Diatonic Phrygian Tetrachord

for Violin and Chamber Orchestra

Bill Robinson

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July 20—August 6, orchestrated Oct. 2-10, 2014
Duration: about 7 minutes 50 seconds

for Jim Waddelow and the Meredith Sinfonietta

On July 6, 2014, WNYC broadcast "The World's Most-Used Musical Sequence", which was an hour-long compilation of musical excerpts demonstrating the use of the Diatonic Phrygian Tetrachord. NPR followed up with five minutes on *Weekend Edition* on July 20. Despite the forbidding academic name, this series of four notes, with many modifications, has been used for centuries by musicians all over the world.

The basic sequence is four descending notes with the pattern whole step, whole step, half step. On a piano keyboard, one example would be the four white notes going down starting from E. Retrograde, it would be B C D E; inverted it would be E F# G# A. Another type of modification is increasing the intervals, such as to major third, major third, minor third. When harmonized in the manner frequently found in flamenco music, it is known as the Andalusian Cadence. Other kind of modifications are altering the order (such as the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth), or interposing notes while the sequence remains relatively stressed.

This composition uses the Diatonic Phrygian Tetrachord both unmodified and highly modified in pretty much every way I could think of, frequently with several modifications simultaneously, in a reasonably contemporary idiom. I will leave it to musicologists yet unborn to deal with the analytical details, as I have some pride in not having opened a music theory book since 1975, and I don't want to have to look things up.

The composition started as the middle movement of *Three Pieces for Violin and Piano*, written for Eric Pritchard. This orchestration for solo violin and chamber orchestra fits the instrumentation of the Meredith Sinfonietta, a student ensemble at Meredith College conducted by Jim Waddelow.

Accidentals hold through the measure and not beyond, and do not refer to other octaves.

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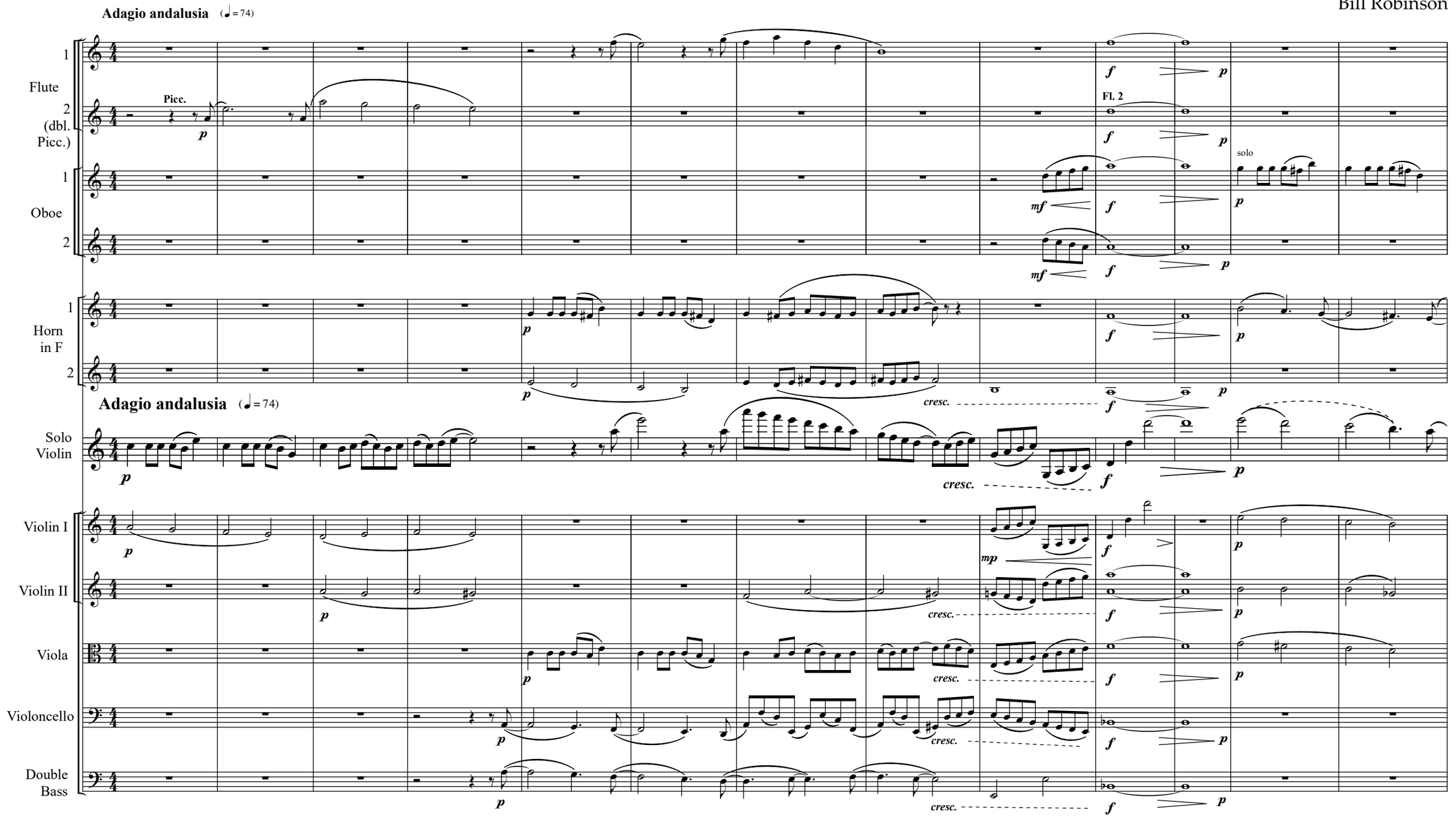

