Alex Temple

mod wheel go spinny

(2024, revised 2025)

for clarinet, bass clarinet & electronics

commissioned by Égide Duo

about the piece

As a college sophomore in 2002, armed with nothing but a cheap keyboard I bought at Radio Shack, the old piano in my parents' basement, an empty plastic jar that had once held pretzels, a friend's squeaky car window, and my laptop's built-in mic, I created a piece of digital avant-prog that I called "MBFEGW" — short for the rather silly "My Big Fat Evil Greek Wedding." I'd only been making electronic music for a little over a year at that point, so my methods were very basic. But over the years I never lost affection for the piece, with its convoluted angular melodies, asymmetrical Eastern-Europeanish meters and abrupt shifts of tone, and the idea of updating it was always slinking around in the back of my mind.

The right opportunity finally came 20 years later, when Égide Duo commissioned me to write a piece for clarinet, bass clarinet and electronics. I recreated the piece from scratch, this time using synth and sequencing software, and now with decades' more experience controlling electronic sound. In many places I gave the performers melodies from the original piece; in others I added newly written parts for them. In the end, the piece is quite different in flavor from the original, despite keeping almost all of its notes and rhythms.

The new title combines two things I'm fond of. First, the mod wheel (short for "modulation wheel") on a synth keyboard, which is often used to trigger a warbly pitch vibrato in live performance. (See, for instance, the keyboard solos in Thomas Dolby's "Commercial Breakup" and Eskaton's "Le cri.") And second, "dress go spinny," a meme popular among femme trans women that describes the joy of twirling in a skirted garment for the first time. Hopefully the experience of playing the piece has a bit of that gleeful energy.

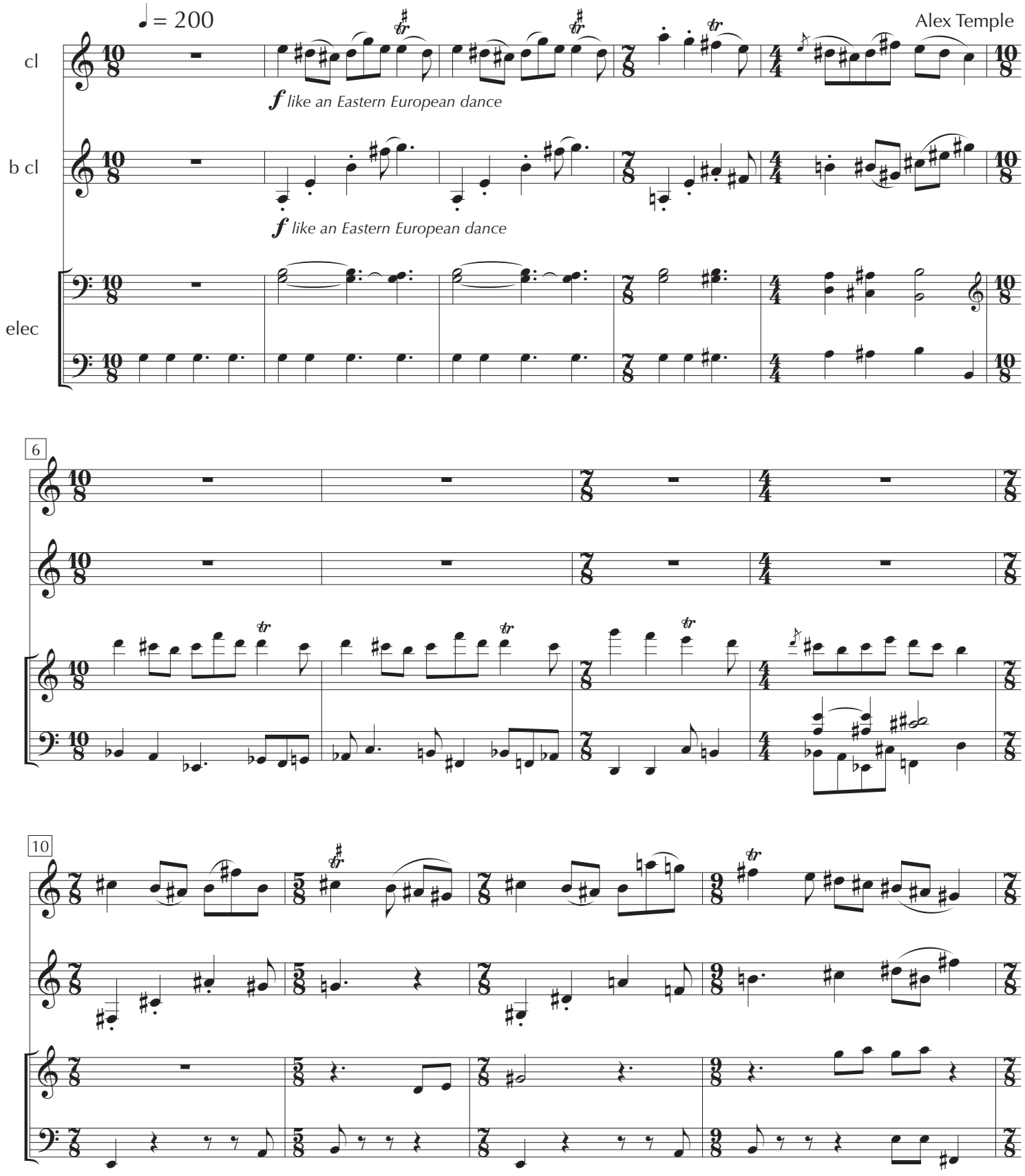
performance notes

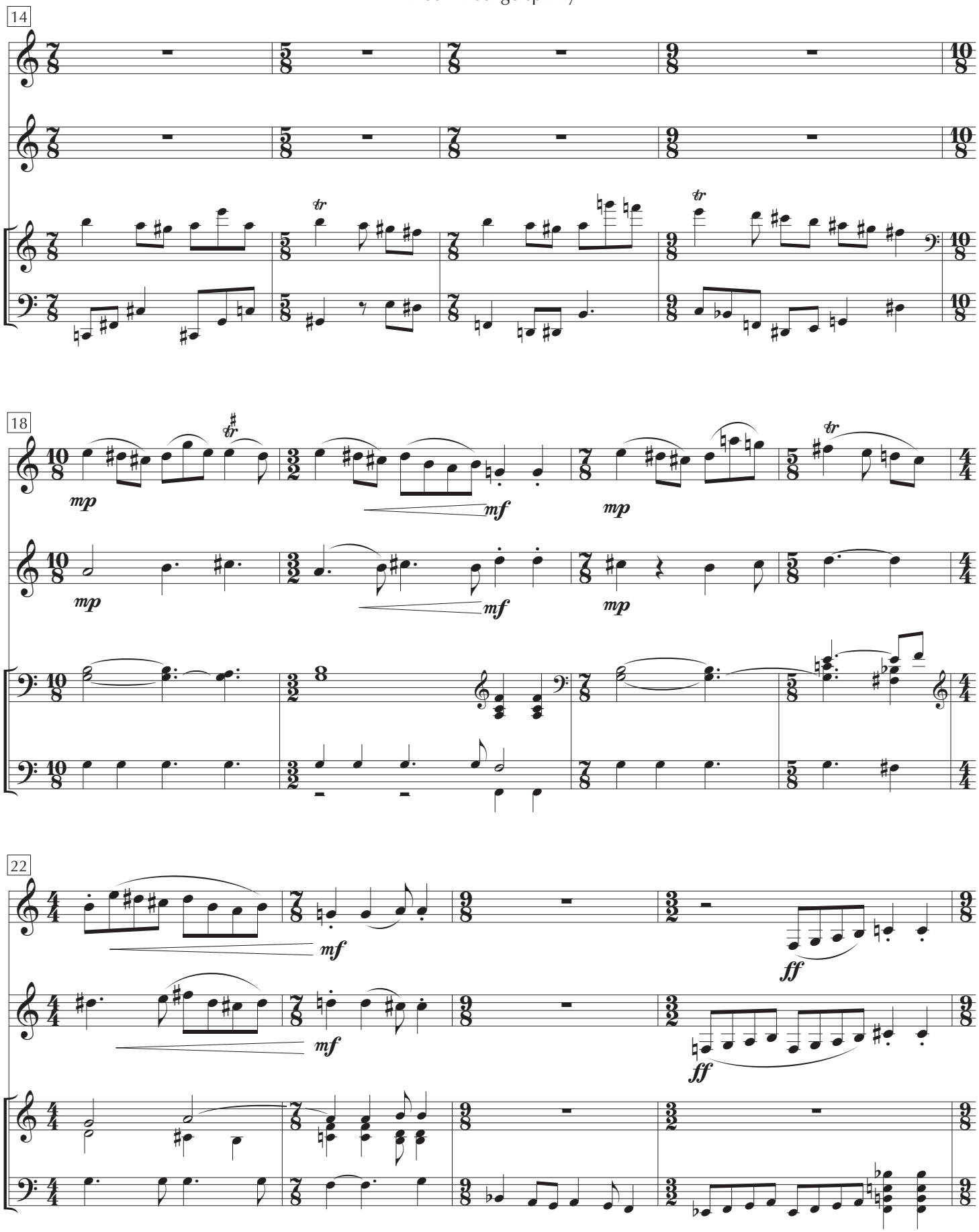
Due to the complex meters and precise rhythmic correlation between the instruments and the electronics, *mod wheel go spinny* is designed to be played from the score. The electronic part is something like a piano reduction of an orchestral score: it doesn't include everything, but it's complete enough to follow while playing.

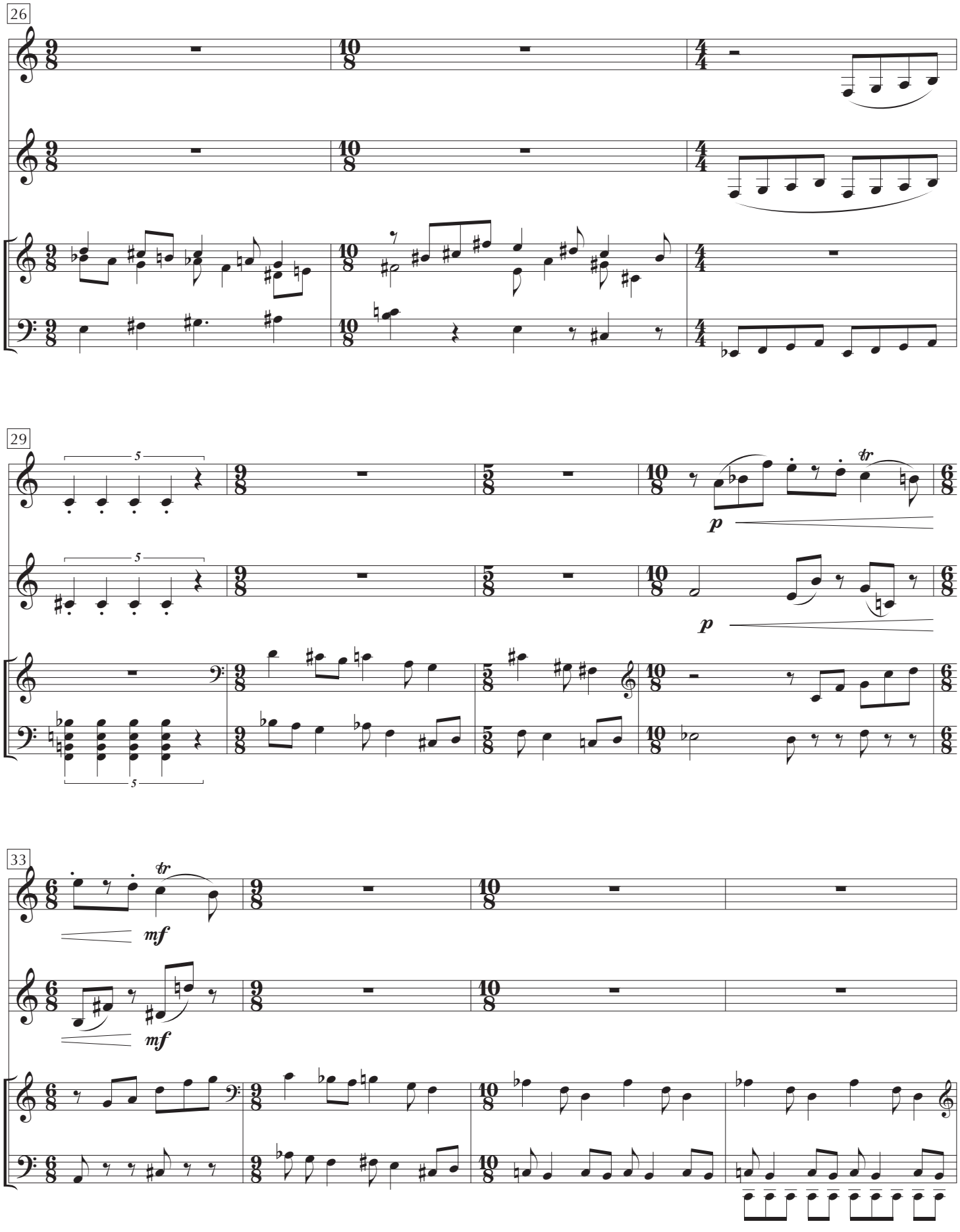
At Rehearsal B and shortly before Rehearsal J, the piece asks the performers to improvise. These passages are intentionally left open-ended, all of them using the same simple qualitative text instruction.

