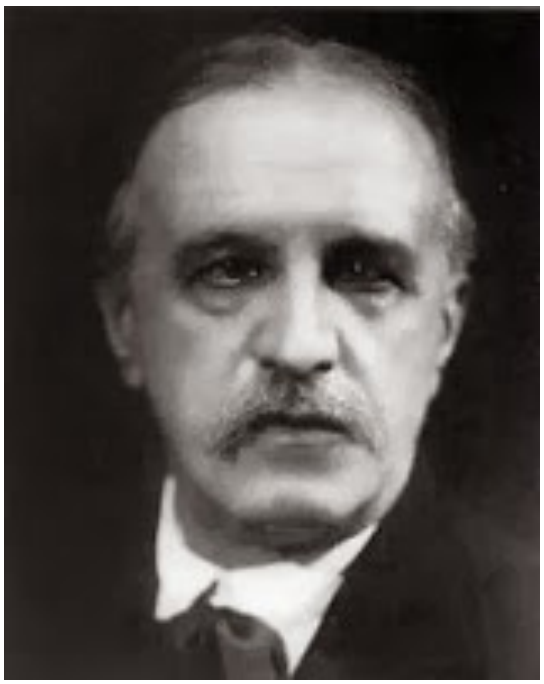
# Louis Vierne
# (1870 - 1937)

*6 pieces from*
## 24 Pièces en style libre (1913-4)

*arranged for wind quintet (Clarinet in A and B♭)*
*by Toby Miller (2021)*



Louis Vierne (unable to trace source or date of picture).

Louis Vierne was born in 1870, the eldest of 5 children. Both sisters died young. His devoted younger brother René, also an organist and composer, died in the First World War, as did Louis' eldest son Jacques. These were just two of the many tragedies that blighted his life, starting with a painful divorce from his wife a few years earlier and continuing with his younger son André's death from TB in 1913. Louis was born blind due to congenital cataracts. An operation at the age of 7 restored some sight, but not enough to lead a normal life: between 1881 and 1890 he was educated at the national institution for blind children, which he credited with giving him excellent preparation for life as an organist, composer and teacher. He is said to have picked out on the piano a tune he had just heard at the age of 2, and in 1887 his performance in his end-of-year exam at school caused the external examiner, César Franck, to offer him free lessons in counterpoint once a week and take him into his organ classes at the Conservatoire as a listener. Aged 11, Vierne had heard Franck improvise in his church at Ste-Clotilde. He later recalled: 'I could not hold back my tears. I knew nothing; but my natural instinct was violently shaken by this expressive music echoing through my every pore'. Joining the Conservatoire fully in 1890, he was smitten with 'passionate admiration, affection for a father-figure and deep respect' (Léonce de St Martin), so that when Franck died in November from the after-effects of a road accident, Louis was devastated. He himself was later universally recalled by his pupils as a kind, conscientious and effective teacher; sensitive but introspective, perhaps partly as a result of the isolation caused by blindness.

These 24 so-called 'freestyle' (character) pieces, one in each major and minor key, were written just before the First World War. They are designed to be played as interludes while the collection is being taken during Mass - so perhaps the church equivalent of salon pieces. The best known is the *Berceuse* (Lullaby), no 19 and the last in this selection of six: dedicated to his daughter Colette (then aged 7 or 8, and living apart from him following the divorce), it is a beautiful harmonization of the familiar tune. Vierne was a master of the 'Mendelssohnian' (fast and light) Scherzo, and there are two examples in this selection: the *Scherzetto* (no 14) and the *Divertissement* (no 11). In between I have chosen the *Légende* (no 13), another piece in a rocking rhythm beautifully harmonized, in Franck's favourite key of F# major (I have included a version transposed to G). The second piece I have chosen is the *Madrigal* (no 9), with a recurring triplet figure and harmonies reminiscent of Grieg. Vierne is perhaps the most chromatic of all composers, often seeming to find semitones between notes that you thought were only a semitone apart, but Grieg also said to his biographer 'I have found that the obscure depths of our folk tunes have their foundation in unexplored harmonic possibilities… I have been especially attracted by the chromatic lines within the harmonic texture'. The first piece in this selection, the *Prélude* (no 5), was dedicated to Vierne's pupil Nadia Boulanger (he also taught her sister Lili), who of course went on to become perhaps the most famous teacher of the 20th century. It is fascinating to trace a chain of knowledge in counterpoint, harmony and general composition passing from Albrechtsberger in Vienna via a succession of earnest pupils who then became passionate and admired teachers in Paris: Antoine Reicha, Franck, Vierne, Boulanger - and from her to countless famous composers and musicians worldwide.

Albrechtsberger, Franck and especially Vierne have tended to stay pigeon-holed in church - still far too often a world apart. Anybody who still harbours secret doubts as to whether organists have a life outside church should listen to Vierne's piano quintet, written just a few years later after the war in grief and anger at his son Jacques' suicide in action: one of the most searingly powerful but also tender pieces of chamber music ever written. Franck's quintet offers equally 'unfiltered' emotion: both pieces demand exceptional commitment by performers and audience.

Selected **Pièces en style libre** arr. for wind quintet by Toby Miller

Score (instrumental pitch)

## V - Prélude *à Nadia Boulanger*

Vierne

**Andante sostenuto ♪ = 112 [120, sempre ♪ = ♪]**

Flute

Oboe

Clarinet in A

Horn in F

Bassoon

*p* *dolce*

(1 / 6)

(3)

(5)

7

*p* *dolce*

(1 / 5)

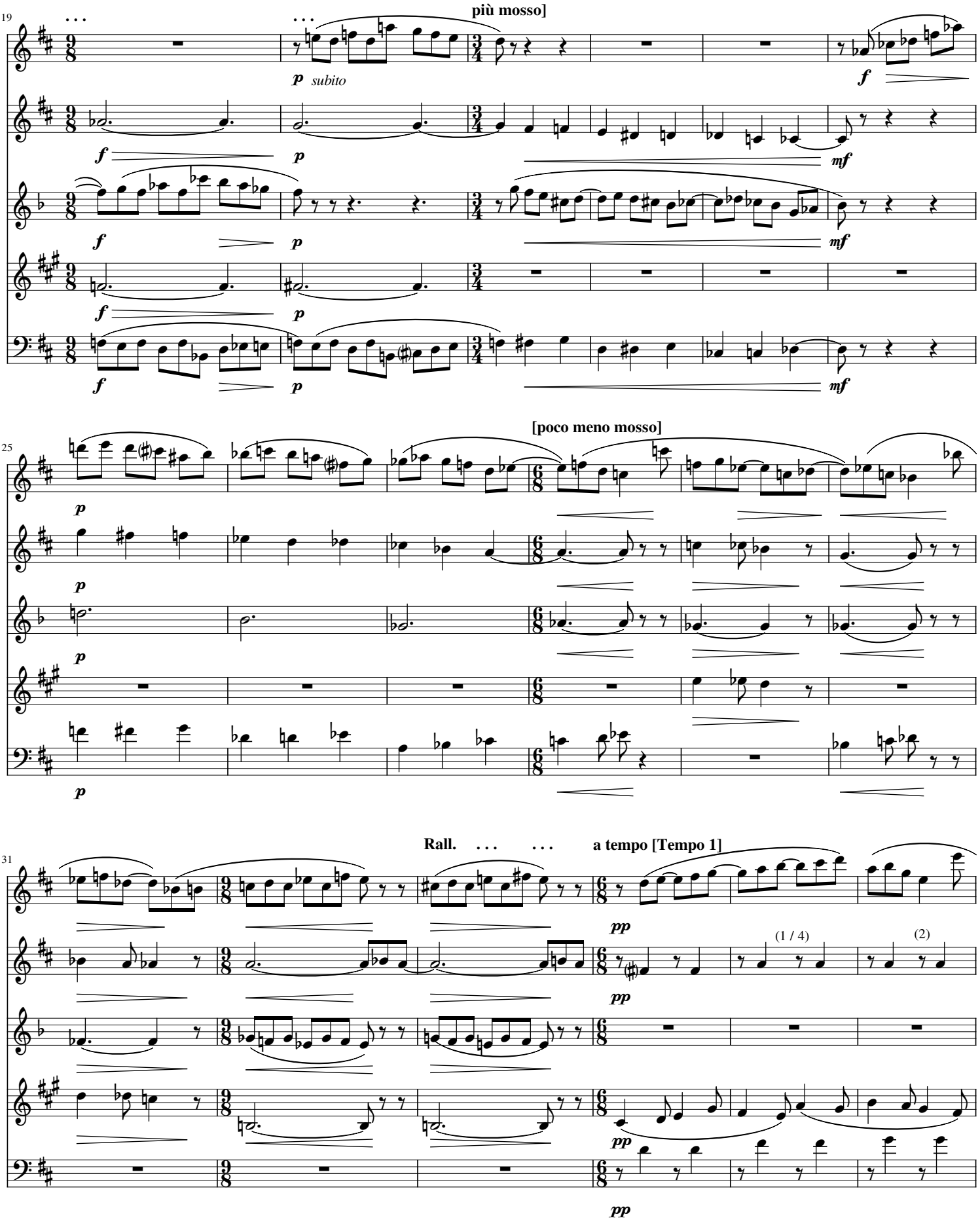
*mp*

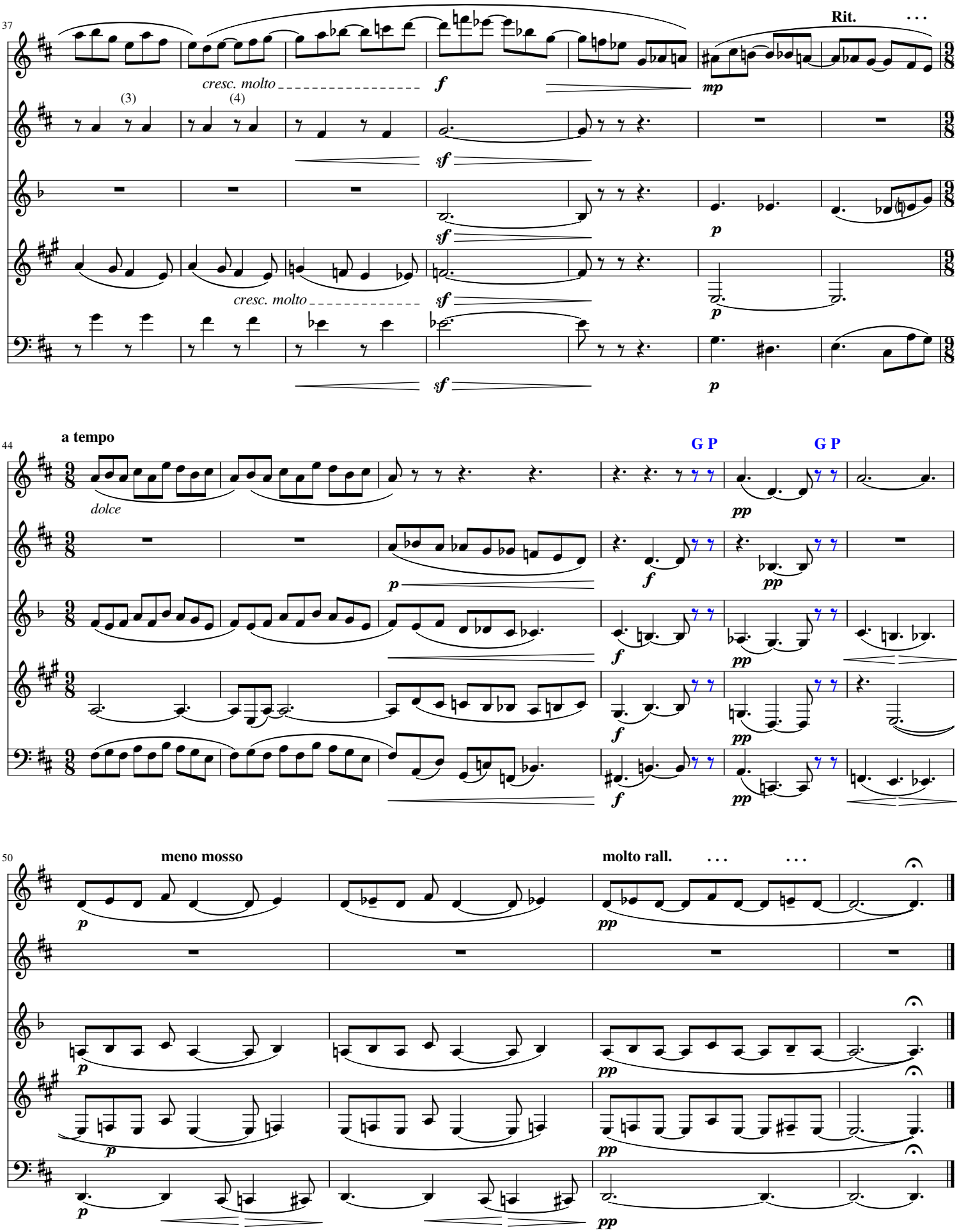
12

**[accel.**

. . .

