Visions of Japan

for shakuhachi and string instruments (2017)
written for and dedicated to Joseph Lee

Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis

PROGRAMME NOTE

I have never been to Japan, but there is a lot about Japanese culture and aesthetics that resonates with me. Poetry, food, architecture, philosophy, music — why is it that these things resonate with me? There is something about this resonance that reminds me of wilderness trips I have taken in northern Lapland in Finland. Something about the bare aesthetics of the landscape, the simple juxtapositions of small, almost unnoticeable contrasts make me want to revisit these places.

In writing this collection of pieces, I explore these sentiments and hunches further, and I look into my own visions of Japan — how have I come to understand Japanese aesthetics through the arts? Like a blind person having paintings described to them, or a disabled person viewing pictures and hearing field recordings from far-away wilderness, I have acquired a set of imagined visions of Japan. While these visions perhaps bear some truth in relation to how Japan actually is, in the end, they are perhaps a reflection of my own personal aesthetics; the elements in my own tastes, experiences, and aesthetic choices, which resonate in my encounters with Japanese culture and aesthetics.

行 (gyō) — *line; row; verse*
Gyō draws on shakuhachi notation which, in turn, is influenced by the Japanese writing system (vertical lines) and alphabets. It is both about visual lines on the score, the tuned strings of the individual instruments, as well as musical "lines" and the multiplicity that arises from a recombination of smaller elements. This piece may be played by shakuhachi and any combination of 2–4 string instruments for which it is scored (i.e. two violins, viola and cello, two cellos, three violas, string quartet, etc). There is no score, only individual parts.

雨後 (ugo) — *after rain*
The Japanese people's relationship to rain and water is a fascinating one that goes deep within their culture. This is evident not only in the ways in which water and rain find their way in Japanese poetry, art, and philosophy but in their rich vocabulary for words related to rain. This solo shakuhachi piece uses notation inspired by traditional shakuhachi notation.

四方 (shihō) — *the four cardinal directions*
This piece for shakuhachi and string quartet is inspired by the four string instruments accompanying the shakuhachi. In terms of material, it draws on four shakuhachi folk pieces that I myself learned on the instrument as a beginner.

Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis
Helsinki, 14 May 2017

I. 行 (gyō)
line; row; verse

II. 雨後 (ugo)
after rain

III. 四方 (shihō)
the four cardinal directions

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I. 行 (GYŌ)
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行 (gyō)

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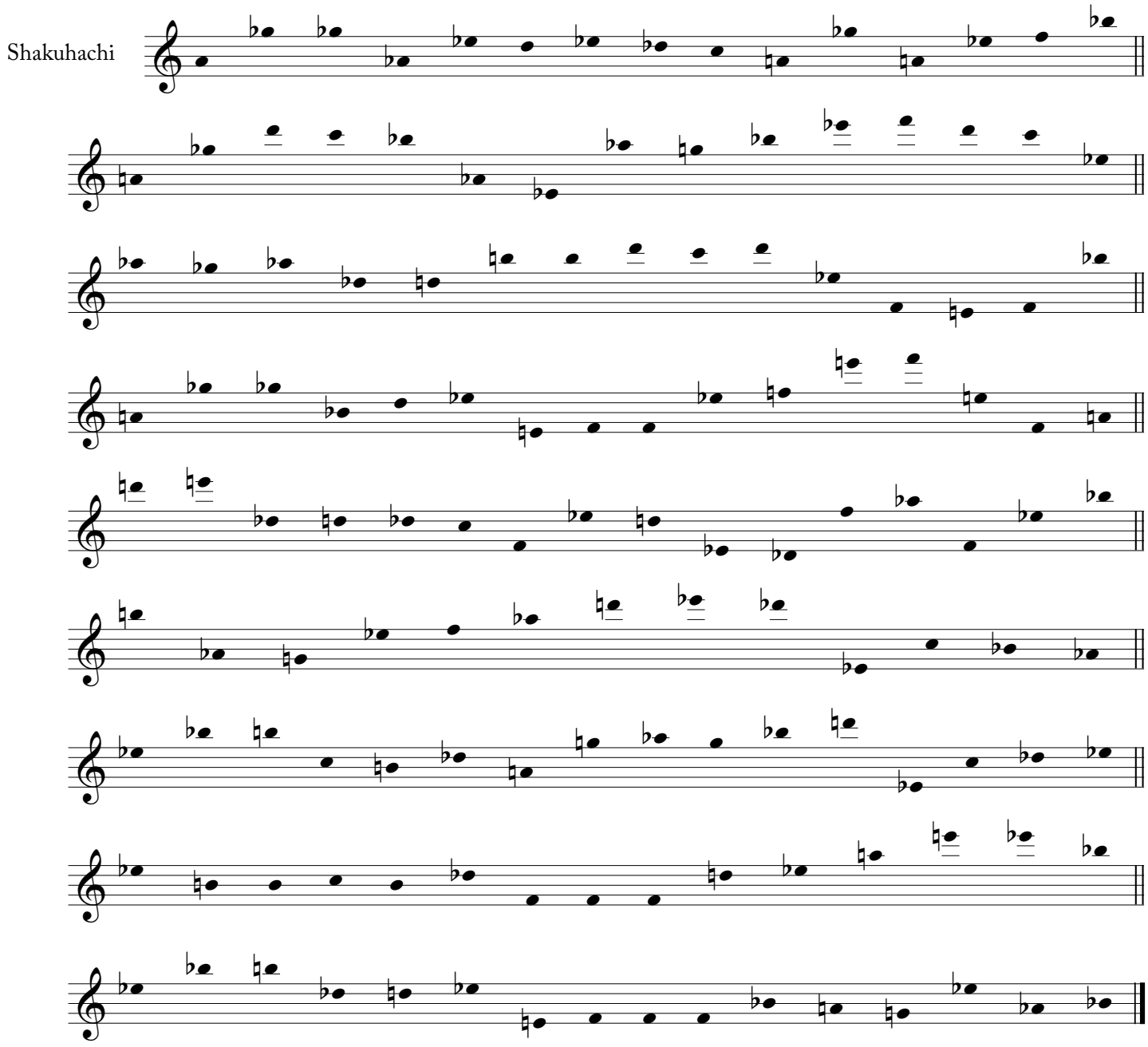
line; row; verse



Each line is to be played as a phrase. Duration of the notes within one phrase are up to the performer. However, once defined, the duration of a phrase should not vary dramatically from one phrase to the next (i.e. it is OK if all phrases are either between 5-10" or 20-30", but it's undesirable if the shortest phrase is 5" and the longest 30").

Dynamics are soft, rather than loud; dynamics and ornamentation up to the performer.

When the shakuhachi player reaches the final note, string players hold whatever note they are playing at that momeny, and all players end together.

