Compositions for Guitar Quartet: Suite For 24 Strings

The Canadian Landmarks Suite

Daron McColl

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Arts

Graduate Program in Music
York University
Toronto, Ontario

April 2019

© Daron Malcolm McColl, 2019

Abstract

This thesis combines the score of an original work by Daron McColl for Guitar Quartet entitled "*The Canadian Landmarks Suite",* for guitar quartet, plus a written analysis including process, intent, and methodology behind the works. In my analysis I will explore my personal process and challenges in completing this project. The suite was written to fill a gap in the guitar quartet repertoire and features themes that are based on a Canadian context and the celebration of the arts within Canada. The themes in the suite represent my personal experiences with places and nature that have impacted me, as well the composition is modeled after many of my musical influences. The score is a collection of works intended for a modern guitar player, who is experienced playing in both, commercial music and jazz settings, as well as having some knowledge of classical guitar repertoire. This collection of works is intended to be a departure from the conventional guitar quartet because, it is written specifically for steel string guitar rather then nylon string. The works also include parts that explore the extended techniques and timbres specific to the guitar.

Acknowledgments

Undertaking this project has been a journey that could not have been done alone. This acknowledgment is a small way that I can say thank you and express my gratitude. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisory committee, Michael Coghlan and Sundar Viswanathan. Your guidance, patience, and expertise were a major factor in bringing this project to fruition. I would also like to send out my gratitude to the many staff and teachers who have been there for me and taught me so much along the way. Lorne Lofsky, Kelly Jefferson, Barry Elmes, Alan Henderson, Mike Cado, Mark Eisenman and many others. I also feel it necessary to mention my high school music teachers Louis Tusz and Jordan Riley, their guidance early on was essential in my success.

Music is not worth anything if it cannot be shared with great friends and musicians. Thank you, Sam Ruttan, Connor Moe, Christopher Goncalves, Jon Catanus, Robert Lee, Robert Bourrie, William Dietrich, Daniel Walton, and many others for challenging me to be my best self and sharing so much music and friendship with me.

I also cannot do an acknowledgement without thanking my family. Thank you to my parents, Jen and Doug for your support in everything that I do. In order to not make anyone mad, I believe I have to mention my siblings; Steven, Owen, Morgan, Bronwyn, and Adelyn thanks for being yourselves!

Lastly, I would like to thank and send love to my partner Samantha Snowden. She has supported me through a countless number of tough times. She has encouraged me to follow my dreams no matter what and she has stayed positive even though I changed her life plans and decided to stay in Toronto for another two years to complete this Master's Degree.

Table of Contents

Abstract……ii

Acknowledgements…… iii

Early Beginnings……...1

The Guitar Quartet: A Brief Overview…….3

Process: Background…….4

Models of Inspiration……....8

Claude Debussy and Ravel Maurice……..…8

Anthony Wilson……...….9

About the Music……...…11

Techniques and Devices……..12

Notation…….……..14

The Music……...…….15

Movement One: Huron……...…….16

Movement Two: Baysville Narrows …….…….17

Movement Three: Black Creek Parkland…….…….……..18

Movement Four: The Gulf of Lawrence……..…19

Movement Five: Journey to Lighthouse Point……..……..20

Challenges……..…….……..…..21

What did I Learn through this process……..……..22

Bibliography…….……..23

Discography……..…..…….23

Appendix: Scores……...……..……..…..25

Performance Notes……..…….25

Movement One: Huron……...…….27

Movement Two: Baysville Narrows …….…….37

Movement Three: Black Creek Parkland……..……..47

Movement Four: The Gulf of Lawrence…….……69

Movement Five: Journey to Lighthouse Point……..……....…..81

Early Beginnings

From a young age, I have very vivid memories about music in general. In an old photo album there is a picture of me, possibly age three where I am holding a little red ukulele, apparently, I was also singing Christmas songs to relatives when the photo was taken. My parents had stacks of CD's sitting on top of the stereo and I remember in the late 90's early 2000's sifting through the piles to find bands like *Great Big Sea* and *The Barenaked Ladies.* My mother always had the radio on to listen to the *Moose 99.5 FM* morning show. Unlike my dad, she was listening to who was trending. I remember her getting *Room for Squares* by John Mayer when it first came out. Now currently she is still listening to new records from artists like Ed Sheeran and Taylor Swift. My dad usually stuck to the classic rock and other music that he played growing up in rock bands; Neil Young, Rolling Stones, and Ozzy Osbourne would frequently get put on during car trips to town. My father is a singer and guitarist and we always had a guitar lying around the house. Although my parent's music never specifically sparked an interest for me to become serious about playing music, I believe that it is still a part of who I am as an artist. Now as an adult, when I hear this music it invokes a nostalgia and a certain appreciation for the music that I grew up listening to.

No one ever had to convince me to want to play the guitar. I would often pick it up and randomly strum along with whatever record was on. It was not, however until around high school, possibly the year before at age 12, that I realized that I could have my own musical identity and tastes. Once I discovered that I could listen to artists that interested me and spoke to me personally, my tastes kept evolving and changing. My interest in music is what drove me to take the guitar more seriously as an instrument to express myself. Eventually I got the chance to play in my high school big band and this is where I realized that I could build my life around

music. My very first guitar influences were Joe Satriani, Angus Young and Alex Lifeson, but once I discovered jazz, I got hooked on many of the essential figures of the tradition, Wes Montgomery, Lenny Breau, Jim Hall and Ed Bickert were my first real guitar heroes. These players introduced me to great repertoire from the "Great American Songbook" and the "Jazz Standards" repertoire. Transcribing Jim Hall and Ed Bickert taught me most of what I know about harmony on the guitar, they also taught me to listen to the other players in that band and use their influence to develop melodic ideas. Wes Montgomery taught me how to make jazz phrasing on the guitar melodic and energetic. Lenny Breau showed me that there is more to the guitar than what meets the eye, his use of techniques such as harmonics and flamenco styles shows just how broad the guitars application can be. At the time of discovering jazz, I was also learning more about musicianship so most of my idols were not guitar players; Bill Evans, Oscar Peterson, Sonny Rollins, Wayne Shorter, Kenny Wheeler, Dave Holland, Dexter Gordon, and many others all came on my radar as I prepared to enter university to study jazz performance at York University. Artists like the ones mentioned earlier are still a major part of who I am as an artist and still are an inspiration to me. However, my interests and tastes are always changing and growing. Artists that are currently shaping my music and inspiring me are; Bill Frisell, Gilad Hekselman, Ben Wendel, Ralph Towner, John Raymond, and Brad Mehldau. During my time at York University, I have had the opportunity to be introduced to a variety of classical, world and other music for a lack of a better term. Igor Stravinsky, Steve Reich, Claude Debussy, Edgard Varèse, Baden Powell, and João Gilberto are among my heroes who are not specifically part of the jazz identity. Unfortunately, I cannot list all my influences, but these are a few of them and hopefully this brief overview conveys an idea of my background.

The Guitar Quartet: A Brief Overview

In my research to write for a guitar quartet, I decided to seek out what compositions others have already written or covered for the idiom. In recent years the genre has been expanding with groups such as *The Canadian Guitar Quartet* (started in 1999) which features members Julien Bisaillon, Renaud Côté-Giguère, Bruno Roussel, and Louis Trépanier. As well as the *Los Angeles Guitar Quartet* formed in 1980, currently featuring Scott Tennant, Matt Greif, John Dearman, and Bill Kanengiser. Also, *The Dublin Guitar Quartet* founded in 2001, featuring Brian Bolger, Patrick Brunnock, David Flynn and Redmond O'Toole. This Irish group made a name for themselves performing minimalist music by composers such as Philip Glass, and Steve Reich. These groups have a wide variety of repertoire featuring Latin, African, rock, bluegrass, modern classical, as well as popular classical works. Some of the music being performed by these mentioned groups is original music written by members specifically for their quartet. While stylistically these groups play a variety of genres from Brazilian music to bluegrass, generally their upbringing is from a classical background. It is also important to note that all players in these popular groups primarily play nylon string guitars and are not from a commercial music background. The music that I have written for this thesis is not necessarily for this type of ensemble. The type of musician and ensemble that my suite is written for will be addressed later in this paper. Historically, the guitar and guitar like instruments (oud, lute, etc.) have been a relatively popular instrument for hundreds of years for a number of reasons. Mostly its popularity is due to its portability as well as its strength as an accompaniment instrument, especially when used to accompany vocalists. The guitar can easily cover chord progressions, filling out harmonies and bass notes and this speaks to its versatility as an instrument. As the guitar becomes more popular in schools, so does the guitar ensemble. The guitar's main purpose

was once used to primarily accompany other instruments and vocalists. It is now finding its role expanding in ensembles because of its gain in popularity. Because of this overpopulation of guitarists and the growing genre of the guitar ensemble, there is now a need for new repertoire that will suit the specific attributes of the guitar. Also, since the electric and steel string guitars have been rising in popularity over nylon string guitars, there is even a greater need to address the individual timbre and qualities of these instruments.

It also needs to be noted that there are guitar quartets that feature a modern approach to the ensemble that combined jazz approaches to harmony and structure, as well as avant-garde textures to the form. One example is the Eos Guitar Quartet, much of their repertoire is written by notable guitarists such as; Mike Stern, Ralph Towner, Wolfgang Muthspiel, and John McLaughlin as well as many others. Another guitar quartet that features a great deal of improvisation is Anthony Wilson's composition, *Seasons, A Song Cycle For Guitar Quartet*, which feature four of the best jazz guitarists in the world. Later in this paper I look extensively into *Seasons, A Song Cycle For Guitar Quartet*. Also, guitar ensembles are now beginning to embrace technology in an interesting way. Steve Reich's *Electric Counterpoint* consists of electric guitars overdubbed to become an electric synthesized sound. First recorded by Pat Metheny. *Electric Counterpoint* is quite minimalist in nature which sonically suits the guitar well.

Process

Background

This project is the next logical step in my development as an artist and in academia. During my undergraduate degree I had the opportunity to dive into my passion and explore areas of music that I did not know existed. During that time, I focused my studies on jazz performance,

and I was fortunate enough to study with many of Canada's finest musicians and educators, such as Barry Elmes, Lorne Lofsky, Kelly Jefferson and Kevin Turcotte. At York University I got to perform with various ensembles regularly, especially at events like *The York University Jazz Festival* and *The playGround* theater festival. During this time, I also got to meet a number of great musicians and had the opportunity to perform with them both at York University in school related groups, such as the *YU Jazz Orchestra* and also outside of York at various venues in Toronto with my own band and groups run by other students. Being immersed with all of these wonderful musical opportunities at York University led me to write in a jazz context. During my undergrad experience most of my composing was for small jazz ensembles. The first compositions I wrote were pieces that lacked context, written with no connection from one song to another. They were mostly pieces used as launching off points for improvisation. This can be enjoyable as a performer but, as a composer I feel that I still have room to grow and working on this project has been very beneficial in finding my own voice as a writer of music.

Although guitar was an instrument I enjoyed playing in ensembles. I felt that as a composer I was not able to express my voice, especially when using the guitar as the vehicle of my expression. This has troubled me and has been a challenge throughout the course of my musical life. In jazz, often times I feel the guitar is always trying to be something other than itself, usually it seems performers try to make it sound like a piano or a horn i.e. a trumpet or a saxophone. Often times this can come from two factors. One, using effects like distortion, delay and reverb to have a somewhat legato singing tone much like that of horns. Or two, it can come from changing the style in which the guitar is played. Guitarists often play patterns and chord shapes associated with piano, they also try to even out their touch on the instrument to avoid the punchy strummed sound that is naturally produced on the guitar. This can be done by using the

fingers on the right to pluck chords, because each finger can be assigned to a singular note this allows each note to have a controlled volume. This sound is not necessarily wrong or bad sounding on the guitar, but it is often used to avoid the traditional sounds that I personally think makes the guitar sound unique. An even sound is currently important in modern guitar, because it allows the player to play notes that are clustered together without them sounding messy, as well as many other timbres and techniques that are called for in music that need this even expression. I am guilty of using effects such as the *Electro Harmonix* "Freeze" sound retainer to have the effect of a piano sustain pedal as well as the other mentioned effects delay, reverb, and distortion. I have also spent a long time studying techniques that even out my sound to make chord clusters ring out much like a piano. These sounds and techniques can be desired on the guitar and are part of the accepted array of sound and textures that the guitar can produce. However, in this project I wanted to stray away from this approach to the guitar. It is important to note that one of the only ways modern guitars can get their sounds is through the advancements in technology. These "new" (since the invention of electronic amplification and common place studio techniques) effects and techniques can be difficult on the guitar and often can take away from the natural quality of the instrument.

One of the major factors in my desire to write for guitars was to rediscover my passion for the instrument. For a long time, I was struggling to find its unique voice and, in many ways, felt that it was a lesser instrument compared to the previously mentioned horns and piano. By revisiting the tradition of the instrument, it has allowed me to gain a fresh perspective and have a new unique feeling, because the music is melding traditional guitar approaches to modern music compositional techniques. The idea of a guitar sounding like a guitar is one of the major features of this project. I have always loved the playing of traditional guitar players such as Django

Reinhardt, Charlie Christian, Robert Johnson, and Andrés Segovia. However, when admiring these players, I notice that they are slightly dated in the repertoire that they are playing. The touch and sound of that generation of players is brilliant. However, when I think of the type of music they were playing compared to what composers were writing at the time i.e. Igor Stravinsky, Arnold Schoenberg, Duke Ellington etc. Stravinsky's ballets, especially *The Rite of Spring* have without a doubt shaped the modern music landscape, Stravinsky's rhythmic complexity was unparalleled at the time. Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw, Op. 46,* scored for narrator, men's chorus and orchestra is a great example of how creative his atonal works are. Ellington built the lineage of what jazz has become today with a sense of individuality and style as well as writing and popularizing many hits in the genre. I feel that many guitarists need to catch up. The compositional forms and devices used in guitar music of the early twentieth century is somewhat outdated, especially considering the advances in microtonal music, minimalism and modernism in the Western art music composition domain. Guitarists and composers that appeared to be writing in a fresh manner and keeping with a traditional playing style and are not specifically trying to emulate other instruments; Ralph Towner, Andrew York, Julian Lage, and Anthony Wilson to name a few, have heavily inspired me in this project. These musicians still do play with elements drawn from the characteristics of other instrument, but the primary portion of their playing style comes directly from the guitar tradition. Embracing the acoustic qualities of the guitar, knowing what can be reached easily on the fretboard and also utilizing the instruments weak points as an advantage. The inspiration that I got from these musicians was one of the major forces in deciding to write a collection of pieces for guitar quartet. At this time, I feel it necessary to say that my composition project is not at a comparable level to any one of the composers previously mentioned but, simply an attempt at modeling

many aspects of all the music from the composer and performers whose music I enjoy. When analysing my process, I can break down my model into two major sources of inspiration.

Models of Inspiration:

Claude Debussy and Ravel Maurice

As someone who started writing in the jazz idiom, music by classical composers have always interested me. The intricacy of their counterpoint and use of texture can seem at times, out of my abilities, and before studying the scores of these greats much of their writing was a complete mystery to me. Music by composers such as Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel have been at the center of music for me as a listener and someone who appreciates the art form but, as a composer modeling my music after them was completely new to me.

While studying Debussy's *String Quartet in G minor* I notice many qualities that I could try to integrate into my own work. Debussy's music has a great deal of colour in it, his harmony is often full, with the entire tonal mood spelled out at once. This gives his music a floating, blurry sound, that I believe, can translate well to the guitar. Debussy was inspired by nature, this speaks to me because I also find that nature is a major source for my own inspiration. Like Debussy, Ravel was often inspired by nature. In *Jeux d'eau* you can clearly hear that this piece is inspired by the noise of water. Ravel and Debussy also started to incorporated jazz elements into their pieces, using extensions in their harmony such as ninths and thirteenths, chromaticism, and a bluesy flare in their phrasing are notable elements in their music. This is inspiring to me because I hope to borrow many of the impressionistic elements from all the different styles of music that I enjoy. The texture and sound from Debussy and Ravel, as well as other impressionist composers, are hard to describe without drawing a parallel to the painting, *Impression Sunrise* by Claude Monet, there is a hazy mysteriousness that the work has. I believe

that the guitar is an excellent instrument to capture a similar impressionist description and this is an element that I tried to employ in my own music.

When thinking of modern guitarists that inspire me with a similar impressionist aptitude and sound, I think of Ben Monder, Ralph Towner and Danish guitarist, Jakob Bro. These guitarists are part of the ECM jazz sound, which I believe is one of the modern outlets for impressionism. As well these musicians take the impressionist sound and use it as a landscape for improvisational expression. I find this to be a unique way to use guitar in modern music. These guitarists orchestrate an entire mood or sound scape onto their instruments, much like the solo piano pieces of the formerly mentioned, Debussy and Ravel. As well, their creativity and unique timbre shine a light on guitar playing in the 21st century. However, with the exception of Ralph Towner, none of these artists have pursued writing for or have played in a guitar quartet.

Anthony Wilson

A major inspiration for this project is composer Anthony Wilson for his composition, *Seasons, A Song Cycle for Guitar Quartet* from the record *Seasons Live at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.* This piece grabbed my attention for a few reasons. Anthony fused my love for classic string quartet works by composer such as Debussy and Ravel, as well as my obsession for the guitar particularly in a chamber setting. Anthony uses the guitar in both traditional and abstracts ways. In the piece "Summer" he writes very traditional guitar parts that sound like they are from the folk bluegrass tradition of guitar playing. The voicings have a very open sound with timeless strumming and fingerpicking patterns that are reminiscent of the style and are fun to play for the performer. In "Spring" the solo sections are open and energetic drawing from different styles in both the accompaniment and the soloist. The abstract nature of Anthony's writing can be heard in all of his pieces, Anthony quickly moves the role of each player in the

ensemble, one moment a guitarist is soloing, then next they are playing a single voice in a harmonised section, only to quickly move onto the main melody or an ostinato bass figure. These quick moving transitions add a certain element of energy and excitement to his music. Anthony uses many aspects of his broad musical background in his work, from swing styled walking bass lines to specifically written rhythmic ostinatos figures, his piece is a great example of guitar quartet music for the modern improviser. The broad approach to harmony that Anthony uses is clearly jazz influenced, although I am not sure exactly what genre this work would fall into, other than simply music for guitar quartet. In many ways Anthony's approach to his composition is similar to mine. He is writing with the modern player in mind. Anthony knows that the musicians that will play his piece have a very broad sense of music and can execute many different techniques on the guitar, but these guitarists primarily come from a jazz and commercial music background. As well, they clearly have knowledge of classical guitar, traditional notation and fingerings. Therefore, Anthony's music is a balance between the detailed writing of classical composers, and the free expression of improvisation. *The Seasons* recording also features four guitar players that I admire and love listening to, both on this record and individually; Anthony Wilson, Julian Lage, Steve Cardenas, and Chico Pinheiro.

Seasons, A Song Cycle for Guitar Quartet was commissioned by master luthier John Monteleone as an accompaniment to John's own project to build four archtop guitars, one for each season. As a performer and composer, I find the instrument that I am playing to be an important factor in my music making and part of the process when I am writing. Over the last year and a half, I have been in contact with the great Canadian luthier Benoit Lavoie. We have been planning the build of a guitar for myself. During this process, I have been learning about all of the factors that go into building a guitar, and all of the slight variation and processes that can

change its character. I feel that I have come closer to understanding the instrument. This process has greatly informed my own writing in recent months. Coming to realize the basic physics of how the string rings is also vital when writing for guitar. It is important to know how a note will react on different areas of the fret board. When notes are played on the lower frets (i.e. frets one, two, three) the note will have much more sustain and ring evenly throughout the length it is held. When a note is played on the upper frets (i.e. 12, 13, 14, 15) the note will not sustain very long as well, it will spike with a loud almost percussive sound and die out quickly. Also, the body of the guitar is often tuned to G this means the certain notes and keys i.e. G-C-D etc. will sound richer and more resonate then Ab-Db-Eb.

About the Music

One of the striking aspects of the guitar ensemble is that there are very few compositions specifically written for this combination. When looking at the most prominent guitar quartet ensembles in the classical world, *The Los Angeles Guitar Quartet*, *The Dublin Guitar Quartet*, and *The Canadian Guitar Quartet*. you can see that a great deal of their repertoire is classic string quartet pieces. These pieces fit in the guitar quartet format well, but they do not fully explore the advantages and special qualities that the guitar has. Aside from a few works including Anthony Wilson's Piece *Seasons, A Song Cycle for Guitar Quartet.* There are very few guitar quartet pieces that include improvisation and other modern conventions that are commonly played on guitar in commercial music. This is why I decided to write a piece that the modern commercial musician will enjoy playing as well as someone who is classically trained.

Techniques and Devices

One of the main aspects that I wanted to explore in *The Canadian Landmarks Suite* is the use of guitaristic devices in my writing. Examples of this are; harmonics, strumming, tremolo picking, bends, and slides. Since so much of current guitar quartets repertoire is simply string quartet material adapted for the guitars I wanted my work of music to be different, in that it draws from the guitar and uses its strengths. The guitar has many options compositionally and it is a very versatile instrument. However, for this project it is important to note that, I will not be able to examine all of the possibilities of the electric guitar and the innovations that adding technology can do for the instrument. Because this piece is meant for a chamber music setting I will be writing with the steel string dreadnought guitar in mind. However, at a later time I would love to explore the electric side of the guitar but, for now I must narrow in on this project. The guitar has an extremely wide range of pitch sounding as low as E2 in standard tuning and can go nearly four octaves above that depending on the particular instrument. This range and its ability to easily play chord voicings with up to six notes allows the instrument to easily play bass parts, singing melodies in the mid and high range, and full chordal accompaniment parts. During the course of this project, this has proven to be both a liberating and challenging facet when writing. There are many textures that the guitar can produce with extended techniques, such as harmonics, artificial harmonics, muted notes, bends, and percussive playing. Composers that have written great pieces for string quartets often use the full range of the stringed instruments and include extended techniques to colour the music. This includes using different bowing techniques such as détaché, spiccato, legato etc. as well as other techniques; pizzicato, double stops, etc. I have tried to emulate this in the guitar quartet, by using many different textures and

techniques. In my project I am not necessarily trying to directly emulate the sound of the string quartet, but rather use it as a model to drive my creative process.

The reason behind the use of steel string flat top guitars are as follows. One, compared to the nylon string guitar, the steel string has even less exposure in a chamber music setting. Two, specific techniques and timbres are more alive on the steel string. Of course, the term alive is subjective and it is simply my personal preference, but the brassy, bright yet warm tone of the steel string is undeniably emotional and powerful. The bright sound of the steel string can make strumming, fingerstyle, harmonics, hammer-ons and other techniques come alive. The sound of the acoustic guitar can take me to many of my favorite memories, which leads to point three. I want to invoke a sense of a Canadian identity in my works. In many ways the steel string guitar could be considered Canada's instrument. There is a rhetoric that even the image of an acoustic guitar presents, it is rugged, like a traveler with stories to tell around a campfire. This quartet hopes to support that rhetoric as well as add to it and make it more of an artistic output. There are many Canadian figures associated with the acoustic steel string guitar, Gordon Lightfoot, Joni Mitchell, and Stompin' Tom Connors to name a few. These artists and many other like them are the cornerstone of Canadian popular music, therefore I want to include part of this sound in my quartet. At times my music visits these Canadian song writing legends with heartfelt child like melody and simple harmonic constructions, voiced much like traditional folk guitarists. By using the steel string with the association and nostalgia that comes with the instrument the music will be able to convey a story that will make connections with each listeners own experience. My composition will also include aspects of the acoustic guitar that are slightly less common such as, extended and modern approaches that are somewhat unconventional. This is because I want my music to not only be enjoyable to listen to, but also push boundaries in the art form, by doing so

my music is both accessible and interesting. This hybrid is put together in a way that I hope conveys a story that is representative of modern Canadian music.

Notation

When looking at guitar notation there are many different systems and conventions commonly used. In my time playing a variety of music I have seen everything from; lead sheets, combination tab/score, highly detailed parts with specific fingering instructions, and big band parts written with both sections of chord symbols and sections of melody. One of my major challenges when writing for this collection of pieces was deciding what methodology to use when notating the music, especially regarding how to notate and how much detail to include. When looking at notation, one of the first aspects to consider is, what type of performer will be performing the piece. For my suite, I wanted to keep it very open, so a variety of modern players can understand what is on the page. I find at times classical guitar repertoire can be somewhat overwhelming when the player is not familiar with all of the symbols and conventions. Sometimes the overpopulation of detail on the page can lead to confusion, and give the music a clucky sound. This of course does not apply to the trained classical guitarist who is familiar with the conventions. However, I want my music to be accessible to a variety of players. Because of my jazz background it is common to read music that is generalized and written for a variety of instruments. There are many sections in the suite where I have decided to leave out conventional fingering numbers commonly seen in classical guitar repertoire. The advantage to doing this is that it leaves the performer with the choice to voice and play parts in a natural and comfortable way. This will result in a more expressive performance. During particular passages in the works I included fingerings, hand positions and number, but only when it felt completely necessary to make a particular sound or to simplify a difficult passage.

In specific areas of the suite the music calls for extended techniques, some of which are a common convention such as harmonics. This is notated with a circle over the note head or a diamond shaped note head, I choose to do the same notation for artificial harmonics as I did with natural harmonic, because in modern music harmonics on the guitar are quite common. I separated them by writing Nat. Har or Art. Har. This allows the performer to know what is expected of them without being overly controlling. Another technique that needed a bit more thought and research when notating is percussive sounds from the guitar. These techniques are not necessarily new but are rather uncommon in notated works. The percussion that I employ in my works comes from hitting the body of the guitar in various places using the knuckles, thumb, and fingernails. Because of the unconventional nature of this technique in writing I included a section in the performance notes that gives a diagram correspondence to the notation used. This can be seen on page 26.

The Music

At this point in the paper I want to include a brief analysis and explanation of the process that has gone into each piece of music written for the suite. One of the major inspirations that I used in writing this music was nature, aside from my musical influences. I think that nature is the strongest source of my inspiration. Exploring the outdoors has always been a major part of my life. As a kid my family would often go on camping trips, cross country skiing, snowboarding, hiking, bicycling, fishing, and swimming as some of our favourite pass times. Being immersed in nature gives me peace of mind, calms me, and gives me clarity. For these reasons I have based my works on places that connect me to the outdoors and calm me. The textures that the guitar can create suits these themes well. As mentioned before, because my upbringing is in Canada I want this suit to exude pride. Through this analysis I will also address my reasons behind

specific techniques both on the guitar and in the musical form. Another aspect I want to address is the hierarchy of musical roles between the guitarists. Certain pieces favour certain guitarists throughout the suite. However, I want this music to be enjoyable for all players. Also, if players are at different levels or lack particular skill such as improvising, simple part swapping can ensure that a particular player does not have to improvise or have challenging parts throughout the suite.

Movement One: Huron

The opening of the suite starts with a subtle, interlocking melody from the Guitars One and Four. The section builds towards more colourful sounds with more of a floating rhythm caused by the quarter note triplets in bars 15 and 16. After this, in bar 19 we reach the main theme of the piece. Each part in this section has an important role. Guitar One is playing the main melody. Guitar Two is doubling the melody and adding harmony notes to enhance the melody in certain parts, Guitar Three is playing the chords in this section B6/9 and C6/9 and Guitar Four is playing a counter line to fill out the sound. Practically, this part can be difficult for the performers. Timing in this section is very important in order to get all parts to work together. It is possible that this will be a rehearsal challenge. Structurally, I wanted this piece to be similar to a pop song containing a verse, chorus, bridge/alternate section, verse, solo, alternate section, chorus, and outro. This evokes a familiarity that I believe the average listener will appreciate. In bar 27 the piece enters an alternate section which contrasts with the main melody. In this section the placement of accents has changed. This add intensity to this section. Although the hierarchy of the piece stays the same with Guitars One and Two performing the melody and Guitar Three playing the accented chords, while at the end Guitar Four enters on the last push, doubling the chord an octave higher. I found the technique of voicing the chord an octave apart between the

guitars to be quite useful. When voicing multiple guitars playing chords at once, it gives the piece a very loud and punchy sound. Practically speaking, it takes out a lot of guesswork when assigning notes in the chord to different guitarist. The name of the piece, Huron, named after the Great Lake Huron is a homage to the many adventures I have had camping and exploring the lake, particularly at *Killbear Provincial Park* and *Pinery Provincial Park*. The lake has many legends of water monsters, and has had large shipwrecks. So, as well as reminding me of fun adventures with friends and family, it also brings some mystery and suspense that fascinates me.

Movement Two: Baysville Narrows

The narrative of the second movement is the Baysville Narrows, a small river near the house where I grew up. This is a place that I would often walk to and reflect. It is also close to where many Baysville event and gathers take place such the Canada Day fireworks or *Art in the Park.* The piece pays homage to growing up and to my roots that is reflected in the simple folky melody. The music in the second movement starts with a simple accompaniment pattern reminiscent of classic fingerstyle accompany found in "folk/pop" music. I enjoy this part because it is simply fun to play and fits nicely in the open position of the guitar giving the introduction of the piece an open ringing quality. Also giving the piece the key of e minor/g major adds to the piece's "campfire" charm and sound, I find this key on guitar to be very full and lively. When the melody enters in bar five you are greeted by a single guitar playing the simple diatonic melody on the platform that is laid out by Guitar Four. This melody to me is very singable and memorable. When Guitar Two enters a tenth apart with the melody it continues to play with the simple, yet open sound previously stated by the other guitars. On bar 13 the tonality changes, this to me is where the interest and drama enters in the piece. This is also the first part of the pieces to

have all four of the guitars playing, this allows the music to build in intensity and note density. This drama then climaxes at bar 21 with a sudden soft underlying rhythmic part from Guitar Four enters, and quietly other guitars conclude the phrase. This new section at bar 25, then brings the listener to new melodic content, similar to the melody in the beginning at bar five, yet different with a new perspective. Bar 35 is another section that adds a great deal of contrast to the piece. The tonality offers something different from the rest of the pieces. However, this section also serves as a launchpad to the solo section at bar 41. The A solo section uses the same chords as the beginning of the piece, Em(add9) - Gmaj7/F# - Am9 - B7(sus4), which gives the improvisor a freedom and comfort to express themselves. This section could be repeated any number of times, as desired by the soloist or band leader.

Movement Three: Black Creek Parkland

The third piece in the cycle is a through composed piece and is transitional from the first half of the music which has a nostalgic, beginning sound into the second half which is more adventurous. Black Creek Parkland is a park right near my apartment where I am living while writing this thesis. While I am in Toronto I often miss being able to be immersed in nature and having a quiet space to walk and have a clear mind. With having a park near me in a big city provides me with space to walk at night when the craziness of the day has settled down and I am able to reflect on myself and the future. Like the music in this piece, my time in Toronto does not feel permanent but rather like a transitional period. The piece starts with a droning A major sound from Guitar Two. The cluster voicing I used can sound very dense on the guitar, especially when notes are let to ring out, sustaining as long as possible. The melody that enters in bar five is played by Guitar Three in the lowest register on the guitar. This contrasts the previous piece, but also the low register notes played lower down the neck allows for notes to ring with a fuller and

longer tone. The register is especially important to consider when writing for guitar and in this instance it gives the piece a warm character. The duration that a note can ring is dependent on where it is played on the neck, lower notes down on the first few frets will ring a lot longer than notes up on the 12th fret and above. In bar 19, Guitar Four enters with a complementary pattern to the underlying drone. Also, it is played with 16th notes which helps to add intensity as the song builds. At bar 36 the melody runs its course, and the piece enters a transitional solo section. This section is in ⅞ time grouped two-two-three, this transition also features guitar body percussion. At the end of the solo the line by Guitar One propels the music back into 4/4 this time in the parallel minor key (A minor).

Movement Four: The Gulf of Lawrence

Driving to Quebec along the St. Lawrence was a great road trip. The scenery as you get closer to the east coast is beautiful. Although I have not spent much time in eastern Canada I can certainly see myself returning. The music in the fourth movement offers a reflection of what has come before. It develops the music in a new perspective and looks to the future. It has themes and elements from the first three sections. The music also has a reflective rippling quality first noted in Guitar Three's arpeggiating chords which, like in Ravel's music, is meant to feel like water flowing. When Guitar Four enters with the melody it's repetition of notes and syncopated rhythm feels like echoes across the water. The range was also considered here in order to have a high singing quality. In Bar 26 and onward Guitar One and Two heighten the echoing passage by displacing and repeating the melody played by Guitar Four. At bar 31 you can begin to hear the waves, as the phrase rises and then falls, only to rise higher and then crash down harder the second and third time. As I transition, I have all the guitars play a chord soli in unison, Anthony Wilson uses similar techniques in his quartet to great effect. In bar 40, Guitar One enters with a

new figure. I wanted to give this part to Guitar One in order to share the role of supporting the other musicians. The tempo chosen in this part of the suite is much slower and calmer than the rest of the suite. This is meant to reflect back on the music that has passed. This pattern played by Guitar One utilizes open strings and a movable shape. This allow many of the notes to ring open without being disturbed. When Guitar Three begins the melody at bar 54, the listener is presented with a familiar theme, directly from movement two. The melody has been somewhat stretched and lengthened to accommodate the slow ¾ pulse of the music. The second time this melody is played, sections of the tune are shared between Guitars Three and Four. This allows the melody notes to be held over one another creating rubbing cluster sounds, much like a piano holding down the sustain pedal. It is in this section Guitar Two plays a supporting role.

Movement Five: Journey to Lighthouse Point

Lighthouse Point is a campsite at *Killbear Provincial Park* and one day my partner and I hiked across the entire shore line of *Killbear* to reach Lighthouse Point. The name of this piece reminds me of that journey, but it is also meant to represent the journey through life and the adventures that can be had in the least likely places. The fifth and final movement in the instrumental cycle is based around an idea I had to move major triads up the neck of the guitar in minor thirds while referring to the open first and second strings (B and E). The introduction of the movement starts with Guitar One outlining the harmony. This is played freely without a pulse and allows for artistic interpretation. This freedom should cause some tension for the listener, who will get some relief when the pulse is introduced at bar 7. At bar 31 there begins a call and response section between Guitars One and Two. The phrases are woven together to create a complex sound, chords spilling over into the next players phrase. At bar 42 all four guitars are staggered in their entries racing toward the finish line at bar 51. I wanted this piece to have

forward moving momentum because I want it to feel like you are trying to reach the lighthouse but, it is a long journey. Bar 56 employs contrapuntal motion between the players with the melody played by the Fourth Guitar and echoed by Guitar Two. This section is meant to feel somewhat disorderly, like the time hiking when you might be a little bit lost or did not pack quite enough to eat. At bar 69 I employed a bit of humor to lighten the negative energy. At bar 84 the piece reaches its stride. Guitars Three and Four are playing the melody. This is one of the biggest payoffs when hiking, when you get in the zone and forget about everything else that might be troubling you. At this point you can truly enjoy nature. In this section I also incorporated some of the Latin jazz influence by giving Guitar Two a two-three son clave rhythm to play the chords to. I feel that the clave makes the piece feel like it is walking or even dancing along through the shore line.

Challenges

There have been many challenges in completing this project. One of the major challenges was narrowing down the repertoire and thematic ideas. Using a through composed writing style made it challenging to have continuity throughout the pieces. At times, I accepted that straying away from themes is part of the interest and journey, however the pieces still needed continuity. Another challenge was to use the guitar in a creative way while keeping the music fun to play and not have the works feel like a novelty piece due to the different sounds and textures. Another challenge in writing for guitars is dealing with all of the possibilities in accompaniment styles. Unlike the violin, viola or cello in the classic string quartet, guitars can fill out a lot of space on their own, which is often why a guitar plays solo so frequently. One guitar can play bass, harmony and melody at once. This left me with an infinite amount of options as to how to voice a particular section. One simple way I addressed this challenge was to use a different model to

base the roles of the guitars on. A common model to use is the rock band model. In this model I separate the guitars into bass, rhythm, harmony, melody. This gives each player something completely different to play. Although it can result in a slightly generic and non-complex sound, it does have a nice familiarity to it and can be contrasted quite easily. Another model in voicing is to employ full counterpoint. This is much closer to the standard string quartet where I voice each player with their own independent line. Often, this is a singable monophonic melody (i.e. no double stops or chords for an individual player). This can result in a full complex sound however, this does not always support the full character and capabilities of the guitar.

What did I Learn through this process

Something that I explored in this process was the value of focusing on one instrument. I now feel like I can write for the guitar in a creative way while using its strengths. I also learned about the importance of moving forward in the writing process, to keep my creative flow going. When there is a great deal of music to write and limited time, it is important to keep moving forward and not dwell too much on what I have already written. I feel that through this process I have bettered myself as a composer. Now I feel that I am able to write with more continuity and clarity. By working on such a large project my ability to focus on details in my writing has expanded. Now having completed this task I feel ready to tackle my next project.

Bibliography

Glick, Srul Irving. *Dance Suite: For Two Guitars*. Toronto, Canada: Nambe Edition, 1993.

Lunn, Robert Allan. *Extended Techniques for the Classical Guitar: A Guide for Composers*. The Ohio State University, 2010.

Monder, Ben. *Ben Monder Compositions*. Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, 2008.

Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice.* Faber and Faber, 1978.

Reich, Steve. *Electric Counterpoint: For Guitar and Tape or Guitar Ensemble*. New York: Hendon Music, 1990.

Roth, Arthur Martin. *The Generation Variations: A New Work for Double Bass Soloist and Electric Guitar Accompanist*. York University, June 2016.

Schönberg, Arnold, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition.* Faber and Faber, 1967.

Towner, Ralph. *Solo Guitar Works*. San Francisco, CA. Chester, NY: Guitar Solo Publications, 2002.

Whiteman, Richard. *Preludes: A Contemporary Collection of Pieces for Solo Piano,* M.A. Thesis, York University, April 2010

Discography

Bickert, Ed. *Ed Bickert/Don Thompson (Sackville, 1978)* SACK 4005, 1978.

Breau, Lenny. *LA Bootleg 1984* Linus Entertainment 270201, 2014.

Bro, Jakob, Thomas Morgan, and Jon Christensen. *Gefion.* ECM 2381, 2015.

California Guitar Trio. *Pathways.* Discipline Global Mobile – DGM9803, 1998

California Guitar Trio. *Rocks the West.* Discipline Global Mobile – DGM0003, 2000

Debussy, Claude. *String Quartet in G minor op. 10, Emerson String Quartet.* GIMA 445 509-2, 1986

Lage, Julian. *Avalon.* Modern Lore Records. B00O64D42W, October 7, 2014

Lage, Julian. *Mount Royal*. Mack Avenue Records – MAC1131, 2018

Los Angeles Guitar Quartet. *LAGQ's Guitar Heroes.* Telarc – CD-80598, 2004.

Monder, Ben. *Amorphae.* ECM 2421, 2015

Ravel, Maurice. *Jeux D'eau*. Lyon, France: CLC Productions, 2010.

Ravel, Maurice. *String Quartet in F major, Emerson String Quartet*, GIMA 445 509-2, 1986

Schoenberg, Arnold. *A Survivor from Warsaw: Op. 46*. Vienna, Austria: Vienna Modern Masters, 1992.

Stravinsky, Igor. *Three Pieces for String Quartet*. Alban Berg Quartett. EMI Classics B0032HKEN6, 2010.

Towner, Ralph. *Travel Guide.* ECM 2310, 2013.

Wilson, Anthony. *Seasons: Live at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.* Goat Hill Recordings B005P89FDK, 2011

Appendix

Scores: Compositions for Guitar Quartet: Suite For 24 Strings

The Canadian Landmarks Suite

Composed by Daron McColl

Performance Notes

It is important to note that any of the parts can be switched between the musicians in between movements if wished. Also, this piece is written for steel string guitars, but experimenting with other guitars or similar stringed instruments may result in an interesting sound. Please note that all repeated solo sections may be repeated as many times as wanted. The repeated sections may be queued out or have a predetermined number of times through the repeats, this is at the discretion of the ensemble. It is intended for all parts to be played with a pick, unless otherwise stated. At times in the piece the rhythm is up to the interpretation of the performer, this is either notated with slashes, or a suggested notated rhythm that can be played ad lib.

