JEAN SIBELIUS
String Trio in G minor

It has long been known that Sibelius wrote a substantial number of chamber music works before turning his attention to orchestral writing. In a communication with Otto Andersson in 1915, he tells of how during his youth he had written several piano trios, the string quartets in A minor and B flat major and a quintet in G minor. But while it was known that Sibelius had written these works, the nature of the works themselves remained a mystery, for from the beginning of the 1890's onwards Sibelius guarded the scores closely and never made them available for public scrutiny. Furthermore, over the years, some of the scores have been lost. Sibelius made an exception out of the B flat major quartet, to which he gave the opus number 4. This was performed from time to time from a manuscript copy.

Finally, in 1982, the Sibelius family donated all the manuscript material in their possession to Helsinki University, where it was deposited in the library collections. It was completely unsorted and no-one knew exactly what it comprised. Only after careful organisation did it become clear what a veritable treasure chest this collection was. For one thing it contained nearly the whole of Sibelius's youthful oeuvre. In addition to many of the works of whose existence was known, there were also many previously unheard of pieces.

The University collection shows that Sibelius composed a substantial body of chamber music, representing a particular period in his career (1883-91), before he composed his first major orchestral work Kullervo (1892). More than ten large-scale works and several tens of smaller pieces survive from this period. They vary greatly in quality and style and show the development of the young Sibelius from schoolboy composer to professional master.

Practical considerations played a part in bringing these works into being. Besides musically ambitious works such as the A minor string quartet, there are virtuoso violin pieces for Sibelius's own use, trios written for the Sibelius family offspring (Jean, Christian and Linda), and pieces written for various occasions. Many of the smaller works were probably compositional exercises. The line which divides exercises from works of music proper is a difficult one to draw, especially since Sibelius himself gives no indication of what the criteria might be; it seems that he himself did not care much for many of the pieces we now regard as important, while it is known that many of the less weighty exercises did get performances.

In the works from the latter years of this period (1888-91) one finds features in common which were to come into their own in Sibelius's later output. Sibelius also made use of thematic material from these early works while composing during his mature years. The early Sibelius works now appearing in Fazer catalogue are taken from precisely this later youthful period and all the original manuscripts can be found in the Helsinki University collection.

Sibelius gave 1885 as the year of composition of the G minor string trio. Research has shown however that the actual year must have been either 1893 or 1894, after he had composed Kullervo. Only one complete movement of the trio has survived, the Lento. The manuscript indicates that Sibelius intended it to be followed attacca by an Allegro, of which he wrote the first forty six bars. He went on to use the theme of this Allegro in his Impromptu op. 19 for women's chorus and orchestra (1902). Only the completed Lento movement has been included in this edition. The incomplete Allegro, which the composer has subsequently strucken out, has been omitted. Also omitted from this edition is a short section of music also to be found in the manuscript which probably formed preliminary material for the Lento movement.

The Lento is interesting in itself, for in it the composer has attempted to combine lied form with sonata form and continuous development of the material, thereby forming a grand symphonic arch out within a single movement. The zenith of this type of formal thinking was reached in single movement form of the 7th Symphony (1924). The Lento also features many other elements which one finds in later Sibelius works, including crescendos and sforzandos at the beginning of the movement (cf. the introduction to Finlandia), a pedal point, sixth chords and "Sibelius triplets".

