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Fluß der Ideen offengehaltenen Formkonzepts heben sich aus dem Zusammenhang der drei Sätze streng gegliederte Komplexe hervor, die den gewohnten Formvorstellungen durchaus nicht widerstreben. Die im Doppelkanon ausgeführte A-B-A-Form des Mittelsatzes ist allerdings auch wiederum nicht so plan wie sie sich auf dem Papier ausnimmt, weil sie durch die symmetrisch gegliederte Zentralpartie in zwei annähernd gleiche Hälften geteilt wird, die sich nur scheinbar wie Spiegelbilder zueinander verhalten. Der erste Satz ist siebenteilig (1 - 15/16 - 32/33 - 50/51 - 65/66 - 78/80 - 95/96 - 112), der dritte fünf-, beziehungsweise sechsteilig (1 - 15/16 - 25/26 - 37/38 - [43/44 -] 53/54 - 68). In beiden Sätzen überschneiden sich Komponenten der Fugen- und der Sonatenform.

Ein etwas rätselhaftes Phänomen ist, daß das wörtliche Zitat des B-A-C-H-Motivs, so diskret es sich sonst auch gebärdet, immer nur an den entscheidenden Stellen des Formablaufs zum Vorschein kommt. Es wird im ersten Satz an dem Ort, wo der Eintritt des Themas zu erwarten wäre, im Krebsgang eingeführt (18/19, 1. und 2. Violine) und gleich darauf, wenn auch in losem Zusammenhang, von der ersten Stimme explizit hervorgehoben (23 und 26); dann taucht es, abwechselnd in der Original- und Krebsgestalt, am Anfang und Ende der beiden "Durchführungsteile" wieder auf (51/53, 1. Violine, 64/65, 2. Violine und Viola, beziehungsweise 66/67, 1. Violine und 73/75, 2. Violine) sowie an den korrespondierenden Stellen der "Reprise" (81/82, 94/95, 1. und 2. Violine). Im zweiten Satz verbirgt es sich in den Schlußtakten der Mittelstimmen, und im dritten gehorcht es einem ähnlichen Impuls der Formdynamik wie im ersten (8/10, Violoncello, 13/14, Viola, 26/28, 2. Violine, 52/53, 1. Violine, 61/63, 1. Violine, 66/68, Violoncello). Wahrscheinlich ist des Rätsels Lösung in einer bestimmten Auswahl und Anordnung der Transpositionsreihen zu finden. Daß Webern sich aber gerade für diese entschieden hat, ist eher einer wohlerwogenen Absicht als einem Zufall zuzuschreiben. Denn Zufälle, die gibt es bei Webern nicht. Geheimnisse allenfalls, wie es sie schon bei Bach gegeben hat. Und die soll man gutverschlossen aufbewahren.

F. S.

PREFACE

The letters Webern wrote over a period of roughly two decades to Hildegard Jone and her sculptor husband Josef Humplik (extracts are published in the little volume "Anton Webern, Briefe an Hildegard Jone und Josef Humplik", Vienna 1959) contain revealing information about the chronology of his creative work. From Webern's remarks (they are usually quite terse) we can fix with some accuracy the genesis of Opus 28 and of each of its three movements. A letter of 3 February 1937 gives us the first clue: "I am doing a string quartet" is the laconic comment. This of course does not mean that Webern could not have begun work earlier. It equally does not mean that the piece was merely in the planning stage, for "doing" always indicated that Webern was hard at it. Exactly seven months later, on 2 September 1937, Webern announced the completion of the first movement, under the impression - still obviously fresh - that he had come to a "decisive point" in his work. Was this the 112-bar movement that was given the number I in the definitive 1939 edition, which position it justly continues to occupy? Or was it the middle 53-bar movement which according to René Leibowitz

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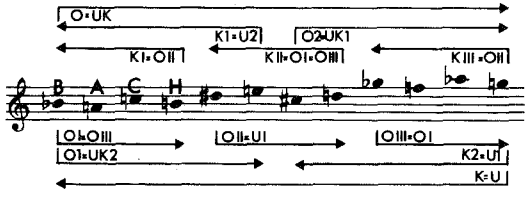
("Schoenberg et son Ecole", Paris 1947) originally came first? The point is open to question, but it is perhaps of no importance in any case. 112 divided by 7 equals an average of 16 bars per month - from which Webern's present-day colleagues can still take an example. The other two movements, however, seem to have demanded less endurance: Webern reported the completion of the next movement on 9 February 1938, and of the whole piece on 15 April of that year.

The psychological perspective that can be discerned in this surely stupendously protracted process gains further clarity and depth from a statement of 12 March 1938. On that day Webern wrote to his friends, "I am completely absorbed in my work and will not, will not be disturbed." 12 March 1938, as it happens, was the day Hitler's troops marched into Austria. Webern's demonstrative defensive stance was therefore doubtless justified. And there can be no question today that it was also justified by the subjective Archimedean motive of defending an autonomous realm of ideas. After all, Webern's String Quartet has outlasted several other "disturbances" since.

The model character that distinguishes the piece (and all of Webern's late works) is seen today in a different light than during the 1950s, when Webern was the rage and his principle of tone-row composition, re-interpreted as "serialism", was proclaimed as the dogma of a new "music of the future". The prototype read into it then is no longer so obvious as it was made to seem. What remains - and remains valid in all respects - can be defined as a model in the sense of a replica, not a prototype: the embodiment of a musical system of thought in the form of a highly stylized example that, like the Art of the Fugue, sets the seal on an epochal experience. Was Webern conscious of the analogy? That question must go unanswered. In any event, the reference to Bach is emphatic, and there must have been a more valid reason for it than merely a casual historical reminiscence. Moreover, it is not actually by the classic B-A-C-H quote that the reference is musically articulated, but, to a much higher degree, by the minute paraphrases of it in the basic elements that give the music its shape. Those paraphrases make the quote the object of a magic reflexion. In the multiple echoes of the paraphrased name, the reference comes to have the nature of an invocation. And what may appear at first, in its rudimentary shape, to be a simple construction formula, takes on the significance of an adjuration through the manner in which construction takes place. This is best illustrated by the row Webern invented for the Quartet (it is notated a major sixth lower in his sketch):



In this order of pitches the original row and retrograde inversion are identical, as are the inversion and retrograde; that is, the four basic modes coincide in the intervallic proportions of a single row. As the diagram shows, the six-tone and four-tone segments can likewise be interchanged, according to the rule of transposition and reversion. Inherent in this tight clinch between the whole and each of its parts, and between the parts themselves, is a relatively narrow range of variation in melodic structure. But this is irrelevant, for Webern's

point is precisely the presentation of analogies in every detail of the composition and, in turn, the presentation of the composition as a unified whole. The many instances of mirror and symmetry in the formal disposition of the three movements and each of their particles occur in exact conformity with that principle.

Strictly speaking, the melodic substance of the work consists only of the four tones of the B-A-C-H motive. That substance can be reduced still further, however, for the last two notes can be considered a transposition of the first two; thus admirers of overstatement could describe the composition, with good reason, as the product of a morphogenesis of two tones. With good reason, since Webern himself outlines a pattern of such figures in the fifteen bars of the introduction, by apportioning two-tone groups, drawn from the four-tone segments of the row, evenly and successively among the four parts. And when the two-tone groups return, a differentiation is made only as regards note values and displacement of rhythmic accents. (These intervals, however, must not be heard as isolated occurrences - the extreme spread of their boundary tones makes them virtually incommensurable in any case - but in the context of the four-part writing, for only then do they have a musically significant shape.)

The process of formation (which, as it were, objectifies itself in the Quartet) sets in with the second section of the first movement (bars 16 - 32) and leads via the defile of six-tone figures in canonic imitation (33 - 49) to a cautious approximation to the imaginary principal motive. As Leibowitz remarked, everything is theme. But one could equally claim that everything is variation. (Always the same and yet different every time - Webern's cardinal idea reaches its objective here.) Despite an apparently vague concept of a form kept open to a permanent flow of ideas, distinctly structured complexes stand out in the context of the three movements that are not opposed to accustomed ideas of form. On the other hand, the double-canon A-B-A second movement is not so plain as it looks on paper: the symmetrically built middle section divides the movement into two roughly equal halves which only seem to have a mirror relationship to each other. The first movement is in seven sections (1 - 15/16 - 32/33 - 50/51 - 65/66 - 78/80 - 95/96 - 112); the third movement can be said to have either five or six sections (1 - 15/16 - 25/26 - 37/38 - [43/44 -] 53/54 - 68). Components of the fugue and the sonata intersect in both movements.

