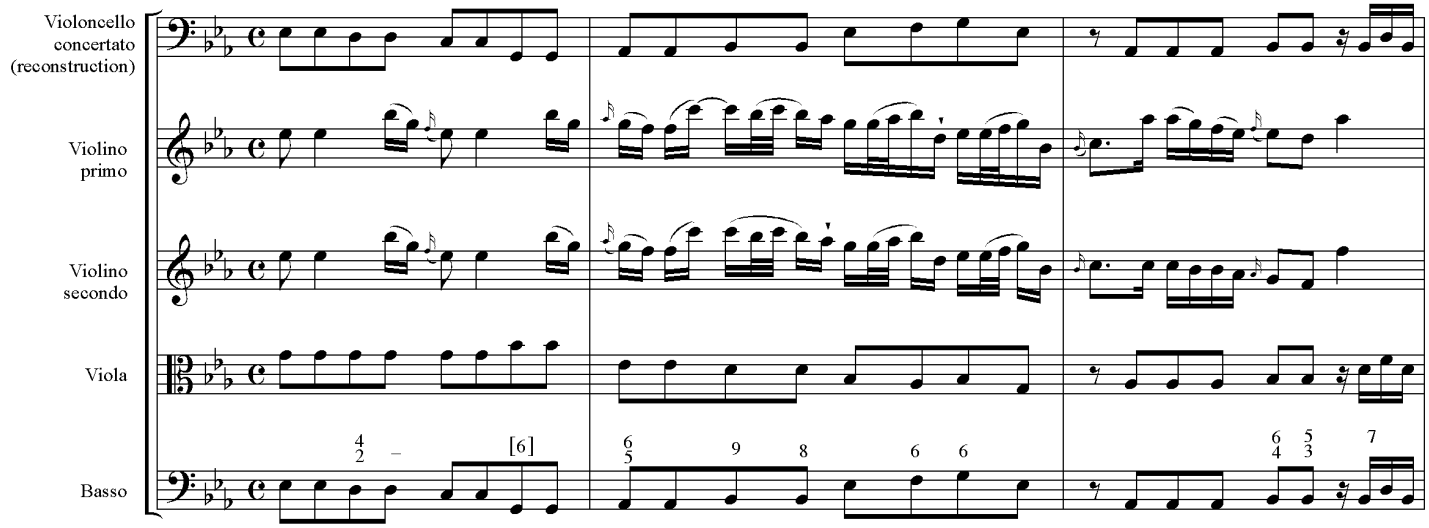
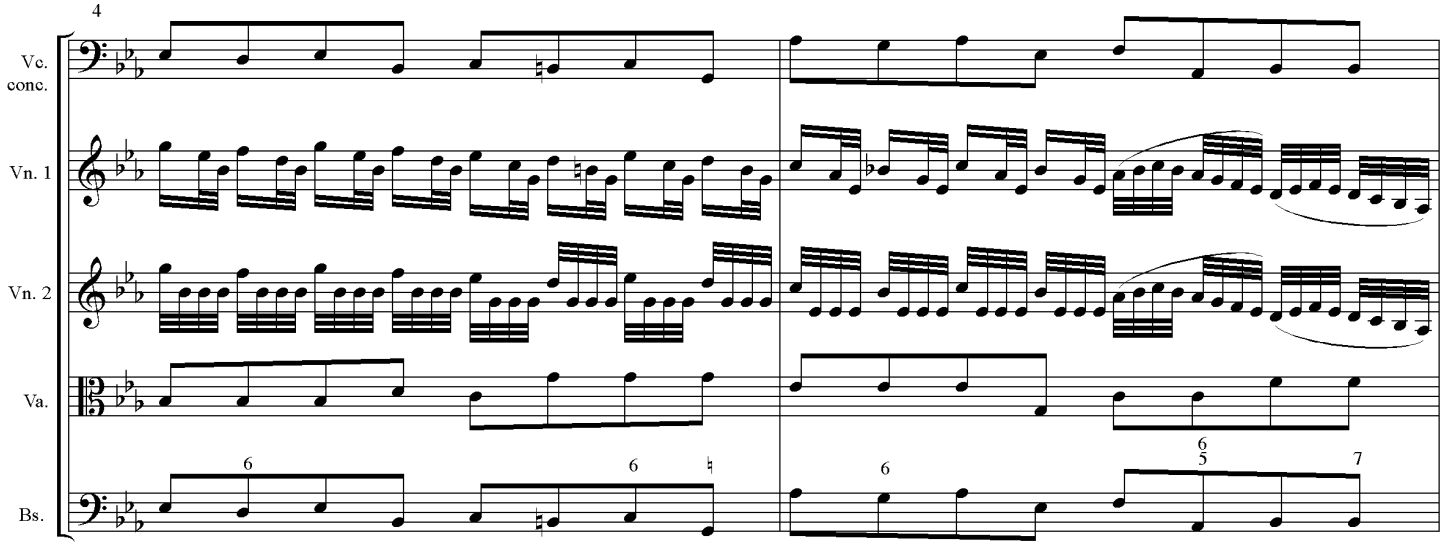
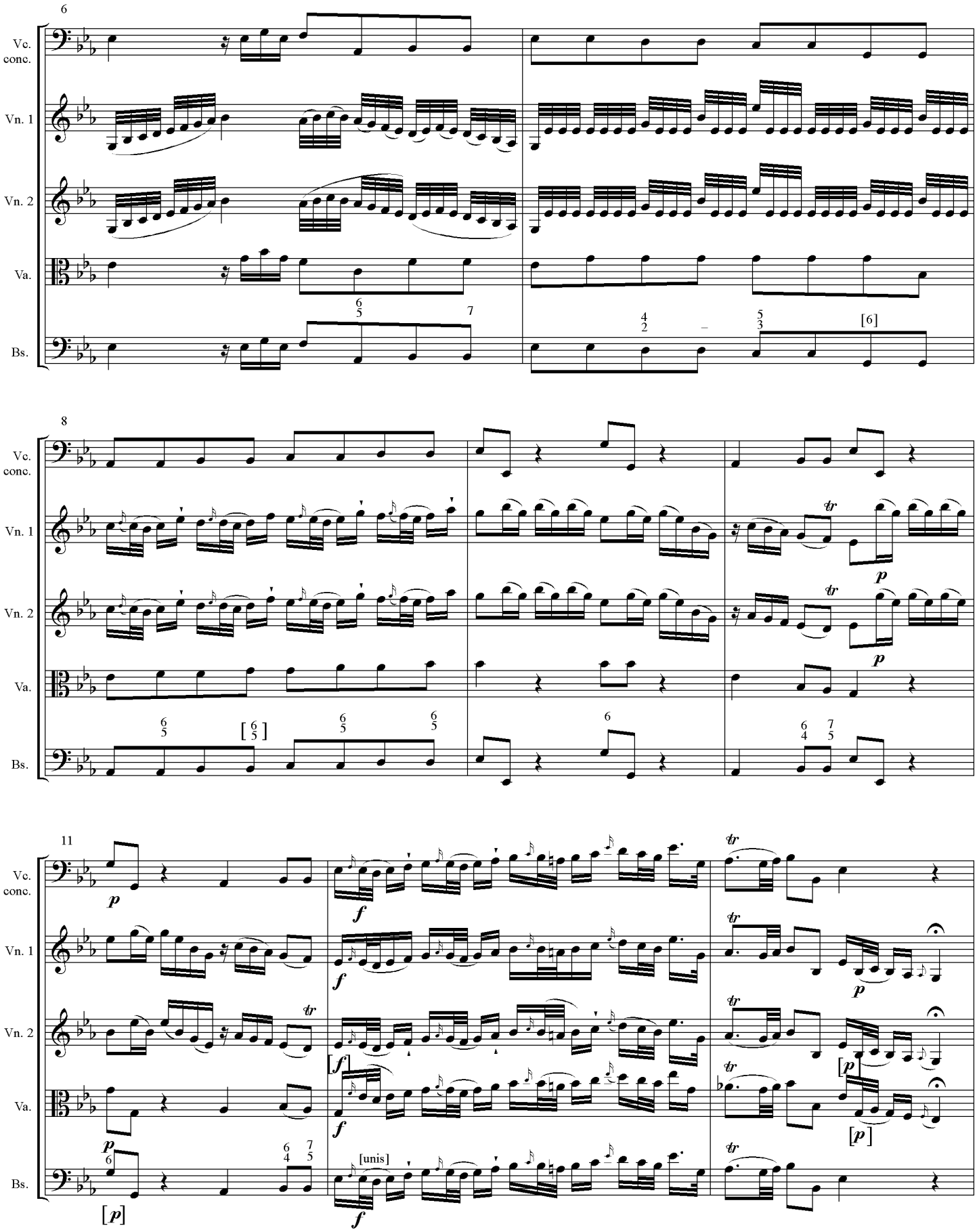
Concerto

