shadow blending

String Quartet

Score

Max Chung

(2025)

TITLE: shadow blending

DURATION: ca. 11'

INSTRUMENTATION: violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello

WORLD PREMIERE: Bergamot quartet, premiered at Point Counterpoint

PREMIERE DATE: September 2025

PROGRAM NOTES:

The quartet, *shadow blending*, was inspired by a late afternoon photo I took at the Salt Flats at Death Valley. The piece explores the delicate interplay of the solidity of geologic textures against the everchanging ephemeral shadows they cast, highlighting the fleeting moments of experience and the fragility of existence and memory. As the composition unfolds, the intertwining traces of earth and shadow become psychologically inseparable, creating a sonic expression that blurs the line between the tangible and the intangible. This work explores human perceptions, navigating the space between what is physically present and what lingers as afterimages fade, particularly as the long evening shadows envelop the geologic formation. In shadow blending, listeners are invited to reflect on the delicate balance of reality and memory, capturing the essence of fleeting moments within a rich auditory landscape.

The piece undergoes two significant transformations. The first transition shifts from a soundscape characterized by tremolos that emerge into a clear melodic line. This short melodic motif gradually unfolds as it is picked up by all four string instruments throughout the piece, creating a dynamic interplay between unison passages and staggered rhythmic figures of descending glissandi.

The second transformation begins midway through the piece with dense and frenetic textures as the quartet unites to produce rapid bursts of seventh chords that change dramatically in quick succession, ranging from two to five note bursts. As the piece continues, the lines increase in length before the violins fade away, revealing the lower registers that represent the sonic shadows that shift throughout the composition.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

The piece undergoes two significant transformations. The first transition shifts from a soundscape characterized by tremolos that emerge into a clear melodic line. This short melodic motif gradually is picked up by all four string instruments as the piece evolves, creating a dynamic and contrasting interplay between the unison passages and staggered rhythmic figures of descending glissandi. Initially, these melodic lines occupy the upper register of each instrument. As the piece progresses, all string instruments descend to the middles of their registers.

At rehearsal letter 'M', roughly three-quarters of the way through the piece, the second transformation occurs. Here, the texture becomes denser and more frenetic as the quartet unites to produce rapid bursts of seventh chords that alternate with quick sixteenth note lines that begin in unison. Over time, the attacks become staggered and the sixteenth notes are sparser and sparser until only the "broken" chords remain at the end of the piece. The piece suddenly ends at the bottom of the cello's register, in contrast to the long, high notes at the beginning in the first violin.

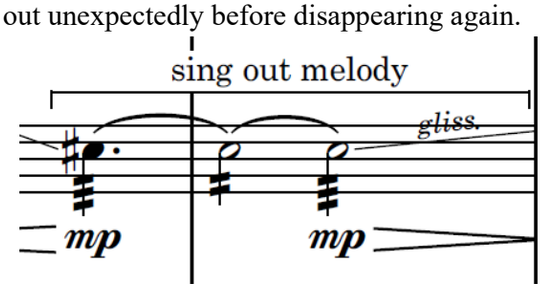
Particularly in the first transformation, the performance should emphasize the contrast between foreground and background (often shown through dynamics), exaggerating the distinction between the tangible and intangible concept of the piece with strongly contrasting performance techniques.

KEY:

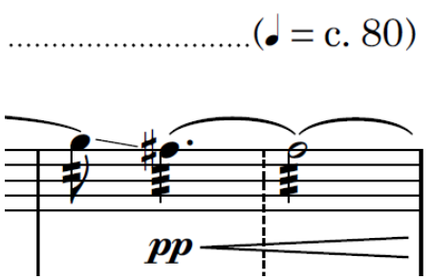
Miscellaneous:

Accidentals apply throughout the bar, and are reset the next measure.

In the middle of the piece, there will be fragments of bracketed melodies. When this is indicated, sing out the line as it becomes the foreground of the texture before fading away quickly once the bracket ends. The dynamics are demarcations on how the fragment should end—in the case of a crescendo/decrescendo, consider the melody as an ebb and flow, appearing and disappearing like a wave. In the case of a sudden dynamic change, the melody should almost be a separate line from the music around it, popping out unexpectedly before disappearing again.

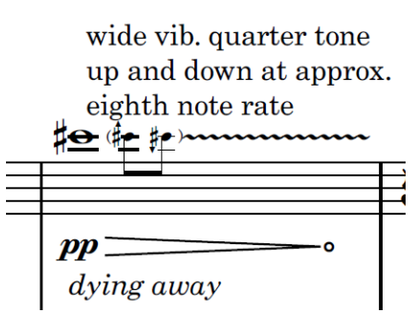


A dotted barline is meant to indicate the start or end of a tempo change, mid-measure.

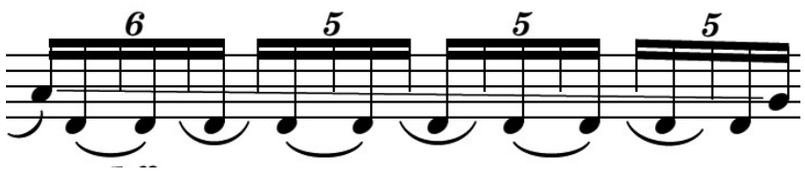


Wide Vibrato:

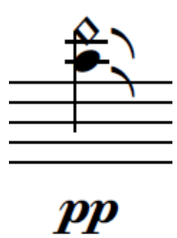
Wide vibrato will have notes parenthesized to indicate the highest and lowest pitches that the player should shift to. The wide vibrato should be played at a similar, but not constant rate.



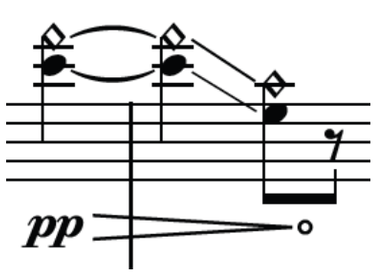
Special Glissandi:
Pitches should change at a completely linear rate, and glissandi should be smooth. Any pitch bends go to an indeterminately high or low note within the eighth note. This notation means the top note should be slowly slid down in the rhythm shown to the target note at the end.



Fall-off:
Play the note for its entire duration and glissando down to an unspecified pitch to give the effect of a line trailing off. The note should travel downwards instantly and at a linear rate.

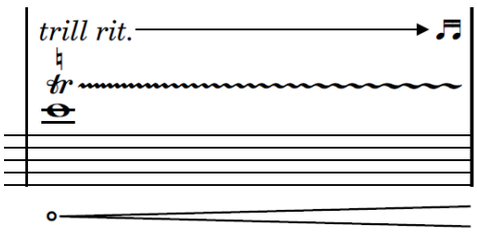


Harmonics:
Natural harmonics are written where the node touched is indicated with a diamond, and the sounding pitch is written in parentheses above. The string number is written above the note and only applies to that note. Artificial harmonics are written where the string is stopped with a regular notehead, and the diamond indicates the node. The harmonic glissando is notated as such:



Trill Ritardando:

Gradually change the rate of trilling from a regular trill speed to the notated value at the end of the ritardando. Slowing down in unison is preferred, but not necessary.



Abbreviations:

n.v.	non vibrato (n.v. used to avoid clutter)
m.v.	molto vibrato (m.v. used to avoid clutter)
n.v. → m.v.	slowly add vibrato over time
vib. ad lib.	free vibrato (vibrato ad libitum)

shadow blending

(2025)

Max Chung
(b. 1998)

Lonely (♩ = 66)

like seagull gliss.

sul pont., non vib.

gliss.

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

Violoncello

pp

sul pont., non vib.

7

gliss.

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

I

3

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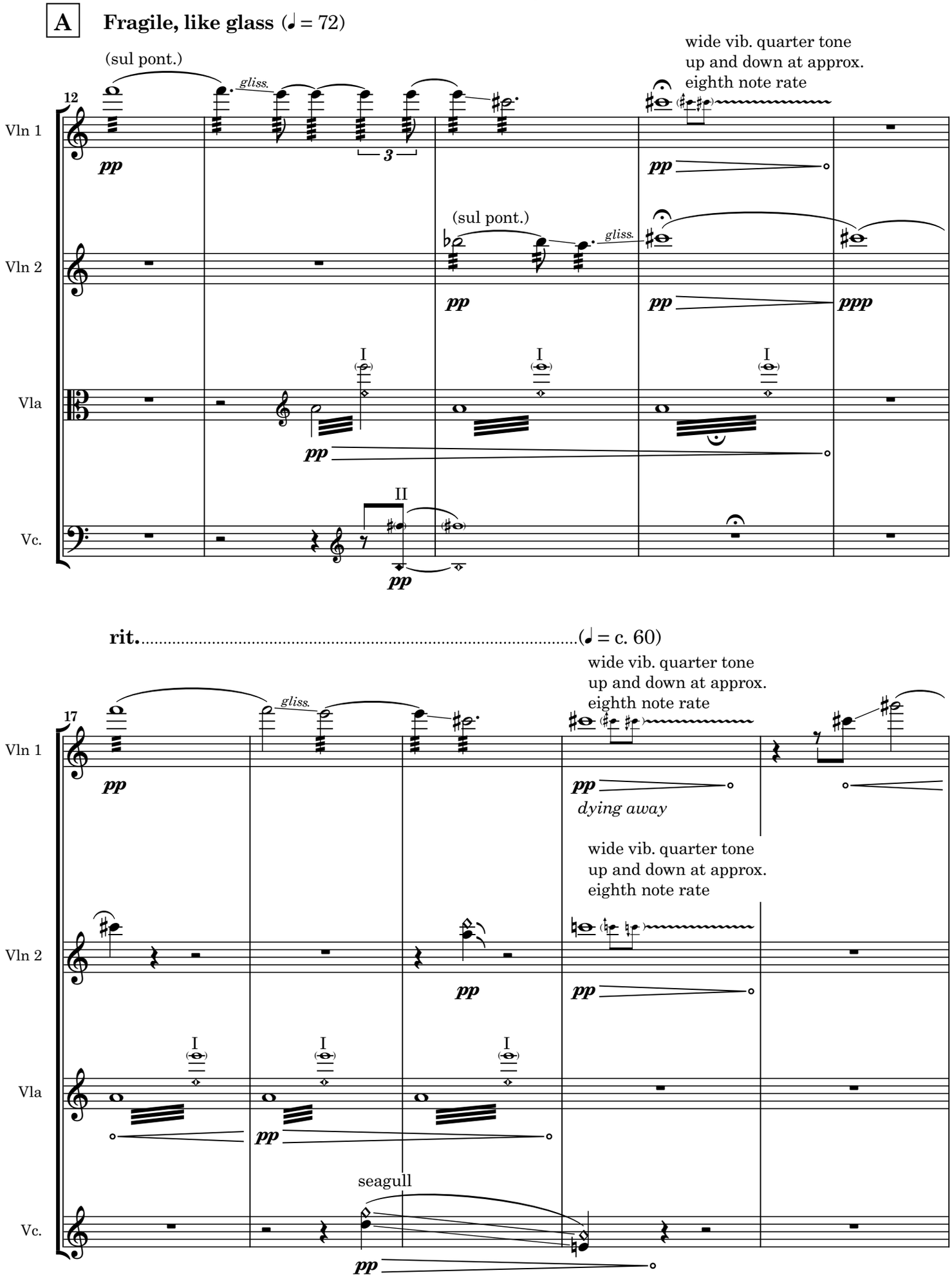
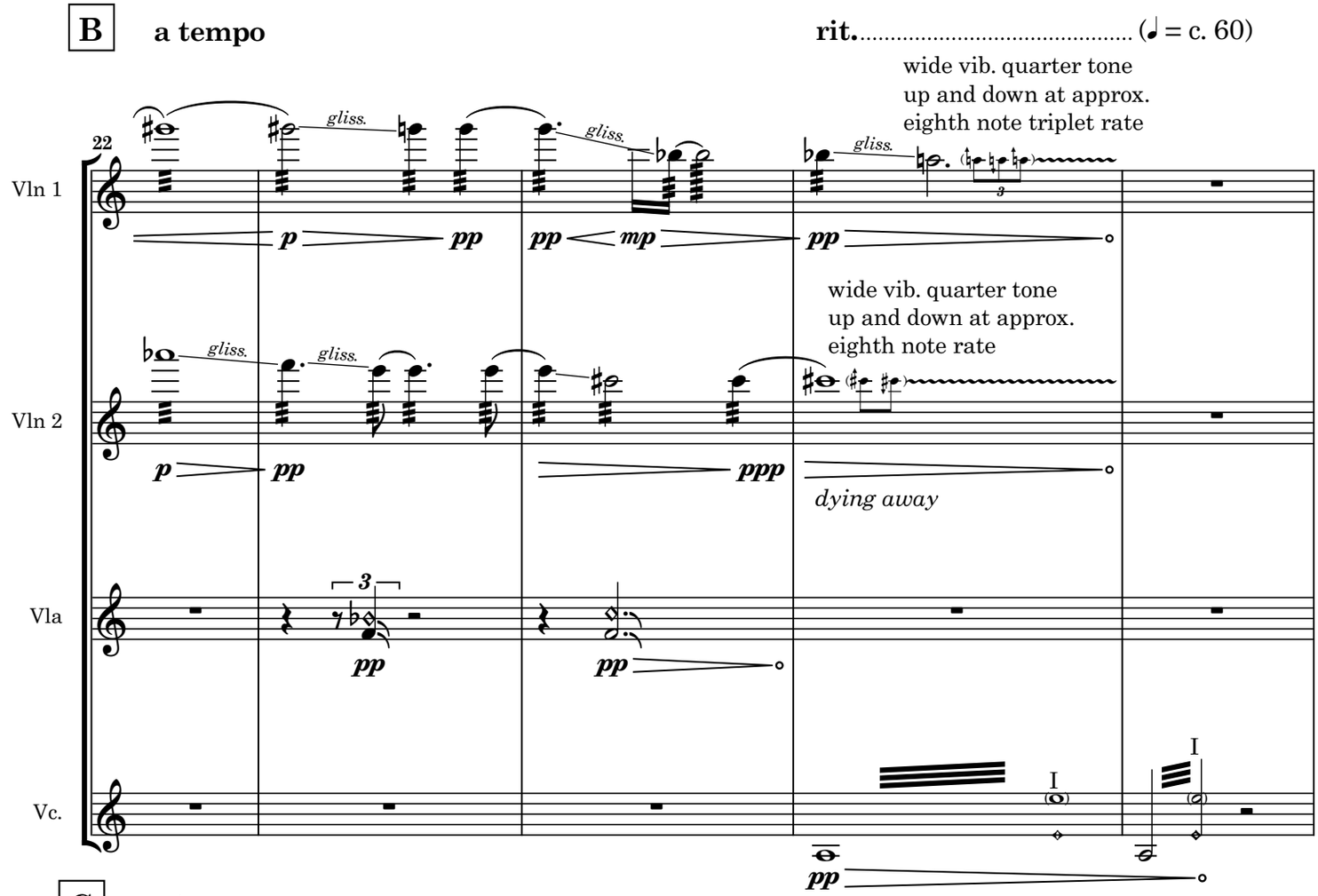
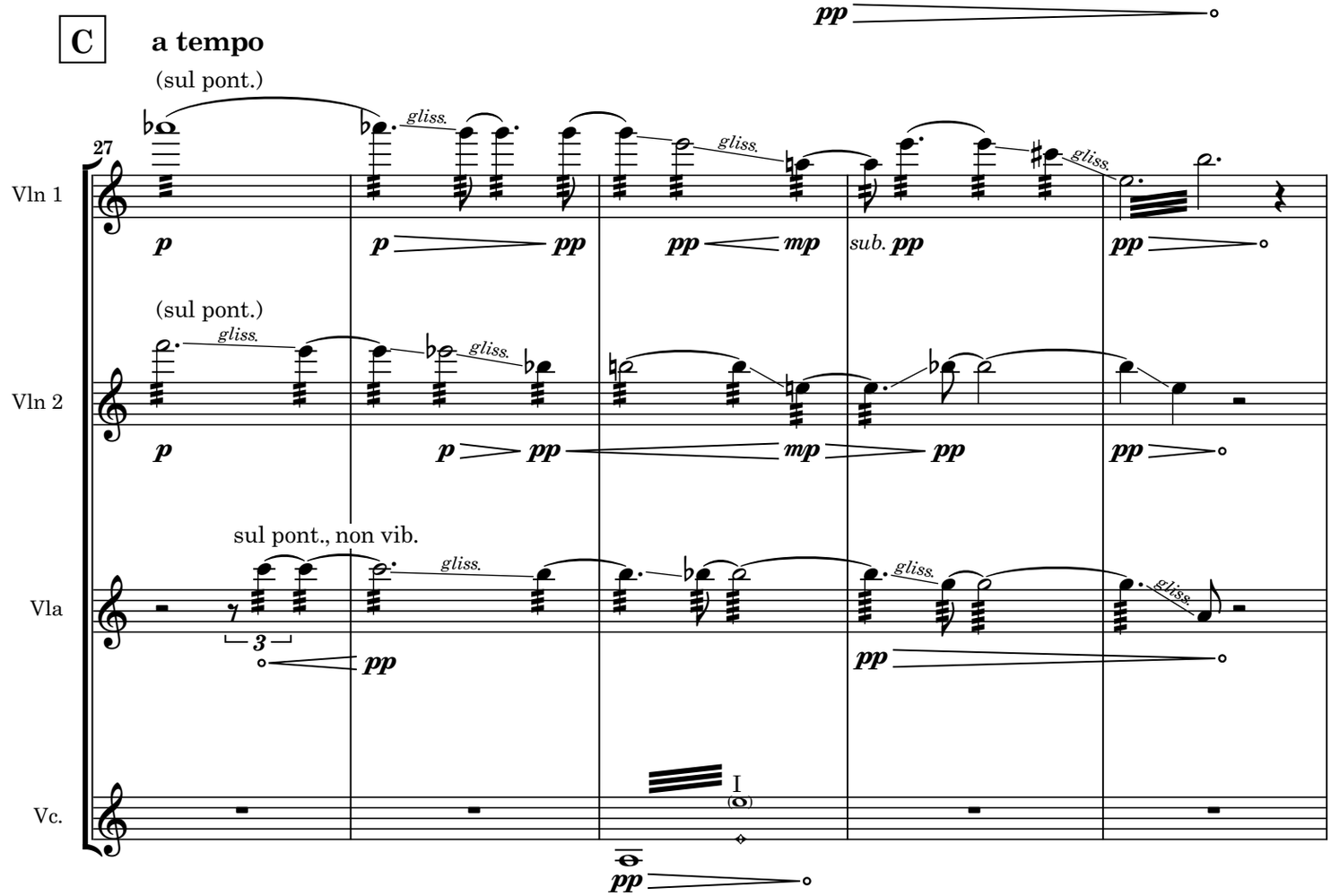
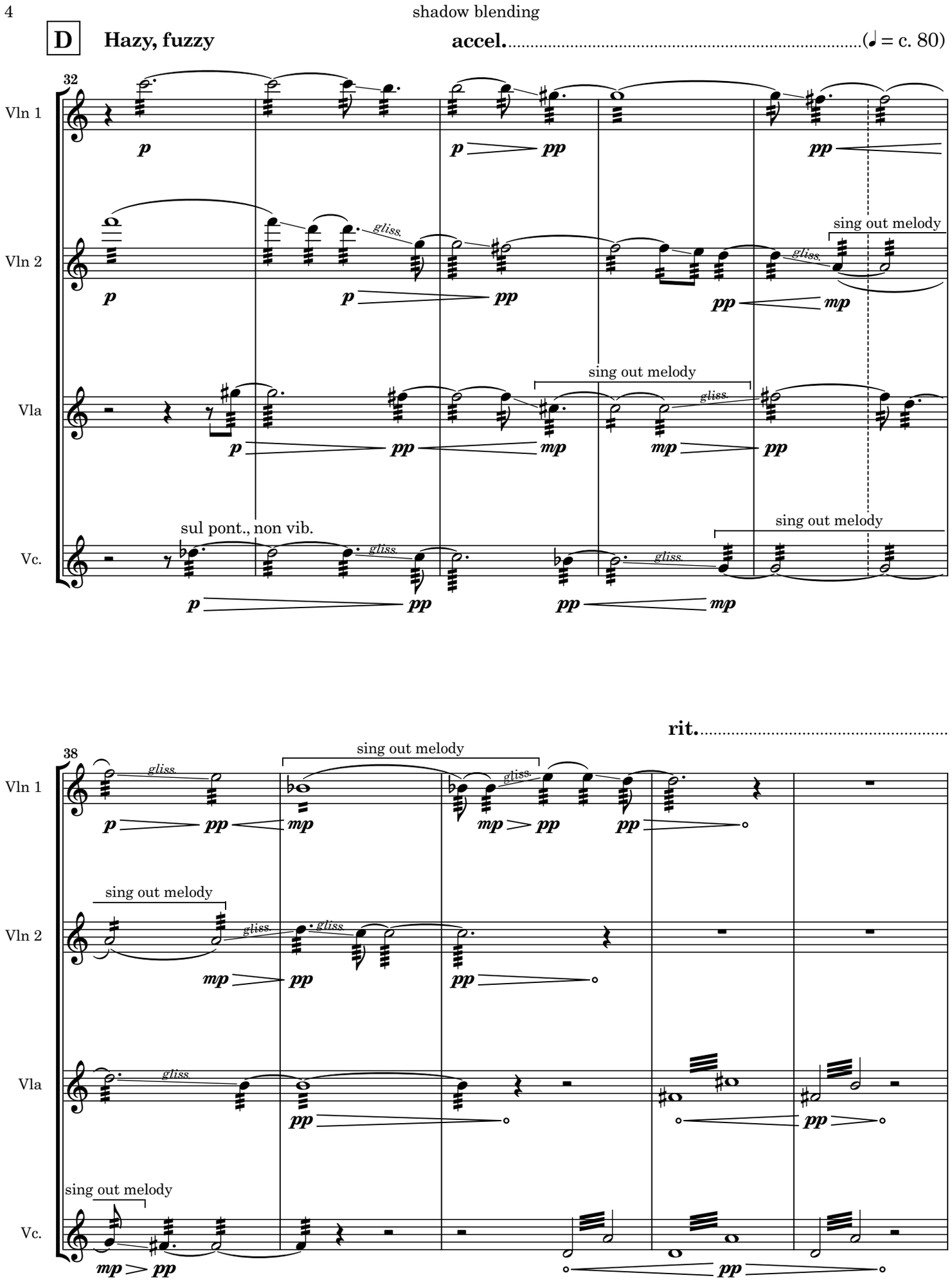
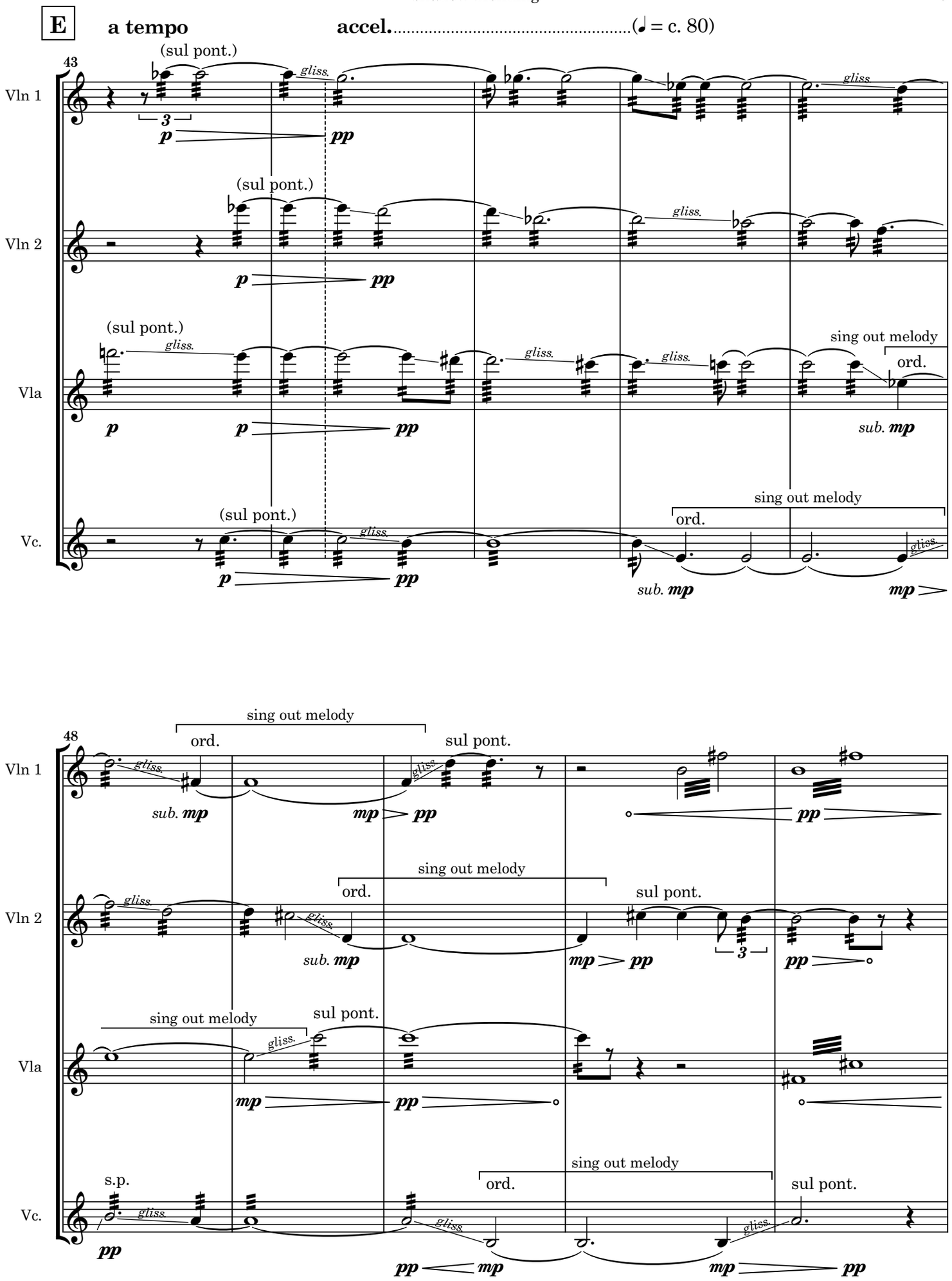
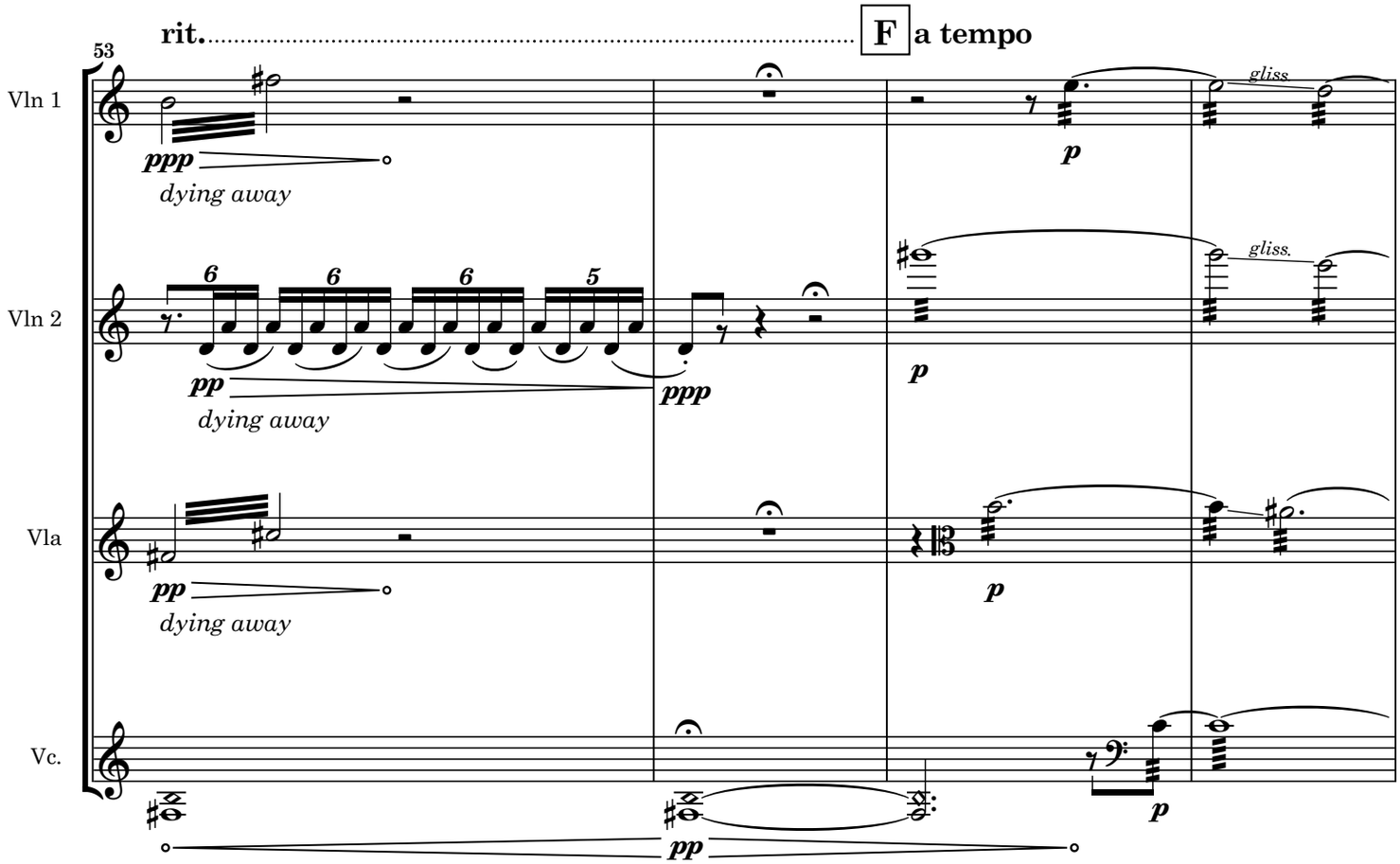

