The Heat of the Sun

A Dream Cycle for Strings

by Mark Goddard

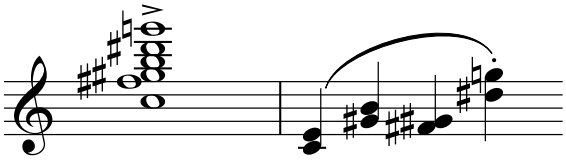
Op. 46

A Structural Analysis

I

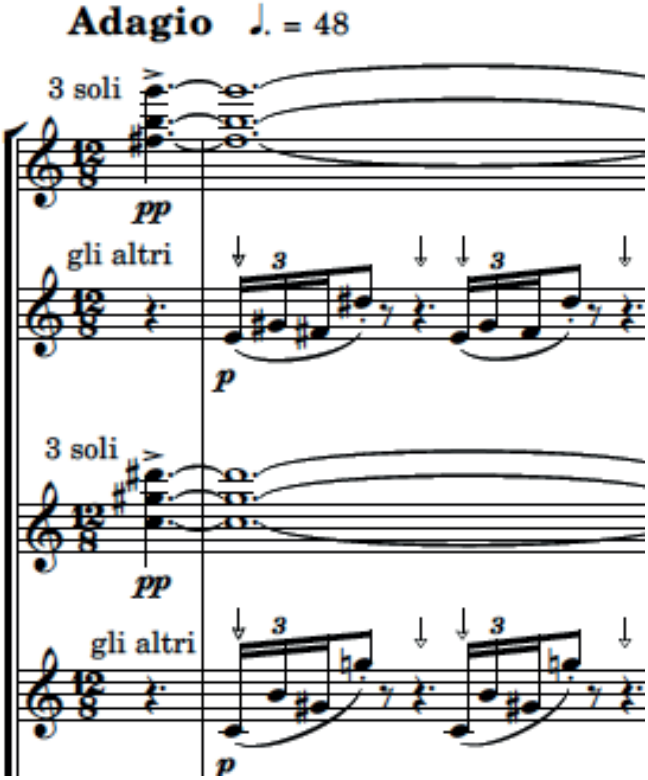
The structure of all four movements of 'The Heat of the Sun' relies on a set of fundamental 'musical building blocks', which appear fairly early on, and then return, like old friends.

The most important of these is the high, intense, 'heat-haze chord', along with numerous arpeggiated derivatives, which pervade the entire work:



Bar 1. (00:00)

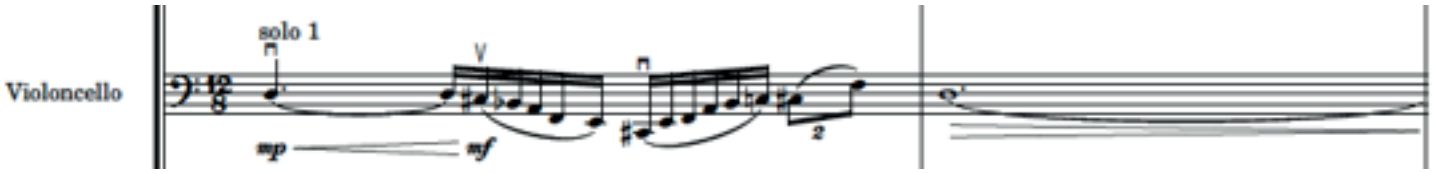
‘Heat-haze chord’



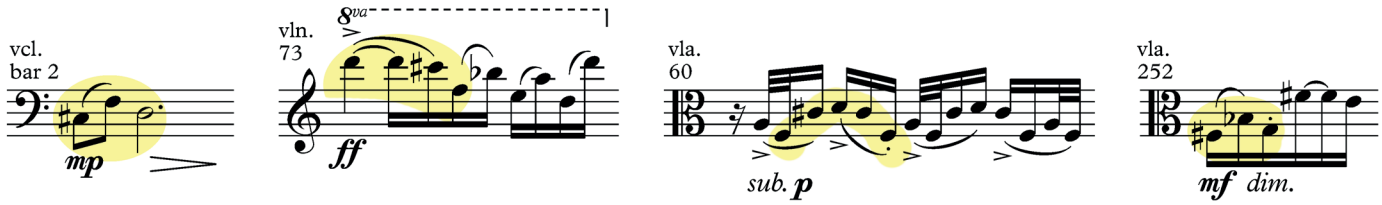
The following melodic motive, based on a descending D (harmonic) minor scale, also permeates the texture of every movement, appearing early in the proceedings and played by the principal cello:

Bar 2. (00:07)

'D minor cello scale motive'



This theme takes on many guises during its journey through the piece. The last three notes particularly, which contain a 'diminished fourth', become an important motive, undergoing numerous developments by way of transpositions, inversions, diminutions etc.:



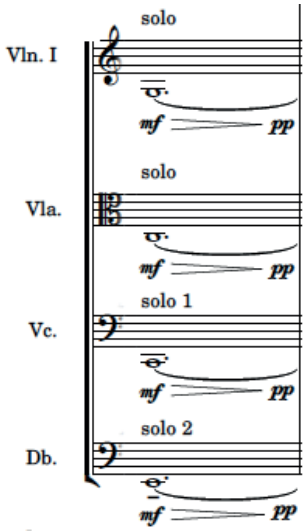
Another recurring building block — much simpler in character, almost 'primal' in contrast — is a very static use of a chord exploiting the sonorous sounds of the 'open strings', usually presented by soloists alone. This typically provides a sense of respite from the strenuous and exhilarating music that precedes it. A welcome 'catch your breath' moment. This earthy 'natural' sound is also used as something of a 'fate' theme — the onset of death even.

Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

William Shakespeare
Cymbeline Act IV, Scene II

Bars 7, 16, 18… (00:32)

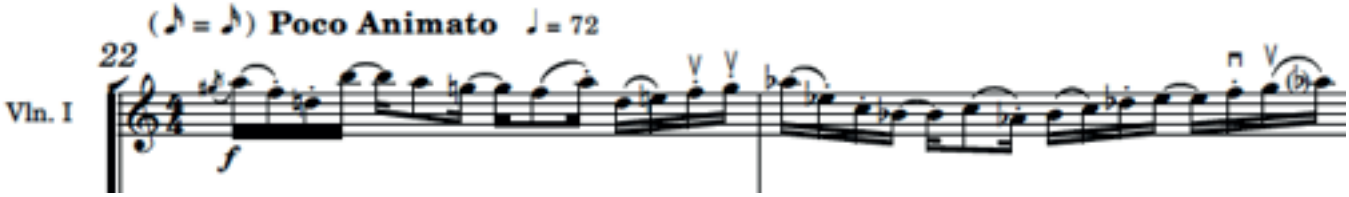
‘Open-strings chord’



Two exuberantly dance-like themes provide the first of the ‘day-dreams’, or ‘episodes’. Highly syncopated, these rather naïve tunes stubbornly reappear as mental ‘flash-backs’:

Bar 22. (01:47)

Violin syncopated folk-dance-like tune

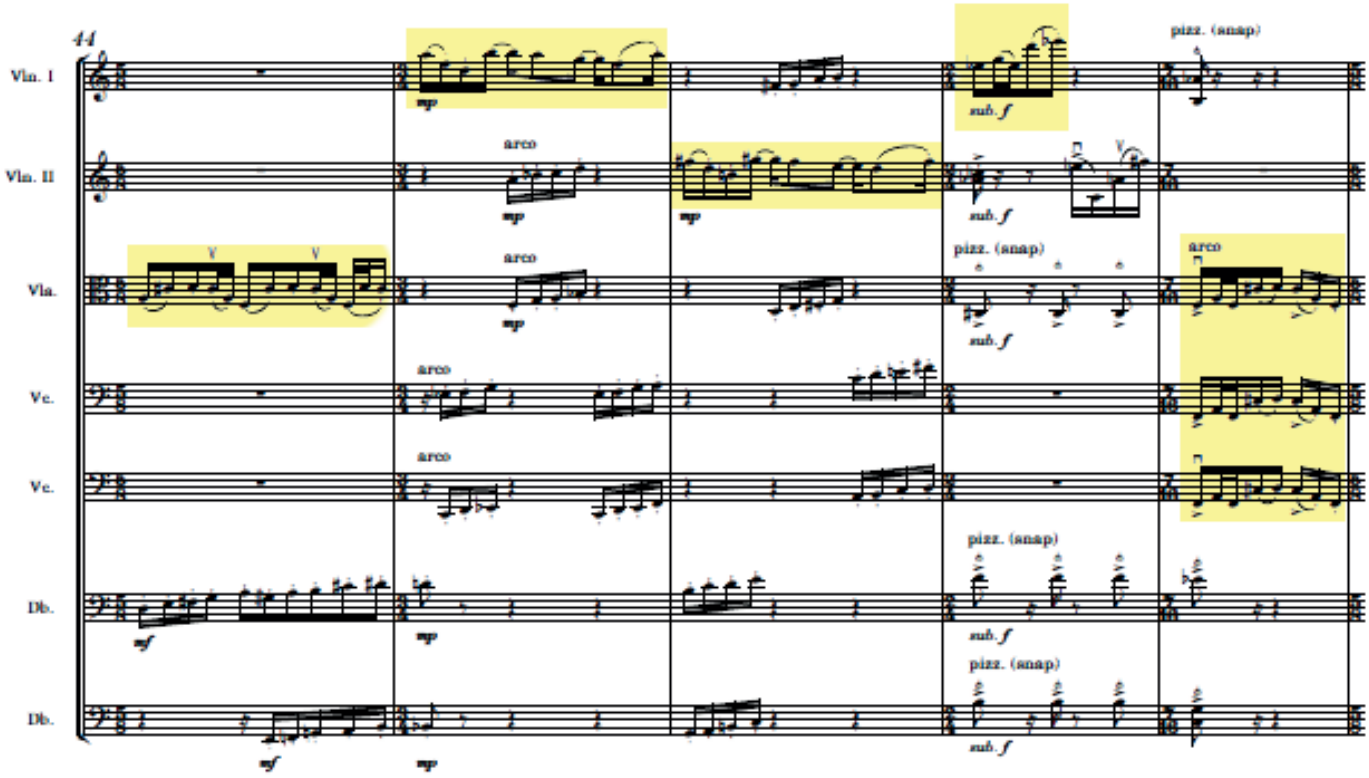


Bar 33. (02:22)

