Jehan Alain
(1911 - 1940)

Variations:

- *sur 'Lucis Creator' (1932)*
- *sur un thème 'de Clément Jan(n)equin' (1937)*

for organ

arranged for
Wind Quintet
(Cor Anglais or Oboe)
by Toby Miller (2011)

(Jehan Alain in 1938)

Jehan Alain was born in a musical town (St Germain-en-Laye: also the birthplace of Debussy and more recently Ludovic Navarre aka St Germain) into a musical family. His father Albert Alain was a composer, organist and practical organ-builder. The magnificent four-manual organ he installed in their house inspired Jehan to sometimes Utopian expectations in his organ compositions. He made somewhat slow progress in his studies at the Paris Conservatoire from 1927, with Dukas and Dupré among others. (Fellow students in Dupré's improvisation class liked to play before Alain. Once he is said to have finished an improvisation in a different key and said 'sorry, I went wrong'. Dupré responded 'you should go wrong more often then'!) Alain signed up to the army and caught severe pneumonia in 1933, got married in 1935 and had three children, which required him to spend more time on fee-paying organist duties. Finally graduating in 1939 with first prizes in both organ and improvisation, he rejoined the army in a motorcycle corps and was killed by the Germans in 1940 after encountering a patrol on his own, being posthumously awarded the *Croix de Guerre* for bravery.

Despite his exposure to many eminent musicians, being steeped in the French church tradition, a formal study of Baroque, oriental and jazz music, and his tragically short life, Alain's own music is remarkably original. It evolves little over an admittedly short span, but one in which he wrote over 120 works. These two sets of variations share a similar structure and technique, with a 'standard' harmonization of the theme followed by a variation with a smoothly-flowing descant quaver line, and then a fugal variation. The organ registration of both pieces with soft woodwind stops, and the counterpoint with strong horizontal part lines, makes them suitable for wind quintet arrangement.

'Lucis Creator' is a hymn attributed to Pope Gregory the Great (6th century AD) . The plainchant has been included at the beginning for reference, and could be either sung or played as a solo before the harmonised theme with which Alain's own work begins.

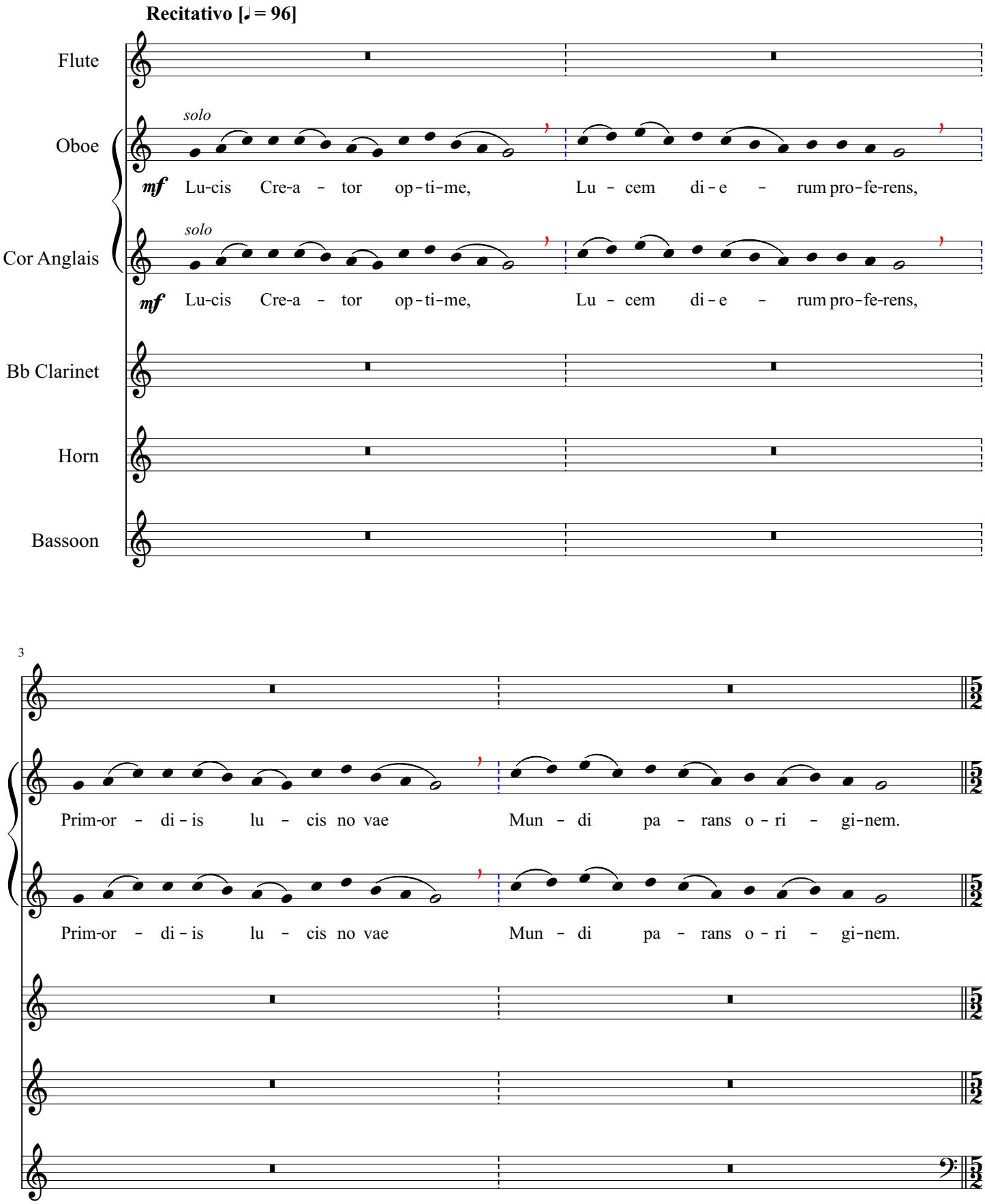
The theme 'by Clément Jan(n)equin' is in fact a popular song published in 1531 by Pierre Attaingnant, who was the first French printer to publish music widely, by exploiting movable music type. Many works by Janequin were published by Attaingnant; however according to Alain's sister Marie-Claire, who through her long life did more than anybody to bring her brother's music to a wide audience, Jehan knew that the tune he chose to set was not by Janequin. He was captivated by the alternation of F sharp and F natural in its cadence. Organists without the luxury of an instrument in their own house are compelled to play in church, and Alain did not want to prevent anybody from doing so by disclosing too much about the original song, which is the complaint of a lover threatening to leave his beloved if she doesn't grant him sex soon. The quaver lines in the variations create an almost spooky atmosphere, which enhances the haunting beauty of the theme and softly rocking coda in their more traditional harmonizations. If a cor anglais is available, its sound is ideal for this piece in particular; however alternative parts for oboe and cor are included for both pieces.

