Brass Quintet

Edward Green

(1st prize in the 1996 International
Kodaly Composers Competition)

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Brass Quintet

I wrote this score in 1995, hoping to create an all-brass chamber composition which would accomplish what all-string music has often done: carry a serious musical narrative across several movements. The quartets of Bartok, Beethoven, Shostakovich, for example, succeed at this. I wanted to tell a story, in musical terms, which would evoke large, valuable emotion in people.

I was guided by what I learned from the great philosopher Eli Siegel. "*All beauty*," he explained, "*is a making one of opposites, and the making one of opposites in what we are going after in ourselves*."

In this quintet, I tried to bring together—with dramatic contrast, yet also with organic coherence—the opposites of Turbulence and Calm; Uncertainty and Confidence; Darkness and Light: to make a one of the gritty harshness of things, and the world as sweet, graceful, and essentially our friend.

To give a sense of what this means, please look at the very opening of the score: the five-note figure in Tpt. 2. Then go to the final page, and the music for Tpt.1 at Reh. S. What a difference! From agitated darkness in the minor mode, expressed with snarling timbres and whip-like rhythms, we now roll triumphantly forward—and the timbres now are open, resonant, bell-like.

A dramatic contrast—but (and this is the technical point) likewise sheer identity: the coda uses the same five-note figure, only transposed (beginning on concert B rather than G). And there's identity, as well, in terms of key center: we remain in F, but now experience that key it in its bright Lydian mode.

I learned from Eli Siegel that technique is never merely abstract, sonic engineering. "There is not one thing music does," he said in a 1951 lecture, "which does not say something about how a person should organize himself, too." The opposites I've been talking about in technical, musical terms are also in our lives. We need to be proud of how we relate our fears—dark, contractile emotions—to our hopes, bright and expansive. We need, as we think about people, to have our thoughts be at once tight and open: precise and generous.

And there is much more to say, which I hope my music succeeds in expressing. We need to make sense of what we see clearly and what we don't see clearly: that is, to make sense of brightness and darkness in ourselves. And, as important as anything, we need to feel the way we have sadness and joy, pain and celebration, has integrity—that as different, even as contradictory these emotions are, they still can make coherent sense in our lives.

Let me be technical again; the five-note motif mentioned before has a companion throughout this work: a three-note pattern made up of a perfect interval—a 4th or 5th—joined to a minor second. This companion motif brings together opposites I talked about earlier. Perfect intervals are wide, open, consonant, and create feelings of brightness, confidence, and strength. The minor second, on the contrary, is tightly dissonant, and tends to feel dark, contractile, and painfully unsure of itself.

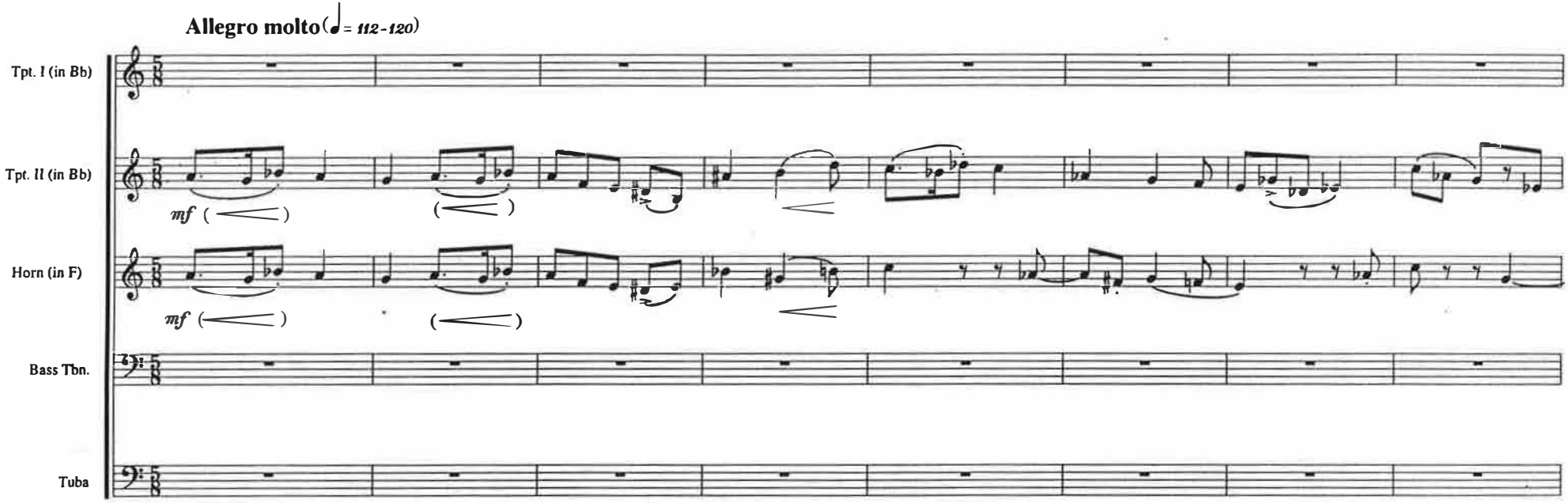
As this Quintet unfolds, I wanted this "companion motif" to take many forms and to express a diverse range of emotions. We hear it in all three movements. I wanted it to be present at the most tragic moments of the composition, and the most celebratory. To me, this has to do with the central meaning of the piece; enabling these emotional transformations to happen convincingly was my biggest challenge as a composer.

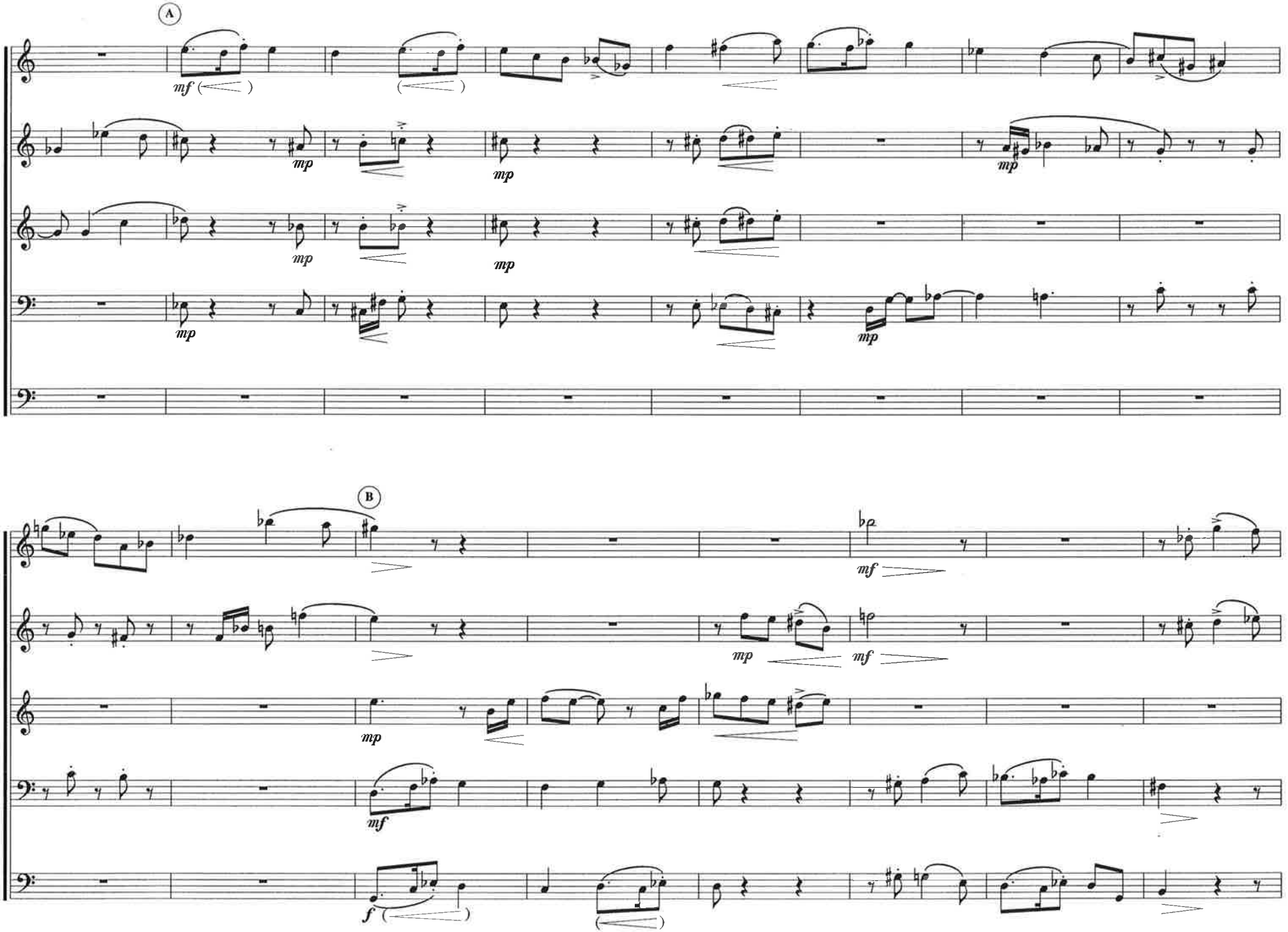
You'll hear the motif, for example, throughout the 2nd movement. This is music I wrote as my mother was dying. There's terror here; also regret, yearning, and wistful memories. And as the second movement in its final measures yields to silence, after cramped chords filled with quiet anguish, the third bursts forth, with brightness and vibrant energy, using—once again—that same motif, in a new form.

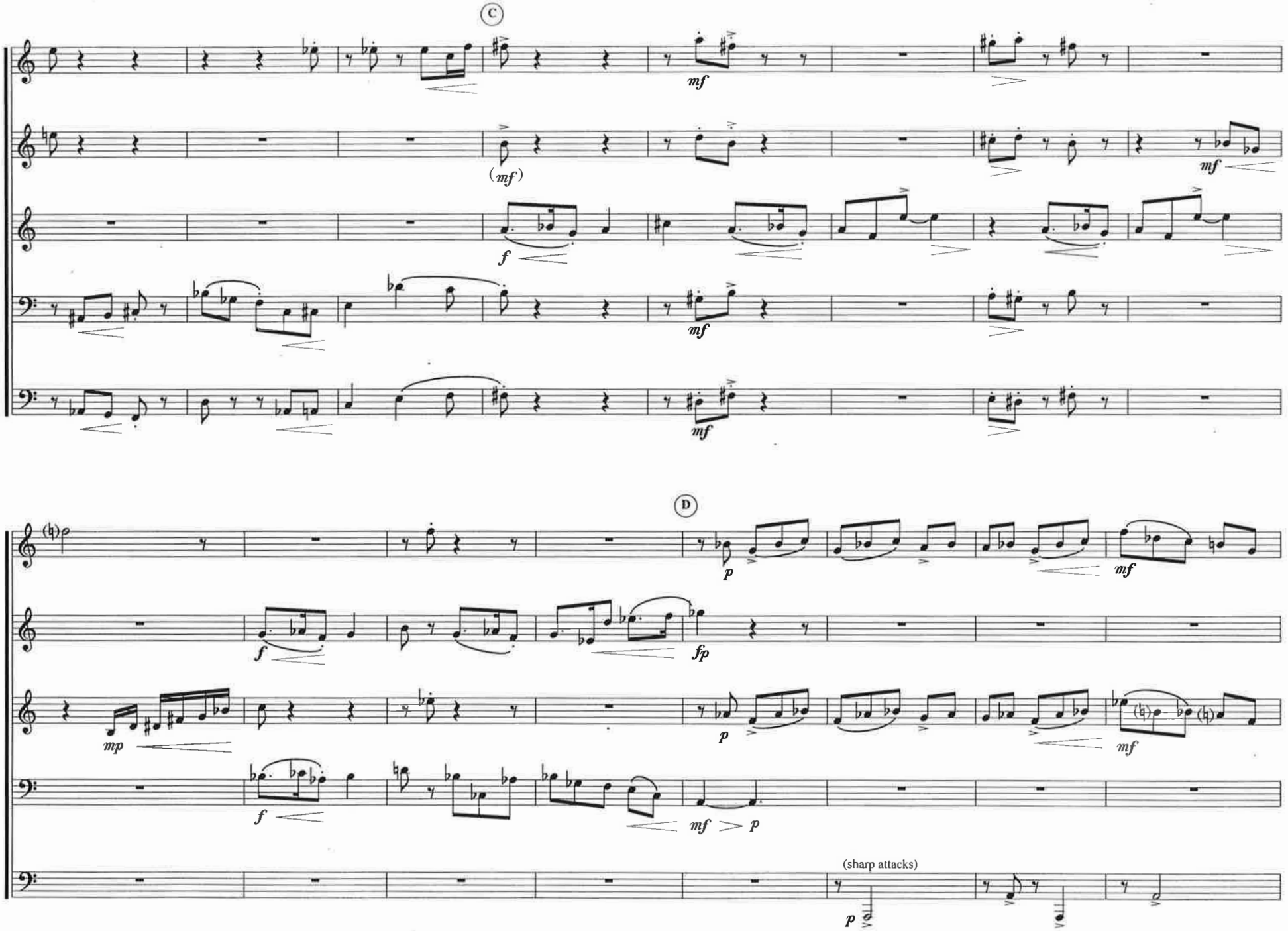
Brass Quintet

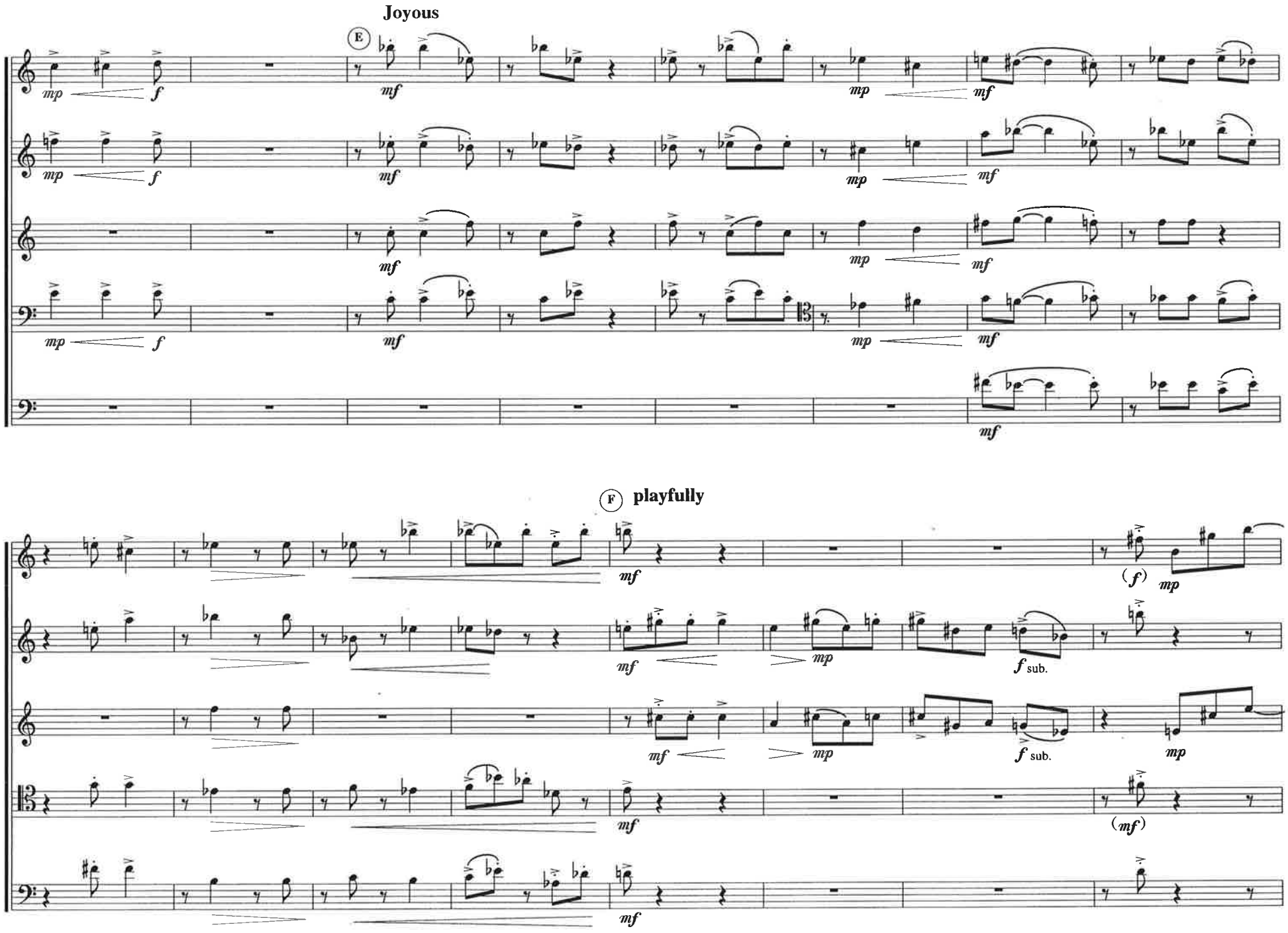
I.

