“...and keep the clay wet”

for string quartet

Nikolaos-Laonikos Psimikakis-Chalkokondylis

"...and keep the clay wet"
for string quartet

Performance Instructions

Each system should last between 15 and 20 seconds, unless otherwise stated. If there is an accelerando or ritardando marking, the specified passage should last less or more than 15-20" respectively.

Each performer performs their own part, starting together but not necessarily ending together. The score is only meant to be a guideline and is not to be taken literally; as the parts move individually, the score is not a representation of the vertical sonorities that occur by the playing of the parts.

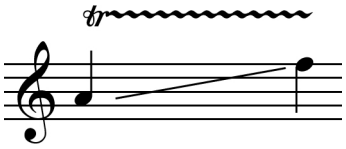
The performers should listen carefully to what is being played when they are playing (and when they are not). They should perform their part as if they are supposed to play exactly what they are playing, exactly when they are playing it.

The notation used (in terms of rhythm) is more evocative than it is authoritative. As there is a different number of notes per system, the duration of the quaver will vary from system to system. The performers should feel free to add ornaments or expressions, such as bending the notes or changing the timbre, especially on long notes.

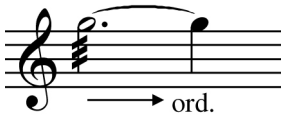
The spacing of the material on the page is relatively free – if the performer feels like playing a piece of material sooner or later than is indicated in the score (but still in a linear order) because of something else that was played by someone else, then they should are free to do so.

Trills are always on the semitone above, unless otherwise notated. Non-vibrato throughout (unless otherwise stated).

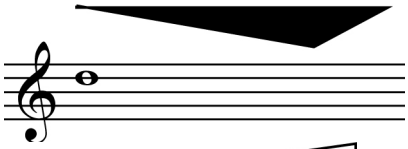
Duration: about 8'



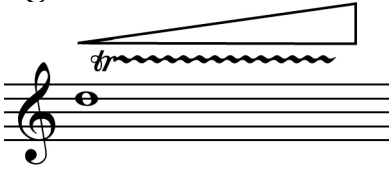
The trill is to be performed during the glissando.



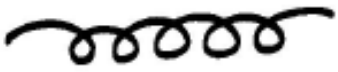
The arrow indicates moving gradually from tremolando to normal playing. An arrow from a normal stem to a stem with tremolando lines indicates the opposite.



Gradually increased bow pressure, creating a "scratch tone".



Gradually decrease pressure on the fingers of the left hand (like when playing harmonics), so as to create a kind of "ghost tone".



Circular bow movement, from ex.ST to ex.SP

ST = sul tasto **SP** = sul ponticello **ex.ST** = extremely ST **ex.SP** = extremely SP **N** = normale

Programme Note

"*..and keep the clay wet*" is a very personal composition. In the past, I had been trying to avoid writing a composition very personal (possibly avoiding taking the responsibility of writing something personal in fear of having it heavily criticised and thus avoiding hurting my ego) by falling back to using methods external to music with which I was familiar before taking up composition, such as mathematics, images, physics, poems, etc.

One of the aspects in which it is personal is that I have utilised folk music material from the three cultures that I consider have played the biggest role in my life and in who I am today: Greek (because of the history), English (because of the language) and Finnish (because of the land). The use of folk material is not meant to be audible, but was used as a base upon which I could compose with what I consider the important materials in this composition, which are extended techniques (such as increased bow pressure) and timbral changes.

With this piece I wanted to create a more "raw" soundscape than the soundscape we are used to listening to in a concert environment. Without claiming to be original or unique in my approach to composing such a piece, I primarily focus on creating such a soundscape for its own sake, to evoke a dance of wild sonic instances that these extraordinarily sophisticated instruments are capable of producing, which have been tamed for the sake of creating what –at a particular time and place– is considered "socially acceptable music". Someone in the workshop mentioned that the piece has an "archaic" feeling to it, but I would take it further and say that if I could use one word to describe the piece, I would use the word "primeval" or "feral". *Unease*, *uncertainty* and *indeterminacy* are also three words which describe the soundscape of this piece in a compositional approach. (Three words which are quite distant from our everyday Western middle-class lives, where things are quite safe, normal, predictable, determined for us, and we have a lot less to worry about than our fellow human beings in remote parts of the world whose natural habitat we destroy so we can keep living our ever-increasingly needy and consumer-oriented lives.)

> "*I feel ready, on yer toes ready, and I am tender to the motto Be Prepared, because, prepared, your future is like a sculpture, clay of tomorrow, moist in your palm. Live like this, damp side out to the world. It's all I'd tell my kids; live generously and keep the clay wet.*"
>
> (Jay Griffiths, "*Anarchipelago*")

"..and keep the clay wet"