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行 (gyō)

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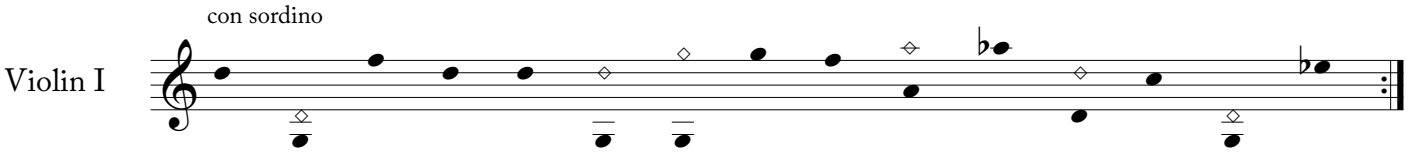
line; row; verse



Play each note with a complete bowing; duration is long rather than short. Occasionally you may play a note with a very quick bowing, but then it must be played col legno. All string players start together, but move from note to note individually and do not need to be synchronised.

You can move freely between sul pont. and sul tasto; dynamics are always soft, and up to the performer. Any variations in bow position (sul pont/sul tasto) or dynamics should take place gradually.

When the shakuhachi player reaches their final note (a cue may be arranged by the shakuhachi player) string players hold whatever note they are playing at that moment, and all players end together.

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行 (gyō)

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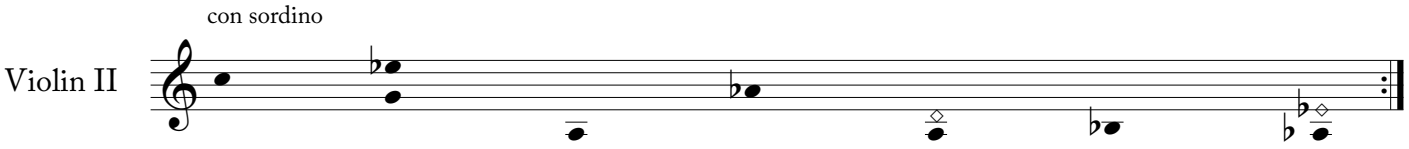
line; row; verse



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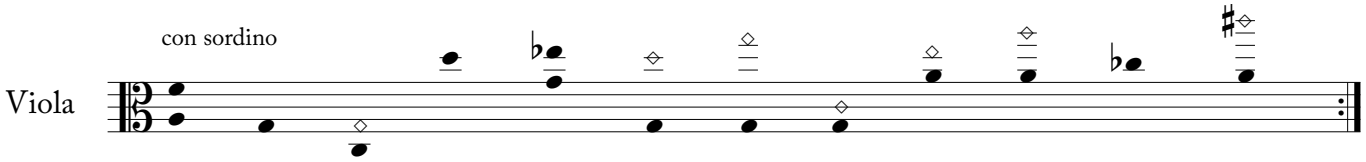

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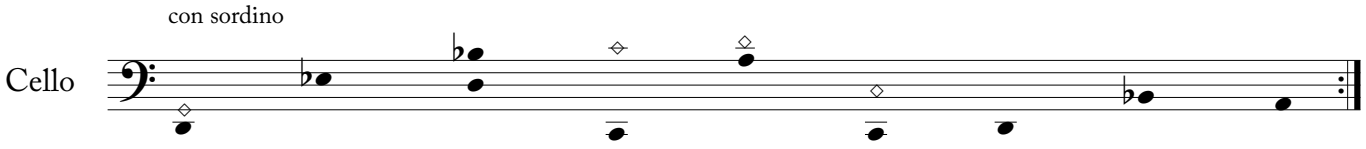

Play each note with a complete bowing; duration is as long as possible. Occasionally you may play a note with a very quick bowing, but then it must be played col legno. All string players start together, but move from note to note individually and do not need to be synchronised.

You can move freely between sul pont. and sul tasto; dynamics are always soft, and up to the performer. Any variations in bow position (sul pont/sul tasto) or dynamics should take place gradually

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When the shakuhachi player reaches their final note (a cue may be arranged by the shakuhachi player) string players hold whatever note they are playing at that moment, and all players end together.

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II. 雨後 (UGO)
after rain

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雨後 (ugo)

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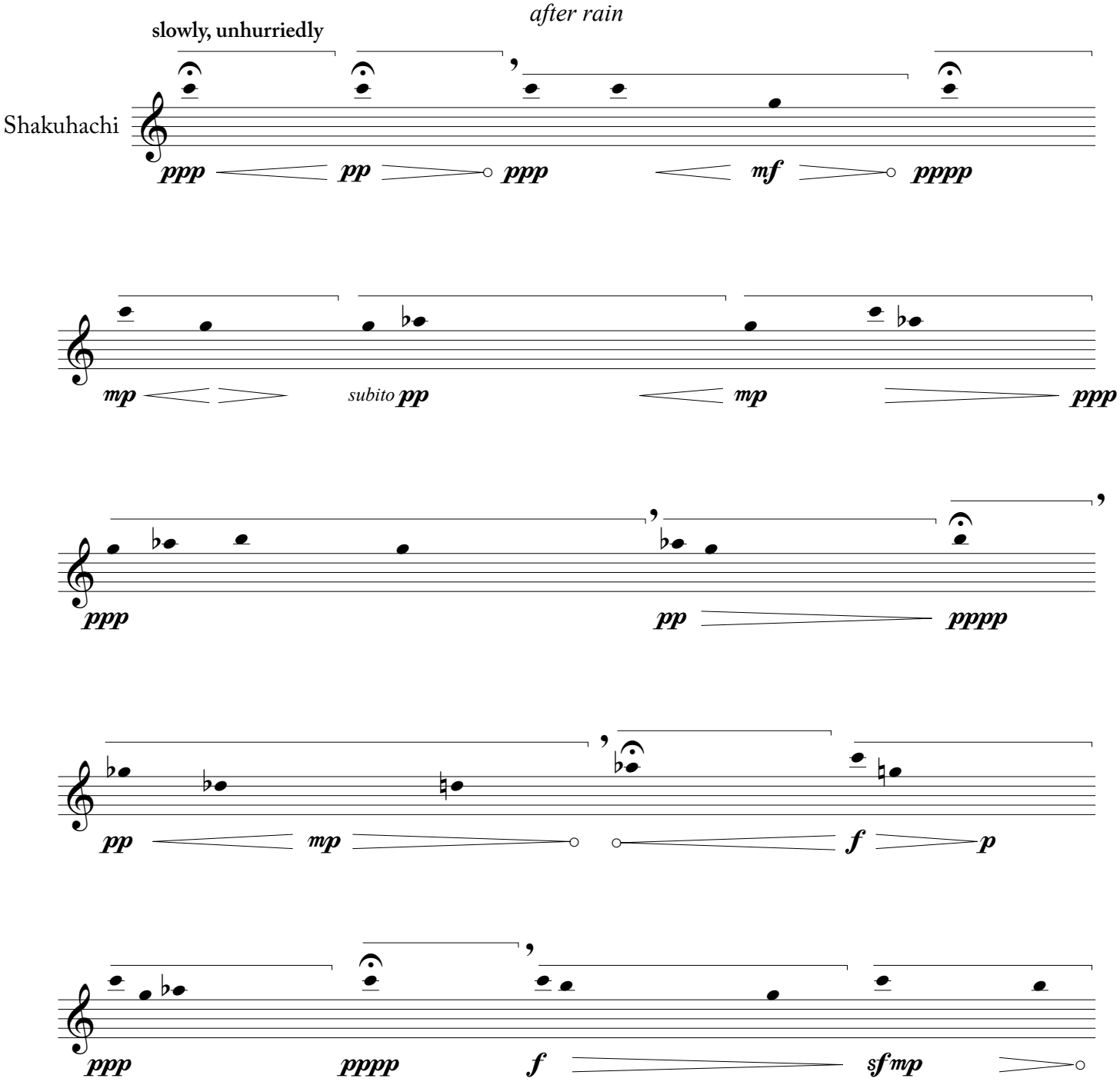
after rain



