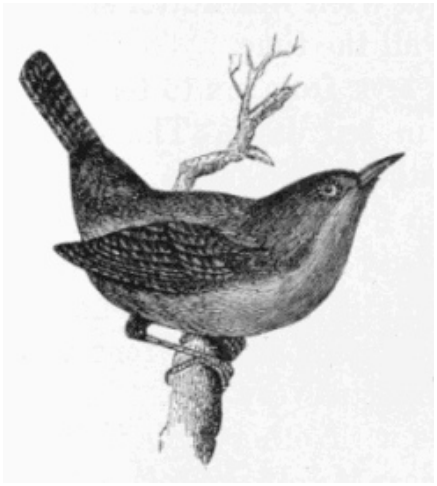
Seven Duos
for Birds or Strings

for Annette-Barbara Vogel



for violin and viola

Written with support from the Erik Stokes Fund, the Culture and Animals Foundation, and the Canada Council for the Arts

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Seven Duos for Birds or Strings

1. *Cyphorhinus arada*
2. *Branta canadensis*
3. *Gymnorhina tibicen*
4. *Myadestes occidentalis*
5. *Cossypha heuglini*
6. *Alectoris rufa*
7. *Thryothorus euophrys*

Duration: Approx. 15’00”
For violin and viola

For Annette-Barbara Vogel, written with support from the Erik Stokes Fund, the Culture and Animals Foundation, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

Please notify the composer of any performances, emilydoolittle@gmail.com.

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In temperate regions of European and North American, most bird songs are sung by males, typically in the context of attracting a mate or defending territory. The females of these species are often very selective about which songs (and thus which birds) they find attractive, and play a large role in determining the direction in which the songs develop. In tropical regions, however, duet songs are common, and the females of many species sing as often as the males. In some species, duets occur between mated pairs: a tightly coordinated duet indicates a well-bonded pair. Sometimes when one bird of these birds dies, its mate will take over singing both parts of the duet. In other species, pairs sing a more loosely coordinated-call-and response, perhaps keeping track of each other in a dense forest through the alternation of songs. In a few species, birds gather in groups of more than two, with all males singing one part and all females singing the other.

In *Seven Duos*, I've explored many different ways two singing birds can relate to each other. Some of the birds I've chosen to represent here are true duetters – each bird has its own part, and the two interlock in a specific way. In other cases, I've simply chosen a species where two or more birds may sing together, but not in a coordinated way. As well, each duo explores a different way that music can relate to birdsong. In some I've transcribed the song as accurately as possible (though I'm keenly aware of the difficulties of notating exact rhythms, pitches, and timbres – some bird-like particularities are always lost, while human musical and instrument-specific particularities are always added.) In other I've used a transcription as a starting point, from which I have allowed the music to develop in its own direction, or have tried to recreate the general atmosphere of hearing the song, rather than trying to transcribe it accurately.

1. *Cyphorhinus arada* (musician wren, or uirapuru) is a small brown wren native to the Amazon. The bird is an important character in Amazonian mythology, and its song has inspired much music in South America and elsewhere. It is unknown whether musician wrens sing interlocking duets, but recordings suggest that they do antiphonally alternate complete songs. The violin part is a direct transcription of the song of a musician wren (recorded by Patrick Ingremeau and available on the Xeno-Canto wbsite) – one which, amazingly, fits almost perfectly into a Lydian scale. The viola part is a song I've composed to complement it, adhering as closely as I can to Musician Wren style. When the piece opens, one bird is depicted as being the background, but it gradually approaches until the two parts can be heard equally, combining to make a musical composite.

2. *Branta Canadensis* (Canada goose) came close to extiction in the first half of the 20th century, but revised game management plans and a program of introducing captive-rasied Canada Geese into the wild has led to such a substantial regrowth in population that they are now considered an invasive pest in some areas. (Border Collies are sometimes employed to encourage large groups of geese to leave lawns and public parks!) Though Canada Geese aren't duetters, they are usually found in large groups, honking together. The thing I love about goose sounds is that an individual goose sounds ridiculous, but in groups they sound hauntingly beautiful.

3. *Gymnorhina tibicen* (Australian magpie) is a medium-sized, crow-like bird native to Australia and Southern New Guinea. Their song is rich in overtones and sounds a bit like

a modem connecting up, but when it is slowed we can hear that it is full of wild arpeggiations and modulations. Though these birds do duet, their song is so complex that I ended up needing both instruments simply to capture one bird's song. I transcribed a slow version, and then expanded it through repetition of motives, and the occasional addition of harmonic notes to try to capture the bright, rough timbre of the Australian Magpie's sound.

4. *Myadestes occidentalis* (brown-backed solitaire) is a bird in the thrush family, native to montane and lowland evergreen forest in Mexico, Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Like the song of the Australian magpie, this song has to be slowed considerably for human listeners to hear that it is made of harmonic-sounding arpeggios. However the Australian magpie leaps from one arepggiated chord to another, while the brown-backed solitaire gradually glissandos up and down.

5. *Cossypha heuglini* (white-browed robin chat) is a member of the Old World flycatcher family, found in sub-Saharan Africa, and known for its beautiful song. In this species, the male and female sing distinctly different parts. The male sings a repeated warbling motive, which increases in volume as the song progresses. When it is sufficiently loud, the female adds a bright, trilled descant.

6. *Alectoris rufa* (red-legged partridge). This could really be any of a number of small or medium-sized ground birds, clucking as they peck at the ground. Though these birds do not duet, interesting cross-rhythms and textures may arise when two of these birds are together.

7. *Pheugopedius euophrys* (Plain-Tail Wren) These small wrens, native to the Andes, gather in groups of two to seven to sing tightly interlocking duets. All the males sing one part and all the females the other. The parts are so well-coordinated that they sound like a single song.

Although the *Seven Duos* are conceived as a whole, they could also be performed in subsets, and the order can be arranged as desired.

The composer would like to thank the Erik Stokes Fund, the Culture and Animals Foundation, and the Canada Council for the Arts for commissioning this work, and for providing the funding which enabled me to research the songs of duetting birds at the Max Planck Institute for Ornithology in Seewiesen, Germany. Thanks to ornithologist Dr. Henrik Brumm and his lab for being my hosts in Seewiesen, and to Annette-Barbara Vogel for her input as I was working on the piece.

1. *Cyphorhinus arada*

♩ = 120

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Dampen strings with left hand so no definite pitch is heard. Play with percussive spitccato bowing.

Pure, ringing tone, notes slightly detached, not much vibrato.

violin

viola

mf f f mf f mf

5

f piu f

Dampen strings with left hand so no definite pitch is heard. Play with percussive spiccato bowing.

pp

11

Pure, ringing tone, notes slightly detached, not much vibrato.

p pp p piu f

15

mf f mf f

21

mf f piu f

p mp

24

p mp mf

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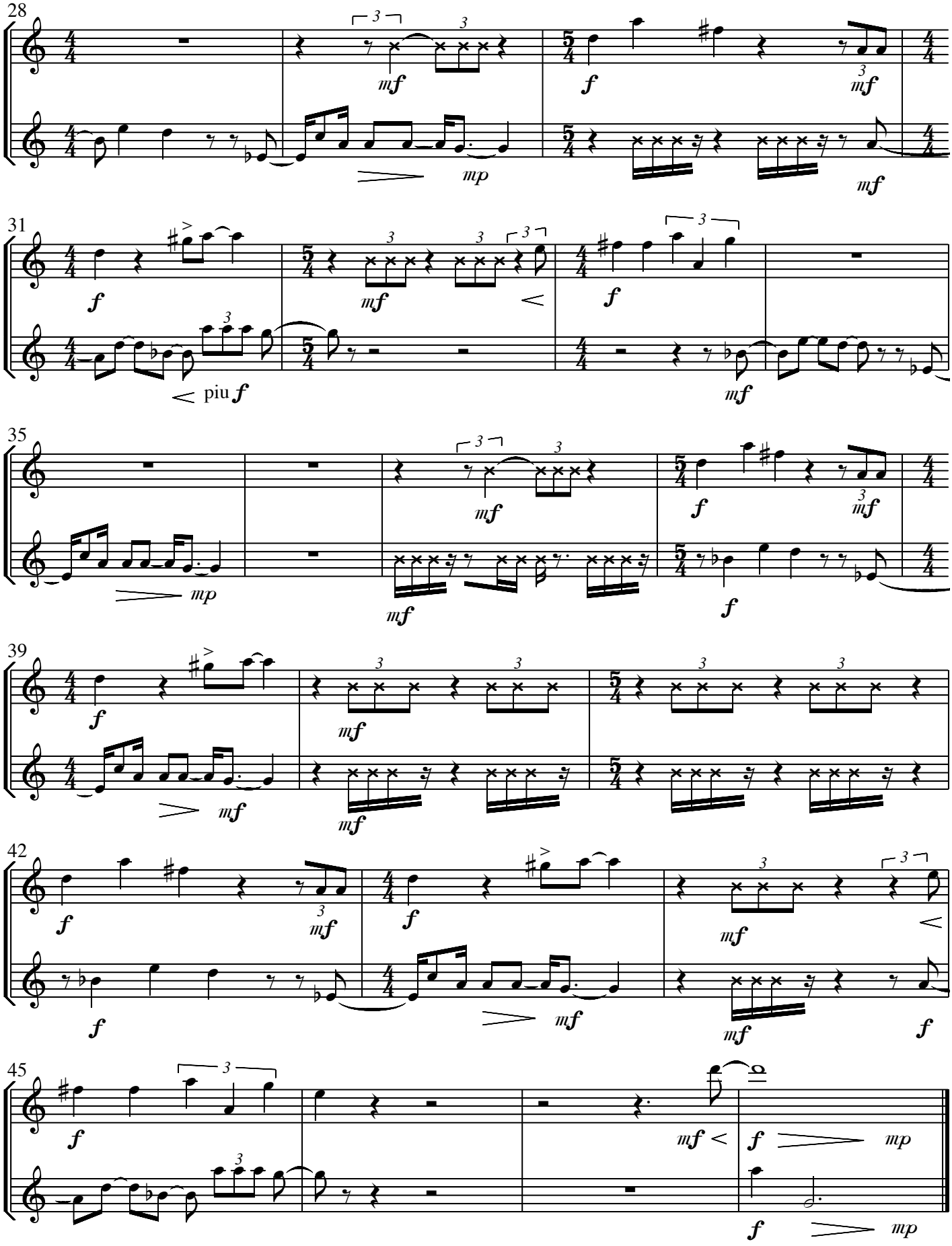
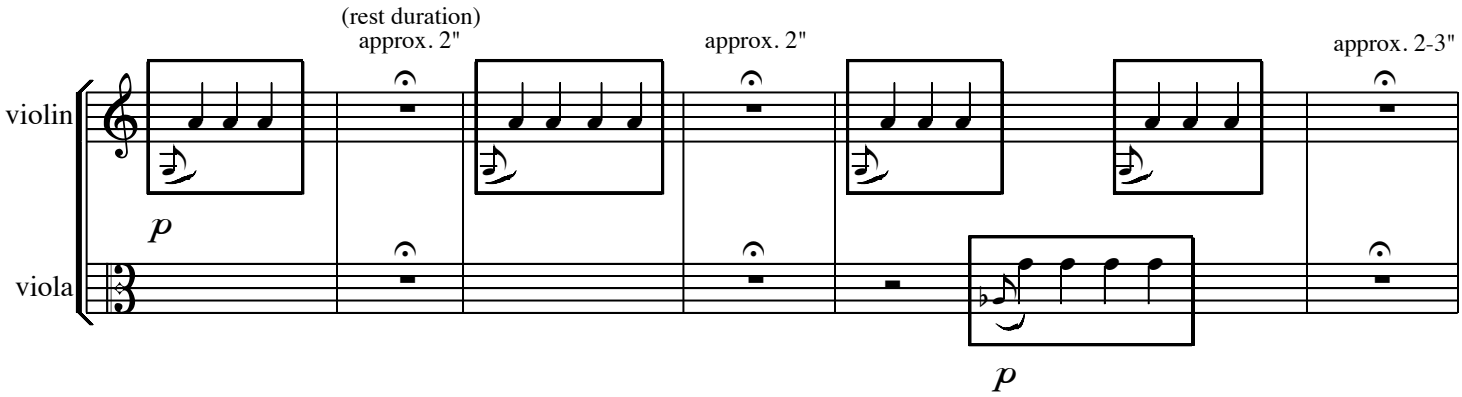

