Matt Browne

Ancient Machines

for Saxophone Quartet

2010-11

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Program Note

The original concept for this piece was to have a suite of five or six short movements for saxophone quartet, where each one depicted a different ancient invention from around the world. During my research, however, the philosophy behind the act of invention became more important in my mind than the actual inventions themselves. The more I studied, the more I began to notice a pattern behind the motivation to invent these devices. In addition to basic survival, there seems to exist two distinct motives to *create* something. The first is to enact control over the masses, and protect humanity's already-attained knowledge. Inventions of this kind tend to include war machines and grizzly torture devices, such as the *Brazen Bull* (the subject of the first movement). The second is to better understand the unknown aspects of our universe, and to attain as much knowledge as possible. These inventions, such as the compass and cosmic clocks (the subject of the second movement), tended to lean toward our observational and exploratory impulses. While both these types of inventions required more or less the same prowess in engineering and mechanical skills, there still exists an interesting ethical duality between the inventions themselves, in addition to their creators. This duality is explored in the following two movements:

I. Perillos and Phalaris

The title refers to, respectively, the inventor and commissioner of a torture and execution device used in ancient Sicily (c. 560 BC) called *The Brazen Bull*. The device was a hollow piece of metal shaped like a bull in which the convict was locked inside and a fire was lit under it. The criminal was left there to roast to death. In addition, the bull was built with an intricate system of pipes whose purpose was two-fold. First, they were used to dispel the smoke from the fire into what Phalaris called "spicy clouds of incense". They were also designed to transform the sound of the victim's screams into what sounded like the cry of a bull. Perillos assured Phalaris that "(his screams) will come to you through the pipes as the tenderest, most pathetic, most melodious of bellowings".

The explosive energy of the piece, unrelenting till the end, is meant to represent not only the dance of the roaring fire, but also the sadistic giddiness in the minds of the title figures with respect to the device.

II. Su Song's Cosmic Engine

Su Song, a Chinese polymath, created his *Cosmic Engine* in 1092 in order to calculate the position of various celestial bodies at any given date with near-flawless accuracy. The engine itself was a massive mechanical contrivance, standing 10 meters high and containing hundreds of precisely sized gears, run by a rotating water wheel.

The piece begins simply, with the first few short notes expanding into a more complex cross-rhythm marked by slap tonguing and multiphonics. This gives way to a largely robotic sounding tune, meant to represent the mechanical nature of the source material. After this plays out, a contrasting tranquil middle section is played, meant to represent the mystery and awe of the cosmos, the entity that this machine was built to understand. The mechanical section returns shortly after, chugging along until a burst of energy reminiscent of the first movement explodes on to the scene, marked by a triumphant return of the tranquil melody, played now with confidence as it, paired with an energetic version of the mechanical theme, draws the piece to a close.

Duration: c. 7 minutes

www.mattbrownecomposer.com

Full Score (Transposed)

For my good friend, Scott Hunt

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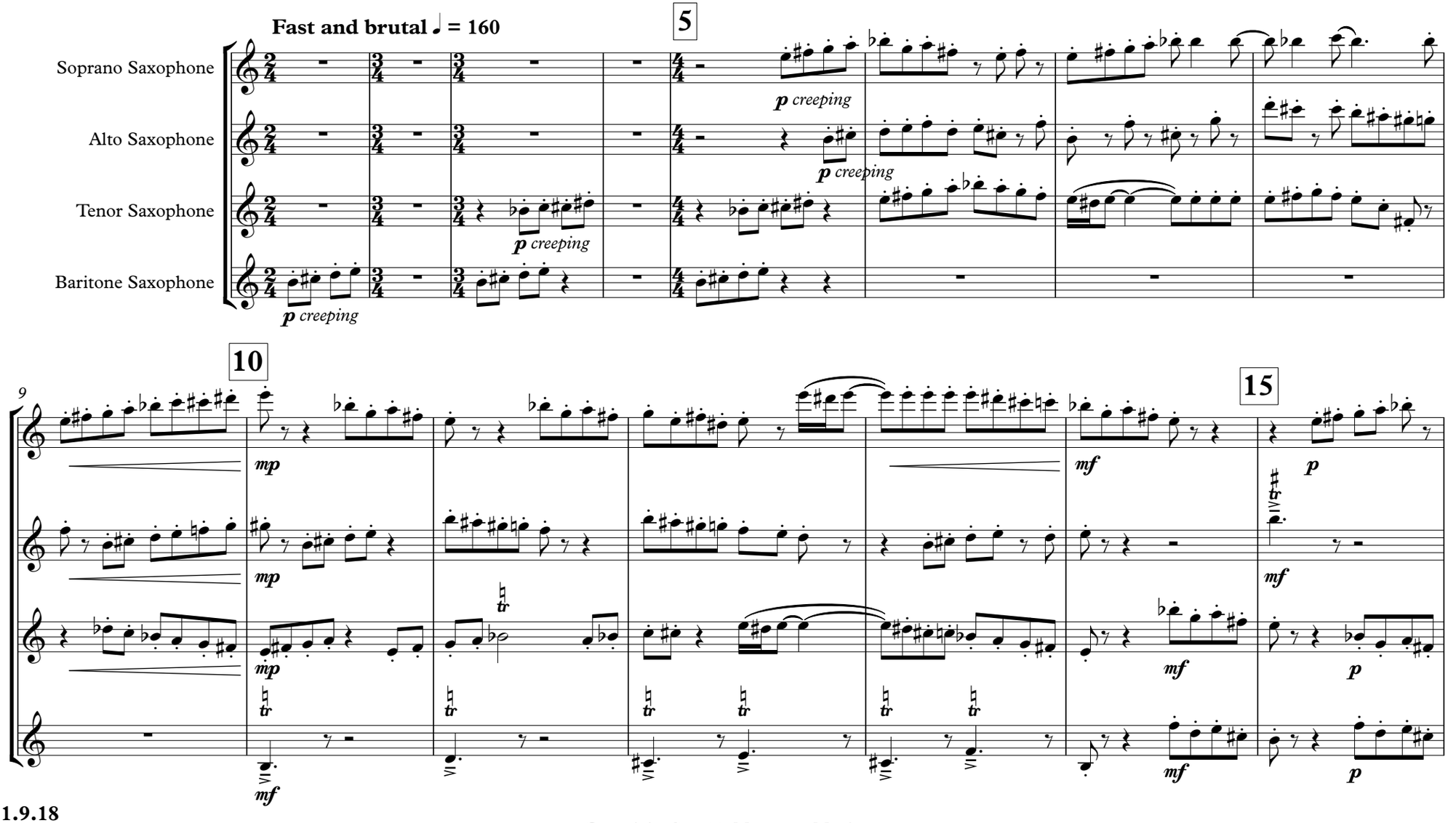
I. Perillos and Phalaris