A
Fragile, like glass (♩ = 72)
(sul pont.)
gliss.
wide vib. quarter tone up and down at approx. eighth note rate
12
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp
ppp
(sul pont.)
I
II
rit. (♩ = c. 60)
17
dying away
seagull

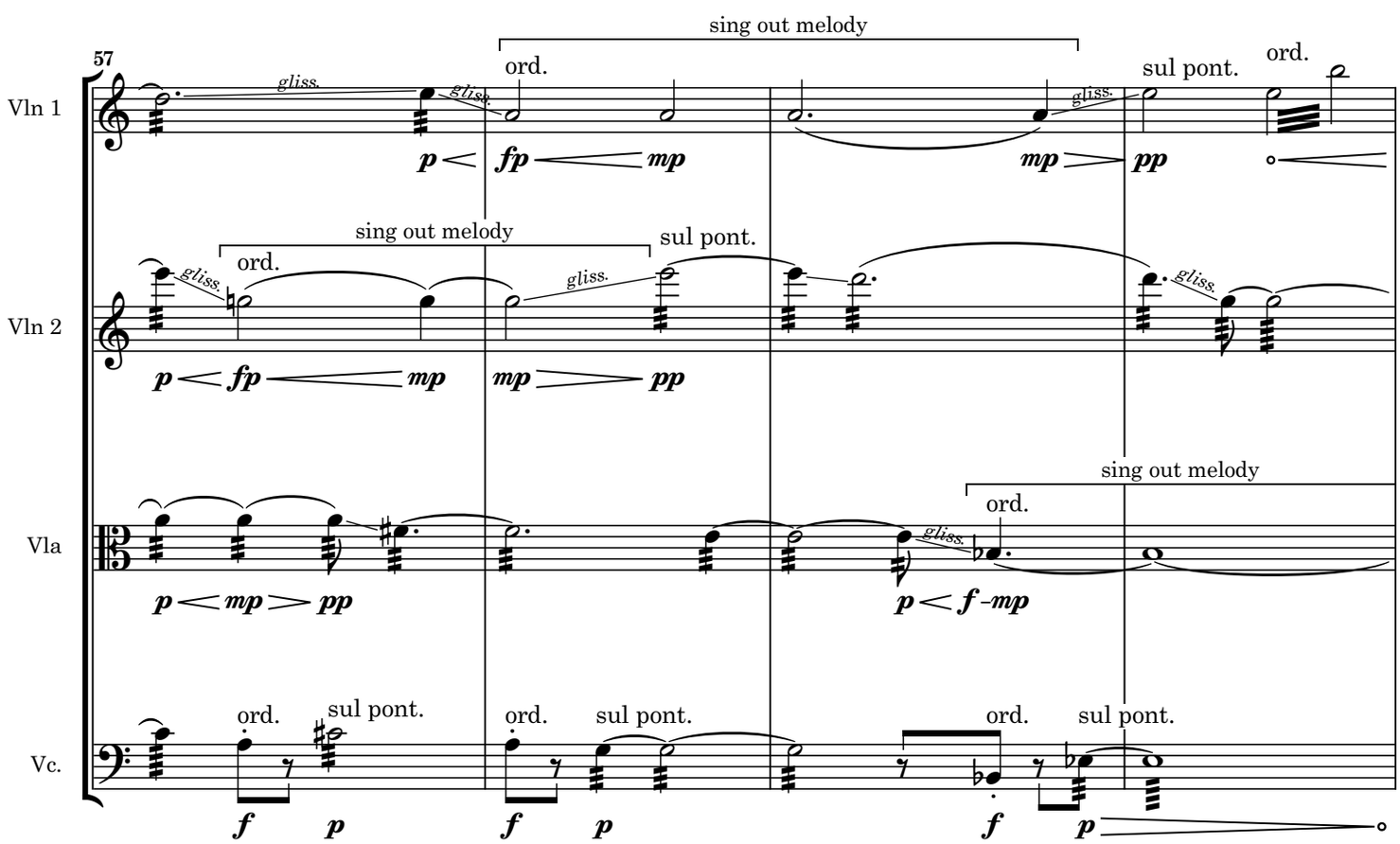

B
a tempo
rit. (♩ = c. 60)
wide vib. quarter tone up and down at approx. eighth note triplet rate
22
Vln 1
gliss.
p
pp
mp
wide vib. quarter tone up and down at approx. eighth note rate
Vln 2
ppp
dying away
Vla
Vc.
I


C
a tempo
(sul pont.)
27
Vln 1
gliss.
sub. pp
Vln 2
sul pont., non vib.
Vla
Vc.
I


D
Hazy, fuzzy
accel. (♩ = c. 80)
32
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
sul pont., non vib.
gliss.
rit.
38


E
a tempo
accel. (♩ = c. 80)
43
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
(sul pont.)
gliss.
sing out melody
ord.
sub. mp
48
sul pont.
s.p.


53
rit.
F
a tempo
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
ppp
dying away
pp
p
gliss.


57
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ord.
sul pont.
gliss.
p
fp
mp
pp
f
f-mp

61

Vln 1

pp

dying away

p

Vln 2

ord.

pp

dying away

p

p

Vla

sing out melody

sul pont.

gliss.

mp *pp*

dying away

ord.

p *ppp*

Vc.

