Rachel Singh

Xiuhcoatl

Xiuhcoatl

In Aztec mythology, Xiuhcoatl is the fire serpent, who is a *nahual*, or shadow form, of the fire deity Xiuhtecuhtli. It takes the form of lightning and is thrown through the night sky as a weapon by Huitzilopochtli, the god of sun and war. Together, Xiuhcoatl and Huitzilopochtli beat back the forces of night so that the day can prevail. Xiuhcoatl is often depicted as a turquoise, segmented serpent, and it is associated with turquoise, grass, and the solar year.

The Aztec ritual calendar features two overlapping cycles that reset at the end of a 260-day year. The first cycle consists of the numbers one through thirteen, and this constituted a week. There were twenty thirteen-day weeks in the year. The second cycle contained twenty nature symbols that were repeated thirteen times over. Each was also associated with a cardinal direction. *Coatl*, or the serpent, is the fifth of these, and *malinalli*, or grass, is the twelfth. In Aztec culture, it was not uncommon for one's name to correspond with what day of this month they were born on, thus lending great significance to these symbols.

In writing *Xiuhcoatl*, I have constructed Xiuhcoatl's and Huitzilopochtli's battle against the night with all these factors in mind. Each phase of the piece corresponds to the symbolism in the Aztec calendar related to the characters involved. To create this, I chose a symbol on the Aztec calendar that was associated with the character, and noted the corresponding day number and cardinal direction. Then, I used the associated number to determine the character's rhythmic appearance in the piece. As for the direction, I overlapped a compass rose with the circle of fifths, and determined the key of each character's theme based on where it pointed on the compass.

The full table with the relationships between the piece and the Aztec calendar and religion can be found below:

Character (in order of appearance):	Associated Symbols*:	Associated Numbers*:	Associated Directions*:	Key Signatures According to Direction:	Rhythm According to Number:
Night	Death	6	North	A minor	6/8 time signature
Xiuhcoatl (wielded by Huitzilopochtli)	Serpent Grass	5 12	East South	(Southeast, at 5:00) G# minor	5-note motive, 12-note motive, 12/8 time signature
Day	Rabbit (associated with fire deity)	8	South	F# major	8/8 time signature

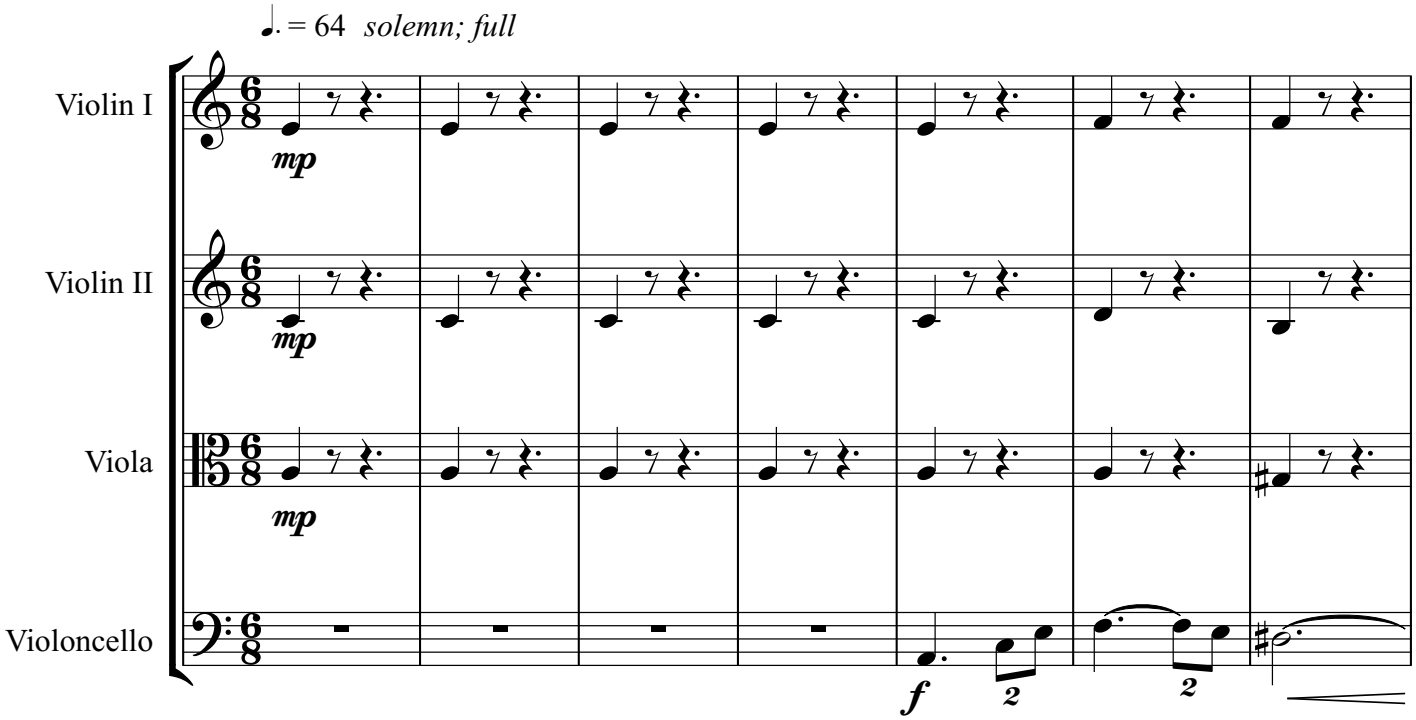
*according to the Aztec ritual cycle calendar

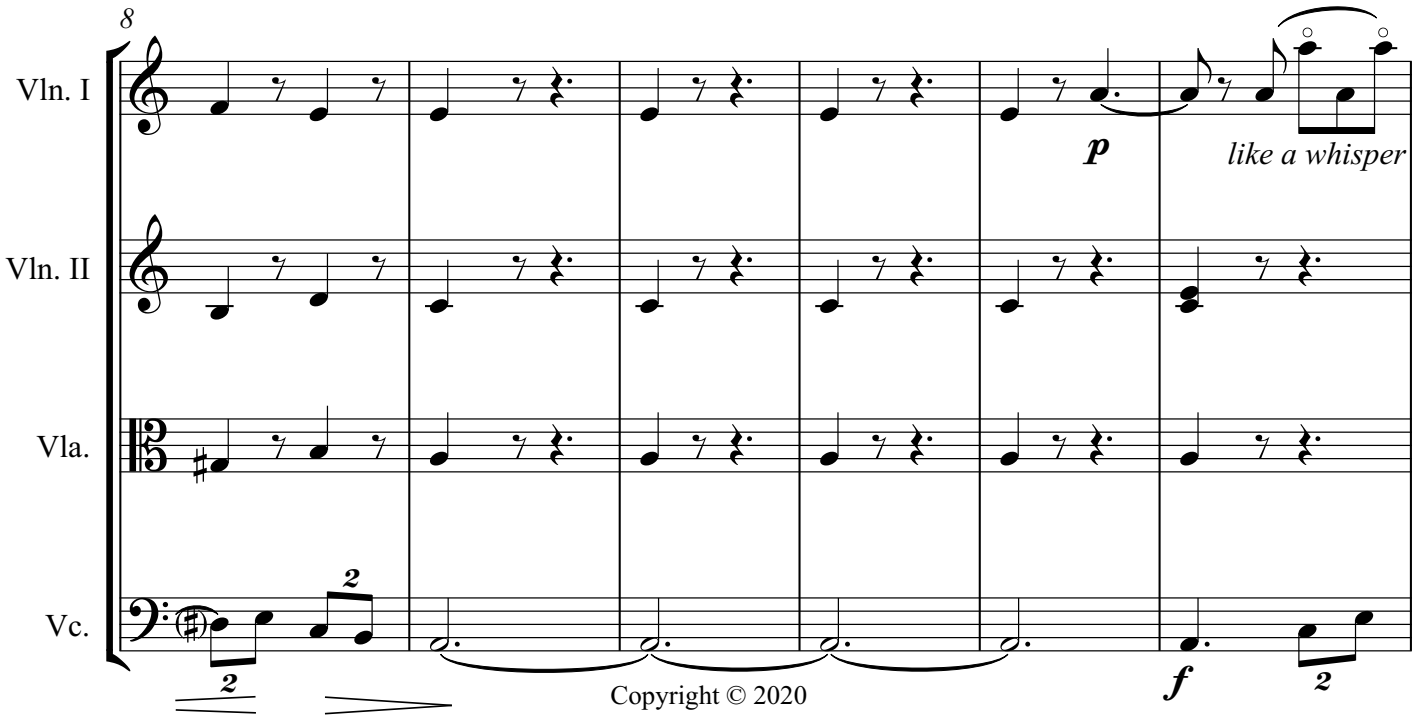
Thus, the piece satisfactorily concludes with the "Day" theme in F# major, which is the complete opposite on the circle of fifths from A minor.

Furthermore, each instrument has a unique role as well. The cello is the night, and the first violin interrupts the night as a flash of lightning: Xiuhcoatl. The second violin soon follows suit as Huitzilopochtli, for it is only natural that the object thrown would arrive sooner than the thrower himself. Finally, the viola is the day.

