Max Mitchell

Exhibition I

based on works by abstract expressionist artists

(2017)

Full Score

Exhibition I

I - Vir Heroicus Sublimis [4'25] *Pages 1-2*
II - Autumn Rhythm [2'05] *Pages 3-11*
III - PH-129 [2'15] *Pages 12-14*
IV - Landscape at Stanton Street [2'25] *Pages 15-17*

Approximate duration: 11'10

Program Note:

Exhibition I is the first in a collection of suites in which I take art from a particular artistic movement and use them as the inspiration for the pieces in the suite. While researching artists I was particularly struck by the work of Barnett Newman and other abstract expressionist works so that's the artistic movement I decided to base the first suite on.

Developed in New York in the 1940s, Abstract expressionism is one of the big post-Wolrd War II art movements. The movement achieved international influence and put New York City at the centre of the western art world. After the war, these young artists wanted to express their feelings about the world through their artwork; wanting to communicate emotions like sorrow, outrage, and joy.

The first piece in the suite is based on the colour field painting 'Vir Heroicus Sublimis' by Barnett Newman. The title of the painting, which translates to 'Man, heroic and sublime' refers to an essay by Newman where he asks the question "if we are living in a time without a legend that can be called sublime, how can we be creating sublime art?" Newman's painting sought to take one colour (in this case, red) and remove it from its context, therefore encouraging viewers to react to the colour according to their instincts. This piece is my reaction upon seeing the work.

Vir Heroicus Sublimis is a large, expansive work measuring at approximately 2.4 x 5.4 metres so, in order to portray the painting's grand scale and immersive nature, I decided to make this piece much longer than the others in the suite. The length of the "red" sections in the composition is roughly dicatated by the physical size of the corresponding red sections in the painting.

The painting also has narrow, vertical bands of colour called "zips". The function of these zips, according to Newman, was to provide contrast to the massive colour field. In the composition, each "musical zip" consists of static dynamics and/or timbral shifts. In order to provide additional contrast in the piece, the permutation of the 'red chord' (C, F#, C#, G) changes after each zip, returning to the original permutation for the final red to give the piece a sense of closure. It is worth noting that I avoided using G as the bass note in the permutations as I didn't want the chord to appear to have a dominant function.

Based on the painting 'Autumn Rhythm' by Jackson Pollock, the piece features the musical equivalents of the spontaneous dribs and splashes found in action painting, with glissandi mimicking the movement of paint and intertwining melodic fragments representing the dense web of lines in the painting. I recreated the disorienting nature of the painting through syncopation, unexpected changes in meter and additive rhythms.

'PH-129' is a bright, oil on canvas painting completed in 1949 by the artist Clyfford Still. The painting has a luminous, shimmery quality which is reflected in my composition through the use of; sul ponticello, which brings out some of the higher partials; the tremolos alternating between natural harmonics and the resonant open strings and; the predominantly high tessitura. The occasional dissonances represent the small, scar-like, blood red area which somewhat taints the painting's luminous nature.

The final piece is based on the lithograph 'Landscape at Stanton Street' by Willem de Kooning. The work is monochrome, completely drained of colour and consists of ink spatters of varying size and density combined with free, gestural brush strokes forming free disordered lines. To me the work, while sombre, does have a sense of calm to it which is reflected in my piece by the slow harmonic rhythm. The sombreness is conveyed using a low tessitura. The pizzicato, halfway through the piece, represents the small ink spatters in the middle of the lithograph.