28
31
piu
35
39
42
45

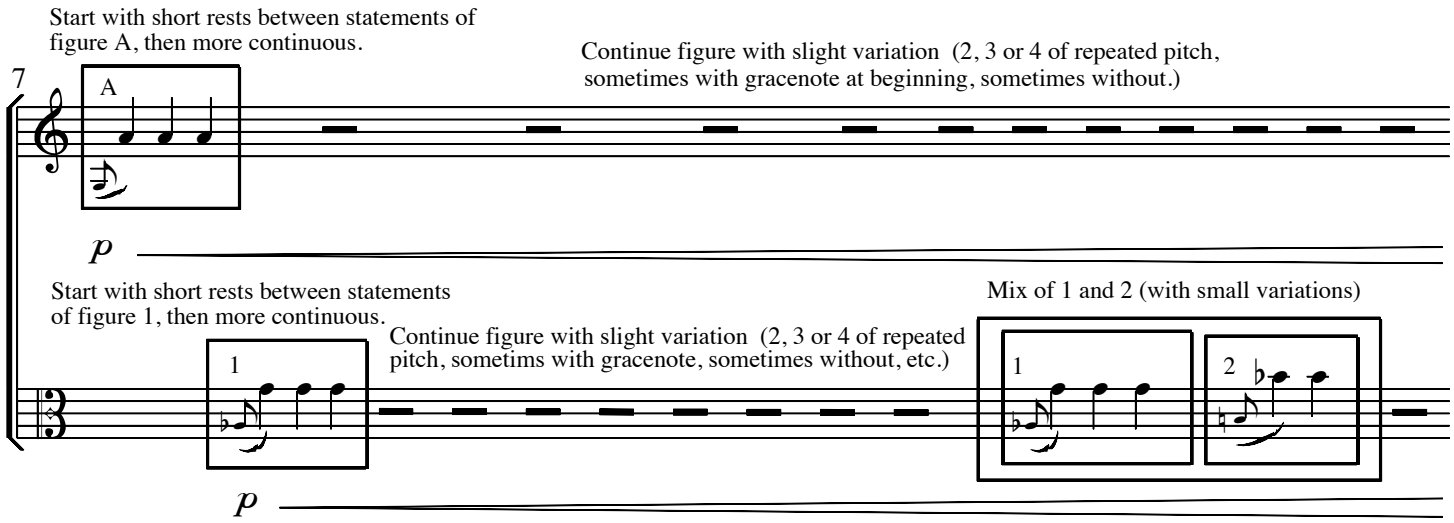
2. *Branta canadensis*

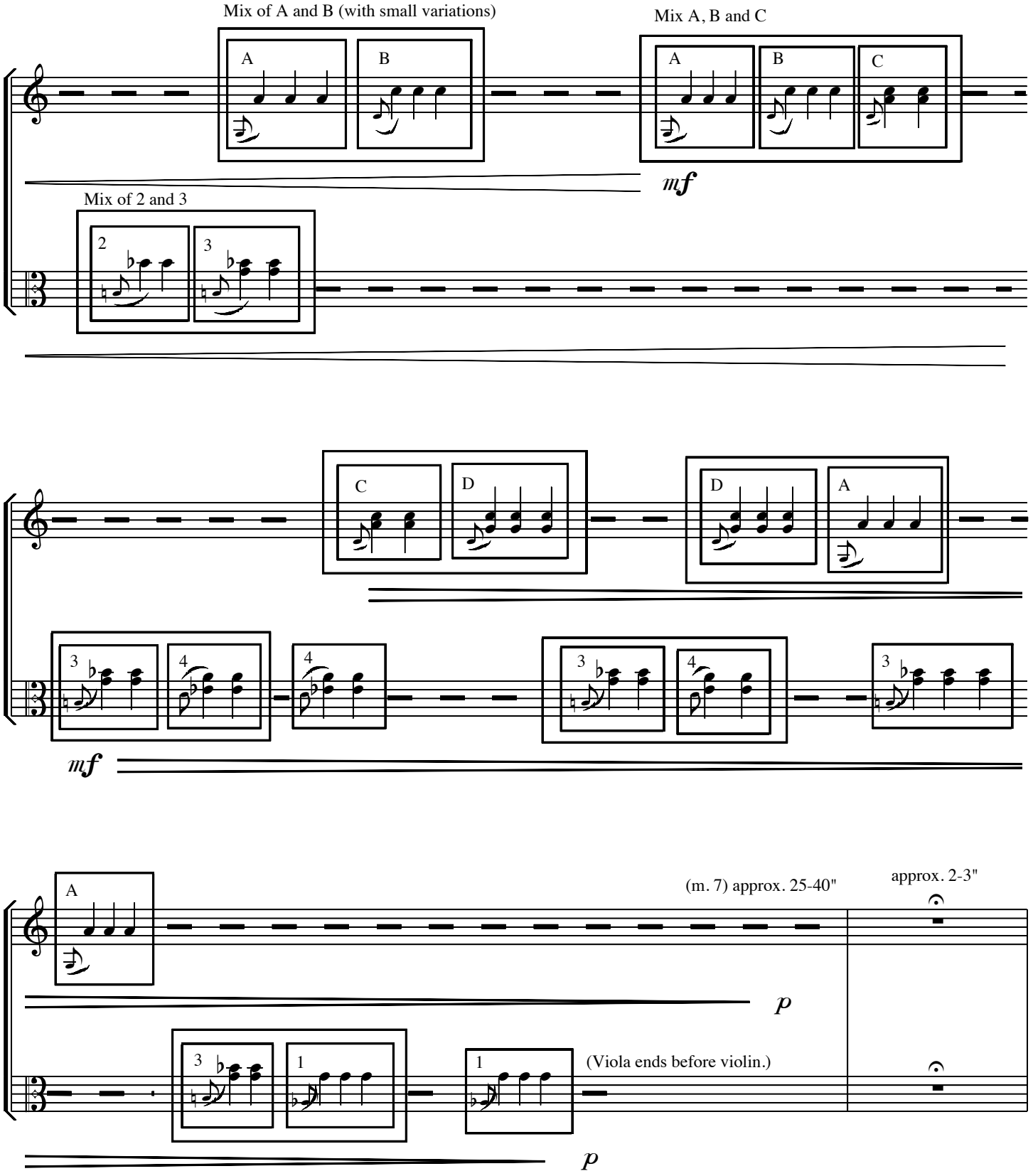
wide, hoarse sound
lots of bow, little or no vibrato

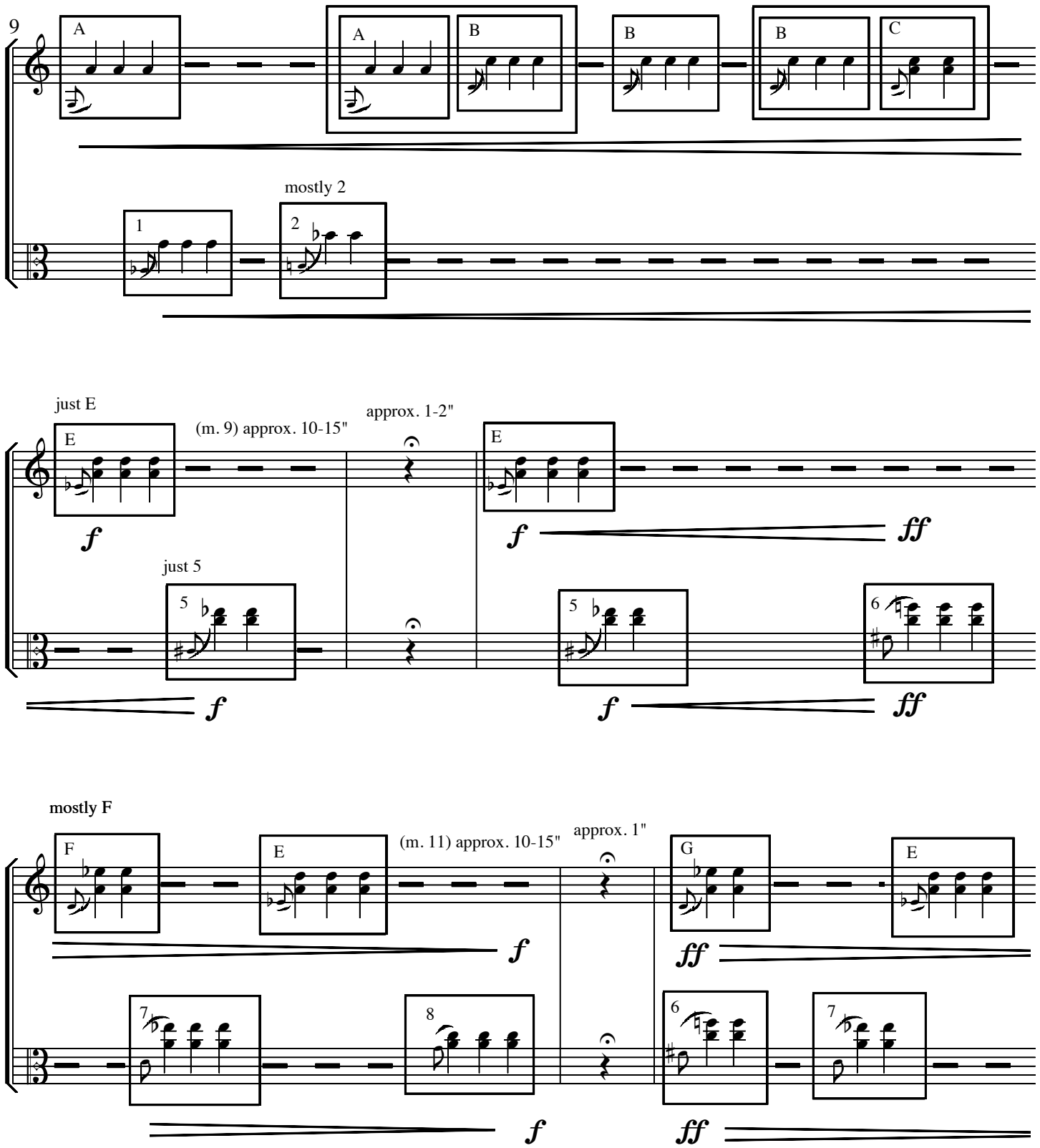
♩ = approx. 132 - 200, violin and viola should not match tempo