Xiuhcoatl

Rachel Singh





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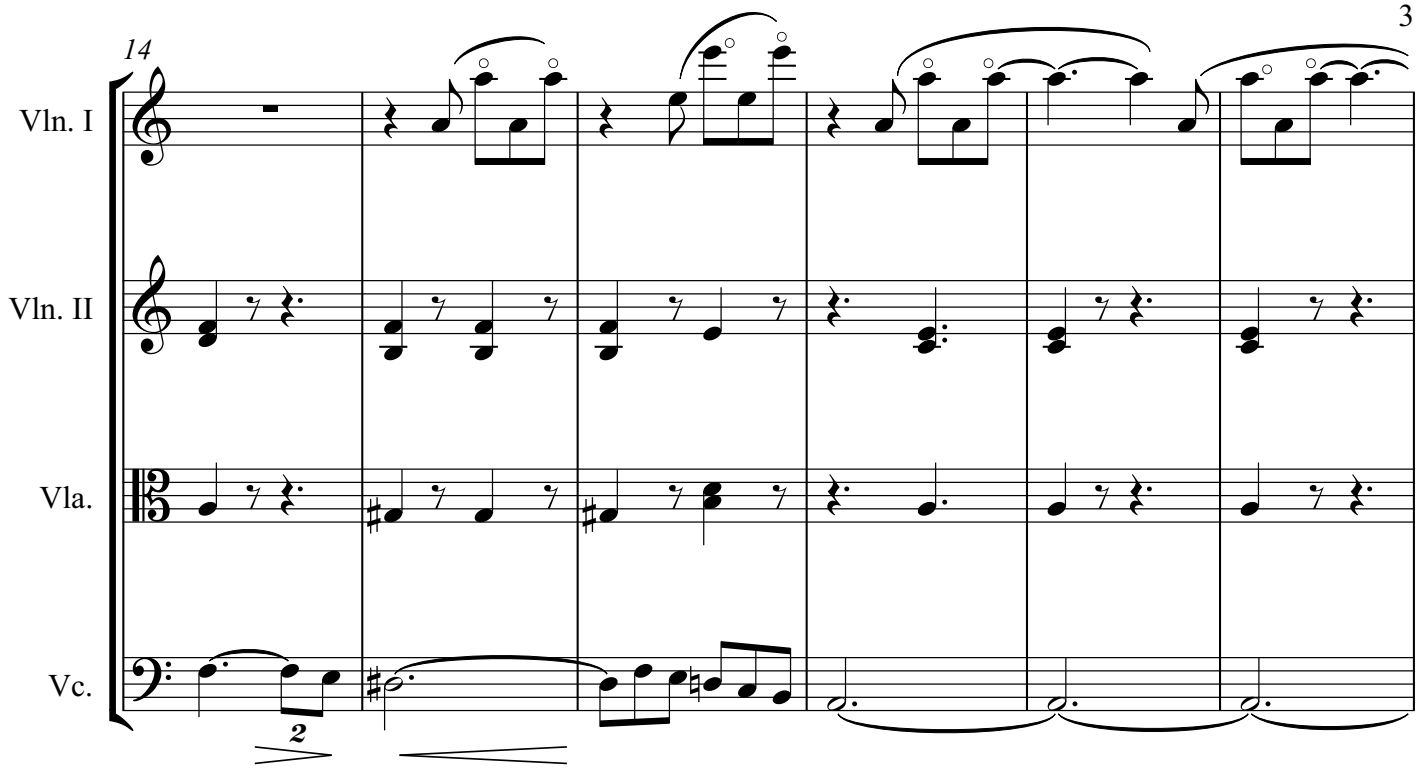
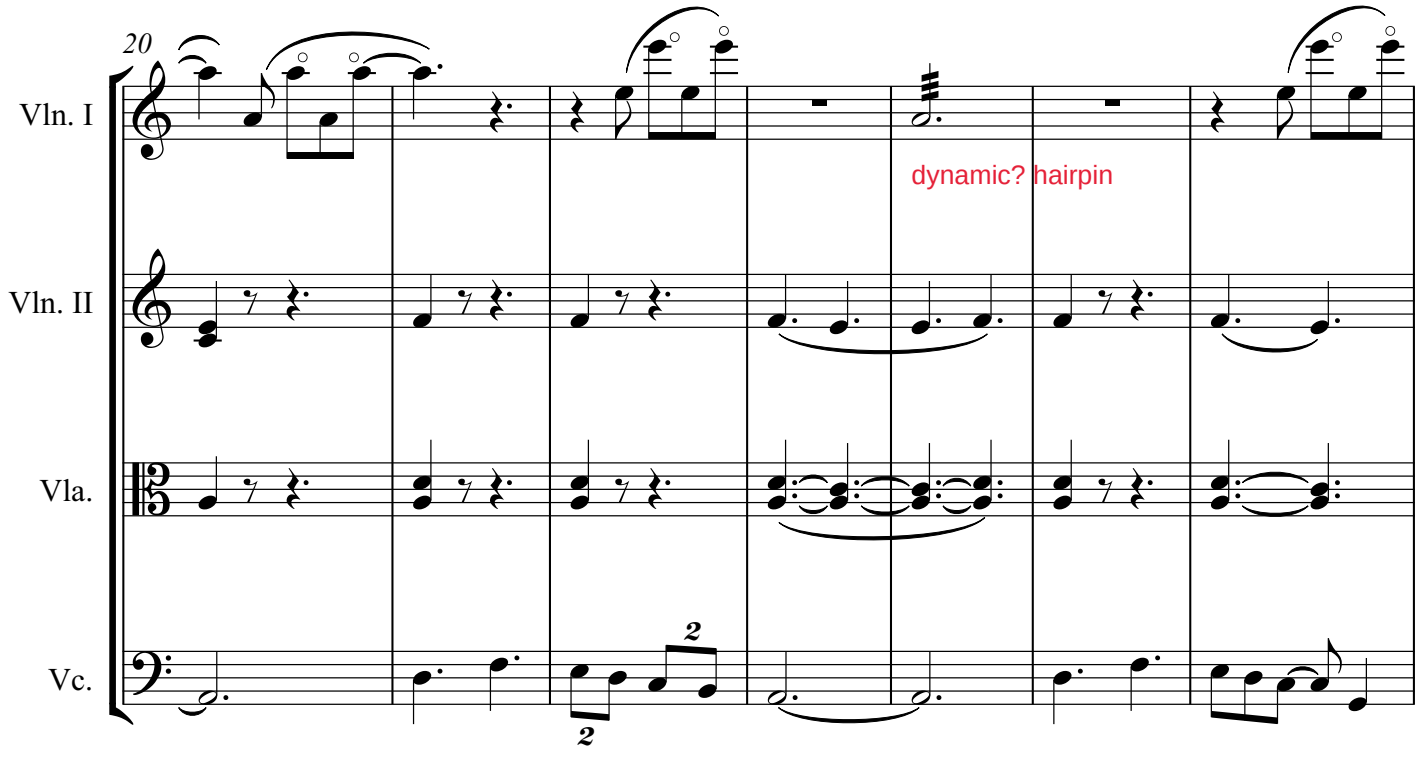
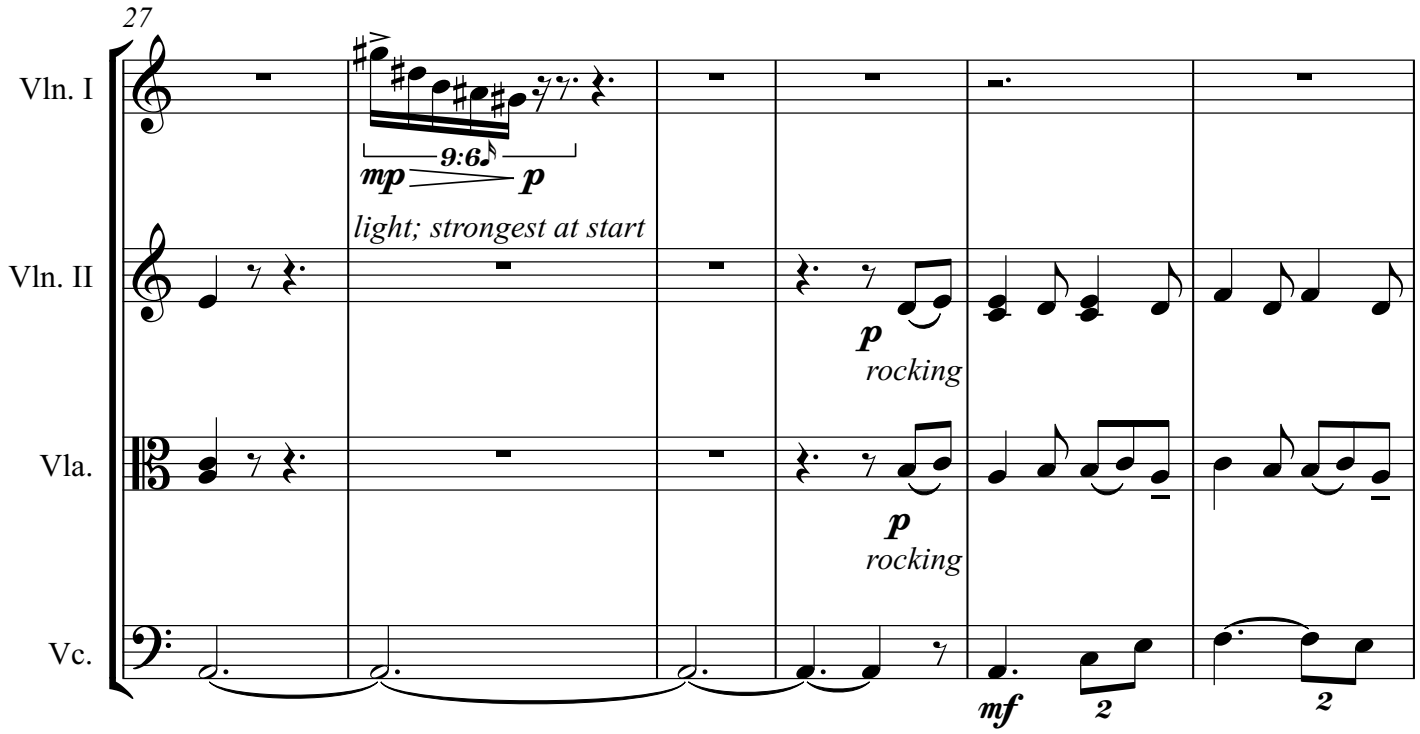
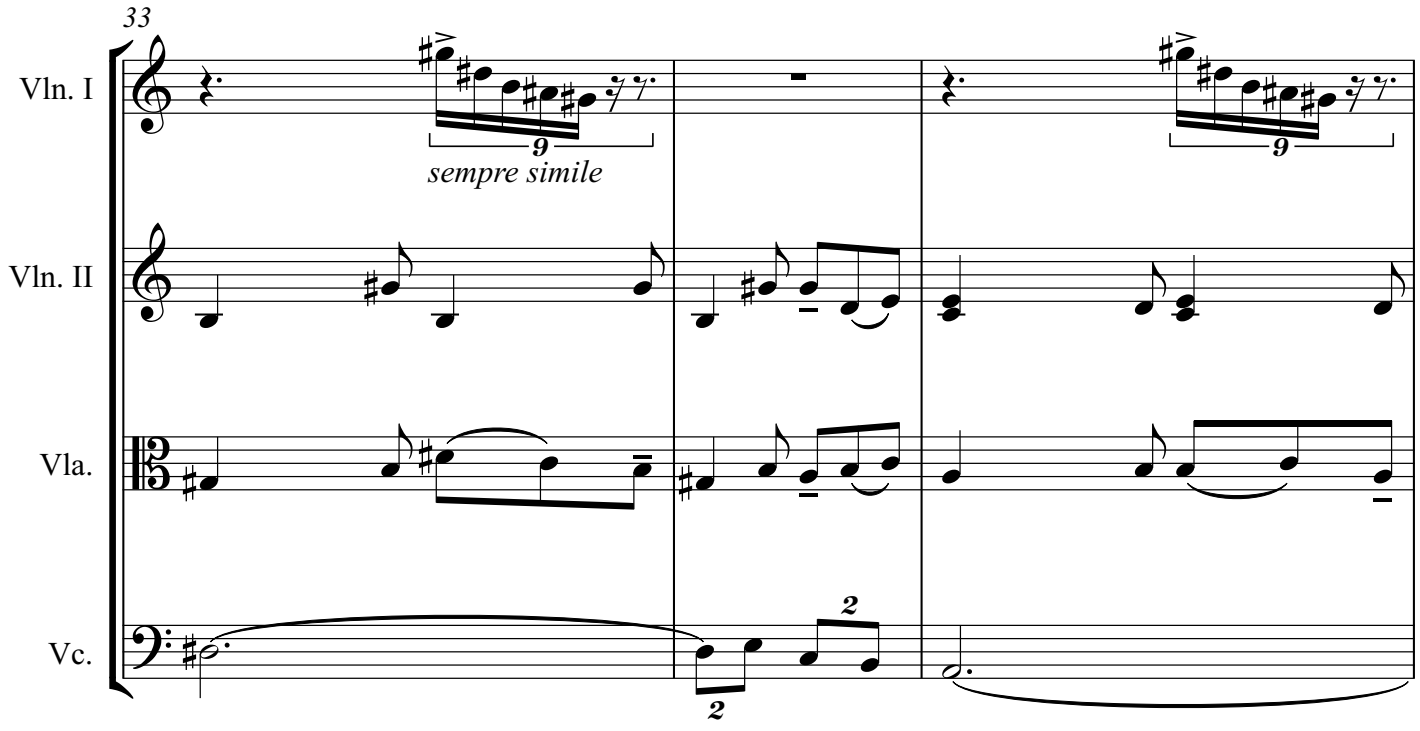

