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Prokofieff's Second Piano Sonata Transcribed for Sring Quartet

Robert Carter Lodge
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PROKOFIEFF'S SECOND PIANO SONATA
TRANSCRIBED FOR STRING QUARTET

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Music

Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Music Education

---

by

Robert Carter Lodge

June 1971

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Statement of the Problem	2
	Purpose of the Paper	2
	Definition of Terms	2
2.	THE COMPOSER: SERGE PROKOFIEFF	4
3.	A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE STRING QUARTET	7
4.	AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSCRIPTION	10
5.	SUMMARY	19
BIBLIOGRAPHY		20
PROKOFIEFF: SONATA NO. 2 TRANSCRIBED FOR STRING QUARTET		
	FIRST MOVEMENT: ALLEGRO	21
	SECOND MOVEMENT: SCHERZO	35
	THIRD MOVEMENT: ANDANTE	39
	FOURTH MOVEMENT: VIVACE	47

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Transcriptions of music from one performance medium to another have been an important part of music for many centuries. Bach was well known for his transcriptions and arrangements of works by many composers, as well as his own works. Most transcriptions fall into one of two categories: (1) the orchestration, in which a work with simple instrumentation (such as a piano solo) is expanded for full band or orchestra, and (2) the reduction, in which a work originally for a large ensemble is arranged for one or two keyboard instruments. Chamber music transcriptions are relatively rare, with a few notable exceptions, such as Beethoven's arrangement of his second symphony for piano trio, and Brahms' transcription of his F minor quintet for two pianos. Both of these examples are, in effect, reductions from a more complex to a simpler instrumentation. In the present work the writer chose to expand a piano solo to a string quartet, and in so doing, illuminate the work by exploiting the capabili-

ties unique to the string ensemble.

Statement of the Problem

The problem was to transcribe for the string quartet Piano Sonata Number 2 in D minor, originally composed for piano solo by Serge Prokofieff.

Purpose of the Paper

The primary purpose of the transcription is to contribute new and fresh material to the ever-expanding body of string quartet literature. A new work by a composer of Prokofieff's stature will be a creditable addition to the chamber music repertoire.

The purpose of the accompanying text is threefold: (1) to give a brief history of Serge Prokofieff, (2) to give a brief history of the string quartet, and (3) to examine the methods chosen by the writer to transcribe the sonata for string quartet.

Definition of Terms

Arco. Instruction to play with the bow following pizzicato.

Continuo. "In the scores of baroque composers..., the bass part that was performed by the harp-

sichord or organ, together with a viola da gamba or cello" (1:203).

Double stop. The playing of two simultaneous tones on a string instrument.

Figured bass. "A bass part provided with figures (numerals) to indicate harmonies" (1:313).

Harmonics. "...high tones of a flutelike timbre that are produced by lightly touching the string...instead of pressing it down.... Stopping and light touch can be used simultaneously. The tones thus obtained are called 'artificial harmonics,' the others 'natural harmonics'" (1:370).

Perpetuum mobile. A piece that proceeds from beginning to end in the same rapid motion.

Polyrhythm. "The simultaneous use of strikingly contrasted rhythms..." (1:687).

Ponticello (al). "A nasal, brittle effect produced by bowing very close to the bridge" (1:104).

Pulse. Commonly called beat. The basic time unit of a composition.

Tremolo. To move the bow back and forth very rapidly on one note.

Chapter 2

THE COMPOSER: SERGE PROKOFIEFF

Serge Sergeivich Prokofieff[1] was born on April 23, 1891. His birthplace was Sontsovka, located in the Ukraine. His parents lavished special attention on him because he was their only surviving child; their attention to his formal music education spurred his career. He received much of his early musical training from his mother, who was a fair pianist, and later attended the Conservatory at St. Petersburg where he studied under Lyadov and Rimsky-Korsakov (8:4).

Prokofieff was a great pianist as well as composer. He was greatly influenced by composers such as Chopin, Liszt, and Schumann, all who wrote primarily piano music. His own compositional output contains many piano works. In 1914, he won the Anton

---

[1]Different sources give varied spellings of his name (Serge, Sergei, Sergey; Prokofieff, Prokofiev) but this writer refers to a photostat of the composer's own signature (8:332f).

Rubinstein prize amid great controversy from the judges; he had substituted his own piano concerto for the classical concerto that was usually played. His early works were quite advanced, and their motor rhythms and harsh dissonances were not always favorably received (3:63).

Much of Prokofieff's life was spent outside of Russia. In 1918, due to events of the October Revolution, he came to the United States and remained for two years. He then moved to Paris, but gave concerts throughout Europe and the United States. In 1934, after two preliminary visits, Prokofieff returned to Russia, ending sixteen years of expatriation. Except for a few concert tours, he remained in Russia the rest of his life. Ironically, news of his death on March 5, 1953 passed almost unnoticed by the Russian press, which was preoccupied with the death, on the same day, of Josef Stalin.

The Second Piano Sonata was completed in 1912, when Prokofieff was twenty-one years old. It is one of his most important early works, and, according to Nestyev, "...is one of young Prokofiev's finest achievements. Compared with the First Sonata, which is stylistically immature, it represents a great step

forward; it is the work of a completely mature creative personality" (3:68). This composition contains each of the four characteristics that Prokofieff attributed to his works: the classical, the innovative, the toccatalike character, and the lyrical (8:75).

Prokofieff composed the Second Sonata in parts. The second movement, the scherzo, had been written years earlier in Lyadov's harmony class. The first movement began as a one-movement sonatina, which grew into the sonata-allegro form. It was then combined with the scherzo, and the third and fourth movements were added to make the final four movement sonata (3:68).

Chapter 3

A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE STRING QUARTET

The most frequently used instrumental combination for Baroque chamber music was the trio sonata, which often consisted of two violins, bass viol, and harpsichord continuo. Toward the end of the Baroque period, the continuo began to lose favor with many composers because a growing number of amateur musicians misinterpreted the figured bass. One characteristic of the Rococo period was a desire for display; as a consequence the first violin emerged as the dominating part in place of the old harpsichord continuo. When the harpsichord disappeared, the three remaining instruments could not supply four-part harmony, so the viola was added. The cello was better suited to the combination than the bass, and by 1745 the string quartet as we know it today--two violins, viola, and cello--was established (10:120-25).

The string quartet is a medium of the Classical period. The first string quartets in the modern sense

are those of Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) and Luigi Boccherini (1743-1805). Earlier examples of this instrumental combination do exist, such as those by Alessandro Scarlatti (1660-1725), George Frederick Handel (1685-1759), and Georg Matthias Monn (1717-50), but these are essentially Baroque works that happen to be written for four string instruments, and do not follow the Classical form (10:126).

