Empty Fathoms

Alastair Stout

Empty Fathoms, written in September 1998, takes its inspiration from a passage of the poem Orfeo: A Masque by George Mackay Brown:

'The uncoiled line, baited, wandering deep. Orfeo and the fiddle and empty fathoms, Play a reel, man'
(From the book Northern Lights published by John Murray (Publishers) Ltd.)

I was interested in creating a work which followed a fishing line uncoiling through the cross section of an ocean - journeying from the unstable surface waters down to the sea bed. On its passage down, the line passes through different layers of sediment, converging tides, and entangles strange sea creatures until it finally reaches the sea bed and nestles amongst the rippling weeds...

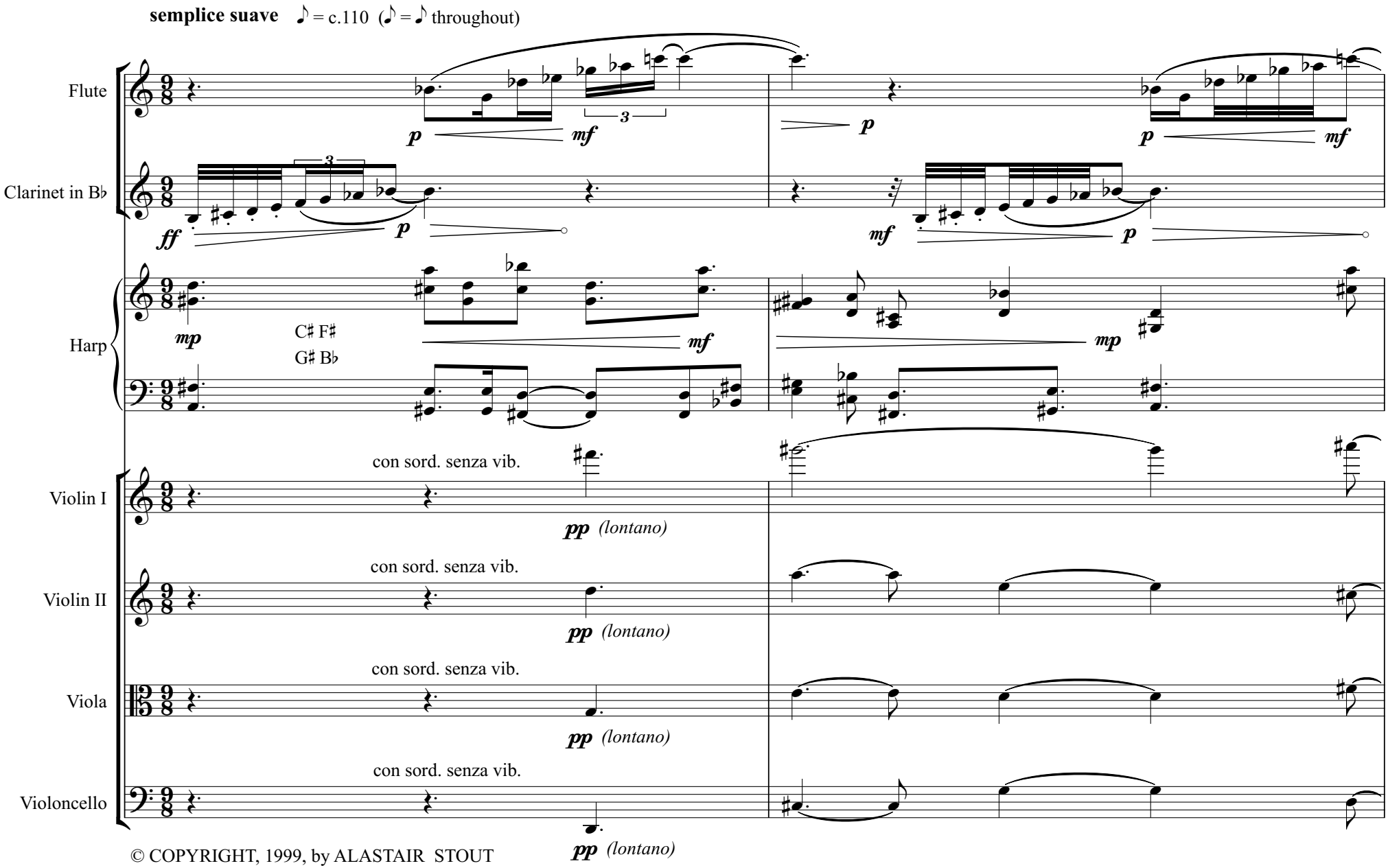
The fishing line is depicted by a series of chords - first heard during the opening two bars of the harp. This chordal line, which begins tight and unaltered, uncoils through the ensemble and, 'wandering deep', explores the harmonies and melodies of which it is capable. There are also glimpses of folk tunes that interrupt the organic flow of material but which also become caught, 'baited' by the line and diffuse into the harmonic stream. Along the way spiralling rhythms, oscillating chord progressions and rotating structures (such as the similar gestures which begin and end the work) all parallel the powerful circular currents which surge through the oceans.

The work lasts 4 1/2 minutes

AS.