64

Vln 1

p *pp*

Vln 2

pp

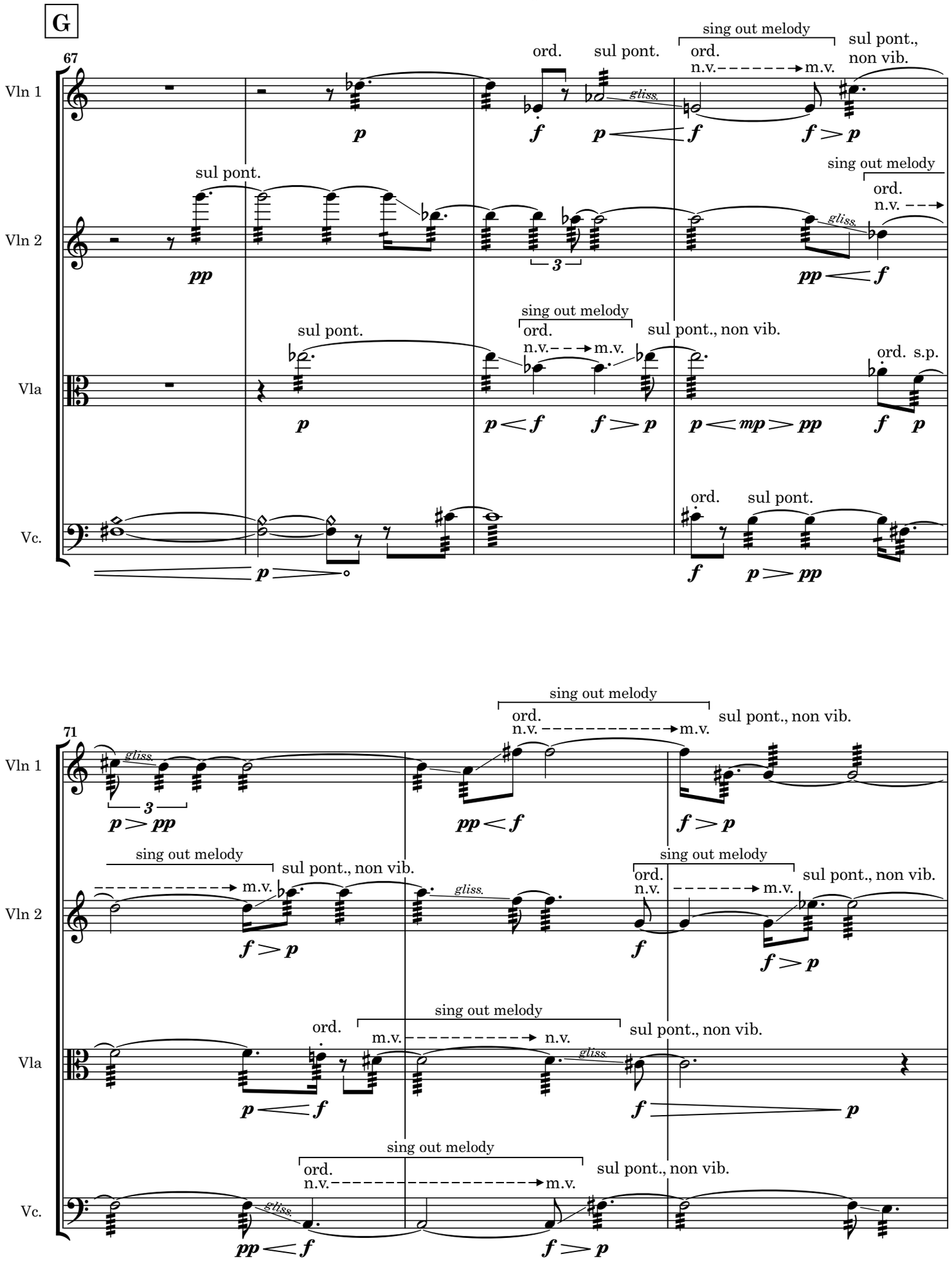
Vla

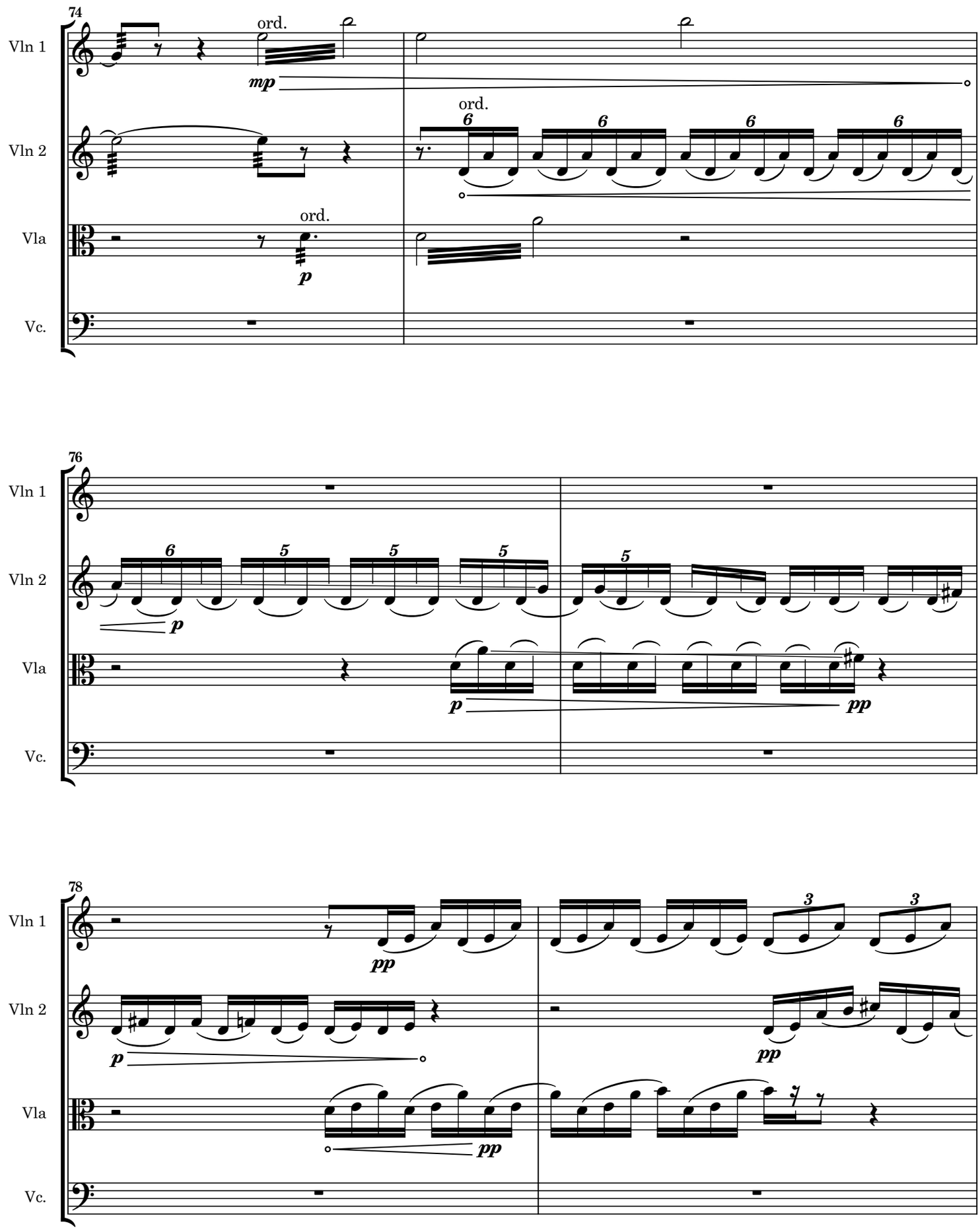
pp

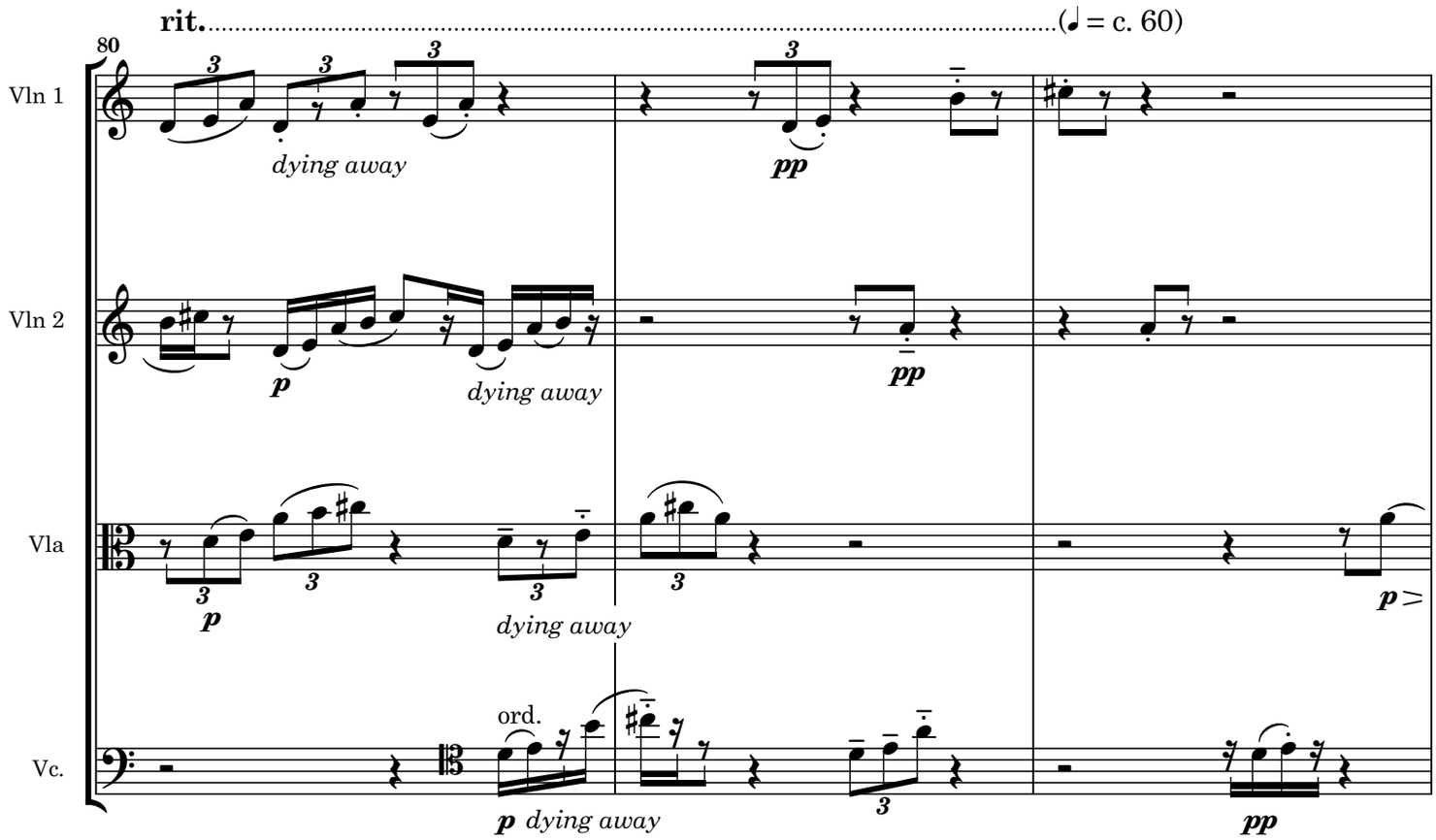
Vc.

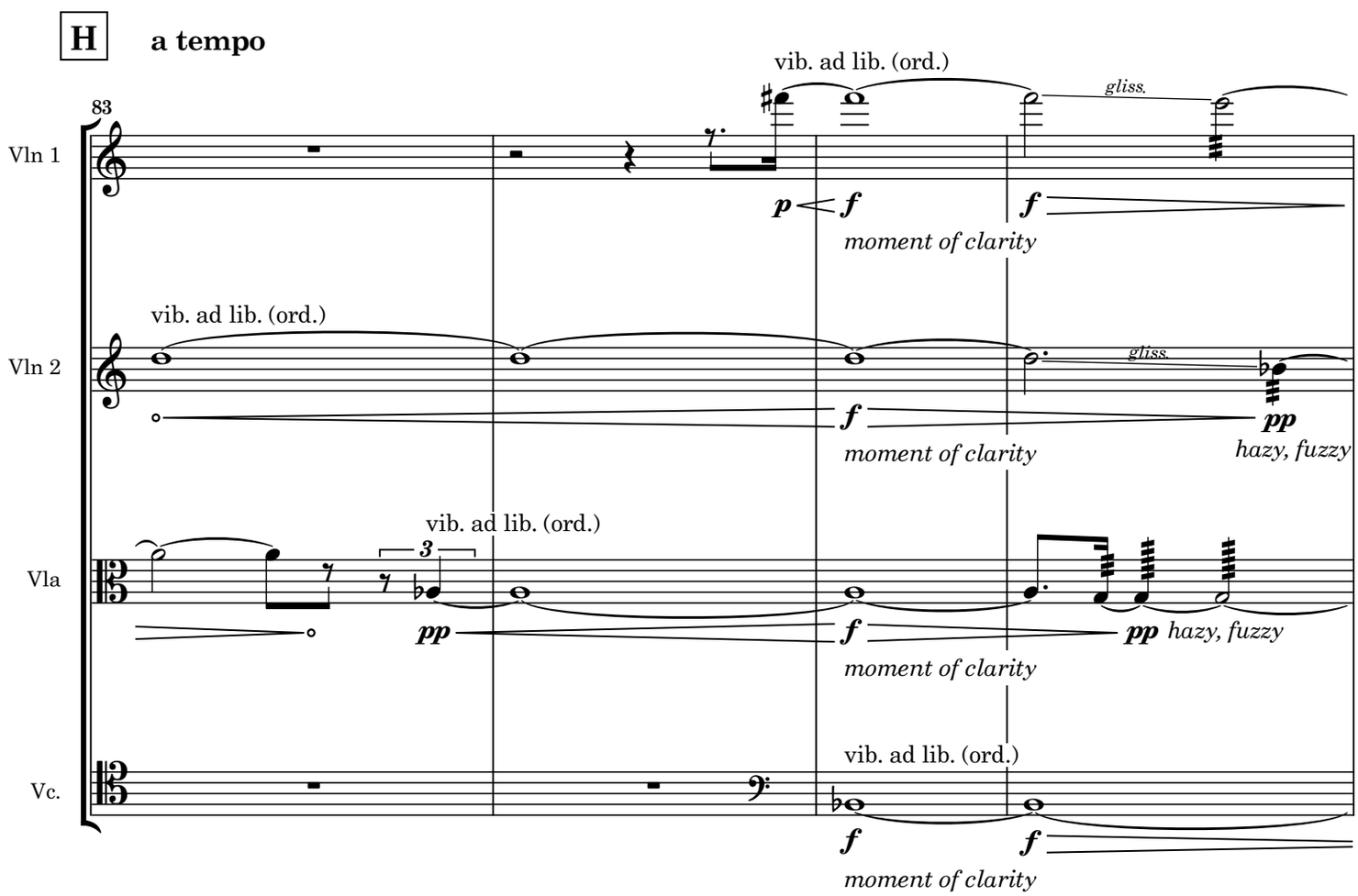
(sul pont.)

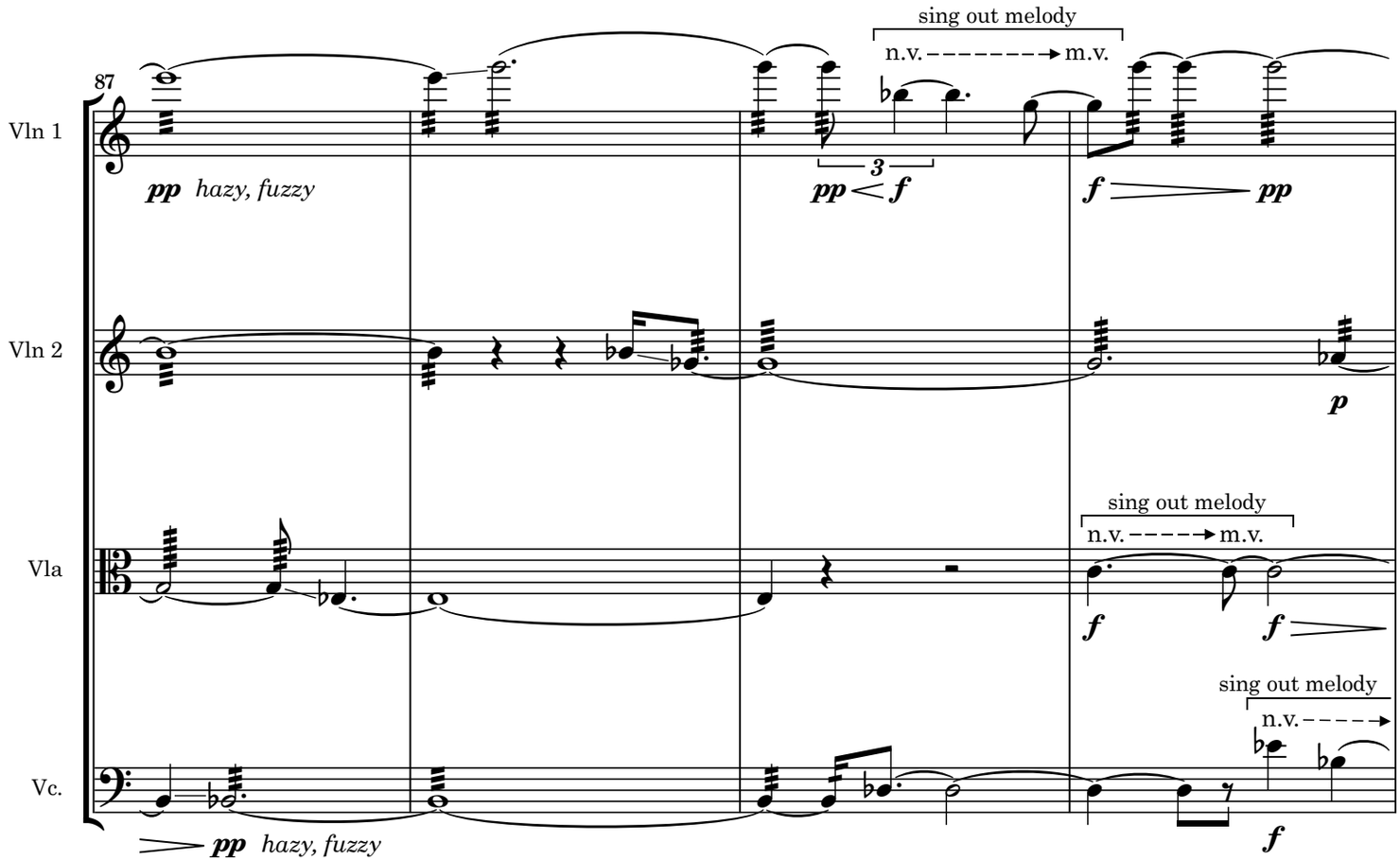
p *pp* *pp*

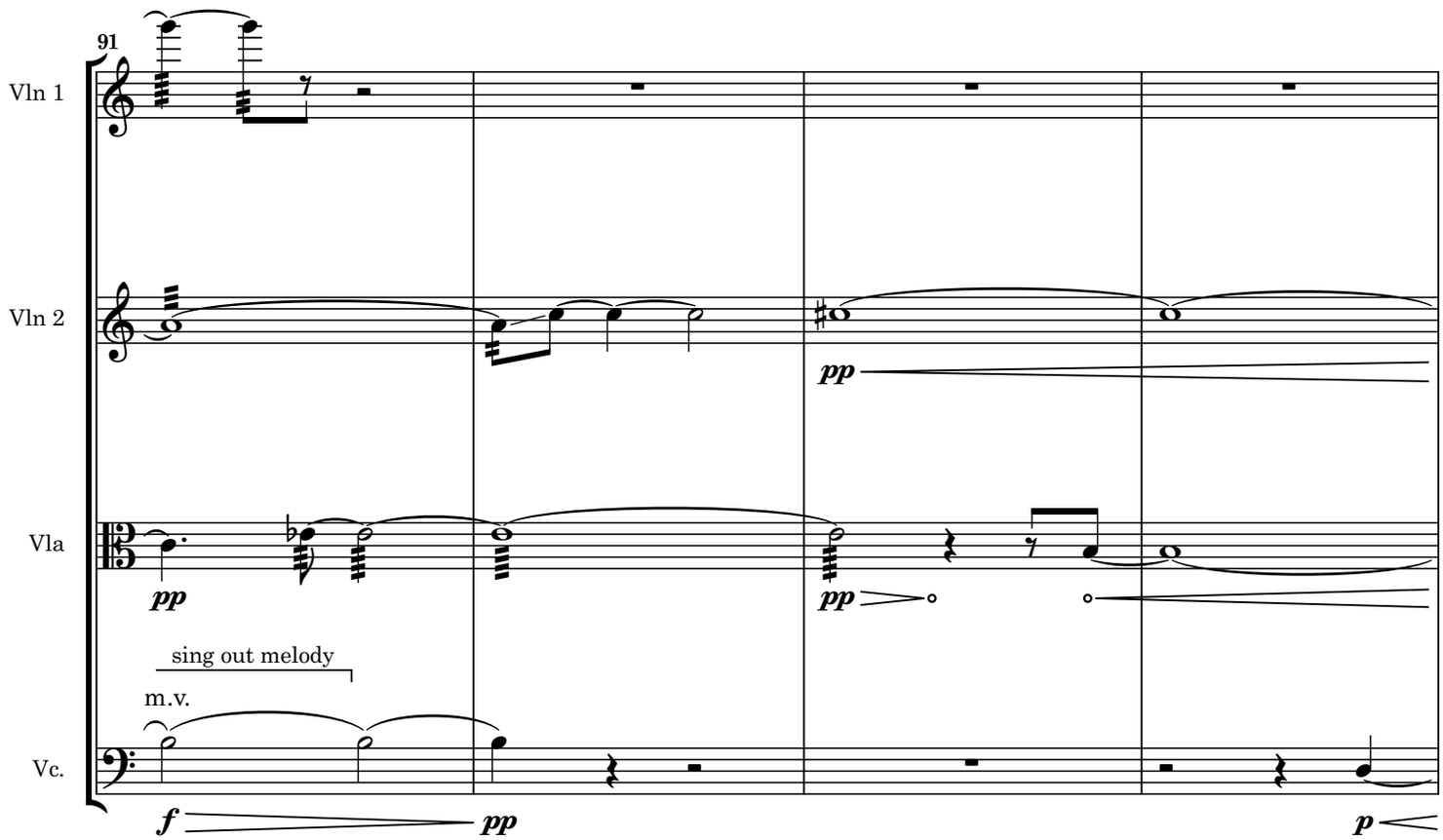

G
67
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
ord.
sul pont.
sing out melody
n.v.
m.v.
sul pont., non vib.
gliss.
ord. s.p.
71

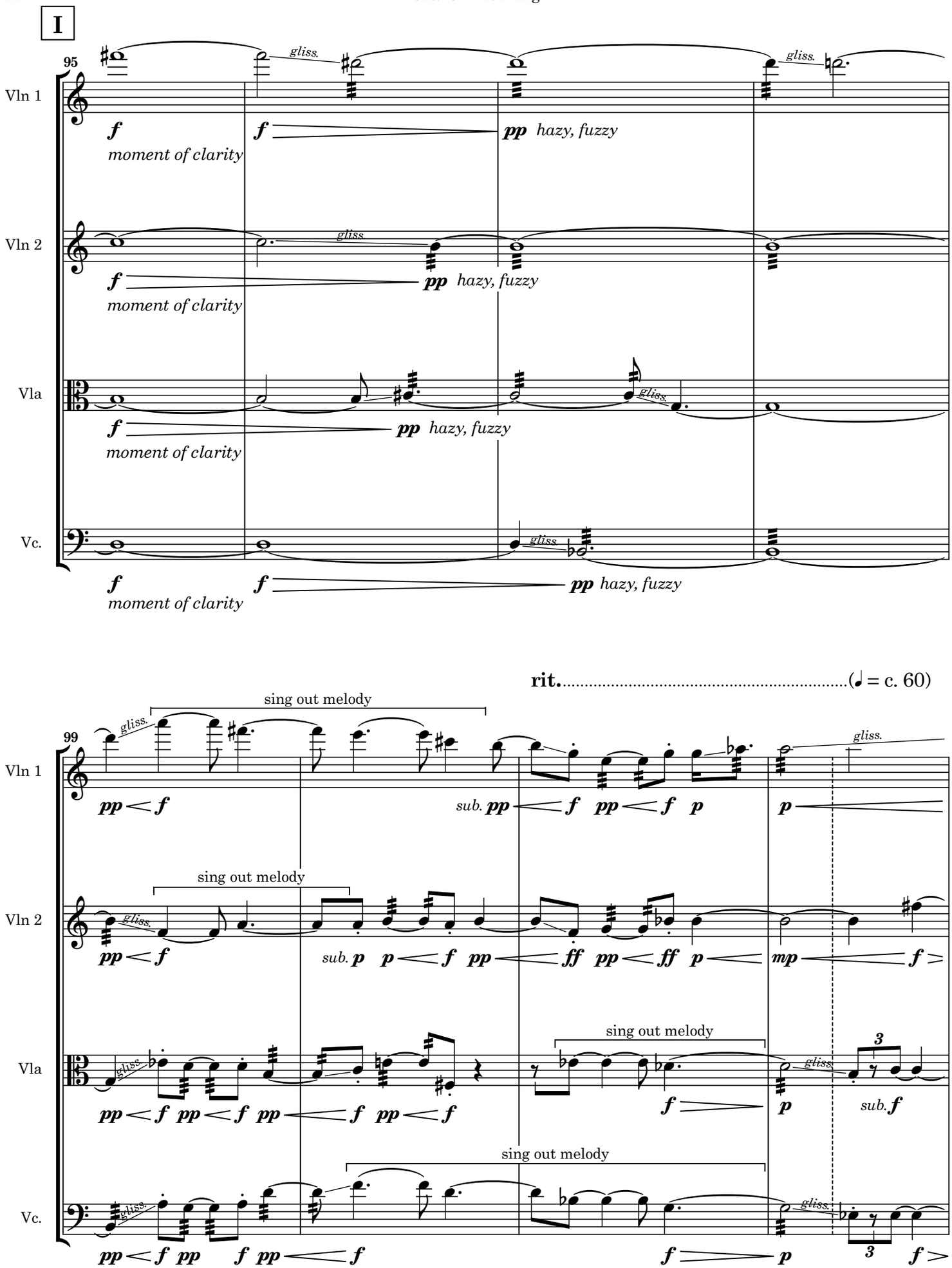

74
Vln 1
ord.
mp
Vln 2
ord.
6
Vla
ord.
p
Vc.
76
Vln 1
Vln 2
6
5
p
Vla
p
pp
Vc.
78
Vln 1
pp
3
Vln 2
p
pp
Vla
pp
Vc.

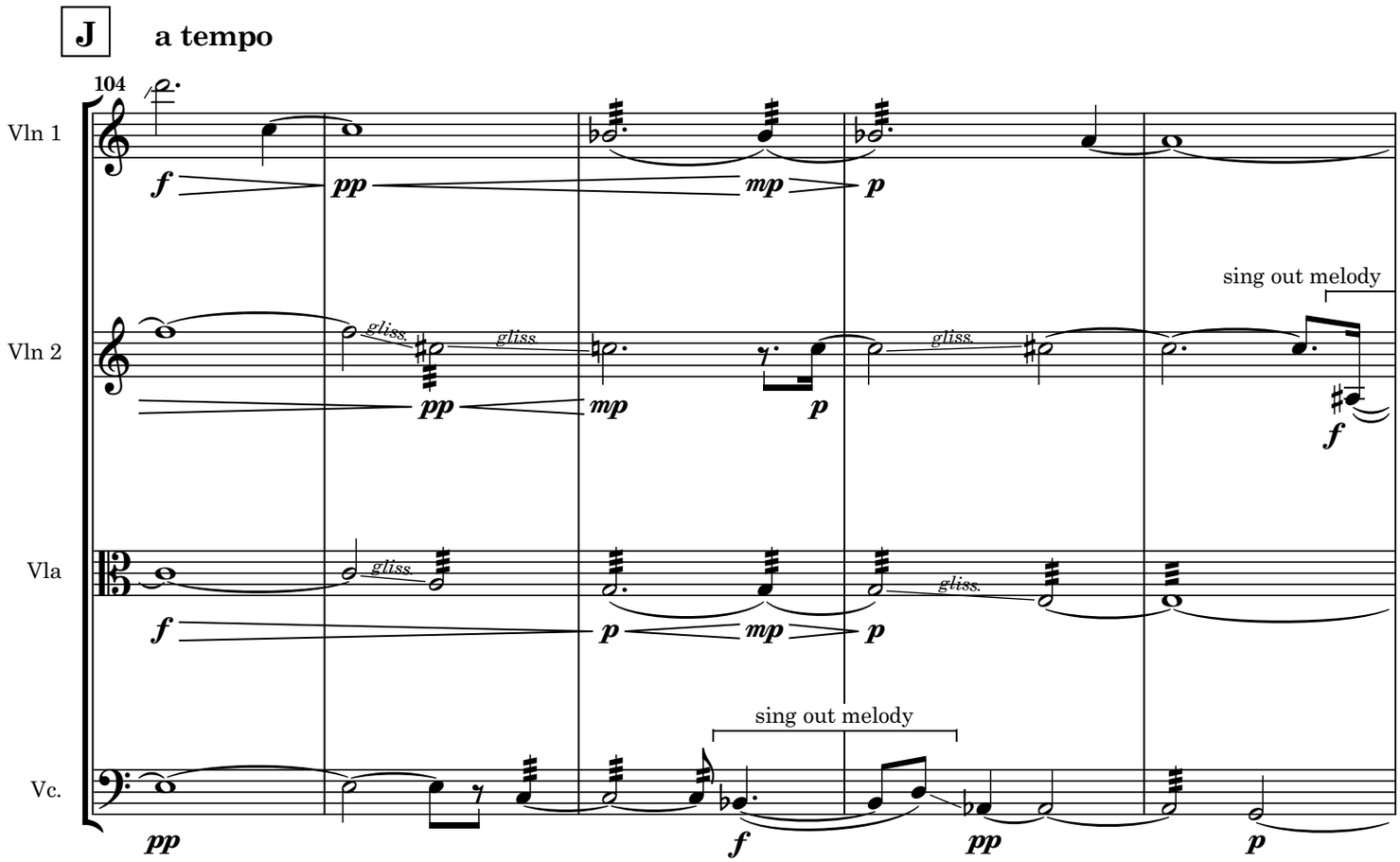

rit. (♩ = c. 60)
80
Vln 1
dying away
pp
Vln 2
p
dying away
pp
Vla
p
dying away
p
Vc.
ord.
p dying away
pp