14
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
2


20
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
dynamic? hairpin
2
2


27
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
9:6
p
light; strongest at start
p
rocking
p
rocking
mf
2
2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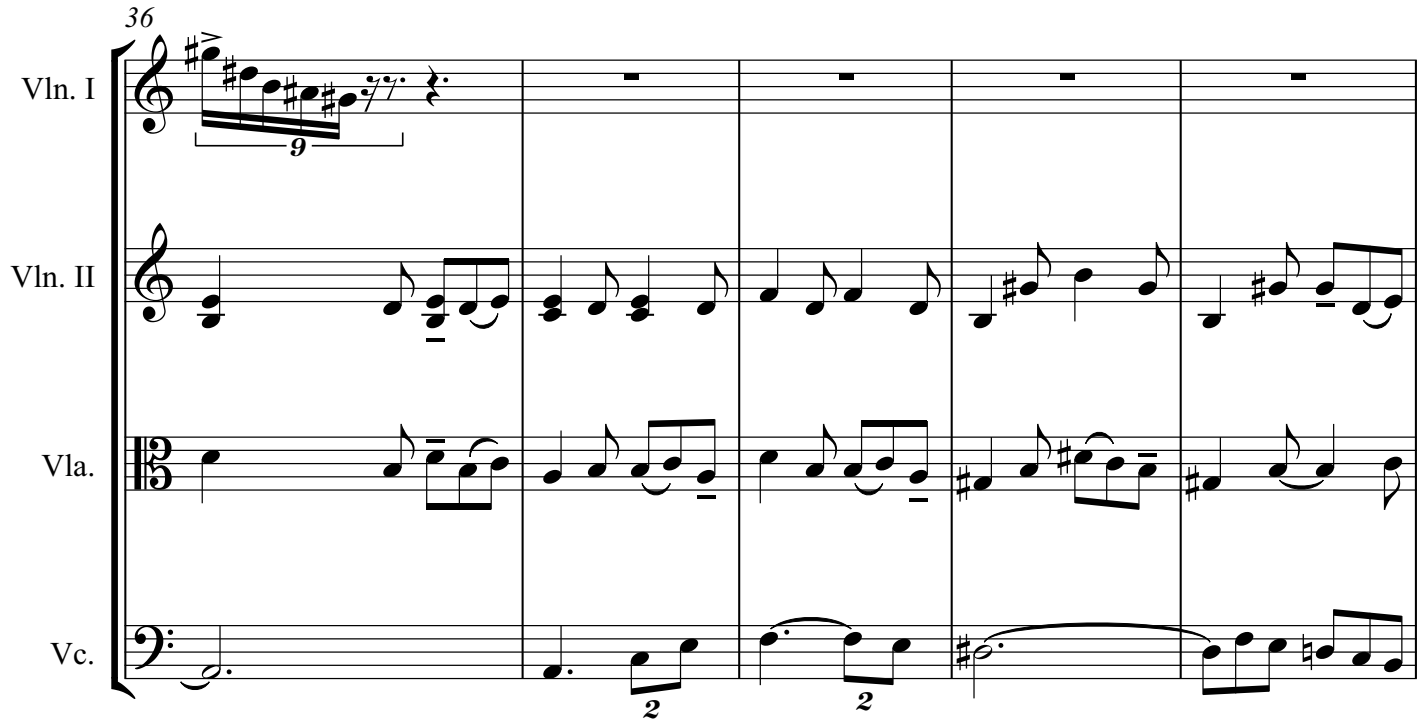
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
9
sempre simile
9
2
2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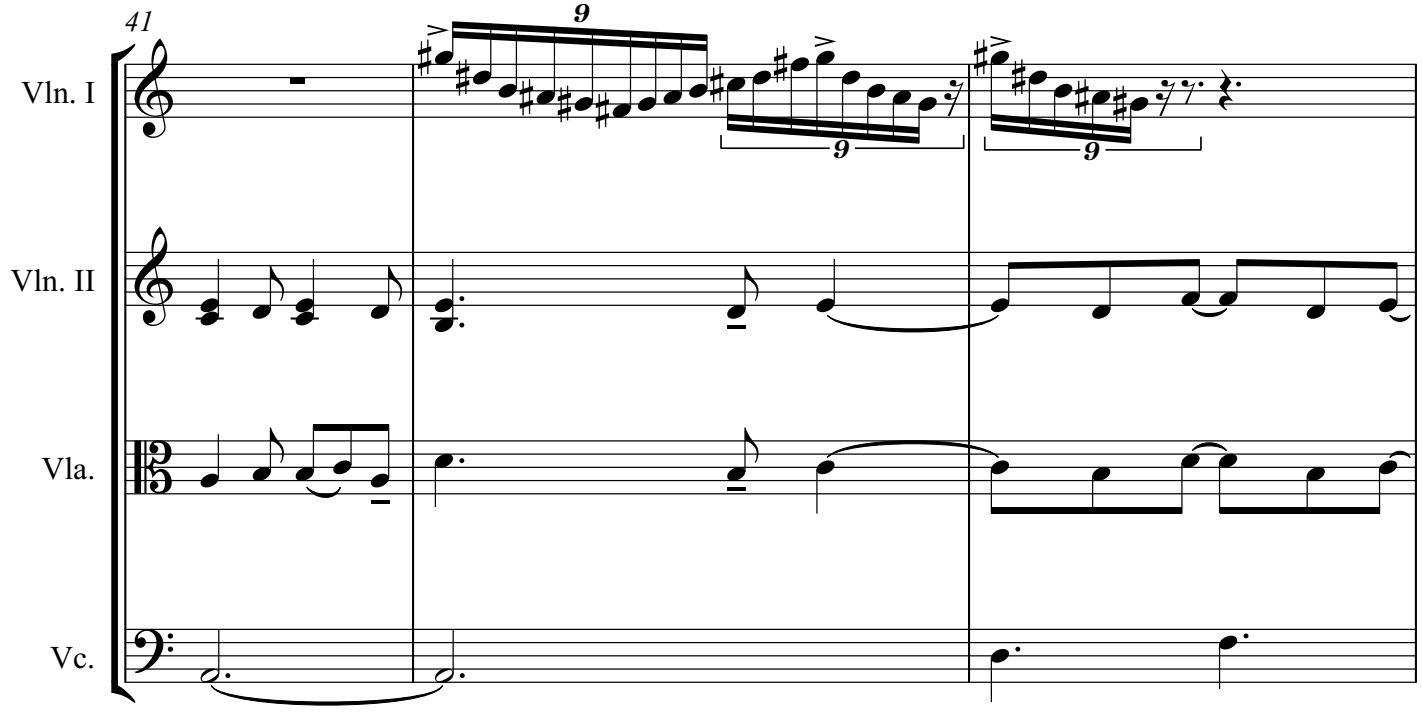
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
9
2
2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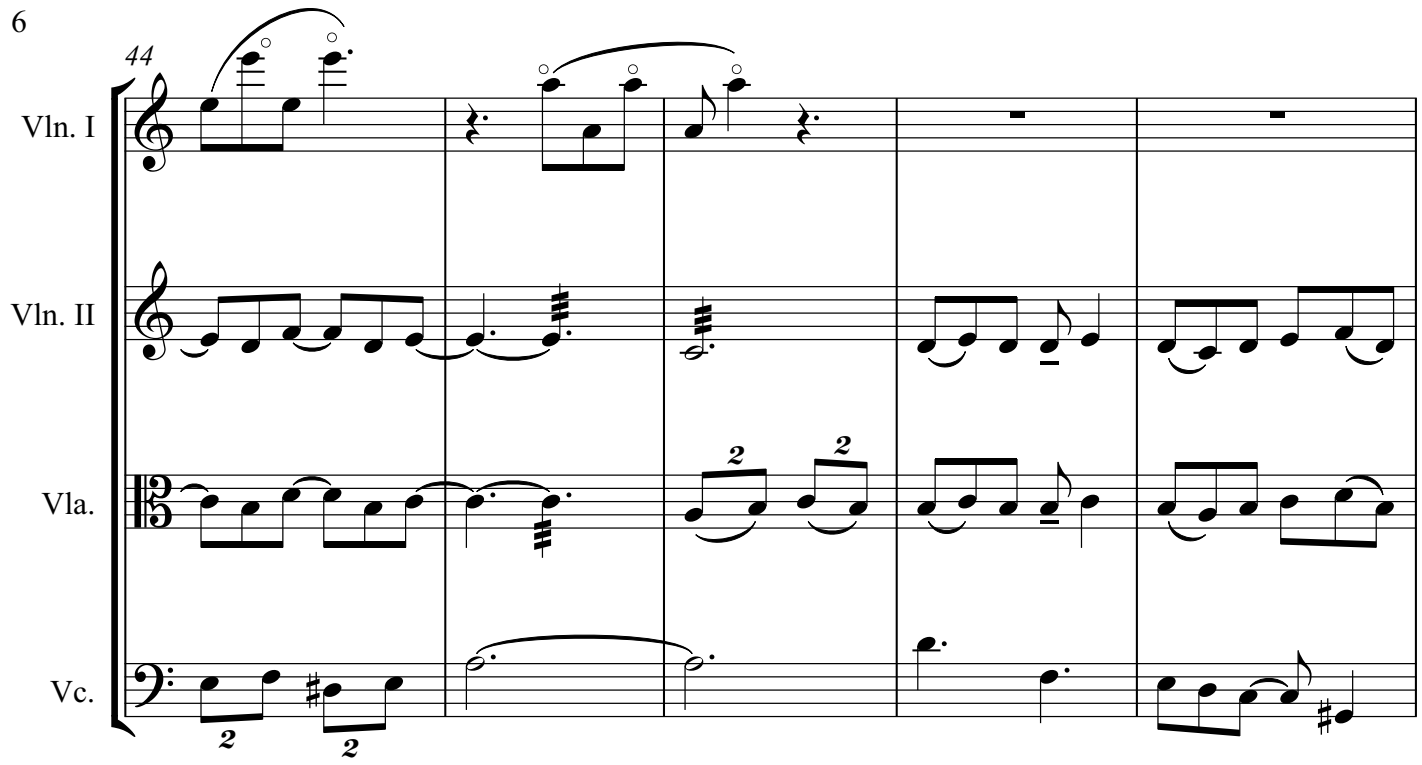
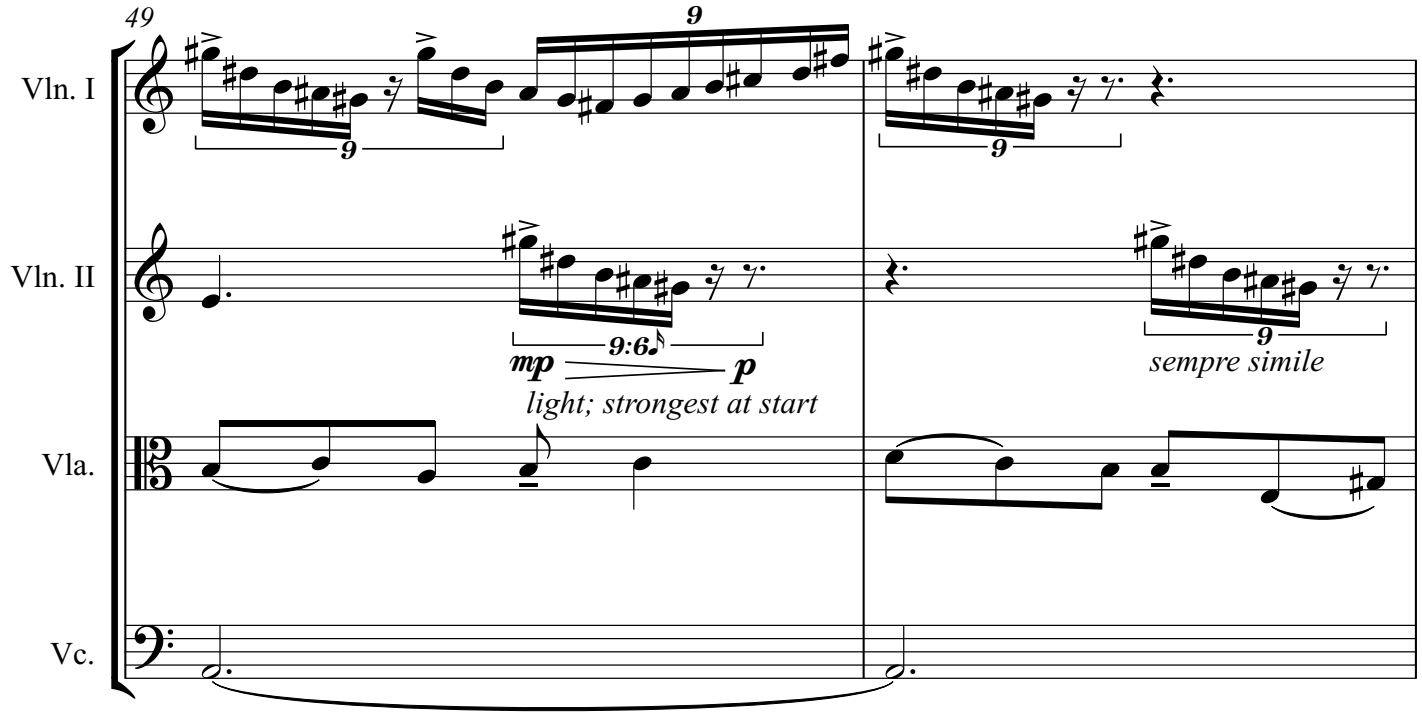
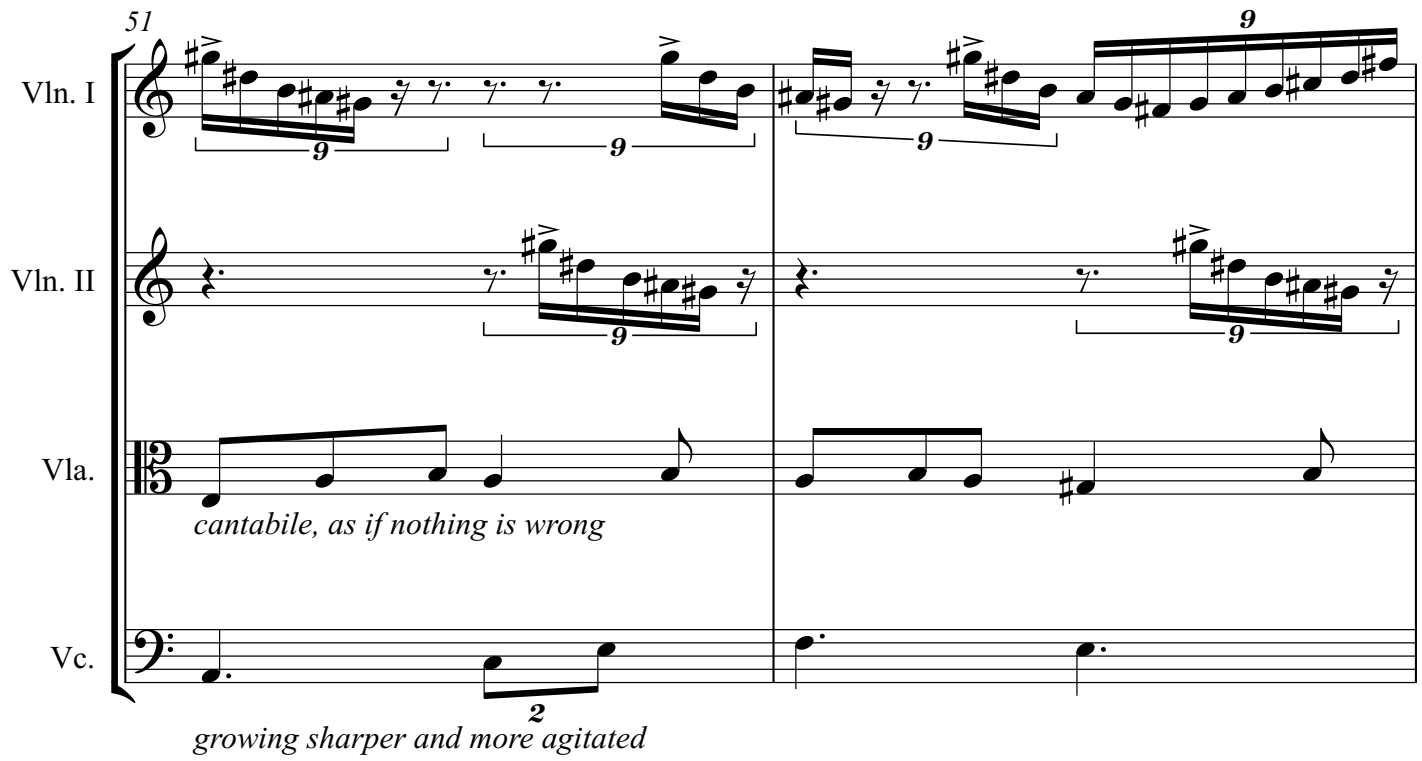
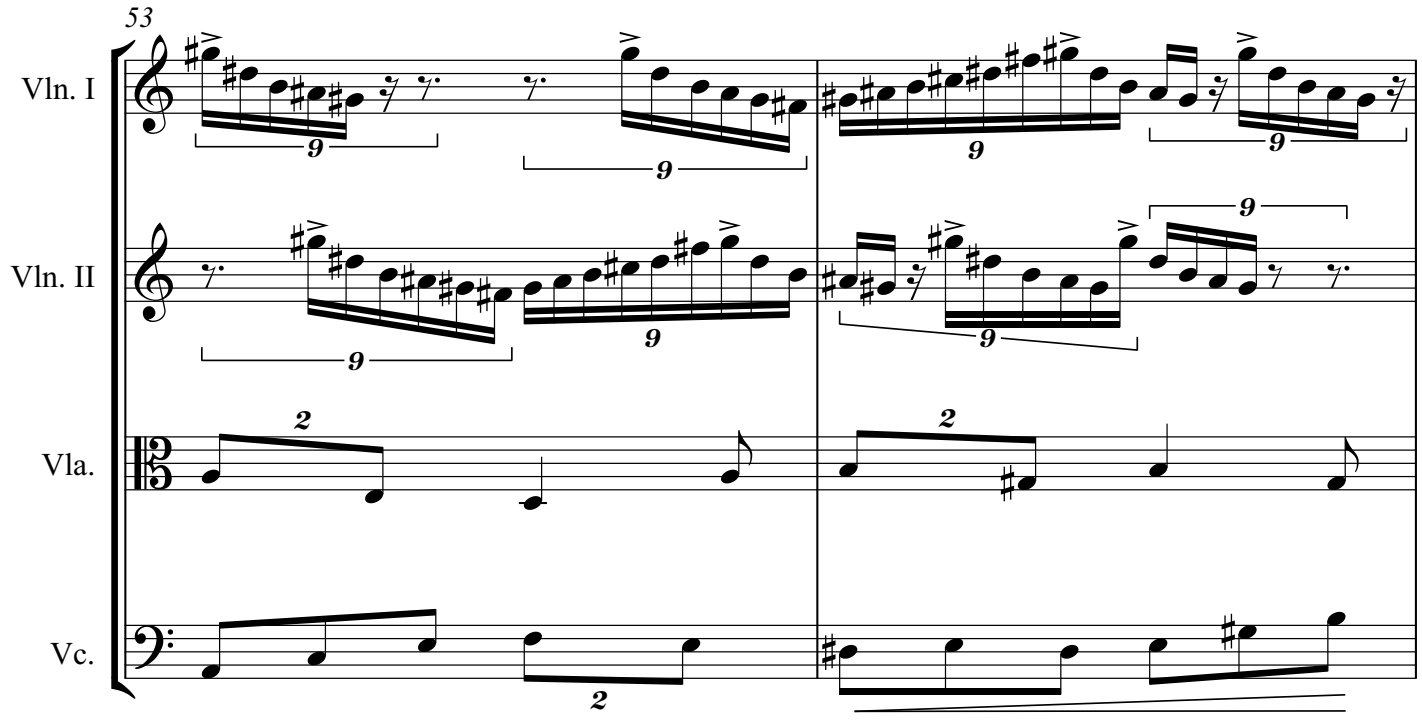
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
9
9
9


44
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
2
2
2
2


49
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
9
9
9
9:6
mp
p
light; strongest at start
sempre simile


