A Hunger Artist

A Chamber Opera in One Act

Adapted from the Story by Franz Kafka

Music and Libretto by Dylan Neely

Instrumentation

Flute
Alto / Tenor Saxophone
Violin
Violoncello

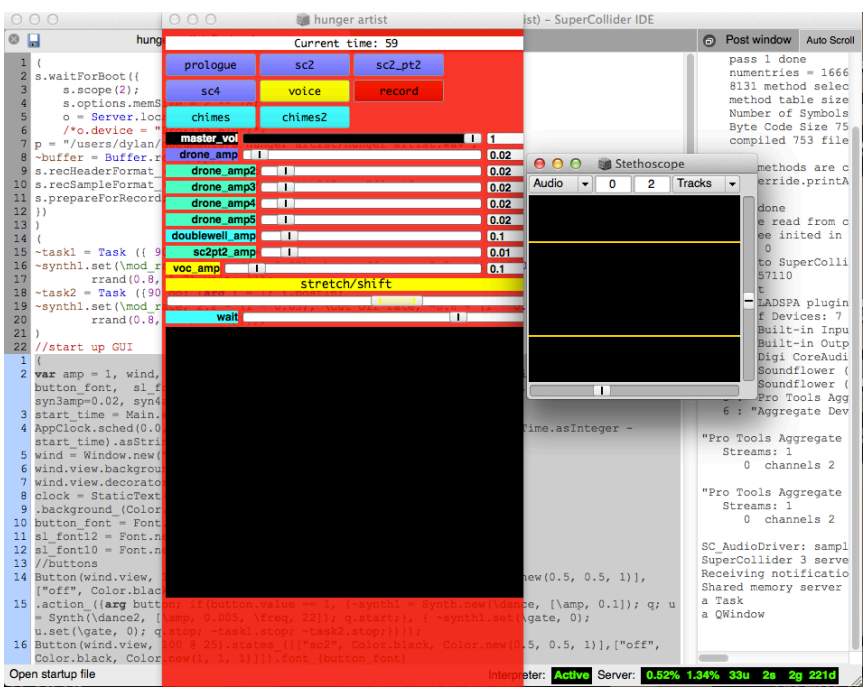
Soprano I
Soprano II
Alto I
Alto II

Live Electronics

Notes

Live Electronics

The live electronics are controlled through a Supercollider patch with a Graphical User Interface. It consists of a set of buttons, amplitude controls, and additional control over the timing of the granulated vocals. The broken speech samples play as the audience takes their seats – the density can be controlled through a slider. They recur at measure 54 of scene 3. The prologue drone is triggered beginning at measure 46 of the prologue. The “sc2” drone is triggered at the beginning of that scene, and “sc2_pt2” is triggered fifteen seconds into the scene. The chimes are triggered during scene 2 in response to larger gestures from the dancer. “chimes1” is non-harmonic; “chimes2” is harmonic and denser in occurrence. The “sc4” drone is triggered at the beginning of scene 4. All electronic cues are indicated in the score.



Dance
The Hunger Artist character is introduced at measure 43 of the prologue and follows with 2'30" of movement which precede scene 1. Scenes 2 and 4 both begin with movement before the spoken "aria" is delivered.

Singers
The singers are placed in the same space as the dancer and interact visually with him. They are asked to assume multiple roles. They play alongside the instruments, mimic the granulated vocal electronic sounds that precede the piece, and create textures out of whispering and sibilance. They are costumed.

Instrumentalists
The instrumentalists are placed in a space distinct from the dancer and singers. A conductor cues all entrances and exits.

Staging
The semi-staged premiere of the work took place on March 8, 2014 during the Signal Flow Festival at Mills College. The dancers and singers were placed in the balcony of the stage, while the instrumentalists were placed on stage. Lighting from the main board is supplemented with overhead projectors in the wings of the balcony. The stage lights fade to darkness as the instruments fade out during the prologue, and come back up for the epilogue. Changing transparencies of black and red bars of light act as lighting cues for the loft from part two of the prologue through the end of scene 4.

Mills College Concert Hall, 2.28.14.

Libretto

Scene 1(a)

Chorus:
Look at him
Look at him
Look at him
Look at him

Look at him / See him there
Look at him / See him there
Look at him / See him there
Look at him / See him there

Look / See
Look / See
Terrible / Amazing
Terrible / Amazing
Fantastic / Horrible
Fantastic / Horrible

Is he real? / Are you true?
Is he real? / Are you true?
I love you / I hate you
I love you / I hate you
Will he live? / Let him die
Will he live? / Let him die
Will he live? / Let him die
Will he live? / Let him die
(solo)
I'll make sure
He won't eat
If he does… (sigh)
what a disappointment it will be

Scene 1(b)

Each night
Each night
Watch him
Watch him
Make sure he don't eat
Make sure he don't eat
All night long

Watch him
Watch him
Make sure he don't eat
Make sure he don't eat
Each night long

(*whispering*)
109 pounds // vital organs healthy // he's so boring

Scene 2

Hunger Artist:
It always happens the same way. On the fortieth day of my fast the cage opens, excited spectators fill the hall, a military band plays, two doctors come inside my cage and measure me. They use instruments. They measure the results of the fast, is what they say. These results are announced through a megaphone – *109 pounds! Vital organs healthy!* Then two young women appear, blissful at being chosen for the honor of helping me down those steps which lead to the tiny table on which food overflows. A carefully chosen invalid repast. But I do not want to eat. I try to say no, but the crowds cheer and finally my impresario tells me enough with my bullshit and they all chant louder and louder for me to eat and finally I do. And they're satiated.
(pause)
They call me pampered. They resent my success. The crowds aren't there for you, they say, all they care about is spectacle. If the crowds leave, if fashions change, it's just a matter of time before fasting comes into fashion once again. I can fast as well as I ever could, better, if they would let me fast as long as I like. I will. I will fast as long as I like. I will leave my impresario and his fascist rules. I will join a circus that lets me do what I want. I will fast as long as I want.

Scene 3
Chorus:
Textured, breathy whispering of meaningless syllables
Return of voices mimicking the broken-up speech sounds from the electronics

Scene 4
Hunger Artist:
How many days has it been? Someone used to come each day and update the notice board; it has stayed at the same number for longer than I can remember. Has anyone counted? I haven't, have you? I have broken all the records. My heart is heavy. I have broken all the records. My heart is heavy. Sometimes a passer-by will stop and make merry over the old figure on the board, that measly low figure, and speak of swindling, and commit the stupidest lie ever invented by indifference and inborn malice. I have never cheated, I have only worked honestly; the world has cheated me. So let me die. Let me die, forgotten in the straw. I only have one apology

to make before I go. I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.

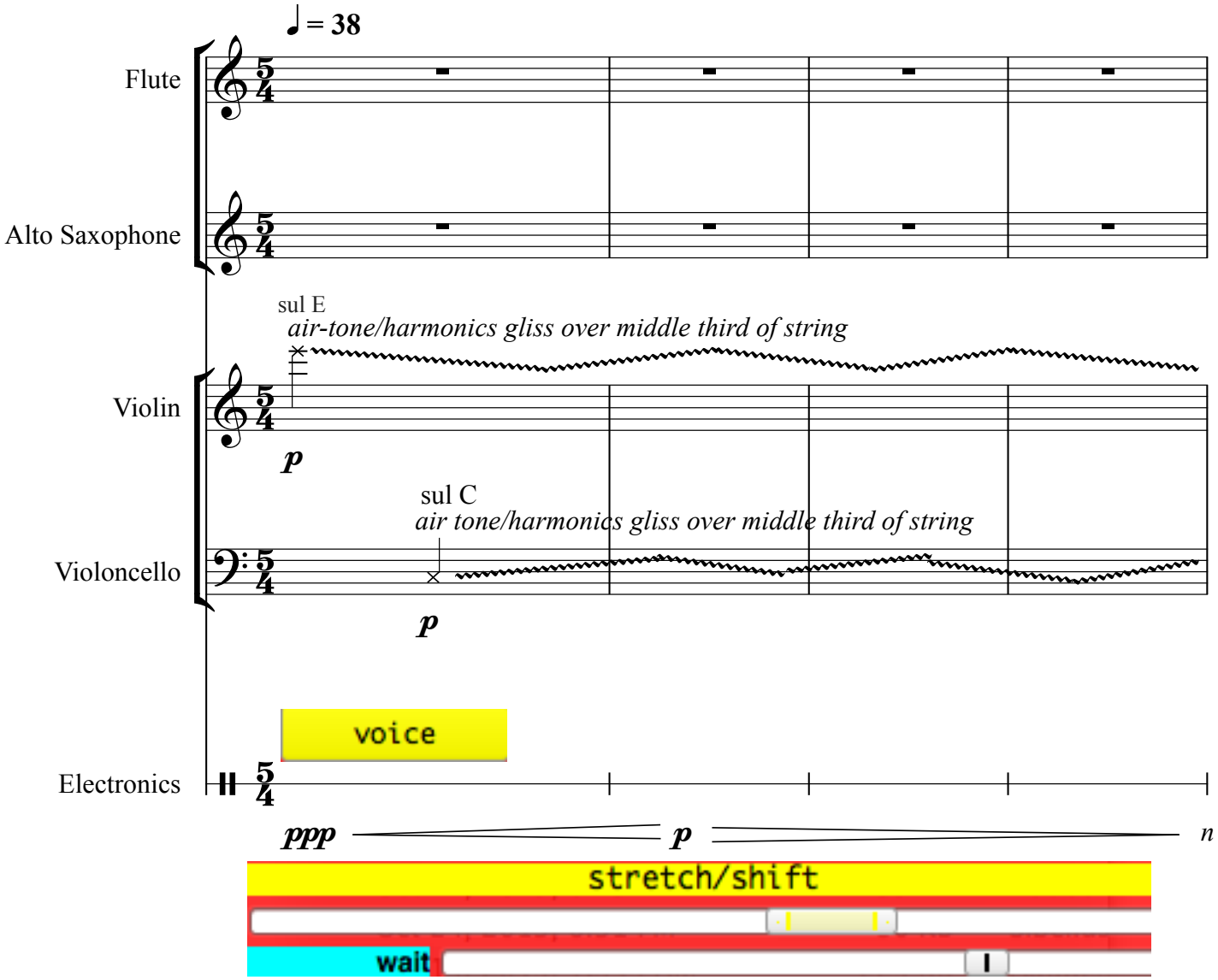
Epilogue

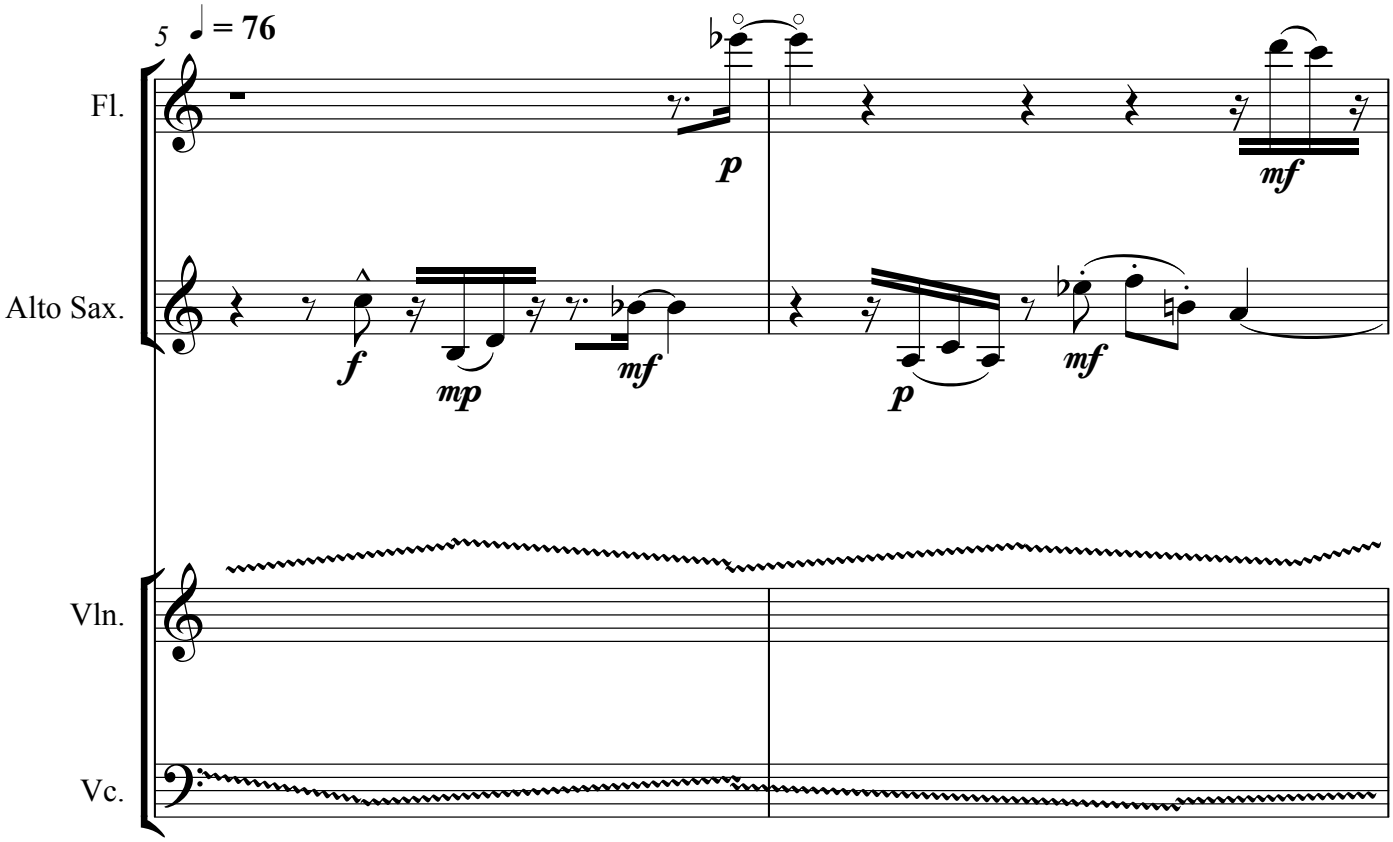
(chorus hums, then murmurs over each other the names of animals)
Giraffe / Kangaroo / Frog / Monkey / Zebra / Deer / Fox / Penguin / Wolf / Ostrich / Hyena / Squirrel

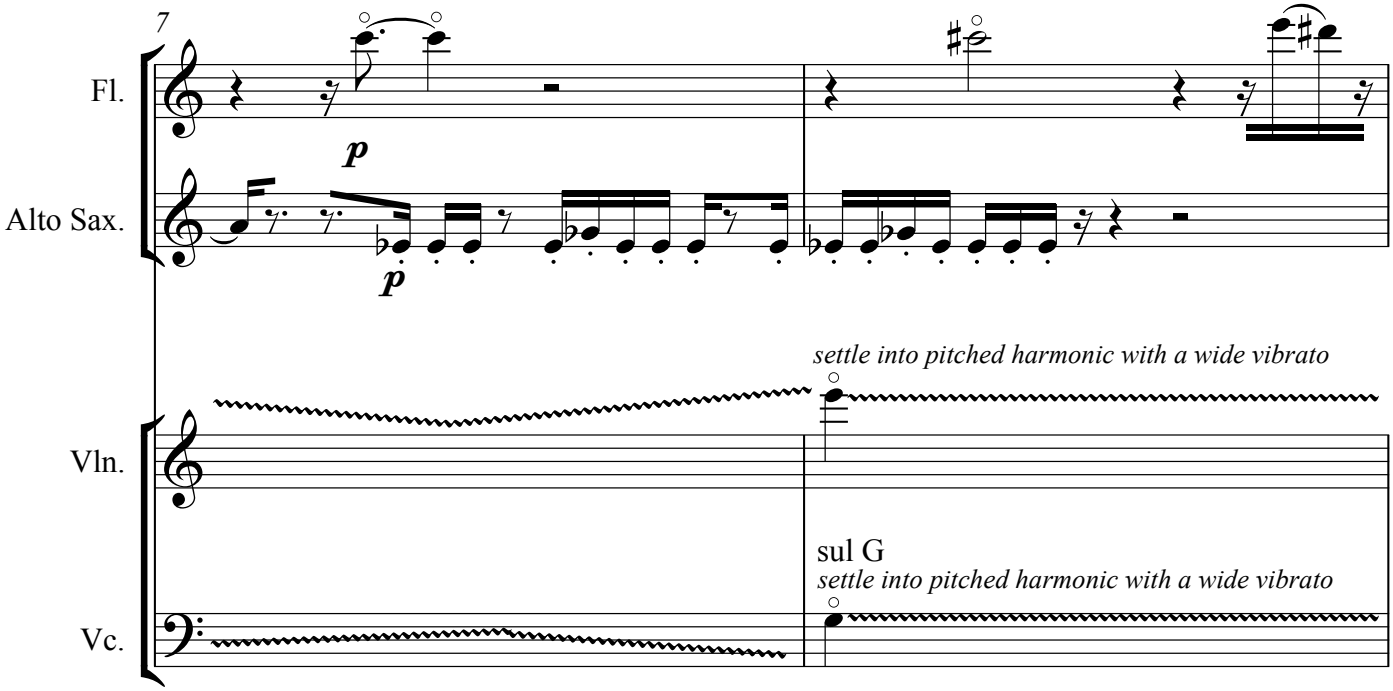
Prologue

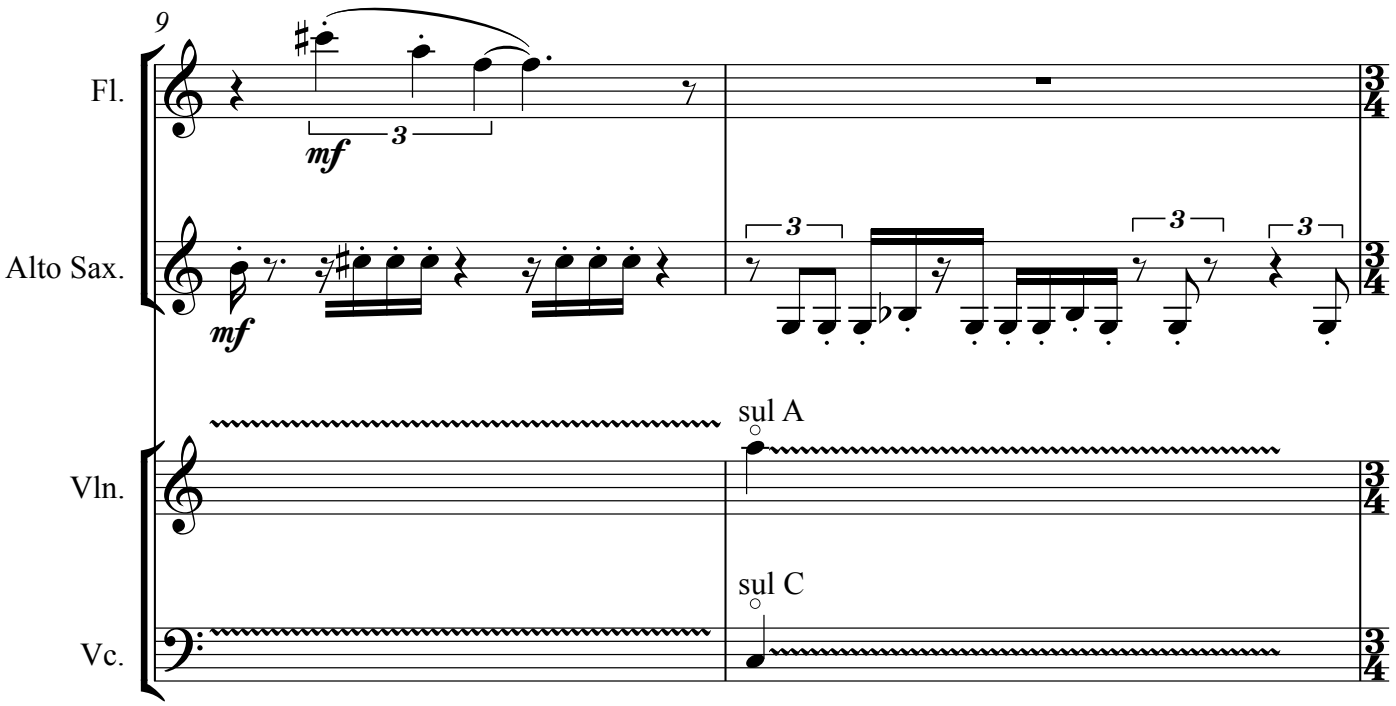
Dylan Neely

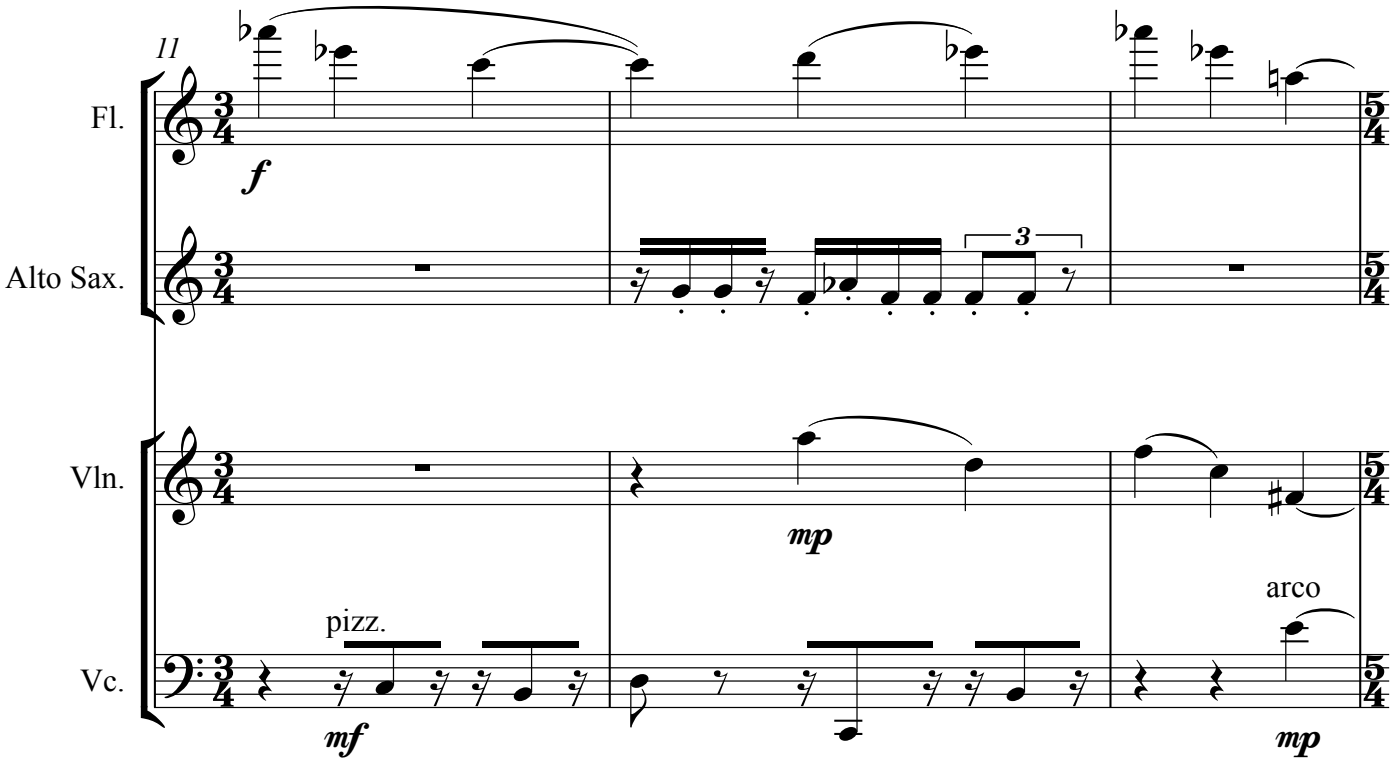
Broken-up electronic vocal sounds are playing in the concert hall before the audience sits down, spatialized, at a barely audible volume and a sparse level of density. Measure 1 begins over these sounds.

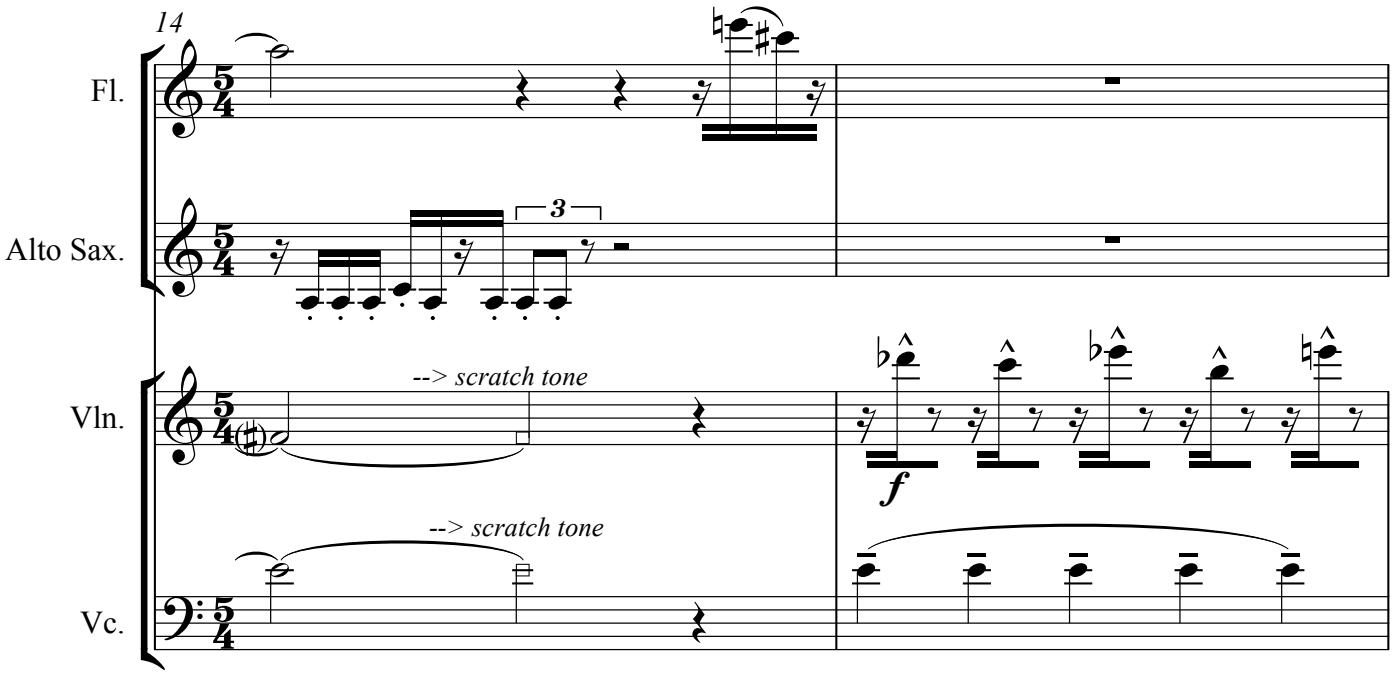


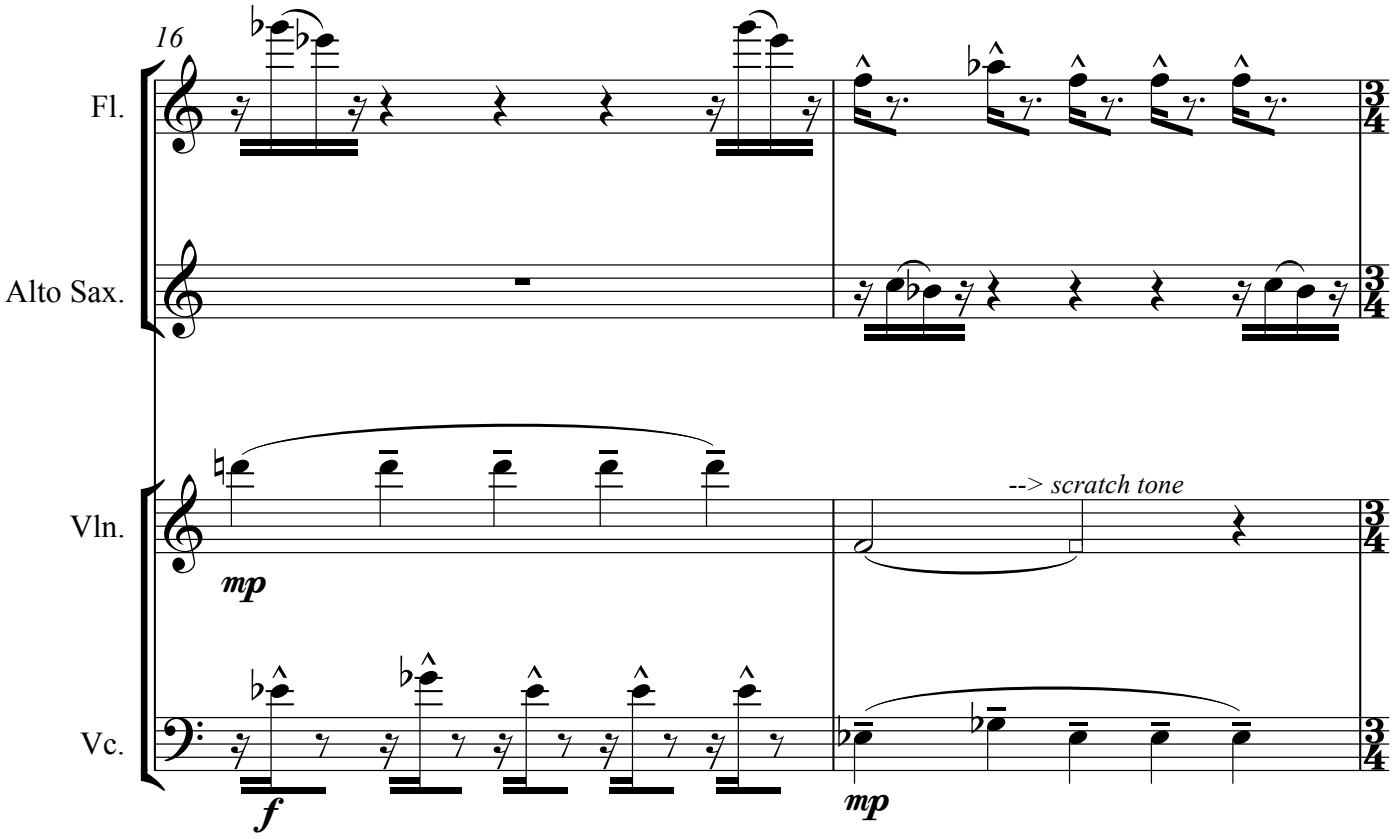

5
♩ = 76
Fl.
p
mf
Alto Sax.
f
mp
mf
p
mf
Vln.
Vc.

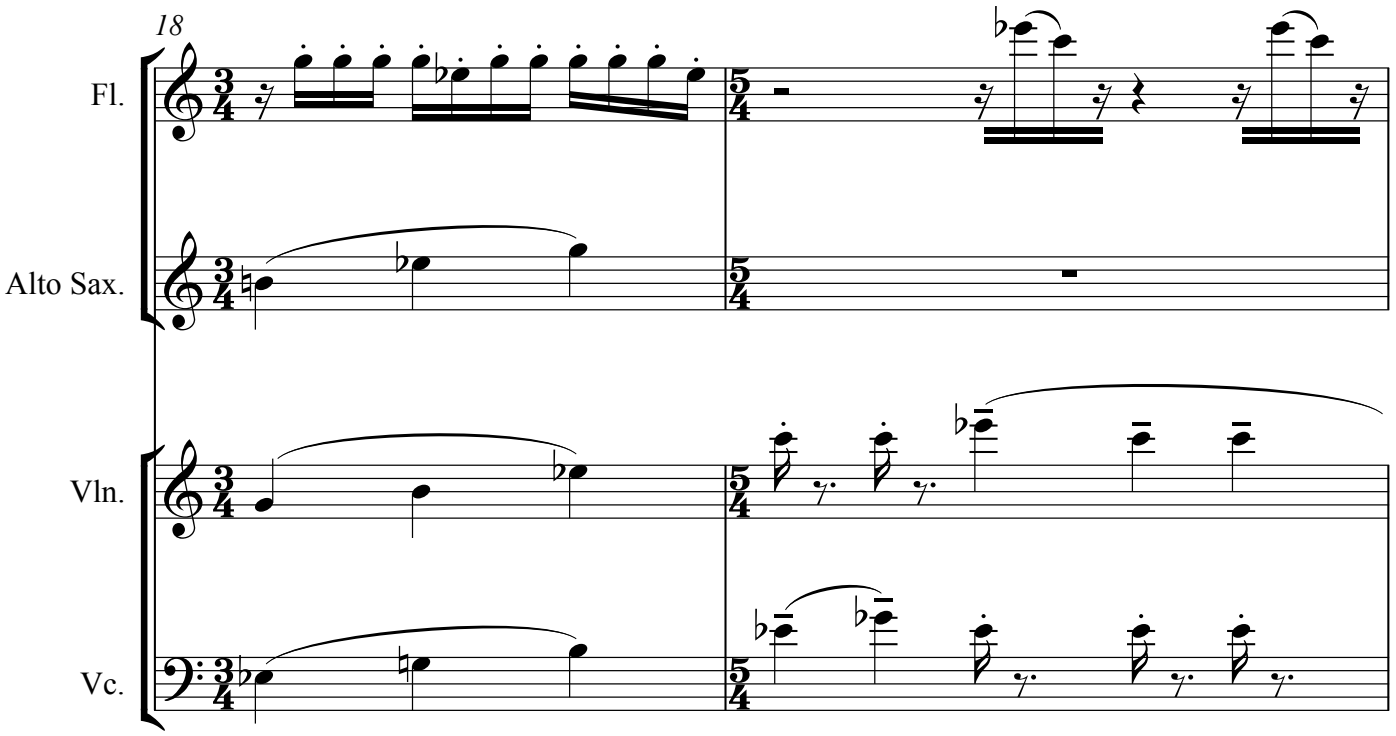

7
Fl.
p
Alto Sax.
p
settle into pitched harmonic with a wide vibrato
Vln.
sul G
settle into pitched harmonic with a wide vibrato
Vc.

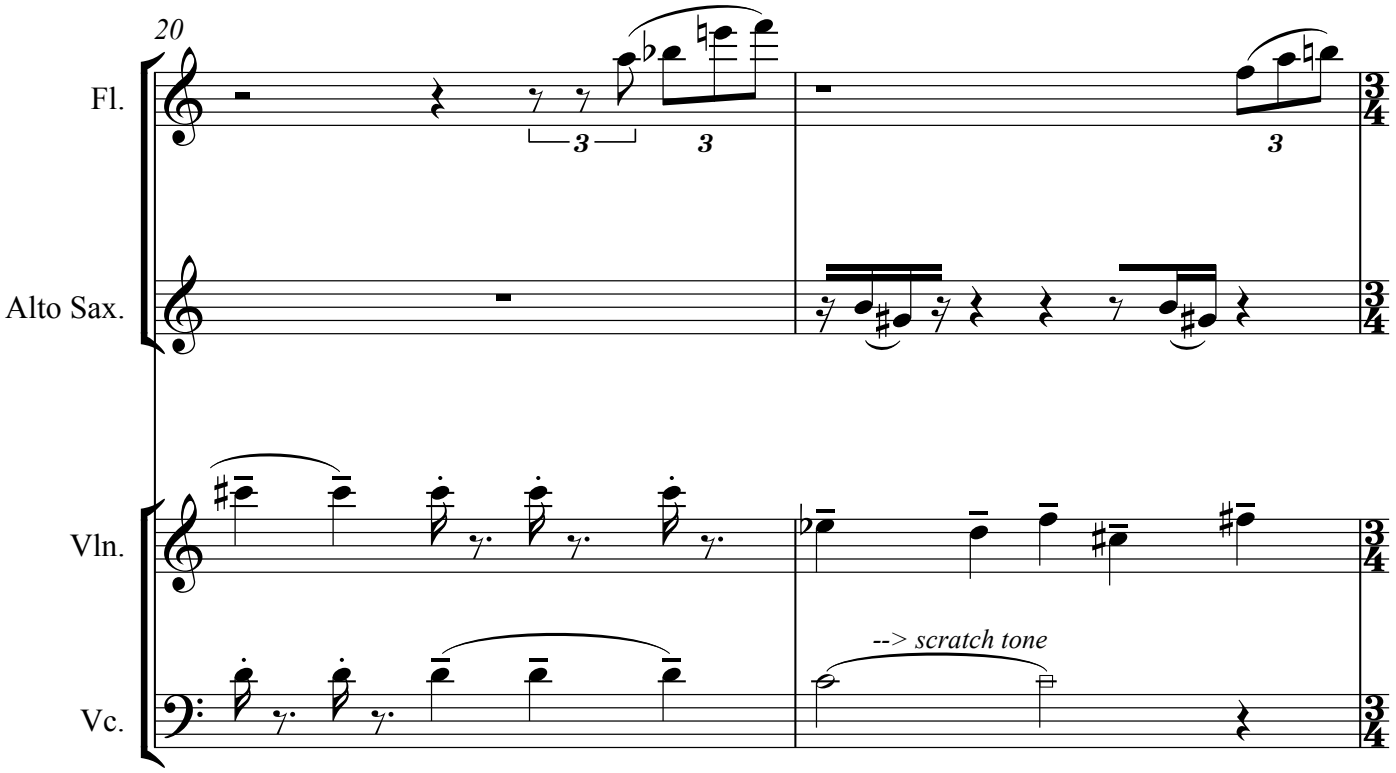

9
Fl.
mf
3
Alto Sax.
mf
3
3
3
Vln.
sul A
Vc.
sul C

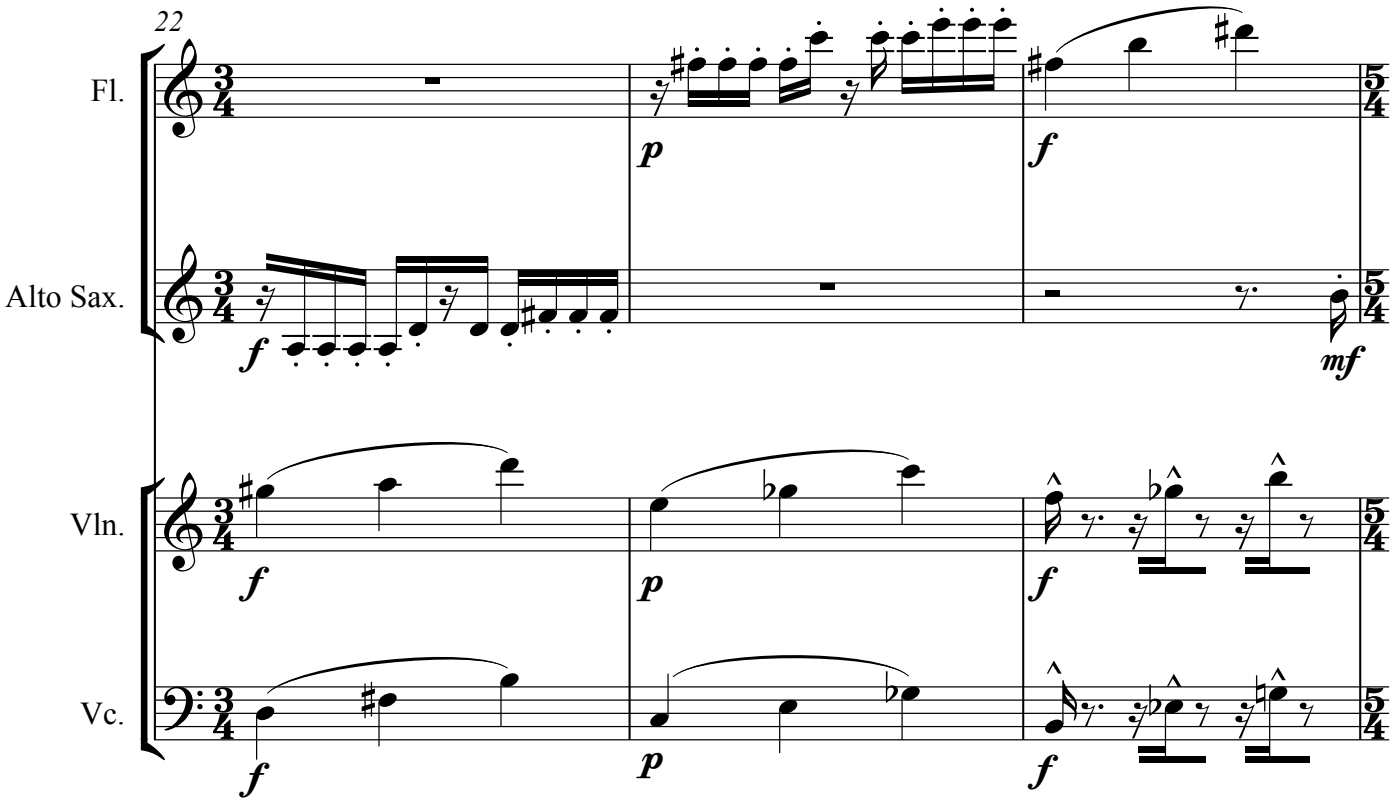

11
Fl.
f
Alto Sax.
3
Vln.
mp
Vc.
pizz.
mf
arco
mp

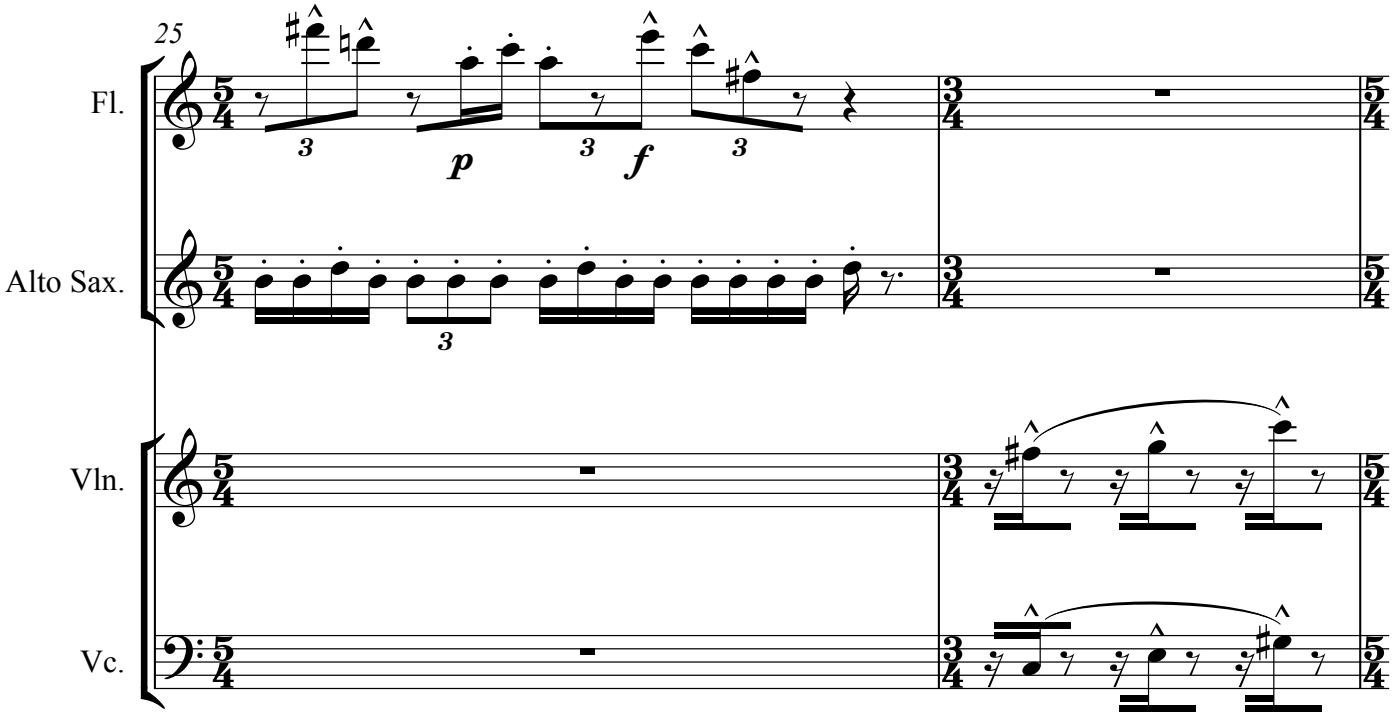

14
Fl.
Alto Sax.
3
Vln.
--> scratch tone
f
Vc.
--> scratch tone

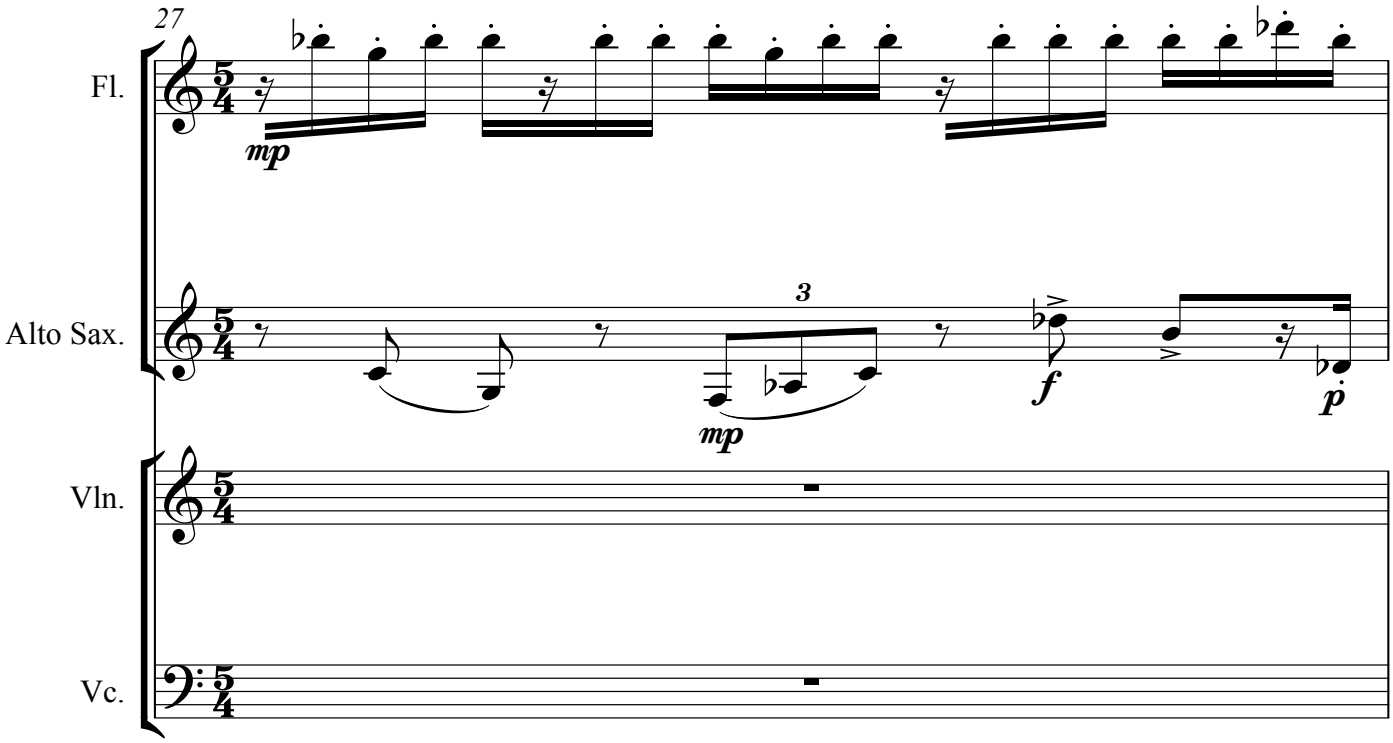

16
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
mp
--> scratch tone
Vc.
f
mp

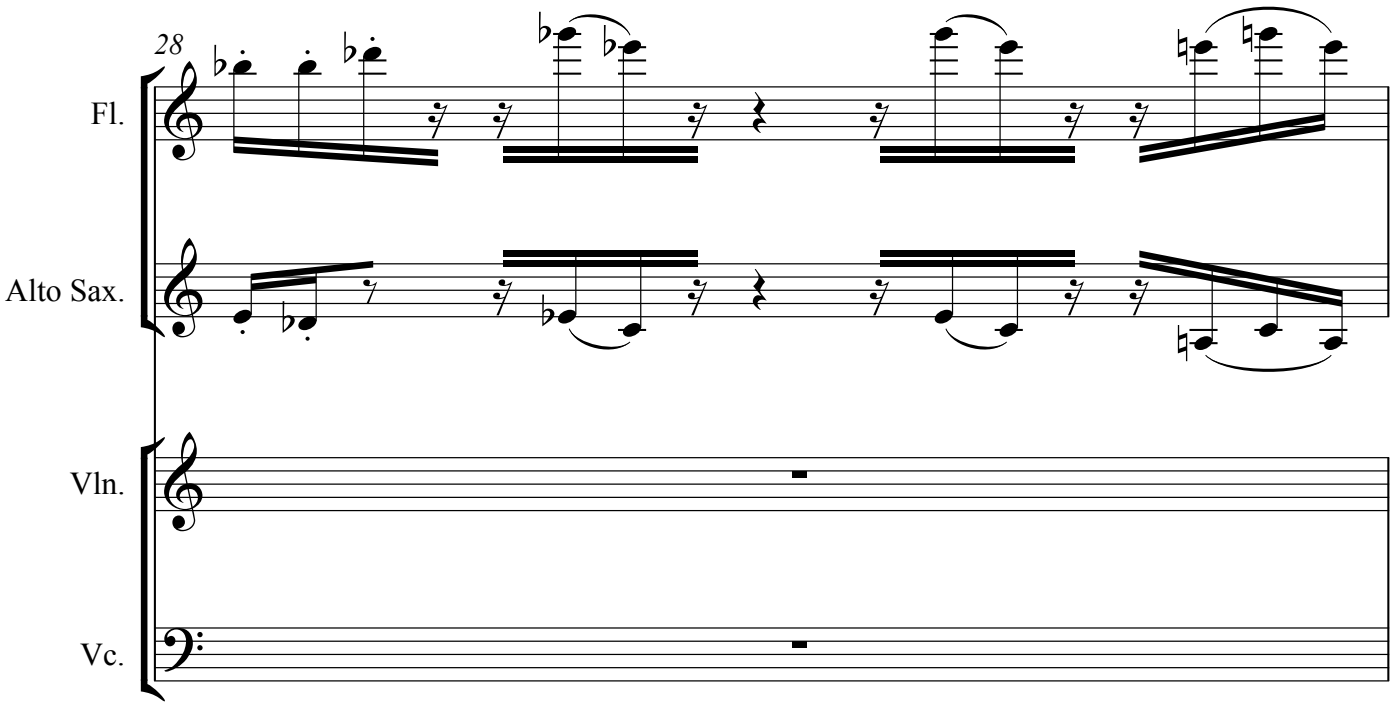

18
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.

