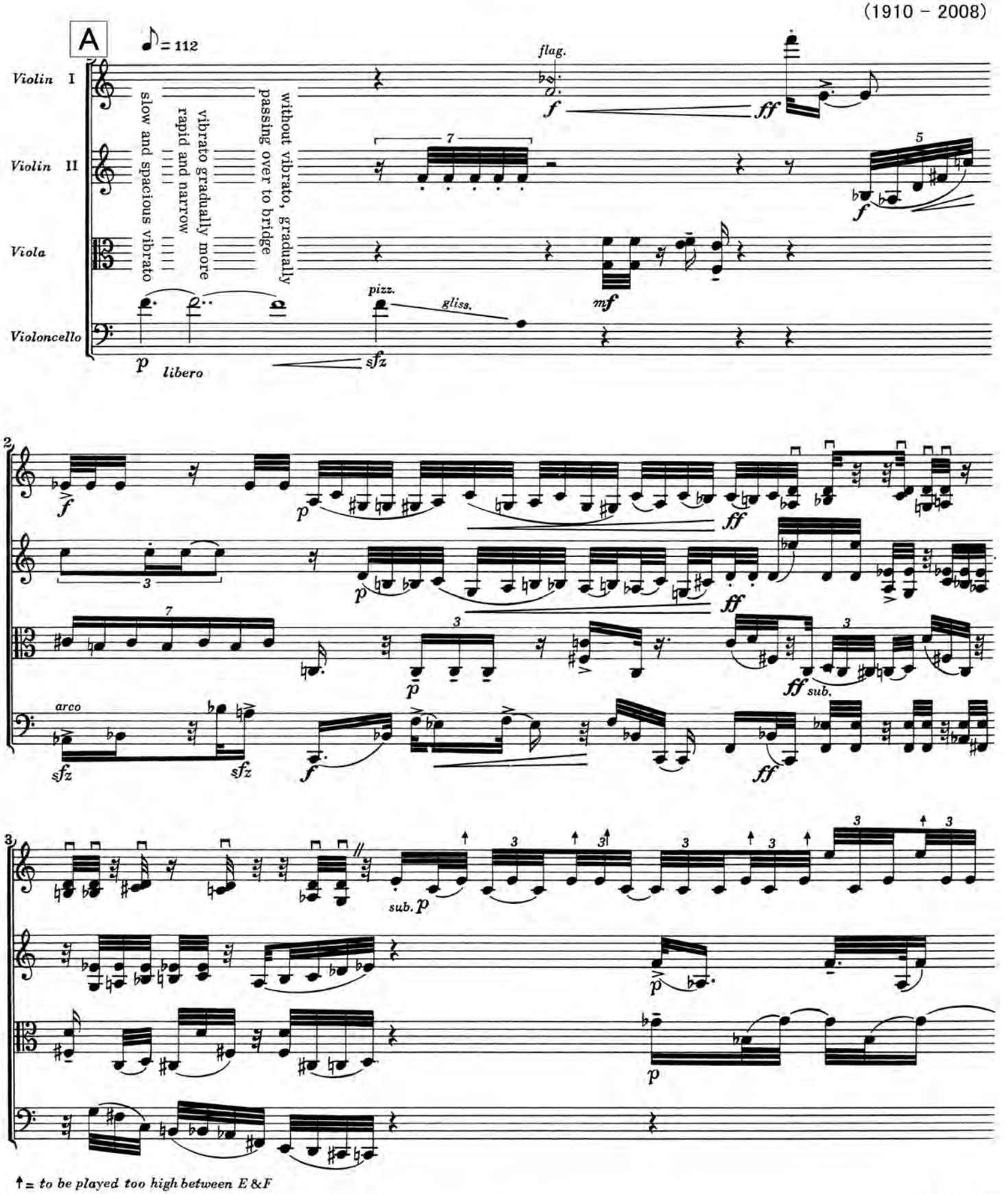
To Prof. Dr. J.J. Groen.

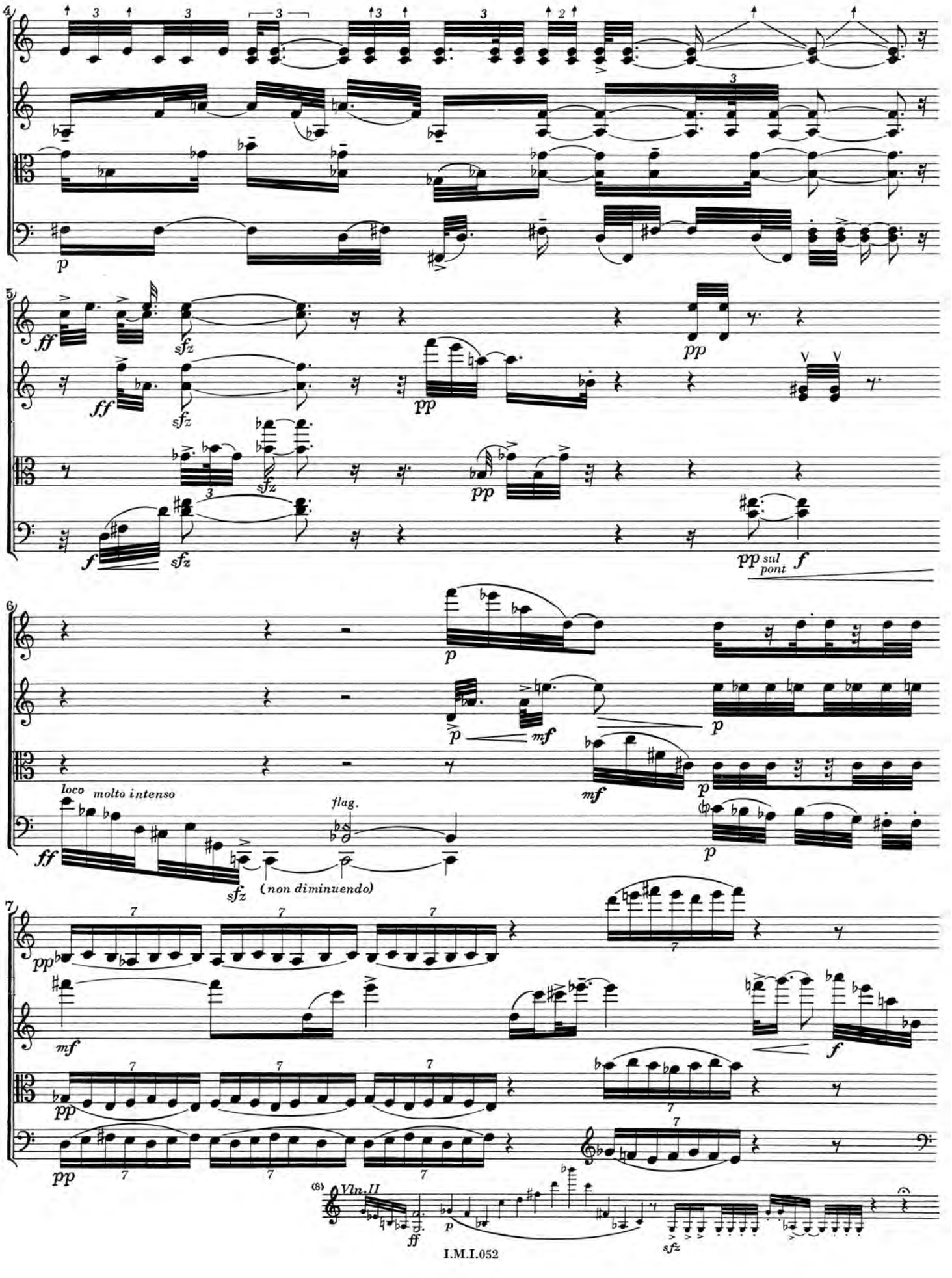
STRING QUARTET No. 2 רביעיה לכלי קשת מס' 2