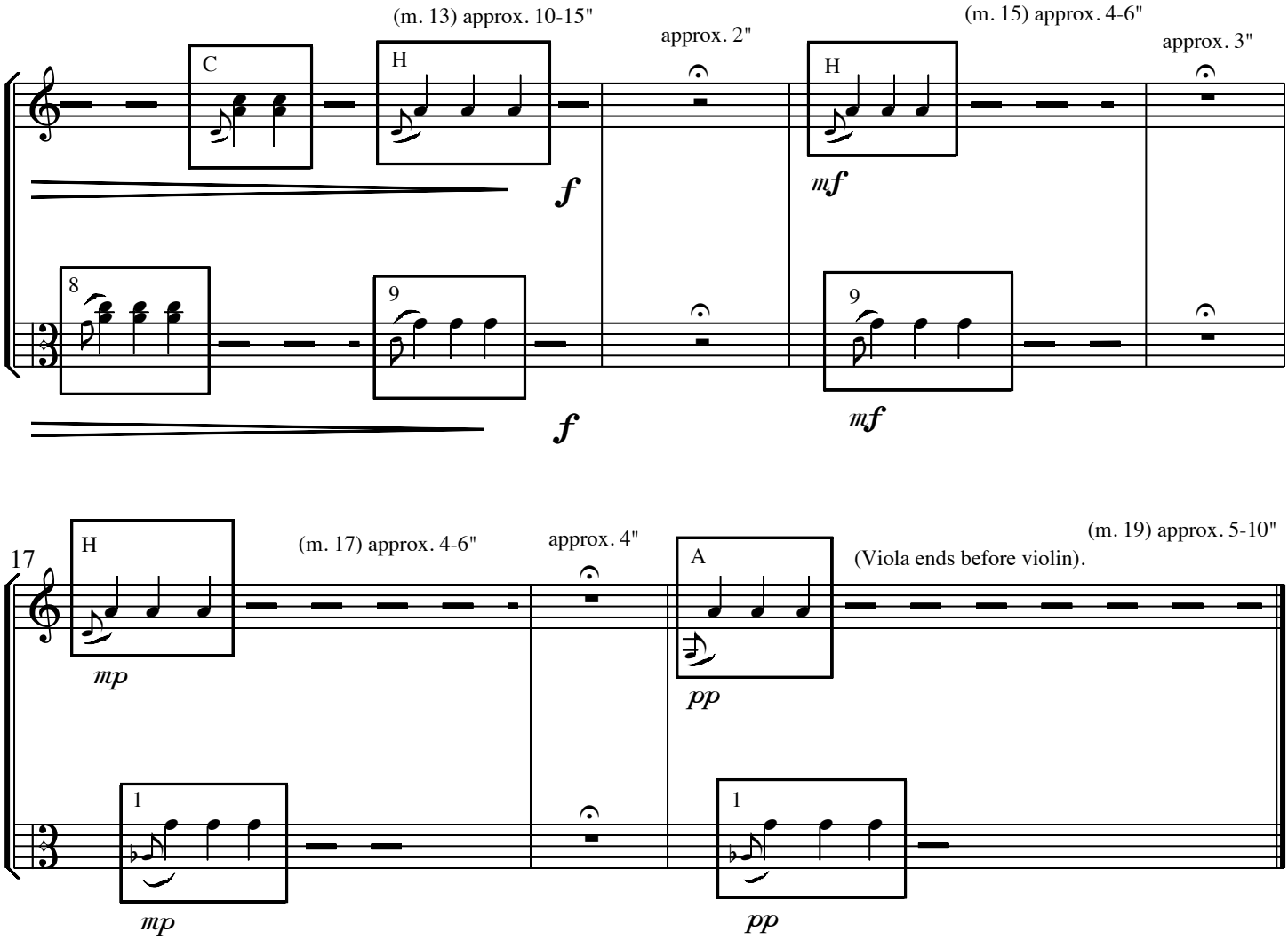
Emily Doolittle






Mix of A and B (with small variations)
A
B
Mix A, B and C
A
B
C
mf
Mix of 2 and 3
2
3
C
D
D
A
3
4
4
3
4
3
mf
A
(m. 7) approx. 25-40"
approx. 2-3"
p
3
1
1
(Viola ends before violin.)
p


9
A
A
B
B
B
C
mostly 2
1
2
just E
E
(m. 9) approx. 10-15"
approx. 1-2"
E
f
f
ff
just 5
5
5
6
f
f
ff
mostly F
F
E
(m. 11) approx. 10-15"
approx. 1"
G
E
f
ff
7
8
6
7
f
ff


(m. 13) approx. 10-15"
approx. 2"
(m. 15) approx. 4-6"
approx. 3"
C
H
H
f
mf
8
9
9
f
mf
17
H
(m. 17) approx. 4-6"
approx. 4"
A
(m. 19) approx. 5-10"
(Viola ends before violin).
mp
pp
1
1
mp
pp

