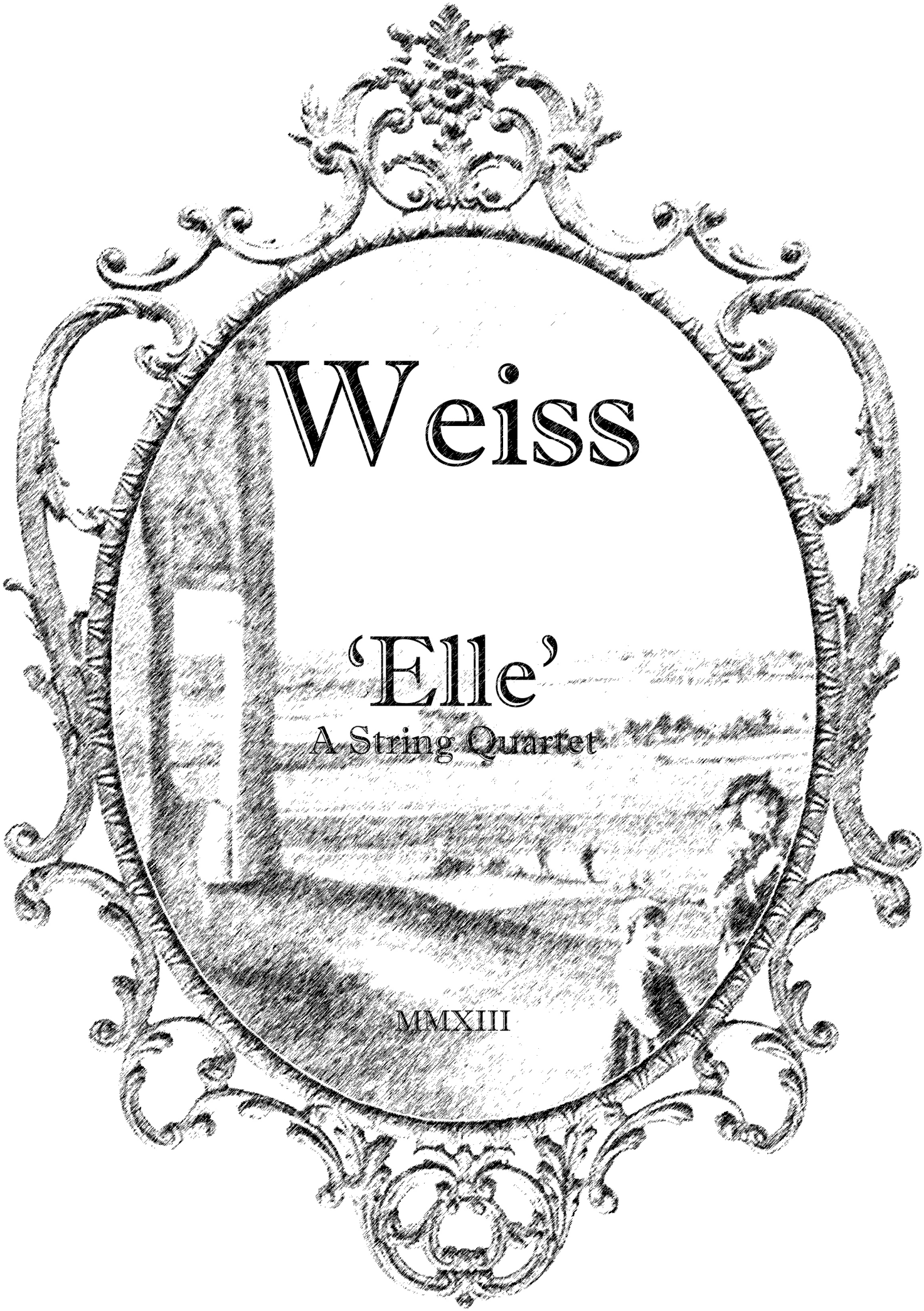

Weiss
‘Elle’
A String Quartet
MMXIII

A Note from the Composer:

*'*Elle*', a string quartet, is a piece meant to explore the gender inequality of music and music theory. The idea that certain aspects of music theory are either masculine or feminine has been a topic of several scholarly articles and has been in books for quite some time. Perhaps the most famous insights into this theory come from Susan McClary, a musicologist associated with the "New Musicology". In McClary's book, she examines (among other topics) gendered aspects of traditional music theory and gendered sexuality in musical narrative.*

Personally, the most intriguing theory that McClary examines is the sexual identity of the sonata form, a well-established (and perhaps the most recognizable and widely used) form of musical composition. What McClary's examination of sonata form boils down to is that sonata form can be interpreted as sexist, or misogynistic and imperialistic. Once interpreted as such, it is easy to see the evidence behind the theory. The primary key of a sonata form can be interpreted as the masculine key area, and the secondary key area as feminine. Over the course of the form, the primary key is supposed to usurp the secondary key. We typically see the secondary theme played in the primary key area. Therefore, the feminine key area is seen as something to be explored and conquered, taken over completely by the masculine key area.

While certainly controversial among musicologists, the theory is also very interesting. The implications that it holds for traditional music theory cannot be understated. What would a piece that sought to subvert the traditional form and established gender roles sound like? What would such a piece's tonal structure look like? Could the sonata form hold under such practices, or would a new form result?

From a compositional standpoint, these implications are far too interesting to simply ignore. Why stick to the established form of music when such a promising horizon is in sight?

From a personal standpoint, why would a conscious person allow for such inequality in gender roles to exist in any medium?

From an intellectual standpoint, how could one pass up the opportunity to probe the theory behind such a well-established practice?

