Learning Self-Modulation

for Violin and Piano

2011

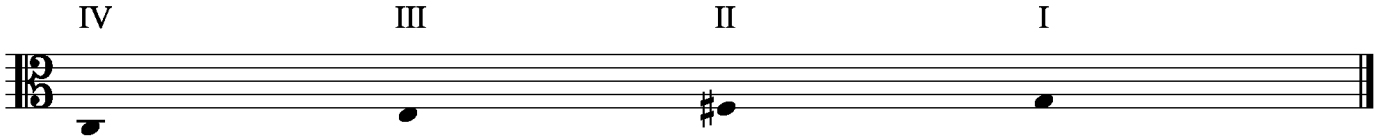
Christian Mason

Instrumentation and Performance Notes:

Violin (+ Scordatura Violin and Voice)
Piano (+ Rin and Voice)

De-tuning of normal Violin:
At the end of mov. II the violinist is required to de-tune the E-string down a semitone to Eb (see page 14).
At the end of mov. IV the violinist is required to de-tune the G-string down a whole tone to F (see page 18).
This process of de-tuning serves as preparation for the use of the scordatura violin in movs. V and VI and should be fully integrated into the flow of the performance. Once de-tuned these strings are only used as open strings or for natural harmonics and therefore do not require any special notation.

Scordatura Violin:
At the end of mov. IV the violinist is required to exchange the normal violin for the scordatura violin (see pages 19 -20). This new instrument is strung with four G-strings, tuned as follows:



It is notated at pitch in the alto clef with a corresponding staff in treble clef indicating the fingering in terms of normal violin tuning.
Ideally the quality of the strings used should match those of the normal violin.

Rin:
In movs. III, V and VI the pianist is also required to play two Rin tuned as follows:

These should be placed on the shoulder of the piano to the right side of the pianist such that they can be played while plucking the strings inside the piano. They should ideally be visible to the audience, sitting on traditional Rin cushions and being struck with a soft beater/stick in order to achieve a soft attack.

Voices:
Both players are requested to hum (in mov. III) and sing (in mov. VI). The vocal line should be sung in whatever octave is most comfortable for the players, and they can either sing at the same octave or different octaves. If they do not feel comfortable doing this, the piece can also be performed without the vocal line which serves to add timbral richness but has no independent musical material.

Movements:
I. Dancing through the thunderous night (p. 1)
II. Azure flashes falling (p. 9)
III. Through suspended mists of white (p. 15)
IV. Seeking realms forever bright (p. 16)
V. We hear *the timeless* calling (p. 20)
VI. And here at last, *we flow like light* (p. 21)

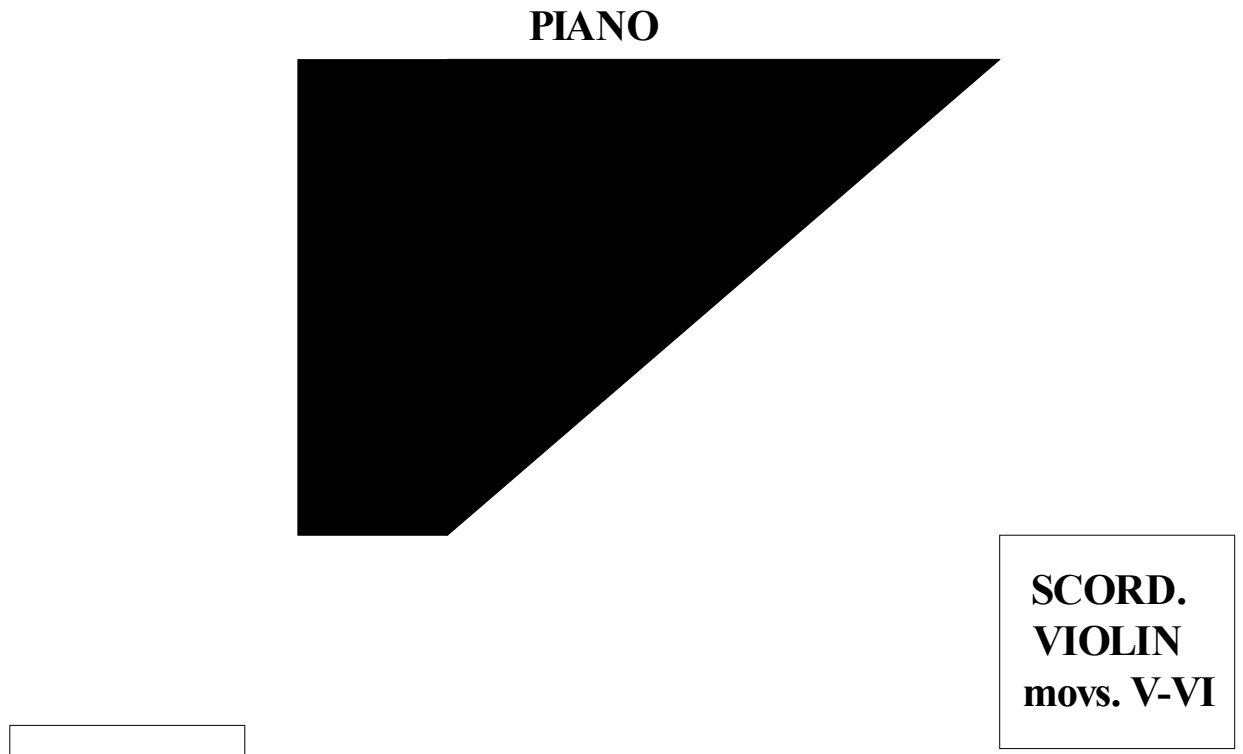
Two versions of the piece:
Ideally the piece should be performed in the full version, however if the scordatura violin is not available it can also be performed in a reduced version:

1. Full version: movs. I – VI, requiring both violins.
2. Reduced version: movs. I – IV, requiring normal violin (including de-tunings) but not the scordatura violin. N.B. In the reduced version the vocal line/humming in mov. III can be omitted.

Duration:
Full version: c.23 minutes
Reduced version: c.16 minutes

Learning Self-Modulation was co-commissioned by Musée du Louvre, Paris; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; and Wigmore Hall, London, the latter with the support of Andre Hoffman, president of the Fondation Hoffman, a Swiss grant making foundation. The first performance was given by Carolin Widmann and Simon Lepper, and took place on 14/10/2011 at the Auditorium du Musée du Louvre in Paris.

Stage Layout:



Dedicated with affection and gratitude to Carolin Widmann

LEARNING SELF-MODULATION

for Violin and Piano

I. Dancing through the thunderous night

Christian Mason (2011)

Like distant thunder

♪ = 96

III IV I II

ff

p

sempre legato

8va

ppp

Ped.

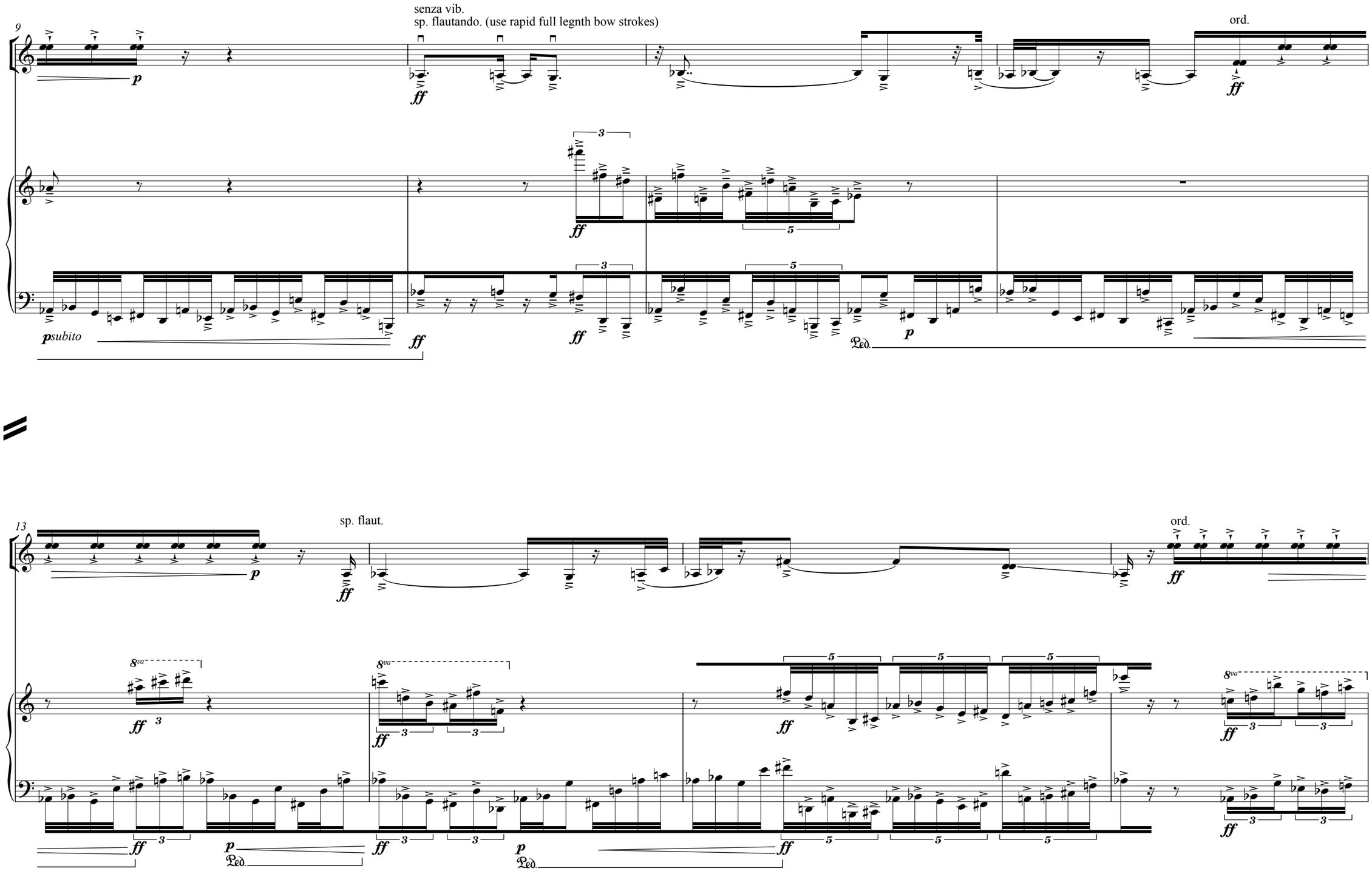
mf

mp

f

ppp

ff


9
senza vib.
sp. flautando. (use rapid full legnth bow strokes)
ord.
p
ff
p subito
Ped.
13
sp. flaut.
ord.
8va

17

sp. flaut.

ord. sp.

ord. sp.

ord. sp.

ord. sp.

21

ord. sp. ord.

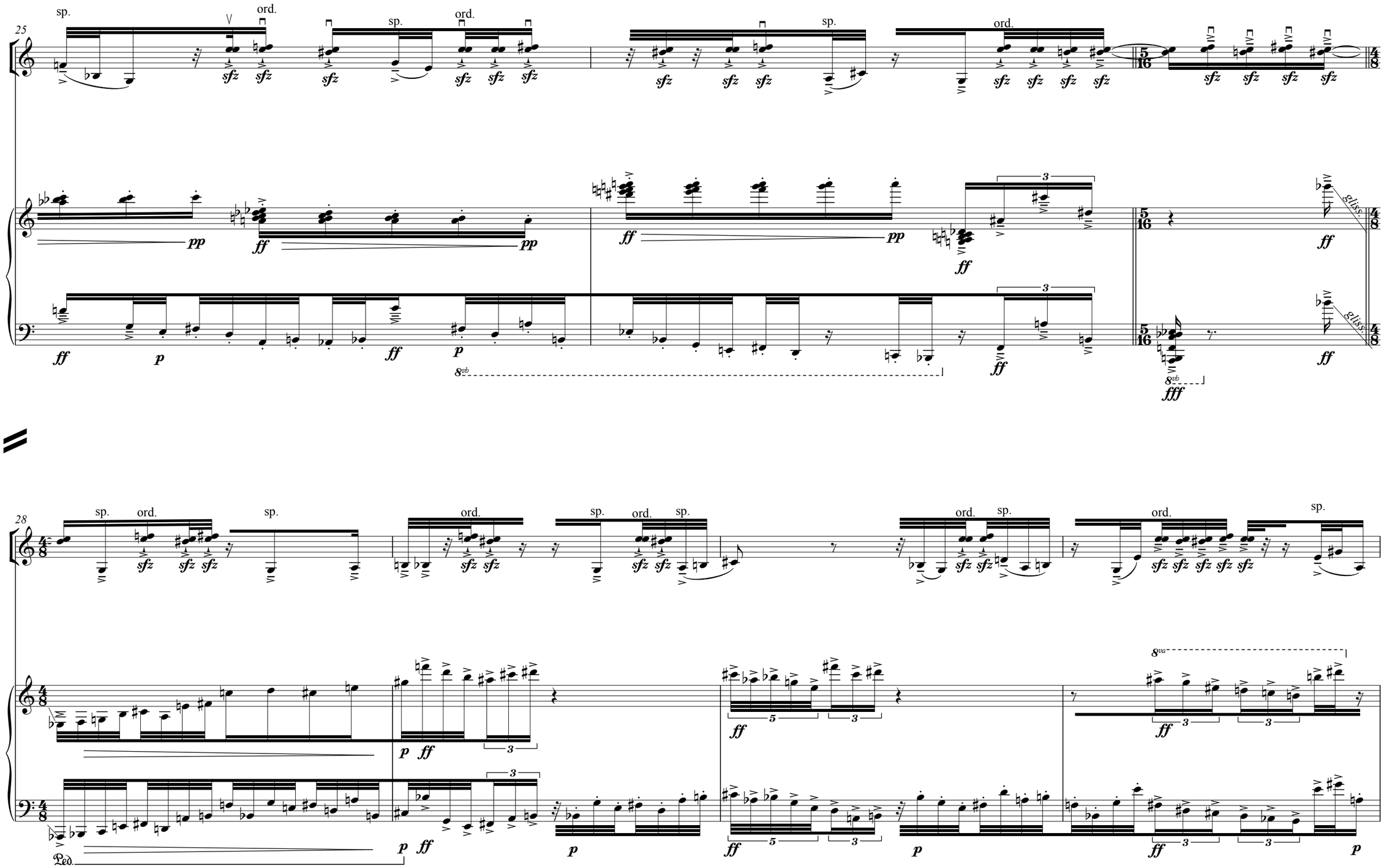
sp.