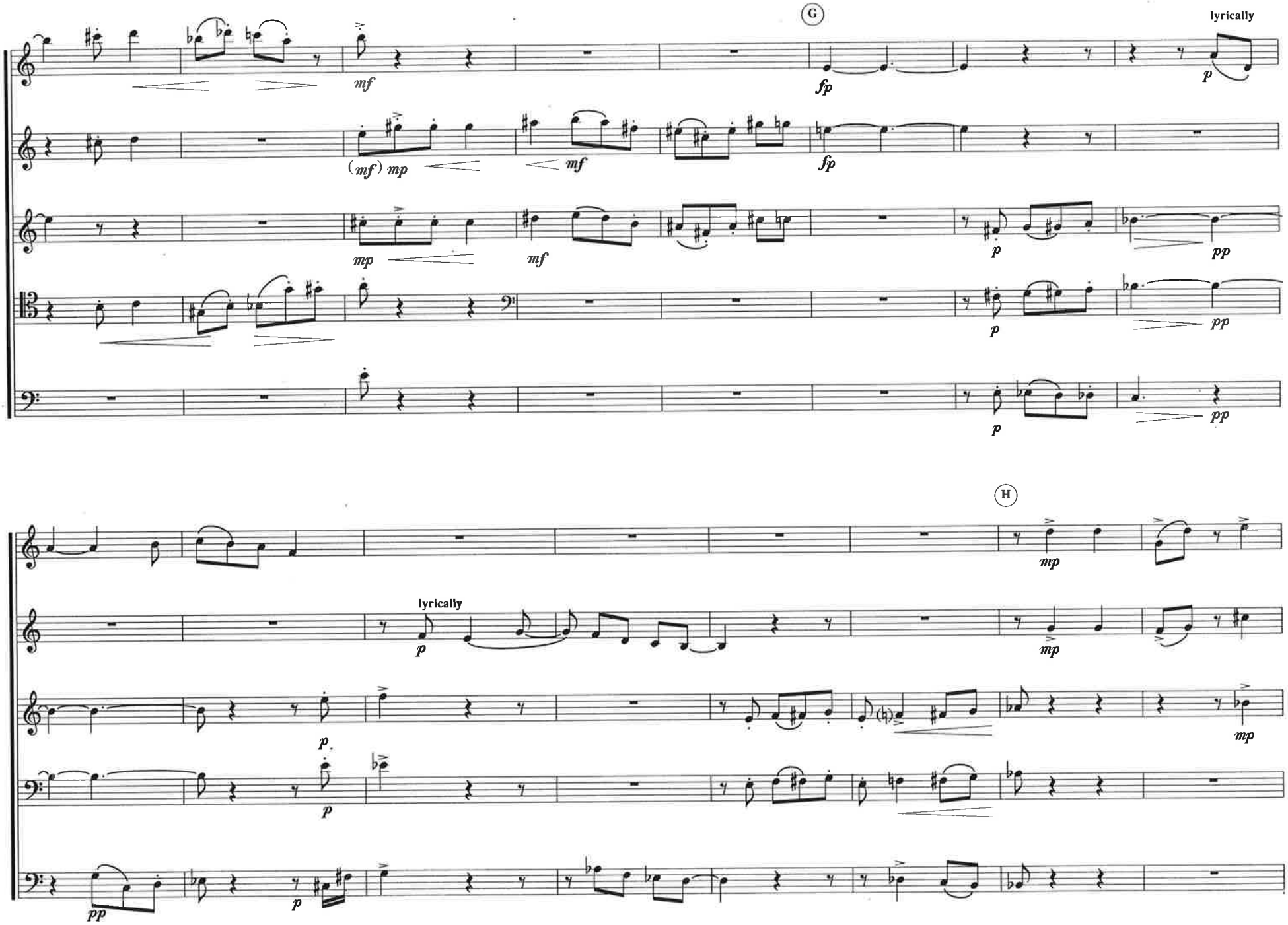
Edward Green

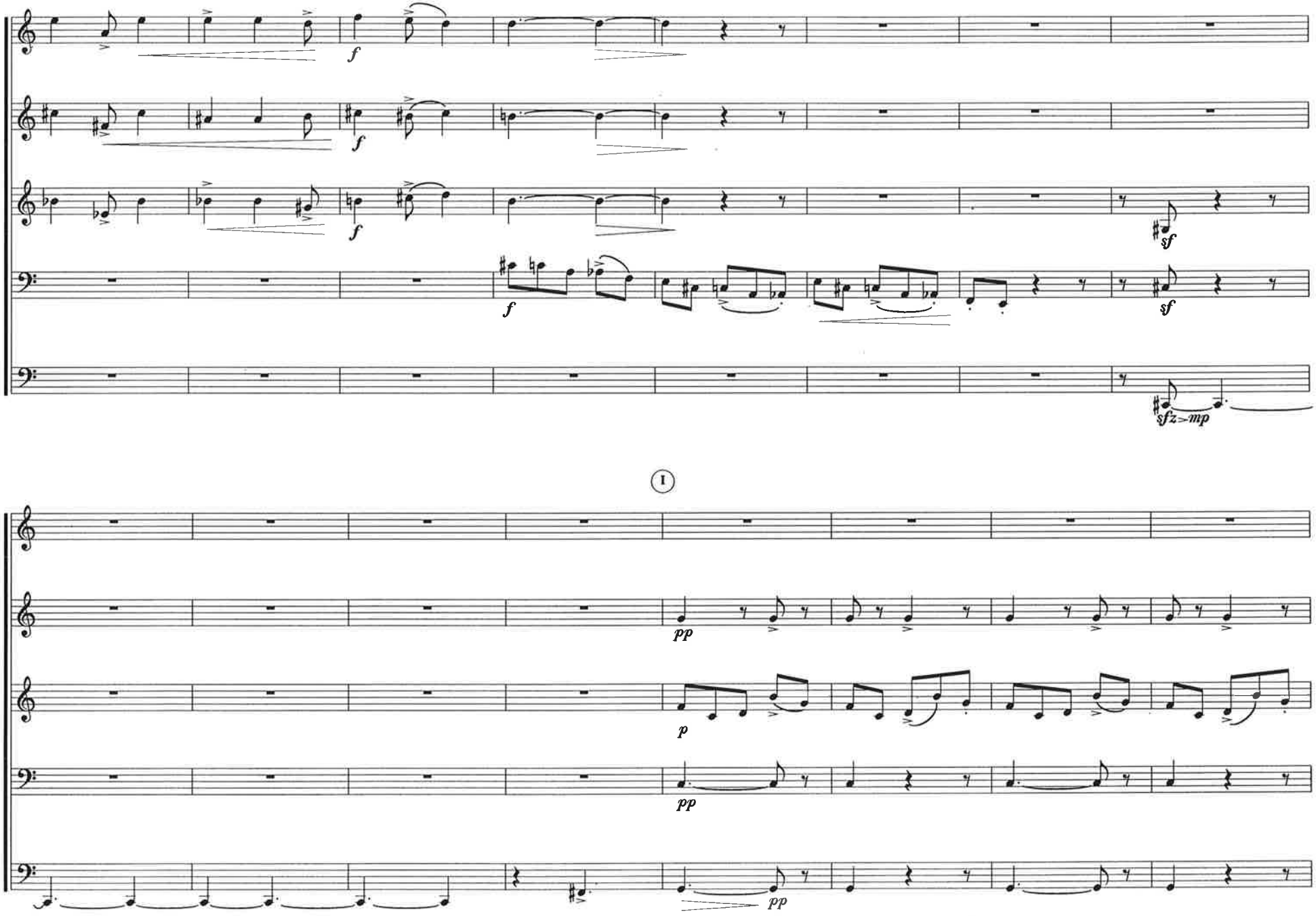


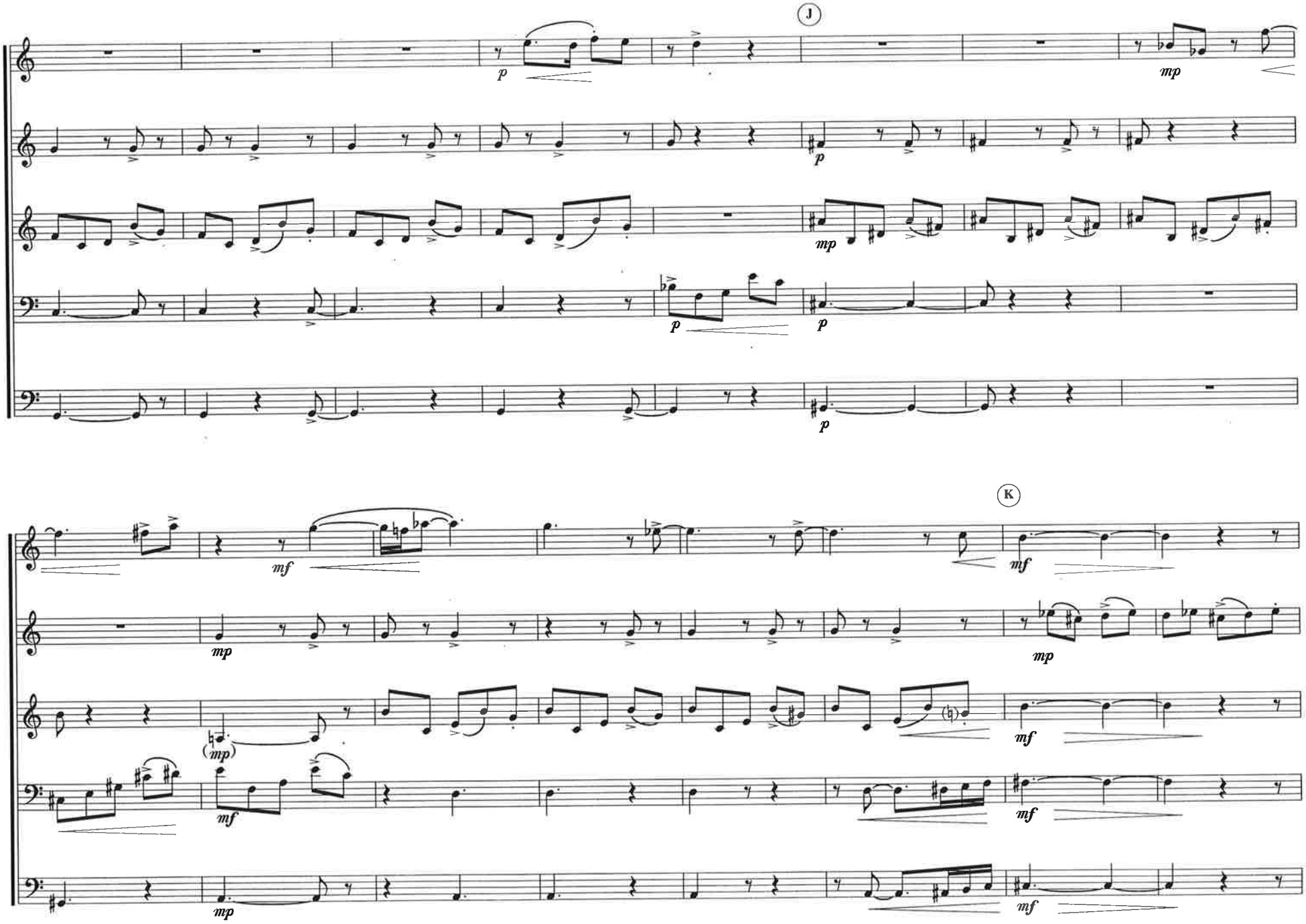

A
mf
mp
B
mf
mp
f

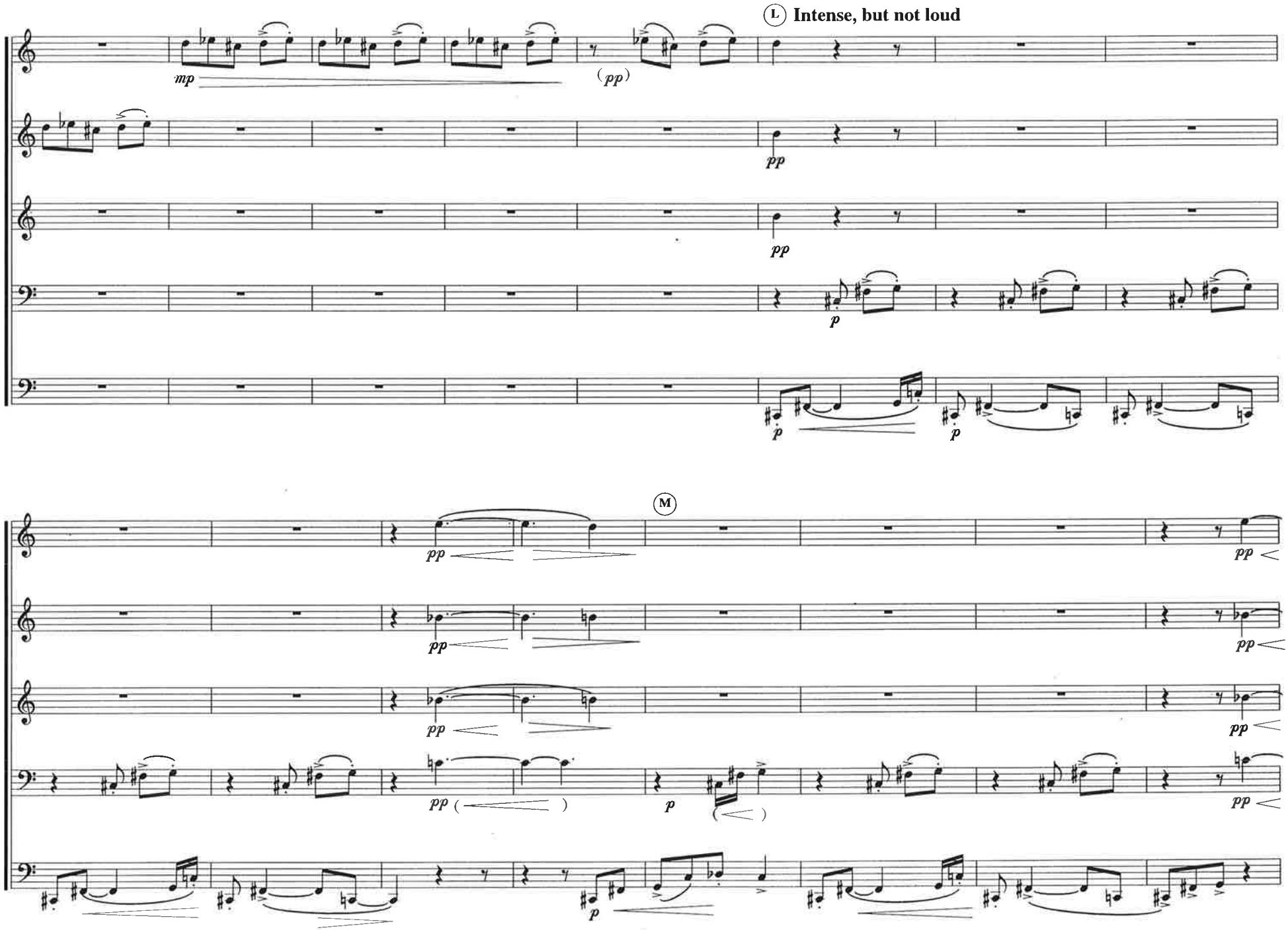

C
mf
(mf)
f
mf
mf
D
p
mf
f
fp
mp
p
mf
f
mf > p
(sharp attacks)
p

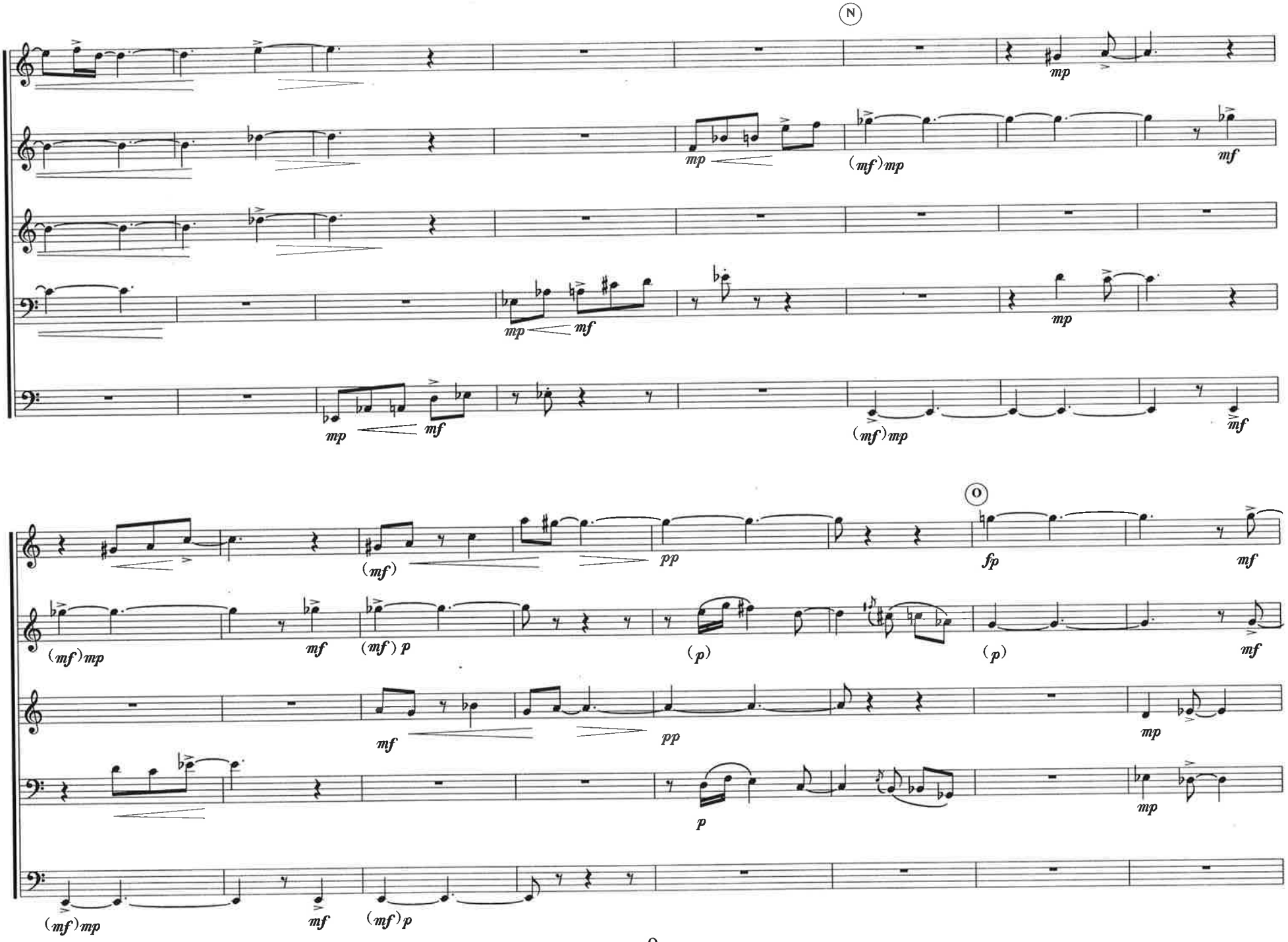

Joyous
E
mp
f
mf
F
playfully
f sub.
(f)
(mf)

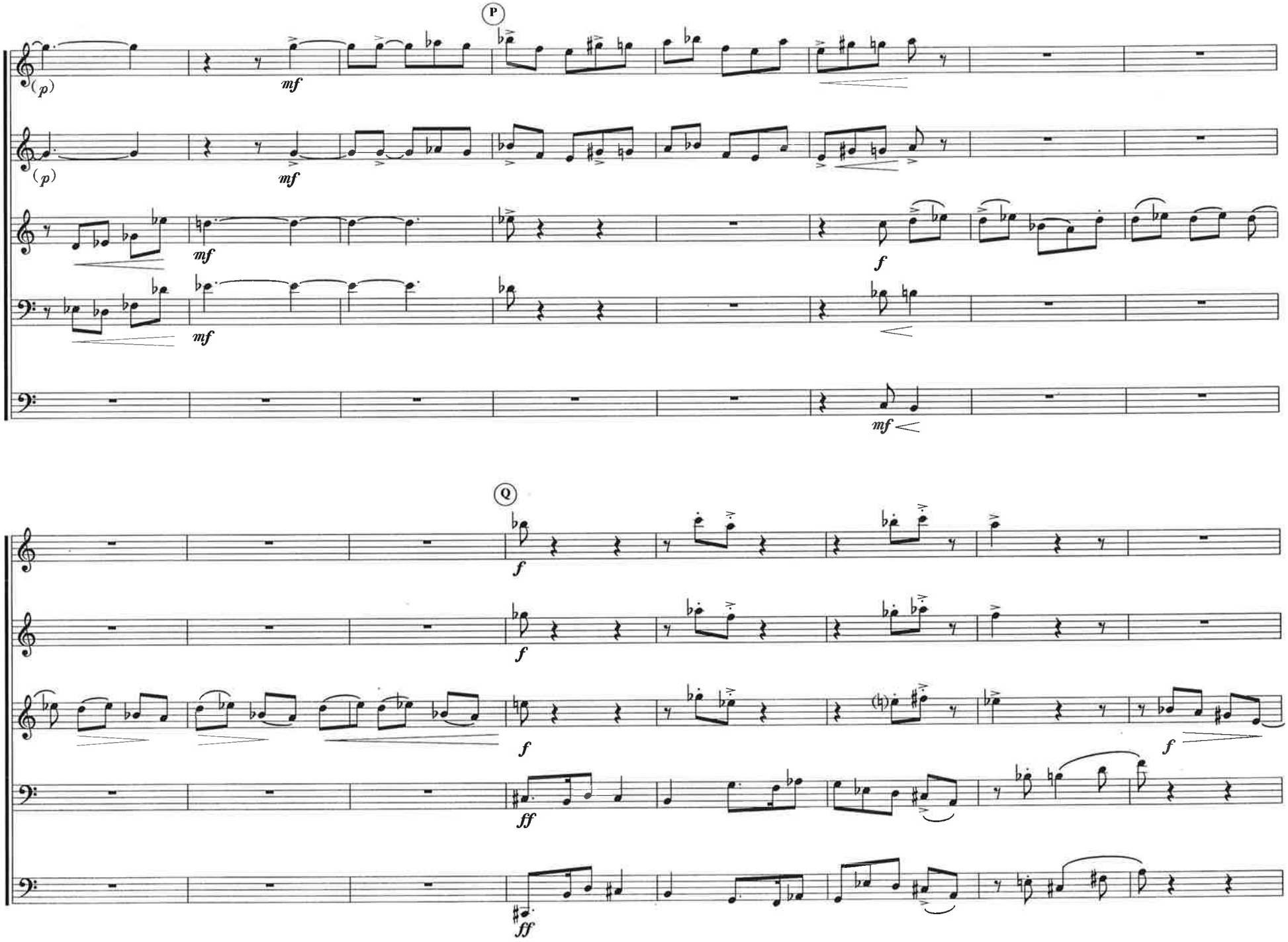

G
lyrically
mf
fp
p
(mf) mp
mf
fp
mp
mf
p
pp
p
pp
p
pp
H
mp
lyrically
p
mp
p.
mp
p
pp
p