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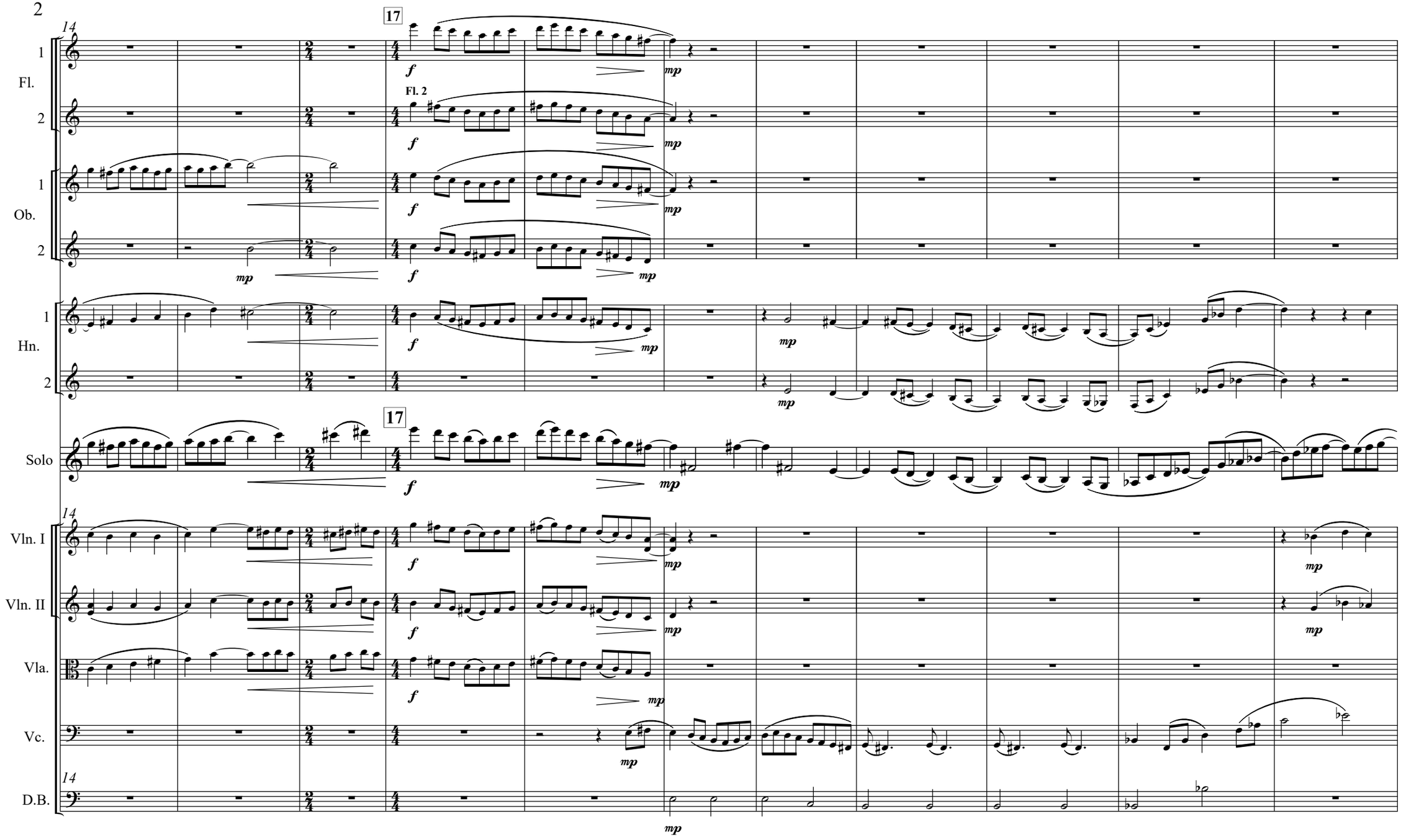