It is a somewhat puzzling phenomenon that the literal B-A-C-H quote, however discreetly it may behave, only ever puts in an appearance at decisive moments in the formal scheme. In the first movement it is introduced in retrograde at the point where the entrance of the theme would be expected (18/19, 1st and 2nd violin); soon afterwards, it is brought out explicitly by the 1st violin, although the connection between the notes is a loose one (bars 23 and 26); then it turns up at the beginning and end of the two "development sections", namely in 1st violin b. 51/53 and in 2nd violin-viola b. 64/65 (both retrograde), in 1st violin b. 66/67 and in 2nd violin b. 73/75 (both in the original form), as well as at the corresponding passages of the "recapitulation" (b. 81/82 and 94/95, 1st and 2nd violin). In the second movement the quote is concealed in the closing bars of the middle parts, and in the third movement it obeys an impulse of formal dynamism similar to that of the first movements (violoncello b. 8/10, viola b. 13/14, 2nd violin b. 26/28, 1st violin b. 52/53 and 61/63, violoncello b. 66/68). The answer to the riddle probably lies in a certain choice and order of row transpositions. But Webern's selection of precisely those rows is sooner a matter of intention than of accident, for accidents do not exist in Webern. Secrets perhaps, as they exist in Bach. And they should be kept under lock and key.

F.S. (trans. E. H.)

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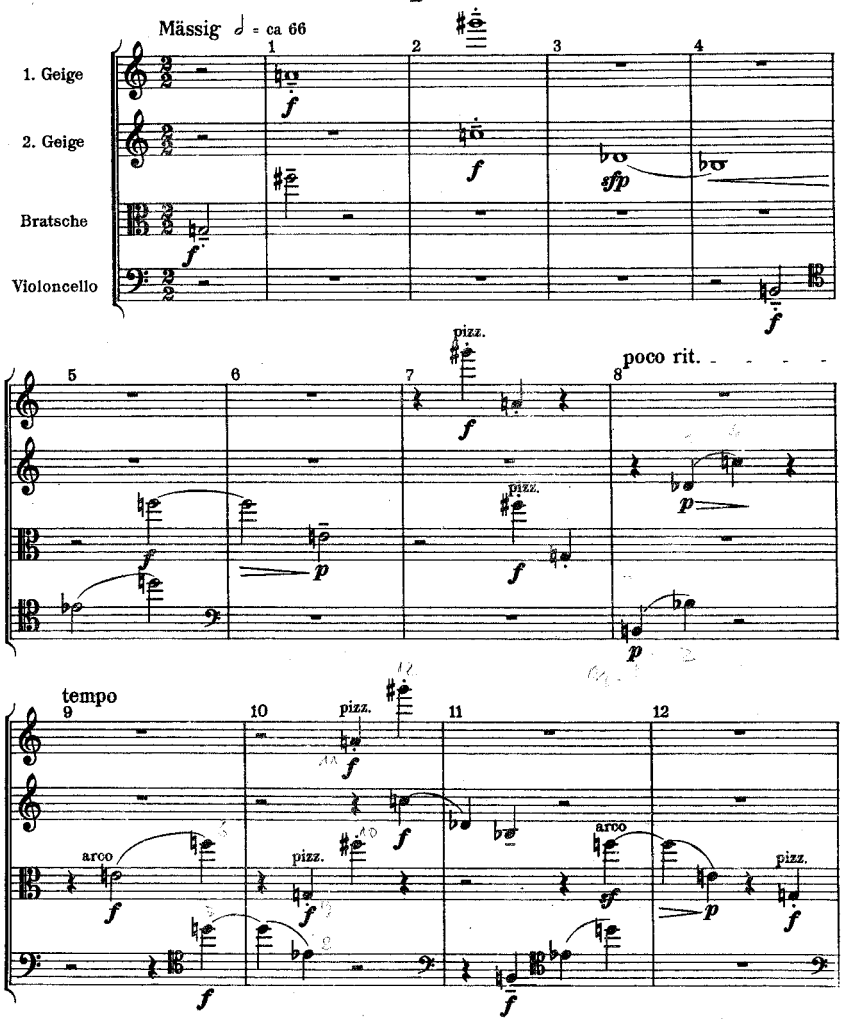
STREICHQUARTETT

ANTON WEBERN, Op. 28

I



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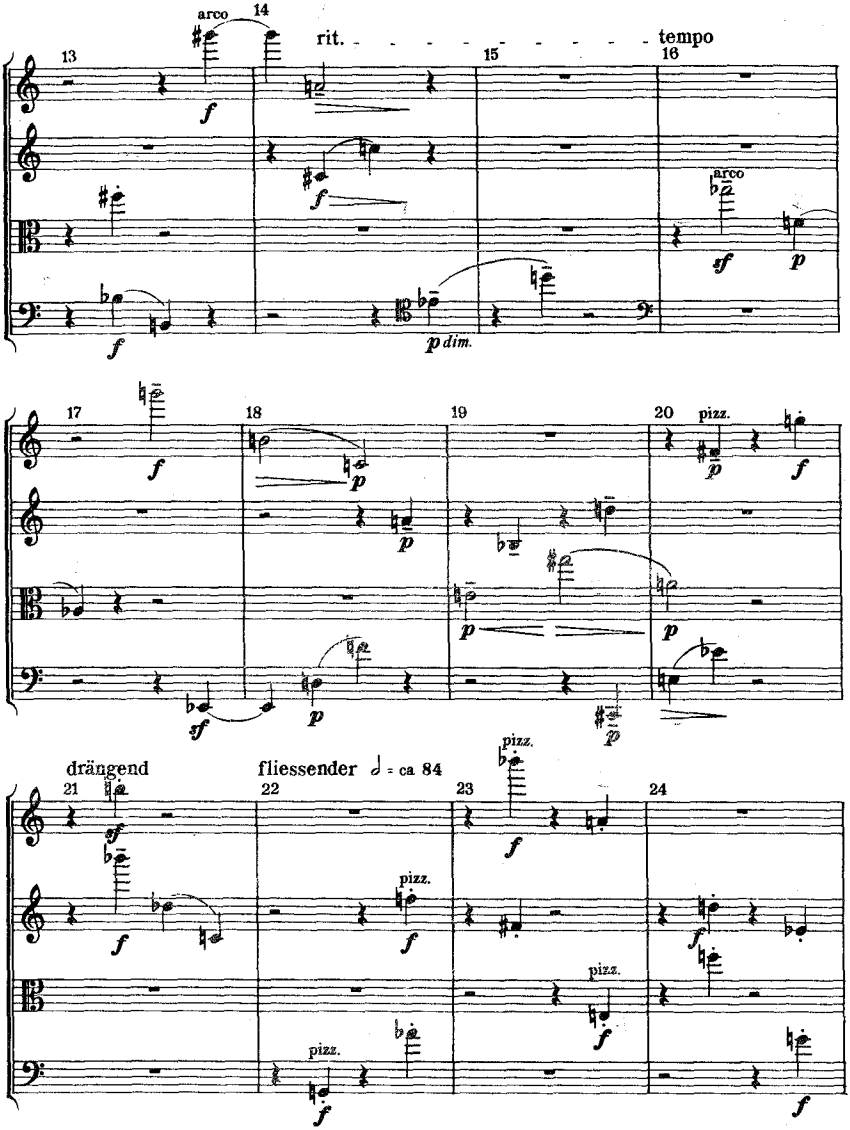