A ——— line indicates a breath's duration. Dynamics are suggestive and to be adjusted according to the taste of the performer and acoustics of the room. A breath mark ❜ indicates a slightly longer pause before the next phrase starts. Any note with a fermata mark 𝄐 may be repeated. Decoration and ornamentation up to the player.

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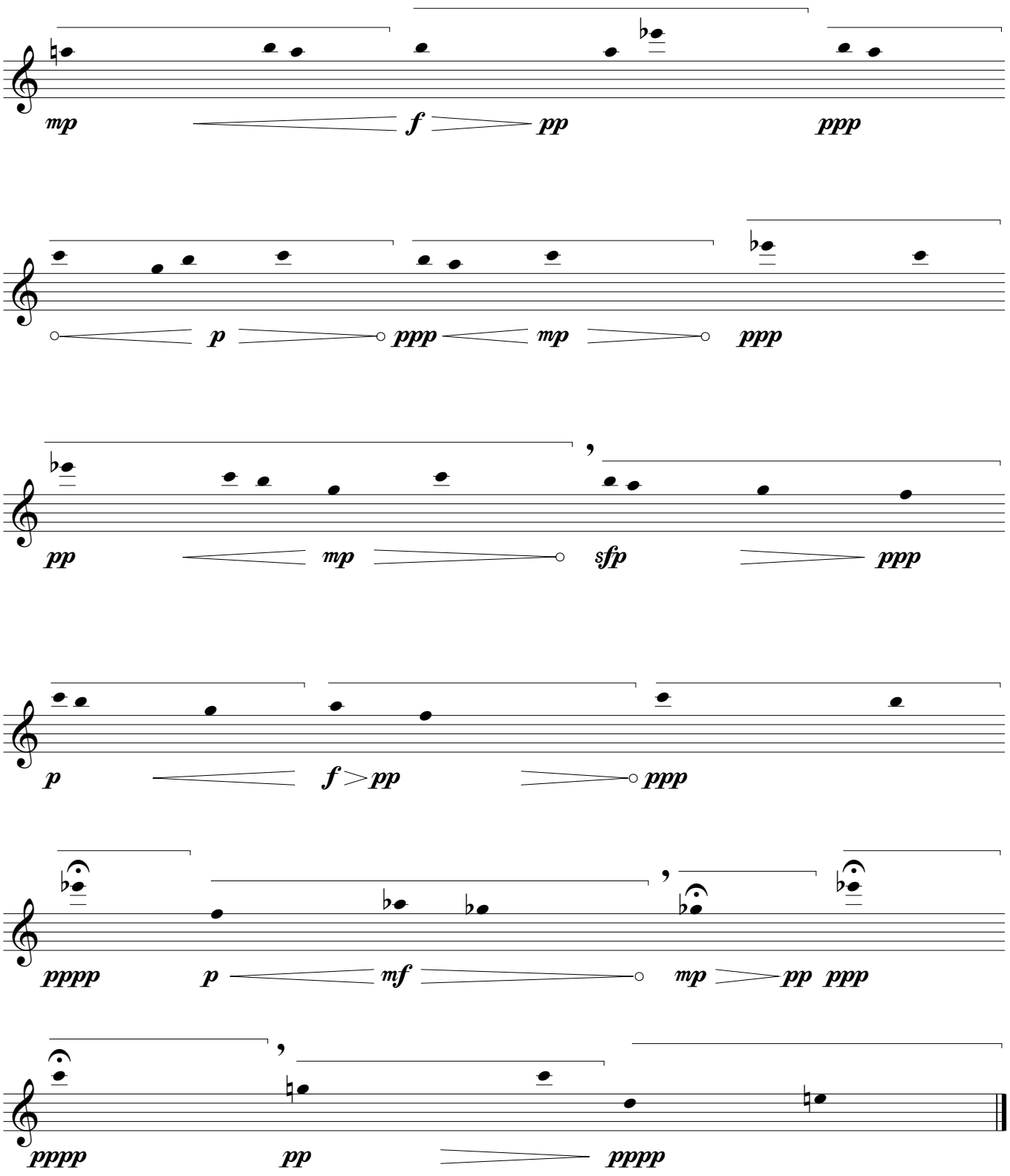
mp f pp ppp
p ppp mp ppp
pp mp sfp ppp
p f > pp ppp
pppp p mf mp pp ppp
pppp pp pppp

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III. 四方 (SHIHŌ)
the four cardinal directions

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四方 (shihō)