Matt Browne



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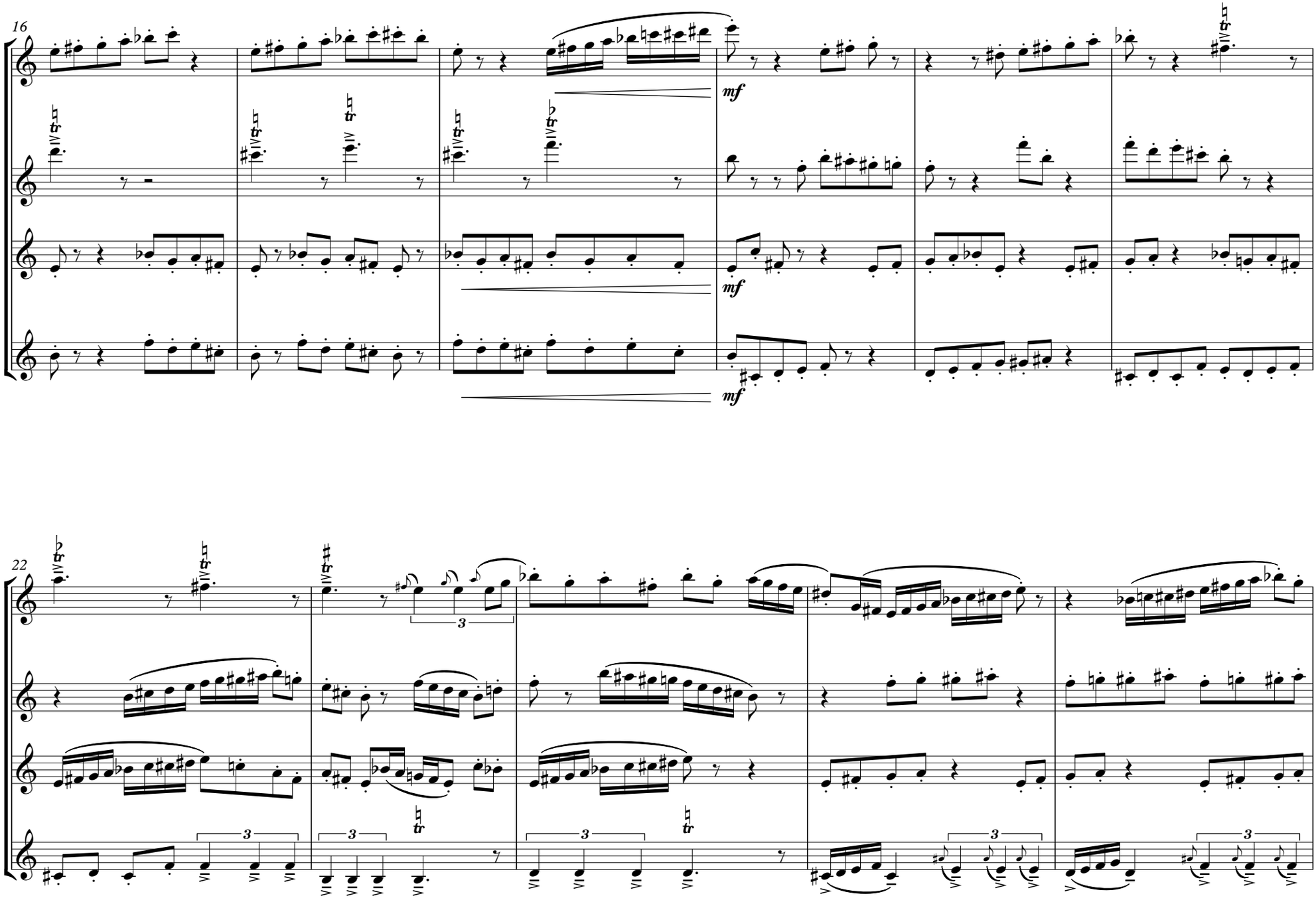
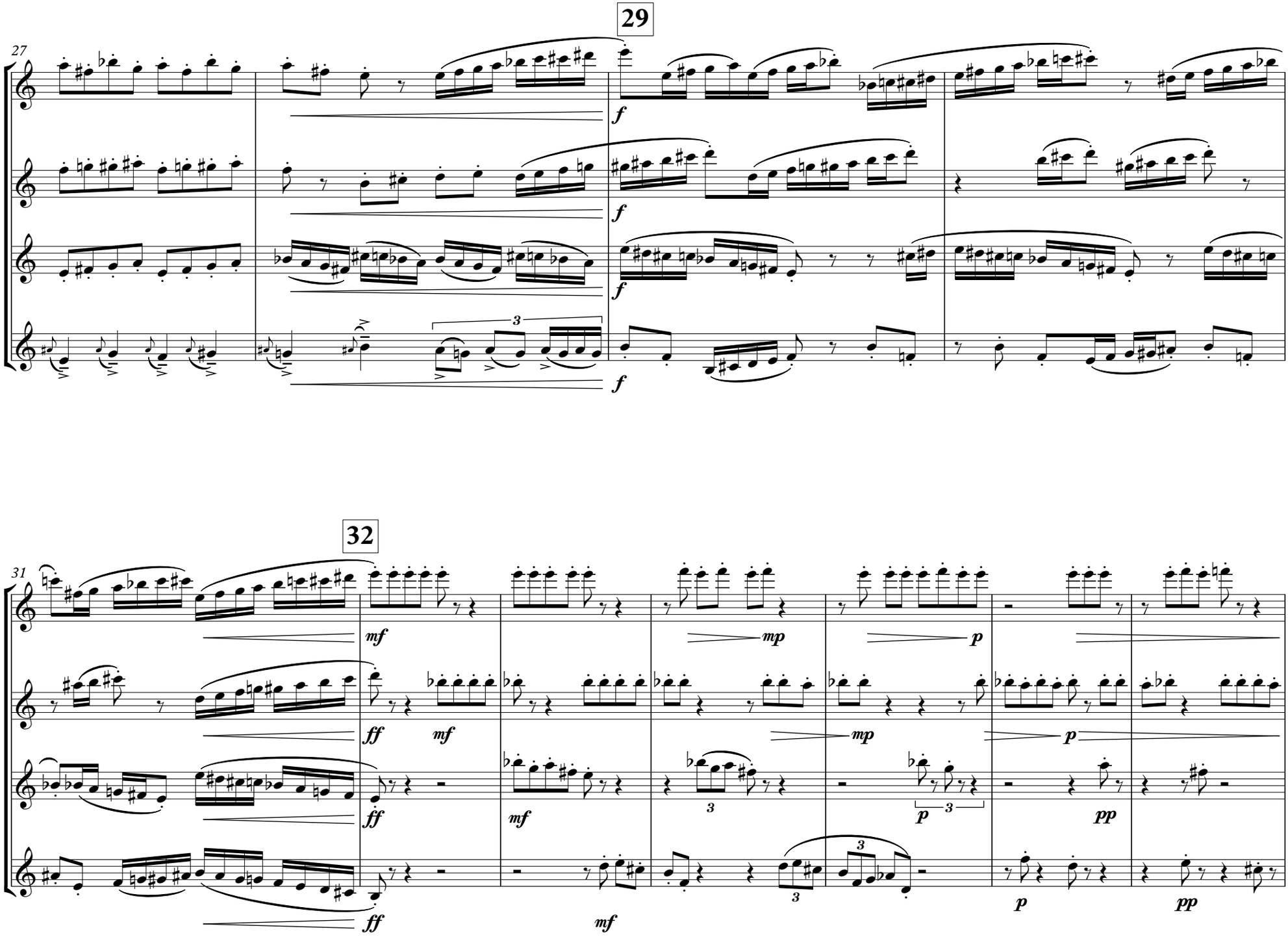
