Weiss
Piano Quintet
"Queen"

- Note for Piano Quintet No. 1 "Queen" -

The following quintet is based on the concept of the second. In music theory the second, or step, is one of the closest relationships two notes can have to one another in terms of pitch. The minor second (a C ascending to a D♭, for instance), is as close as two tones can get to one another in the tempered system of tuning. The major second (a C ascending to a D, for instance), is the second closest two notes can get to one another. However, this close relationship in terms of pitch does not correspond to a very close relationship in terms of simple harmony.

C and D are 'distantly related' keys in terms of key signatures. While they have some similarities, they do not have as much in common as they do with their closely related keys (for C, the closely related keys are F and G. For D, they are G and A). When played together their relationship is considered dissonant, or displeasing to the ear, no matter their arrangement (with D played over C, the relationship is a major second. C over D, a minor seventh).

This piece of music focuses on this distant, yet close, relationship.

To begin, the piece opens with a modal, easy, and modern section. Played in the key of E Dorian (a mode created by playing the notes of the D major scale from a major second above, E to E), this section introduces the main relationship explored throughout the piece. All of the opening chords are only a step away from their neighbors and the main theme, which is built off of a tone's neighboring tones, is first heard in the viola.

While there is harmonic shifts and explorations of nearby modes, the overall 'key' of the first section does not fully change. E Dorian dominates the entire first section, stubborn and unwilling to budge.

When at last the key of D major is established, the mood of the piece changes. Suddenly traditional tonal harmony can be heard, and the tonal center is free to move. While the opening of the second section of the piece begins in D major, it quickly begins to ascend. First by half step to E♭, then up to F, and all the way back up to D again in a light-hearted manner. Where the first section of the piece is introspective and serious, the second section keeps a sense of humor throughout while still exploring the relationship of the step.

Once the second section has had it's fun, E Dorian returns along with the first section for an almost note for note repeat. Hence, the overall structure of the piece is binary as it only really contains two sections (the first is simply a repeat).

So, during the course of the work, the relationship of the step is explored in the melodies, the harmony, and the very structure of the piece itself.

While working on this piece I learned a great deal about the possibilities of this tense relationship of the second. The music here is composed of very closely linked harmoies and melodies resulting from this interval and yet because the two notes that make up this interval are so very different they lend a momentum and interest to the piece that would not have been as easy to achieve with other intervals.

Personally, I found it fascinating that two notes that have almost nothing in common could create music that ends up sounding so pleasing to the ear.

I hope you enjoy listening to this piece as much as I have enjoyed composing it.

Raymond Weiss - 11/22/2015

-A Note on the Cover-

The cover is Elisabeth Vigee-Le Brun's self-portrait (1790), depicting the artist at her easel.

Born in Paris on 16 April 1755, Marie-Louise-Élisabeth Vigée was the daughter of a portraitist and fan painter, Louis Vigée, from whom she received her first instruction.

By the time she was in her early teens, Louise Élisabeth was painting portraits professionally. After her studio was seized for her practicing without a license, she applied to the Académie de Saint Luc, which unwittingly exhibited her works in their Salon. In 1774, she was made a member of the Académie.

The challenges in her life included various sexual scandals and 'she was forced to exploit her personal charm to get her art education'. For the most part she contrived to silence the gossips by her adroit manipulation of royal patronage and her strict attention to the appearances of propriety.

In 1787, she caused a minor public scandal with a self-portrait, exhibited the same year, in which she was shown smiling open-mouthed – in contravention of painting conventions going back to antiquity.

As her career blossomed, was invited to the Palace of Versailles granted patronage by Marie Antoinette. So pleased was the queen that during a period of six years, Vigée Le Brun would paint more than thirty portraits of the queen and her family, leading to her being commonly viewed as the official portraitist of Marie Antoinette.

After the arrest of the royal family during the French Revolution, Vigée Le Brun fled France with her young daughter Julie. She lived and worked for some years in Italy, Austria, and Russia, where her experience in dealing with an aristocratic clientele was still useful. In Rome, her paintings met with great critical acclaim and she was elected to the Roman Accademia di San Luca.

After a sustained campaign by her ex-husband to have her name removed from the list of counter-revolutionary émigrés, Vigée Le Brun was finally able to return to France during the reign of Emperor Napoleon I.

Her tombstone epitaph states "Ici, enfin, je repose…" (Here, at last, I rest…).

-A Note on Electronic Accompaniment-

This piece, although complete as it appears here in the score, is meant to be played with an additional element; electronic accompaniment.

This element does not require an additional player (in fact, it is not required to be a part of the piece in a literal sense), so it is not indicated by any marks in the score.

During the compositional process I pictured the place where this piece may one day be performed, and I thought what a fitting venue given the nature of the piece itself; a modern coffee house.

Once the coffee house was a social venue, where people could enjoy their morning or afternoon brew surrounded by stressed college kids and busy working people.

Now, these places are almost as private as one's own personal study. Everyone is absorbed in their smart phone, tablet, or laptop and very little actual socializing is being done in these places anymore.

What other venue would offer such duality? This is a place where one can be simultaneously in a public place surrounded by people and at the same time compeltely absorbed in their own private world oblivous to everyone around them.

The noises of distant conversations and familiar clinks of glass are meant to be the representation of the social aspect of a modern coffee house (as in, the social aspect is now only a background part of being at a coffee house). The music, played so that every note can still be heard over the coffee house noises even at the softest volumes, is meant to be the private world of a stressed college student engrossed in their laptop or phone - partially aware of what is going on around them but paying the absolute minimum amount of attention necessary to still function in society.

In any recording of this piece, this background noise must be present to give the piece it's full effect. Whether by electronic means or a recording of a performance.

I believe that in most circumstances of an actual performance, this electronic accompaniment is not necessary, so long as the audiece is as self-absorbed as I expect.

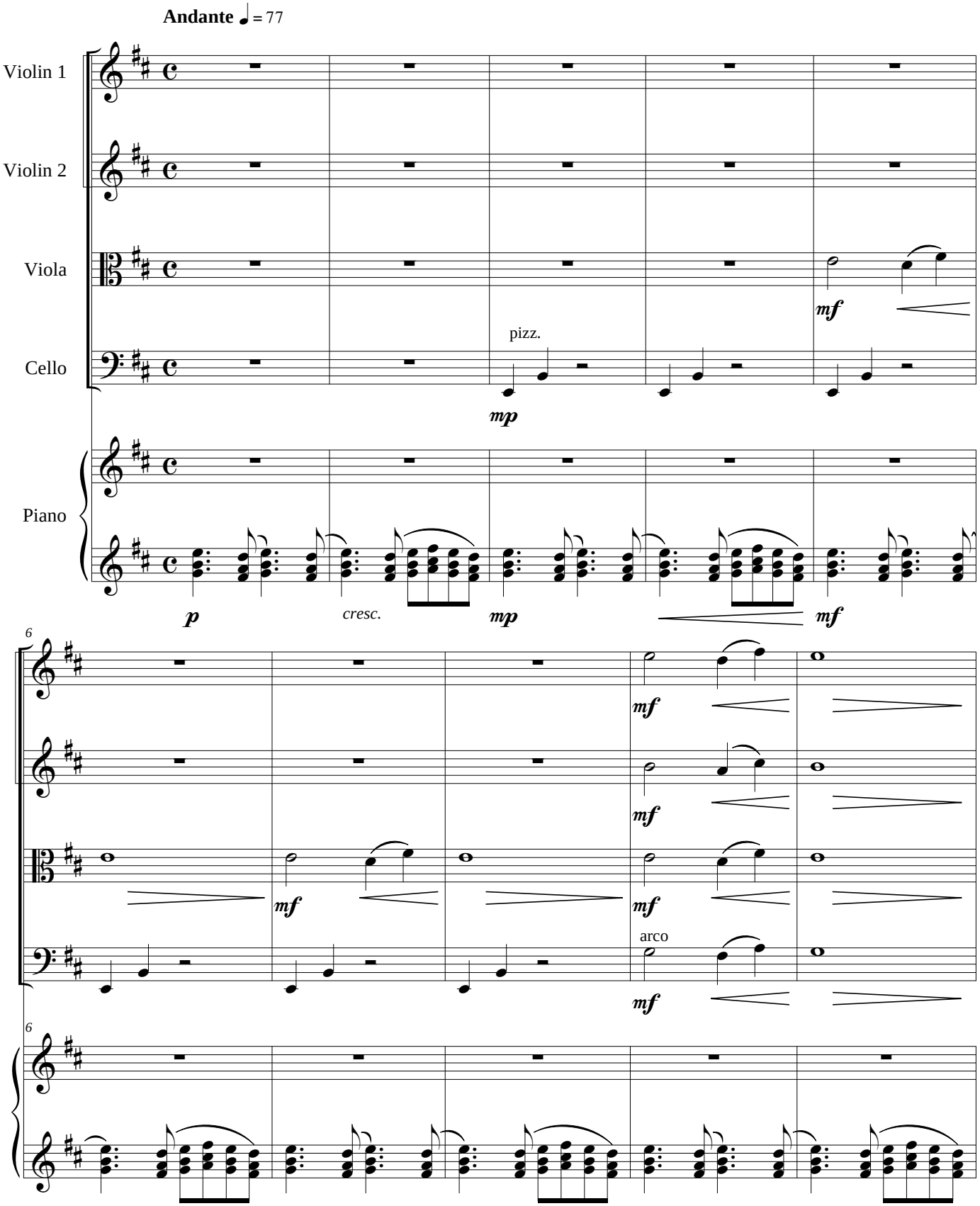
"For a young Queen"

Piano Quintet

"Queen"

Score

Raymond Weiss



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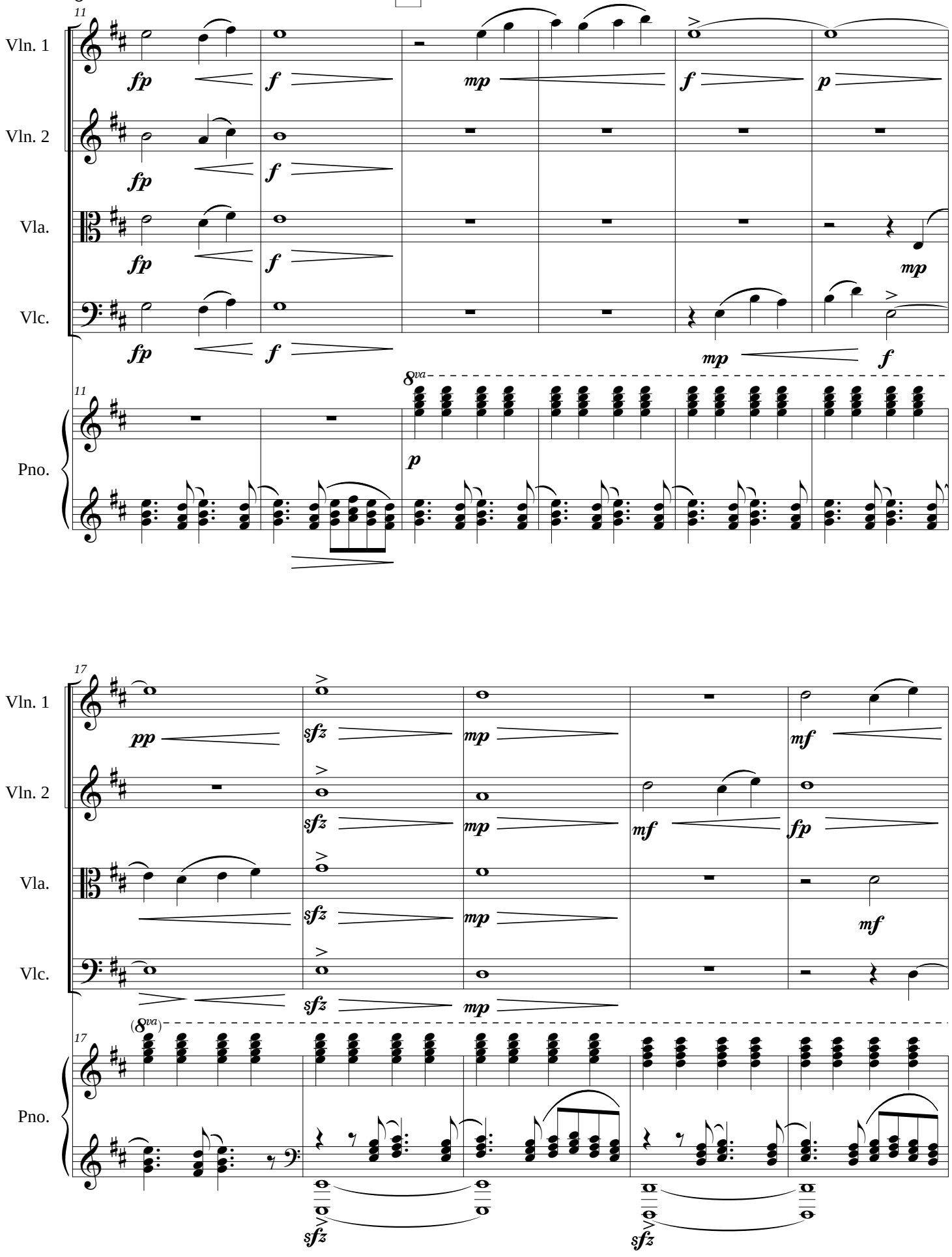
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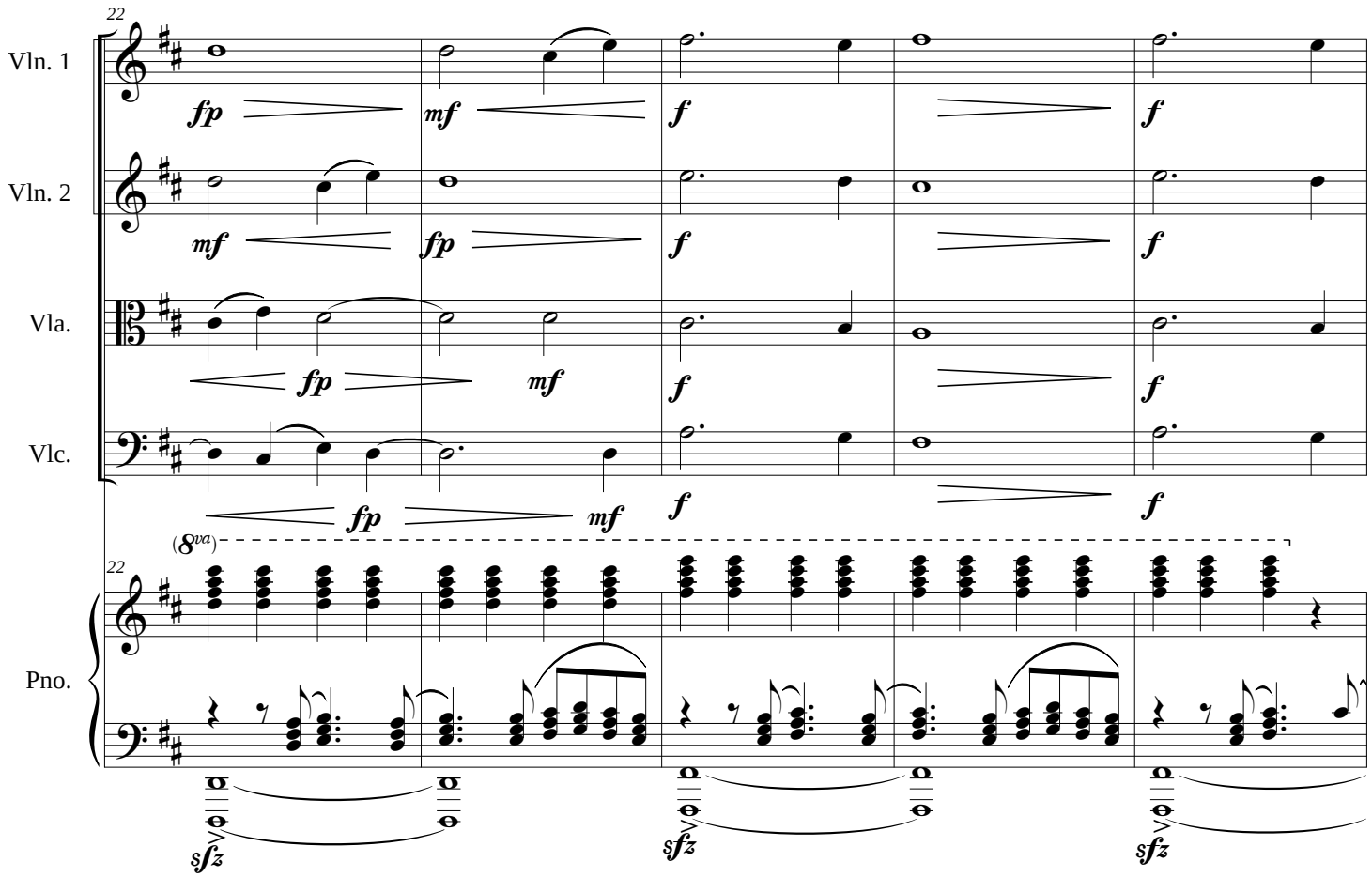
8va
p
17
pp
sfz
mp
mf
fp
(8va)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Pno.
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f
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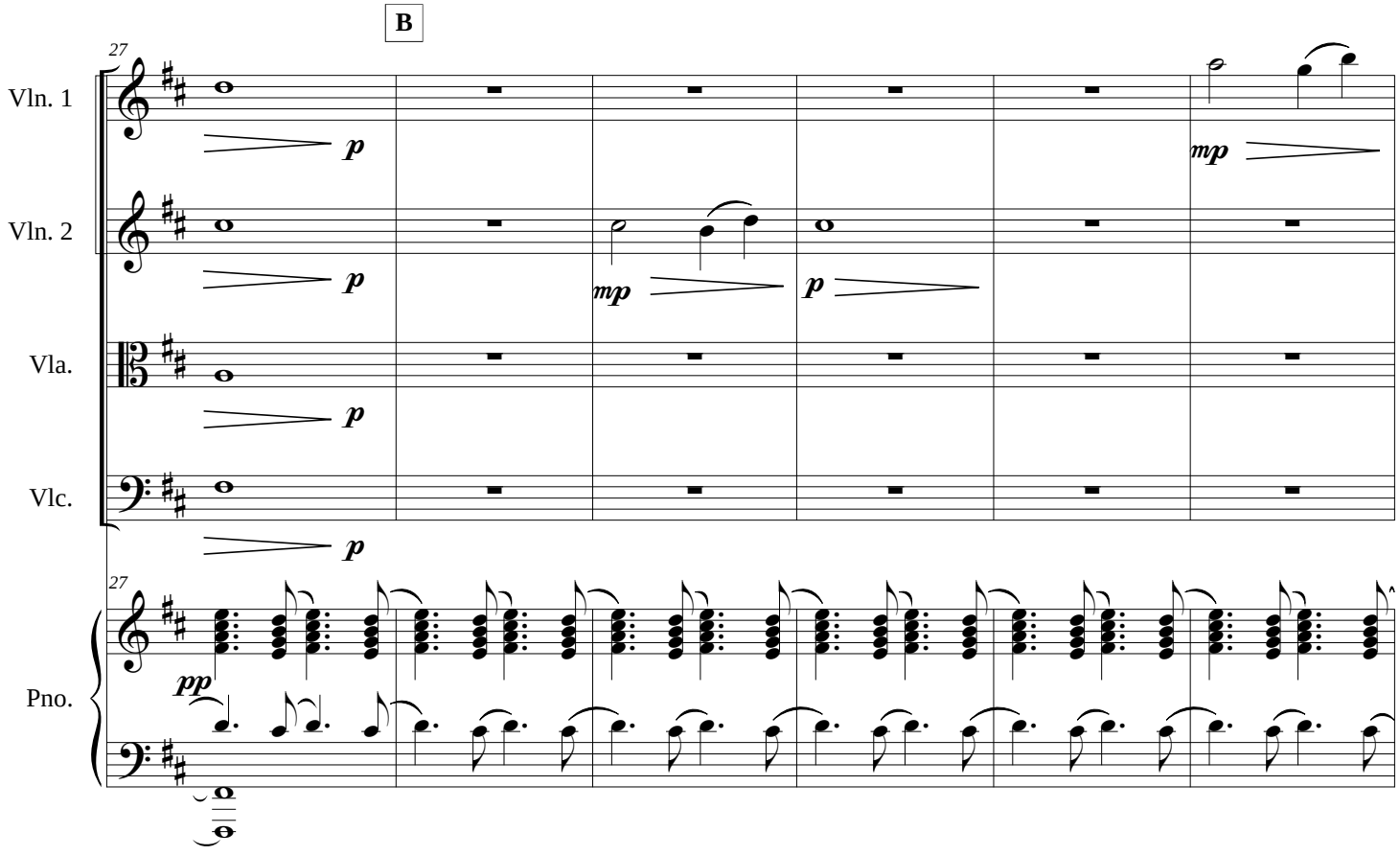
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mp
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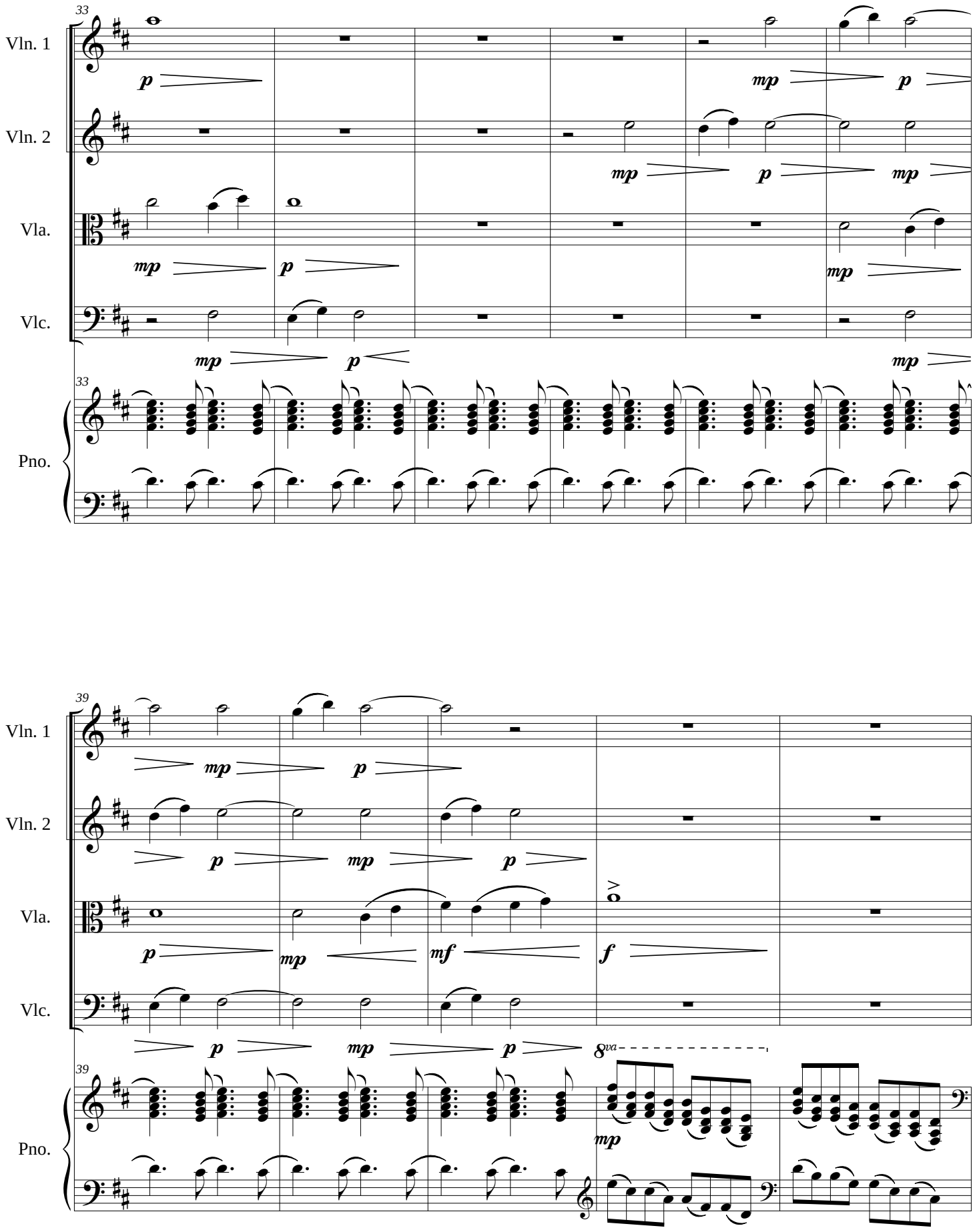
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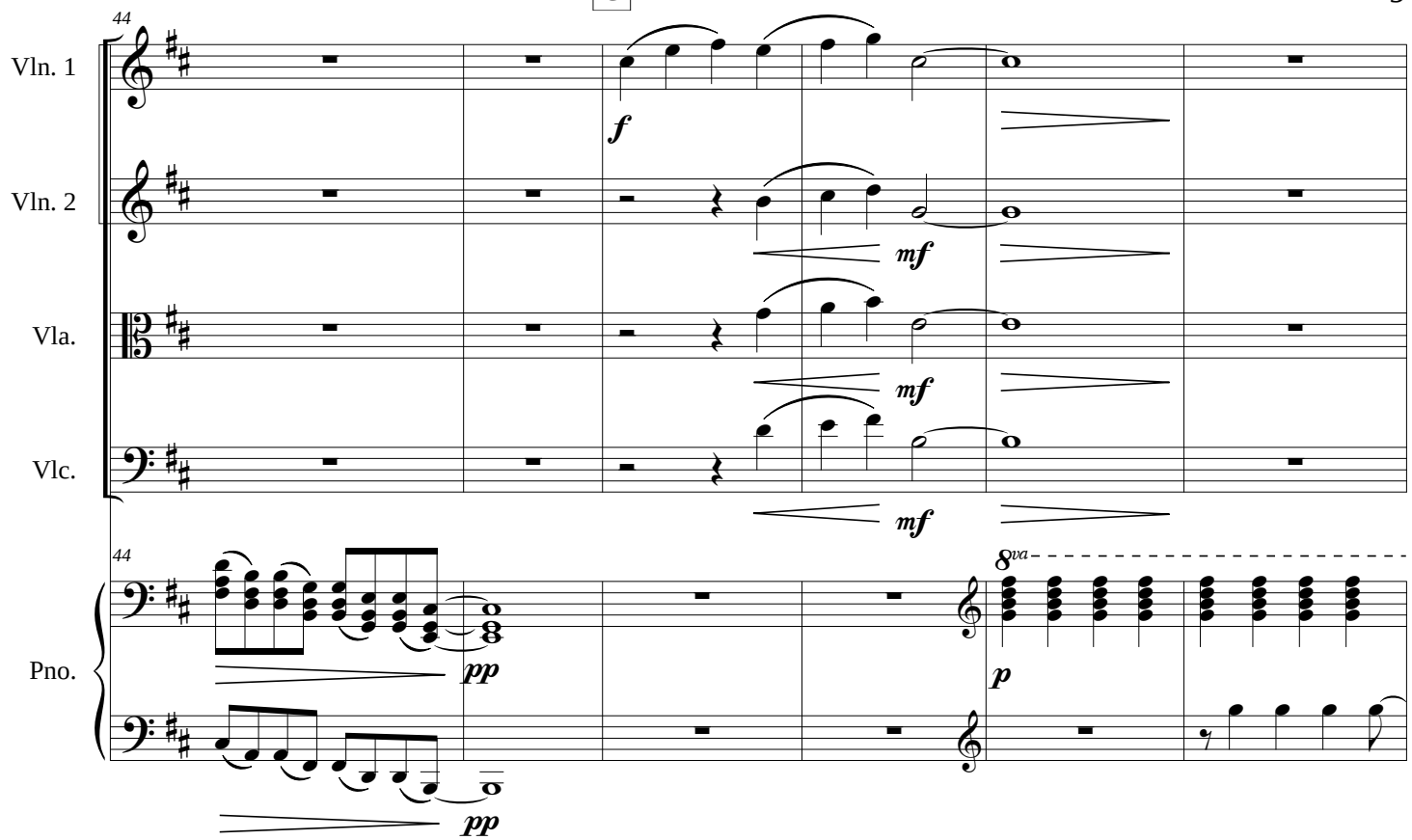
f
8va

