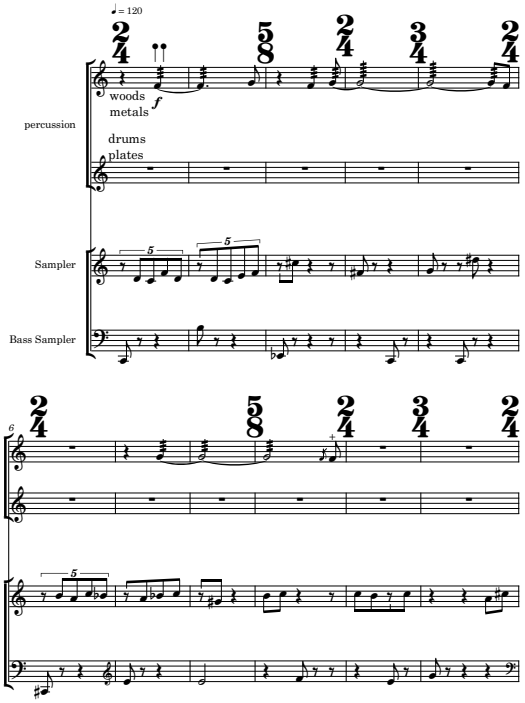
ME105

MA BELL

for percussionist and computer



www.michael-edwards.org

MICHAEL EDWARDS

MA BELL

for one beautiful bell and
four percussion groups consisting of six
objects each of wood, metal, drum, and plate
plus computer

MICHAEL EDWARDS

michael edwards
ma bell
for percussionist and computer

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programme note

ma bell was written for Michael Pattmann. It is a re-working of *ma bel* which in turn was written for Jean-Francois Laporte and his composite compressed-air instrument, the *Babel Table*. The titles' connections to the Old Testament myth explaining the origin of the world's different tongues is clear.

The title *ma bel* transposes merely one character of *ba-bel*. *ma bell* goes one step further in merely repeating a character but in doing so connects to a key percussion instrument. These simple elaborations offer several meanings to speakers of different languages: as a homonym in French (*ma belle*) it could refer to *my beautiful (wife, daughter, belle-sœur, etc.)* or imply the more complete *ma belle vie*; in English it could be misheard as *marble* (the stone but also the child's toy) or refer to *Mabel*, the woman's name; but in Arabic *ma bel* means *what but*, after which I particularly enjoy question marks and perhaps even a *why?*—good things to ask about a piece such as this.

So then: so few symbols, and even fewer syllables, but so much meaning and context. And *Babel* connects back beautifully to this in that, obscured from its mythological context, it refers more generally to a confusing mélange (as in mixture, not the Viennese coffee :): a mêlée, in the non-violent sense, of sounds and voices or a noisy, confused scene in general. Such is *ma bell*: a plethora of unrelated samples mixed with the potent sounds of varied percussion, all driven by a score which is digital yet conventionally notated.

What you see or read, however, is by no means what you get (I'm referring now particularly to the score). The symbols need even more translation, interpretation, and *making sense of* than usual. And that's not just the musician's job but the audiences' too (as always), given the sound structures on offer.

And further: *ma bell* integrates strongly emotive vocal utterances from a certain Austrian female; samples that are prelingual but often guttural (synonyms perhaps here: *before the tongue*, as in before language as well as the muscle)—even guttural in both senses: articulated in the throat and perhaps unpleasant or strange—and most definitely communicative, in a nonsensical way, *bien sûr*.

This is what music is: by no means a language but nevertheless able communicate or rather provoke a wide variety of experiences, and transporting meaning (or not) to individuals formed both collectively and uniquely. (*Ahh... ma bel(l)(e) musique)!*)

ma bell :: technical and score notes

Duration

c. 8:30, depending on the tempo scaler set in the Max patch (see below).

Percussion

1. There are four groups/families of six percussion instruments, the exact instrumentation of which is left to the preference and discretion of the performer:
   (a) woods: e.g. wood blocks, temple blocks, slit drums
   (b) metals: e.g. brake drums, iron pipe, triangle, cowbells
   (c) drums: e.g. roto-toms, tom-toms, bongos, bass/kick drum, congas, timbales
   (d) plates: e.g. sizzle and other cymbals, gongs, tam-tams, bell plates.
2. Required in addition to these are
   (a) chains suitable for drawing across the plates and drums
   (b) additional metal plates which can be placed on drums
   (c) a nicely resonant metal bell, for use exclusively at the very end of the piece.
3. The left to right disposition of the six instruments in each group is from low to high in pitch/spectral energy, most probably therefore also from large to small.
4. The notation for the four groups of six instruments is as follows:
   (a) two staves are used, with two groups per stave
   (b) the six-note range, with one instrument per note, is from D4 (middle D) to B4 and C5 to A5, thus:
      i. upper stave
         A. woods: C5 to A5
         B. metals: D4 to B4
      ii. lower stave
         A. drums: C5 to A5
         B. plates: D4 to B4

   (a) N.B. pitches in the percussion part are relative, with no definite pitch being implied by the mapping of notes to instruments.

5. The percussion instruments should be amplified and panned to the front speakers only according to their stage position.

Max

1. Sampling rate is 48khz.
2. Max version 8 is required.
3. You will need the ICST Ambisonics package: launch the MaxMSP package manager and download it from there.
4. As a lot of samples are pre-loaded by the *ma bel* patch, even on fast computers it takes quite a while to load.
5. Once the patch is loaded, press the big X toggle (or press the space bar) and the video score playback will start along with the MIDI sequence after the user-selectable count-down.
6. At the start of each section new samples and processing parameters will be loaded/routed automatically.
7. The video and sample playback speed can be changed with the horizontal slider.
8. During rehearsal you can jump to different sections of the piece using the given drop-down menu. This skips to predetermined points in the video and MIDI sequence.
9. Tempo can be changed by using the speed slider: this is a scaler for the tempi indicated in the score.

Output configuration

1. Output is to be selected from a range of loudspeaker configurations: simple stereo up to octophony and beyond (3rd order ambisonics-configured half/full domes).
2. Stereo performances are not optimal with the current ambisonic setup, but may be useful for rehearsal purposes.
3. Ambisonic movement types and parameters are set for each of the six sections of the piece, along with sample sets, etc.
4. Saved along with the ambisonics settings is the speaker configuration. This should be selected from the drop-down menu and saved in the preset object (shift click on the respective rectangle). This must be done for each of the 6 sections otherwise the outputs may be mis-configured on section changes.

Balance

1. The performance will need someone on the mixing desk to balance levels.
2. Overall sound level is consistently high (but not dangerously so).
3. Maximum impact should be retained throughout, especially for the more percussive sounds/samples.
4. The samples in the computer part must be in equal balance to the amplified percussion.

Score

1. The A4 score is for rehearsal purposes: during the performance it will be read from the video presentation in the Max patch.
2. The pitches in the computer parts are mapped to a sampler banks so there is not usually a relationship between the perceived and notated pitches.

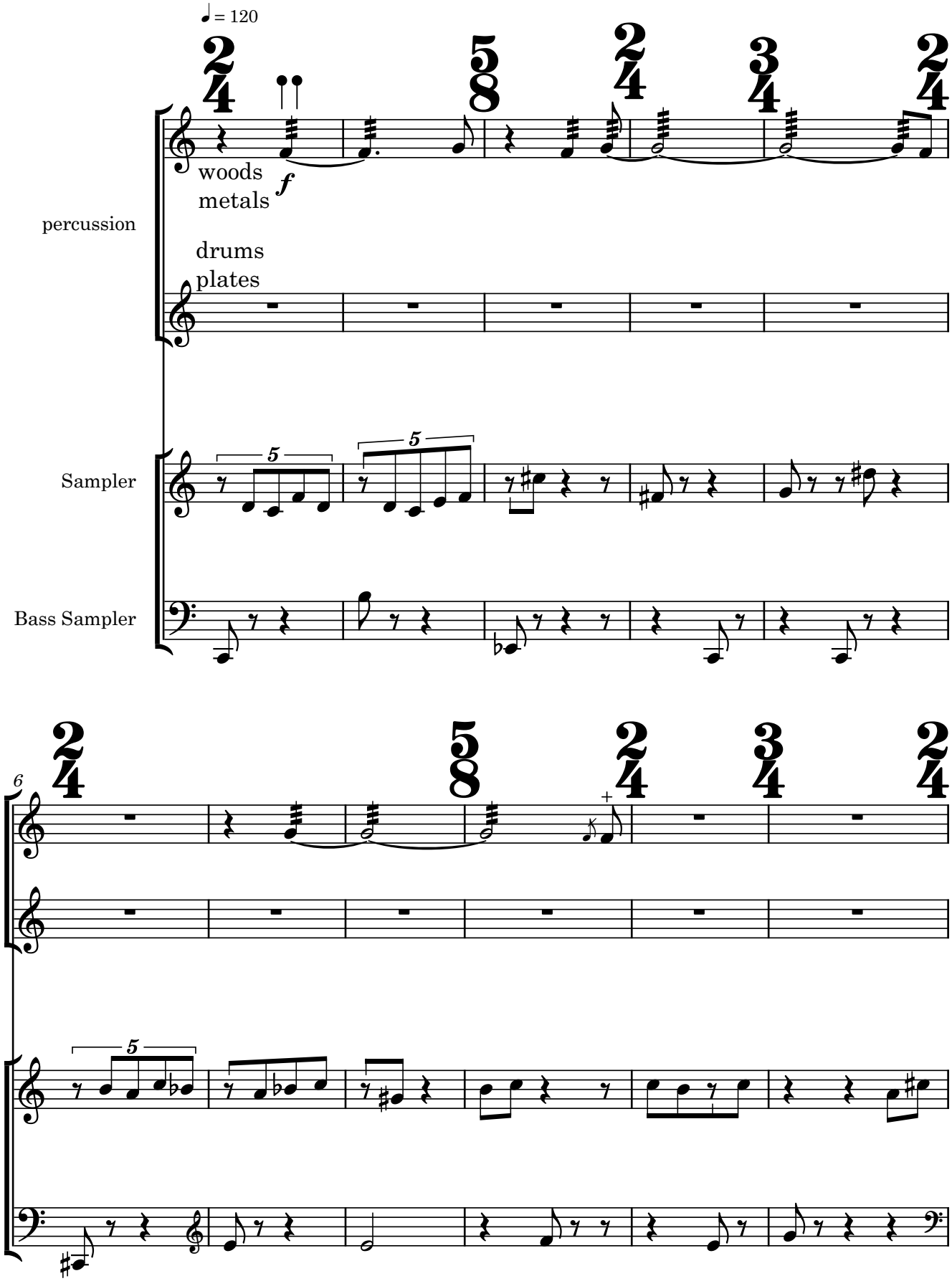
Symbols

1. Sounds should always be left to decay undamped (i.e. always l.v.) unless the damp symbol is explicitly used.
2. + sign over note: deadstick/stopped: either with the hand or by holding the stick on the striking surface: whichever is preferred or most appropriate in the context.
3. Glissando lines in combination with tremolandi mean rolls are played over the intervening instruments between the start and end notes.
4. Circle with X over or next to a note: strike the drum rim.
5. Circle with an arrowhead over a note: scrape rather than strike the surface of the plate.
6. Mallets: standard notation is used here where black circle mallet heads (e.g. in bar 1) indicate hard mallets; half black, half white circle heads indicate medium hard; and completely white heads indicate soft;
   (a) in addition, brushes will be needed, as indicated at letter B
   (b) the choice of which variety of hard/medium hard/soft mallets is of course left to the discretion of the performer, as these will need to be chosen to work well with the chosen percussion instruments.

for Michael Pattmann

ma bell

Michael Edwards 2020



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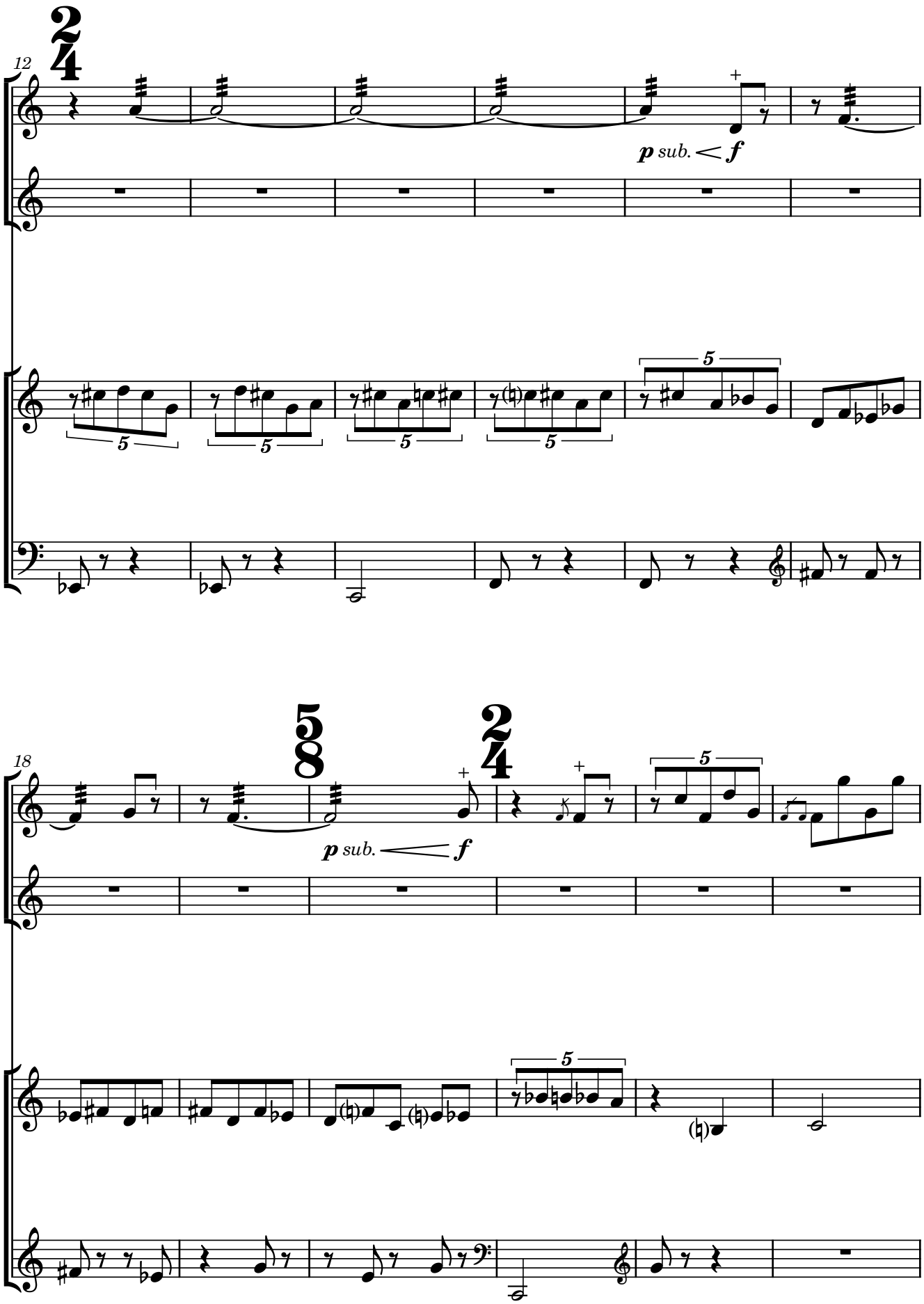
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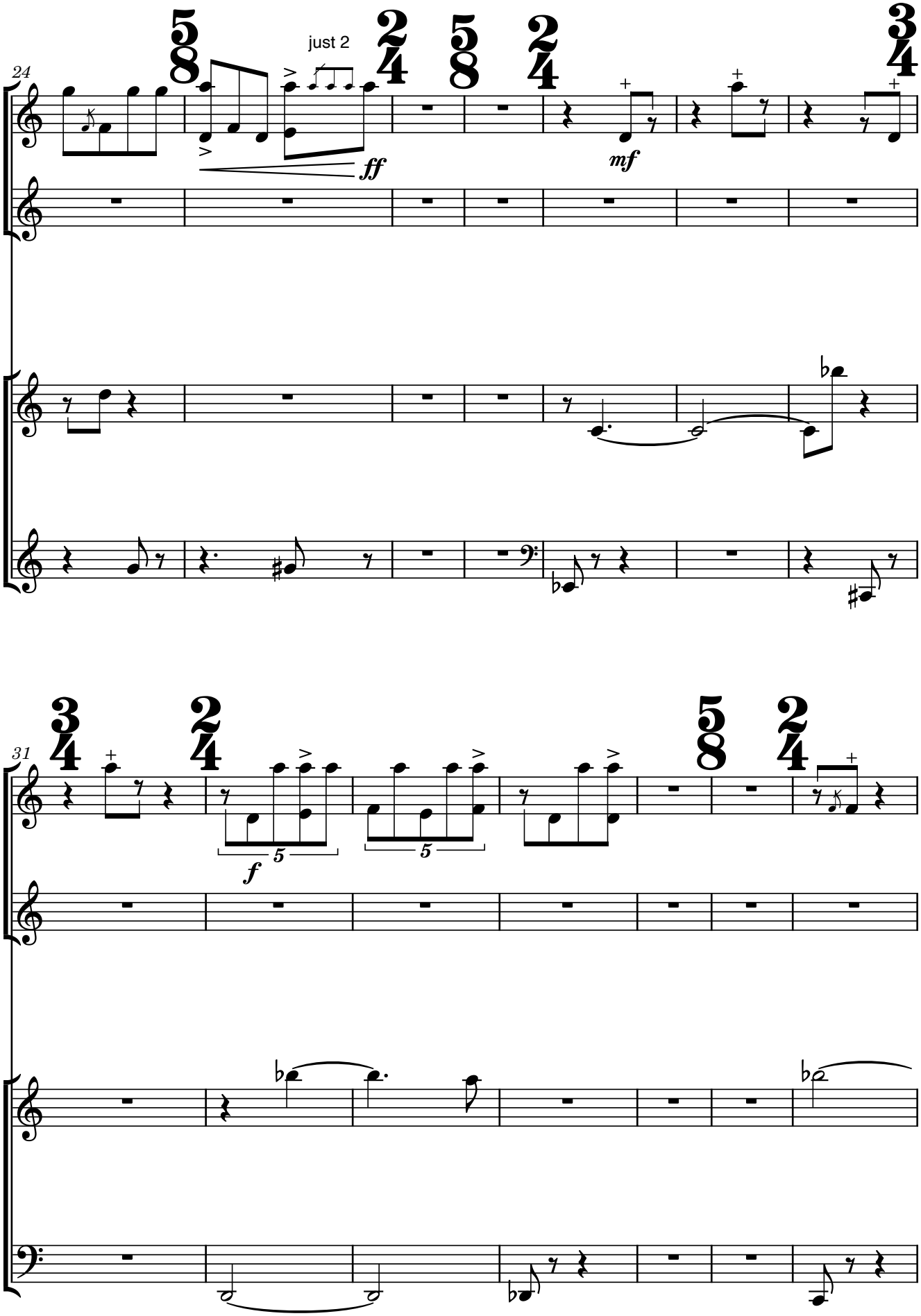
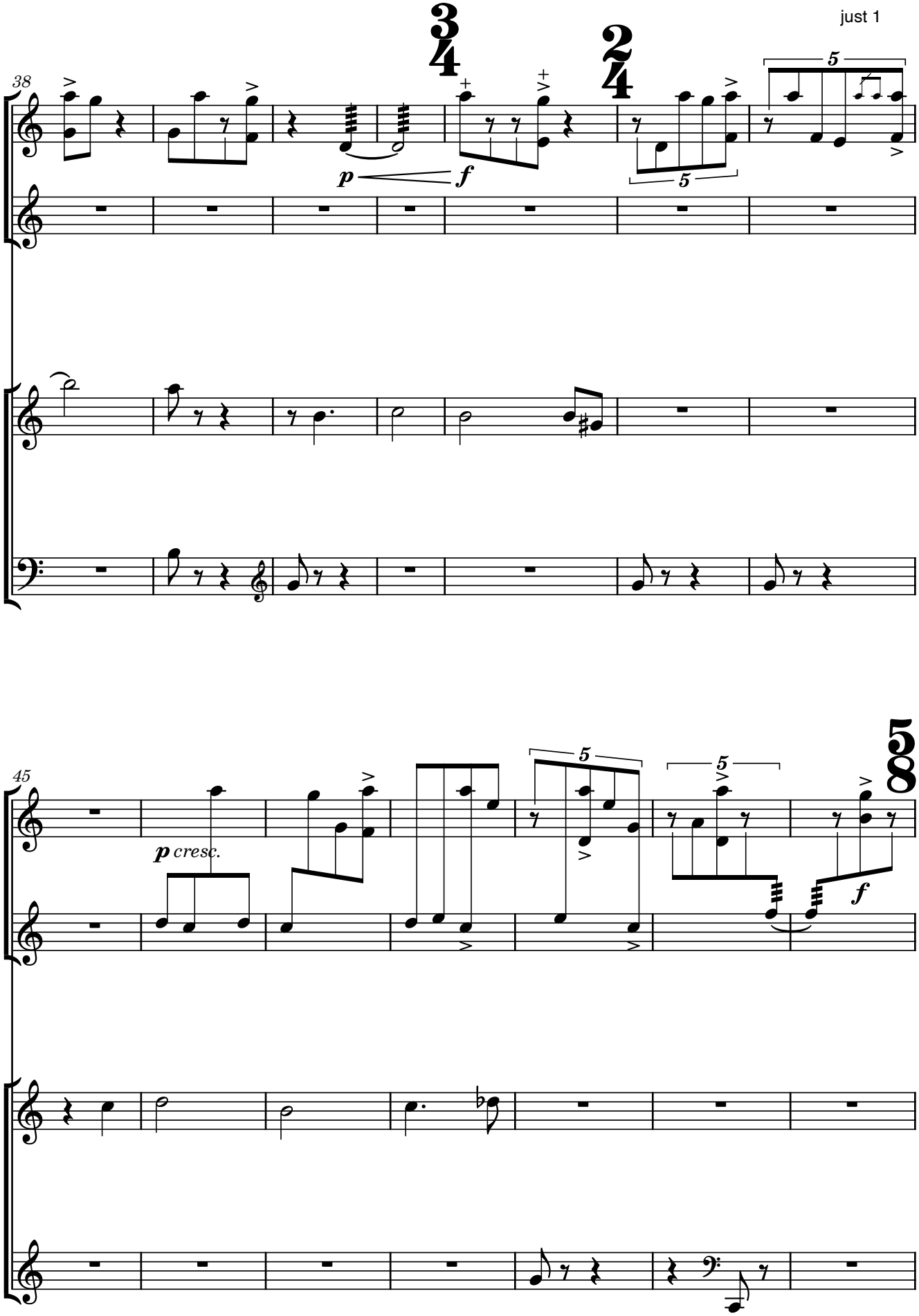
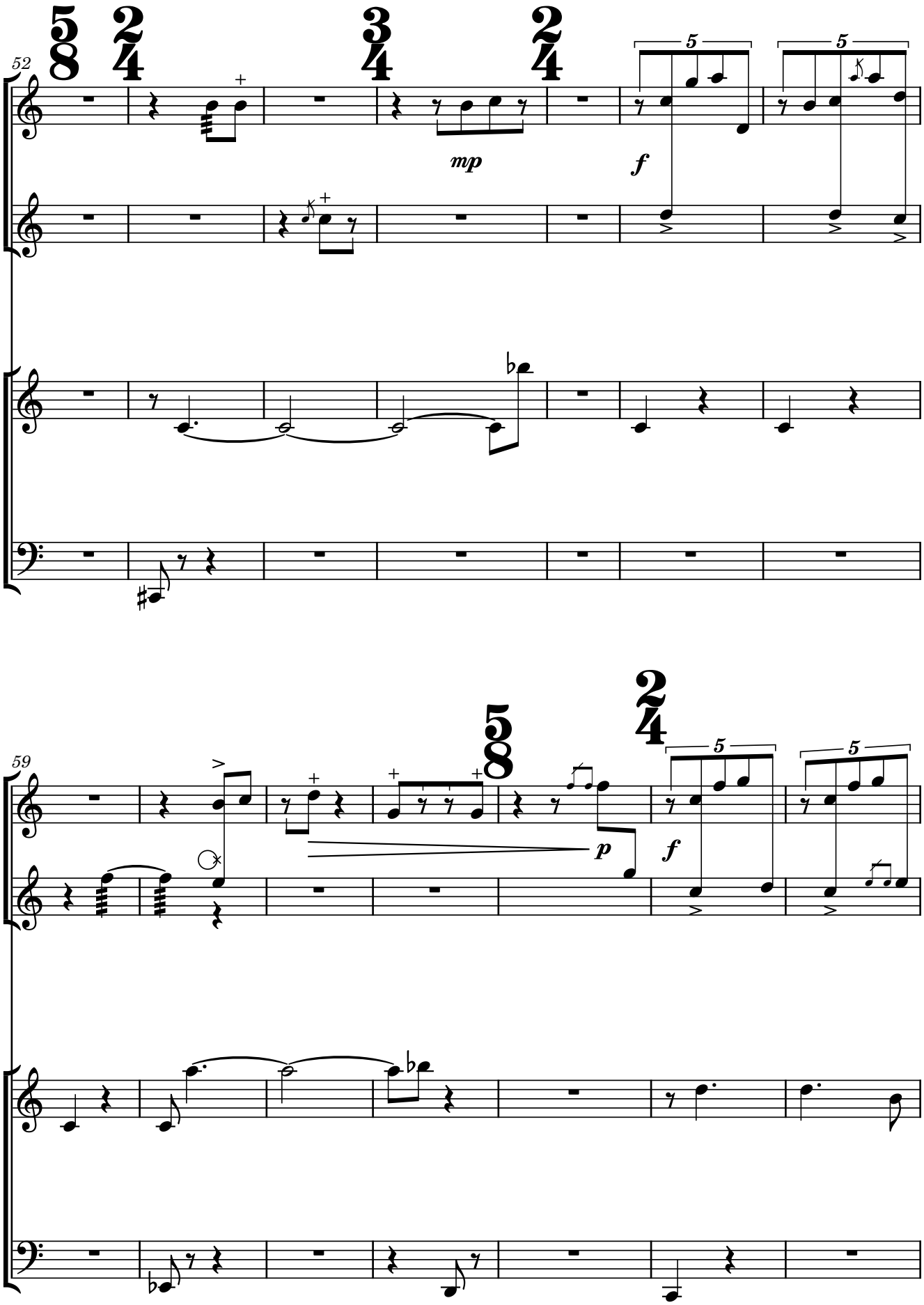
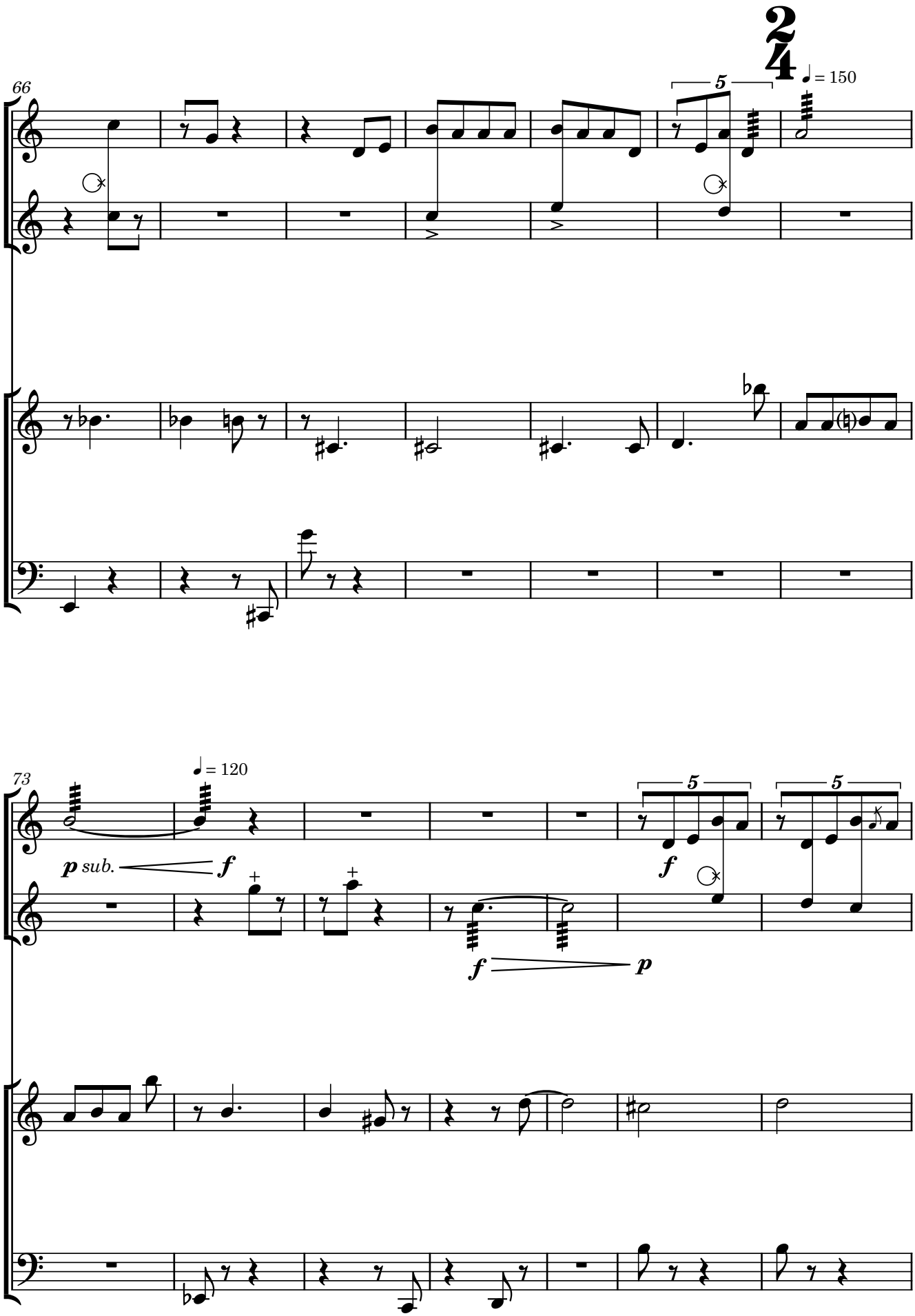
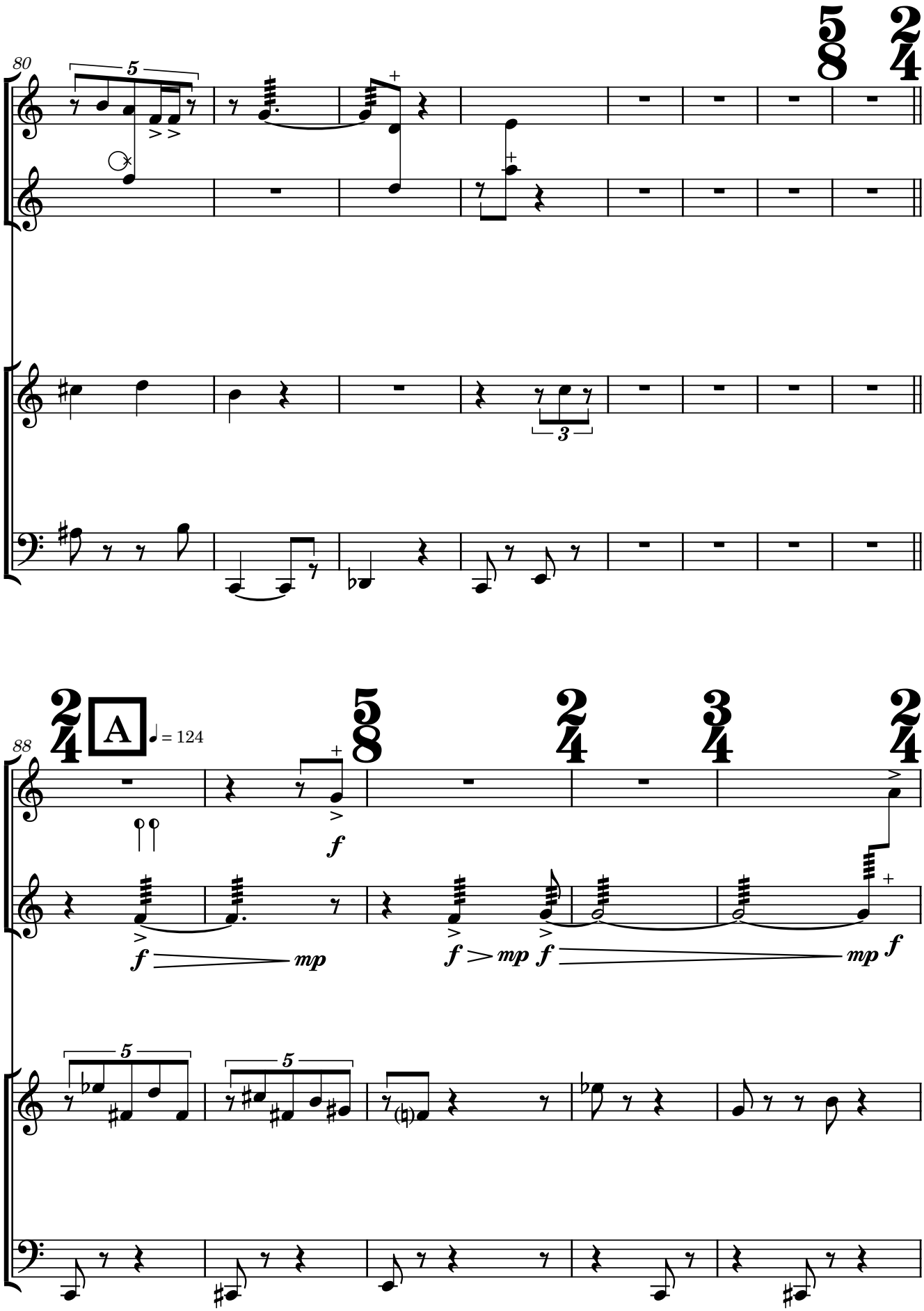
2
4
p sub.
f
18
5
8
2
4
p sub.
f

