Béla Bartók

Ten Easy Pieces

orig. for piano (1909)

Transcribed for String Quartet

by Alan Bonds

Ten Easy Pieces for Piano (1909)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Ten Easy Pieces (Bartók)	
Native name	*Tíz könnyű zongoradarab*
Catalogue	Sz. 39
	BB 51
Composed	1908
Published	1909 - Budapest
Movements	11
Original Scoring	Piano

Ten Easy Pieces, Sz. 39, BB 51 (Hungarian: *Tíz könnyű zongoradarab*) is a collection of short pieces for piano by Hungarian composer Béla Bartók. It was composed in 1908.

Though initially it was conceived as Eleven Piano Recital Pieces, one of the pieces was dropped and used as a bagatelle in Bartók's Fourteen Bagatelles. However, he was required by a contractual obligation with his publisher to write eleven pieces, so he wrote a dedication which is not numbered but serves to complement the set. For this reason, this set and his set of bagatelles are related, both in their harmonic and rhythmic styles and in their educational vocation. These works were heavily influenced by Bartók's fascination with folk music and by his admiration to Claude Debussy, who had, by then, made a name for himself.

Whereas Fourteen Bagatelles is decidedly more difficult for young pianists, this set was planned to serve as an easy contemporary preparation for students. It is, indeed, being used in the intermediate piano repertoire, together with his other set of short pieces, *For Children*. The set was published a year later, in 1909, by Rozsnyai Károly.

The set consists of eleven pieces in total, although the initial dedication is not numbered. It has an overall approximate duration of 17 minutes. The movement list is as follows:

Dedication

1. Peasant Song
2. Frustration (Painful Wrestling)
3. Slovakian Boys' Dance
4. Sostenuto
5. Evening in Transylvania
6. Hungarian Folksong
7. Dawn
8. Slovakian Folksong
9. Five-Finger Exercise
10. Bear Dance

Bartók makes an extensive use of pentatonic scales, modes, novel harmonies and ostinato. All the pieces have a duration of about one or two minutes. Out of all 11 pieces, only three are based on folk tunes: numbers three, six and eight. The rest of the pieces were created in their entirety by Bartók, who used to make a great number of short pieces for piano using folk-like structures and melodies. The dedication uses material that he associated to his friend, the violinist Stefi Geyer, to whom he dedicated his first violin concerto. The motif in this dedication was thoroughly used both in the concerto and in his Two Portraits, as well as in the last of his Fourteen Bagatelles, all of them written between 1906 and 1908.

The set begins with a slow motif in the dedication, consisting of just four notes.

Following the dedication, the first piece begins and is a very simple melody played in unison which is marked allegro moderato.

The second piece, alternatively translated as Painful Wrestling, has an ostinato bass line while the melody is being played with the right hand.

The third piece, which is an arrangement of a folk tune, already presents some of the elements seen in the previous pieces, both unison and accompaniment.

The fourth piece, in turn, becomes a slow tenuto piece where the melody is played with both the left and the right hand, but not in unison.

The fifth piece is the longest in the set. Its structure is strictly ABABA, and the melody is played exclusively with the right hand.

The sixth, an arrangement of a popular folk song, explores rhythm with both hands.

The seventh presents melodies in thirds where harmonies clash constantly, as opposed to the sixth whose melody revolves around a pre-set folk tune.

The eighth arrangement in the set is, again, a tenuto-like piece which is constructed using a folksong melody.

Then, the ninth piece is a study to practice scales with all five fingers.

Finally, the tenth piece in the set consists of a well-known melody accompanied by a bouncing note in the bass line.

Bartók is known to have played pieces five and ten for recording on November 20, 1929, although it is unknown if he ever recorded himself playing the rest of the pieces. Recording whole compositions used for educational purposes was an uncommon practice at the time, since recording at length was expensive.

In a letter to Bartók he says:

> "I wish to emphasize that it would be better if the rules of classical harmony would be even more strictly observed without any modernization than in the ones already published. I should not like to see a new trend in the undertaking but rather the beaten track on which you can continue working from time to time…"

Szelényi observes that this was simply a reflection of the conservatism of the time. However, within these strictures, Bartók was determined to set his folk melodies in a manner which reflected their modality. He wished to move beyond the clichéd diatonic accompaniments common at this time. In a lecture, Bartók said:

> "It is always important, however, that the musical mantle in which we dress the melody should be related to the character of the melody as well as the musical traits openly or disguisedly inherent in the melody. In other words, so that the melody and every addition to it should create the impression of being an organic entity."

ABOUT THIS EDITION

This version for string quartet could be part of a voyage of discovery for the string player which culminates in the duos, string quartets and the works for string orchestra and full orchestra. Naturally one should start with the *44 Duos*, but to facilitate this journey I have also arranged the *Roumanian Colinda*, the *Transylvanian Dances*, the *Fifteen Hungarian Peasant Songs*, the *Petite Suite*, the *Roumanian Dances* and a large number of the *Mikrokosmos* for strinq quartet and string orchestra. It is hoped that string players will approach the later works in the same natural and methodical way as pianists.

To absorb the idiom, especially the natural inflections, I thoroughly recommend listening to the excellent recordings by famous Hungarian pianists (including Bartók himself). Even better, modern technology now permits hearing the original singers and players in Bartók's own field recordings.

These pieces have been specially layed out for a quartet to be able to study them from the full score. Because they are fairly short they are ideal cases for study from the score, a practice I wish was more common in student ensembles. It is even more valuable in the parlando rubato songs in which the melodist is invited to play freely and spontaneously. This arrangement was originally typeset for larger paper making it easier to read. It may be possible to print it out magnified by a print bureau. In some cases it will be necessary to photocopy a third page to avoid a page turn. Parts are only necessary to perform a few of the longer ones.

In order to see Bartok's original phrasings in the piano version, they have been retained and bowings should be overlayed. Every care has been taken to preserve the natural song or dance accentuations, usually taking strong beats on down bows and weak beats on up bows in the traditional way. Bartok's hierarchy of accentuations is very clear and has been faithfully retained.

I have omitted No. 9 (Five-finger Exercise) - it's a piano study and doesn't suit strings.

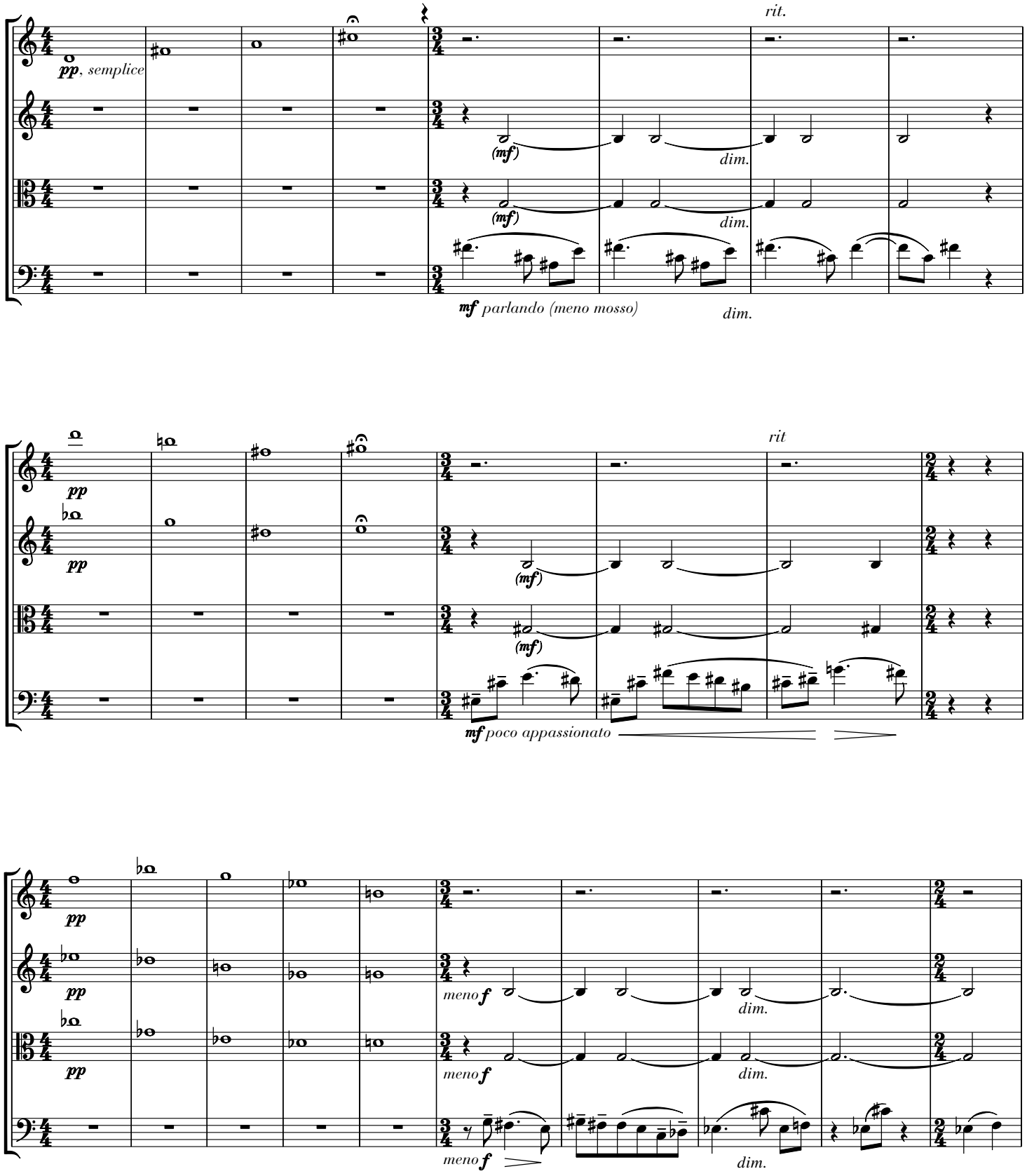
In No. 10, I have used some of Bartók's later version orchestra (BB 103) for a more idiomatic voicing and the use of grace-notes. There are a lot of discrepancies with dynamics & articulations between the two versions.