Variations sur 'Lucis Creator'

Score (concert pitch)

arranged for Wind Quintet (Oboe or Cor Anglais) by Toby Miller

Jehan Alain

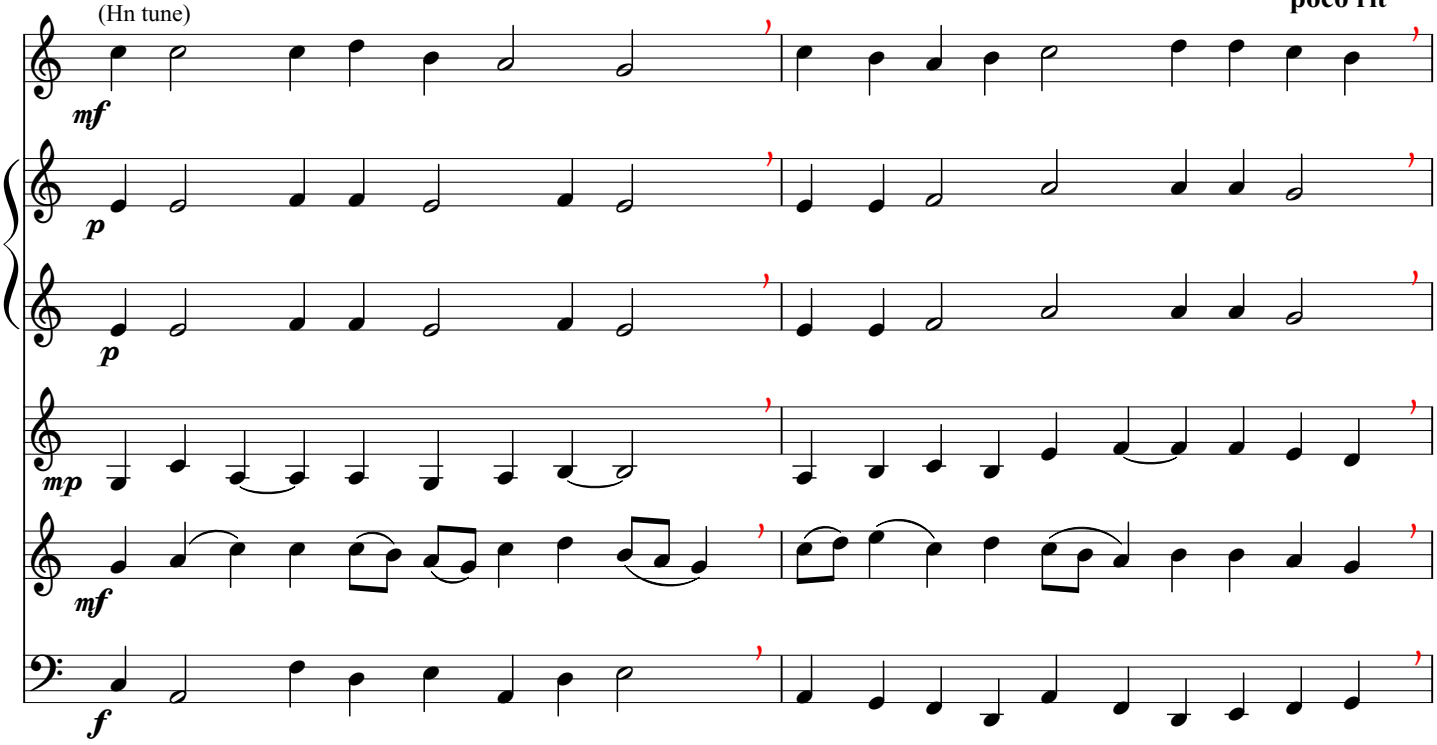


Theme

Recitativo [♩ = 80]

