W. Jay Sydeman

Treble Quartet

for Four Violins

(c. 1997)

Arts Aeternum

A quartet for four violins... that's an odd idea, and for the life of me I cannot recall why I wrote it, but must assume there were (at some time) four violinists who requested it.

It is not difficult, so they must either have been amateurs or pros who just wanted to have some fun, maybe at a house concert. It is decidedly tonally traditional and lovely, so I doubt it was written for the modern music crowd, maybe more a for a violin workshop. Because of its transparent prettiness, it can't belong to the period when I was flexing my avant-garden muscles – no way was this played in Carnegie Hall in New York during the roaring '60s. Your guess is as good as mine. (Note that as I approach my 85th year and 600th-odd piece, I must be forgiven for the occasional memory lapse.)

– W. Jay Sydeman, August 2012

W. Jay Sydeman's life mirrors the breadth and variety of his music. Born in New York in 1928 and educated at Manhattan's Mannes School of Music, he quickly became one of the most sought-after and honored composers of his generation, receiving commissions from such prestigious groups as the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the Tanglewood Music Center, and the Boston Symphony, which premiered his orchestral work in memory of John F. Kennedy in 1966. "Sydeman uses a whole battery of far out techniques," wrote the *New York Times*, "but he has an uncanny ability to throw in the whole avant-garde machinery as if it were the simplest, most normal way of making music in the world ... More than many of his colleagues, he seems to know what will sound well, and he works for some remarkably attractive, pure textures. His sounds seem to grow from a physical sense of exactly what material is right."

In 1970, after a heady period that included awards from the National institute of Arts and Letters, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Library of Congress, Sydeman left New York – and composition – to begin a journey of personal and artistic exploration.

"Around 1980," he has written, "I returned to composition – at first a large number of choral works which reconnected me to the source of all music – the human voice. Out of this new lyric impulse have evolved all of my works since that time – more romantic, more accessible. I create music for the musician."

– Howard Hersh,
Artistic Director of "Music Now"

Sydeman is part of a composers' group in Nevada City annually producing the "Wet Ink Festival of New Music." He now lives in Mendocino and hosts a bi-weekly program on KZYX, "The Mind of a Composer," 10 am to noon on Mondays, introducing and commenting on contemporary music.

Duration: circa 1:40

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Edited and engraved by Rick Shinozaki (Albany, CA), consulting with the composer.

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for Four Violins

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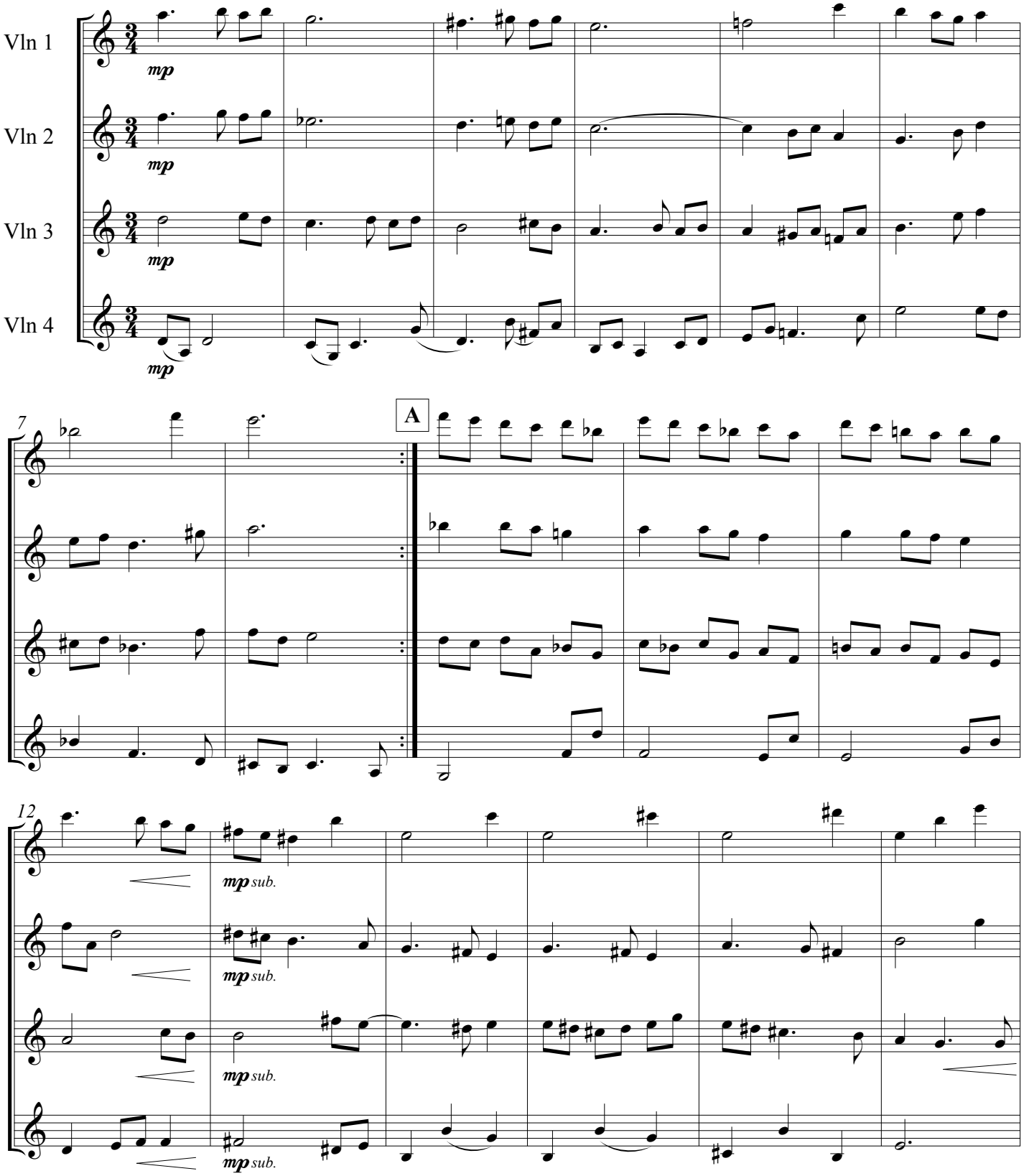
Andante, tender rubato ♩ = c. 76



