Version for Piano Trio, 2020
to a wonderful Nottingham team

KERRY MILAN

A Rapture Suite

Trio for

Violin, Violoncello and Pianoforte

1: Forest - *trio*		*c. 3 min.*
2: River - *violin and piano*		*c. 3 min.*
3: Rapture - *trio*		*c. 4½ min.*
4: Grief - *'cello and piano*		*c. 2½ min.*
5: Finale - Art - Give - *trio*		*c. 5 min.*
	total:	*c. 18 min.*

These five movements are based on the music of the *Rapture Song Cycle,* which comprises settings of twenty of the poems by poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy, part of a collection of 52 poems called *Rapture*. The present settings for horn trio / piano trio retain the author's original poem titles. *Give* in the original is not with *Art,* lying between *Rapture* and *Grief*. Further information overleaf.

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The horn trio *A Rapture Suite* was written in the summer of 2019; but it draws its name, and inspiration, from the *Rapture Song Cycle* for female voice and pianoforte published in 2016, which comprises settings of 20 of the 52 poems that make up Carol Ann Duffy's award-winning collection *Rapture,* winner of the 2005 T.S. Elliot Prize. The work was recorded in Glasgow in 2018 by the splendid Yvonne Howard and Scott Mitchell and received its première in Stafford just weeks later when Miss Howard was accompanied by Roy Wightman. It is interesting to note that Yvonne Howard, Roy Wightman, Kerry Milan and Carol Ann Duffy all have close ties to Stafford (with Cannock Chase just five minutes away) while the latter three also have strong Scottish, and especially Glasgow, connections.

The *Rapture* poems are highly evocative, chronicling the course of a love affair as it ebbs and flows, peaks and finally dies, and the challenge in setting them was how to capture such a captivating range of emotions, changing not just from one poem to the next, but within just a few lines, often short sentences each with its own surprising turn of phrase and feeling. It was this need to be able to switch suddenly and unexpectedly from one thought or reflection to the next that eventually led to the choice of the medium of twelve-tone music, which doesn't necessarily destroy all sense of tonality; more that one never quite knows where the music is leading. Further information about the actual tone rows employed can be found in the background to the music printed with the song cycle, which is in two books, each with ten settings.

The settings I have used here for the Horn Trio are *Forest, River, Rapture* and part of *Give* from book one, and *Grief* and *Art* from part two. The trio was written for my two young grandchildren Emily and James and for friend and colleague Roy Wightman who knows the children well, having accompanied both of them for their diploma examinations.

The work is perhaps best considered as a short quasi tone poem, based as it is on the song cycle settings and immediately setting out to evoke the opening scene the poet so vividly portrays:

> *"There were flowers at the edge of the forest, cupping the last of the light in their upturned petals. I followed you in, under the sighing restless trees and my whole life vanished."*

Brahms loved to walk in the Black Forest and we know that he once revealed the very pine groves where the theme of the first movement of his Trio had come to him. Staffordians have Cannock Chase on their doorstep, and it is said that one reason the German War Graves are situated on the Chase is its affinity with the Black Forest! It is surely pure coincidence though that Brahms' opening violin entry is so uncannily echoed by the 'flowers at the edge of the forest' of this setting.

Roy Wightman and I have in fact performed the Brahms Trio with friend and colleague Mike Revell, at a time in the 1980s when we were all on the staff of the County of Staffordshire's specialist school for talented young musicians -we were brave enough to peform to them!

Lennox Berkeley's horn trio, published in 1953, echoes the free atonality of early Schoenberg while the Australian Don Banks' 15 minute trio of 1962 (for Barry Tuckwell) seems fully serial in technique. And then in 1982 Ligeti wrote his own trio as a companion to the Brahms, and specifically indicated it was an "Hommage à Brahms". Indeed the first three movements were written for natural horn, which we know Brahms himself was most emphatic should be used. The occasional hand-stopping of *A Rapture Suite* is perhaps part of my own Brahms homage.

The fact that grief features so heavily in both works is again a coincidence, a double one indeed. Brahms' mother had died just a few months before his Trio was written, with its often sorrowful, melancholic feel. The very day that I was starting to set Carol Ann Duffy's poem *Grief* (April 15th 2016) a dear friend and wonderful musician Guy Woolfenden died and that undoubtedly profoundly affected the resulting piece. Not only was Guy for many years Director of Music at the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford upon Avon and also a renowned band and orchestral conductor, he was also a fine composer and horn player, and its seems only right to have this movement of the trio just as a horn solo.

Brahms' E♭ minor movement seems to have a particularly melancholic feel to it and again by coincidence this is the key for the *River* music of the *Rapture Suite* trio, now set as a high violin solo. The sense of yearning here is palpable.

Of course the E♭ minor mood comes within the constraints of twelve-tone music and the tone row system first advocated by Schoenberg, specifically with the aim of undermining any sense of key. But from Berg onwards composers have made their own interpretations of what may be permitted, and the tradition of British composers bringing their own insights goes back to Elizabeth Lutyens (1906-1983) whose own horn trio *Horai* was actually premièred by the Liverpool Horn Trio in 1969 at Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire. *(Compare Berkeley's dates, 1903-89).*

John McCabe's own *Dance Movements for Horn Violin and Piano* was premièred just a couple of years earlier, at the Wigmore Hall London by the Ifor James Horn Trio and it is interesting to recollect that in the 1970s I led a chamber ensemble *Janus* that sometimes included John McCabe. One of his movements has a distinctly jazz feel and this is true too of the *Rapture Suite*'s third movement *Rapture*. Here, just as Brahms quoted from his early *Albumblatt*, there is a quote from my much earlier *Metropole* song, in the song cycle just a snatch on the piano, but here (and still true to the music's twelve-tone discipline) the horn sings out "life's got some style, when I do it with you"!