the four cardinal directions

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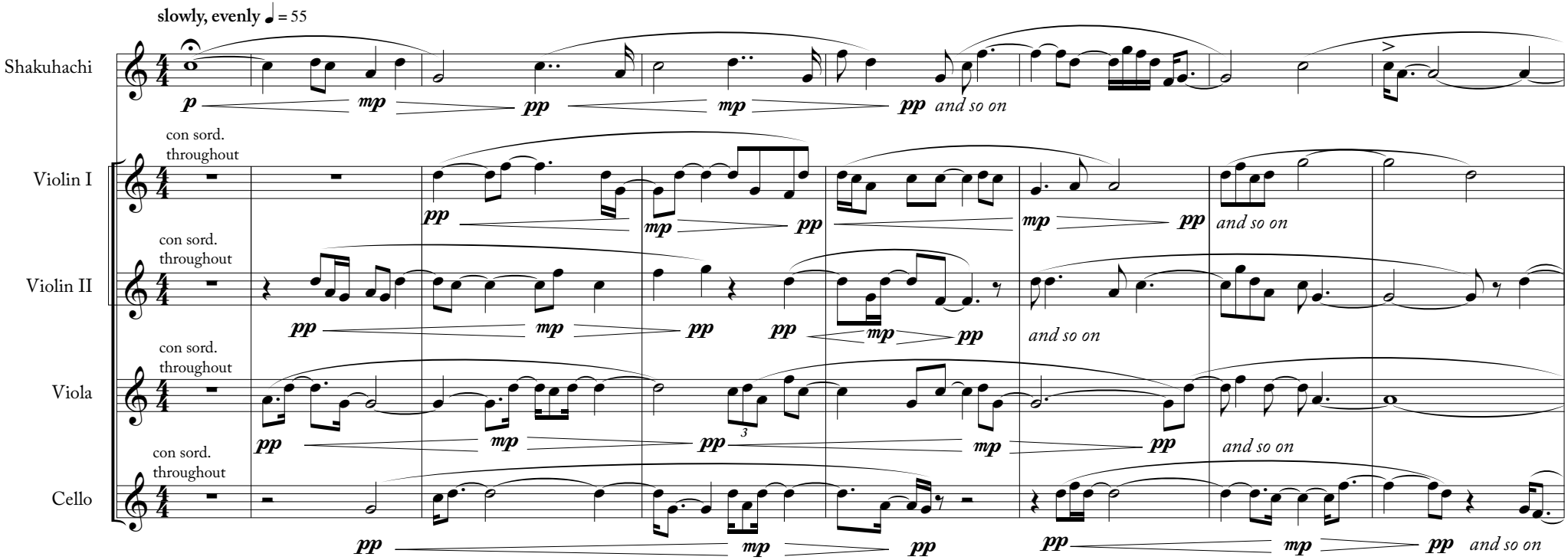

Phrases, as indicated by the phrasing slur ⌒, are performed with the same dynamic envelope ***pp*<*mp*>*pp*** throughout, unless indicated otherwise. If a phrase is very short, the envelope may be less pronounced, i.e. ***pp*<*p*>*pp***