51
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
cantabile, as if nothing is wrong
Vc.
growing sharper and more agitated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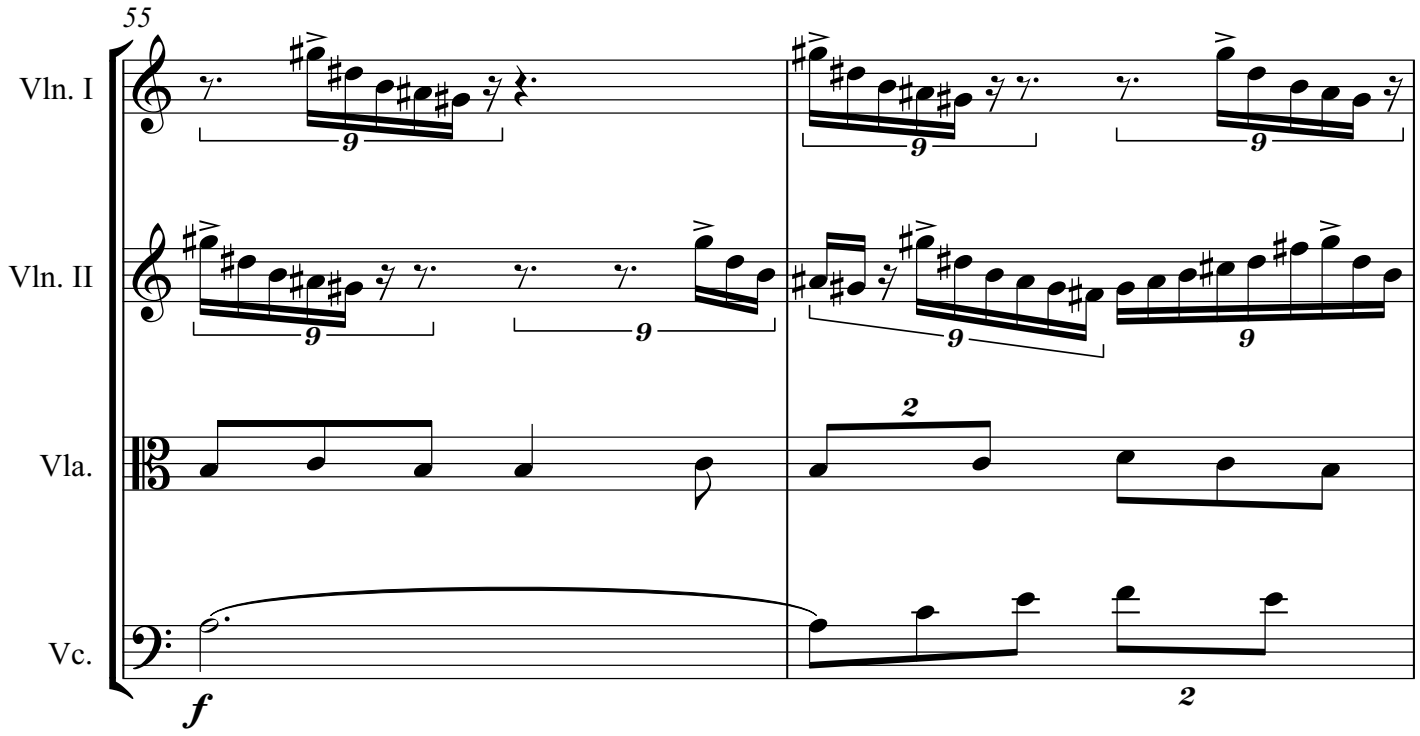
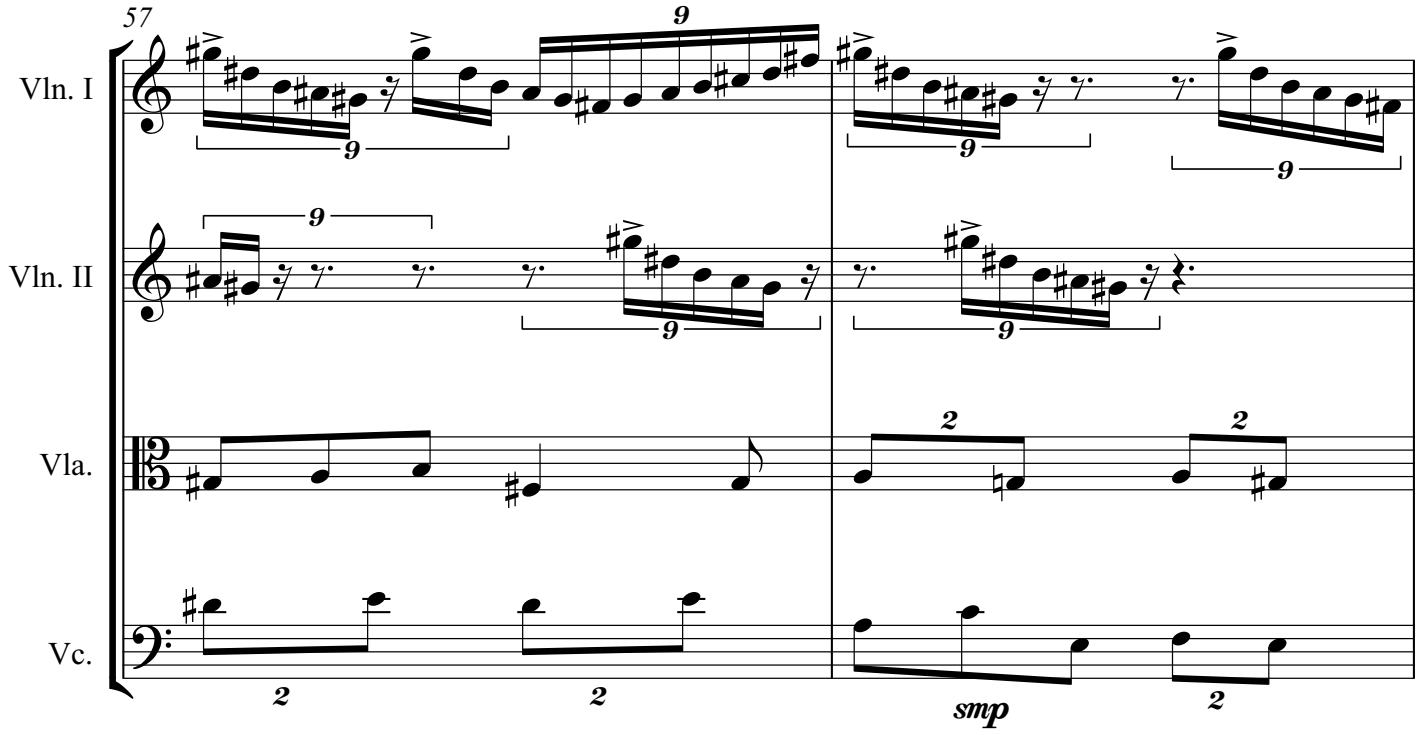
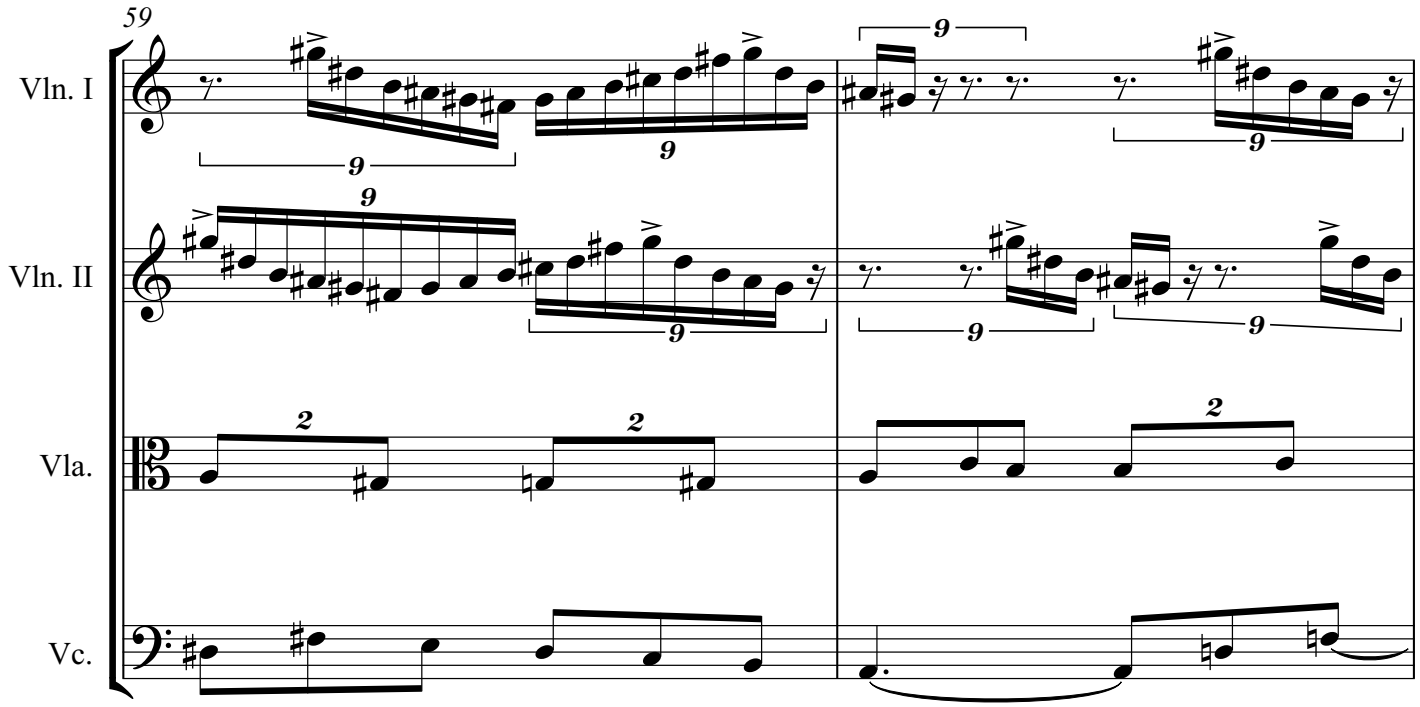
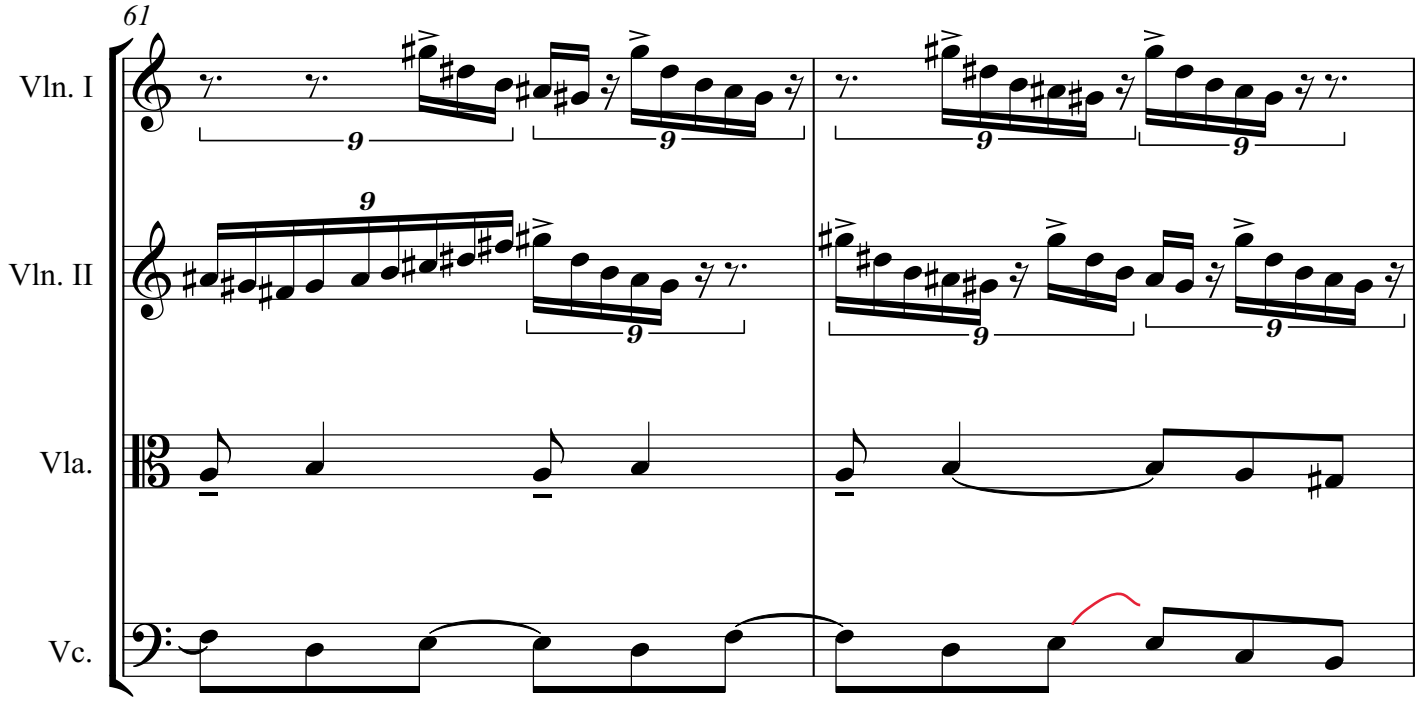
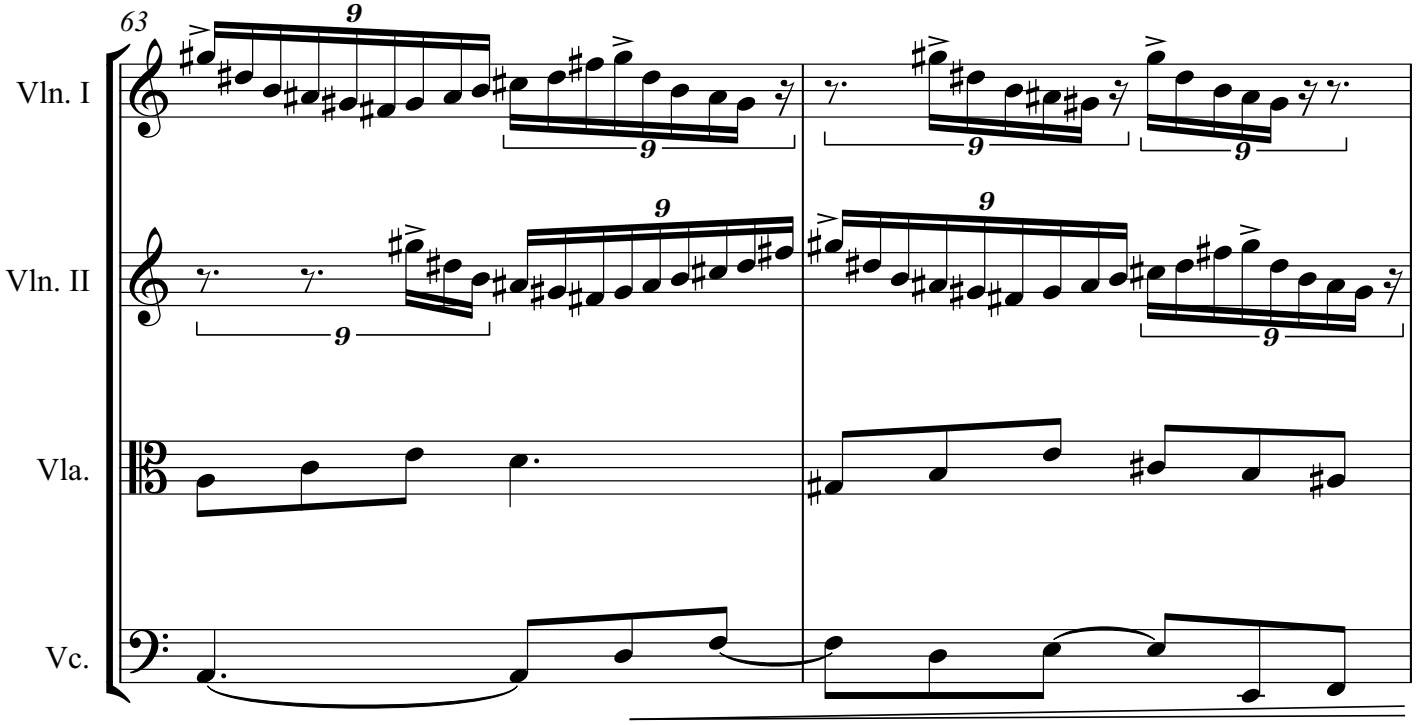
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

