Luca Marenzio

Crudele, acerba, inesorabil morte…

adapted by Thomas Feng
for string quartet

Performance Notes

Minimal vibrato throughout, except where marked (toward the very end).

The slurs show phrasing, not necessarily bowing.

The intent of the octave/unison doublings is a "chorus" effect (i.e. on an effect pedal for an electric guitar); do not emphasize the melodic "leaps" resulting from an octave doubling, only the change in timbre.

Program Notes

I have strong "performer's envy" – all too often I'll fall in love with a piece, and regret that I'll never be able to perform it, simply because I don't sing or play any instrument that the piece requires. Such was the case with this madrigal by Marenzio, which I've loved from first hearing. If I couldn't "make the piece mine" by performing it, I figured I would do so by arranging it – that way, I could get to know it intimately and then still offer a personal interpretation of it, albeit with some abstraction.

I have no Italian fluency whatsoever, so the darkness and melancholy of Petrarch's text came as a surprise to me. In adapting the madrigal for string quartet I've tried to underscore Marenzio's own subtle "madrigalisms", both emulating the experience of hearing a texted piece without understanding the words ("glossolalia"), and using the meaning and structure of the text (now latent) as a structure for the music.

> *Cruel, bitter, inexorable Death,*
> *You give me reason never to be happy,*
> *But to live my life instead with weeping,*
> *Darkened days, and the saddened nights.*
> *My heavy sighs will not go into rhyme,*
> *And my harsh pain defeats any style.*
>
> – Petrarch, translated by Emily Ezust

Just as a madrigal is a personal interpretation (or illustration, extrapolation, exaggeration) of a text, so I intend likewise in my humble arrangement of this achingly beautiful madrigal.

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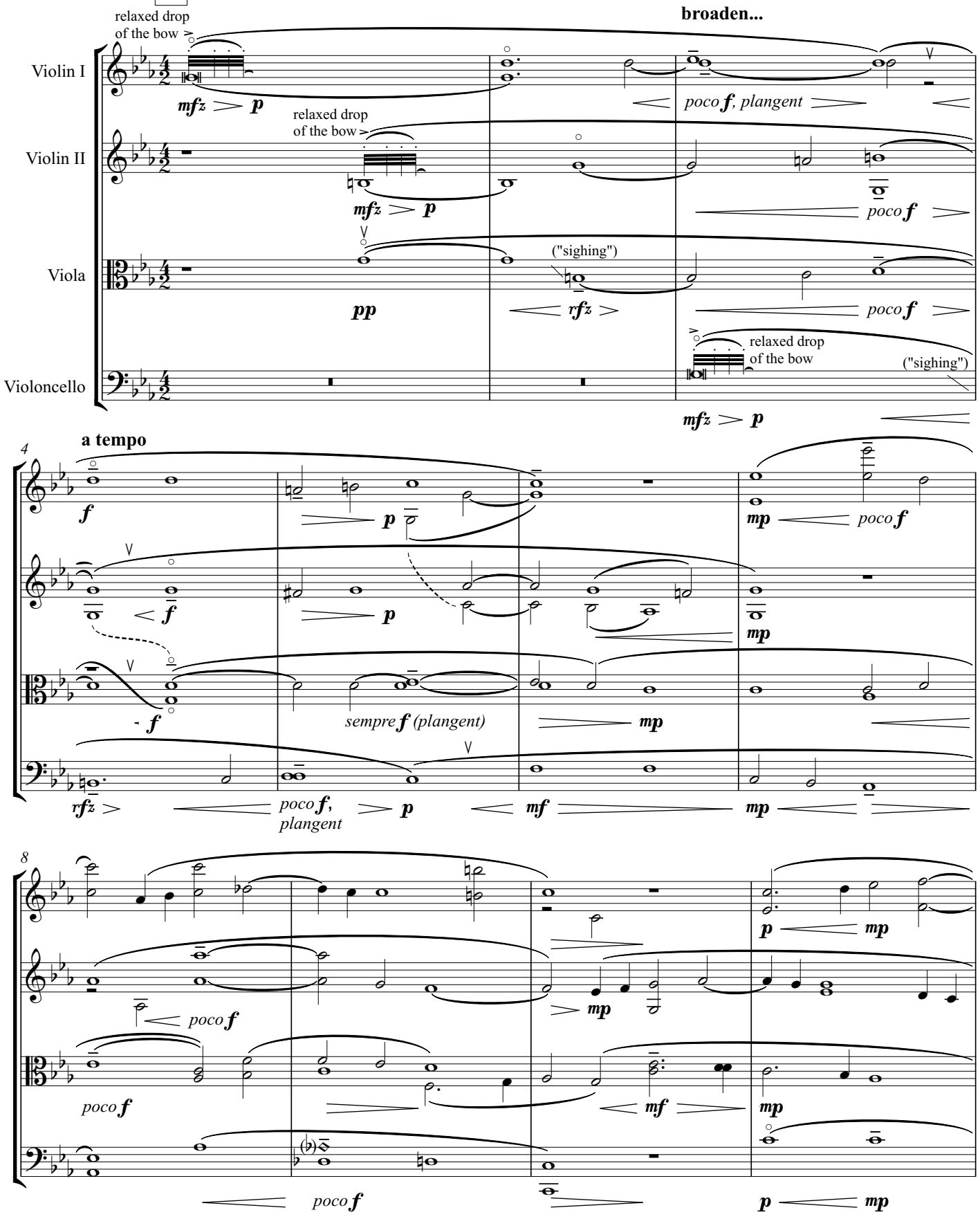
A **Viscous; slow and sustained** ♩ = ca. 48



