Cap Rock Wind

for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra (1,1,1,alto sax,1; 1,1,1; el gt, vib, pno; strings)
text from *House of Earth* by Woody Guthrie (1947)

by Kyle Gann
(2015-16)

Cap Rock Wind (2015-16)

Scored for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra: flute, oboe, clarinet in Bb, alto saxophone, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, piano, vibraphone, electric guitar (one of each), and strings; duration 18 minutes.

Co-commissioned by Contemporaneous and The Adele and John Gray Endowment Fund

Program notes:

In 1947, folk singer Woody Guthrie wrote a novel titled *House of Earth*. It was a story of living in the Texas panhandle region during the Depression and the Dust Bowl. Guthrie was clearly inspired by John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, but why he failed to publish *House of Earth* remains something of a mystery. He apparently sent it to Hollywood studios in hopes of having it made into a film, but since the first half of the novel centers around a startlingly erotic sex scene and the second half graphically describes a birth nine months later, the chances of it being turned into a film in the 1950s, or even afterward, seem remote to say the least. In any case, this beautiful novel was finally published in 2013 by Infinitum Nihil, the publishing company founded by actor Johnny Depp.

In fall of 2015, the ensemble Contemporaneous asked me to write them a piece. I wanted to take advantage of their expert conductor, David Bloom, to employ the kind of intricate ensemble polyrhythms that I rarely get to indulge in with a chamber orchestra; I wanted to also benefit from their dynamic mezzo-soprano Lucy Dhegrae. I pored through various texts, many of them my usual suspects, but nothing seemed suitable until I found *House of Earth*, with its rambling descriptions of weather whose riotous lists of objects and verbs accumulate into a Gertrude Stein-like ecstasy. So I finally settled on an unusual form, two movements played without pause, one instrumental and rhythmically fluid, the other vocal and more operatic. As I composed, each movement borrowed more and more from the other, tying them more closely together. (Of course I considered quoting tunes of Woody's songs, but they would have pushed the music in a very different direction - one already well explored by American composers of the 1930s - and added copyright issues.)

The piece is about wind, and, in the first half, is a depiction of high winds and associated weather, climaxing in a cathartic rainstorm. The novel is about a couple, Tike and Ella May, living in the Cap Rock region of the Texas panhandle and trying desperately to protect their fragile, rented frame house from the violent vicissitudes of the weather during the Dust Bowl. Tike has received a pamphlet from the government explaining that adobe houses stand up better under the southwestern wind and rain and sleet and ice than wooden houses do - thus his dream, a House of Earth. I grew up in Texas, but had never before made the state a subject of one of my compositions. Out of many such passages, I copied out 1500 words or so that I found amazingly musical in their repetition and nuance, whittled those down to about 500, and sought and received the kind permission of Woody Guthrie Publications to use them. The first 3/5 of the text describes the weather

in the Texas panhandle; the remainder charts the thoughts of the woman in the novel as her baby is coming into the world.

Text:

[p. 77] The noise of things moving in the wind came to their ears like the flapping of wings. Dry stalks of corn, higuera, tumbleweeds, and sticker bushes rattled as they bounced against the boards, as they blew loose from their places and leaped, jumped, sailed, and whistled past the ends of the shed. The world moved around about them. All of the face of nature crept, crawled, wiggled, shook, watched its chance, and then howled away over the grass roots...
In their hearts this was a sorrowful season, an old and a dry season, a season of good-bye and parting, a season when all of the things of the plains, the twigs, grasses, hays, flowers, stalks, and the shucks, the things grown of the earth, take leave without further crying, and blow away somewhere to be whipped apart, to be parted and parted again.

[p. 91] No place on the earth is closer to the sun than these upper flat plains. No spot on the globe is closer to the wind than here on these north panhandle plains. Nowhere could the wind blow the rain any colder than here, nor any harder could the rain ever hope to fall, nor any longer could it stand. None of the world's winds blow dustier nor drier, nor harder day in and day out. Nowhere on the planet do the winds and the sun suck the grass, the leaves, the cattle, sheep, hogs, chickens, dogs, cats, people any drier. Nowhere could the winter blow any icier, the blizzards howl any lonesomer, nor the smoke from ranch house chimneys get whipped out any quicker, nowhere could the icicles hang down any longer, or could the whole world freeze in two minutes any glassier.

[p. 152] Here are the people in this room coming and going. They go and they come in and through, in and through one another. And the people of the farms and the ranches around, they go and they come in and through, in and through one another. Like the weeds, the stems, the hay, straws and lints, like the powders, chalks, dusts arise and fall and pass in and through, in and through one another in the winds, the sun. And the people are all born from one and they are really all one. And all of the upper north plains are one big body being born and reborn in and through one another, and those also of the lower south plains...
And there are a few people that work to hurt, to hold down, to deny, to take from, to cheat, the rest of us. And these few are the thieves of the body, the germs of the disease of greed, they are few but they are loud and strong....
This is the only one truth of life that takes in all of the other works.
This is the greatest one single truth of life and takes in all other books of knowing.

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Co-commissioned by Contemporaneous and The Adele and John Gray Endowment Fund

Cap Rock Wind

Woody Guthrie
1947

Kyle Gann
2015-16

Quiet but restless, relentless

♩ = 92

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in B♭

Alto Saxophone

mp

Bassoon

mp

Horn in F

Trumpet in C

Trombone

Vibraphone

Piano

mp

Electric Guitar

mp

Mezzo-Soprano Solo

Quiet but restless, relentless

♩ = 92

Violin I

mp

Violin II

divisi

mp

Viola

mp

Violoncello

mp

Contrabass

pizz.

mp

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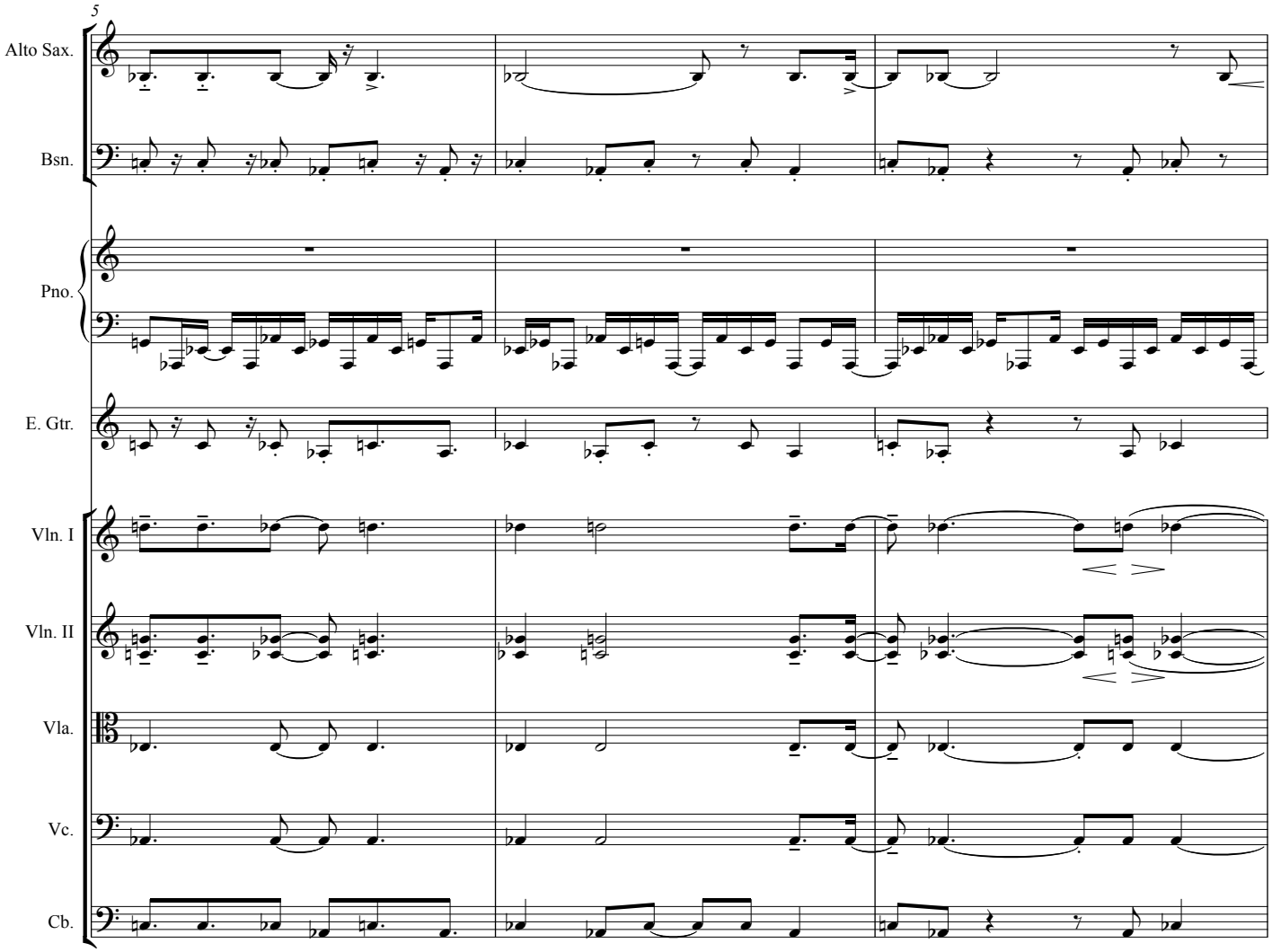
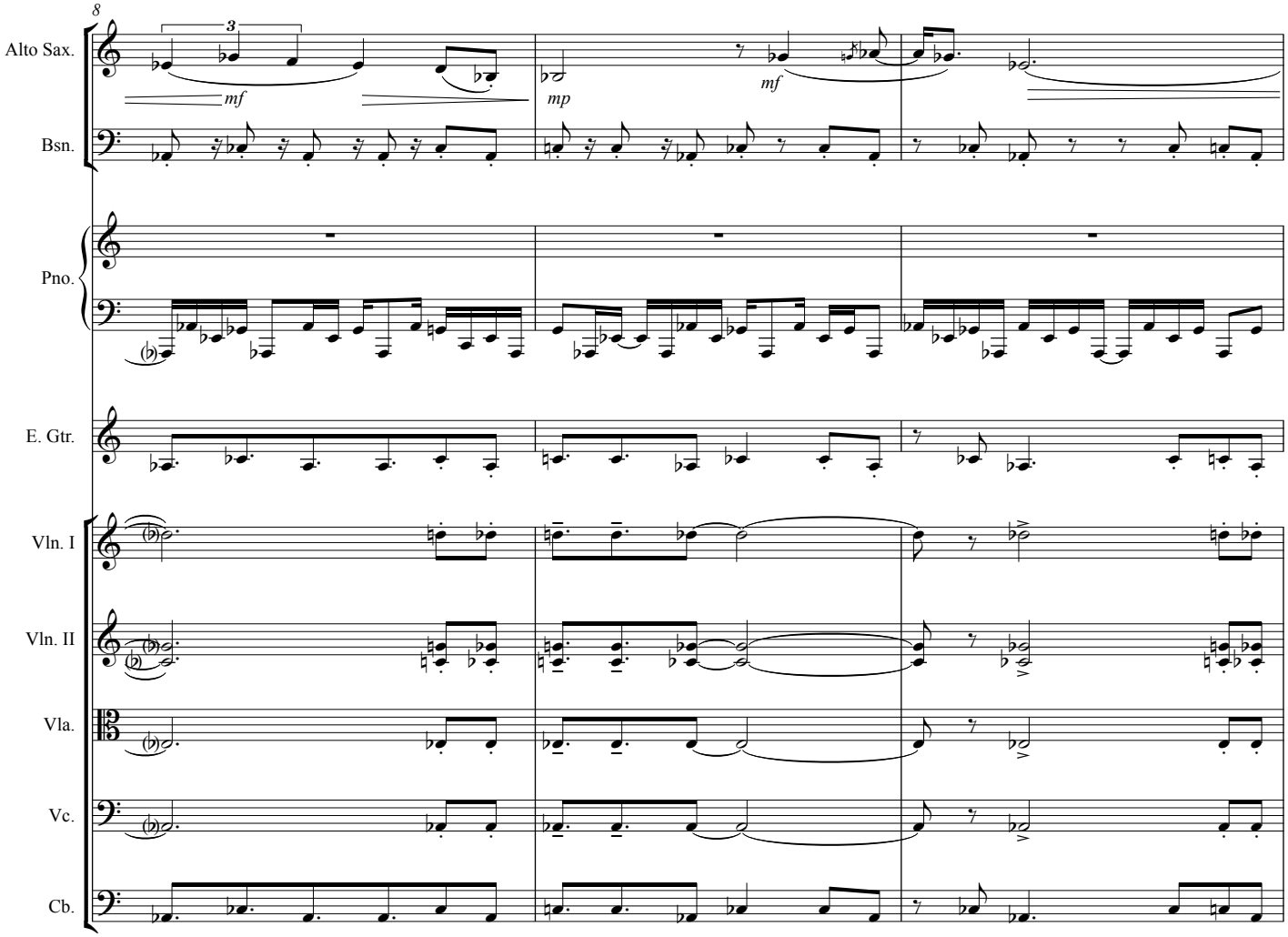
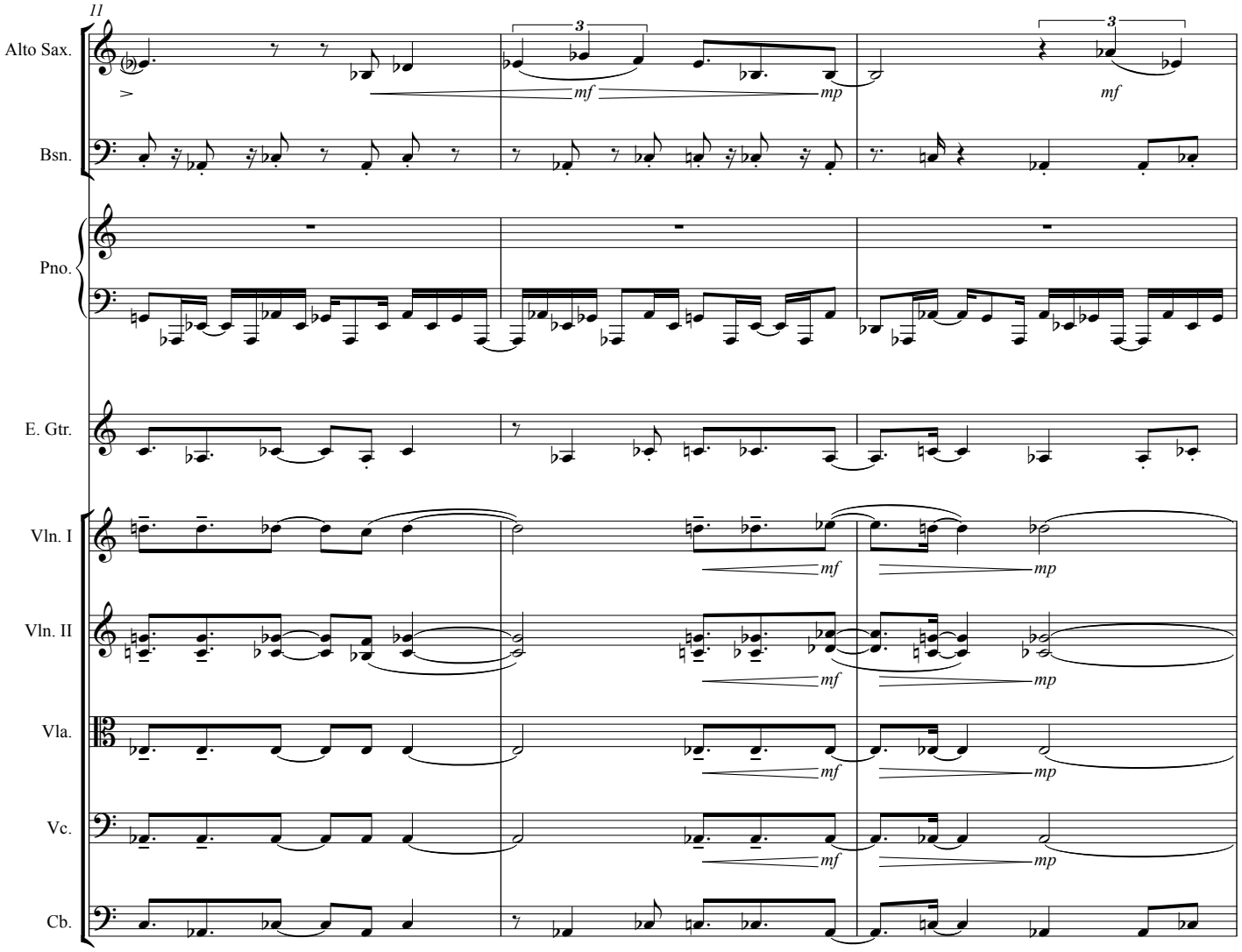
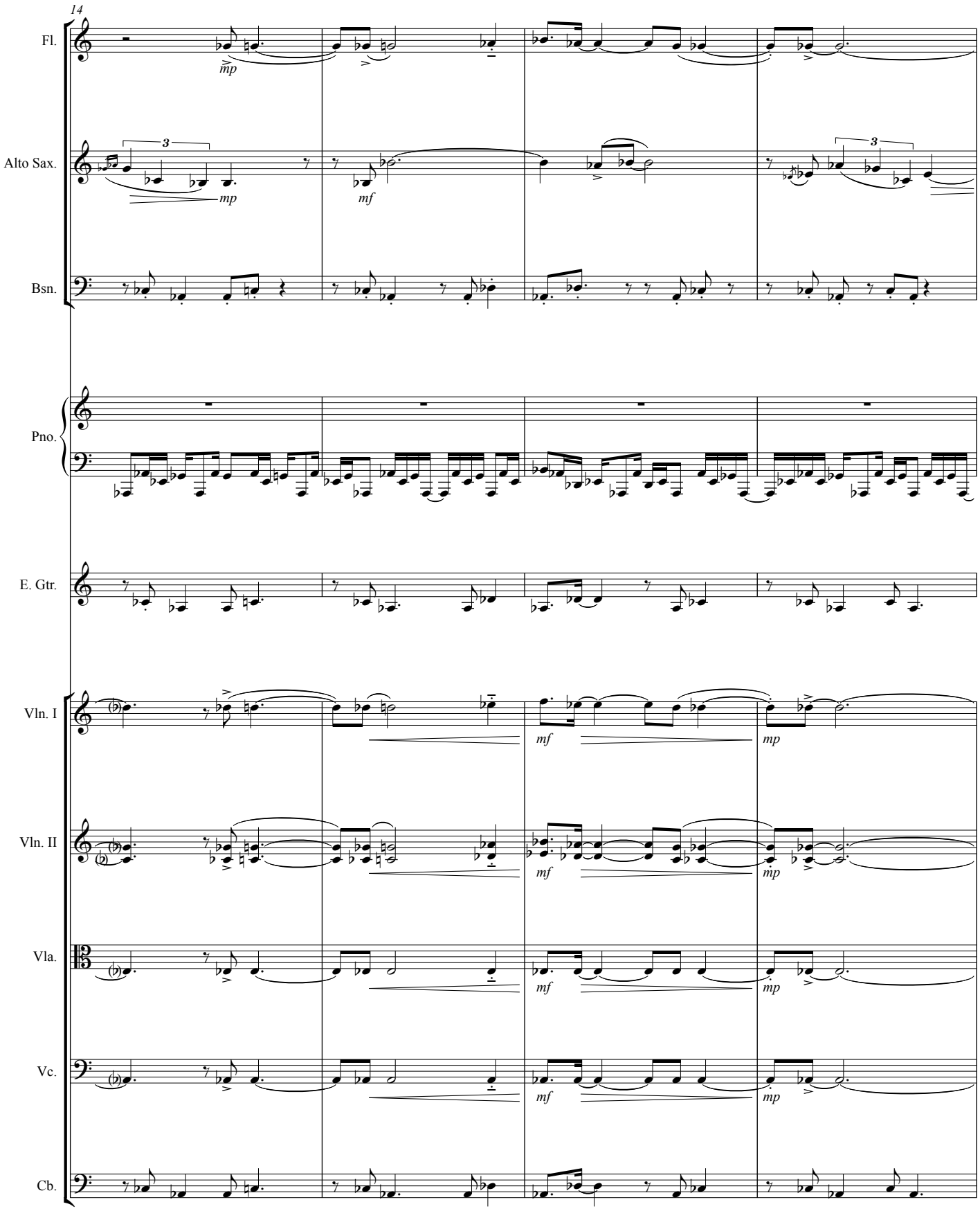
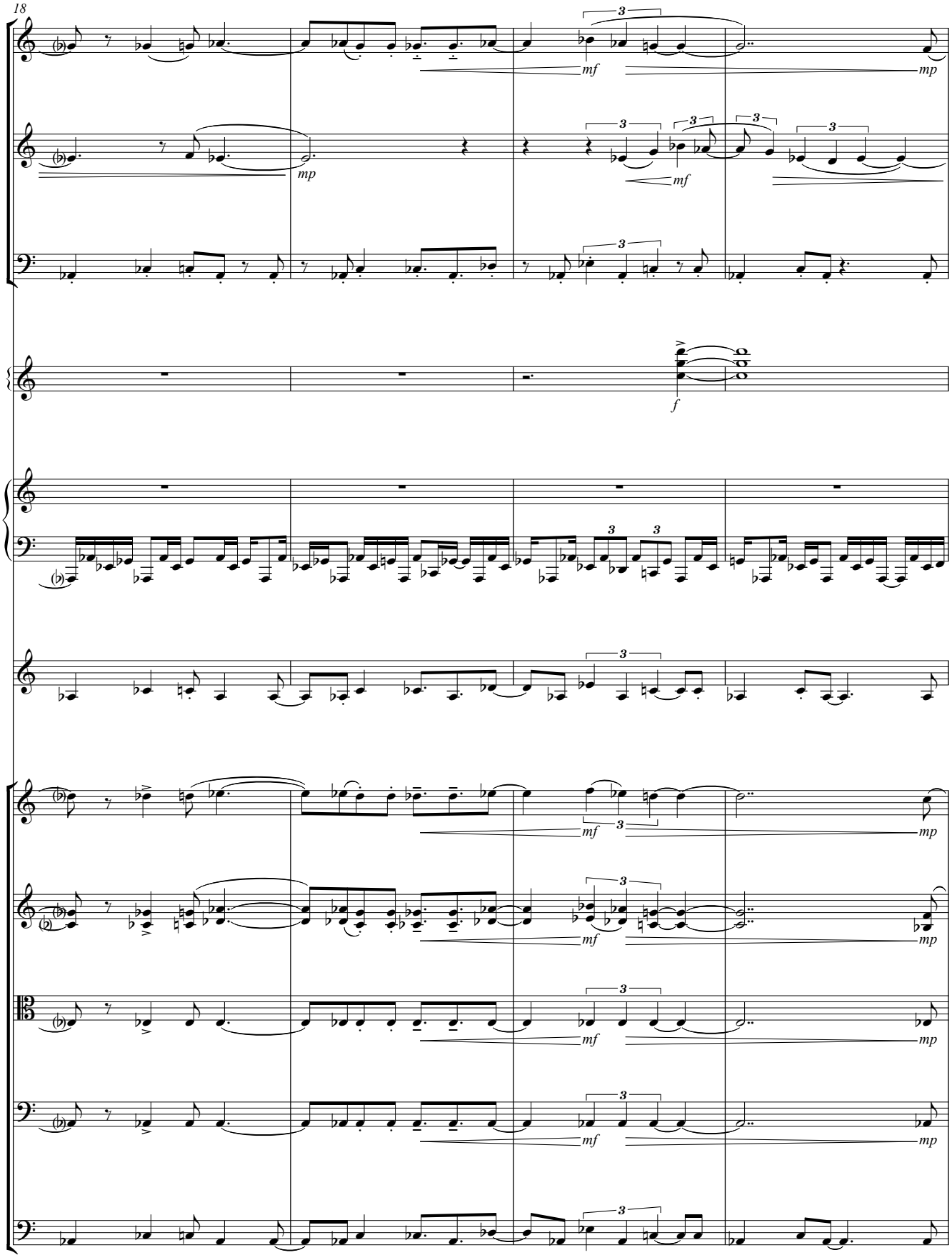
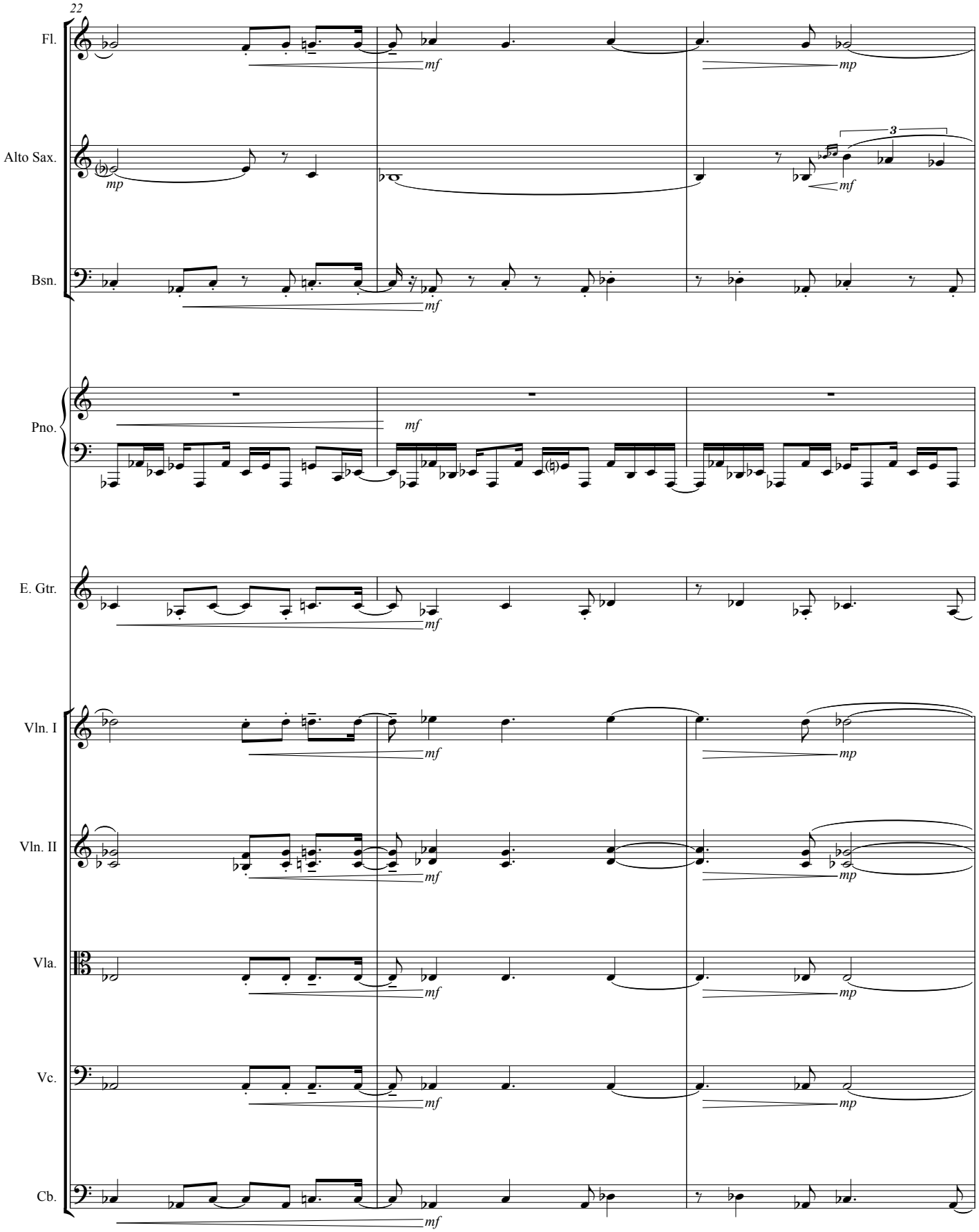

5
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

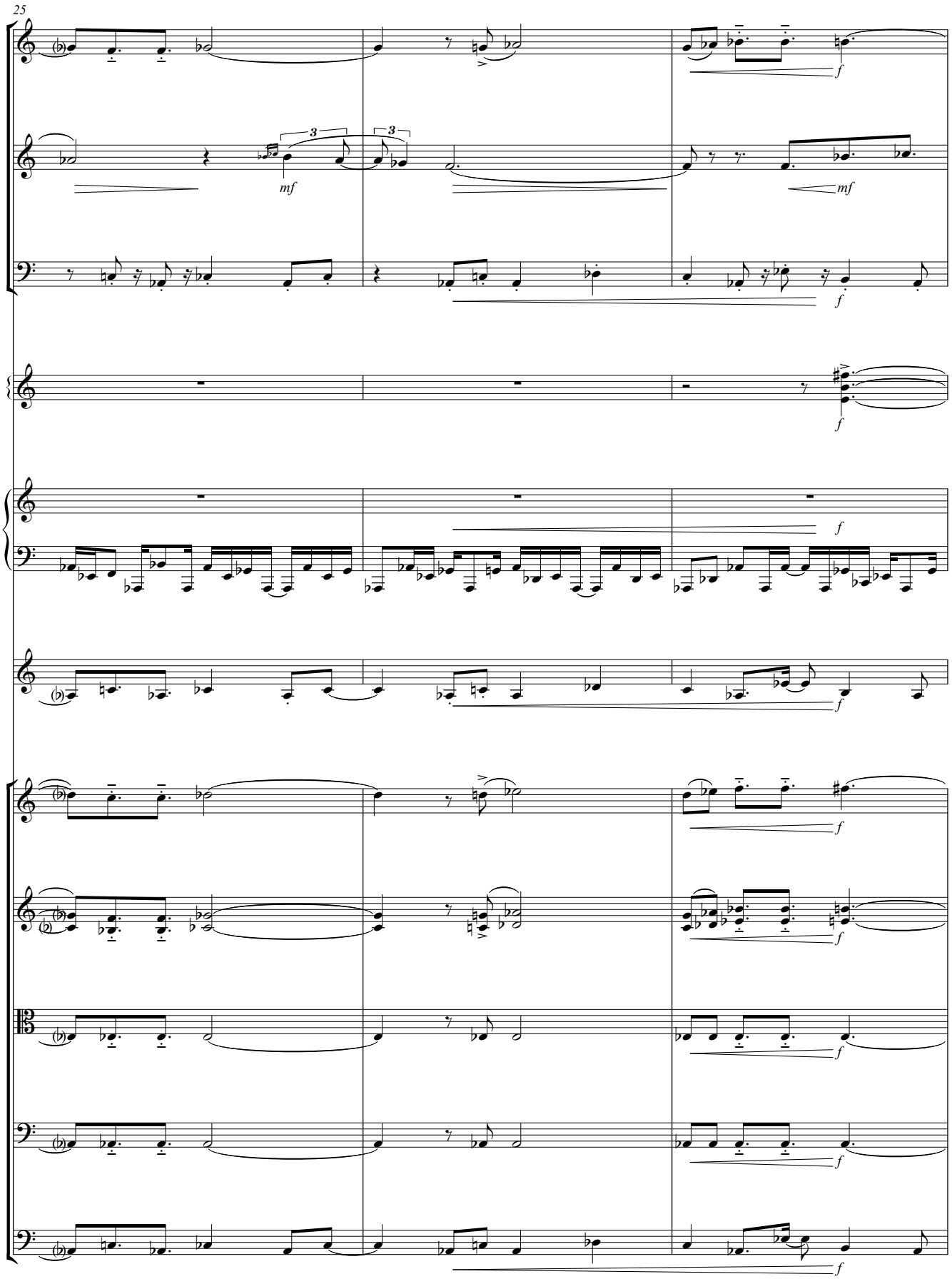

8
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
3
mf
mp
mf

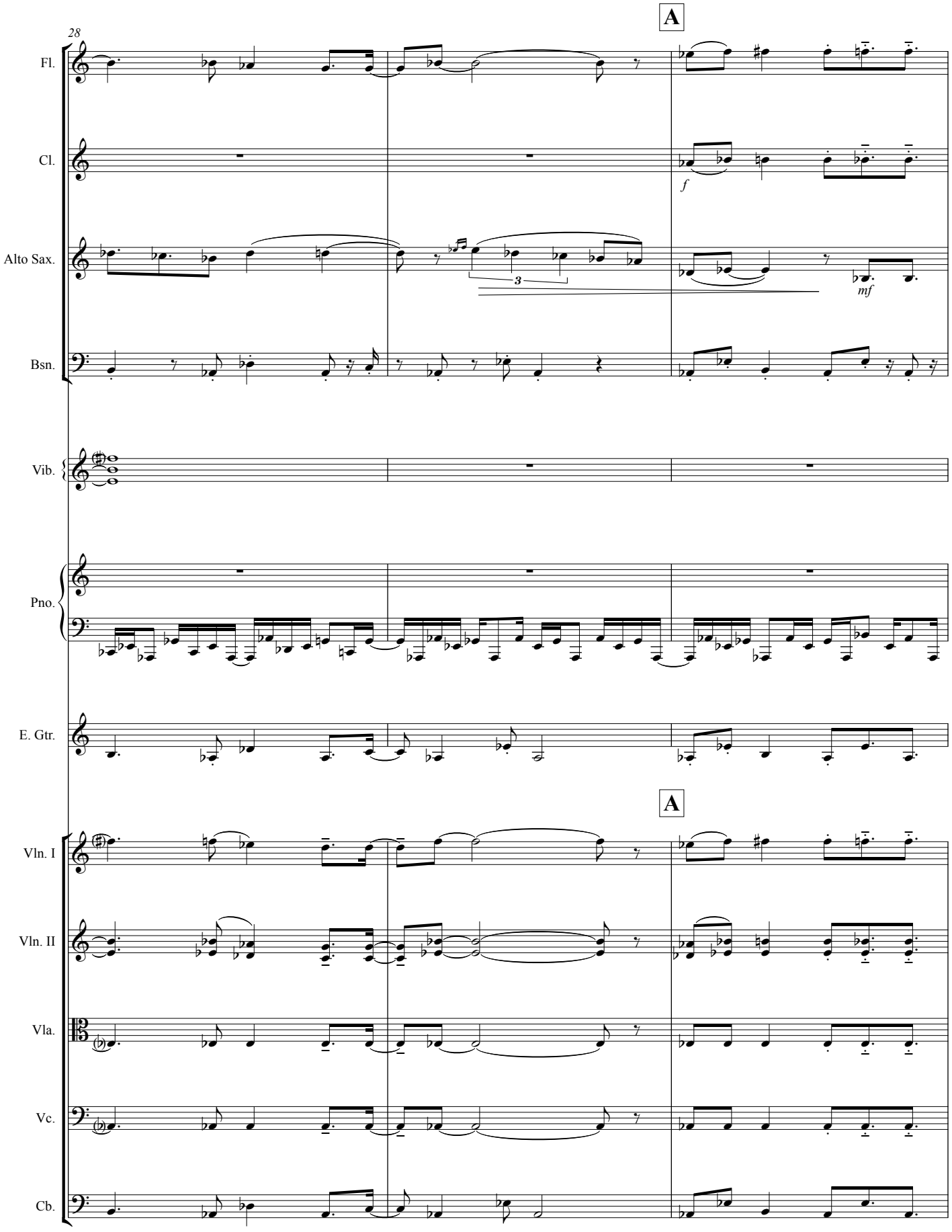

11
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
3
3
mf
mp
mf
mf
mp
mf
mp
mf
mp
mf
mp