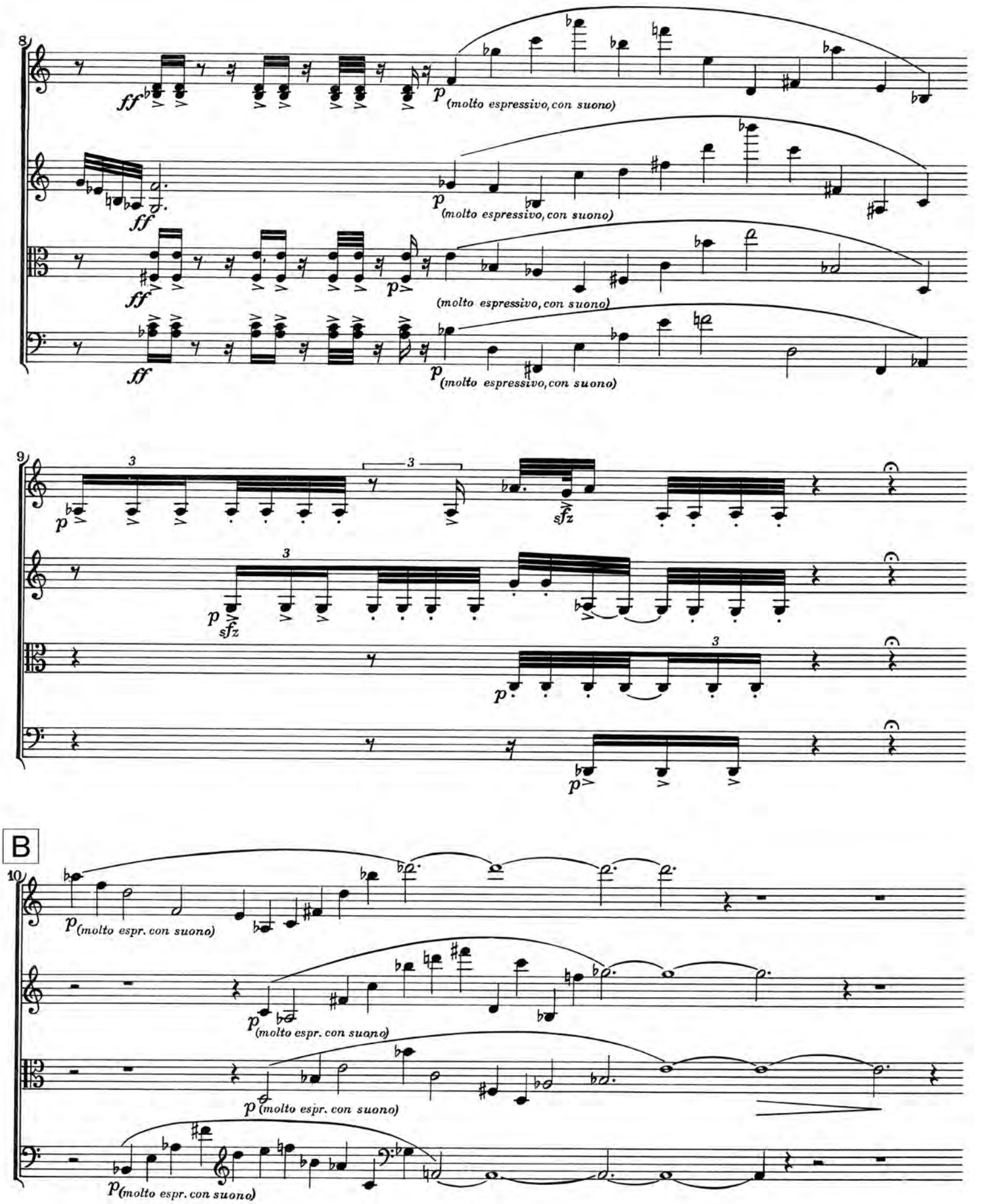
(1963)

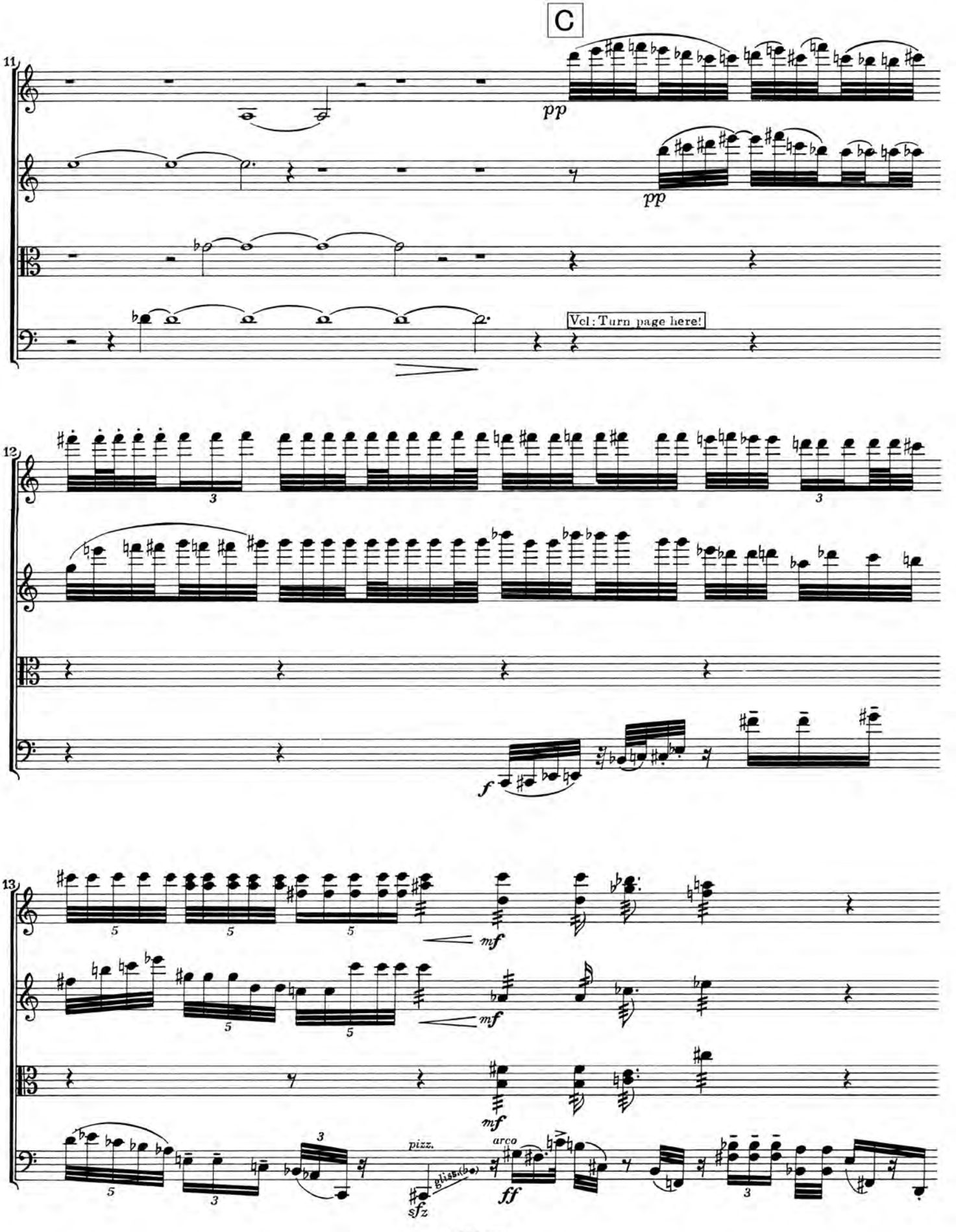
יוסף טל
JOSEF TAL
(1910 – 2008)