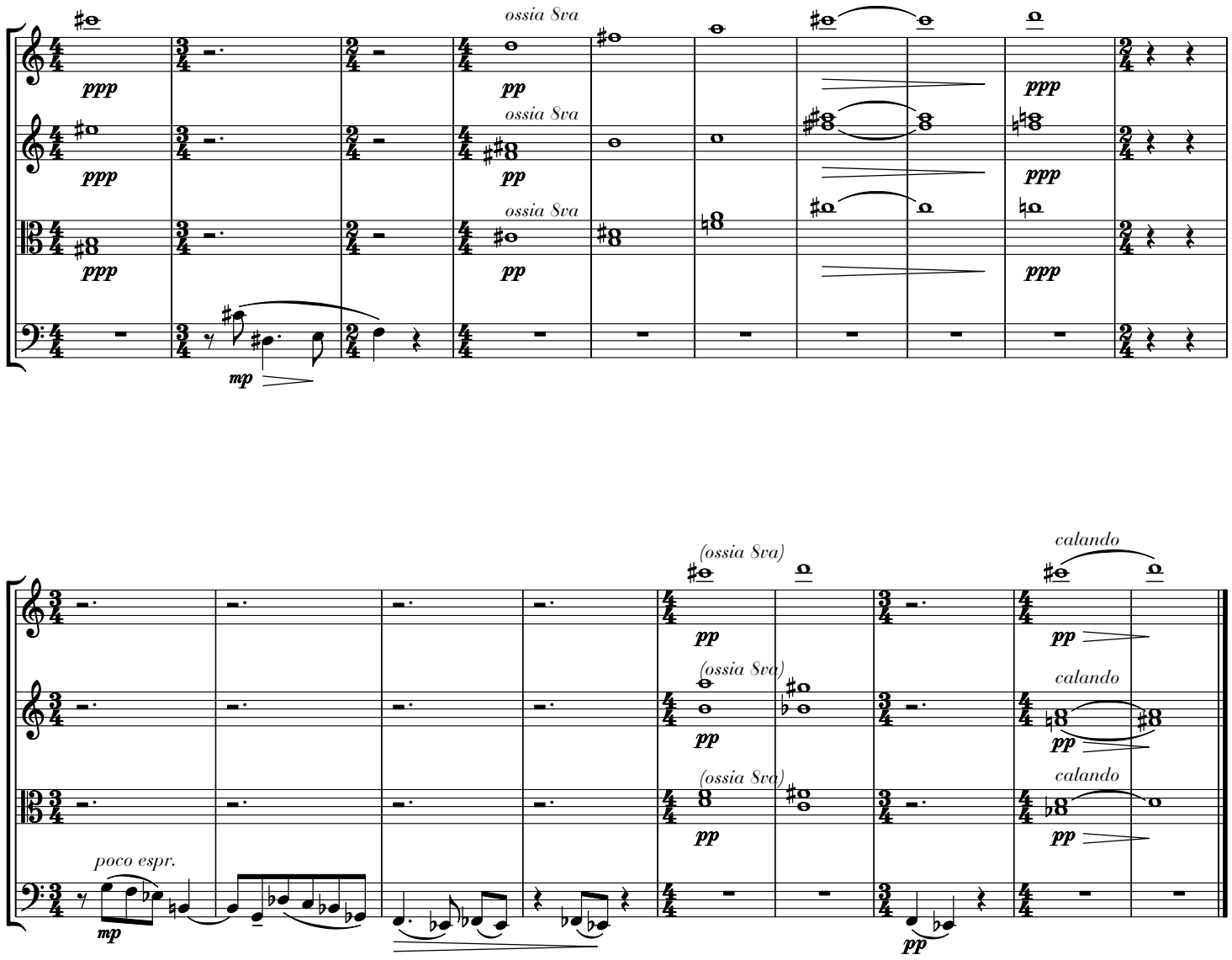
Likewise Bartók's articulations in the piano version are very clear and have been scrupulously retained. Only a few are specifically pianistic and require interpretation.

A few fingerings have been suggested, mostly to restrain players from using too sophisticated an approach, and sometimes to deliberatly encourage the use of open strings in the dances.

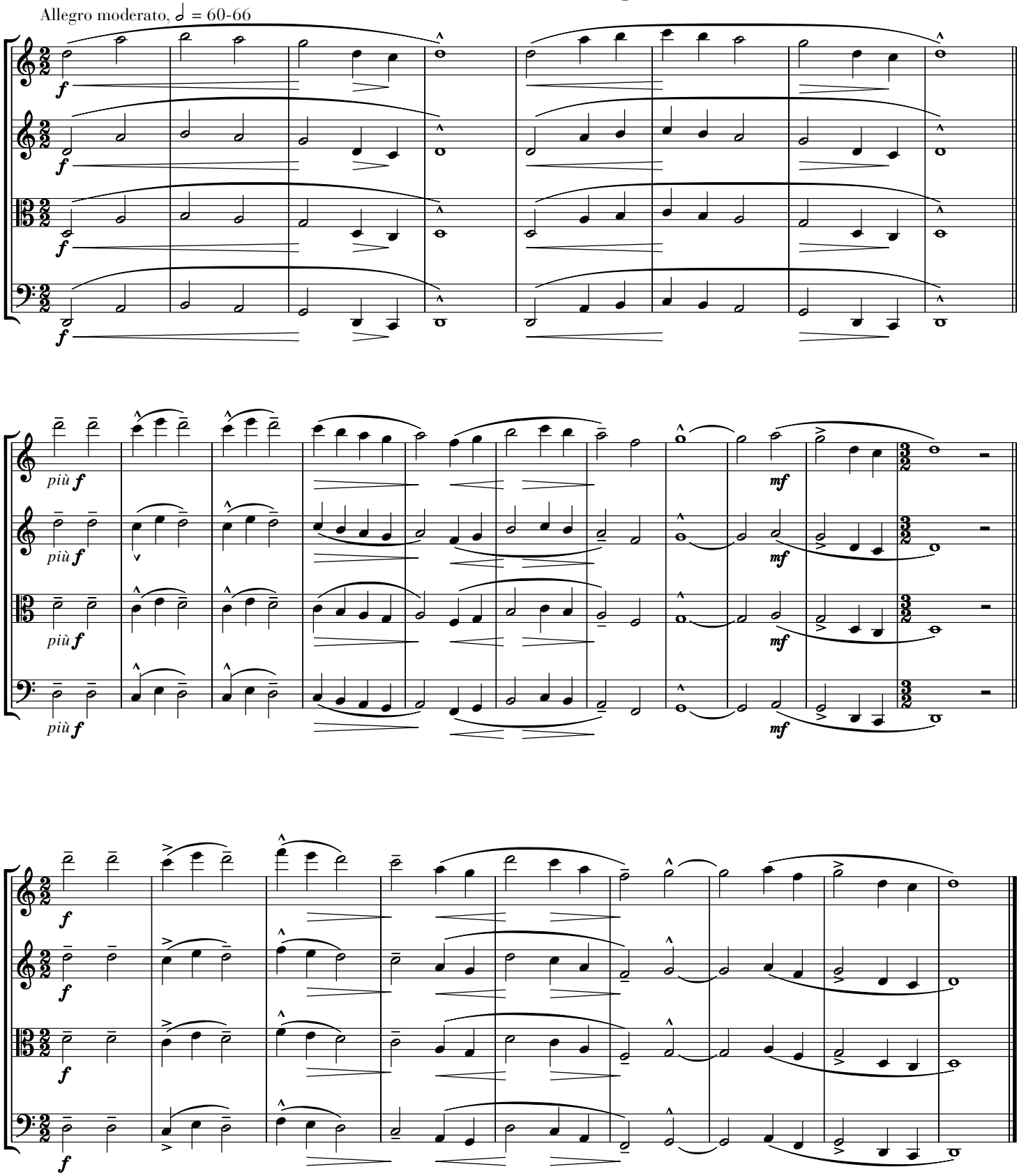
Alan Bonds
Perth, Western Australia
September 2006
[abonds@swiftdsl.com.au]