Like the concerto, symphony, and sonata, the string quartet was originally based on the sonata allegro form, and as such has continued through the Romantic period to the present day. Almost every important composer since Haydn has composed for the string quartet, with a few exceptions such as Chopin, Liszt, Berlioz, and Wagner. In addition to Boccherini and Haydn, all of the following composers have written especially noteworthy string quartets:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Franz Schubert (1798-1828)
Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Robert Schumann (1810-1856)
Bedrich Smetana (1824-1884)
Alexander Borodin (1833-1887)
Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Peter Ilyitch Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)
Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)
Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)
Gabriel Faure (1845-1924)
Claude Debussy (1862-1918)
Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

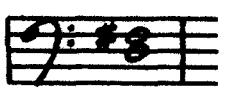
Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)
Bela Bartok (1881-1945)
Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967)
Anton Webern (1883-1945)
Alban Berg (1885-1935)
Serge Prokofieff (1891-1953)
Walter Piston (1894)
Paul Hindemith (1895-1963)
Henry Cowell (1897-1965)
William Walton (1902)
Dmitri Shostakovich (1906)
Elliott Carter (1908)
Samuel Barber (1910)
Benjamin Britten (1913)

Many twentieth-century quartets, especially those of Bela Bartok, have extensively exploited the unique capabilities of string instruments. Special expressive effects, such as pizzicato, glissando, harmonics, al ponticello, sul tasto, and all kinds of bowing, have been used singly or in combination to transform the Classical string quartet into a new set of instruments. When these effects are used in conjunction with modern rhythms and harmonies, the sounds sometimes approach those of electronic music. The instruments, however, are the same as they were over two centuries ago--two violins, a viola, and a cello.

Chapter 4

AN ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSCRIPTION

One of the first problems in transcribing for string quartet is that of range. The string instruments are limited to the pitch of the open lowest string. For the ensemble, the lowest possible pitch is the open C string of the cello, which is considerably higher than the lowest range of the piano. Furthermore, when all of the writing tends to get low in the range, the limitations of the viola and violins must be considered, as they will be taking on the next-lowest sounds of the chord. The transcriber must also be aware of the limitations of double stops, for these will necessarily involve more than just the lowest string. For example, this interval



lies above the lowest range of the viola, however it cannot be played by the viola because both notes are taken on the C string, and obviously cannot be played

simultaneously. The register of the transcription was determined with these and other considerations in mind.

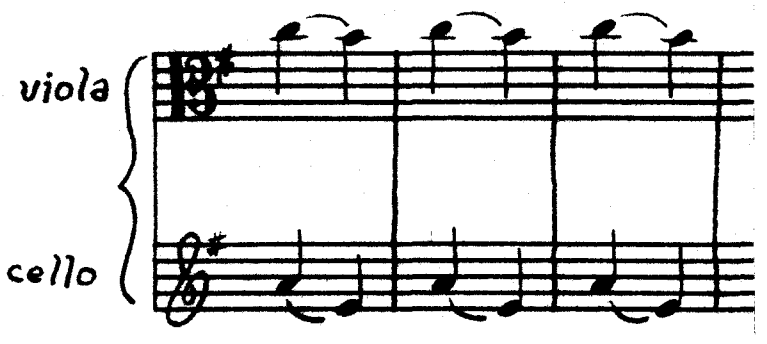
The Piano Sonata Number 2 consists of four movements: (1) Allegro in D minor, (2) Scherzo in A minor, (3) Andante in G-sharp minor, and (4) Vivace in D minor. In order to best facilitate the transcribing for strings, the keys were changed as follows:

1. The first and fourth movements were raised one whole step, from D minor to E minor.
2. The second movement was left in its original register, in A minor.
3. The third movement was raised a minor third, from G-sharp minor to B minor.

The new settings for the four movements are then E minor, A minor, B minor, E minor, or a relationship of I, IV, V, I, which is more traditional than the original order.

At the beginning of the first movement the text falls smoothly into four parts. At measure 32 (Piu mosso), the voices taken by the two violins were shown in the original as separate parts with up- and down-stems, as though Prokofieff might have been thinking in terms of different instruments (7:18).

In the accompanying figure given to the viola and cello, the obvious arrangement might have been



but overlapping shaped phrases give added independence to the voices:

This technique was used again in similar passages further on.

In situations such as the first pulse of measure 47, the parts should overlap as the melody shifts

from one part to another; otherwise the transition will not be smooth. This idea occurs in other sections of the composition also.

At measure 103 (dolce), the accompanying figure in the left hand continues for twelve measures with repeated chords, indicating that Prokofieff wished to sustain the harmony without allowing the natural decrease of piano tone to occur (7:20). The strings could, of course, sustain the chords as dotted half-notes, but the writer chose to incorporate one of the special provinces of the strings--the bowed tremolo. This accomplishes the effect that Prokofieff probably had in mind but could not obtain on the piano.

The meter goes back to 2/4 at the scherzando (measure 115), but Prokofieff curiously retained the 3/4 signature until measure 133 (7:21). As the former is much easier for four players to count together, the transcription begins the 2/4 meter at the earlier measure. This section also incorporates the contrasting effect of pizzicato, which illuminates the feeling of the original.

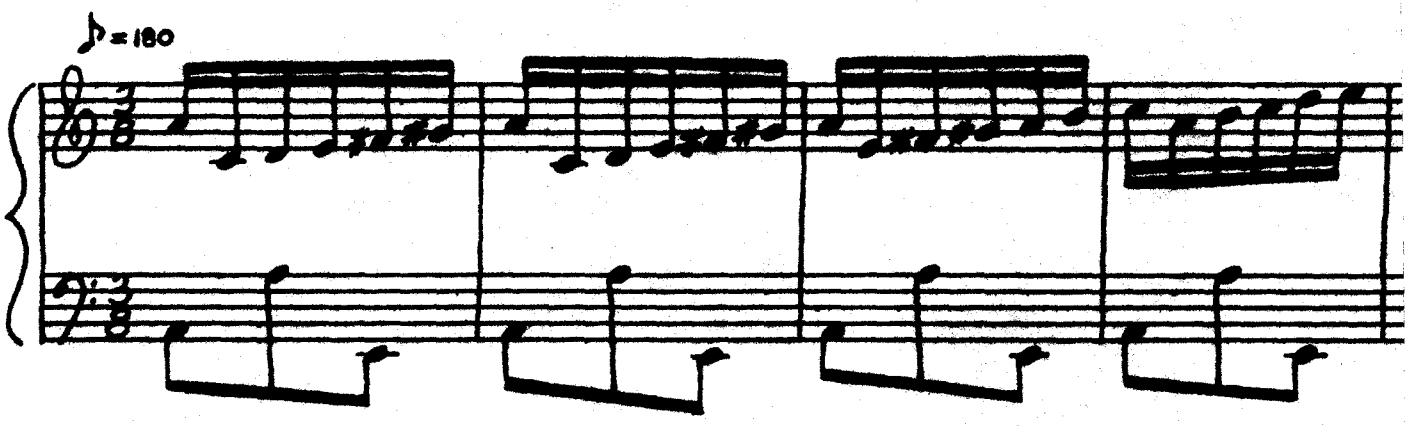
In measure 298 the humorous blurt of the cello anticipates the reentry of the beginning figuration; this allows an effective use of al ponticello.

The Scherzo is in ternary form. The opening section is a staccato perpetuum mobile, whose character is best expounded by sempre pizzicato. The accented melody shifts constantly from one part to another; in order for it to be heard, the dynamics must be observed very strictly. The trio is played arco. The repeat of the first section is exact; in order to eliminate unnecessary duplication of writing, "dal segno al fine" is used.