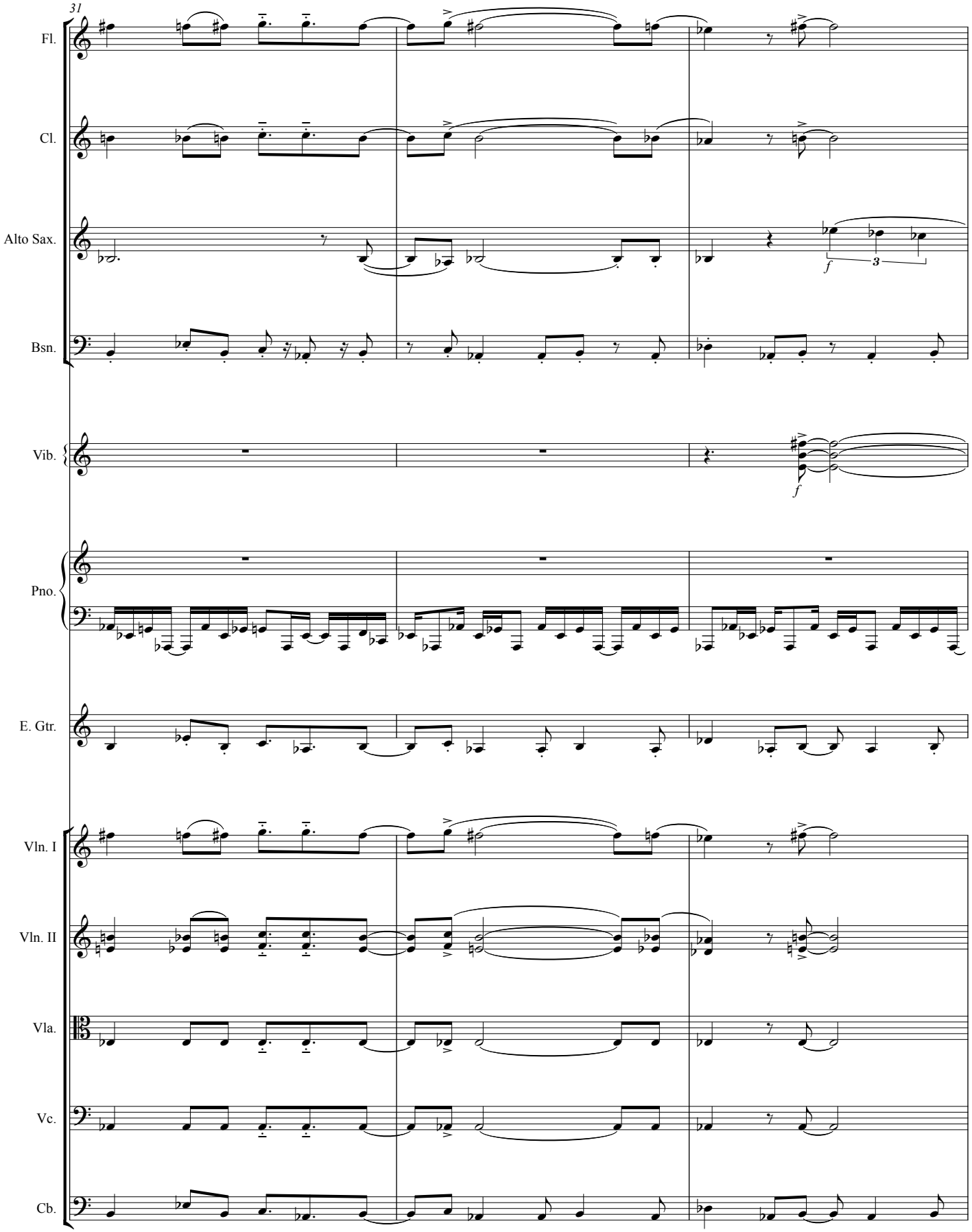

14
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
mf
3

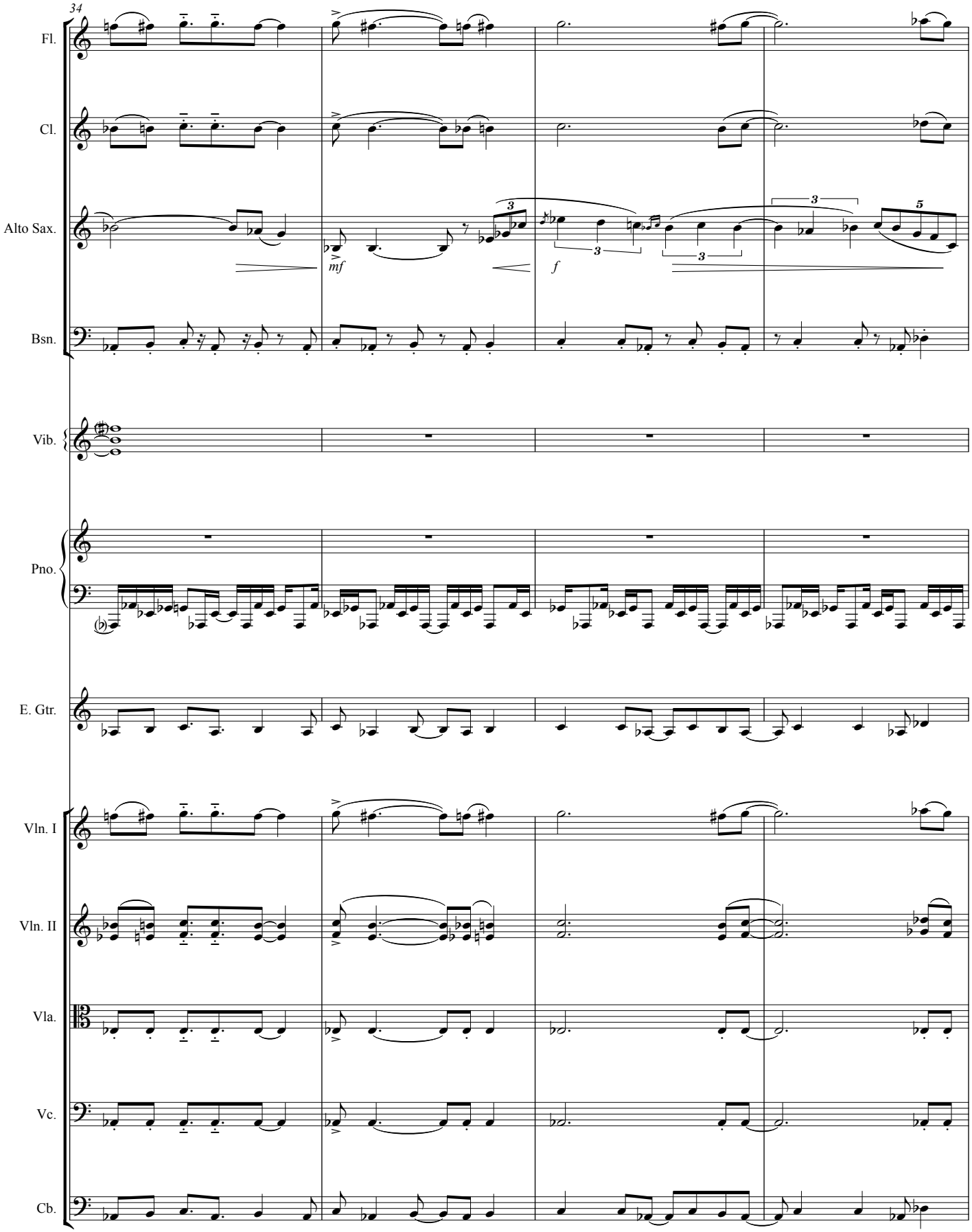

18
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
mp
f
3

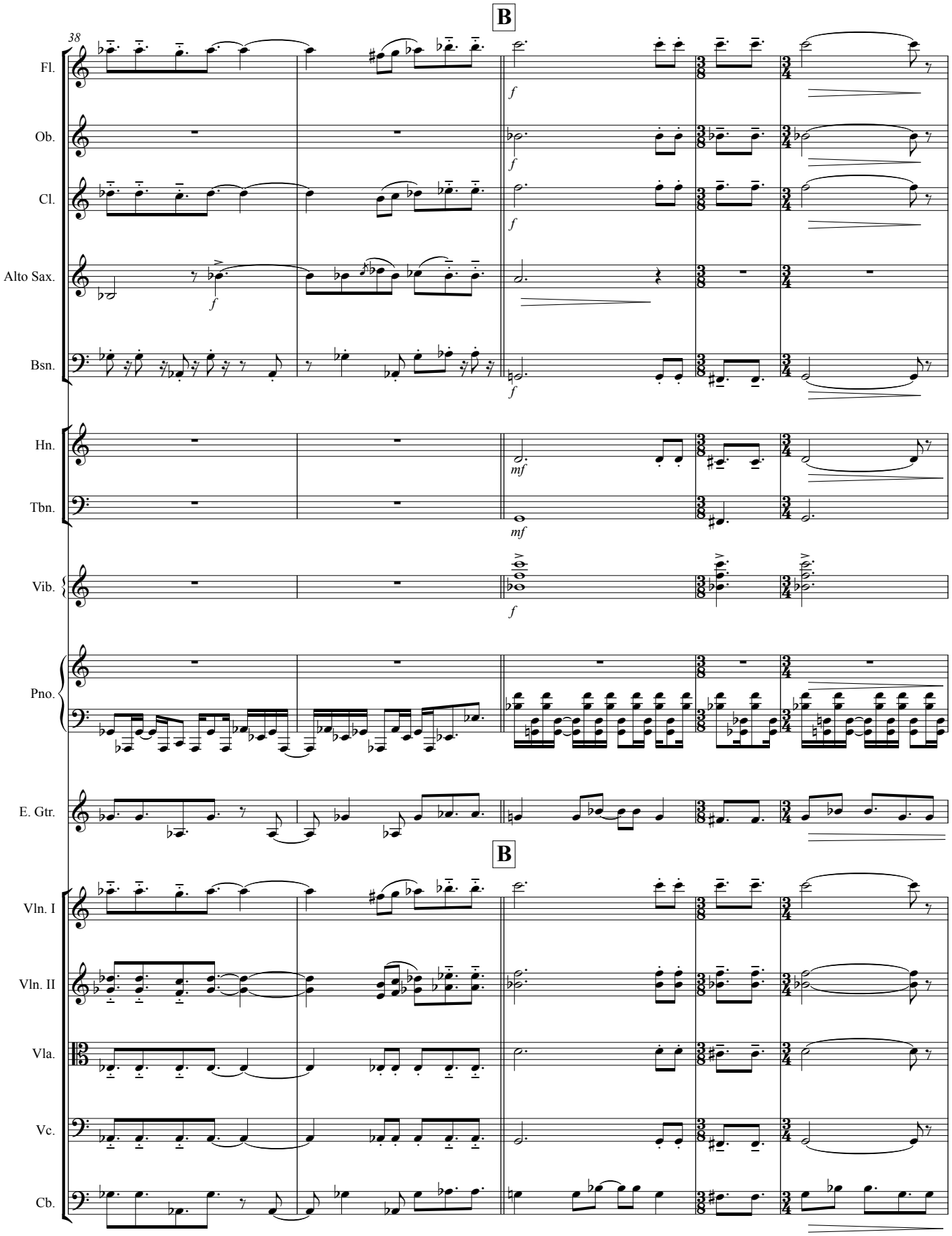

22
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
mp
3

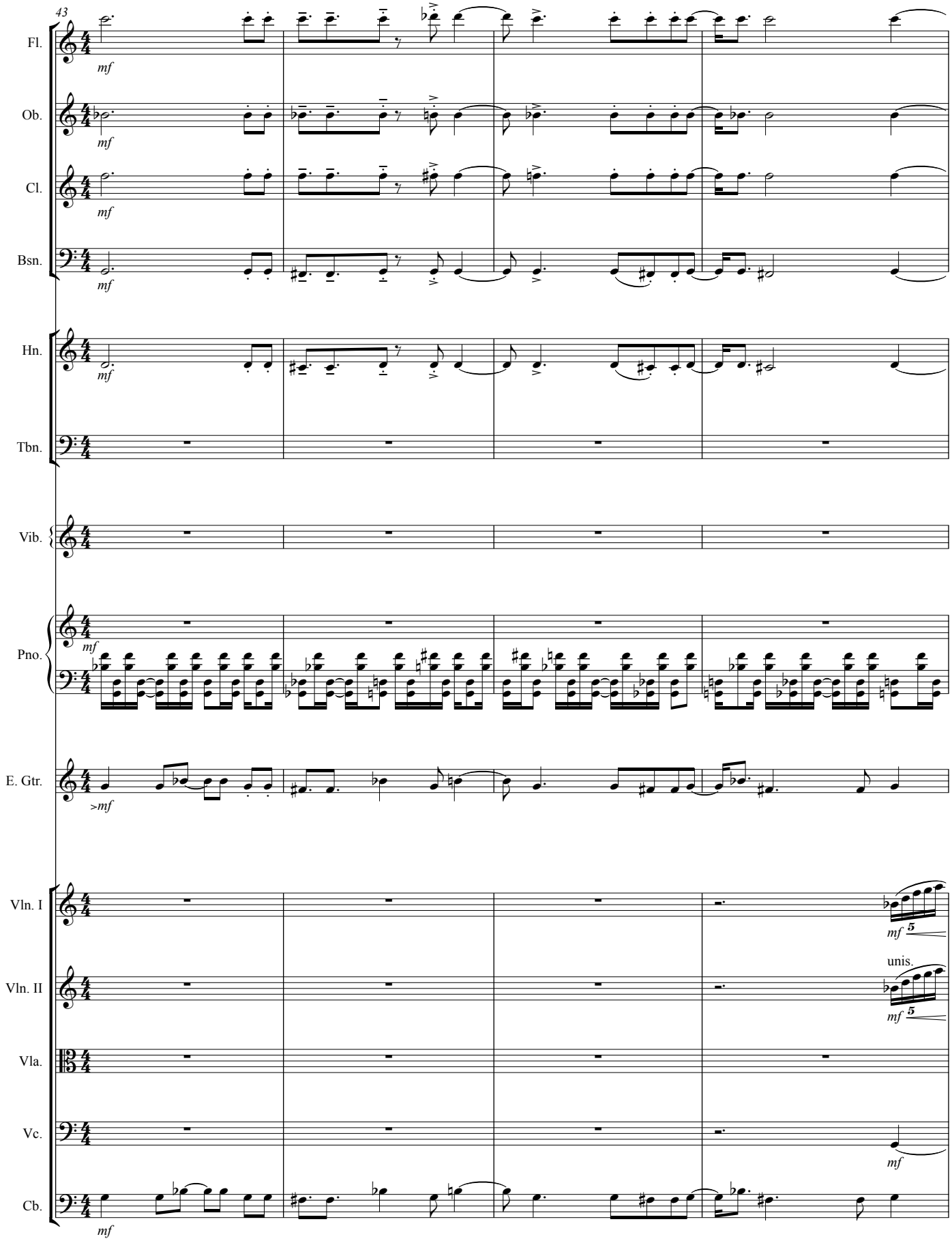

25
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
f
3

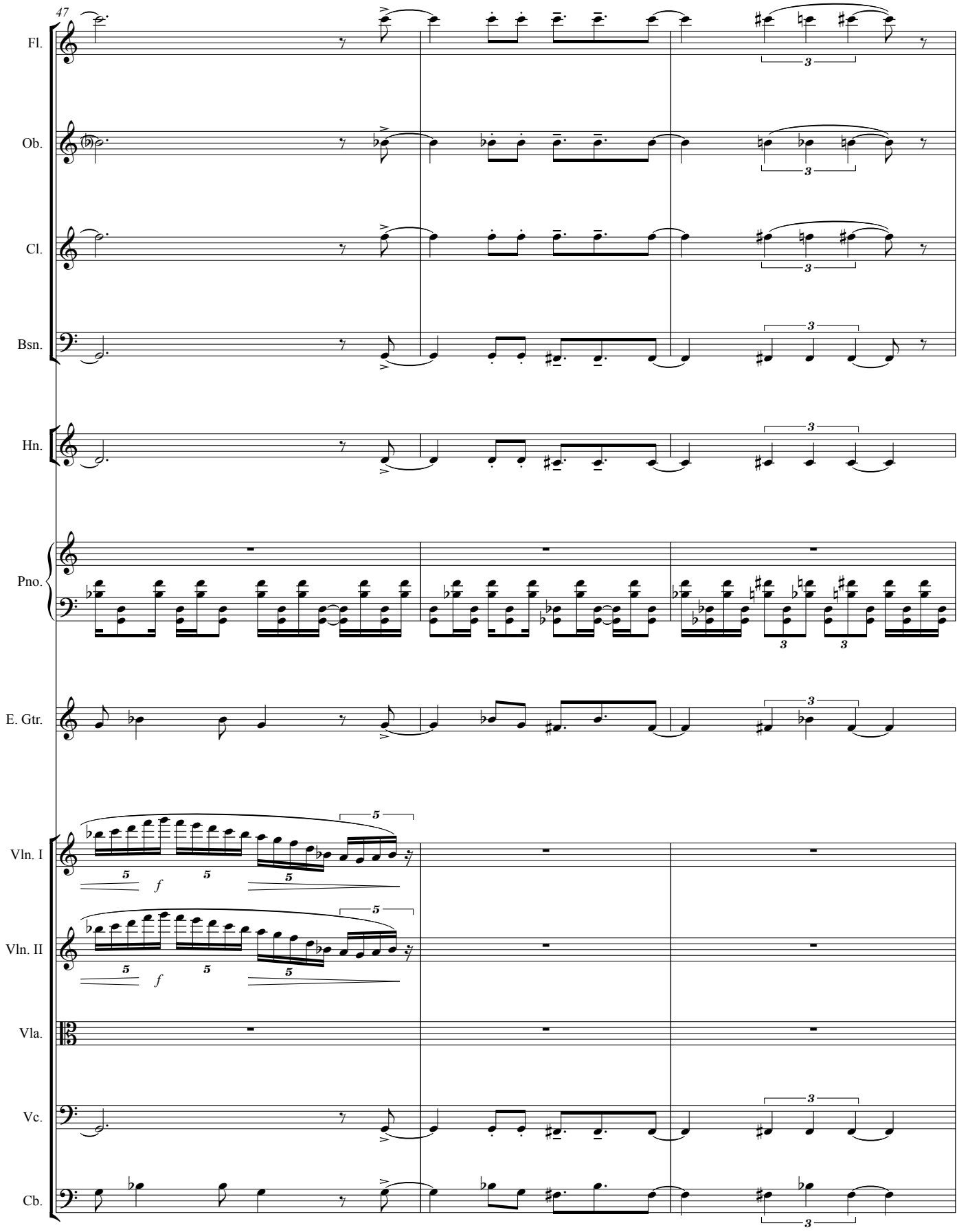

A
28
Fl.
Cl.
f
Alto Sax.
3
mf
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
A
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


31
Fl.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3
f


34
Fl.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
f


B
38
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
B
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
mf


43
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
unis.


47
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Pno.
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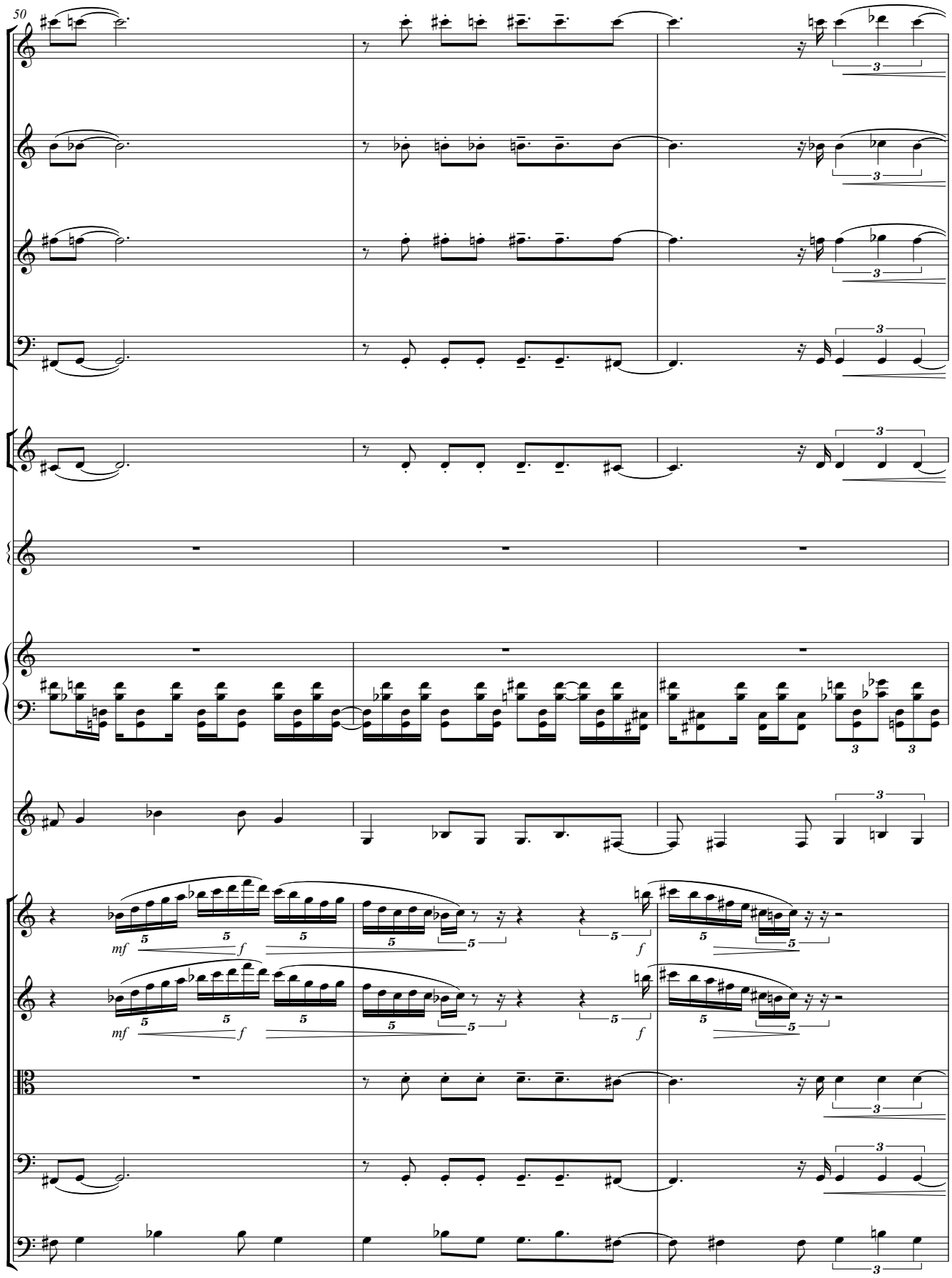
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
f


50
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
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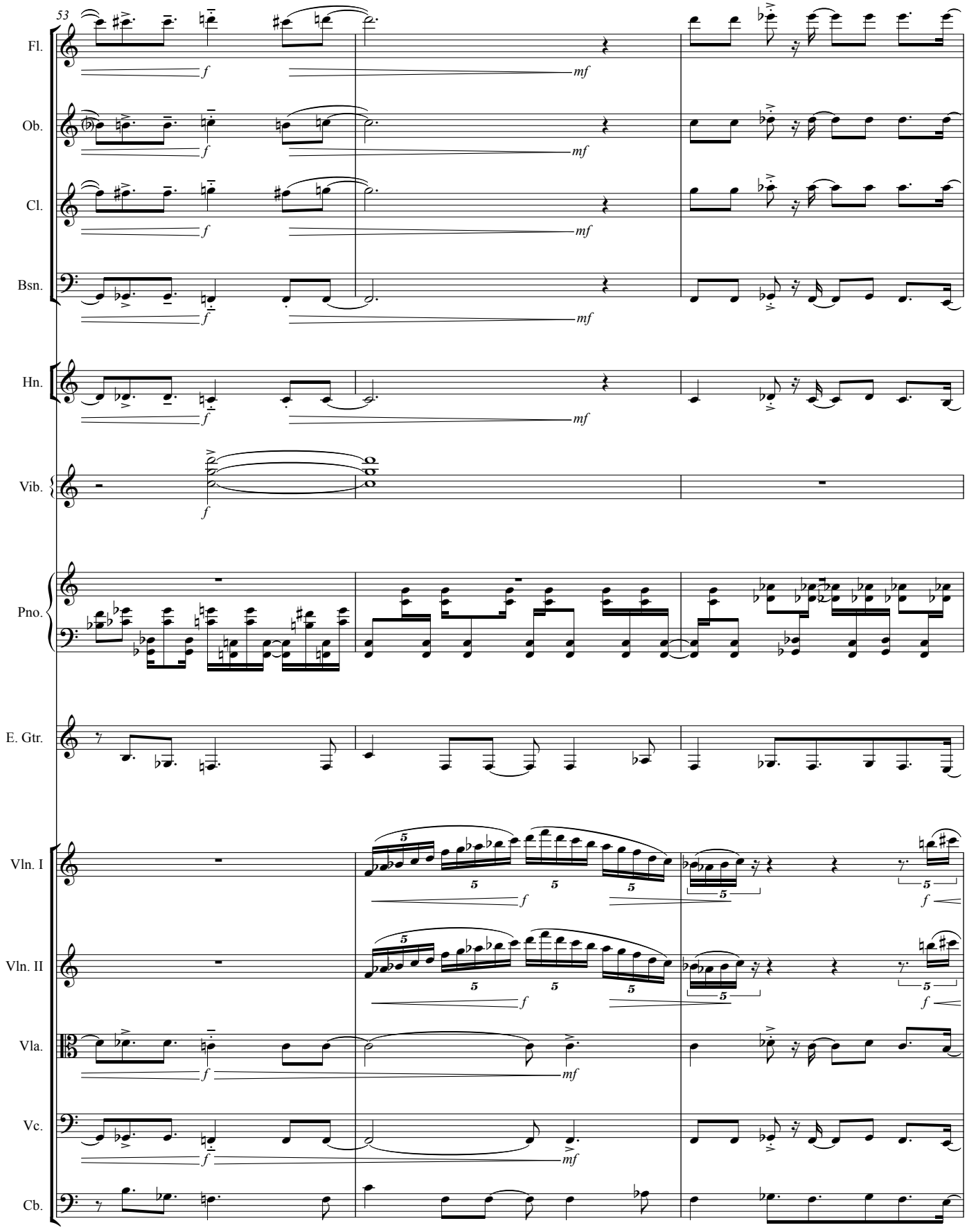
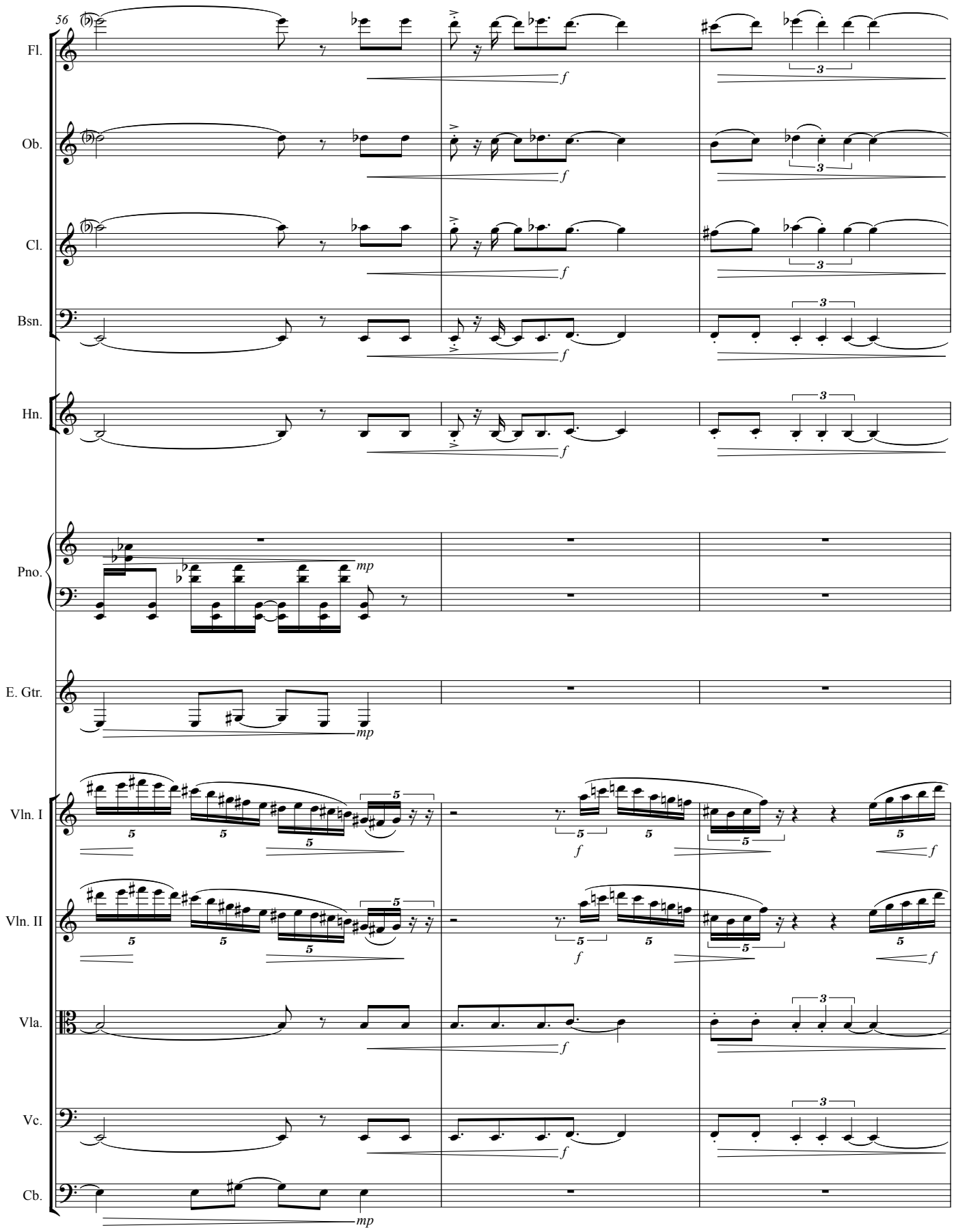
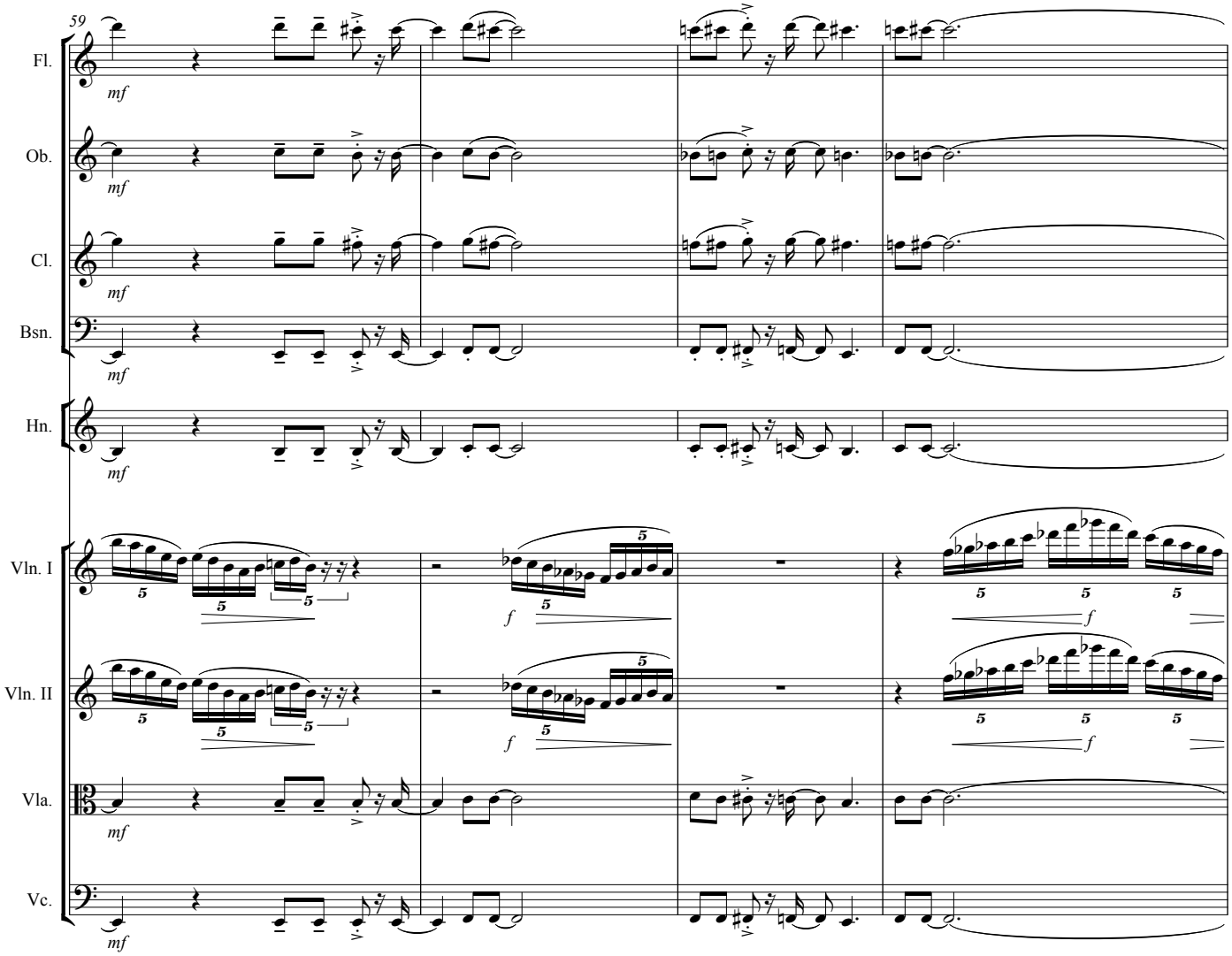
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf
f


