Unreal City

Alexander Kolassa

(2011)

'Fourmillante cité, cité pleine de rêves,
Où le spectre en plein jour raccroche le passant!'
Les Sept vieillards, Baudelaire

The name of this piece is lifted from a recurring phrase in T.S. Eliot's landmark poem, *the Waste Land* (1922): 'Unreal City/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn' and later 'Unreal City/Under the brown fog of a winter noon'.

In the extensive analysis he published along with the poem Eliot refers the reader to Baudelaire's *Les Sept vieillards*, specifically the two lines in the epigraph above. Both poems share in a similar mystification of the urban landscape, exploring the mixture of alienation and awe the individual feels as they are eclipsed by their respective modernities. In light of the Lowry exhibition soon to be opened here at the University of Nottingham, consideration of the above could inspire a reinterpretation of Lowry's supposed naive celebration of the northern industrial cityscape. The austere and imposing industrial structures, juxtaposed against the busy optimism in the streets below poses an interesting flipside to the bleaker post-war image of Eliot's *The Waste Land*; it is the space somewhere between these two images that I have set out to explore in music.

The piece can be divided into three parts; a slow-paced opening which deals with large structures and combinations of instruments, often overlapping. The harmony here is intentionally static – like the monolithic factories of the industrial landscape – built primarily upon a pitch-class set which emphasises both a major and a minor 3rd, and a more dissonant 2nd. However, the security of the Unreal City is undermined and eventually gives way to a fast section; here we have the individual movement of instruments and a spiralling kaleidoscope and widening harmony that is characterised by fifths. Elements of the static harmony are maintained and following a final build up the piece collapses back into a recapitulation of the initial slow section.

(programme note: October 2011)

flute
oboe
clarinet in Bb
bassoon

horn in F

percussion (one or two players optional)
    vibraphone
    finger cymbals (*)

strings (quintet, vln I and II, vla, vc, cb)

* The finger cymbals referred to here are small (about 2-3 inches in diameter) and when struck against each other (lightly and on the side) emit a particularly resonant high pitched ‘ping’, Held at the base, a vibrato effect can be achieve by subtly ‘wobbling’ the cymbals.

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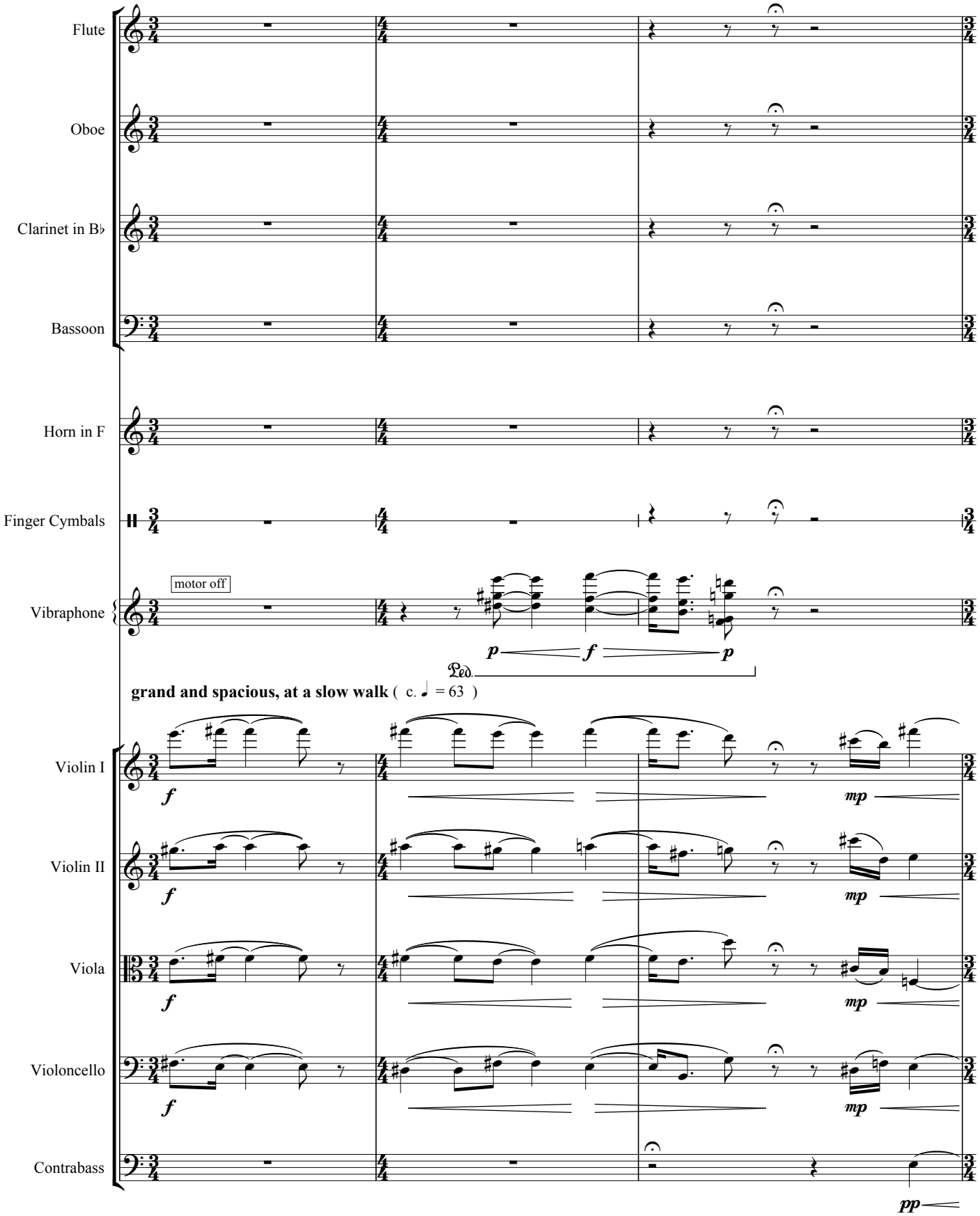
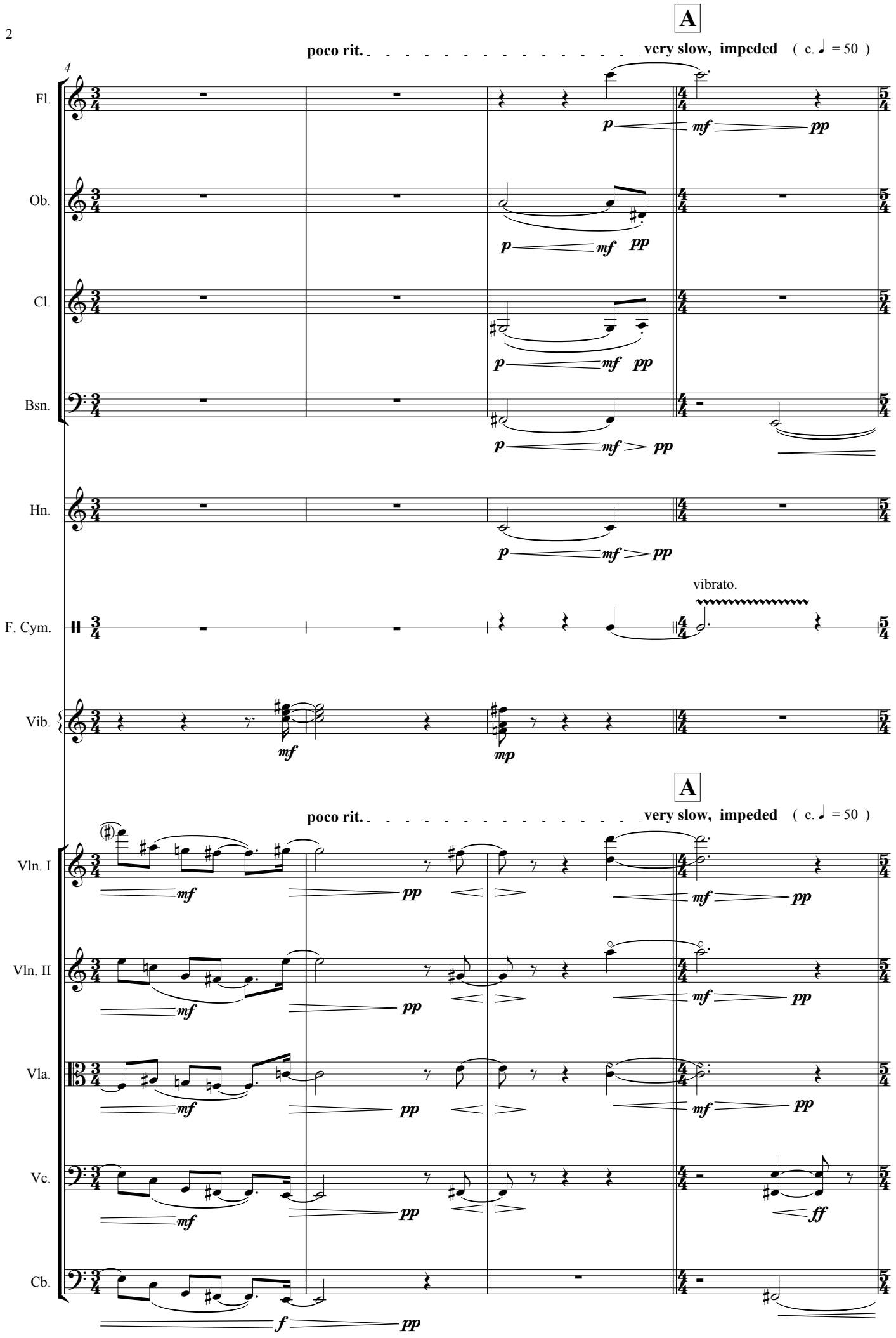
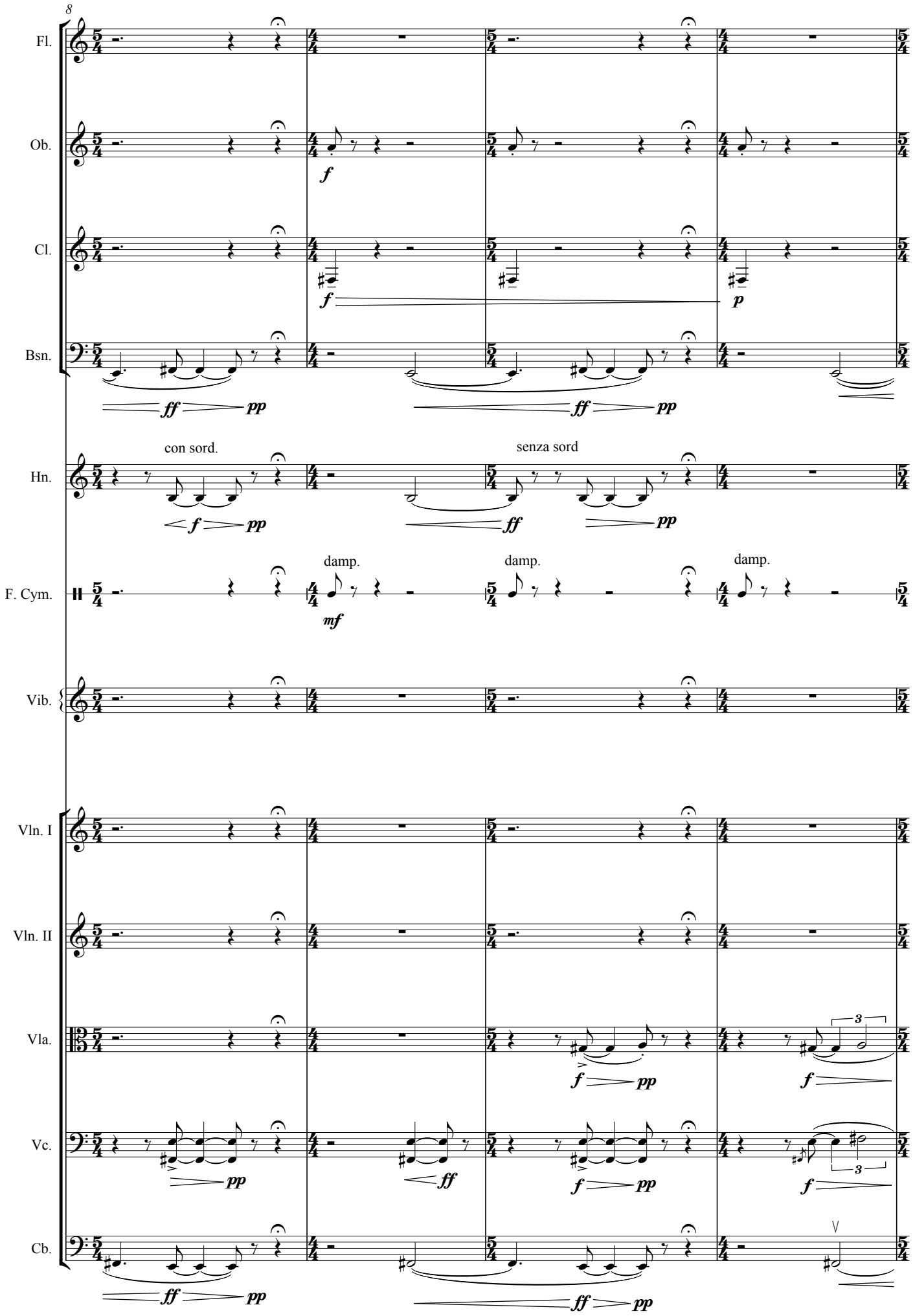
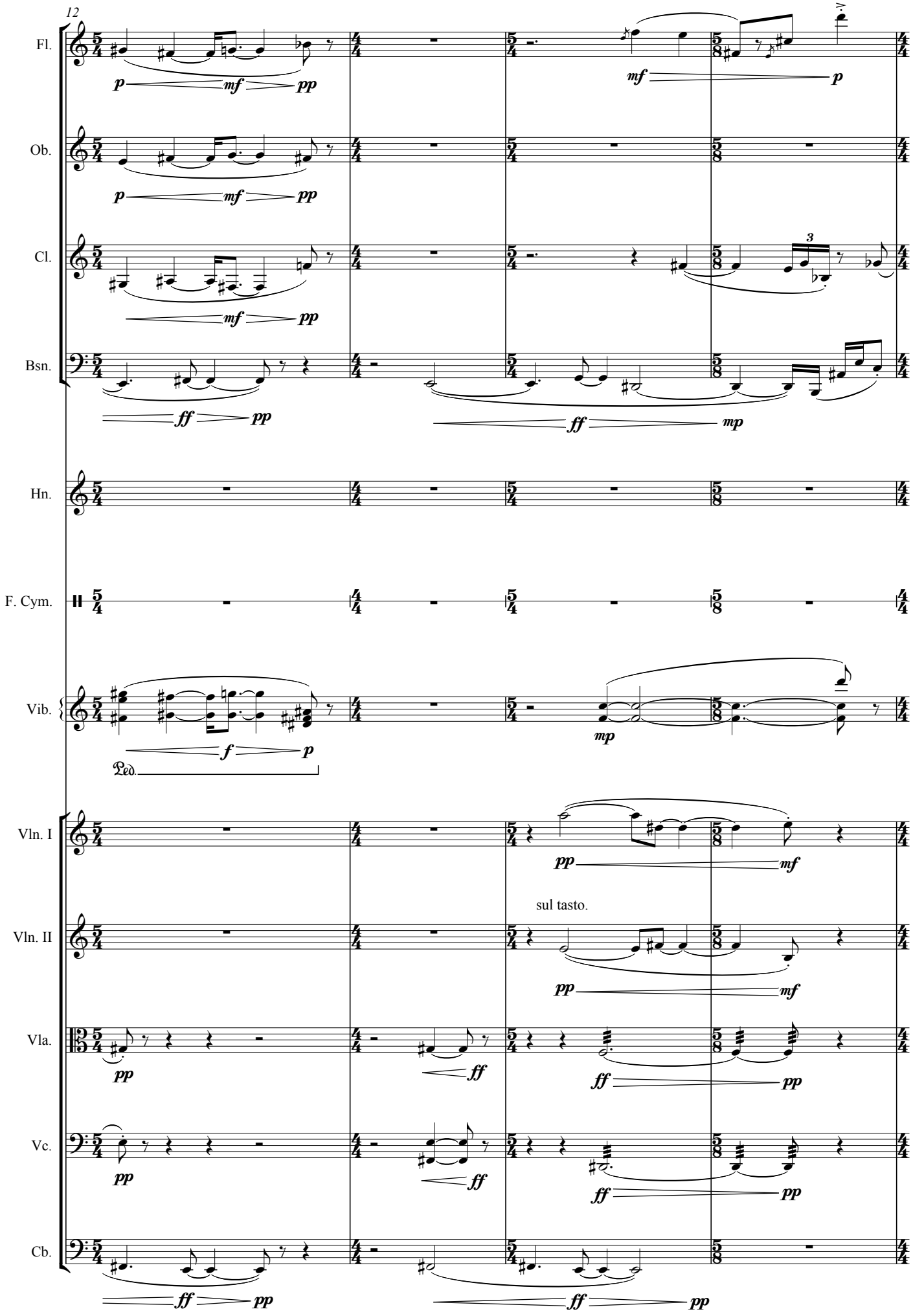
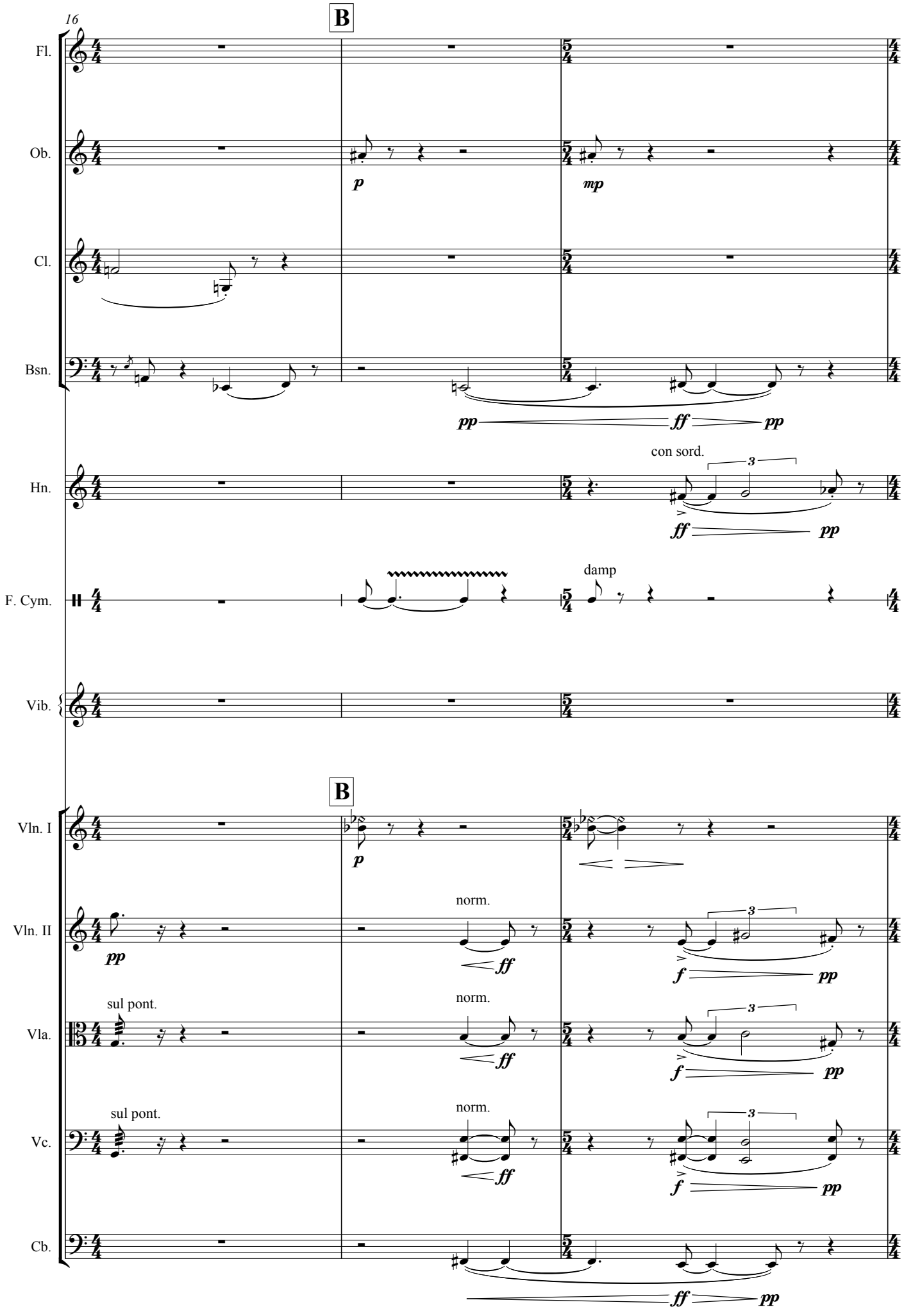
grand and spacious, at a slow walk (c. ♩ = 63)