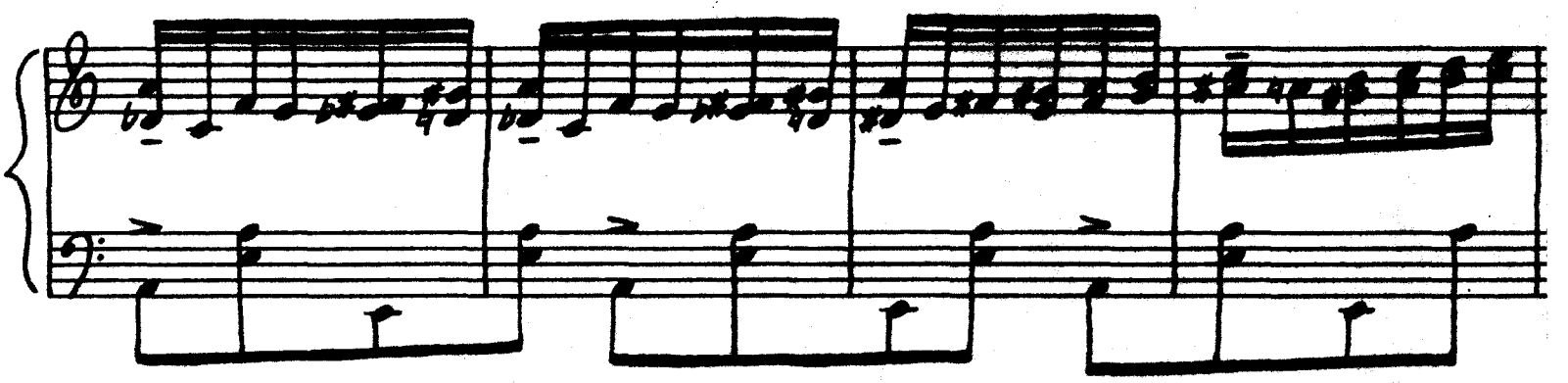
The Andante is one of Prokofieff's most sublime accomplishments. In keeping with its character the instruments play with mutes. The principal melody is aptly described by Nestyev: "Over a smoothly swaying lullaby figure unfolds a prominent melody in declamatory style, which mounts gradually from quiet meditation to almost tragic pathos" (3:70).

At the indication leggiero (measure 23), the first violin plays expressively in double stops against the sixteenth-note figurations of the second violin, and the light accompaniment in the viola and cello is played pizzicato. The double stop patterns in the second violin part (measure 27) are possible because of the extremely slow tempo. This section leads smoothly into the passage marked con tristezza

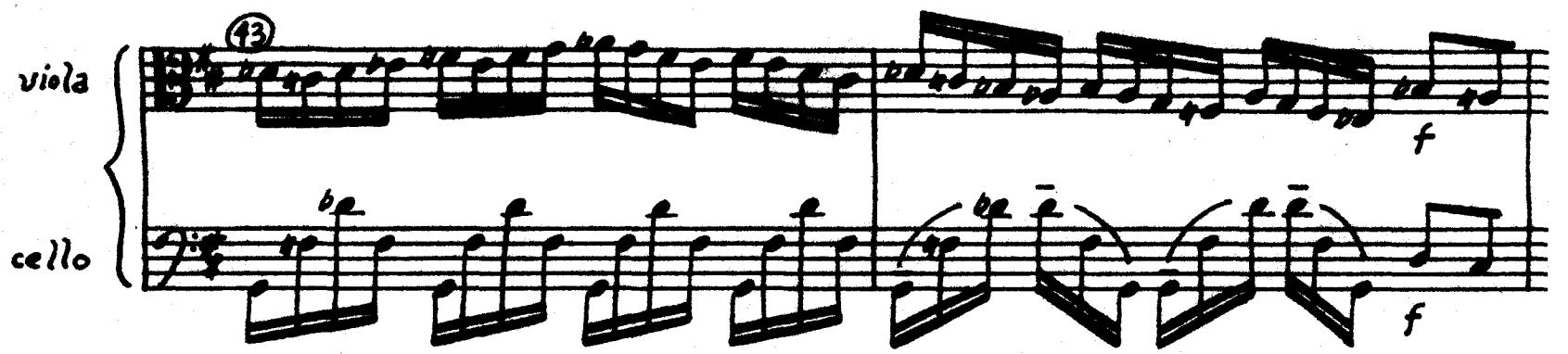
(measure 31), one of the most beautiful sections of the movement. It ideally fits the four instruments with the viola playing the countermelody. After the cello momentarily takes over the viola's melody in measure 39, it begins to use figurations rather than the previous long notes for its accompaniment. As the dynamics increase, the interruption of motion in measure 44 is accomplished with the help of a device used by Prokofieff in his Scherzo, Op. 12, No. 10, for piano. The simple rhythmic structure used at the beginning of the piece



becomes a diabolical polyrhythm later on:



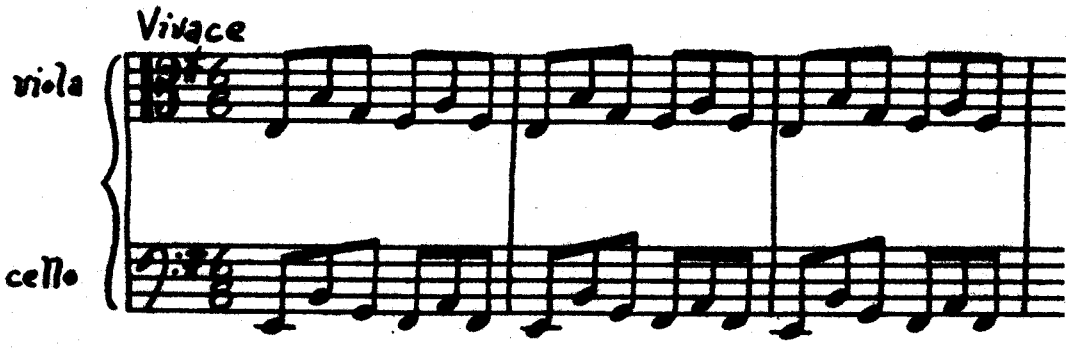
Similarly, in measure 44 the cello arpeggios suddenly become grouped in threes instead of fours, adding a feeling of unrest to the motion as it builds toward the climax in measure 48.



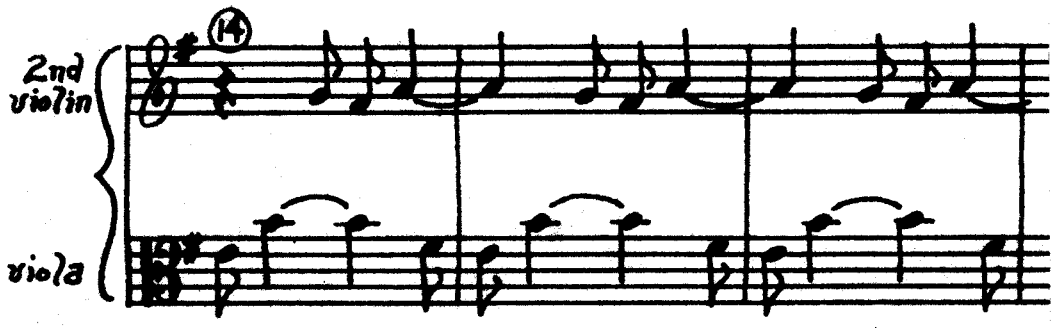
At the return of the <u>leggiero</u> section the first violin plays the very high melody in artificial harmonics, then repeats it an octave lower in double

stops as the movement fades to a close.