53
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
mf


56
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
f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Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
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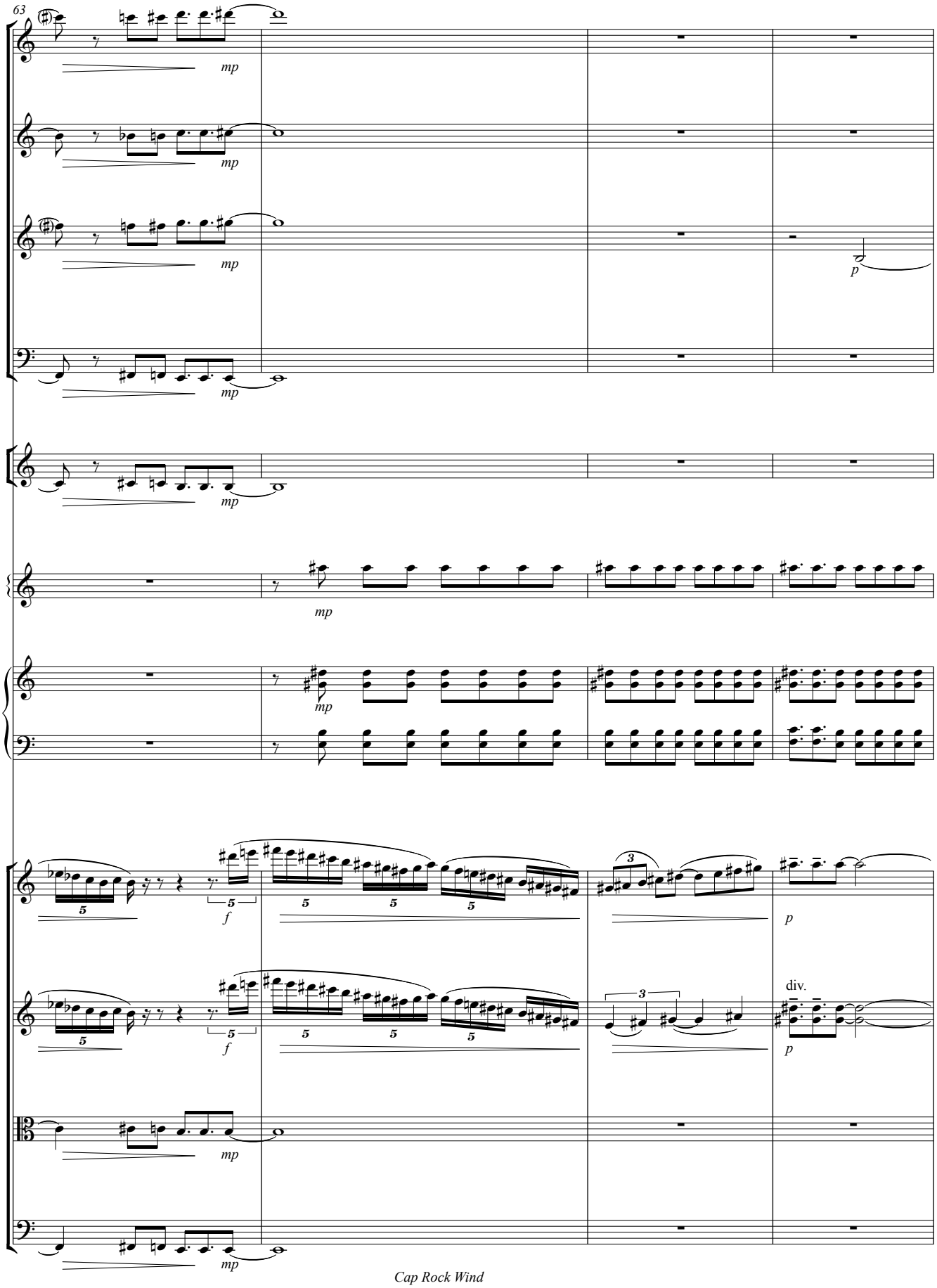
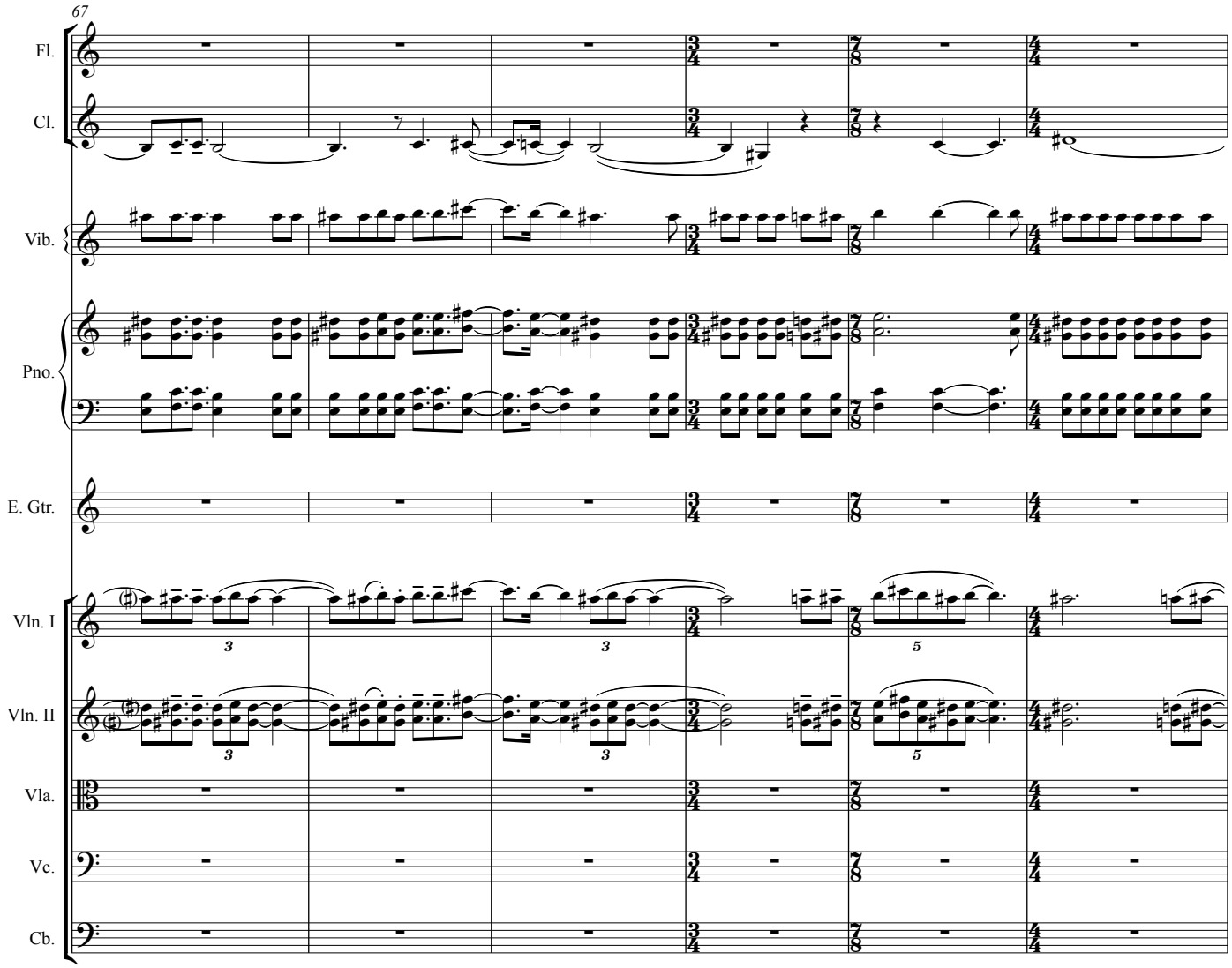
Hn.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mf
f


63
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Vib.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
p
f
div.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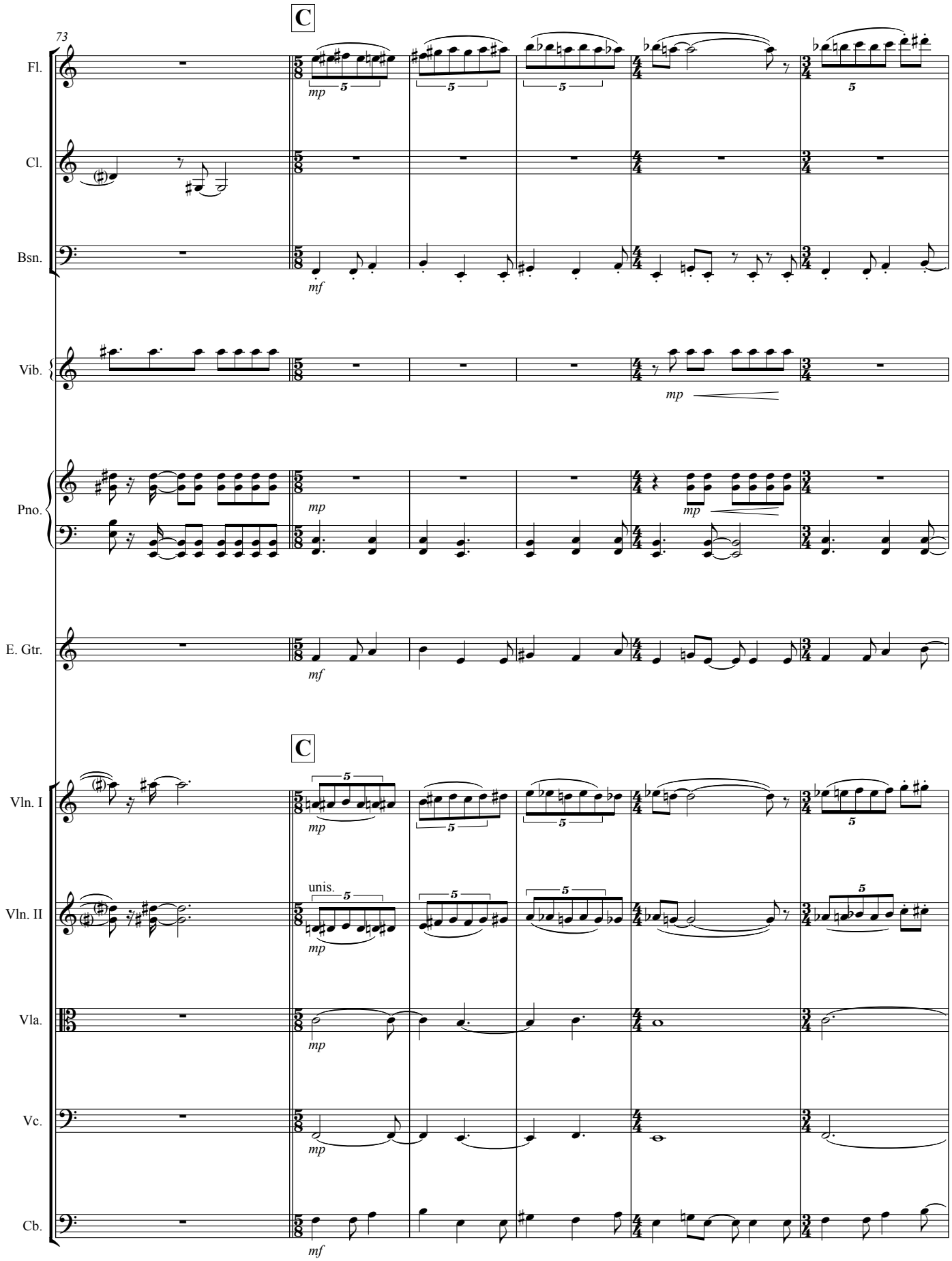
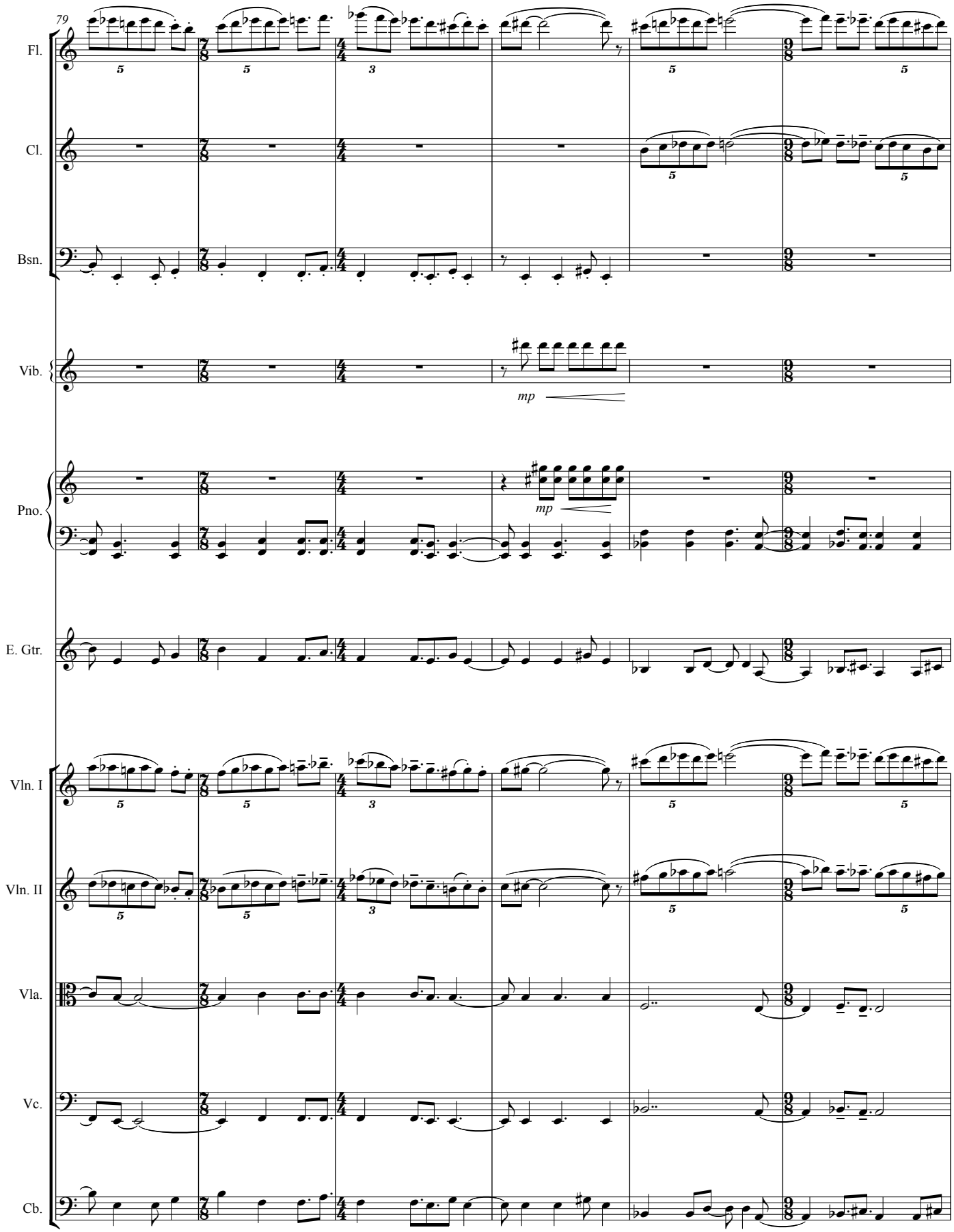
Fl.
Cl.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


C
73
Fl.
Cl.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
C
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
unis.
mp
mf


79
Fl.
Cl.
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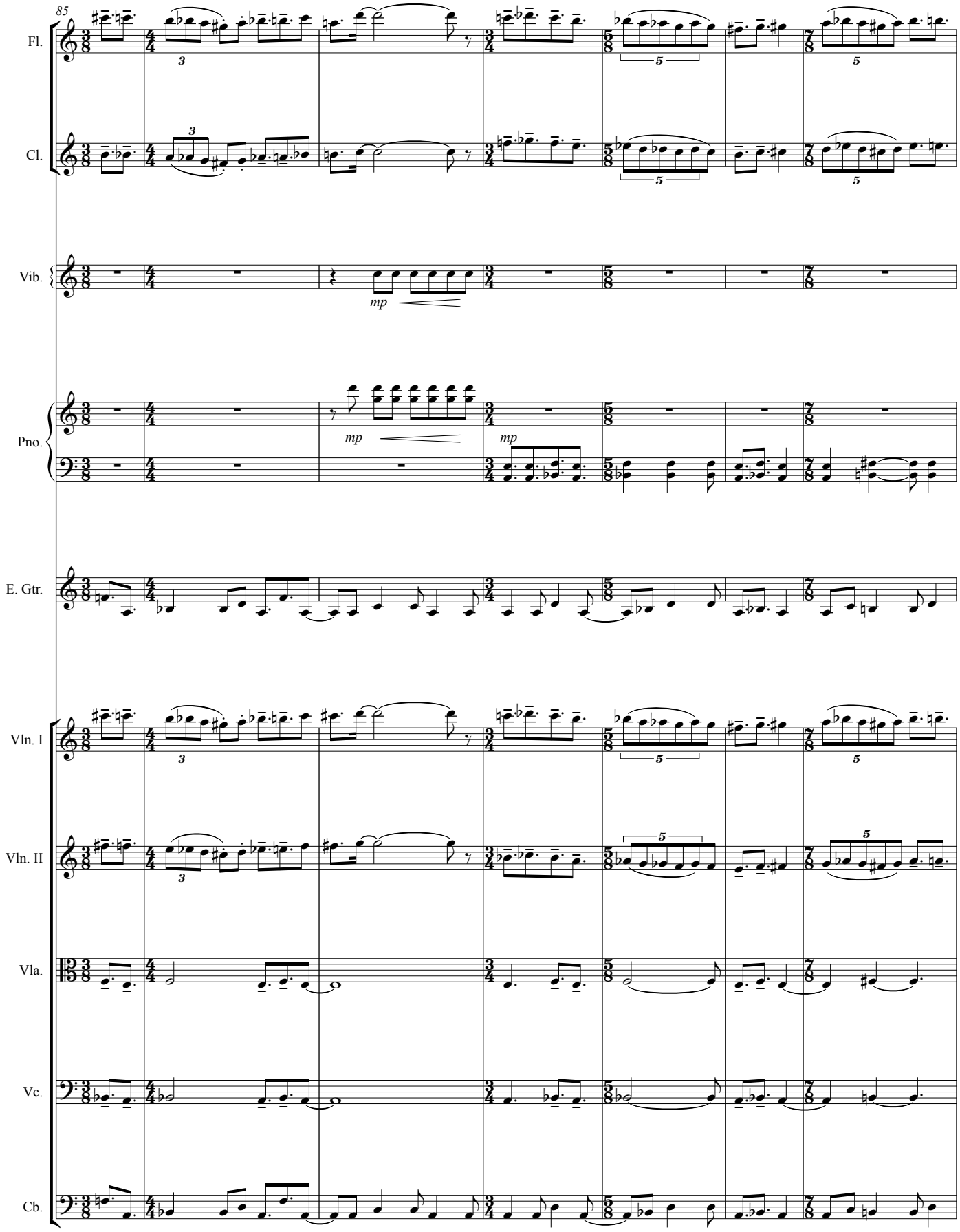
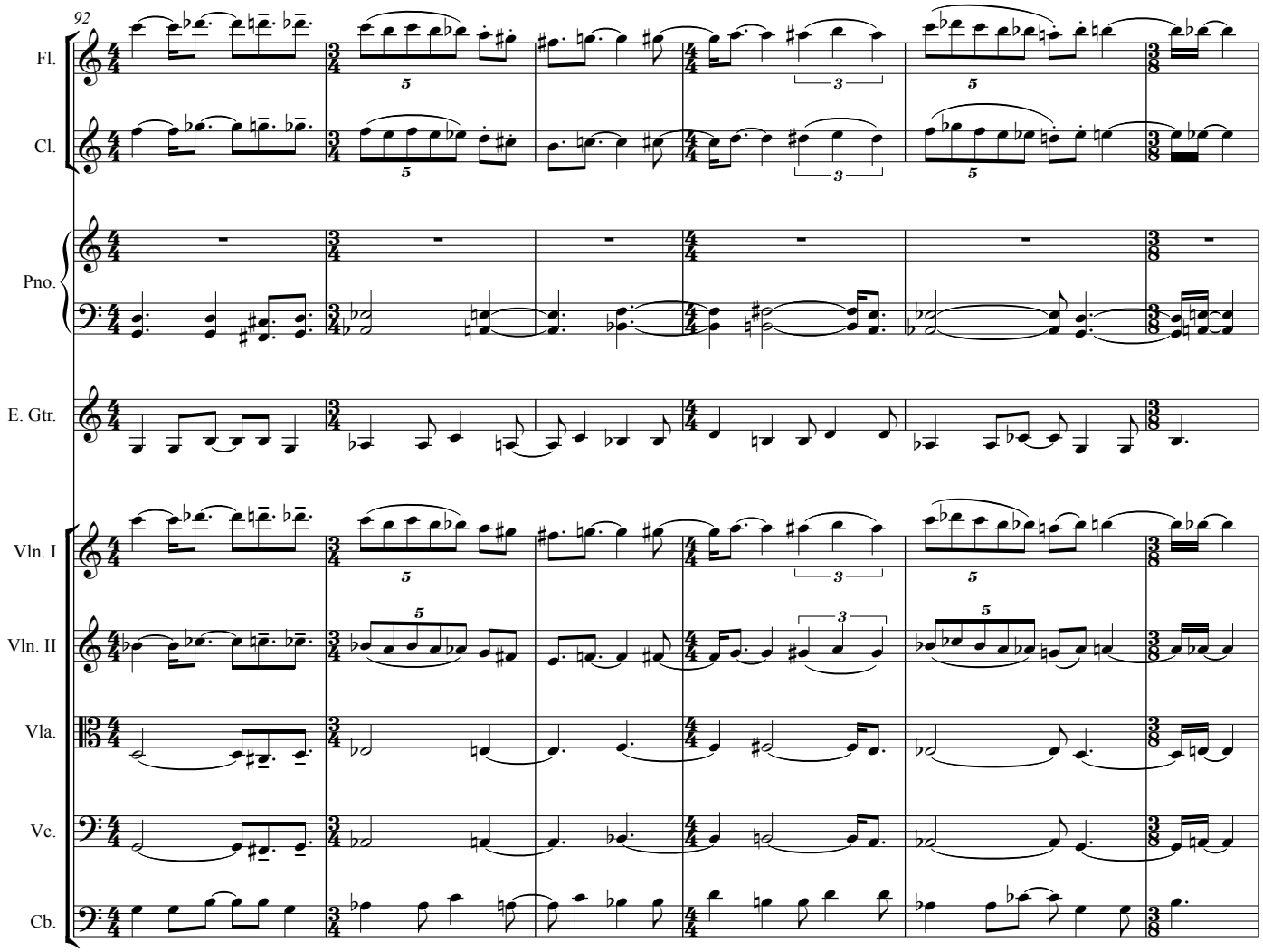
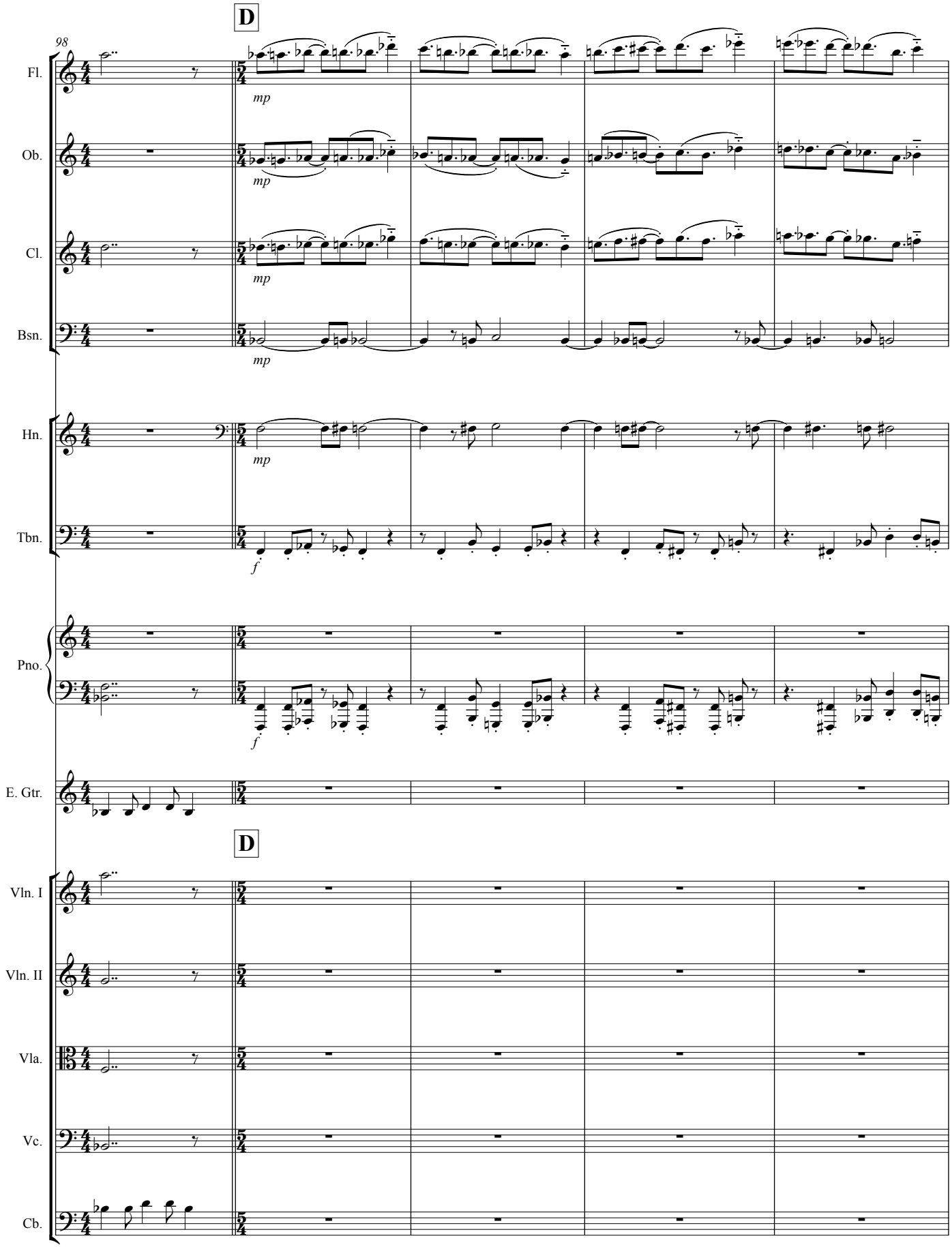
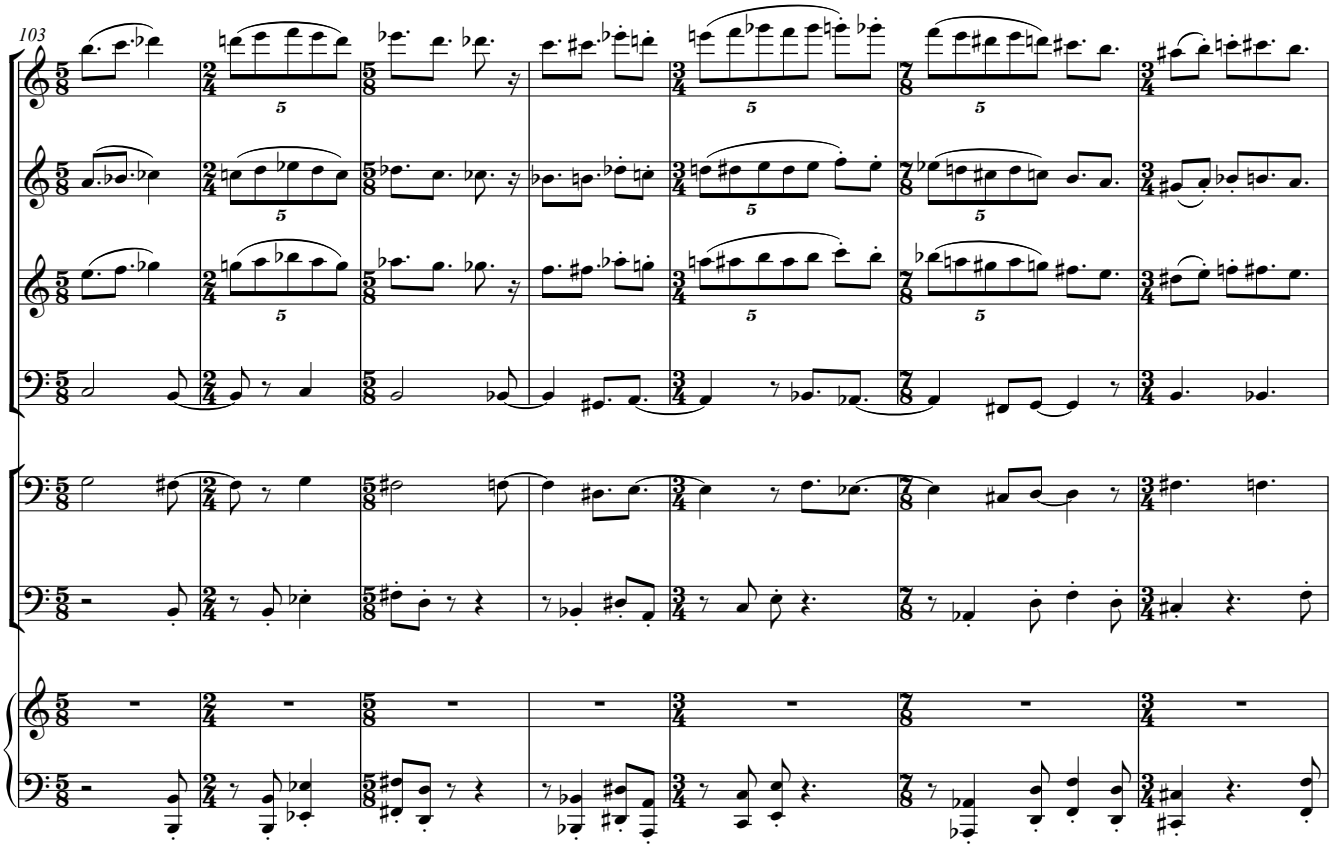
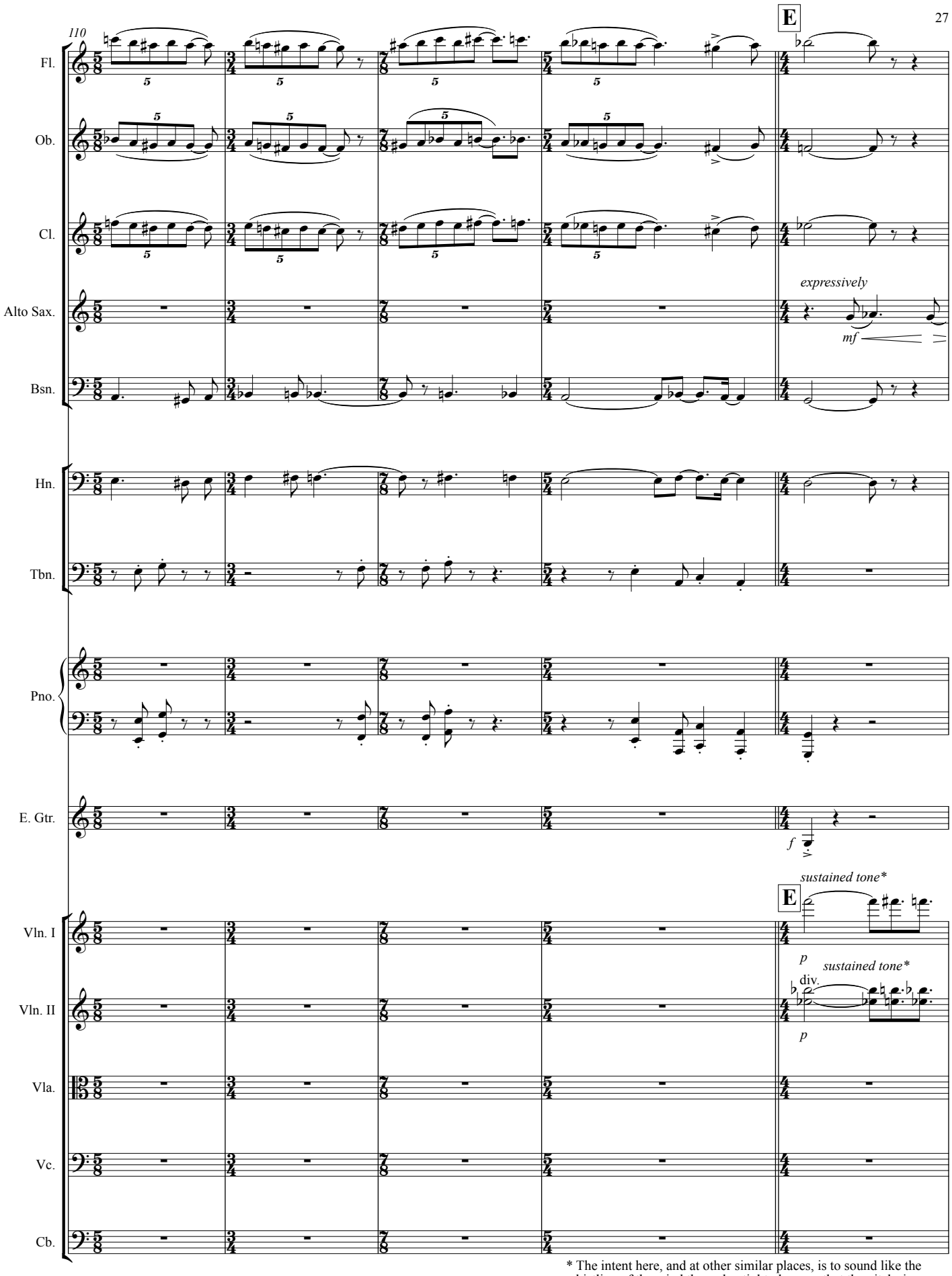
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