(Hn tune)

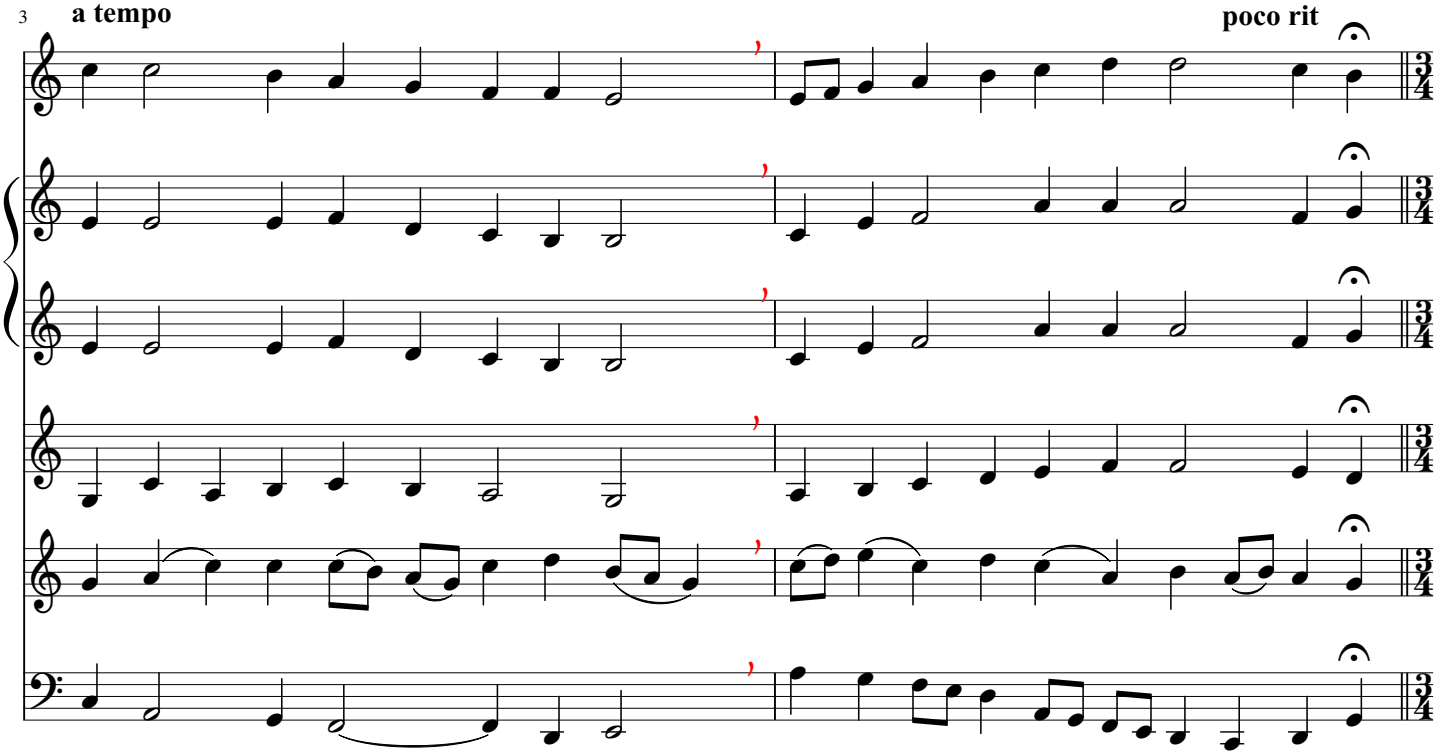
poco rit

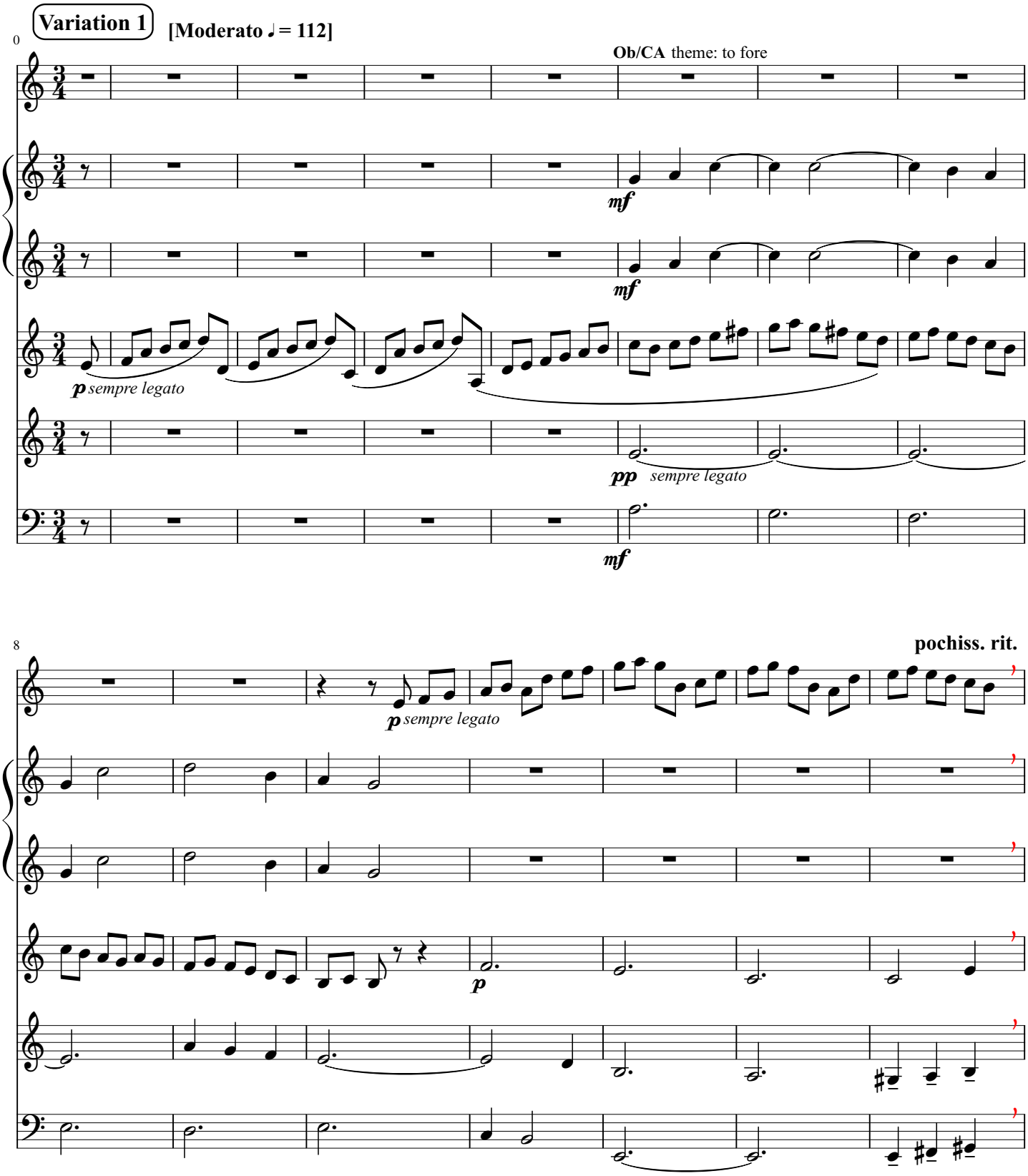