Double bass syncopated folk-dance-like tune

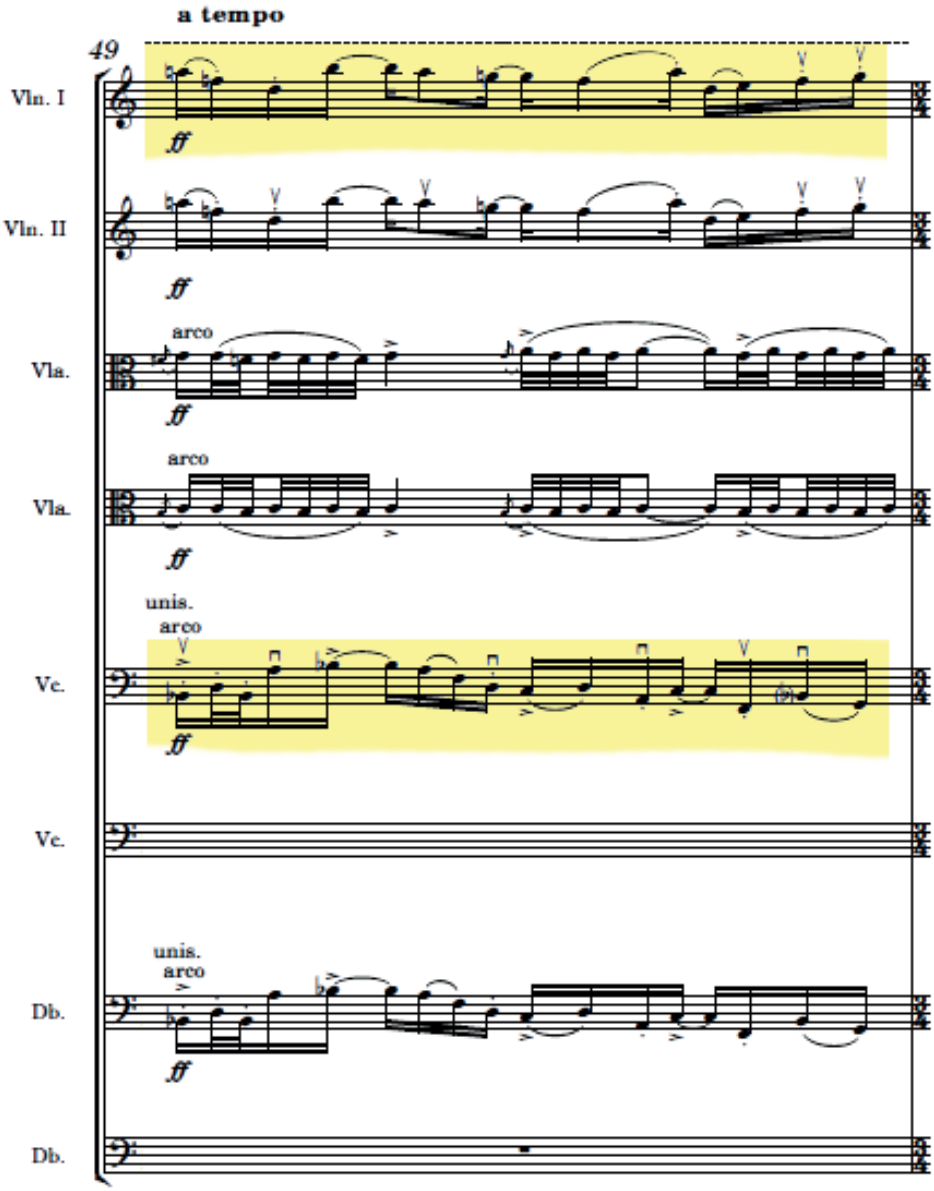
Bar 44. (02:53)

An increasingly complex development section starts here, where the ‘D minor cello scale motive’ is continually remodelled and interspersed with the exuberant treble and bass folk-dance-like motives:



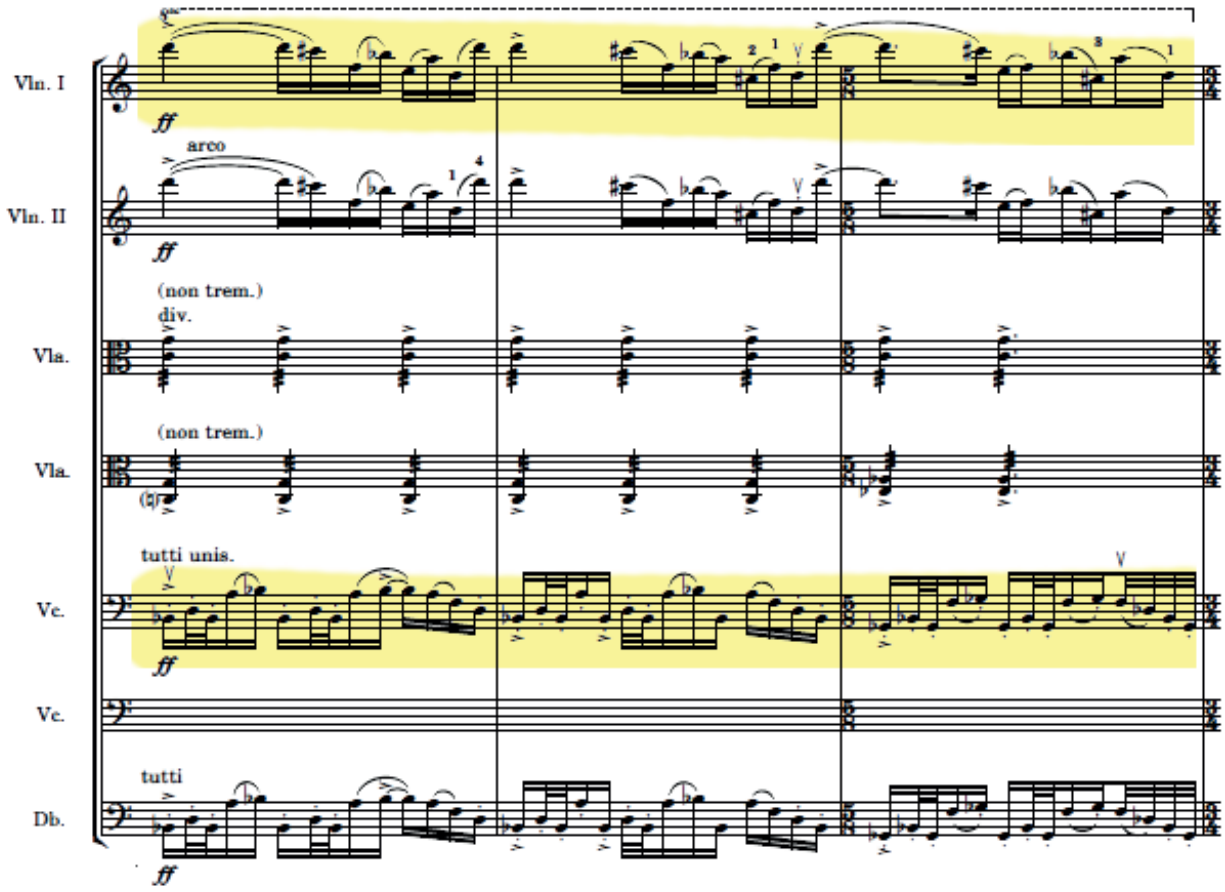
Bar 51. (03:08)

Here, both folk-dance-like motives combine:



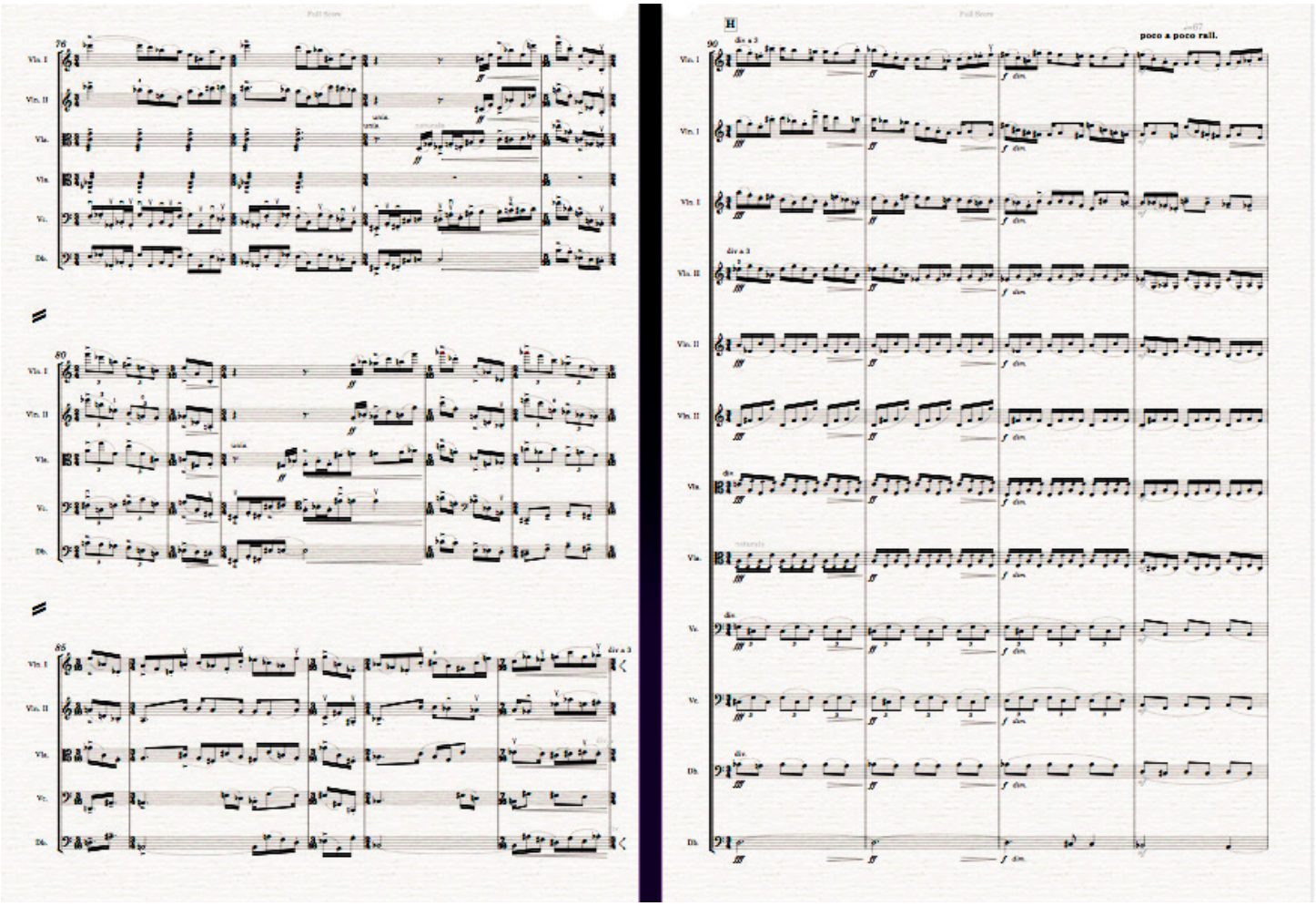
Bar 73. (03:42)

The ‘D minor cello scale motive’ is further modified here, and combined with the ‘Bass folk-dance-like’ melody:



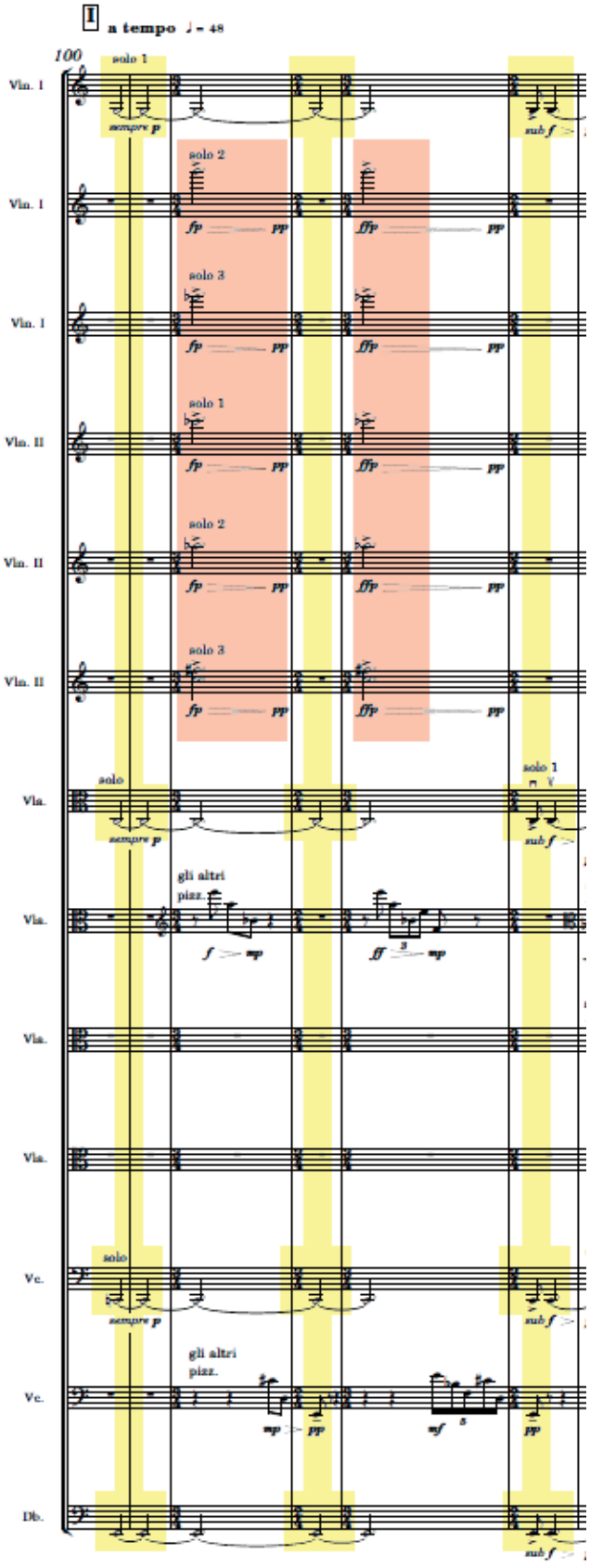
Bar 90. (04:13)

After an electrifying frenzy of excitement, the first movement reaches a breathtaking climactic tutti and subsides into respite.