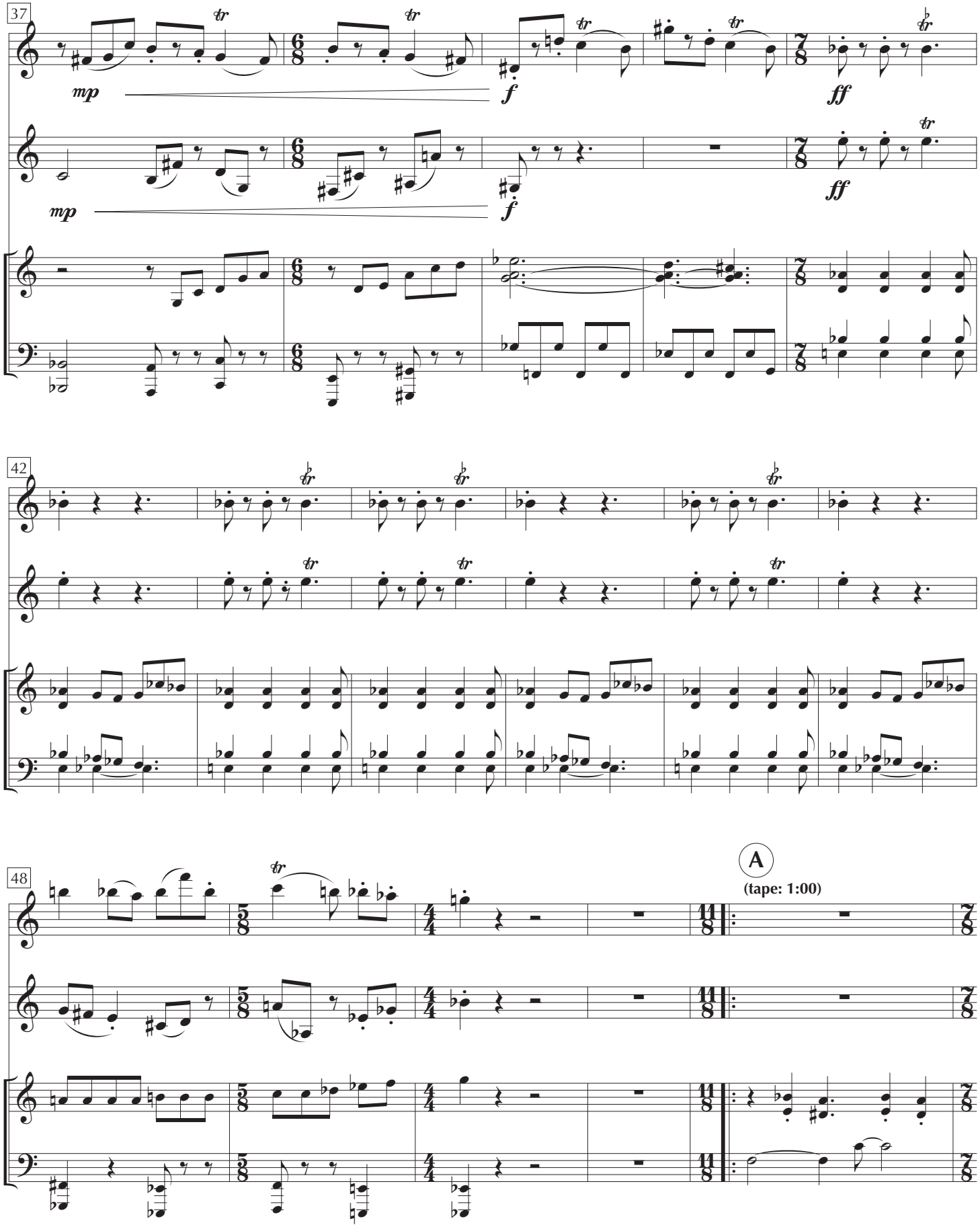
mod wheel go spinny

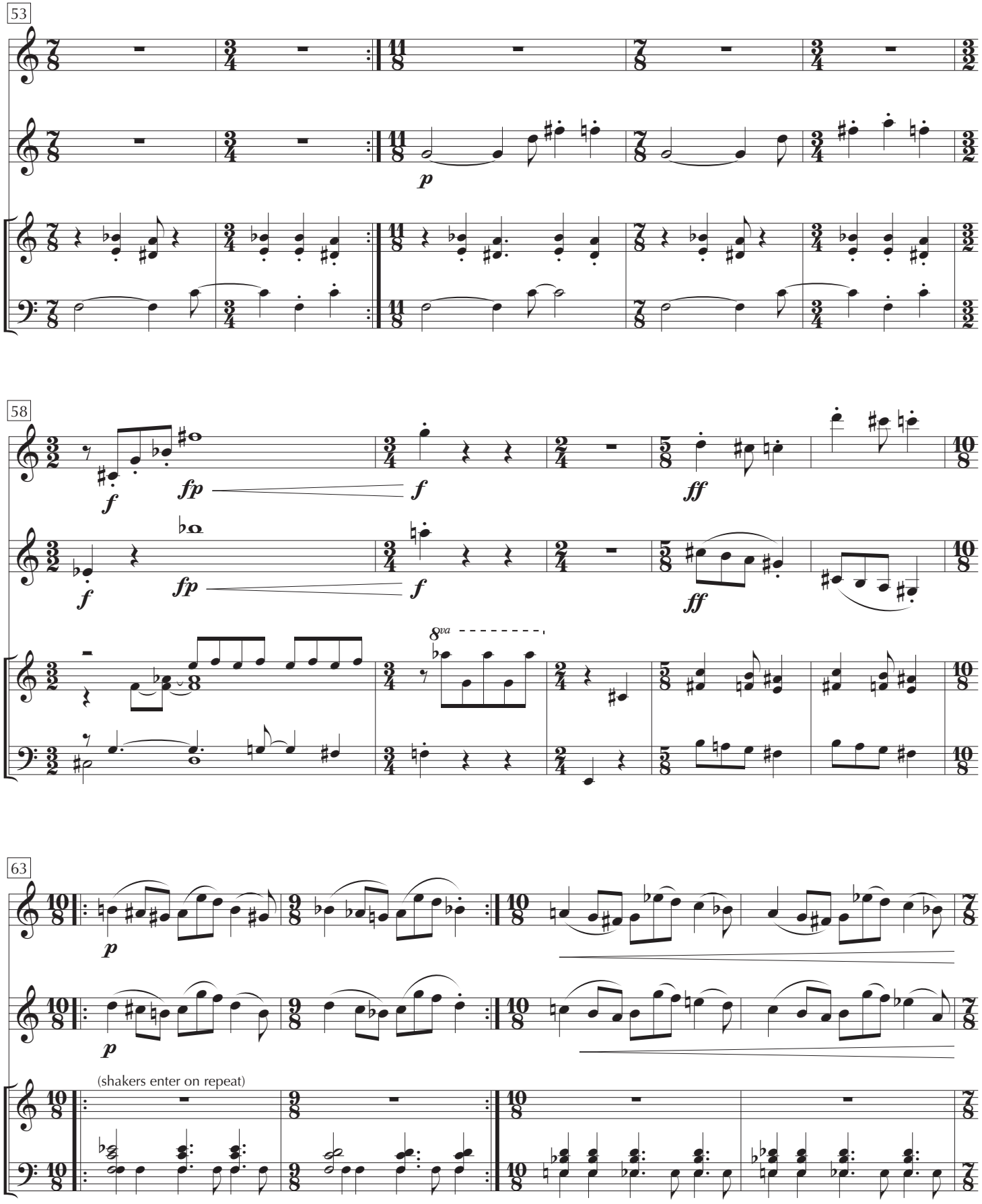
for Égide Duo

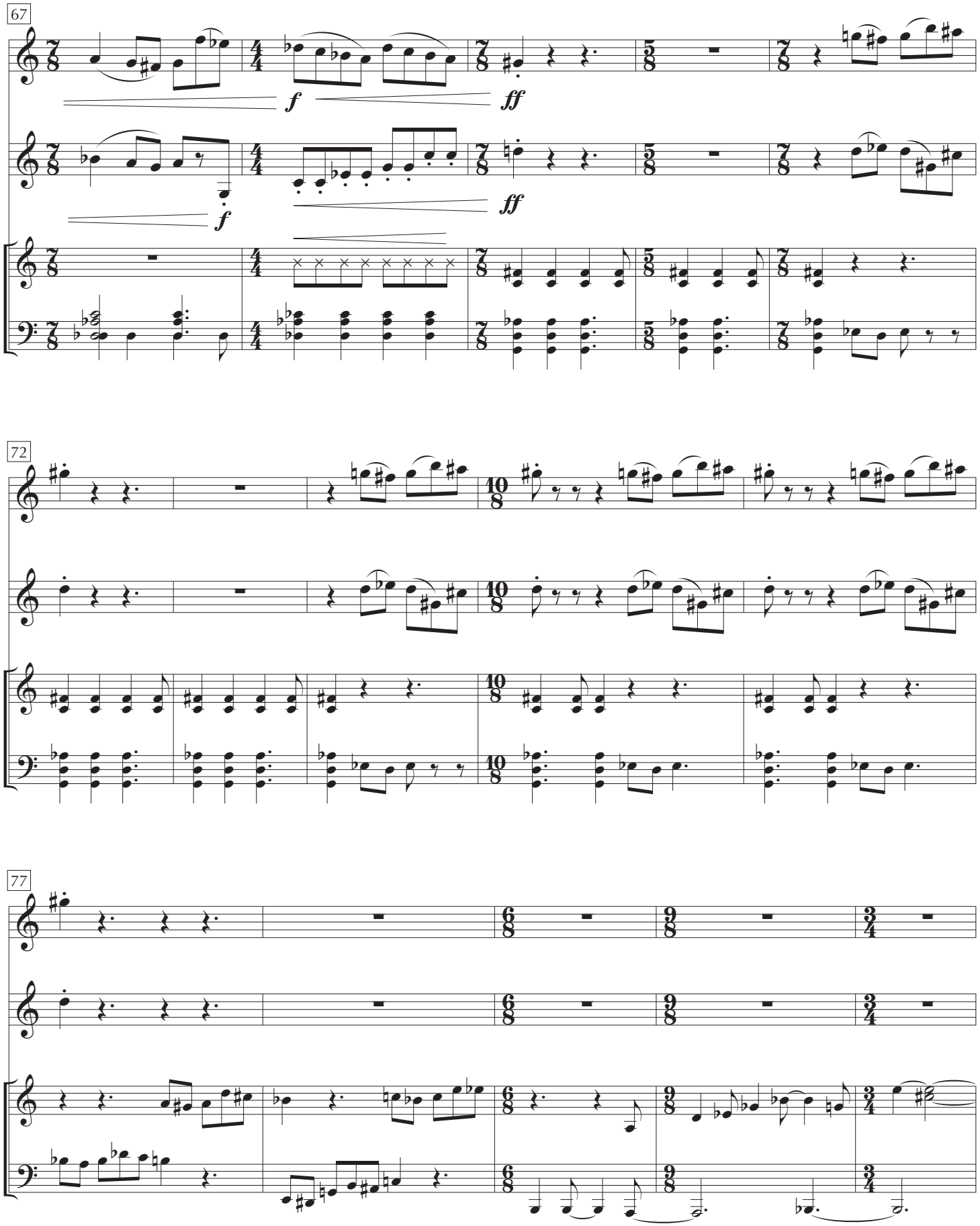


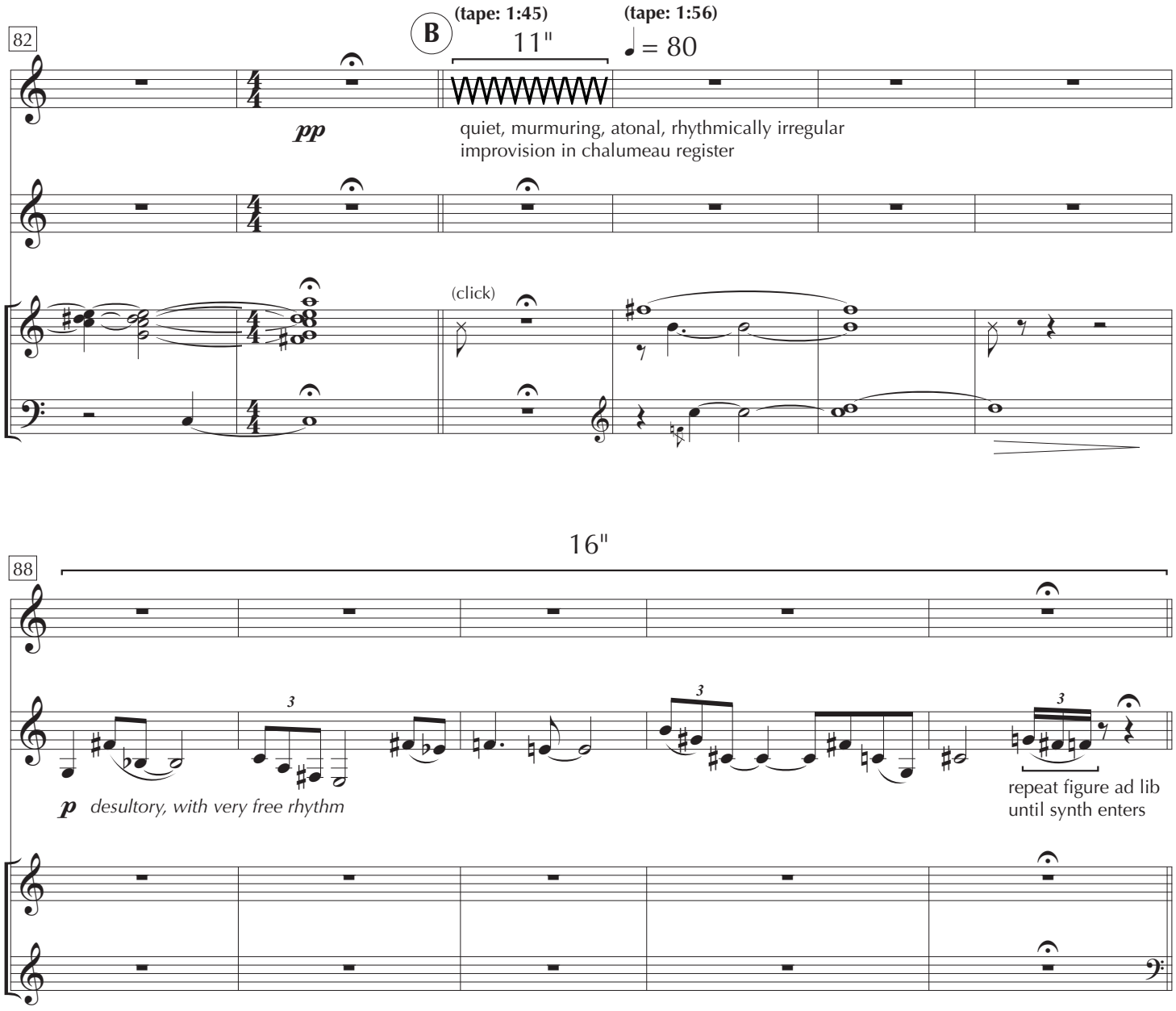

14
18
22
mp
mf
ff
tr

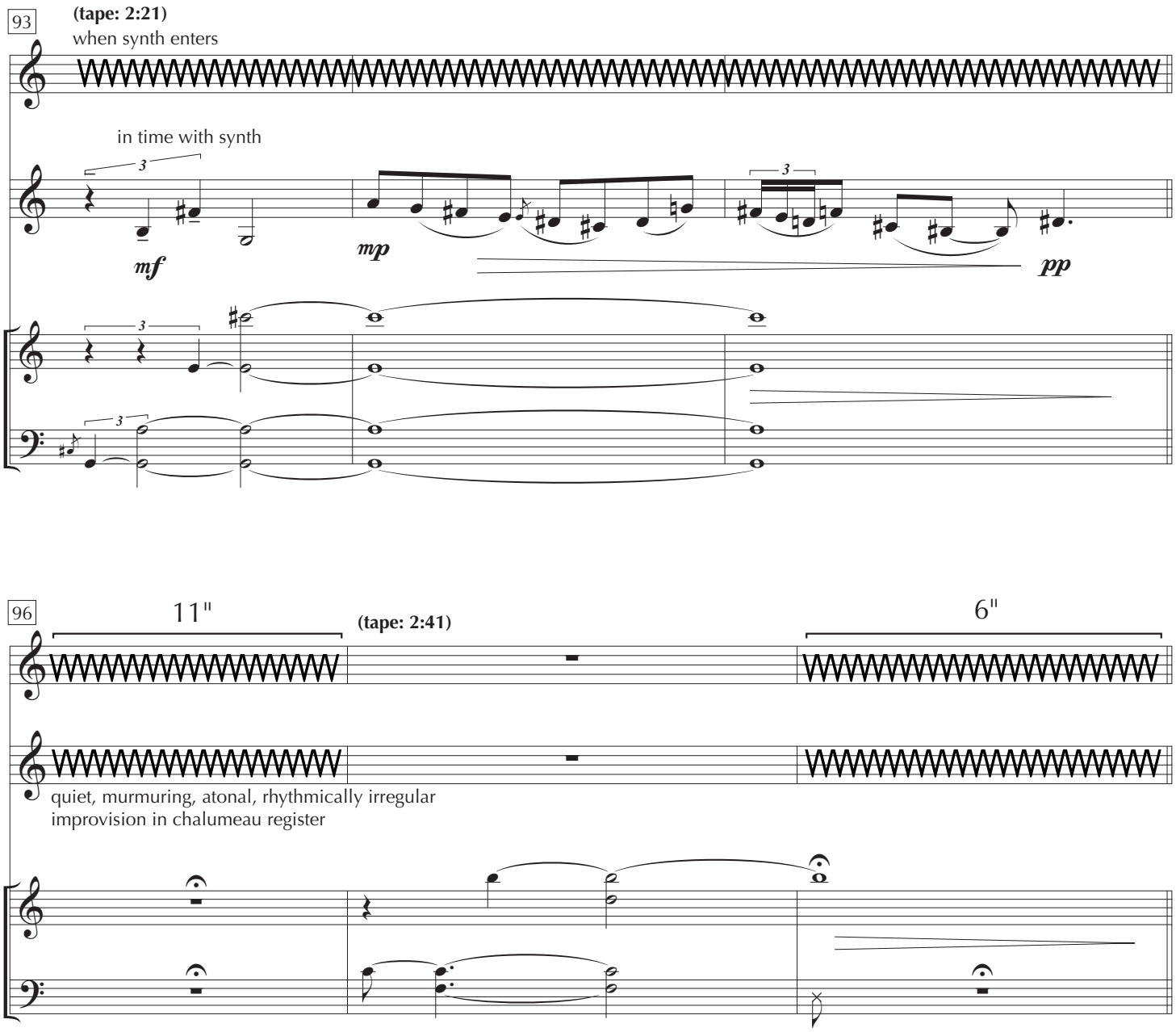

26
29
33
p
mf


37
mp
f
ff
42
48
A
(tape: 1:00)


53
58
63
p
fp
f
ff
8va
(shakers enter on repeat)


67
f
ff
f
ff
72
77


82
B
(tape: 1:45)
11"
(tape: 1:56)
♩ = 80
pp
quiet, murmuring, atonal, rhythmically irregular
improvision in chalumeau register
(click)
16"
88
3
3
3
p desultory, with very free rhythm
repeat figure ad lib
until synth enters