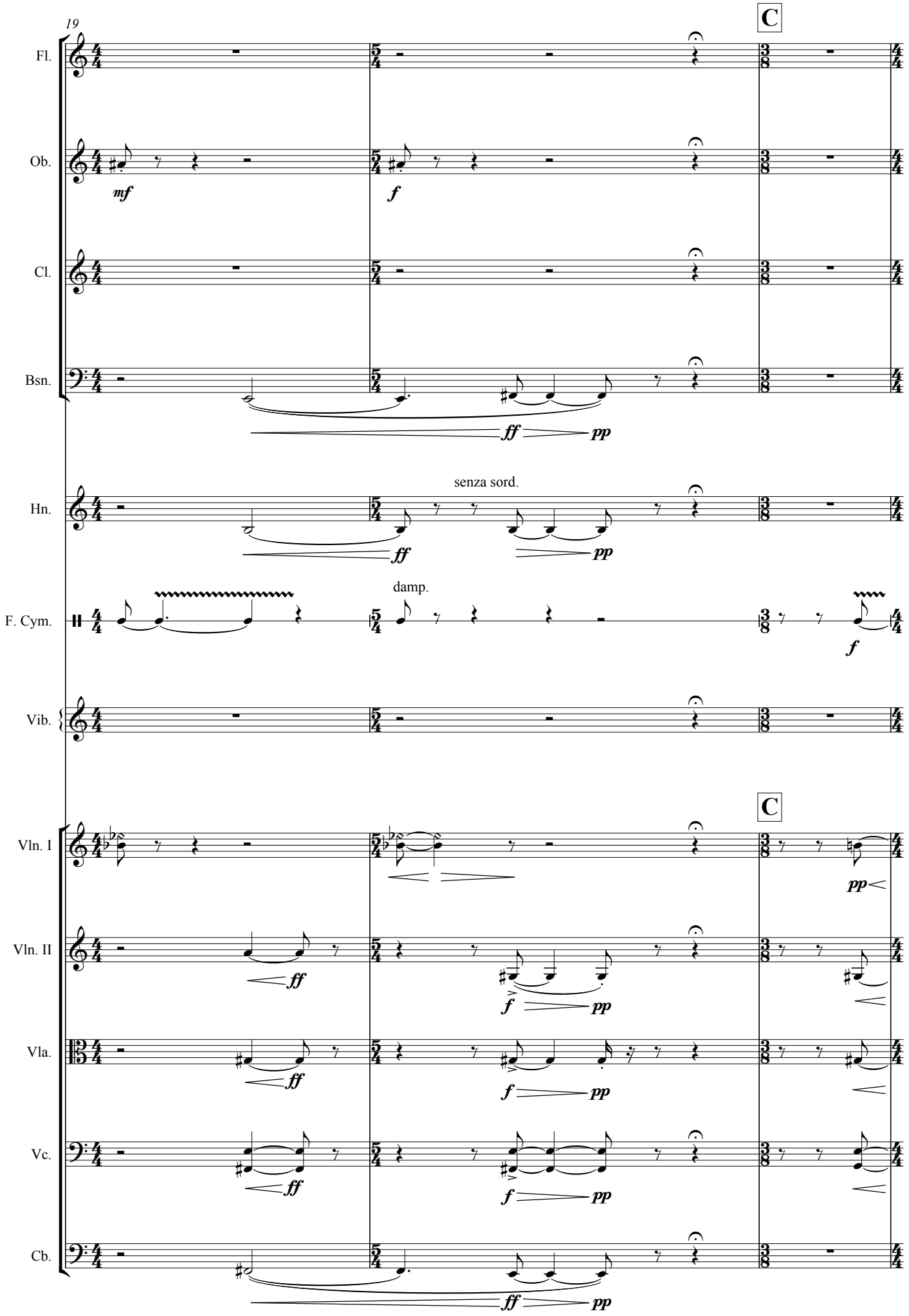


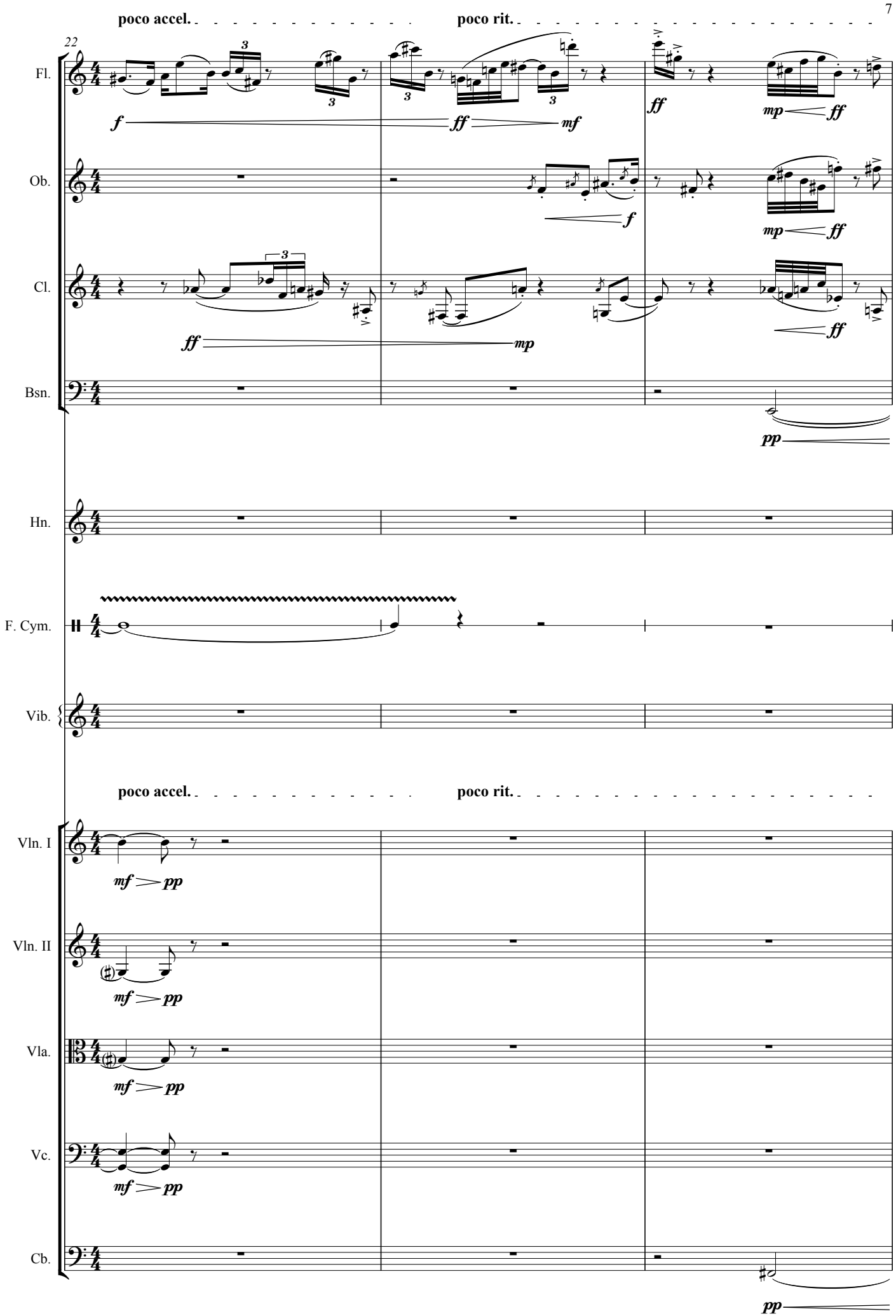

A
poco rit.
very slow, impeded (c. ♩ = 50)
4
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
vibrato.
Vib.
A
poco rit.
very slow, impeded (c. ♩ = 50)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

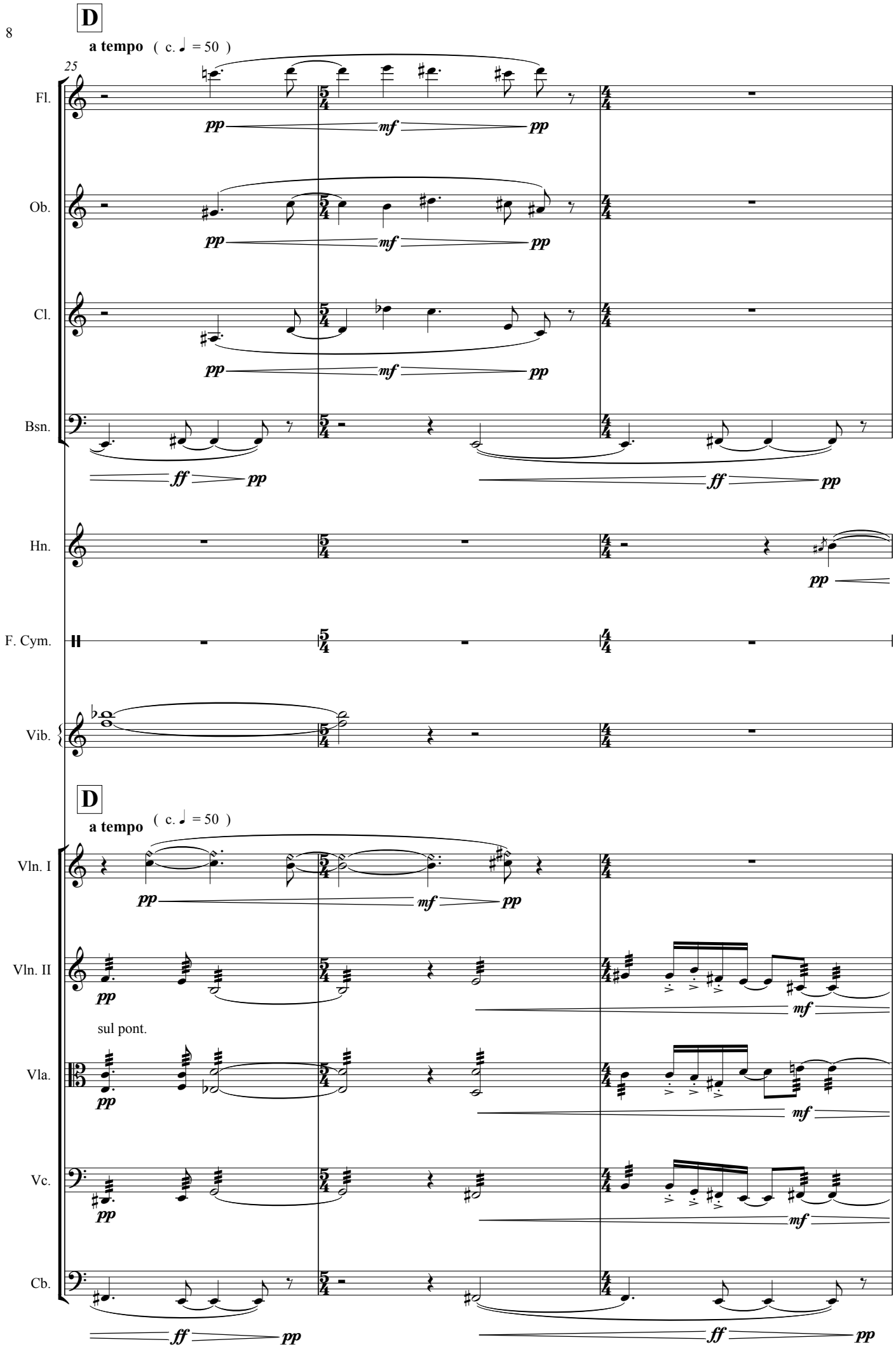

8
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
con sord.
senza sord
F. Cym.
damp.
damp.
damp.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
ff
pp
f
p
mf
3
V

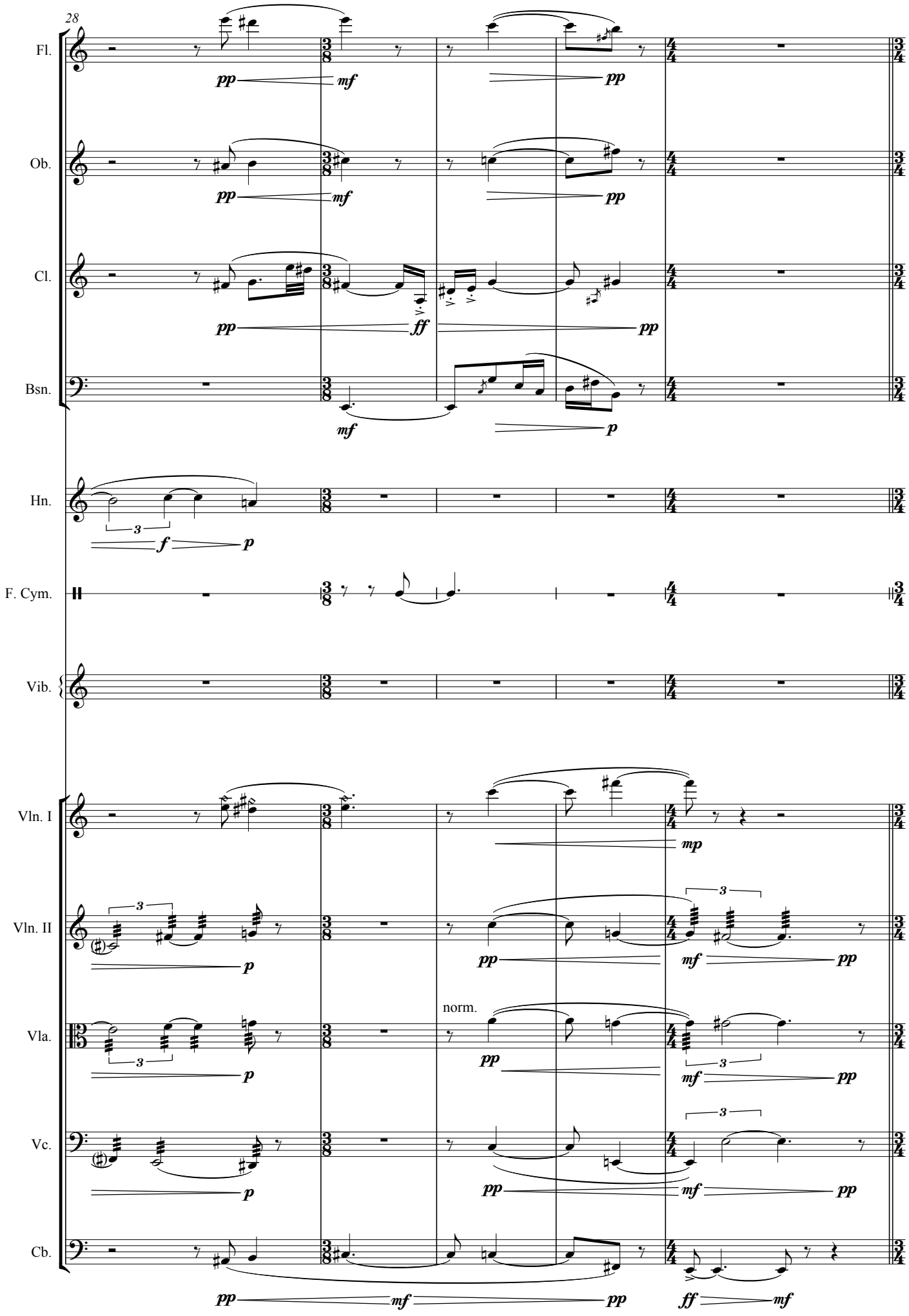

12
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
sul tasto.