*mf*


più mosso]
19
p subito
f
mf
[poco meno mosso]
25
Rall. . . . . . a tempo [Tempo 1]
31
pp
(1 / 4)
(2)


37
Rit.
cresc. molto
f
mp
(3)
(4)
sf
p
cresc. molto
44
a tempo
dolce
G P
G P
pp
50
meno mosso
molto rall.

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Score (instrumental pitch)

## IX - Madrigal *à Georges Jacob*

Vierne

**Moderato ♩ = 80 [72]**

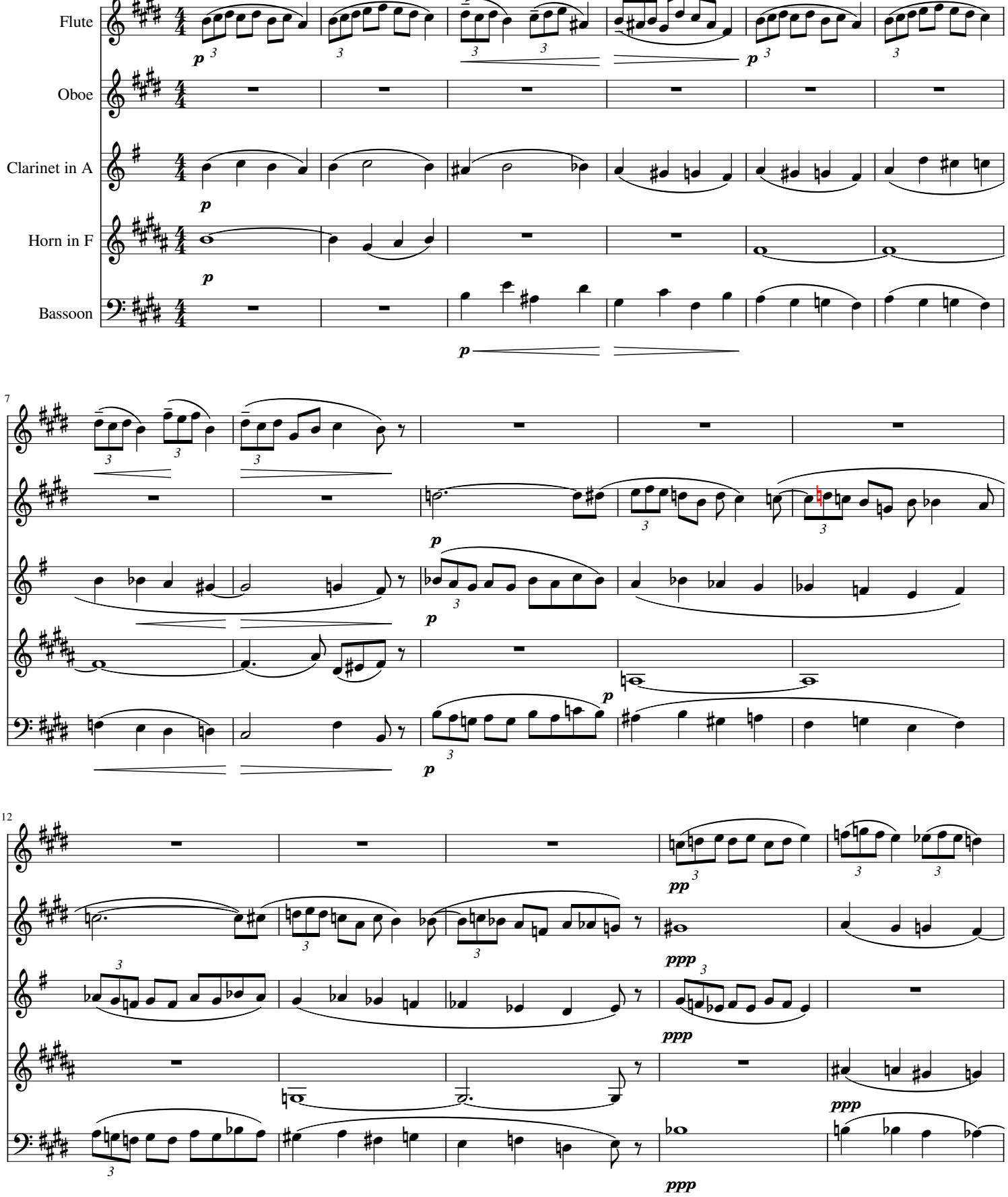
Flute

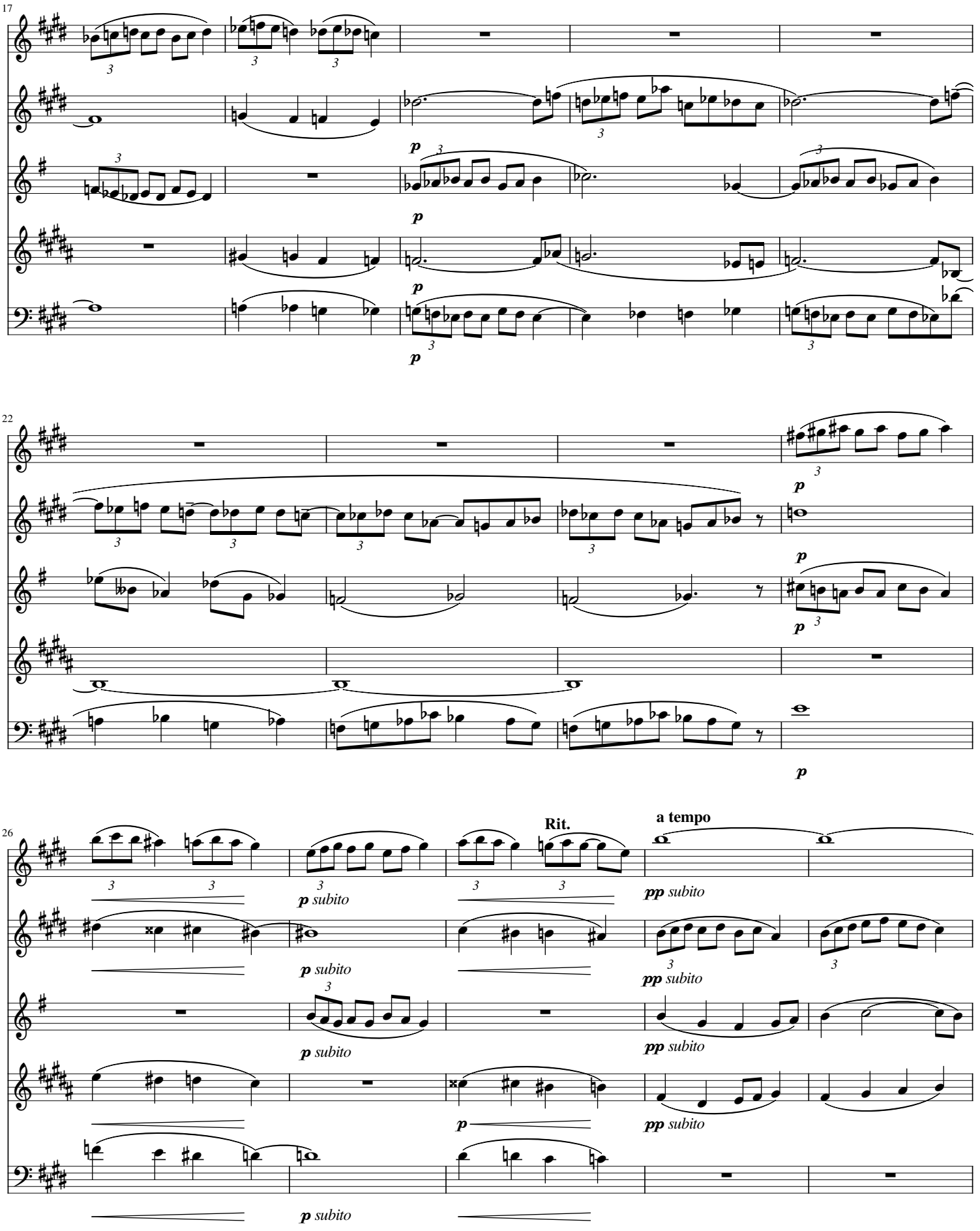
Oboe

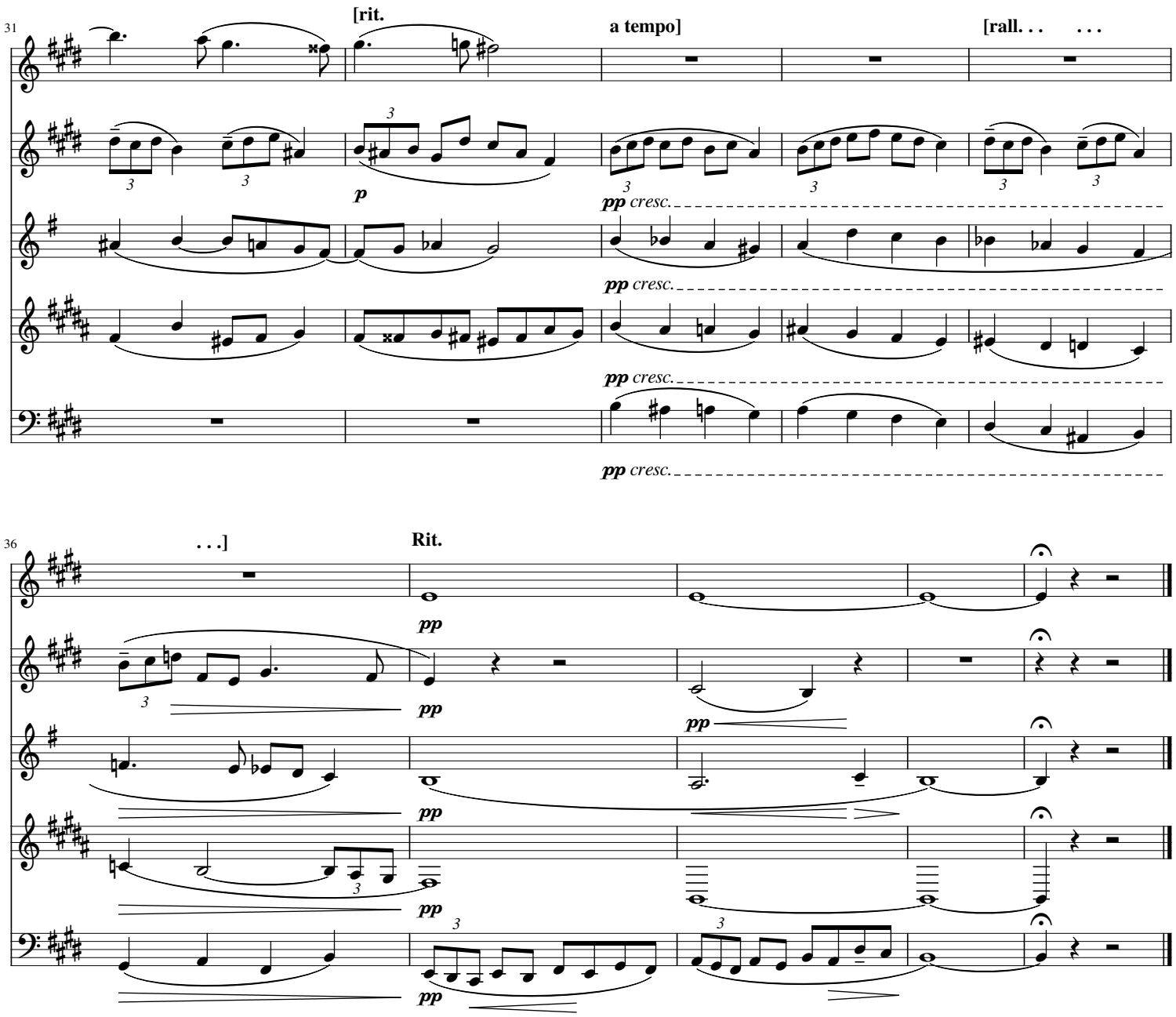
Clarinet in A

Horn in F

Bassoon




17
22
26
Rit.
a tempo


31
[rit.
a tempo]
[rall. . .
. . .
p
pp cresc.
pp cresc.
pp cresc.
pp cresc.