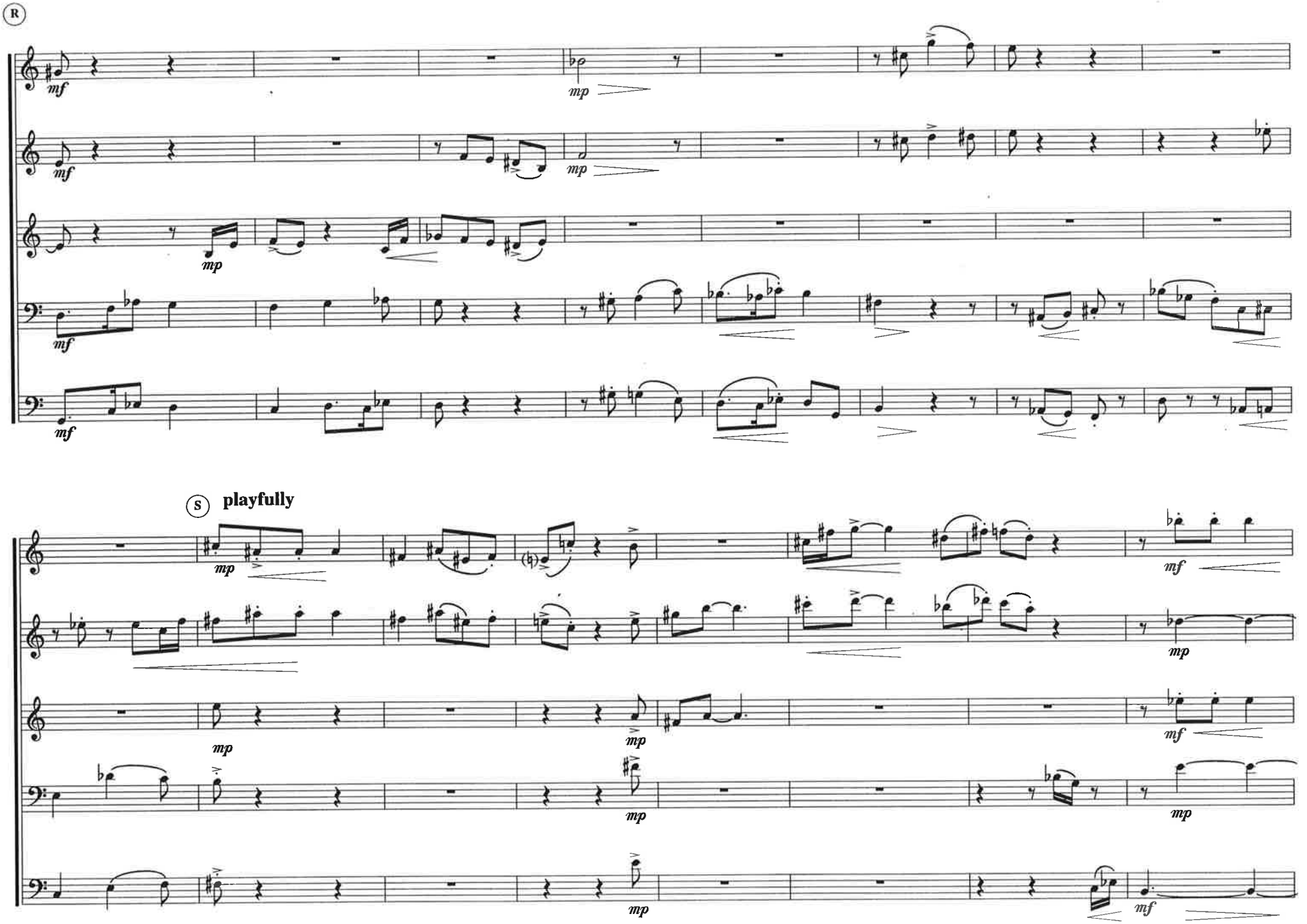

f
f
f
f
sf
sf
sfz>mp
I
pp
p
pp
pp

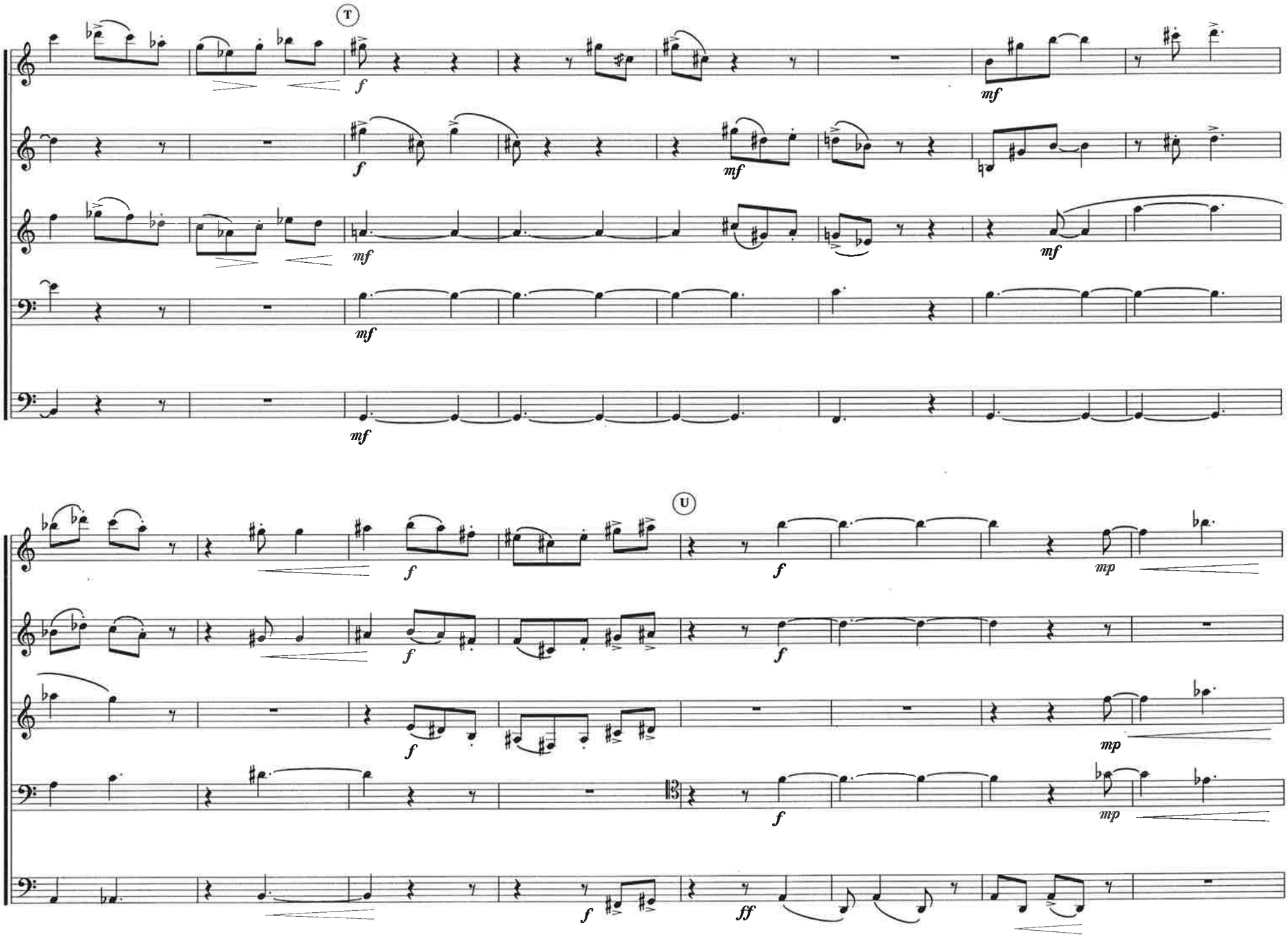

J
K

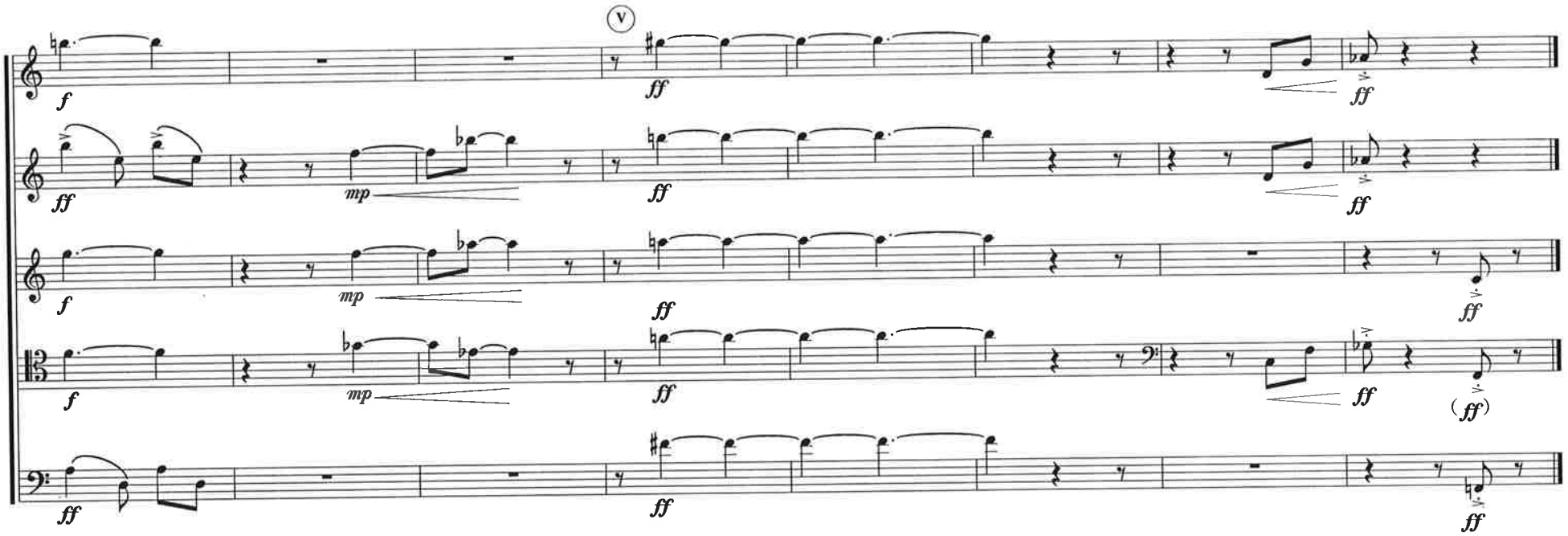

L
Intense, but not loud
M


N
O

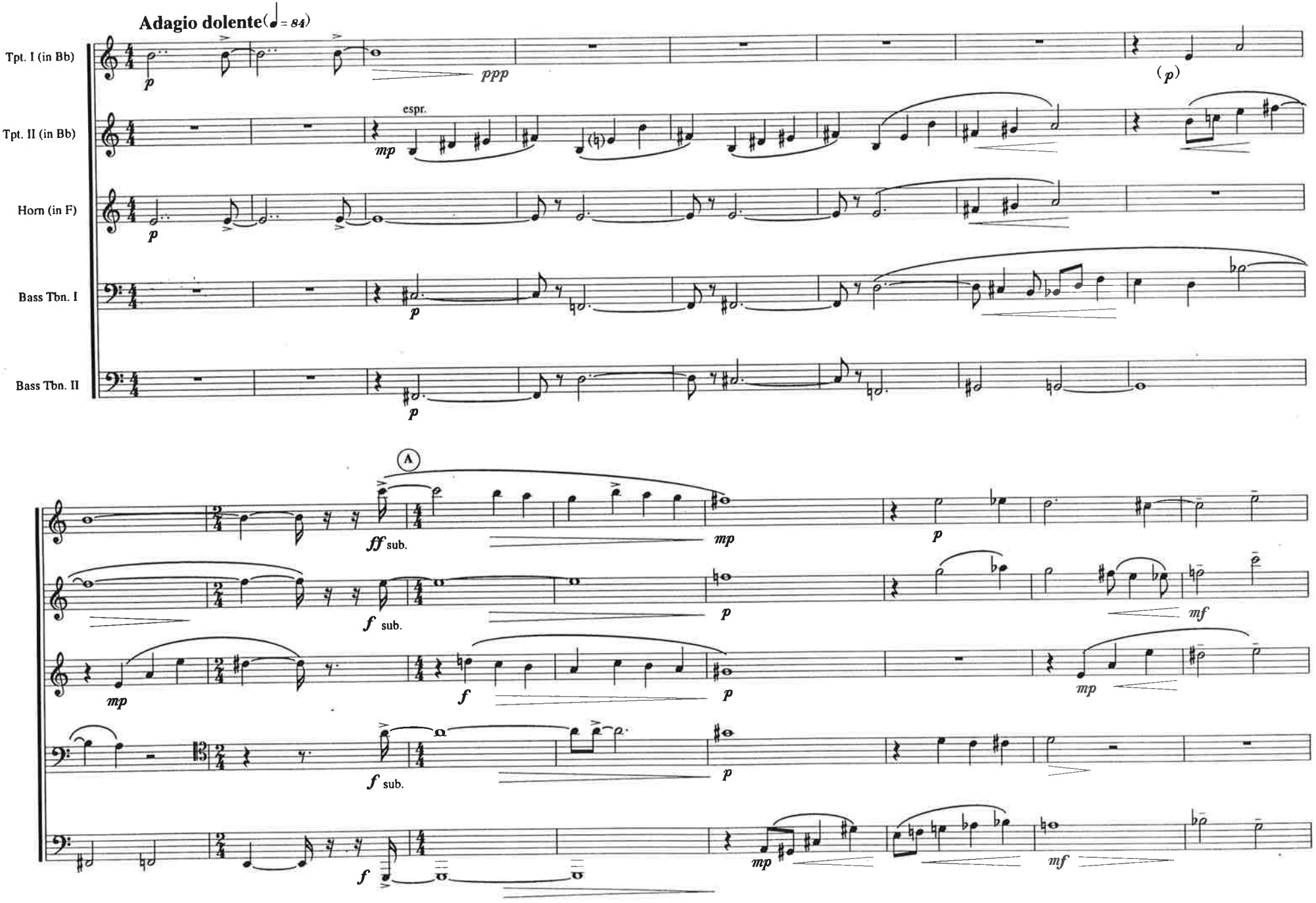

P
(p)
mf
(p)
mf
mf
mf
f
mf
Q
f
f
f
f
ff
ff

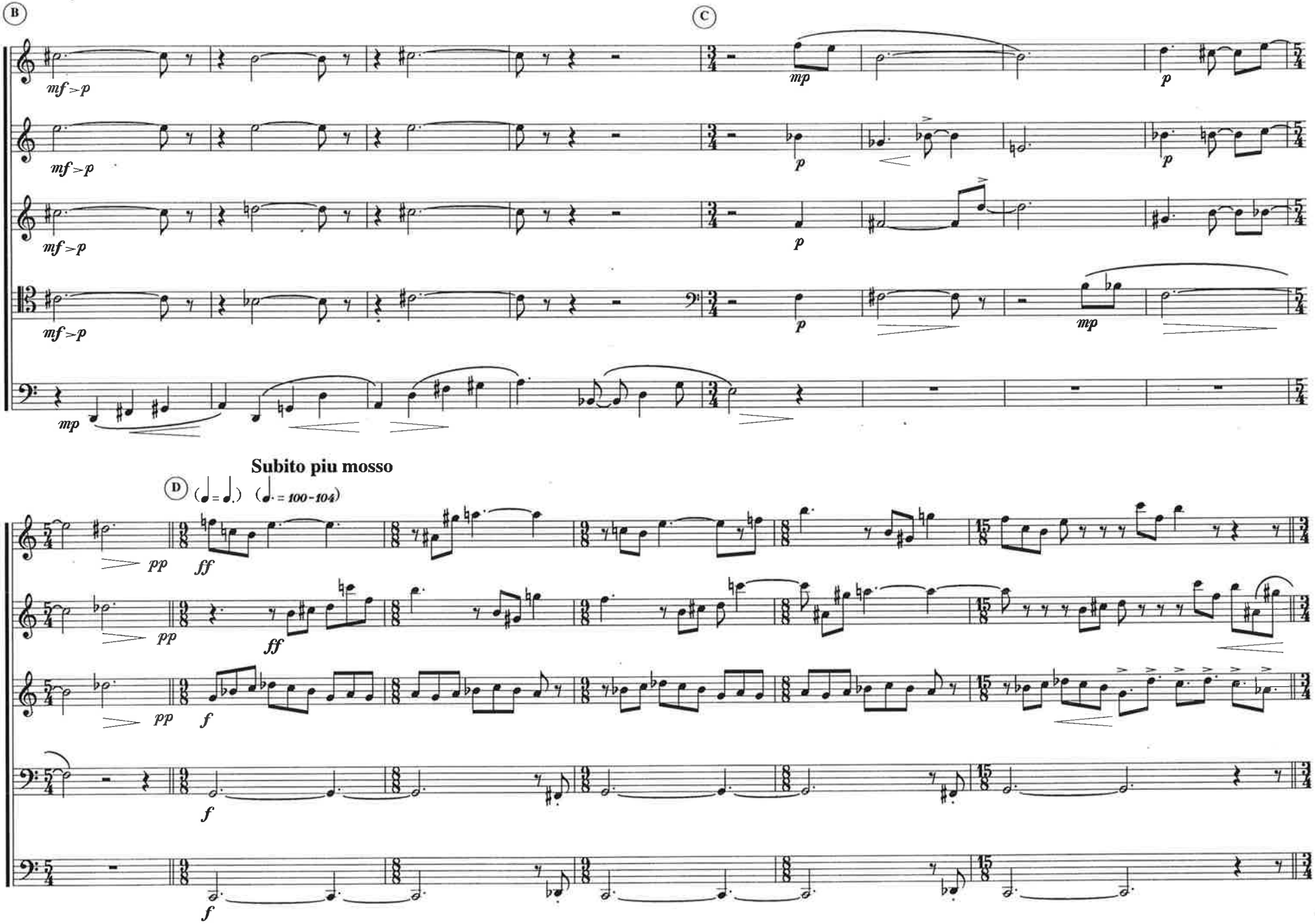

R
mf
mp