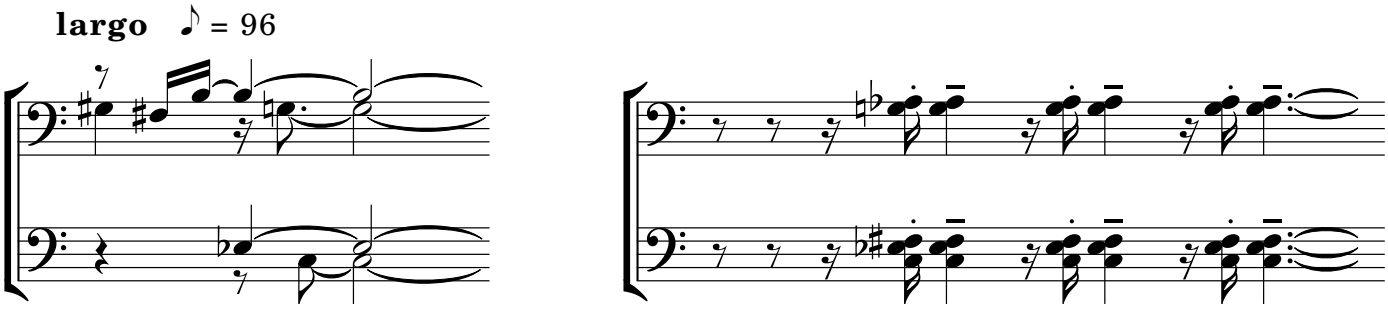
Bar 100. (04:44)

From here, the mood becomes progressively subdued and reflective. The healing properties offered by the assiduous ‘open strings chord’ are presented again, but partially punctured by lingering memories of the ‘heat-haze’.

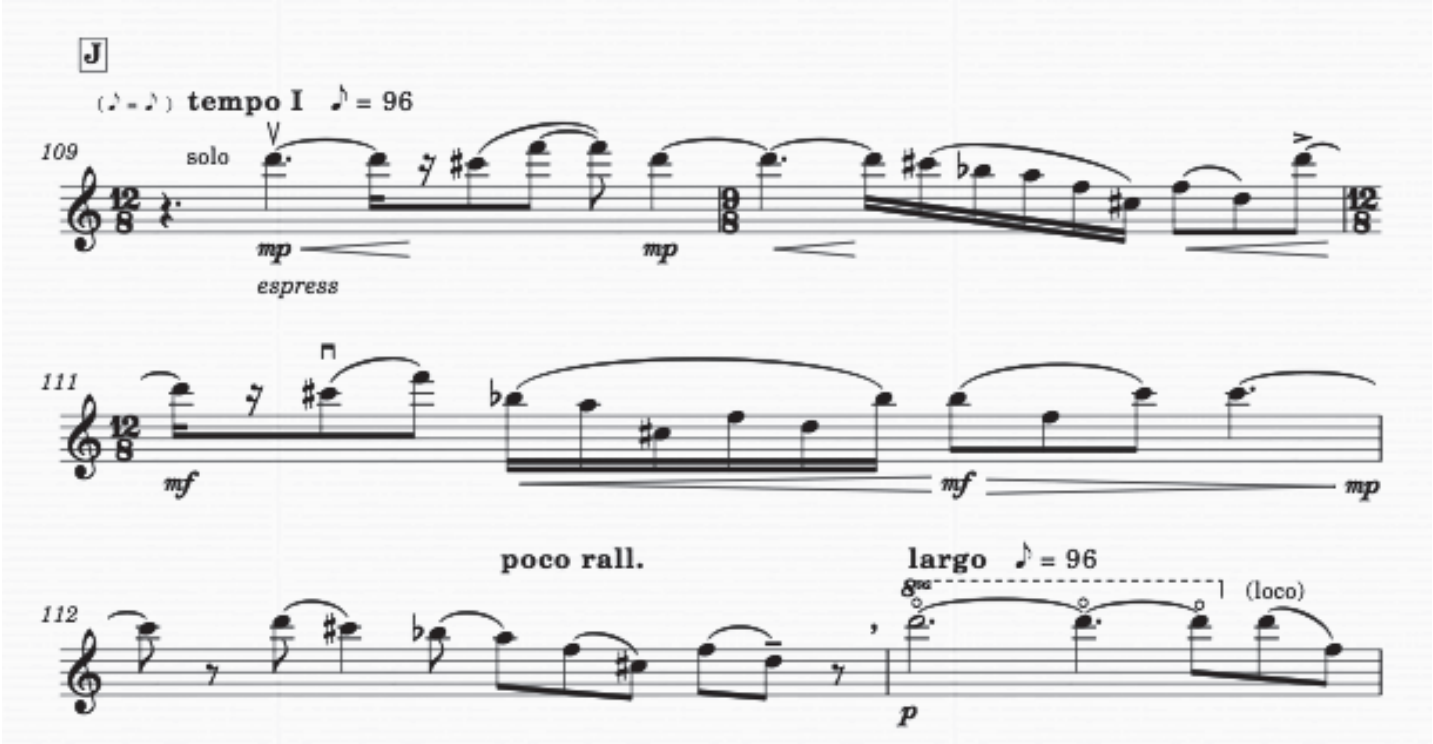


Bar106. (05:00)

Harmonic elements of this ‘sun-chord’ have evolved into new, fragmented accompaniment figures:

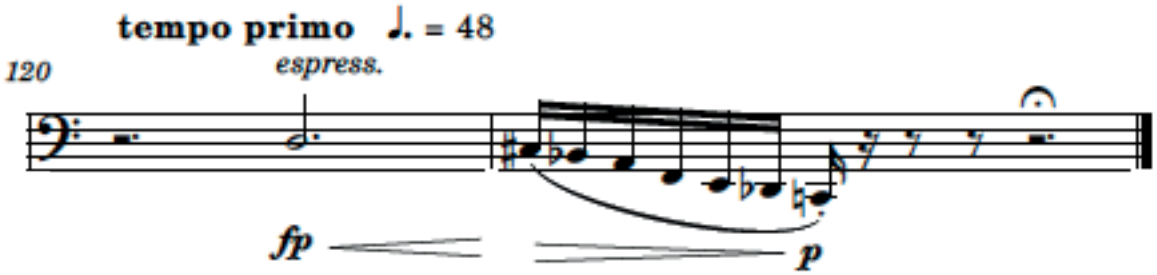


Over this, a soaringly expressive solo violin recalls hints of the initial ‘D minor cello scale motive’, now ruminative and self possessed.



Bar 122. (06:33)

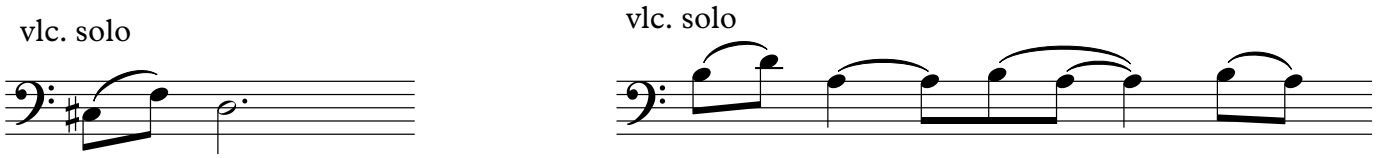
The movement ends with the a ‘final gasp’ of the ‘D minor cello scale motive’, as if stumbling under the desert heat.



II

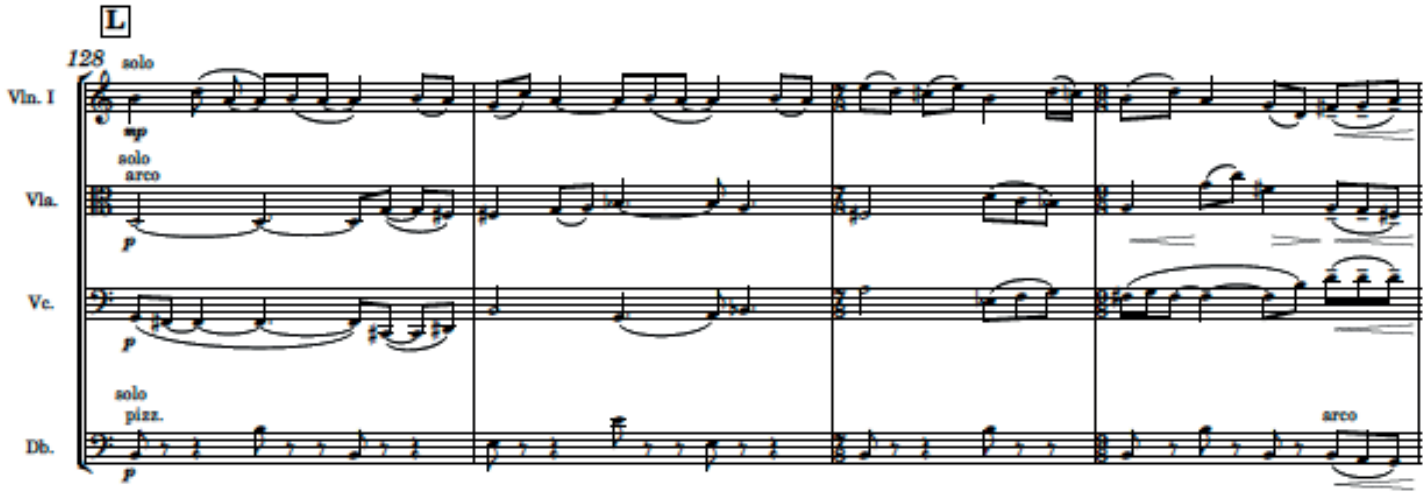
Bar 123. (06:45)

The ‘slow movement’ begins gently enough with the solo cello’s anguished D minor harmonic diminished fourth of the first movement being rehabilitated into the more optimistic key of G major.