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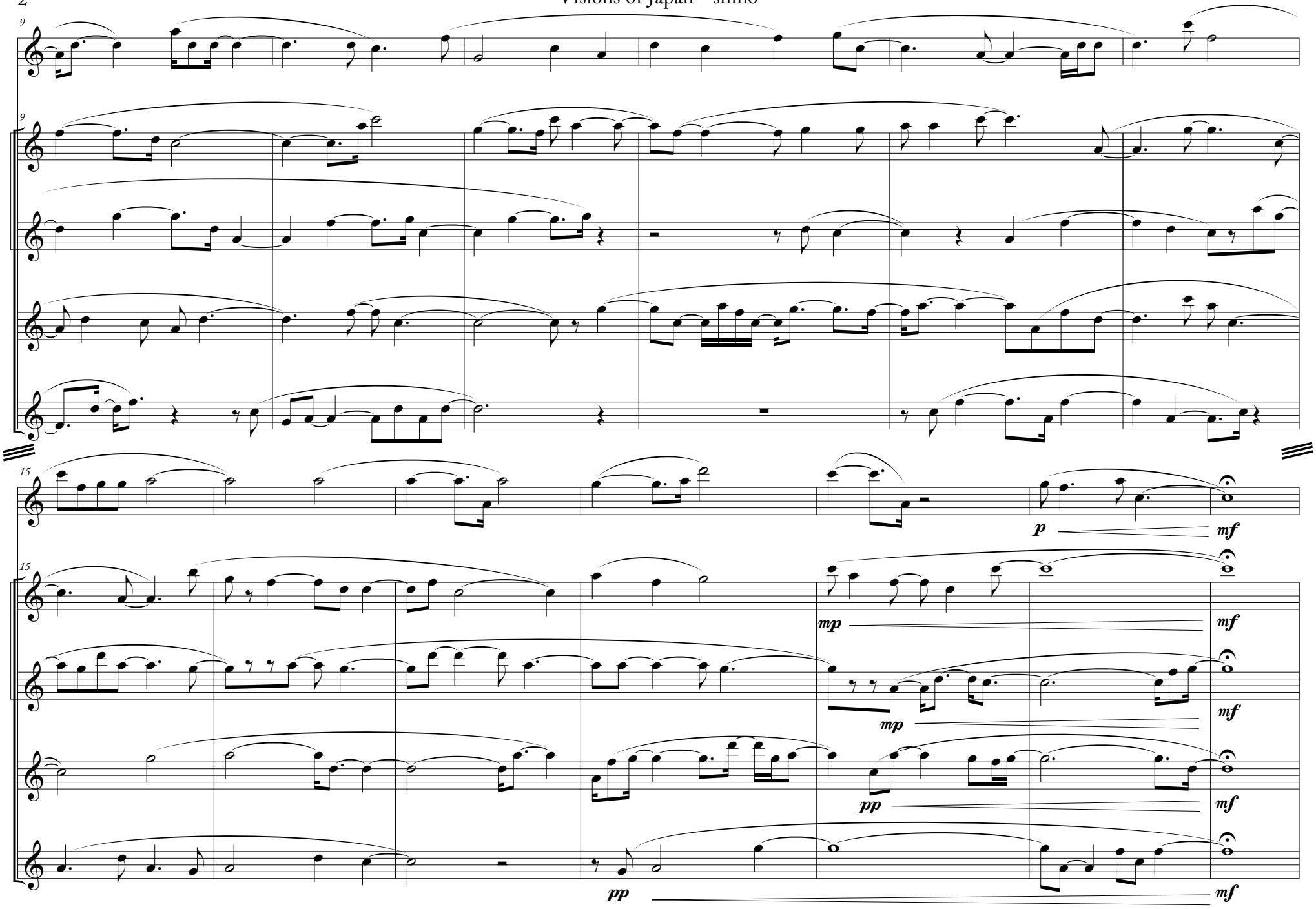