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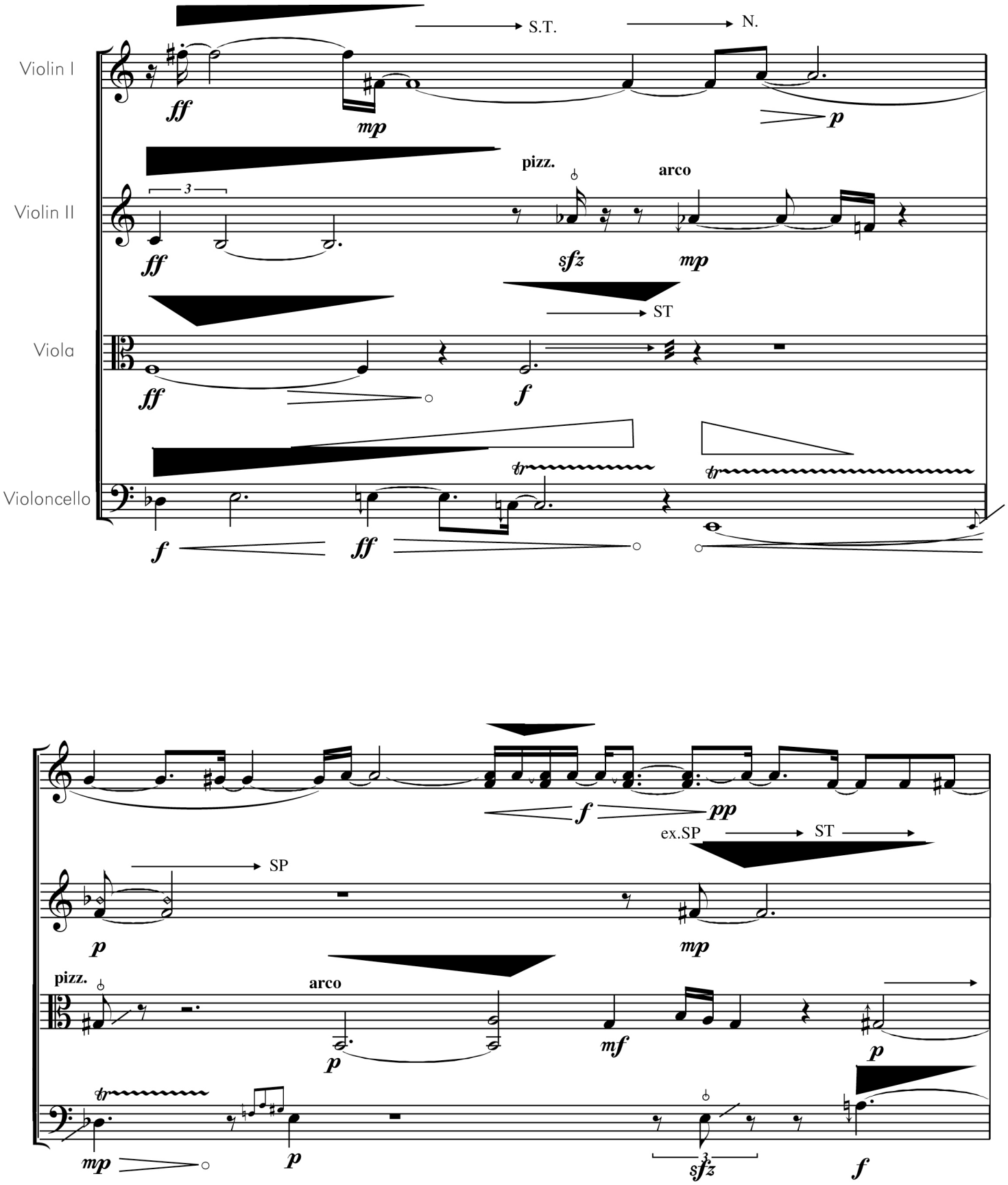