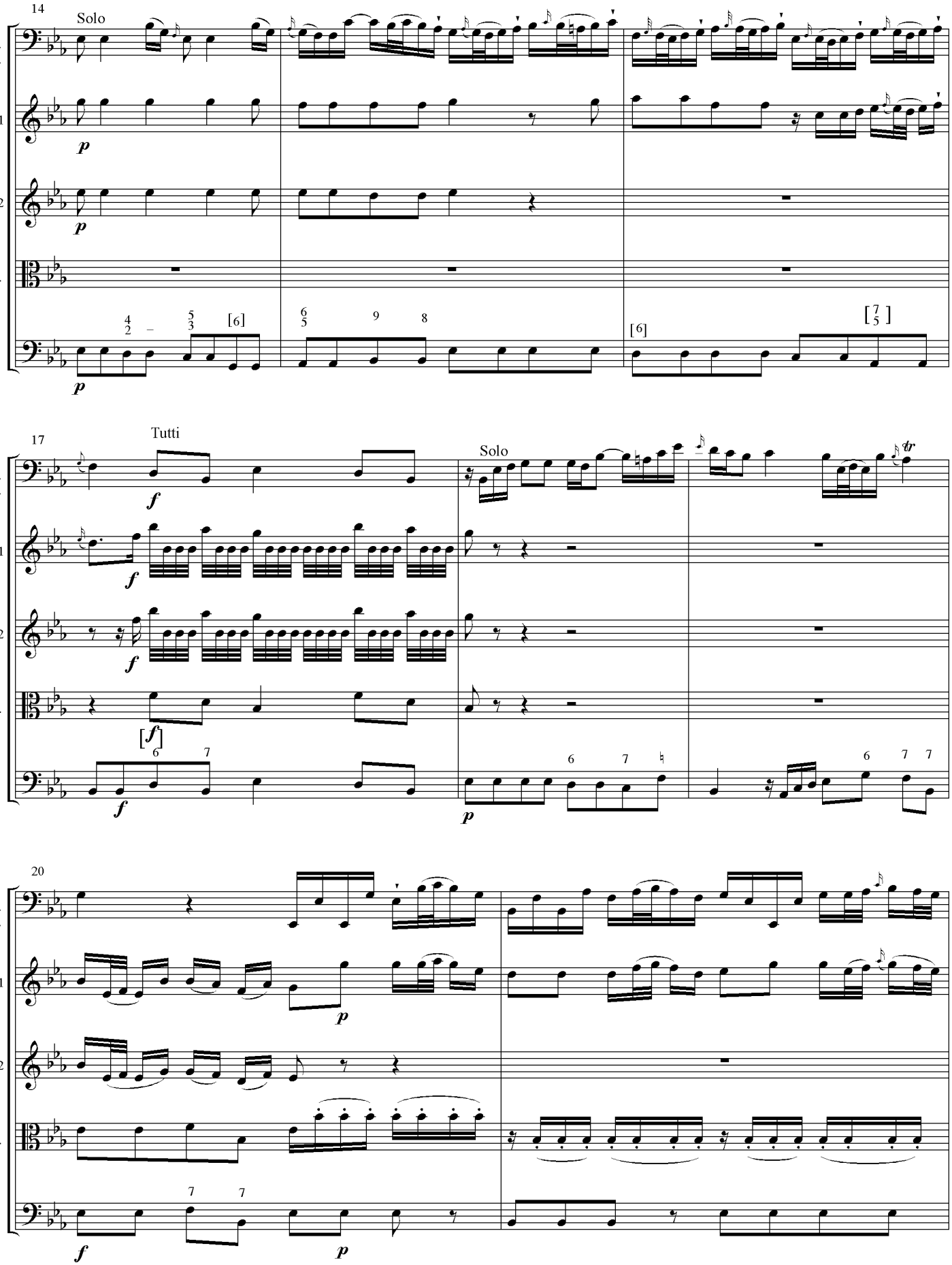
Ignaz Mara (from D Bsa SA 2849)