16
B
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
p
mp
pp
ff
con sord.
damp
norm.
sul pont.
f


19
C
Fl.
Ob.
mf
f
Cl.
Bsn.
ff
pp
senza sord.
Hn.
ff
pp
damp.
F. Cym.
f
Vib.
C
Vln. I
pp
Vln. II
ff
f
pp
Vla.
ff
f
pp
Vc.
ff
f
pp
Cb.
ff
pp


poco accel.
poco rit.
22
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
poco accel.
poco rit.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


D
a tempo (c. ♩ = 50)
25
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
pp
mf
ff
D
a tempo (c. ♩ = 50)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
sul pont.


28
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
norm.

E

faster, chattering (c. ♩ = 120)

33

Fl.

Ob.

pp mf pp

f pp

Cl.

Bsn.

pp mf pp

f pp

Hn.

F. Cym.

Vib.

f

E

faster, chattering (c. ♩ = 120)

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

(on the string)

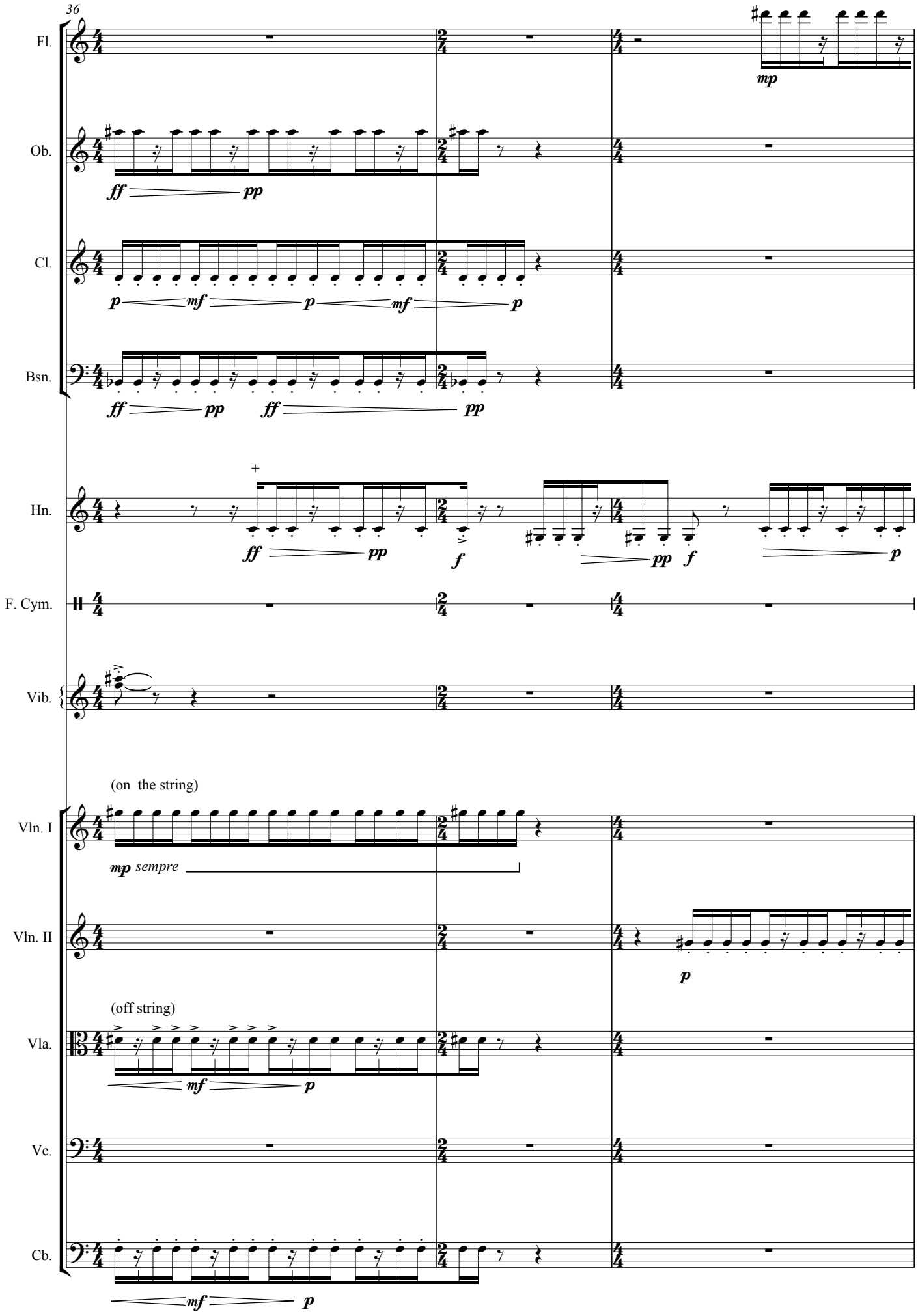
p mf p

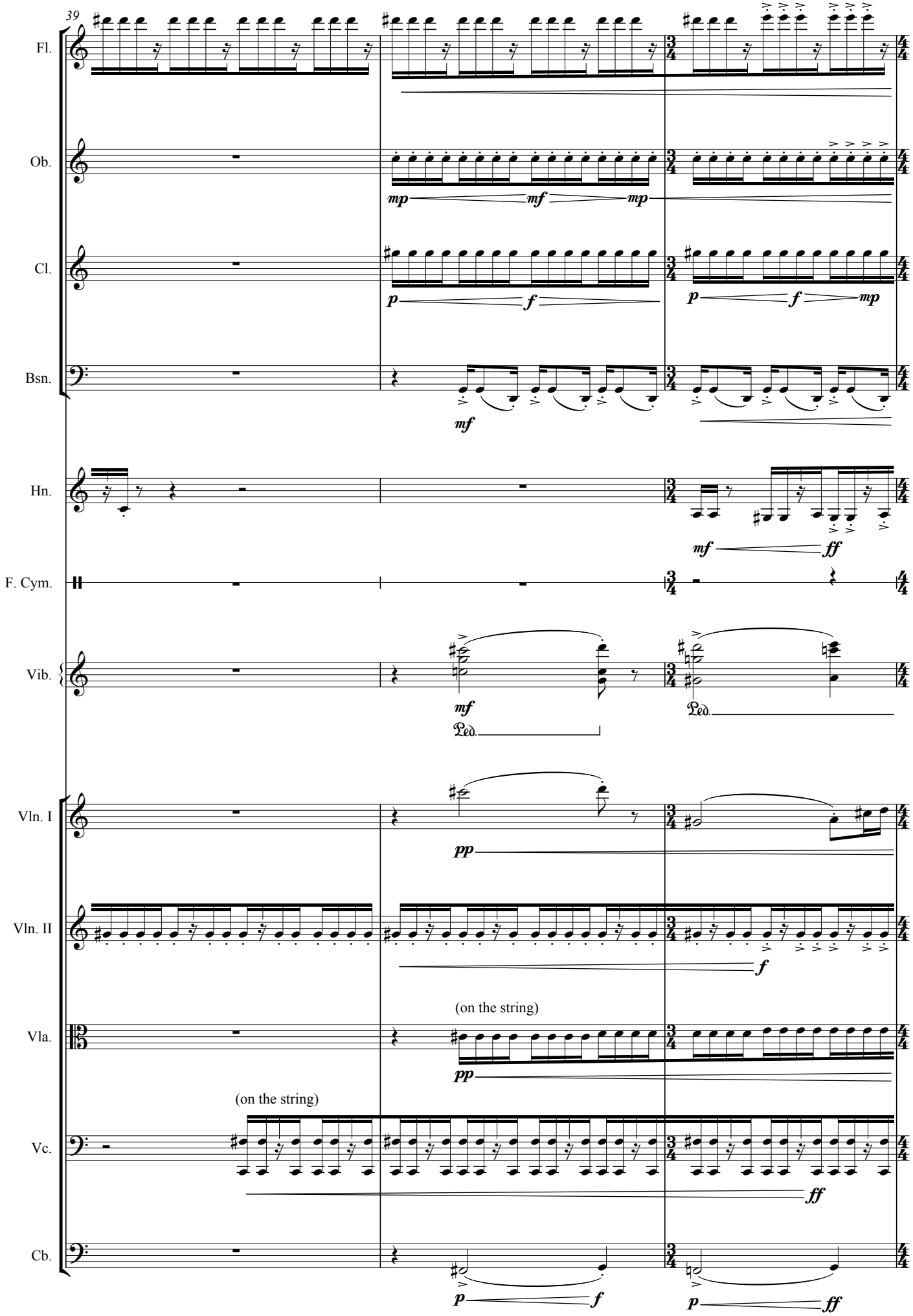
Vc.

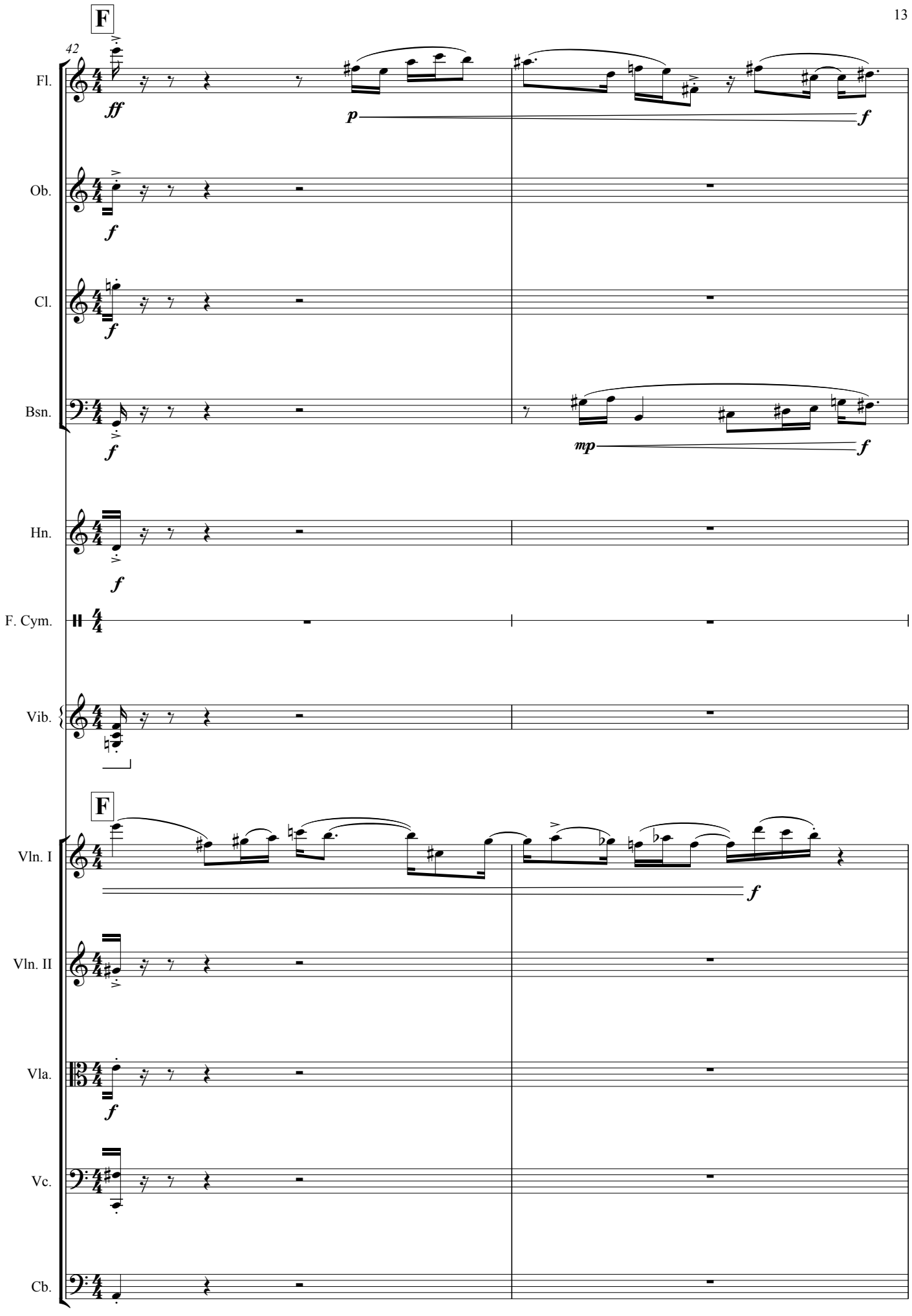
Cb.