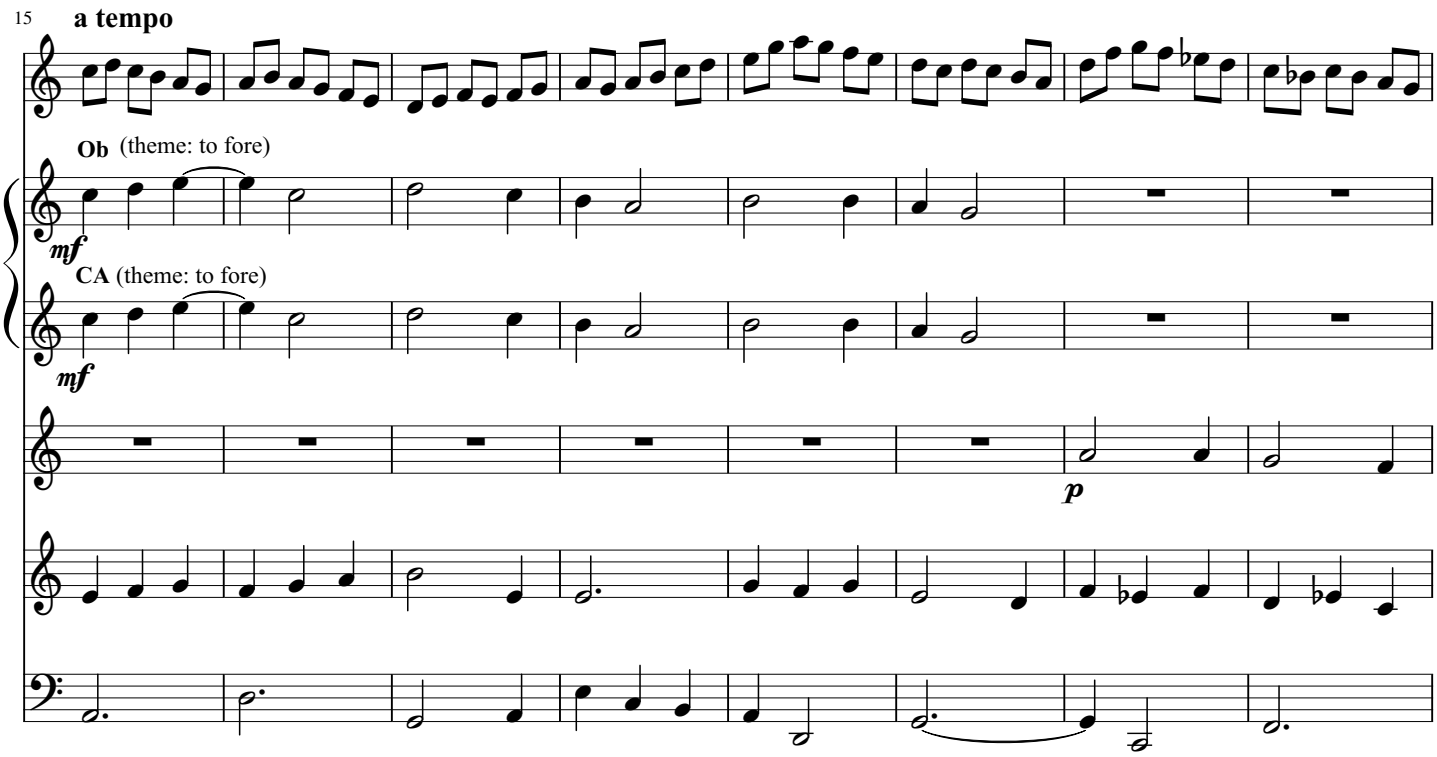
3

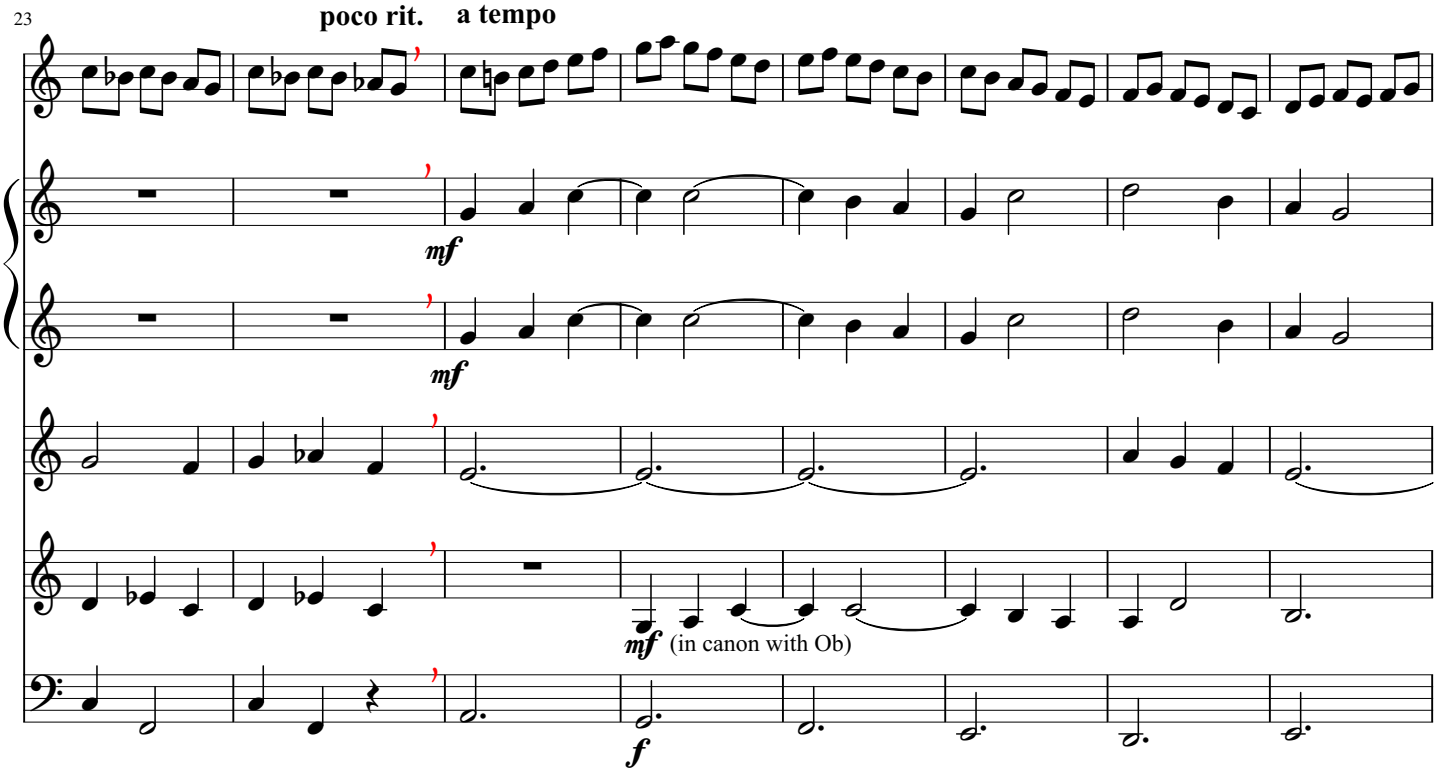