3. *Gymnorhina tibicen*

lively, impulsive

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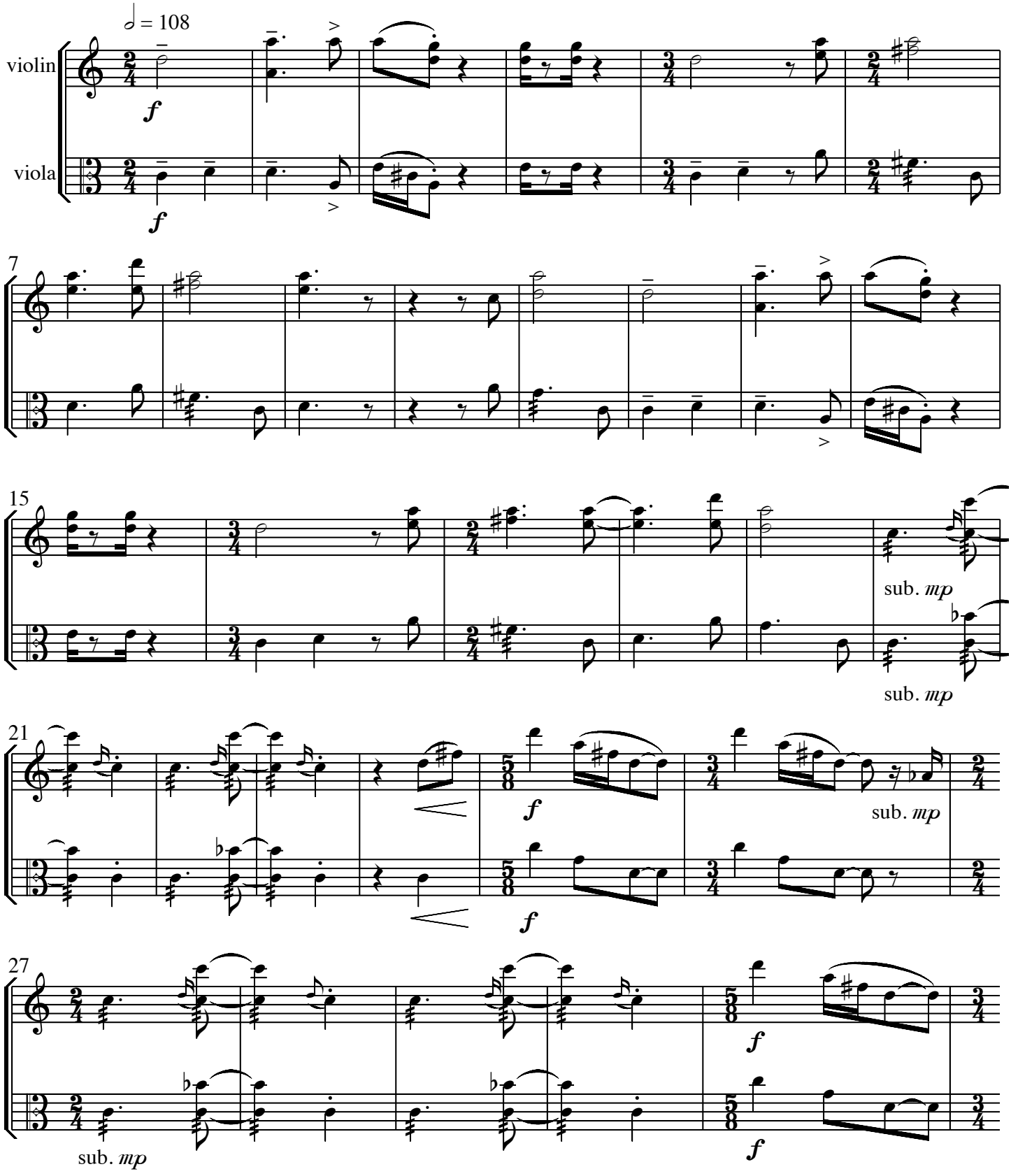
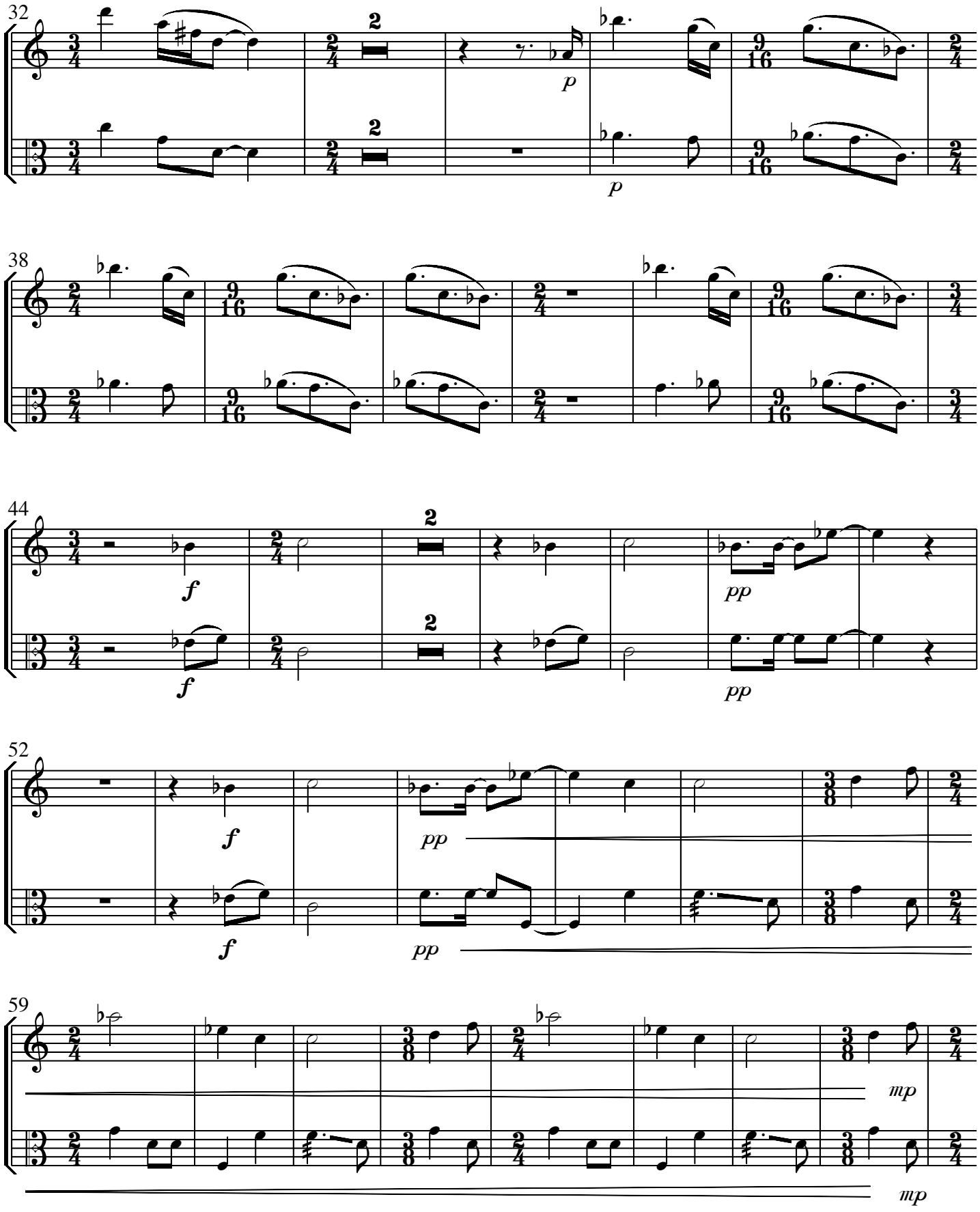
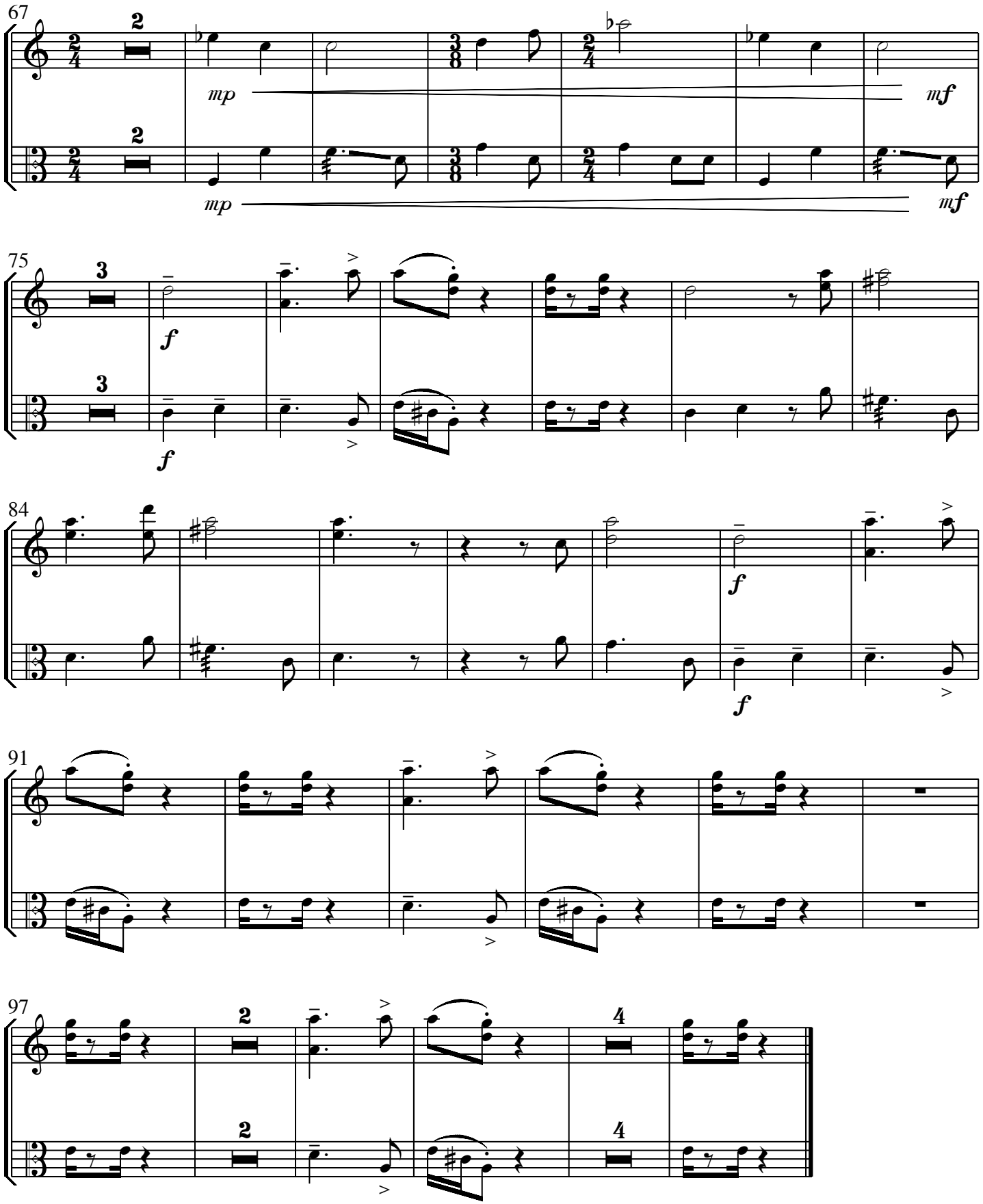



32
2
p
p
38
44
2
f
pp
f
pp
52
f
pp
f
pp
59
mp
mp


67
mp
mf
75
f
84
f
91
97

4. *Myadestes occidentalis*

rough, gritty

Down and upbow as fast as possible (each box should take less than half a second). Downward arpeggiation on downbow, lean into doublestop on upbow. Occasional variation (extensions, contractions, etc.) of boxes ad lib.

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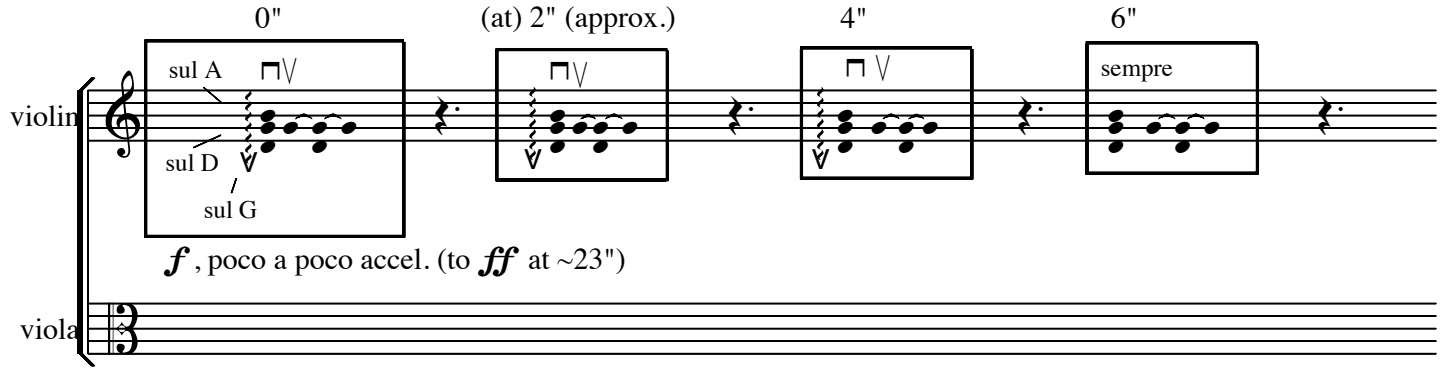
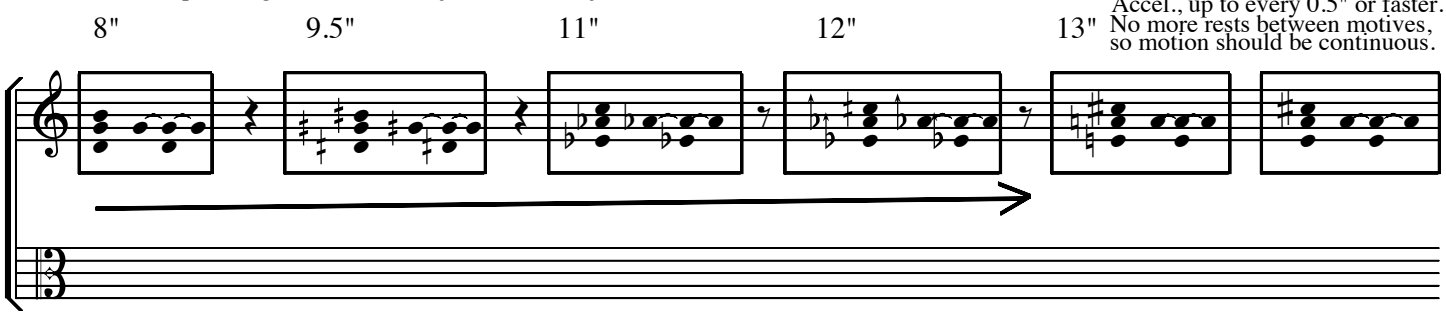