93
(tape: 2:21)
when synth enters
in time with synth
mf
mp
pp
96
11"
(tape: 2:41)
6"
quiet, murmuring, atonal, rhythmically irregular
improvision in chalumeau register

13"

99 ♩ = 84

repeat until
percussion enters*

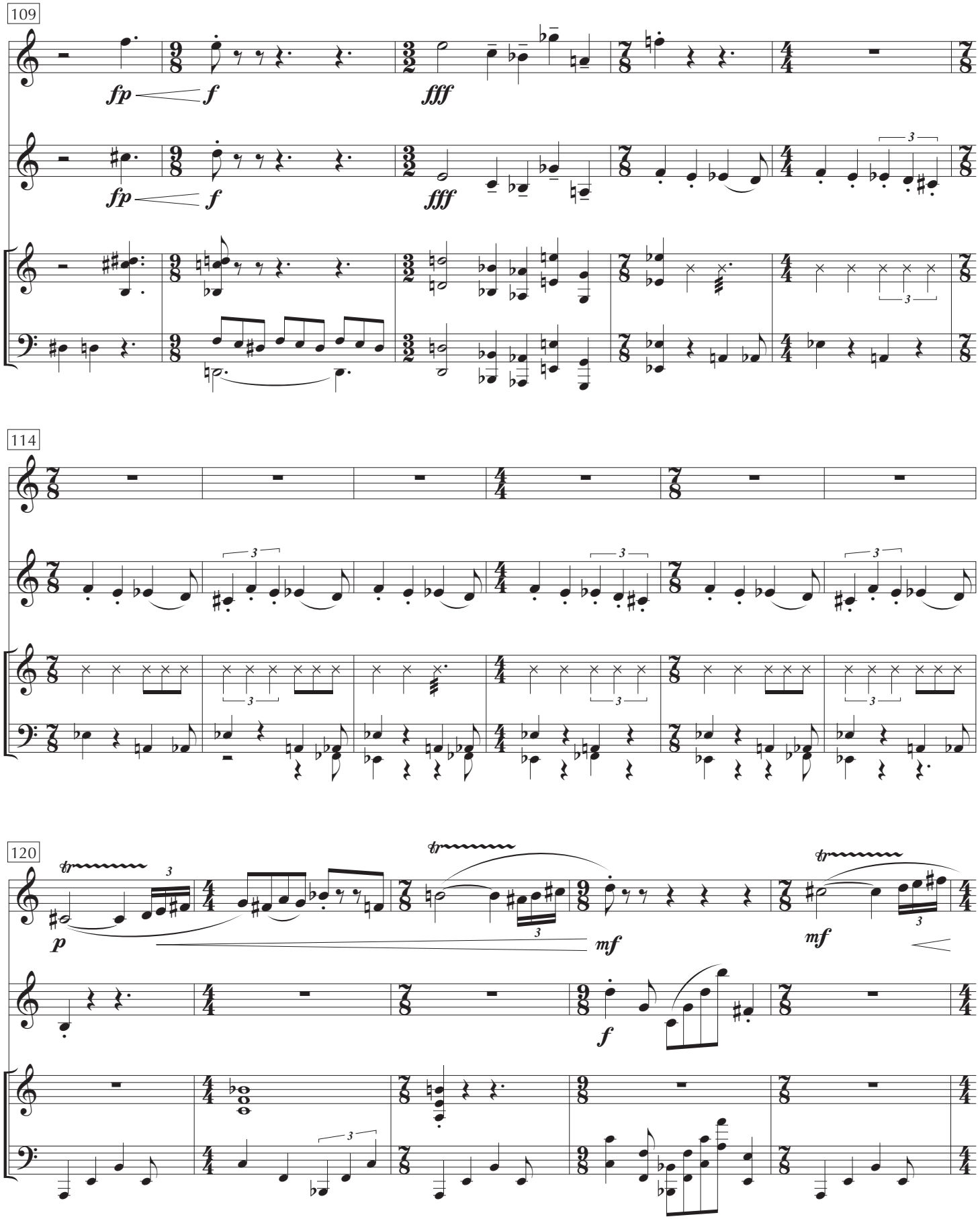
pp mp sfz mf mf

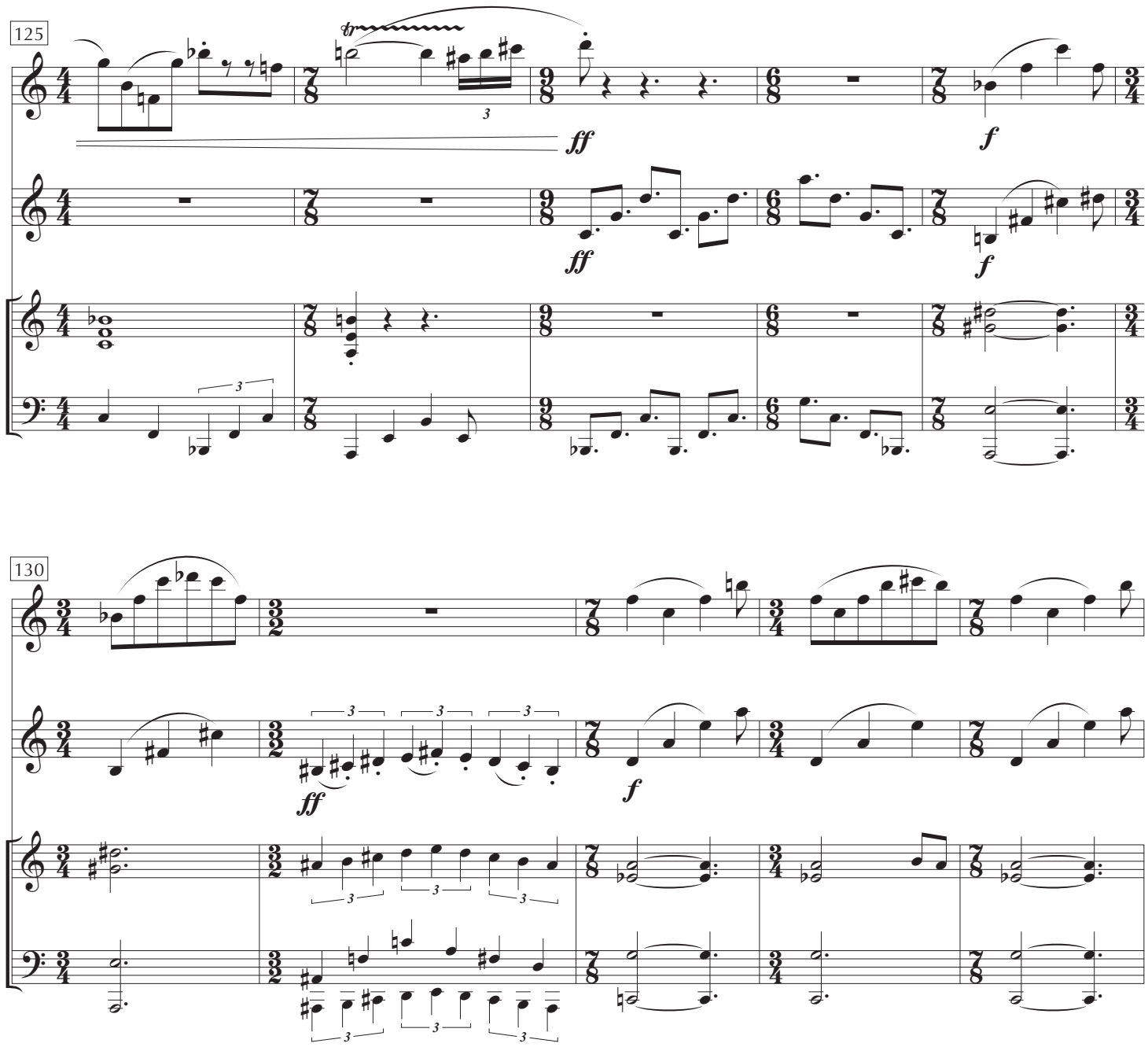
* when percussion enters, finish the current iteration of
the repeated measure rather than cutting off immediately

103 (tape: 3:03)