Dear friend and fellow composer Andrew Downes is also a horn player, so it is no surprise that his recent horn trio, premièred in 2008 by the Brahms Trio, Prague, has been described as "modern tonal chamber music at its finest" (*The Horn Call* journal).

All these works have their own sound worlds, and hopefully that of the *Rapture Suite* is equally distinctive, and reasonably accessible, certainly for a horn trio audience!

The mood of the original Rapture Song Cycle is of course inspired by Carol Ann Duffy's striking text, published in 2005 by Picador. The song cycle music and recording with Yvonne Howard and Scott Mitchell are under the Ardross House label.

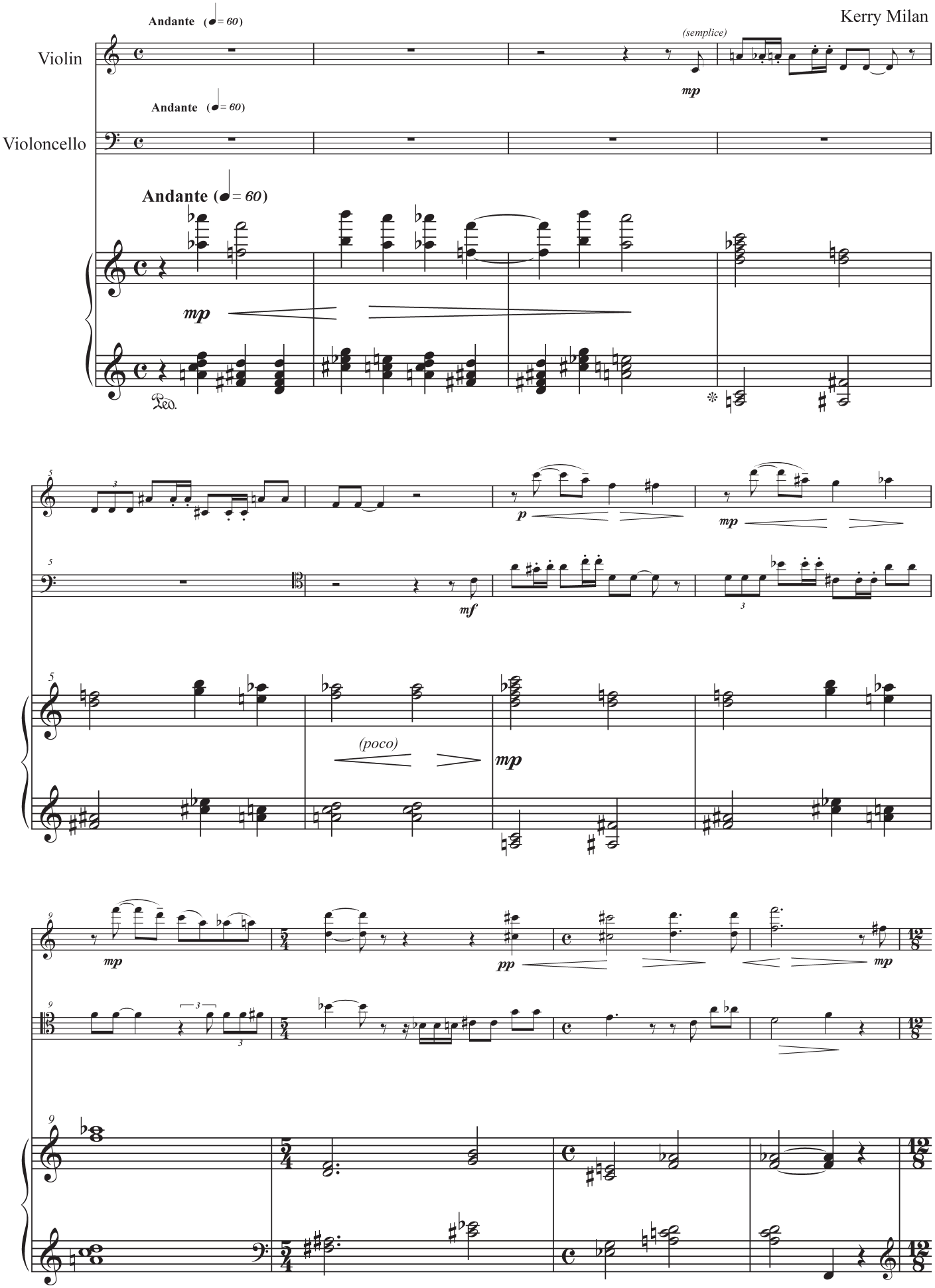
A very different, but distinctive sound world is to be found in the settings made in 2010 of *Five Songs of Asolo* for Mezzo Soprano and Piano Trio, *Pippa Passes*, taken from Robert Browning's dramatic eponymous poem of 1841. This work was recorded by Yvonne Howard and the English Piano Trio. Again, the recording at All Saints Church East Finchley was for Ardross House. The first performance, once more featuring Yvonne Howard and Roy Wightman, was at the 2013 Stafford Festival, with Nigel Stubbs and Julie Stubbs violin and 'cello respectively.

Brahms decidedly did not like using the 'cello in place of the horn in his horn trio; though apparently he thought it worked 'just fine' with viola! Whether either would work for *A Rapture Suite* remains to be seen!

