Putrefaction is for 4 violins and 4 violas. It is about 20-25 minutes in length.

There are three parts with no breaks in between. The piece is set up to work without a conductor. There is no score. It would misrepresent how the piece actually works to have one. Ideally, for the first and third parts, the players start in unison but feel comfortable enough with their parts to play with flexible tempos. Part of the idea behind the piece is that occasionally another person's part might sound to you like it's establishing the beat or meter. You should feel free to follow that person's beat or not.

The players should stand in this order: viola iii, violin iv, viola ii, violin i, viola i, violin ii, viola iv, violin iii. Originally, I wanted the players to surround the audience; then I realized that the premiere was taking place in a venue set up differently than what I had envisioned. In any case, the players should either surround the audience with violin i in the back, or they should stand in line with a slight arch, in front of and as close to the audience as possible, spread out to the width of the venue. In all cases, the players should be able to see one another; use risers/podiums/platforms/amplification as you see fit.

The first part: The violas start in unison eighths, which set the tempo; however they soon break off from this unison. Each individual is responsible for maintaining their own tempo; do feel free to experiement with rubato, especially in passages that are more melodic and less percussive or 'atmospheric.' You are not responsible for lining up with anybody, but if by chance you do or want to, that's fine, too.

The violins' entrance is cued by the second viola, which is marked in their parts.

The violas are the more important 'choir,' whereas the violins function more as percussionists providing textural color.

At the end of the first part only violin i goes on immediately to part ii; everyone else should wait for their cue to begin the second part.

The second part: Violin i begins with a solo melody and will cue viola i to join. The rest will be cued to join in this order: viola iii, violin iii, violin iv, viola iv, violin ii, viola ii. In this section, unlike the first, you are expected to be together. Everyone should sing along with their part until indicated to stop. Your singing doesn't have to be beautiful or even in tune, but do your best and always sing with conviction. Experiment with consonant and vowel sounds; if inspired to sing actual words (yes, even ones that mock the piece or composer – I can't stop you), go for it. Once everyone is in, the parts gradually become more polyphonic and complex and eventually give way to part iii.

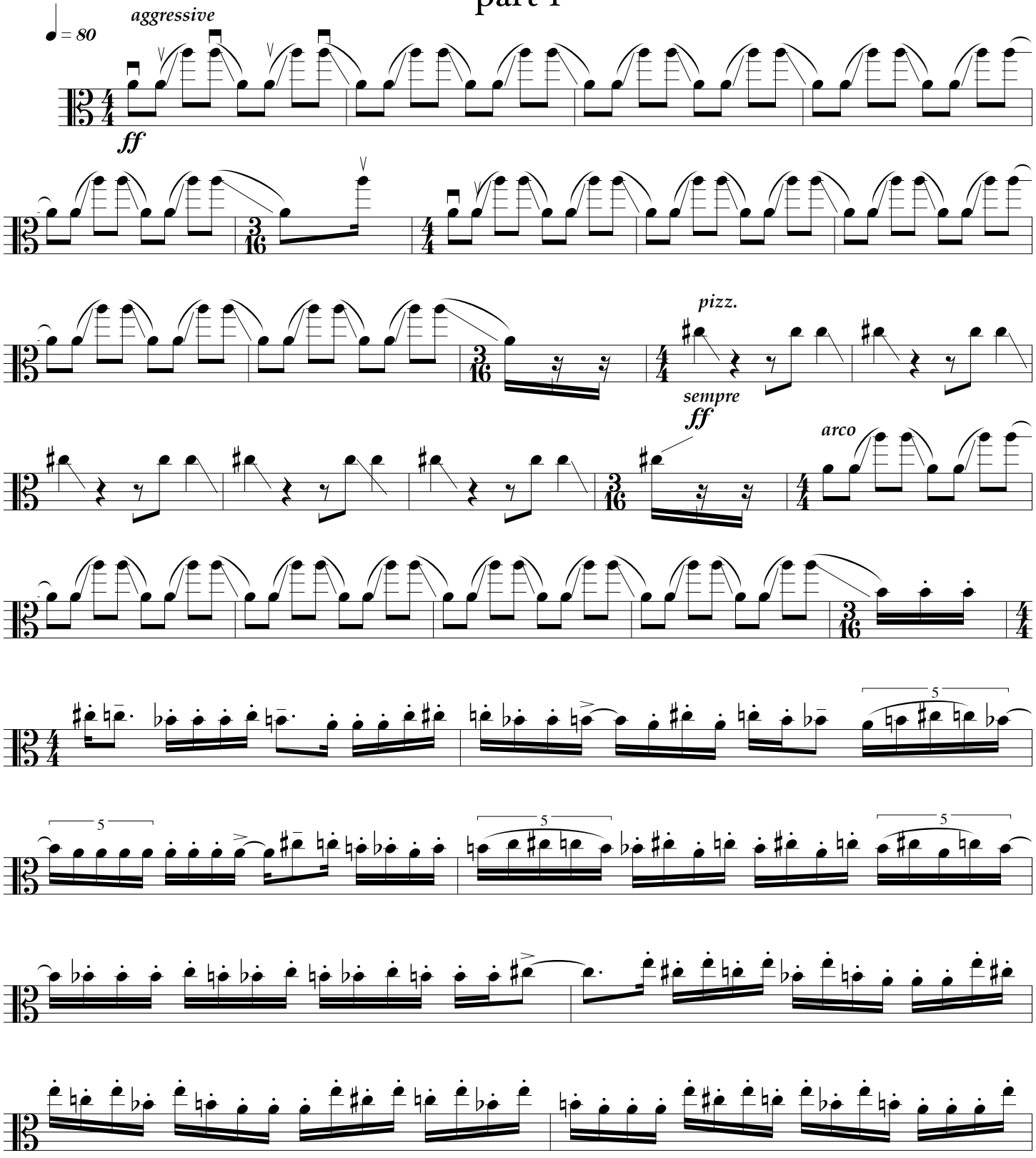
The third part is similar to part i (but shorter) and involves more overbowing and the violas detune their lowest string down to a flabby octave below its normal pitch.

notational particulars:
- a triangle notehead indicates to play on the designated string behind the bridge.
- an x notehead or an x on the stem indicates to overbow, creating that lovely scratchy sound.
- a diamond notehead indicates a hammer-on (think eddie van halen or stanley jordan, but not as flashy...): The string to hammer is shown as an open notehead. The point of hammering is shown above with a closed notehead. There will be a multitude of sounding pitches when you press down and when you release. The written dynamic is forte, but we all know that's more of an attitude marking than an actual volume indication. Try to produce as much sound as you can.