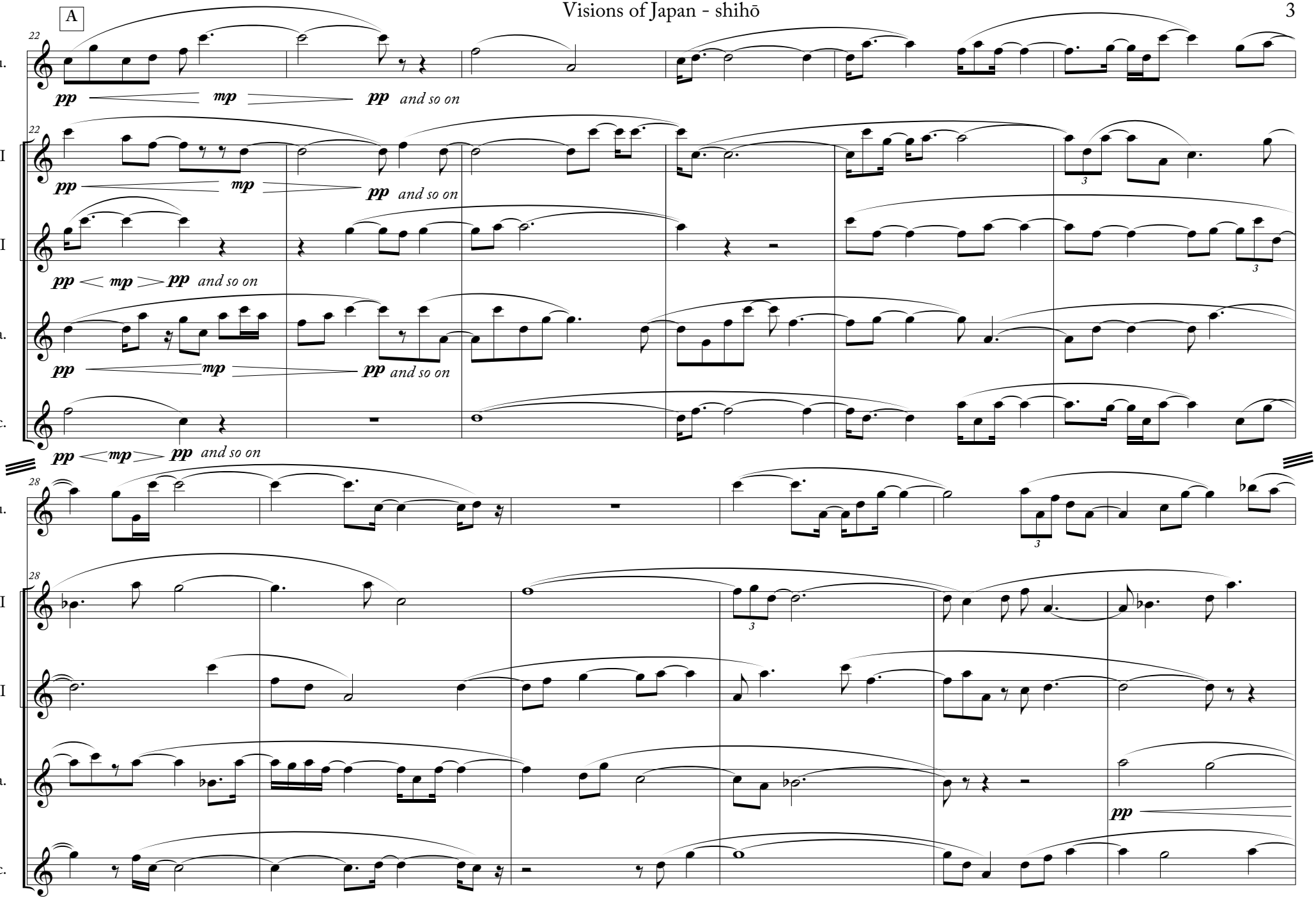
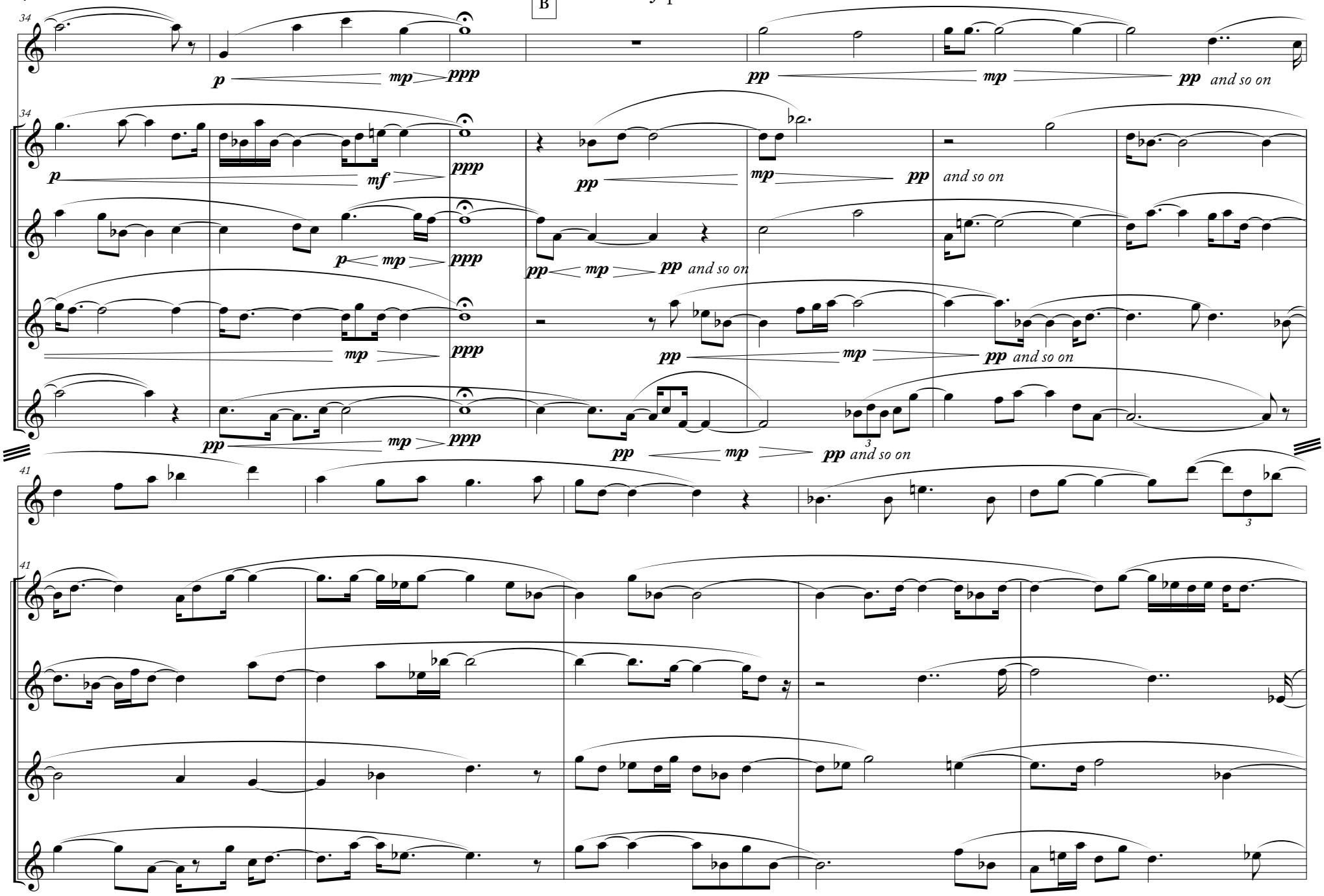
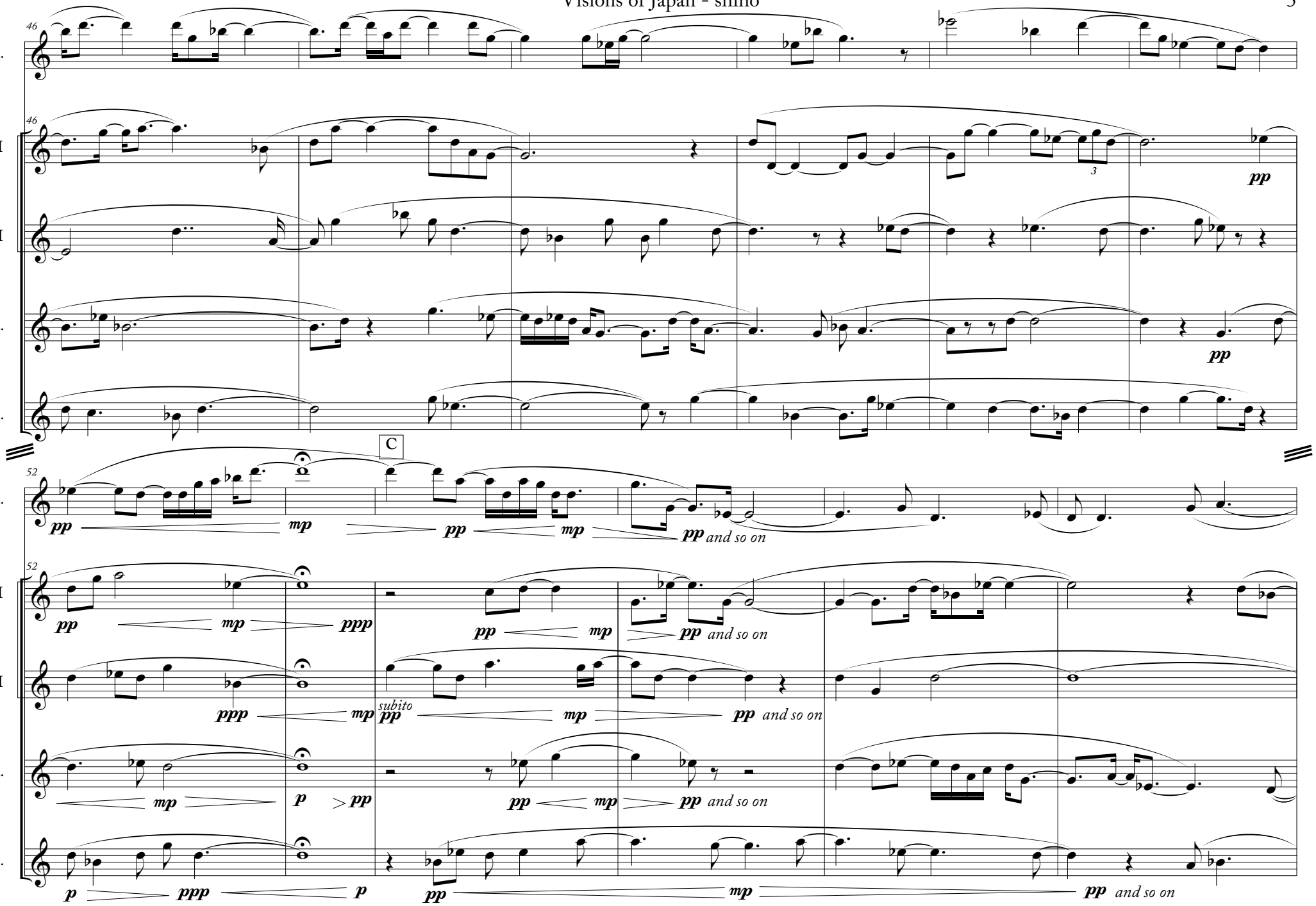