S
playfully

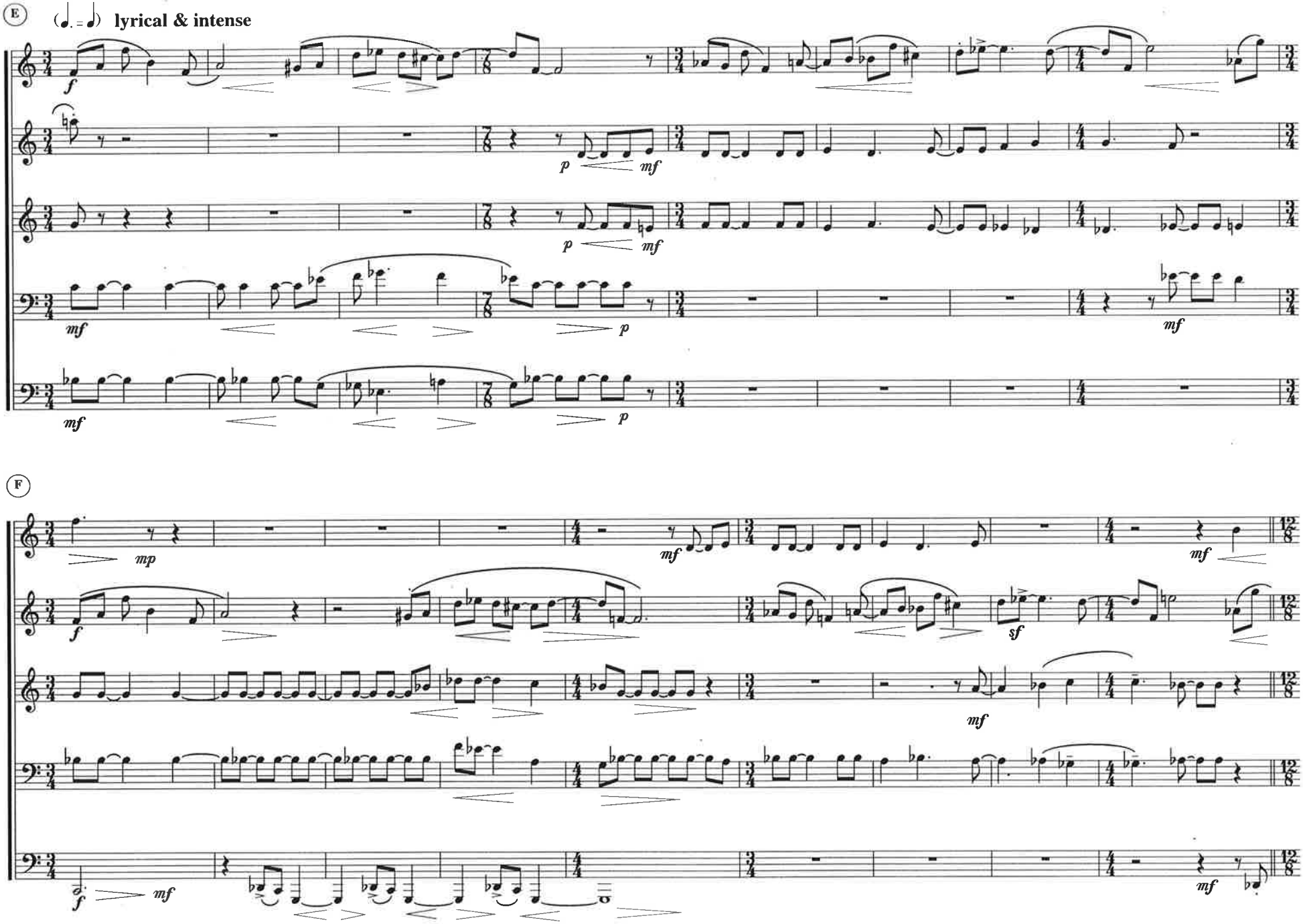

T
f
mf
U
ff

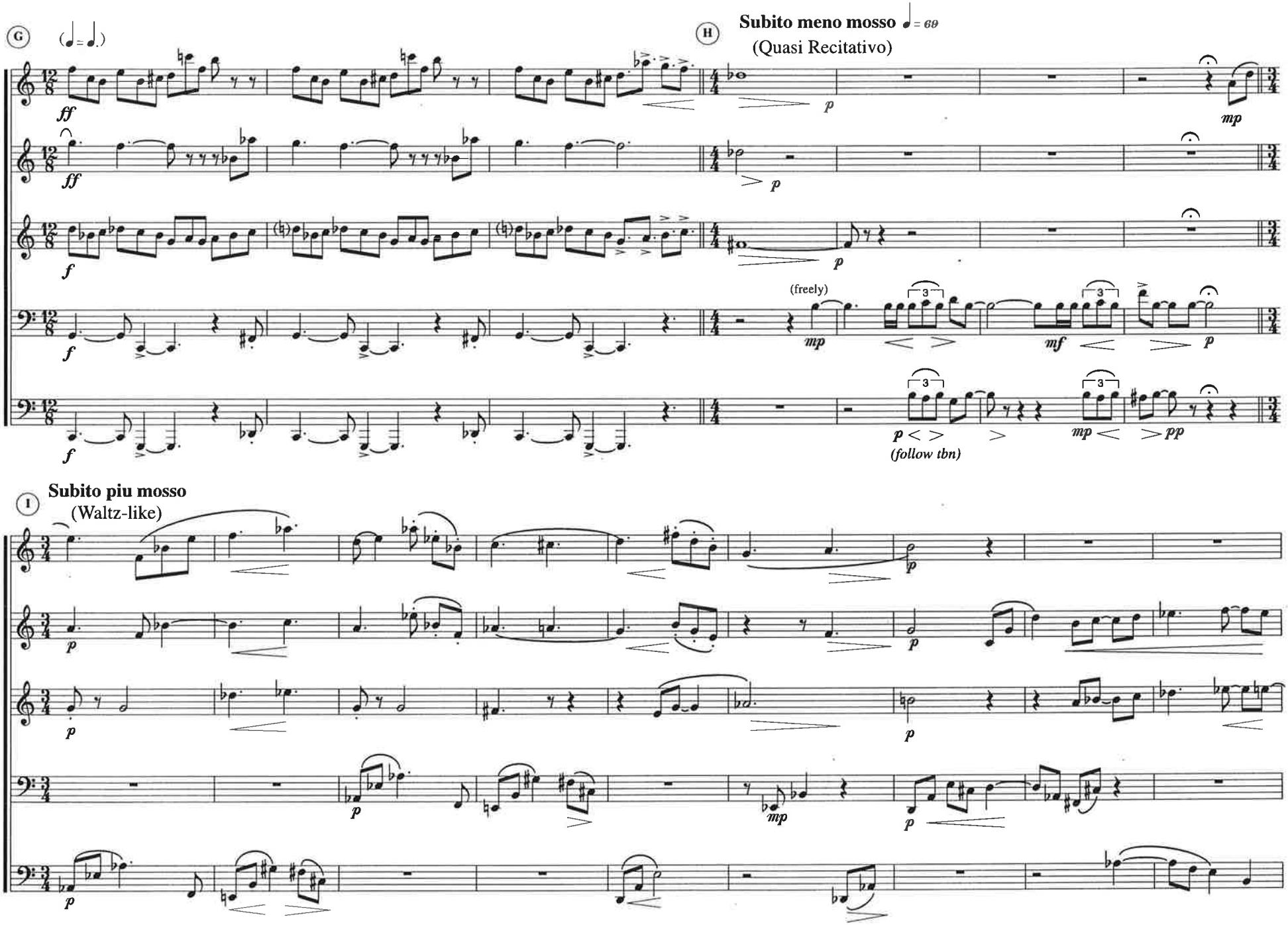

V
f
ff
mp
(ff)

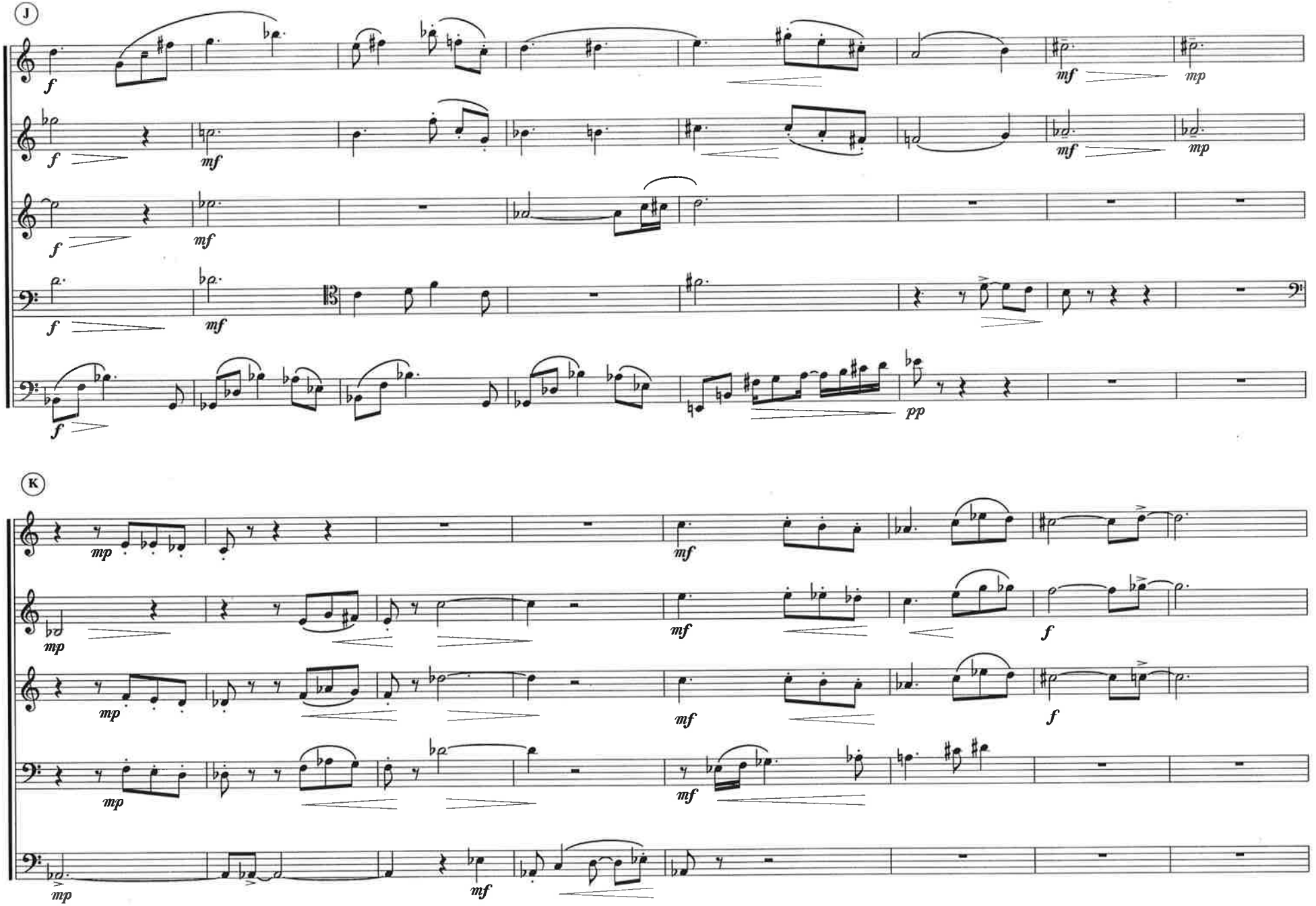
11.

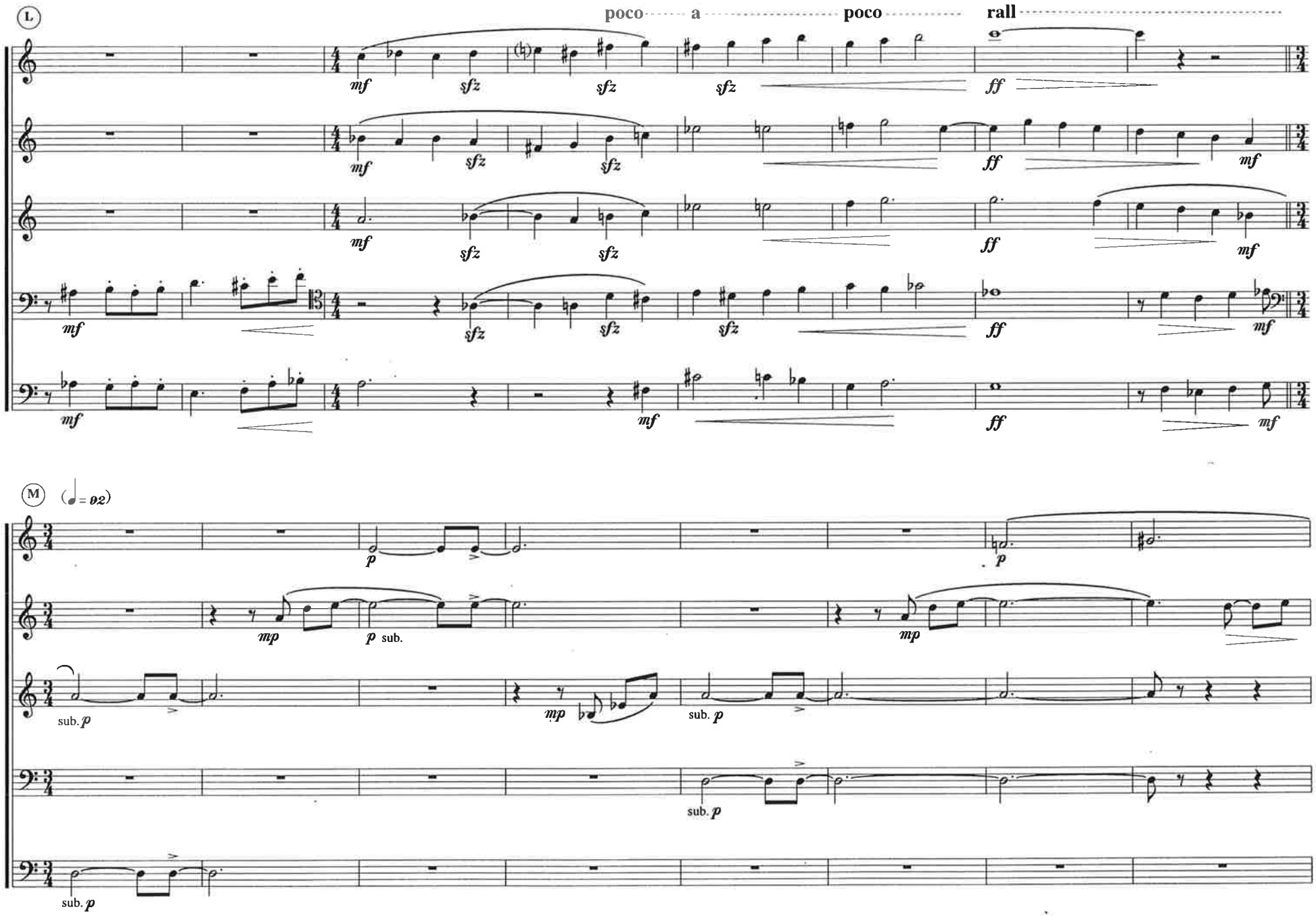

Adagio dolente (♩ = 84)
Tpt. I (in Bb)
Tpt. II (in Bb)
Horn (in F)
Bass Tbn. I
Bass Tbn. II
espr.
A
ff sub.
f sub.
f sub.