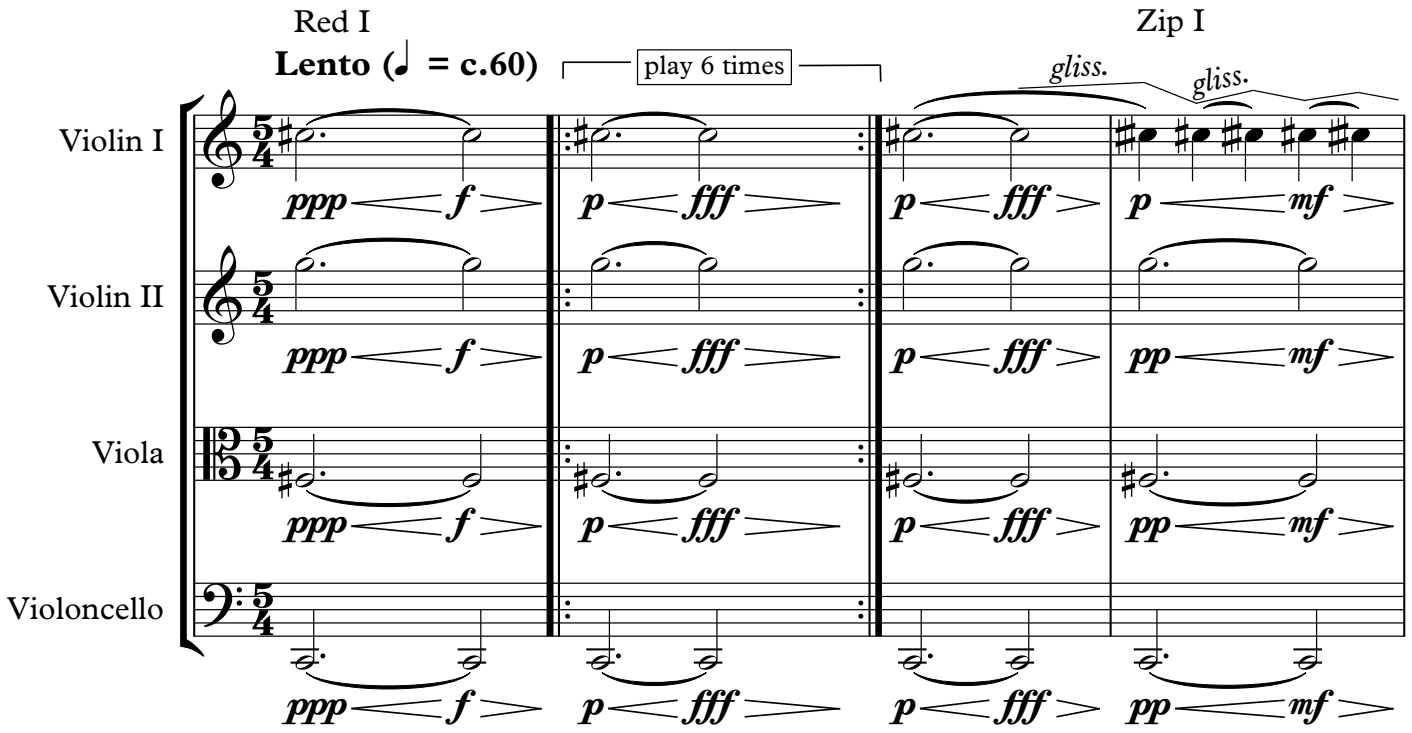
I

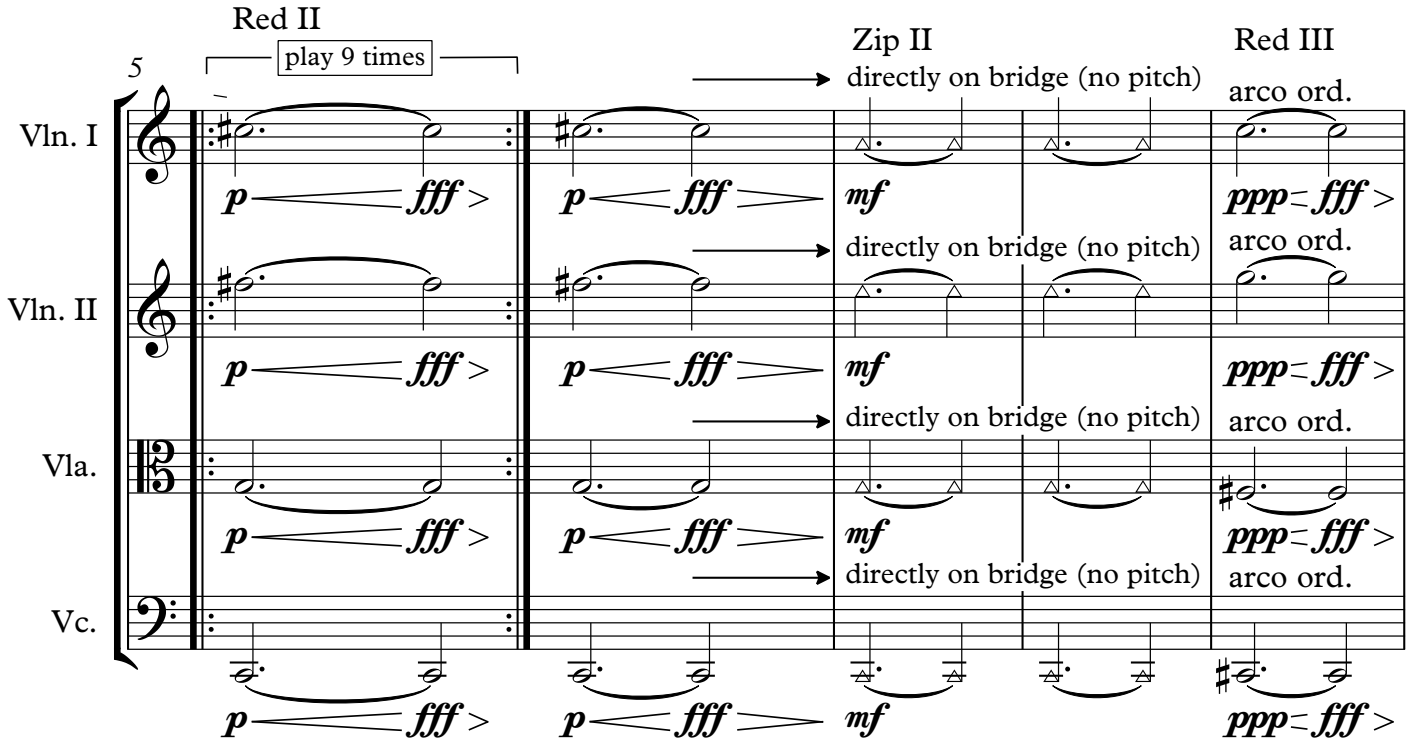
Vir Heroicus Sublimis

1950-51

Max Mitchell

BARNETT NEWMAN





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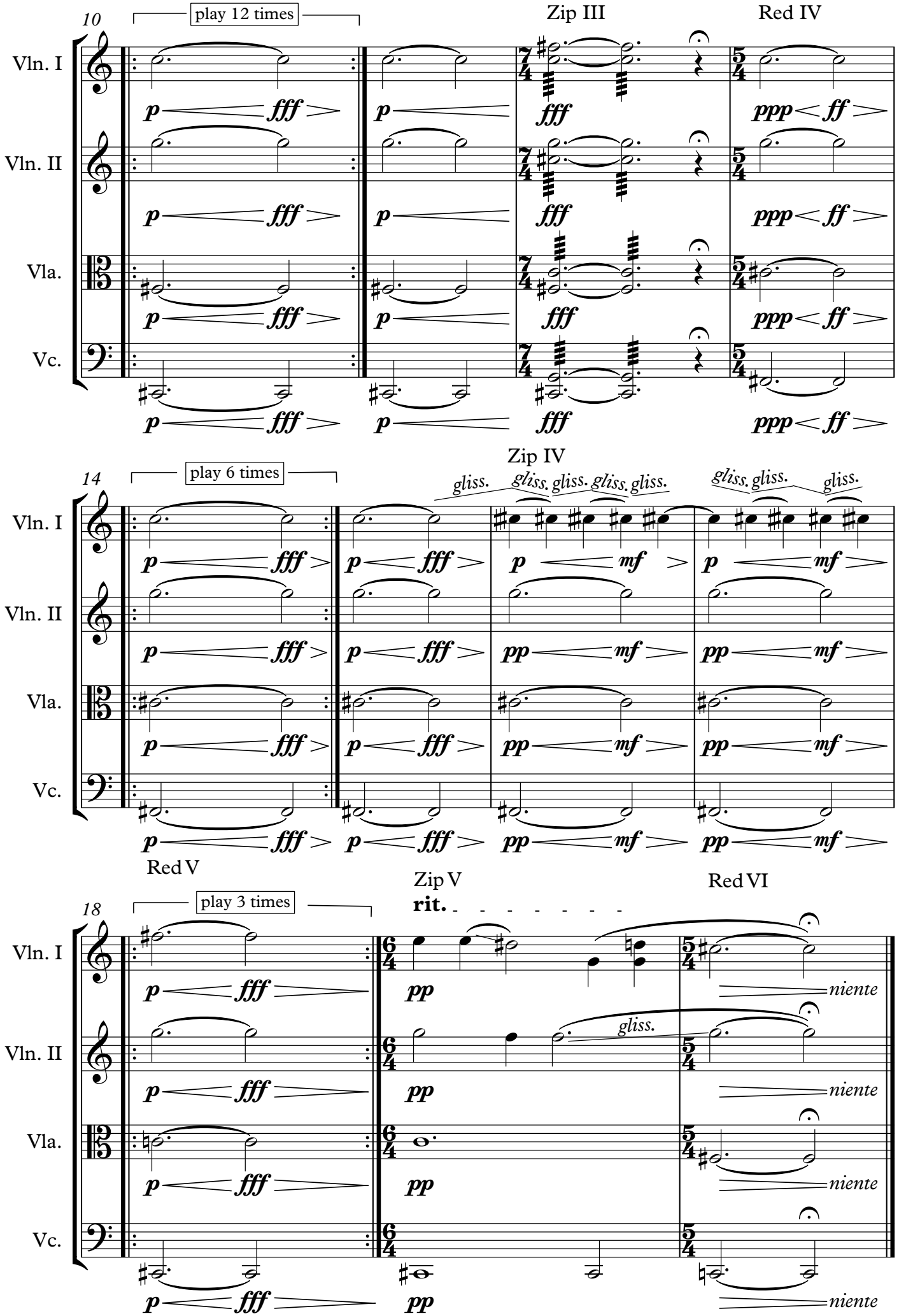
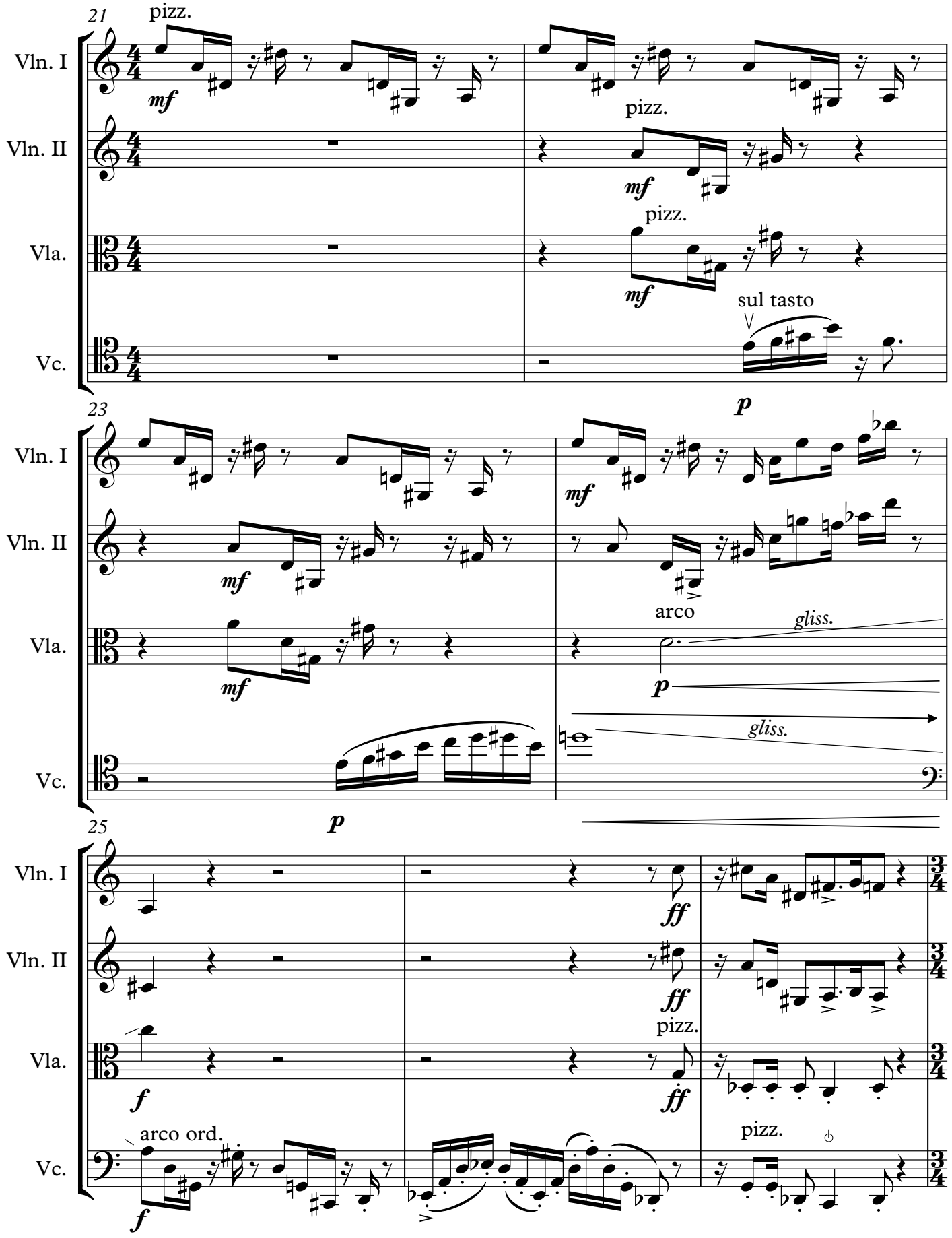

10
play 12 times
Zip III
Red IV
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
14
play 6 times
Zip IV
gliss.
gliss. gliss. gliss. gliss.
gliss. gliss.
gliss.
Red V
Zip V
Red VI
18
play 3 times
rit.
niente