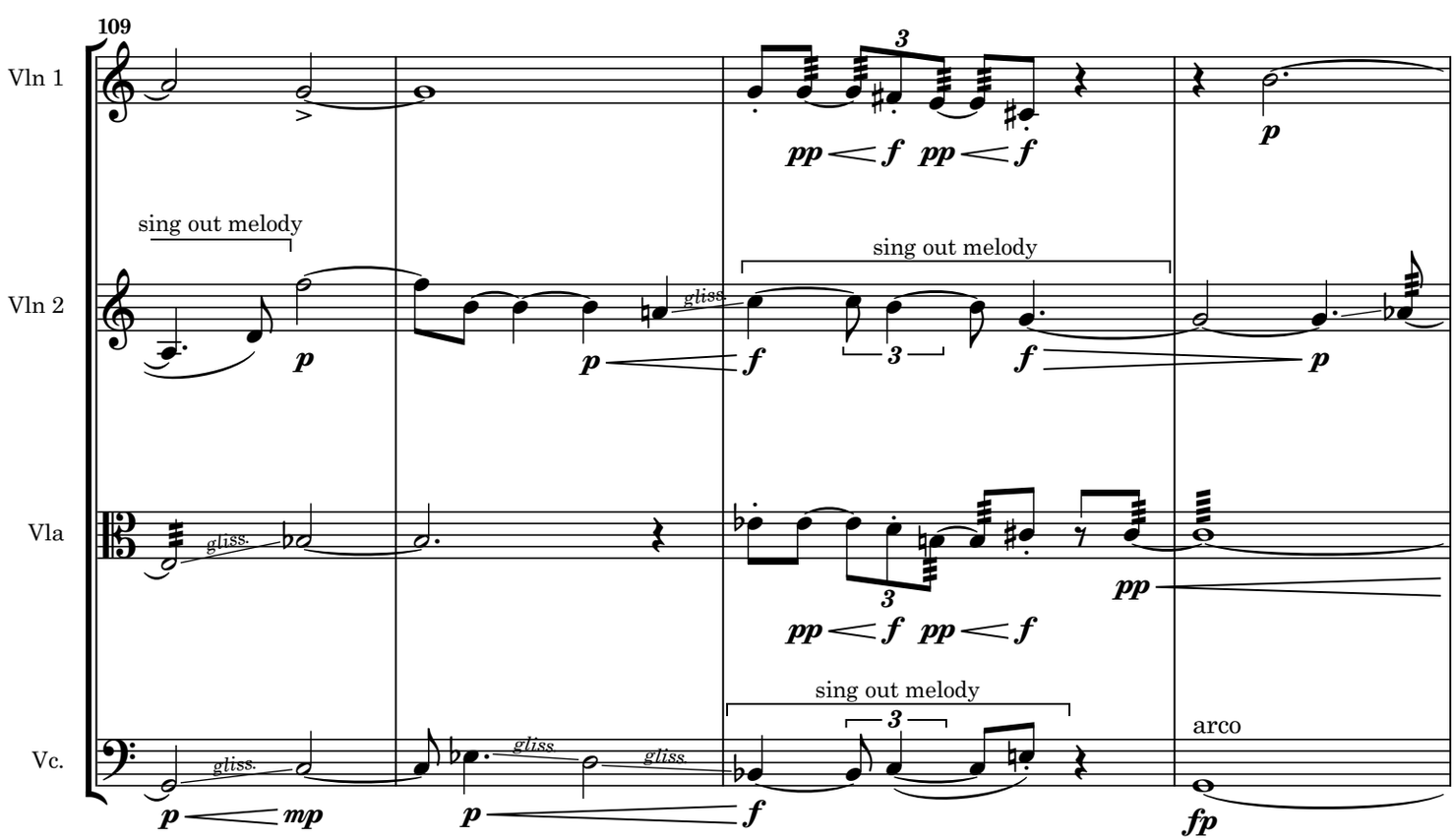

H
a tempo
83
Vln 1
vib. ad lib. (ord.)
gliss.
p f
f
moment of clarity
Vln 2
vib. ad lib. (ord.)
gliss.
f
pp
moment of clarity
hazy, fuzzy
Vla
vib. ad lib. (ord.)
pp
f
pp hazy, fuzzy
moment of clarity
Vc.
vib. ad lib. (ord.)
f
f
moment of clarity

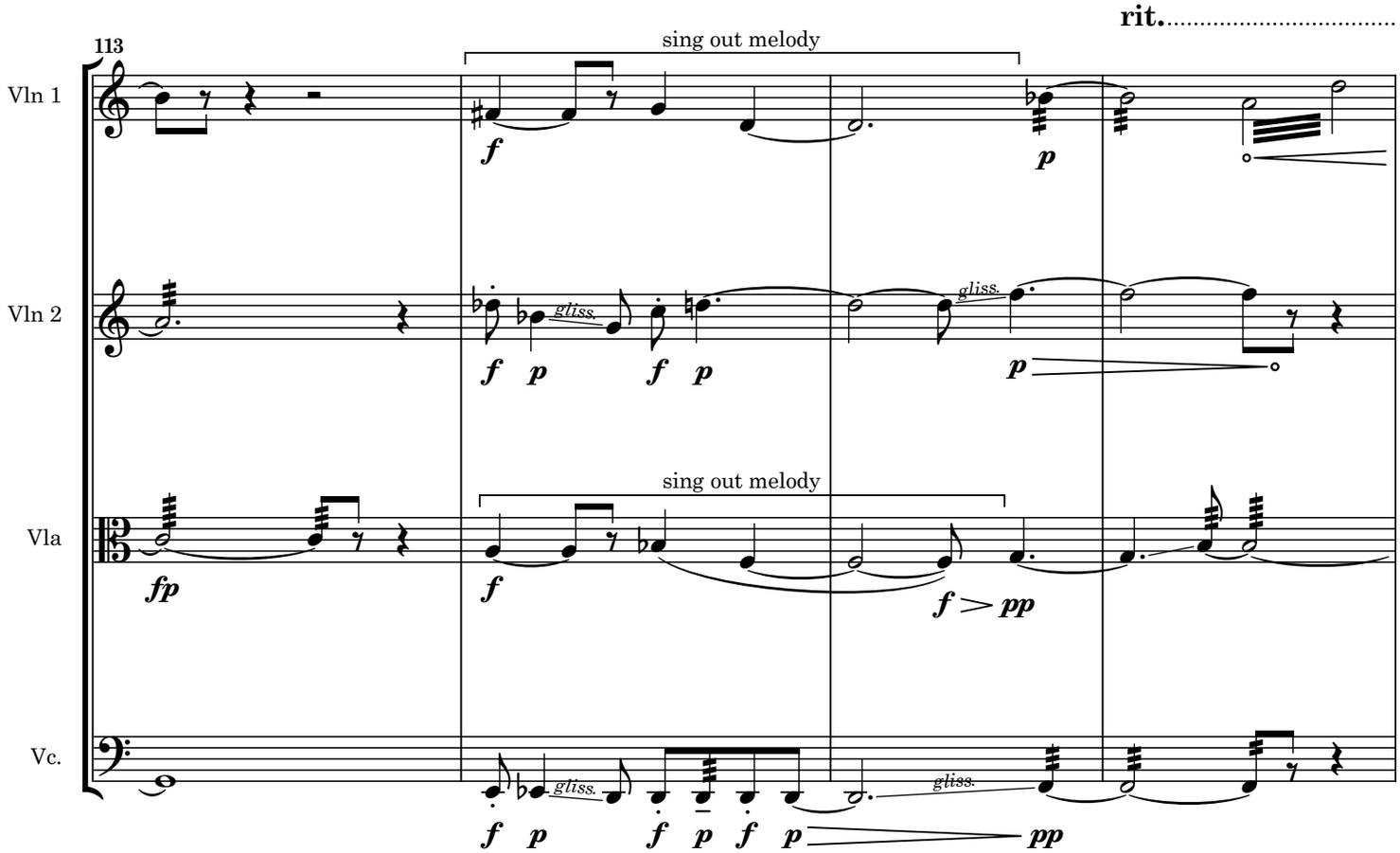

87
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp hazy, fuzzy
sing out melody
n.v. m.v.
3
pp f
f pp
p
f
pp hazy, fuzzy

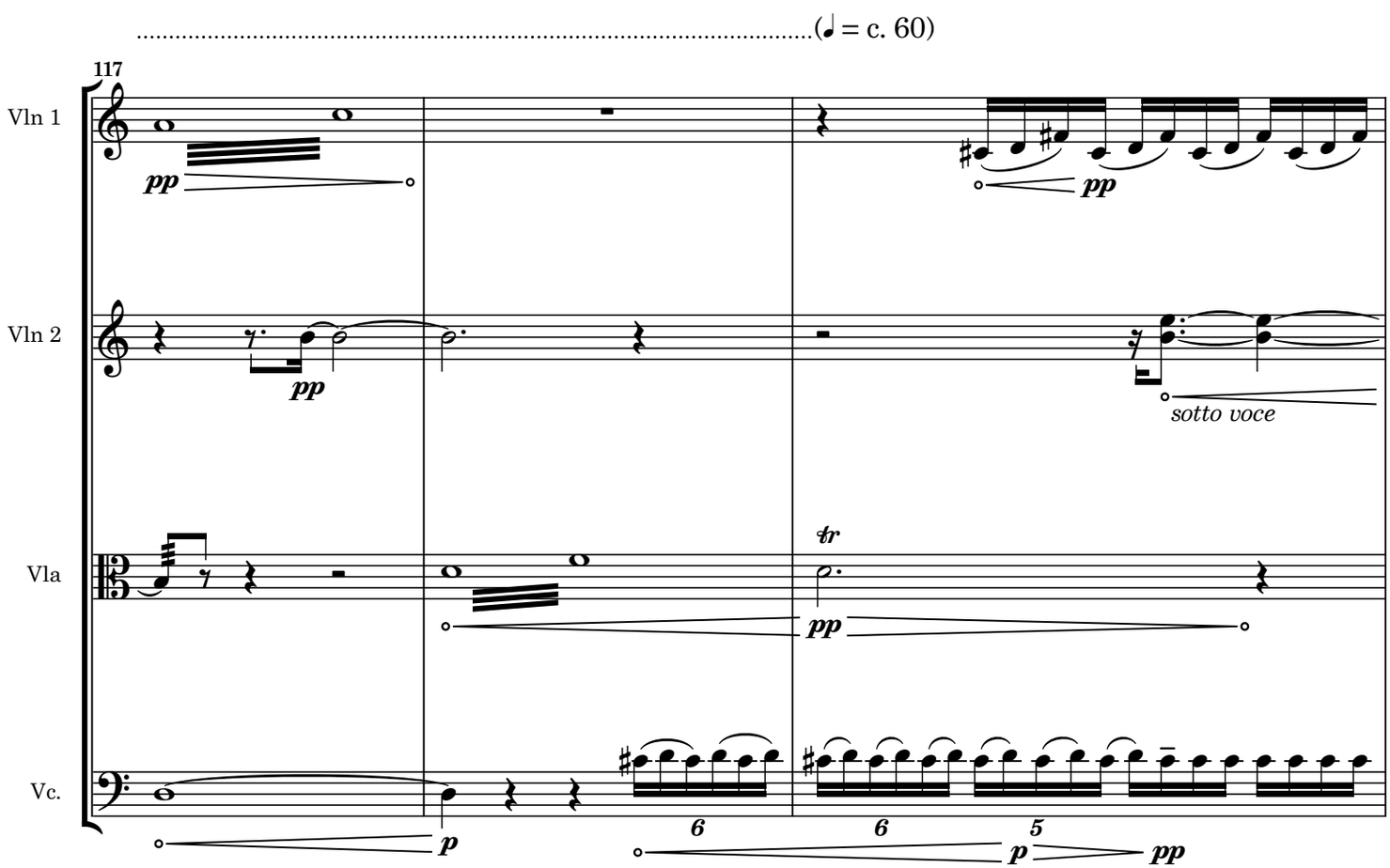

91
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp
sing out melody
m.v.
f pp
p

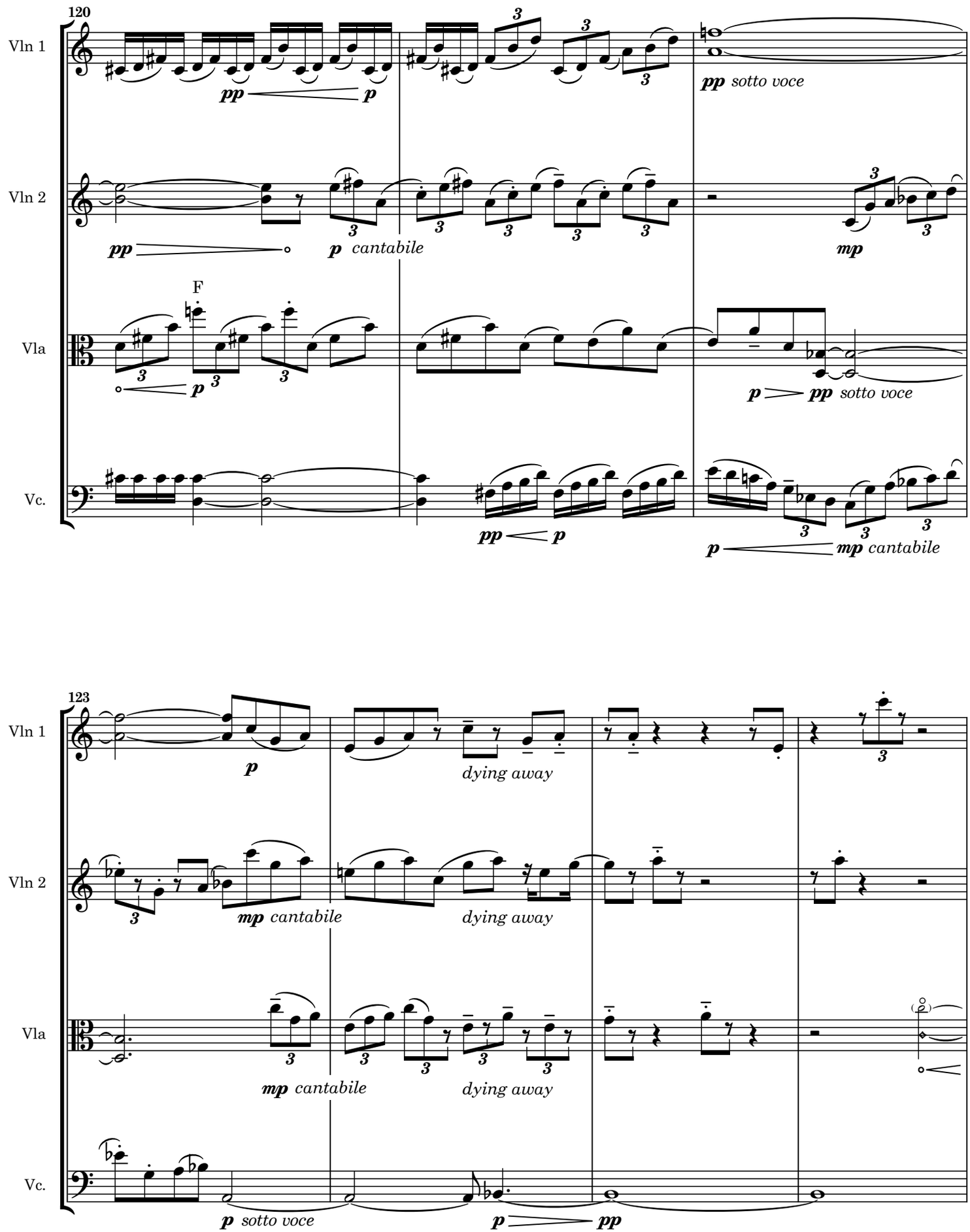

I
95
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
gliss.
f
moment of clarity
pp hazy, fuzzy
rit. (♩ = c. 60)
99
sing out melody
sub. pp
sub. p
sub. f
ff
mp
p

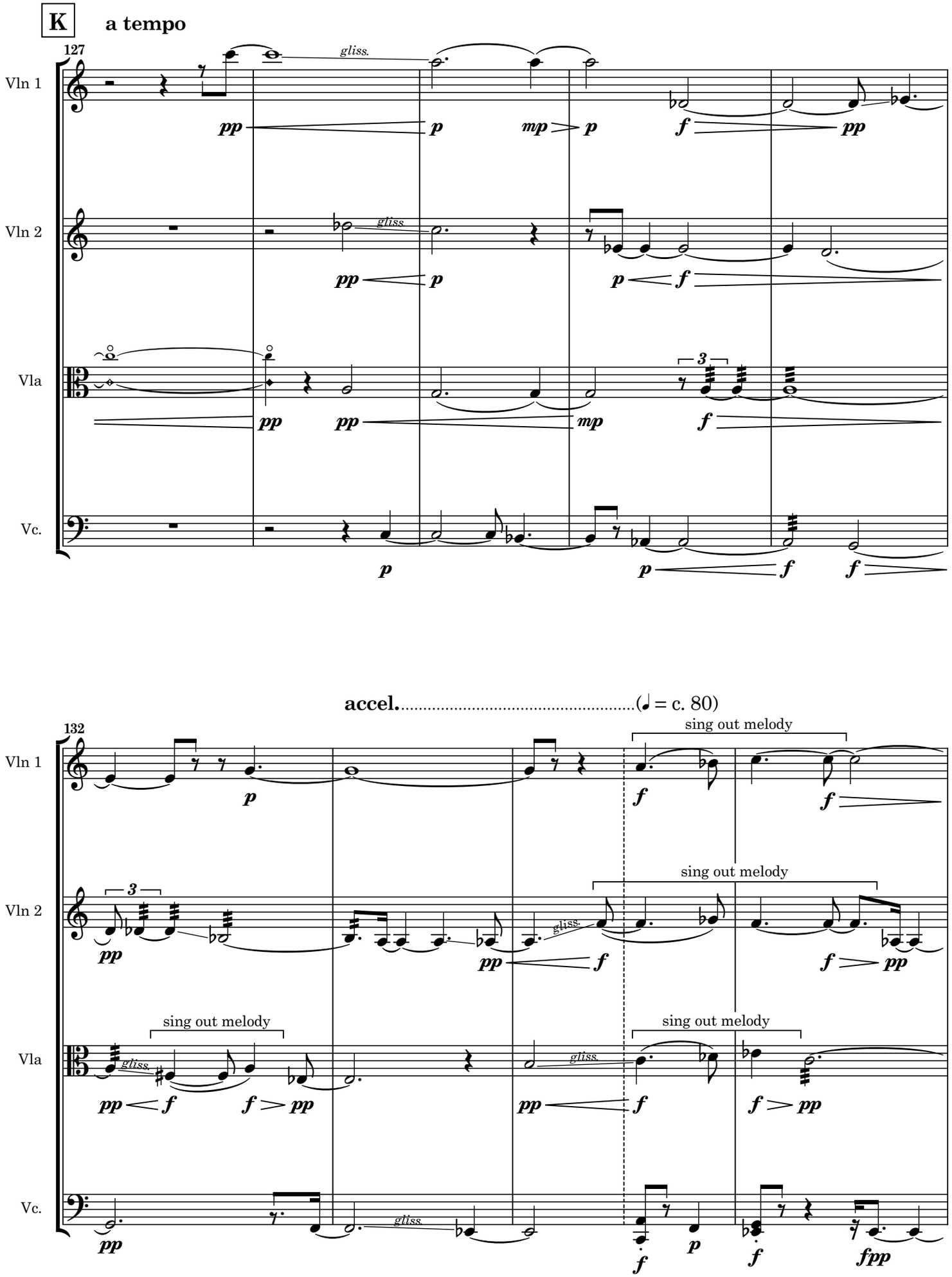

J
a tempo
104
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
gliss.
f
pp
mp
p