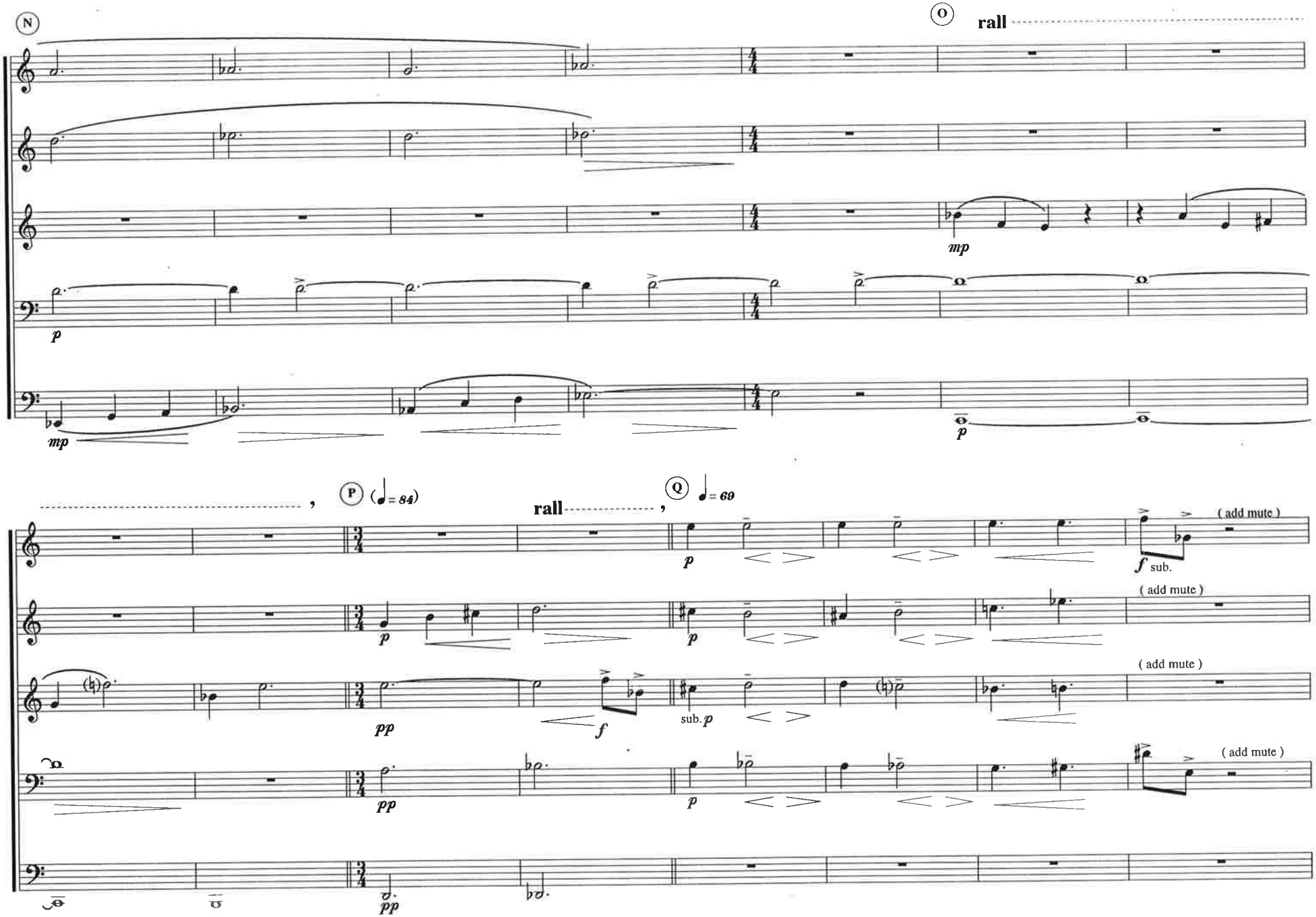

B
C
mf>p
mp
p
Subito piu mosso
D
(♩= ♩.) (♩. = 100-104)
pp
ff
f

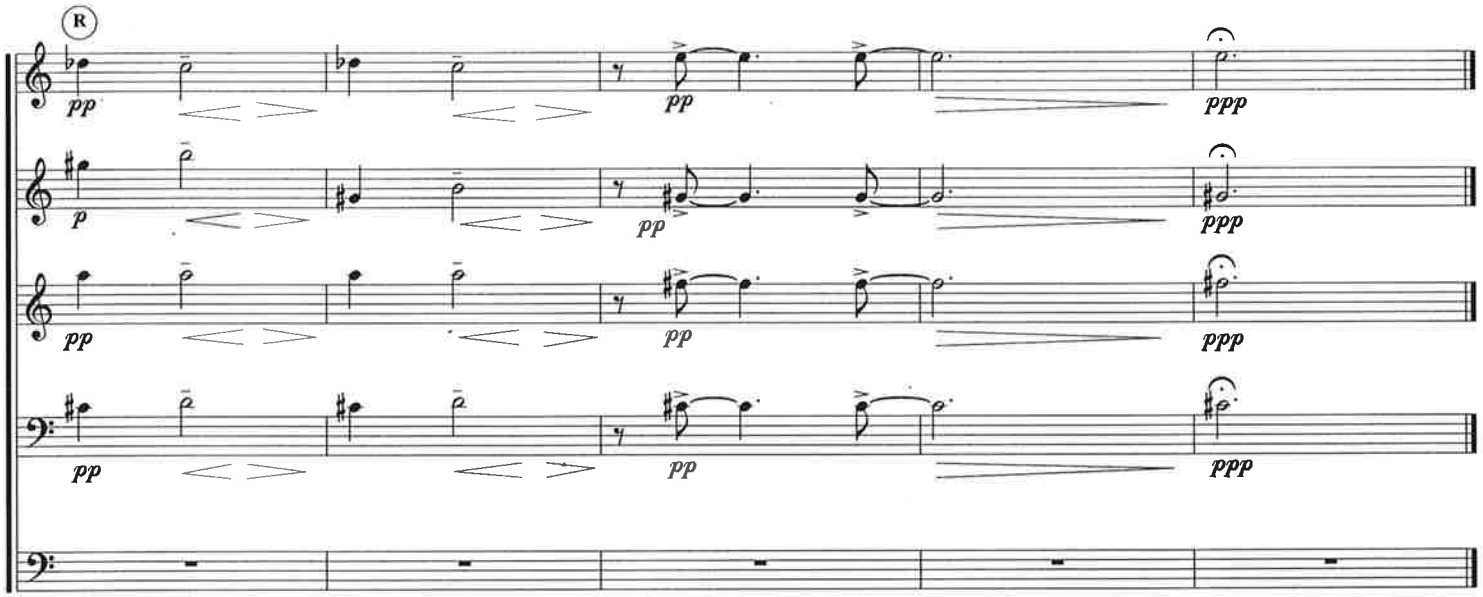

E
(♩. = ♩) lyrical & intense
f
p
mf
mf
p
mf
p
mf
F
mp
mf
f
sf
mf
f
mf
mf


G
H
Subito meno mosso
(Quasi Recitativo)
(freely)
(follow tbn)
I
Subito piu mosso
(Waltz-like)


J
K

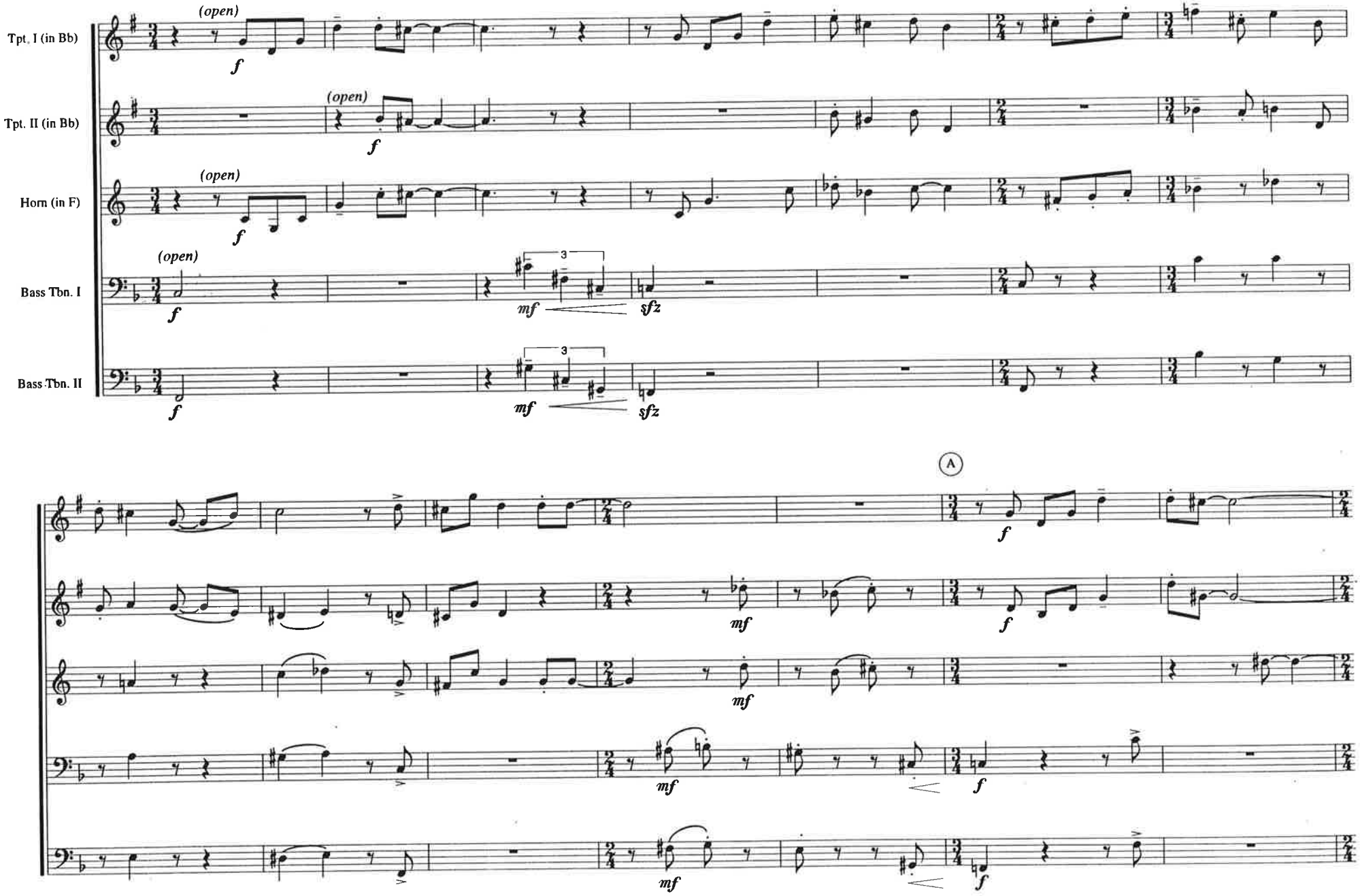

L
poco a poco
rall
mf
sfz
ff
M
(♩= 92)
p
mp
sub. p

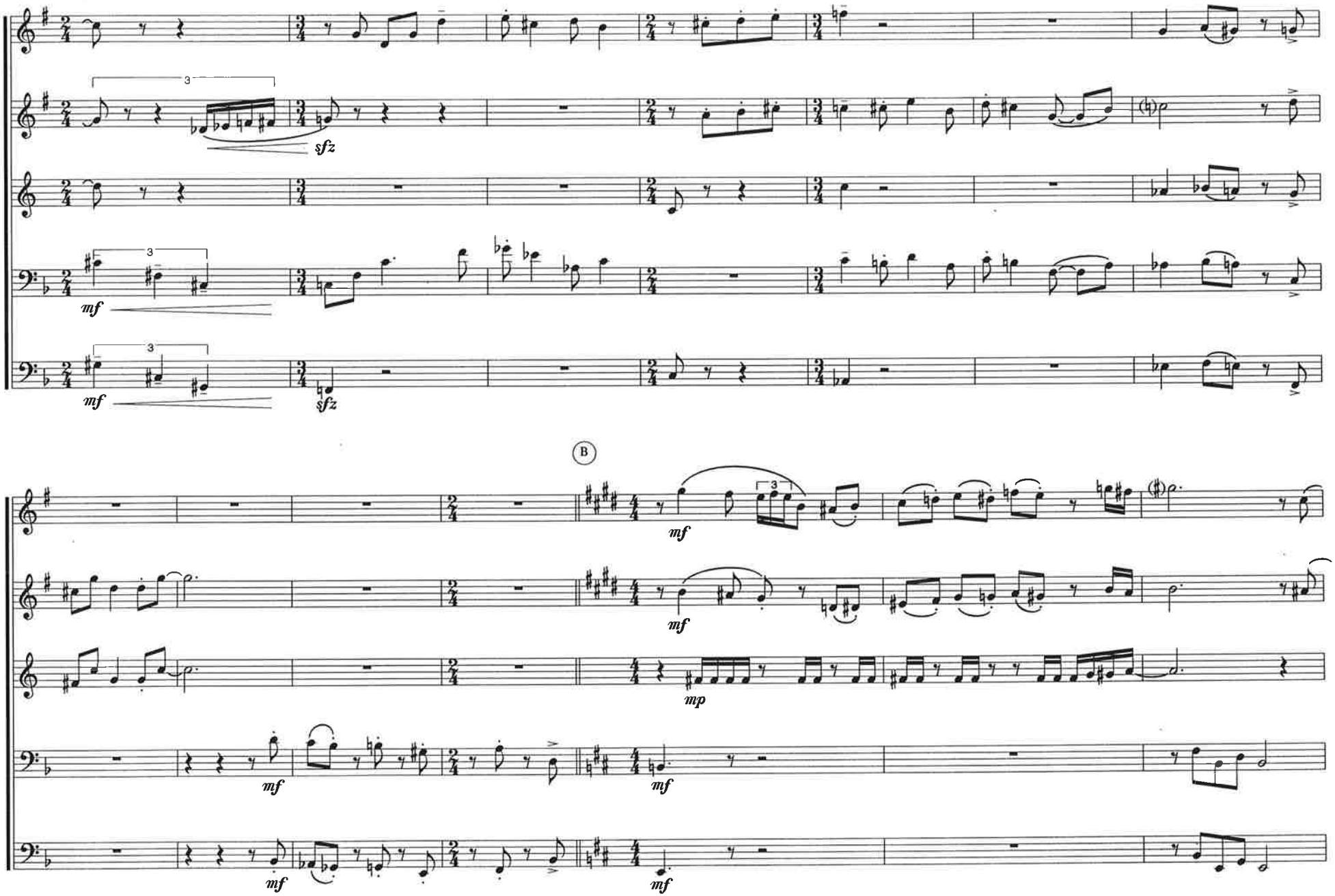

N
O
rall
mp
p
mp
p
P
(♩= 84)
rall
Q
♩= 69
p
f sub.
(add mute)
p
p
(add mute)
pp
f
sub. p
(add mute)
pp
p
(add mute)
pp