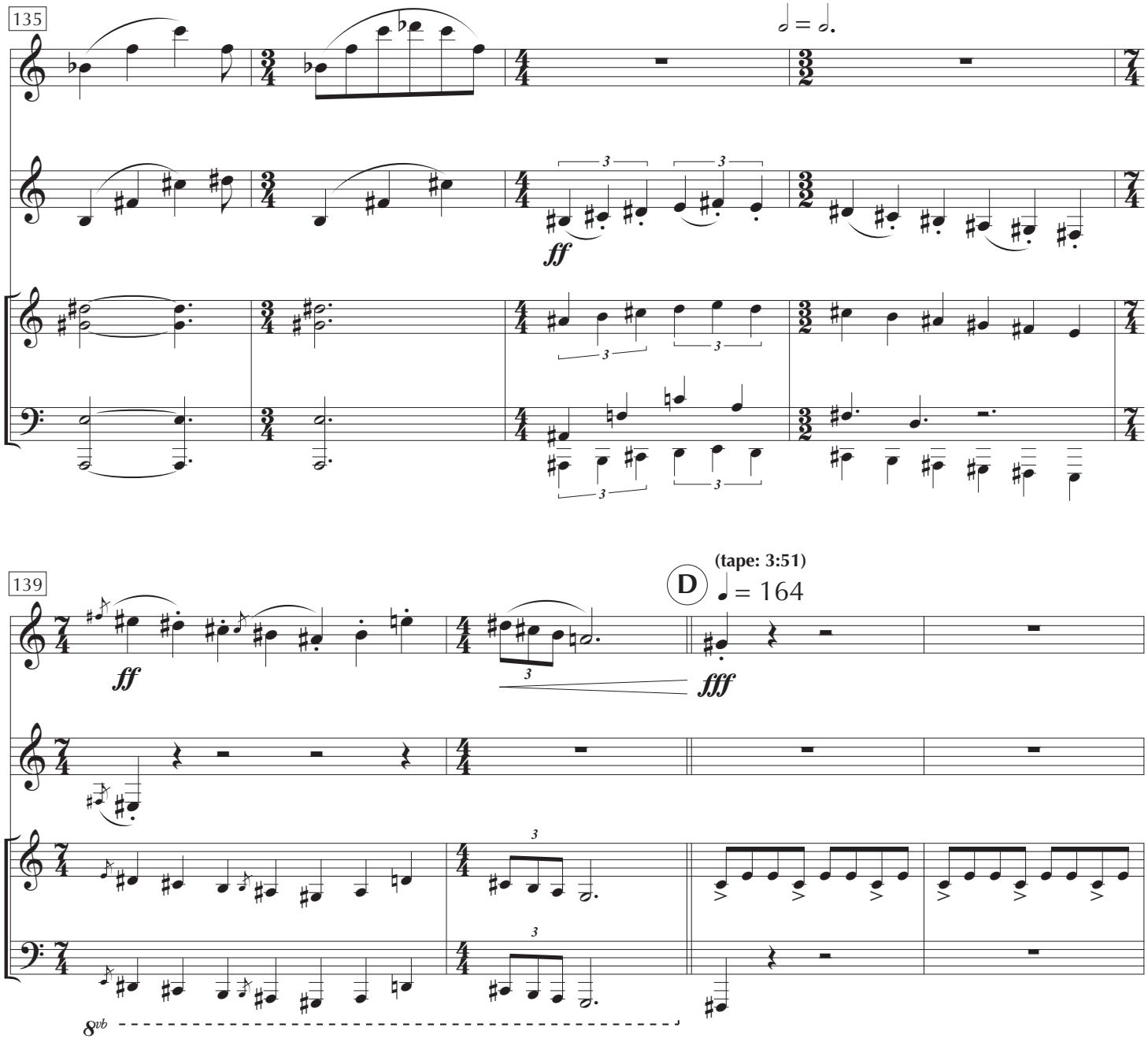
C ♩ = 200

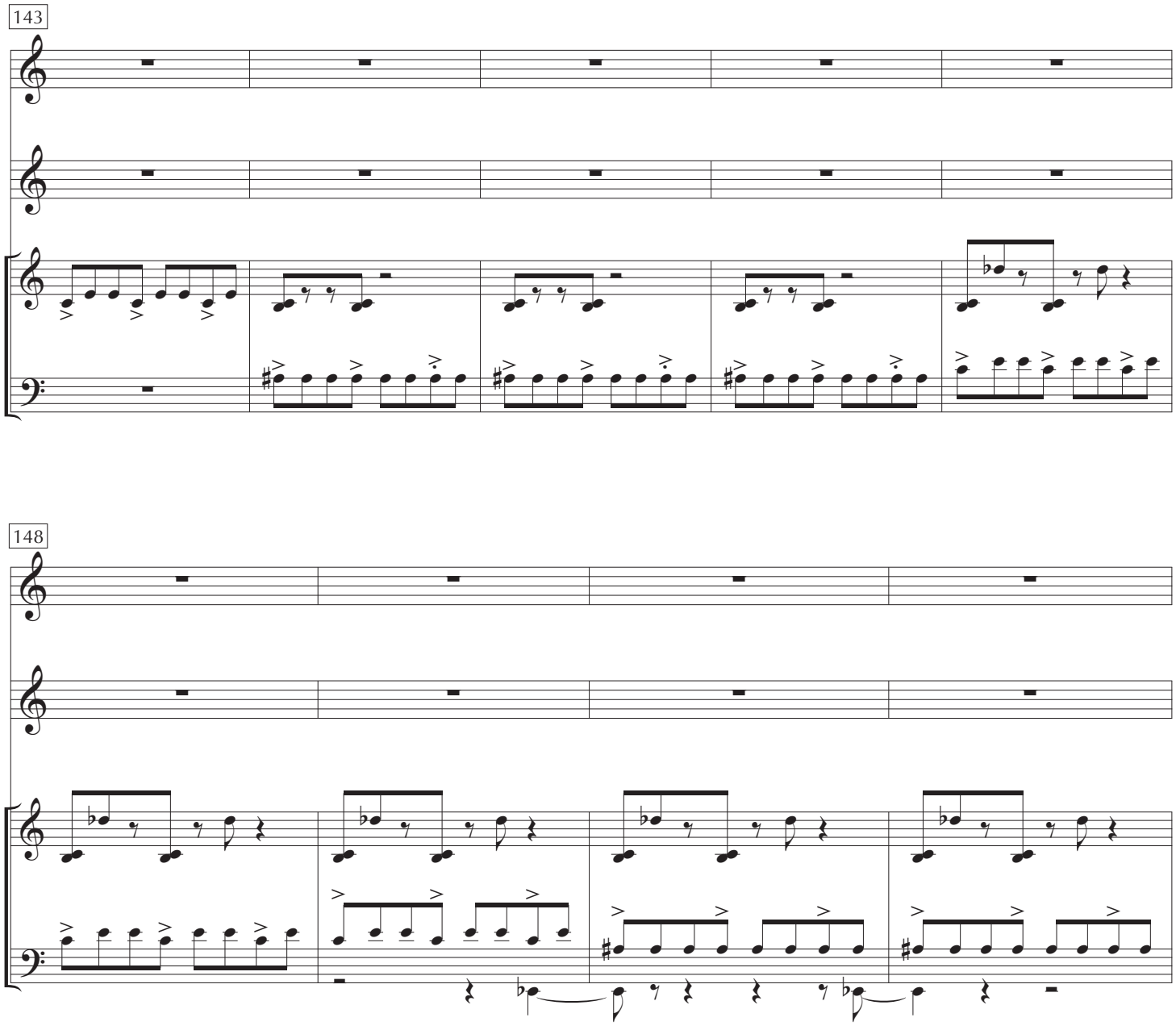
fp f fp f

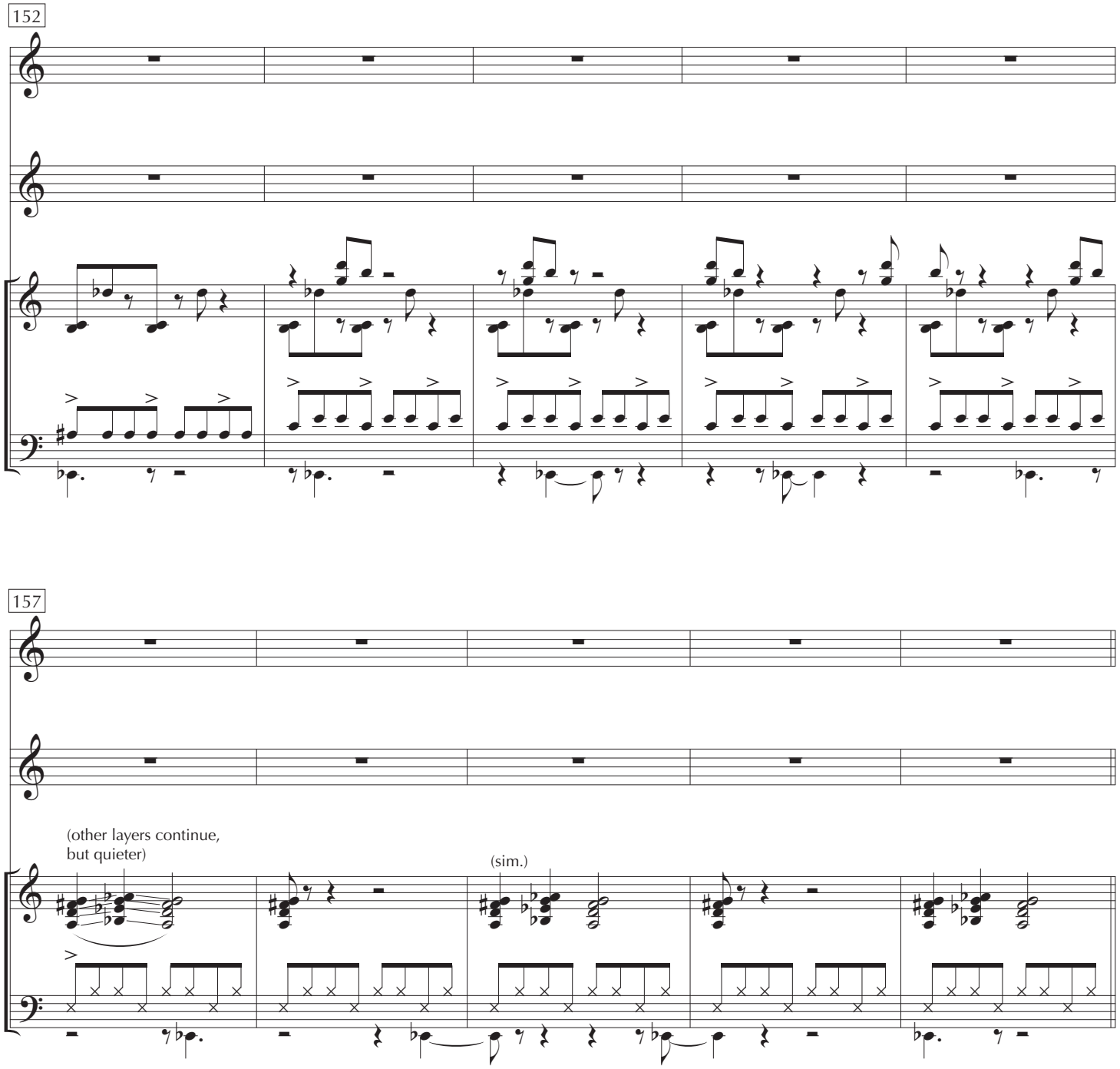

109
fp
f
fff
114
120
tr
p
mf
f

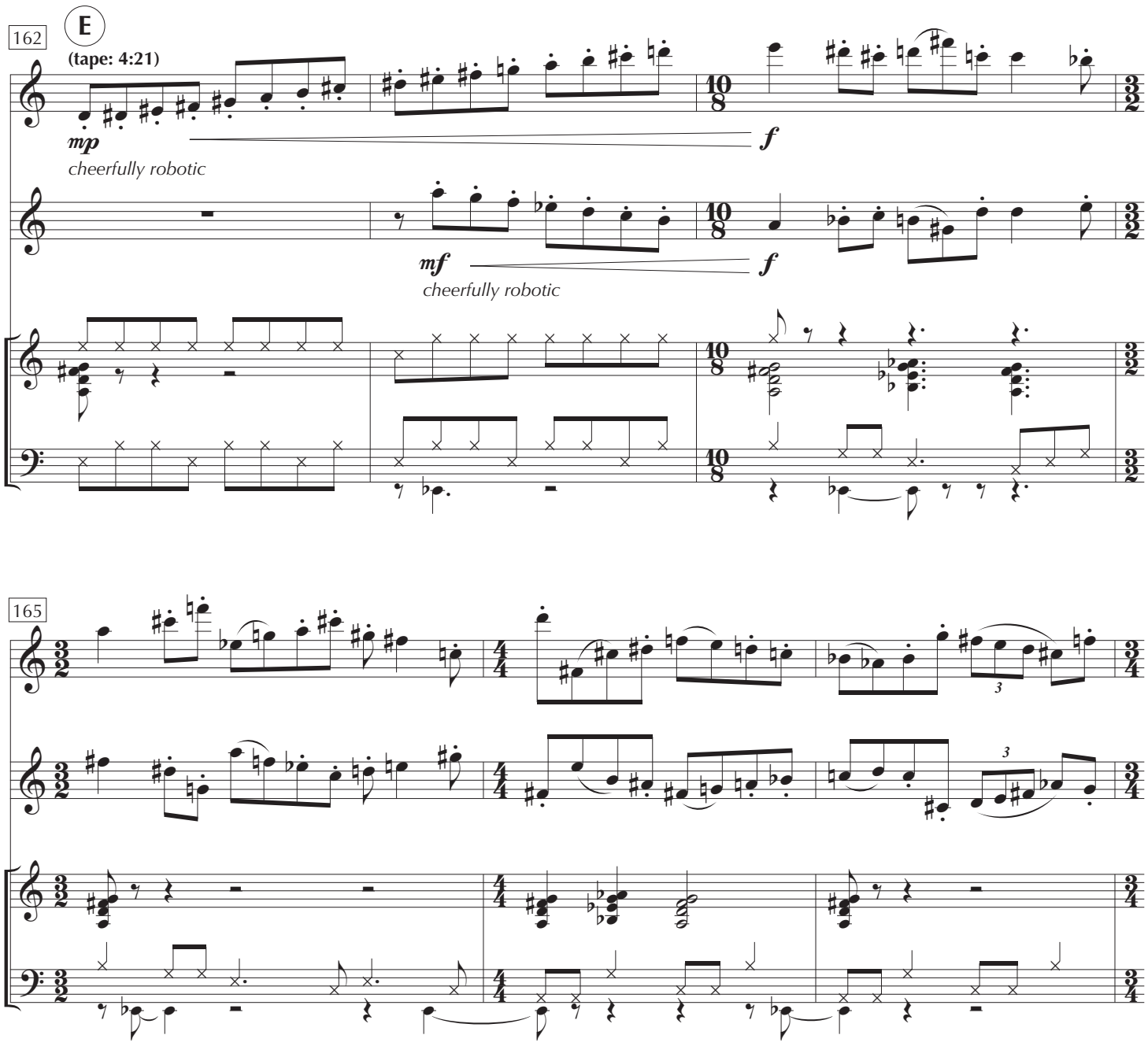

125
ff
f
ff
f

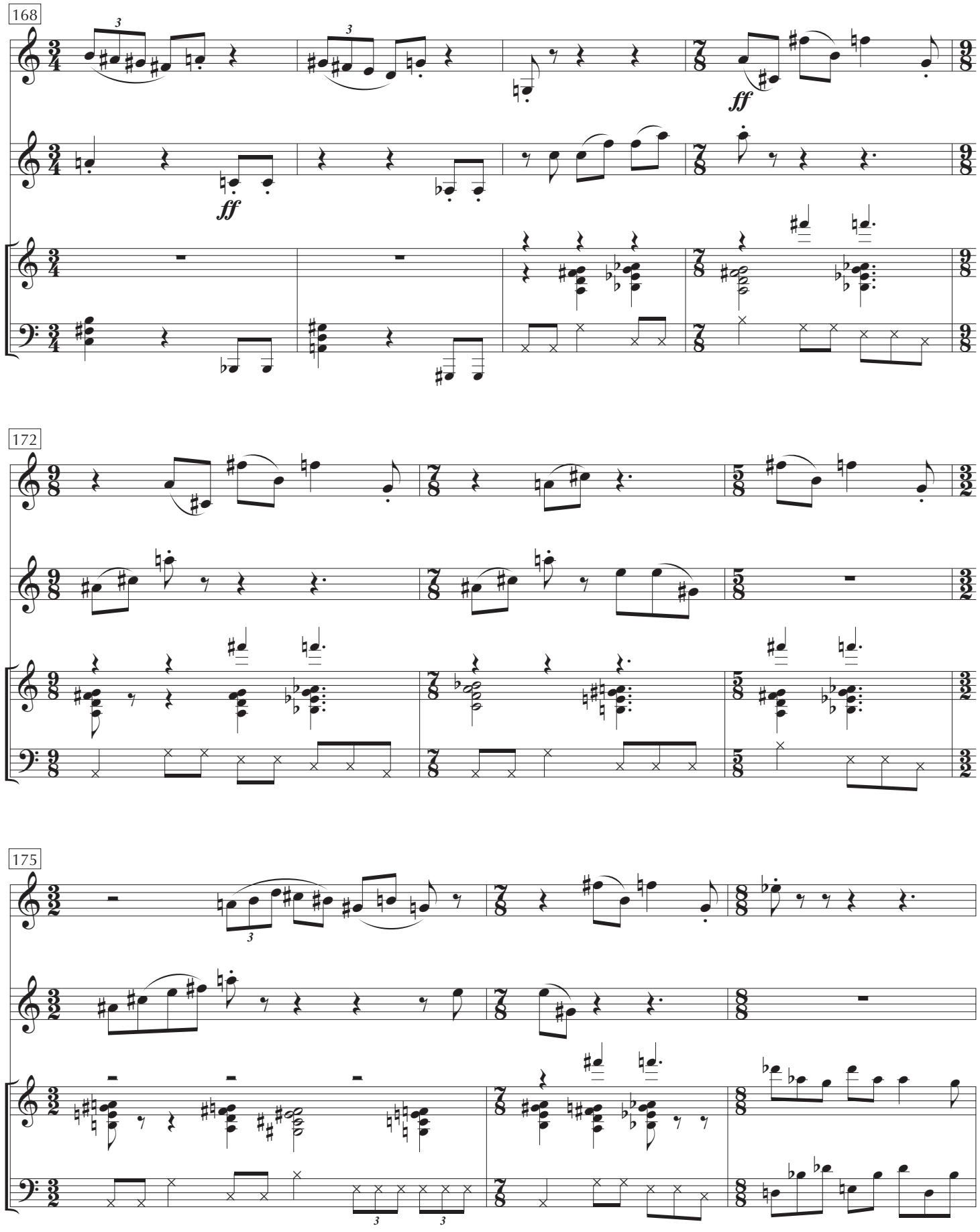
130
ff
f


135
ff
139
ff
(tape: 3:51)
D
= 164
fff
8vb


143
148

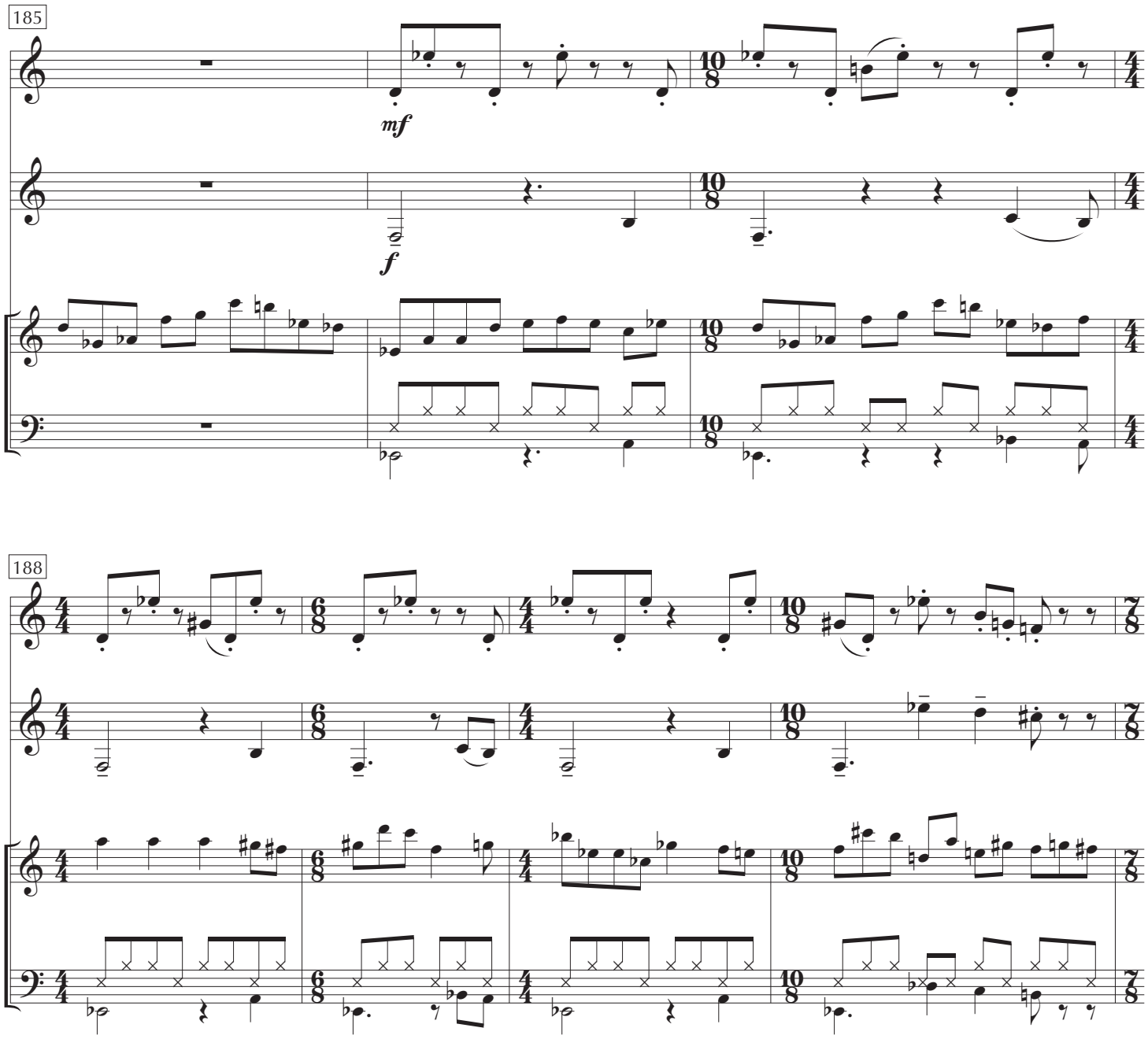

152
157
(other layers continue,
but quieter)
(sim.)