The fourth movement opens with a characteristic supporting figure in the viola and cello



which is, upon returning, handled in a more dynamic fashion with the second violin and viola:



Glissandos are freely used in place of the original piano arpeggios. At measure 50 the accom-

panying figure is played pizzicato. The entire movement abounds in festive garlands, sharp accents, biting percussive sounds, and amusing grimaces (3:71), which are achieved on the strings with pizzicati, glissandi, and double stops.

The lyrical dolce section from the first movement returns unexpectedly (measure 130), and is "...abruptly cut off by a new buffoon's dance" (3:71).

In the coda (measure 302), the two themes of the movement are cleverly combined; two separate string players will more smoothly accomplish this than a single pianist. The transcription comes to an end with a set of rousing chords, in which the use of open strings is exploited.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY

This covering paper was not intended to explain in detail the harmonic or formal contents of the Sonata, as these considerations pertain to the original composition as well as the transcription. It is hoped that the chapters on the backgrounds of the composer and the medium will give the reader some insight into the stylistic and technical problems involved.

It is desired that this paper might serve as an assistance to the student interested in transcriptions, and that a performance of this transcription might be realized in the future.

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SONATA NO. 2 IN D MINOR

by

Serge Sergeivich Prokofieff

Transcribed for String Quartet

by

Robert Lodge

Allegro

mf cresc.

mf

mf legato cresc.

mf cresc.

f

f

f marcato

f

rit. a tempo

p pp mp

rit. a tempo

p pp cresc.

rit. a tempo

p pp mp

rit. a tempo

p pp mp cresc.

f legato

sf ff

ctese. legato

sf ff

sf ff

30

Più mosso

p

mp

mp simile

mp simile

40

50

mp

mp

p

pizz. p

3

3

3

60

ritard.

ritard.

ritard.

atco

Tempo Primo

8va

mp molto legato

mp molto legato

p legato

p

70

rit. a tempo

mp sul tasto

rit. a tempo

mp

rit. a tempo

p

rit. a tempo

p

80

rit. a tempo

mp

rit. a tempo

mp

rit. a tempo

p cresc.

rit. a tempo

p cresc.

rit. a tempo

p cresc.

rit. a tempo

p cresc.

90

f

p cresc.

100

p

pizz.

arco

dolce

p legato

110

pp

mp scherzando

p scherzando

p scherzando

p scherzando

120

pizz.

arco mf

pizz.

arco mf

pizz.

arco mf

pizz.

arco mf

pp

p

p

fp

p

fp

130

pizz.

arco f

pizz.

arco f

pizz.

arco f

pizz.

arco f

p legato

p

p

p

140

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

mp

mp

sempre marcato

mp

150

160

mf

mf

mf

mf

170

180

f

f

3

3

3

f non marcato

f

190

200

ff

sff

sf

210

rit.

pp legato

a tempo
p
cresc.
a tempo
p
cresc.
a tempo
mp
cresc.
a tempo
mp
legato
cresc.
sf
f
220
sf
f
sf
sf
sul G
Più mosso
230
mp
p
p
p
simile
p
simile

240

mp

mp

p

pizz.

p

250

3

3

3

rit.

rit.

rit.

arco

Tempo primo

260

molto legato
p dolce

molto legato
p dolce

pp

III'
IV'

pp

rit.

a tempo

270

p

a tempo

pp sul tasto
non vib.

tit.

tit.

a tempo

rit.

a tempo

p

pp

molto rit.

a tempo

p

molto rit.

a tempo

p

molto rit.

a tempo

molto rit.

a tempo

p

280

cresc.

290

300

pizz.

arco

sul ponticello

310

p

mf

mf

p

legato

mf

cresc.

ff

f

cresc.

ff

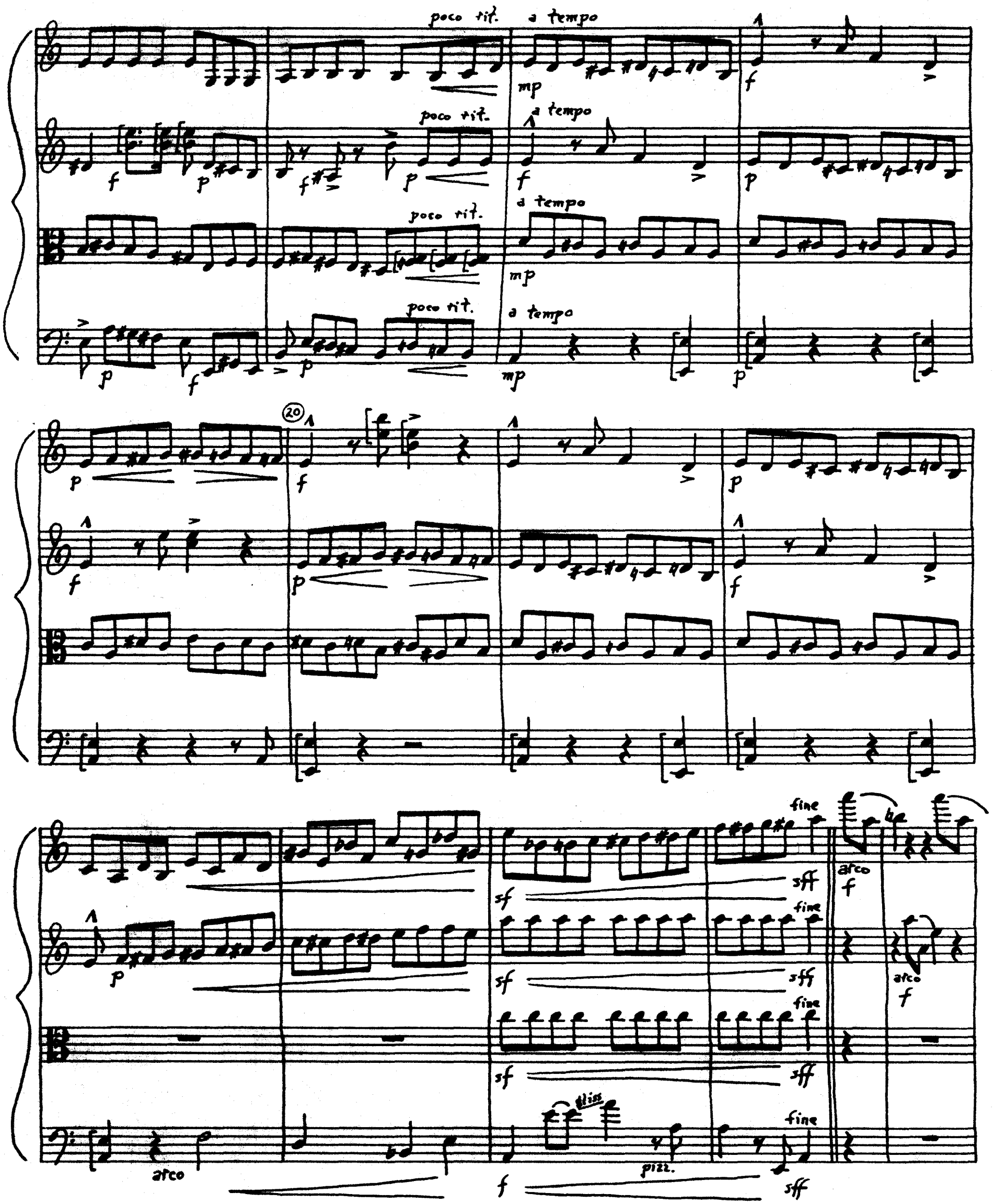
mf cresc.

ff

cresc.