C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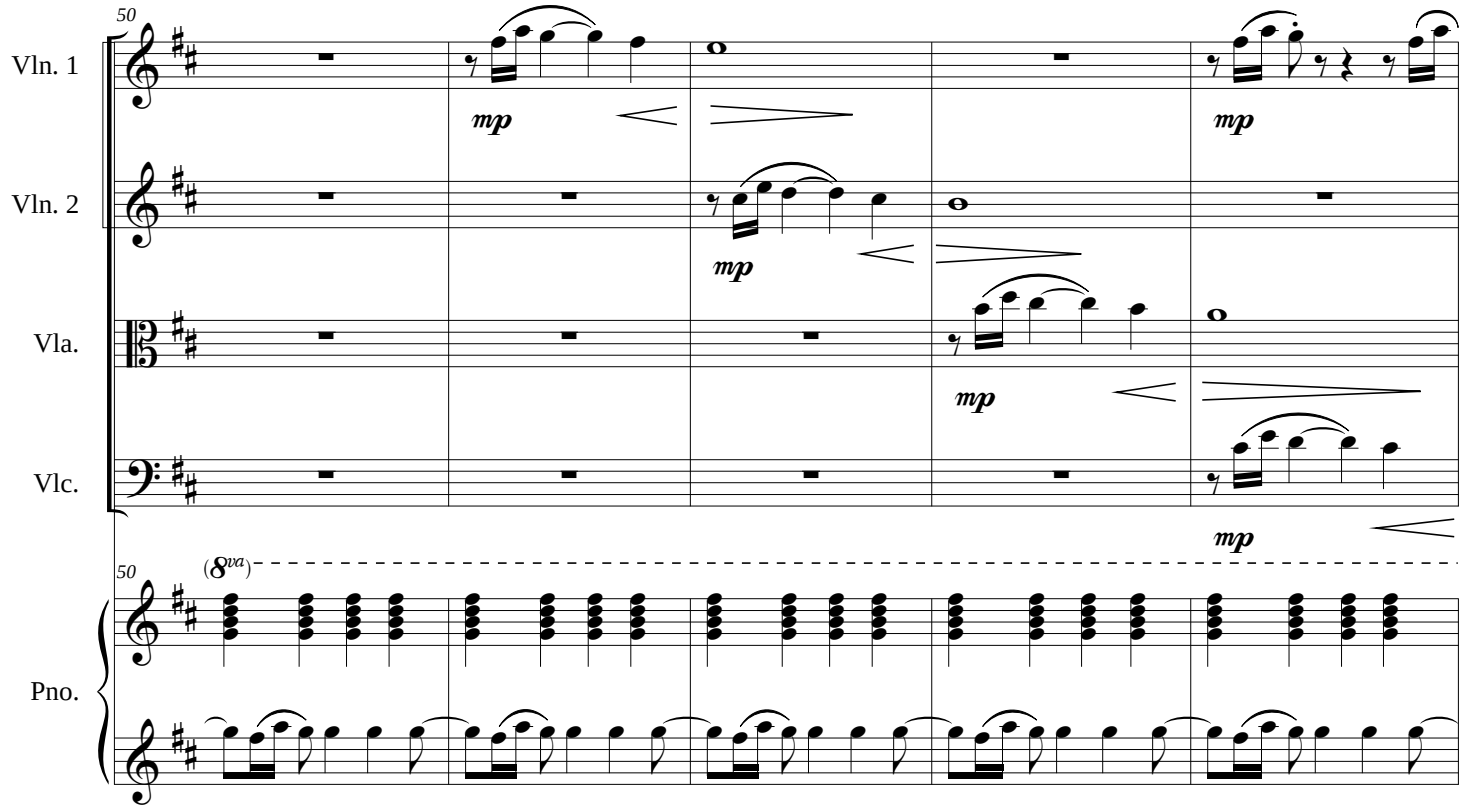
Pno.
f
mf
mf
mf
pp
pp
8va
p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Vlc.
Pno.
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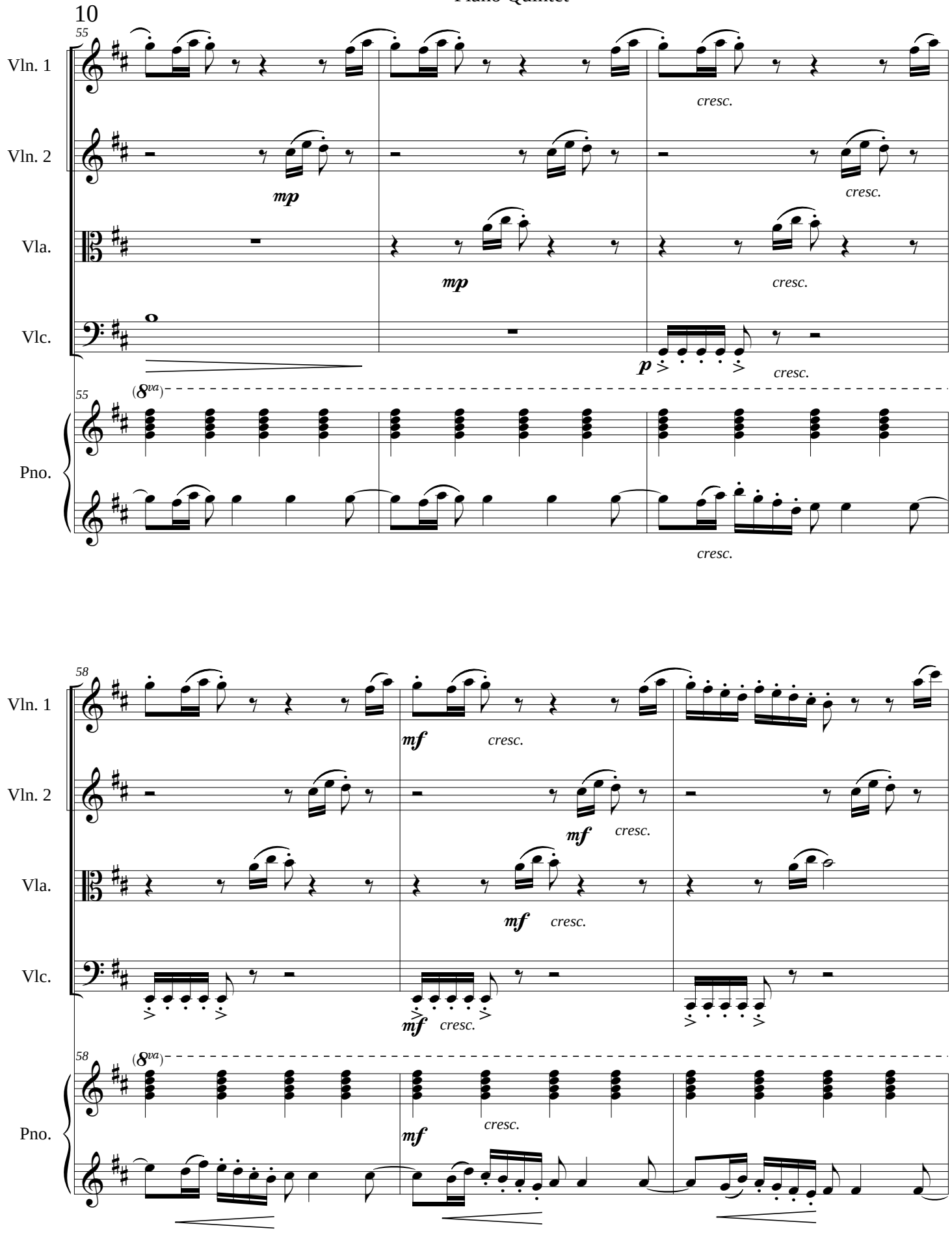
mp
mp
mp
(8va)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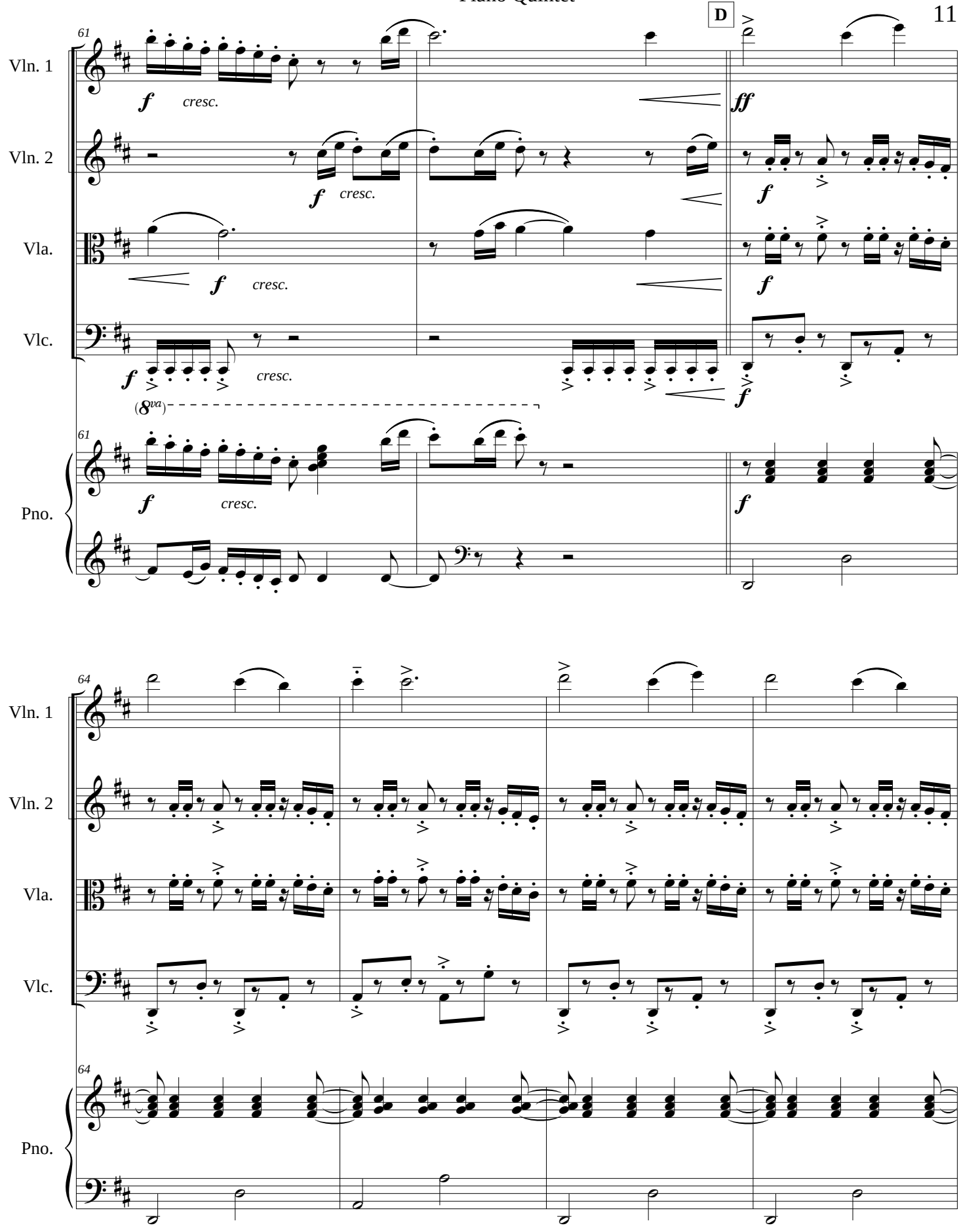
Vlc.
Pno.
mp
cresc.
p
(8va)
58
mf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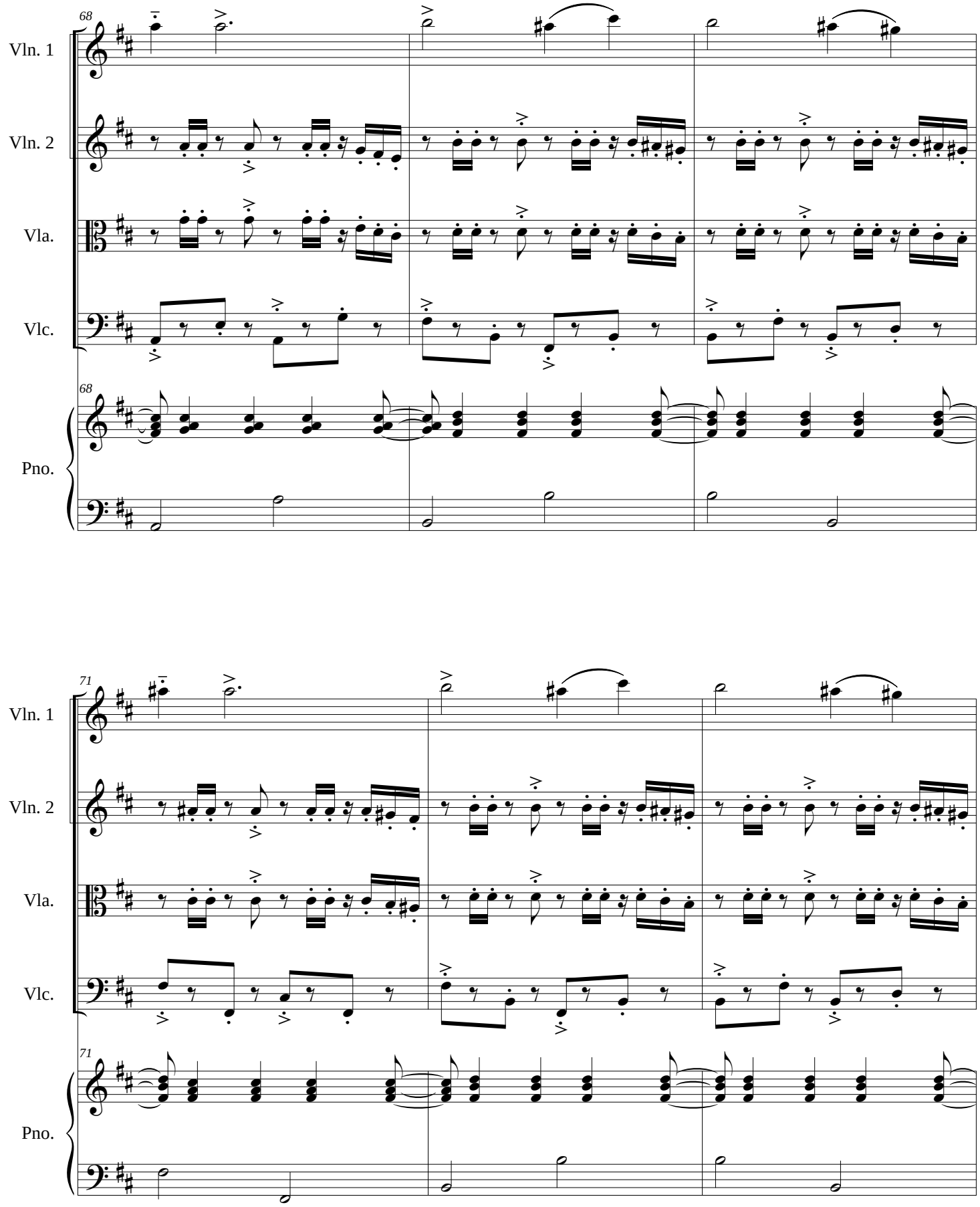
ff
(8va)
64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Vlc.