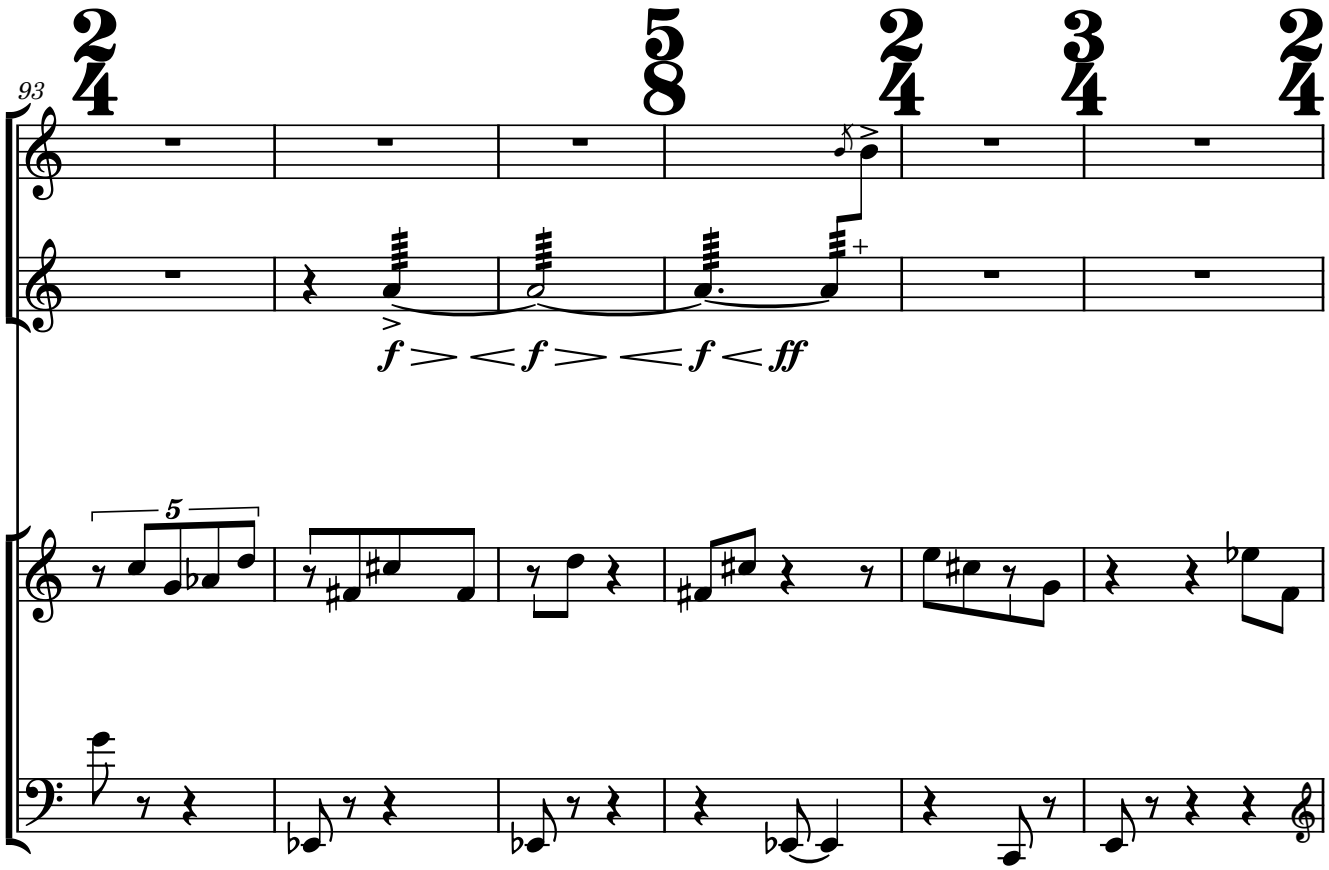

24
just 2
ff
mf
31
f

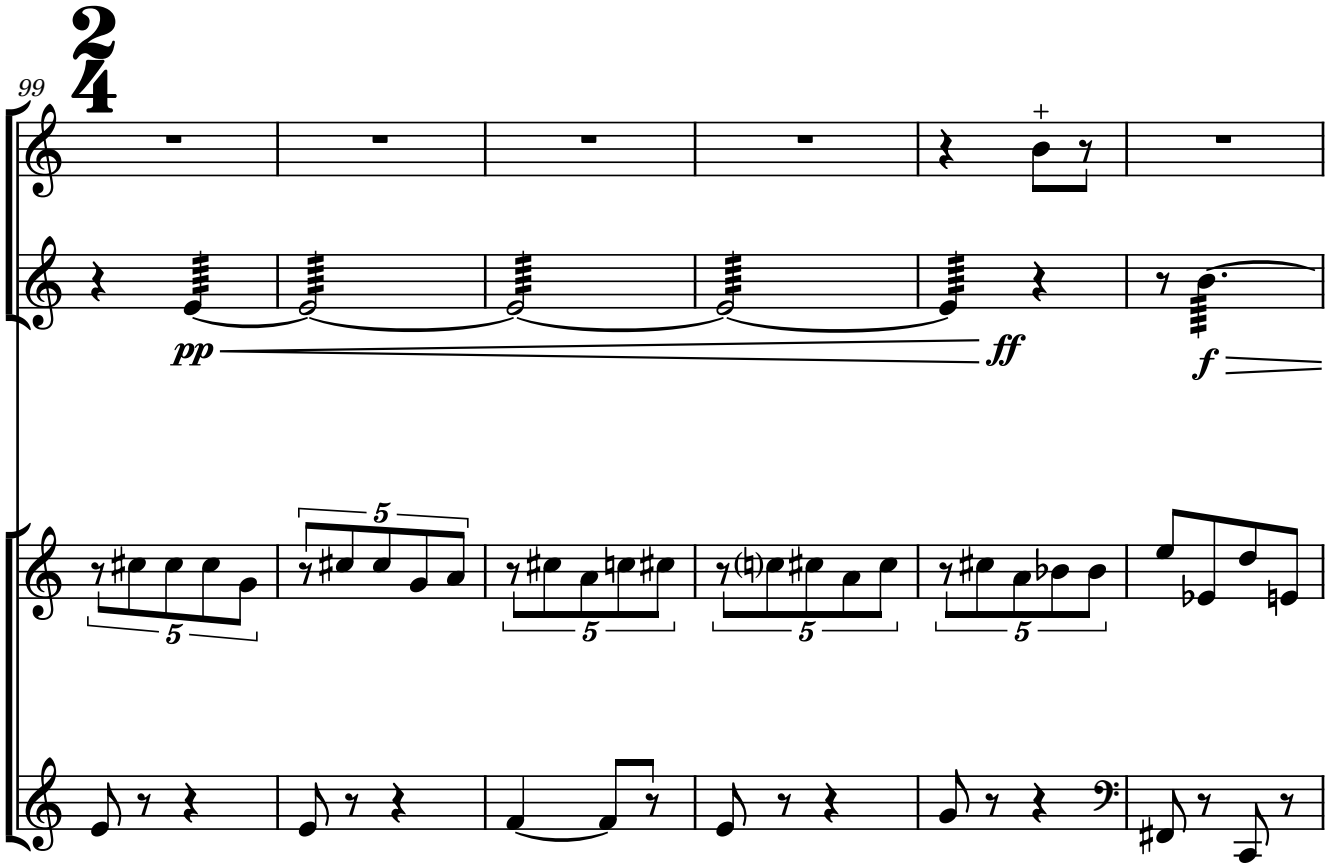

just 1
38
3/4
2/4
5/8
45
p
f
p cresc.
5

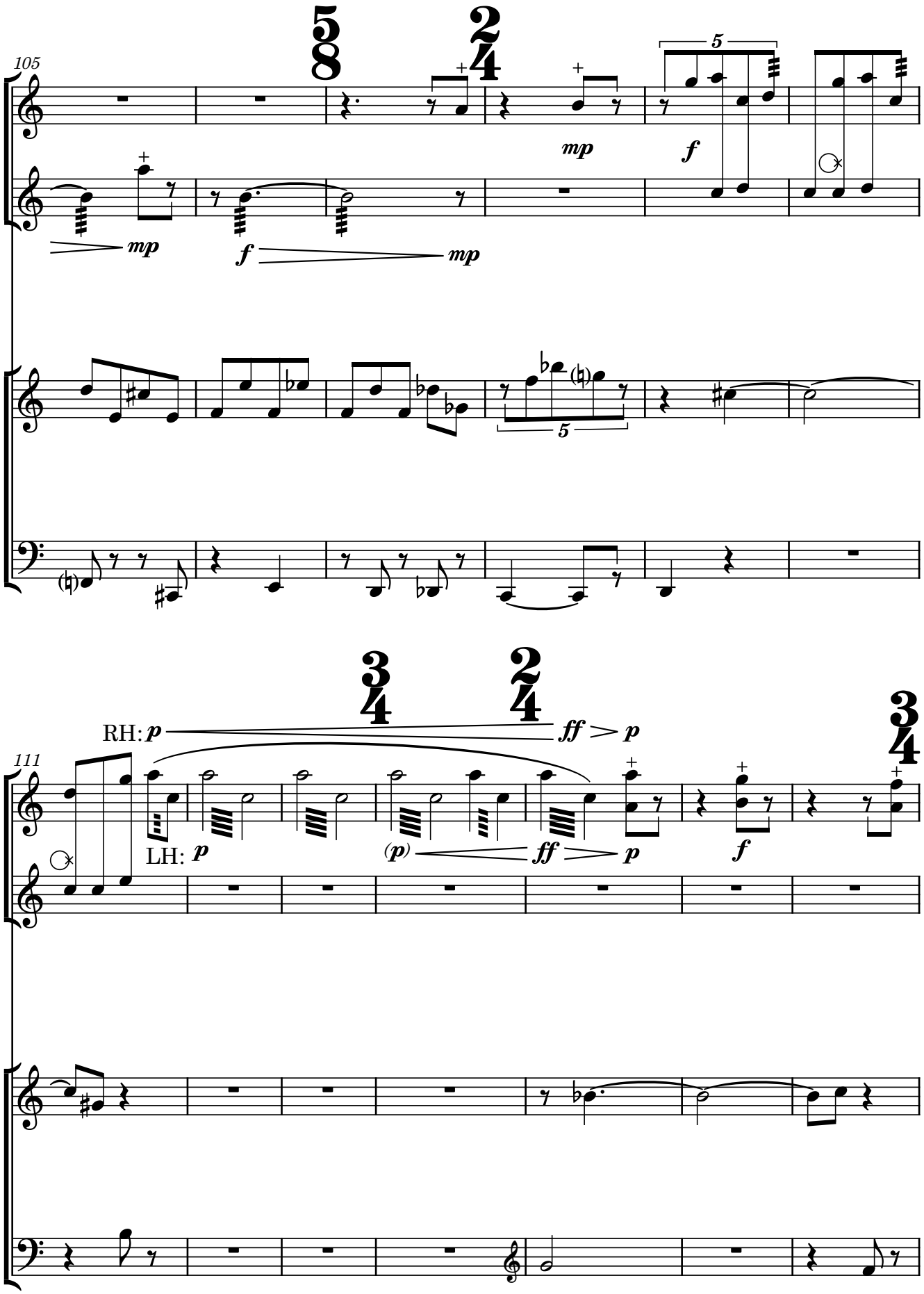

52
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
mp
f
59
5/8
2/4
p
f

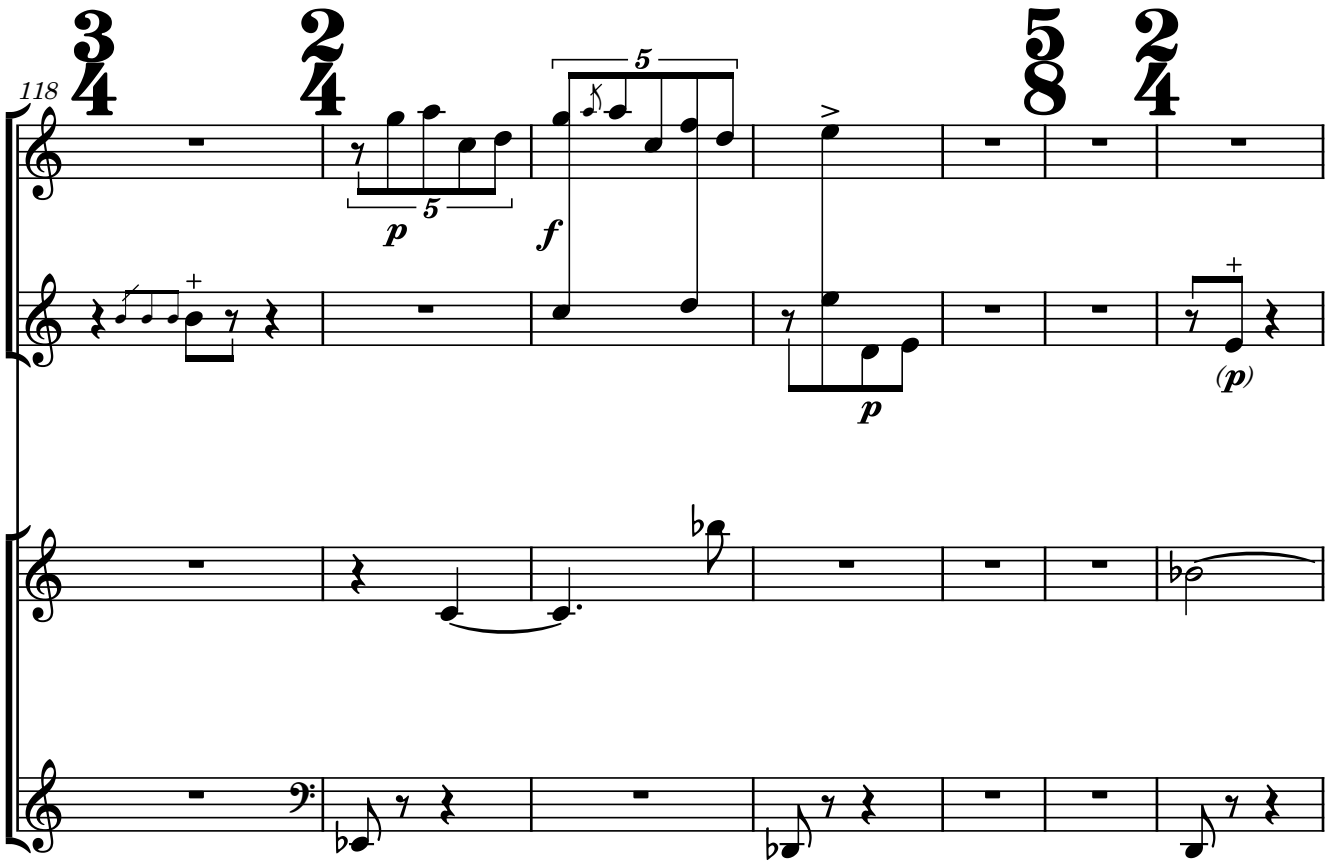

66
2
4
♩ = 150
5
73
♩ = 120
p sub.
f
5
f
5
f
p

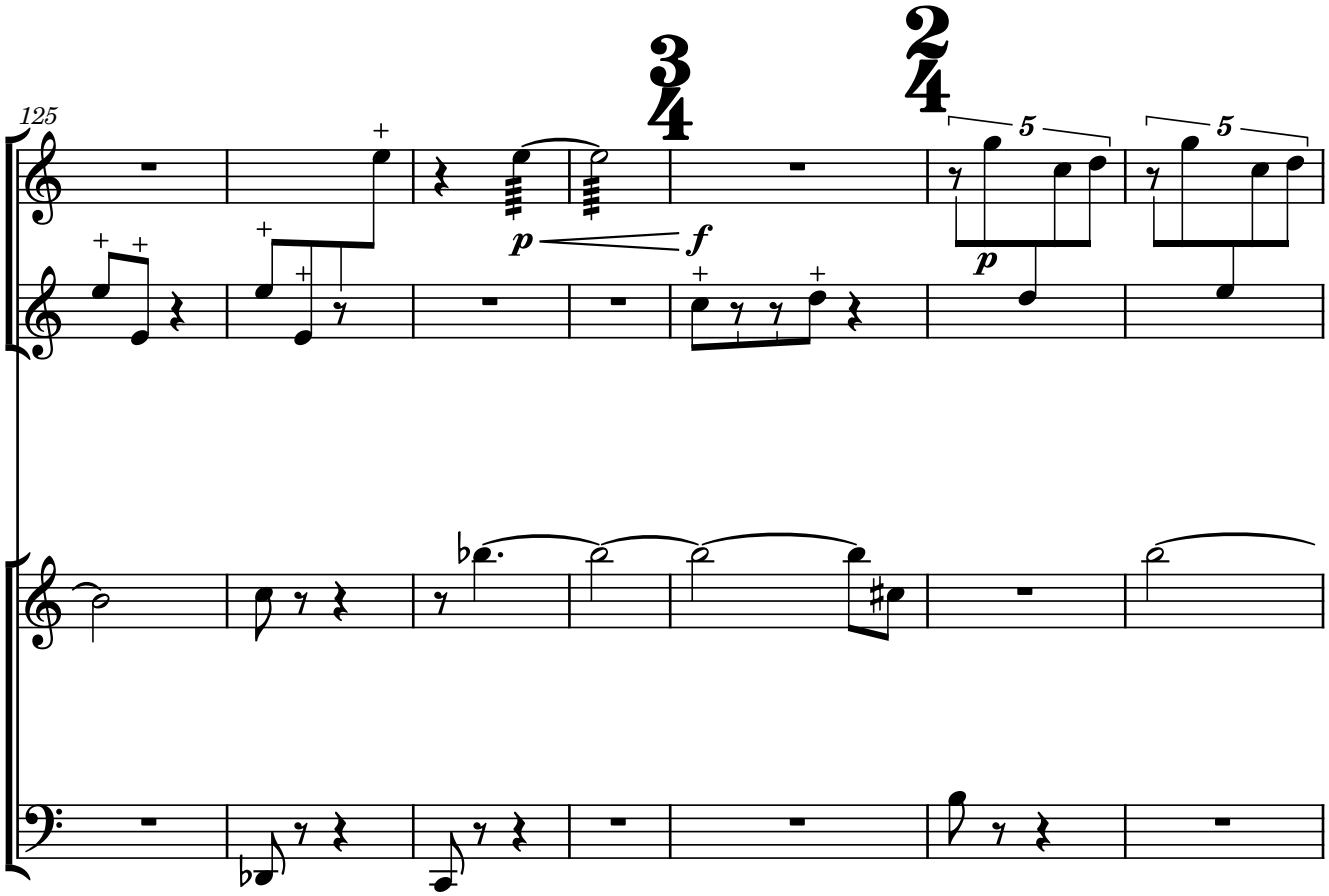

80
88
A
= 124

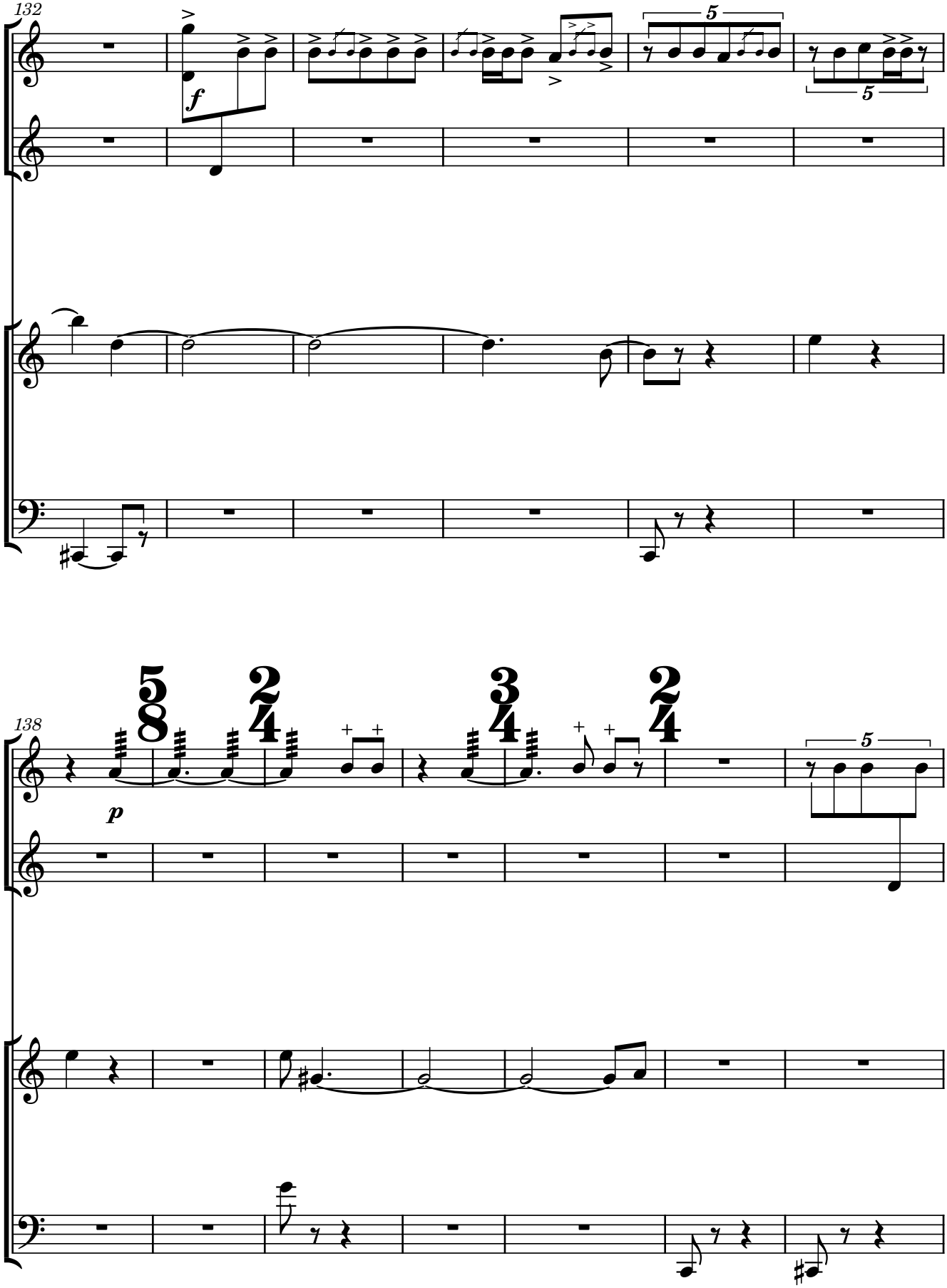

93
f > < f > < f < ff

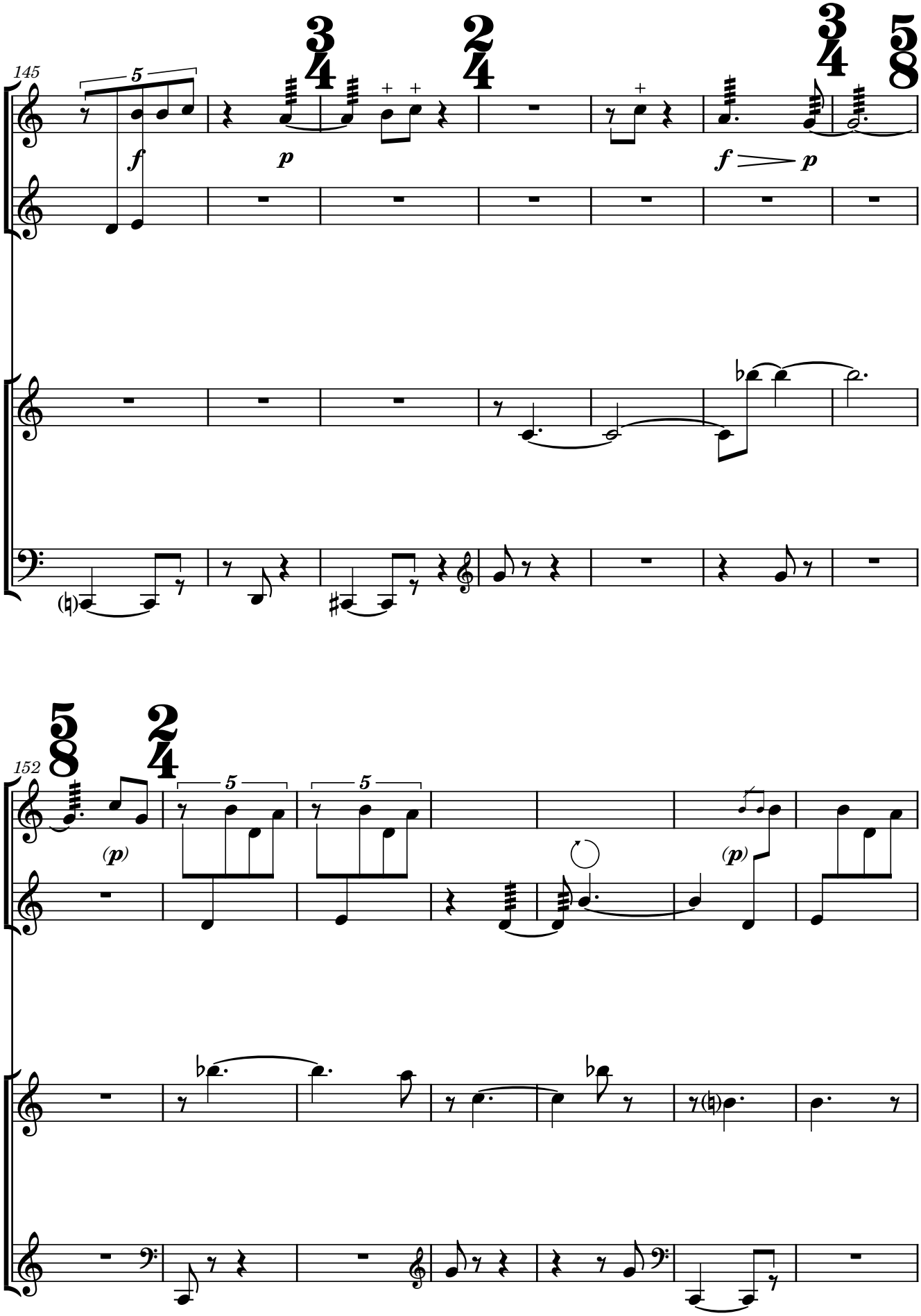

99
pp
ff
f

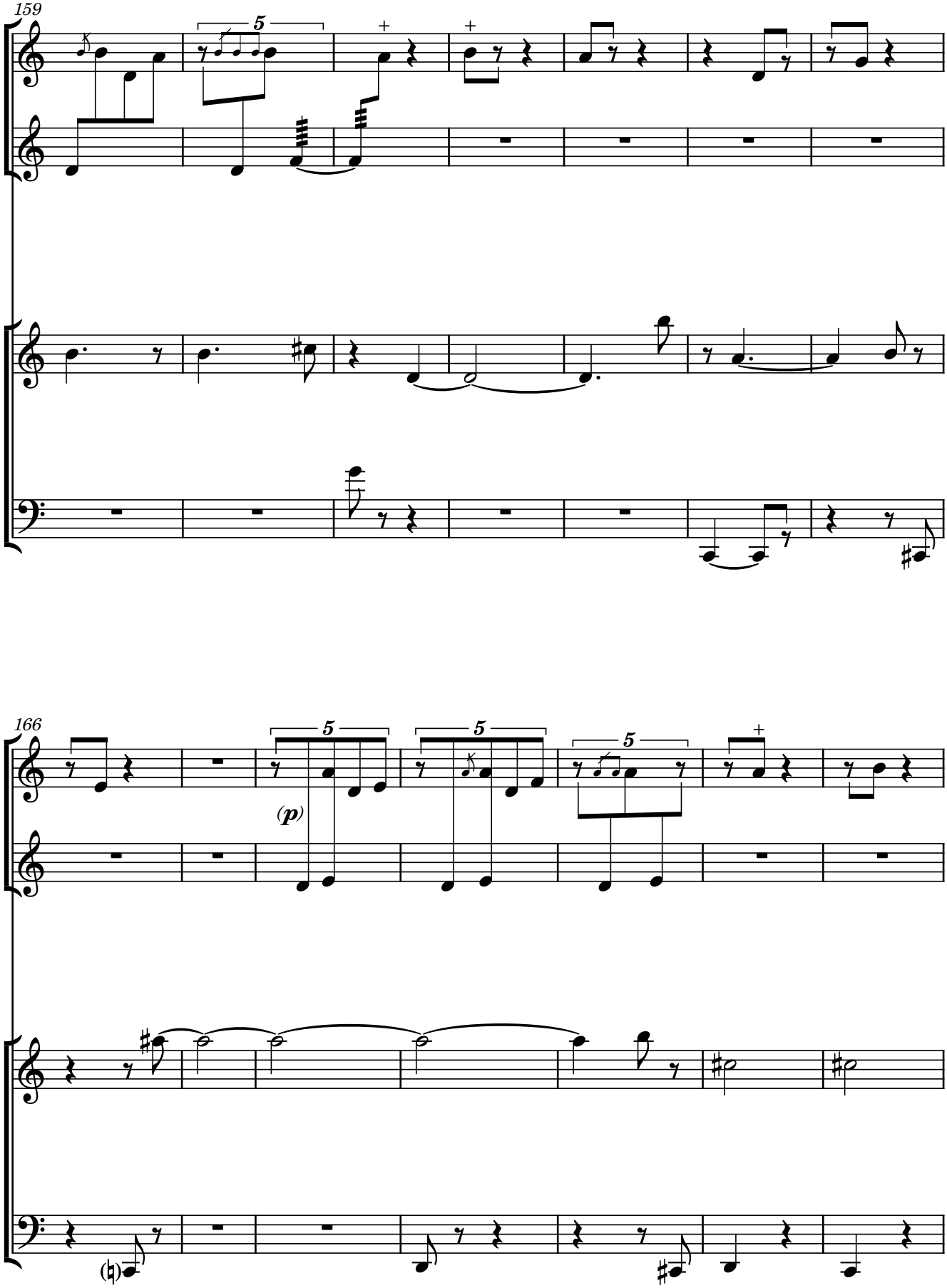

105
5/8
2/4
mp
f
mp
f
mp
5
5
111
3/4
2/4
3/4
RH: p
ff
p
LH: p
(p)
ff
p
f

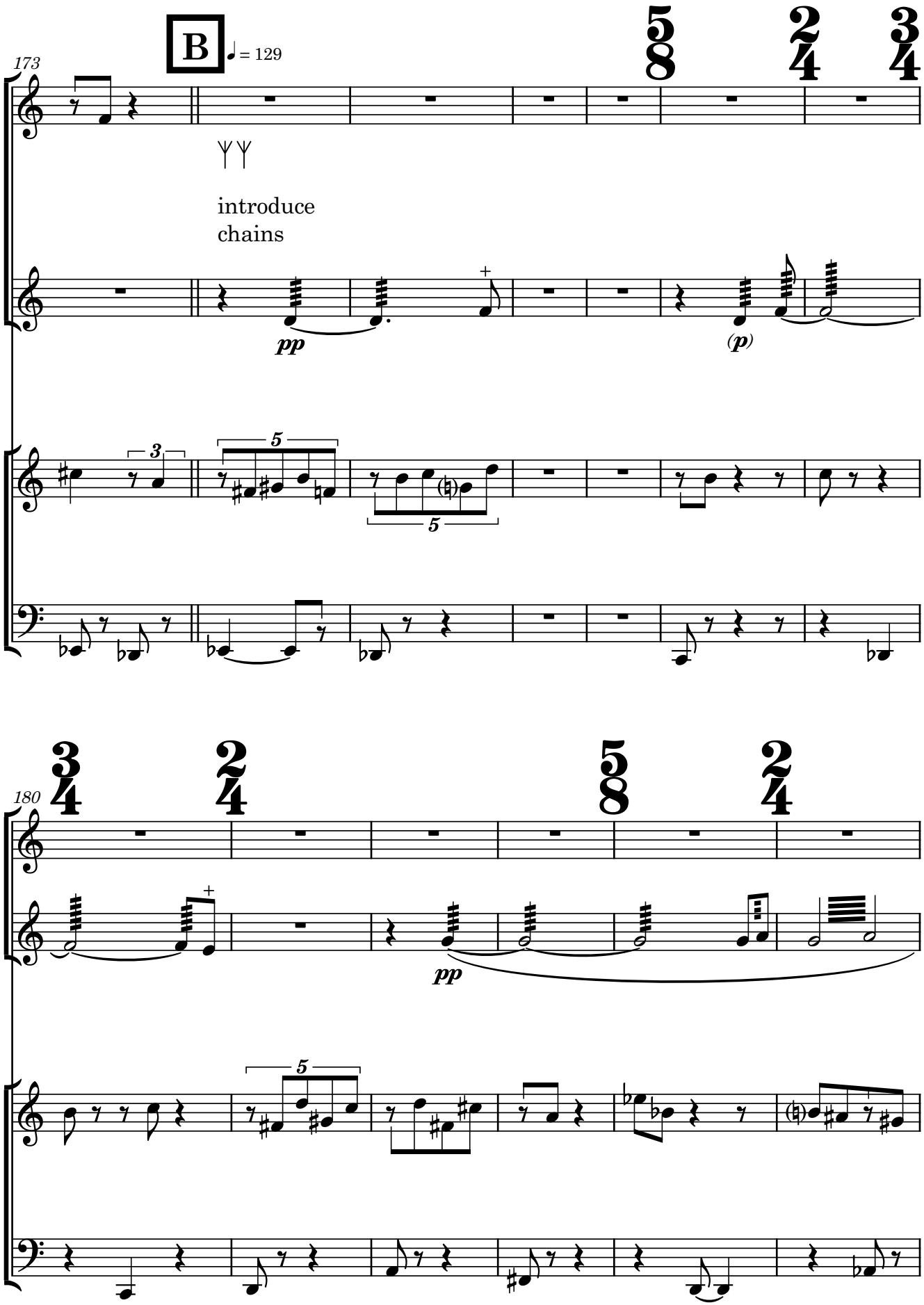

118
3/4
2/4
5
p
5
f
5/8
2/4
(p)