Dedication

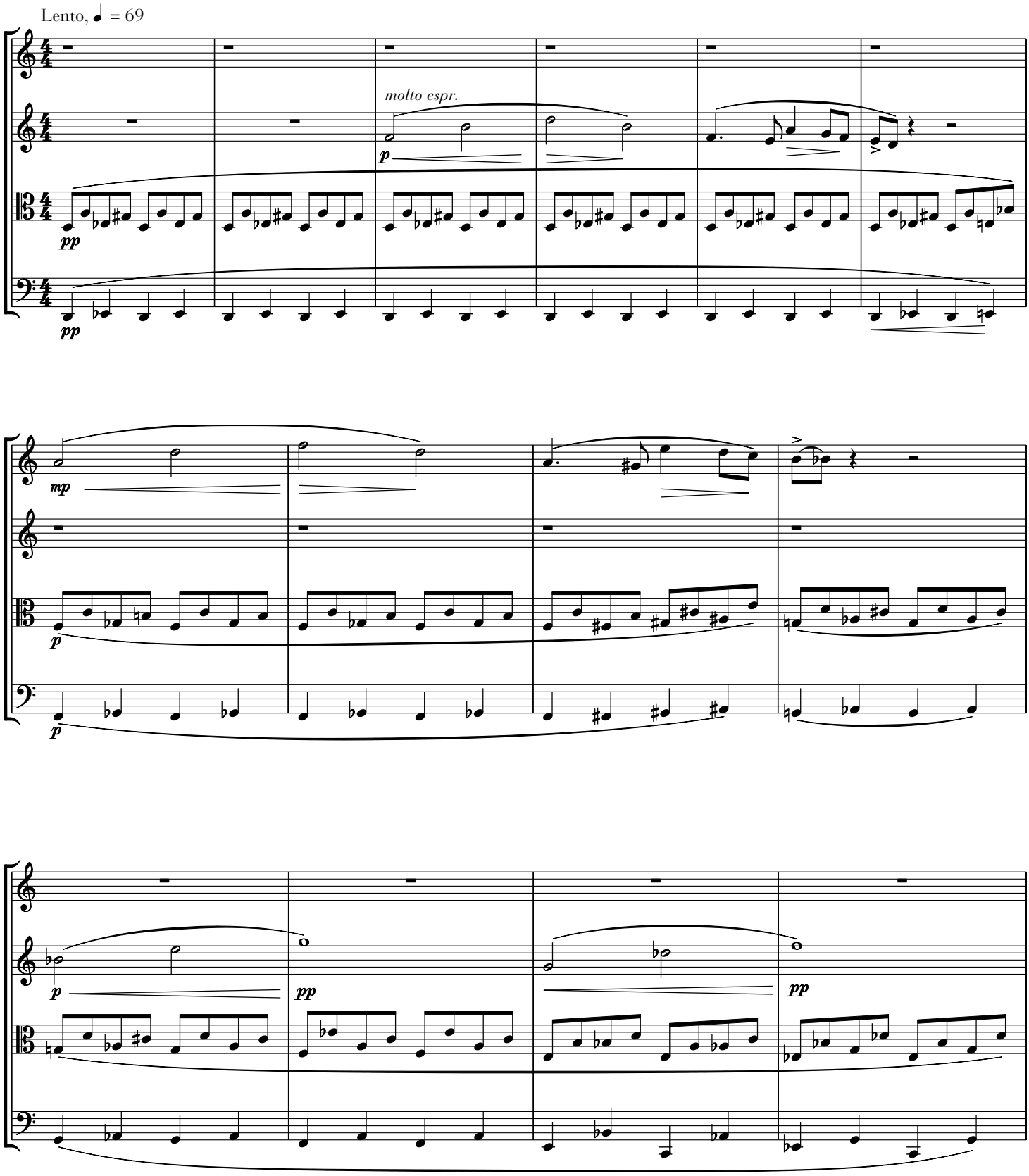

rit.
pp, semplice
(mf)
dim.
(mf)
dim.
mf parlando (meno mosso)
dim.
rit
pp
pp
(mf)
(mf)
mf poco appassionato
pp
pp
pp
meno f
dim.
meno f
dim.
meno f
dim.

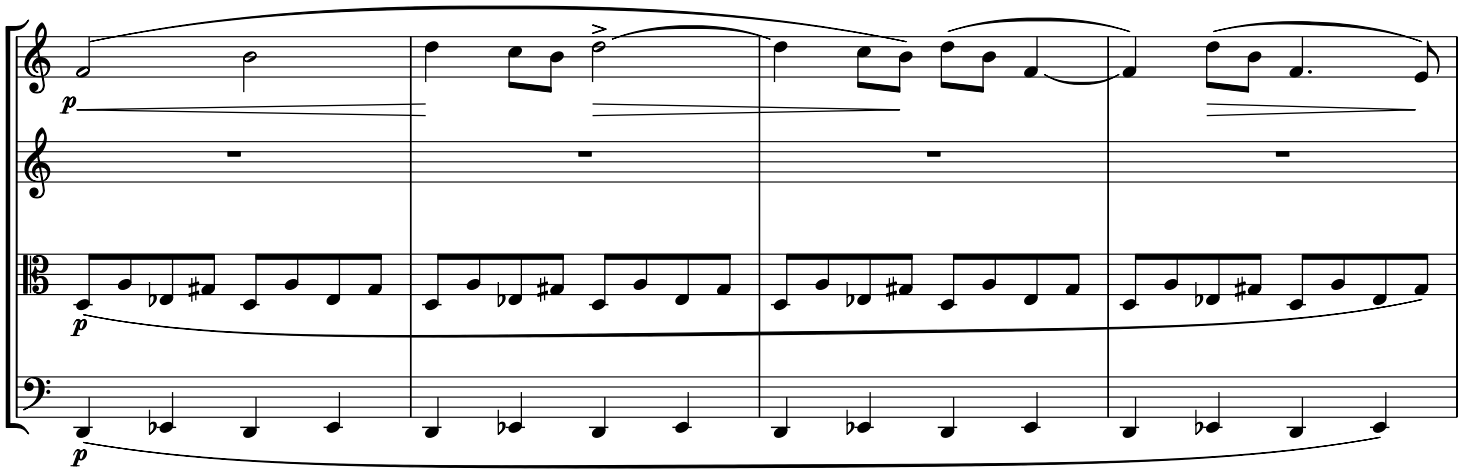

ossia 8va
ossia 8va
ossia 8va
ppp
pp
mp
(ossia 8va)
(ossia 8va)
(ossia 8va)
calando
calando
calando
poco espr.