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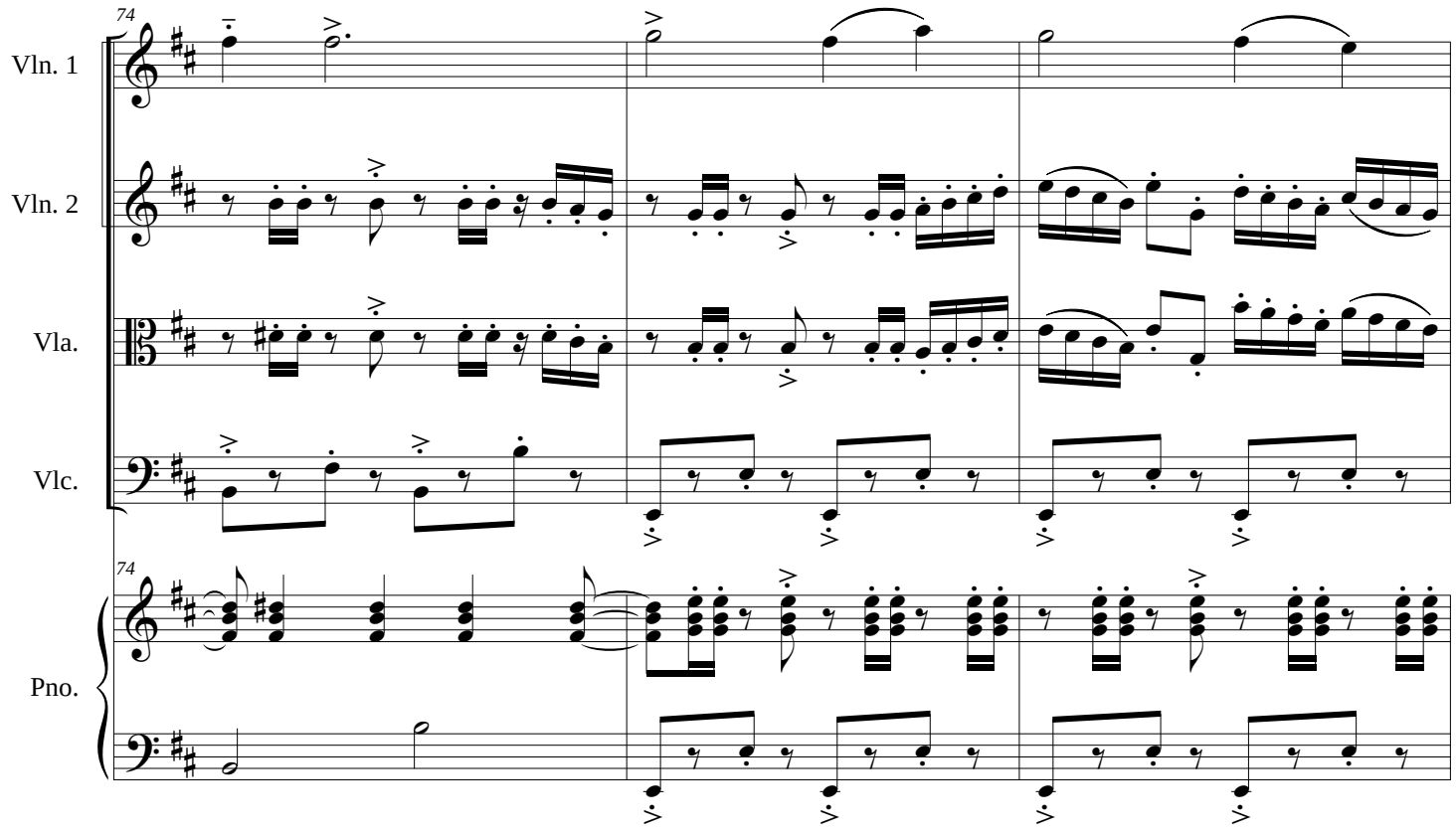
Pno.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74
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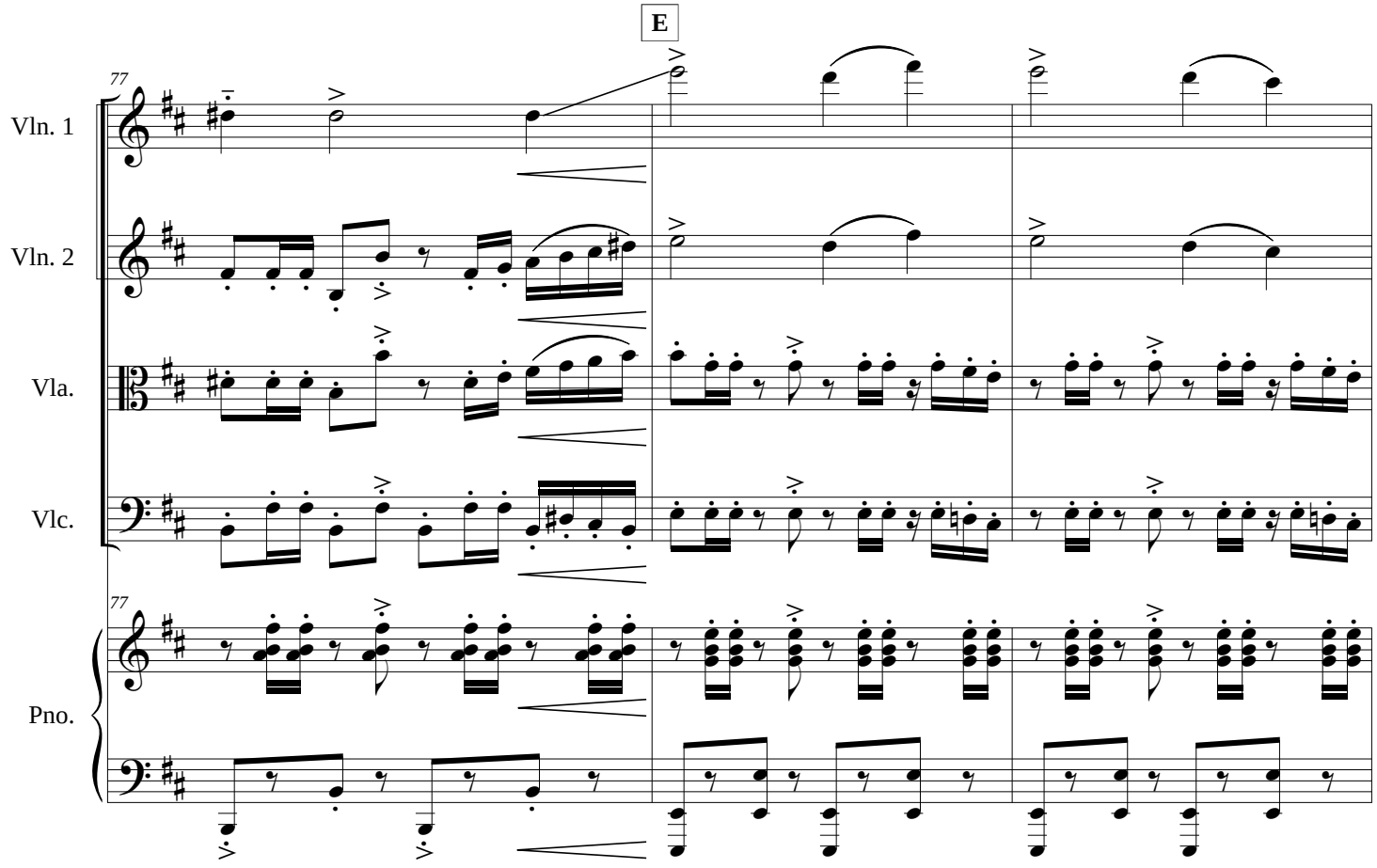
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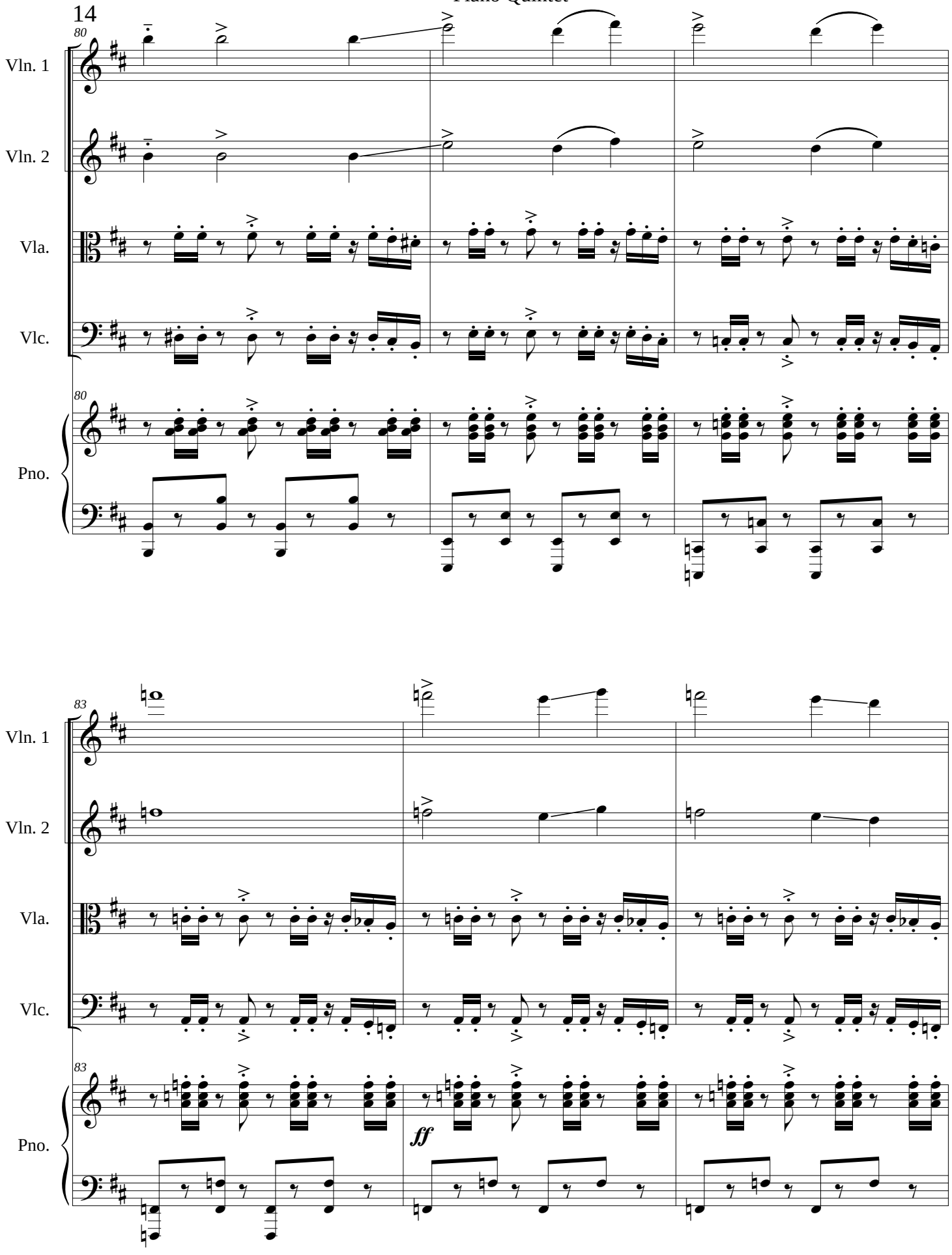
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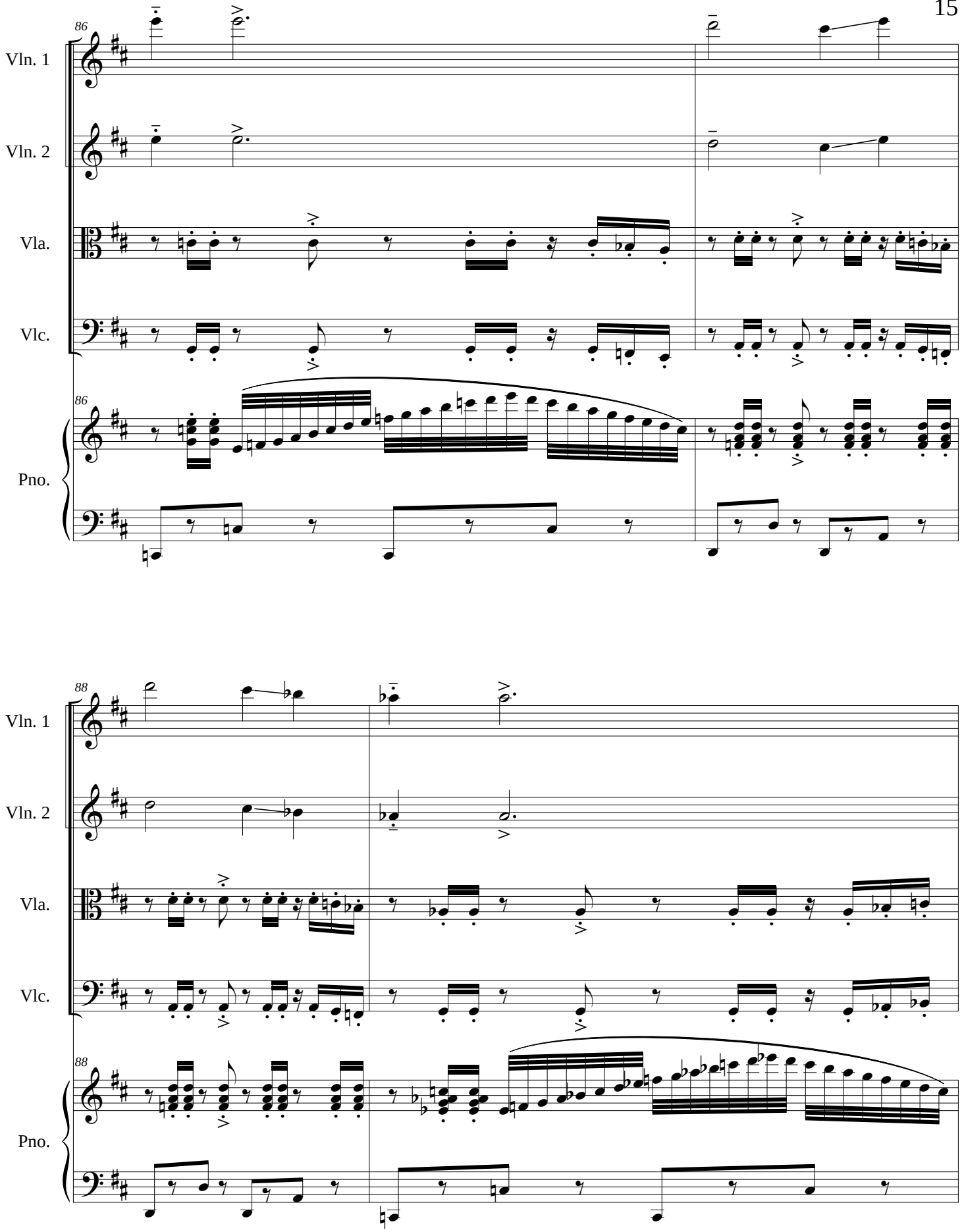
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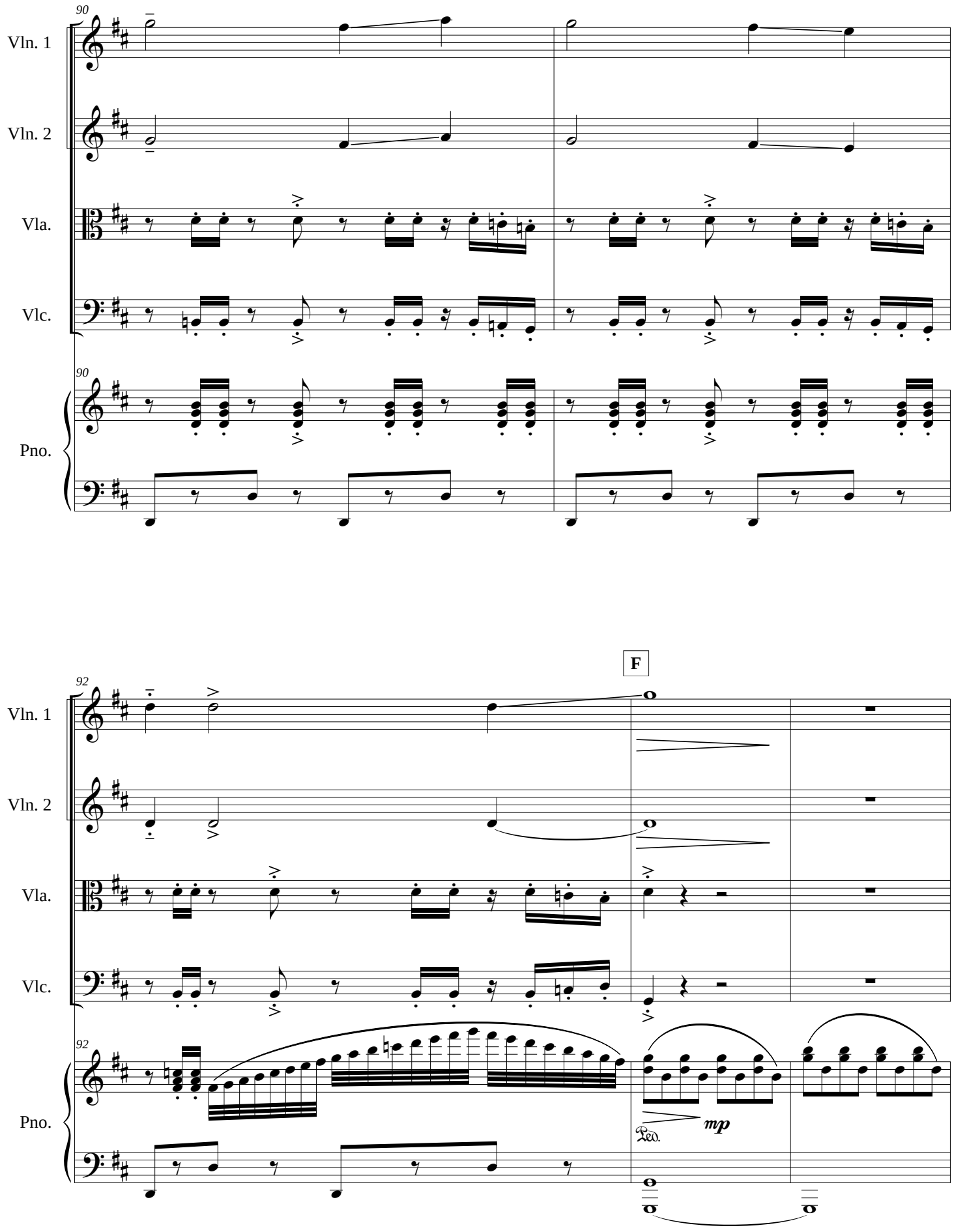
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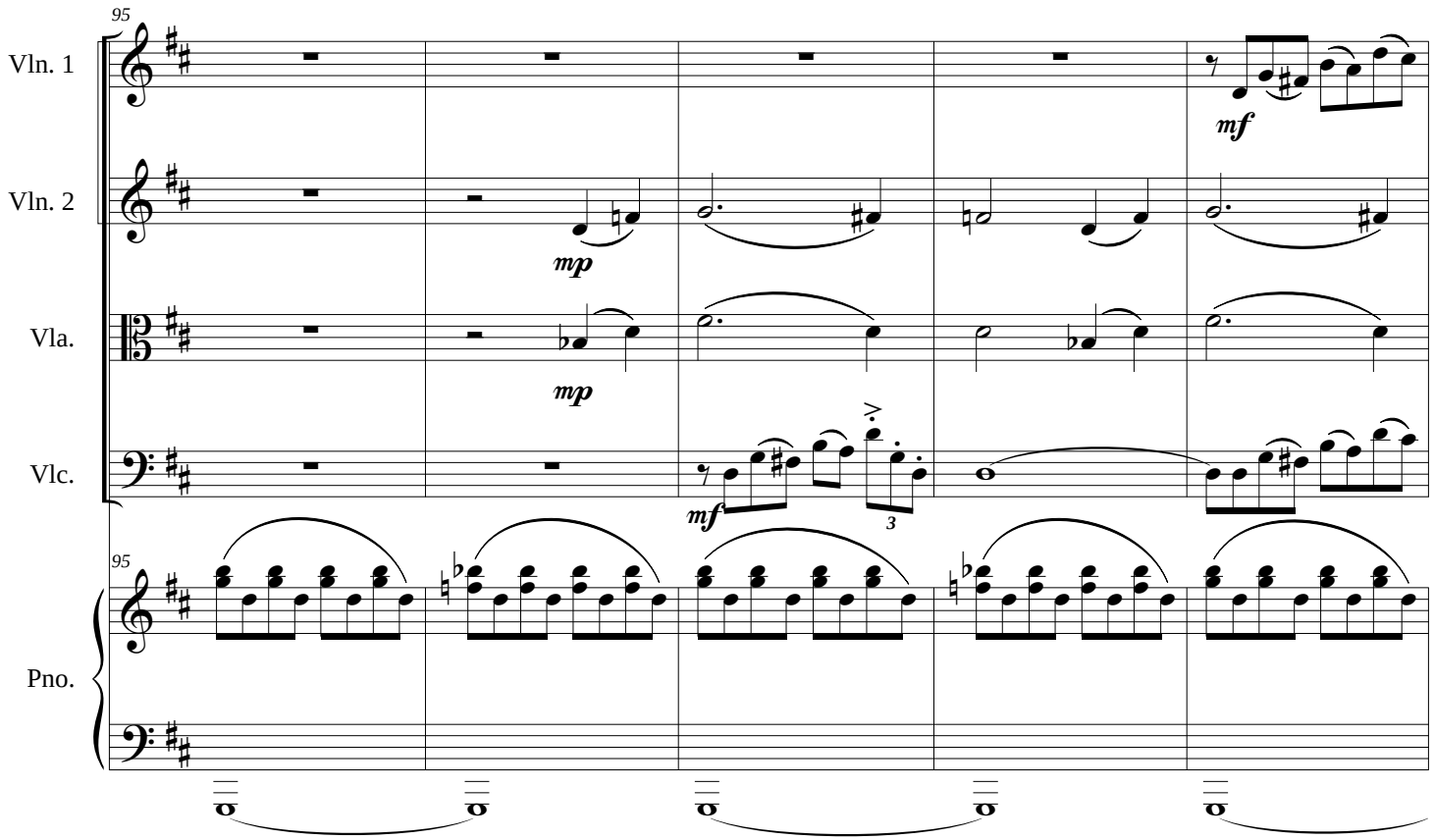