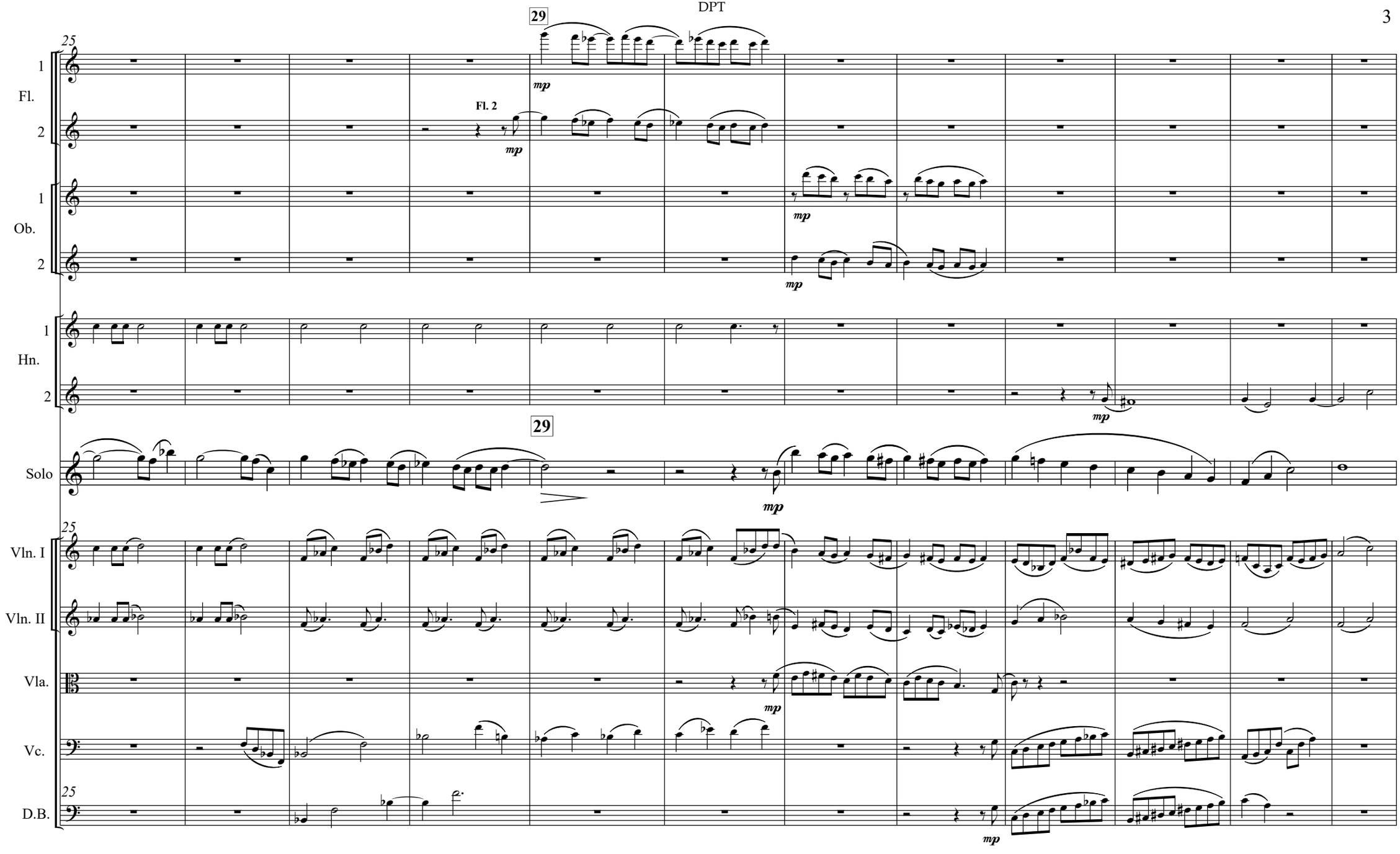