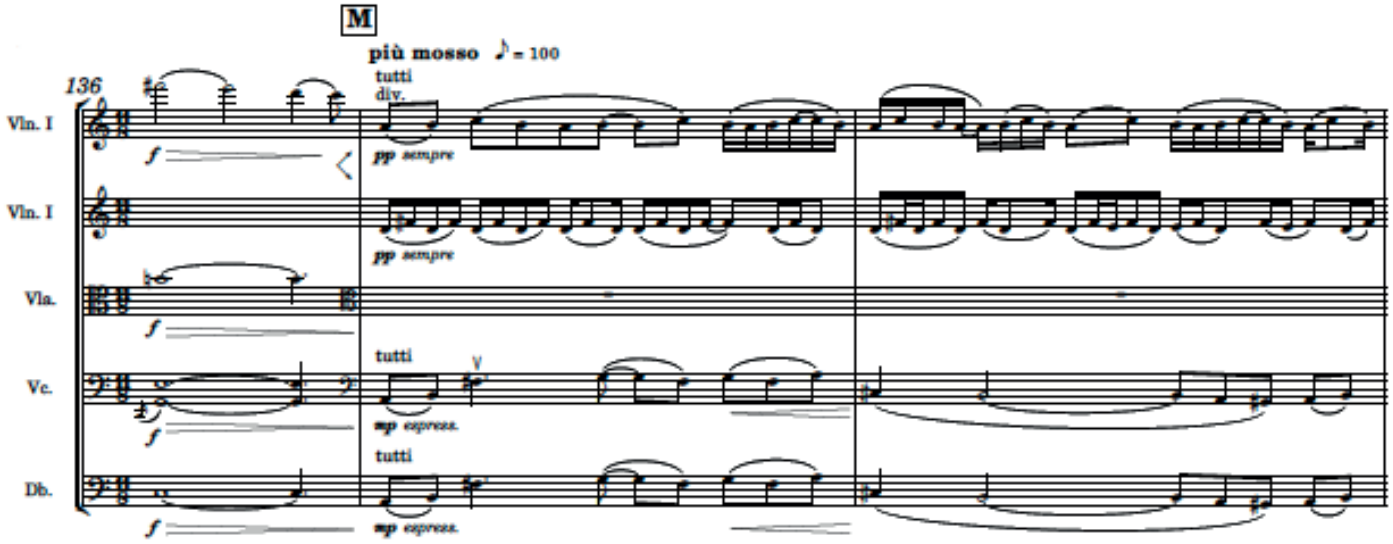
Bar 12. (07:28)

The feeling of serenity is enhanced when the theme is taken up by four soloists — a string quartet where the second violin is replaced by a double bass:



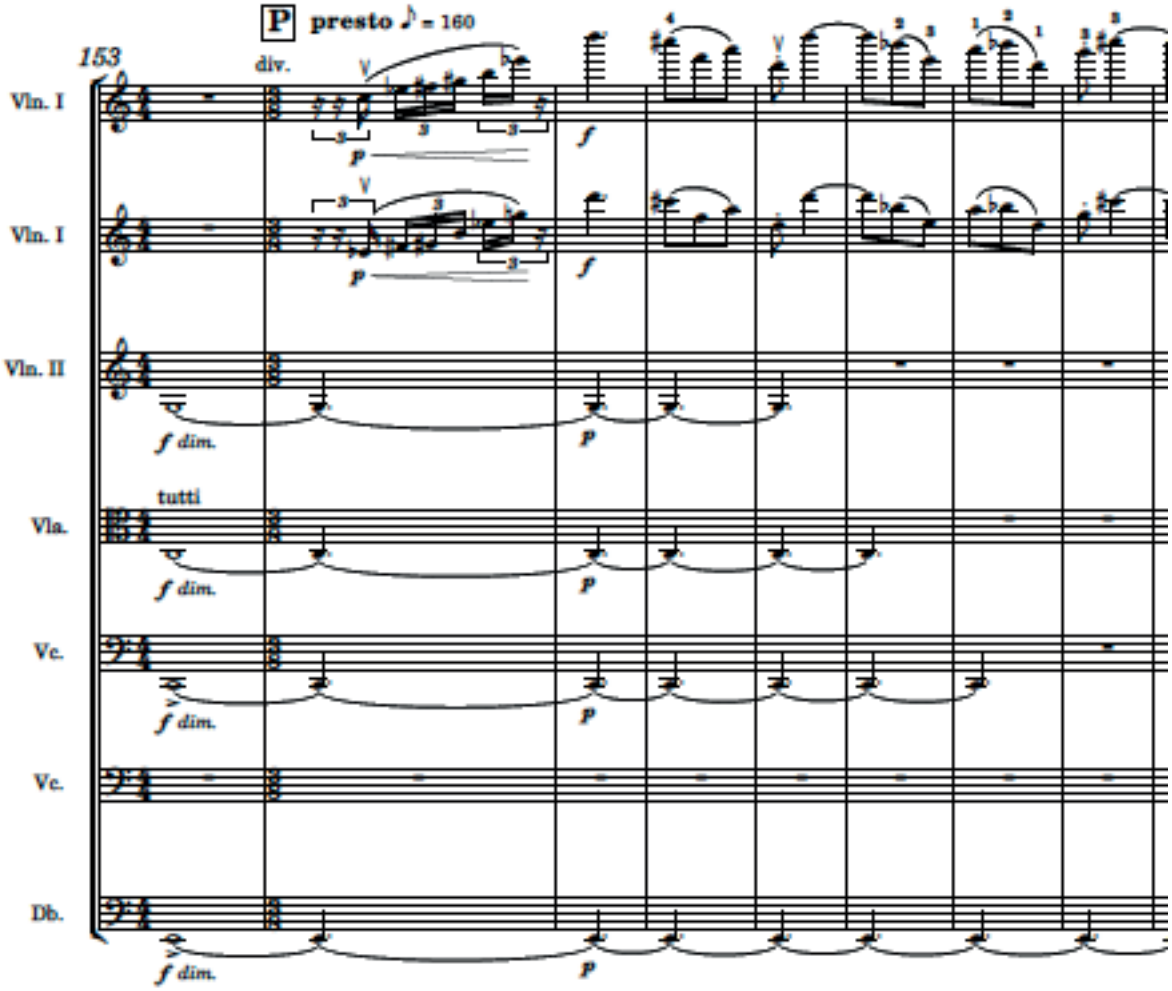
Bar 137. (08:33)

Tutti resumes here, with the cellos and basses more pressingly reciting a variant of the same tune, far below gentle ostinato figurations in the violins.



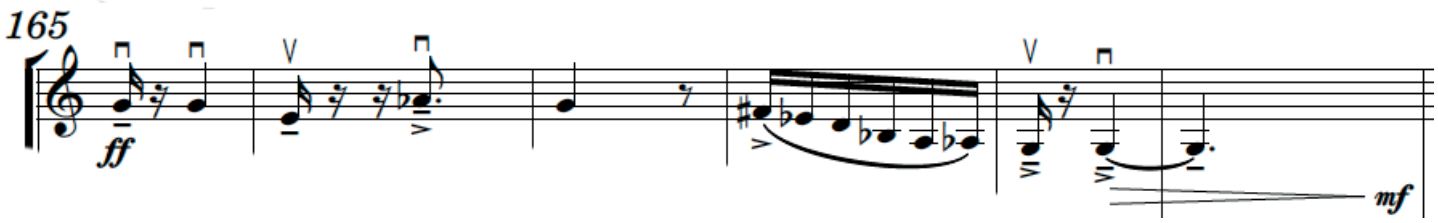
BAR 153. (10:19)

The peaceful atmosphere is rudely interupted, firstly in the forceful reappearance of the ominous 'open strings chord', then an all too familiar arpeggiated run in the first violins, based on the 'heat-haze' material, and finally a nervy and stratospheric declaration by the violins based on the 'D minor' material.

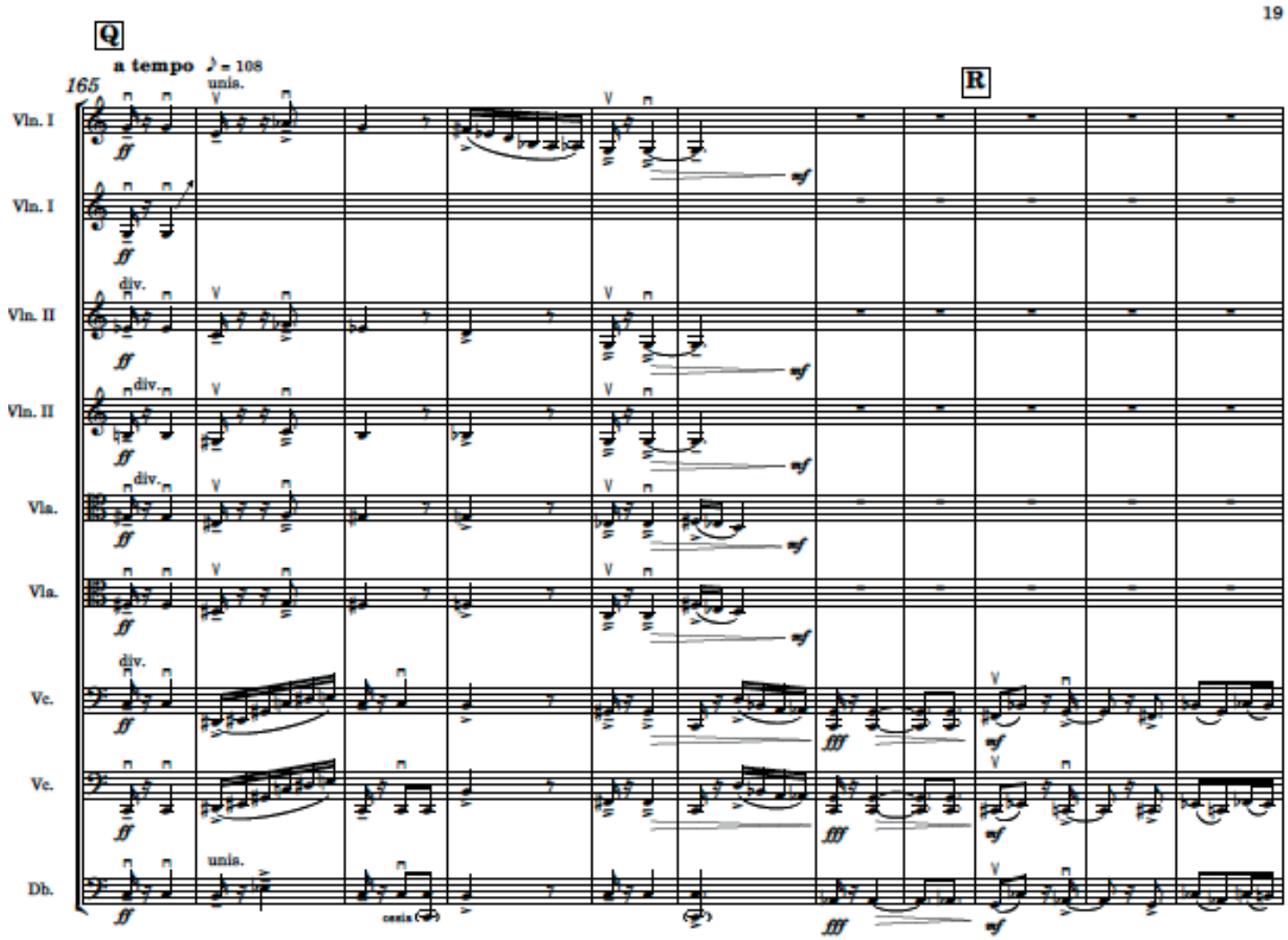


Bar 165. (10:37)

This intrusion finally throws us all into the dark and sinister world which forms the middle section of the movement. The threatening diminished fourth interval is back — and with a vengeance,

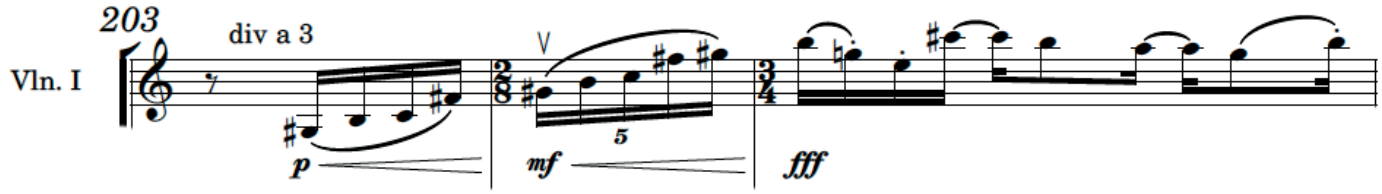


...combined with the fully realised aggressive potential of the 'heat-haze-tone-clusters', only this time, less like a heat-haze, and more like an ill-boding smouldering fire!