*It is from these three standpoints that I wrote '*Elle*'. Personally, intellectually, and compositionally, I could not have* not *written this piece of music. The many insights that such a piece would provide in all these areas are too many to list. Even if the piece is a complete failure, the discussion as to why is was such a failure would be well worth the composition by itself.*

So before the first notes were on the page, I decided upon the form of the piece. Sonata form would be the obvious blueprint, but many liberties would have to be taken. Here, the primary key area and secondary key area would remain in their percieved gender roles. The exposition of the piece would remain largely intact, with the primary key area presenting the primary theme, and the secondary key area presenting the secondary theme, and then modulating back into the primary key for the repeat of the exposition.

The development, for my intents and purposes, would explore the tonal possibilities of both themes in the typical manner of sonata form. The major change would come near the end of the development, where the primary theme would be played in the seconary key area very strongly. This would have to be a convincing effect, enough to make an audience think that they were actually in a 'home' key. Then the secondary theme would play again in the secondary key area, even though the secondary key area now clearly sounds like 'home'. This restatement would immediately be followed by a 'cadential' figure in which the main theme is again stated, in the secondary key area, to end the piece.

This form sought to usurp the traditional gender roles. Instead of the masculine key area overcoming and taking over the feminine key area, the feminine key area influences and changes the masculine key area to come into alignment with the feminine key. Hopefully, this practice produces well-recieved aural results, as well as a clear seperation and contrast to traditional musical form and percieved gender roles in music.

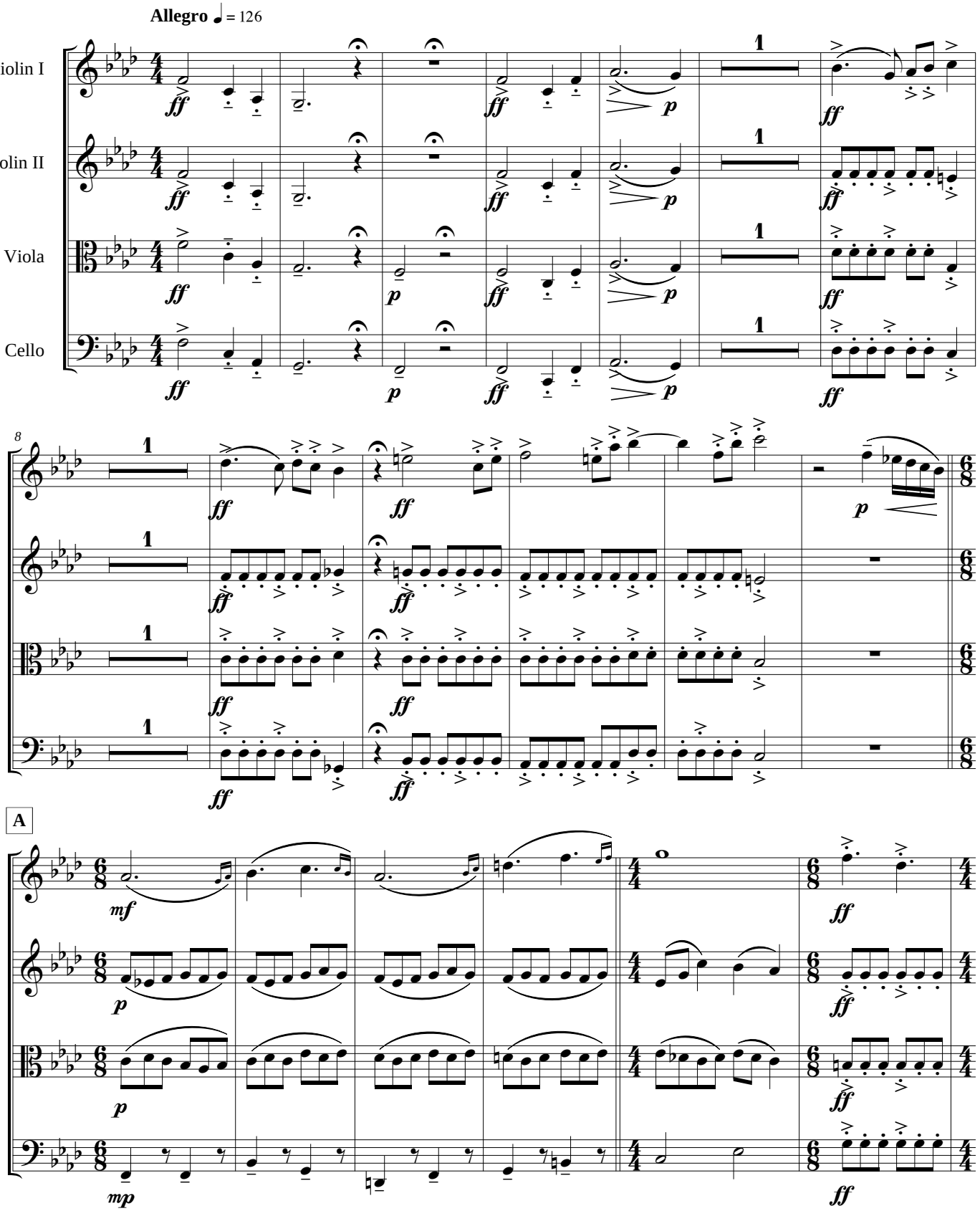
- Raymond Weiss

Score

'Elle'