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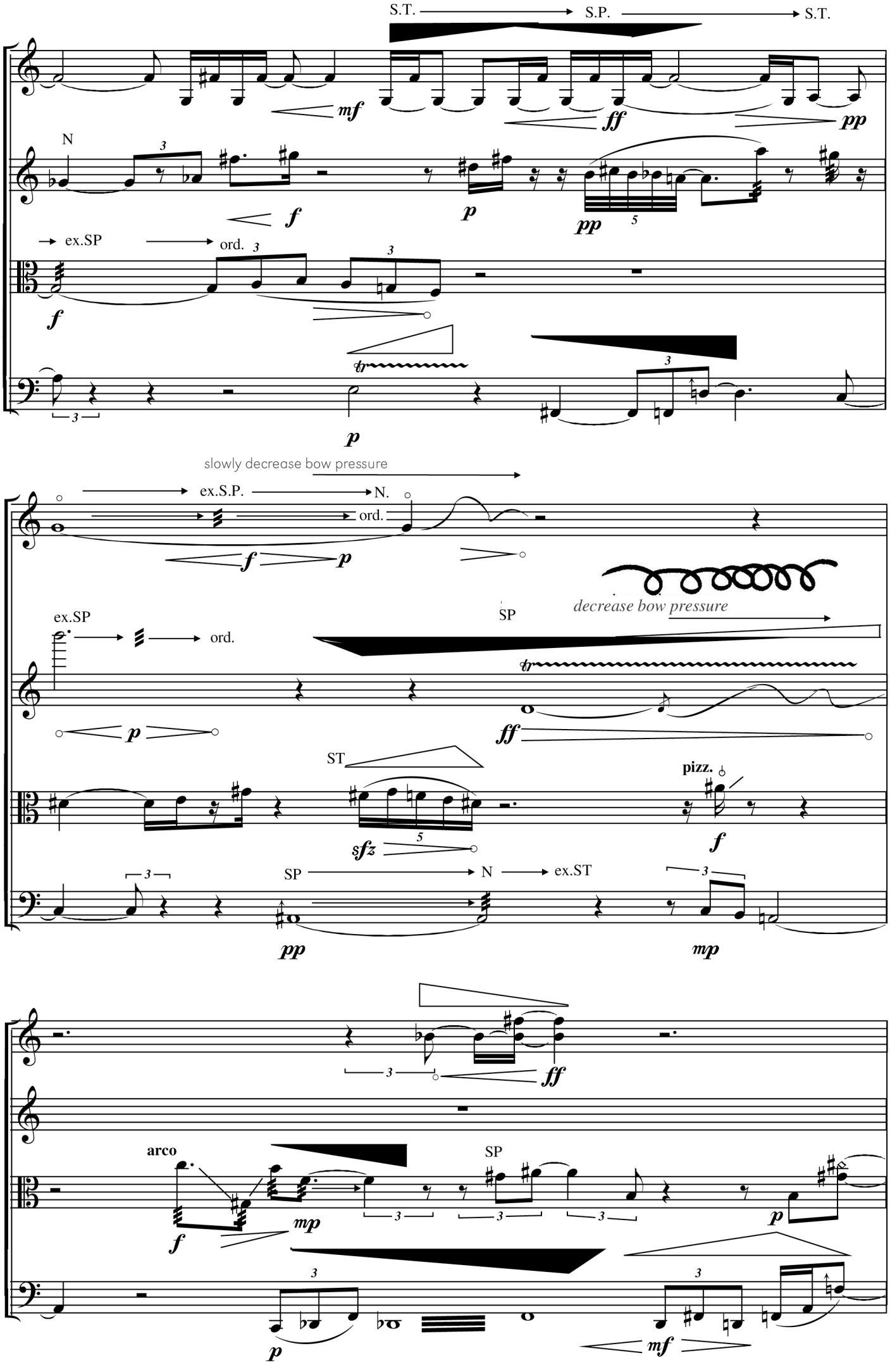