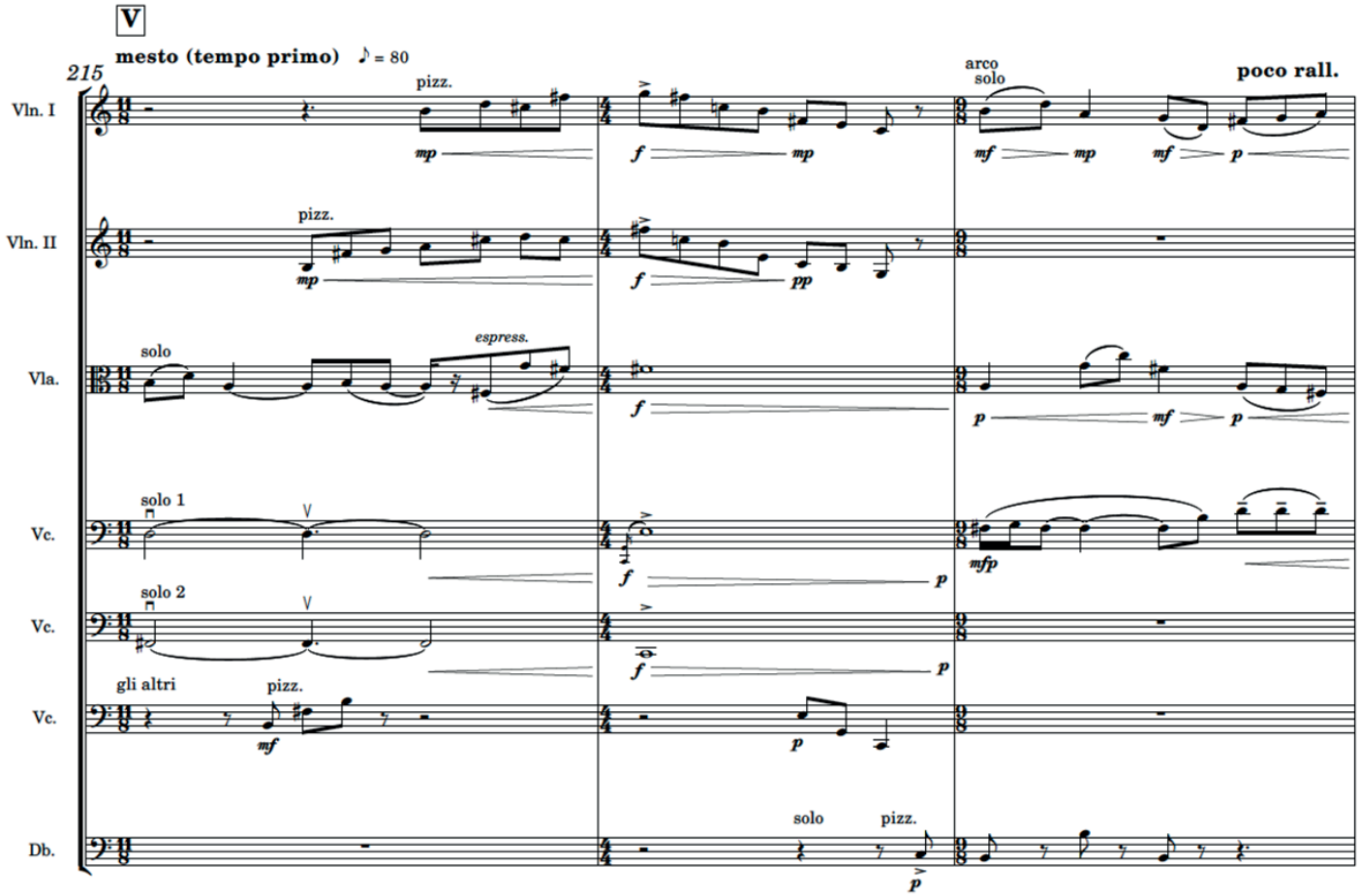
Bar 208. (11:40)

The ashes burst into flames at the climax of the movement, disturbingly heralded by the ubiquitous 'heat-haze' arpeggio figure, followed by an impenetrable texture formed of macabre variants of the syncopated folk-dance-like theme of the first movement.



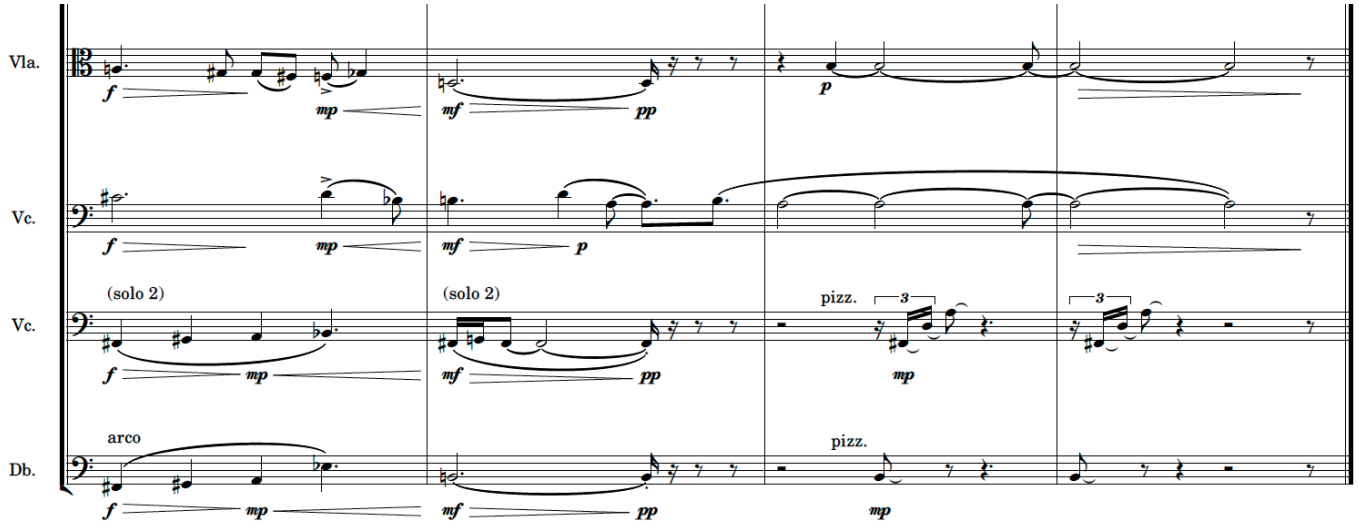
Bar 215. (12:01)

Merciful tranquillity is eventually restored before the movement ends, with the return of the original 'serene theme', this time made radiant thanks to pizzicato adornments.



Bar 220. (12:30)

The slow movement ends as it started, with the solo cello relishing the ‘serene theme’.

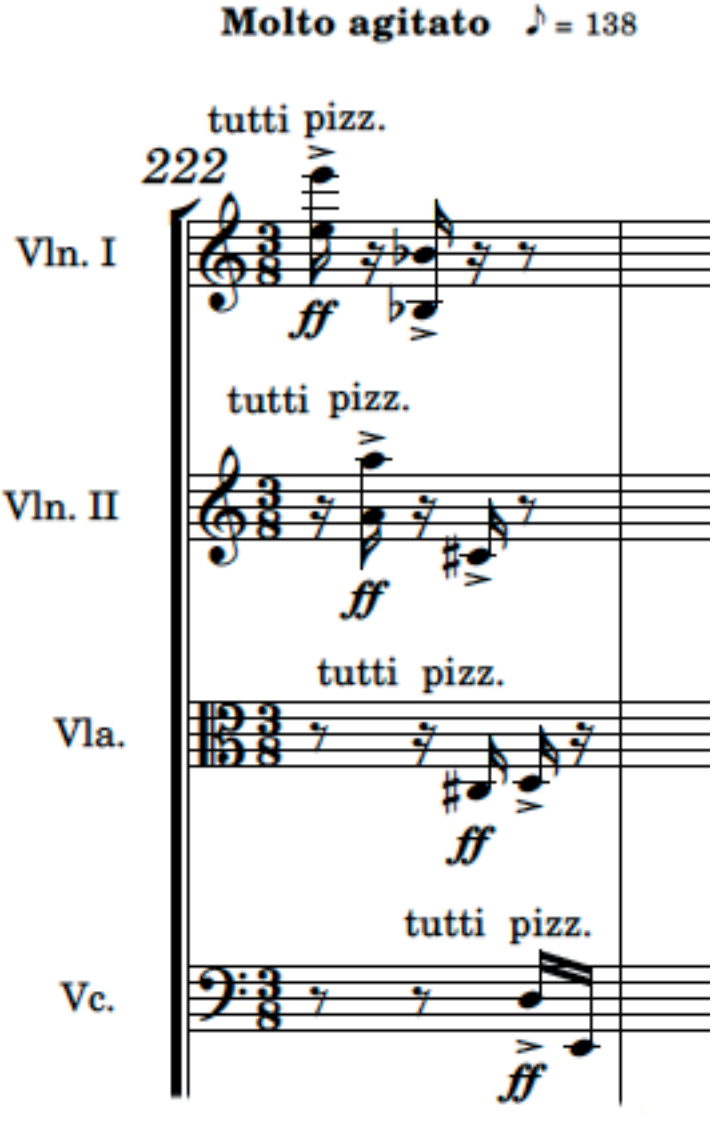


III

This movement is a fast and furious fugato — a determined race to the finish. Positioned third where a 'Scherzo' might traditionally appear, this is no Scherzo (or 'joke')! It's a scary night-mare-like episode, short lived, but terrifying while it lasts, which constantly pits opposing elements against each other.

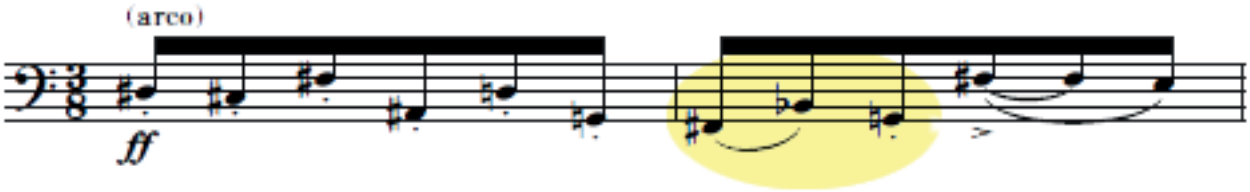
Bar 222. (12:55)

This first bar (and later at bar 250), comprises a strong pizzicato figure, once again, calling on the belligerent quality of the 'heat-haze arpeggio', but this time backwards (descending).



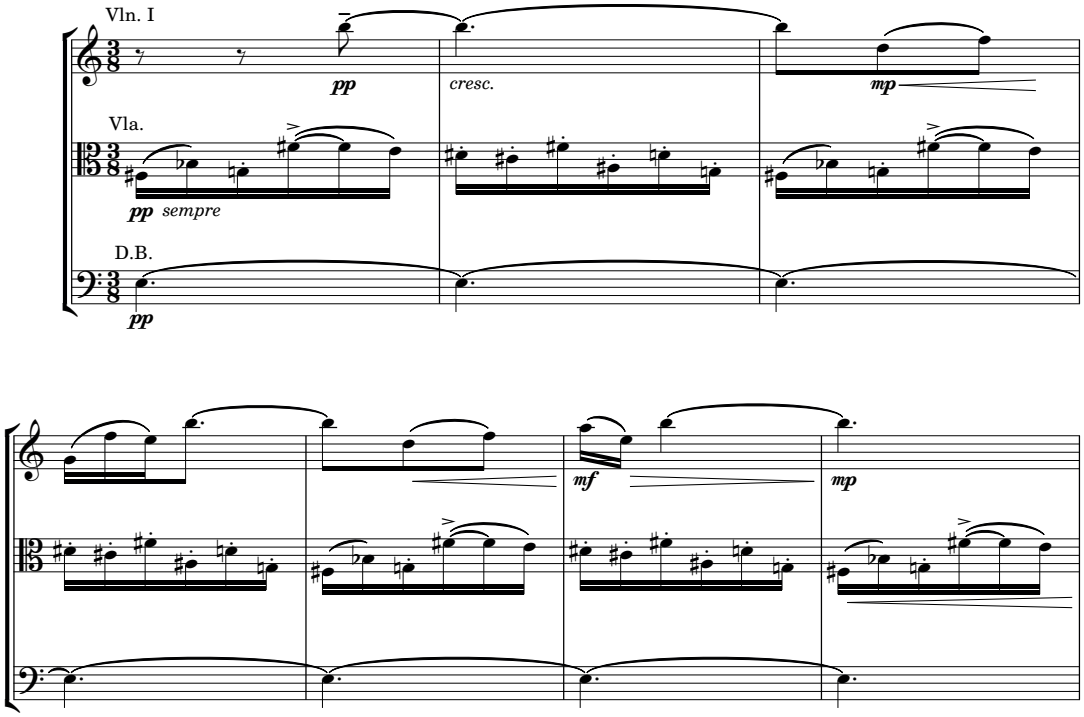
Bar 223. (12:58)

The fugato subject, distinctive in its own right, is thematically heavily influenced once more by existing motives, including the idiosyncratic use of the diminished fourth.