ord.

sp. ord.

sp. ord.

8va


25
sp.
ord.
sfz
pp
ff
p
8vb
gliss.
fff
28
Ped.
8va

Playful

32

ord. sp. ord. sp. ord. sp. ord. sp. ord.

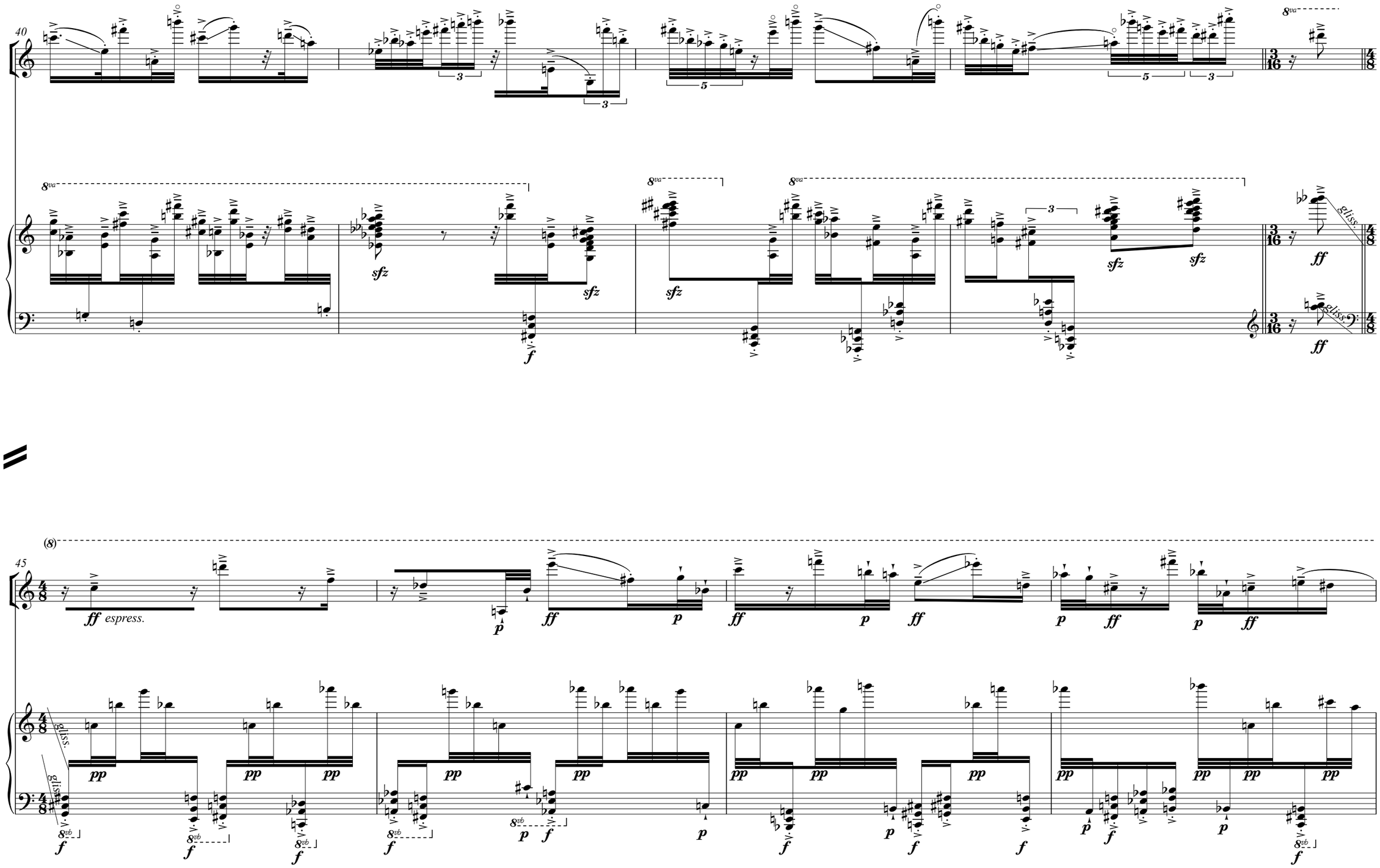
gliss. gliss. gliss.