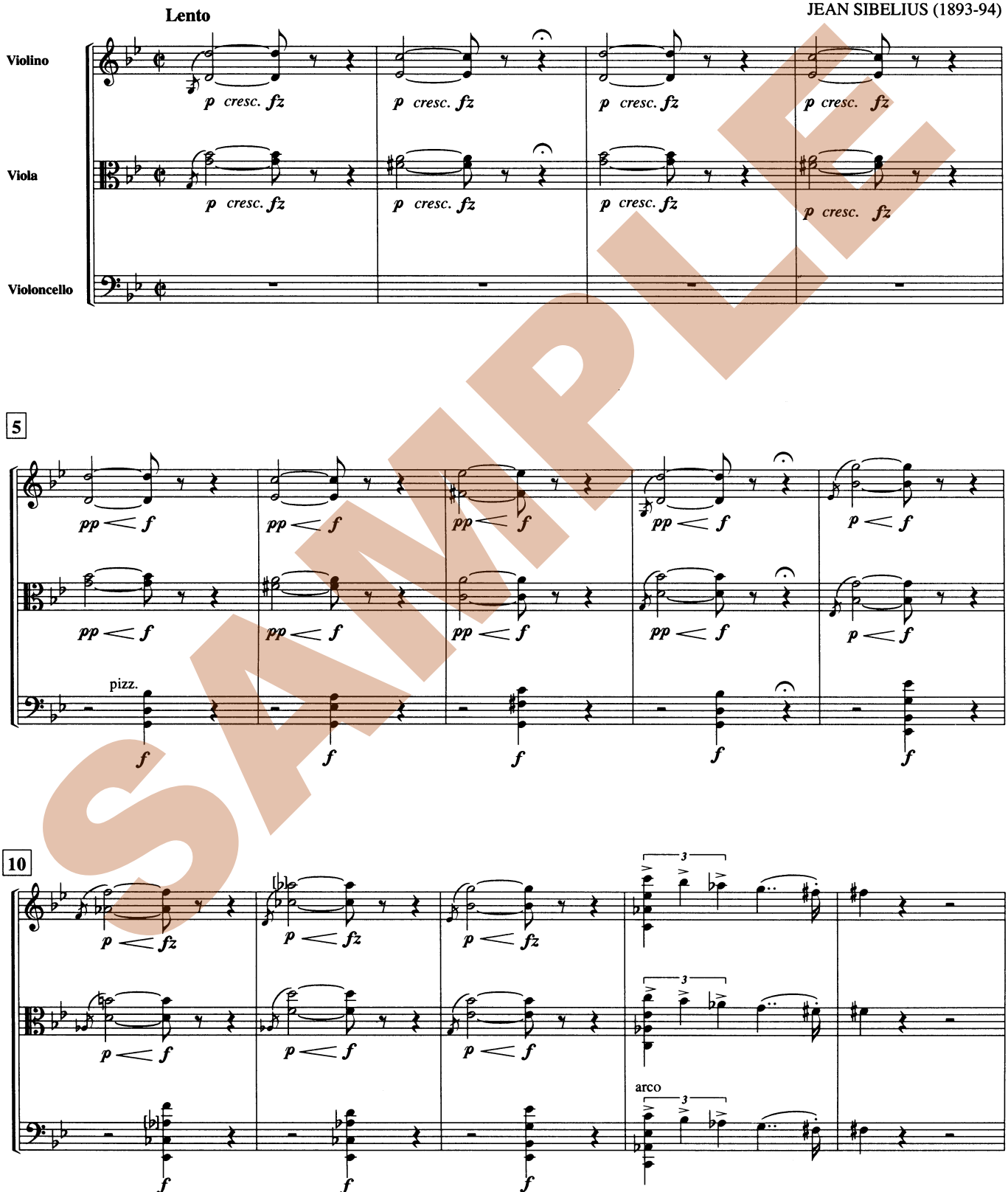
Even if Sibelius wrote the G minor trio after Kullervo, it can still be regarded as belonging to his early chamber music period, to which it forms a kind of epilogue, reviewing the work he had done to date but also looking ahead to future possibilities. The language of the trio, striving as it does for an orchestral quality, might indeed be the reason why the composer left it unfinished, for he was leaving chamber music behind and moving on to work on an altogether larger scale.