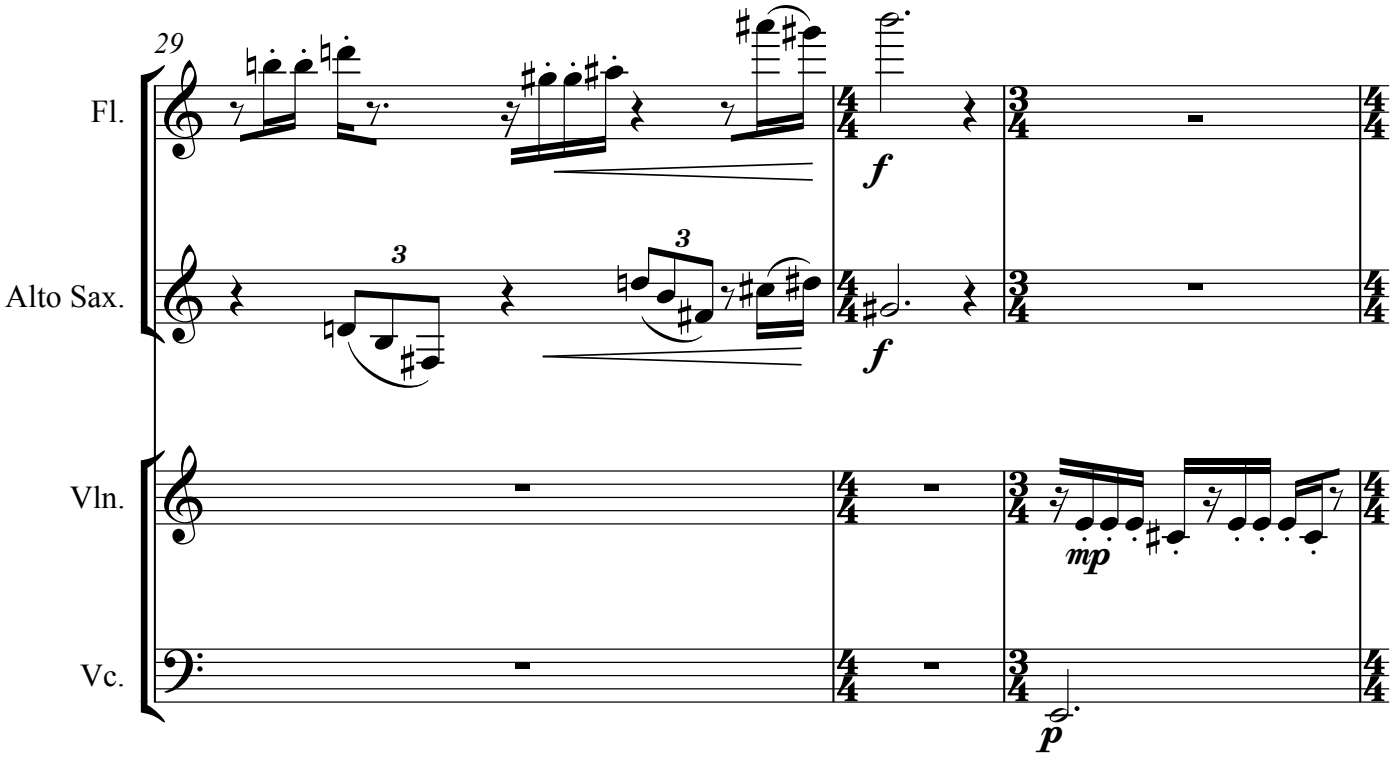

20
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
--> scratch tone

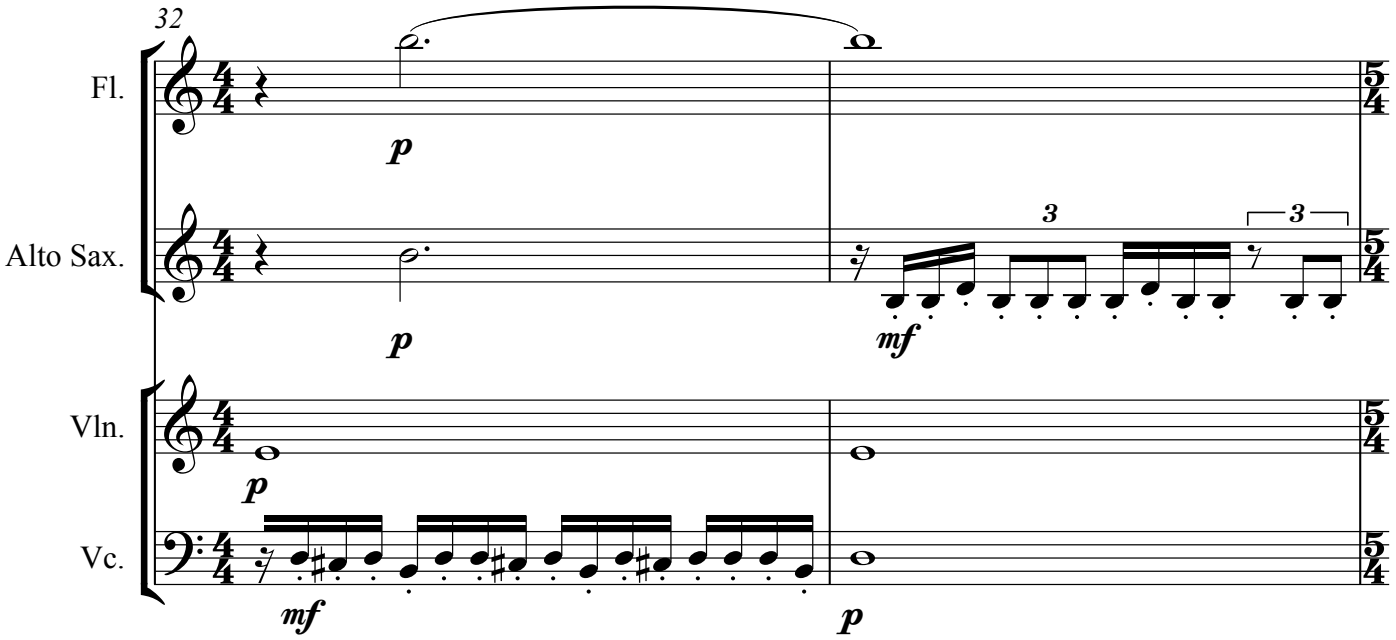

22
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
p
f
mf

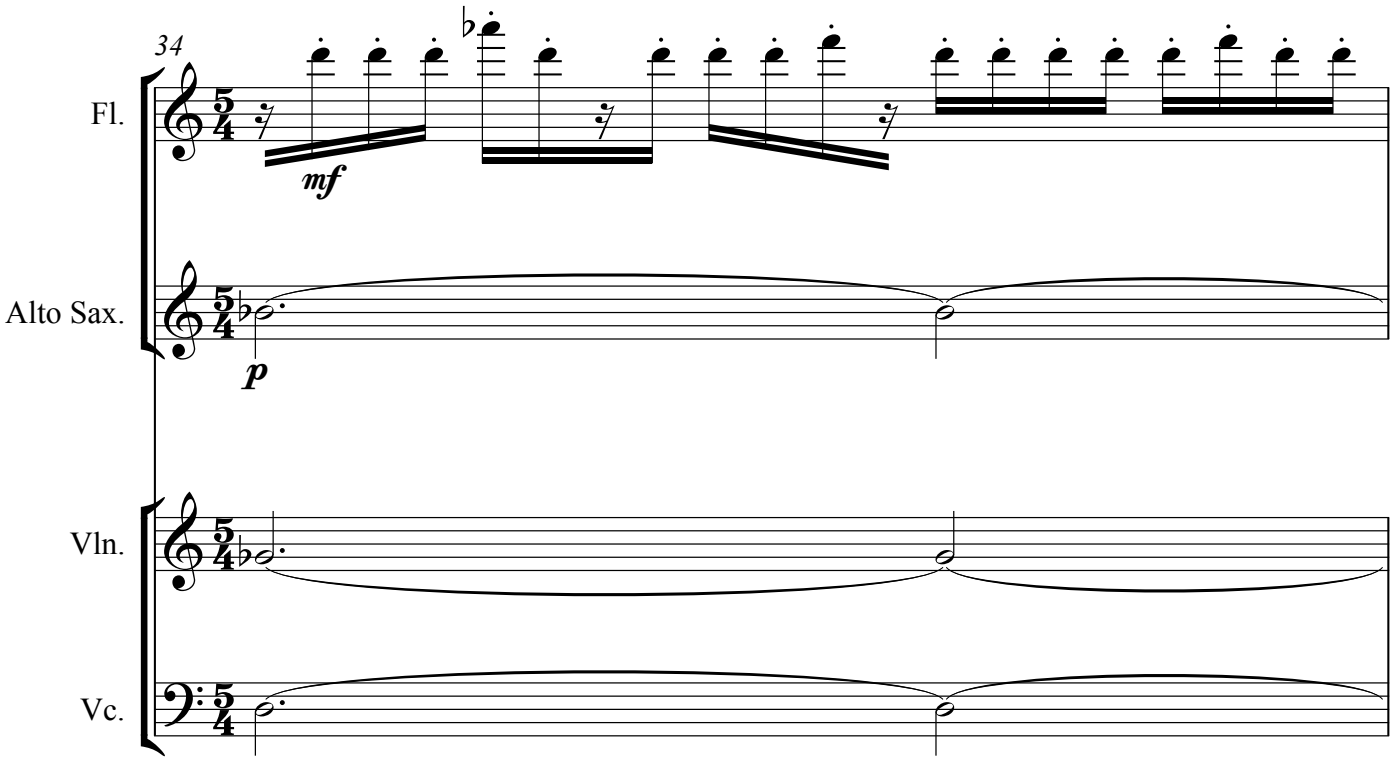

25
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
p
f
3

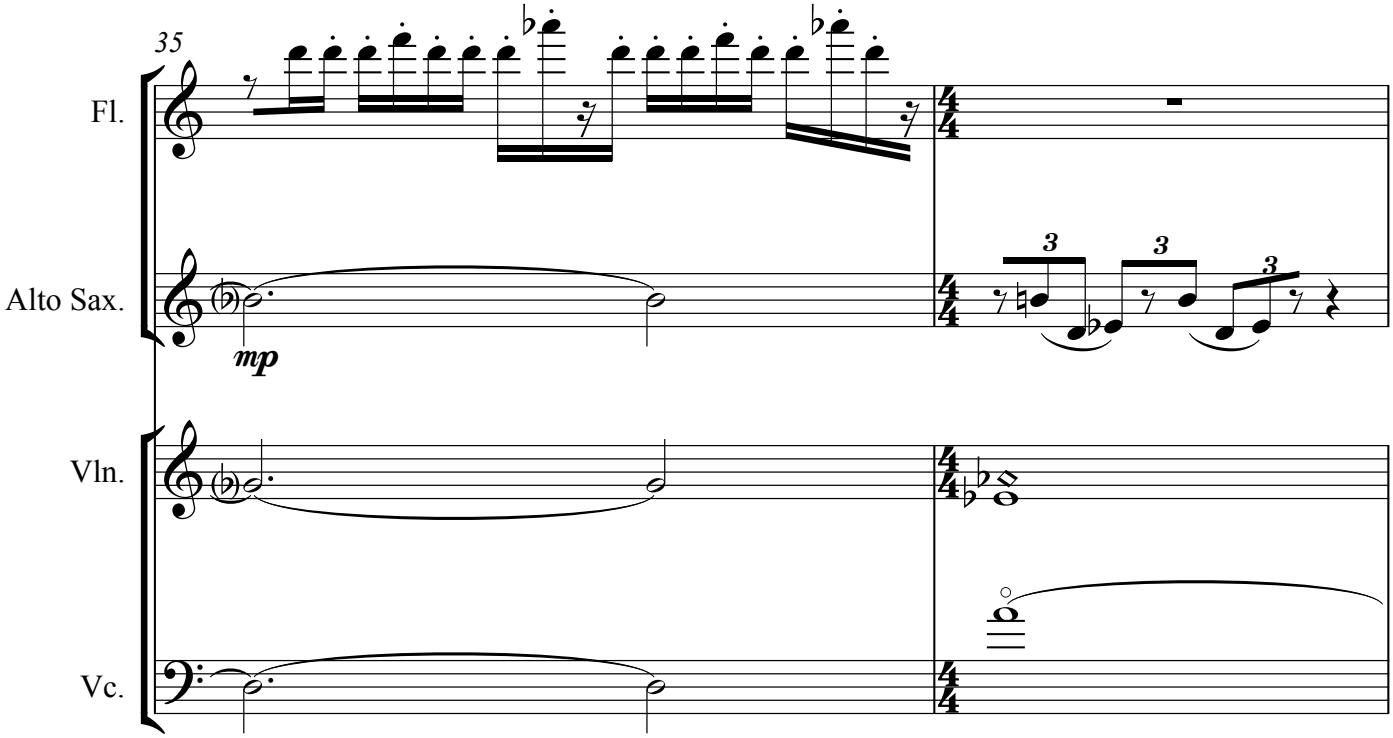

27
Fl.
mp
Alto Sax.
3
mp
f
p
Vln.
Vc.

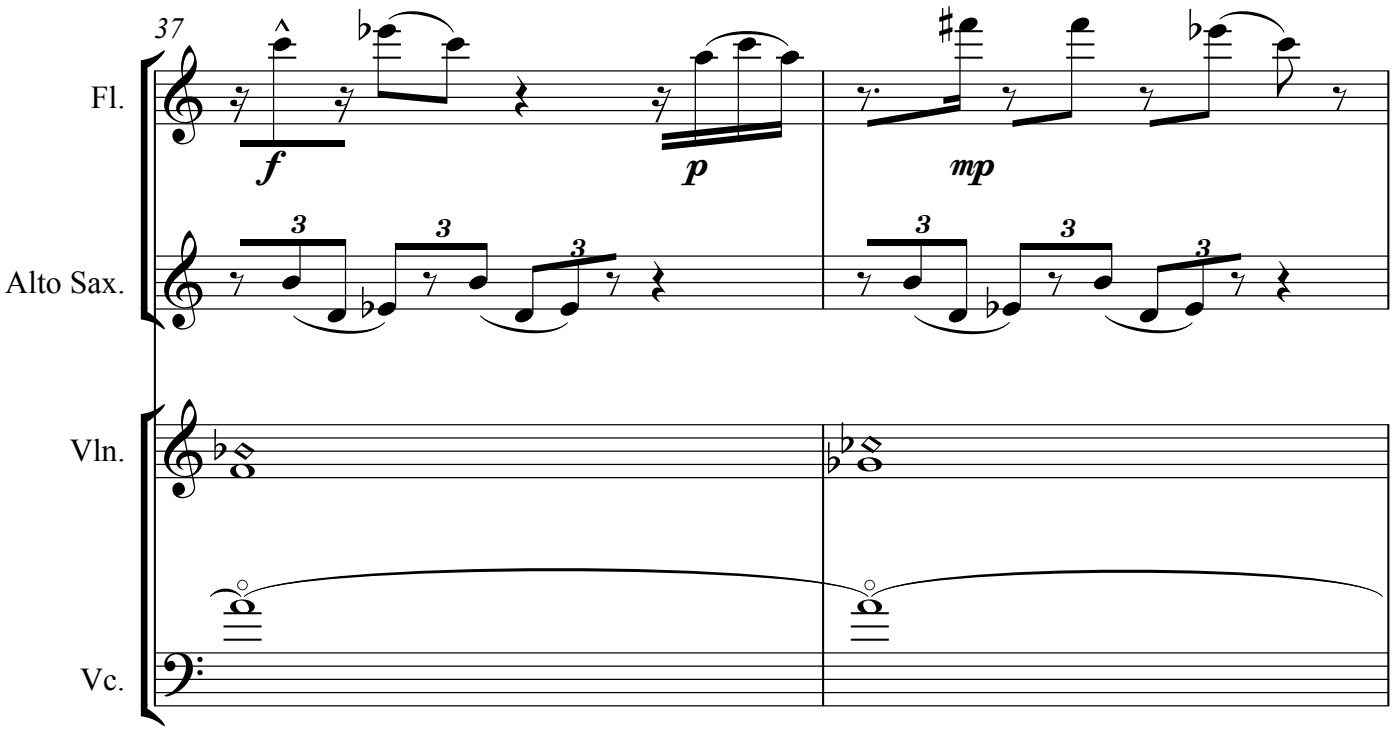

28
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.

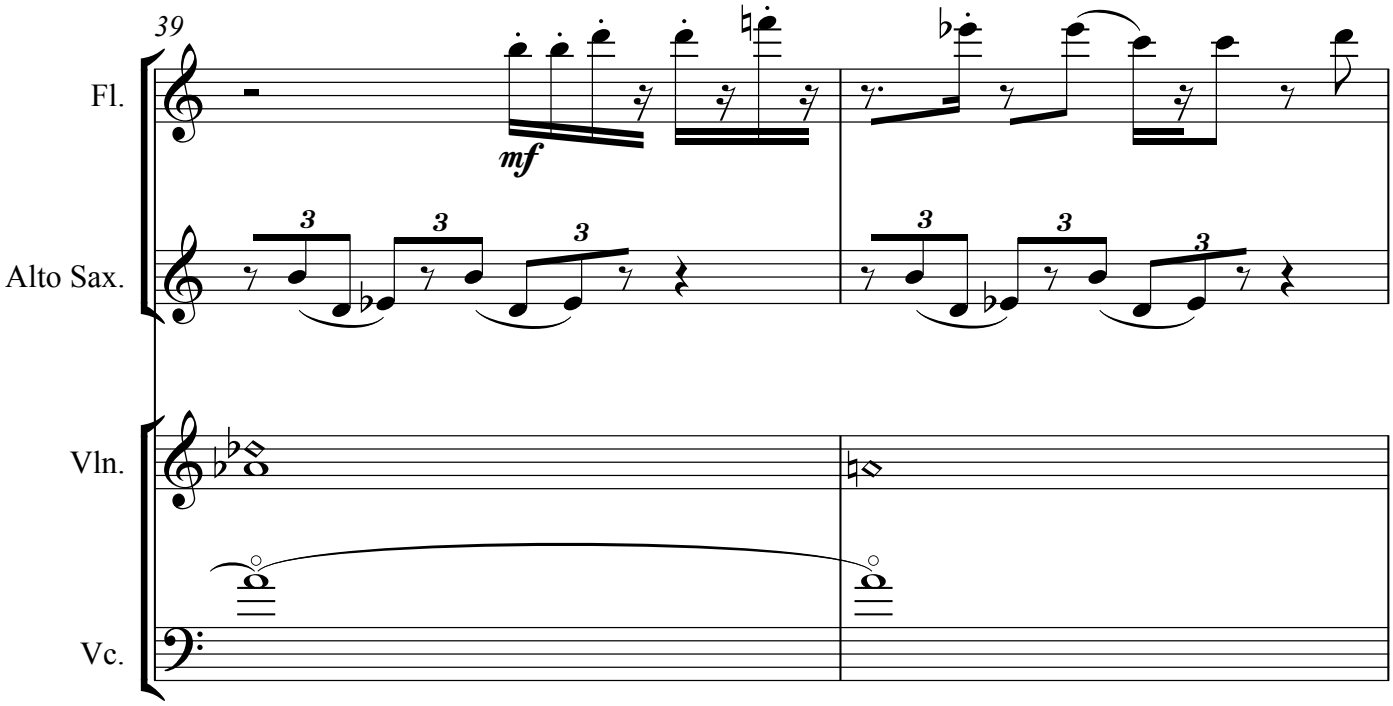

29
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
f
f
mp
p


32
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
p
p
p
mf
mf
p


34
Fl.
mf
Alto Sax.
p
Vln.
Vc.


35
Fl.
Alto Sax.
mp
3
3
3
Vln.
Vc.


37
Fl.
f
p
mp
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.


39
Fl.
mf
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.

Movement Begins

41

Fl.

Alto Sax.

p

Vln.

8va

Vc.

44

Fl.

Alto Sax.

Vln.

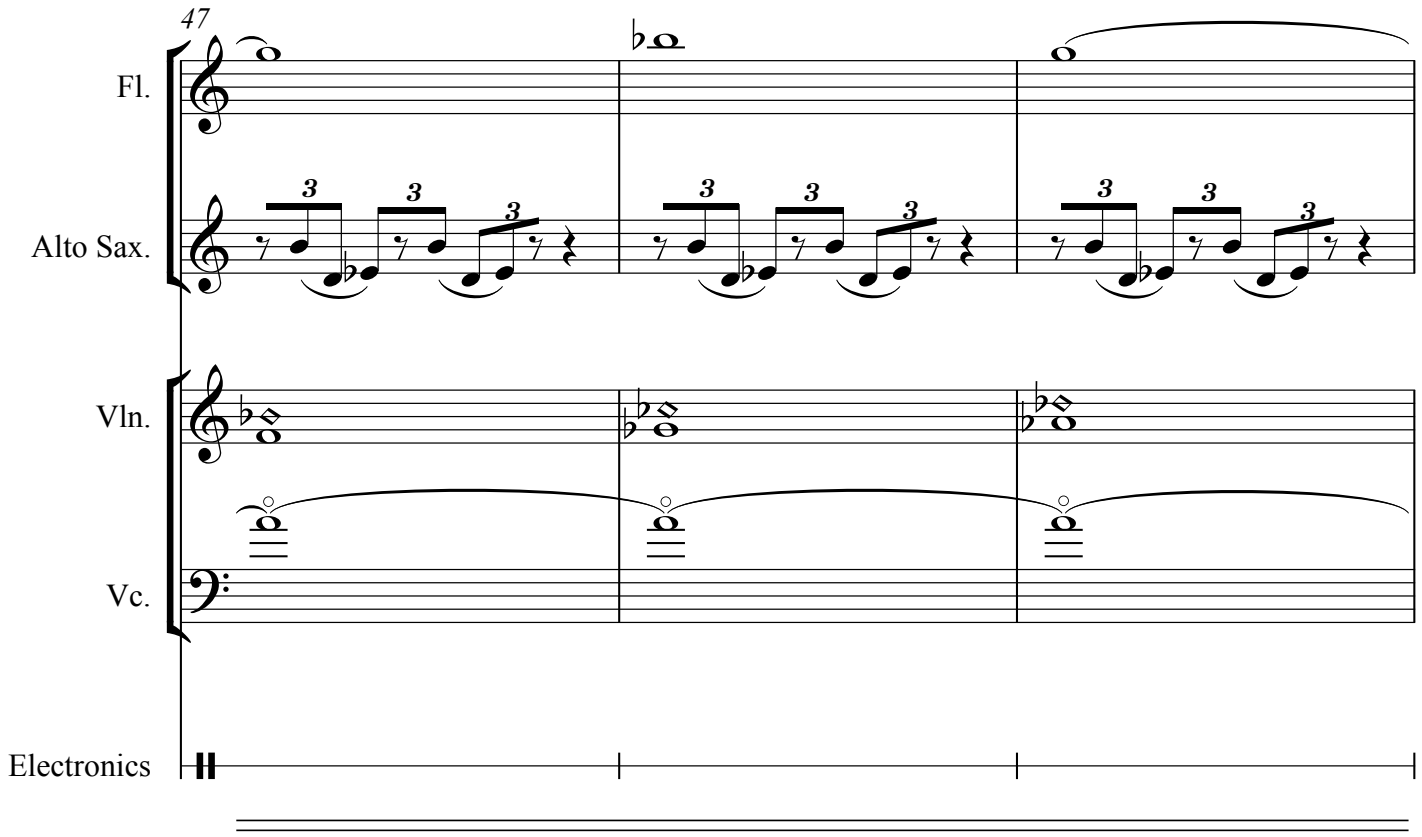
(8)

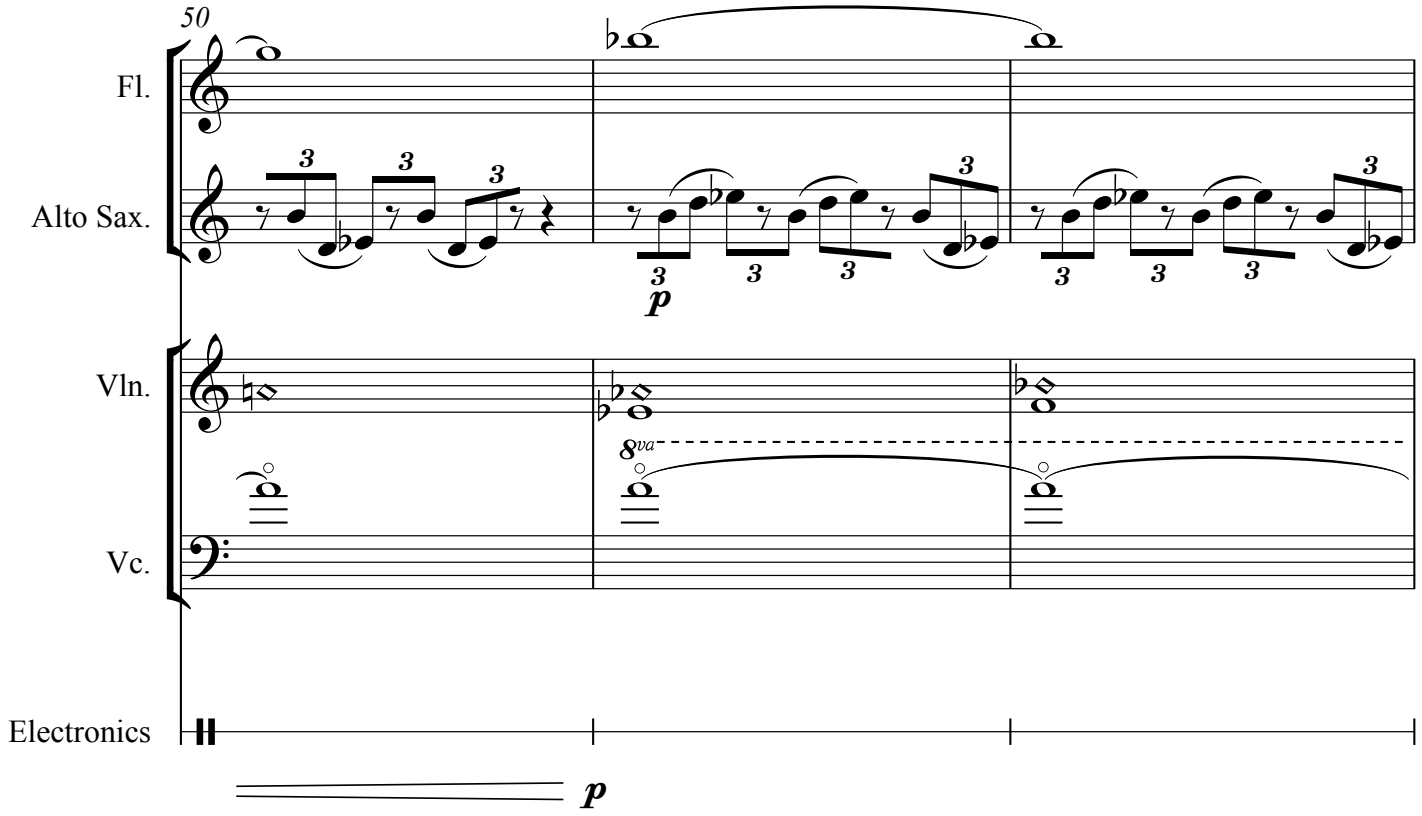
Vc.