Schetzo

p sempre pizz.
f
p
f
f
mp
f sempre pizz.
p
f
p
pp subito
p sempre pizz.
pp subito
p sempre pizz.
pp subito
pp
mp
pp
10
mp
pp
mp
ff
mf
mf
mf
ff
f
p
f
p
f
p
p
p
mp
f
p
f
p
f
p
f


poco rit.
a tempo
mp
f
p
20
fine
sf
sff
arco
pizz.

rit. 30 a tempo
mp p pp
rit. a tempo
mp p pp
rit. a tempo
arco mp p pp
rit. a tempo
arco pp

rit. 40 a tempo
rit. a tempo
rit. a tempo

mp

mp

mp

mp

pp

pp

pp

pp

pizz.

p

f

D.S. al fine

pizz.

p

f

p f

D.S. al fine

pizz.
mp

mf

f p

f p

D.S. al fine

pizz.

p

D.S. al fine

Andante

arco
con sord.

mp

arco
con sord.

legato mp

arco
con sord. p

legato

arco
con sord. p

p

simile

p

pp

pp

10

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

cresc.

f

f

mp

f

f

mp

f

f

mp

più f

mf

mf

f

dim.

dim.

dim.

20

pp

pp

pp

meno mosso

p leggiero

meno mosso

pp leggiero

meno mosso

pizz.

pp leggiero

meno mosso

pizz.

pp leggiero

arco

pizz.

30

poco più mosso

(pp)

poco più mosso

pp con tristezza

poco più mosso

arco

con tristezza

poco più mosso

arco

tenebroso

p

p

p

pp

pp

pp

pp

40

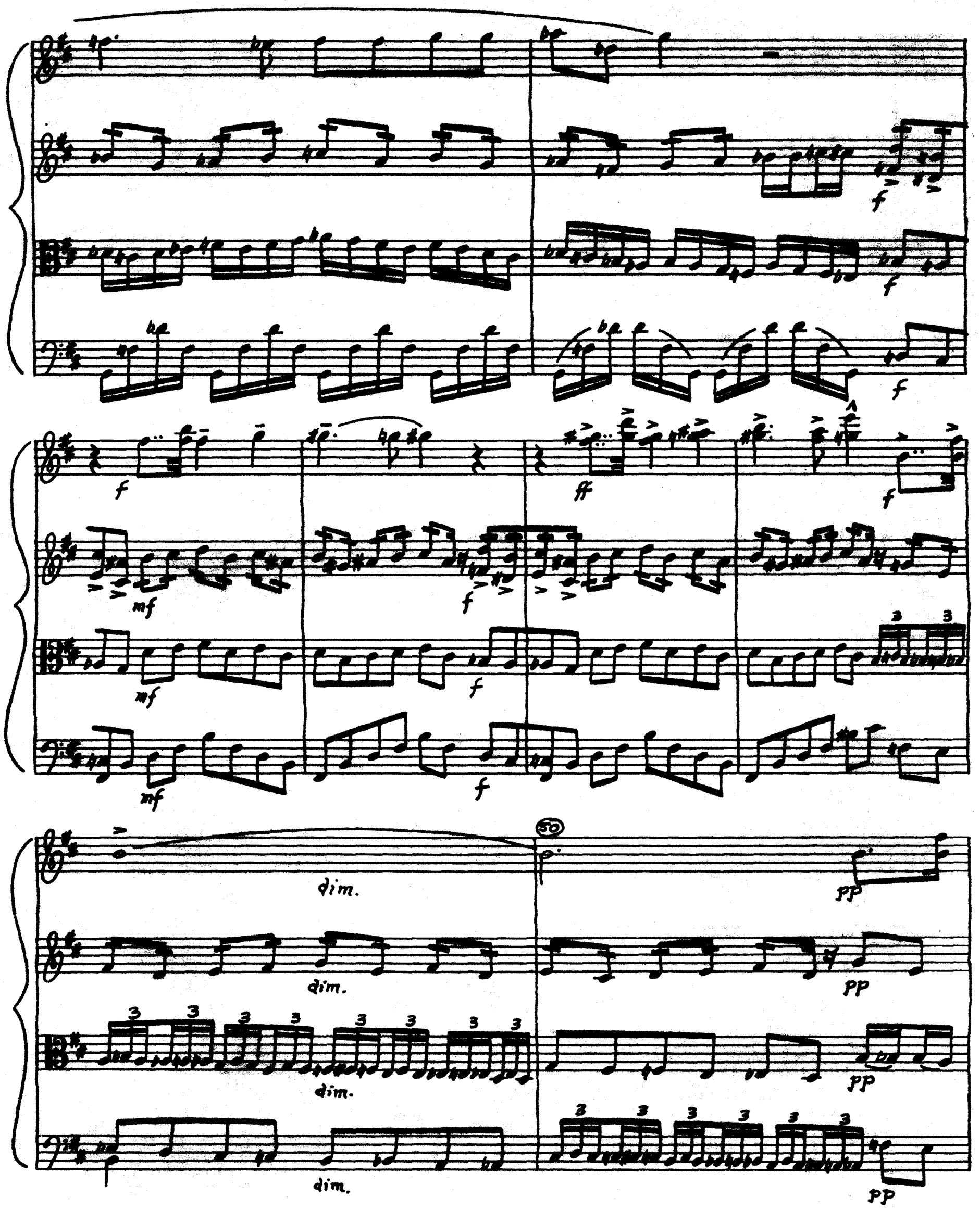
legato

ctesc.

ctesc.

ctesc.

ctesc.


f
f
f
f
ff
f
mf
f
mf
f
mf
f
dim.
dim.
dim.
dim.
50
pp
pp
pp
pp

meno mosso

pp leggiero

ppp leggiero

pizz.
ppp leggiero

pizz.
ppp leggiero

rit.

rit.

rit.

arco

rit.