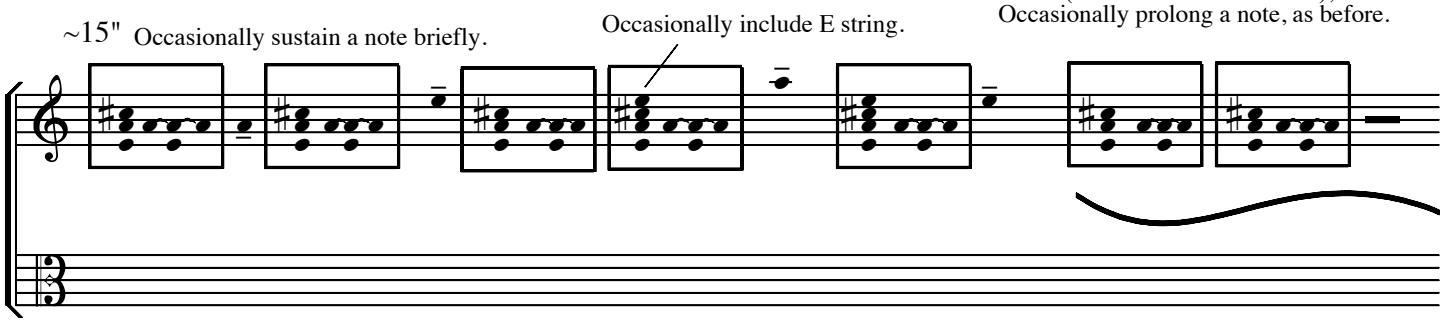
f, poco a poco accel. (to ***ff*** at ~23")

Gradual upwards gliss. (from G Maj at 8" to A Maj at 13")

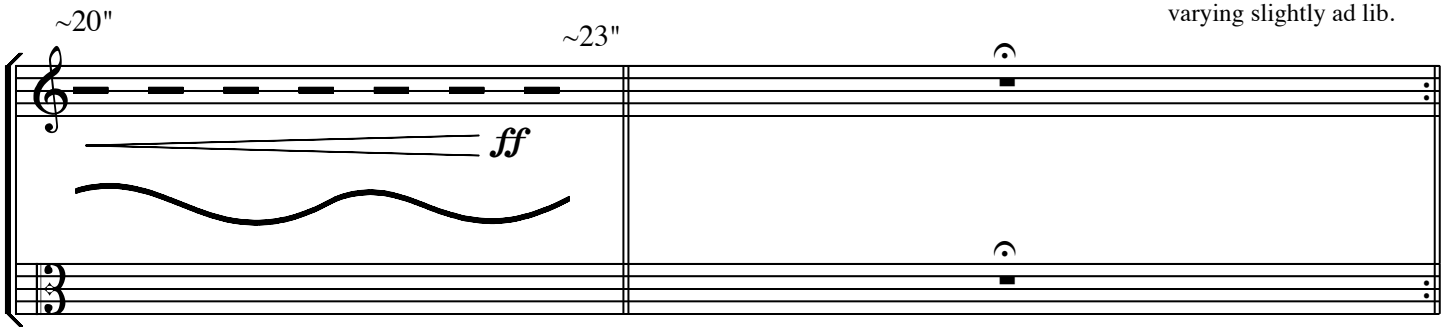


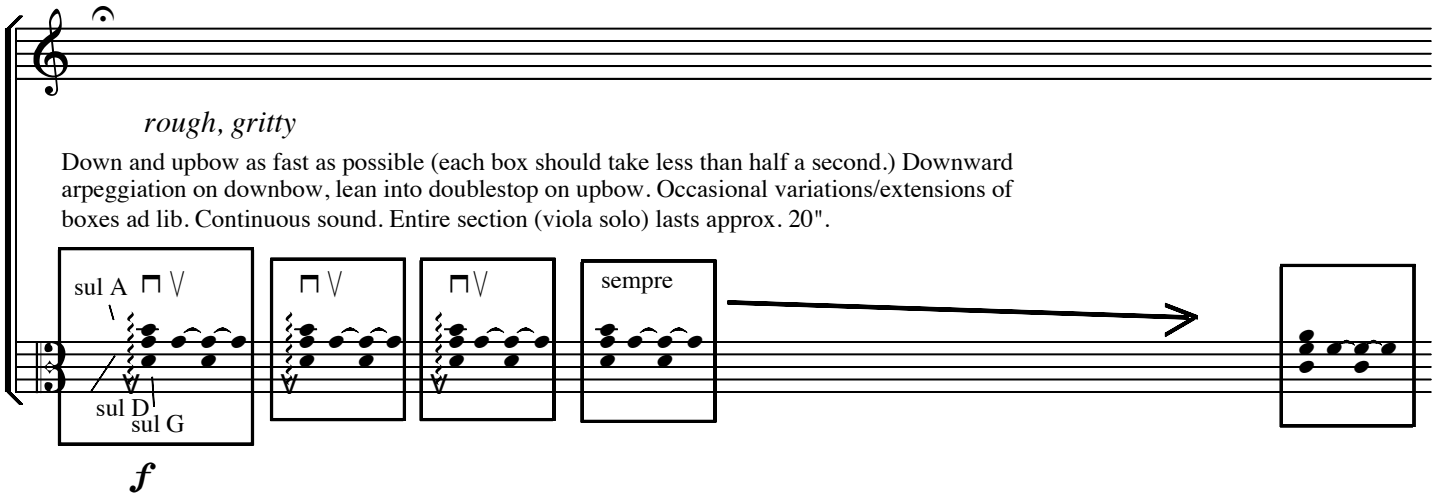
Accel., up to every 0.5" or faster. No more rests between motives, so motion should be continuous.

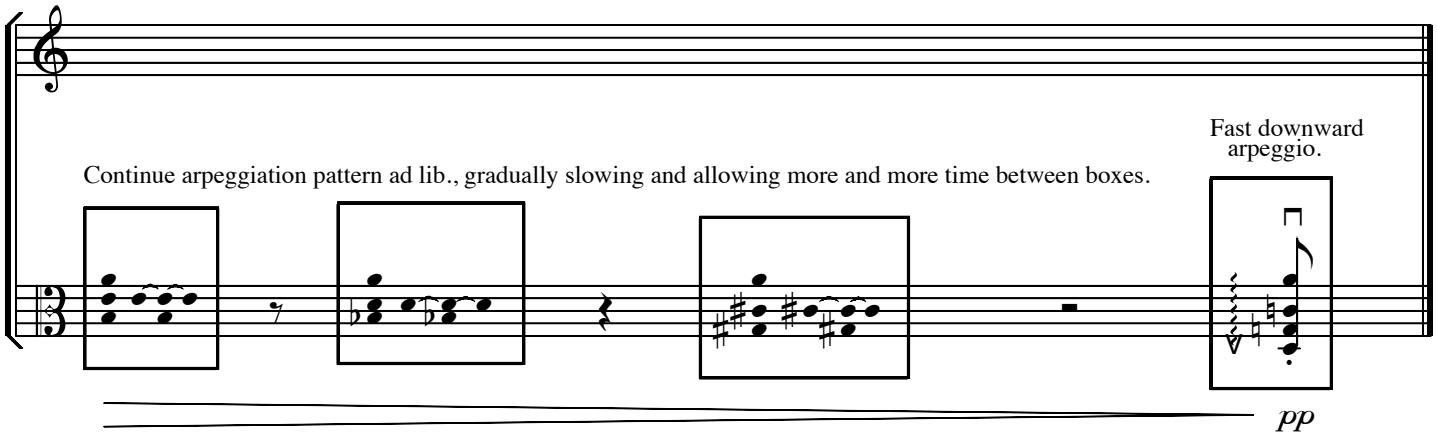
Continuous flow of notes, following the same pattern. Slight slide upwards or downwards (no more than a semitone), ad lib. Occasionally prolong a note, as before.



Repeat from beginning 3 times, varying slightly ad lib.




rough, gritty
Down and upbow as fast as possible (each box should take less than half a second.) Downward arpeggiation on downbow, lean into doublestop on upbow. Occasional variations/extensions of boxes ad lib. Continuous sound. Entire section (viola solo) lasts approx. 20".
sul A
sul D
sul G
sempre
f


Continue arpeggiation pattern ad lib., gradually slowing and allowing more and more time between boxes.
Fast downward arpeggio.
pp

5. *Cossypha heuglini*

♩ = 204

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violin

viola

wispy, breathy, smooth

First eighth of each pair slighty longer, second slightly shorter, like baroque "inegal" or a very subtle swing. Add slides between pitches ad lib.

ppp (barely audible), poco a poco cresc.

7

3

3

(*pp*, poco a poco cresc.)

bright, a bit shrill

Fast tremolo glissando. Exact timing and number of notes can vary, so long as start and end pitch are as written.