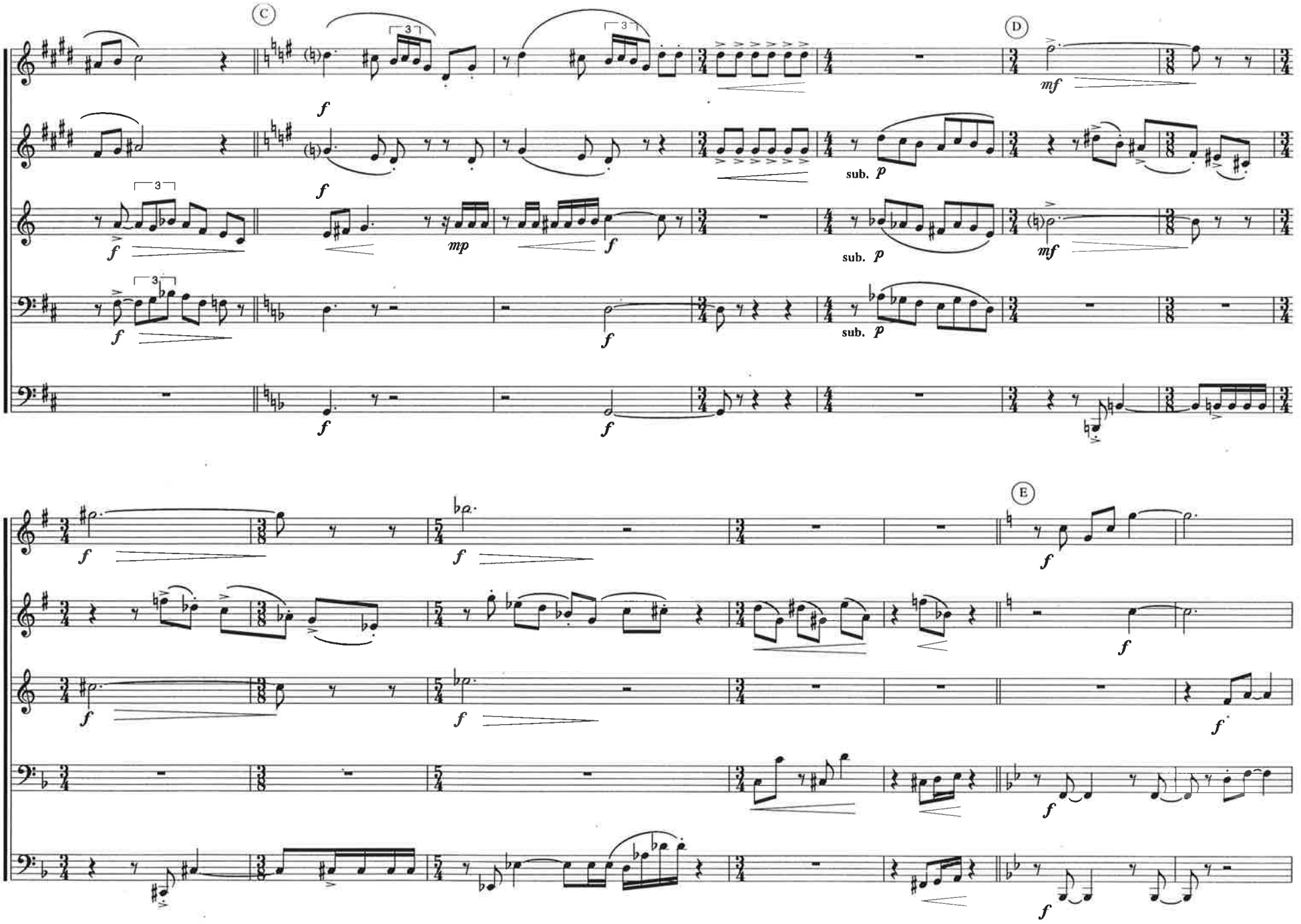

R
pp
pp
ppp
p
pp
ppp
pp
pp
ppp
pp
pp
ppp

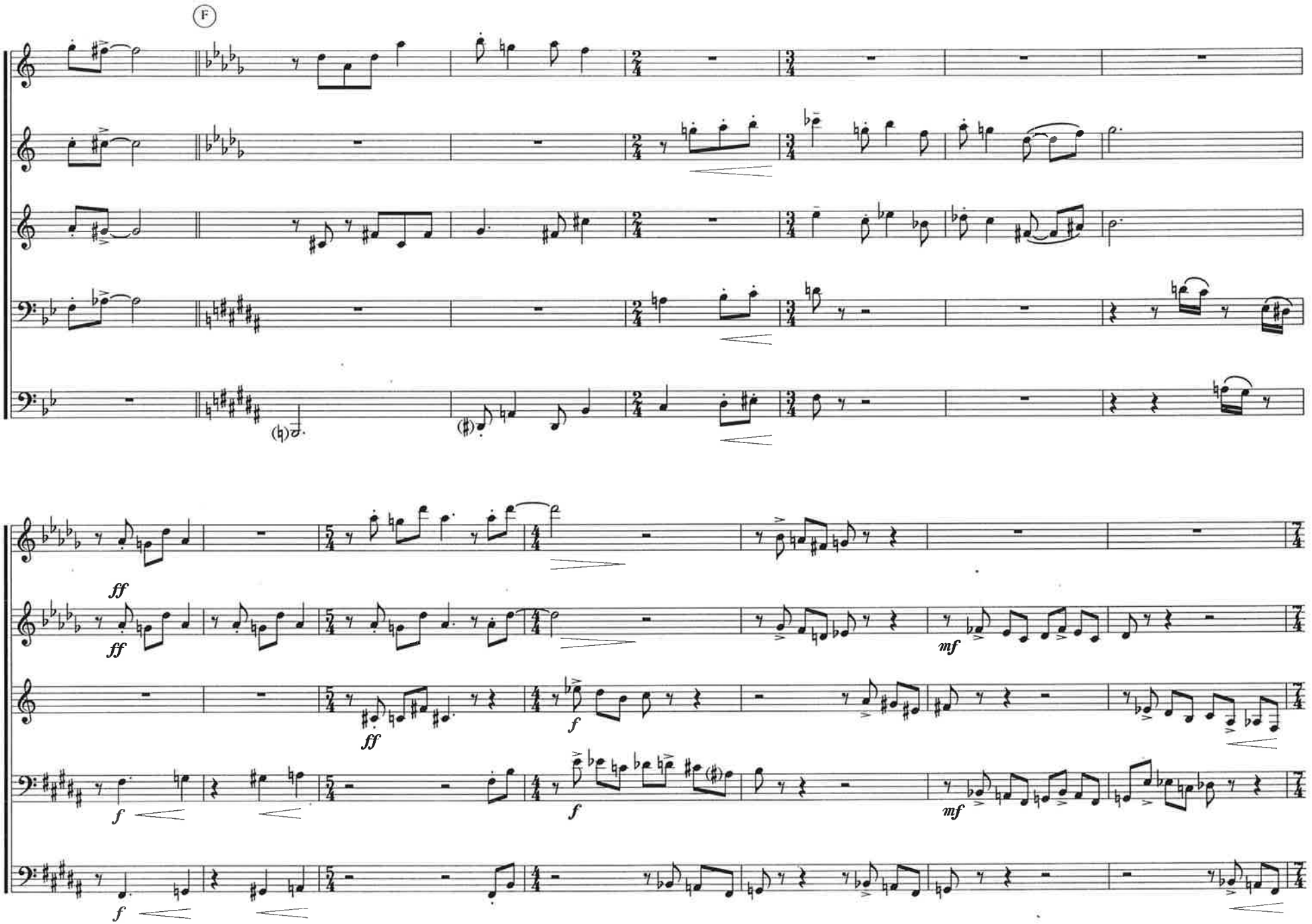
III.

