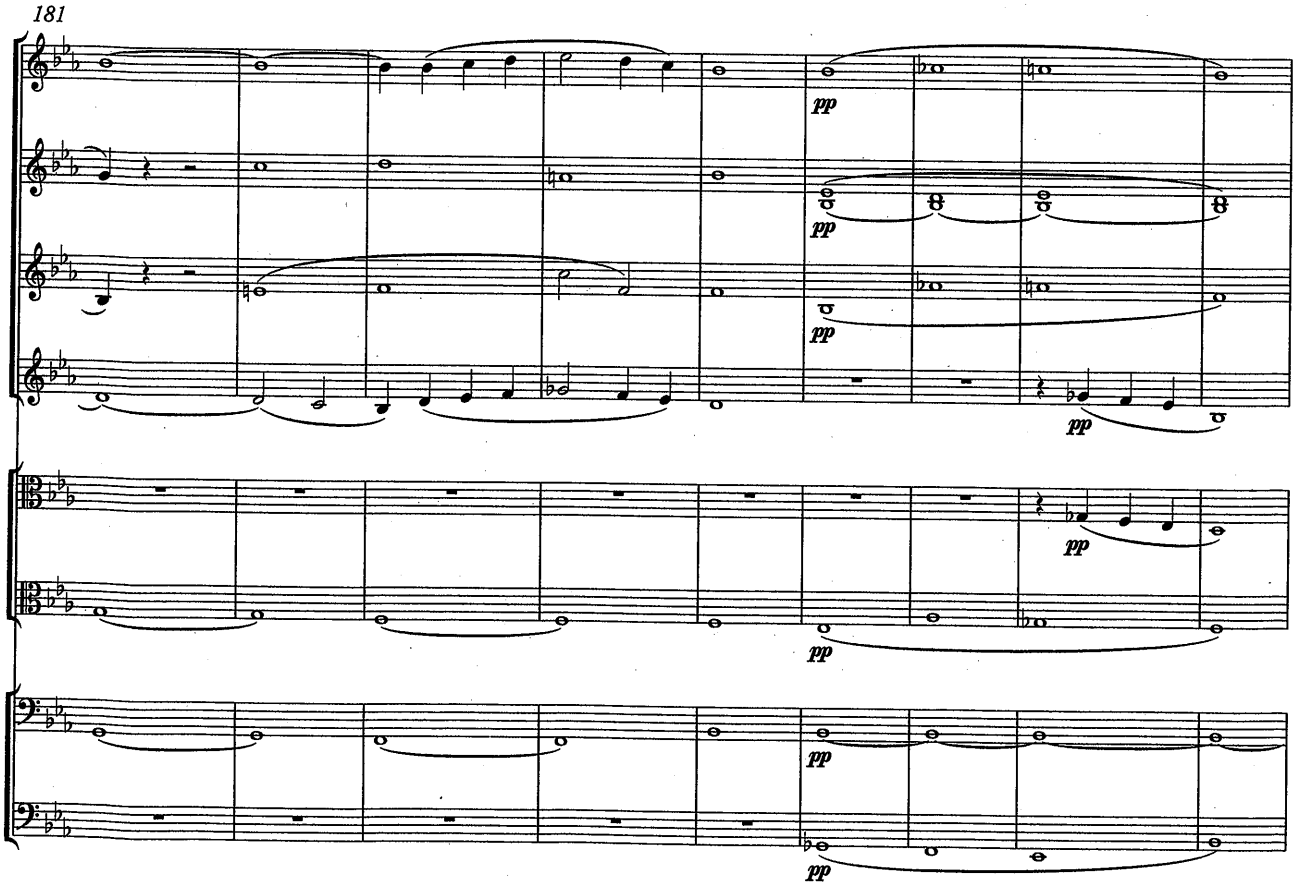
ff


146
ff
f
dim.
mf


154
p
dim.
pp
pp con espr.
164
sfp
espr.
dim.
p


172
p
pp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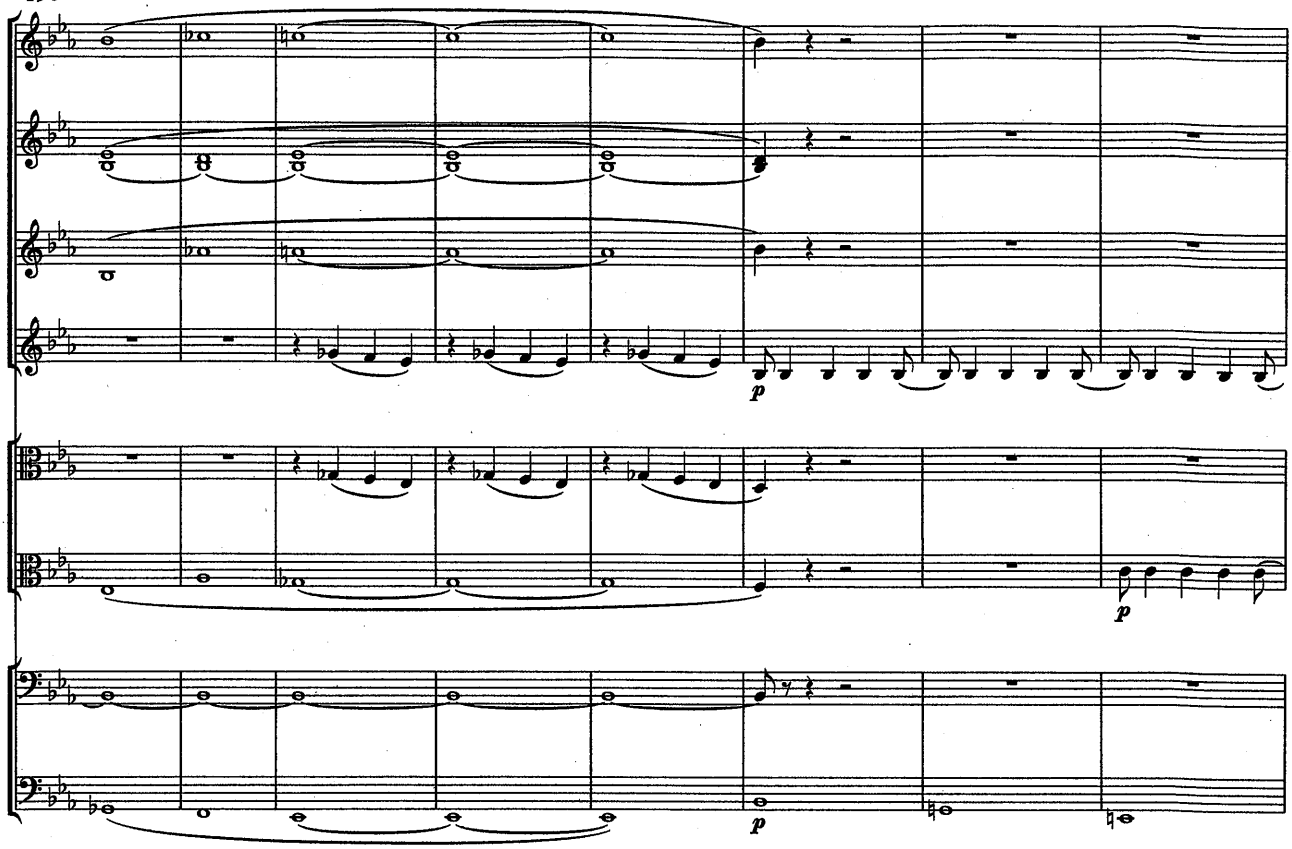

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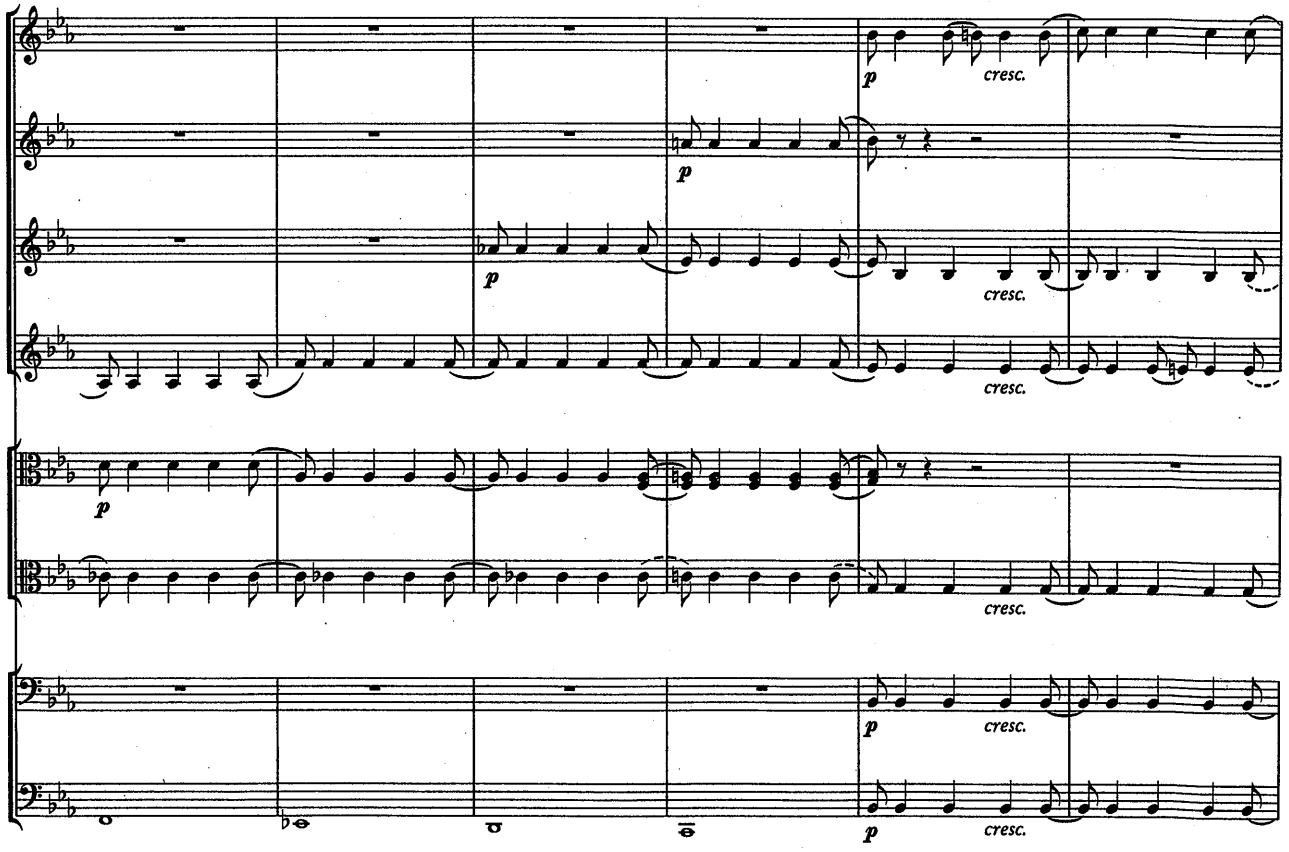
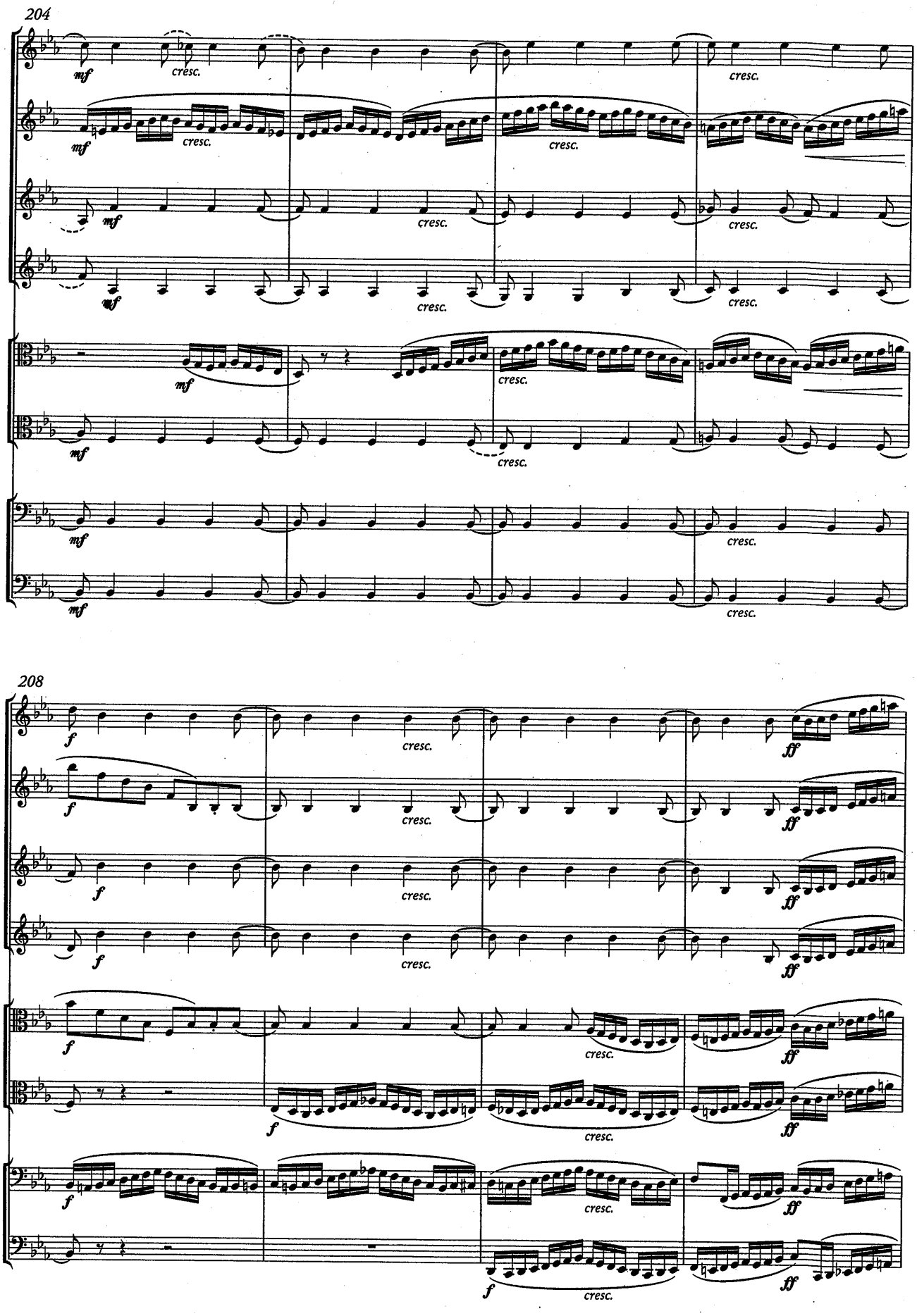
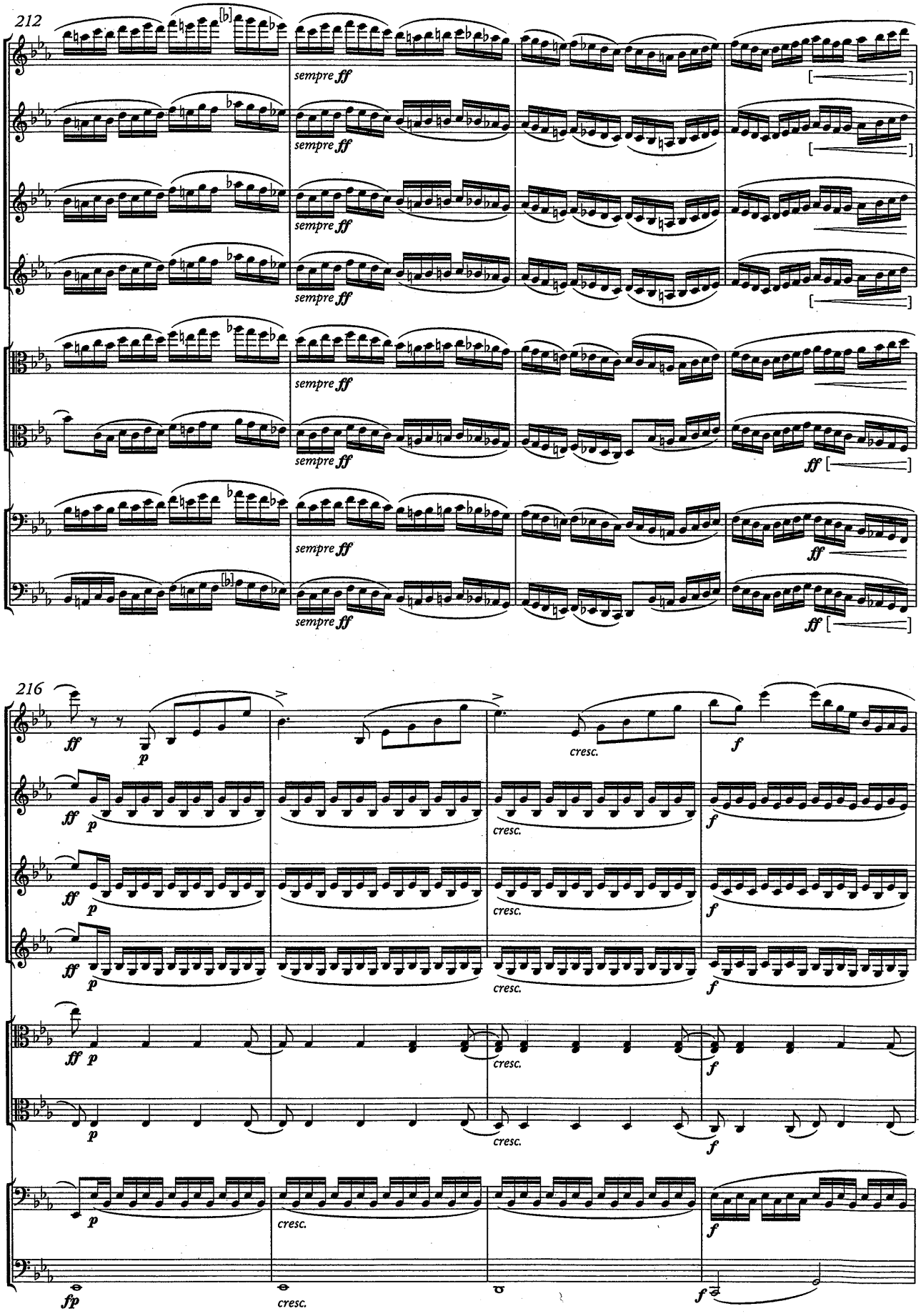
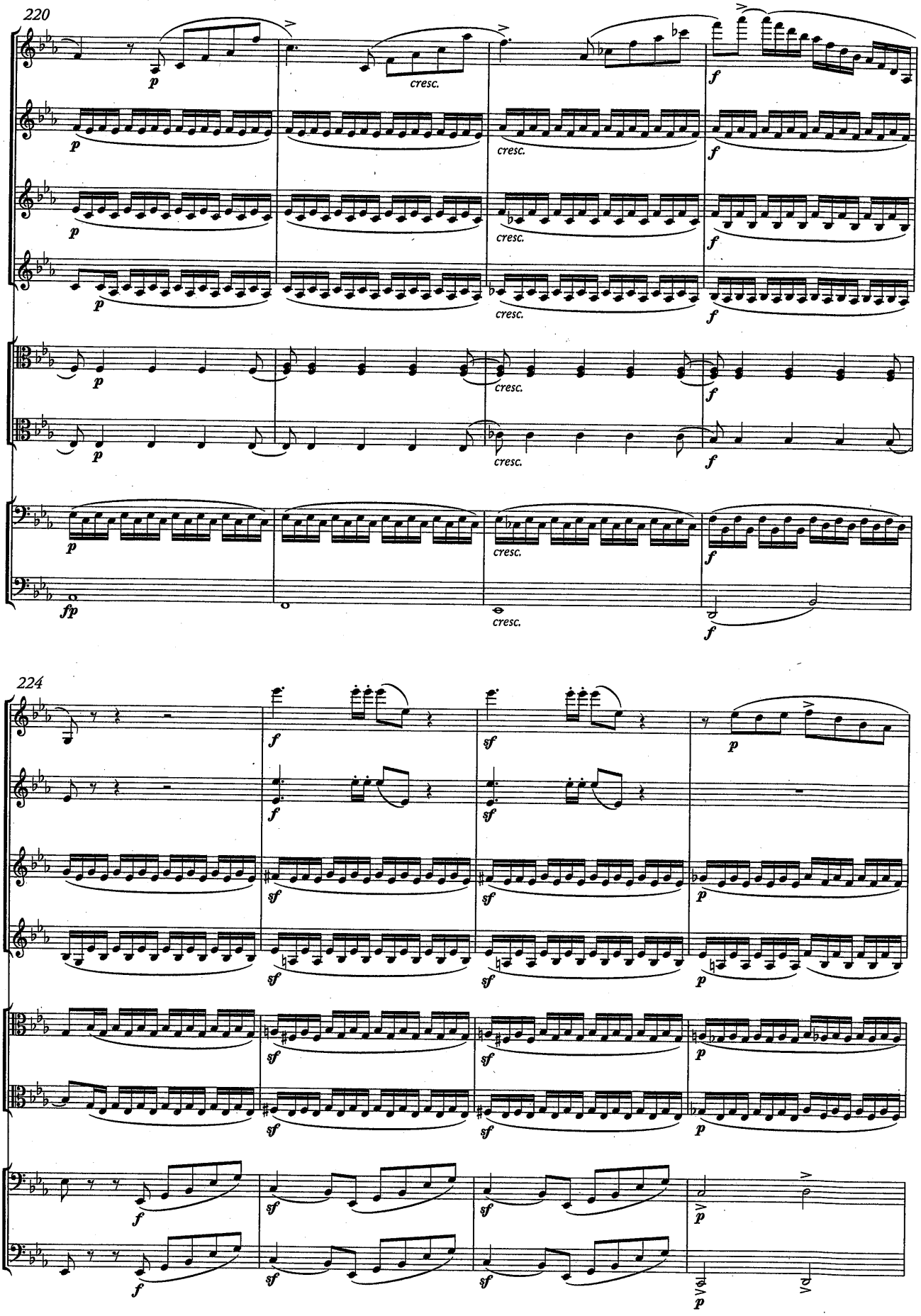



204
mf
cresc.
208
f
ff


212
sempre ff
ff
216
p
cresc.
f
fp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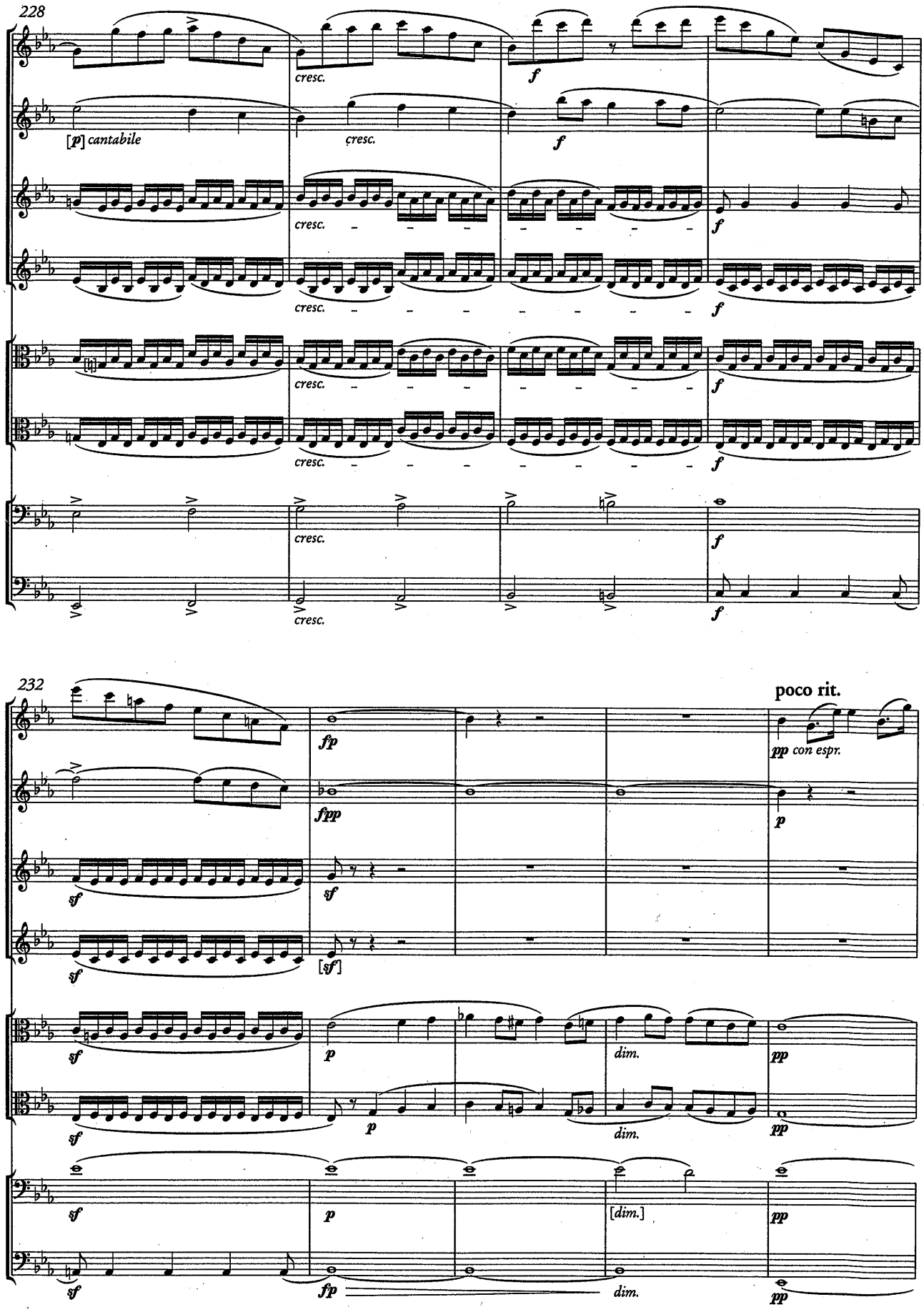
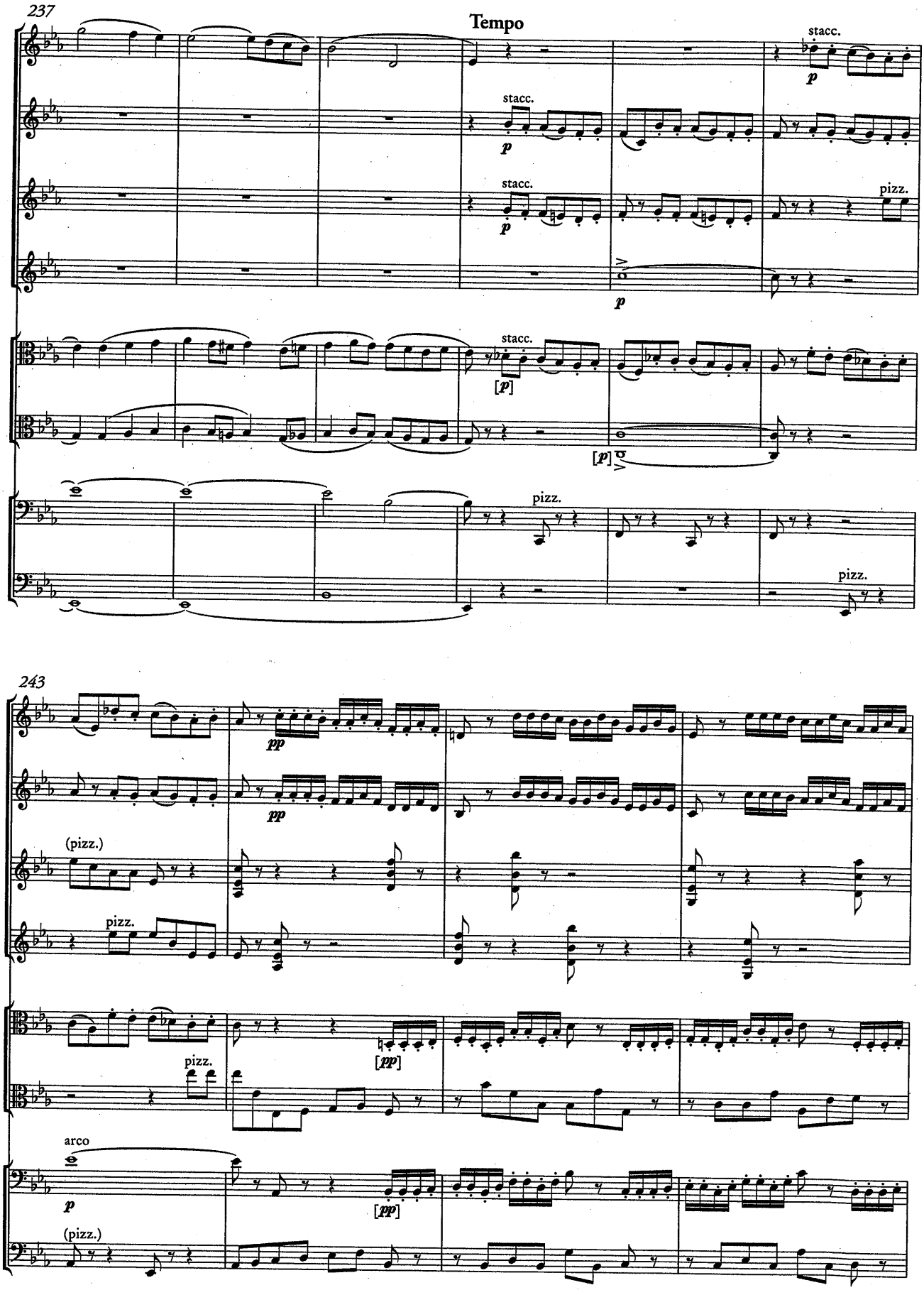

228
[p] cantabile
cresc.
f
232
poco rit.
fp
fpp
pp con espr.
p
sf
[sf]
dim.
pp
[dim.]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Tempo
stacc.
p
stacc.
p
stacc.
p
pizz.
p
stacc.
[p]
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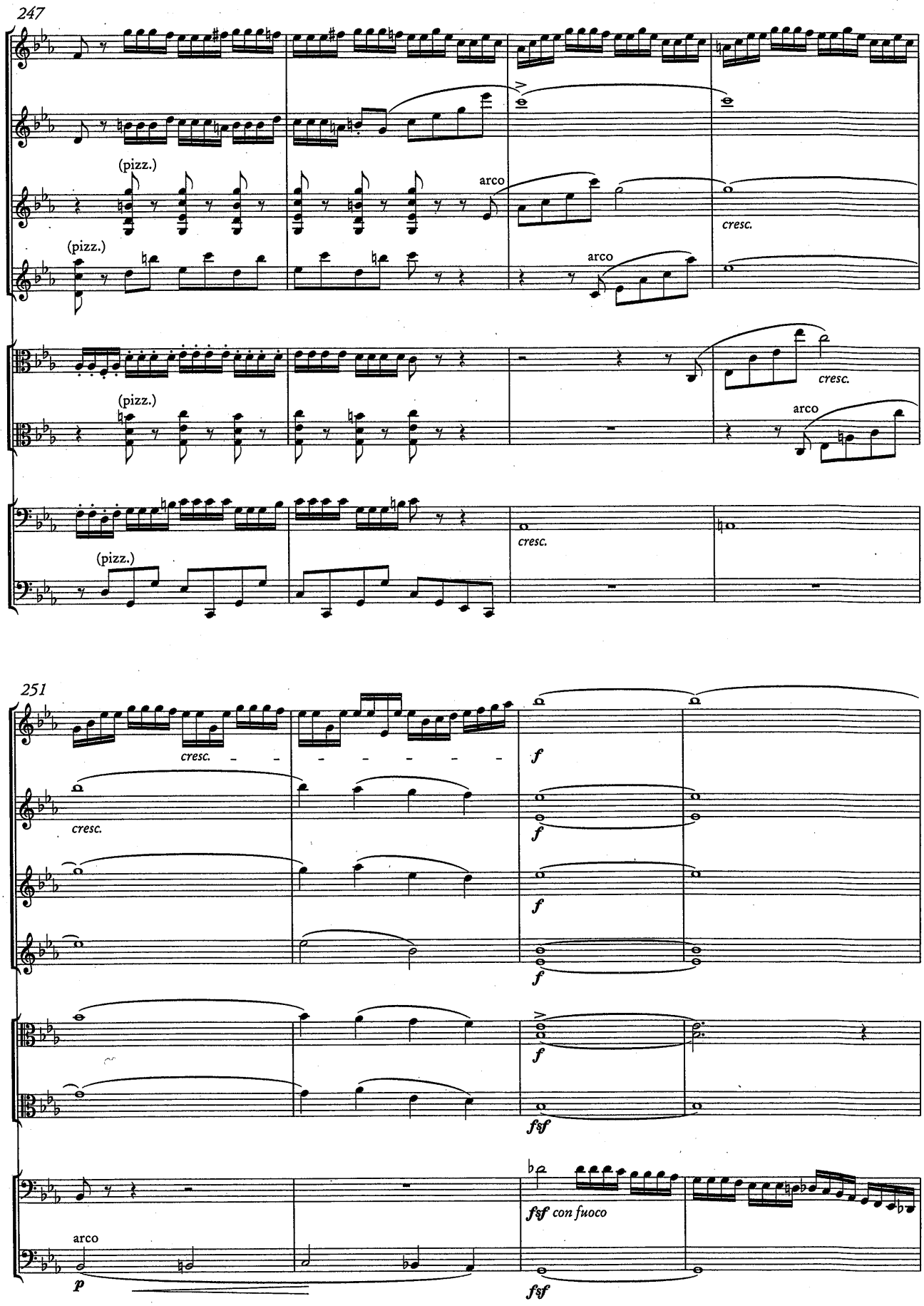
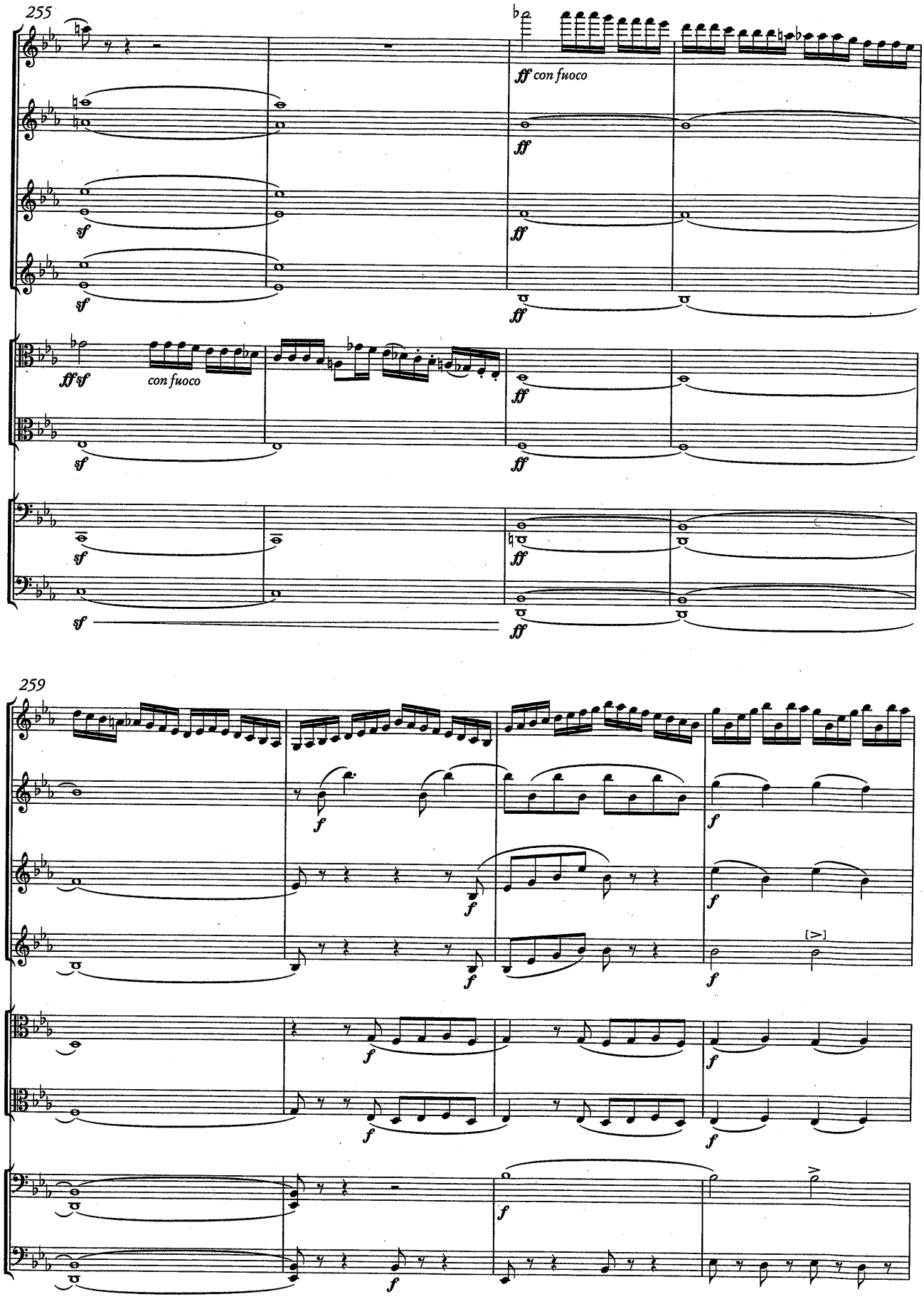
pizz.
pizz.
243
pp
pp
(pizz.)
pizz.
pizz.
[pp]
arco
p
[pp]
(pizz.)