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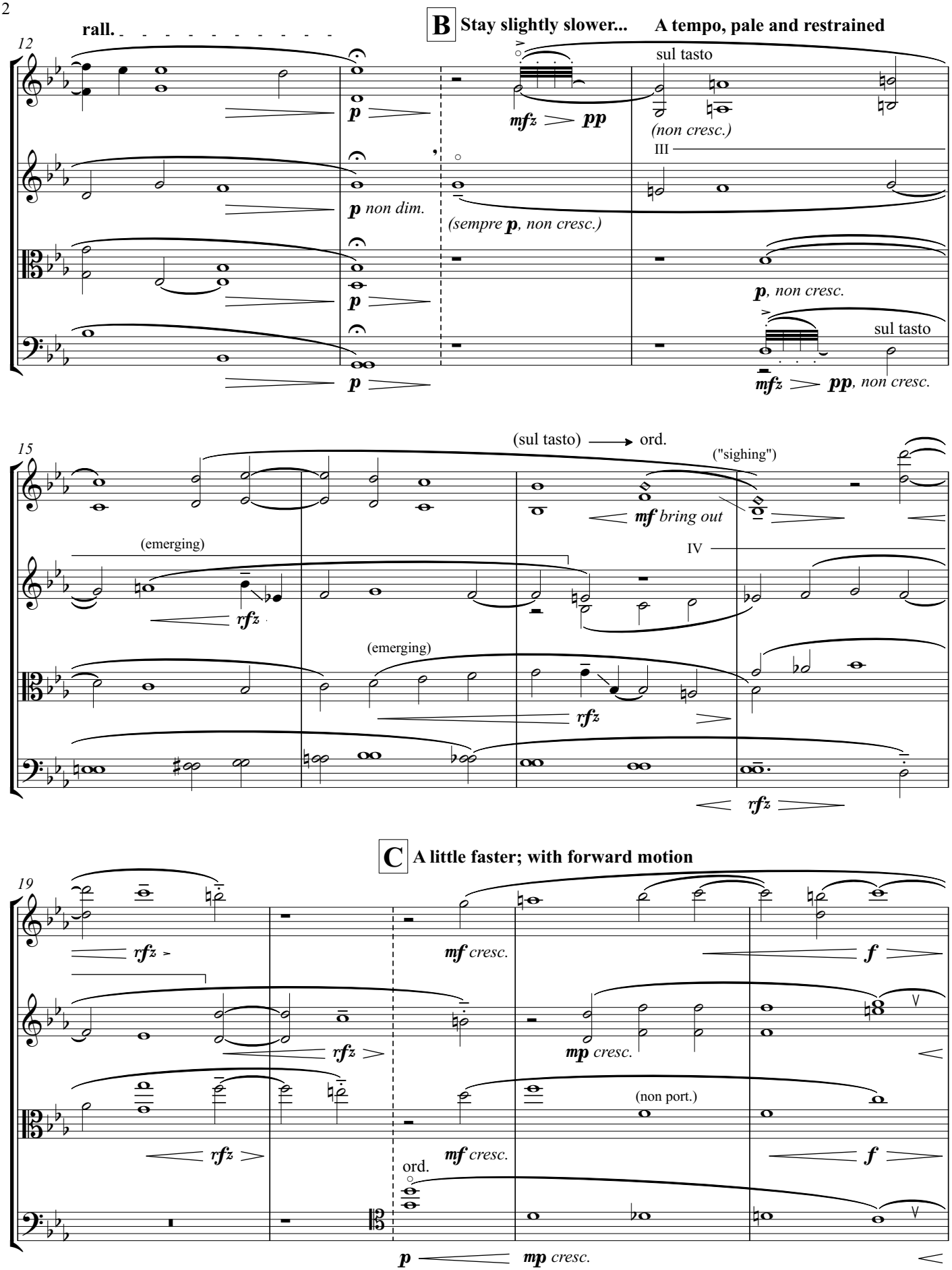
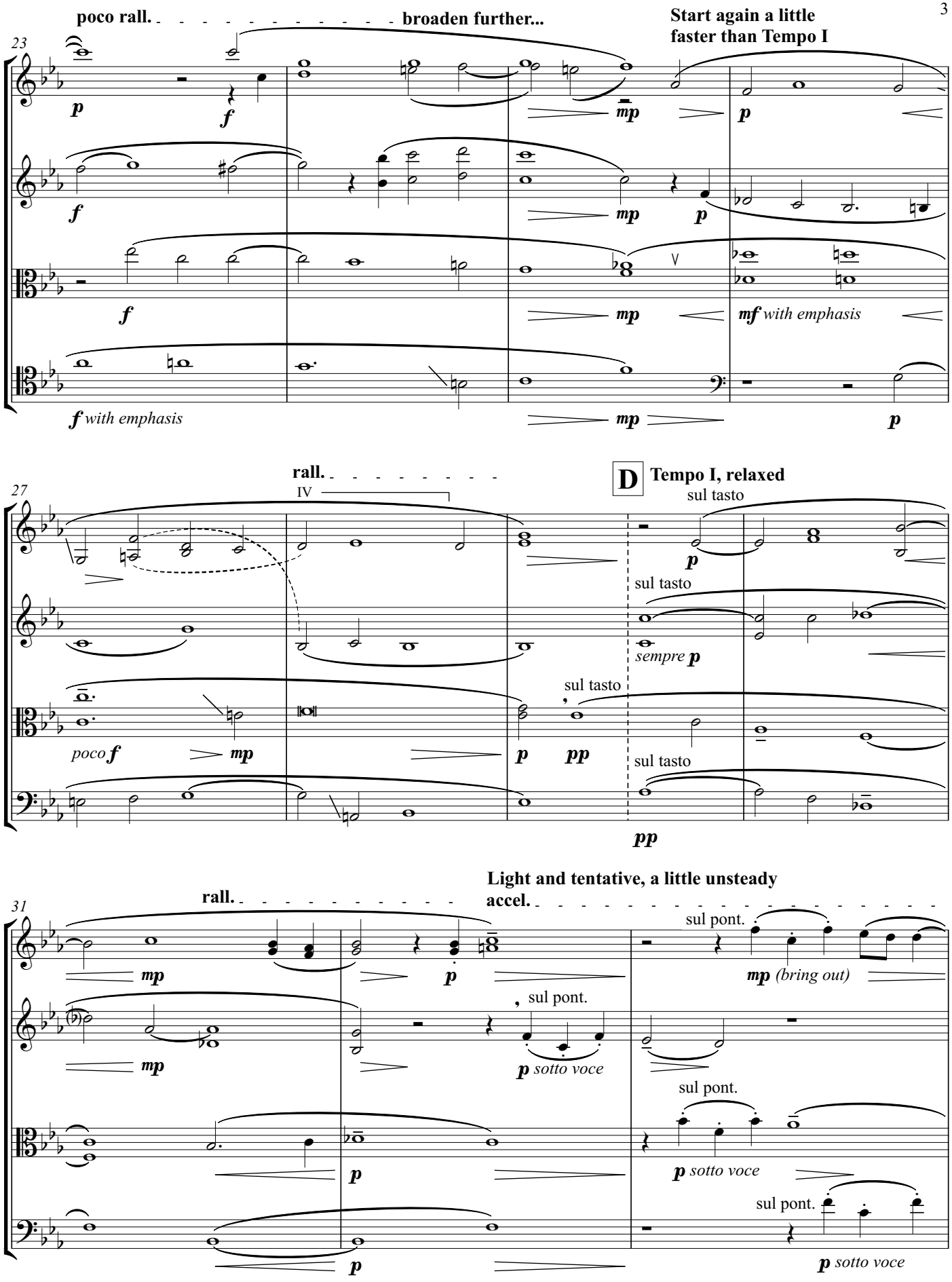