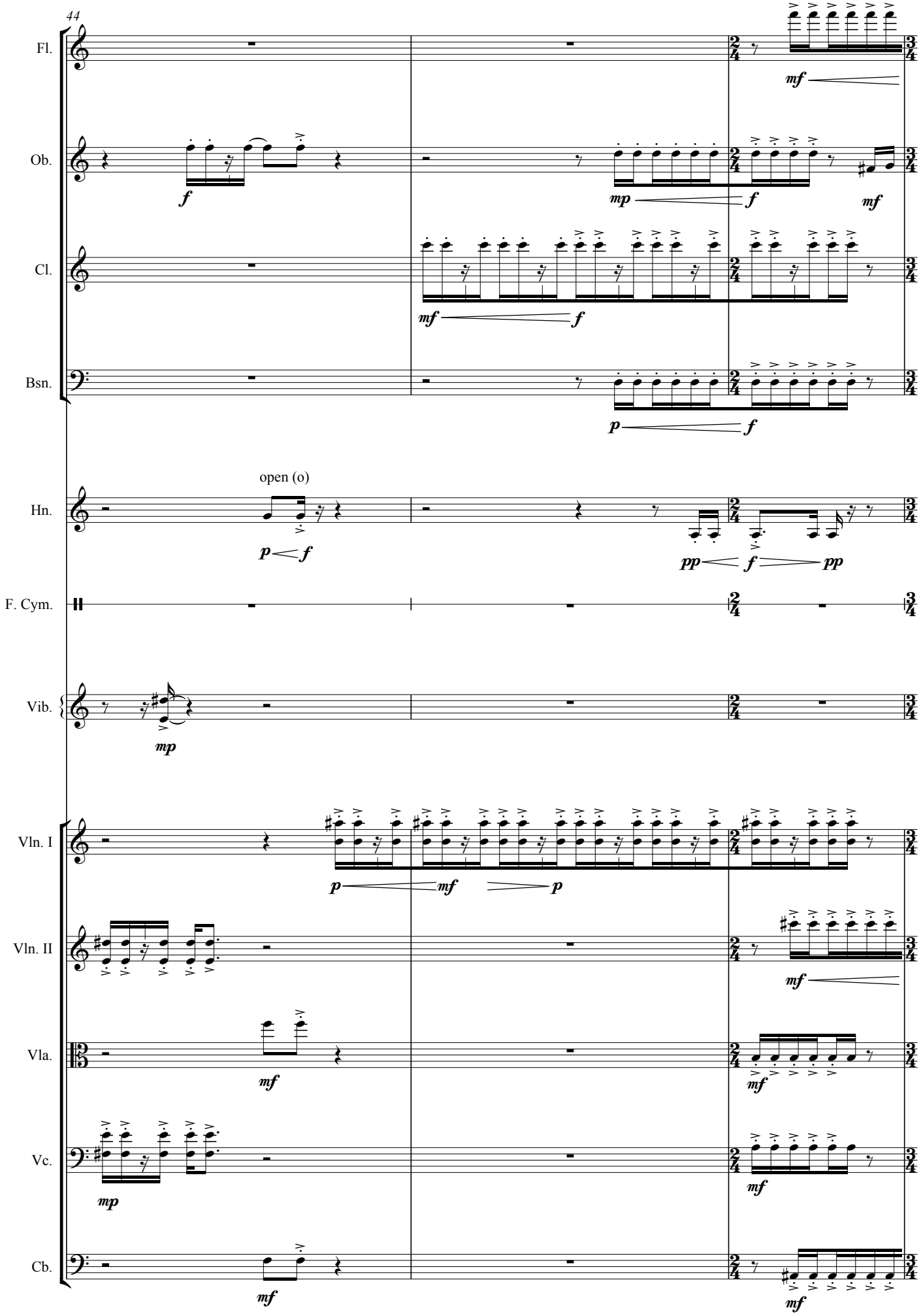
(off string)

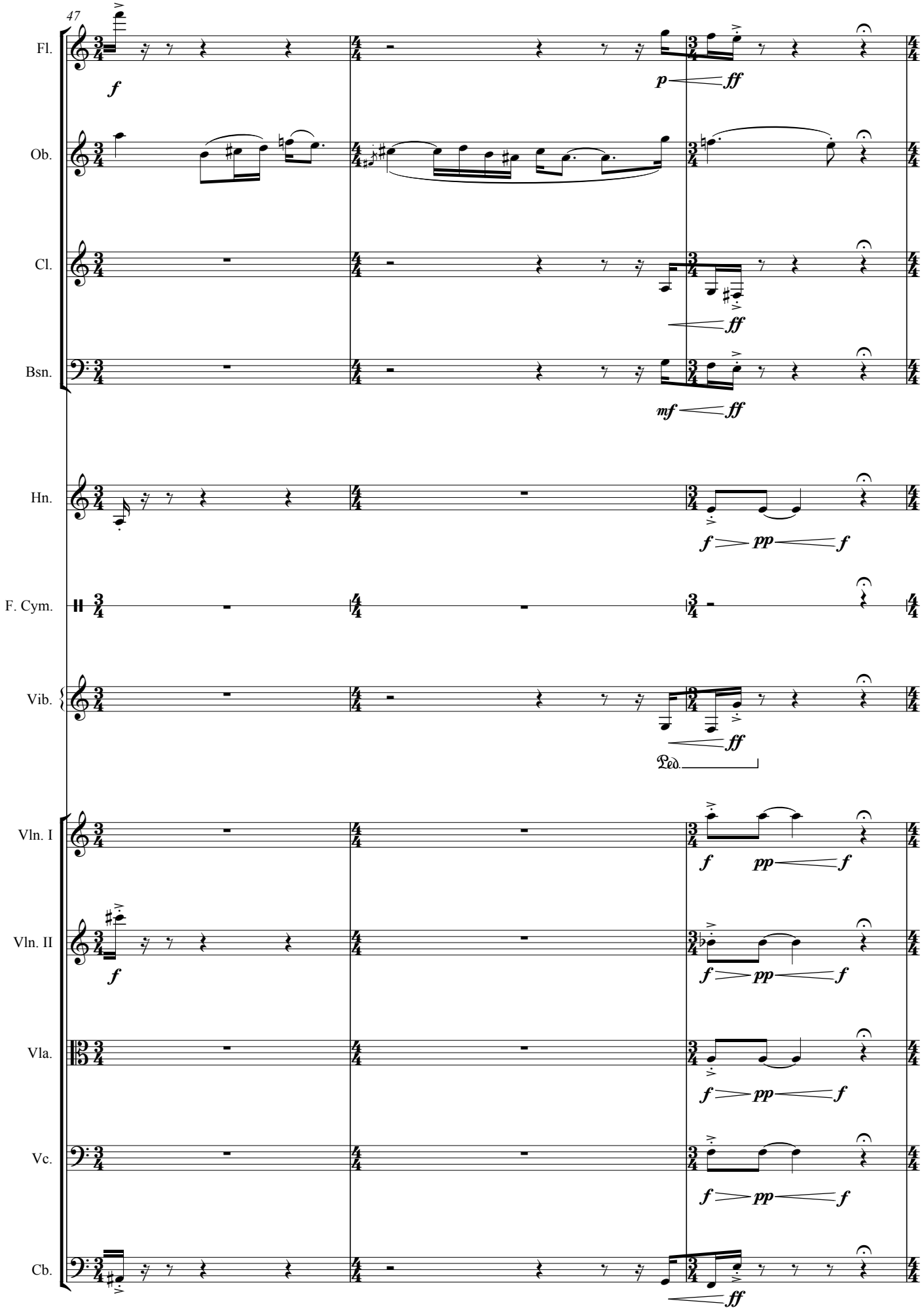
p mf p


36
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
(on the string)
Vln. I
mp sempre
Vln. II
(off string)
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


39
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
mp mf mp
p f
p f mp
mf
mf ff
pp
f
(on the string)
pp
(on the string)
ff
p f
p ff

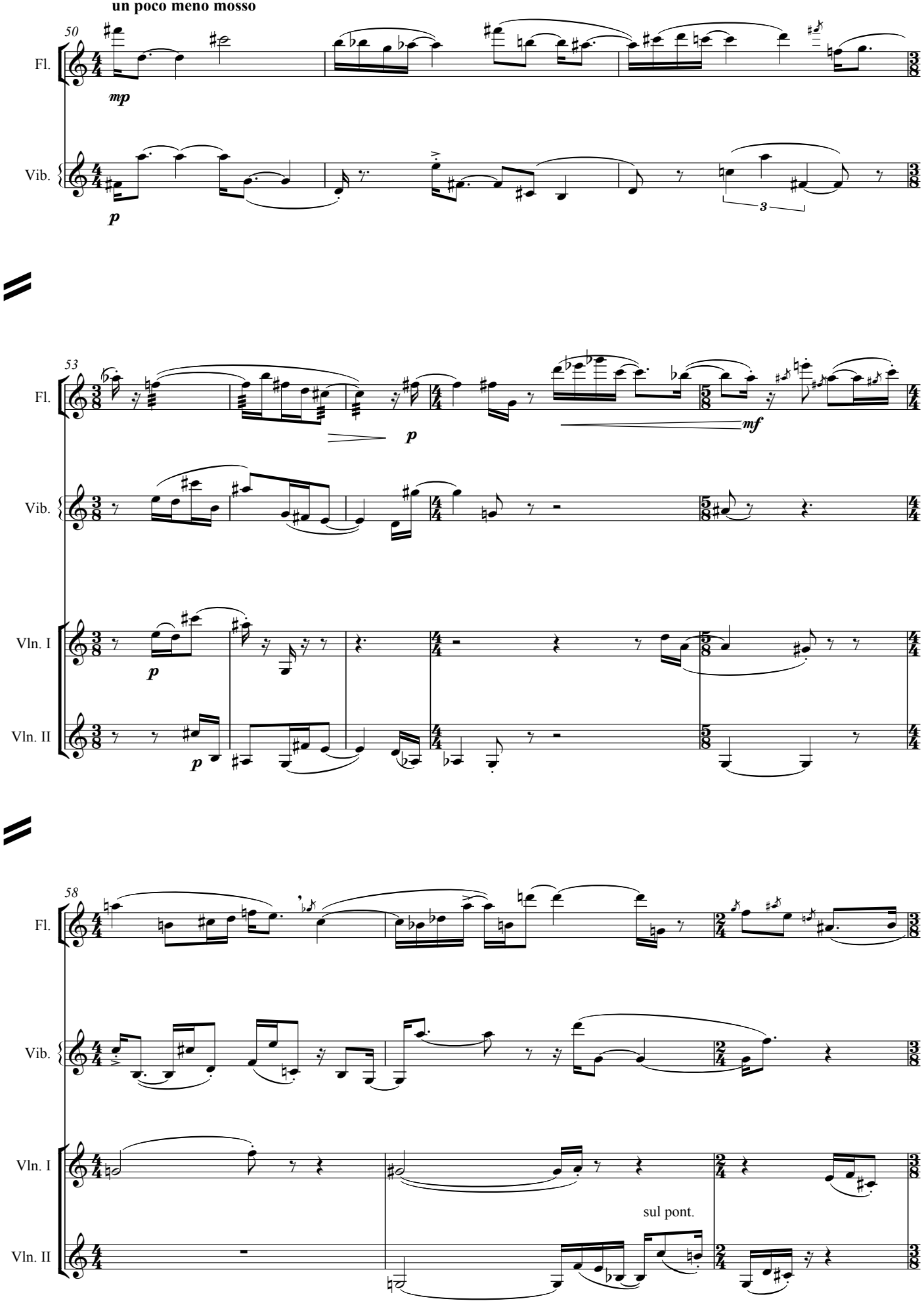

F
42
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
F
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
ff
p
f
mp