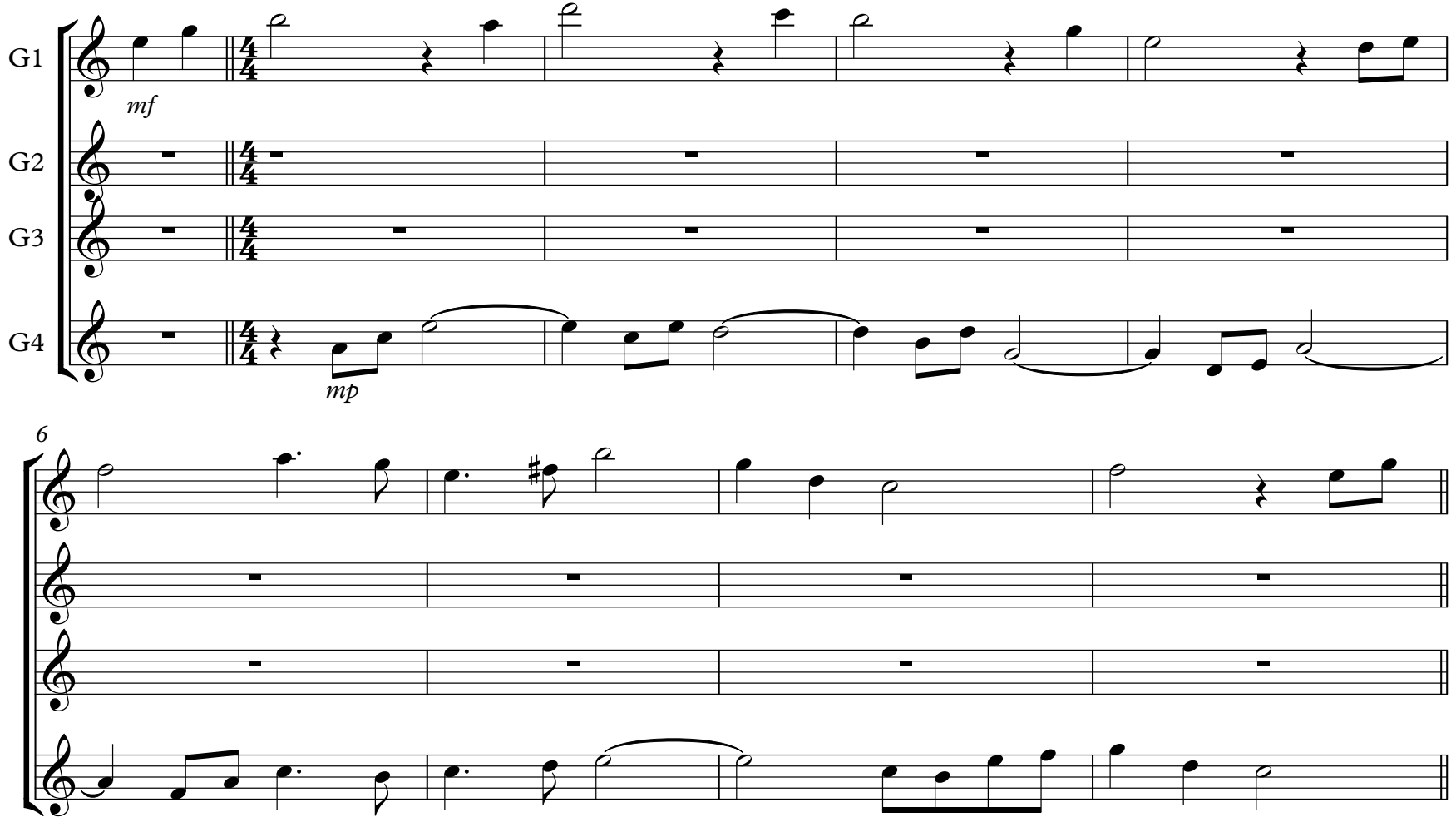
Guitar body percussion is notated with a X note head, in these instances I suggest closing the ends of the fingers, so your fingers are closed but your palm is still open, then move your hand to the lower body of the guitar and hitting the top alternating between the thumb and knuckles for different timbres.

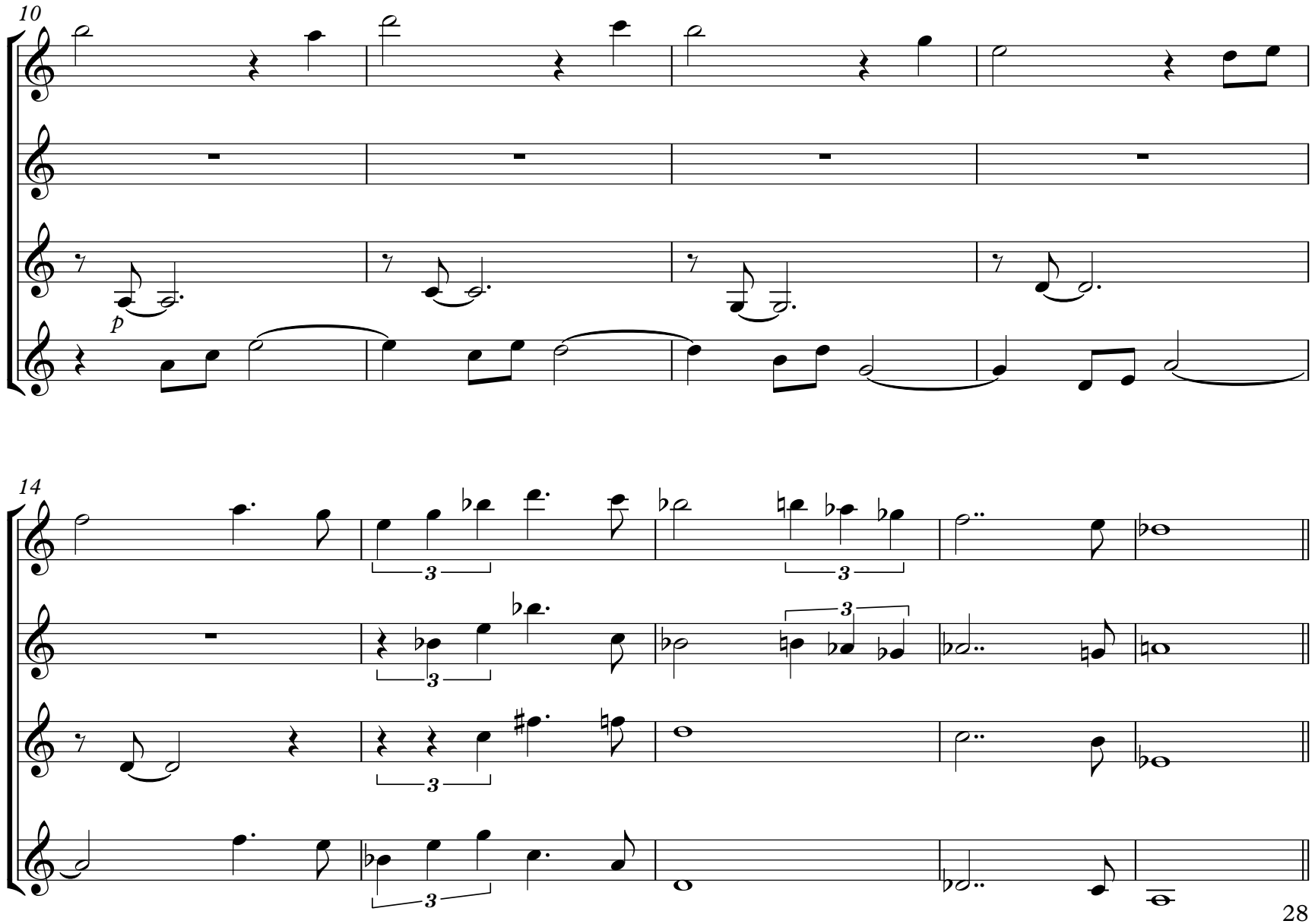
Table of Notation and Instructions

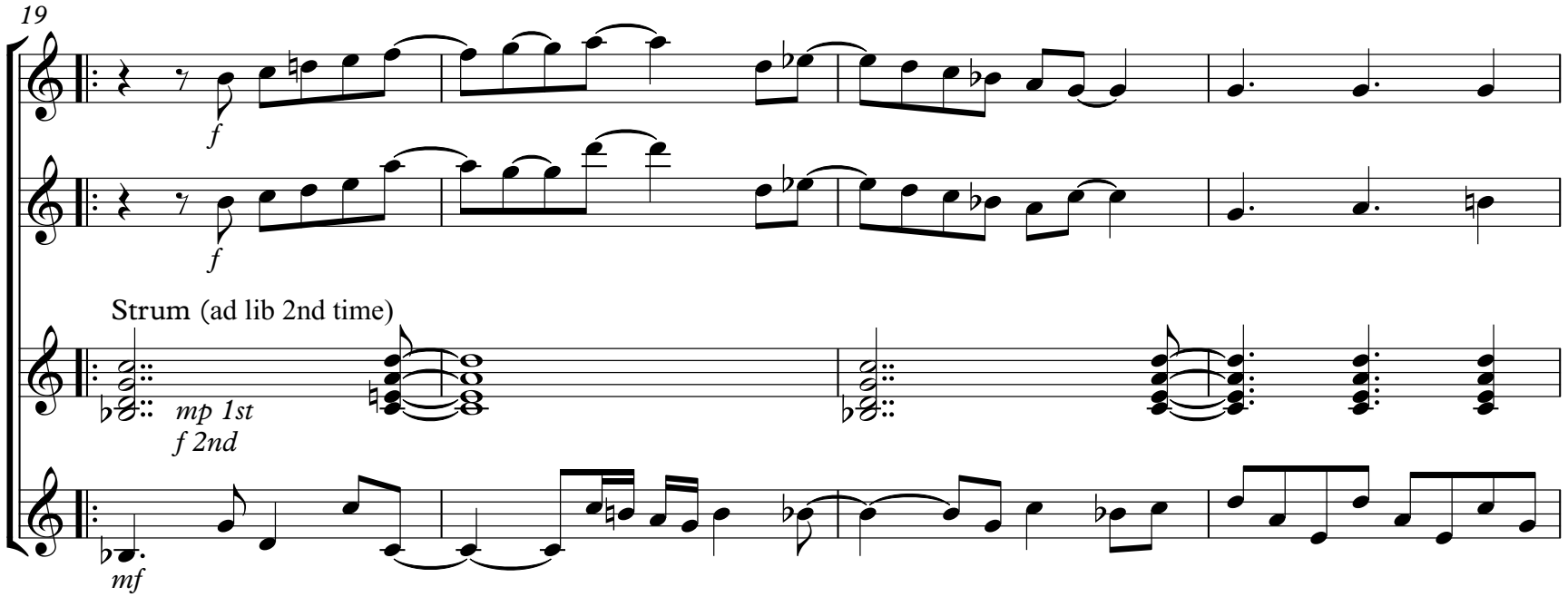
A. H.	**Artificial harmonic**
N. H.	**Natural harmonic (to be played at the 12th fret or a specified fret)**
Roman Numerals (E.g. I, II, III etc.)	**Refers to the fret number that must be bared with the index finger.**
	Arpeggio in the direction indicated
p,i,m,a	**Thumb, index, middle, ring fingers**
"Let ring"	**Hold the notes with the fretting hand as long as possible**
⑴⑵⑶⑷⑸⑹ **circled number.**	**Used to indicate the specific string to play particular notes on.**

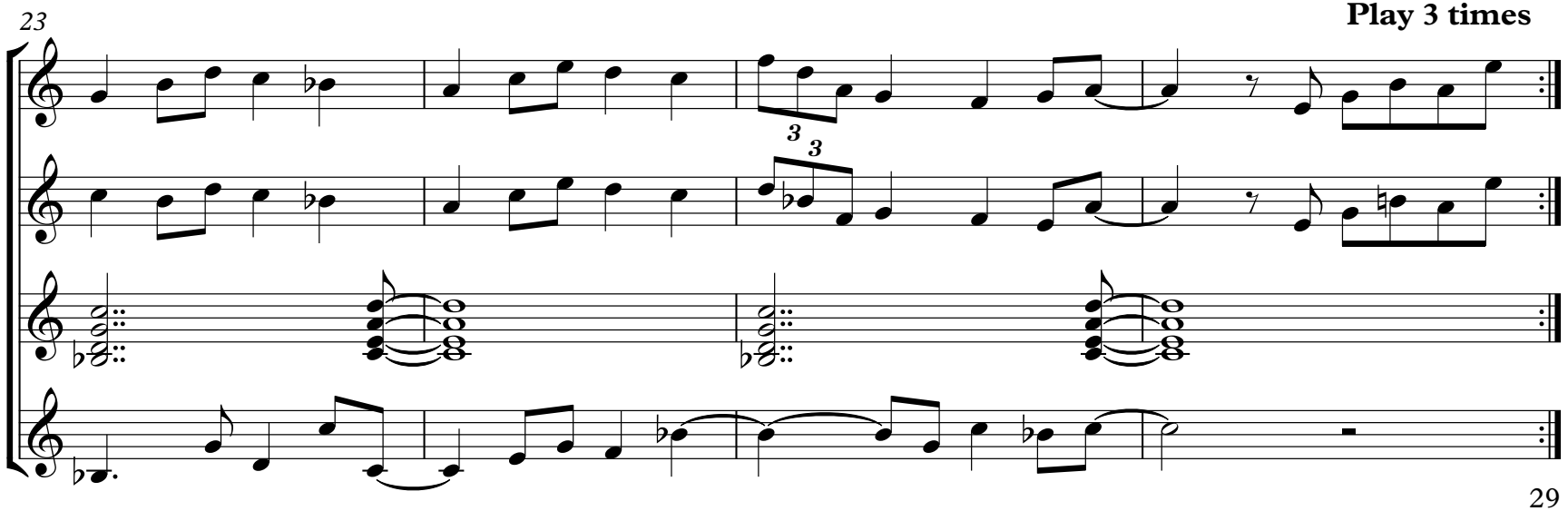
Movement One: Huron

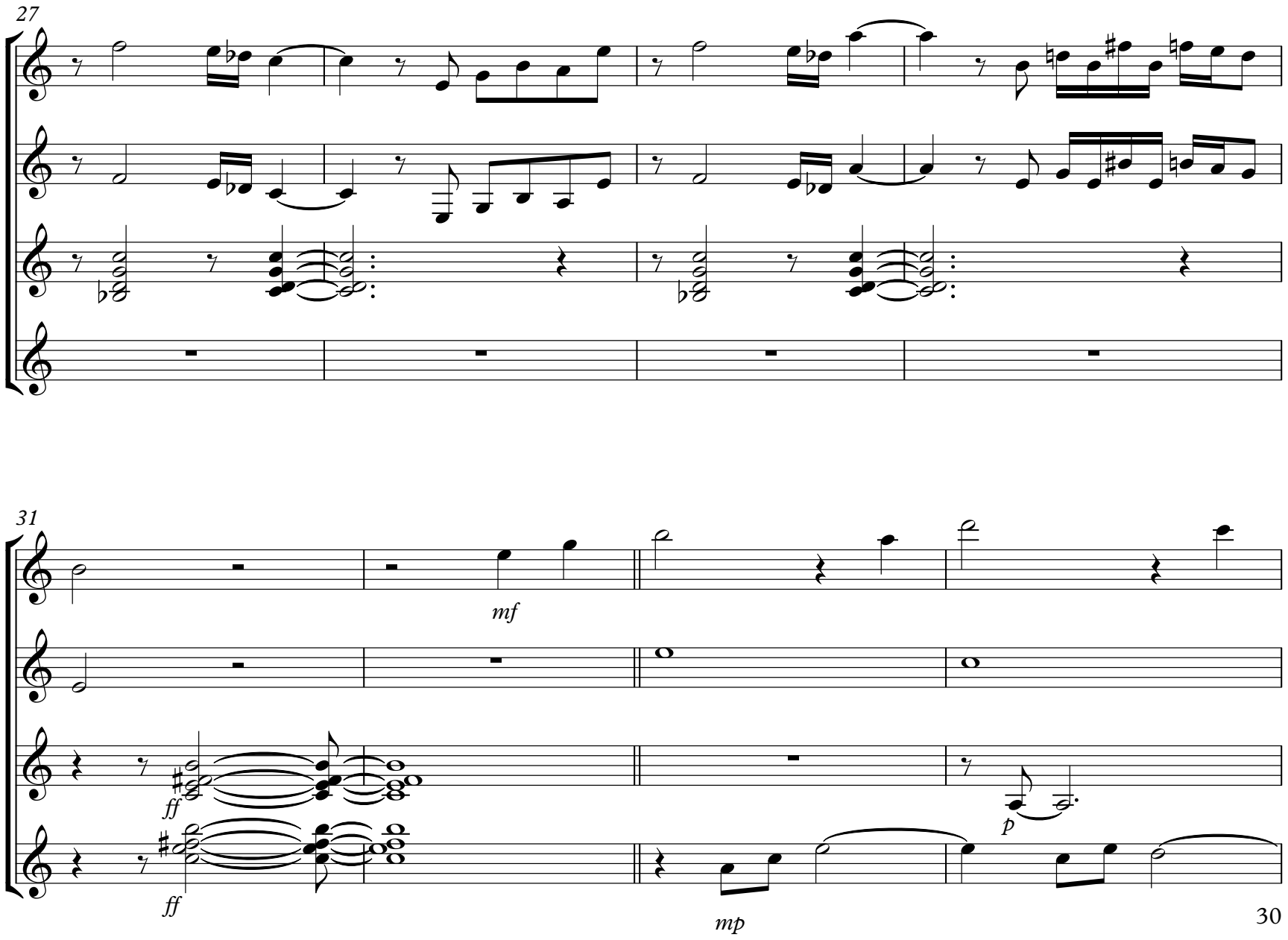
Daron McColl

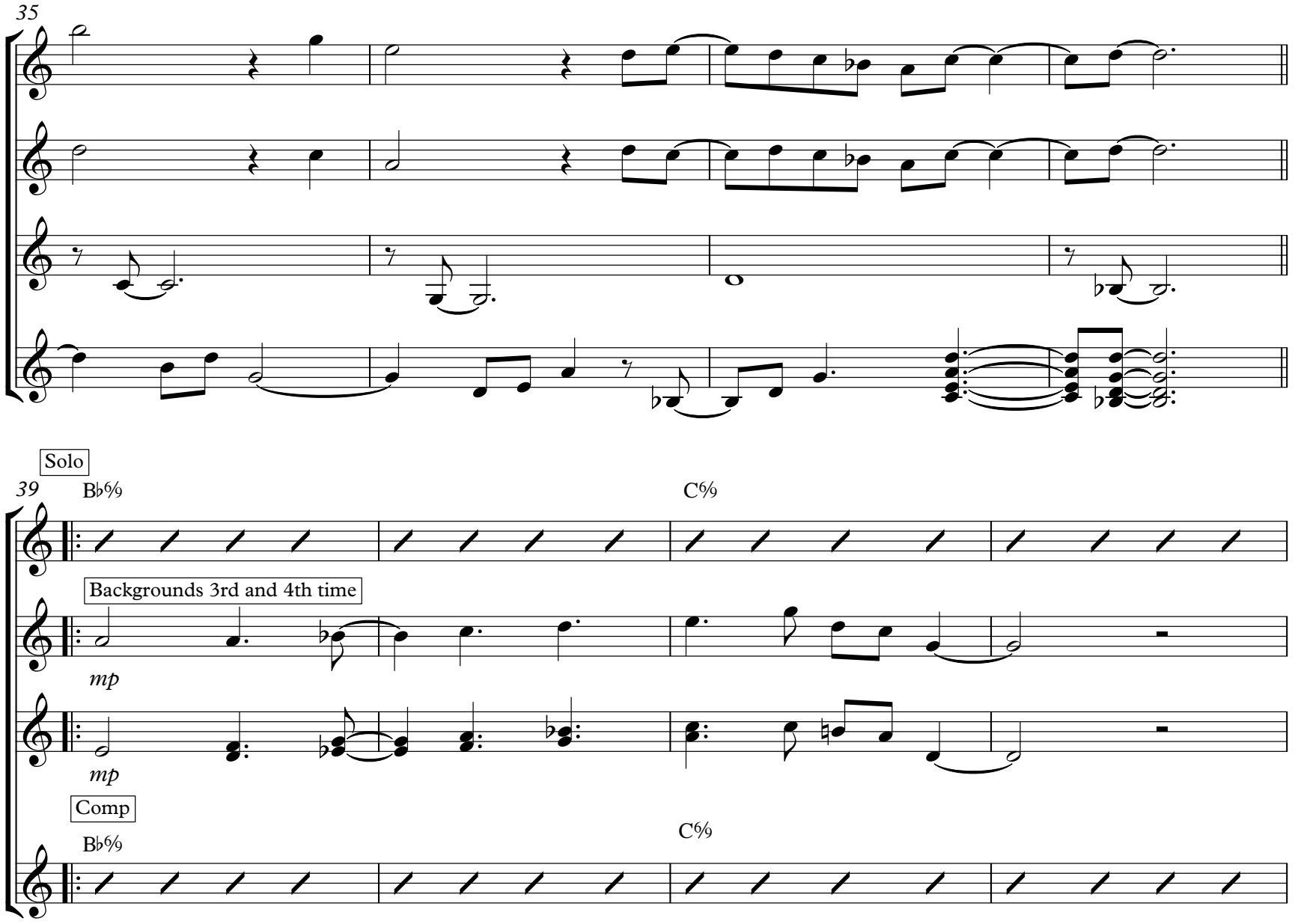


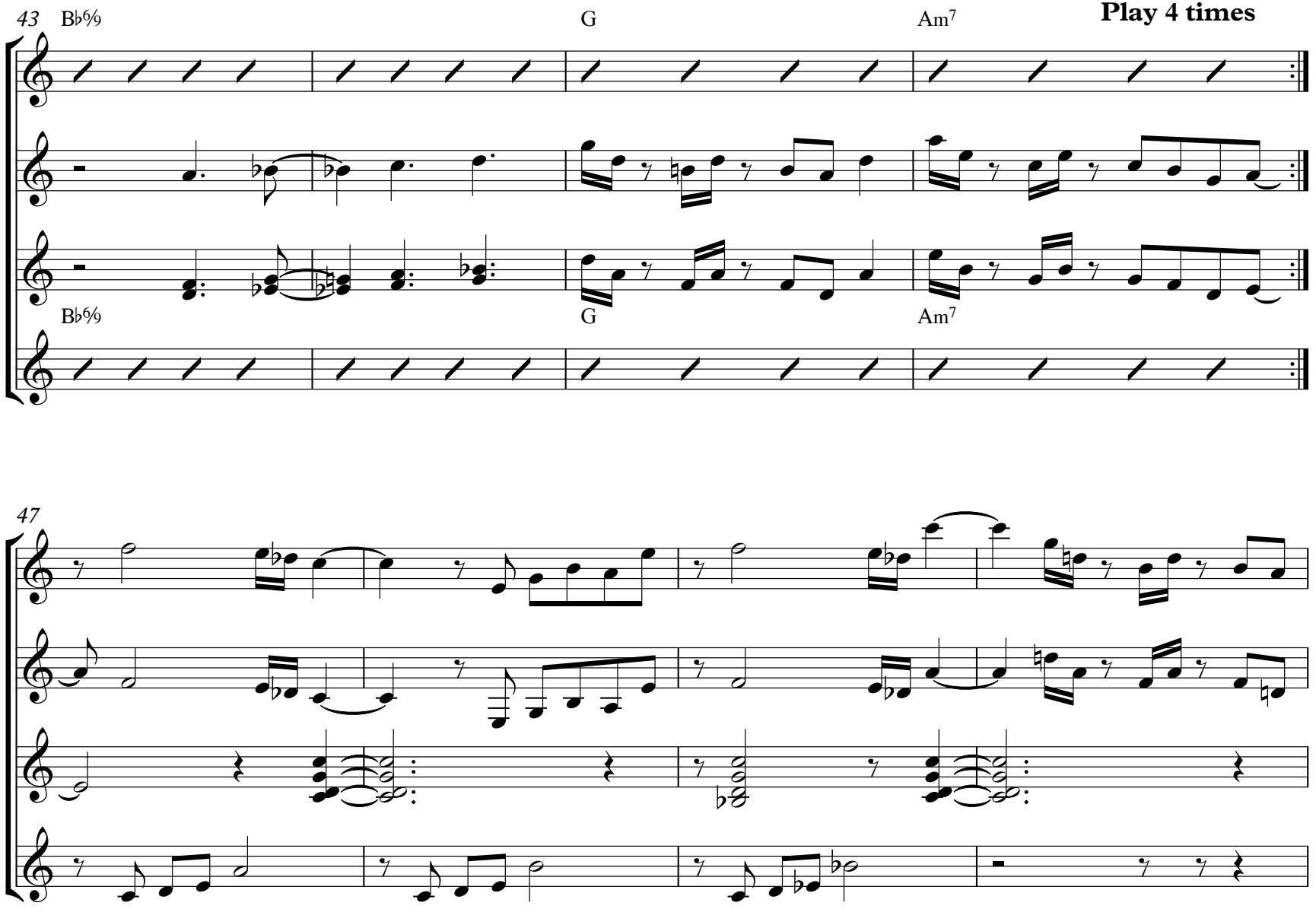

10
p
14
3
3
3
3
3
3

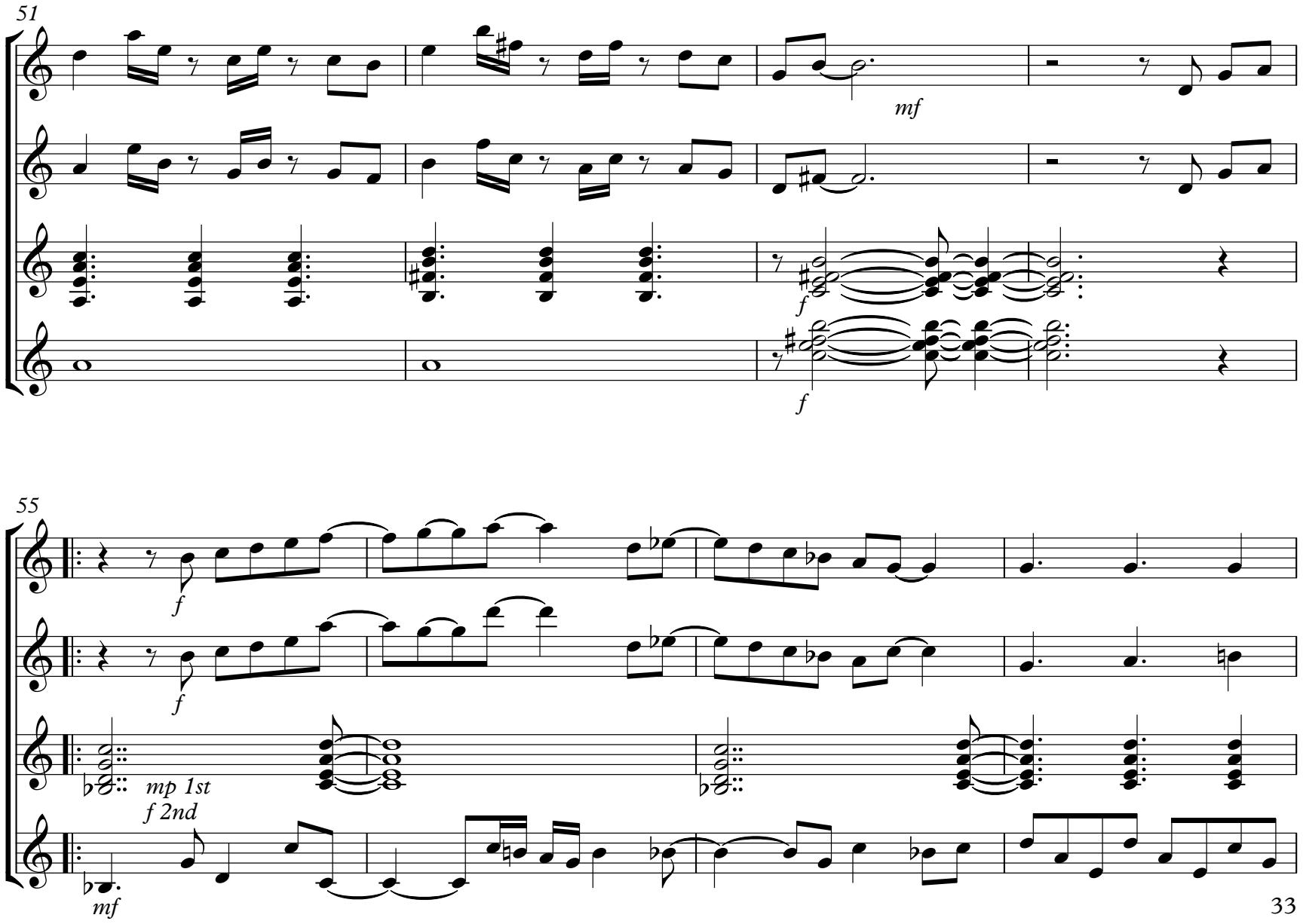

19
f
f
Strum (ad lib 2nd time)
mp 1st
f 2nd
mf

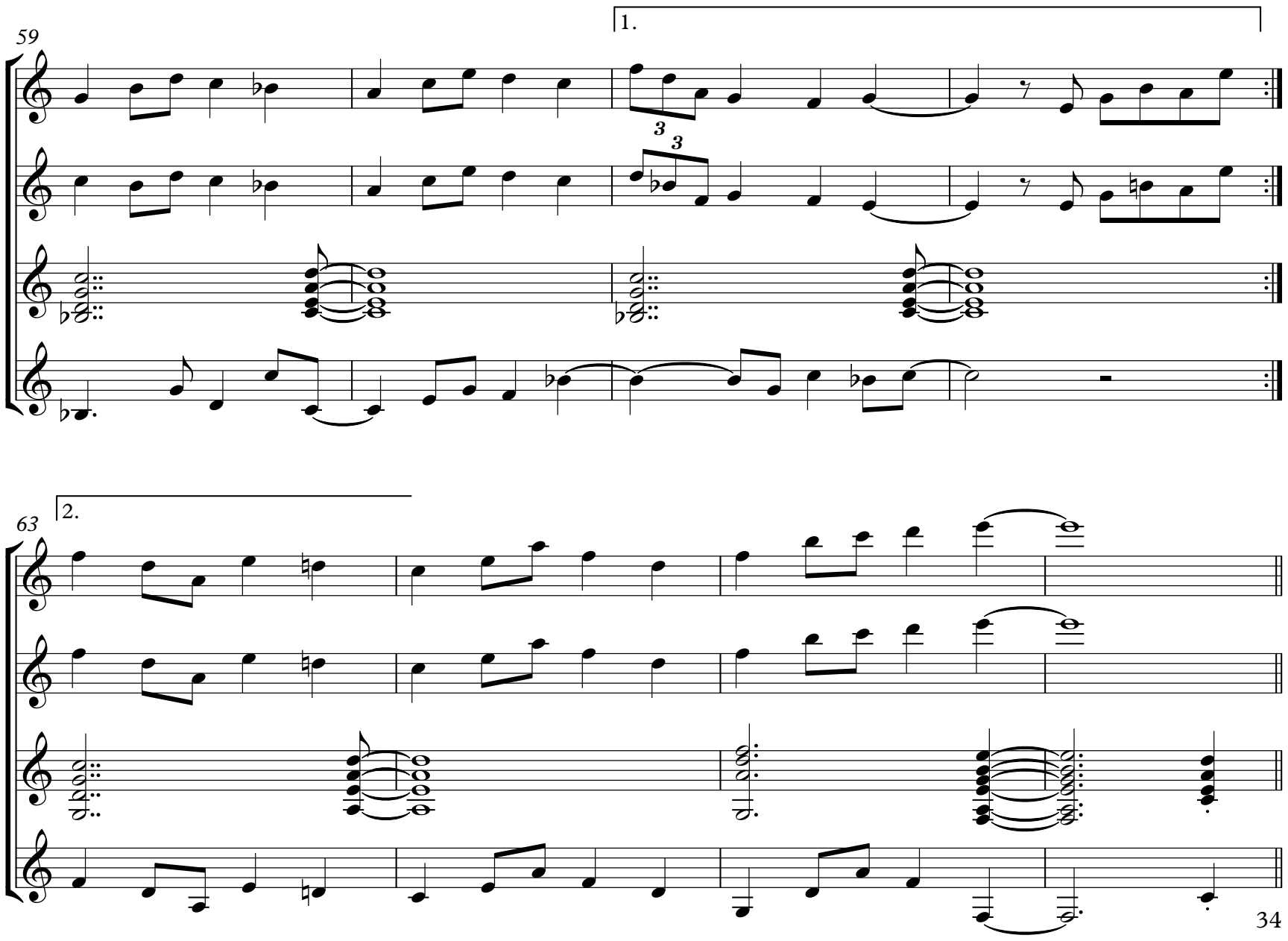

23
Play 3 times
3
3

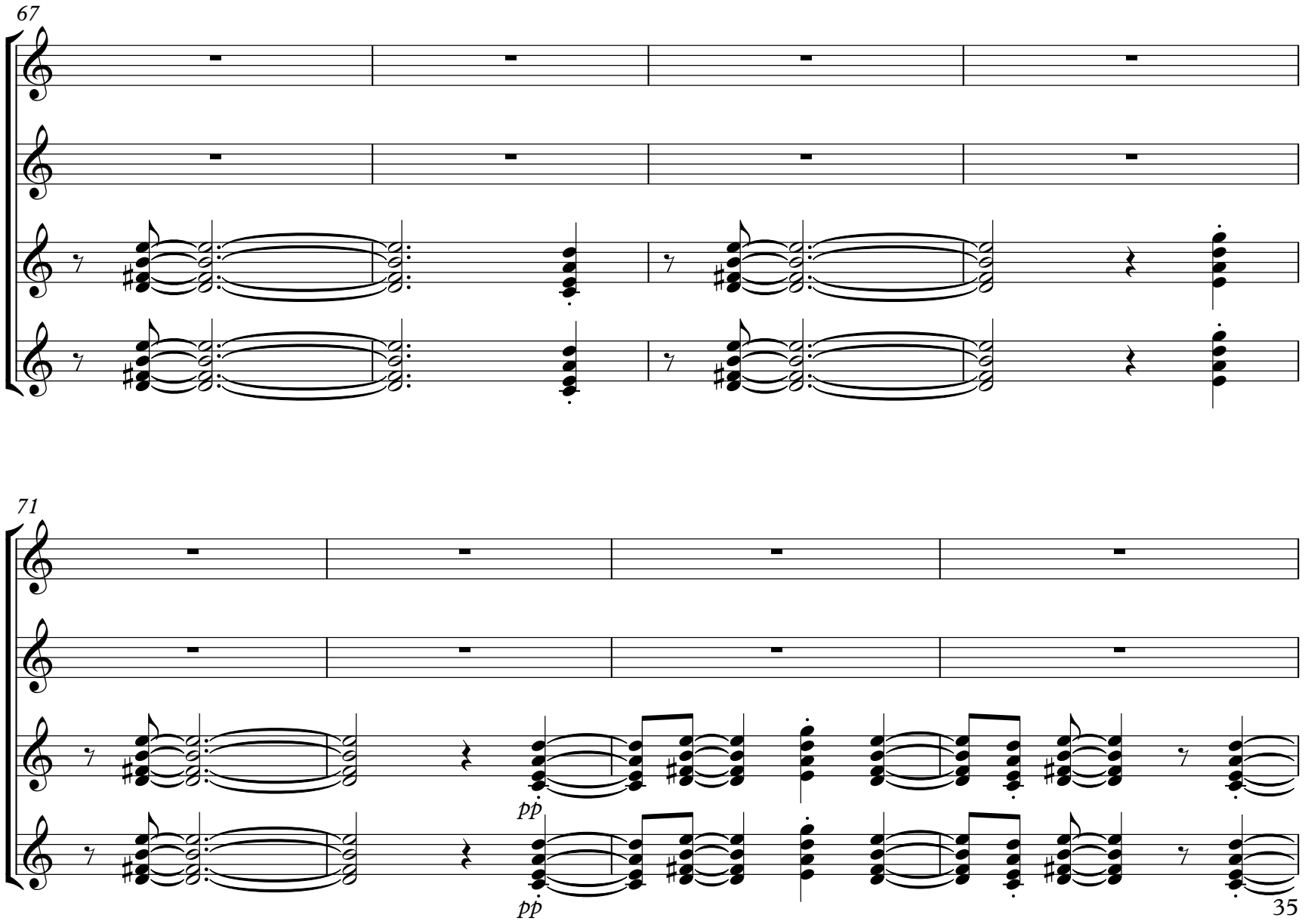

27
31
mf
ff
ff
p
mp

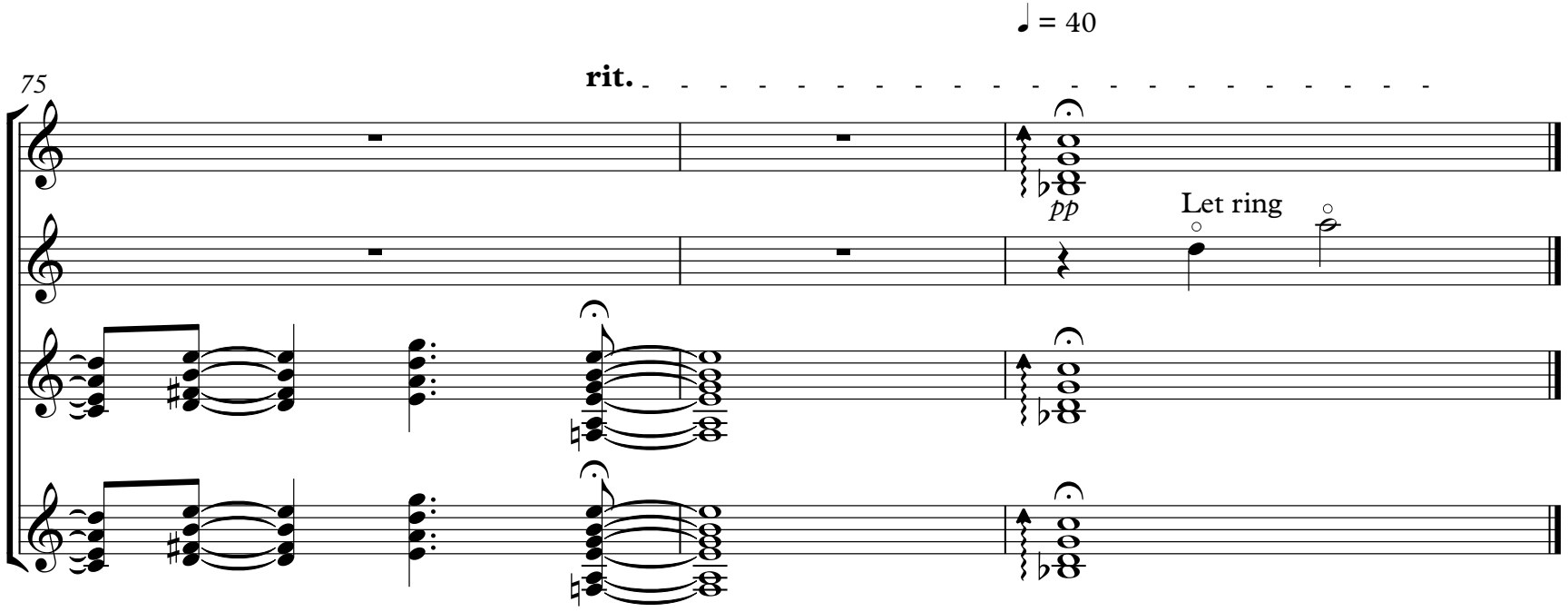

35
Solo
39
B♭%
C%
Backgrounds 3rd and 4th time
mp
mp
Comp
B♭%
C%


43
B♭6/9
G
Am7
Play 4 times
B♭6/9
G
Am7
47


51
mf
f
f
55
f
f
mp 1st
f 2nd
mf

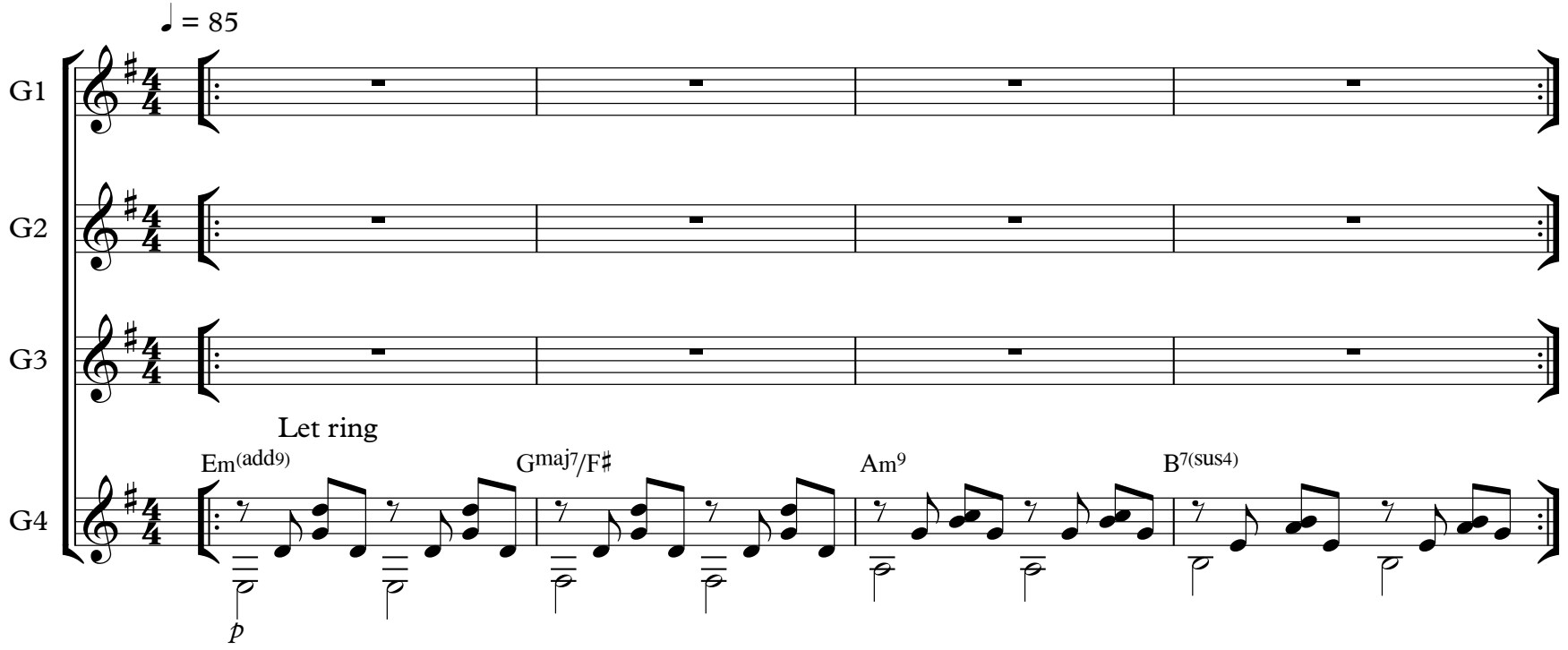

59
1.
3
3
63
2.