Stafford, Summer 2019 Kerry Milan

1: Forest

Kerry Milan



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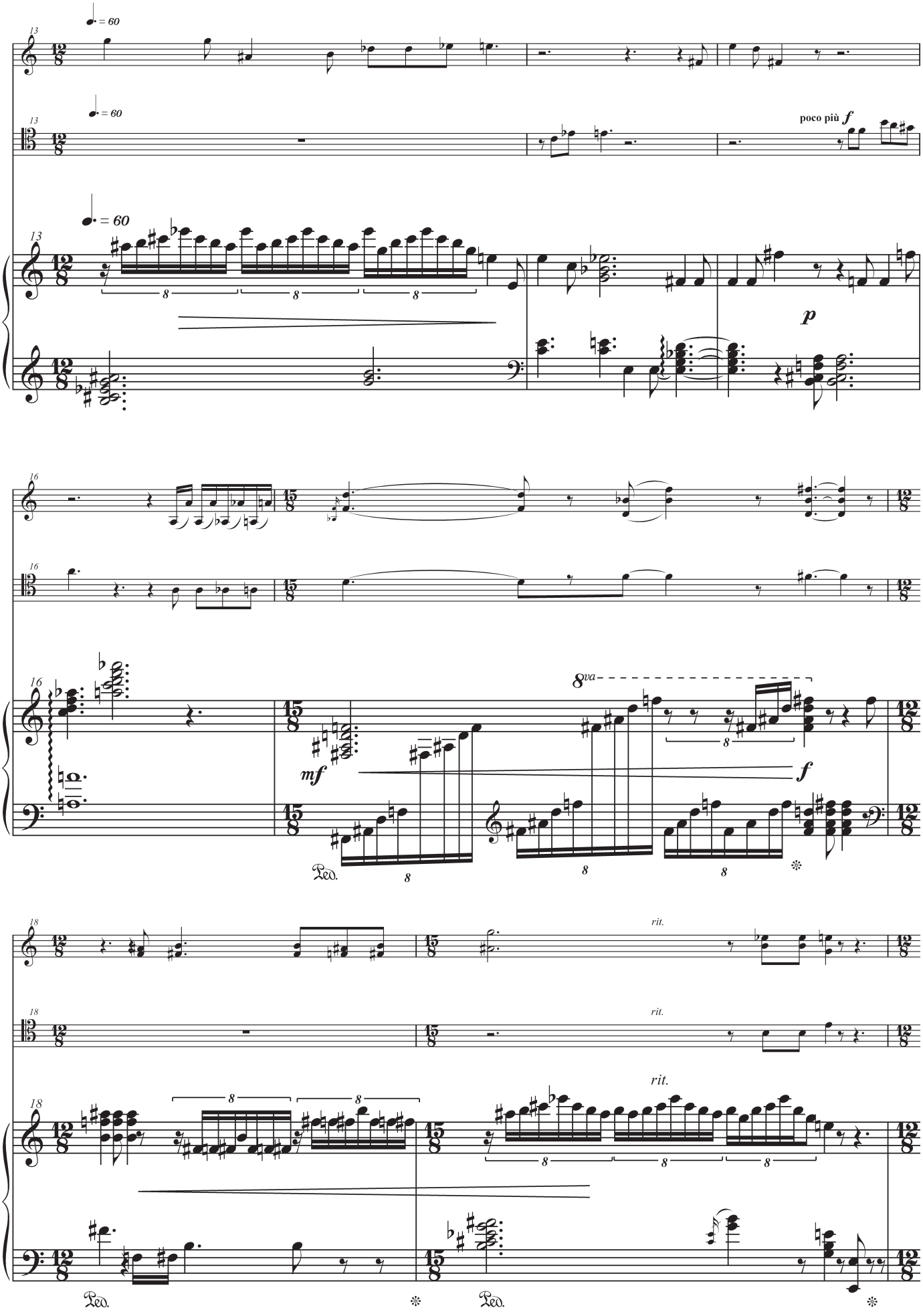
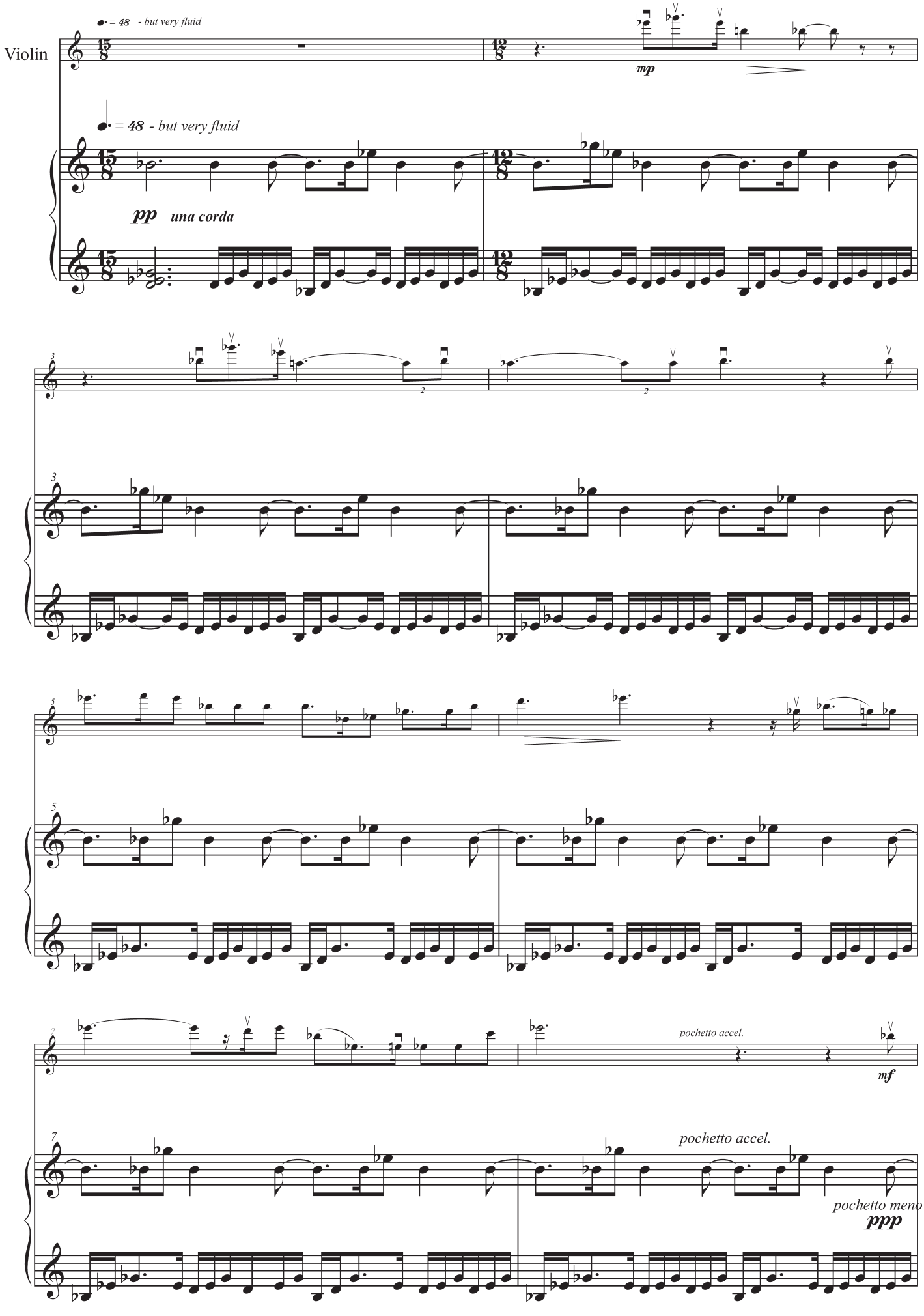