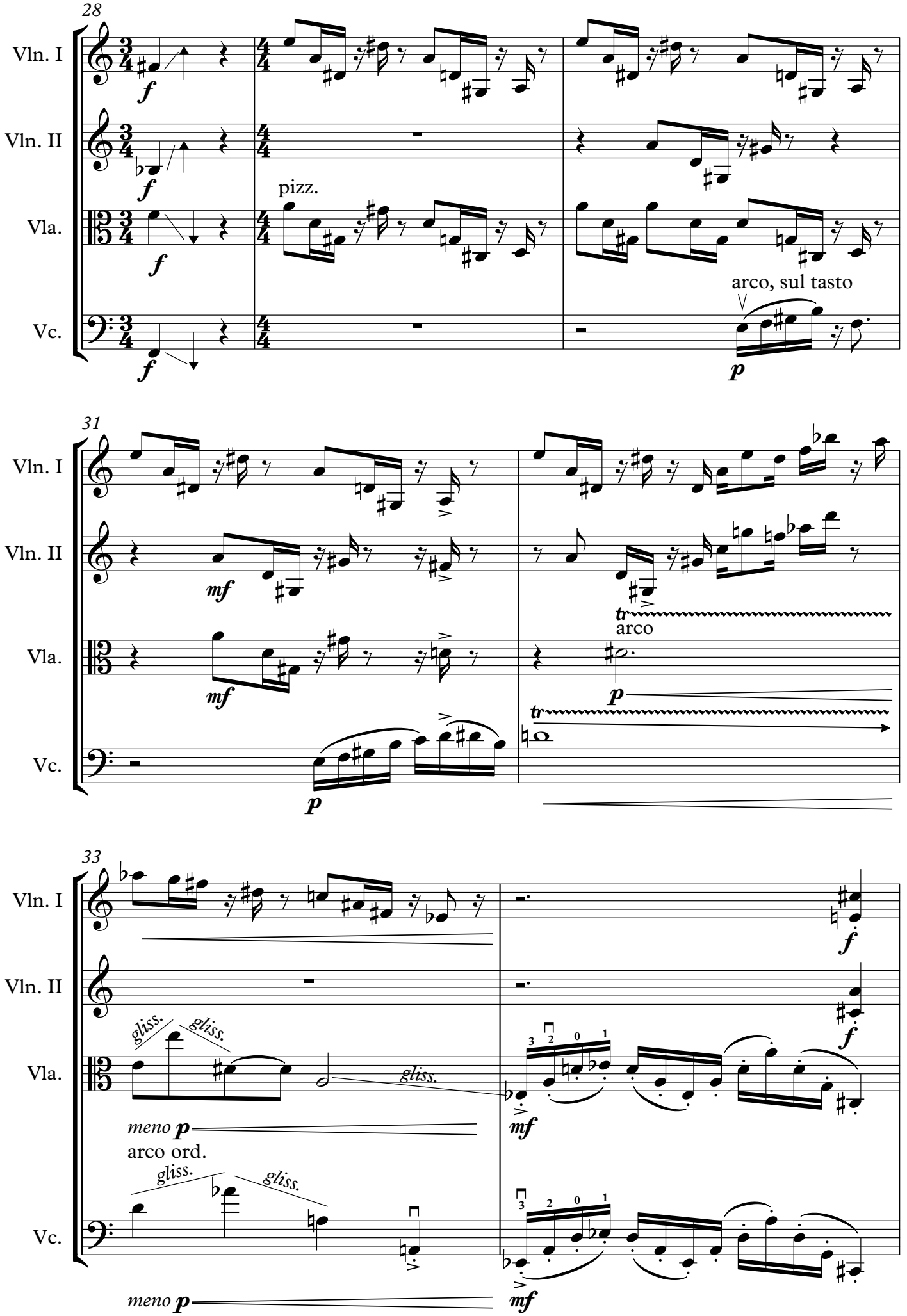
II

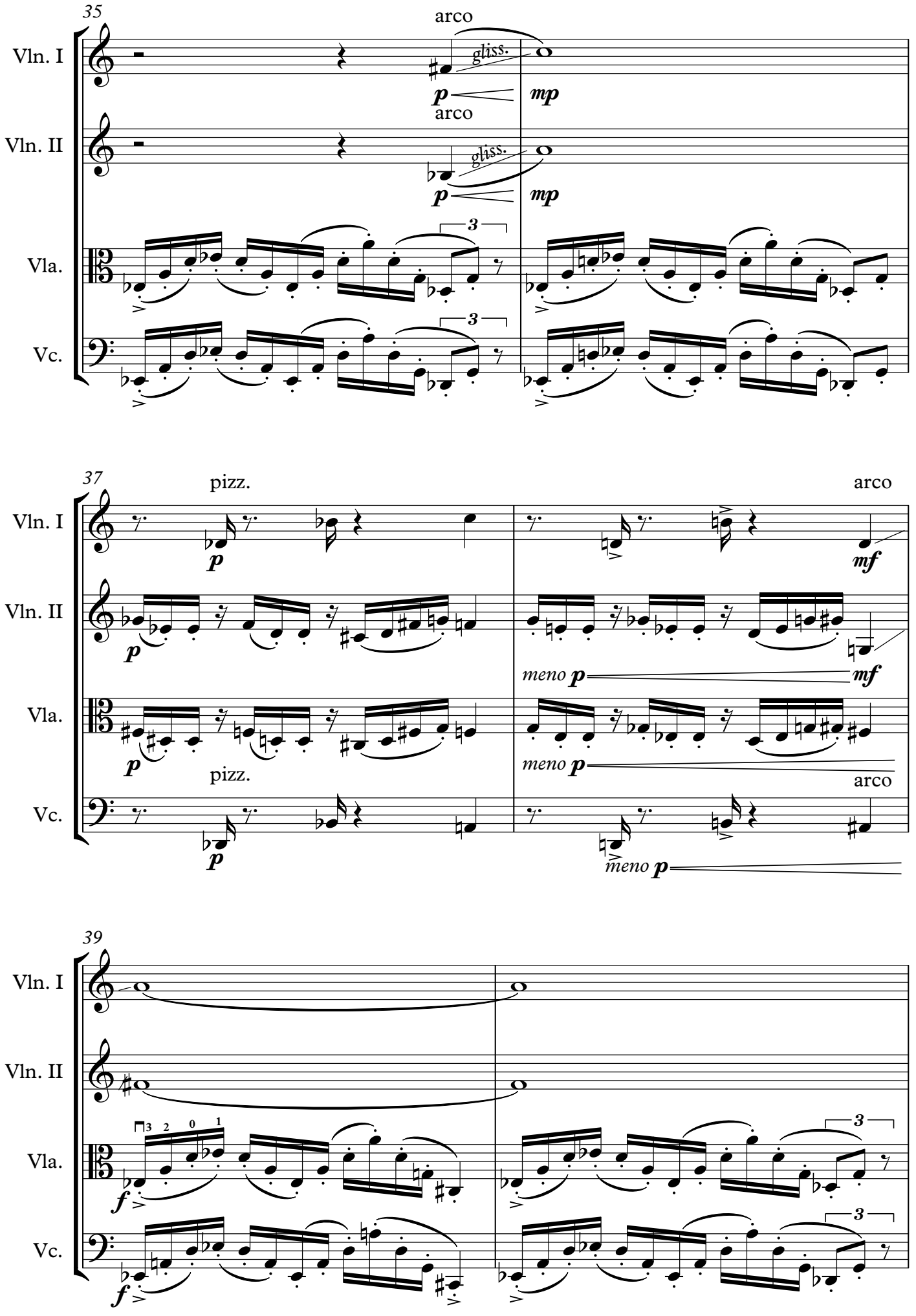
Autumn Rhythm

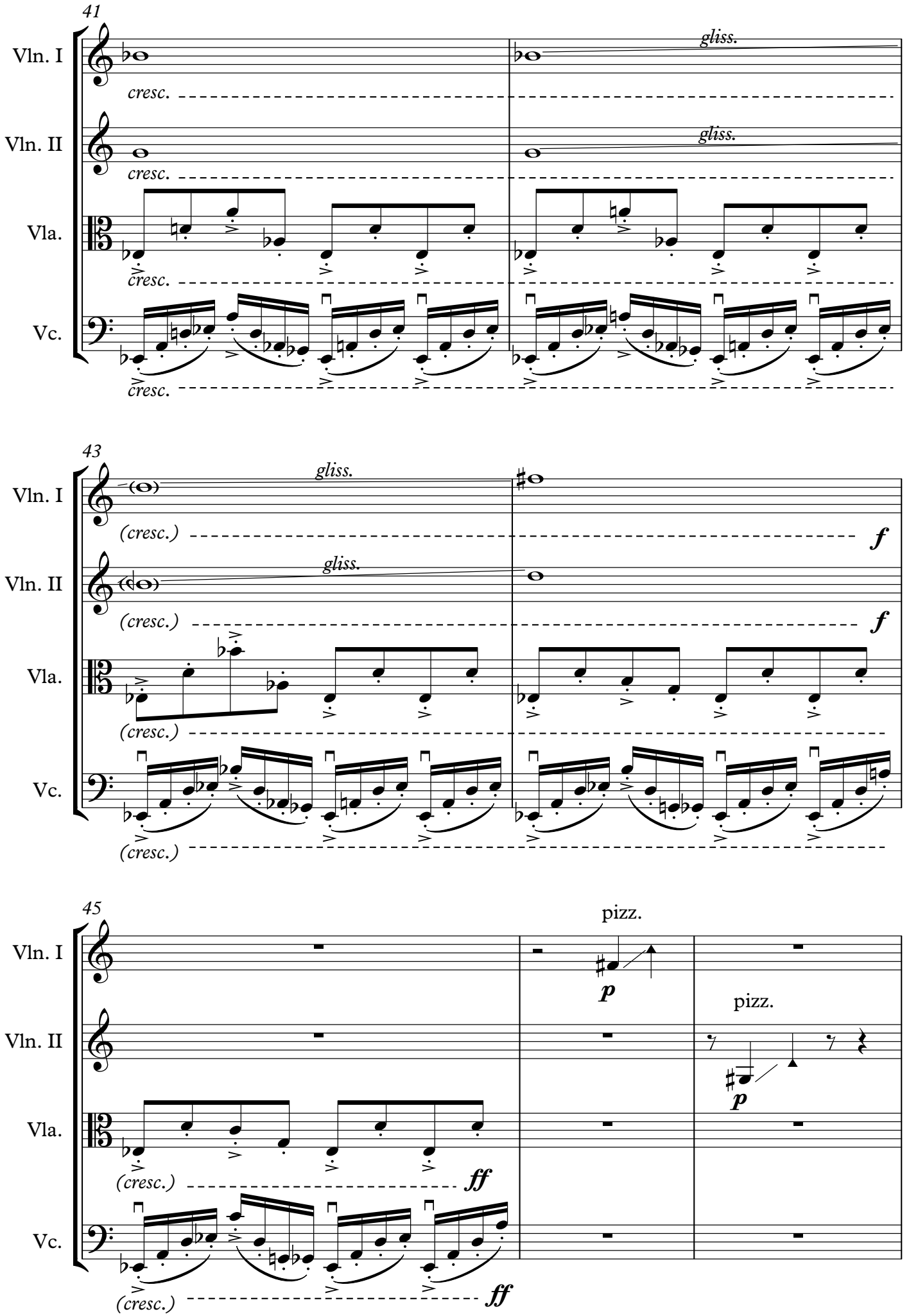
1950

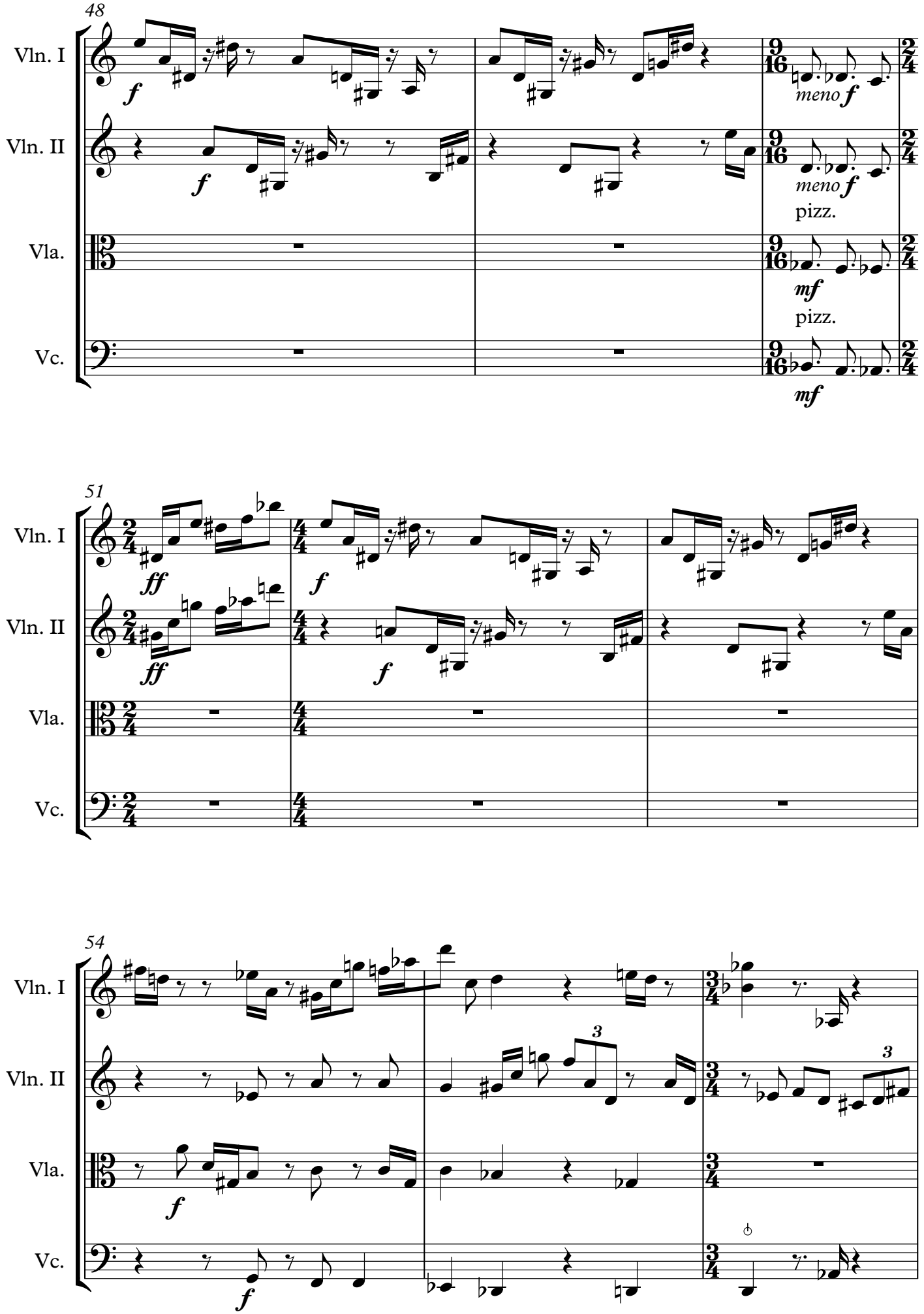