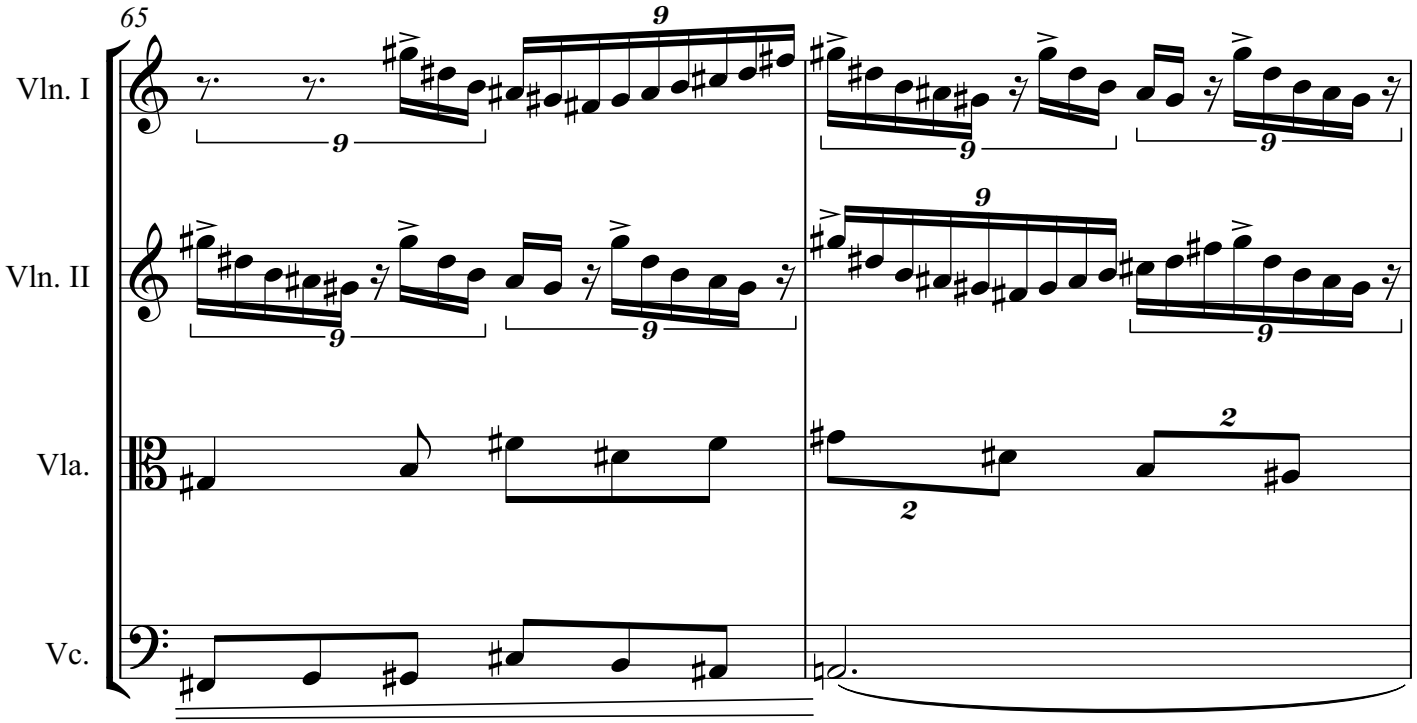

55
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
f


57
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
smp


59
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


61
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


63
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.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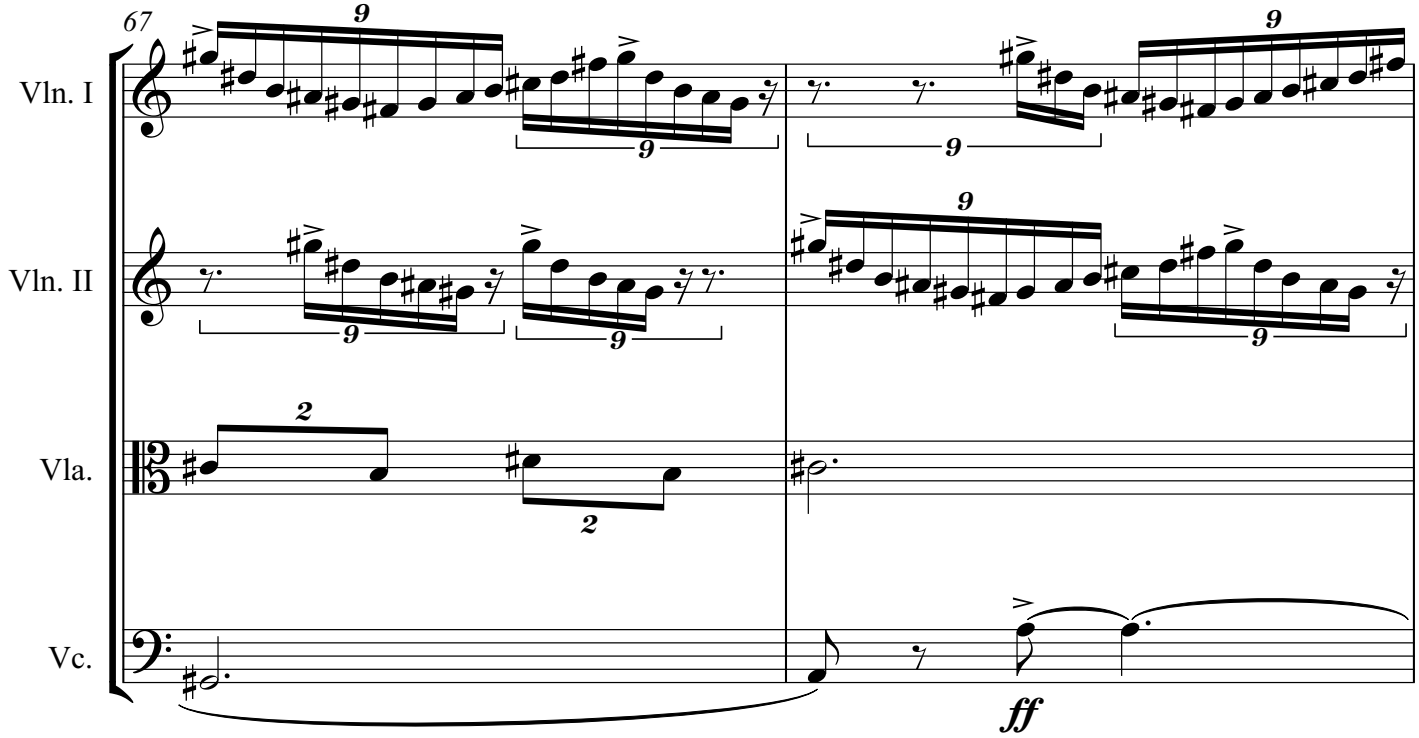
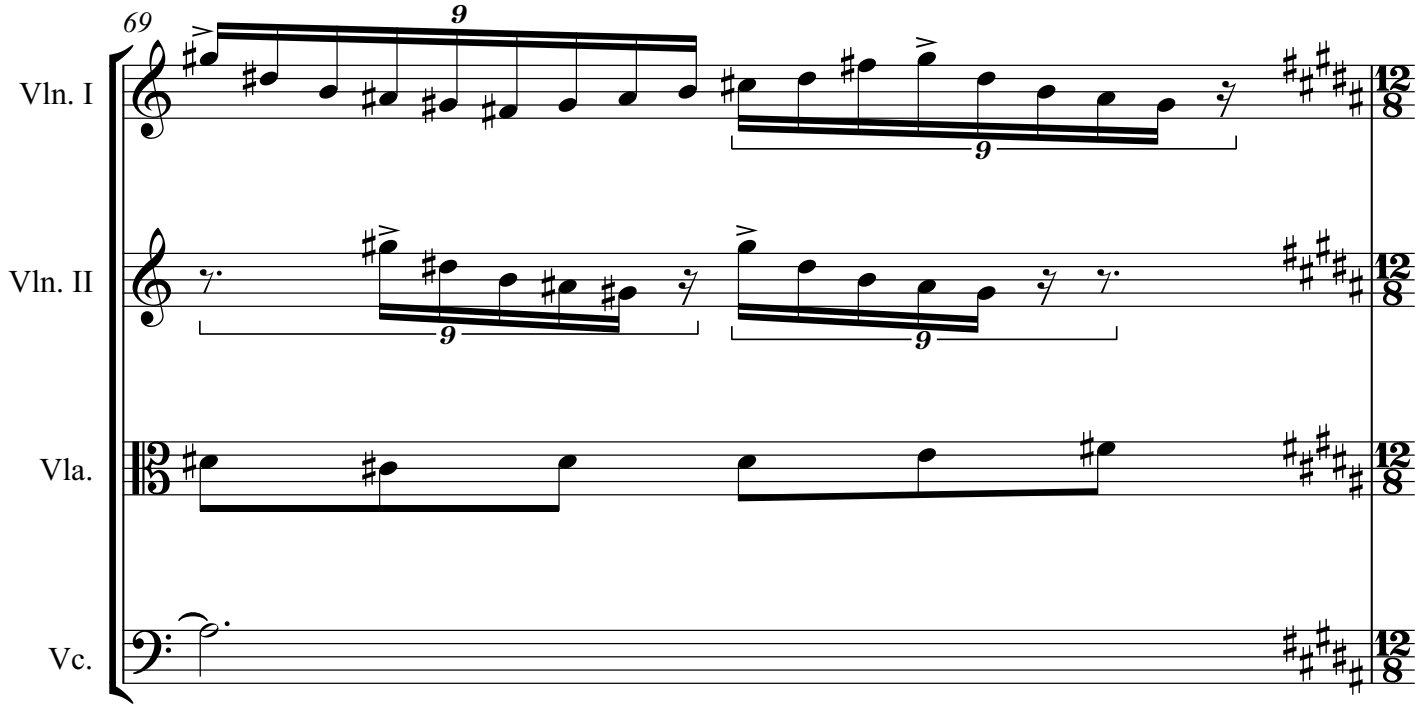
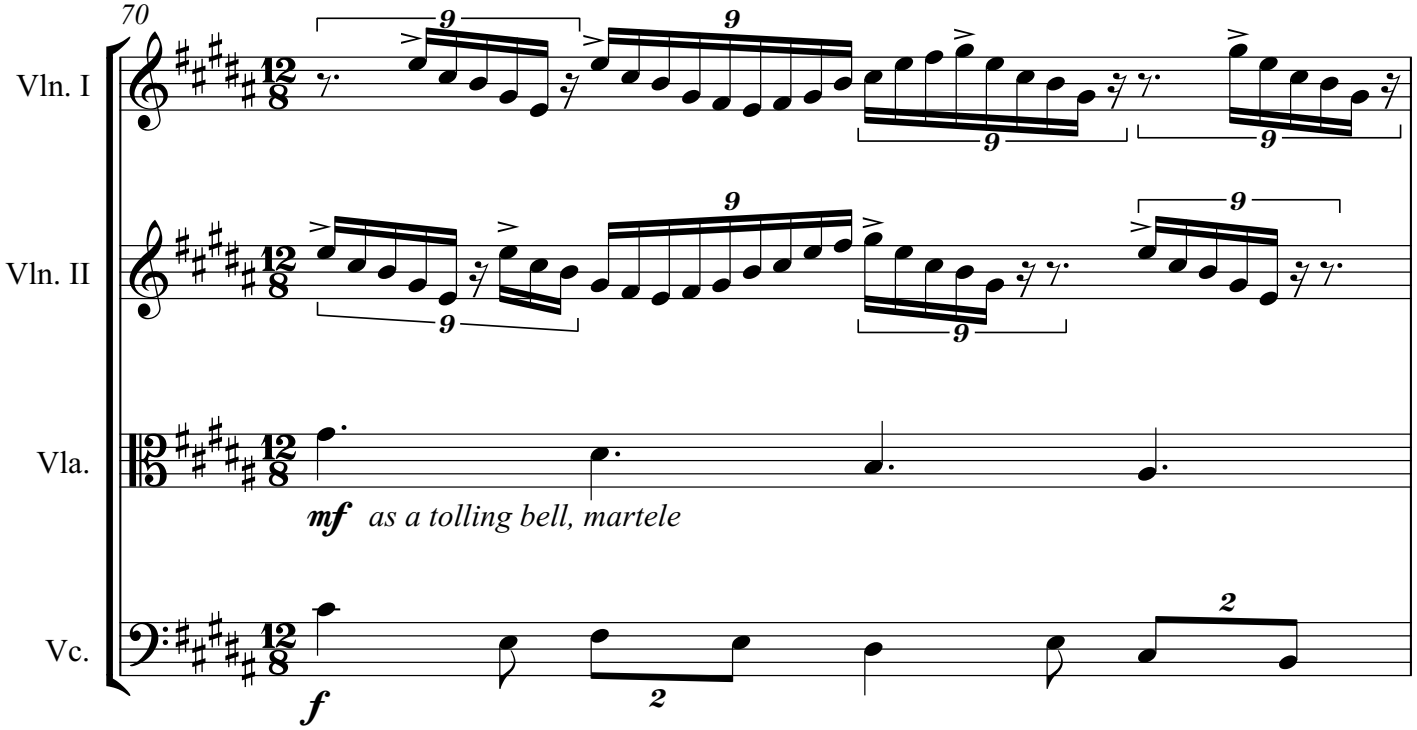
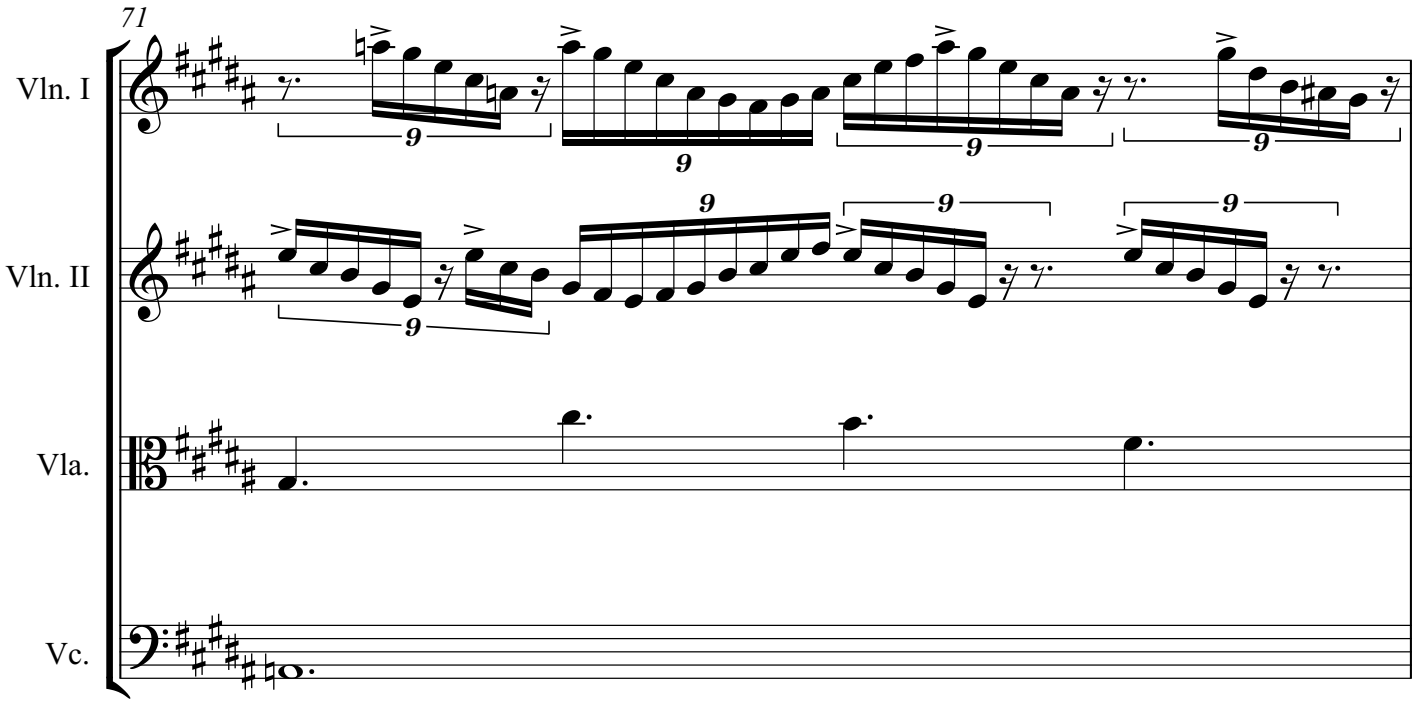
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