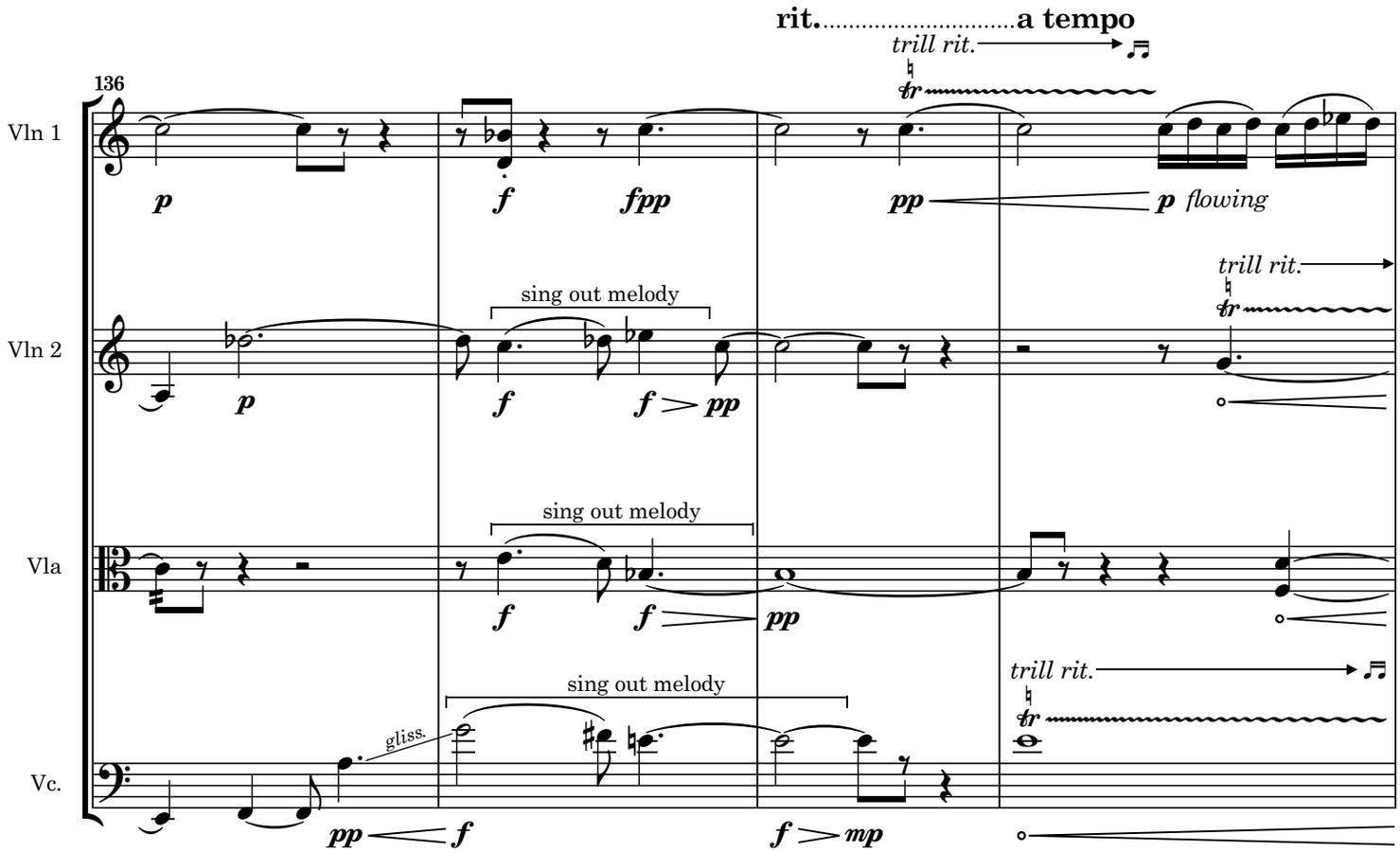

109
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
gliss.
arco
pp
f
p
mp
fp

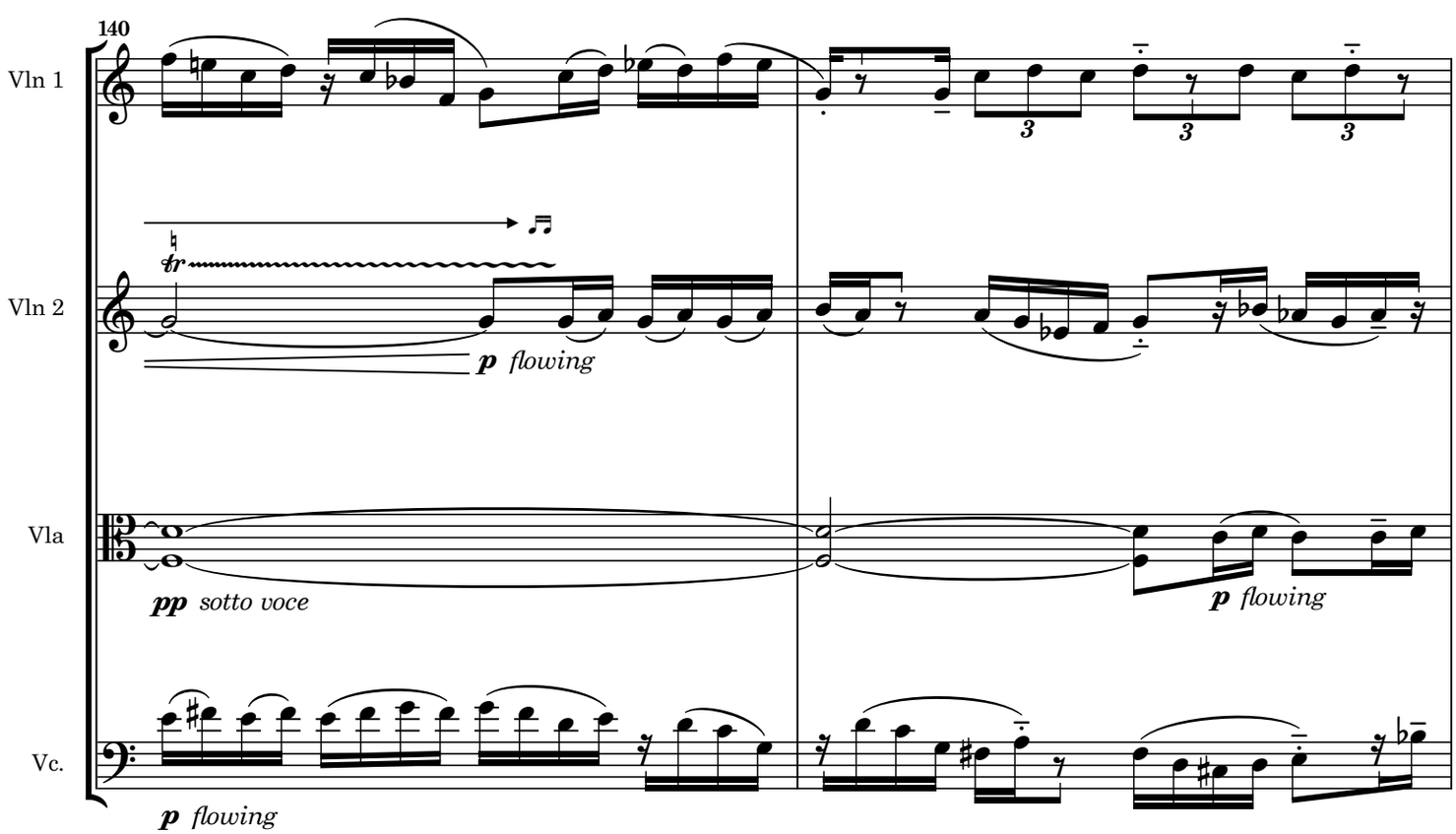

rit.
113
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
sing out melody
gliss.
f
p
fp
f > pp
pp

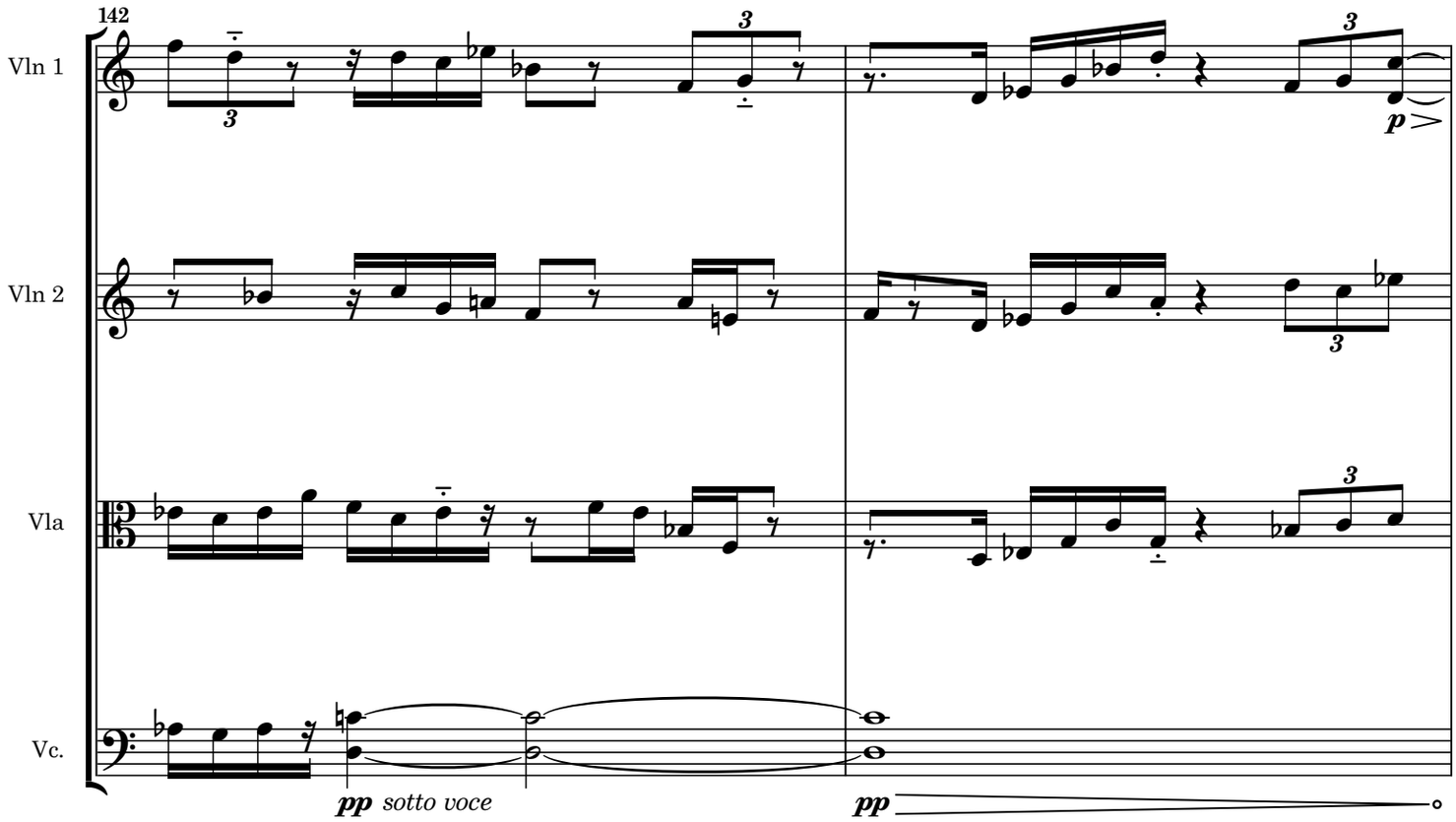

(♩ = c. 60)
117
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp
sotto voce
tr
p
6
5

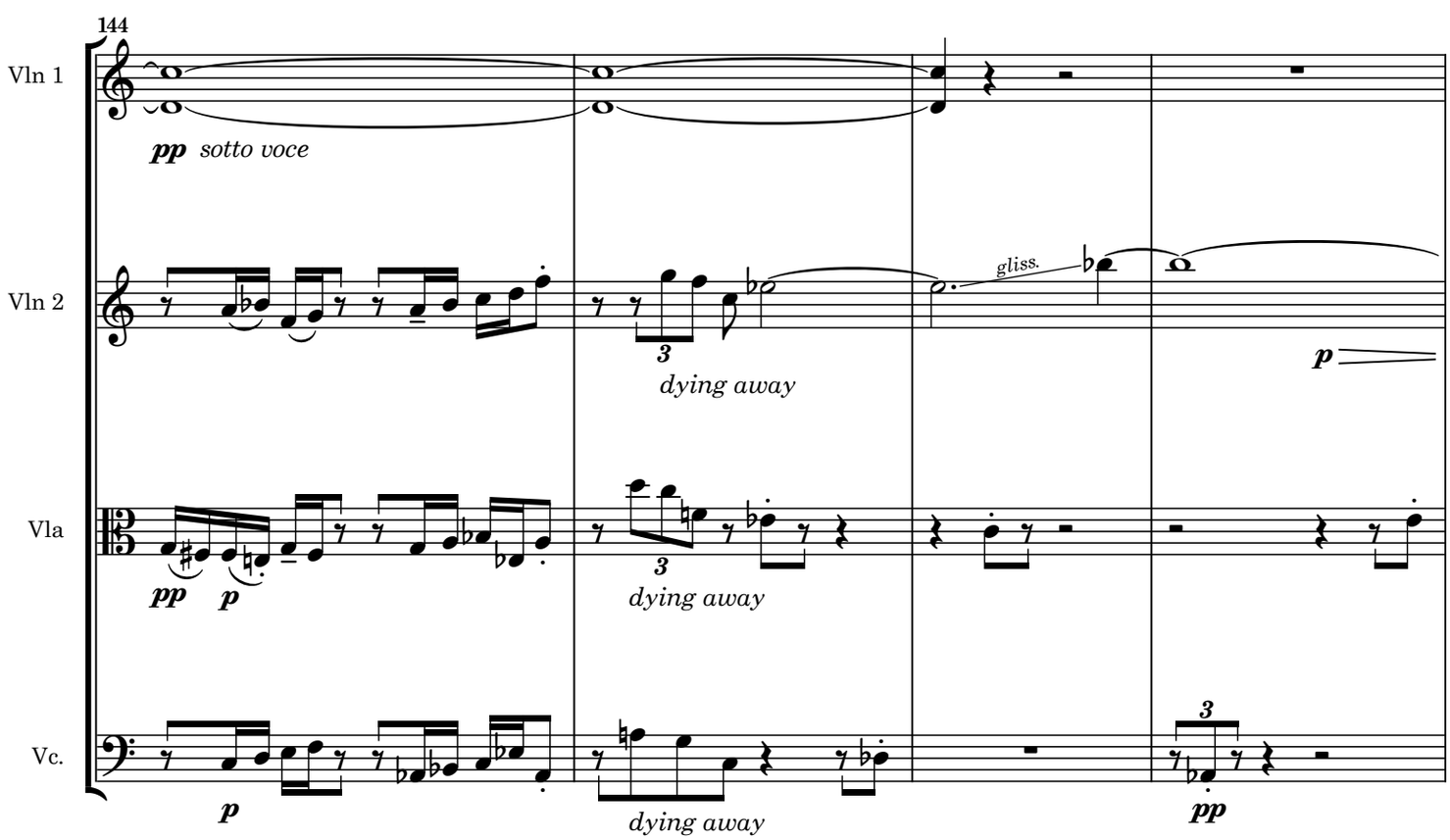

120
Vln 1
pp
p
pp sotto voce
Vln 2
pp
p cantabile
mp
Vla
F
p
p
pp sotto voce
Vc.
pp
p
p
mp cantabile
123
Vln 1
p
dying away
Vln 2
mp cantabile
dying away
Vla
mp cantabile
dying away
Vc.
p sotto voce
p
pp

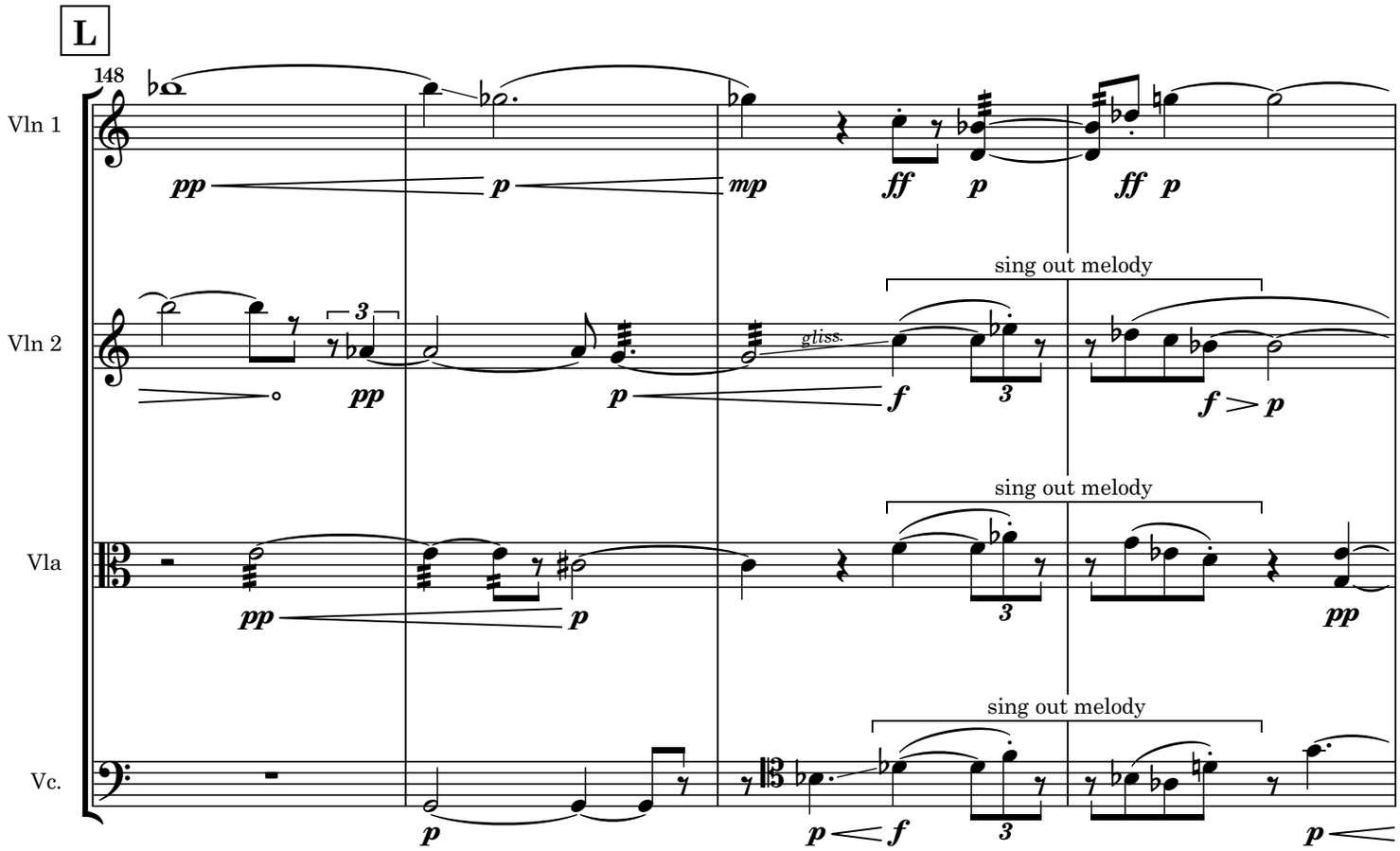

K
a tempo
127
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
gliss.
accel. (♩ = c. 80)
132
sing out melody

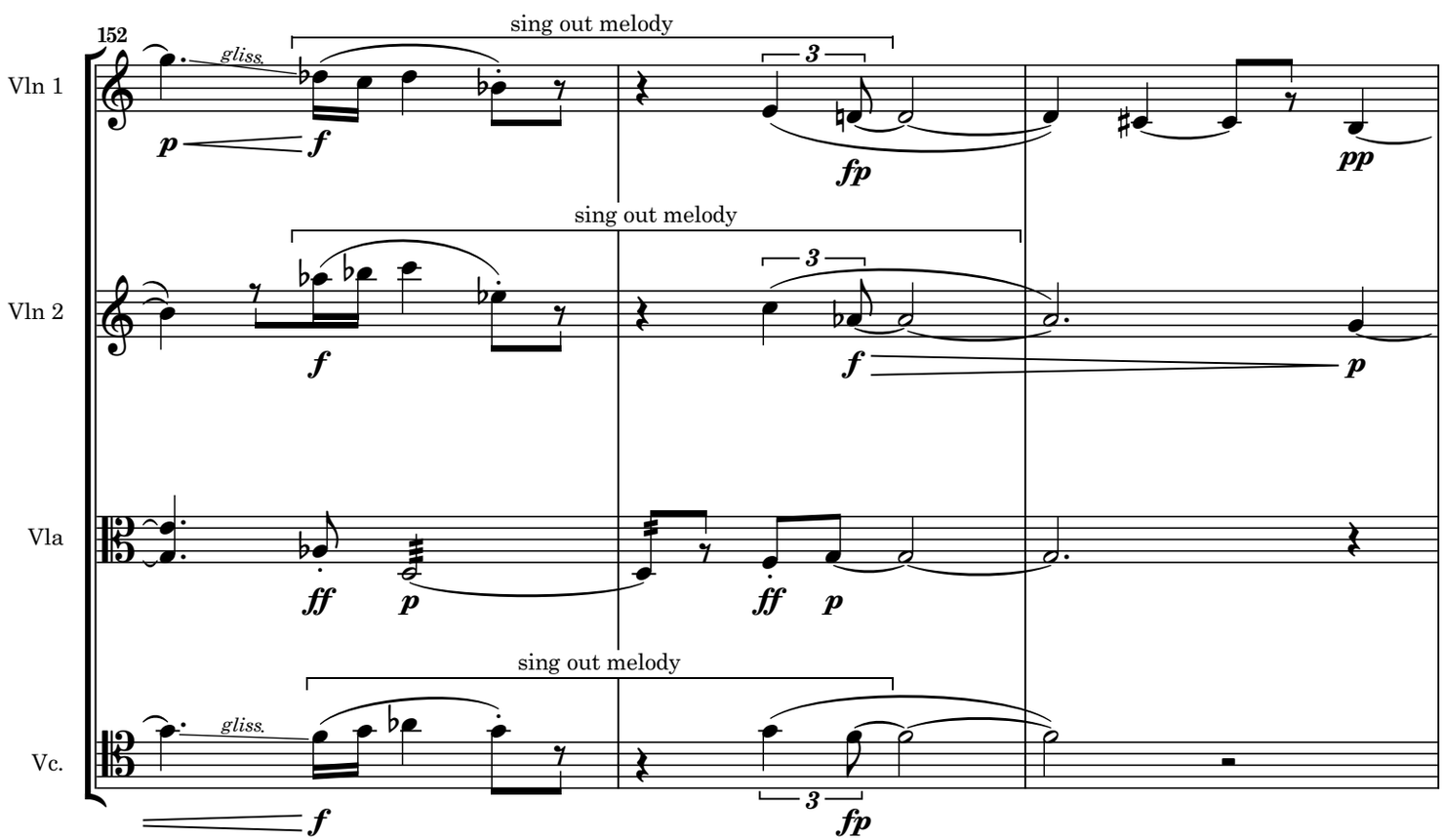

rit. a tempo
trill rit.
136
Vln 1
p
f
fpp
pp
p flowing
Vln 2
sing out melody
p
f
f > pp
trill rit.
Vla
sing out melody
f
f
pp
Vc.
gliss.
sing out melody
pp
f
f > mp
trill rit.