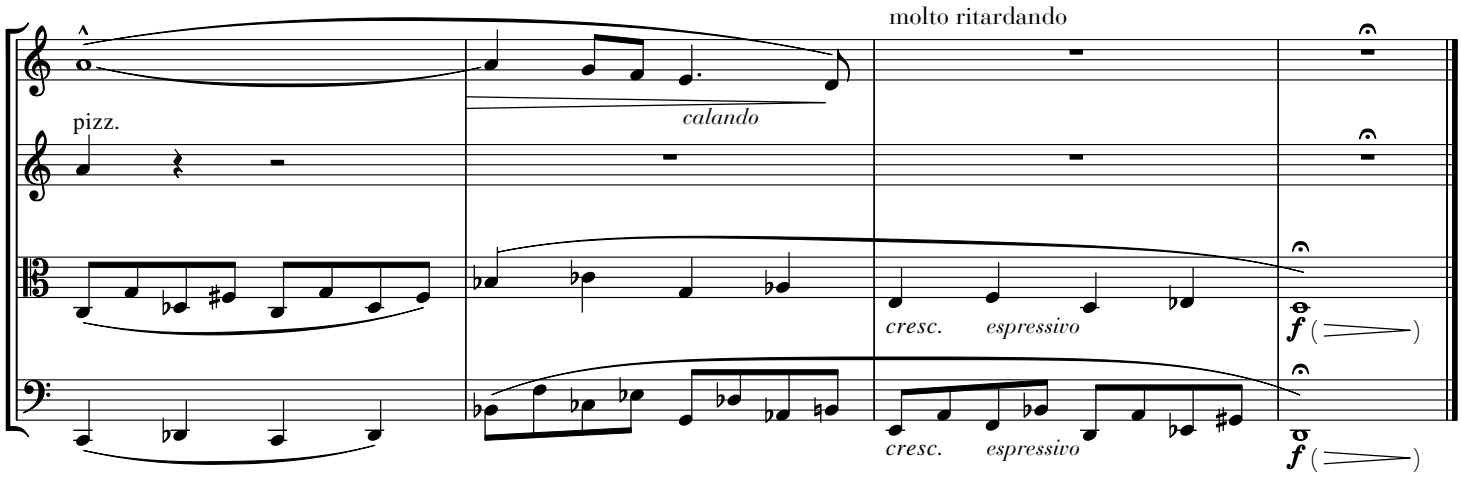
1. Peasant Song



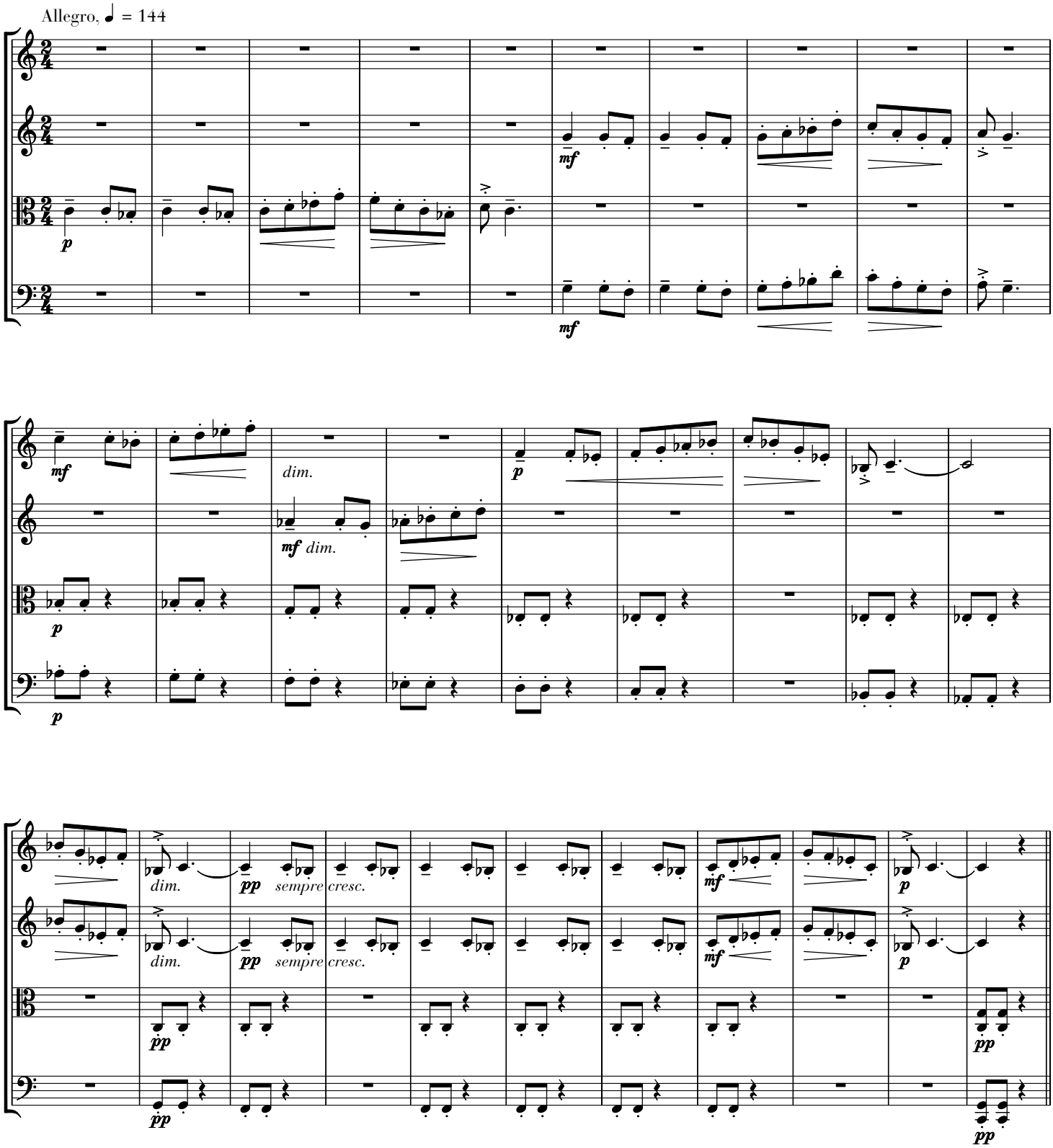
2. Frustration

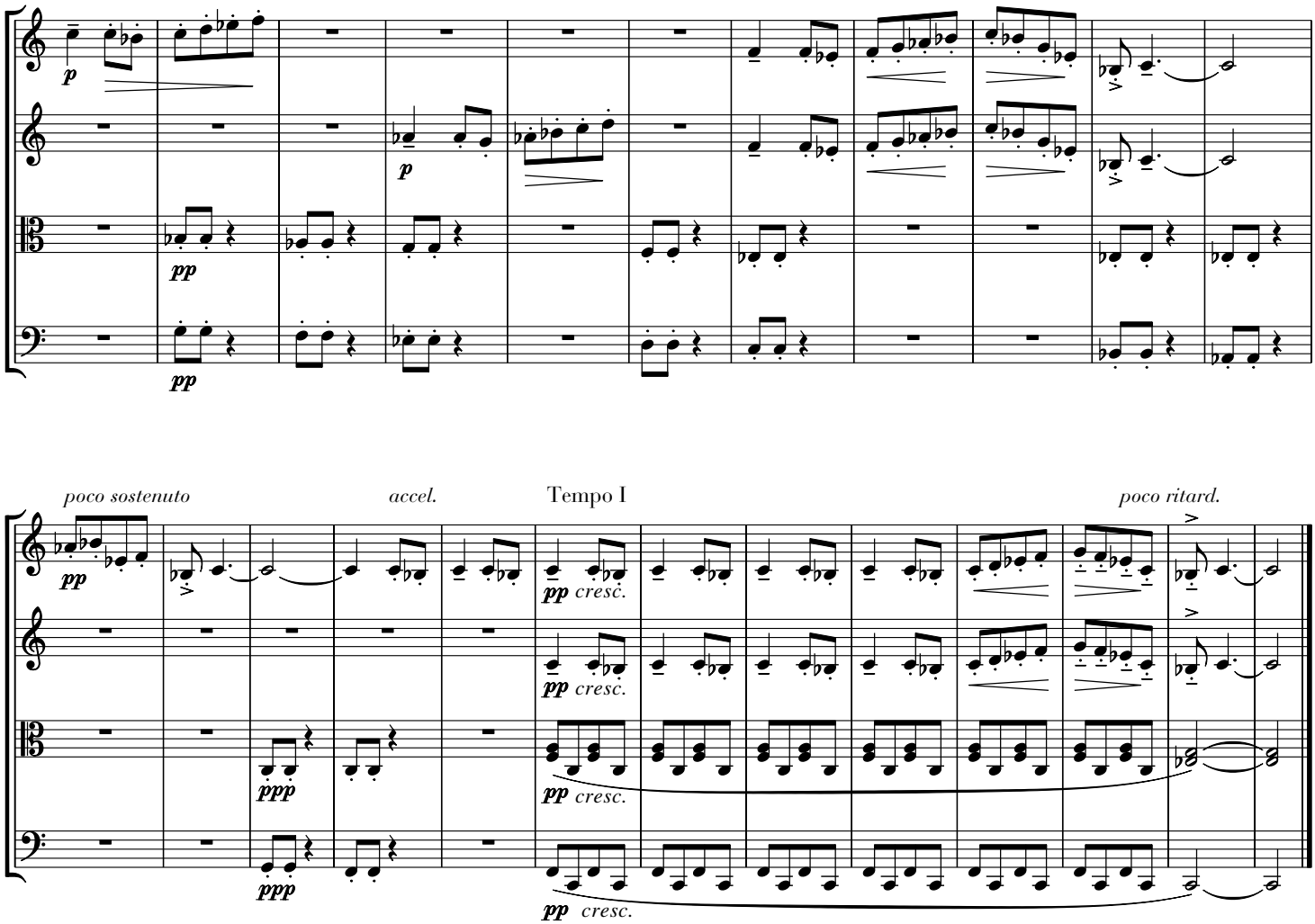



p
p
p

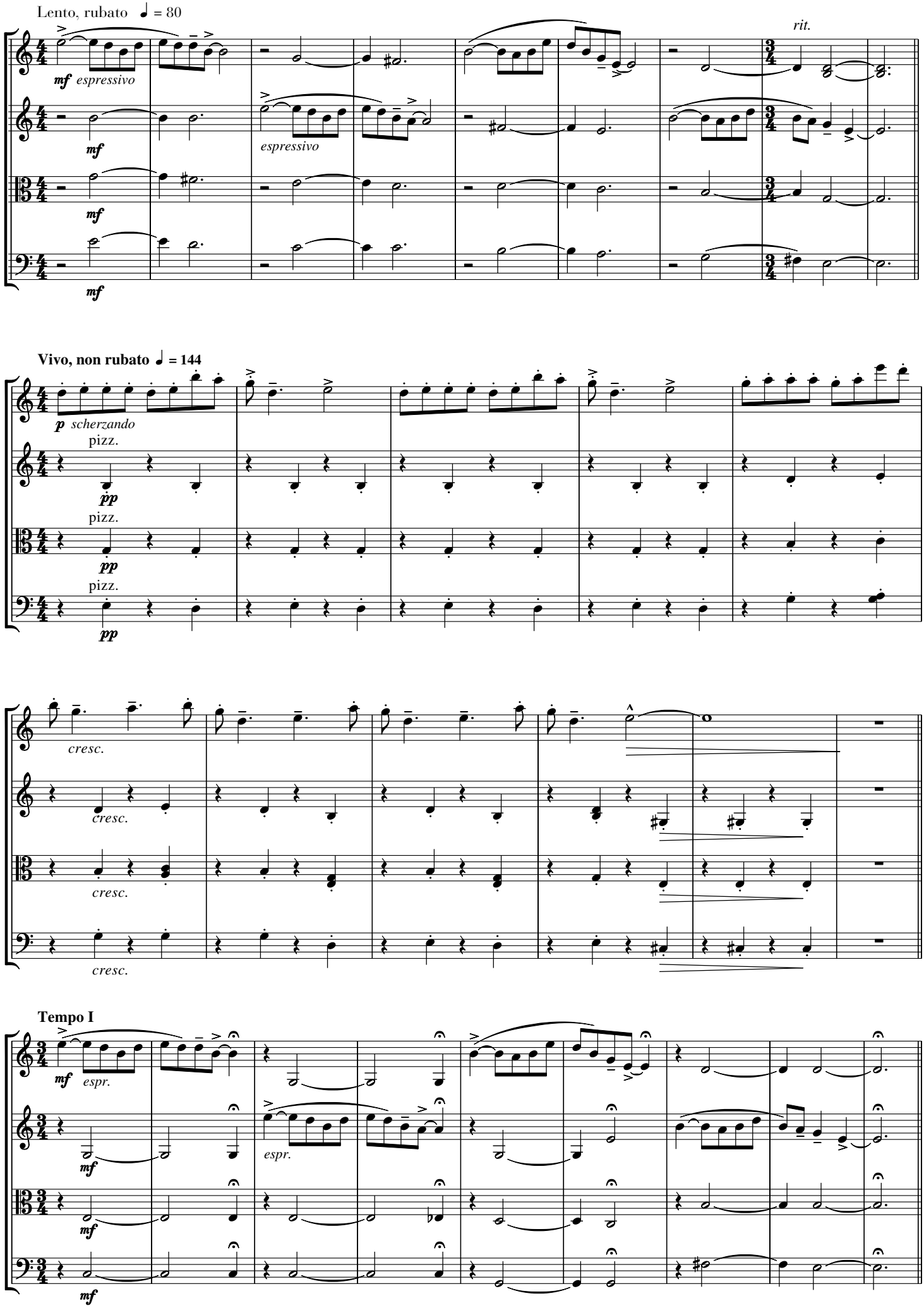

pizz.
calando
molto ritardando
cresc.