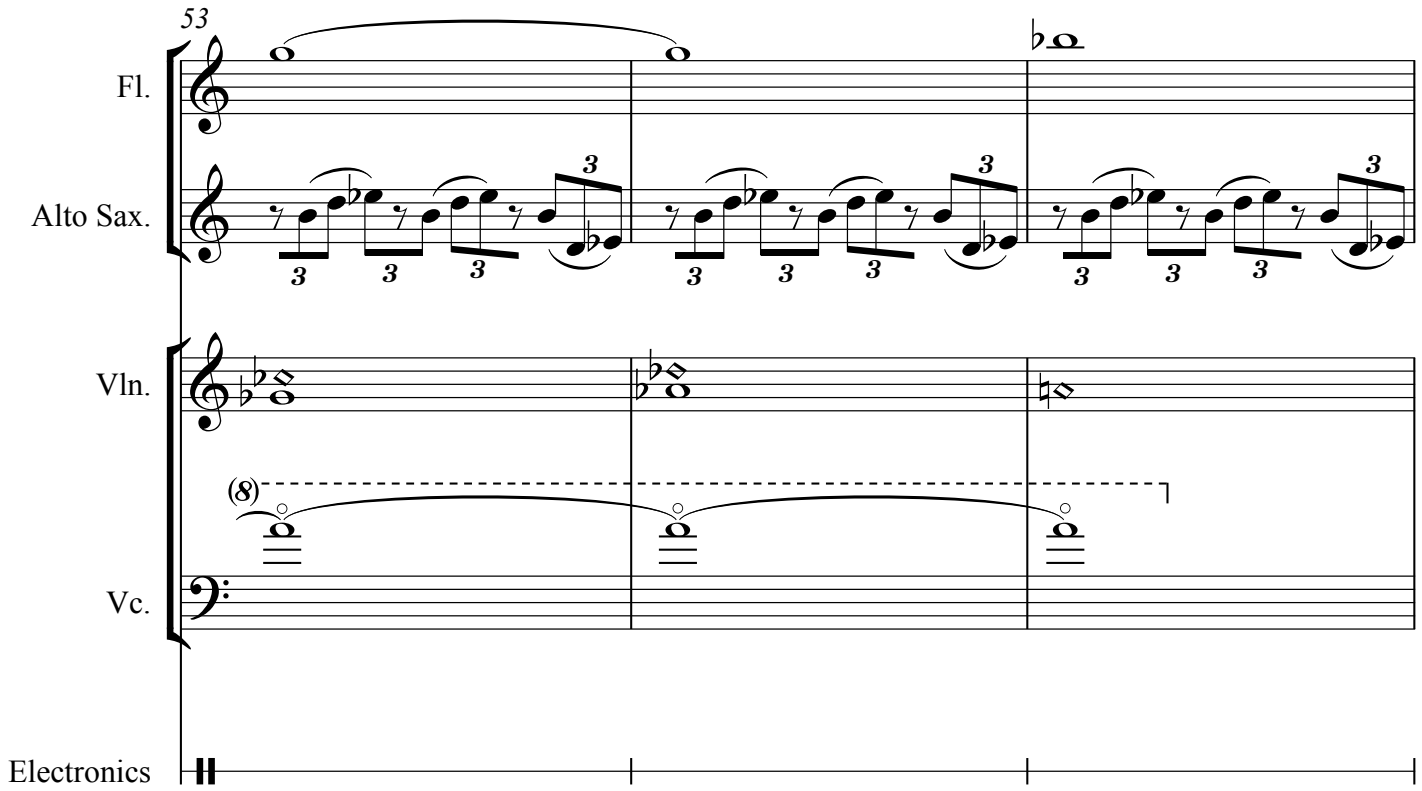
prologue

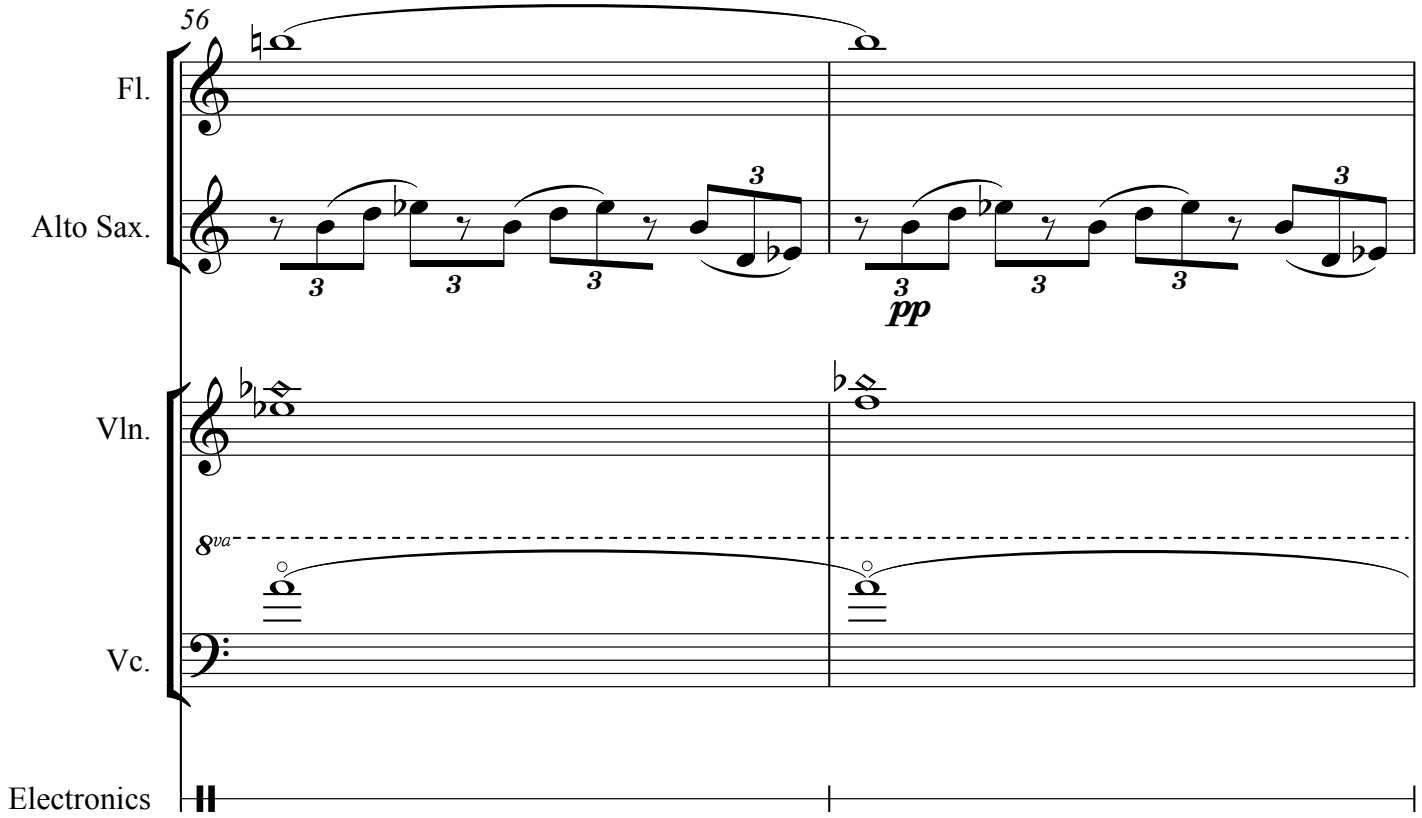
Electronics

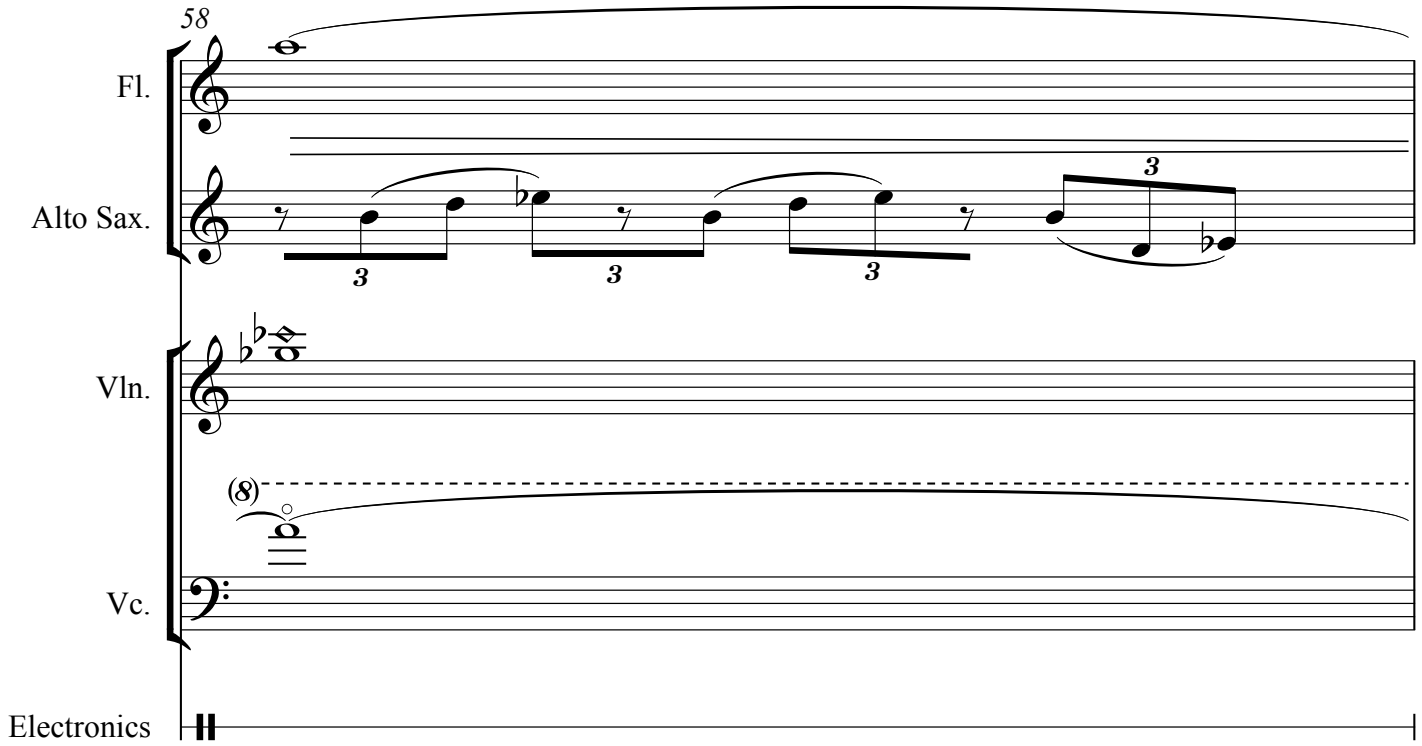
ppp

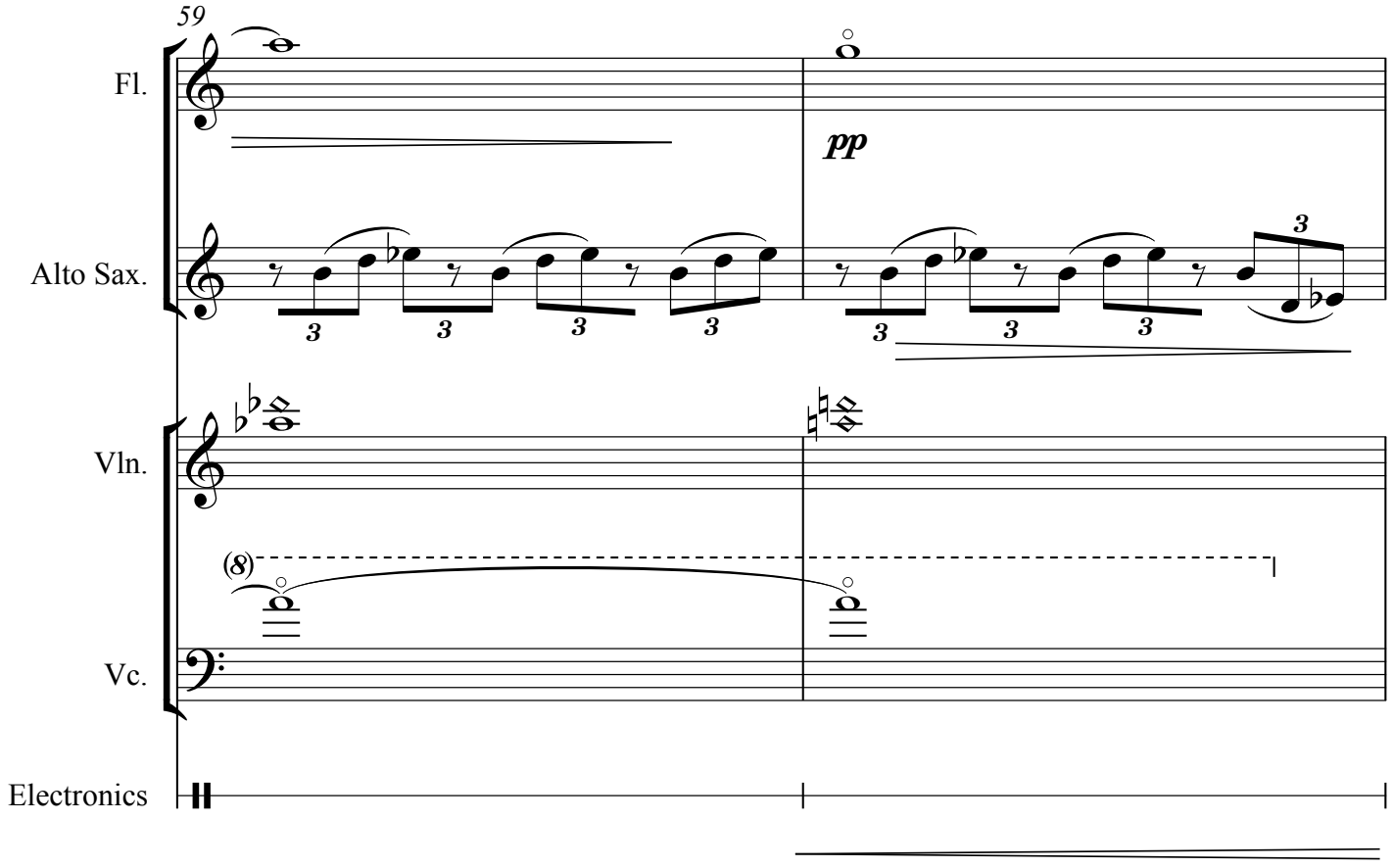

47
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
Electronics

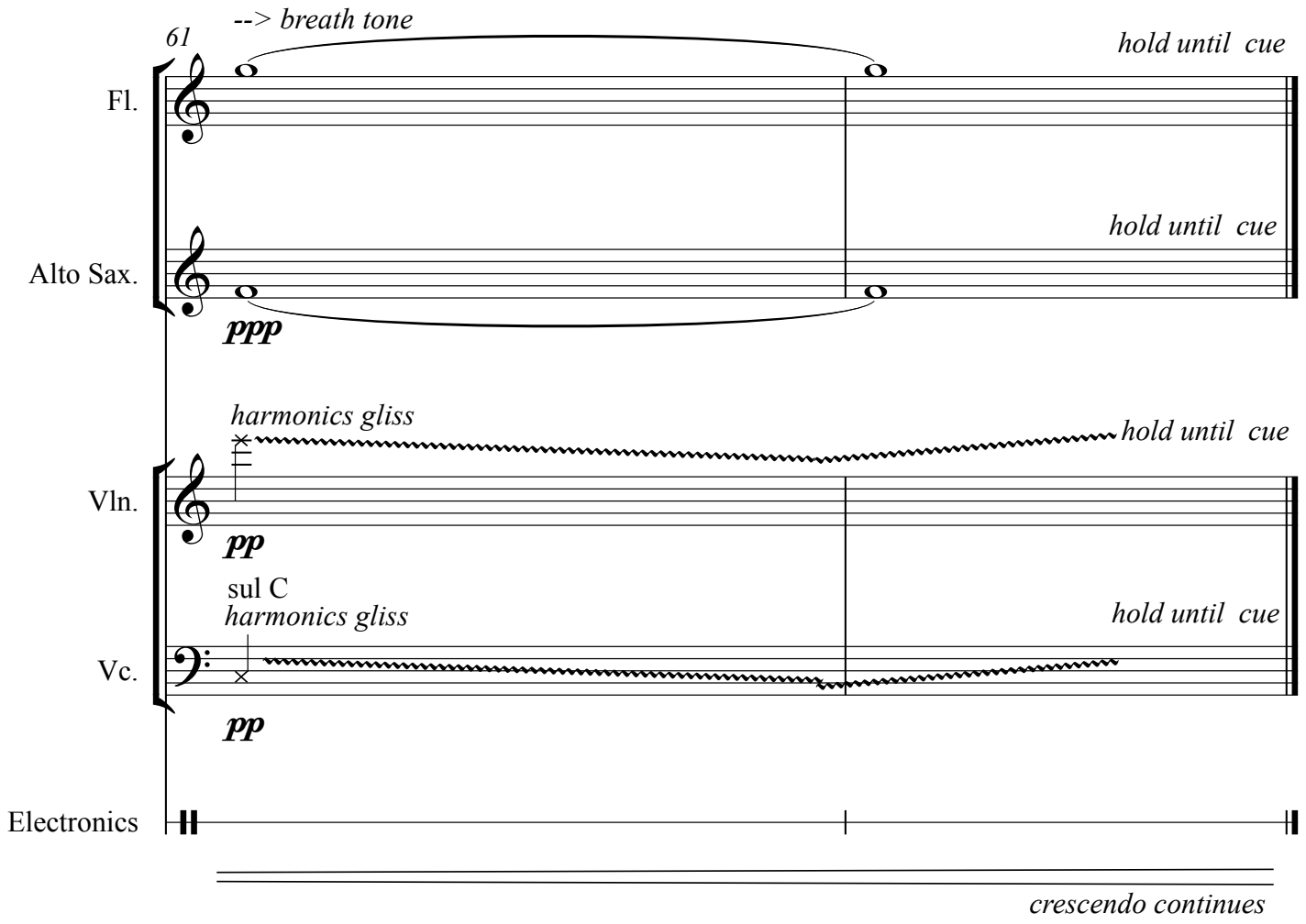

50
Fl.
Alto Sax.
p
Vln.
8va
Vc.
Electronics
p


53
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
(8)
Vc.
Electronics


56
Fl.
Alto Sax.
pp
Vln.
8va
Vc.
Electronics


58
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
Electronics


59
Fl.
pp
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
Electronics

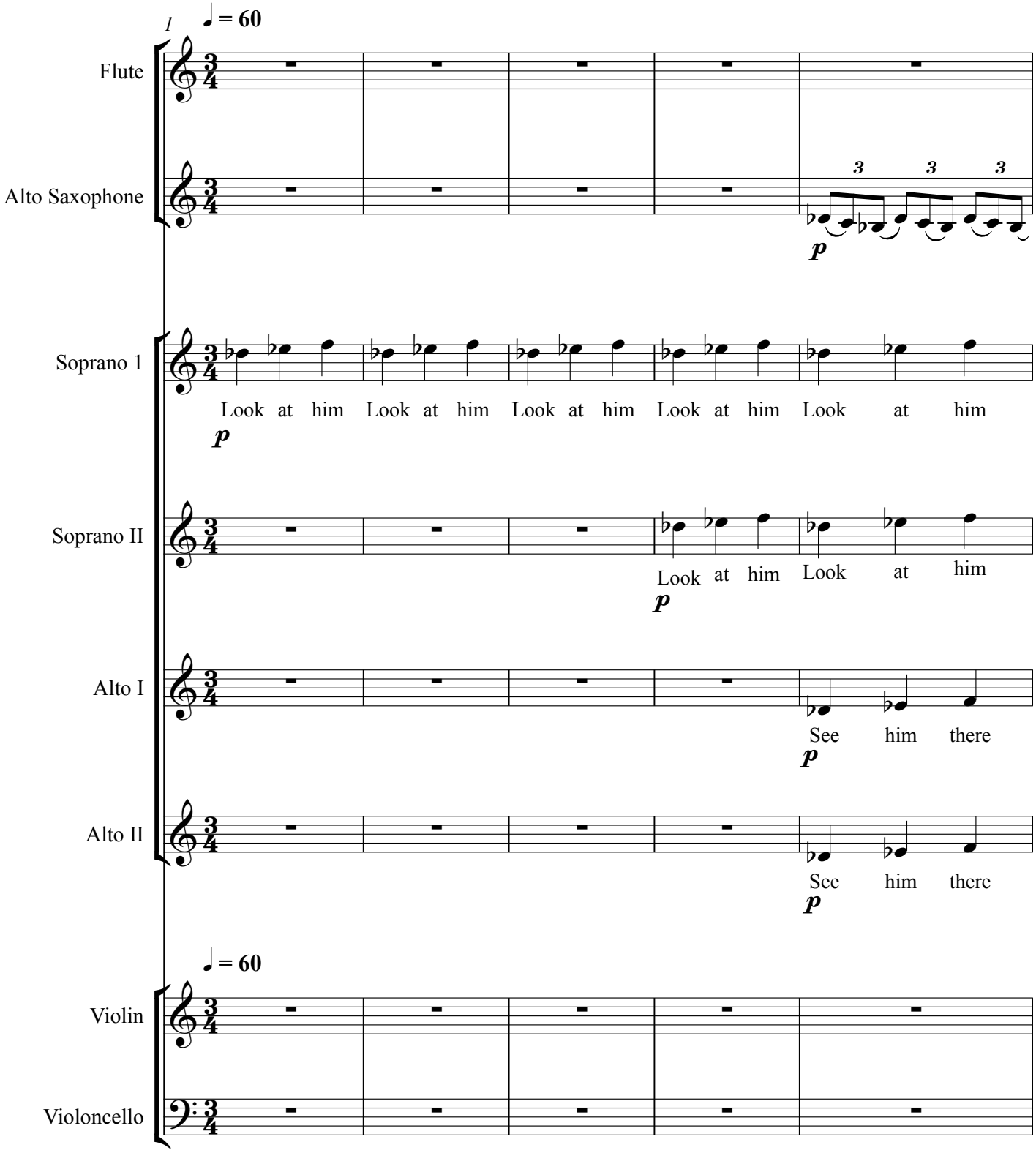


Following the exit of the instruments, there is 90 seconds of movement accompanied by slowly morphing low frequency electronics.

As the dancer assumes a still pose, the electronics fade to quiet.

Scene 1 then begins.

Scene 1


1
♩ = 60
Flute
Alto Saxophone
3 3 3
p
Soprano 1
Look at him Look at him Look at him Look at him Look at him
p
Soprano II
Look at him Look at him
p
Alto I
See him there
p
Alto II
See him there
p
♩ = 60
Violin
Violoncello

6

Fl.

Alto Sax.

S. I

Look at him Look at him Look at him

S. II

Look at him Look at him Look at him

A. I

See him there See him there See him there

A. II

See him there See him there See him there

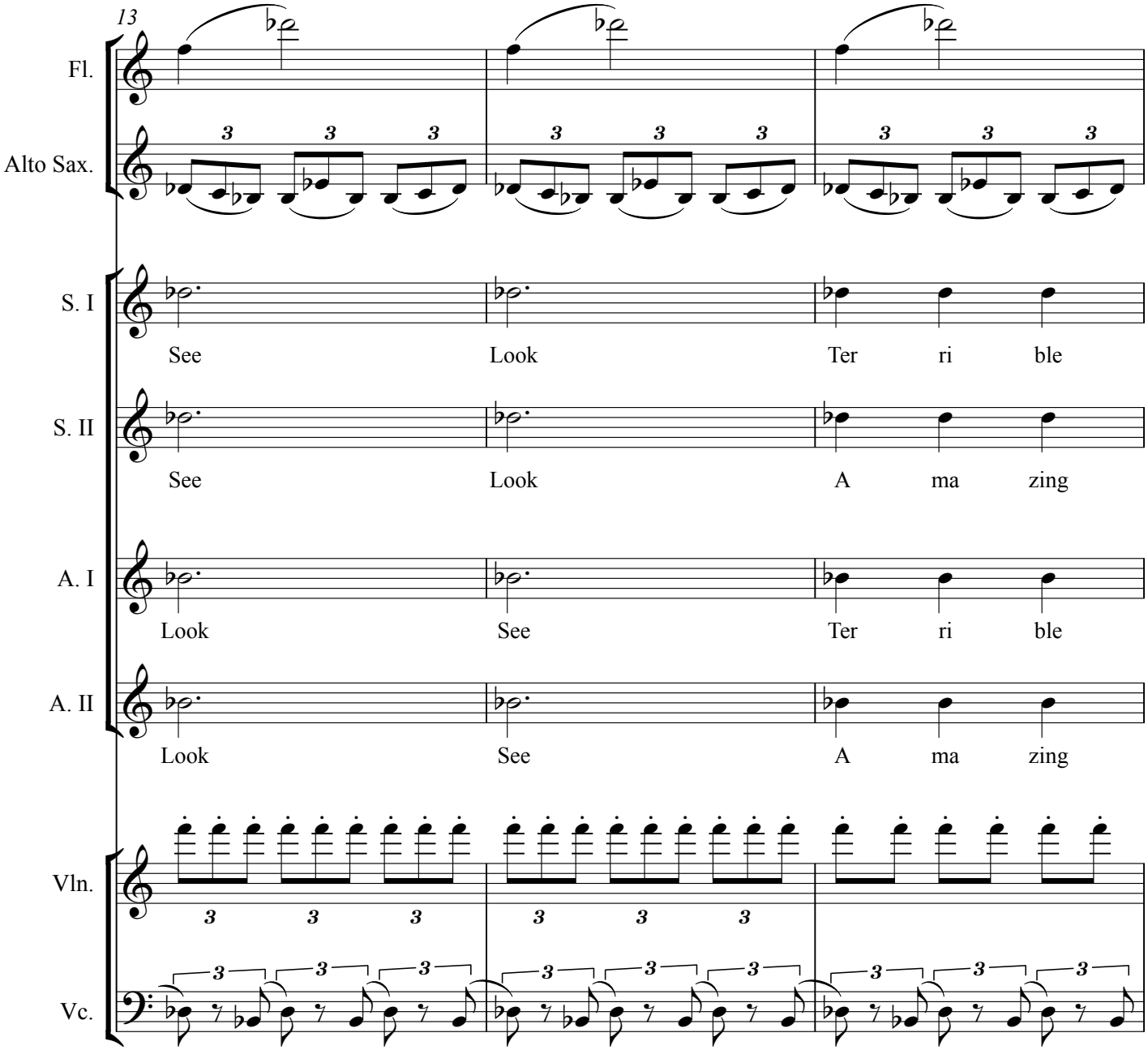
10

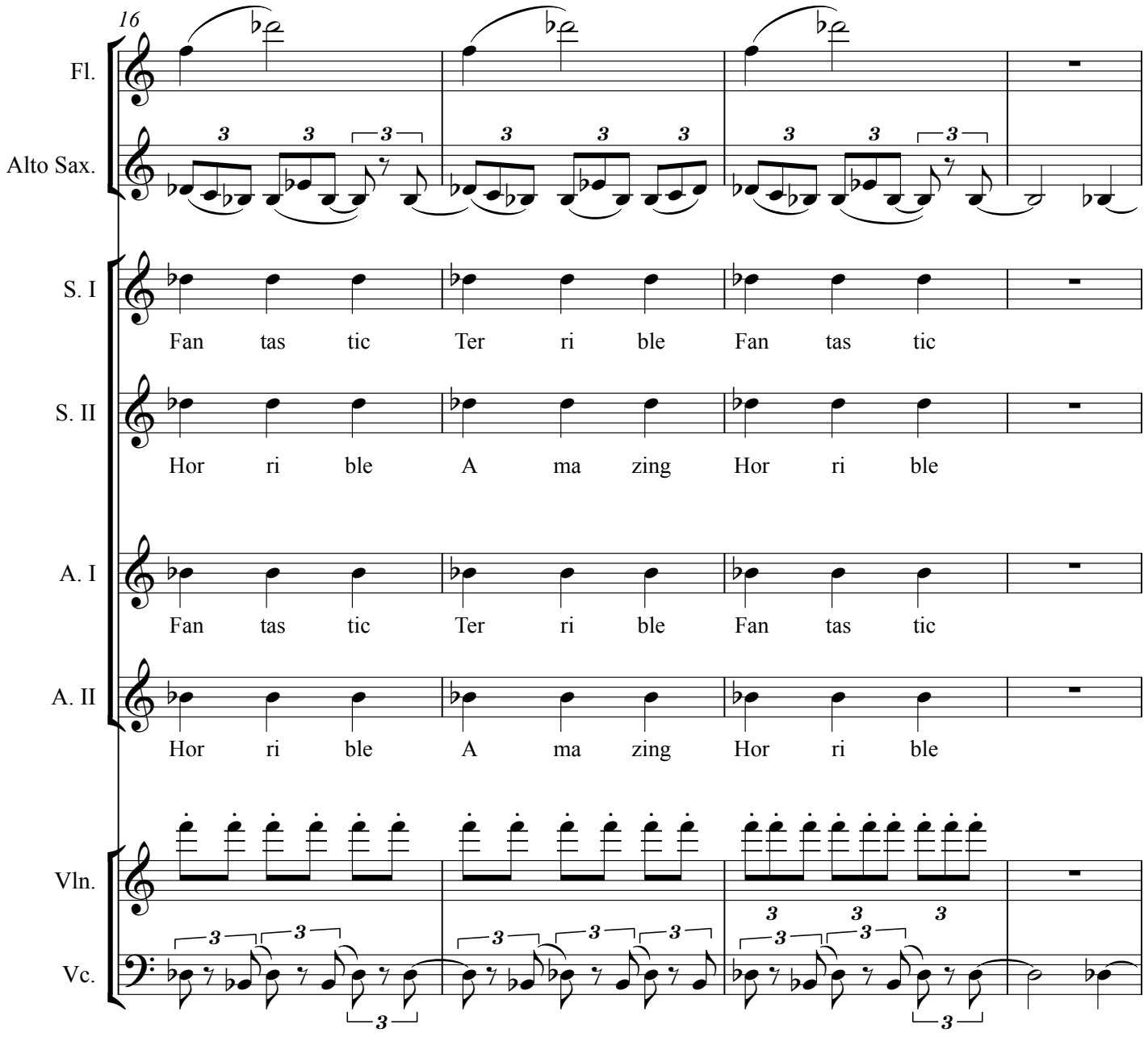
Fl.

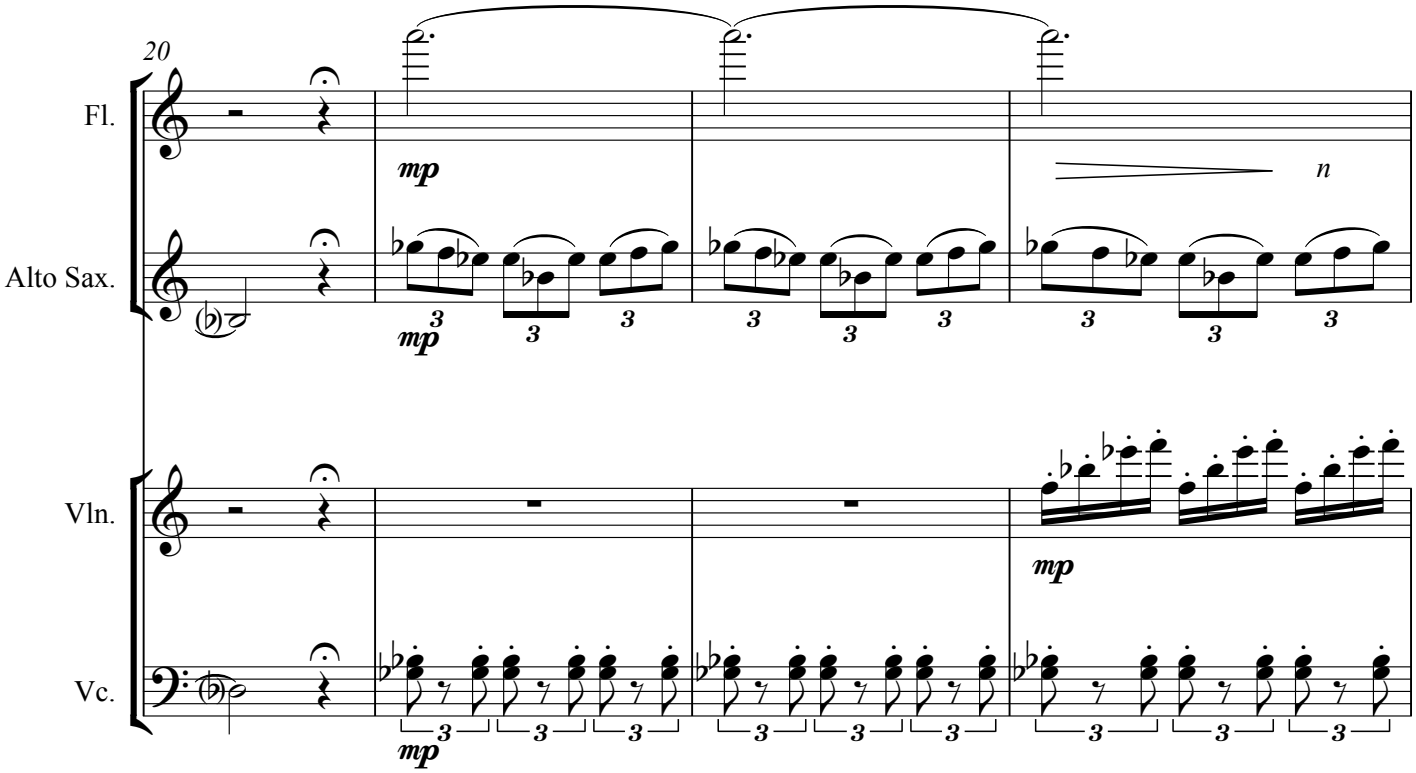
Alto Sax.

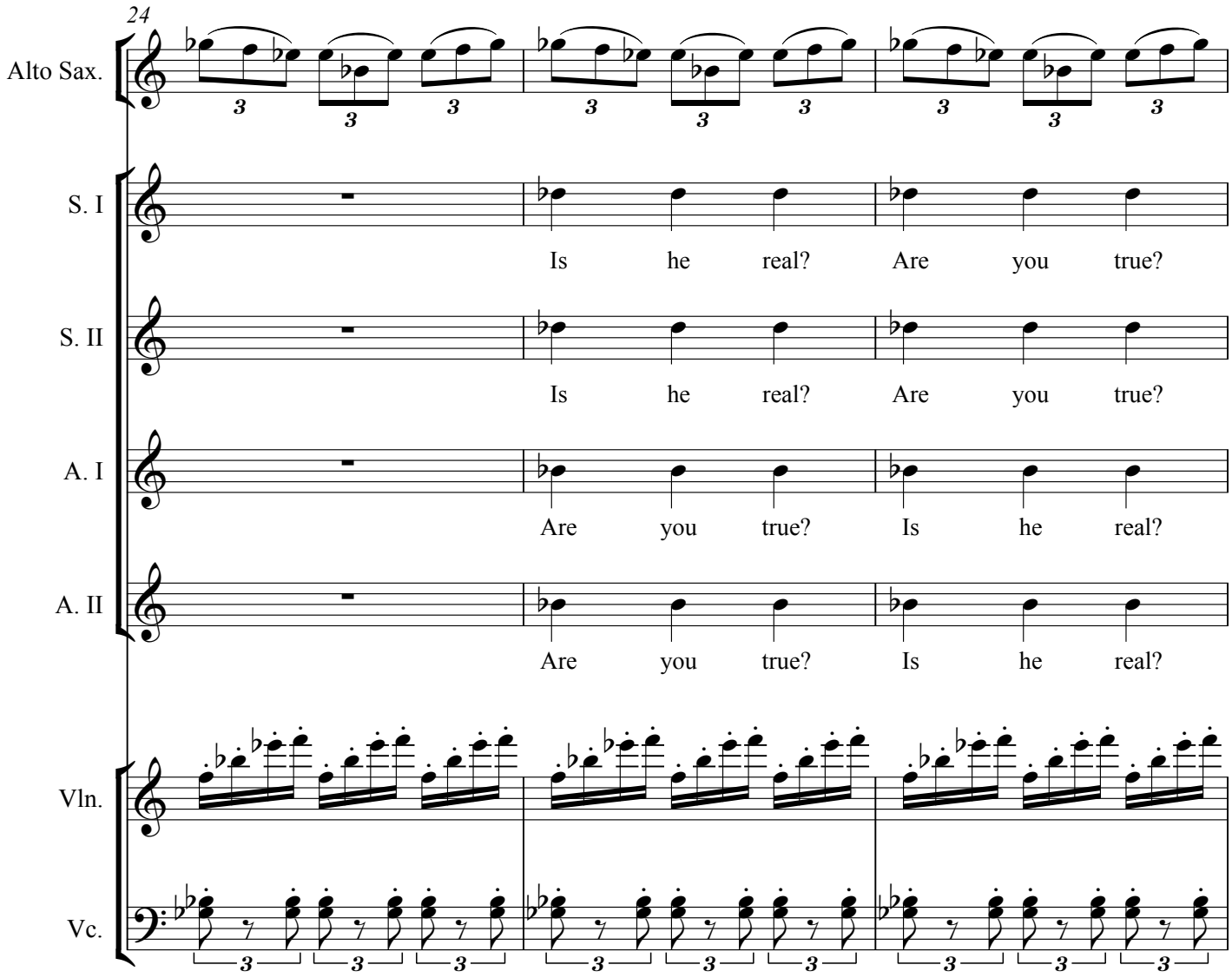
Vln.

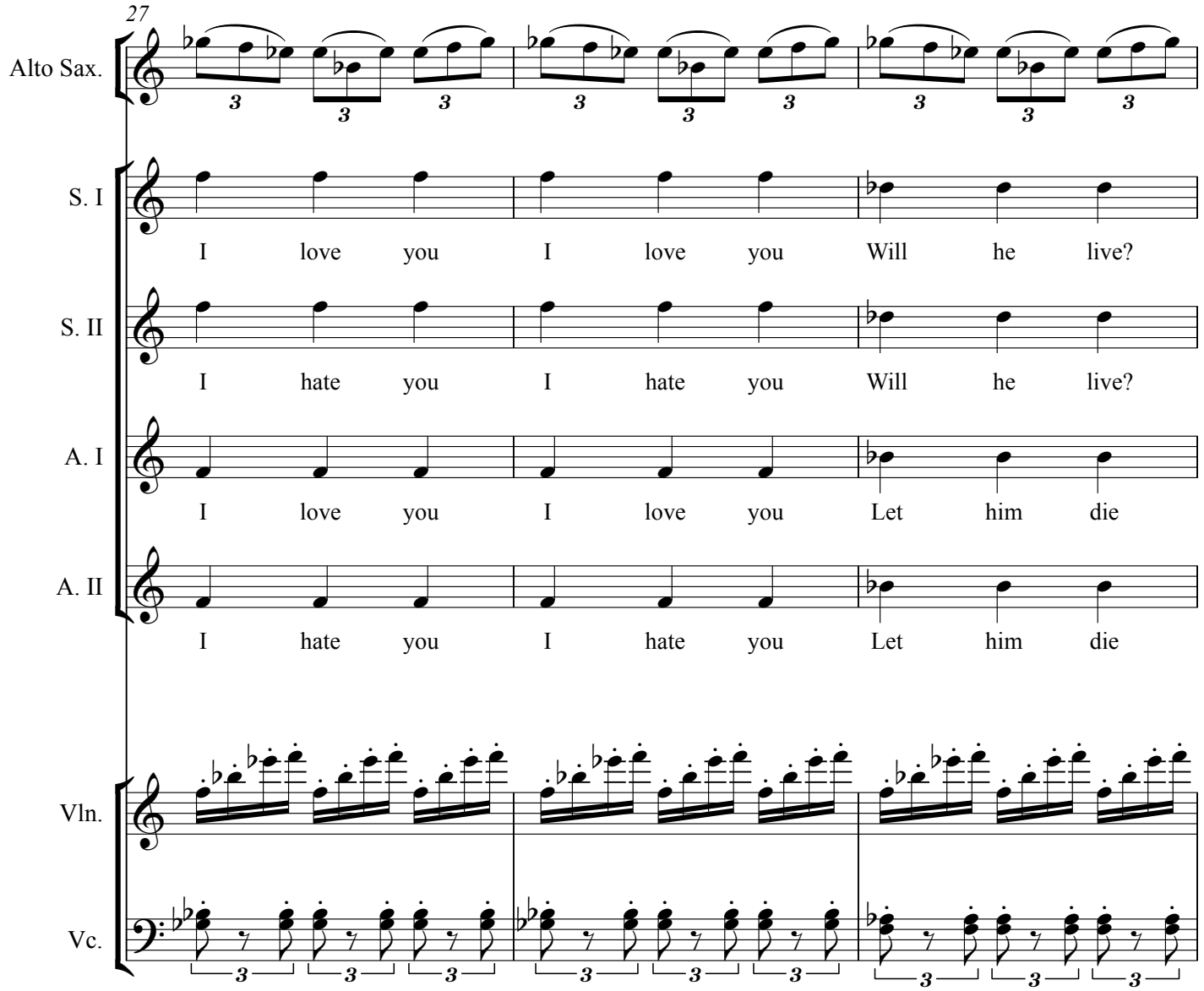
Vc.


13
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
See Look Ter ri ble
S. II
See Look A ma zing
A. I
Look See Ter ri ble
A. II
Look See A ma zing
Vln.
Vc.


16
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Fan tas tic Ter ri ble Fan tas tic
S. II
Hor ri ble A ma zing Hor ri ble
A. I
Fan tas tic Ter ri ble Fan tas tic
A. II
Hor ri ble A ma zing Hor ri ble
Vln.
Vc.


20
Fl.
mp
n
Alto Sax.
mp
Vln.
mp
Vc.
mp


24
Alto Sax.
S. I
Is he real? Are you true?
S. II
Is he real? Are you true?
A. I
Are you true? Is he real?
A. II
Are you true? Is he real?
Vln.
Vc.


27
Alto Sax.
S. I
I love you I love you Will he live?
S. II
I hate you I hate you Will he live?
A. I
I love you I love you Let him die
A. II
I hate you I hate you Let him die
Vln.
Vc.

30

Alto Sax.

S. I

Let him die Will he live? Let him die

S. II

Let him die Will he live? Let him die

A. I

Will he live? Let him die Will he live?

A. II

Will he live? Let him die Will he live?

Vln.

Vc.

33

Fl.

mp

n

Vln.

Vc.

36

Fl.

Alto Sax.

Vln.

Vc.

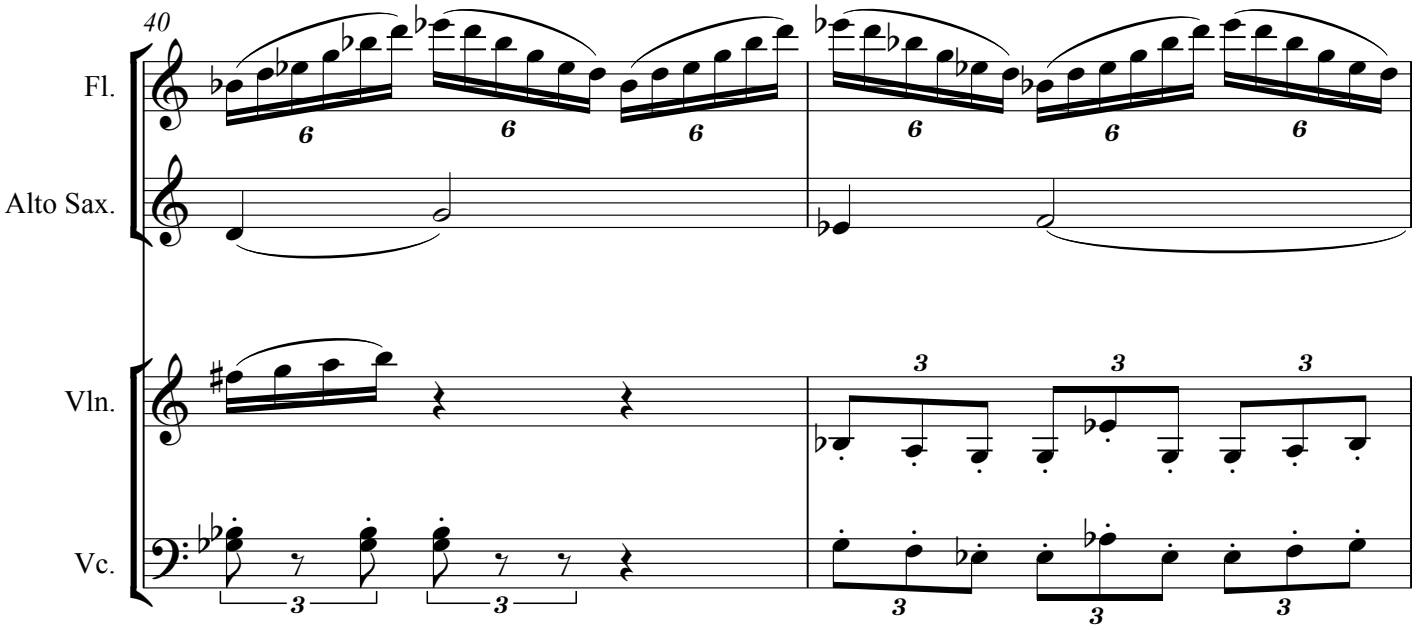
38

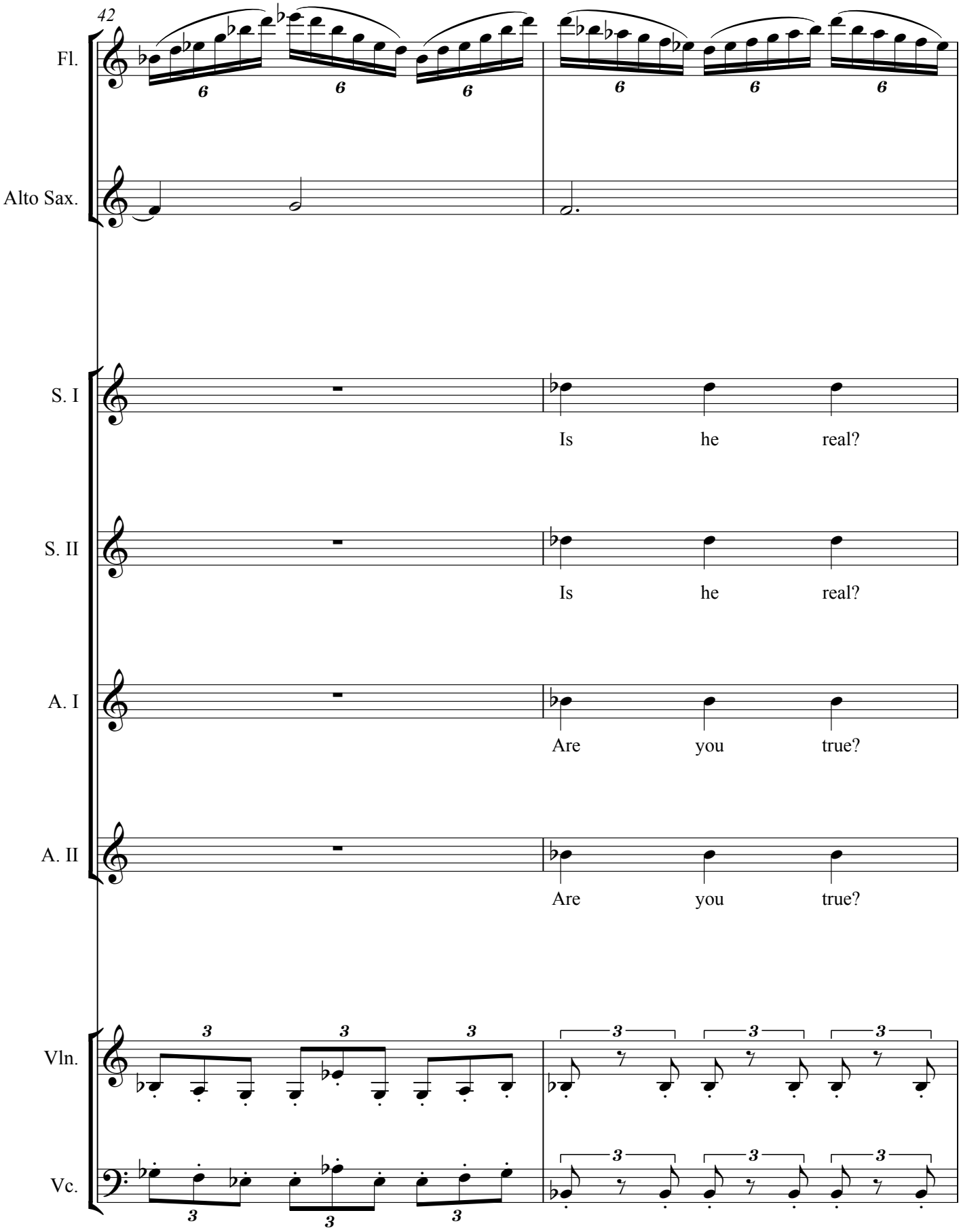
Fl.

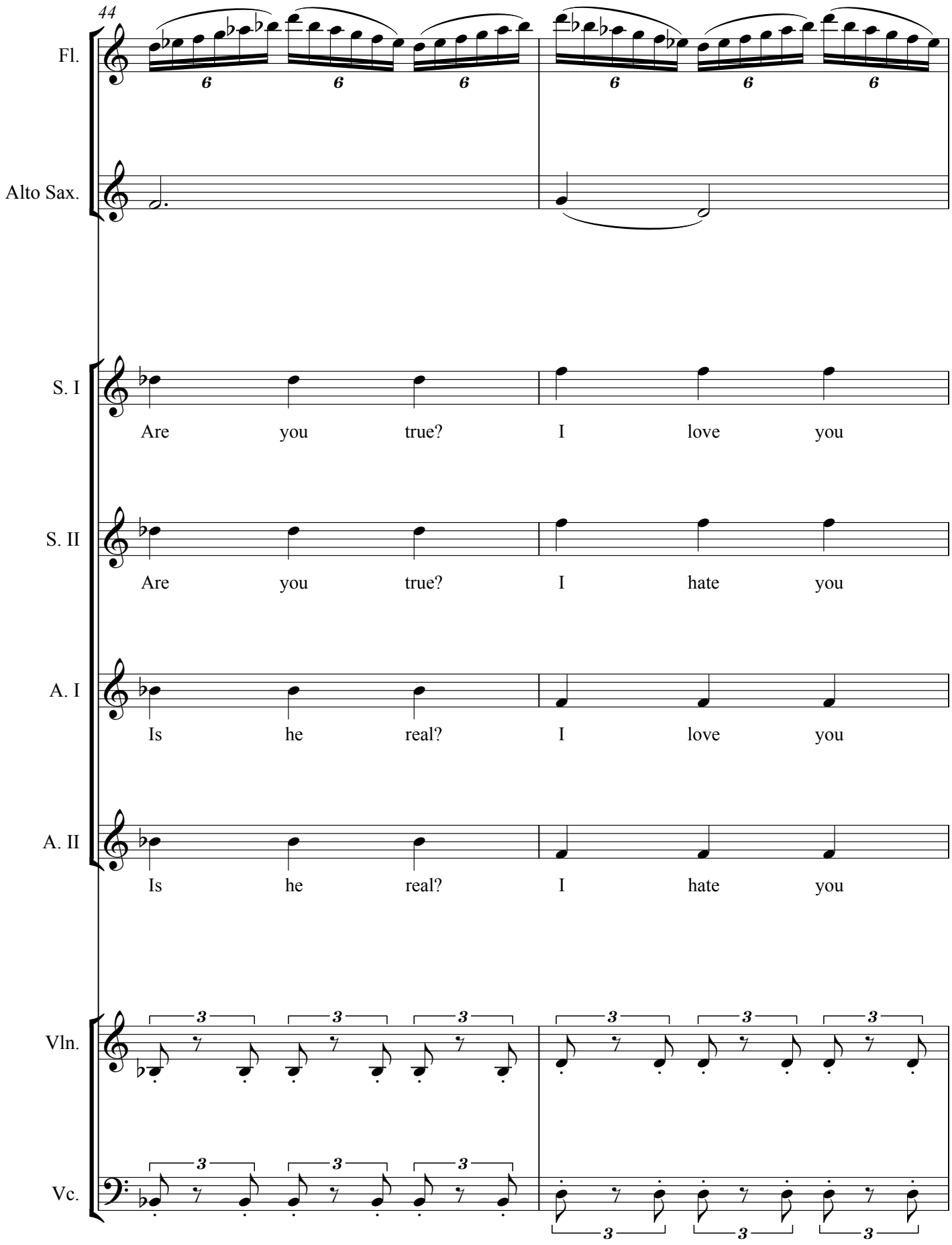
Alto Sax.

Vln.

Vc.


40
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.


42
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Is he real?
S. II
Is he real?
A. I
Are you true?
A. II
Are you true?
Vln.
Vc.


44
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Are you true? I love you
S. II
Are you true? I hate you
A. I
Is he real? I love you
A. II
Is he real? I hate you
Vln.
Vc.

46

Fl.

Alto Sax.

mp

S. I

I love you Will he live?

S. II

I hate you Will he live?

A. I

I love you Let him die

A. II

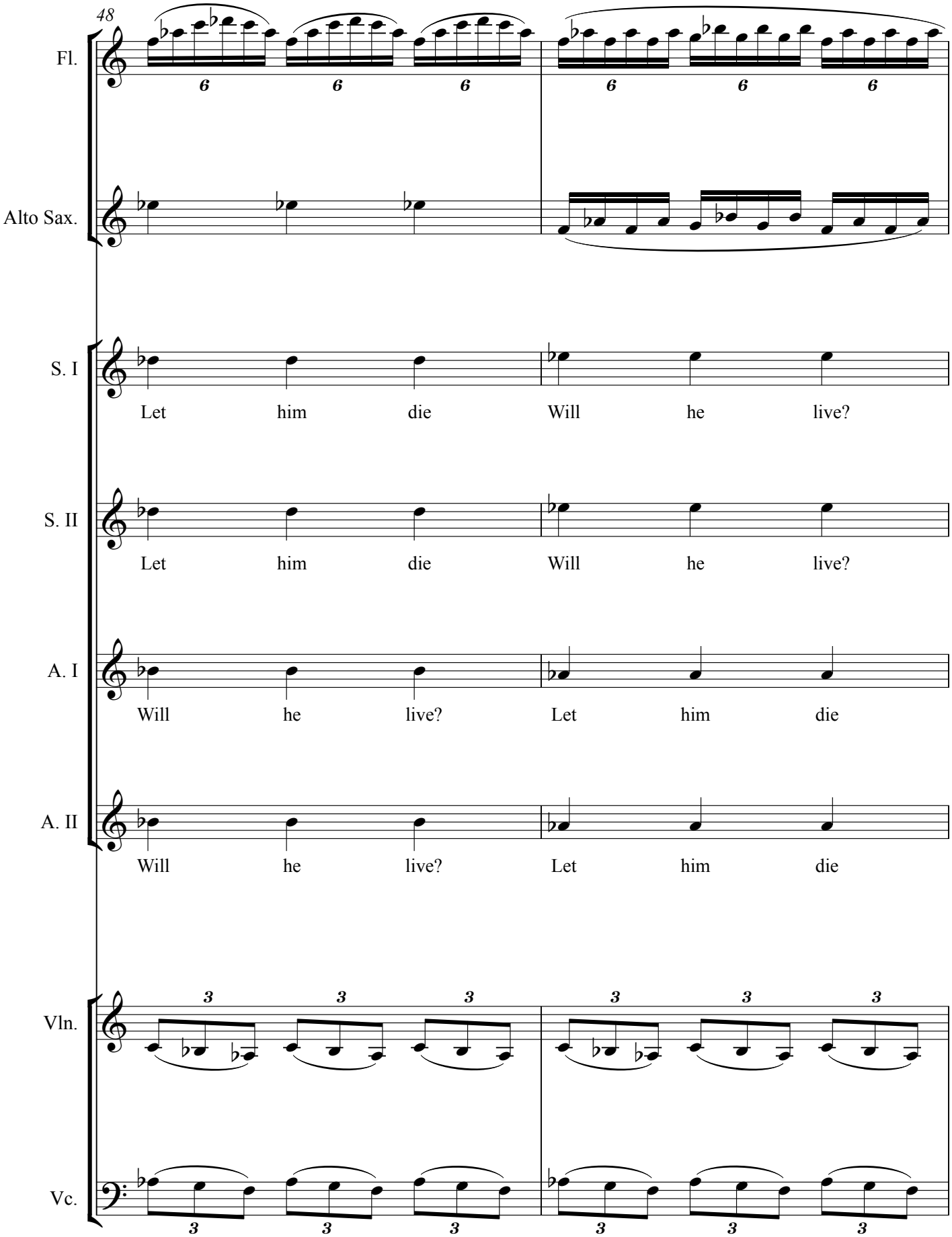
I hate you Let him die

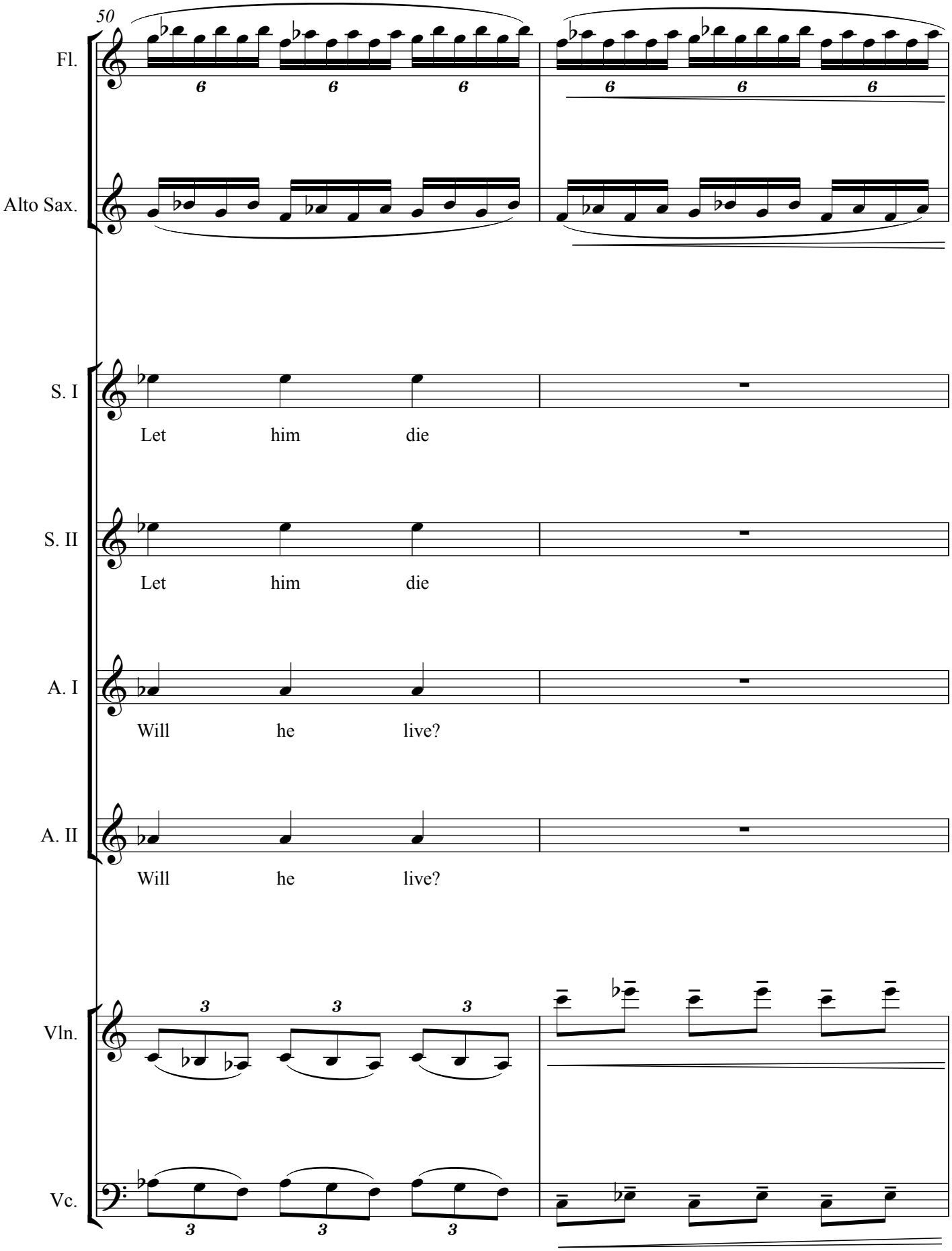
Vln.