247
(pizz.)
arco
cresc.
(pizz.)
arco
(pizz.)
cresc.
arco
(pizz.)
cresc.
251
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f
f
f
fsf
arco
p
fsf con fuoco
fsf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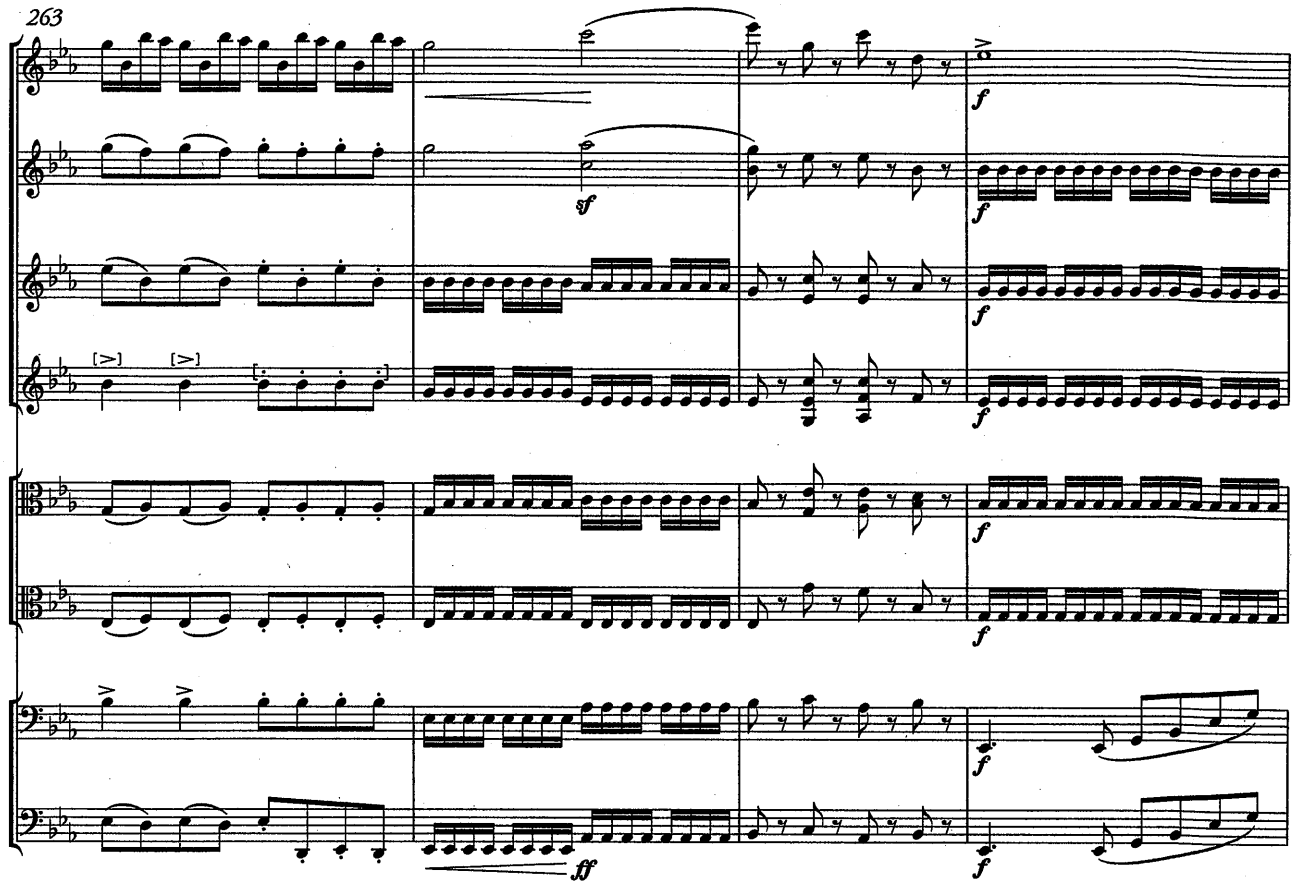
ff con fuoco
ff
sf
ff sf
con fuoco
259
f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sf
f
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f
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ff
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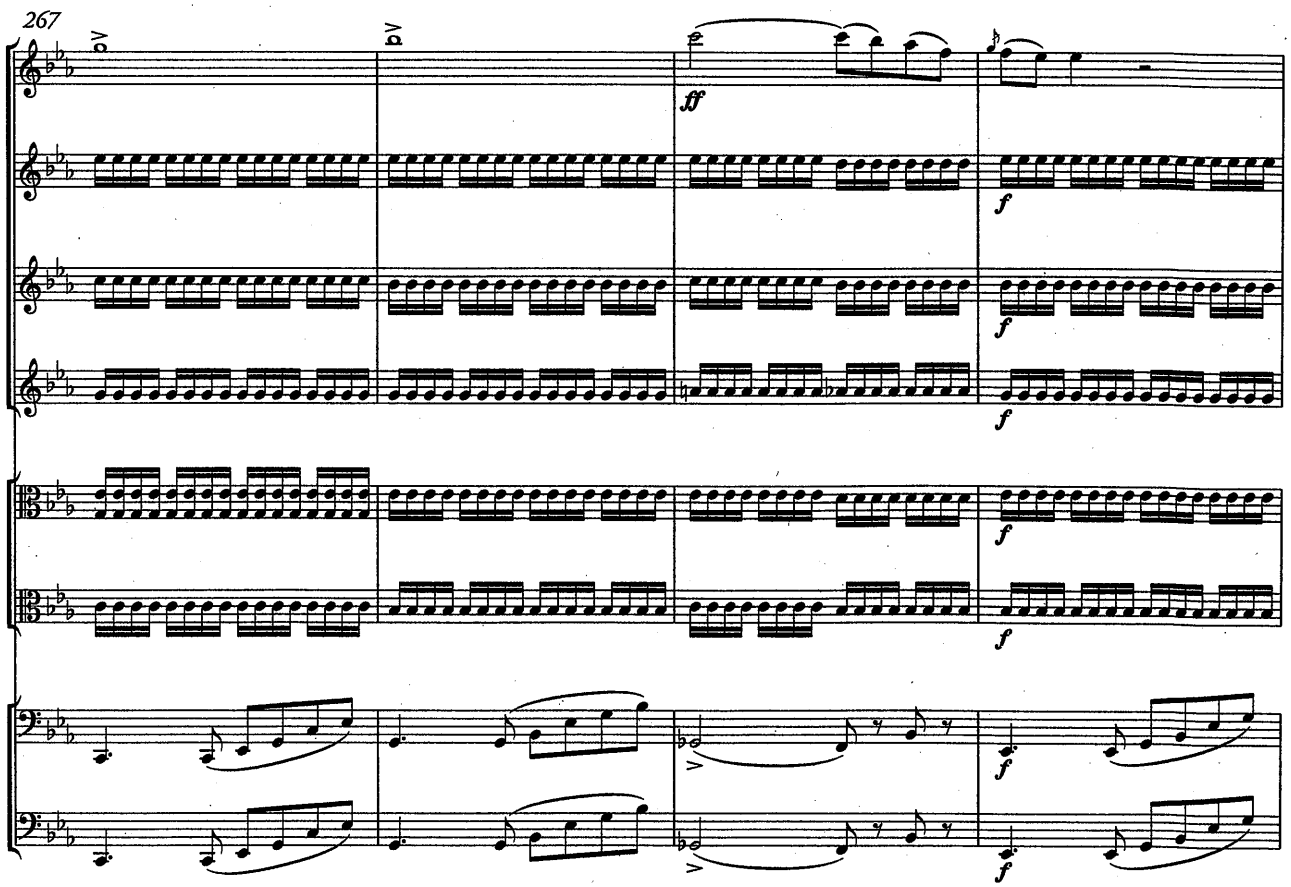
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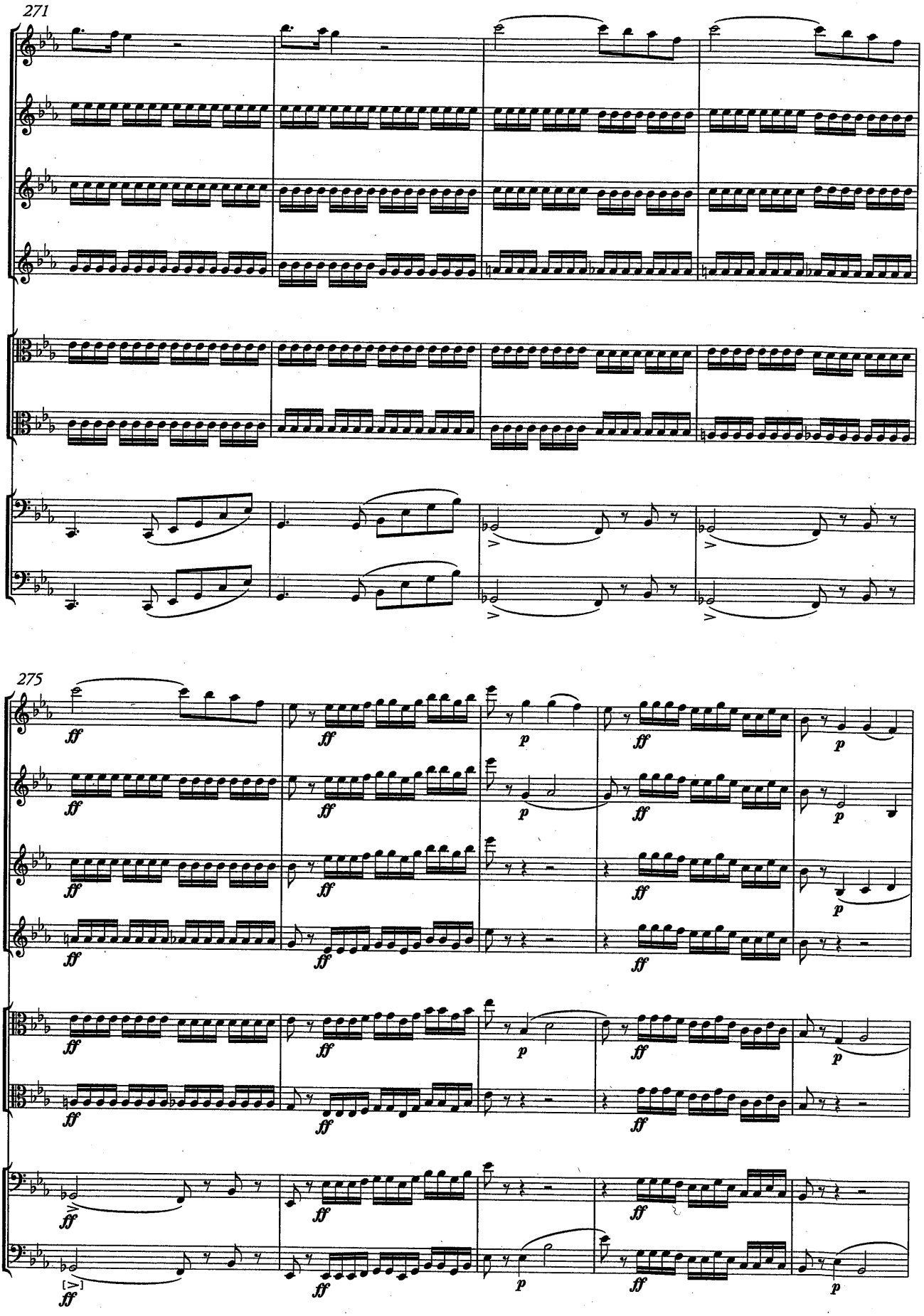
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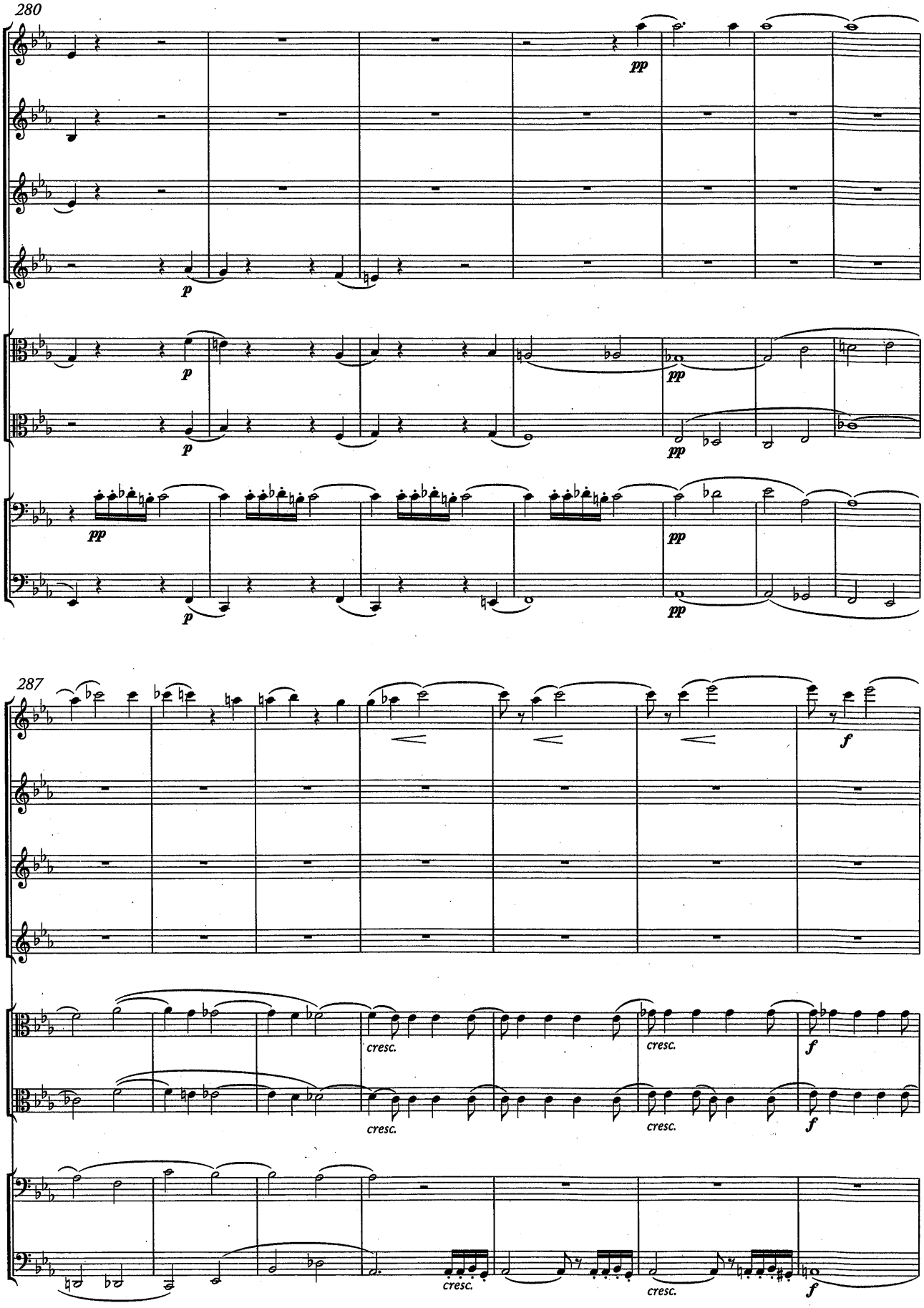
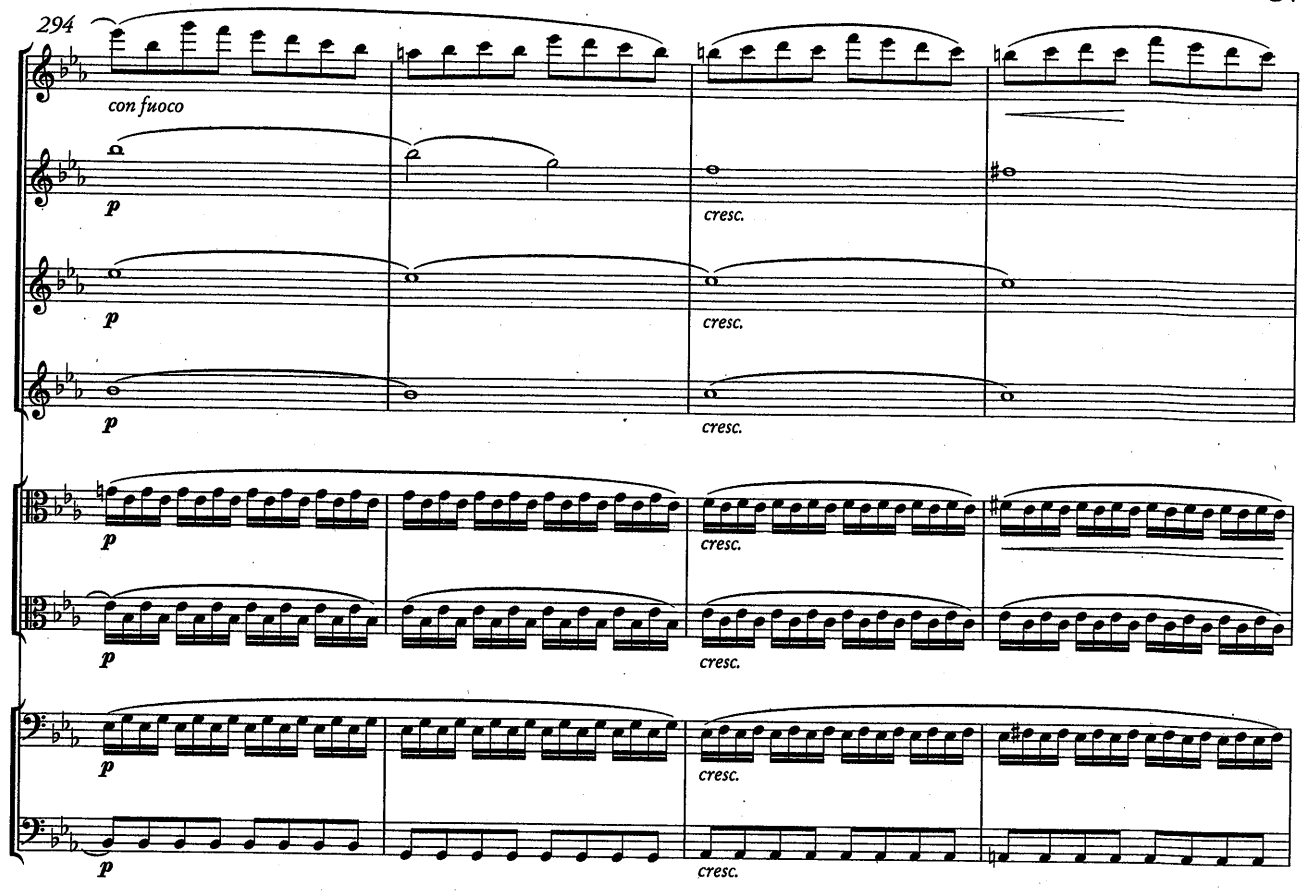
ff
p


280
pp
p
287
f
cresc.


294
con fuoco
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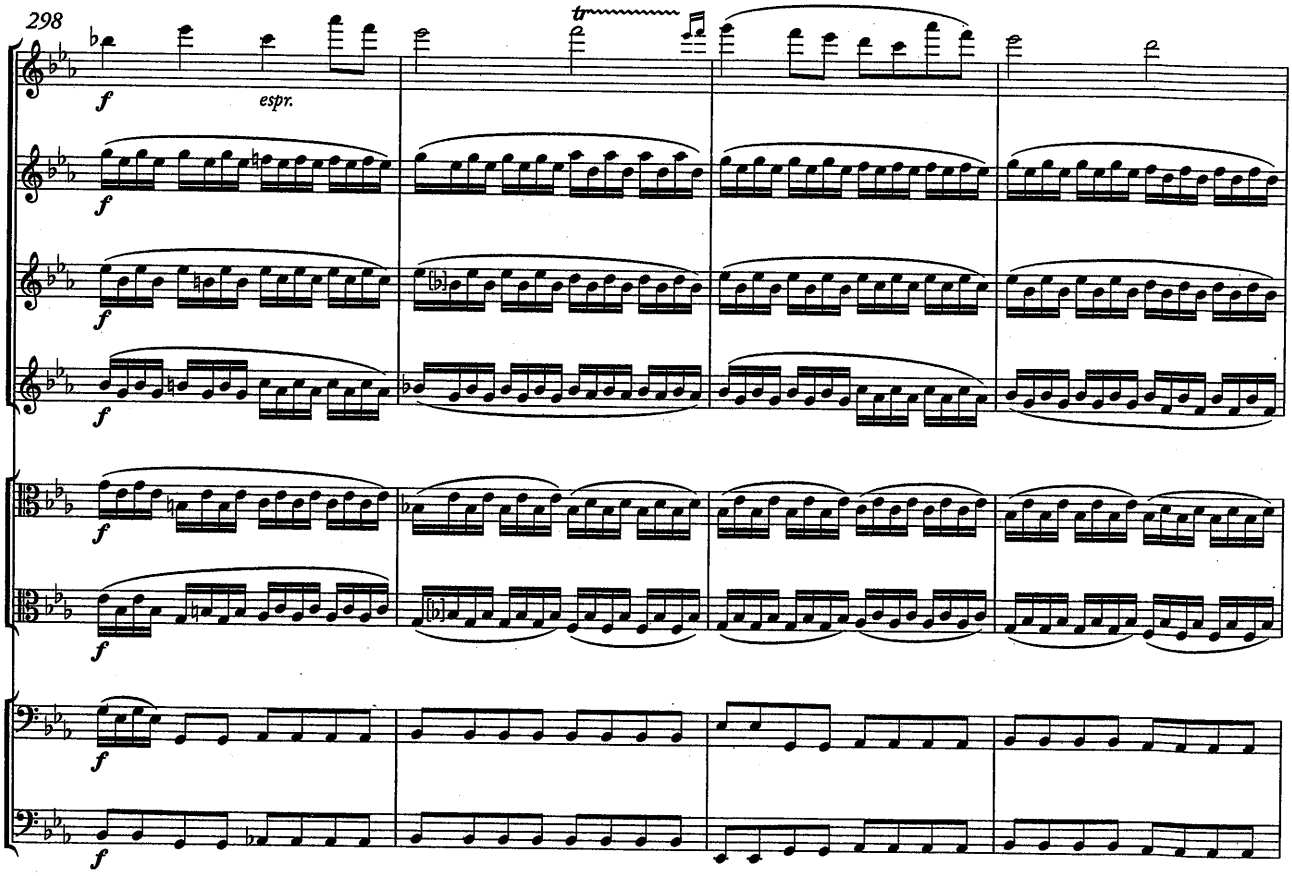
cresc.


298
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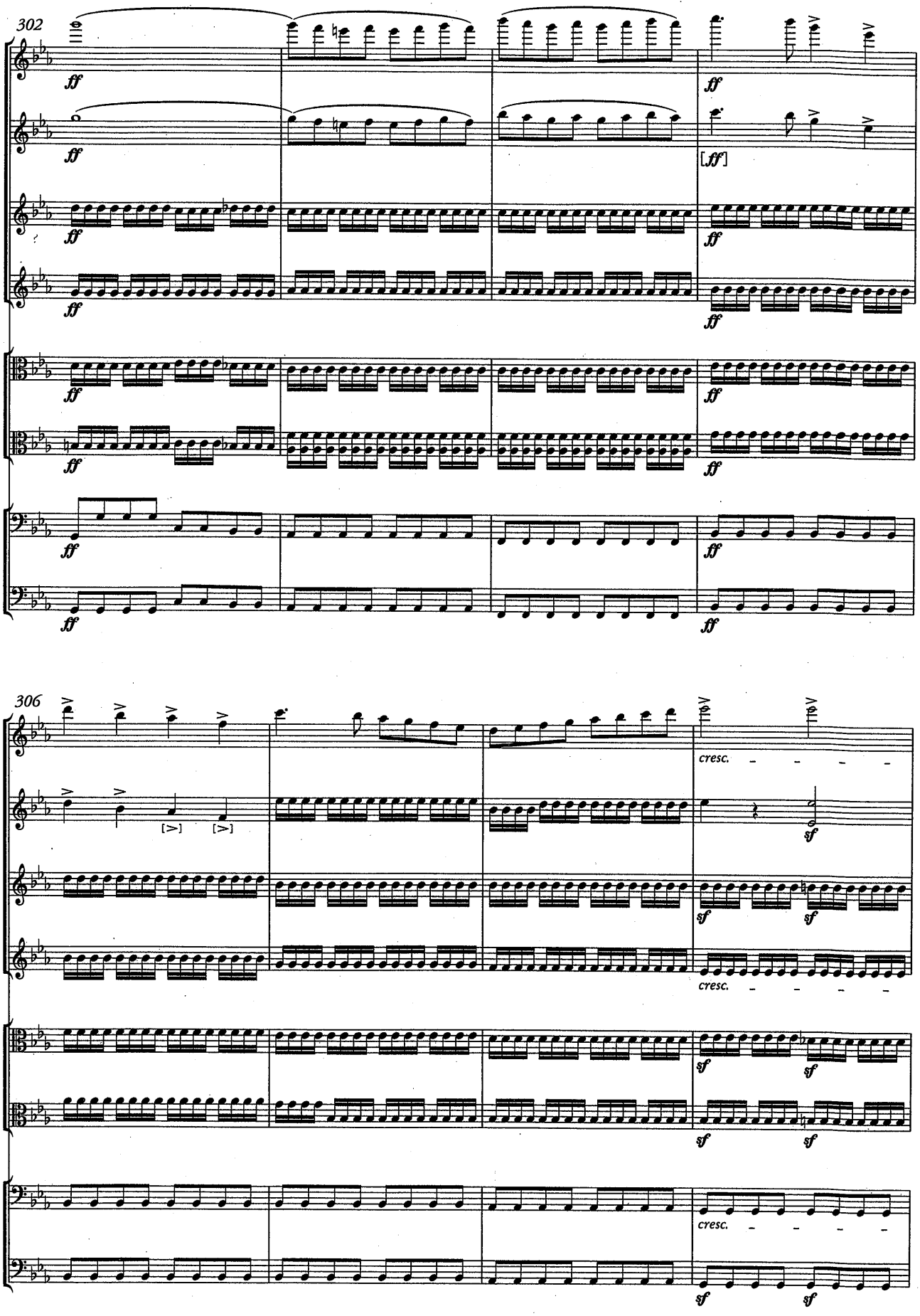
f
espr.


302
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306
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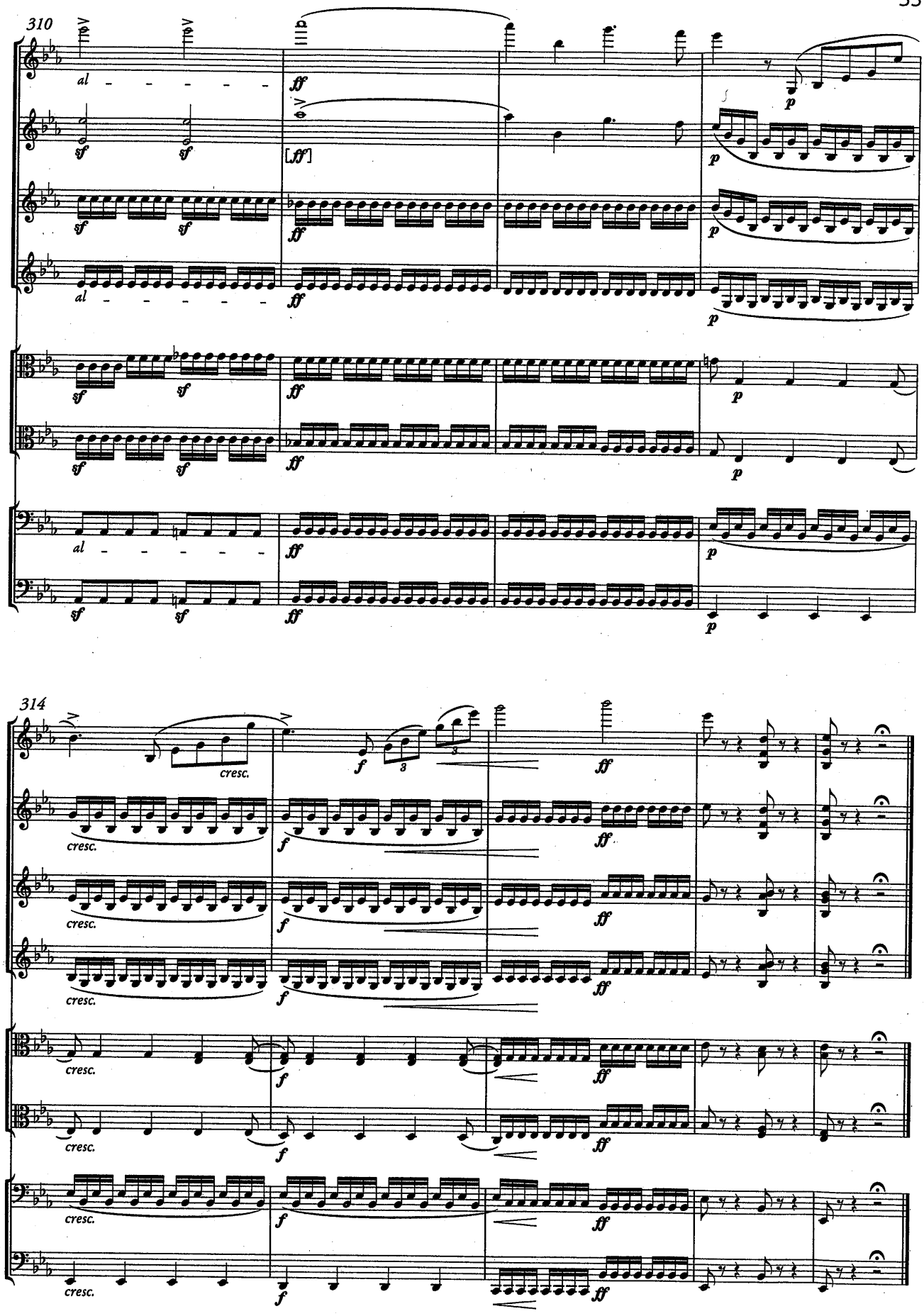
sf


310
al
sf
ff
[ff]
p
314
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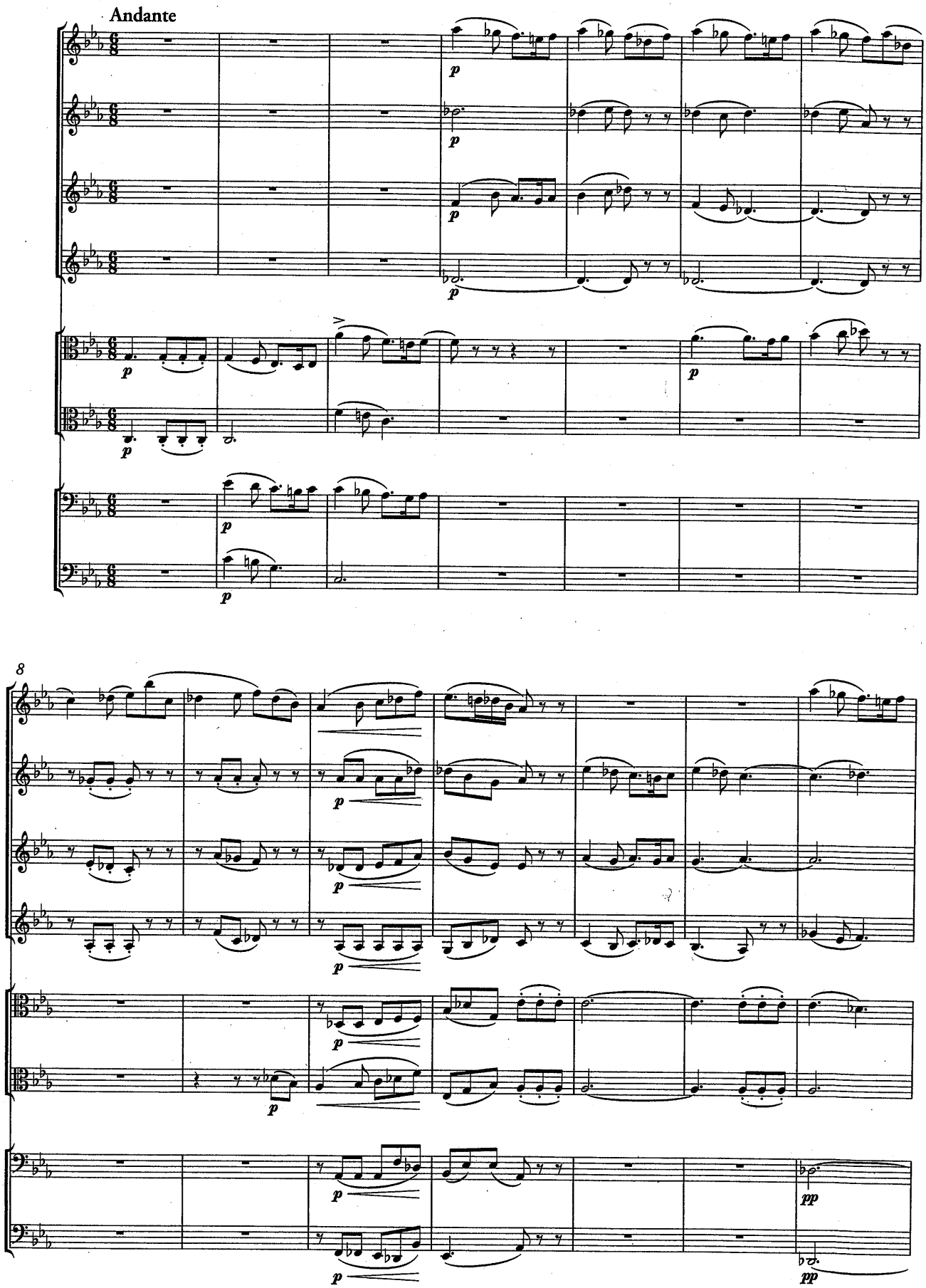
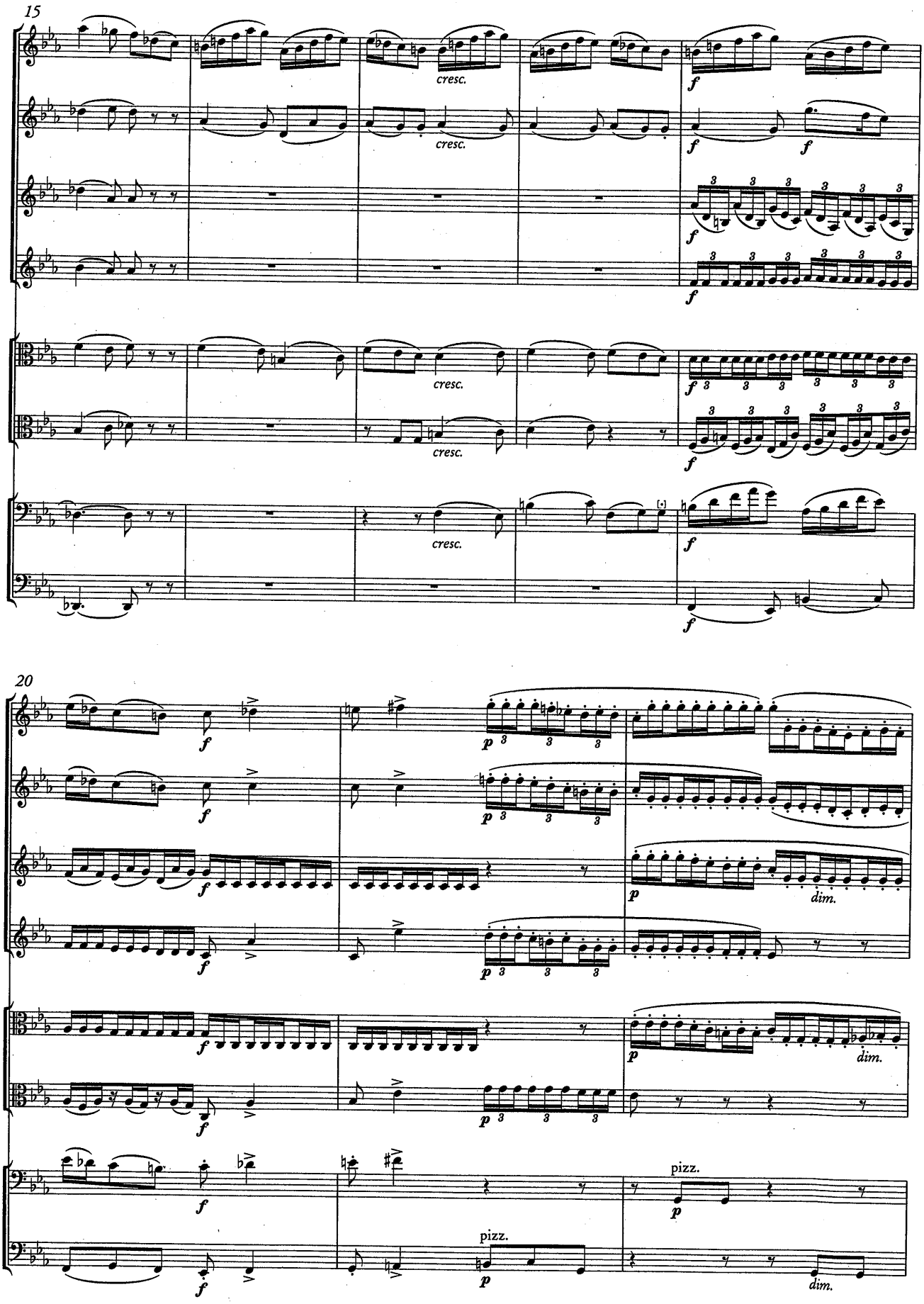
f
3
ff


Andante
8


15
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
f
20
p
dim.
pizz.
pizz.

23
dim.
dim.
pp
pp
pp
pp
pp
(pizz.)
arco
dim.
pp
arco
pp
26
pp
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff
ff
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ff
ff
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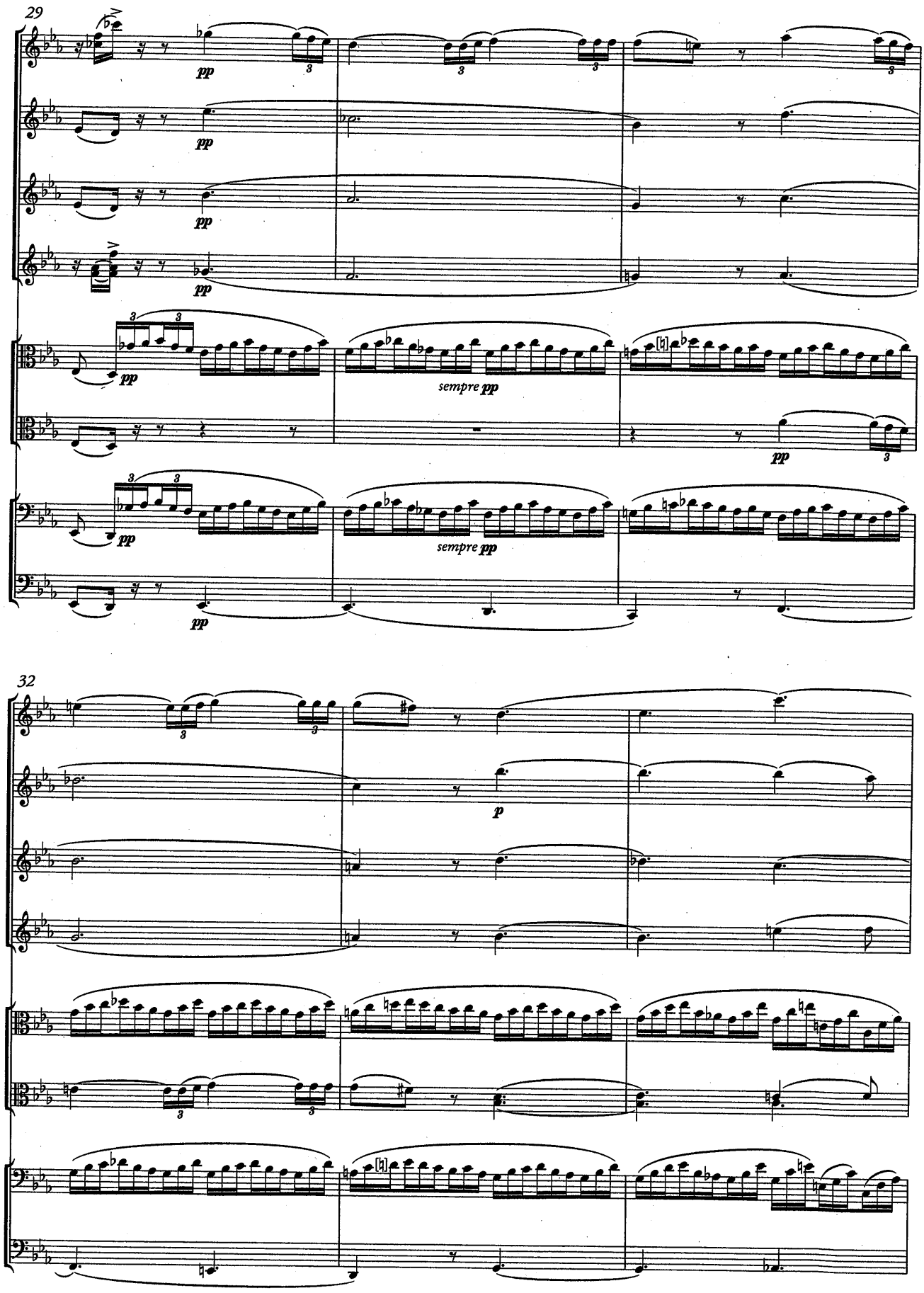
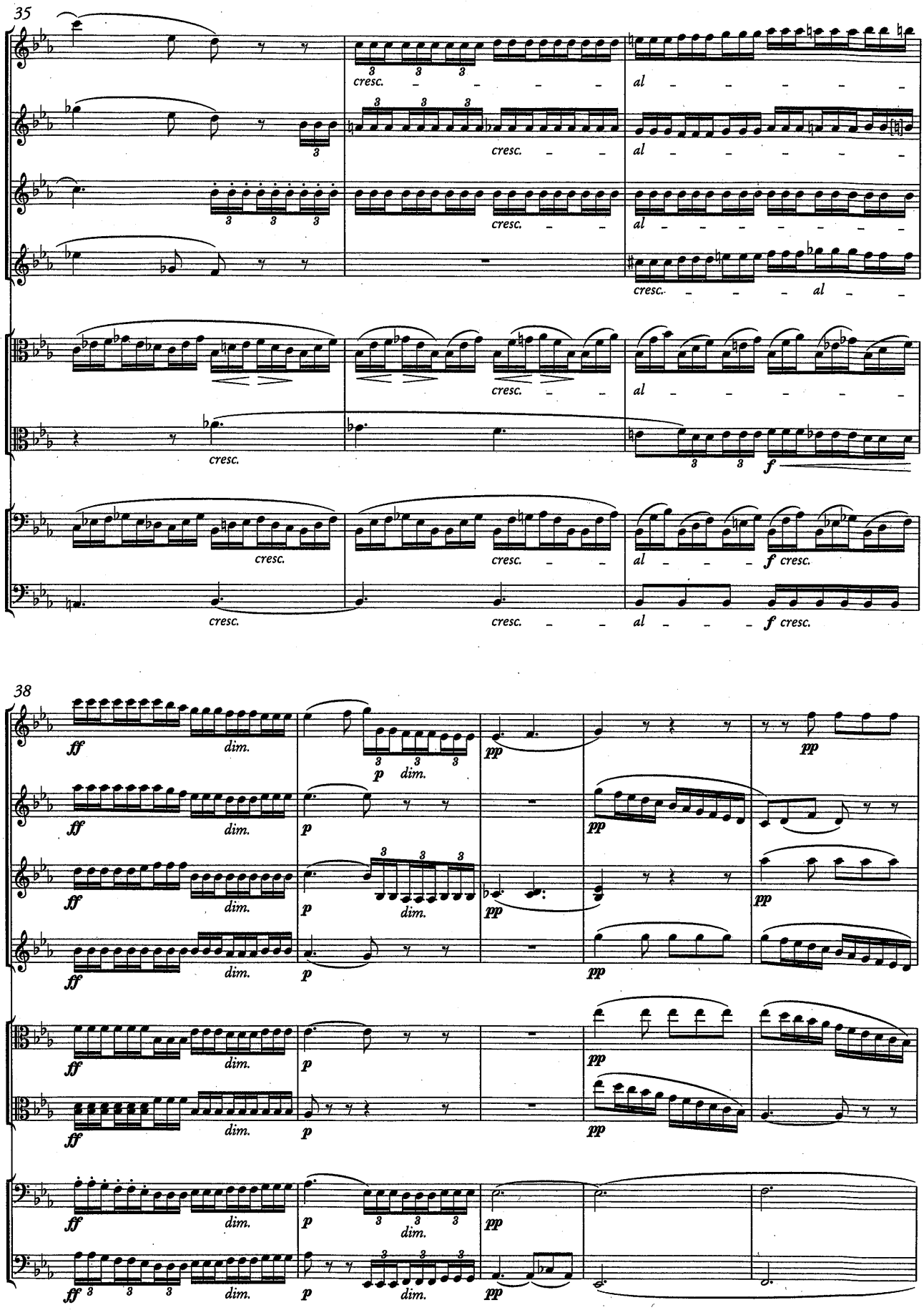
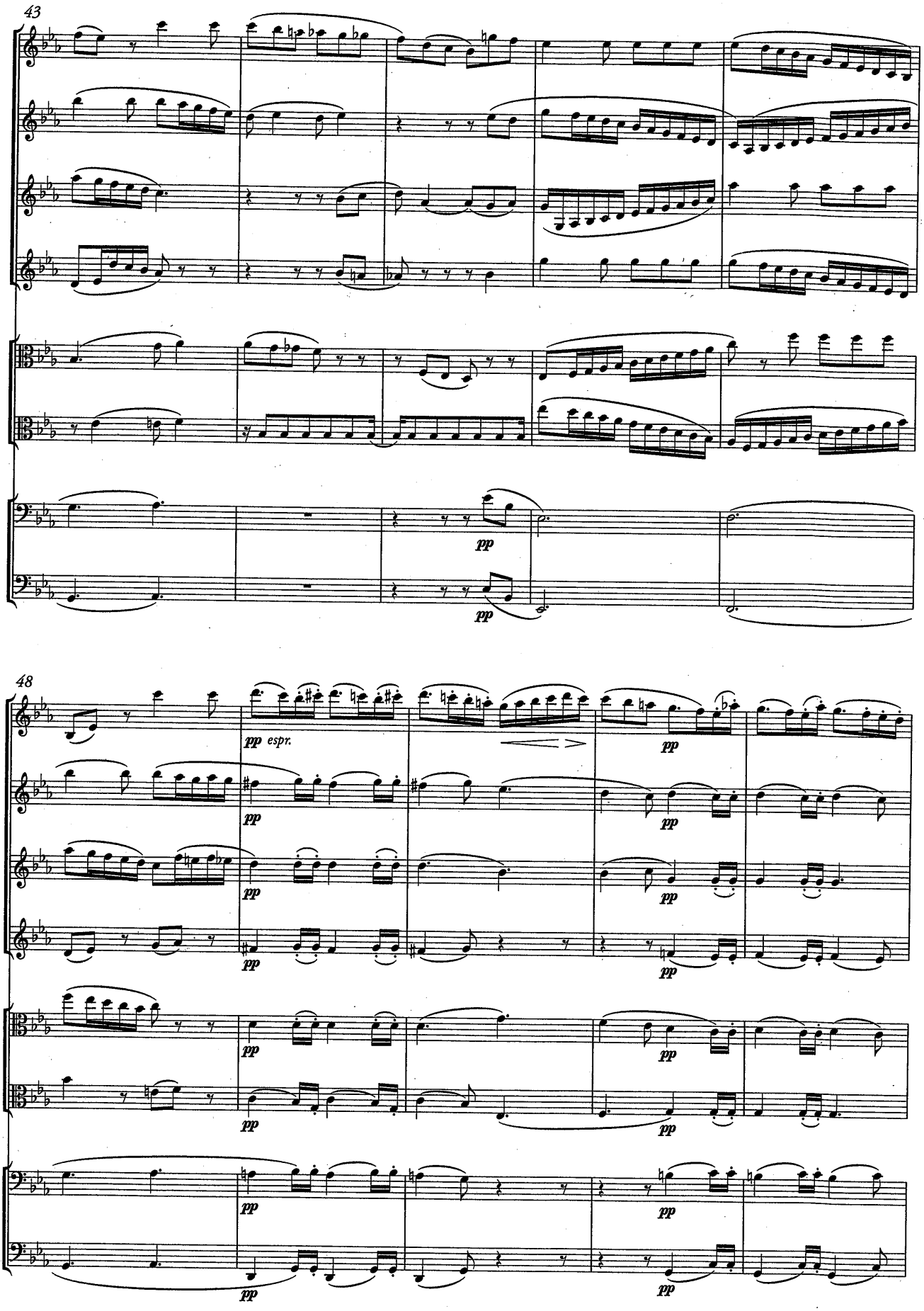
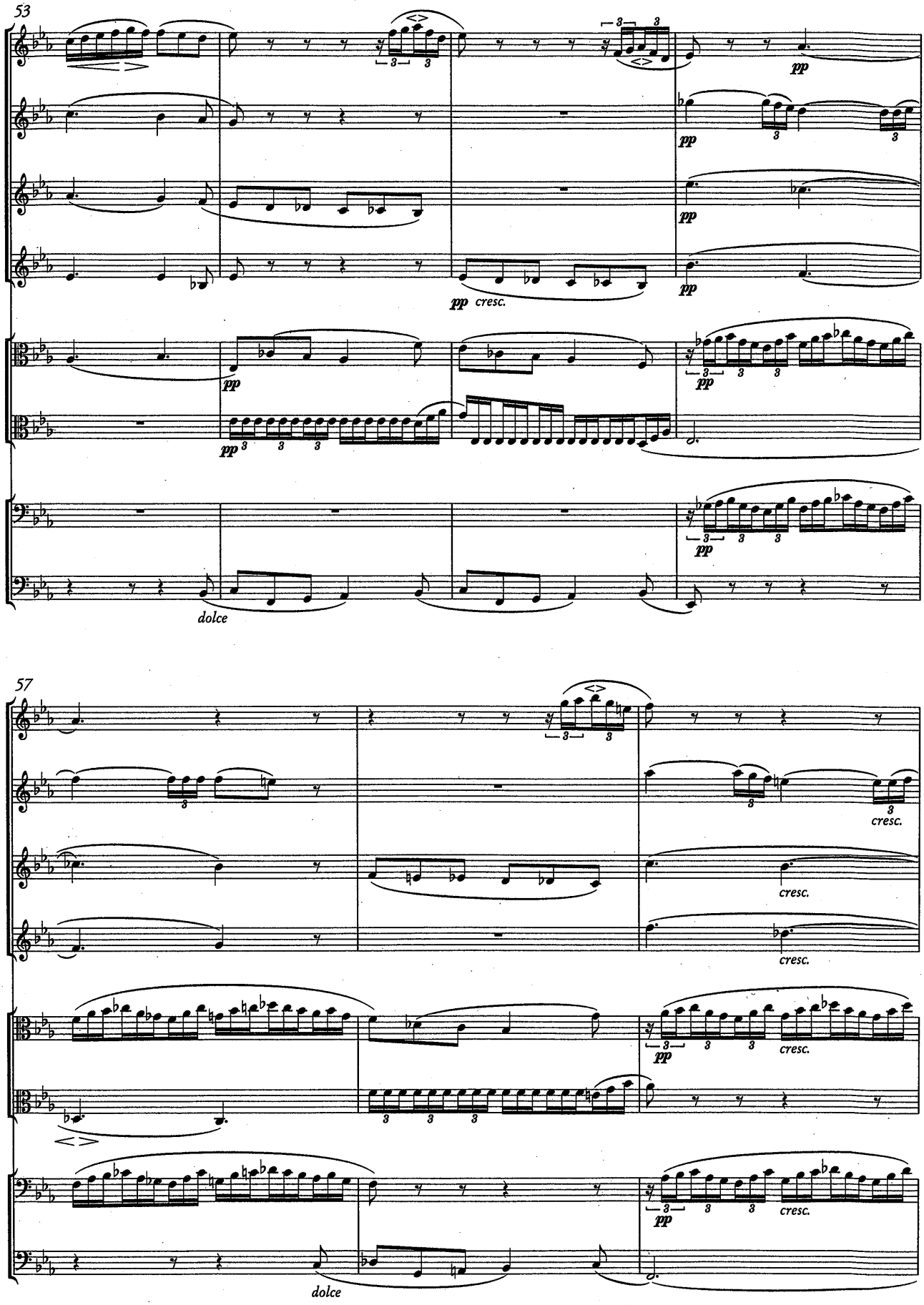
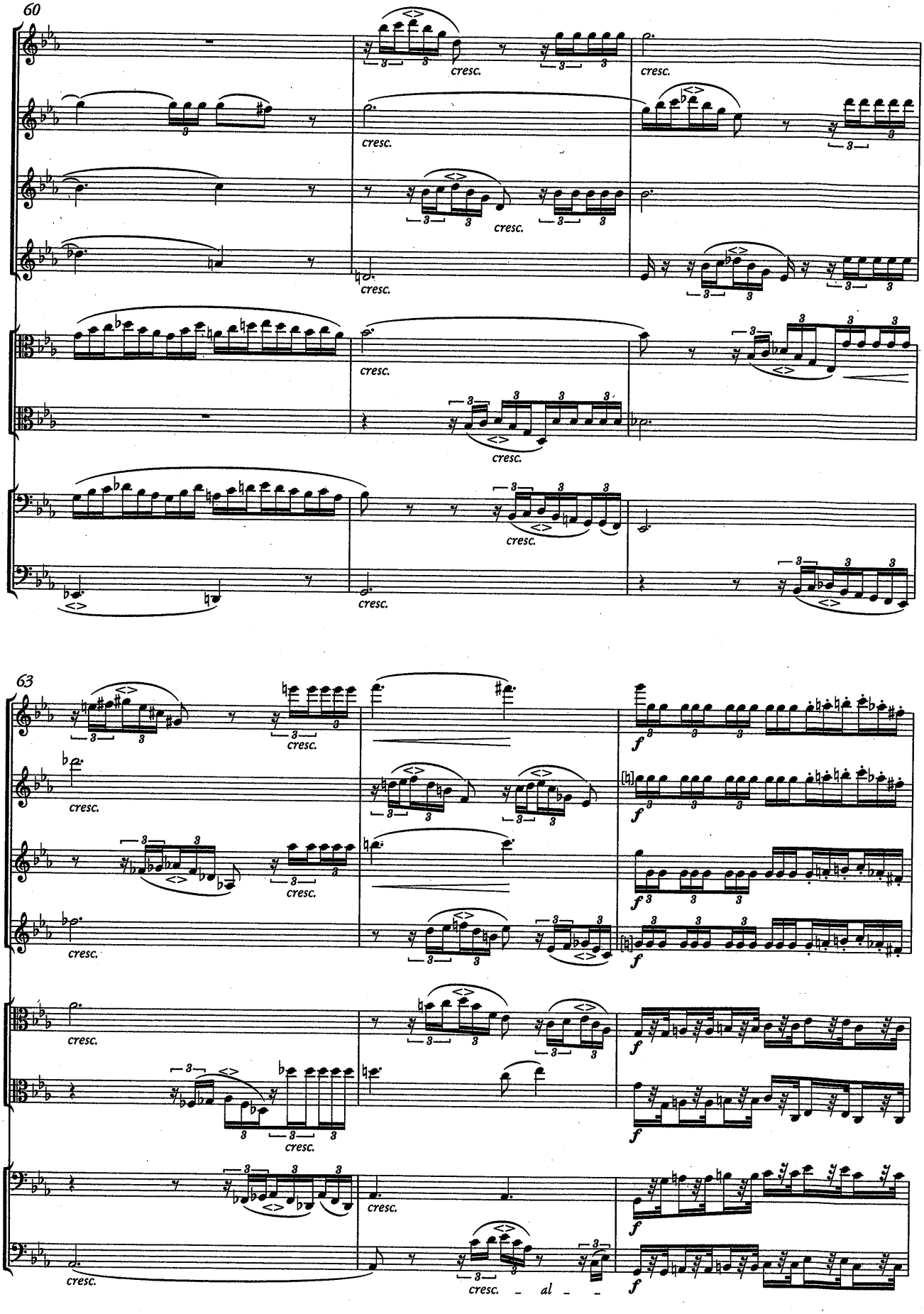
ff
ff