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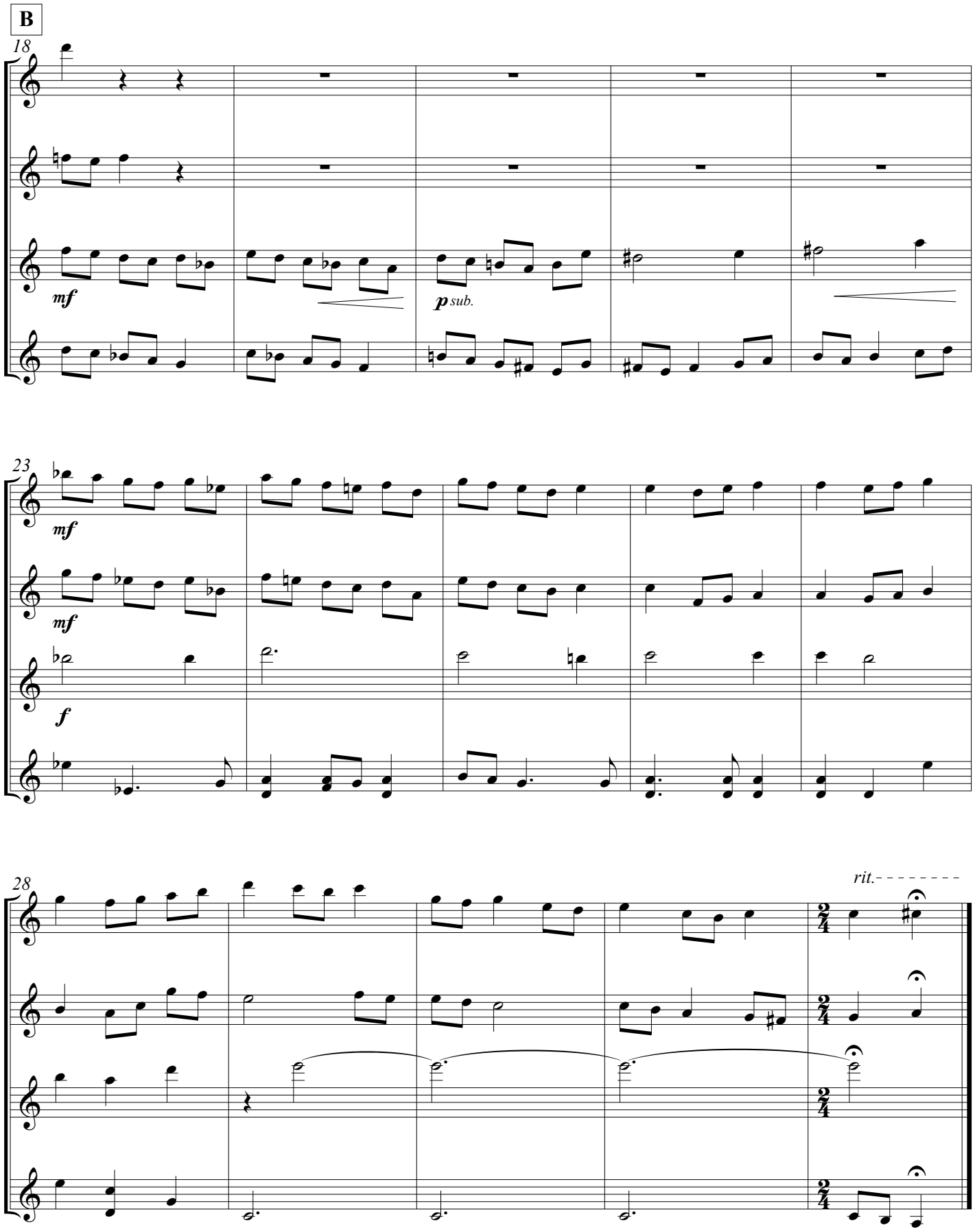
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