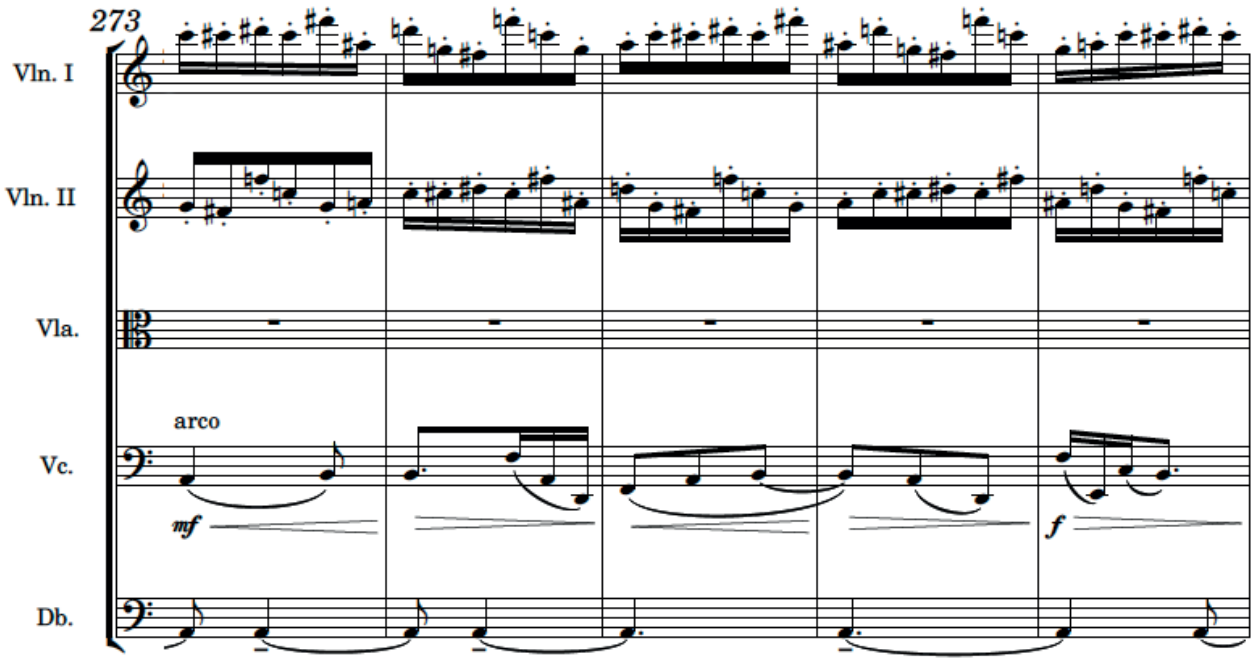
Bar 254. (13:38)

A new, sublime melody appears in the first violins: towering sustained notes, then navigating wide sweeping intervals. All this contrasts spectacularly with the fast, staccato assiduity of the detailed ostinato writing below it.



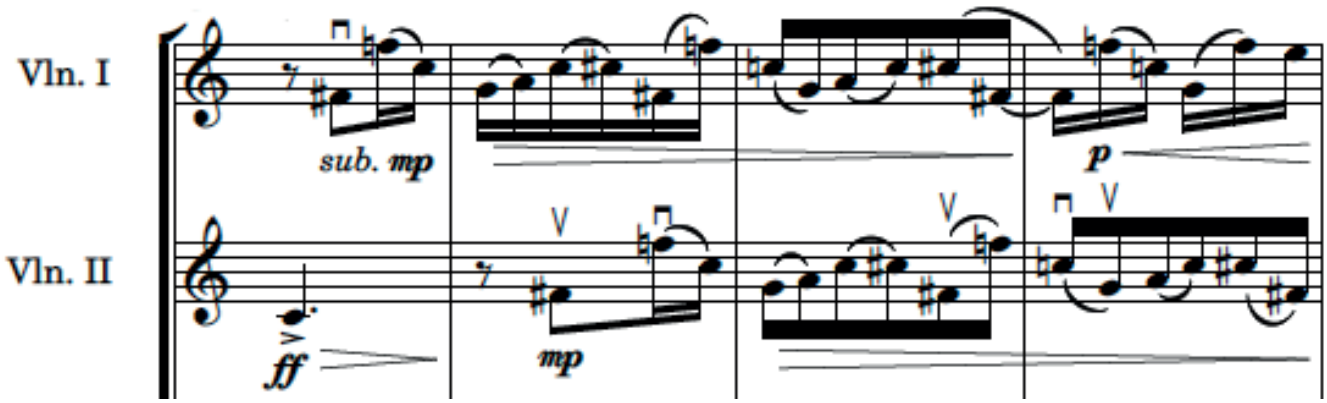
Bar 273. (14:02)

Invertible counterpoint turns the tables here, sending the prickly semi-quaver figure high into the violins and giving the cellos the opportunity of an expressive, satin-like theme.



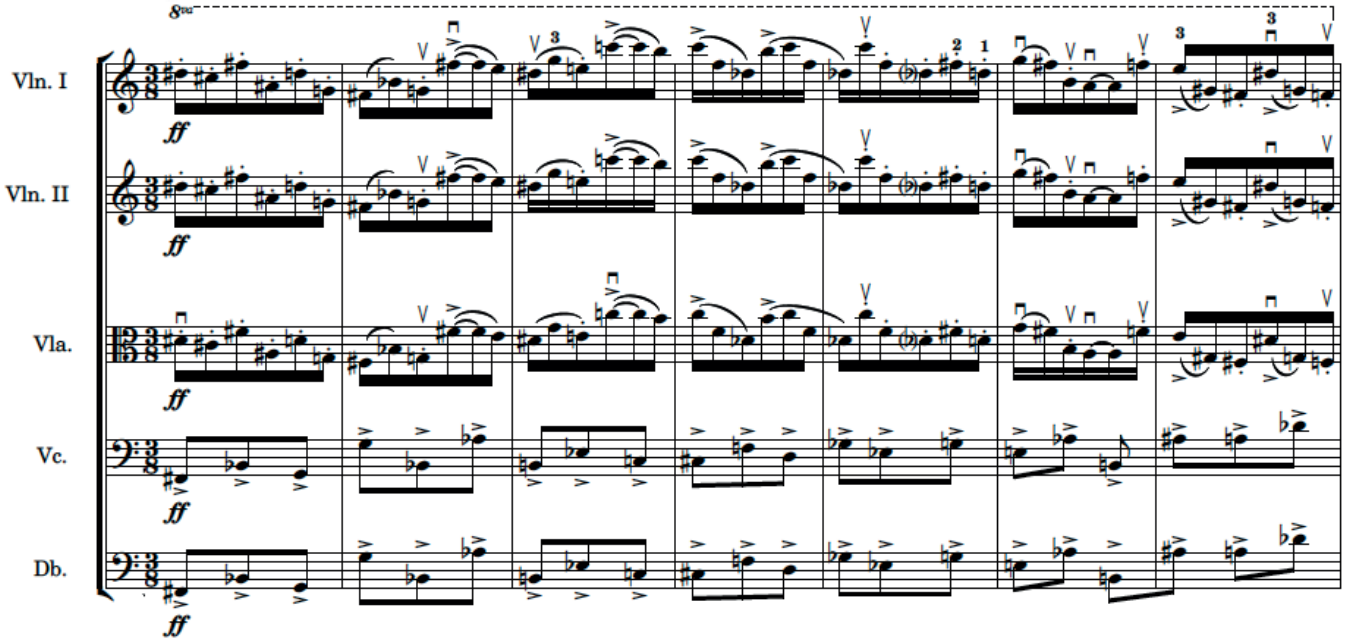
Bar 294. (14:30)

Canonic writing (in this case, between the violin sections) sparks a new phase, building tension.



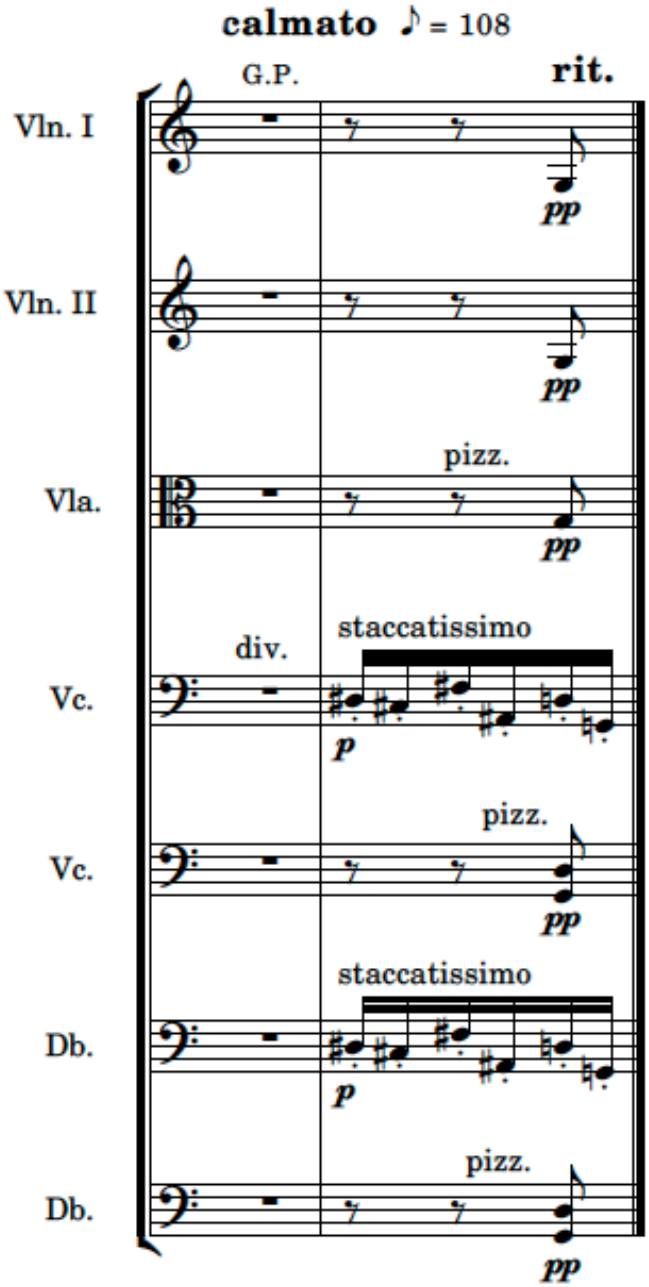
Bar 332. (15:22)

A fortissimo section represents the pinnacle of the rivalry between the upper and lower sections of the orchestra.



Bar 347. (15:41)

The nightmare ends with blessed deliverance in the shape of the habitual 'open-strings chord', followed by a more subdued rendition of the cellos' 'satin-like theme', and concludes with a bar of fully subjugated fugato.