85
Fl.
Cl.
Vib.
mp
Pno.
mp
mp
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

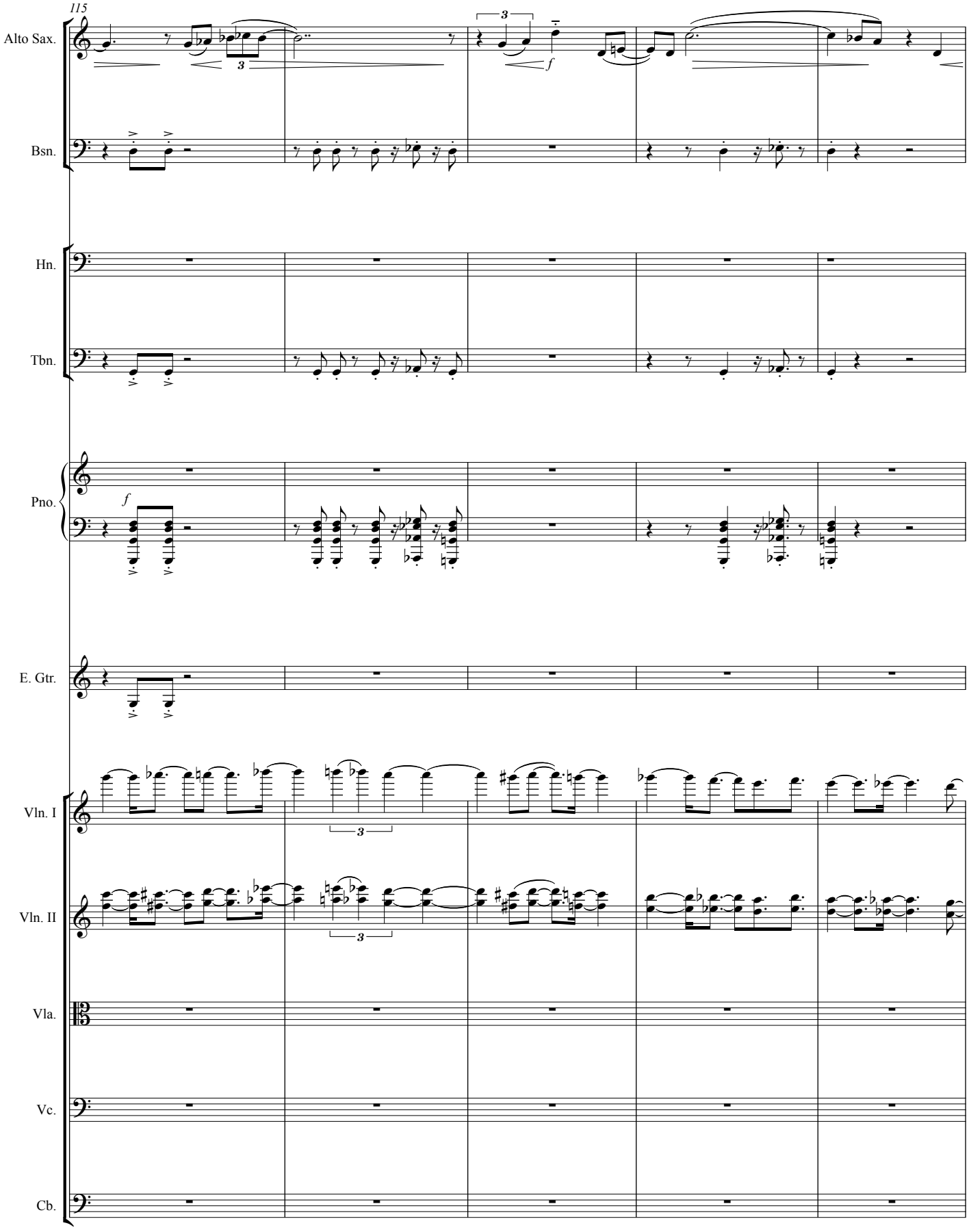

92
Fl.
Cl.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

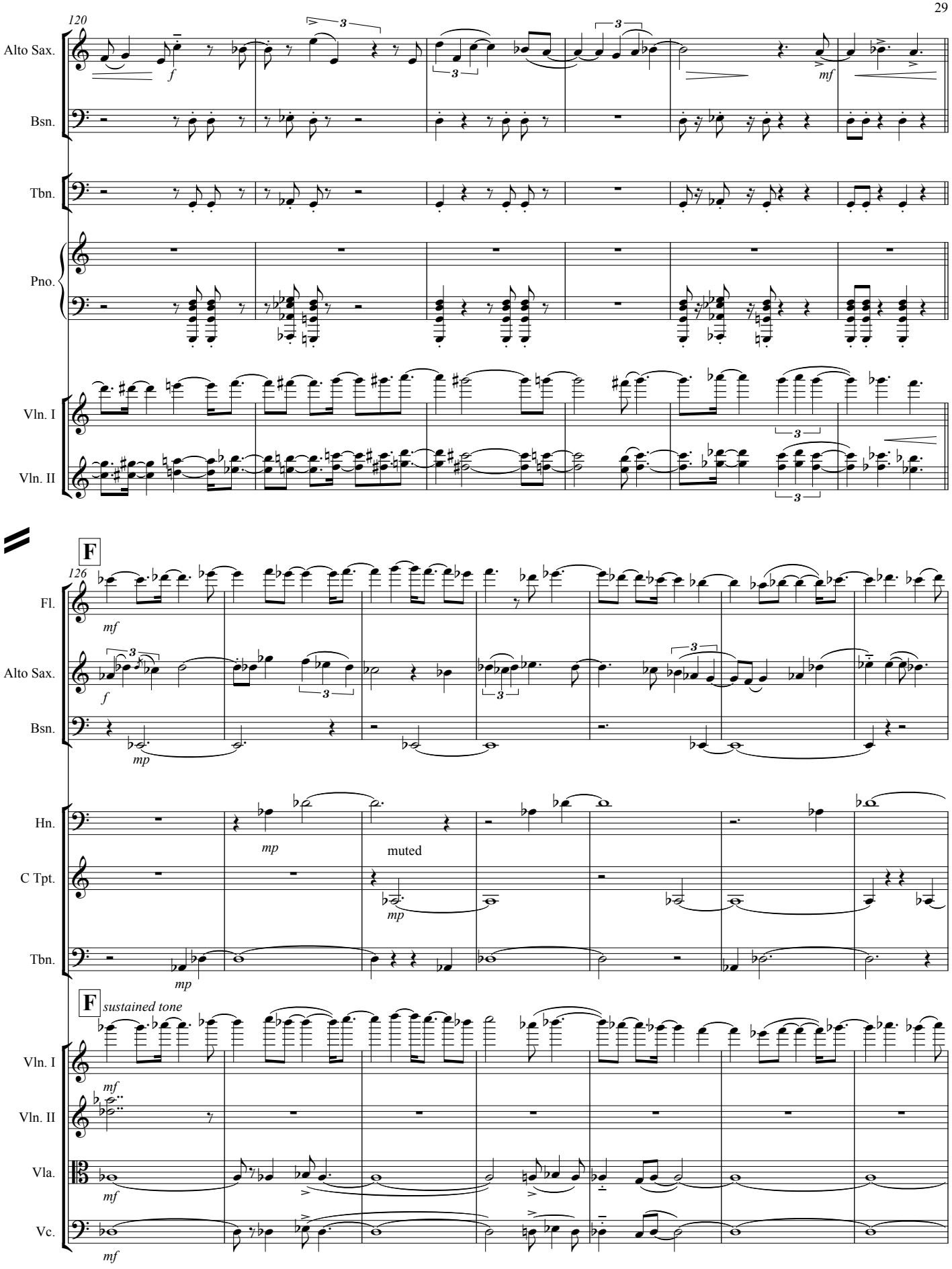

D
98
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
D
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
f

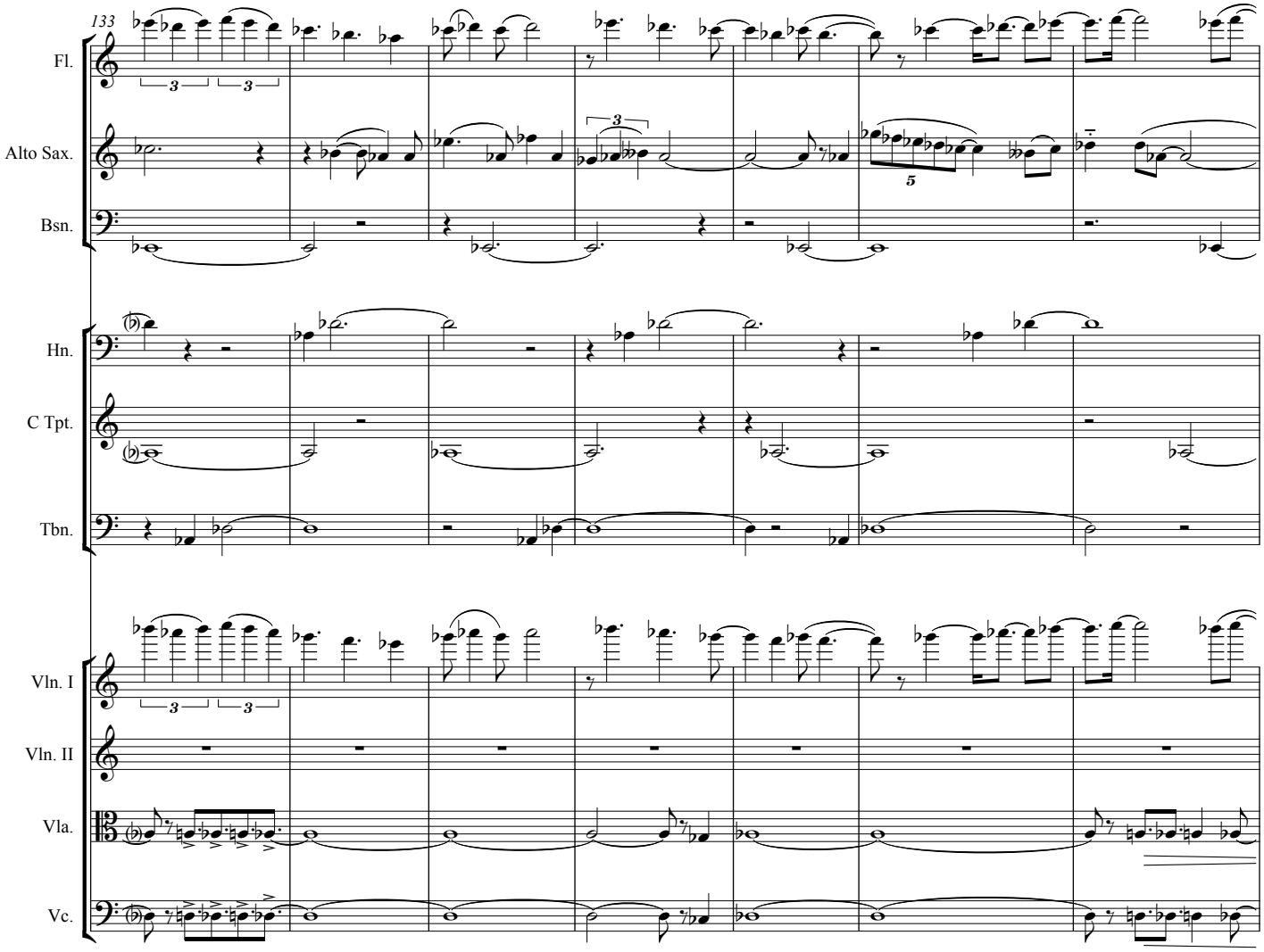

103
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Pno.

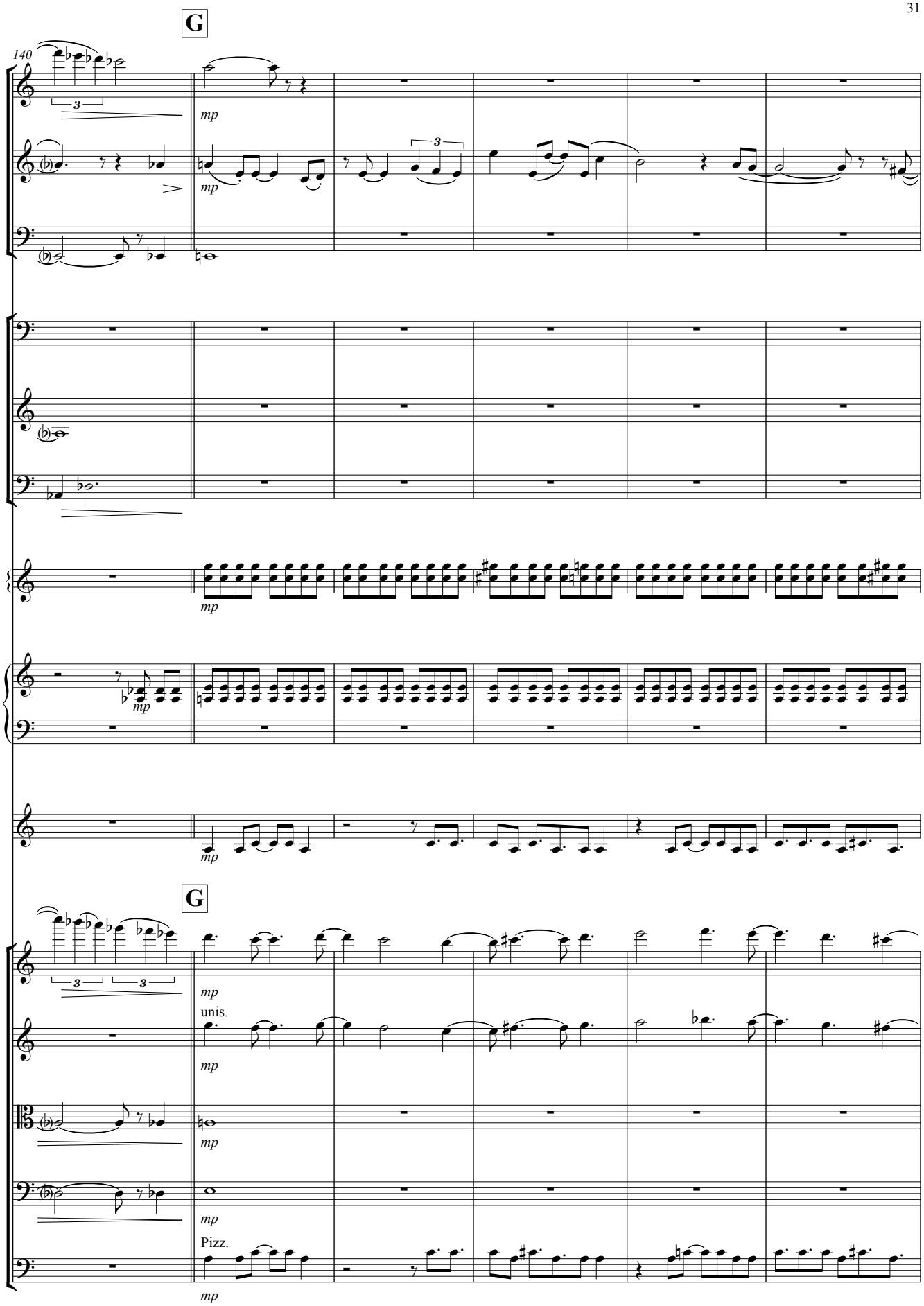


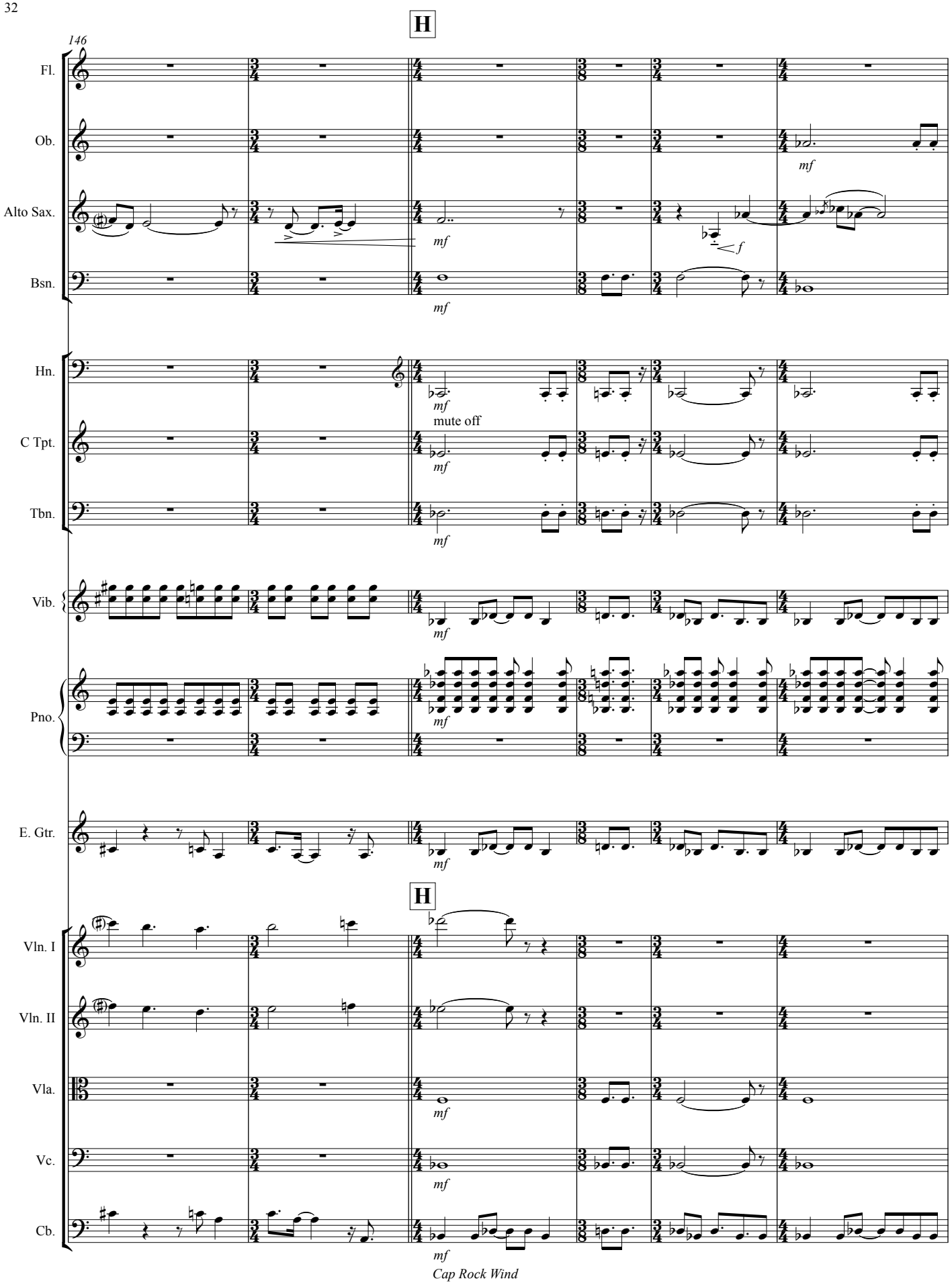
* The intent here, and at other similar places, is to sound like the whistling of the wind through a tight place, so that the pitch rises and falls but not the dynamic; in other words, do not diminuendo within each note.

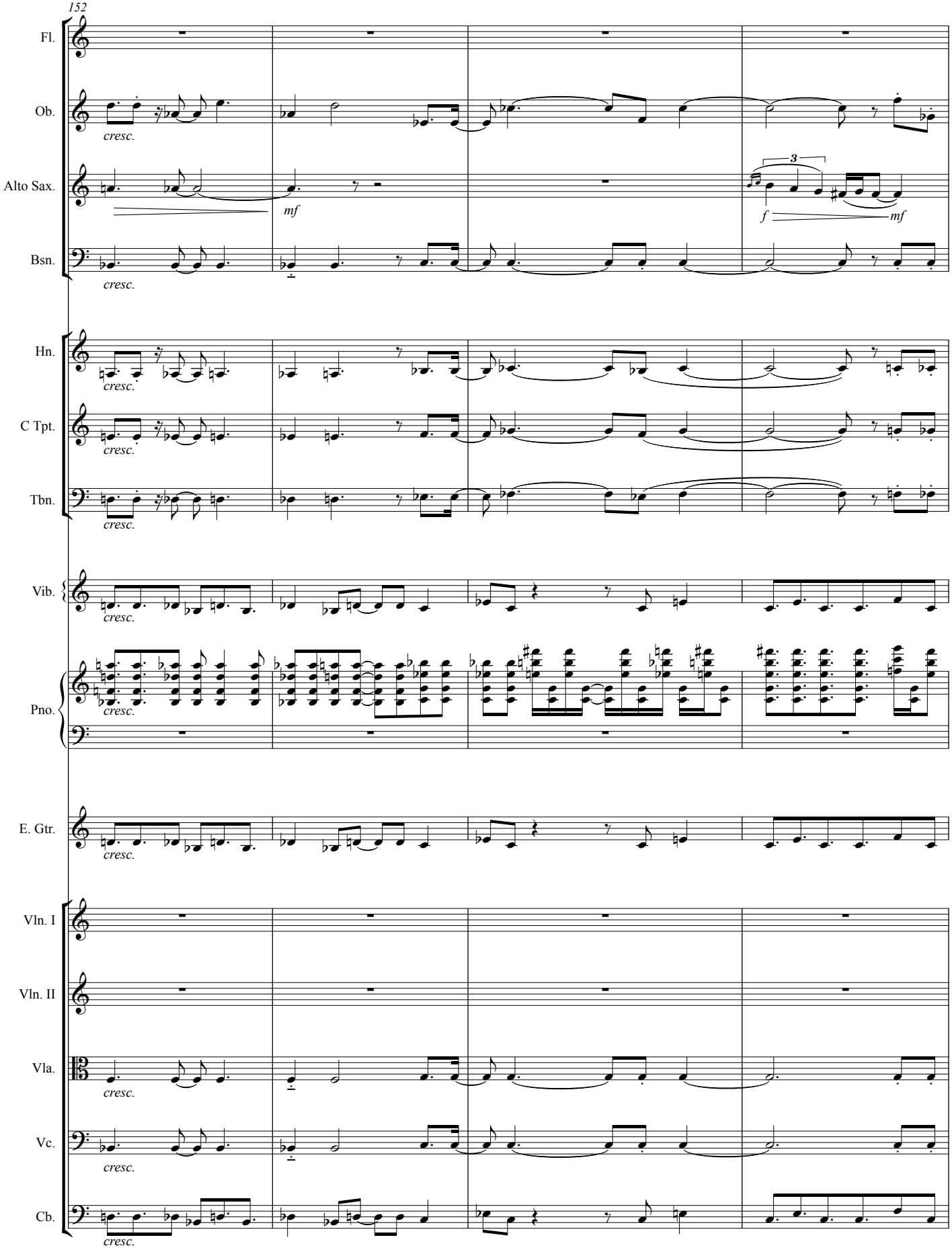

115
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

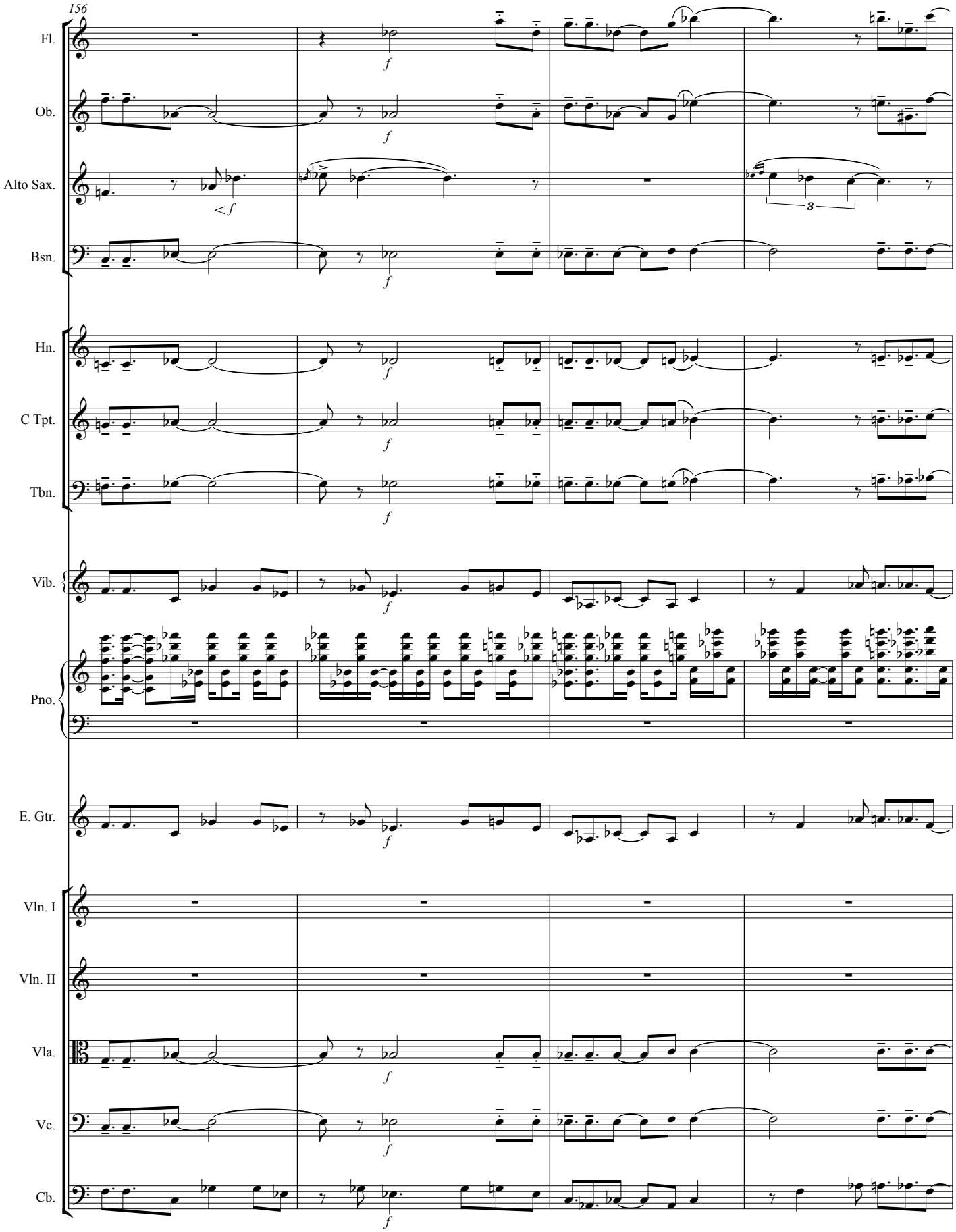

120
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Tbn.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
f
mf
F
126
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
mp
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
muted
F
sustained tone
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mf

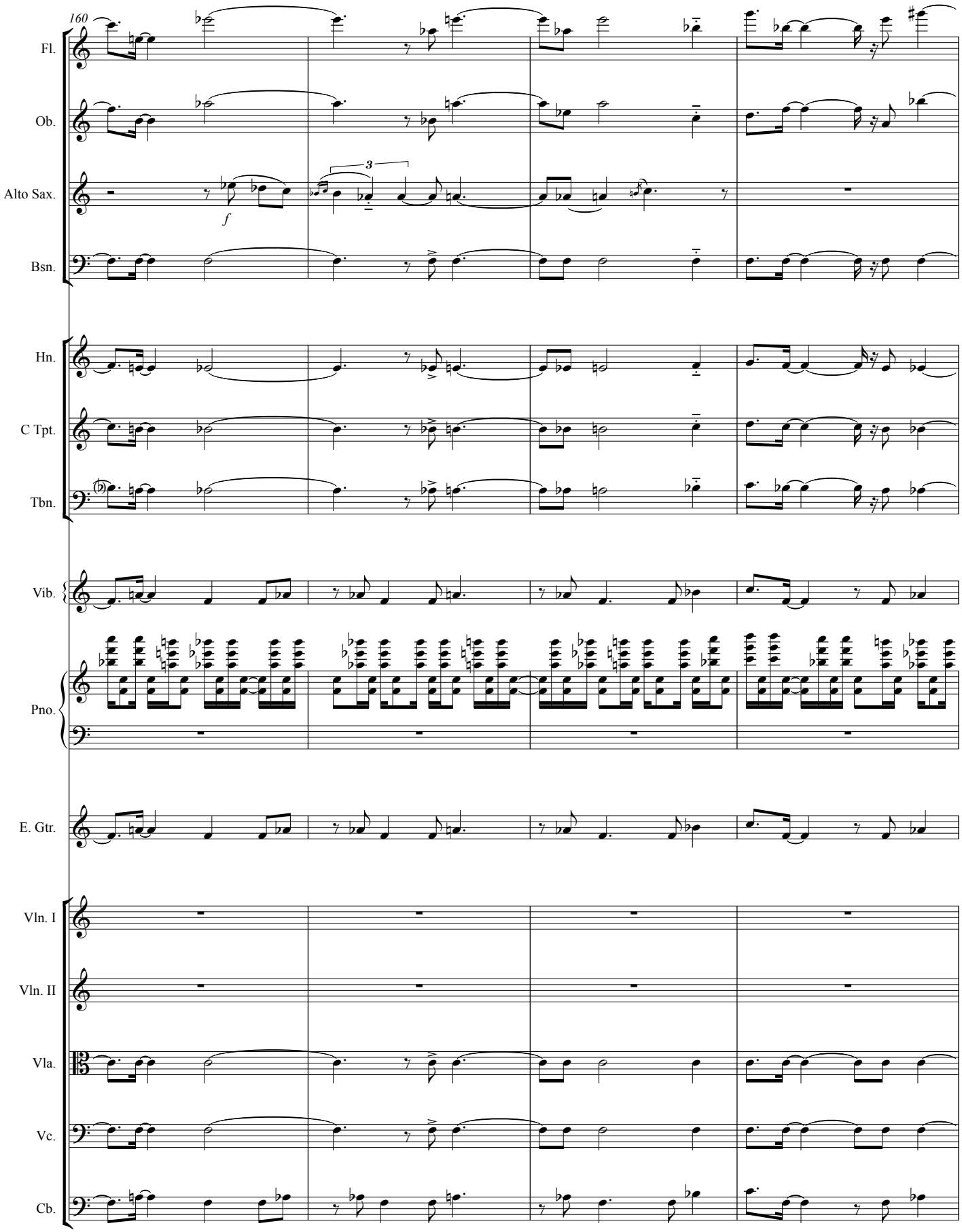

133
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

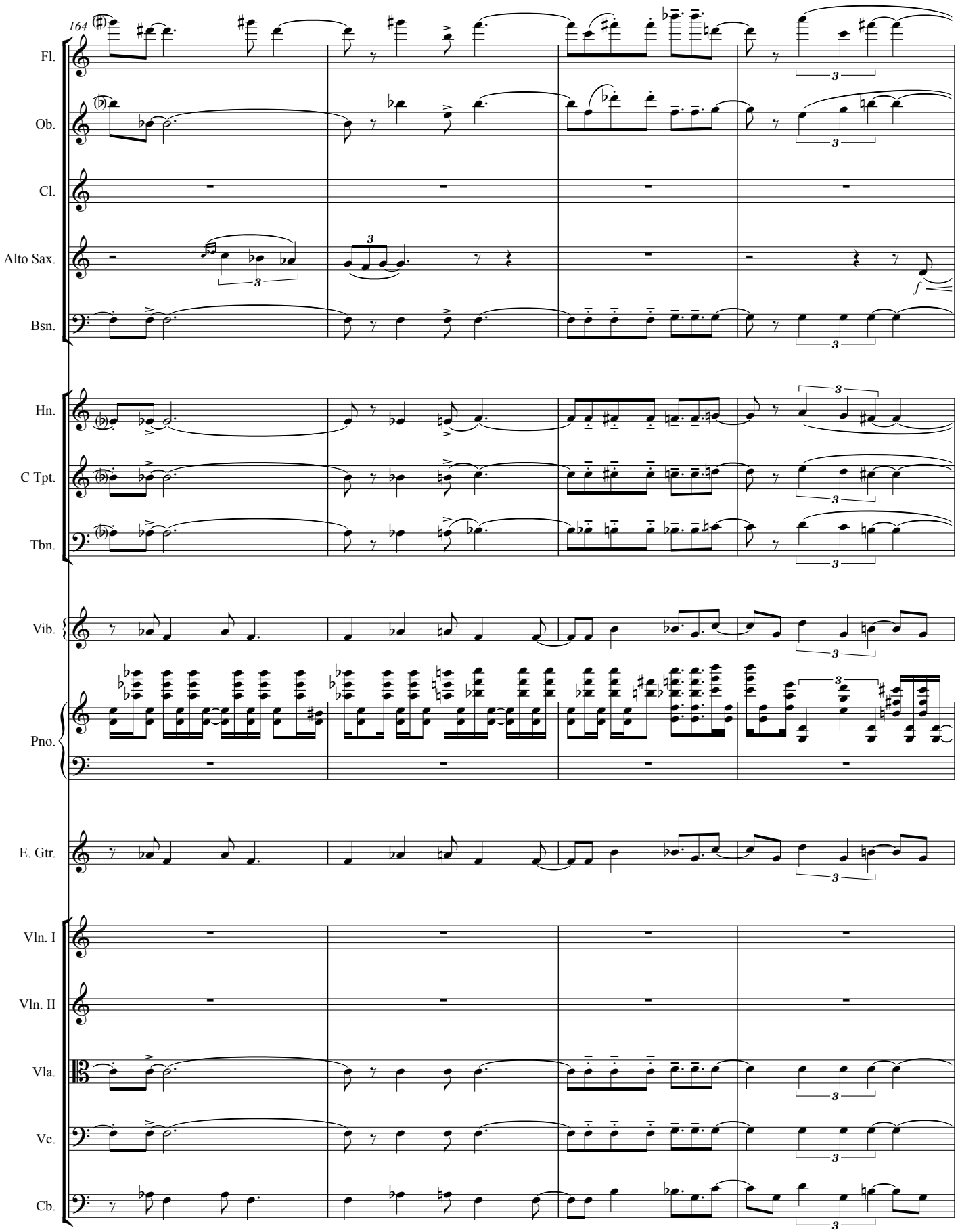

G
140
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
G
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
unis.
Pizz.