espressivo
f
cresc.
espressivo
f

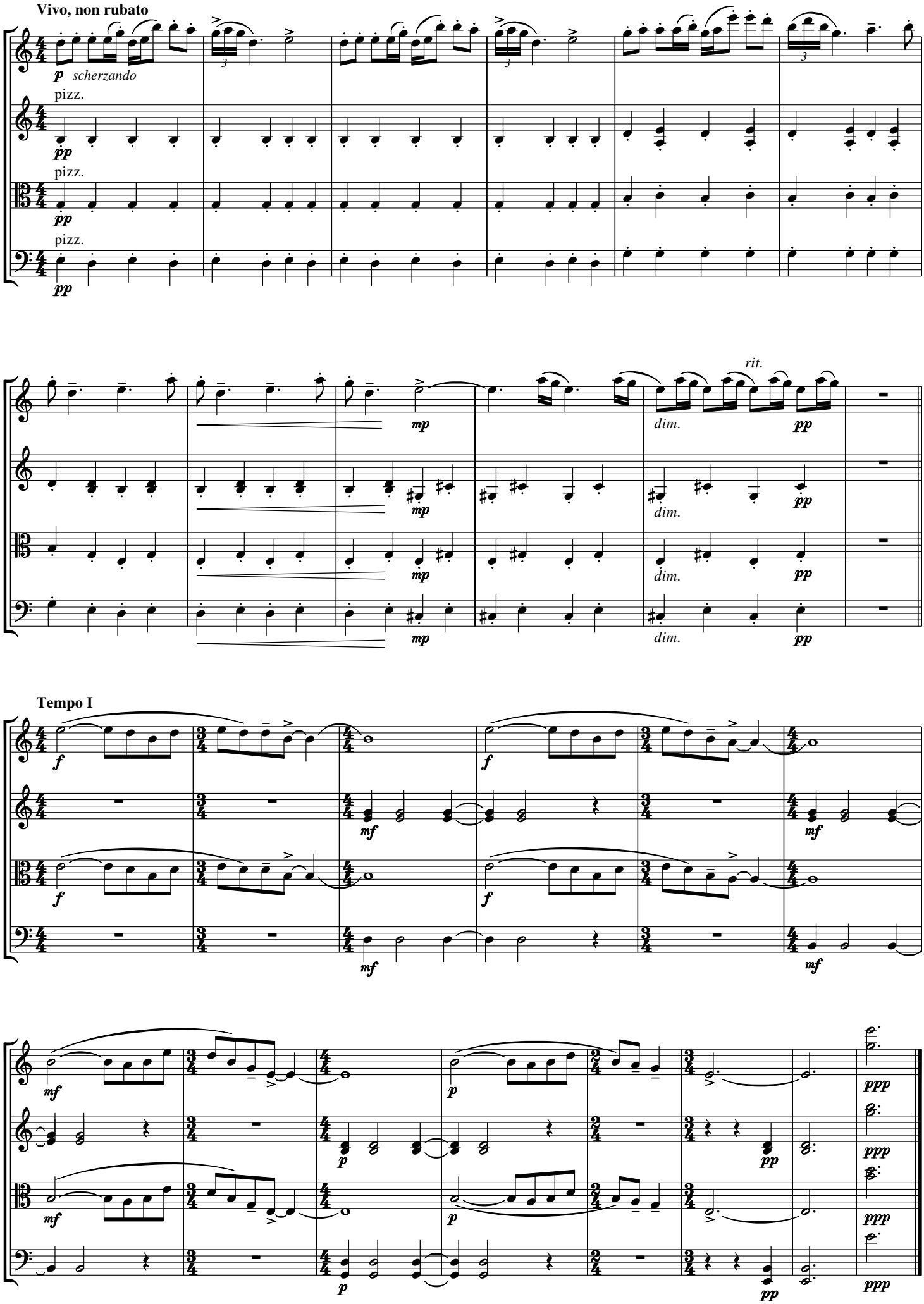
3. Slovakian Boy's Dance



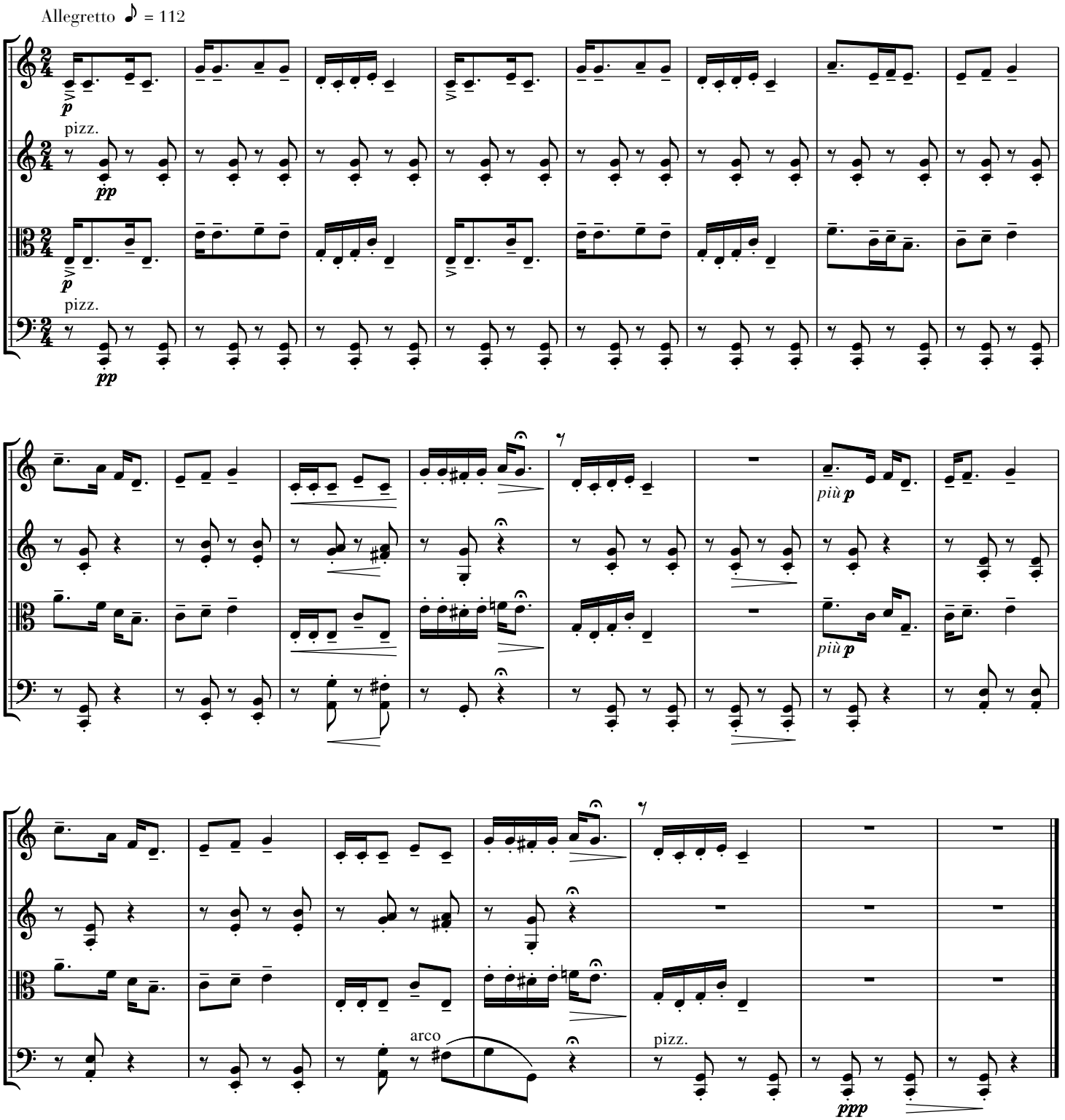

p
pp
p
pp
poco sostenuto
accel.
Tempo I
poco ritard.
pp
pp cresc.
pp cresc.
ppp
pp cresc.
ppp
pp cresc.