Allegretto (♩ = c.116) JACKSON POLLOCK

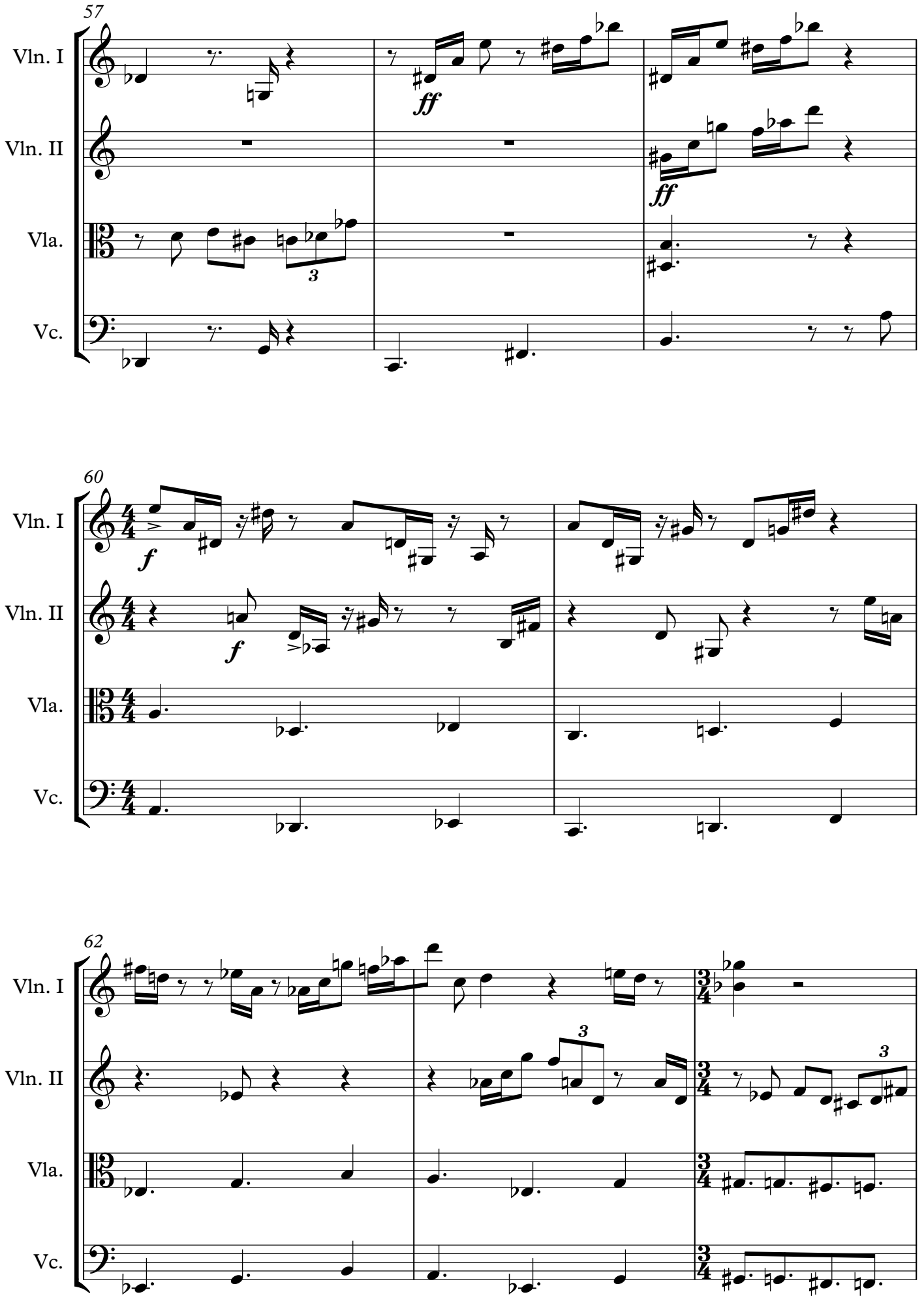


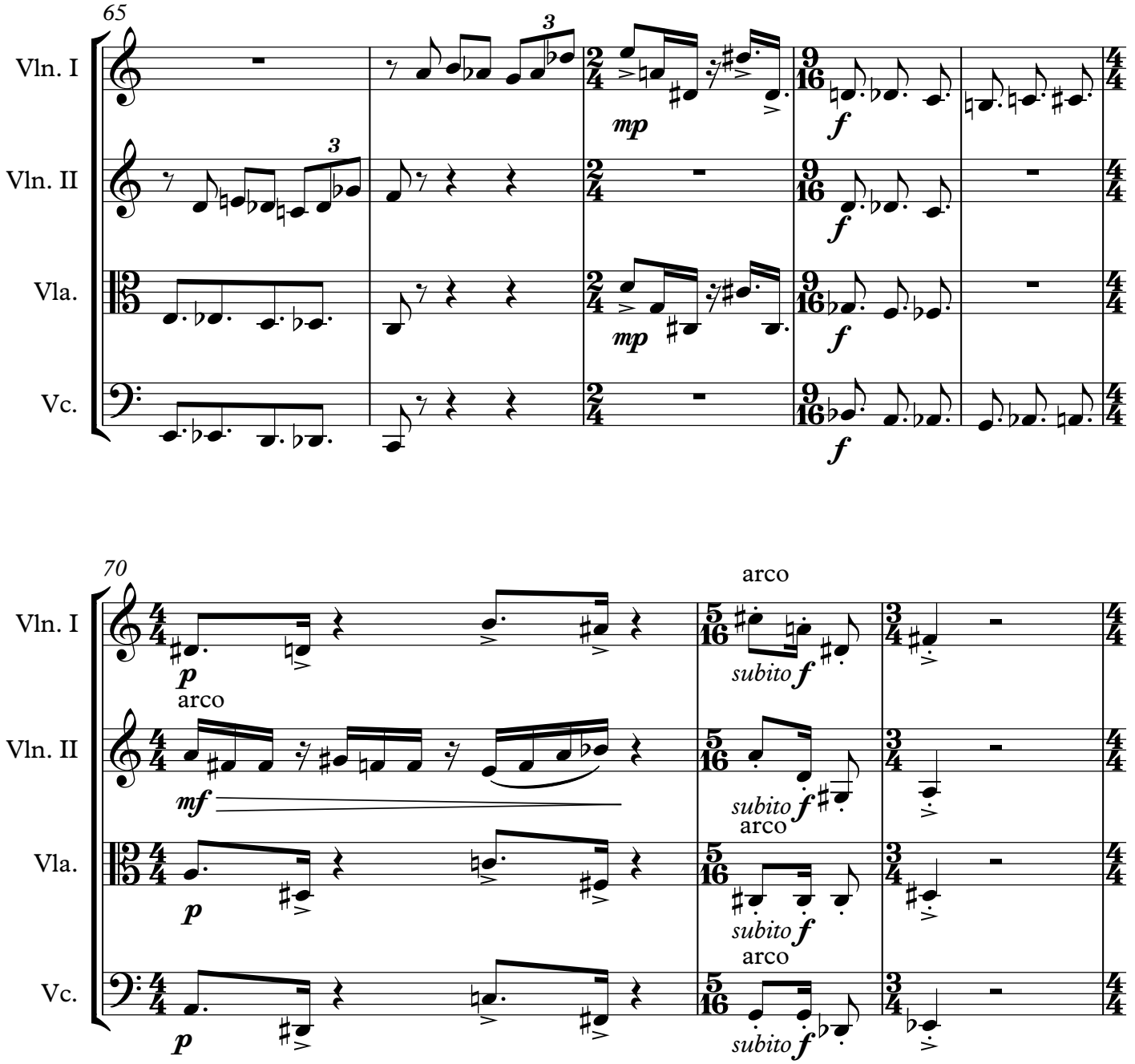

28
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
arco, sul tasto
31
arco
33
gliss.
meno p