EMPTY FATHOMS

ALASTAIR STOUT



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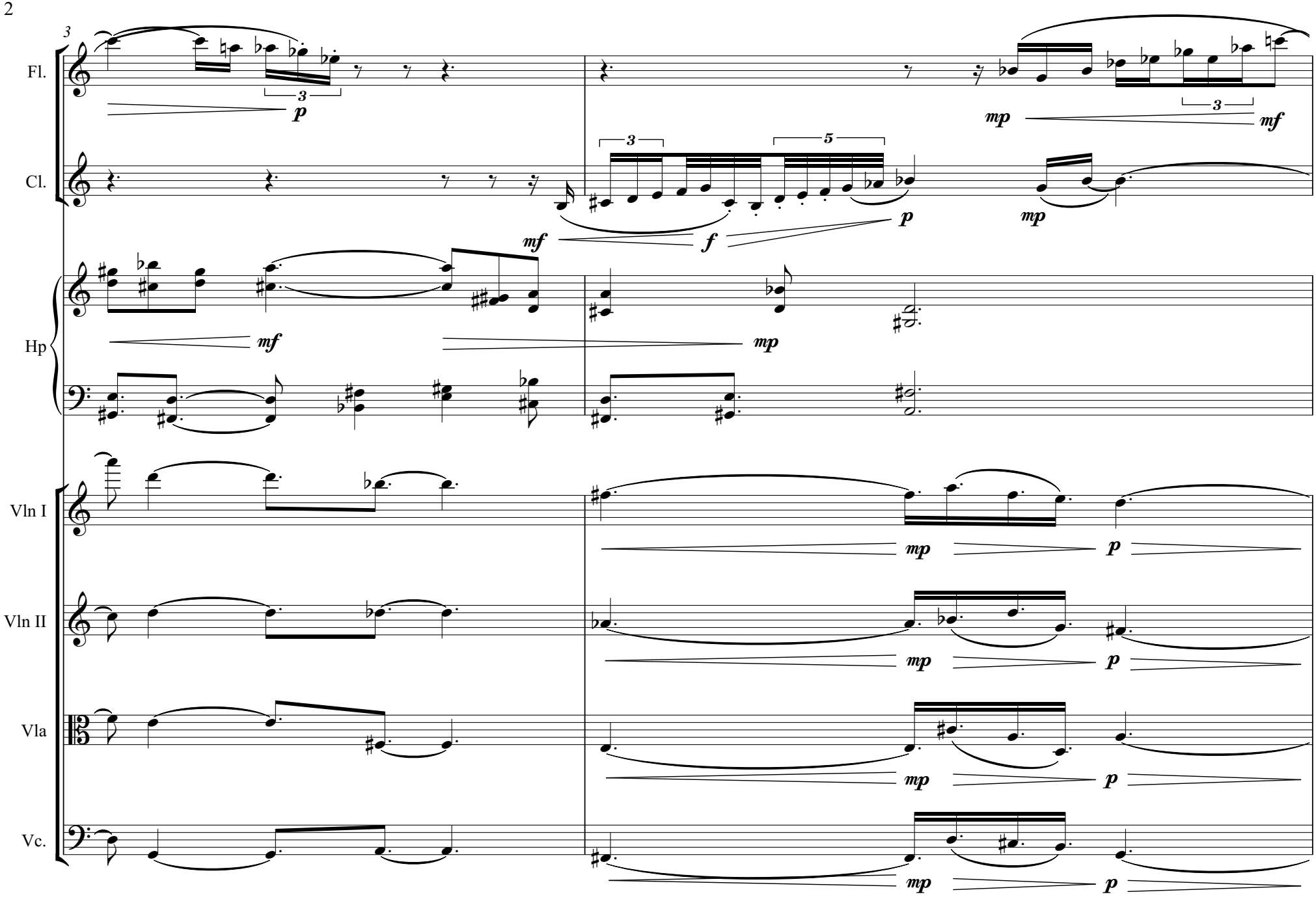
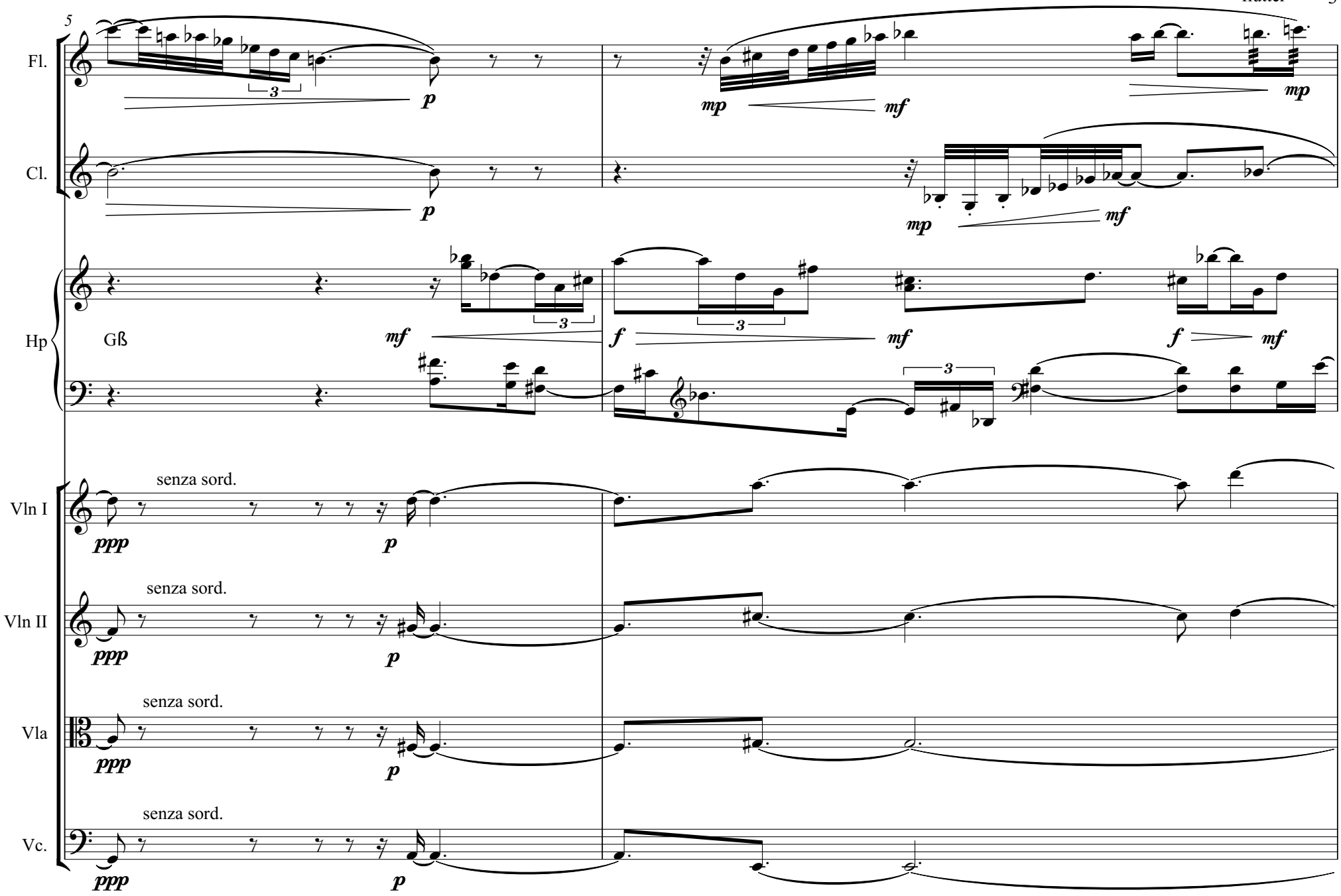
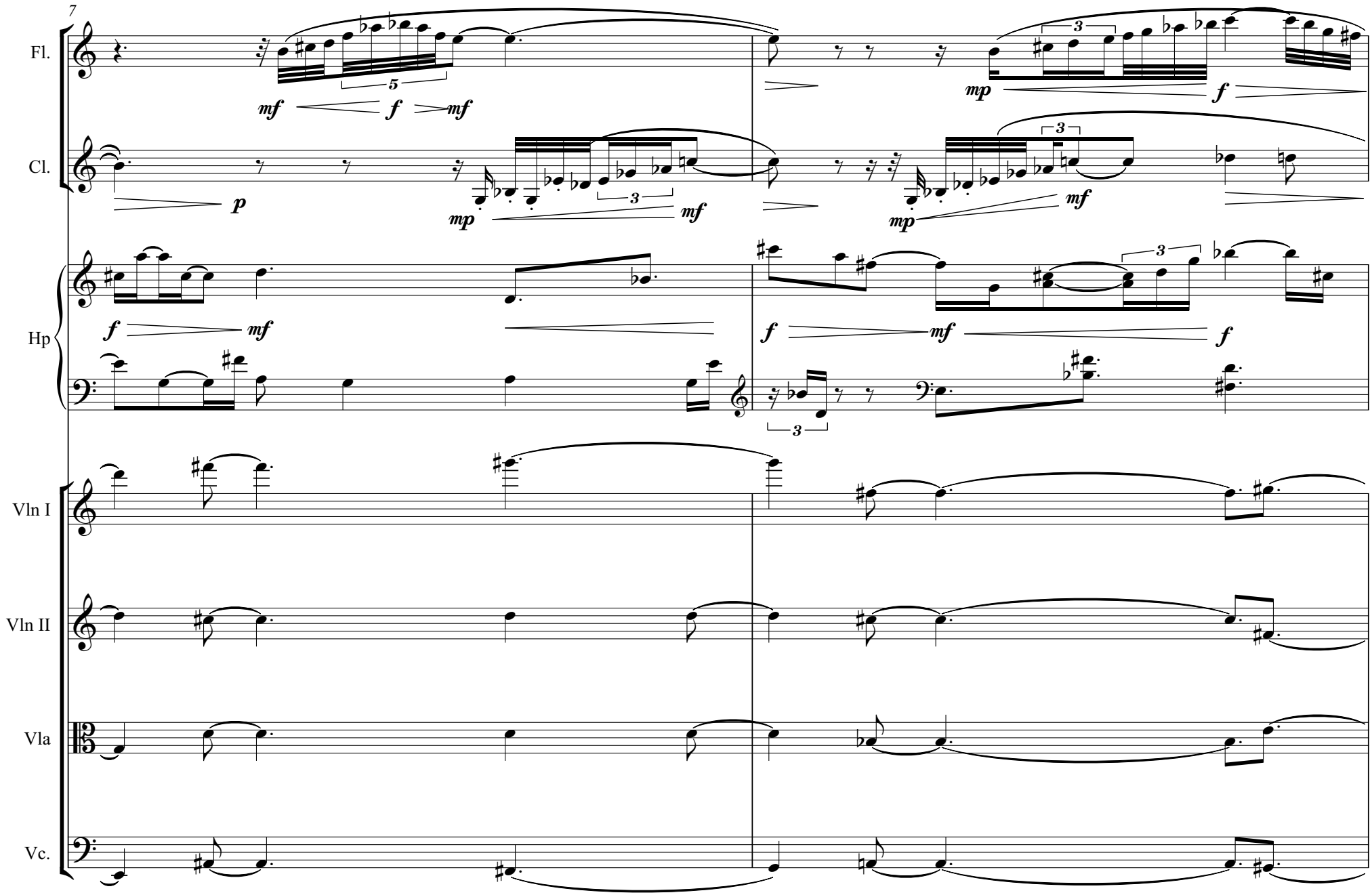
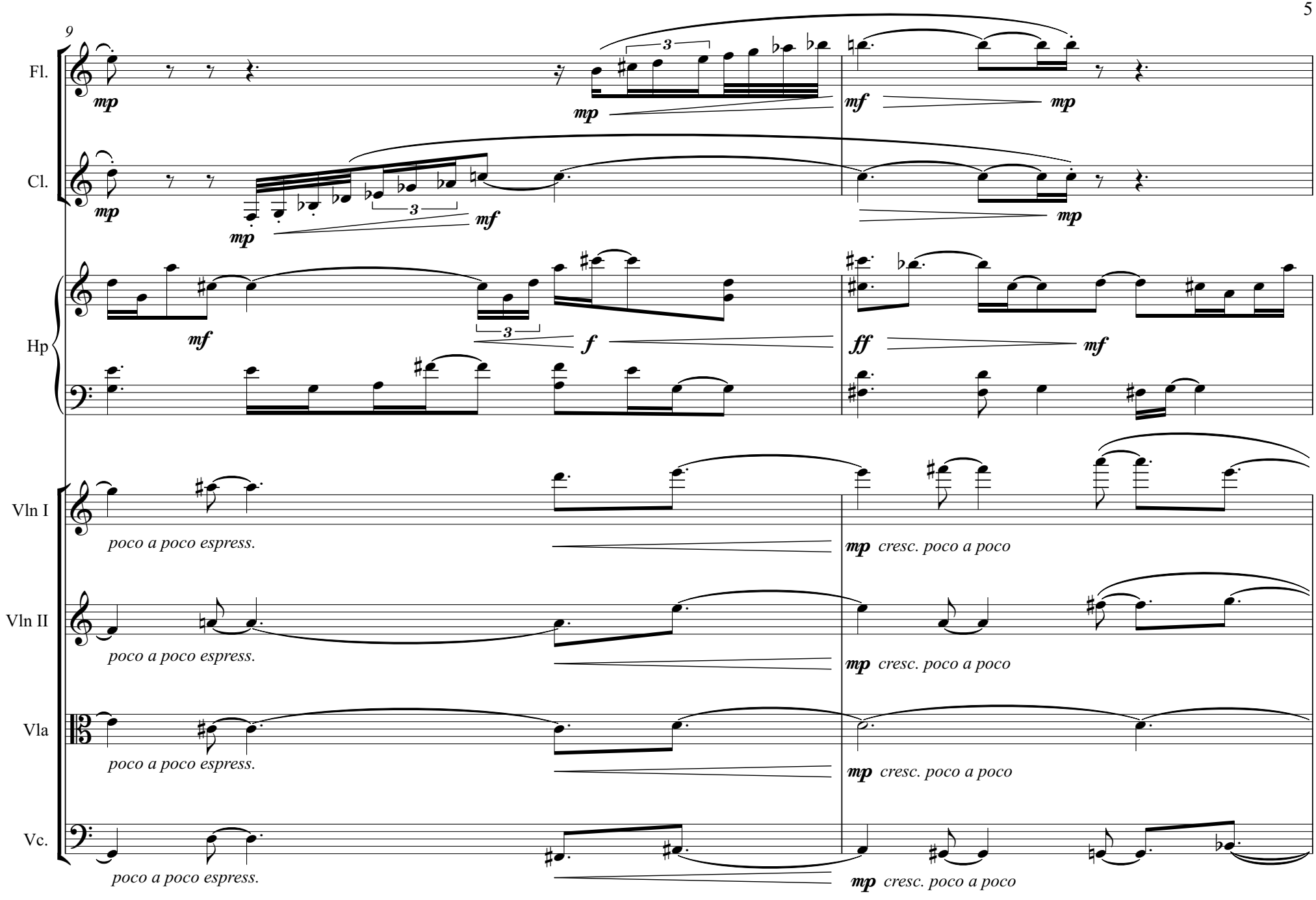
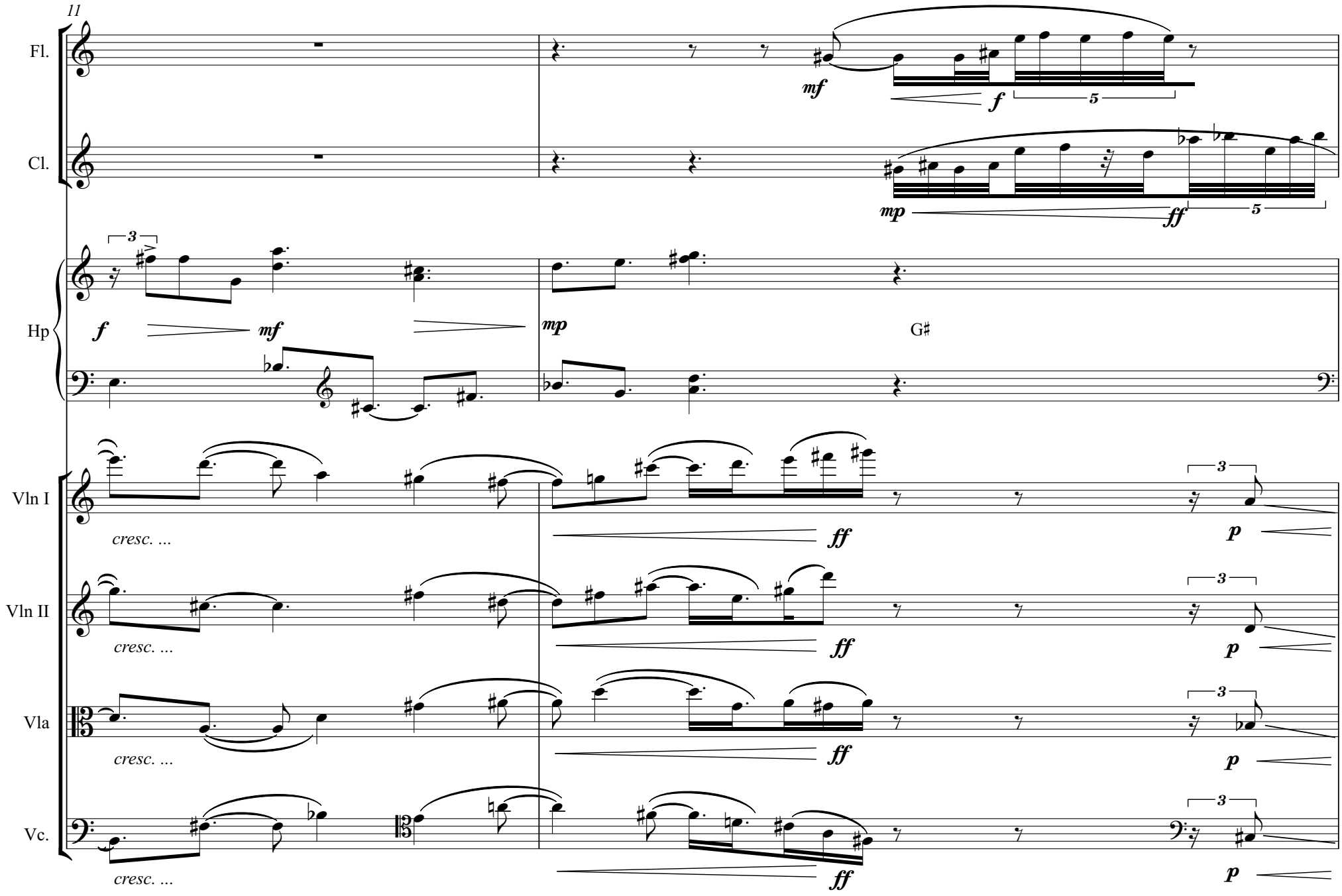
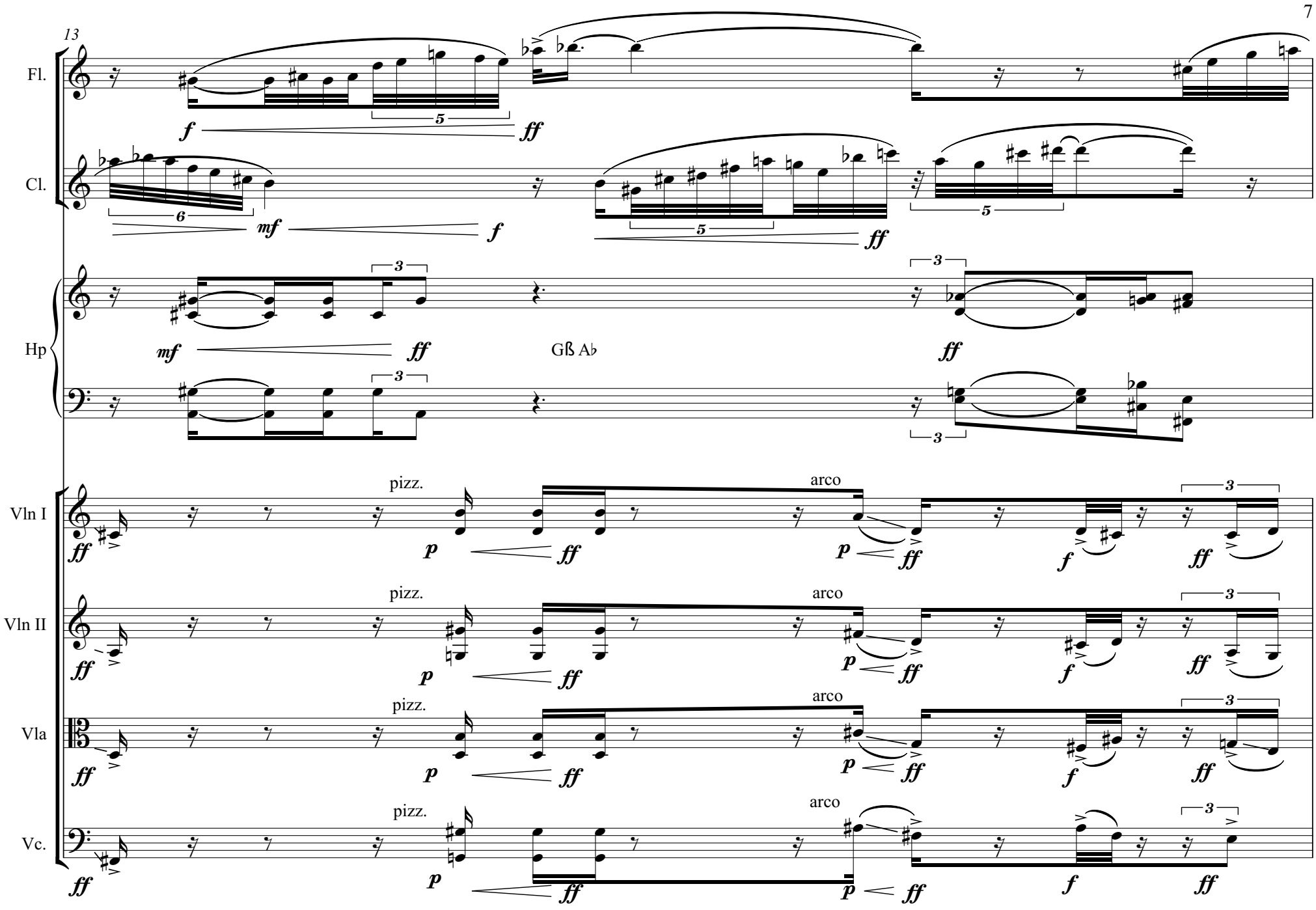