mp *ff* *mp*

Joyful

36

f *p* *sfz* *8va*


40
8va
sfz
f
ff
gliss.
45
(8)
ff espress.
p
pp
8vb

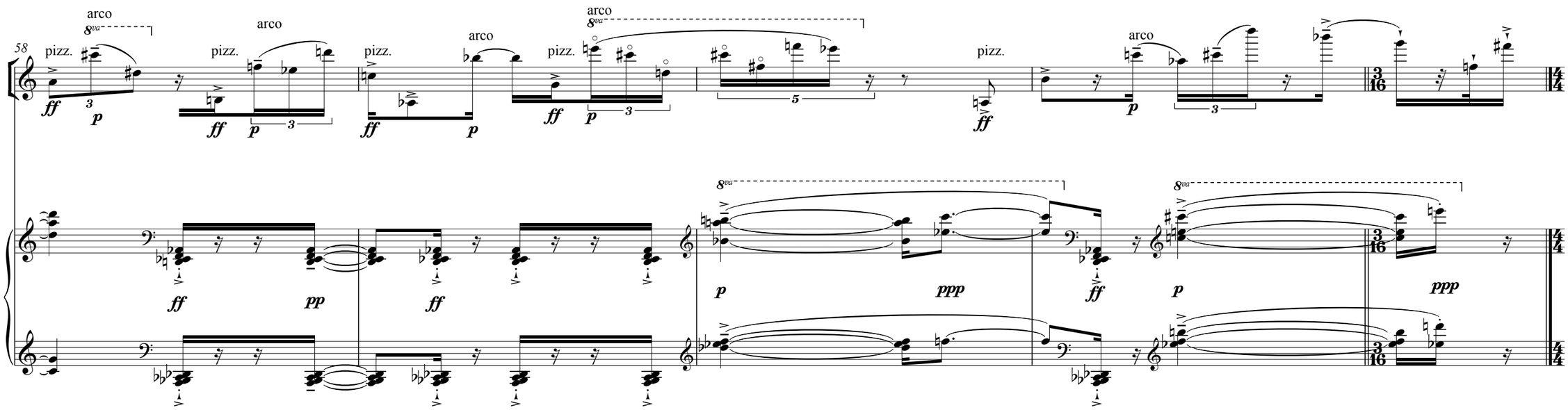
49

(8)

pizz.

arco

54


58
pizz.
arco
8va
ff
p
pp
ppp

II. Azure flashes falling

Infinitely delicate, tender and contemplative

♩ = c.40

63 solo violin

poco vib. (fast and narrow)

s.t. ---------- ord.

s.t. flautando

ord.

gliss

gliss

gliss

69

With increasing light-filled intensity

accel.

♩ = 50

I sempre

s.t. flautando

ord.

gliss

gliss

gliss

dolce espress.

75

Becoming brilliantly bright

accel.

♩ = 60

80

accel.

Elemental, ecstatic

♩ = 90

87

fff

fff

92

sul pont.

ord.

sffz *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff*

pp

Ped.