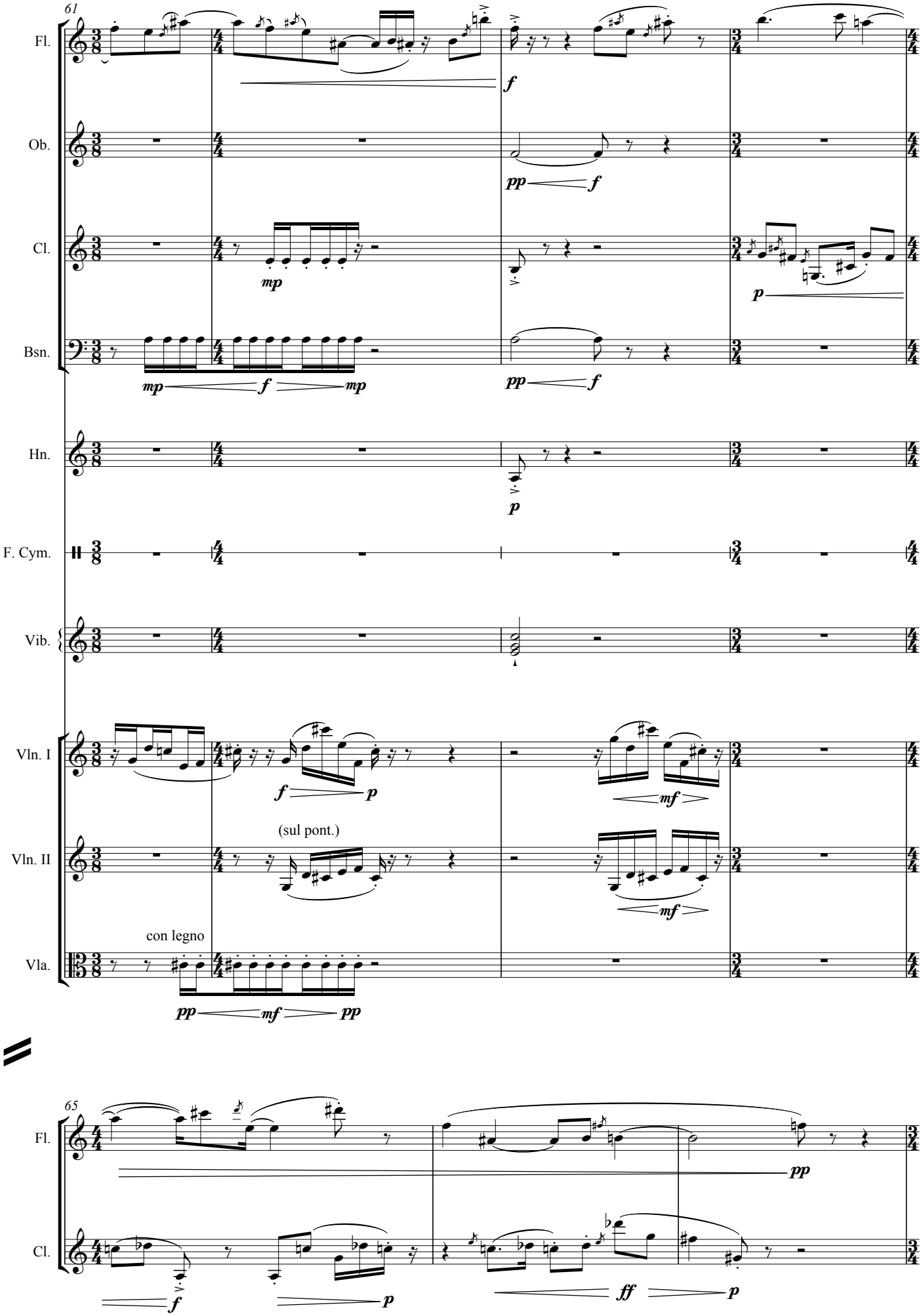

44
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
open (o)
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


47
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
p
ff
mf
pp
Ped.

G

un poco meno mosso




61
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
(sul pont.)
con legno
65
Fl.
Cl.

H

energetic chattering (again) (c. ♩ = 120)

68

Fl.

Ob.

Cl.

Bsn.

Hn.

F. Cym.

Vib.

H

energetic chattering (again) (c. ♩ = 120)

Vln. I

mf

Vln. II

norm.

mf

f

Vla.

norm.

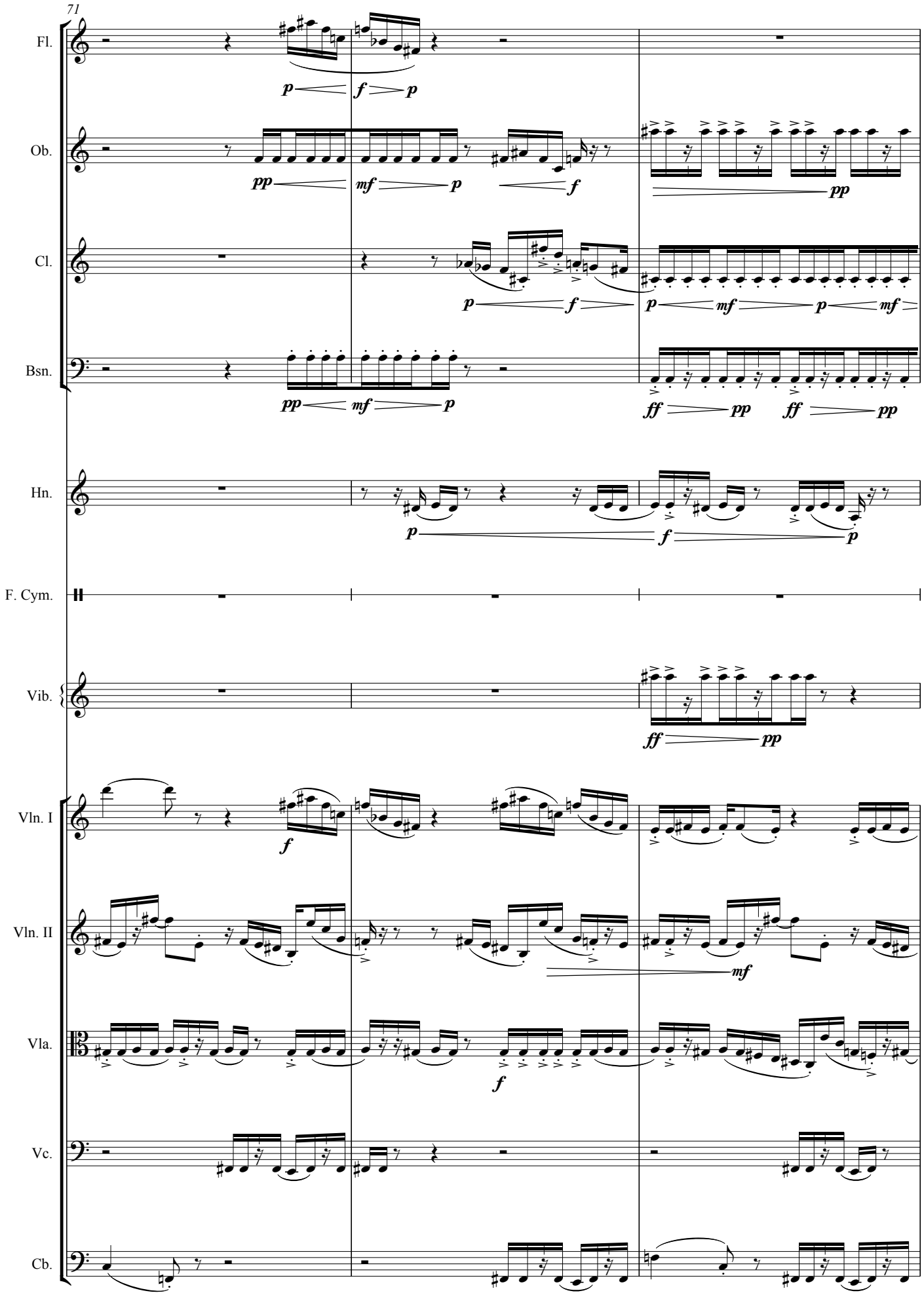
mf

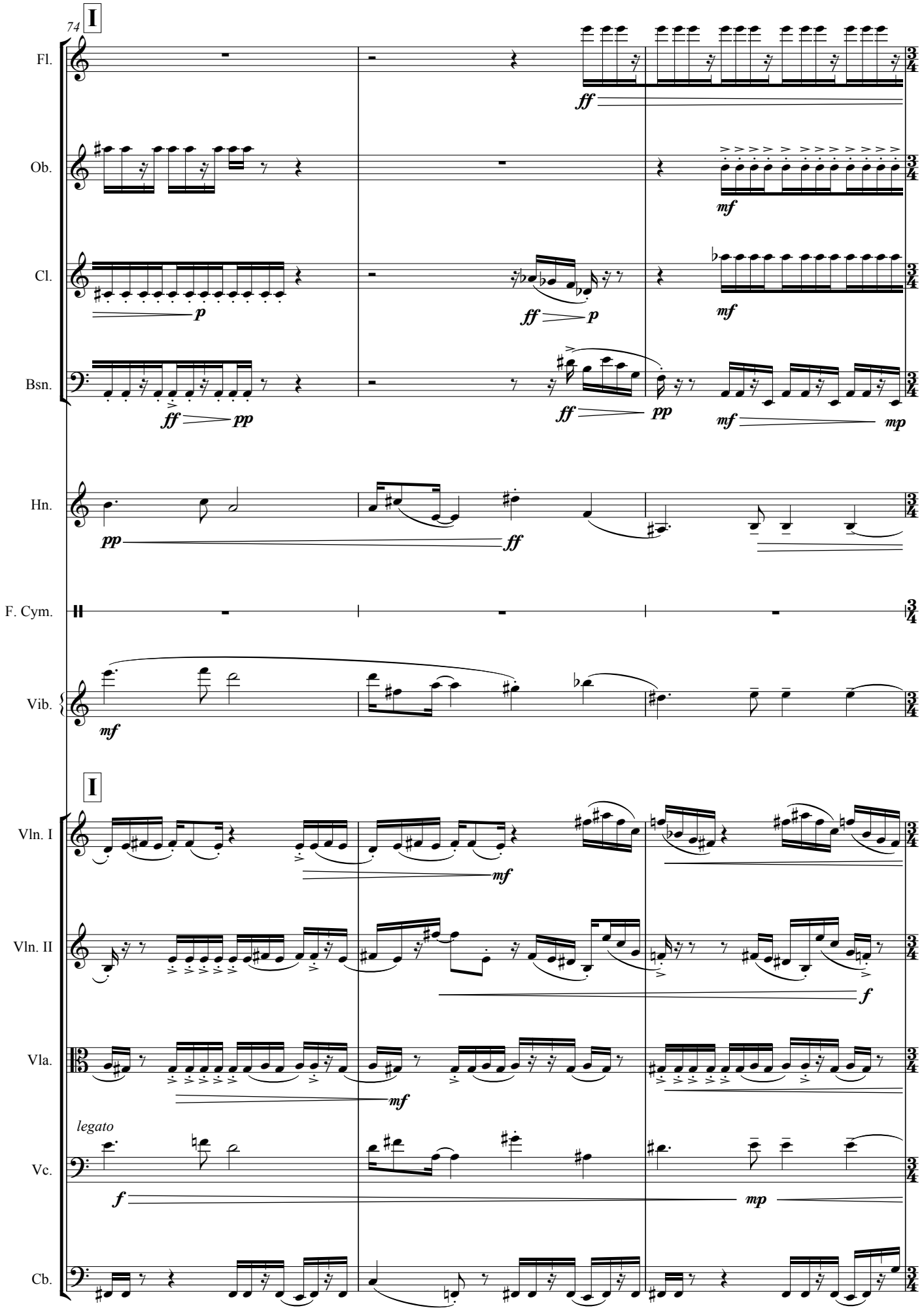
Vc.