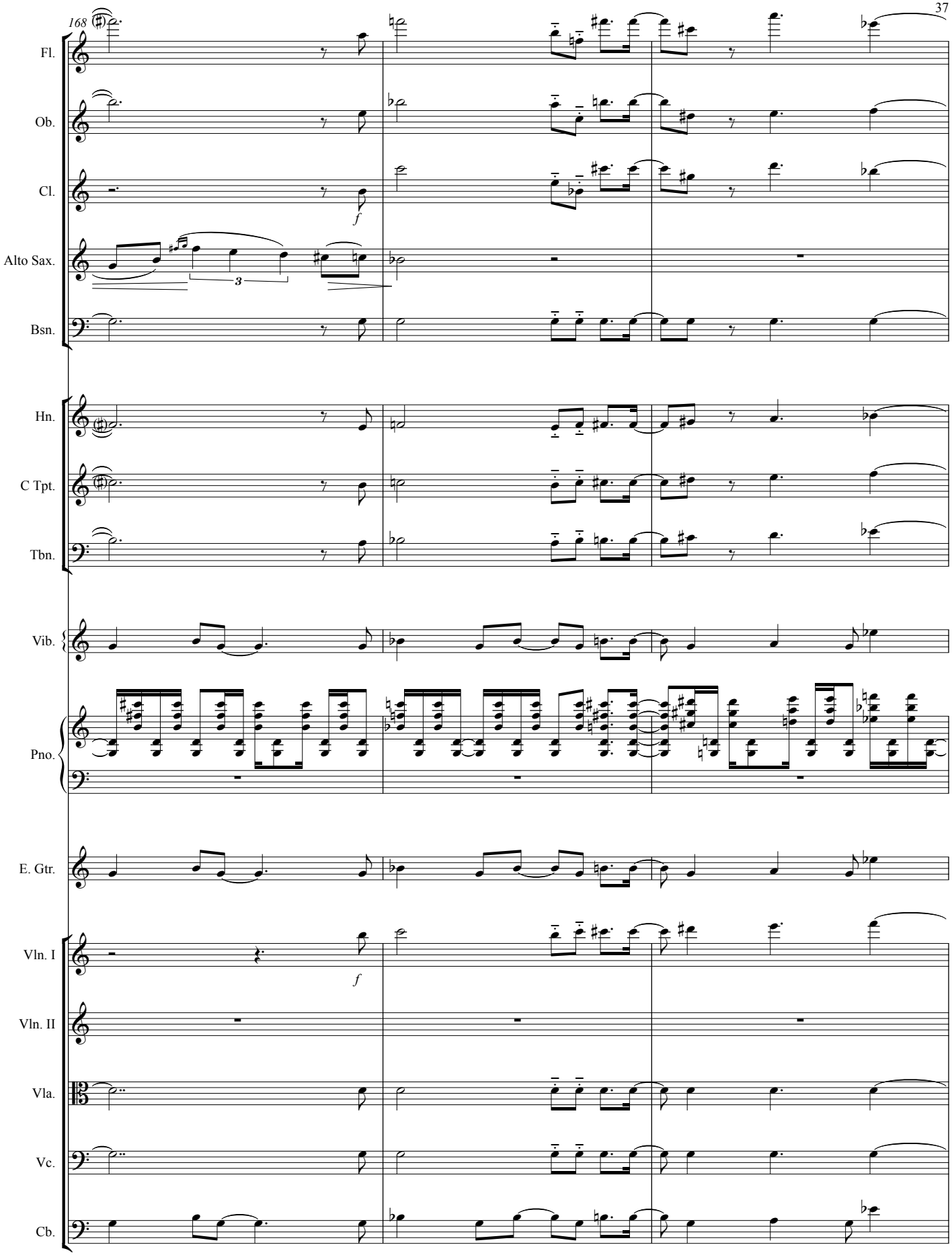

H
146
Fl.
Ob.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
mf
f
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
mute off
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
H
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
Cap Rock Wind

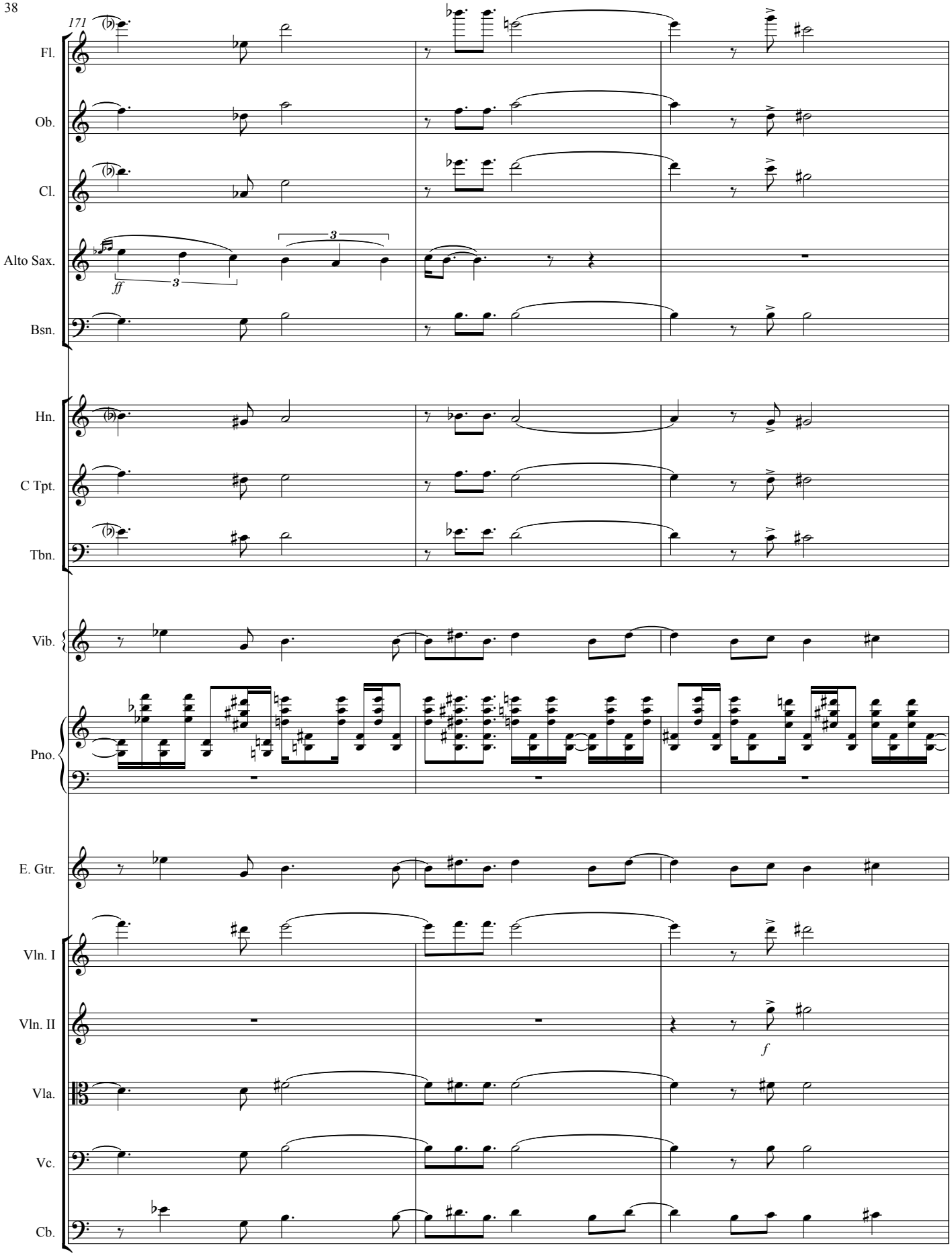

152
Fl.
Ob.
cresc.
Alto Sax.
mf
3
f
mf
Bsn.
cresc.
Hn.
cresc.
C Tpt.
cresc.
Tbn.
cresc.
Vib.
cresc.
Pno.
cresc.
E. Gtr.
cresc.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
cresc.
Vc.
cresc.
Cb.
cresc.

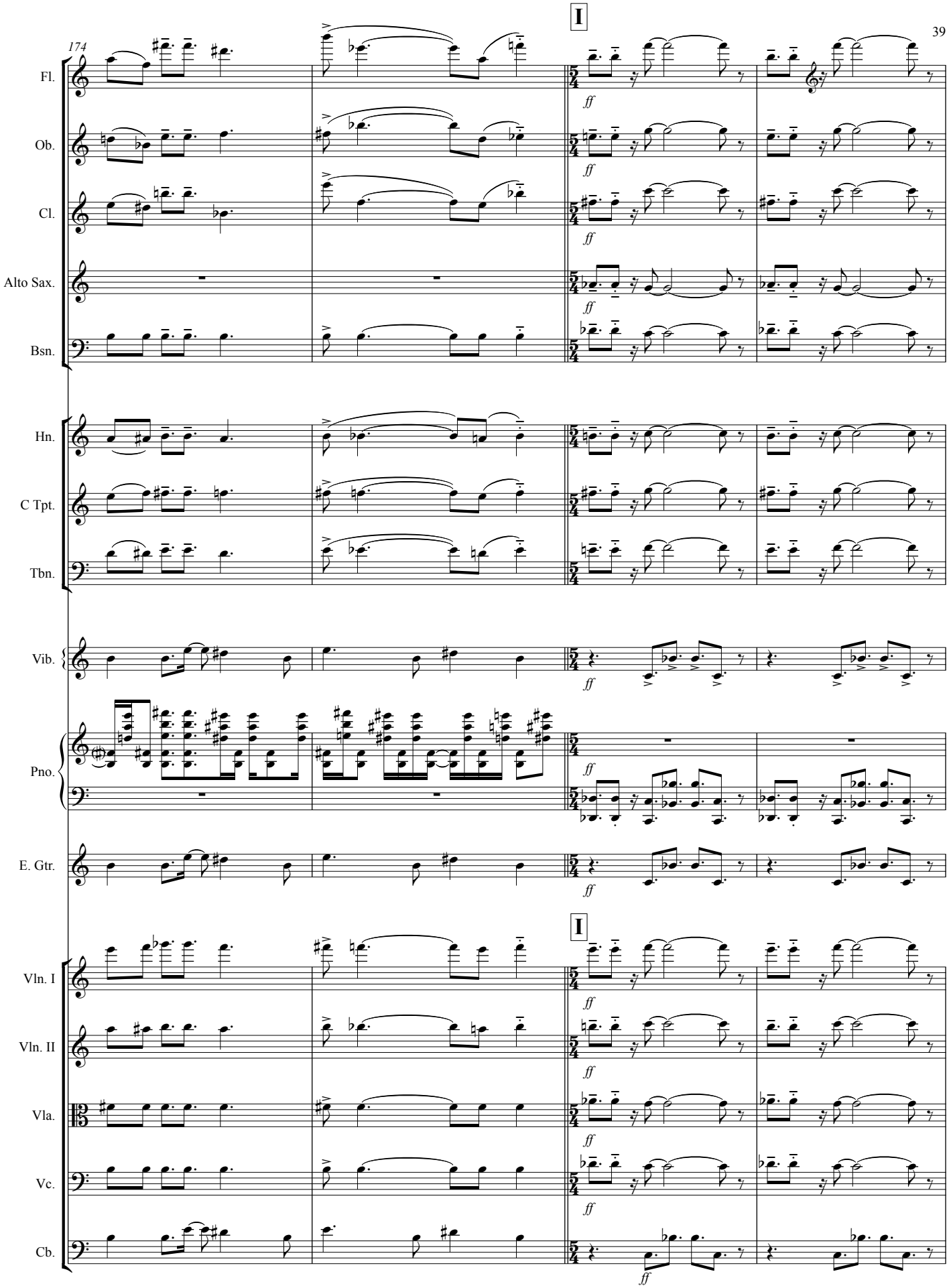

156
Fl.
Ob.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
< f
3

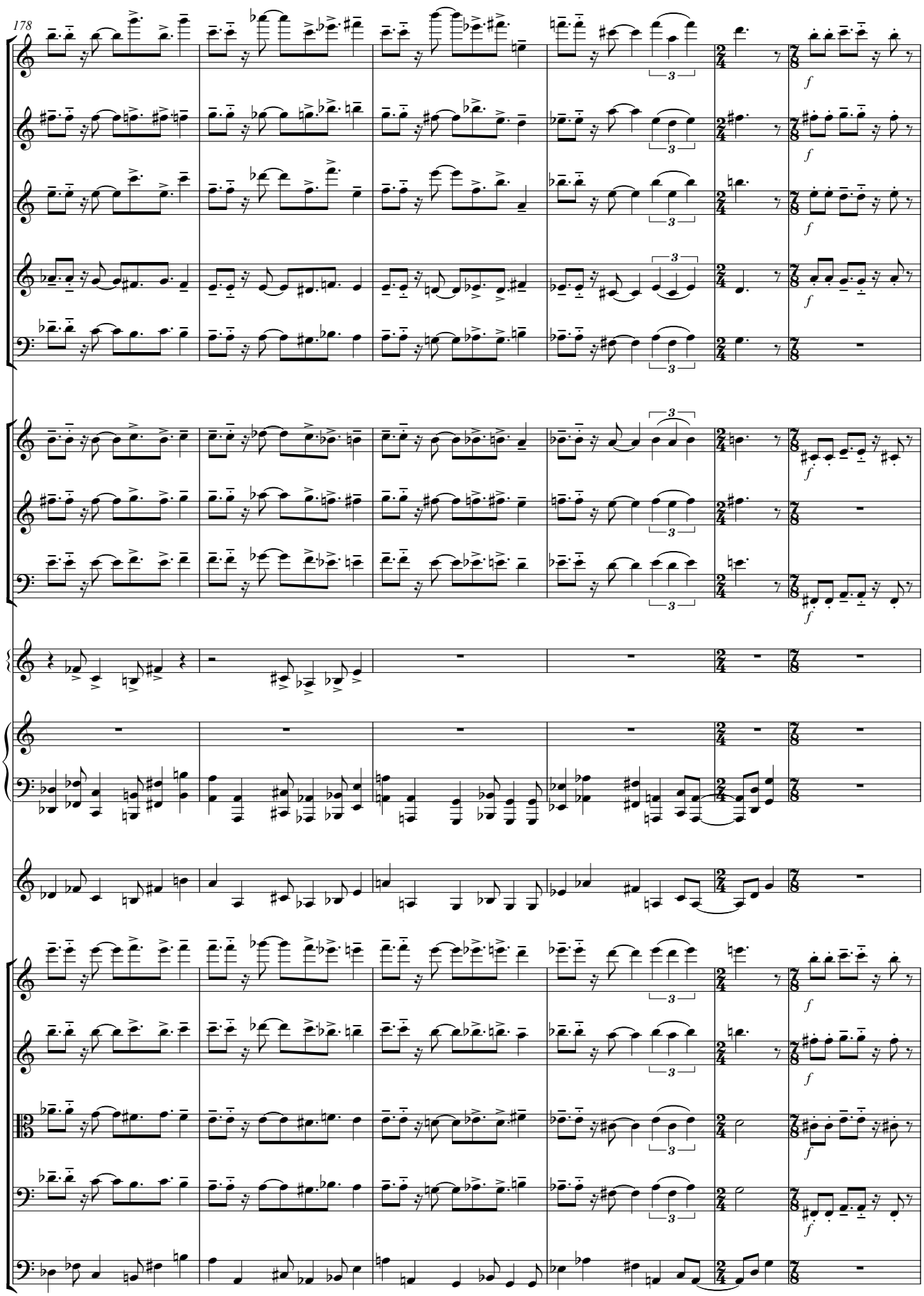

160
Fl.
Ob.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3

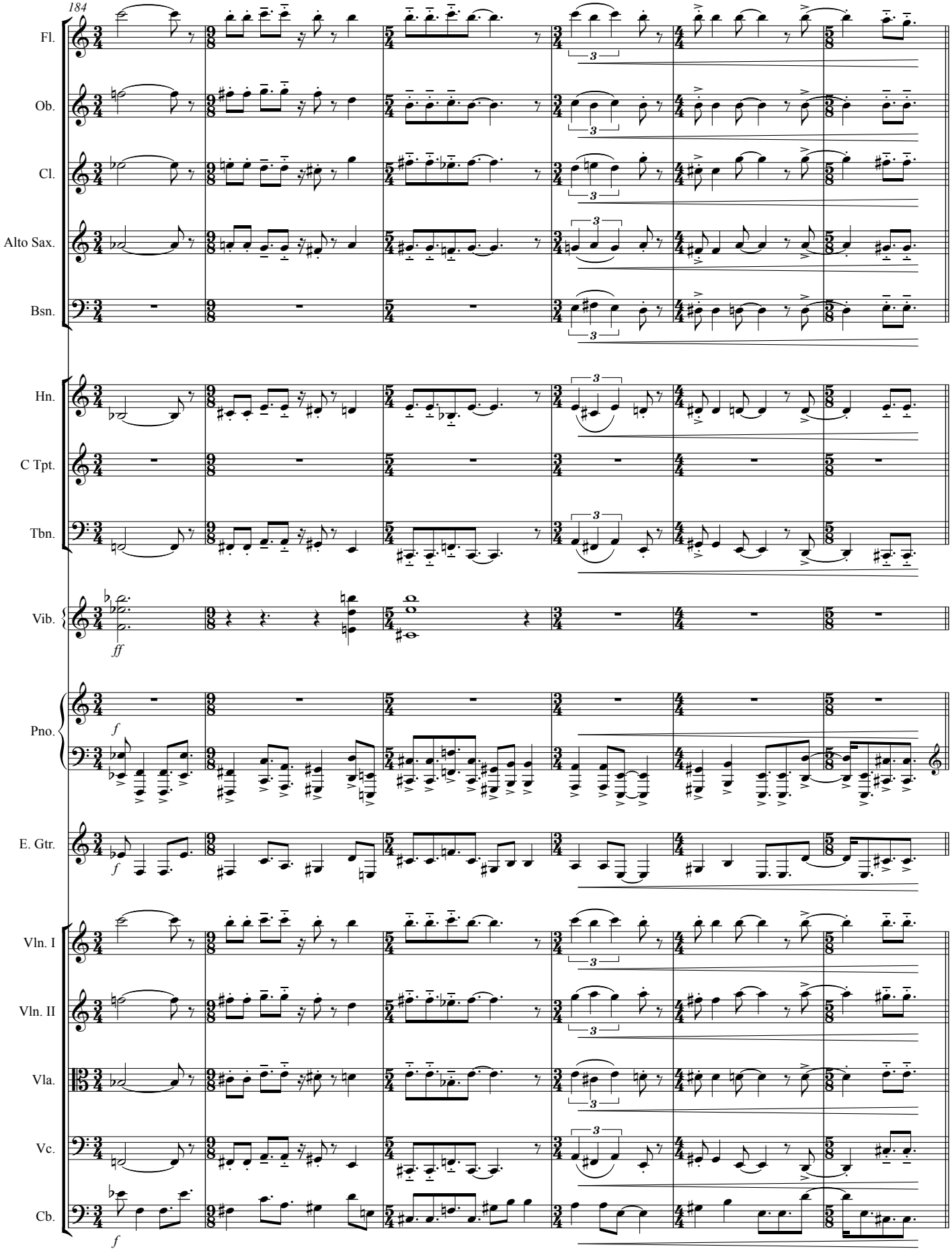

164
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f

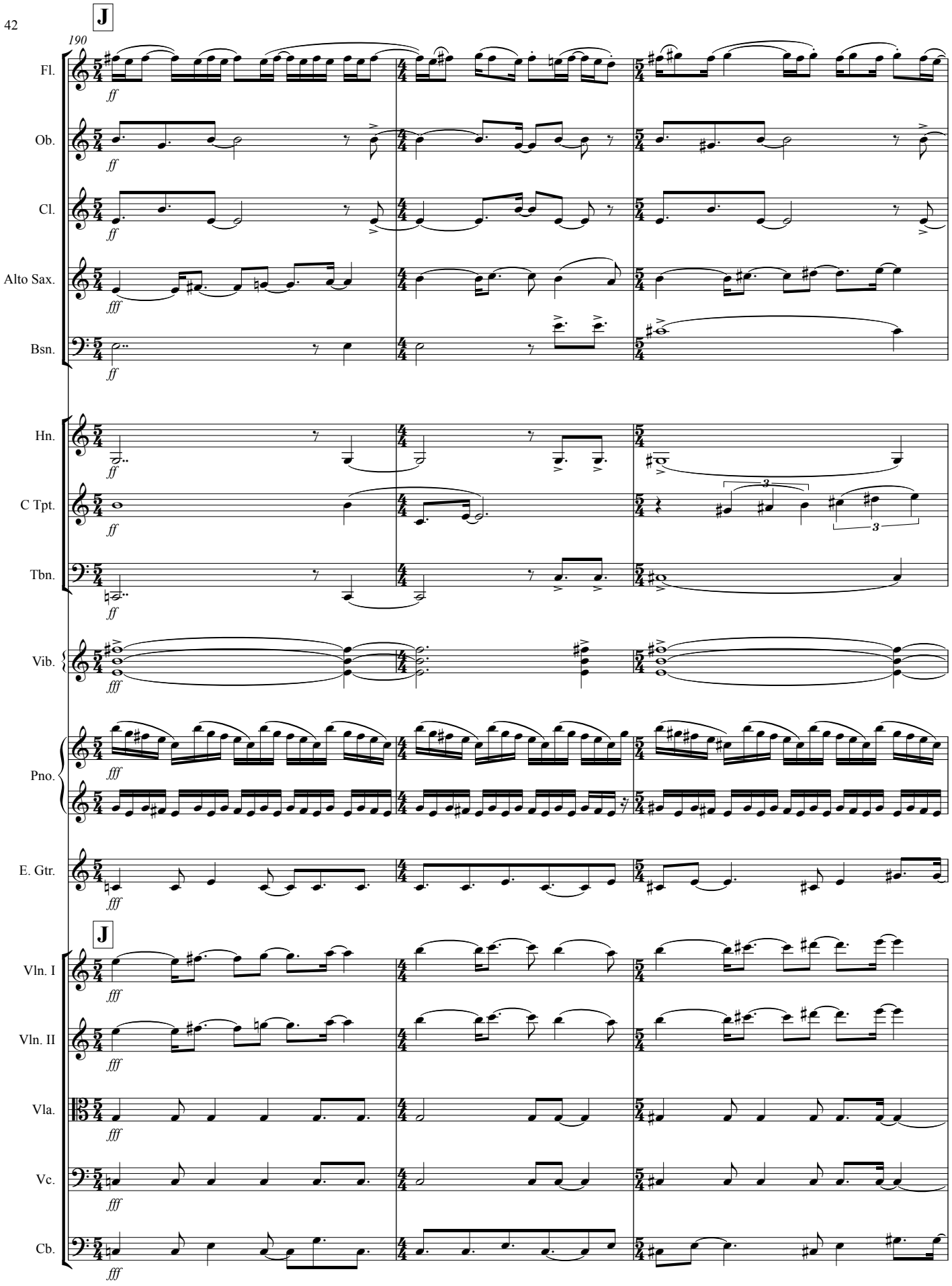

168
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3

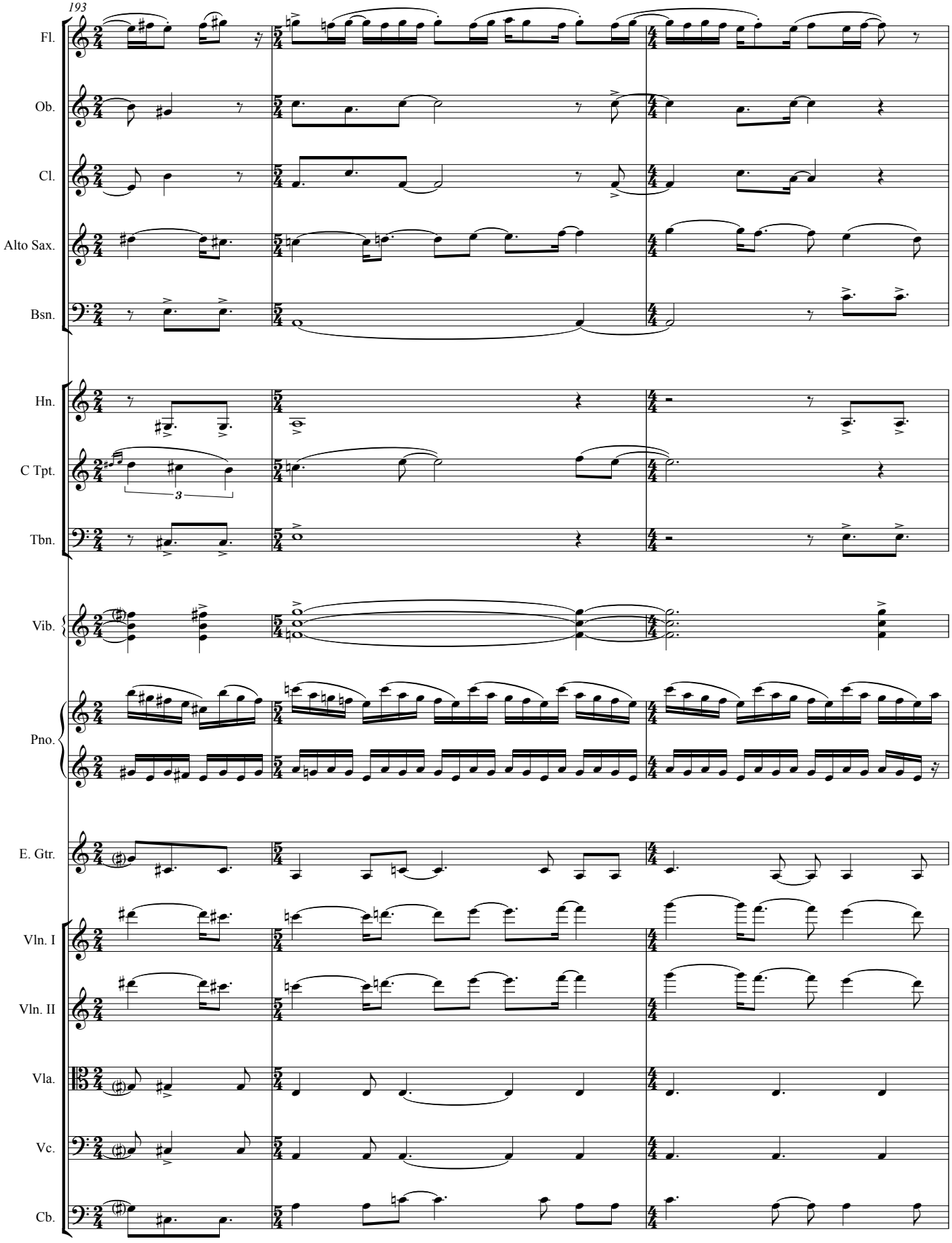

171
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
ff
f

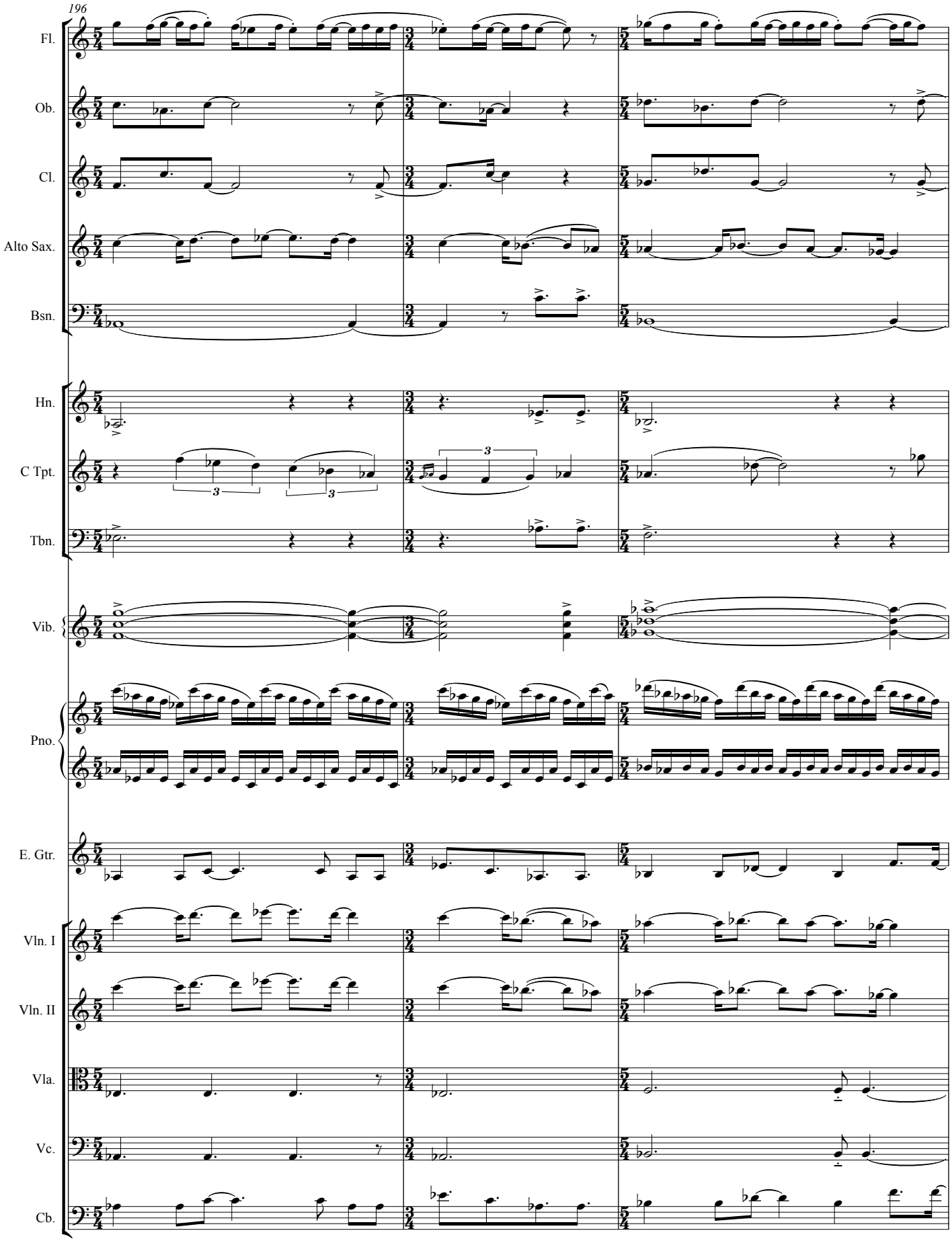

I
174
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
I
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
ff