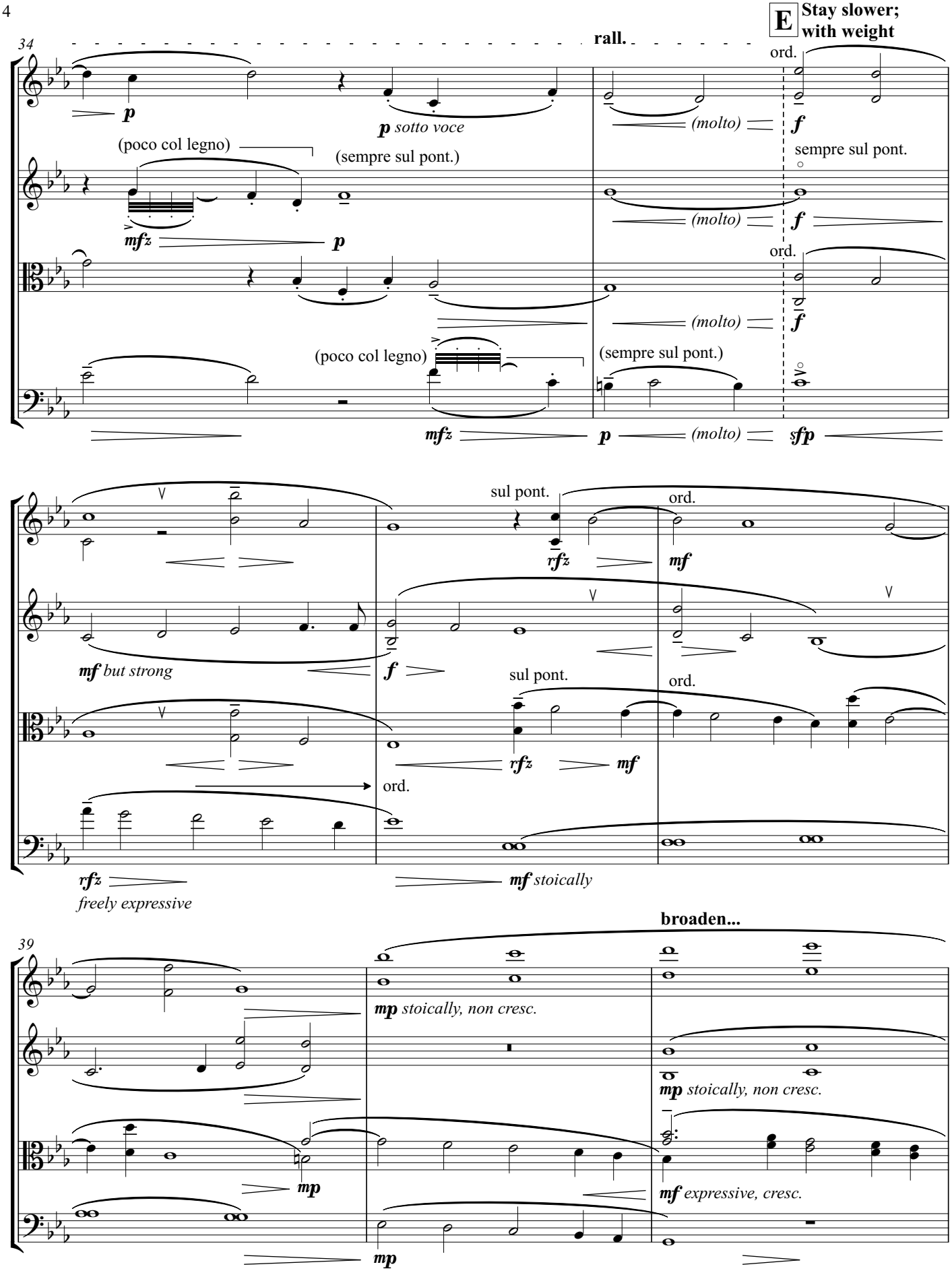