arco

Adagio

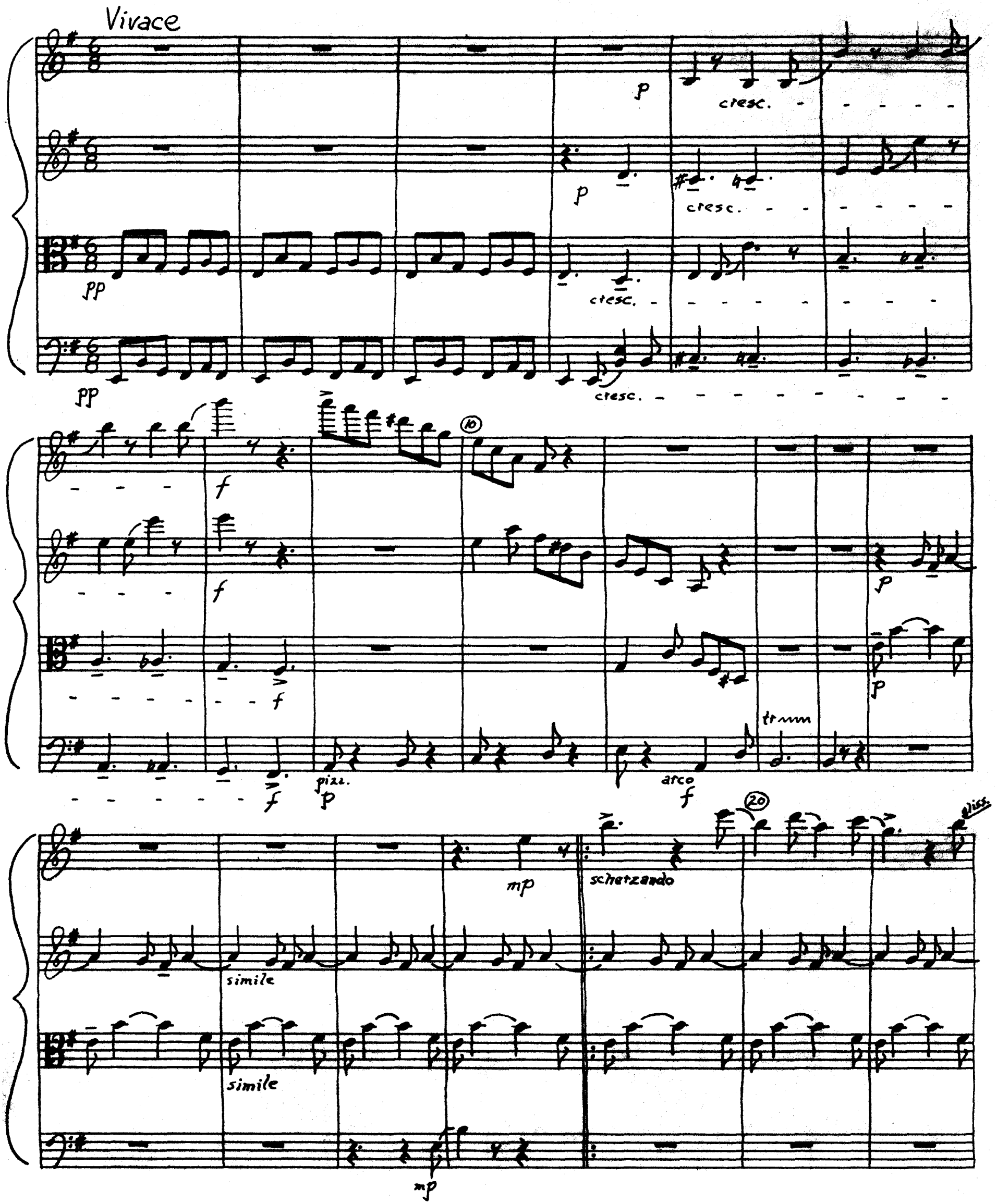
60

senza sord.

senza sord.

senza sord.

pppp


Vivace
p
cresc.
pp
f
pizz.
arco
tr
mp
scherzando
simile
gliss.

pizz.
arco
mp
p
30
1
2
mf
p
mp
p
40

mf p

mp p

mf p

mp p

mf p

mp p

(50)

f

pizz.

dim.

f

pizz.

dim.

mf pizz.

dim.

(60)

arco

p

arco

p

p

p

70

mf p sub. f

mf p sub.

mf f p sub. mf f

mf p mp f

80

pizz. dim.

pizz. dim.

dim.

sul A

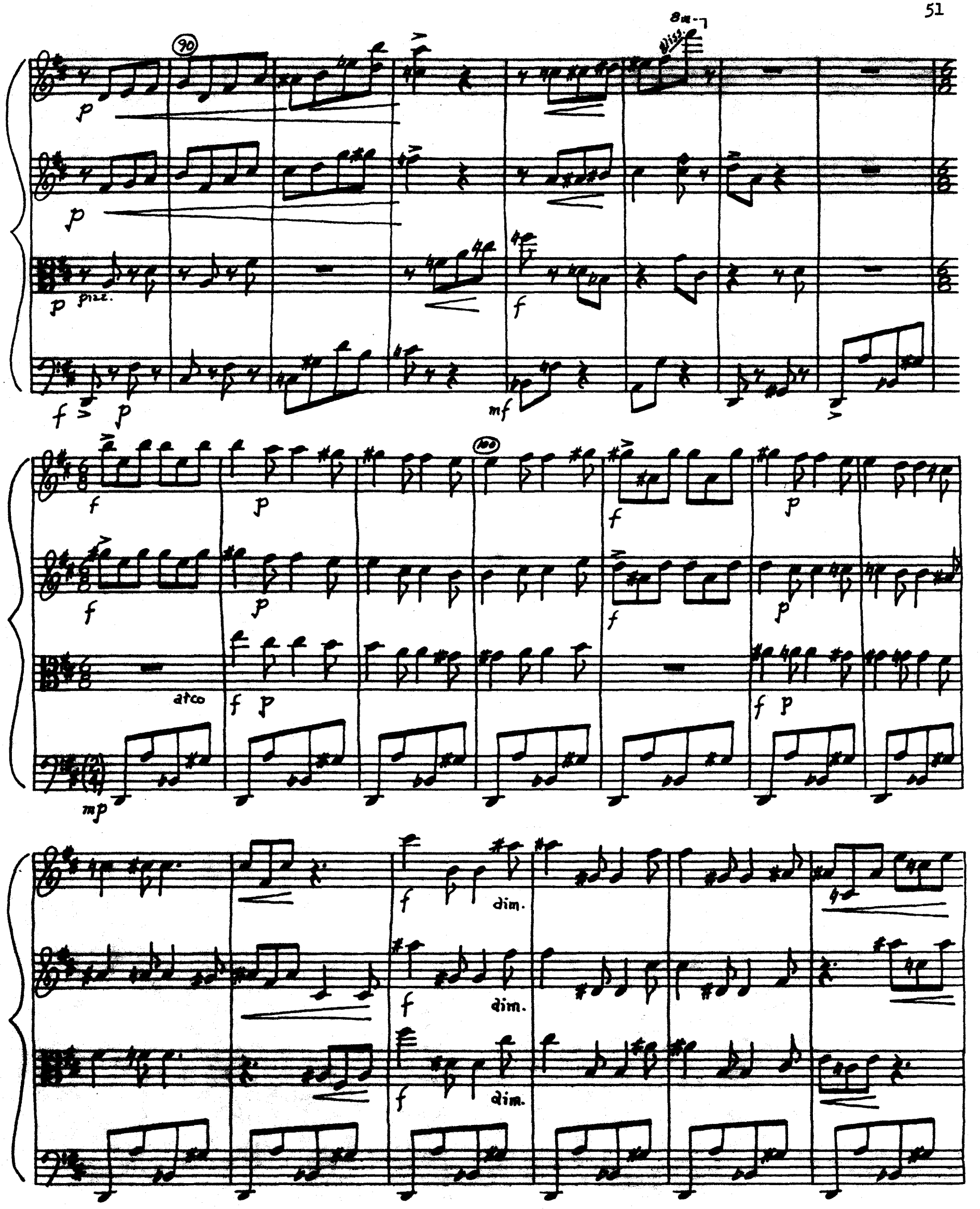
arco p

arco p

arco p

p f

f


90
8va
pizz.
f
p
mf
100
arco
mp
dim.