Kari Kilpeläinen
English translation by Andrew Bentley

SAMPLE

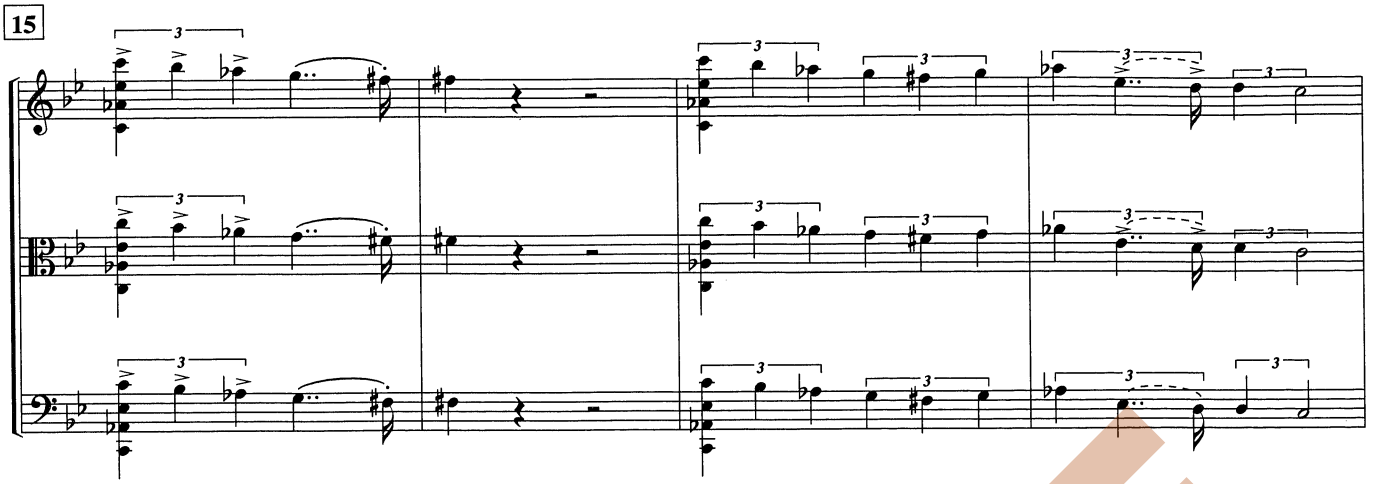
String Trio in G minor

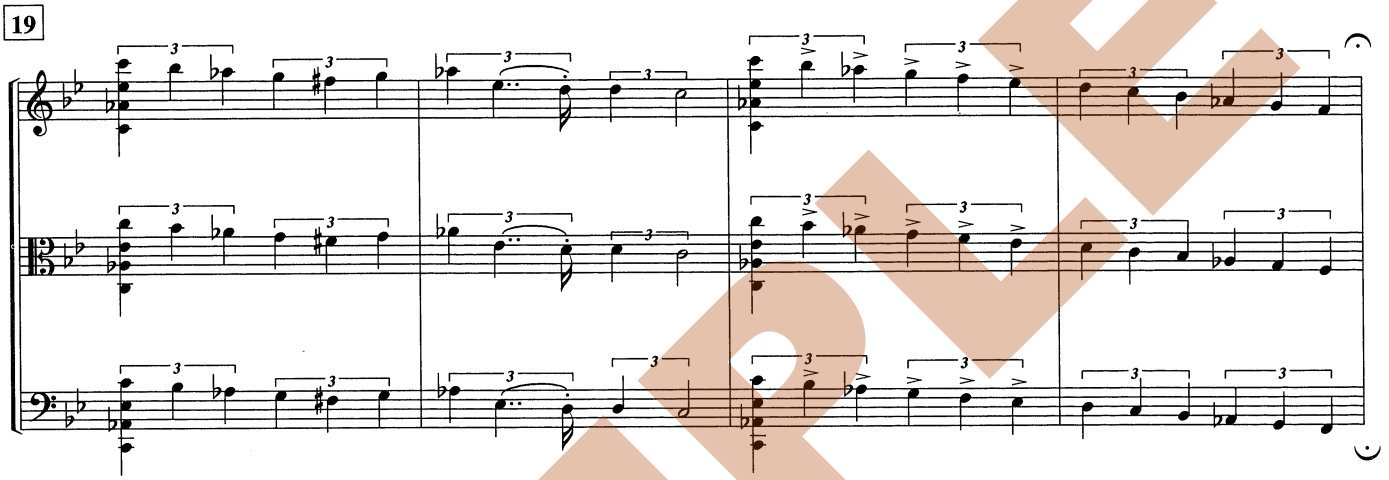
JEAN SIBELIUS (1893-94)