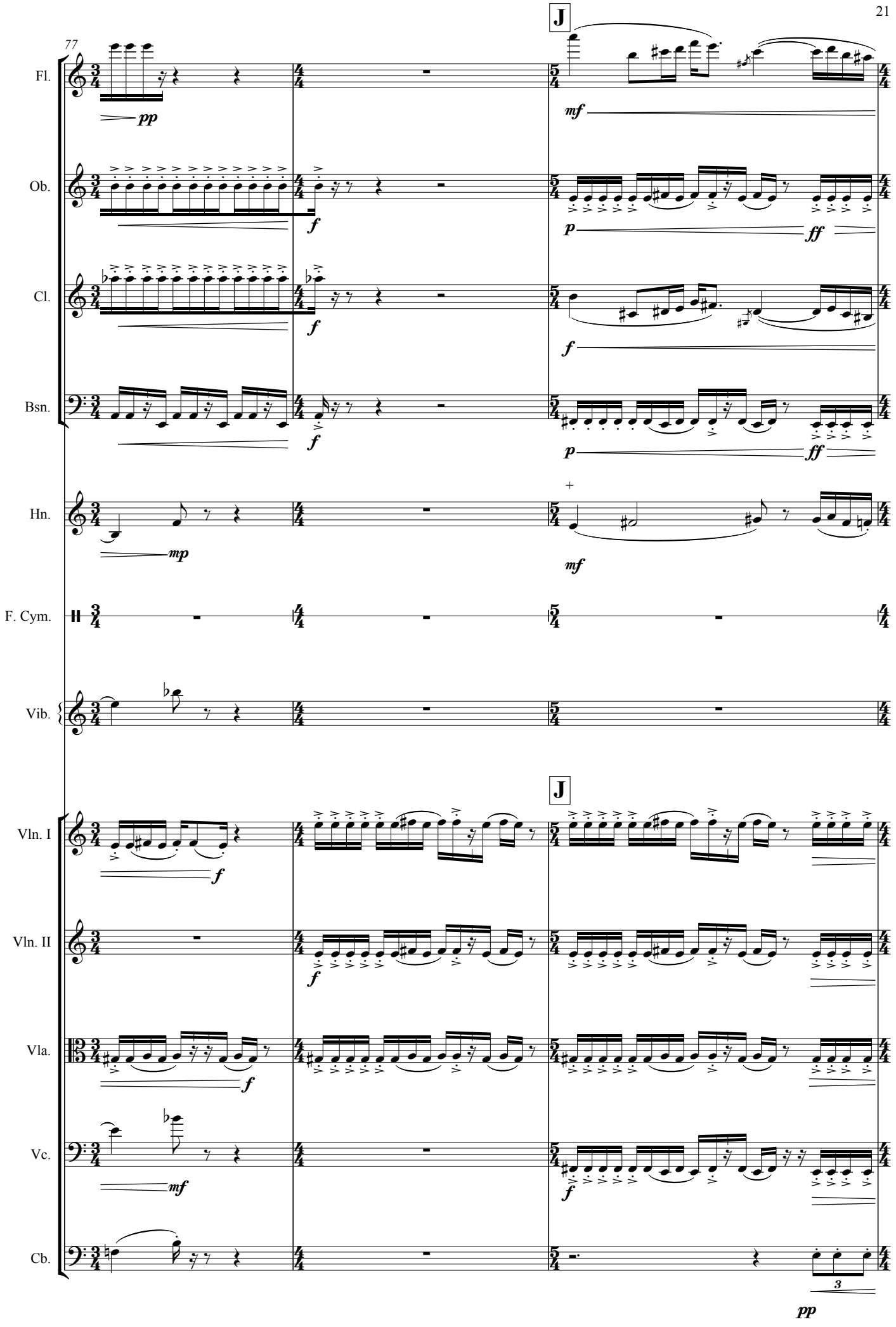
mf

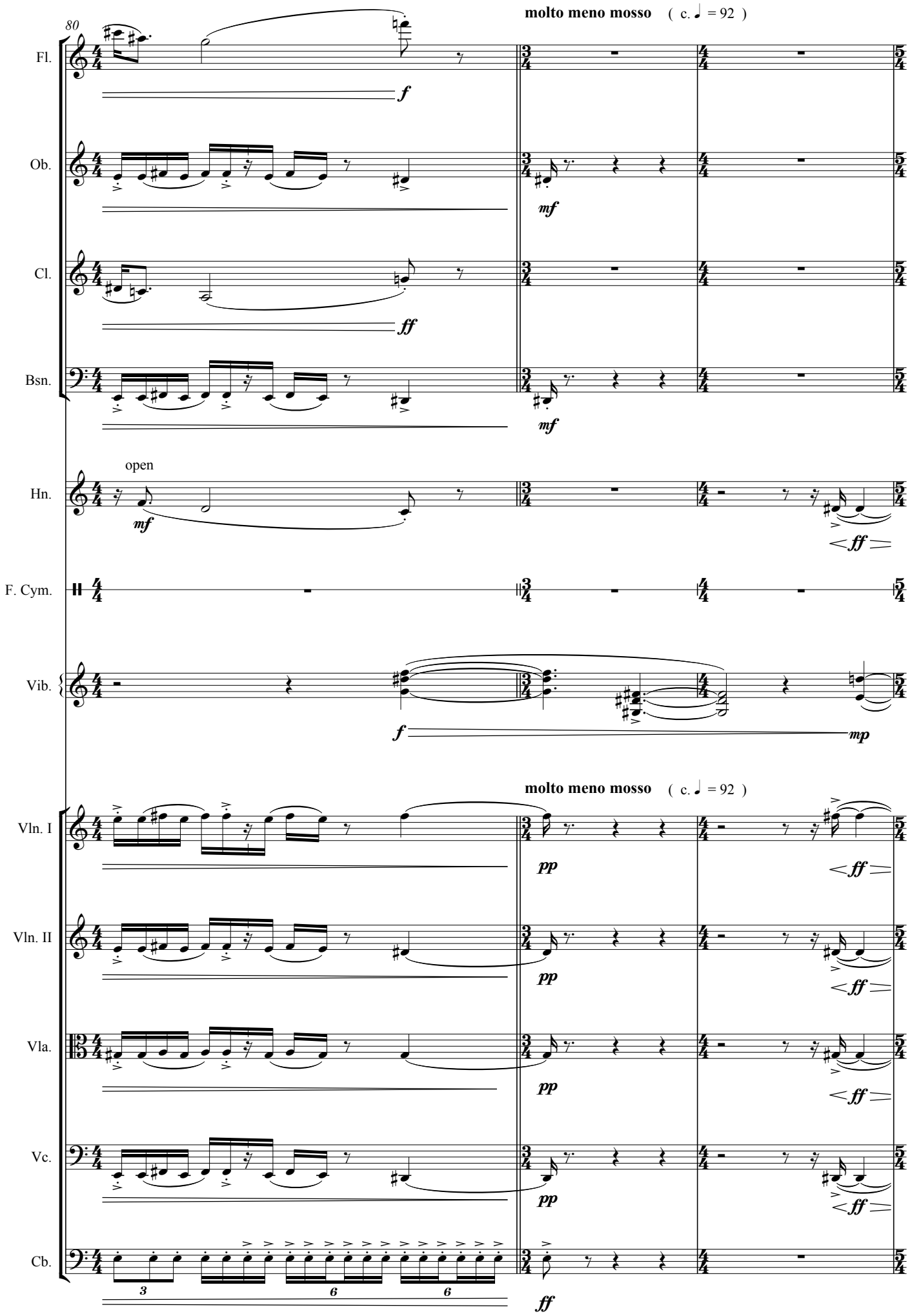
Cb.