36
. . .]
Rit.
pp
pp
pp
pp
pp

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Score (instrumental pitch)

## XI - Divertissement *à Joseph Bonnet*

Vierne

**Allegro ♩ = 100**

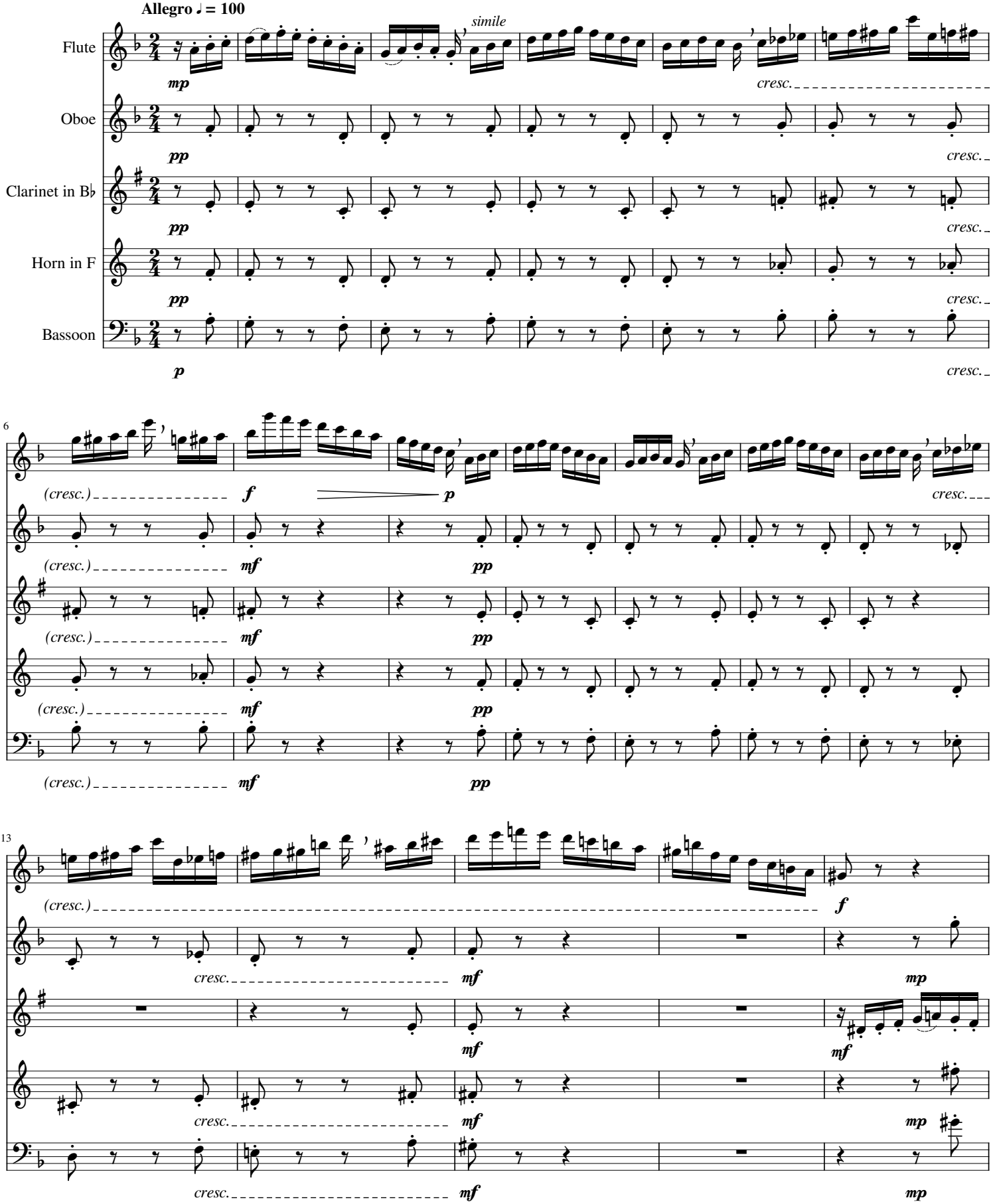
Flute

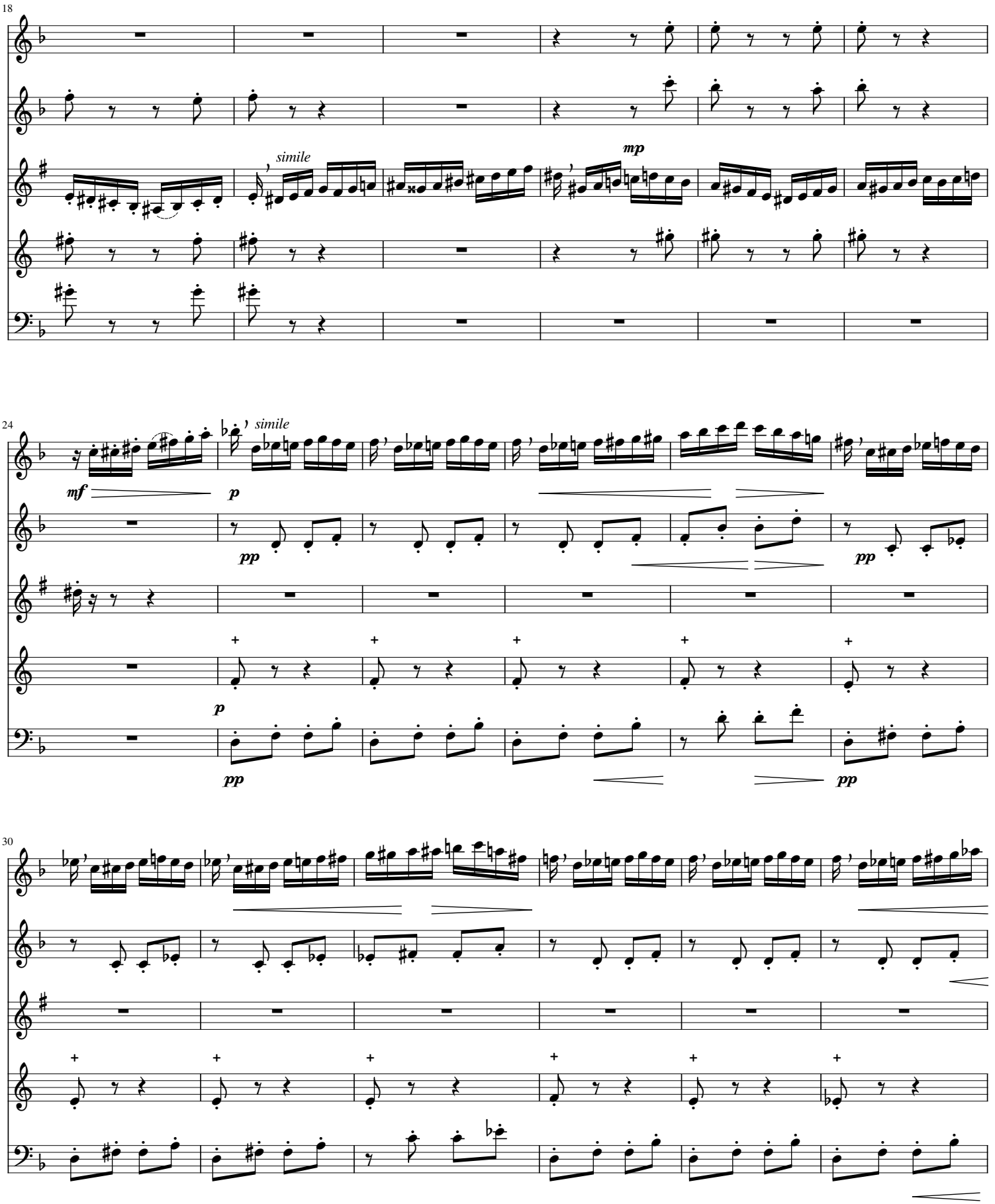
Oboe

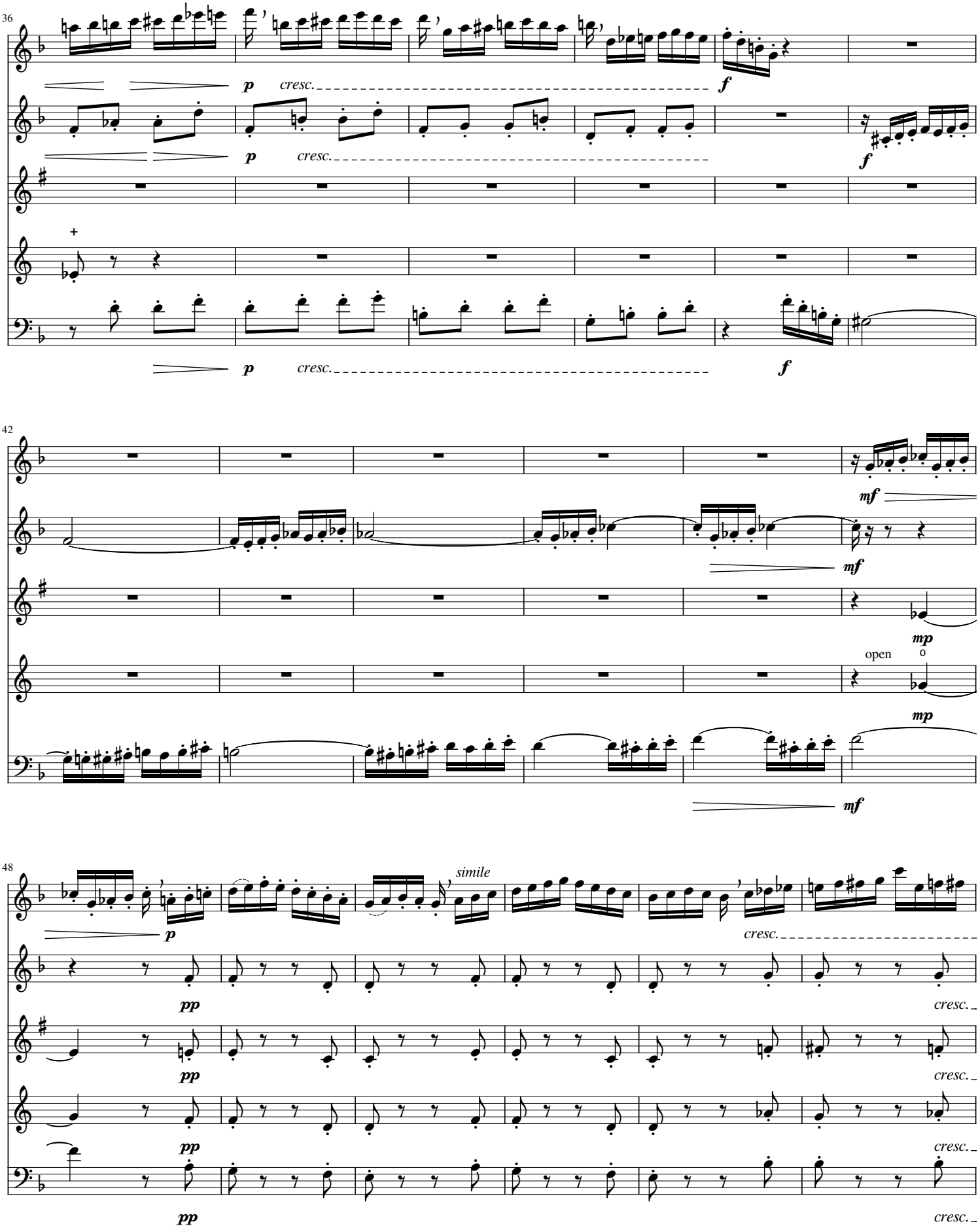
Clarinet in B♭

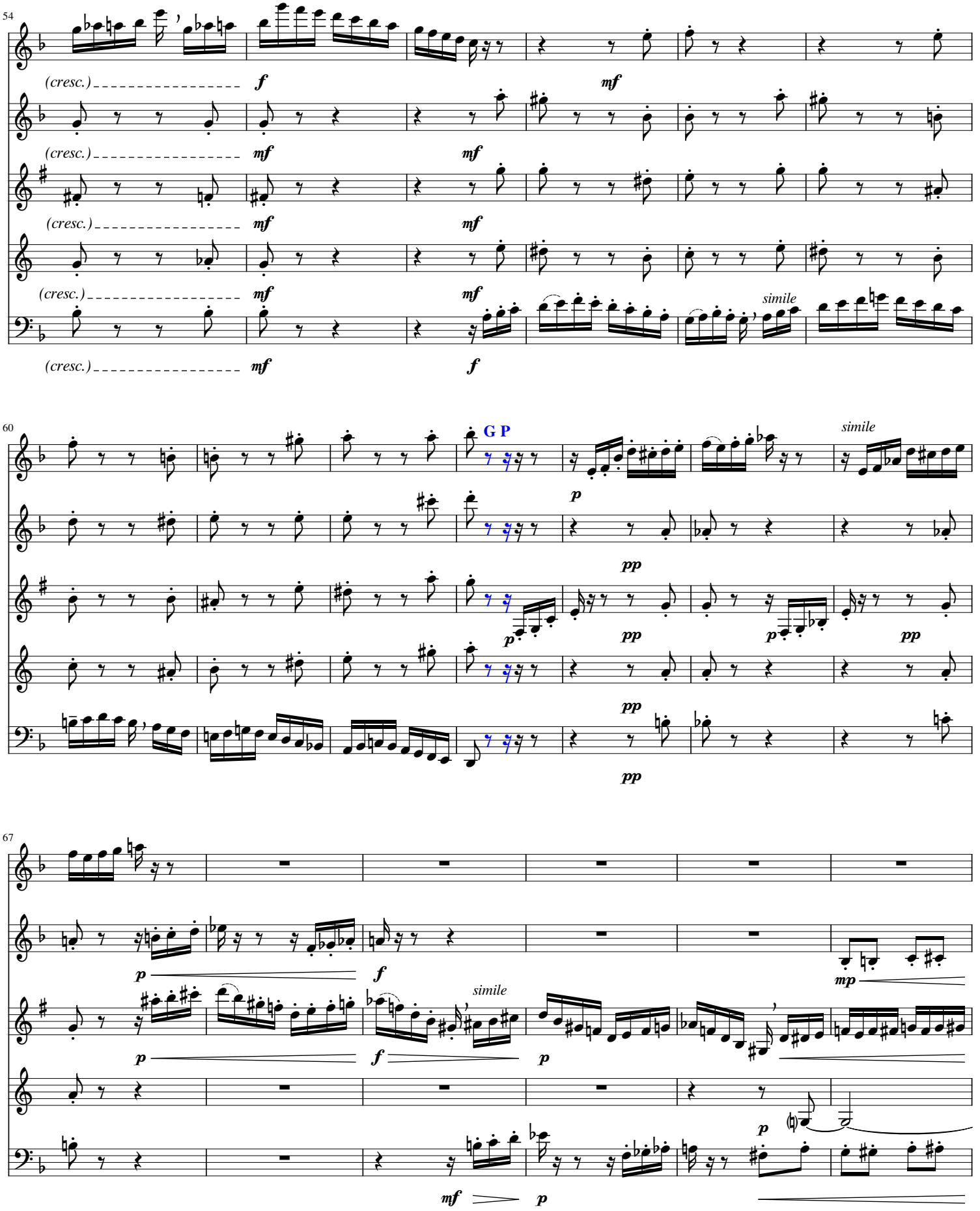
Horn in F

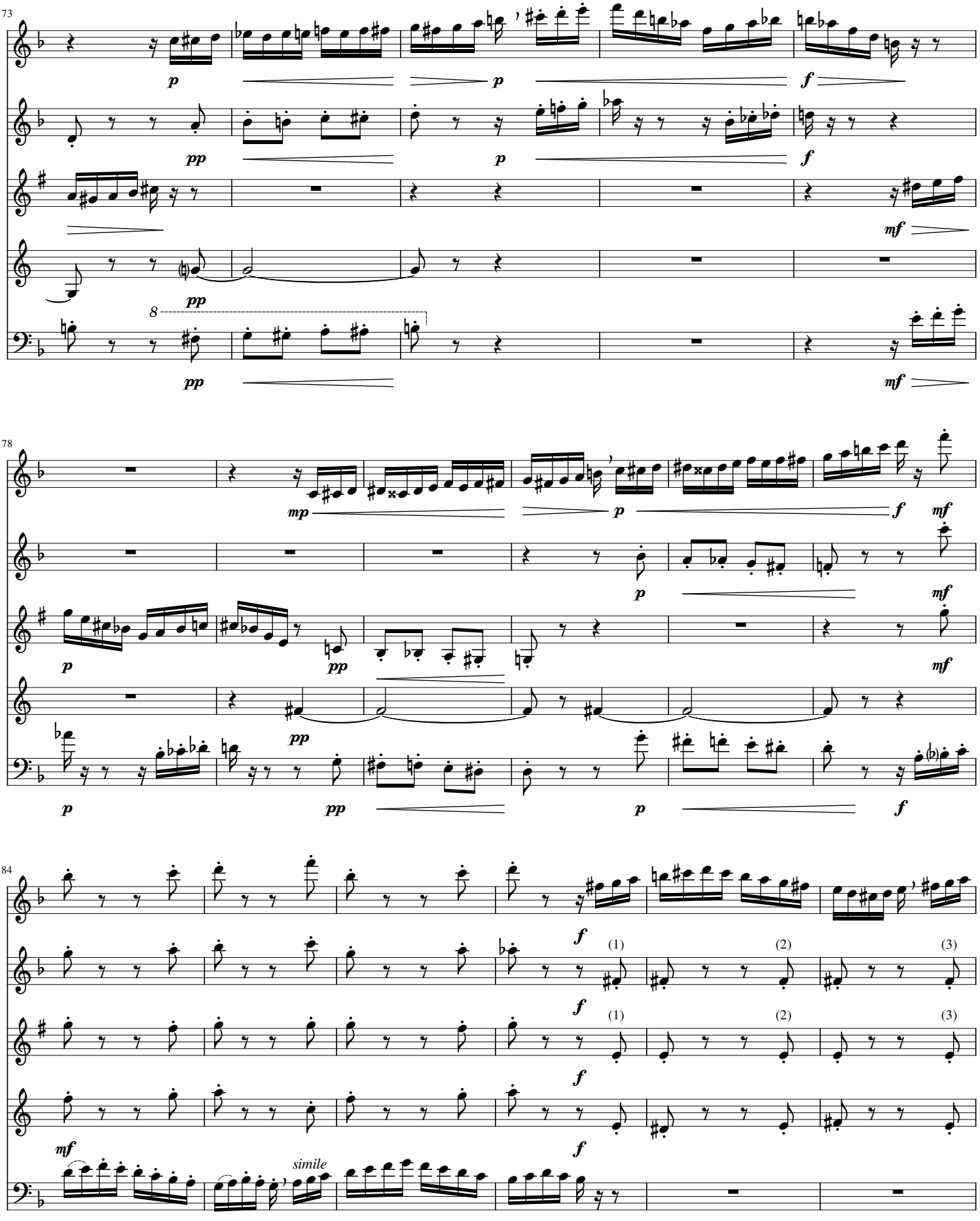
Bassoon

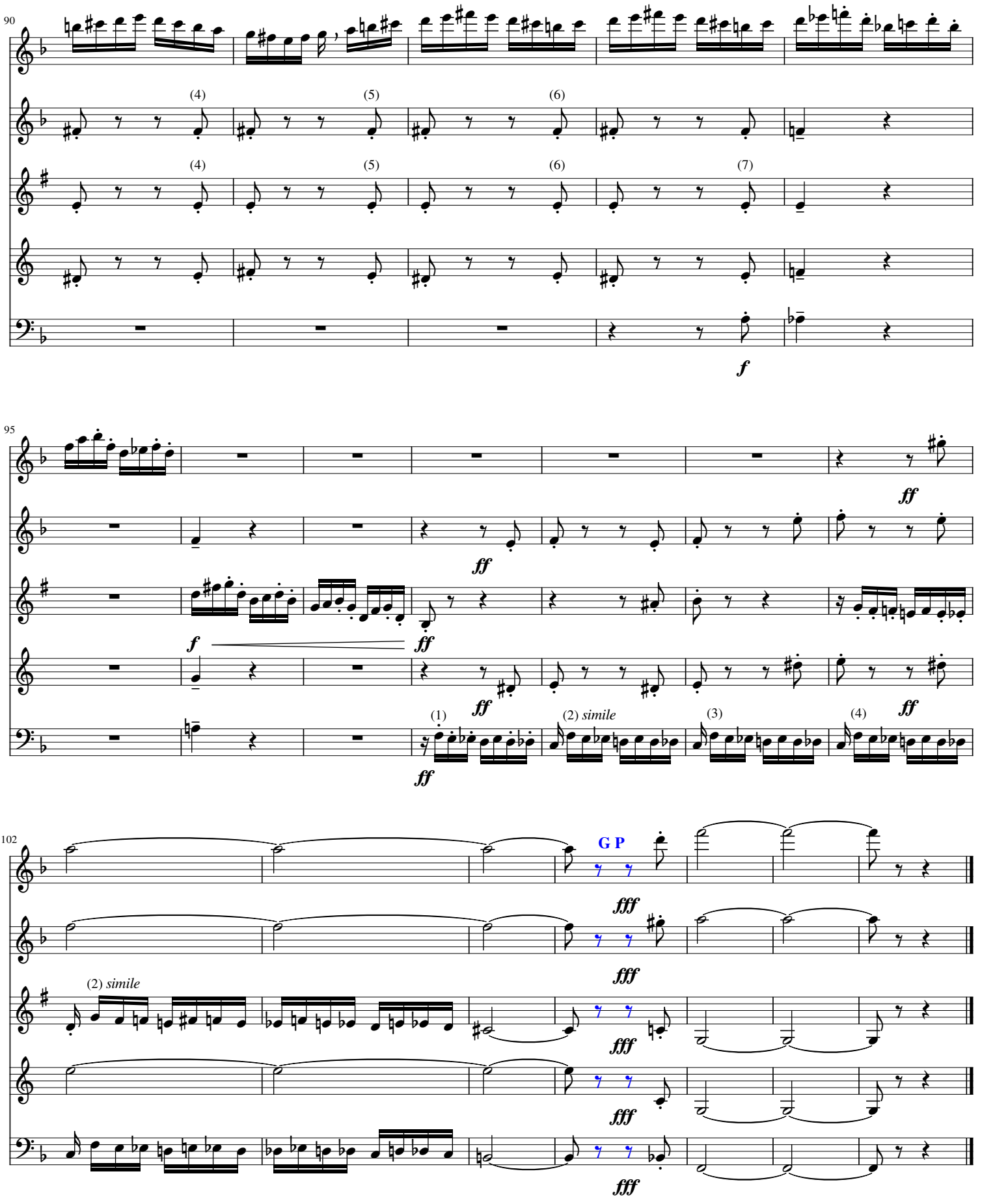



18
simile
mp
24