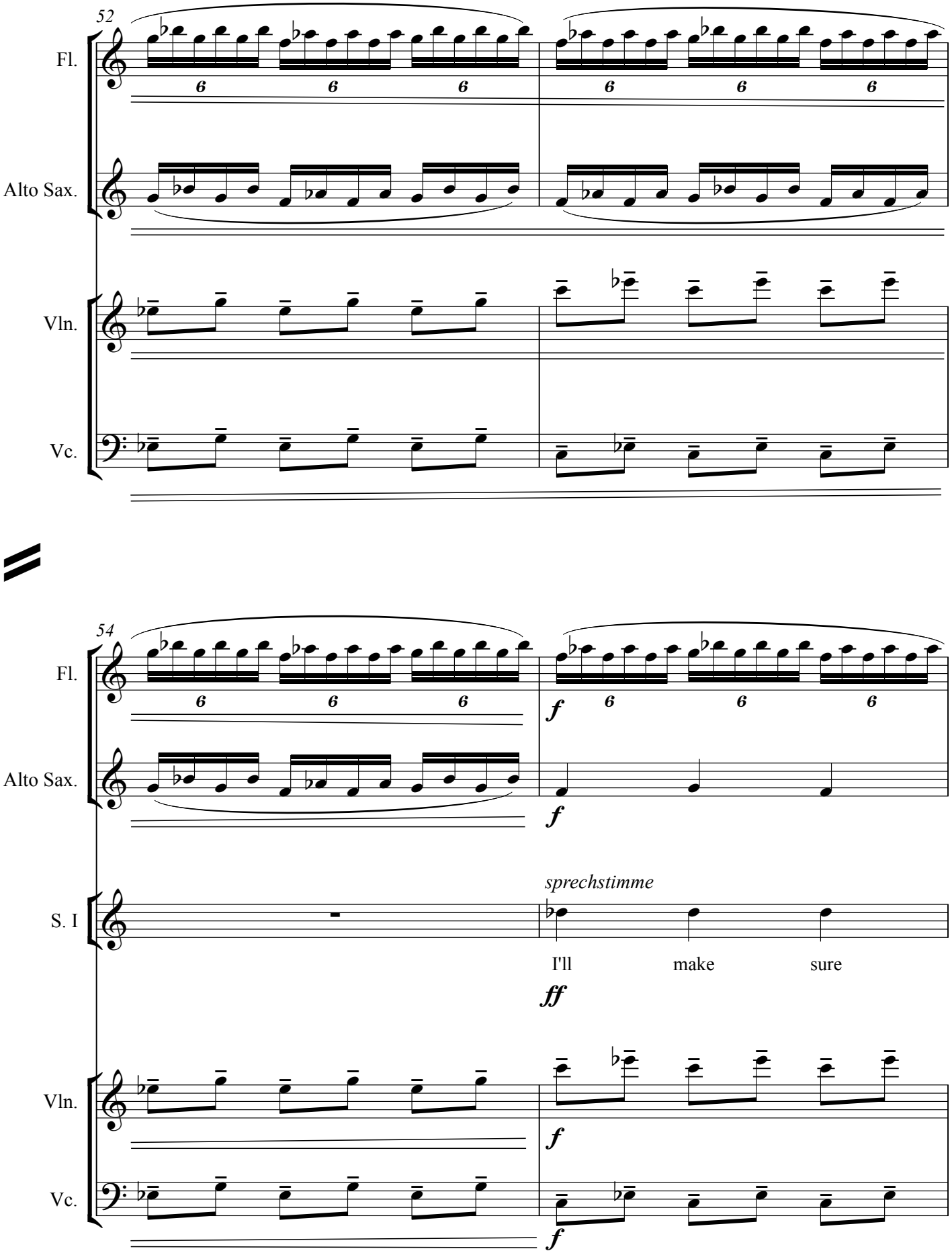
mp

Vc.

mp


48
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Let him die Will he live?
S. II
Let him die Will he live?
A. I
Will he live? Let him die
A. II
Will he live? Let him die
Vln.
Vc.


50
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Let him die
S. II
Let him die
A. I
Will he live?
A. II
Will he live?
Vln.
Vc.


52
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
54
Fl.
f
Alto Sax.
f
S. I
sprechstimme
I'll
make
sure
ff
Vln.
f
Vc.
f

56

Fl.

Alto Sax.

S. I

He won't eat If he does

Vln.

Vc.

58

Fl.

Alto Sax.

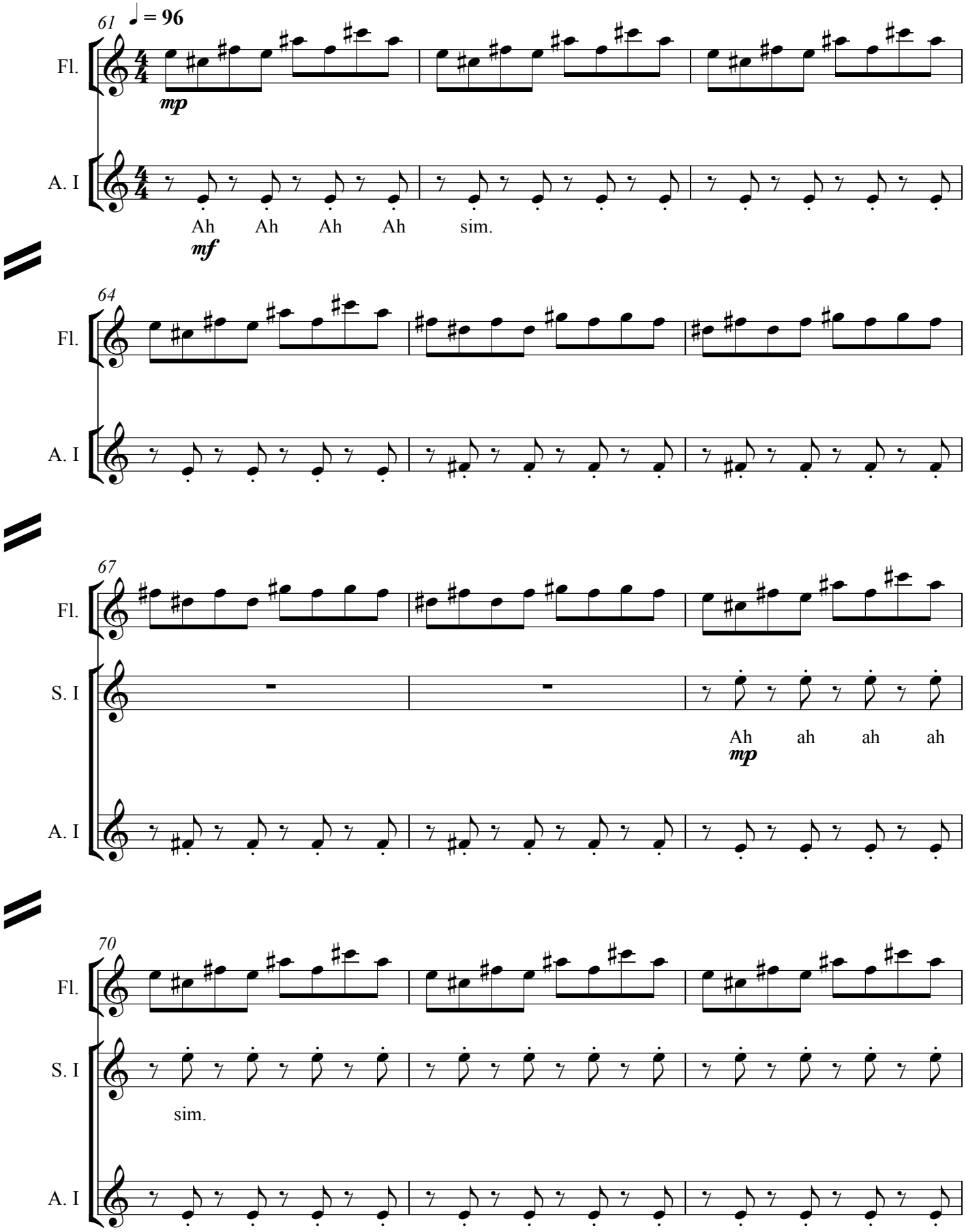
S. I

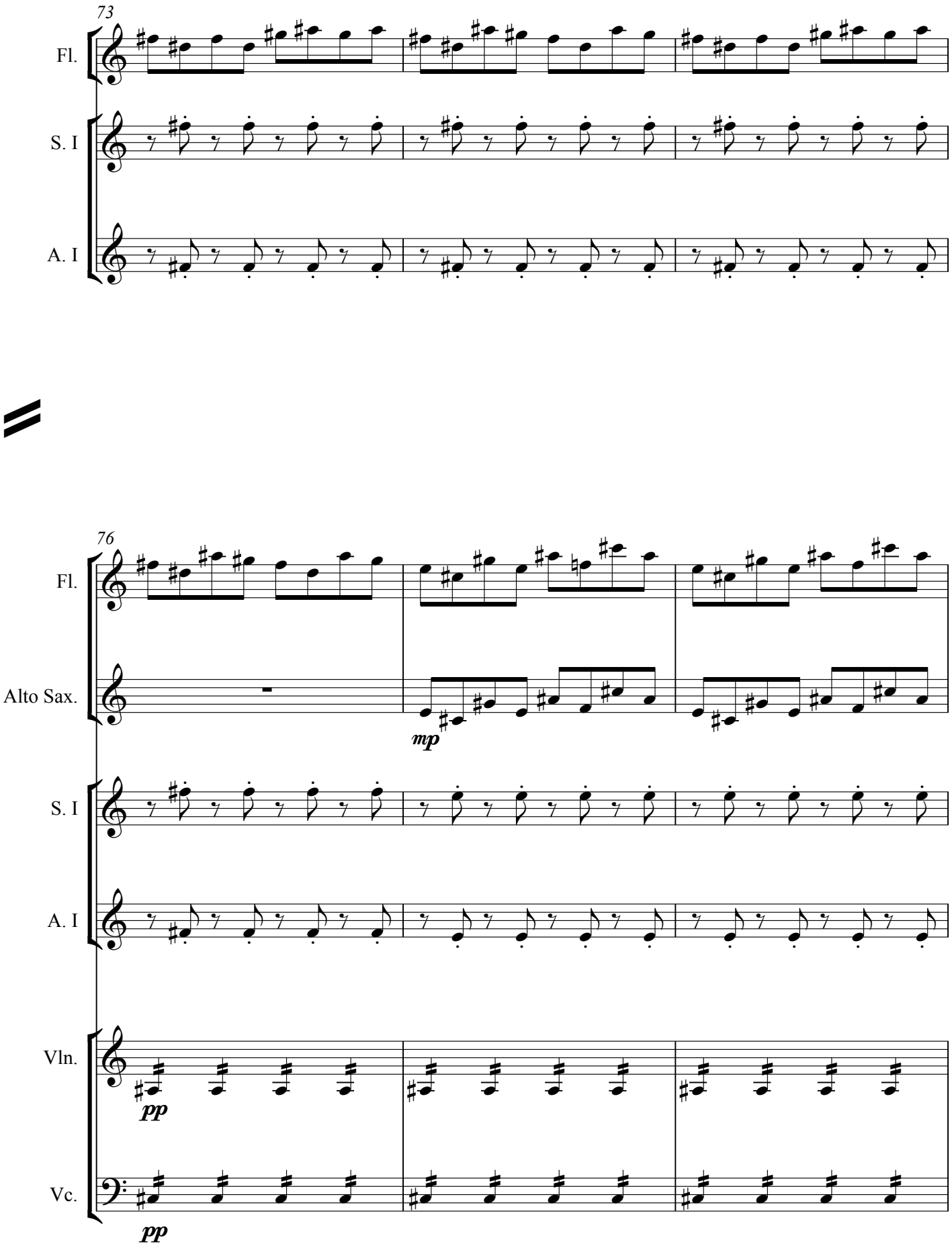
hurried, with stilted rhythm

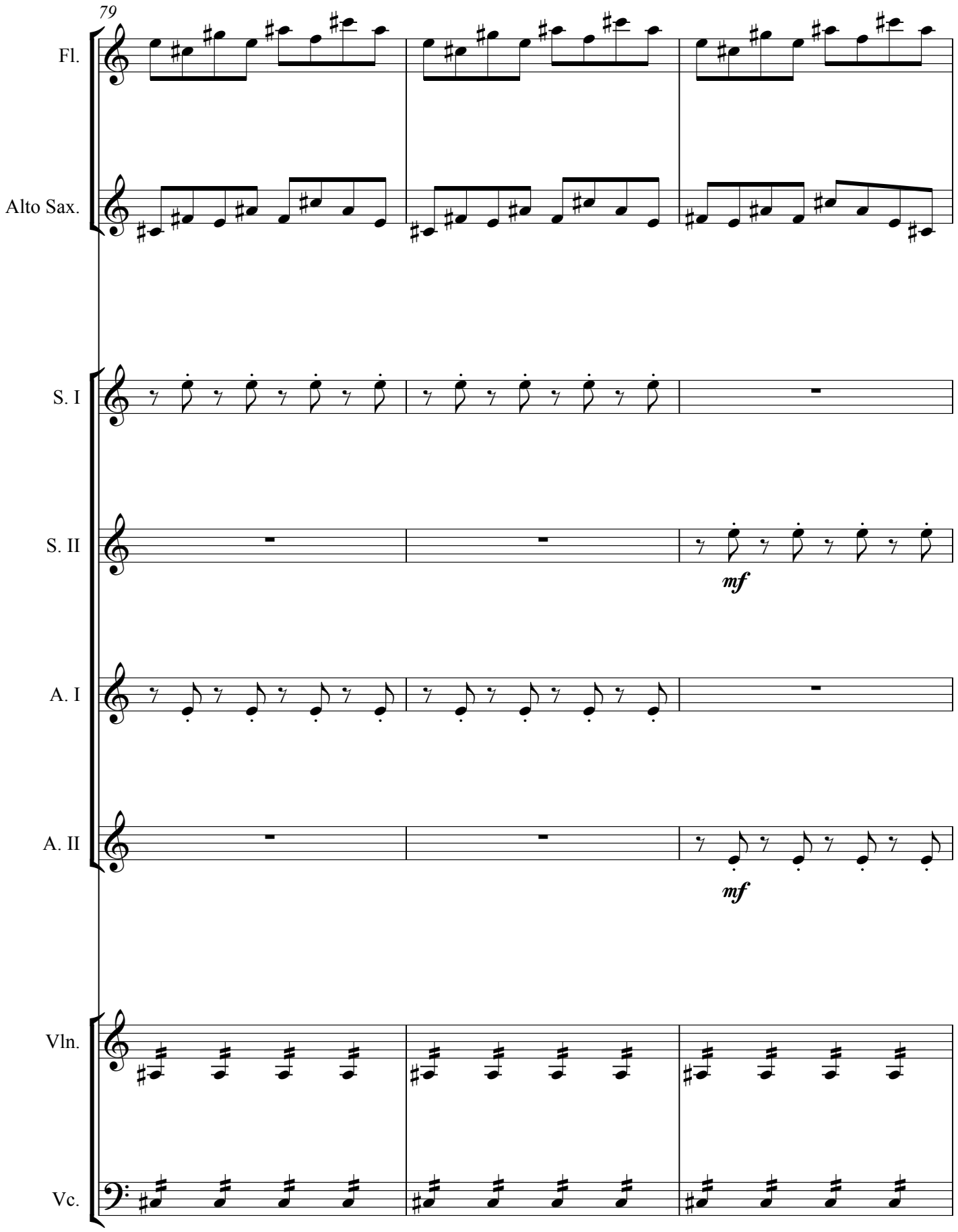
(sigh) what a disappointment it will be!

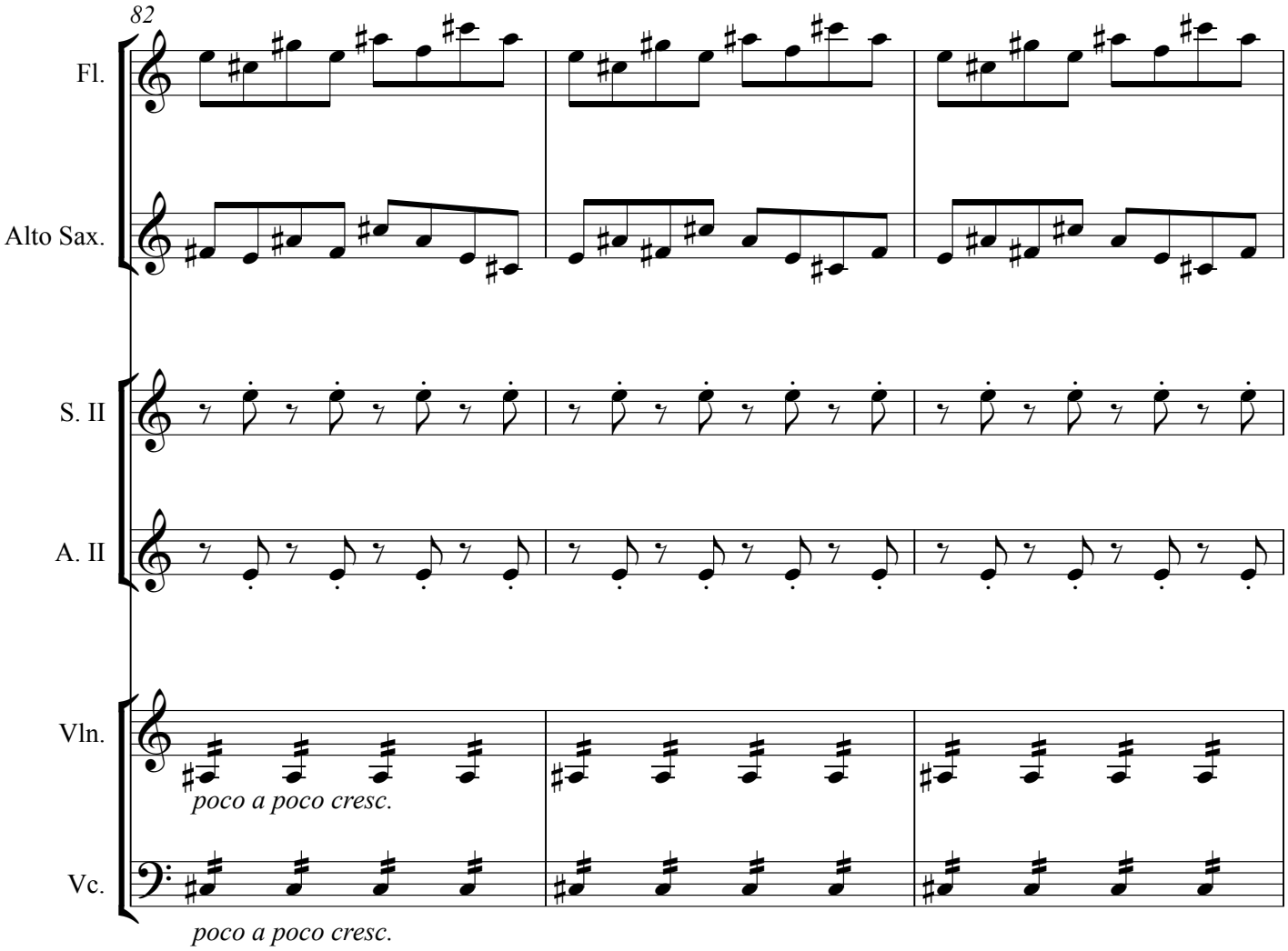
Vln.

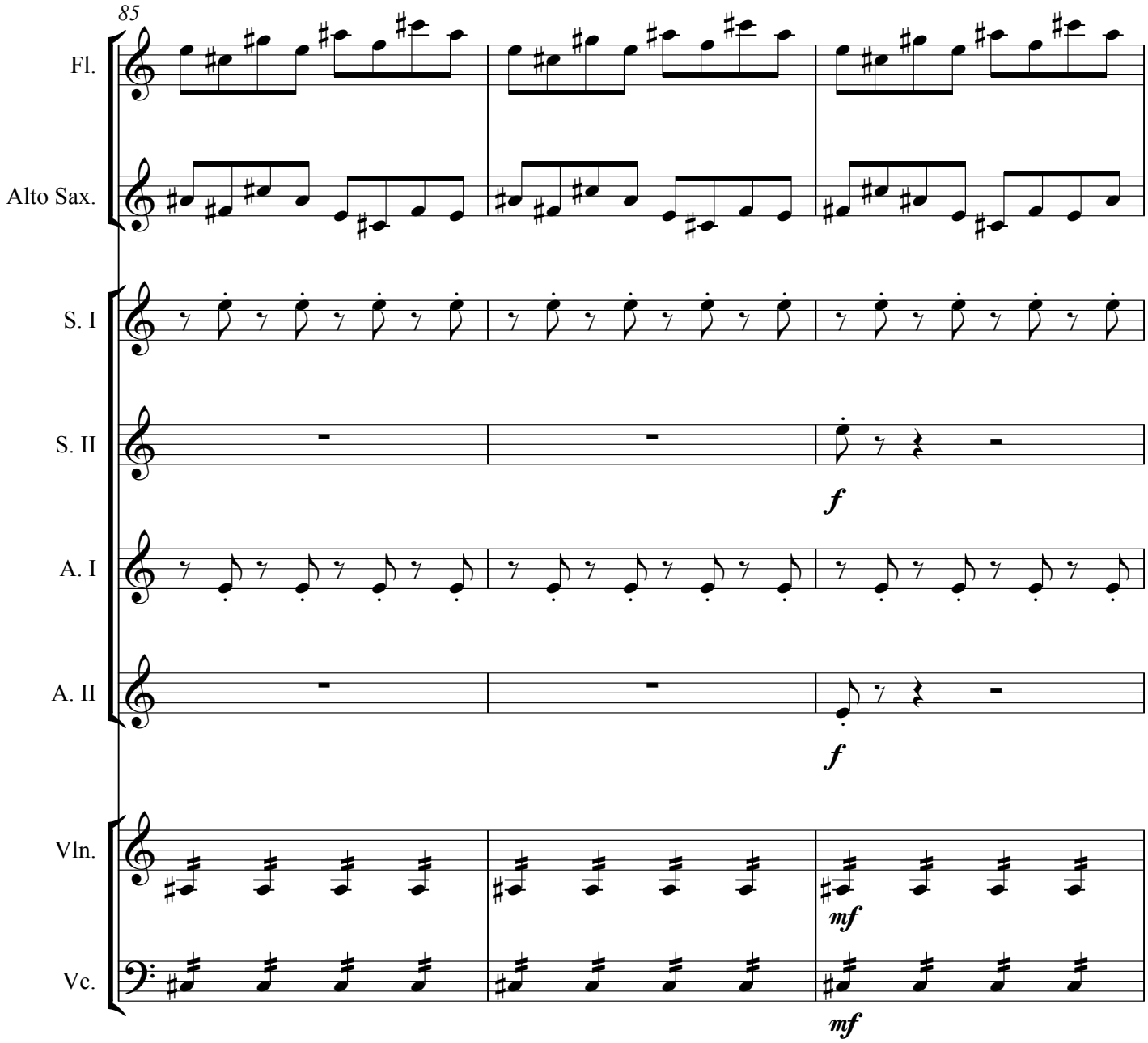
Vc.

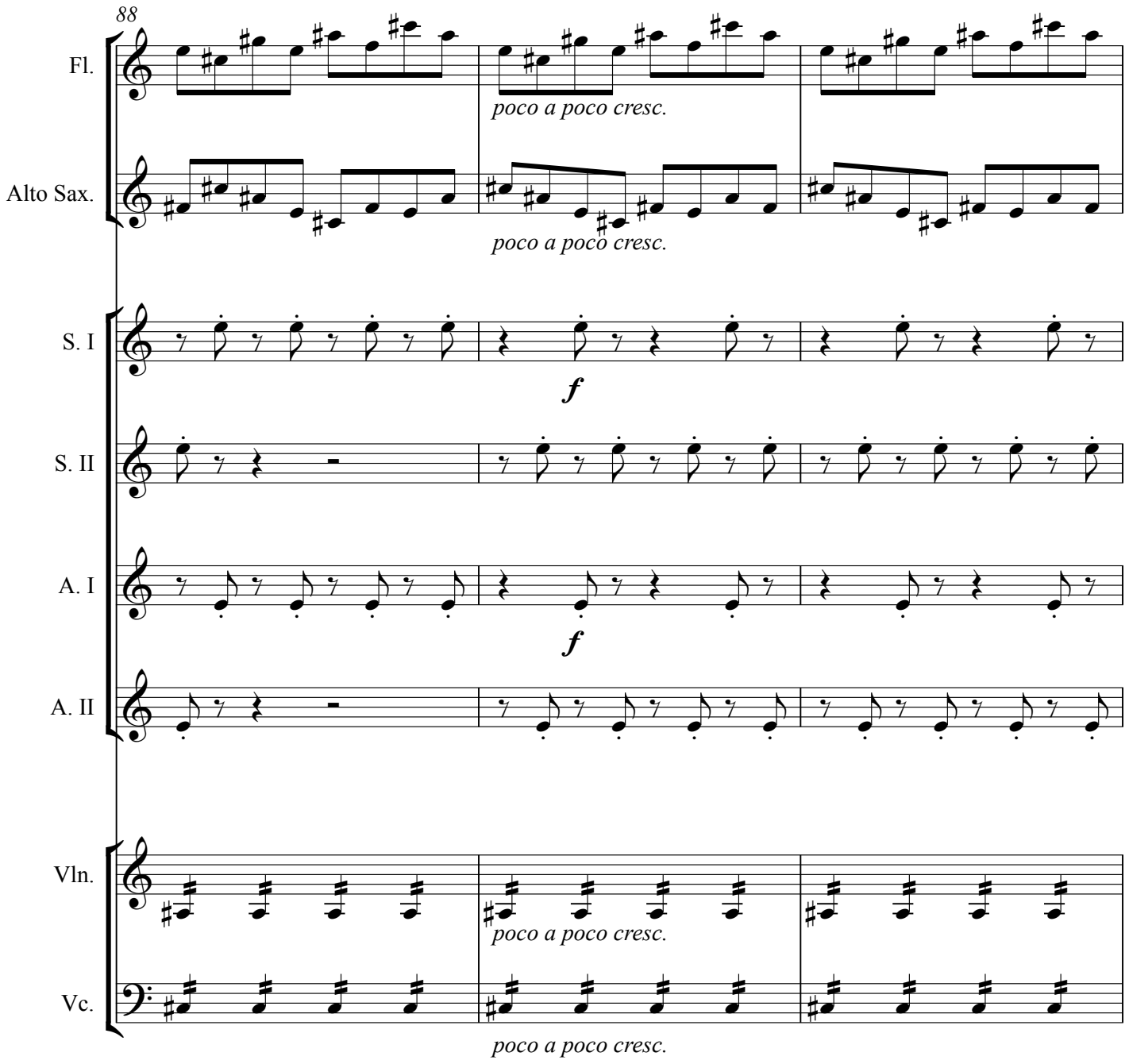

61
♩ = 96
Fl.
mp
A. I
Ah Ah Ah Ah sim.
mf
64
Fl.
A. I
67
Fl.
S. I
Ah ah ah ah
mp
A. I
70
Fl.
S. I
sim.
A. I

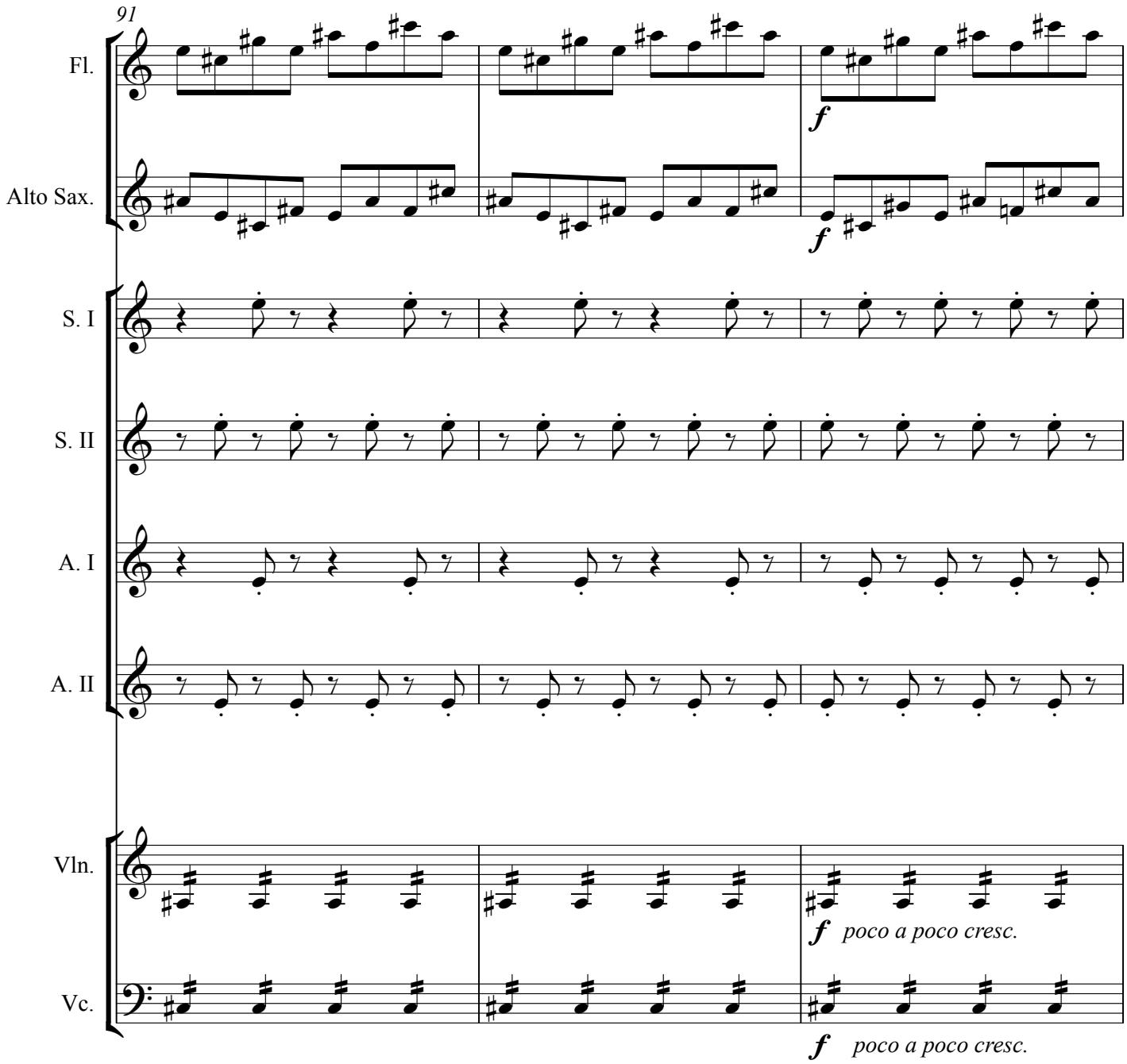

73
Fl.
S. I
A. I
76
Fl.
Alto Sax.
mp
S. I
A. I
Vln.
pp
Vc.
pp

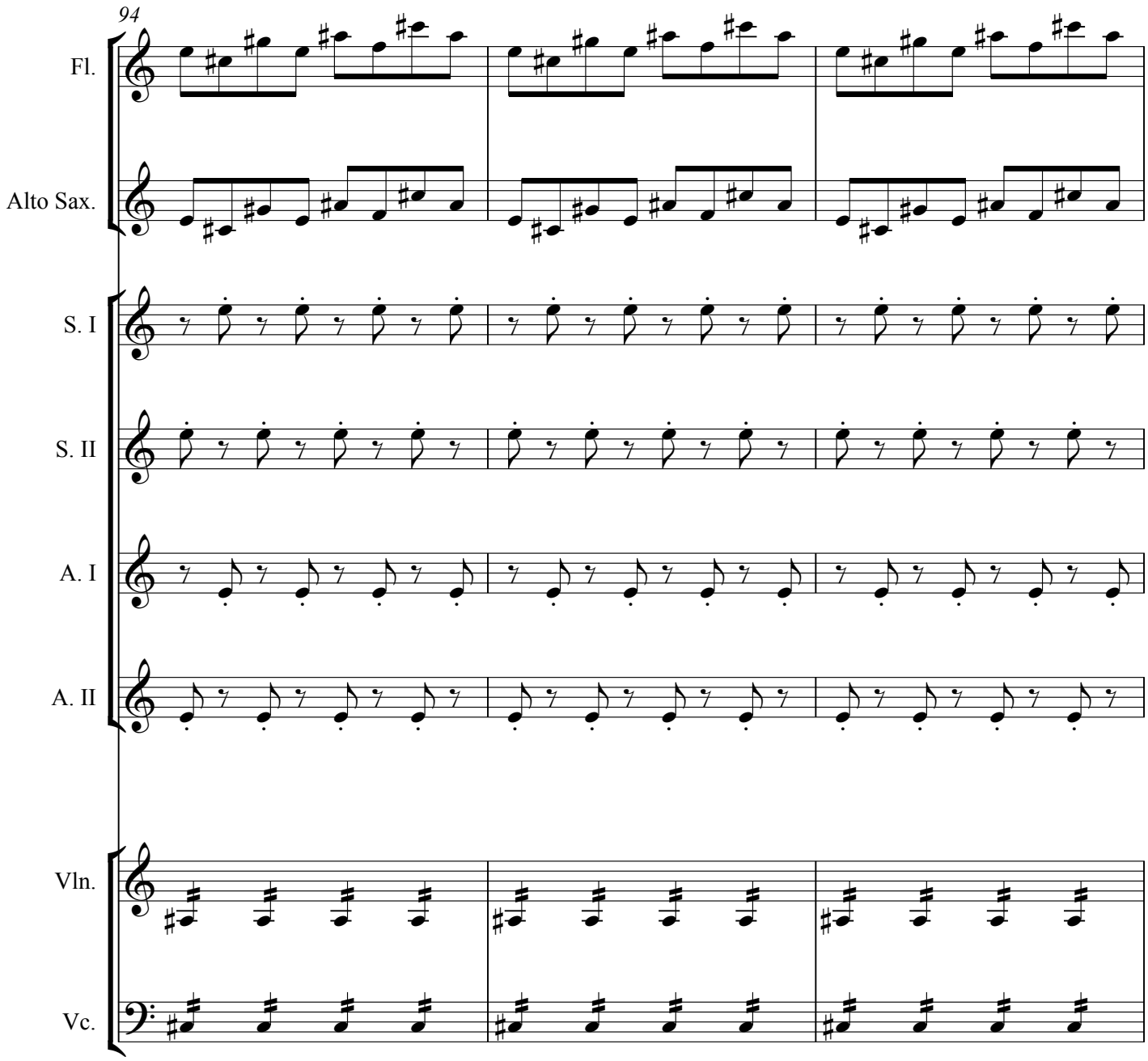

79
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
mf
A. I
A. II
mf
Vln.
Vc.

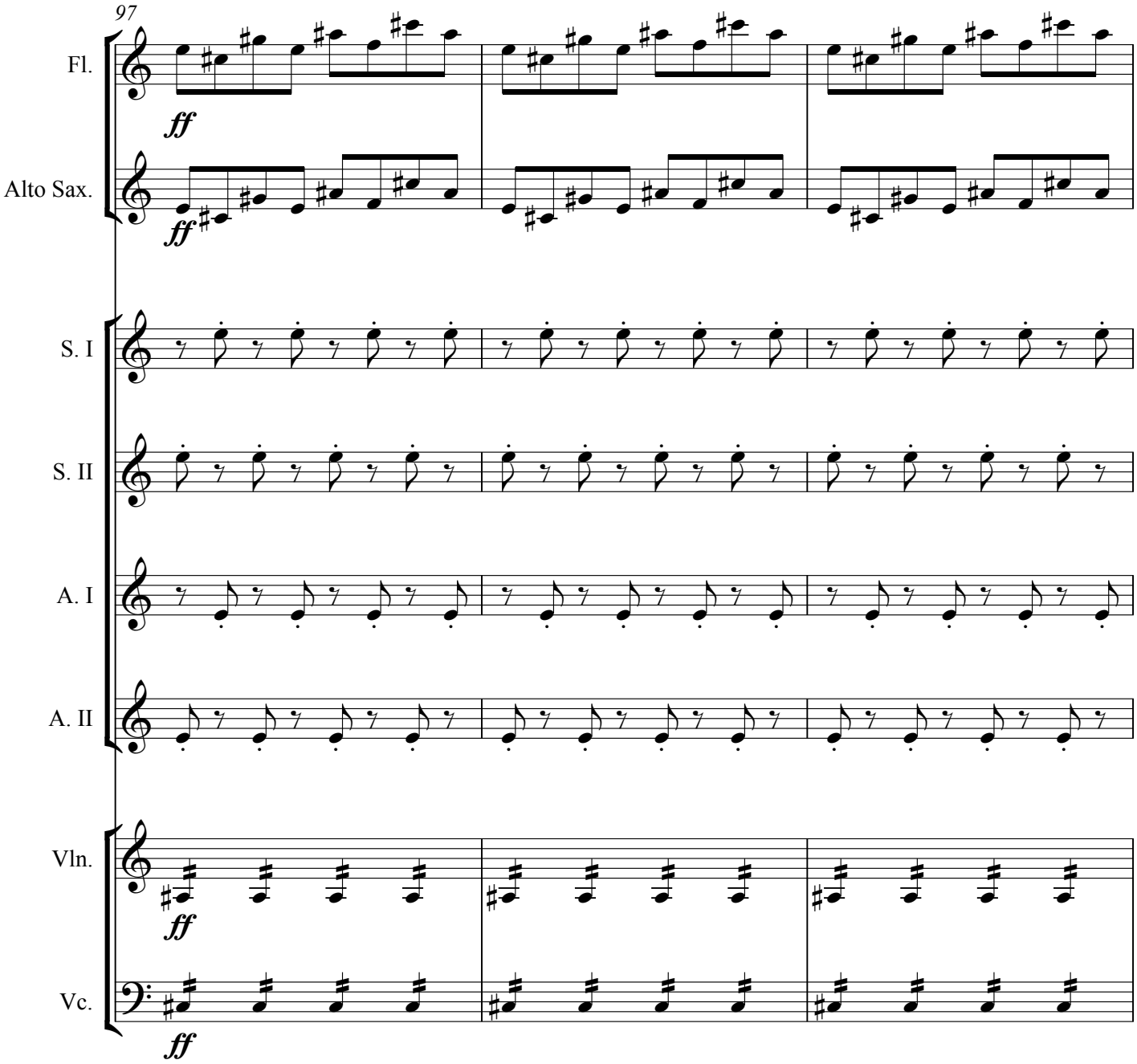

82
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. II
A. II
Vln.
poco a poco cresc.
Vc.
poco a poco cresc.