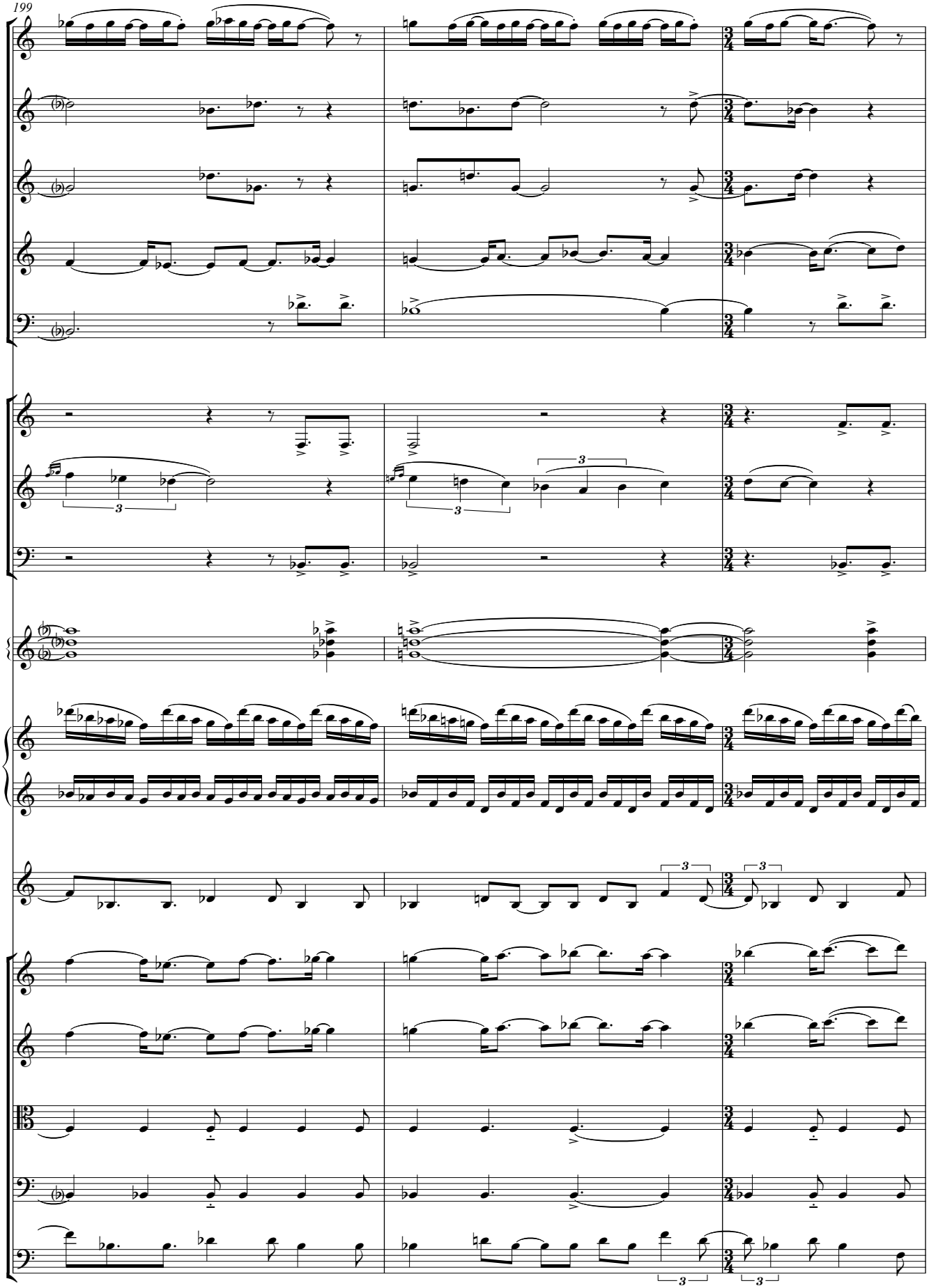

178
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3

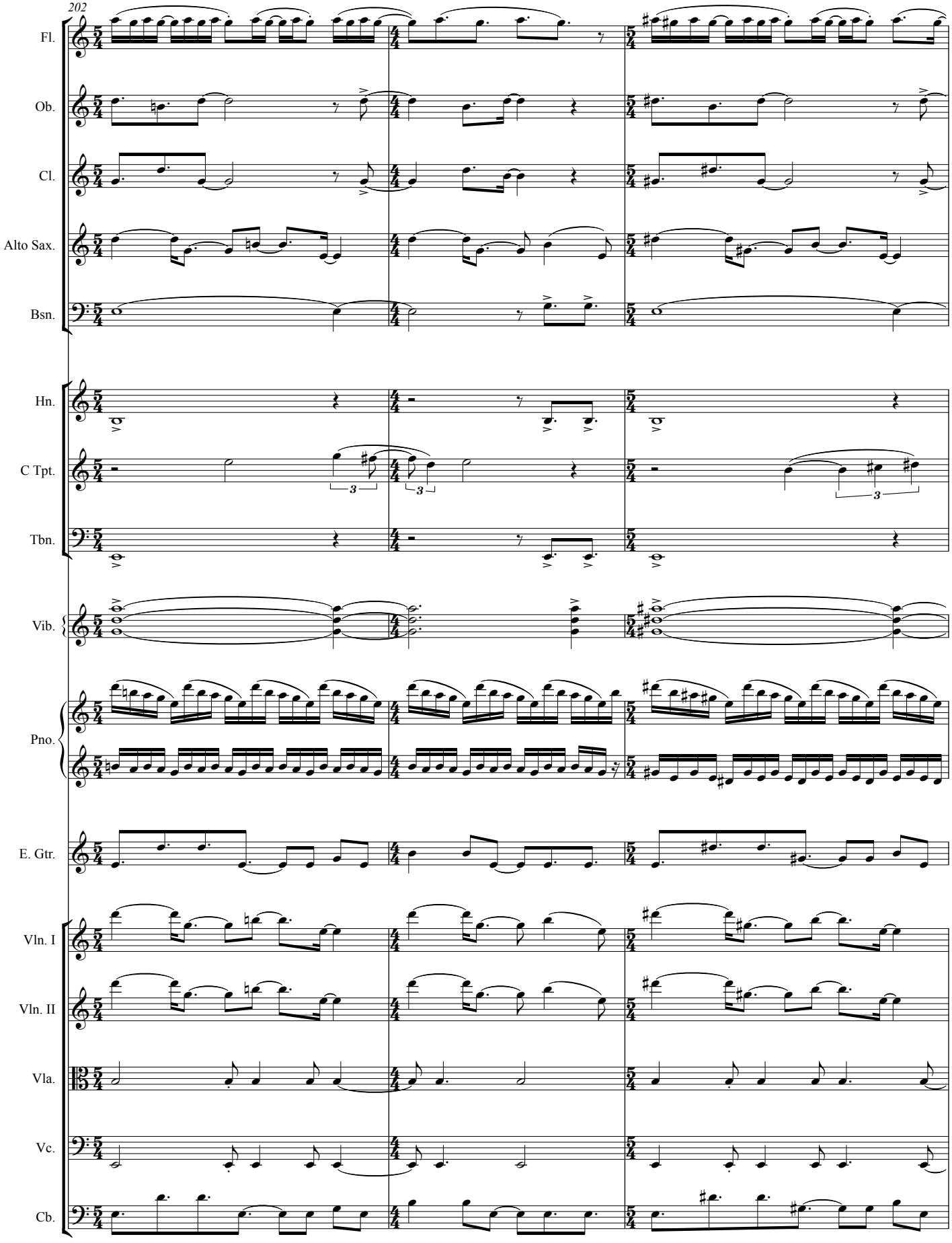

184
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
ff
Pno.
f
E. Gtr.
f
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3

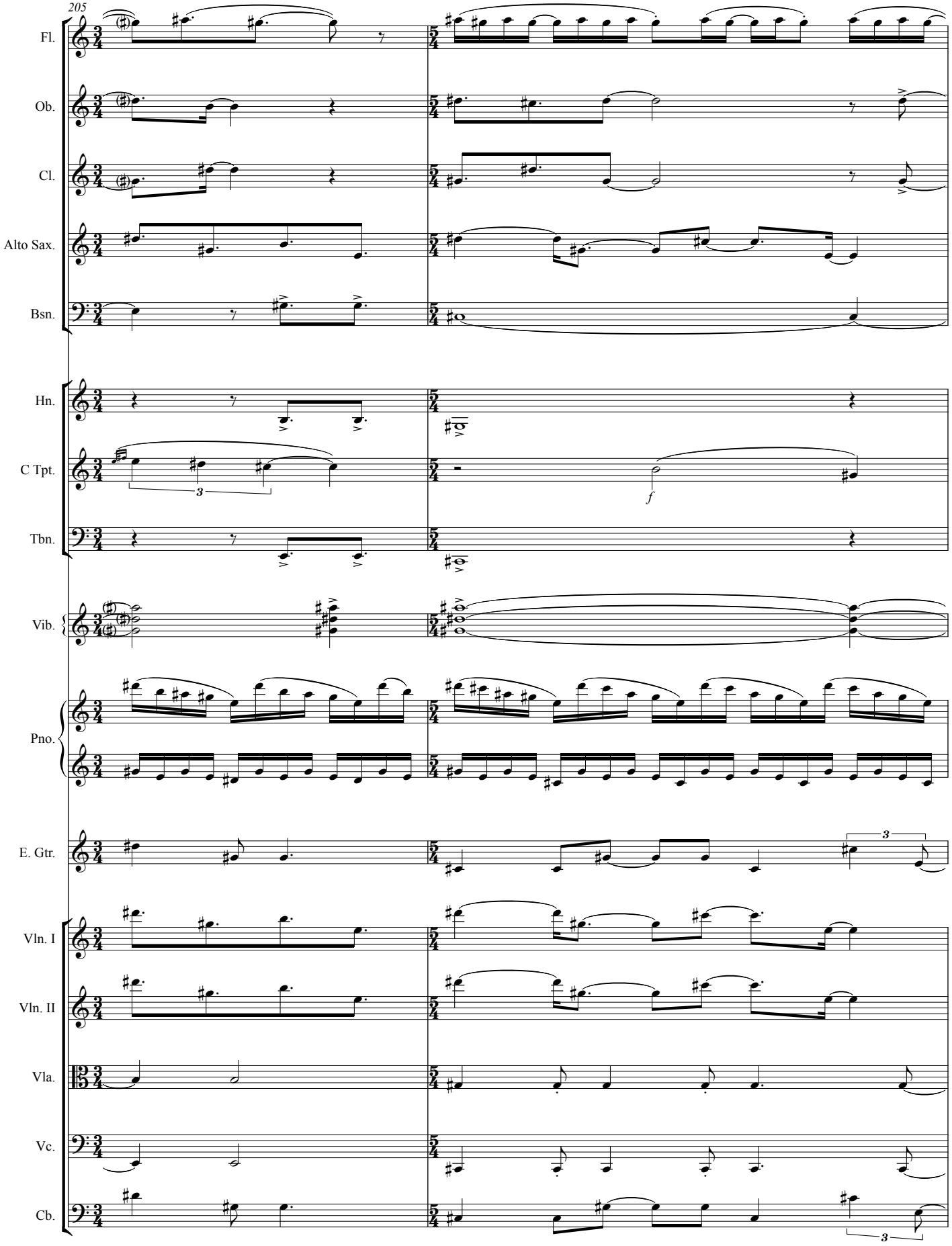

J
190
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
J
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

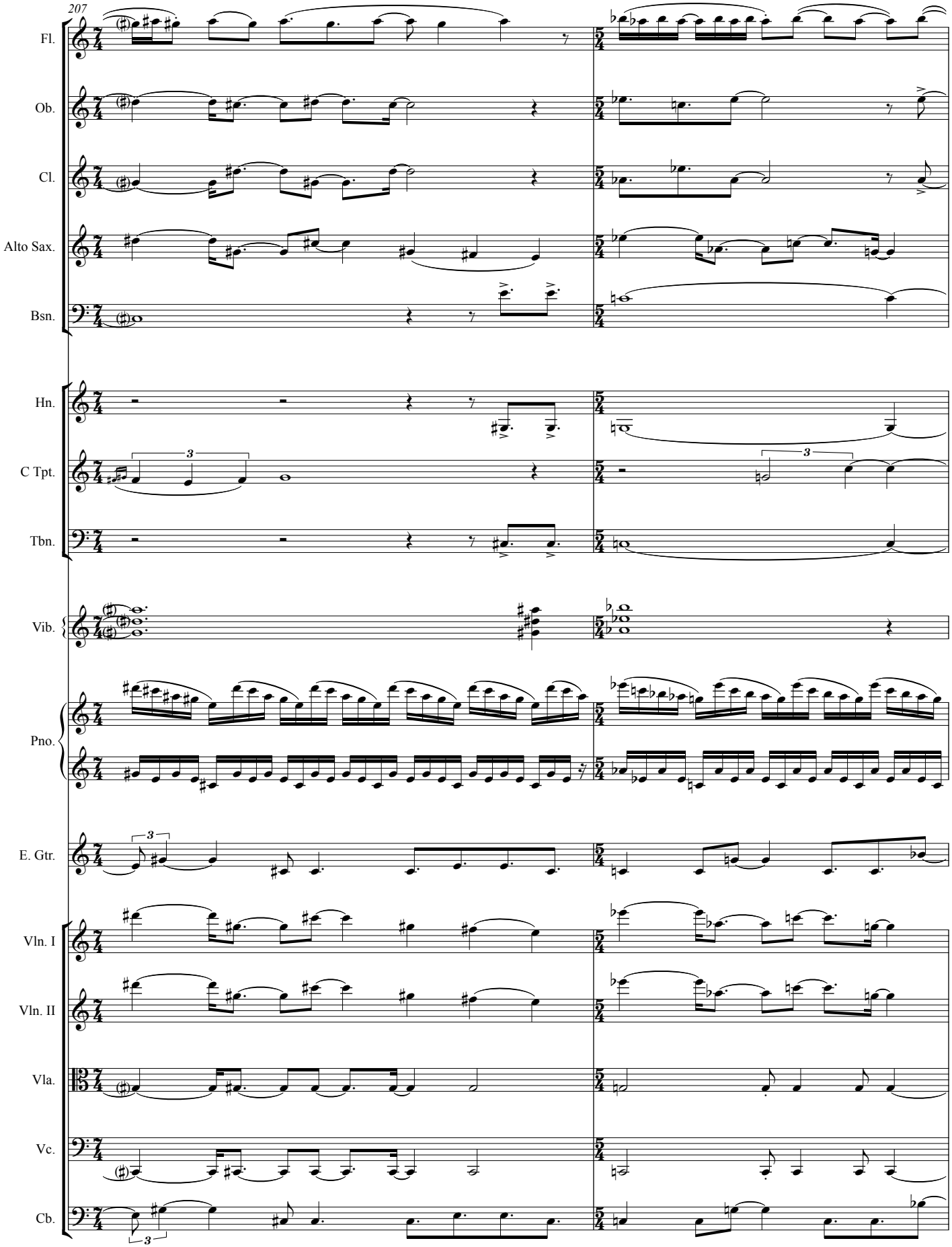

193
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
3
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

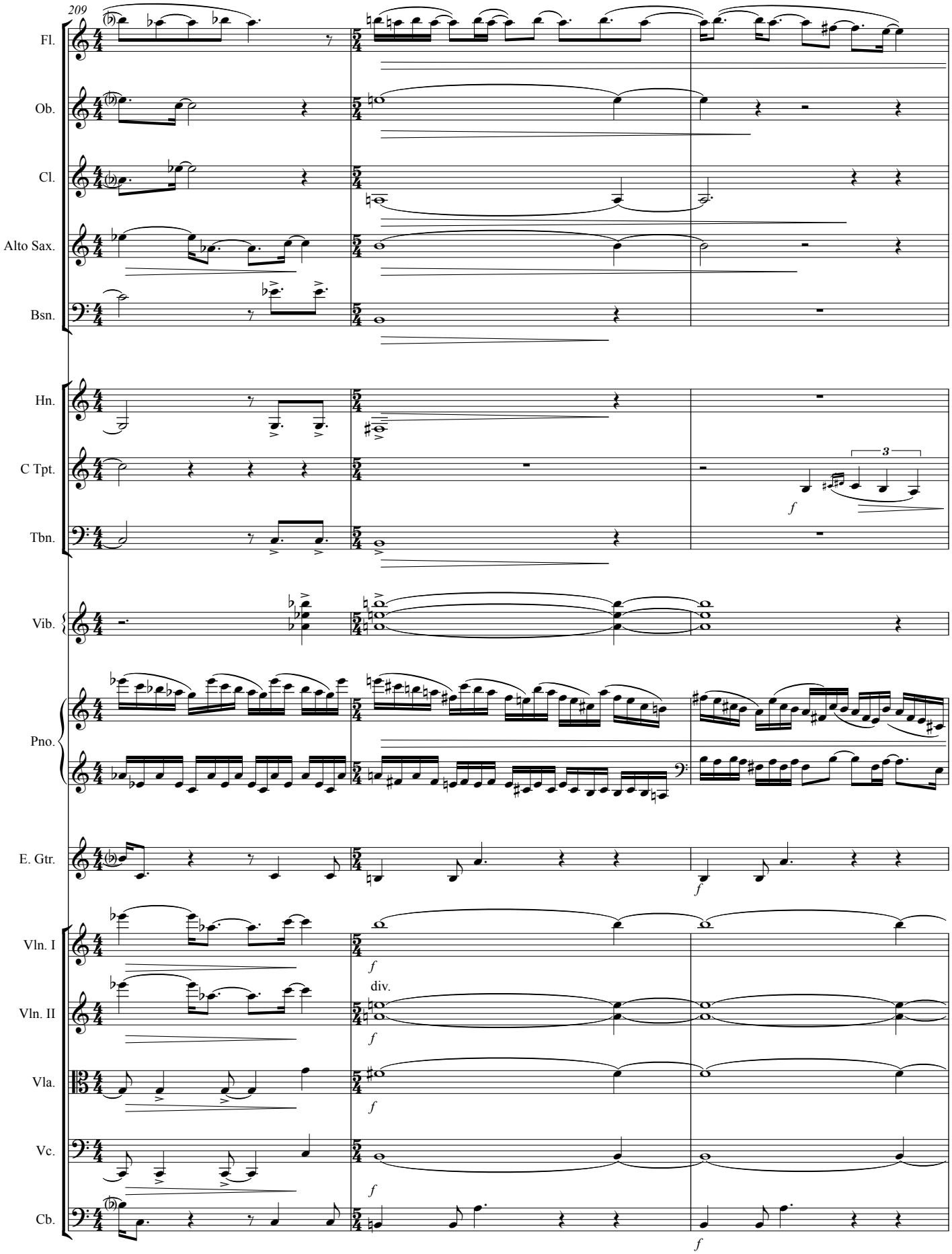

196
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

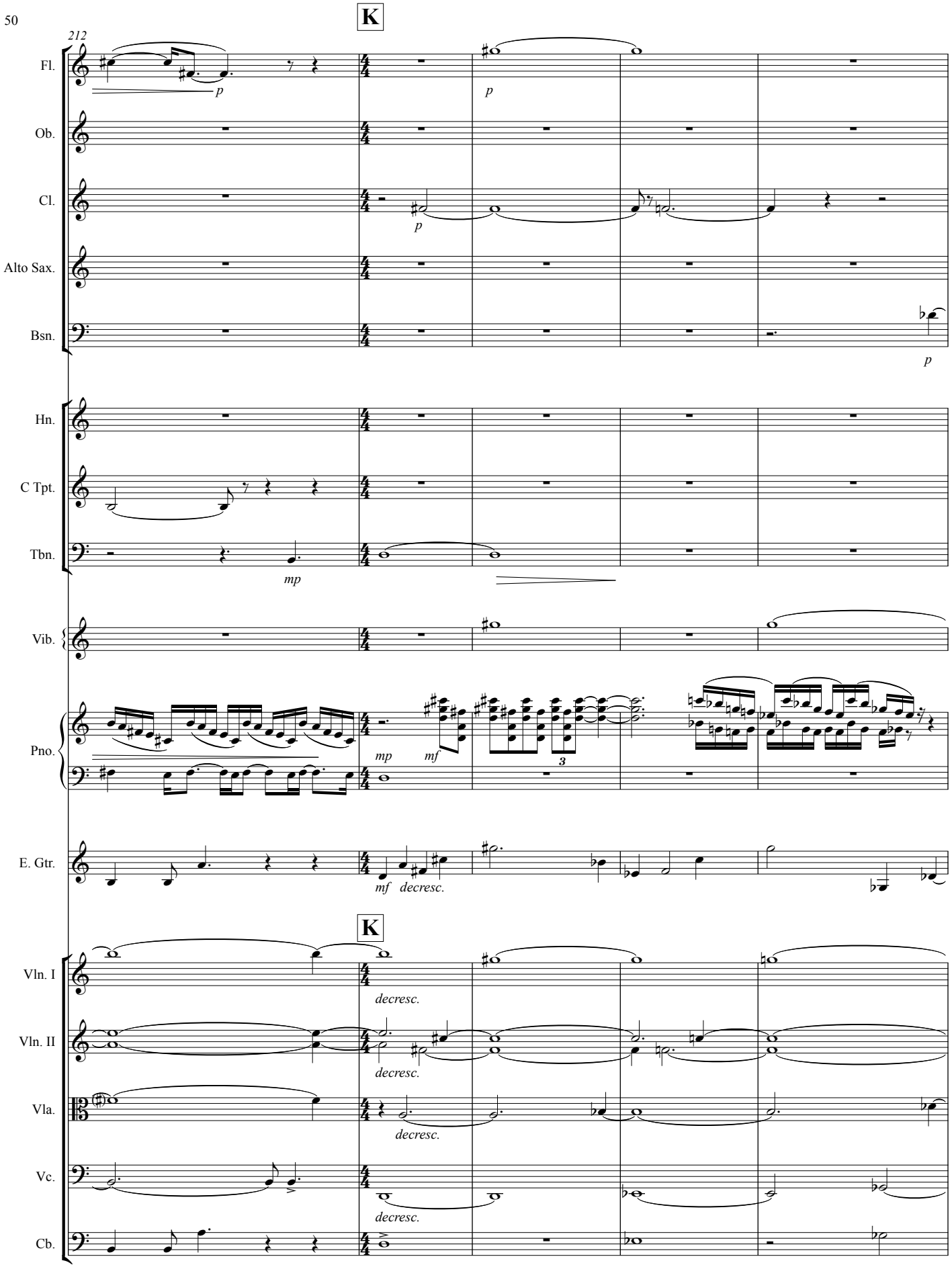

199
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

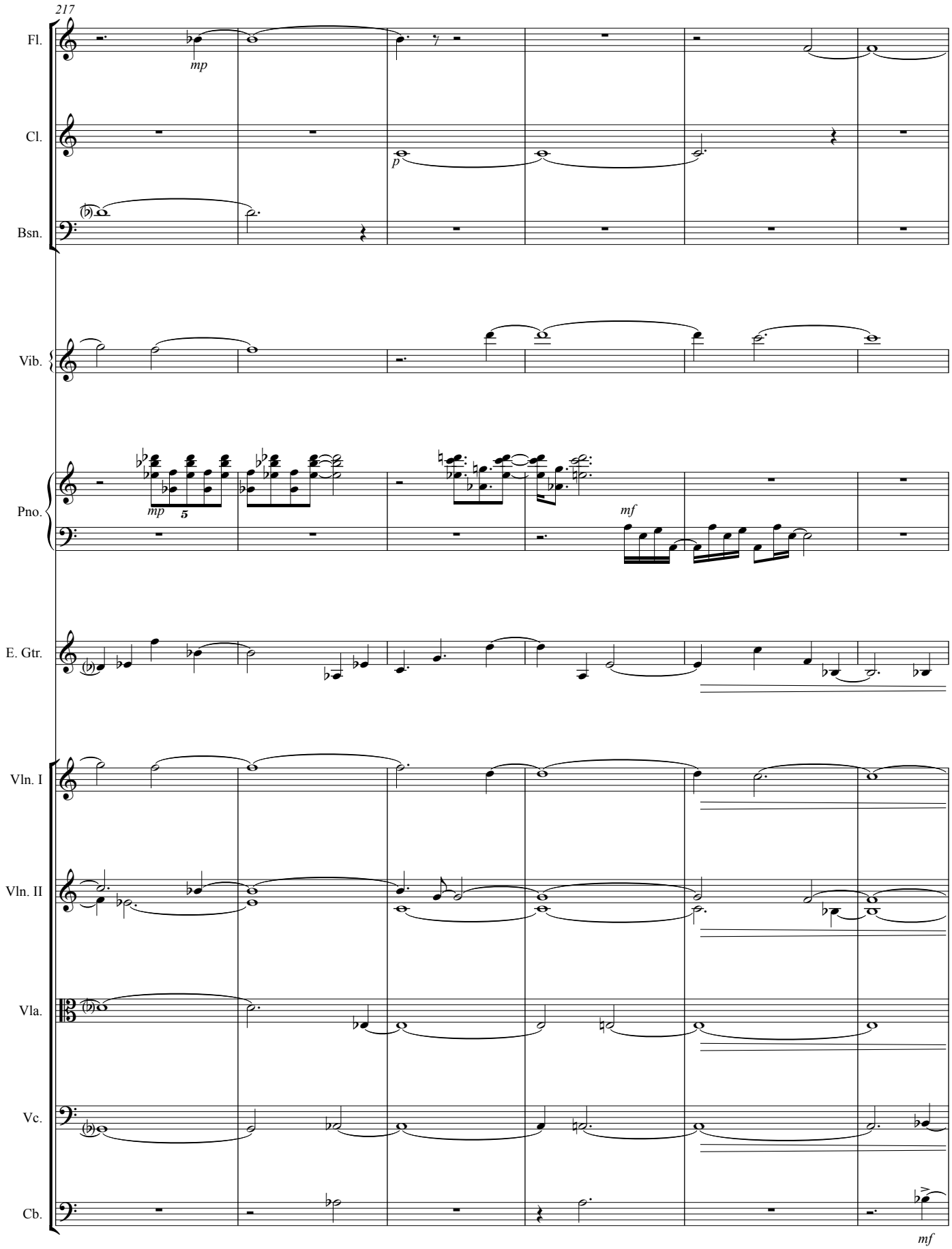

202
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


205
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f


207
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


209
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
3
div.


K
212
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
K
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
p
mp
mf
decresc.


217
Fl.
mp
Cl.
p
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
mp
5
mf
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mf

Slower, walking tempo

L ♩ = 72

223

Fl.

Vib.

Pno. *mf*

E. Gtr. *mp*

S. Solo *mp*

The noise of things

Slower, walking tempo

L

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

230

Fl. *mp*

Vib. *mp*

S. Solo

mov-ing in the wind came to their ears like a flap-ping of wings Dry stalks of corn, hi-

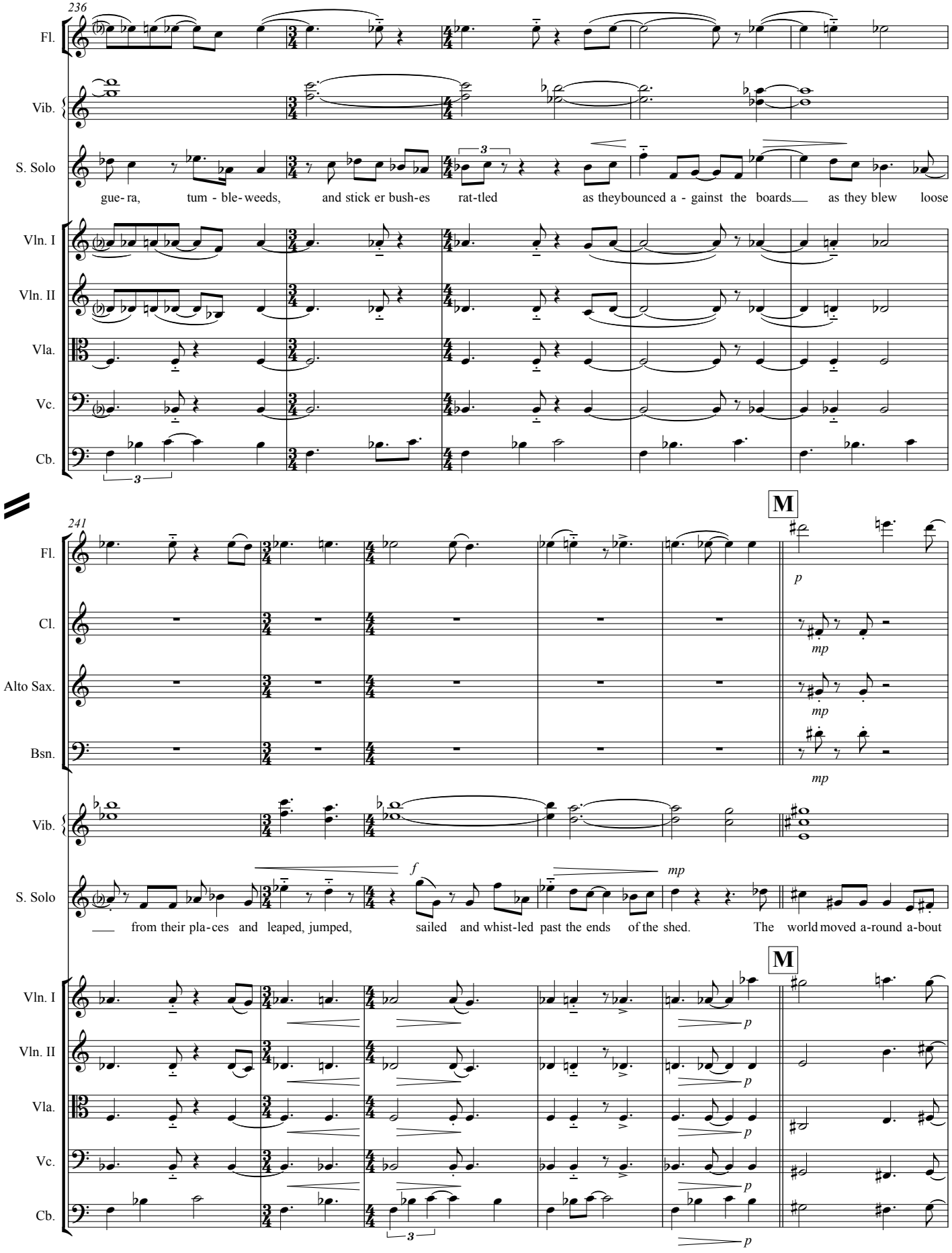
Vln. I *mp* unis.