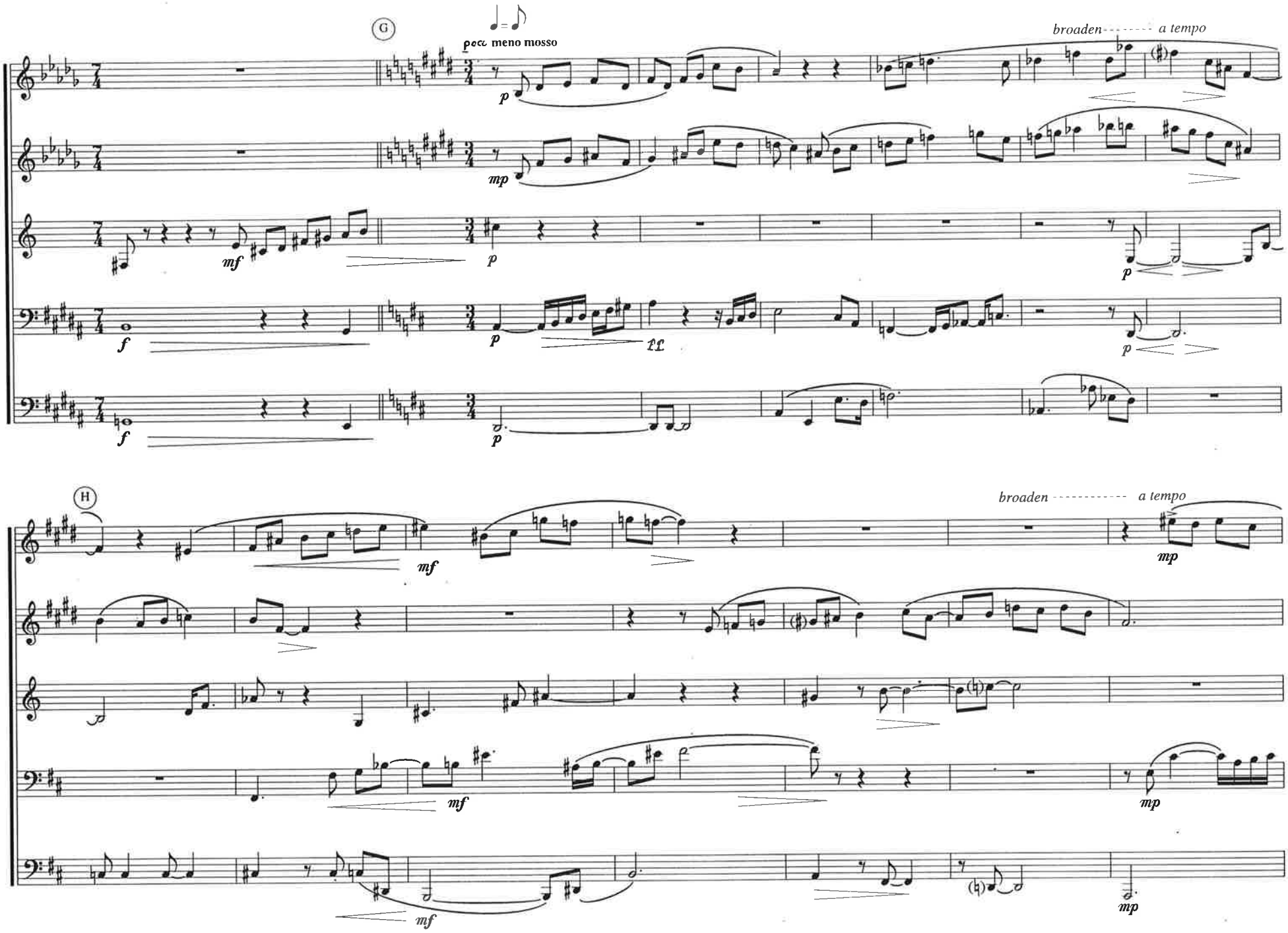
Allegro giovale con brio

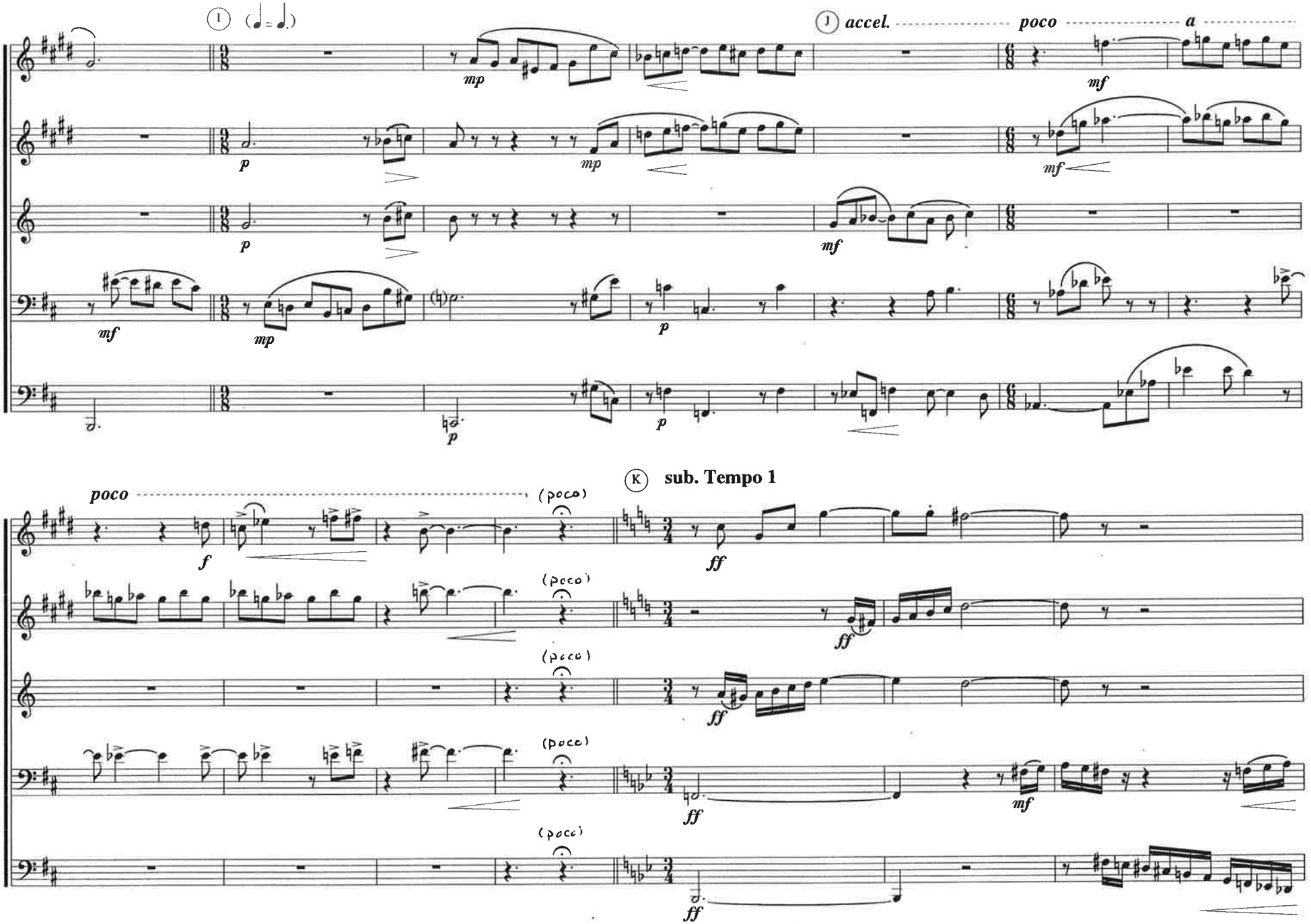


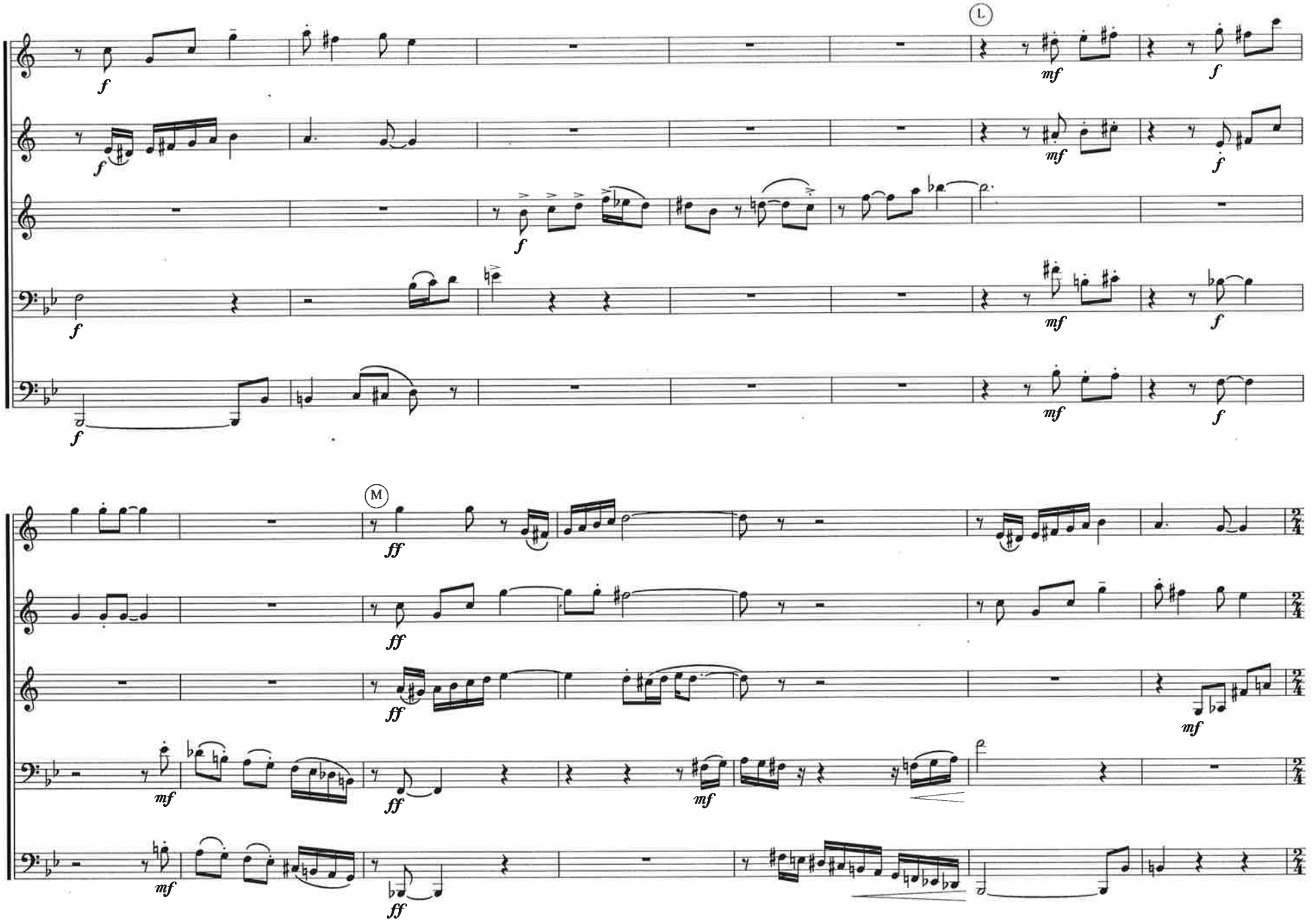

3
sfz
mf
3
mf
sfz
B
3
mf
mf
mp
mf
mf
mf
mf

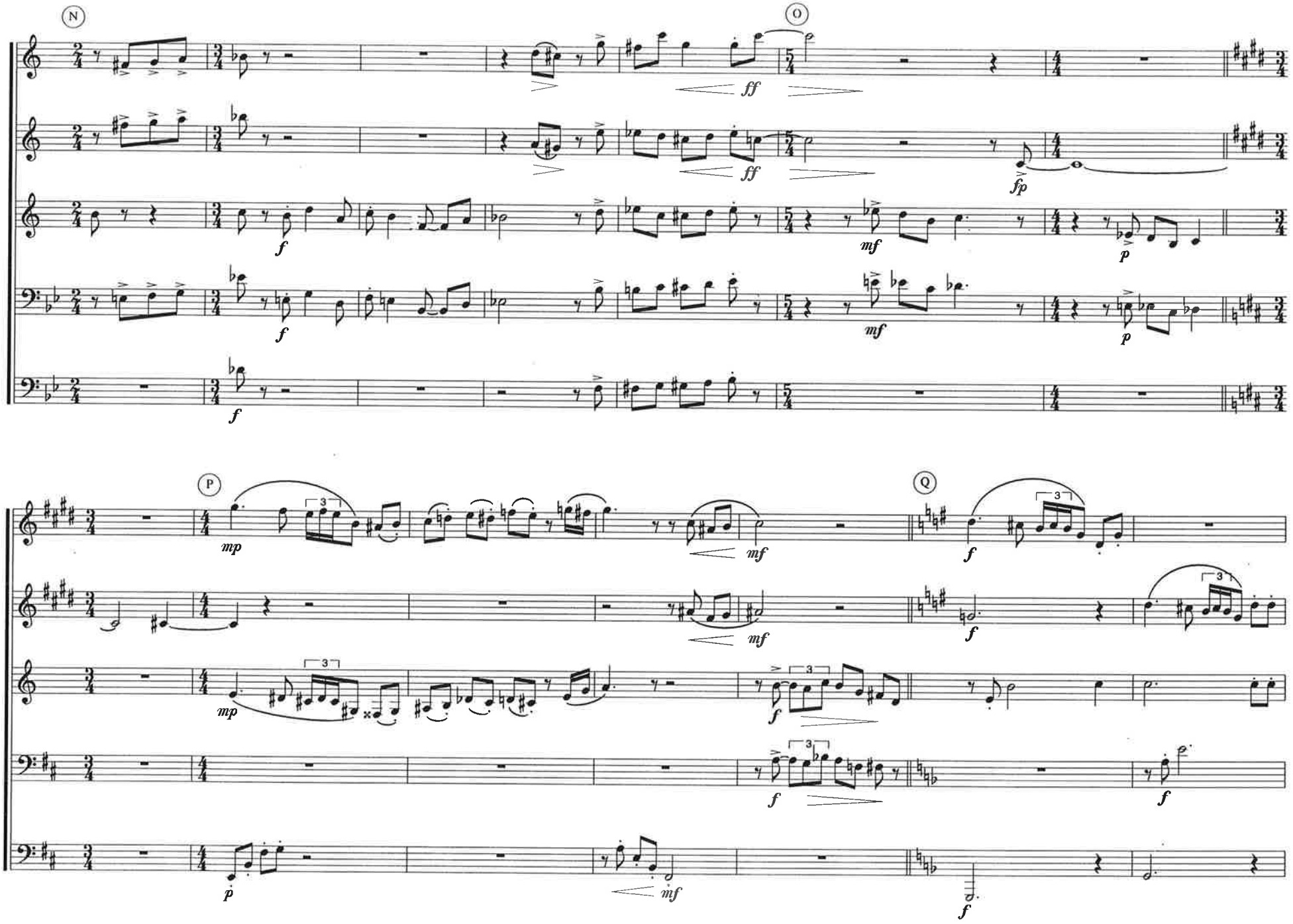

C
D
E
sub. p
sub. p
sub. p

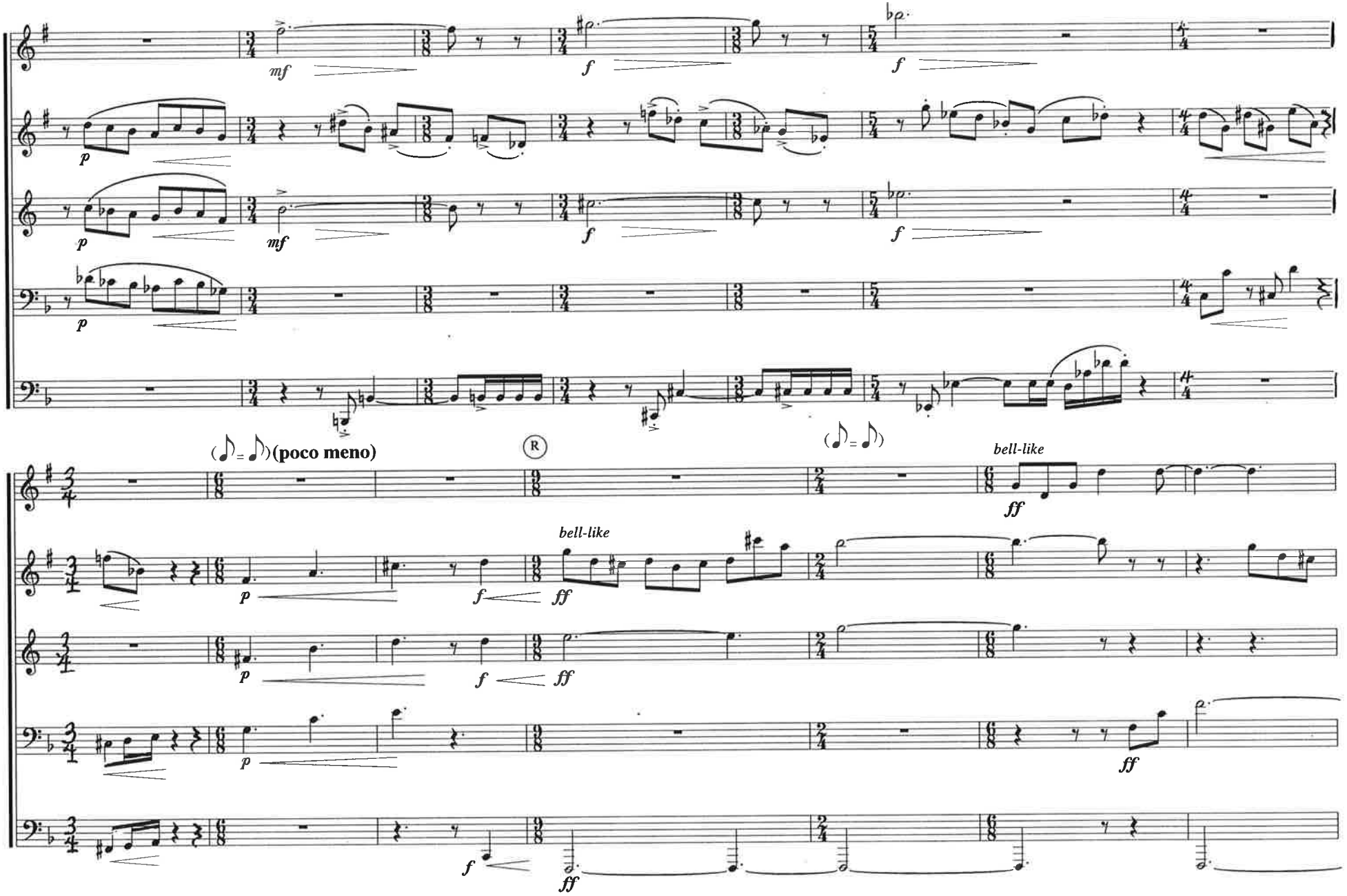