3
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
p
mf
f
mp
3
5

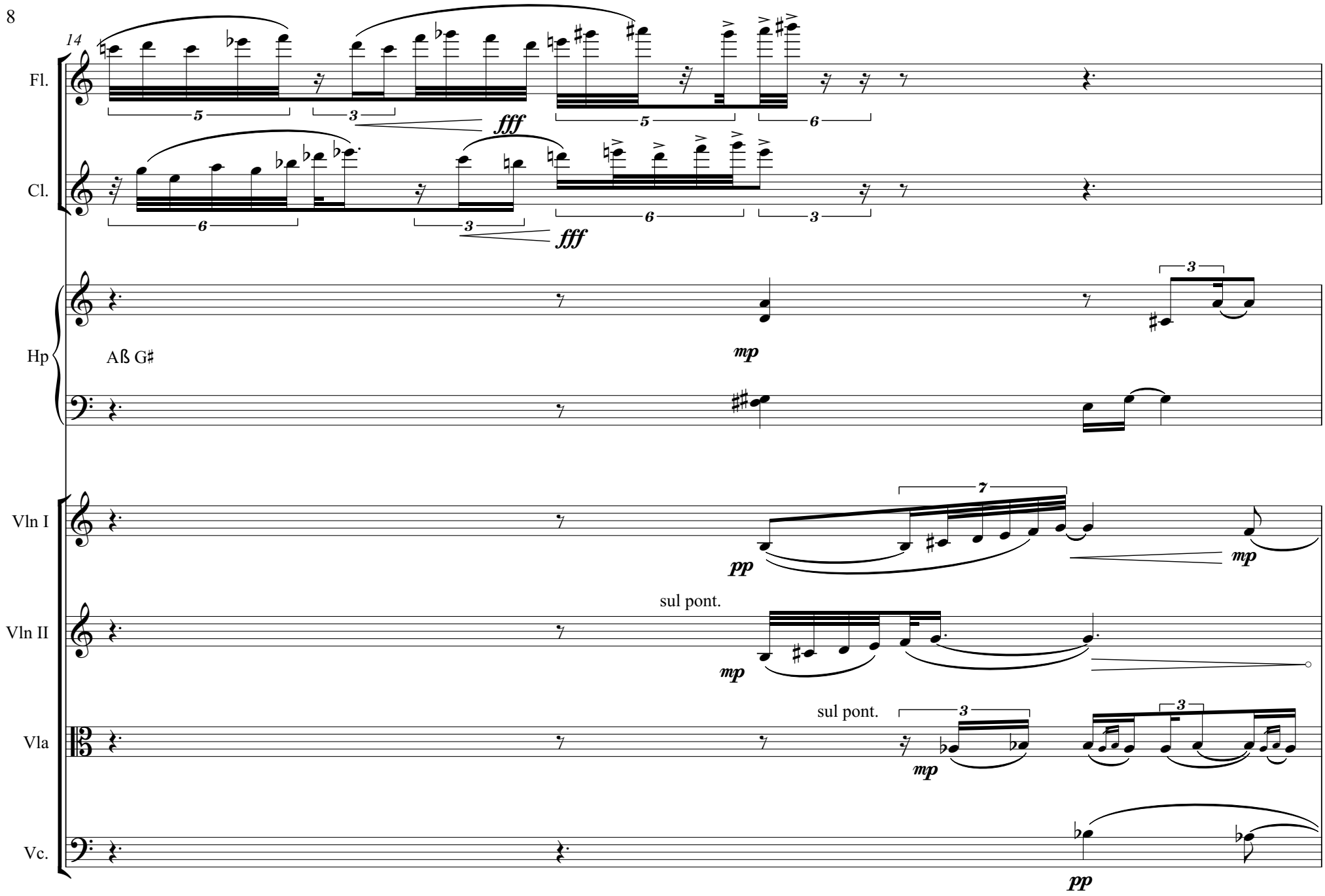

5
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Gß
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
senza sord.
ppp
p
mp
mf
f

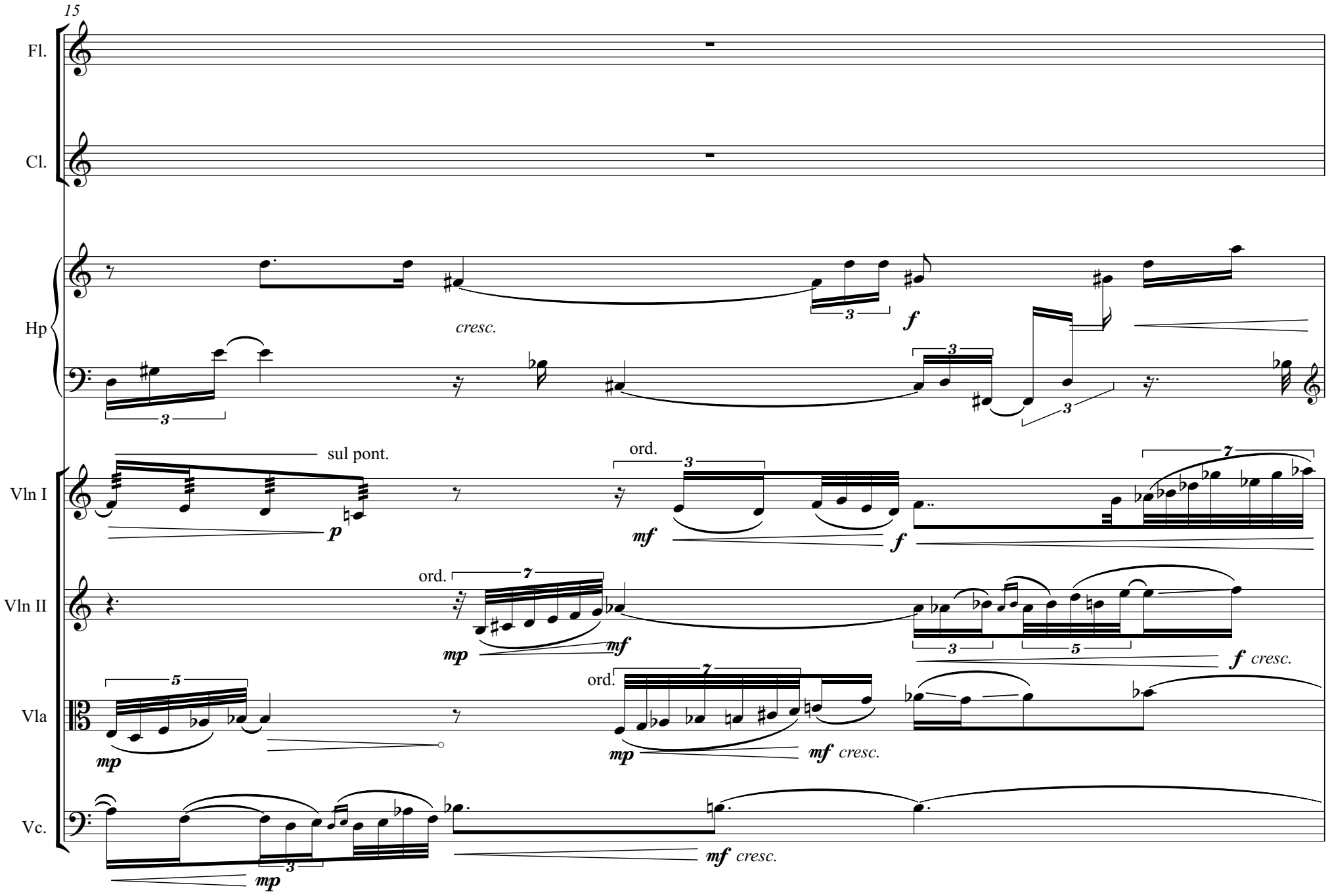

7
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.

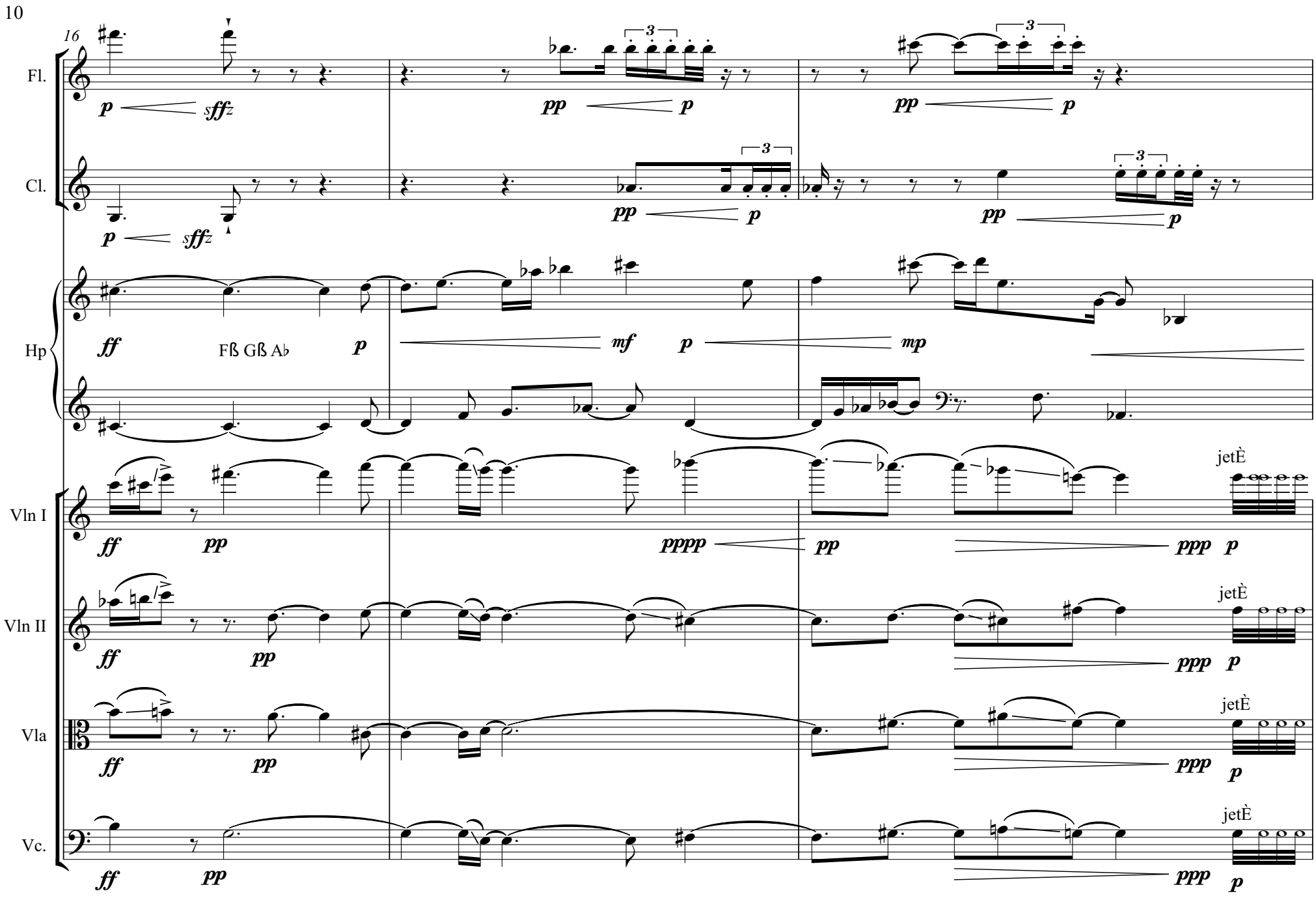

9
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
mp
mf
f
ff
poco a poco espress.
cresc. poco a poco