putrefaction

viola i

part 1



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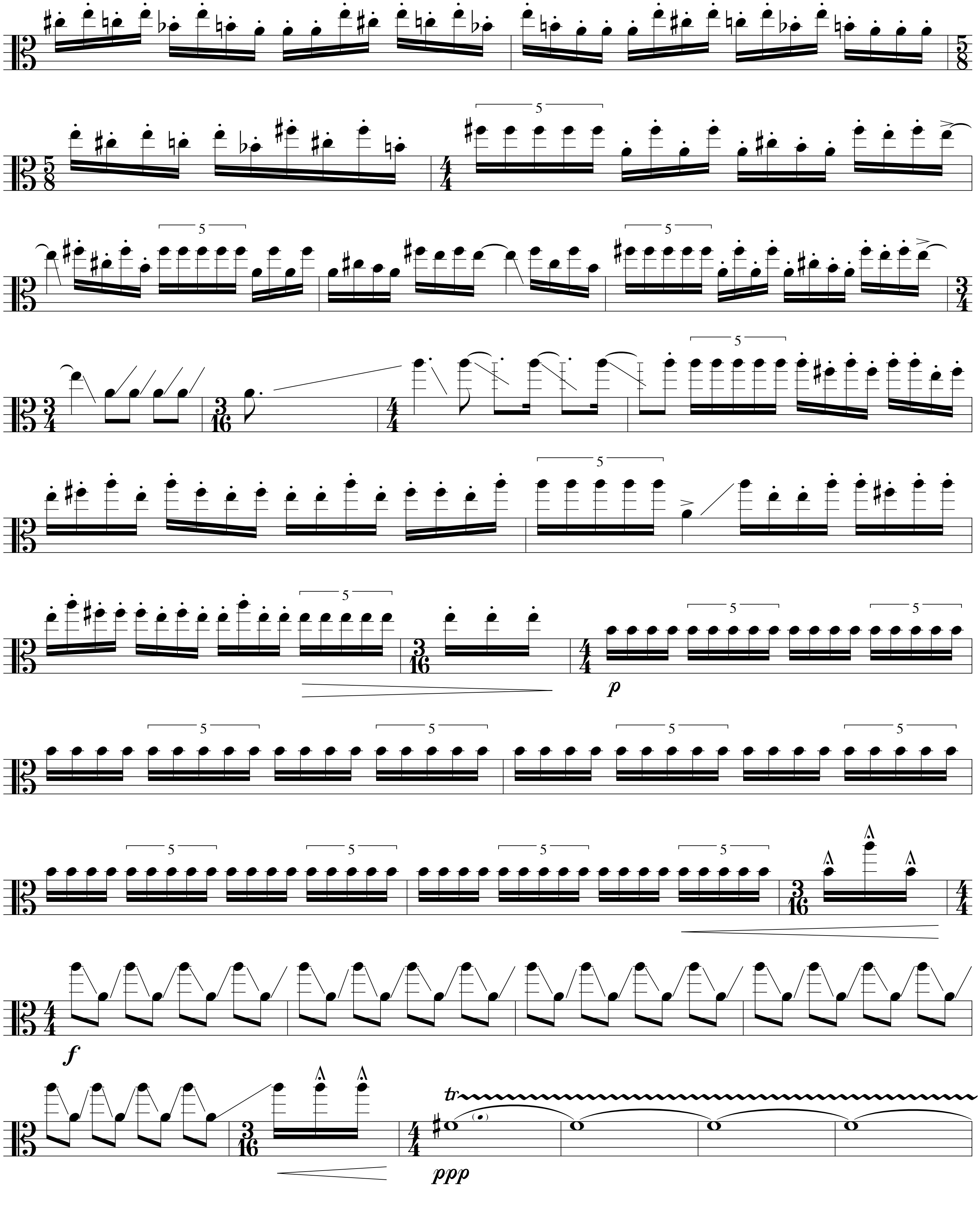
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