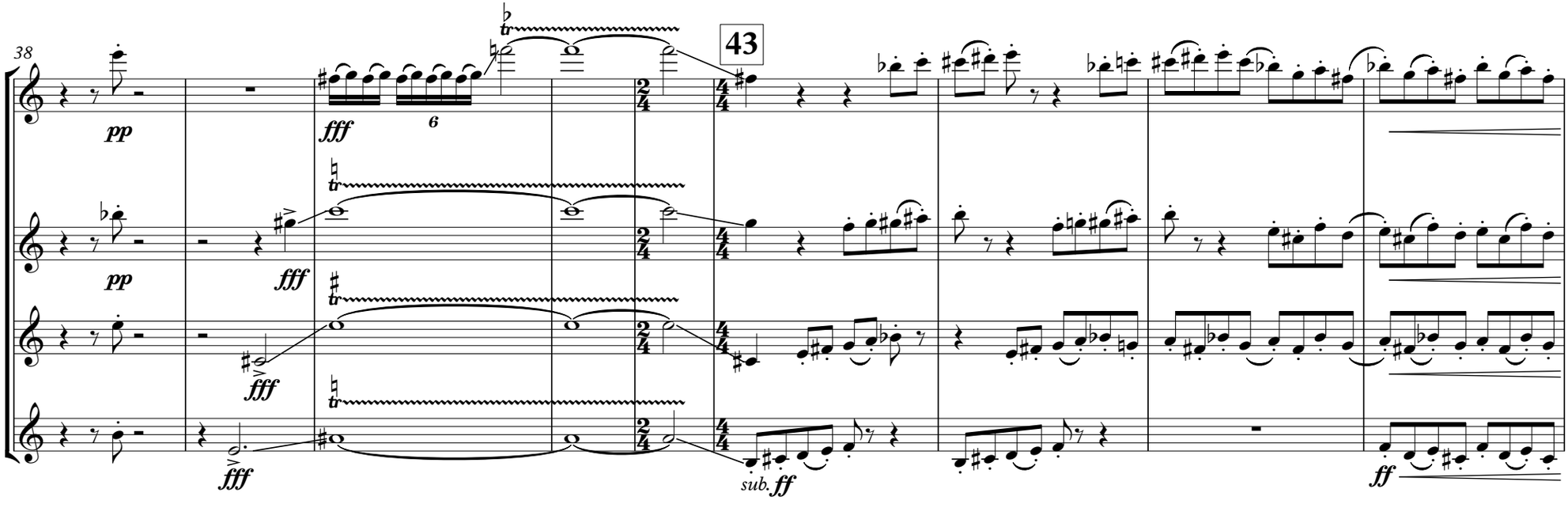
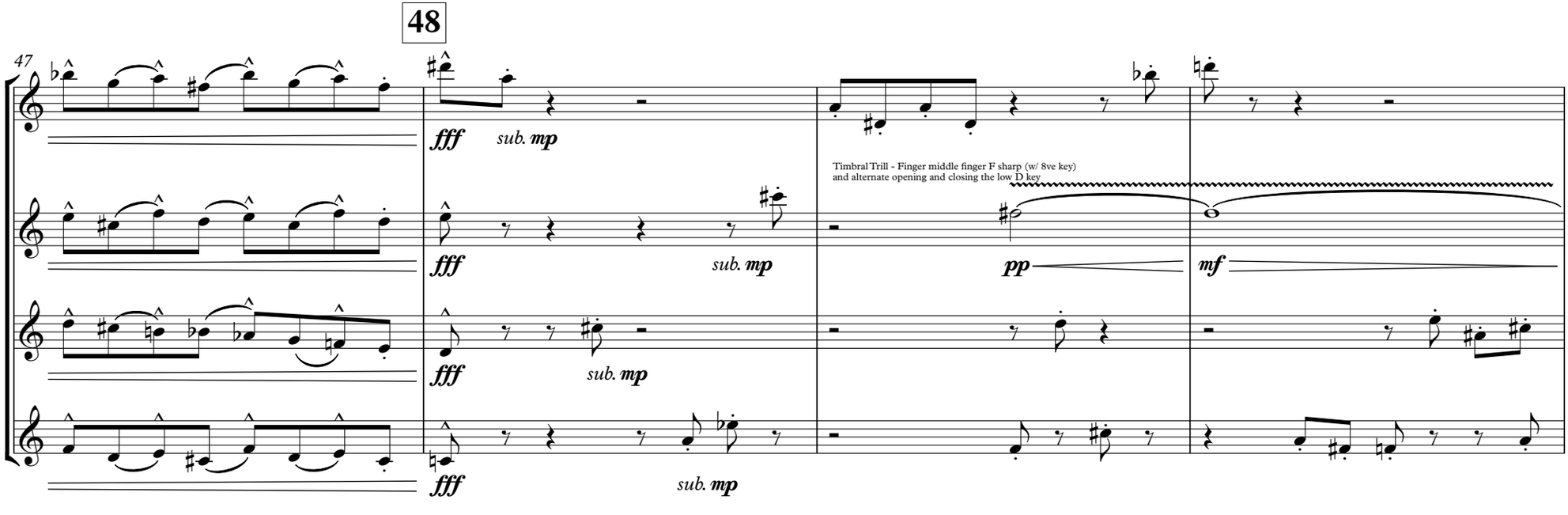
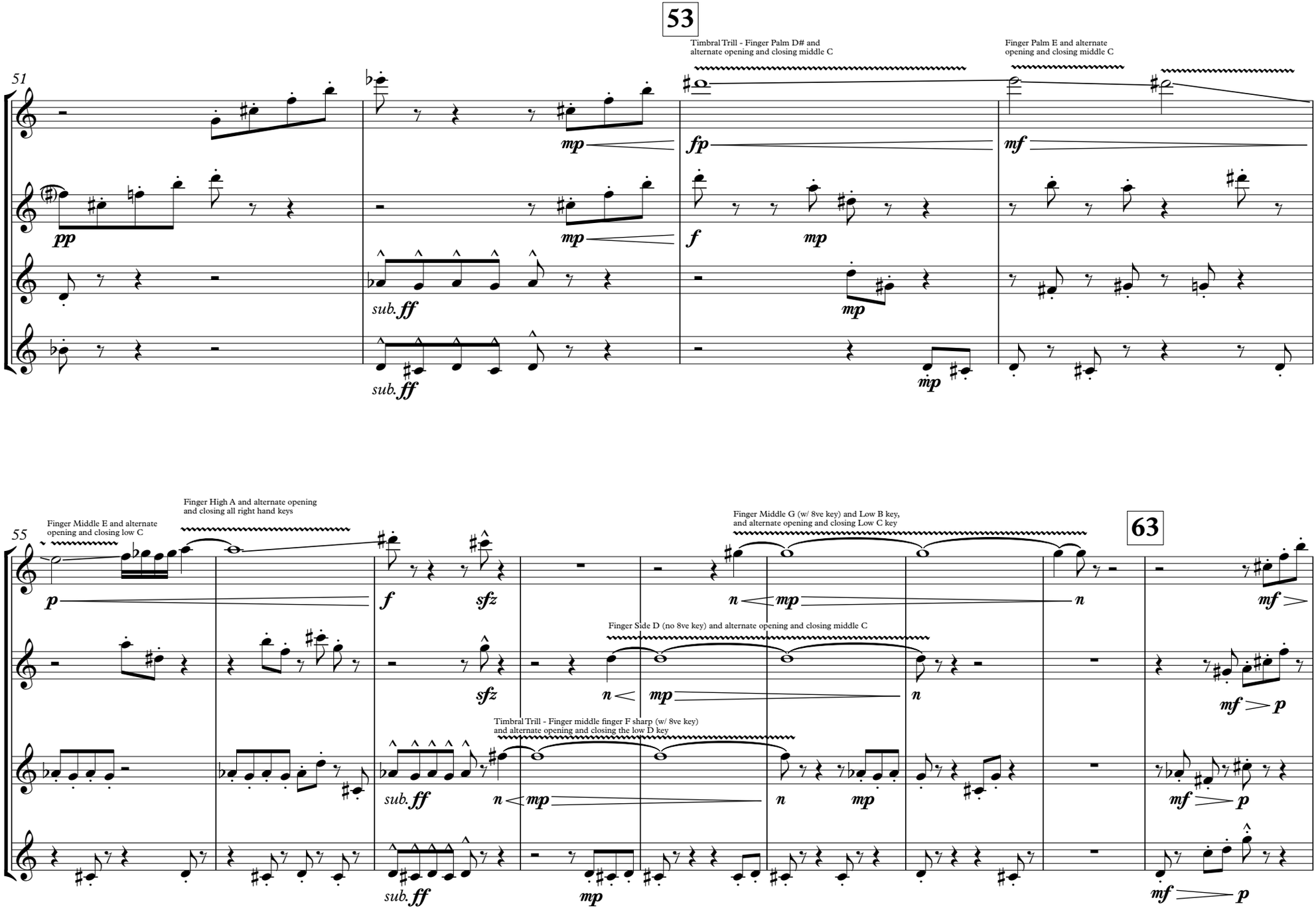
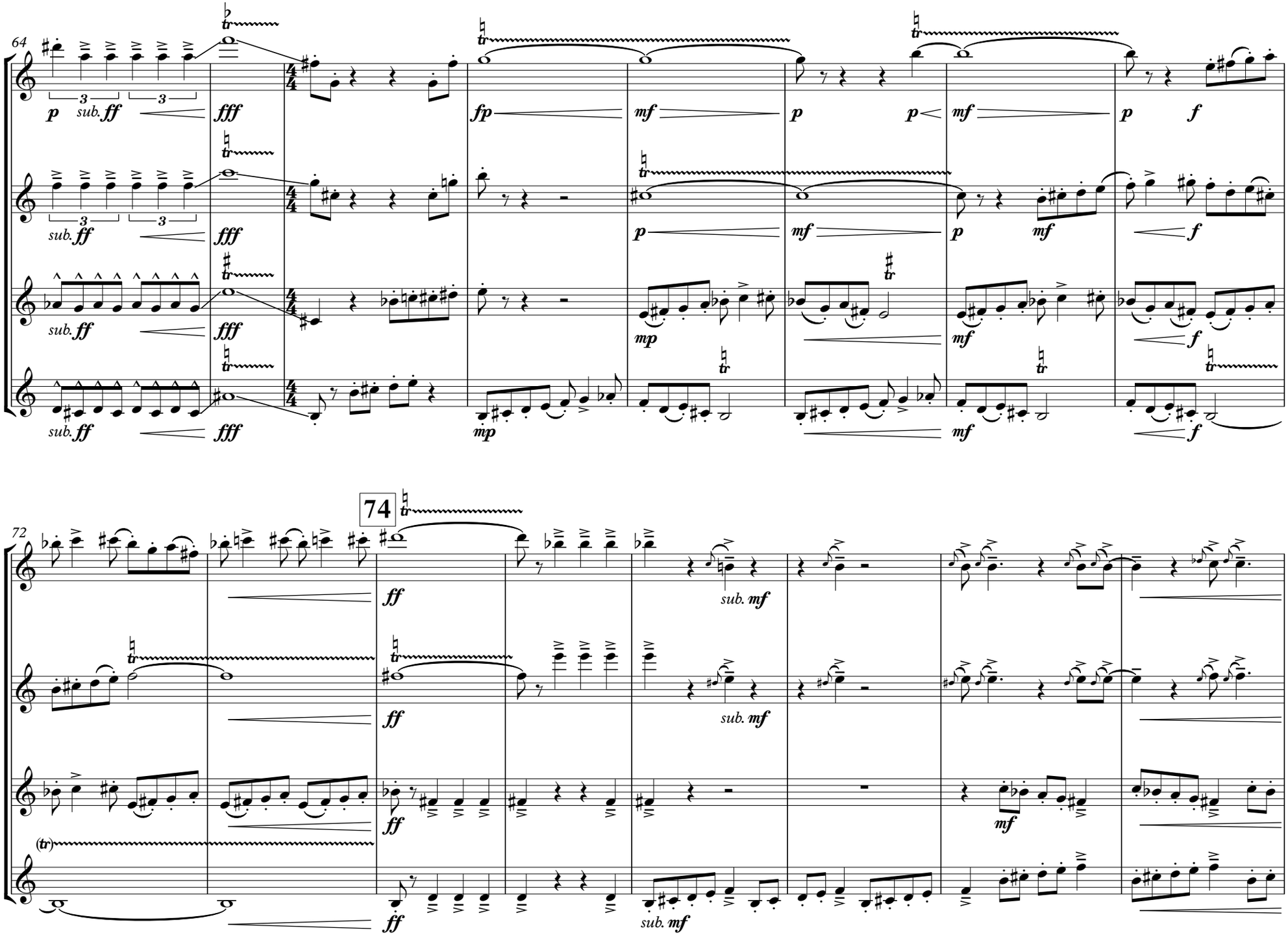