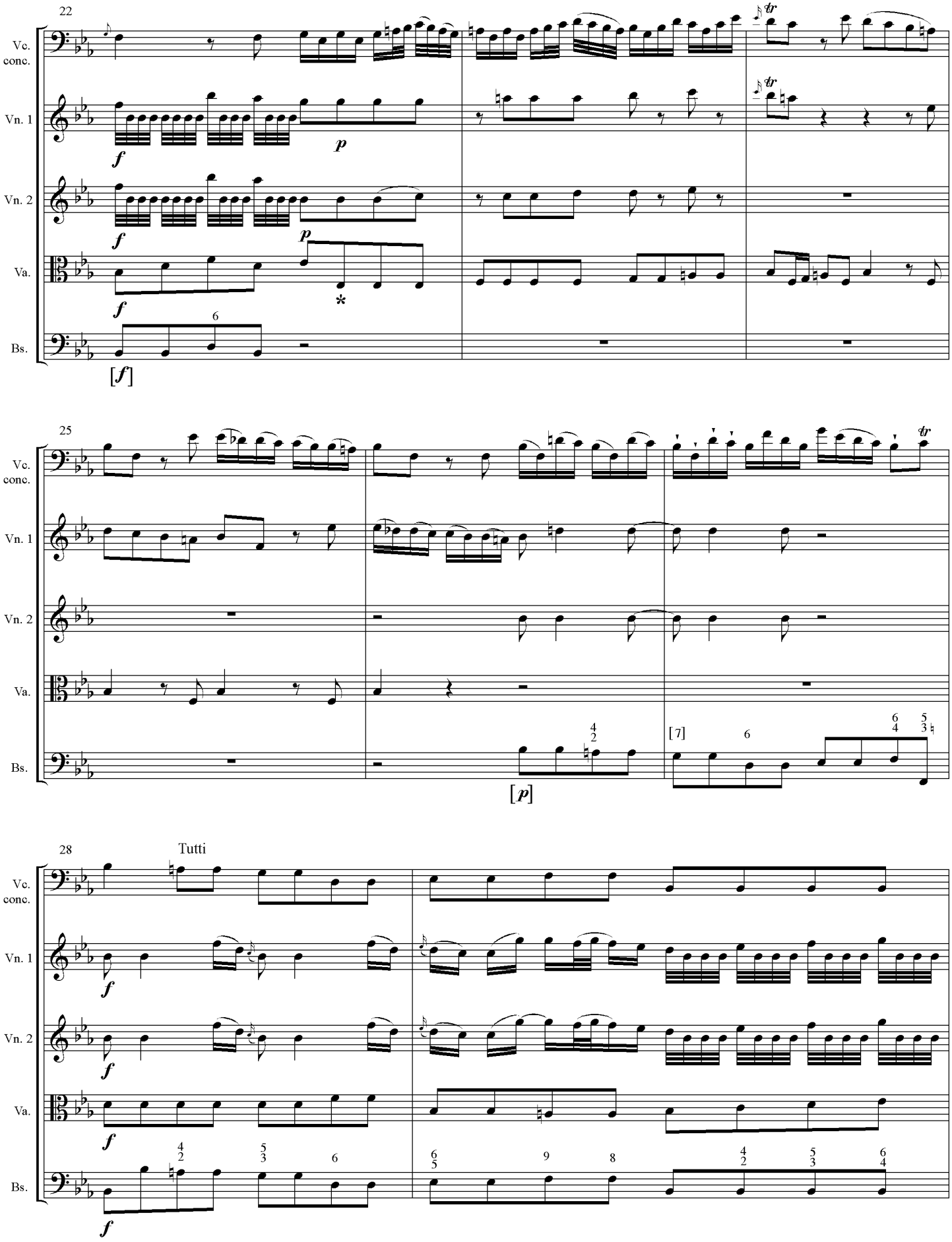
Allegro moderato



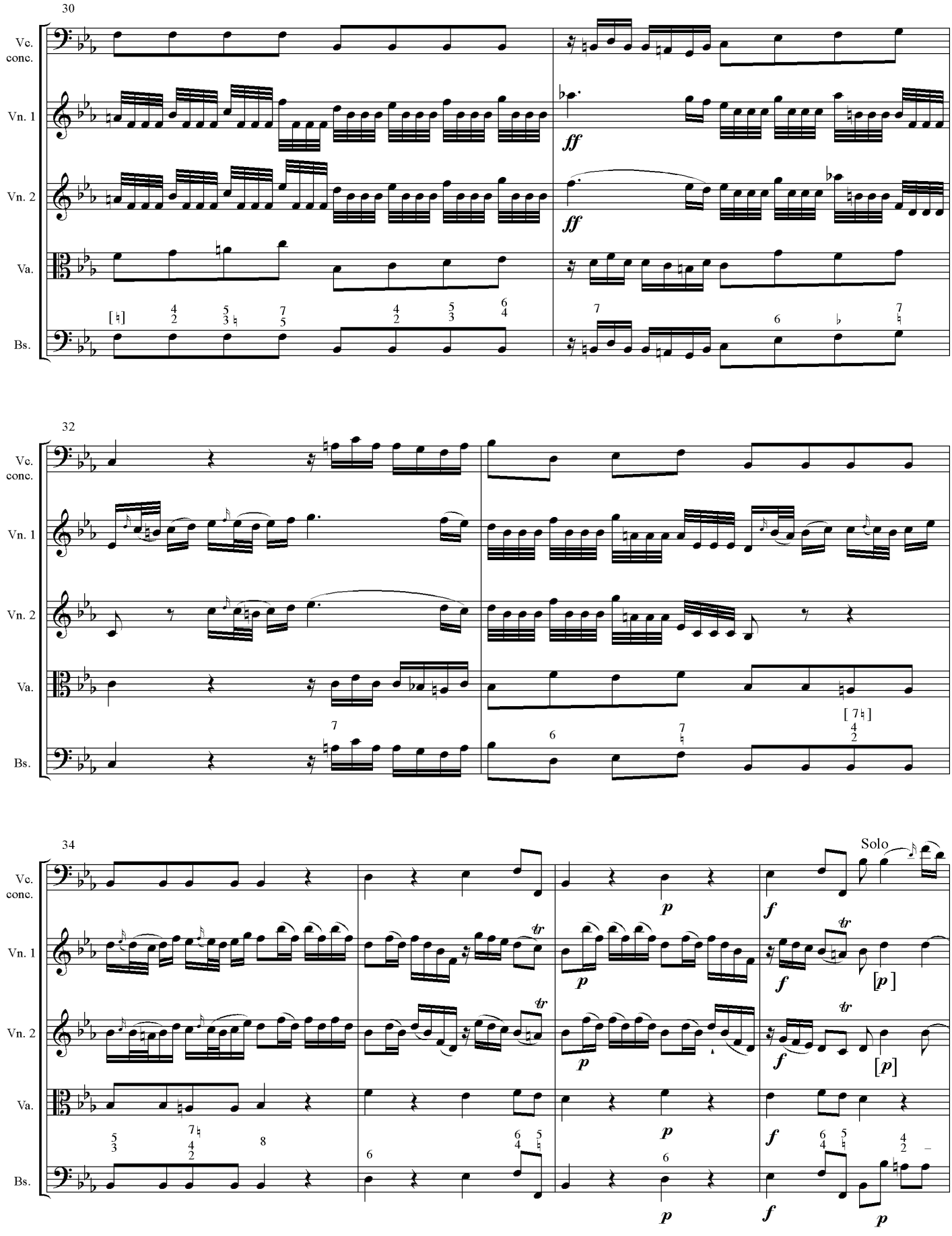


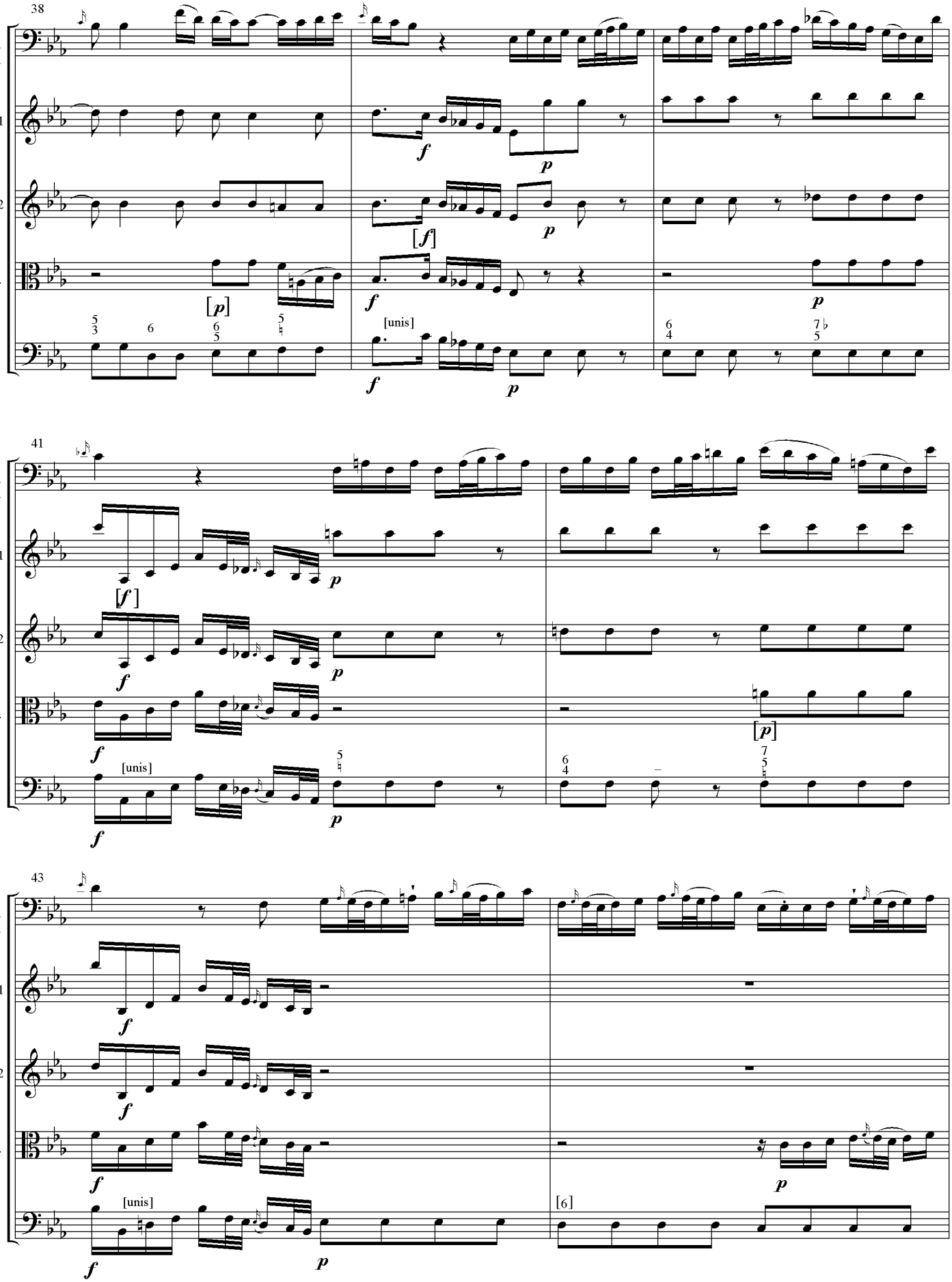

6
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
8
11
[unis]