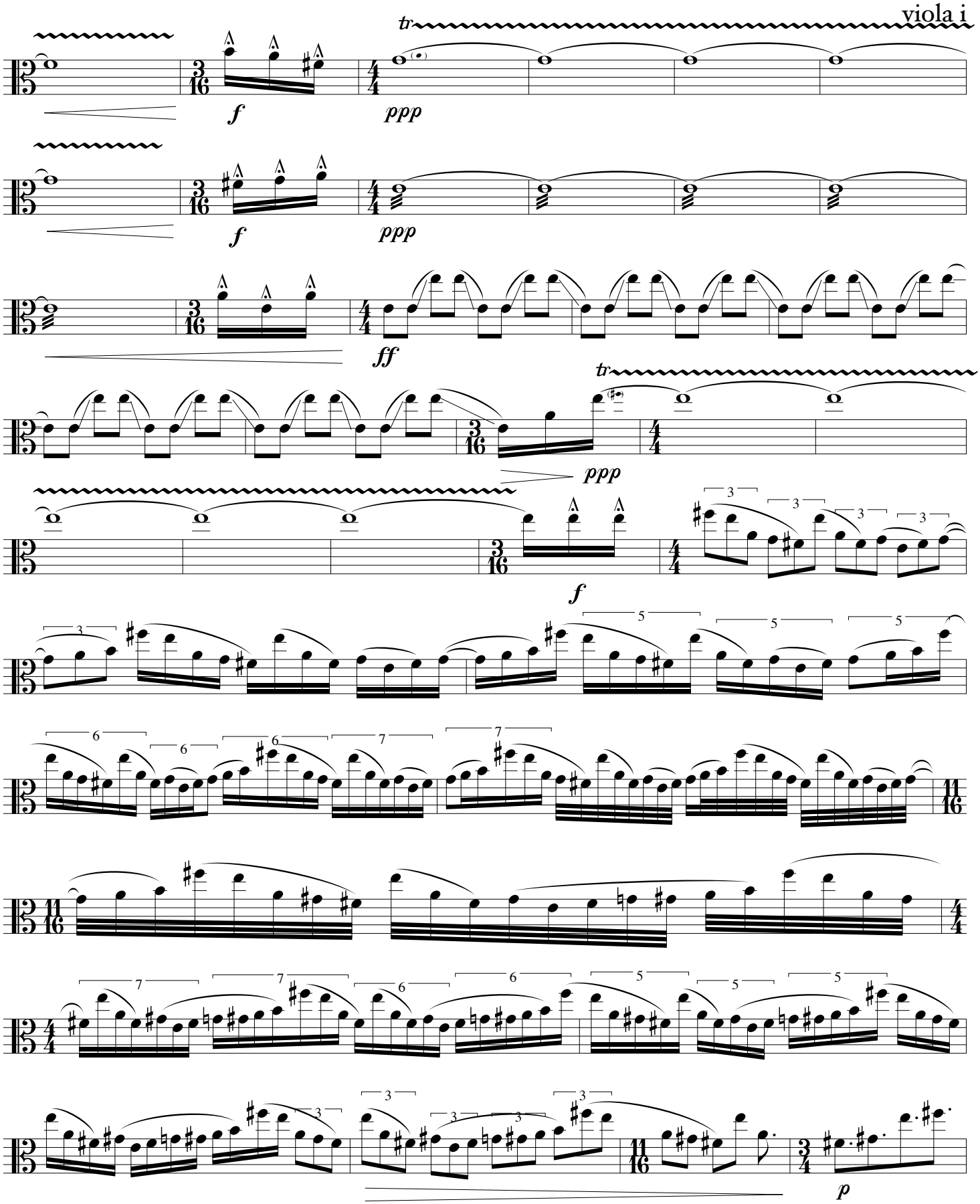
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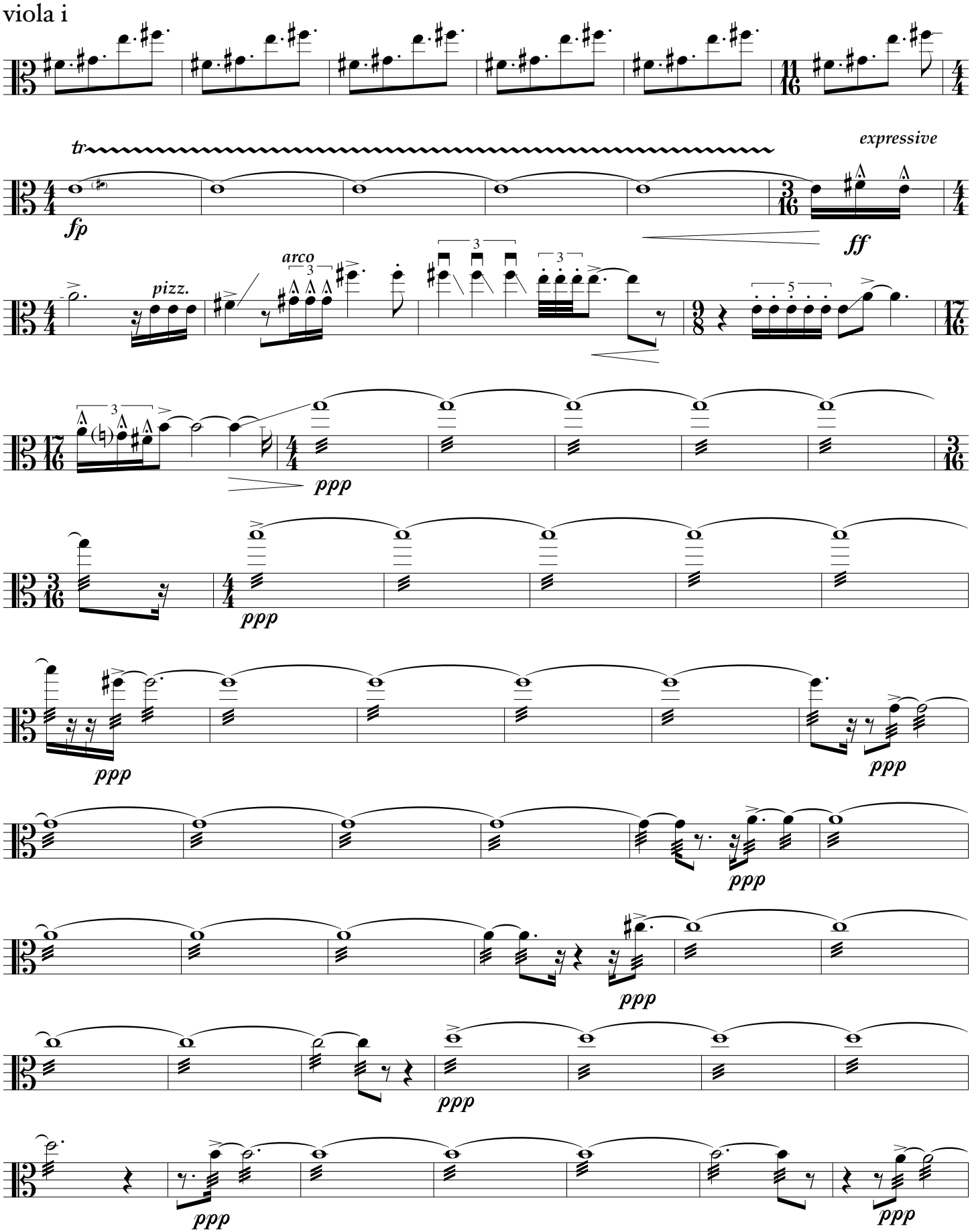
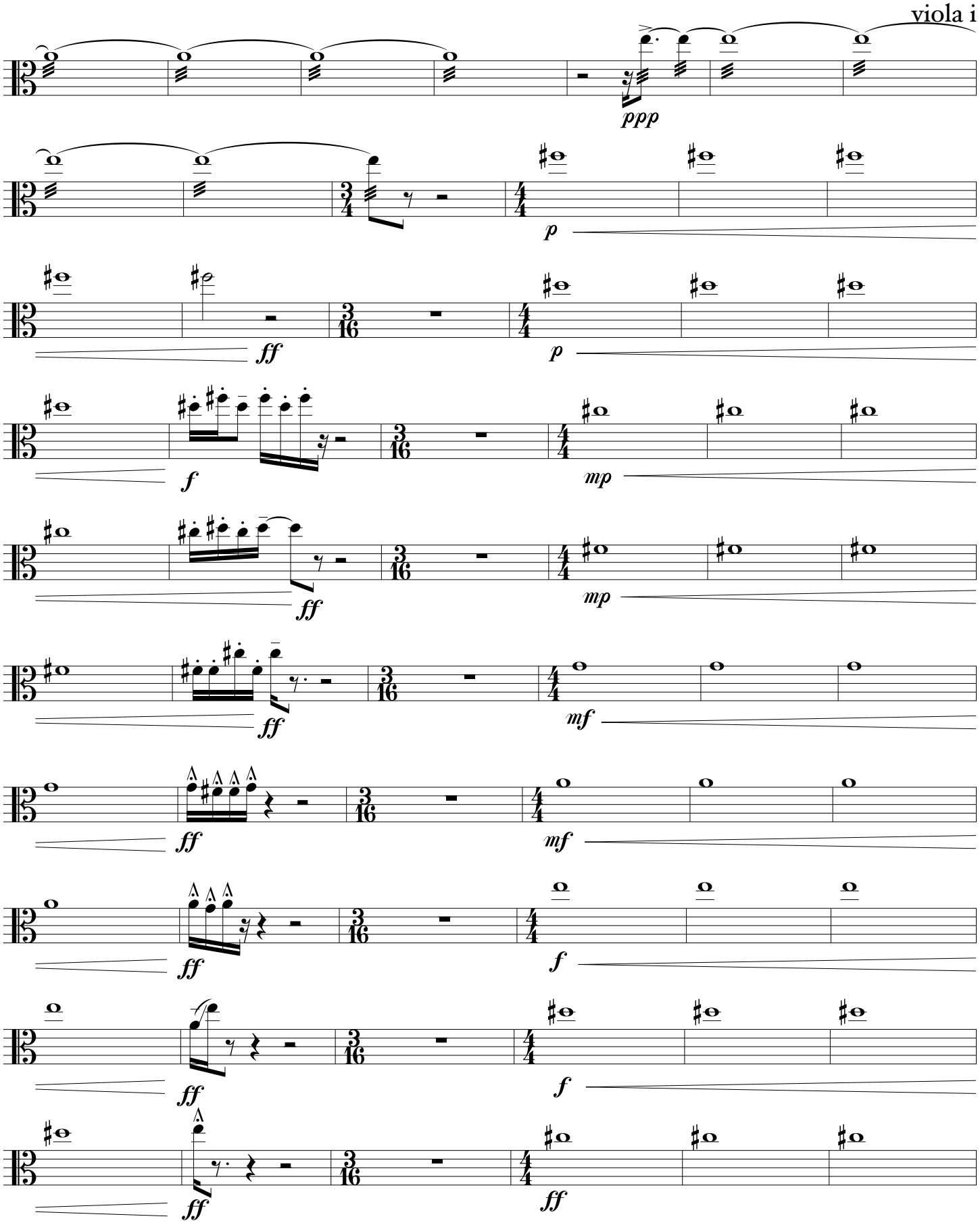
viola i