a tempo

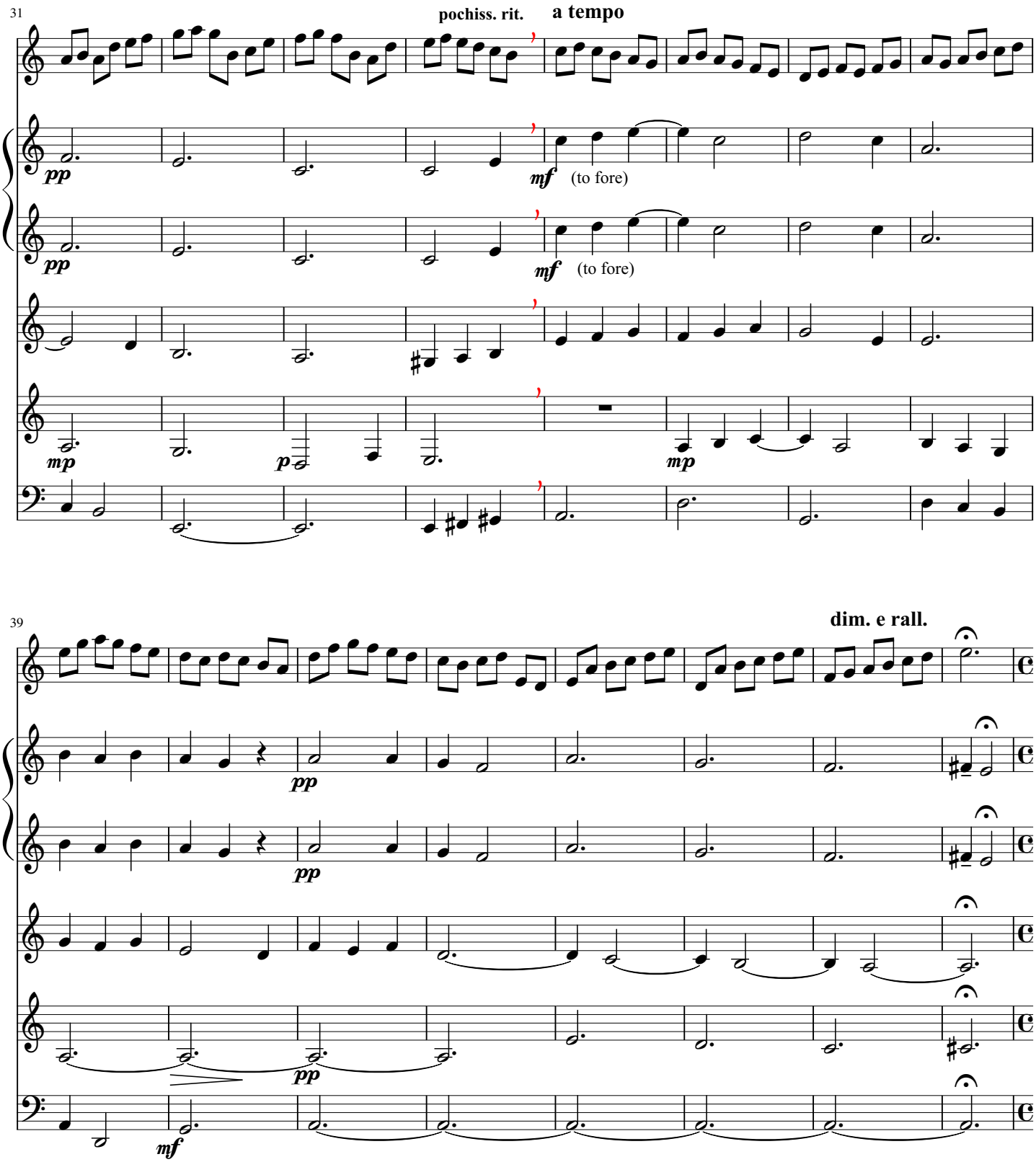
poco rit