5. Evening in Transylvania

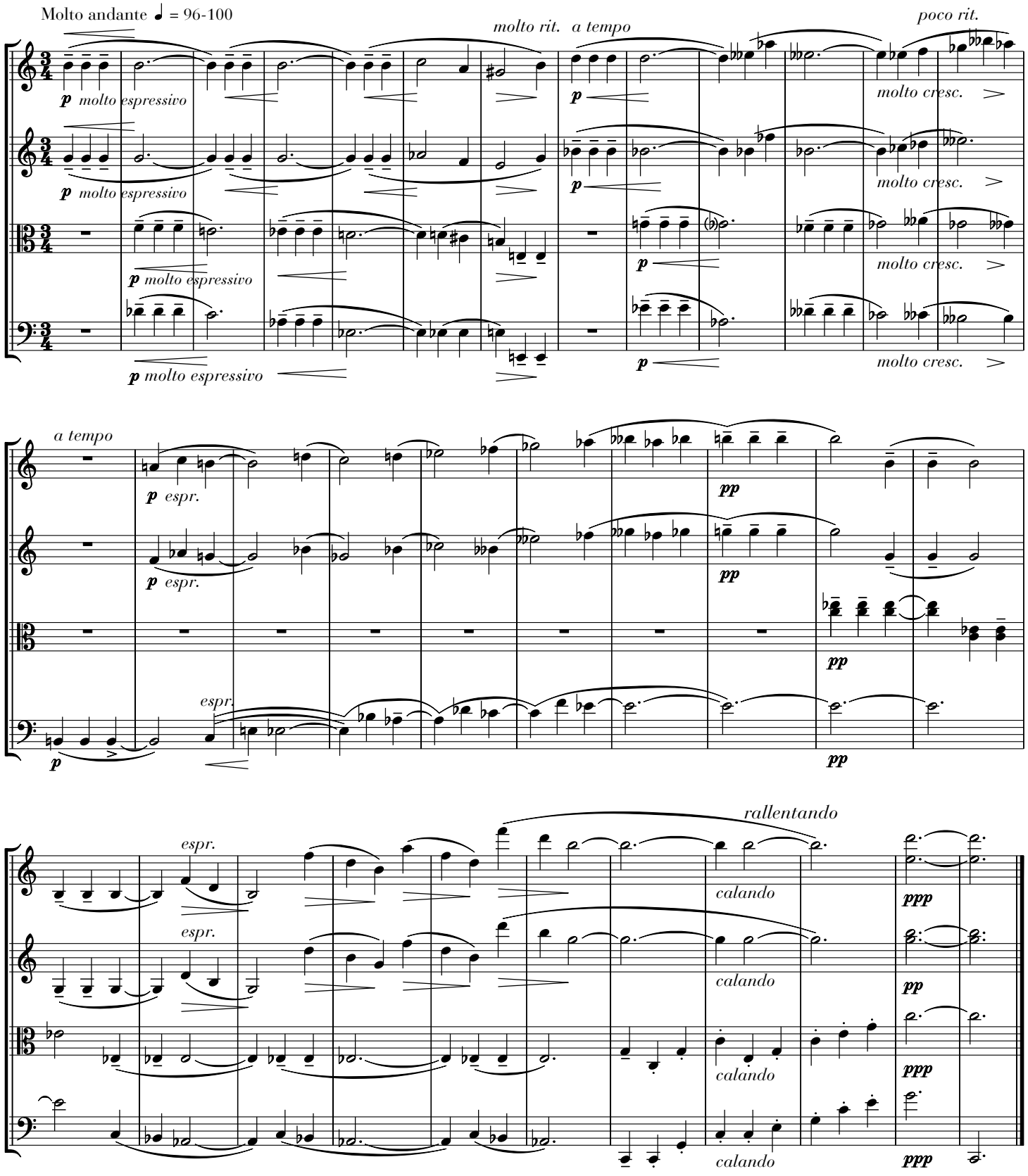



Vivo, non rubato
p scherzando
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp
pizz.
pp
mp
dim.
pp
rit.
Tempo I
f
mf
p
ppp