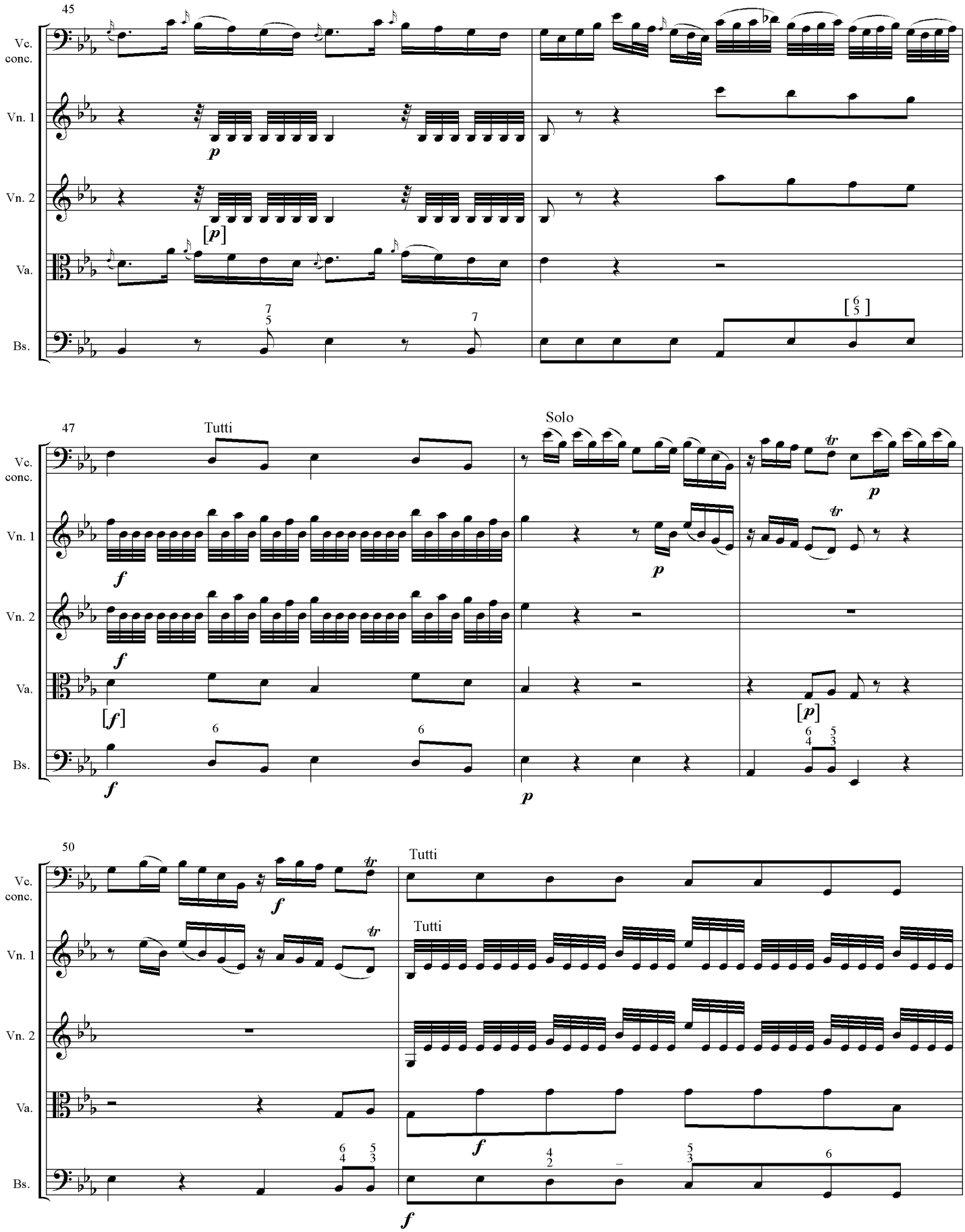

14
Solo
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
17
Tutti
Solo
20

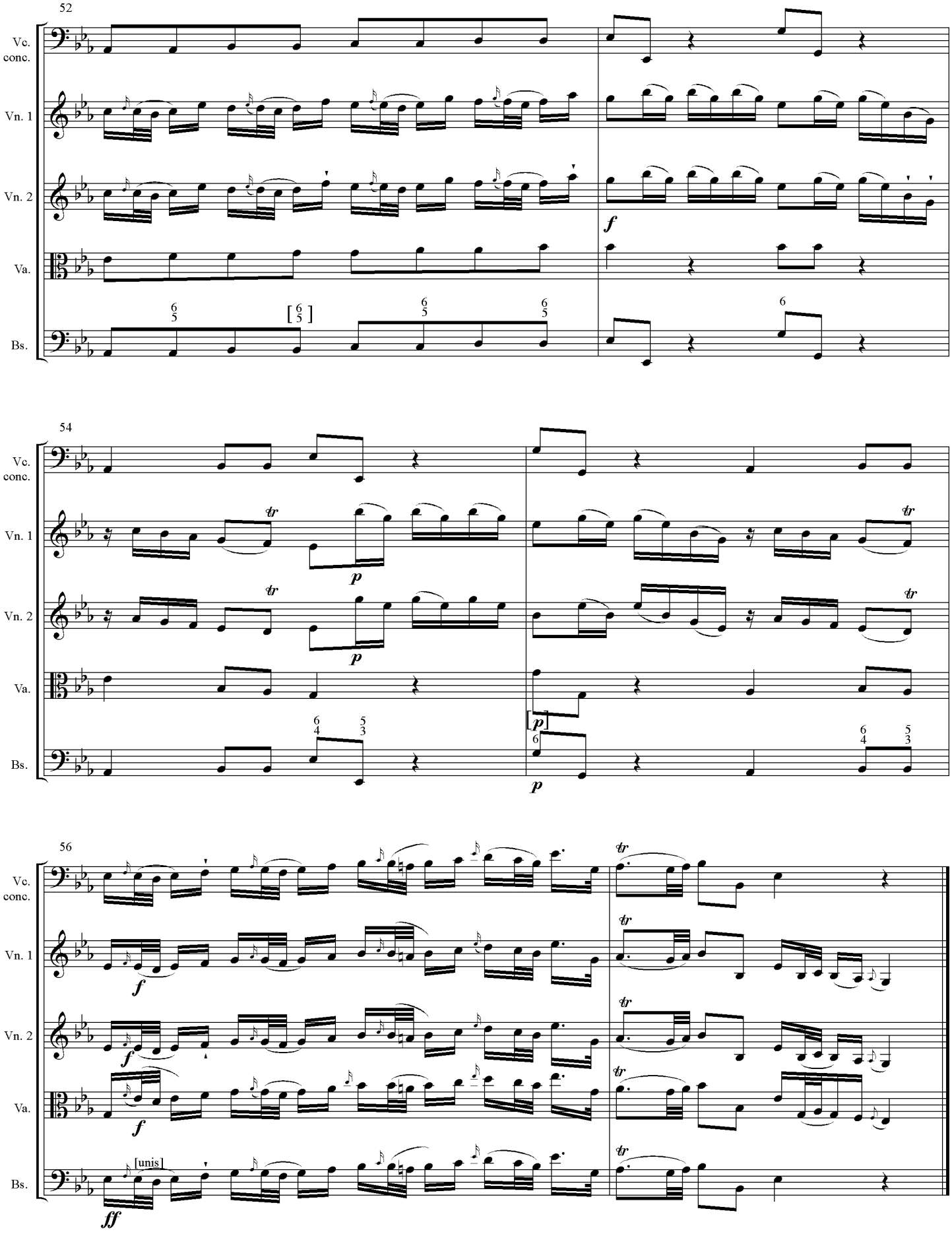


*Viola from this point through m. 26 transposed down an octave.

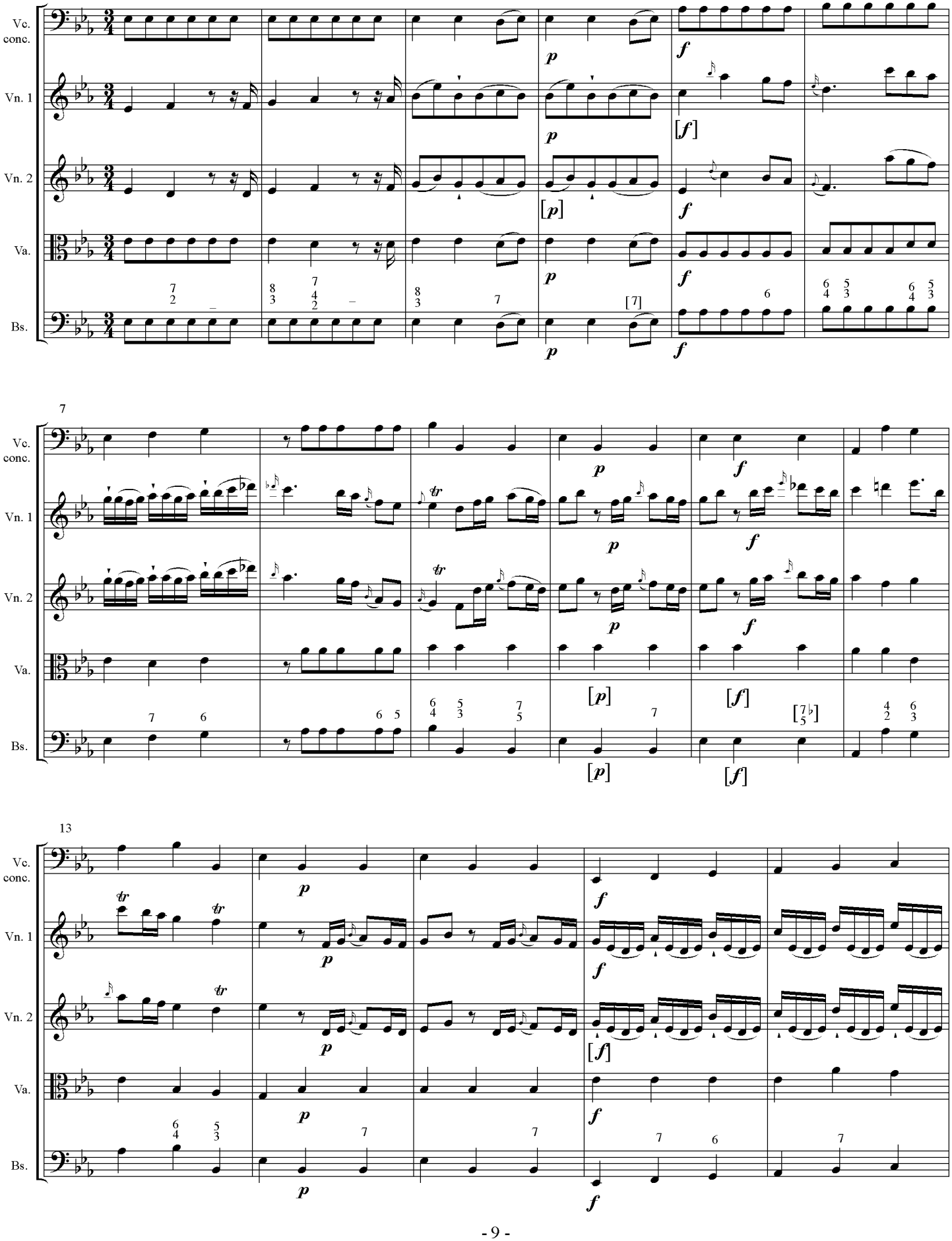

30
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
ff
ff
32
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
34
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
Solo
p
f
[p]

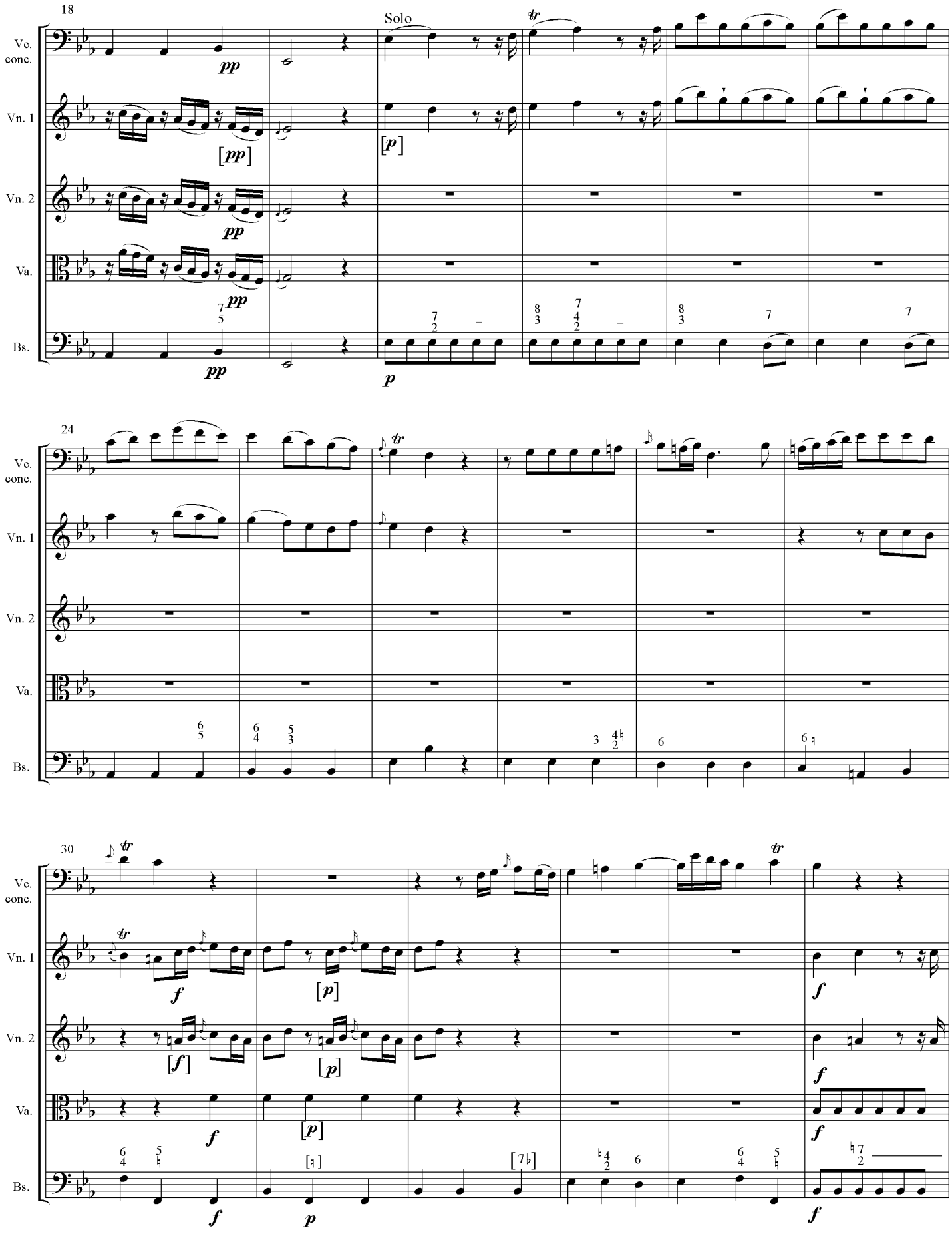

38
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
[unis]
41
[unis]
43
[unis]
[6]