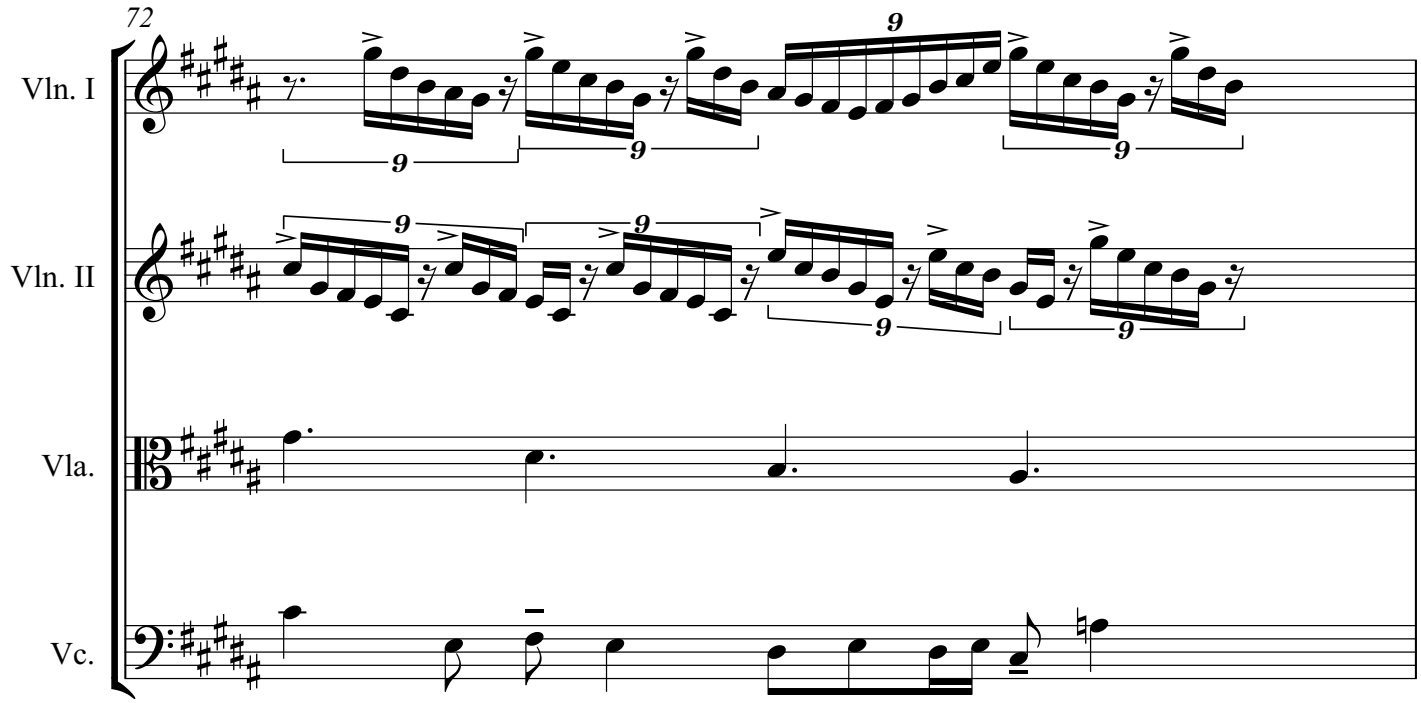

67
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
ff

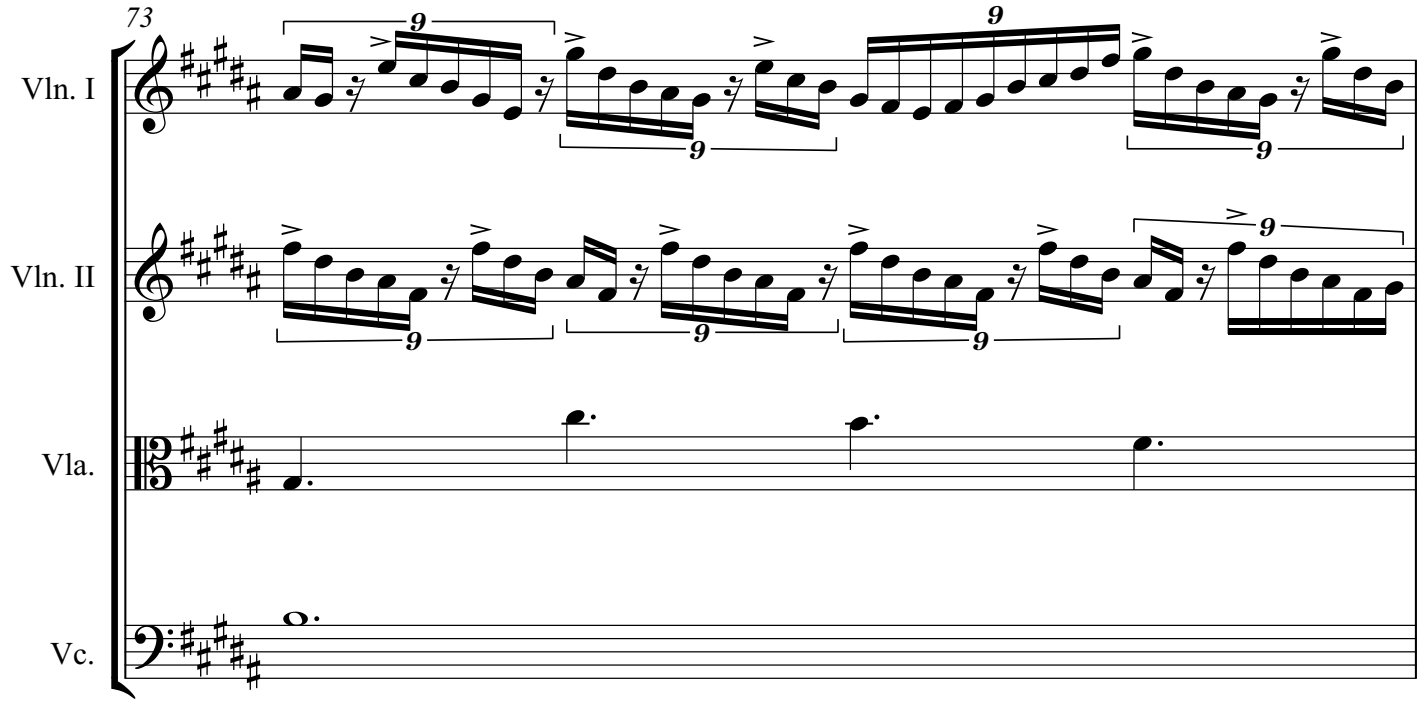

69
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

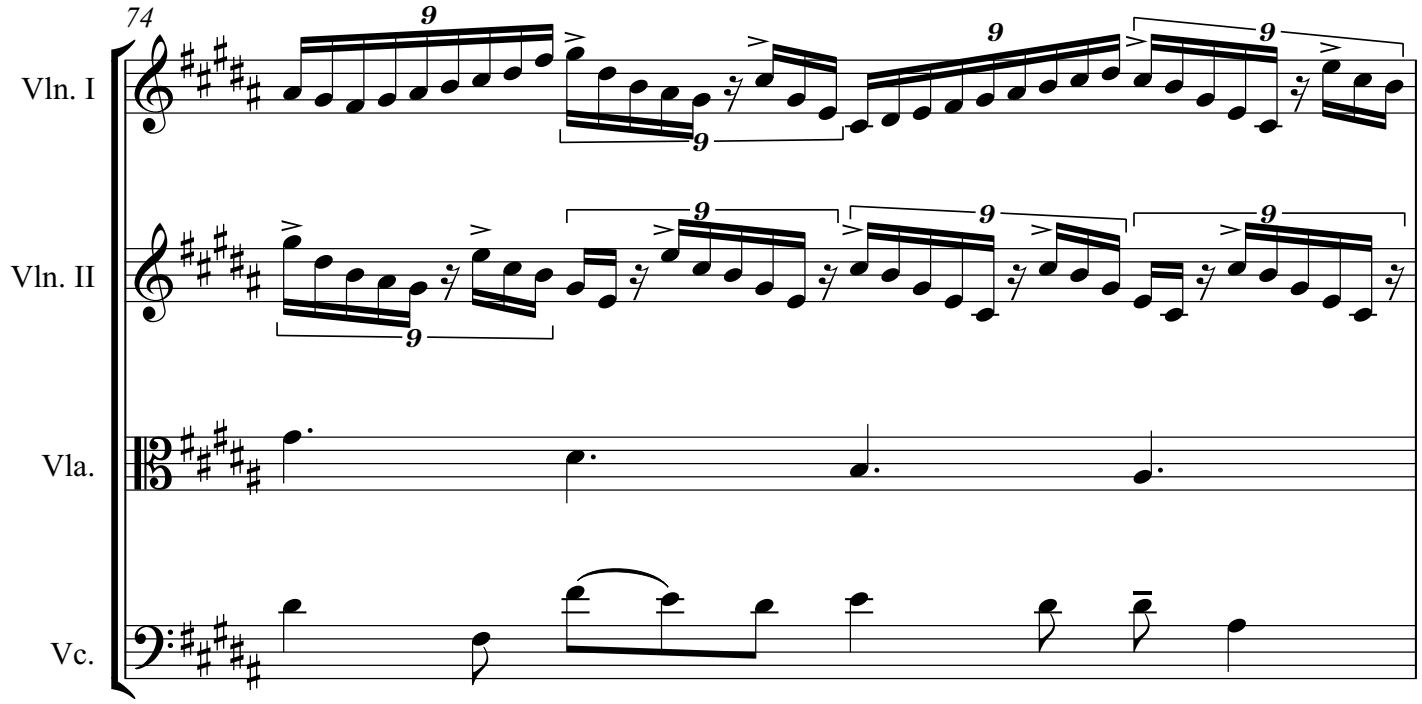
L'istesso tempo






72
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


73
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.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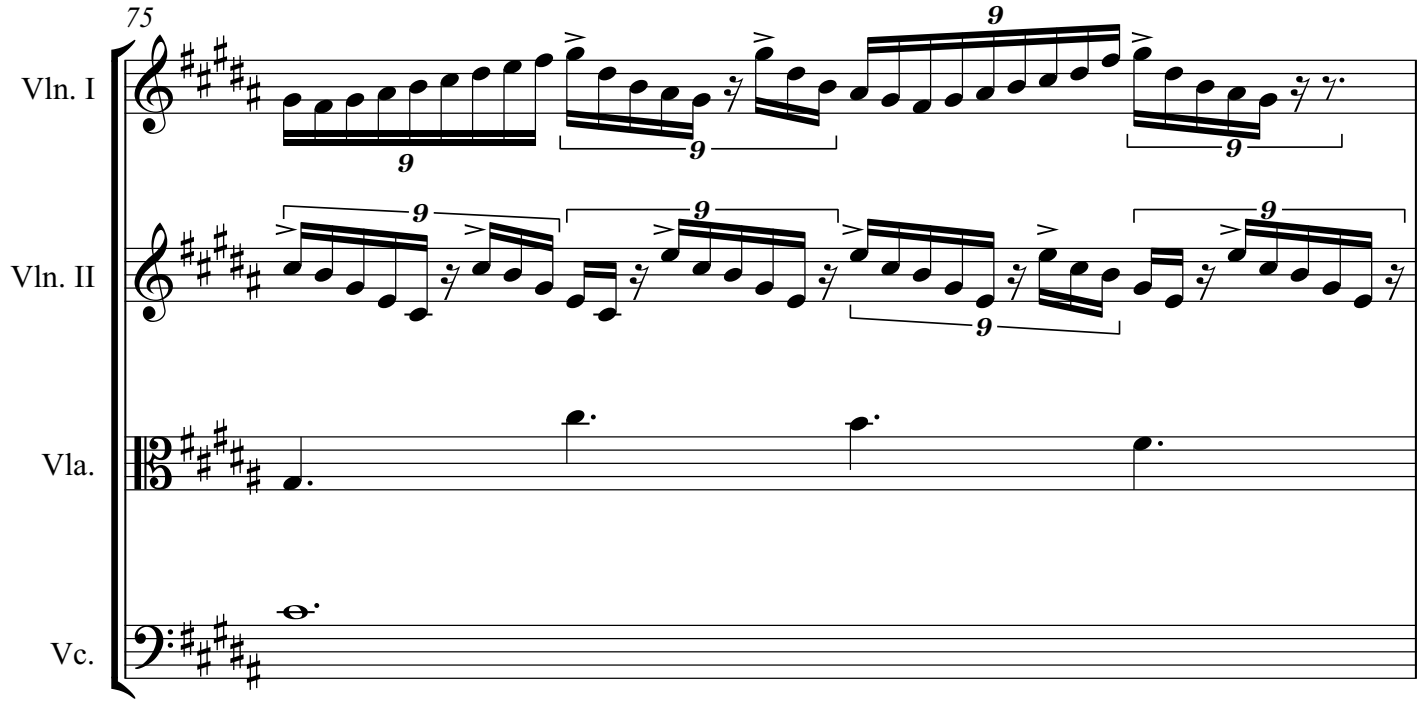
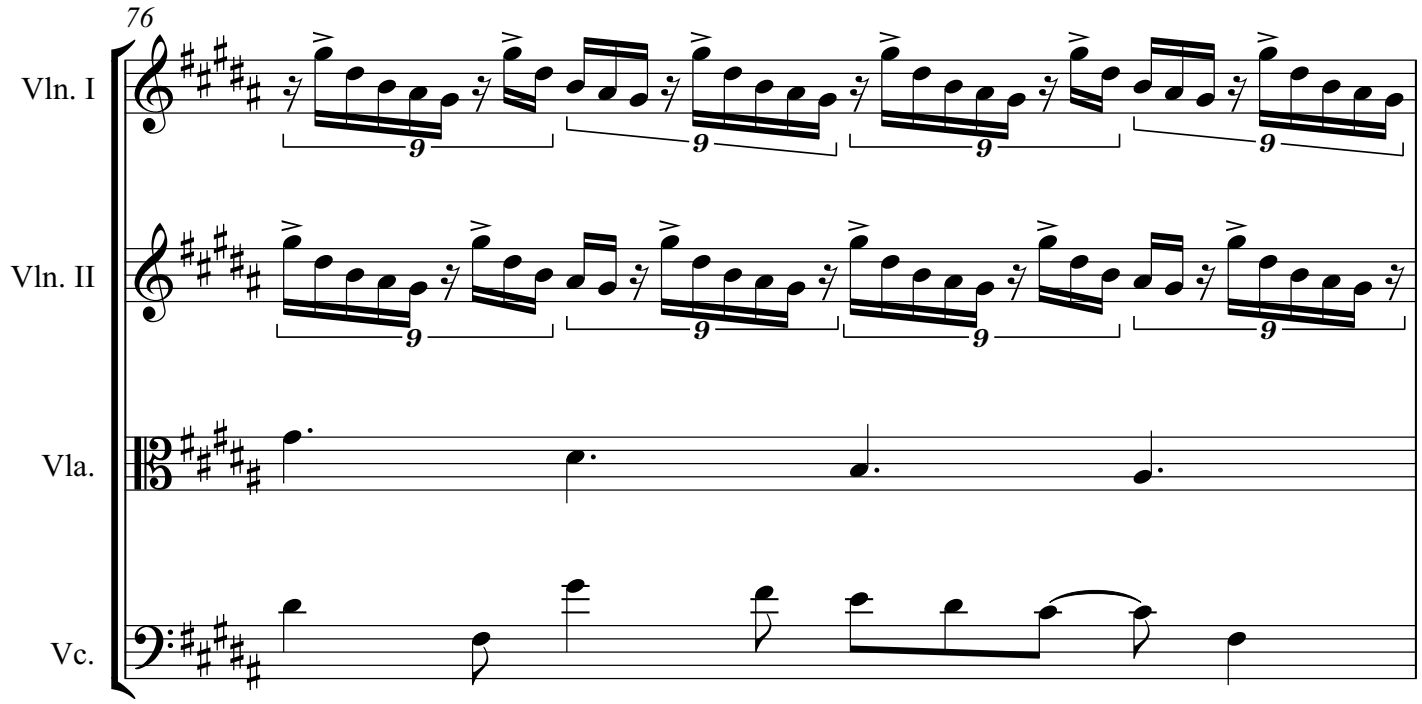