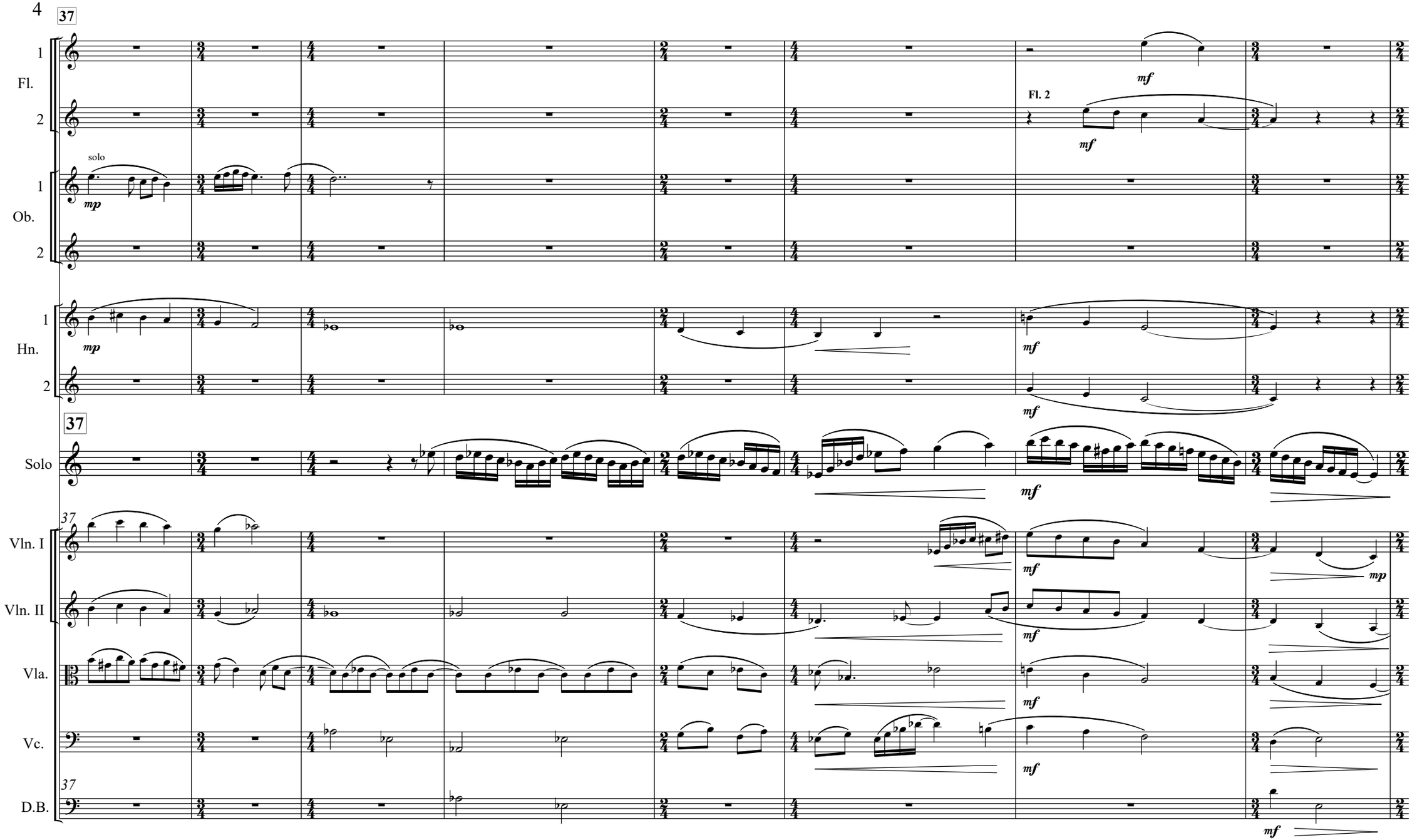
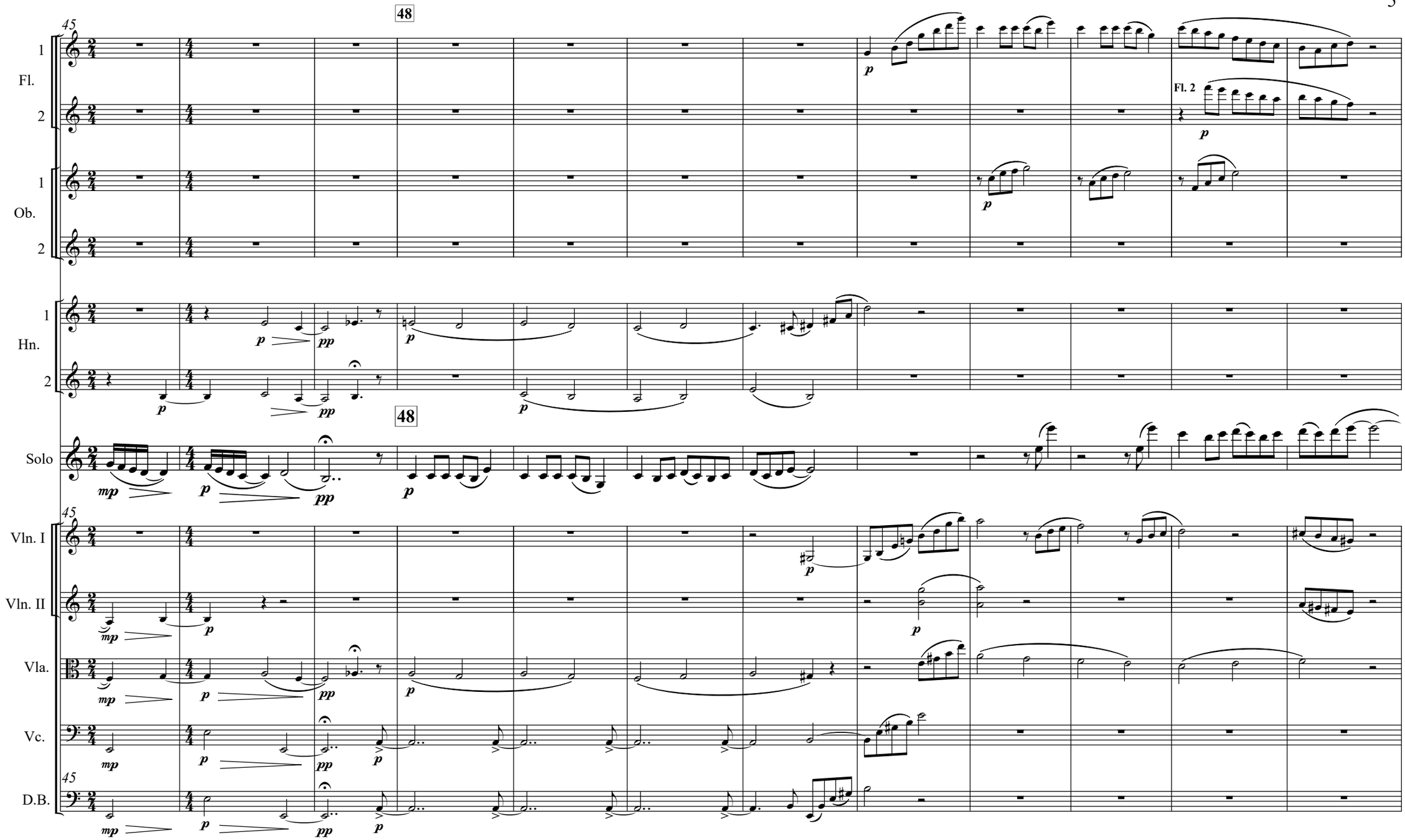