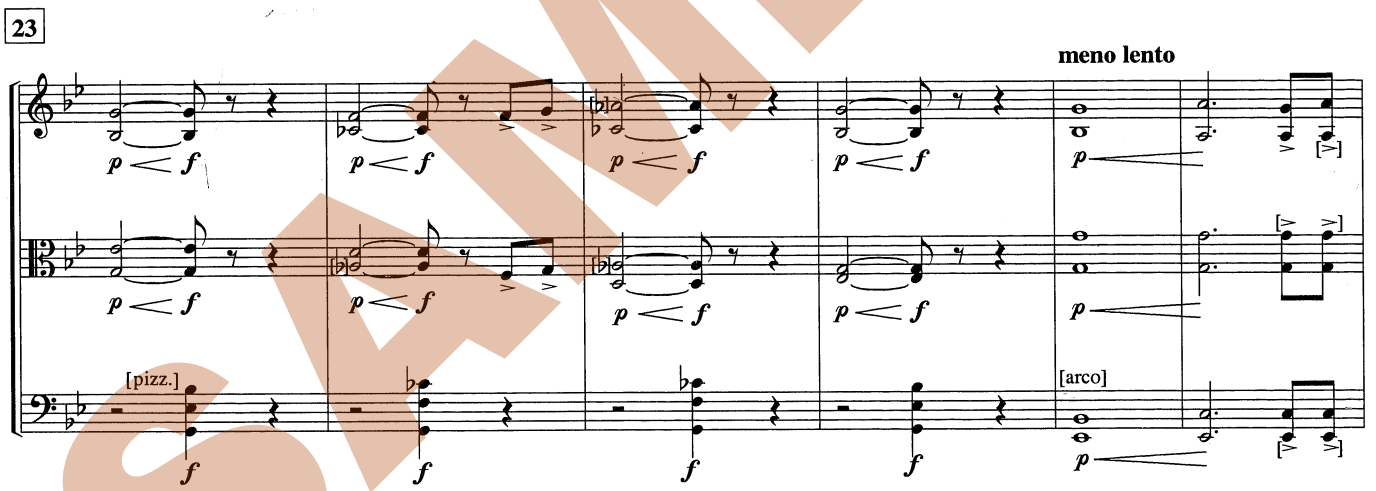


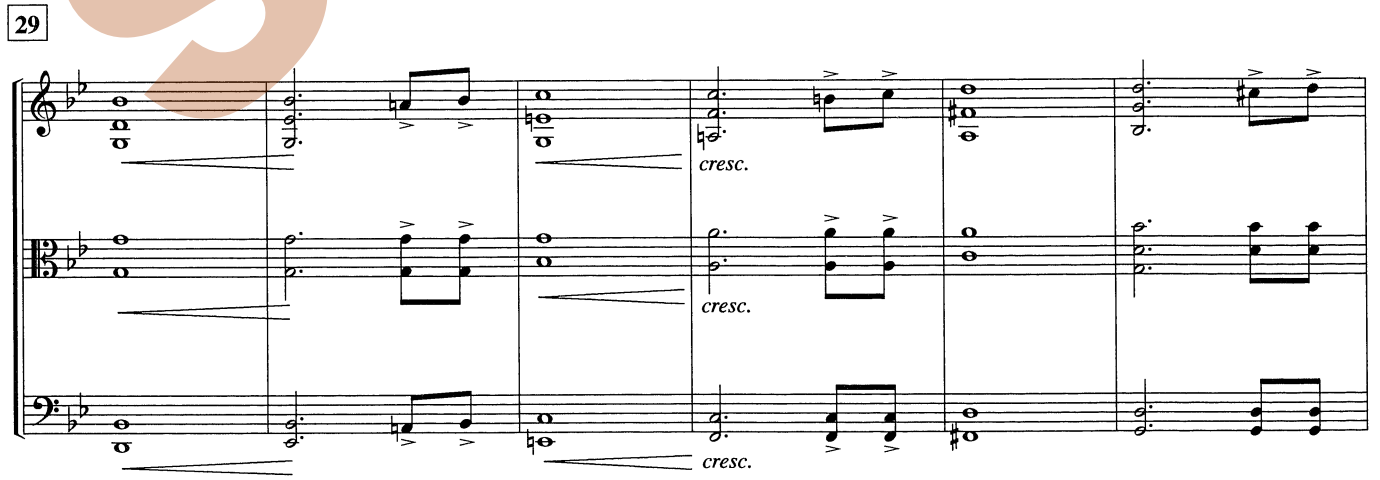
SAMPLE

© 1994 Edition Fazer, Helsinki
© Fennica Gehrman Oy, Helsinki