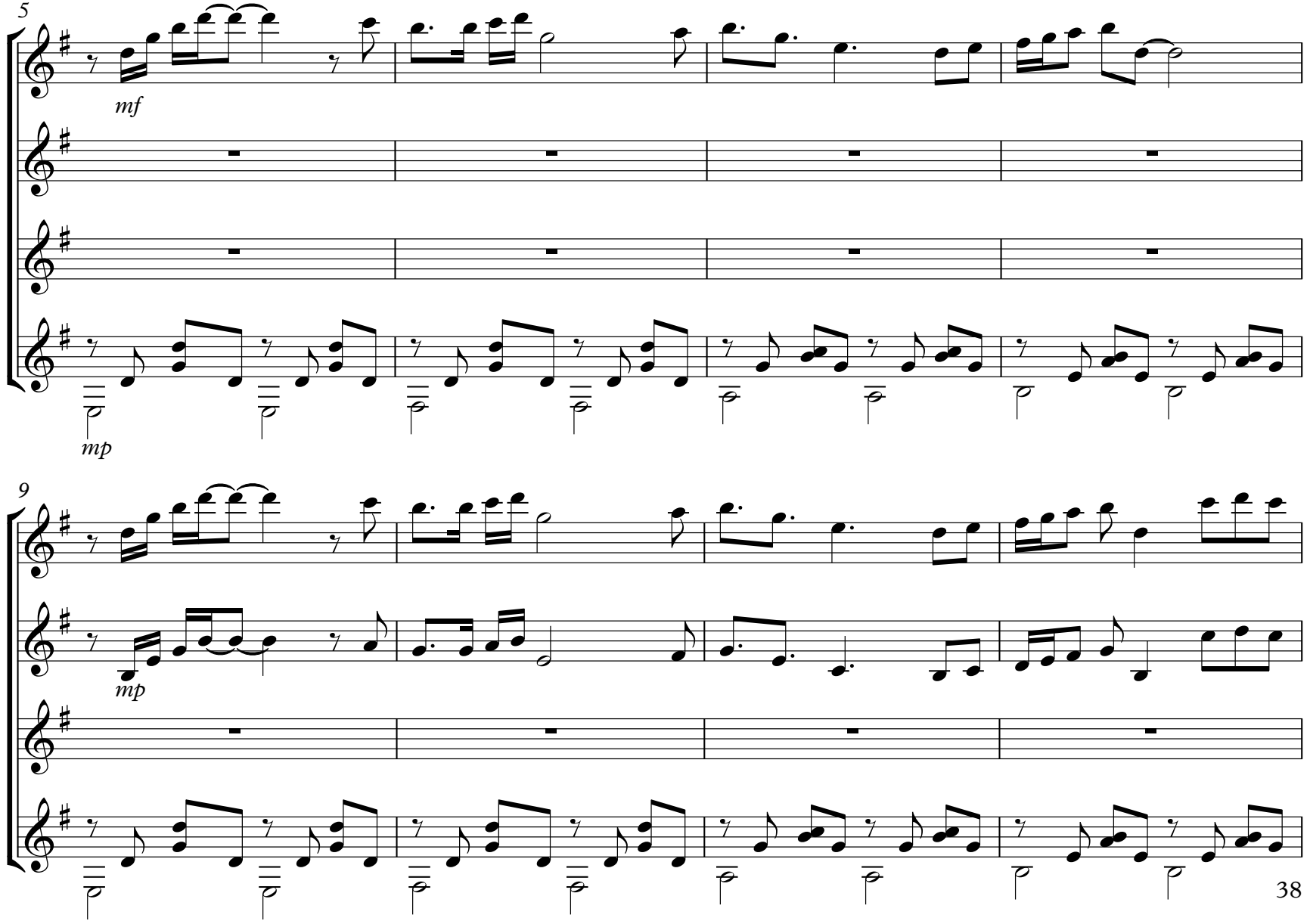

67
71
pp
pp

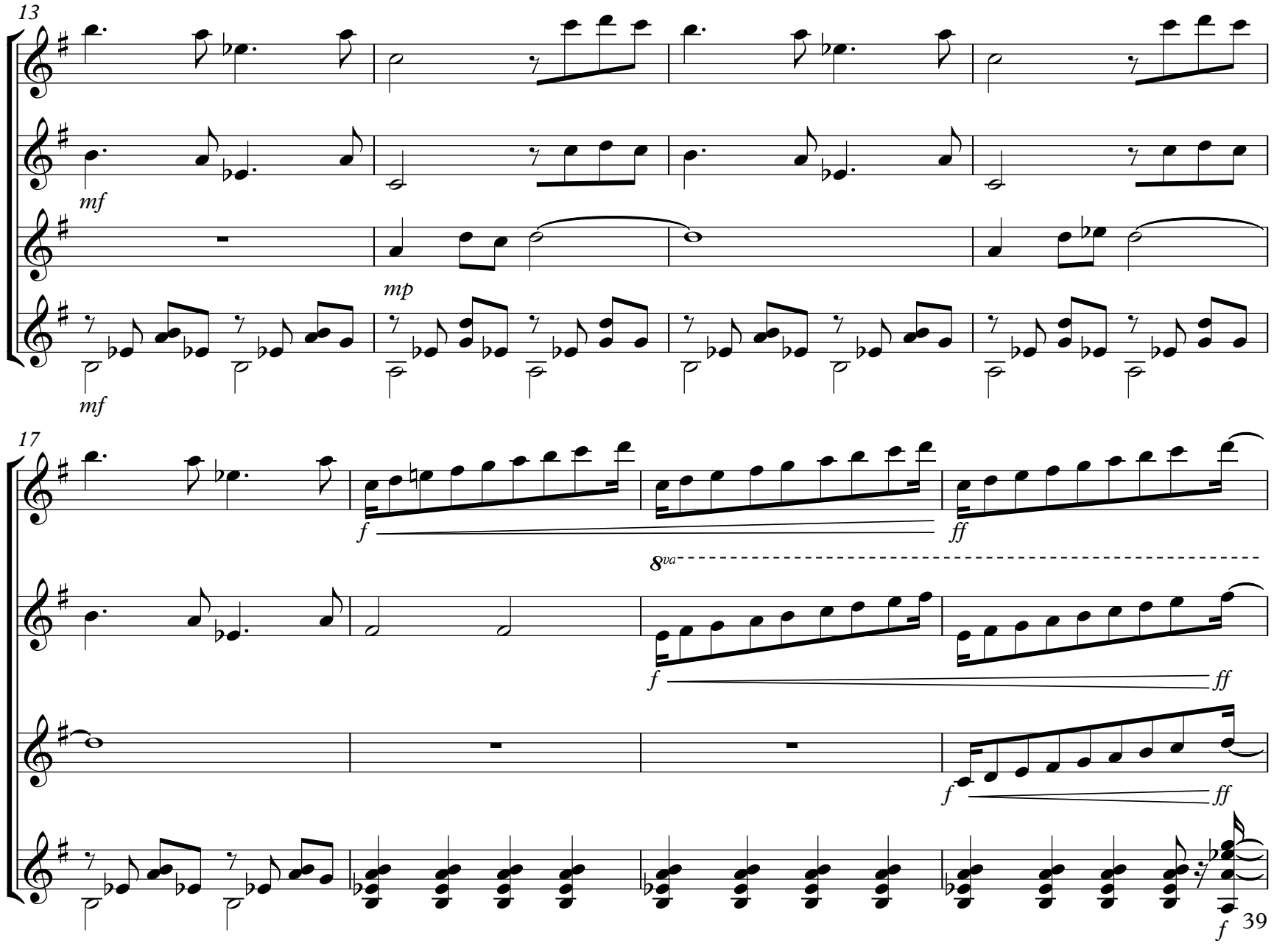

♩ = 40
75
rit.
pp
Let ring

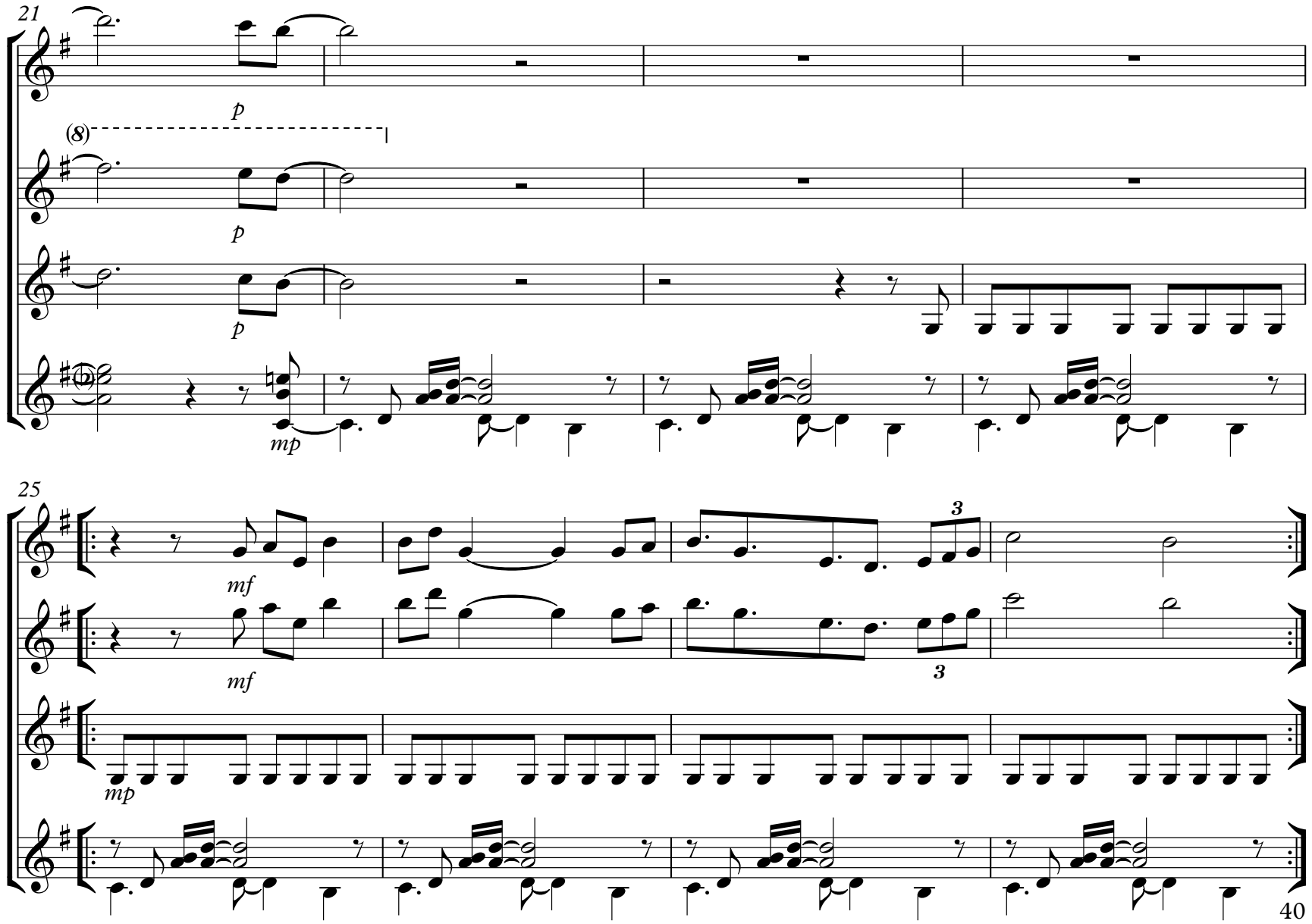
Movement Two: Baysville Narrows

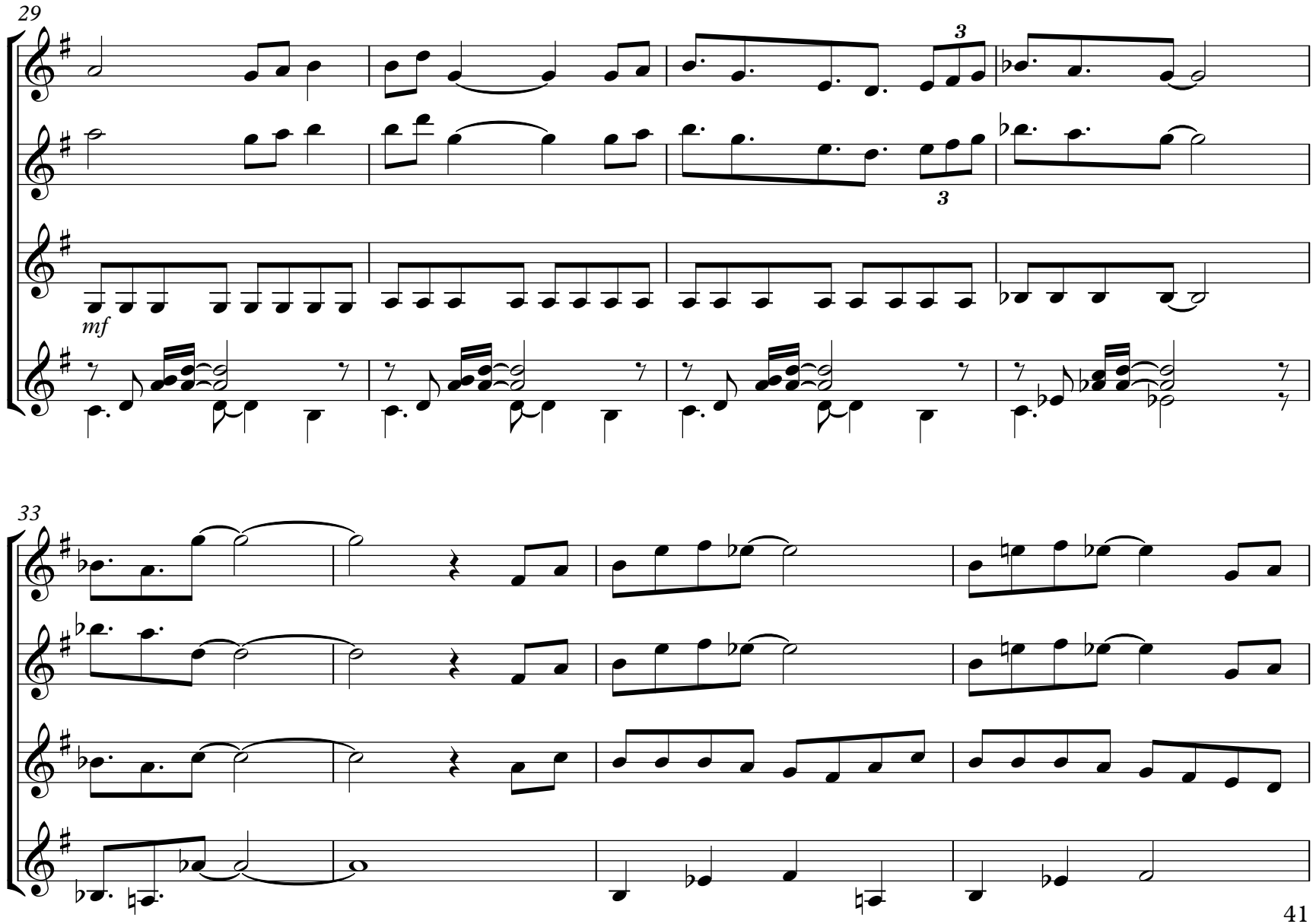
Daron McColl

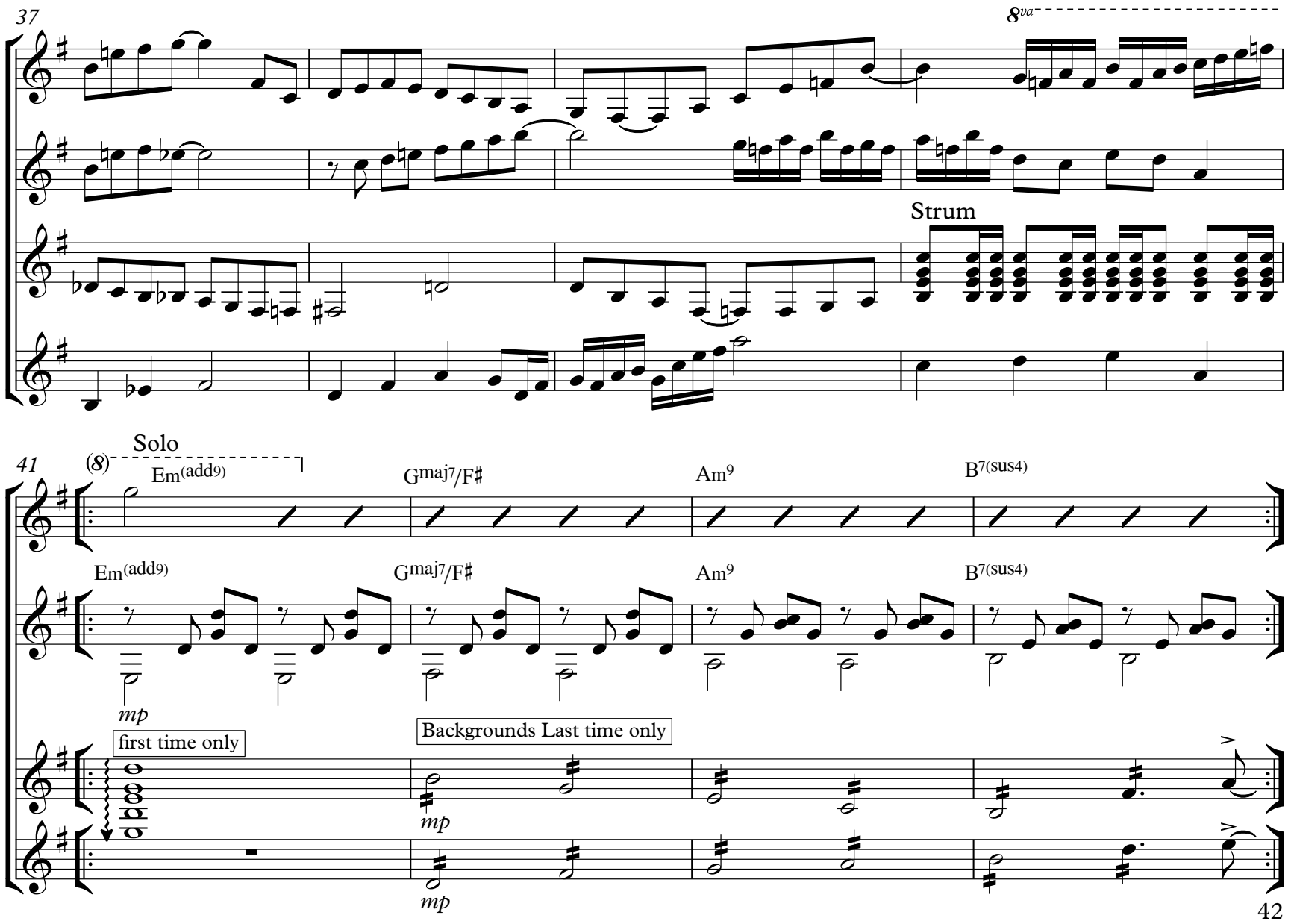


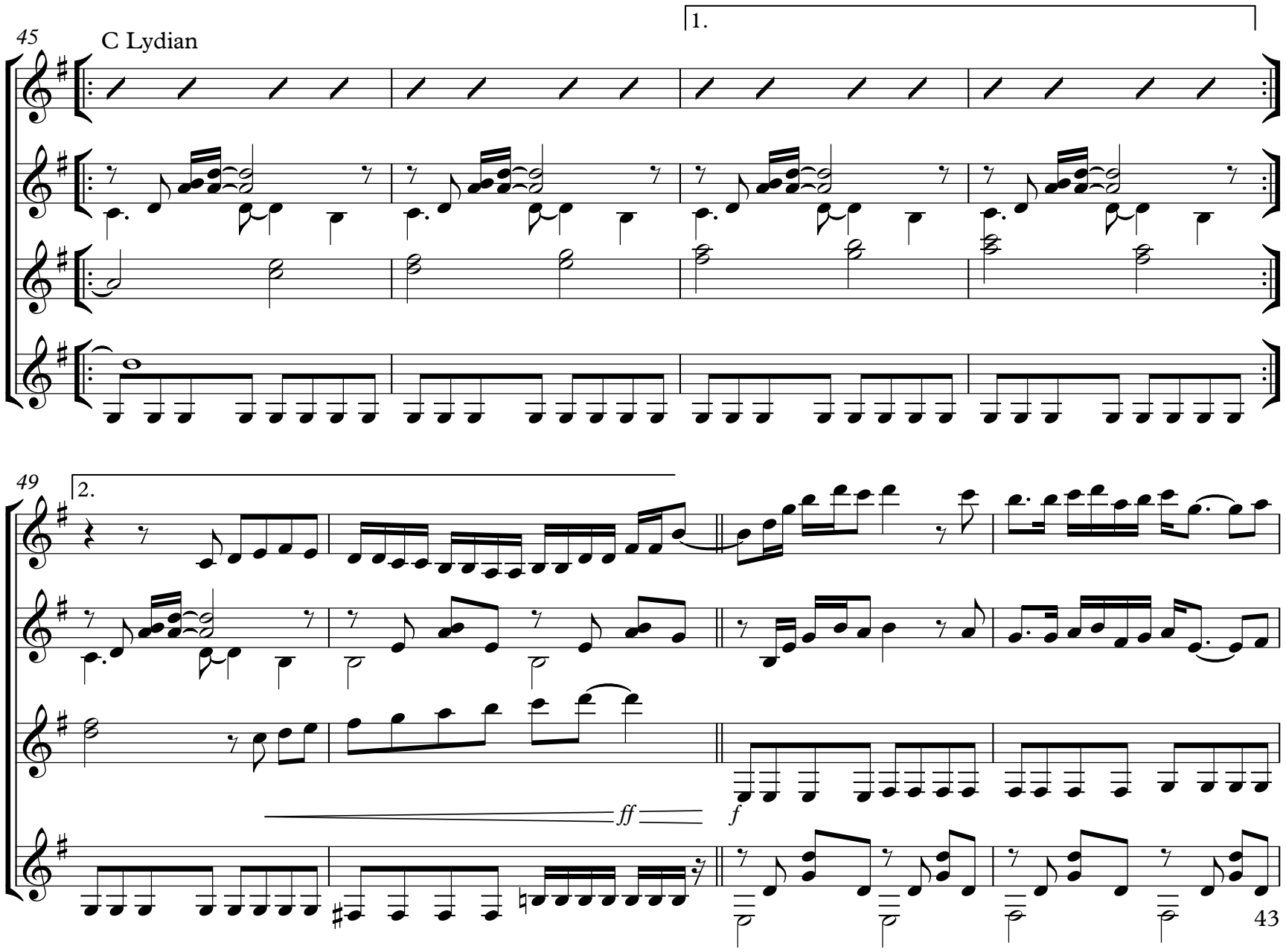

5
mf
mp
9
mp

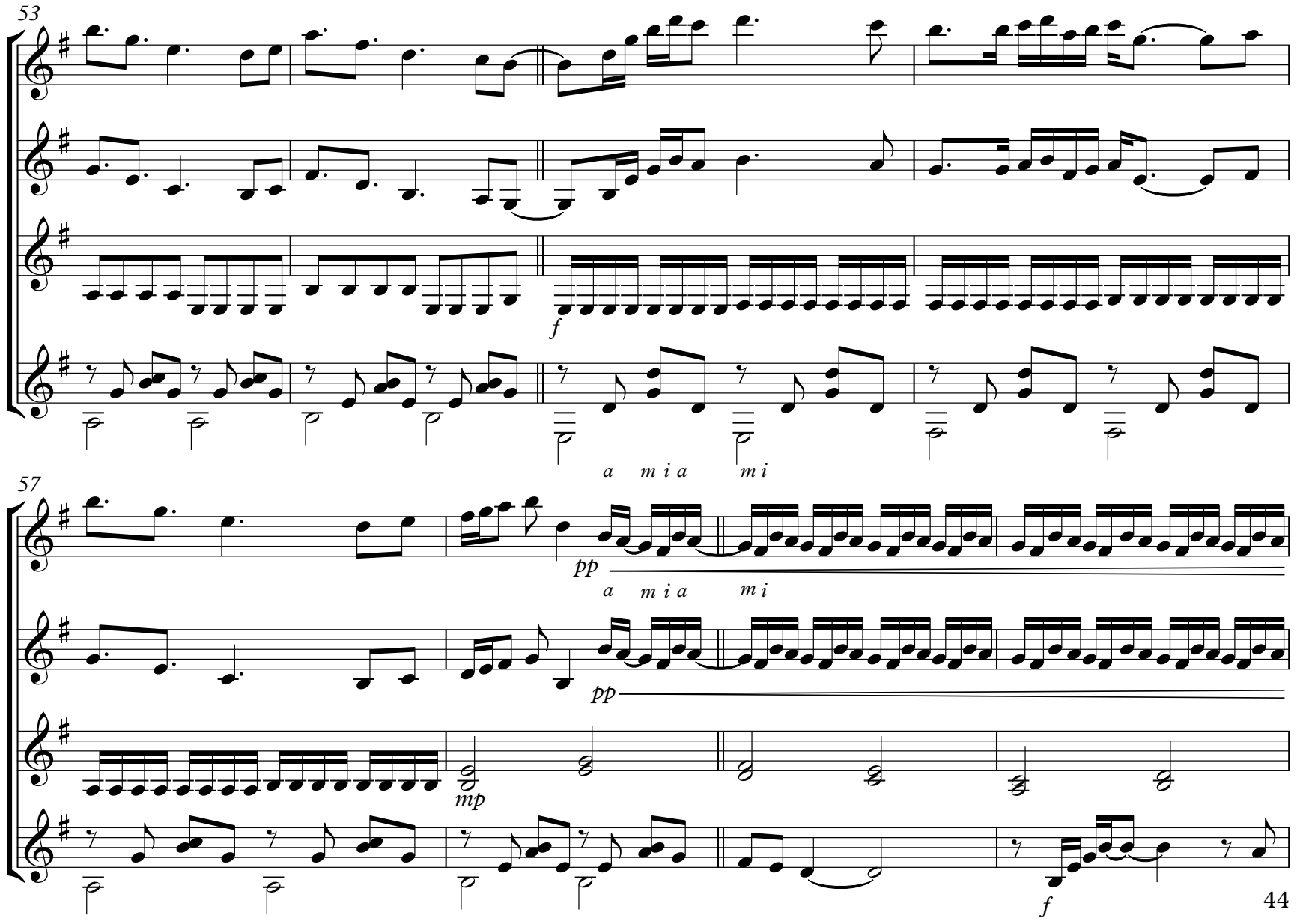

13
mf
mf
mp
17
f
ff
8va
f
ff
f
ff
f

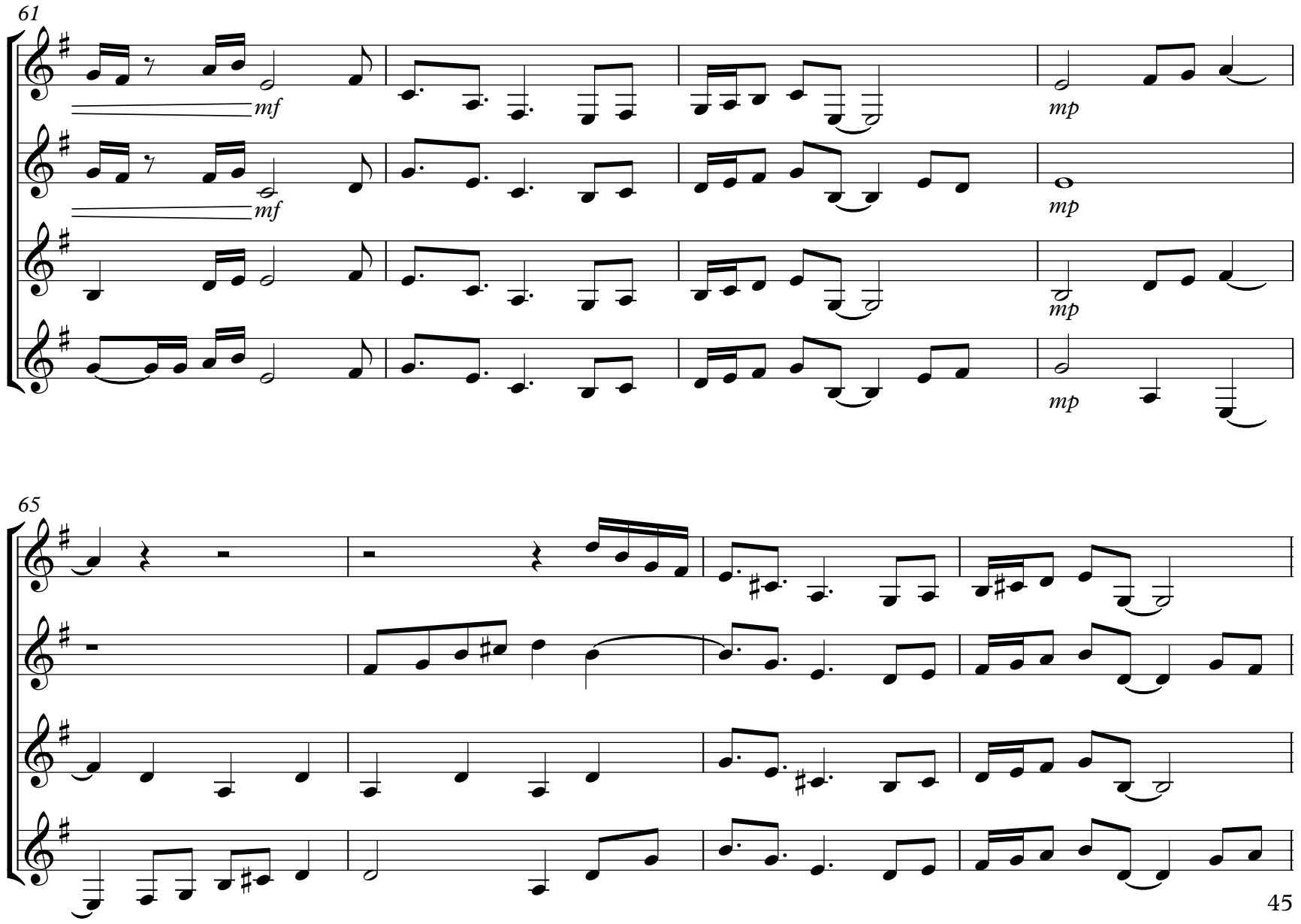

21
p
(8)
p
p
mp
25
mf
mf
3
3
mp

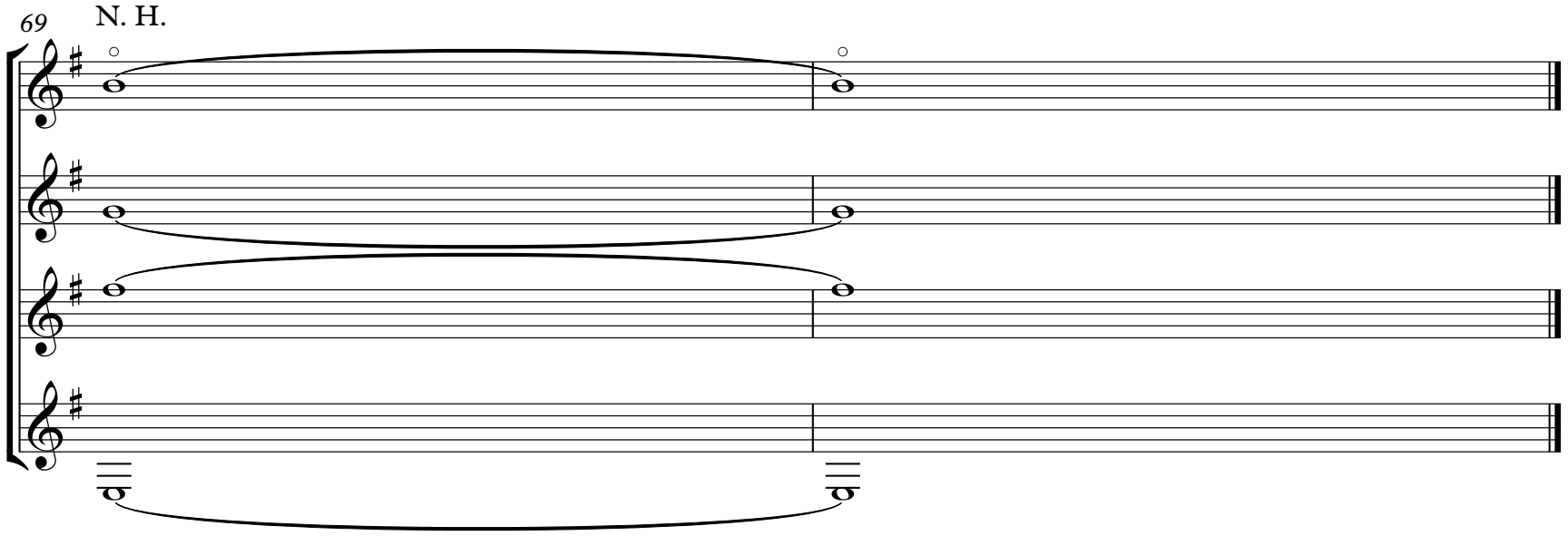

29
3
3
mf
33


37
8va
Strum
41
Solo
(8)
Em(add9)
Gmaj7/F♯
Am9
B7(sus4)
mp
first time only
Backgrounds Last time only
42