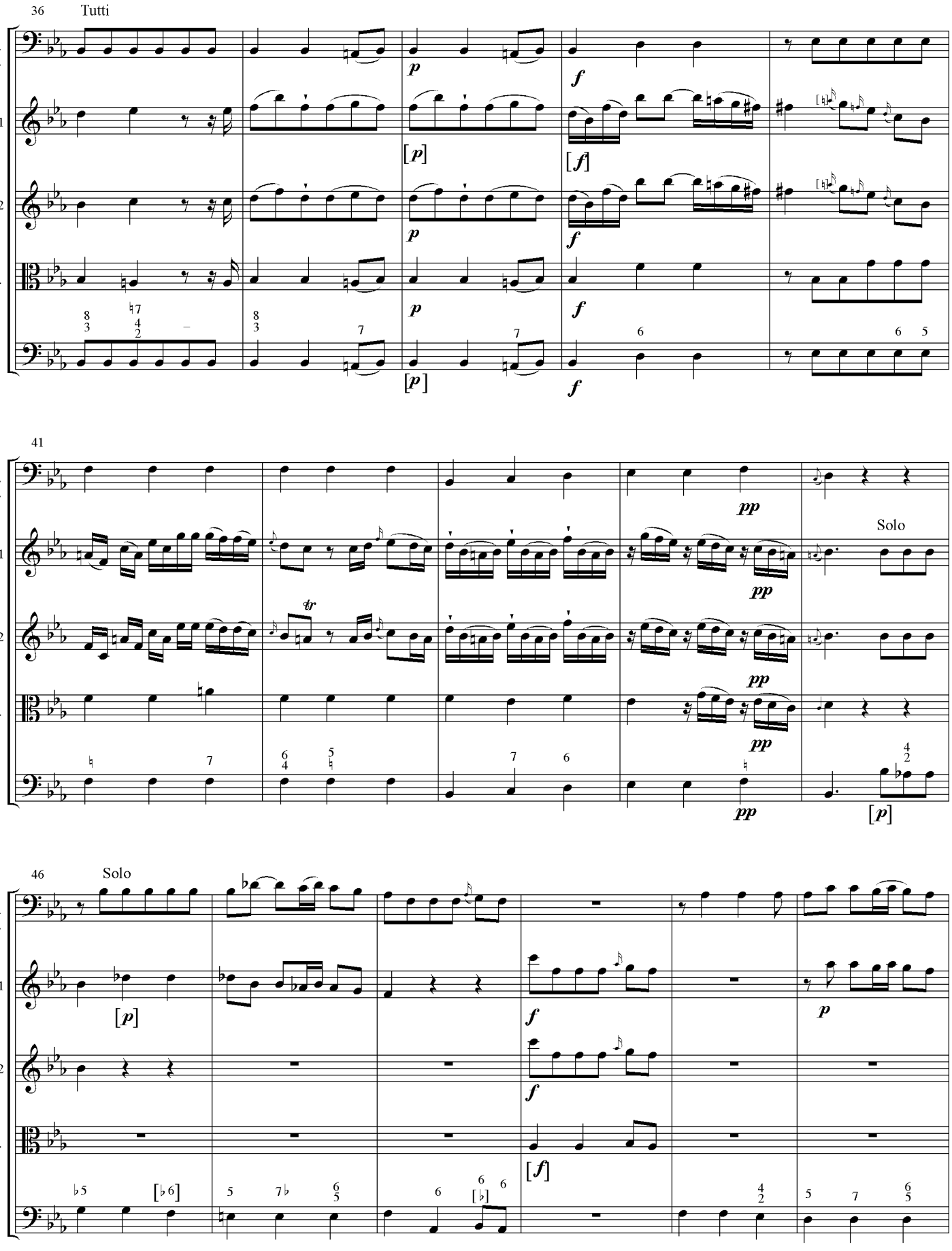

45
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
47
Tutti
Solo
50
Tutti

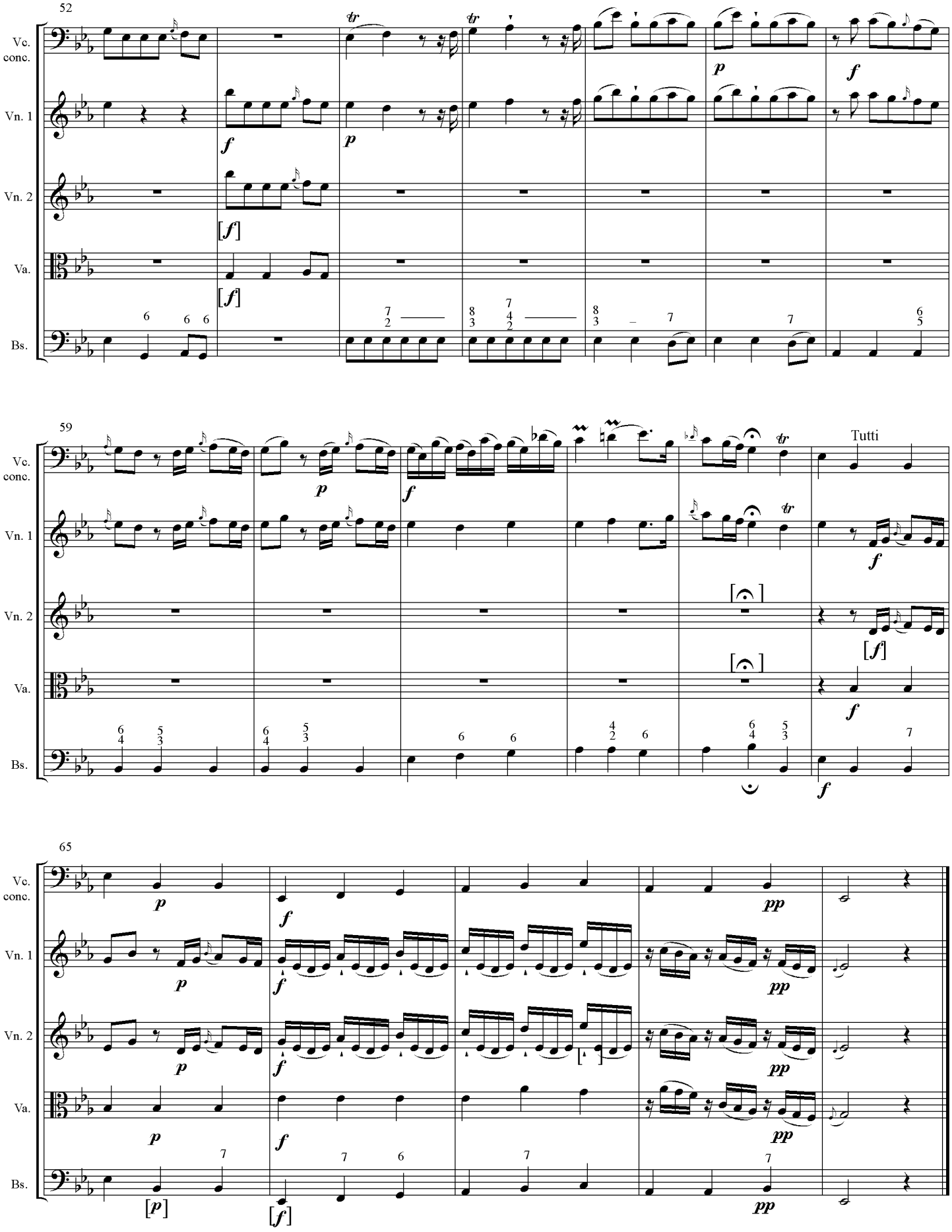

52
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
f
54
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
tr
p
56
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
f
ff
[unis]