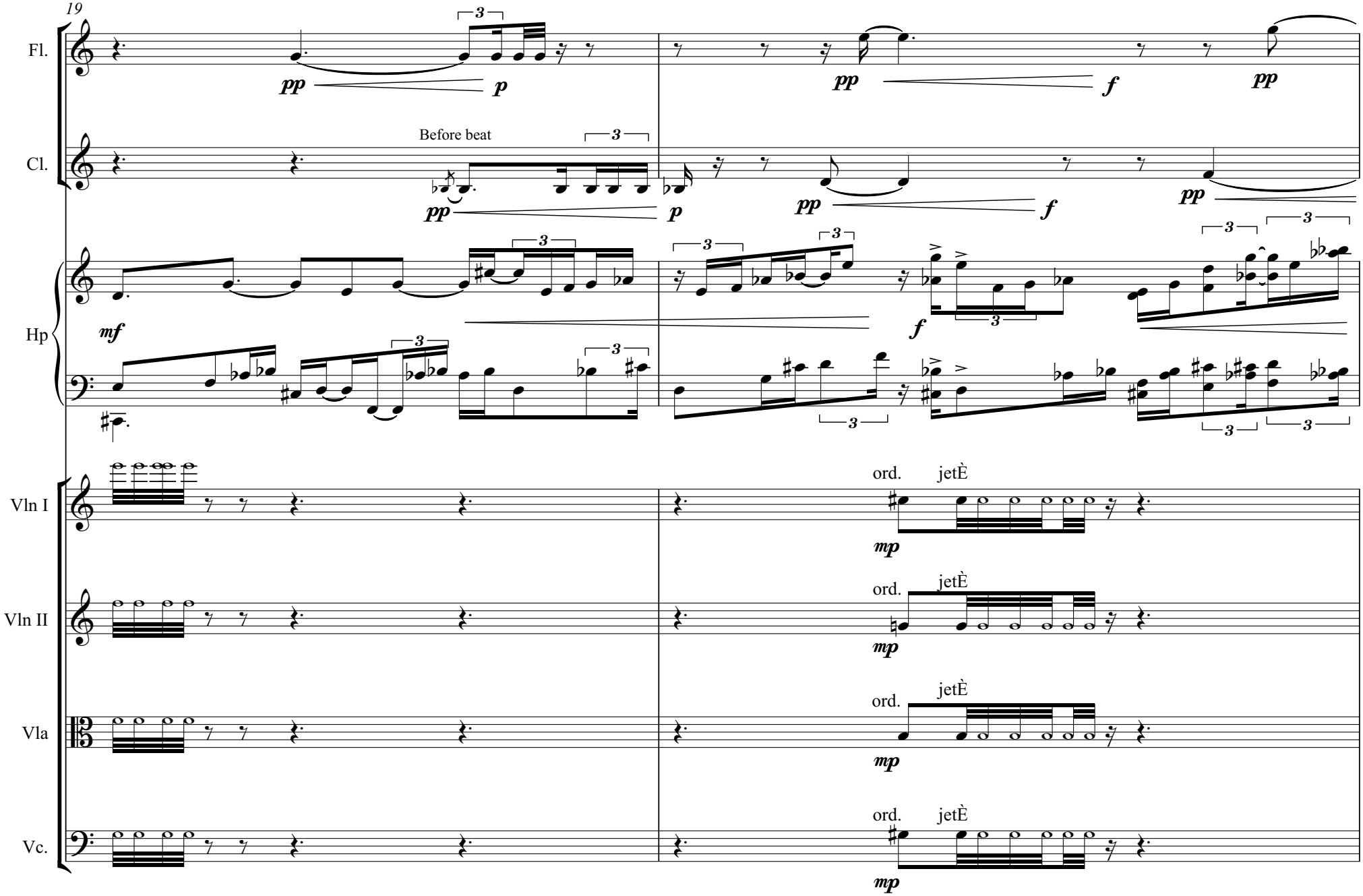

11
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
mf
f
5
mp
ff
3
G♯
cresc. ...
p

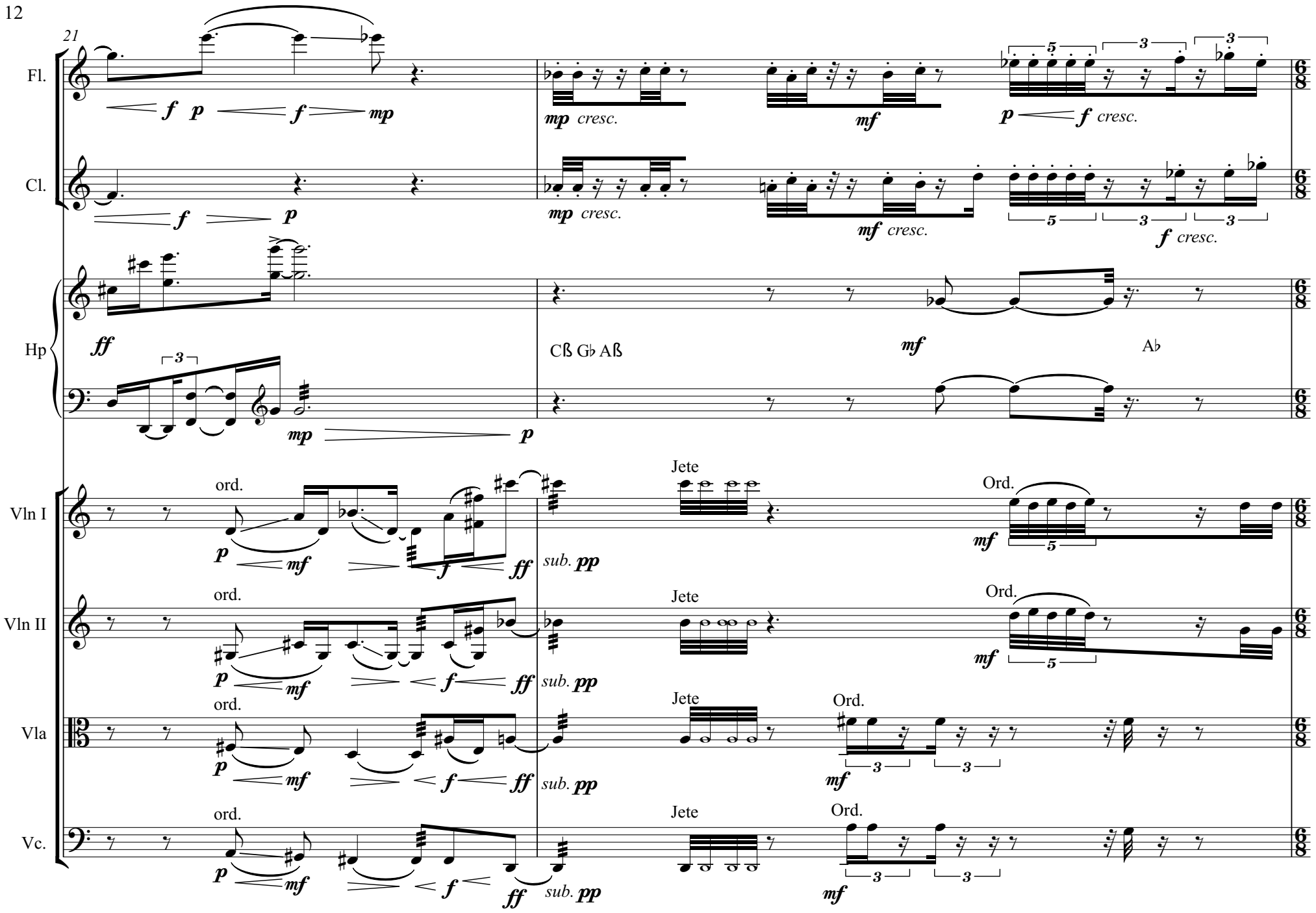

13
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Gß Ab
pizz.
arco

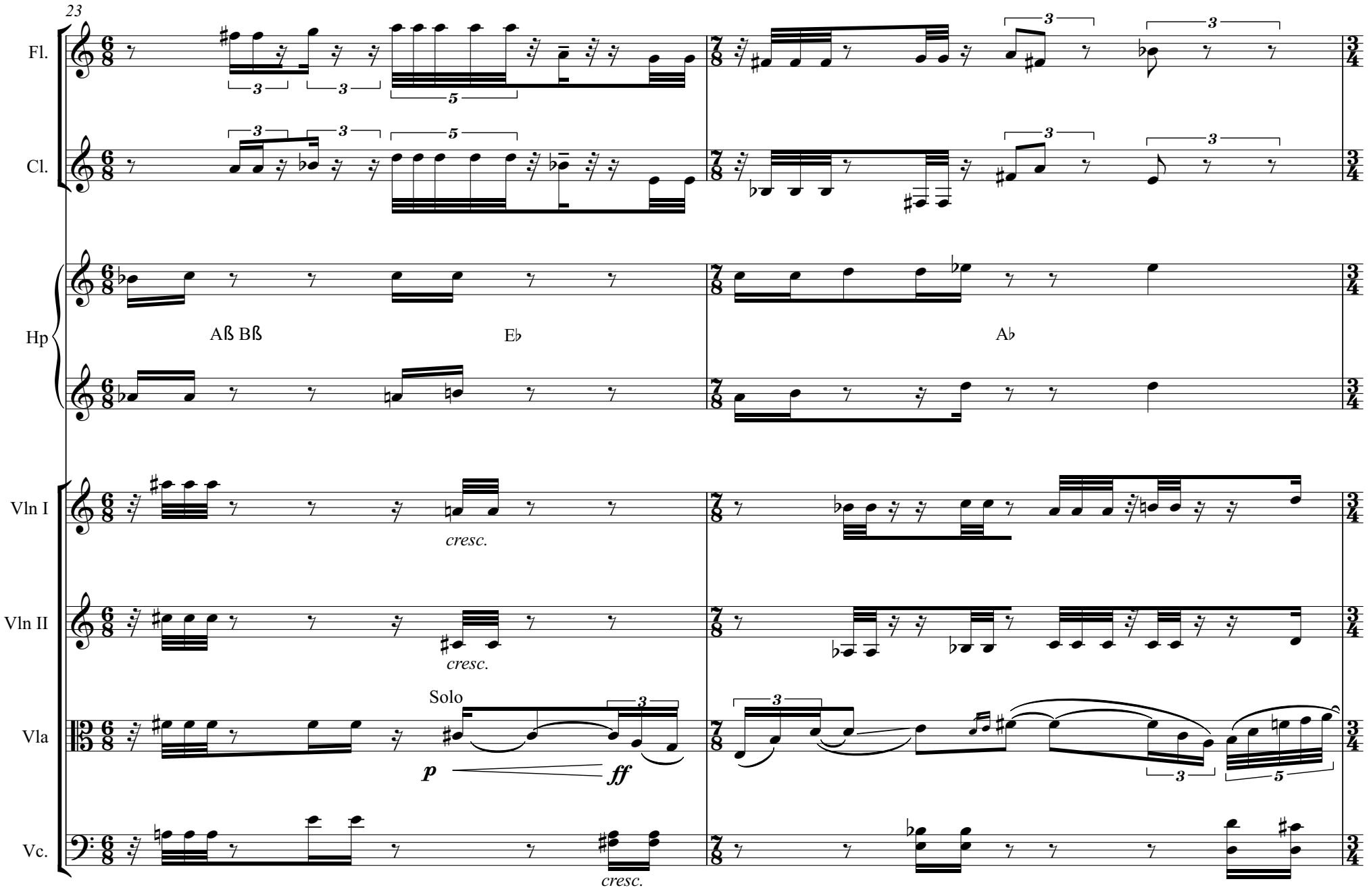

14
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Aß G♯
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
fff
mp
pp
sul pont.

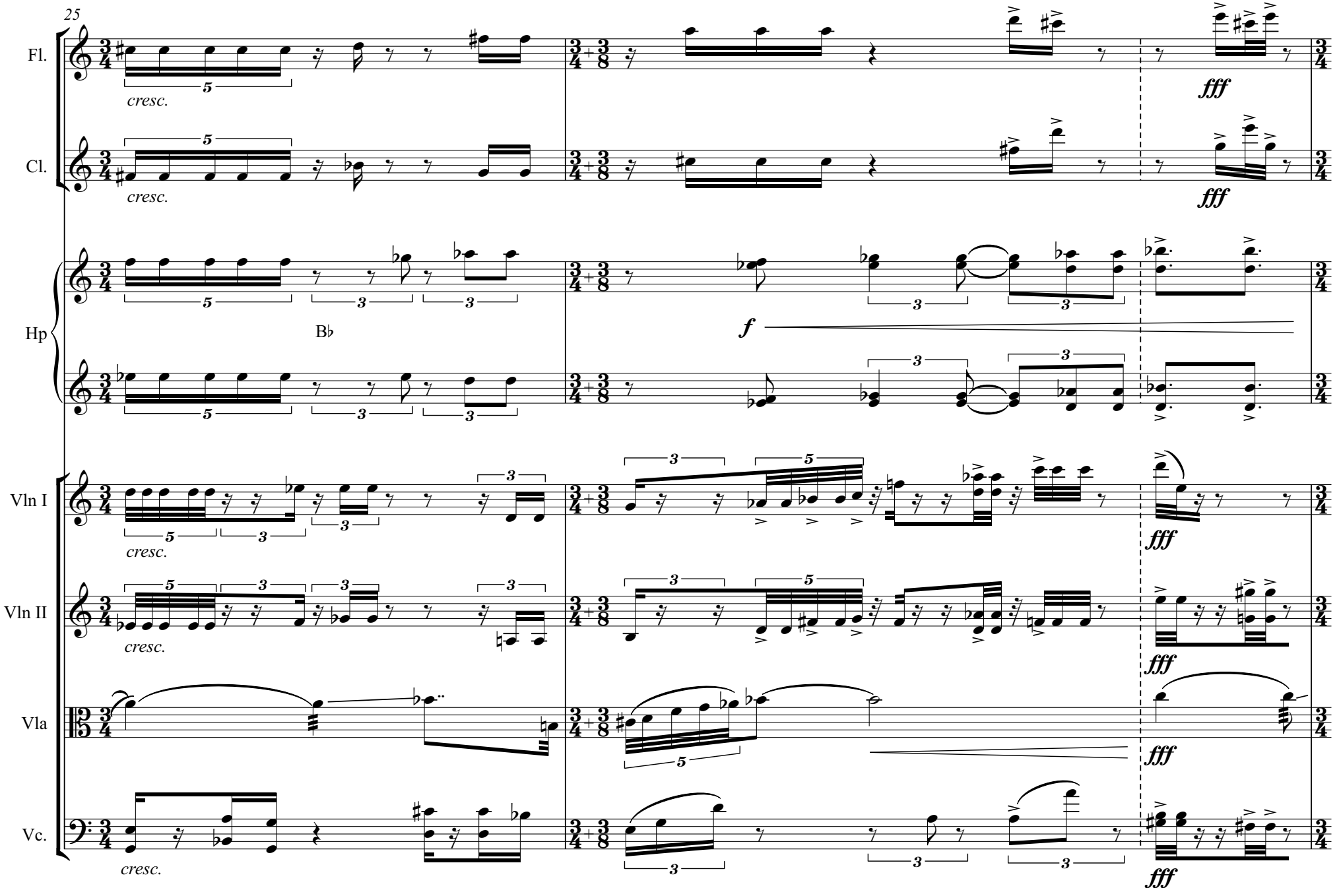

15
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
cresc.
f
Vln I
sul pont.
p
ord.
mf
f
Vln II
ord.
mp
mf
f cresc.
Vla
mp
ord.
mp
mf cresc.
Vc.
mp
mf cresc.