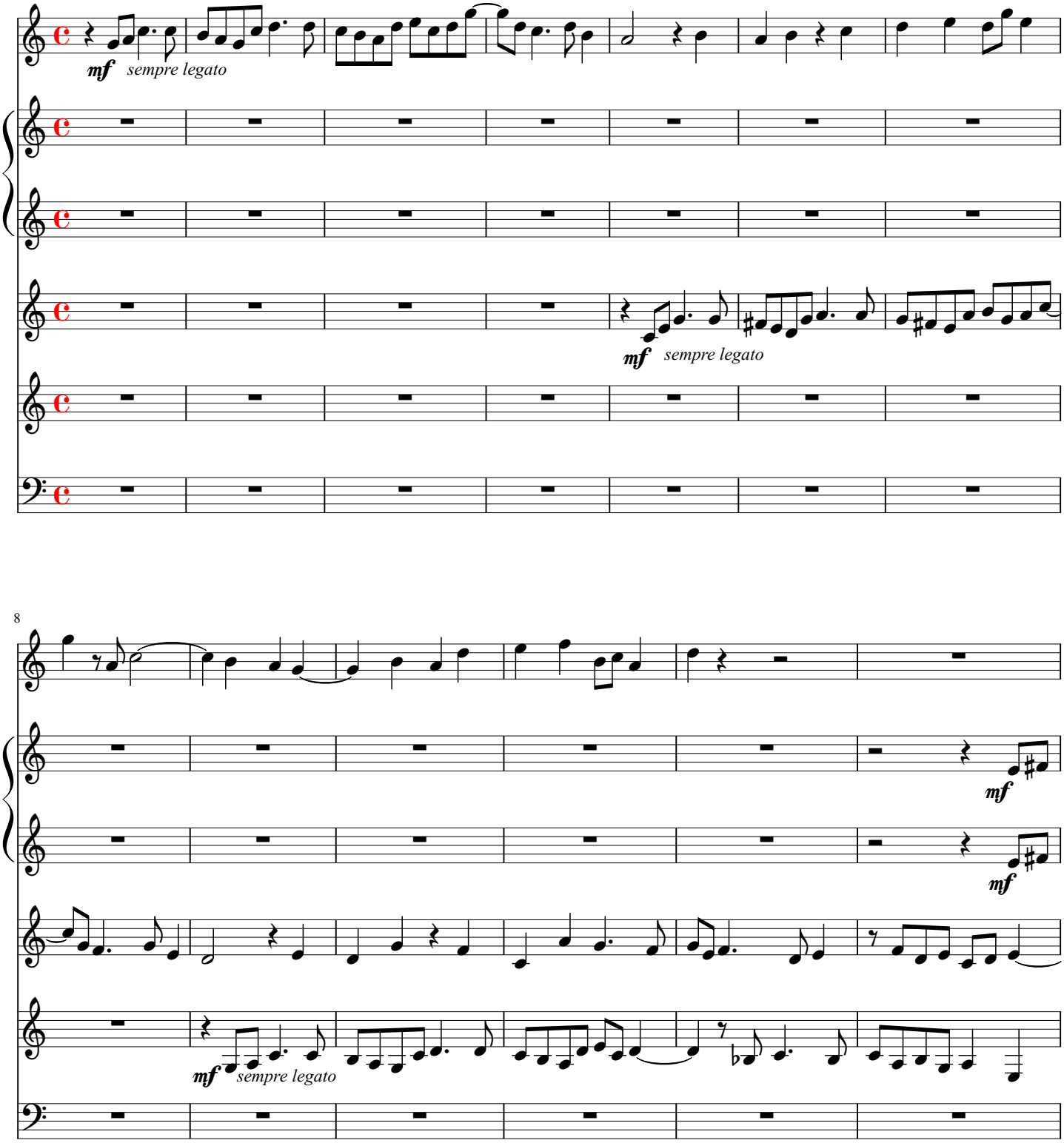

Variation 1
[Moderato ♩ = 112]
0
Ob/CA theme: to fore
mf
mf
p sempre legato
pp sempre legato
mf
8
pochiss. rit.
p sempre legato
p