162
E
(tape: 4:21)
mp
cheerfully robotic
f
mf
cheerfully robotic
f
165
3
3

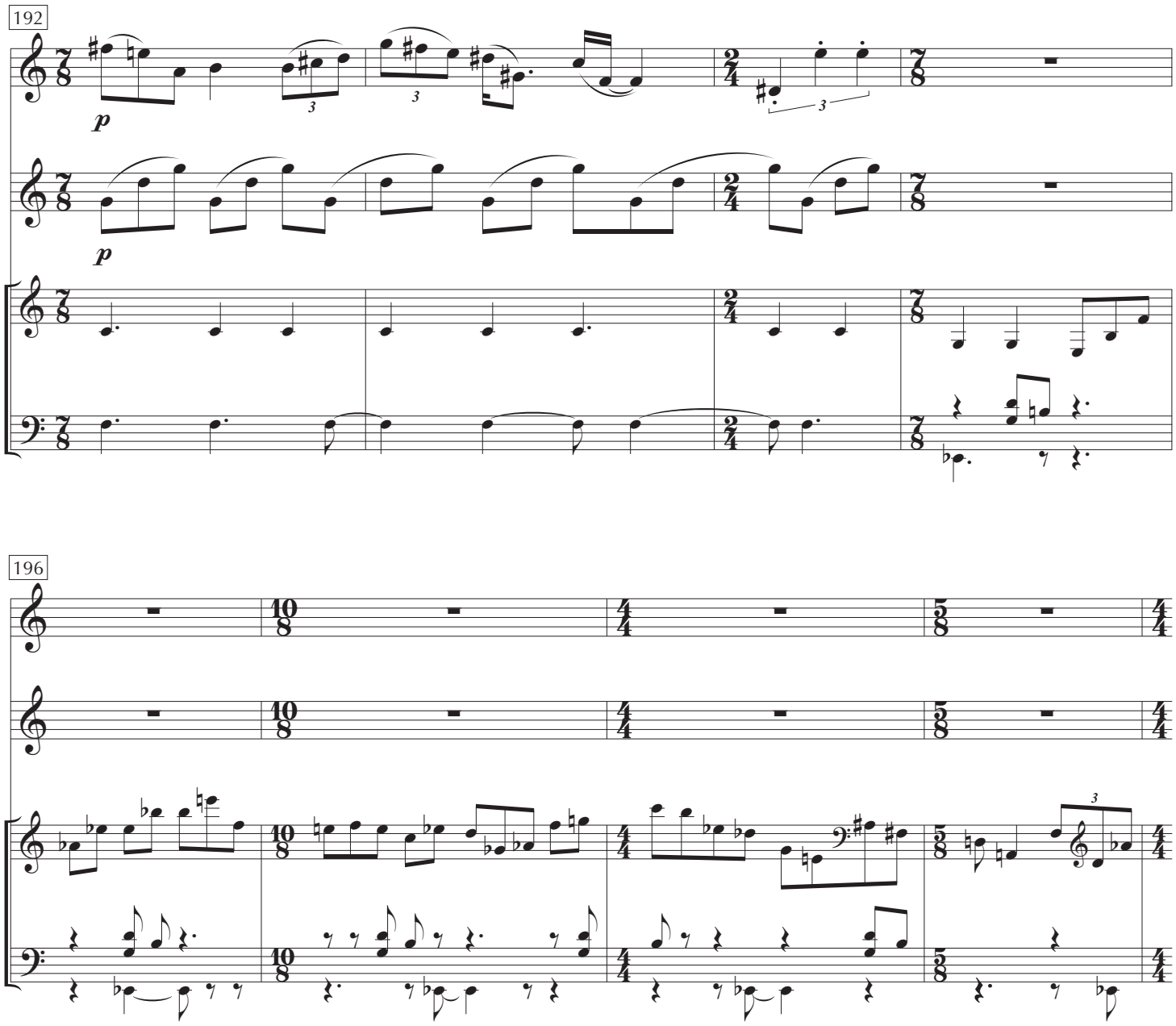

168
ff
ff
172
175

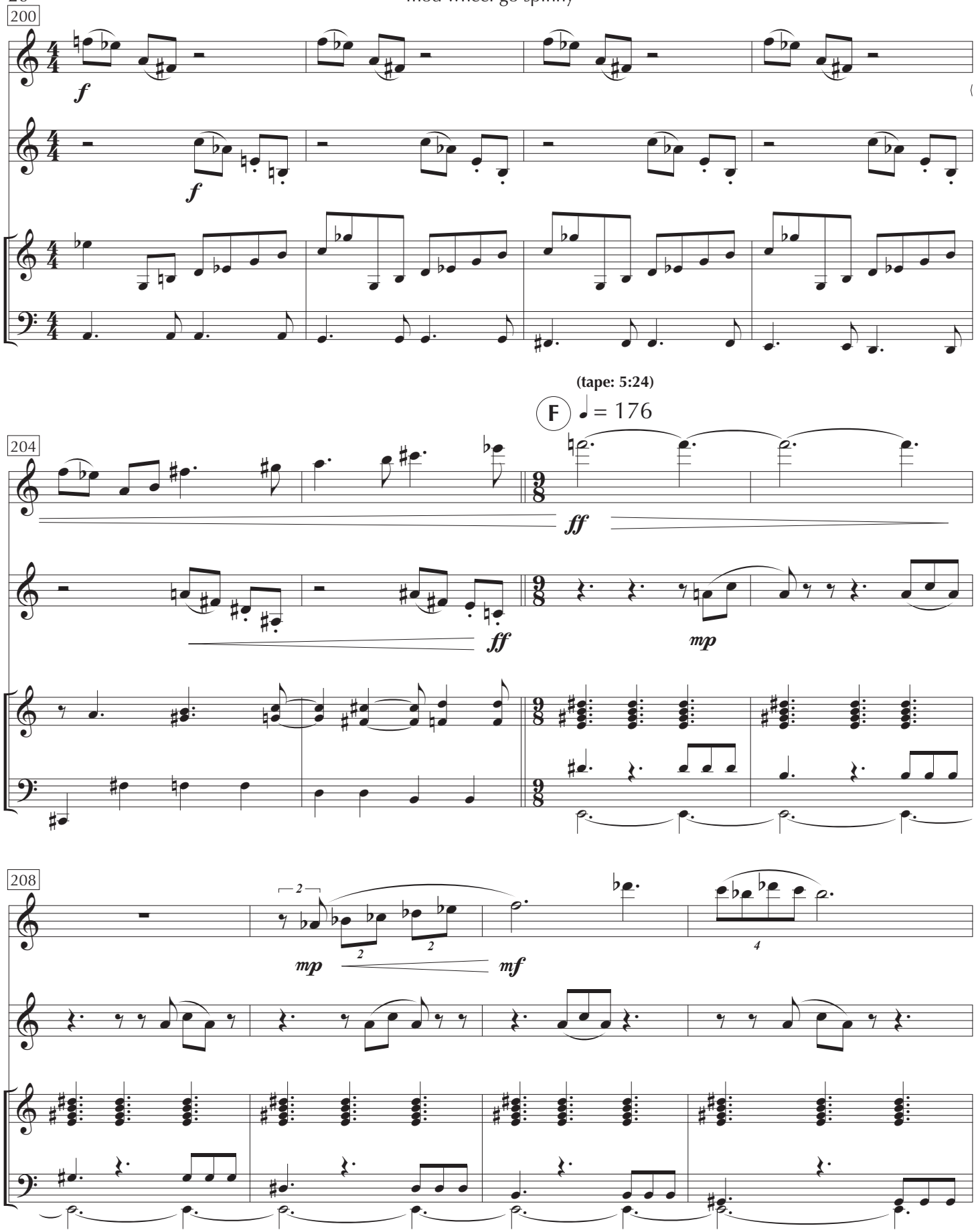
178
slap tongue
slap tongue
3

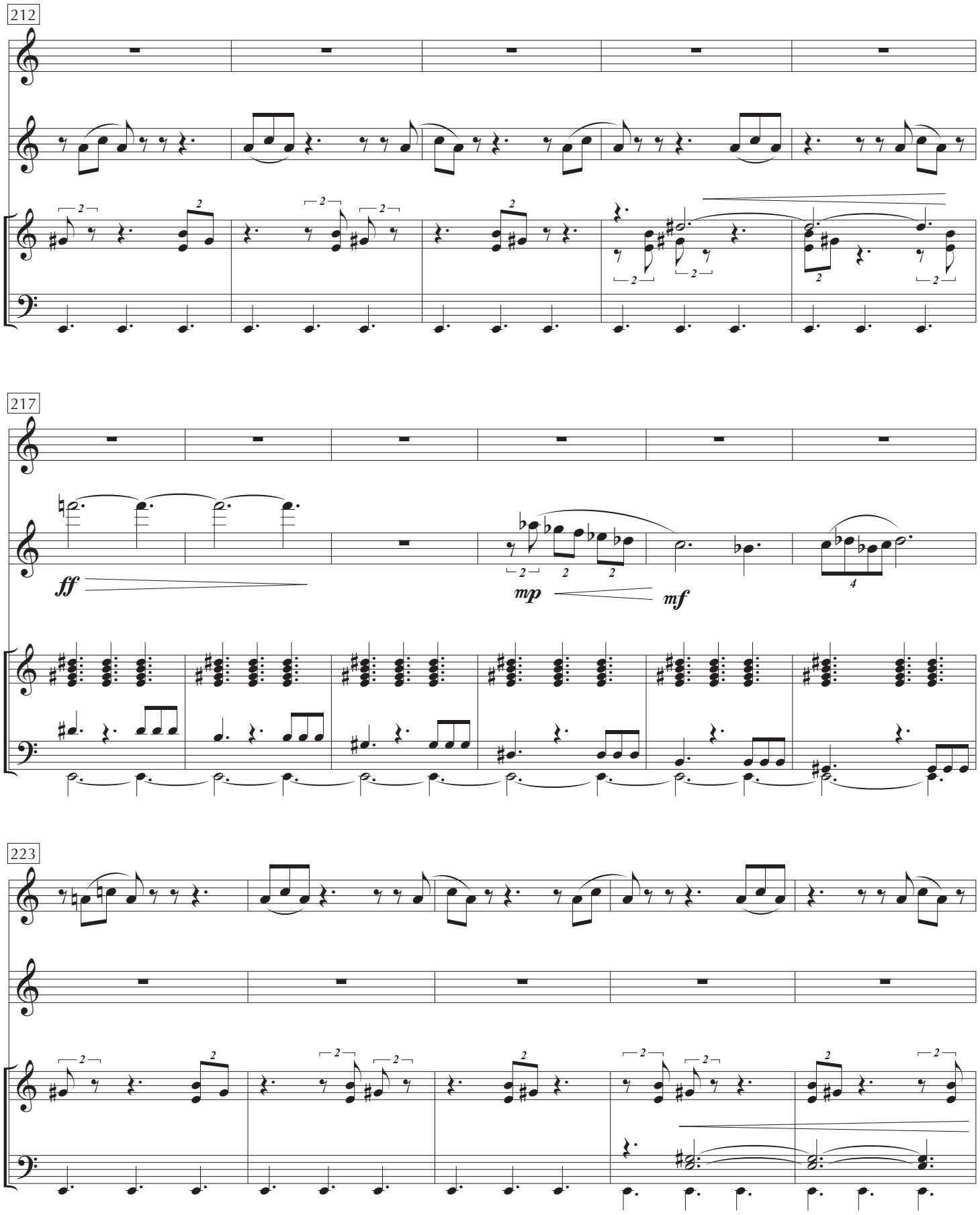
182
3

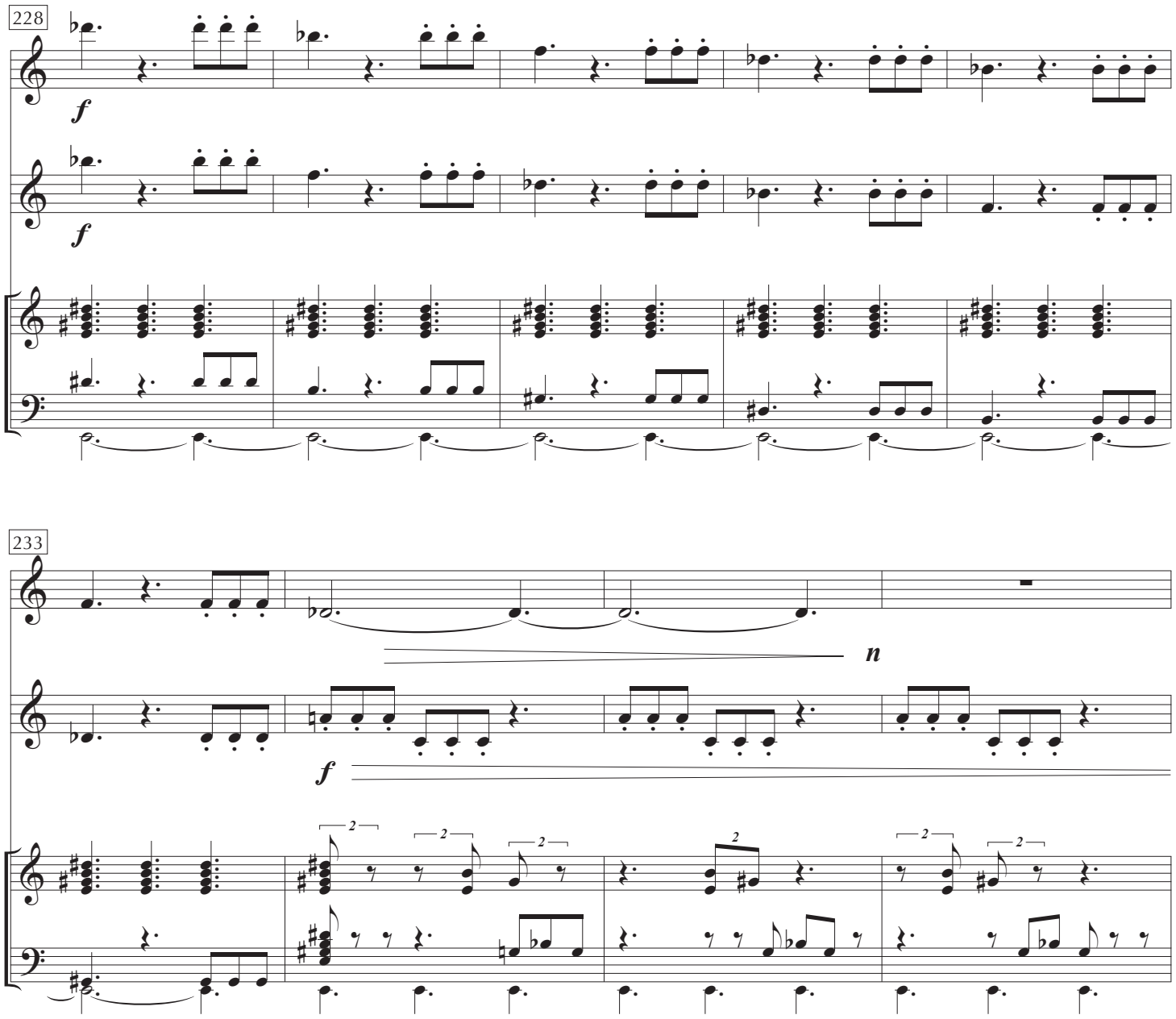

185
mf
f

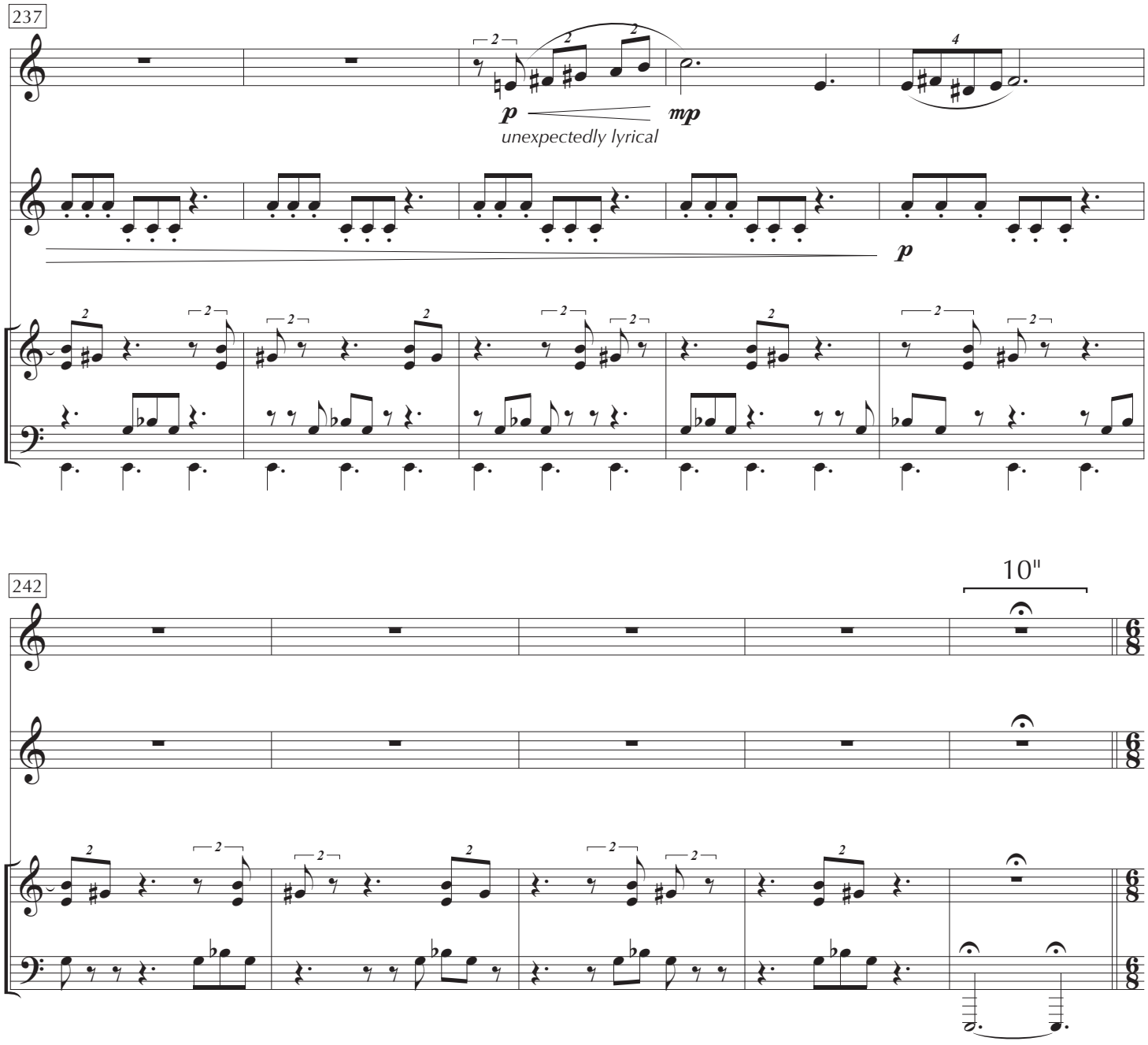
188


192
p
p
196


200
f
f
(tape: 5:24)
F
♩ = 176
204
ff
ff
mp
208
mp
mf


212
217
ff
mp
mf
223


228
f
f
233
n
f
2
2
2
2
2
2


237
p
mp
unexpectedly lyrical
p
242
10"