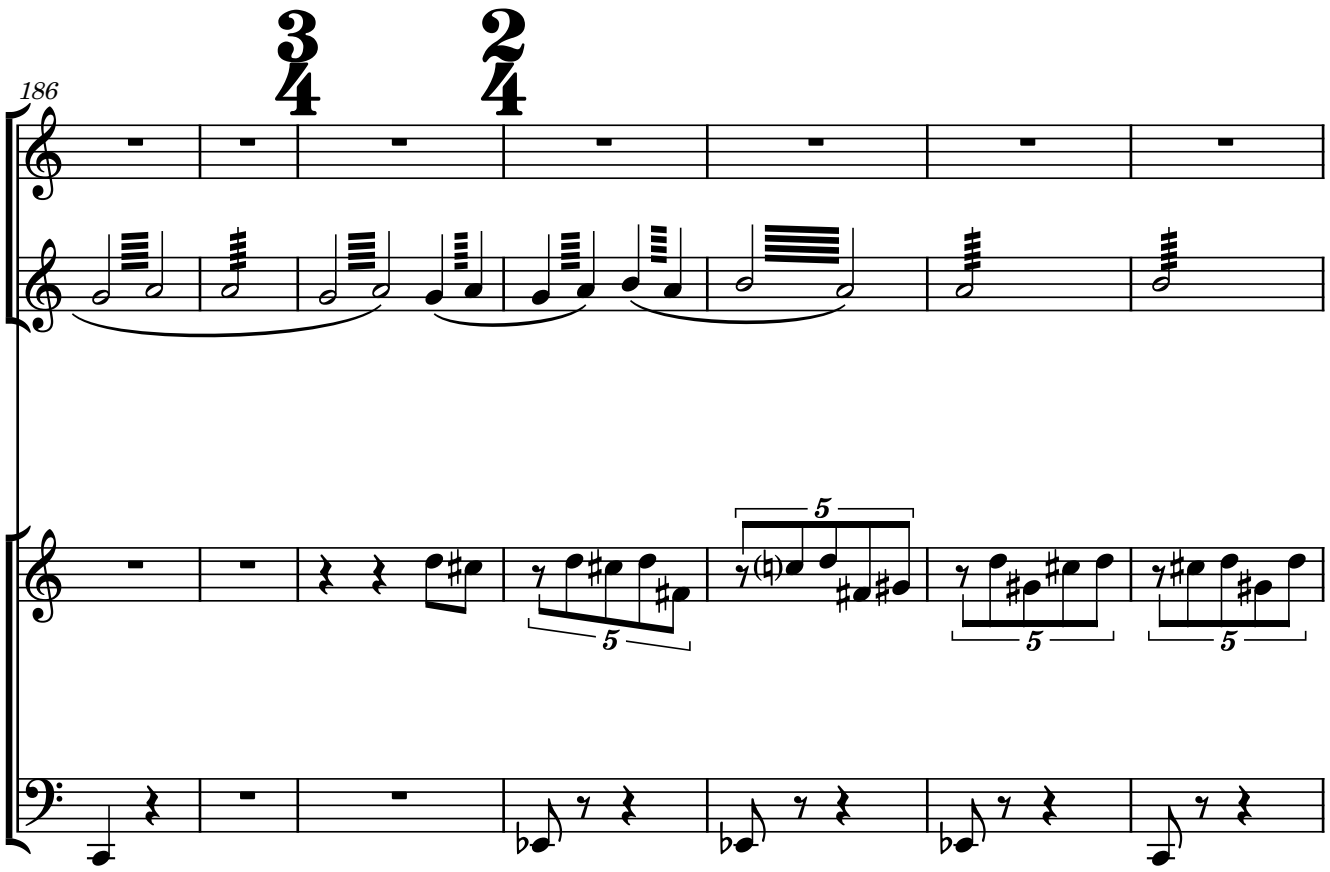

125
3/4
p
f
2/4
5
p
5

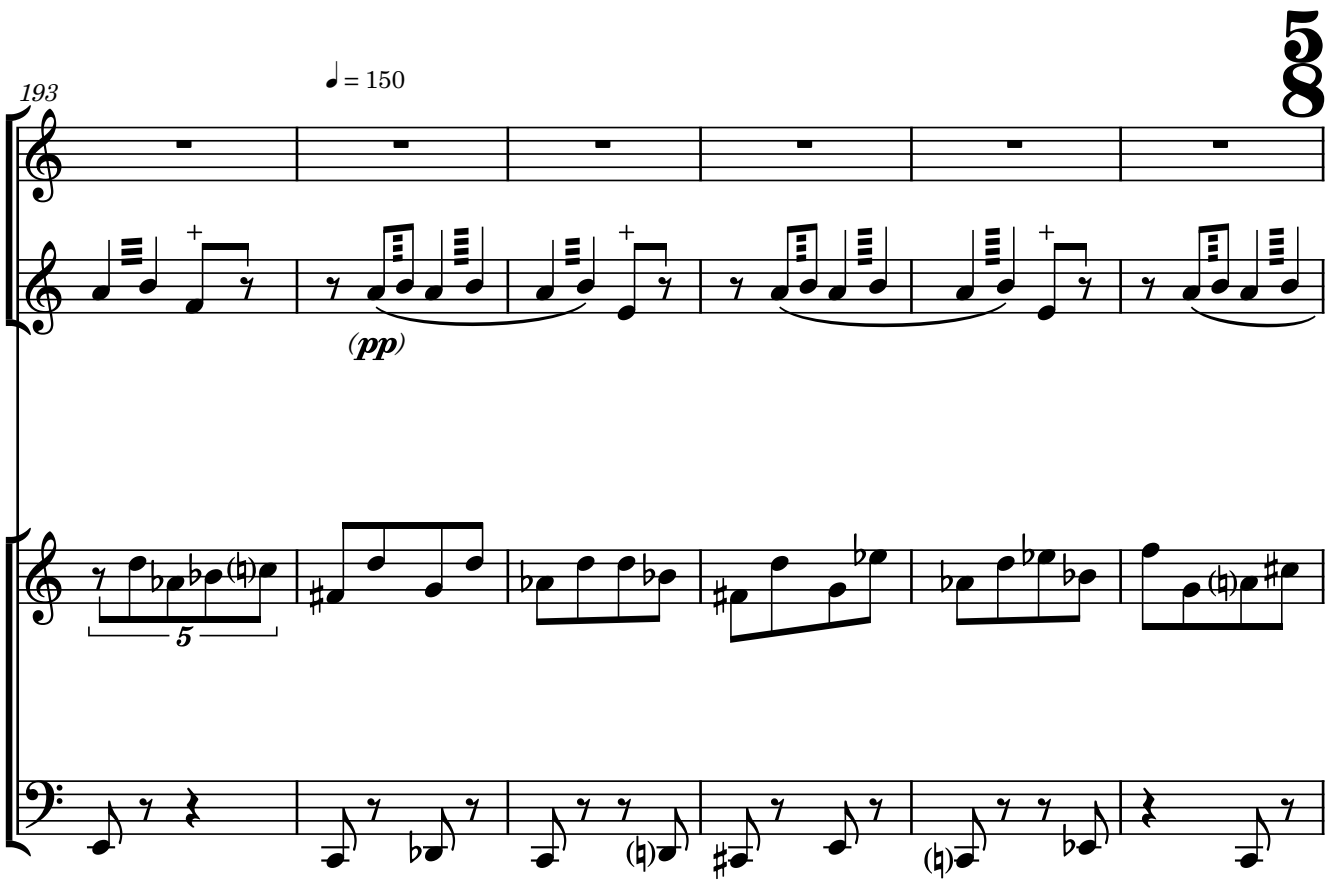

132
f
5
5
138
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
p
5

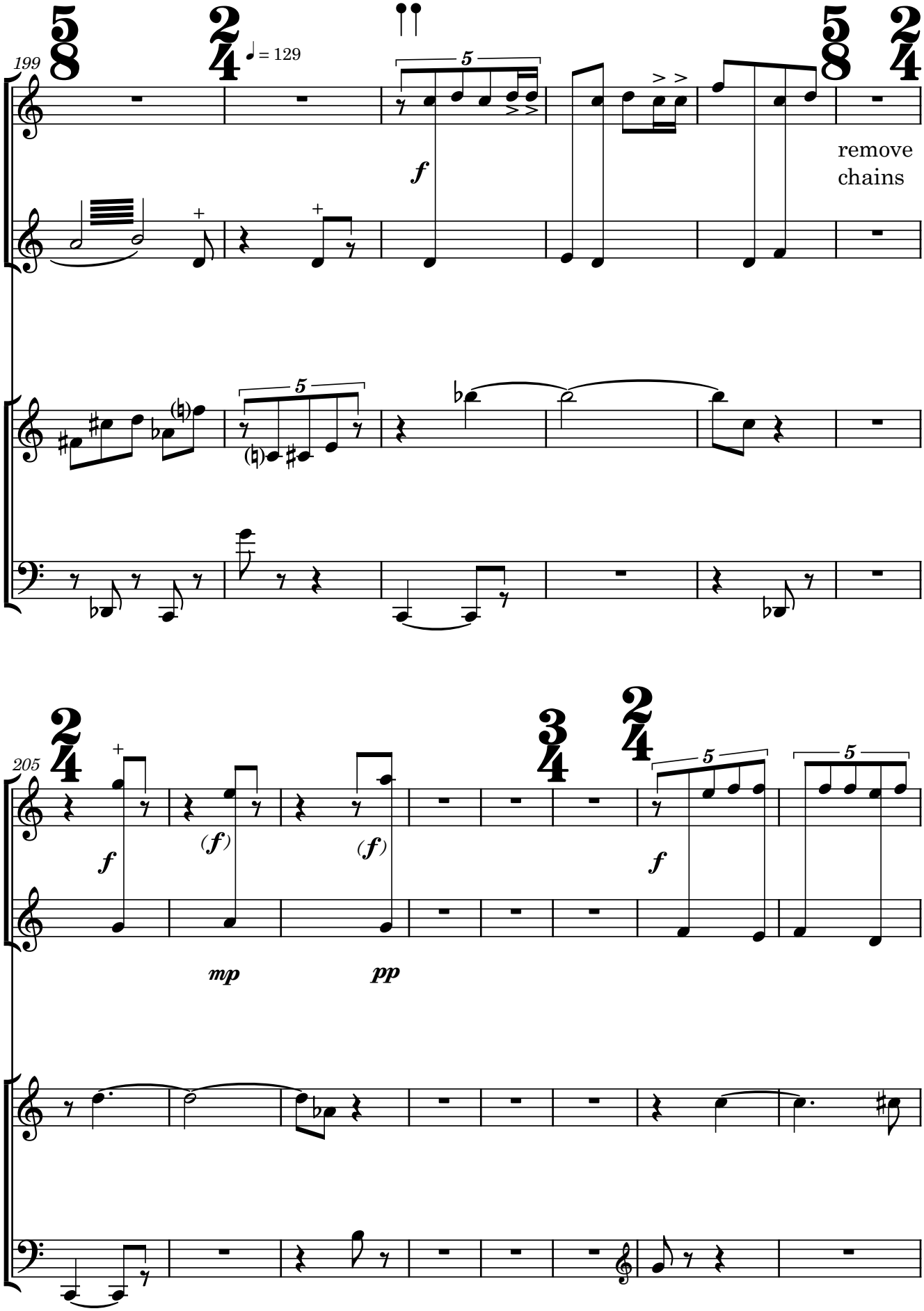

145
5
f
p
f
p
152
5
5
(p)
(p)

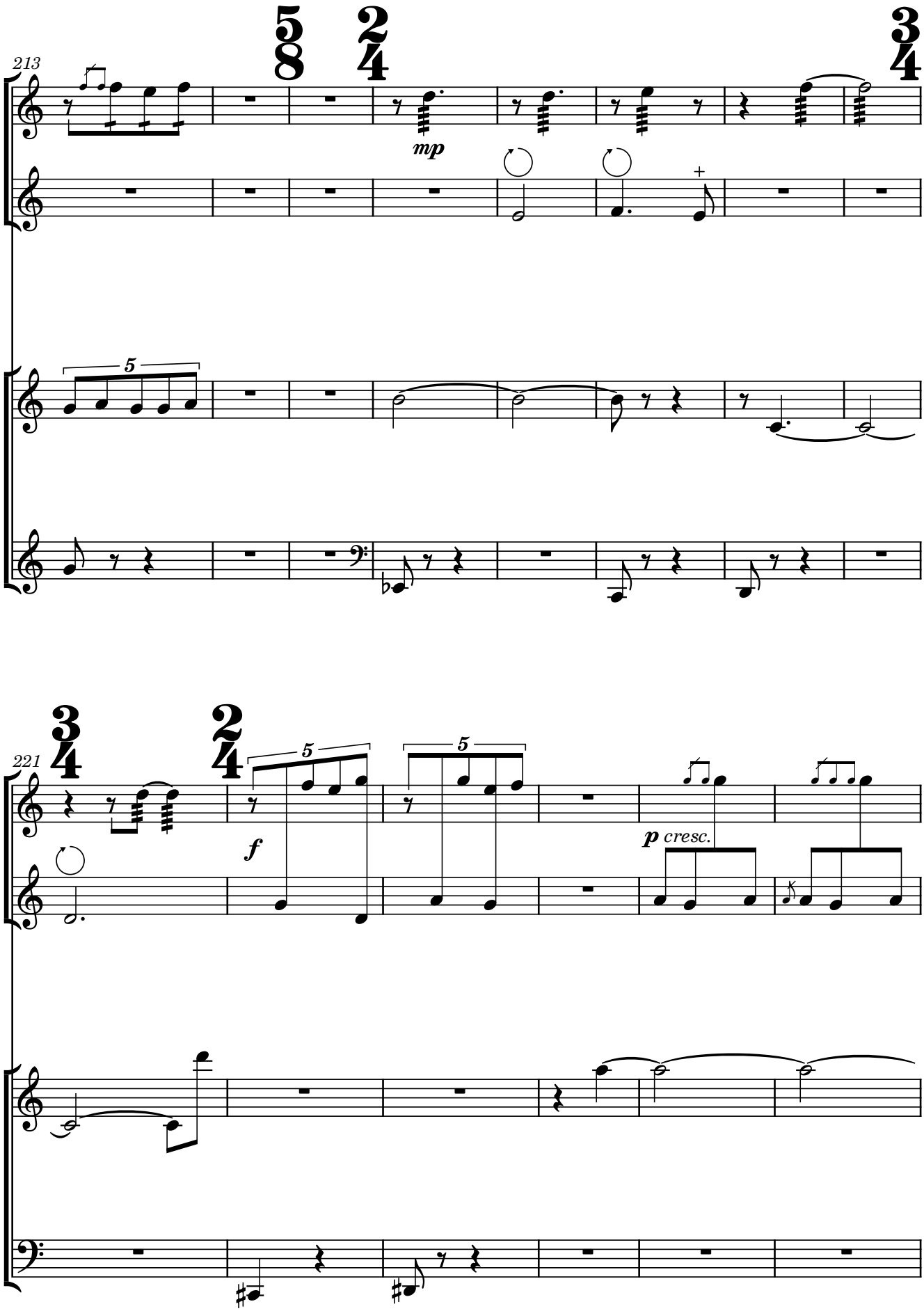

159
5
+
+
166
5
5
5
+
(p)