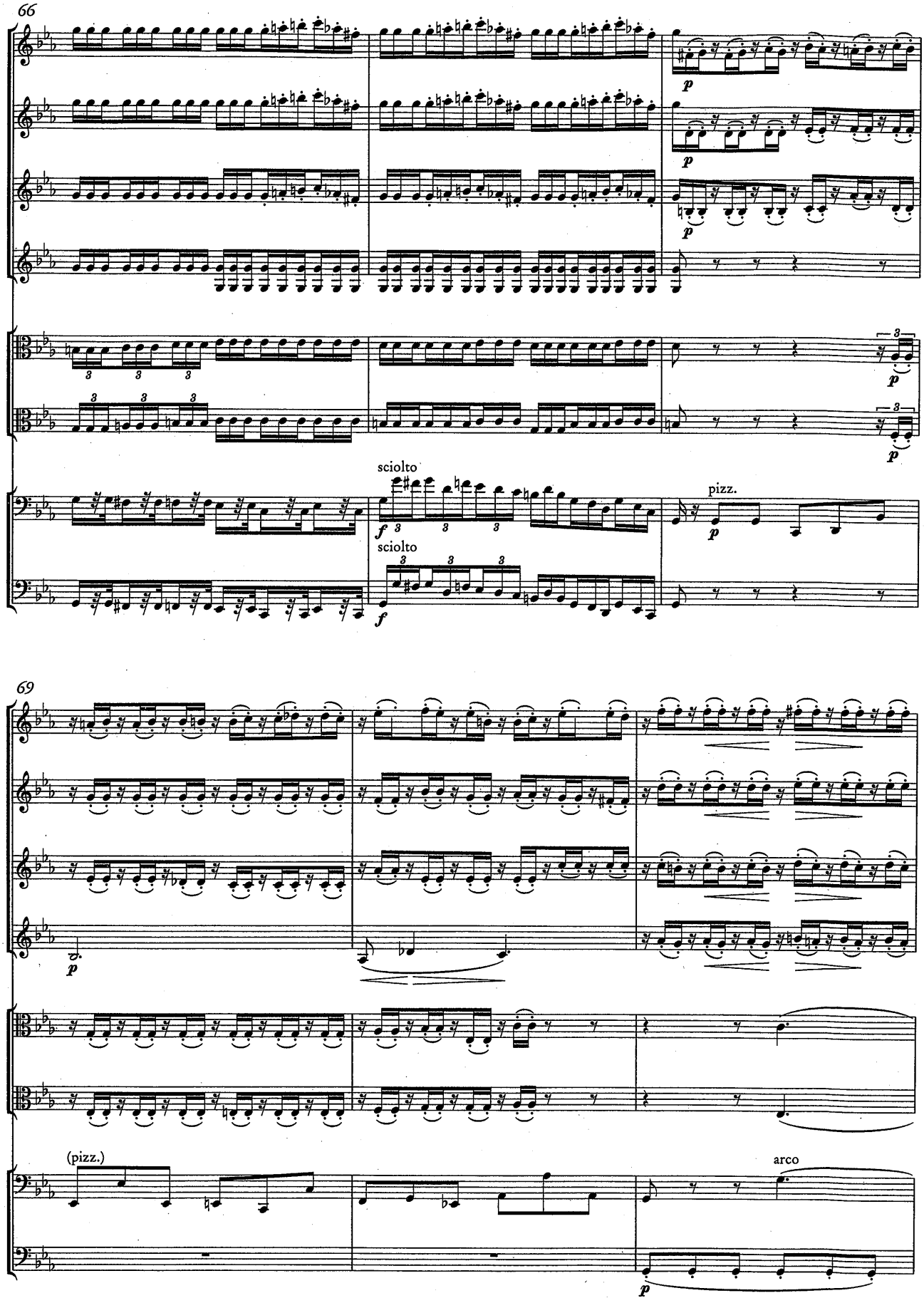

29
pp
sempre pp
32
p

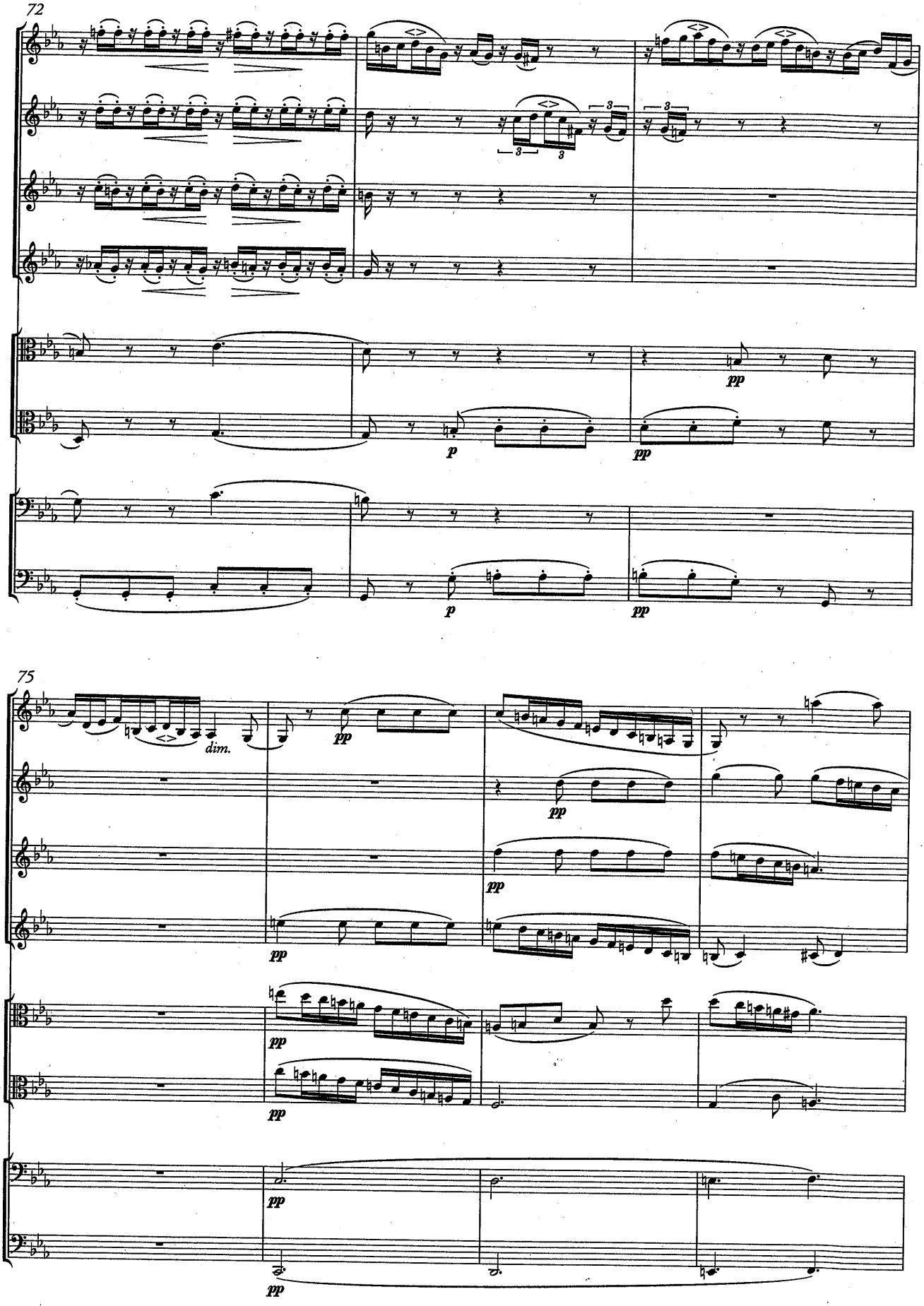

35
cresc.
al
f
f cresc.
38
ff
dim.
p
pp

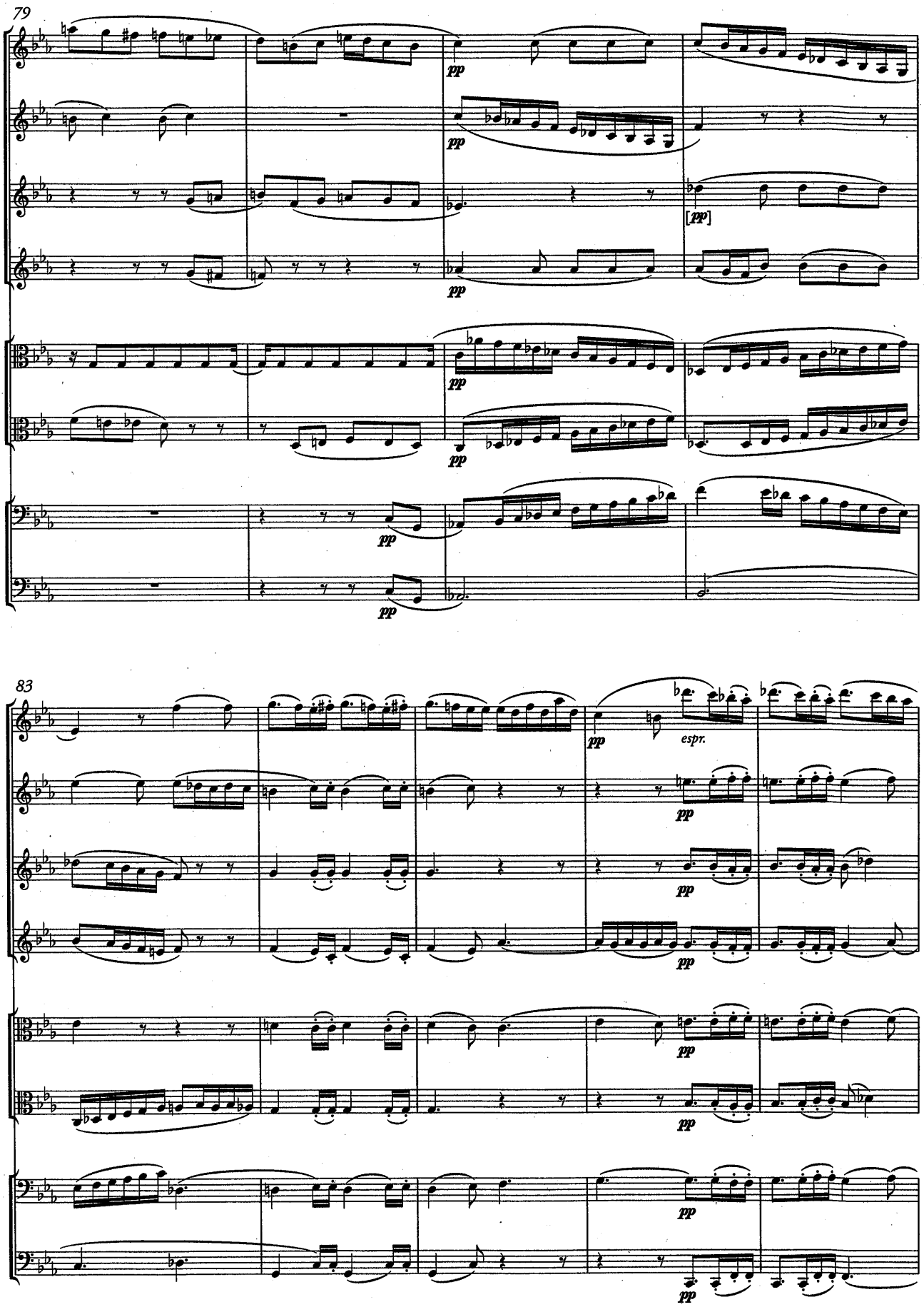

43
pp
pp
48
pp espr.
pp

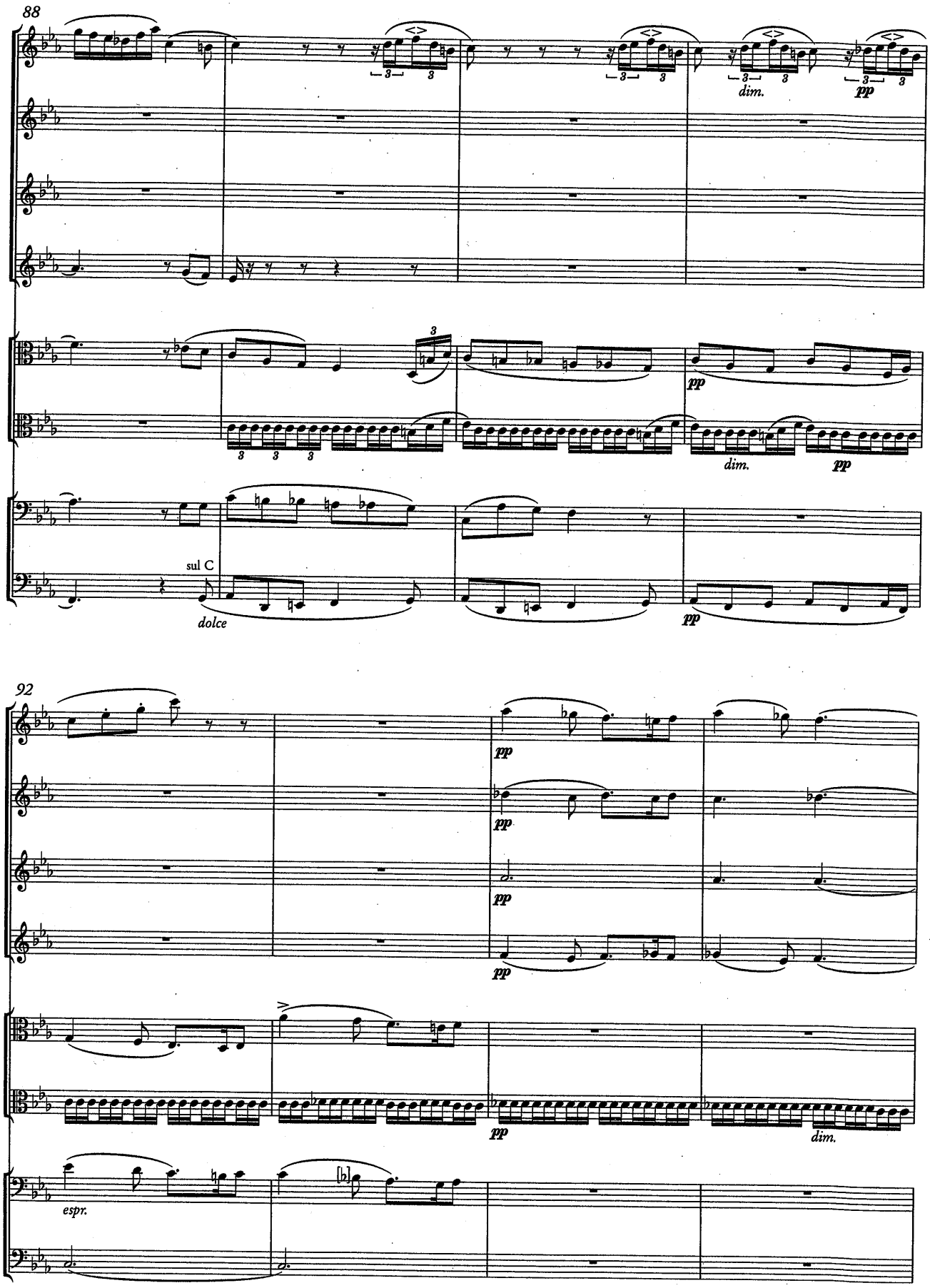

53
pp
pp cresc.
dolce
57
cresc.
dolce

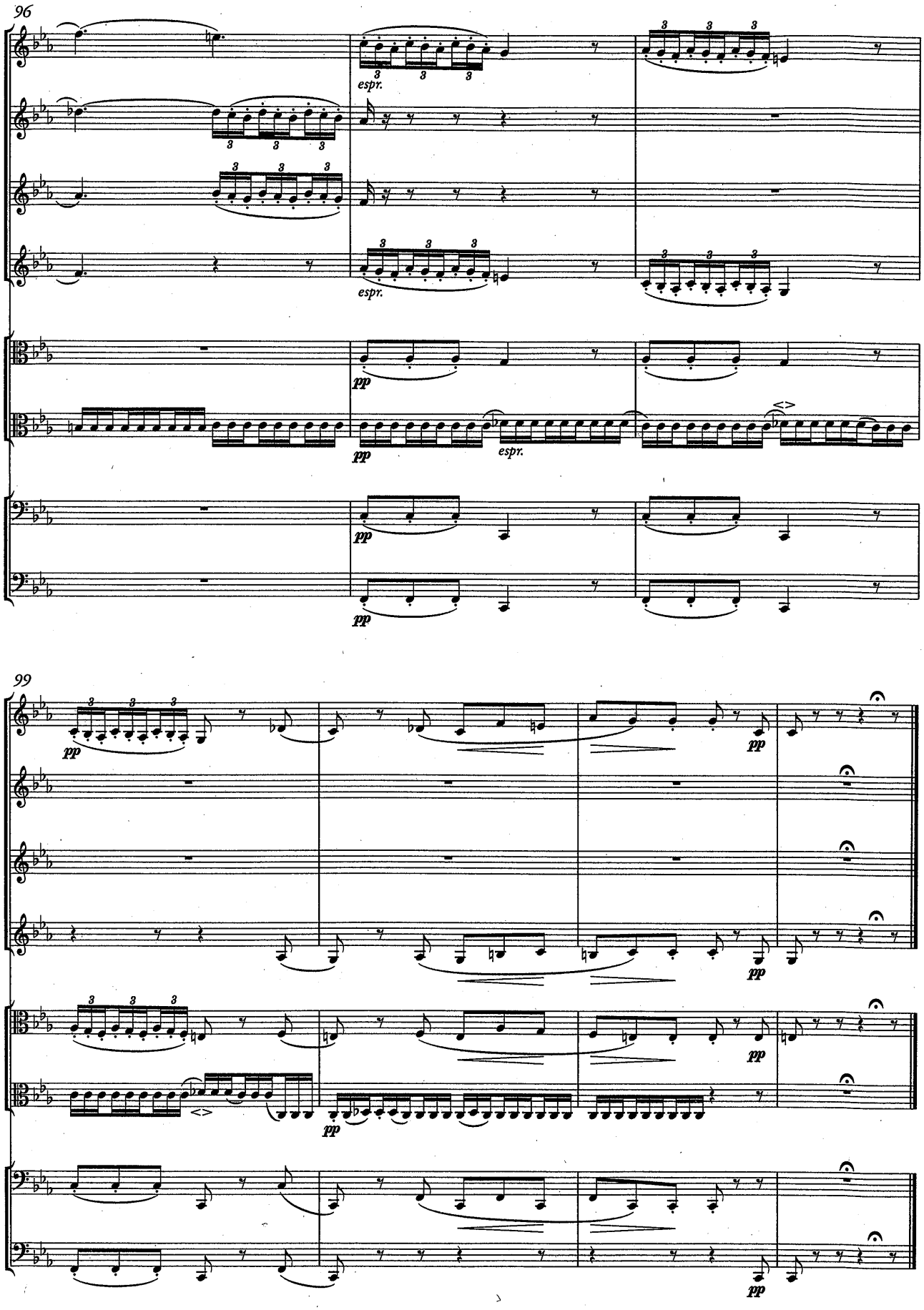

60
cresc.
63
f
cresc.
- al -


66
sciolto
sciolto
pizz.
69
(pizz.)
arco


72
p
pp
75
dim.
pp


79
pp
[pp]
83
espr.

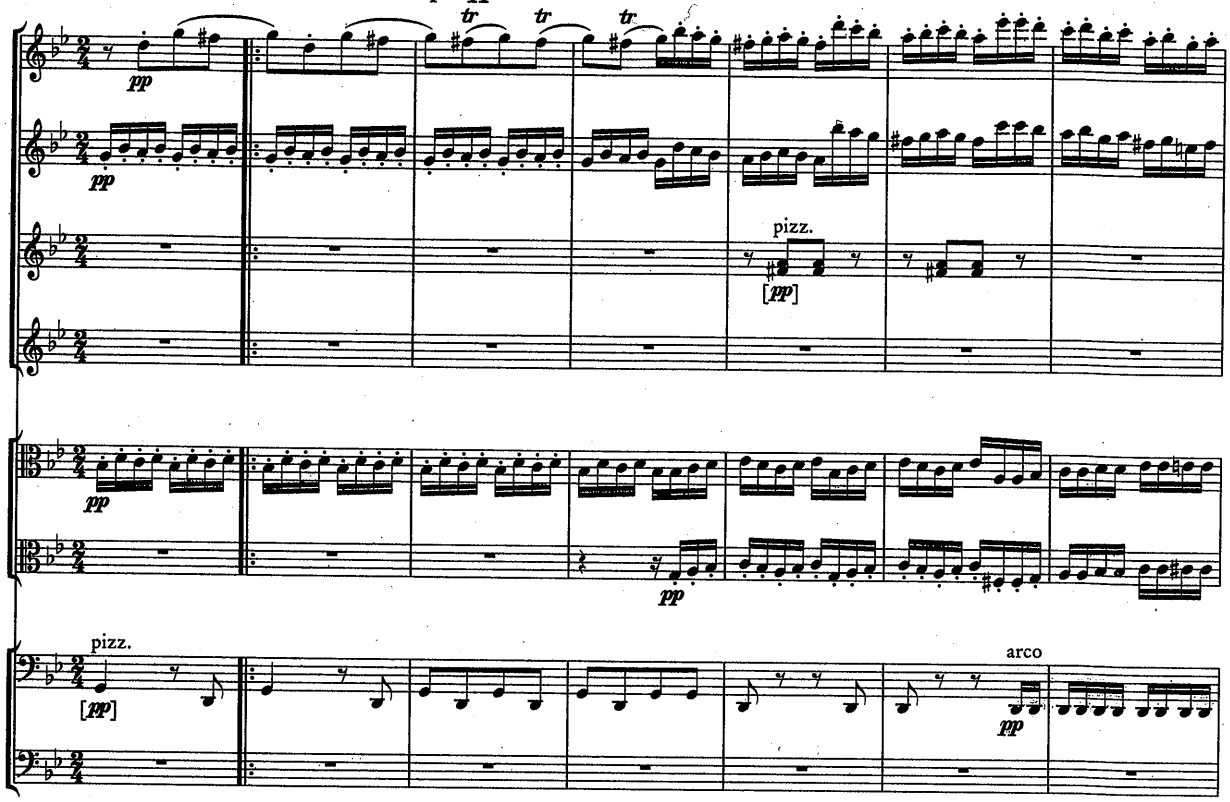

88
dim.
pp
sul C
dolce
92
espr.

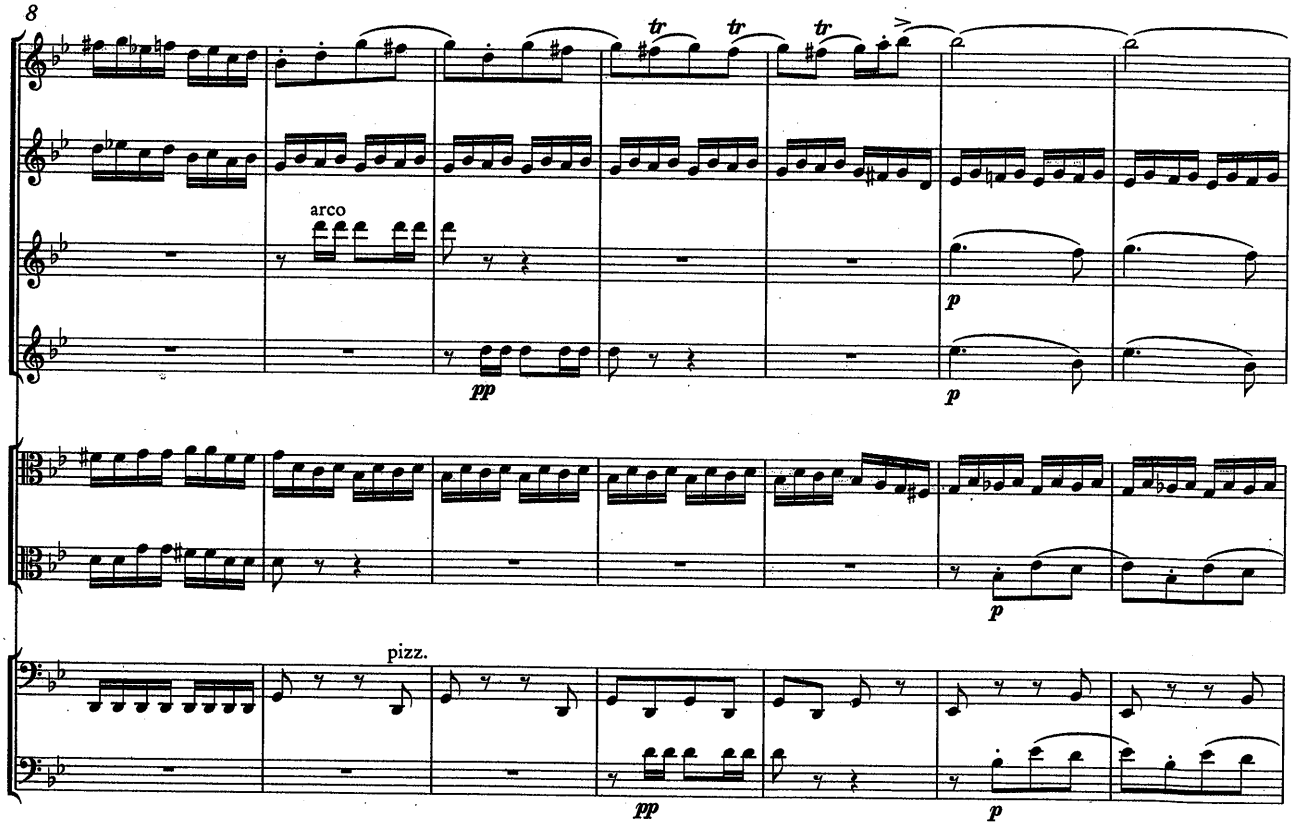

96
espr.
espr.
pp
pp
espr.
pp
pp
99
pp
pp
pp
pp
pp

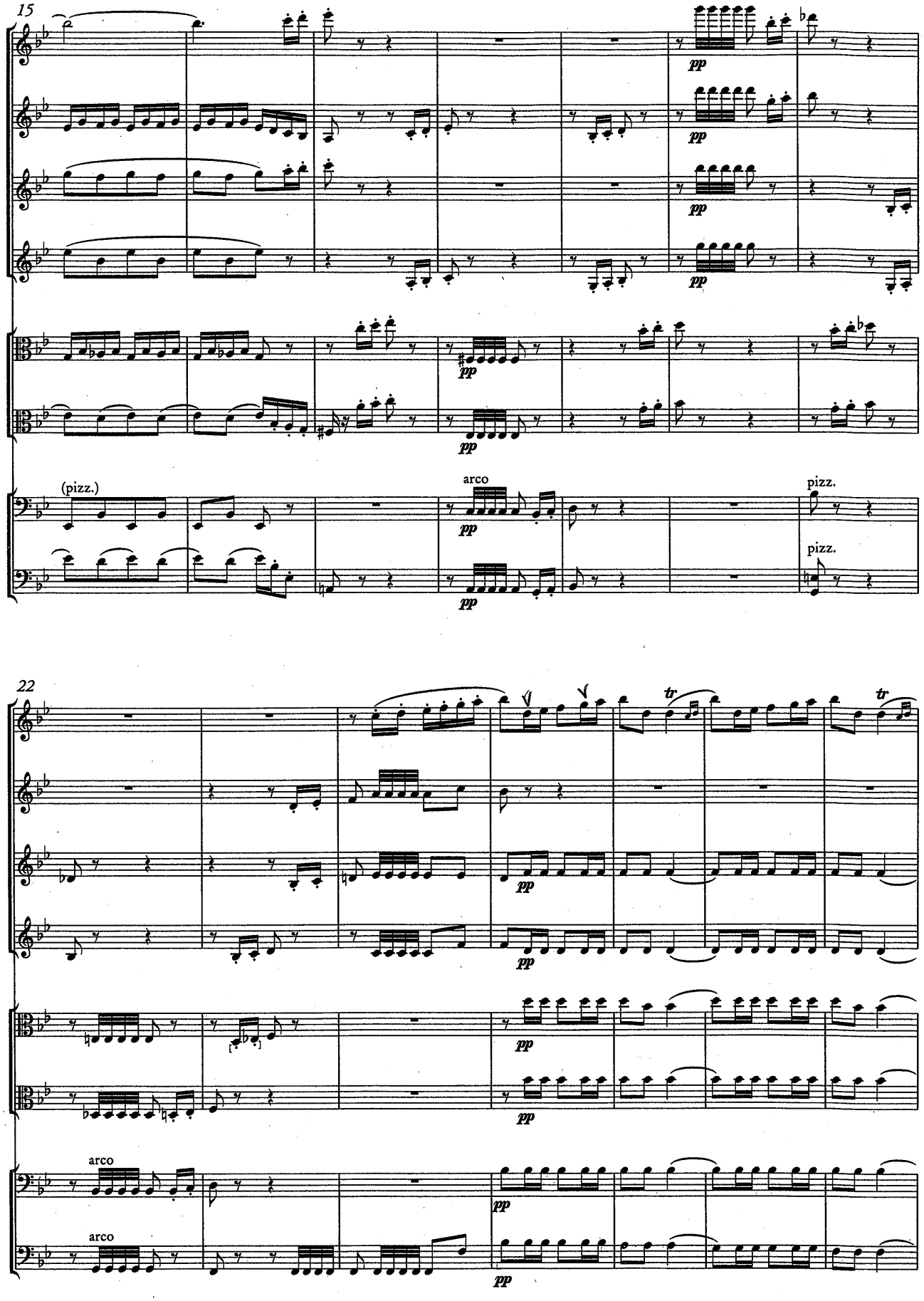
Scherzo

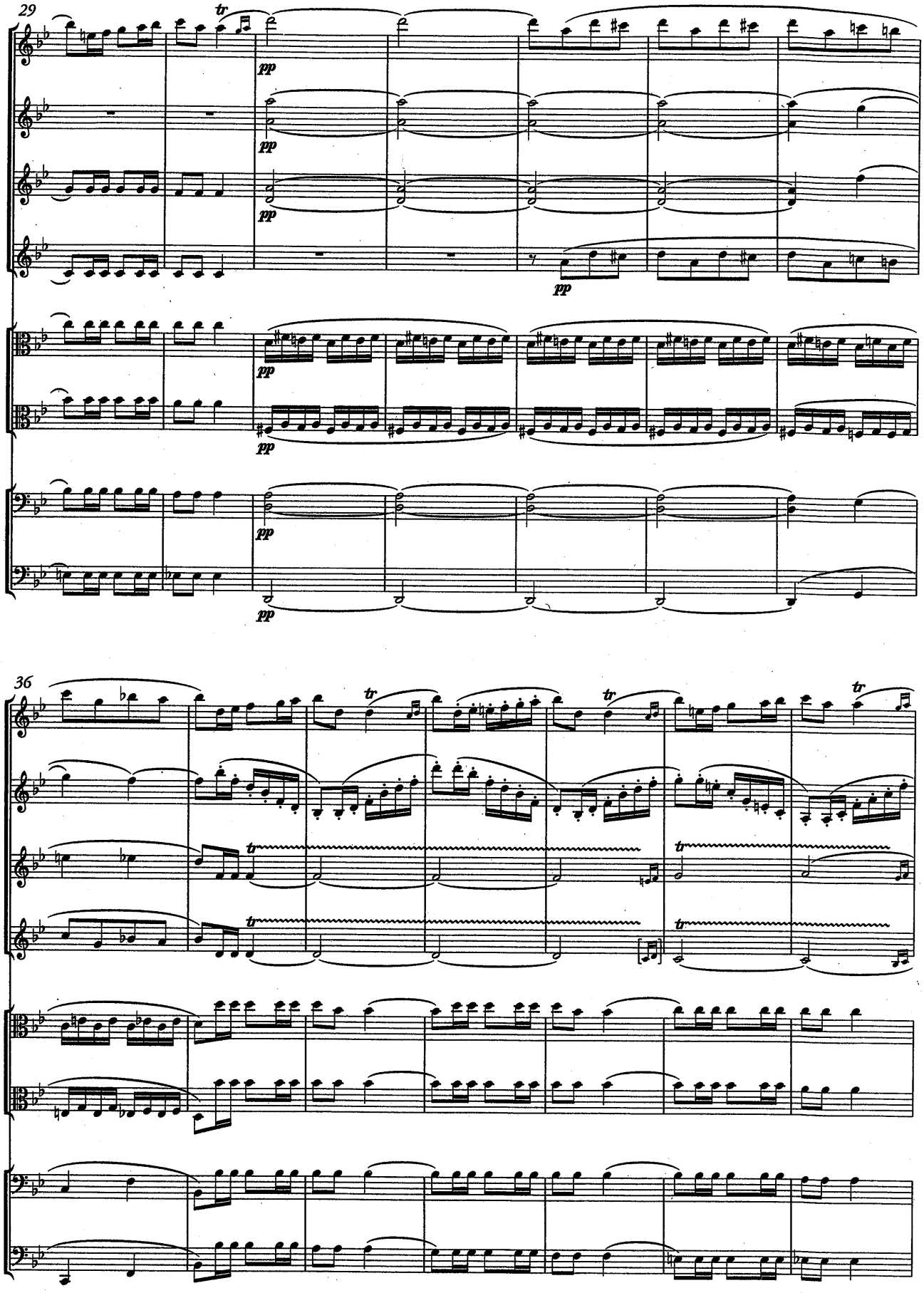
Allegro leggierissimo

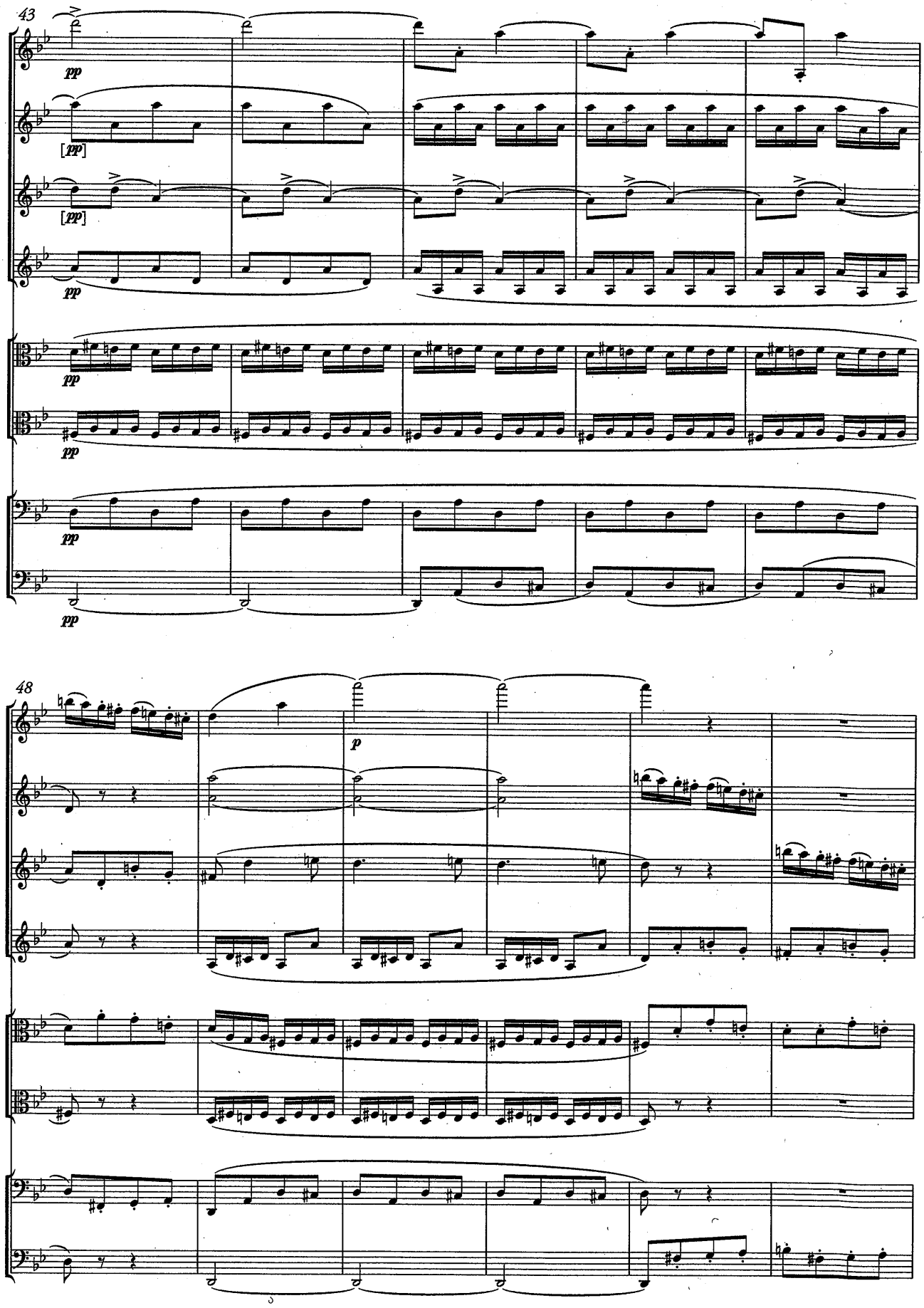
Si deve suonare questo Scherzo sempre *pp* e staccato