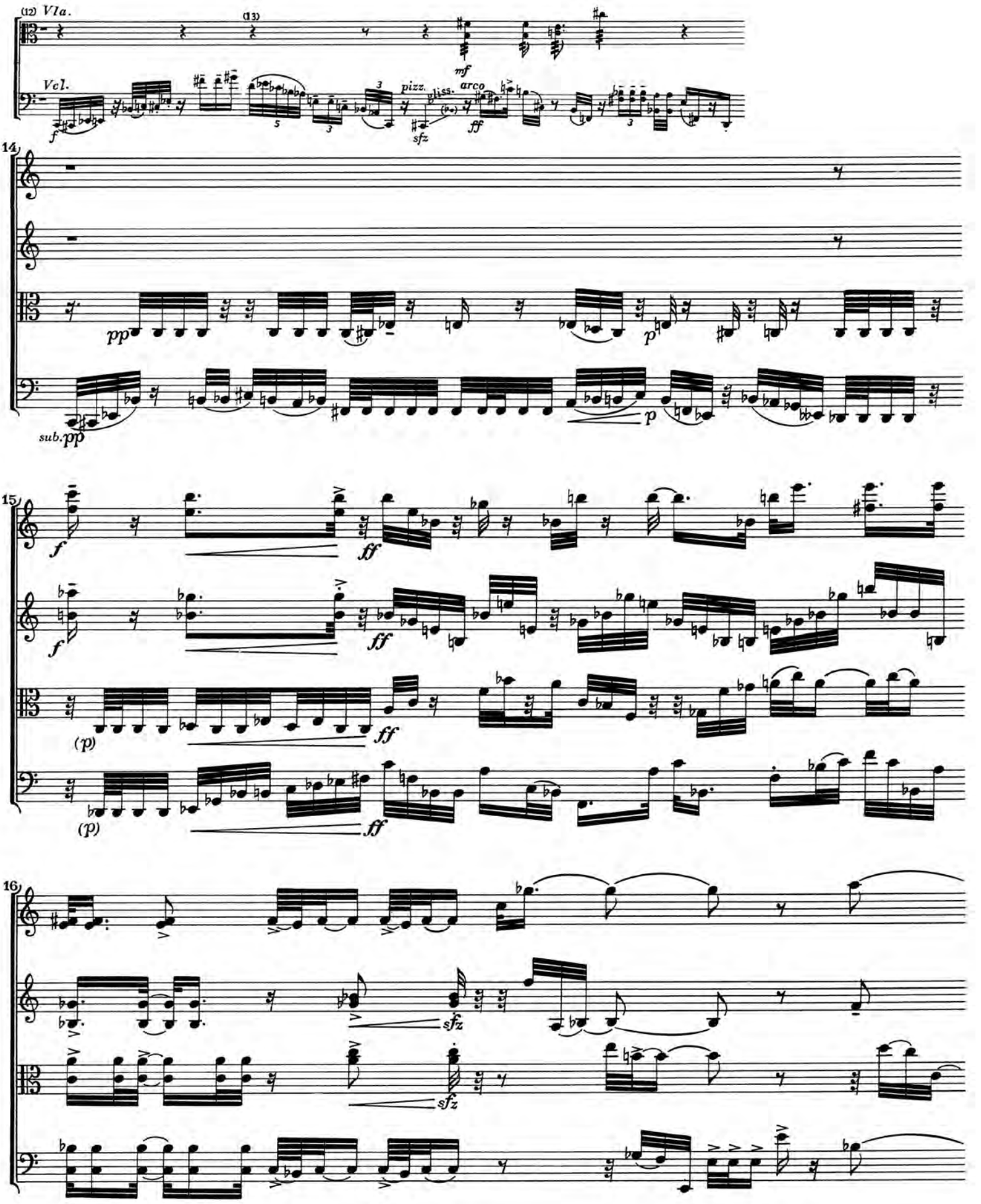


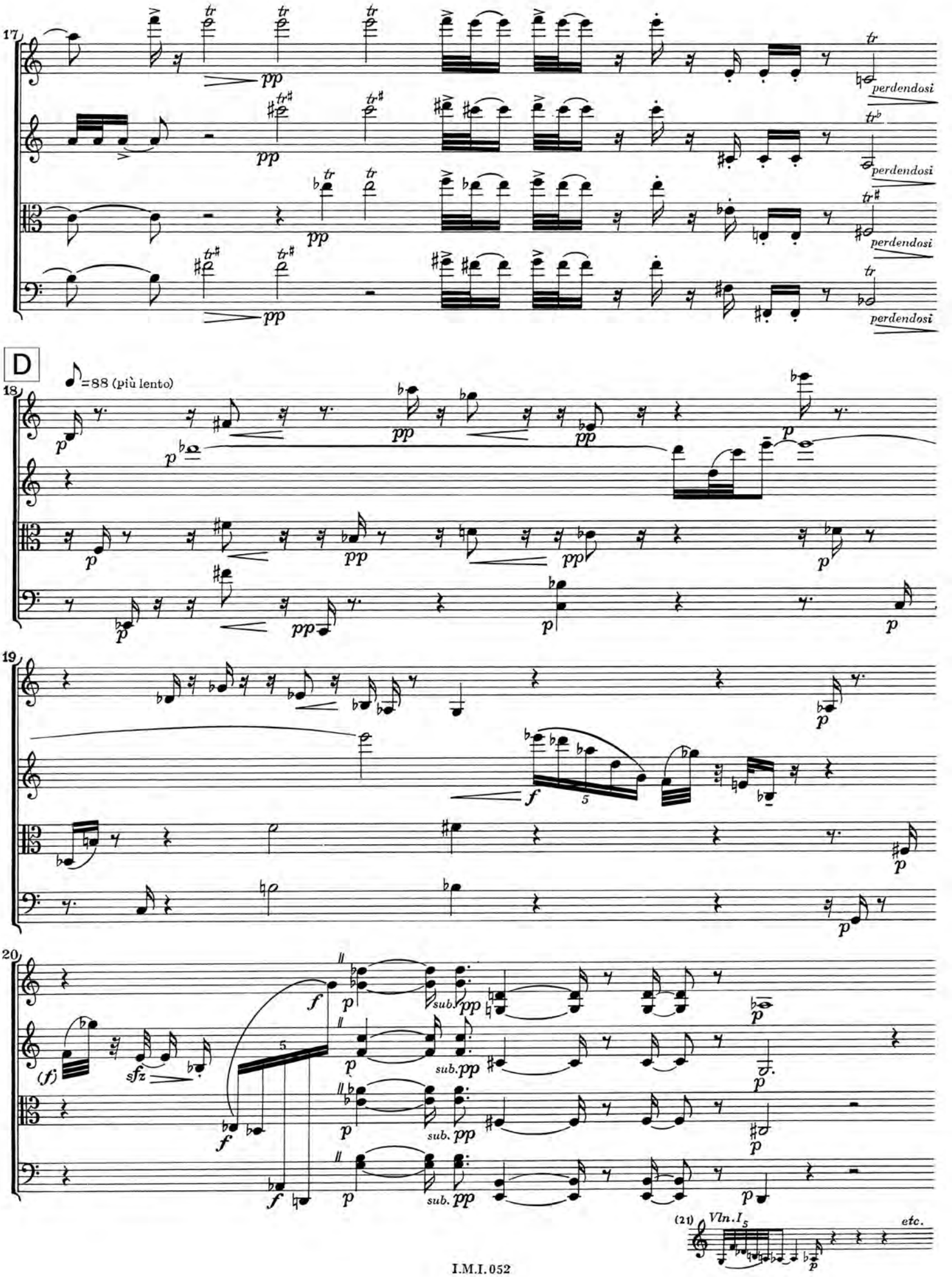
↑ = *to be played too high between E & F*

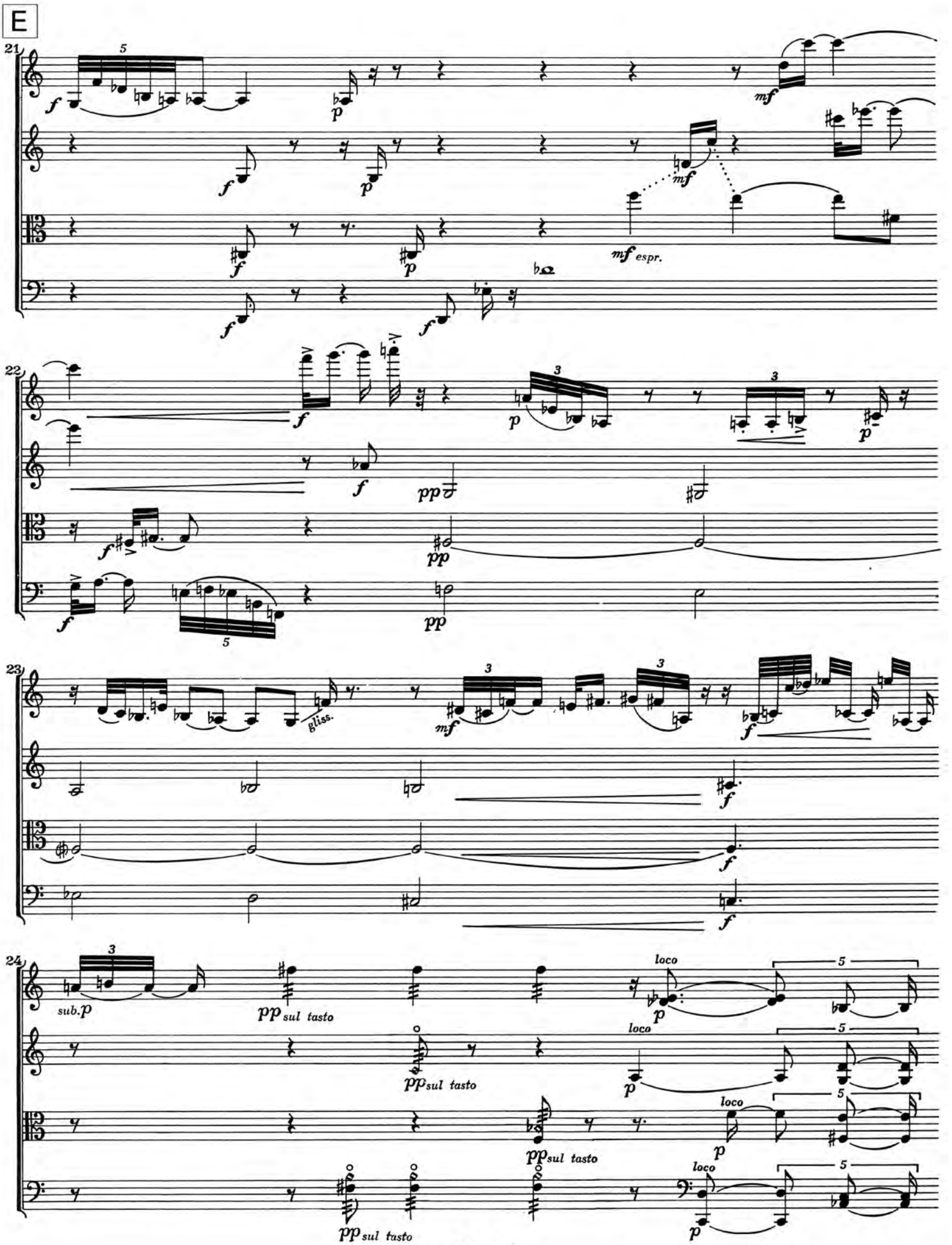

4
p
5
ff
sfz
pp
f
sul pont
6
loco molto intenso
flag.
(non diminuendo)
mf
7
(8) Vln. II