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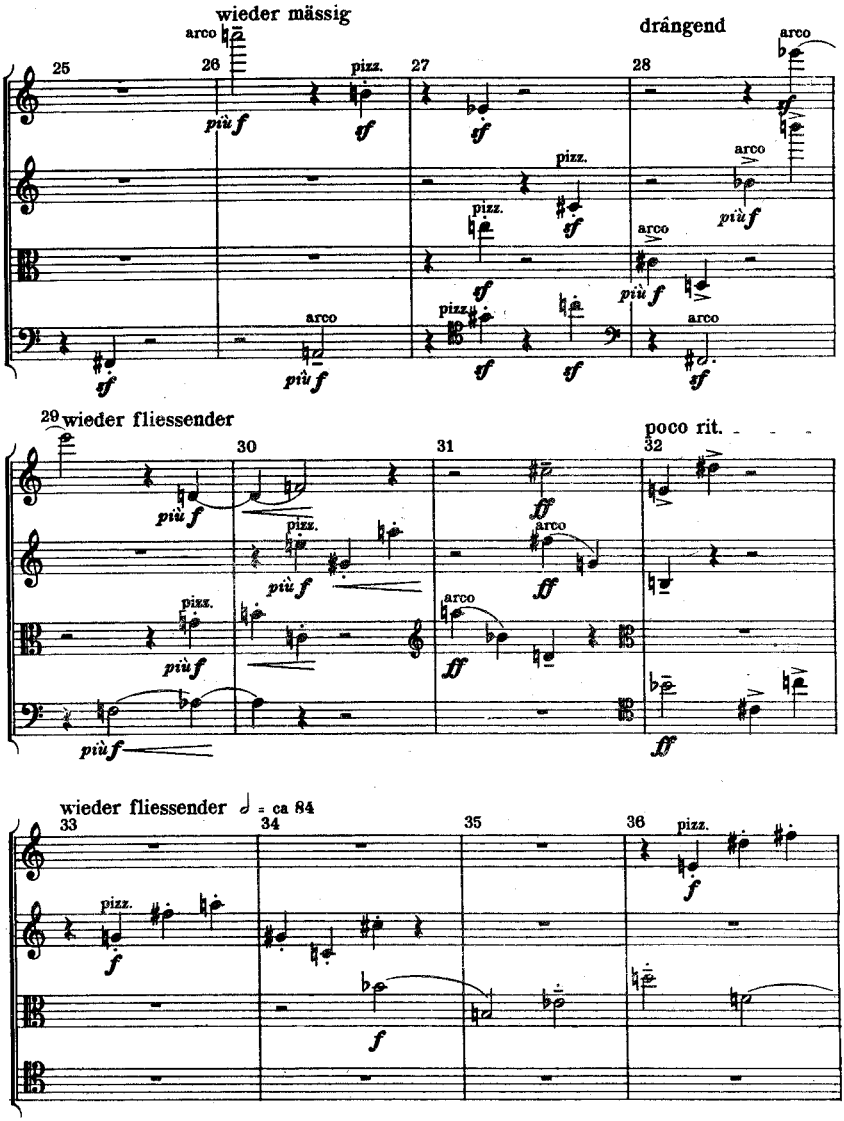

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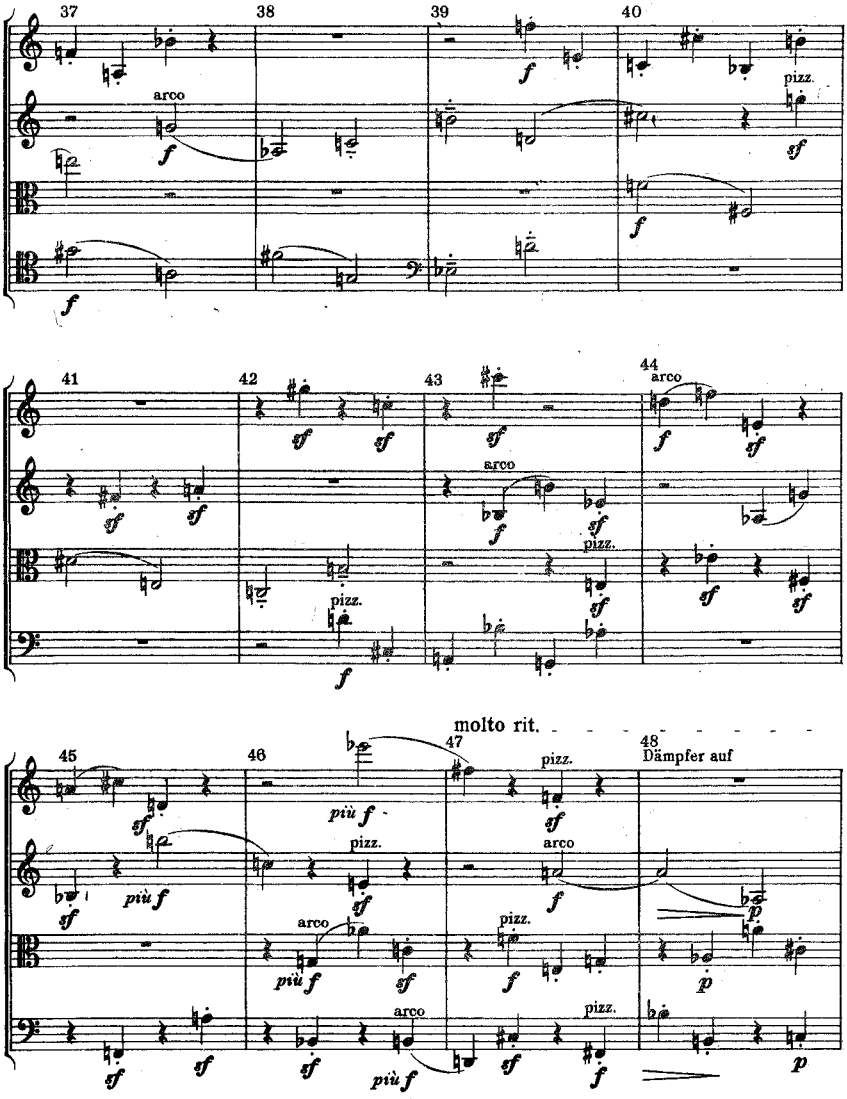

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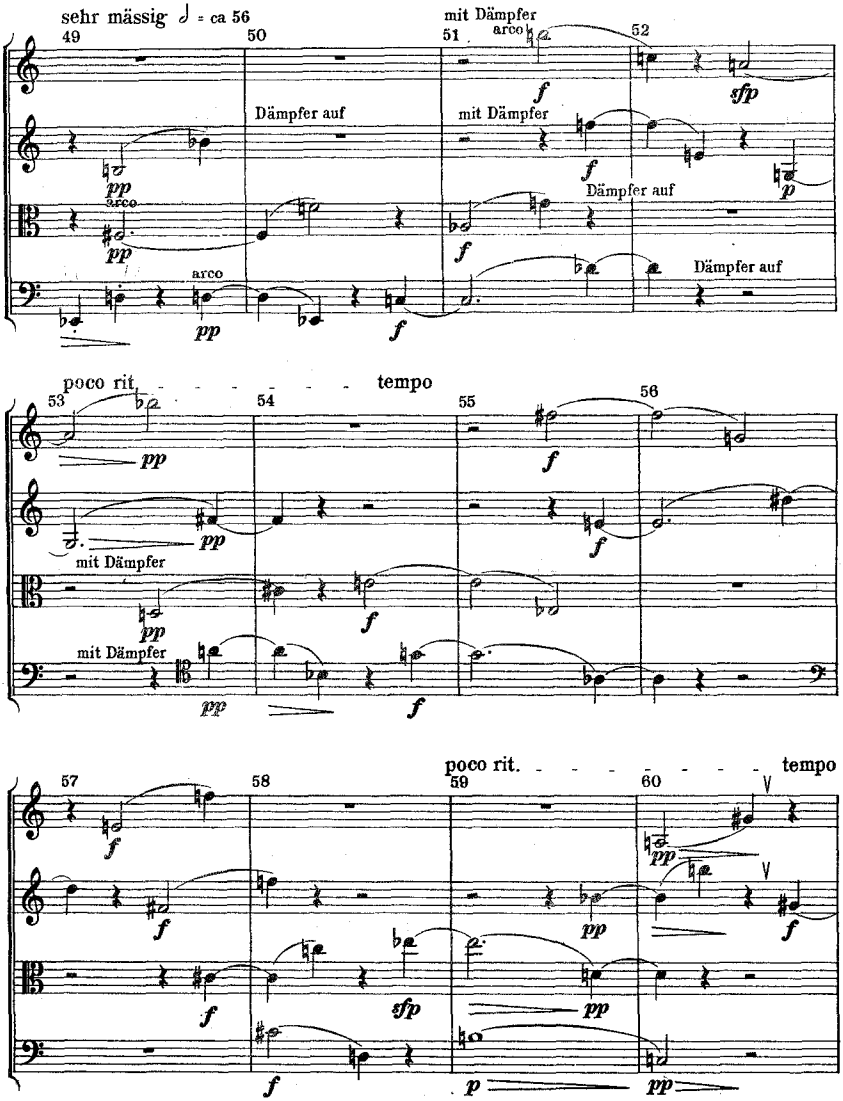