45
C Lydian
1.
49
2.
ff
f

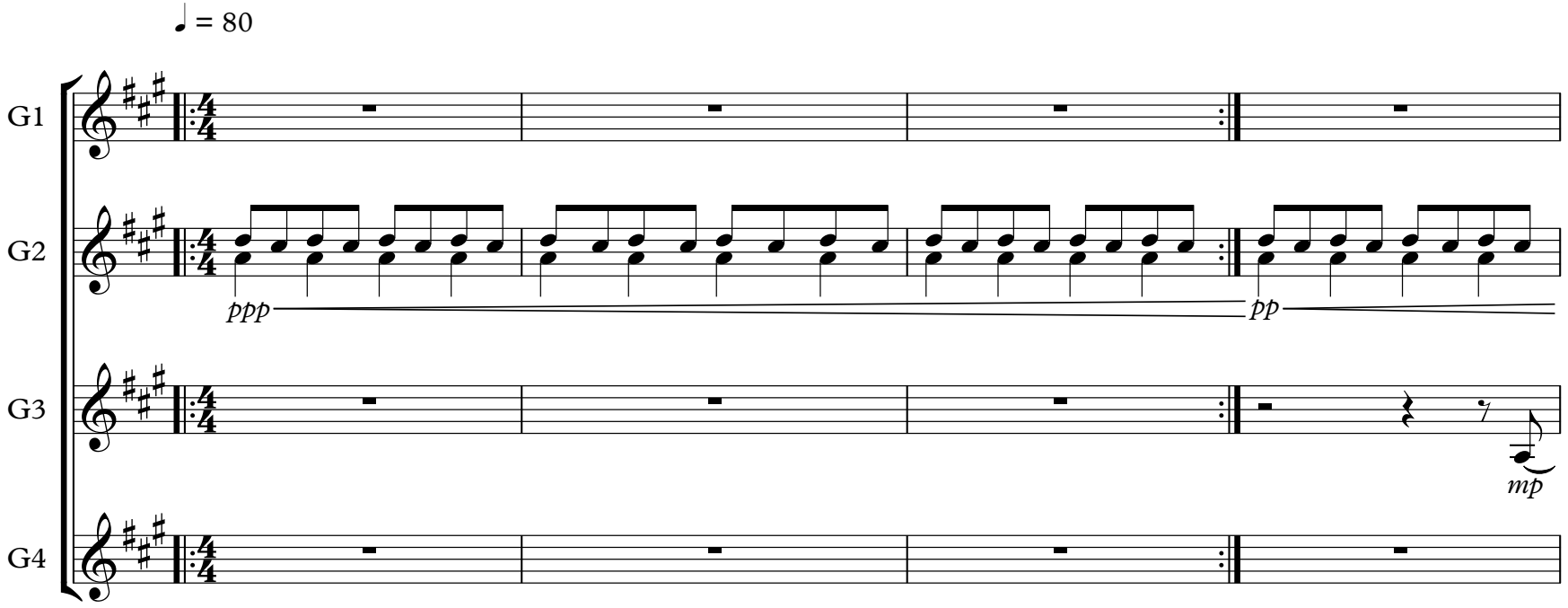

53
f
a m i a
m i
57
pp
a m i a
m i
pp
mp
f

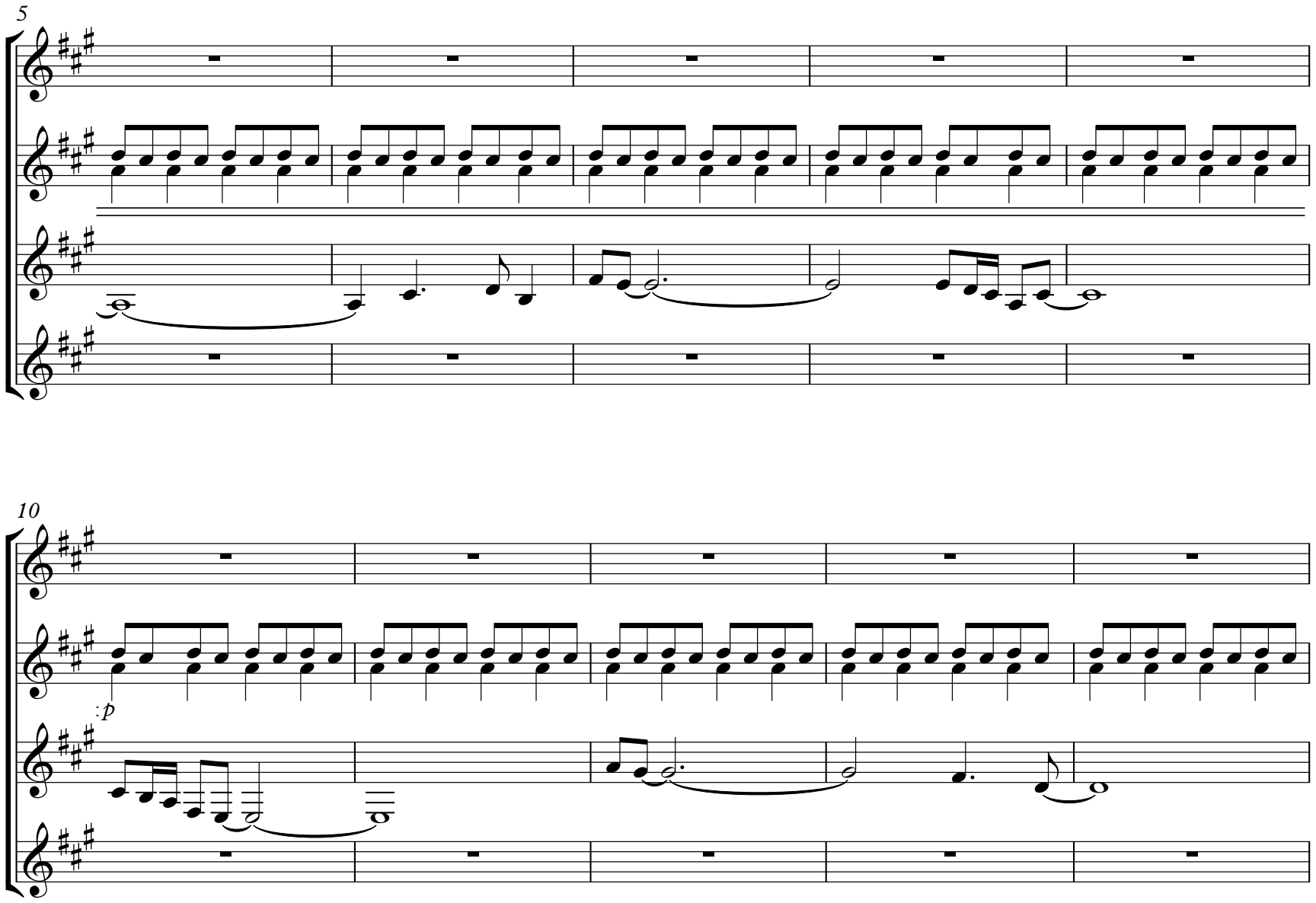

61
mf
mf
mp
mp
mp
65

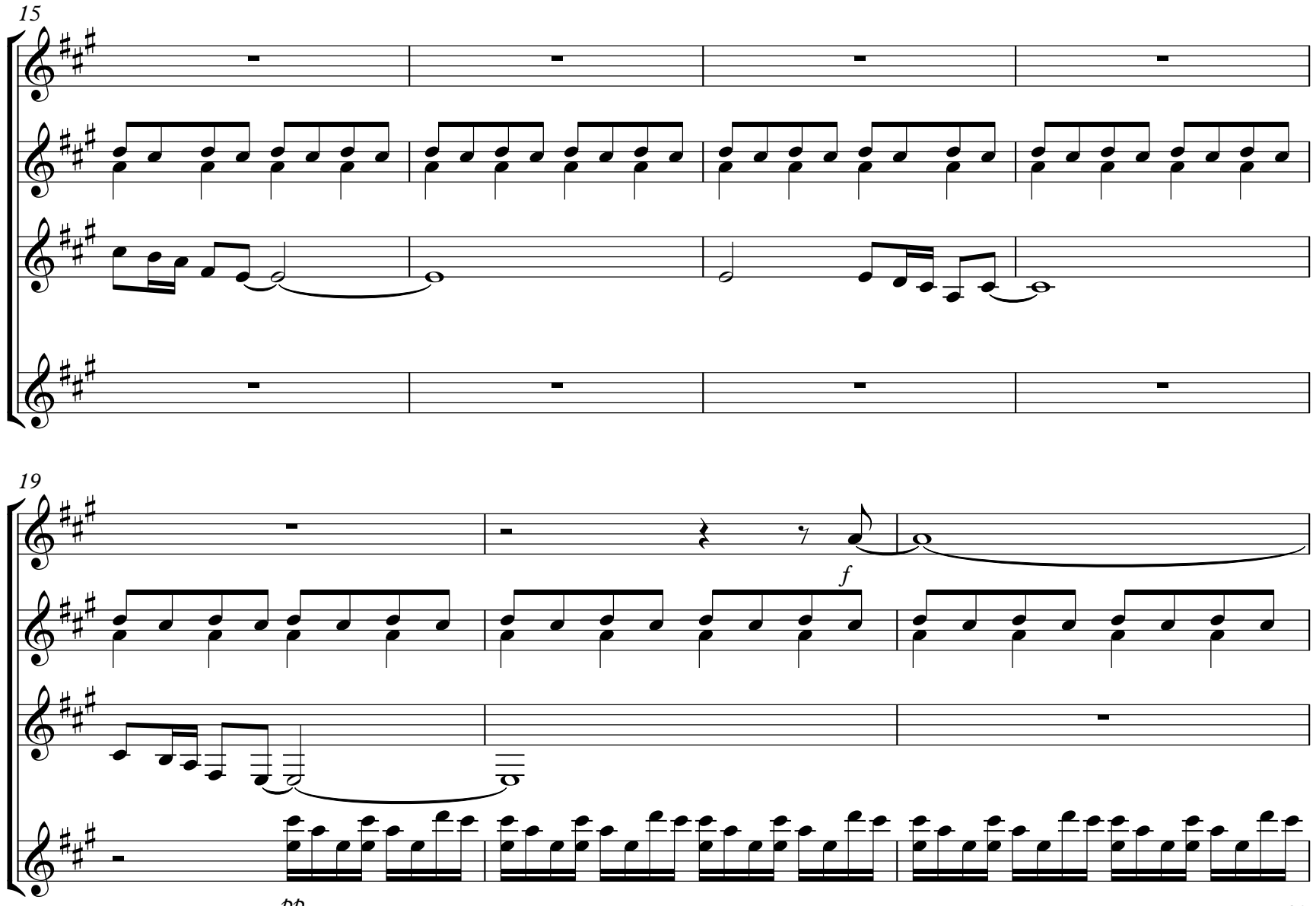

69
N. H.

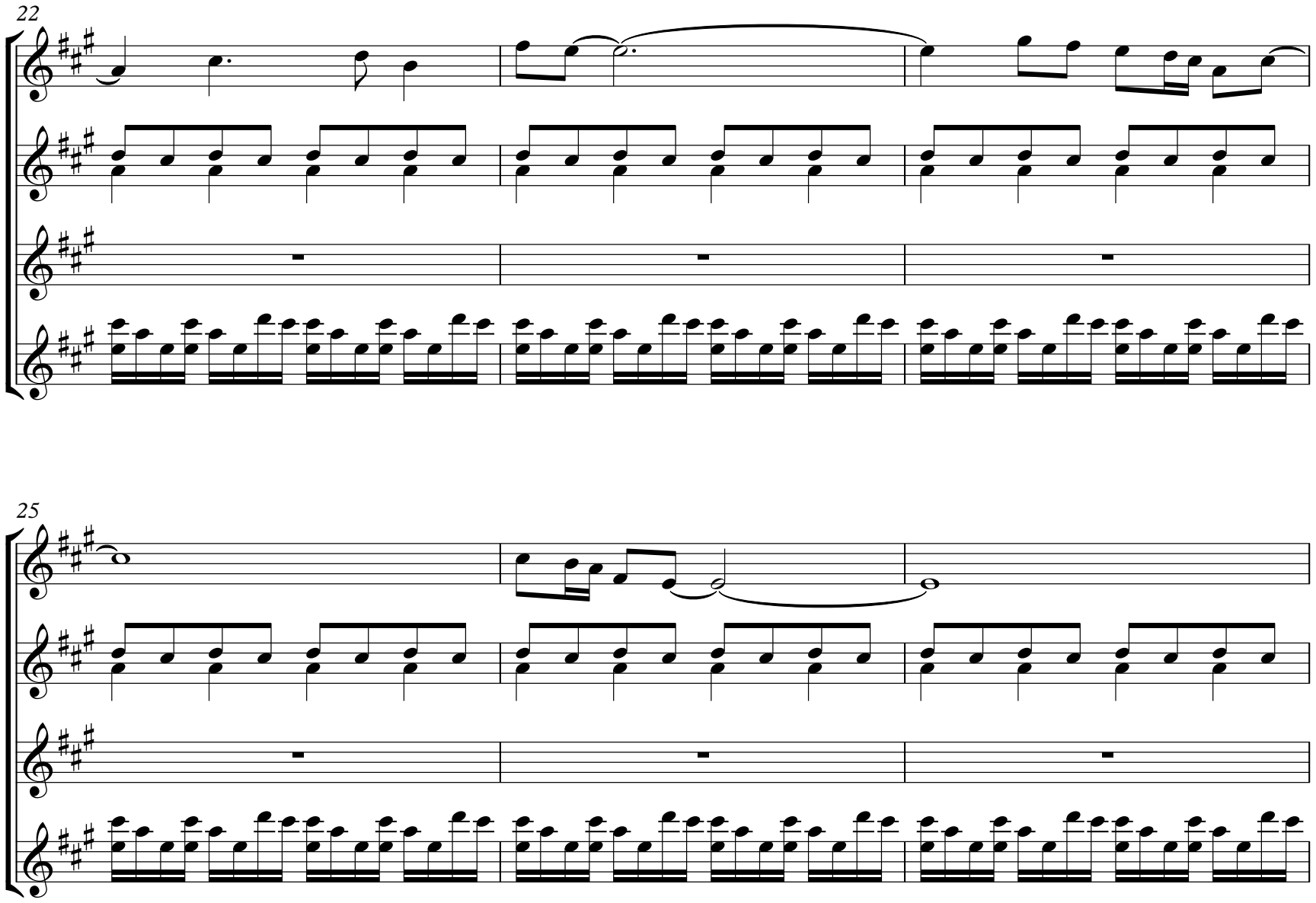
Movement Three: Black Creek Parkland

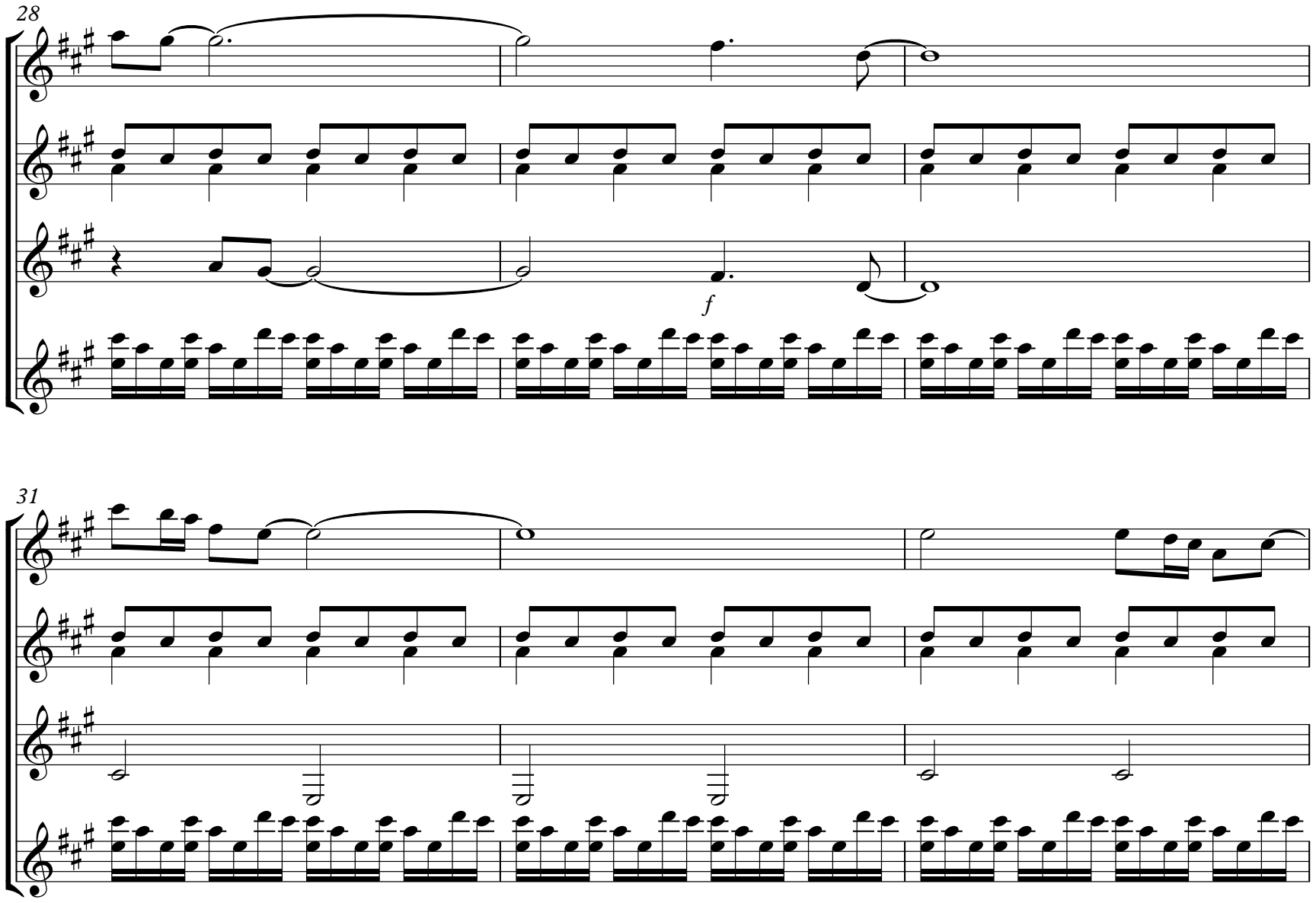
Daron McColl

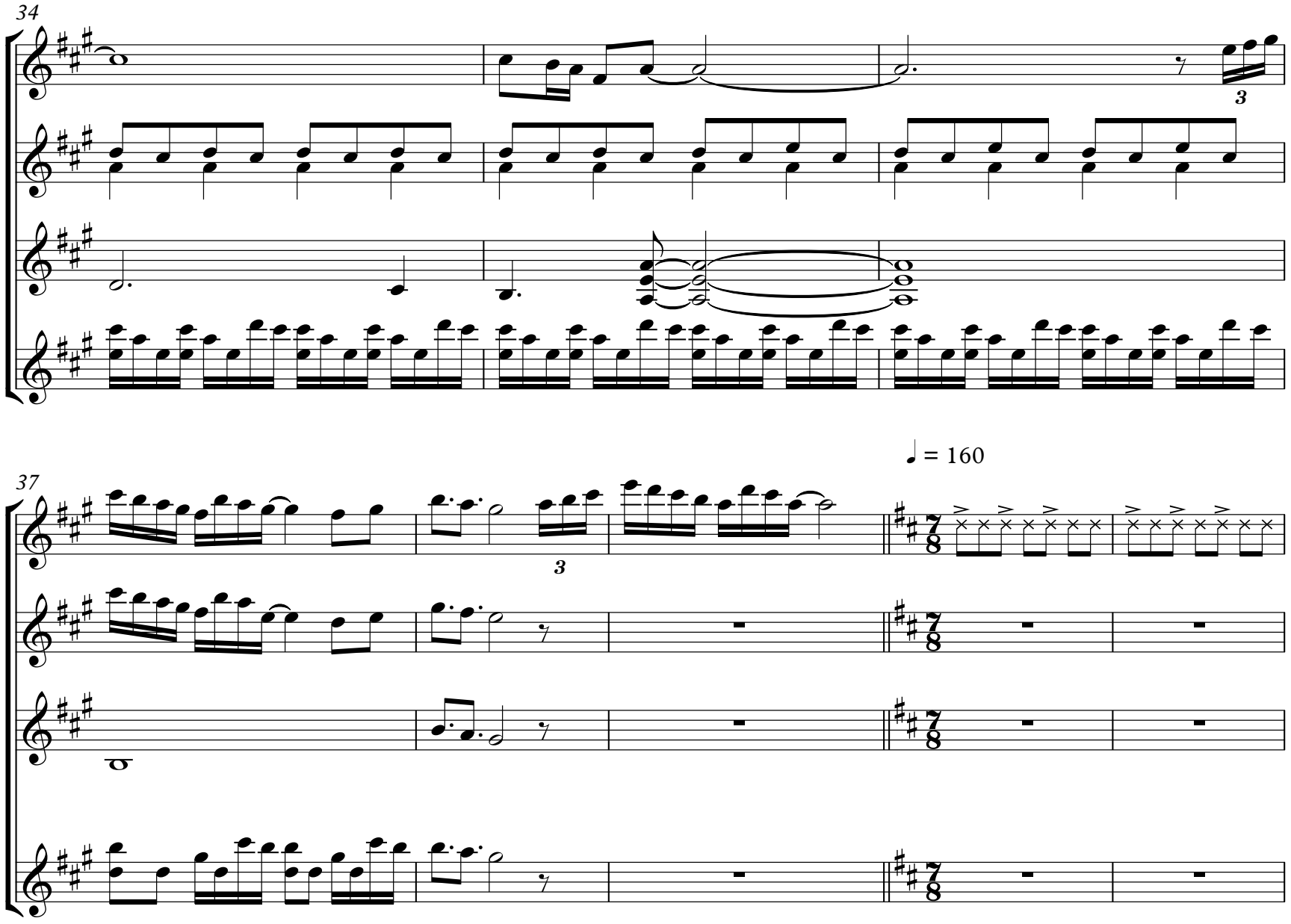


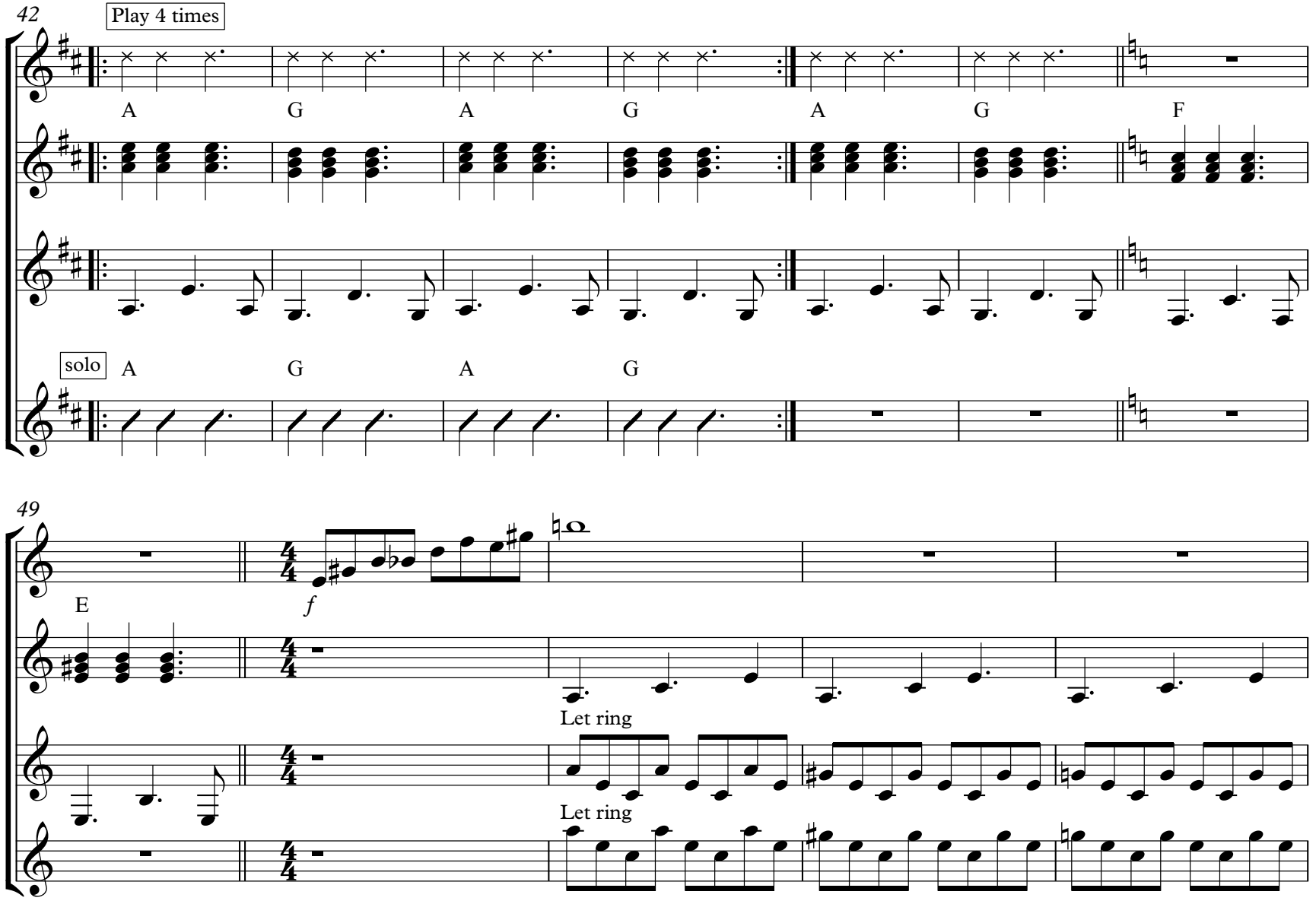

5
10
:p

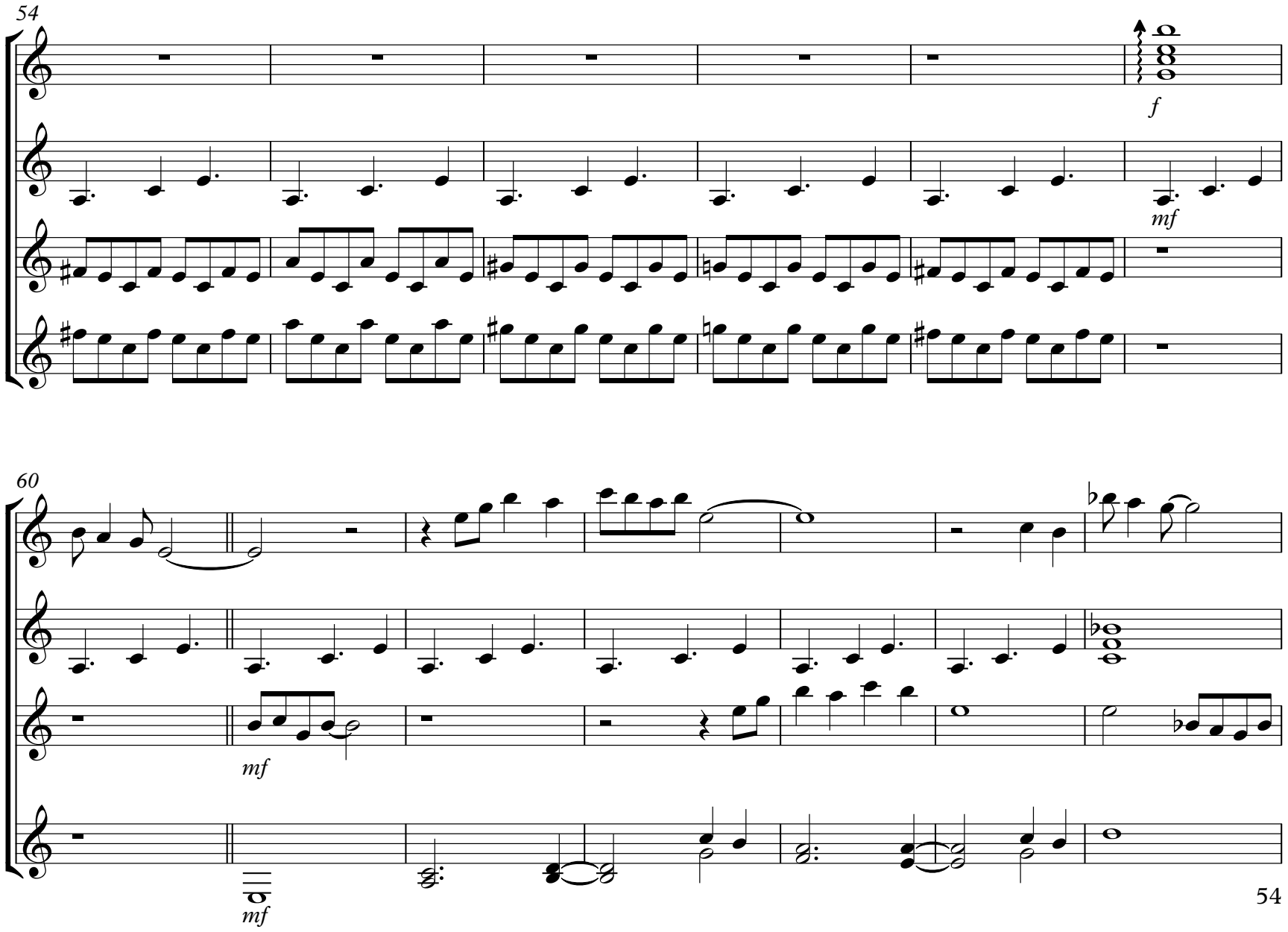

15
19
f
pp

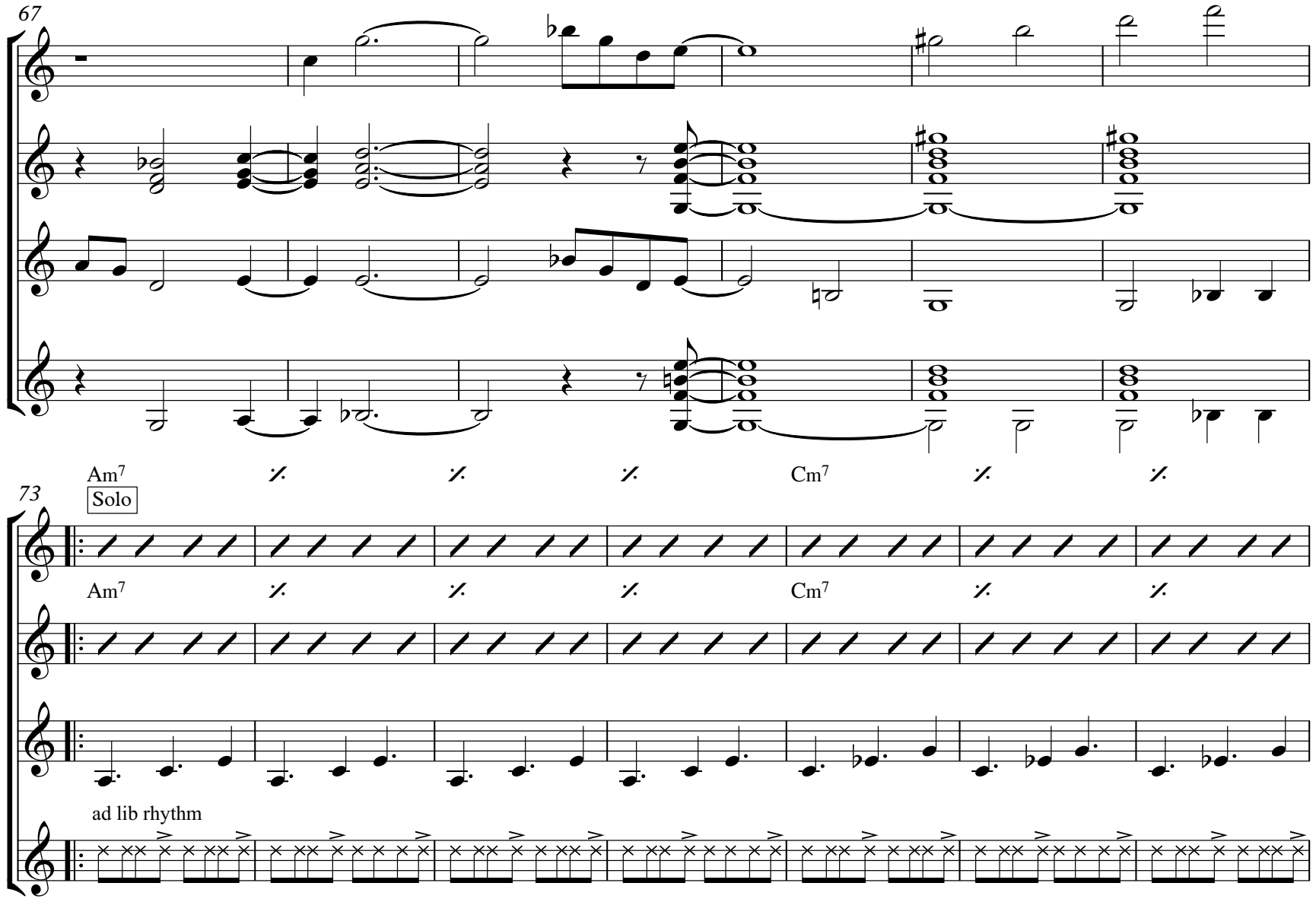

22
25

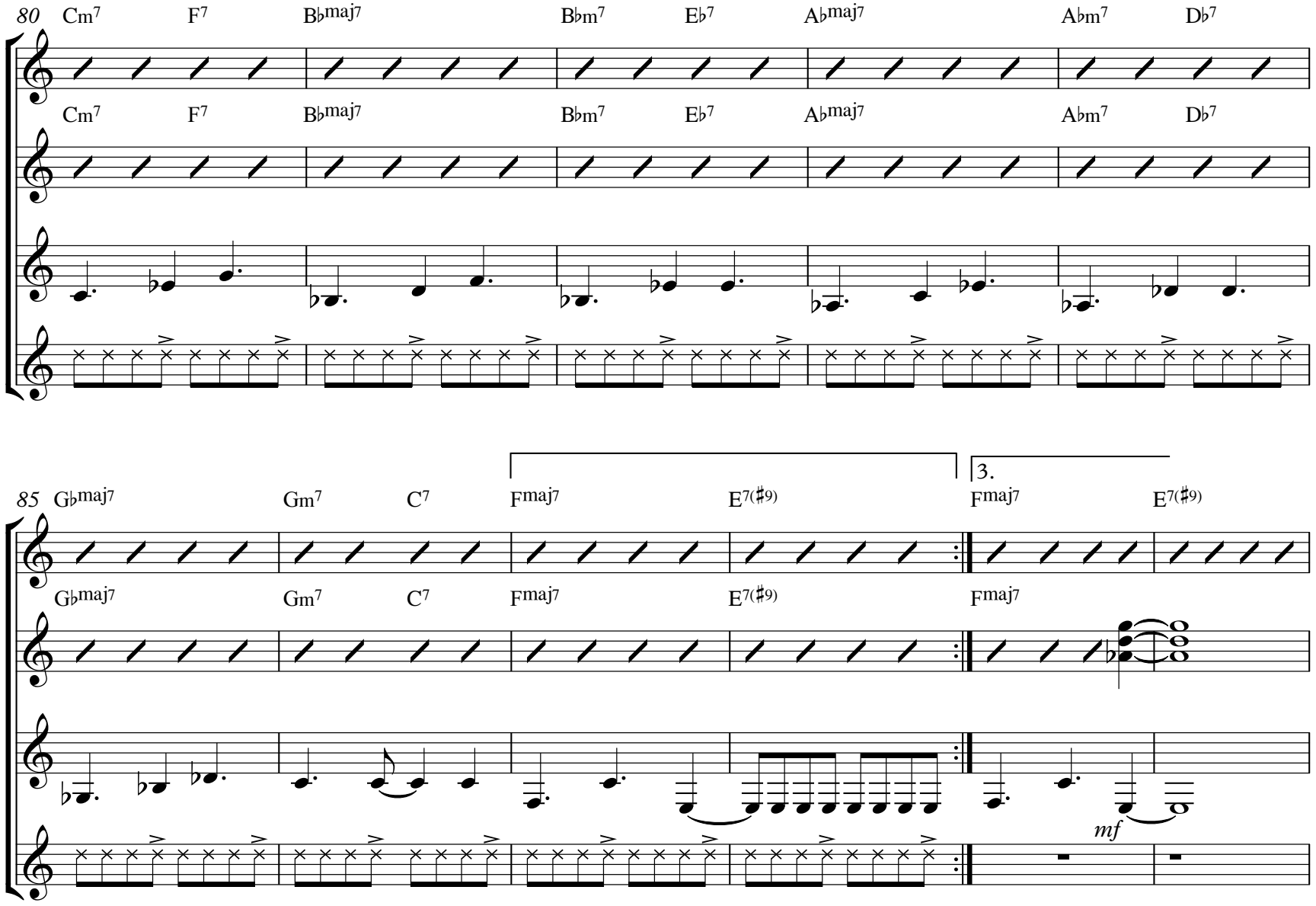

28
f
31

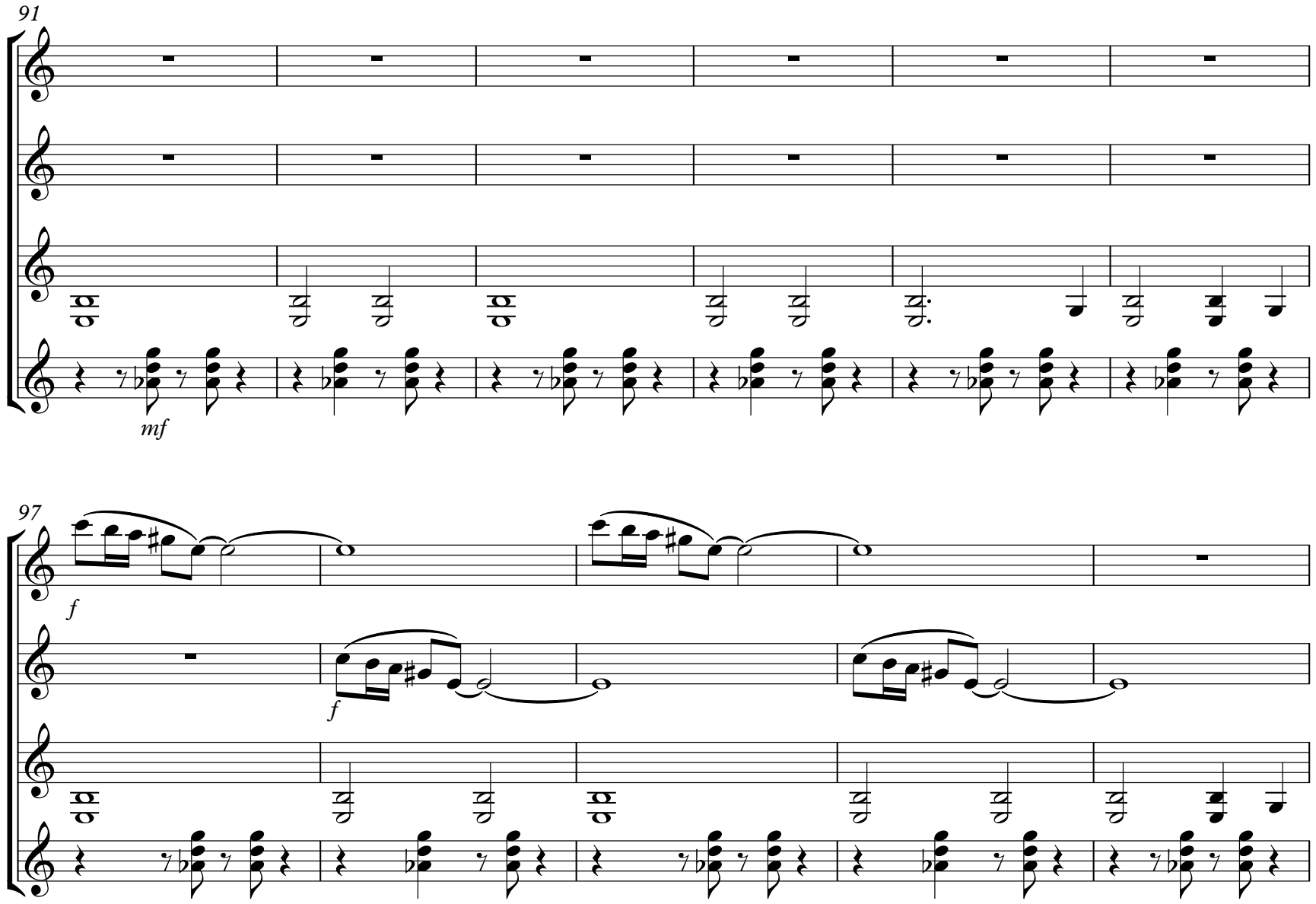

34
37
♩ = 160

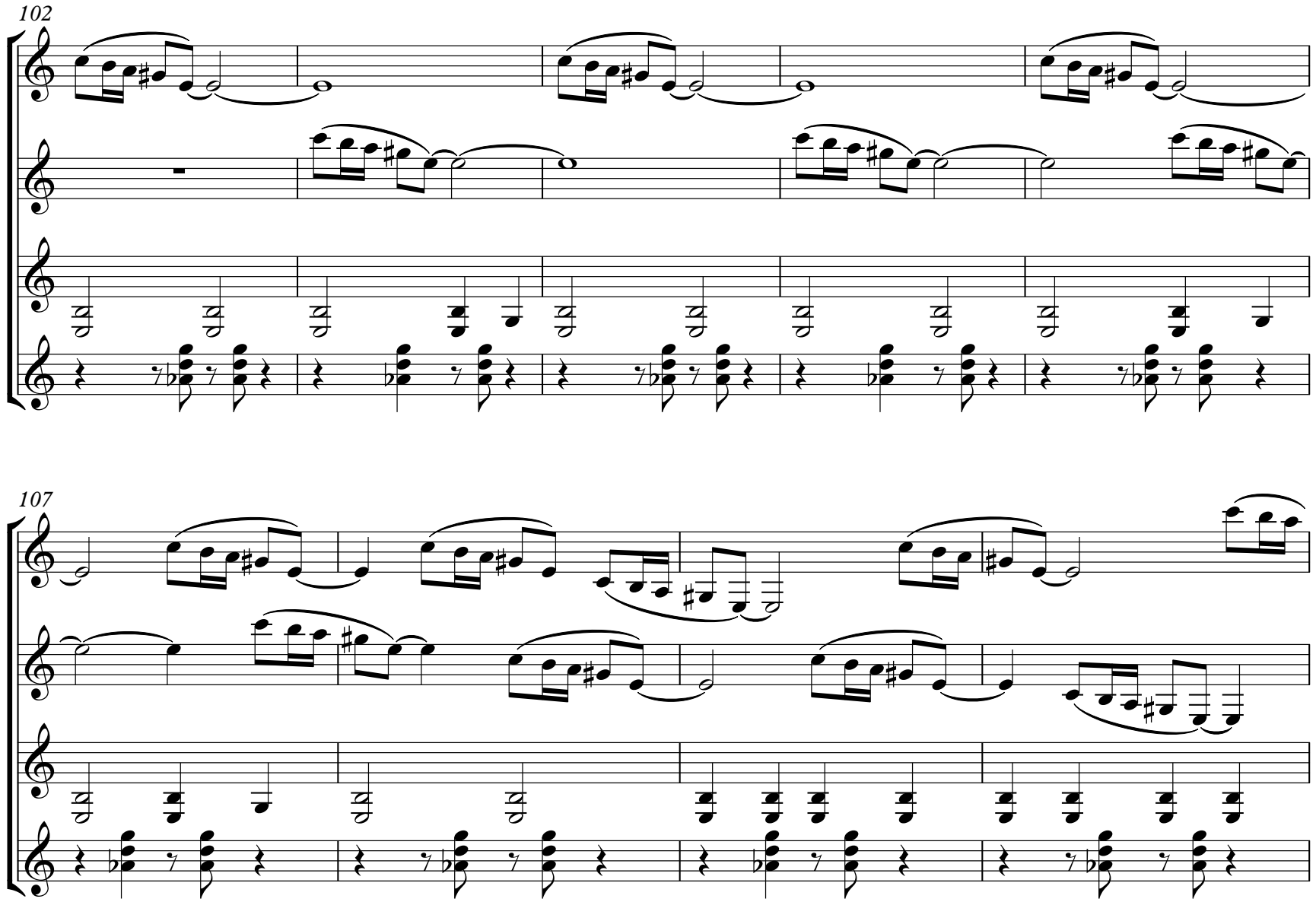

42
Play 4 times
A
G
A
G
A
G
F
solo
A
G
A
G
49
E
f
Let ring
Let ring

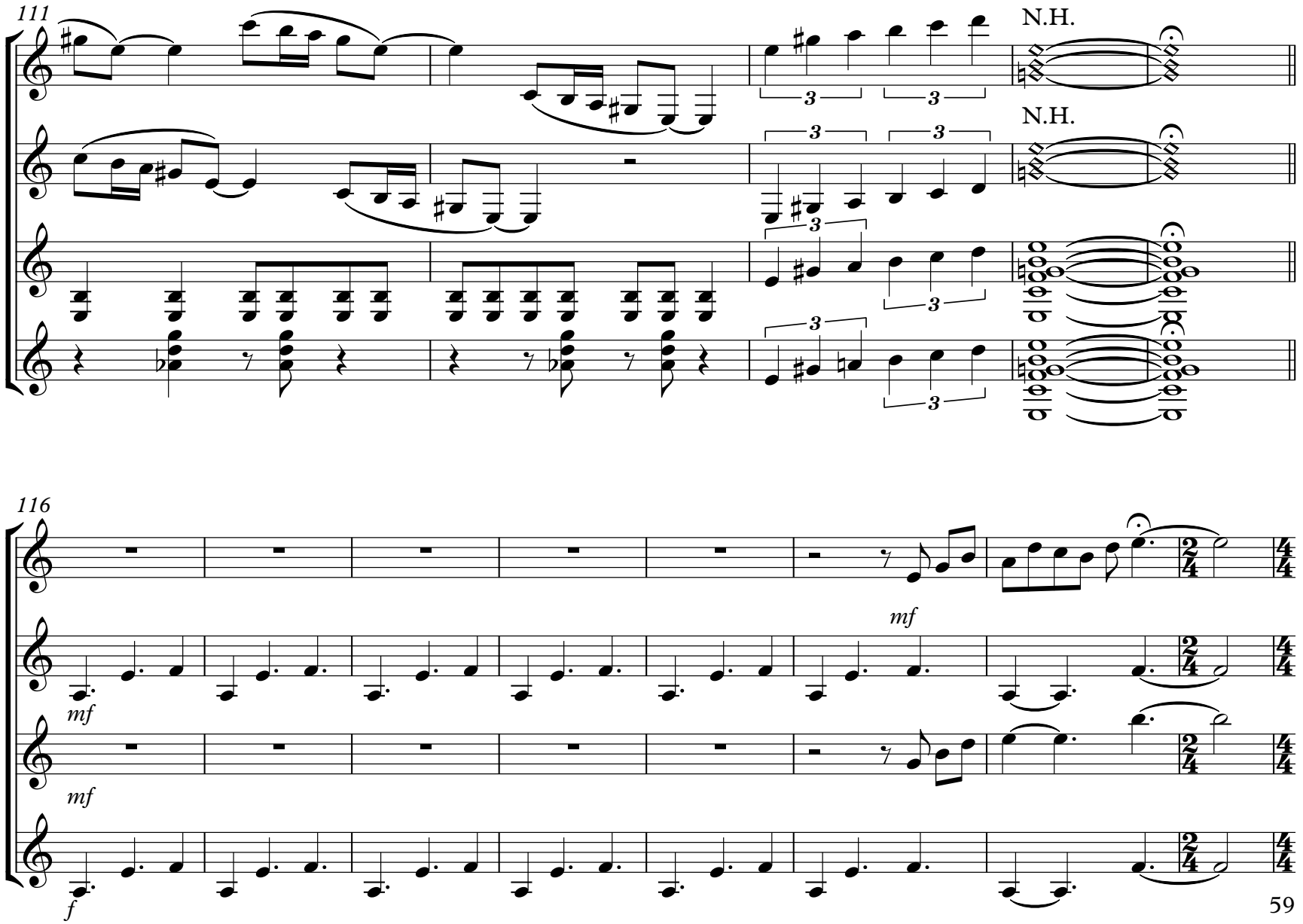

54
f
mf
60
mf
mf

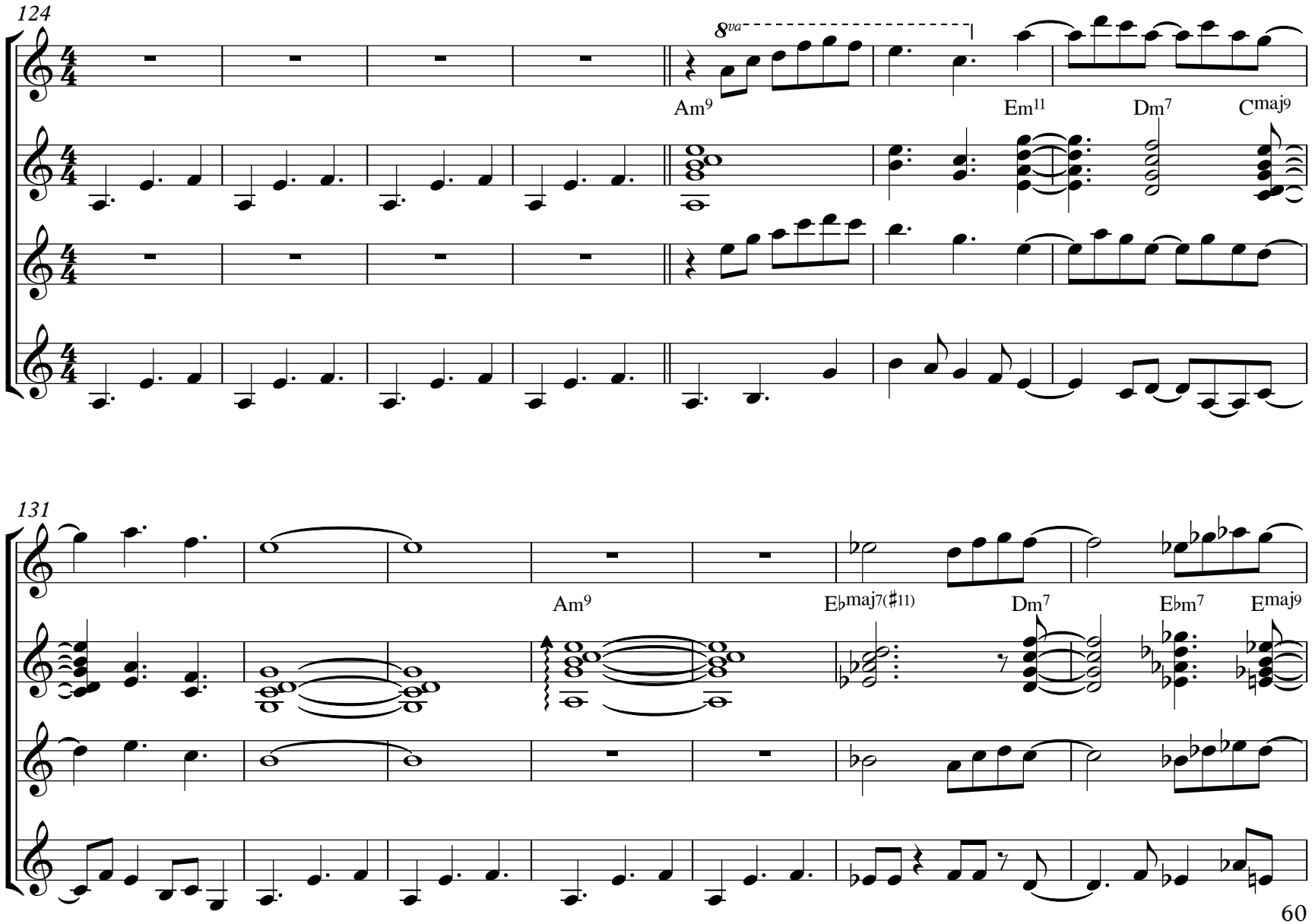

67
73
Am7
Cm7
Solo
ad lib rhythm

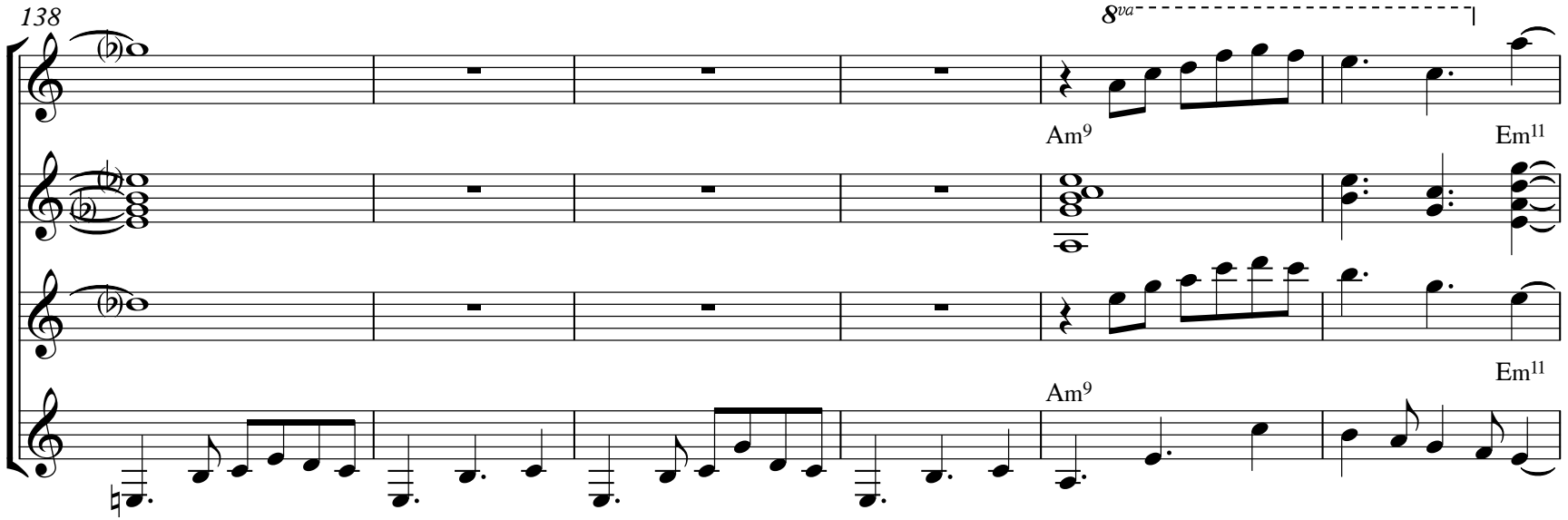

80
Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 B♭m7 E♭7 A♭maj7 A♭m7 D♭7
Cm7 F7 B♭maj7 B♭m7 E♭7 A♭maj7 A♭m7 D♭7