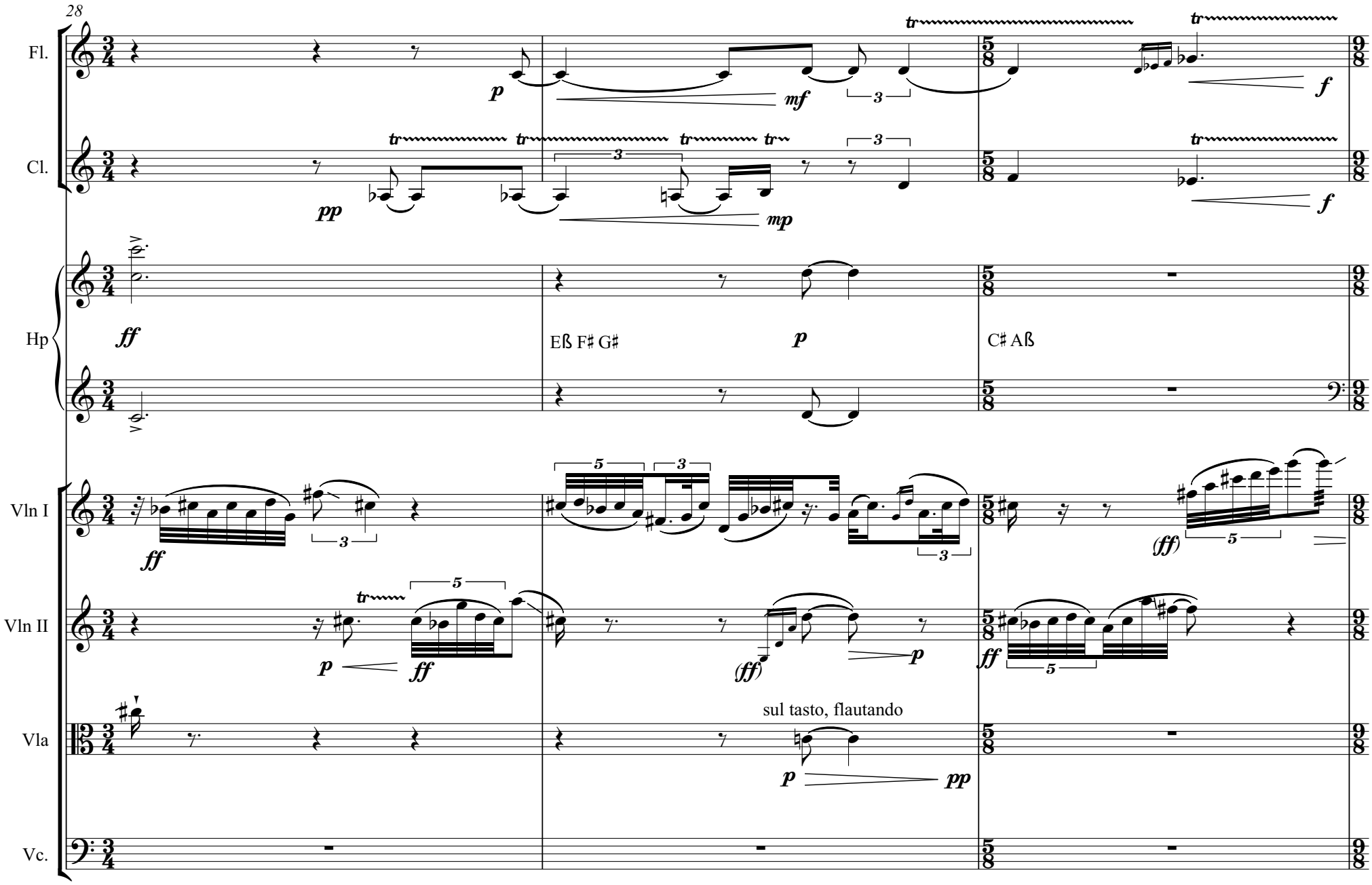

16
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Fß Gß Ab
jetÈ

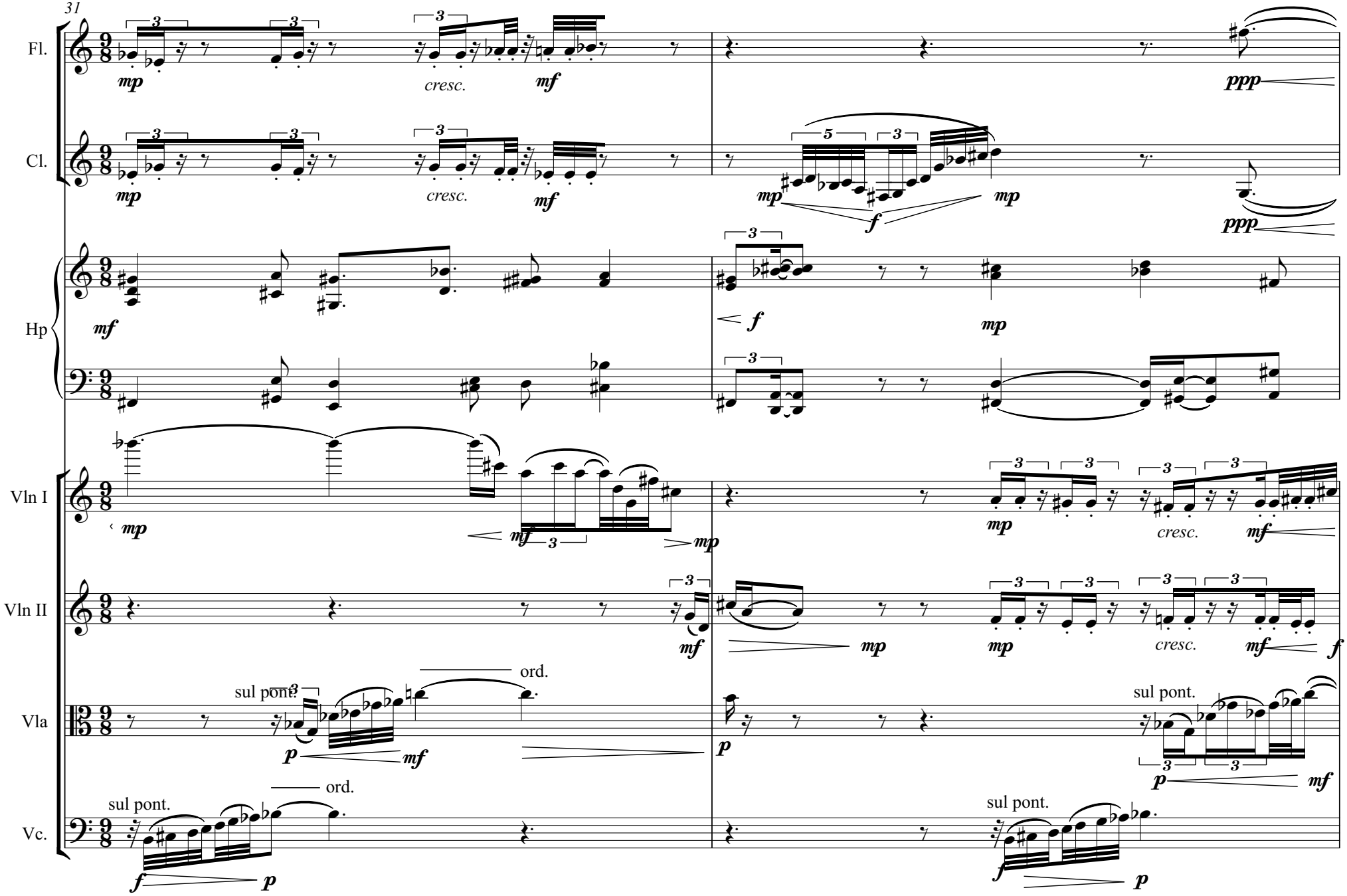

19
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Before beat
pp
p
f
mf
mp
ord.
jetÈ

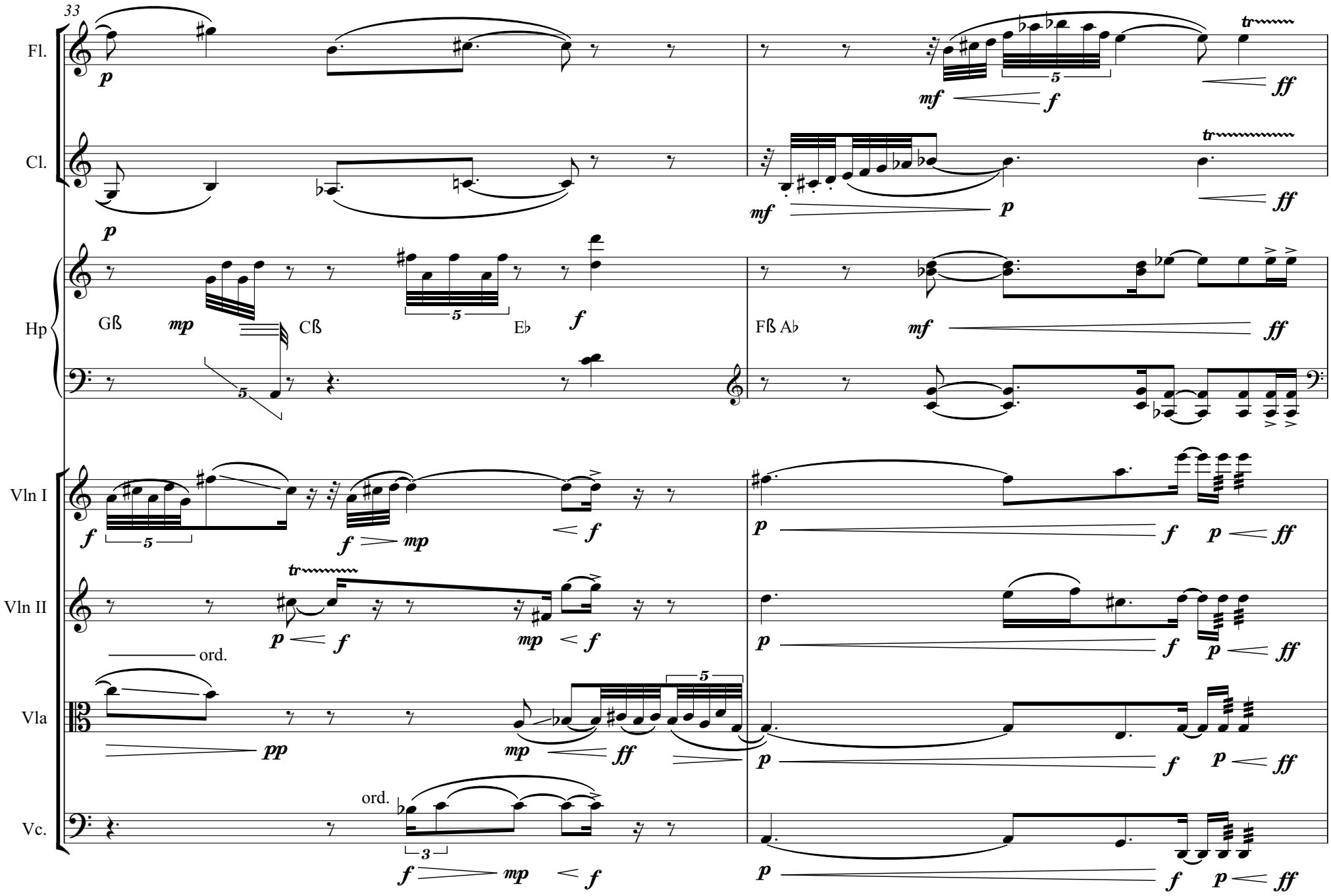

21
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Cß Gb Aß
Ab
ord.
Jete
Ord.
sub. pp