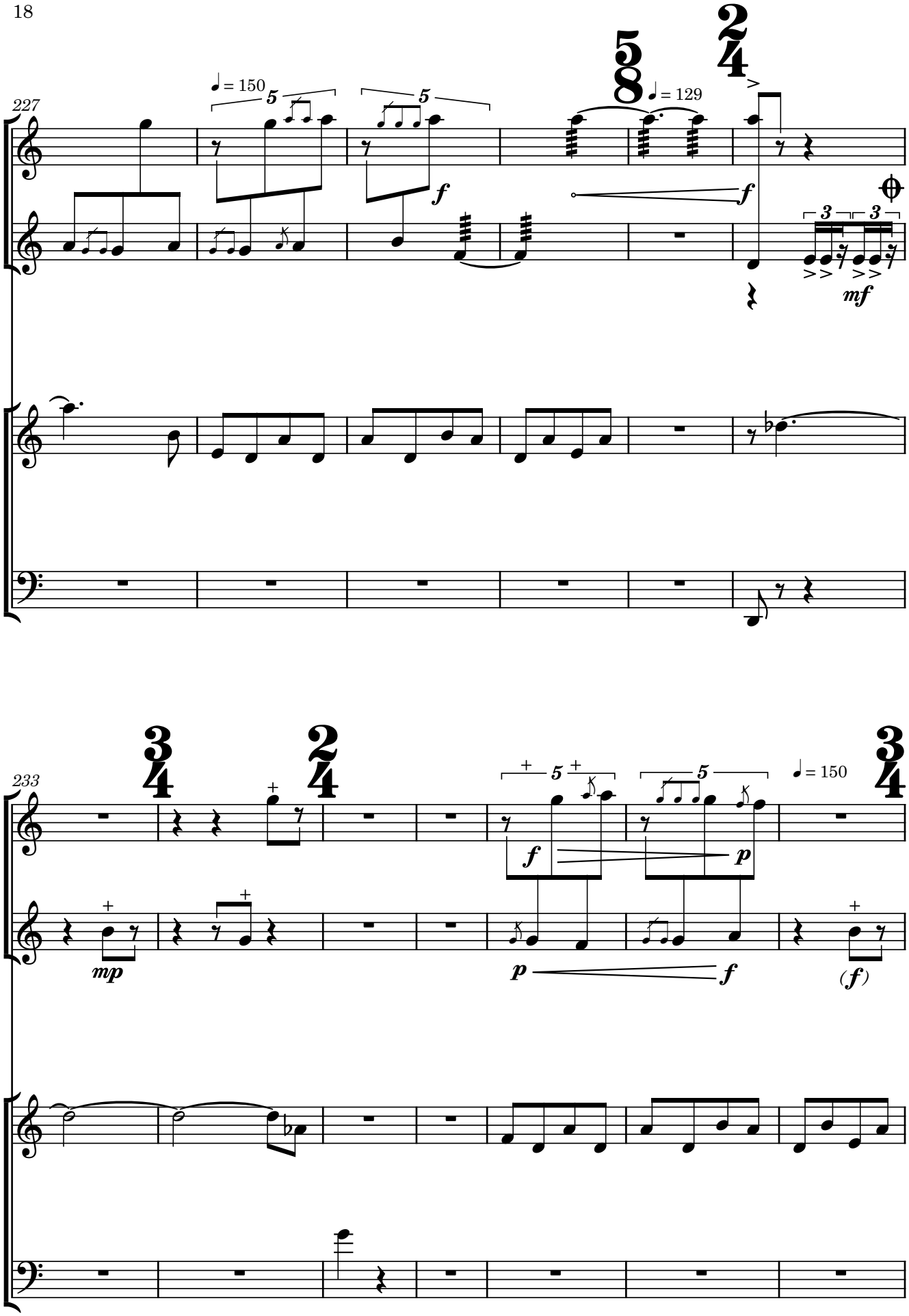

B
= 129
173
introduce
chains
pp
(p)
180
pp

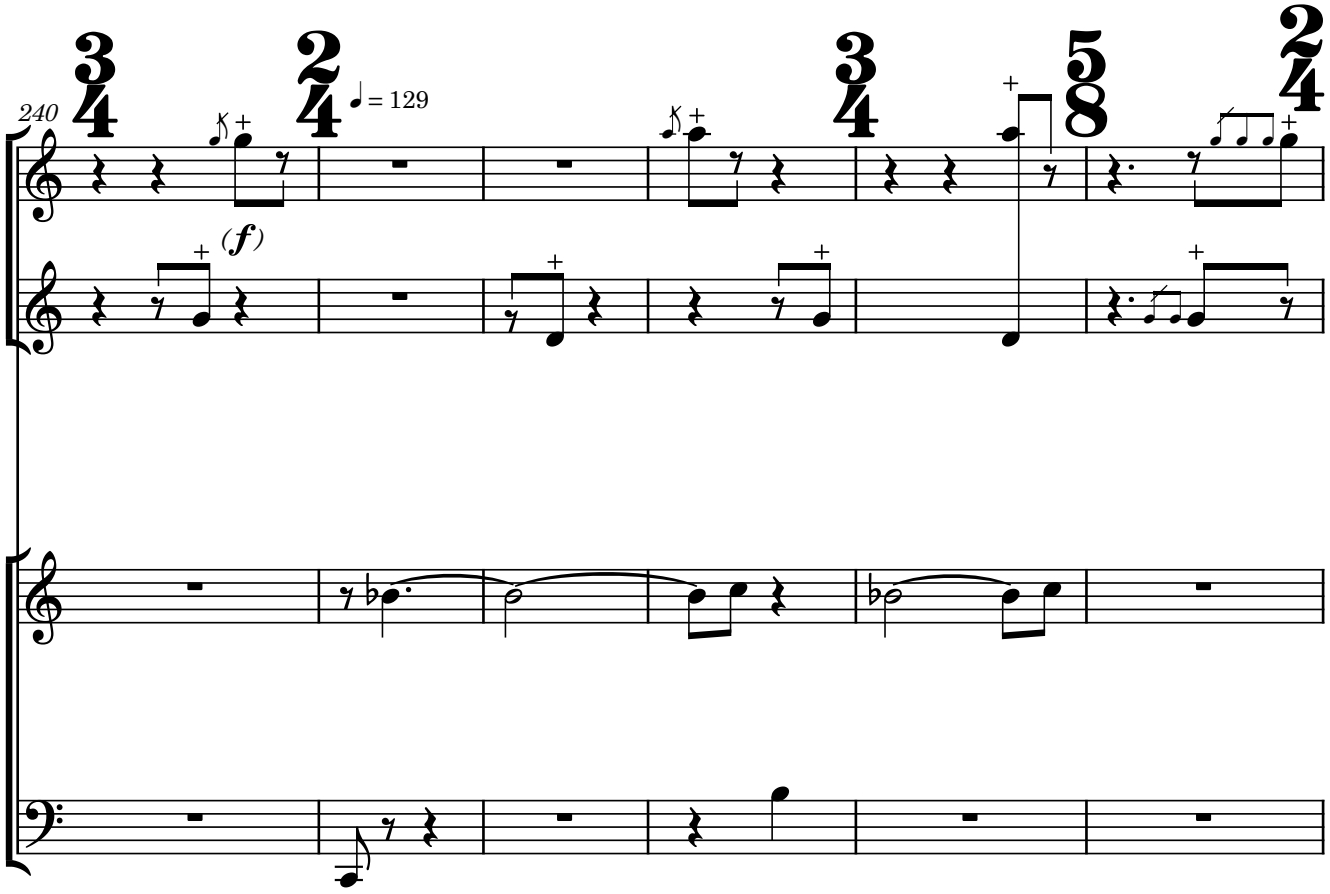

186
3/4
2/4
5
5
5
5

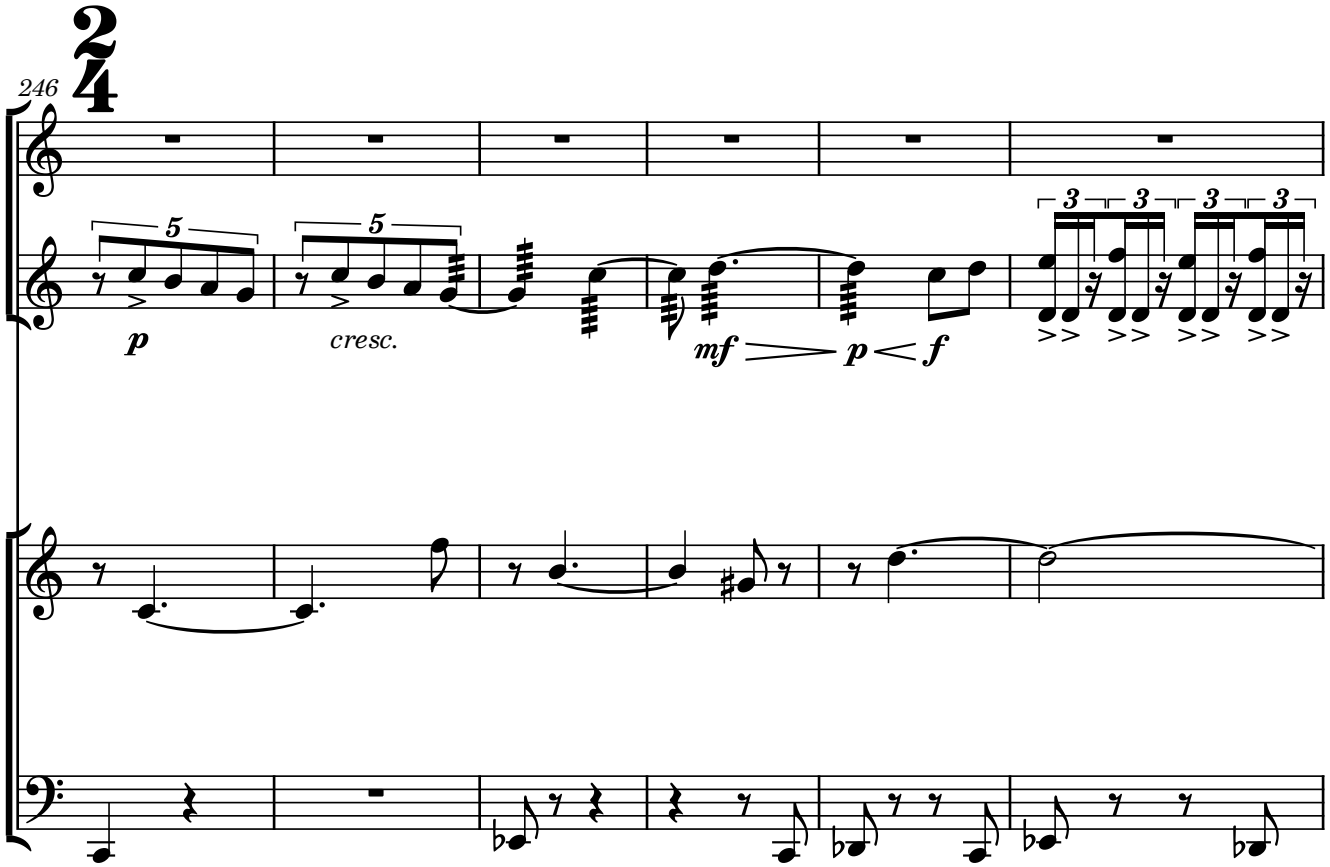

193
♩ = 150
5/8
(pp)
5

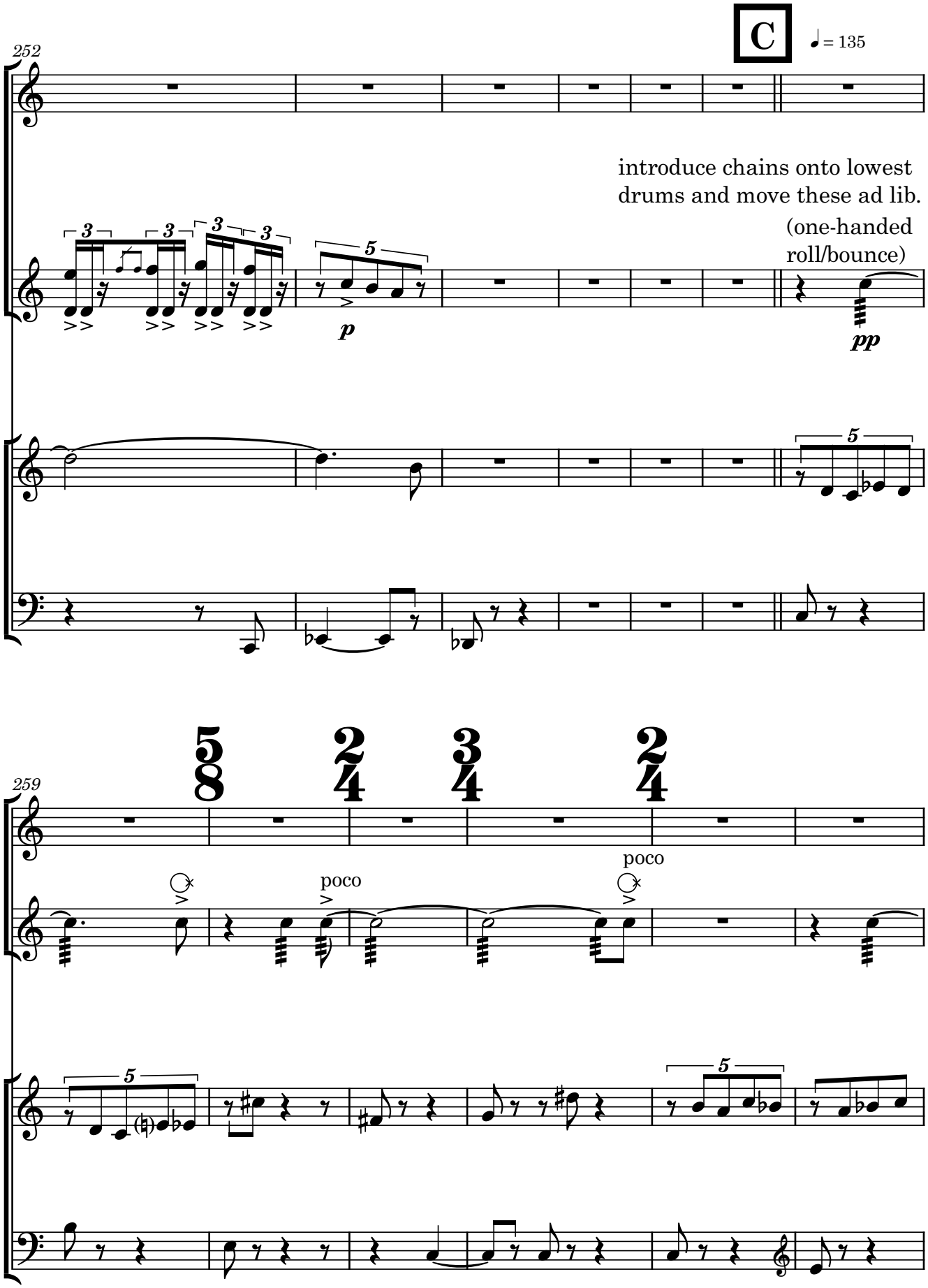

199
5/8
2/4
♩ = 129
5
f
remove
chains
205
2/4
3/4
2/4
(f)
(f)
f
f
mp
pp

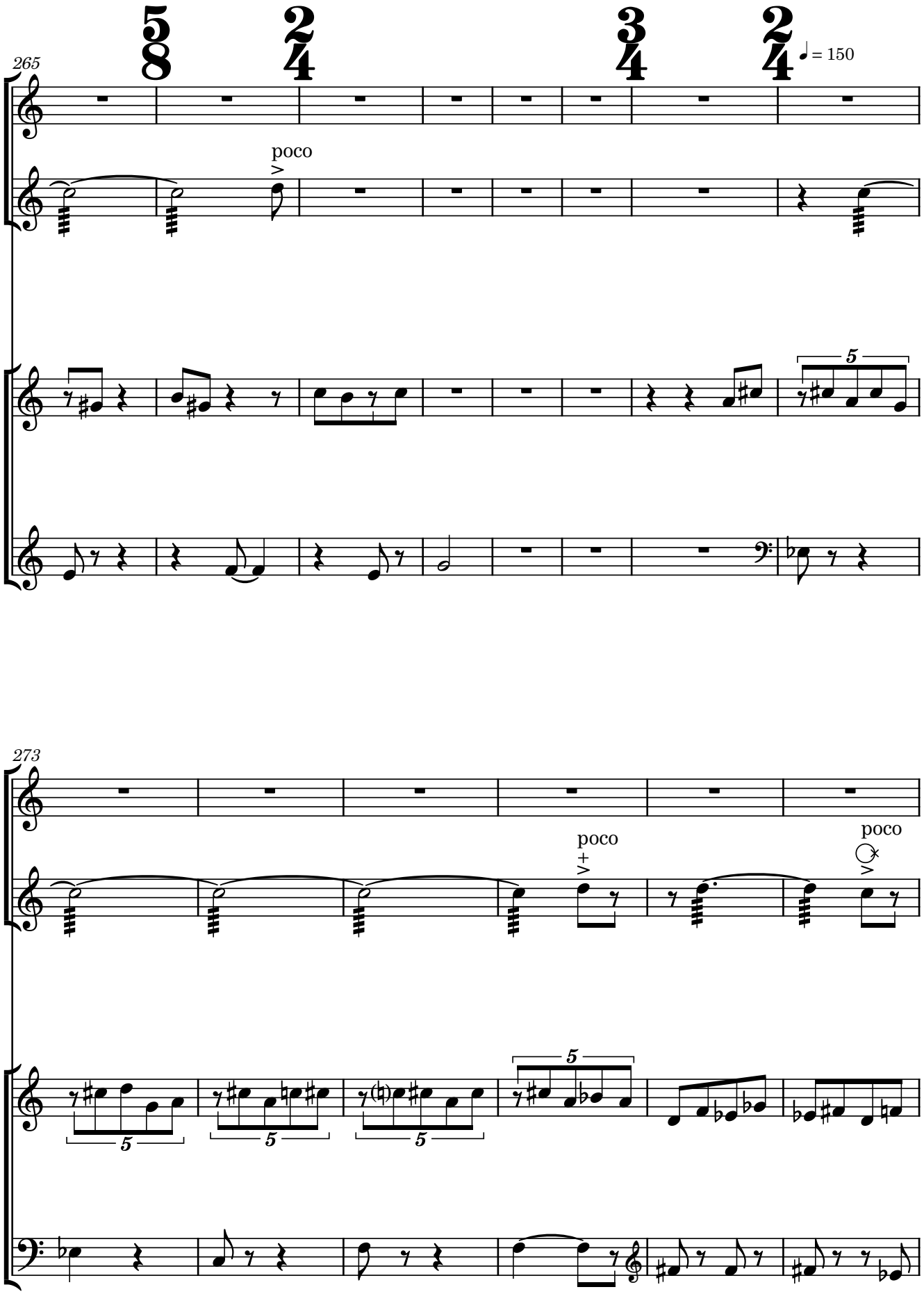

213
mp
221
f
p cresc.


227
♩ = 150
5
5
f
5/8
♩ = 129
f
2/4
3
3
mf
233
3/4
2/4
mp
5
5
f
p
p
f
♩ = 150
3/4
(f)


240
3/4
2/4
♩ = 129
3/4
5/8
2/4
(f)


246
2/4
5
5
p
cresc.
mf
p
f
3
3
3
3


C
♩ = 135
252
introduce chains onto lowest drums and move these ad lib.