A String Quartet

Raymond Weiss



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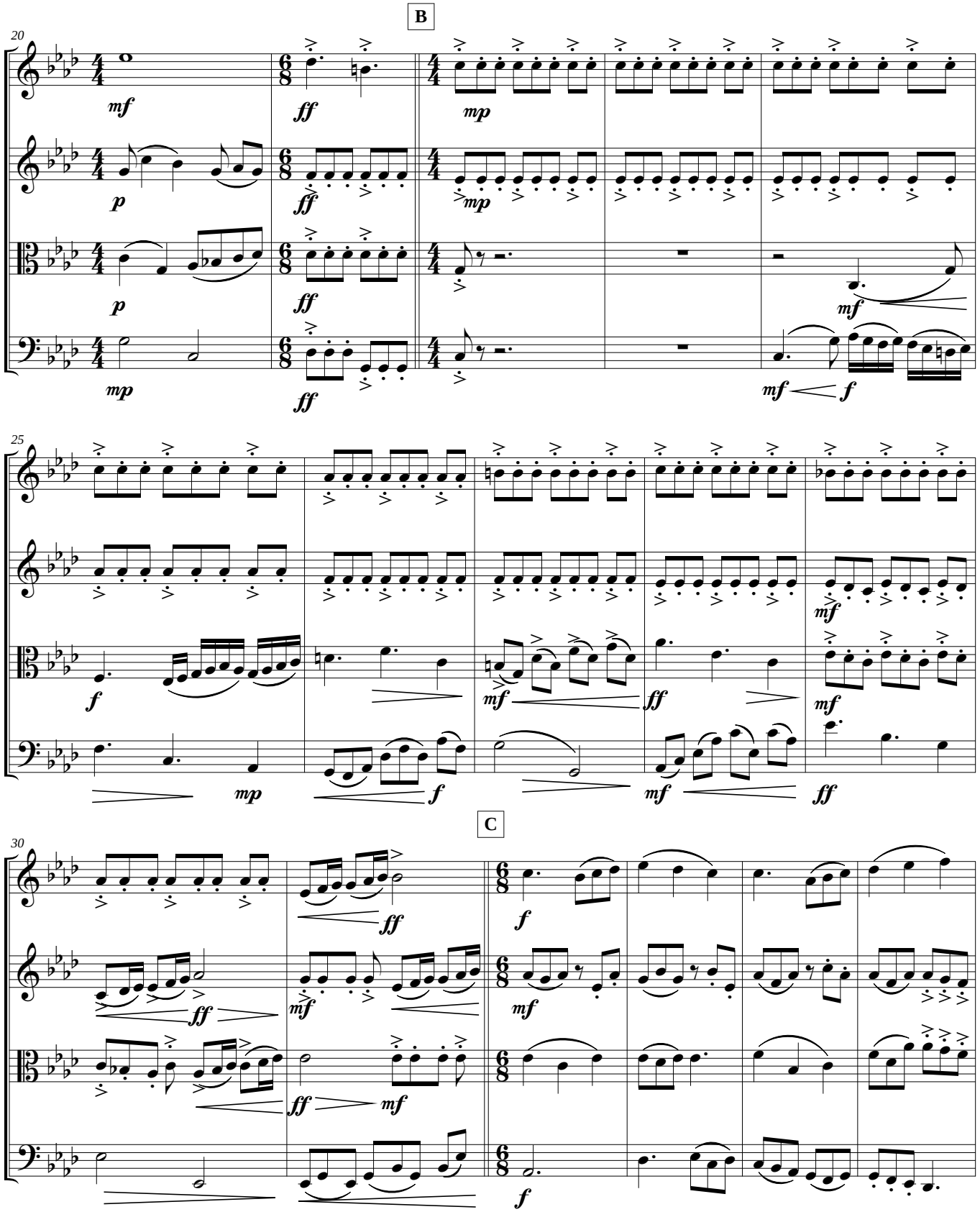
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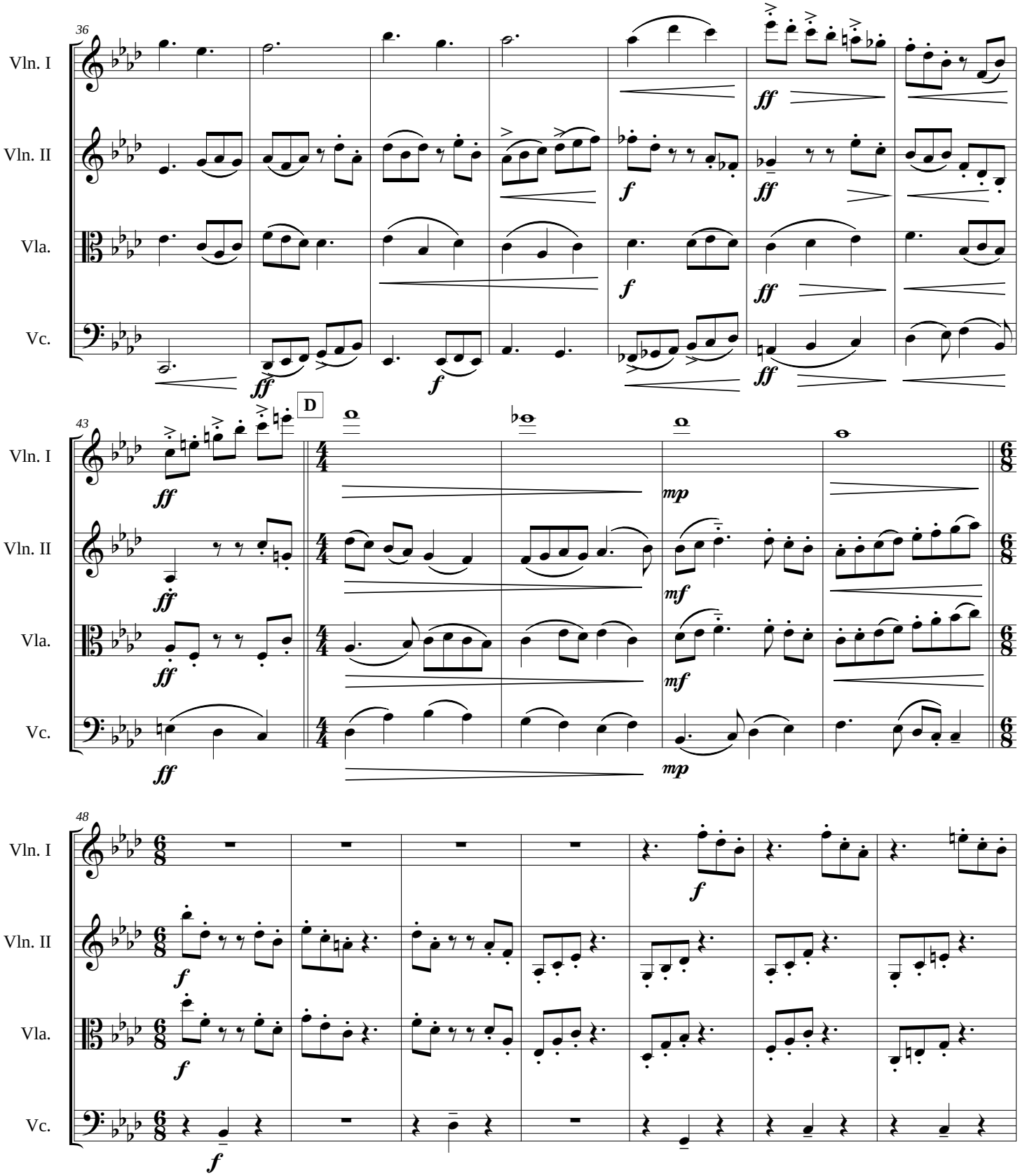
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mf
ff
p
mp
f
25
C