simile
mf
p
pp
p
pp
pp
30


36
p
cresc.
f
42
mf
mp
open
48
simile
pp


54
(cresc.)
f
mf
simile
60
G P
p
pp
67
mp


73
78
84
simile

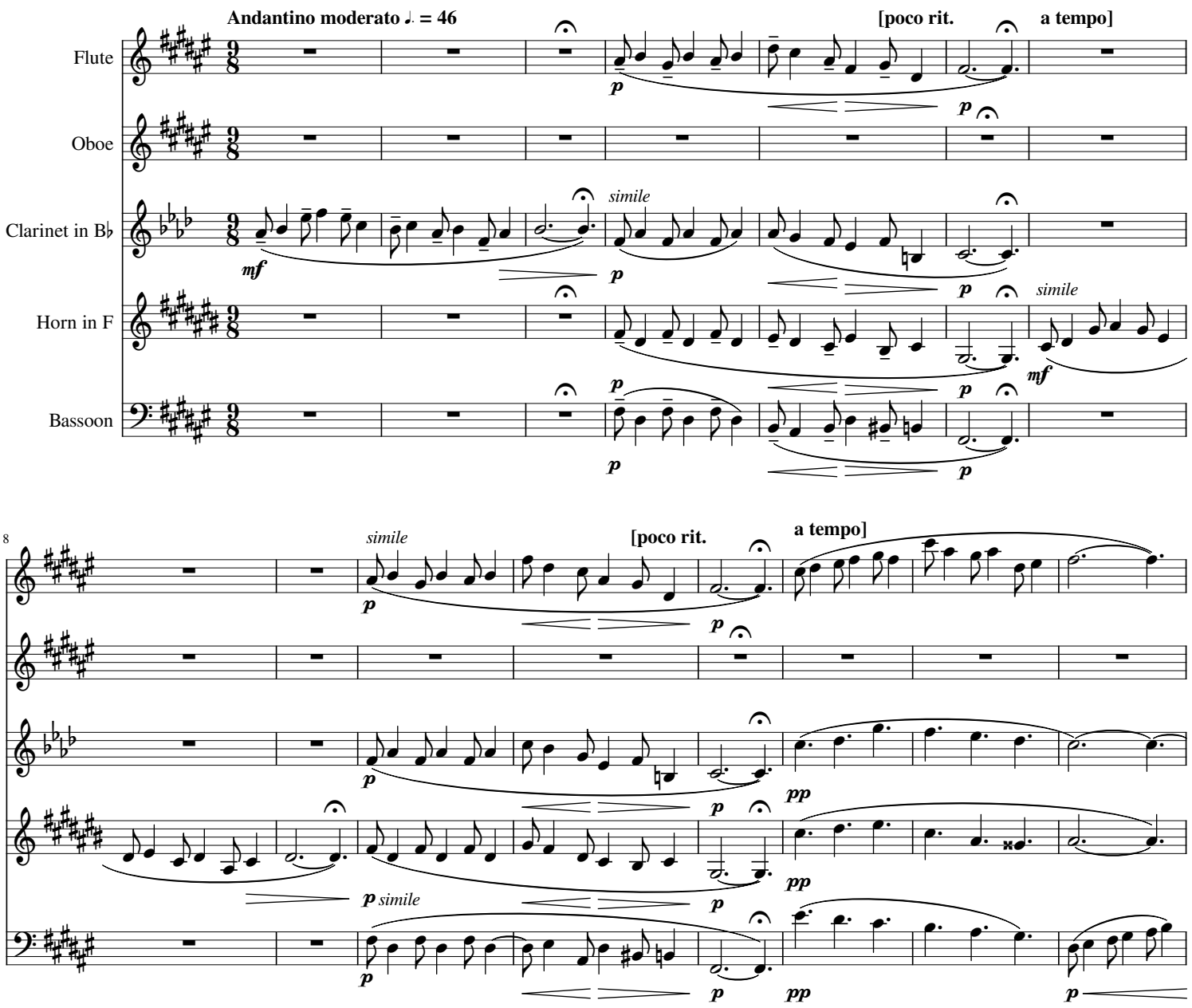

90
(4)
(5)
(6)
(7)
f
95
ff
f
(1)
(2) simile
(3)
(4)
102
G P
fff
(2) simile

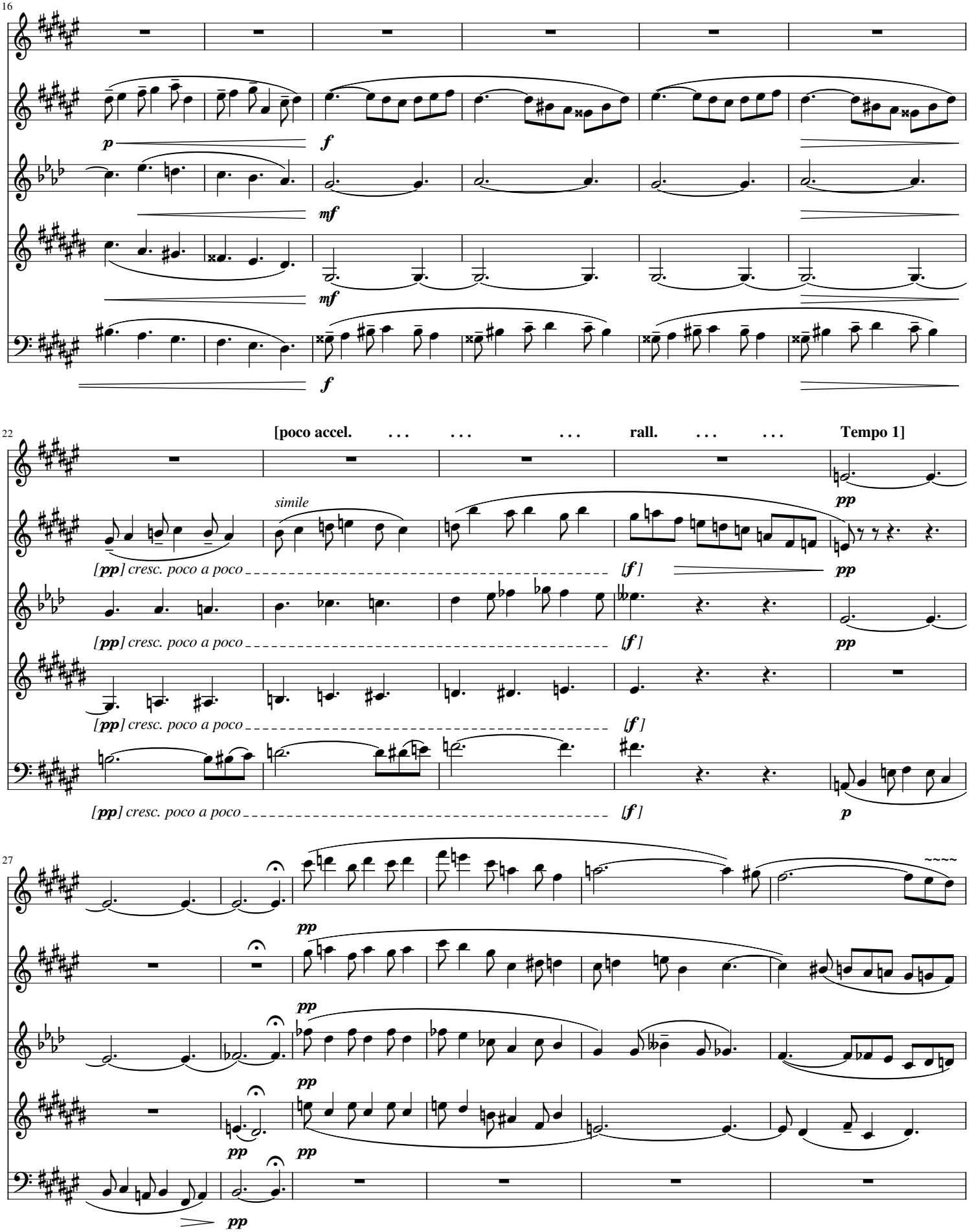
Selected **Pièces en style libre** arr. for wind quintet by Toby Miller

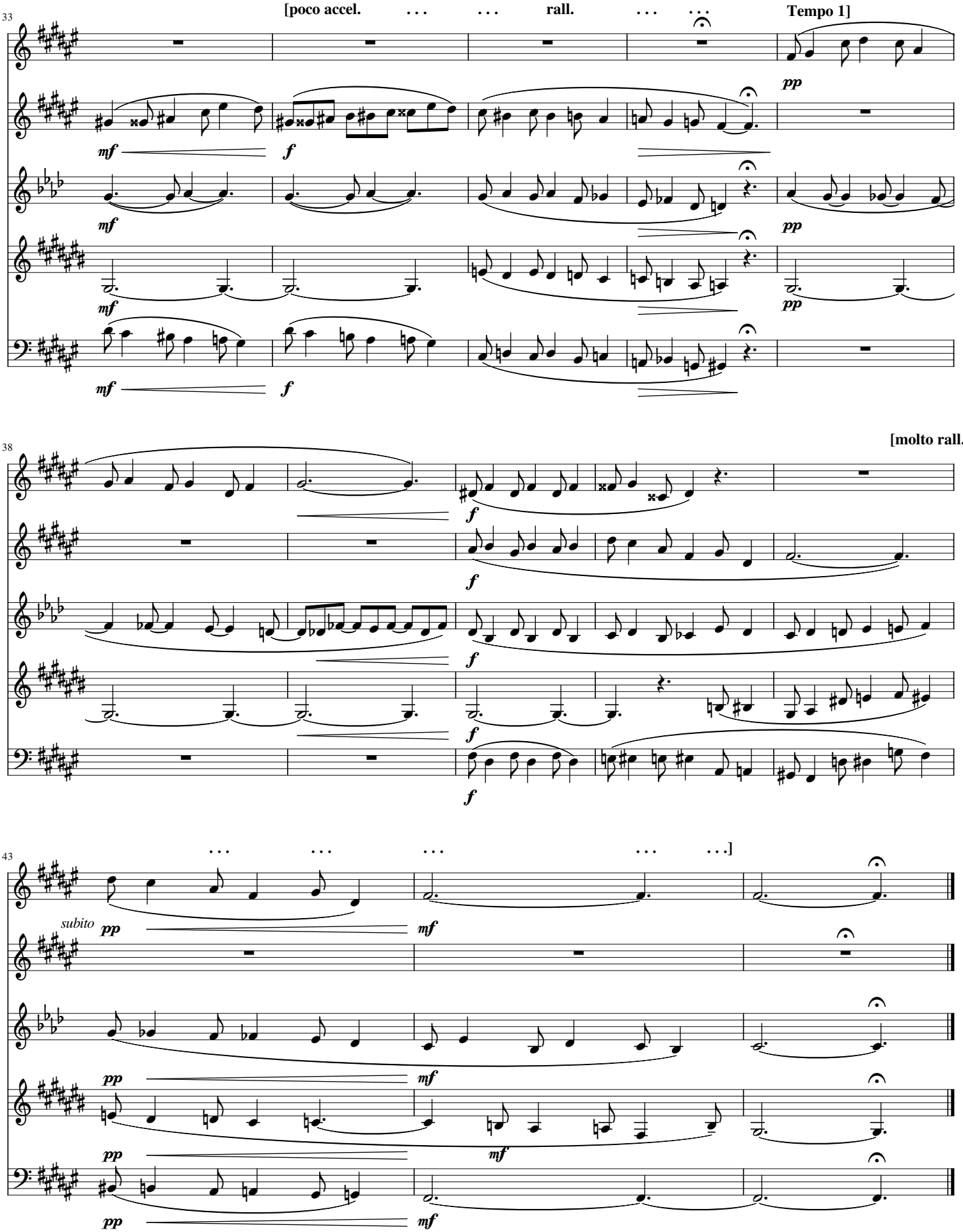
Vierne

Score (original key, instrumental pitch)
[transposed version at end of set]

## XIII - Légende *à Maurice Blazy*




16
p
f
mf
mf
f
22
[poco accel. . . . . rall. . . . Tempo 1]
simile
pp
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
[f]
pp
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
[f]
pp
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
[f]
p
27
pp
pp
pp
pp
pp


33
[poco accel. . . . . rall. . . . . Tempo 1]
38
[molto rall.
43
. . . . . . . . . . . . .]
subito

Selected **Pièces en style libre** arr. for wind quintet by Toby Miller

Score (instrumental pitch)