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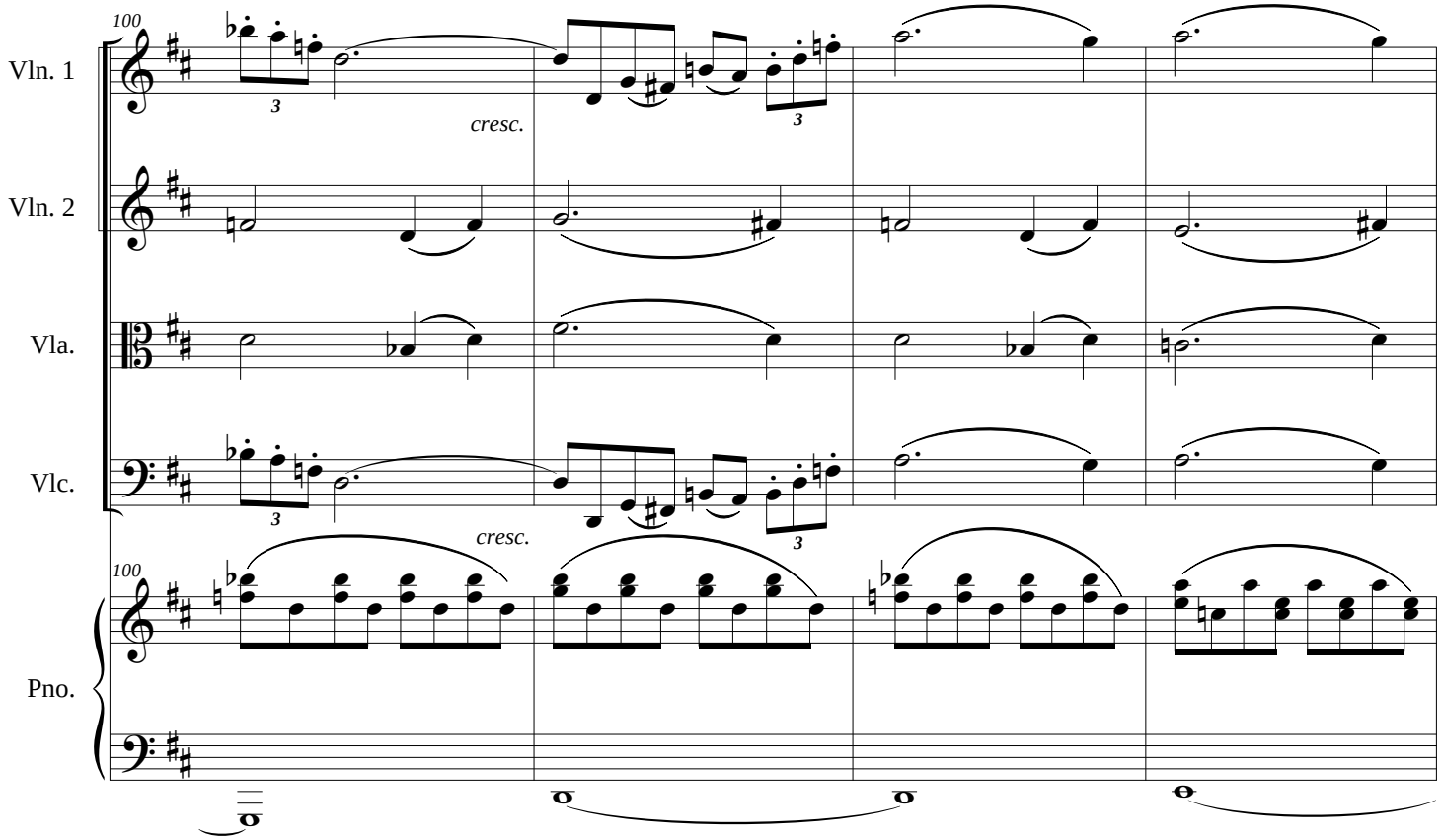
95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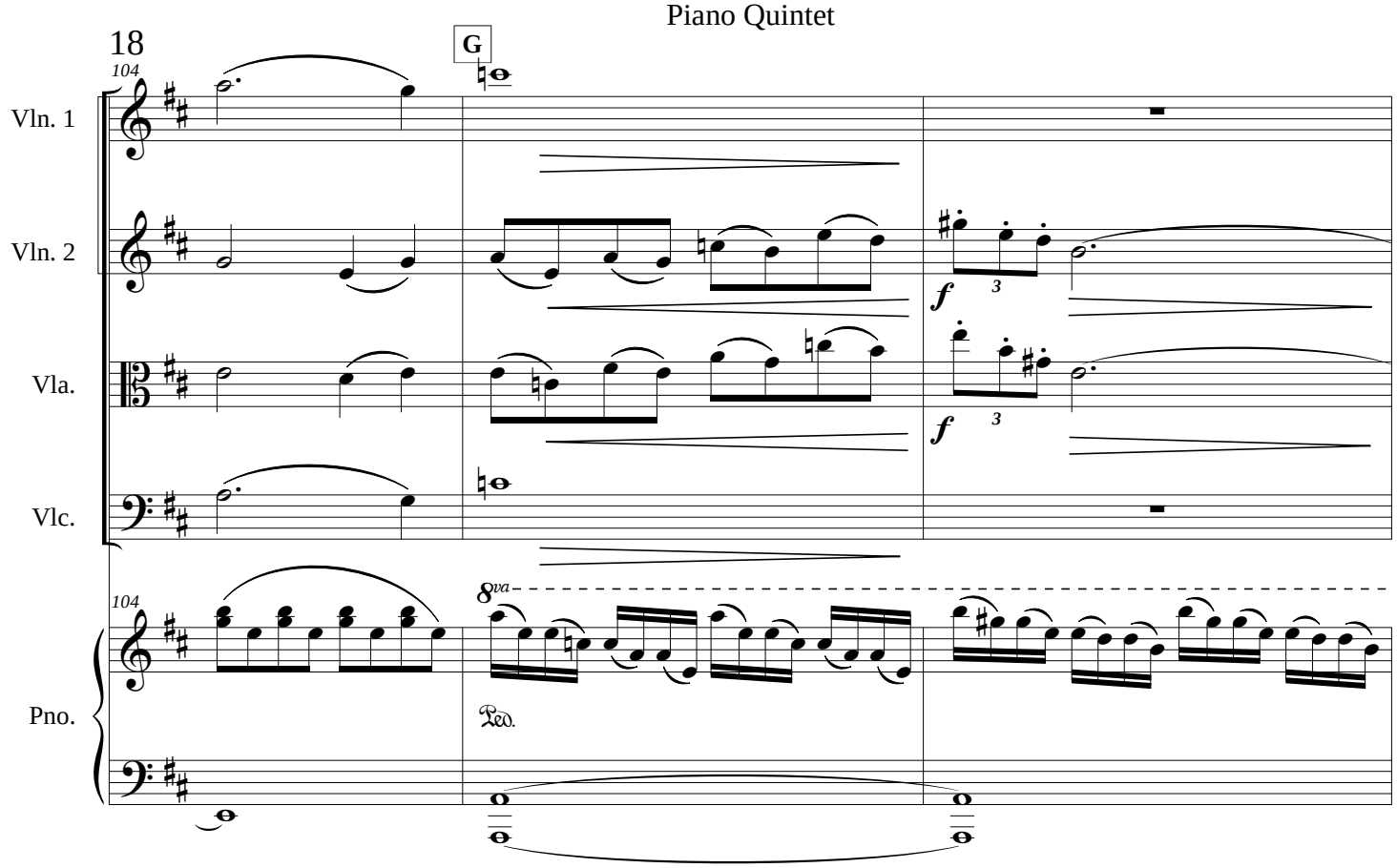
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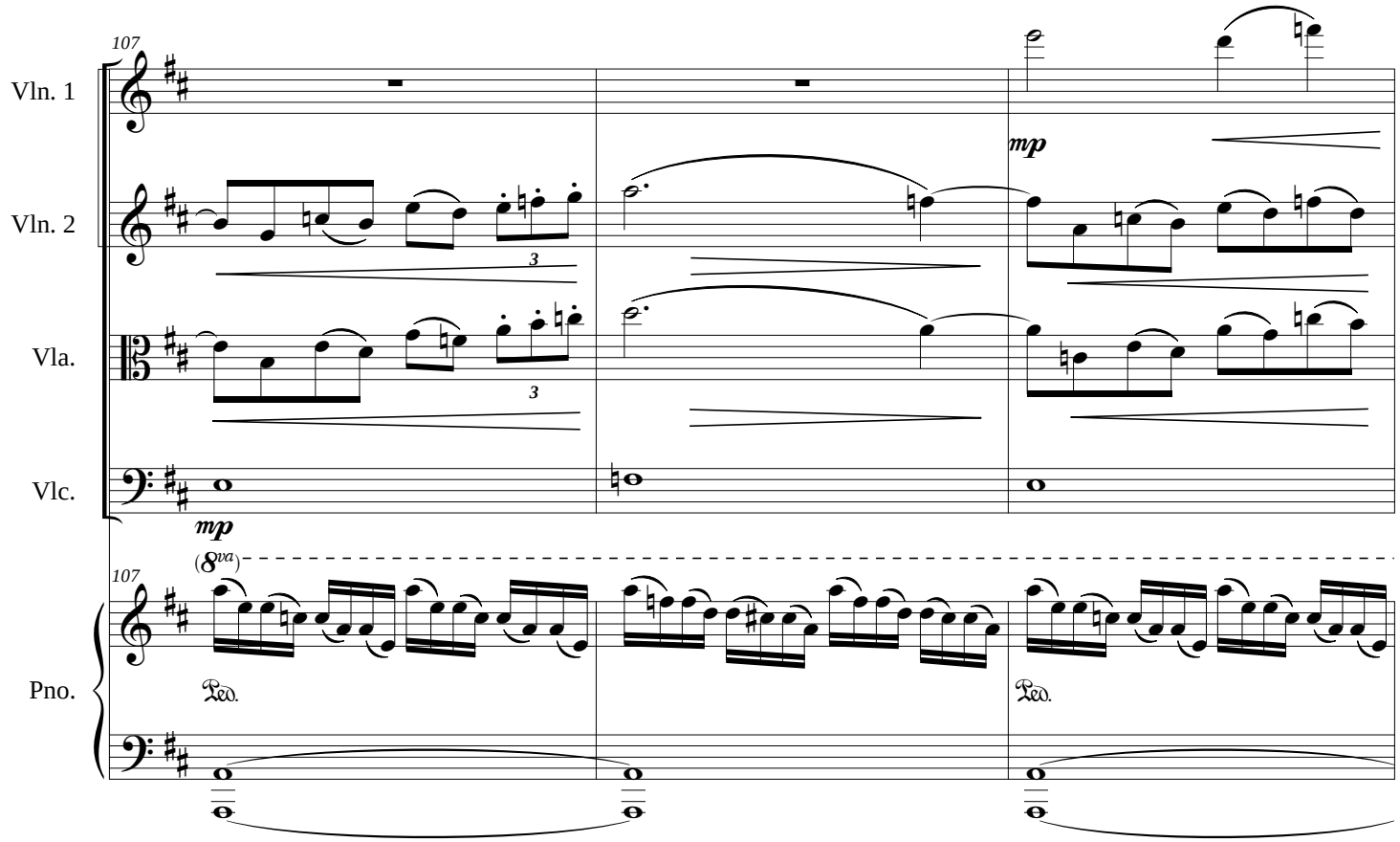
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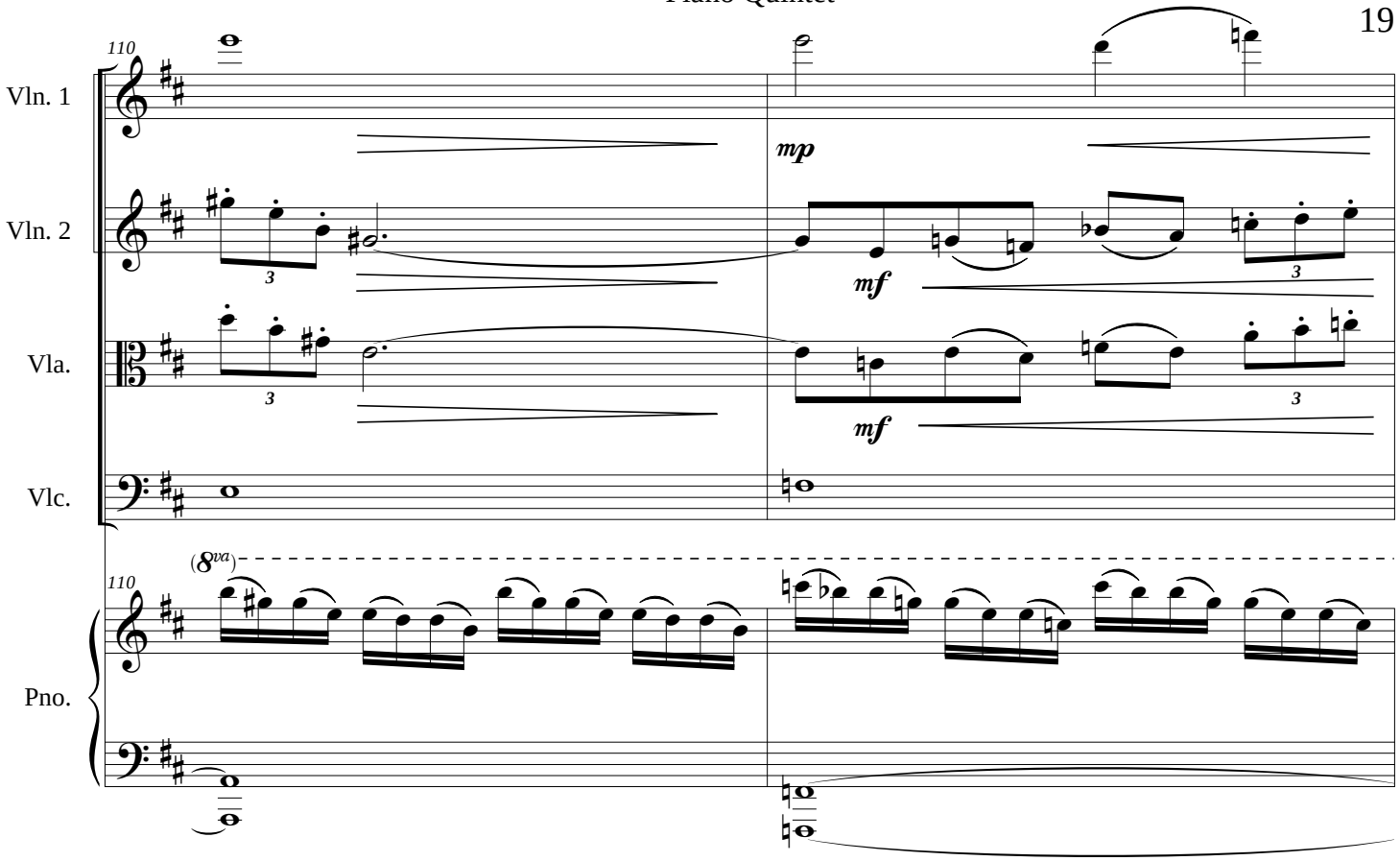
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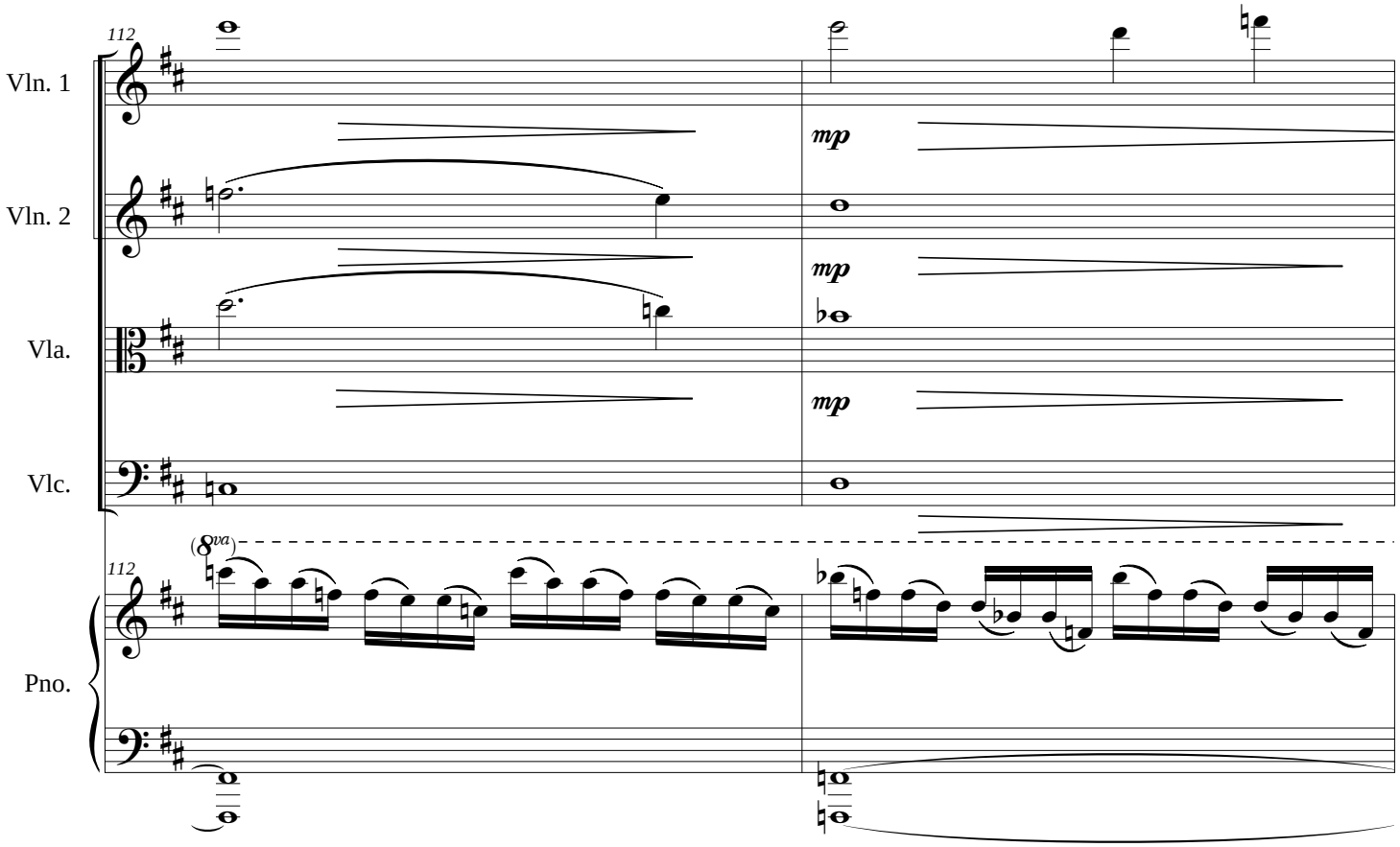
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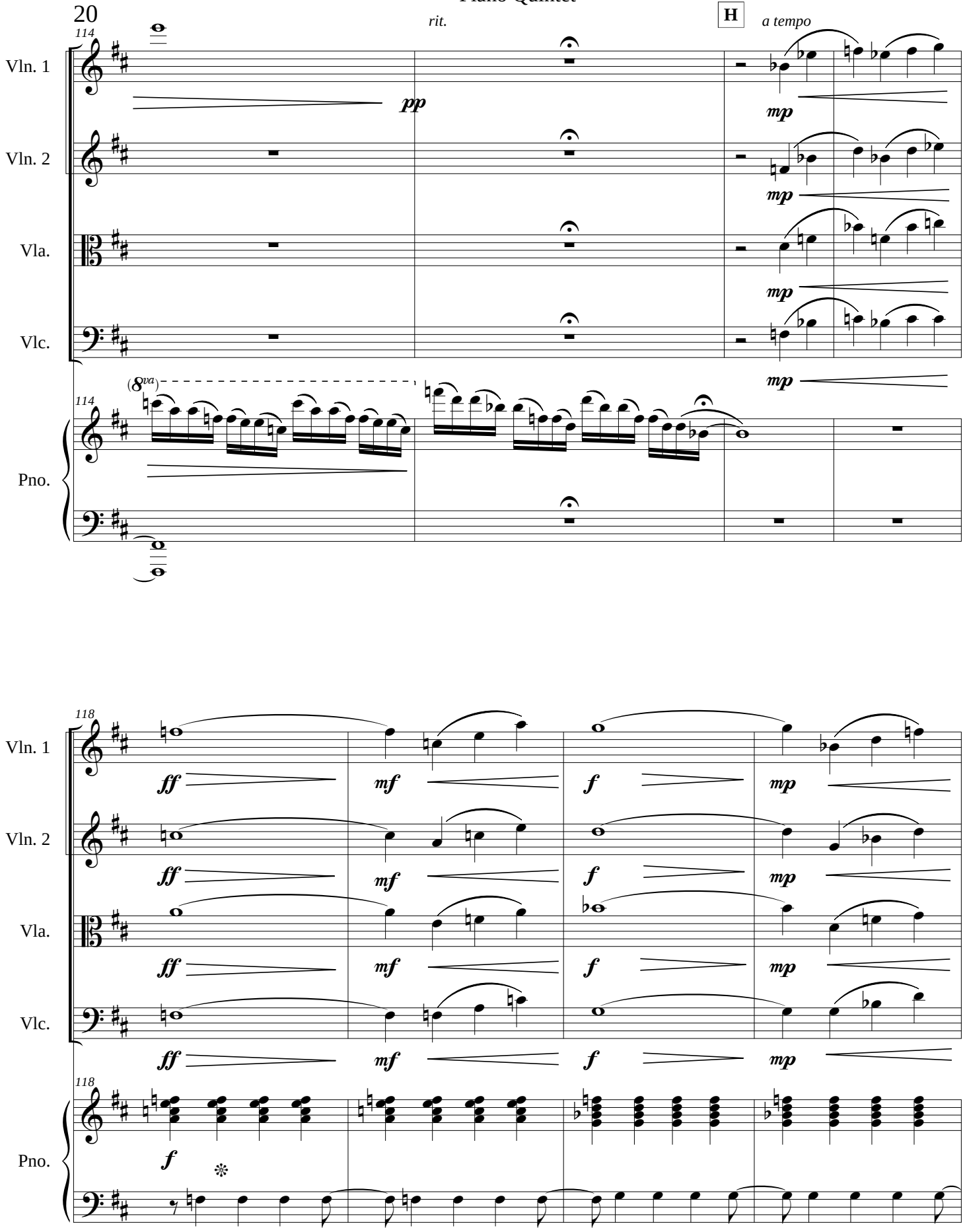
mp
(8va)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mp