arco ord.

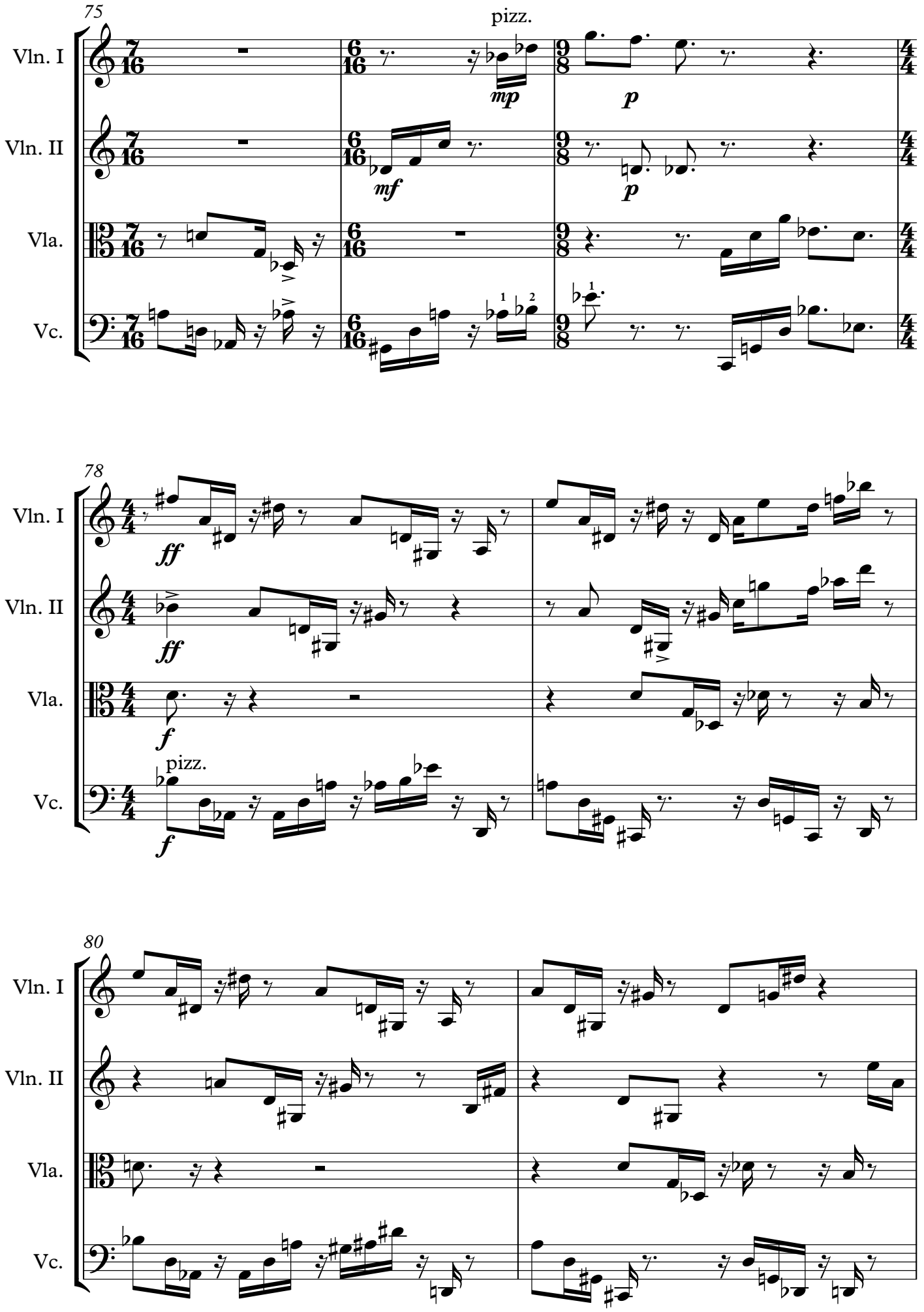

35
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
arco
gliss.
p
mp
arco
gliss.
p
mp
3
3
37
pizz.
arco
p
mf
meno p
mf
meno p
pizz.
arco
p
meno p
39
f
3
3