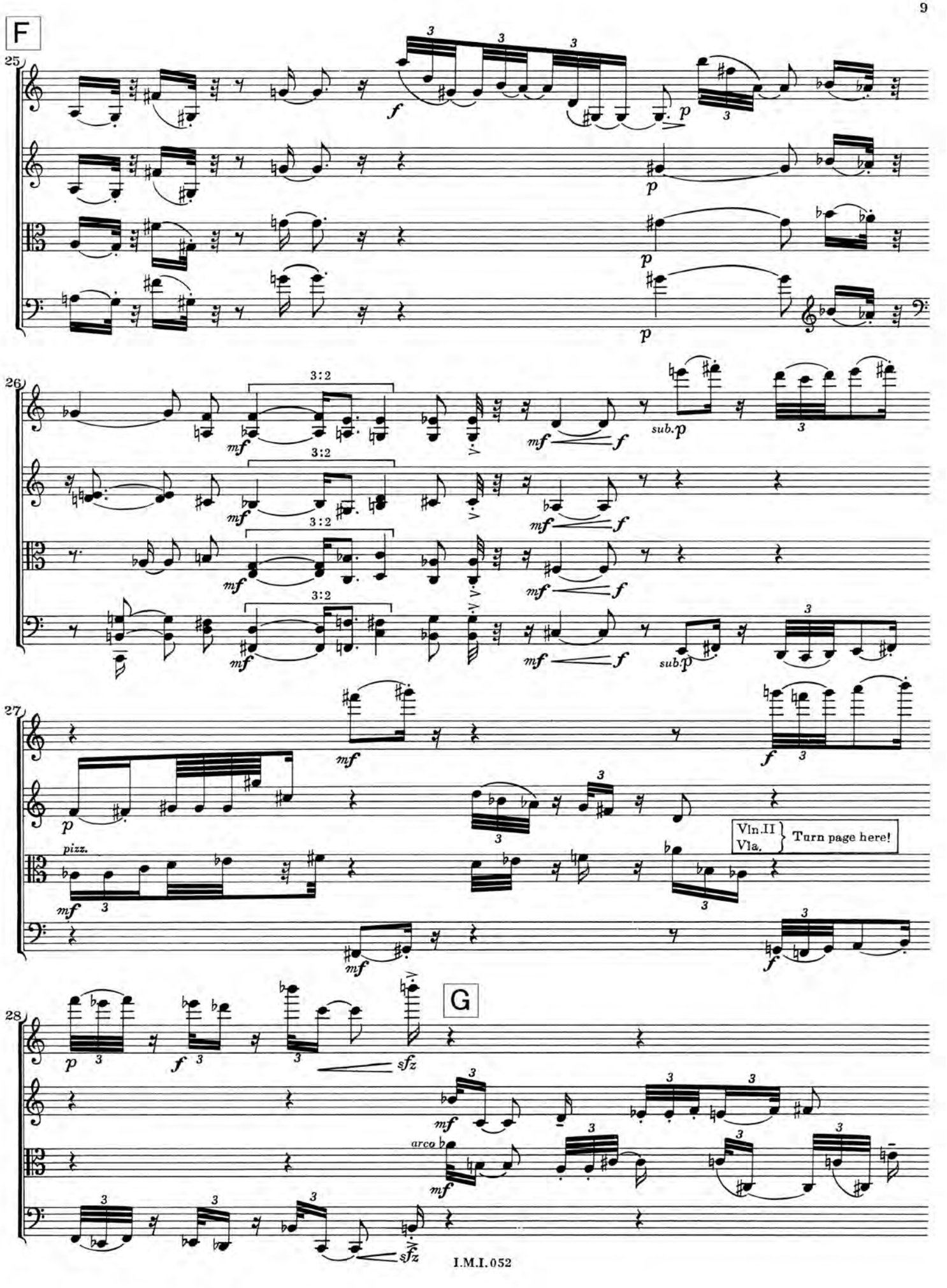

8
ff
p (molto espressivo, con suono)
ff
p (molto espressivo, con suono)
ff
p (molto espressivo, con suono)
ff
p (molto espressivo, con suono)
9
p
sfz
p
sfz
p
p
B
10
p (molto espr. con suono)
p (molto espr. con suono)
p (molto espr. con suono)
p (molto espr. con suono)