15

p

21

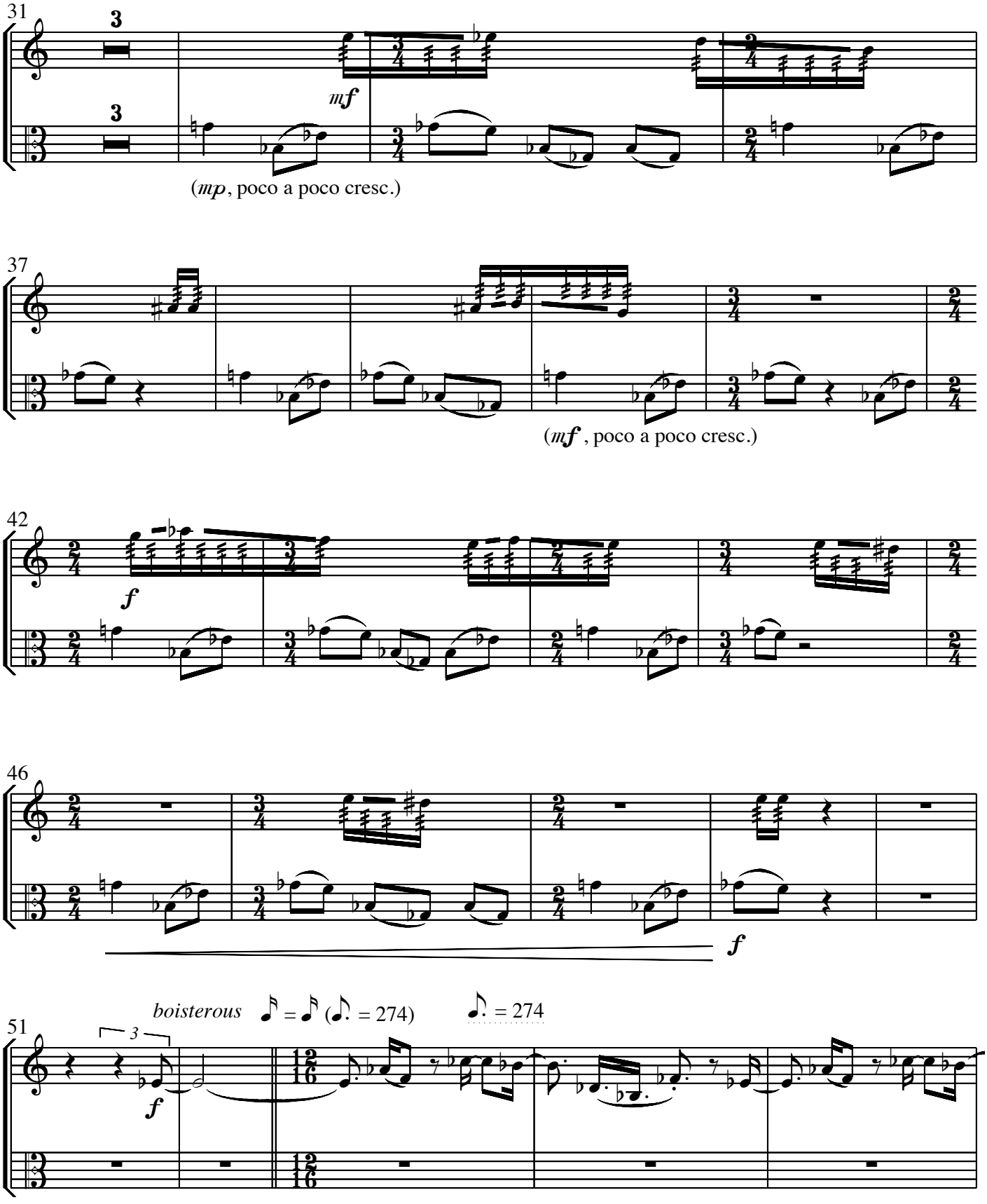
2

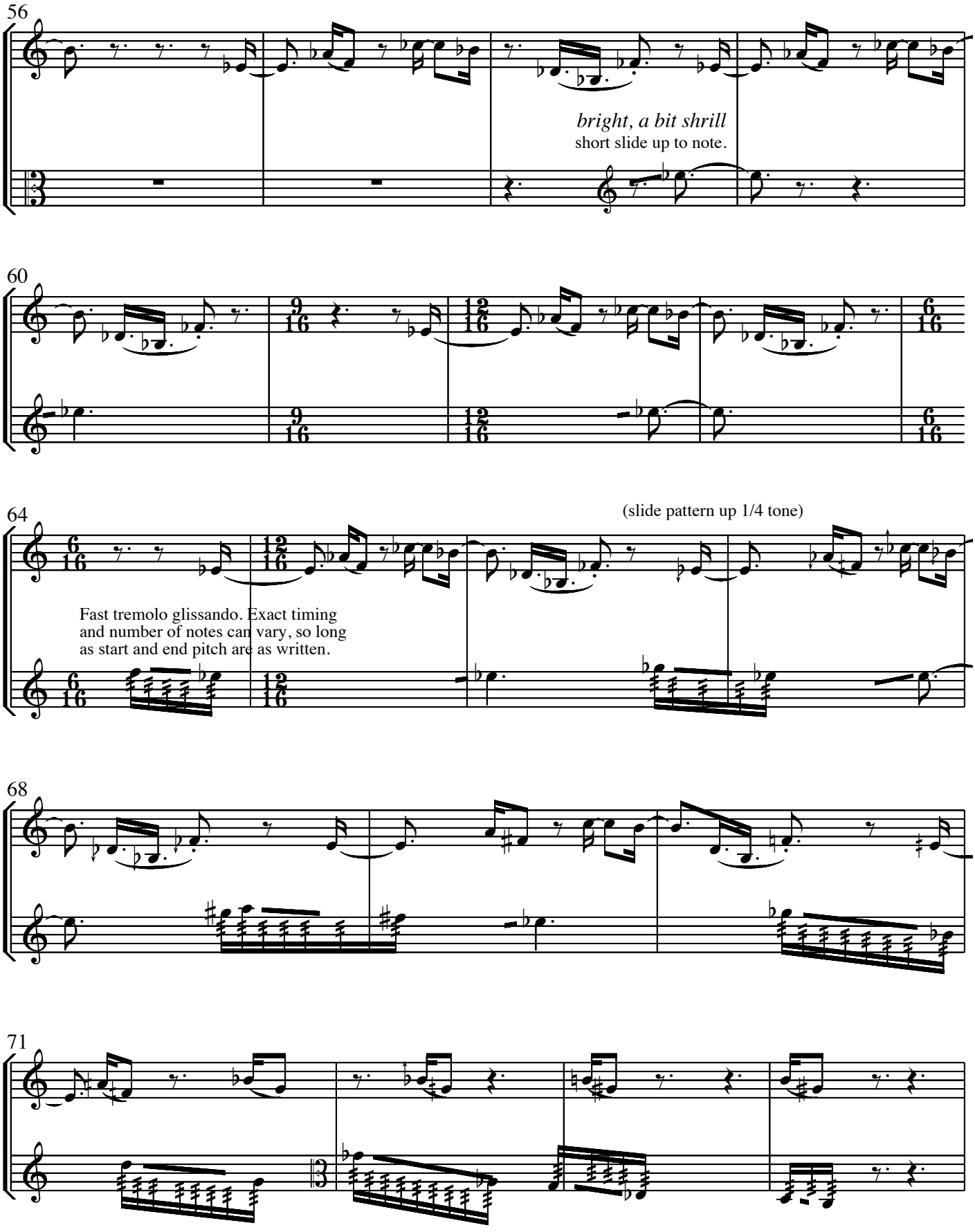
2

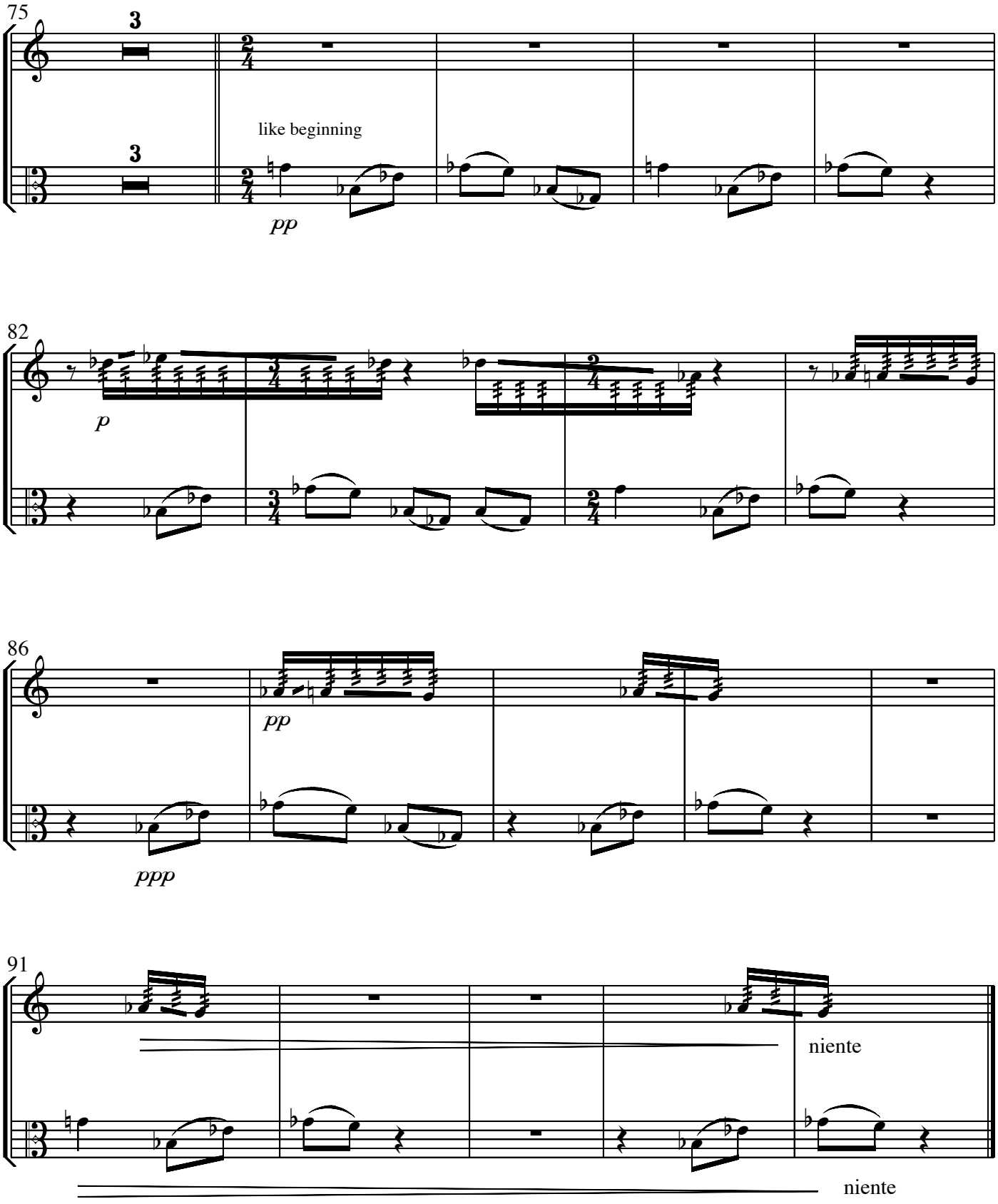
mp

(*p*, poco a poco cresc.)