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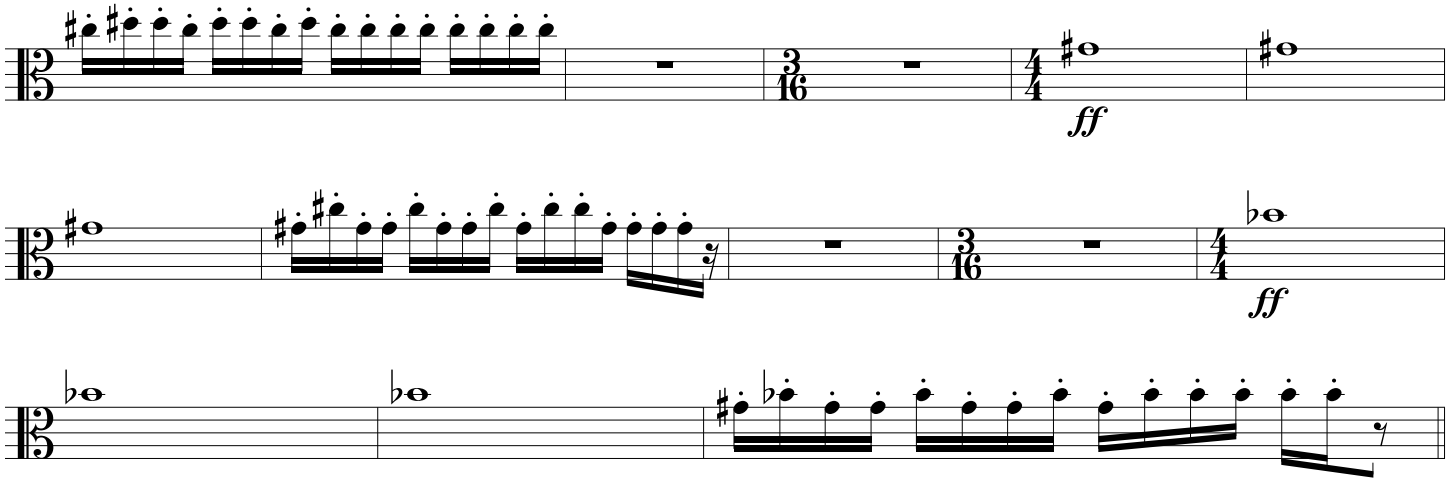
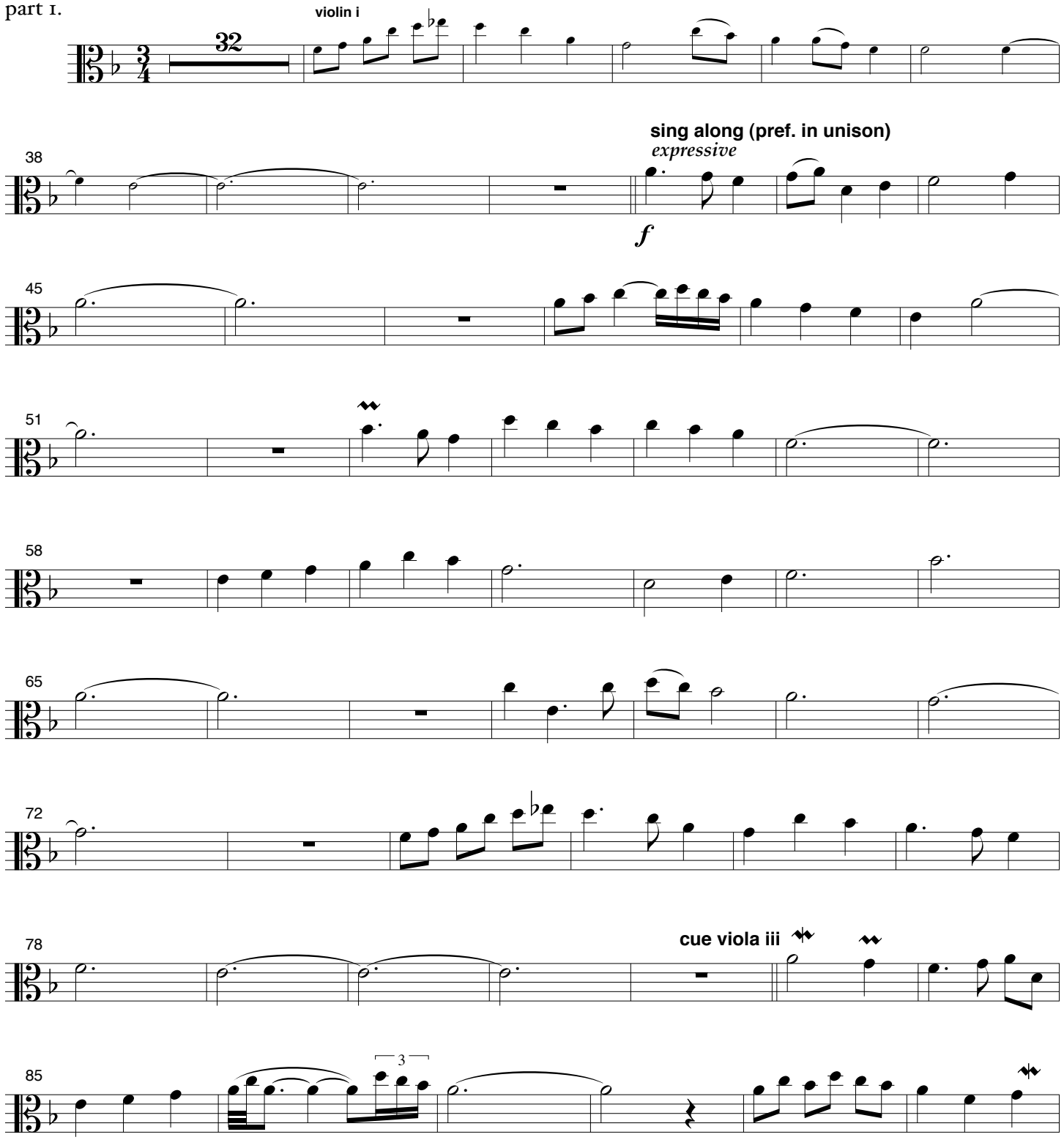
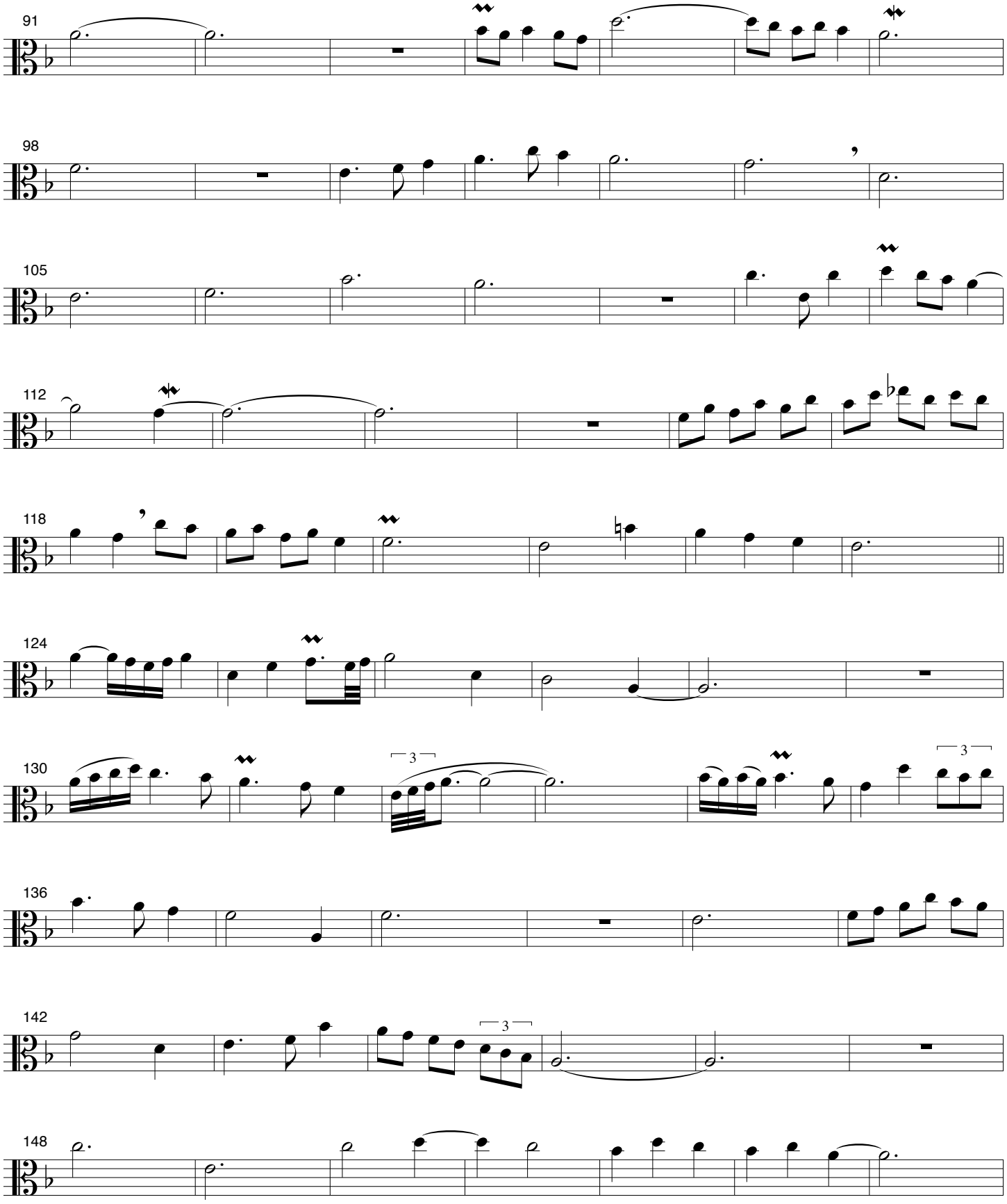
viola i