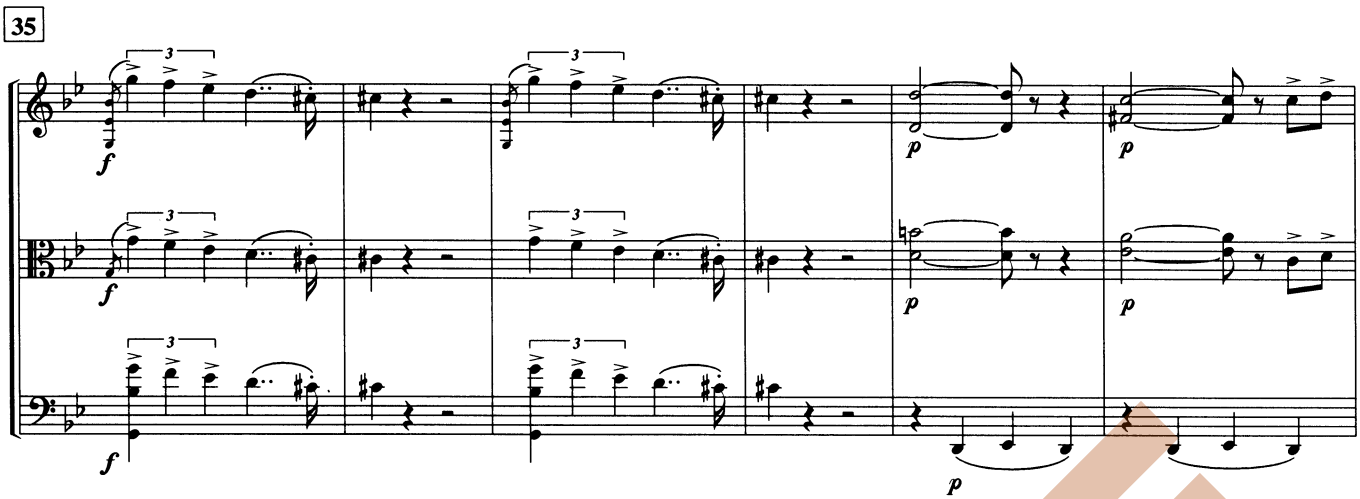


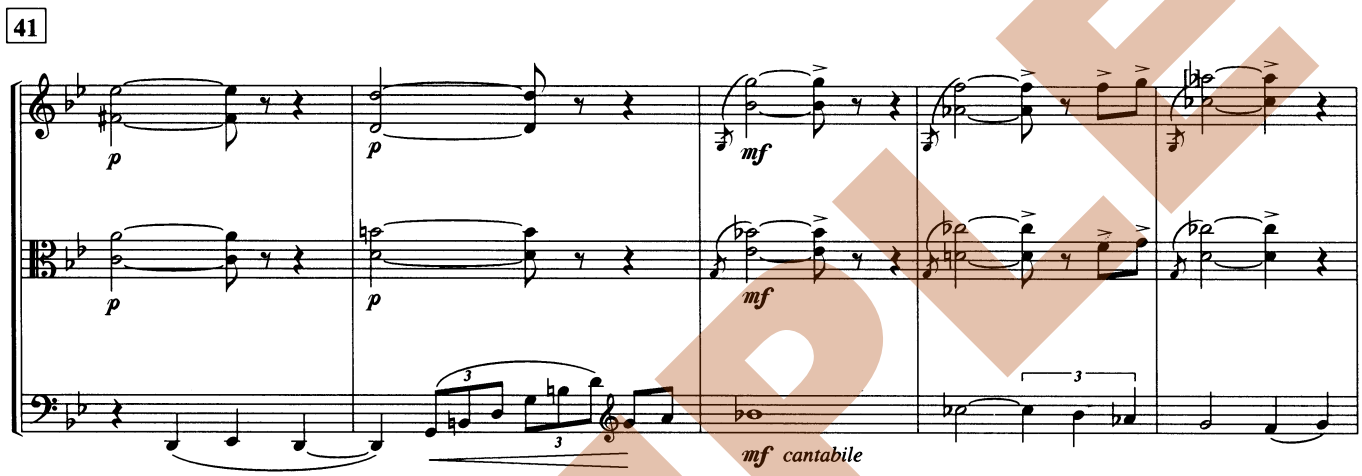


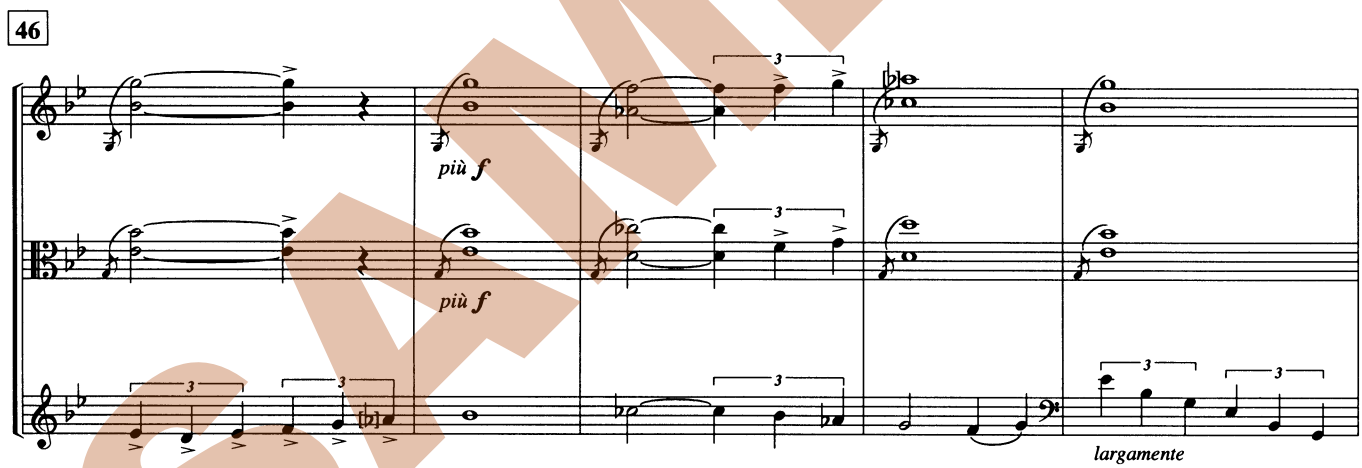