27


31
3
3
mf
(mp, poco a poco cresc.)
37
(mf, poco a poco cresc.)
42
f
46
f
51
boisterous
3
f
= (. = 274)
. = 274


56
bright, a bit shrill
short slide up to note.
60
64
(slide pattern up 1/4 tone)
Fast tremolo glissando. Exact timing
and number of notes can vary, so long
as start and end pitch are as written.
68
71


75
3
3
like beginning
pp
82
p
86
pp
ppp
91
niente
niente

6. *Alectoris rufa*

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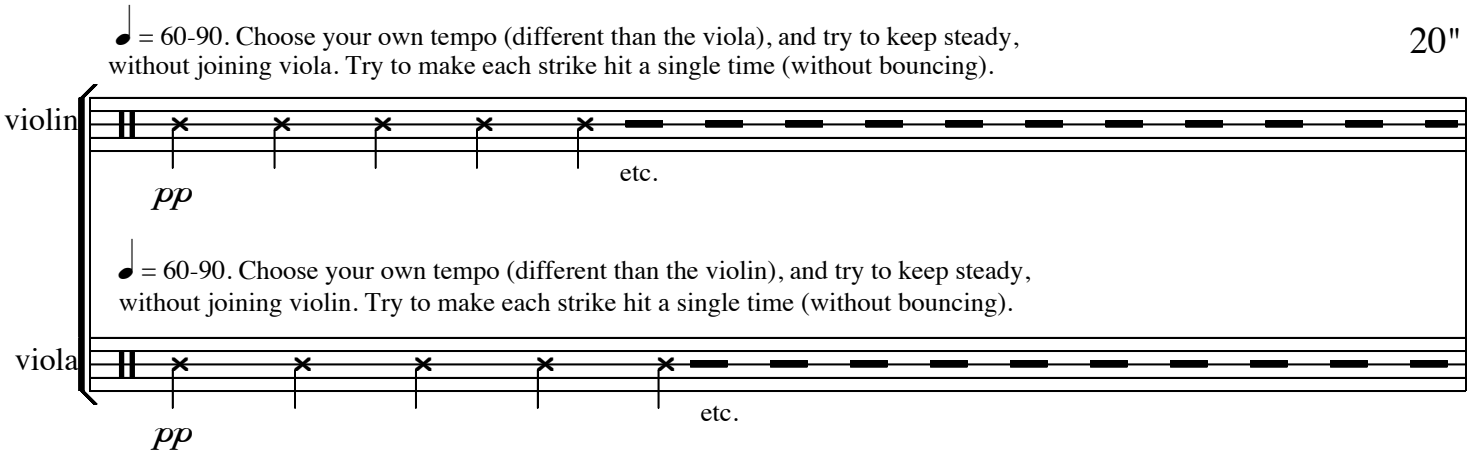
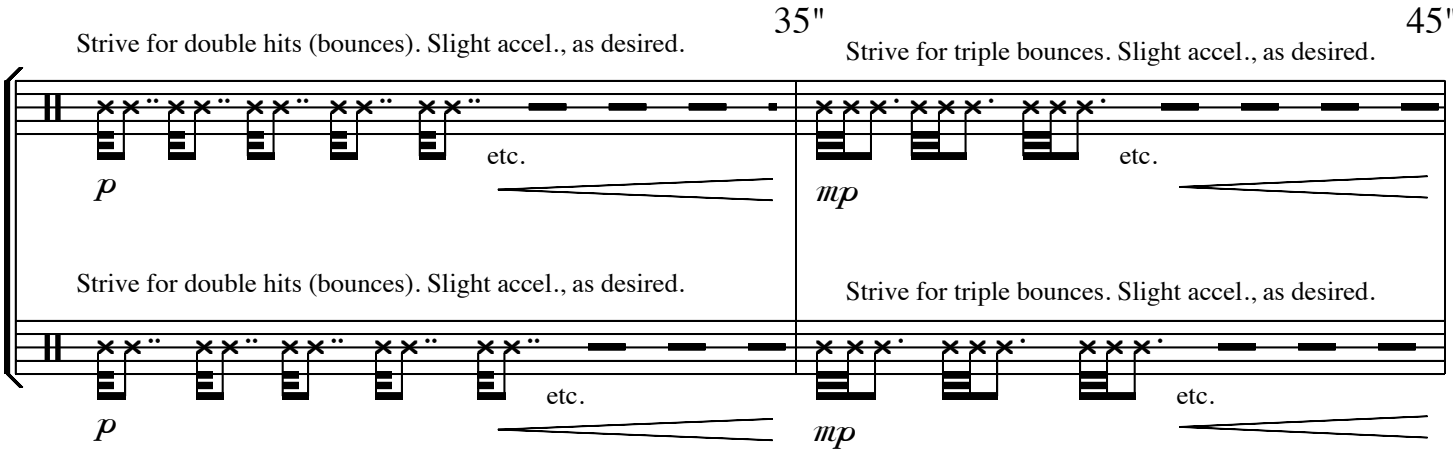
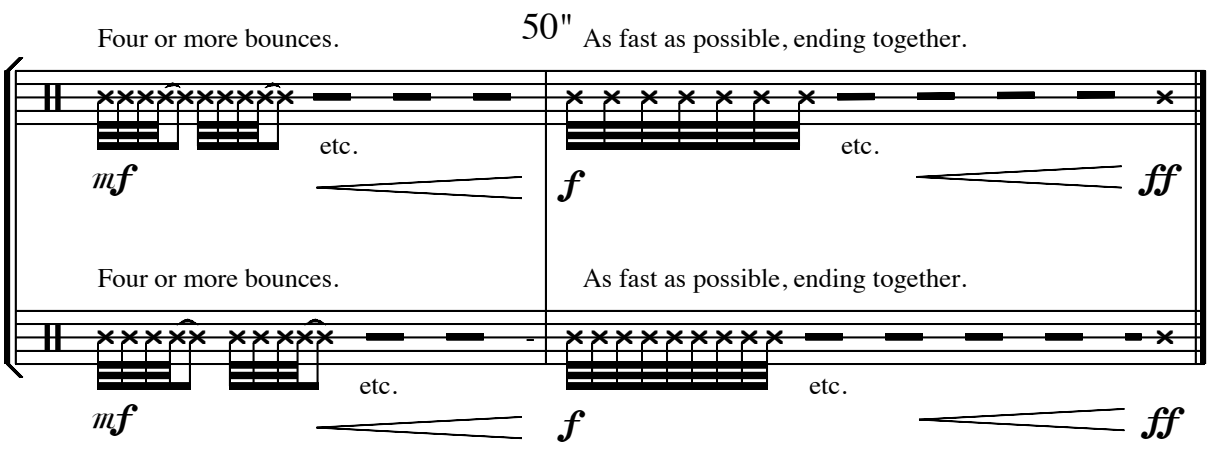
With left hand, hold instrument gently across fingerboard, so strings can't vibrate. Play by striking strings with a pencil held loosely between thumb and index finger so pencil can bounce.







7. *Thryothorus euophrys*

as fast as possible (approx. ♩. = 168)
like one voice
add slides between pitches ad lib.