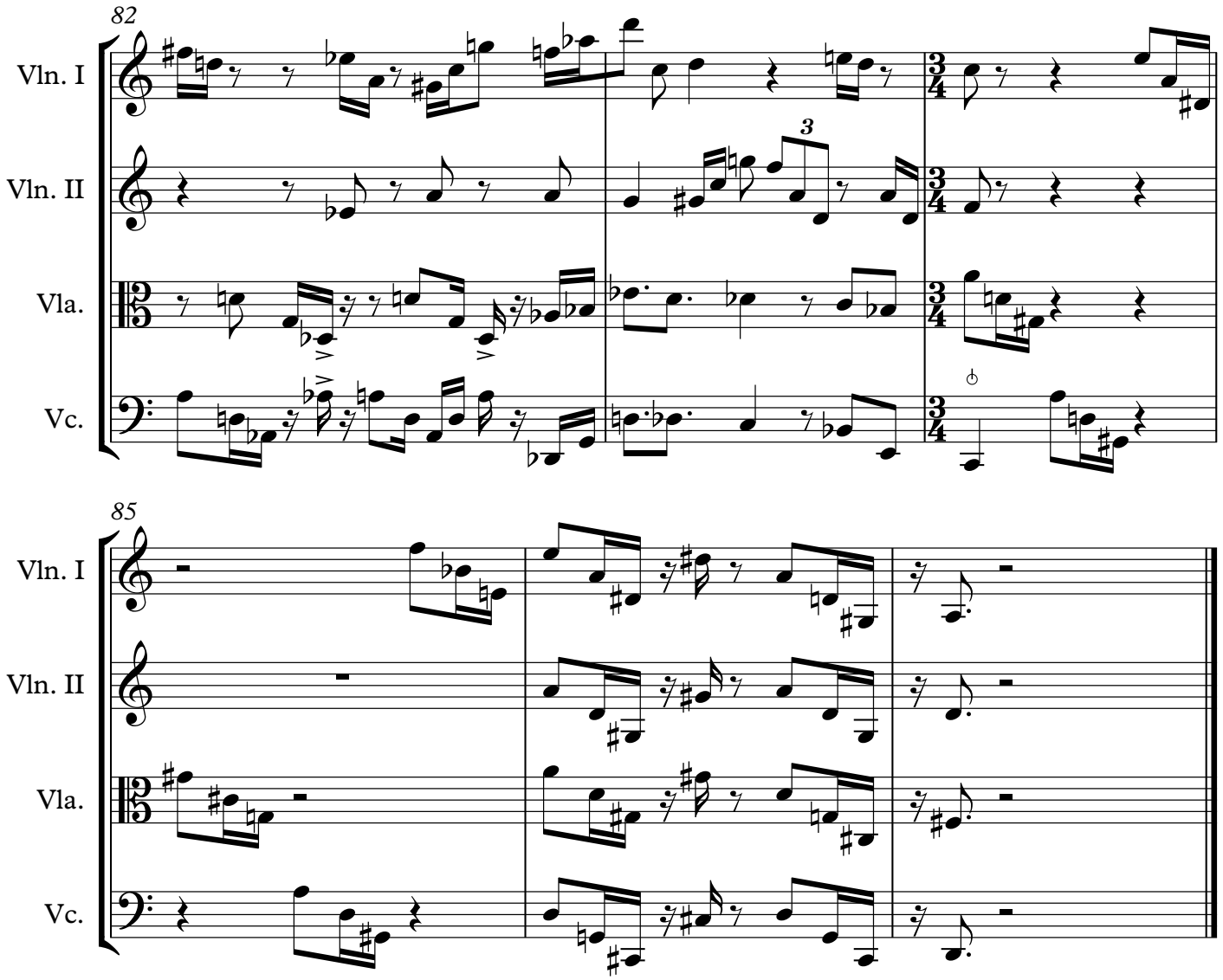

41
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
cresc.
gliss.
43
(cresc.)
f
45
pizz.
p
ff


48
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
f
meno f
pizz.
mf
51
ff
54
3


57
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
ff
ff
3
60
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
f
f
62
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
3
3
3


65
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
3
mp
f
70
arco
p
mf
subito f
73
pizz.


75
pizz.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
p
mf
p
78
ff
ff
f
pizz.
f
80

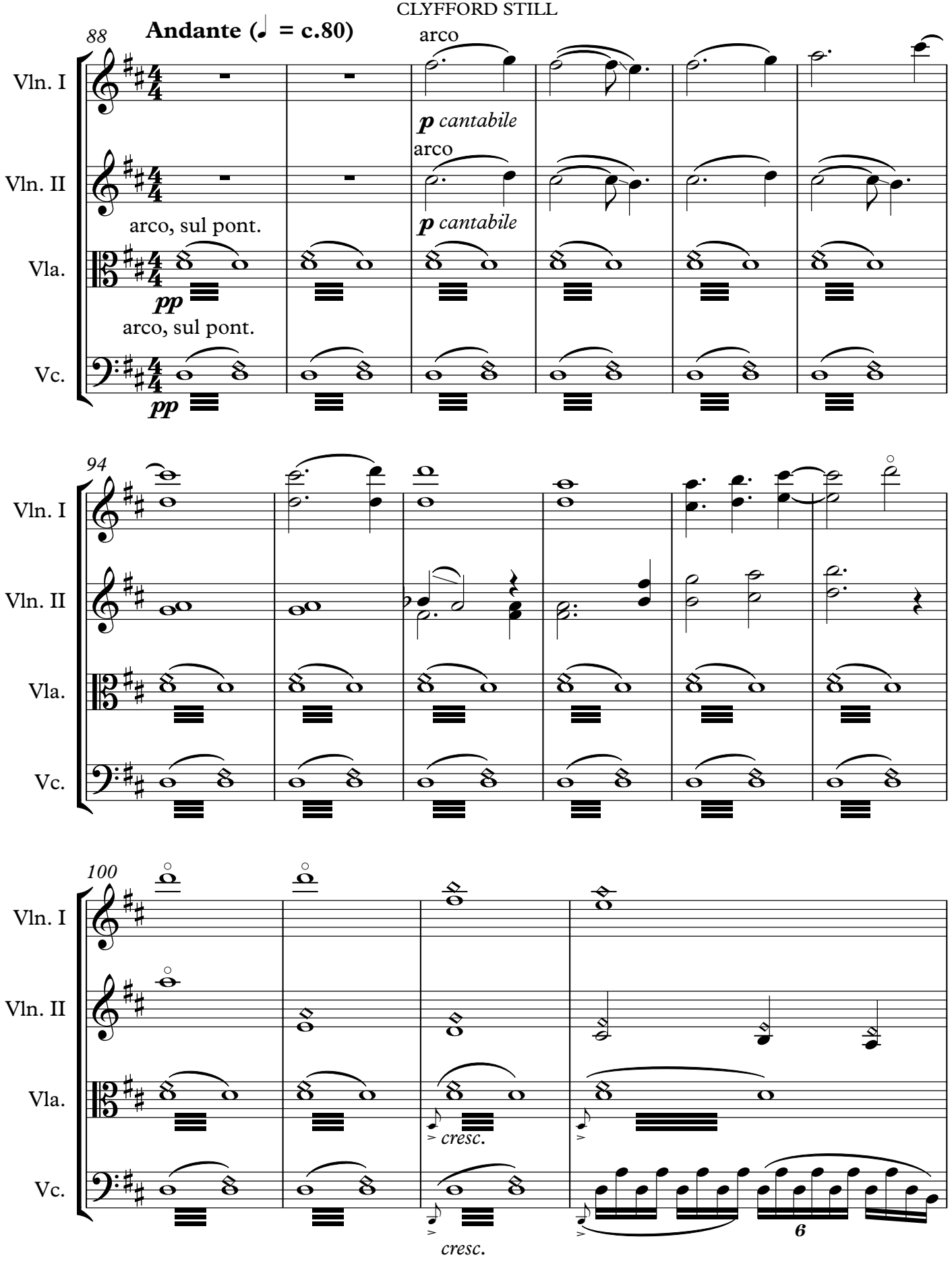

82
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
3
85
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