16
mf
mf
mf
22
3
3
3
3
3
3

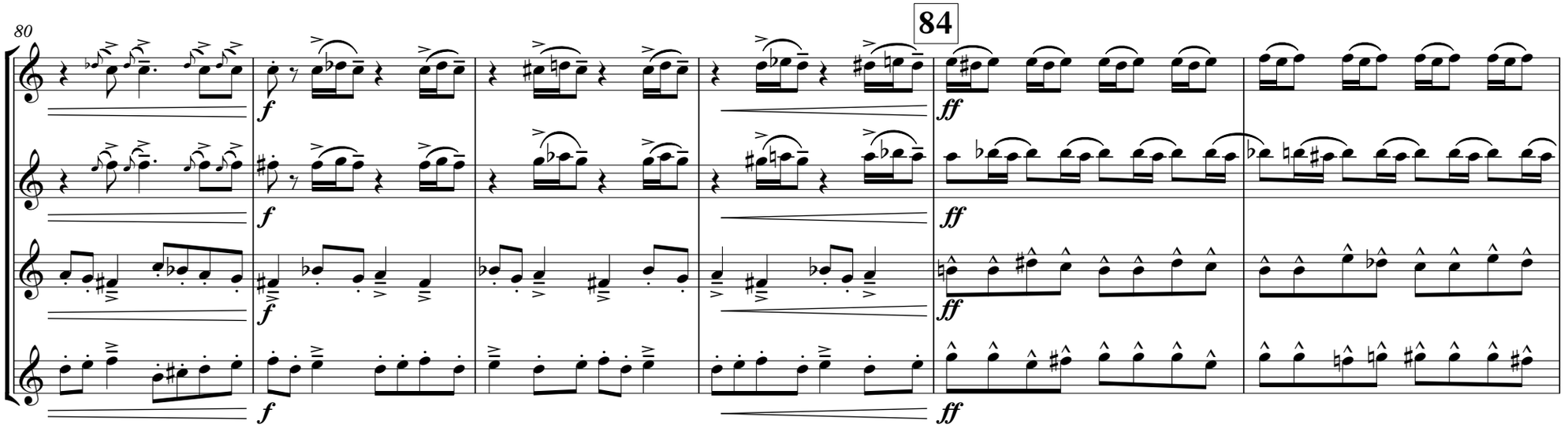

29
27
f
32
31
mf
ff
mp
p
pp

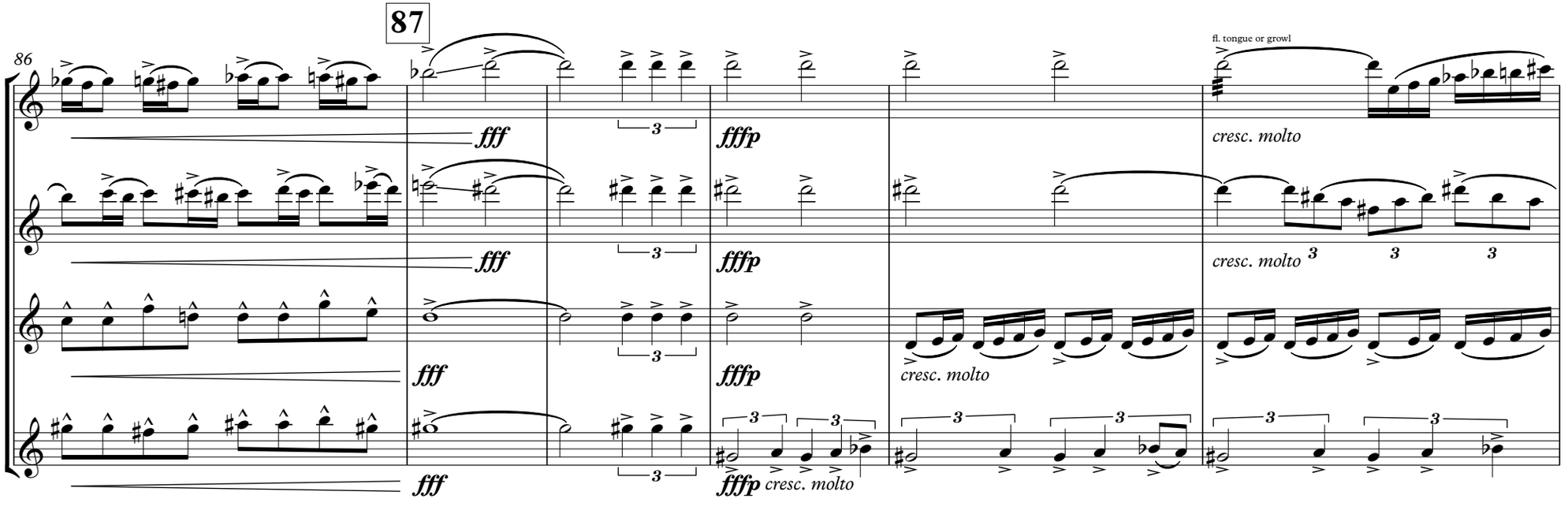

38
43
pp
fff
6
sub. ff
ff

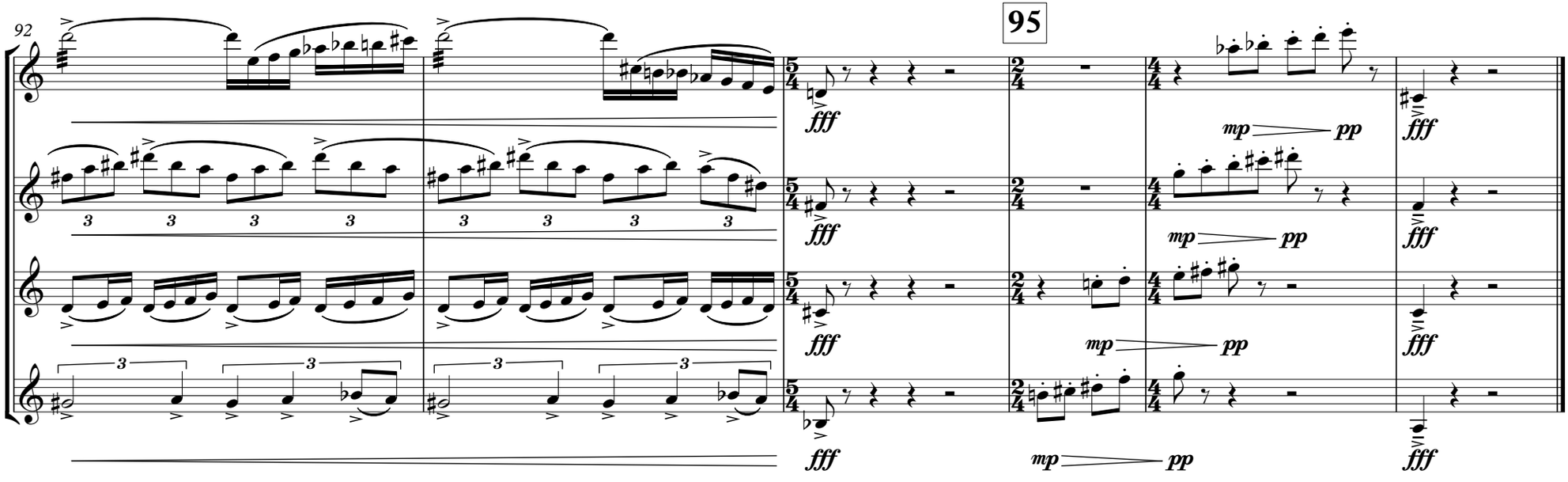

47
48
fff
sub. mp
Timbral Trill - Finger middle finger F sharp (w/ 8ve key)
and alternate opening and closing the low D key
pp
mf


53
51
Timbral Trill - Finger Palm D# and alternate opening and closing middle C
Finger Palm E and alternate opening and closing middle C
55
Finger Middle E and alternate opening and closing low C
Finger High A and alternate opening and closing all right hand keys
Finger Middle G (w/ 8ve key) and Low B key, and alternate opening and closing Low C key
63
Finger Side D (no 8ve key) and alternate opening and closing middle C
Timbral Trill - Finger middle finger F sharp (w/ 8ve key) and alternate opening and closing the low D key

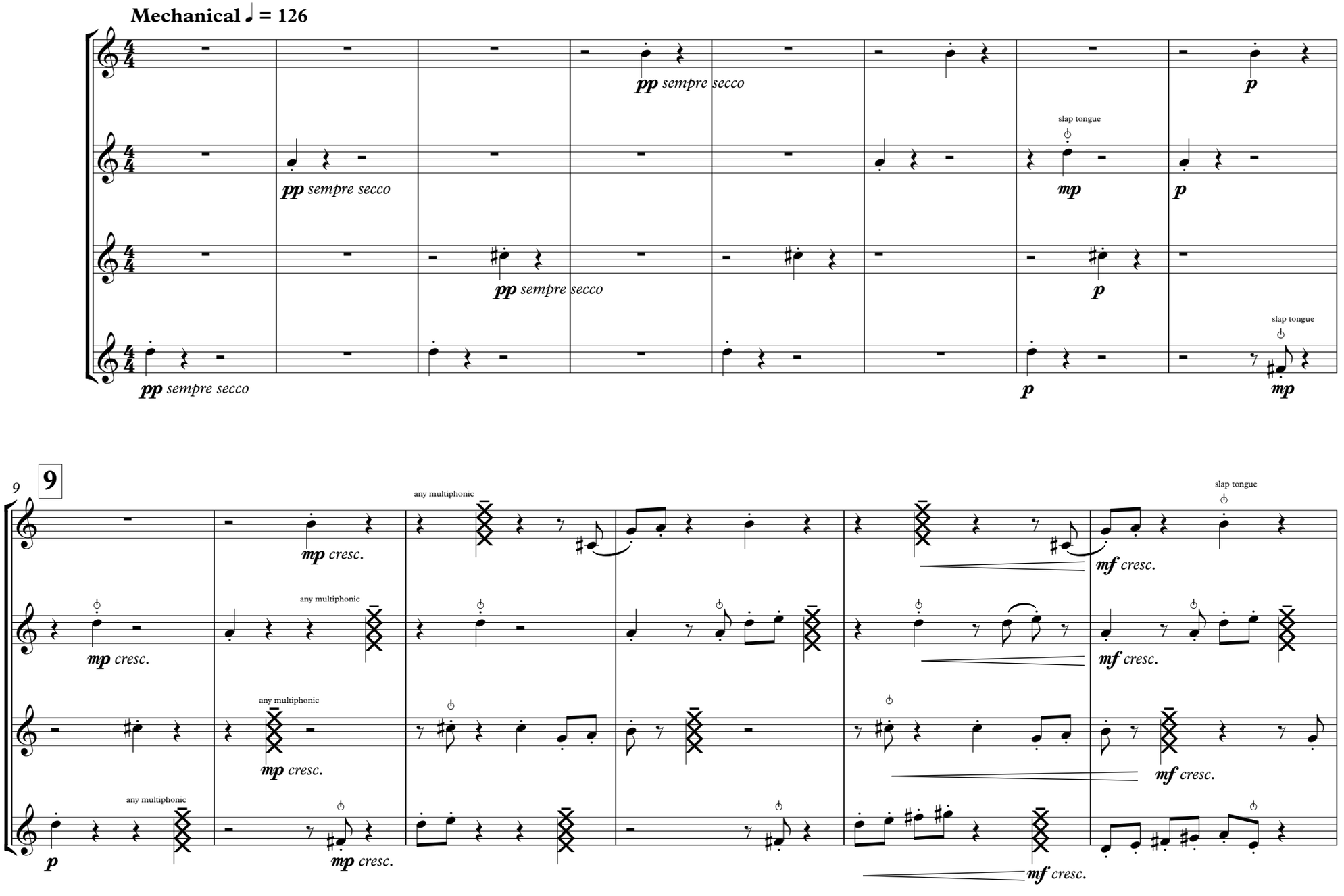

64
p
sub. ff
fff
fp
mf
p
p
mf
p
f
sub. ff
fff
p
mf
p
mf
f
sub. ff
fff
mp
mf
f
sub. ff
fff
mp
mf
f
72
74
ff
sub. mf
ff
sub. mf
ff
mf
(tr)
ff
sub. mf