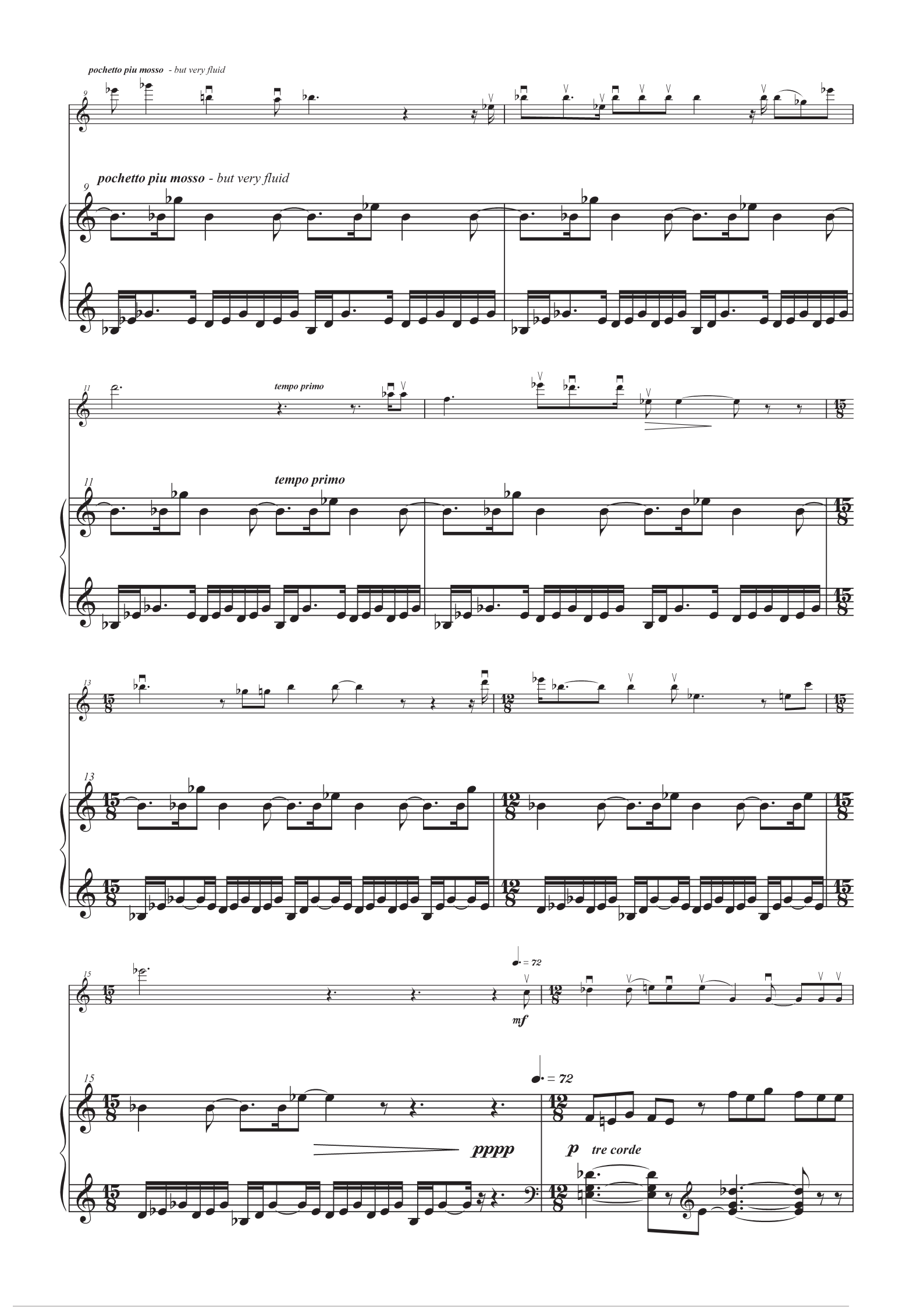
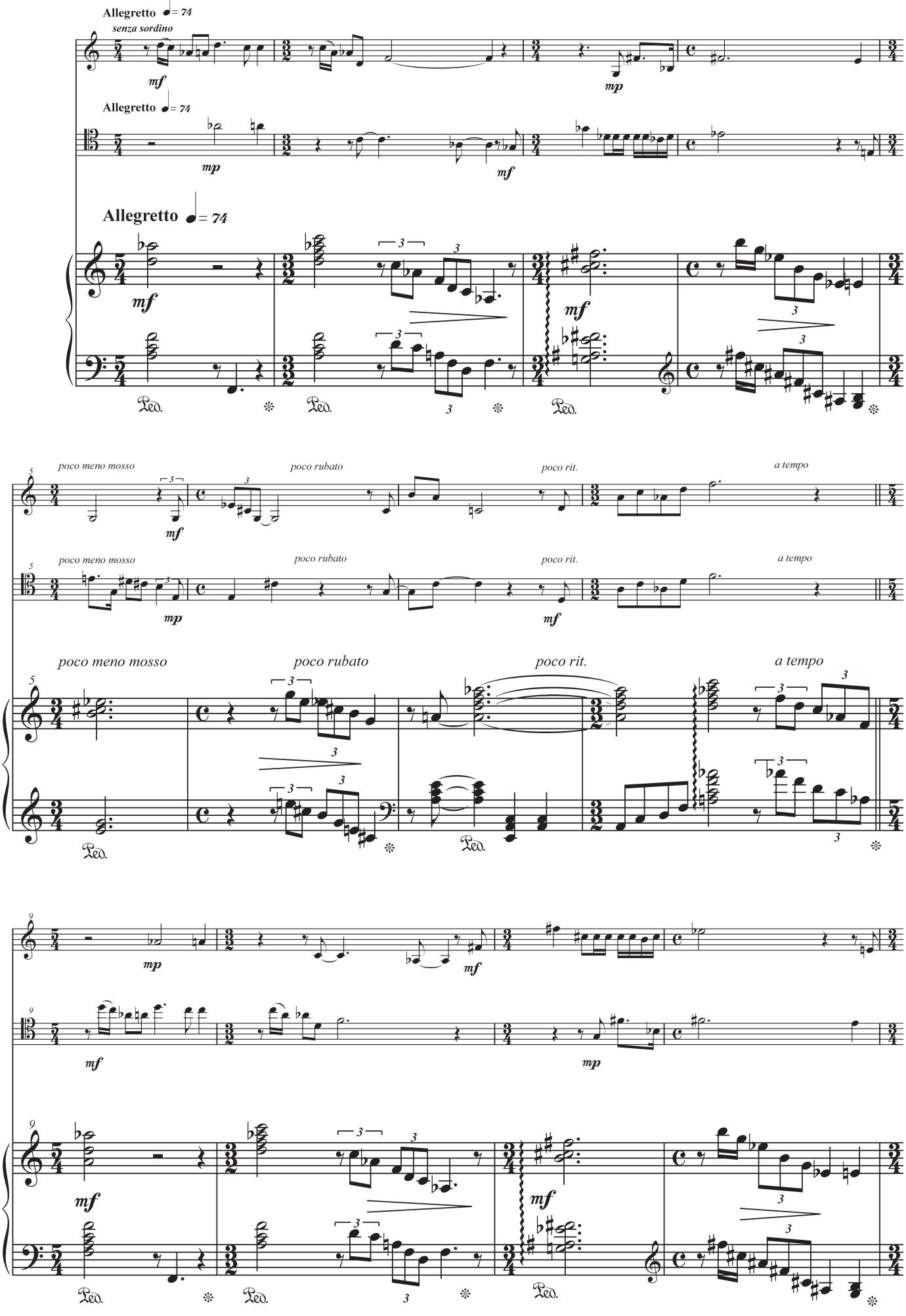