30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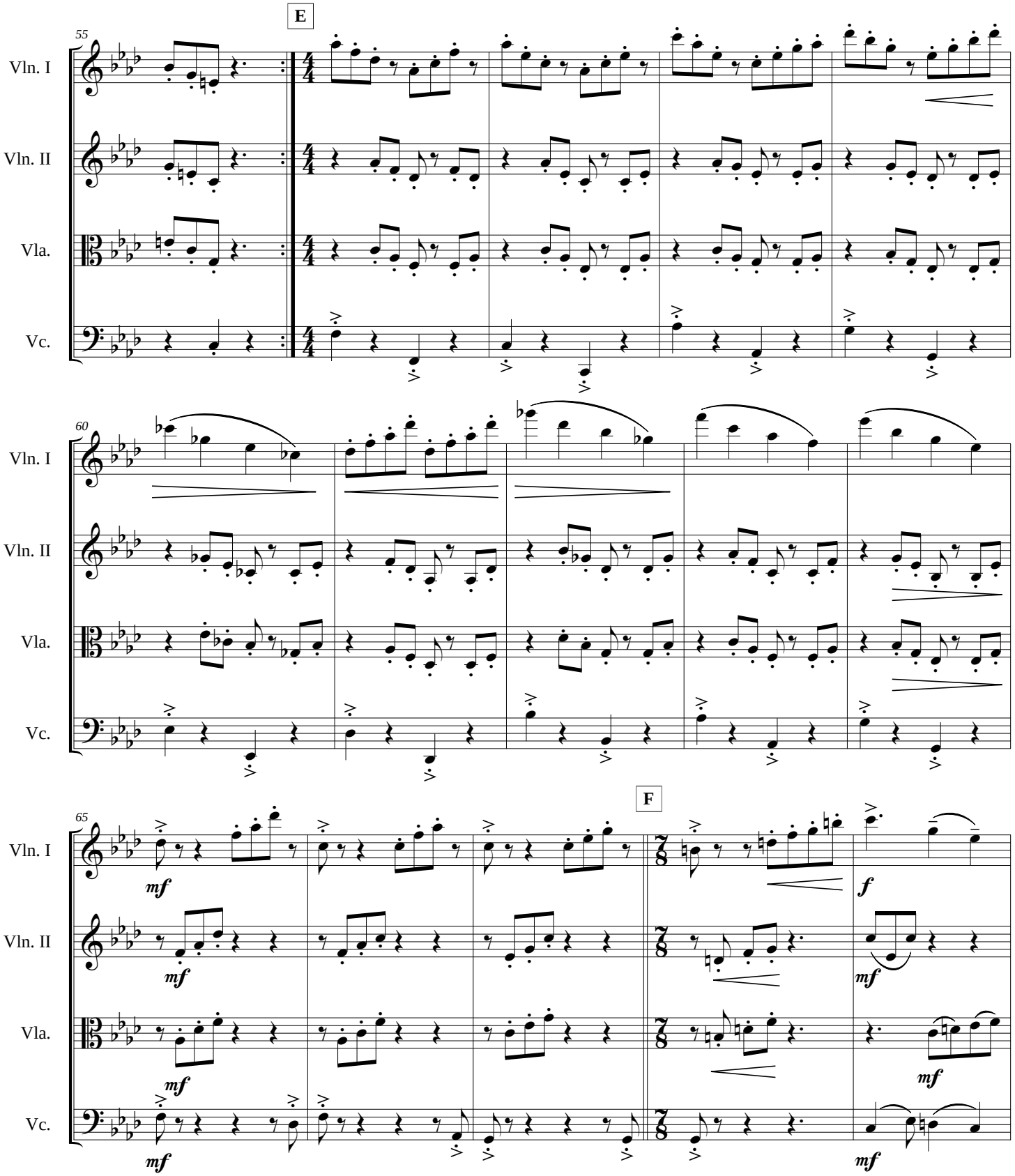
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
ff
f
ff
f
ff
ff
43
D
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
ff
ff
ff
mp
mf
mf
mp
48
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
f
f
f