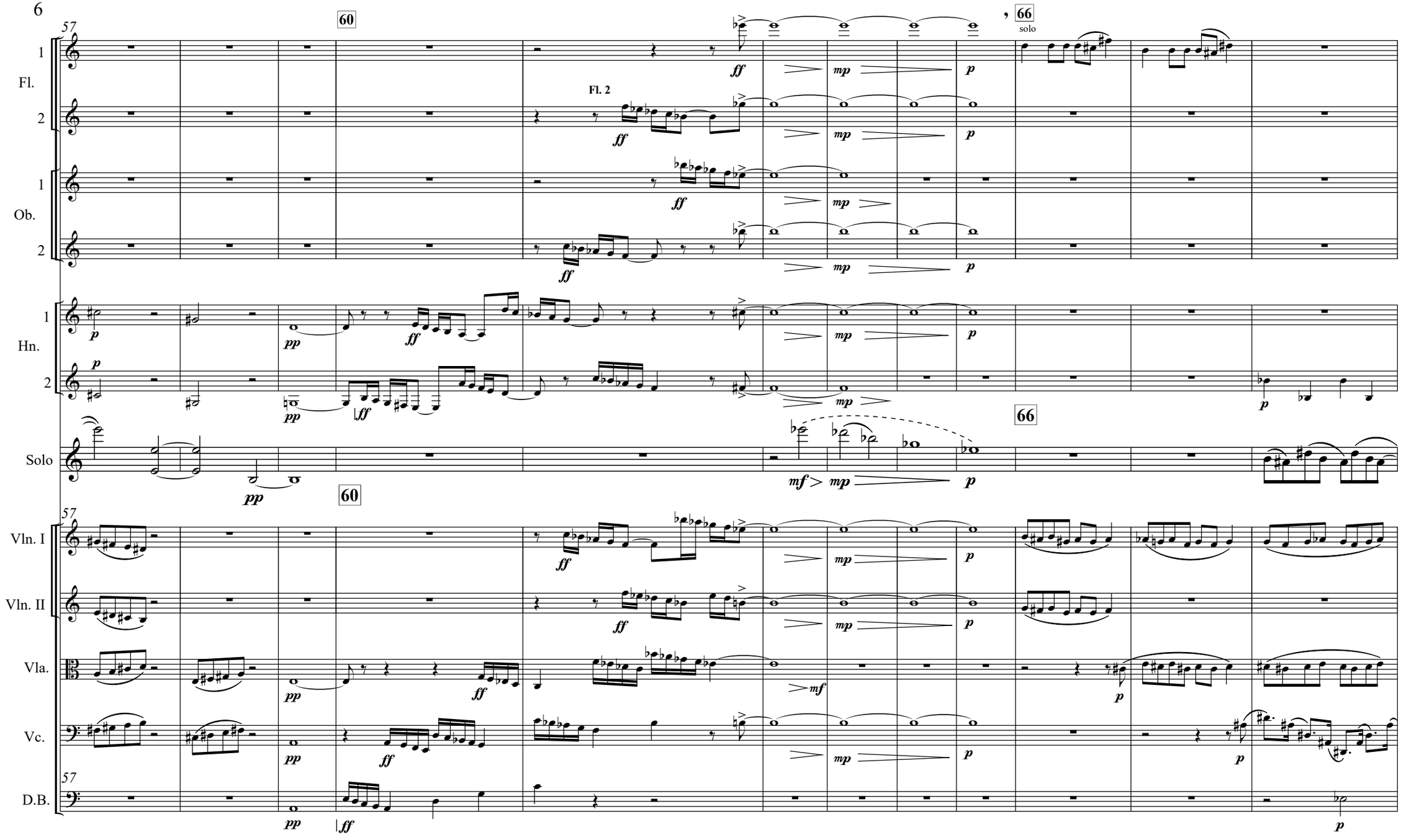
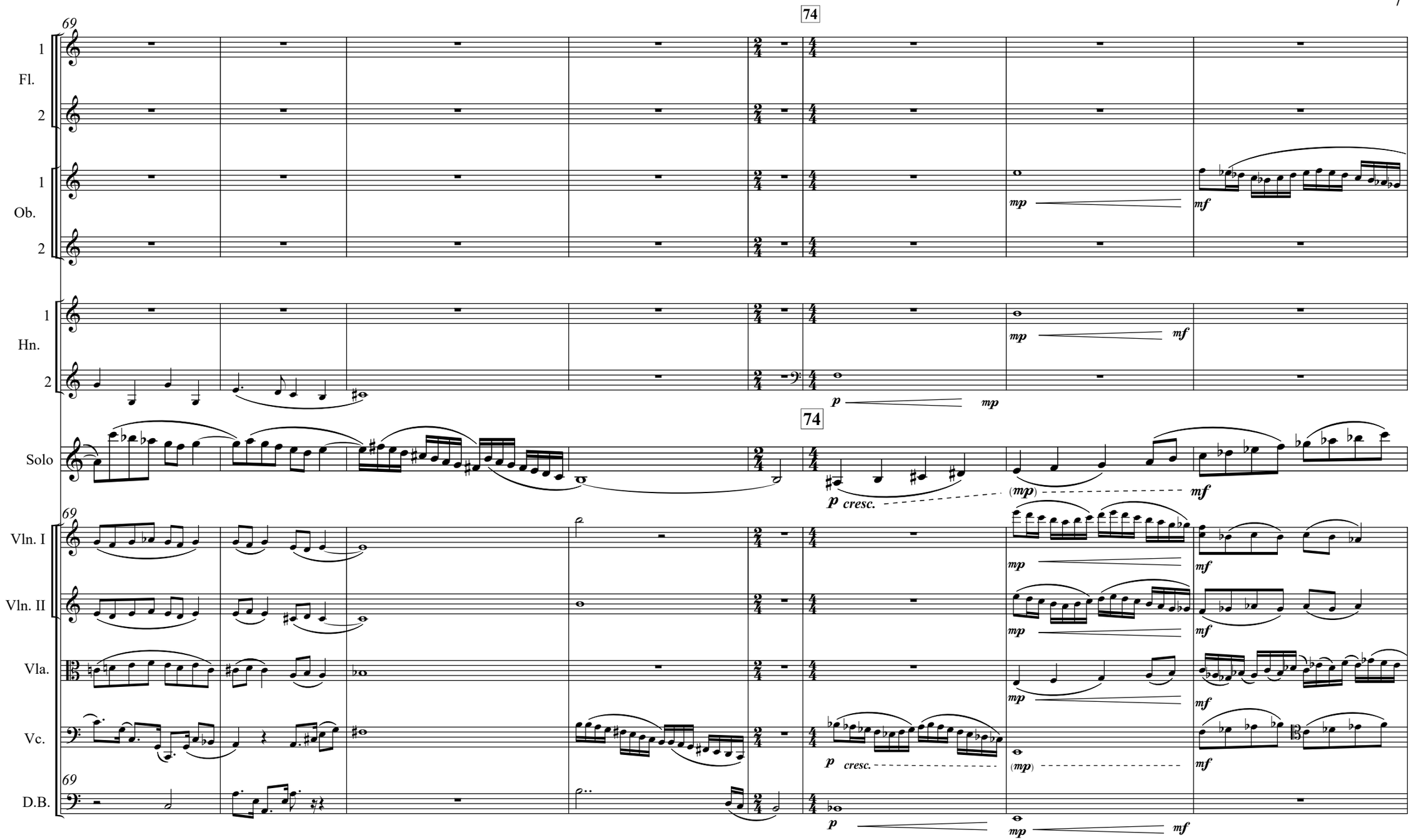