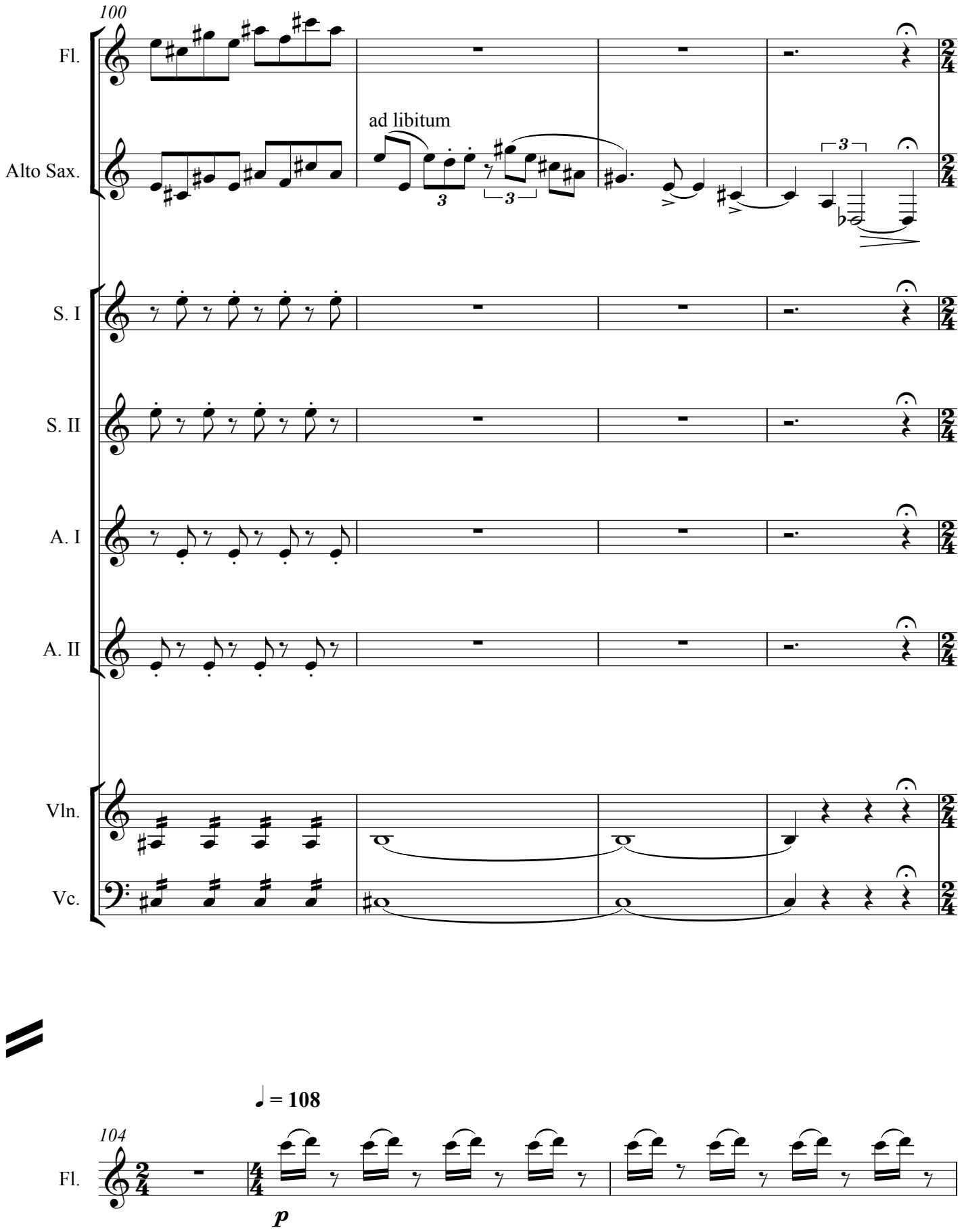

85
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
f
A. I
A. II
f
Vln.
mf
Vc.
mf

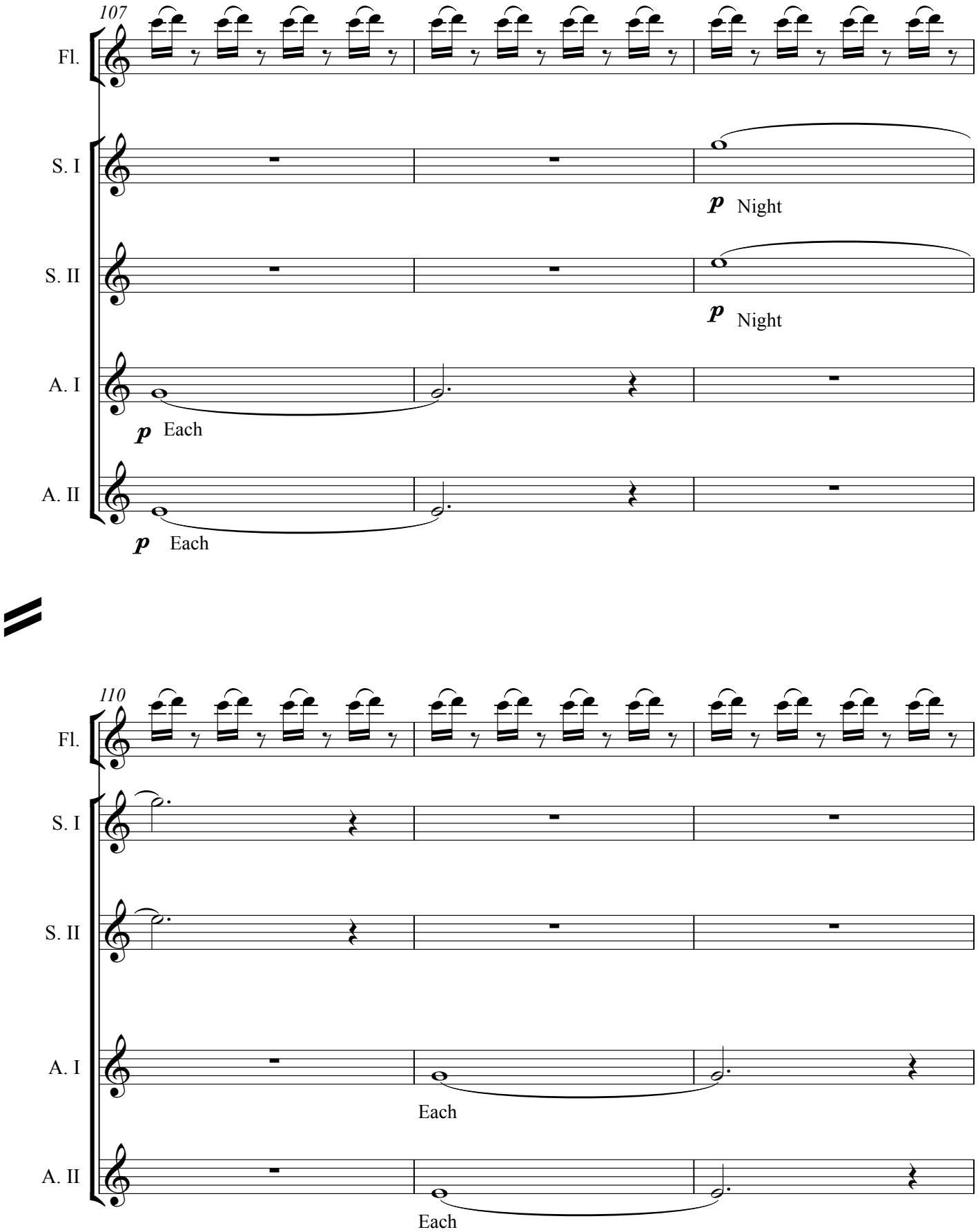

88
Fl.
poco a poco cresc.
Alto Sax.
poco a poco cresc.
S. I
f
S. II
A. I
f
A. II
Vln.
poco a poco cresc.
Vc.
poco a poco cresc.

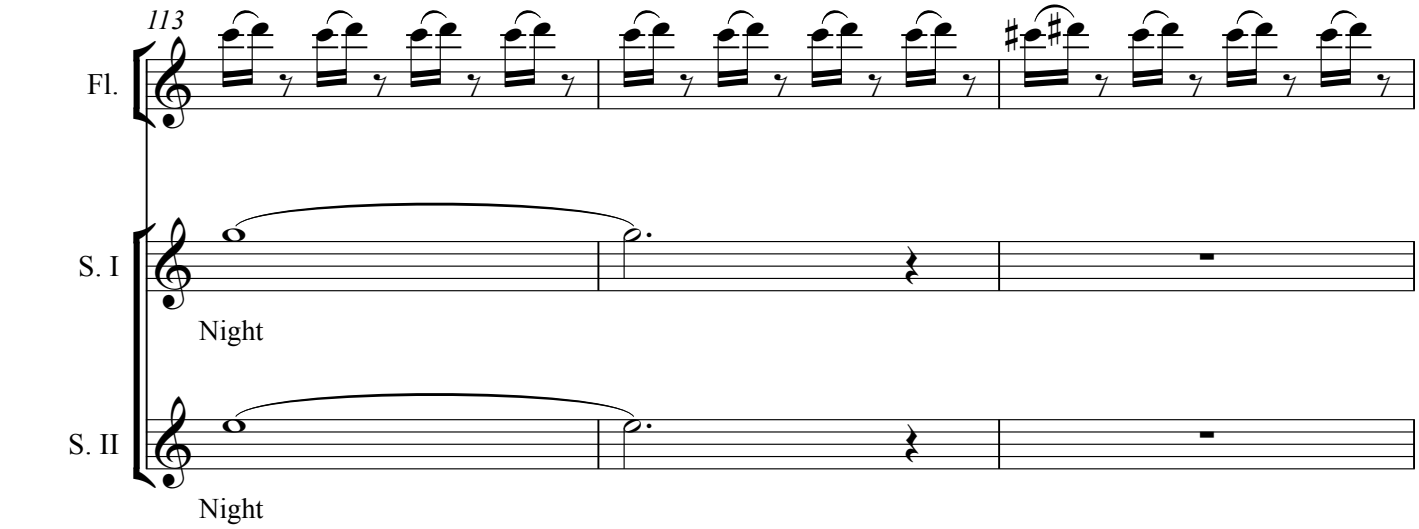

91
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln.
Vc.
f
f
f poco a poco cresc.
f poco a poco cresc.

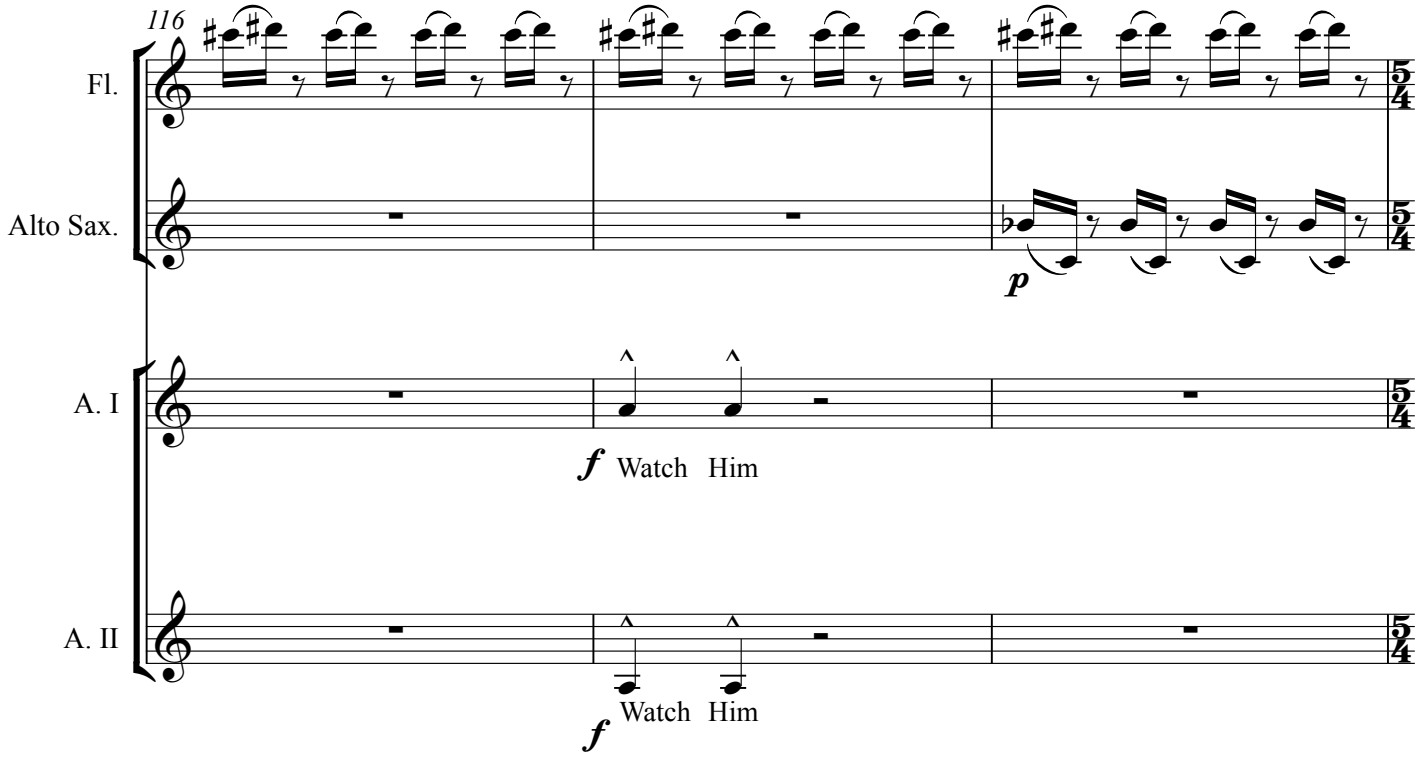

94
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln.
Vc.

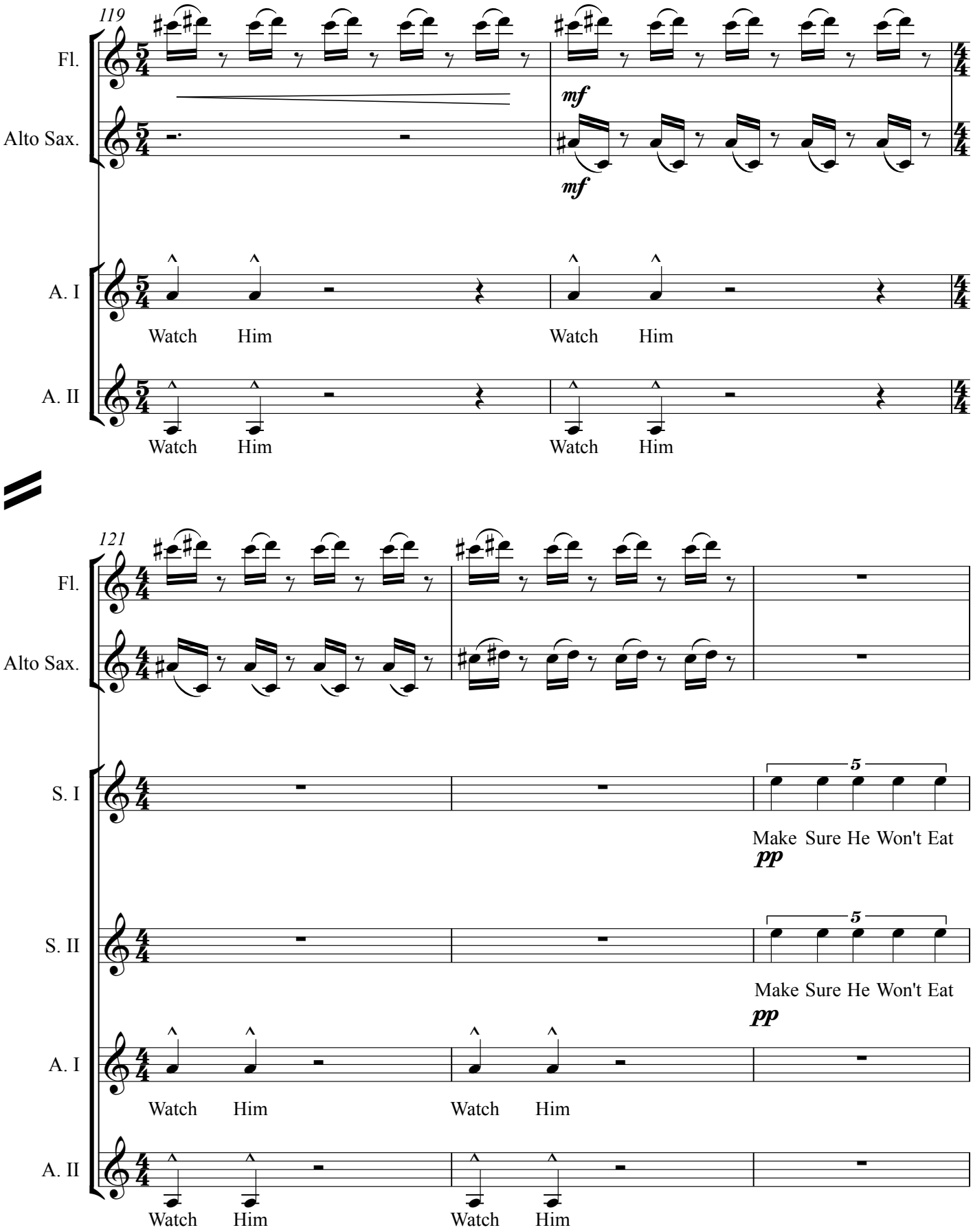

97
Fl.
ff
Alto Sax.
ff
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln.
ff
Vc.
ff

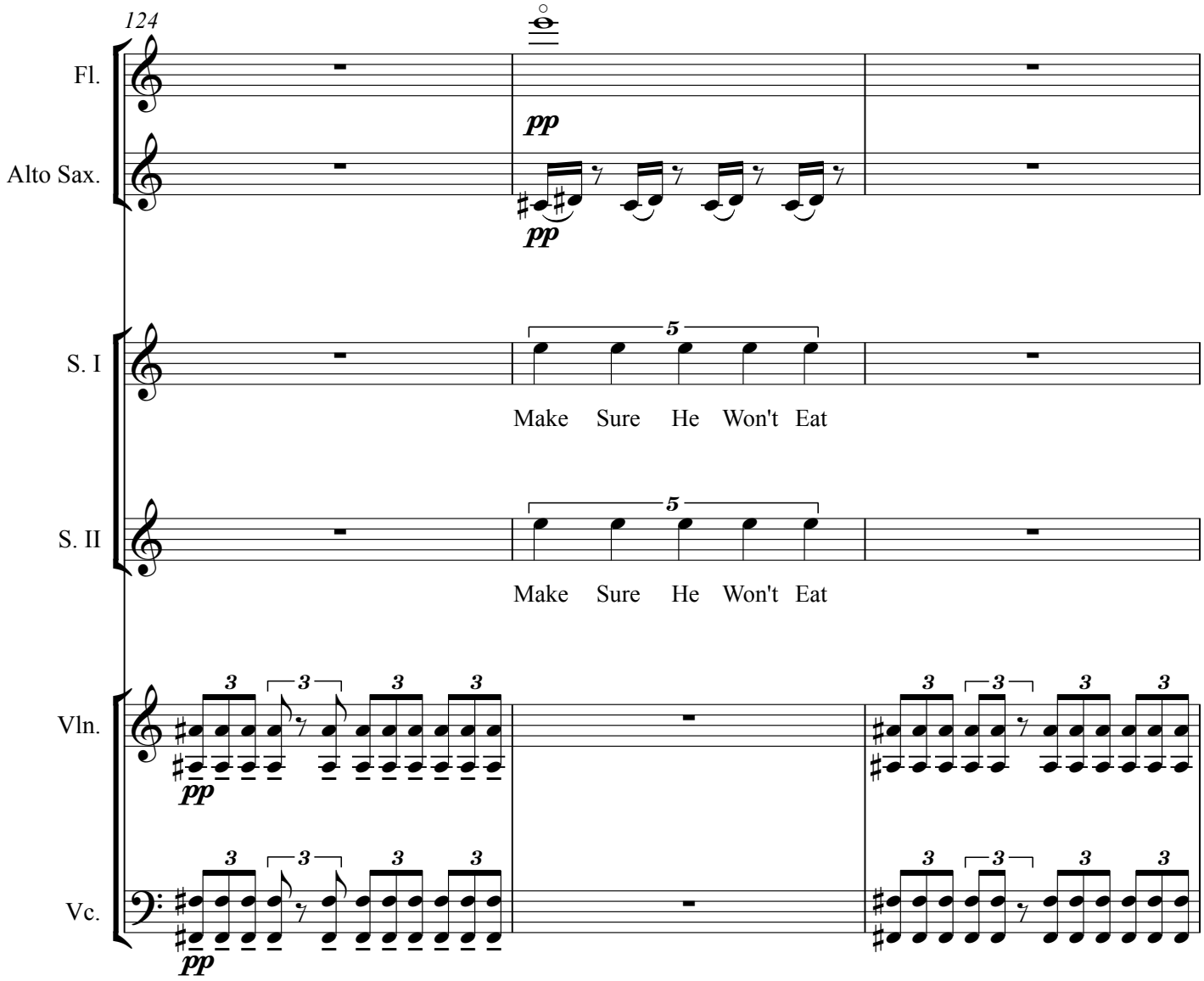

100
Fl.
Alto Sax.
ad libitum
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln.
Vc.
104
Fl.
♩ = 108
p


107
Fl.
S. I
p Night
S. II
p Night
A. I
p Each
A. II
p Each
110
Fl.
S. I
S. II
A. I
Each
A. II
Each


113
Fl.
S. I
Night
S. II
Night


116
Fl.
Alto Sax.
p
A. I
f Watch Him
A. II
f Watch Him


119
Fl.
Alto Sax.
mf
mf
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him
121
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
5
Make Sure He Won't Eat
pp
S. II
5
Make Sure He Won't Eat
pp
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him


124
Fl.
pp
Alto Sax.
pp
S. I
5
Make Sure He Won't Eat
S. II
5
Make Sure He Won't Eat
Vln.
3
pp
Vc.
3
pp

127

Fl.

mf

Alto Sax.

mf

A. I

Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him

A. II

Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him

Vc.

mp

130

Fl.

Alto Sax.

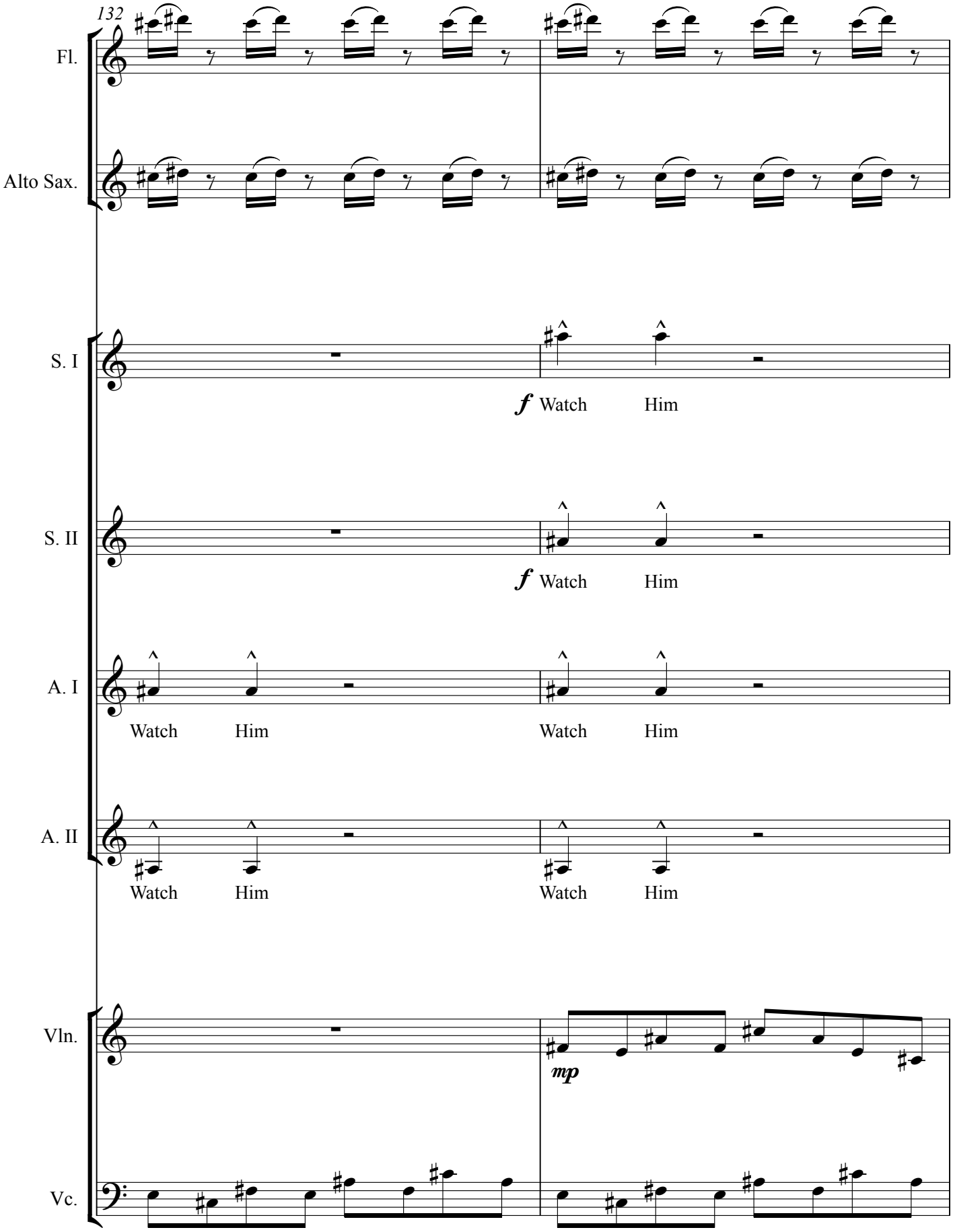
A. I

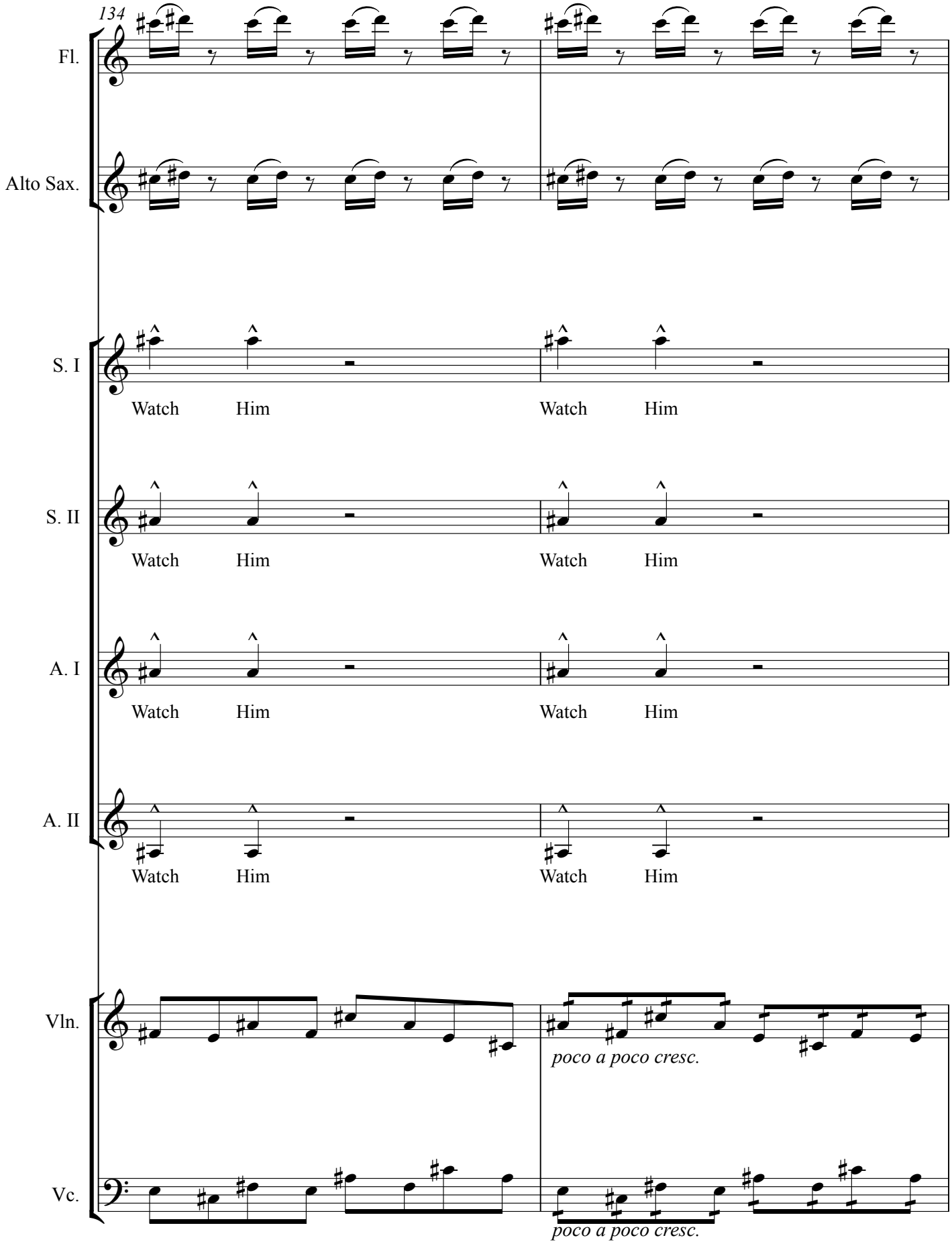
Watch Him Watch Him

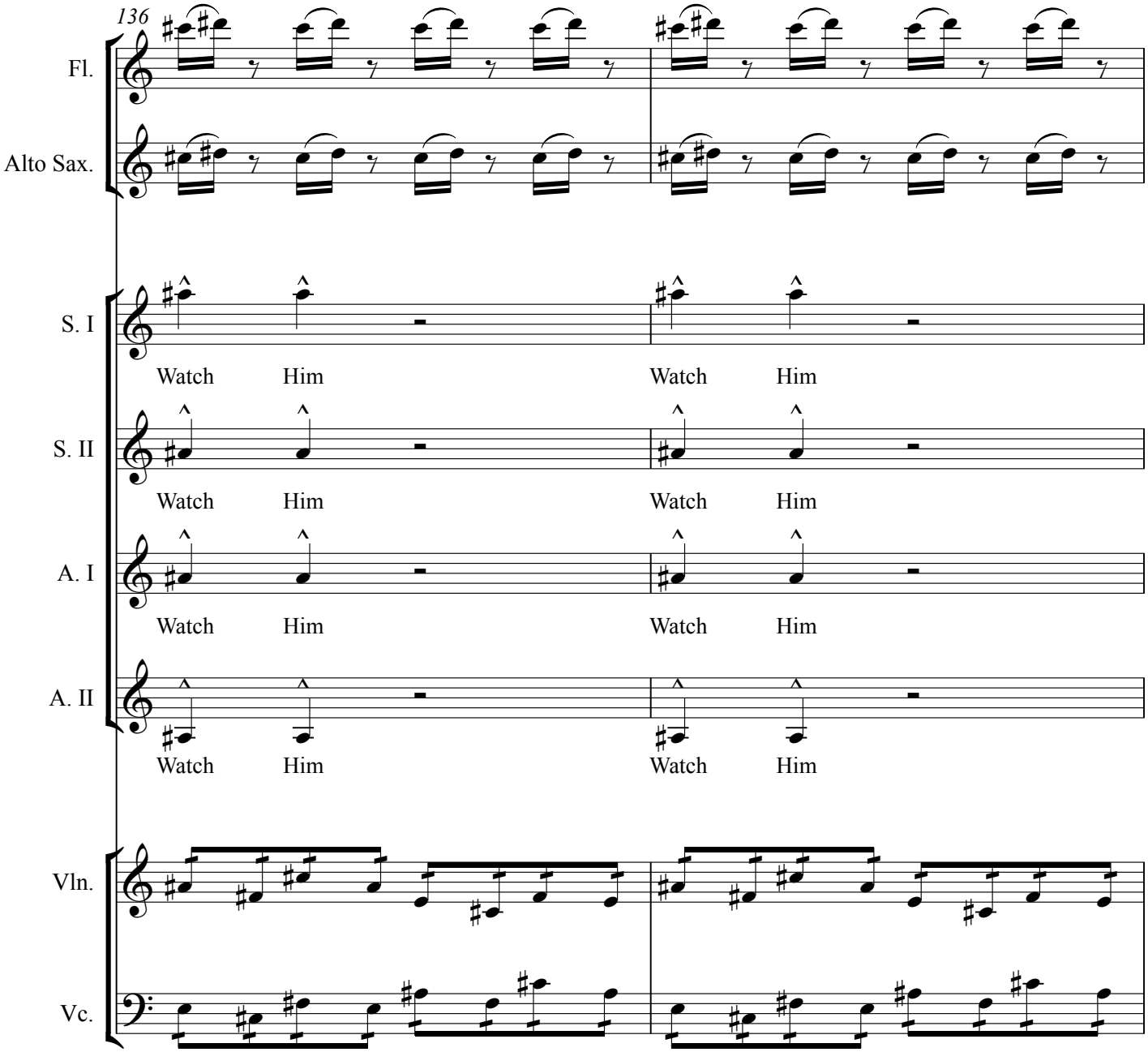
A. II

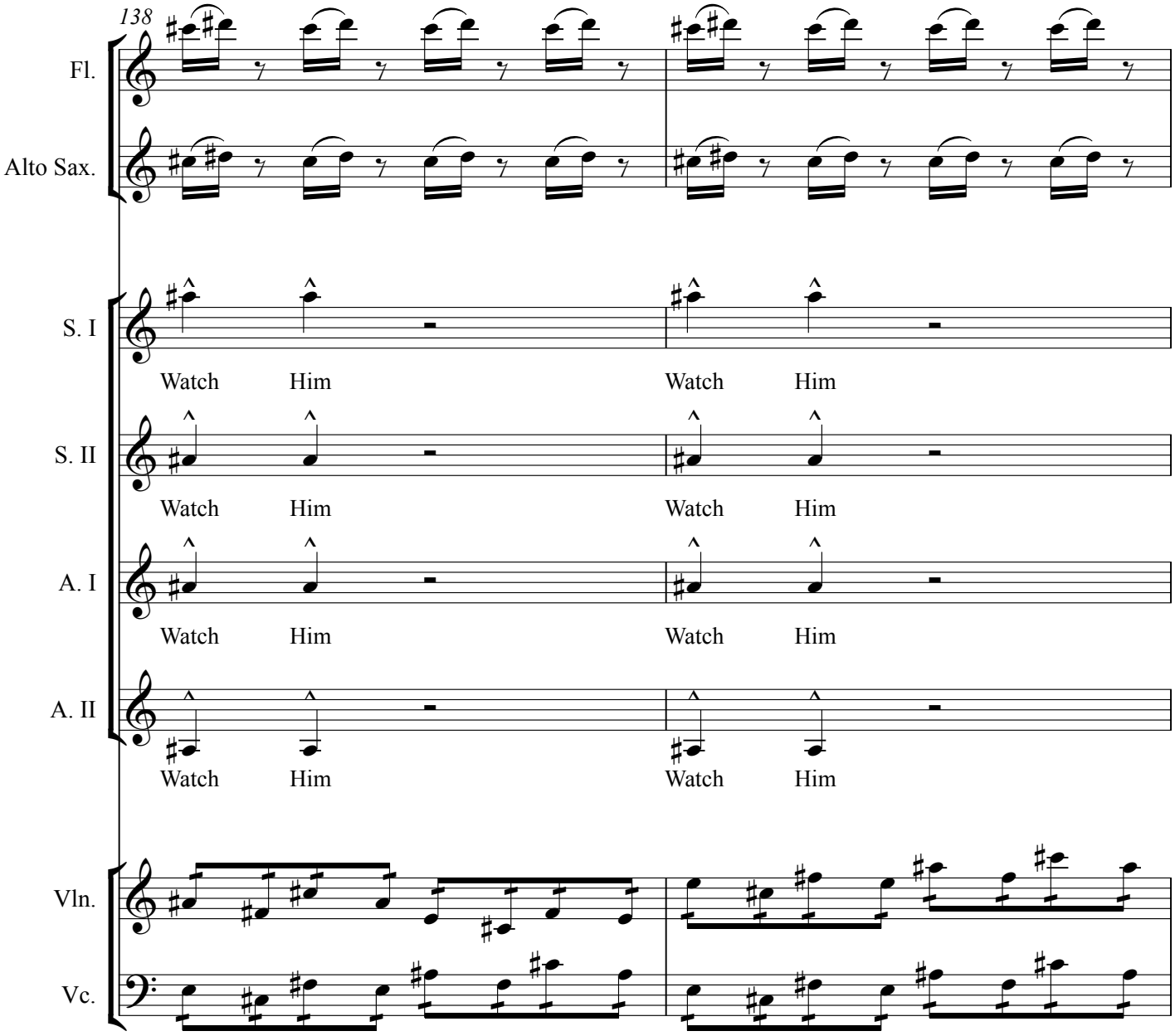
Watch Him Watch Him

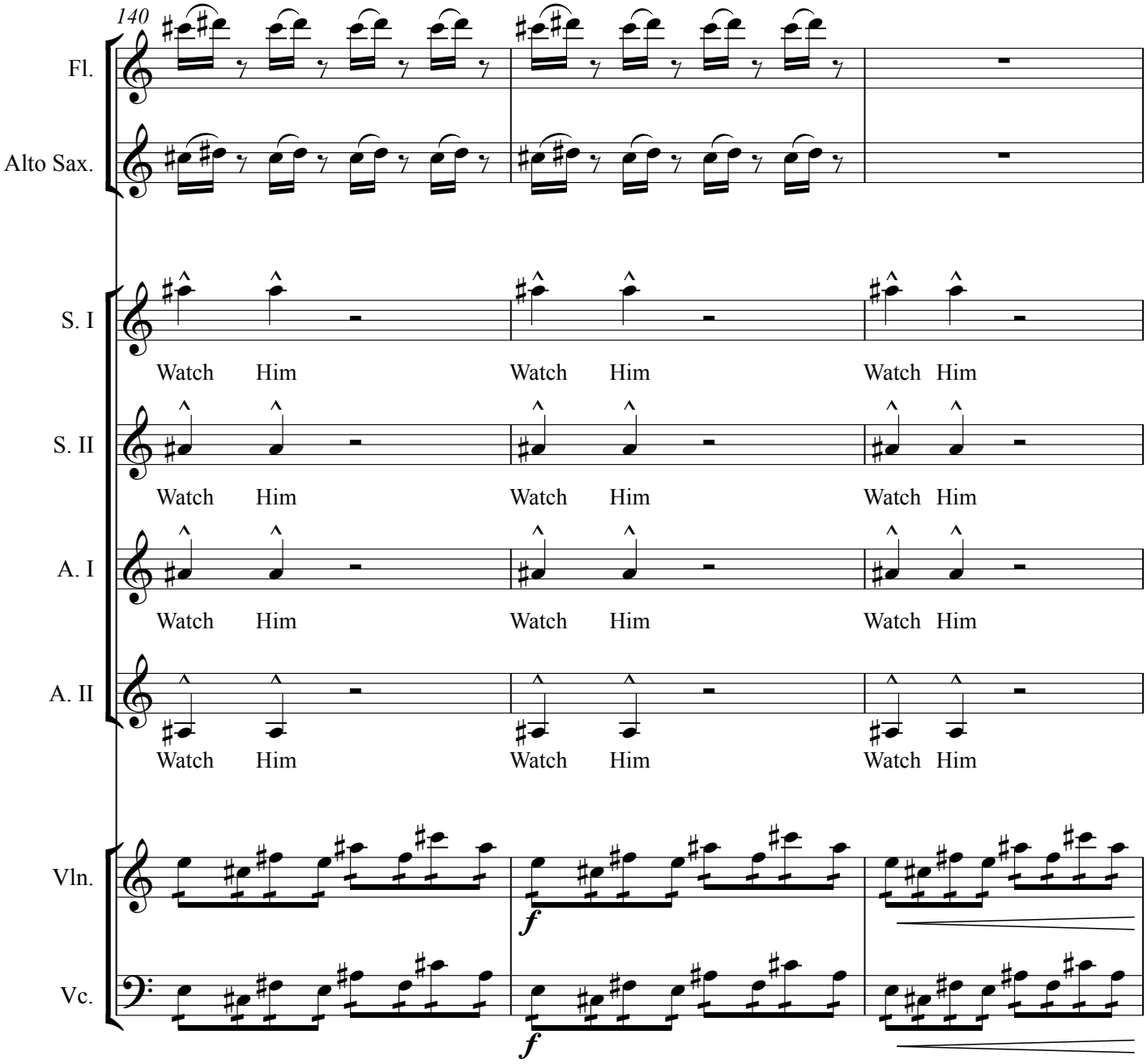
Vc.

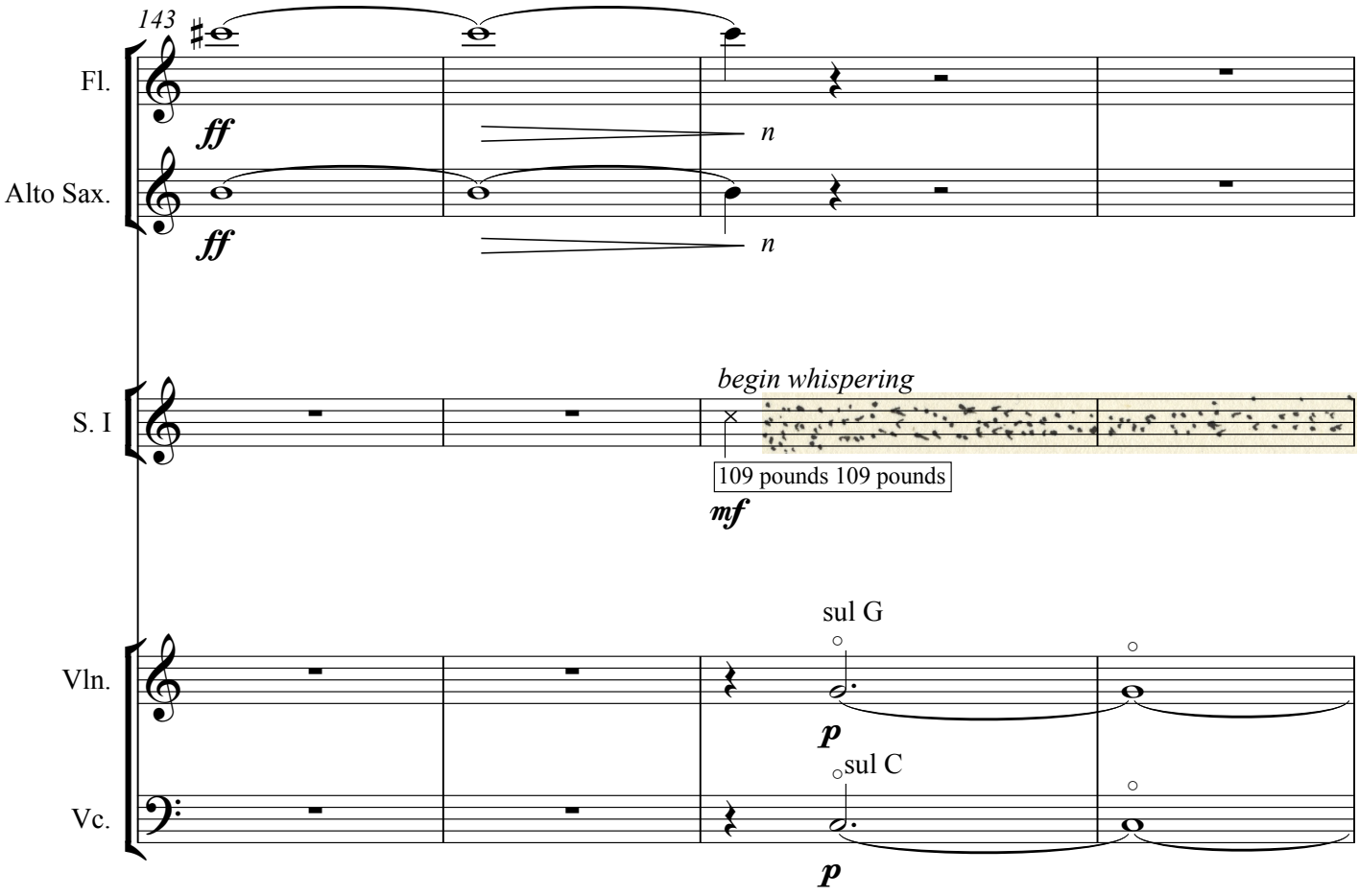

132
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
f Watch Him
S. II
f Watch Him
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him
Vln.
mp
Vc.

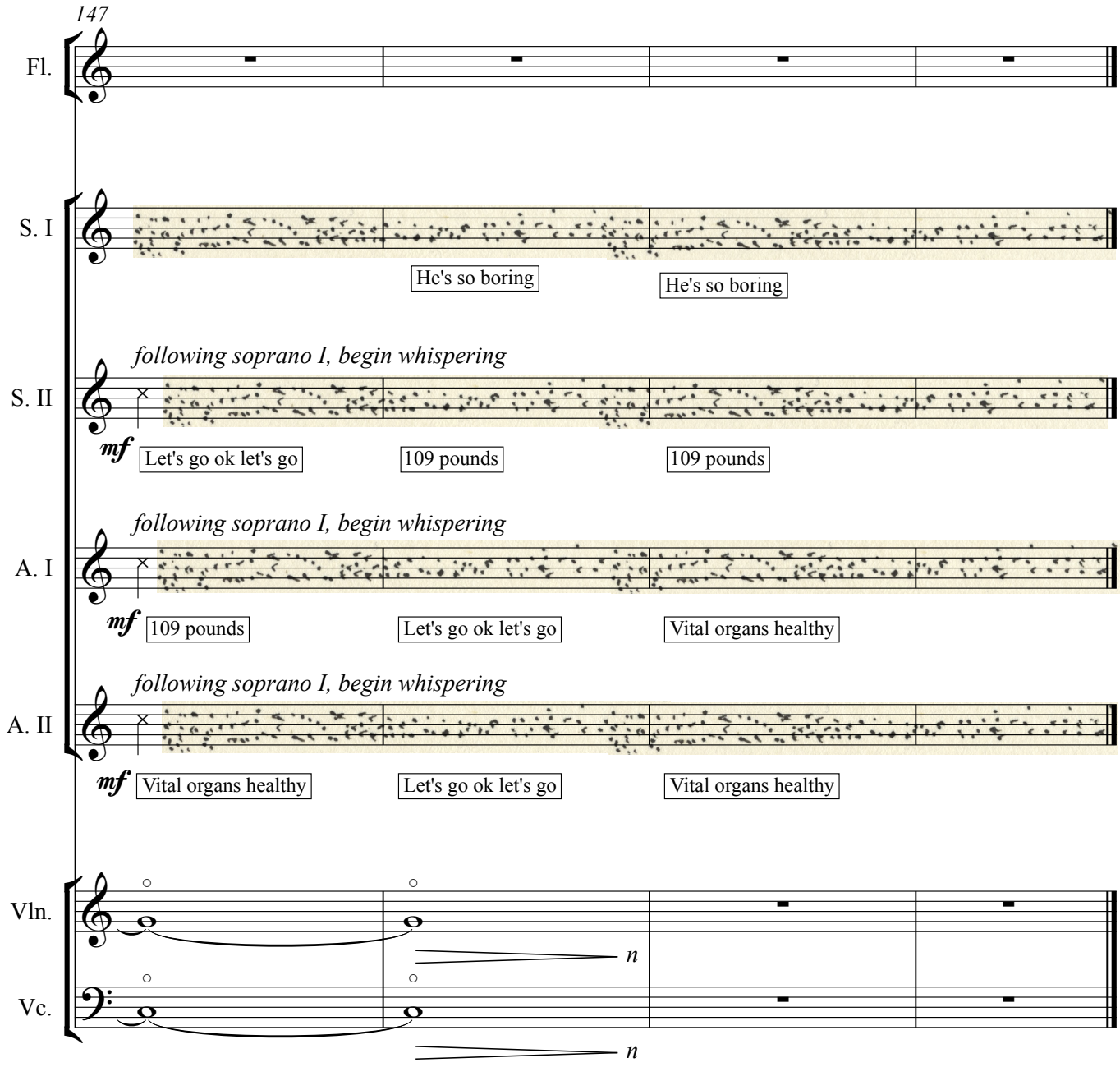

134
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Watch Him Watch Him
S. II
Watch Him Watch Him
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him
Vln.
poco a poco cresc.
Vc.
poco a poco cresc.