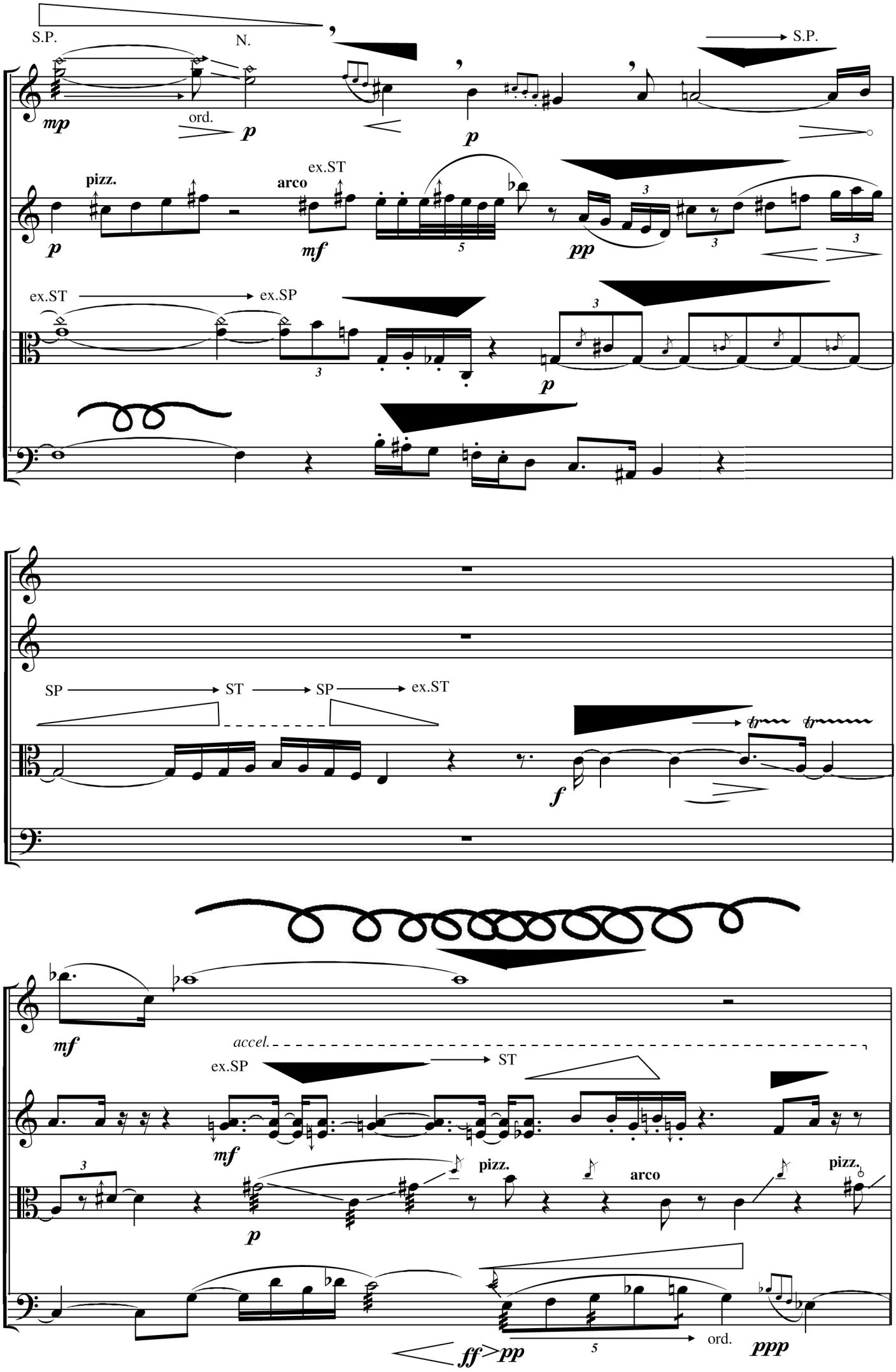