13
♩. = 60
poco più f
p
16
mf
8va
f
18
rit.
Ped.

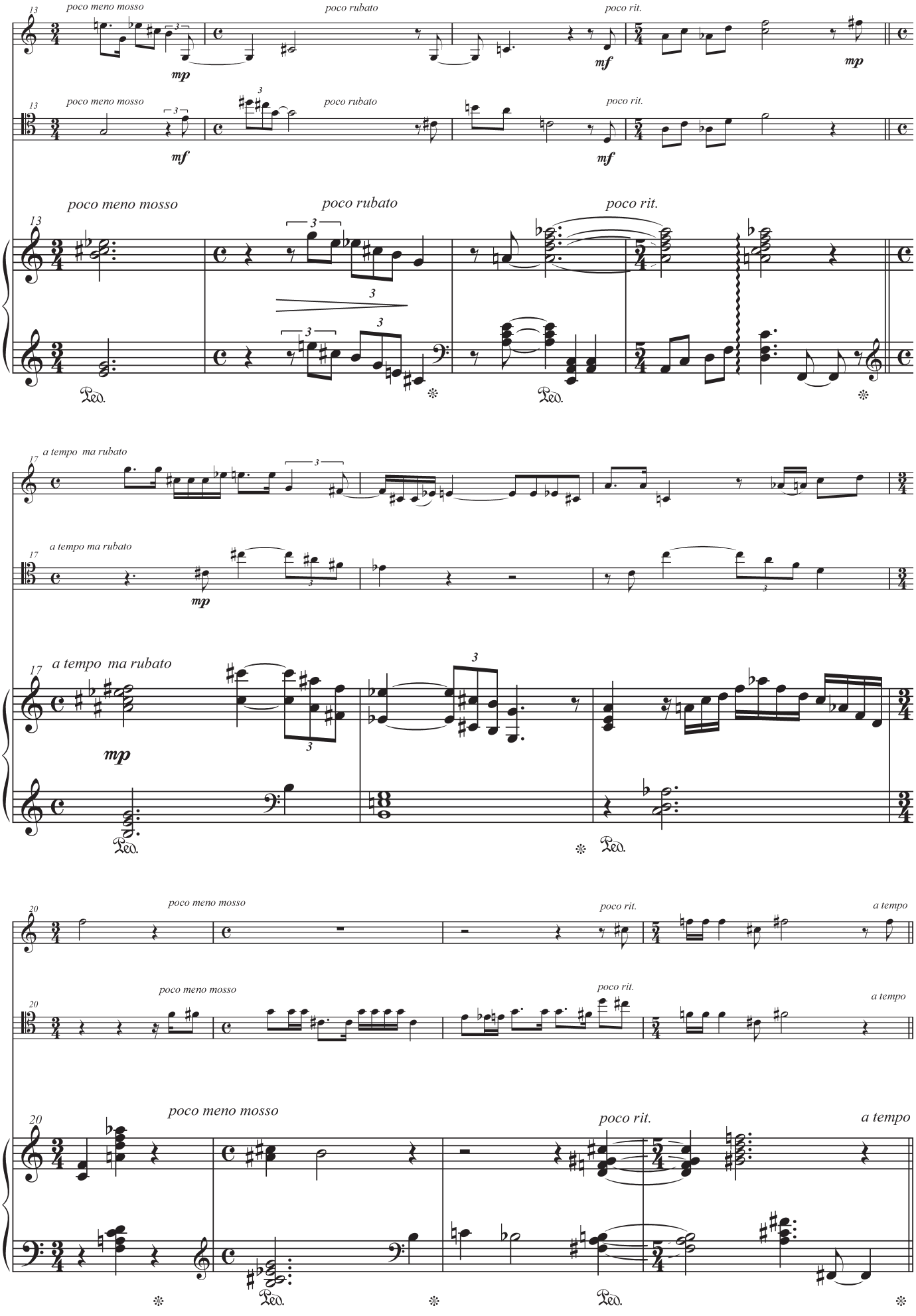
2: River


Violin
♩. = 48 - but very fluid
mp
♩. = 48 - but very fluid
pp una corda
pochetto accel.
mf
pochetto accel.
pochetto meno
ppp


pochetto piu mosso - but very fluid
pochetto piu mosso - but very fluid
tempo primo
tempo primo
= 72
mf
= 72
pppp
p
tre corde