(one-handed roll/bounce)
p
pp
259
poco
poco


265
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
♩ = 150
poco
5
273
poco
poco
5
5
5
5

279

♩ = 135

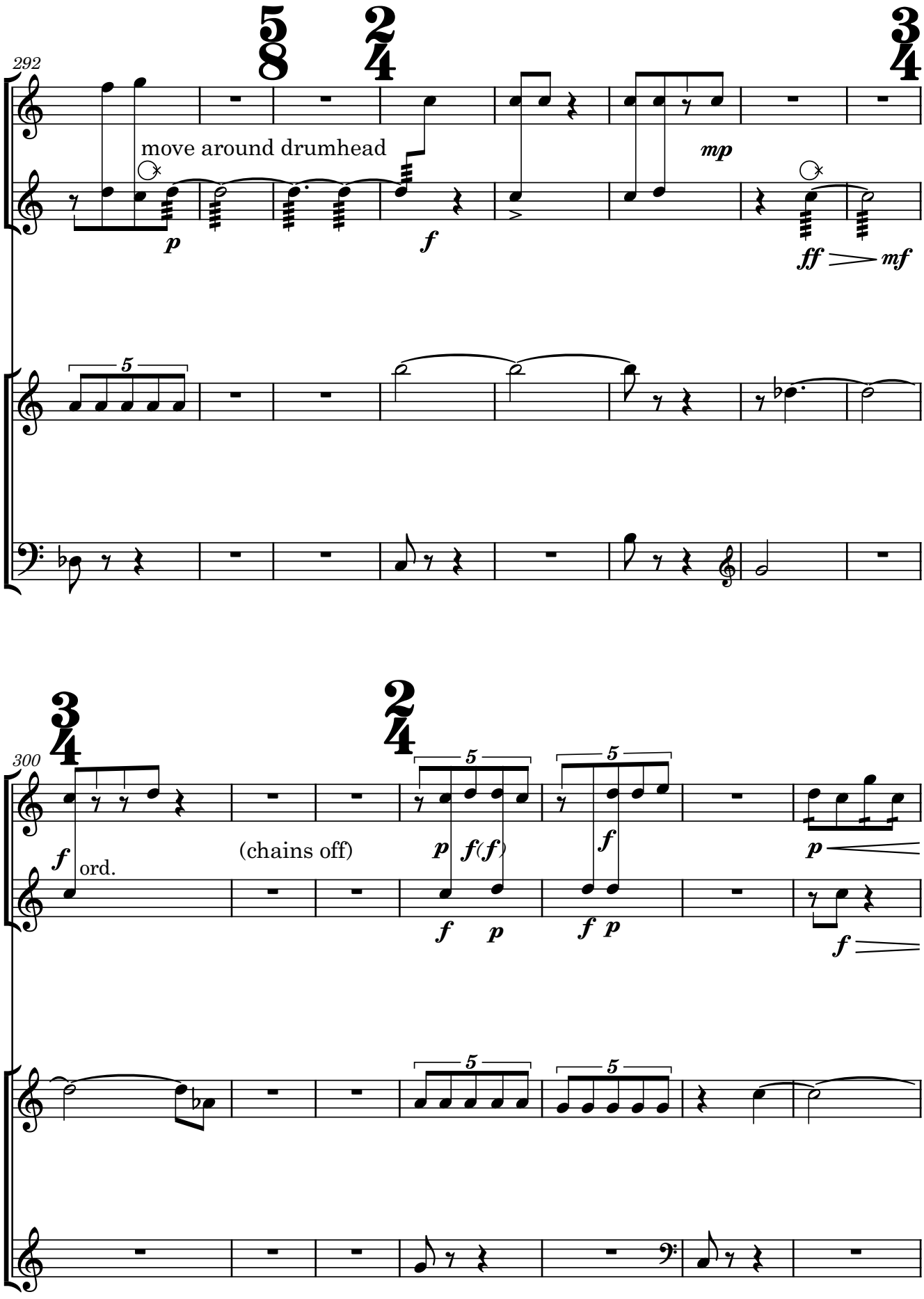
(one-handed indeterminate number of bounces)

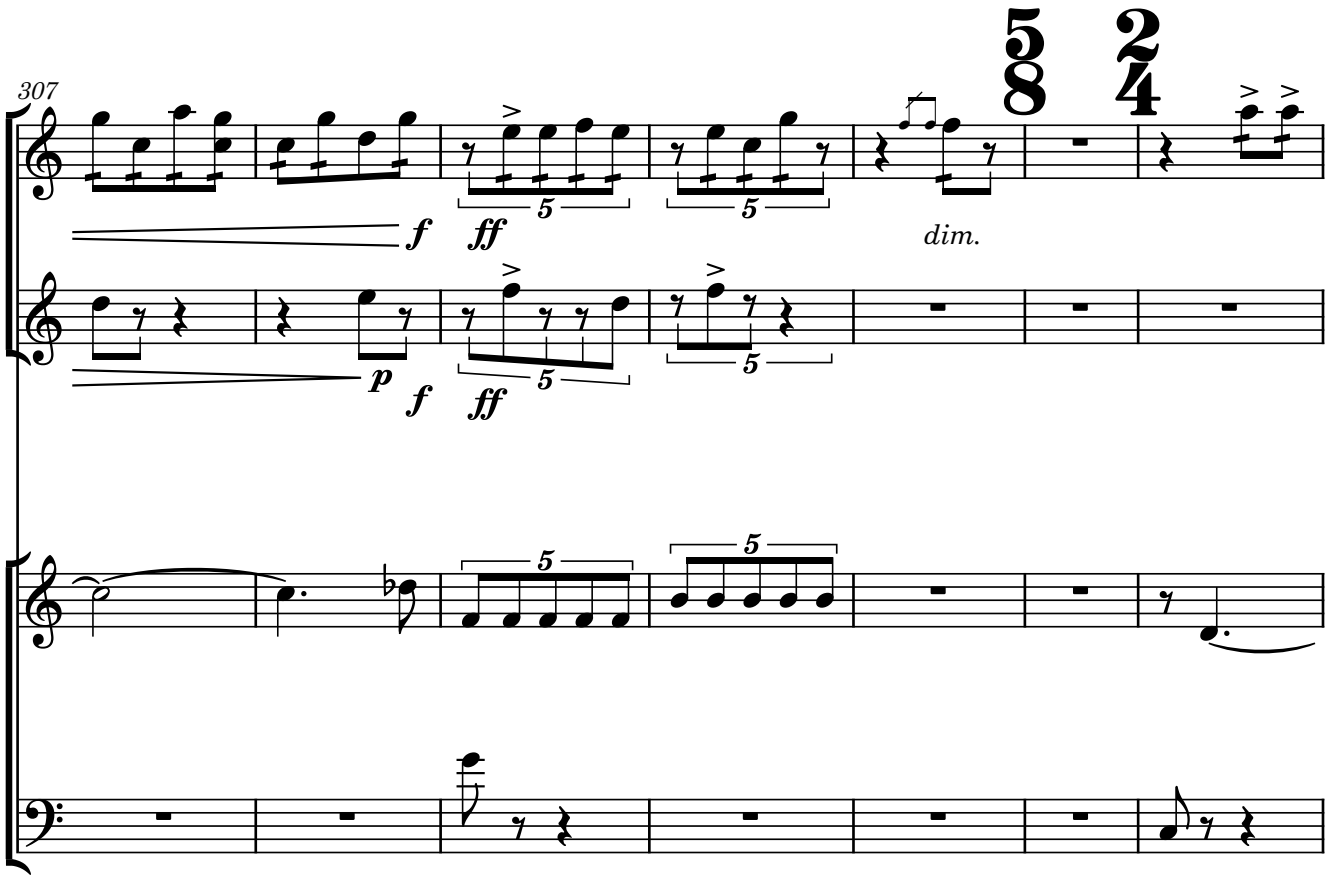
poco

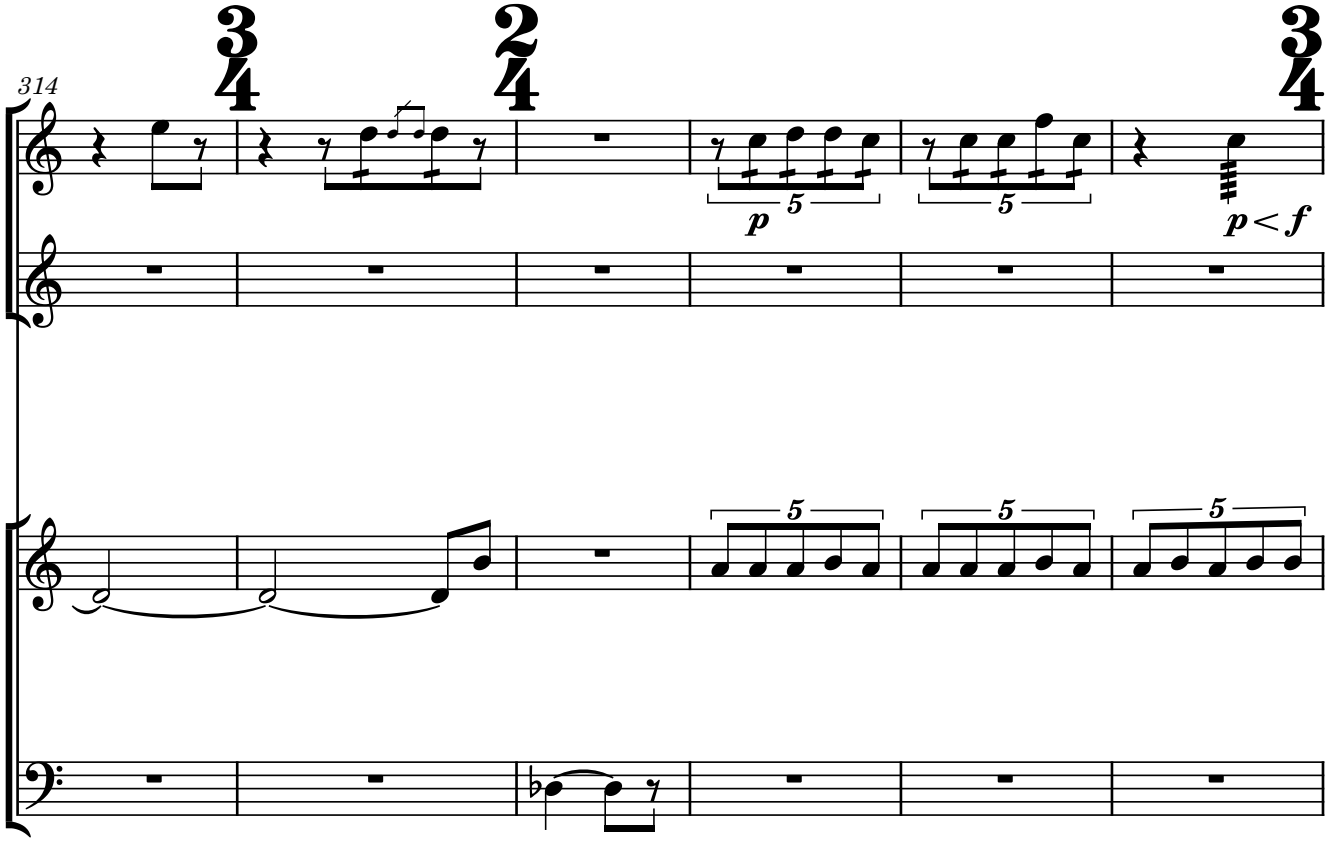
285

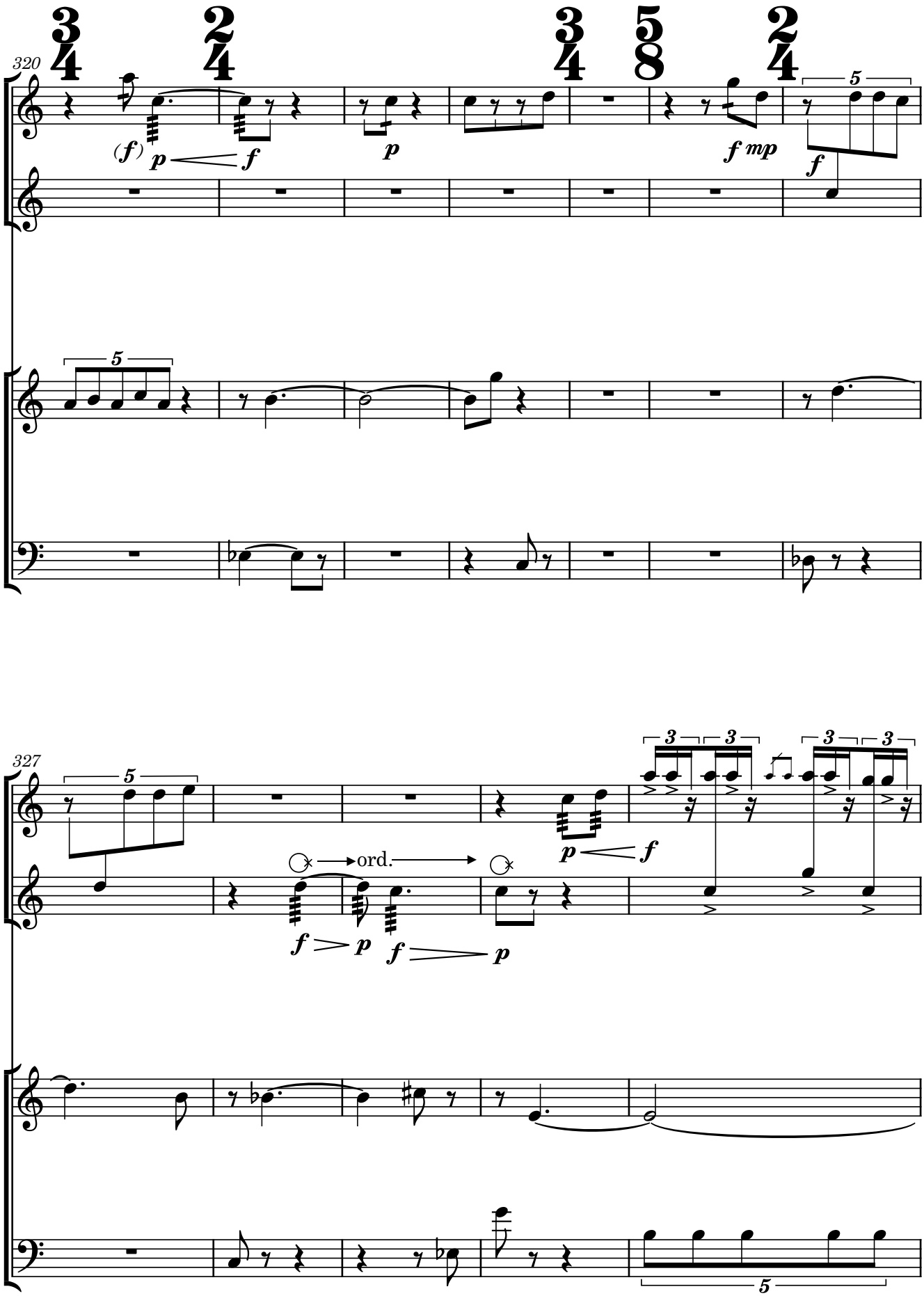
gradually remove chains (roll)

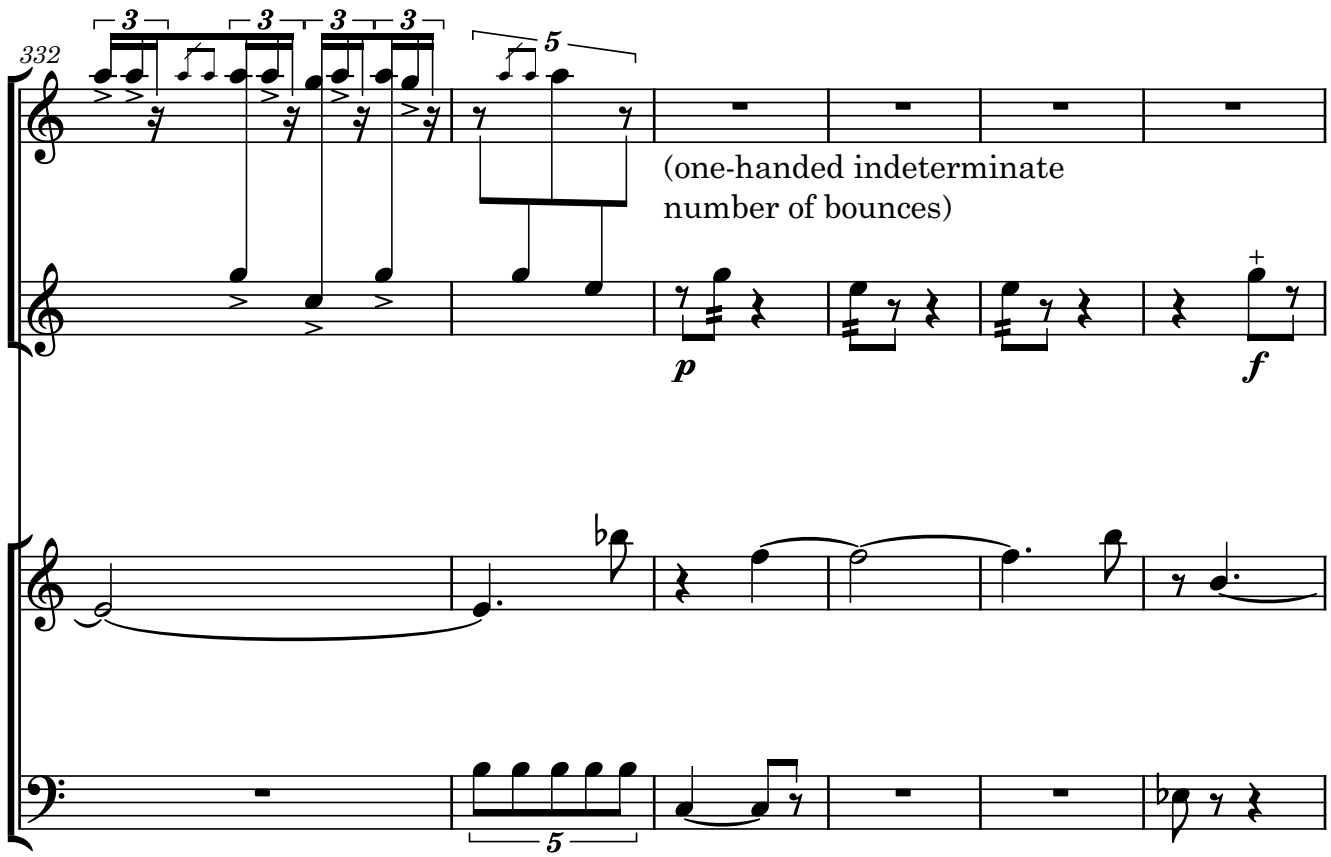
f

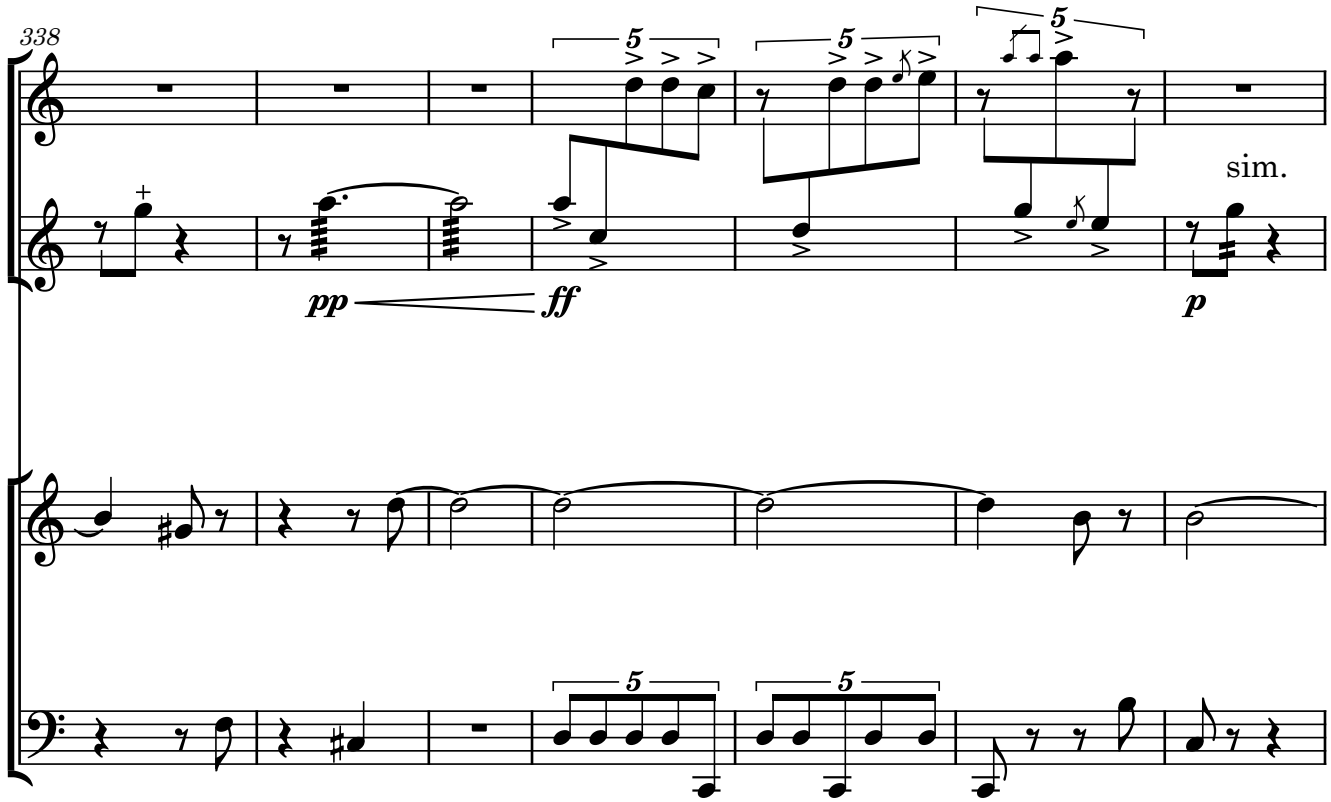

292
move around drumhead
p
f
mp
ff
mf
5
300
f
ord.
(chains off)
p
f(f)
f
p
f
p
f
5