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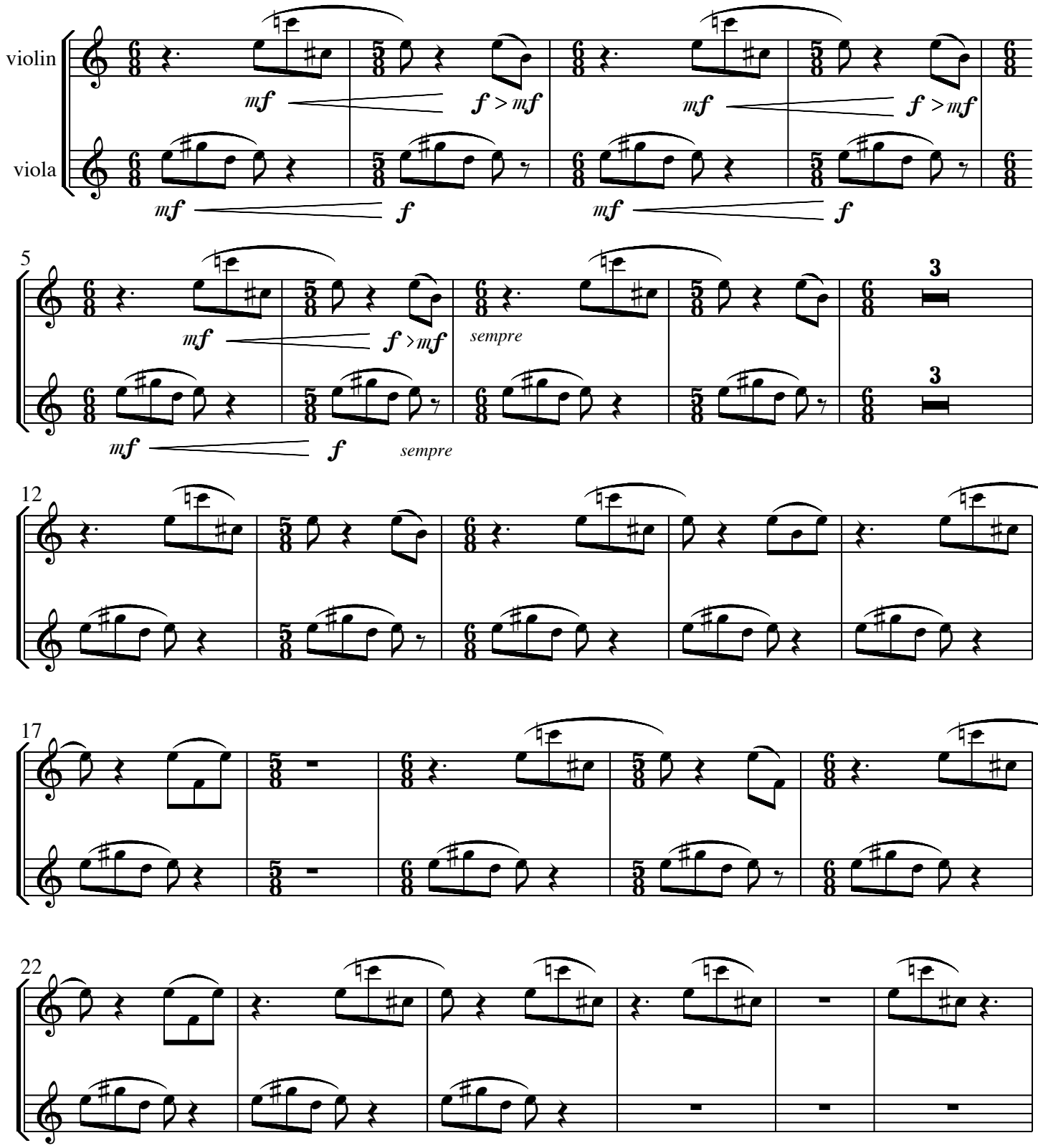
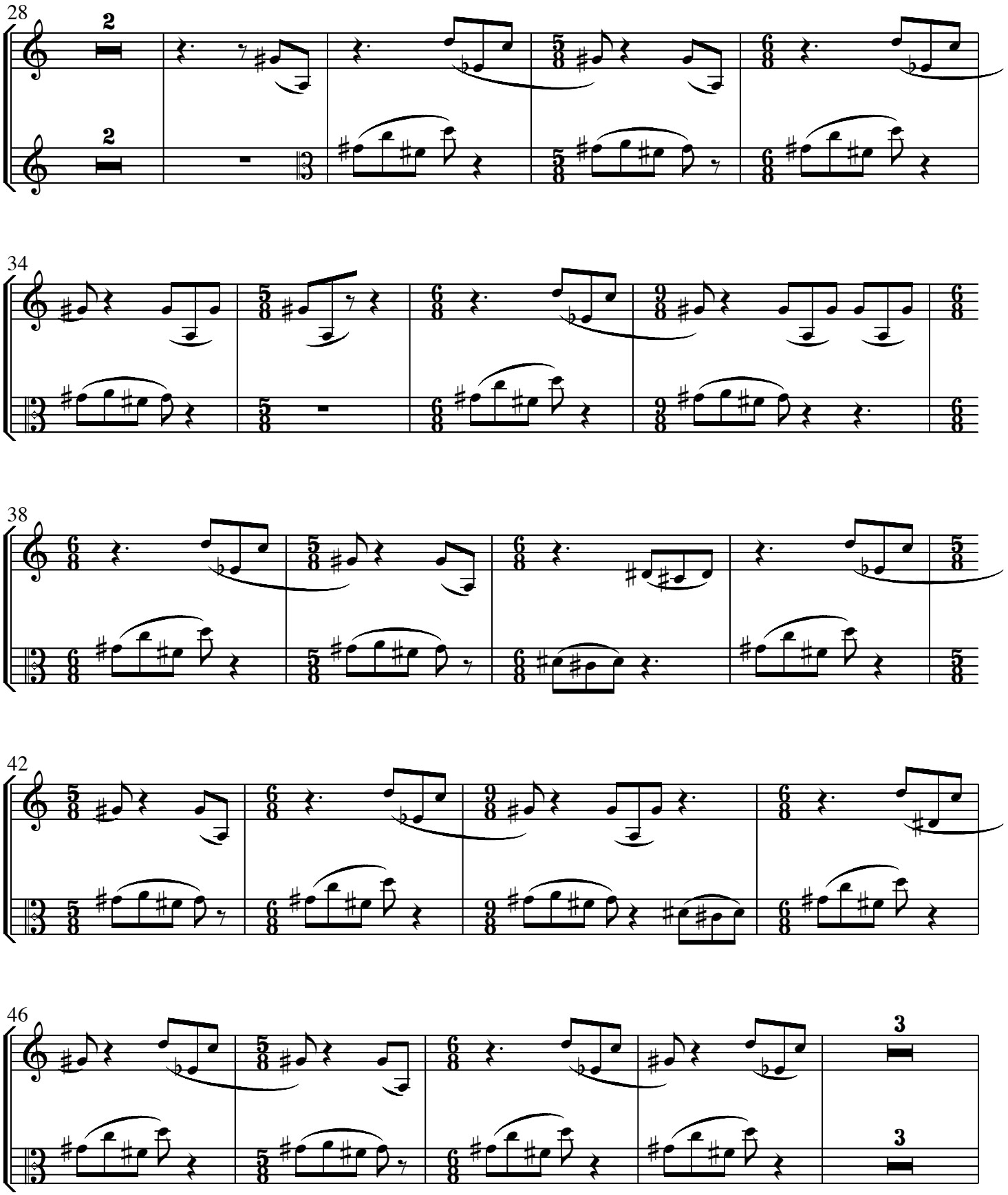
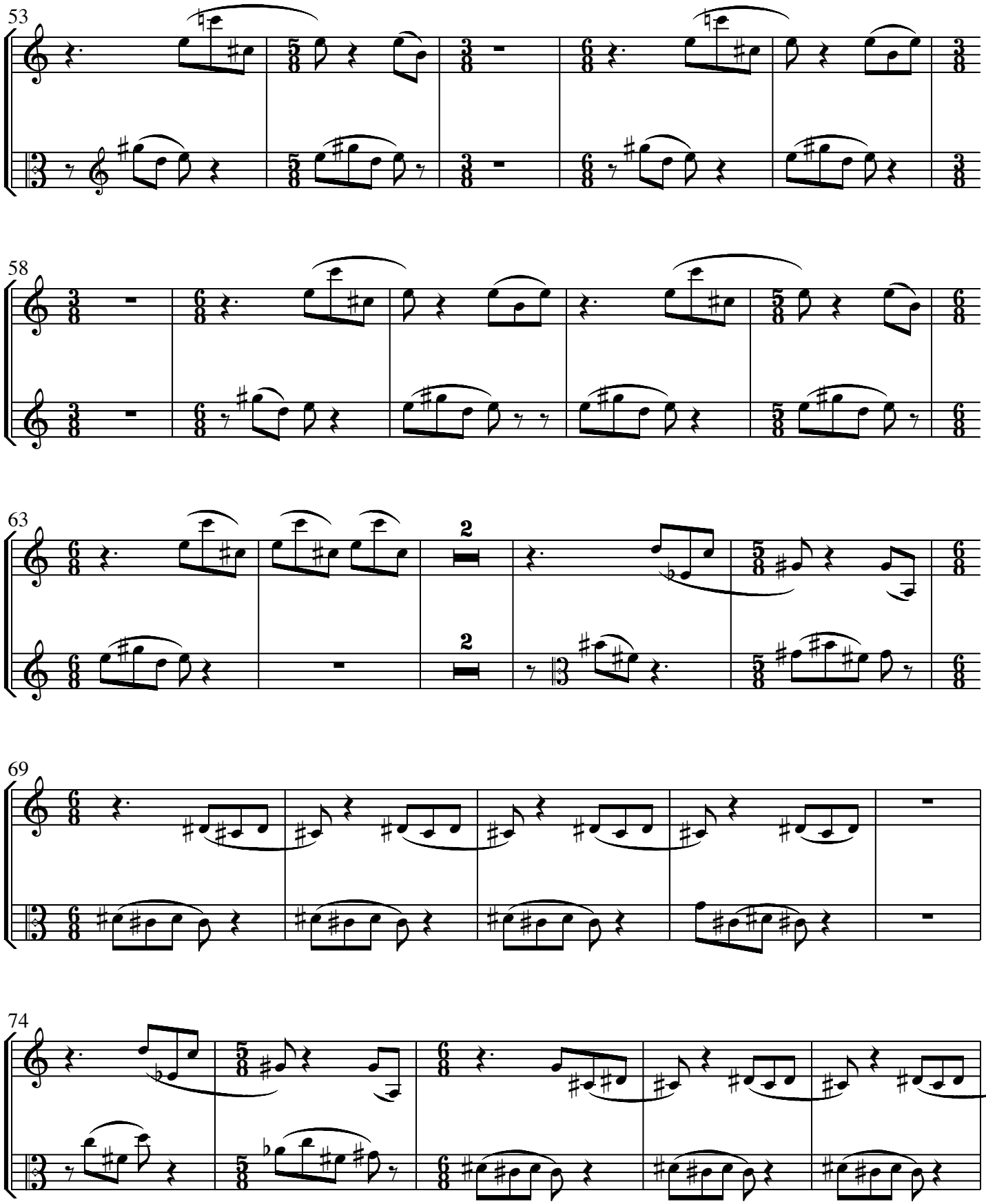
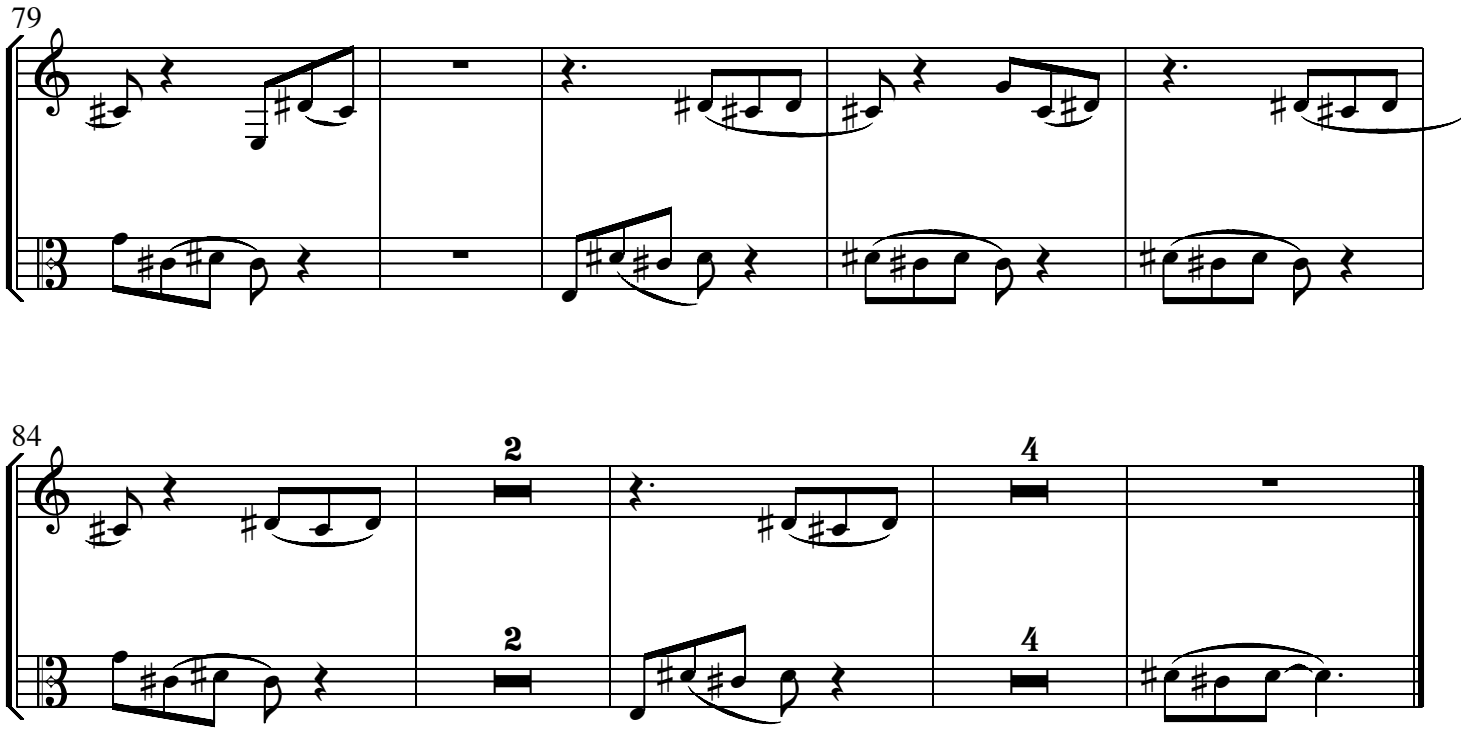



28
2
2
34
38
42
46
3
3


53
58
63
2
2
69
74


79
84
2
2
4
4