f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Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
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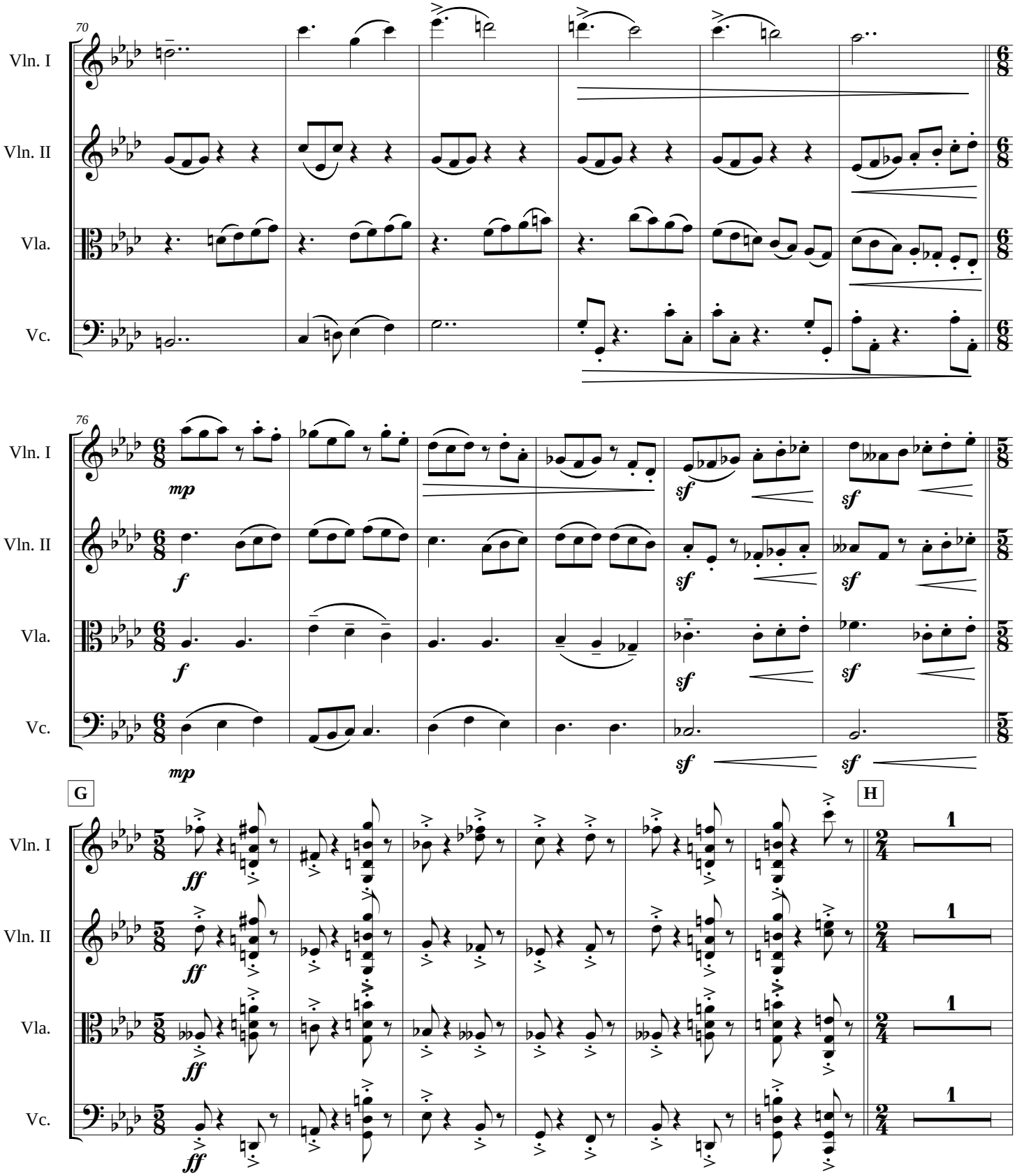
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
F
65
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mf