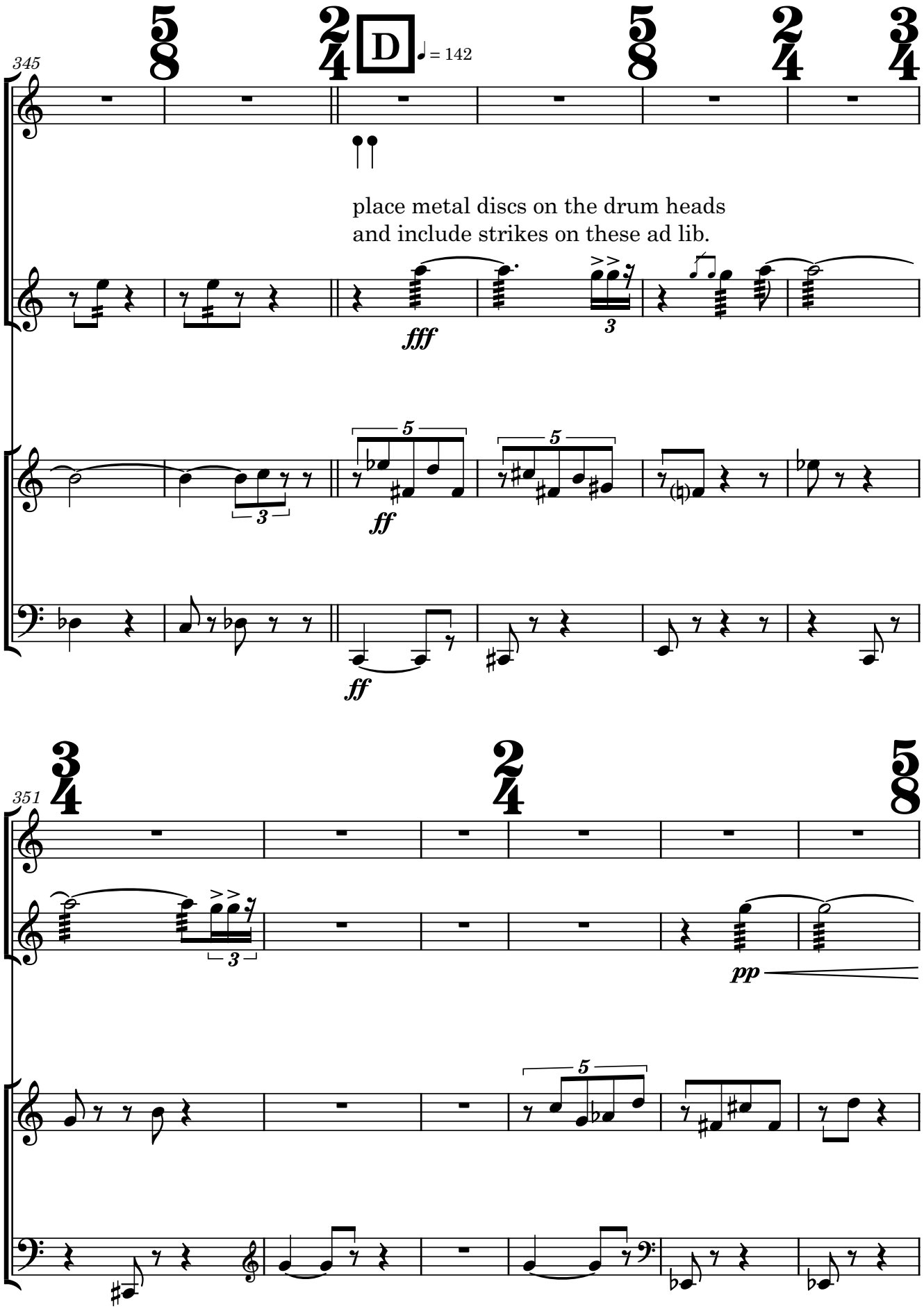

307
5/8
2/4
f
ff
dim.
p
f
ff

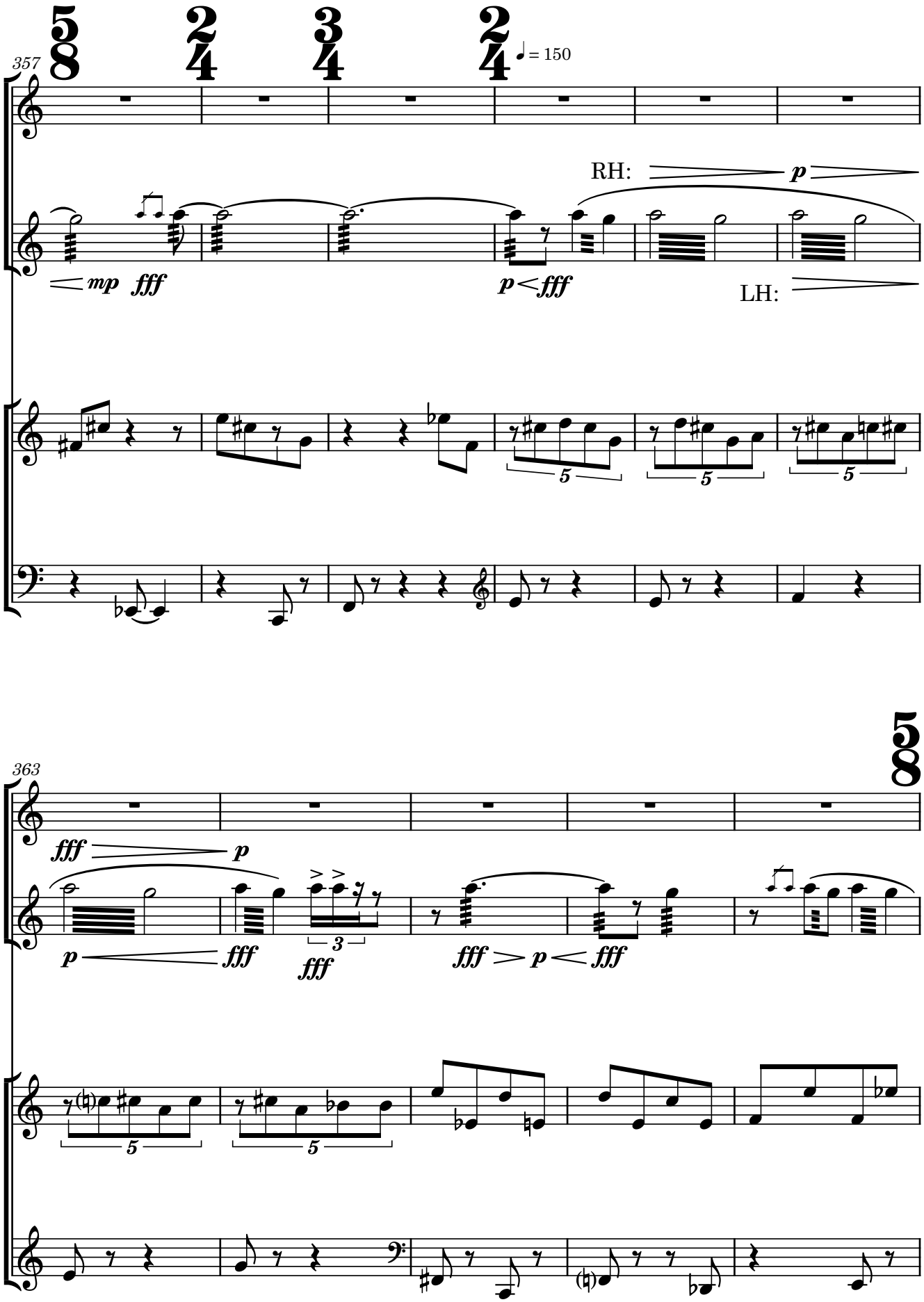

314
3/4
2/4
3/4
p
p < f

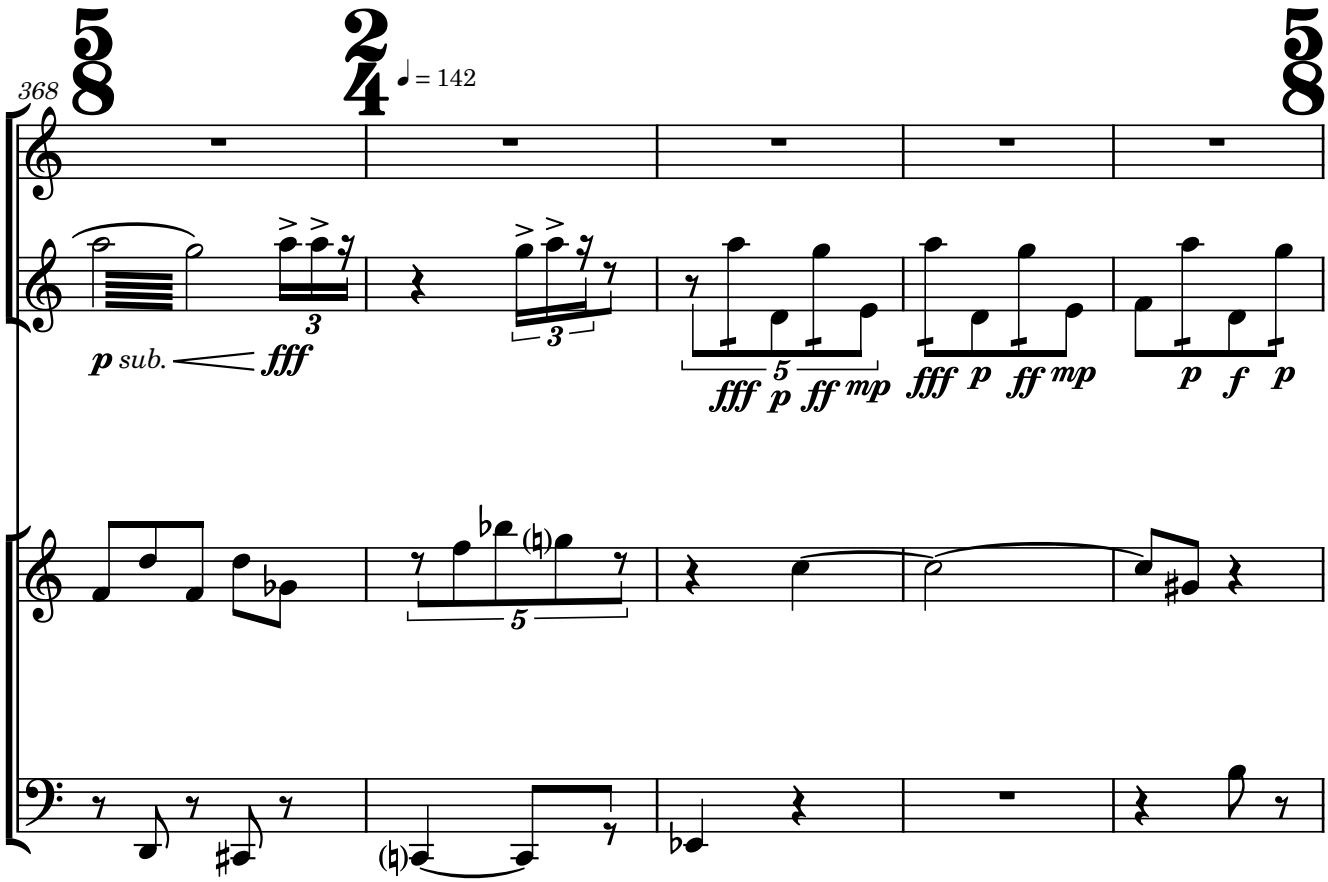

320
(f)
p
f
p
f mp
f
5
5
327
5
p
f
3
3
3
3
ord.
f
p
f
p
5

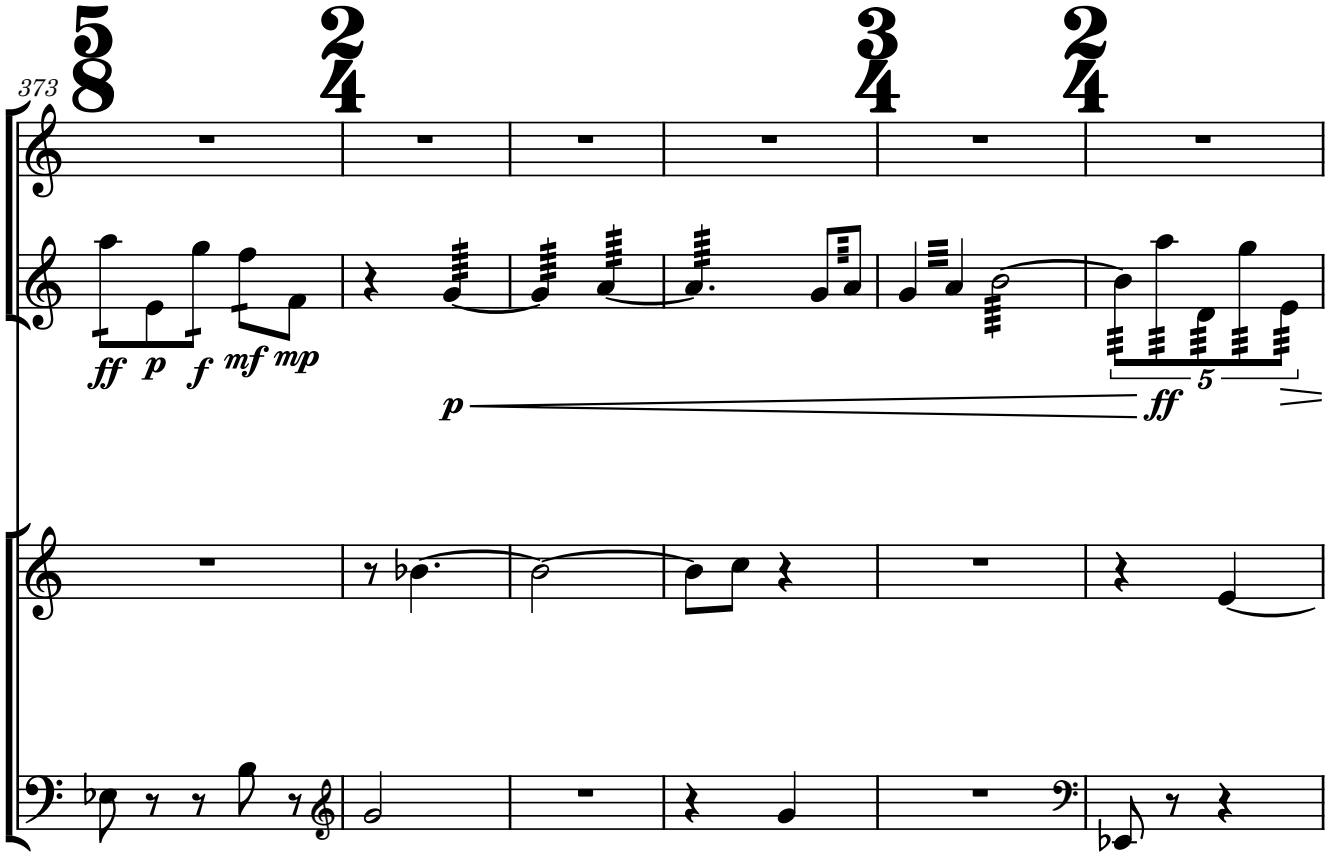

332
(one-handed indeterminate
number of bounces)
p
f

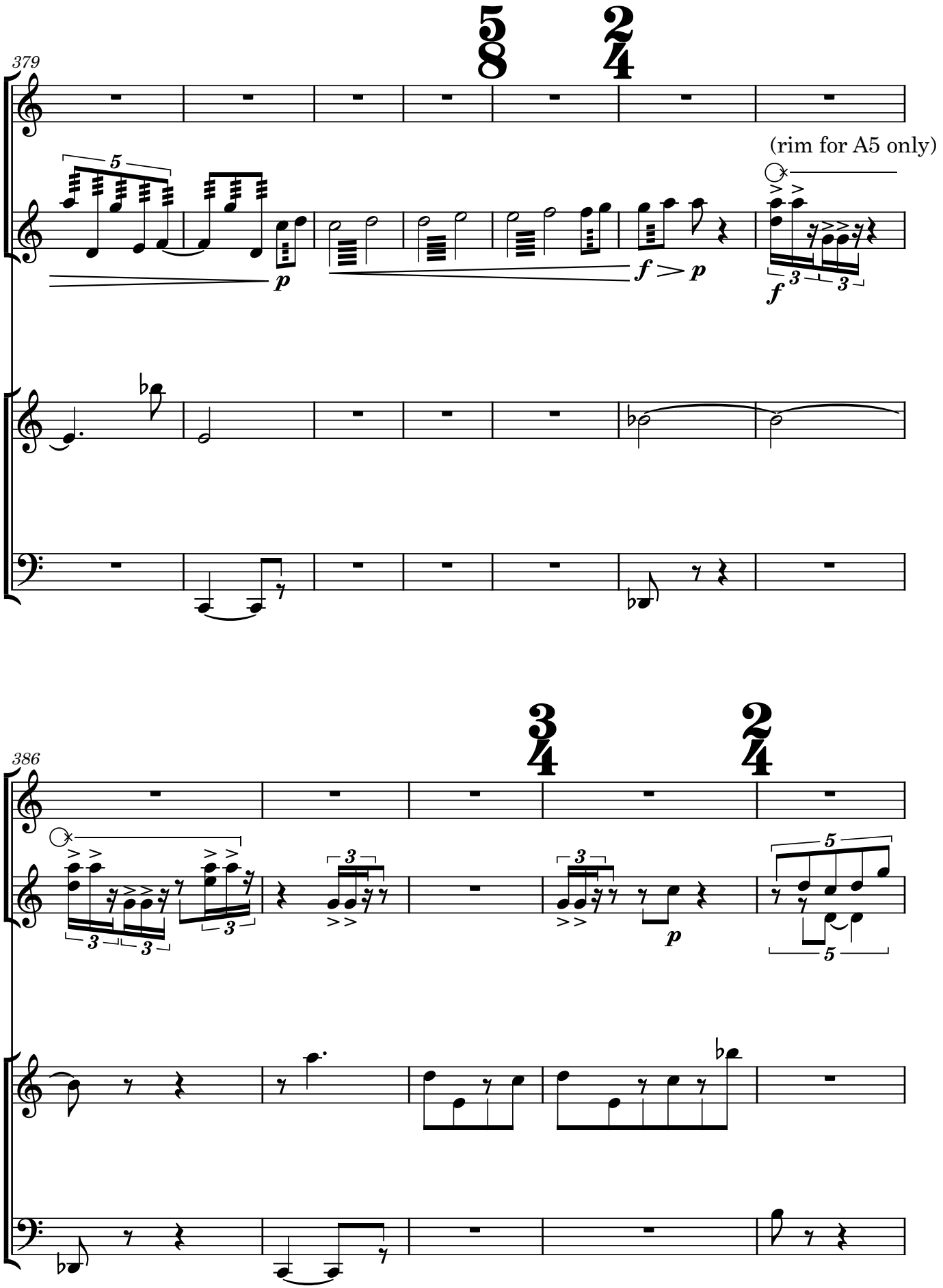

338
pp
ff
p
sim.