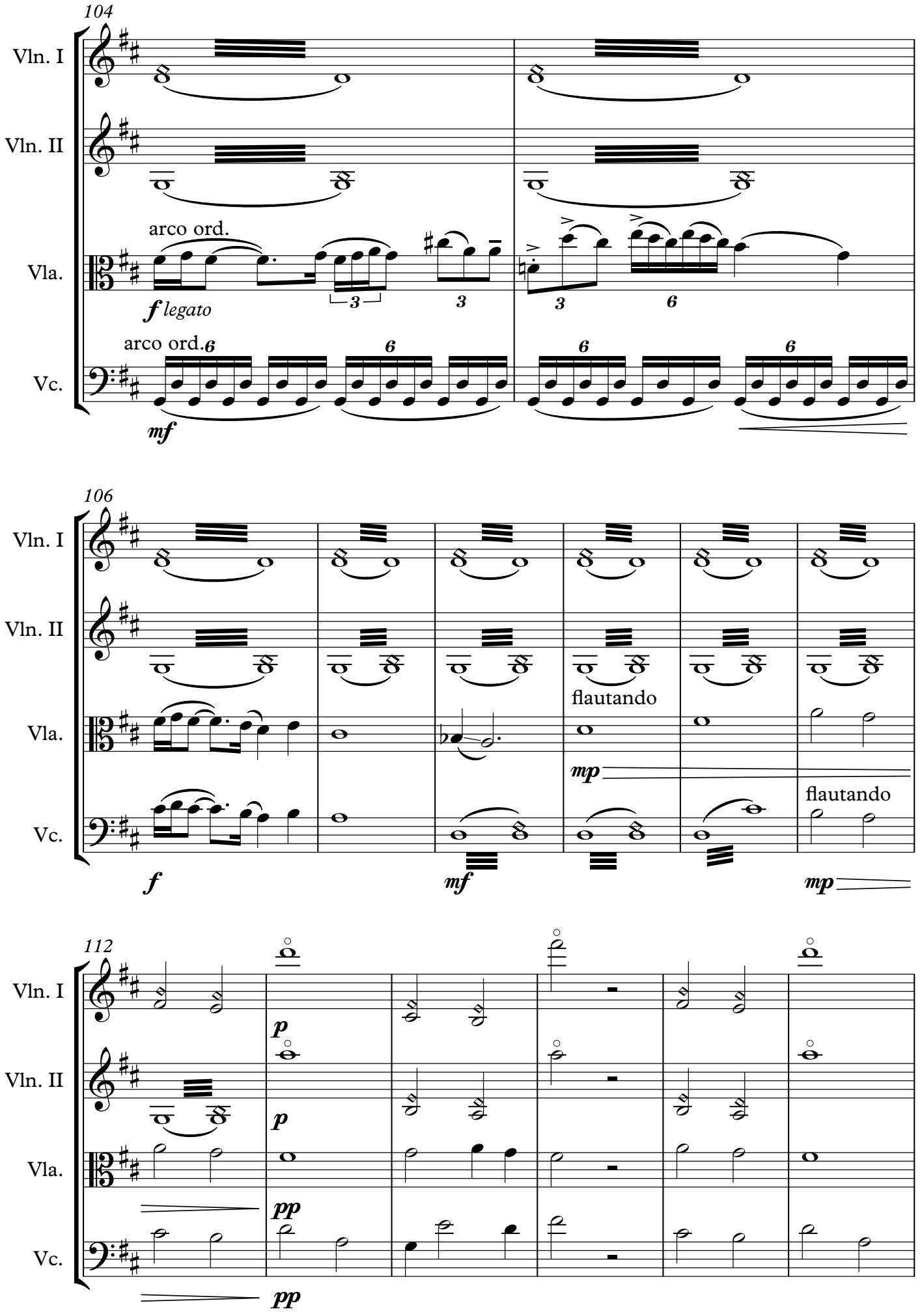
III

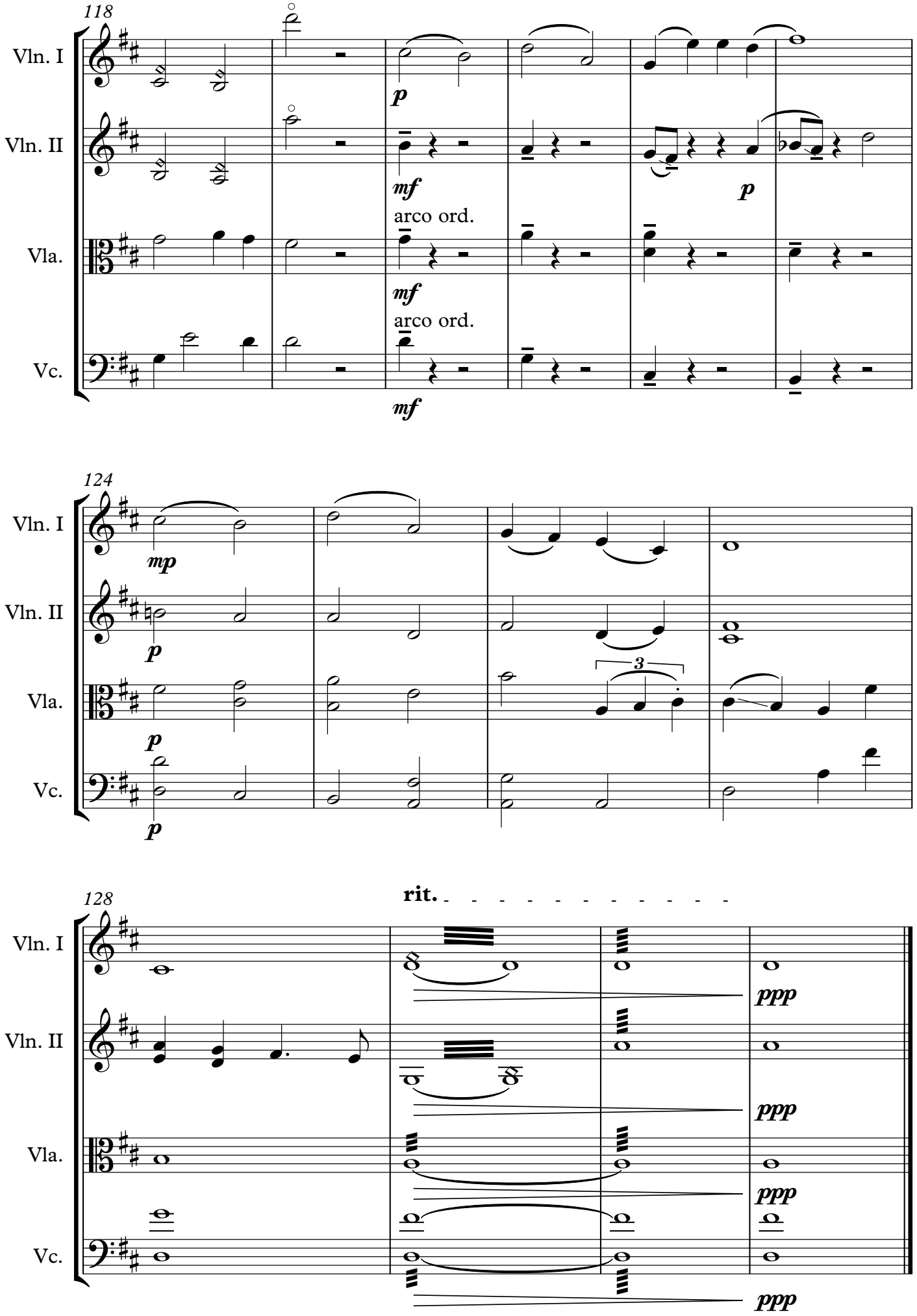
PH-129

1949

CLYFFORD STILL




104
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
arco ord.
f legato
arco ord.
mf
106
flautando
mp
flautando
f
mf
mp
112
p
p
pp
pp


118
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
p
mf
arco ord.
mf
arco ord.
mf
p
124
mp
p
p
p
3
128
rit.
ppp
ppp
ppp
ppp

IV

Landscape at Stanton Street

1971

WILLEM DE KOONING

Lento (♩ = c.60)