f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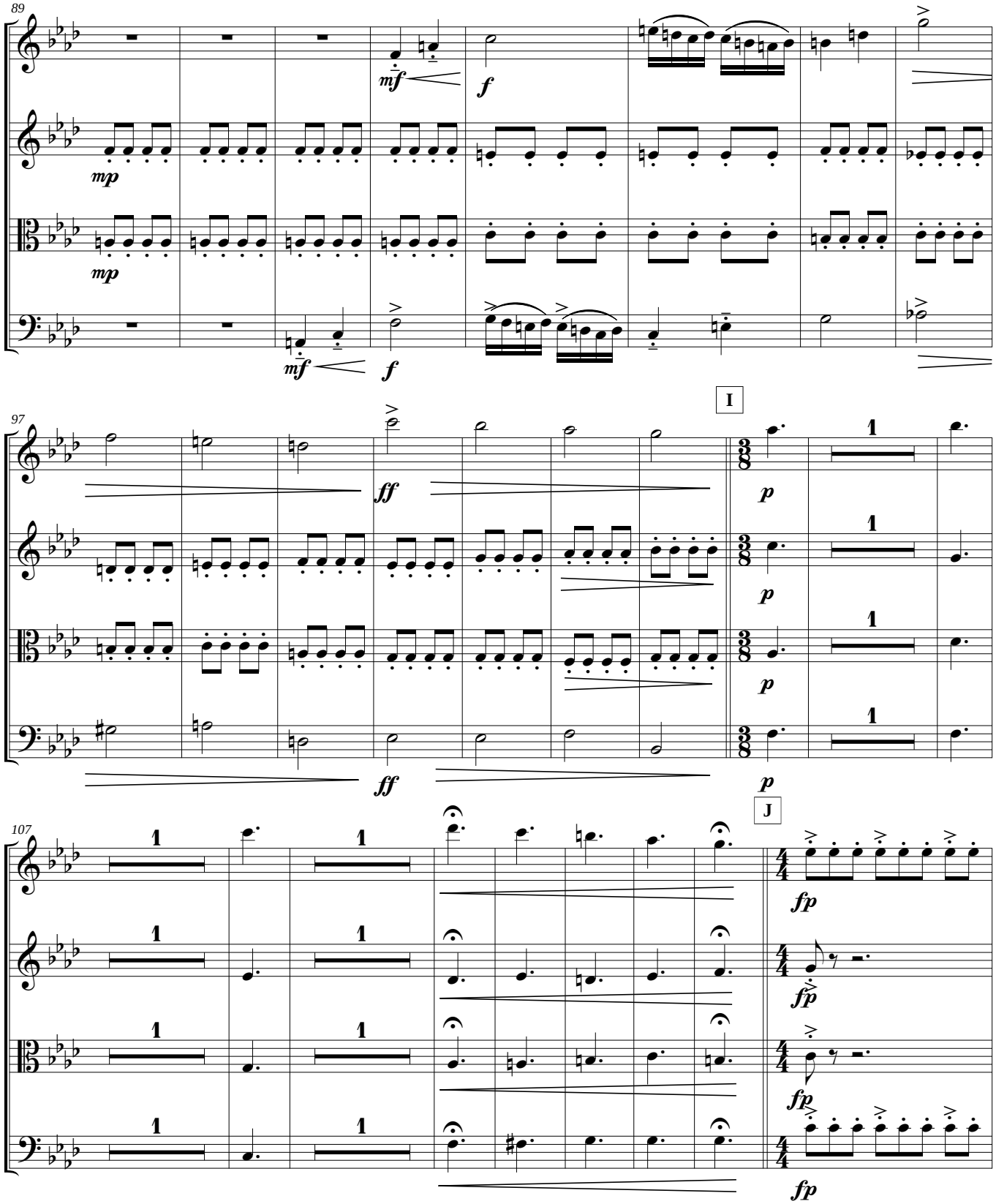
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
76
mp
f
sf
G
H
ff
1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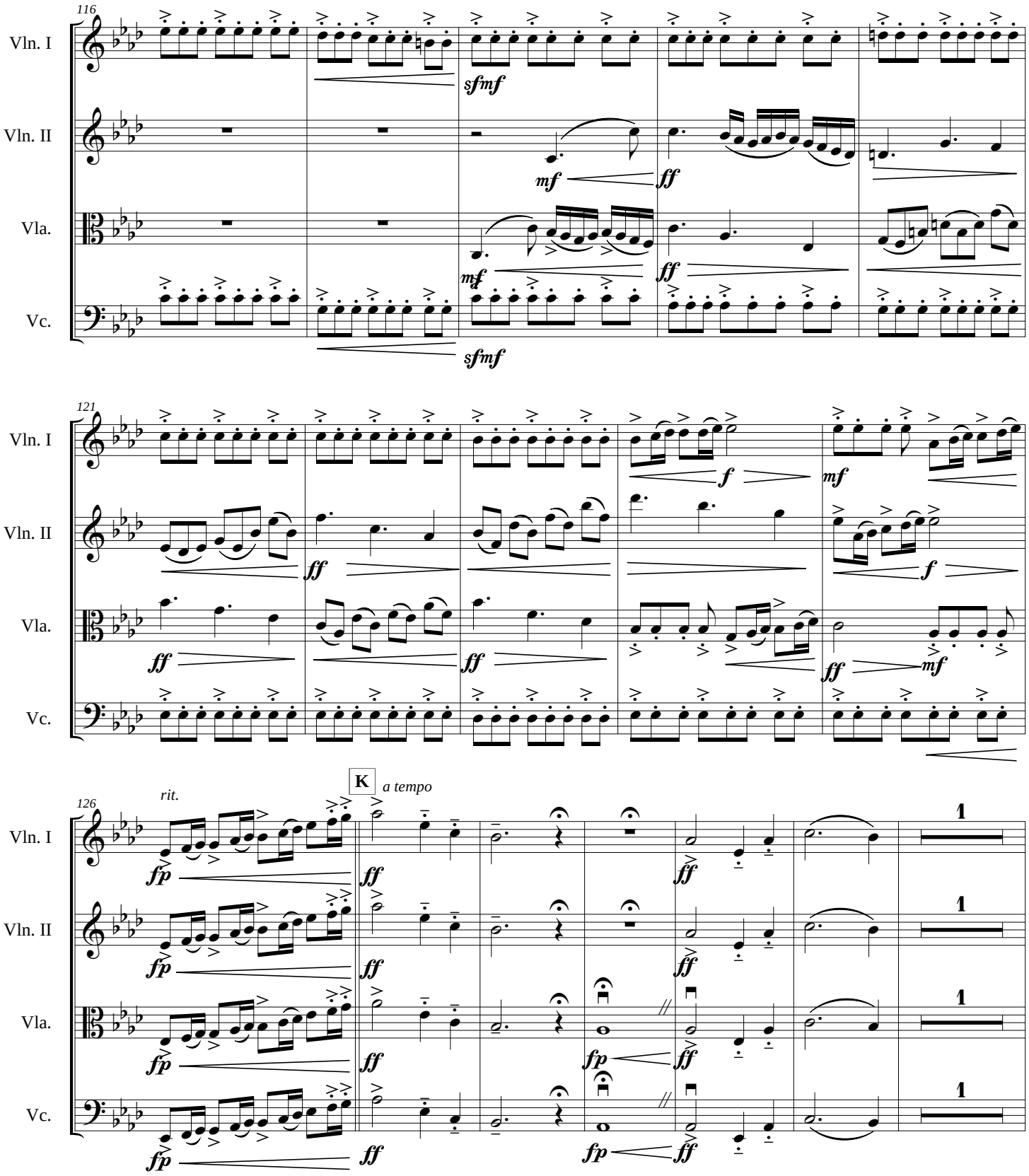
Vc.
mf
f
mp
97
ff
I
p
1
107
J
fp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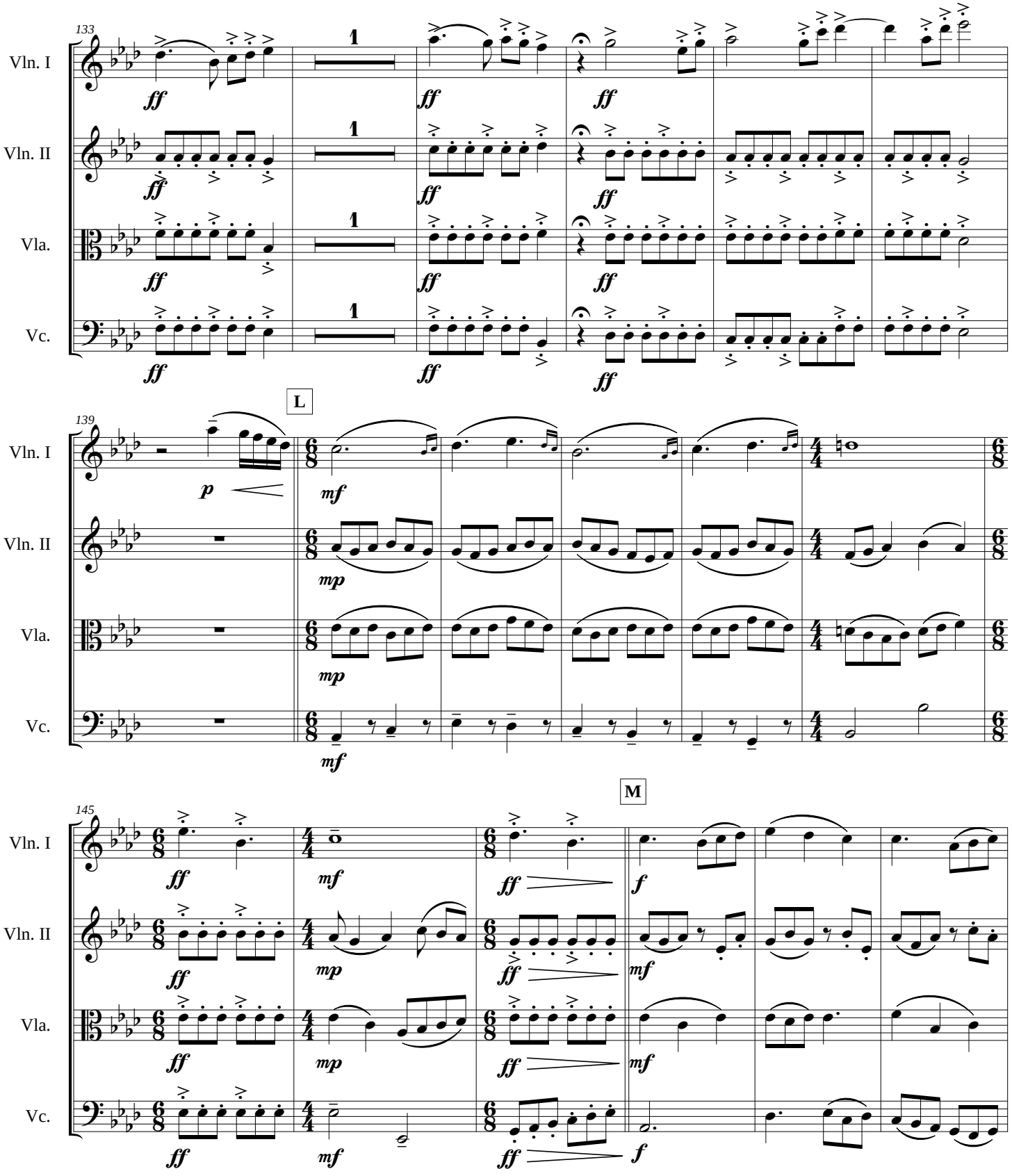