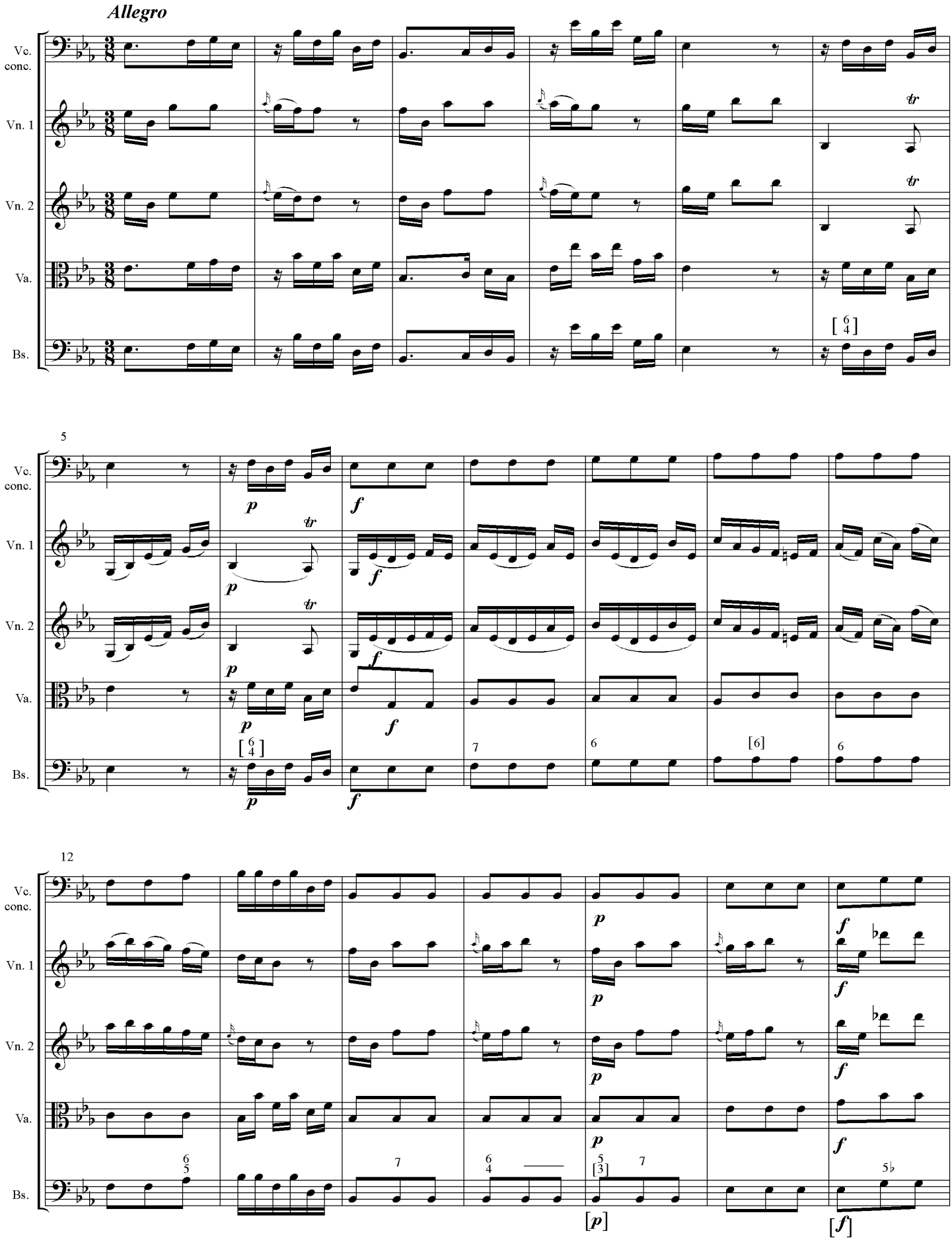
Largo con sordini

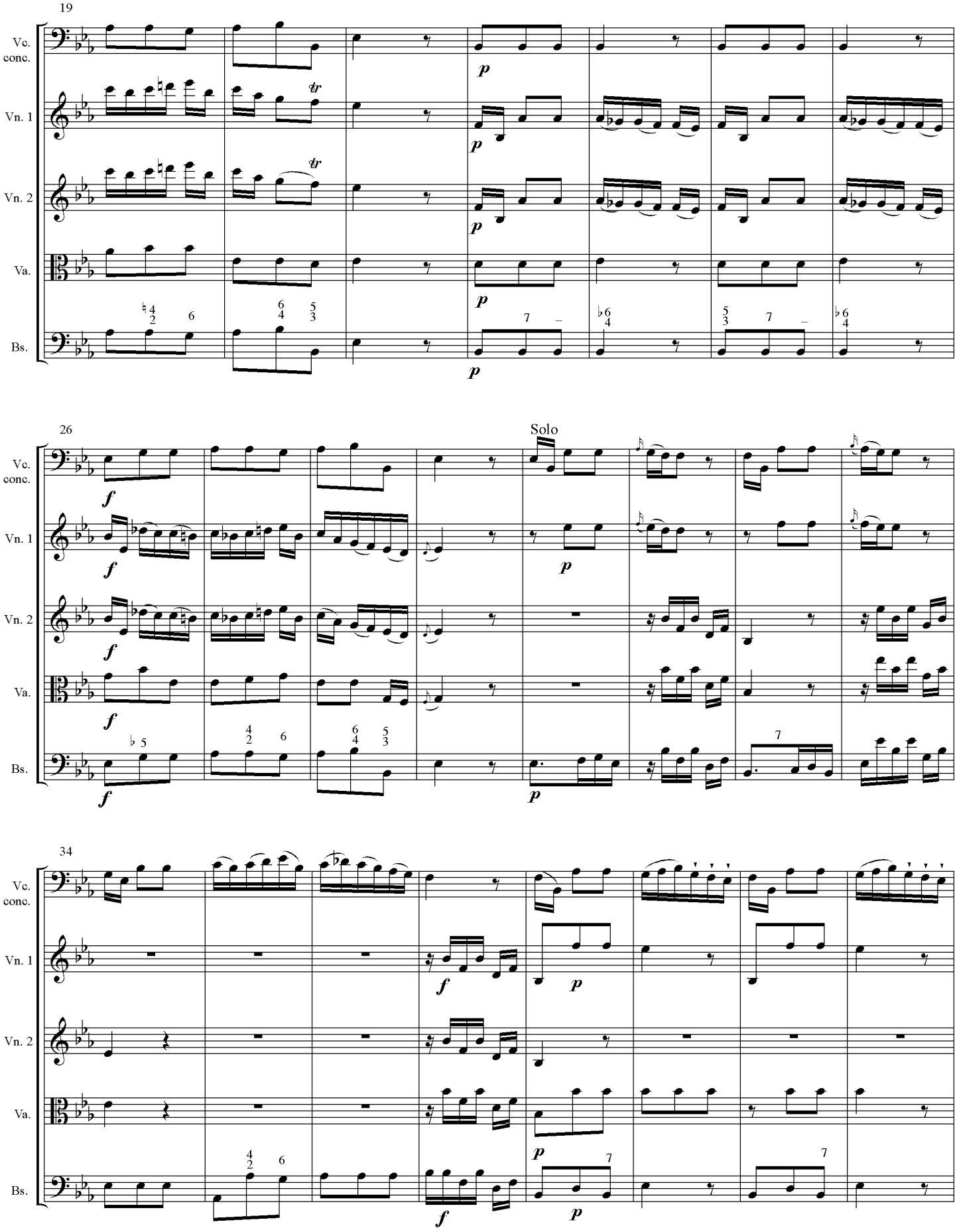


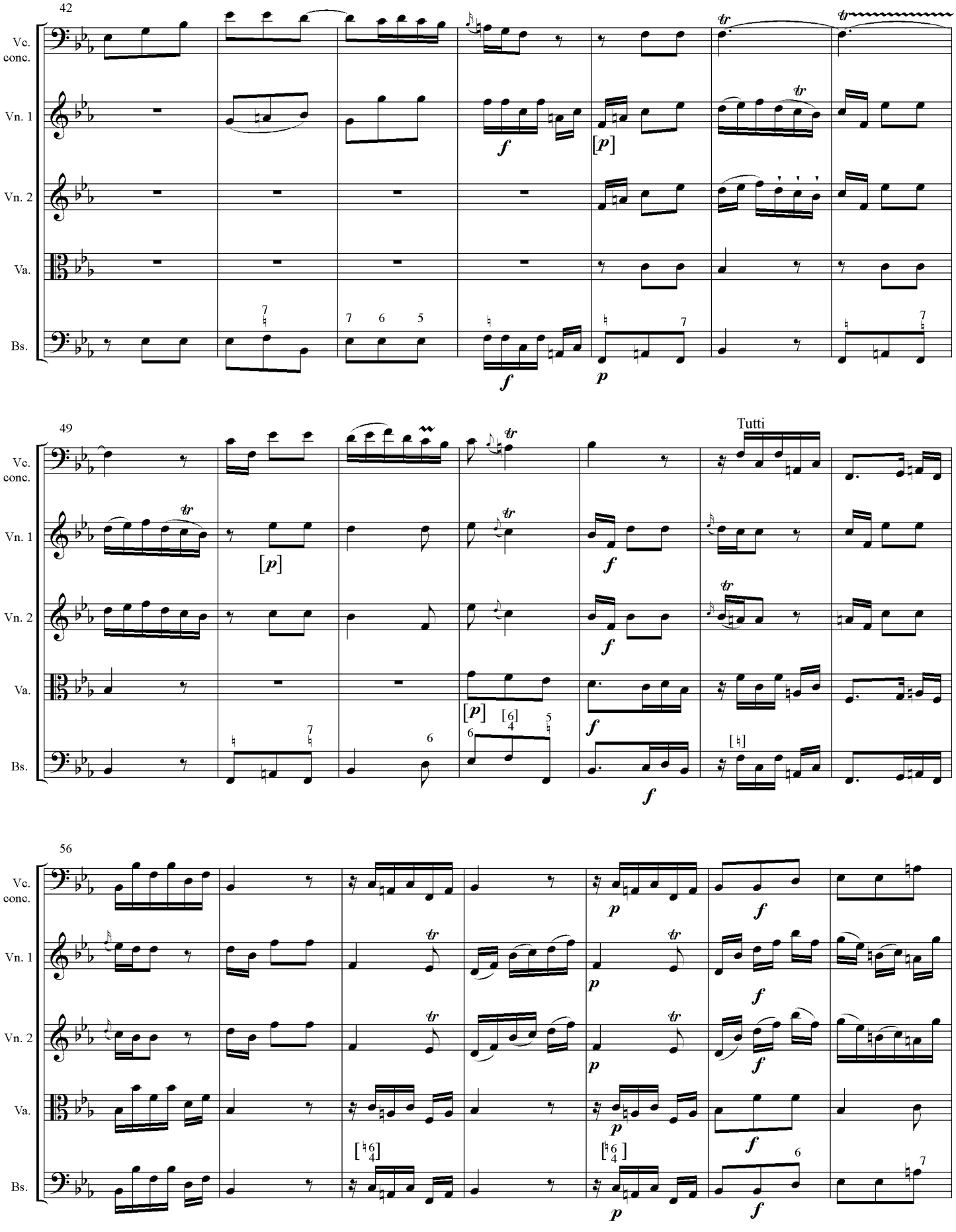

18
Solo
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
24
30

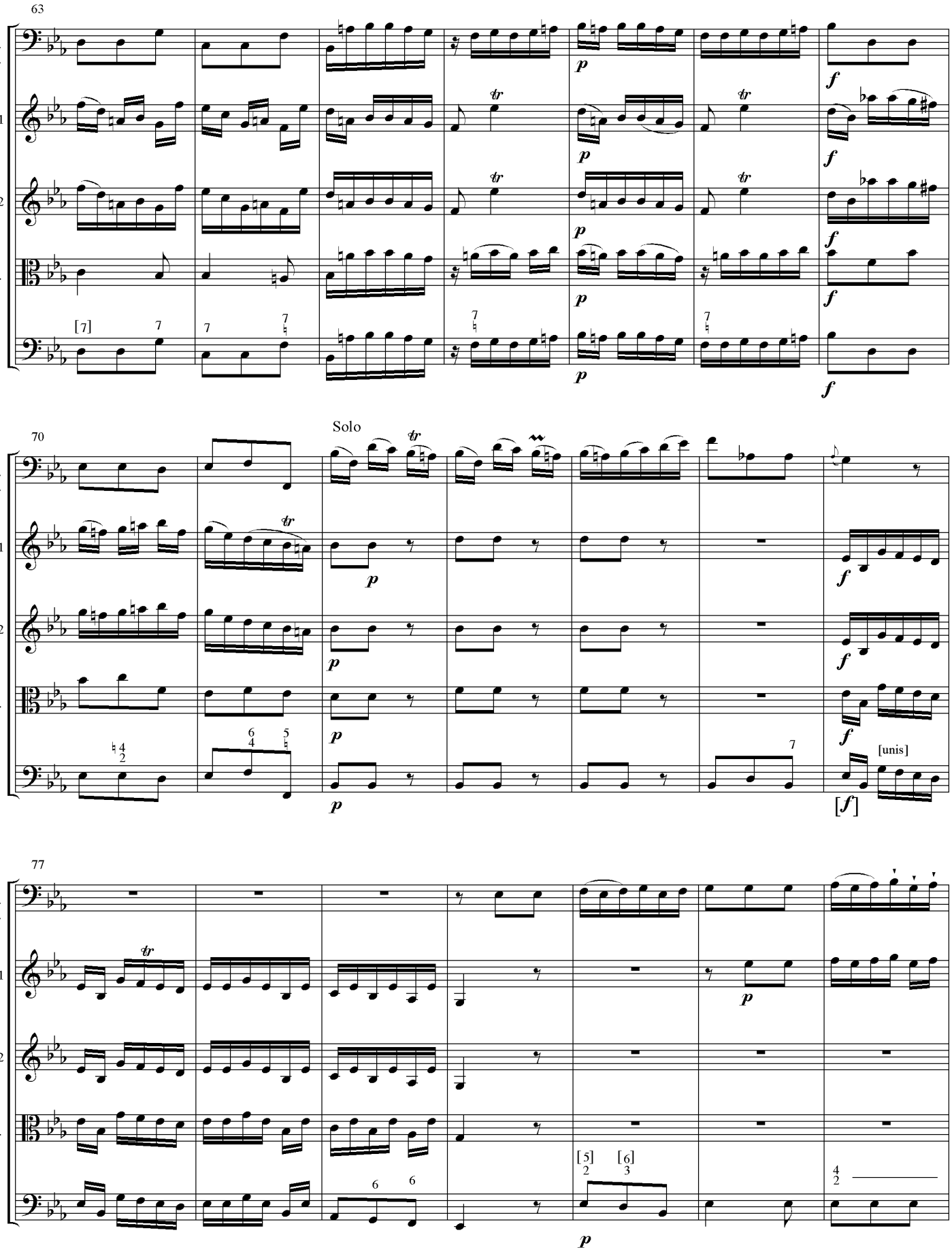

36
Tutti
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
41
Solo
46
Solo

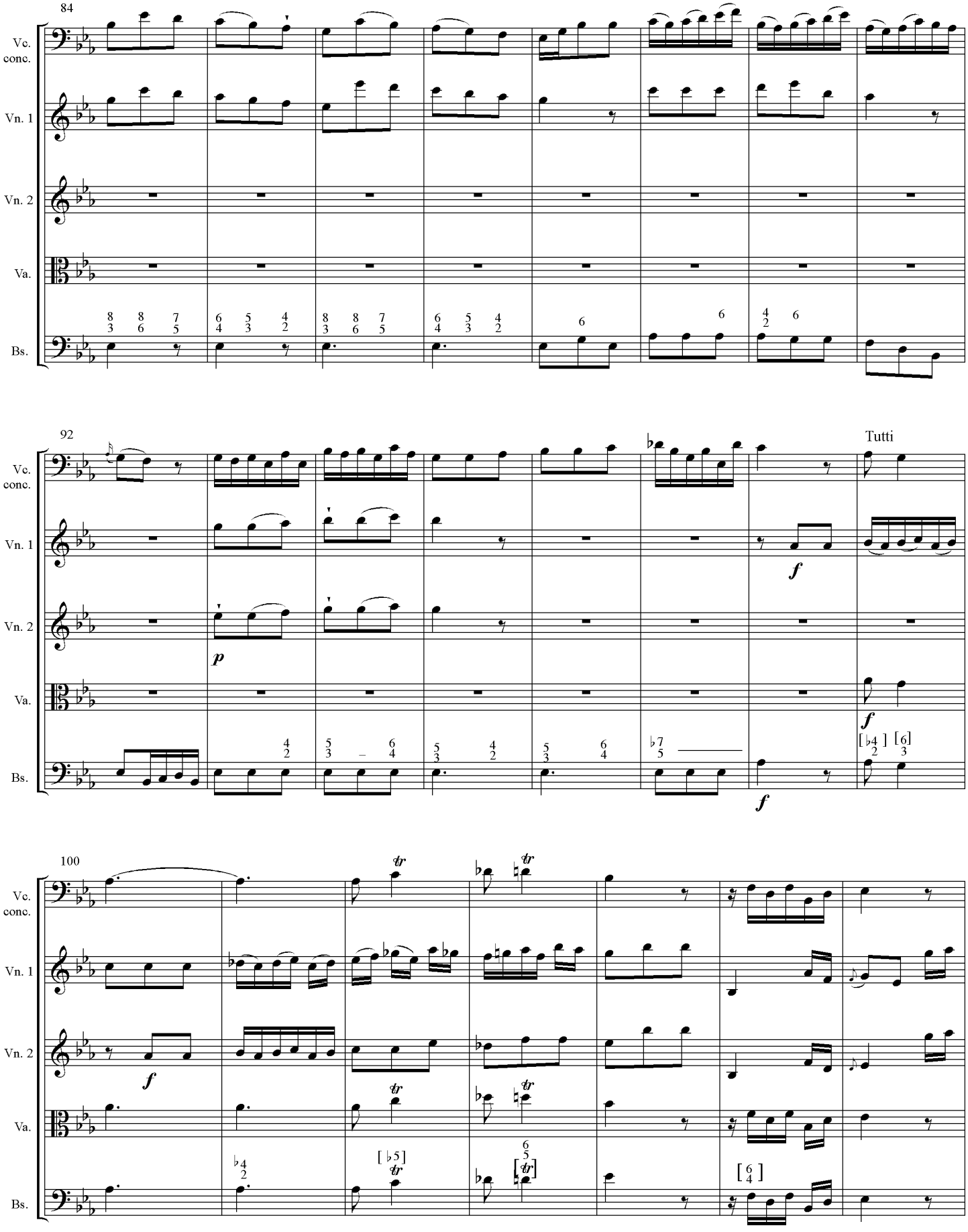

52
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
59
Tutti
65

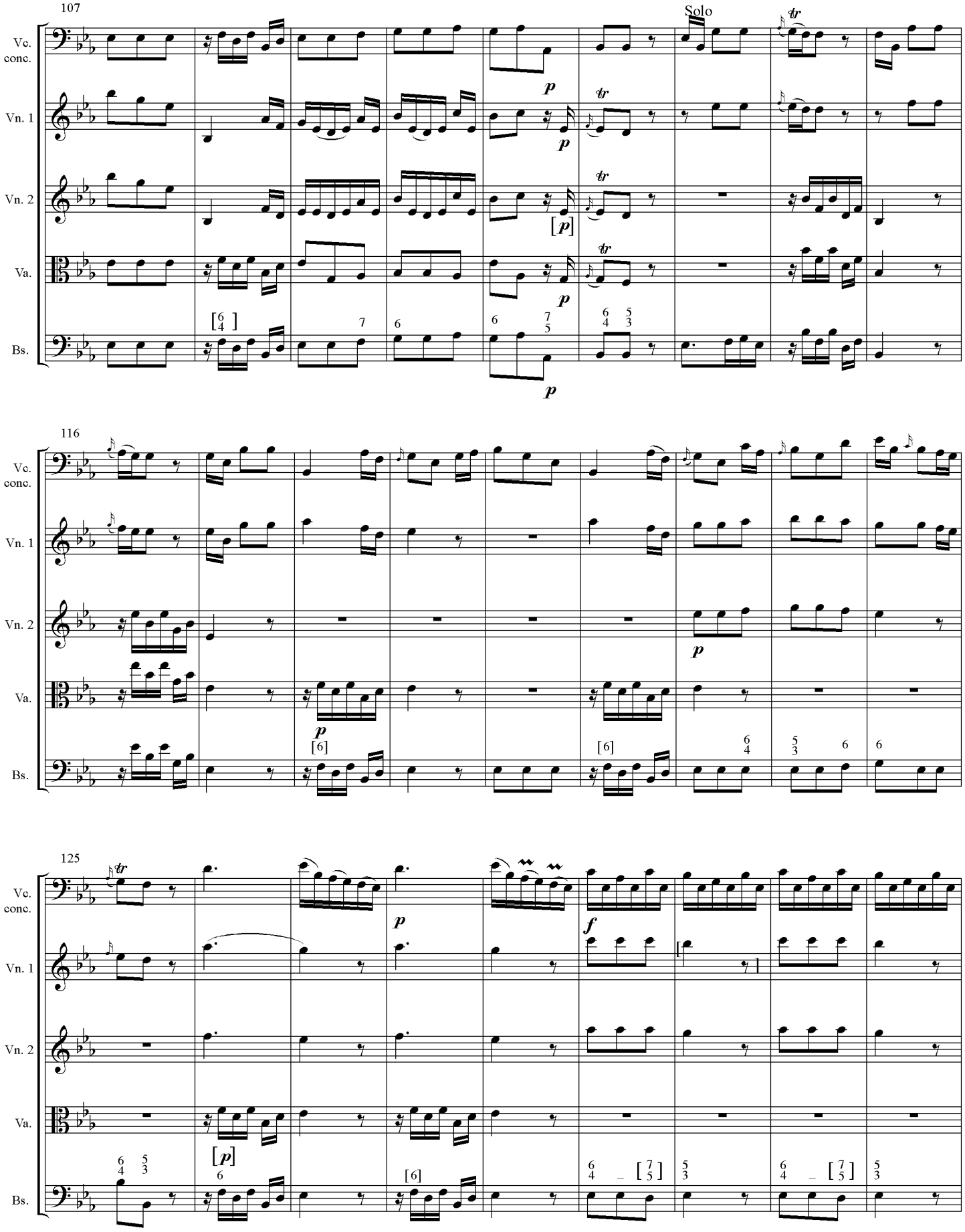

Allegro
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
5
12

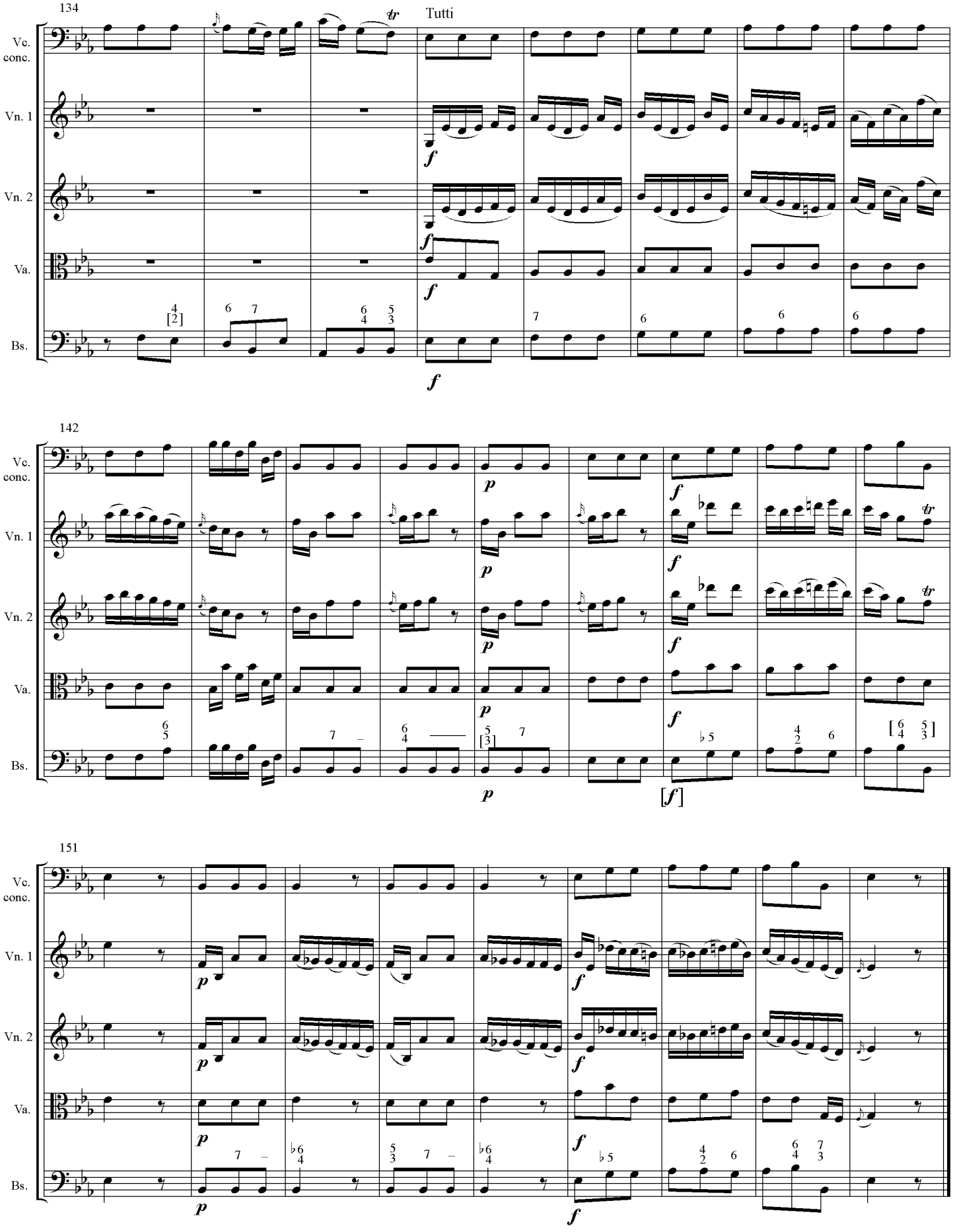

19
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
26
Solo
34


42
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
49
Tutti
56


63
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
70
Solo
[unis]
77


84
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
92
Tutti
p
f
100
tr


107
Solo
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
116
125


134
Tutti
Vc. conc.
Vn. 1
Vn. 2
Va.
Bs.
142
151

Ignaz Mara: Concerto in E-flat for viola, strings, and continuo

This work is preserved in two eighteenth-century sets of manuscript parts in the archive of the Sing-Akademie zu Berlin, SA 2849 and SA 3007. The two sources, both remarkably inaccurate, give very similar readings, indicating that they stem from either the same unreliable exemplar or a composing score that was difficult to read. SA 3007, which appears to be the somewhat later of the two, might have been copied from SA 2849, but the poor quality of the microfiche reproductions from which the score has been prepared precludes detailed study of the text. (Both sources were examined in scans made from the microfiche edition published by Saur of Munich.)