G

(tape: 6:36)

mod wheel go spinny

247

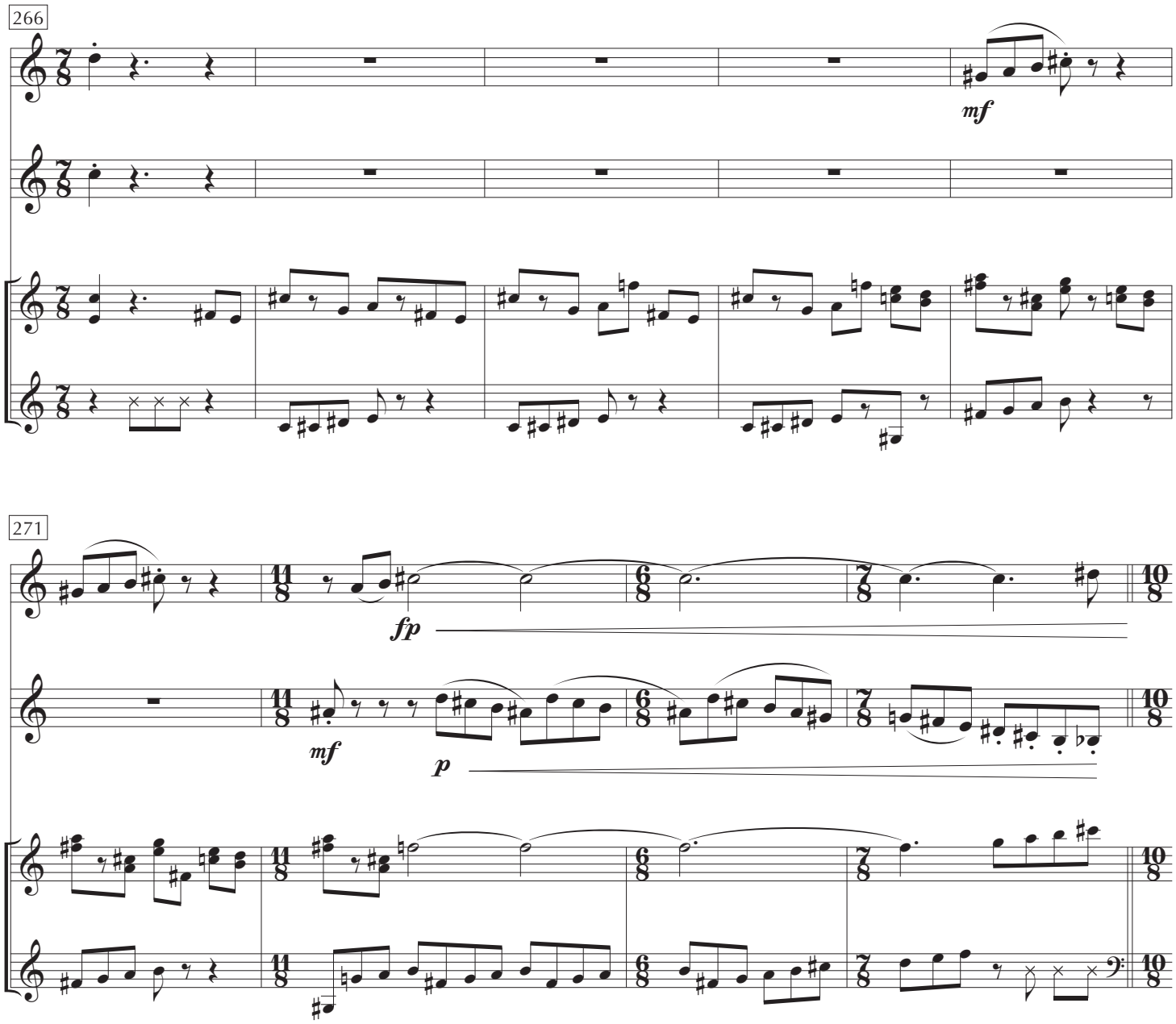
♩. = 133

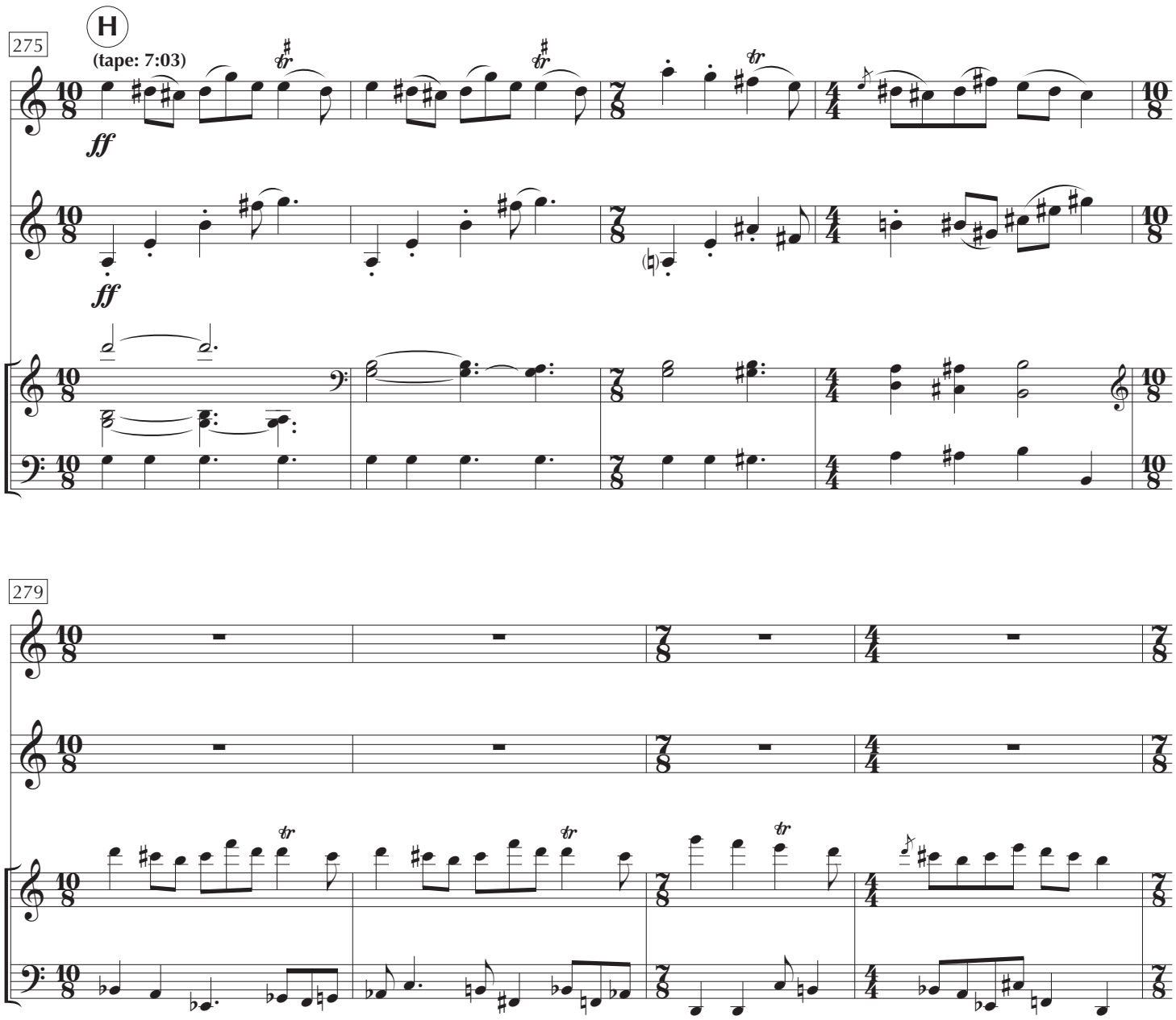
256

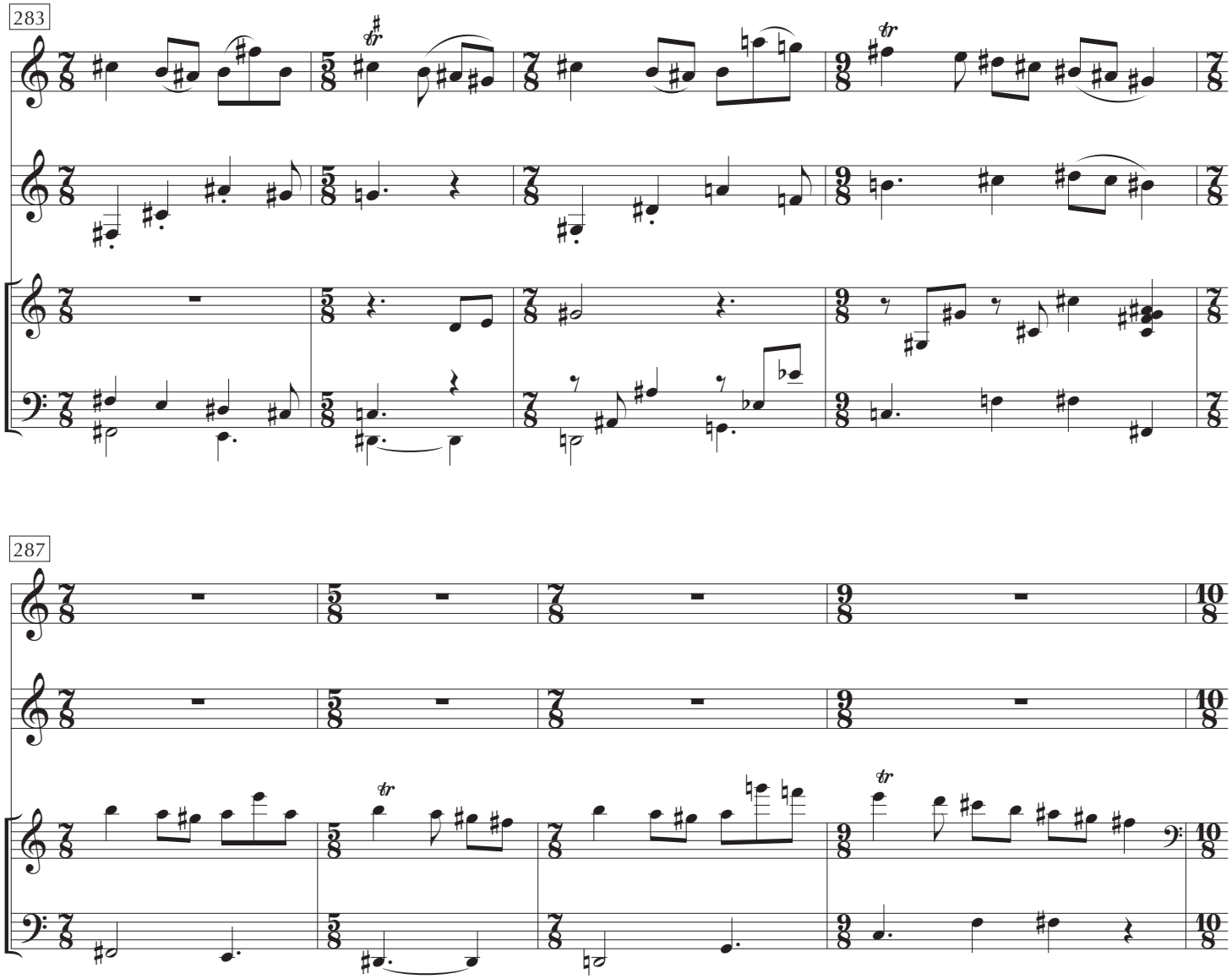
pp p mp

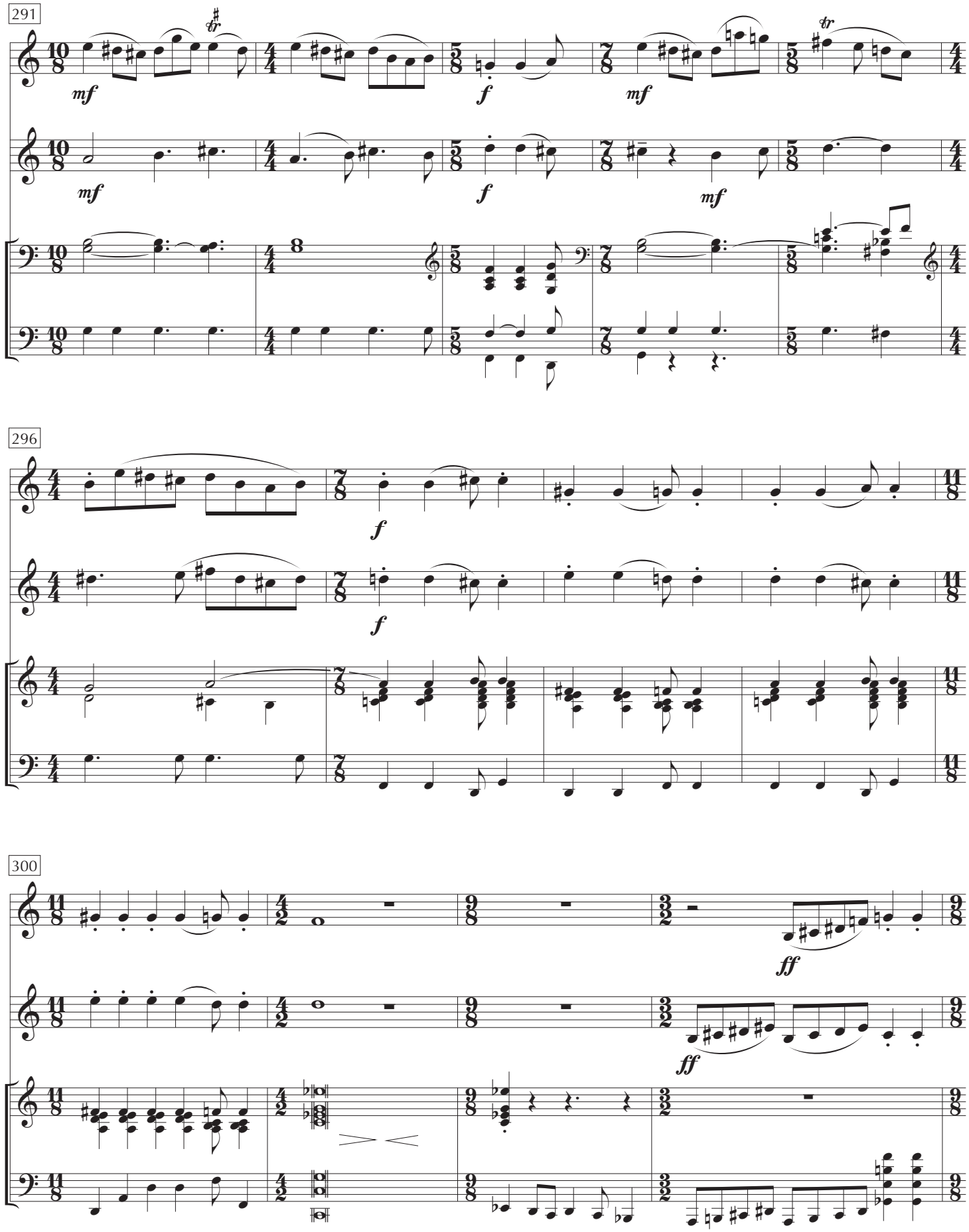
261

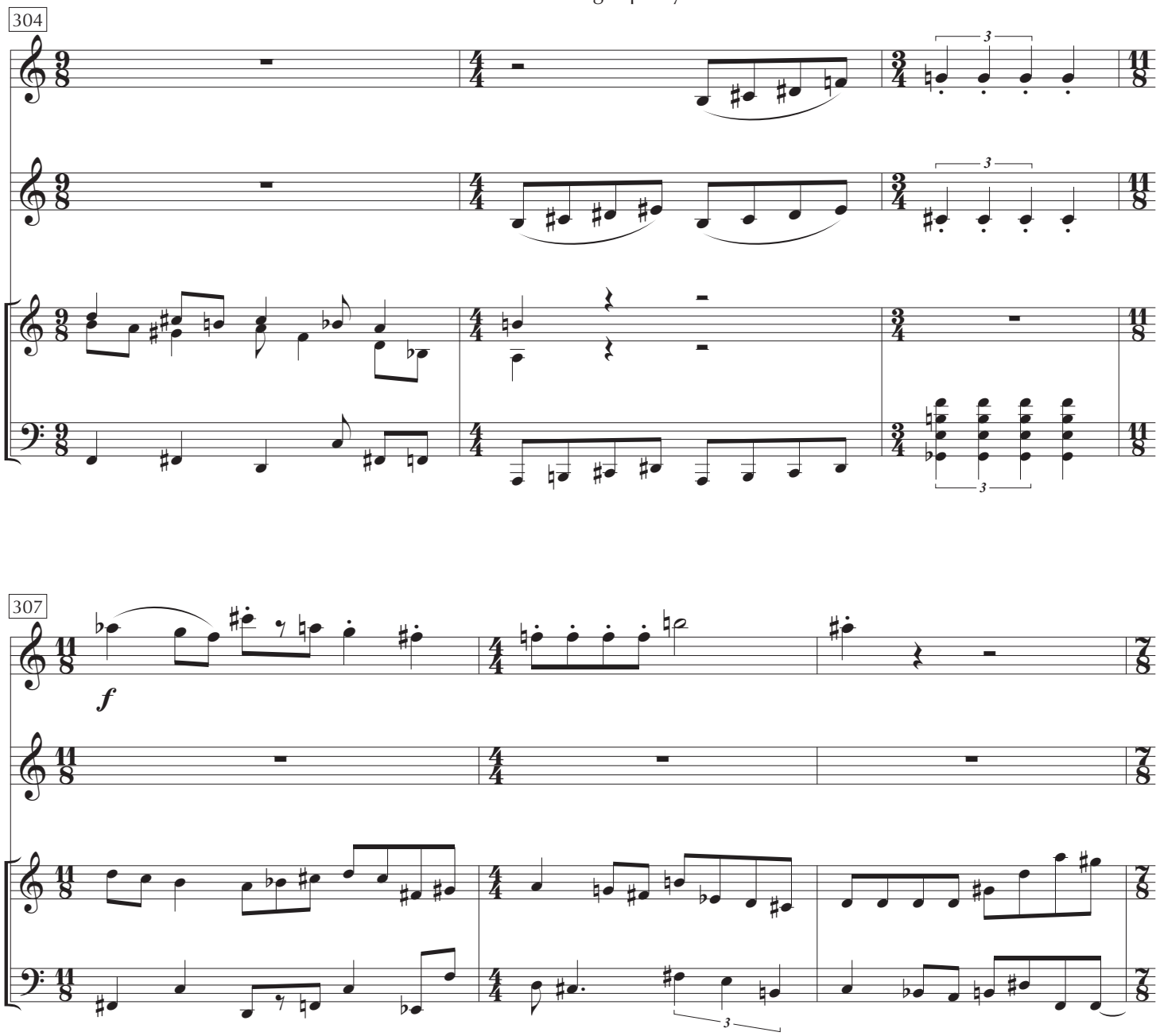
mf f mf f

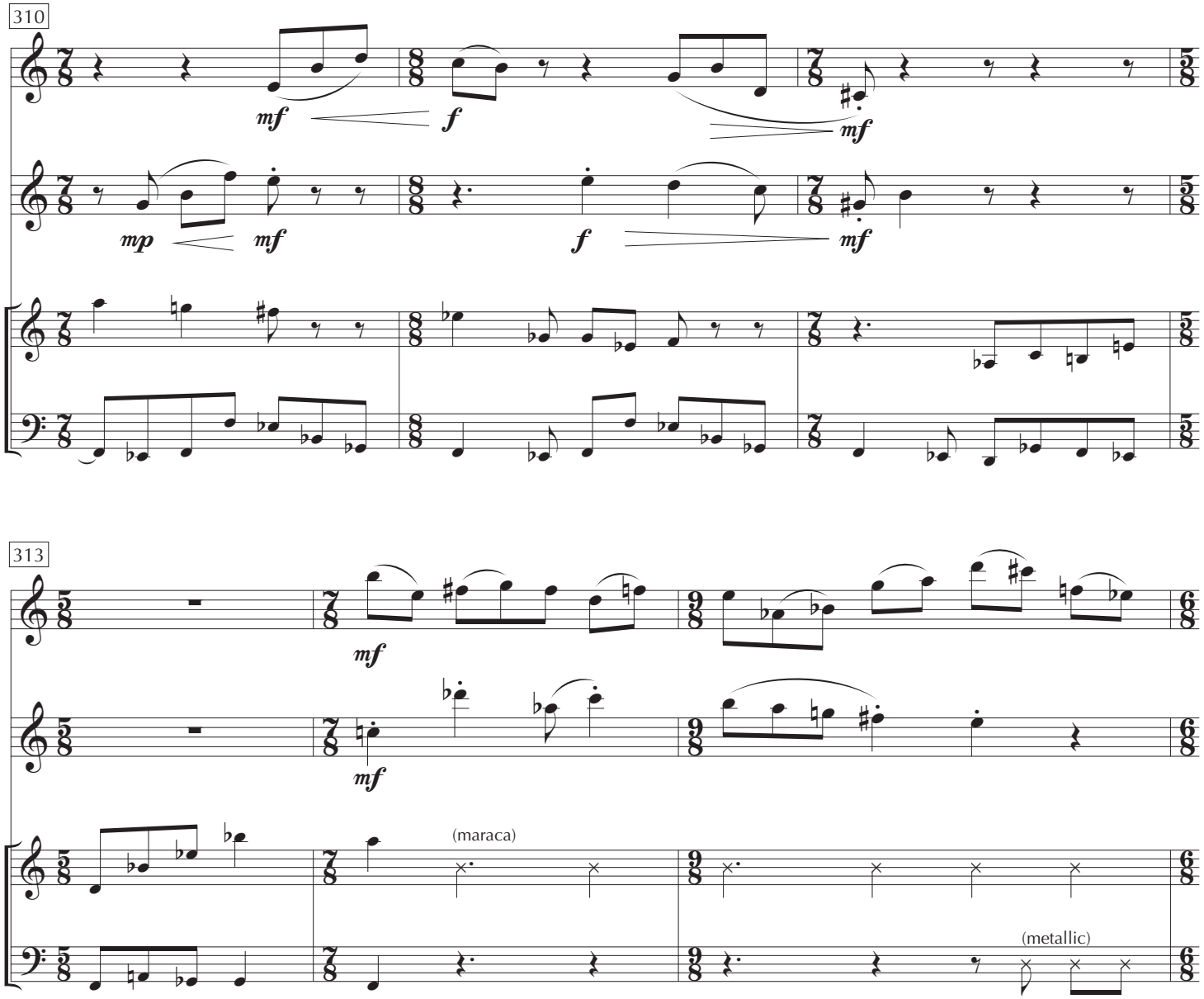

266
mf
271
fp
mf
p

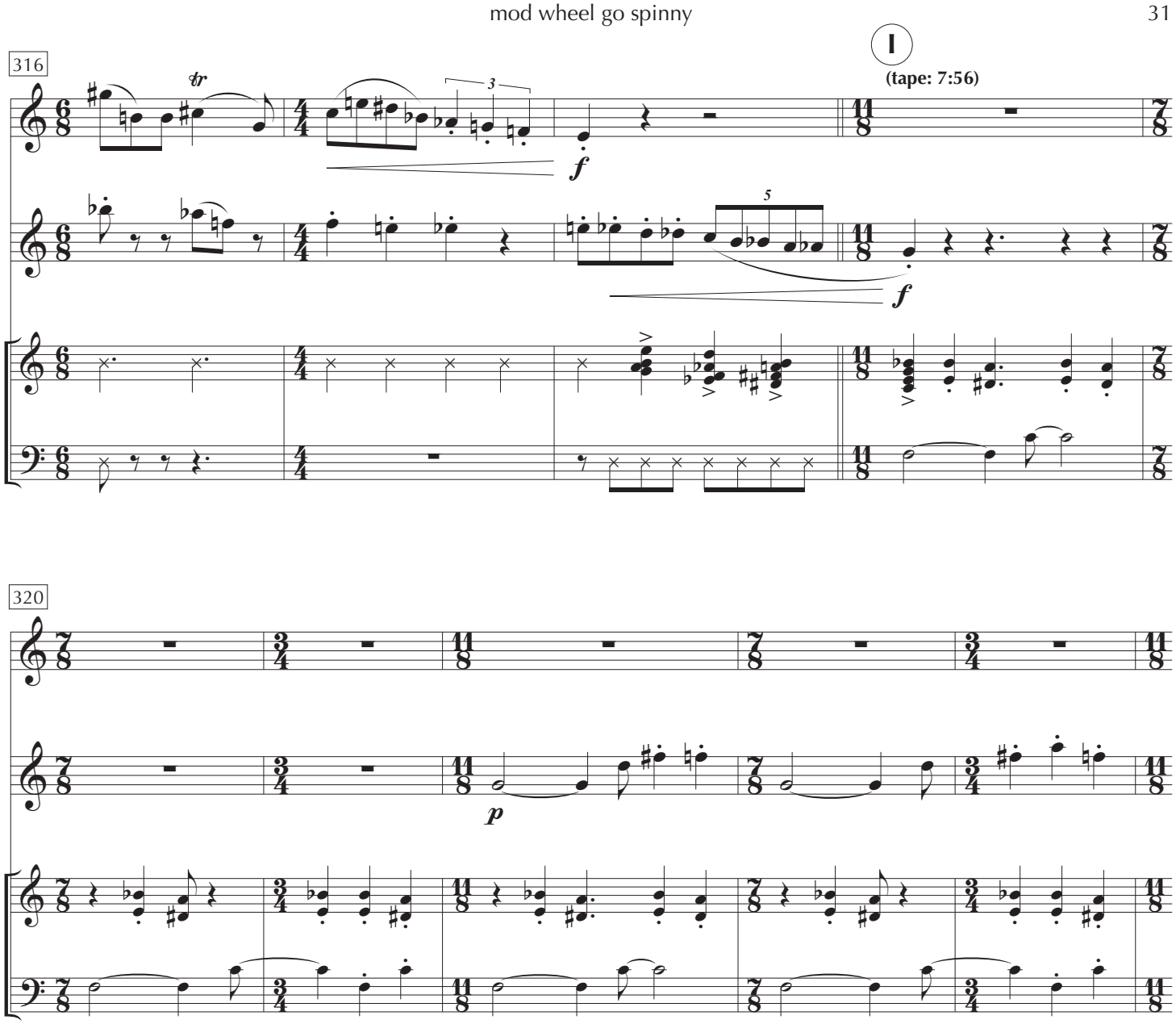

H
275
(tape: 7:03)