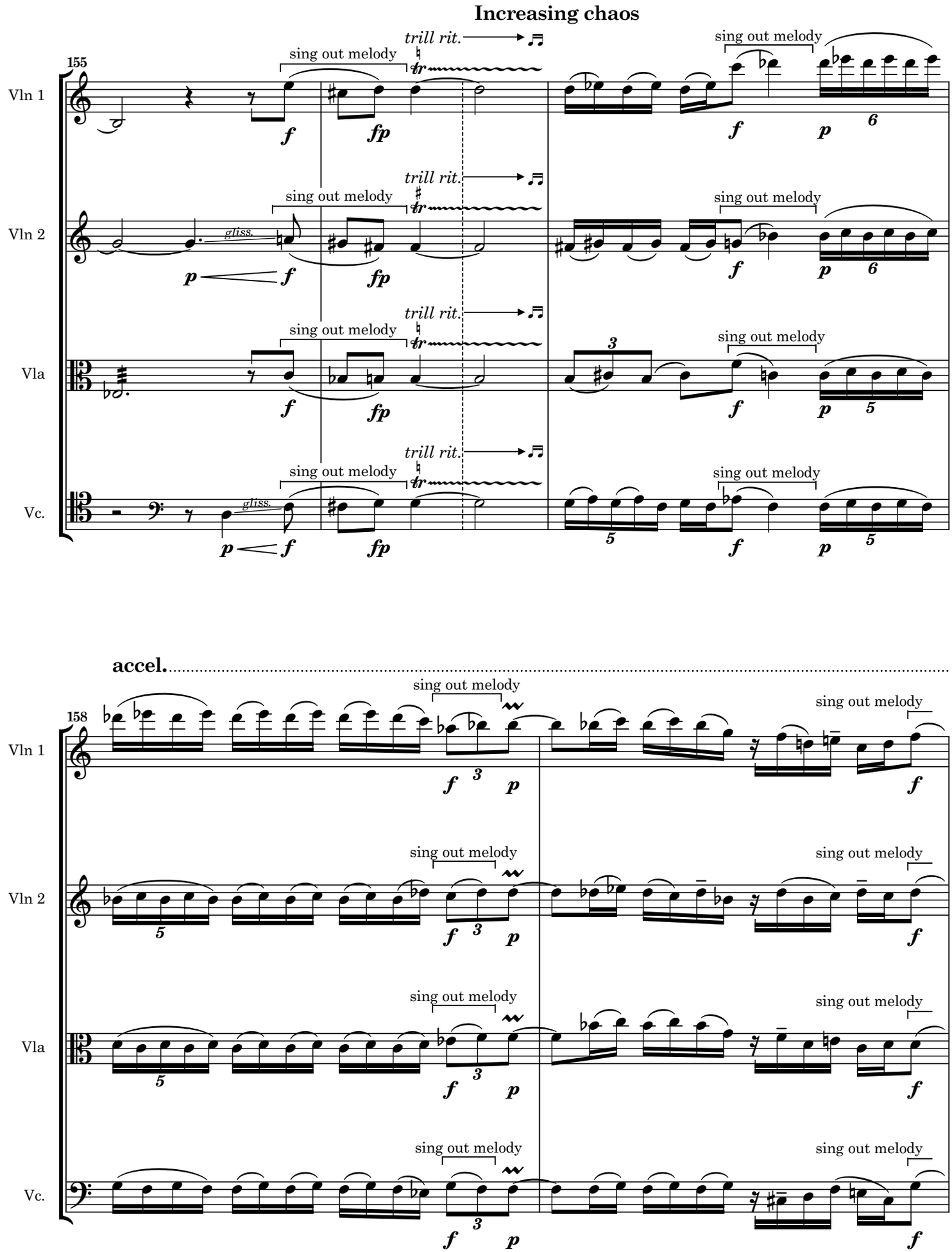

140
Vln 1
3
3
3
Vln 2
p flowing
Vla
pp sotto voce
p flowing
Vc.
p flowing

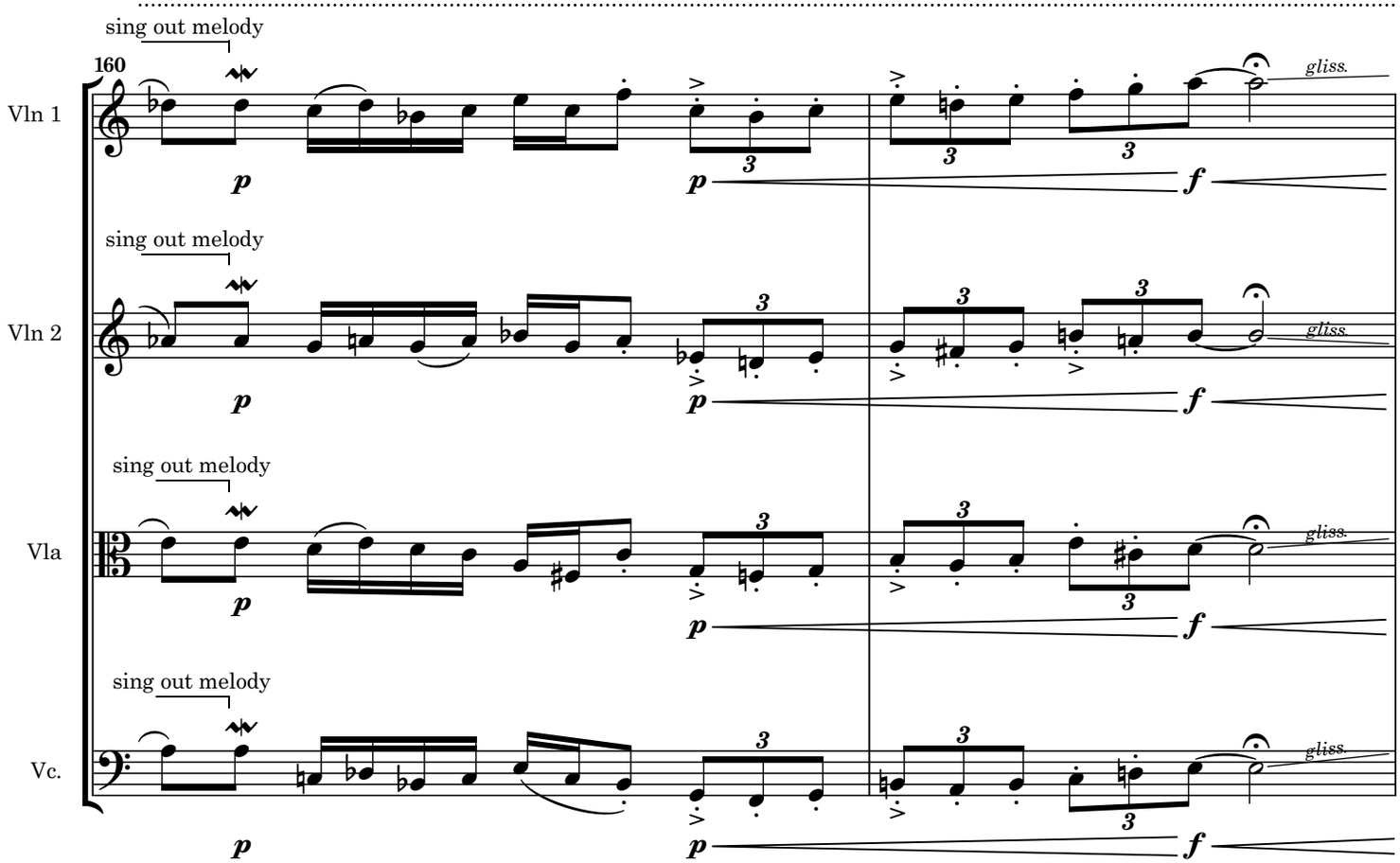

142
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp sotto voce
pp
p


144
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
pp sotto voce
gliss.
dying away
p
pp
dying away
dying away
p
pp

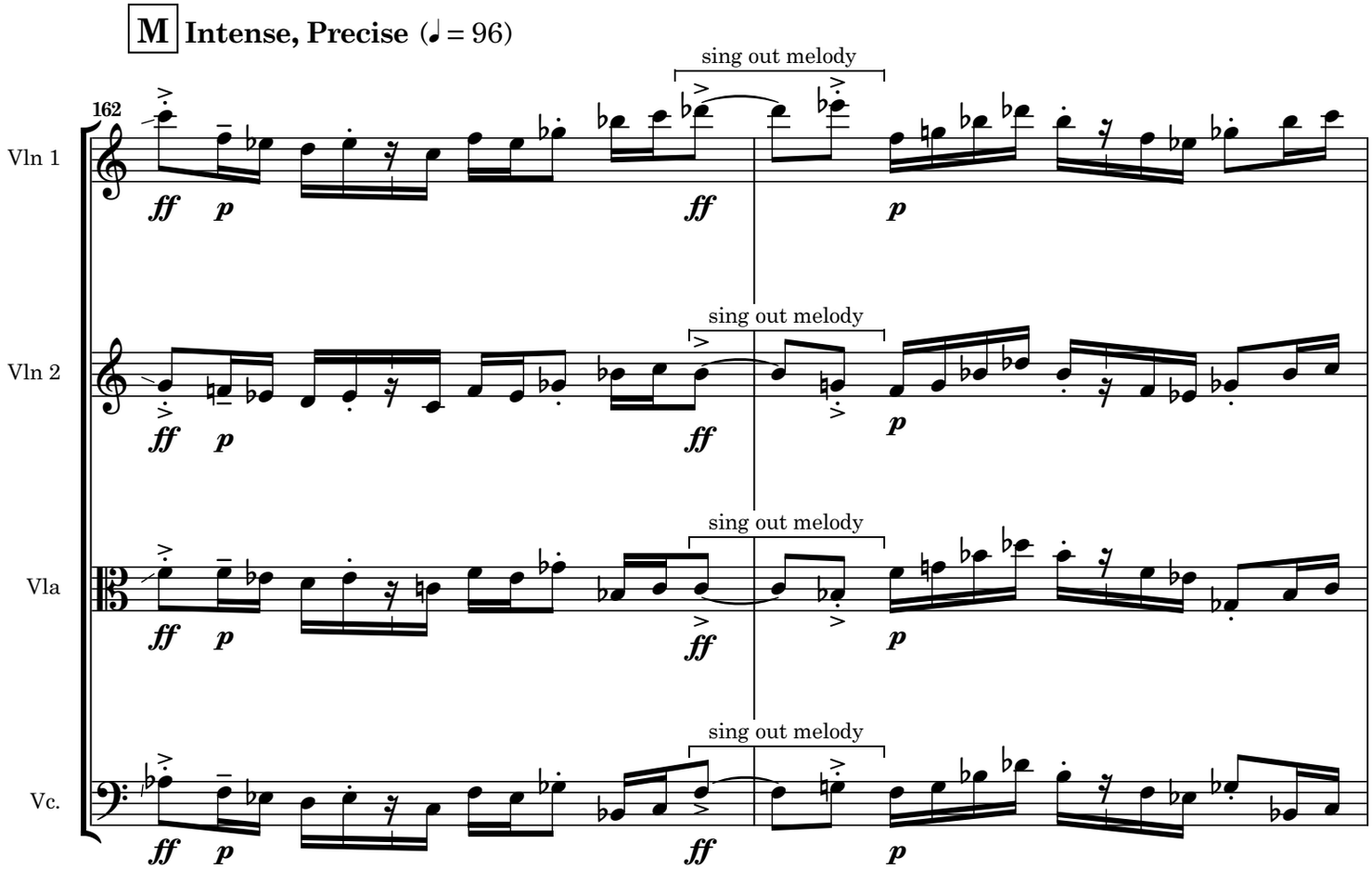

L
148
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
sing out melody
sing out melody
gliss.
gliss.

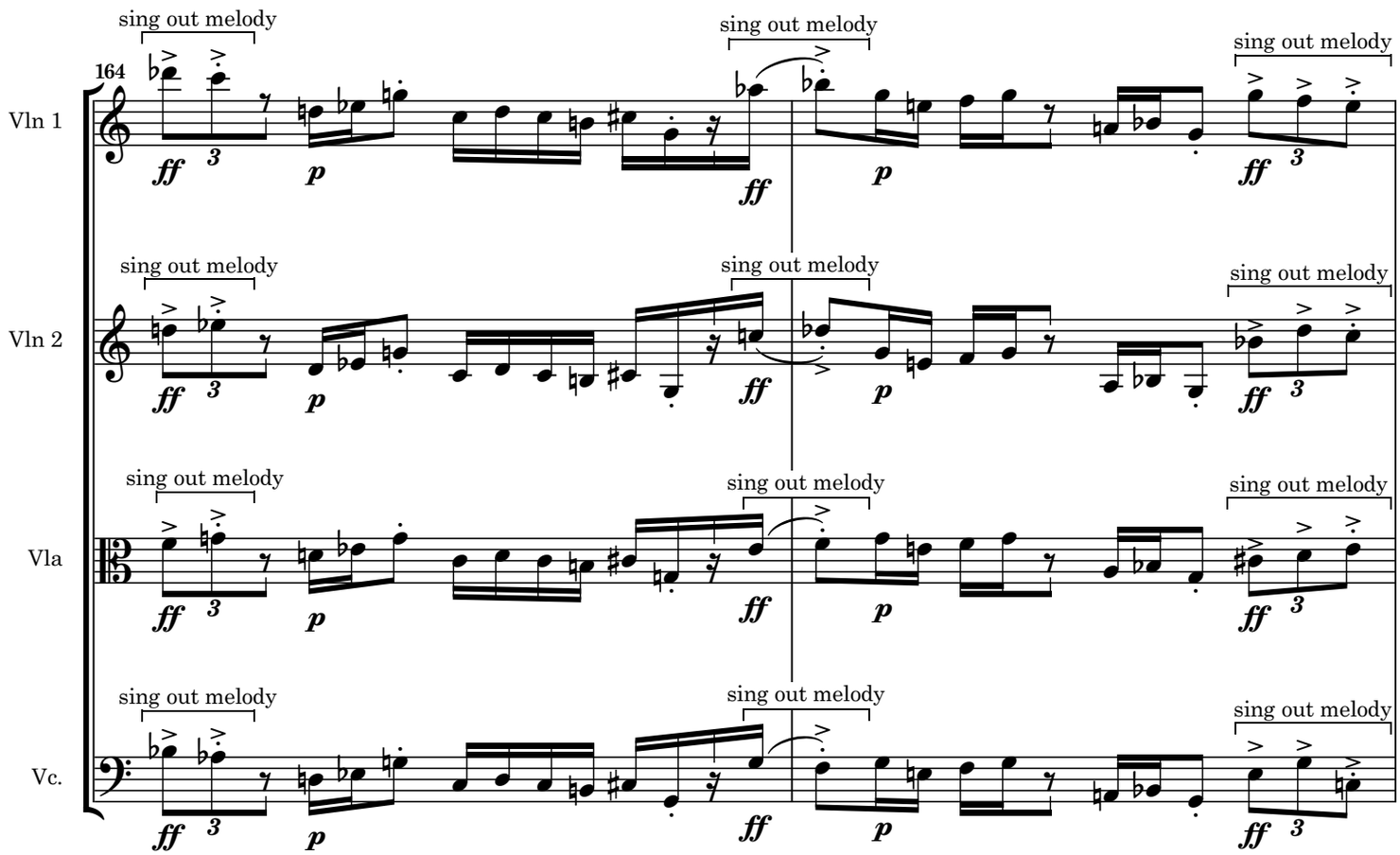

152
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
sing out melody
sing out melody
gliss.
gliss.