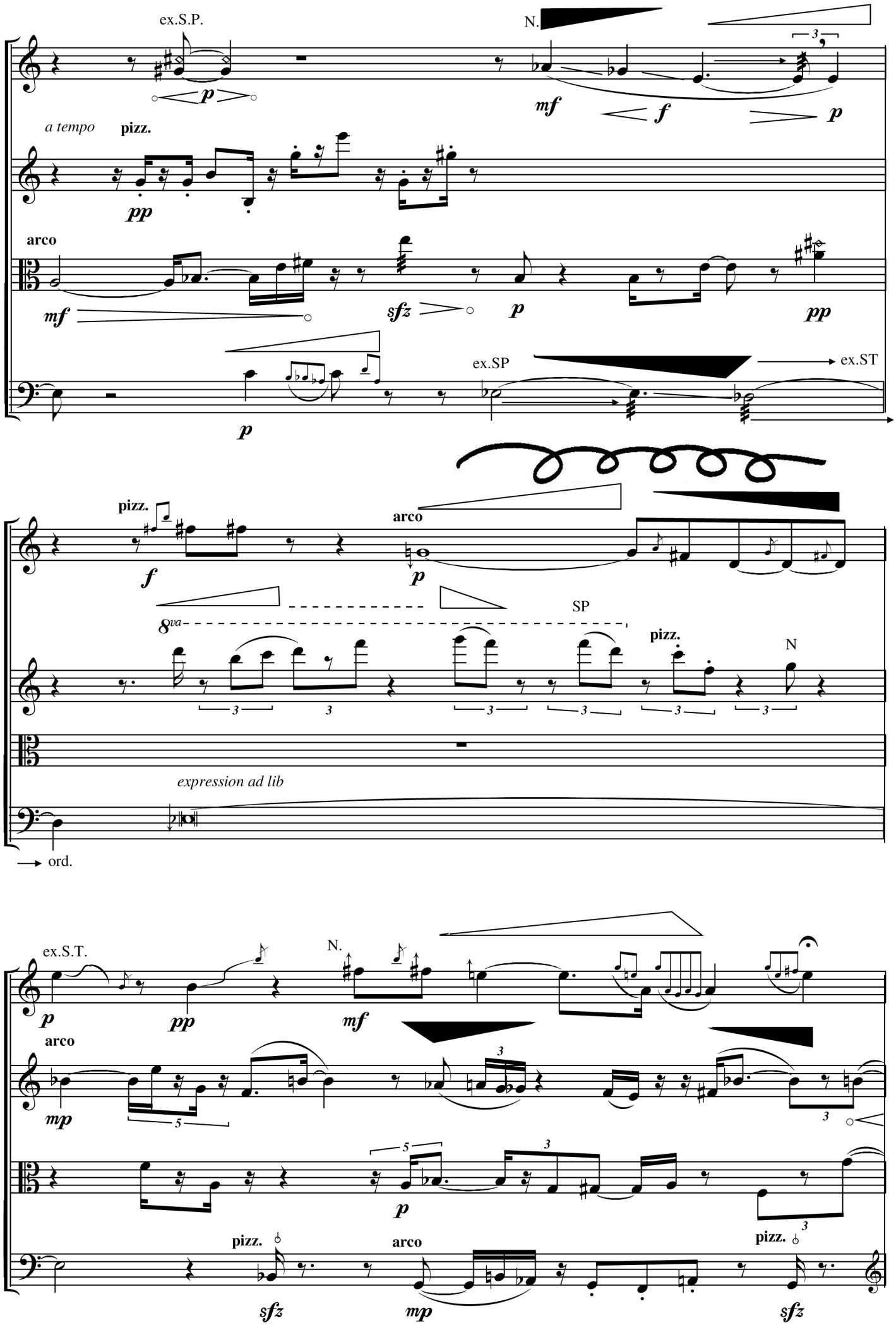
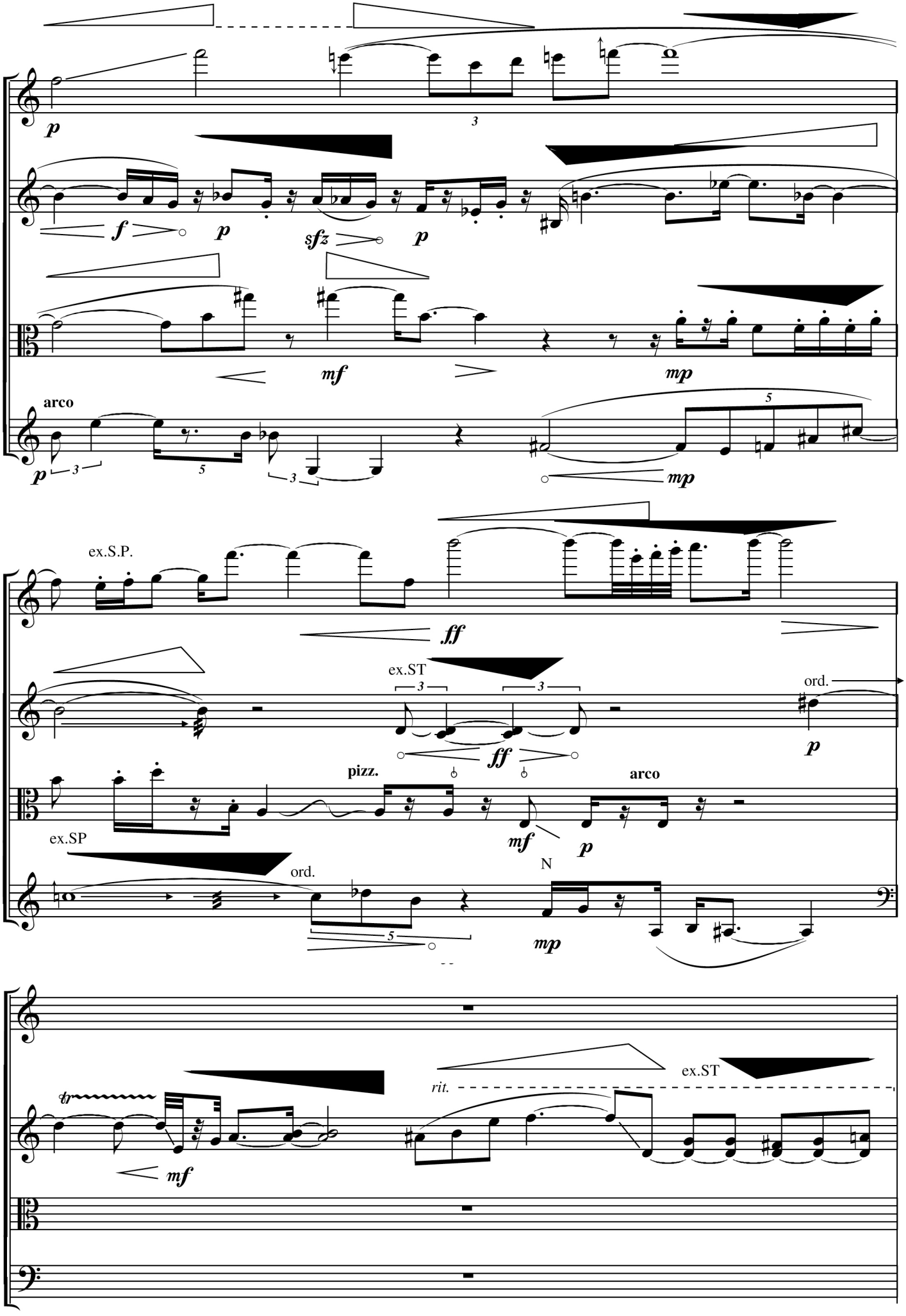