(110)

f dim.

8va

f dim.

8va

f dim

f

f

(120)

mf pizz.

mp

p

pp

mf pizz.

mp

p

pp

mp pizz. dim.

pp mp

dim.

pp mp

(130) Moderato

arco mp legato

p pp

arco p

mp legato

pp

arco p

p pp

arco p

140

a poco a poco acceletando al vivace

p

p

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

pizz.

150

più

arco

arco

pizz.

pizz.

arco

Vivace

160

arco f

arco f

arco f

p

p

p

p

170

mp 7 giocoso

mp giocoso

mp giocoso

mp giocoso

gliss.

180

sf mp sf mp

3 3

sf mp sf sf

190

sf mp sf mp

200

sf mp sf mp

p

sf

pizz. p

p pizz.

210

sf

sf

p

atco

atco

220

sf

sf

p cresc.

sf p

cresc.

pp

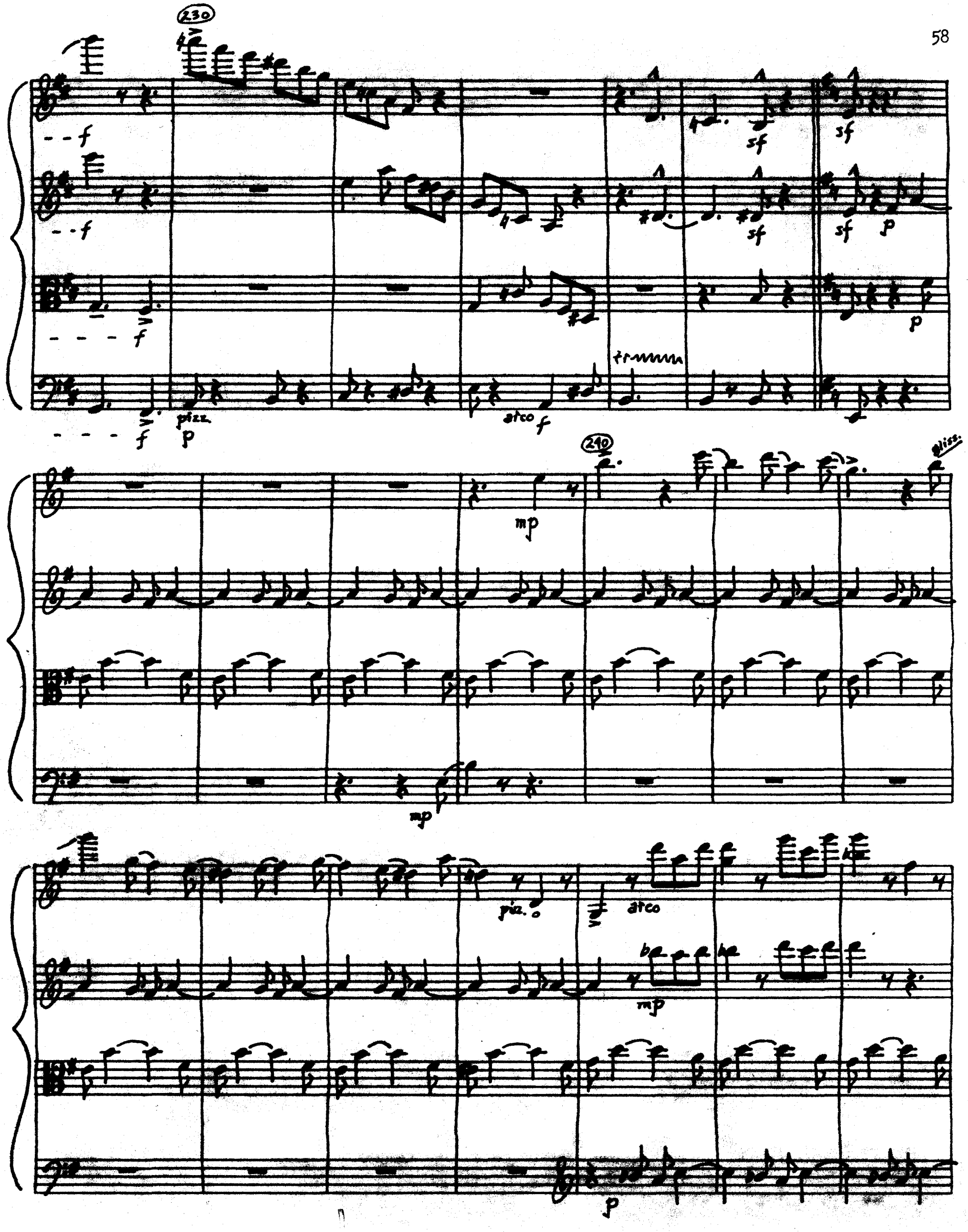
p

cresc.

pizz.
pp

atco
p

cresc.