(8va)
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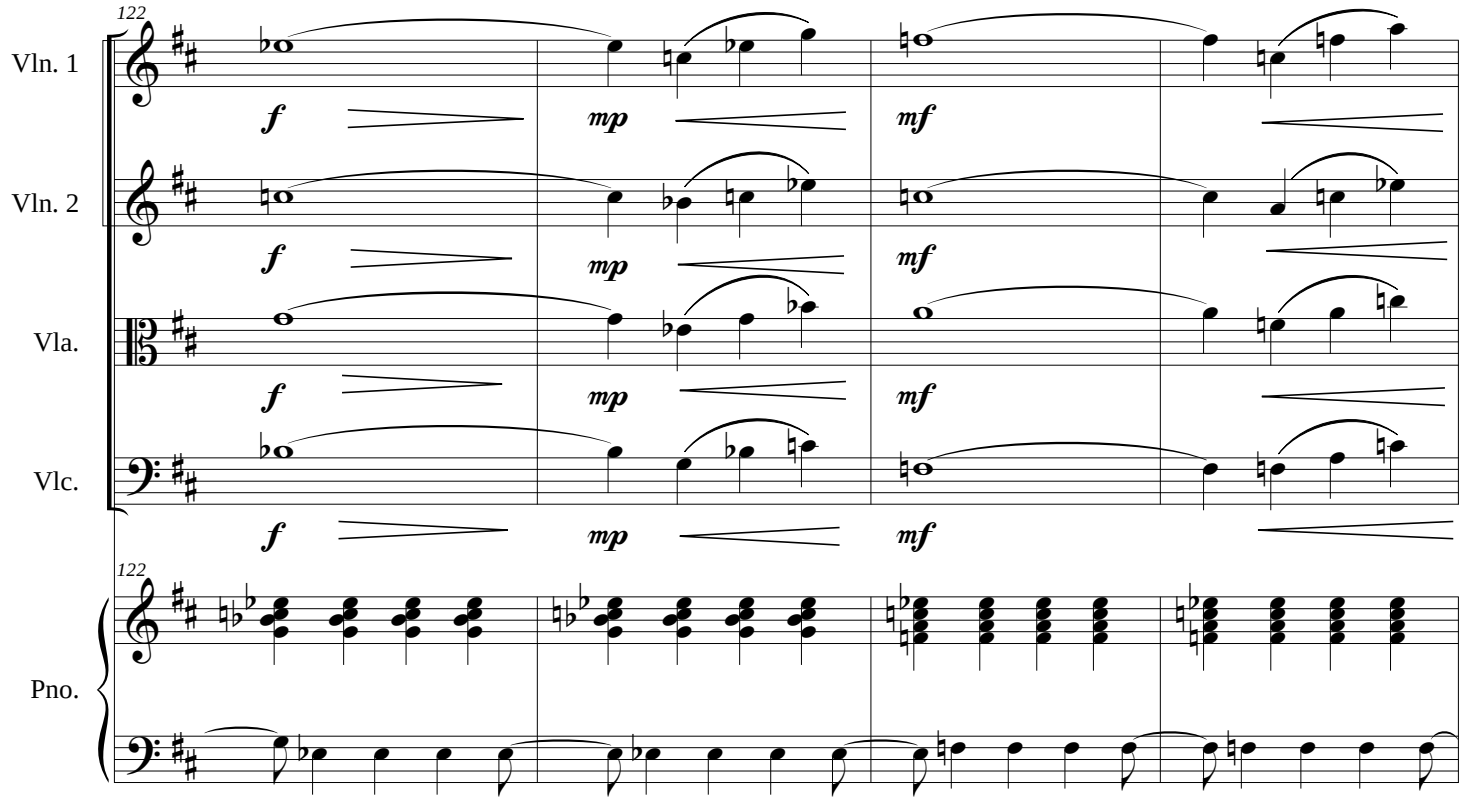
Pno.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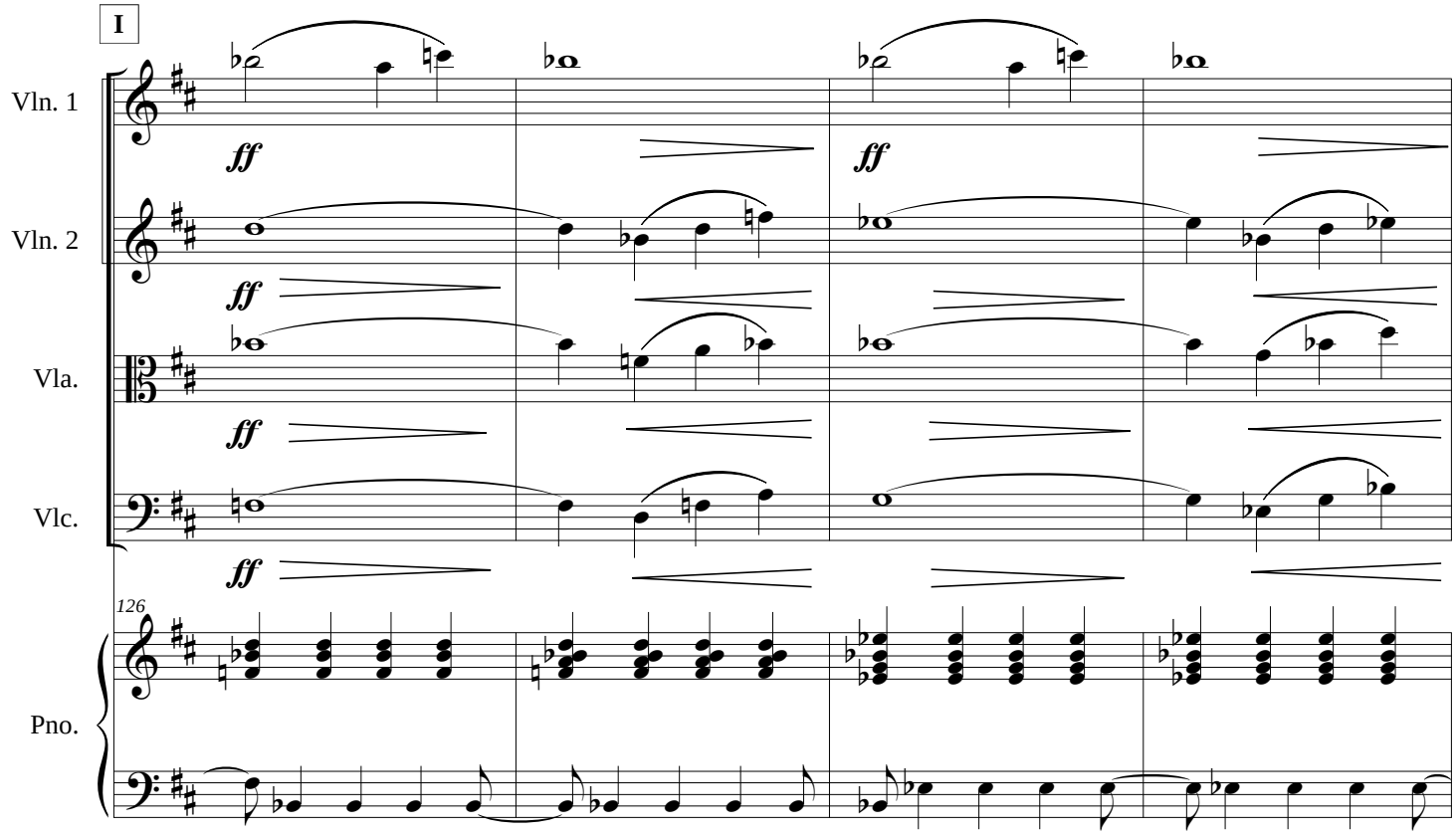
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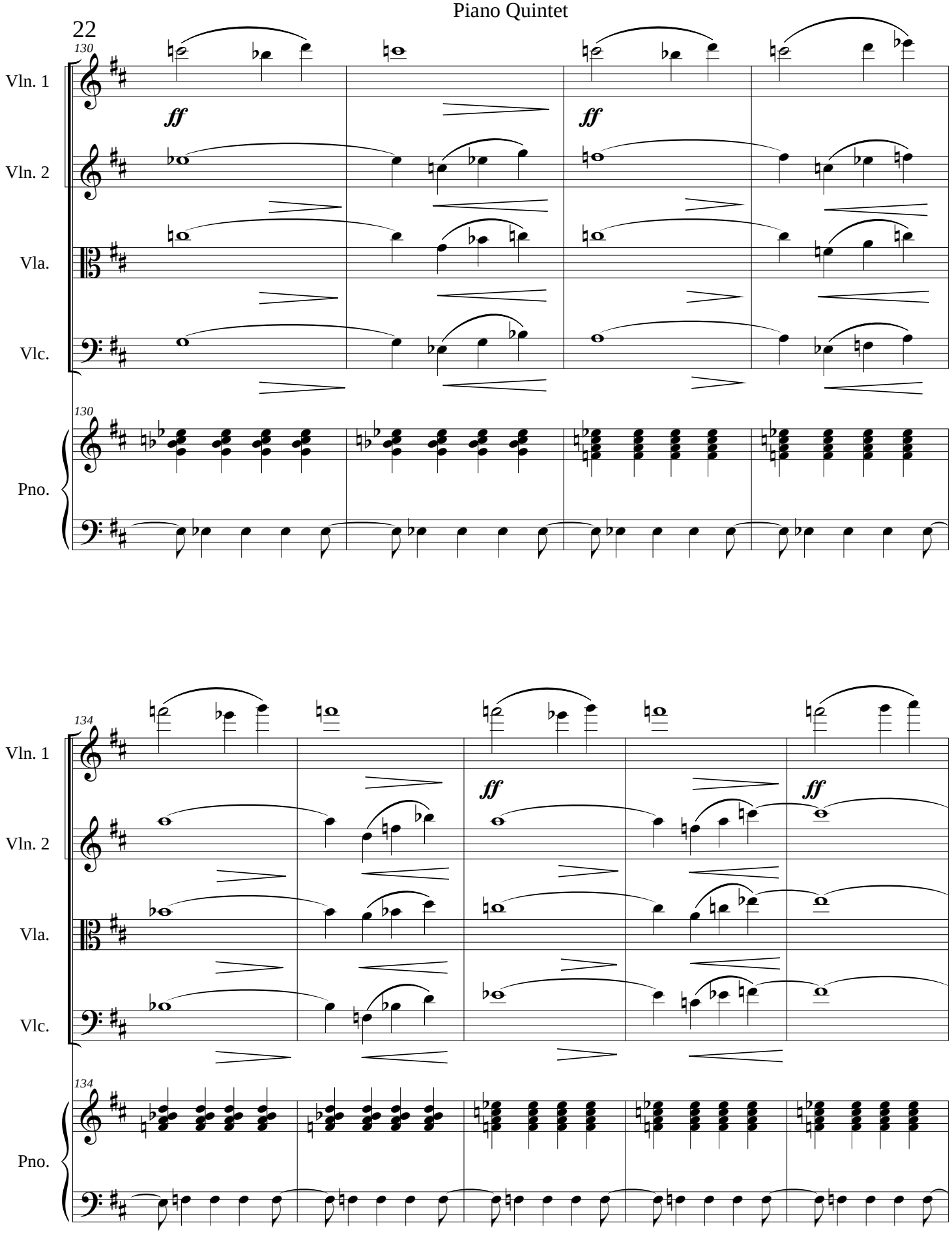
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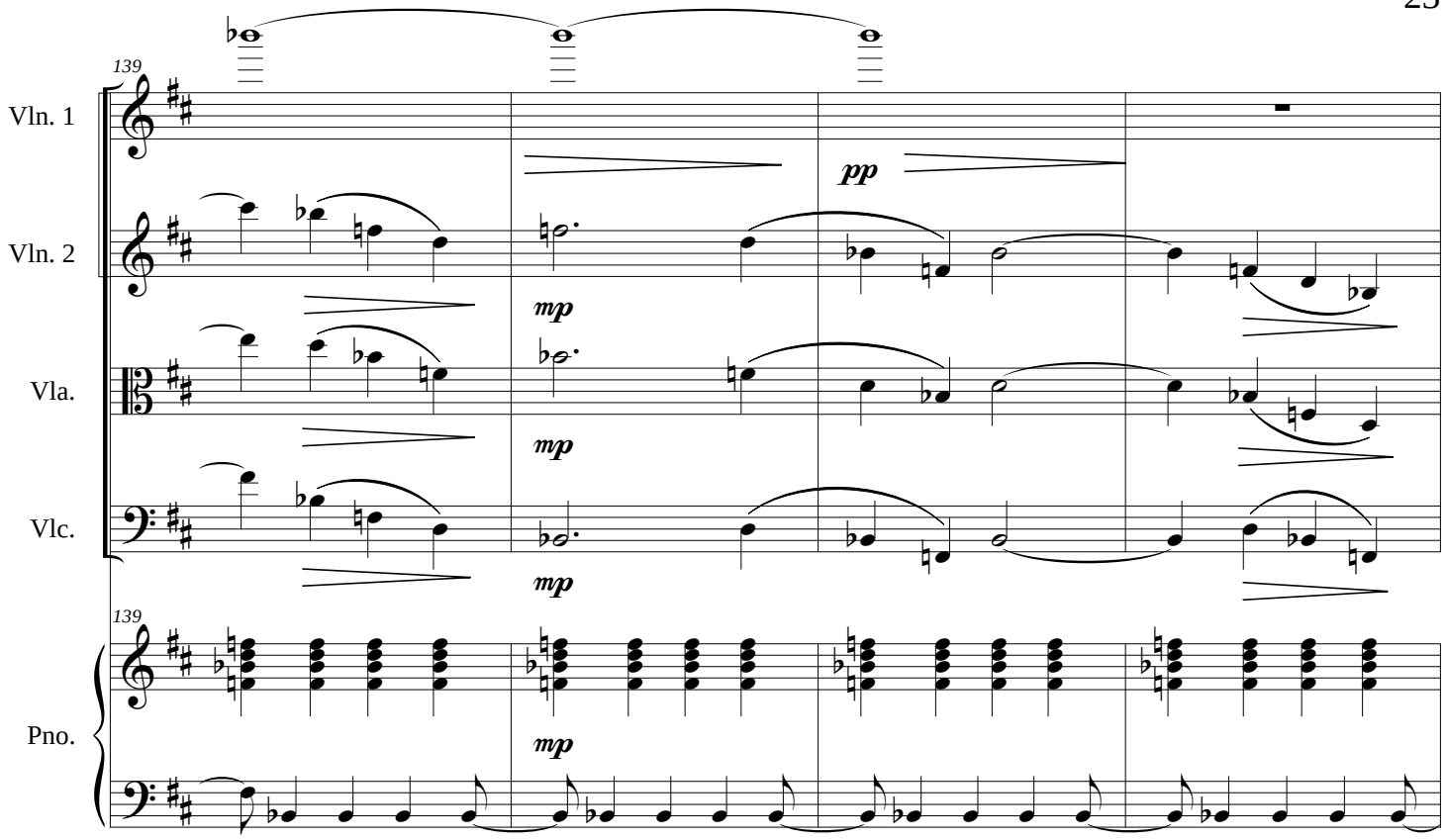
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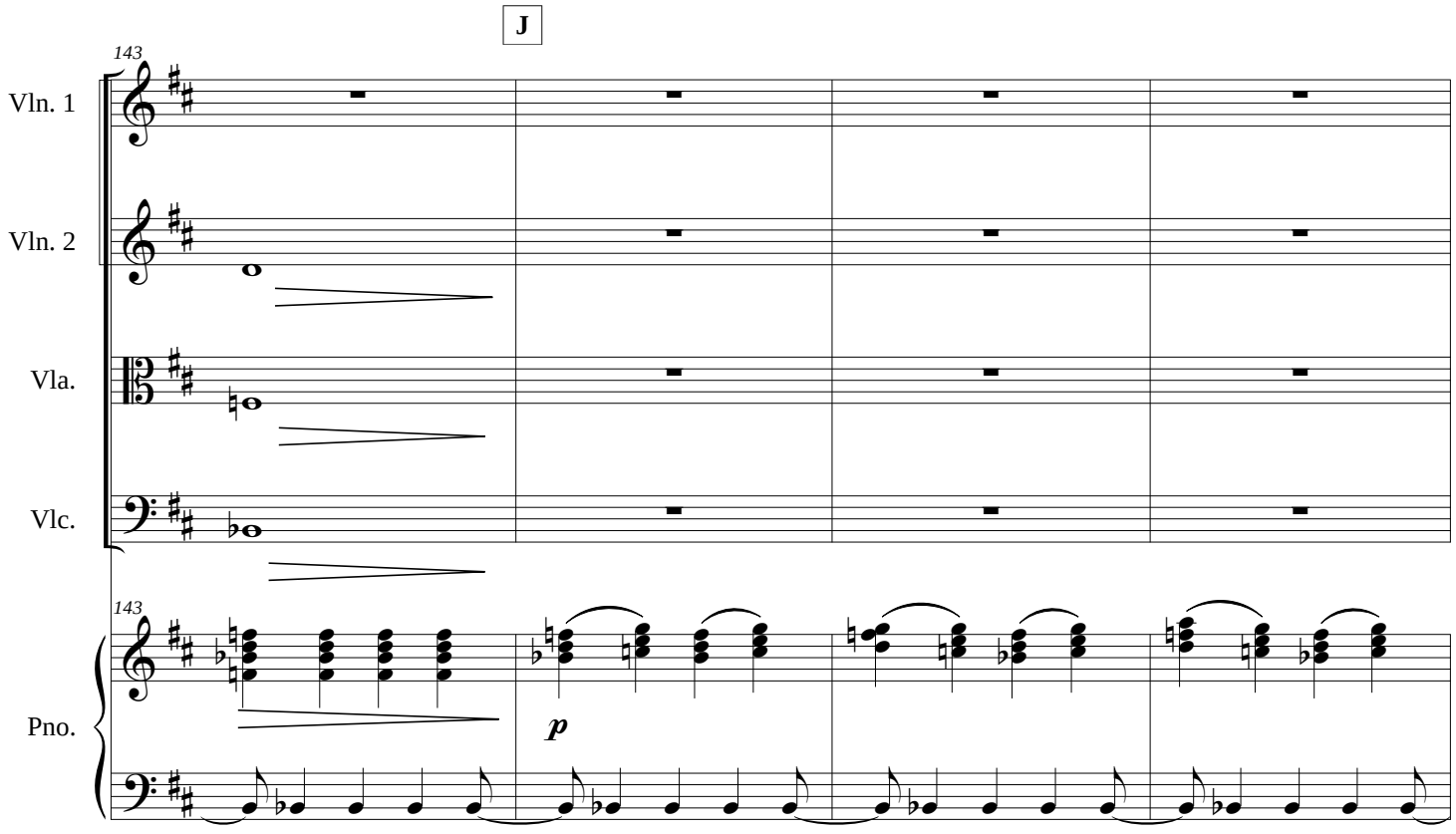
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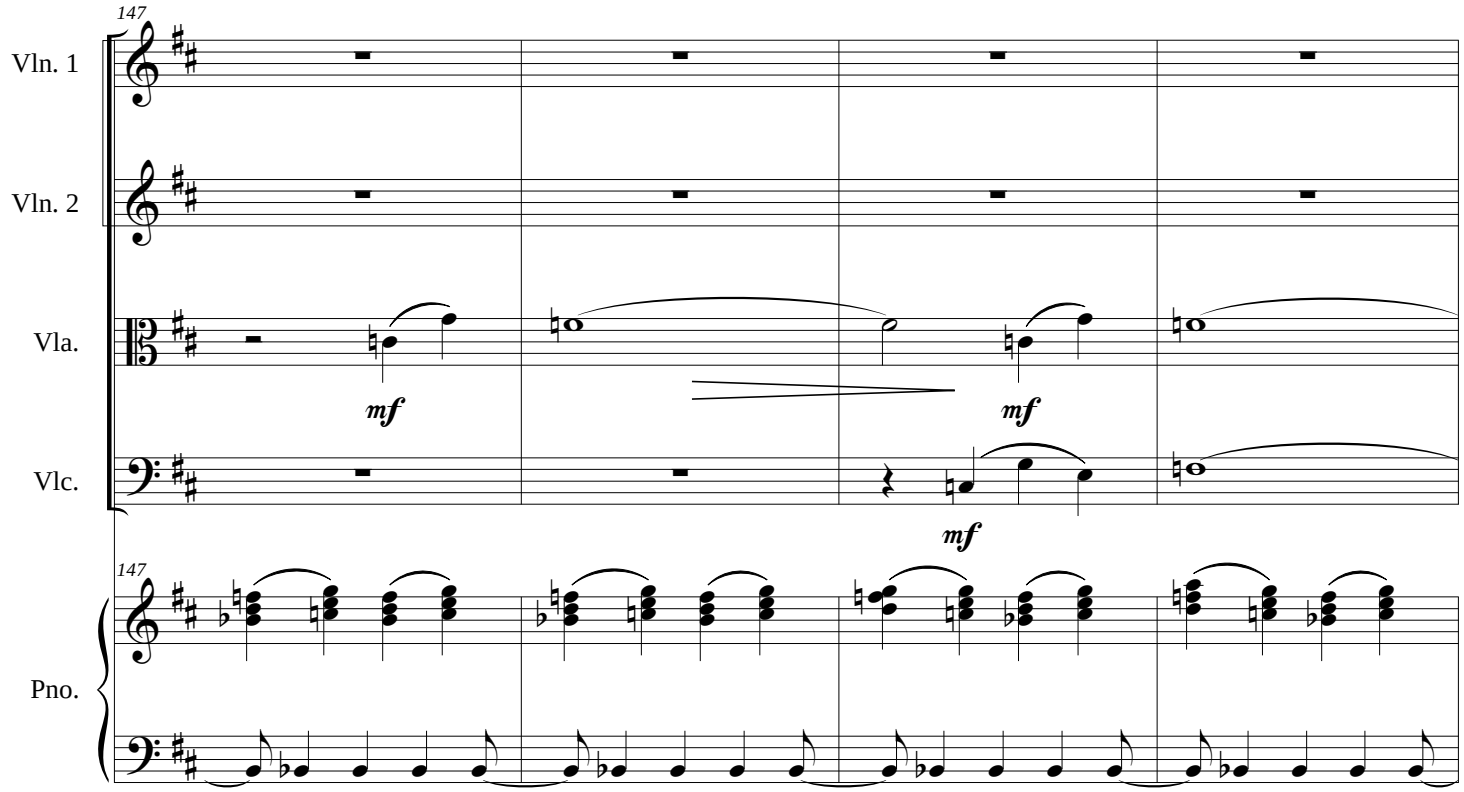