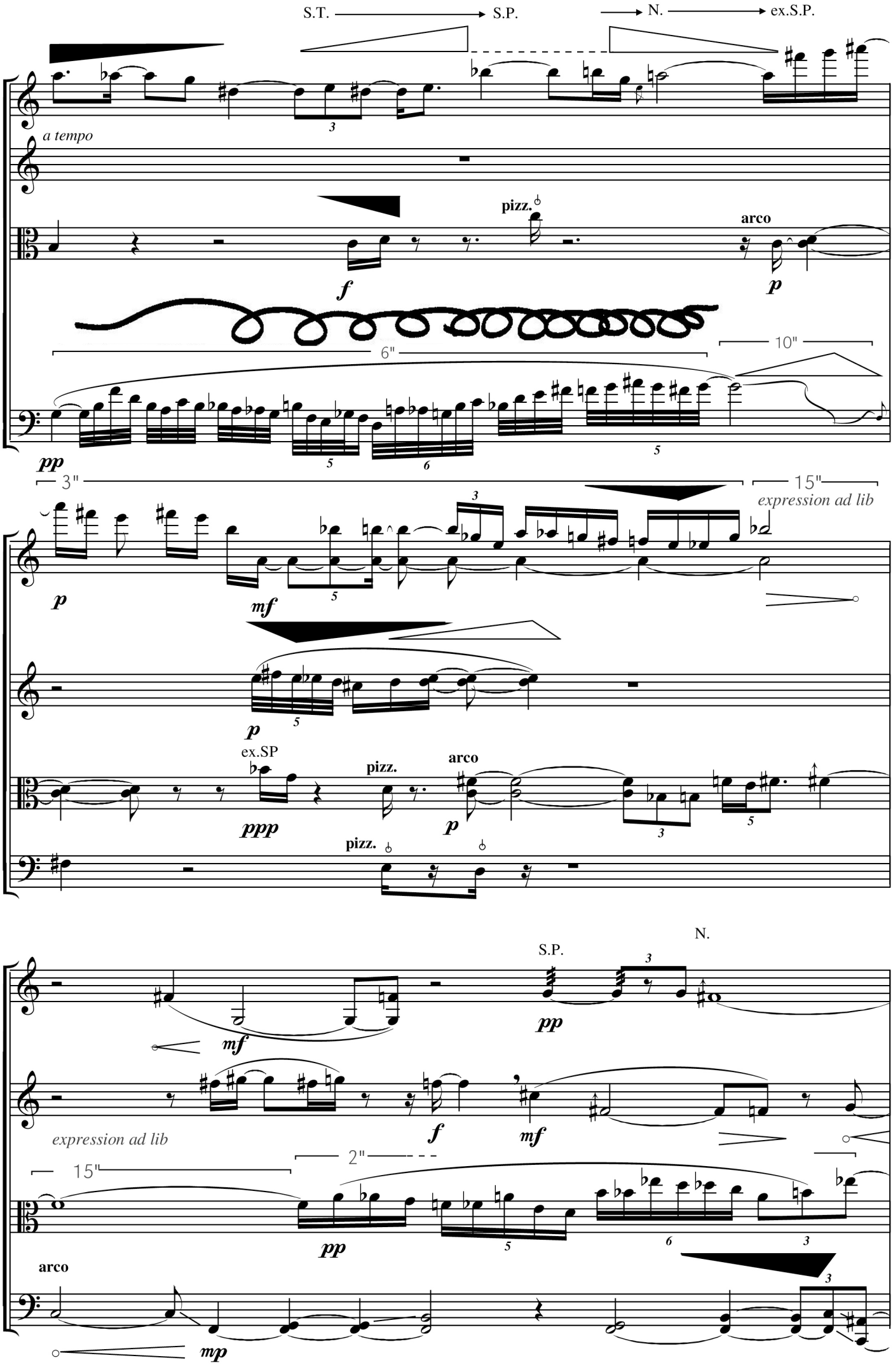
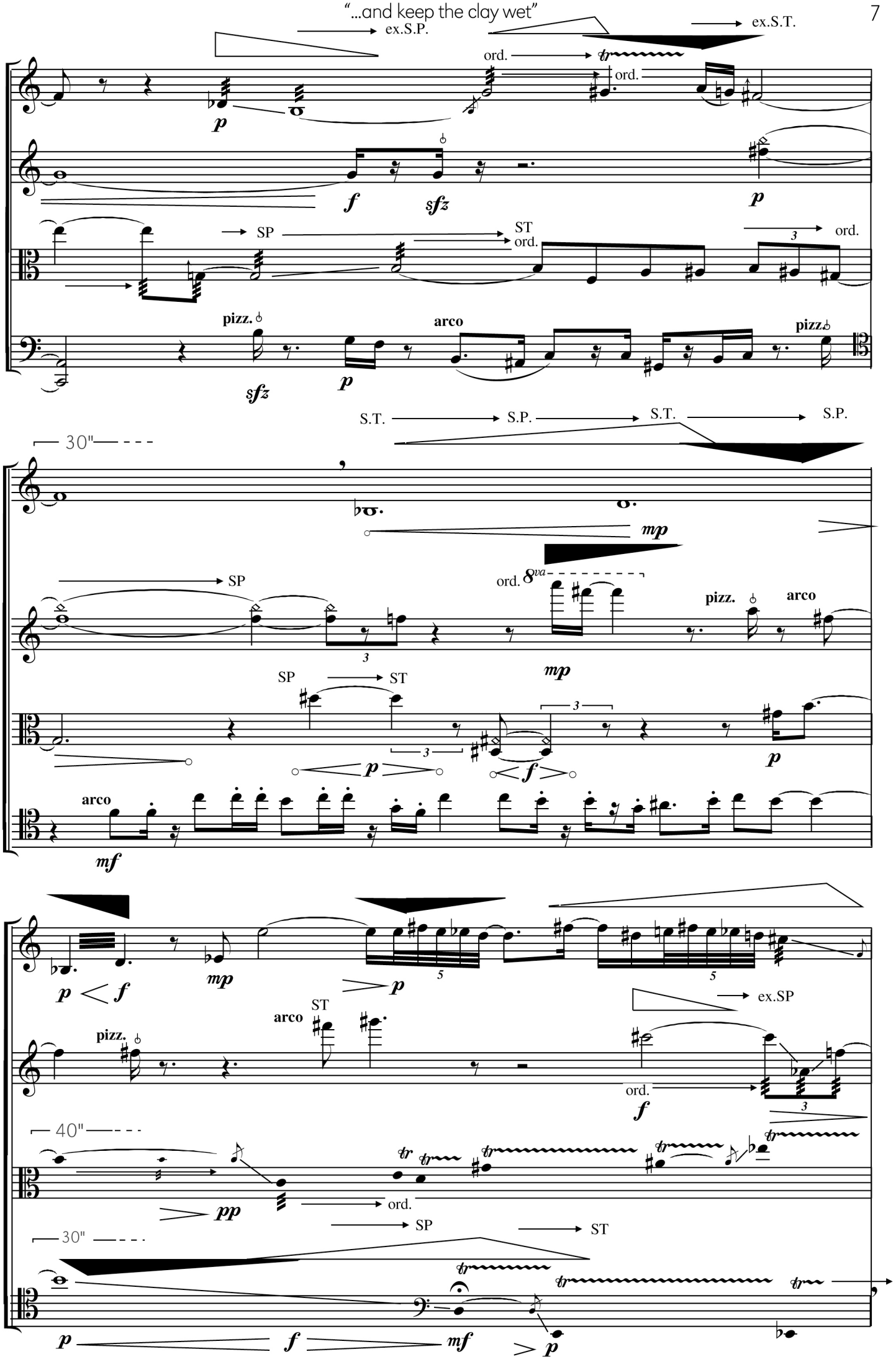