85
G♭maj7 Gm7 C7 Fmaj7 E7(♯9)
3.
Fmaj7 E7(♯9)
G♭maj7 Gm7 C7 Fmaj7 E7(♯9) Fmaj7
mf

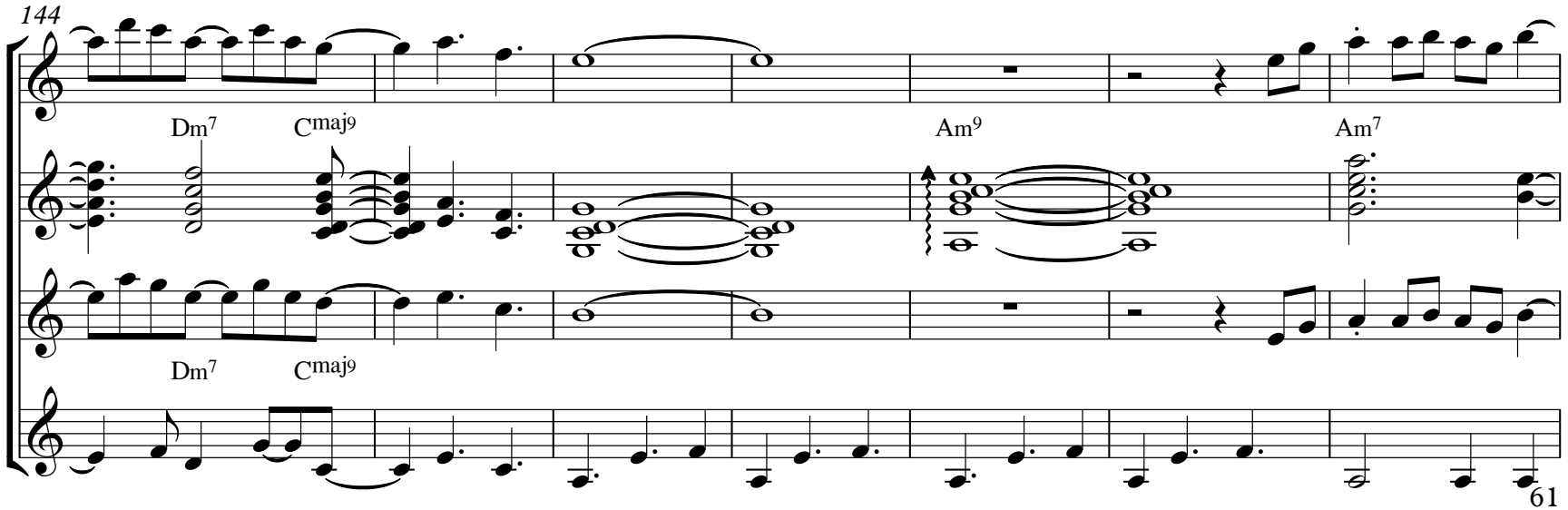

91
mf
97
f
f

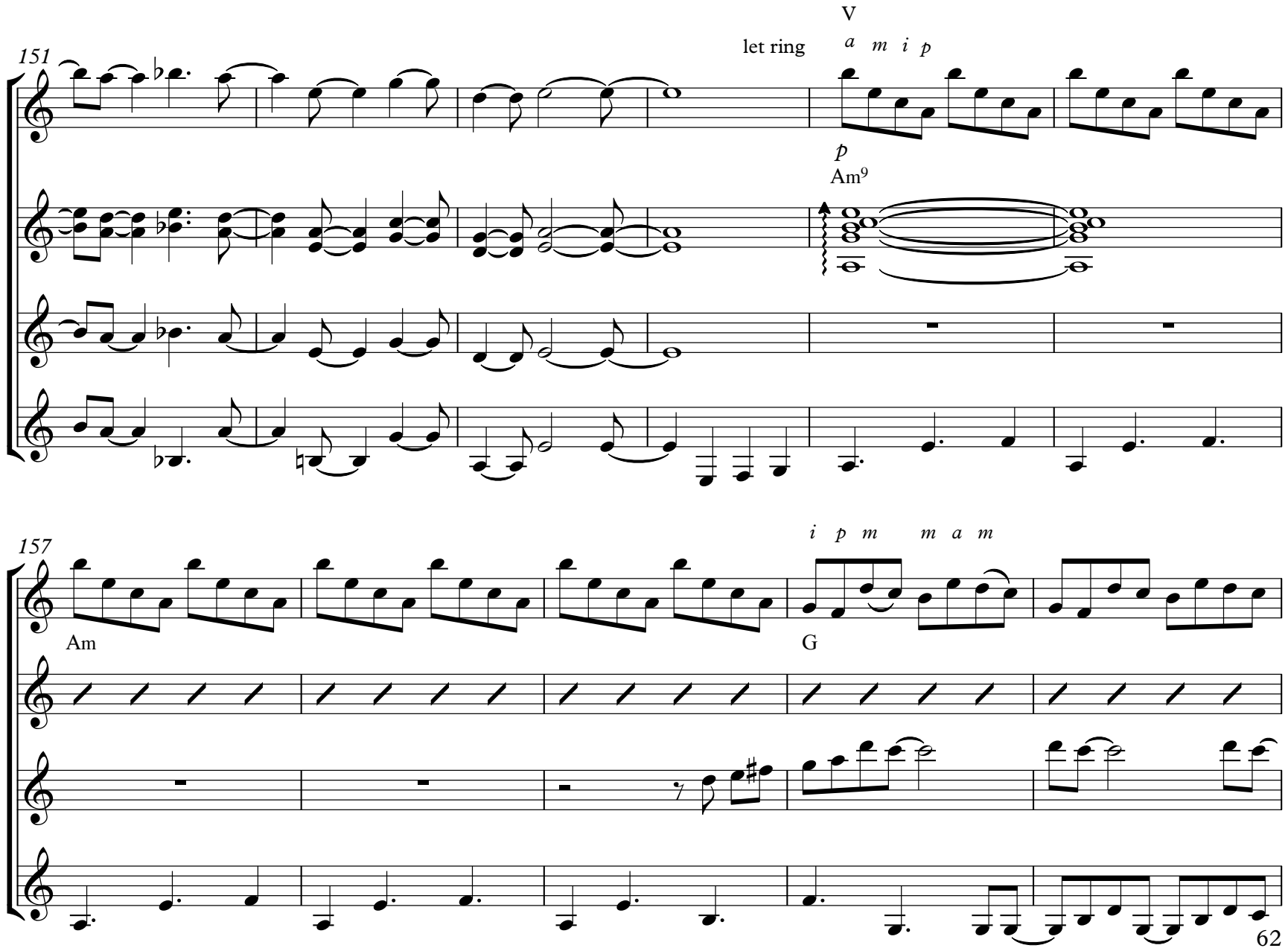

102
107

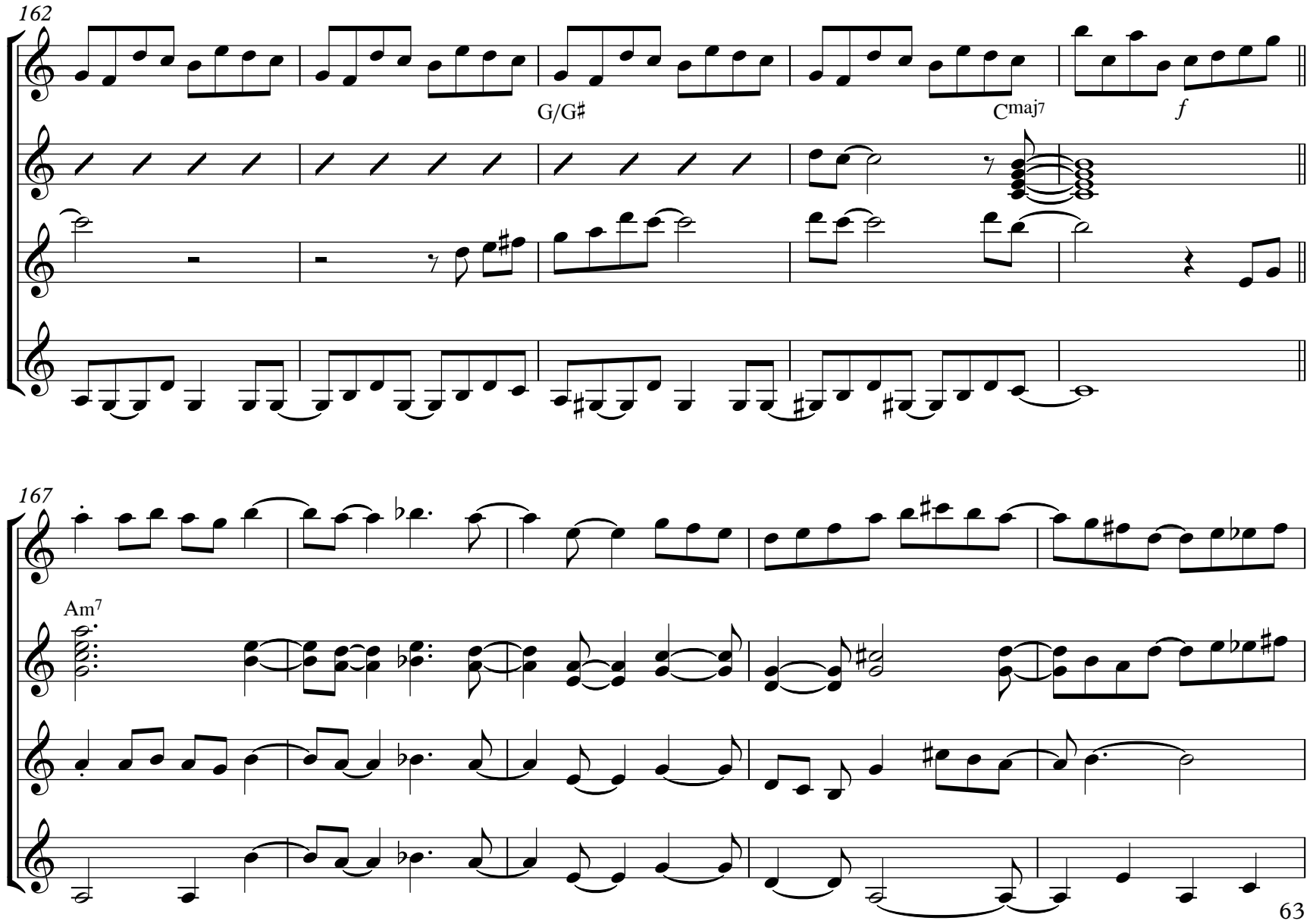

111
N.H.
N.H.
116
mf
mf
mf
f

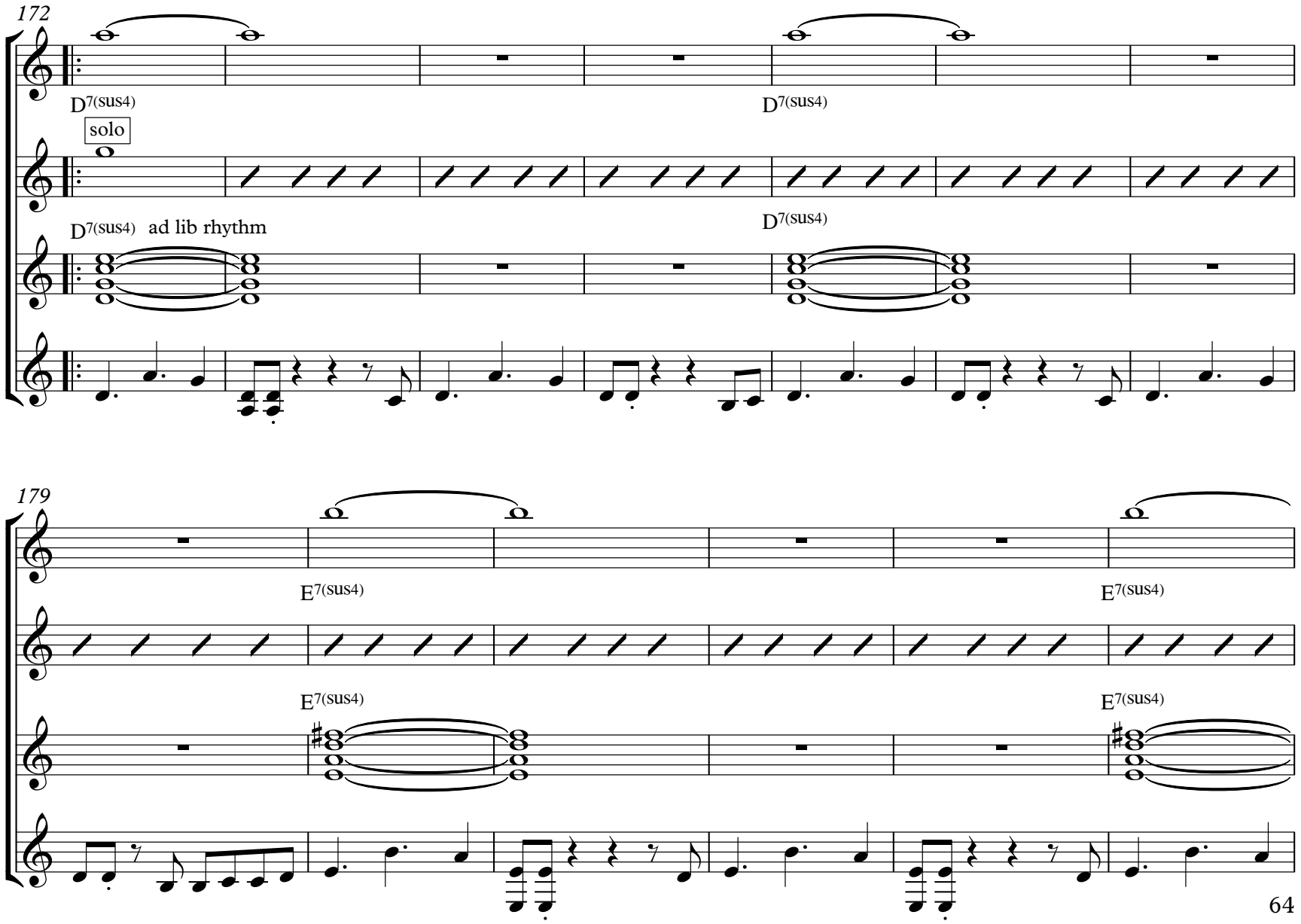

124
8va
Am9
Em11
Dm7
Cmaj9
131
Am9
E♭maj7(♯11)
Dm7
E♭m7
Emaj9

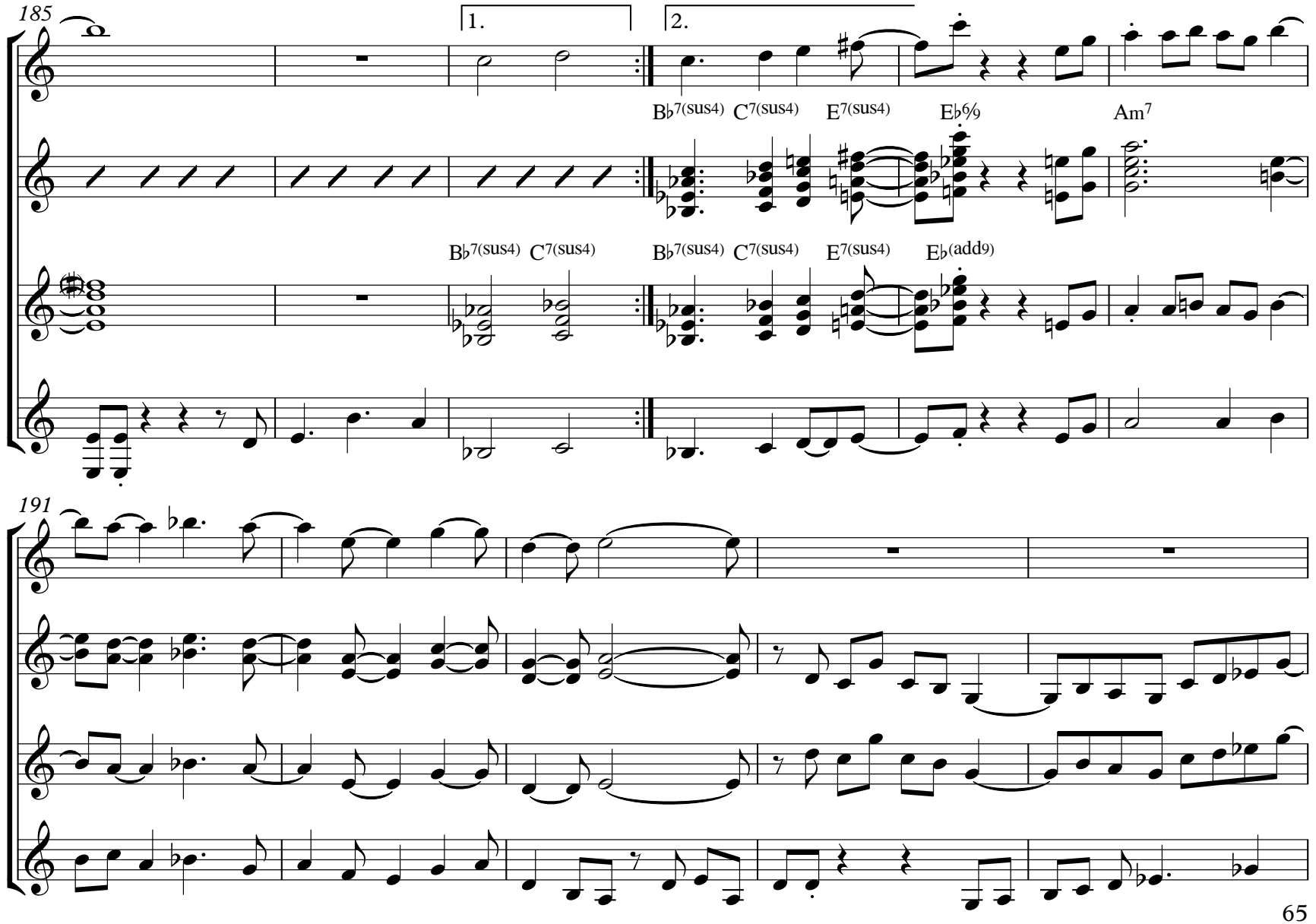

138
8va
Am9
Em11
Am9
Em11

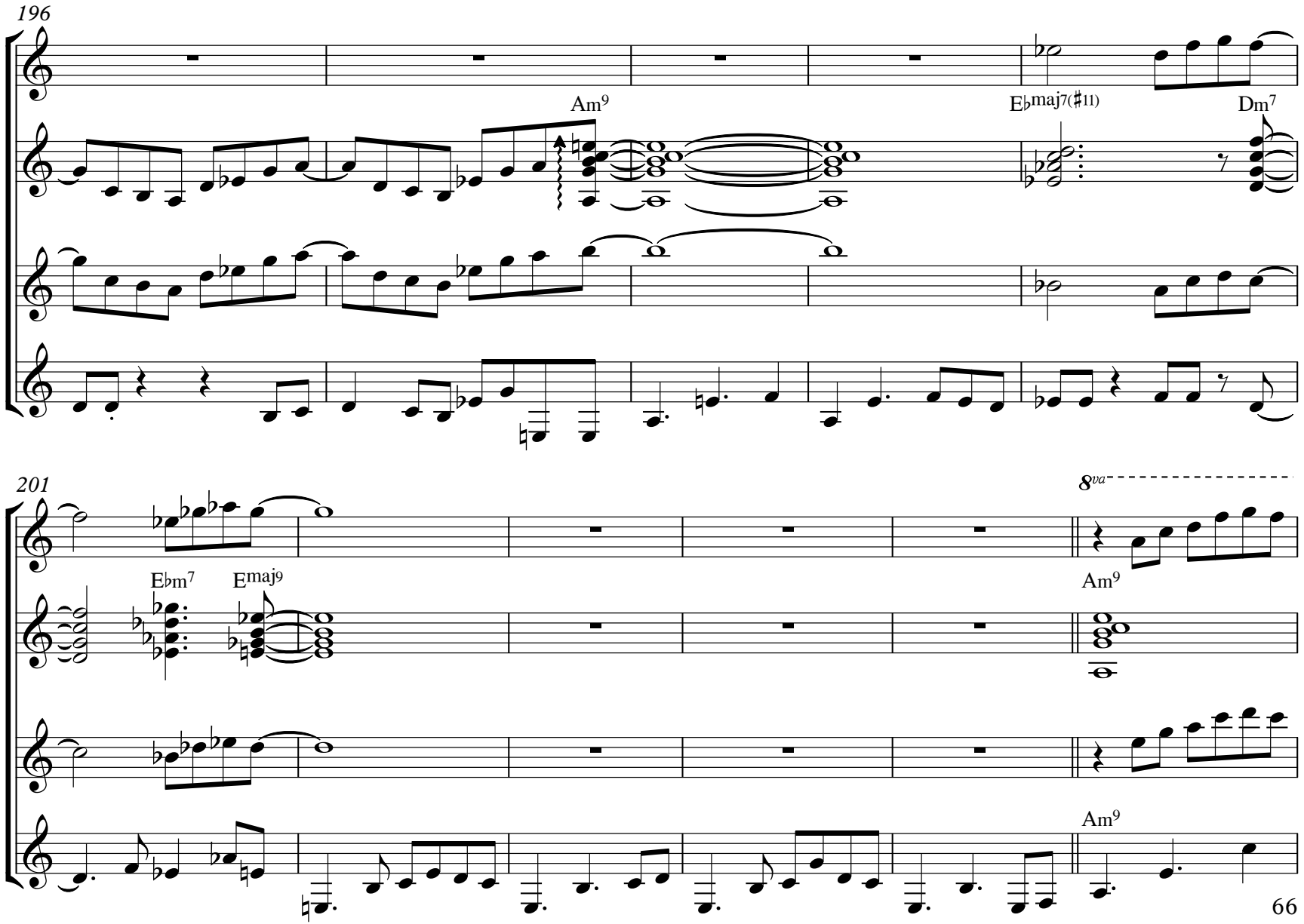

144
Dm7
Cmaj9
Am9
Am7
Dm7
Cmaj9

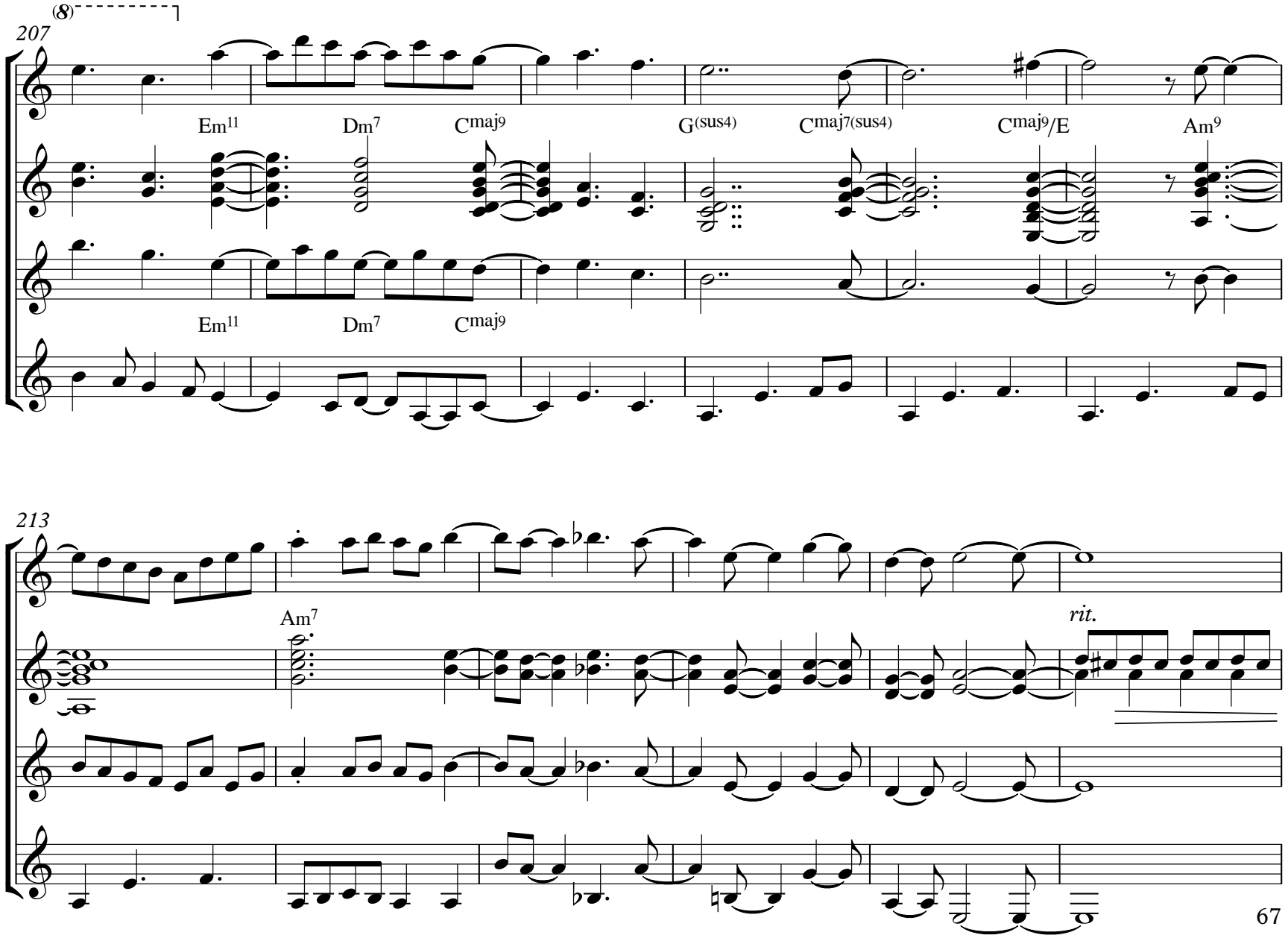

151
let ring
V
a m i p
p
Am9
157
Am
i p m
m a m
G

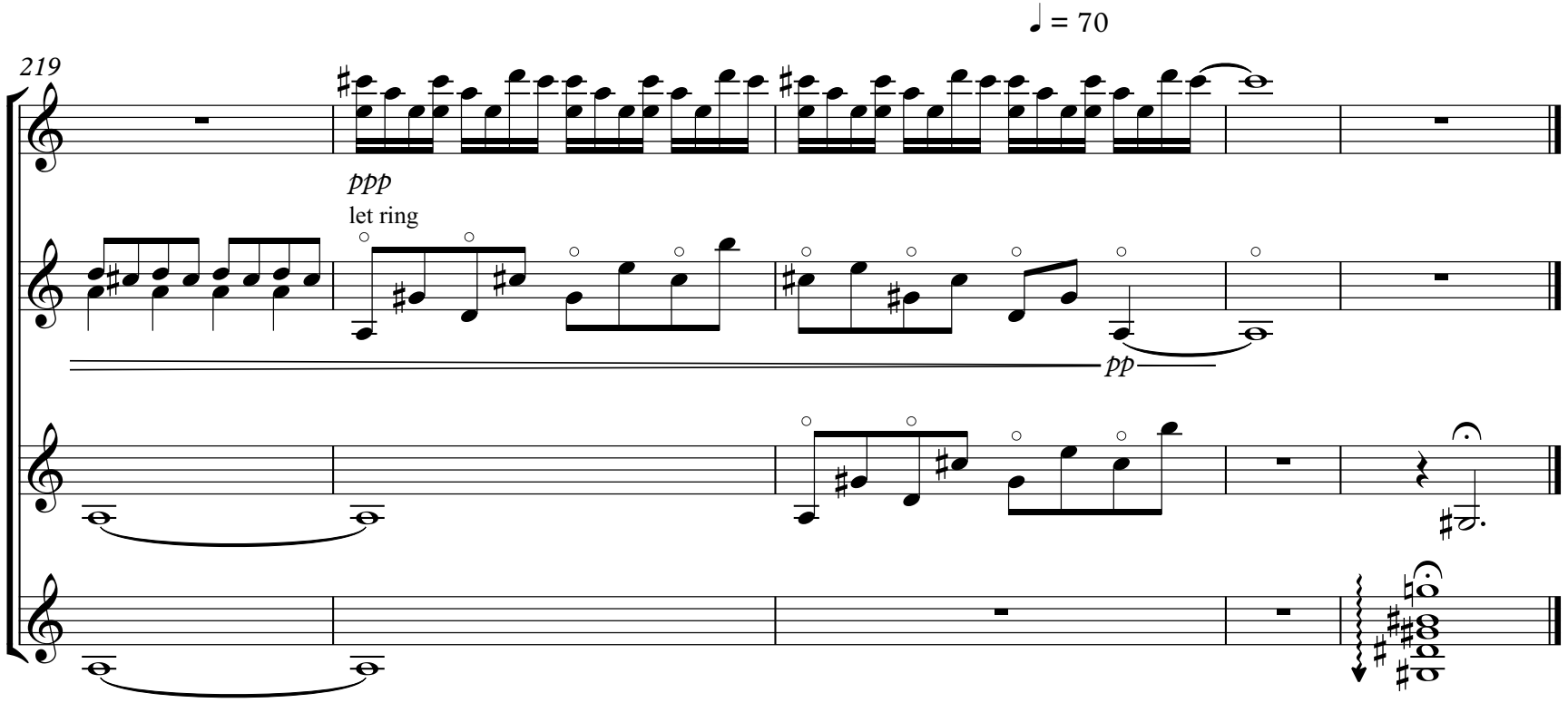

162
G/G♯
Cmaj7
f
167
Am7


172
D7(sus4)
D7(sus4)
solo
D7(sus4) ad lib rhythm
D7(sus4)
179
E7(sus4)
E7(sus4)
E7(sus4)
E7(sus4)


185
1.
2.
B♭7(sus4) C7(sus4) E7(sus4) E♭6/9 Am7
B♭7(sus4) C7(sus4)
B♭7(sus4) C7(sus4) E7(sus4) E♭(add9)
191


196
Am9
E♭maj7(♯11)
Dm7
201
8va
E♭m7
Emaj9
Am9
Am9

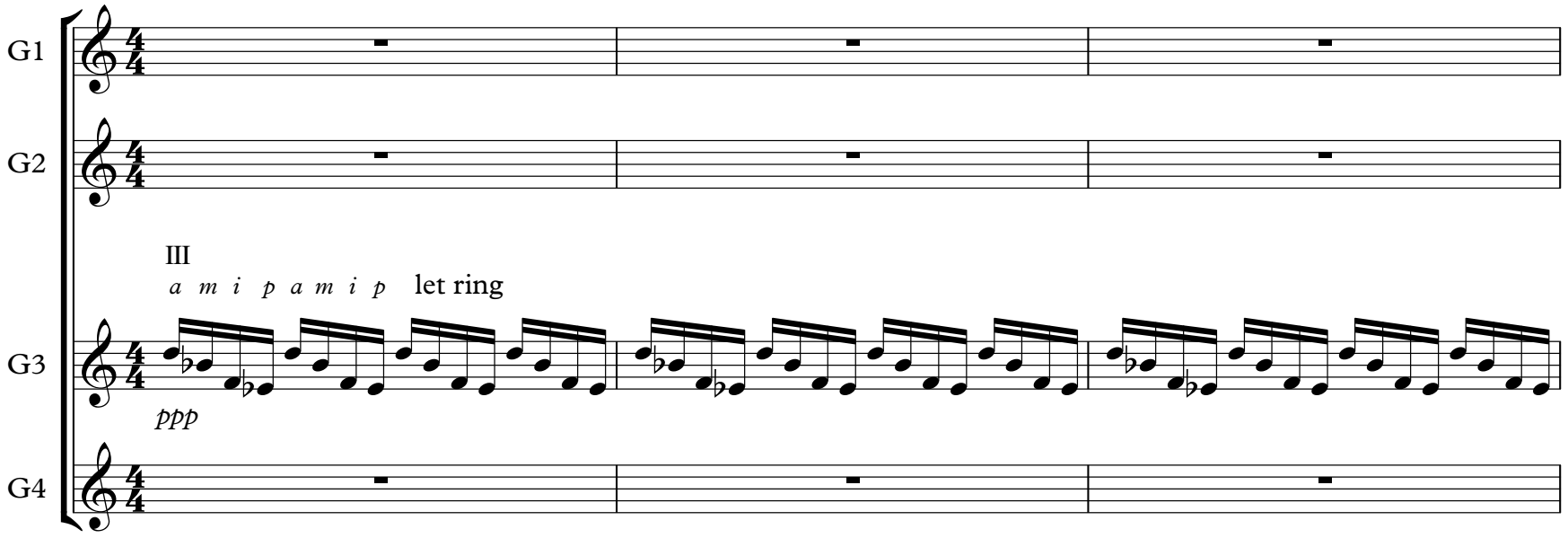

(8)
207
Em11
Dm7
Cmaj9
G(sus4)
Cmaj7(sus4)
Cmaj9/E
Am9
Em11
Dm7
Cmaj9
213
Am7
rit.