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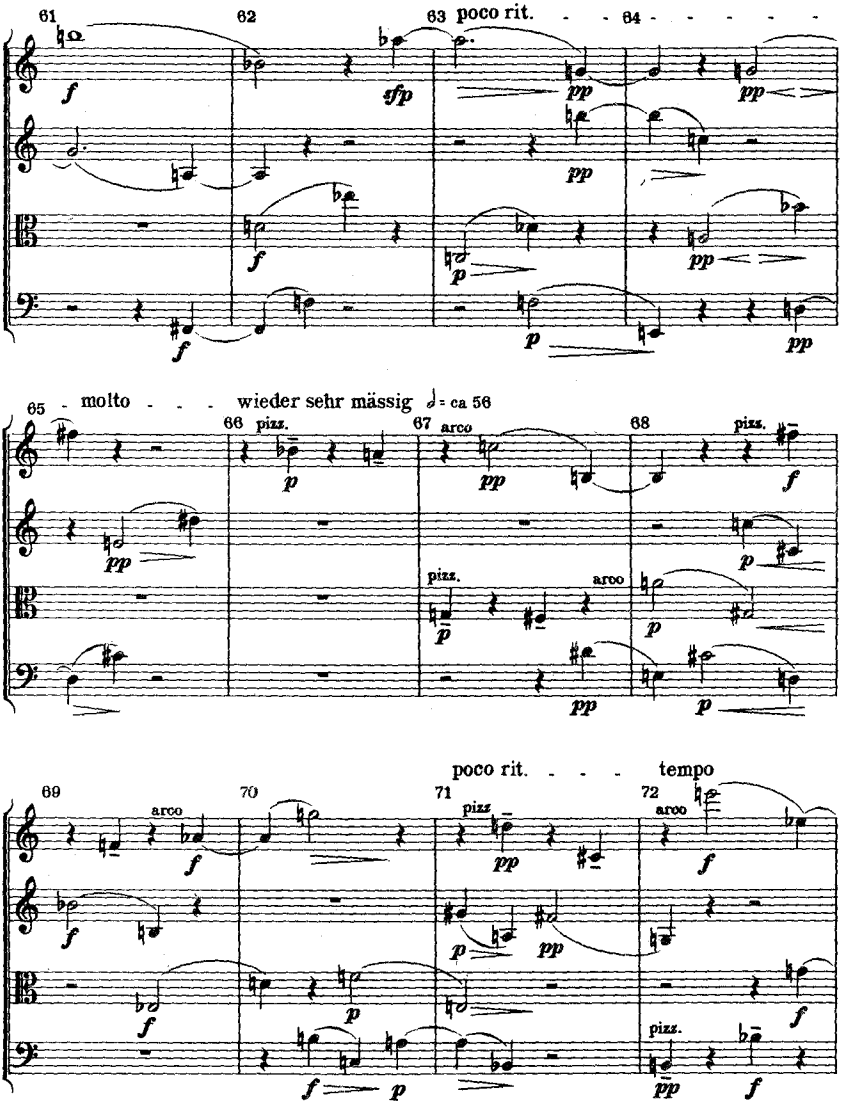

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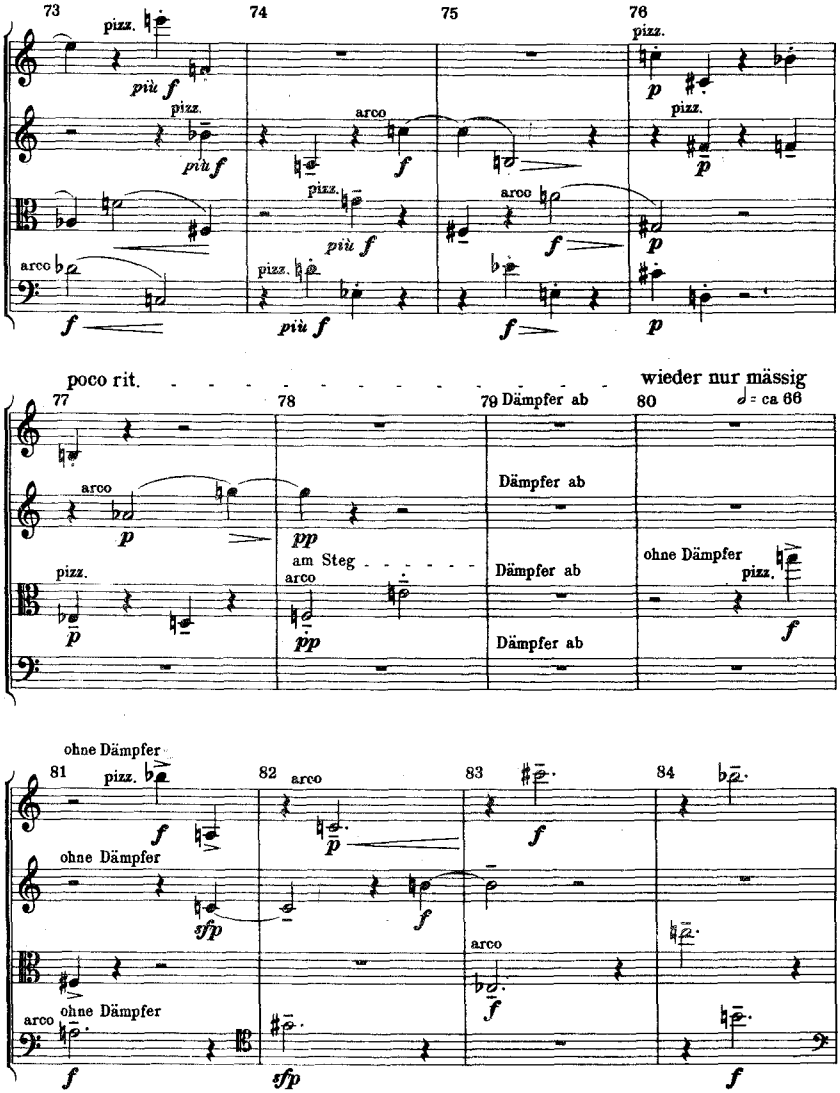

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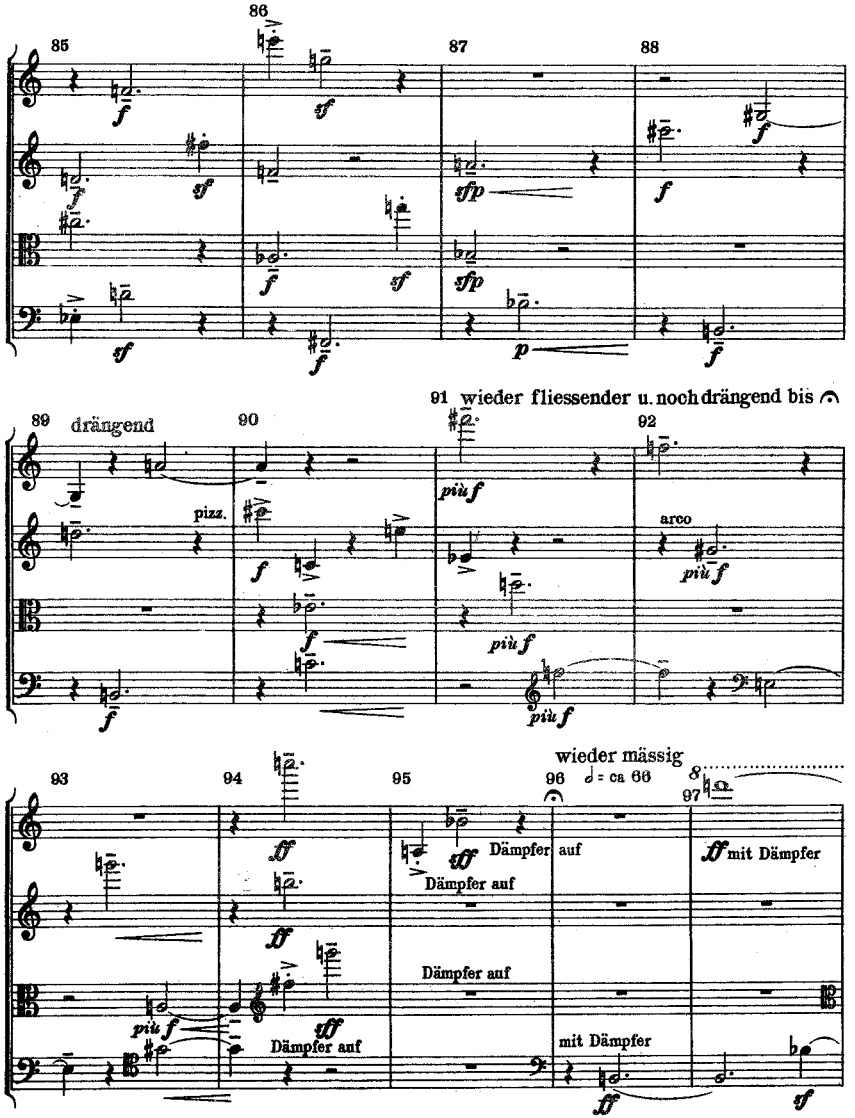