## XIV - Scherzetto *à Alexandre Cellier*

Vierne

**Scherzando ♩ = 84 [96]**

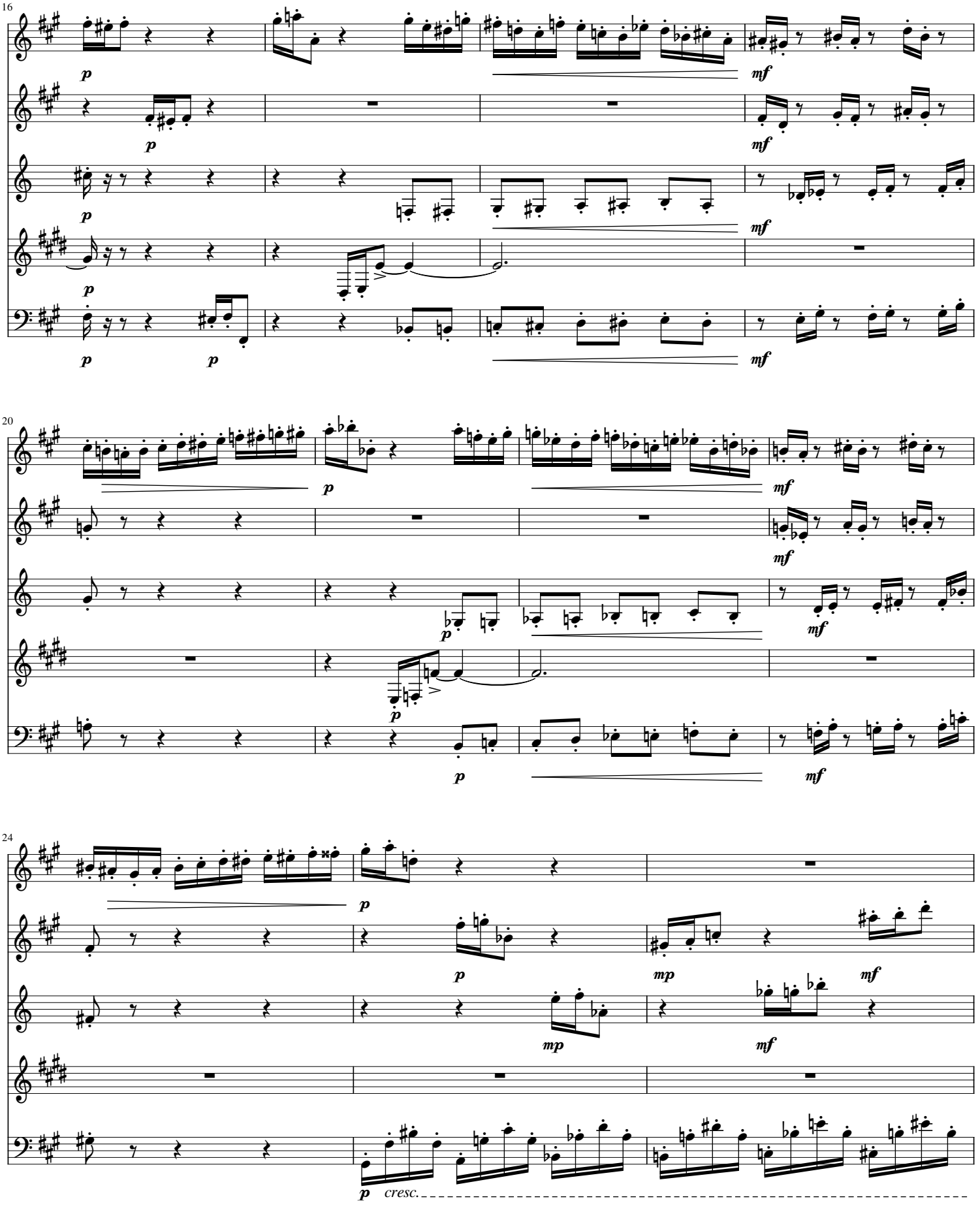
Flute

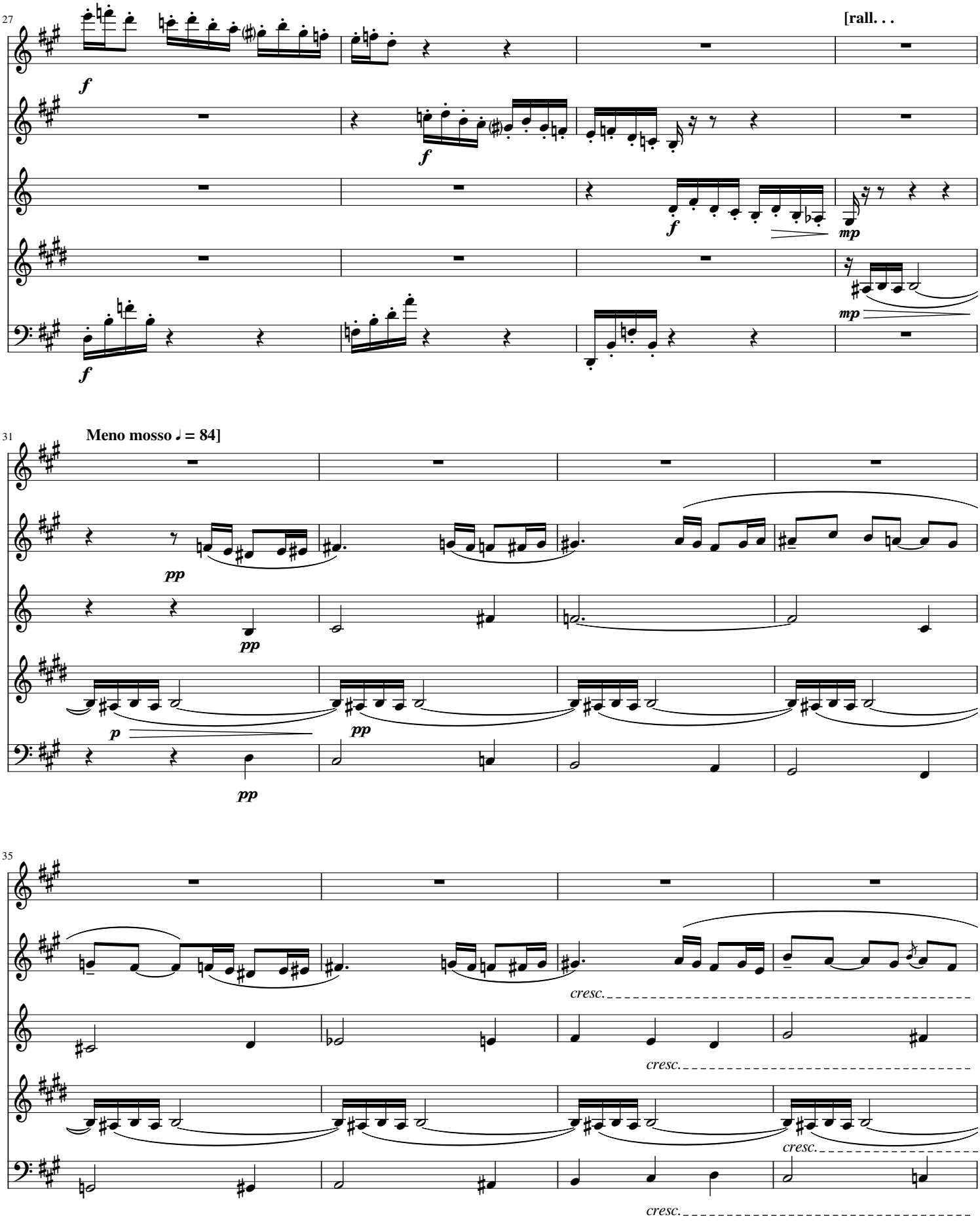
Oboe

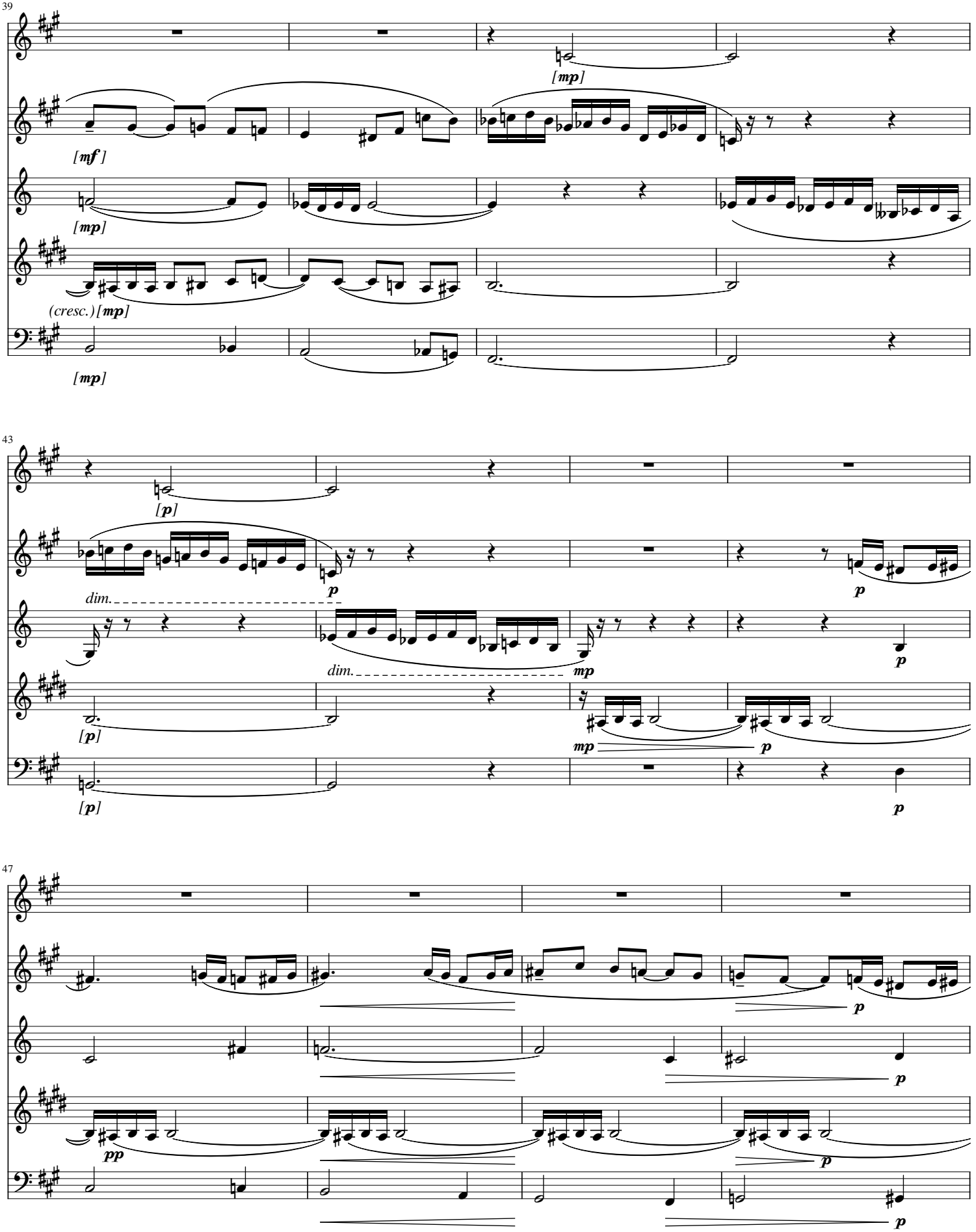
Clarinet in A

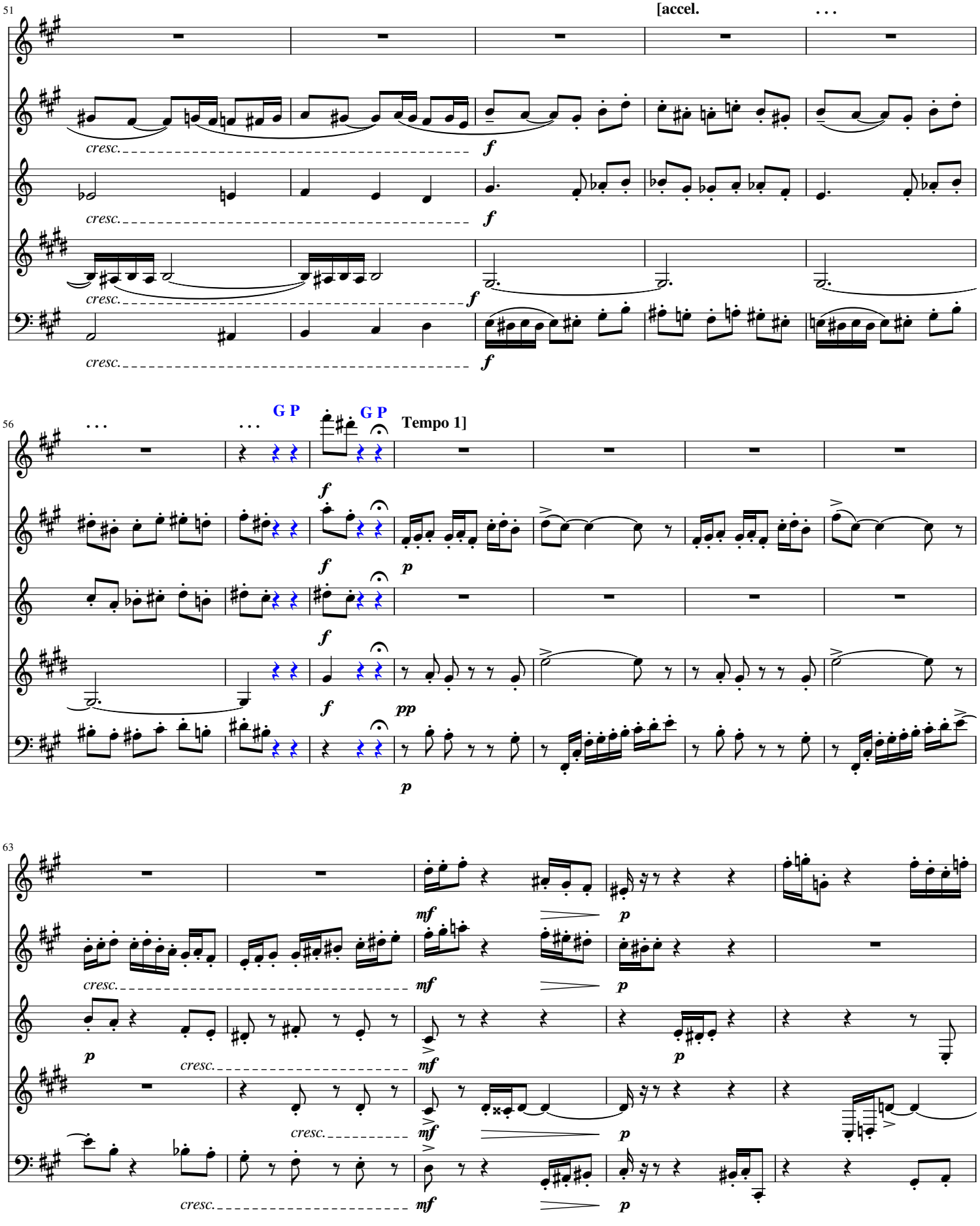
Horn in F

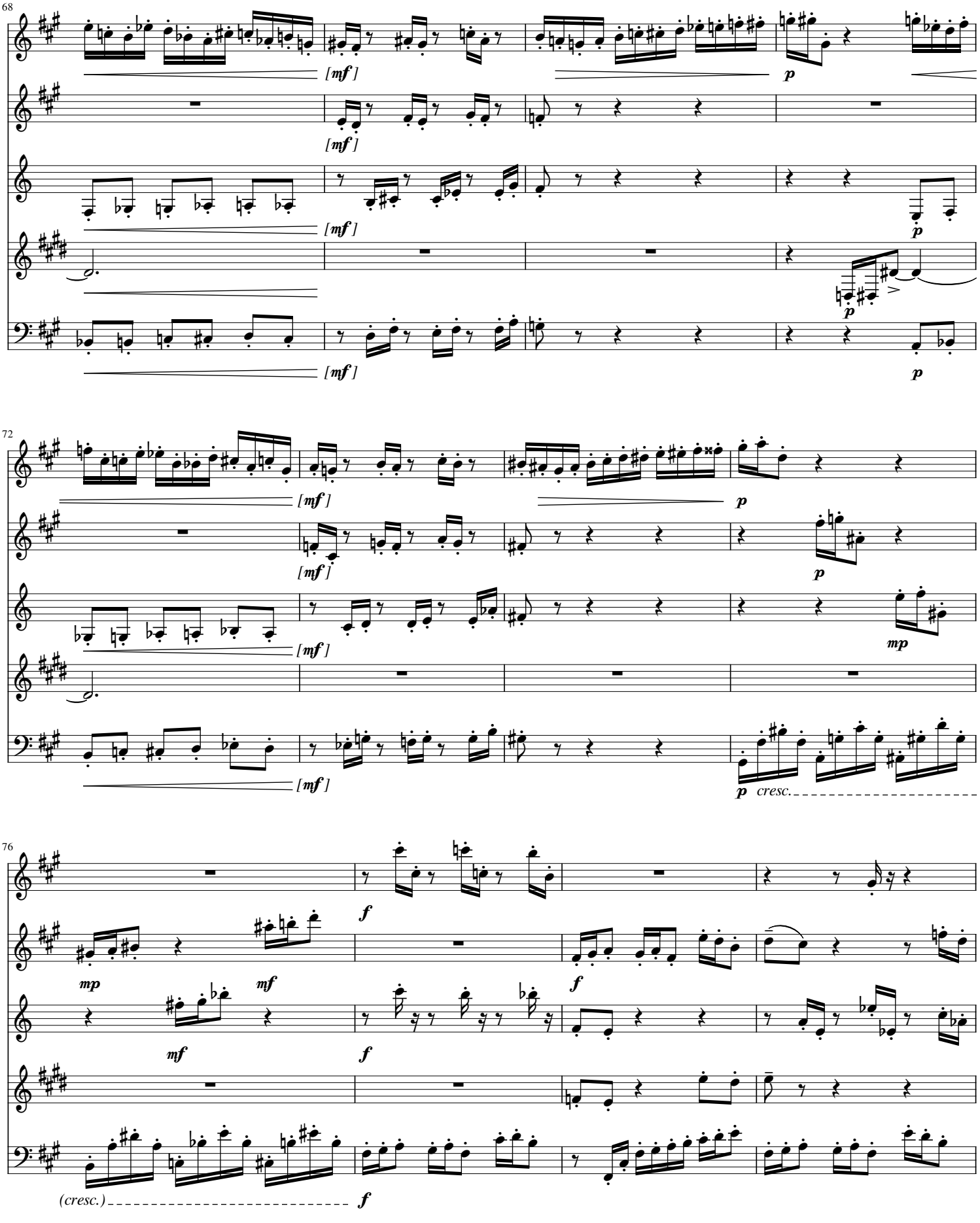
Bassoon

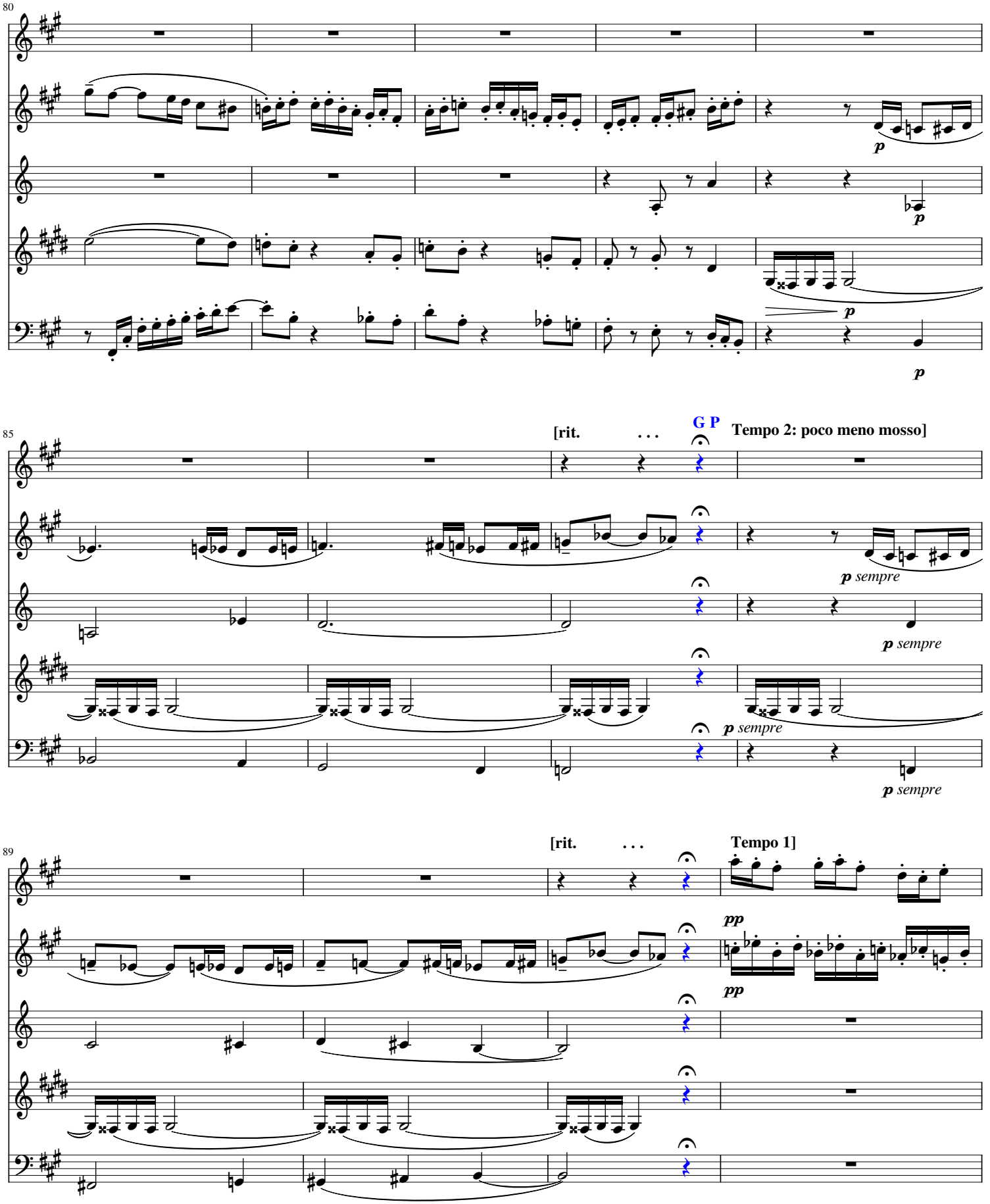

16
p
mf
20
24
cresc.

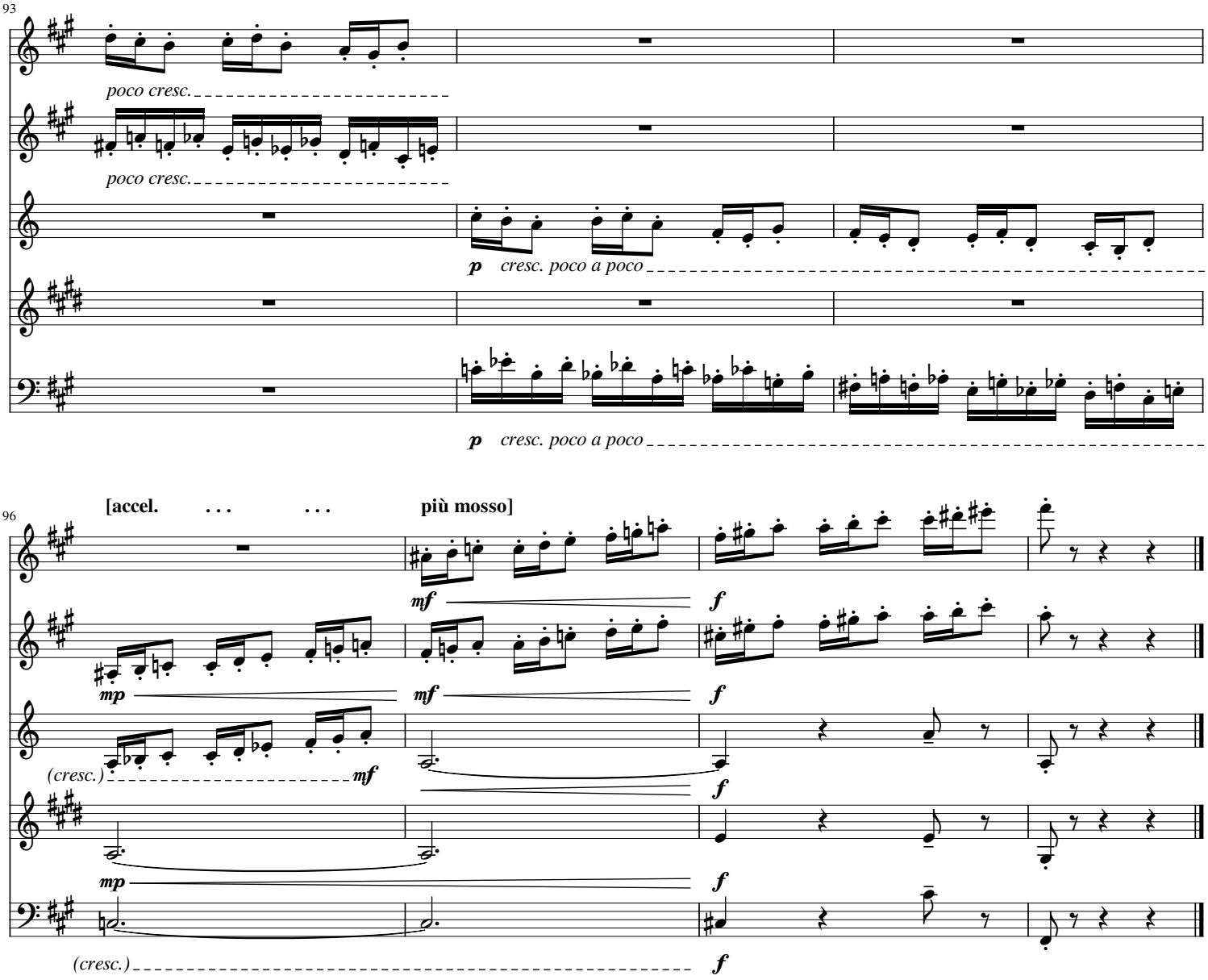

27
[rall. . .
f
f
f
mp
mp
31
Meno mosso ♩ = 84]
pp
pp
p
pp
35
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.
cresc.


39
[mp]
[mf]
[mp]
(cresc.)[mp]