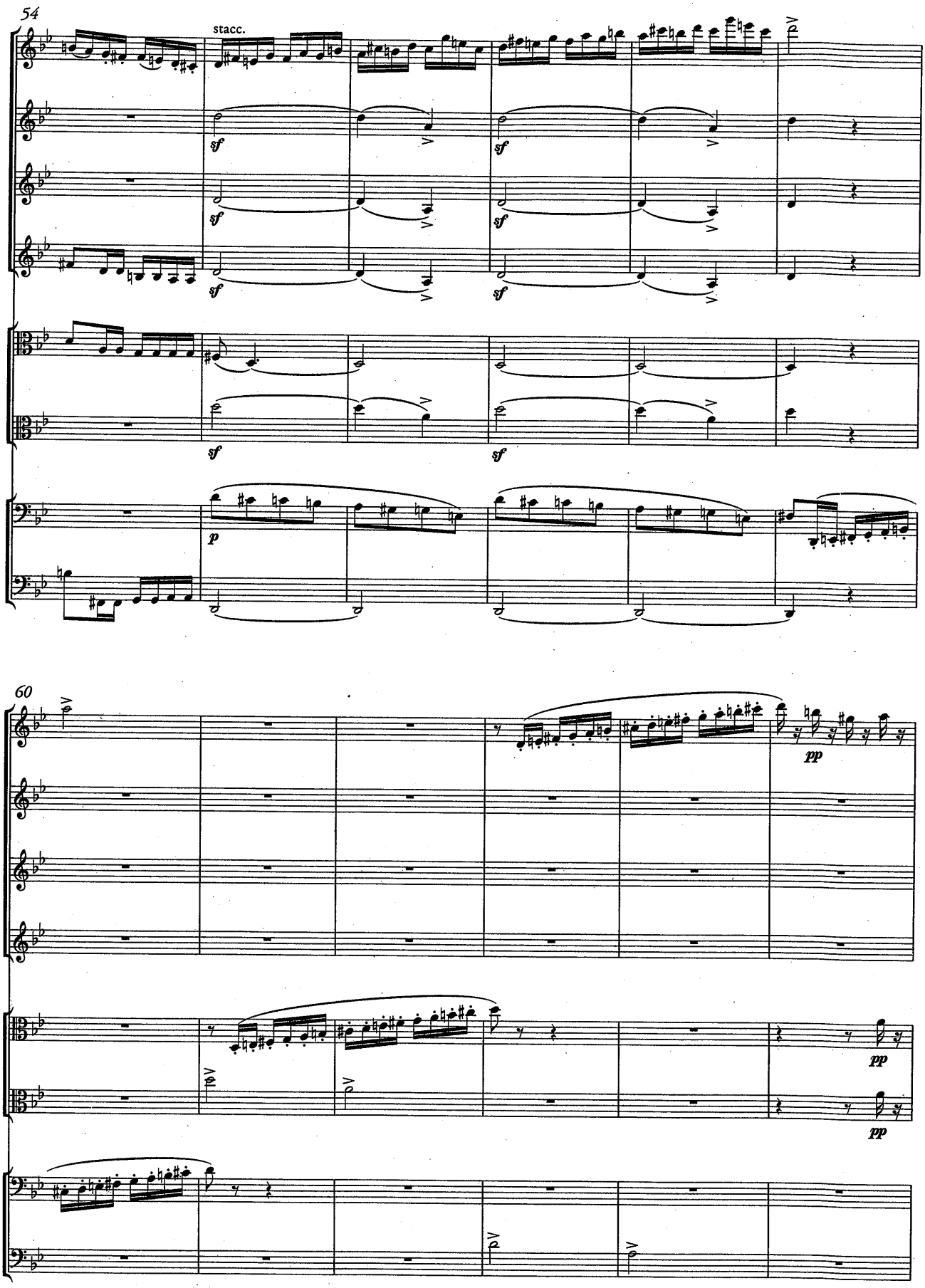





15
(pizz.)
arco
pizz.
pizz.
22
arco
arco


29
tr
pp
36
tr


43
pp
[pp]
[pp]
pp
pp
pp
pp
48
p


54
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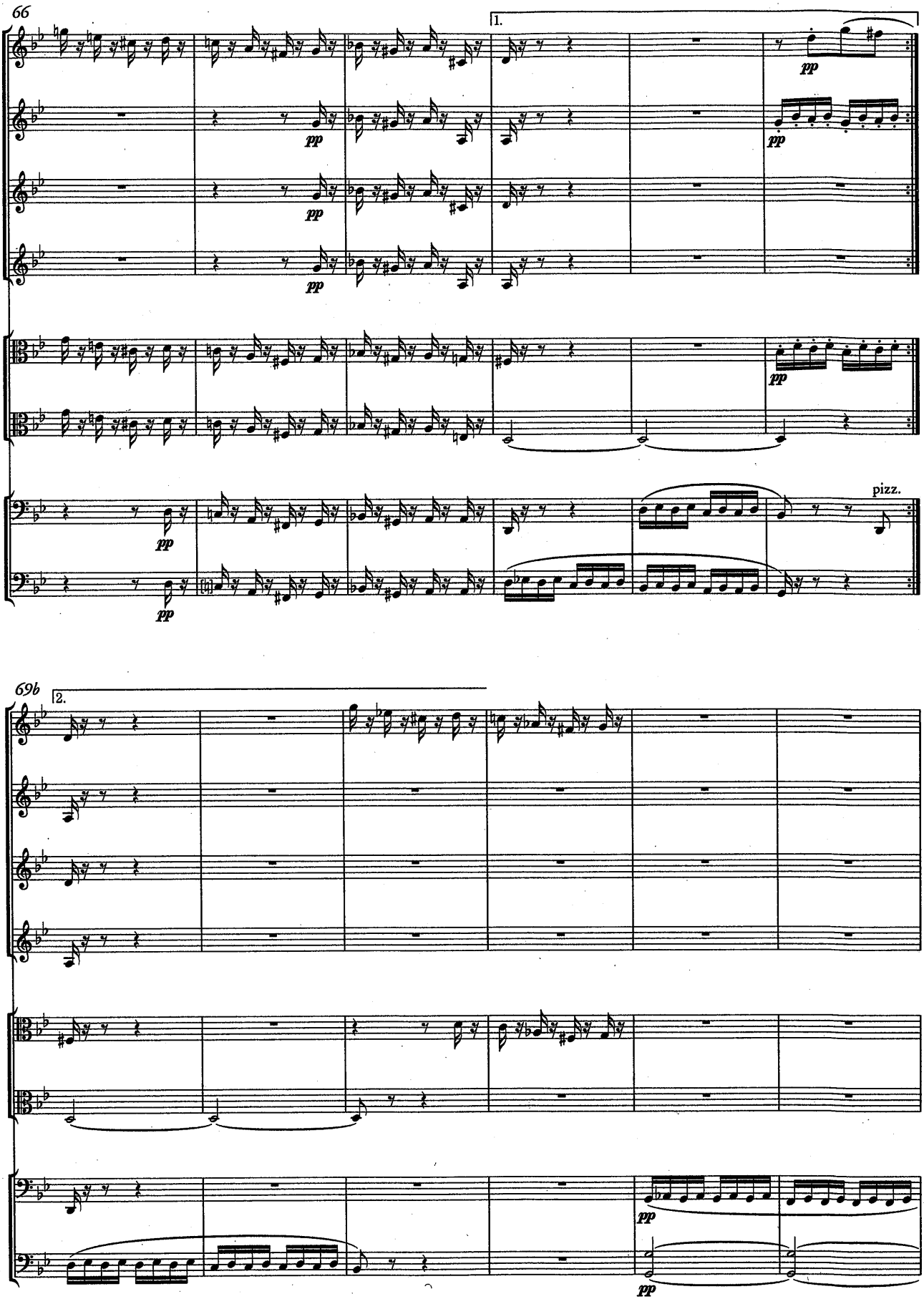
sf
p
60
pp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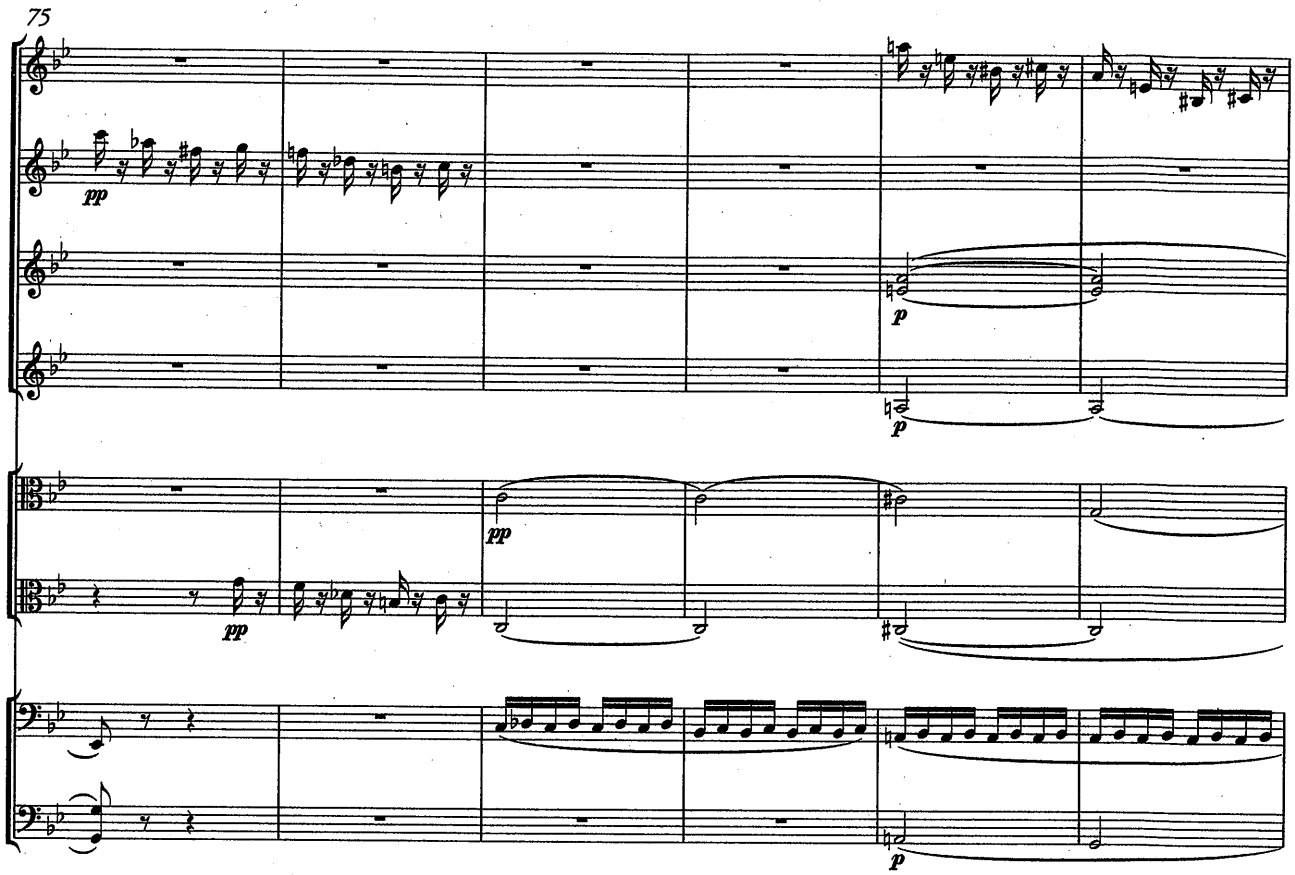
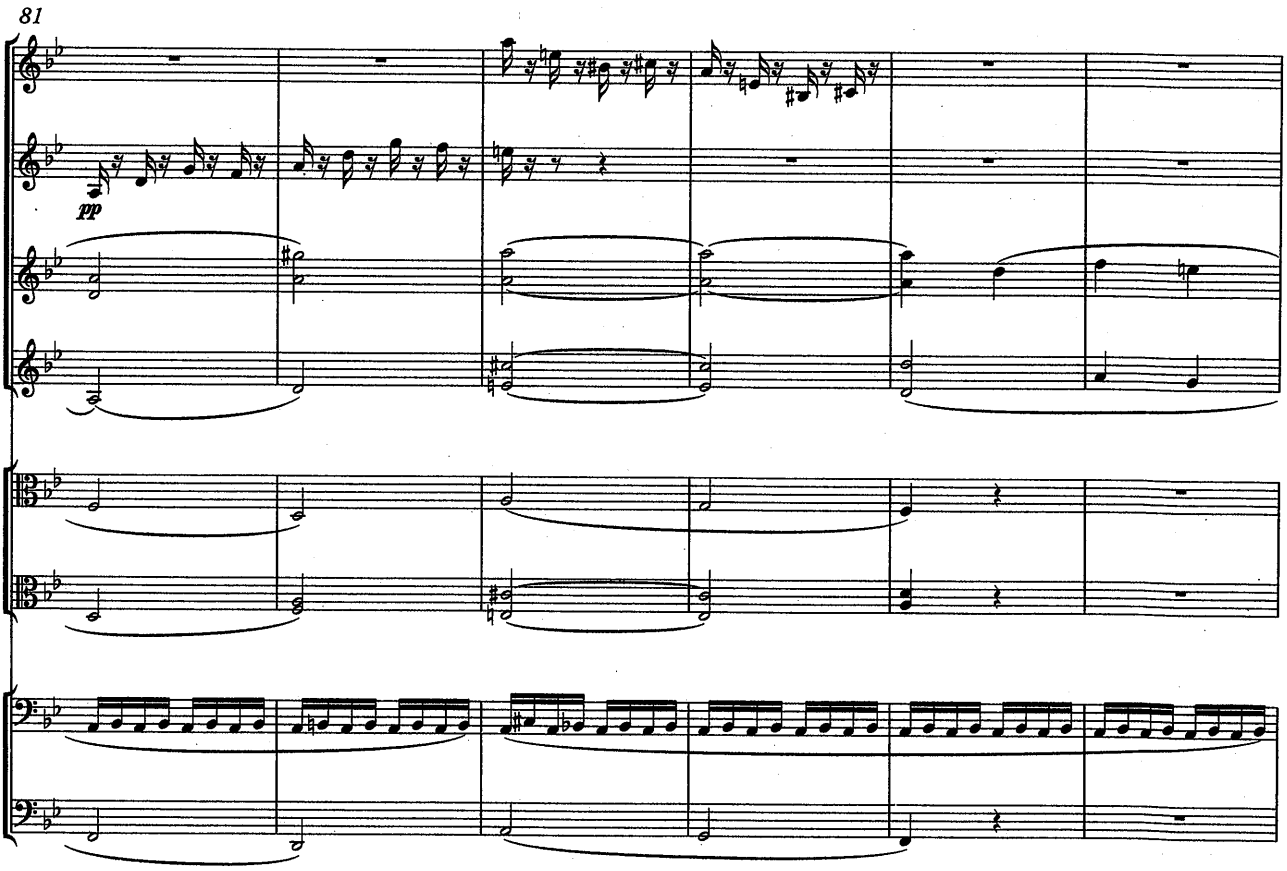
69b
2.


75
pp
p
pp
p


81
pp

87

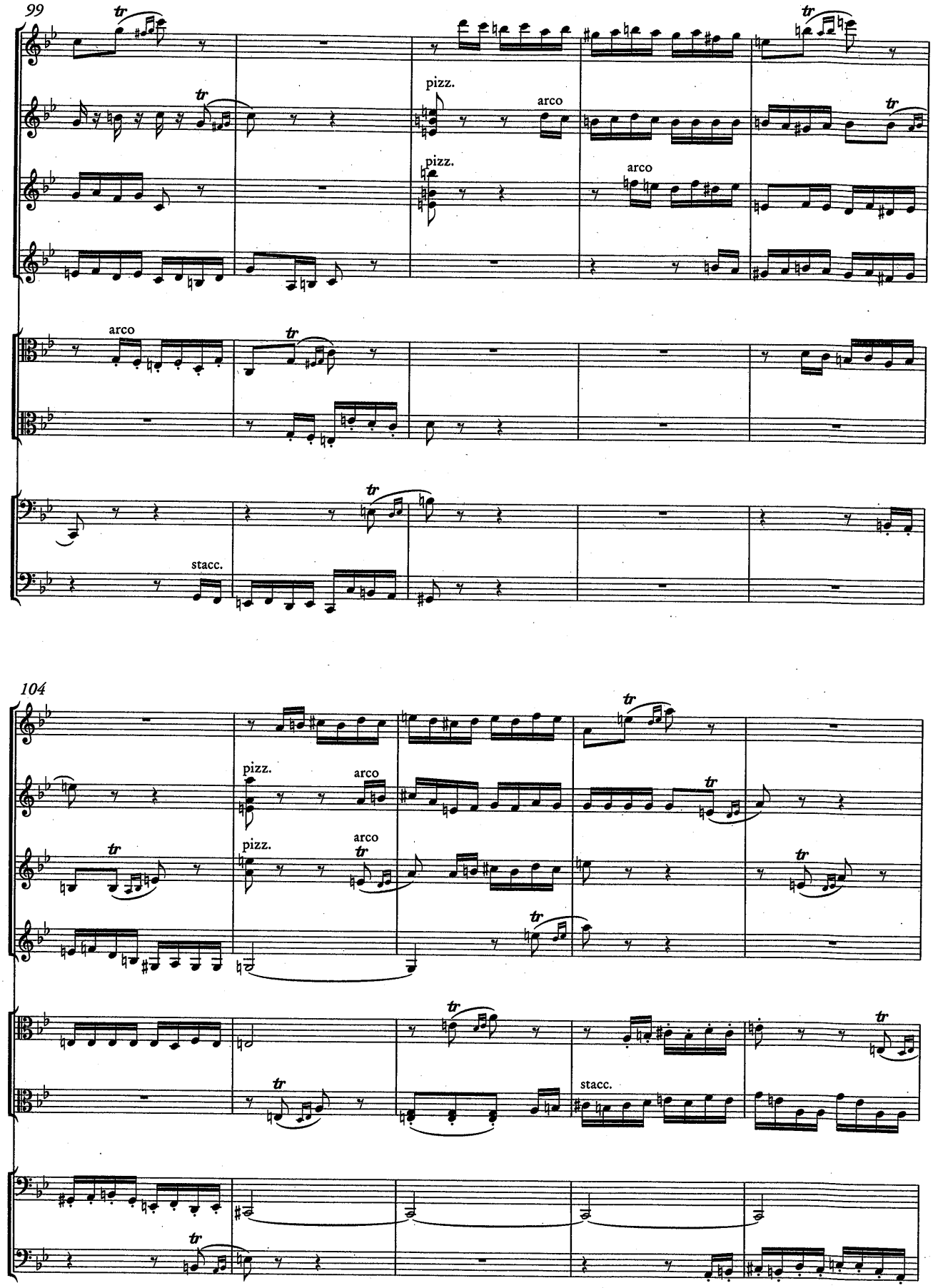
93

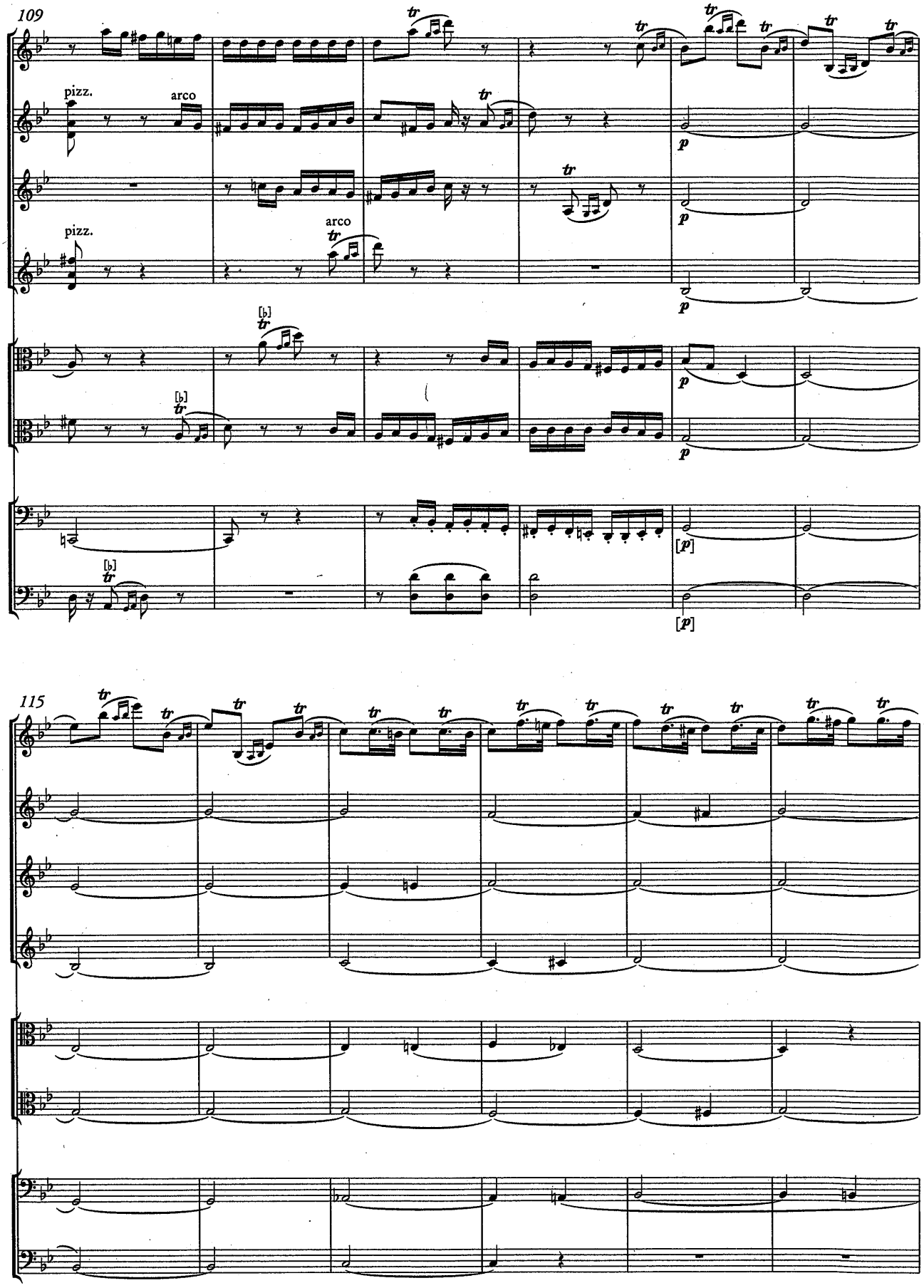
stacc.

tr

pizz.

arco


99
tr
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
arco
tr
tr
stacc.
104
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
tr
tr
tr
tr
tr
stacc.
tr


109
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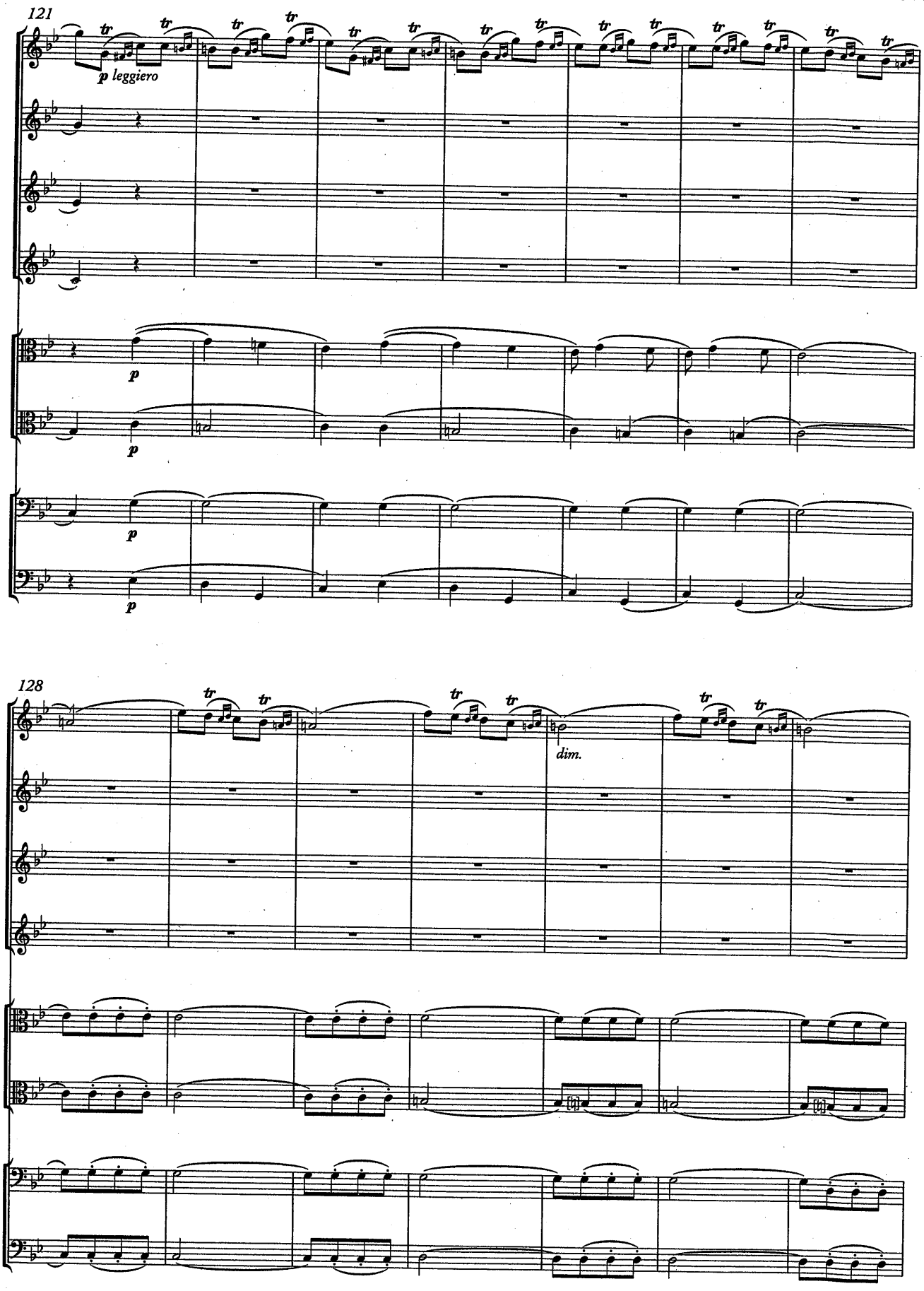
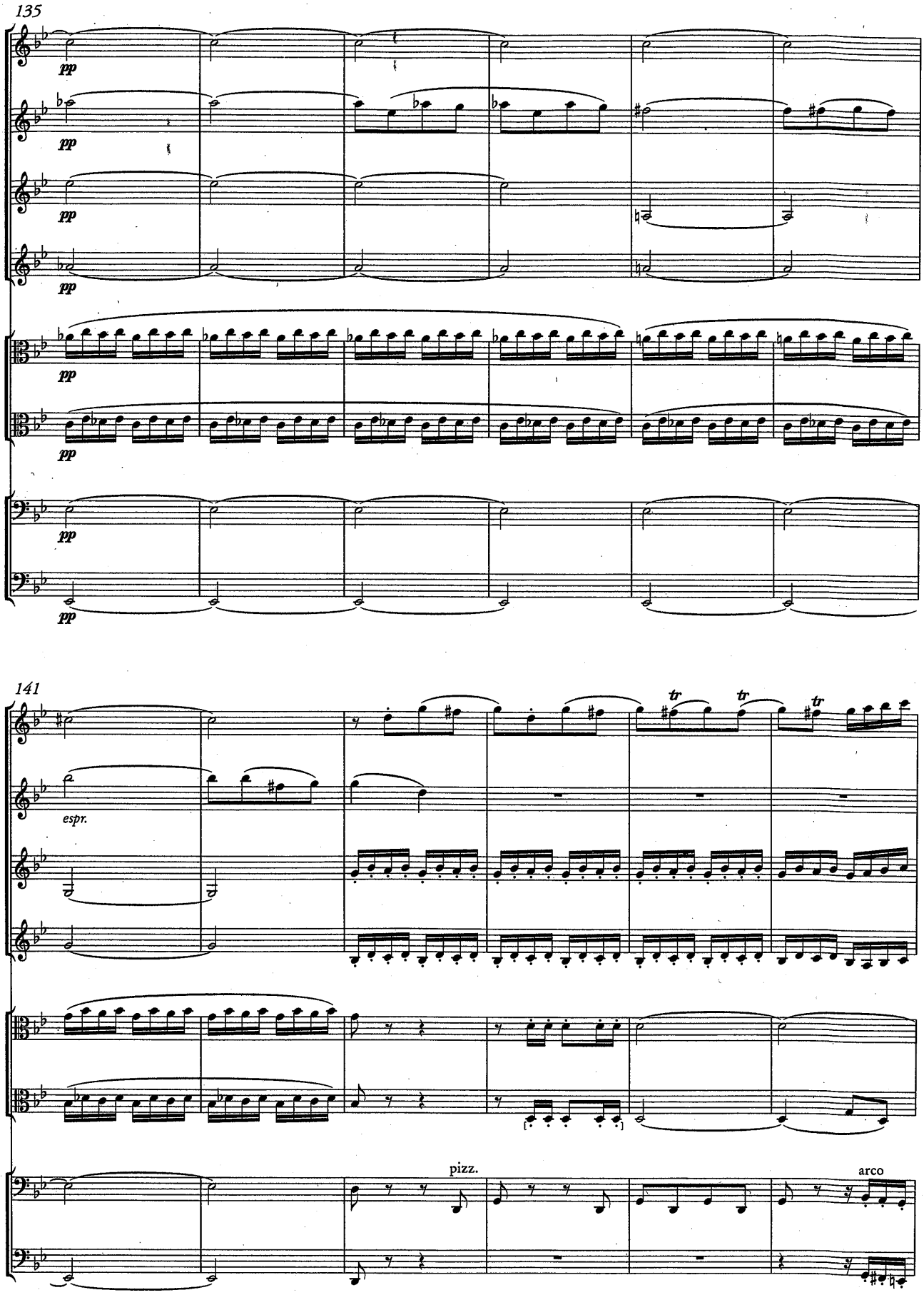
arco
pizz.
arco
115


121
p leggiero
p
p
p
p
128
dim.


135
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141
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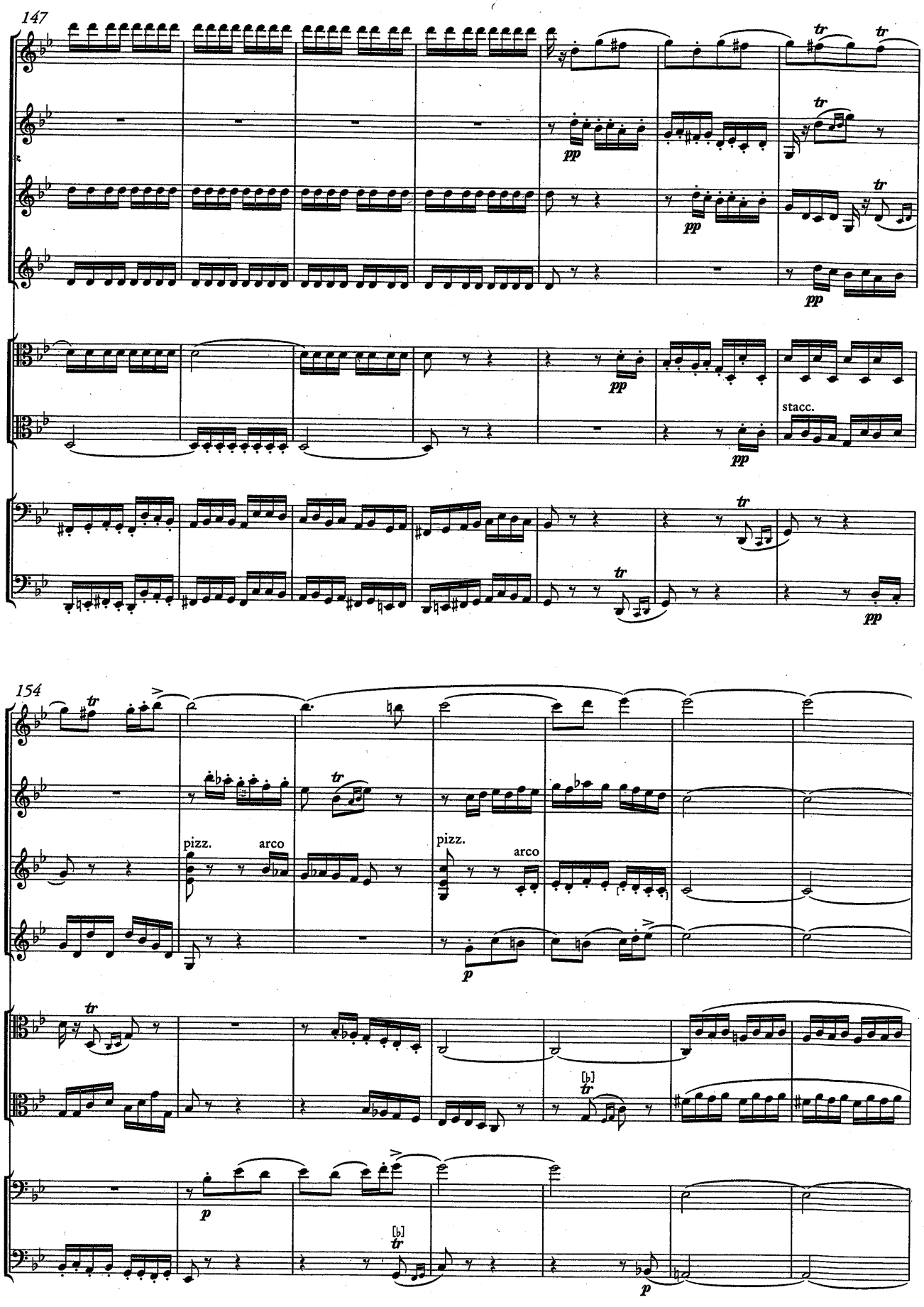
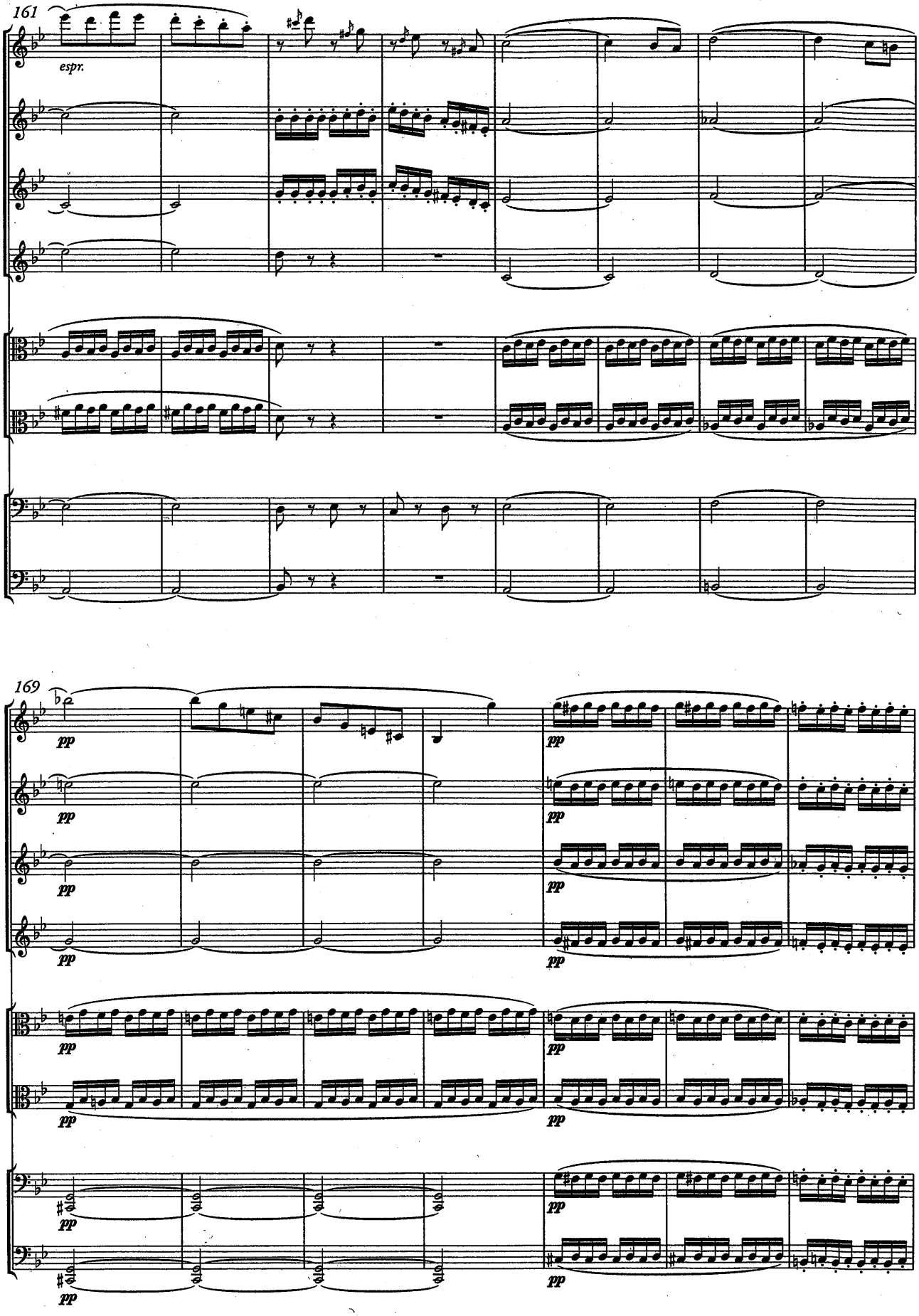
tr
pizz.
arco


147
tr
pp
stacc.
154
pizz.
arco
p


161
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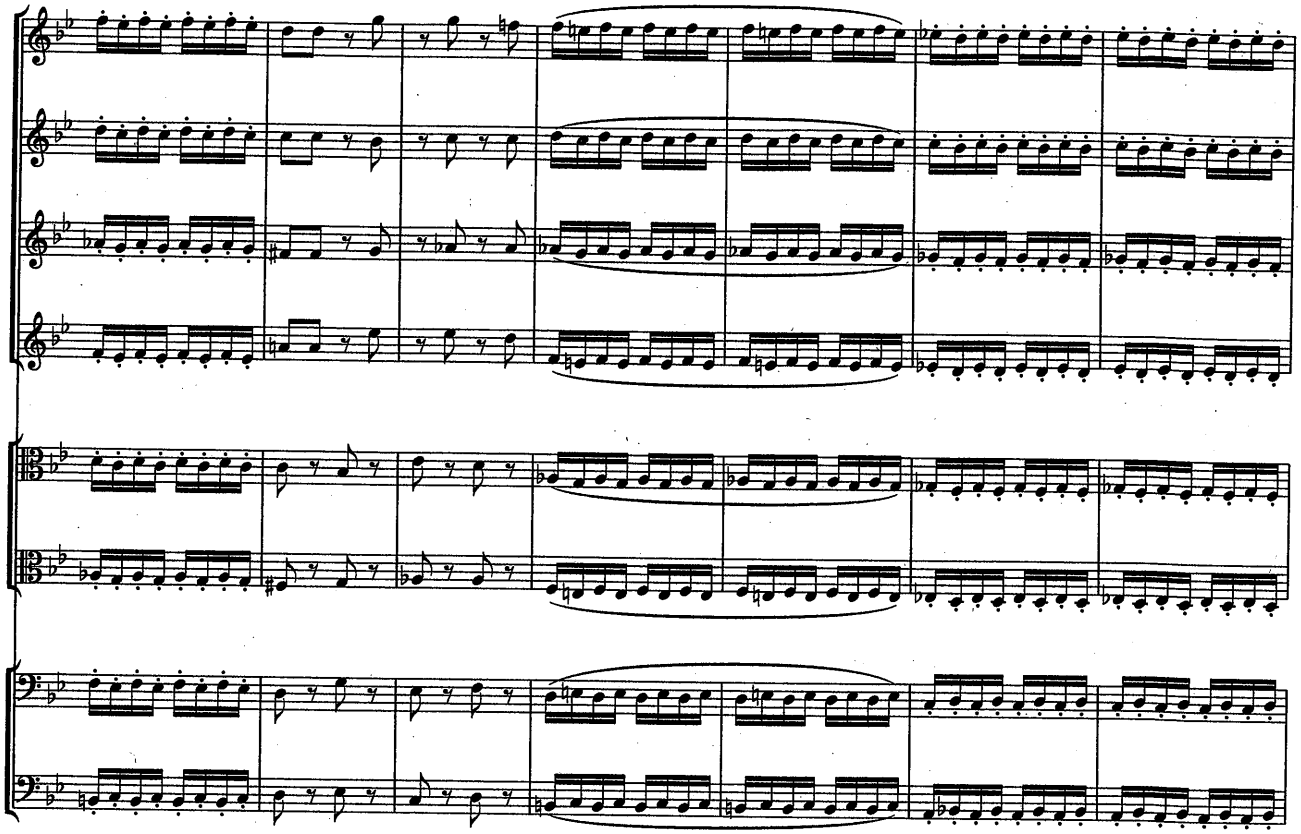
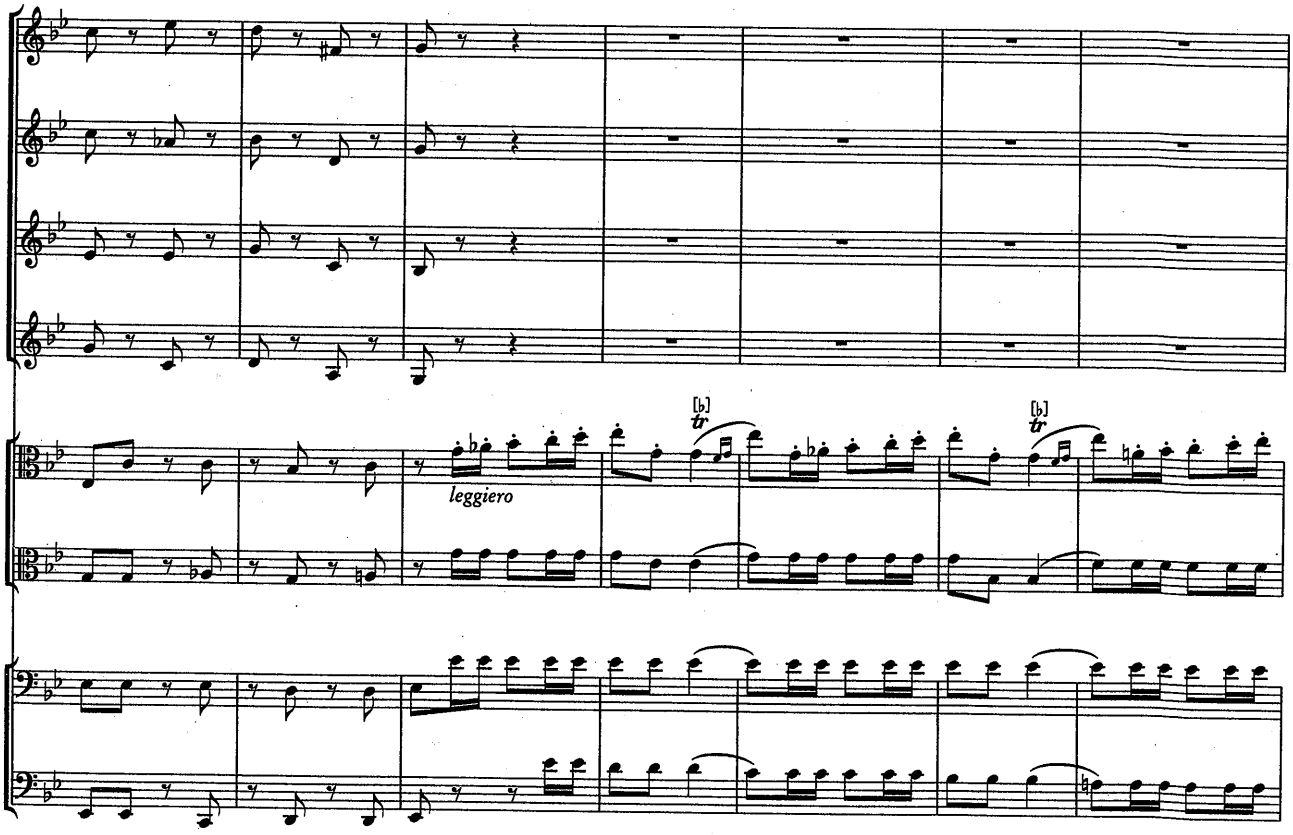
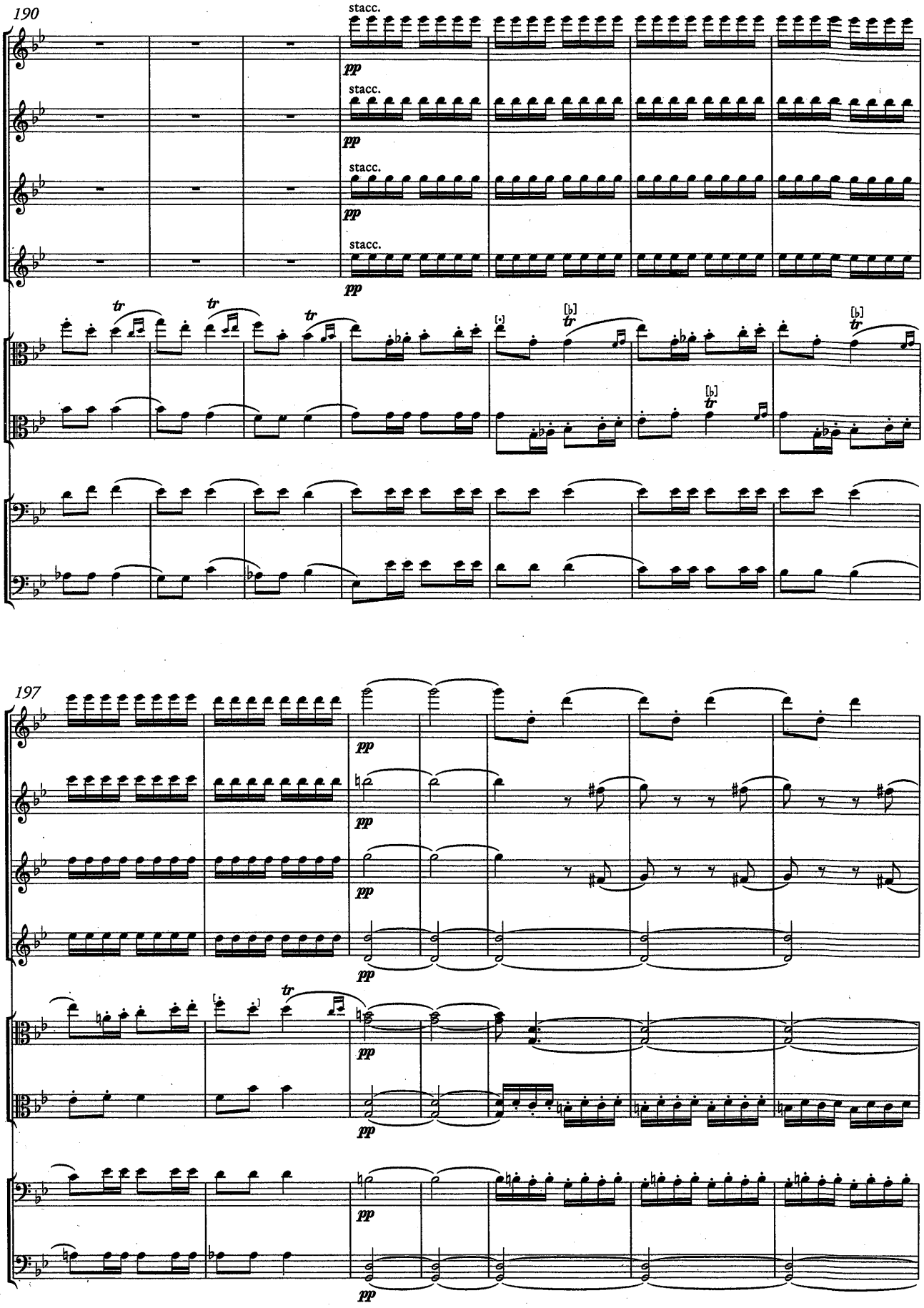
169
pp