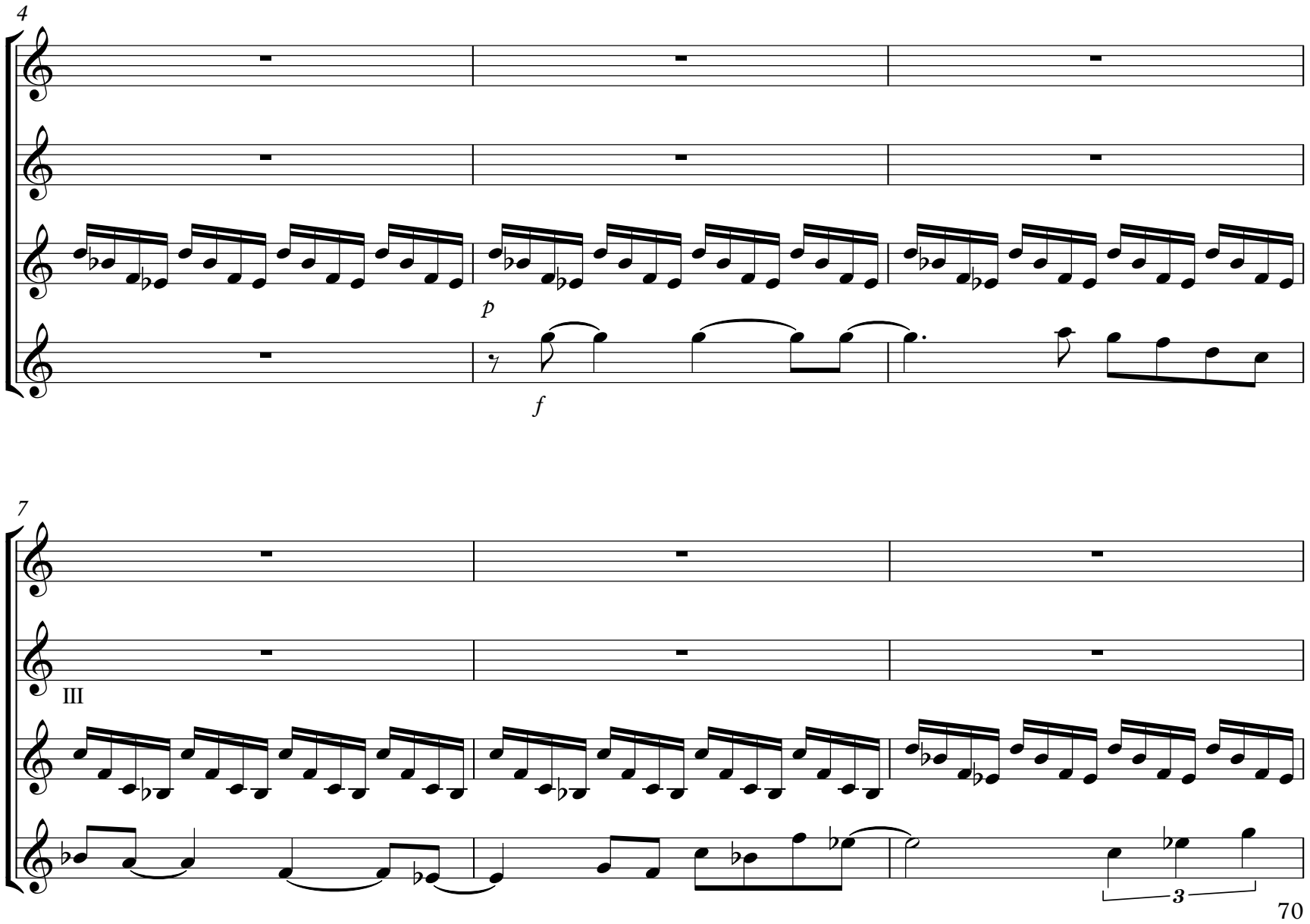

♩ = 70
219
ppp
let ring
pp

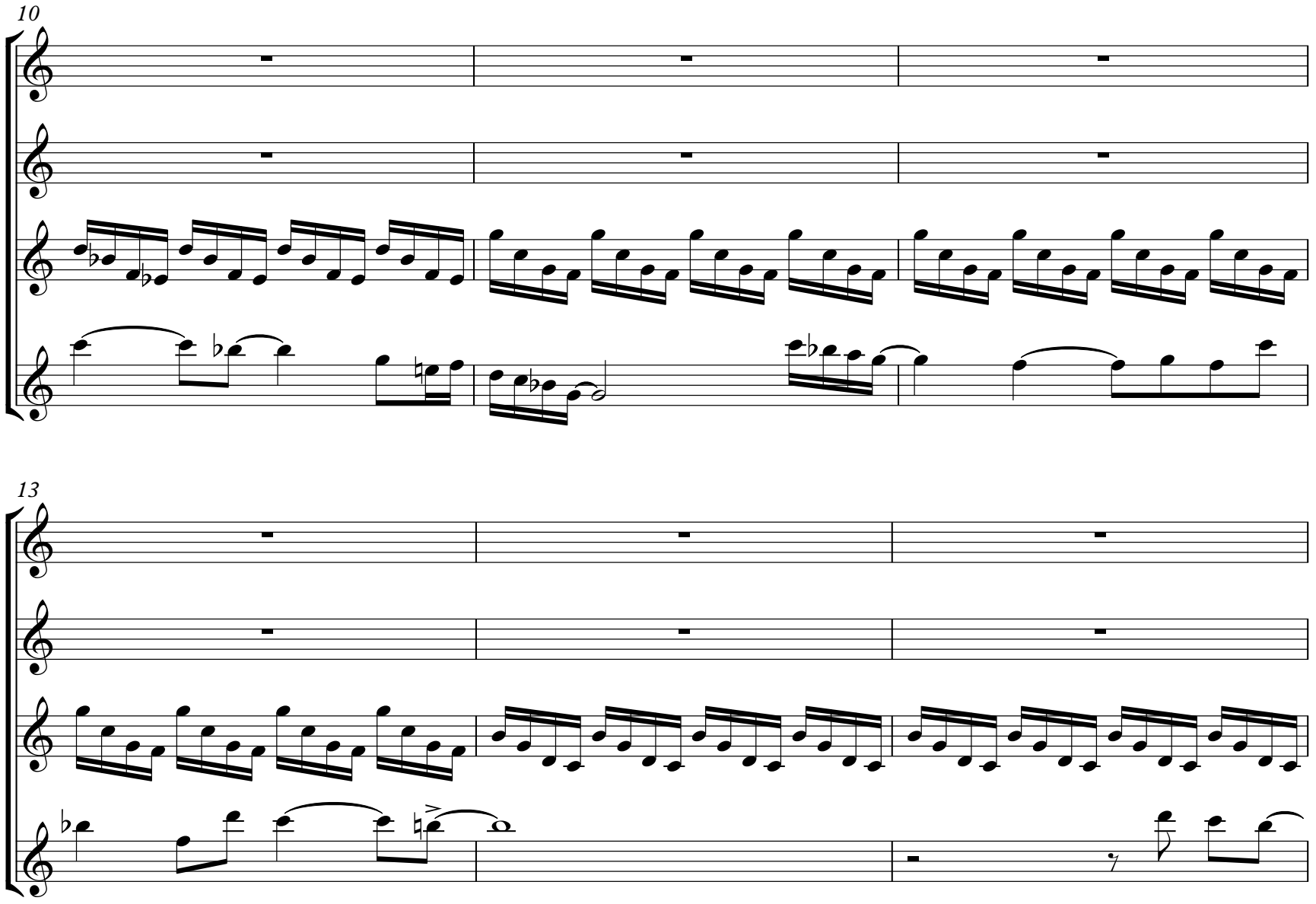
Movement Four: The Gulf of Lawrence

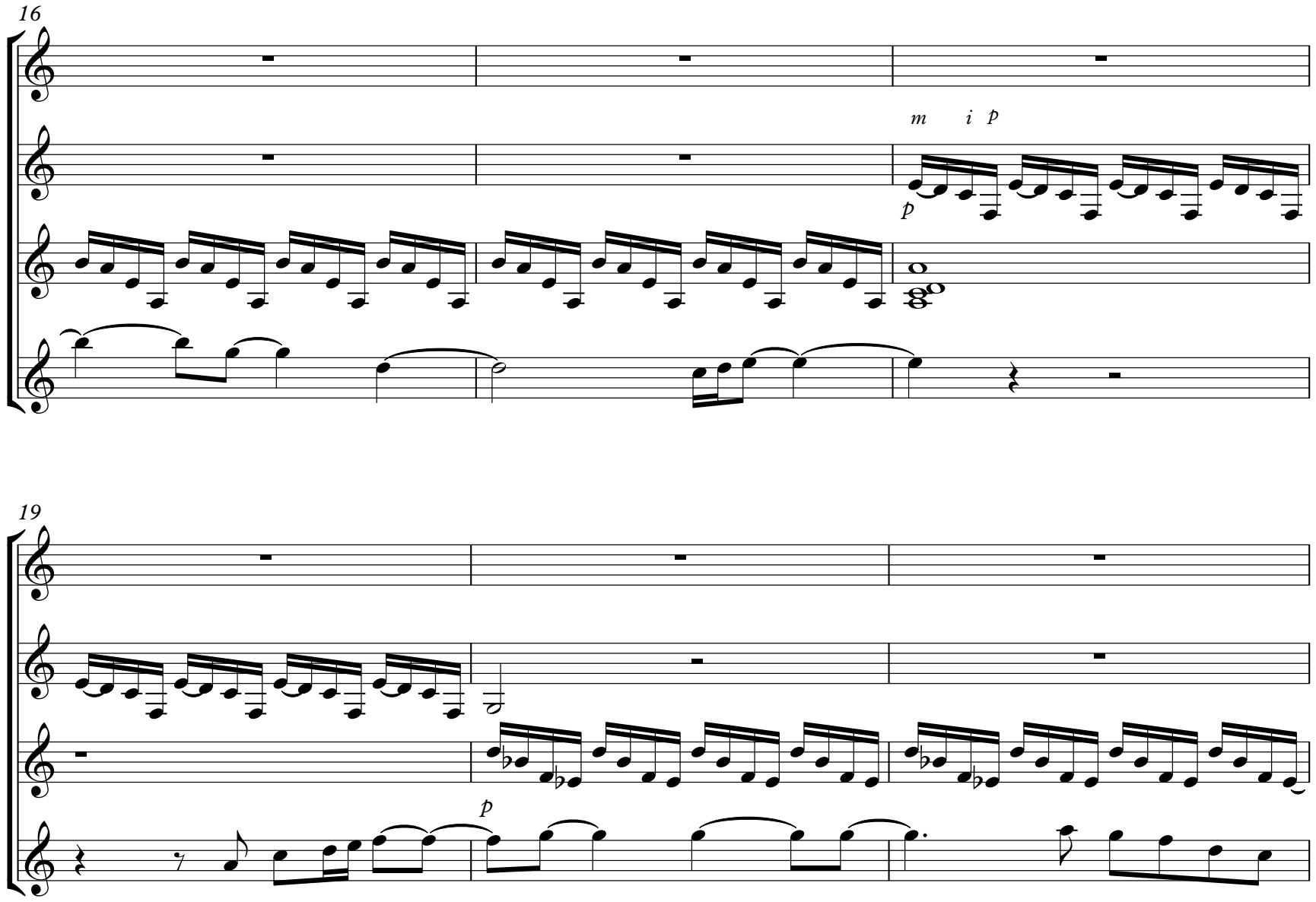
♩ = 104

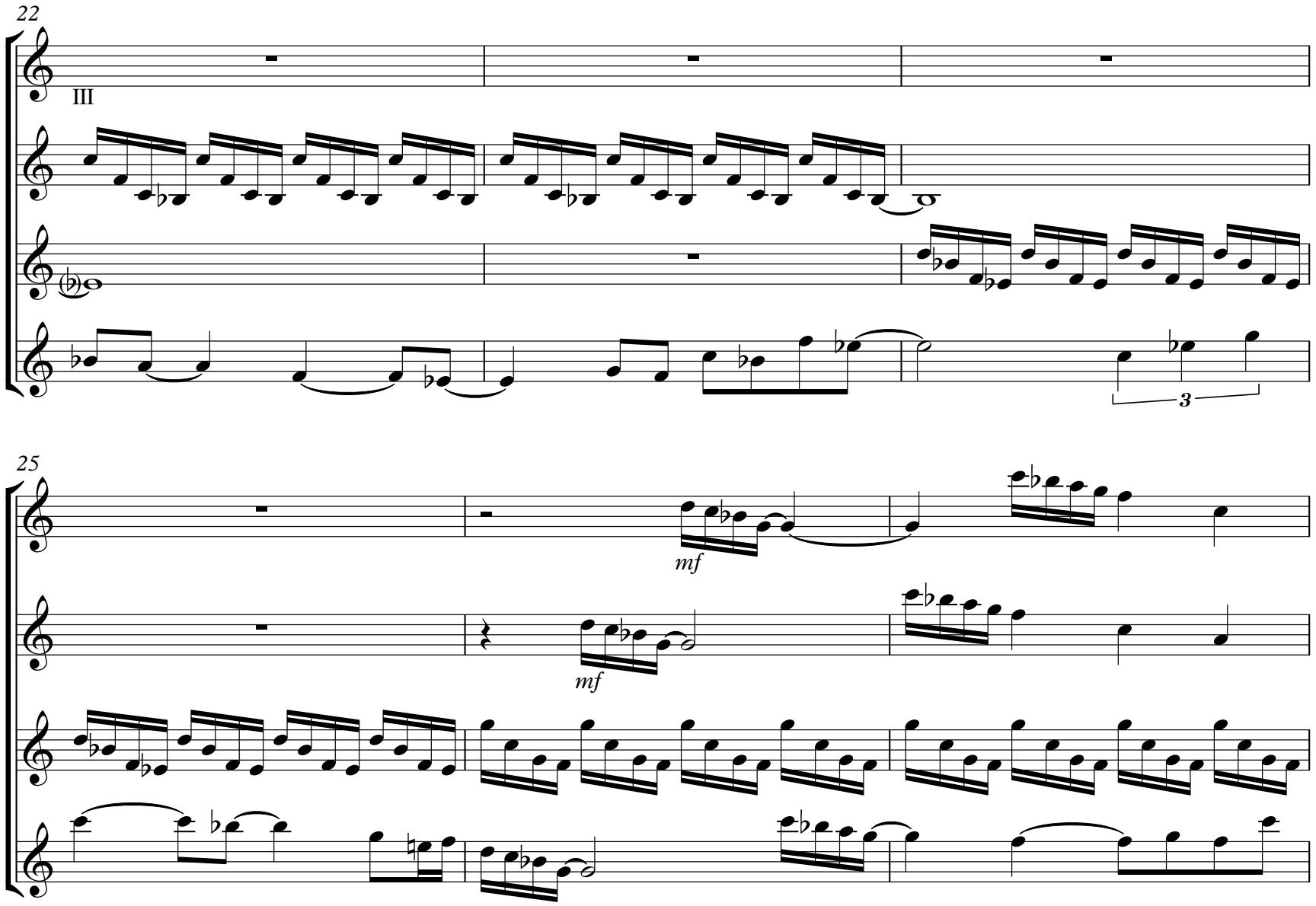
Daron McColl

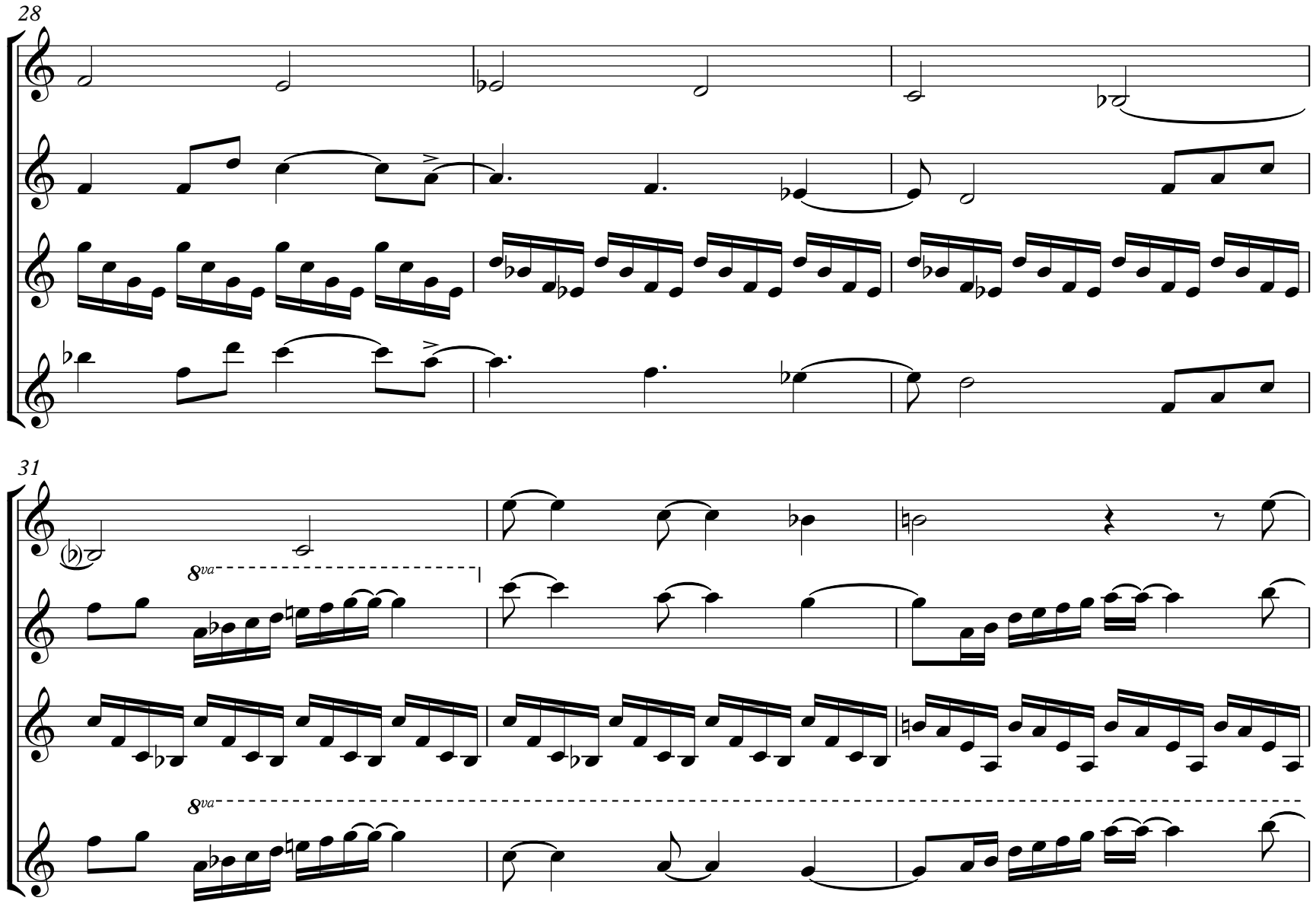


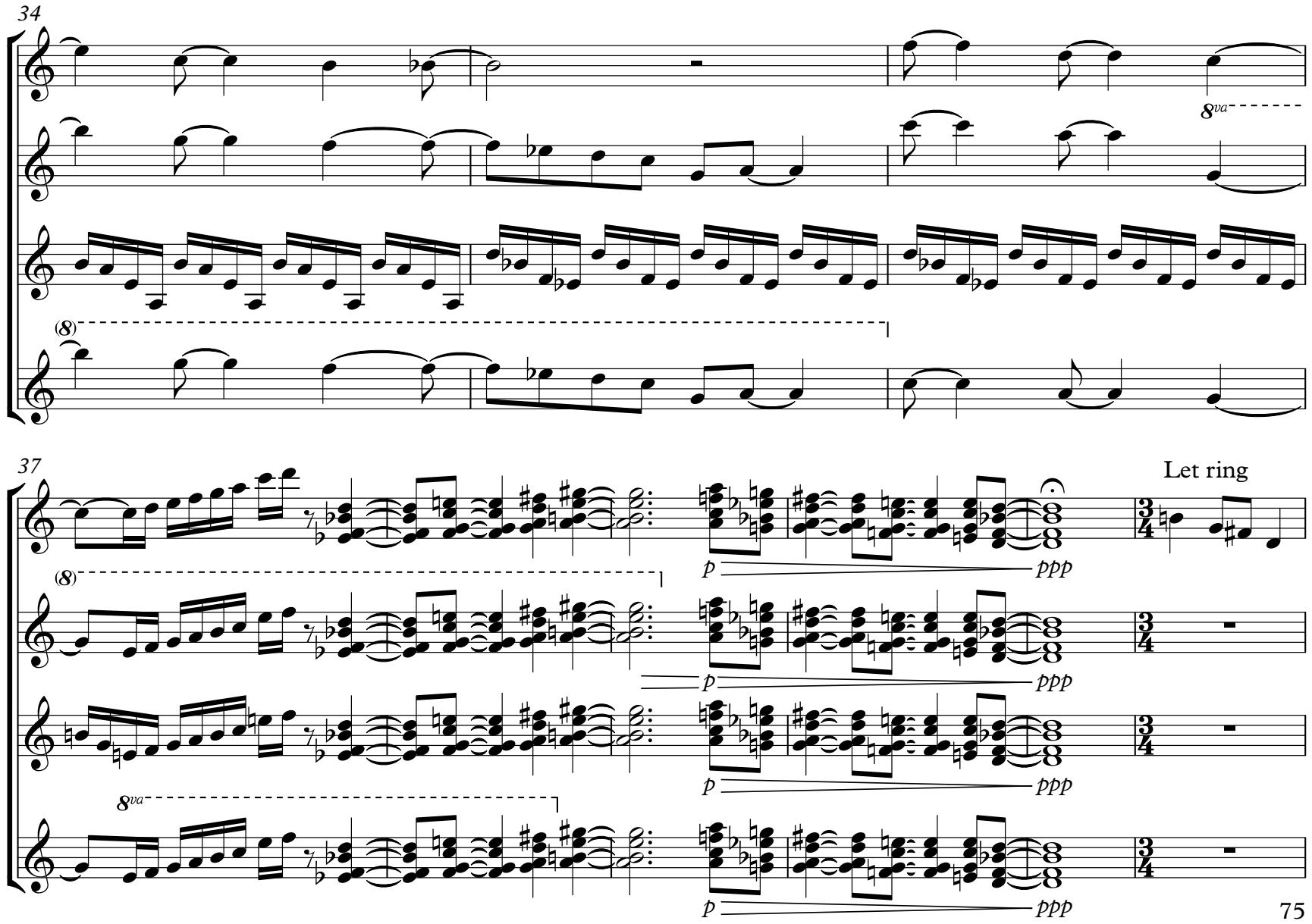

4
p
f
7
III
3

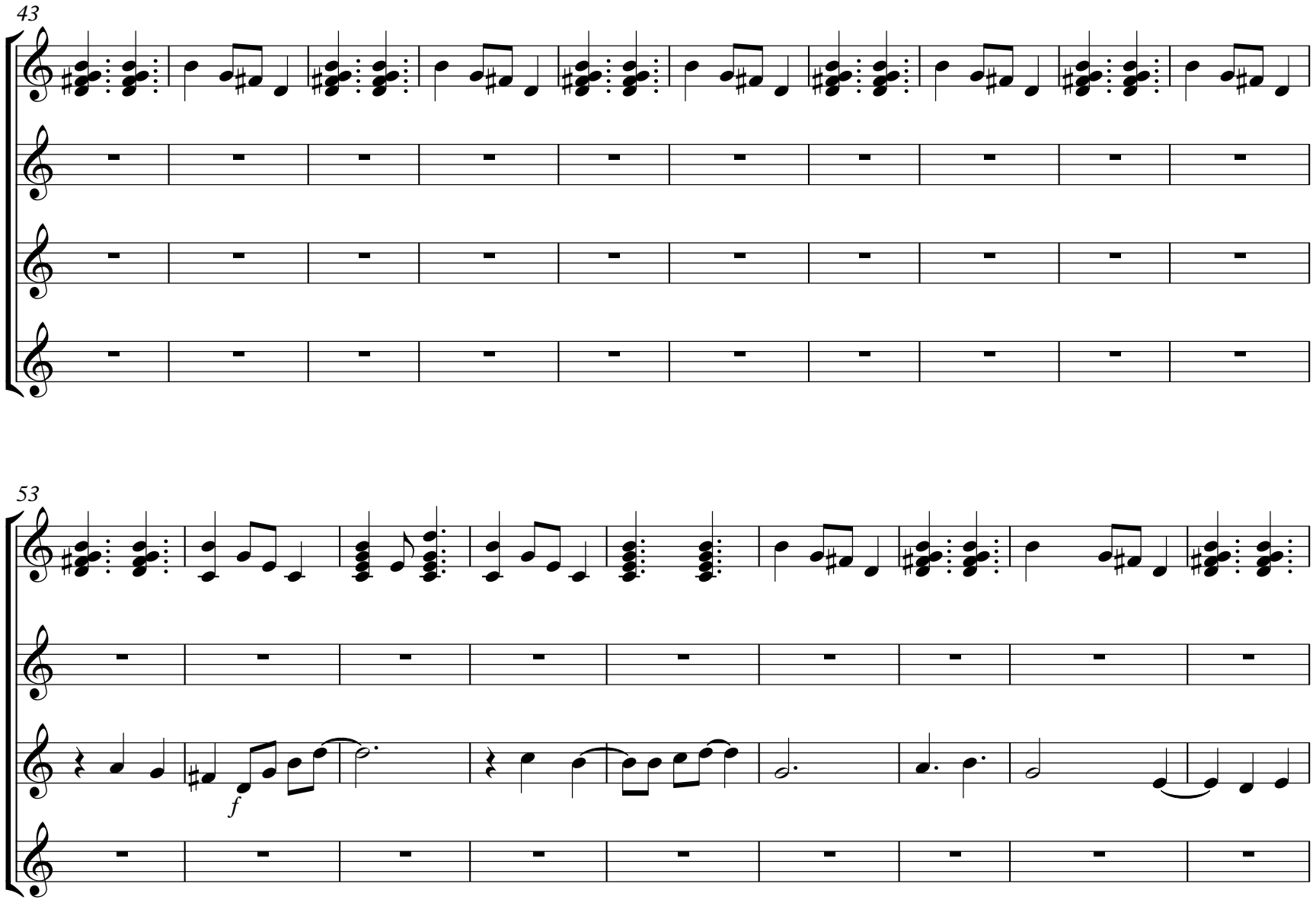

10
13

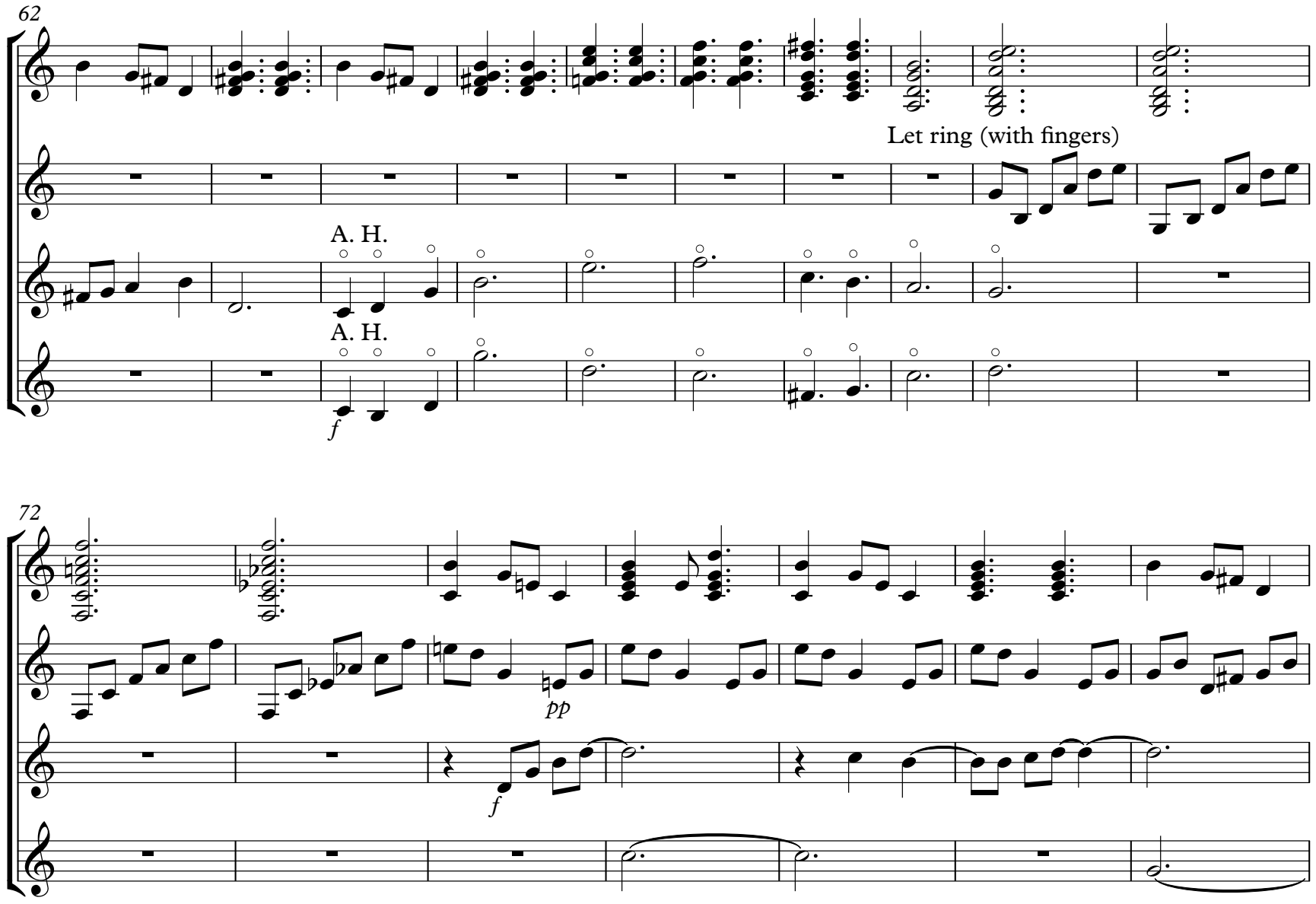

16
m i p
p
19
p

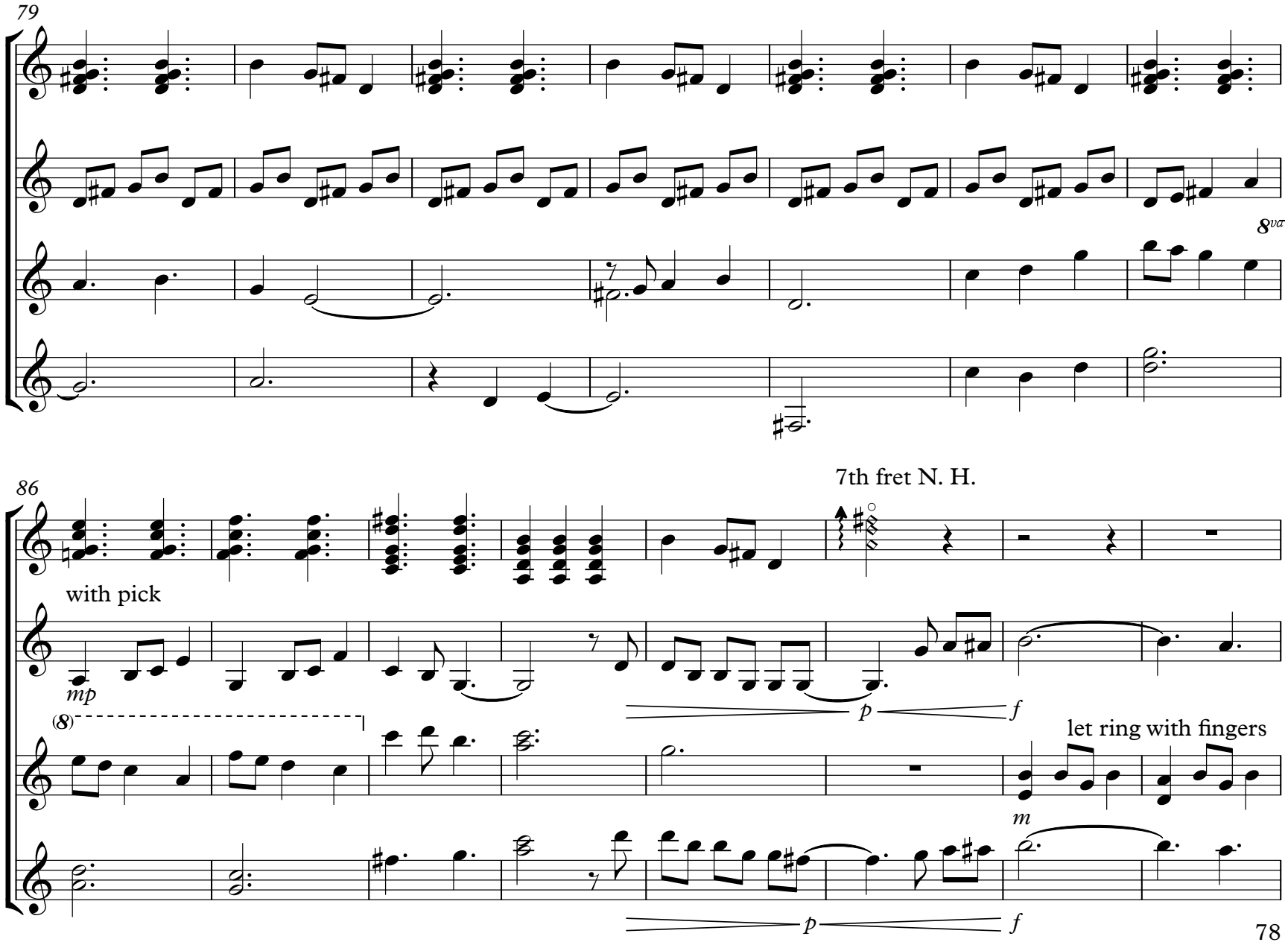

22
III
3
25
mf
mf

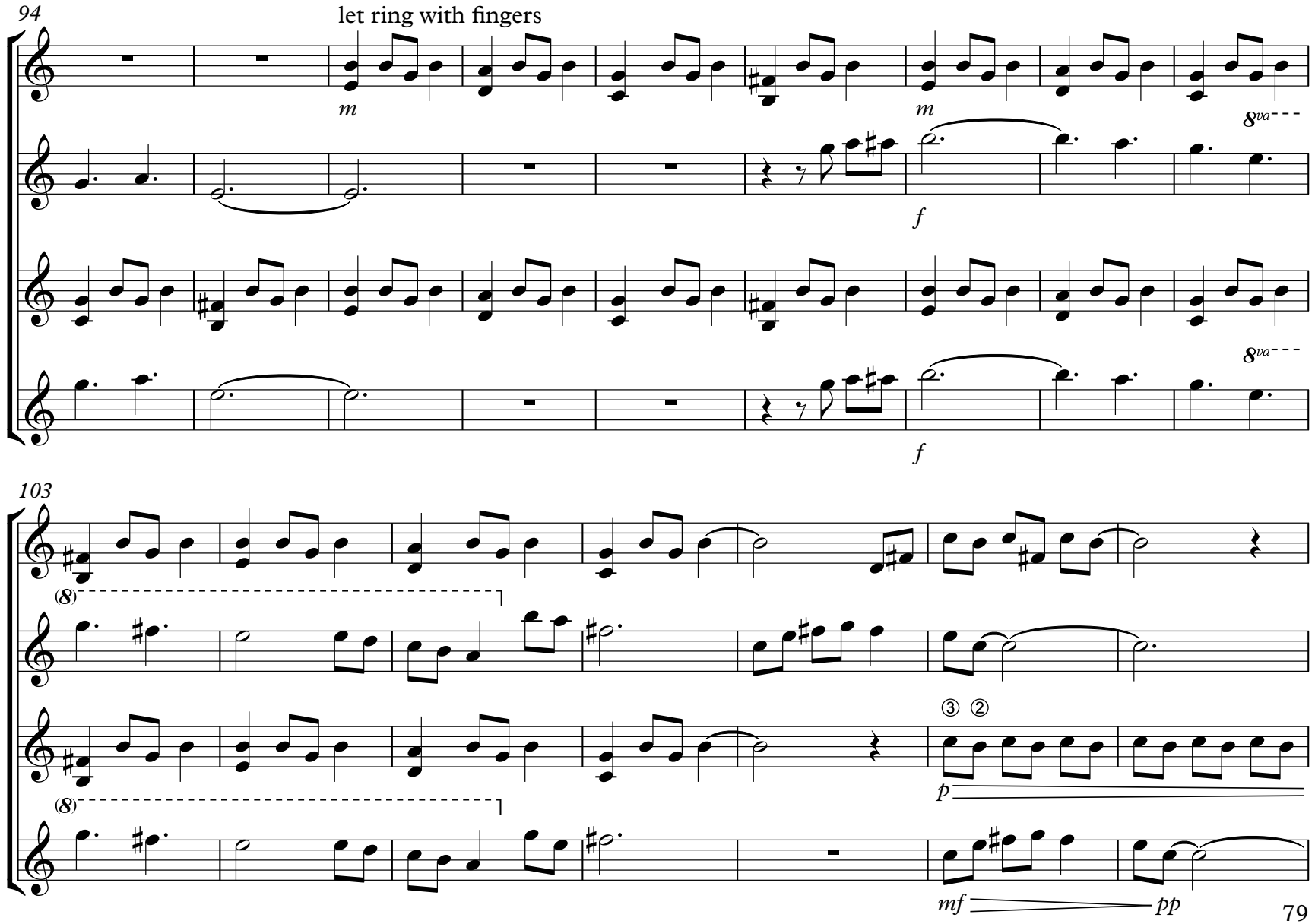

28
31
8va
8va

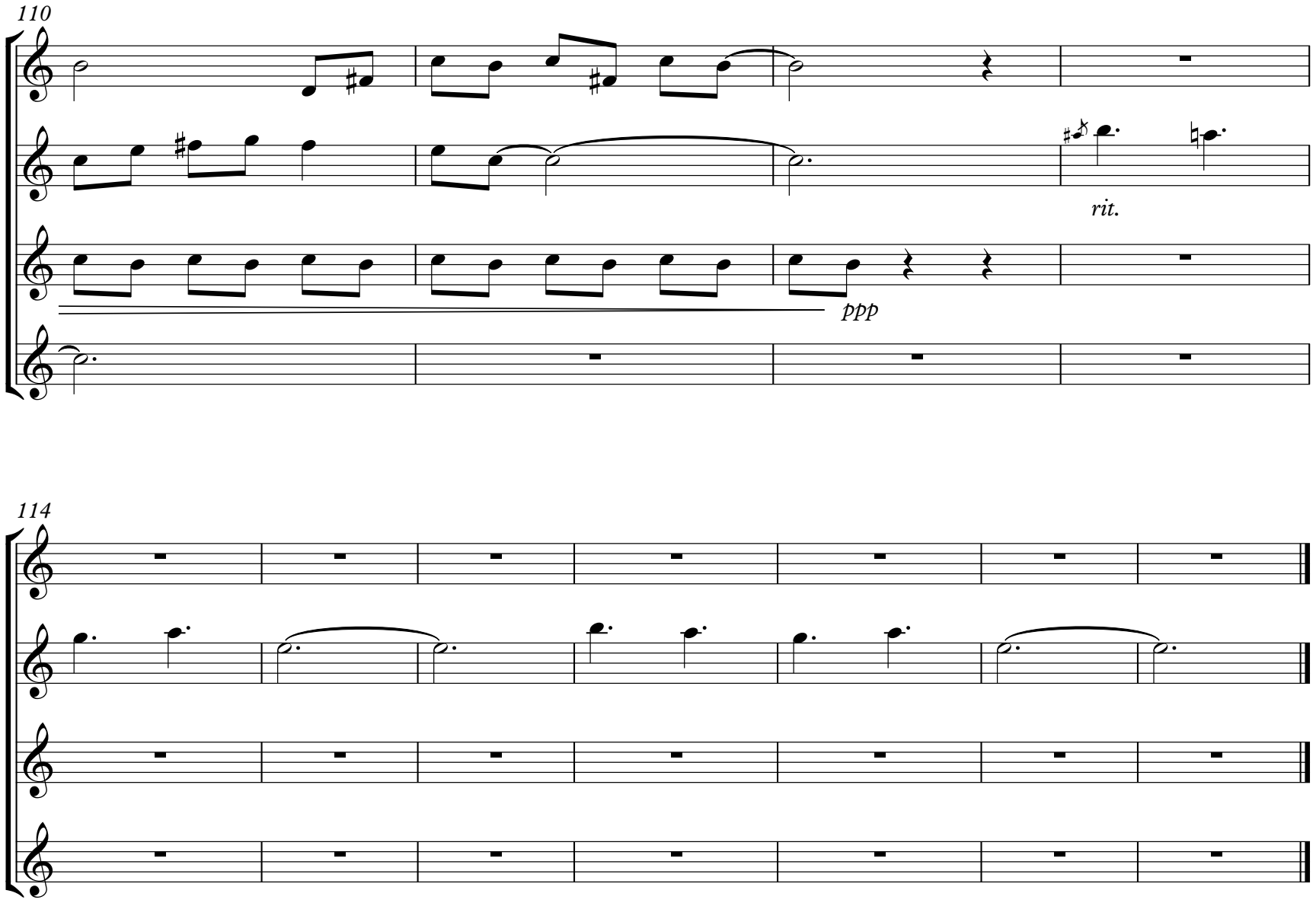

34
8va
(8)
37
Let ring
p
ppp
3/4
8va


43
53
f

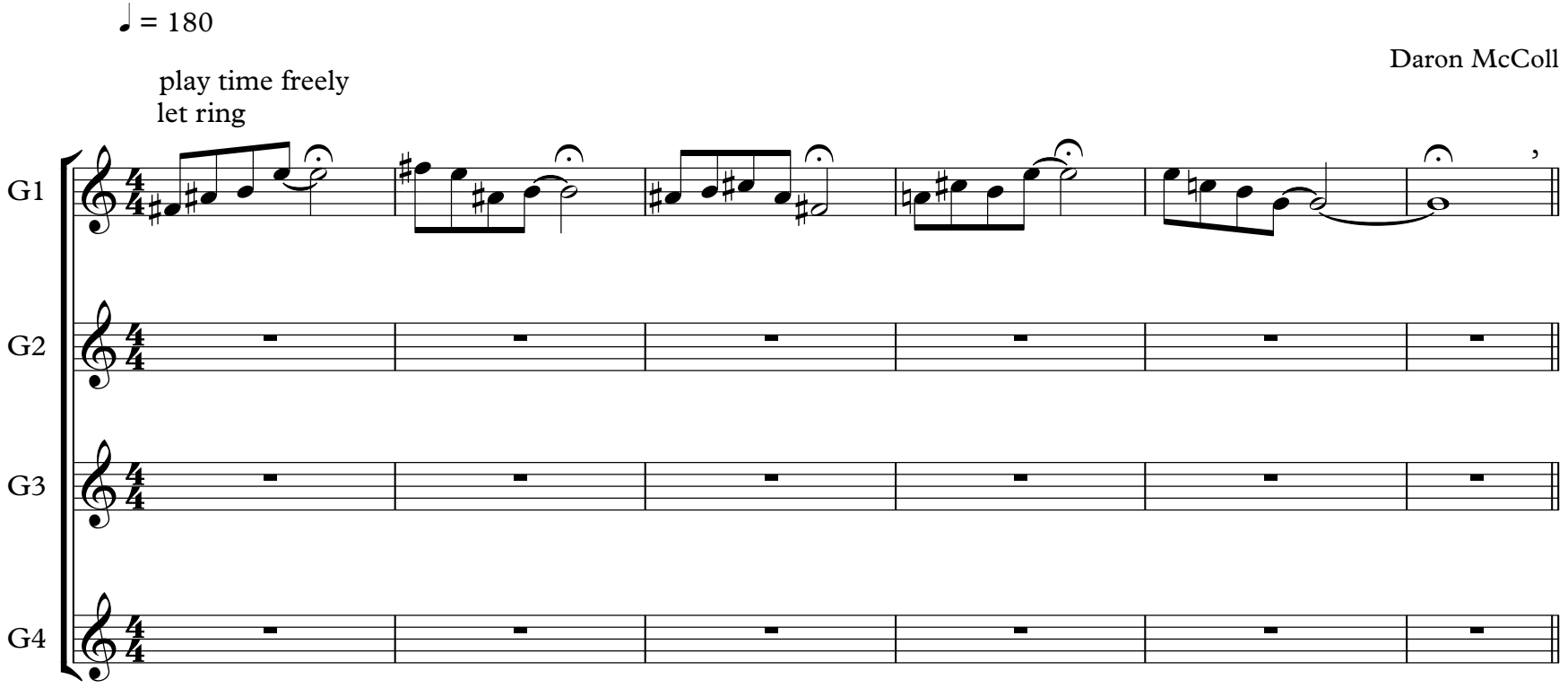