95

p ff p ff p ff *fff*

fff

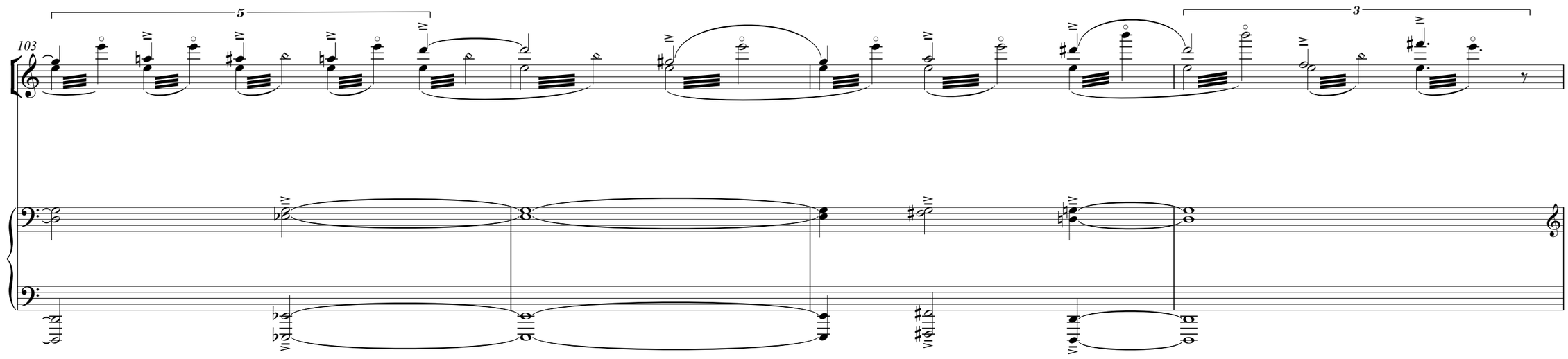
100

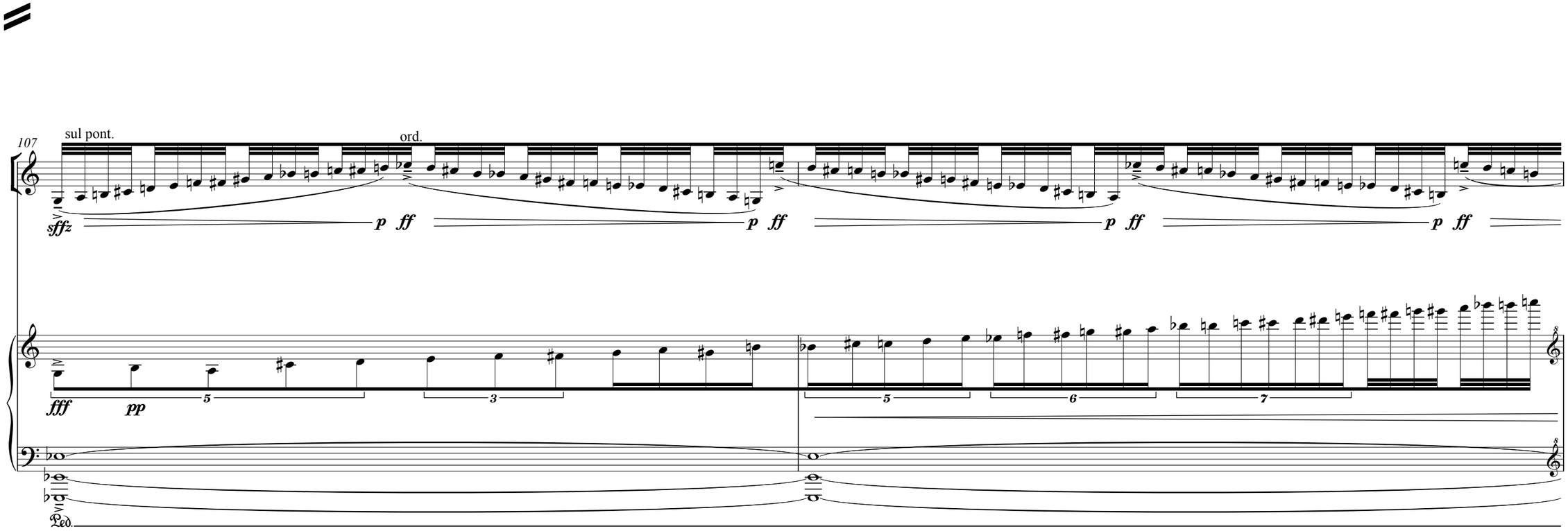
sul pont. ord.

sffz *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *p ff* *fff*

pp *fff*

Ped.