176



183




190
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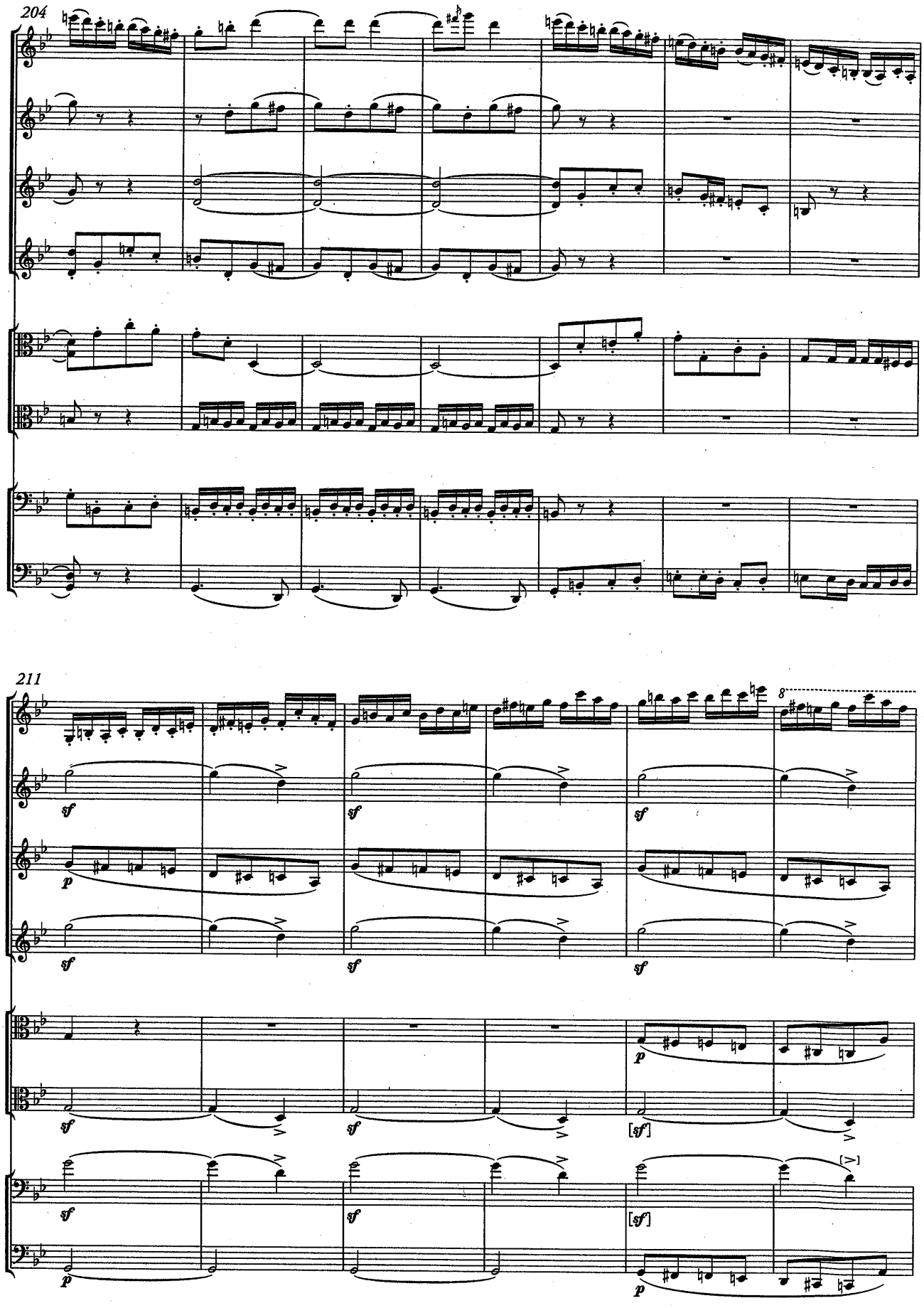
pp
197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211
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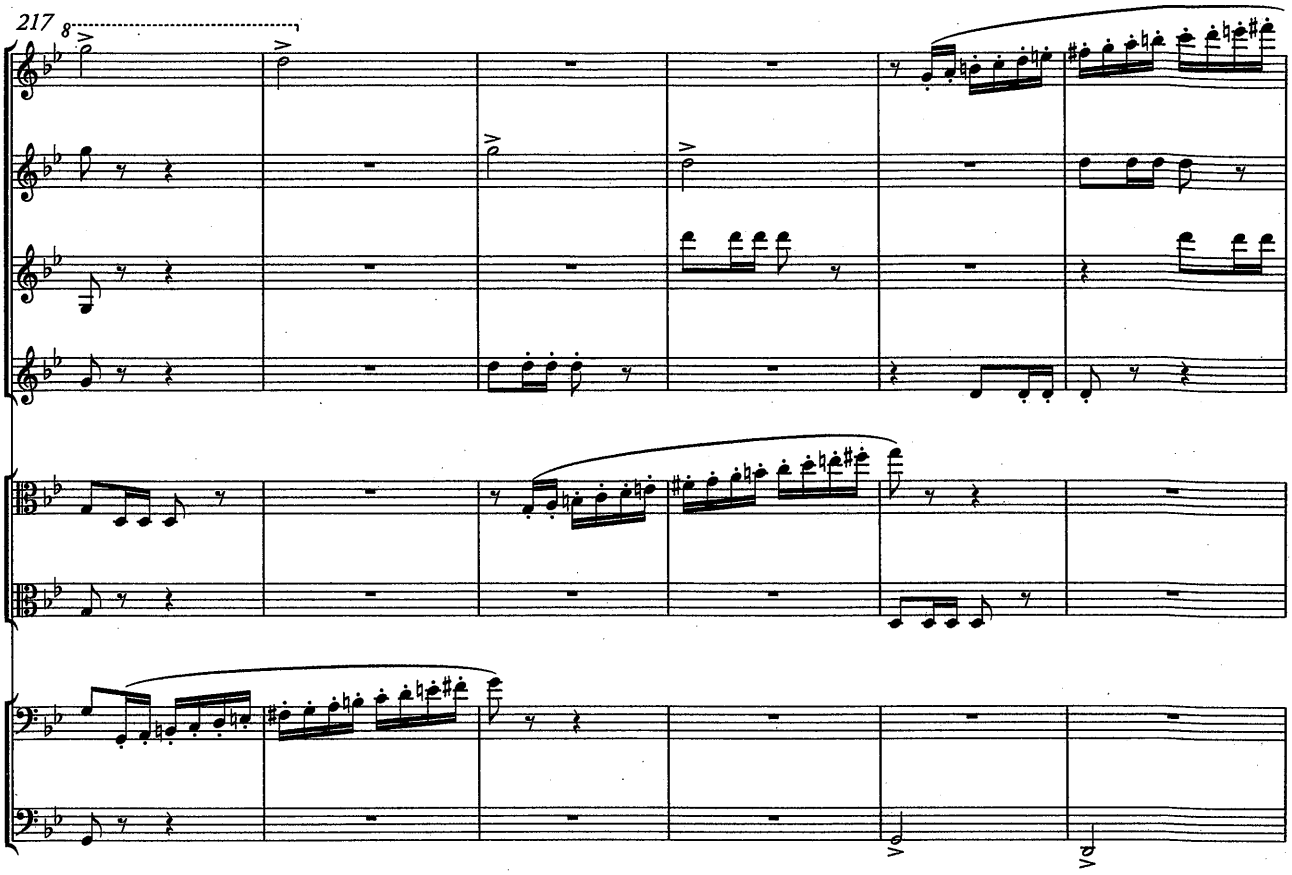
217
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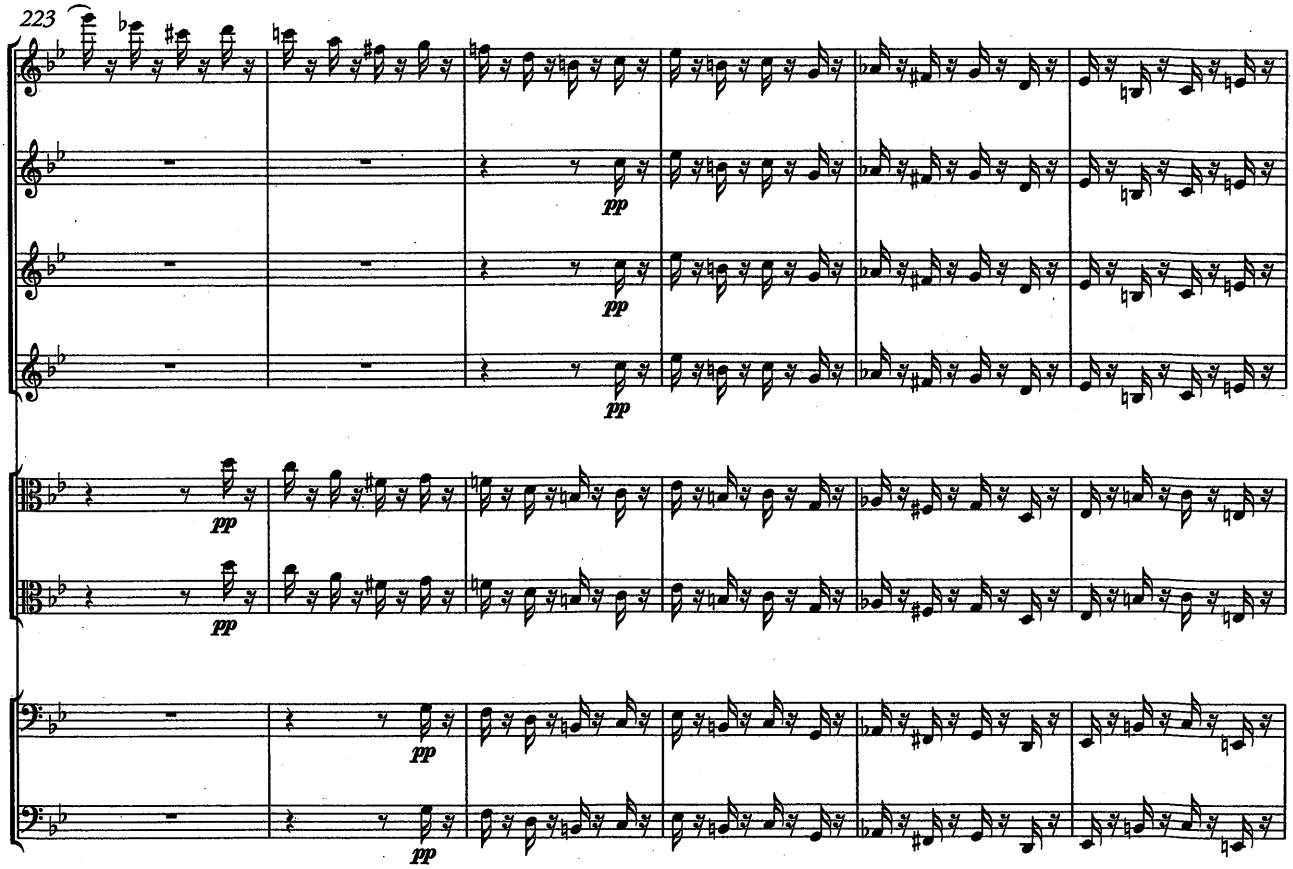
223
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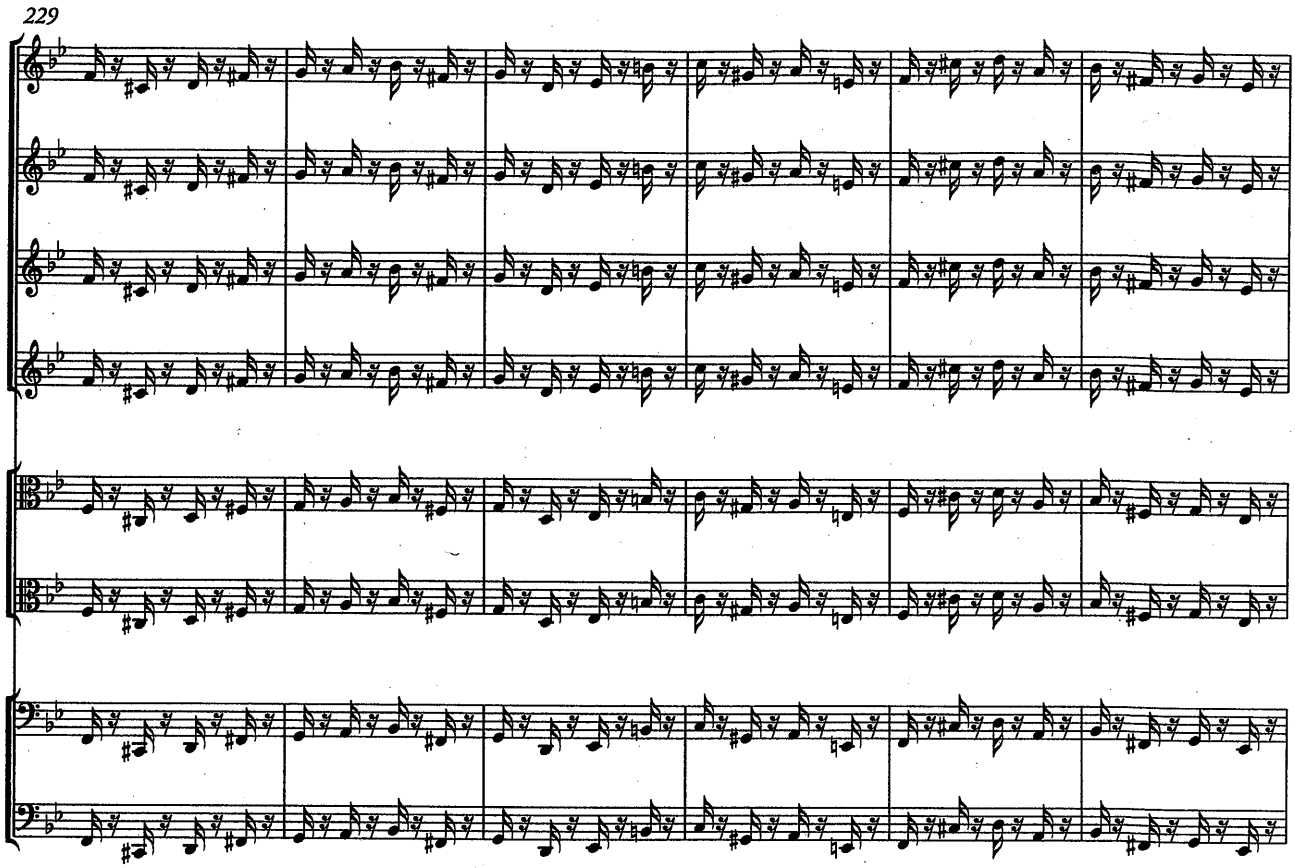
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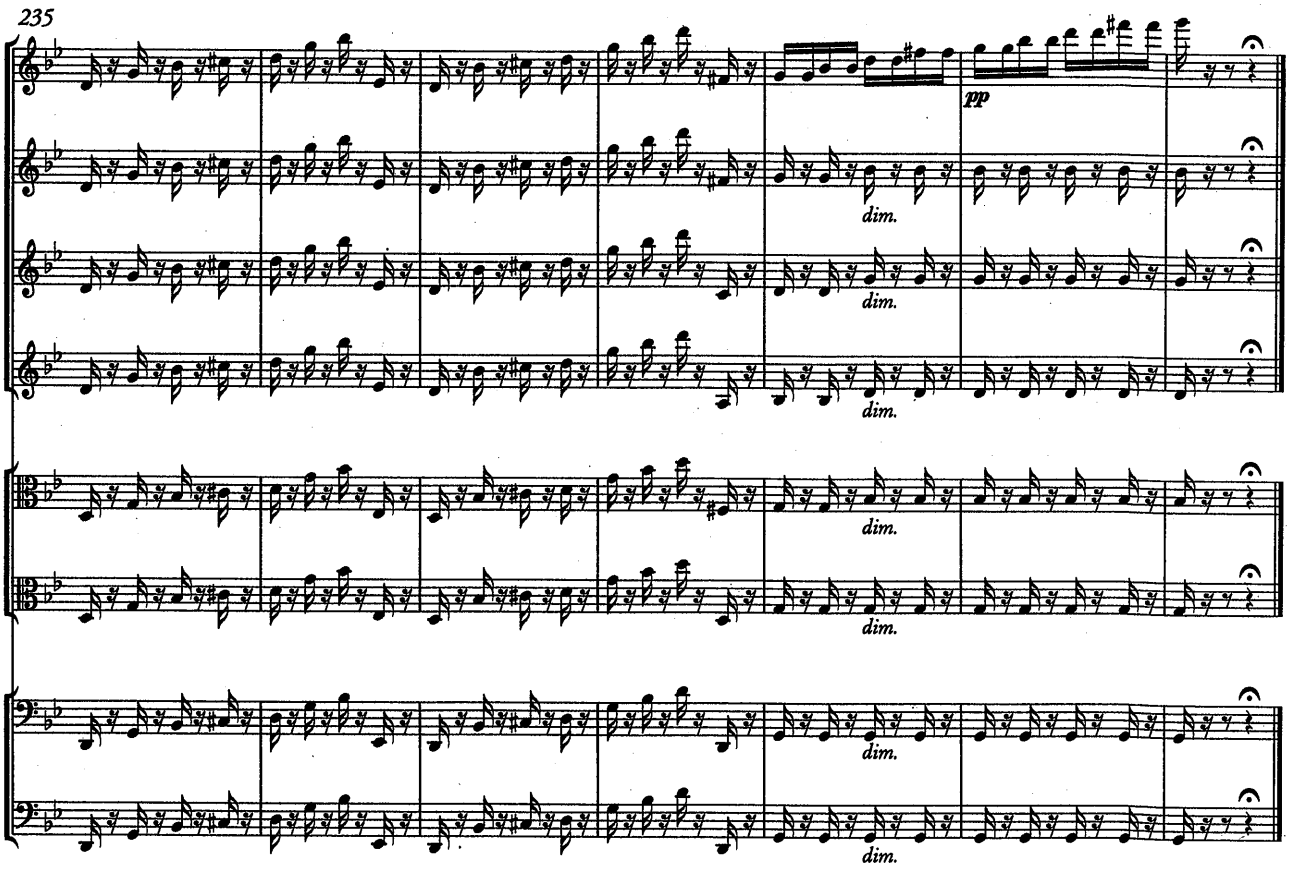
235
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dim.
dim.
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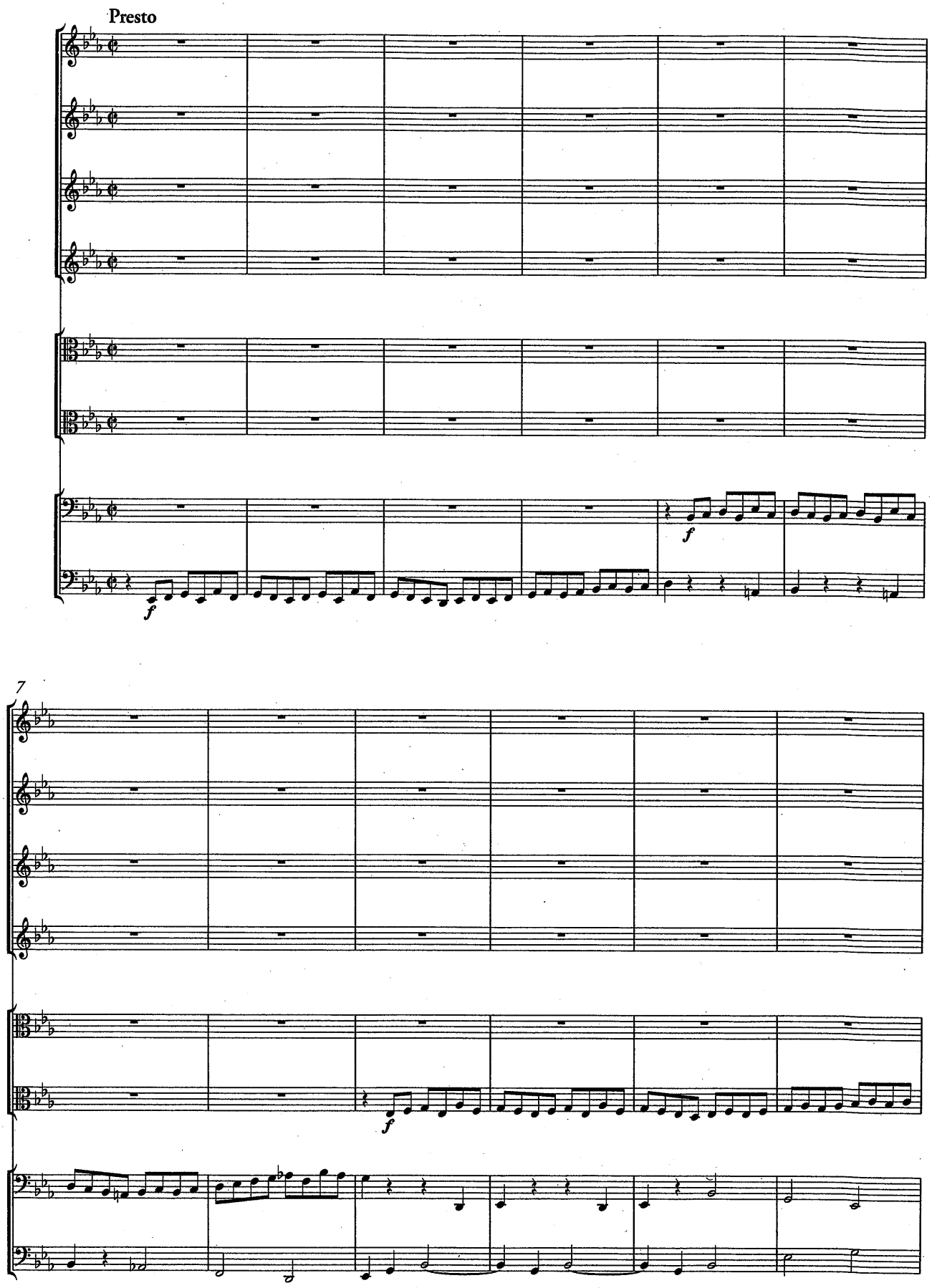
dim.


Presto
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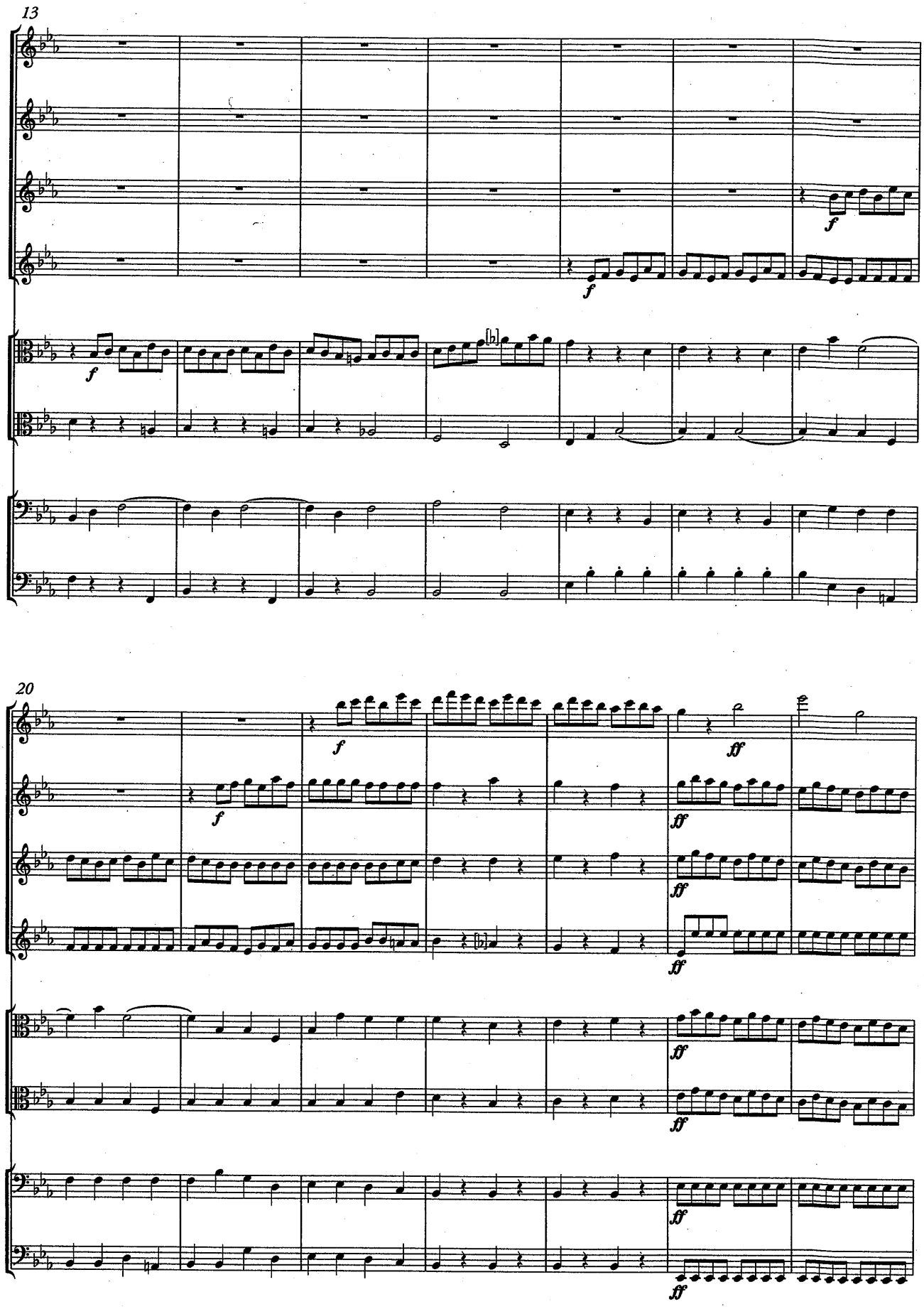
f
7
f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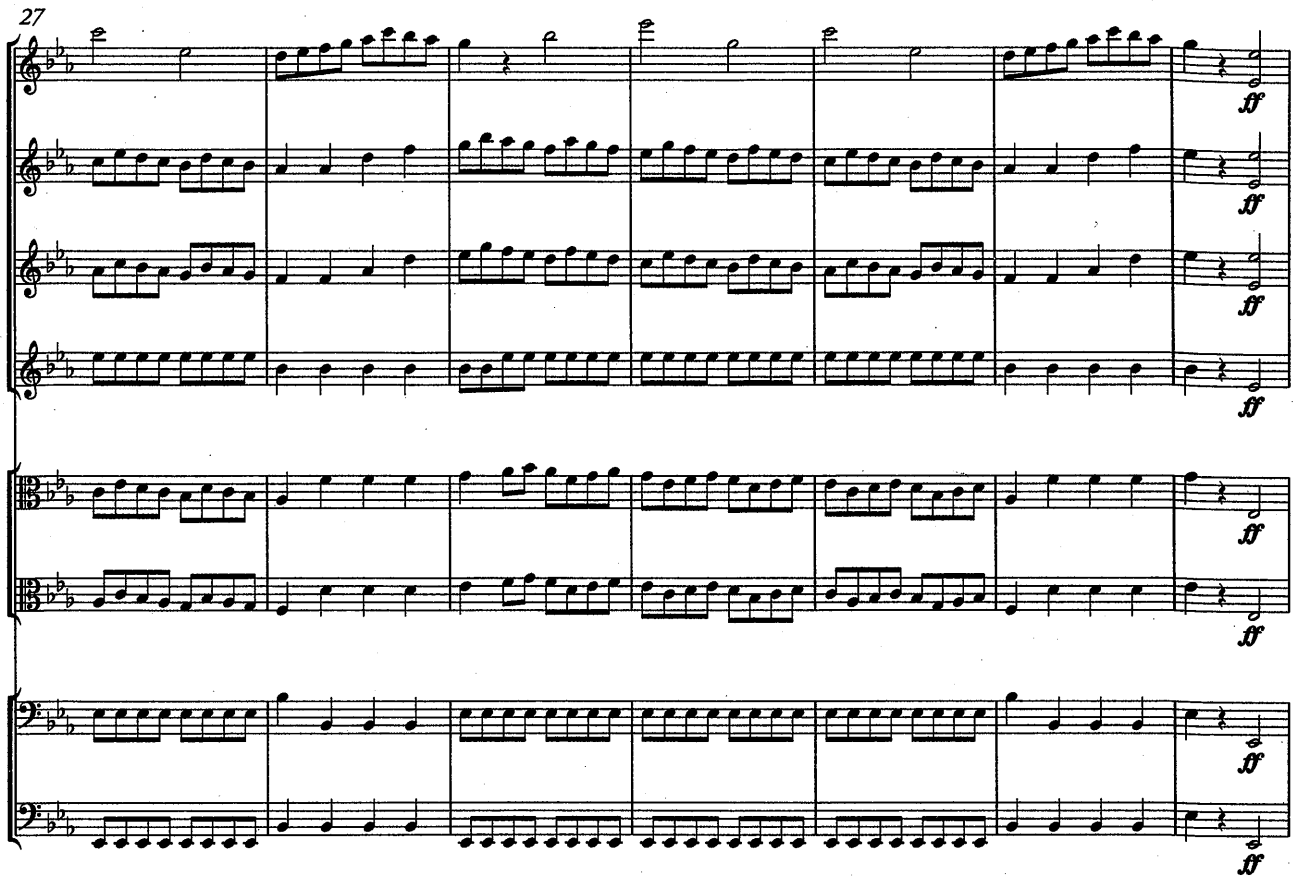
27



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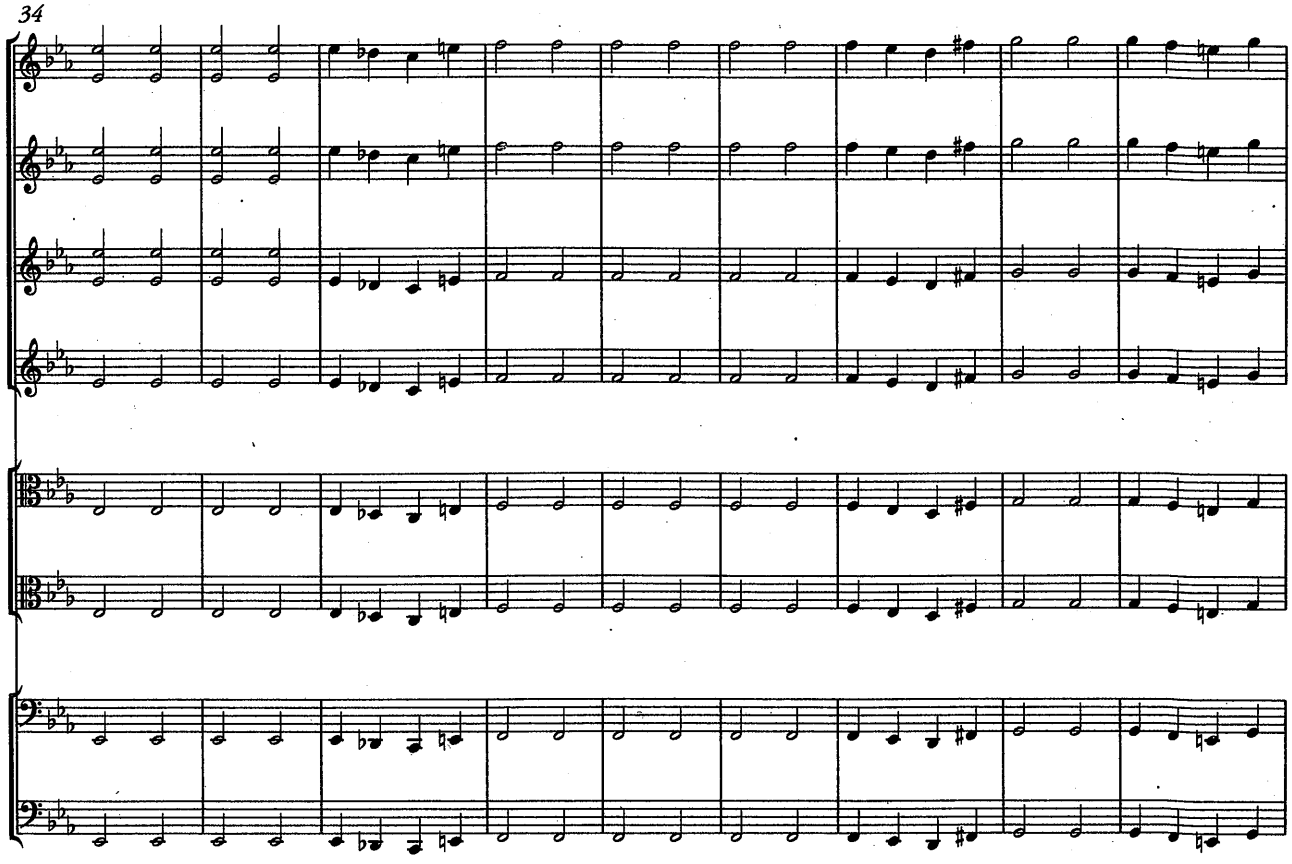

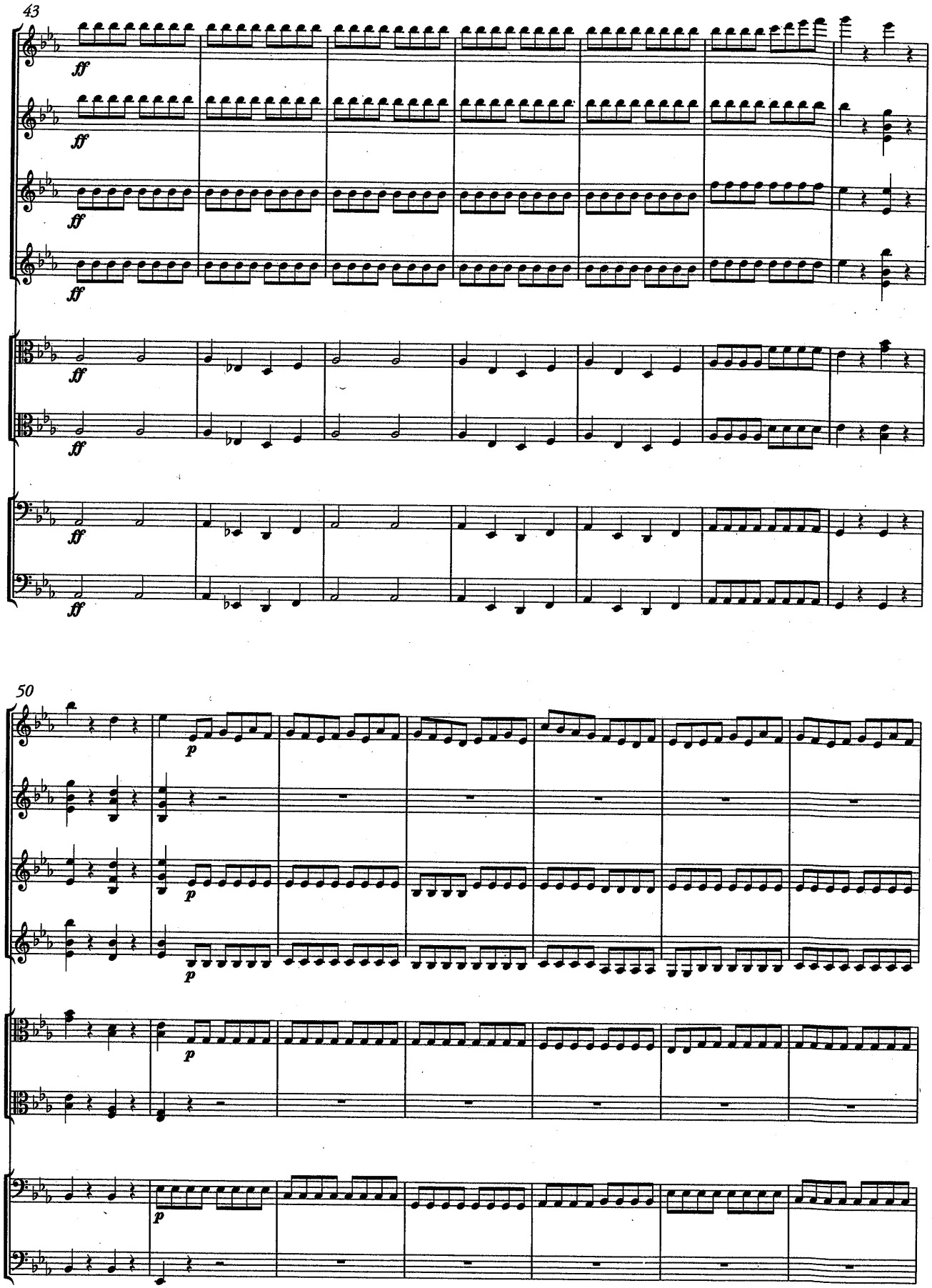
43
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50
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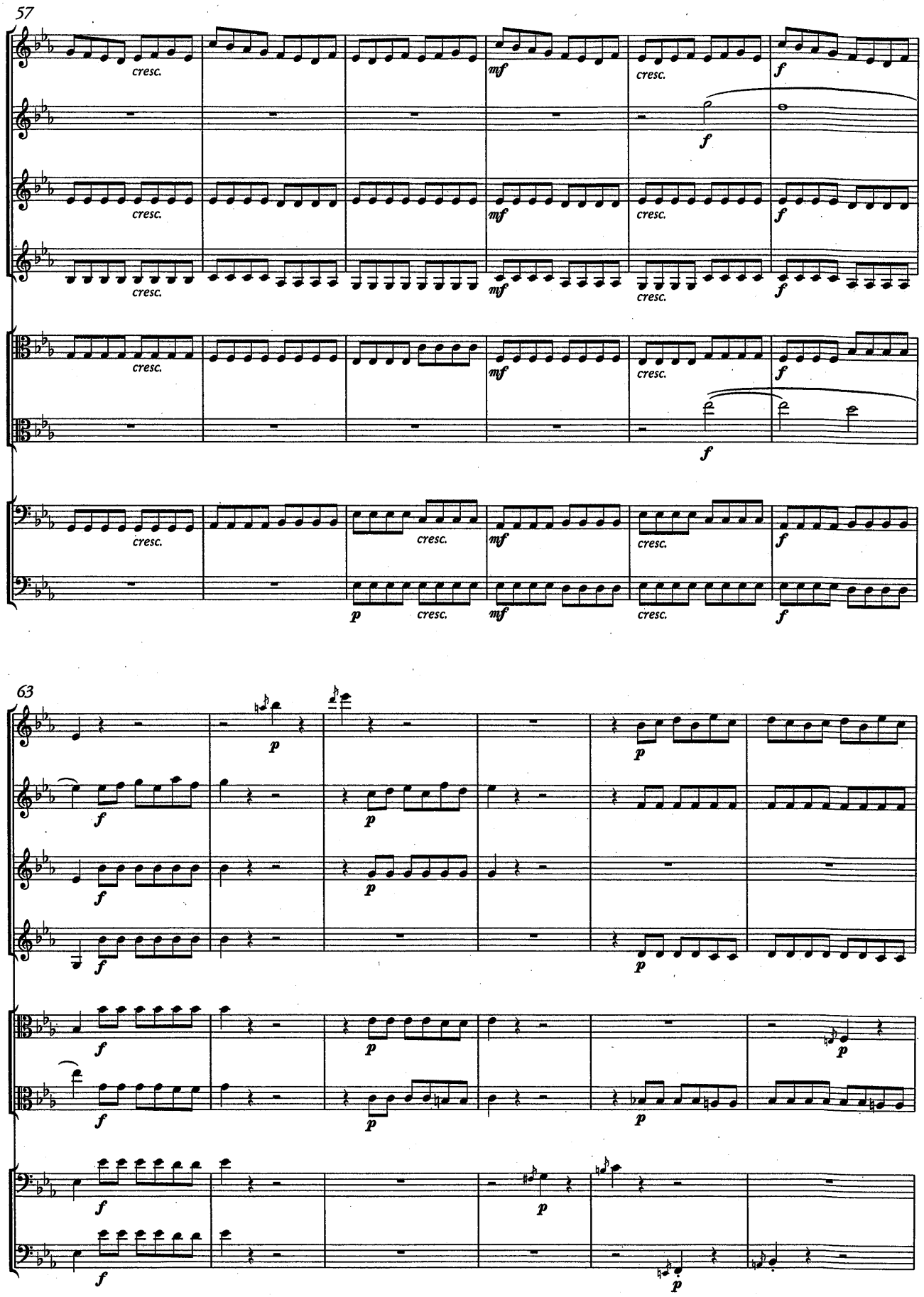
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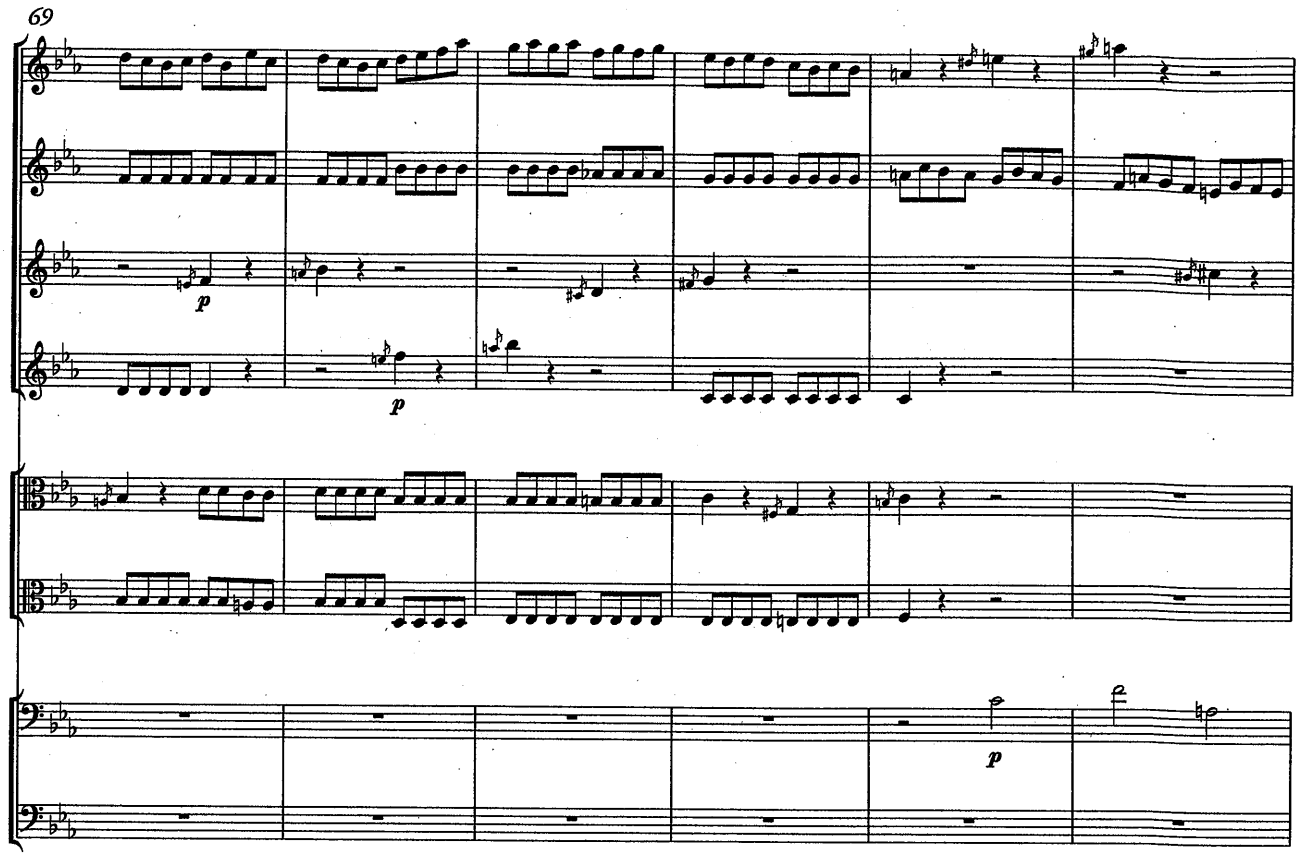
f
63
p
f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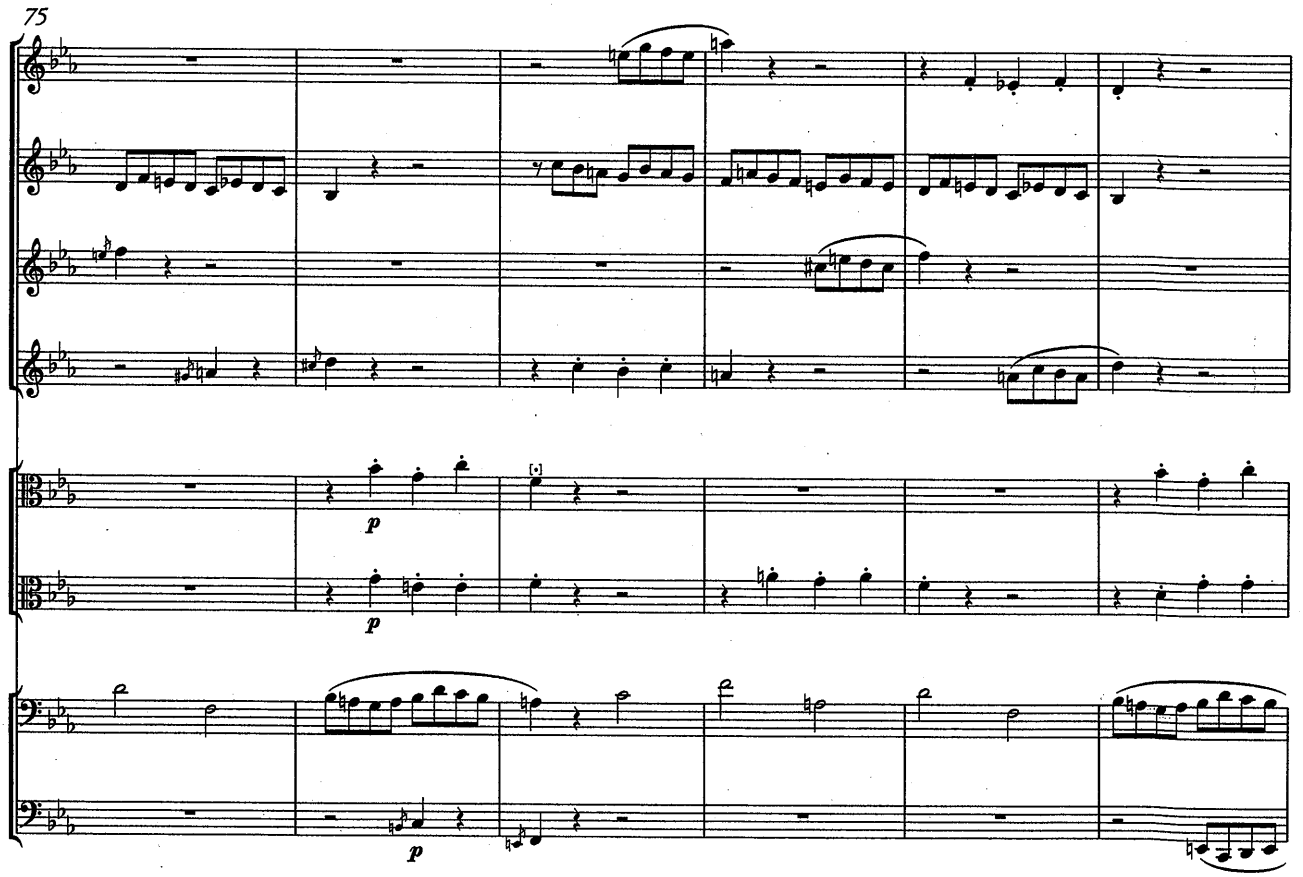
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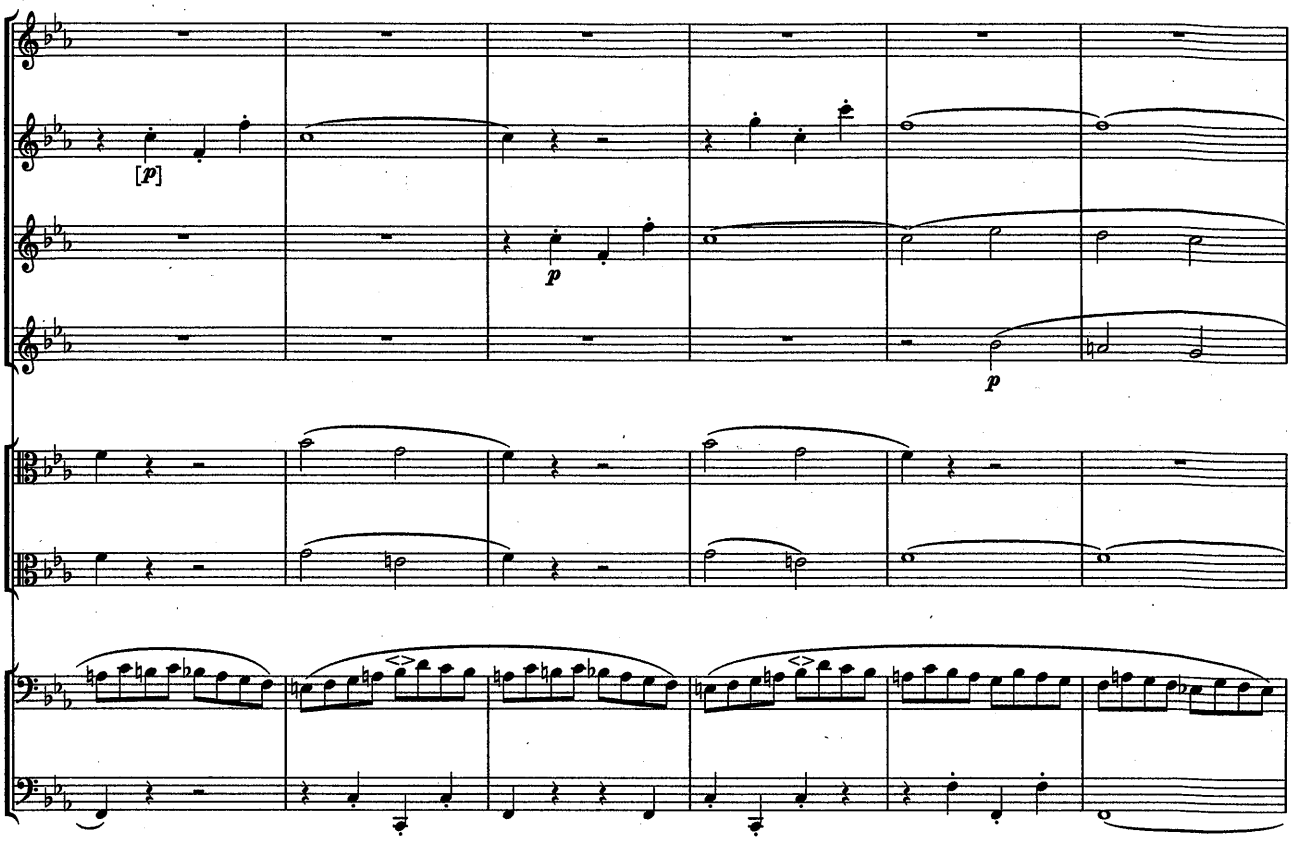
81