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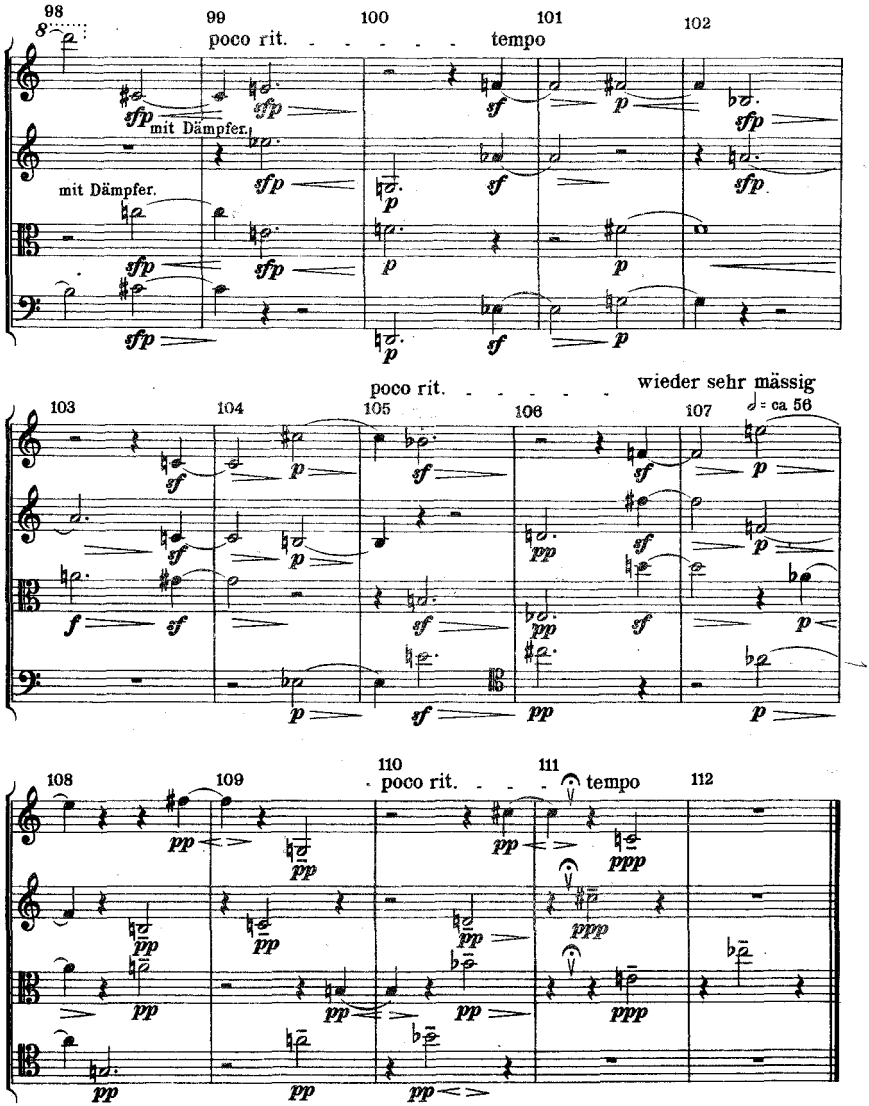

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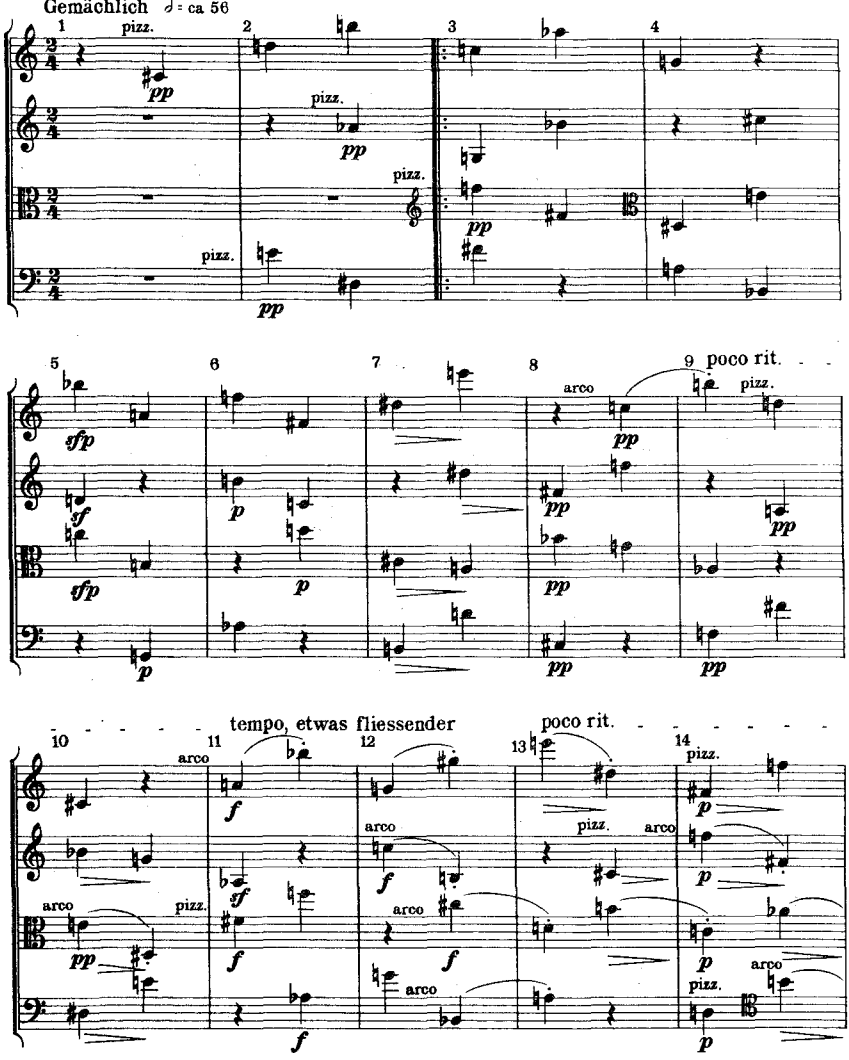

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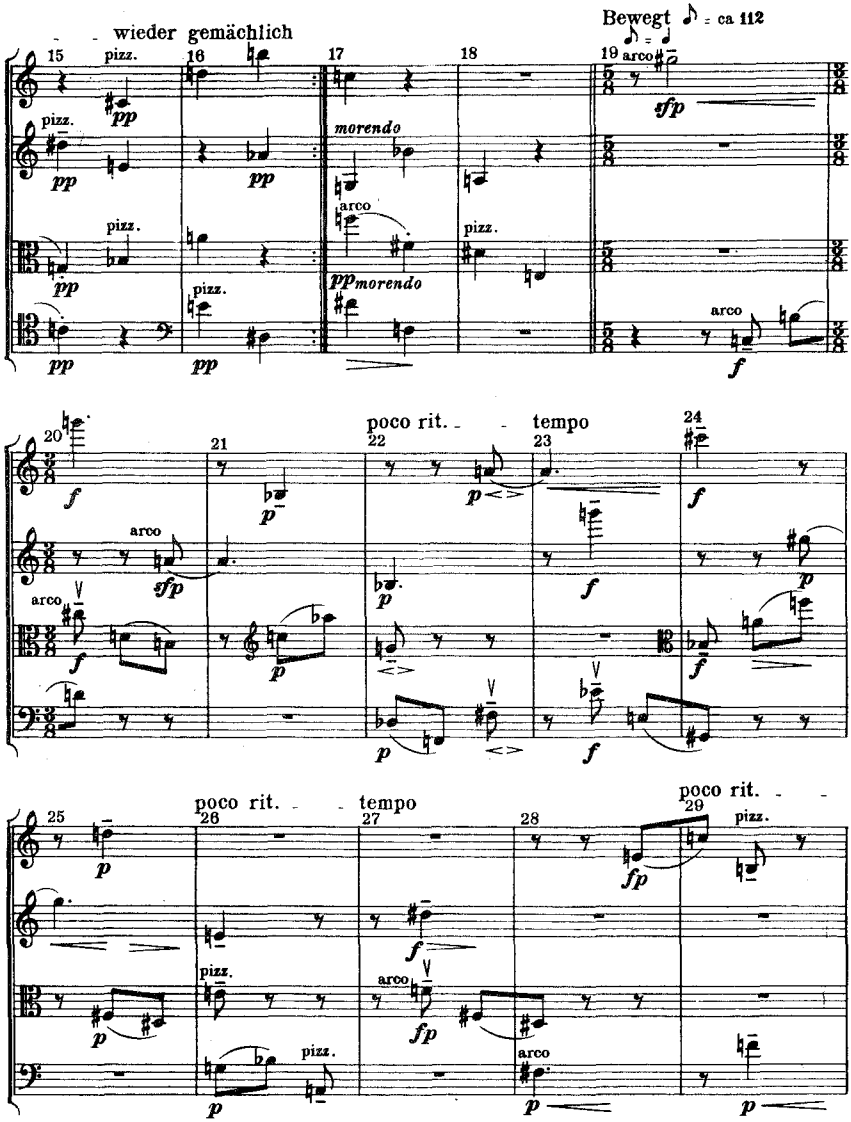