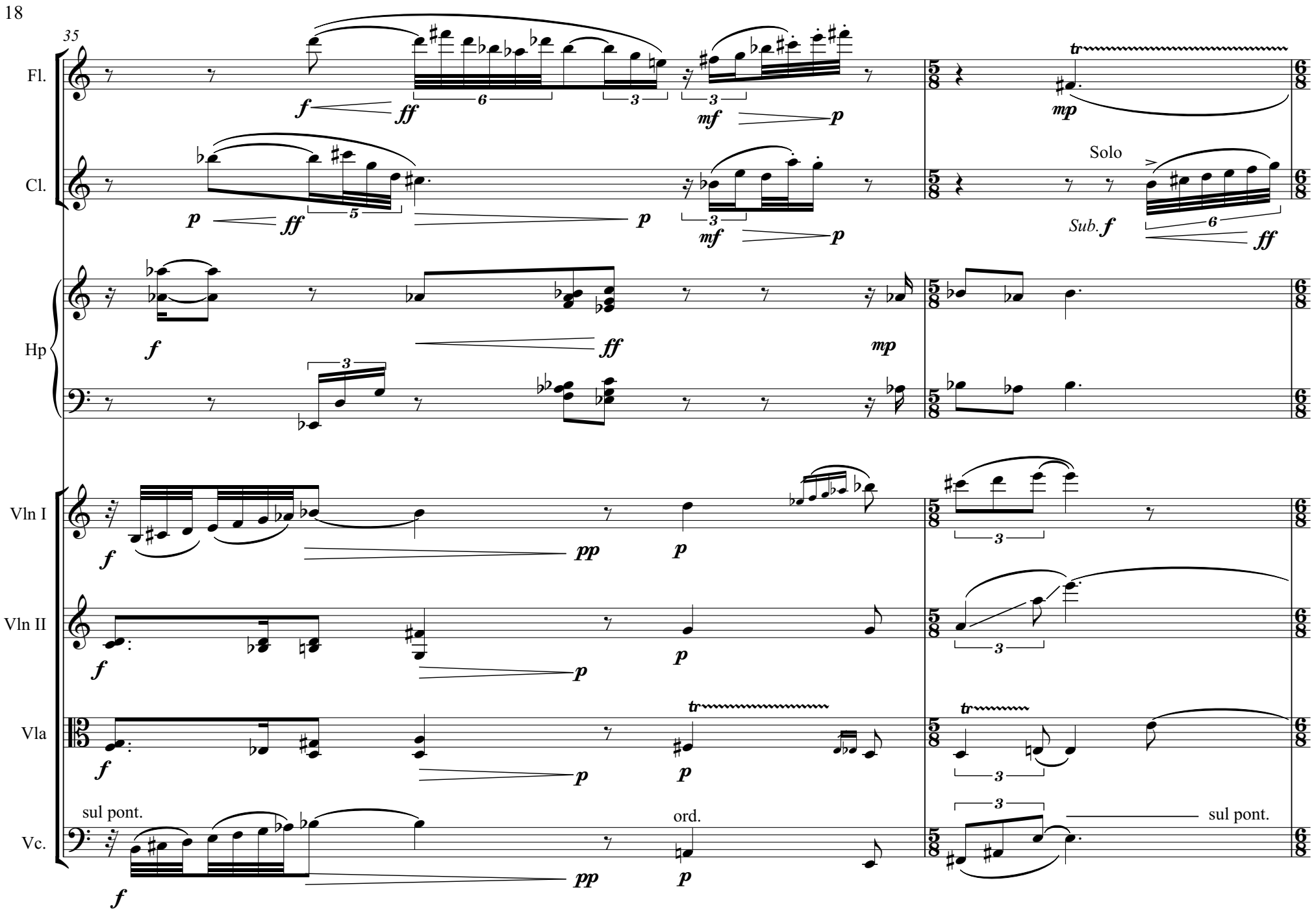

23
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Aß Bß
Eb
Ab
Vln I
cresc.
Vln II
cresc.
Solo
Vla
p
ff
Vc.
cresc.

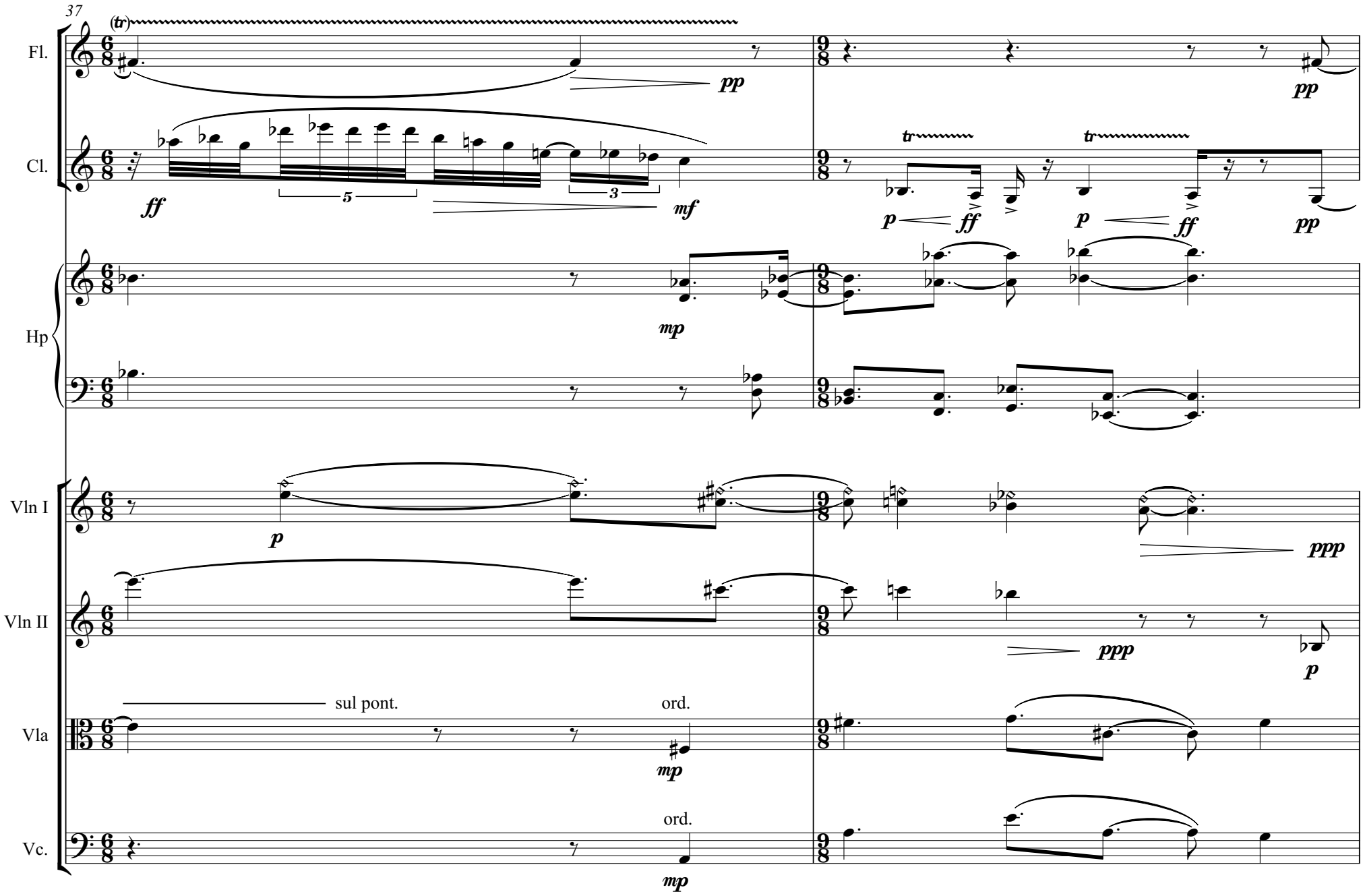

25
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
cresc.
B♭
f
fff

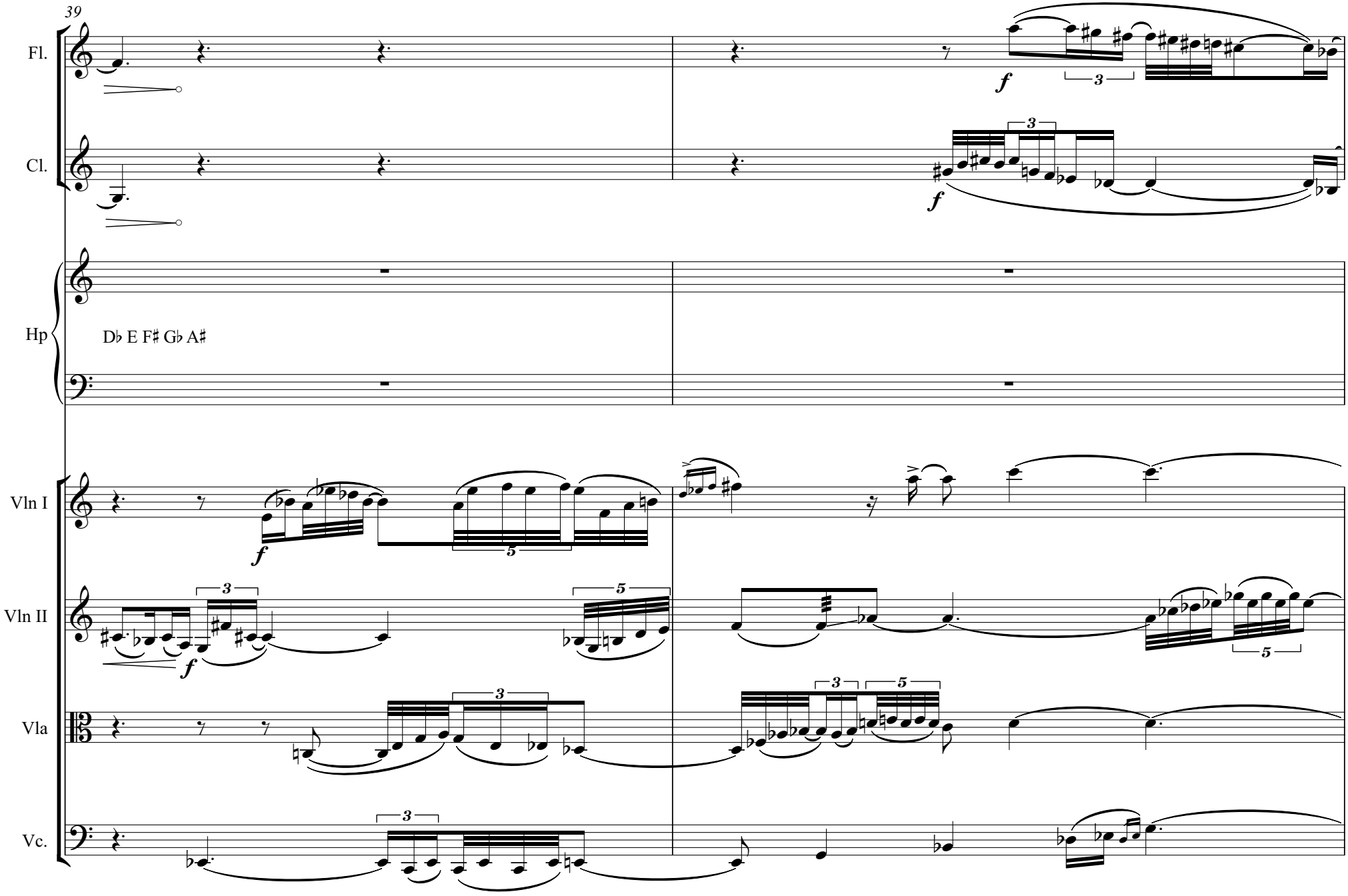

28
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Eß F♯ G♯
C♯ Aß
sul tasto, flautando