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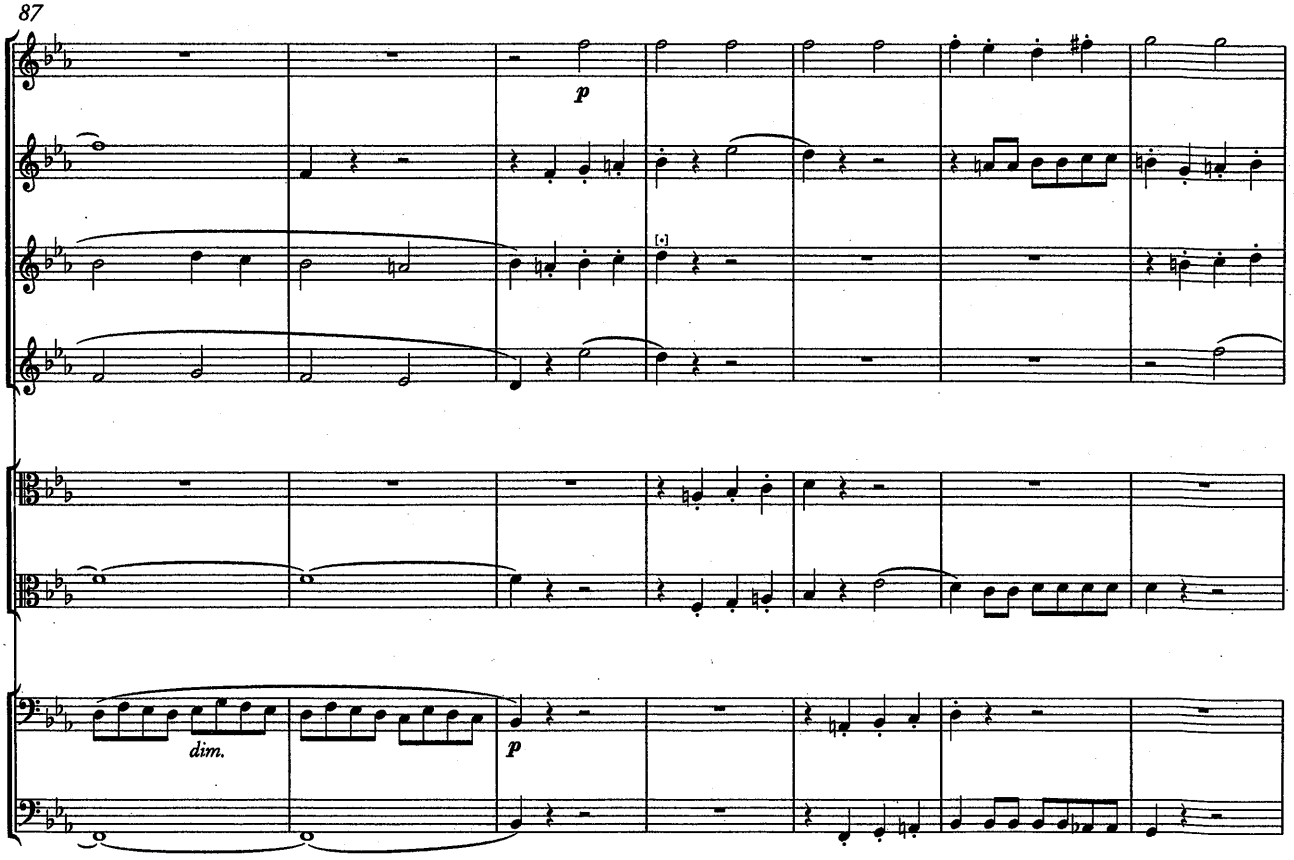

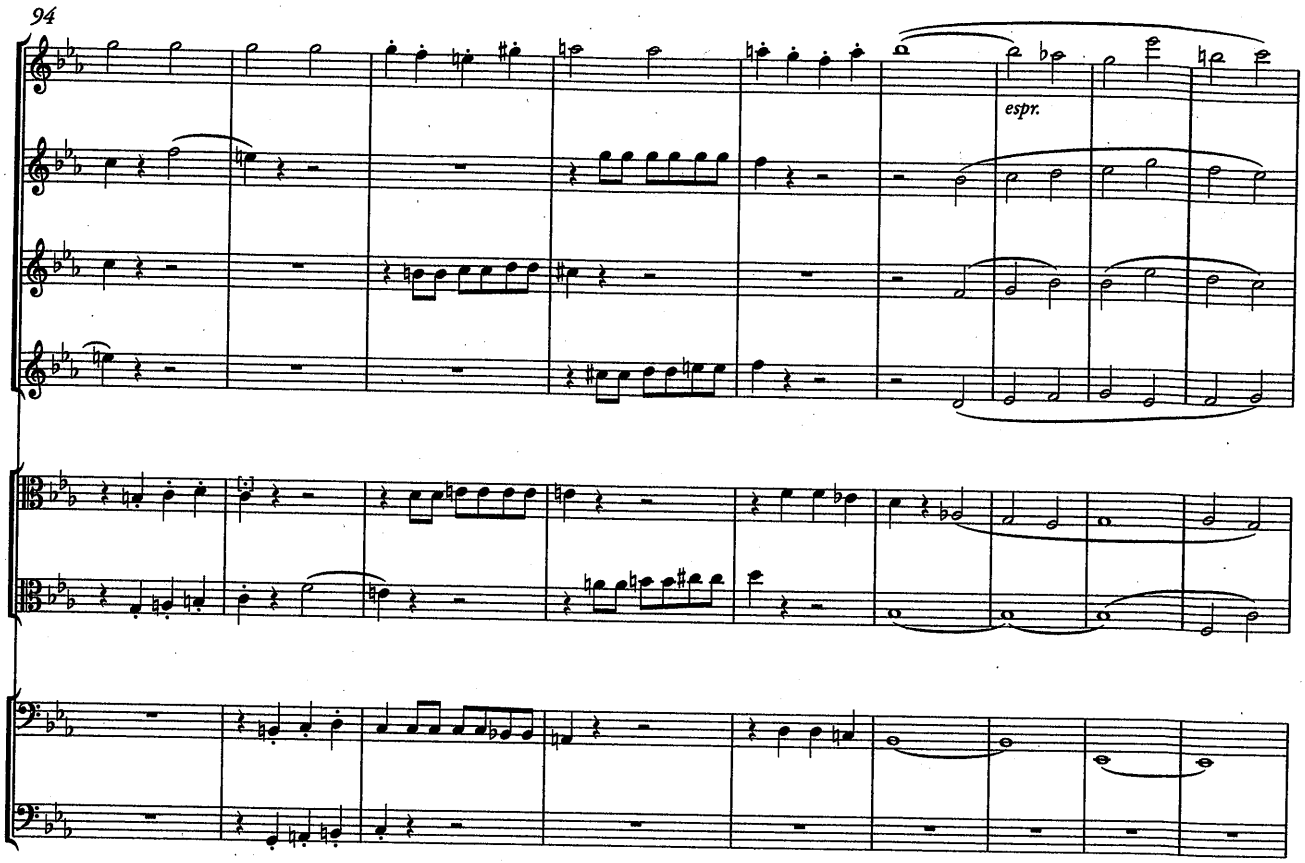
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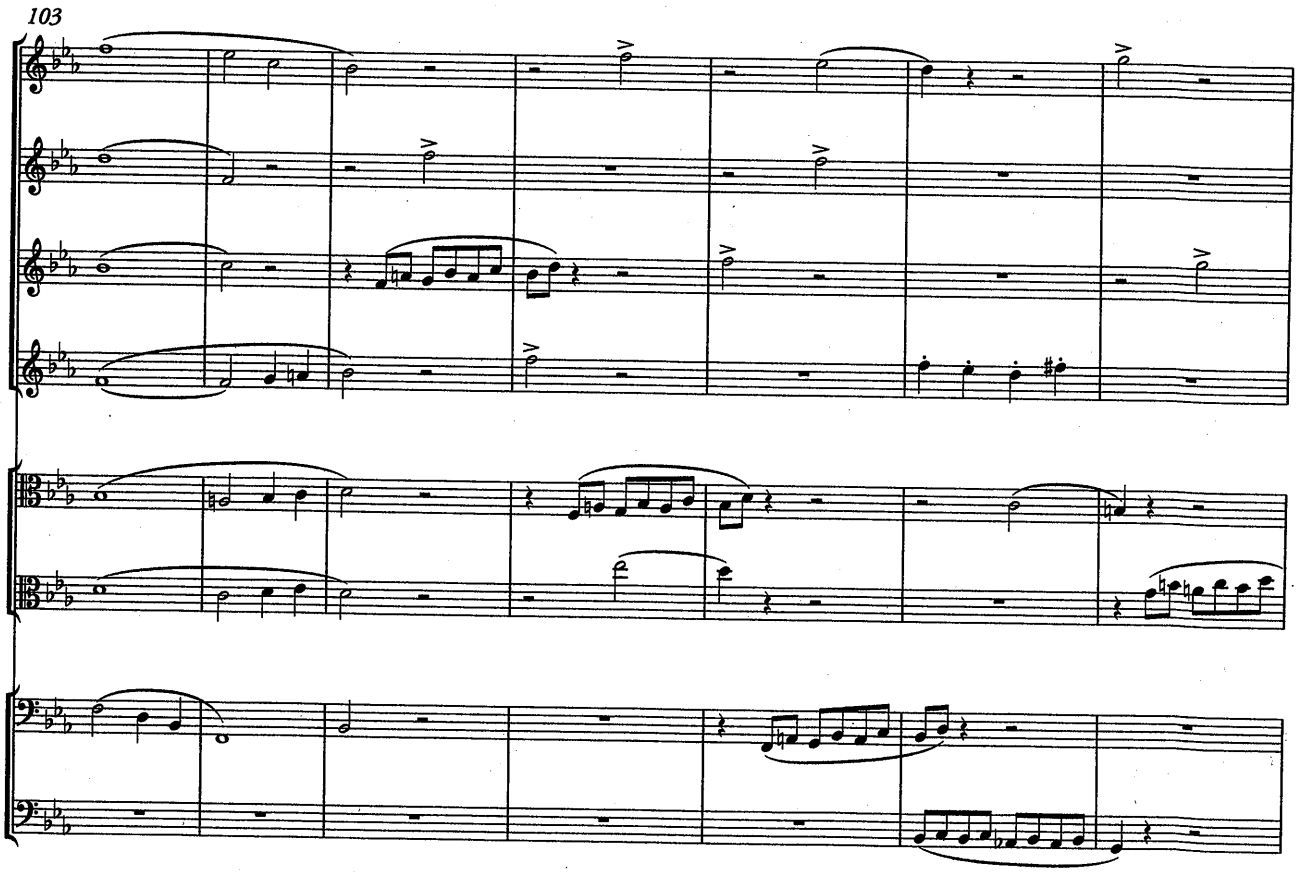
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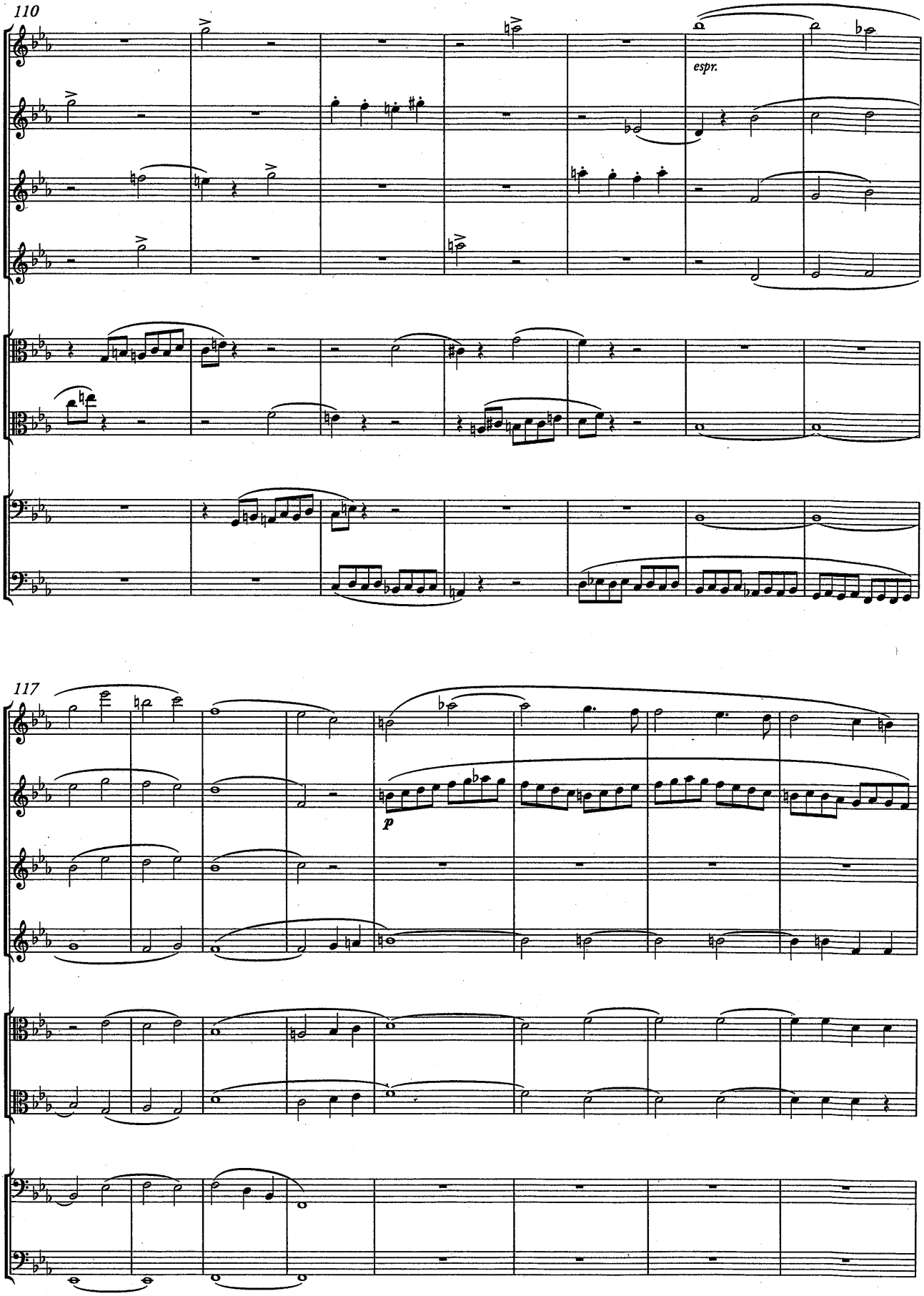
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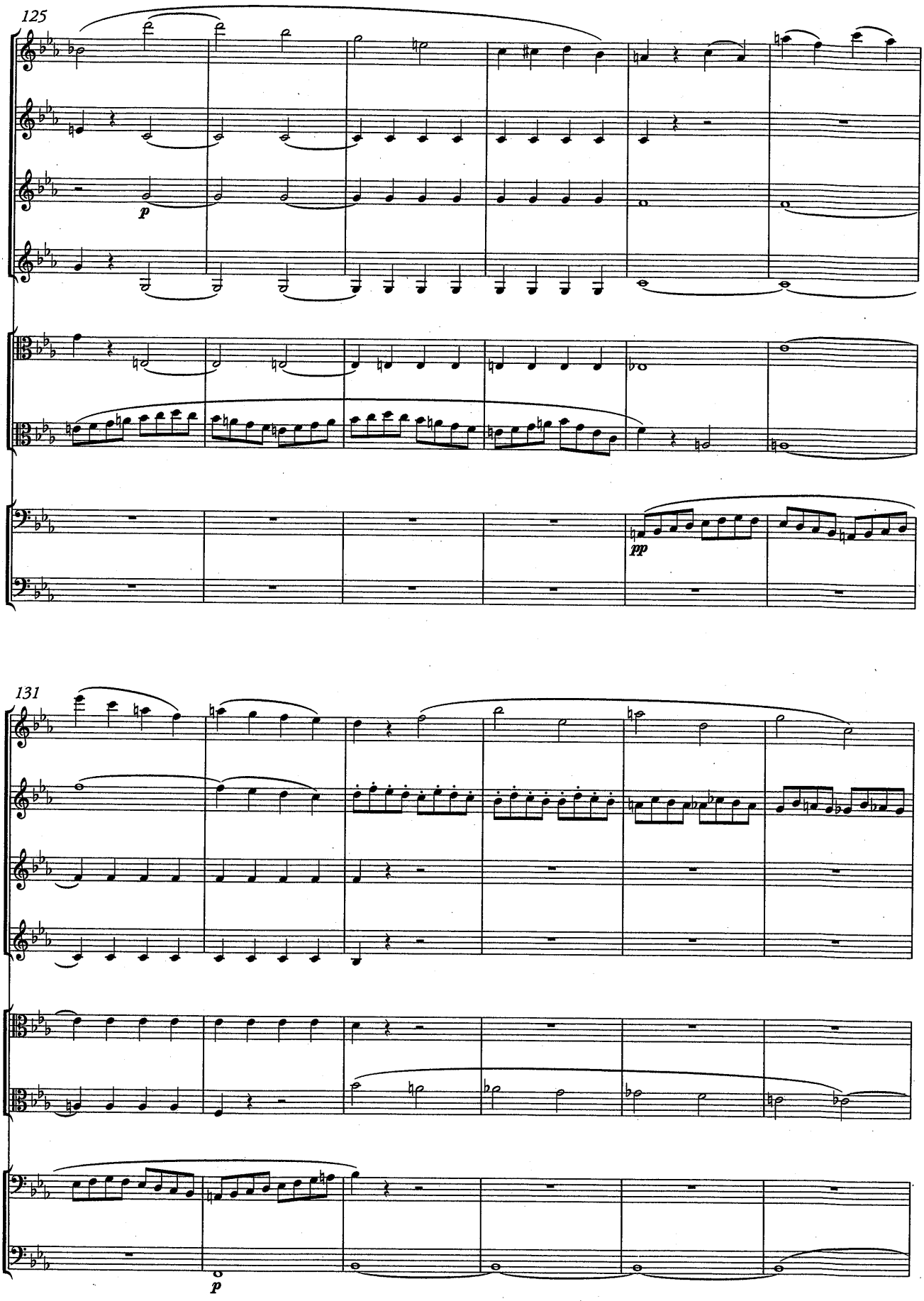
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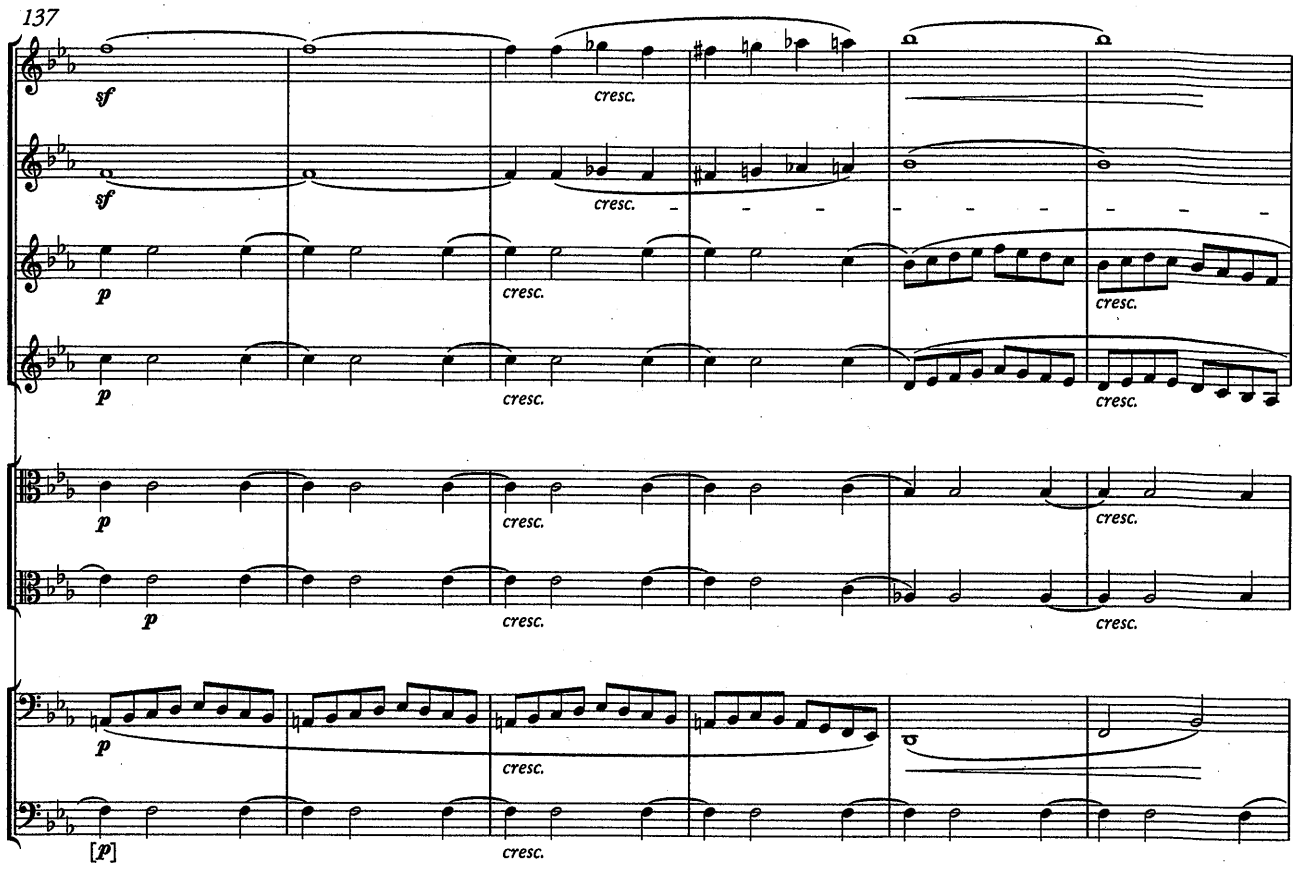
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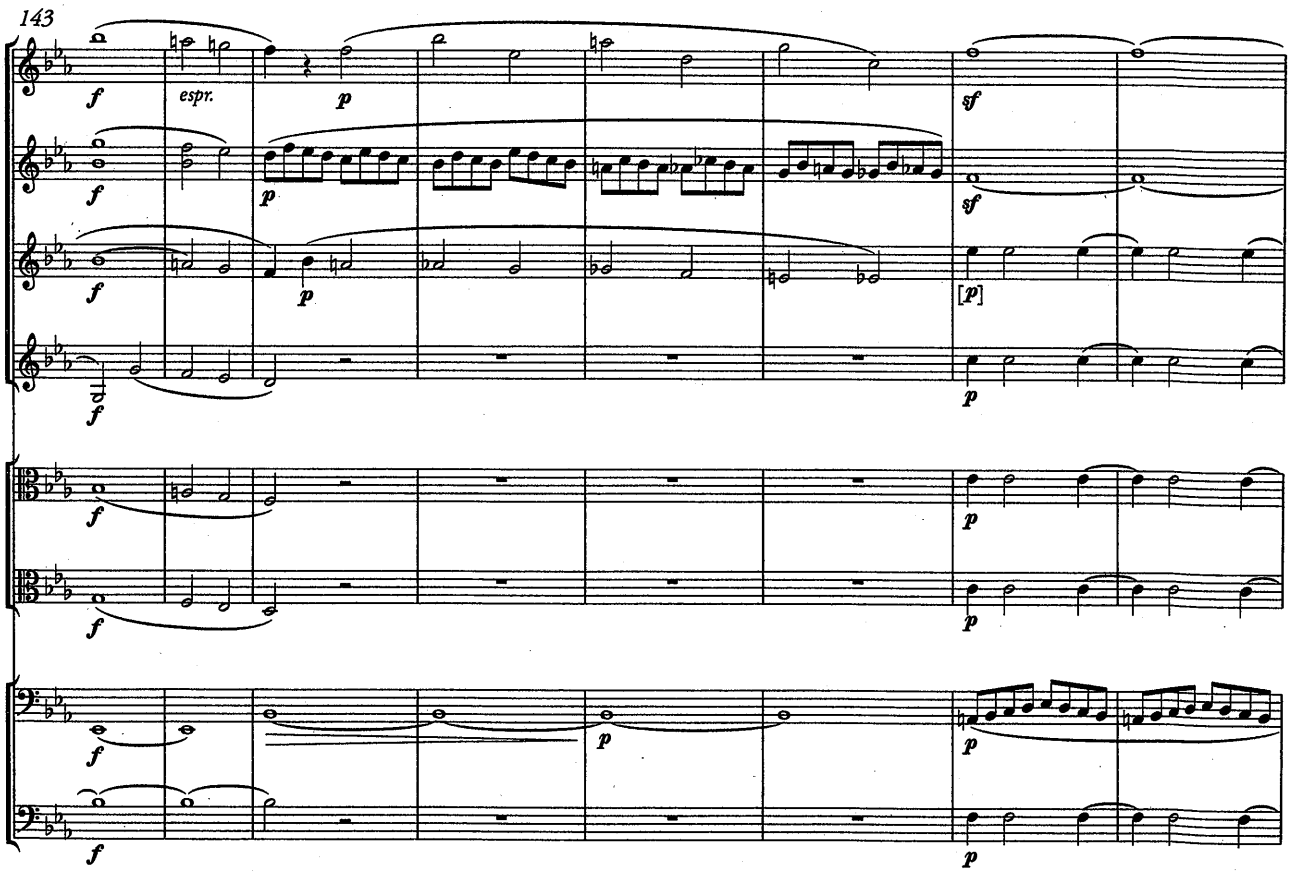
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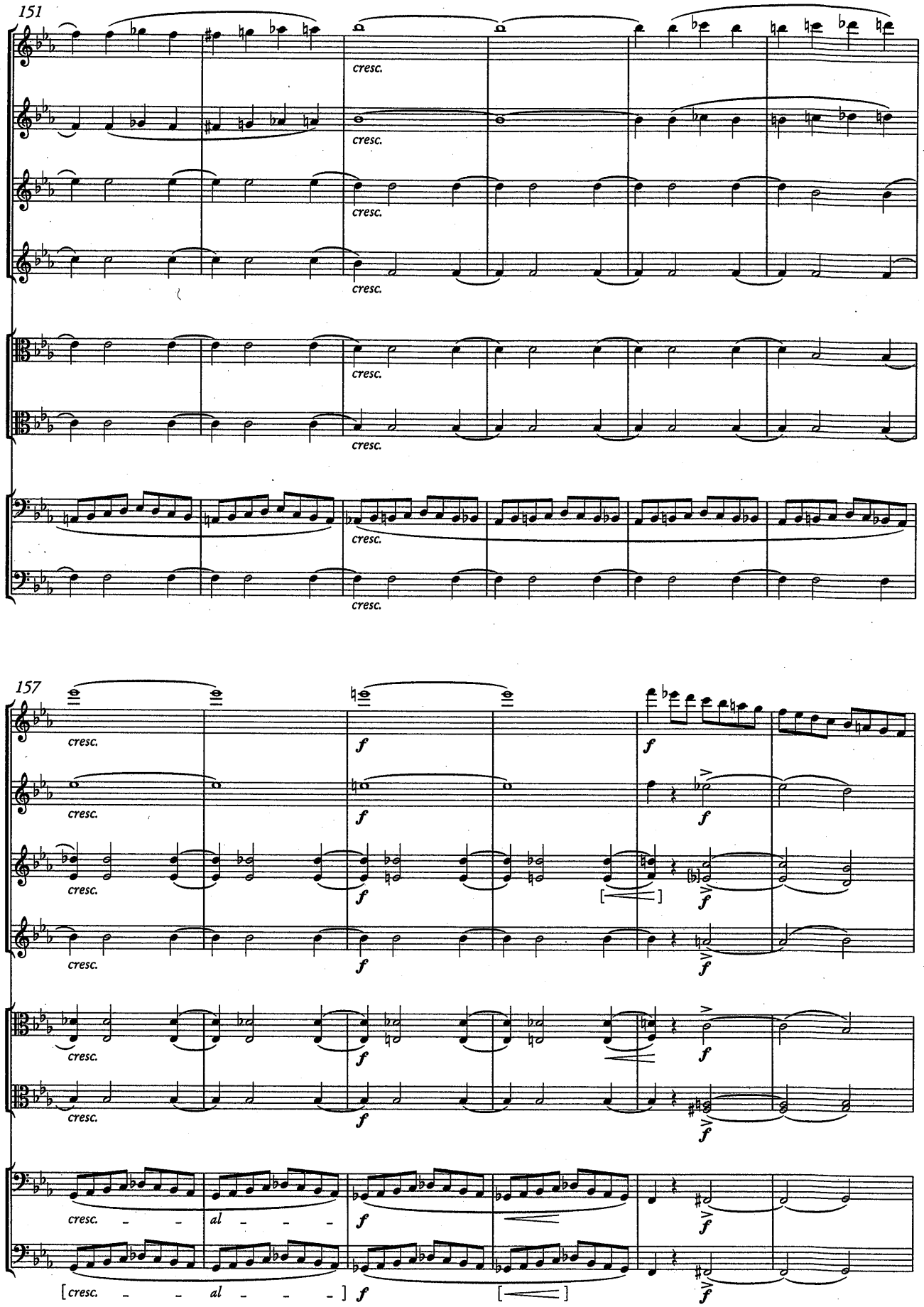
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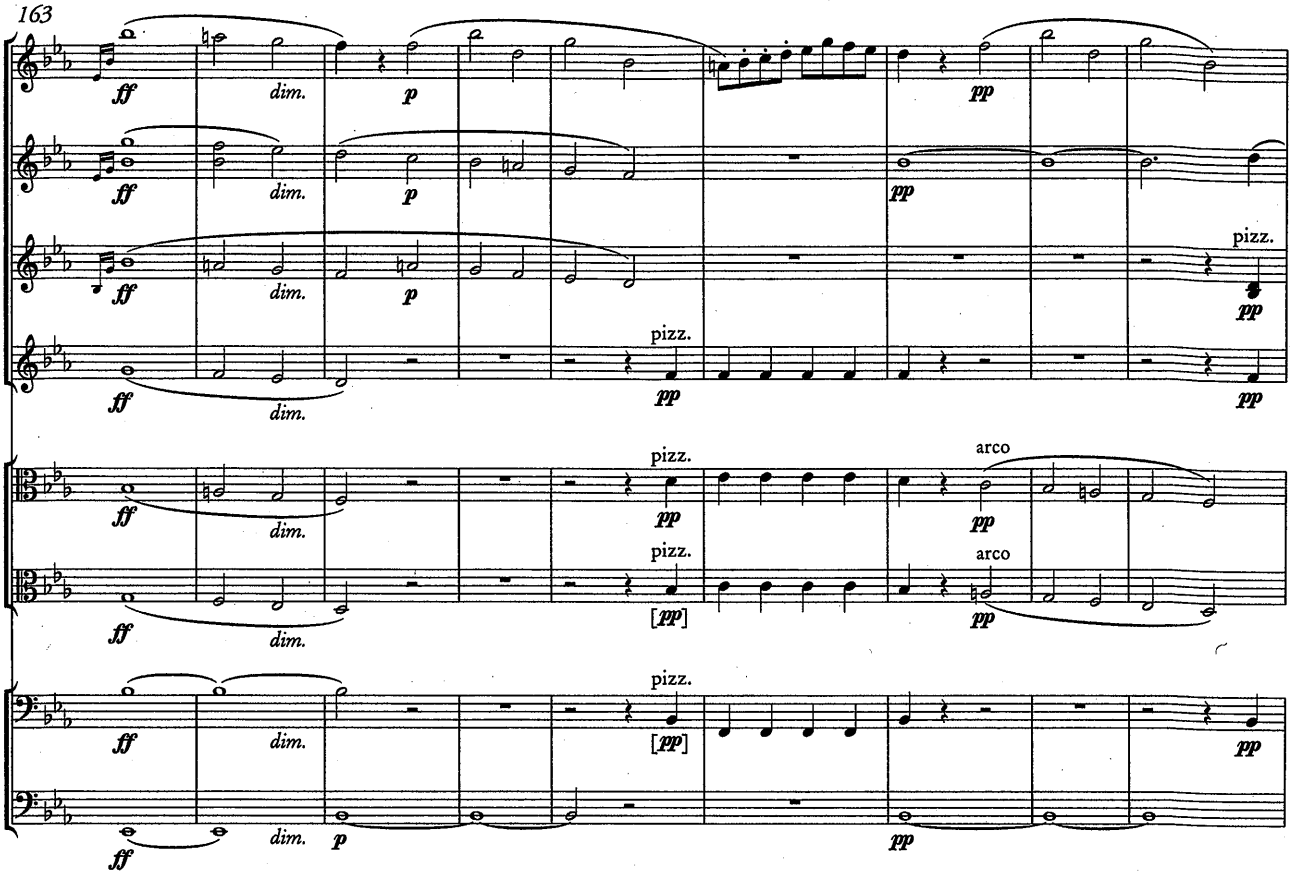
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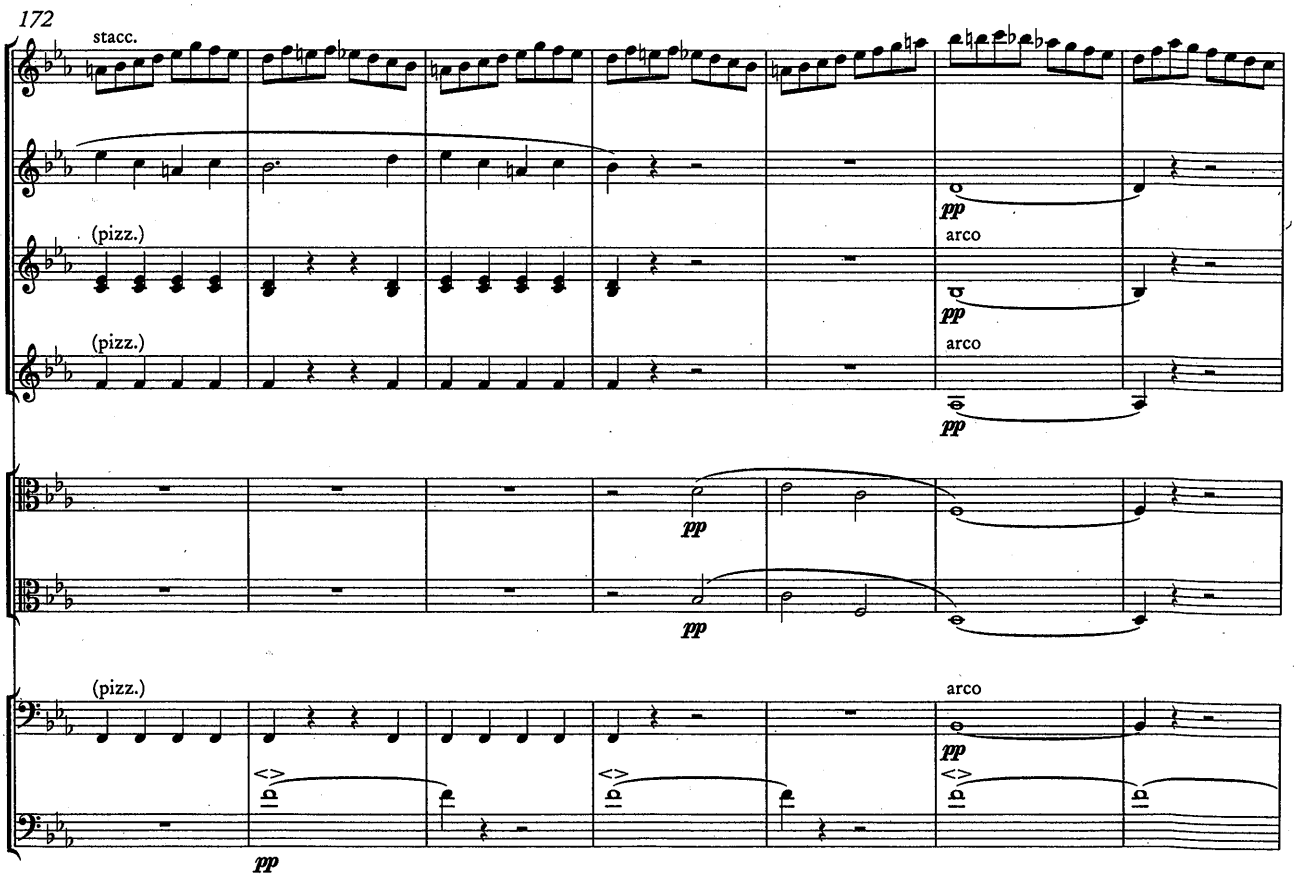
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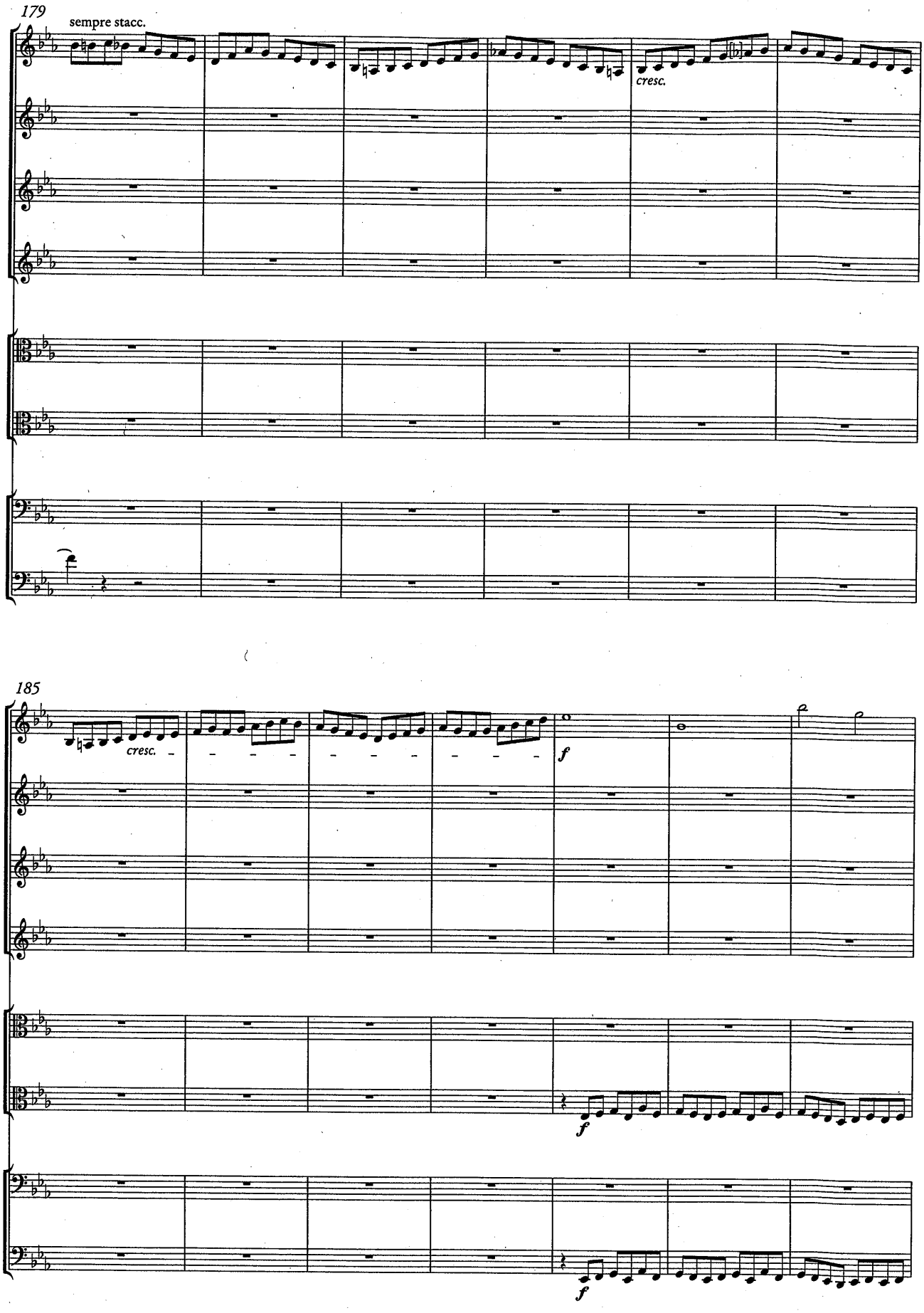
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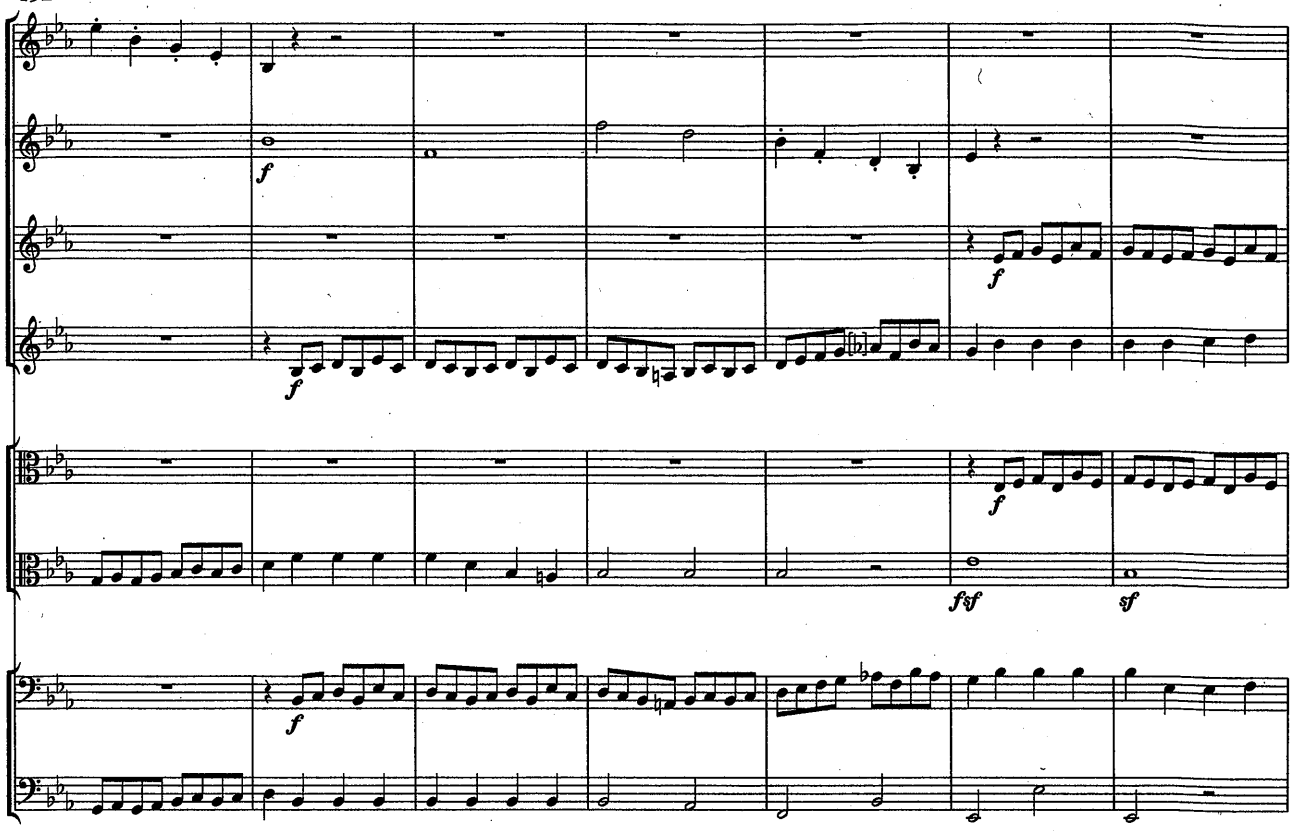