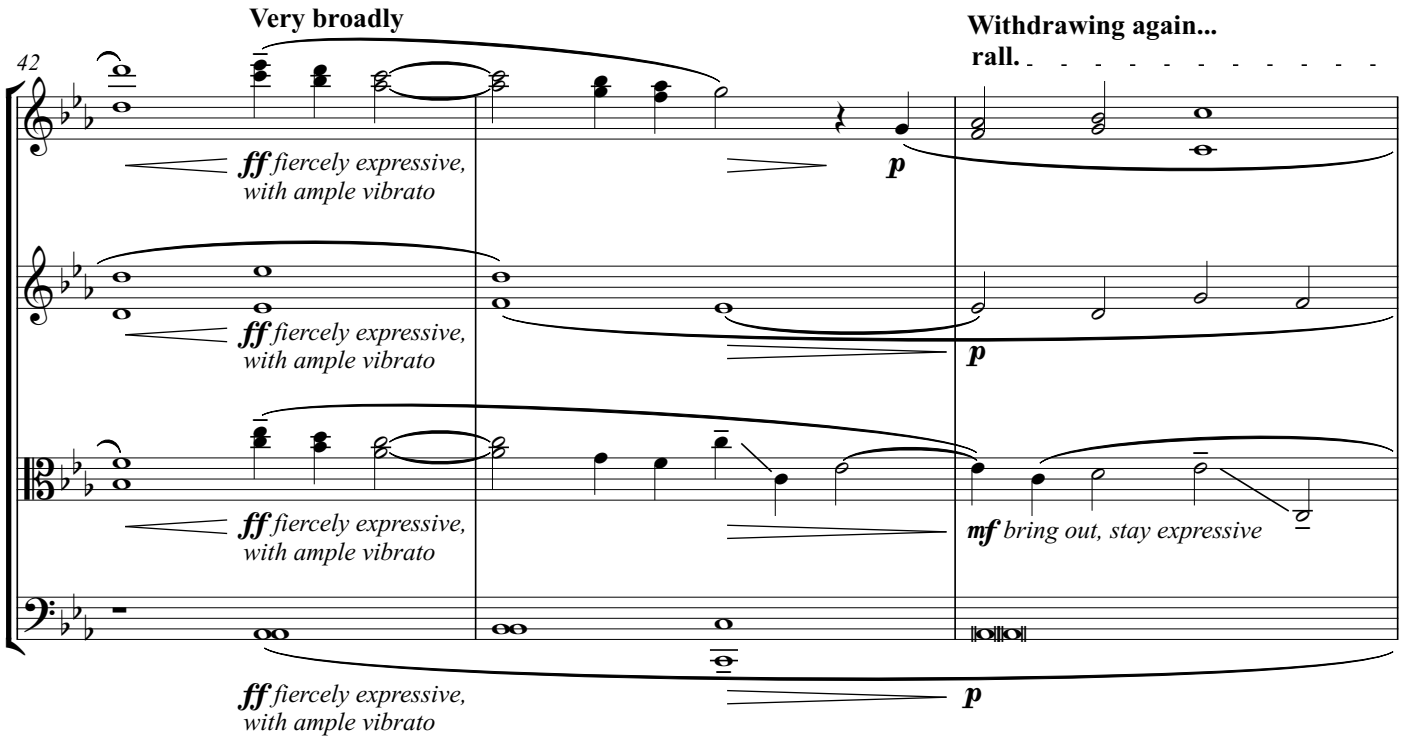
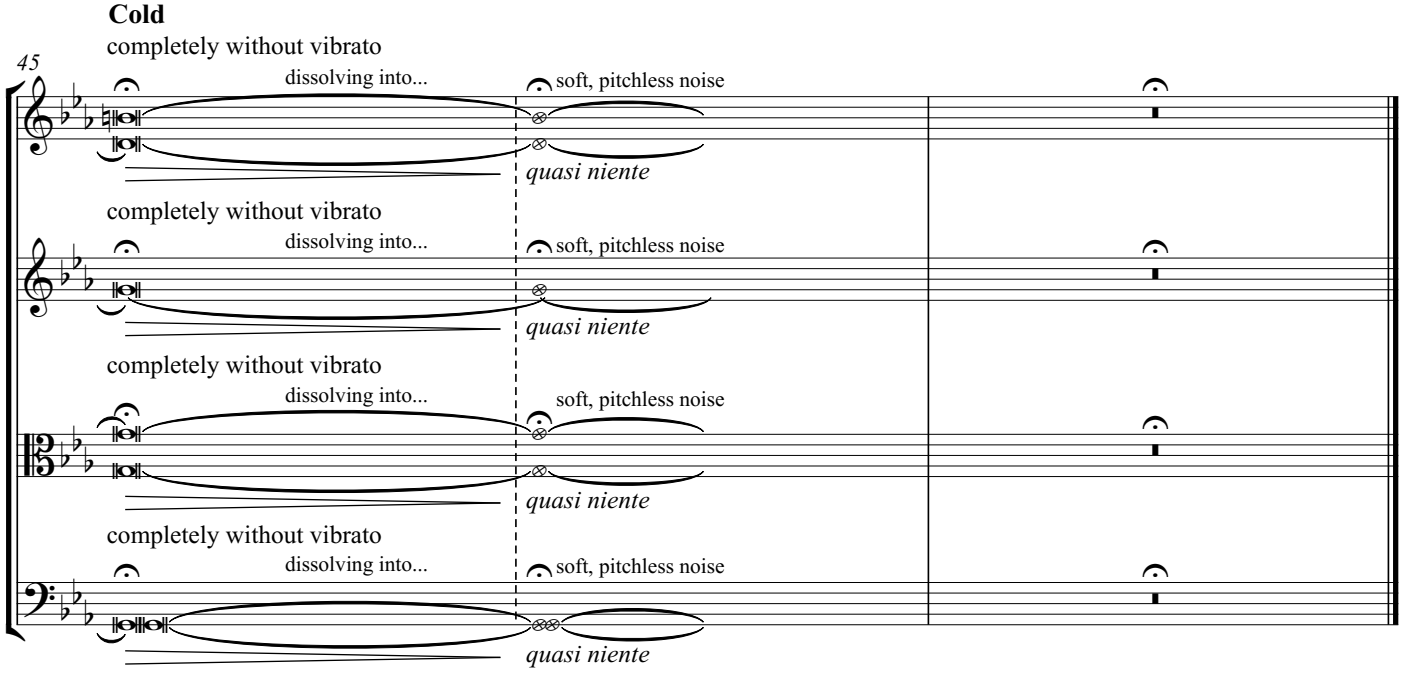