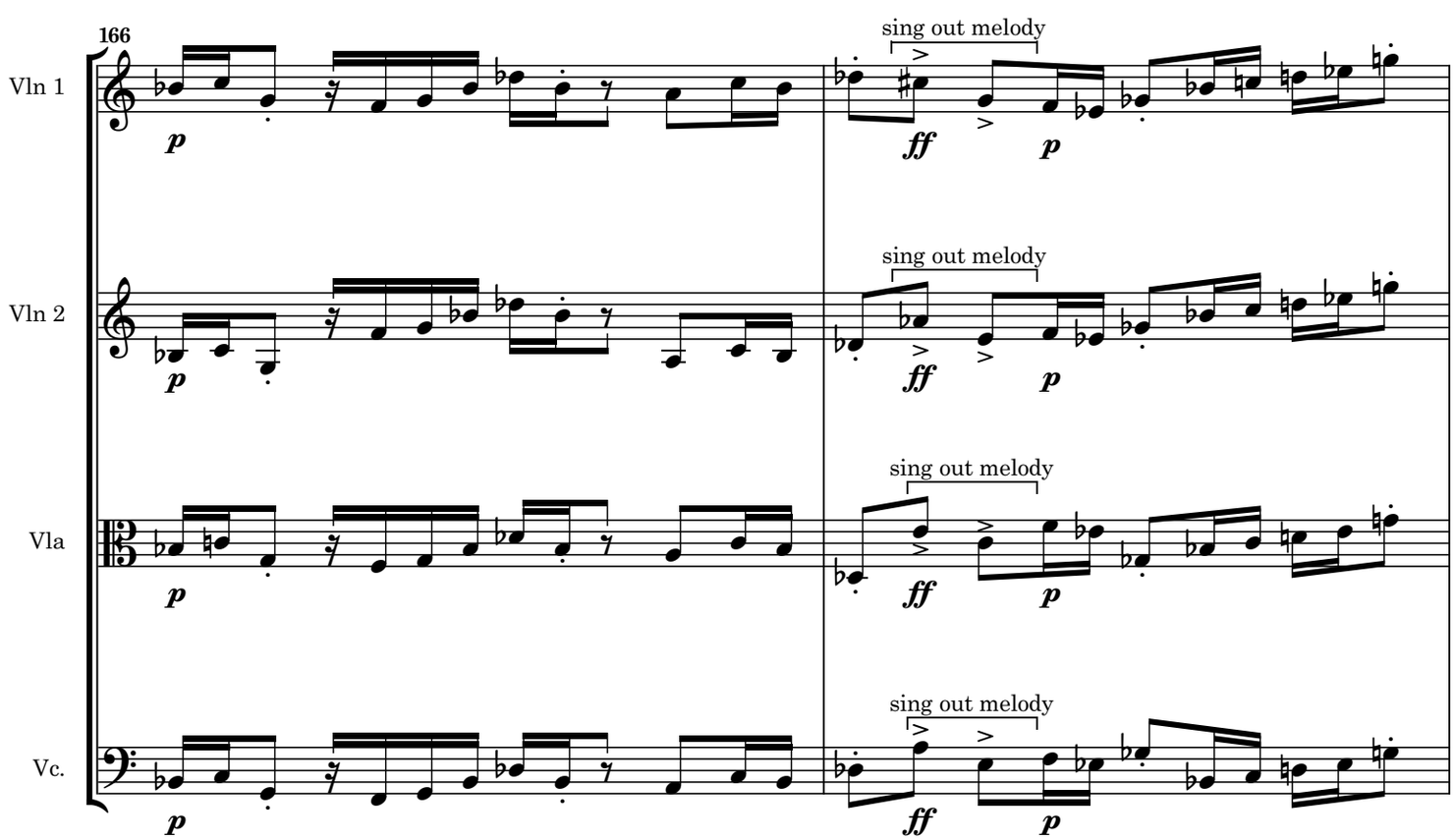

Increasing chaos
155
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
trill rit.
gliss.
accel.
158

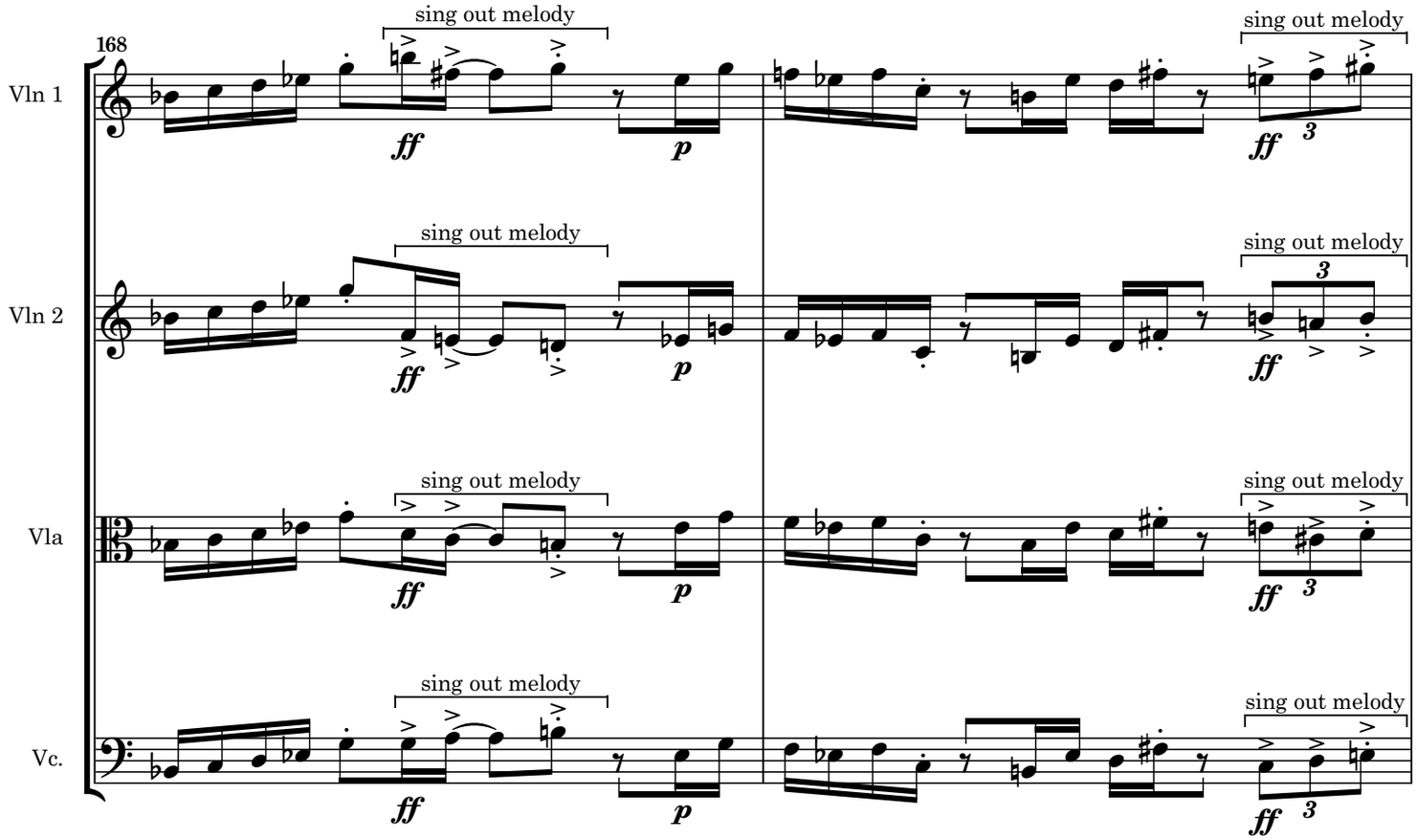


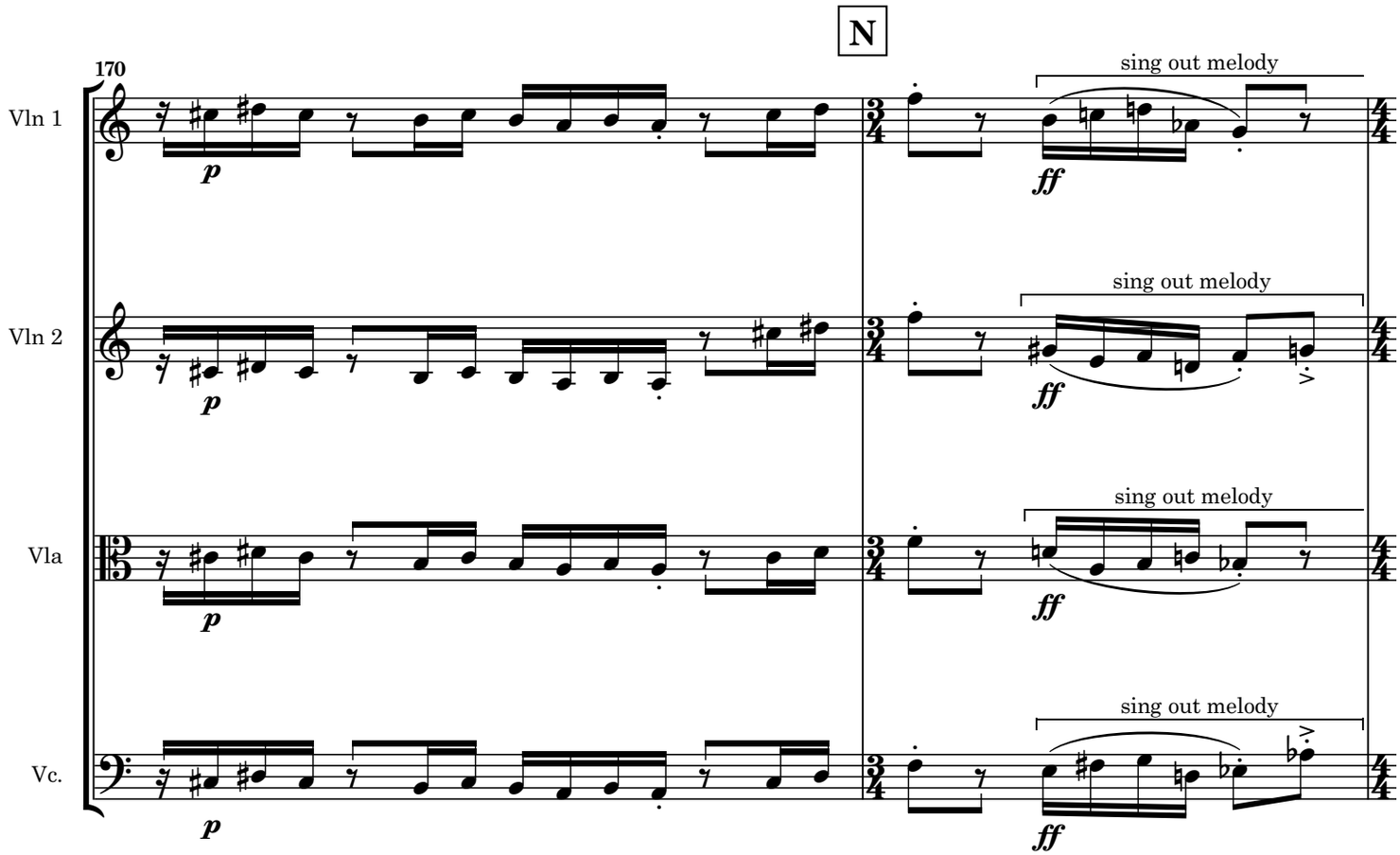
M **Intense, Precise** (♩ = 96)