14
17
Fl. 2
Fl.
Ob.
Hn.
Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
f
mp

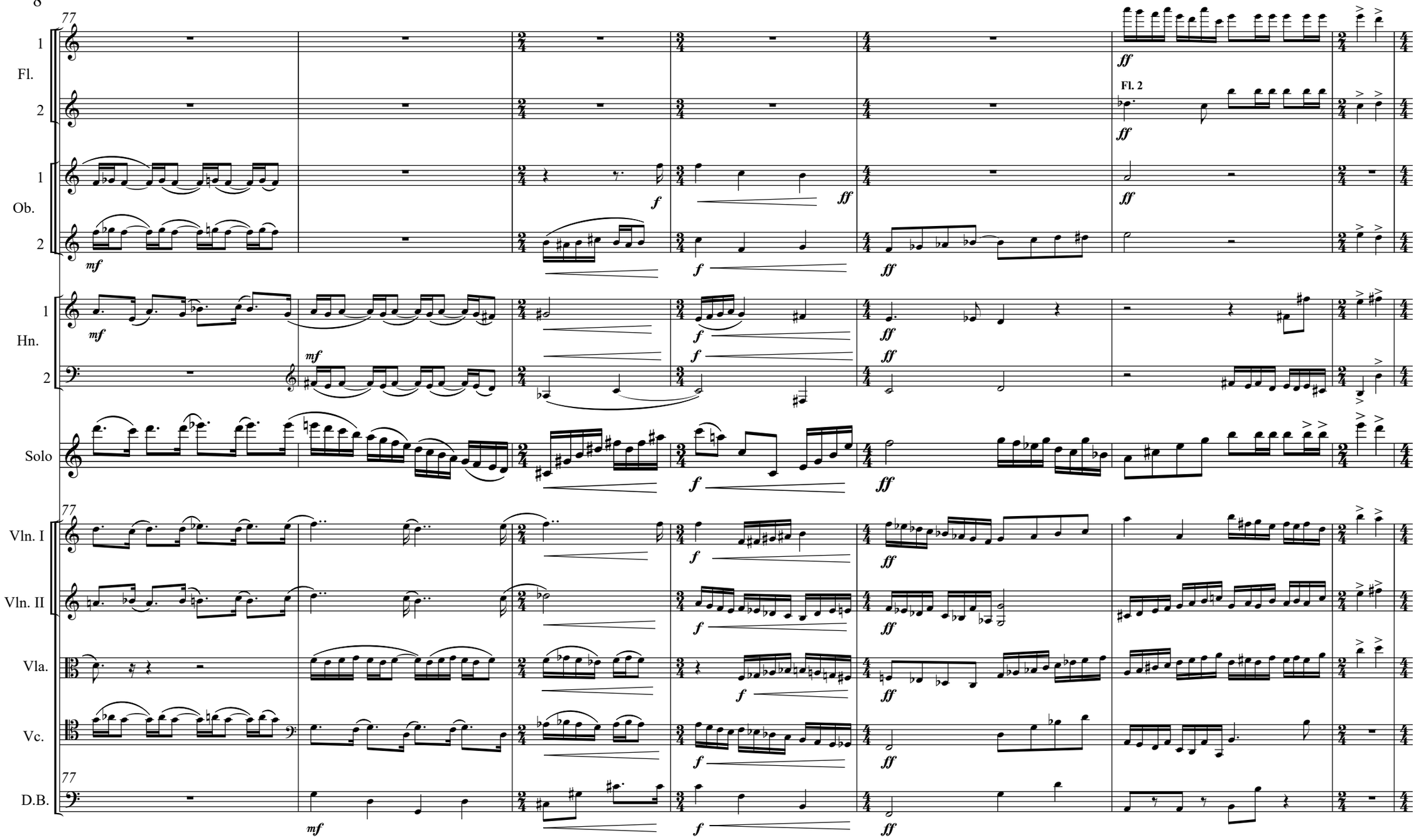

29
25
1
Fl.
2
Fl. 2
mp
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
29
Solo
25
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
25
D.B.

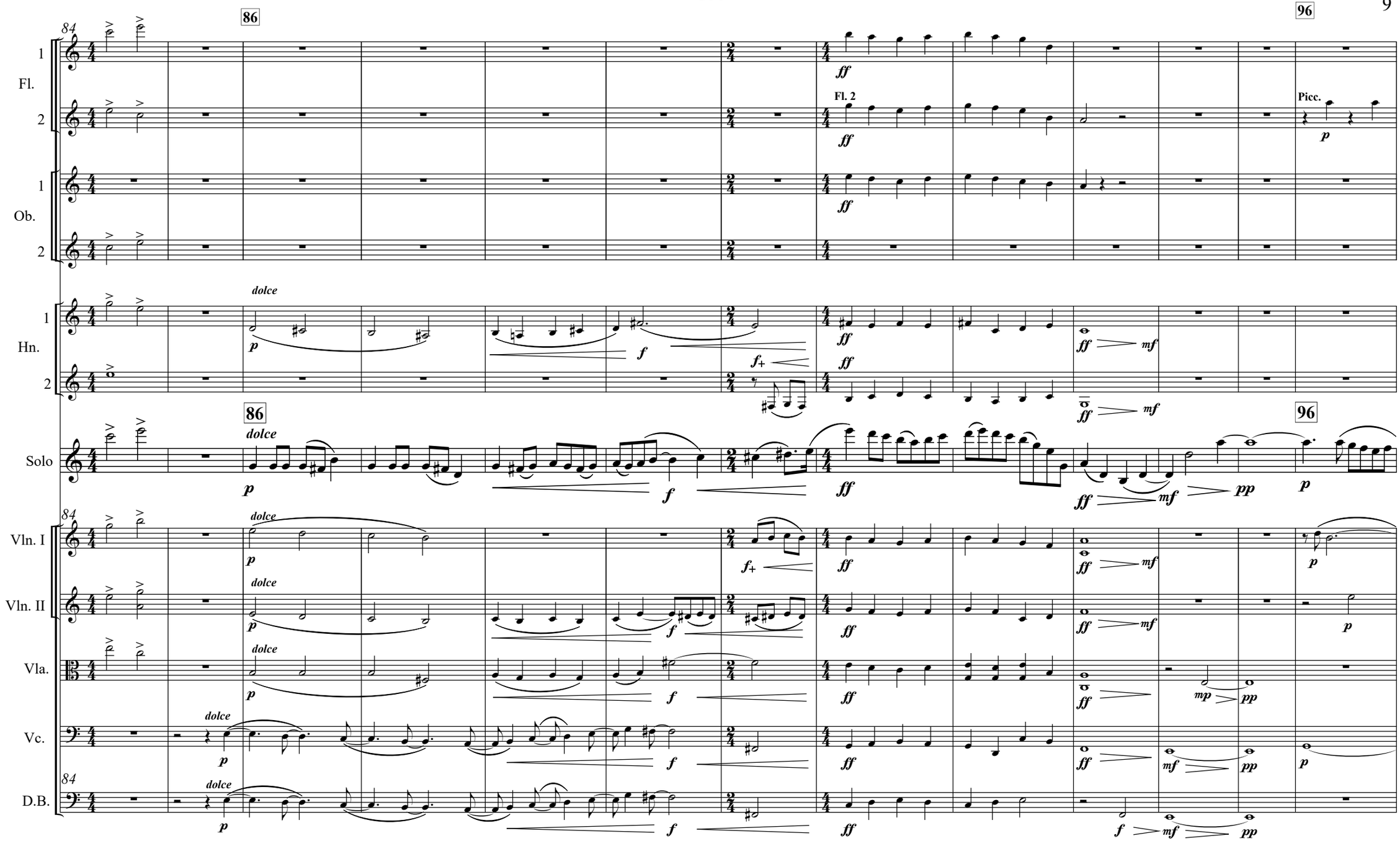

37
1
Fl.
2
mf
Fl. 2
mf
solo
1
Ob.
2
mp
1
Hn.
2
mp
mf
mf
37
Solo
mf
37
Vln. I
mf
mp
Vln. II
mf
Vla.
mf
Vc.
mf
37
D.B.
mf