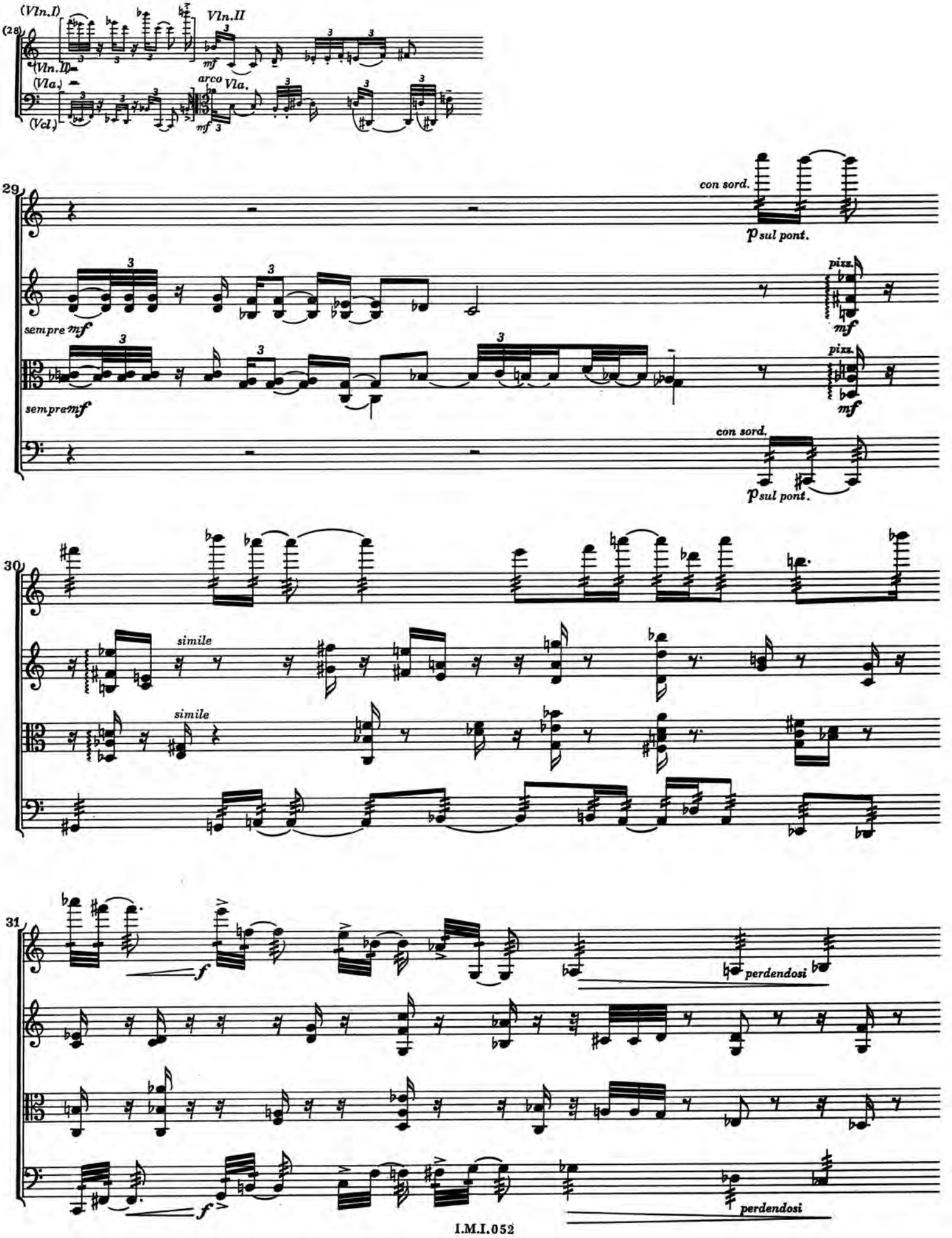

C
11
pp
pp
Vcl: Turn page here!
12
f
13
mf
mf
mf
pizz.
gliss.
sfz
arco
ff

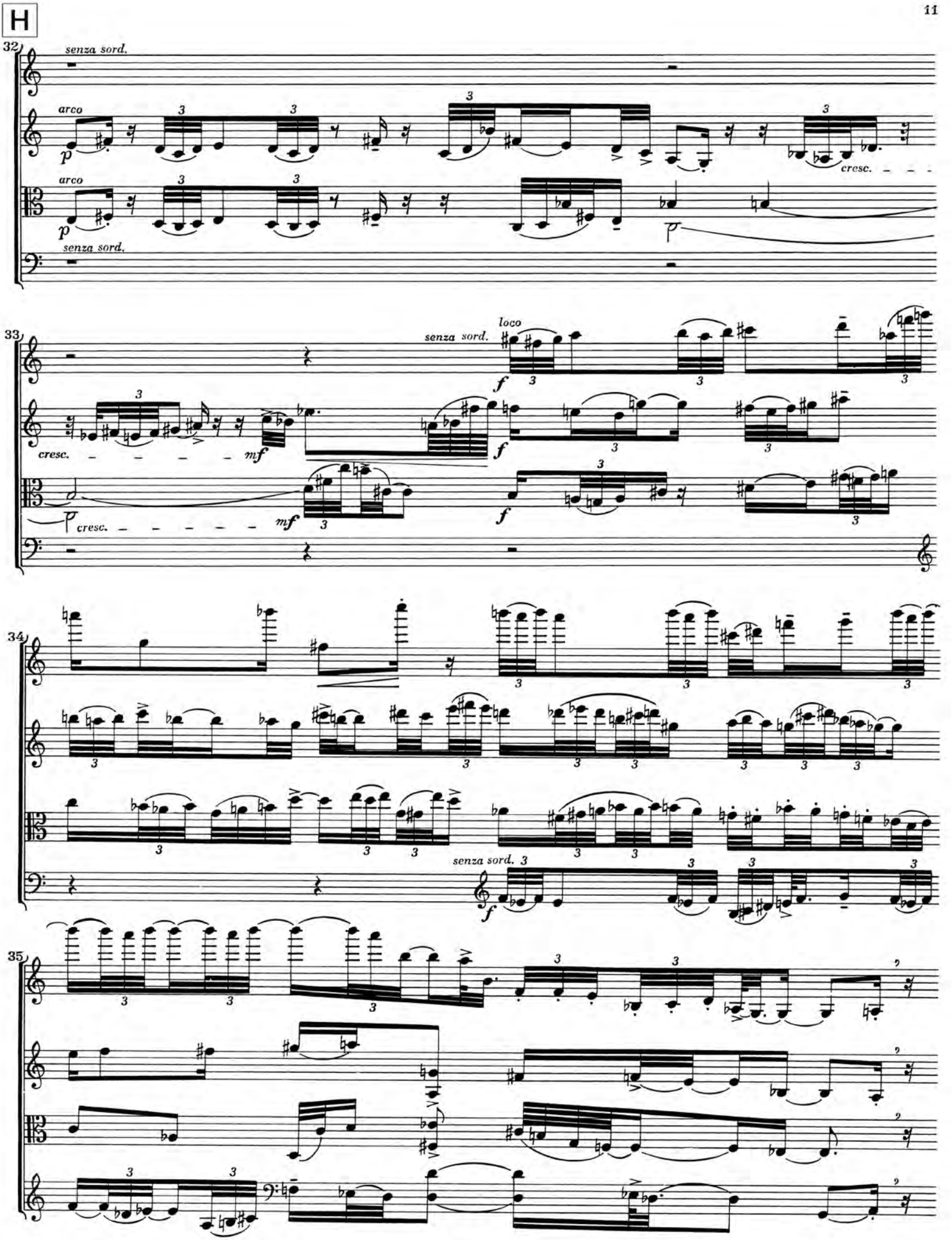

(12) Vla.
(13)
Vcl.
mf
arco
pizz.
liss.
sfz
ff
14
pp
p
sub.pp
15
f
ff
(p)
16
sfz

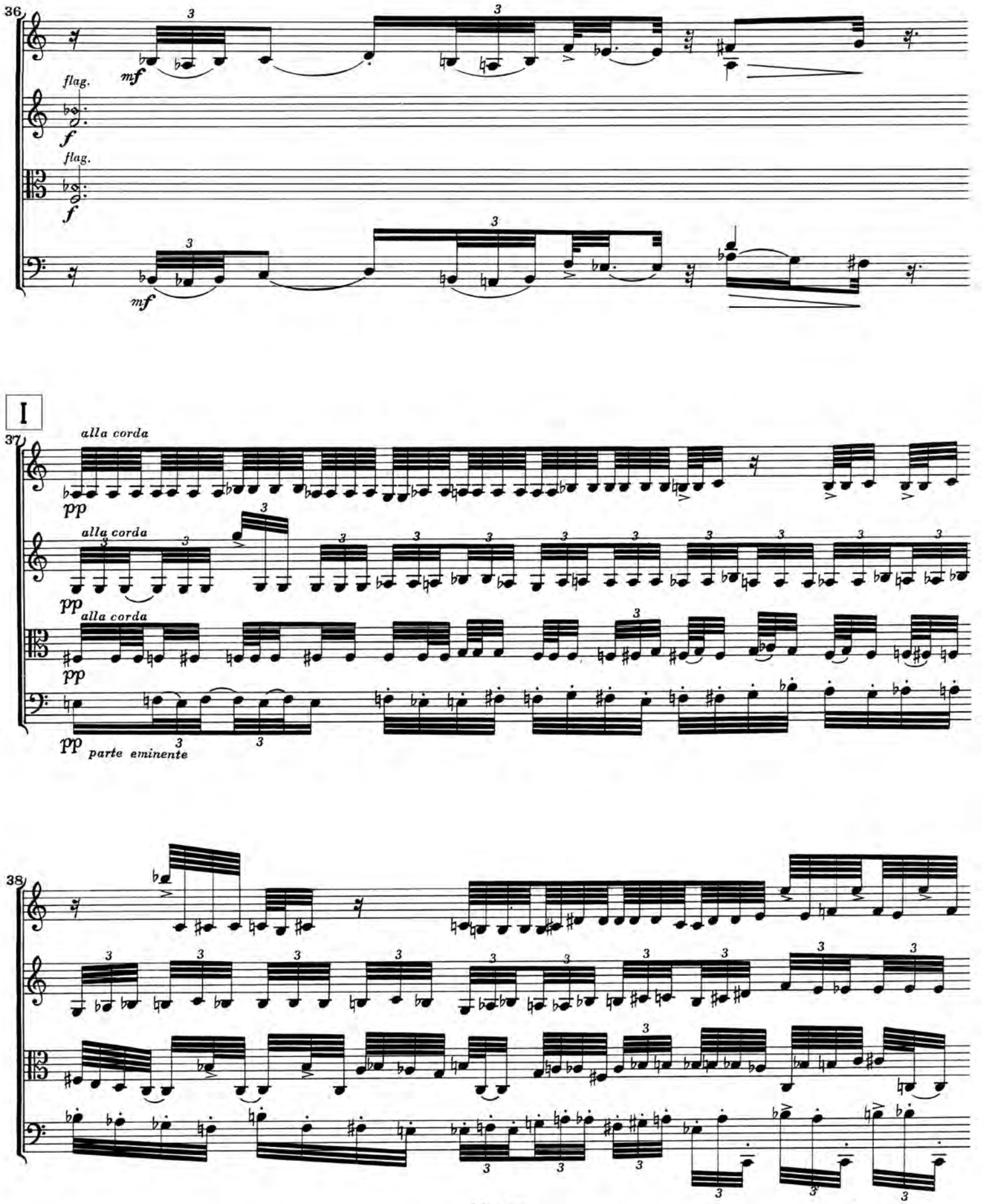

17
perdendosi
perdendosi
perdendosi
perdendosi
D
=88 (più lento)
18
19
20
sub. pp
(21) Vln. I
etc.

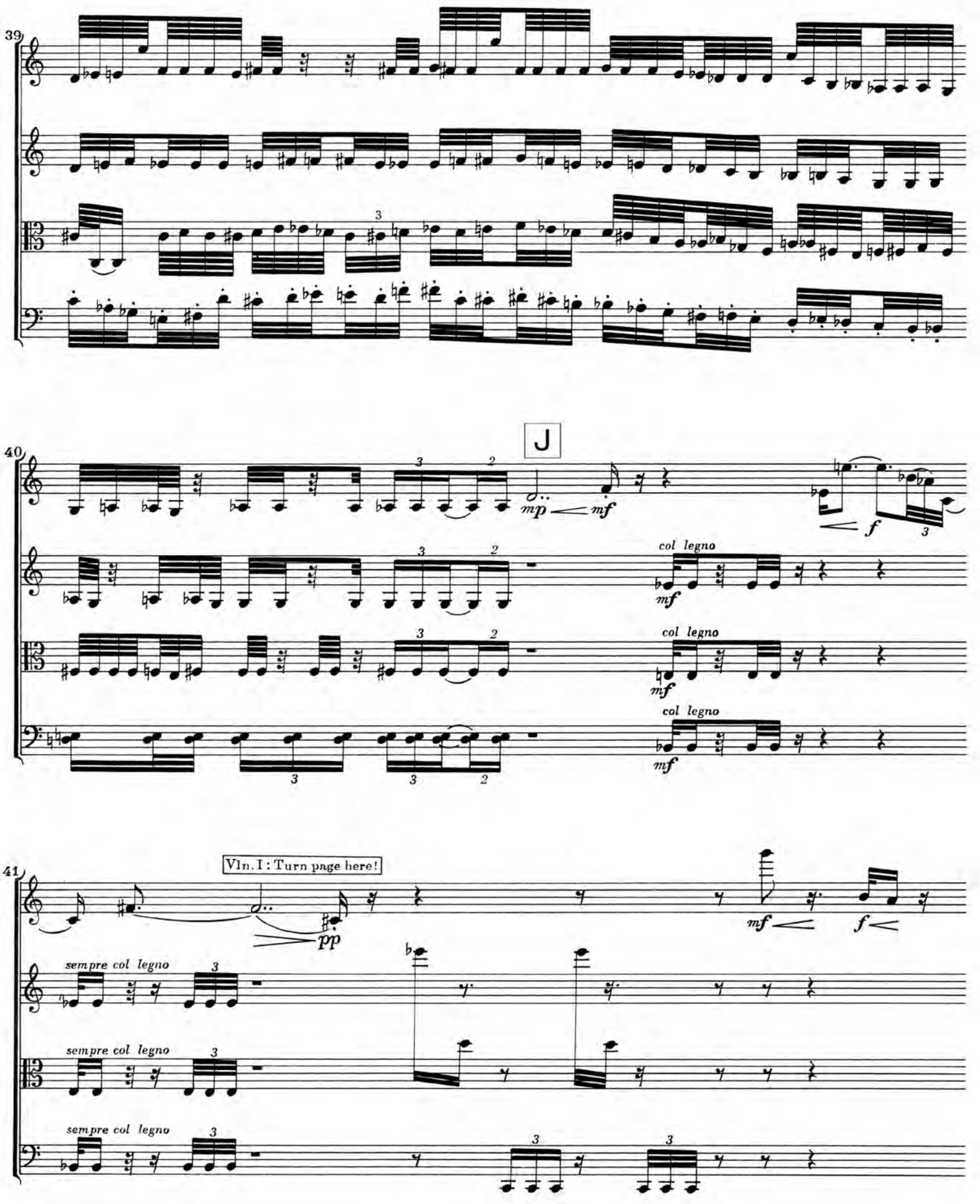

E
21
22
23
24
gliss.
sub.p
pp sul tasto
loco
mf espr.