103
5
3


107
sul pont.
ord.
sffz
p ff
p ff
p ff
p ff
fff
pp
5
3
5
6
7
Ped.

109

p ff p ff p ff ff p ff p ff

ff

NB: parts cross

111

p ff p ff p ff p ff p ff

113

nat. harm. gliss.

fff

A few moments of pathos...

♩ = c. 45

116

II

IV III II I

De-tune E-string down a minor 2nd to E♭: repeat as many times as necessary to stabilise new tuning. The notated gesture is only an approximation and can be interpreted freely

fff f p pp f ppp

attacca

8va

fff

Ped.

attacca

Ethereal and dream-like

♩ = 40 - 50

124

pp espress.

p pp

mp pp p

pp mf

HUM: "mmm": both players (either as written or an 8ve below)

pp

8va

p bell-like

pizz. (inside piano)

ord.

pp p bell-like

pizz.

pp

ord.

p bell-like

pizz.

pp

p

Ped.

132

pp

ff

attacca

HUM

p ff pp

2 RIN: to be played by the pianist
Smaller = slightly flat E♭5
Larger = slightly flat F4

Let ring into next mov.

f p f p f

8va

p bell-like

ord.

p bell-like

pizz.

mf f f ff ff ff

attacca

IV. Seeking realms forever bright

Mercurial

♩ = c.45

143

always senza or poco vib.

pizz. arco

pizz. arco

sost. ped.

sost. ped.

149

III

pizz.

arco

II
III

pizz.

sost. ped.

153

arco

III

II

III II

pizz.

arco

(8)

8va

Ped.

157

accel.