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
sfmf
mf
ff
121
f
mf
126
rit.
K
a tempo
fp
1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Vln. II
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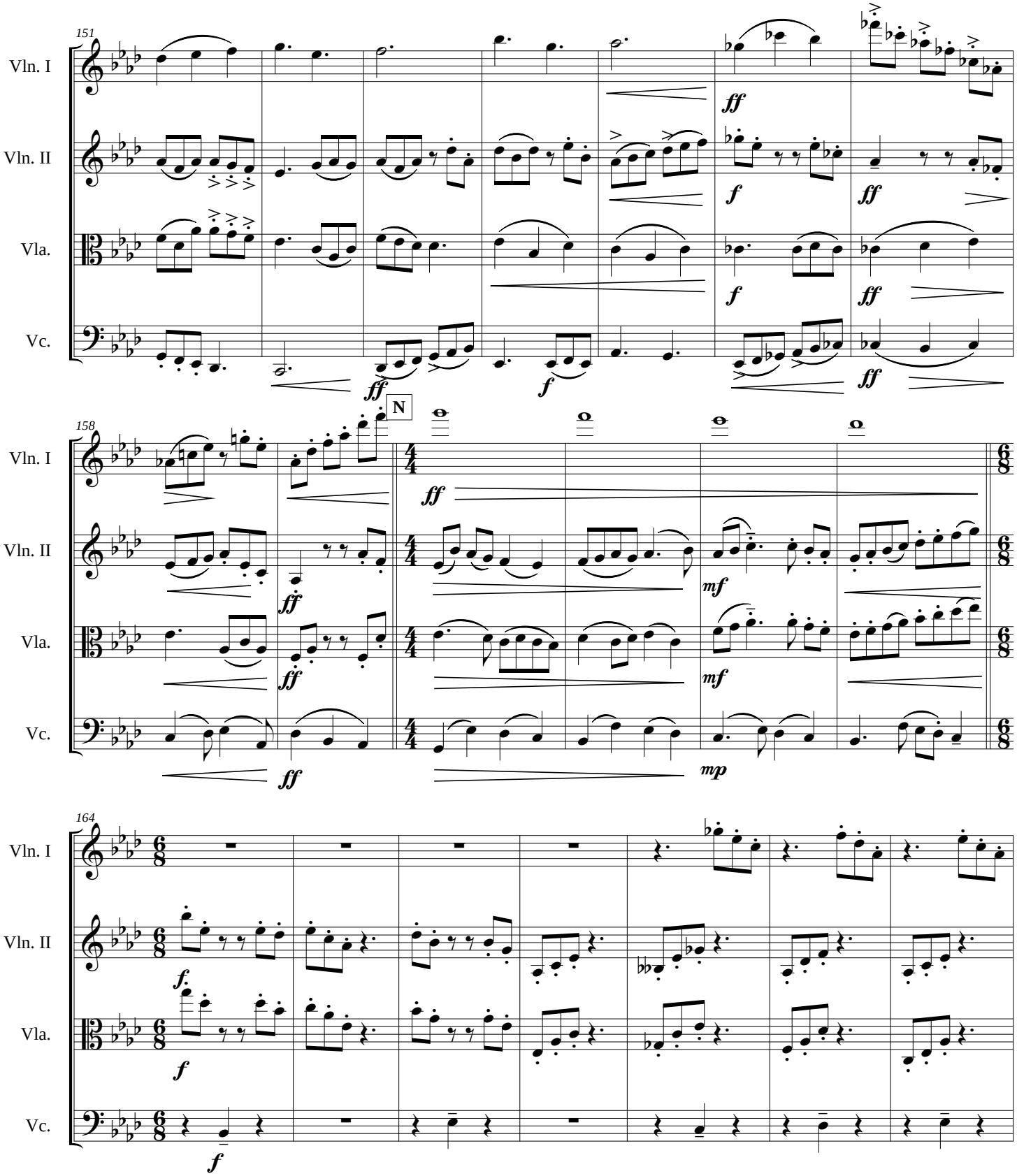
Vc.
ff
1
L
139
p
mf
mp
M
145