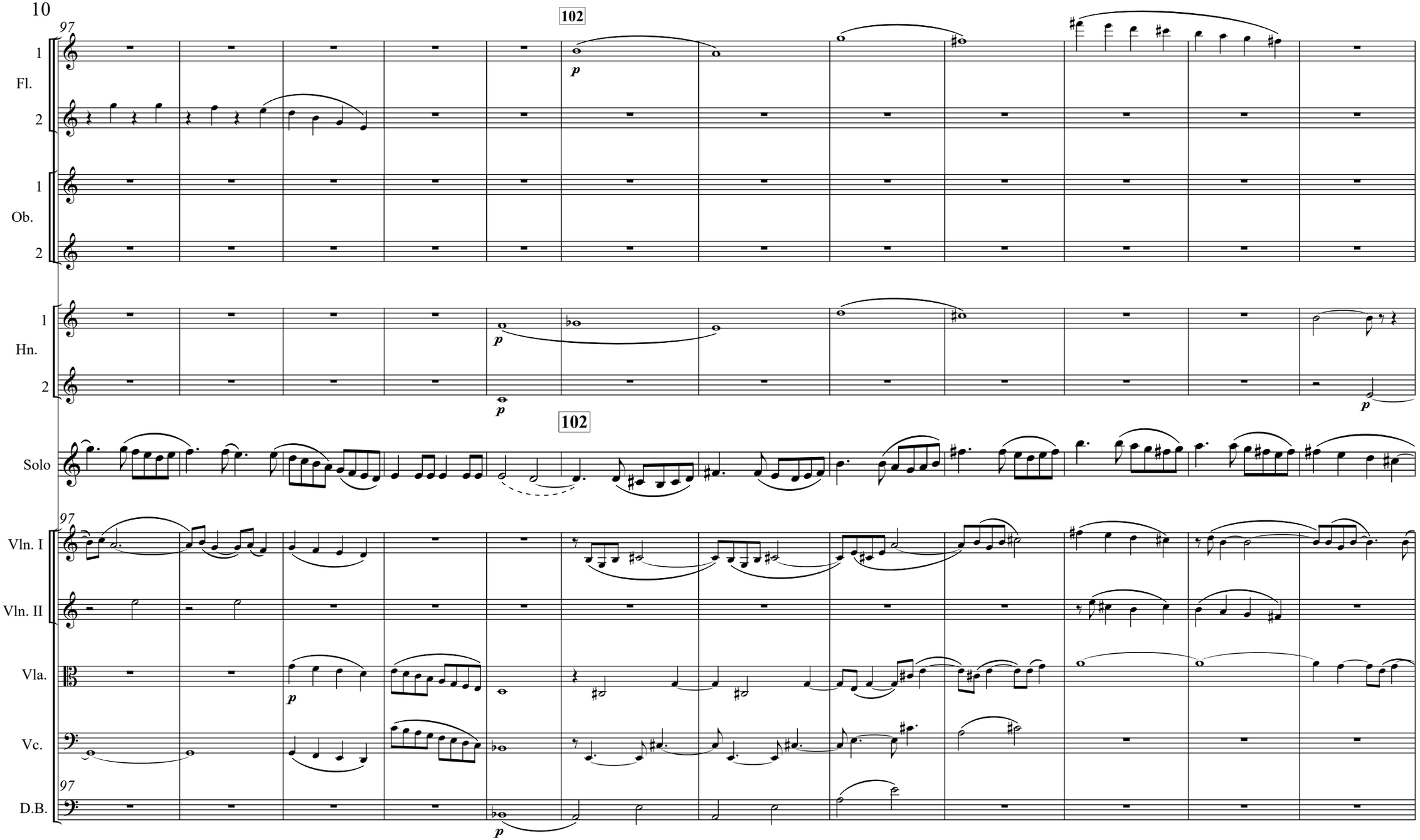

45
48
1
Fl.
2
Fl. 2
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
Solo
48
45
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
45
D.B.