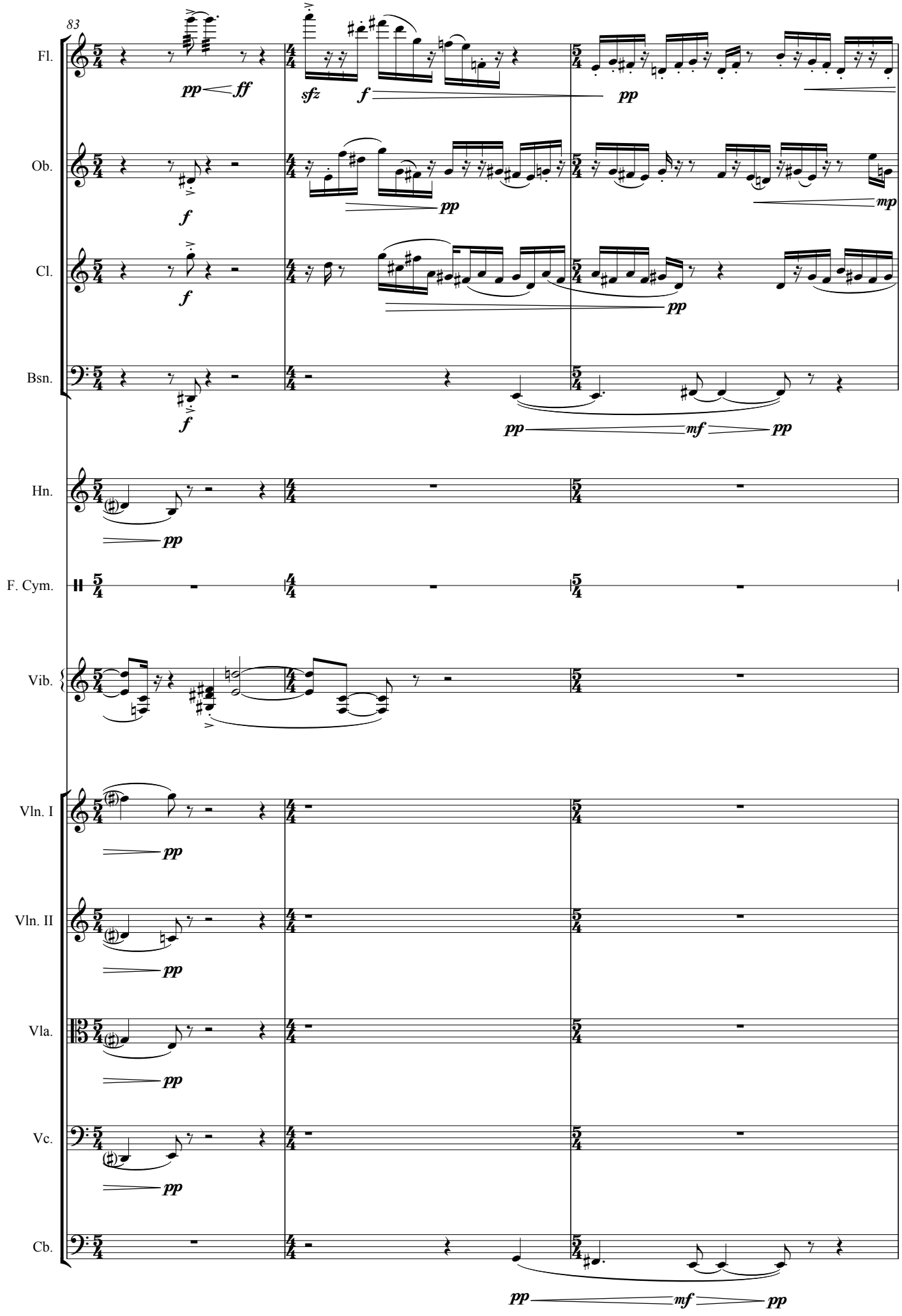
f

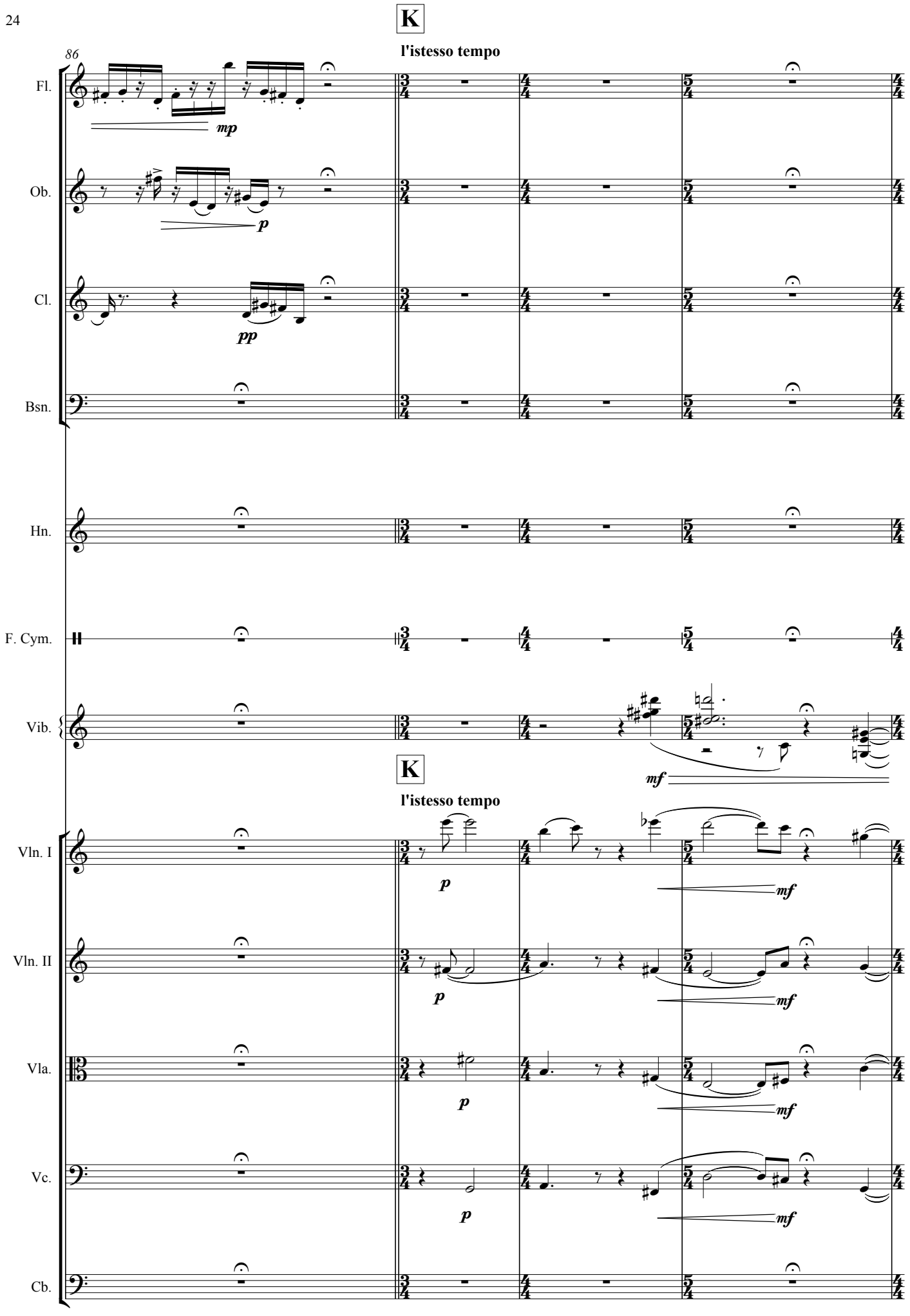

71
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

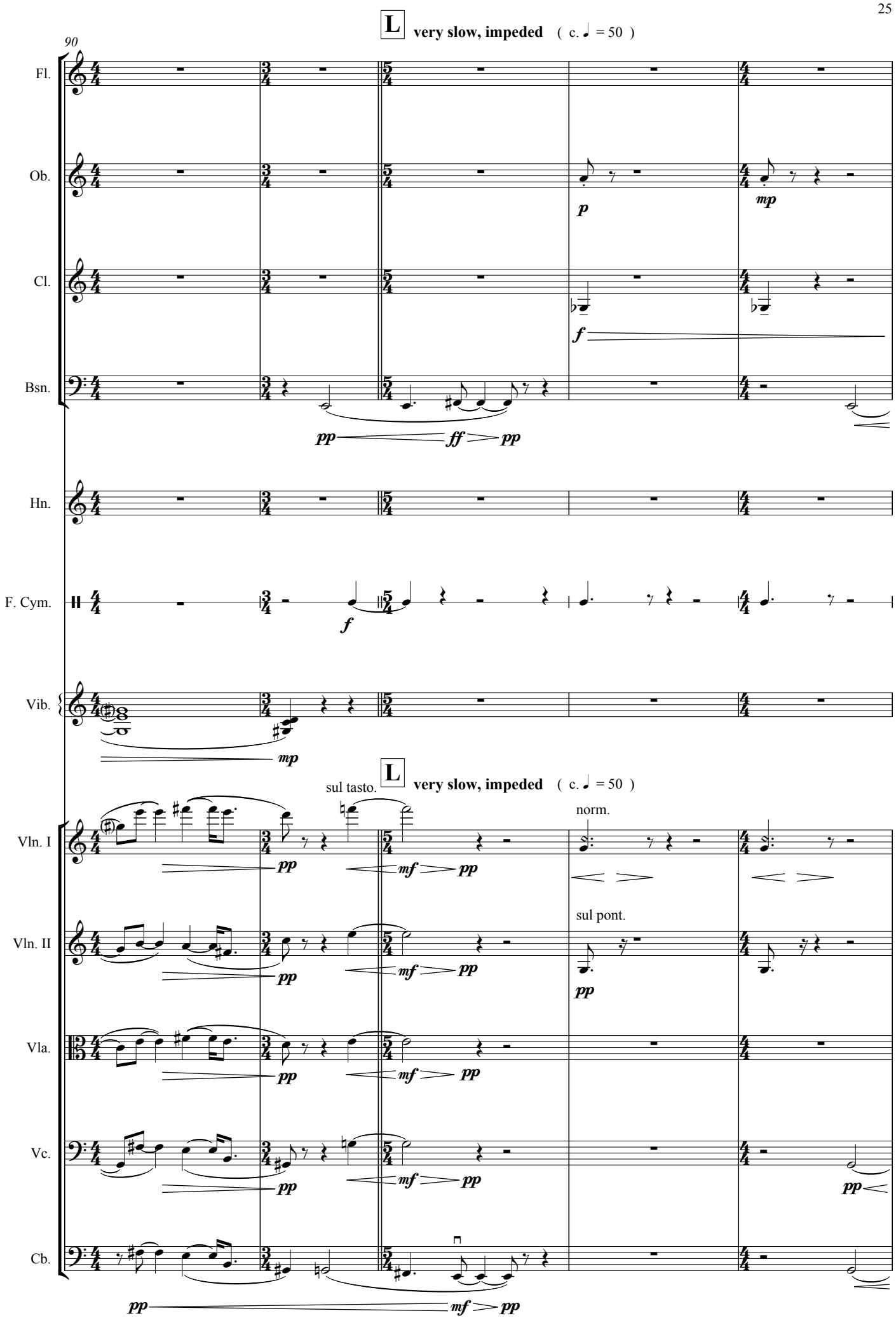

74
I
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
I
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
legato
Vc.
Cb.
ff
mf
p
pp
mp
f

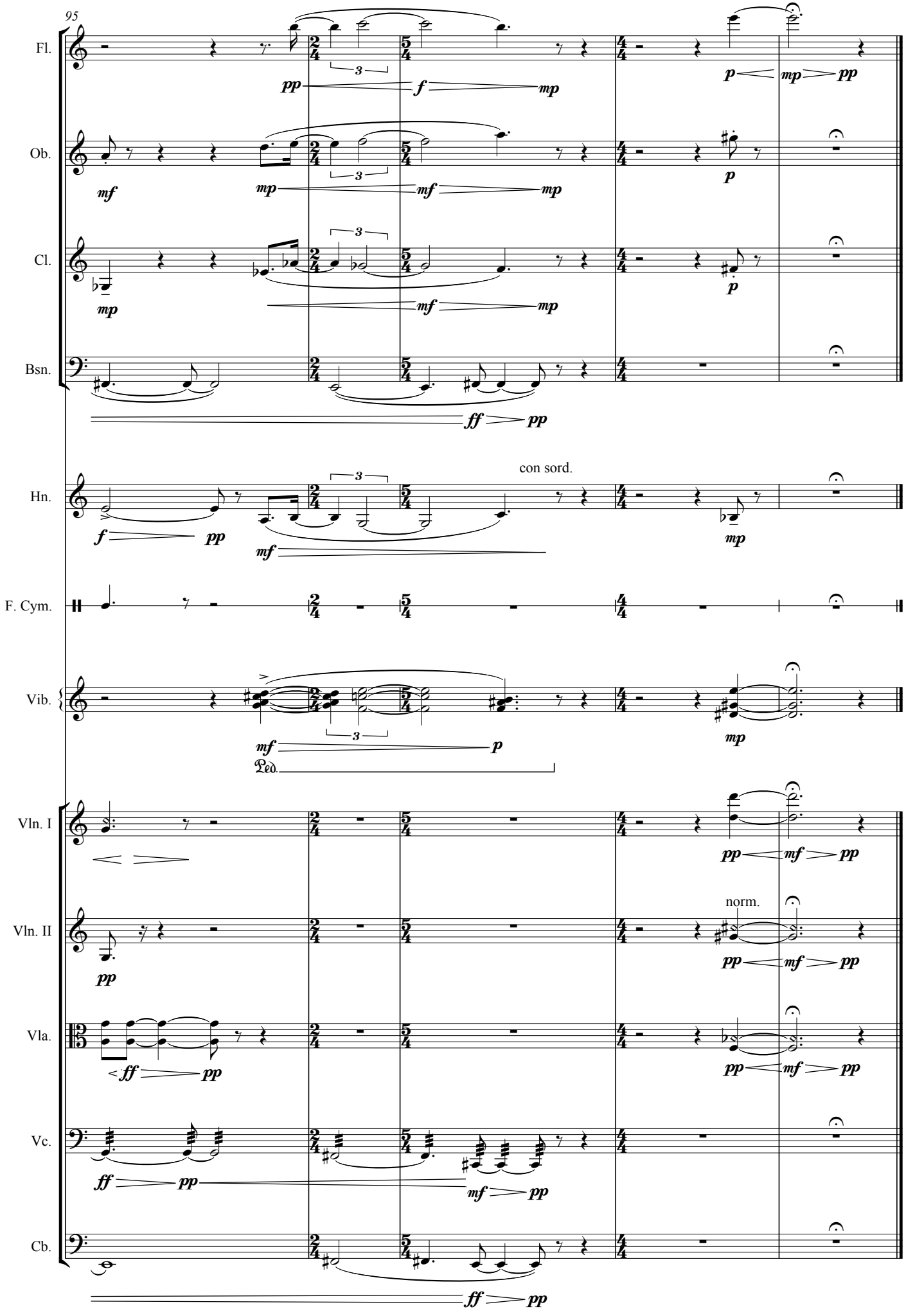

77
J
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
pp
mf
f
p
ff
mp
3
pp


80
molto meno mosso (c. ♩ = 92)
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
open
F. Cym.
Vib.
molto meno mosso (c. ♩ = 92)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.


83
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
pp
ff
sfz
f
mp
mf


K
l'istesso tempo
86
Fl.
mp
Ob.
p
Cl.
pp
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
mf
K
l'istesso tempo
Vln. I
p
mf
Vln. II
p
mf
Vla.
p
mf
Vc.
p
mf
Cb.


L
very slow, impeded (c. ♩ = 50)
90
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
F. Cym.
Vib.
p
mp
f
pp
ff
pp
mp
f
sul tasto.
L
very slow, impeded (c. ♩ = 50)
norm.
sul pont.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
pp
mf
pp


95
Fl.
Ob.
Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
con sord.
F. Cym.
Vib.
Vln. I
Vln. II
norm.
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.