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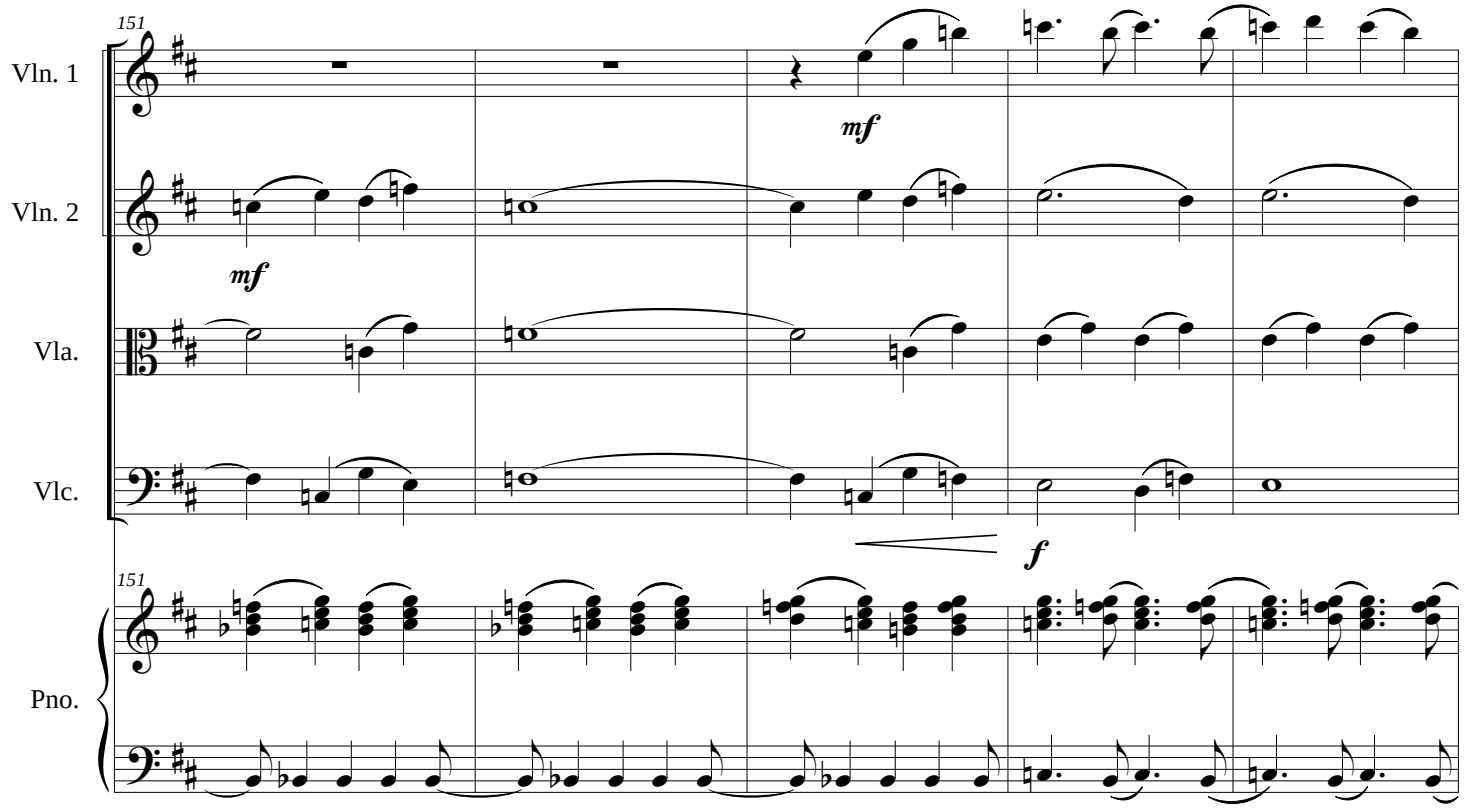
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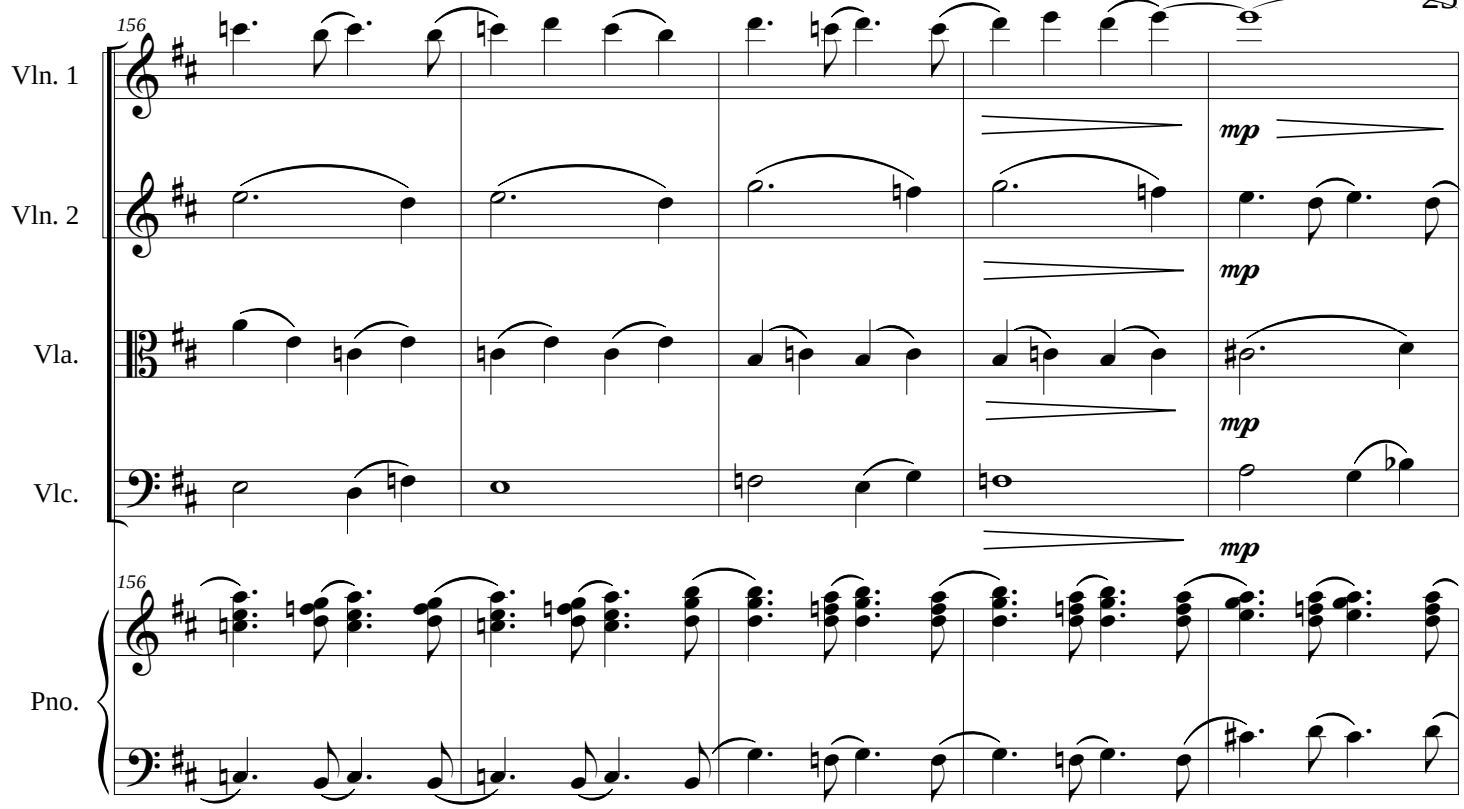
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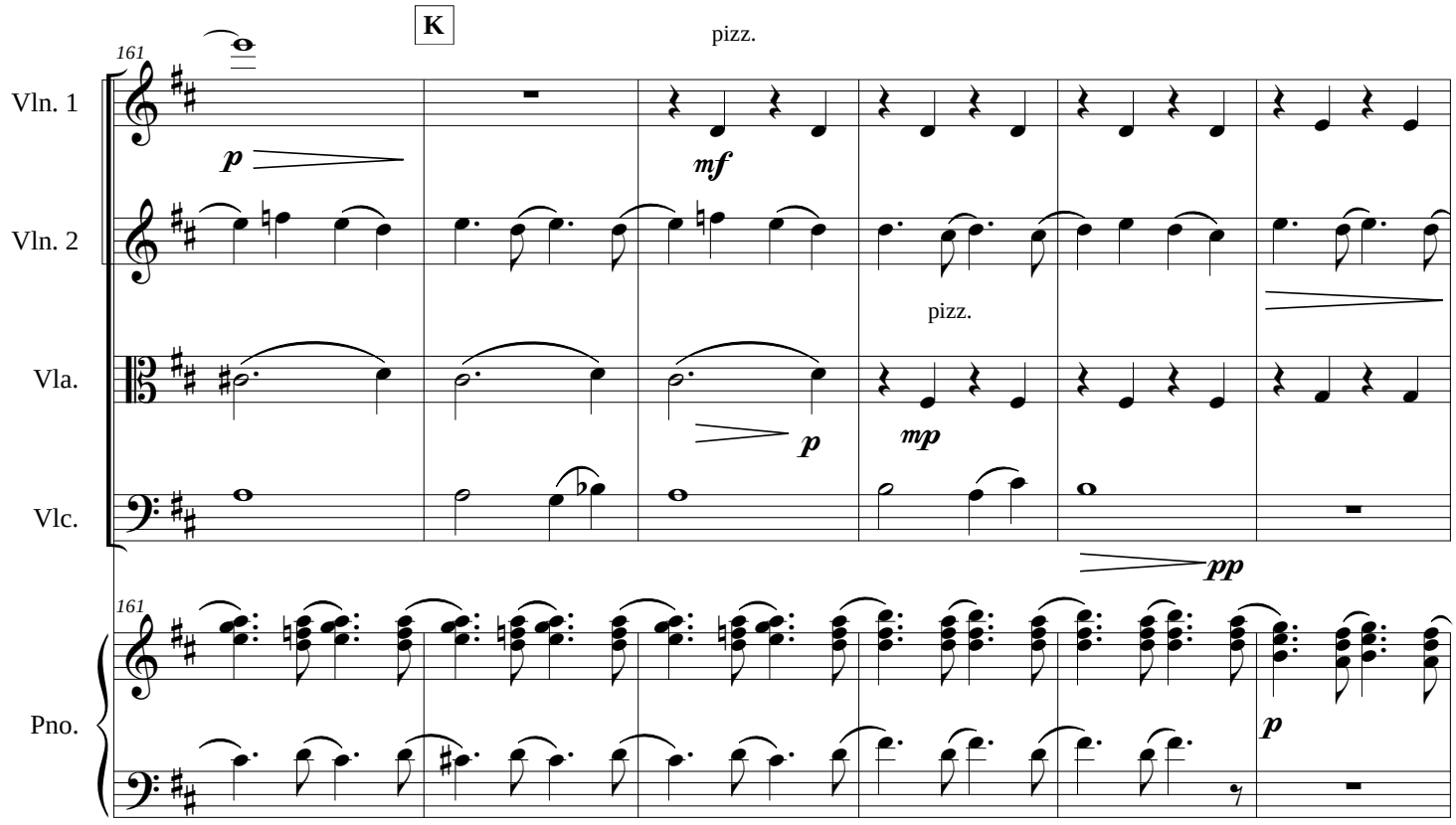
K
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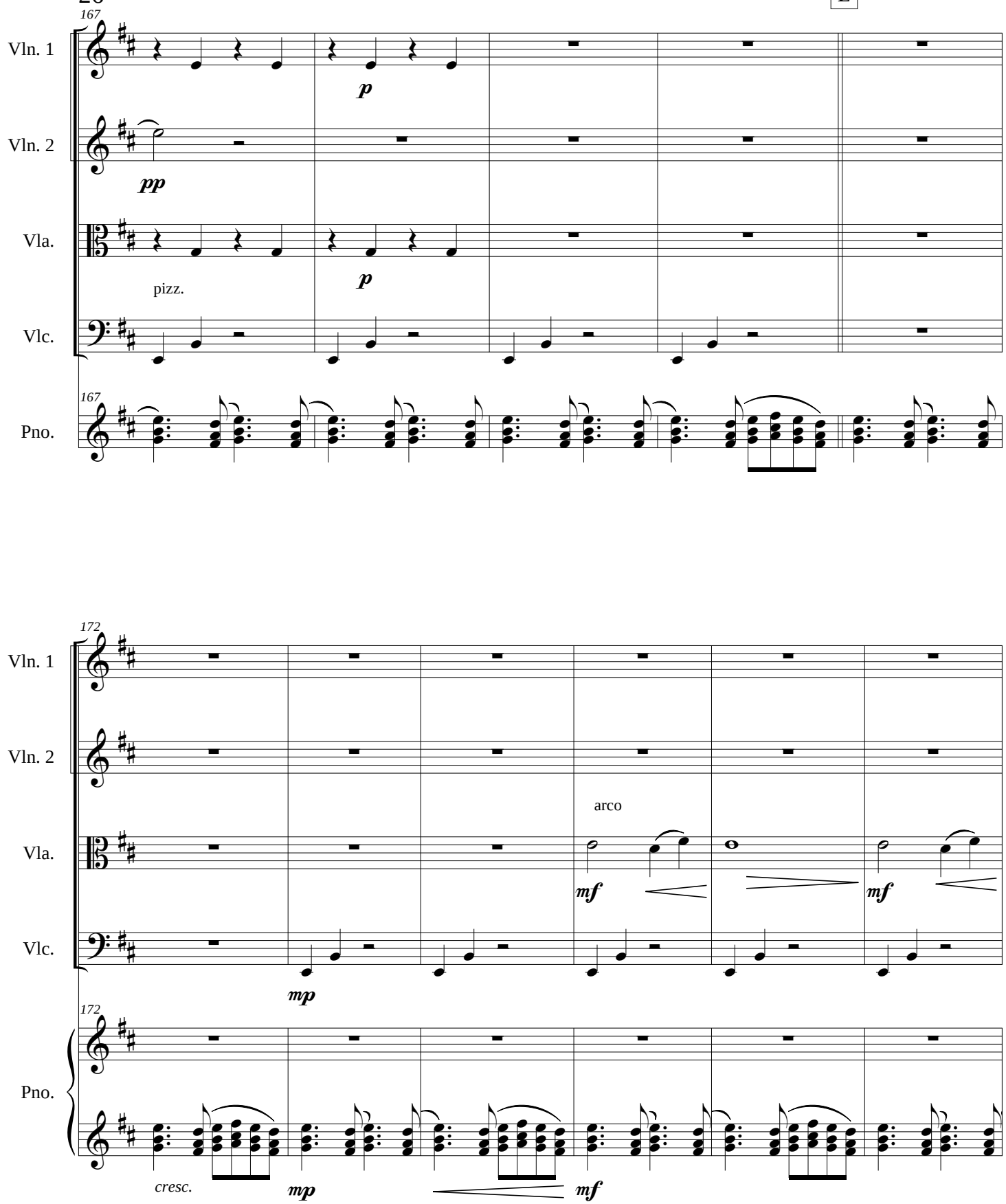
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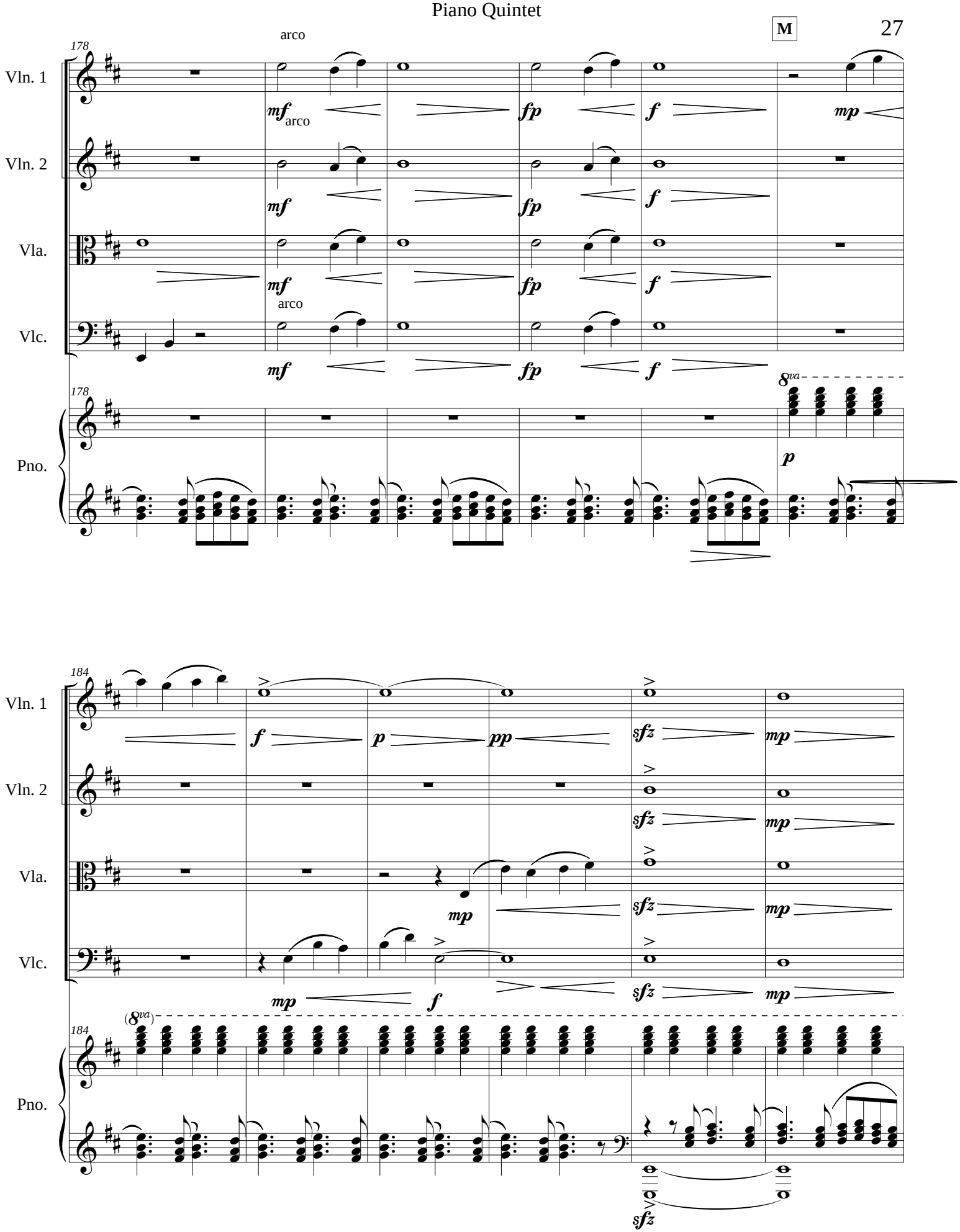
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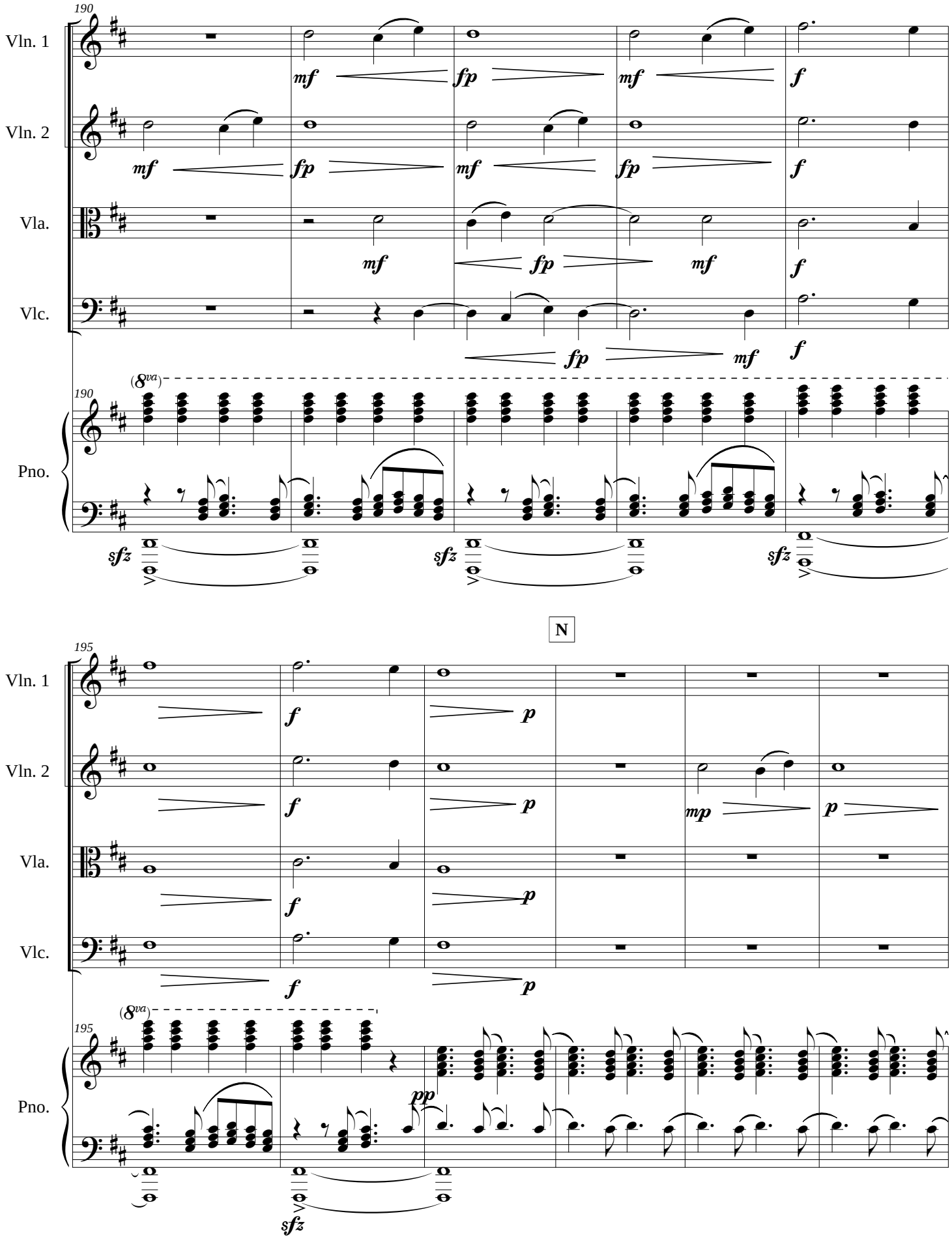
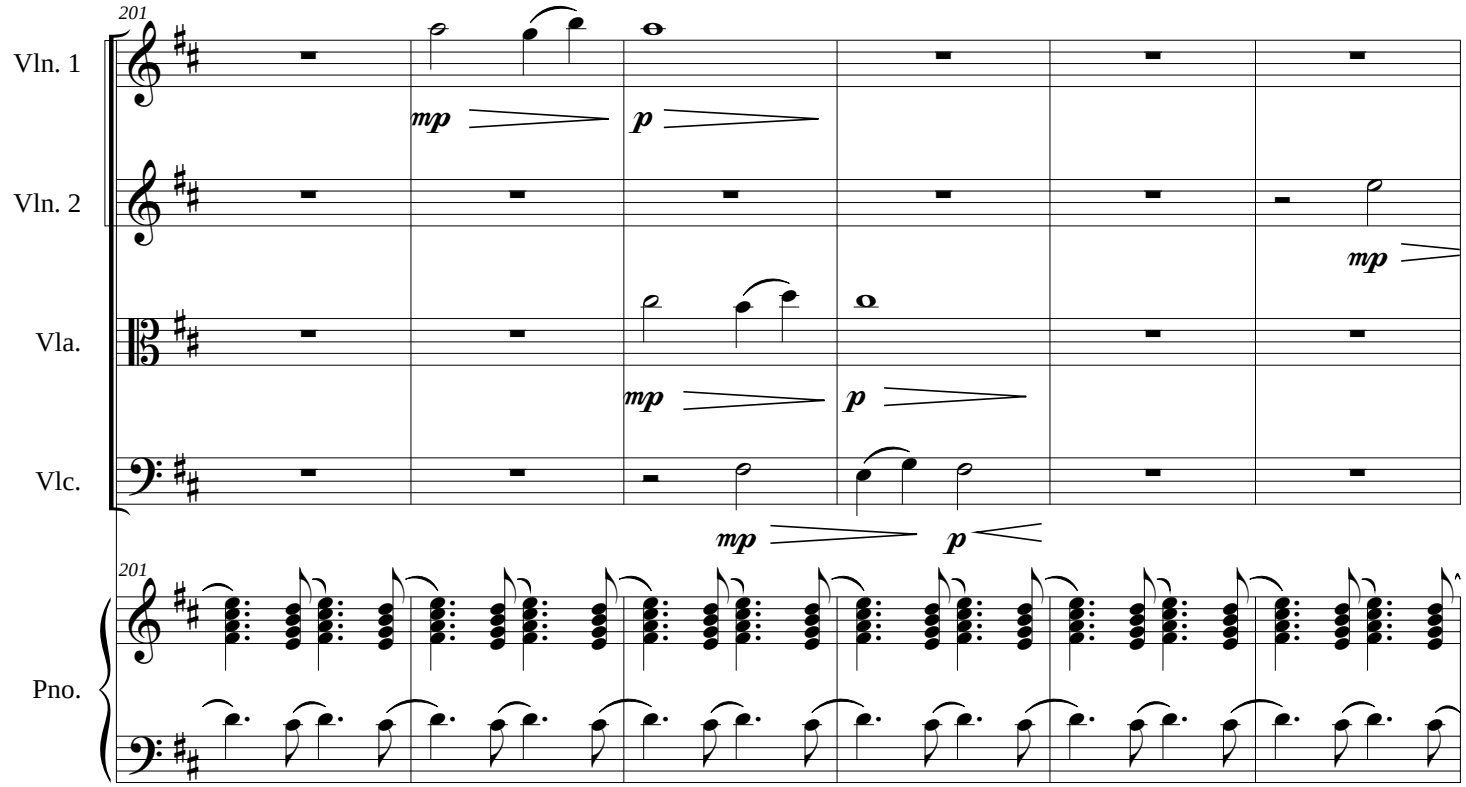
sfz
(8va)