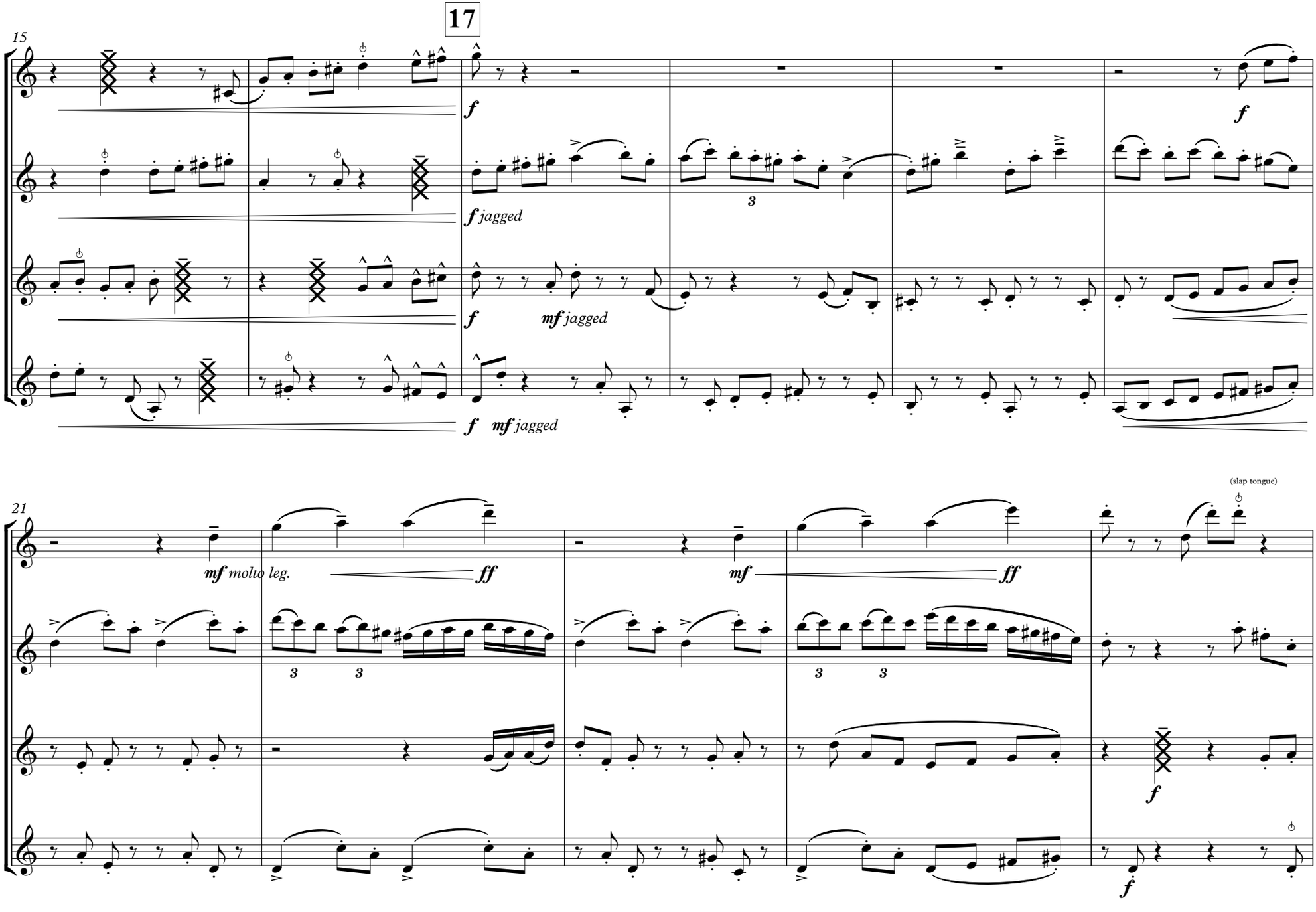

80
84
f
ff

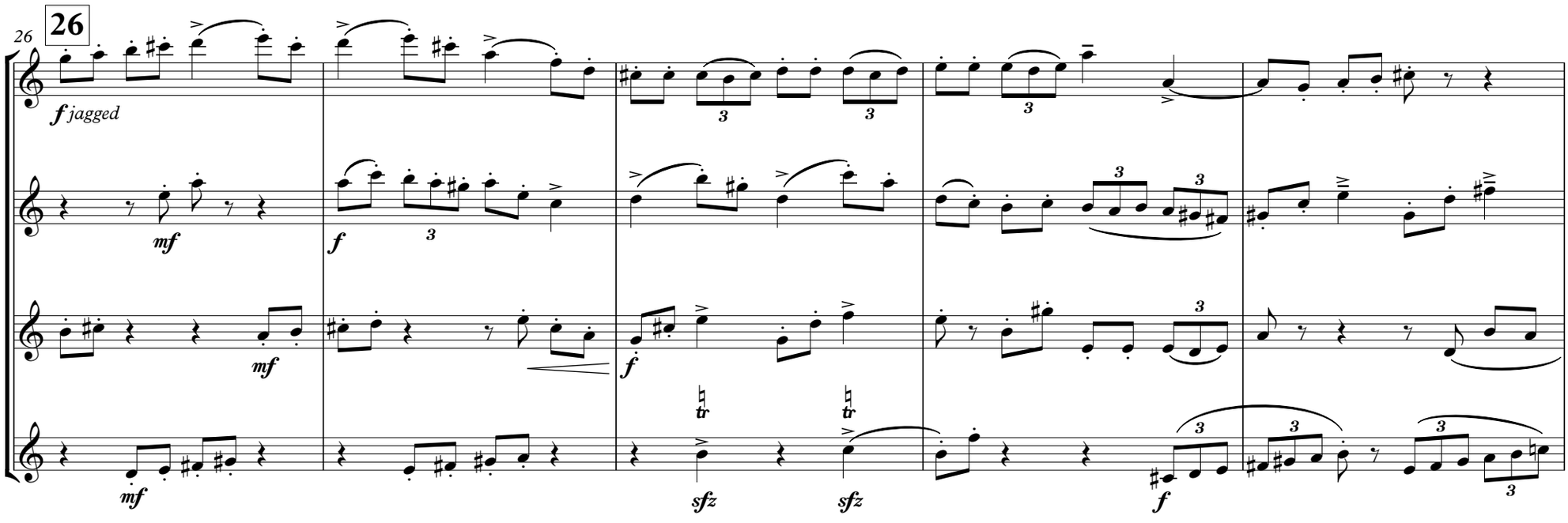

86
87
fff
fffp
cresc. molto
fl. tongue or growl

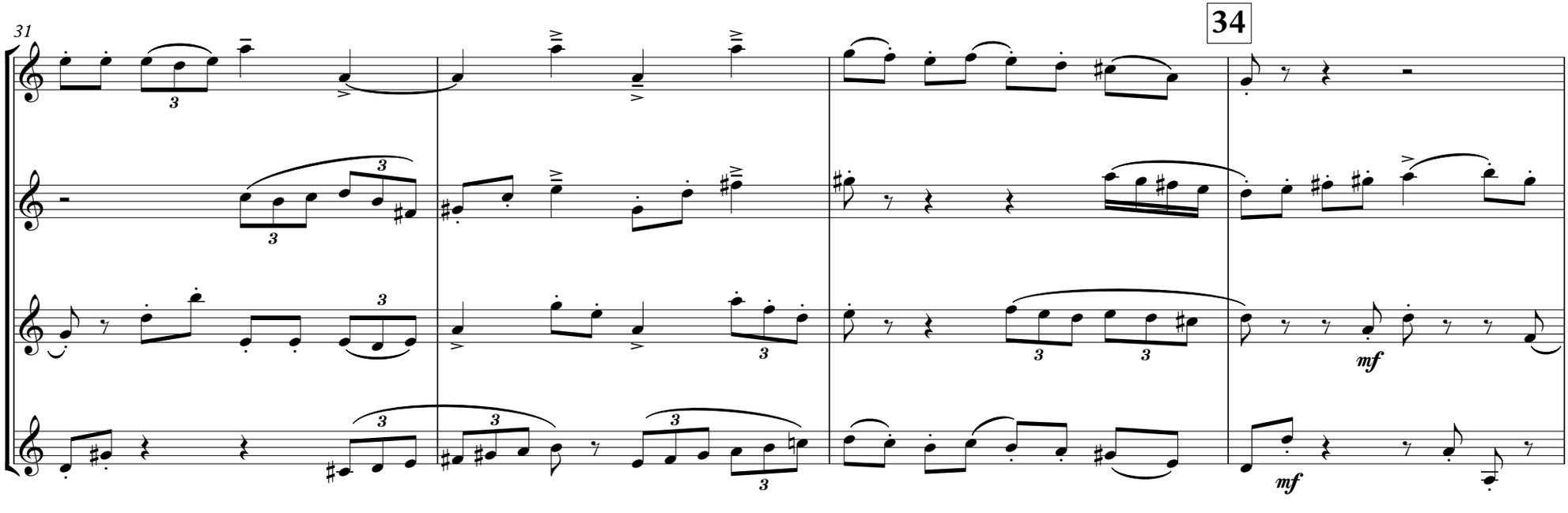

92
95
fff
mp
pp

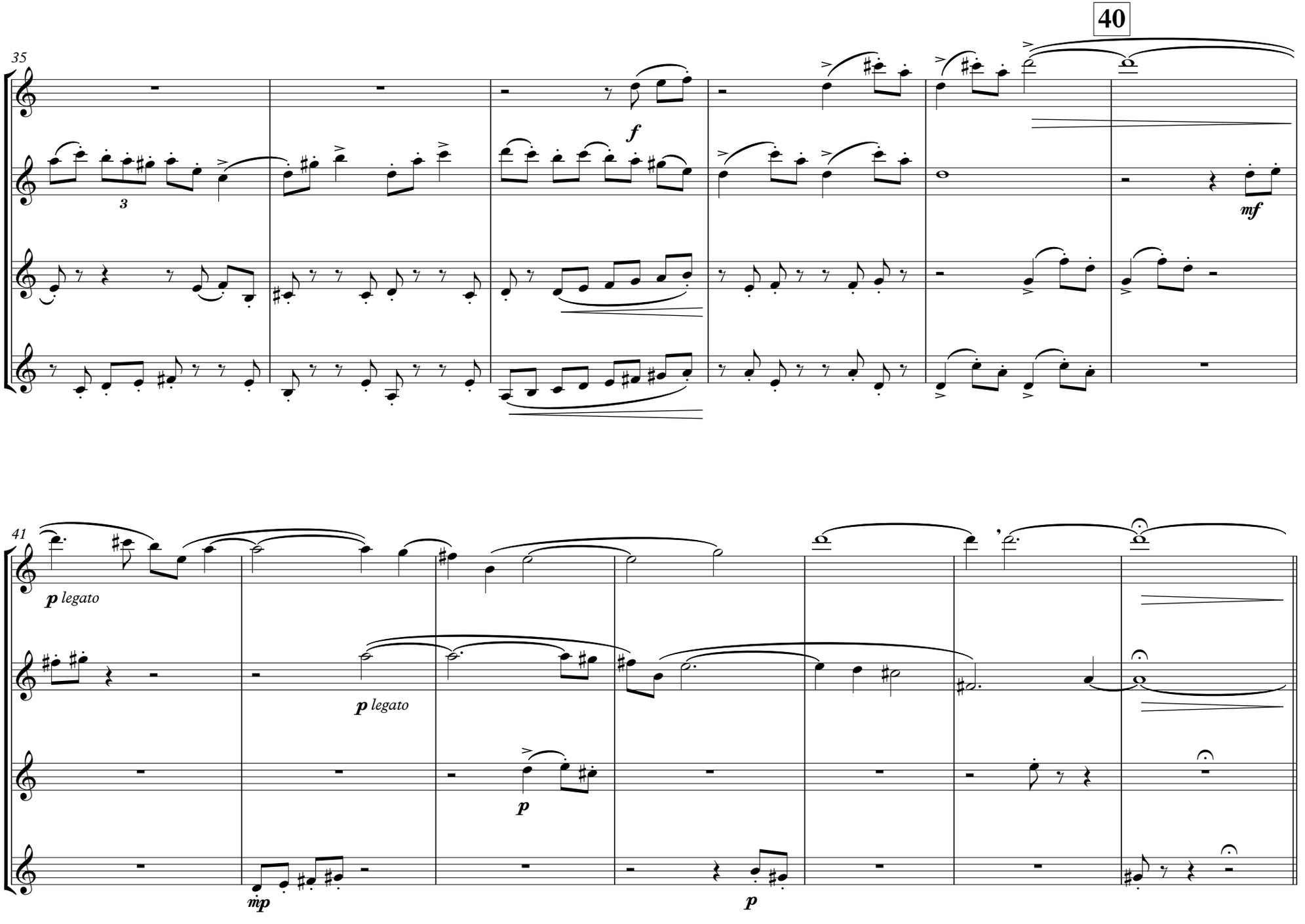