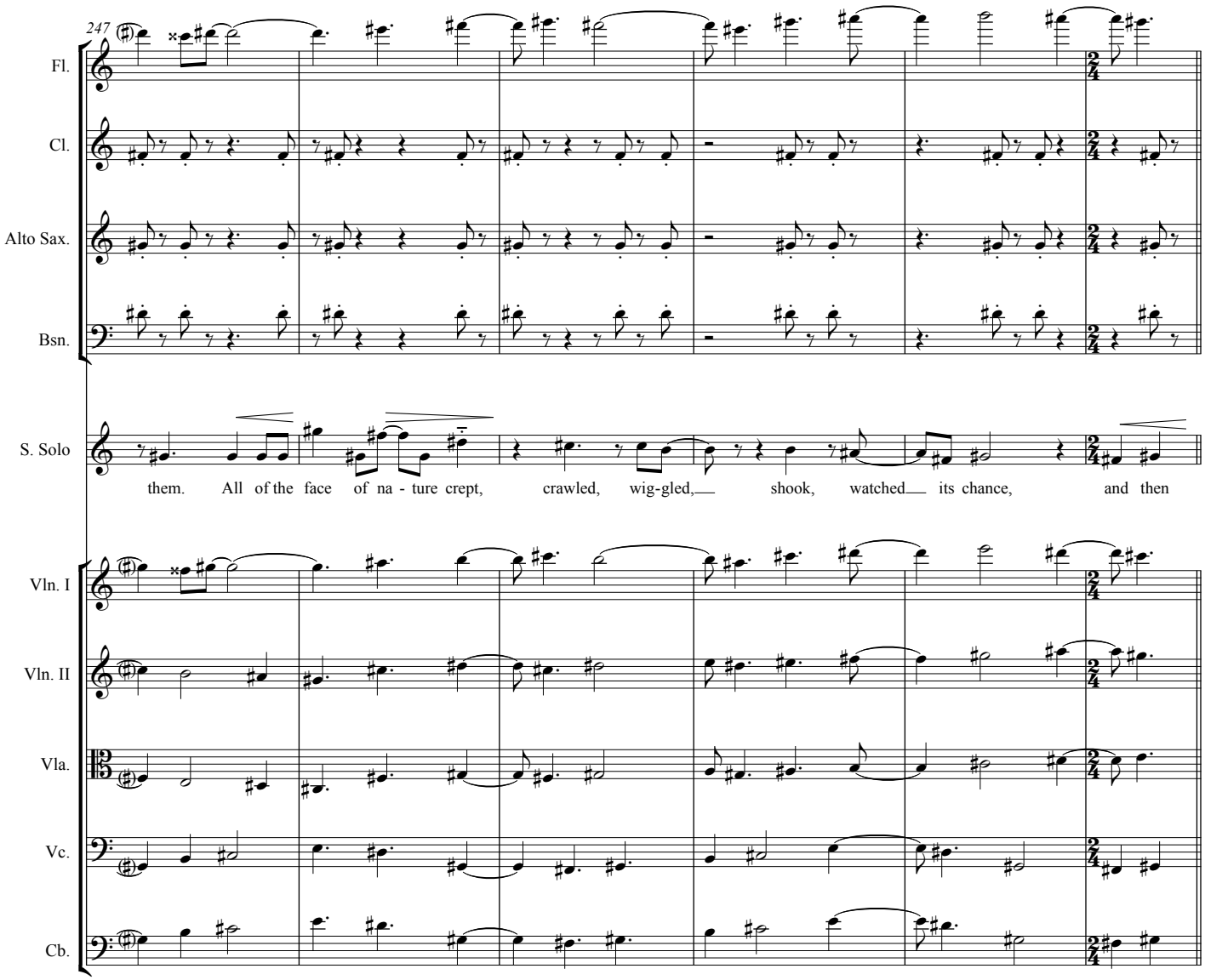
Vln. II *mp*

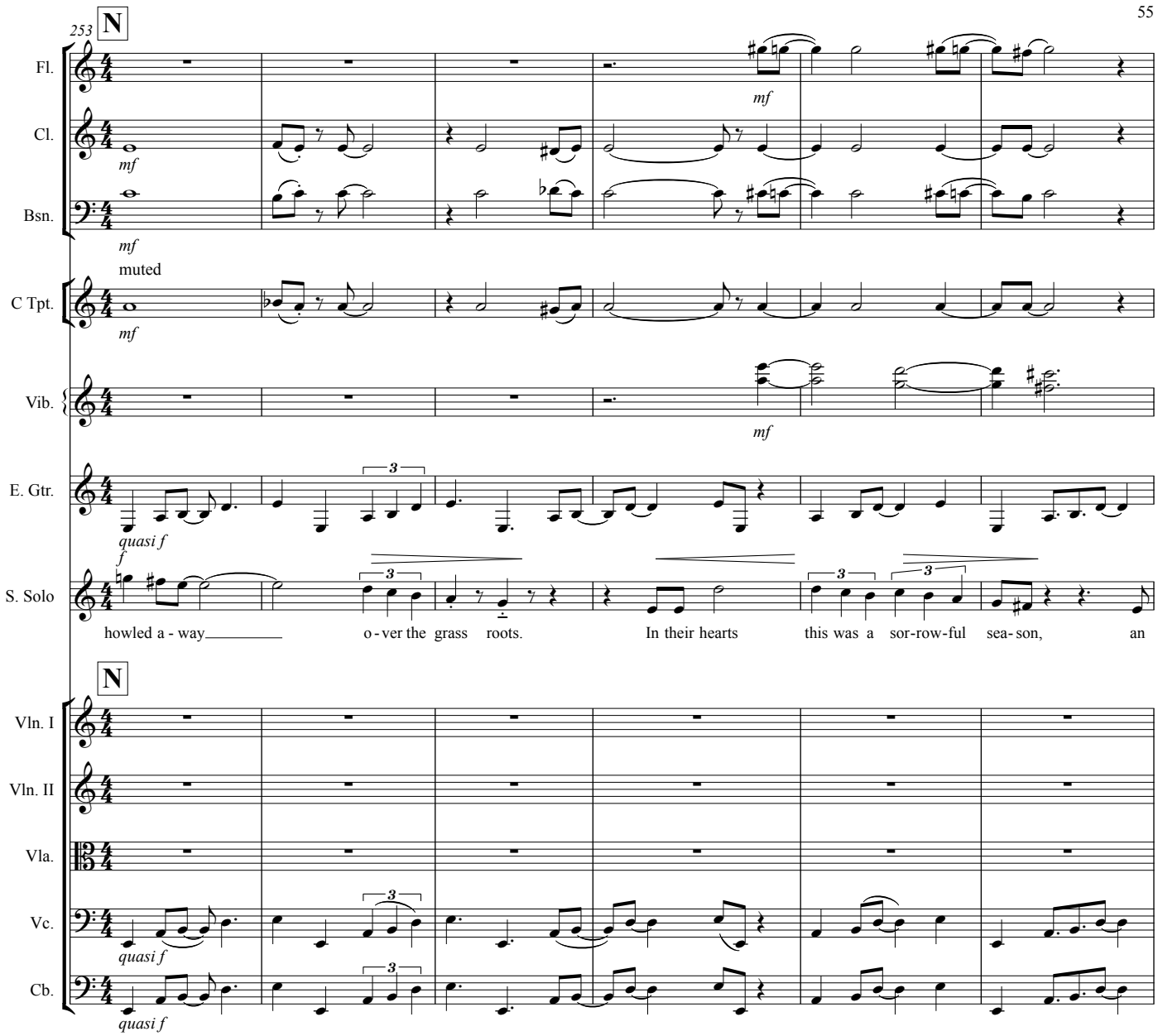
Vla. *mp*

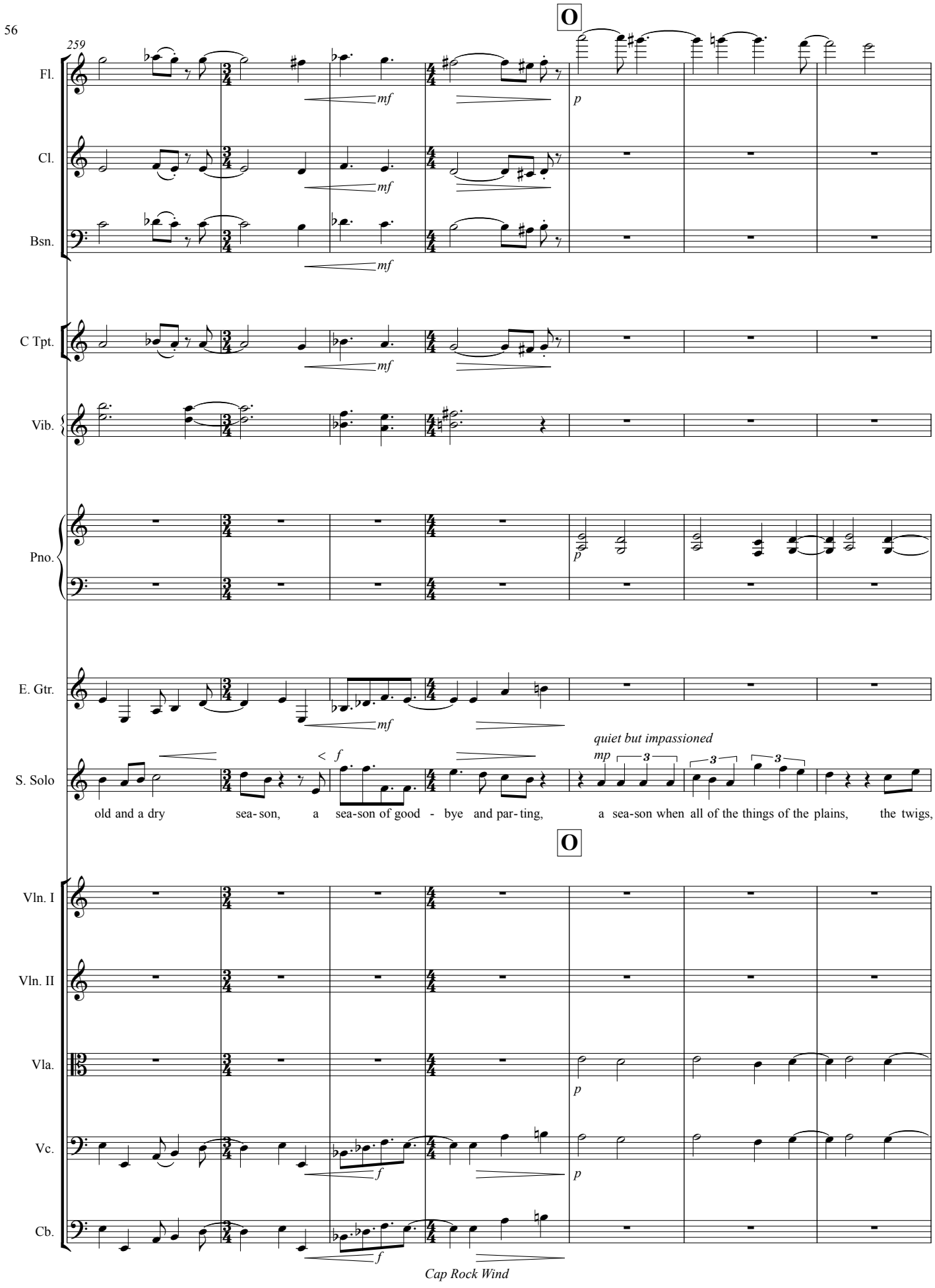
Vc. *mp*

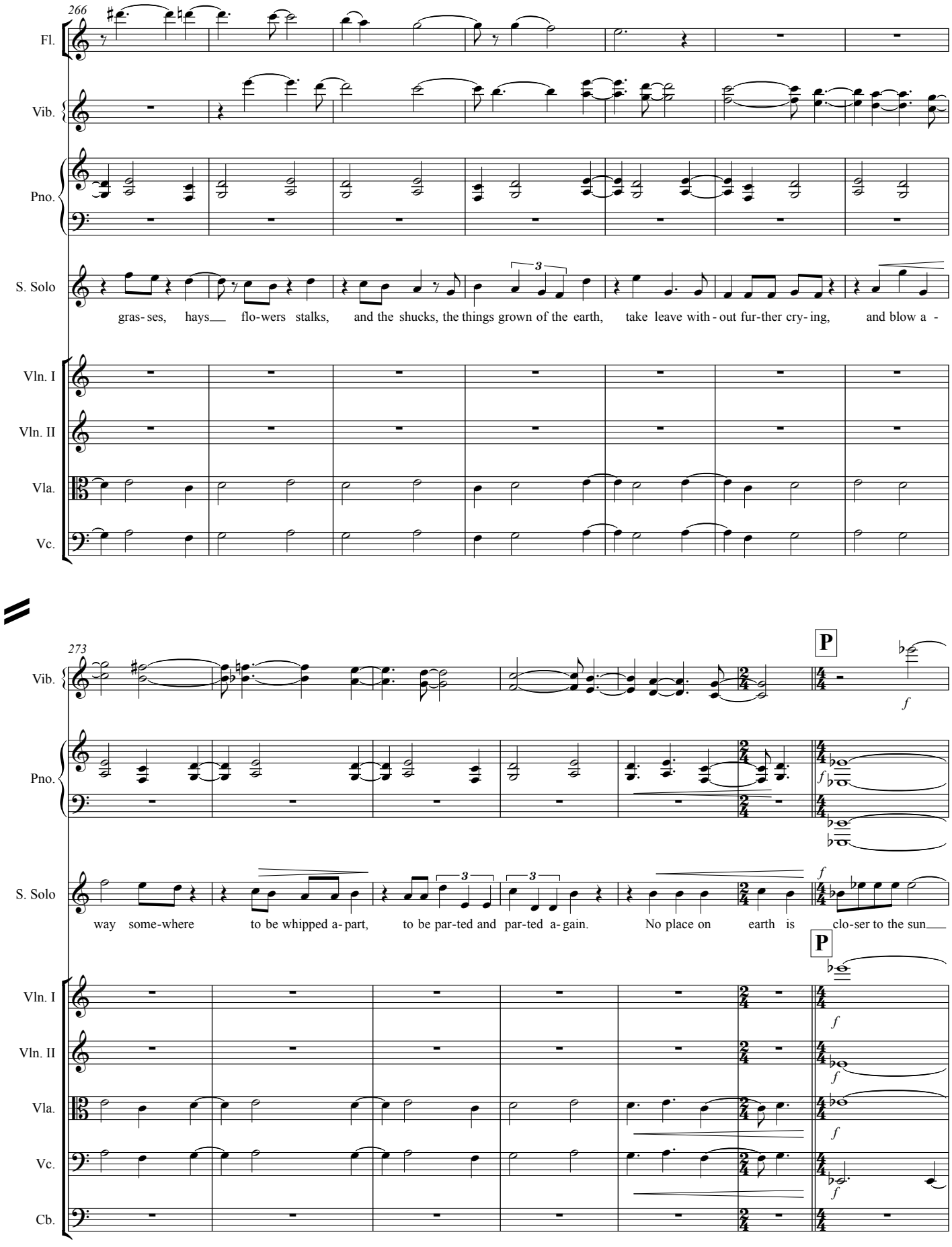
Cb. *mp*

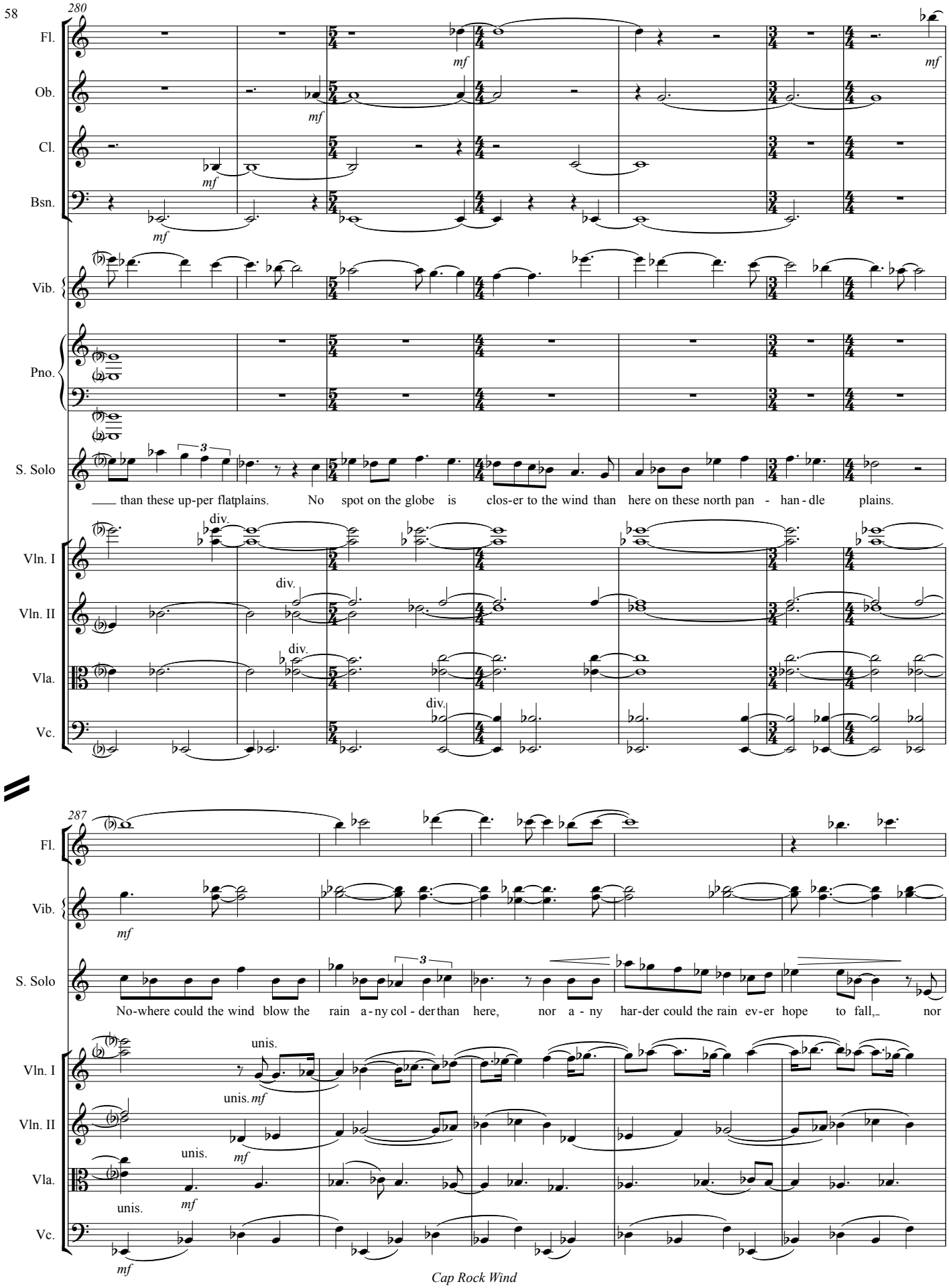

236
Fl.
Vib.
S. Solo
gue- ra, tum - ble- weeds, and stick er bush-es rat-tled as theybounced a - gainst the boards as they blew loose
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
241
M
Fl.
p
Cl.
mp
Alto Sax.
mp
Bsn.
mp
Vib.
S. Solo
f
mp
from their pla-ces and leaped, jumped, sailed and whist-led past the ends of the shed. The world moved a-round a-bout
M
Vln. I
p
Vln. II
p
Vla.
p
Vc.
p
Cb.
p

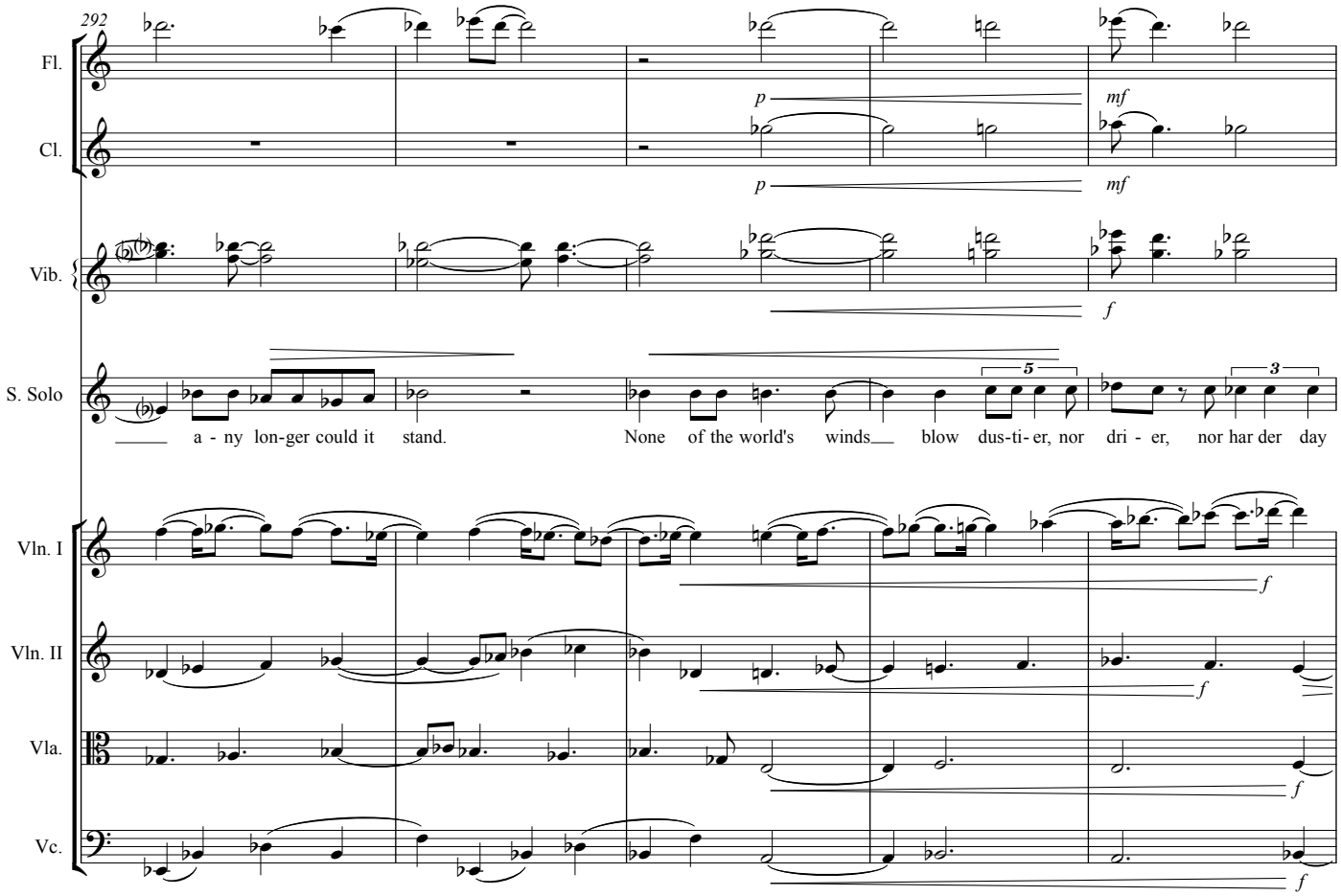

247
Fl.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
S. Solo
them. All of the face of na - ture crept, crawled, wig-gled, shook, watched its chance, and then
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

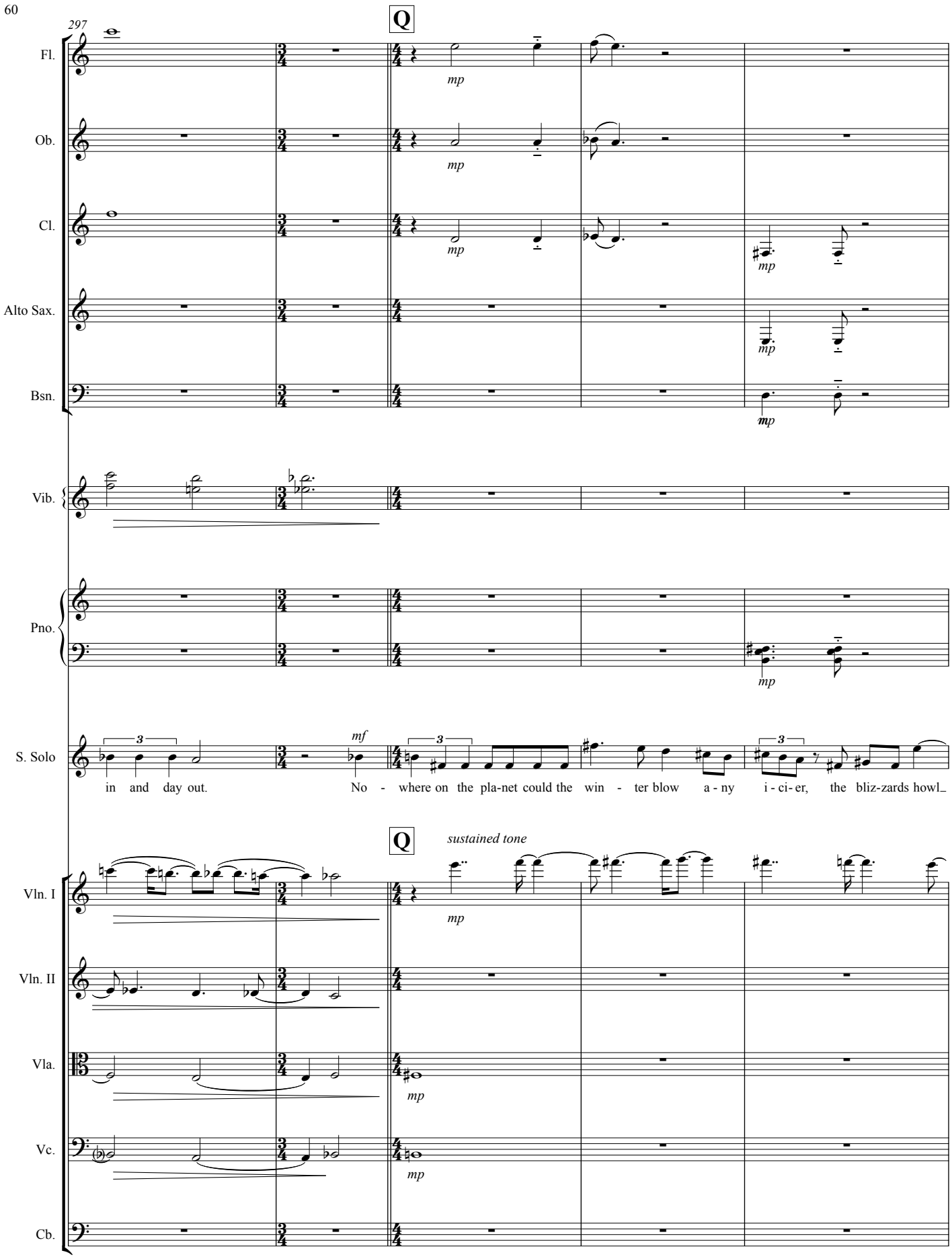

253
N
Fl.
Cl.
Bsn.
C Tpt.
muted
Vib.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
mf
quasi f
howled a - way
o - ver the grass roots.
In their hearts
this was a sor-row-ful sea- son, an
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

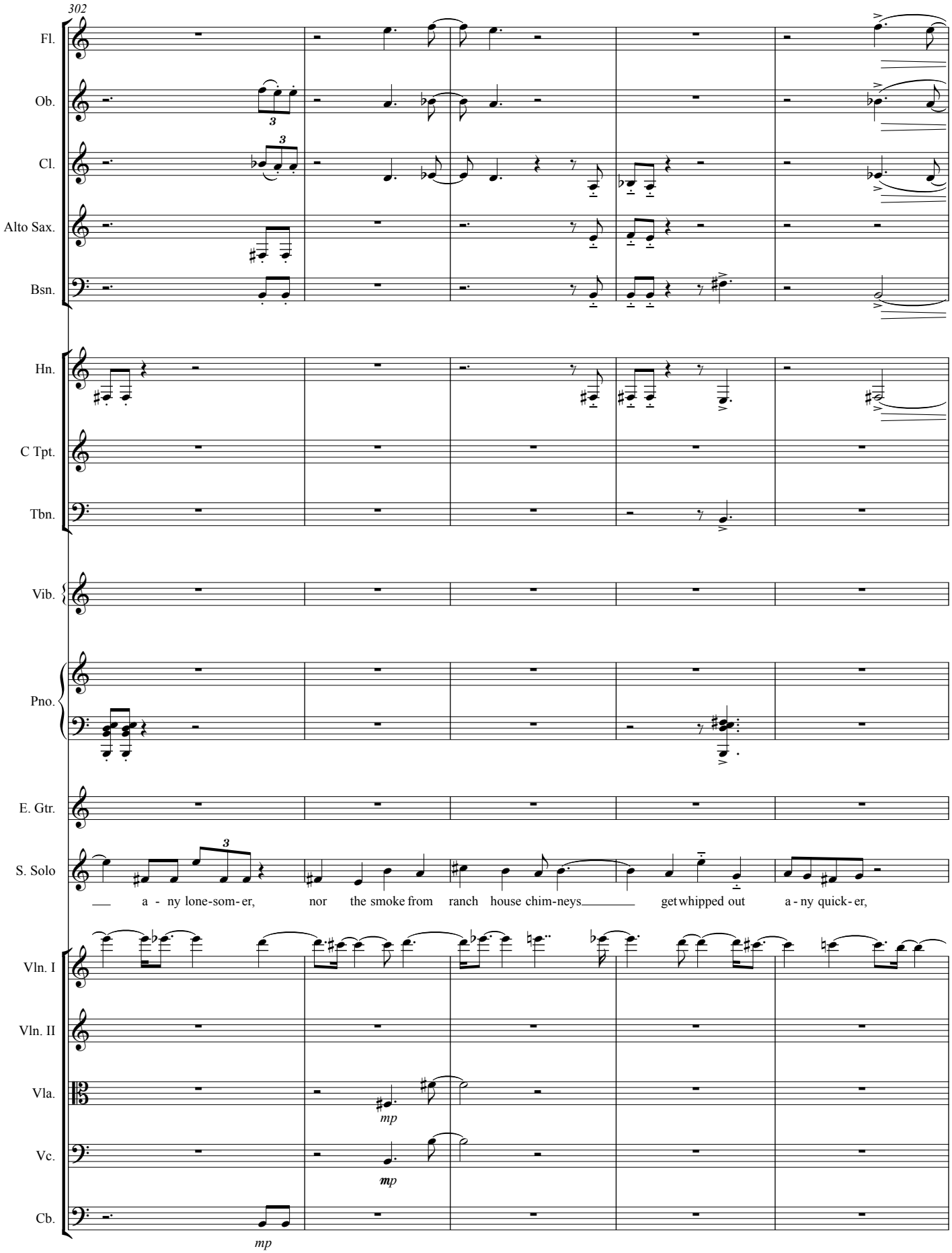

259
O
Fl.
Cl.
Bsn.
C Tpt.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
mf
p
quiet but impassioned
mp
old and a dry sea- son, a sea-son of good - bye and par- ting, a sea-son when all of the things of the plains, the twigs,
O
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f

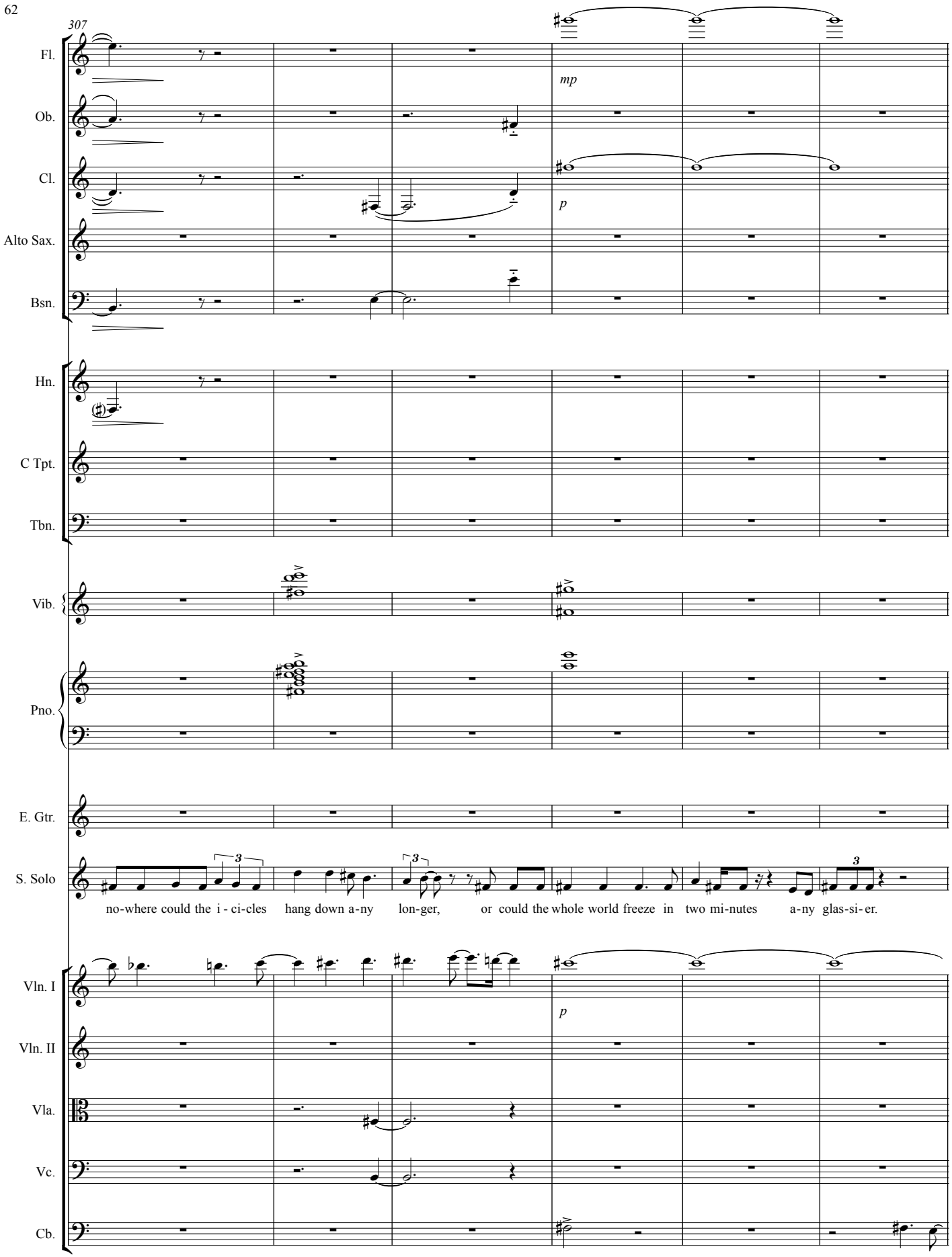

266
Fl.
Vib.
Pno.
S. Solo
gras- ses, hays flo-wers stalks, and the shucks, the things grown of the earth, take leave with- out fur-ther cry- ing, and blow a -
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
273
P
f
Pno.
f
S. Solo
f
way some-where to be whipped a- part, to be par-ted and par-ted a- gain. No place on earth is clo-ser to the sun
P
Vln. I
f
Vln. II
f
Vla.
f
Vc.
f
Cb.


280
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
S. Solo
than these up-per flatplains. No spot on the globe is clos-er to the wind than here on these north pan - han - dle plains.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
div.
287
No-where could the wind blow the rain a - ny col - der than here, nor a - ny har-der could the rain ev-er hope to fall, nor
unis.
mf


292
Fl.
Cl.
Vib.
S. Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
p
mf
f
a - ny lon-ger could it stand.
None of the world's winds blow dus-ti- er, nor dri - er, nor har der day


297
Q
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
S. Solo
mp
mf
in and day out.
No - where on the pla-net could the win - ter blow a - ny i - ci- er, the bliz-zards howl_
Q
sustained tone
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


302
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
___ a - ny lone-som-er, nor the smoke from ranch house chim-neys___ get whipped out a - ny quick-er,
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
mp
mp


307
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
p
p
3
3
3
no-where could the i - ci-cles hang down a-ny lon-ger, or could the whole world freeze in two mi-nutes a-ny glas-si-er.

Slightly slower, if needed to enunciate the text without rushing

313

R

Fl. *mp*

Vib. *mp*

S. Solo

Here are the peop-le in this room go-ing and com-ing_ They go and they come in andthrough, in and through one a-no-ther.

R

Vln. I *mp*

Vln. II *mp*

Vla. *p* *mp*

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

318

Fl.

Vib. *mf*

S. Solo *mf*

And the peo-ple of the farms and the ran-ches a-round, they go and they come in and through, in and through one a-no-ther.