F
ff
ff
mf
ff
f
f
mf
f
f

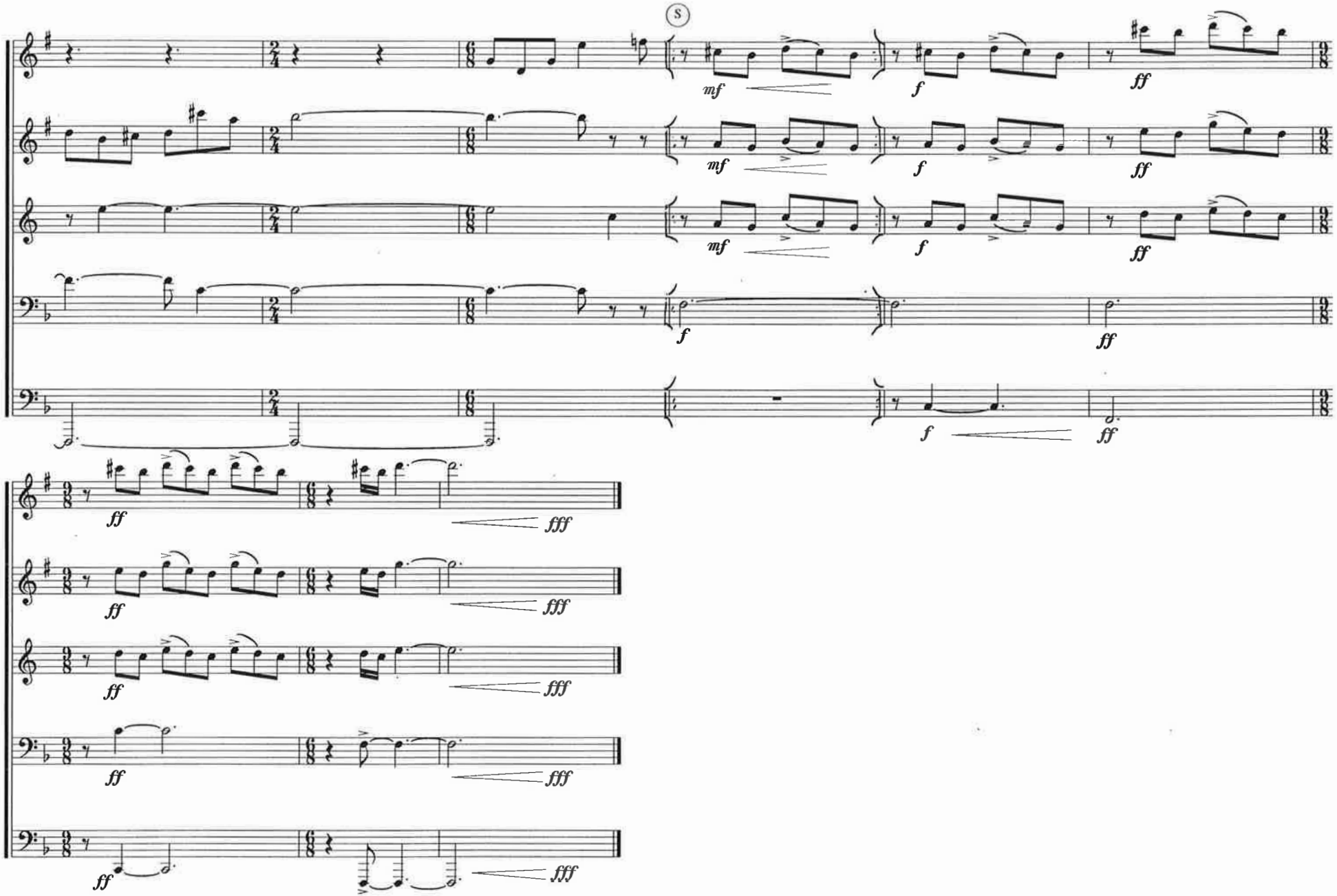

G
poco meno mosso
broaden
a tempo
H
broaden
a tempo


I
J accel.
poco
a
K sub. Tempo 1
poco
(poco)


L
M
f
mf
ff
2/4


N
O
P
Q
ff
fp
f
mf
p
mp


mf
f
f
p
p
mf
f
f
p
(poco meno)
R
bell-like
ff
p
f
bell-like
ff
p
f
ff
p
ff
f
ff


S
mf
f
ff
fff