II. Su Song's Cosmic Engine

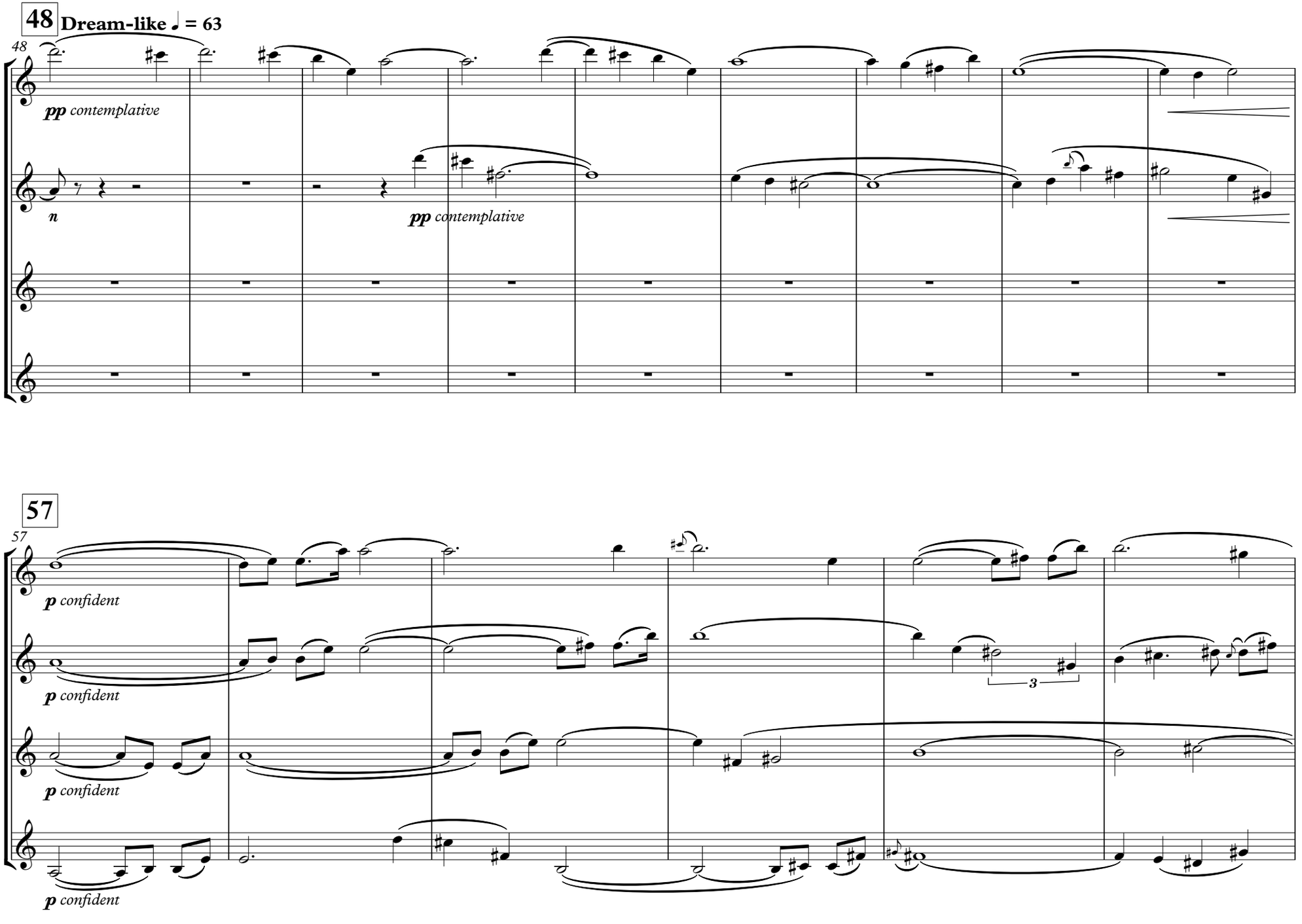


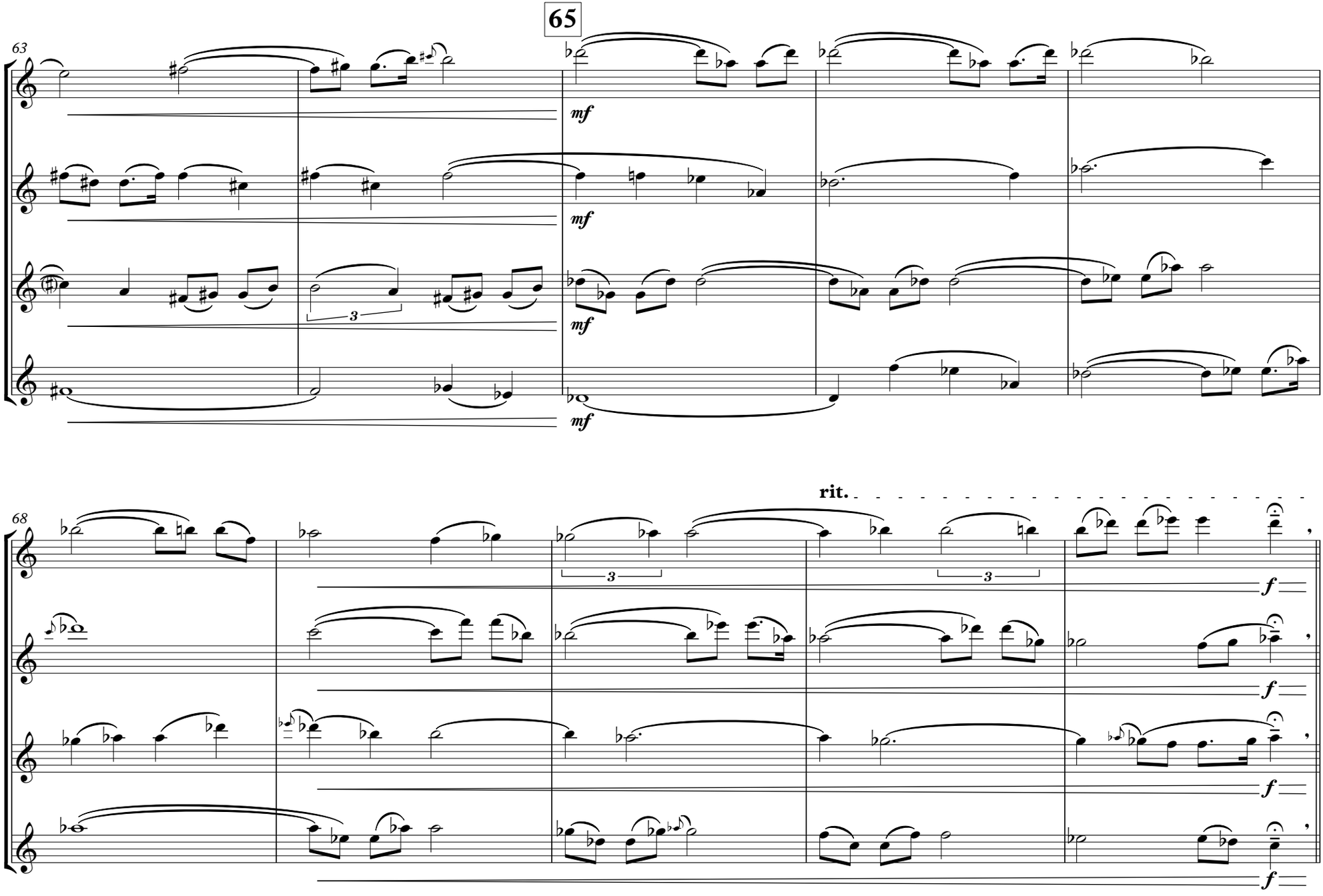

17
15
f
f jagged
f
mf jagged
f mf jagged
3
f
21
mf molto leg.
ff
mf
ff
(slap tongue)
3 3
3 3
f
f