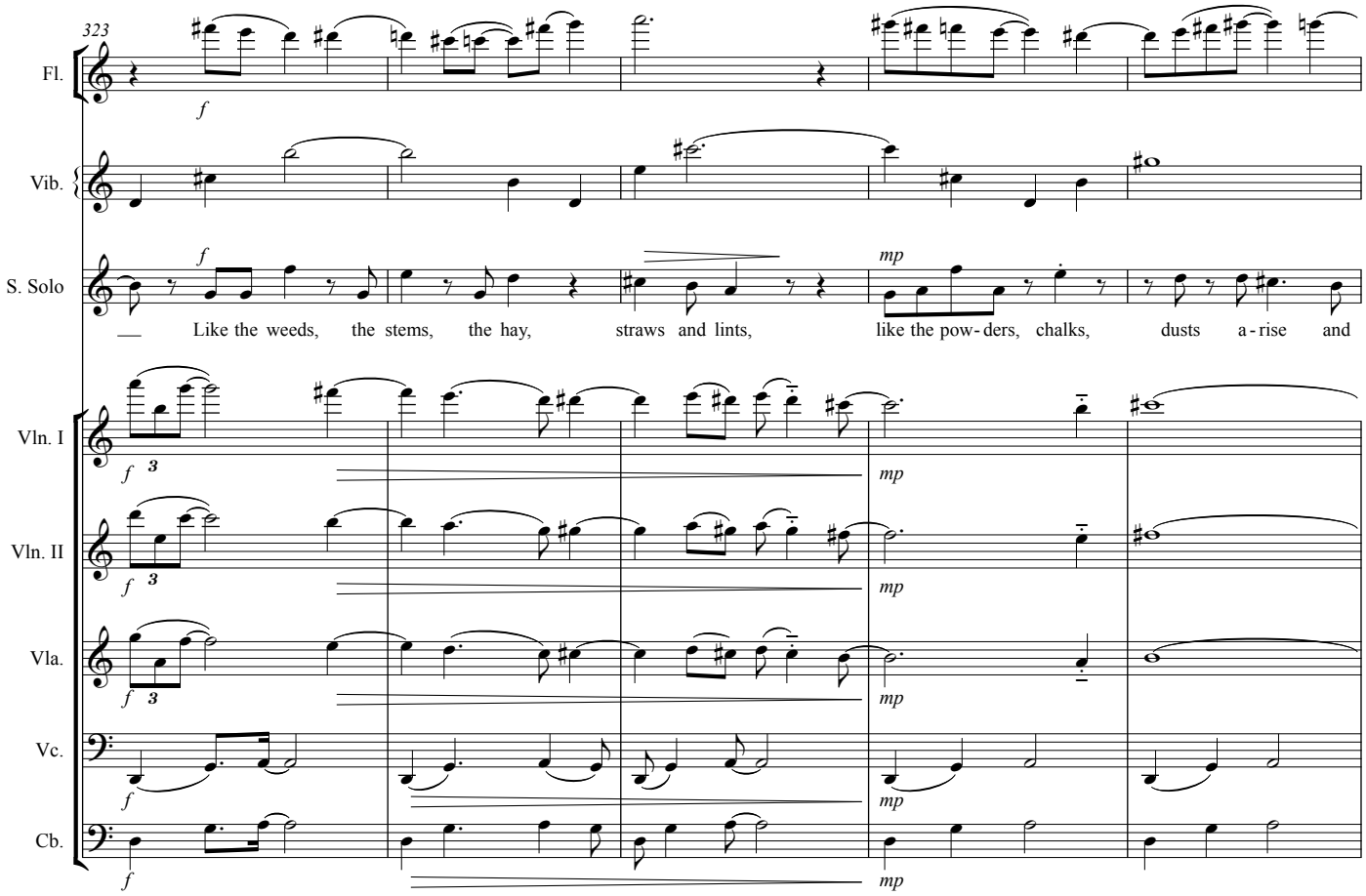
Vln. I *f* *mf*

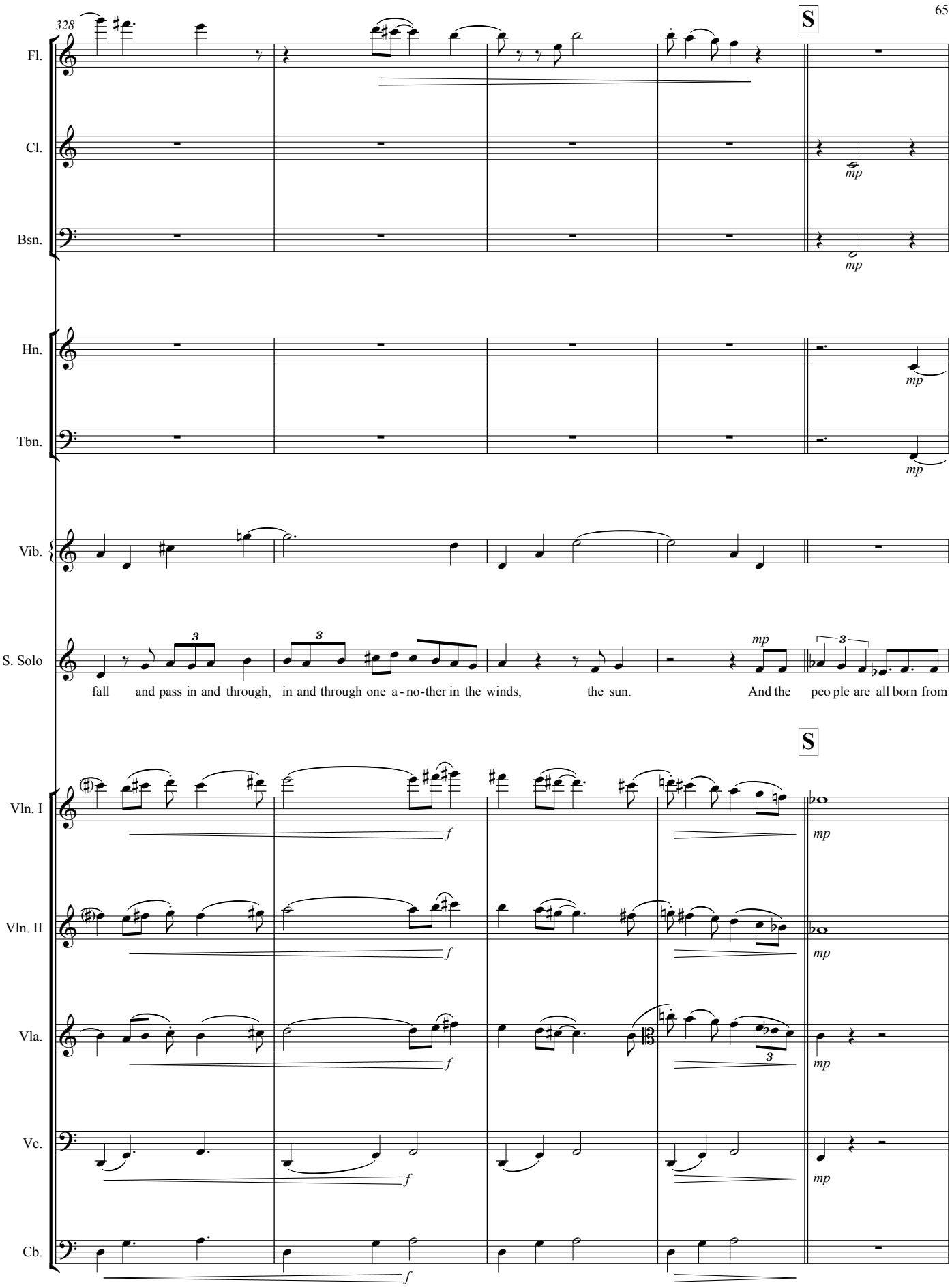
Vln. II *f* *mf*

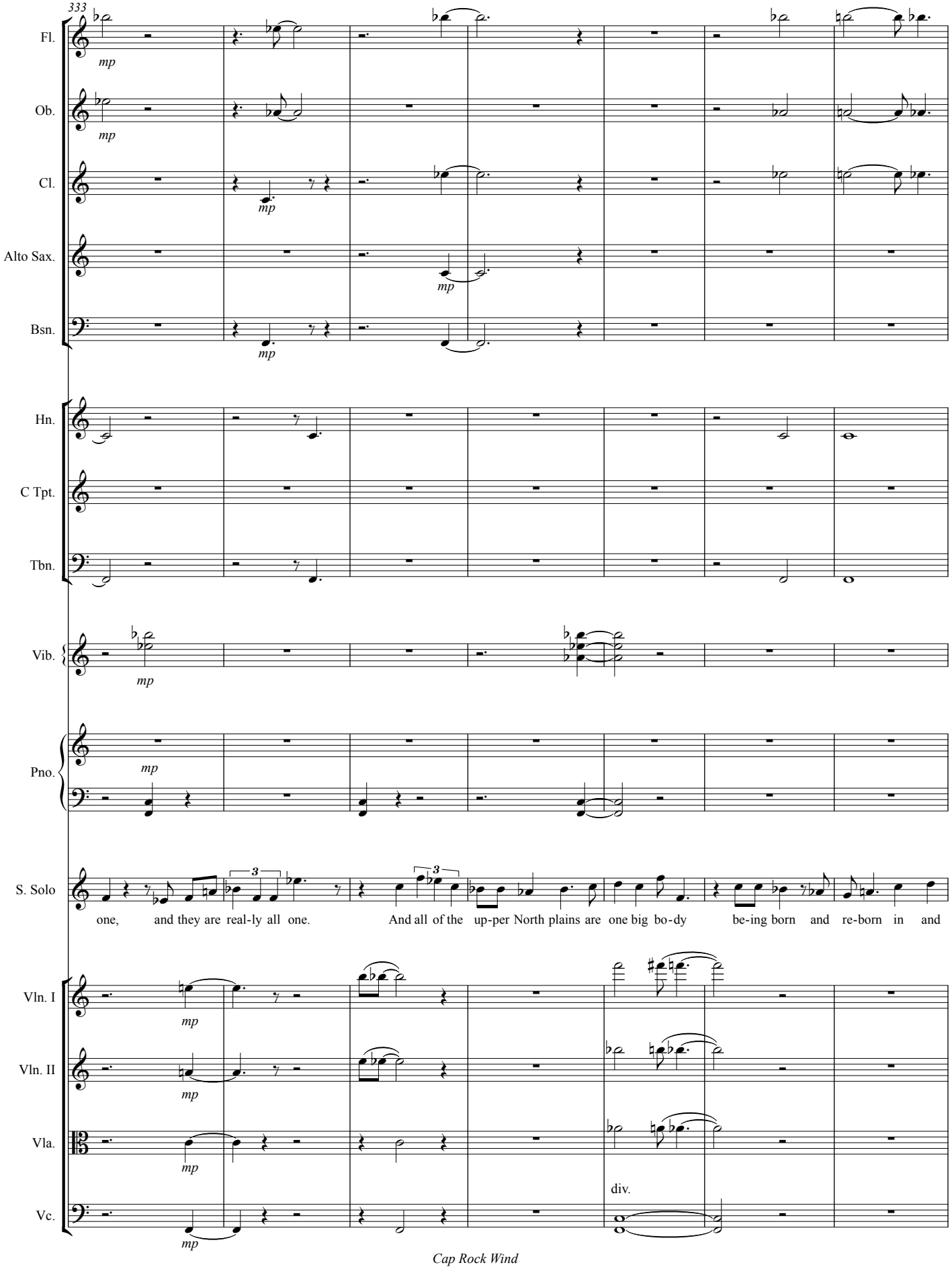
Vla. *f* *mf*

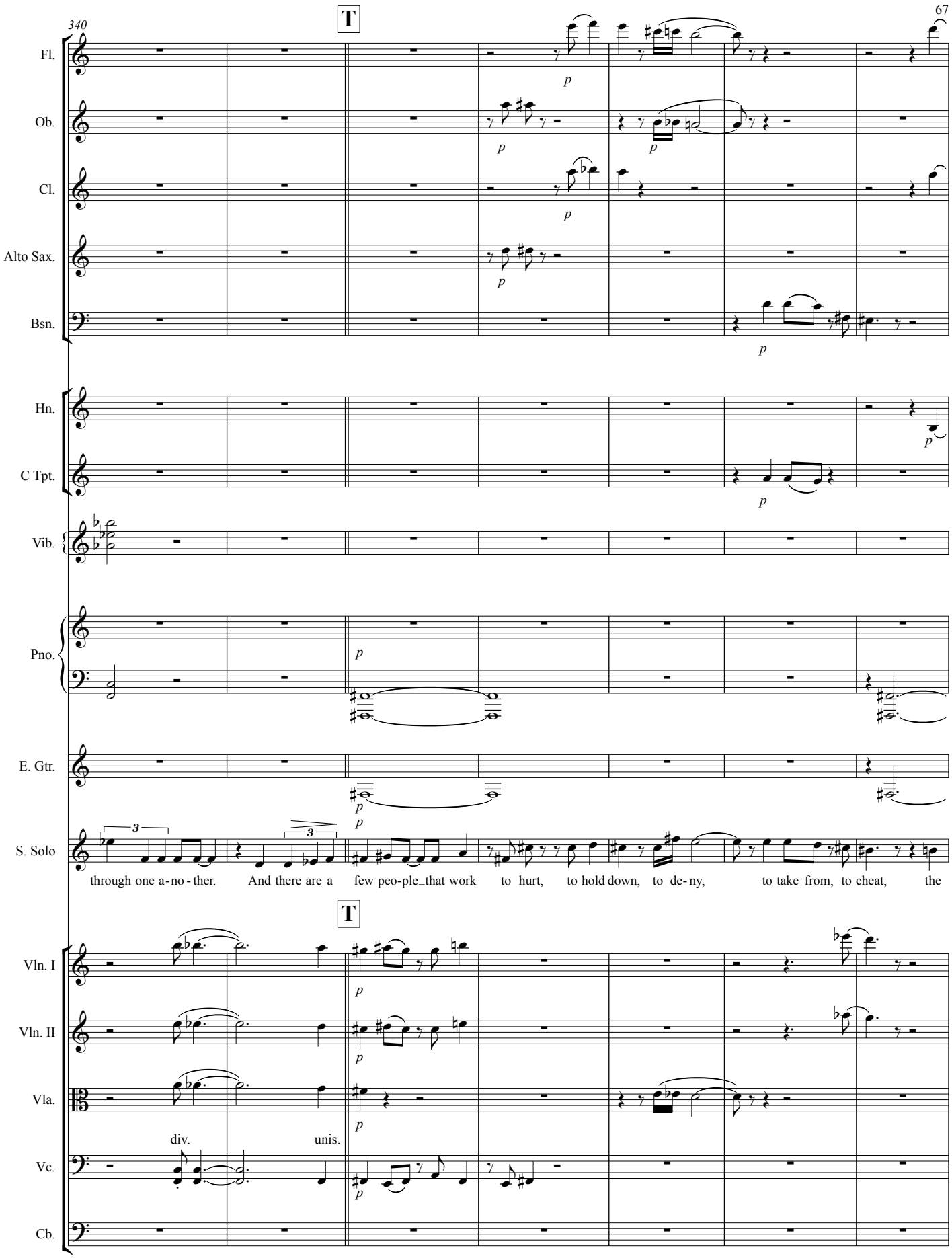
Vc. *f* *mf*

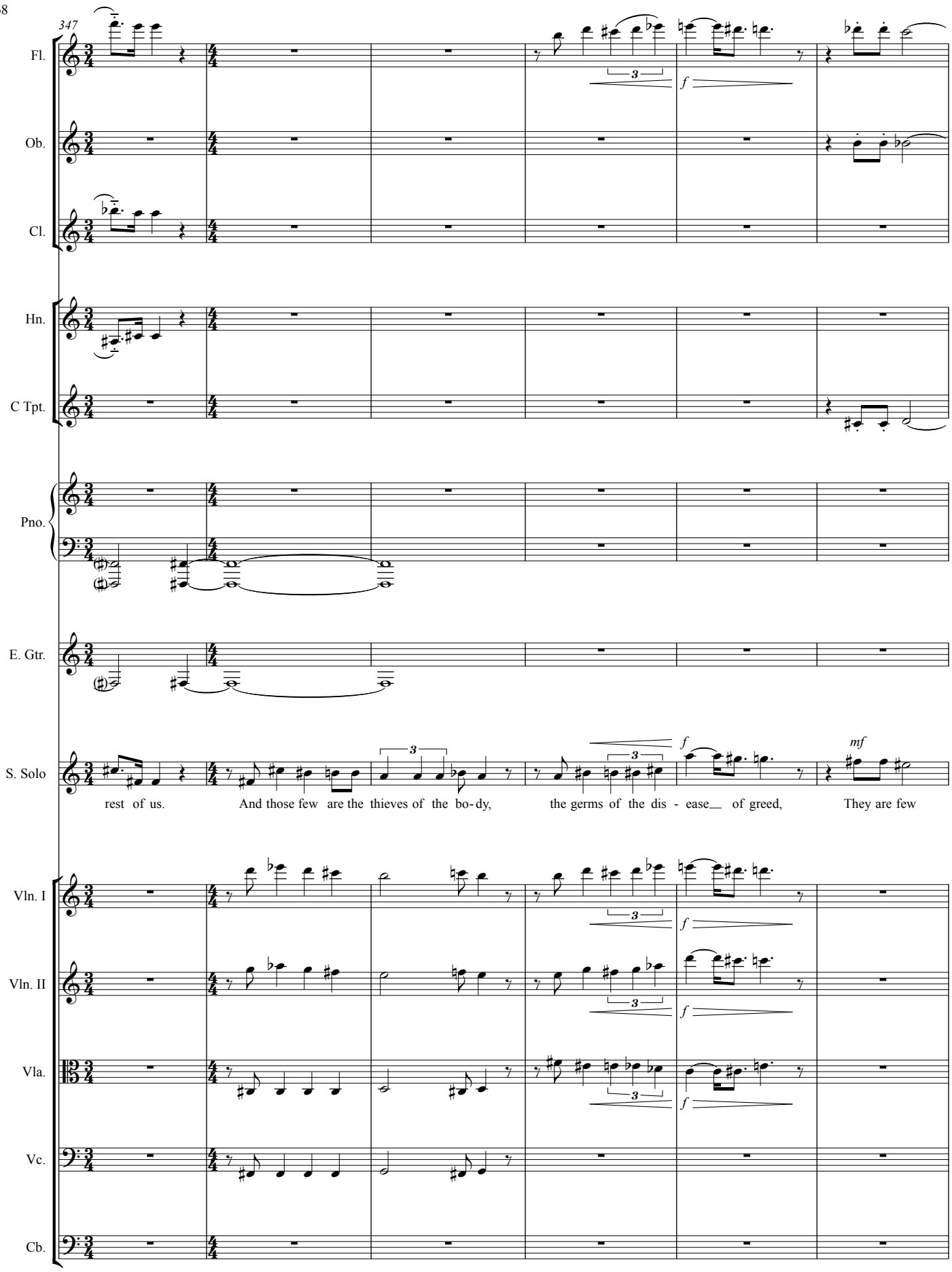
Cb. *f* *mf*

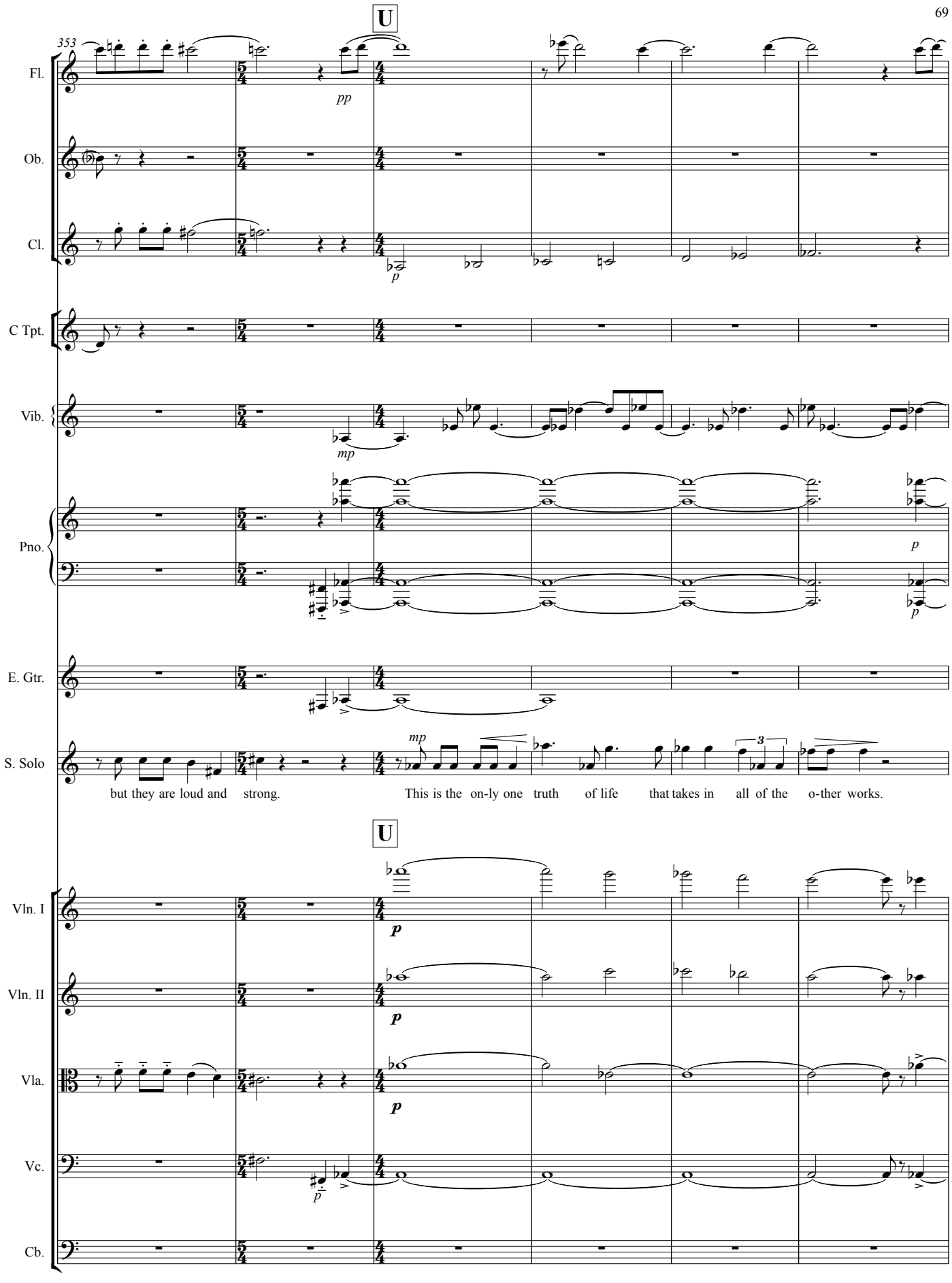

323
Fl.
Vib.
S. Solo
Like the weeds, the stems, the hay, straws and lints, like the pow-ders, chalks, dusts a-rise and
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
mp
3

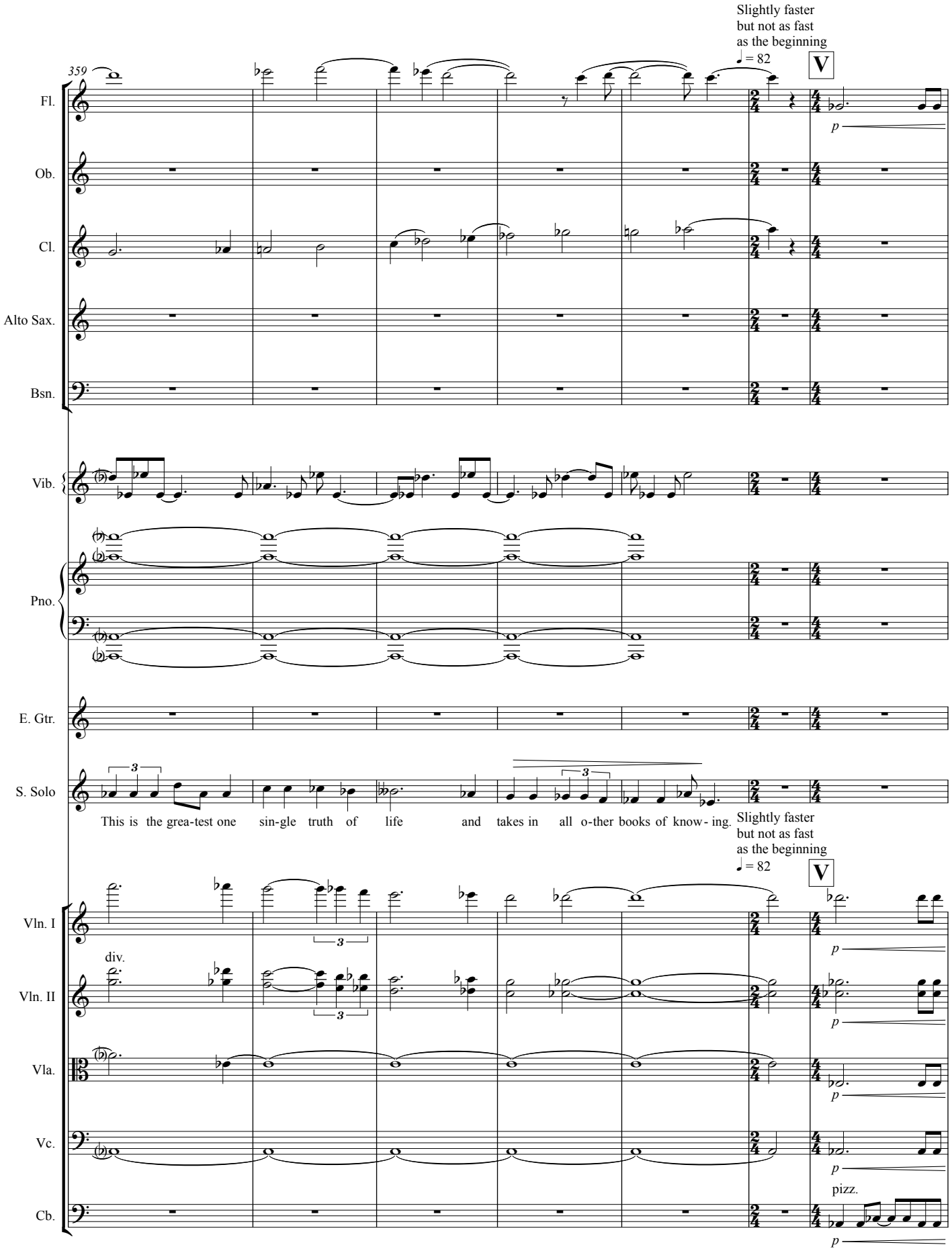

328
S
Fl.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tbn.
Vib.
S. Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
f
fall and pass in and through, in and through one a - no-ther in the winds, the sun. And the peo ple are all born from

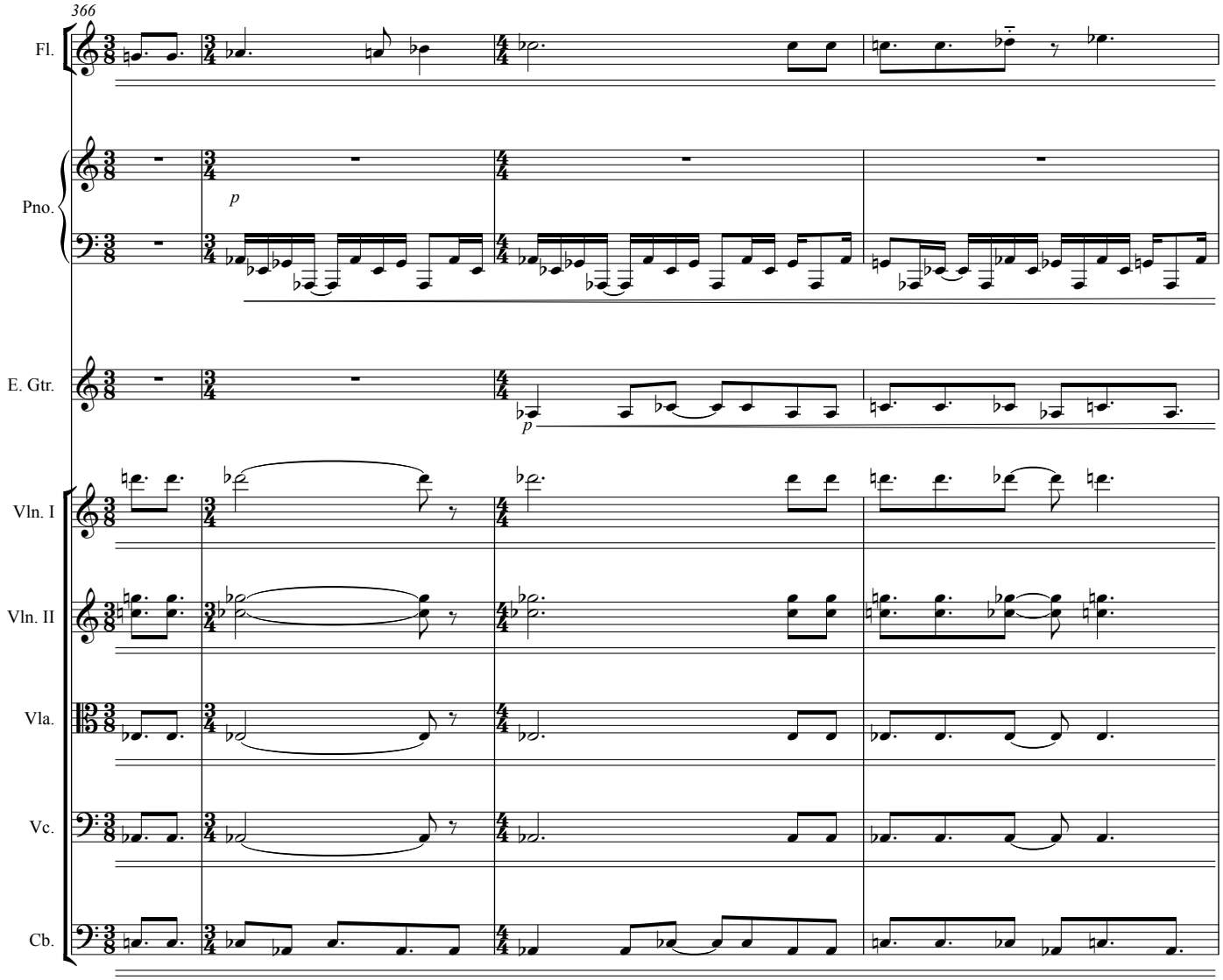

333
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Tbn.
Vib.
Pno.
S. Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
one, and they are real-ly all one. And all of the up-per North plains are one big bo-dy be-ing born and re-born in and
div.

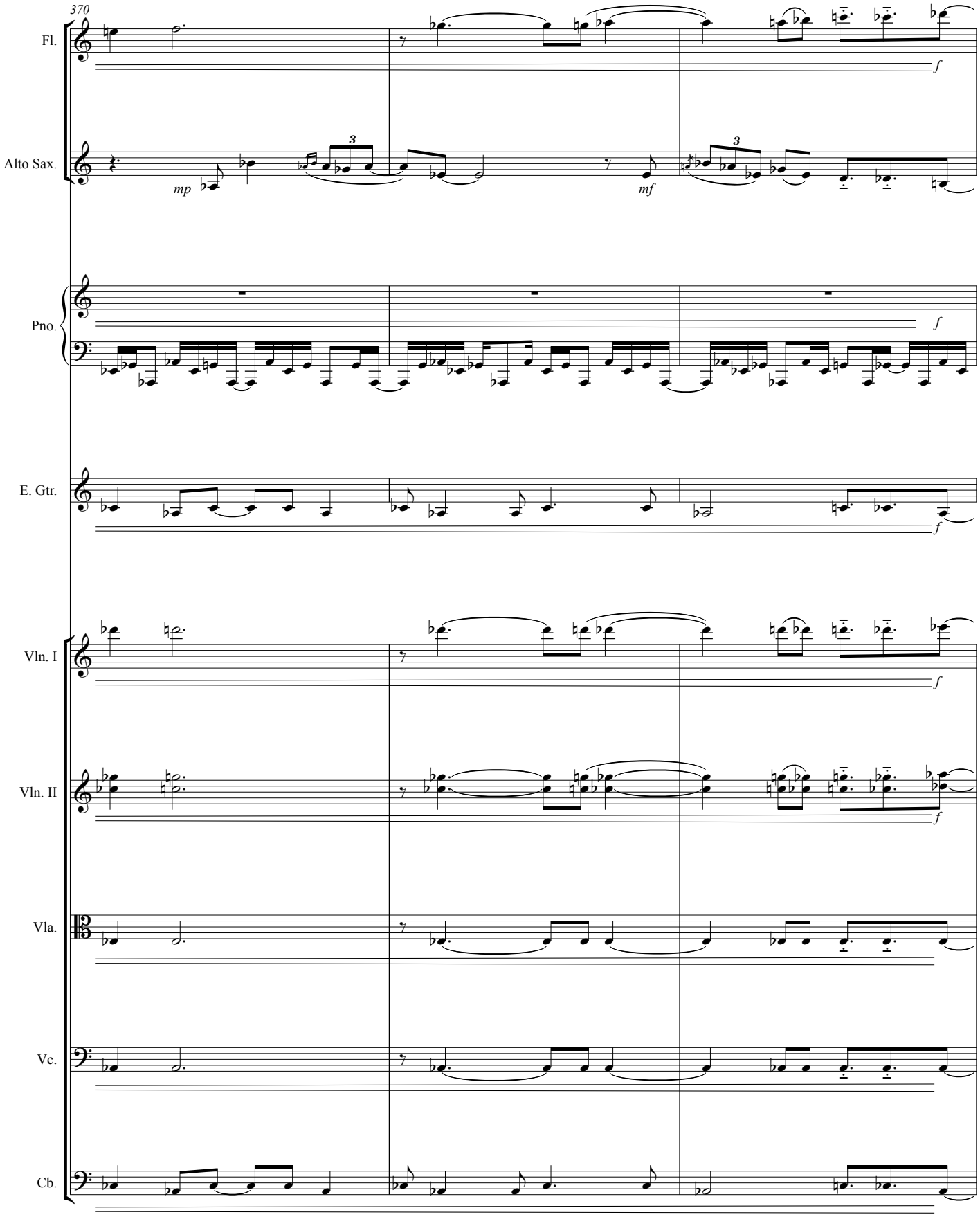

340
T
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
through one a-no-ther. And there are a few peo-ple_that work to hurt, to hold down, to de-ny, to take from, to cheat, the
T
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
div.
unis.
Vc.
Cb.

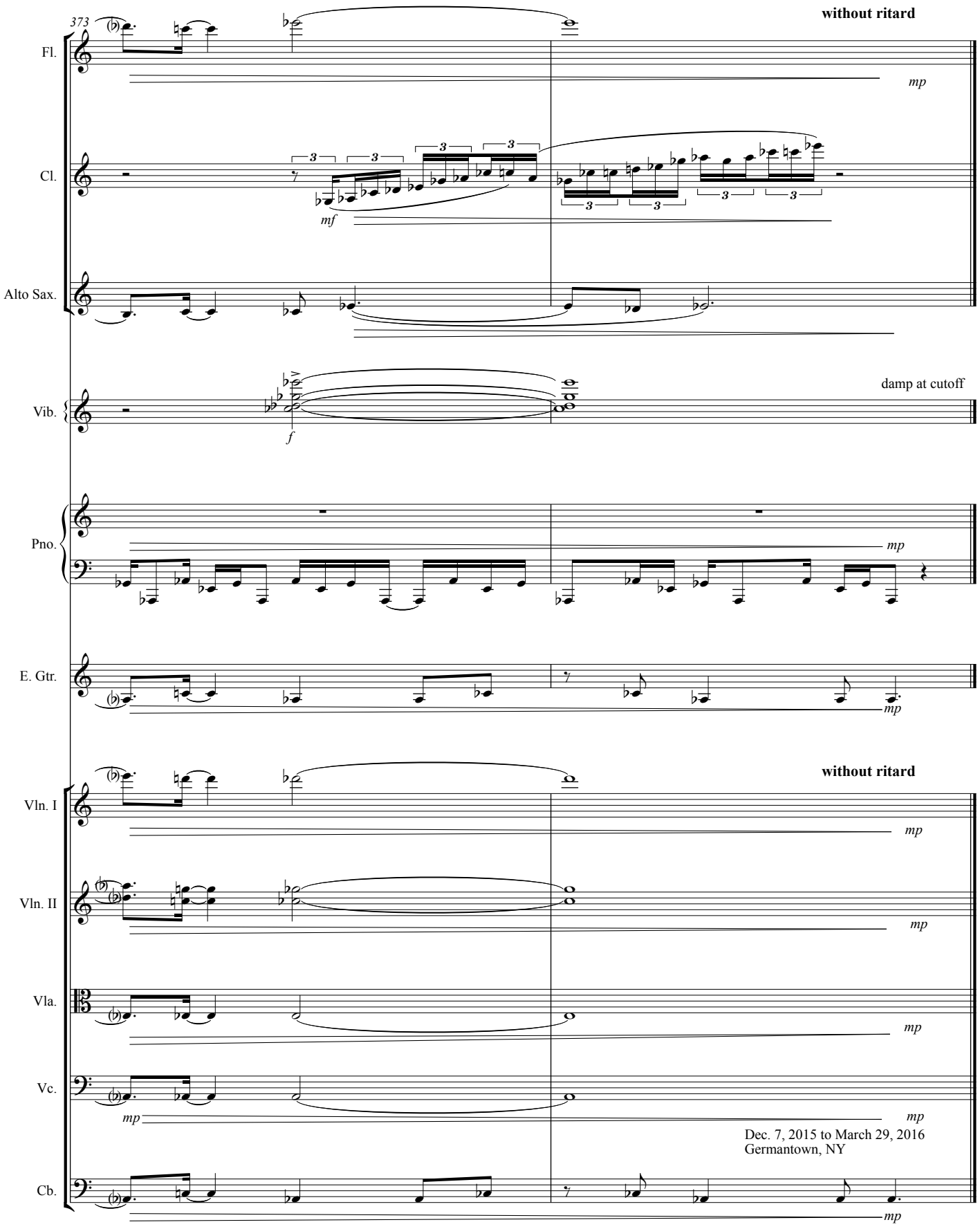

347
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Hn.
C Tpt.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
mf
3
rest of us.
And those few are the thieves of the bo- dy,
the germs of the dis - ease of greed,
They are few


U
353
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
C Tpt.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
pp
p
mp
mp
p
p
3
but they are loud and strong.
This is the on-ly one truth of life that takes in all of the o-ther works.
U
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
p
p
p
p


359
Slightly faster
but not as fast
as the beginning
♩ = 82
V
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Alto Sax.
Bsn.
Vib.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
S. Solo
This is the grea-test one sin-gle truth of life and takes in all o-ther books of know- ing.
Slightly faster
but not as fast
as the beginning
♩ = 82
V
Vln. I
div.
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
pizz.
p


366
Fl.
Pno.
p
E. Gtr.
p
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


370
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Pno.
E. Gtr.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp
mf
f
3


373
without ritard
Fl.
mp
Cl.
mf
Alto Sax.
damp at cutoff
Vib.
f
Pno.
mp
E. Gtr.
mp
without ritard
Vln. I
mp
Vln. II
mp
Vla.
mp
Vc.
mp
mp
Dec. 7, 2015 to March 29, 2016
Germantown, NY
Cb.
mp