62
Let ring (with fingers)
A. H.
A. H.
f
72
pp
f

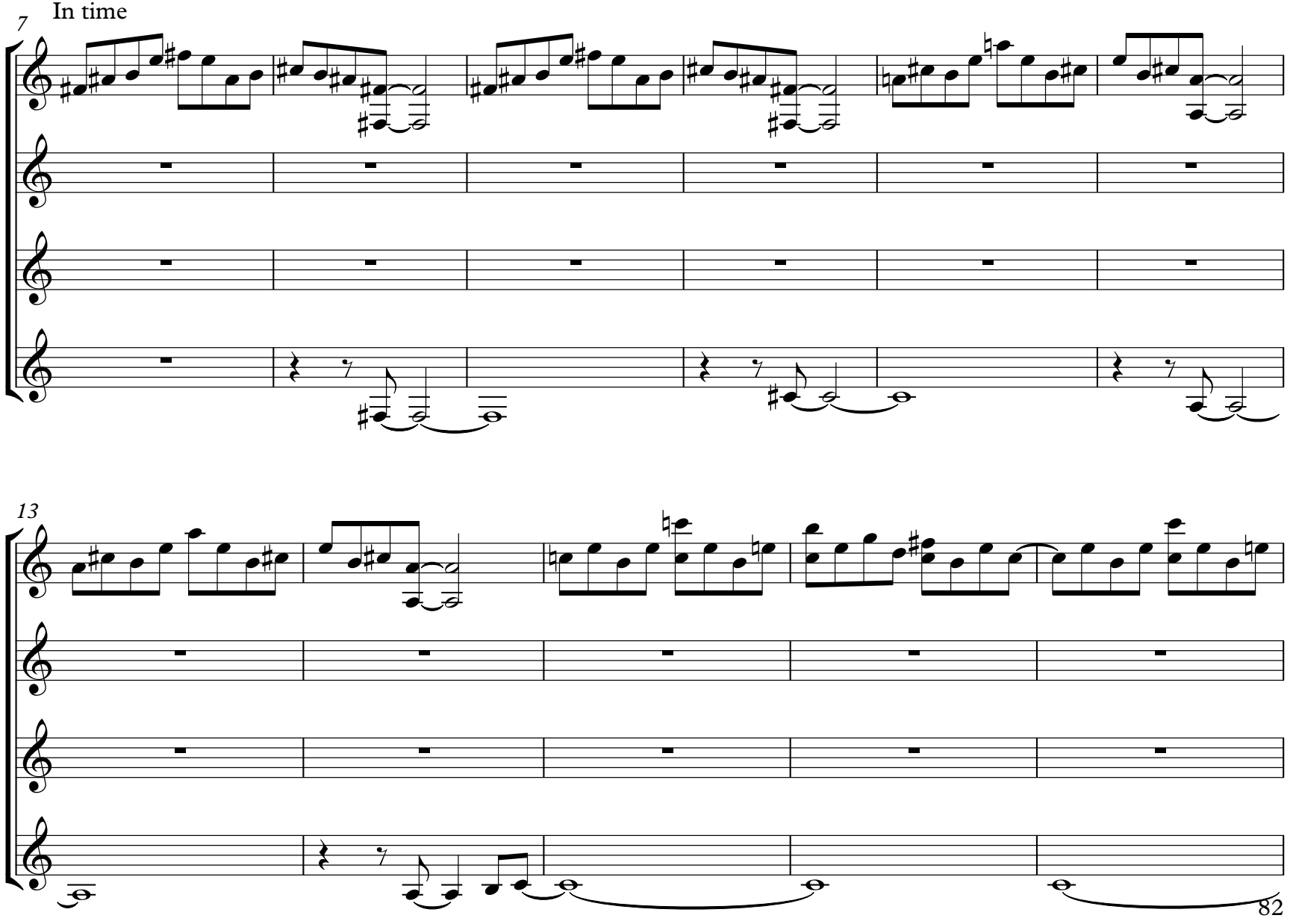

79
8va
86
7th fret N. H.
with pick
mp
p
f
(8)
let ring with fingers
m
p
f

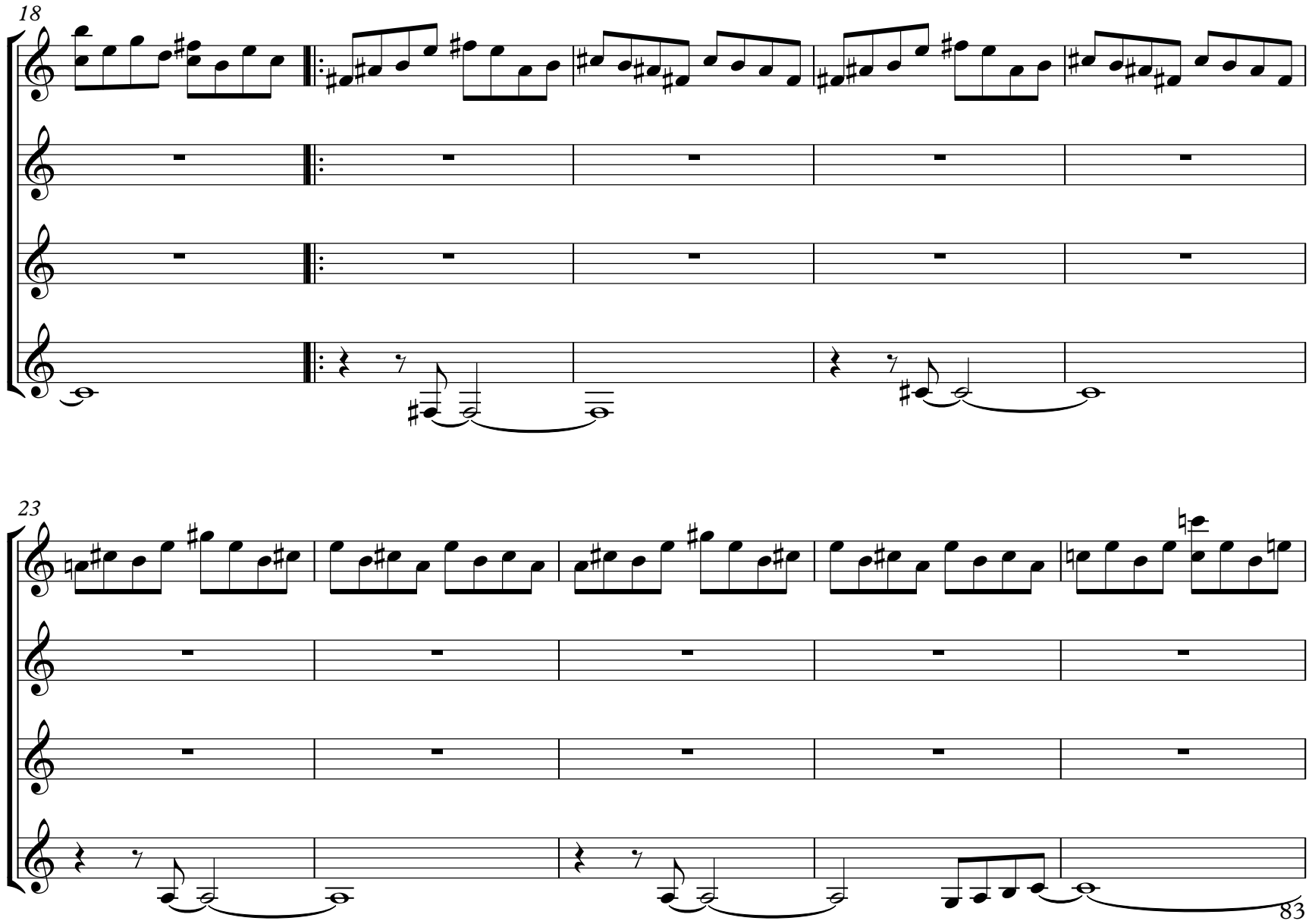

94
let ring with fingers
m
m
8va
f
f
8va
103
(8)
(8)
③ ②
p
mf
pp

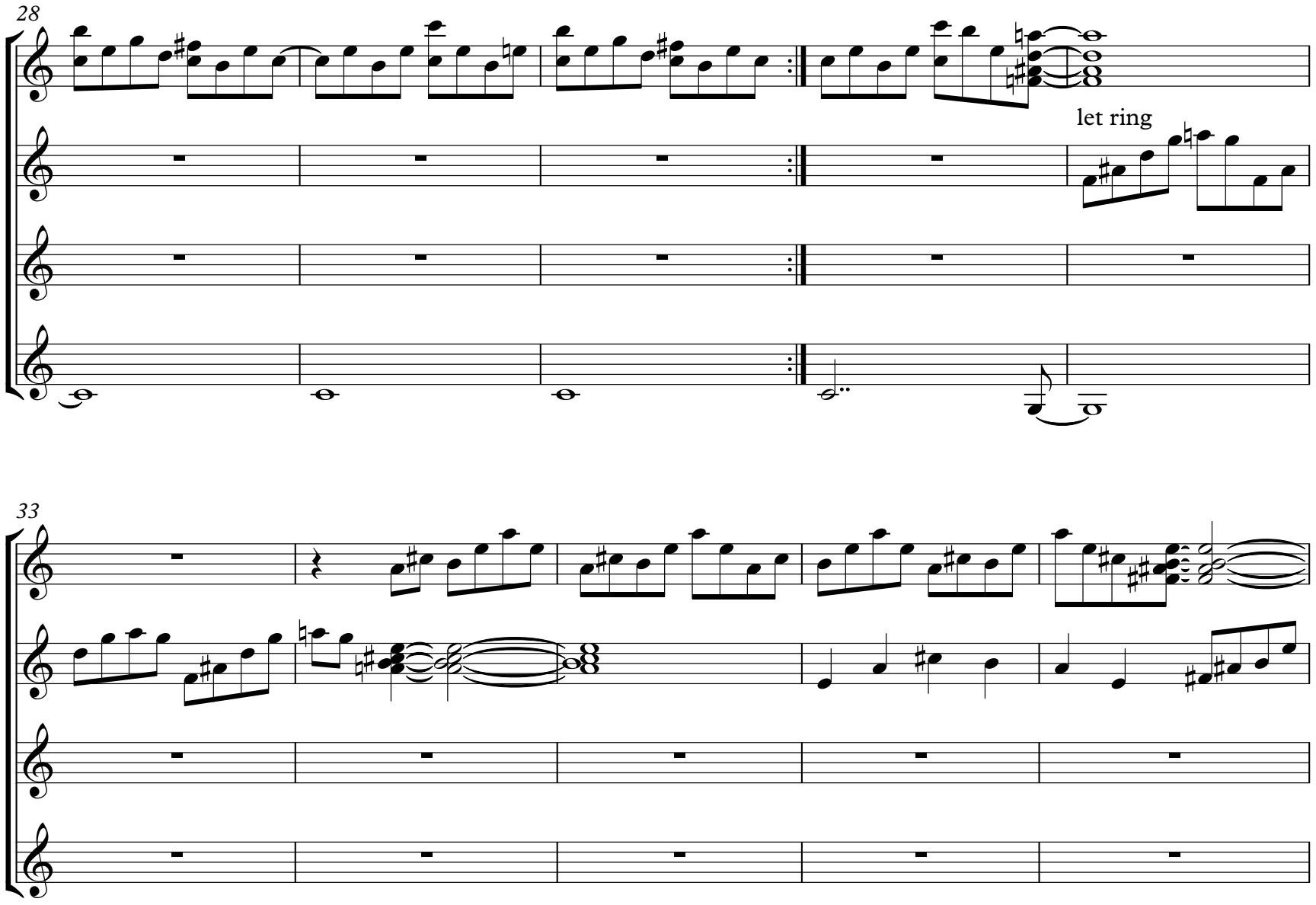

110
rit.
ppp
114

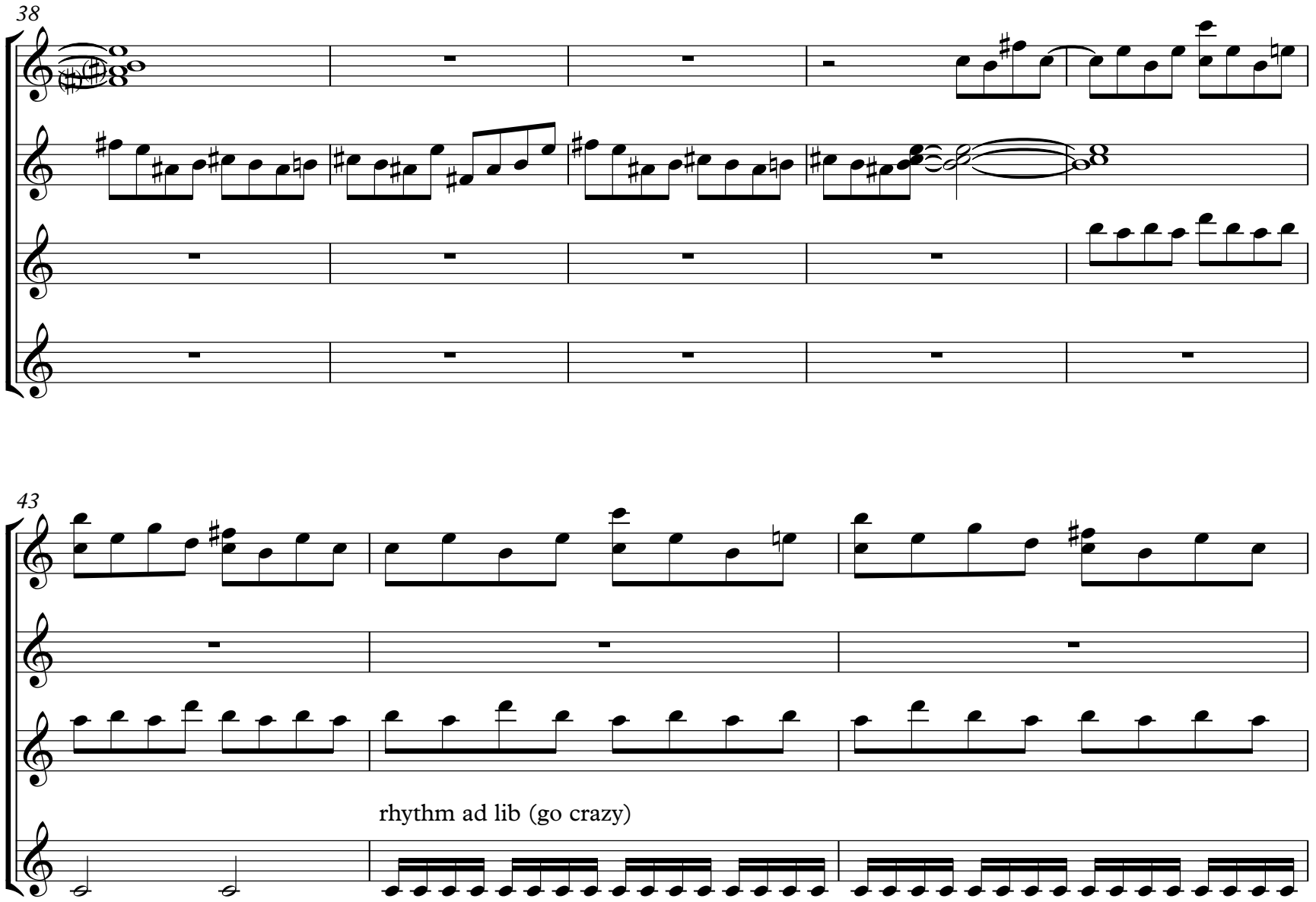
Movement Five: Journey to Lighthouse Point

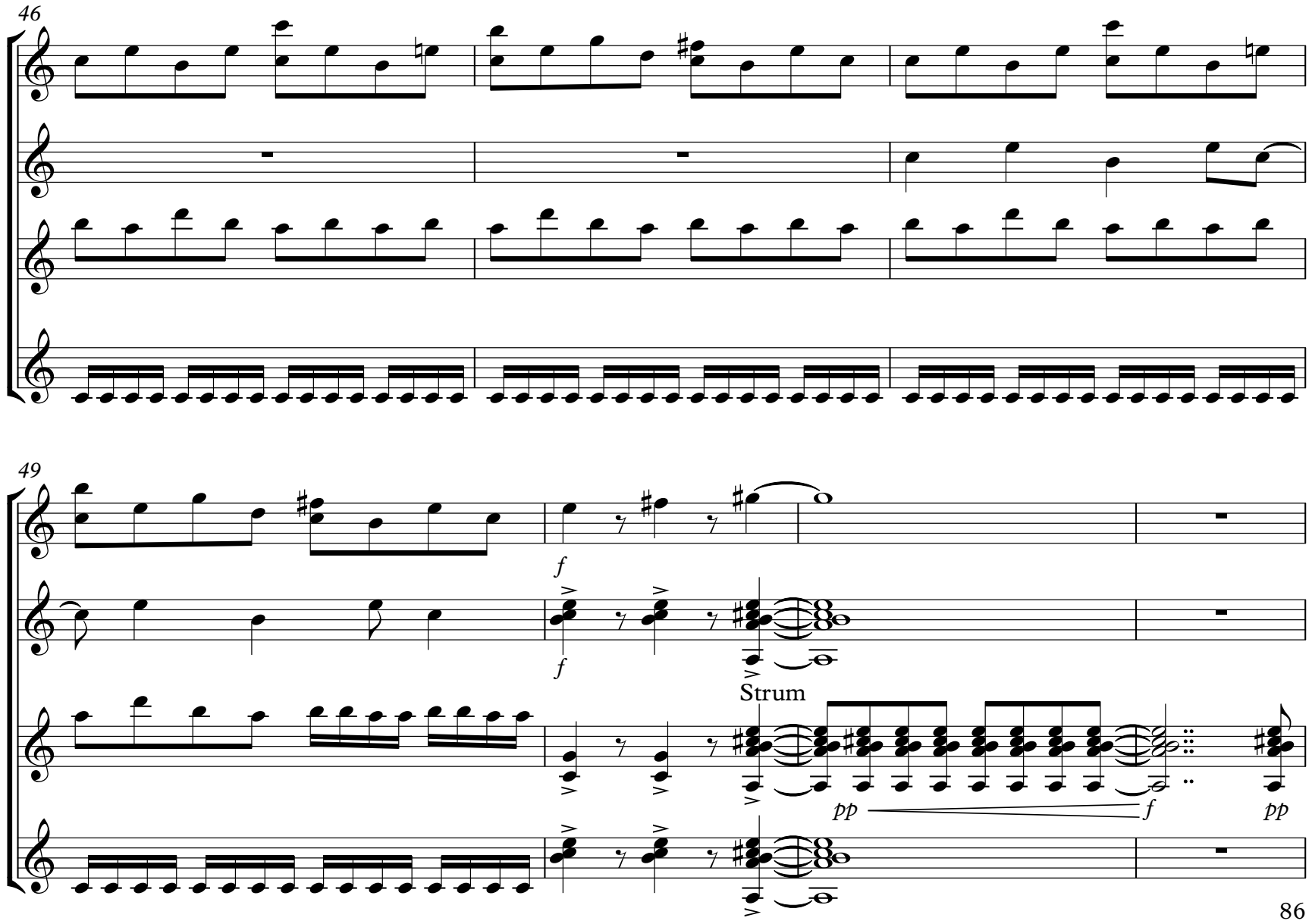


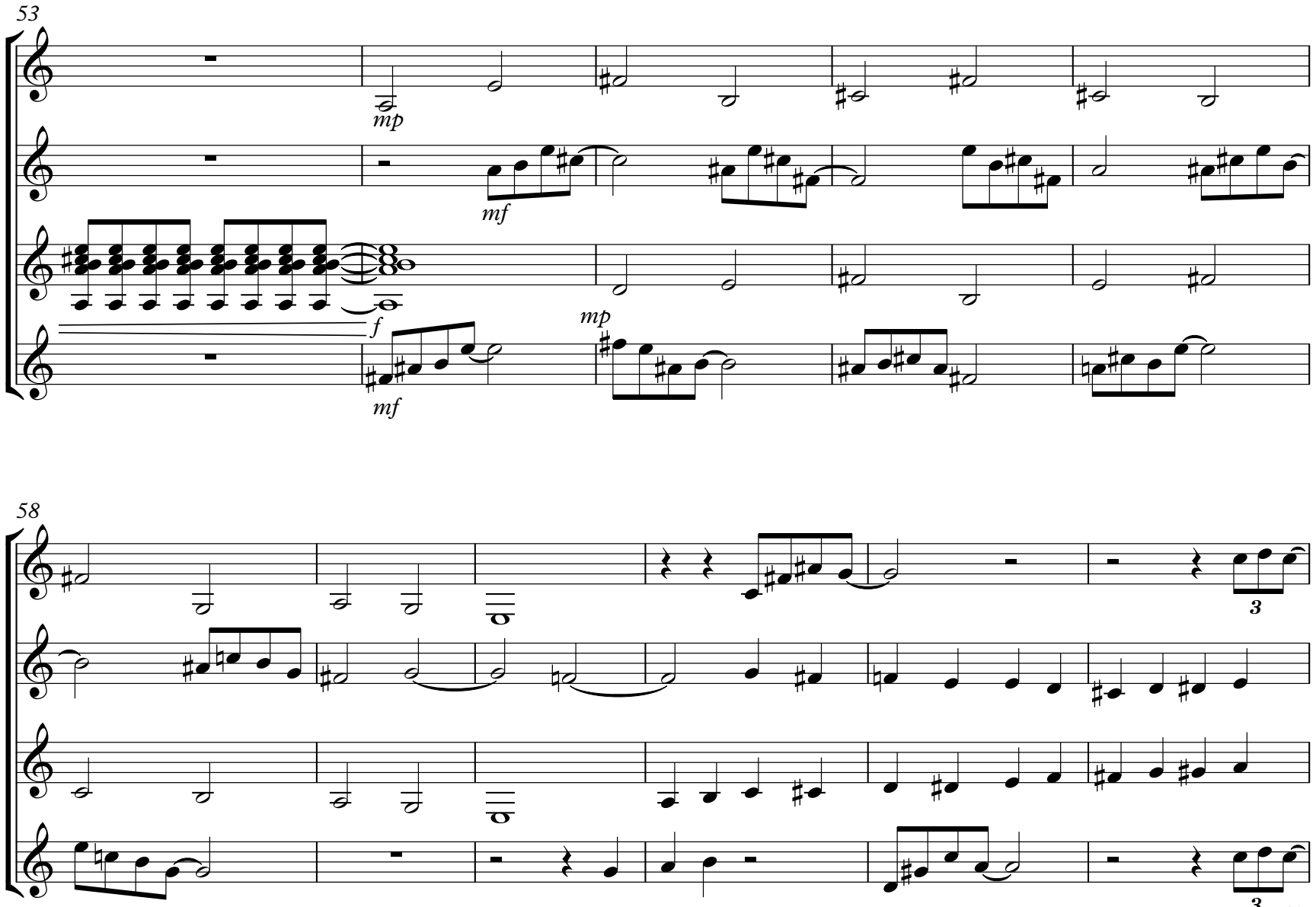

In time
7
13

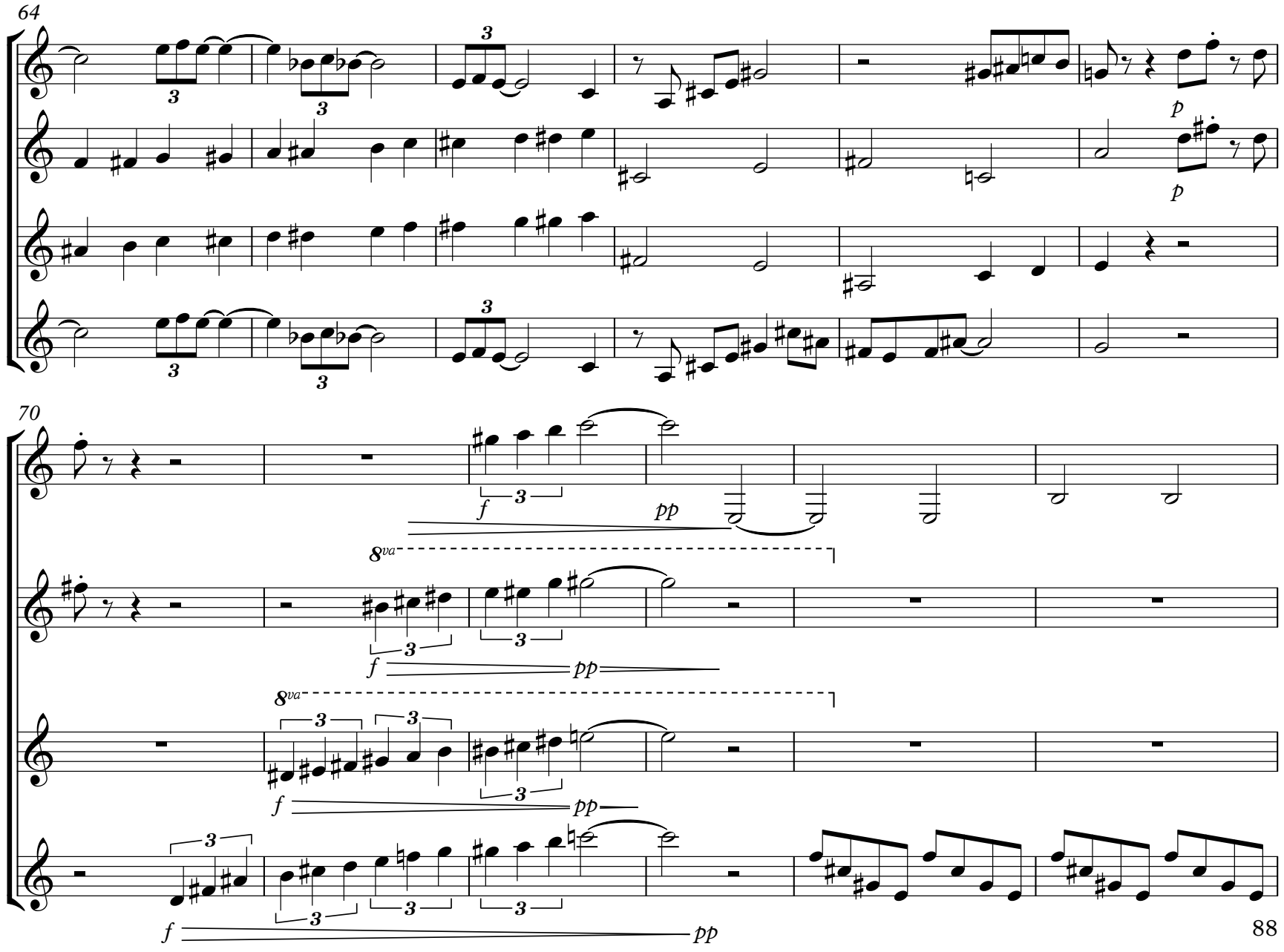

18
23

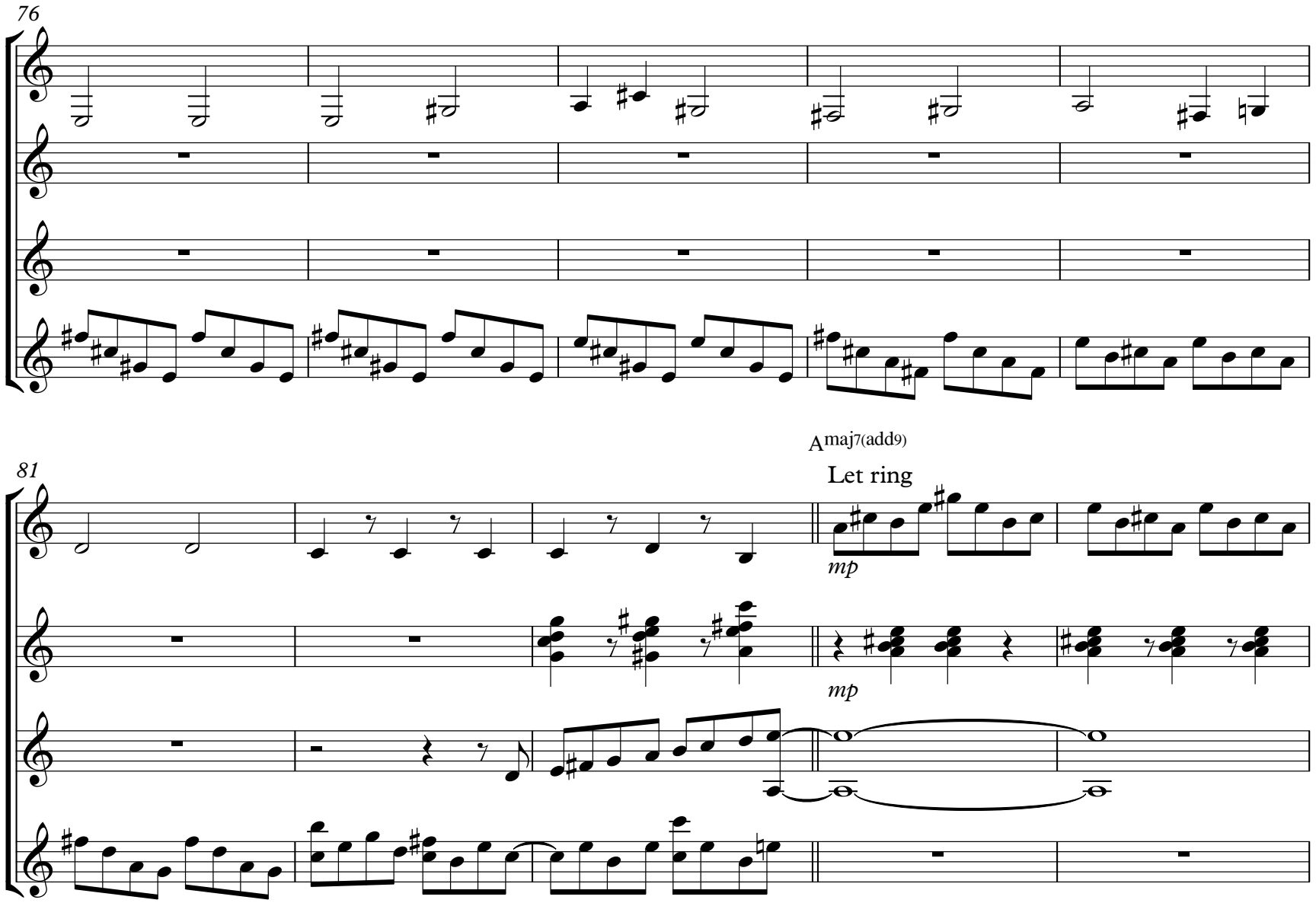

28
let ring
33

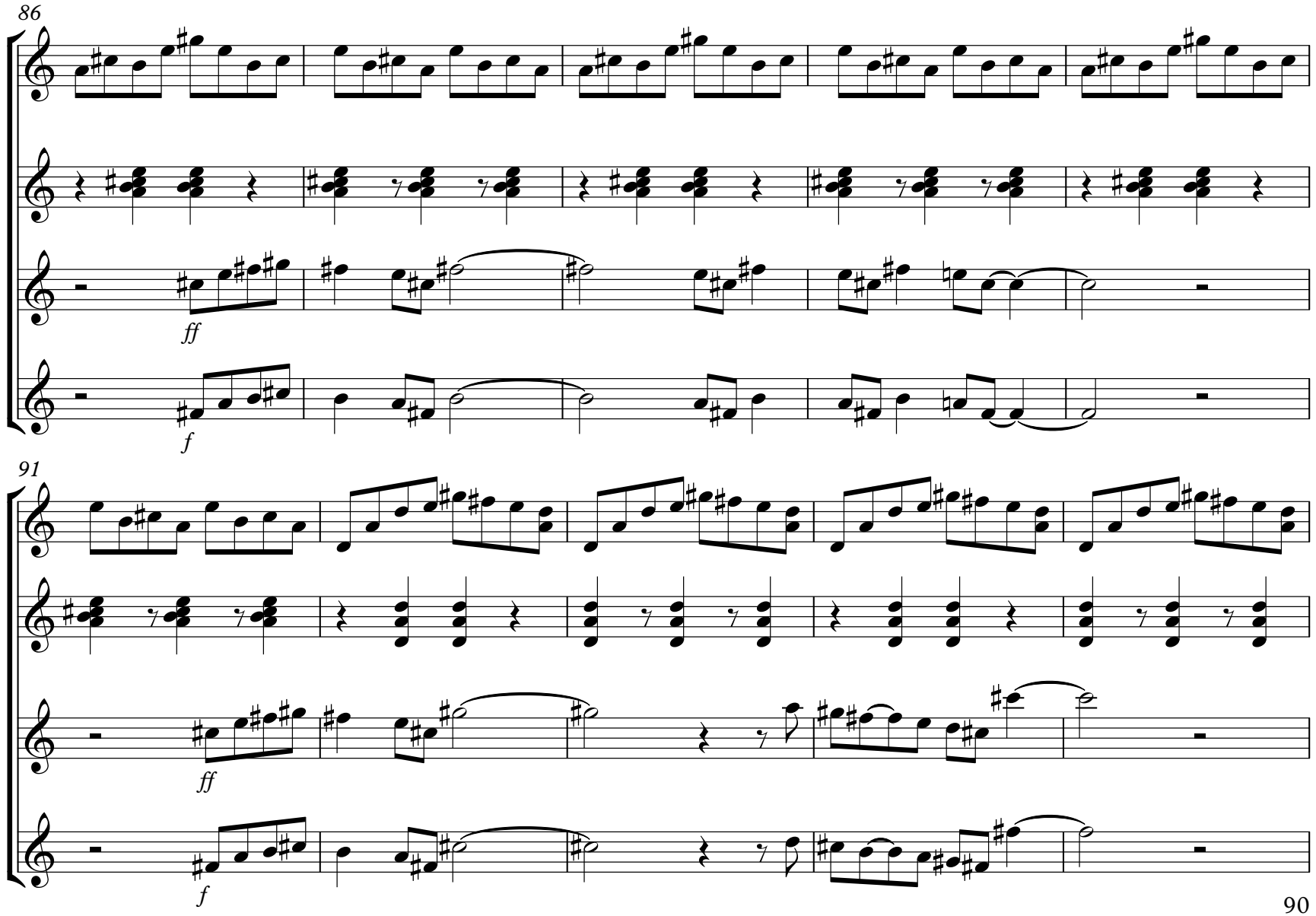

38
43
rhythm ad lib (go crazy)