136
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Watch Him Watch Him
S. II
Watch Him Watch Him
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him
Vln.
Vc.


138
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Watch Him Watch Him
S. II
Watch Him Watch Him
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him
Vln.
Vc.


140
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him
S. II
Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him
A. I
Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him
A. II
Watch Him Watch Him Watch Him
Vln.
f
Vc.
f


143
Fl.
ff
n
Alto Sax.
ff
n
S. I
begin whispering
109 pounds 109 pounds
mf
Vln.
sul G
p
Vc.
sul C
p



Singers continue whispering into the beginning of scene 2.

They fade to quiet approximately 20 seconds after the electronics begin.

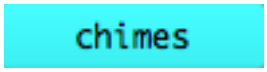
Scene 2

Voices continue whispering as they were at the end of scene 1, with a slow diminuendo to nothing over the first twenty seconds of the scene.

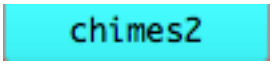
The dancer begins to move. The electronics are triggered:

Slow crescendo of low frequency electronic sounds. After approximately 15 seconds, a second electronic layer is introduced:

Rapid gestures from the dancer are to be occasionally matched with chimes-like sounds:



(Non-harmonic)



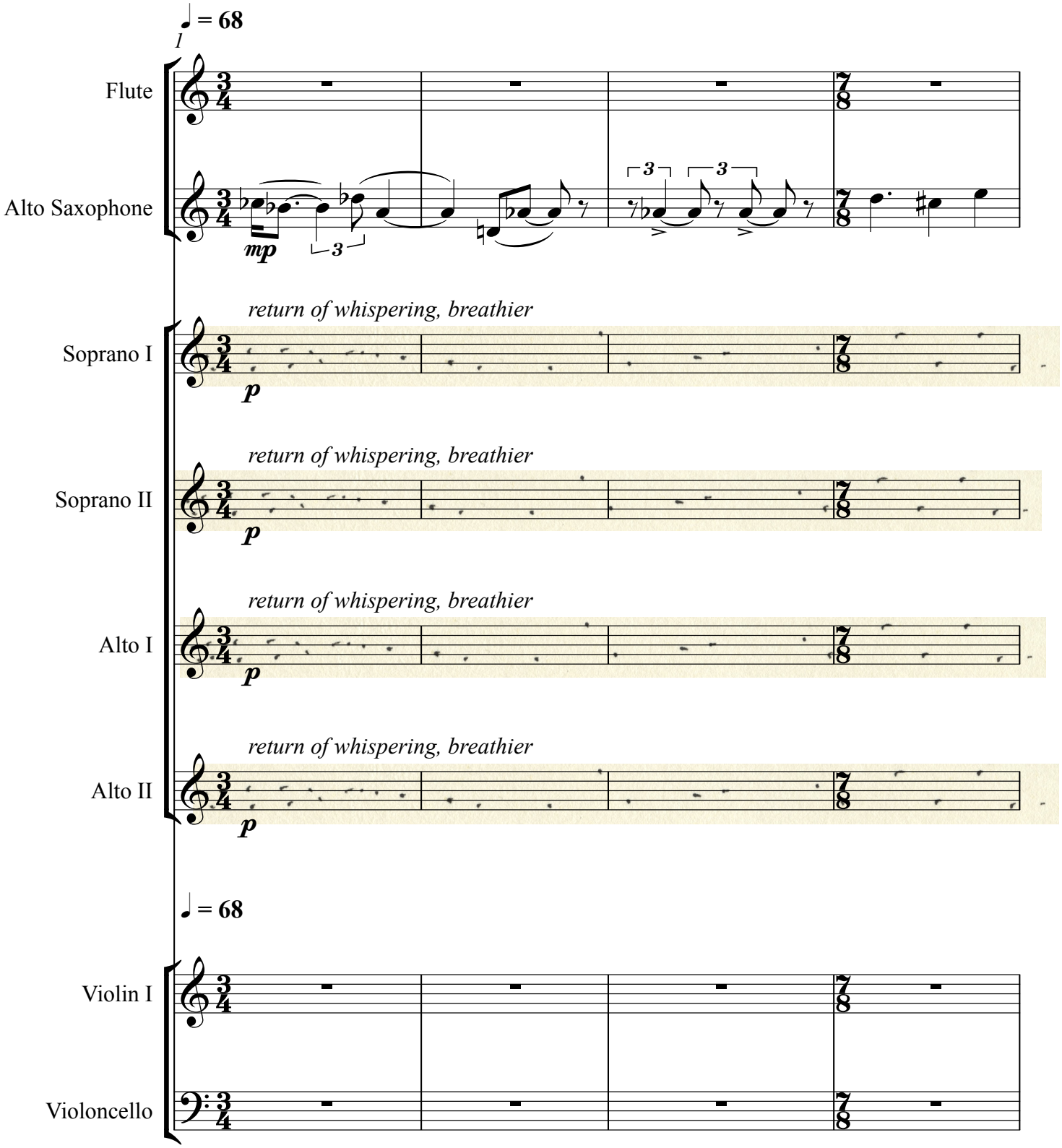
(Harmonic)

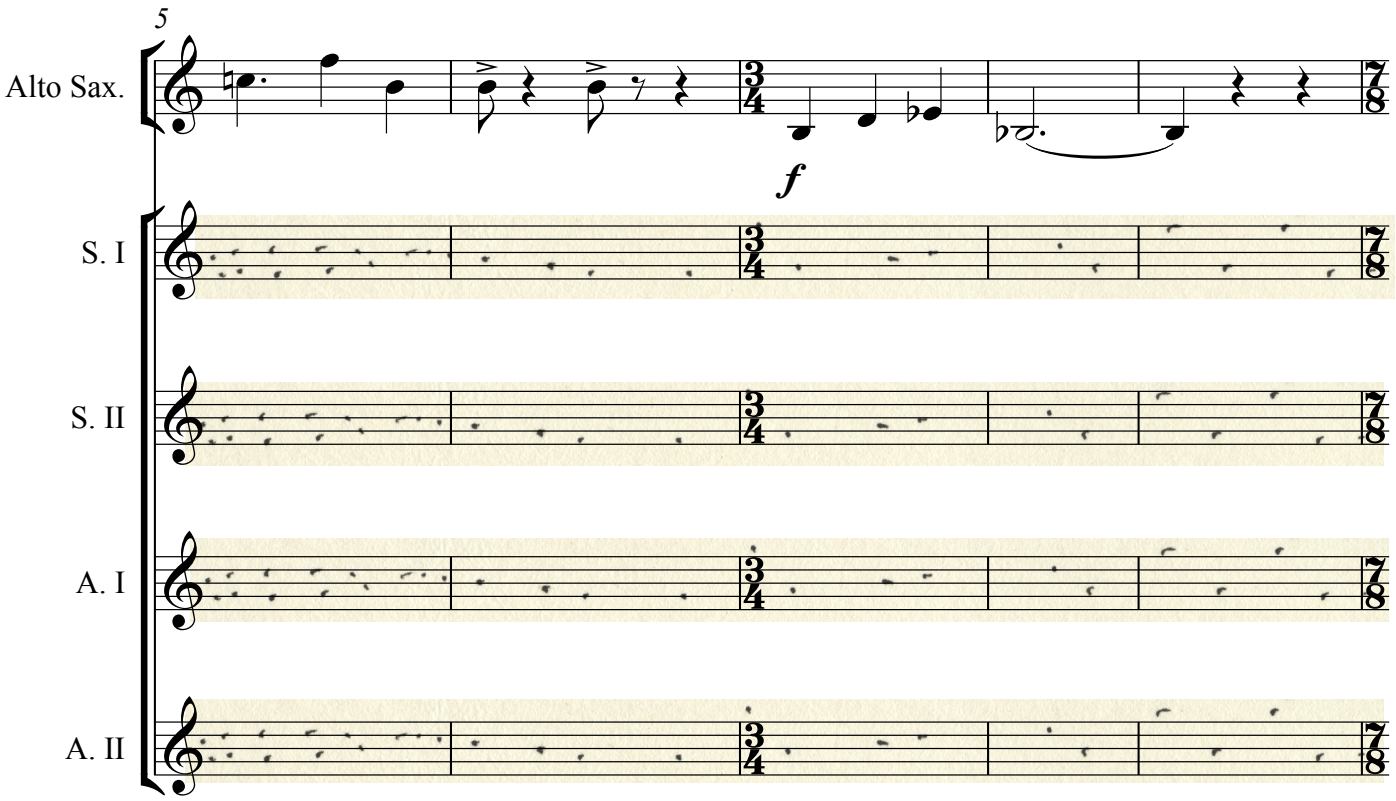
After approximately 90 seconds of movement, the dancer slows and assumes a position at the front of the stage. The droning electronics diminuendo to pianissimo. The dancer begins to speak:

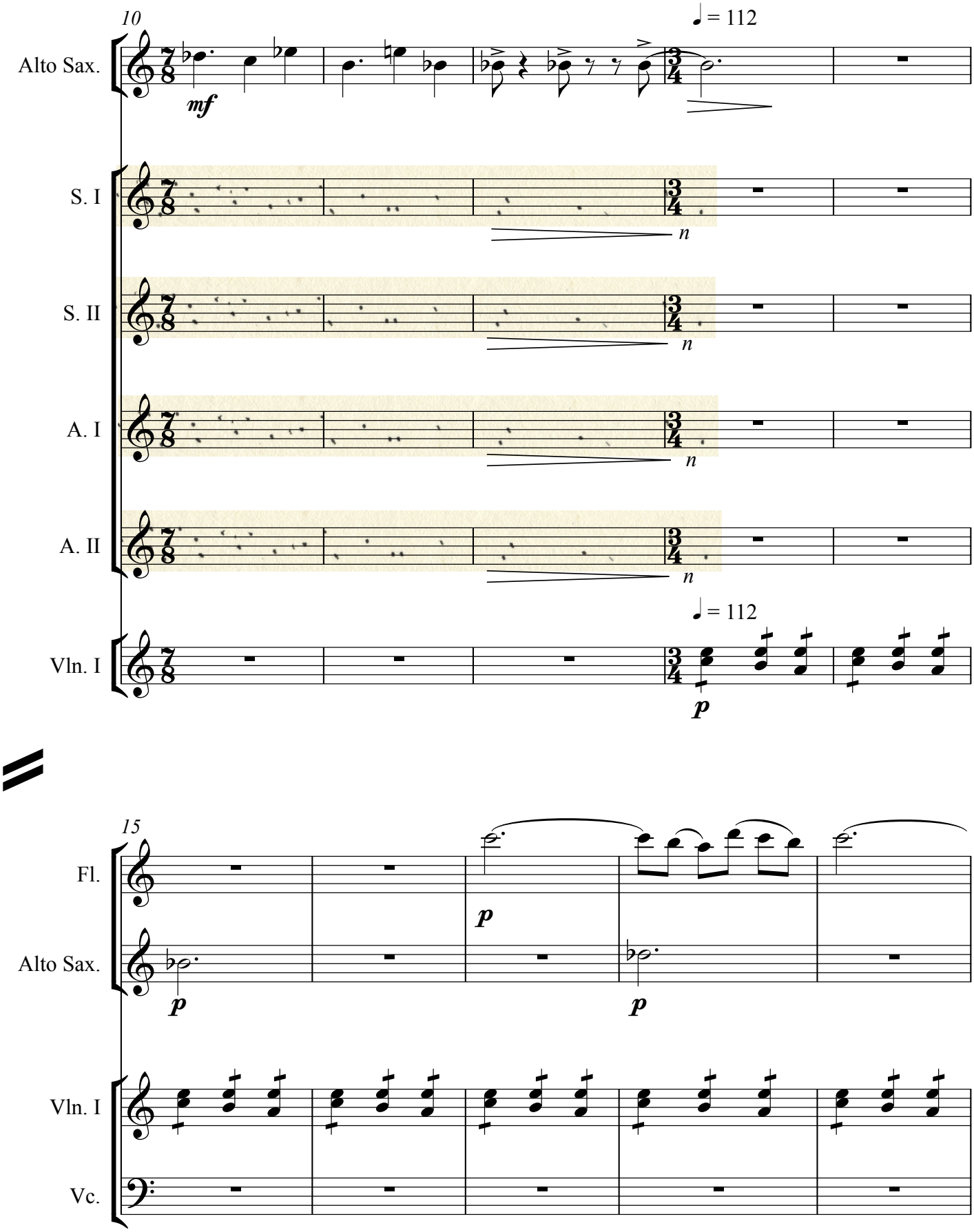
It always happens the same way. On the fortieth day of my fast the cage opens, excited spectators fill the hall, a military band plays, two doctors come inside my cage and measure me. They use instruments. They measure the results of the fast, is what they say. These results are announced through a megaphone – 109 pounds! Vital organs healthy! Then two young women appear, blissful at being chosen for the honor of helping me down those steps which lead to the tiny table on which food overflows. A carefully chosen invalid repast. But I do not want to eat. I try to say no, but the crowds cheer and finally my impresario tells me enough with my bullshit and they all chant louder and louder for me to eat and finally I do. And they're satiated.
(pause)
They call me pampered. They resent my success. The crowds aren't there for you, they say, all they care about is spectacle. If the crowds leave, if fashions change, it's just a matter of time before fasting comes into fashion once again. I can fast as well as I ever could, better, if they would let me fast as long as I like. I will. I will fast as long as I like. I will leave my impresario and his fascist rules. I will join a circus that lets me do what I want. I will fast as long as I want.

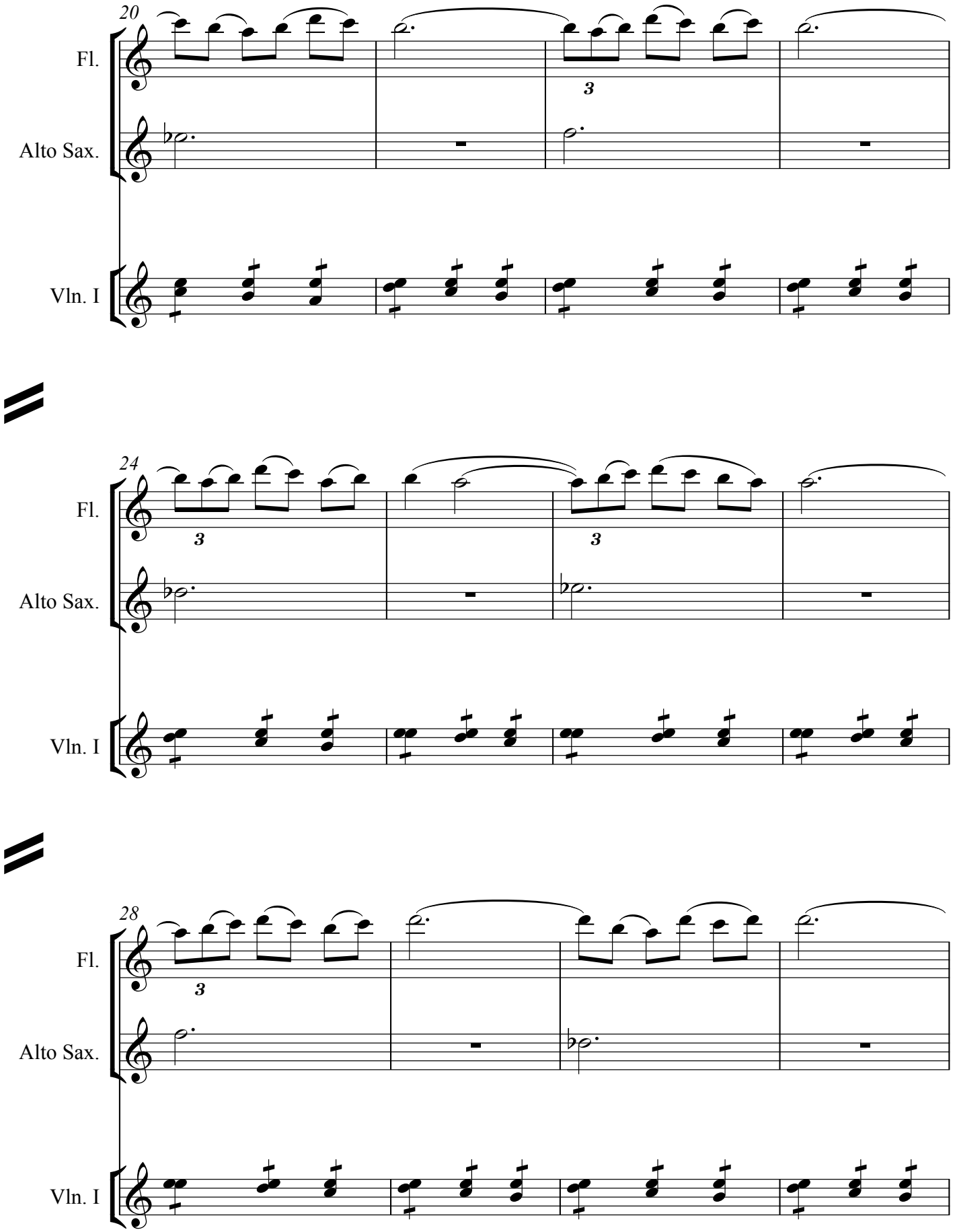
The dancer stands resolutely facing the audience. The electronics fade out.

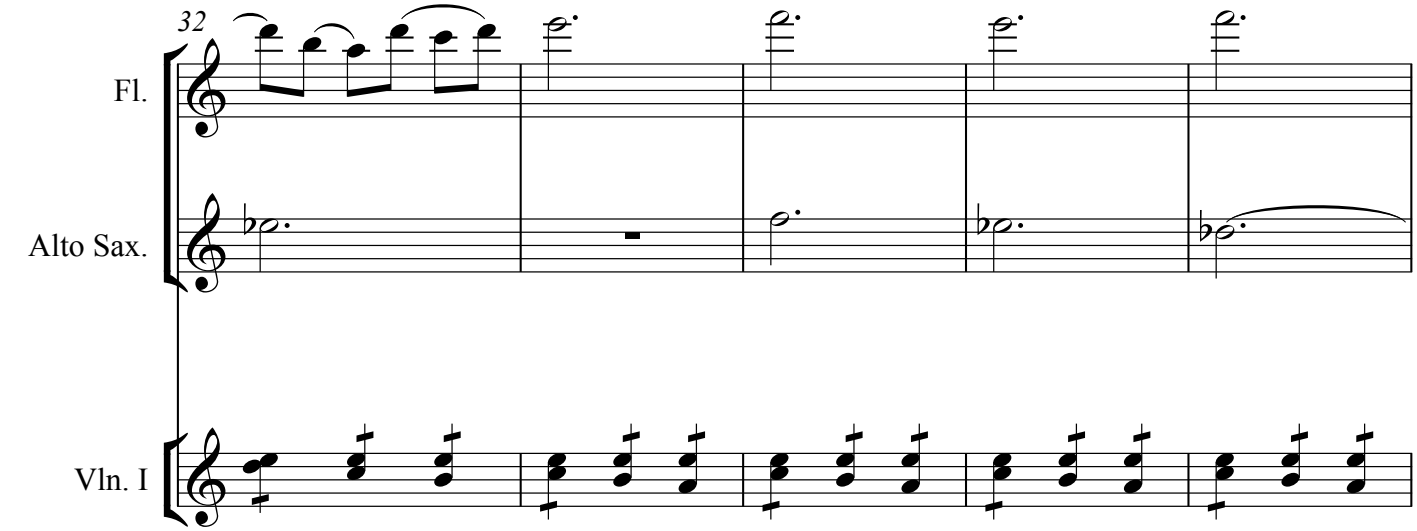
Scene 3

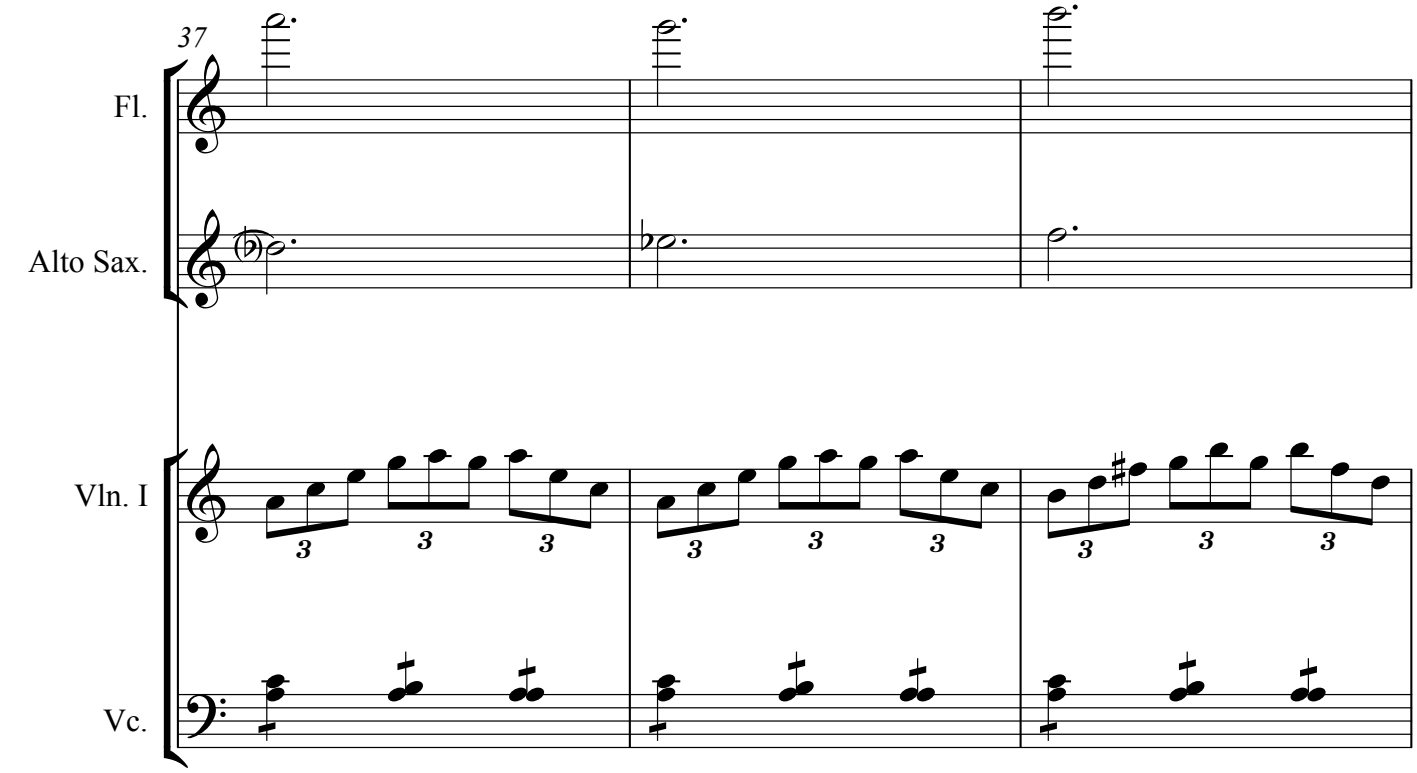

♩ = 68
1
Flute
Alto Saxophone
mp
3
return of whispering, breathier
Soprano I
p
Soprano II
Alto I
Alto II
♩ = 68
Violin I
Violoncello

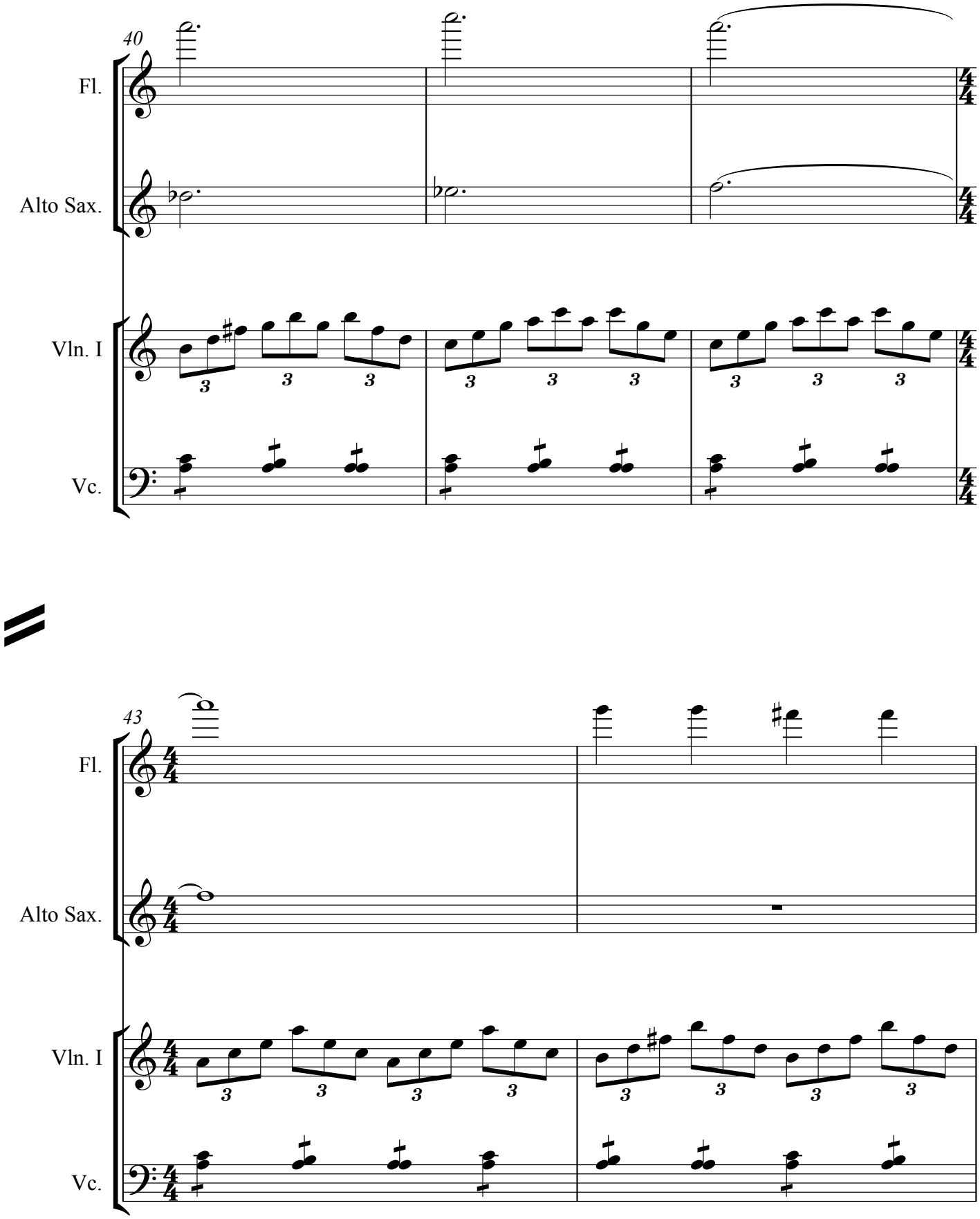

5
Alto Sax.
f
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II

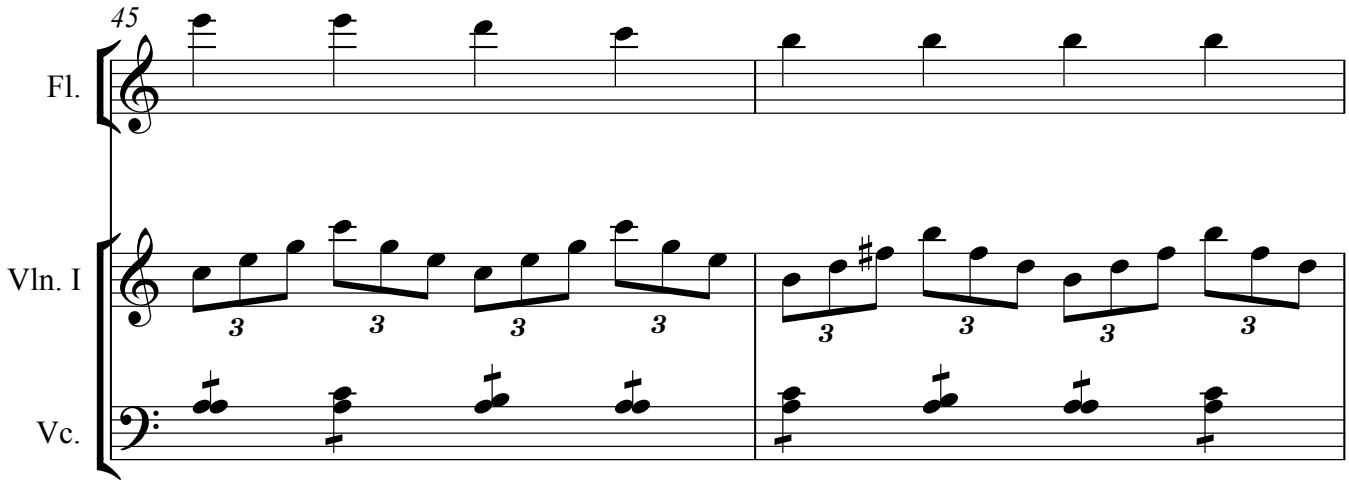

10
♩ = 112
Alto Sax.
mf
S. I
n
S. II
n
A. I
n
A. II
n
♩ = 112
Vln. I
p
15
Fl.
p
Alto Sax.
p
p
Vln. I
Vc.

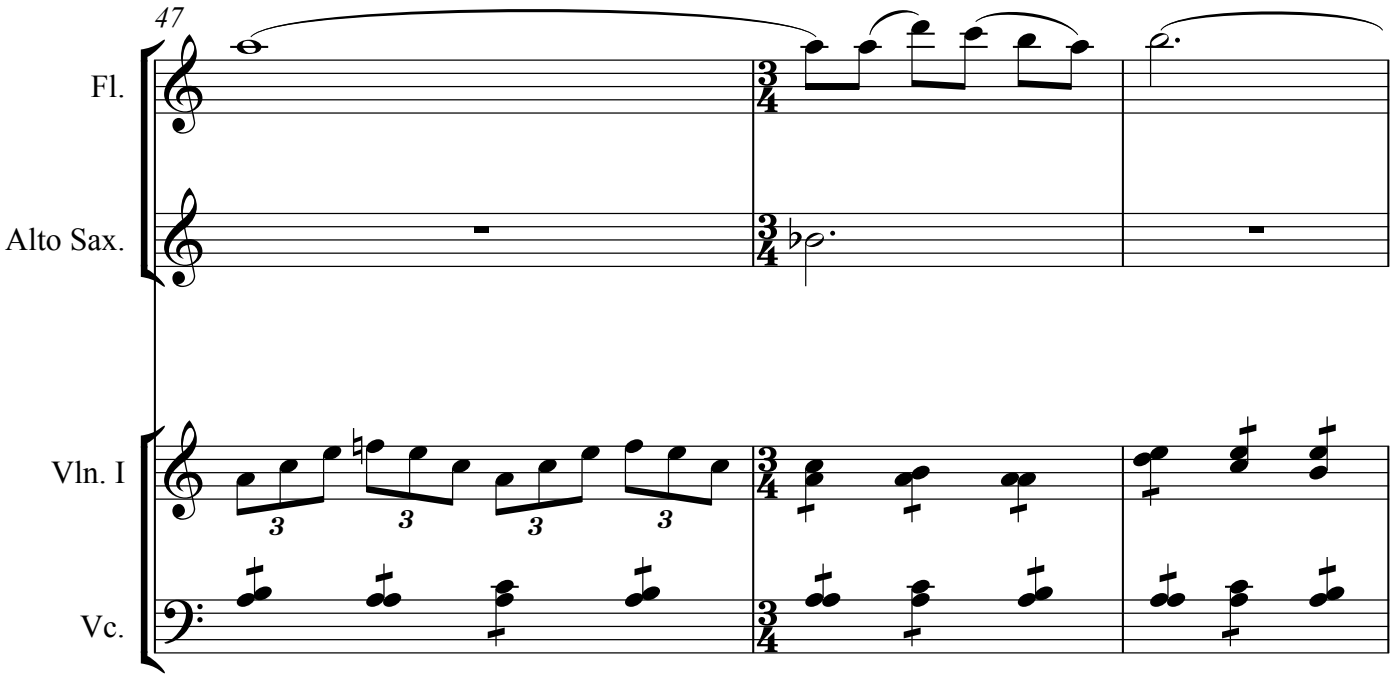

20
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
3
24
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
3
3
28
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
3

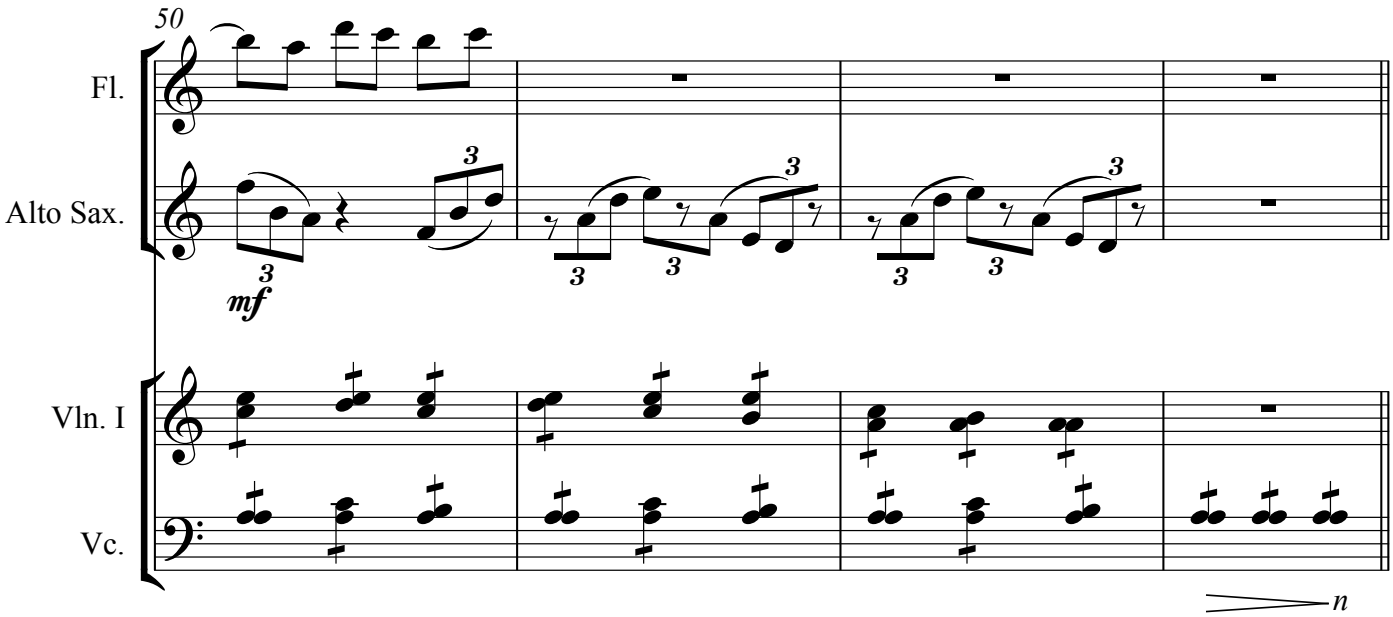

32
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I


37
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.


40
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.
43
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.


45
Fl.
Vln. I
Vc.


47
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.


50
Fl.
Alto Sax.
mf
Vln. I
Vc.
n

Out of Time - approximately 30 seconds before conductor cues mm. 55

54

Fl.

S. I

mimicking the electronic vocal grains

mf

S. II

mimicking the electronic vocal grains

mf

A. I

mimicking the electronic vocal grains

mf

A. II

mimicking the electronic vocal grains

mf

Out of Time - approximately 30 seconds before conductor cues mm. 55

Electronics

voice

mf

n

stretch/shift

wait

♩ = 68

55

Fl.

p

Alto Sax.

p

S. I

continue murmuring vocal grains after electronics fade out, slowly reduce density

p

S. II

continue murmuring vocal grains after electronics fade out, slowly reduce density

p

A. I

continue murmuring vocal grains after electronics fade out, slowly reduce density

p

A. II

continue murmuring vocal grains after electronics fade out, slowly reduce density

p

♩ = 68

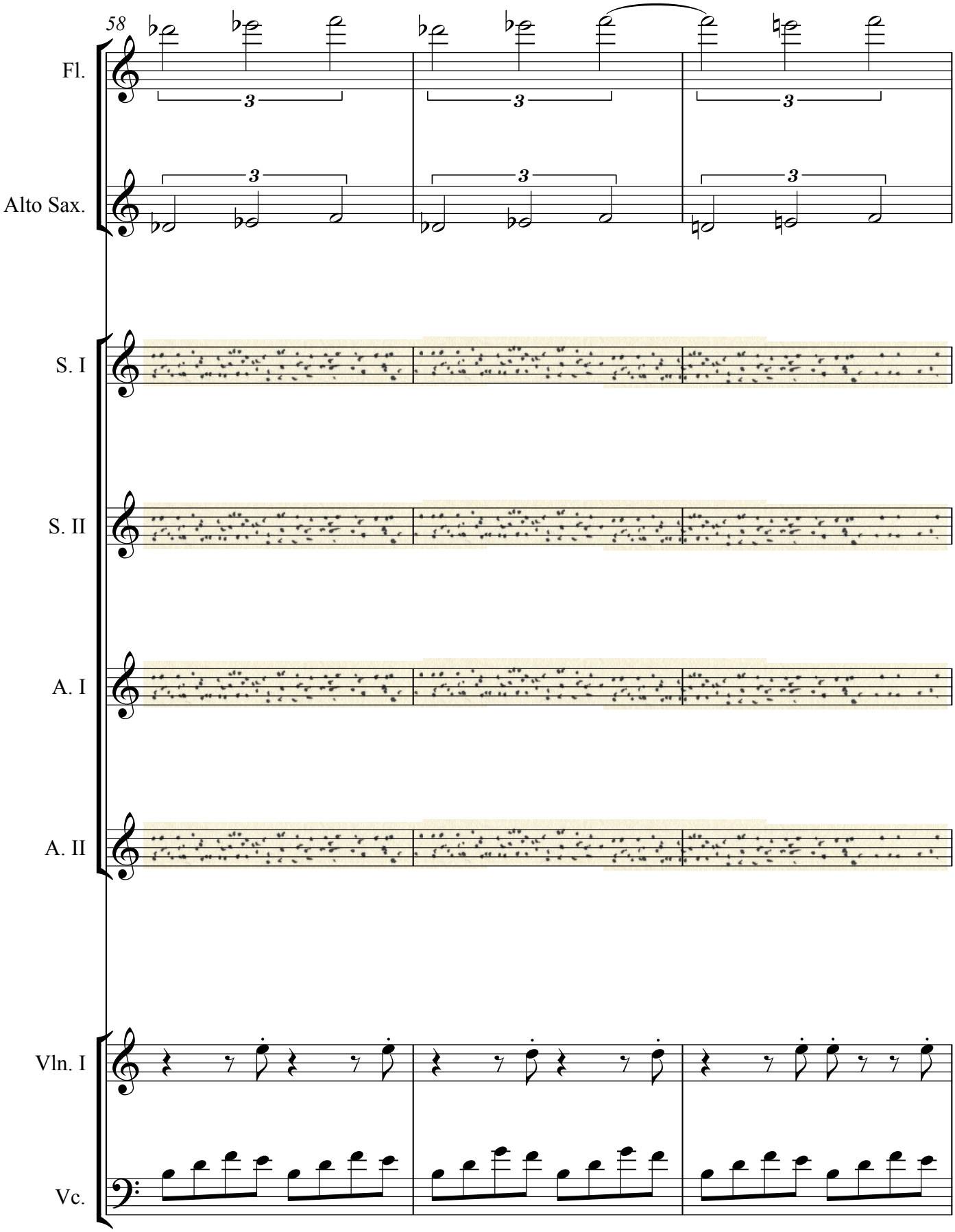
Vln. I

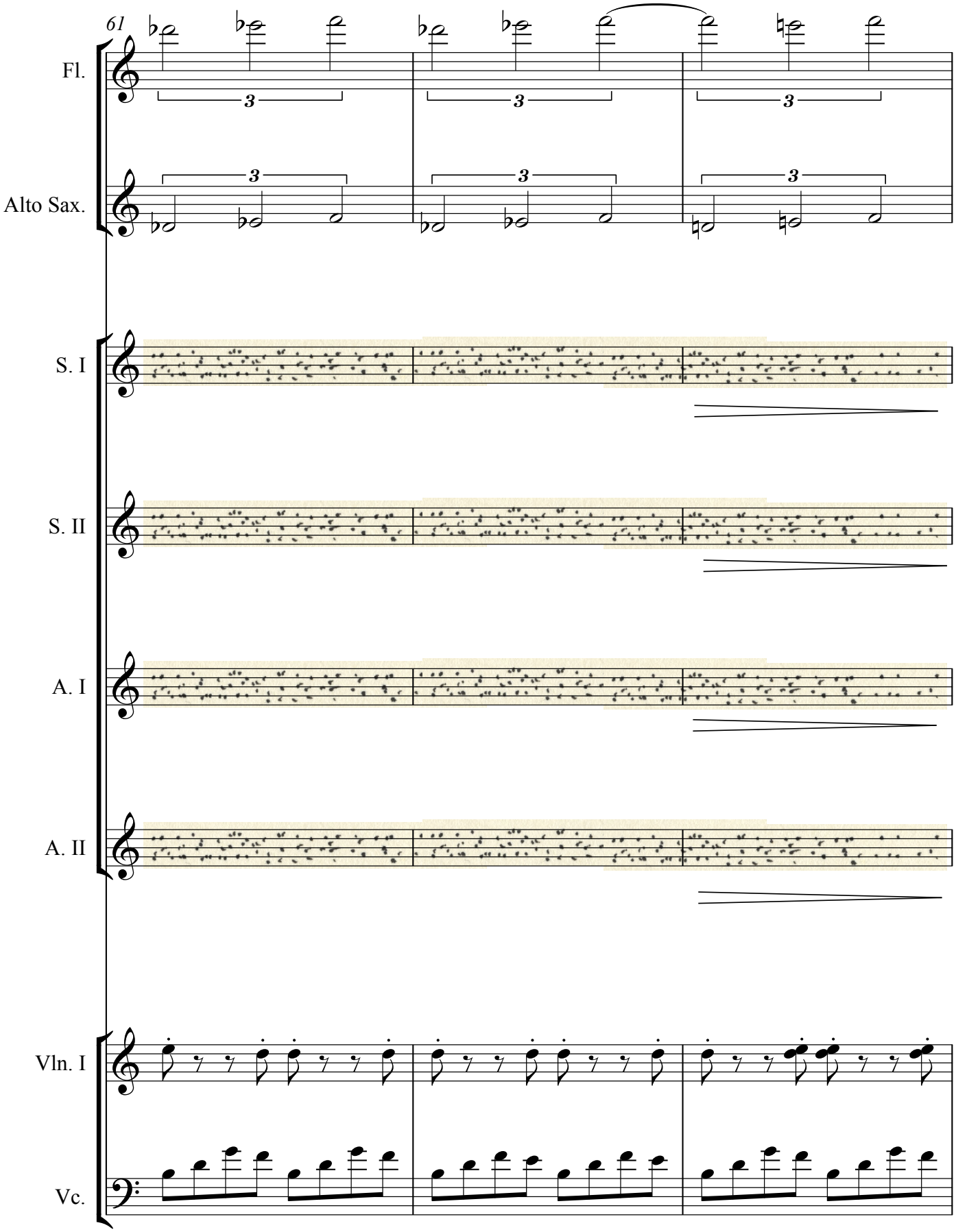
p

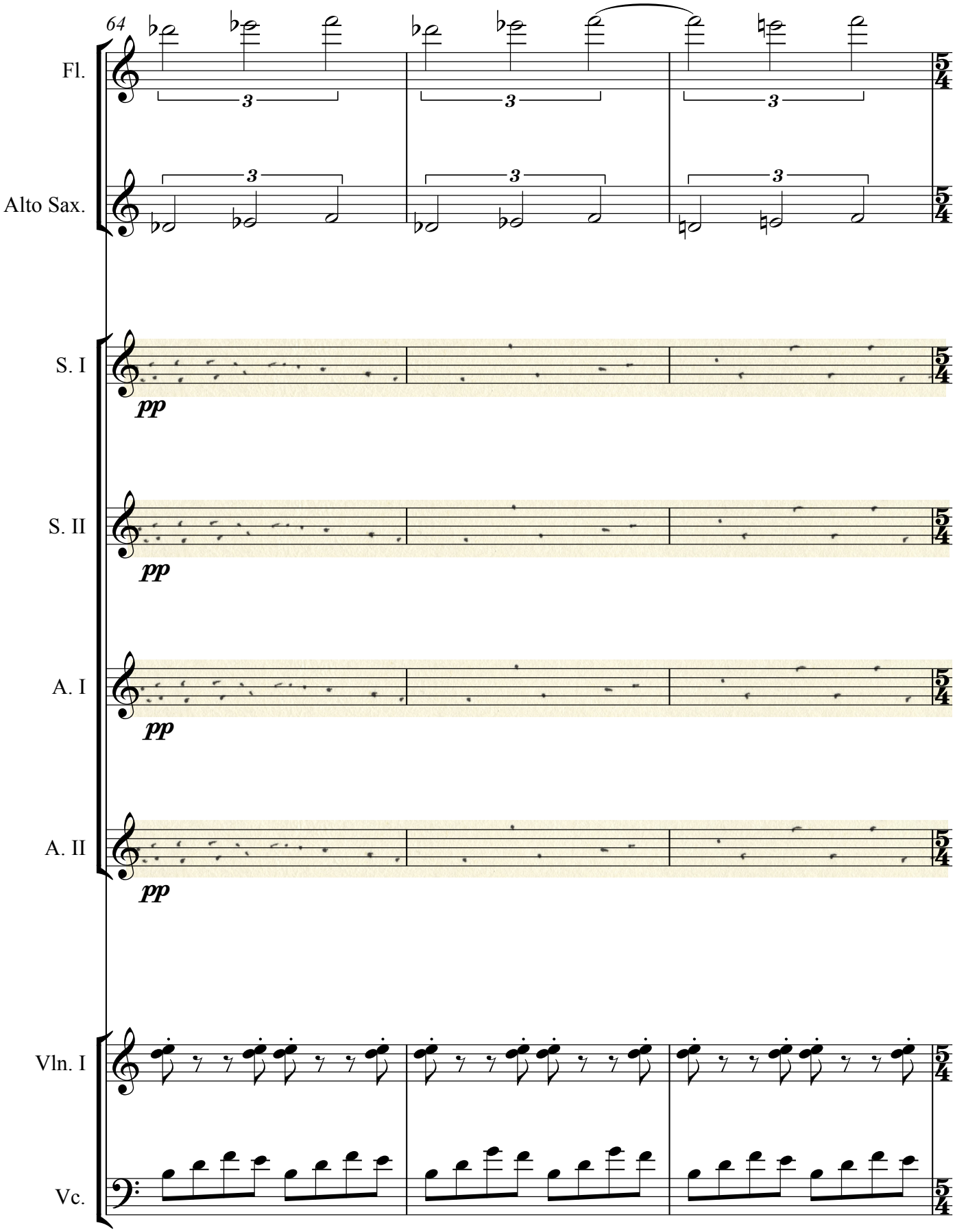
Vc.