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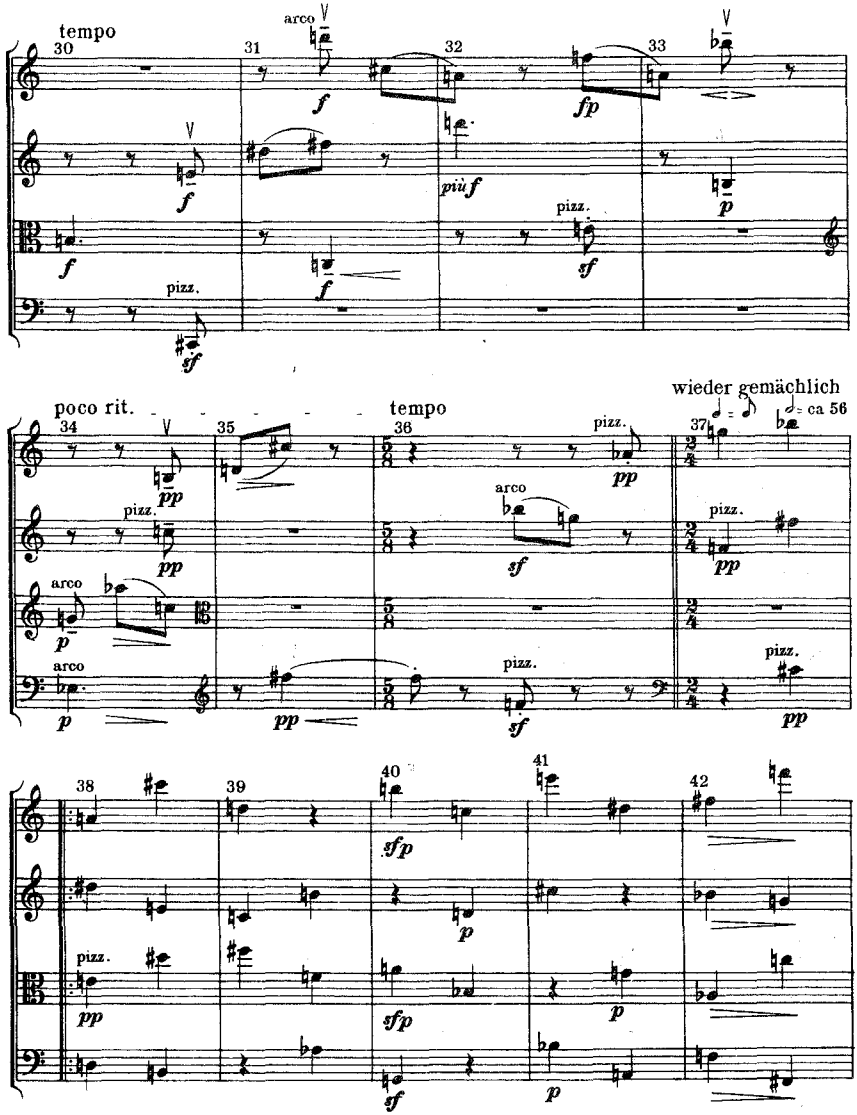

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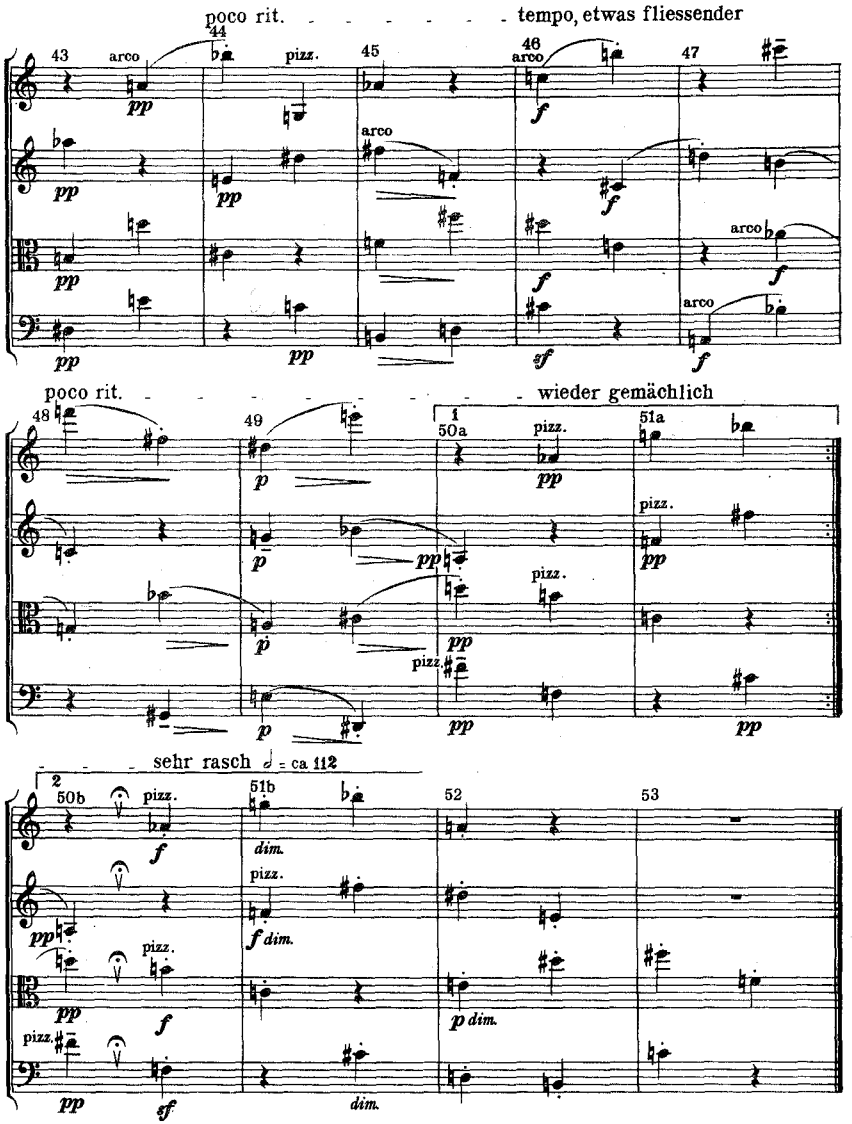