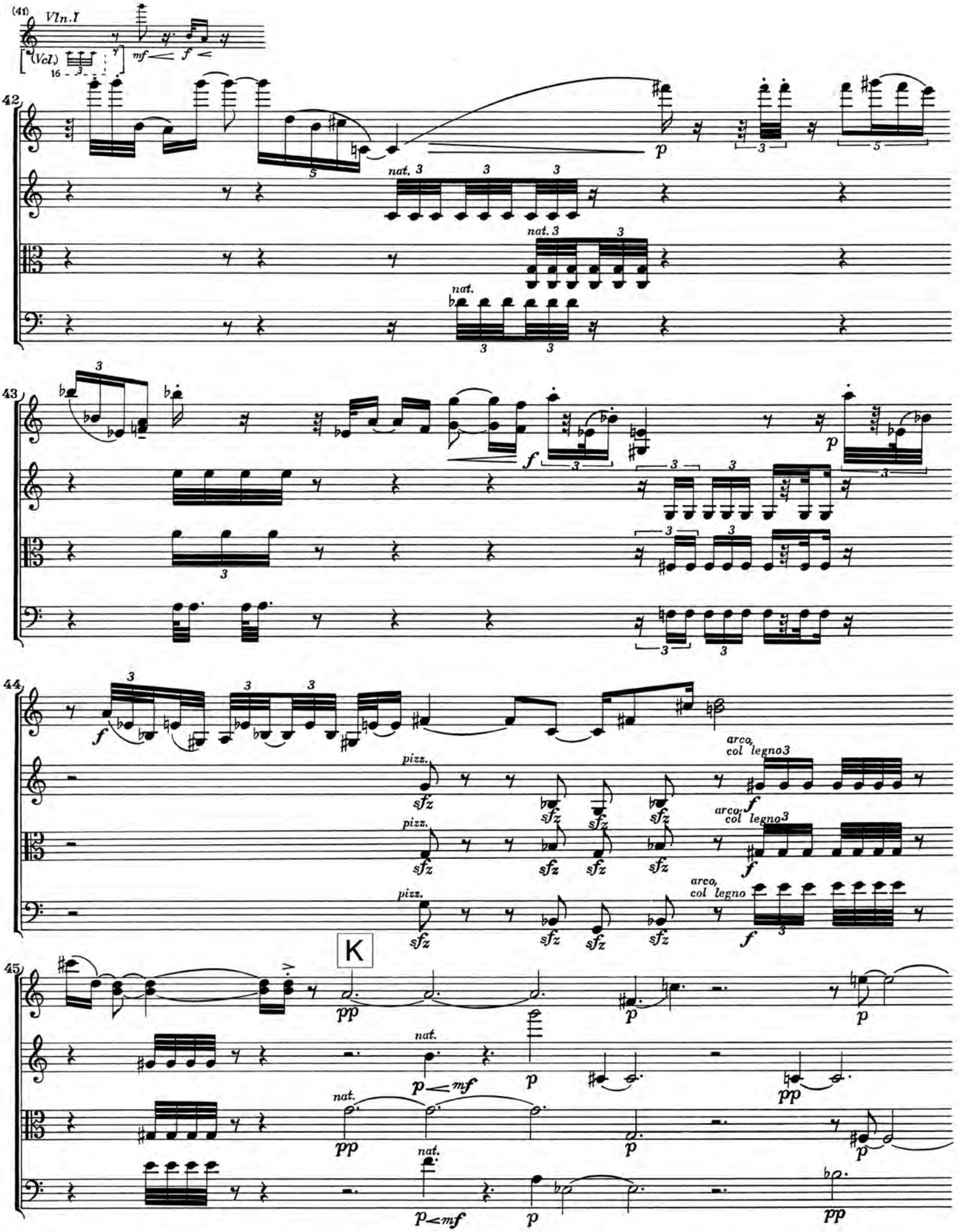

F
25
26
3:2
sub.p
27
pizz.
Vln.II
Vla.
Turn page here!
28
G
arco

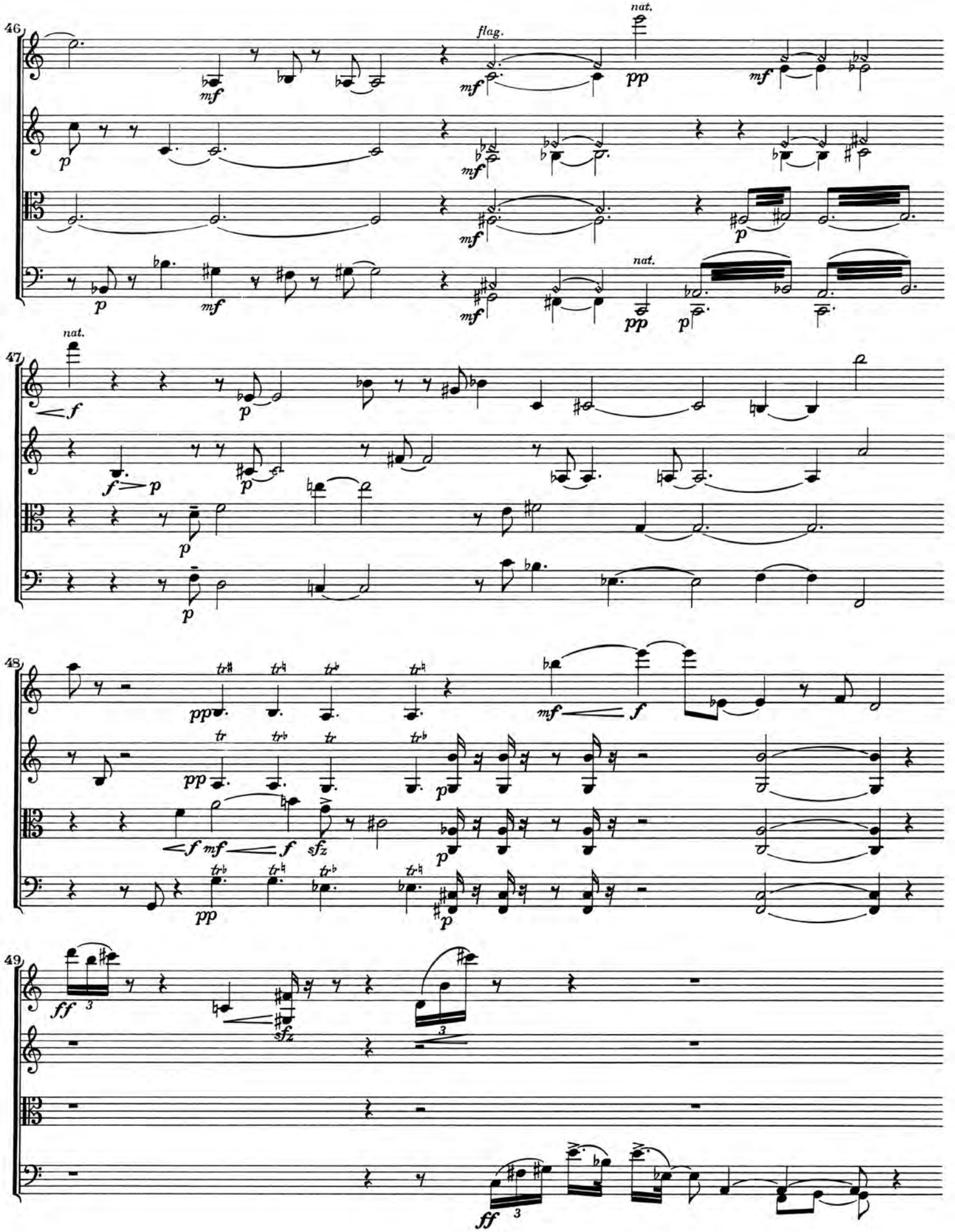

(28)
(Vln.I)
(Vln.II)
(Vla.)
(Vcl.)
Vln.II
mf
arco Vla.
mf
29
con sord.
p sul pont.
pizz.
mf
sempre mf
sempre mf
pizz.
mf
con sord.
p sul pont.
30
simile
simile
31
f
perdendosi
f
perdendosi