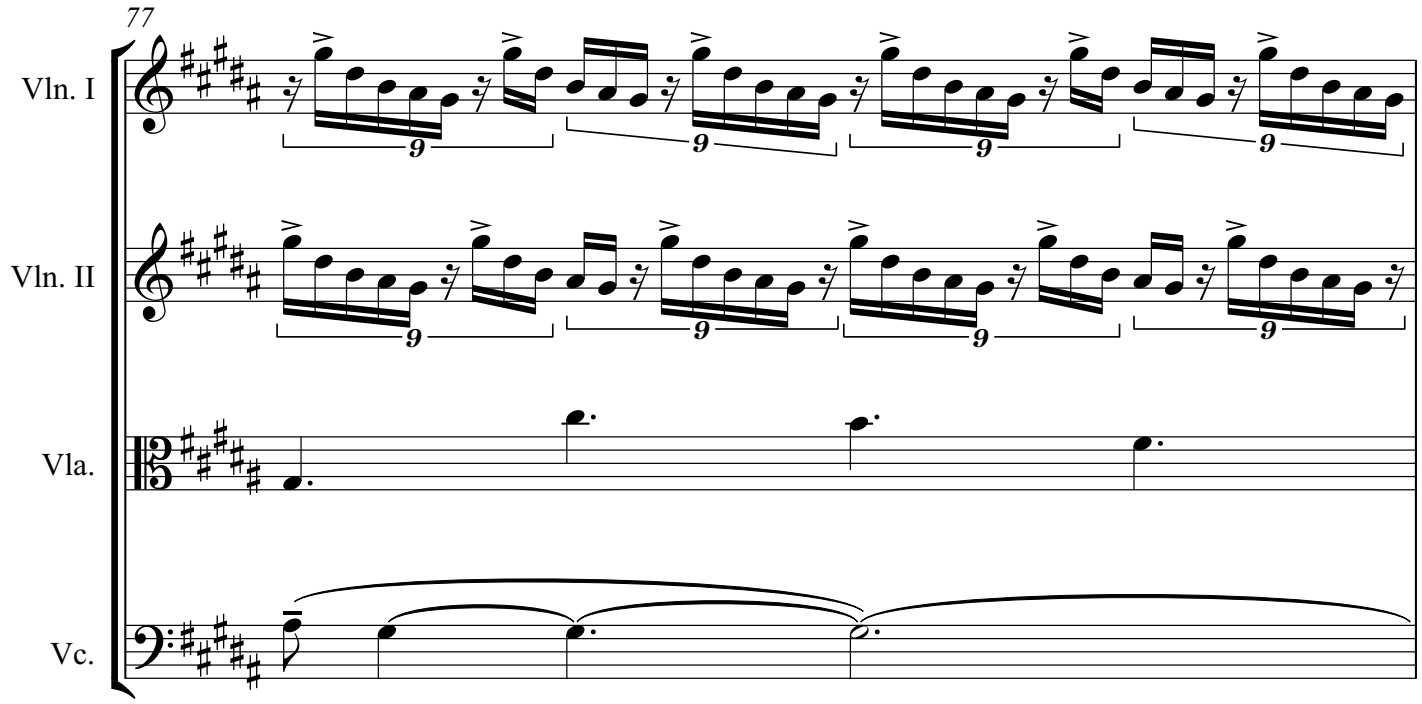
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


75
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


76
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


77
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

78

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

79

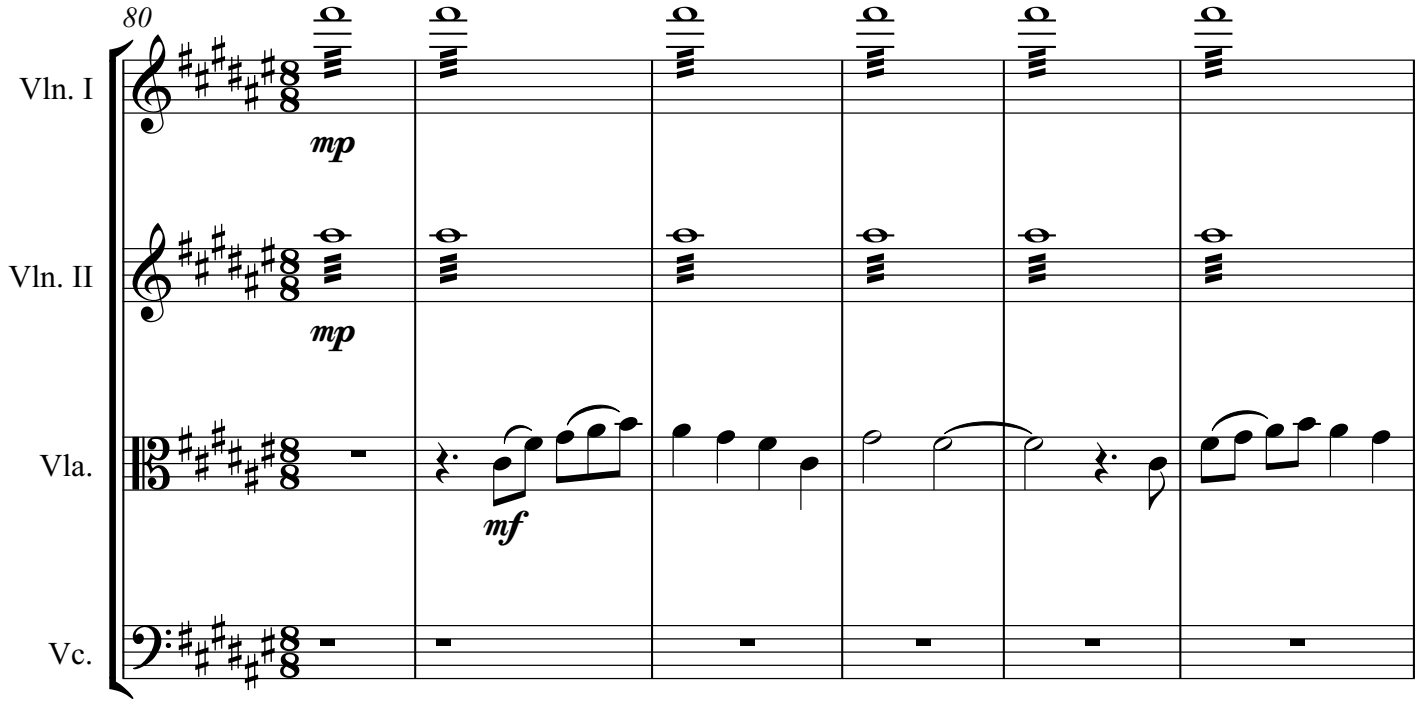
Vln. I

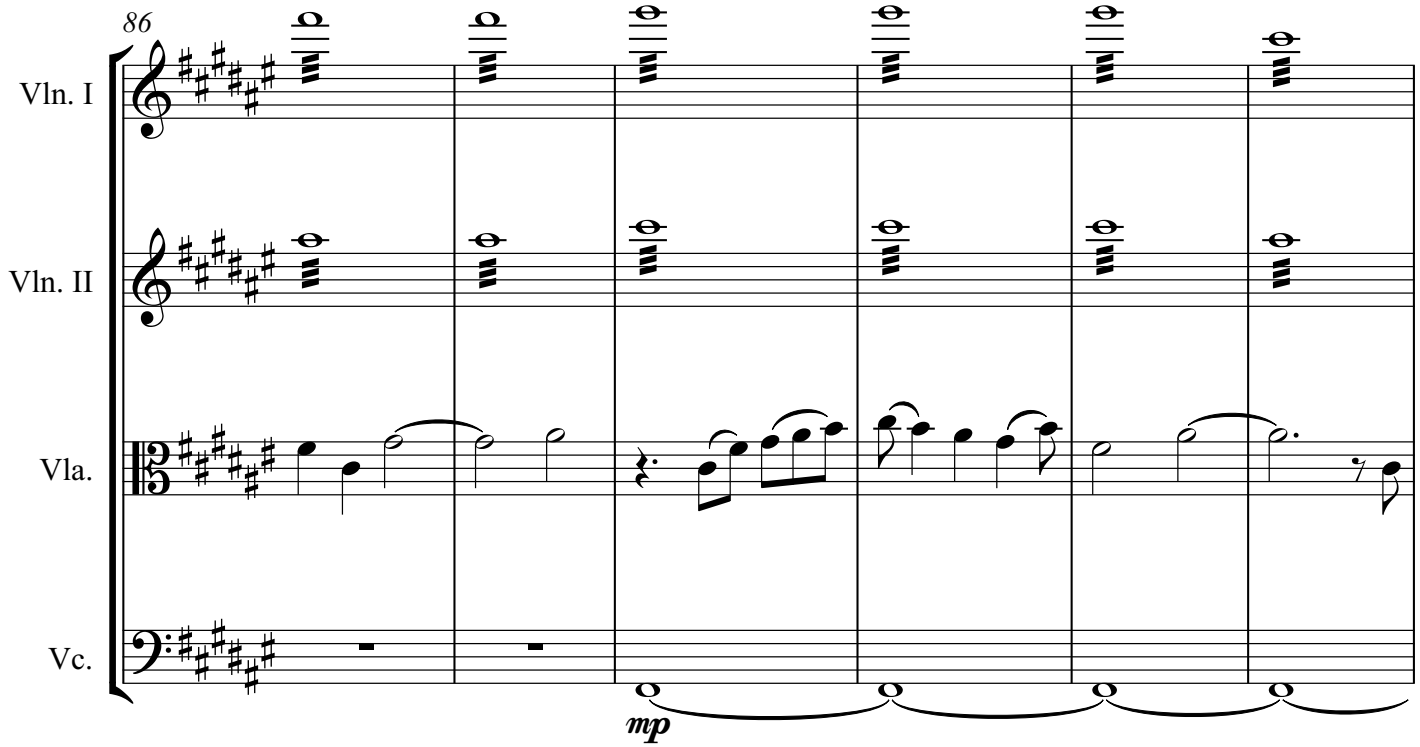
Vln. II

Vla.

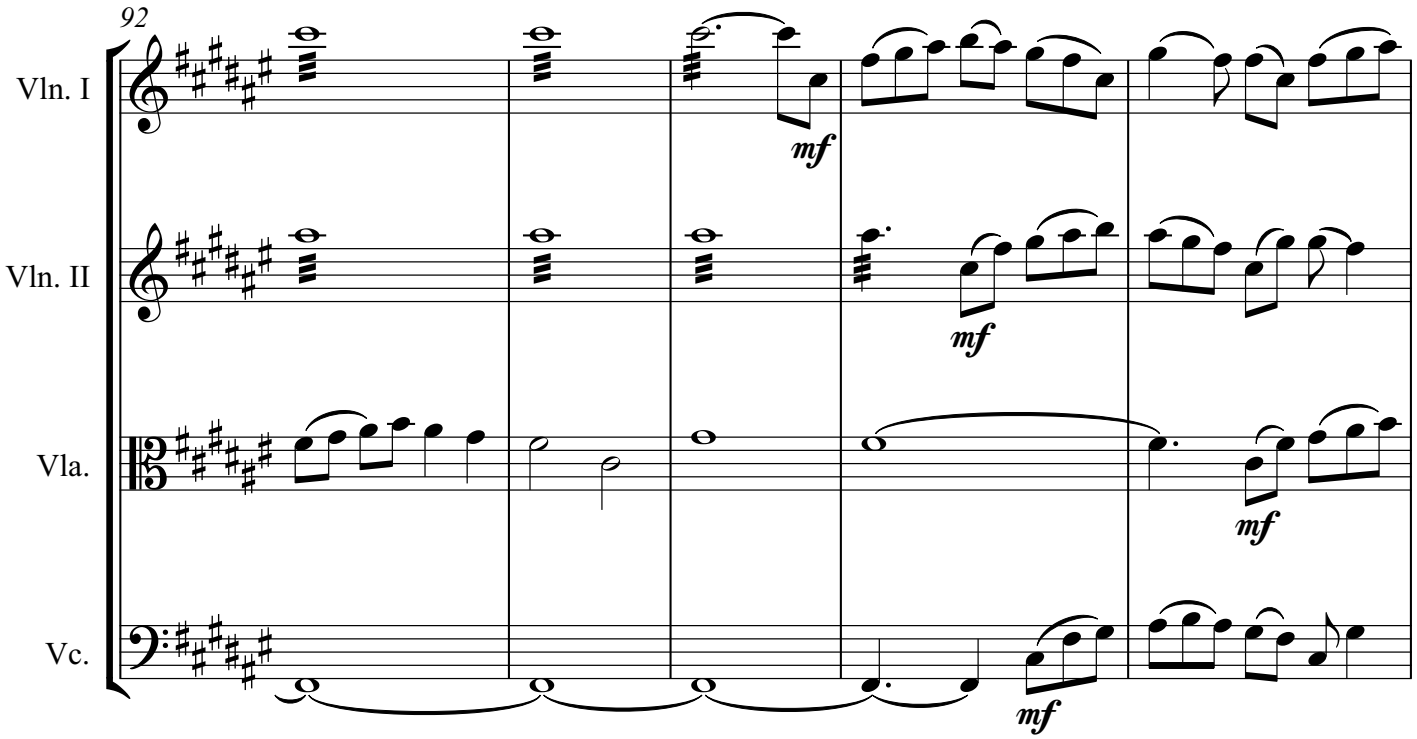
Vc.