putrefaction
part ii

after finishing part i, wait for violin i to cue your entrance. violin i may play the first 41 measures twice in order to wait for everyone to finish part 1.

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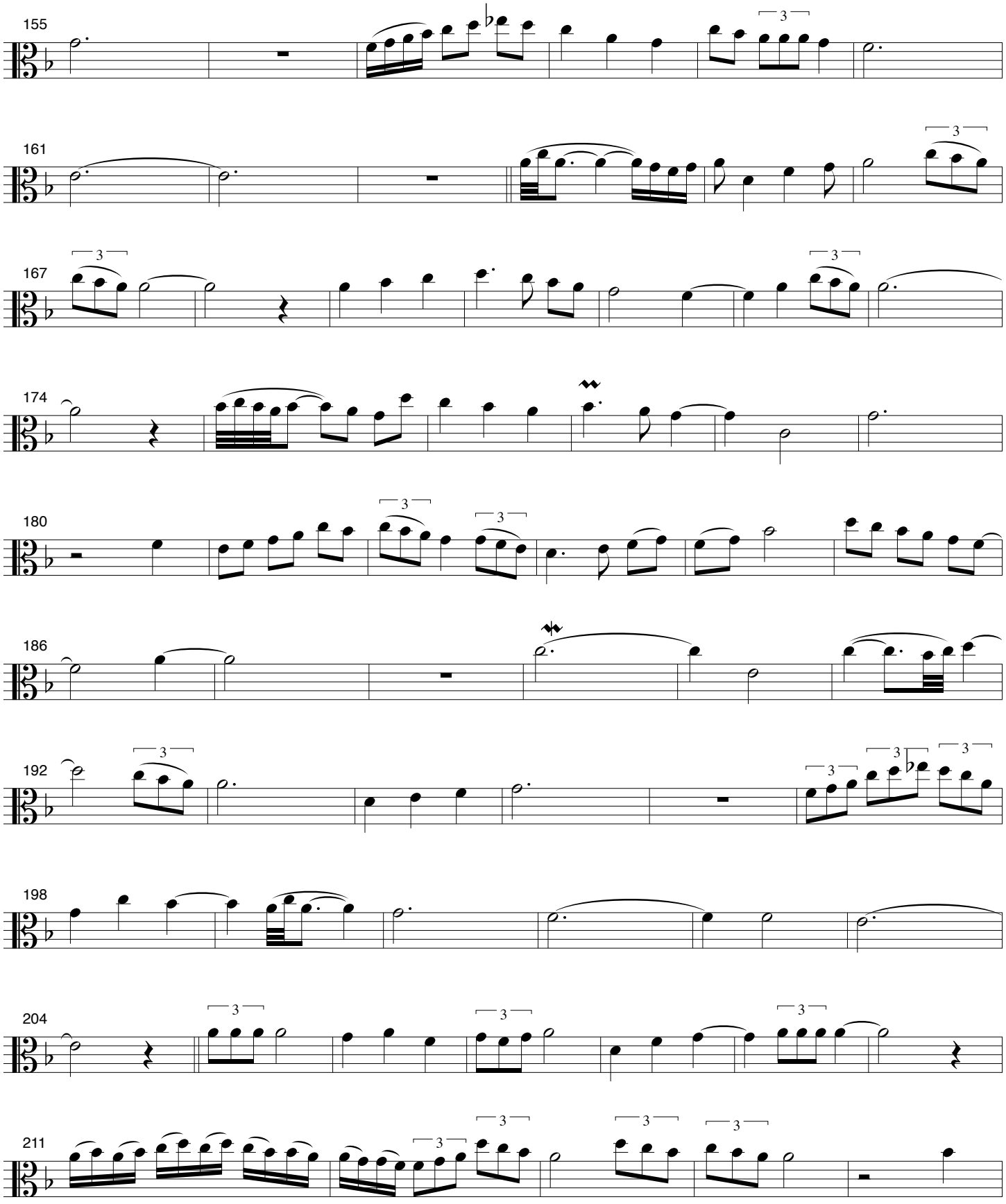