With wild energy

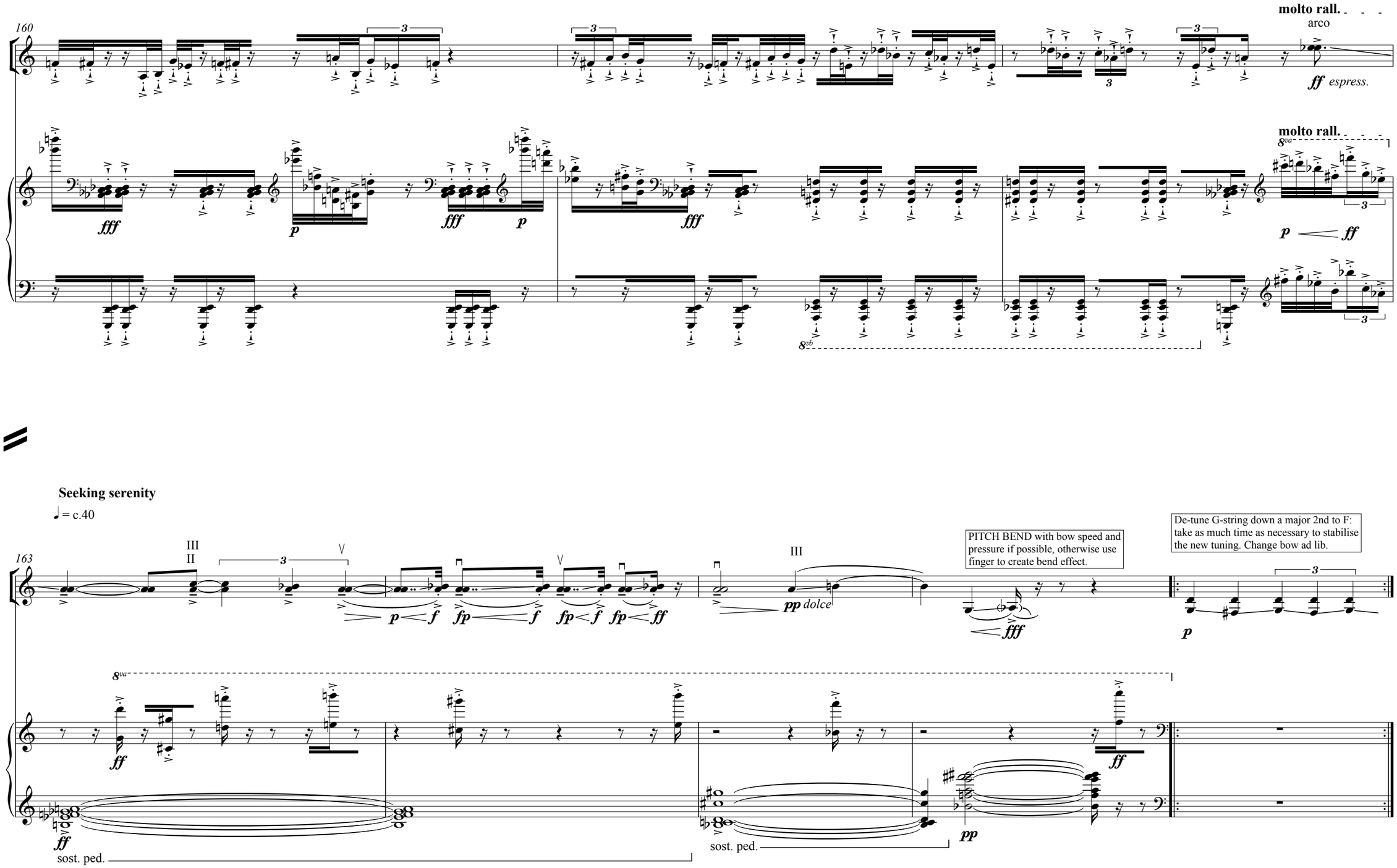
♩ = c.60

sim.

sp.

agitato

fff agitato


160
molto rall.
arco
ff espress.
fff
p
fff
p
fff
molto rall.
8va
p
ff
8vb
Seeking serenity
♩ = c.40
163
III
II
p
f
fp
f
fp
f
fp
ff
III
pp dolce
PITCH BEND with bow speed and pressure if possible, otherwise use finger to create bend effect.
fff
De-tune G-string down a major 2nd to F: take as much time as necessary to stabilise the new tuning. Change bow ad lib.
p
8va
ff
ff
sost. ped.
sost. ped.
pp
ff

168

gliss. from grace note to main note

sul IV

fp fp fp fp fp fp fp fp fp

f 5 pp

pp 3

Ped.

174

fp fp fp fp fp

arco I

mp

pizz. IV II III I

arco II

p

pizz.

arco

pp

pizz.

arco

mp

p

pp

Ped.

I

179

Transition - violinist should walk behind piano to exchange instruments

During this transition the violinist exchanges instruments, replacing the ordinary violin with the scordatura violin strung with 4 G-strings tuned: G, F♯, E, C

ppp

If the scordatura violin is unavailable then the piece should end here.

Ped.

V. We hear *the timeless* calling

Yearning, yet calm

♩ = 40 - 48

184

FINGERING

SCORDATURA VIOLIN

IV III II I

PITCH BEND with bow speed and pressure - not fingered

sim.

2 RIN: to be played by the pianist
Smaller = slightly flat E♭5
Larger = slightly flat F4

189

sim.

194

VI. And here at last, *we flow like light*

A **Contemplative and temporally fluid, aspiring to eternity, as in plainchant**

♩ = 40 - 50

199

FINGERING

The constant trilling should give a sense of life to the sound, but the fundamental tone should never be strongly audible since the main melody is in the harmonics

SCORDATURA VIOLIN

pp *sempre flautando*

RIN

PIANO

sempre pizz.

p

Ped. *sempre*

205

211

ff

pp

ff

pp

B **Slightly faster, but with essentially the same feeling**

♩ = 50 - 60

217

mp *sempre flautando*

f

mp

f

mp

f

SING: "ah": violinist only (at whatever 8ve is most comfortable)

p *sempre*

mp *sempre*

Ped. *sempre*

223

mp *f* *mp* *f* *mp*

229

ff *mp* *ff* *pp*

C **Slightly faster, but with essentially the same feeling**

♩ = 60 - 70

235

f sempre flautando

SING: "ah": both players (at whatever 8ve is most comfortable)

f sempre

PIANO (pizz.)

f sempre

Ped. sempre

241

f

247

fff

f

ff

p

p

D **Slightly faster, but with essentially the same feeling**

♩ = 70 -80

253

ff

ff

ff

Ped.

As the bow leaves the string it should describe an elegant 'slow-motion' arc as you bring your arm back to your side.

...SUSTAIN THE SILENCE...

Gradually release pedal causing the string to buzz as the sound decays. Synchronise the buzzing decay with the arc of the violinists bow.