S.T.
S.P.
S.T.
mf
ff
pp
N
f
p
pp
ex.SP
ord.
f
tr
p
slowly decrease bow pressure
ex.S.P.
N.
ord.
f
p
decrease bow pressure
ex.SP
ord.
SP
tr
p
ff
ST
pizz.
sfz
f
SP
N
ex.ST
pp
mp
ff
arco
SP
f
mp
p
p
mf

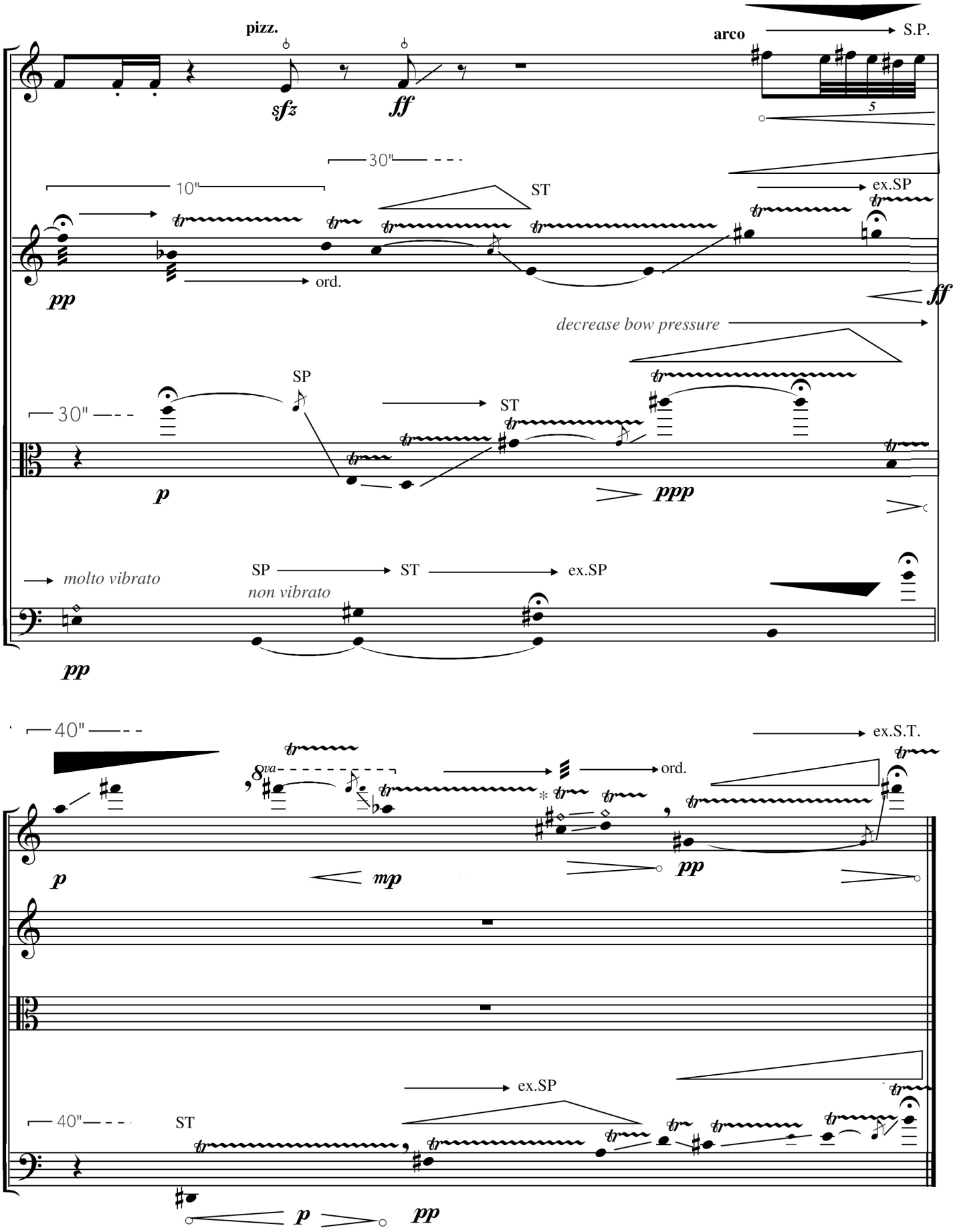

S.P.
N.
S.P.
mp
ord.
p
p
pizz.
ex.ST
arco
p
mf
pp
ex.ST
ex.SP
p
SP
ST
SP
ex.ST
f
mf
accel.
ex.SP
ST
mf
pizz.
arco
pizz.
p
ff>pp
ord.
ppp


ex.S.P.
N.
a tempo
pizz.
arco
ex.SP
ex.ST
pizz.
arco
SP
N
expression ad lib
ord.
ex.S.T.
N.
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.