rall.
B Stay slightly slower... A tempo, pale and restrained
12
sul tasto
(non cresc.)
III
(sempre p, non cresc.)
p non dim.
p, non cresc.
sul tasto
mfz pp, non cresc.
15
(sul tasto) ord.
("sighing")
mf bring out
(emerging)
IV
rfz
(emerging)
C A little faster; with forward motion
19
mf cresc.
f
mp cresc.
(non port.)
ord.
p mp cresc.


poco rall.
broaden further...
Start again a little faster than Tempo I
23
p
f
f
mp
p
f
mp
p
f
mp
mf with emphasis
f with emphasis
mp
p
rall.
D
Tempo I, relaxed
27
IV
sul tasto
p
sul tasto
sempre p
sul tasto
poco f
mp
p
pp
sul tasto
pp
Light and tentative, a little unsteady
rall.
accel.
31
sul pont.
mp
p
mp (bring out)
sul pont.
mp
p sotto voce
sul pont.
p
p sotto voce
sul pont.
p
p sotto voce


34
rall.
E
Stay slower; with weight
p
p sotto voce
(molto)
f
ord.
(poco col legno)
(sempre sul pont.)
sempre sul pont.
mfz
p
(molto)
f
ord.
(poco col legno)
(sempre sul pont.)
mfz
p
(molto)
sfp
sul pont.
ord.
rfz
mf
mf but strong
f
sul pont.
ord.
rfz
mf
ord.
rfz
freely expressive
mf stoically
39
broaden...
mp stoically, non cresc.
mp stoically, non cresc.
mp
mf expressive, cresc.
mp


Very broadly
Withdrawing again...
rall.
42
ff fiercely expressive, with ample vibrato
p
mf bring out, stay expressive


Cold
completely without vibrato
45
dissolving into...
soft, pitchless noise
quasi niente