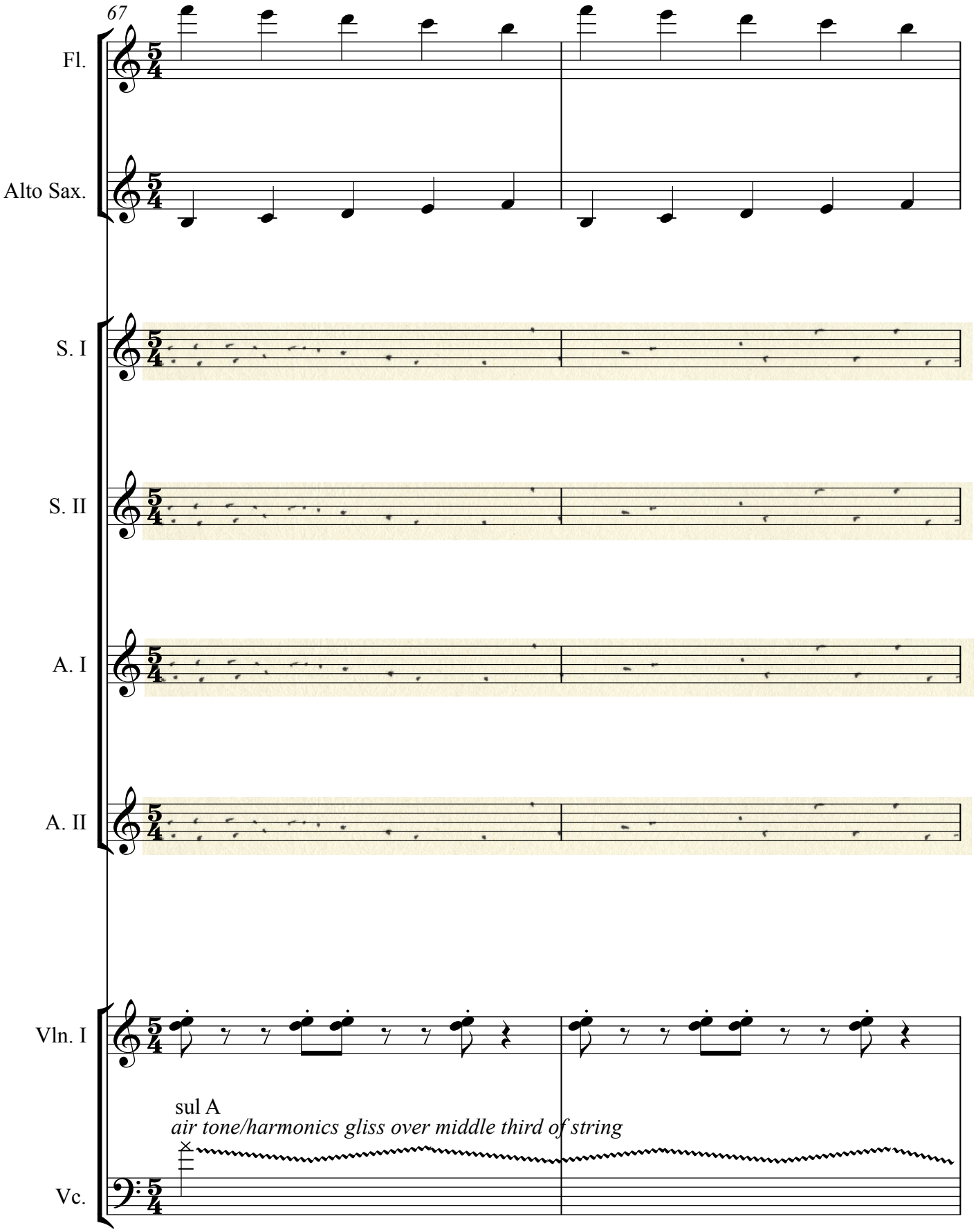
sim.

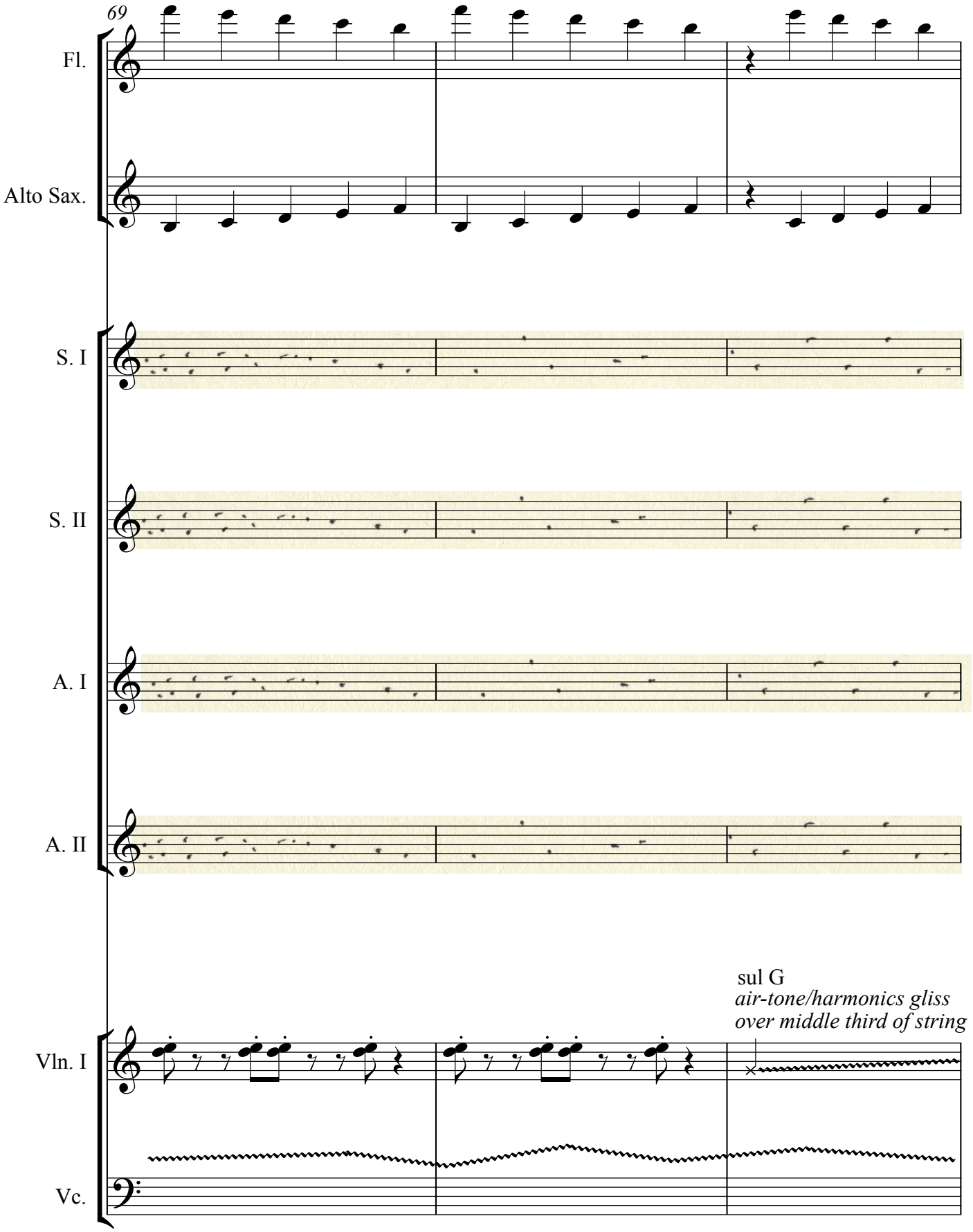
p

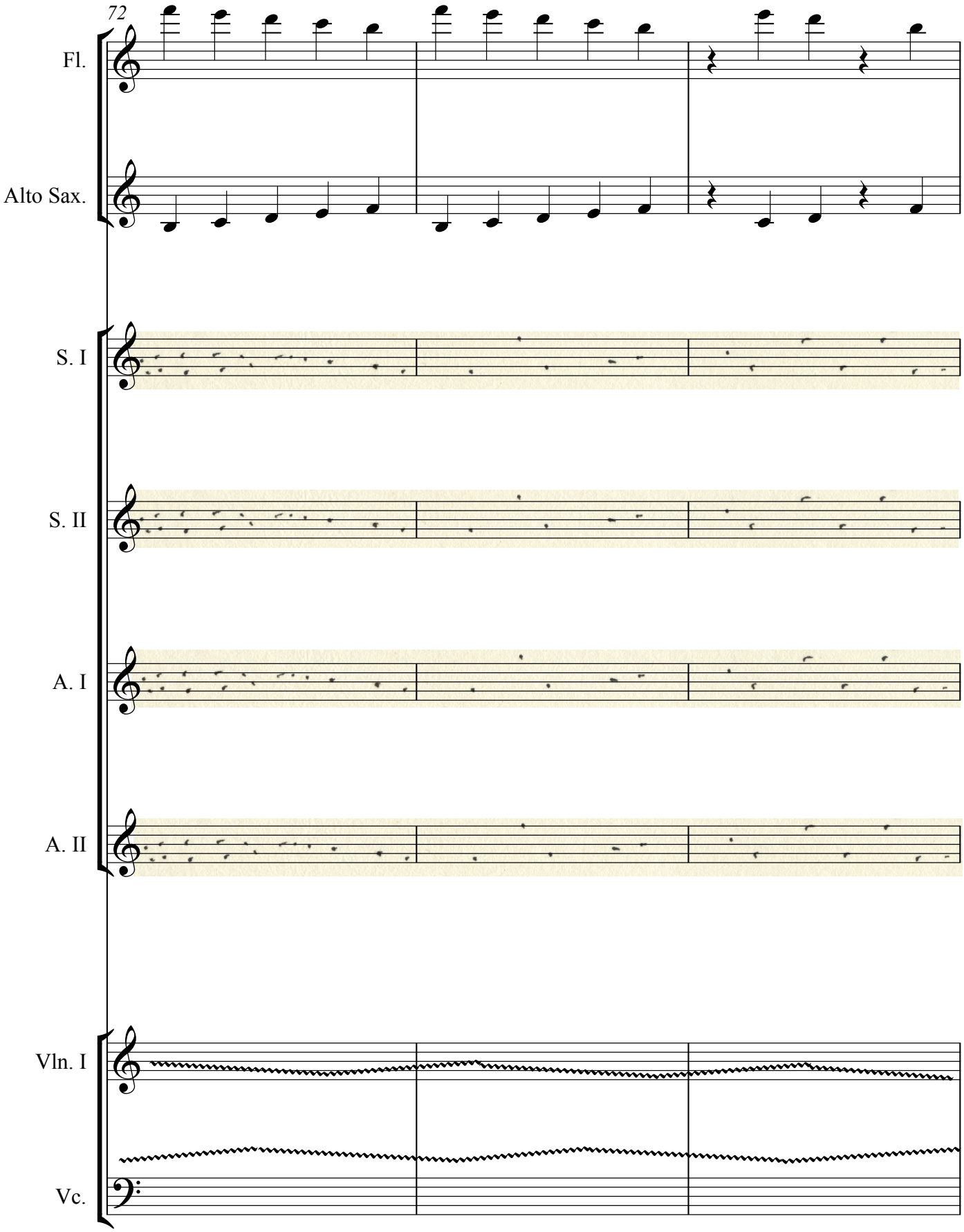

58
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
Vc.

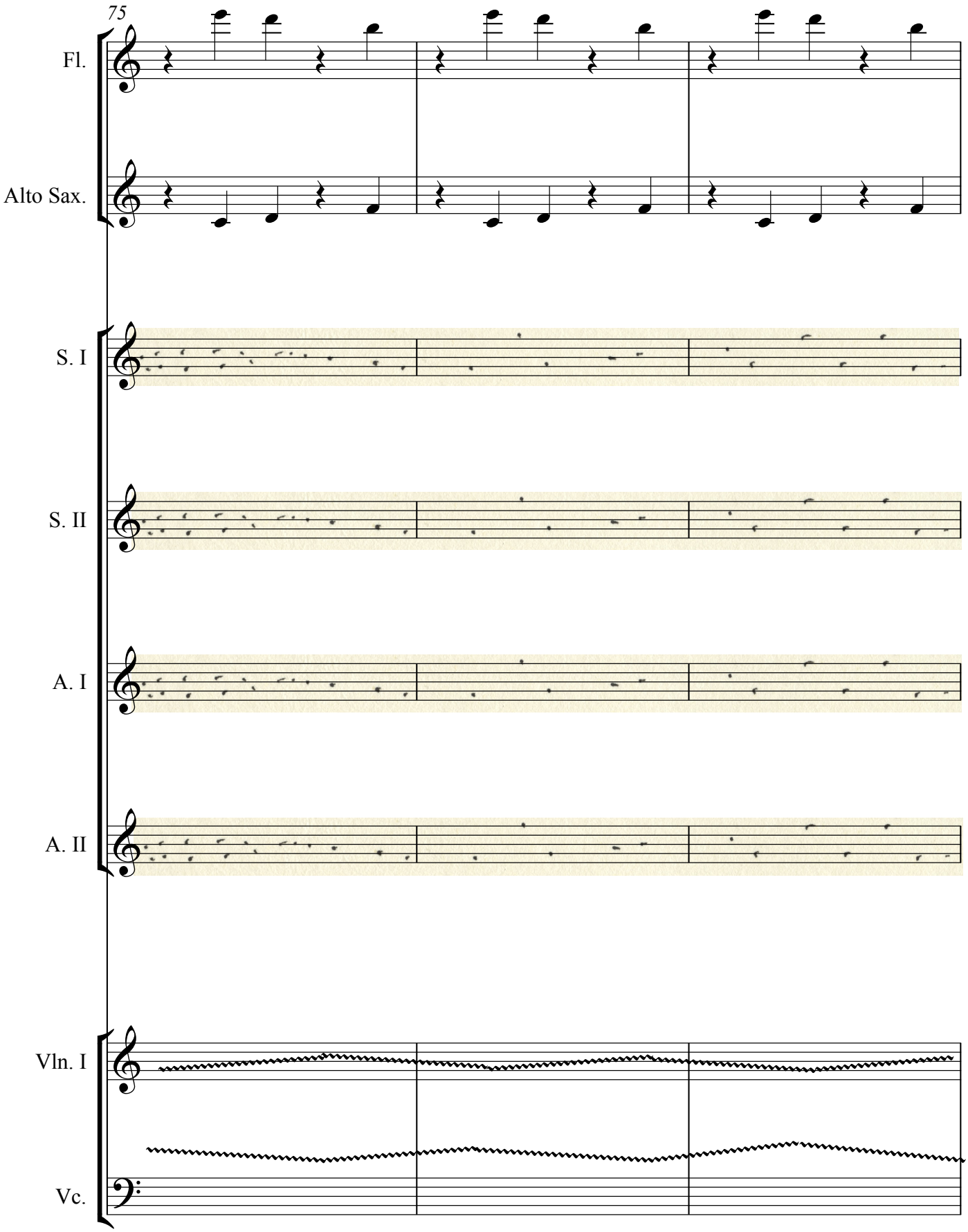

61
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
Vc.

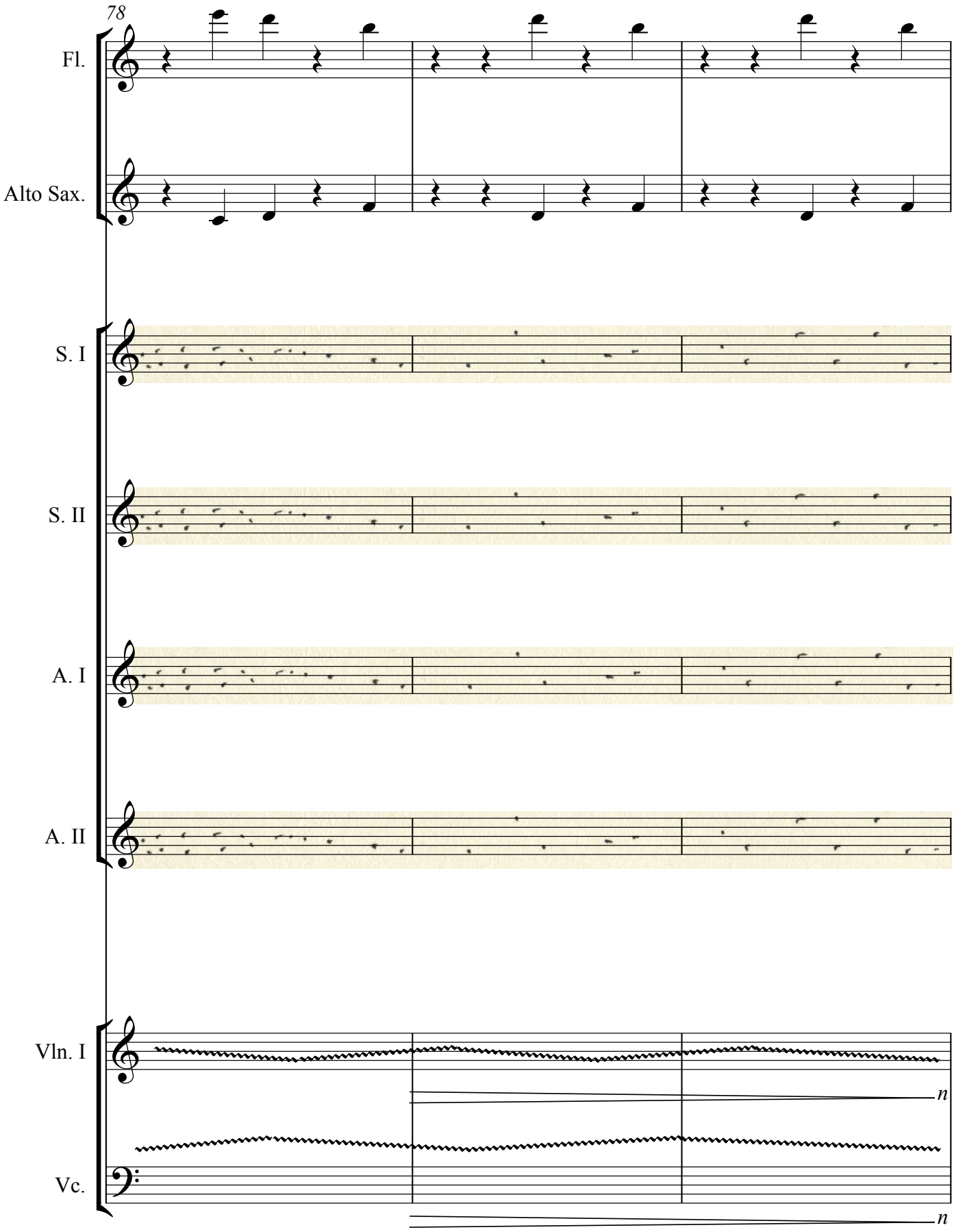

64
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
pp
S. II
pp
A. I
pp
A. II
pp
Vln. I
Vc.

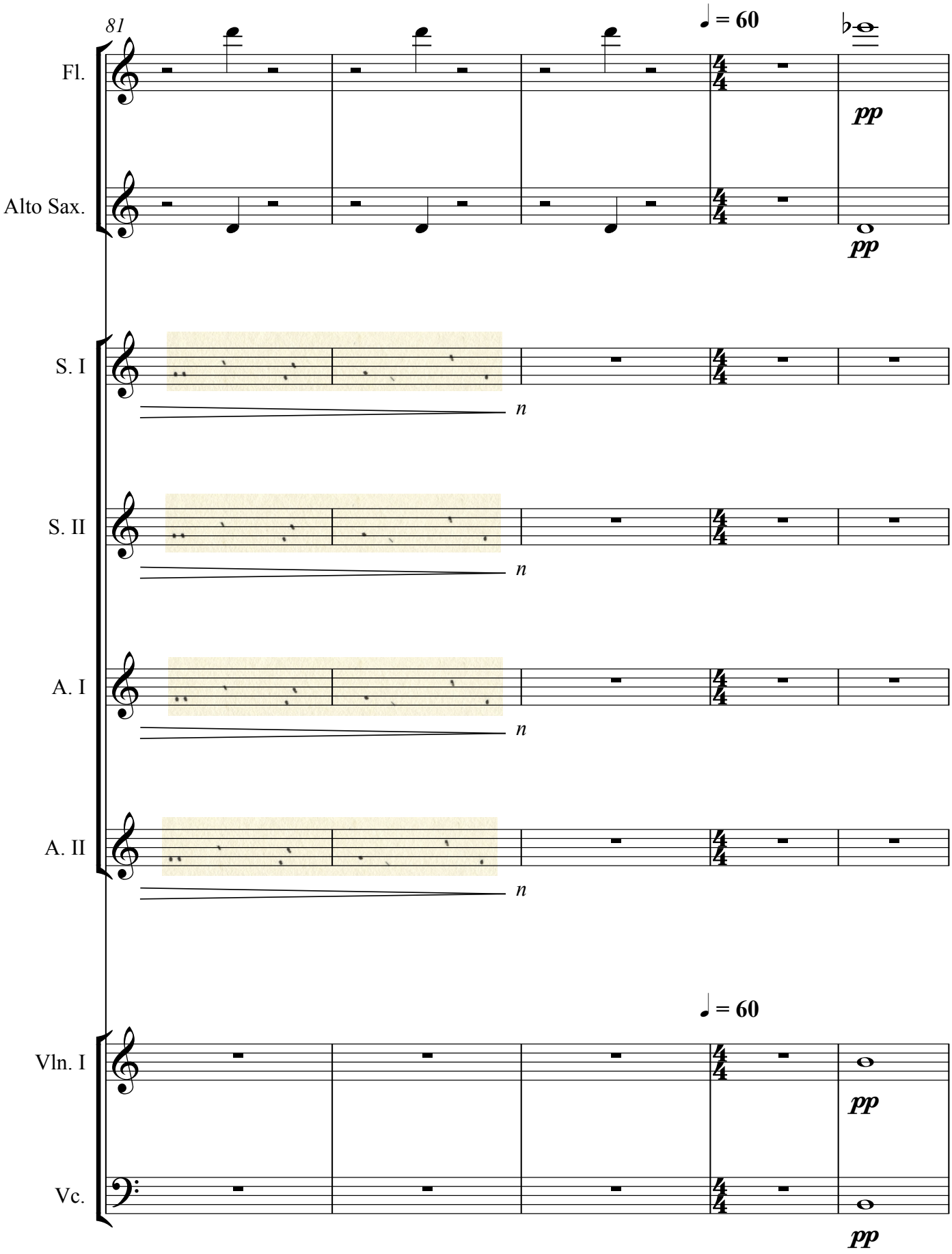

67
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
sul A
air tone/harmonics gliss over middle third of string
Vc.

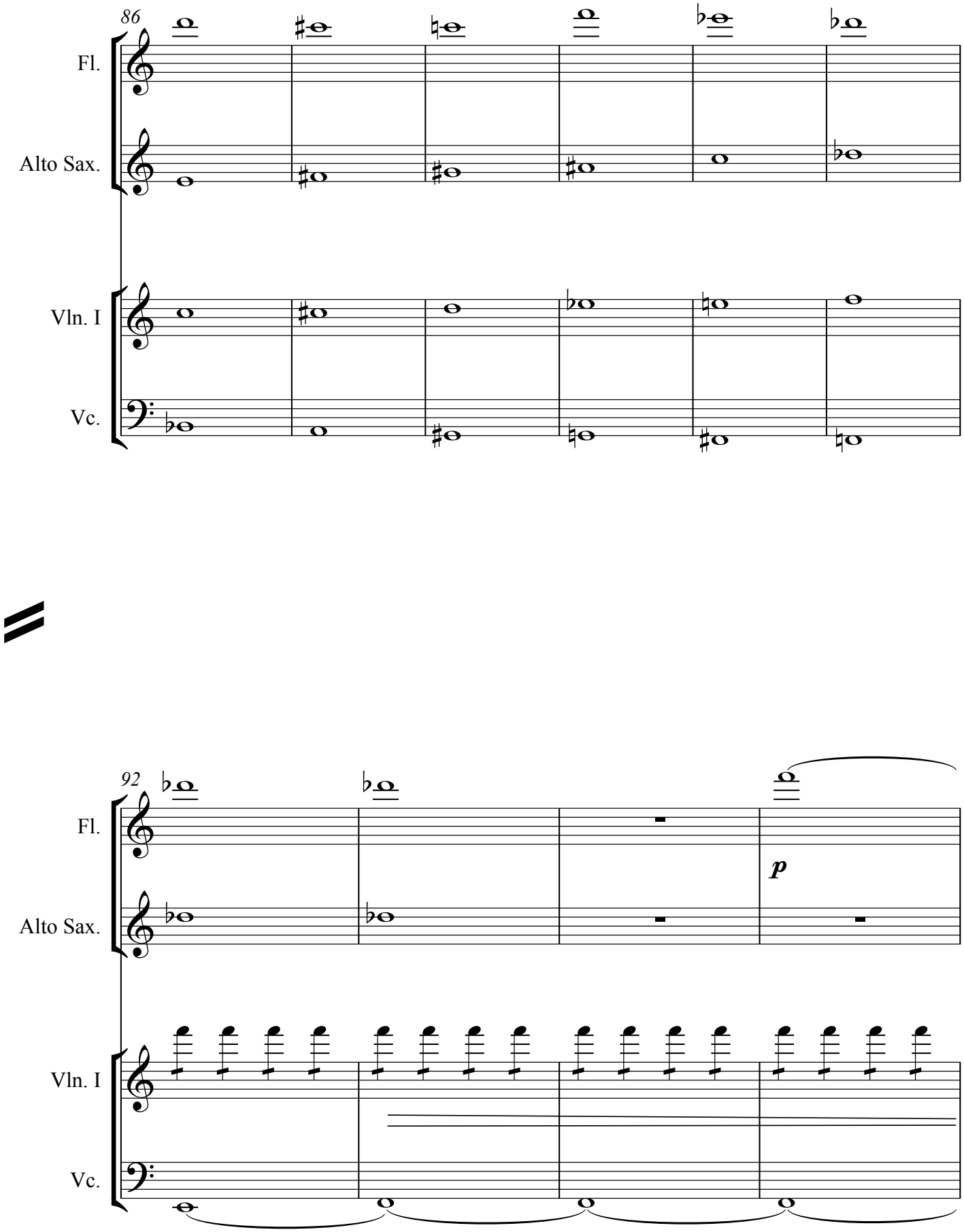

69
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
Vc.
sul G
air-tone/harmonics gliss
over middle third of string

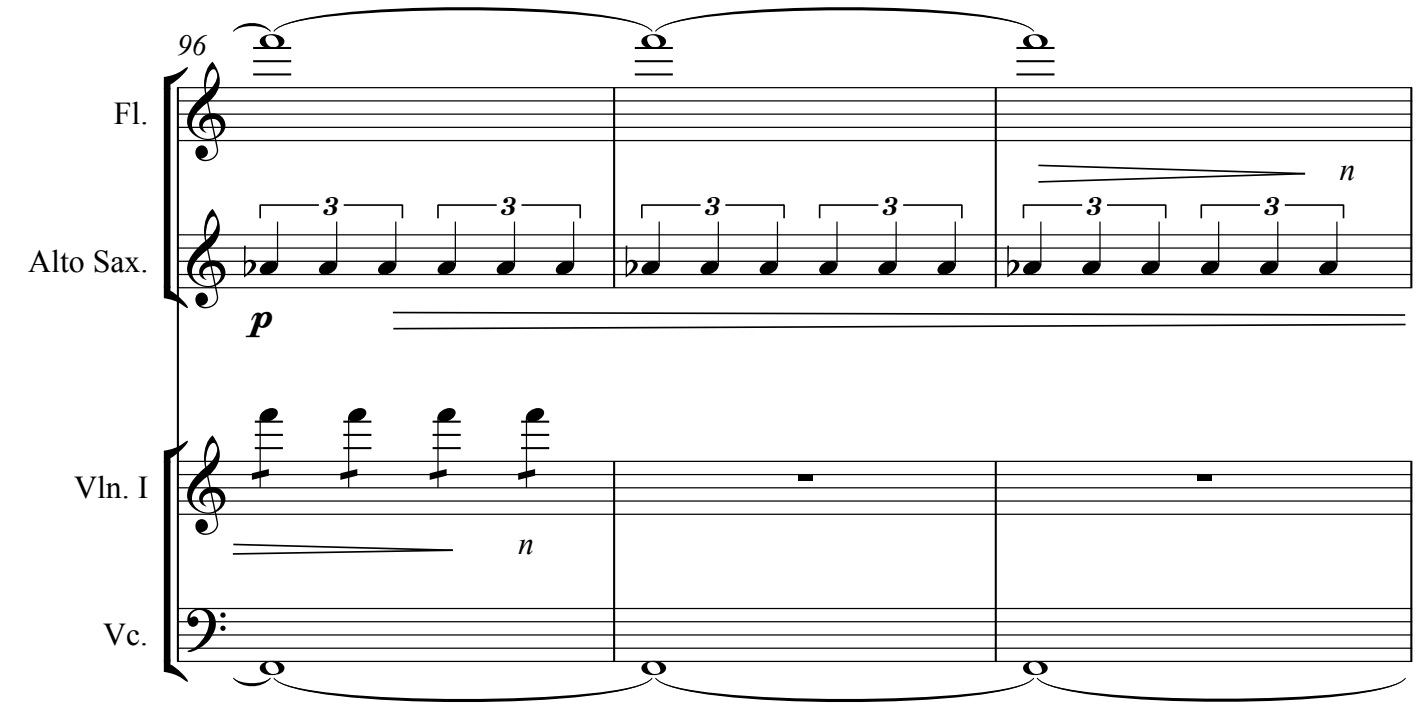

72
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
Vc.

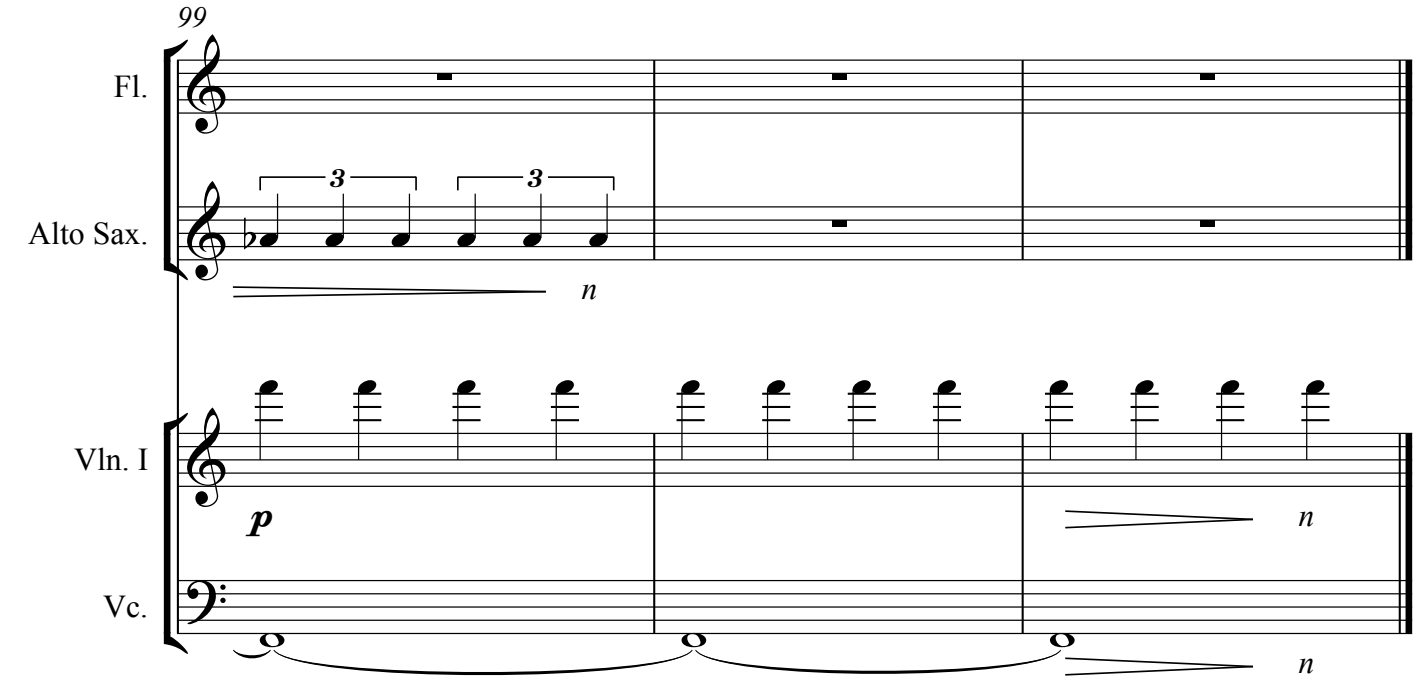

75
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
Vc.


78
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S. I
S. II
A. I
A. II
Vln. I
n
Vc.
n


81
♩ = 60
Fl.
pp
Alto Sax.
pp
S. I
n
S. II
n
A. I
n
A. II
n
♩ = 60
Vln. I
pp
Vc.
pp


86
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.
92
Fl.
p
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.


96
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.
p
n
3


99
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln. I
Vc.
p
n
3

Scene 4

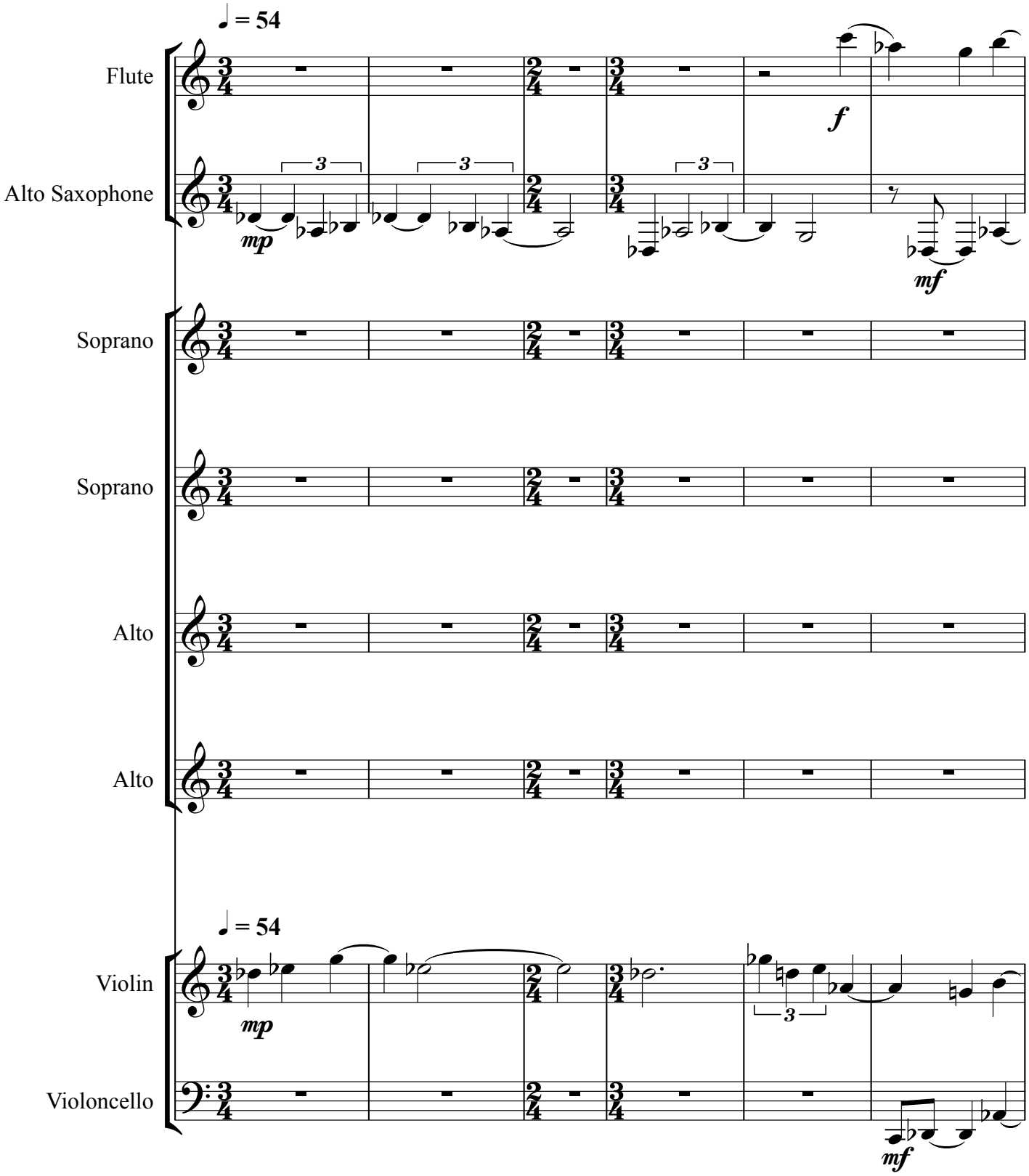
The single electronic cue for the scene is triggered:

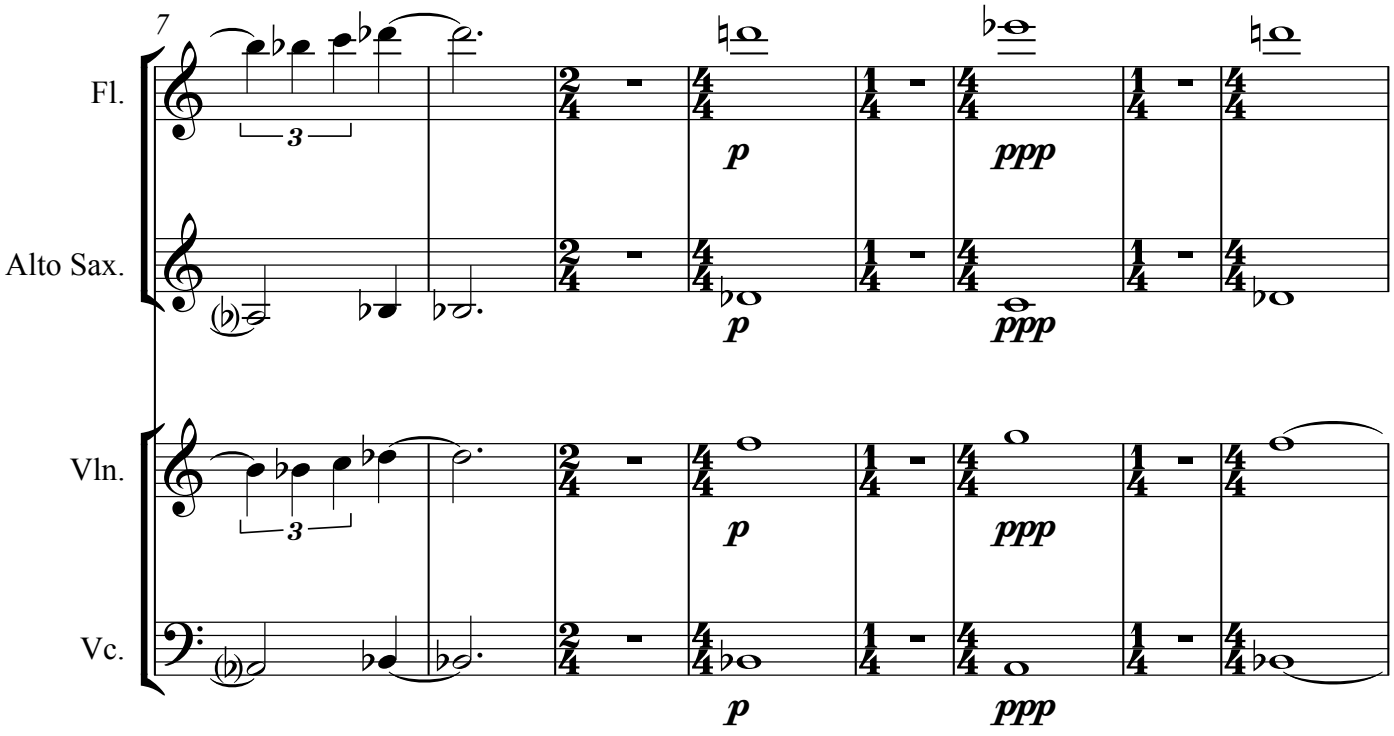
As the muted electronic sound palette fades in, the dancer begins to move, slowly, as if trapped. After approximately two minutes, he ends facing the second soprano, acting as the overseer. The electronics fade to pianissimo, and he delivers his final aria to her:

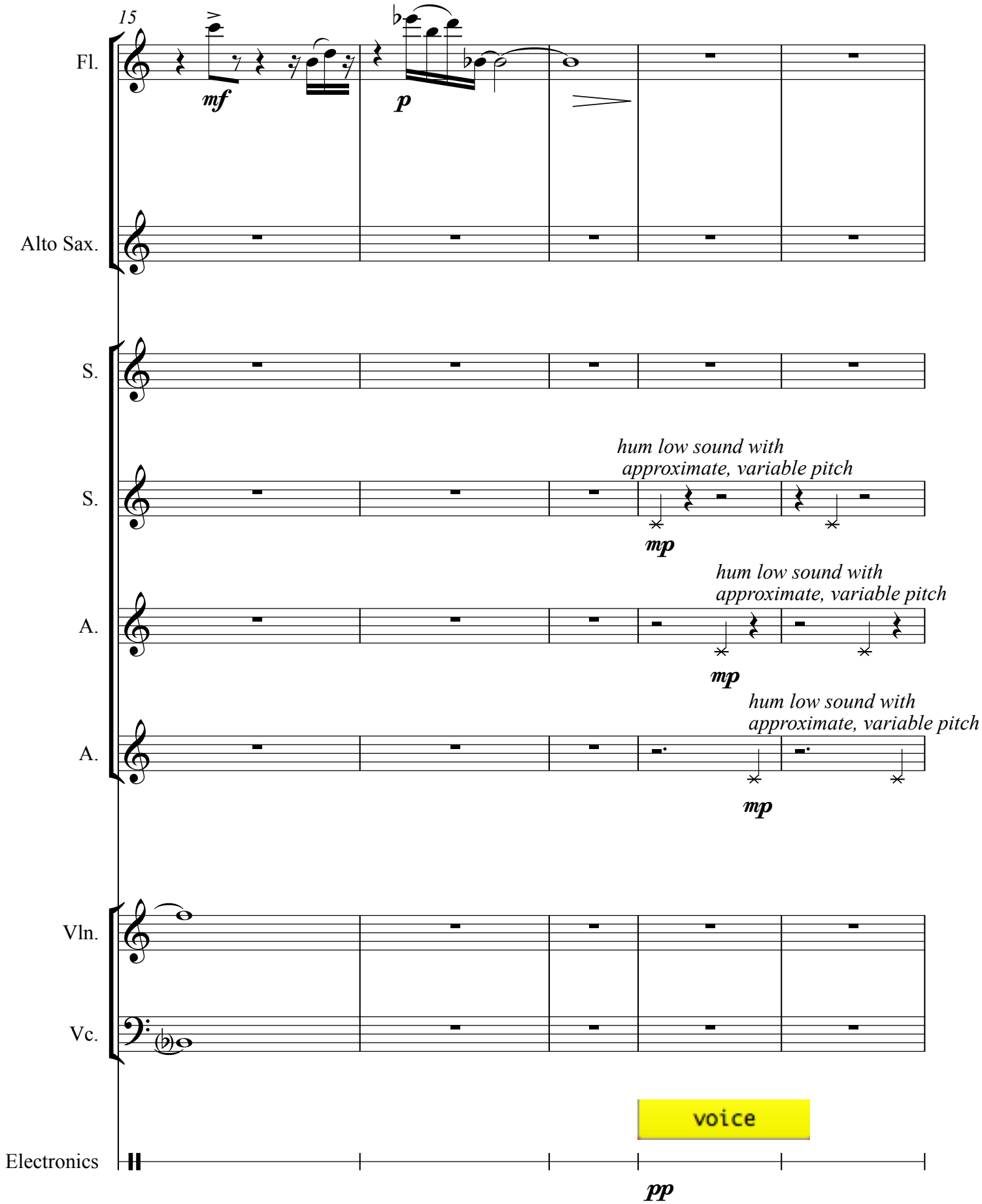
How many days has it been? Someone used to come each day and update the notice board; it has stayed at the same number for longer than I can remember. Has anyone counted? I haven't, have you? I have broken all the records. My heart is heavy. I have broken all the records. My heart is heavy. Sometimes a passer-by will stop and make merry over the old figure on the board, that measly low figure, and speak of swindling, and commit the stupidest lie ever invented by indifference and inborn malice. I have never cheated, I have only worked honestly; the world has cheated me. So let me die. Let me die, forgotten in the straw. I only have one apology to make before I go. I couldn't find the food I liked. If I had found it, believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else.