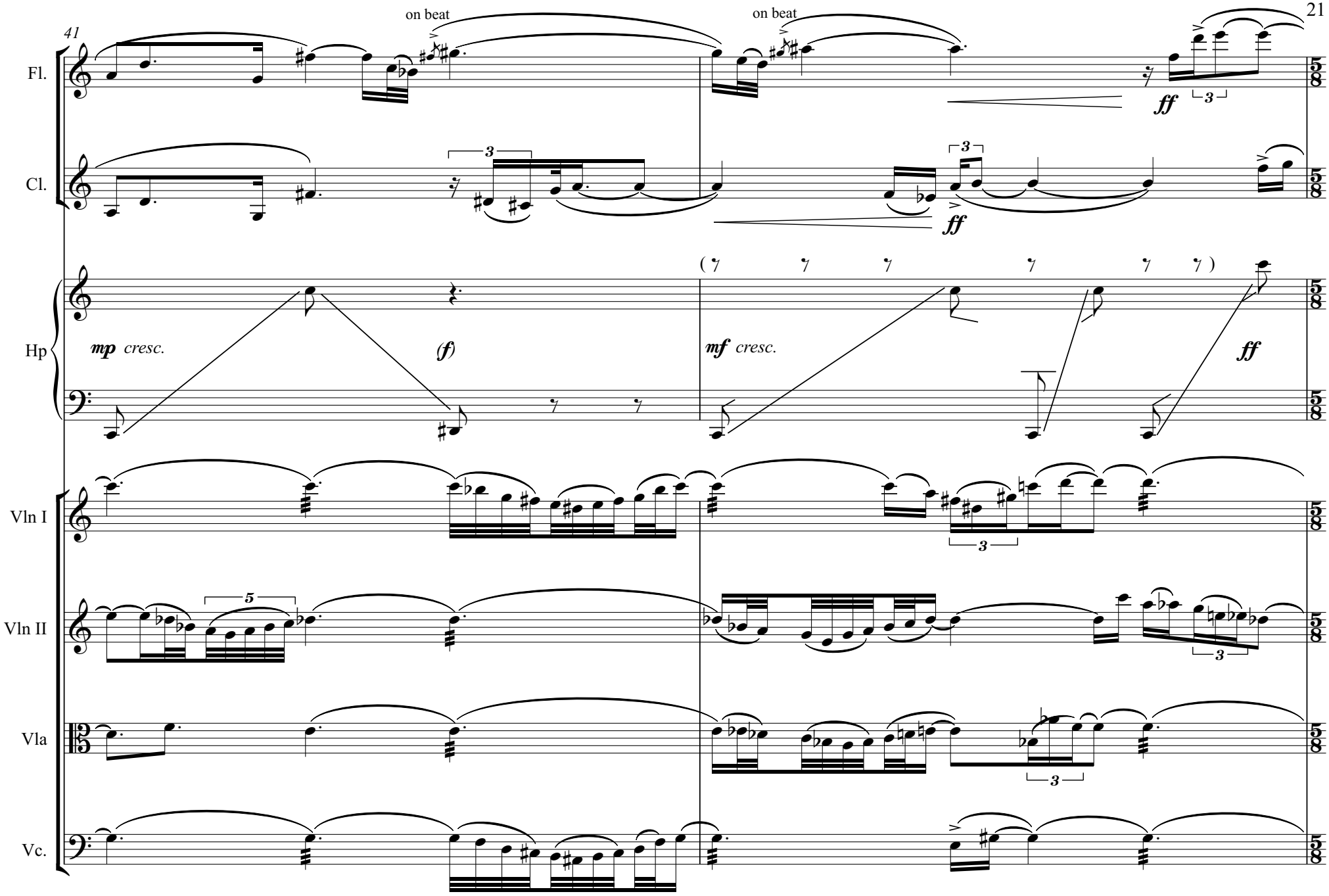

31
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
mp
cresc.
mf
ppp
f
sul pont.
ord.
p

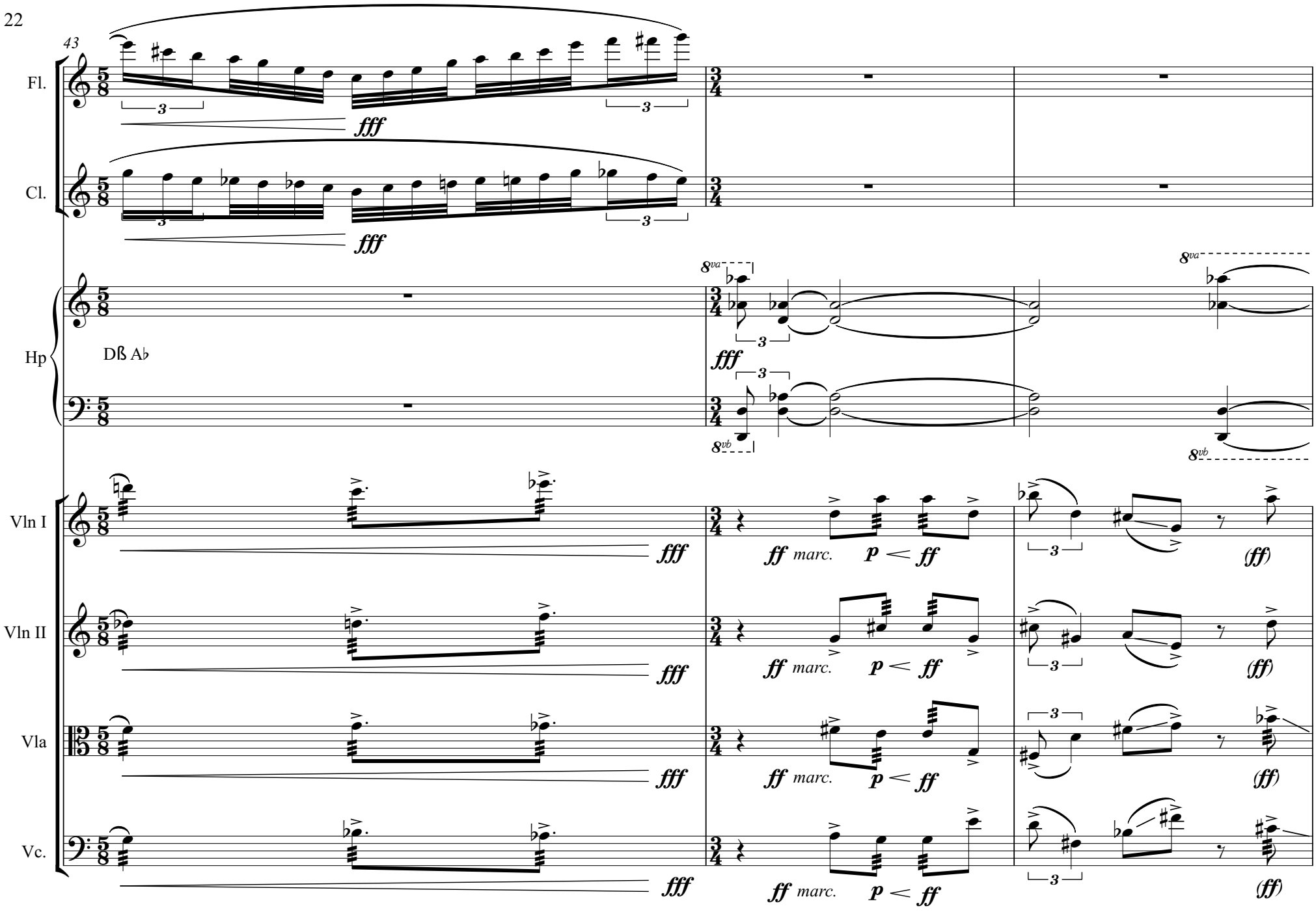

33
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Gß
Cß
Eb
Fß Ab
ord.
ord.

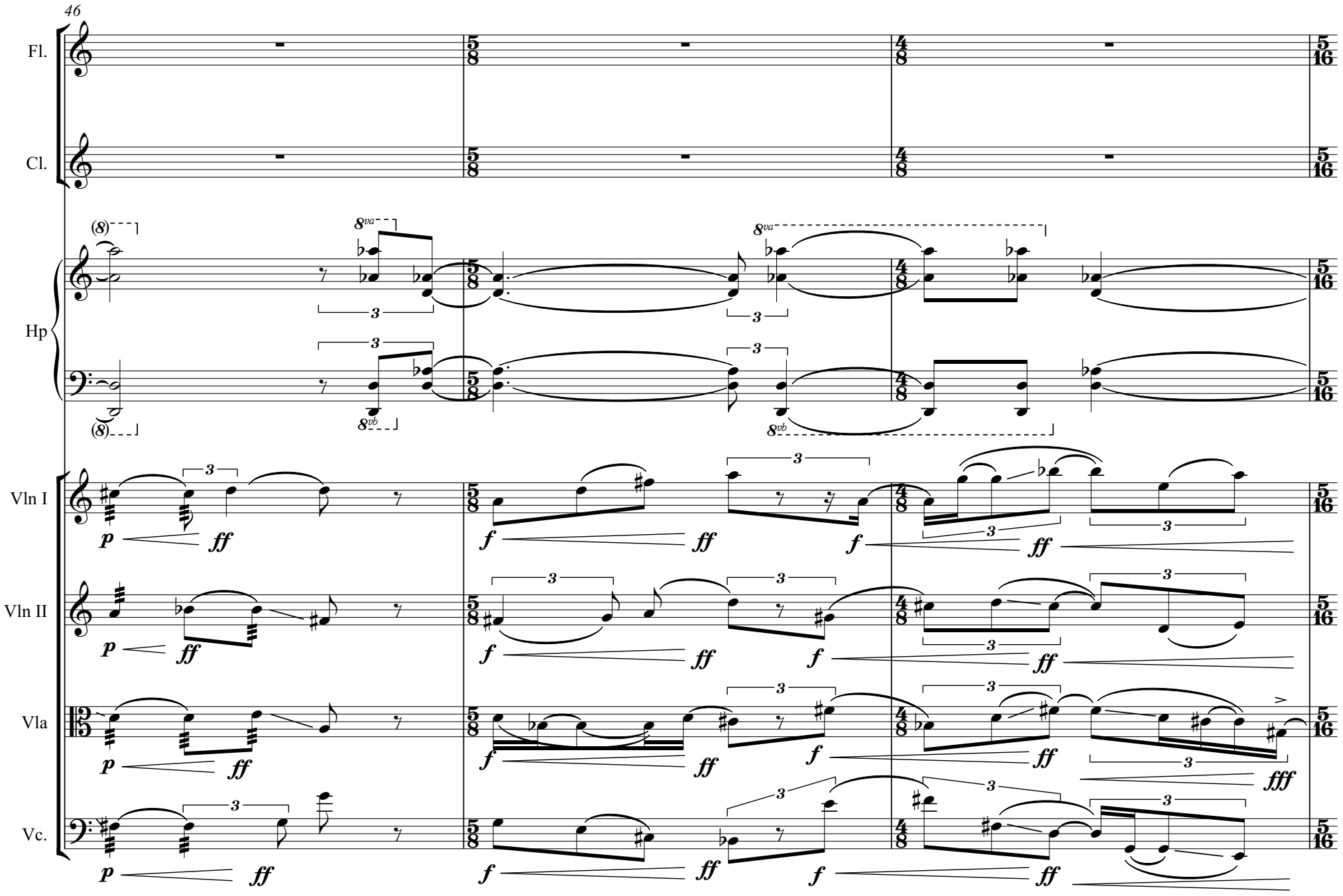

35
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
Solo
Sub.
sul pont.
ord.
sul pont.

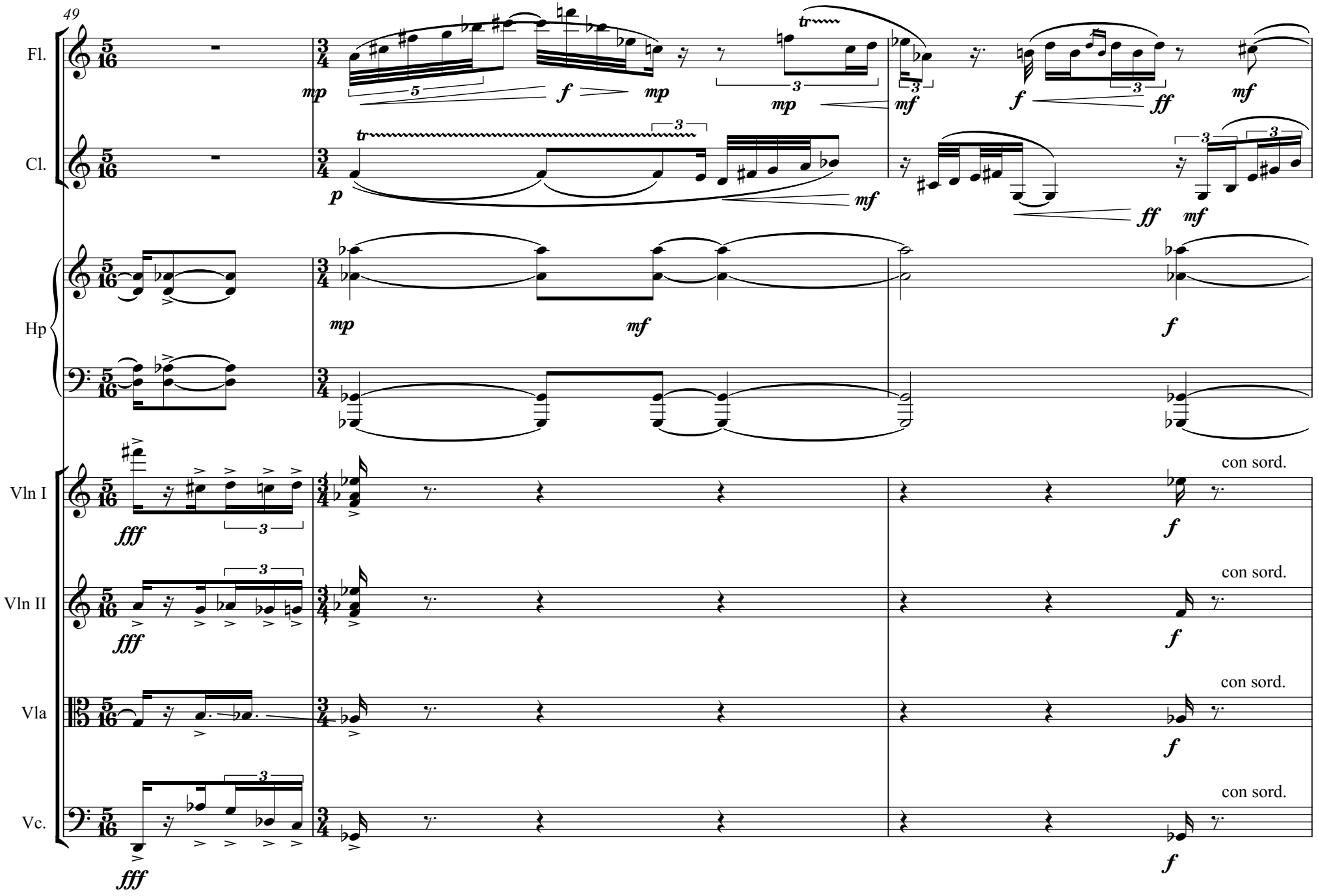

37
(tr)
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
pp
ff
5
3
mf
tr
p
mp
sul pont.
ord.
ppp