The score is a straightforward transcription of SA 2849, with errors in notes, rhythms, and the placement of performance markings (dynamics, articulation, and basso continuo figures) silently corrected. Editorial additions, as opposed to emendations, are set within brackets. No attempt has been made to reconcile the conflicting slurs in parallel passages or parts, and the beaming of small note values has in general been reproduced as in the manuscript. Staccato signs, which range from light dots to strokes of varying thickness, have been all been rendered as strokes.

The chief interest in this work lies in the fact that the composer Ignaz Mara (ca. 1722–1783) was the principal cellist in the court ensemble of King Friedrich II "the Great" of Prussia from 1742 until his death. Although apparently not a great virtuoso, he was praised for being a capable soloist "in his youth" and was reported to be a good composer for his instrument (see CPEBCW 3/6:xxiii). But despite the cultivation of cello music at Berlin during the reign of Friedrich's successor, Friedrich Wilhelm II, Mara's music for the instrument does not appear to survive, with the possible exception of two sonatas for cello and continuo (some uncertainty is due to the possibility of confusion with works by his son, Johann Baptiste Mara, who was apparently a more prolific composer).

Naturally the question arises whether this work might have originated as a composition for cello. Although the viola was cultivated at Berlin—there is a remarkable repertory of solo, trio, and quartet sonatas, as well as concertos, all with virtuoso parts for solo viola—the present work is quite restrained in its demands on the soloist. To