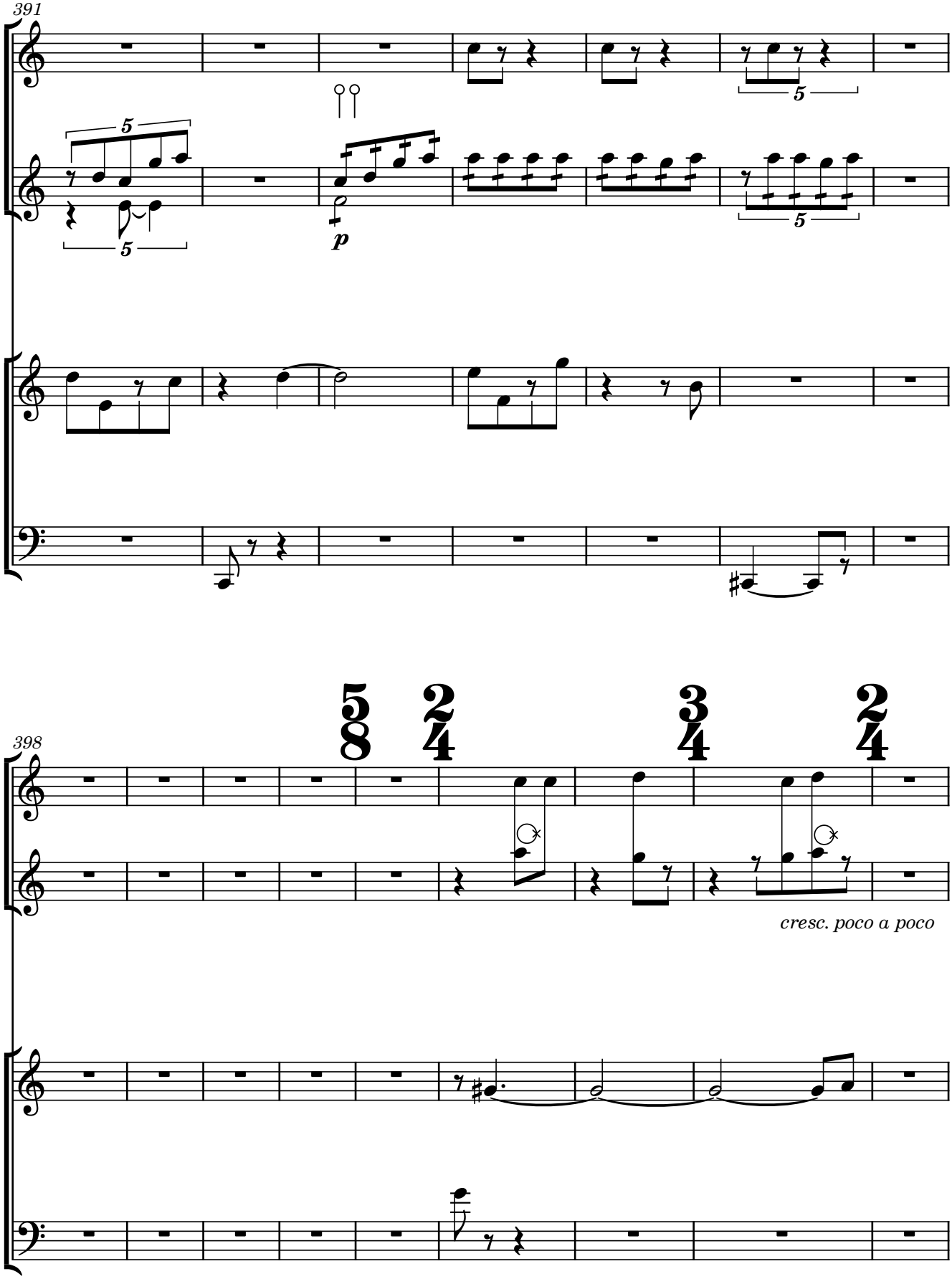

345
D
♩ = 142
place metal discs on the drum heads
and include strikes on these ad lib.
fff
ff
ff
351
pp

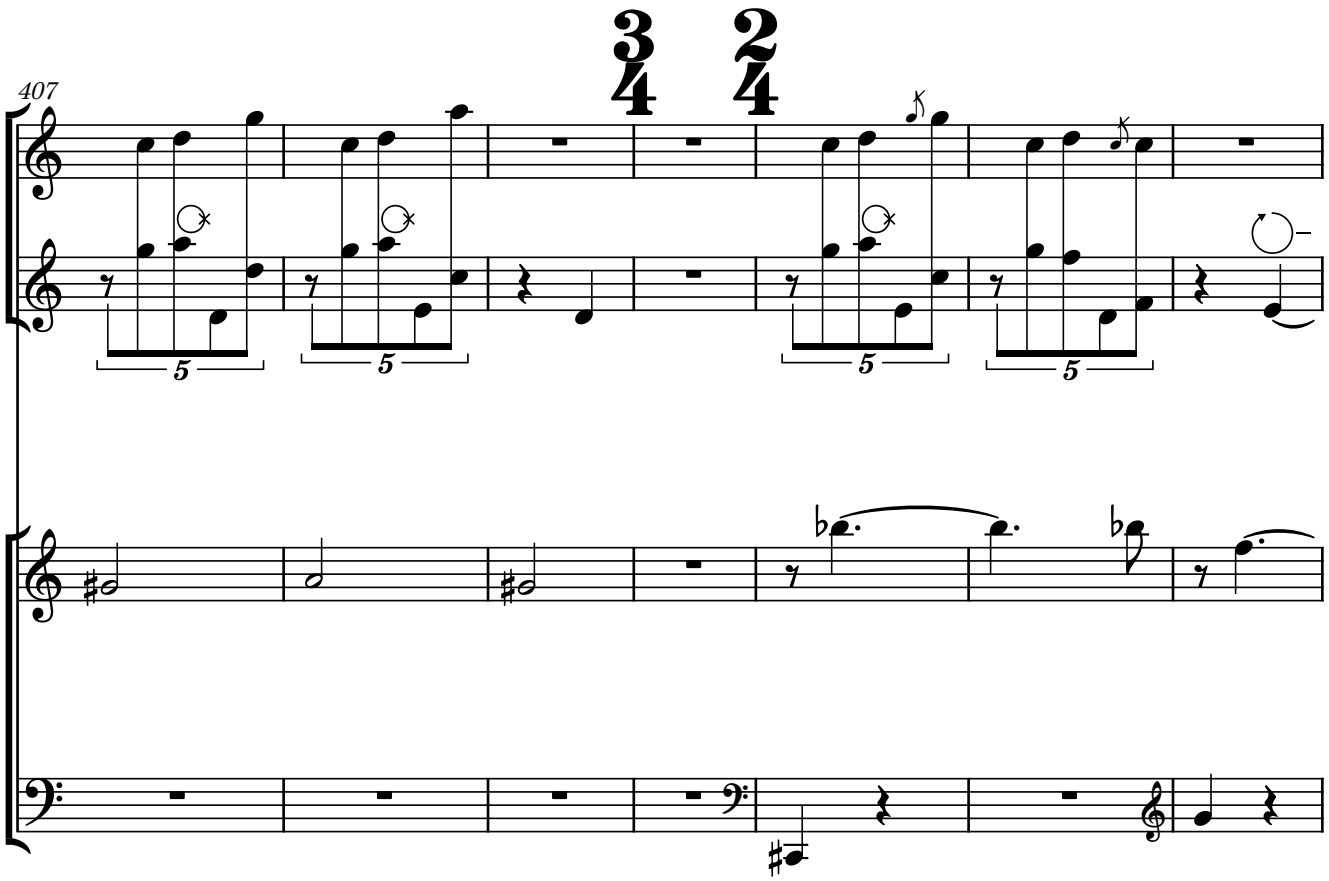

357
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
♩ = 150
RH:
p
mp
fff
p
fff
LH:
5
5
5
363
5/8
fff
p
p
fff
fff
3
fff
p
fff
5
5

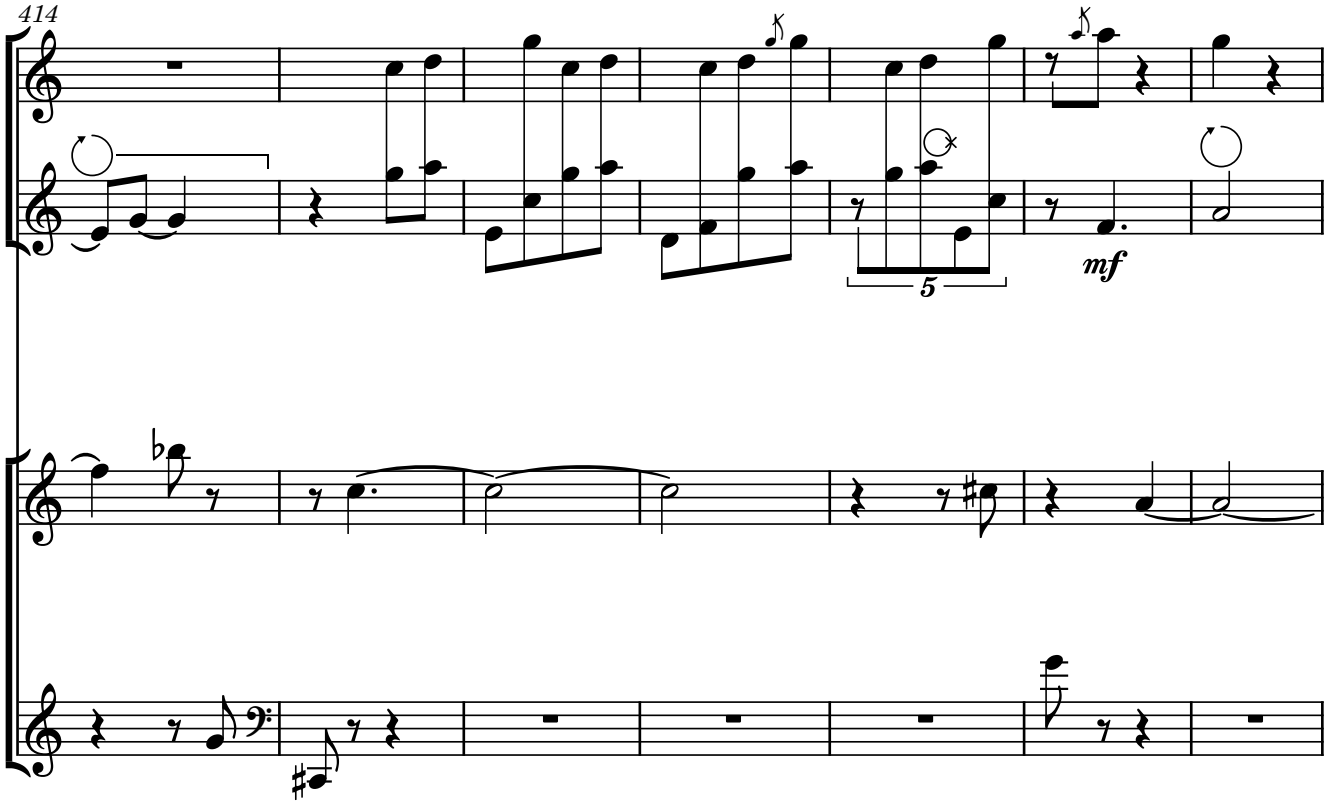

368
5/8
2/4
♩ = 142
5/8
p sub.
fff
fff p ff mp
fff p ff mp
p f p

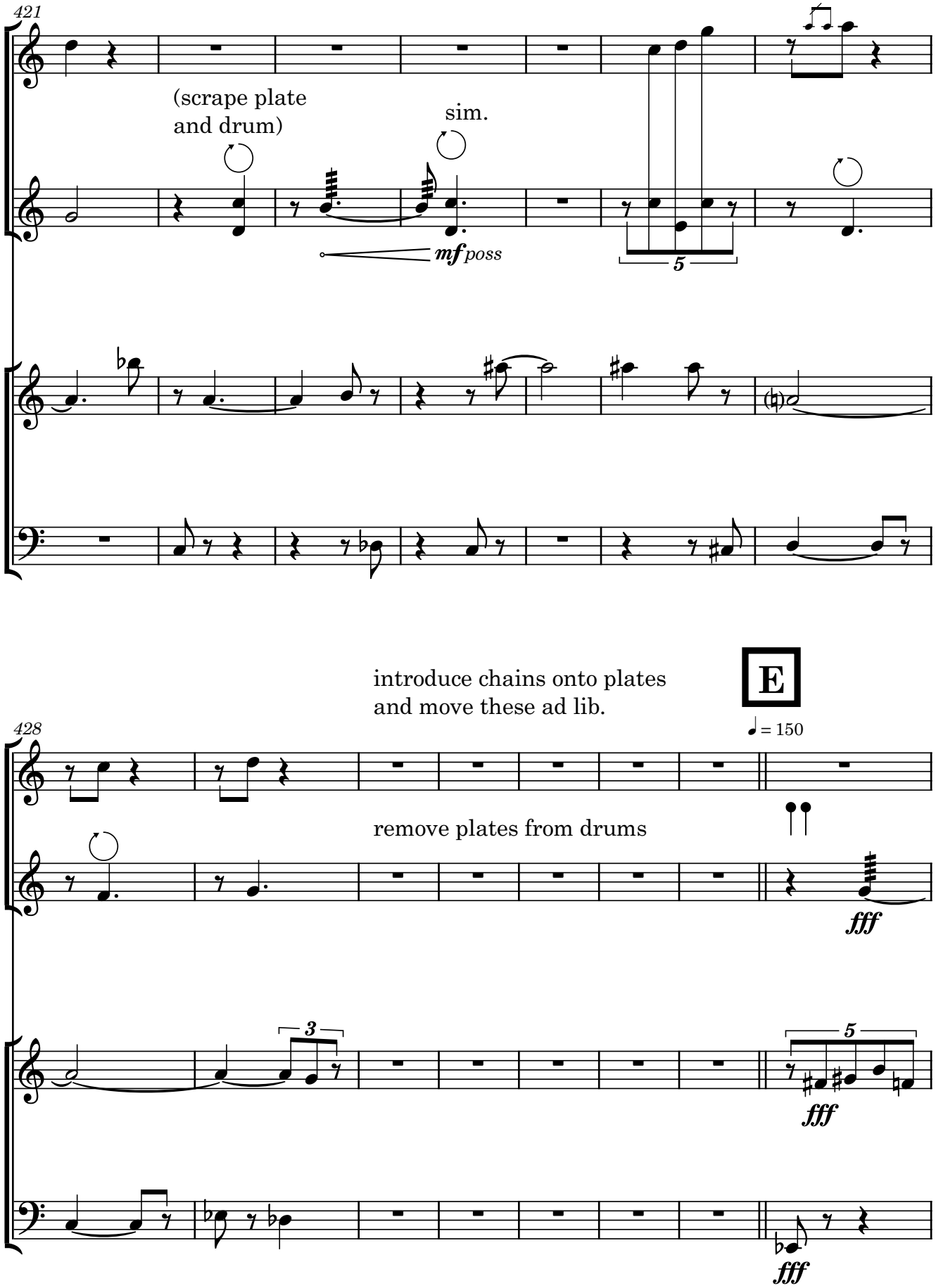

373
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
ff p f mf mp
p
ff

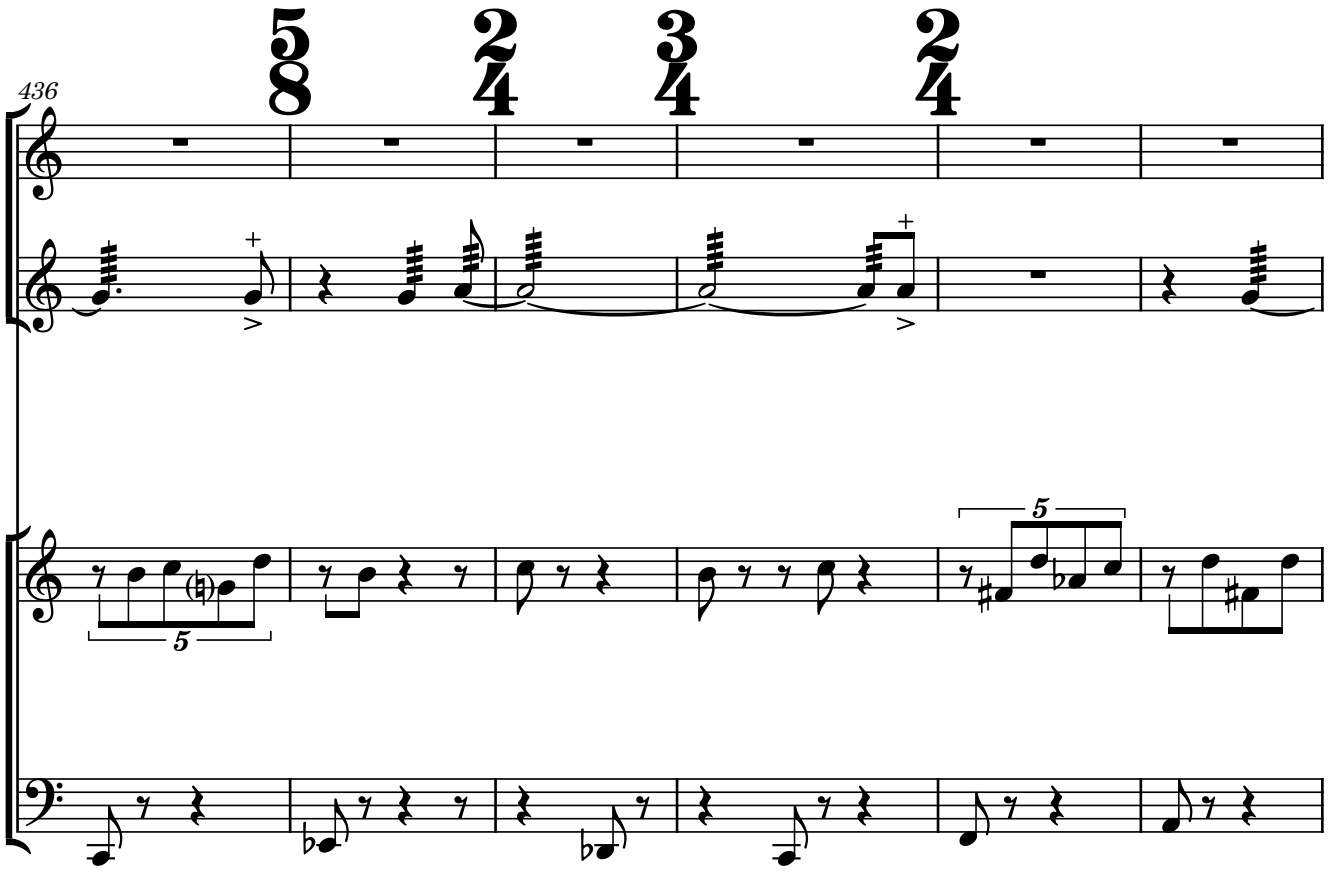

379
5/8
2/4
(rim for A5 only)
386
3/4
2/4

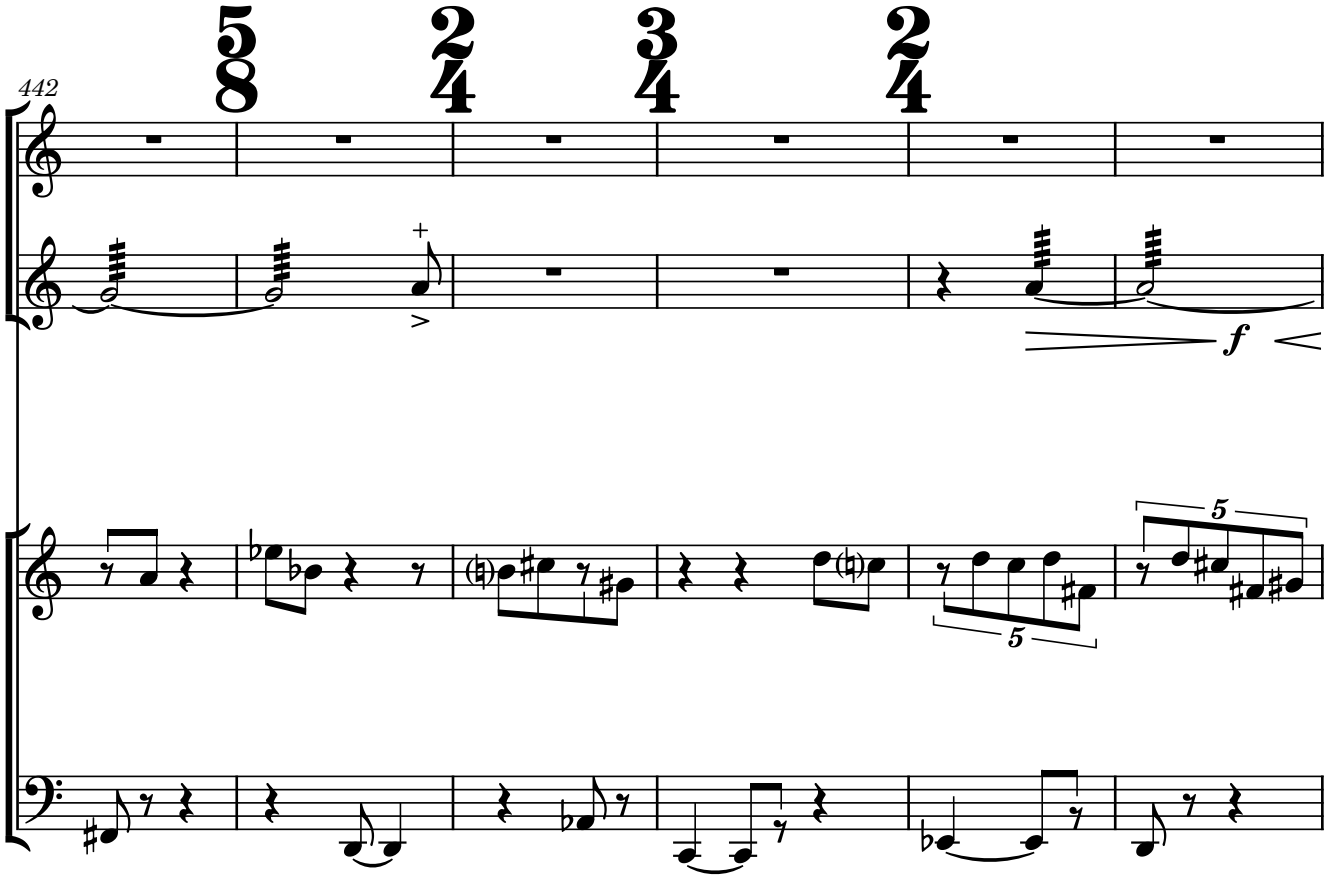

391
5
5
p
5
398
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
cresc. poco a poco