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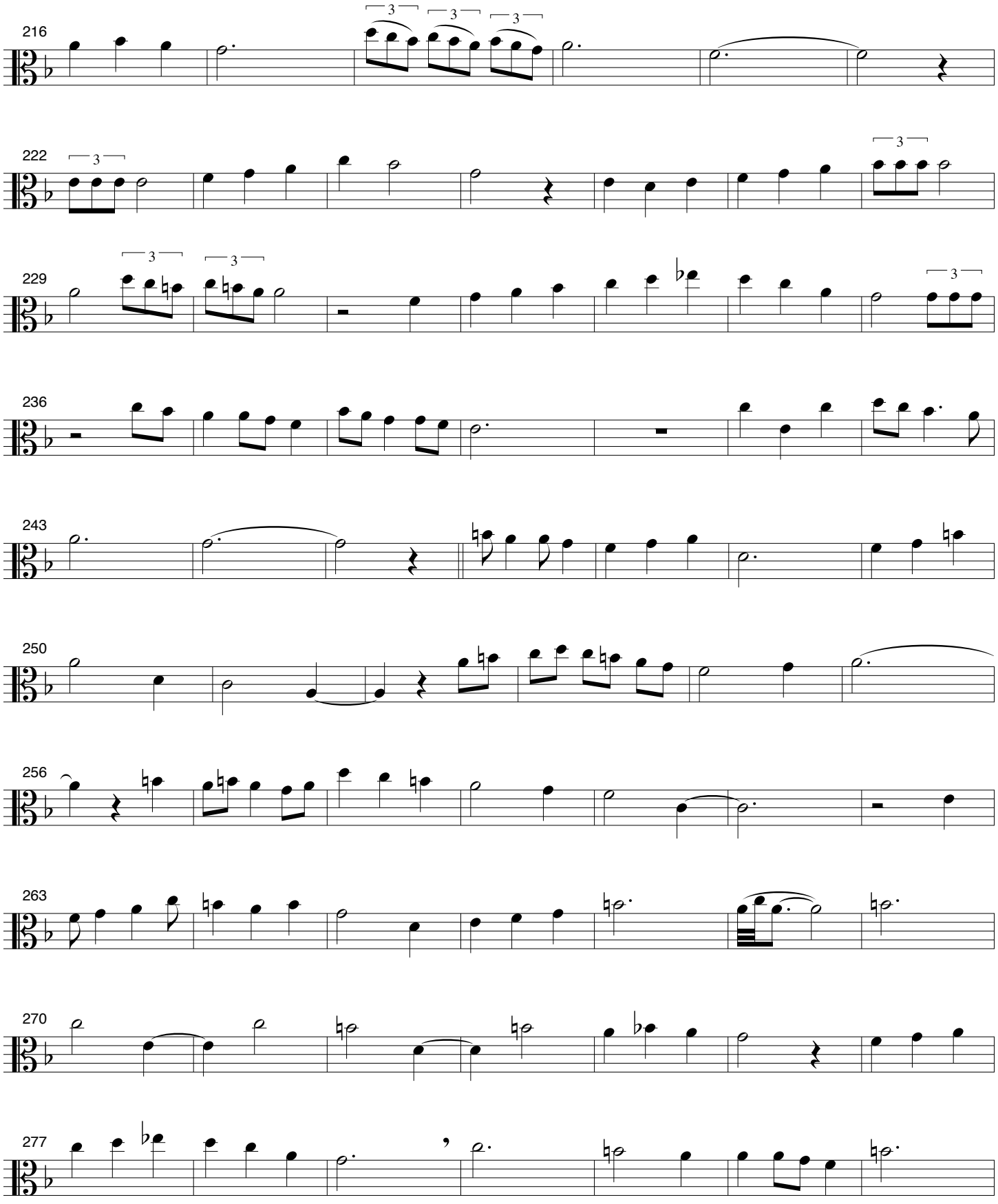
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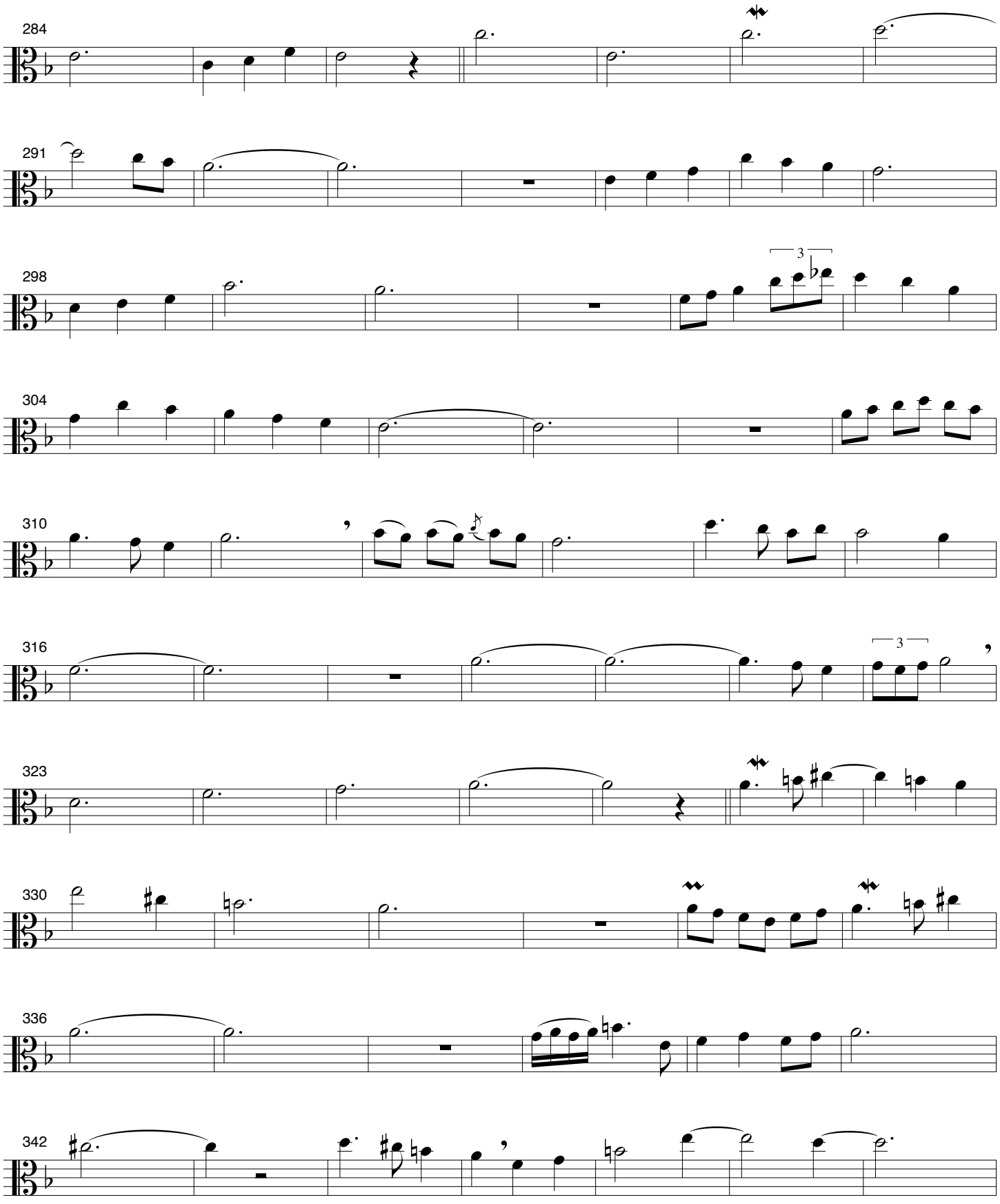
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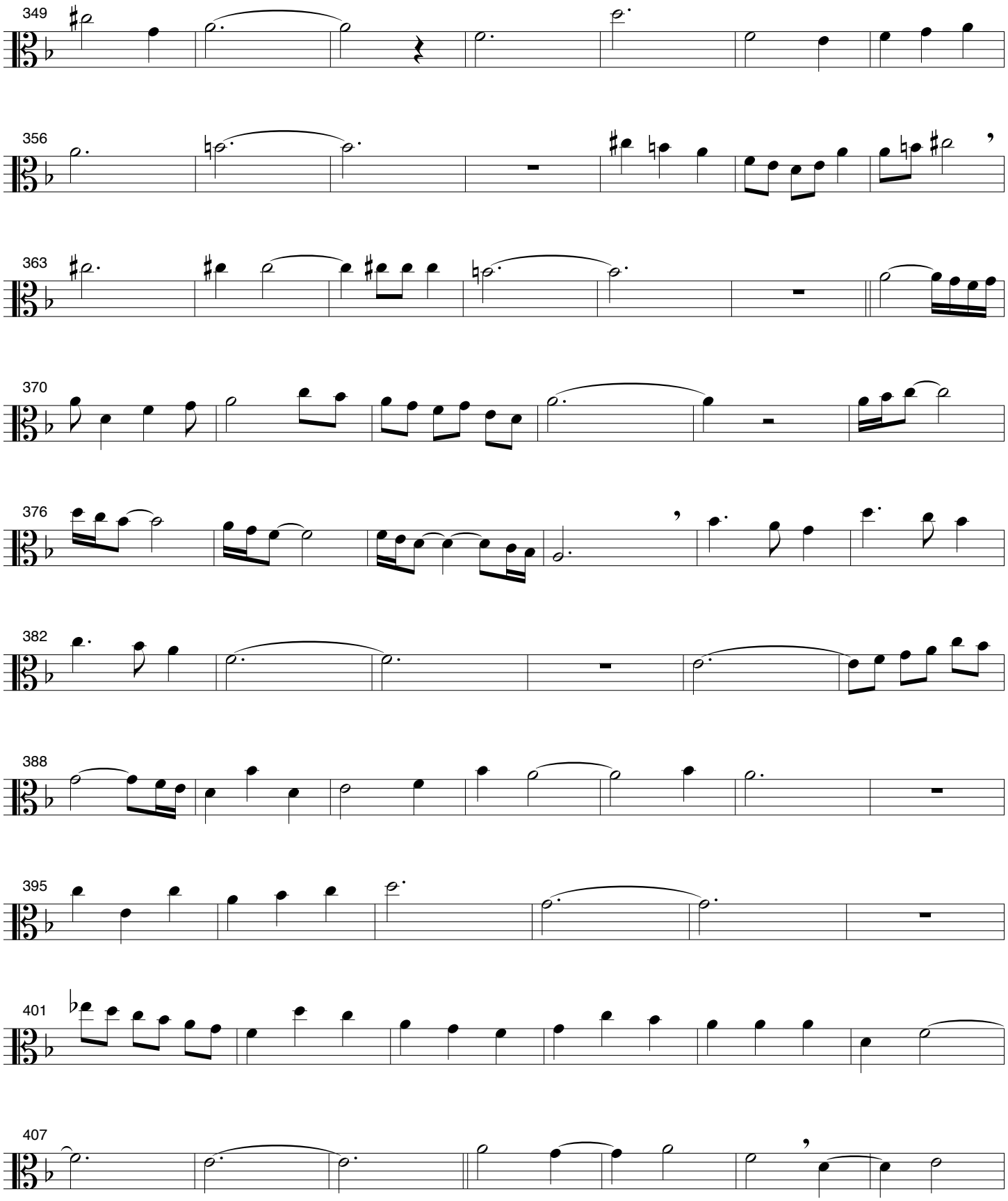
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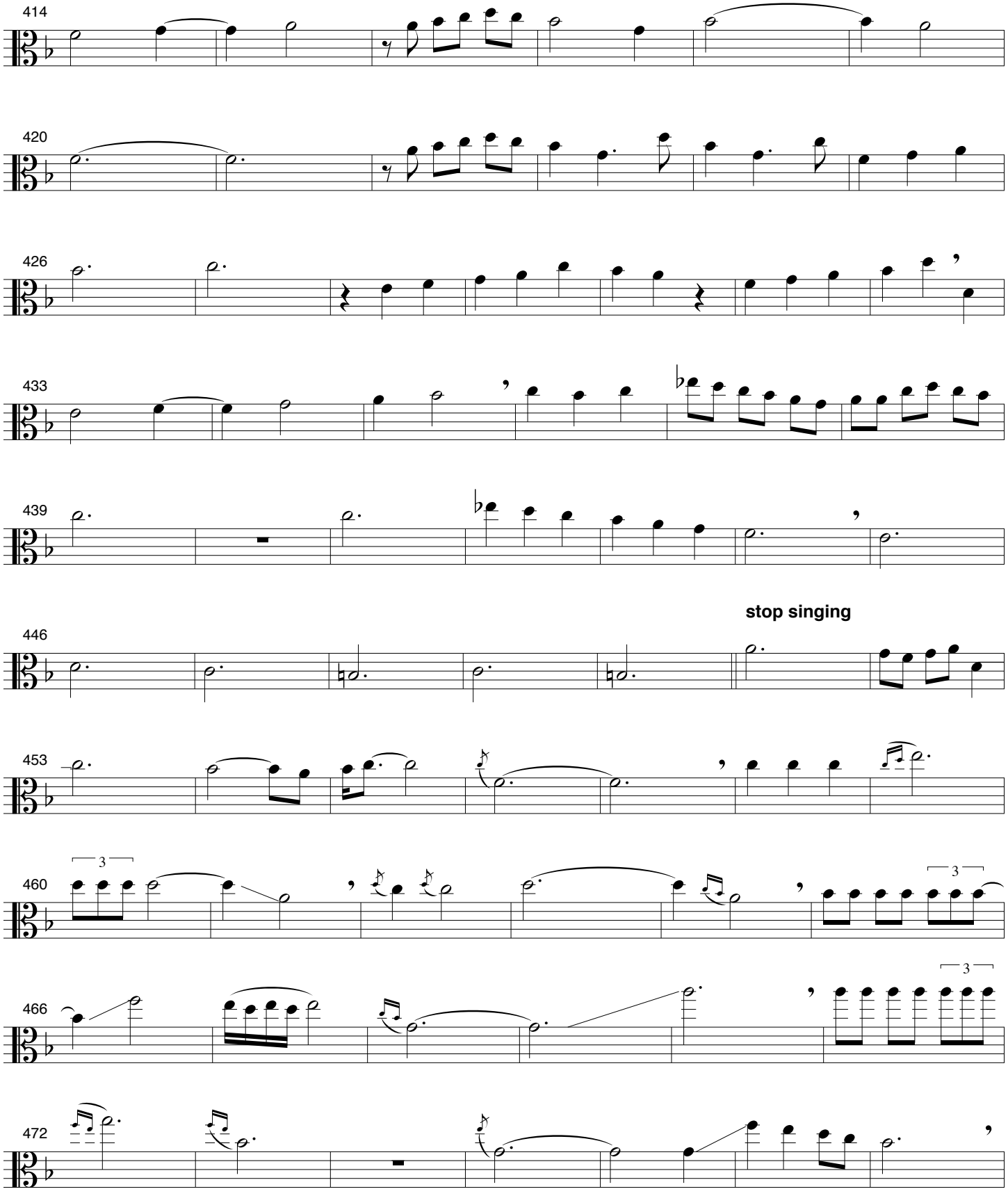