190
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
mf
fp
f
(8va)
sfz
N
195
mp
p
pp


201
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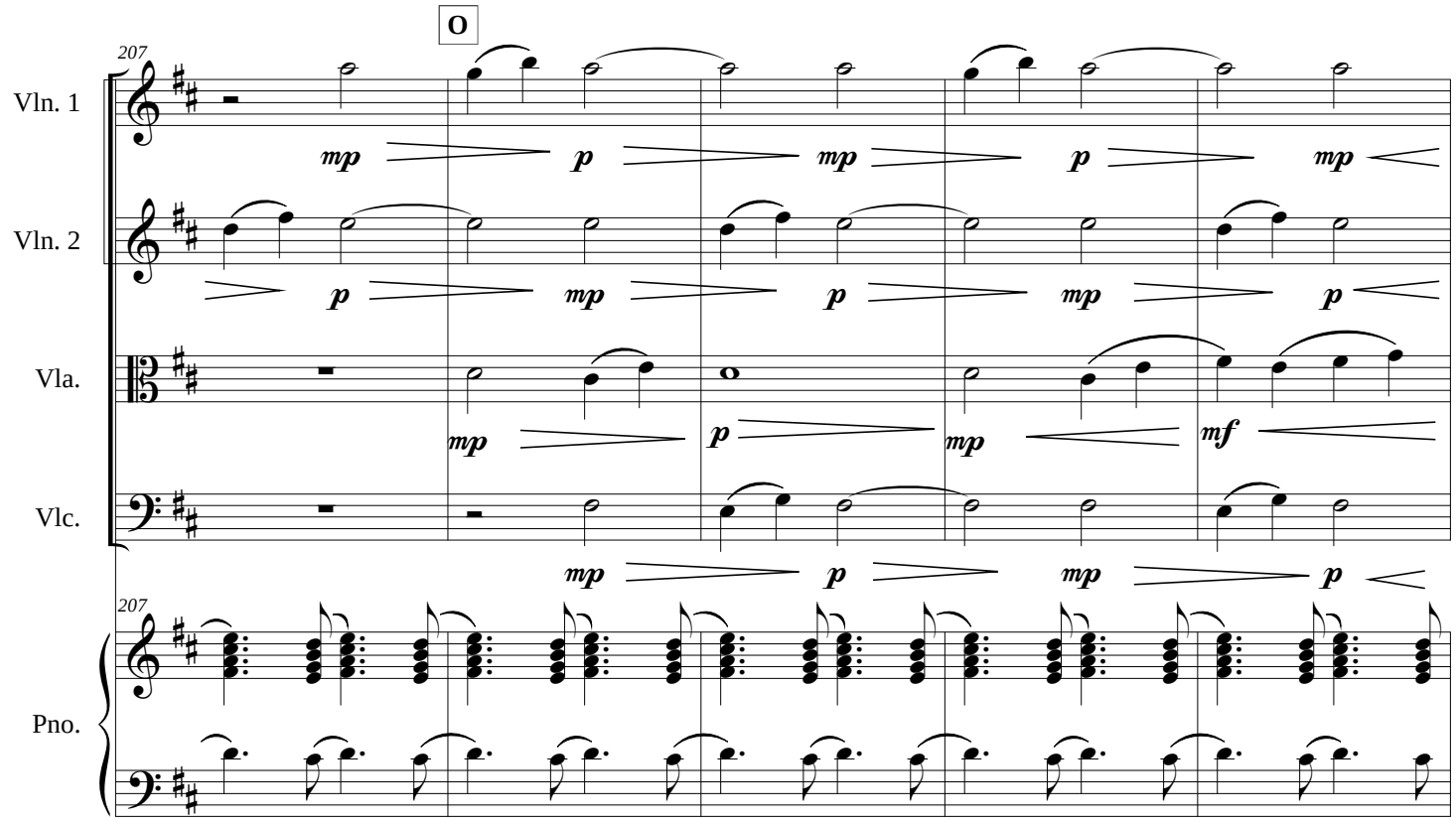
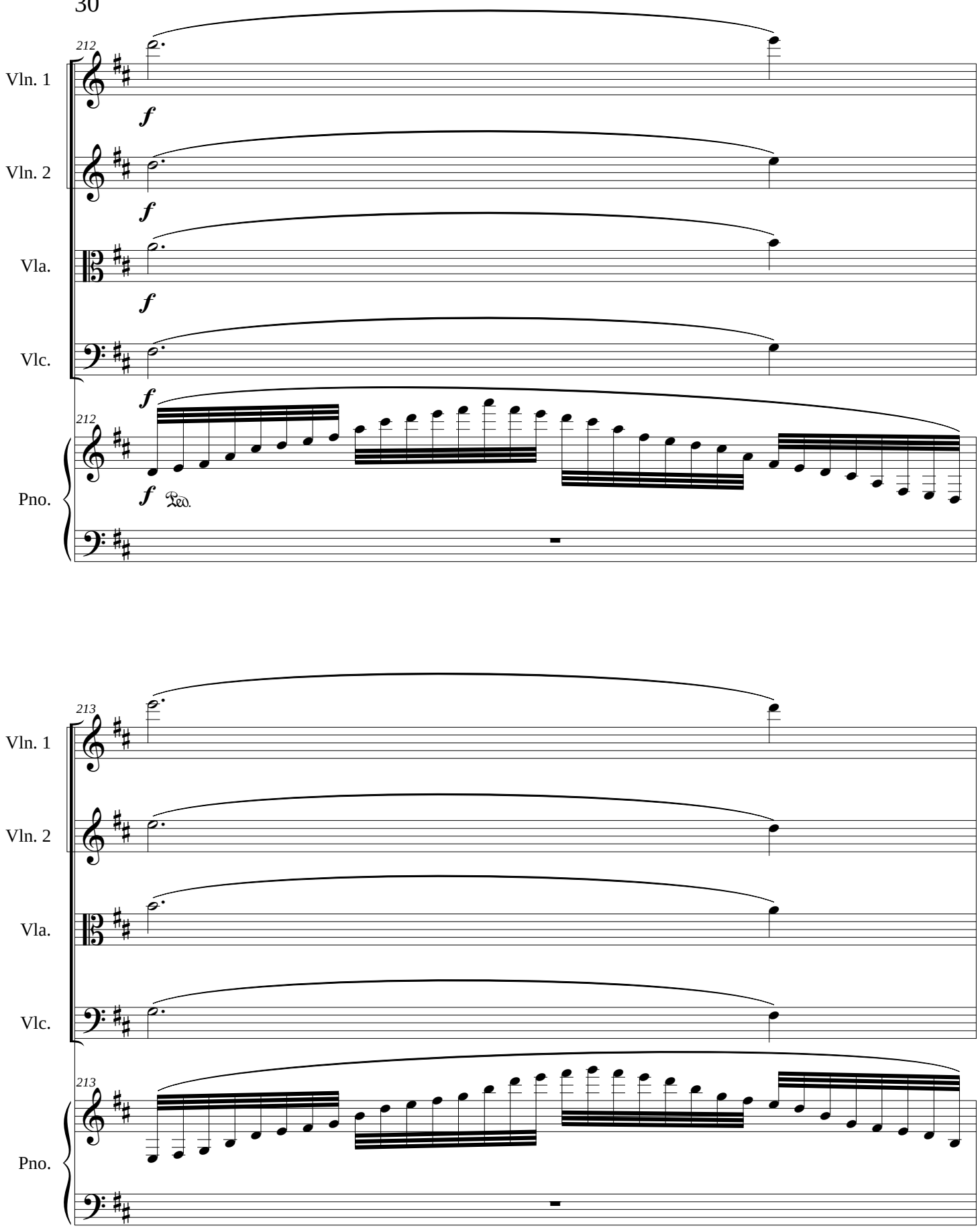
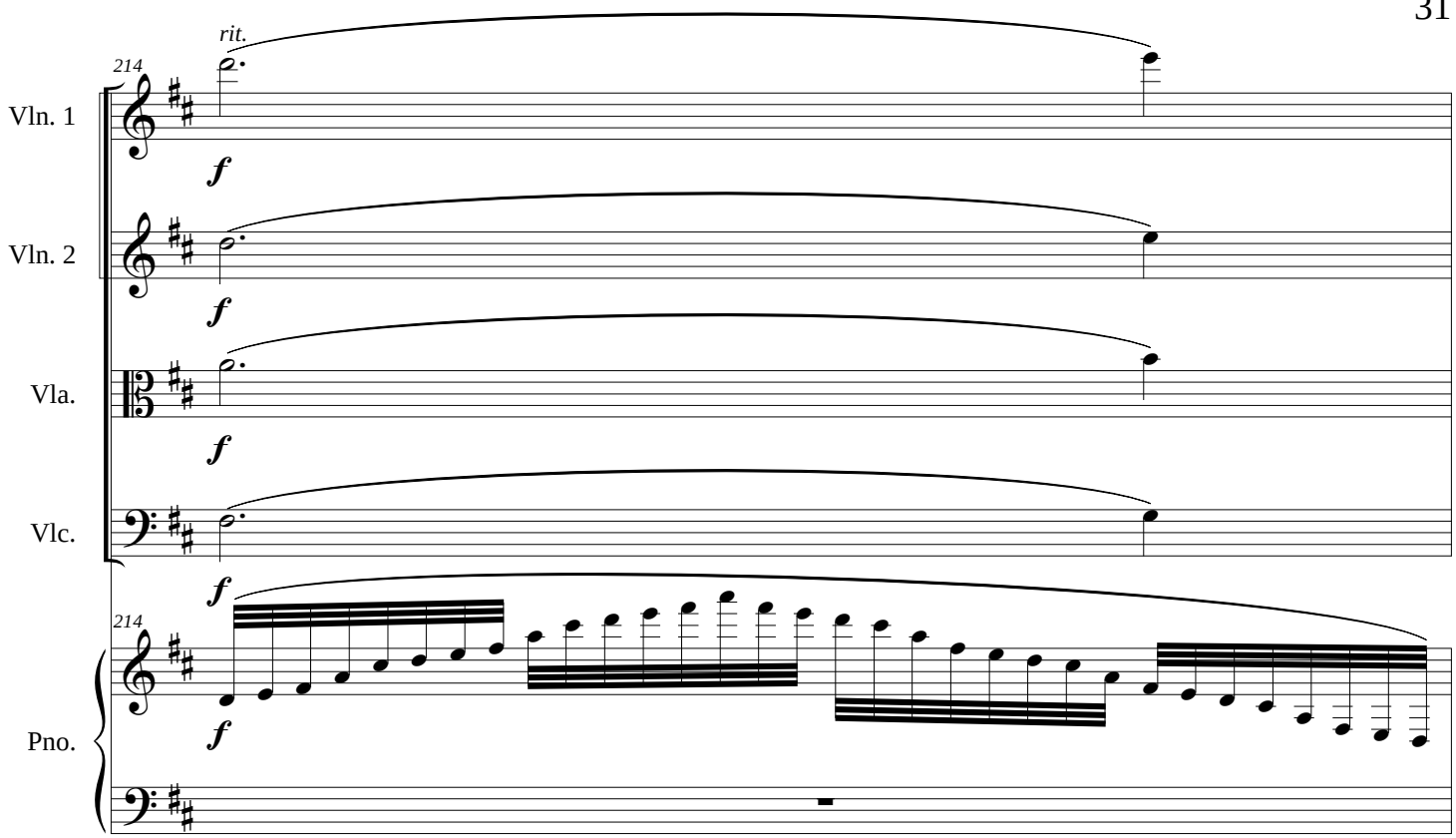
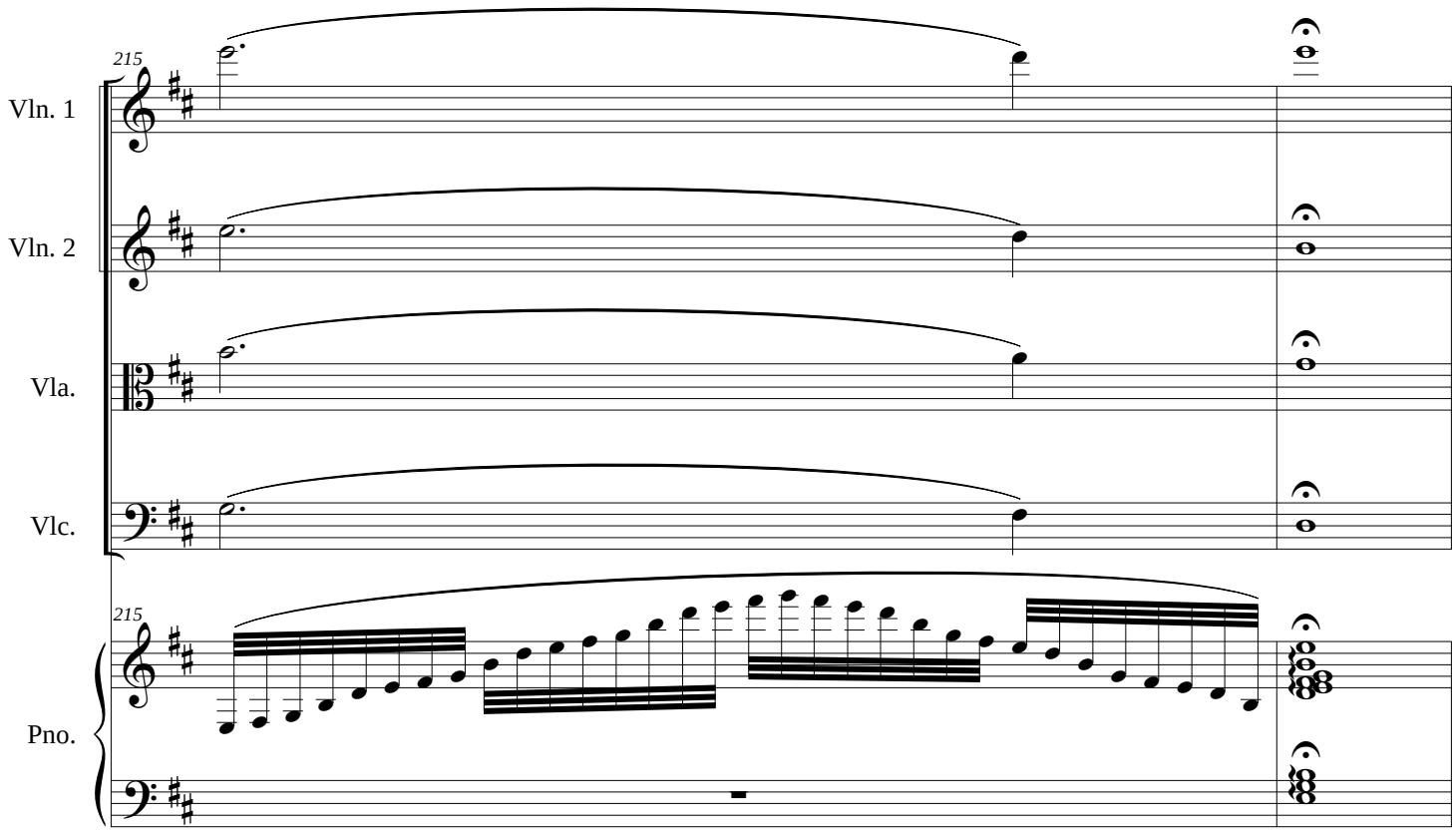
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
mp
p