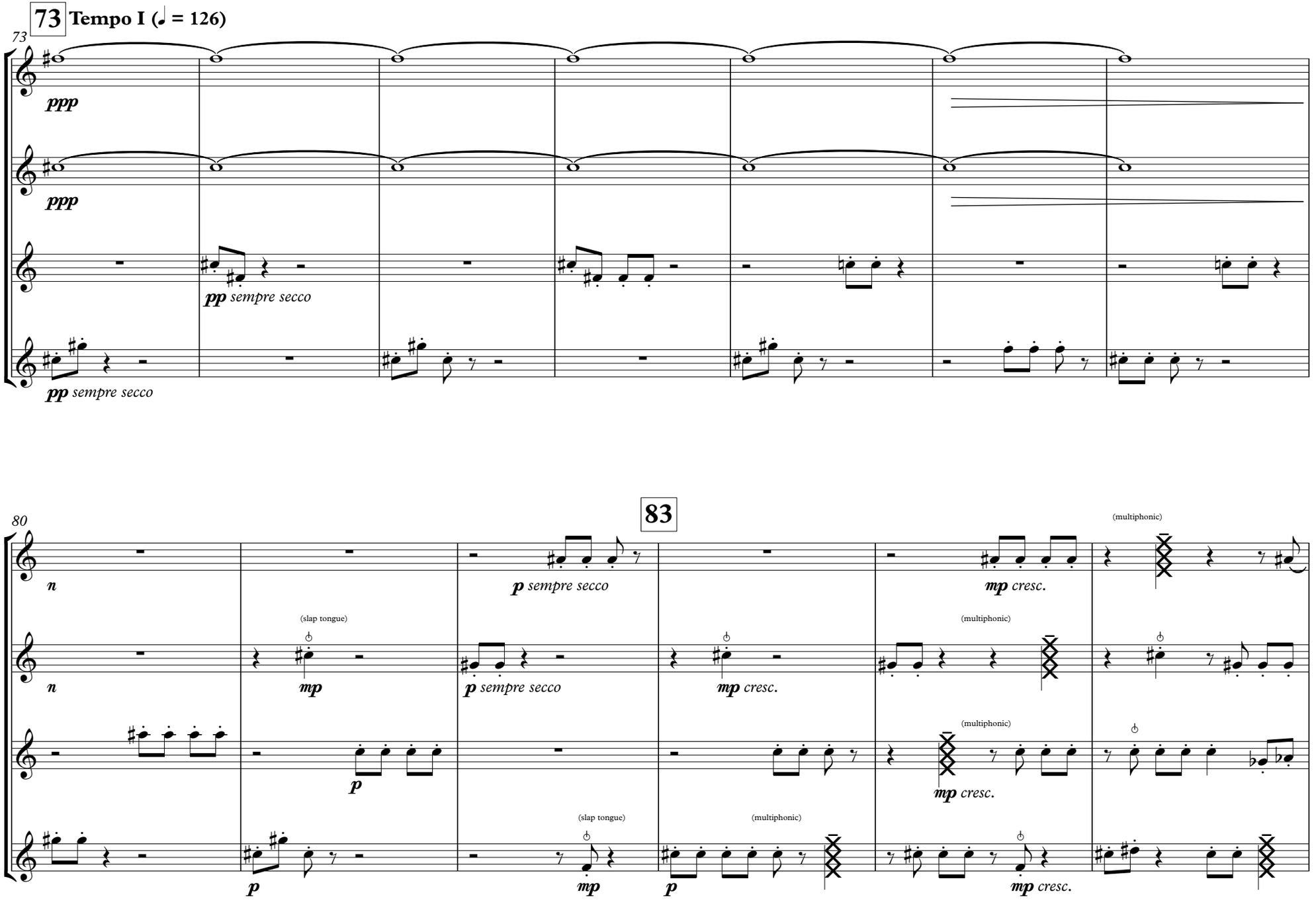

26
26
f jagged
mf
f
mf
f
mf
sfz
sfz
f
mf

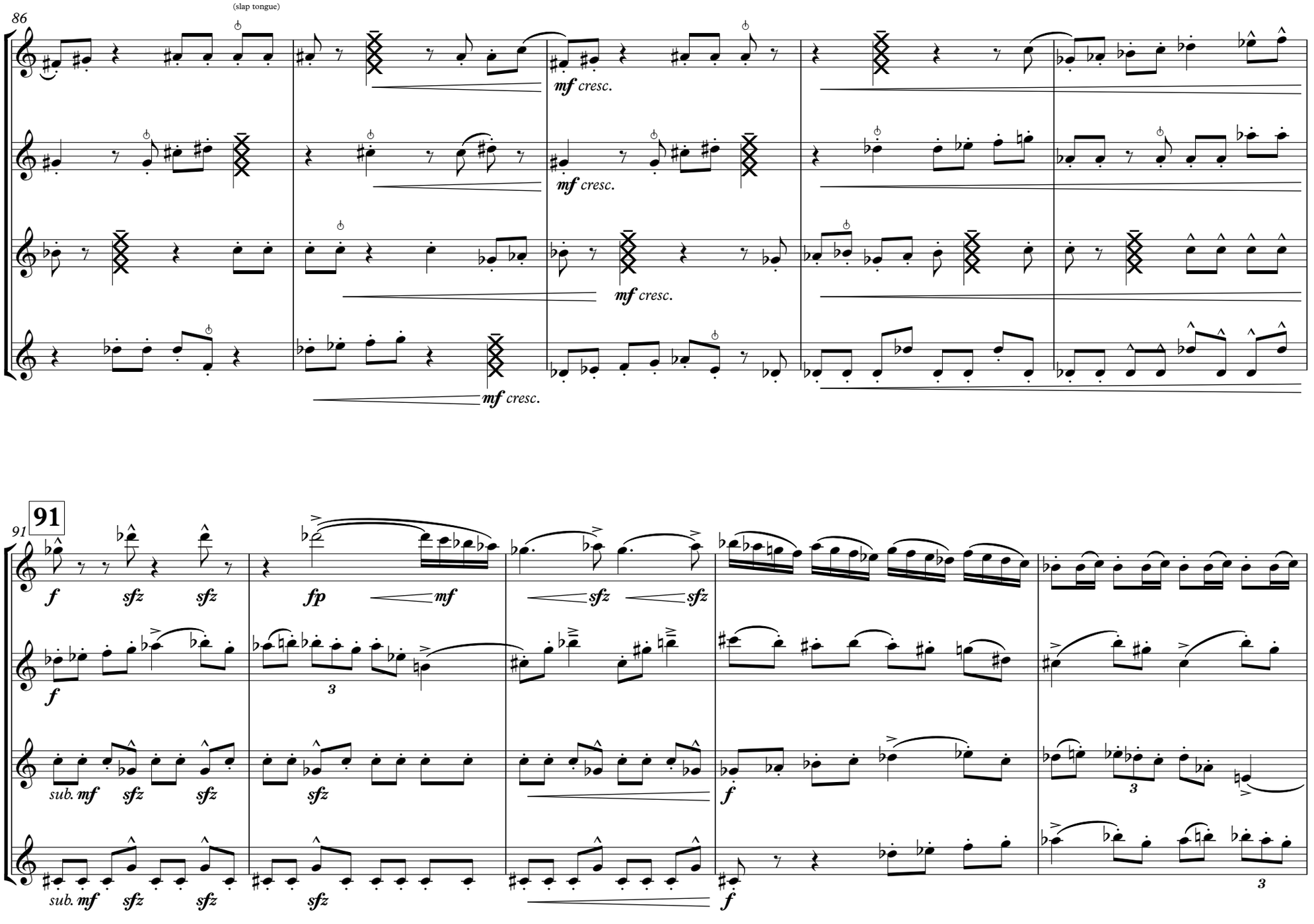

31
34
mf
mf

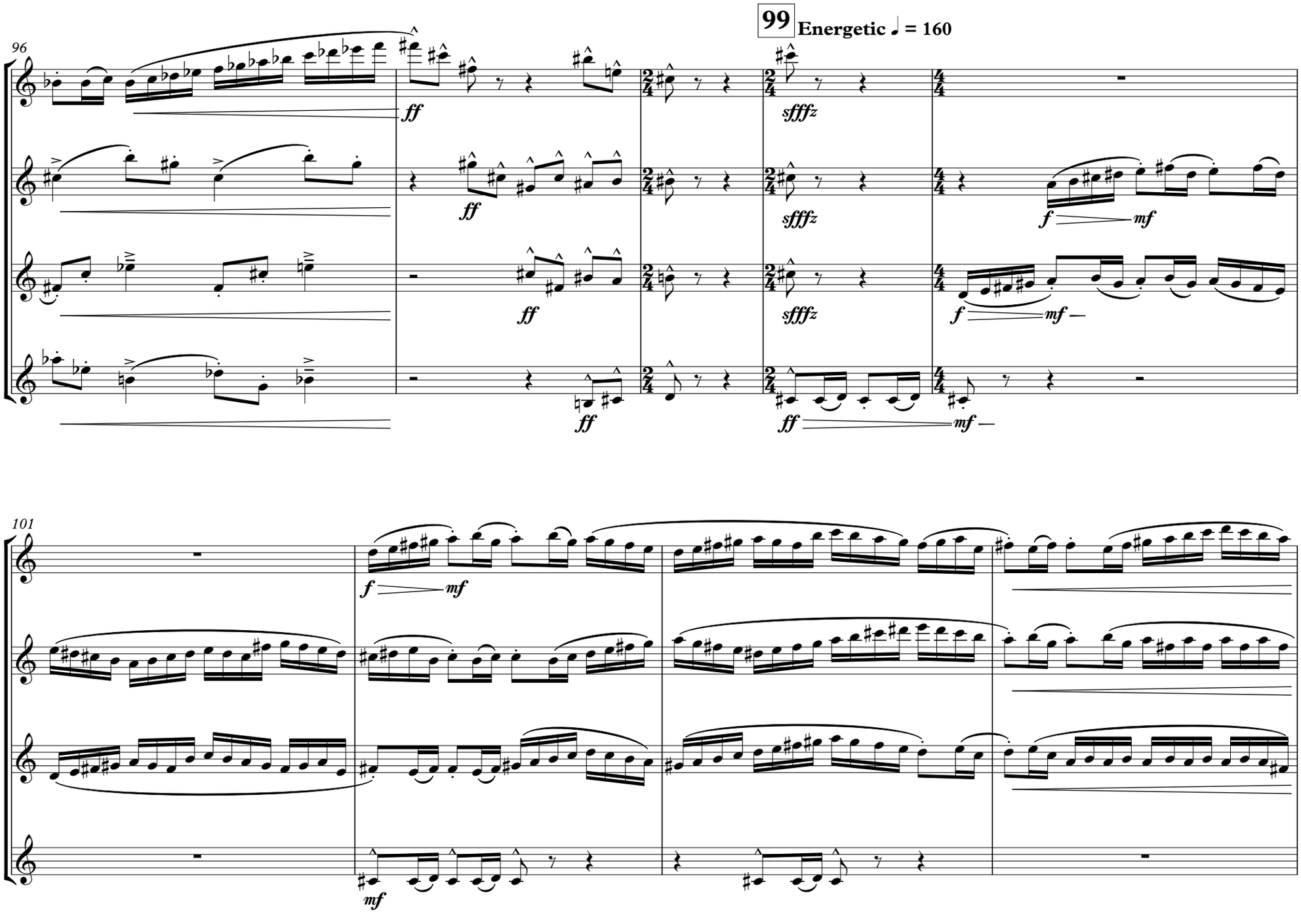

40
35
f
mf
41
p legato
p legato
p
mp
p

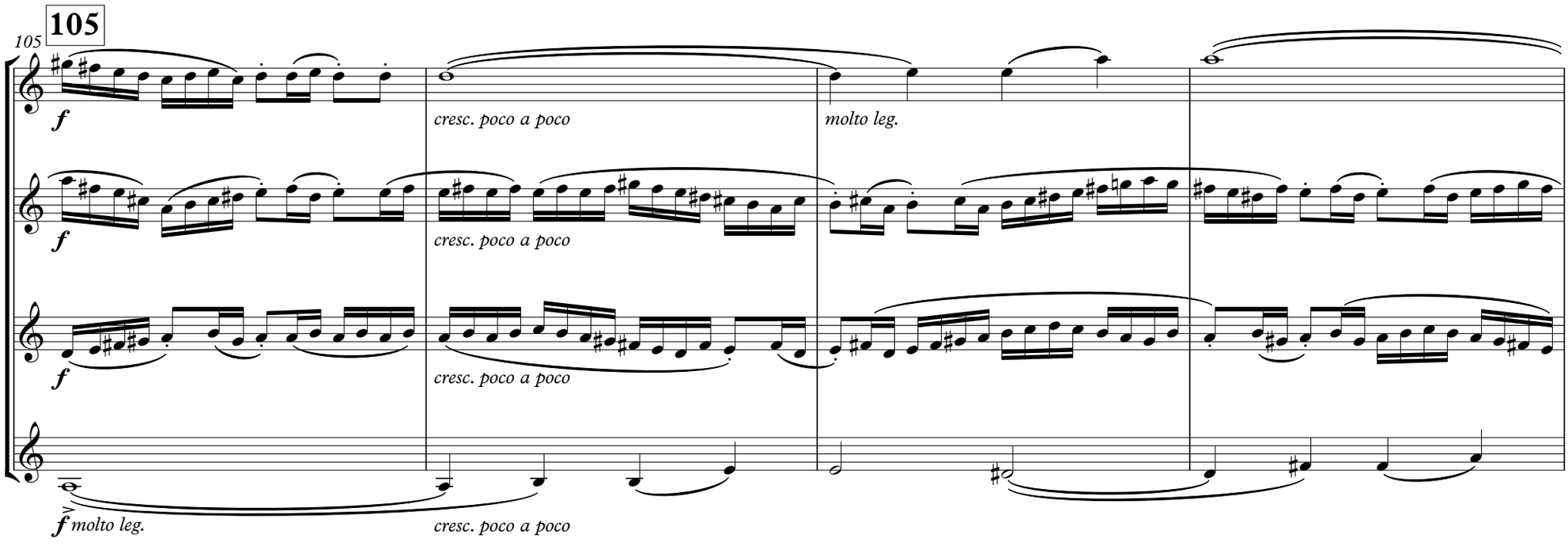

48
Dream-like ♩ = 63
48
pp contemplative
n
pp contemplative
57
57
p confident
p confident
p confident
p confident
3

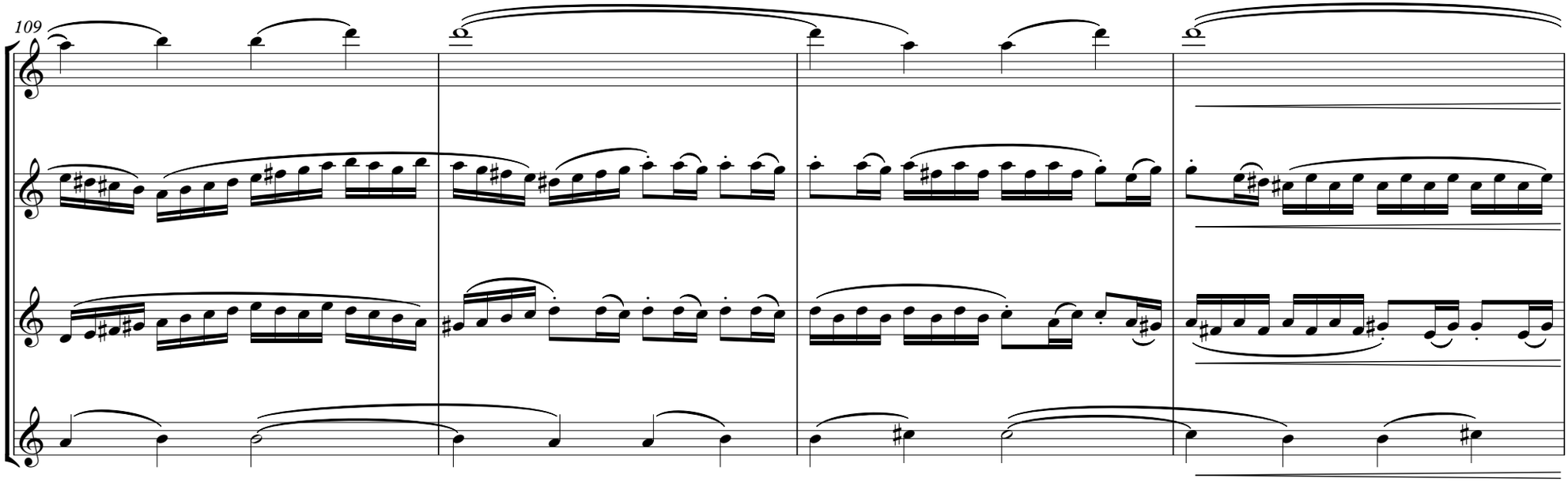

65
63
mf
mf
mf
mf
3
3
3
68
rit.
f
f
f
f


73
Tempo I (♩ = 126)
73
ppp
ppp
pp sempre secco
pp sempre secco
80
83
n
n
(slap tongue)
mp
p sempre secco
p sempre secco
mp cresc.
mp cresc.
(multiphonic)
(multiphonic)
(multiphonic)
mp cresc.
p
p
(slap tongue)
mp
(multiphonic)
p
mp cresc.