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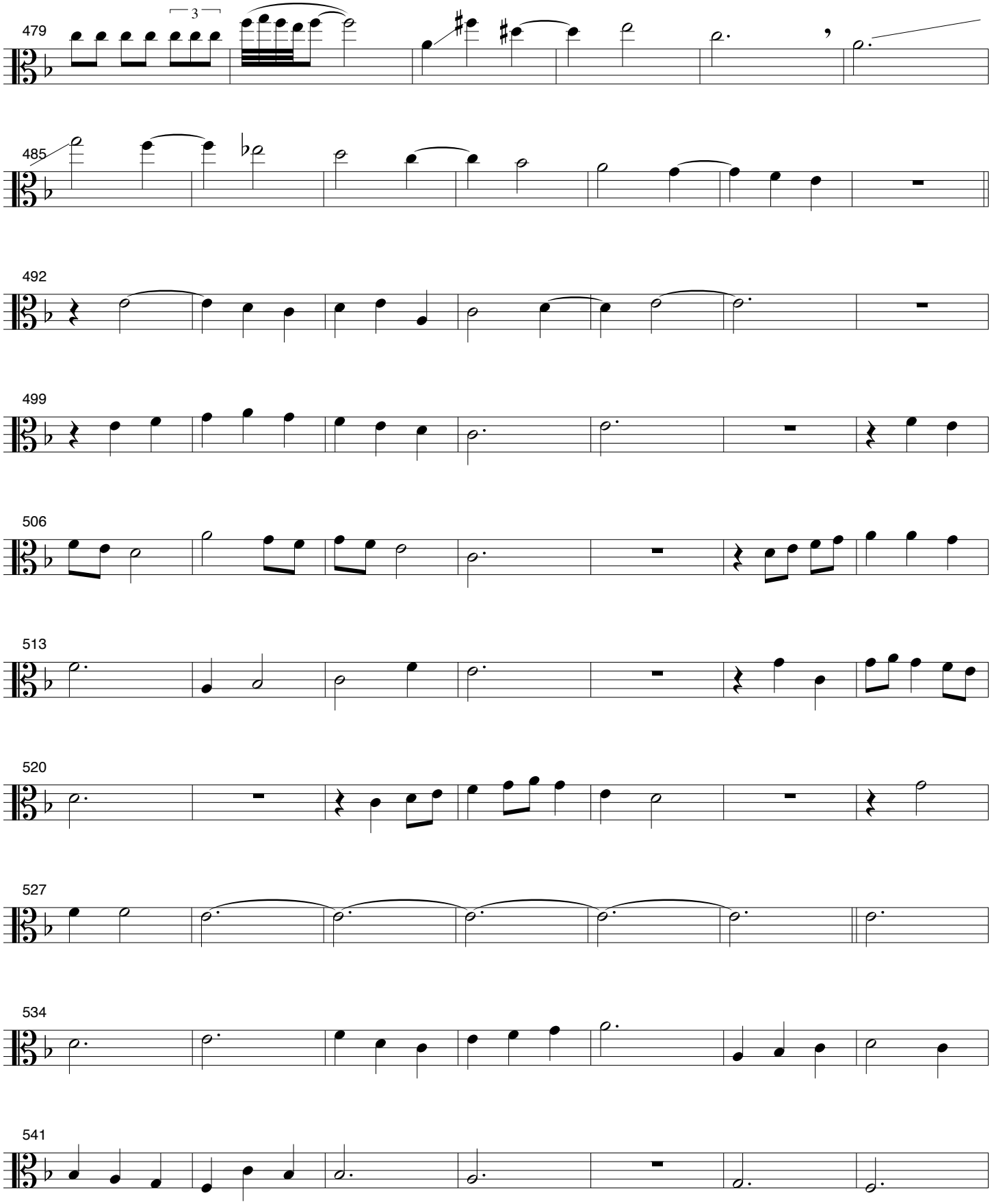
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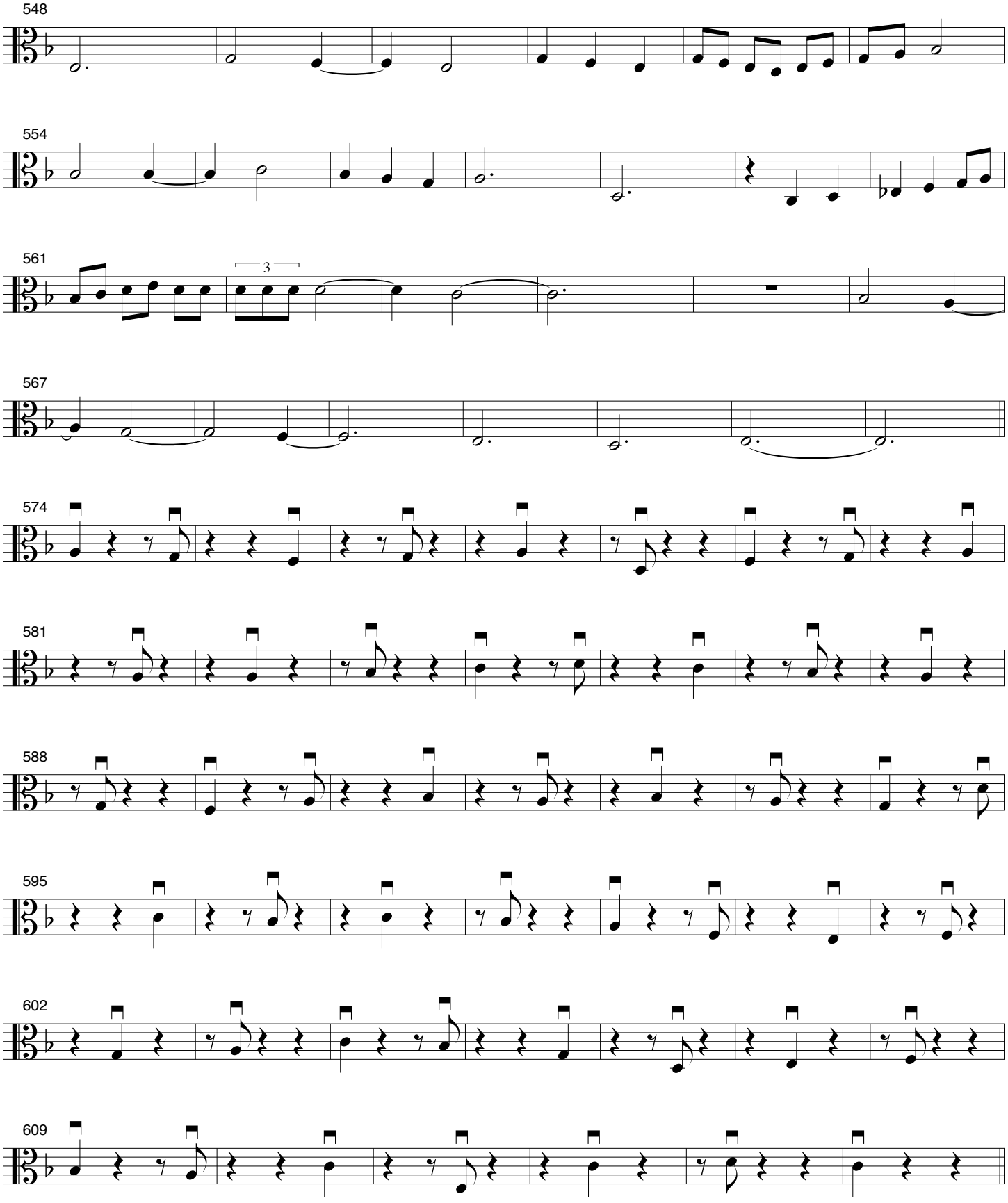
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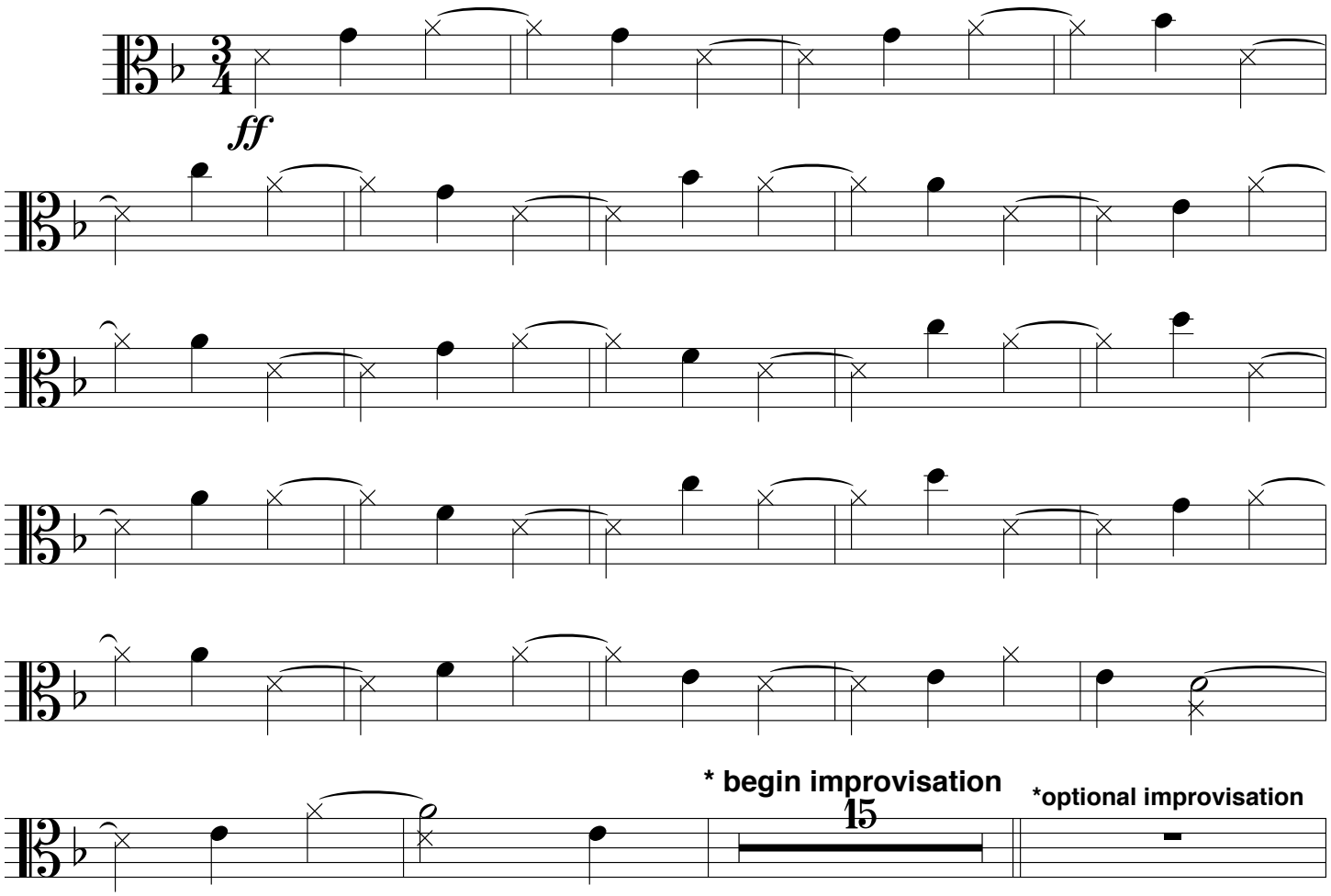
putrefaction
part iia