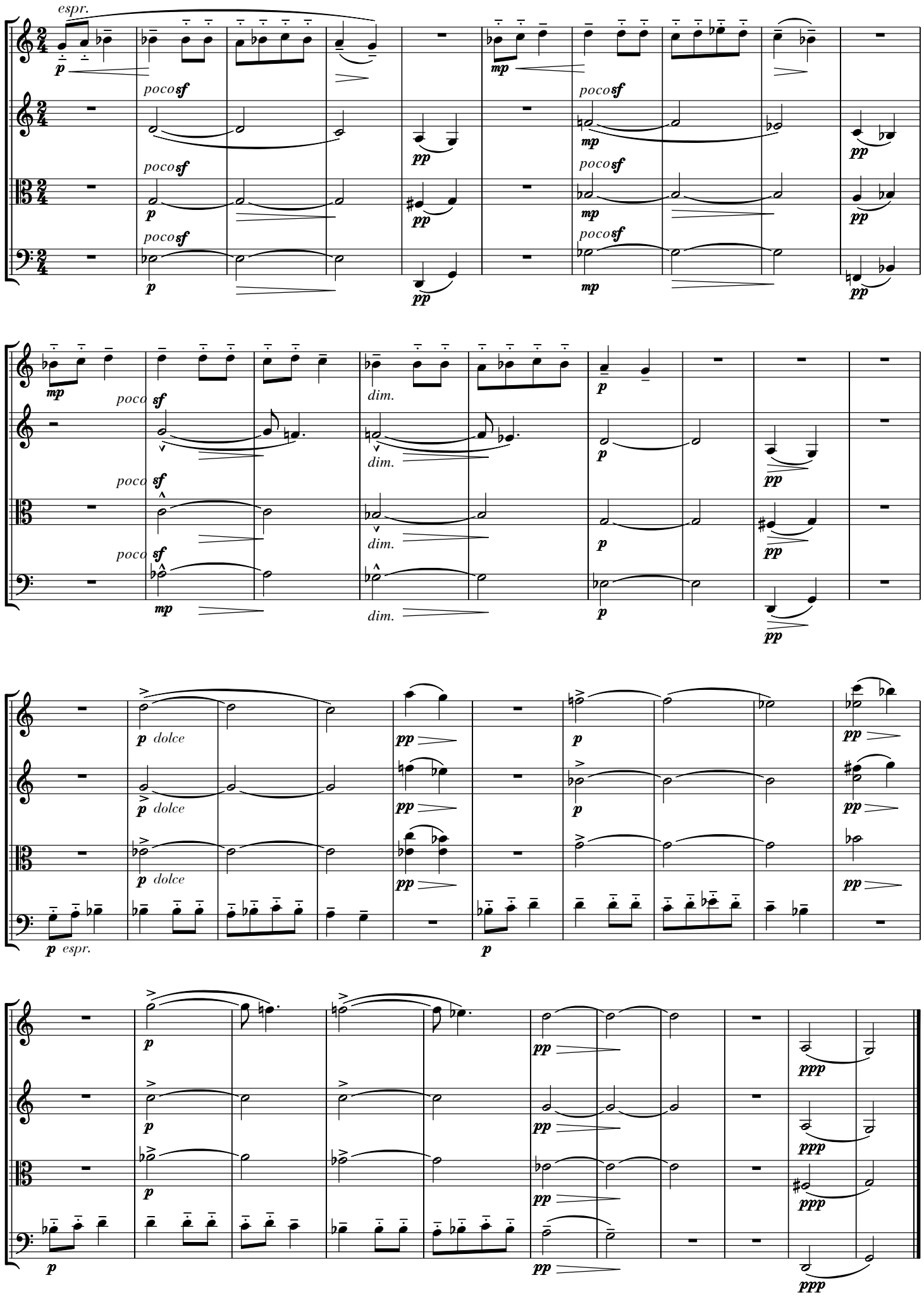
6. Hungarian folksong



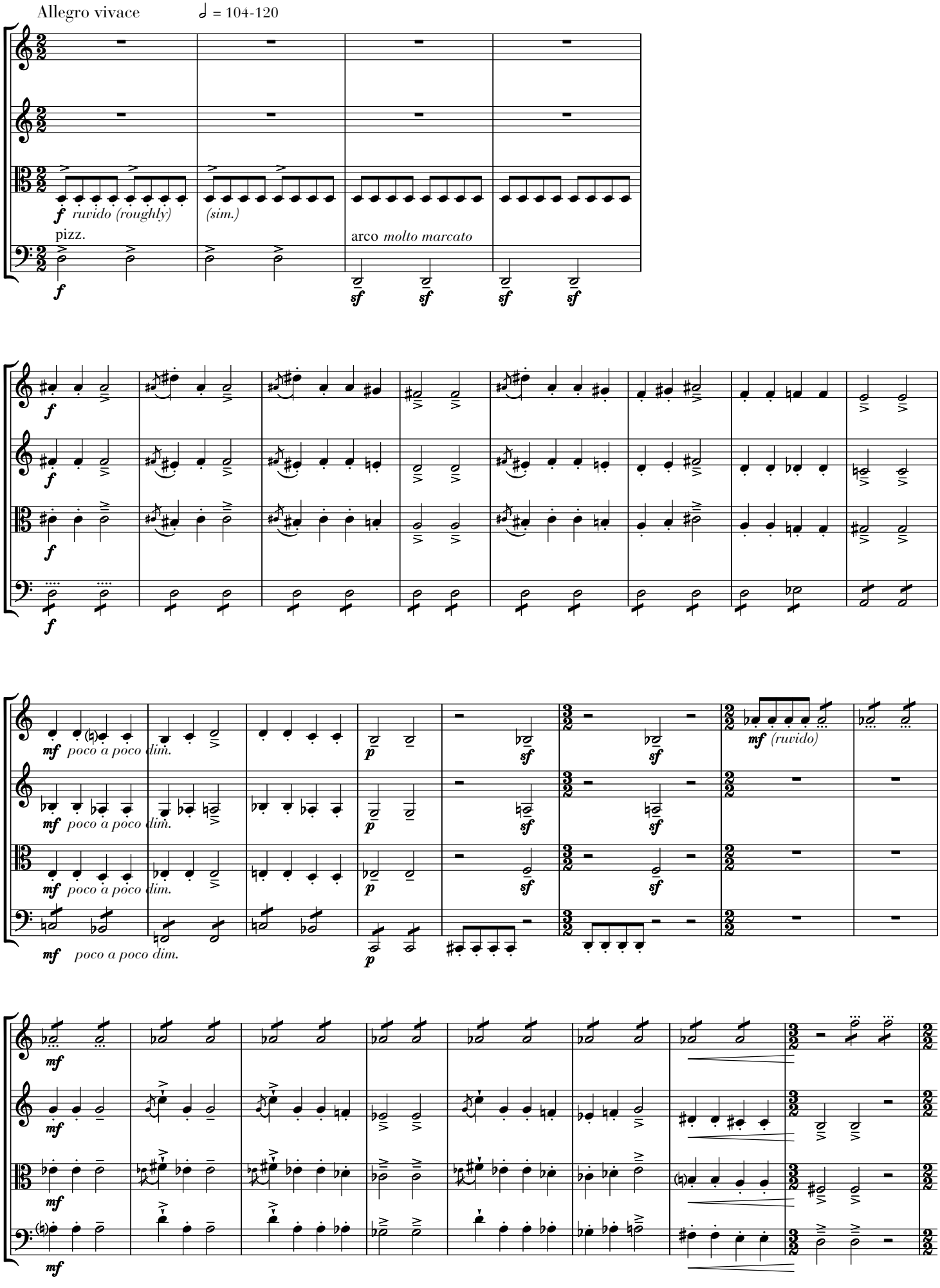
7. Dawn

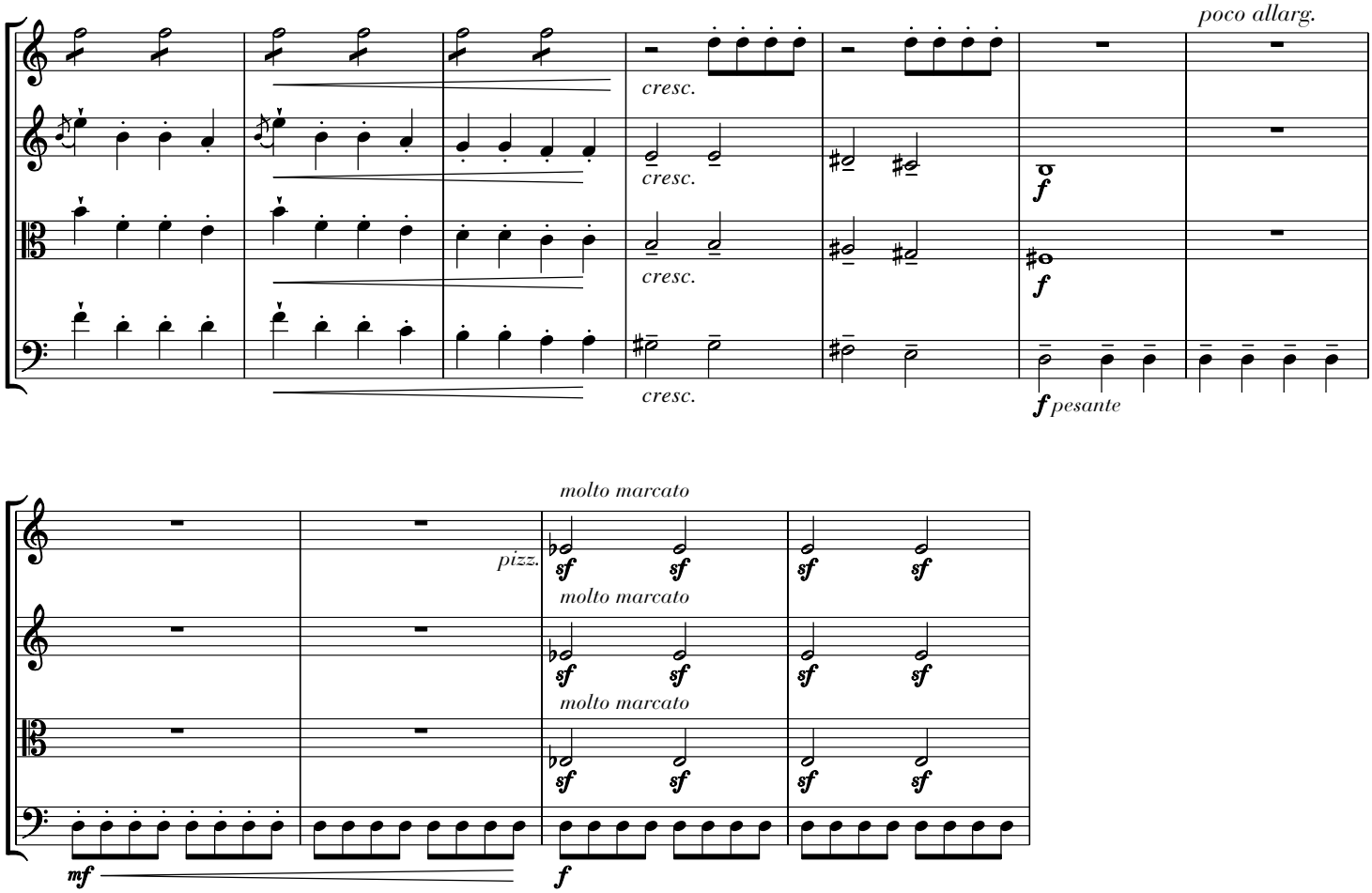

Molto andante ♩ = 96-100
molto rit.
a tempo
poco rit.
p molto espressivo
molto cresc.
a tempo
p espr.
pp
espr.
rallentando
calando
ppp