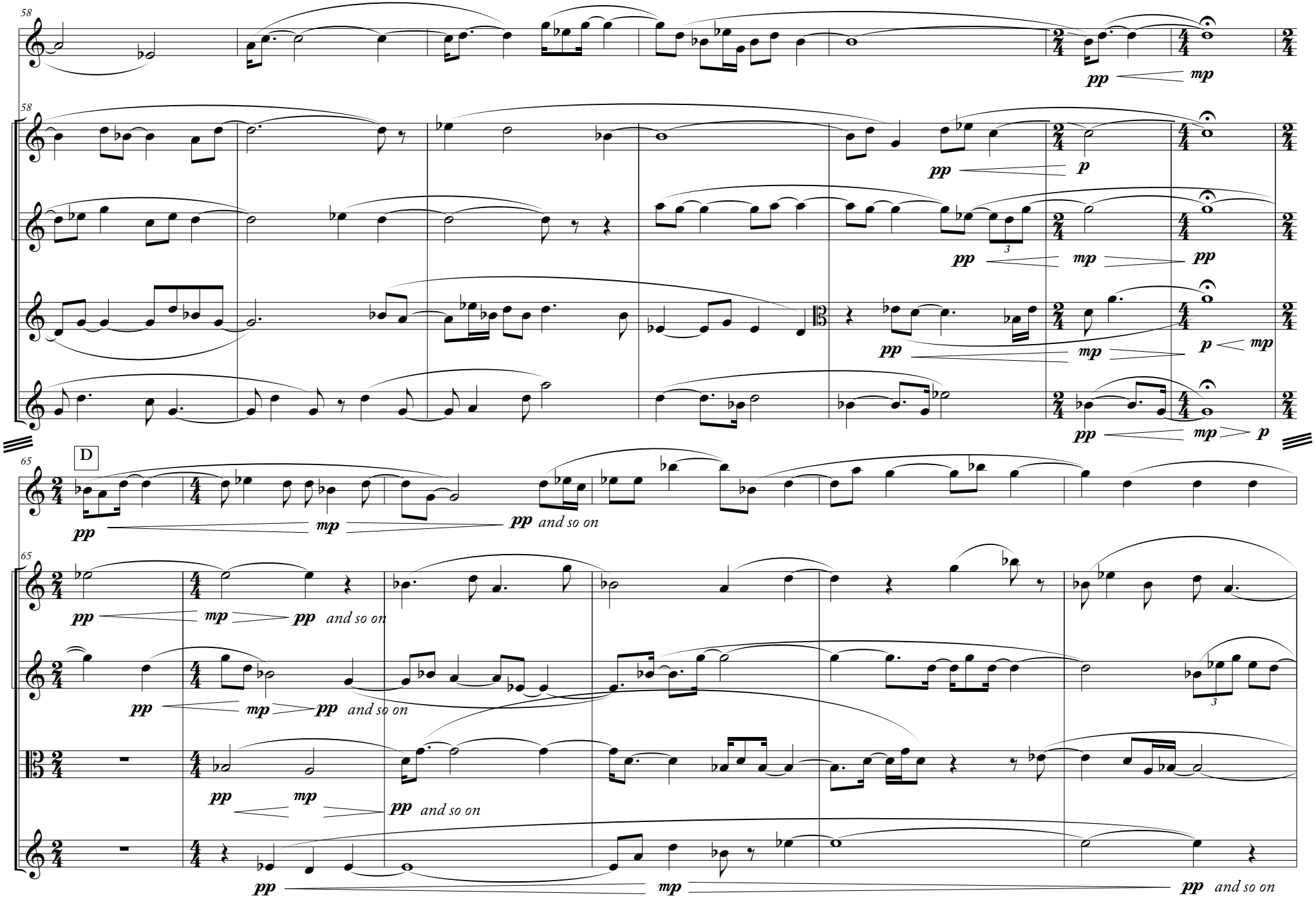
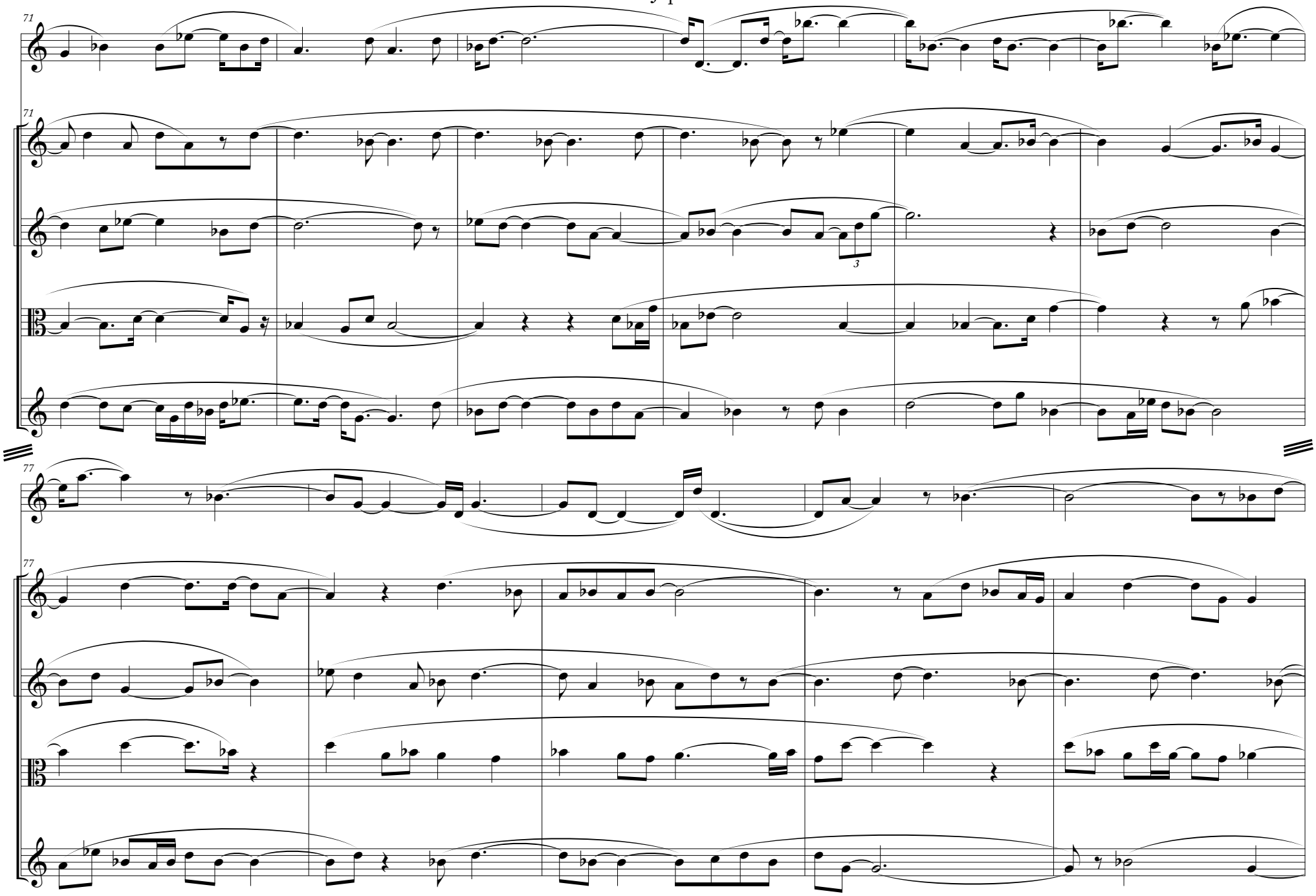