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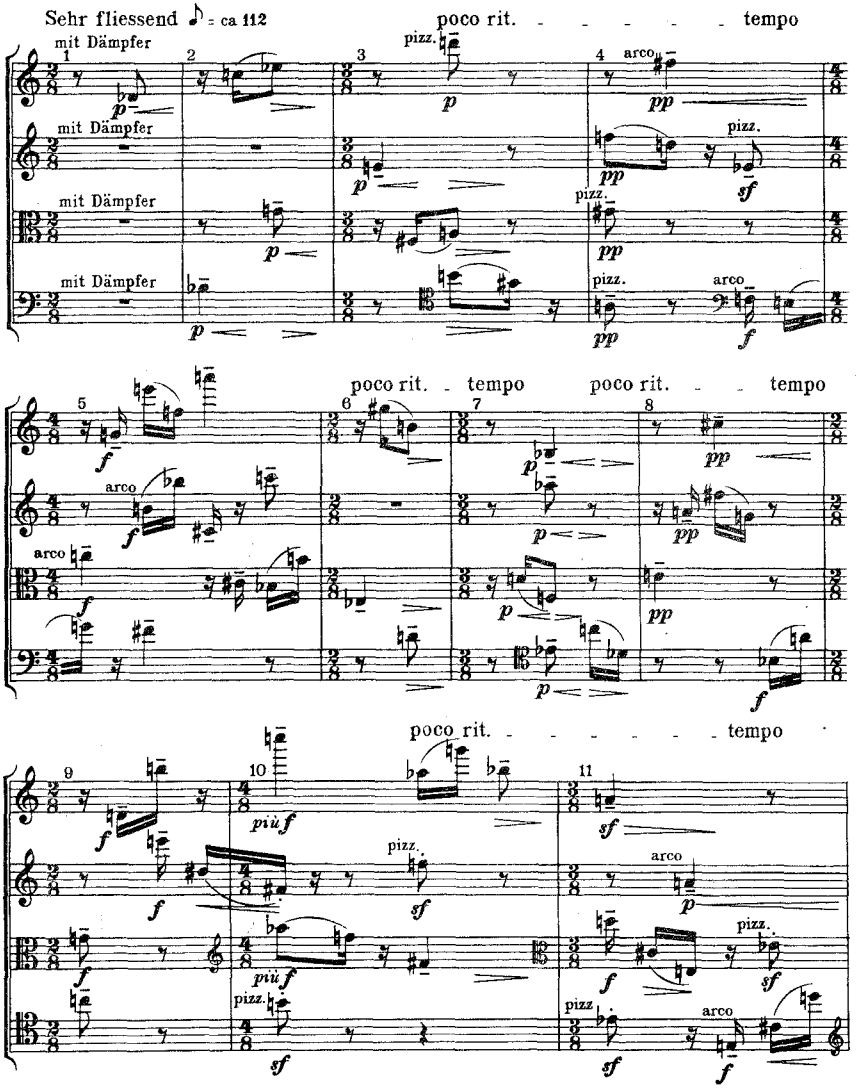

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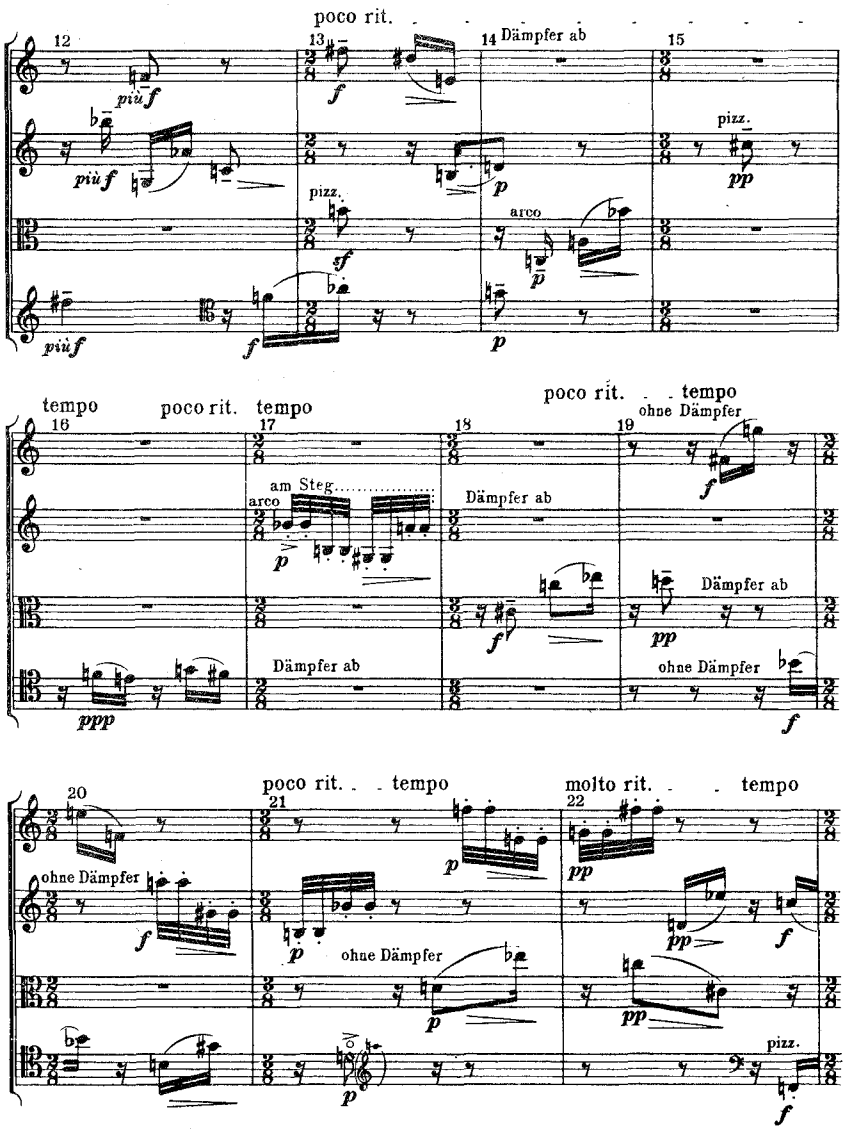

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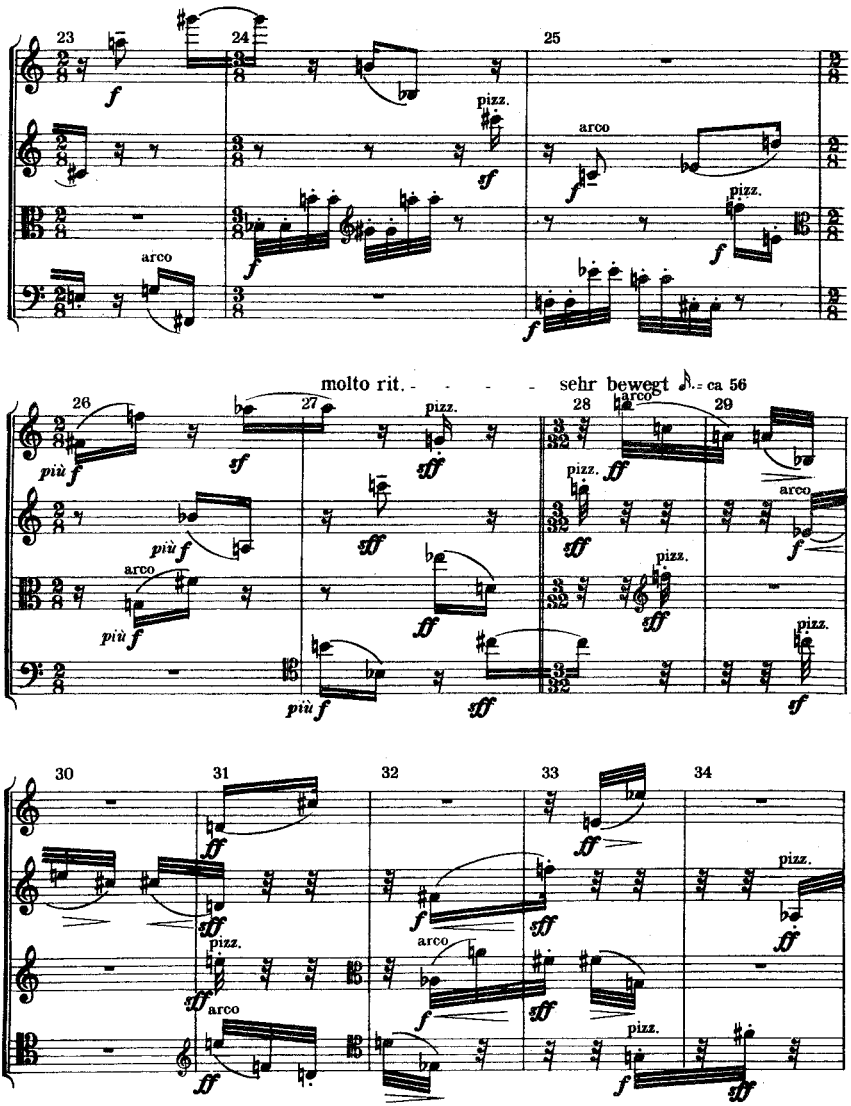