86
(slap tongue)
mf cresc.
91
91
f
sfz
fp
mf
sub. mf
3


96
99
Energetic ♩ = 160
ff
sfffz
f
mf
101


105
105
f
cresc. poco a poco
molto leg.
f
cresc. poco a poco
f
cresc. poco a poco
f molto leg.
cresc. poco a poco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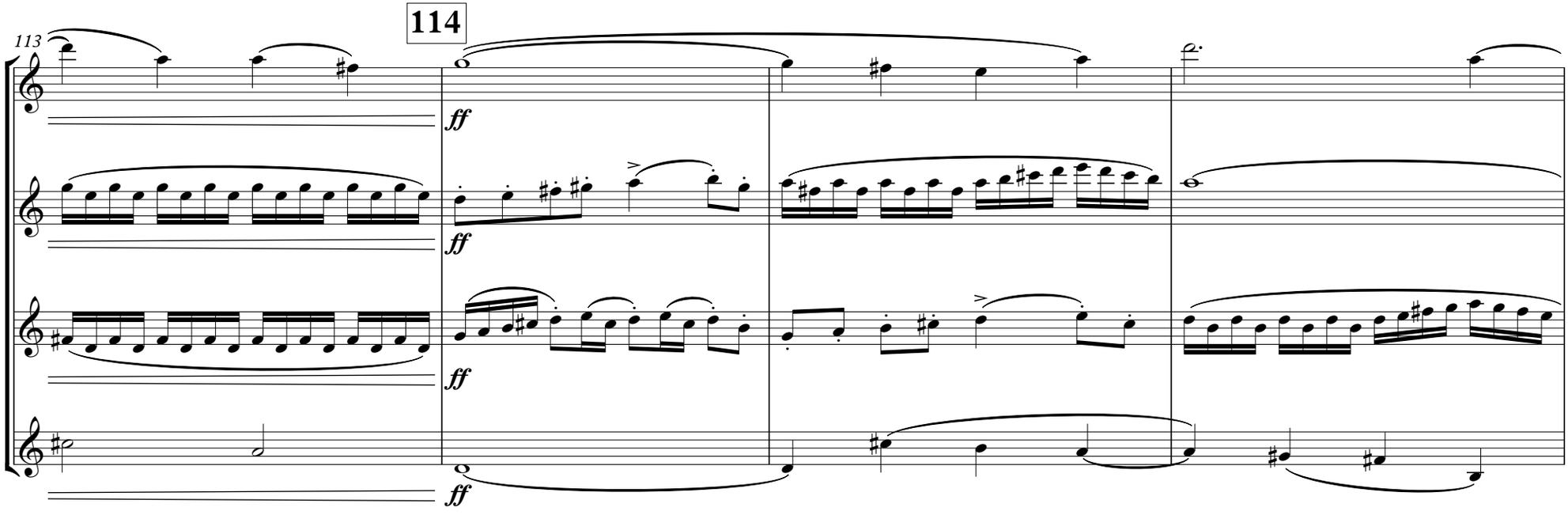
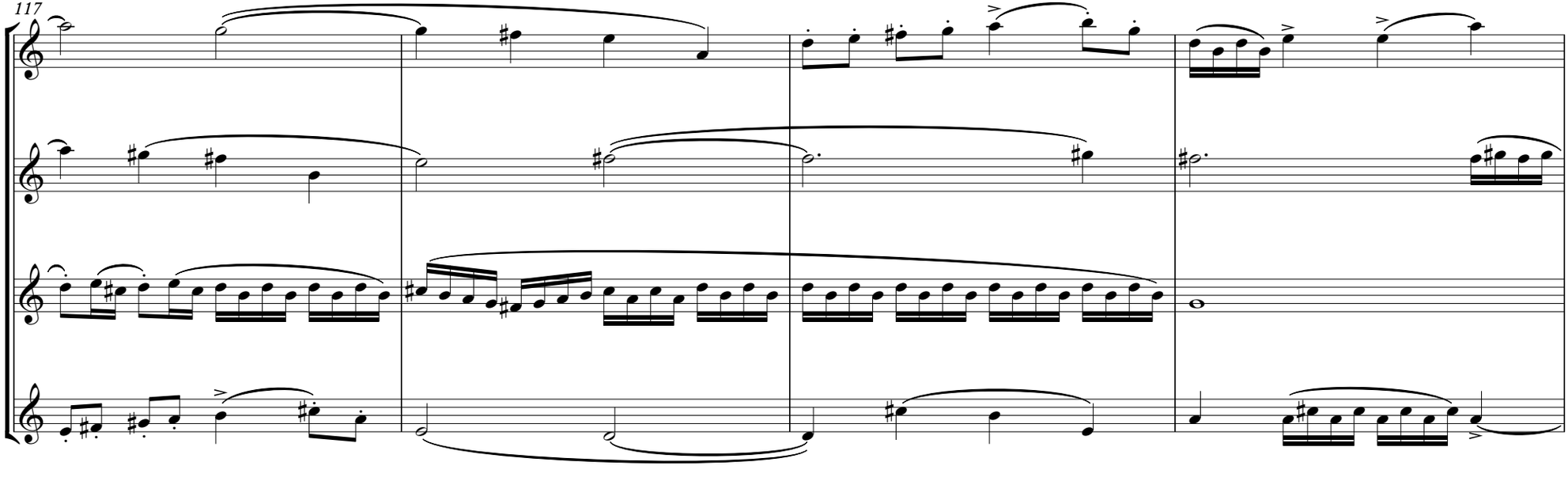

113
114
ff
ff
ff
ff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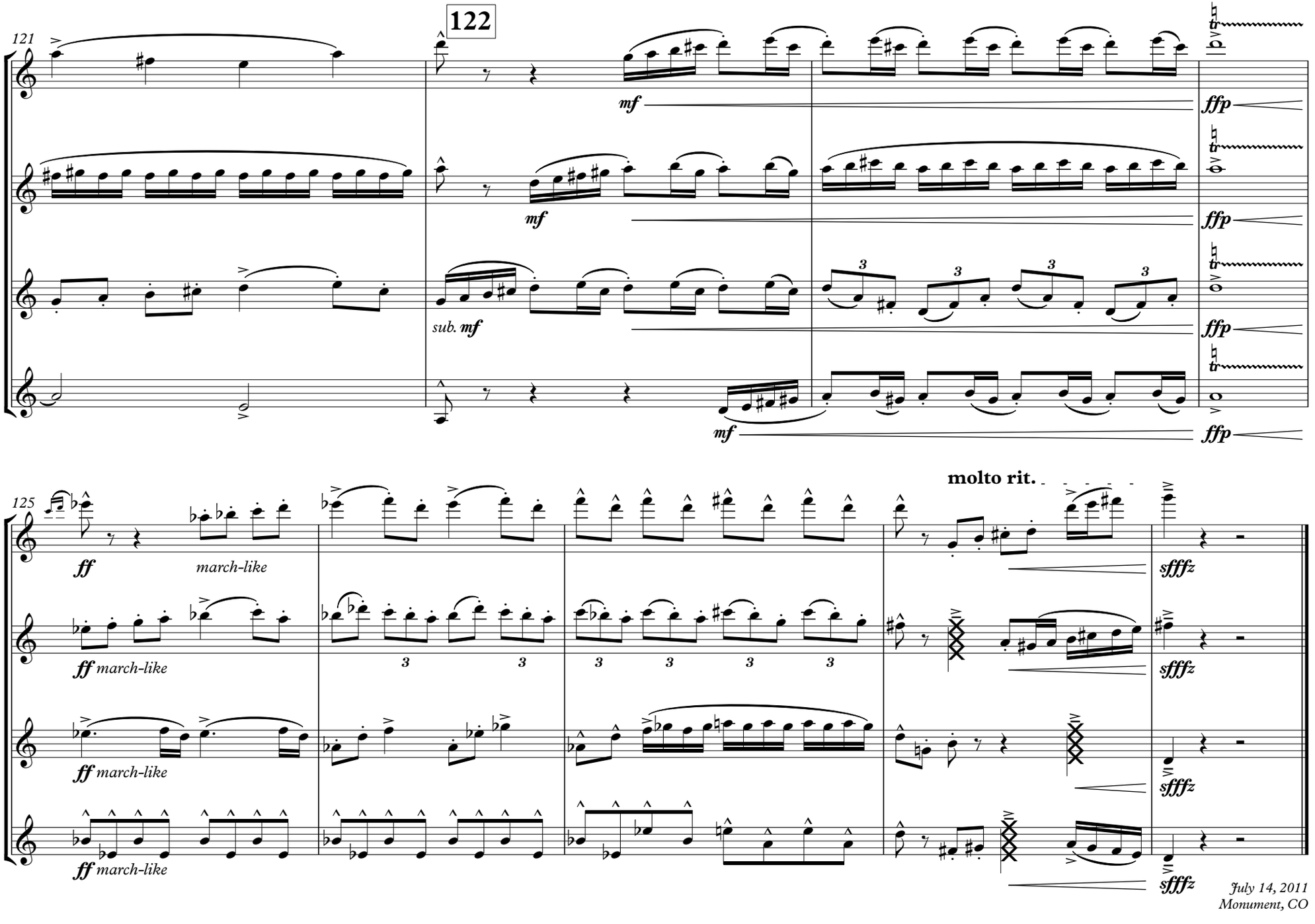
121
122
mf
ffp
sub. mf
125
ff
march-like
molto rit.
sfffz
July 14, 2011
Monument, CO