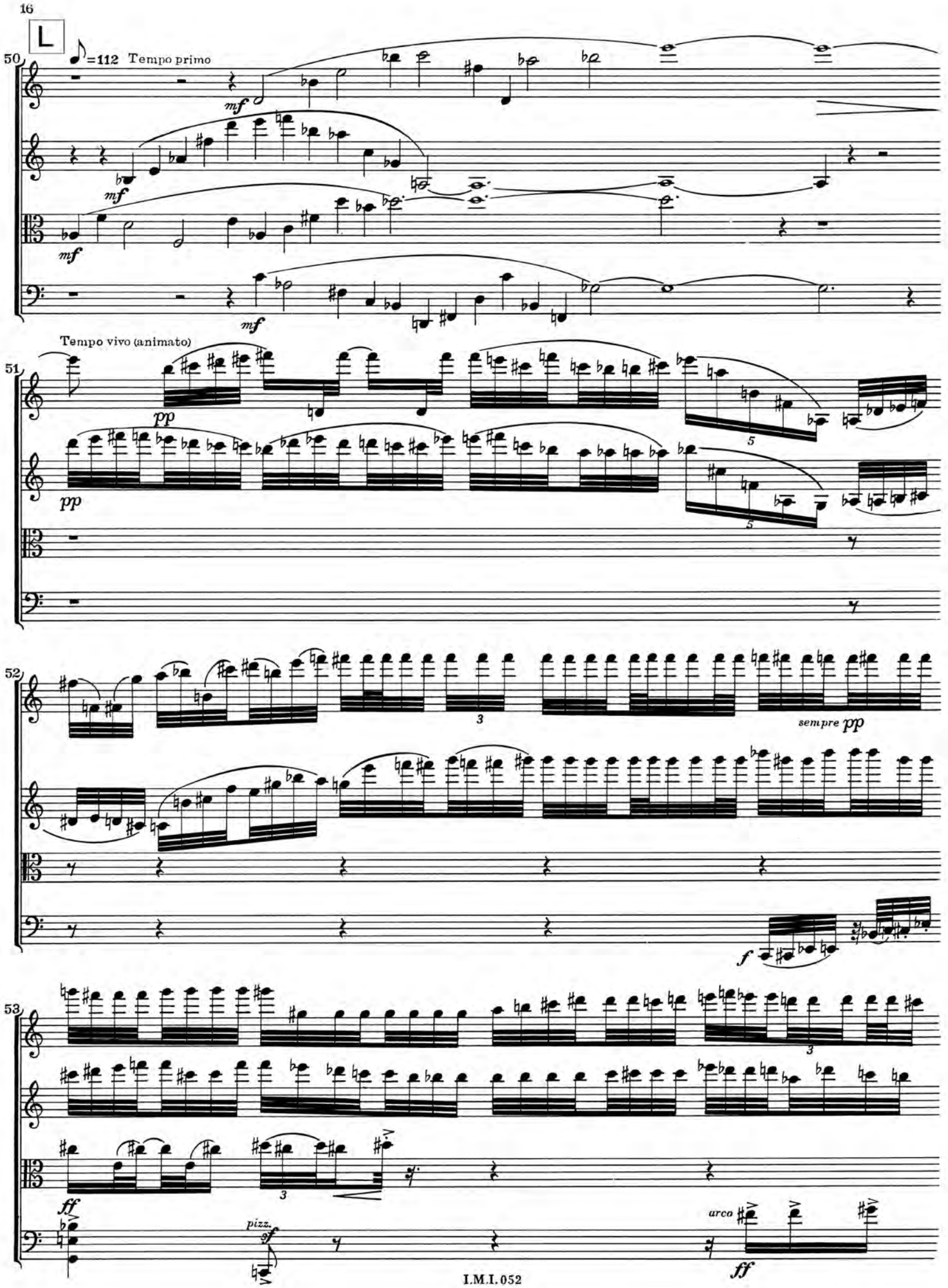

H
32
senza sord.
arco
p
arco
p
senza sord.
cresc.
33
loco
senza sord.
f
cresc.
mf
f
cresc.
mf
f
34
senza sord.
f
35

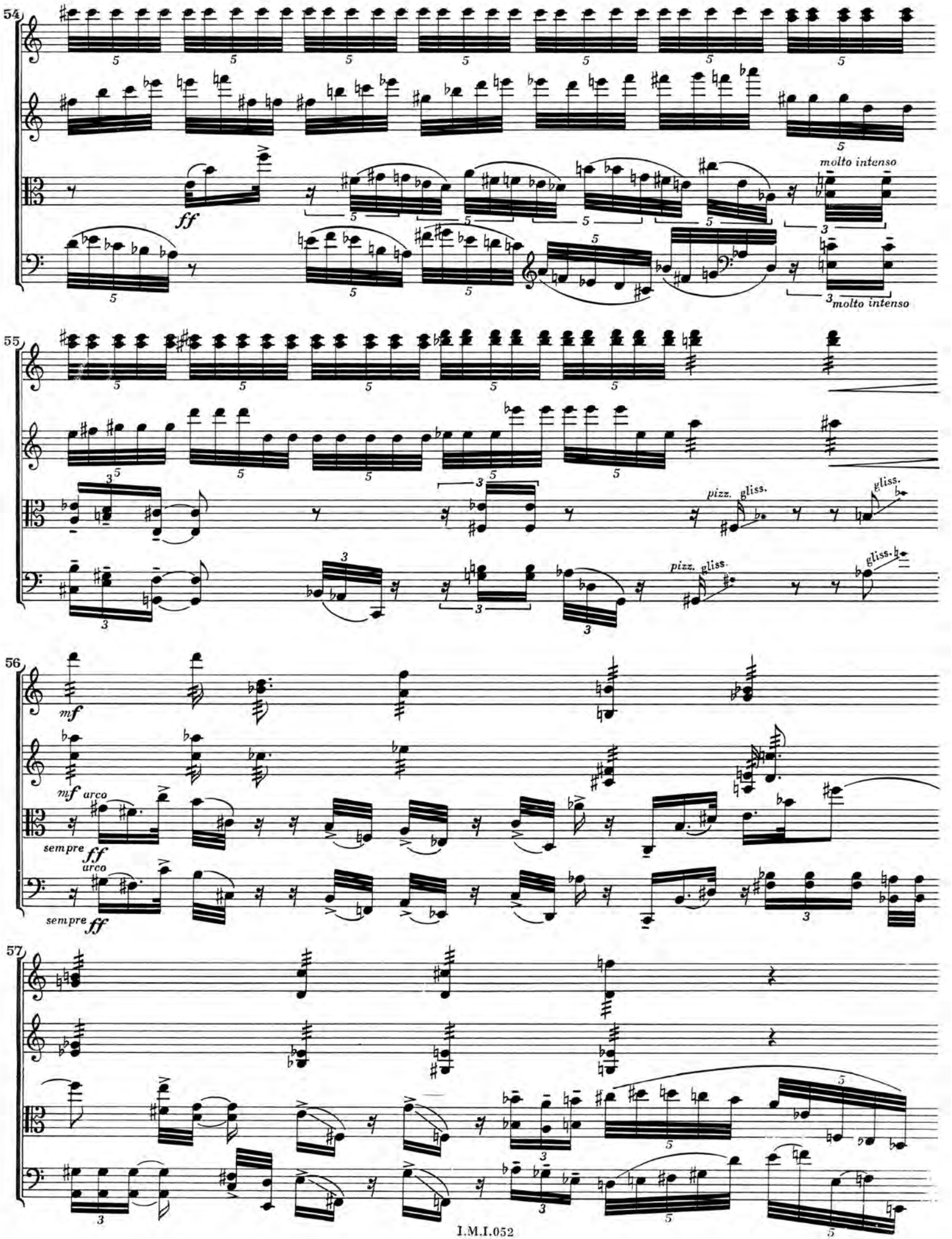

36
flag.
mf
f
flag.
f
mf
I
37
alla corda
pp
alla corda
pp
alla corda
pp
pp
parte eminente
38