ff
ff
279


283
287

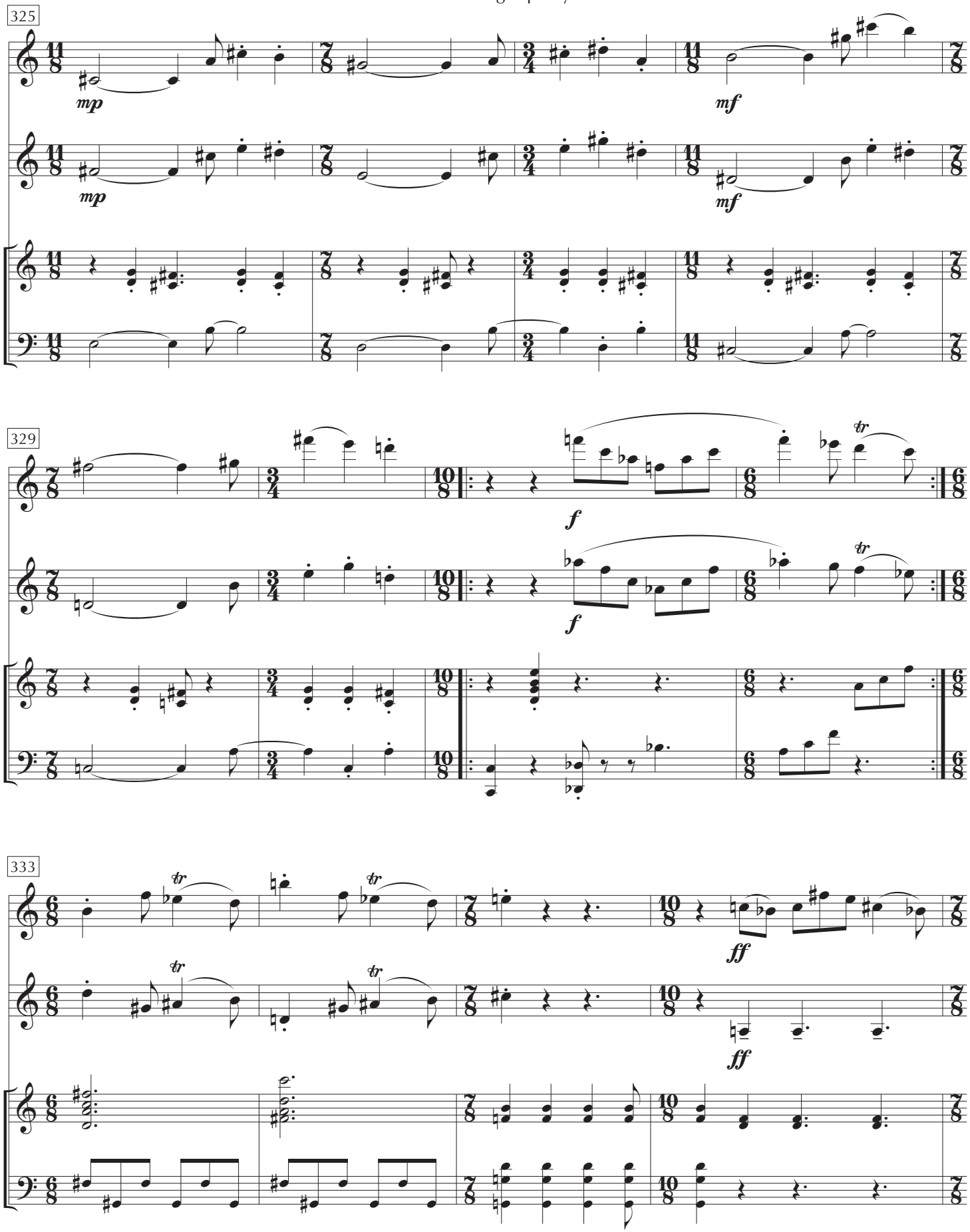

291
296
300

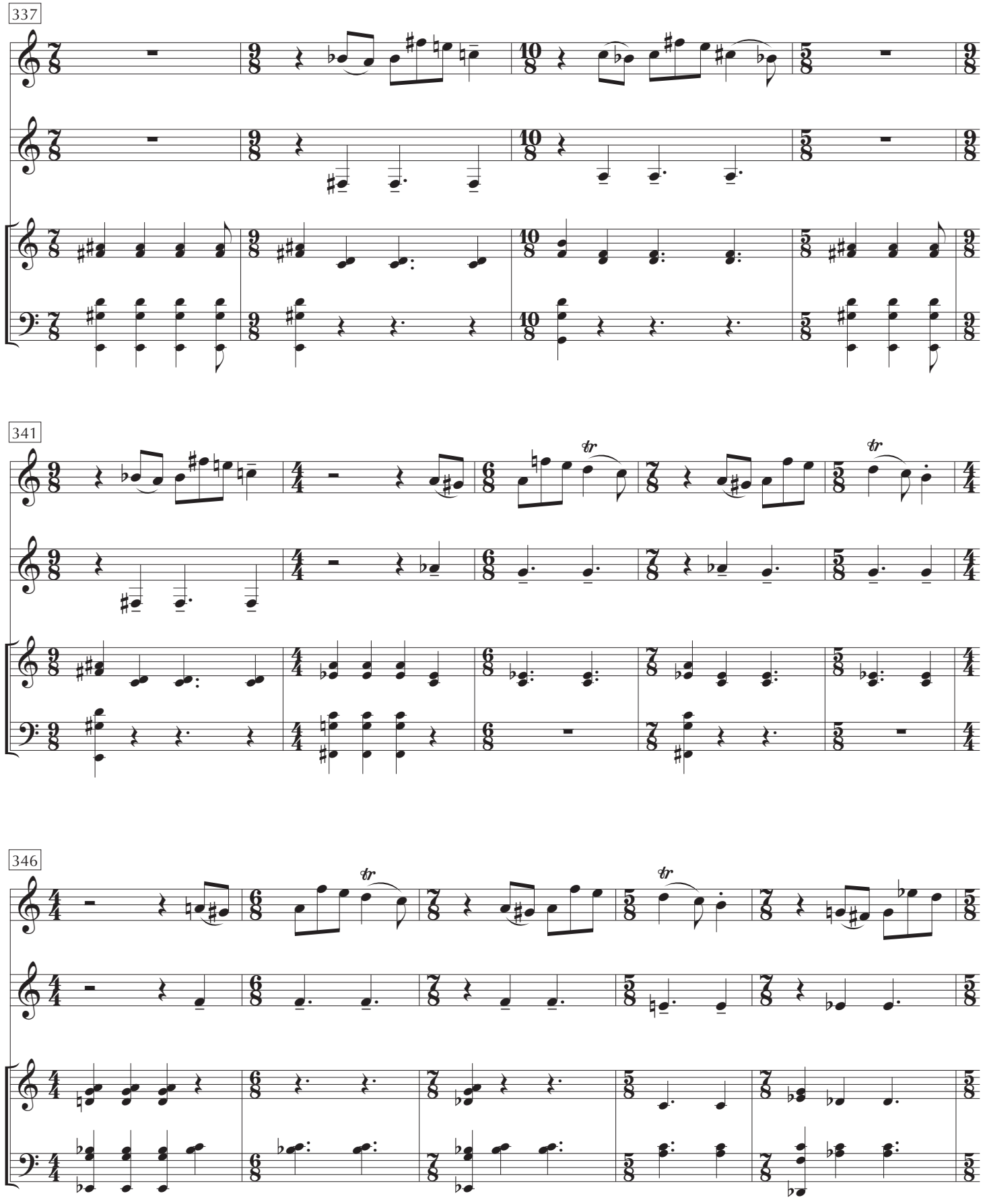

304
307
f

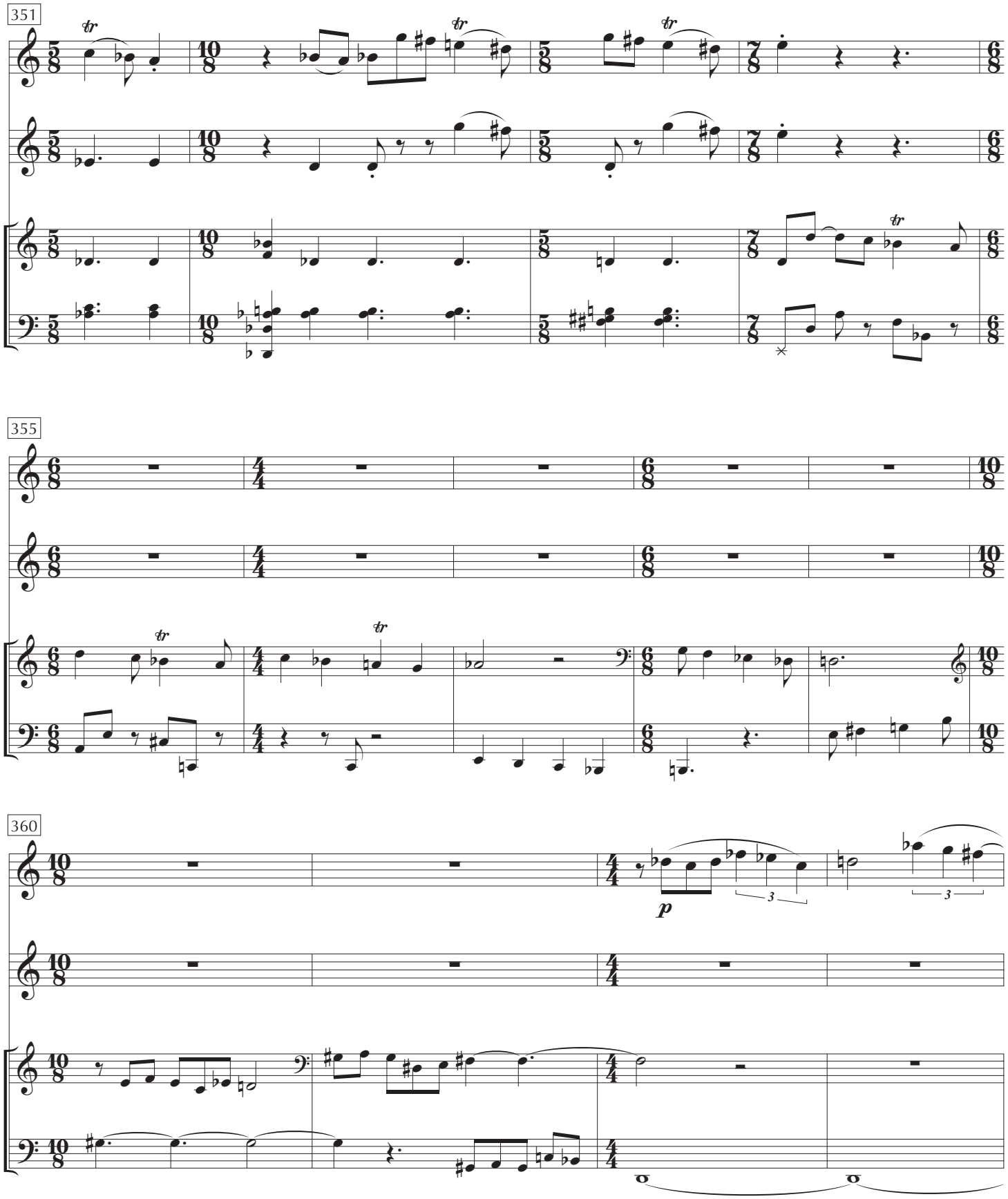

310
mf
f
mf
mp
mf
f
mf
313
mf
mf
(maraca)
(metallic)

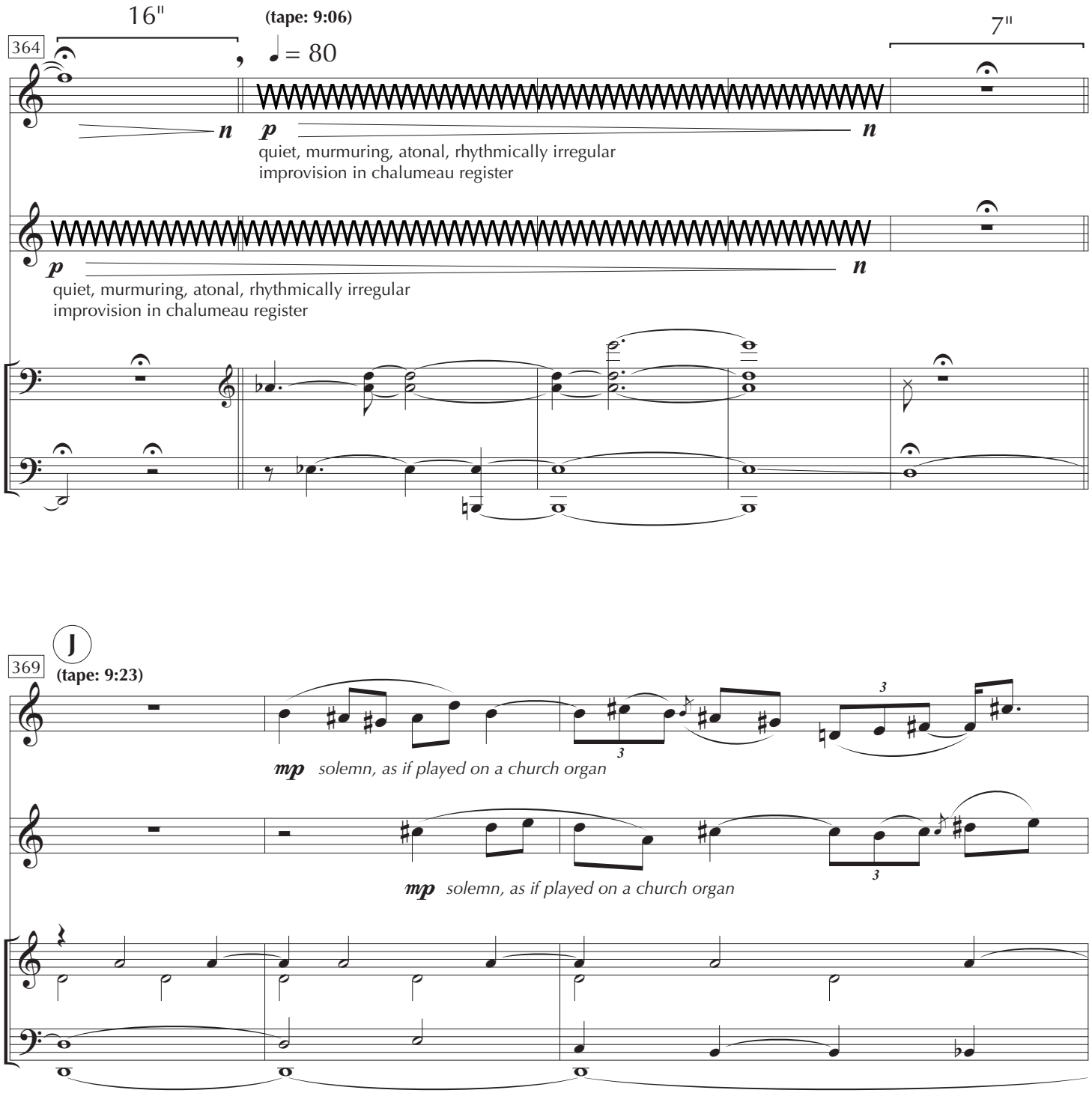

316
I
(tape: 7:56)
tr
3
f
5
f

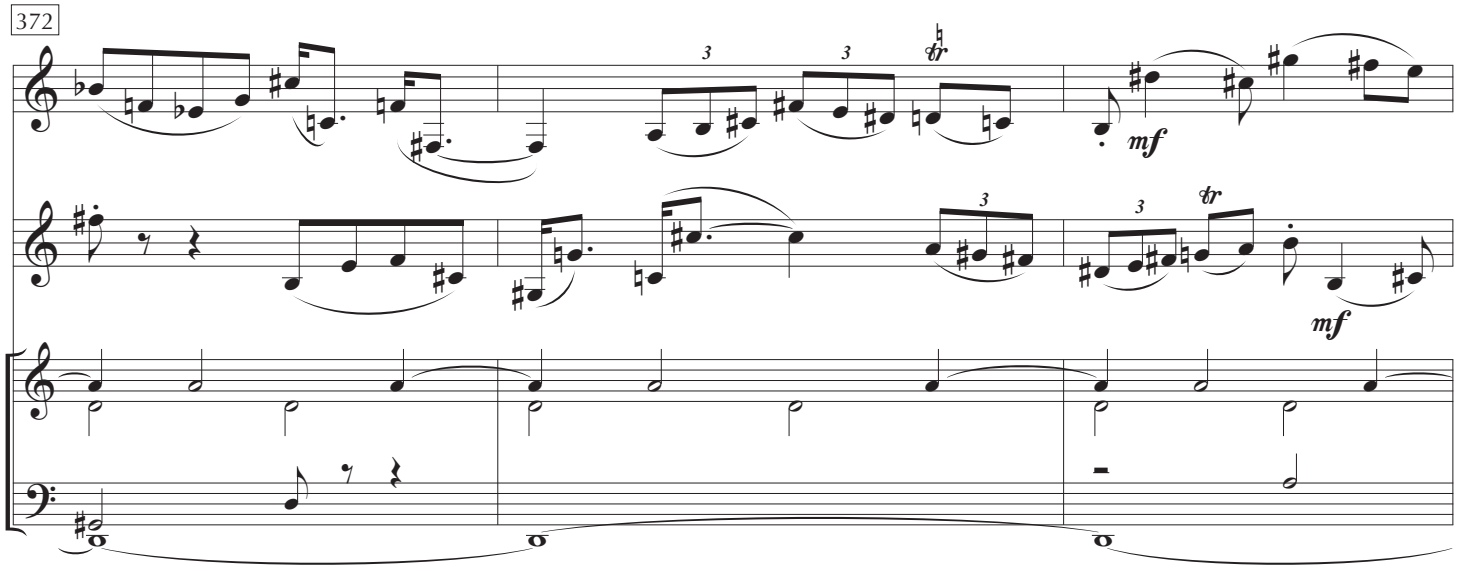
320
p

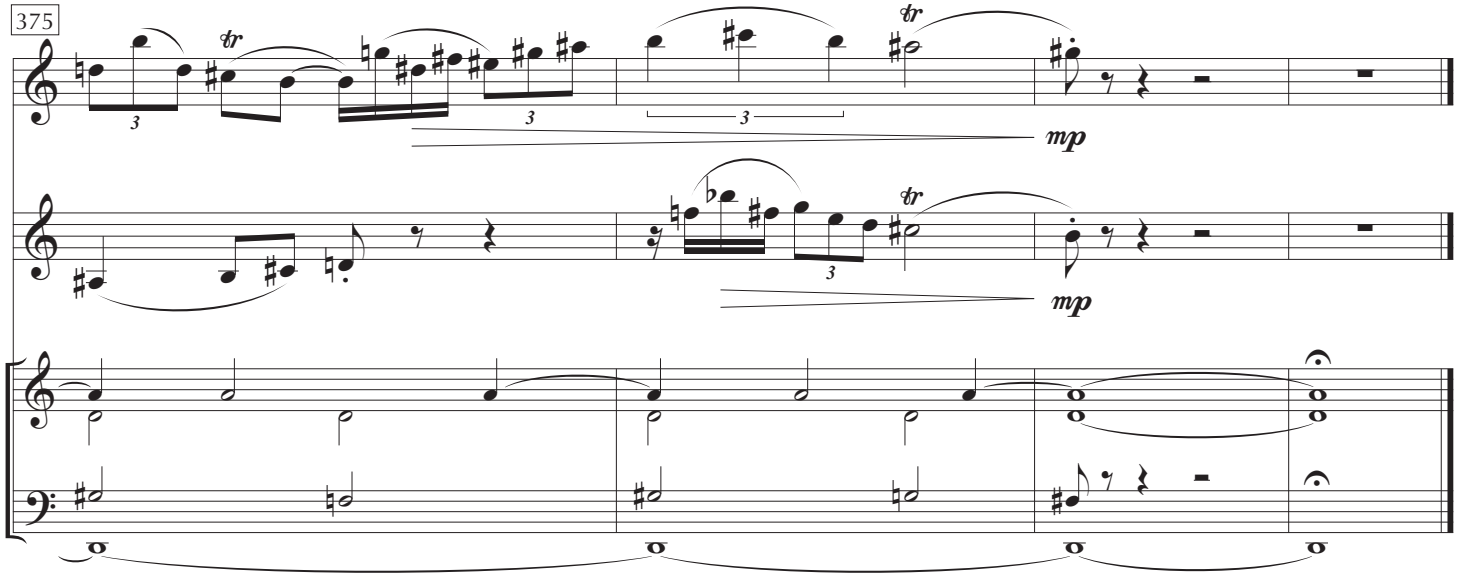

325
mp
mp
mf
mf
329
f
f
tr
tr
333
tr
tr
tr
tr
ff
ff


337
341
346
tr
tr
tr


351
355
360
p


16"
(tape: 9:06)
7"
364
= 80
n
p
quiet, murmuring, atonal, rhythmically irregular
improvision in chalumeau register
n
p
quiet, murmuring, atonal, rhythmically irregular
improvision in chalumeau register
n
J
369
(tape: 9:23)
3
mp solemn, as if played on a church organ
3
mp solemn, as if played on a church organ


372
mf
mf


375
mp
mp