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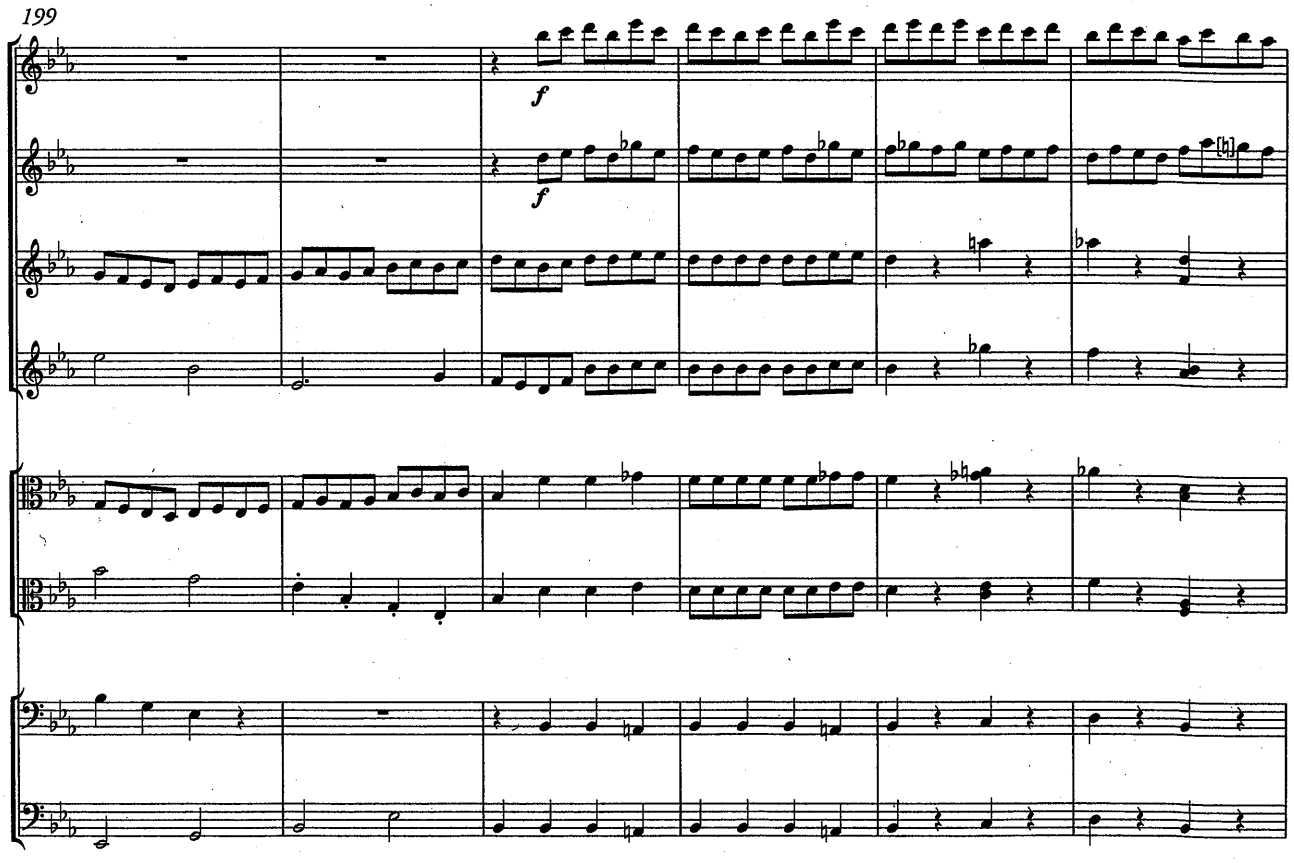