230
f
sf
p
pizz.
arco
240
mp
gliss.
pizz.
arco

250

mf p

mf p

mf p

p

260

mp p

mp p

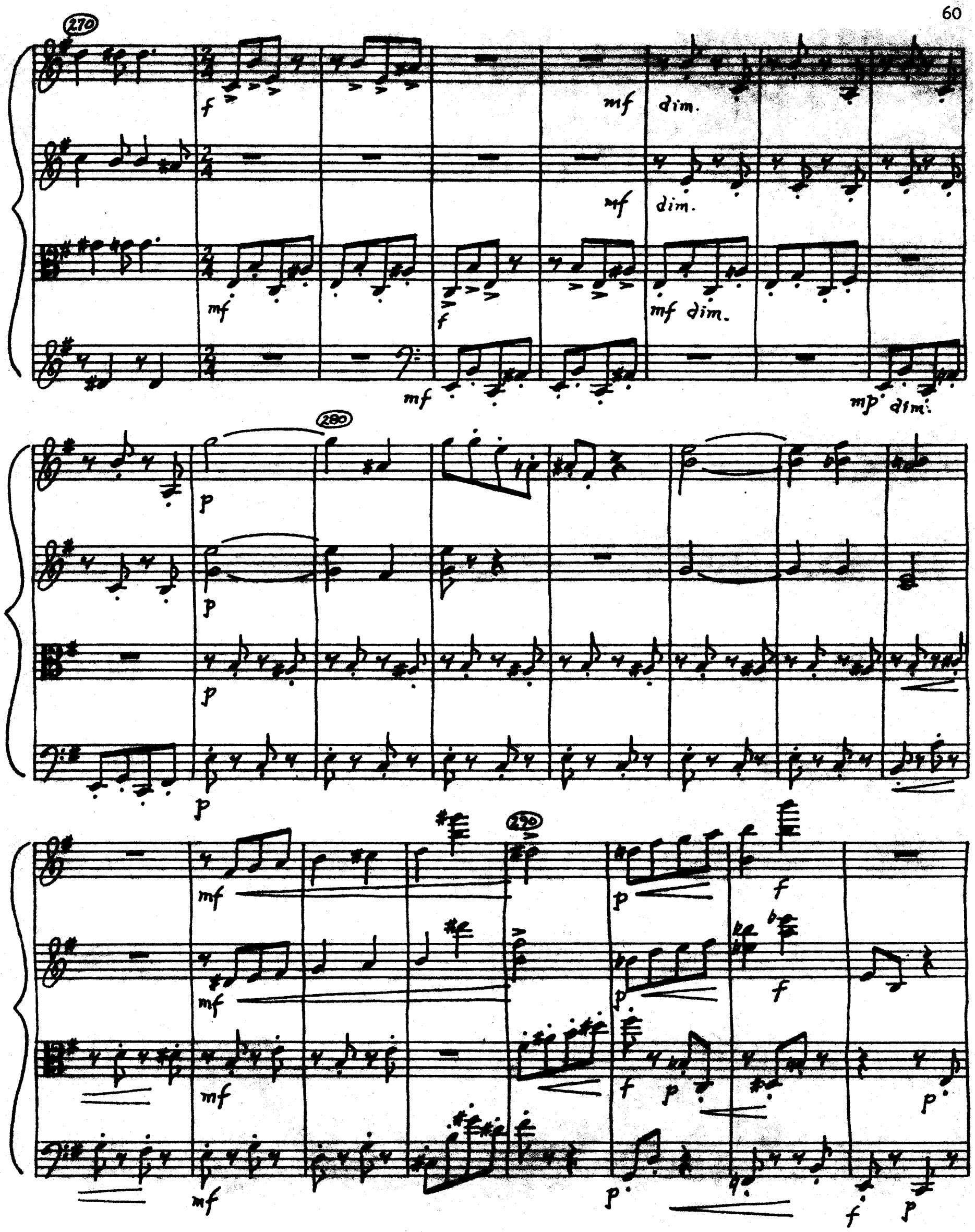
mf p

mf p

mp p

mf p

mp p


270
f
mf
dim.
mf
dim.
mf
f
mf dim.
mf
mp dim.
280
p
p
p
p
290
mf
p
f
mf
p
f
mf
f
p
p
mf
p
f
p

mf dim.

mf dim.

f

f

mf

mp dim.

mf

mf dim.

gliss.

mp scherzando

mp

mp

p

8va

pizz.

arco

cresc.

cresc.

pizz.

arco

cresc.

cresc.

320

f

mp

f

mp

f

p

f

p

330

mp

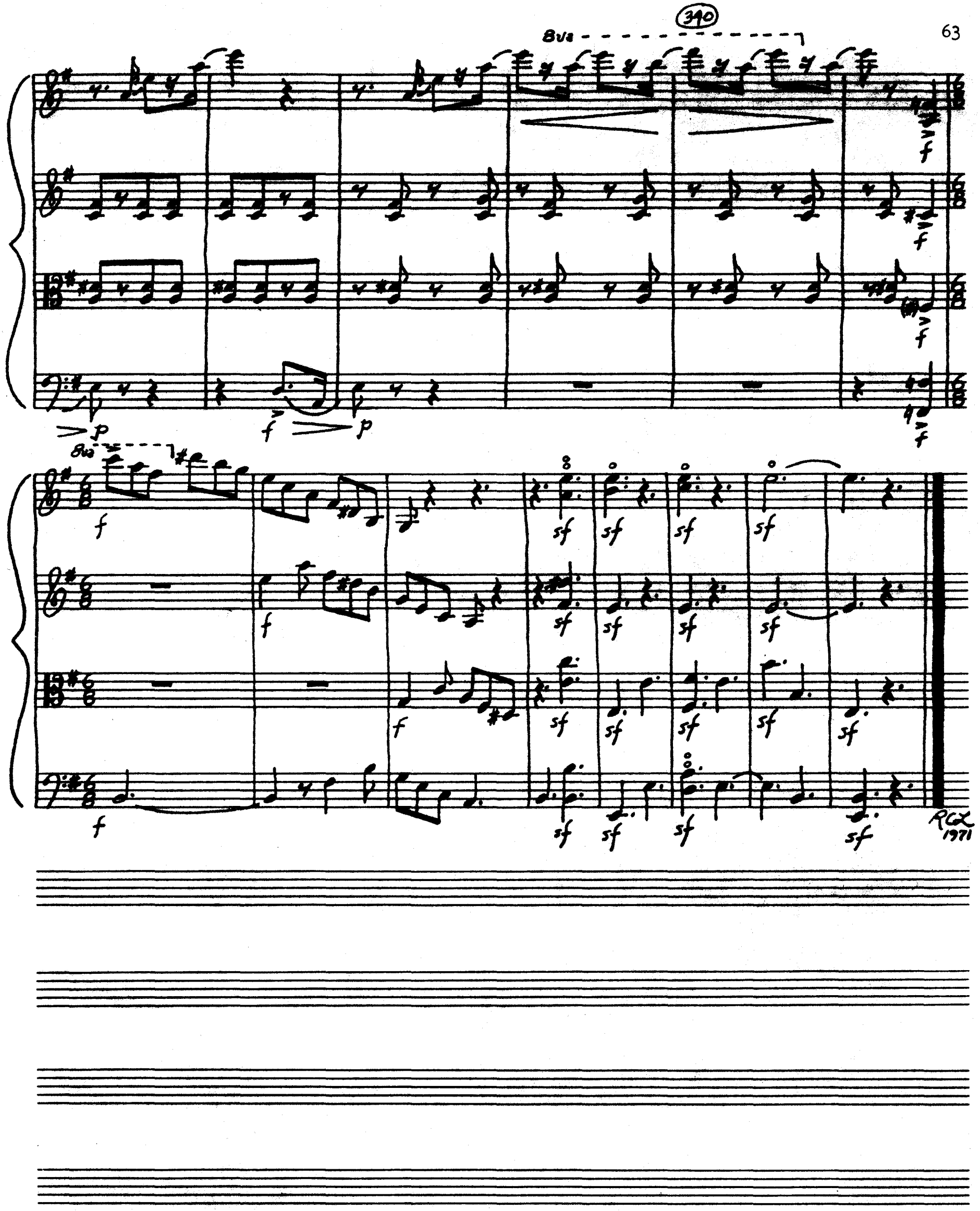
p

p

f

p

f


340
8va
8va
RCL
1971