p
f
p
sfz
p
mf
mp
arco
p
mp
ex.S.P.
ff
ex.ST
ff
ord.
p
pizz.
arco
ex.SP
mf
p
N
ord.
mp
tr
mf
rit.
ex.ST


S.T.
S.P.
N.
ex.S.P.
a tempo
pizz.
arco
6"
10"
3"
15"
expression ad lib
ex.SP
pizz.
arco
N.
S.P.
2"
15"
expression ad lib
arco


ex.S.P.
ex.S.T.
ord.
SP
ST
pizz.
arco
30"
S.T.
S.P.
8va
ex.SP
40"



* in the form of *molto vibrato*

Commentary for “...and keep the clay wet”

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"..and keep the clay wet" is a very personal composition. In the past, I had been trying to avoid writing a personal composition (possibly avoiding taking the responsibility of writing something personal in fear of having it heavily criticised and thus avoiding hurting my ego) by falling back to using methods external to music with which I was familiar before taking up composition, such as mathematics, images, physics, poems, etc. to help me compose.

The basic underlying pitch and rhythmic material I have used in the piece comes from folk music of the three cultures I consider have played the most important role in my life, and in who I am today: Greek (because of the history), English (because of the language) and Finnish (because of the land).

The use of folk music material was not intended to be audible in the final result - it rather provided a base material which I could mould and shape with the use of what I consider the important sonic materials of my composition. My main working materials are extended techniques such as increased bow pressure, timbral changes (sul pont, sul tasto etc) or trills and tremolos in unusual combinations, which need pitches and rhythms to be applied on, but whose sonic result does not necessarily depend on the notes they are played on.

I admire the more free interaction folk performers have with their material, which is something I attempt to do in my composition, albeit in a different way and in a substantially different context. Every time the piece is played it is different, but retains various characteristic elements: much like stories (which are different depending on who tells them, where, and to whom - representing an emergent and more folk-like mindset) and much unlike histories (which are established, once and for all, unchanged, stated, there - representing an established and more control-obsessed and western mindset).

With this piece I wanted to create a more "raw" soundscape than the soundscape we are used to listening to in a concert environment. Obviously, some of 20th-century and contemporary music sounds quite "raw" in the sense that the sounds produced during performances of such pieces are very remote from the earlier classical tradition of the west, and have adopted in their array of accepted "musical" sounds a vast number of what would simply be called "noise" in earlier days or other contexts. However, I believe that in many occasions these soundscapes were the result of other compositional processes or attitudes in composition, and were not so much explored for their own sake. Without claiming to be unique in my approach to composing such a piece, I primarily focus on creating such a soundscape for its own sake, to evoke a dance of wild sonic instances that these extraordinarily sophisticated instruments are capable of producing, which we have tamed for the sake of creating what –at a particular time and place– is considered "socially acceptable music". Someone in the workshop mentioned that the piece has an "archaic" feeling to it, but I would take it further and say that if I could use one word to describe the piece, I would use the word "primeval" or “feral”. *Unease*, *uncertainty* and *indeterminacy* are also three words which describe the soundscape of this piece in a compositional approach. (Three words which are quite distant from our everyday Western middle-class lives, where things are quite safe, normal, predictable, determined for us, and we have a lot less to worry about than our fellow human beings in remote parts of the world whose natural habitat we destroy so we can keep living our ever-increasingly needy and consumer-oriented lives.)

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>
> *(Jay Griffiths, “Anarchipelago”)*

Post-workshop comments

In the workshop which took place in the first week of term, I received some very helpful comments from the string quartet which played this piece. The material given to the players was intended to be played a lot more slowly, and had a lot less extended techniques and more "clean" sounding notes. However, it turned out that the character of the piece (which was the more scratchy, ethereal and "weird" kind of soundscape) was more disturbed by the clean notes than I expected. In turn, they suggested I should fill in the score with a lot more "weird" stuff (in their words) so as to make sure that the performers know what kind of atmosphere they should be creating in the piece, so when they are familiar with the material and perform it, they will be more free to act on the material (as it is asked in the performance instructions) in a way that will be faithful to my intentions. The second time they performed the piece, we decided to make each system a lot faster (twice the speed), and almost eliminate any clean notes and add as much 'crazy' and 'weird' things they thought would be appropriate. I much preferred that end result, and I decided to use the clean notes with the –sometimes– folk reminiscences as a decorative element to the piece rather than as an equal and polarising element in the composition which is what they were in the beginning.

Unfortunately there is no recording of the workshop due to an error with the recording equipment, but I believe a recording wouldn't be very representative of the composition anymore as it has changed significantly since the workshop.