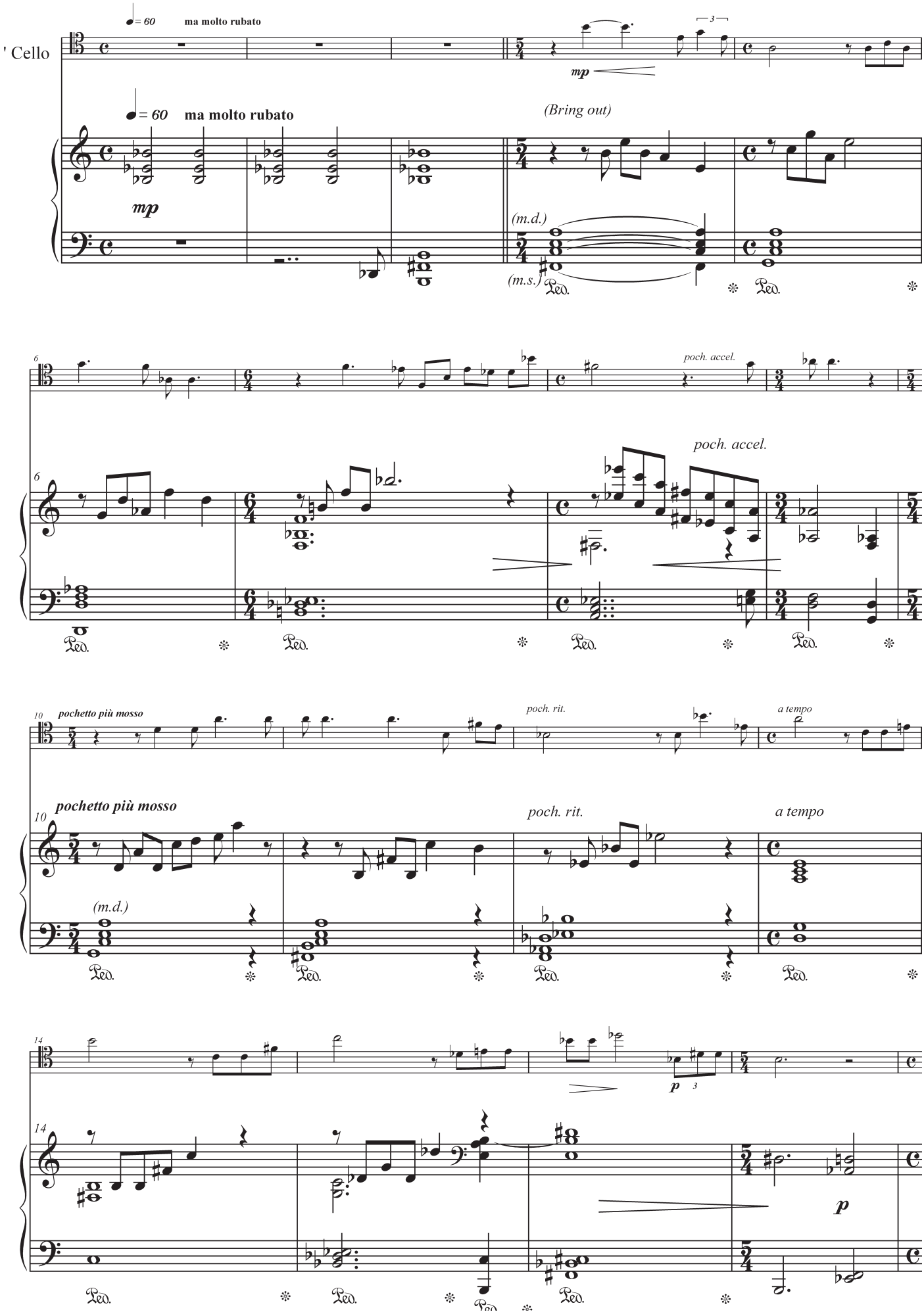
3: Rapture


Allegretto ♩= 74
senza sordino
mf
mp
Allegretto ♩= 74
mp
mf
Allegretto ♩= 74
mf
mf
Ped.
poco meno mosso
poco rubato
poco rit.
a tempo
mf
mp
mf
poco meno mosso
poco rubato
poco rit.
a tempo
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
mp
mf
mf
mp
mf
mf
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.