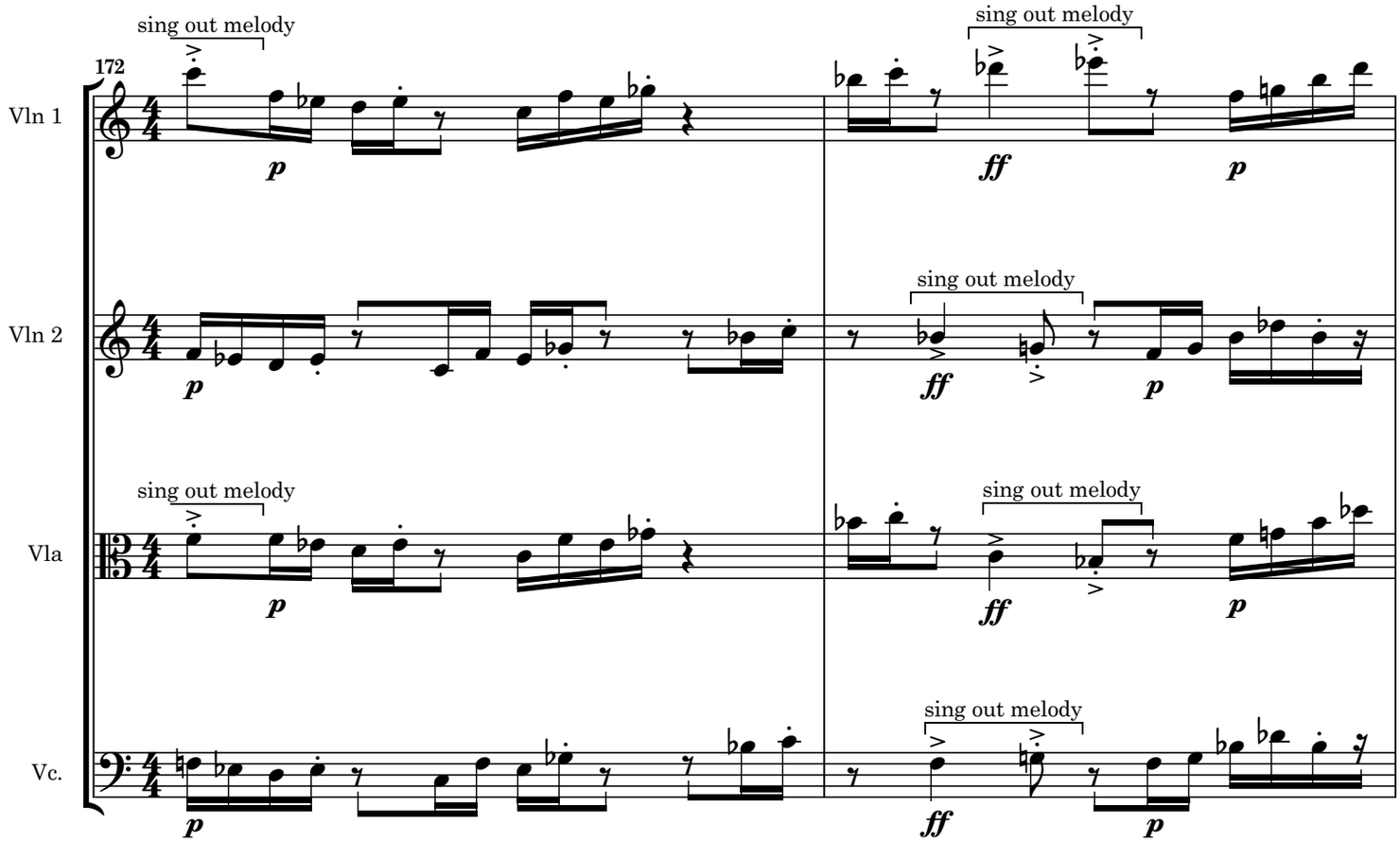


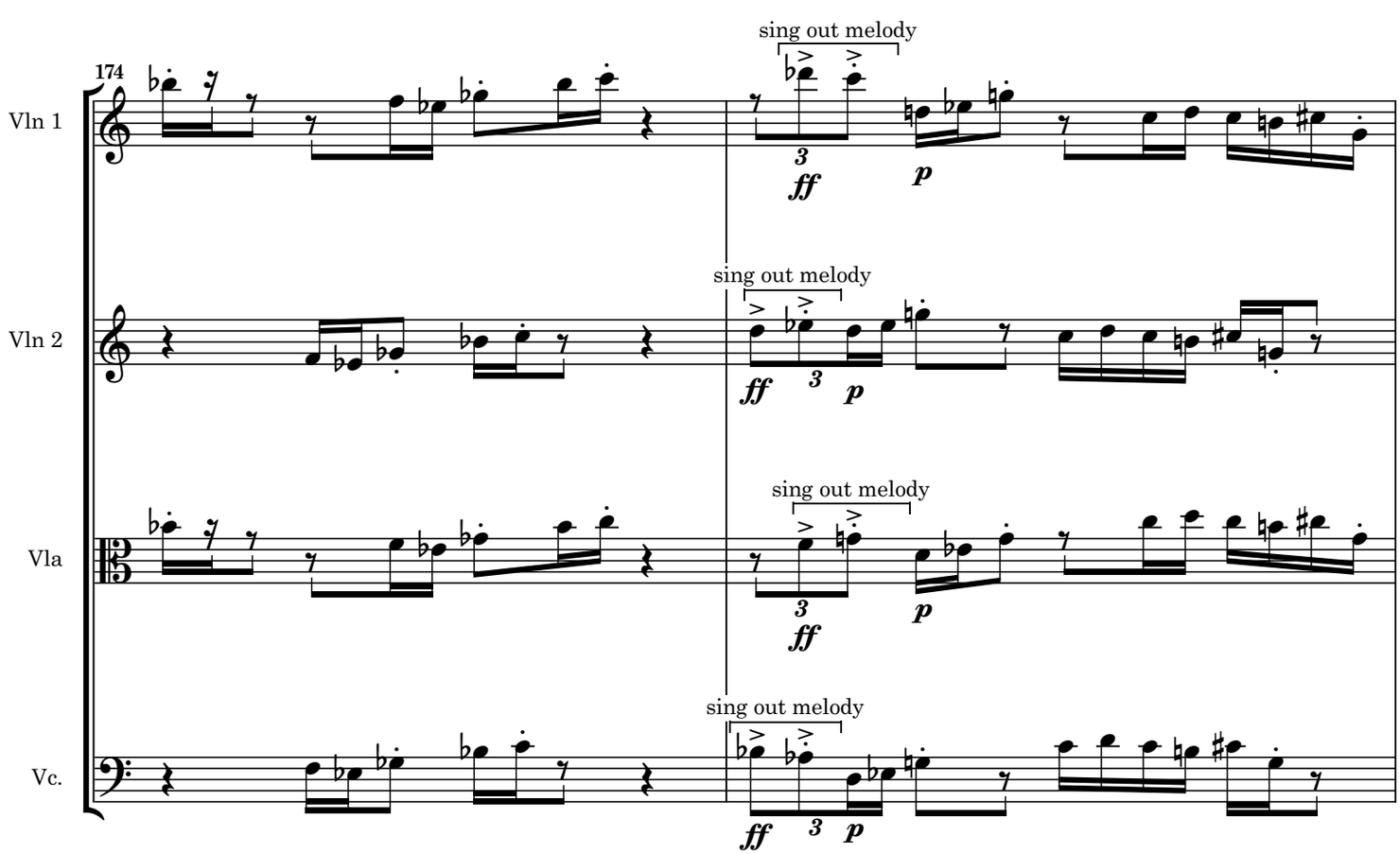

164
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p
3

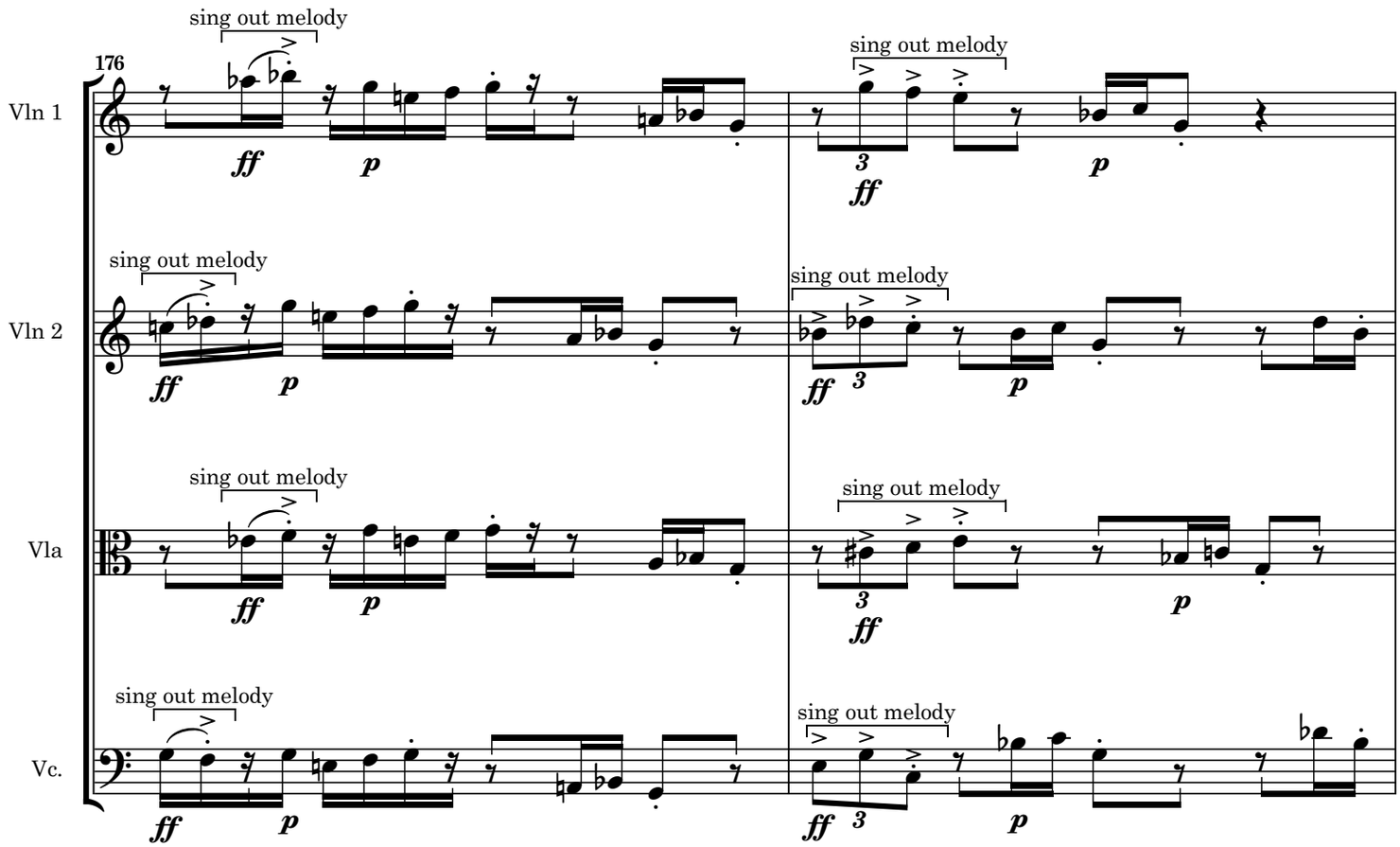

166
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p

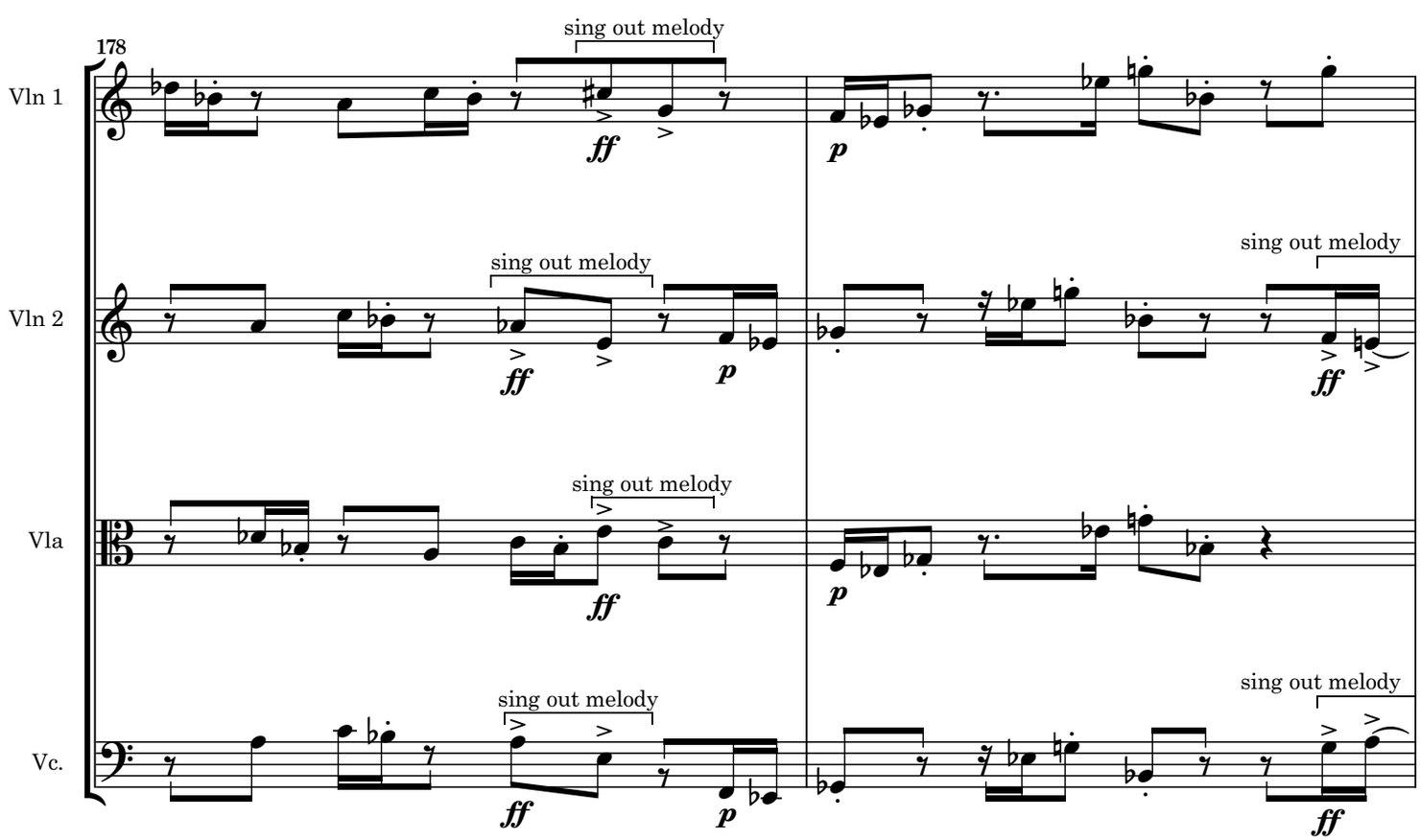

168
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p
3

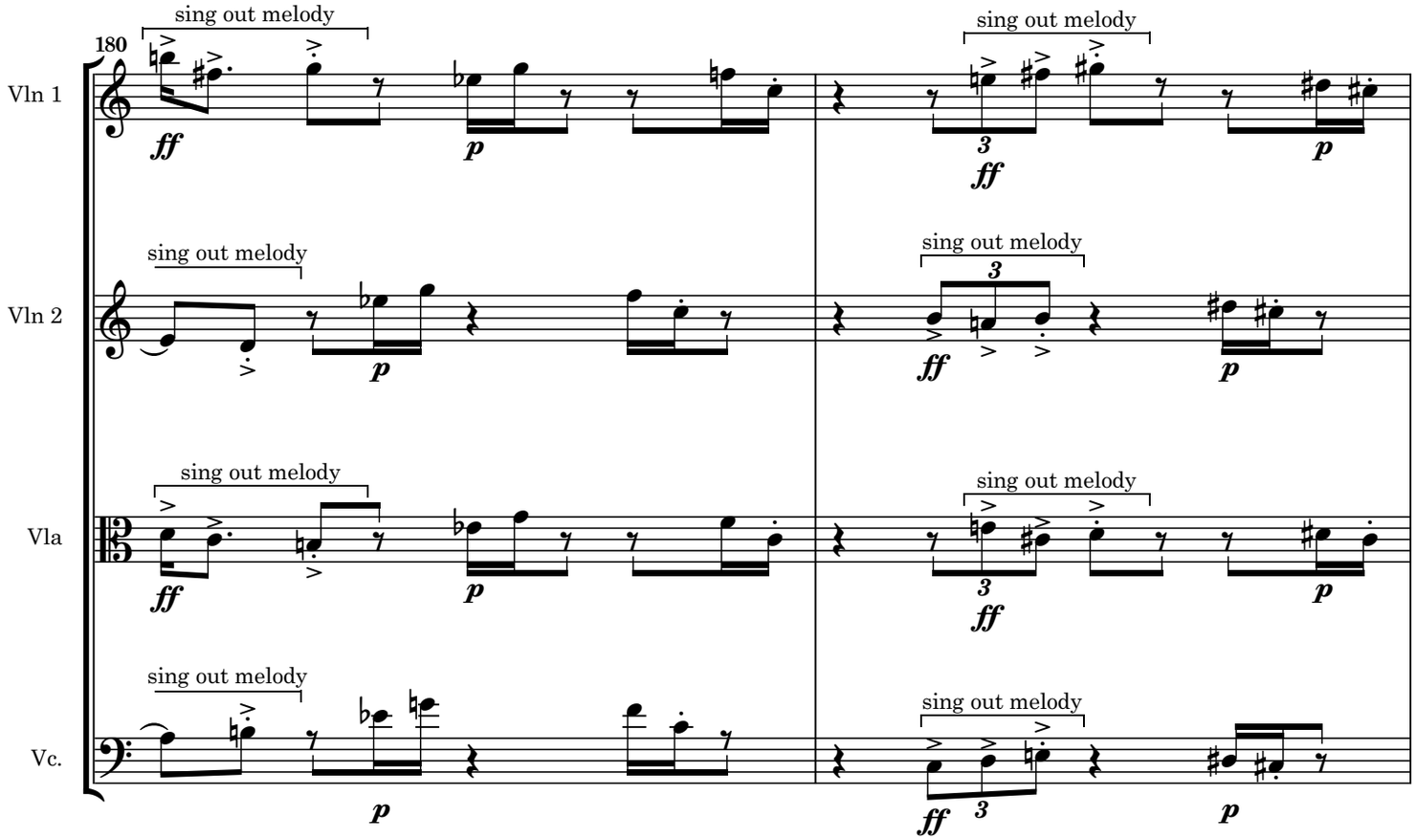

N
170
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
p
ff

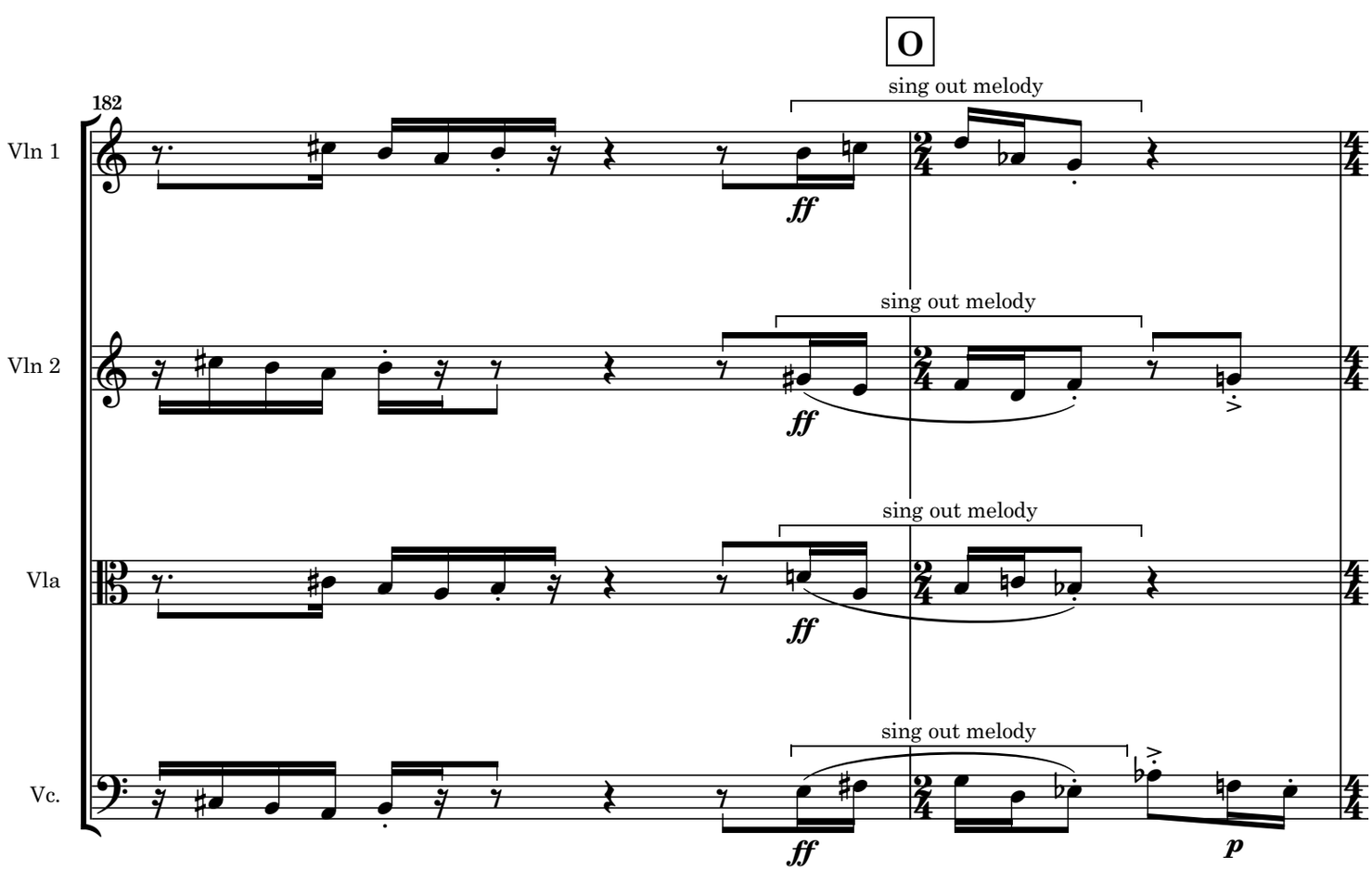

172
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
p
ff

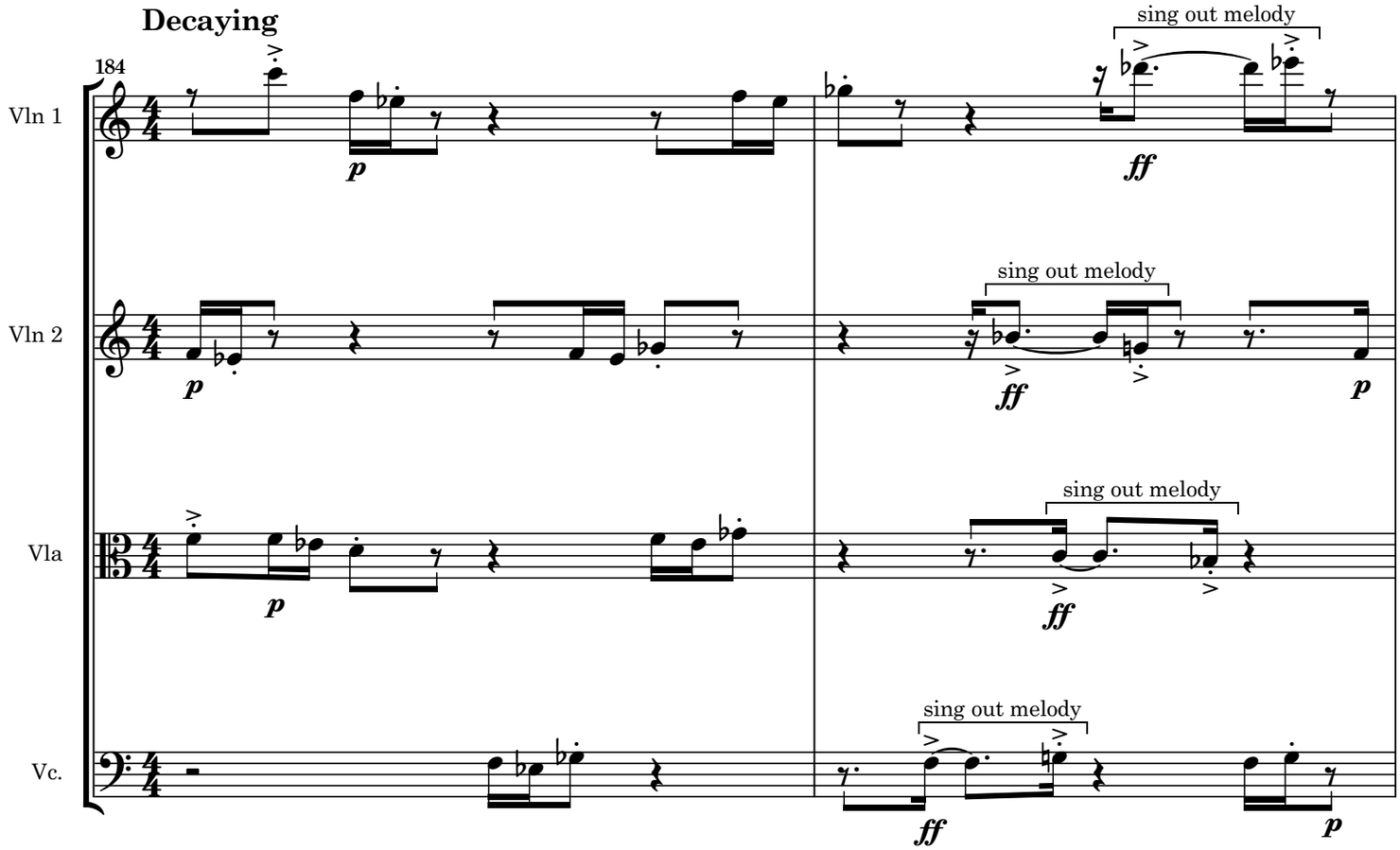

174
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
3
ff
p

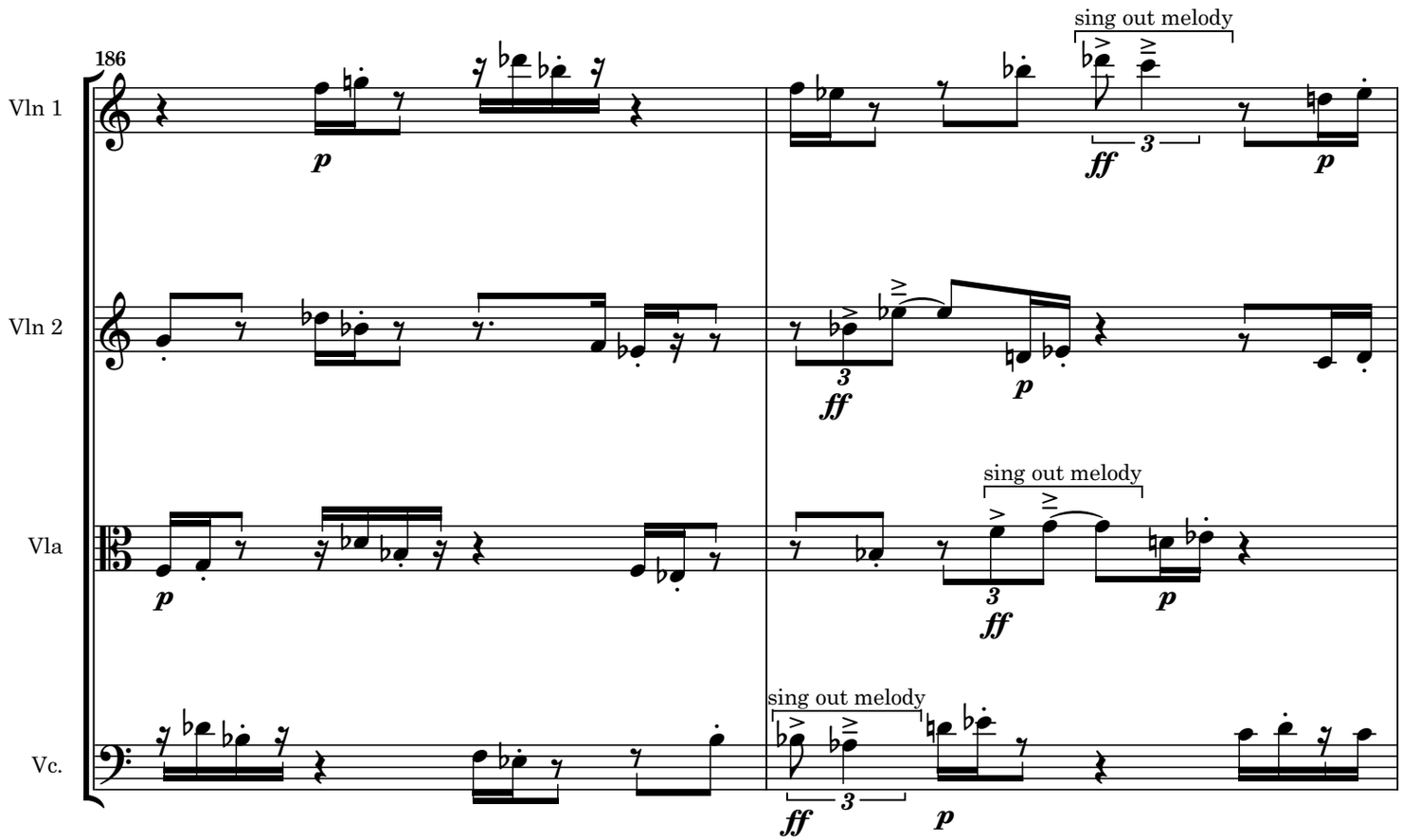

176
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p
3


178
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p


180
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p
3


O
182
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
ff
p


Decaying
184
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
p
ff


186
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
sing out melody
p
ff
3

188

Vln 1

Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

sing out melody

ff p

191

Vln 1

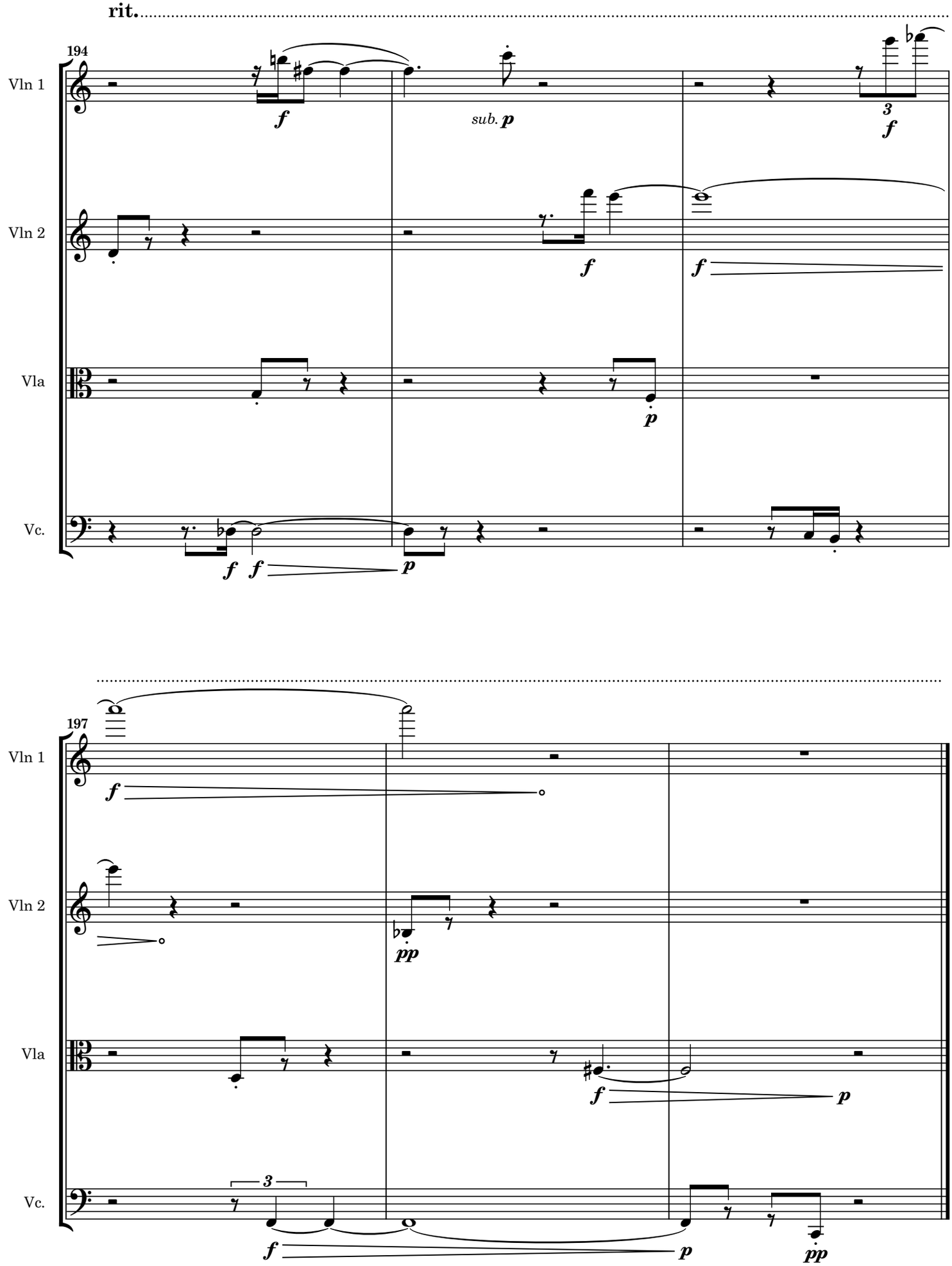
Vln 2

Vla

Vc.

sing out melody

ff p f


rit.
194
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
f
sub. p
3
f
f
f
p
f f
p
197
Vln 1
Vln 2
Vla
Vc.
f
pp
f
p
3
f
p
pp