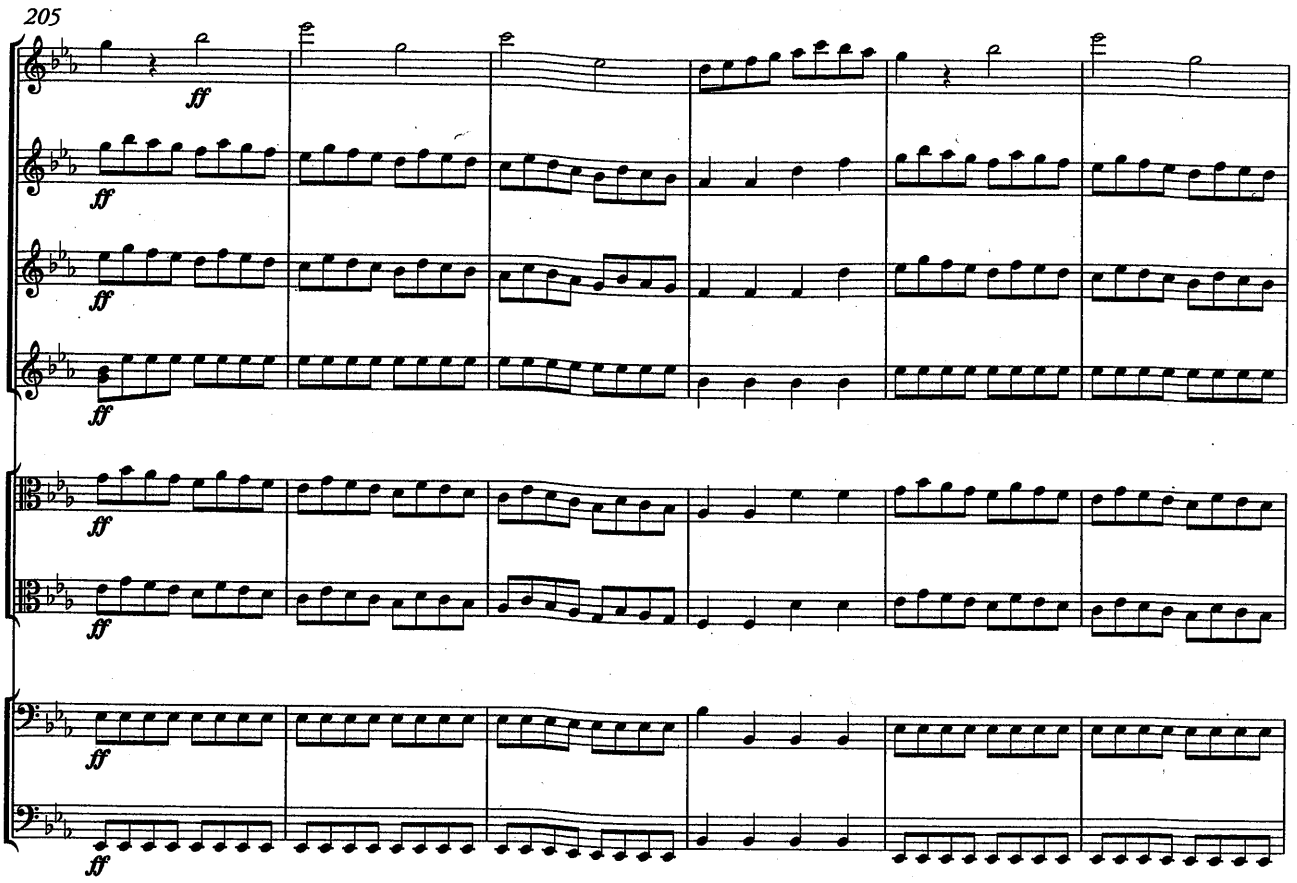
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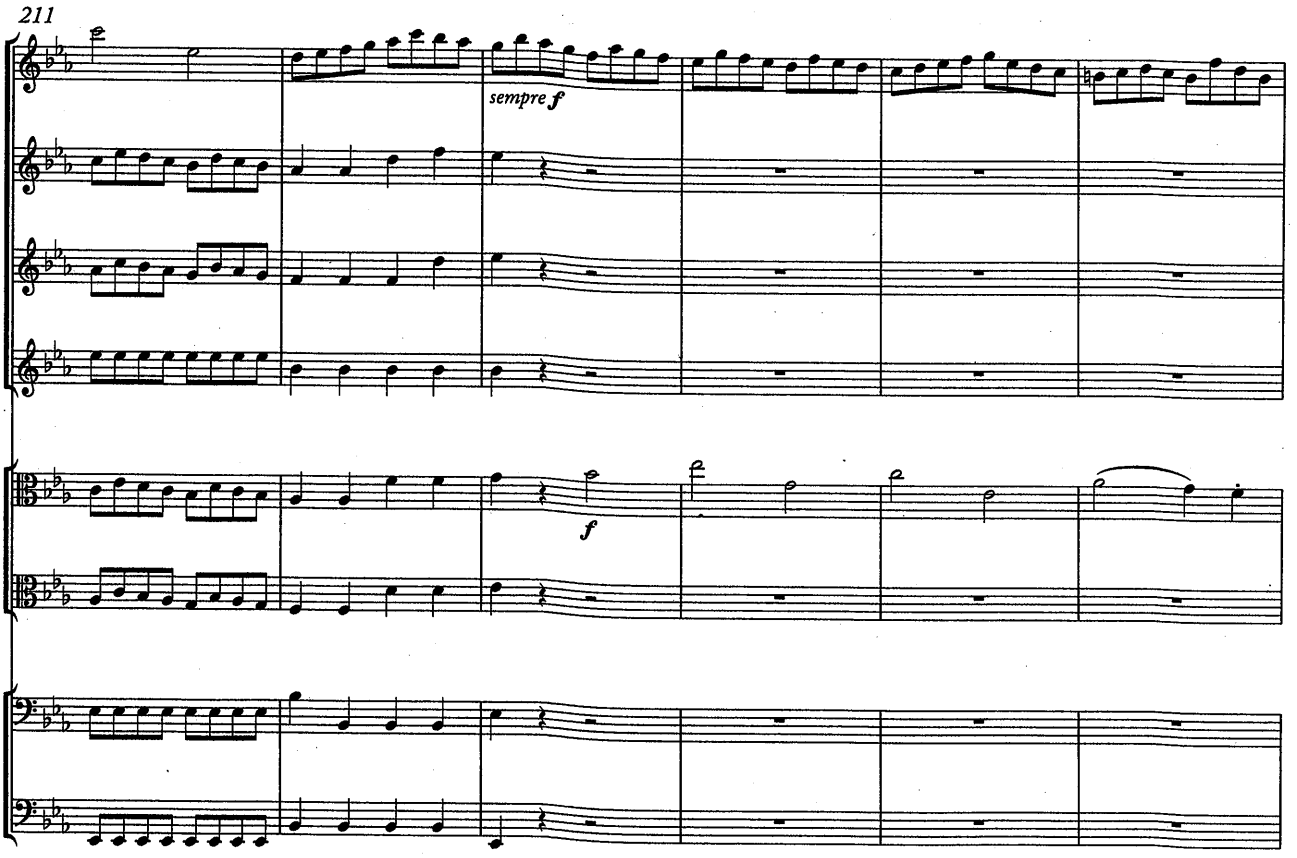
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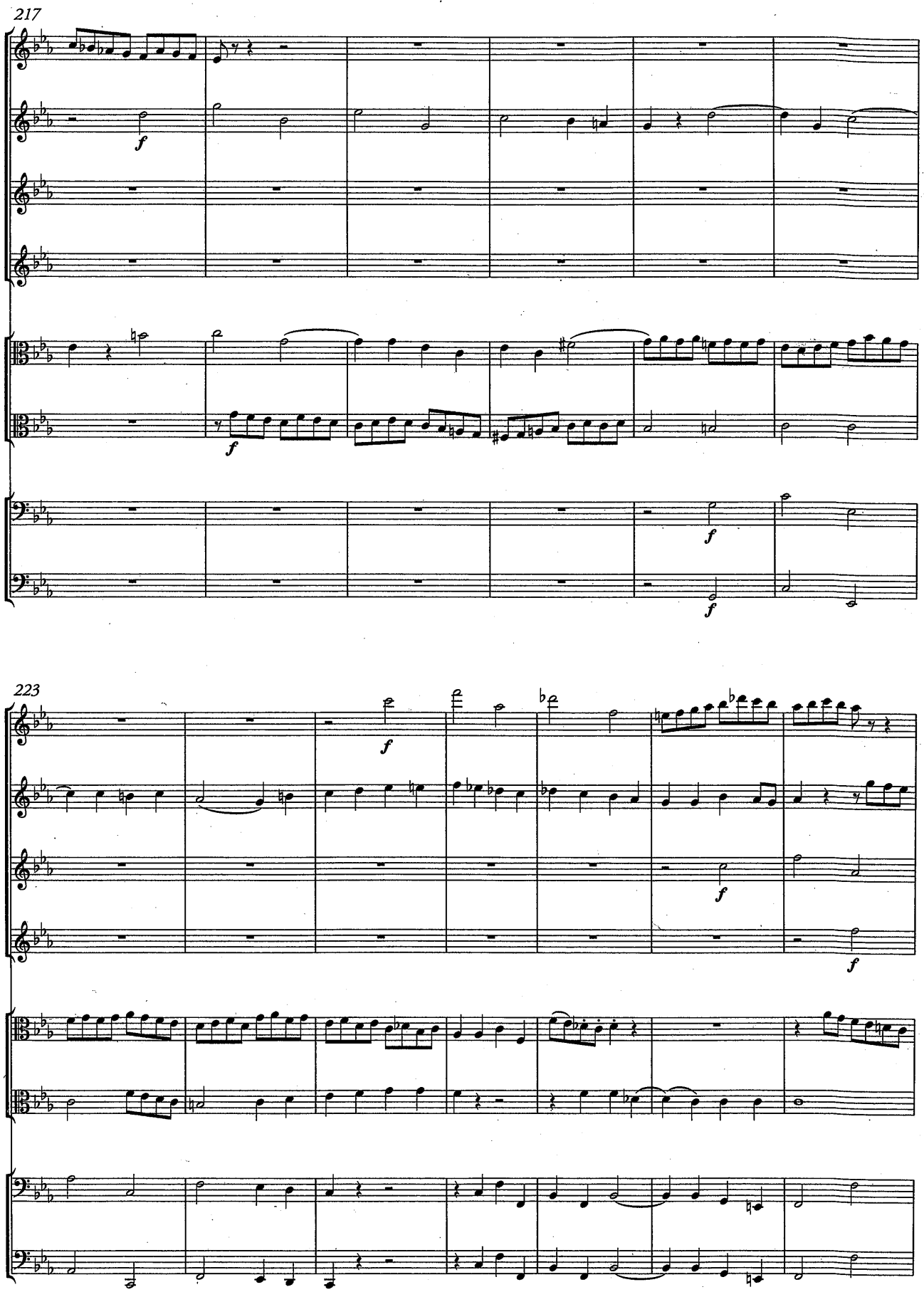
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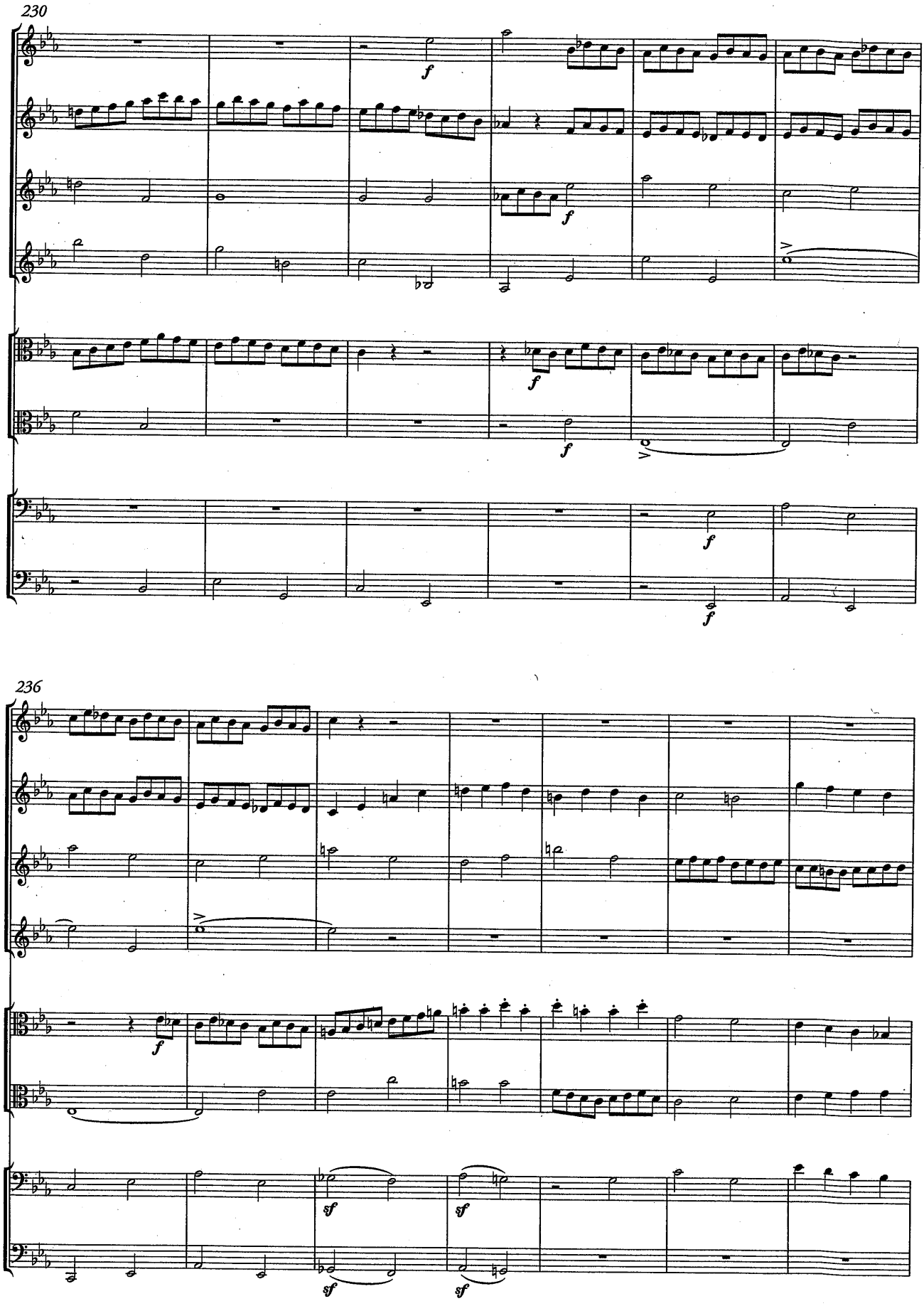
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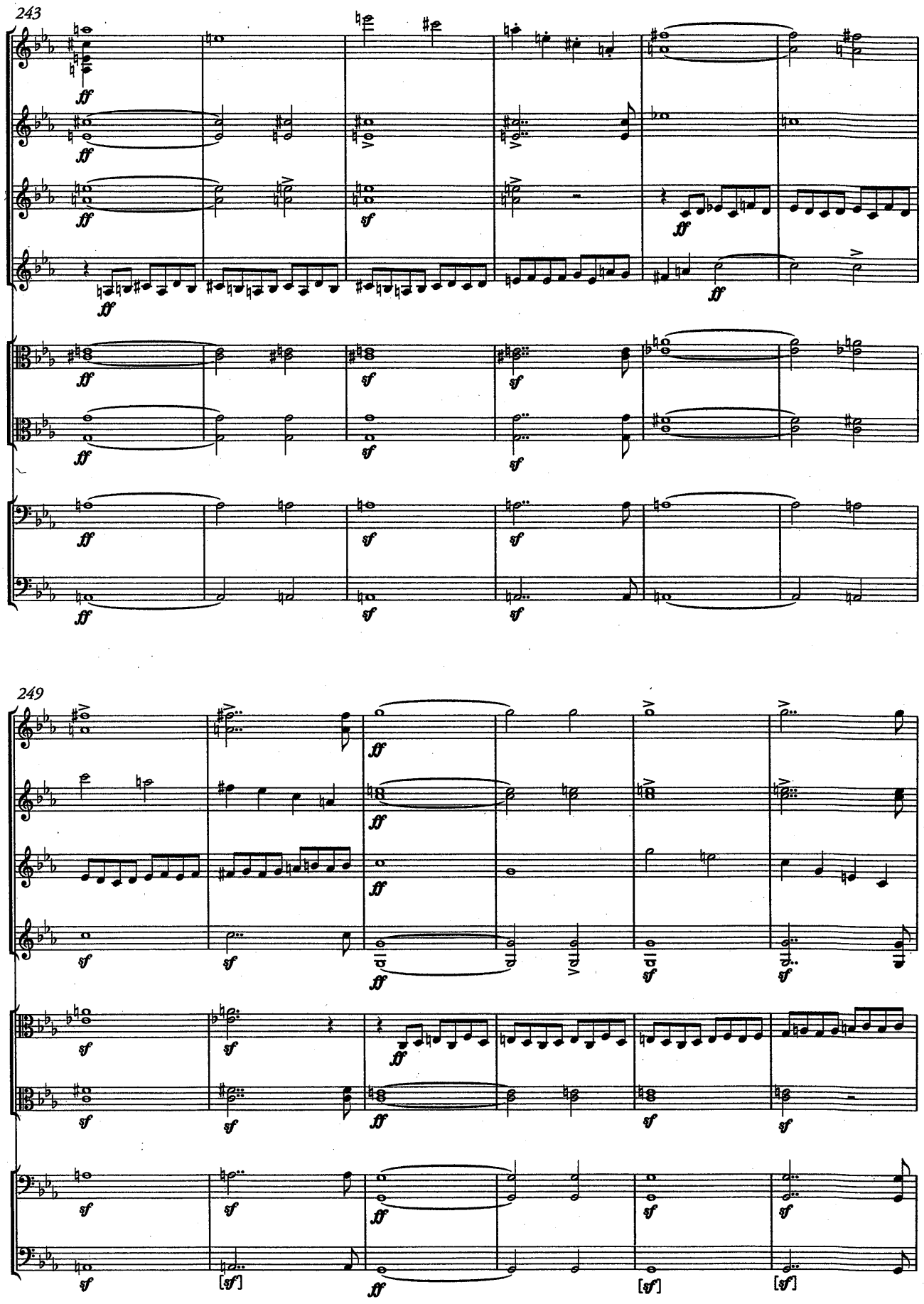
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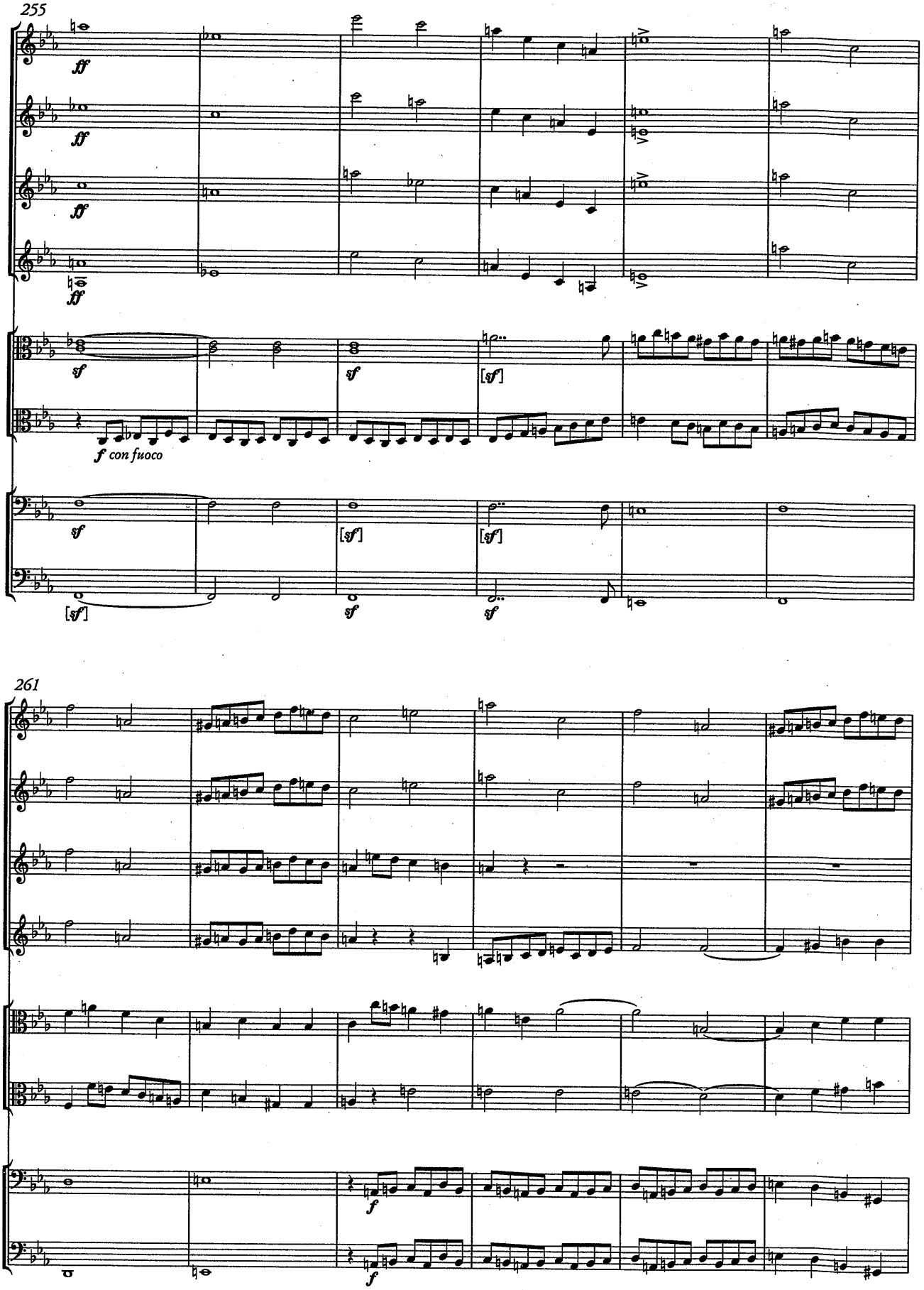
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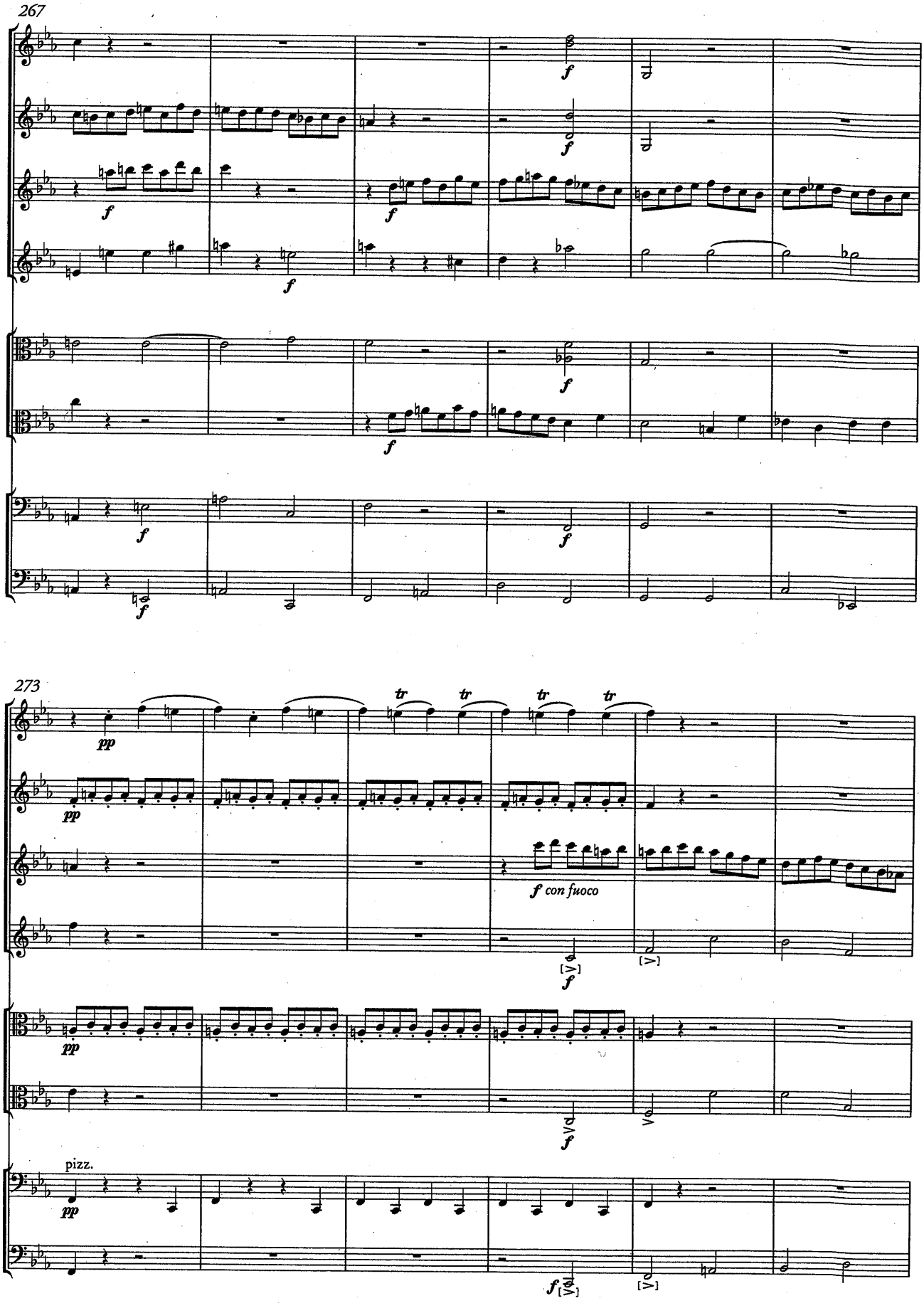
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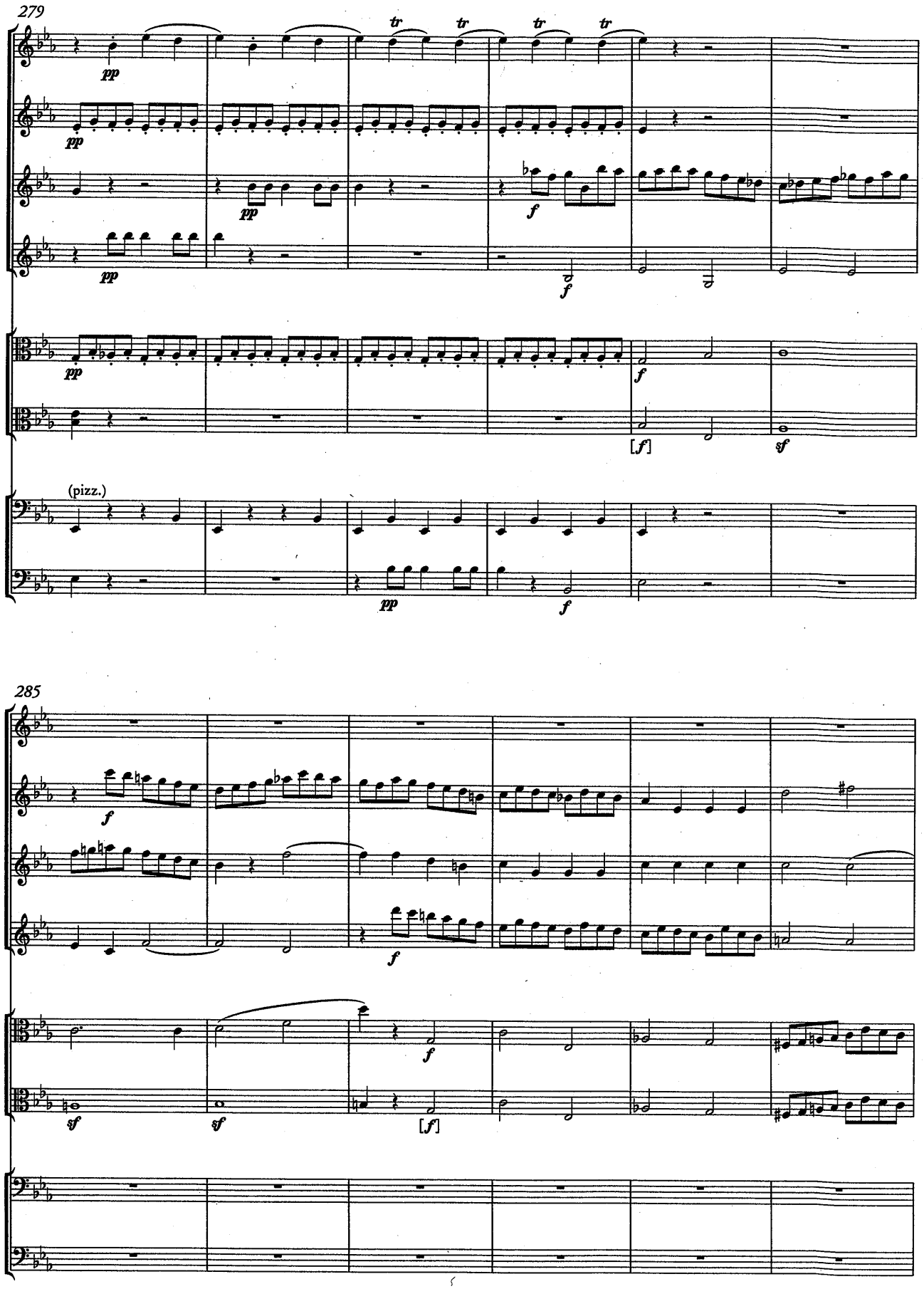
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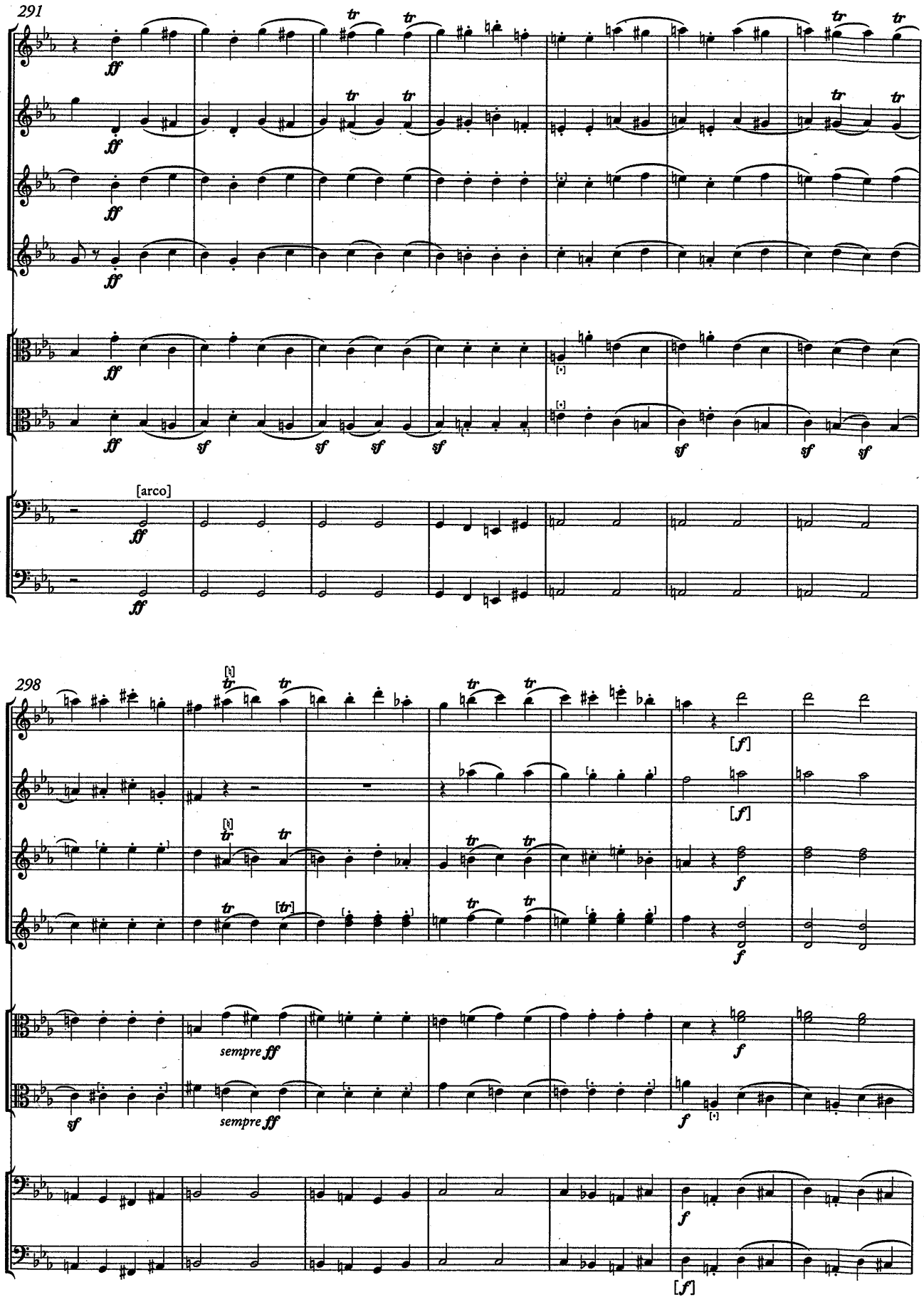
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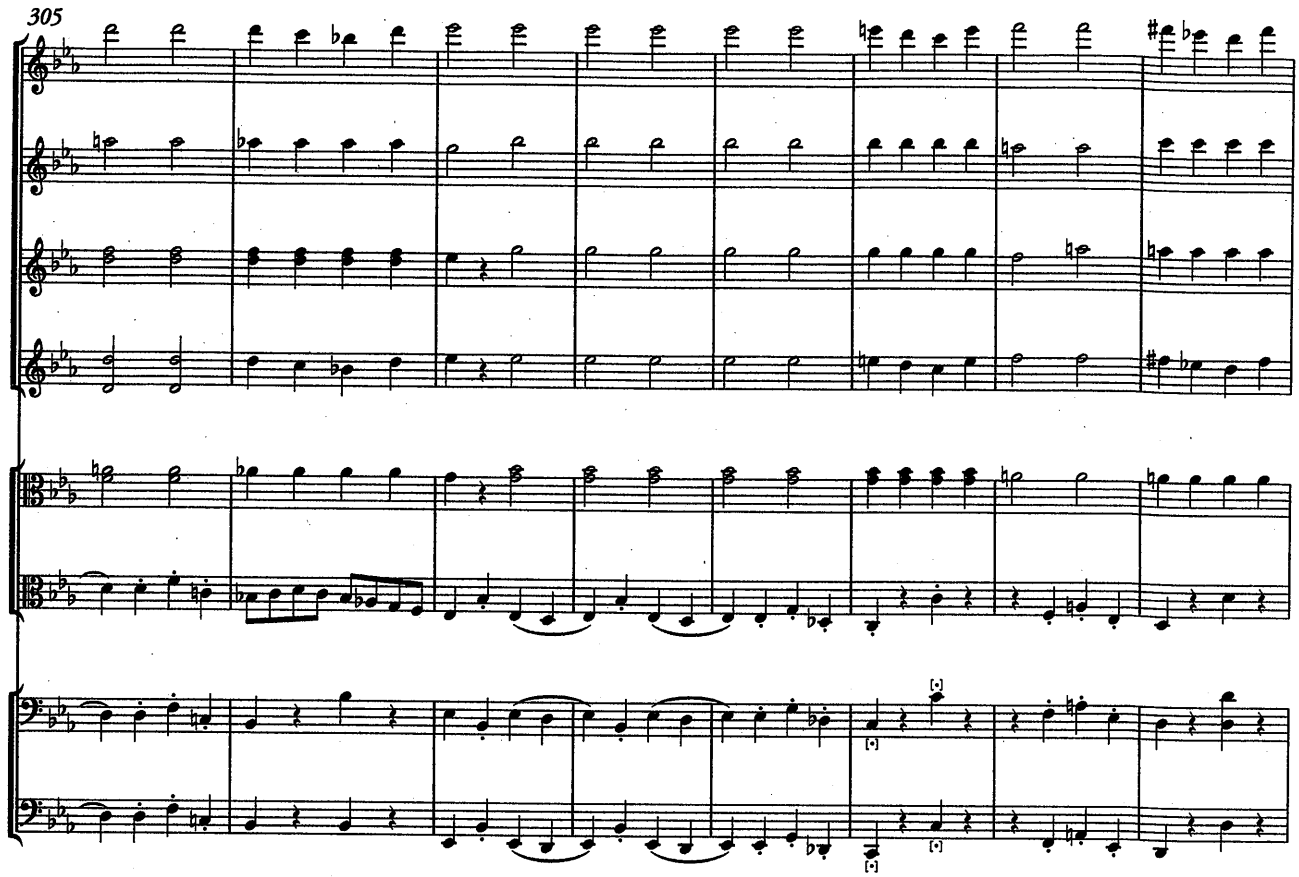
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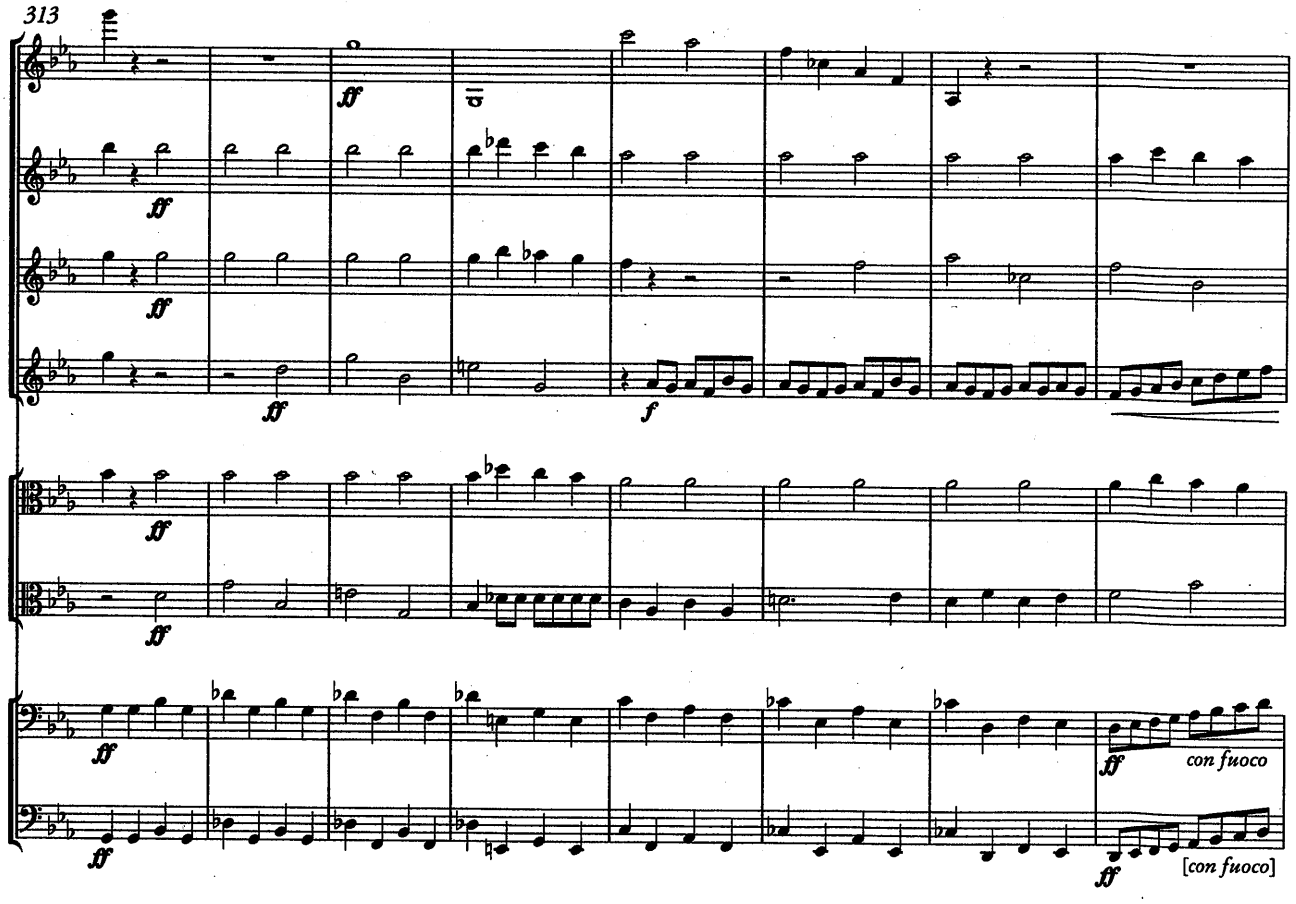
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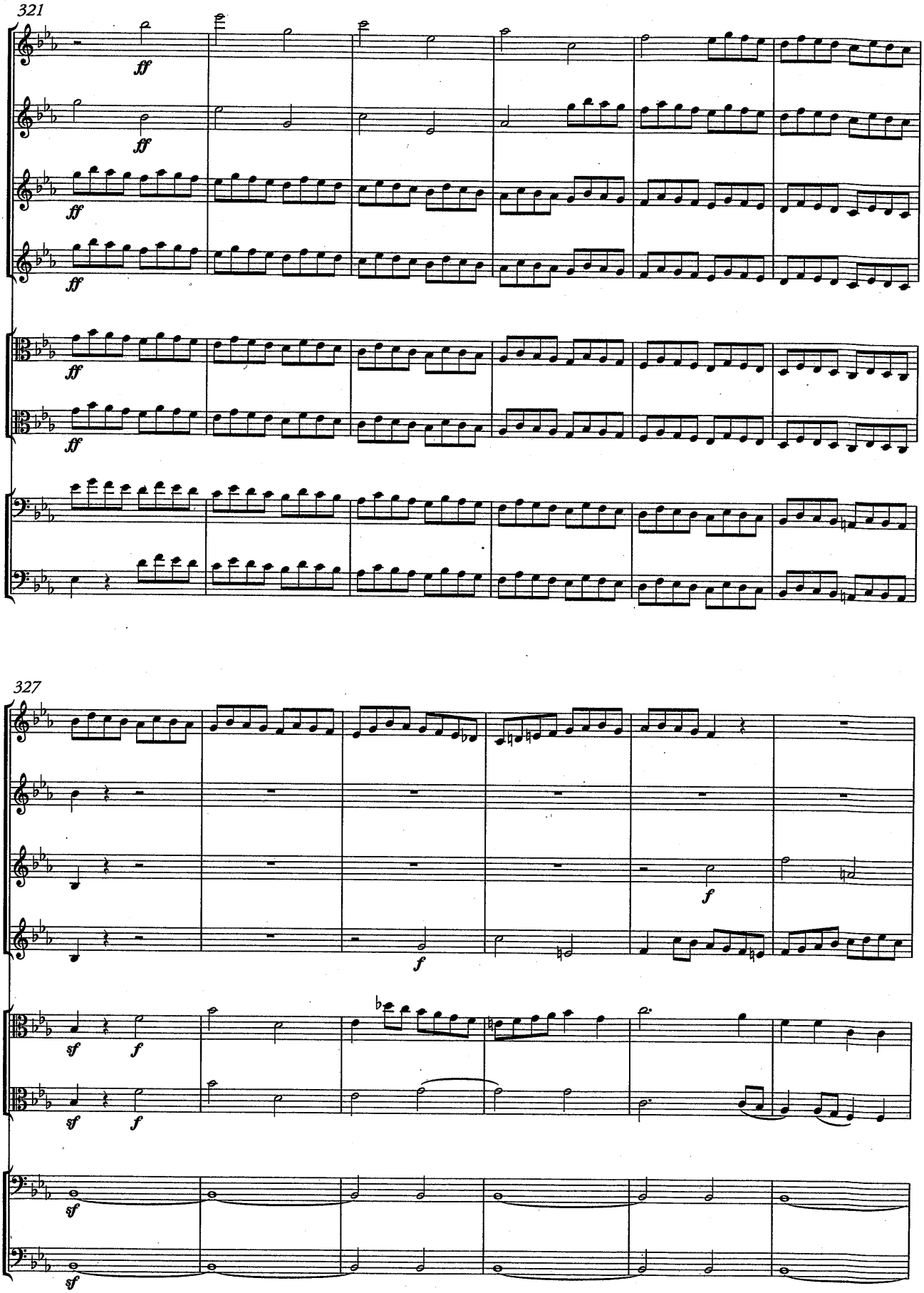
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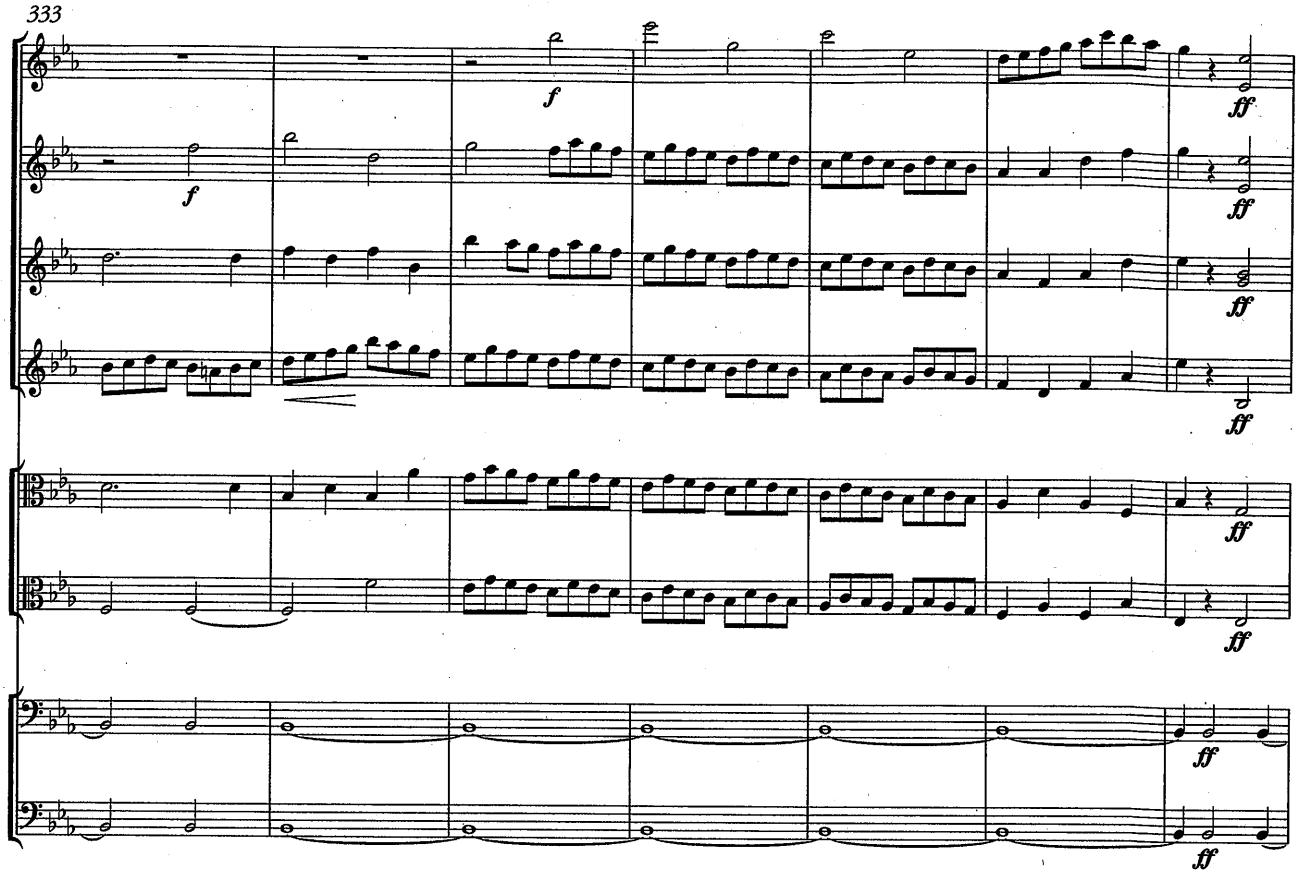
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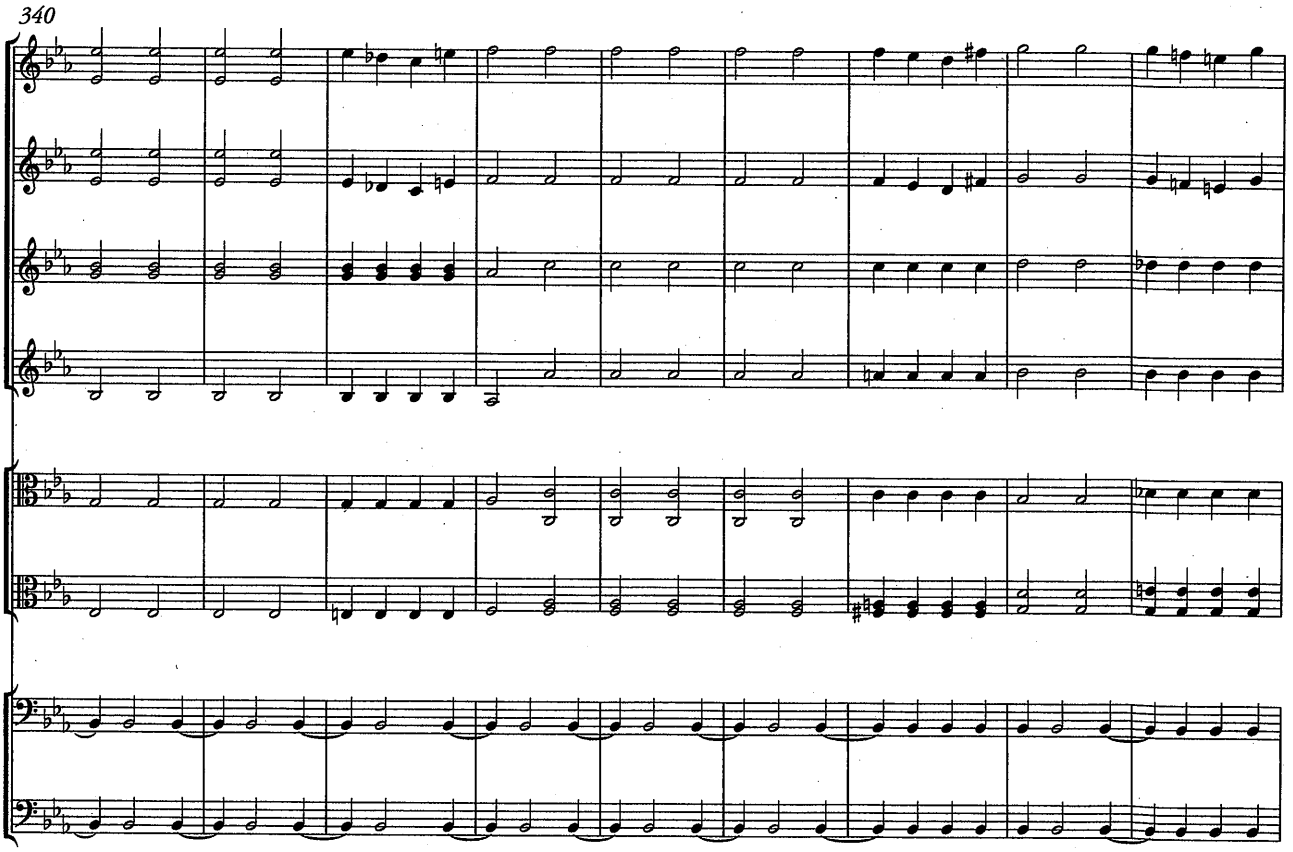
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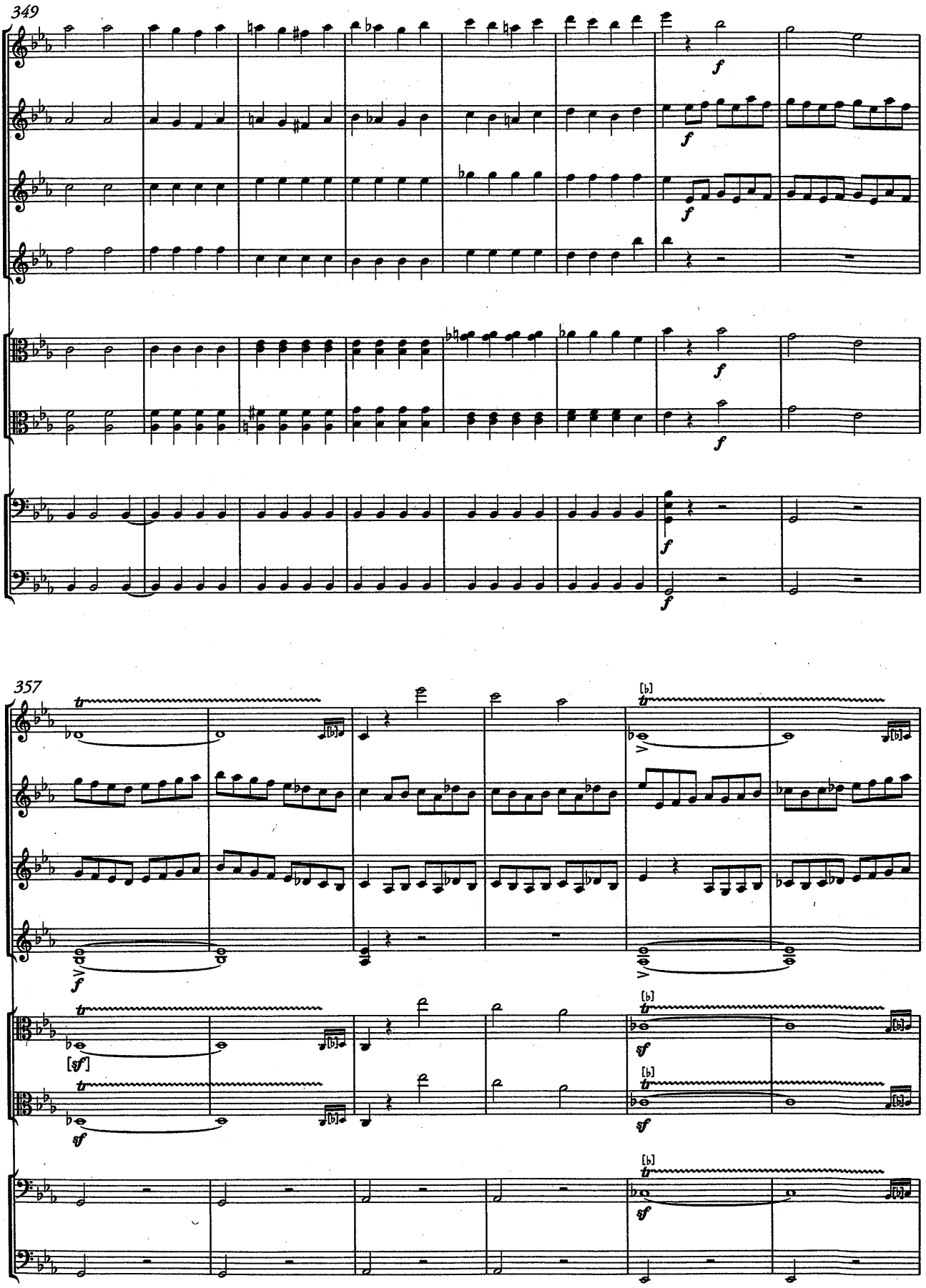
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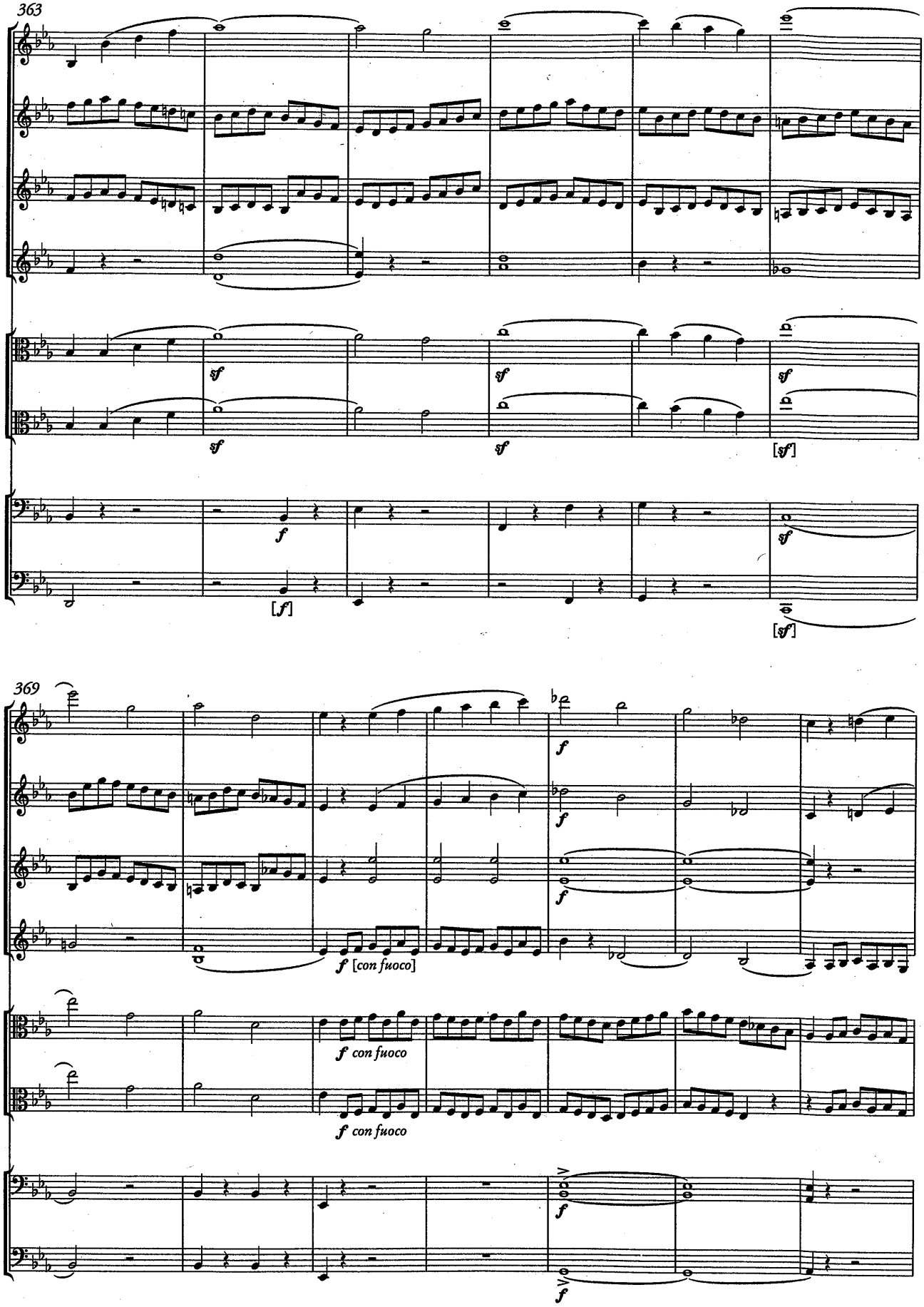
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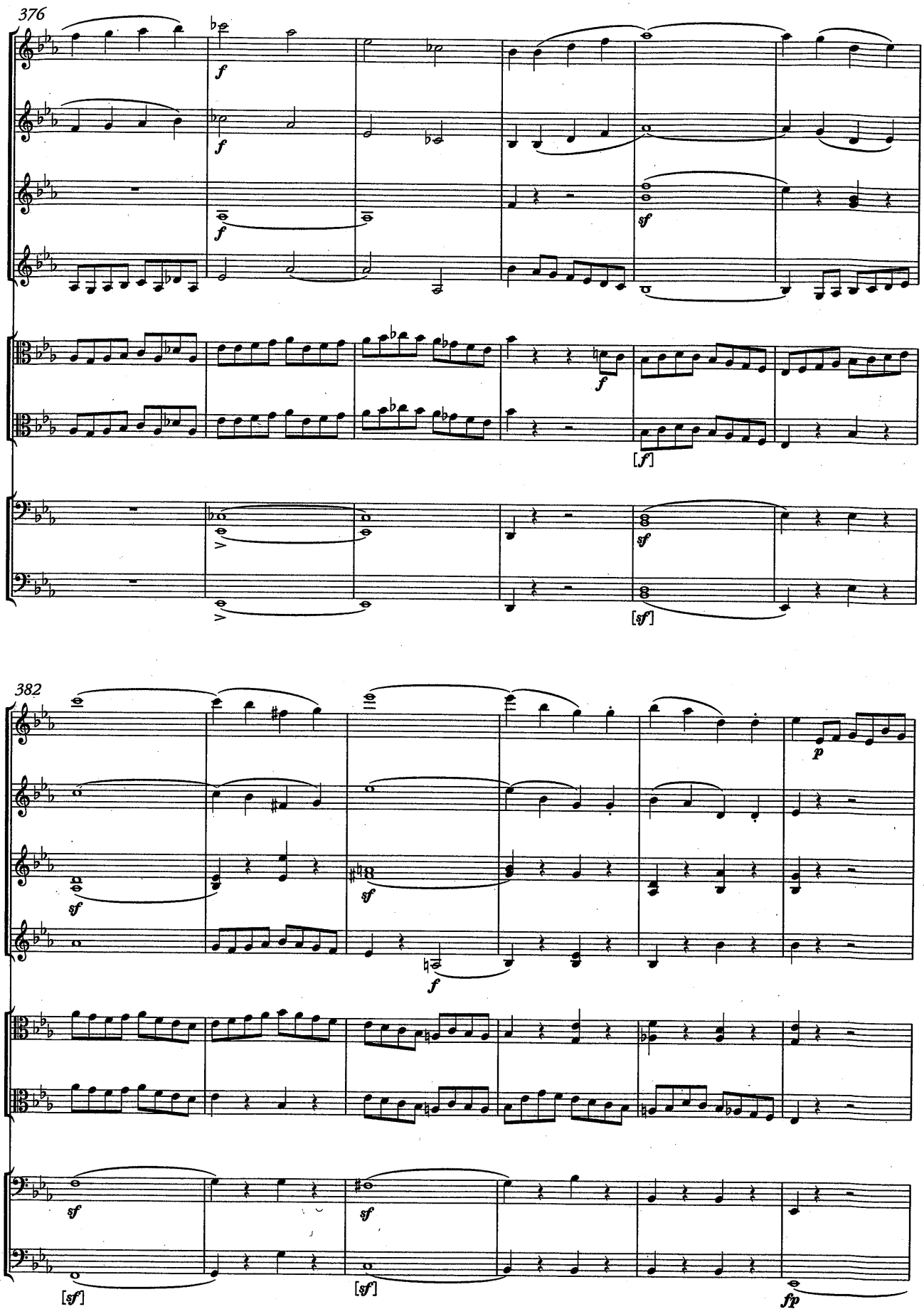
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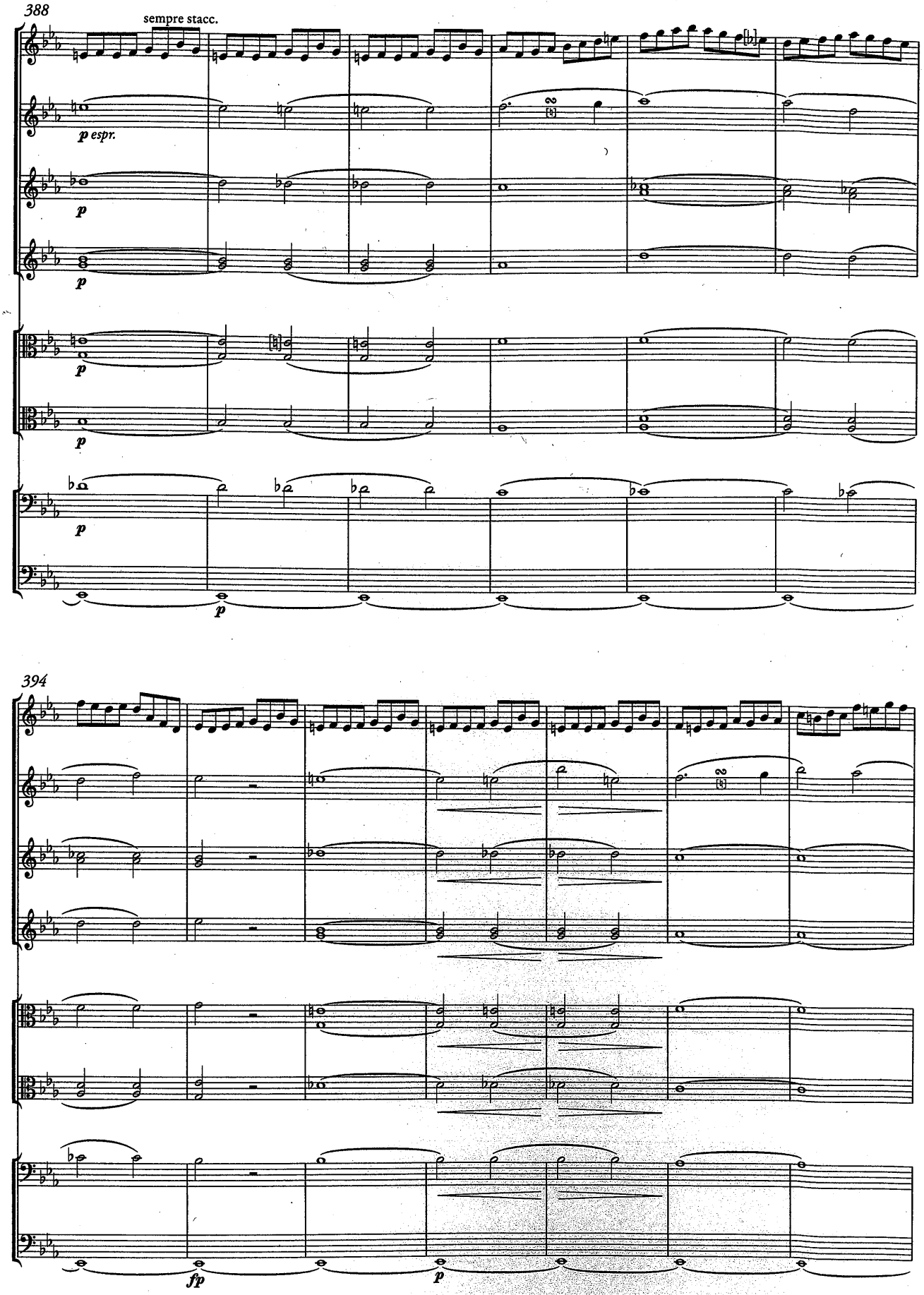
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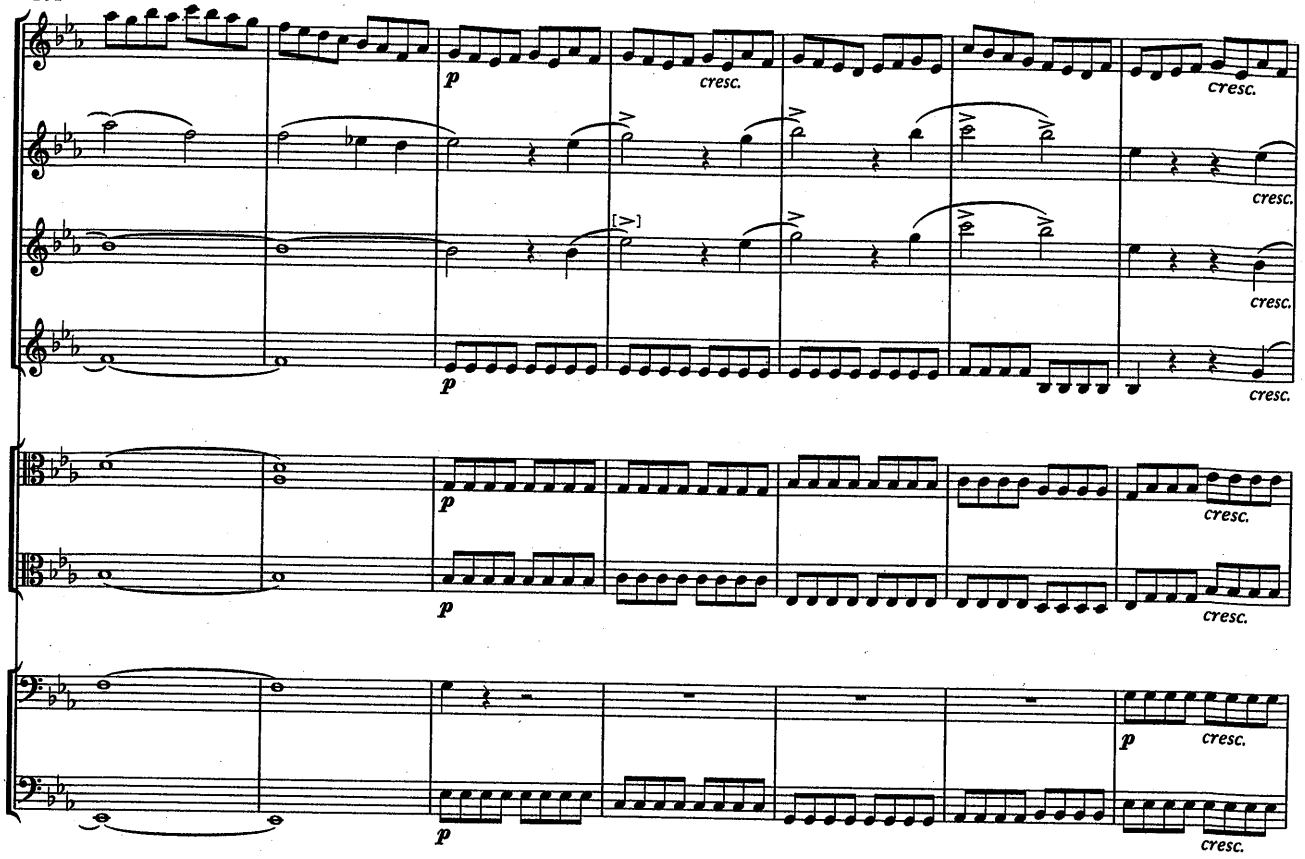

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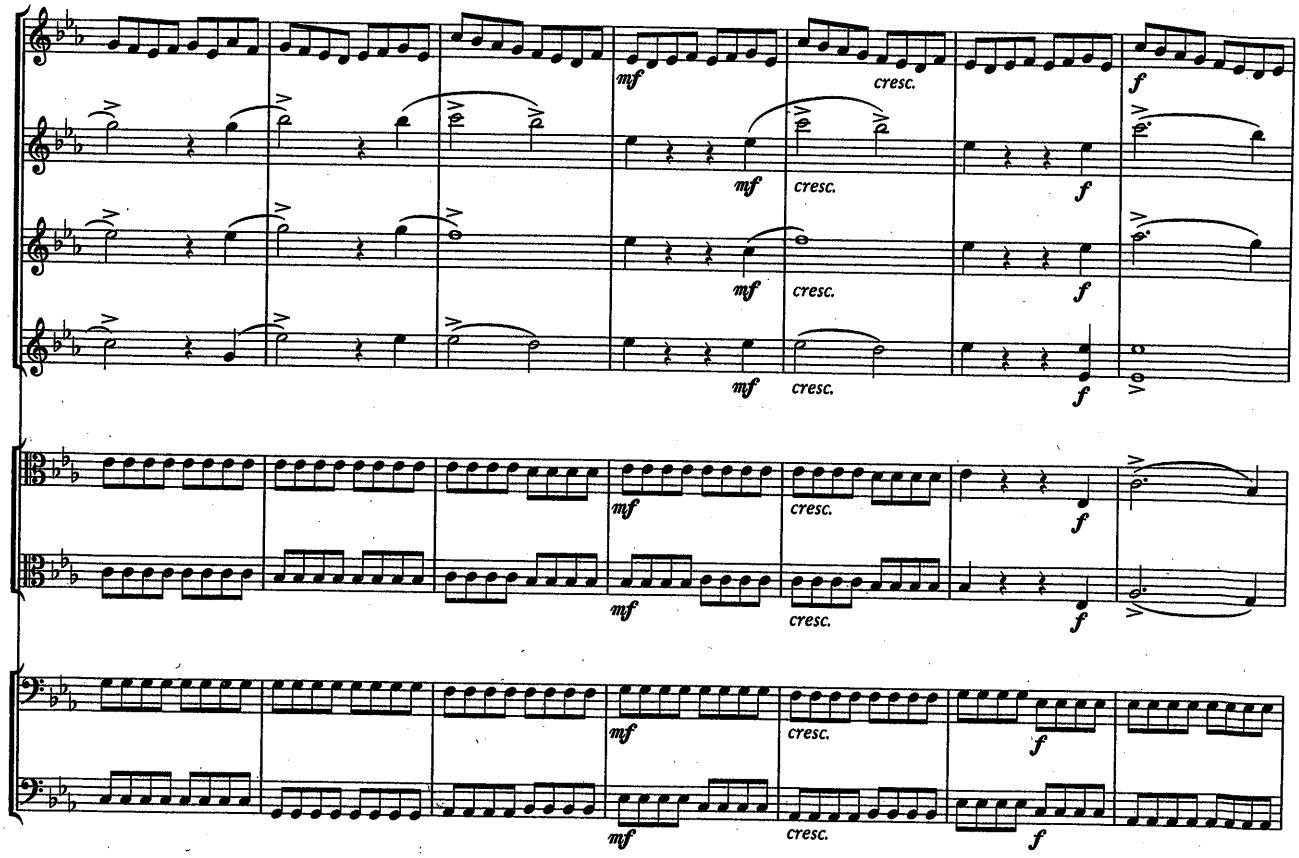

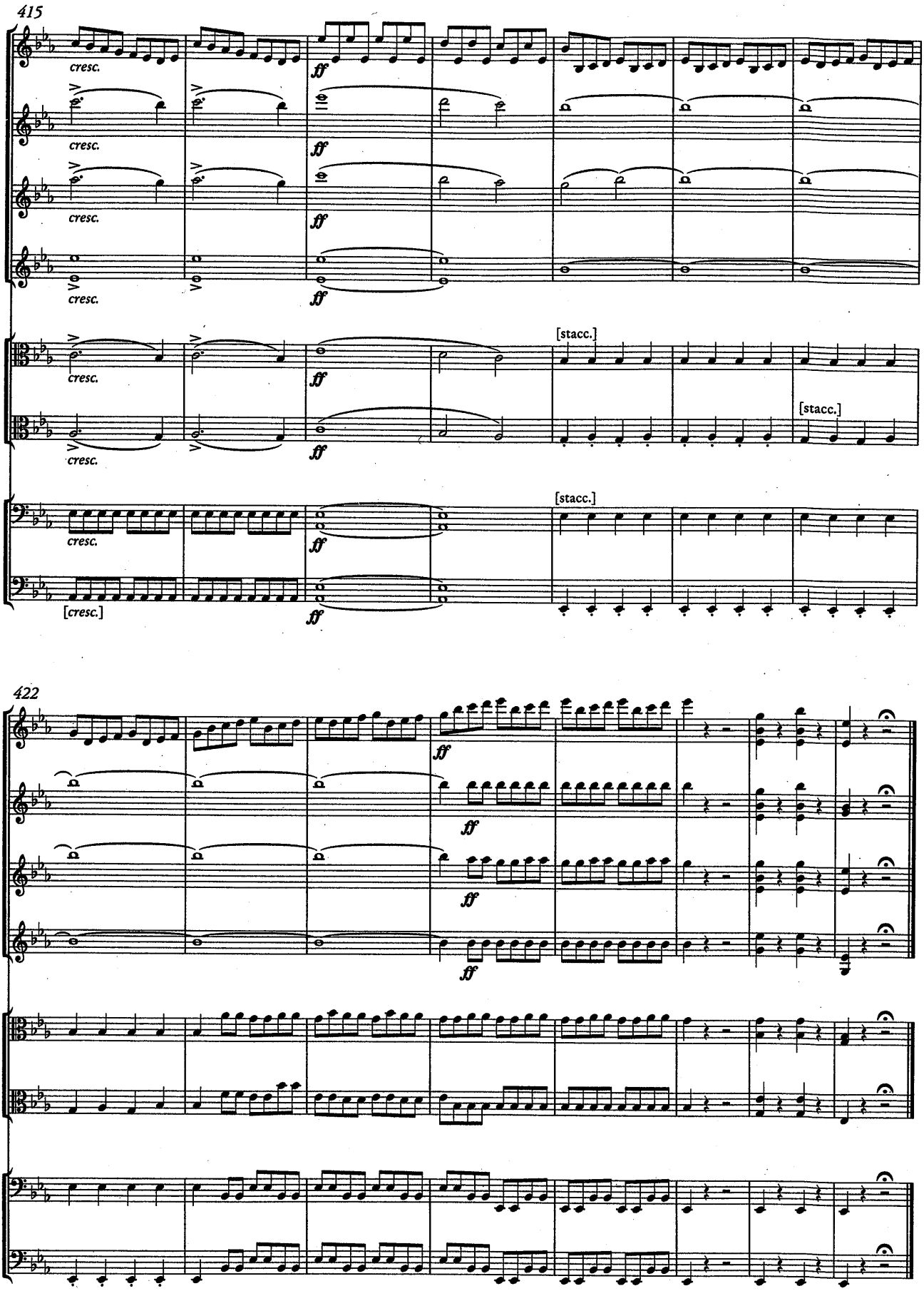

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