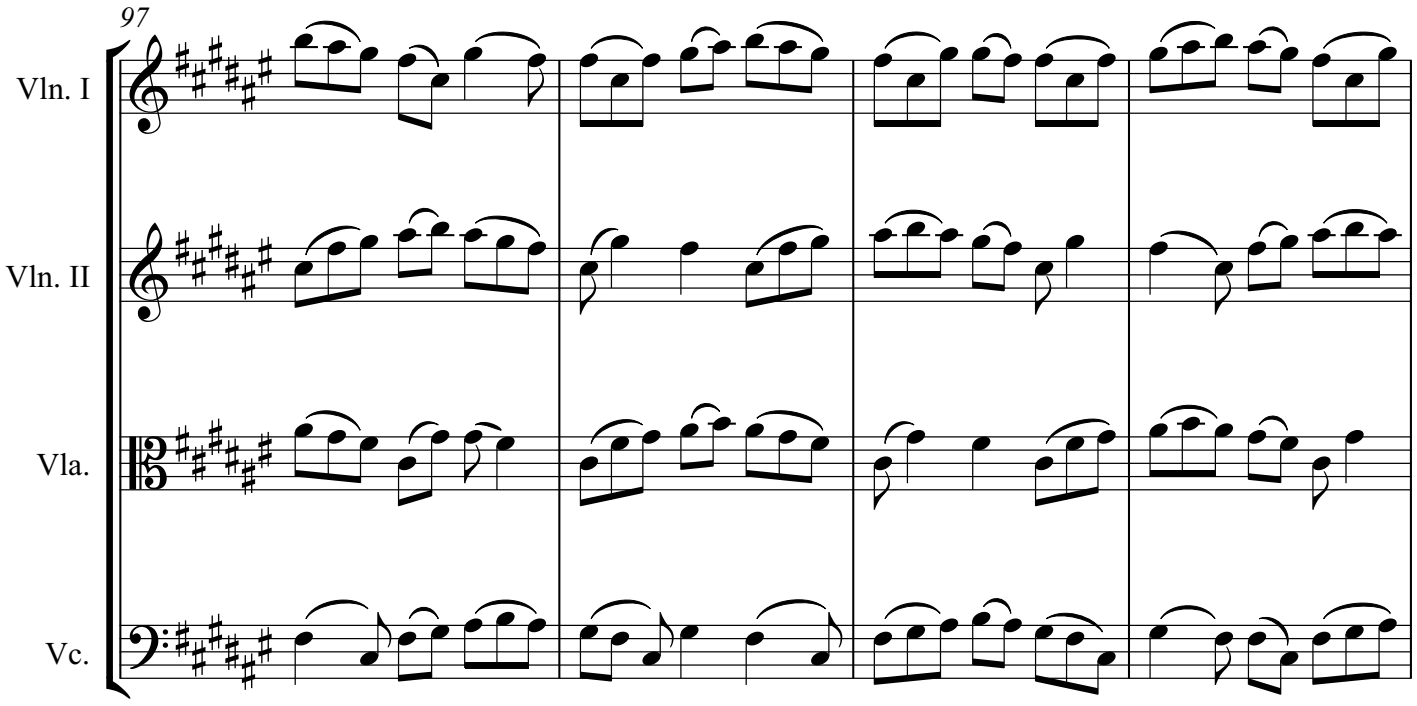
♩ = 64

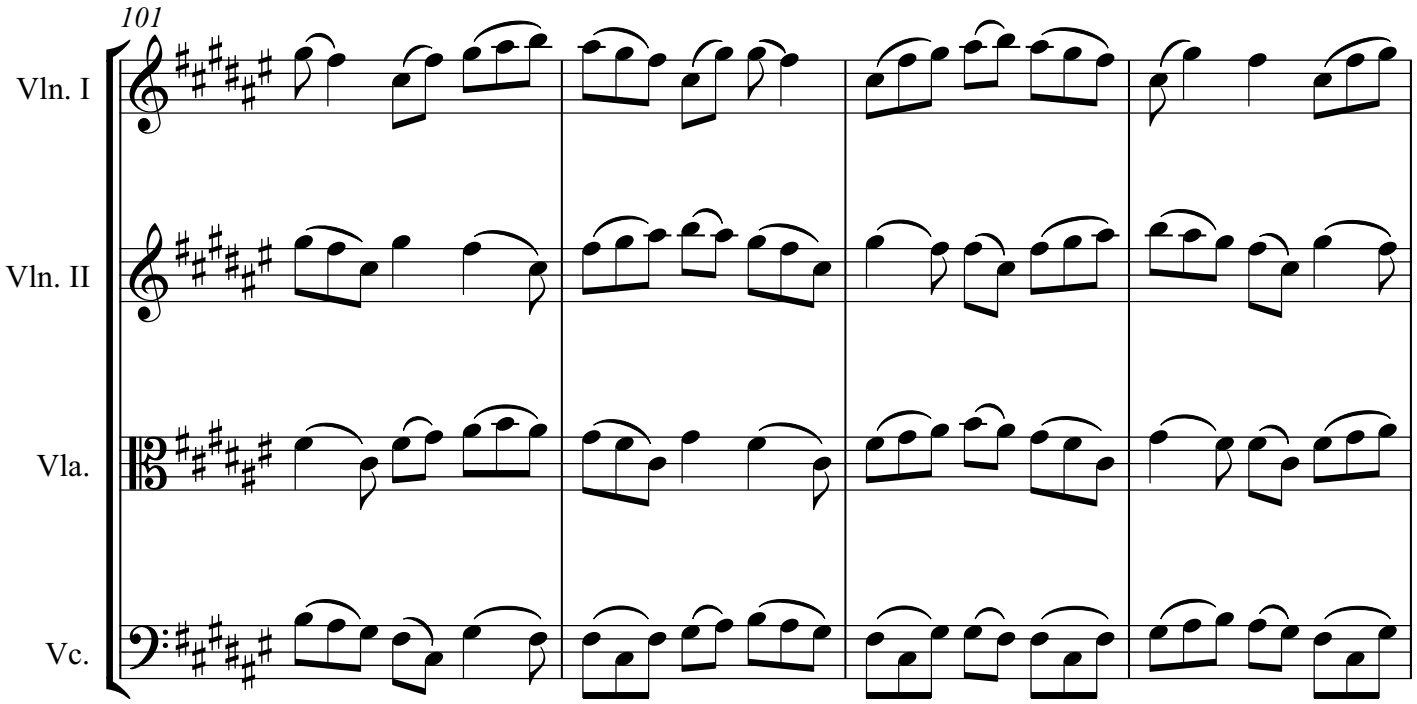

80
Vln. I
mp
Vln. II
mp
Vla.
mf
Vc.

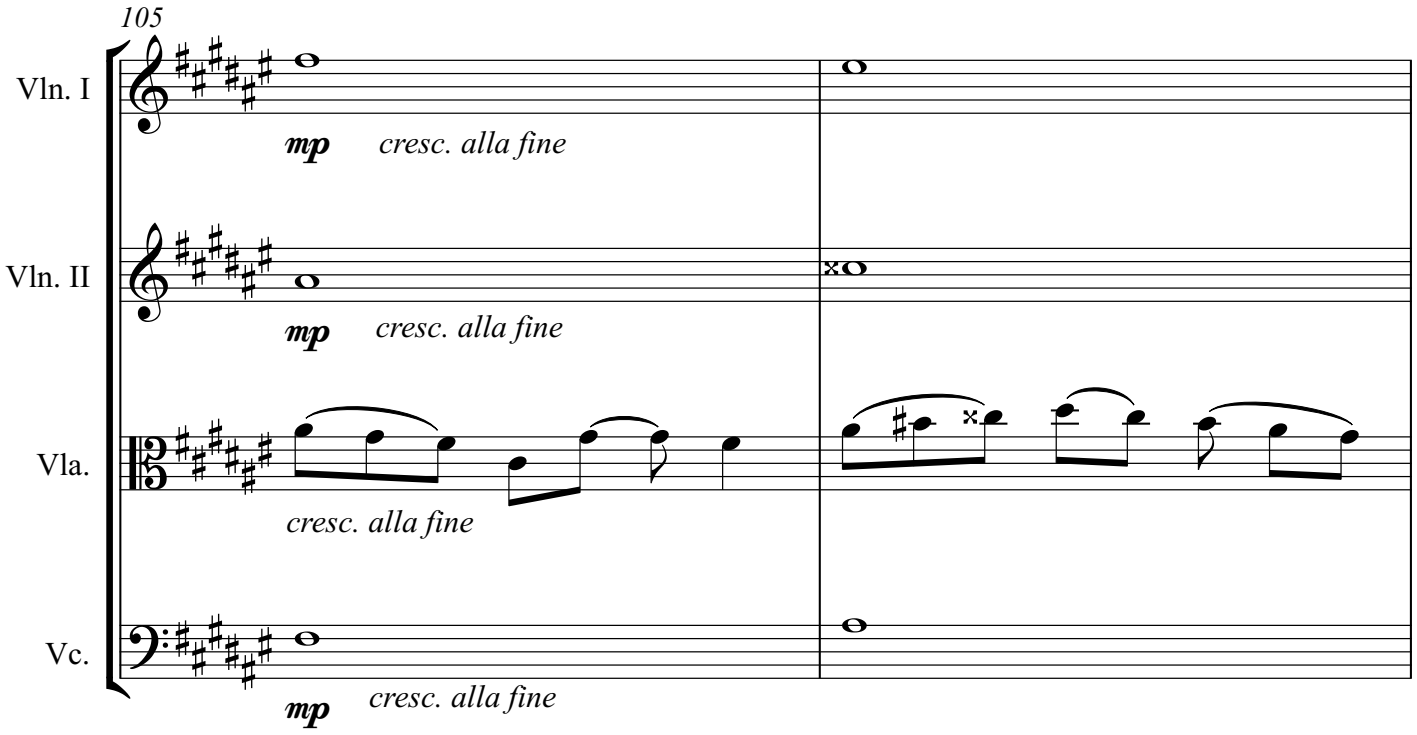

86
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp

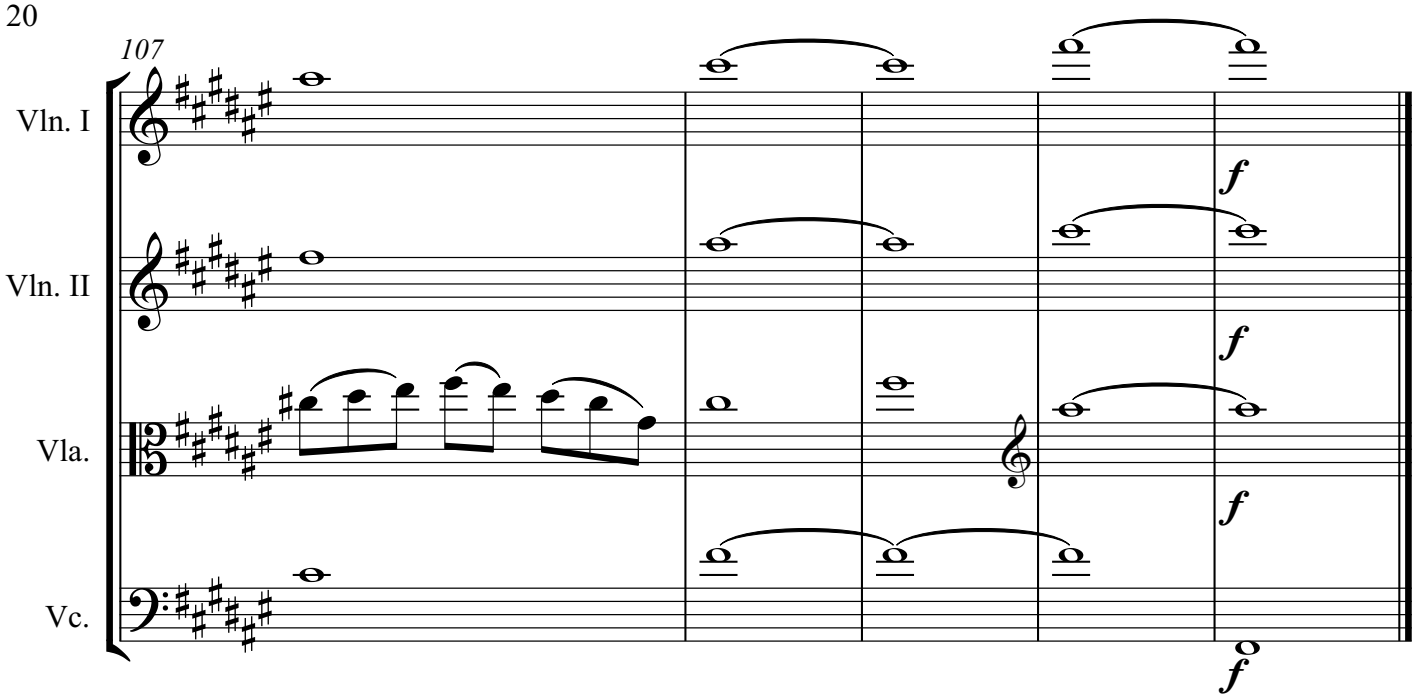
dynamic motion






101
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


105
Vln. I
mp
cresc. alla fine
Vln. II
mp
cresc. alla fine
Vla.
cresc. alla fine
Vc.
mp
cresc. alla fine


107
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
f
f
f
f