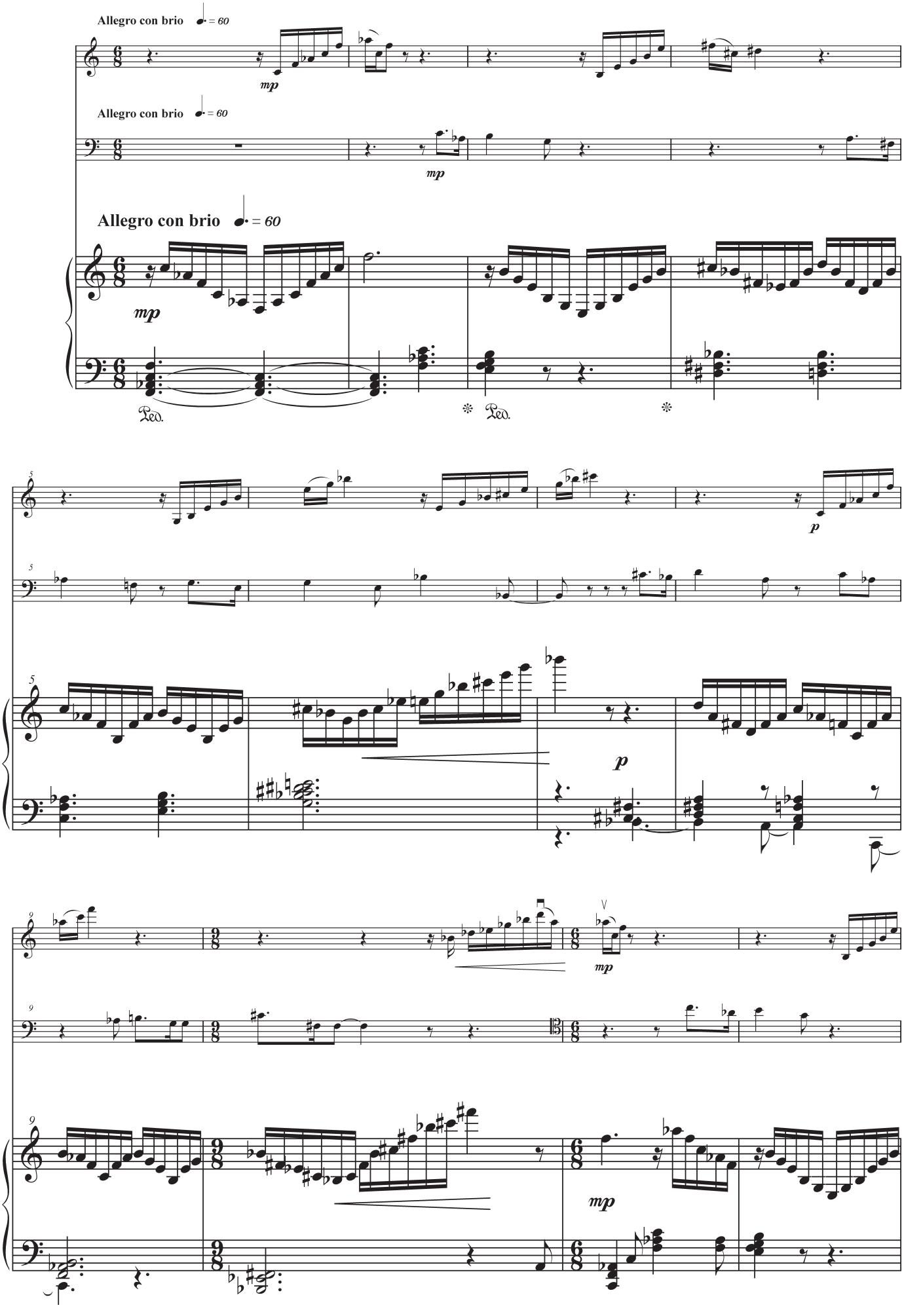

13
poco meno mosso
poco rubato
poco rit.
mp
mf
mp
13
poco meno mosso
poco rubato
poco rit.
mf
mf
13
poco meno mosso
poco rubato
poco rit.
Ped.
Ped.
Ped.
17
a tempo ma rubato
mp
17
a tempo ma rubato
17
a tempo ma rubato
mp
Ped.
Ped.
20
poco meno mosso
poco rit.
a tempo
20
poco meno mosso
poco rit.
a tempo
20
poco meno mosso
poco rit.
a tempo
Ped.
Ped.

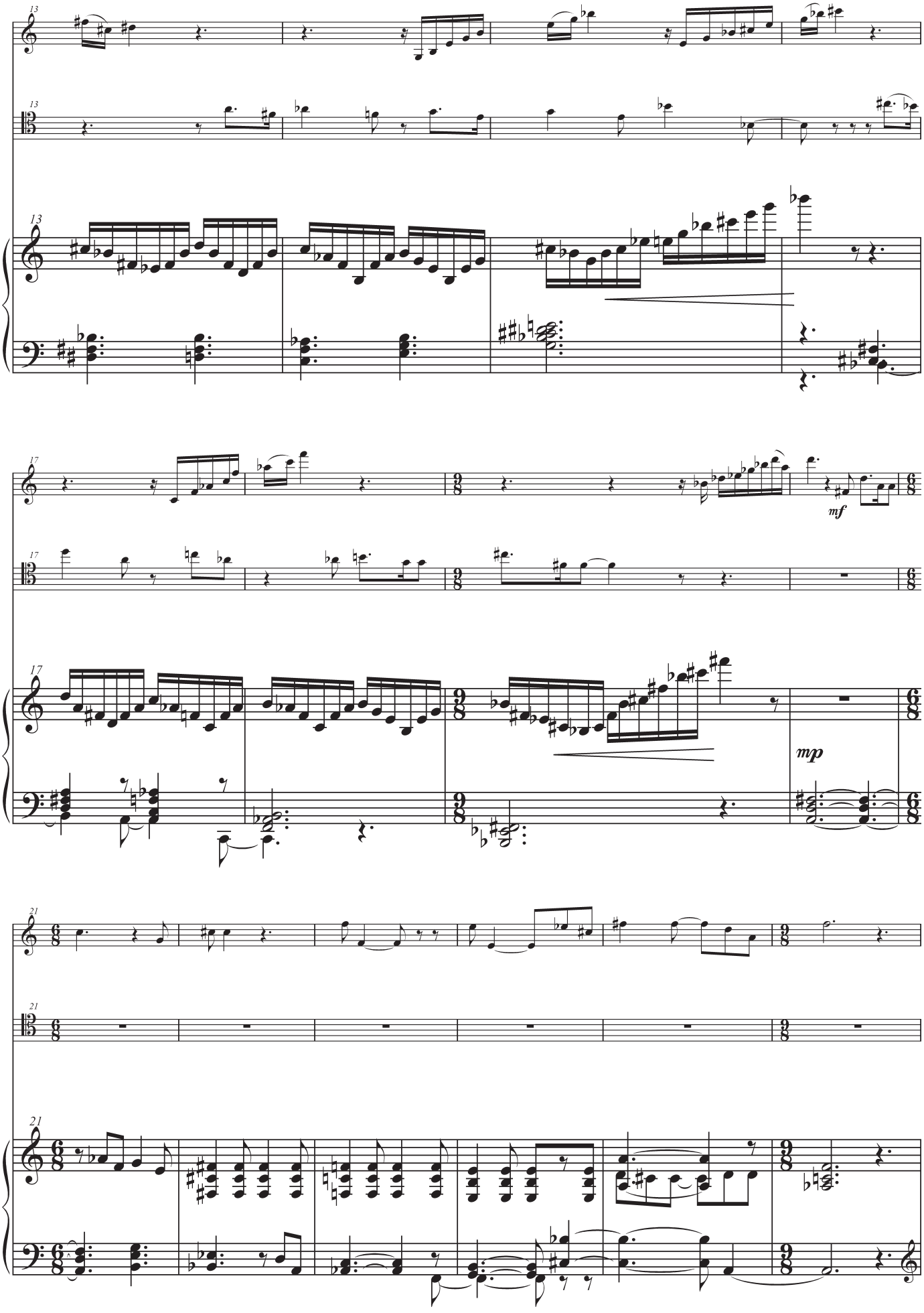
4: Grief

- dedicated to the memory of a wonderful musician and lovely person **Guy Woolfenden** who died on April 15th 2016 just as I was beginning this setting, so appropriately called *Grief. KEM*



5: Art - Give


Allegro con brio ♩. = 60
mp
Allegro con brio ♩. = 60
mp
Allegro con brio ♩. = 60
mp
Ped.
Ped.
p
p
mp
mp


13
13
13
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17
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mf
mp
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21