f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Vla.
Vc.
ff
f
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N
mf
mp
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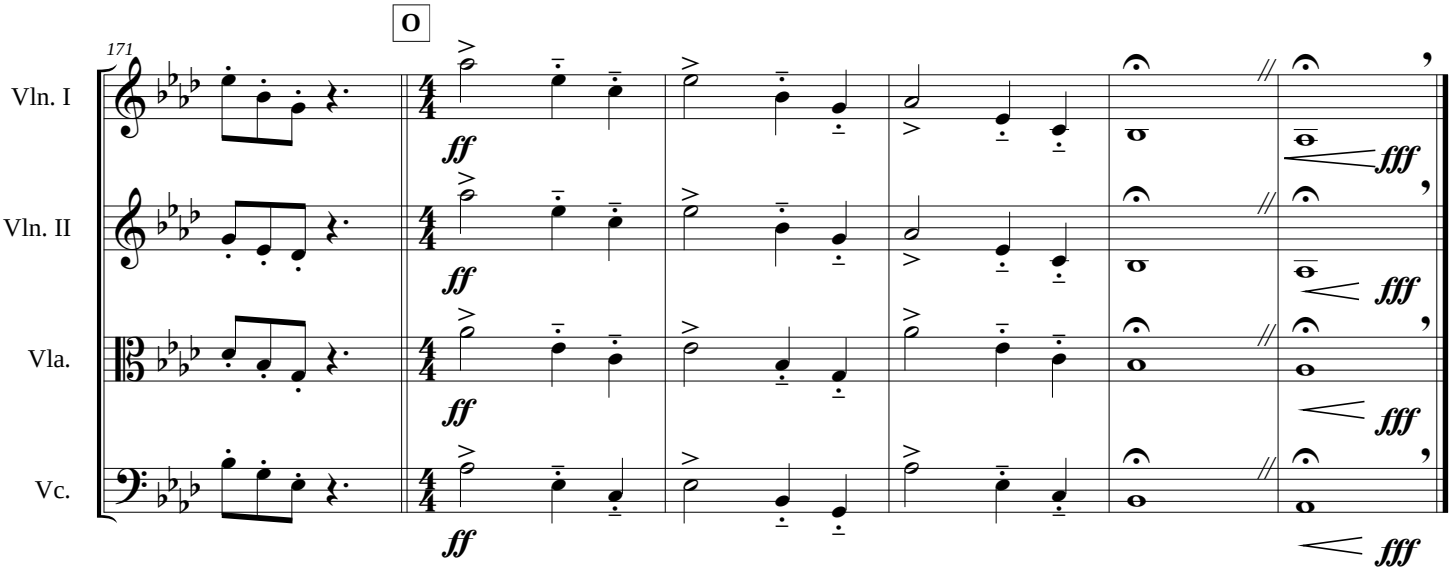
O
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Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
ff
fff