[mp]
43
[p]
dim.
p
dim.
mp
[p]
[p]
mp
p
p
47
p
pp
p
p


51
[accel.
. . .
cresc.
f
56
. . .
G P
G P
Tempo 1]
pp
63
mf
p


68
[mf]
p
72
mp
cresc.
76
mf
f
(cresc.)


80
p
p
p
85
[rit. . . .
G P
Tempo 2: poco meno mosso]
p sempre
p sempre
p sempre
p sempre
89
[rit. . . .
Tempo 1]
pp
pp

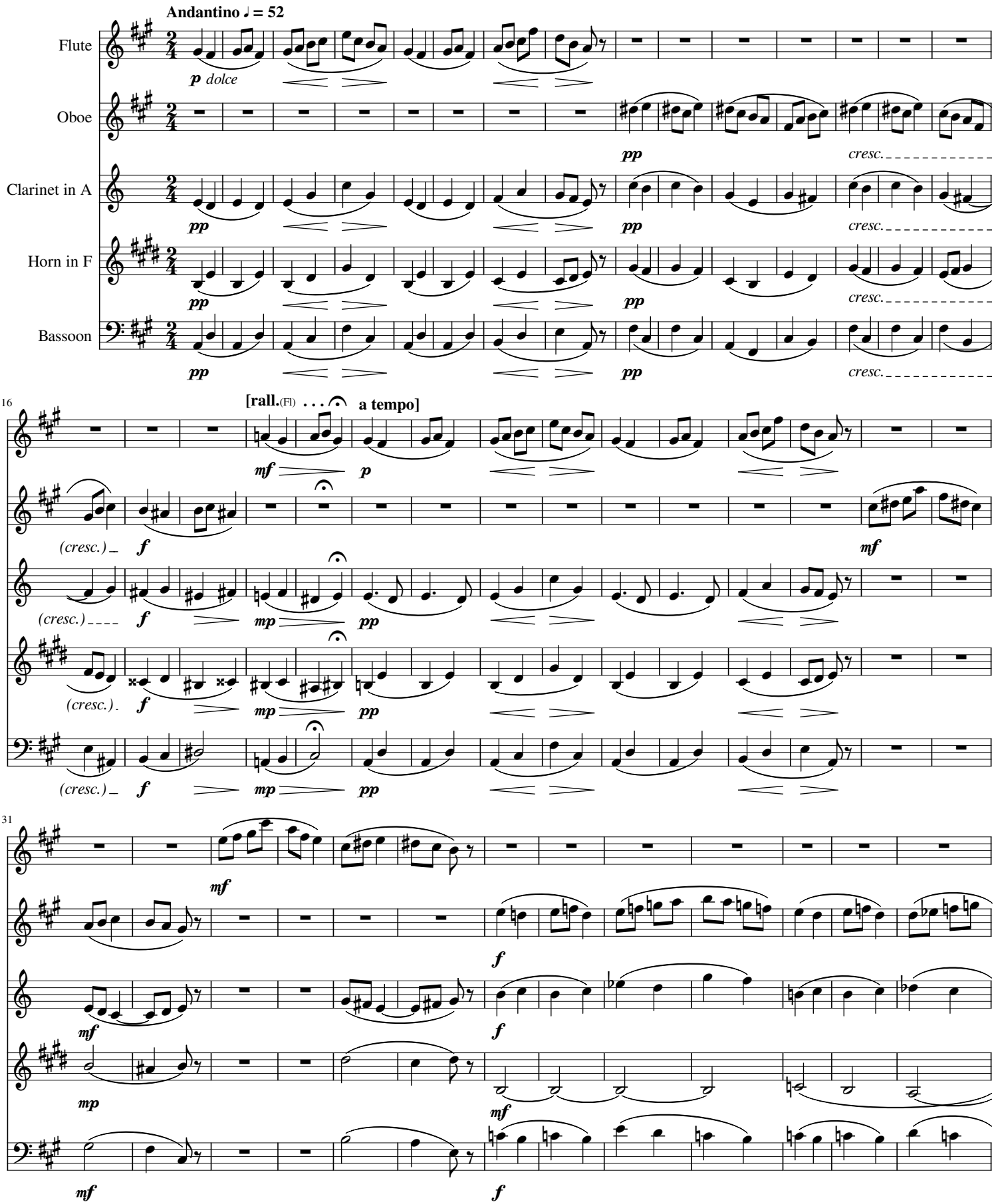

93
poco cresc.
poco cresc.
p cresc. poco a poco
p cresc. poco a poco
96
[accel. . . . . più mosso]
mf
f
mp
mf
f
(cresc.)
mf
f
mp
f
(cresc.)
f

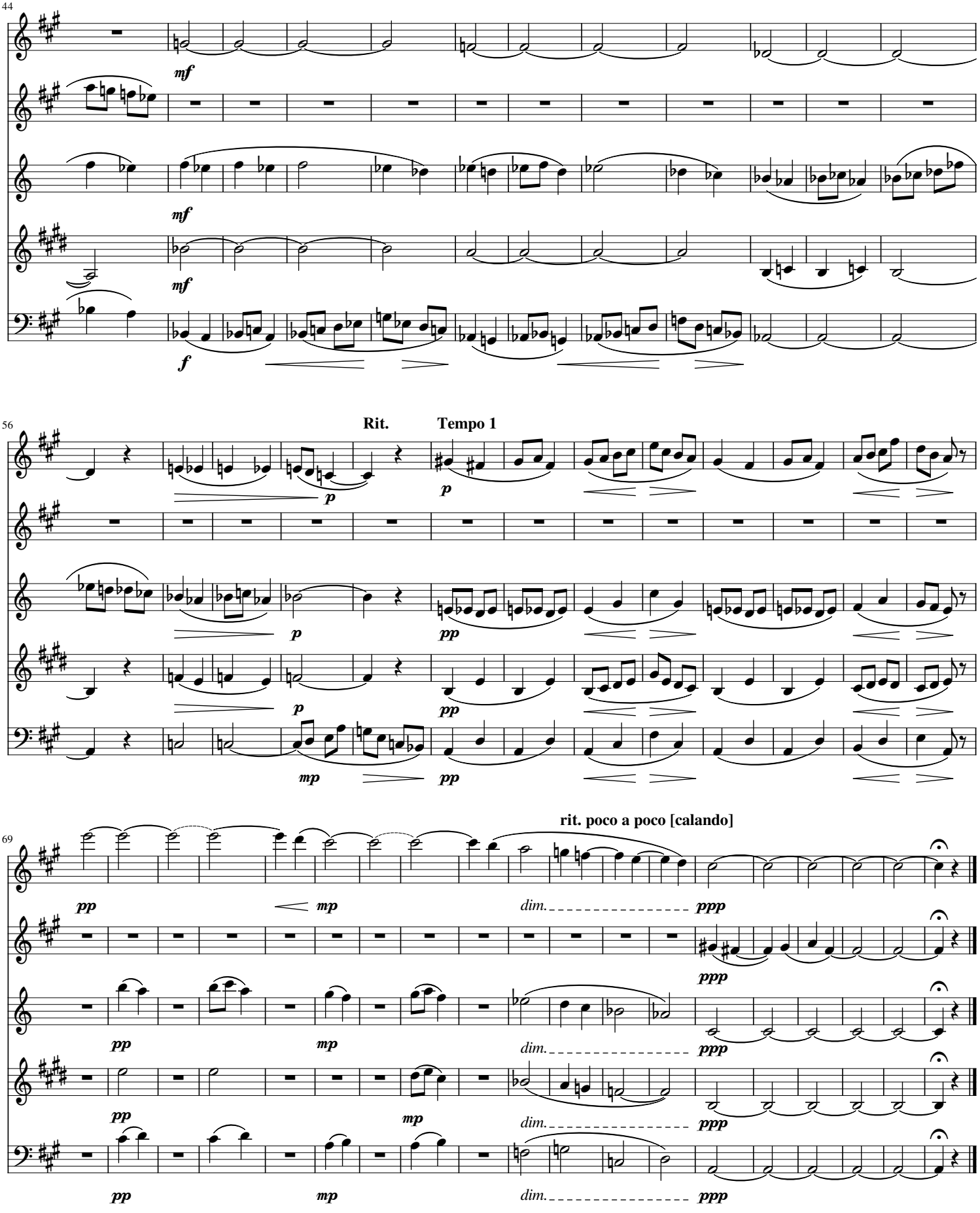
Selected **Pièces en style libre** arr. for wind quintet by Toby Miller