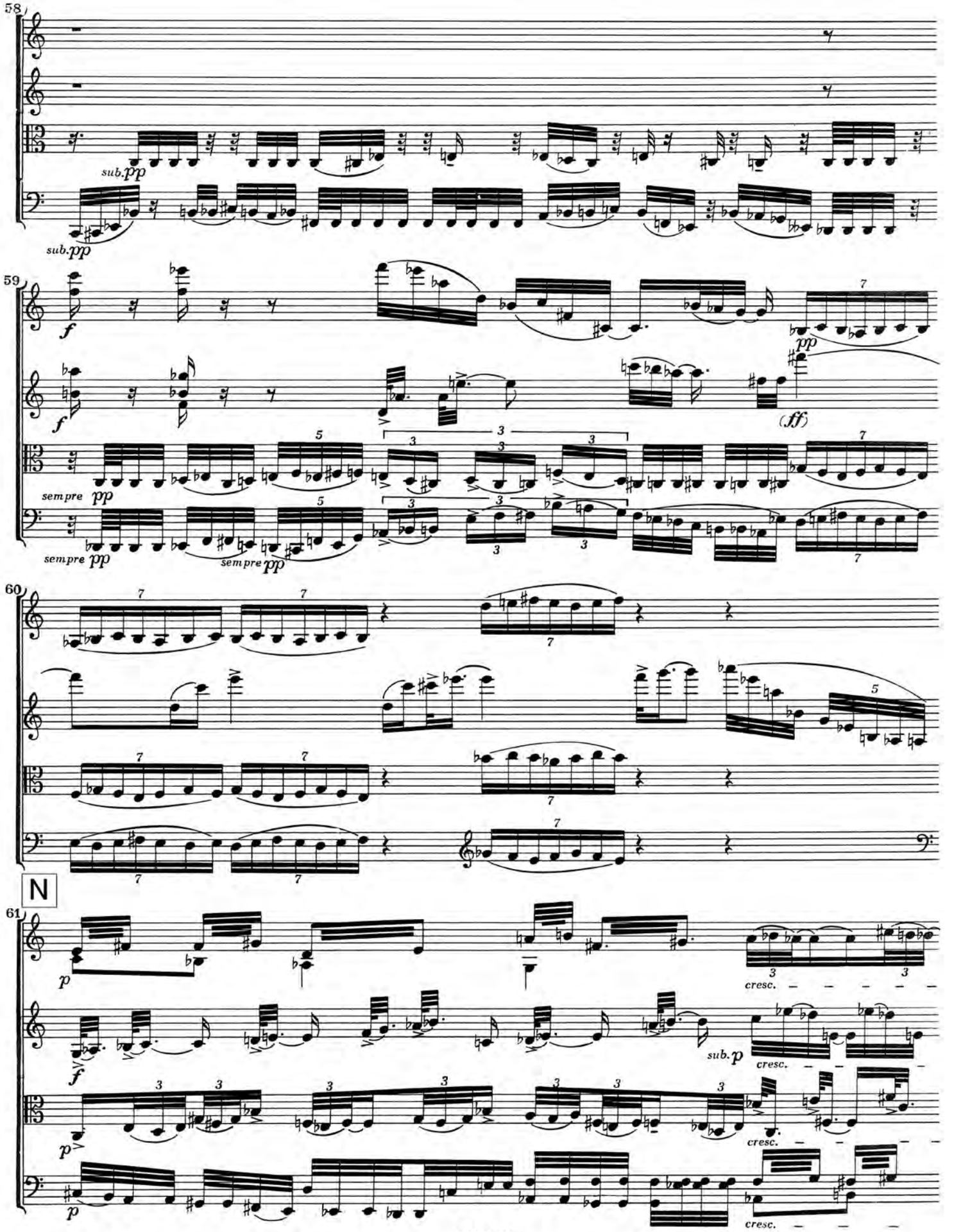

39
40
J
mp
mf
f
col legno
41
Vln. I : Turn page here!
pp
sempre col legno

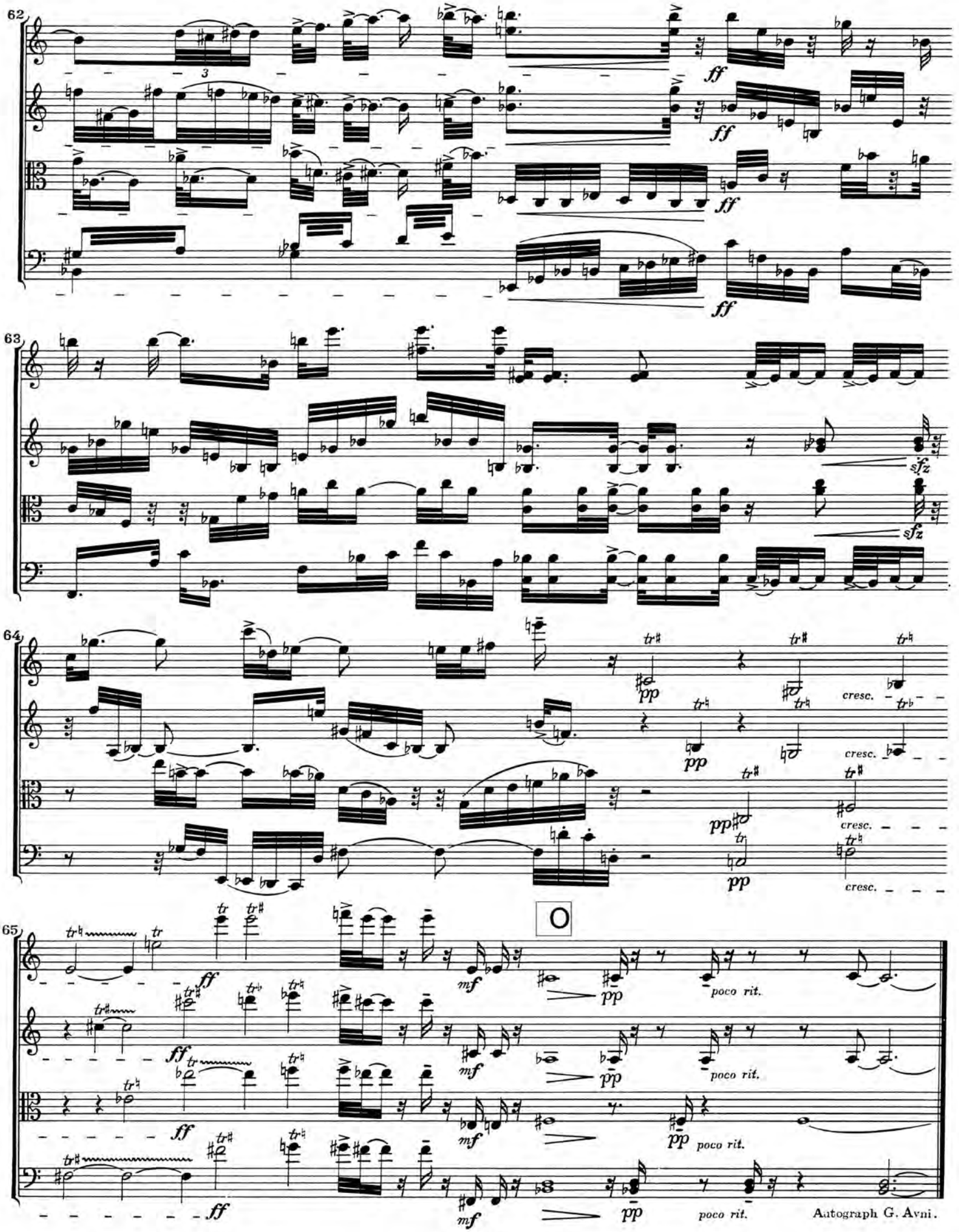

(41)
Vln.I
(Vcl.)
mf
f
42
nat.
p
43
f
p
44
f
pizz.
sfz
arco, col legno
f
45
K
pp
p
nat.
p
mf
pp


46
flag.
nat.
47
nat.
48
49


L
50
♩=112 Tempo primo
mf
mf
mf
mf
Tempo vivo (animato)
51
pp
pp
5
5
52
3
sempre pp
f
53
3
ff
pizz.
arco
ff


54
ff
molto intenso
molto intenso
55
pizz. gliss.
gliss.
pizz. gliss.
gliss.
56
mf
mf arco
sempre ff
arco
sempre ff
57


58
sub.pp
sub.pp
59
f
pp
f
(ff)
sempre pp
sempre pp
sempre pp
60
N
61
p
cresc.
f
sub.p
cresc.
p
cresc.
p
cresc.


62
63
64
65
cresc.
poco rit.
Autograph G. Avni.

String Quartet No.2 by Josef Tal

Don't be misled into thinking that the very first tone of the work is a "distortion" for which the recording technicians are responsible. You are listening to what might be termed an electronic event which tells of the dynamic development of the tone F from instability to stability.
This strongly dynamic and aggressive development, achieved in the first twenty seconds of the work, sounds like a "motto" the second part of which — the addition of the new tones — is developed into the entire composition. The dynamism expressed in this "motto" would appear to be the abstract theme which is the subject under discussion in the work. Obviously, in order to describe dynamism, the opposite, static condition needs be looked at as well. However, on listening to this quartet one cannot but realize that its music does not aspire to achieve the tranquility of a static frame of mind but to re-iterate "dynamism" as a central theme in many variations — as it were, a "song of praise" to dynamism. Josef Tal's sober glance investigates matters thoroughly and presents them in their natural conflict between ascending and dropping or descending tendencies. Tal does not conceal the tension attached to ascending, nor does he avoid a description of the helplessness and perhaps even exasperation connected with descending. Nevertheless, Tal clearly comes to the conclusion that dynamism is the positive basis of life and that descent, rest and relaxation, in denying this positive basis, intimate the awareness of mortality.
In this quartet of one movement Tal avoids the accepted time-signatures (4/4, 3/4 etc.) which by association, lead to a classical sentence-structure. Instead of a fixed meter he chooses a fixed pulse — of quavers — which enables the music to move forward freely and in the length of time required in order to expend the energy concentrated in every sentence. The entire movement in its general lines, follows upon the principle of sonata-form with its enunciation, development and recapitulation and thus expresses Tal's point of view as regards the need for continuity between the present and the past. What is characteristic of his compositional method is that he succeeds — by means of freely-decorated variations — in expressing the traditional privilege of the composer to freedom within the limits of the law, in spite of the fact that the 12-tone row develops through pre-determined permutations.
In the Enunciation there are two groupings divided by a silence of approximately five seconds which can be described as the first and second upflows. As mentioned, the "first upflow" opens with a composition: on F and with the accretion of the tone row. Immediately after this, three consecutive "waves" swell up. A most conspicuous event marks the end of the "first upflow". The "whisper" — actually a static movement of tones which pivot upon themselves — now appears in its most important guise: that of an electronic tape moving along slowly, as it were. This slow progression of "note against note" emphasizes the lack of dynamic purpose which marks this motif. A short, fast trill introduces the silence. What characterizes the second upflow and affords it a higher degree of importance that the first upflow is the fact that, while in the first upflow the dynamic ascents ended with the "failure" of the whispers and the foam, here in the second upflow, the "whispers" are the first to appear and out of them the dynamic "waves" ascend with renewed vigor.
The Development Section commences without a break. It has three large groupings. Block A starts with a melodic theme (Wave 1) which develops into a quasi-recitative and ends in chords. Block B presents a new-sounding melody clearly having its source in the whisper which in the past accompanied the melodic theme. Block C includes a new recitative in the center of which are slow chords broadening out into a more or less independent block to mark the "lowest" area of the work — in as far as the dynamics are concerned. The Recapitulation establishes even more firmly that dynamism is the subject under discussion in this work.

After having heard Josef Tal's second quartet the listener is not left with somber thoughts about the immutability of life — but rather, with a positive sensibility of conflict itself being the essence of life and an increased ability to stand up to life's demands: continual movement into the future.

Nathan Mishori