8. Slovakian Folksong

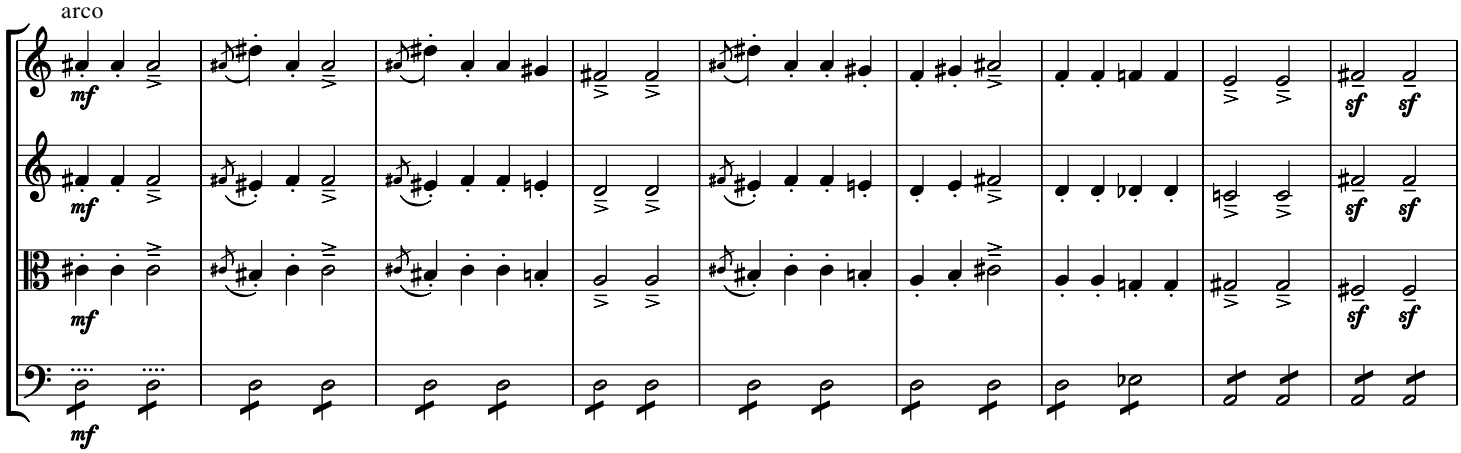


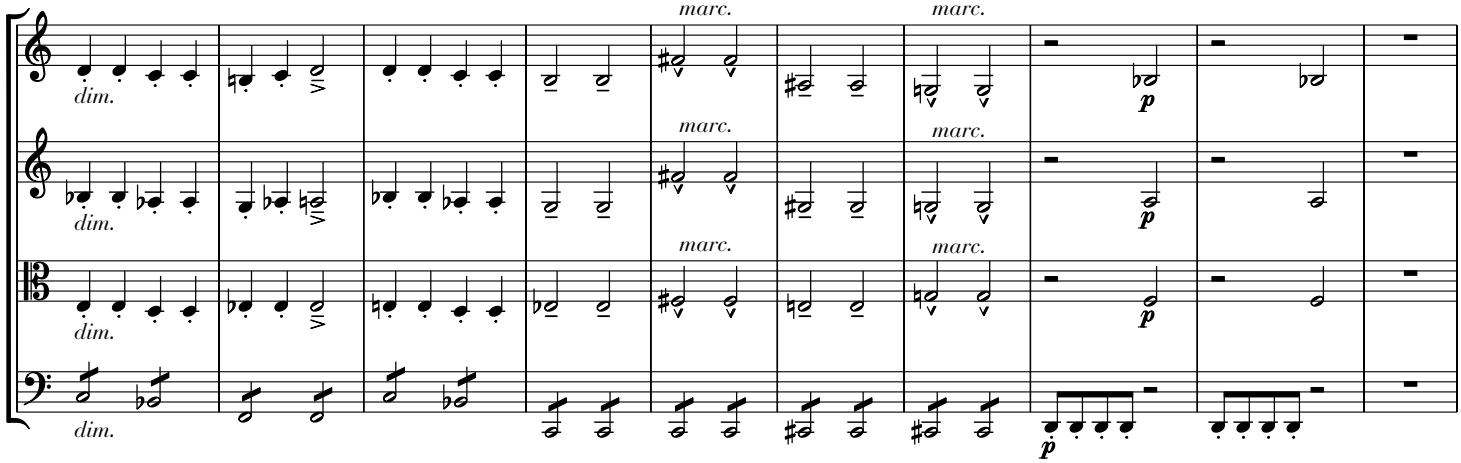
10. Bear Dance

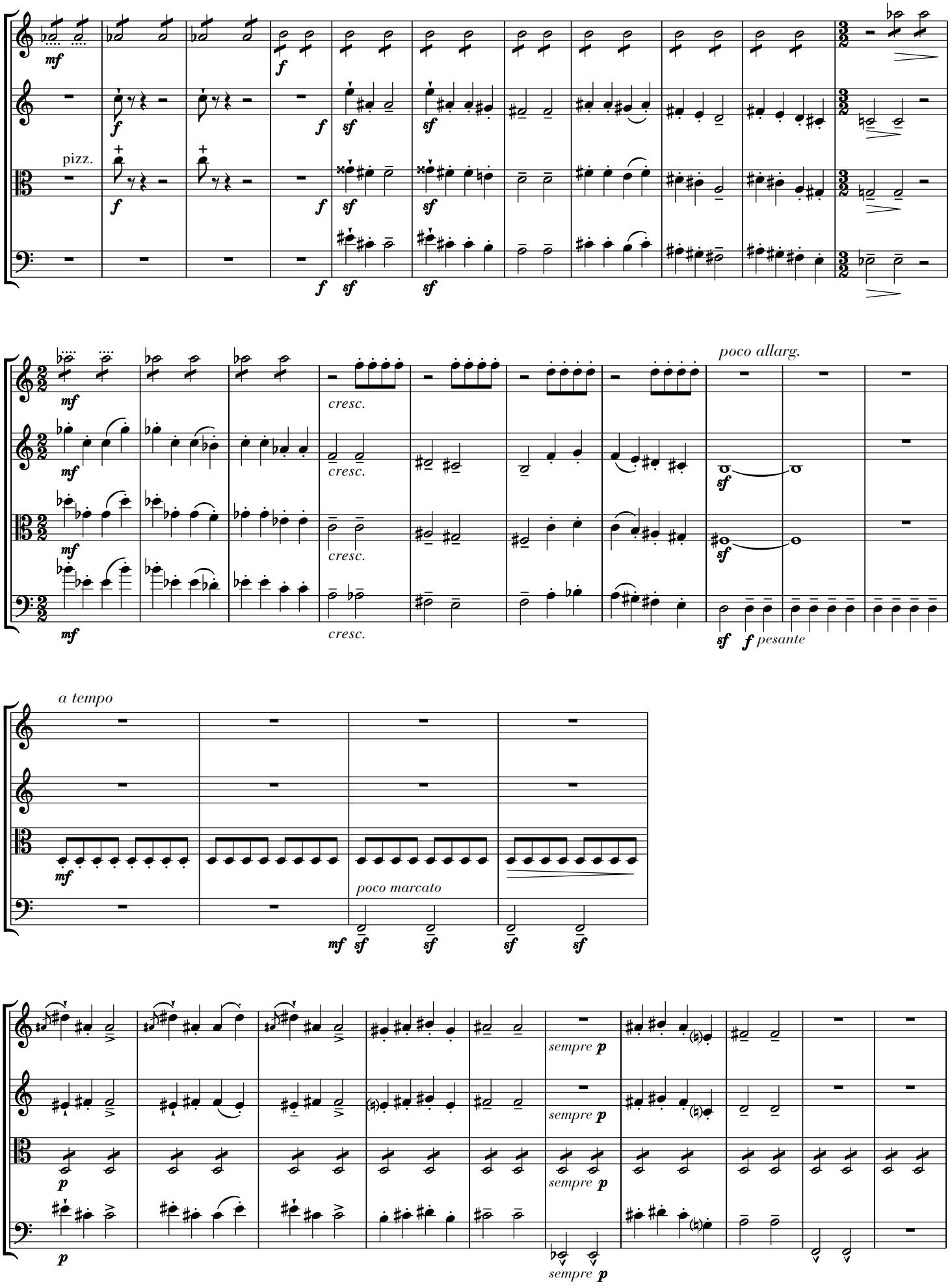


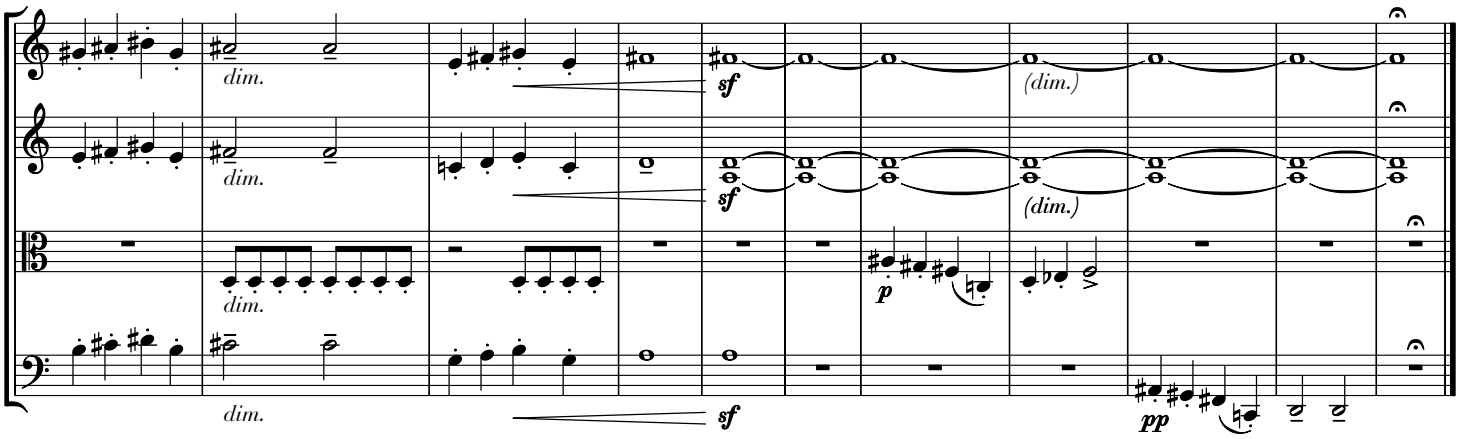

poco allarg.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
f
f
f pesante

molto marcato
pizz.
sf
molto marcato
molto marcato
mf
f


arco
mf


marc.
marc.
dim.
p


pizz.
poco allarg.
cresc.
pesante
a tempo
poco marcato
sempre p


dim.
dim.
dim.
dim.
sf
sf
sf
(dim.)
(dim.)
p
pp