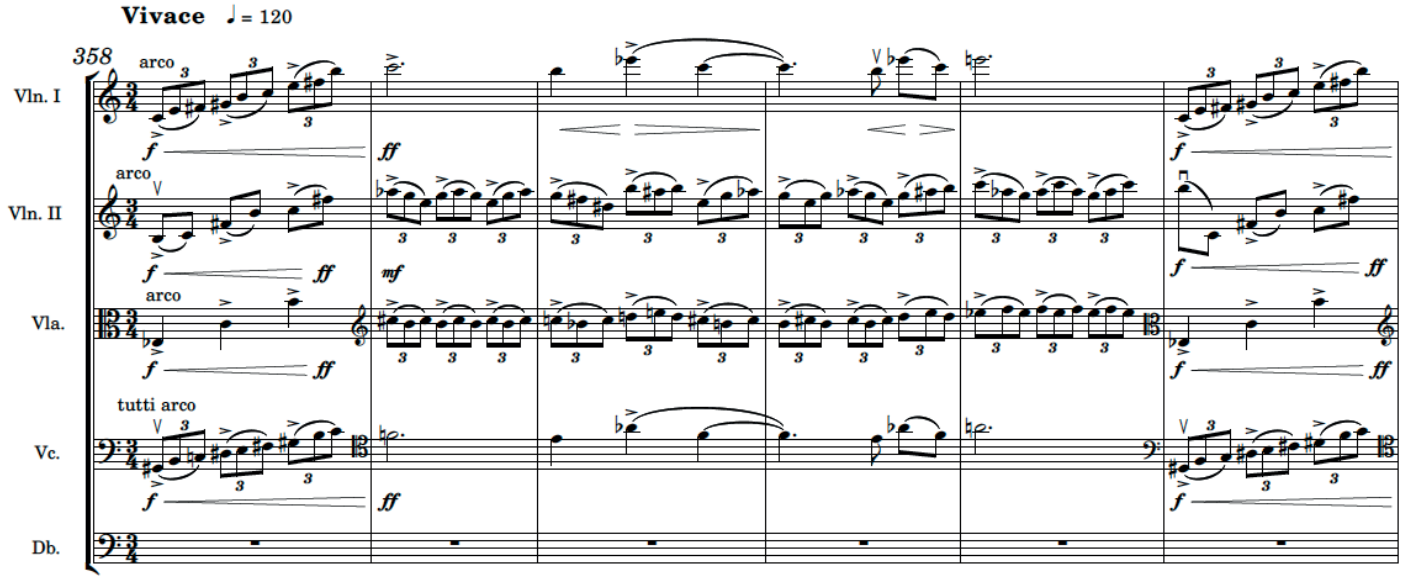


IV

The brief final movement is a retrospective ‘Epilogue’. A final assemblage of day dreams before we ‘come to dust’ (as Shakespeare describes in the poem).

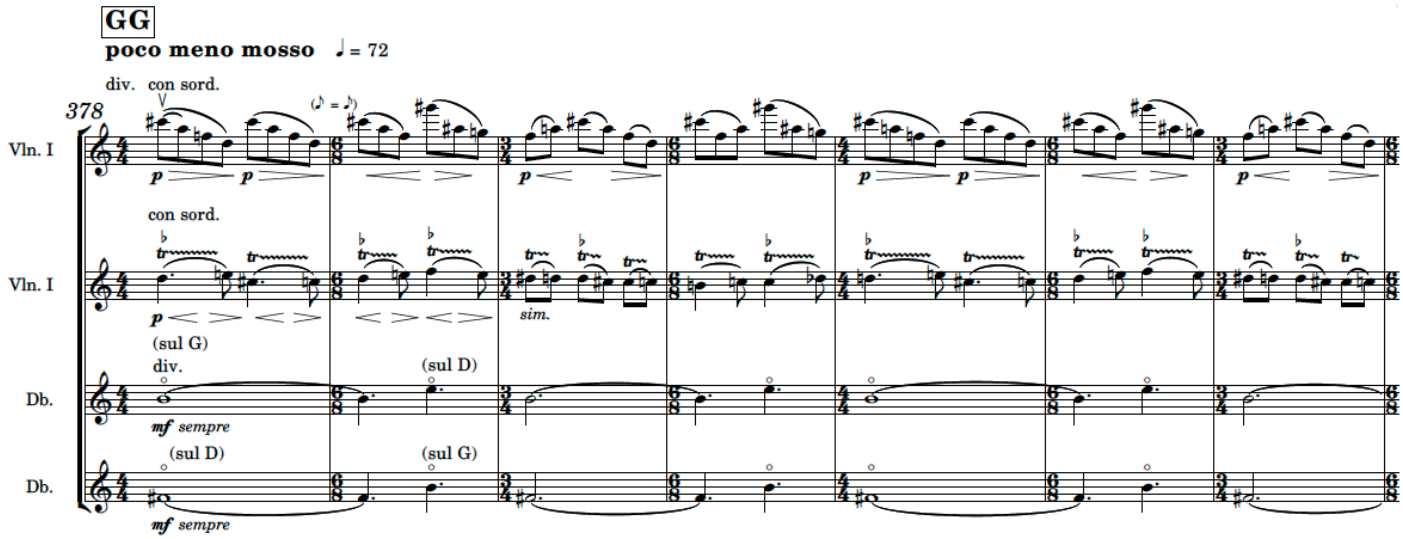
Bar 358. (16:05)

The blazing introduction throws us straight back to the oppression of the desert heat: accented triplet figures derived directly from the ‘heat-haze’ chord, do battle with an anxious melody played by pairing first violin and cello sections, playing an octave and a fourth apart (like a ‘Quarte de Nasard’ stop on the organ).



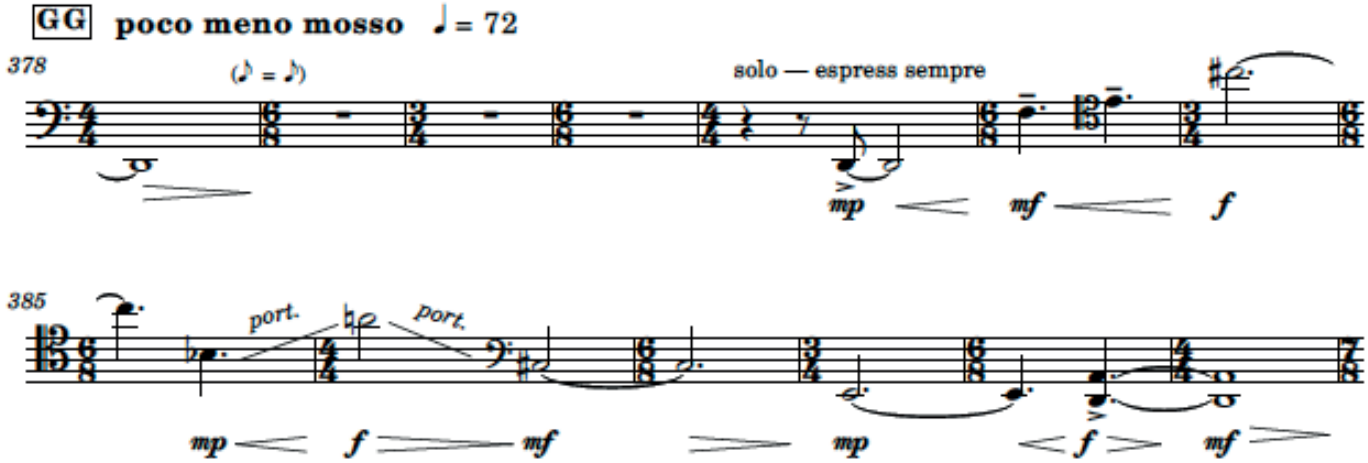
Bar 378. (16:35)

A new dream (or 'episode') begins: muted violins play mysteriously as if in a trance, with divisi double basses contributing eerie harmonics — a spellbinding sound world, once more drawing on harmonic language borrowed from the omnipresent 'heat-haze' arpeggios.



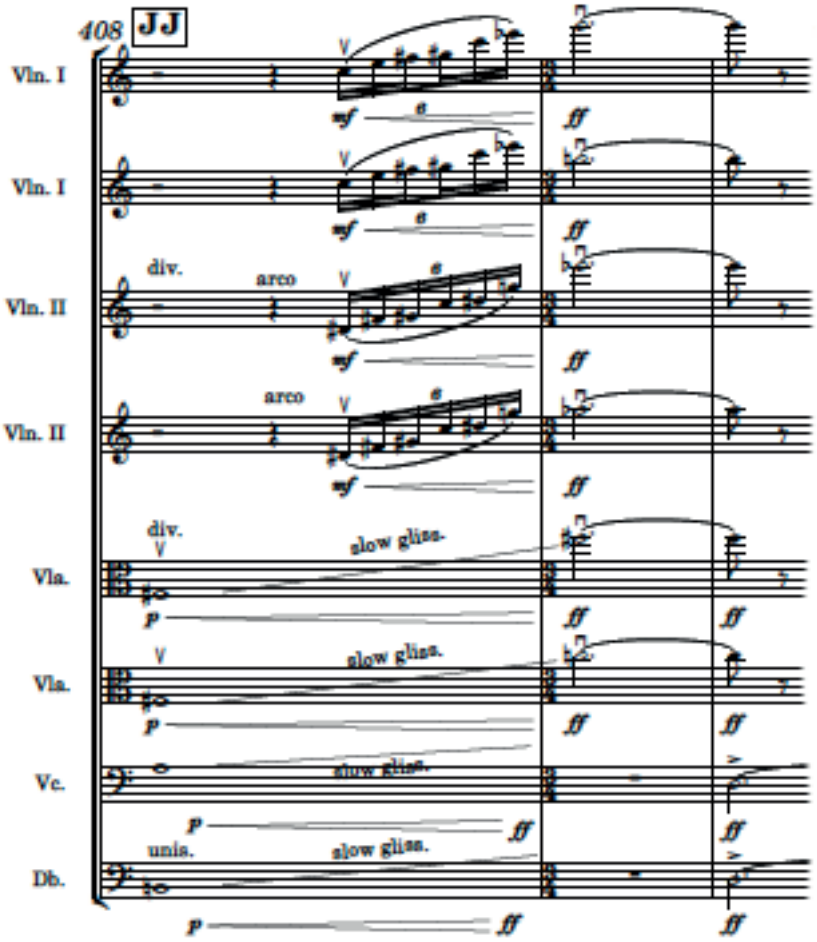
Bar 382. (16:47)

Over this, a bemused cello solo meanders across the supernatural landscape.