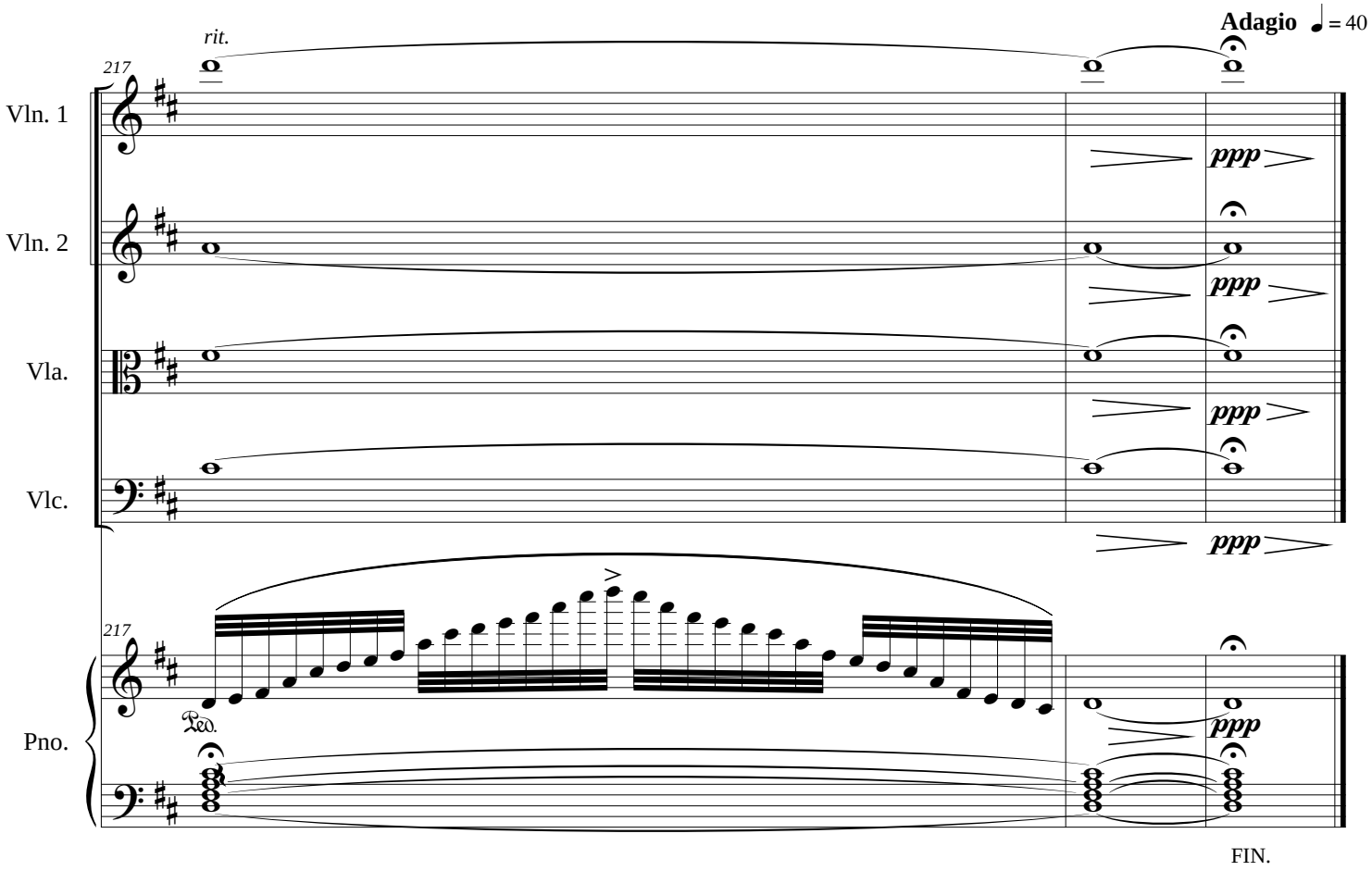

O
207
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
mp
p
mf


212
Vln. 1
f
Vln. 2
f
Vla.
f
Vlc.
f
212
Pno.
f
Ped.

213
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
213
Pno.


rit.
214
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
214
f
f
f
f
f
f


215
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
215


Adagio ♩= 40
rit.
217
Vln. 1
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vlc.
Pno.
ppp
Ped.
FIN.