As he crumples to the ground, the electronic sounds die and the stage goes to darkness. The epilogue begins immediately.

Epilogue


♩ = 54
Flute
Alto Saxophone
Soprano
Soprano
Alto
Alto
♩ = 54
Violin
Violoncello
mp
f
mf
mp
mf


7
Fl.
Alto Sax.
Vln.
Vc.
p
ppp
p
ppp
p
ppp
p
ppp


15
Fl.
mf
p
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
hum low sound with
approximate, variable pitch
mp
A.
hum low sound with
approximate, variable pitch
mp
A.
hum low sound with
approximate, variable pitch
mp
Vln.
Vc.
voice
Electronics
pp

20

Alto Sax.

S.

humming

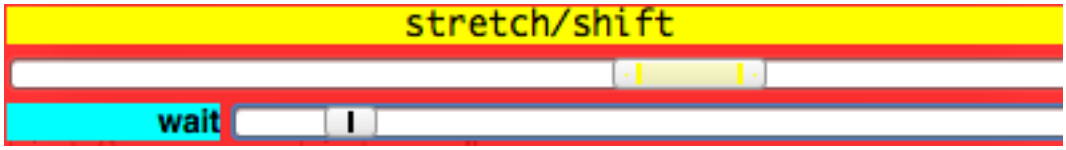
mp

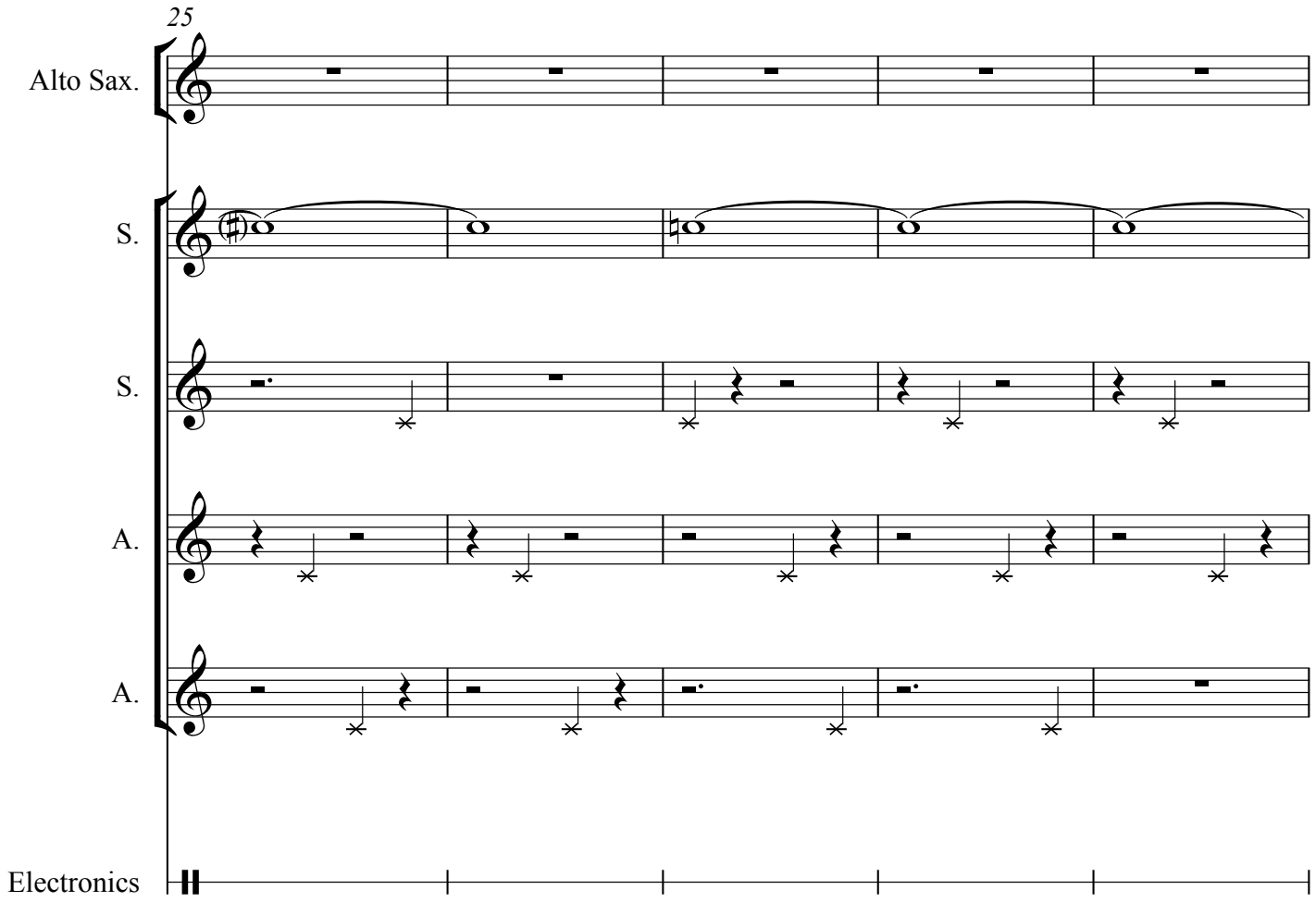
S.

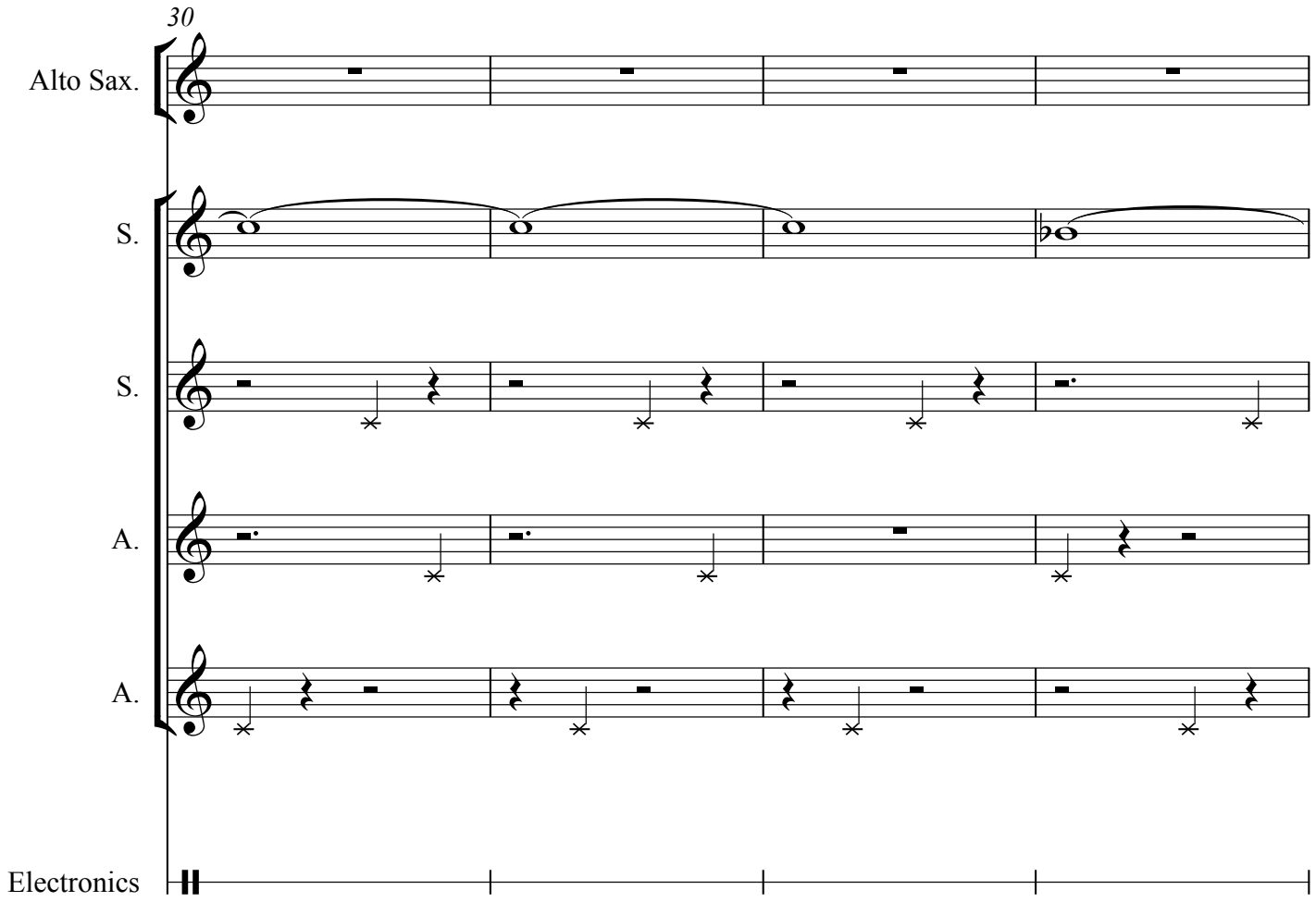
A.

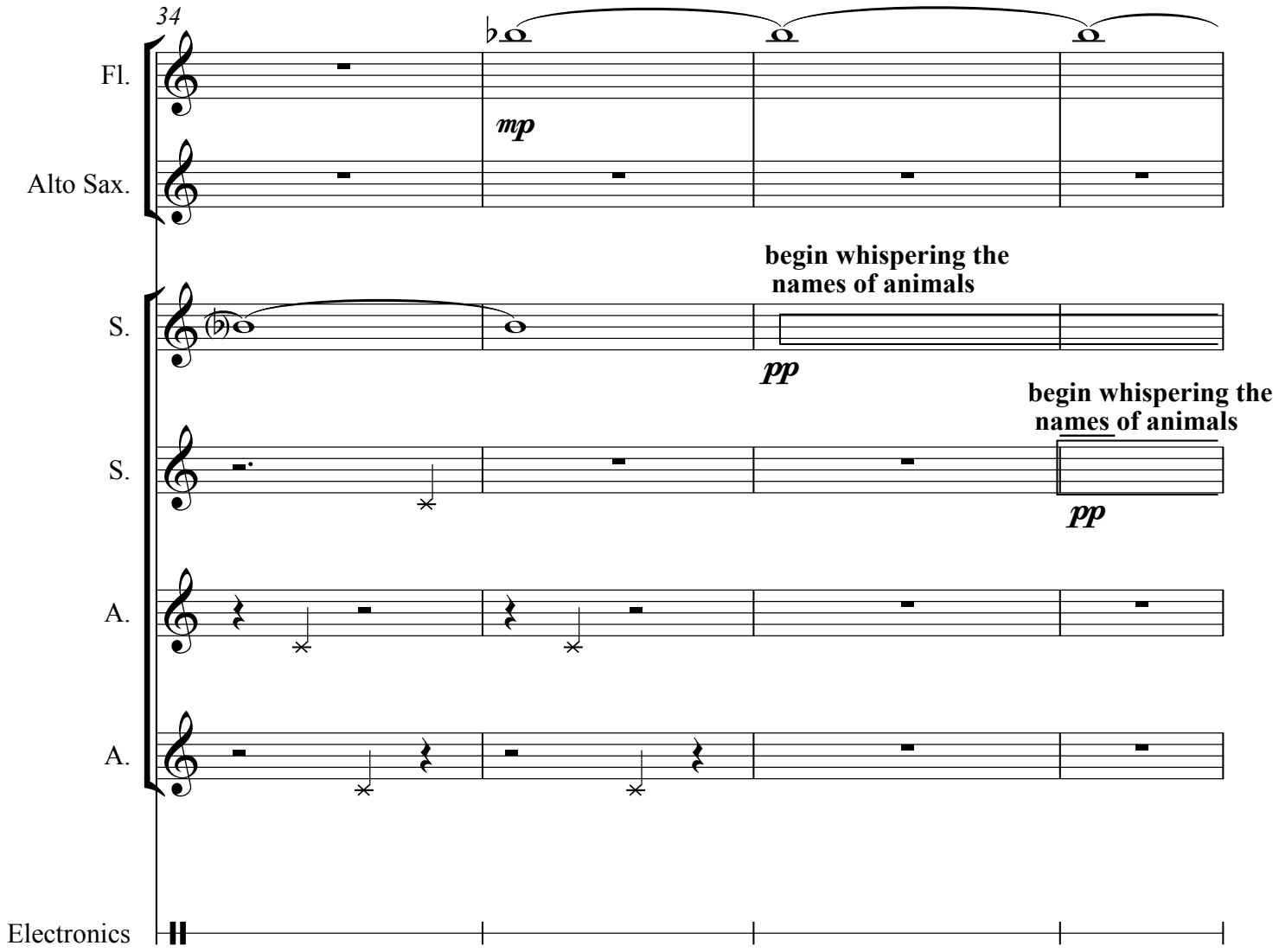
A.

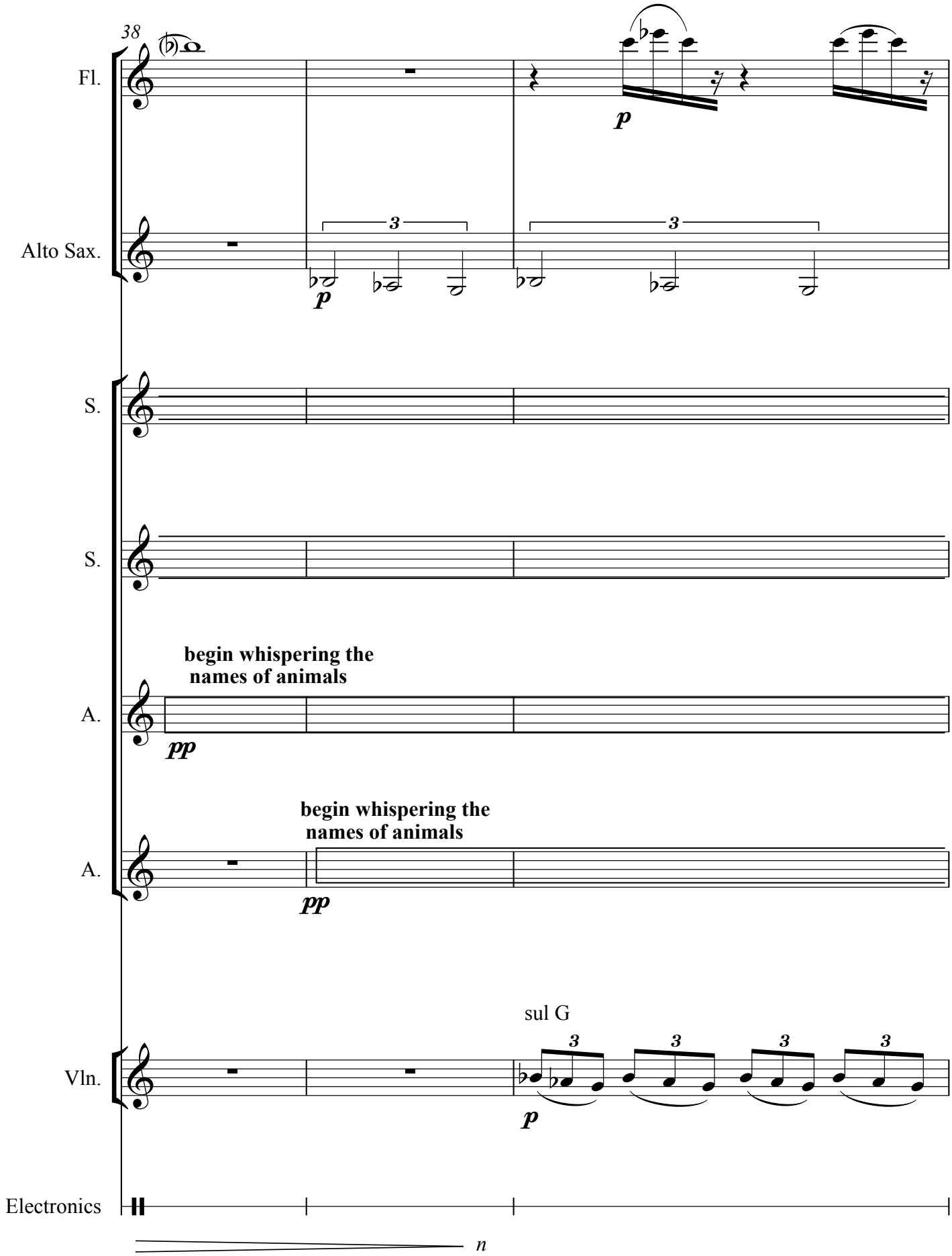
Electronics

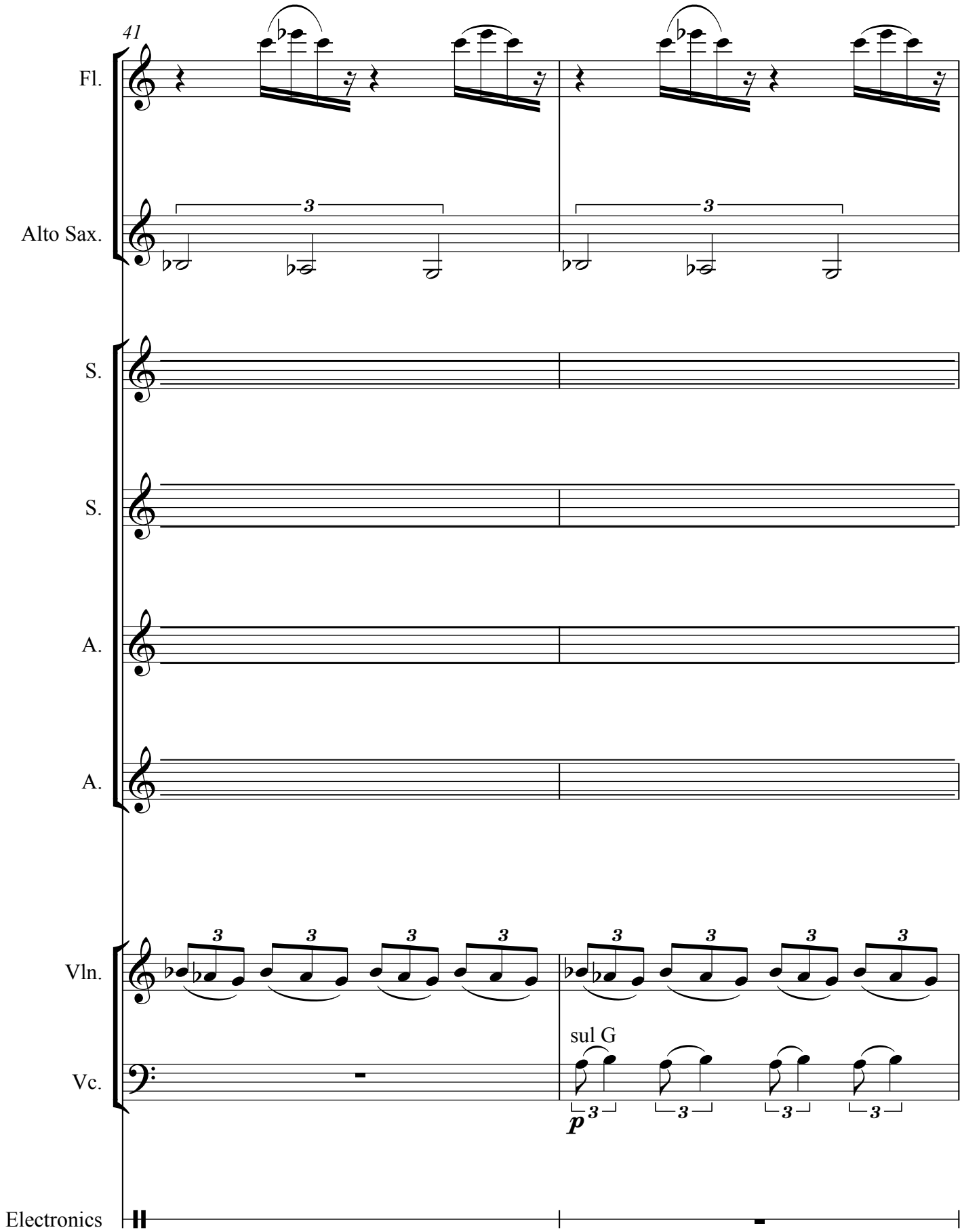


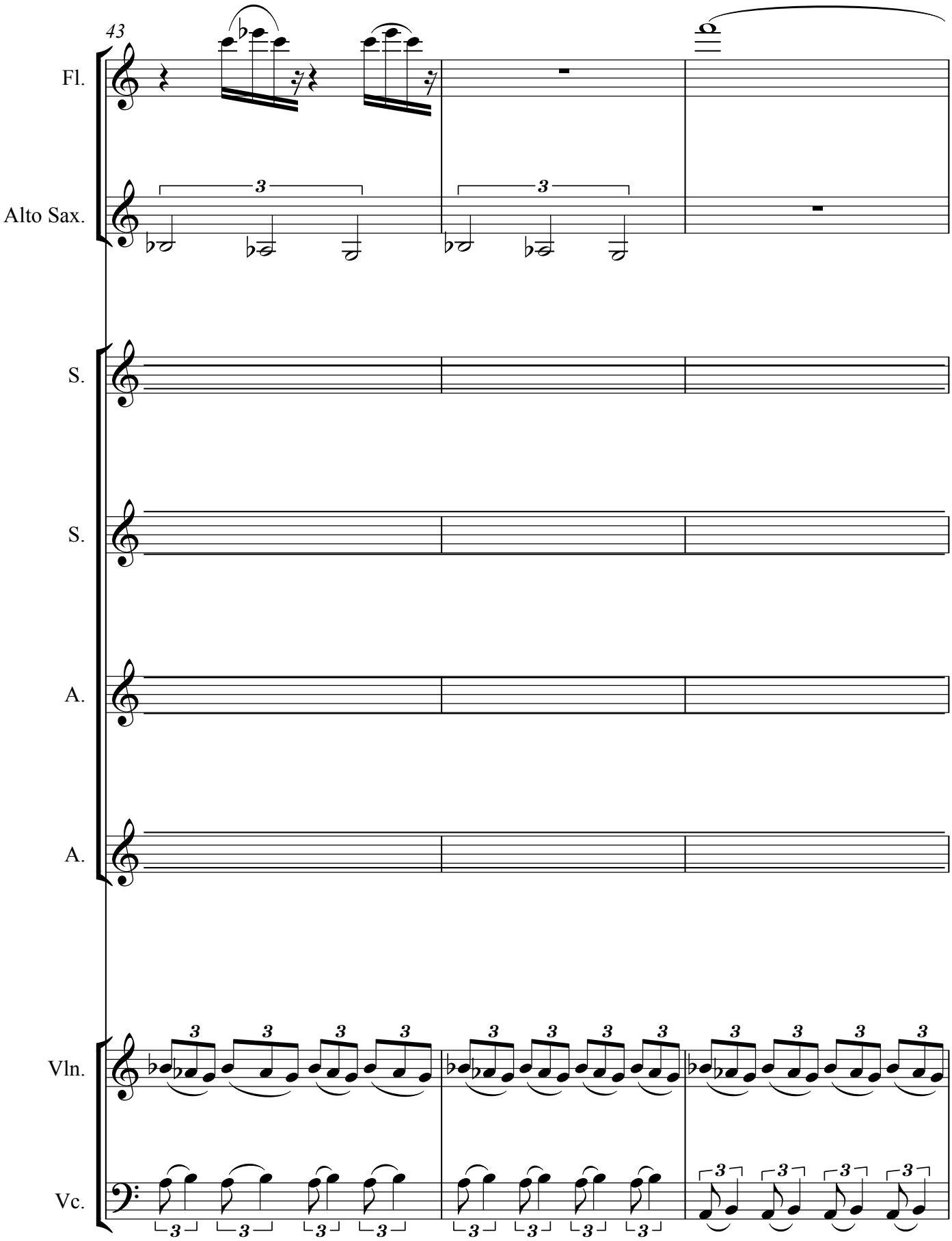

25
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Electronics

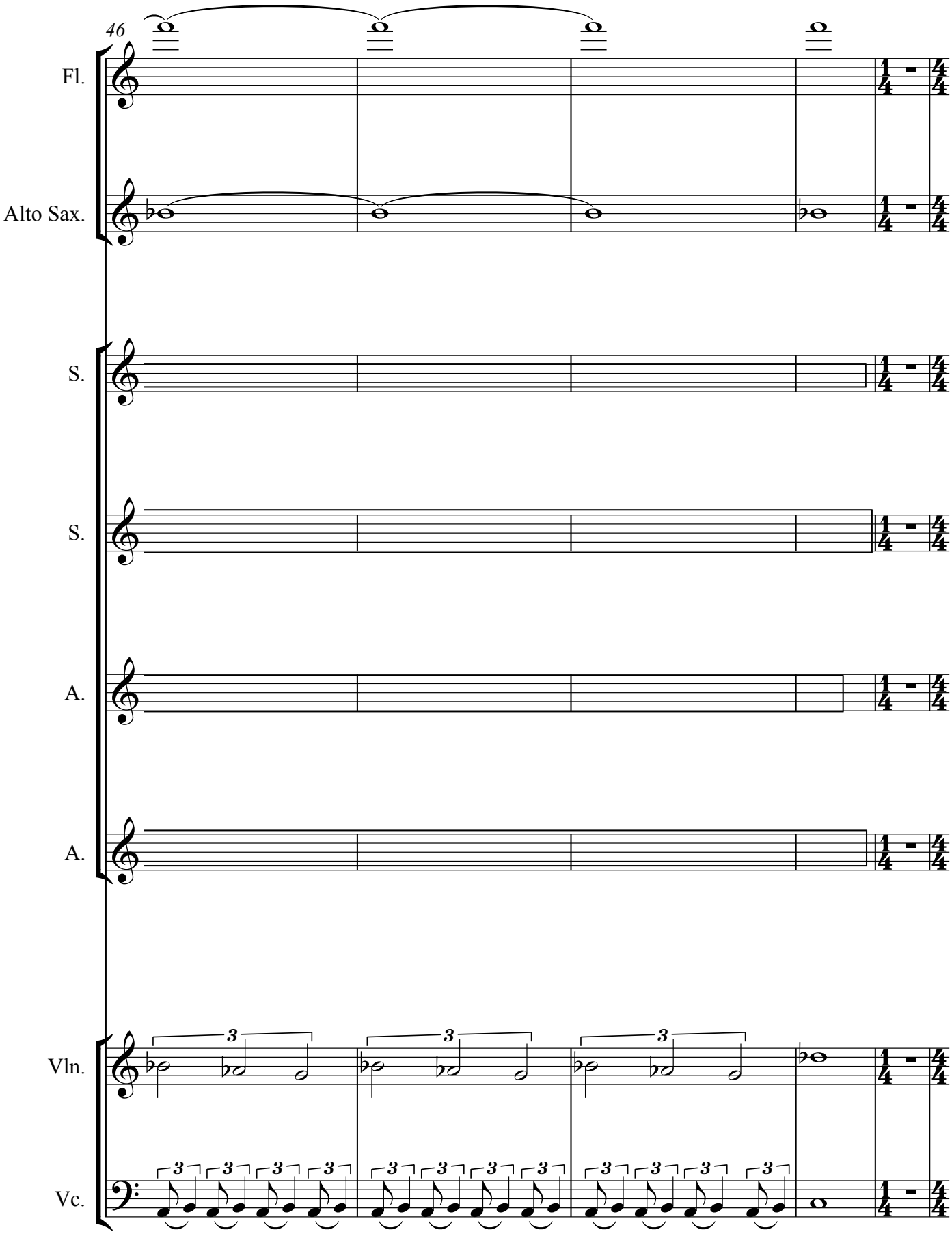

30
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Electronics

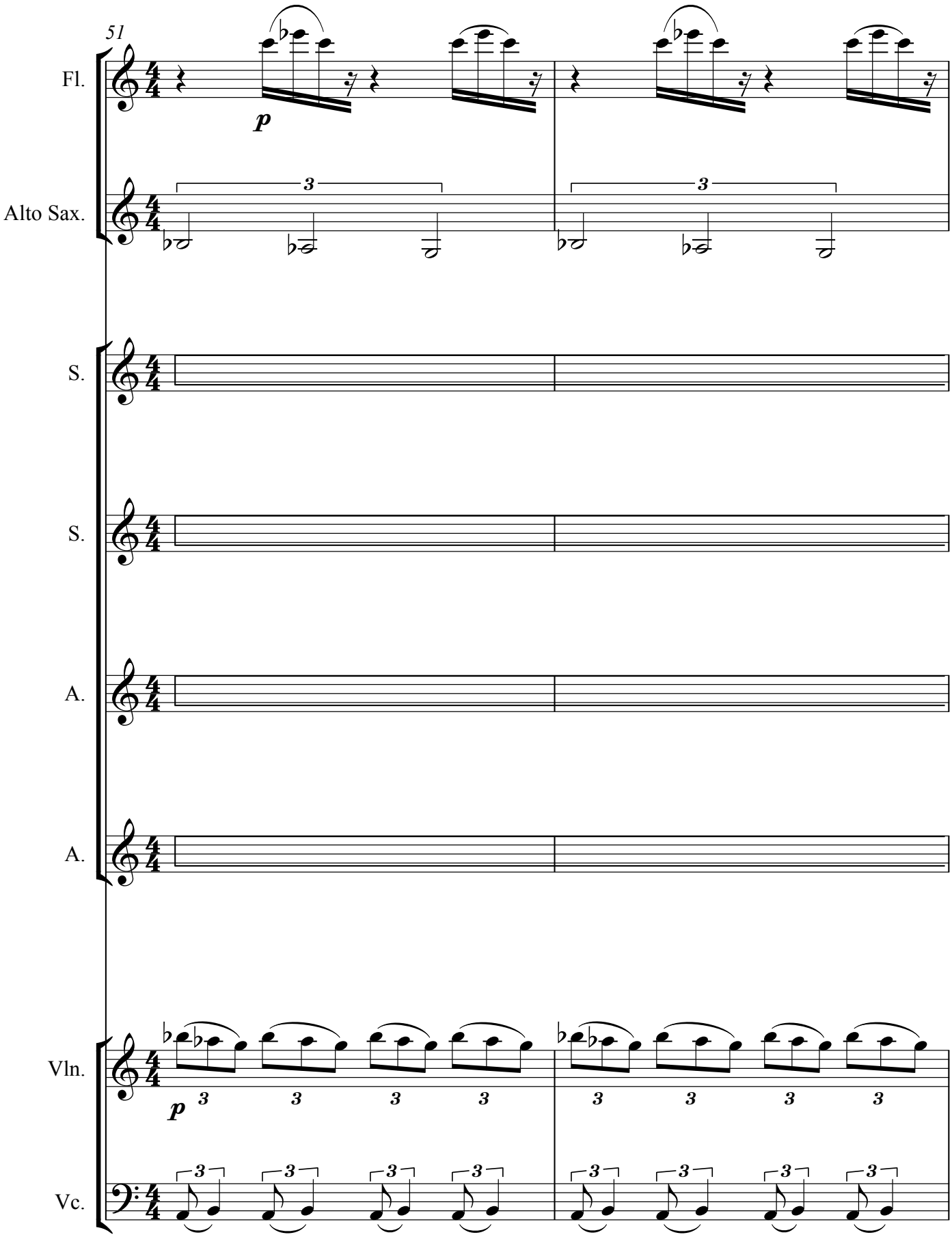

34
Fl.
mp
Alto Sax.
begin whispering the
names of animals
S.
pp
begin whispering the
names of animals
S.
pp
A.
A.
Electronics

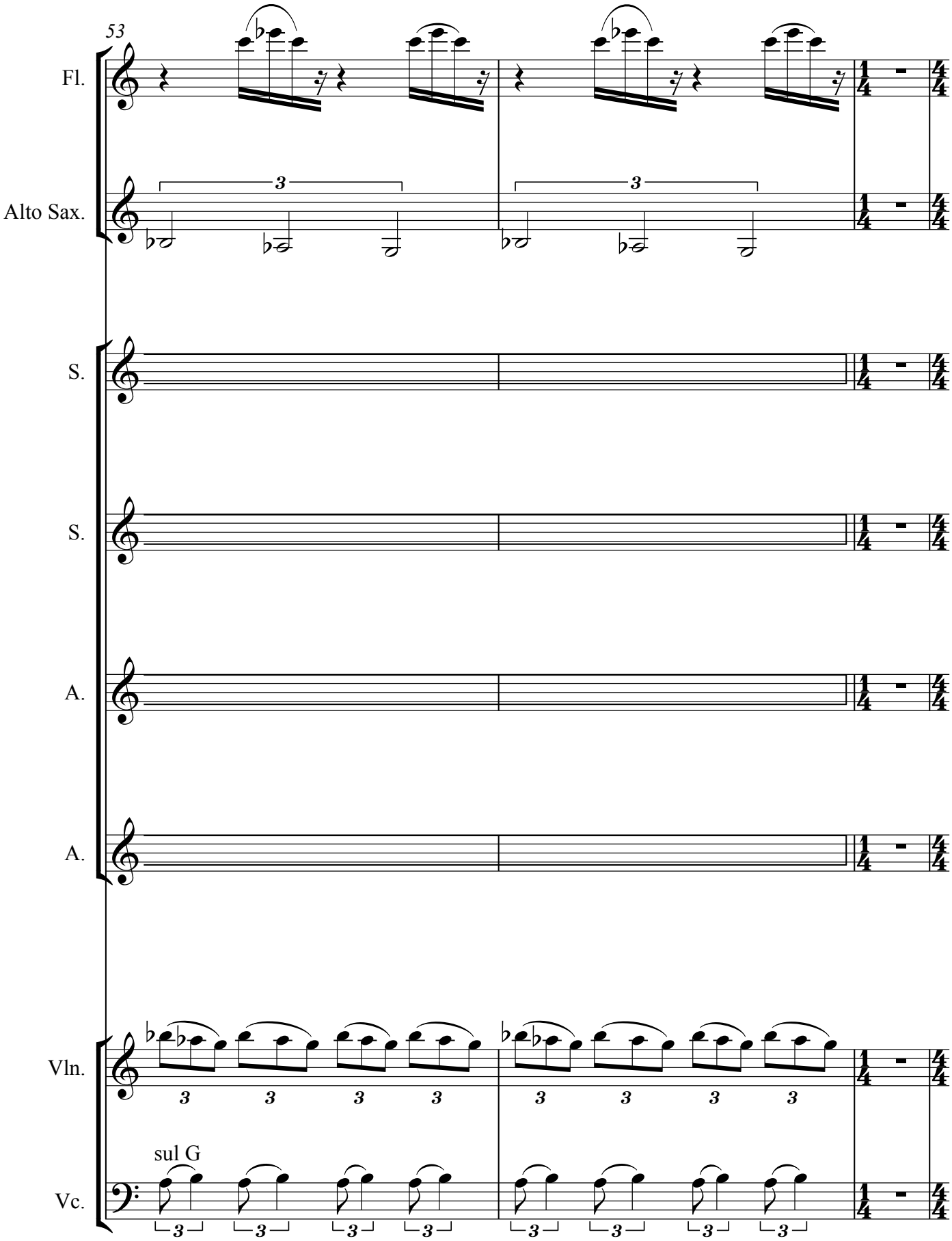

38
Fl.
p
Alto Sax.
3
3
p
S.
S.
begin whispering the
names of animals
A.
pp
begin whispering the
names of animals
A.
pp
sul G
Vln.
3
3
3
3
p
Electronics
n

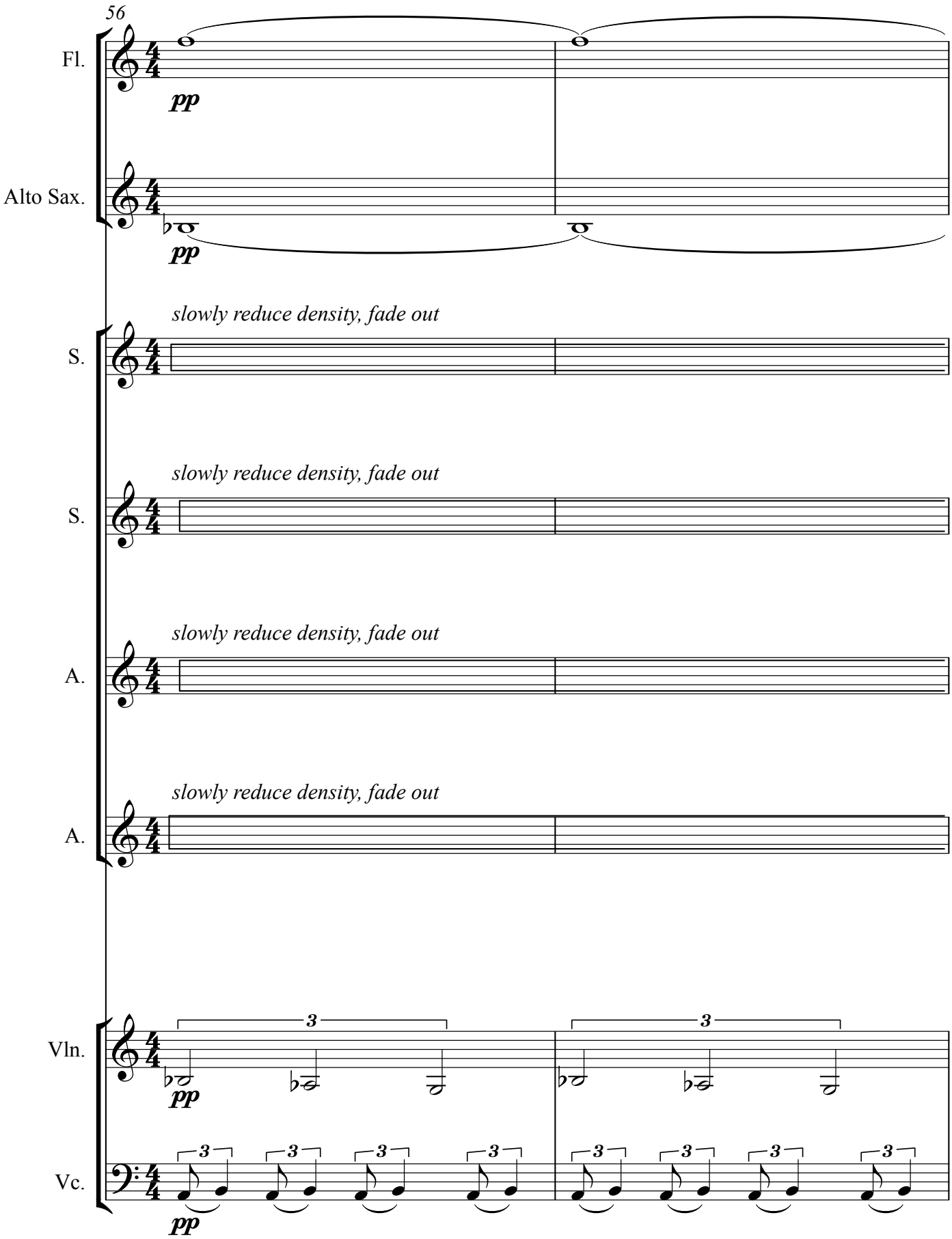

41
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
Vc.
sul G
p
Electronics

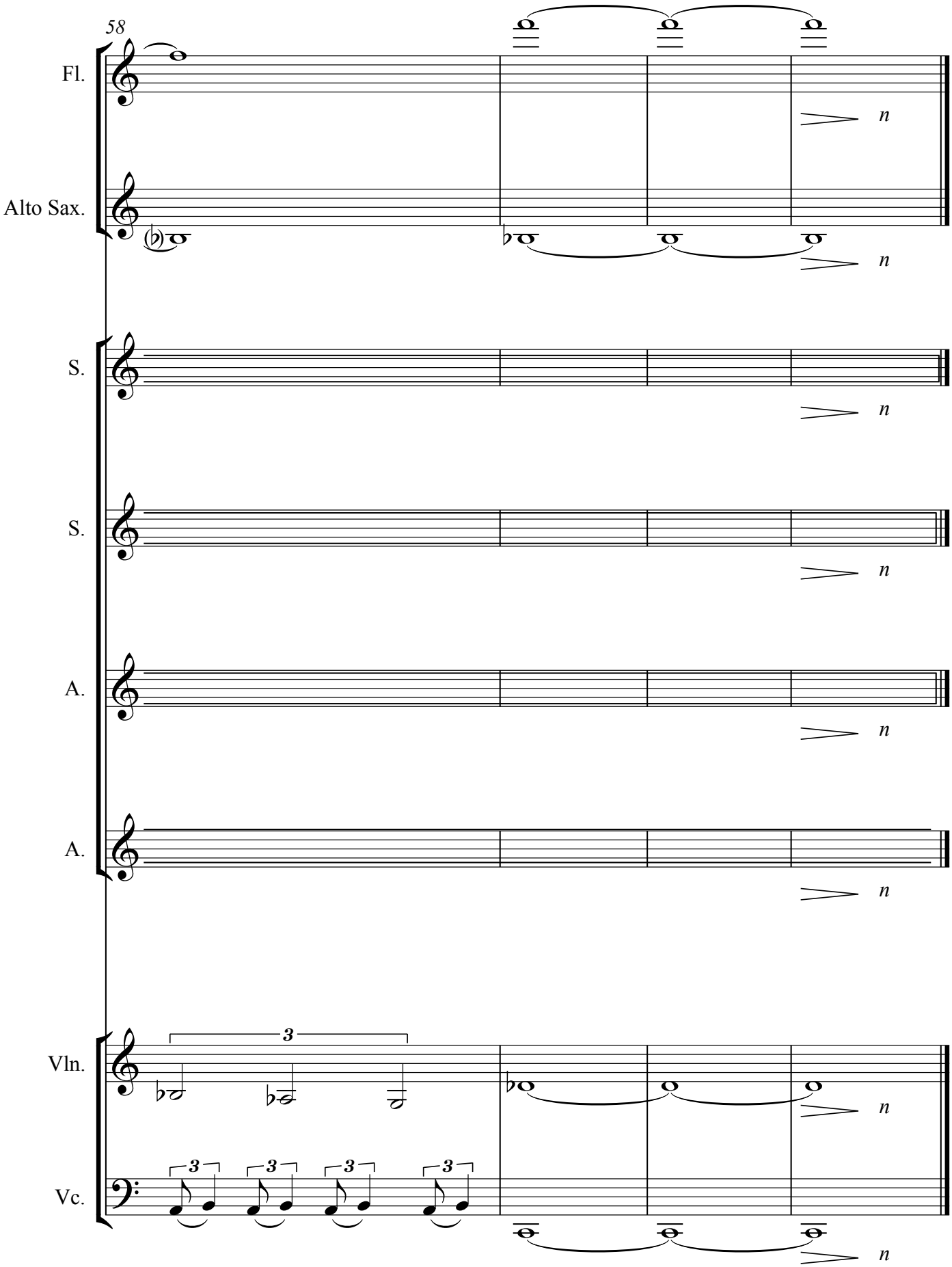

43
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
Vc.


46
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
Vc.


51
Fl.
p
Alto Sax.
3
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
p
3
Vc.


53
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
Vc.
sul G


56
Fl.
pp
Alto Sax.
pp
slowly reduce density, fade out
S.
slowly reduce density, fade out
S.
slowly reduce density, fade out
A.
slowly reduce density, fade out
A.
Vln.
pp
Vc.
pp


58
Fl.
Alto Sax.
S.
S.
A.
A.
Vln.
Vc.
n
3