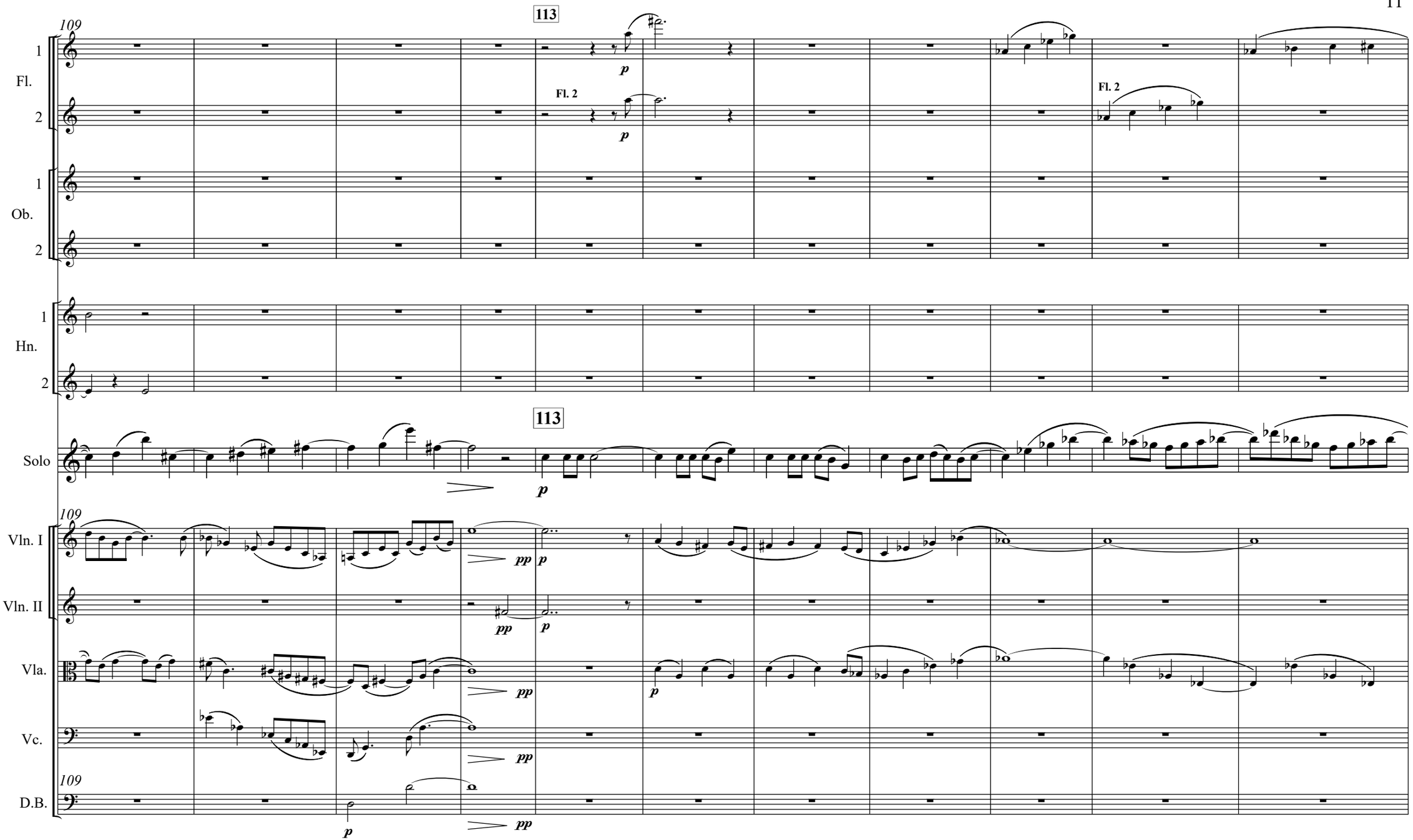

60
66
solo
Fl. 2
Fl.
Ob.
Hn.
Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
57


74
69
1
Fl.
2
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
mp
mf
p
cresc.
(mp)

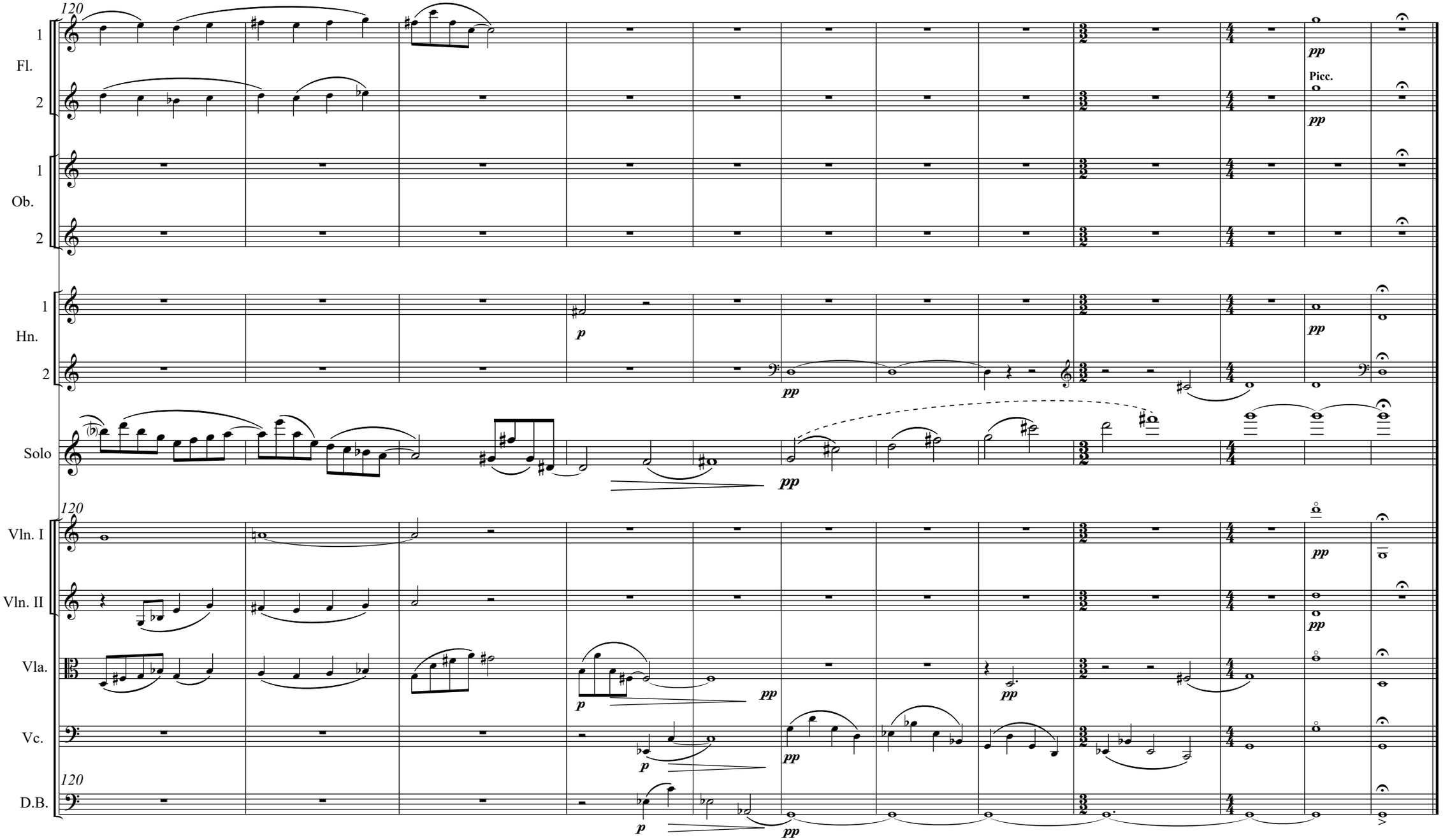

77
1
Fl.
2
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
Solo
77
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
77
D.B.
Fl. 2
ff
f
mf


84
86
96
Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Fl. 2
Picc.
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Hn. 1
Hn. 2
Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
dolce
ff
mf
mp
pp
p
f


97
102
1
Fl.
2
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
102
Solo
97
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
97
D.B.
p


109
113
Fl.
1
2
Fl. 2
Ob.
Hn.
Solo
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
p
pp

12


120
1
Fl.
2
Picc.
pp
1
Ob.
2
1
Hn.
2
p
pp
Solo
120
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
120
D.B.