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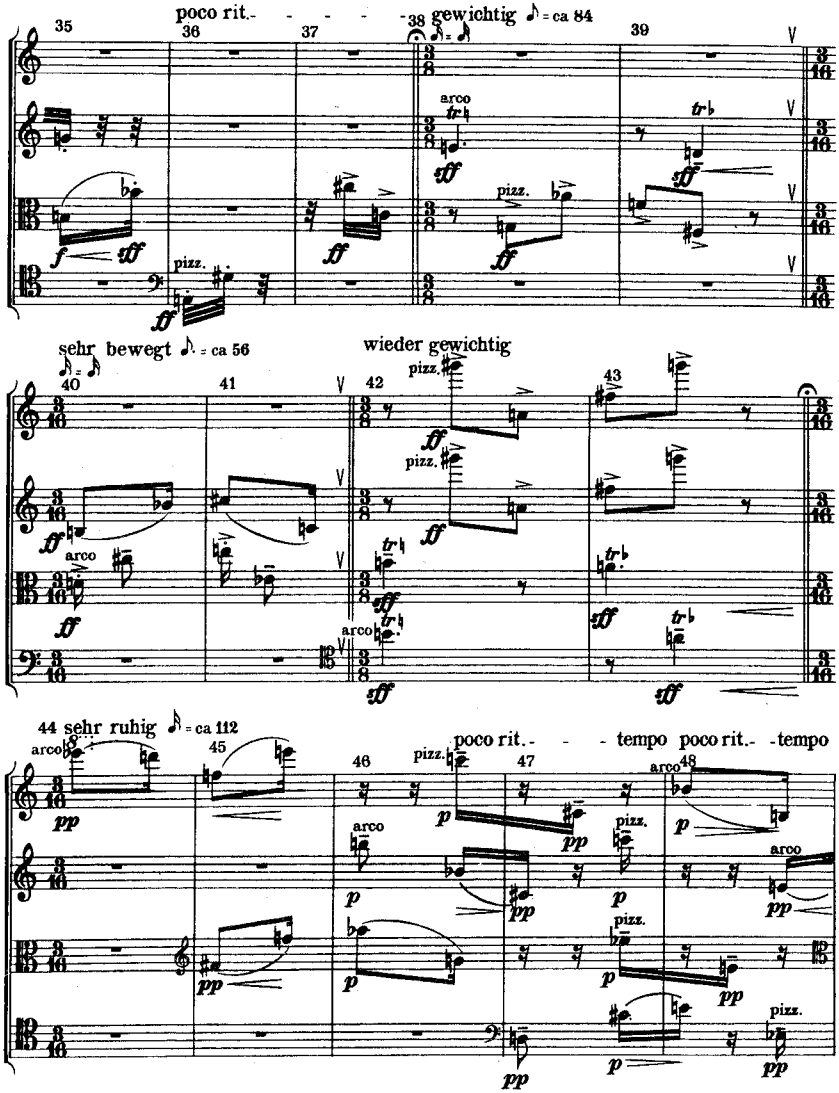

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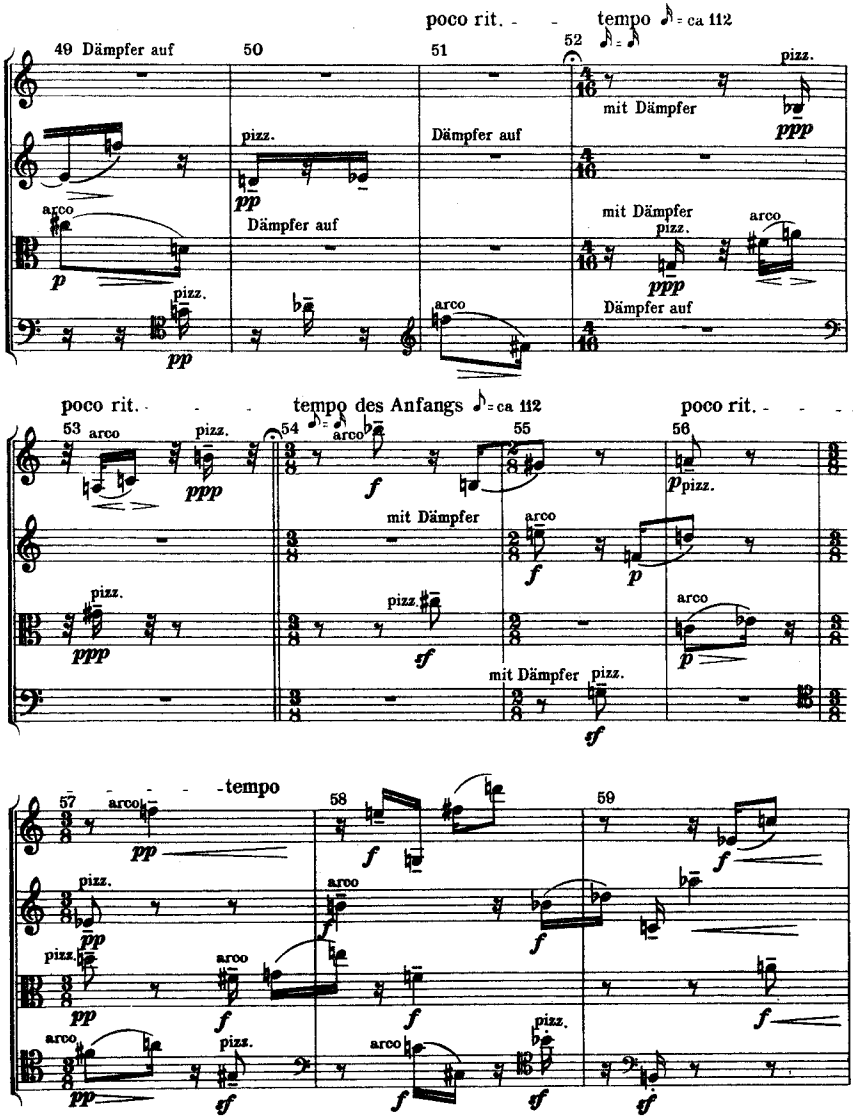
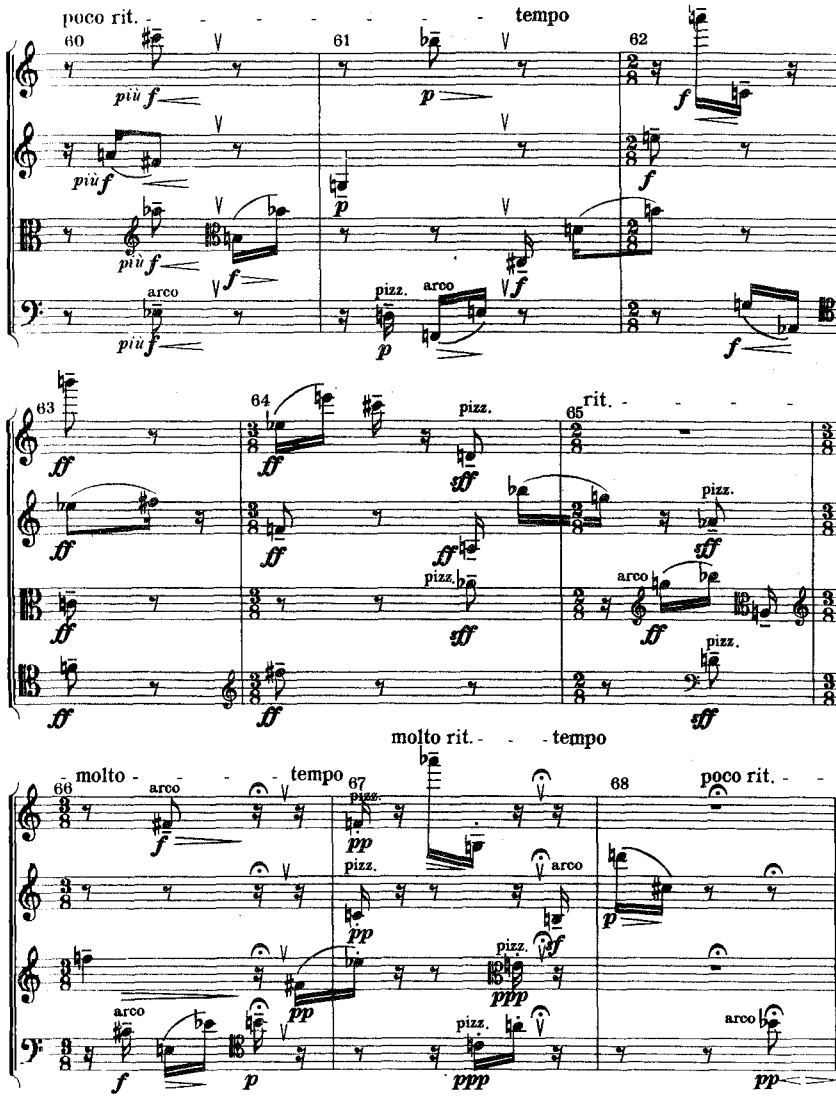
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