9
Shaku.
9
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
15
Shaku.
p
mf
15
Vln. I
mp
mf
Vln. II
mp
mf
Vla.
pp
mf
Vc.
pp
mf

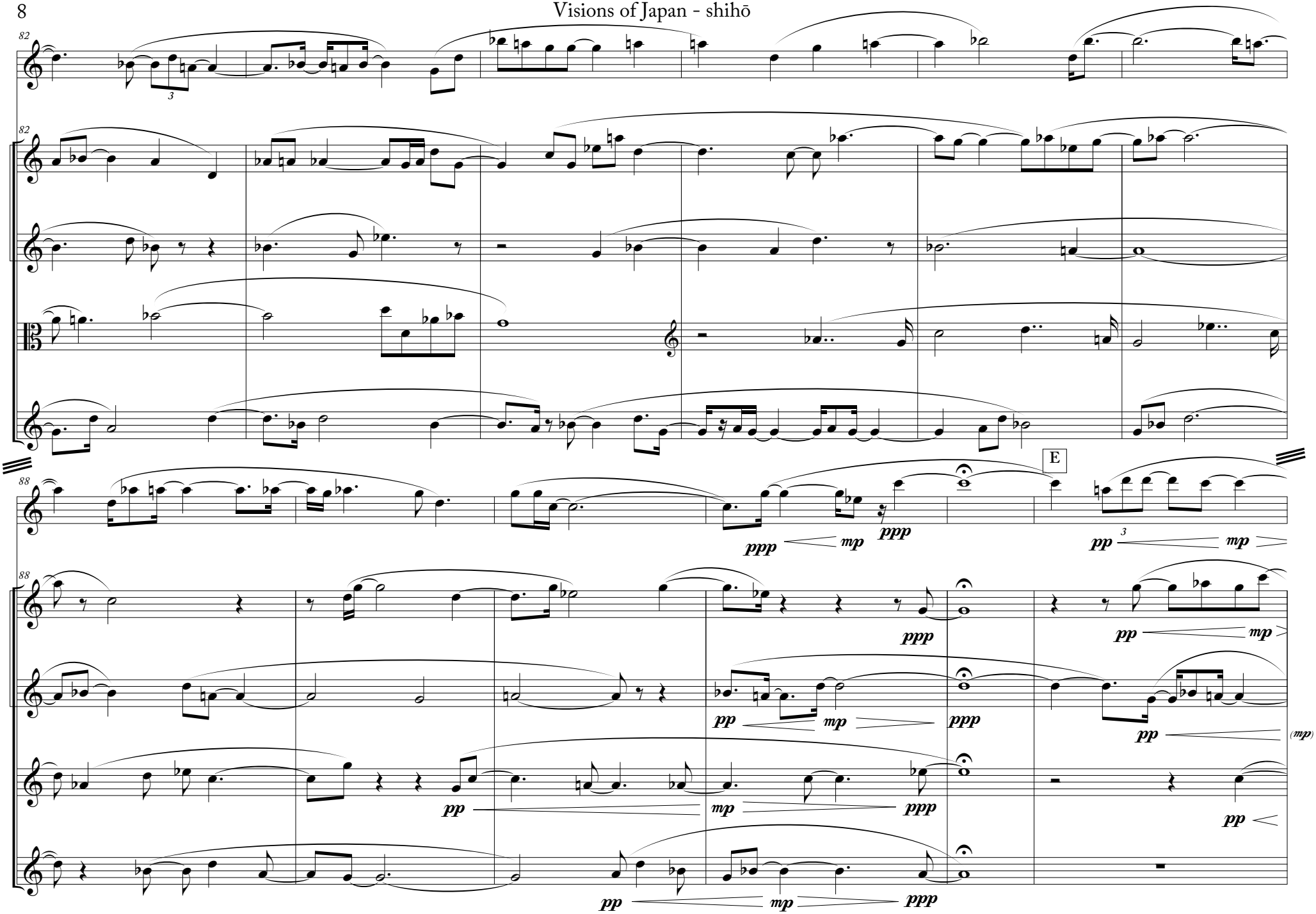

A
22
Shaku.
pp mp pp and so on
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
28
Shaku.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pp

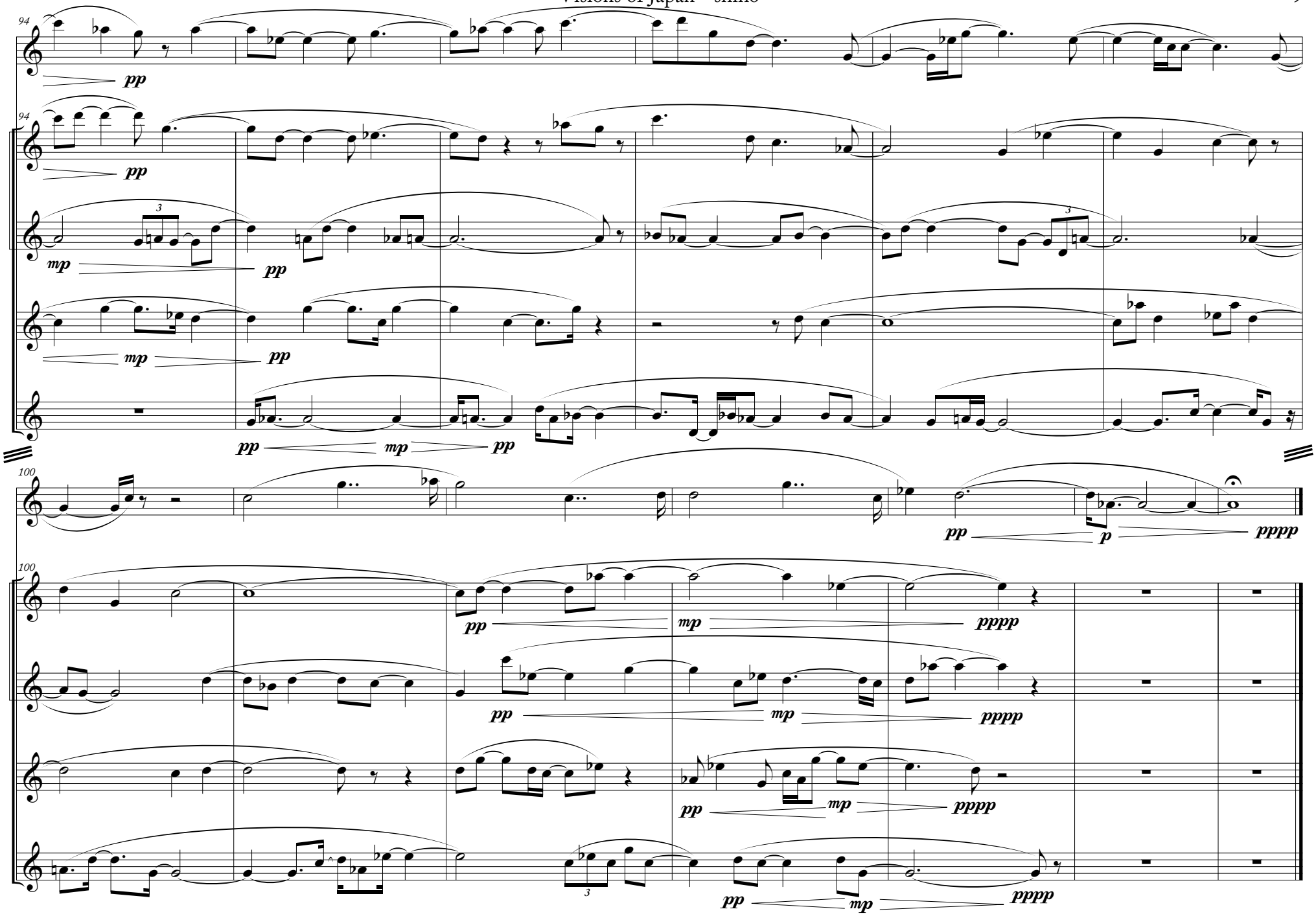

B
34
Shaku.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
p mp ppp
pp mp pp and so on
mf
41


46
Shaku.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pp
C
52
mp
ppp
p
and so on
subito


58
Shaku.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pp
mp
p
D
65
and so on


71
Shaku.
71
Vln. I
Vln. II
3
Vla.
Vc.
77
Shaku.
77
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


82
Shaku.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
88
E
ppp
mp
pp
(mp)


94
Shaku.
pp
94
Vln. I
pp
Vln. II
mp
pp
Vla.
mp
pp
Vc.
pp
mp
pp
100
Shaku.
pp
p
pppp
100
Vln. I
pp
mp
pppp
Vln. II
pp
mp
pppp
Vla.
pp
mp
pppp
Vc.
pp
mp
pppp