132

Vln. I

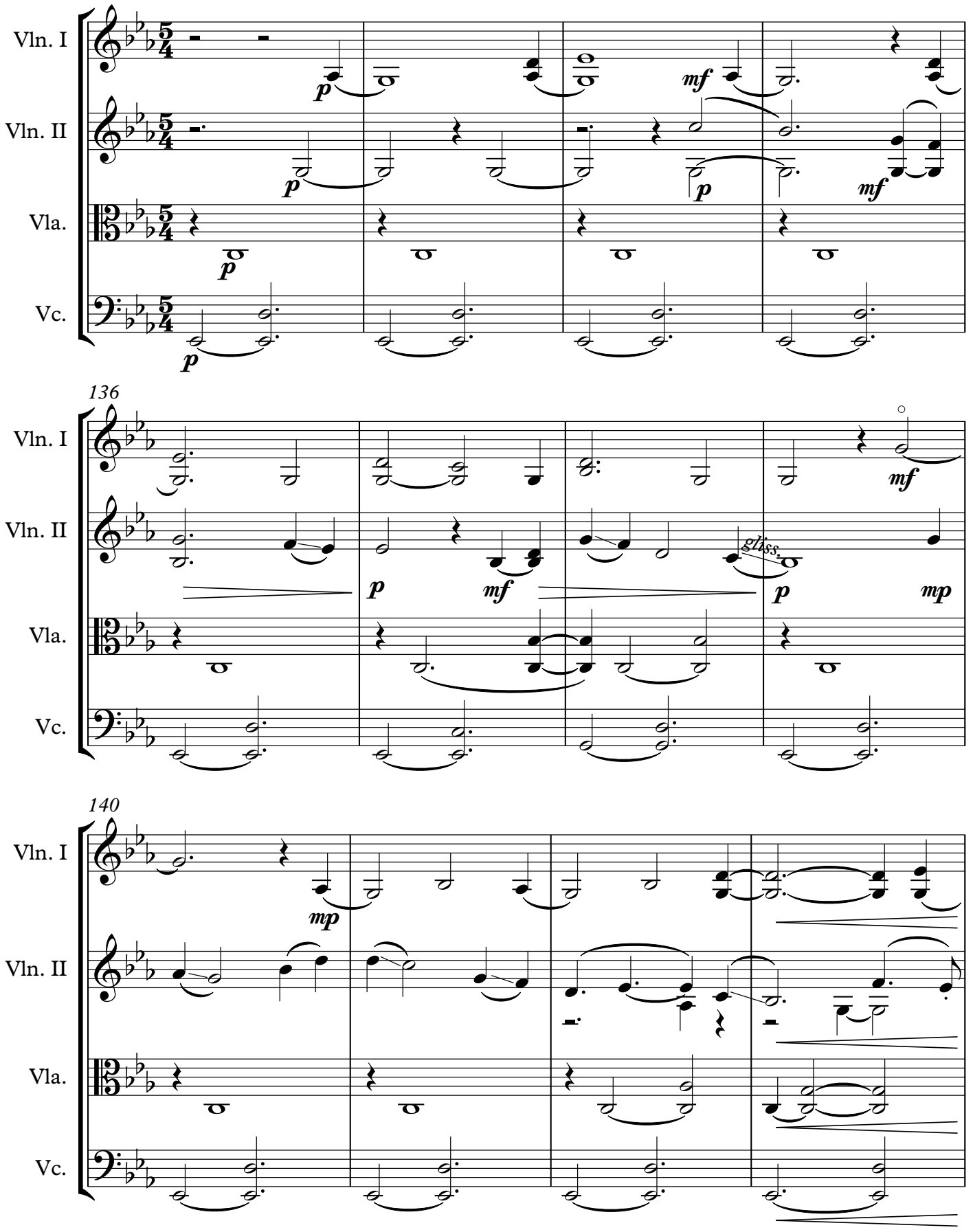
Vln. II

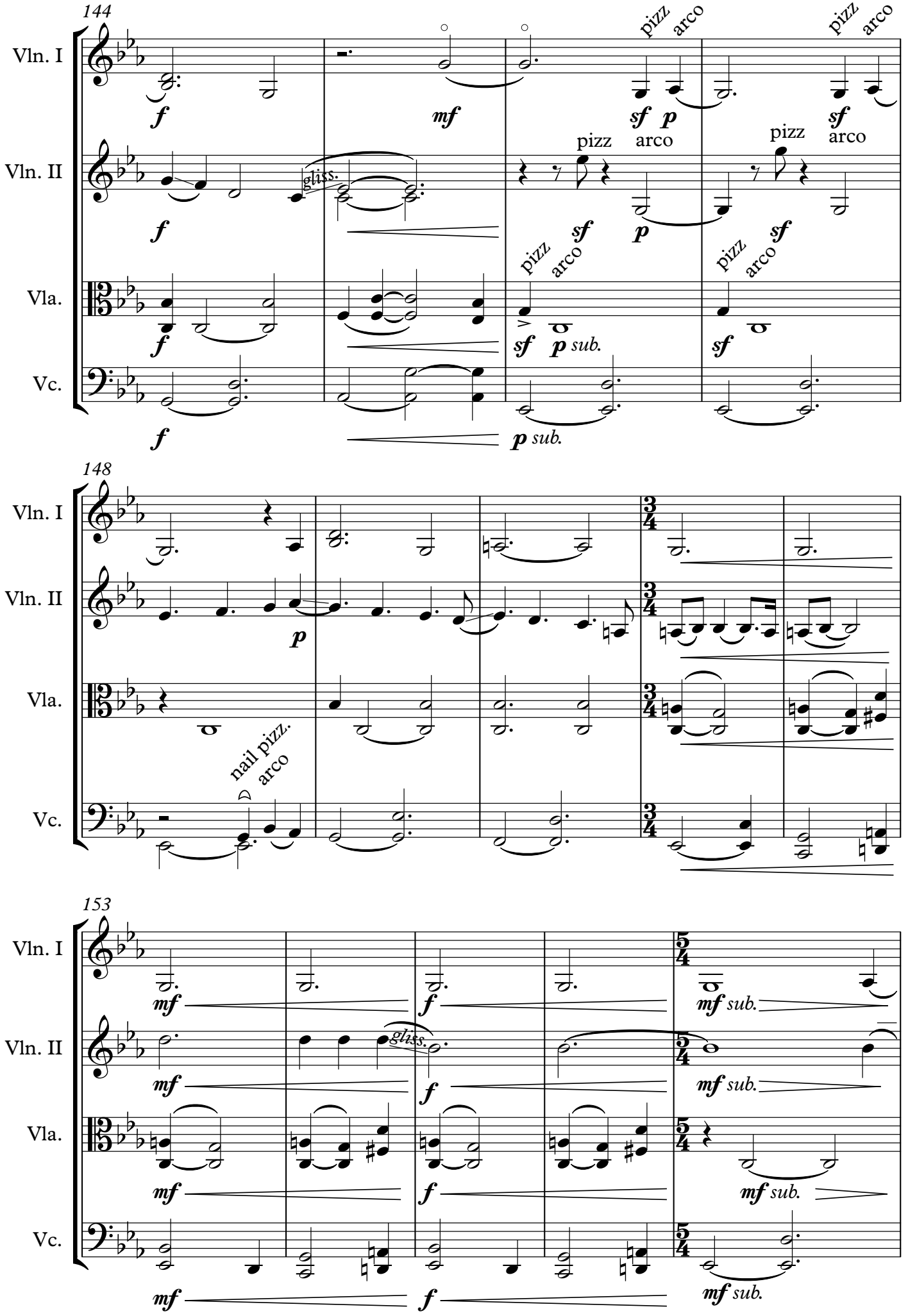
Vla.

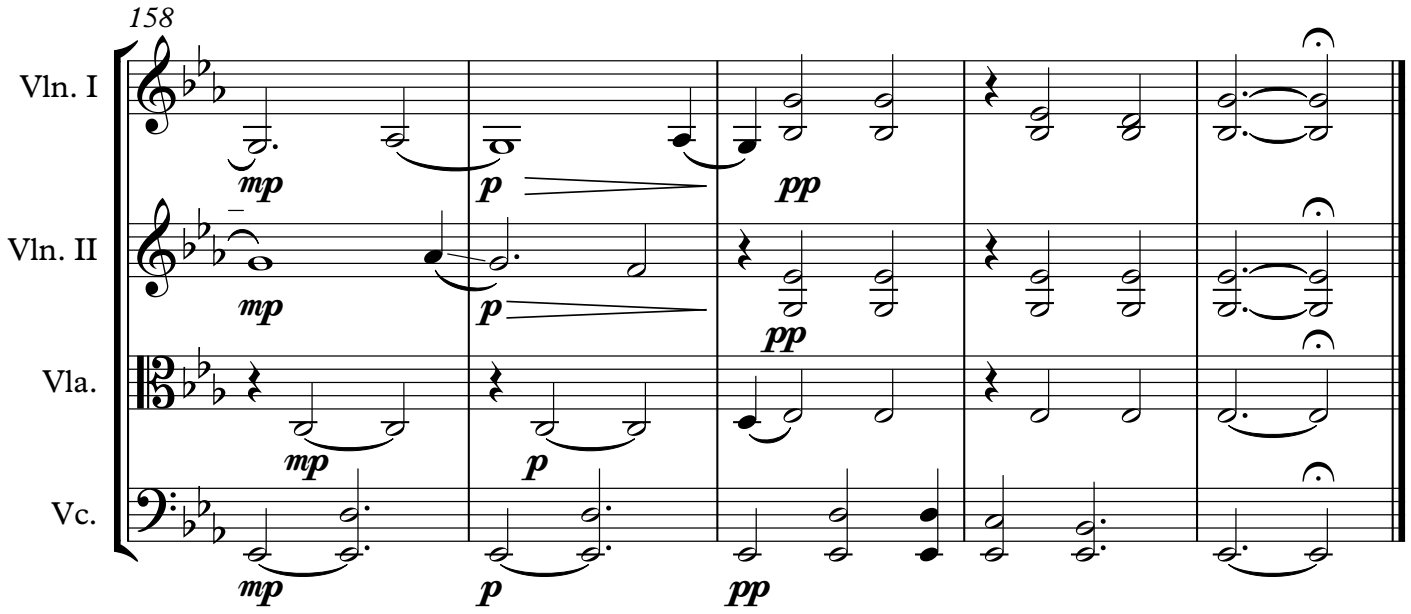
Vc.

136

140




144
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
gliss.
pizz
arco
sub.
148
nail pizz.
153


158
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
p
pp