be sure, it also reveals limited compositional capabilities on the whole: although following the general pattern of eighteenth-century Berlin concertos, as established in works by Quantz, the Graun brothers, and C. P. E. Bach, all three movements are much shorter than usual, and the level of melodic and harmonic invention is quite modest. There also are occasional parallel octaves and other oversights, although some apparent problems of this type are due to errors in the sources, which, as noted above, have been silently corrected. Possibly the most inventive moment is a brief passage in the first movement where the soloist is accompanied by the ripieno violist (mm. 43–44). Nevertheless, the writing for the solo instrument is indeed such that it might indeed have been conceived for cello, and particularly for a player stronger in lyrical than virtuoso playing, as Mara seems to have been.

Therefore the edition of the viola concerto is accompanied by one in which the solo part is transposed down an octave for cello. Besides transposing the solo part, in reconstructing the hypothetical original for cello it has been necessary to alter only one passage in the first movement (mm. 22–26). There the ripieno viola part, providing the bass line, has also been transposed down by an octave in order to remain beneath the soloist. Arguably some other passages in which the first violin joins the soloist in parallel motion might be improved by also bringing the violin down by an octave (e.g., mvt. 2, mm. 20–30, 54–63; mvt. 3, mm. 80–92). These have been left to stand, however. An edition of the viola concerto advertised online by Nico Bertelli Edizioni Musicali was not seen.

David Schulenberg (May 18, 2015)