Bar 408. (18:01)

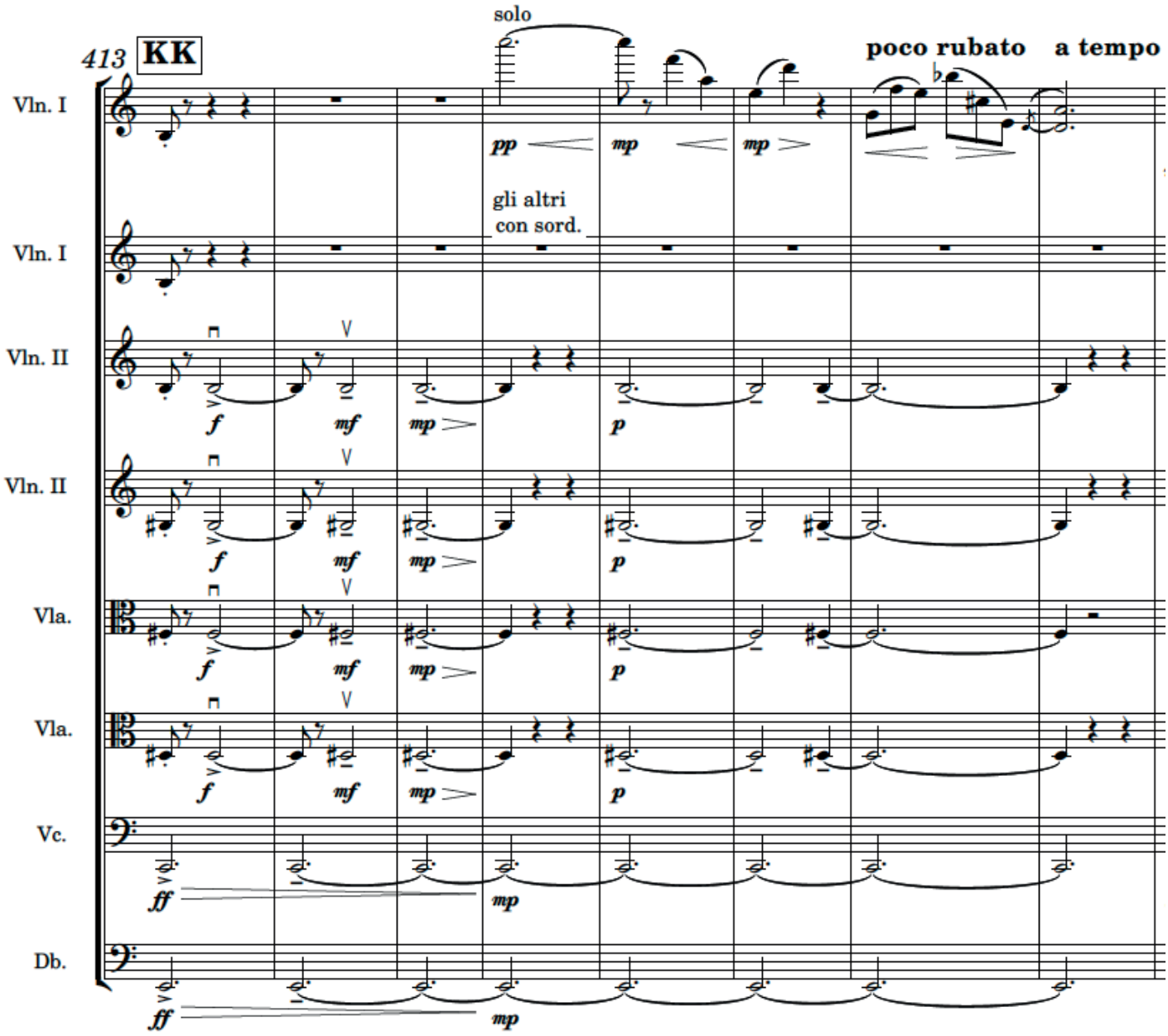
The dangerous hot sun brings us back to reality...



A progression of short, retrospective memories appear:

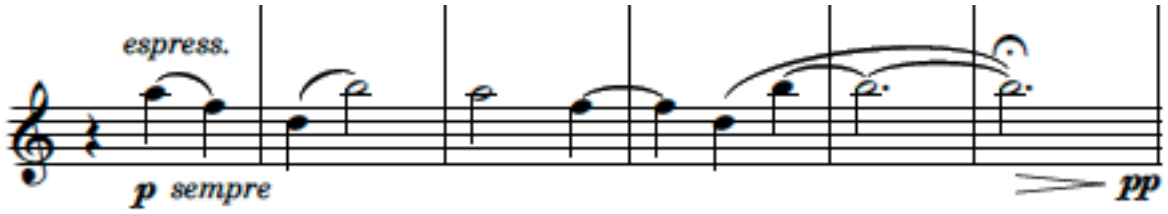
Bar 413. (18:15)

The unnerving viola tone clusters make an entrance, below a luminously expressive violin solo.

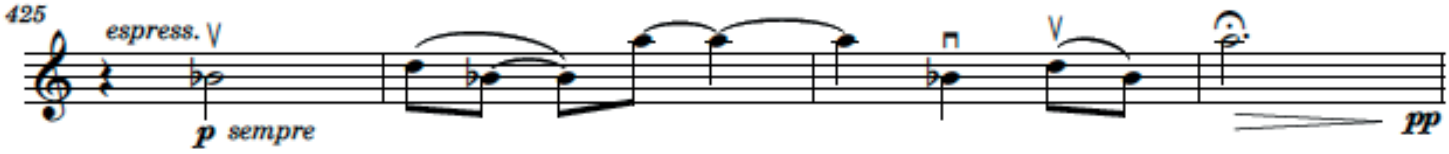


Bar 421. (18:36)

The ‘open strings chord’ takes root from here and simply refuses to budge until the bitter end. Muted violins sadly play the first few notes of the [previously] energetic syncopated folk-dance-like tune, now reduced to a crawl — played so slowly it’s barely recognizable as the same tune.

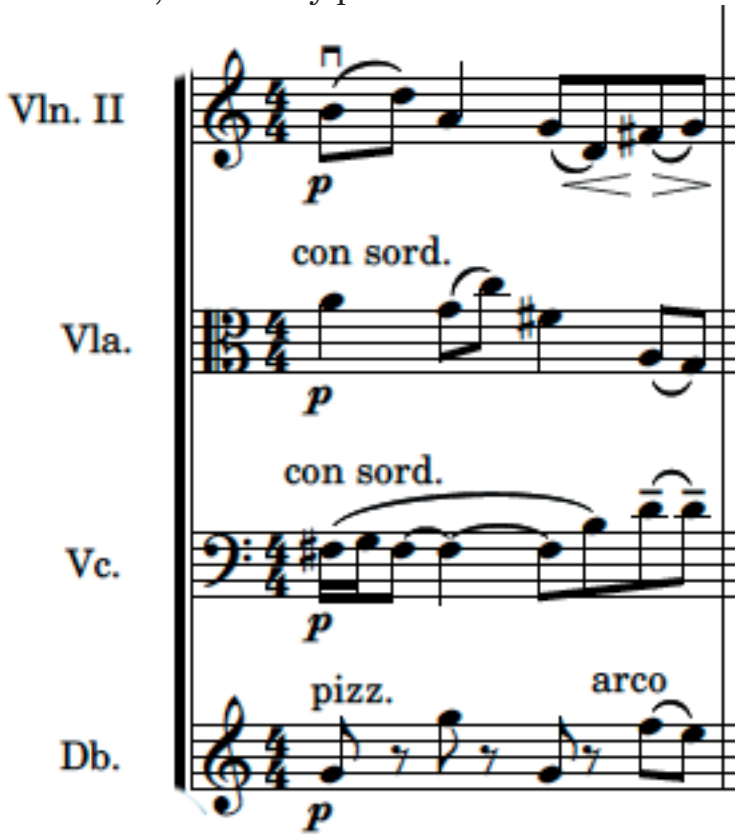


At the same time, in a macabre slow motion counter-subject, muted second violins play the first few notes of the double bass folk-dance-like tune, again, apathetically.



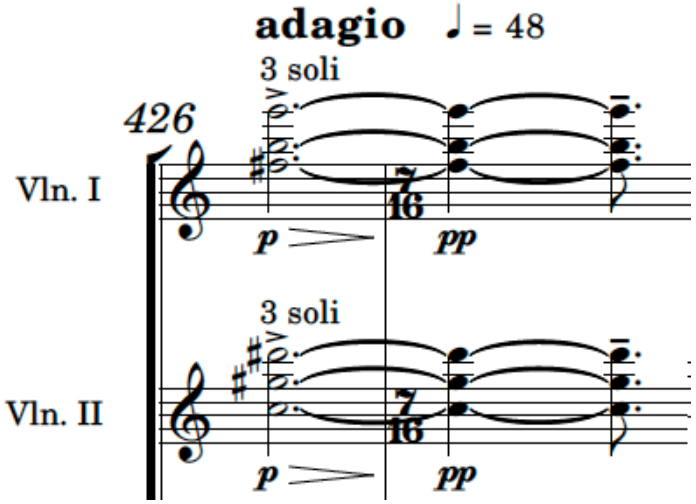
Bar 431. (19:01)

Fragments of the serene tune from the slow movement are heard next, again, on muted strings. But they only get so far before the bland open-strings chord is all that can be heard, ominously prevalent beneath the texture throughout this final phase.



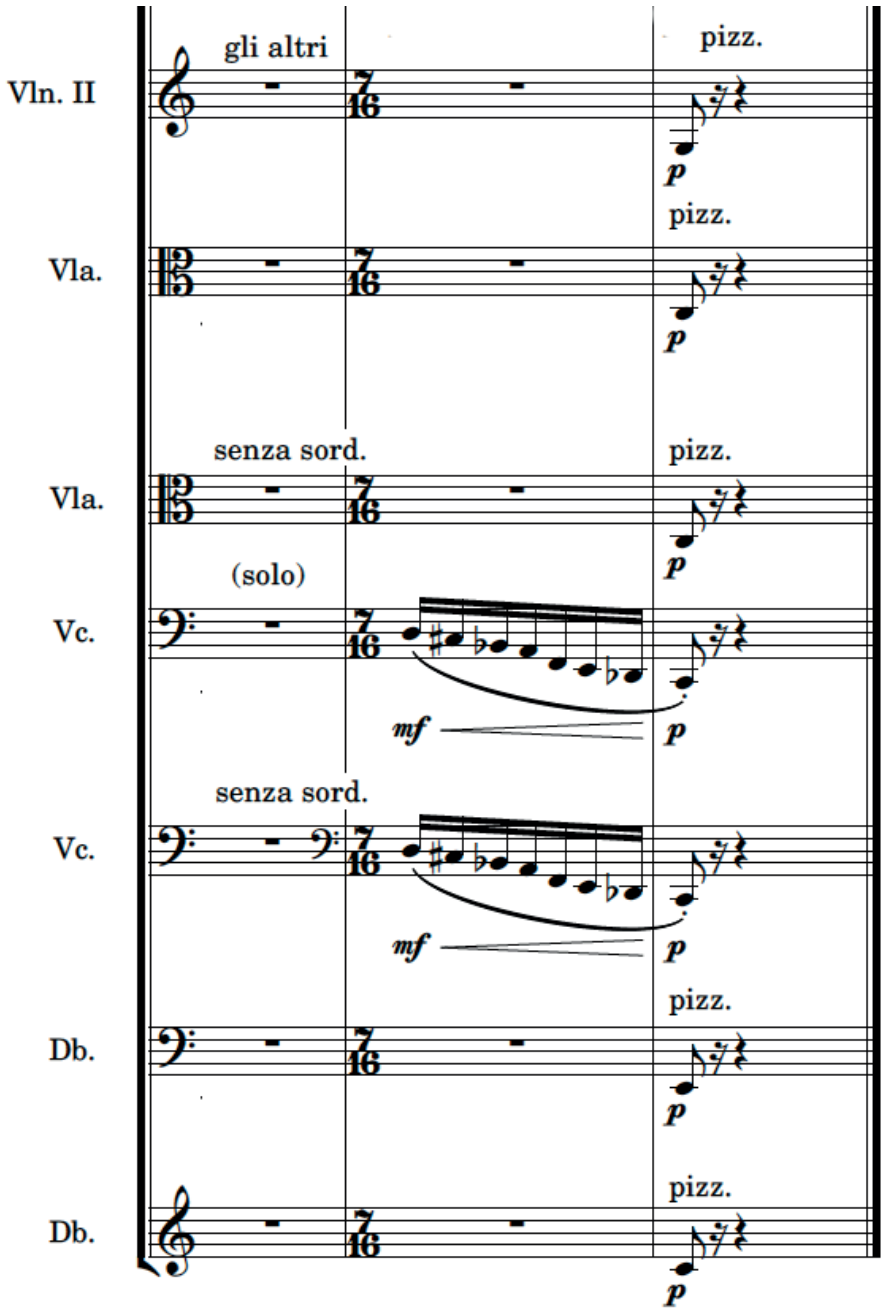
Bar 434. (19:16)

The 'heat-haze' chord occurs for the last time. It's back to it's original shape:



Bar 436. (19:20)

The ‘last gasp’ from the cellos is truncated by a ‘terminal pluck’ — that fateful ‘open strings chord’ has the ‘final, pizzicato, word’.



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