Score (instrumental pitch)

## XIX - Berceuse(sur les paroles classiques) *à ma fille Collette*

Vierne



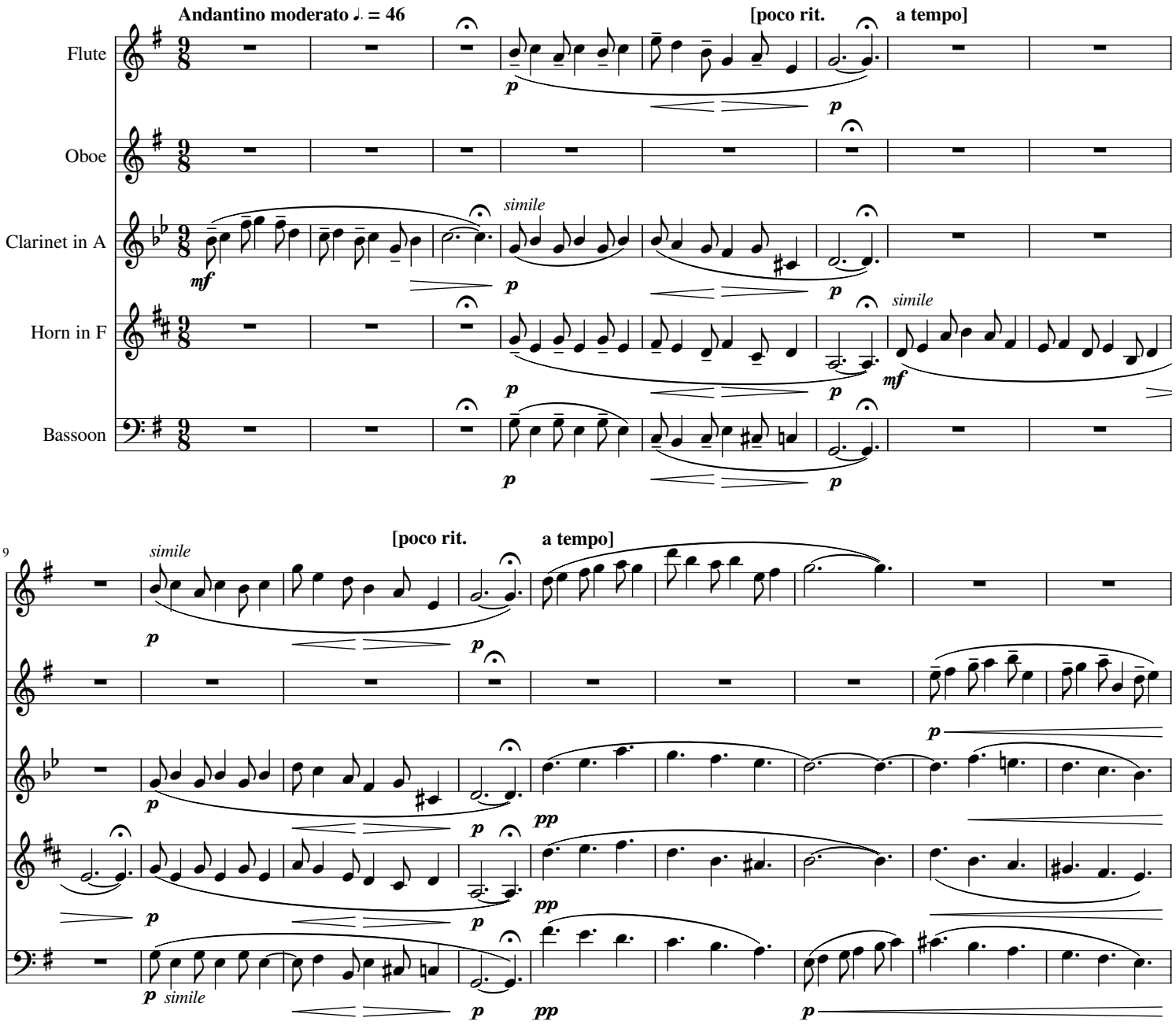

44
mf
mf
mf
f
56
Rit.
Tempo 1
p
p
pp
p
pp
mp
pp
69
rit. poco a poco [calando]
pp
mp
dim.
ppp
pp
mp
dim.
ppp
pp
mp
dim.
ppp
pp
mp
dim.
ppp

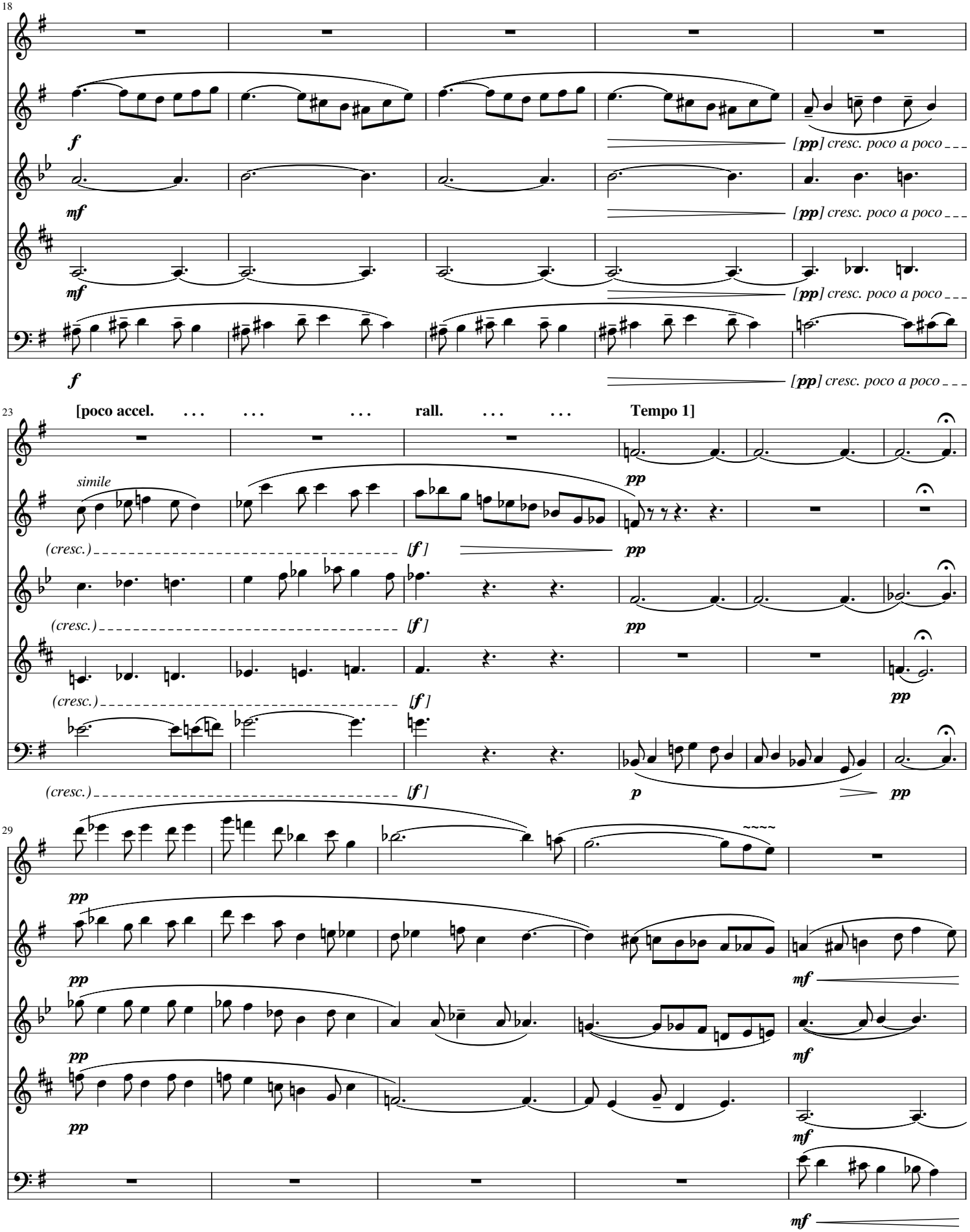
Selected **Pièces en style libre** arr. for wind quintet by Toby Miller

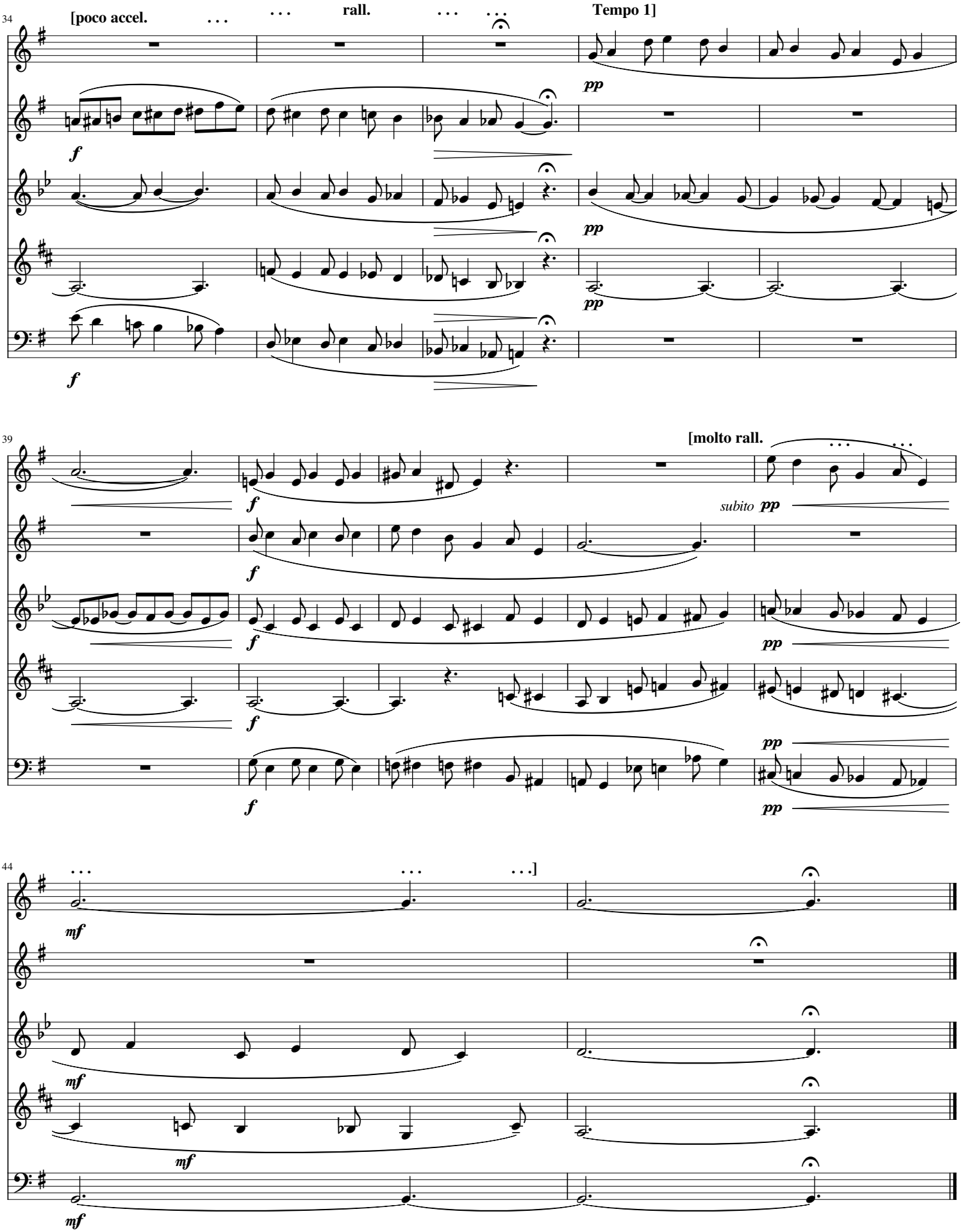
(**transposed key**; instrumental pitch)

## XIII - Légende *à Maurice Blazy*

Vierne




18
f
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
mf
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
mf
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
f
[pp] cresc. poco a poco
23
[poco accel. . . . . rall. . . . . Tempo 1]
simile
pp
(cresc.)
[f]
pp
(cresc.)
[f]
pp
(cresc.)
[f]
pp
p
pp
29
pp
pp
mf
pp
mf
pp
mf
mf


34
[poco accel.
rall.
Tempo 1]
39
[molto rall.
subito
44
...]