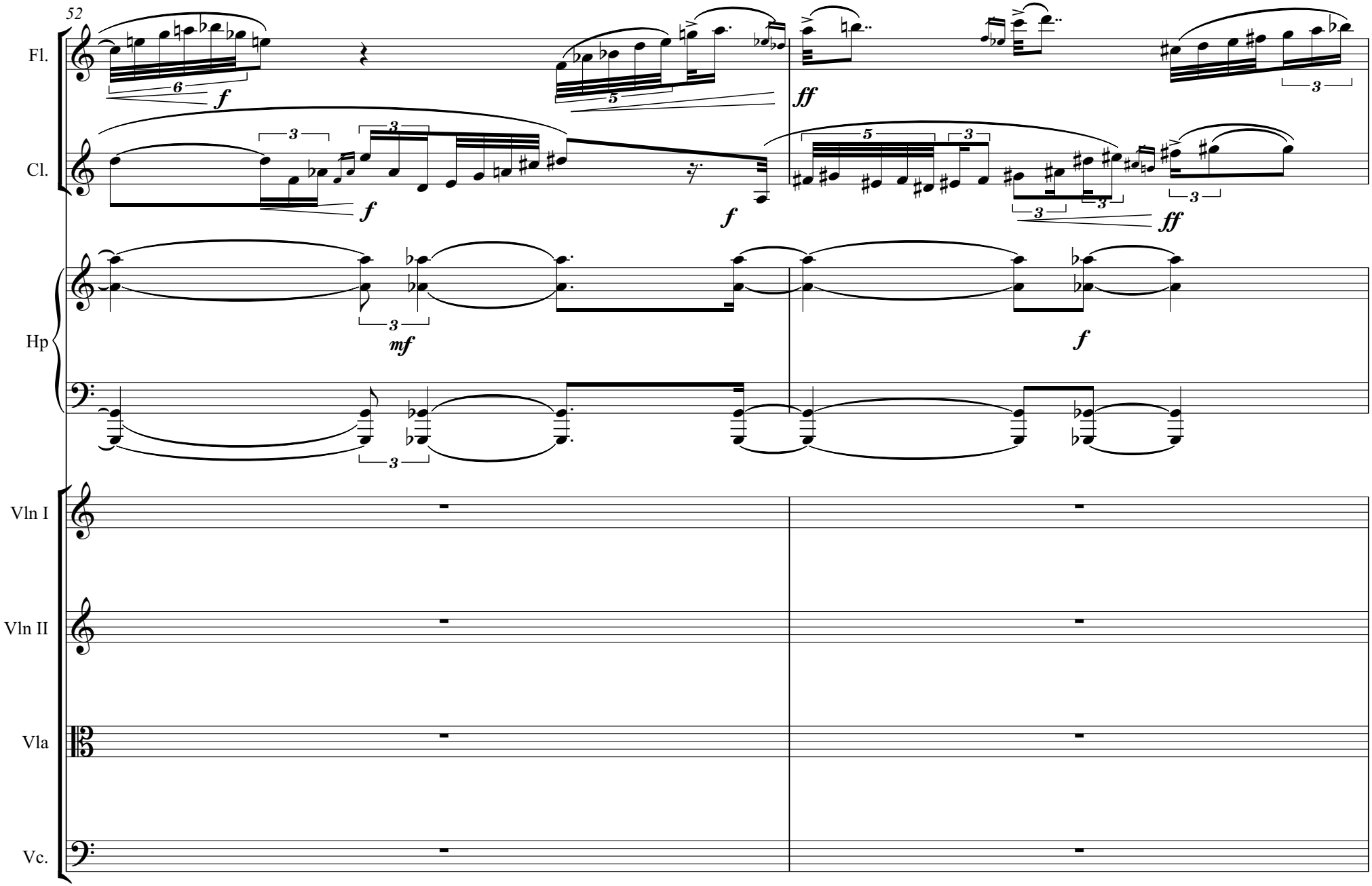

39
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
D♭ E F♯ G♭ A♯
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
f

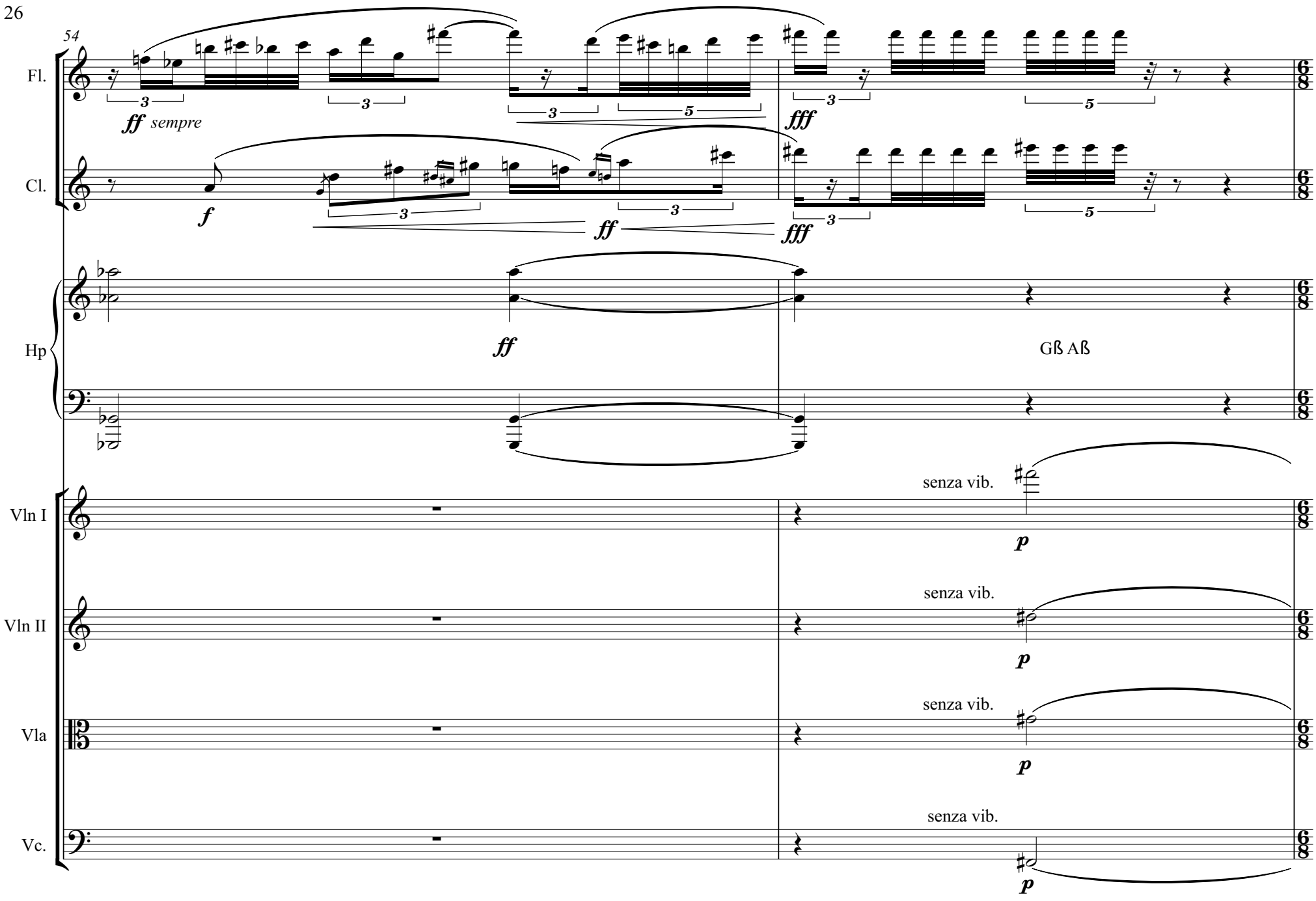

41
on beat
on beat
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
mp cresc.
(f)
mf cresc.
ff
ff
ff

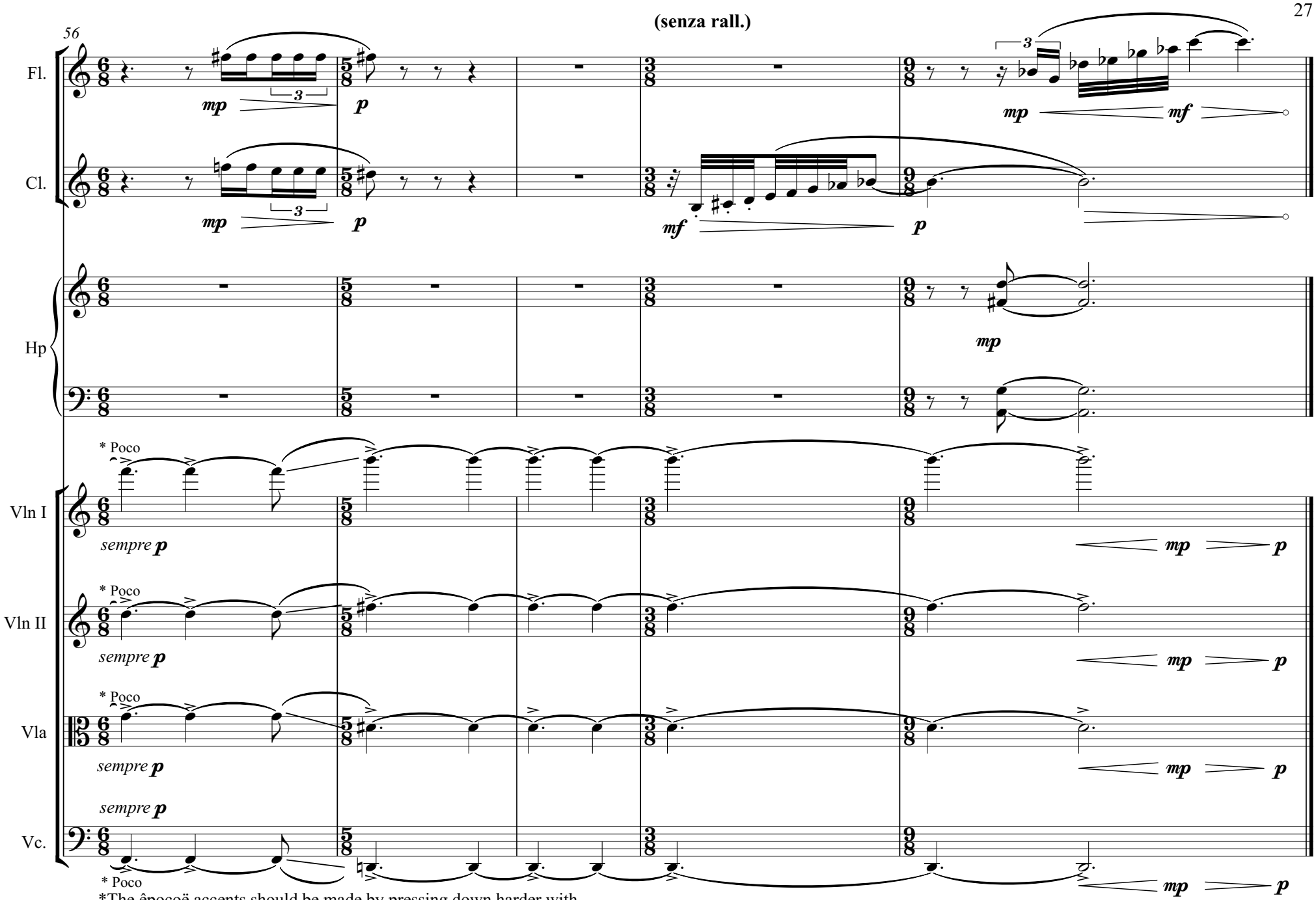

43
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Dß Ab
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
fff
ff marc.
p < ff
(ff)
8va
8vb


46
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
8va
8vb
p
ff
f
fff


49
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
con sord.
con sord.
con sord.
con sord.


52
Fl.
Cl.
Hp
Vln I
Vln II
Vla
Vc.
f
ff
mf


54
Fl.
ff sempre
fff
Cl.
f
ff
fff
Hp
ff
Gß Aß
Vln I
senza vib.
p
Vln II
senza vib.
p
Vla
senza vib.
p
Vc.
senza vib.
p



*The êpocoë accents should be made by pressing down harder with the bow, which, until the end, should never leave the strings.

London, September 1999