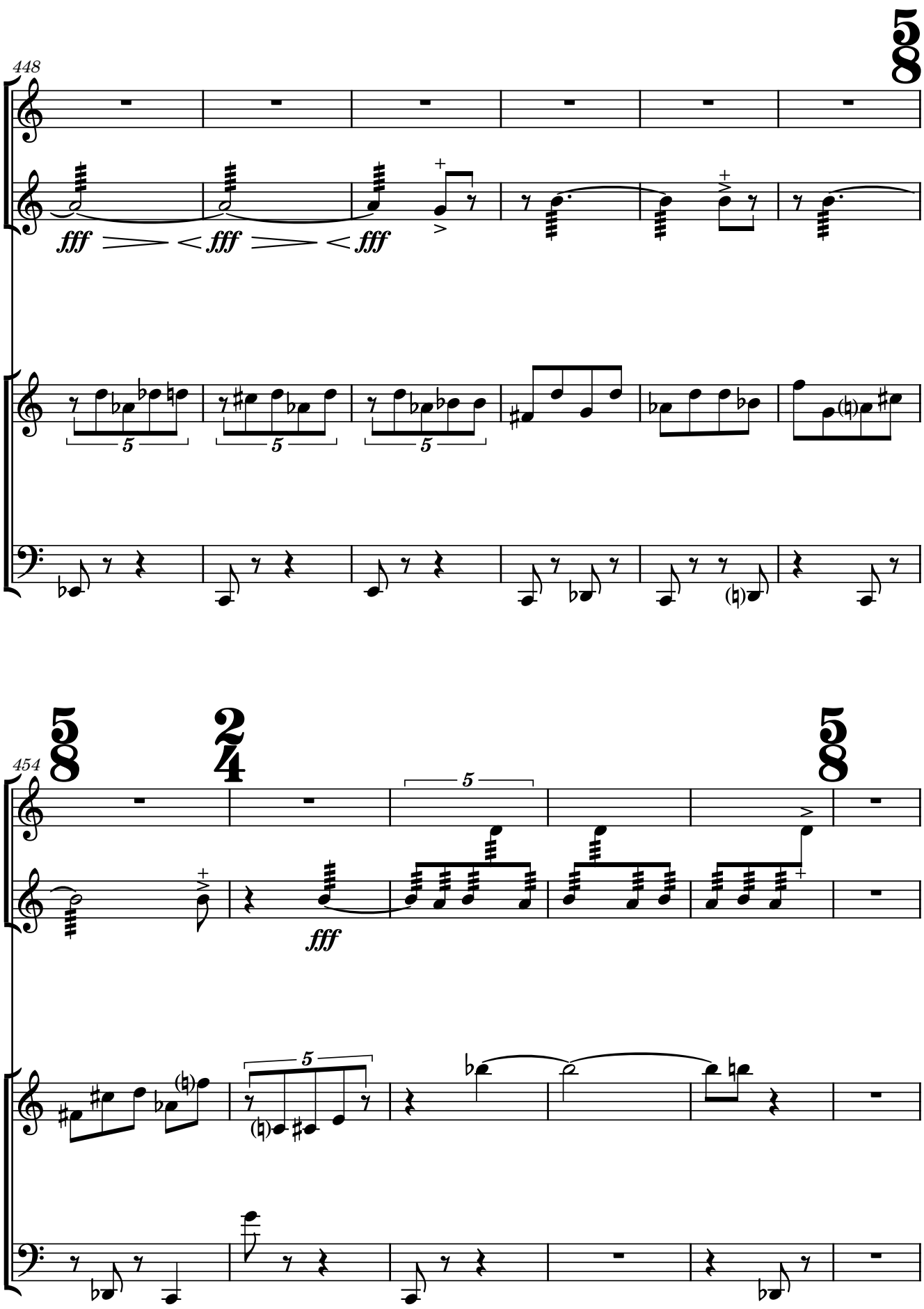

3/4 2/4
407

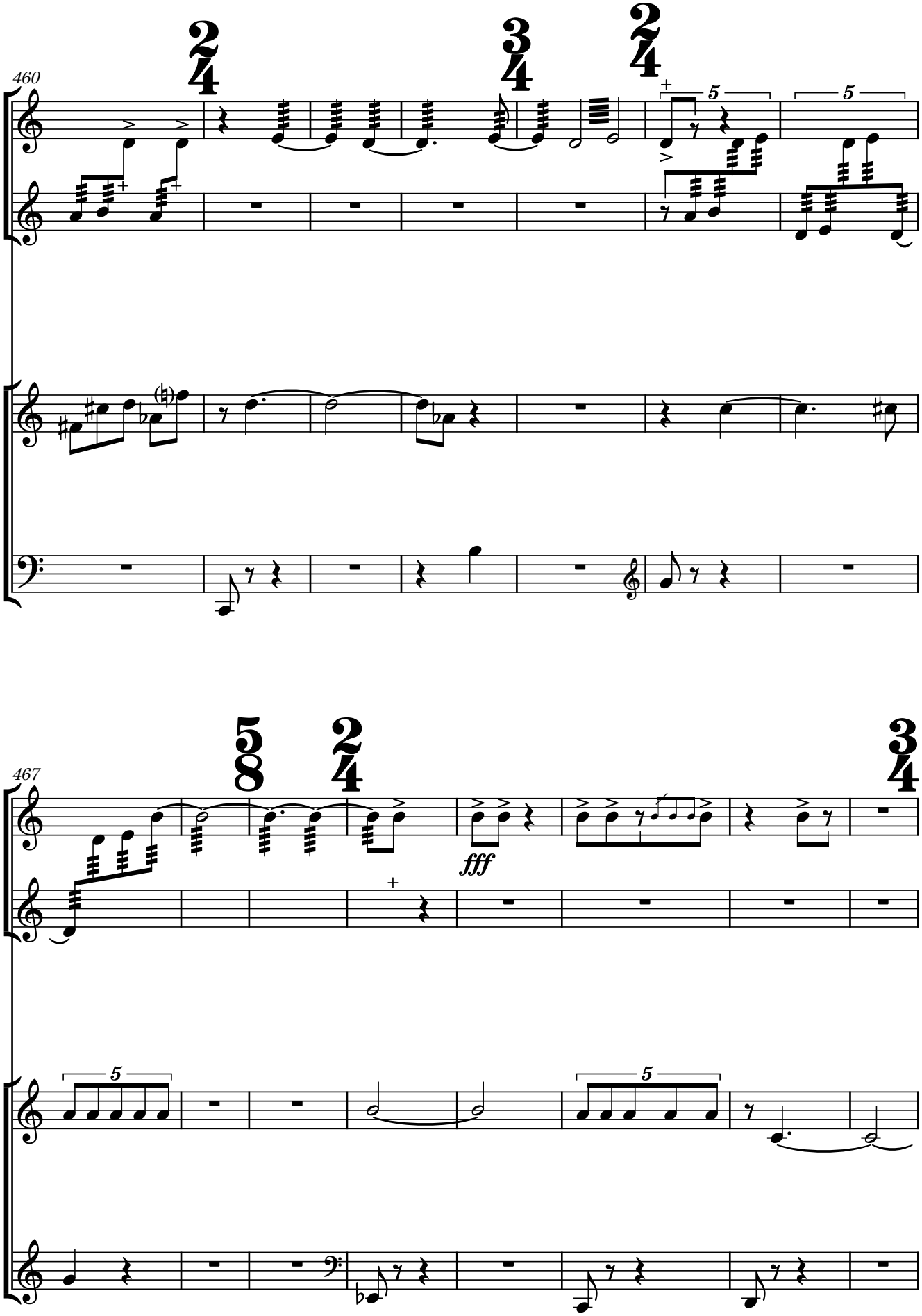

414
mf

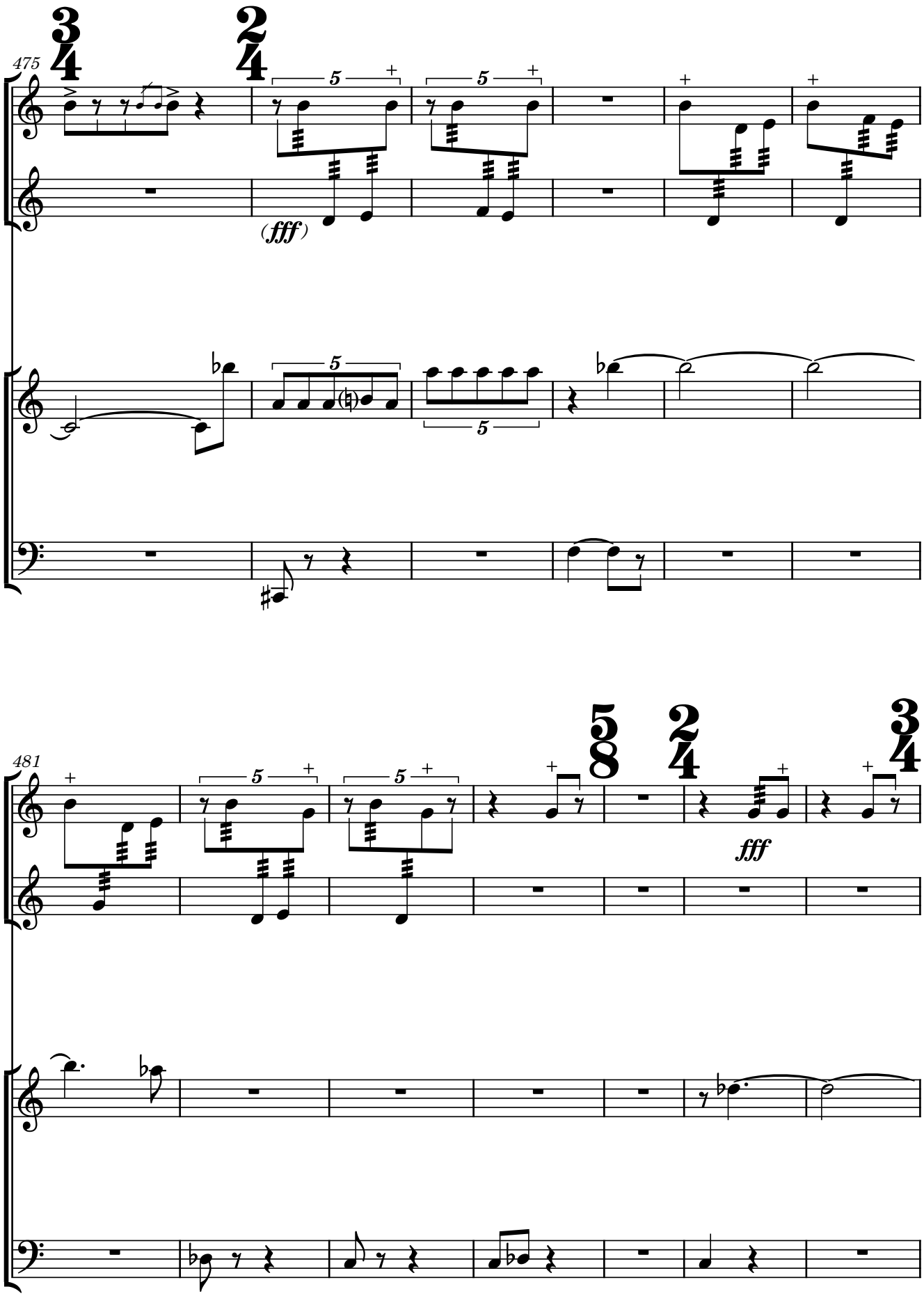

421
(scrape plate
and drum)
sim.
mf poss
5
introduce chains onto plates
and move these ad lib.
E
428
♩ = 150
remove plates from drums
fff
3
5
fff
fff

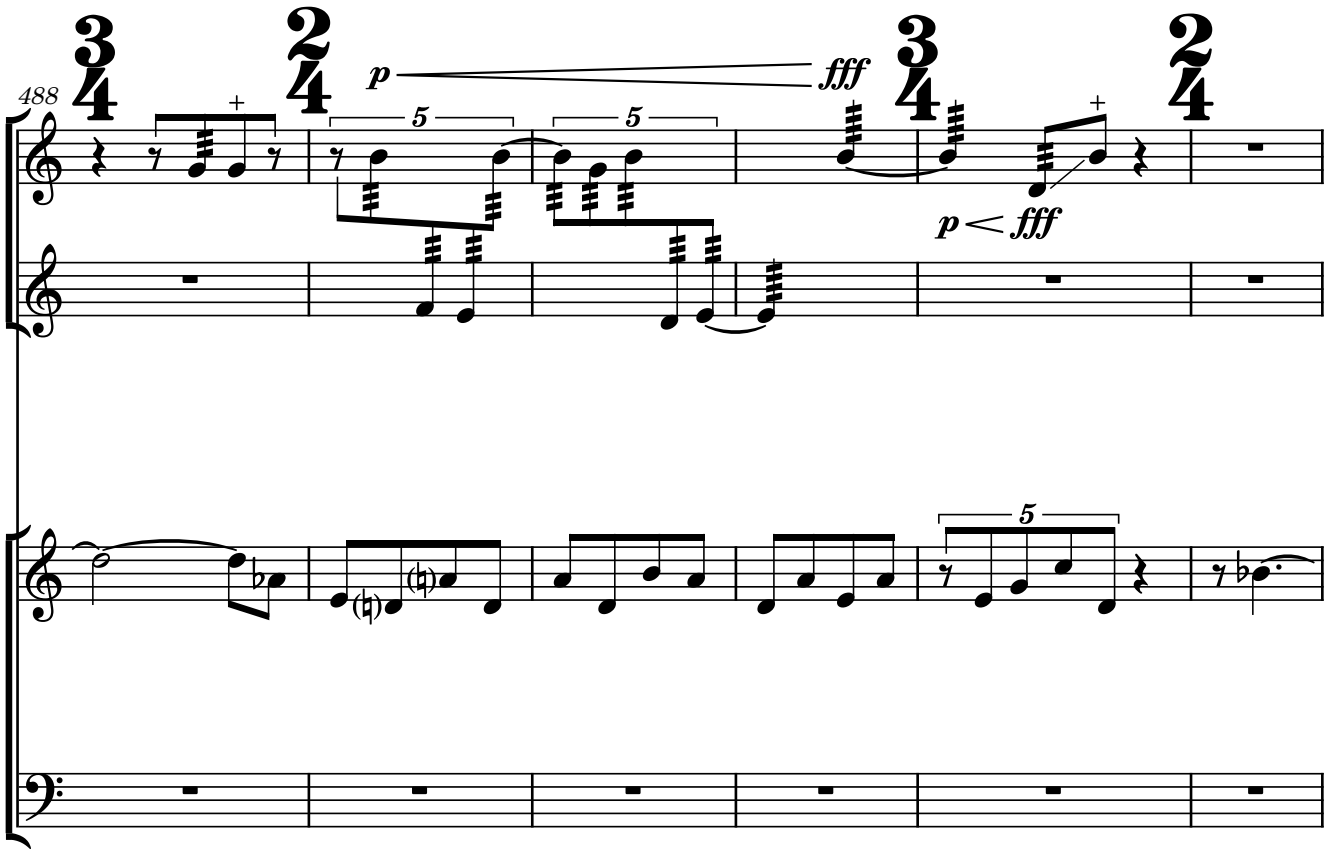

436
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
5
5

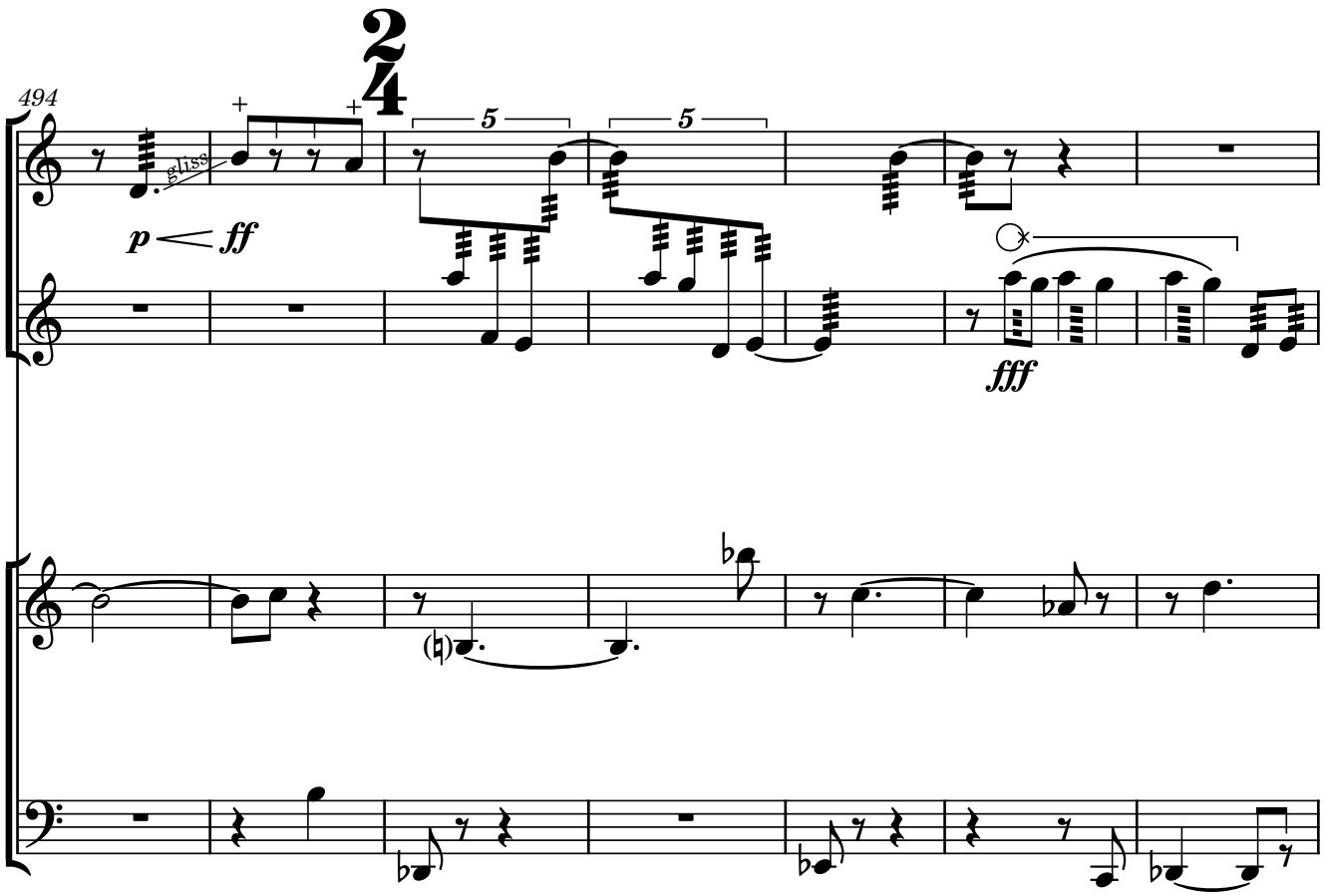

442
5/8
2/4
3/4
2/4
f
5
5

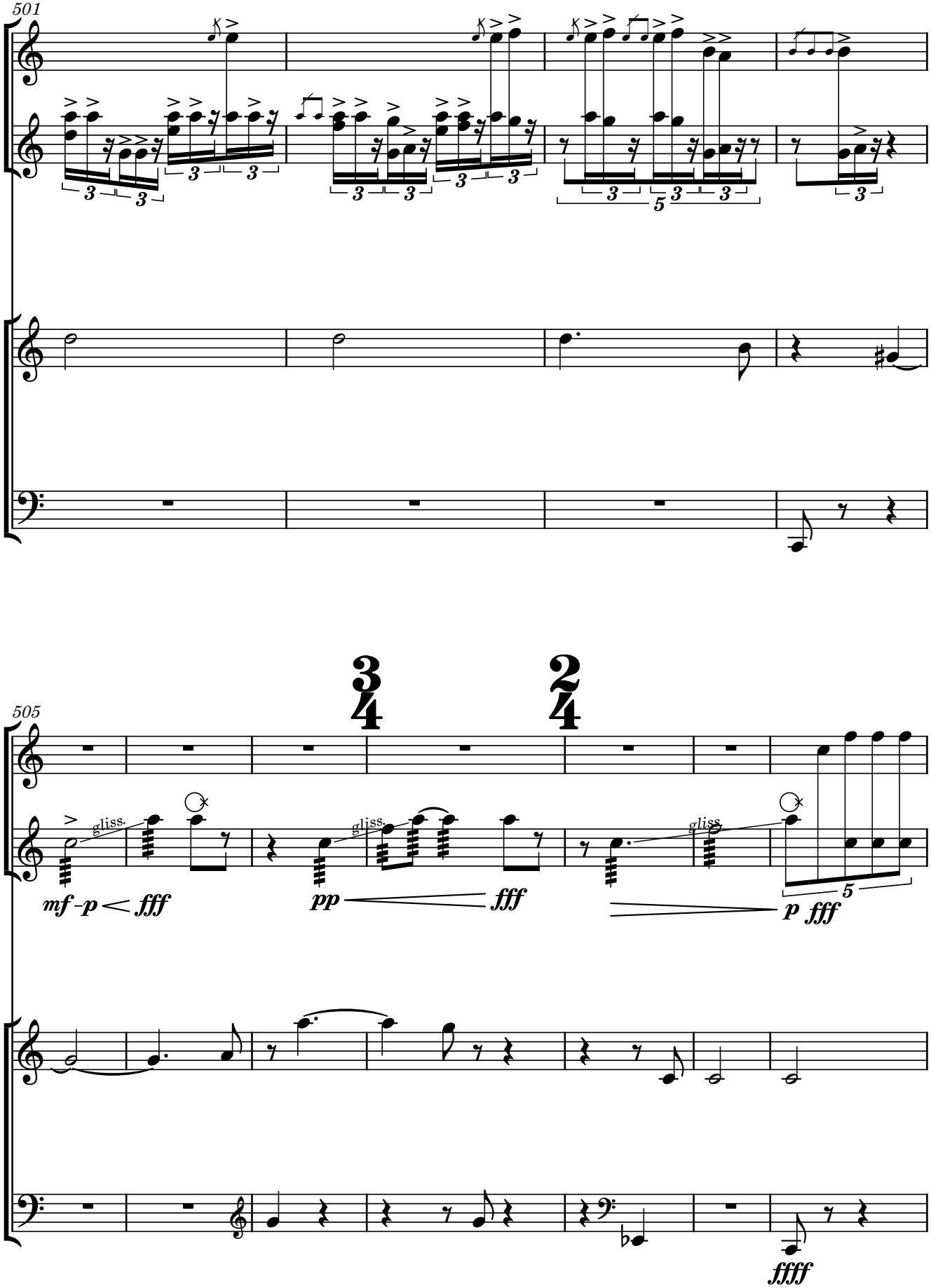

448
fff
fff
fff
454
fff

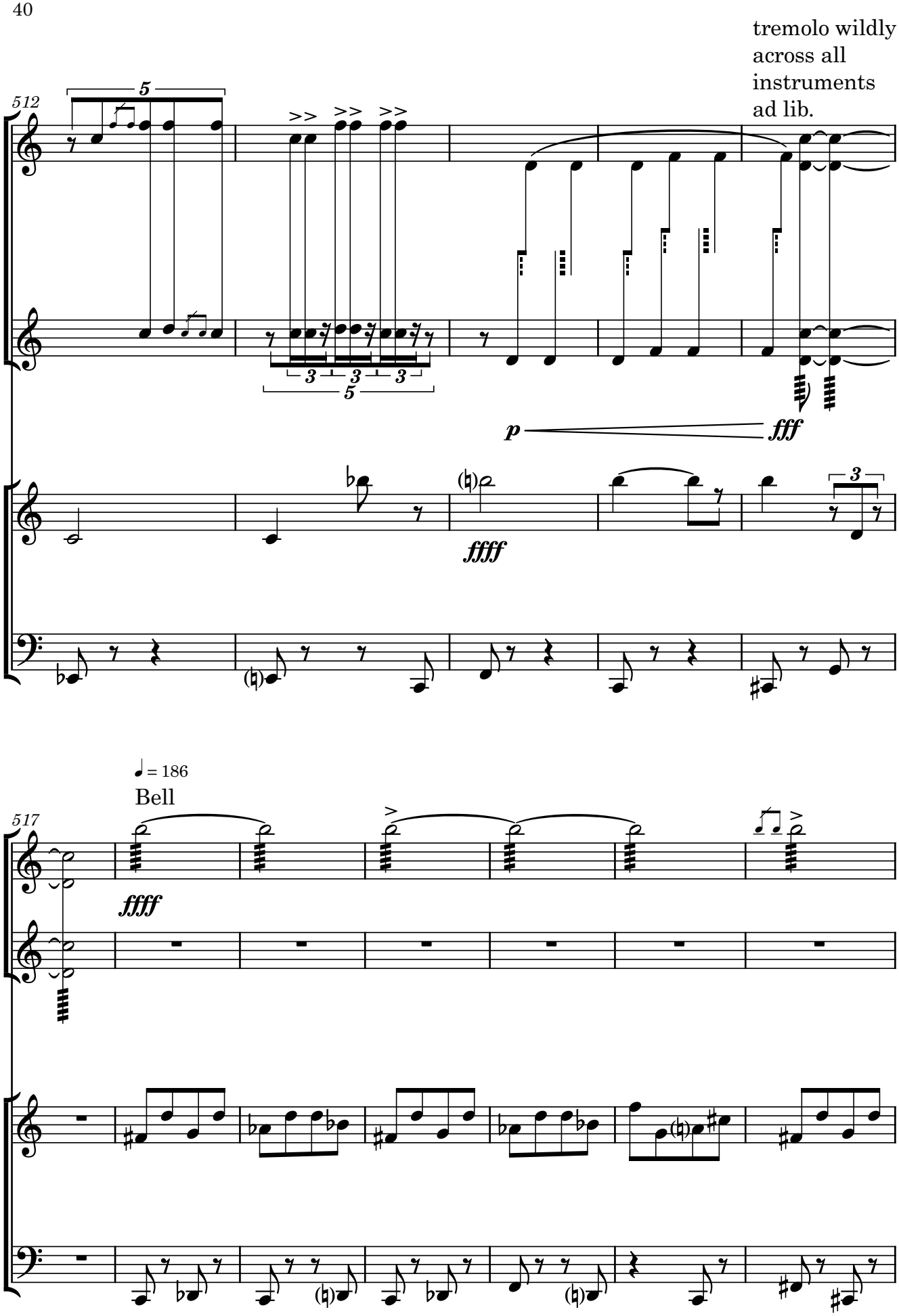

460
467
fff

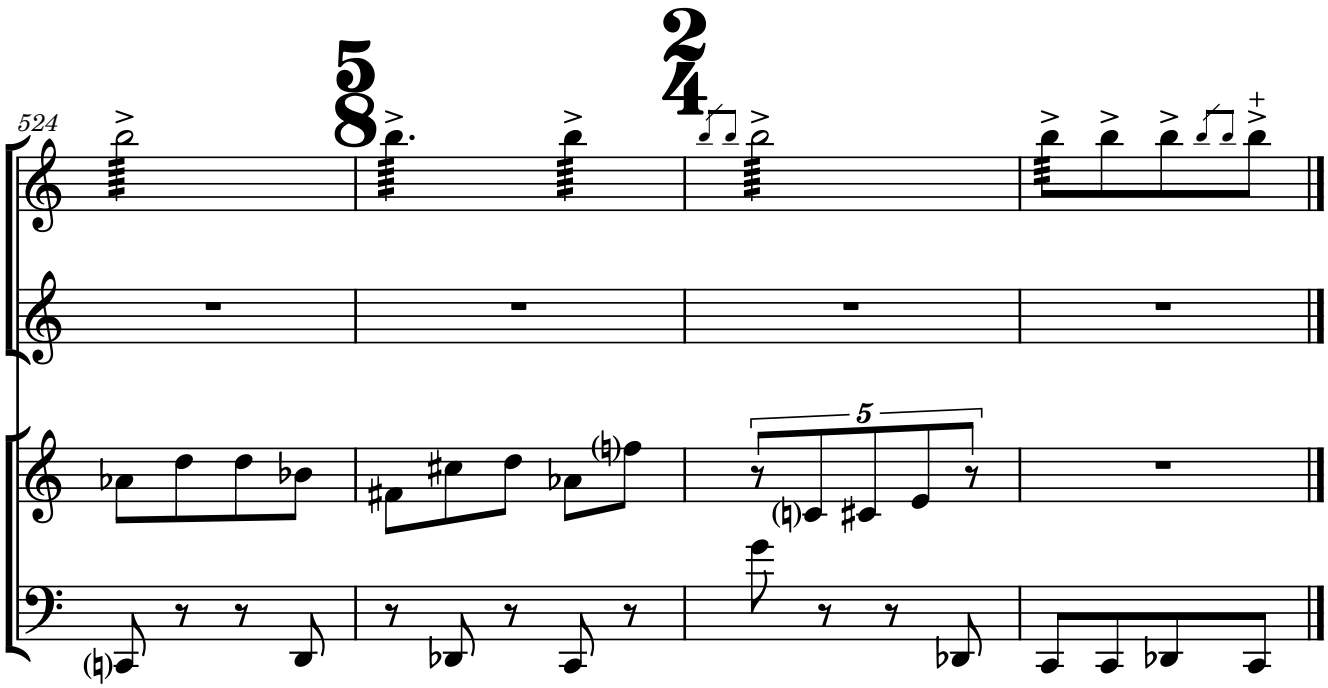

475
(fff)
481
fff


488
p
fff
p < fff
5
5
5


494
gliss.
p < ff
fff
5
5


501
505
gliss.
mf-p
fff
pp
fff
p
fff
ffff


tremolo wildly
across all
instruments
ad lib.
512
5
3
3
3
5
p
fff
ffff
3
♩ = 186
Bell
517
ffff


524
5
8
2
4
5