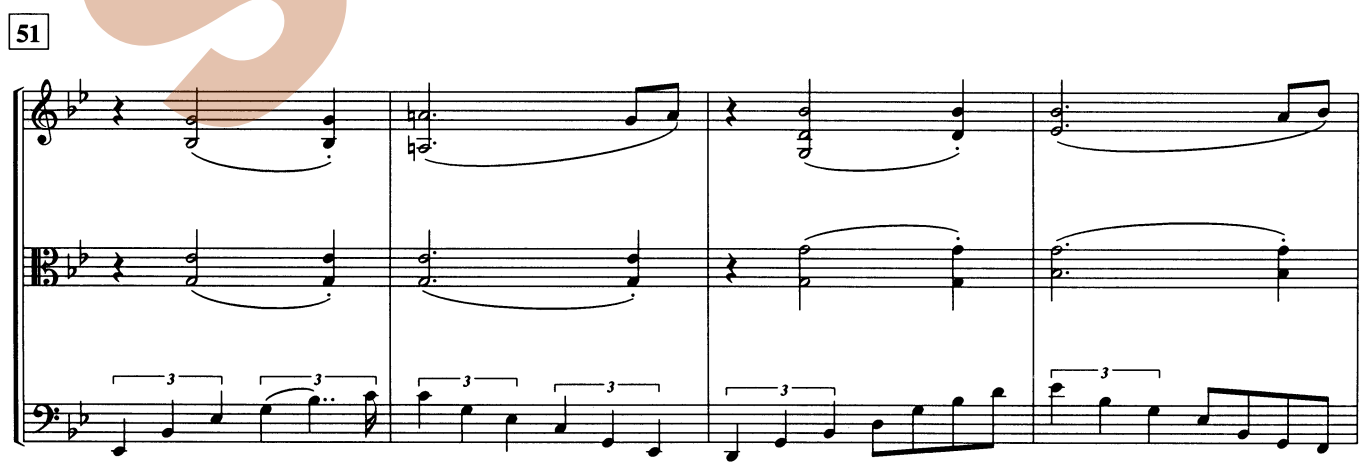


SAMPLE


35
f
f
f
p
p
p
p


41
p
p
p
p
mf
mf
mf cantabile


46
più f
più f
largamente


51

SAMPLE