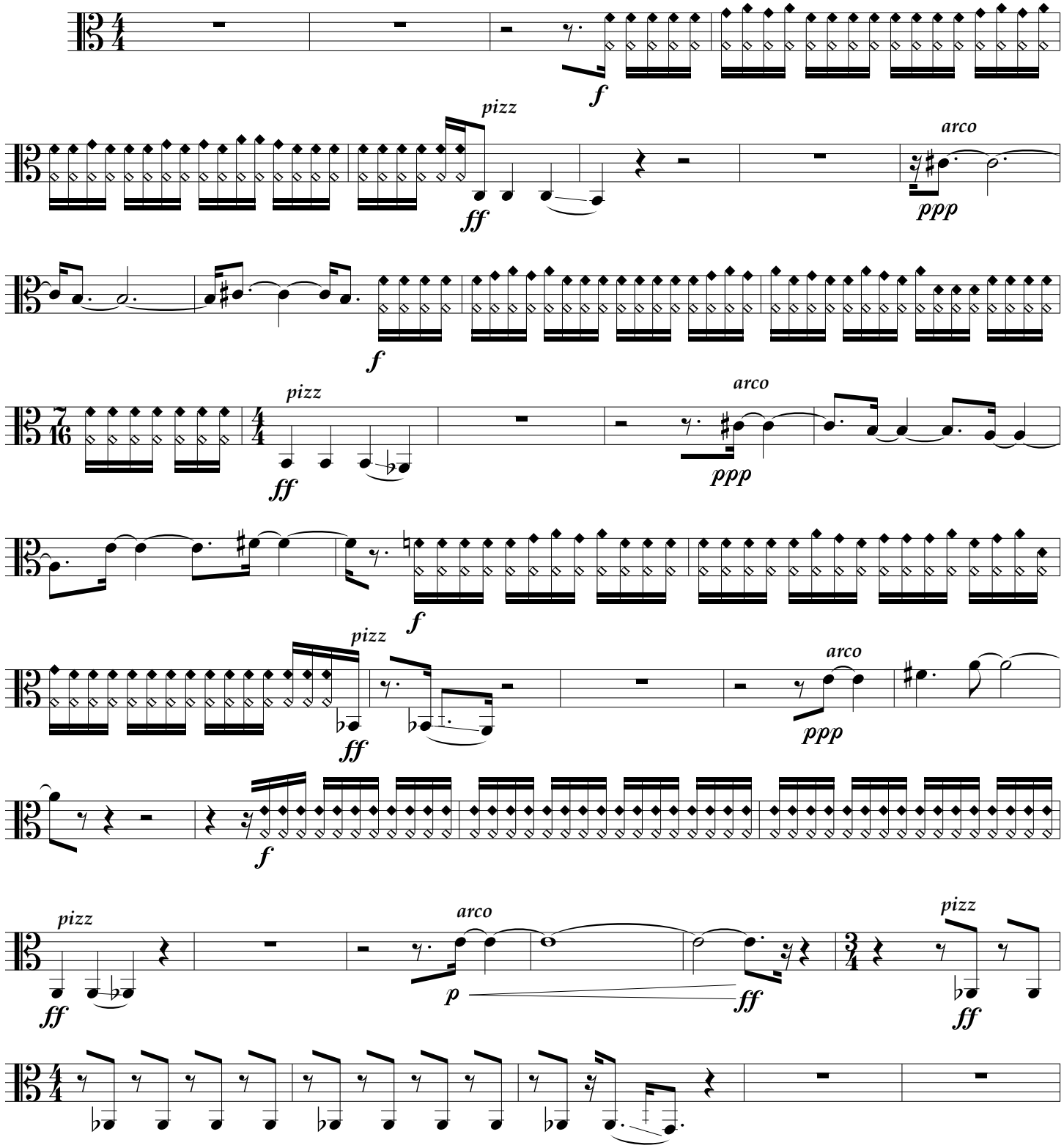
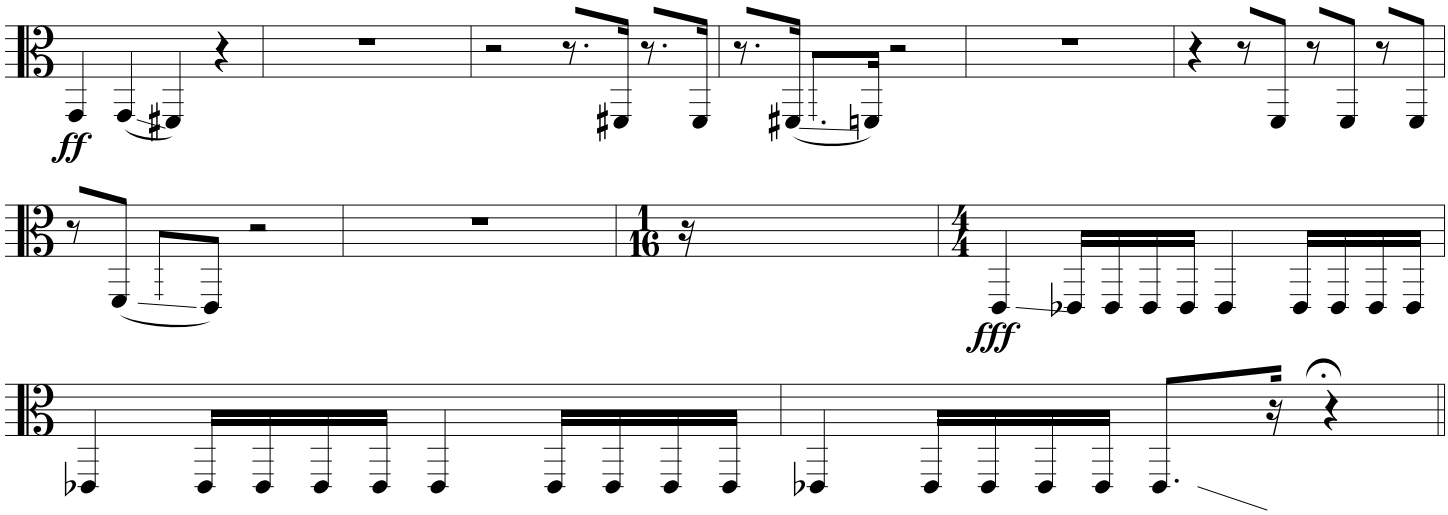


*optional improvisation: should last for at least two minutes. Begin with pizz and overbowing, in the style already established, gradually moving to other material (freely), then move back to pizz and overbowing. Once everyone is ready to move on, violin i will cue part iii. There should be no obvious breaks. If group chooses not to improvise, then everyone should go immediately onto part iii (violin i, violas i & iii should not improvise during the rest).

putrefaction

part iii

use tuning peg to slide down on pizzicato on the low C string.



viola i