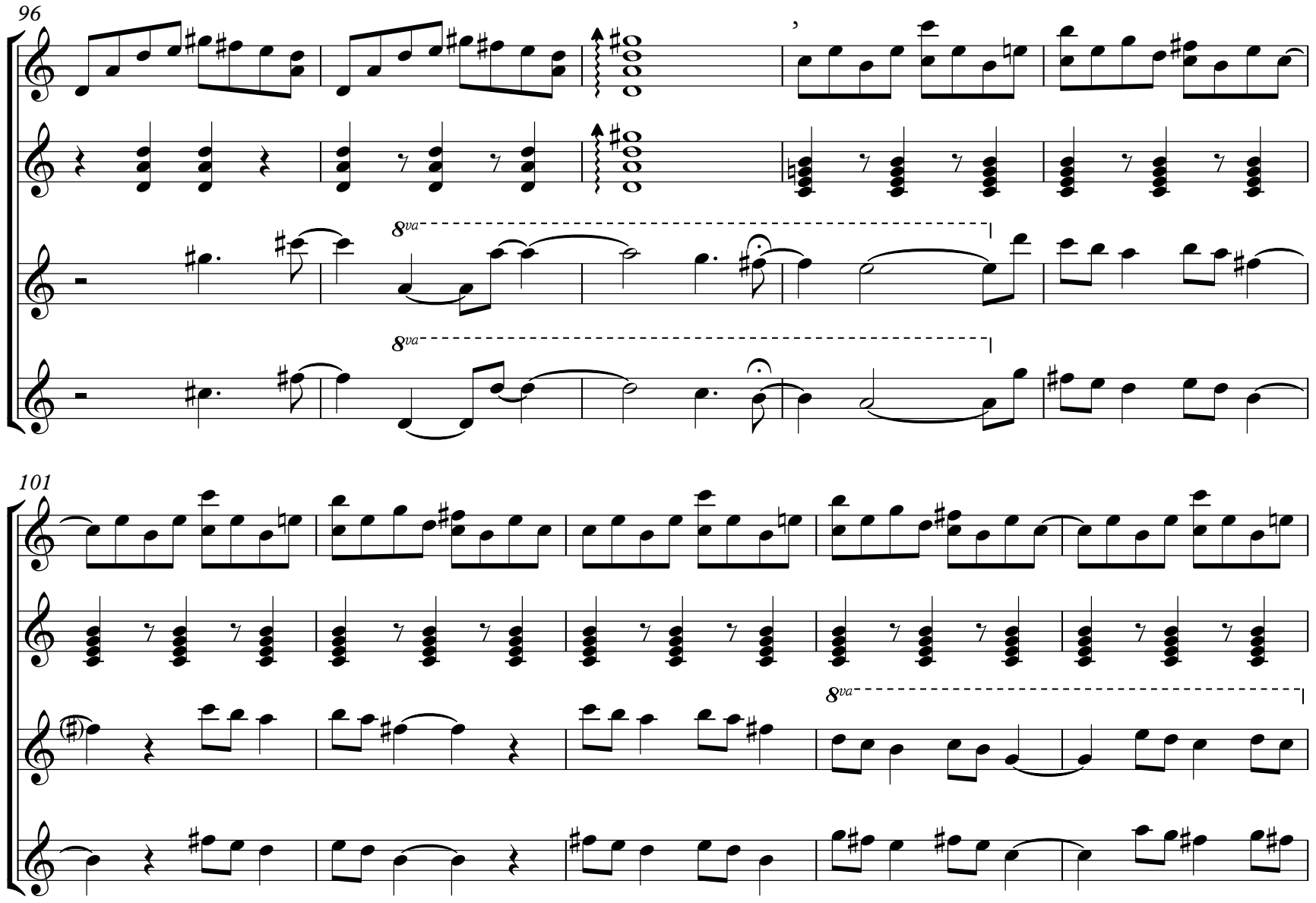

46
49
f
f
Strum
pp
f
pp

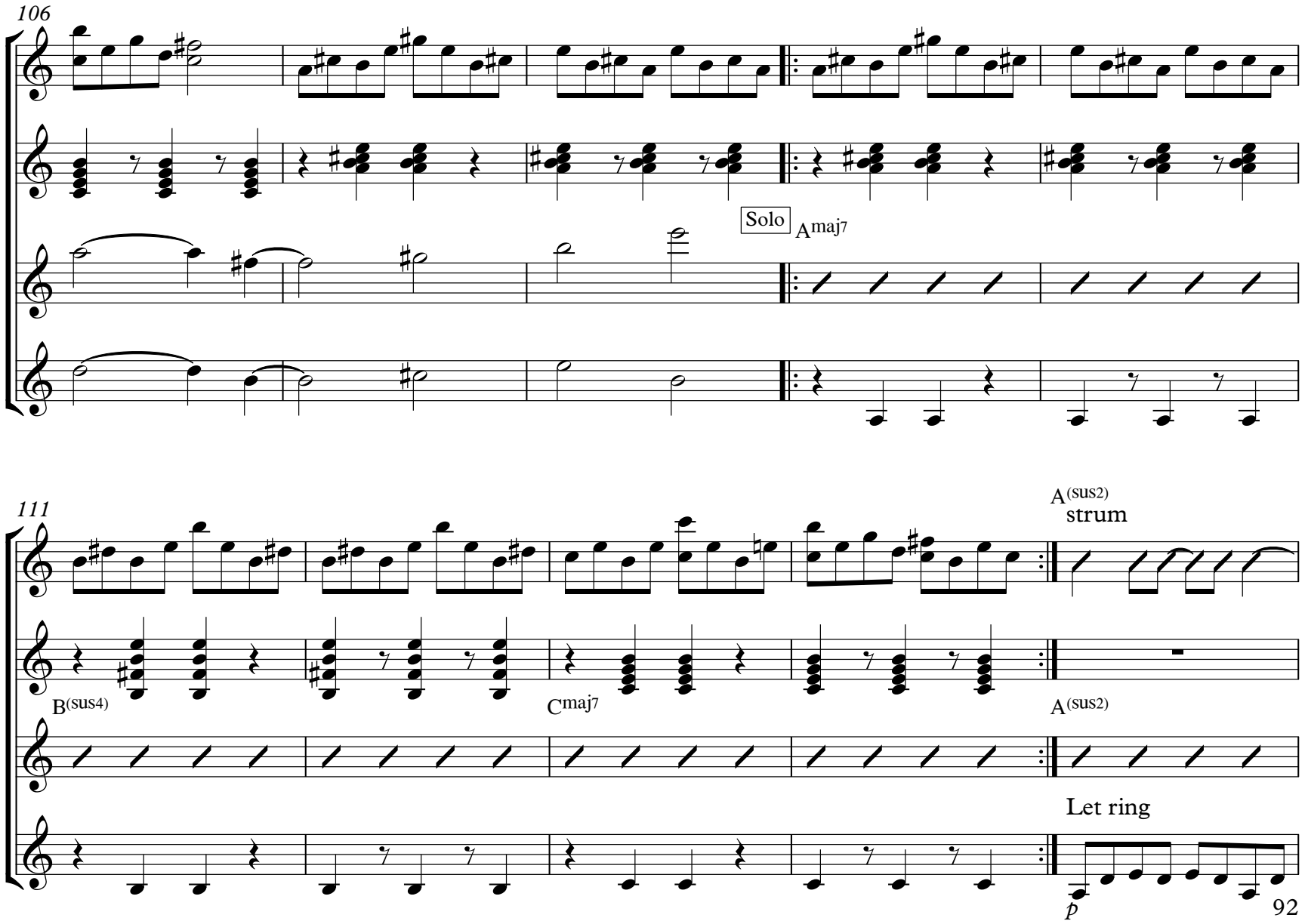

53
mp
mf
f
mf
mp
58
3
3

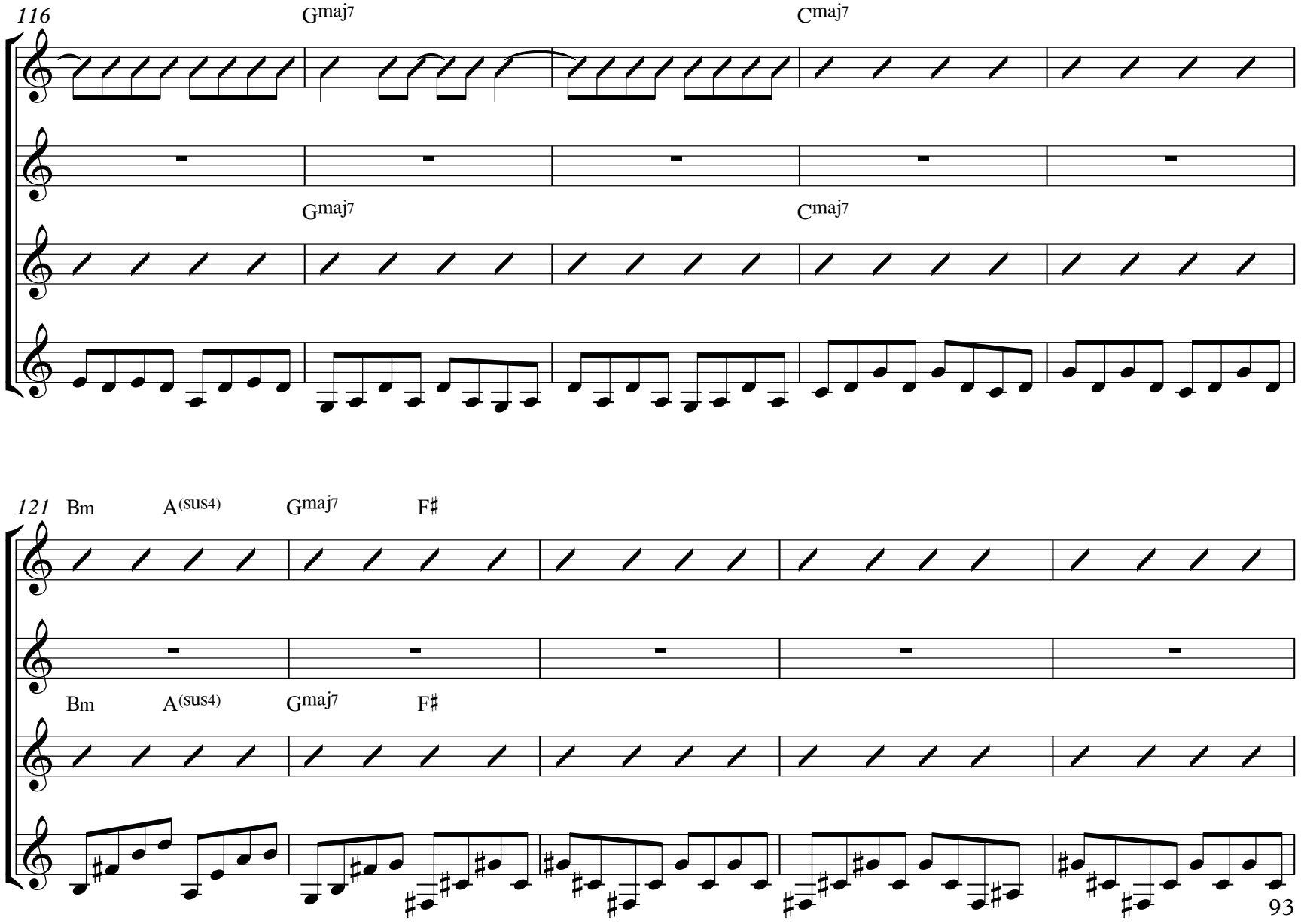

64
3
3
3
3
p
p
70
f
pp
8va
3
3
f
pp
8va
3
3
3
f
pp
3
3
3
3
f
pp

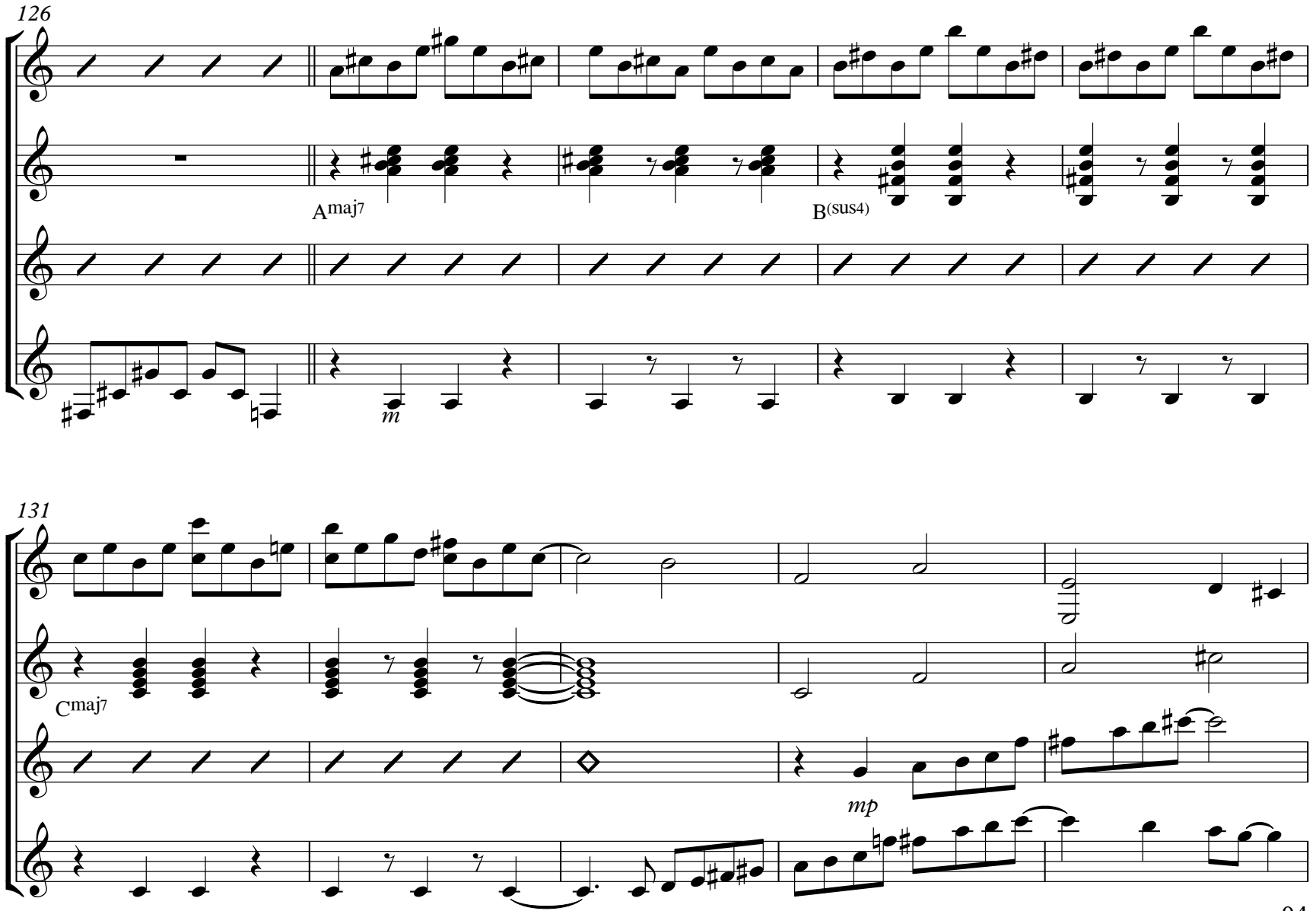

76
81
Amaj7(add9)
Let ring
mp
mp

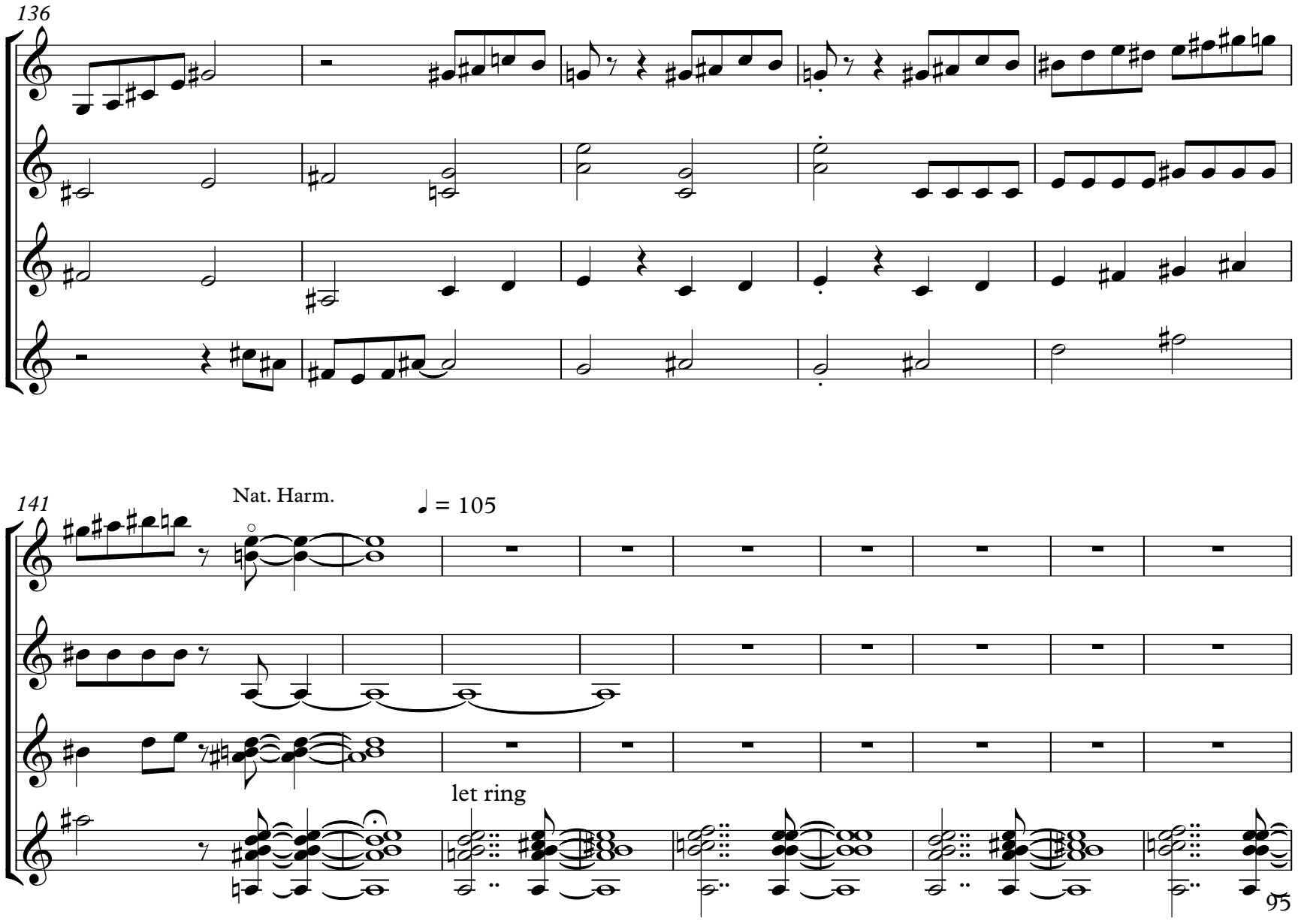

86
ff
f
91
ff
f

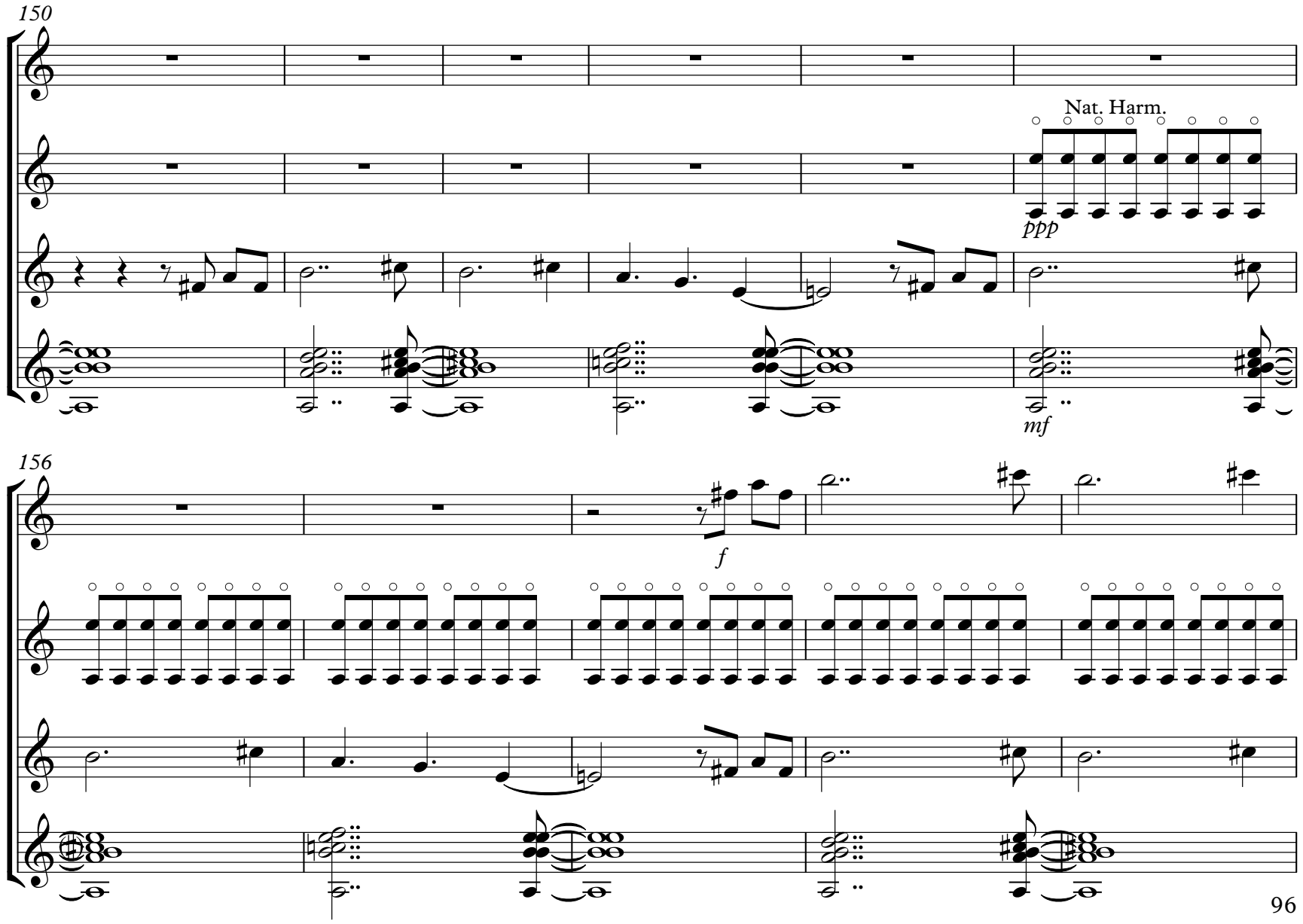

96
8va
8va
101
8va

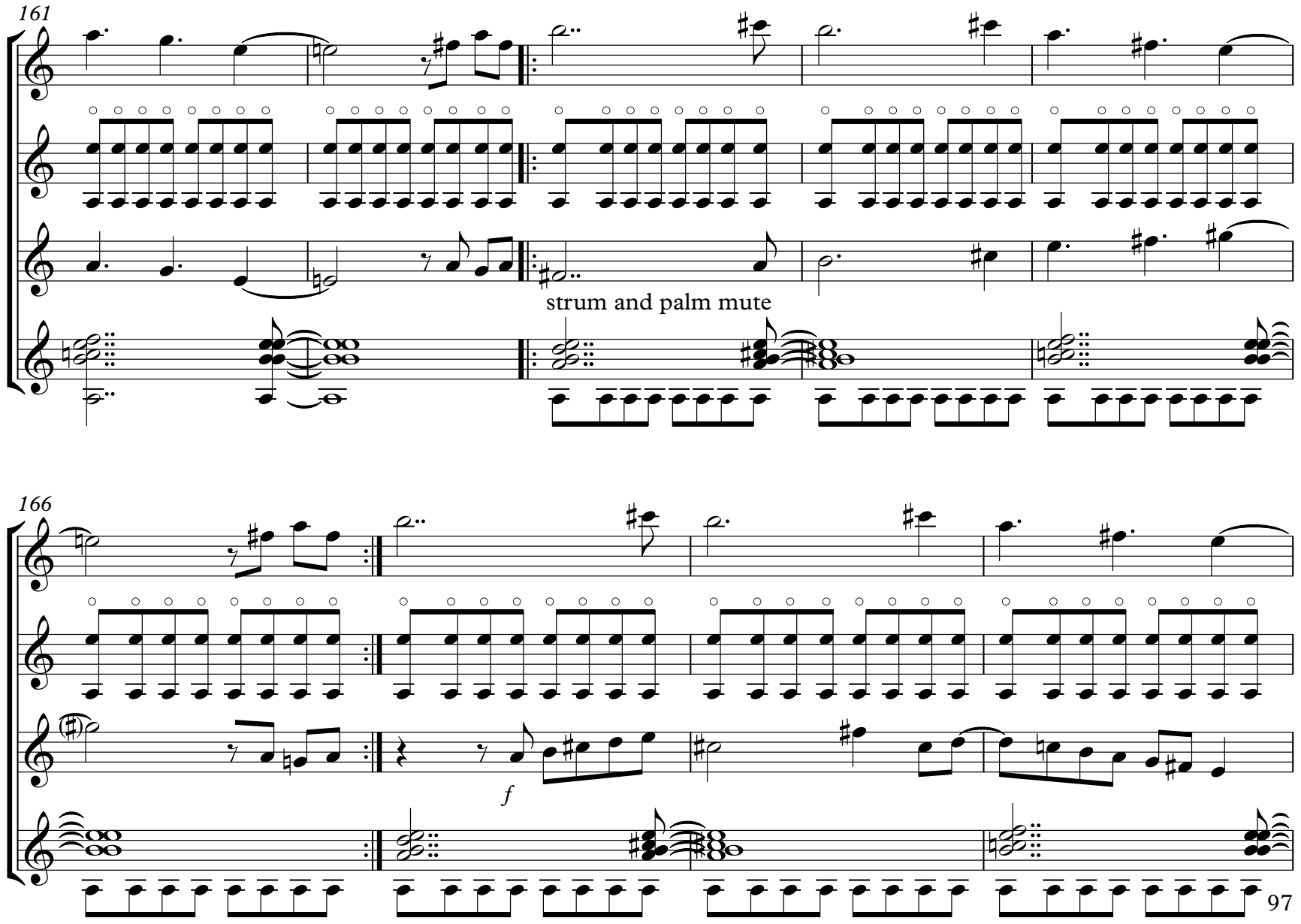

106
Solo
Amaj7
111
B(sus4)
Cmaj7
A(sus2)
strum
A(sus2)
Let ring
p

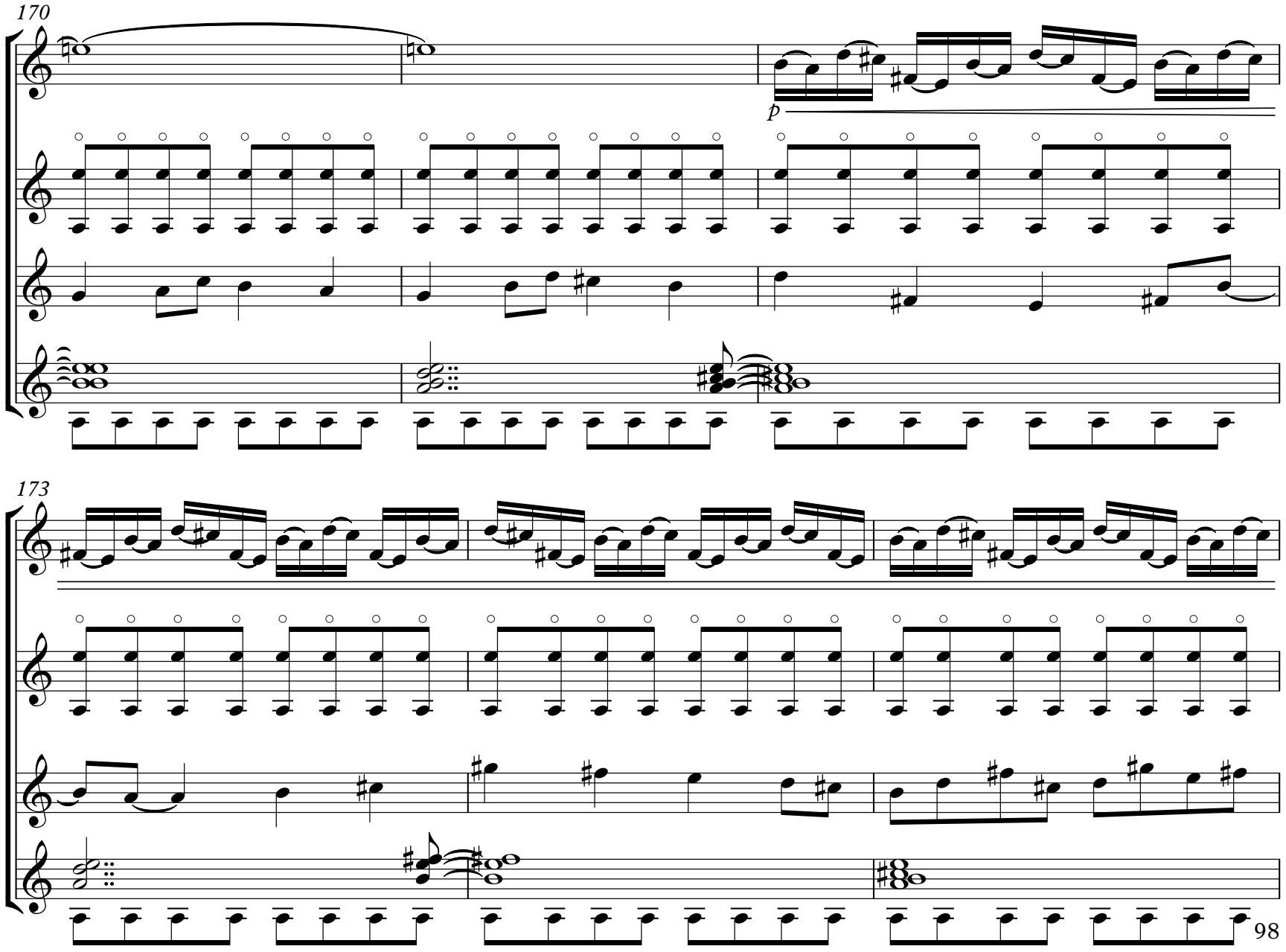

116
Gmaj7
Cmaj7
Gmaj7
Cmaj7
121
Bm
A(sus4)
Gmaj7
F♯
Bm
A(sus4)
Gmaj7
F♯

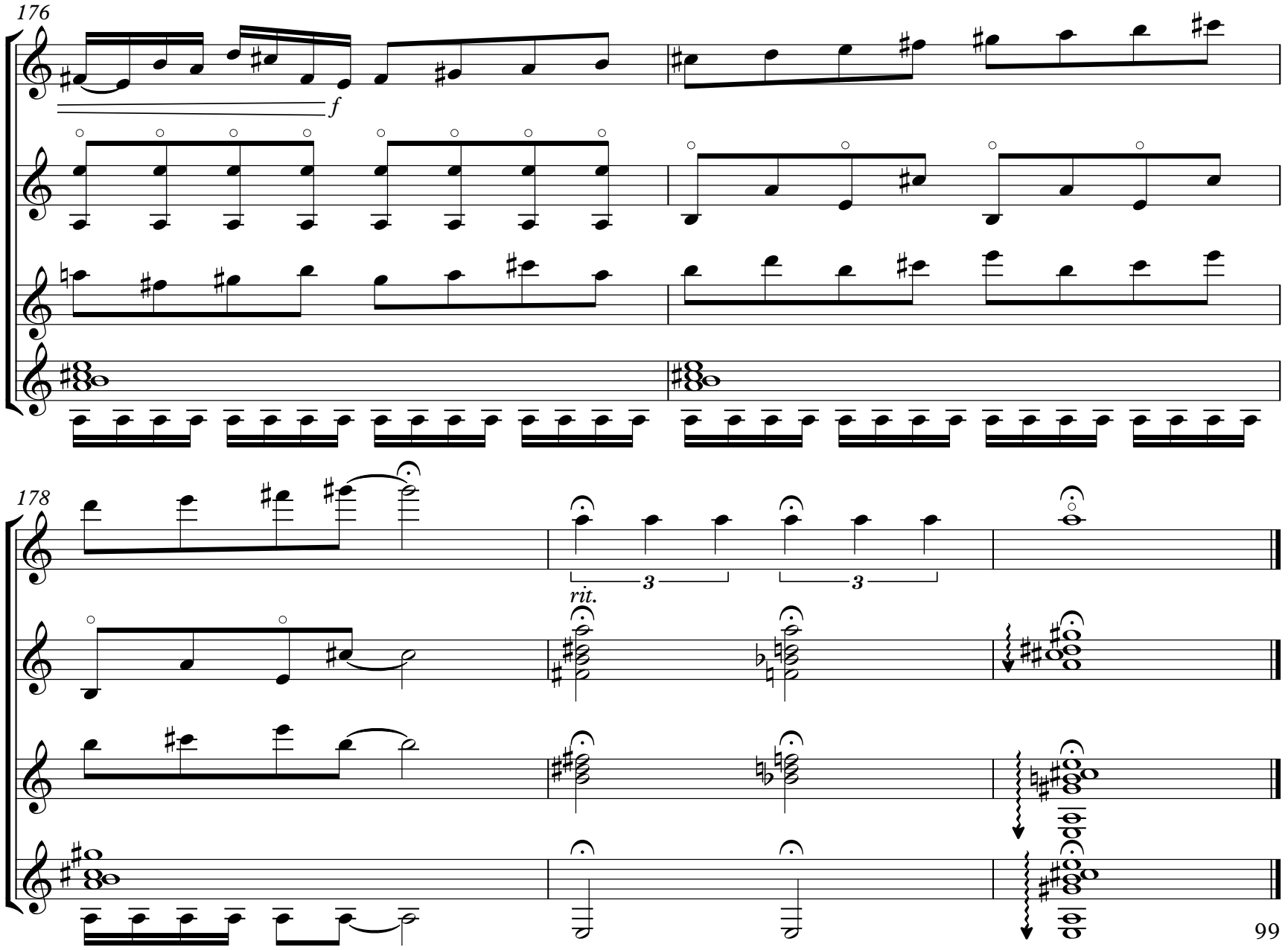

126
Amaj7
m
B(sus4)
131
Cmaj7
mp


136
141
Nat. Harm.
♩ = 105
let ring


150
Nat. Harm.
ppp
mf
156
f


161
strum and palm mute
166
f


170
p
173


176
f
178
3
3
rit.