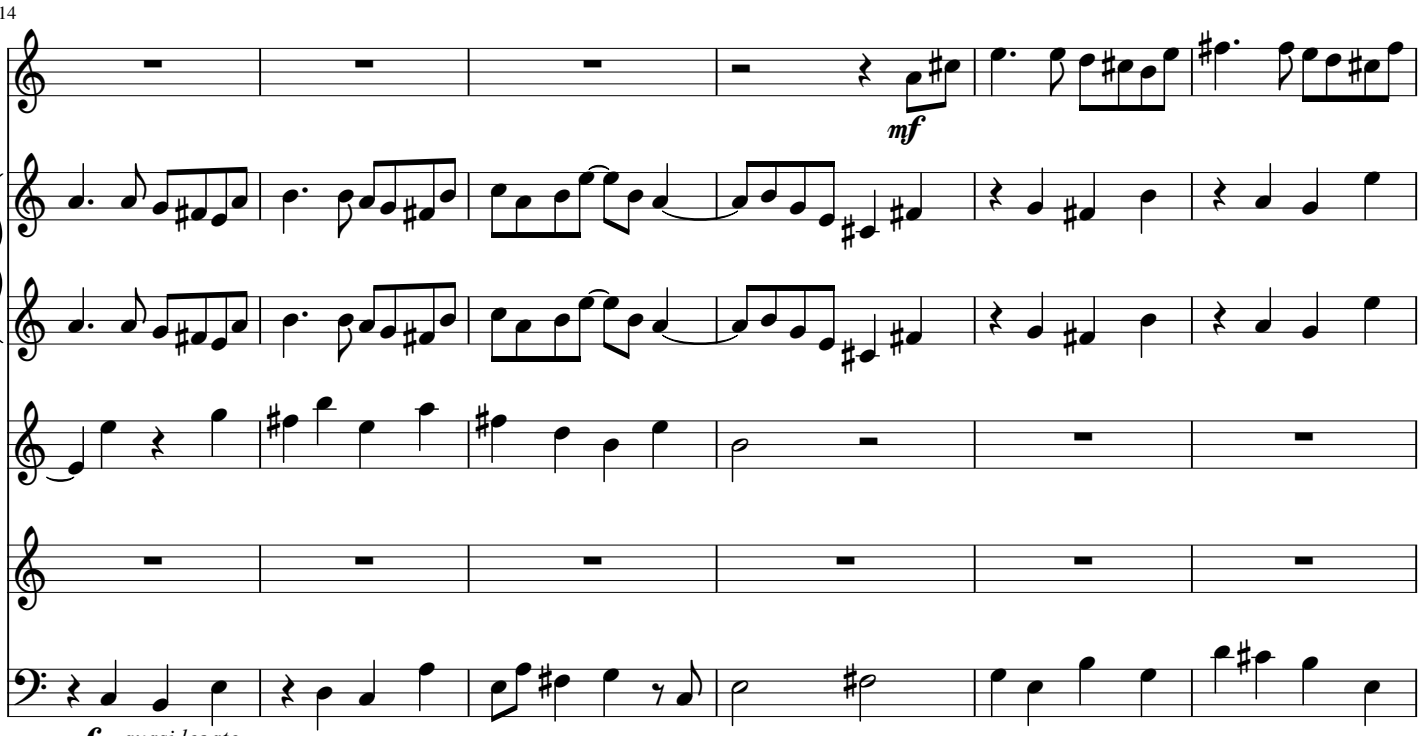

15
a tempo
Ob (theme: to fore)
mf
CA (theme: to fore)
mf
p

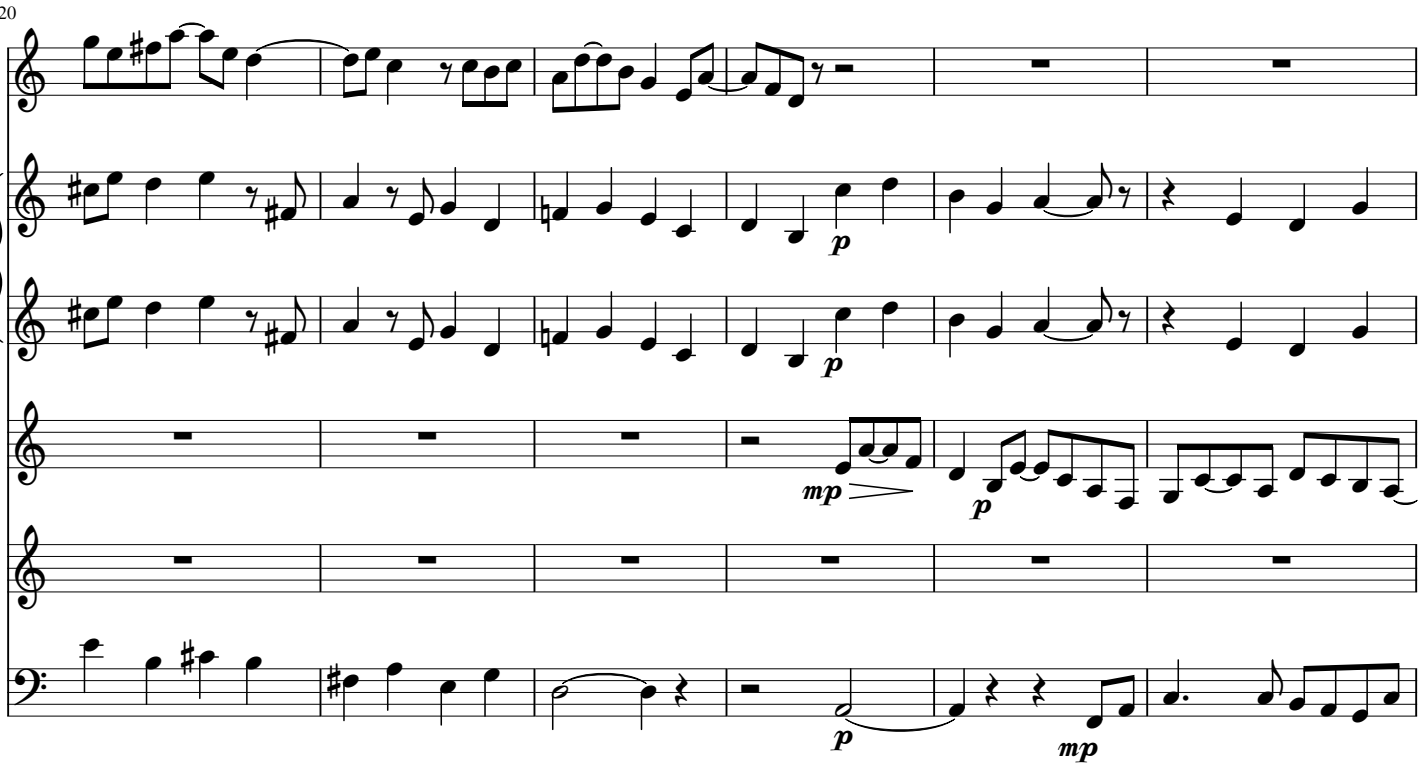

23
poco rit.
a tempo
mf
mf
mf (in canon with Ob)
f

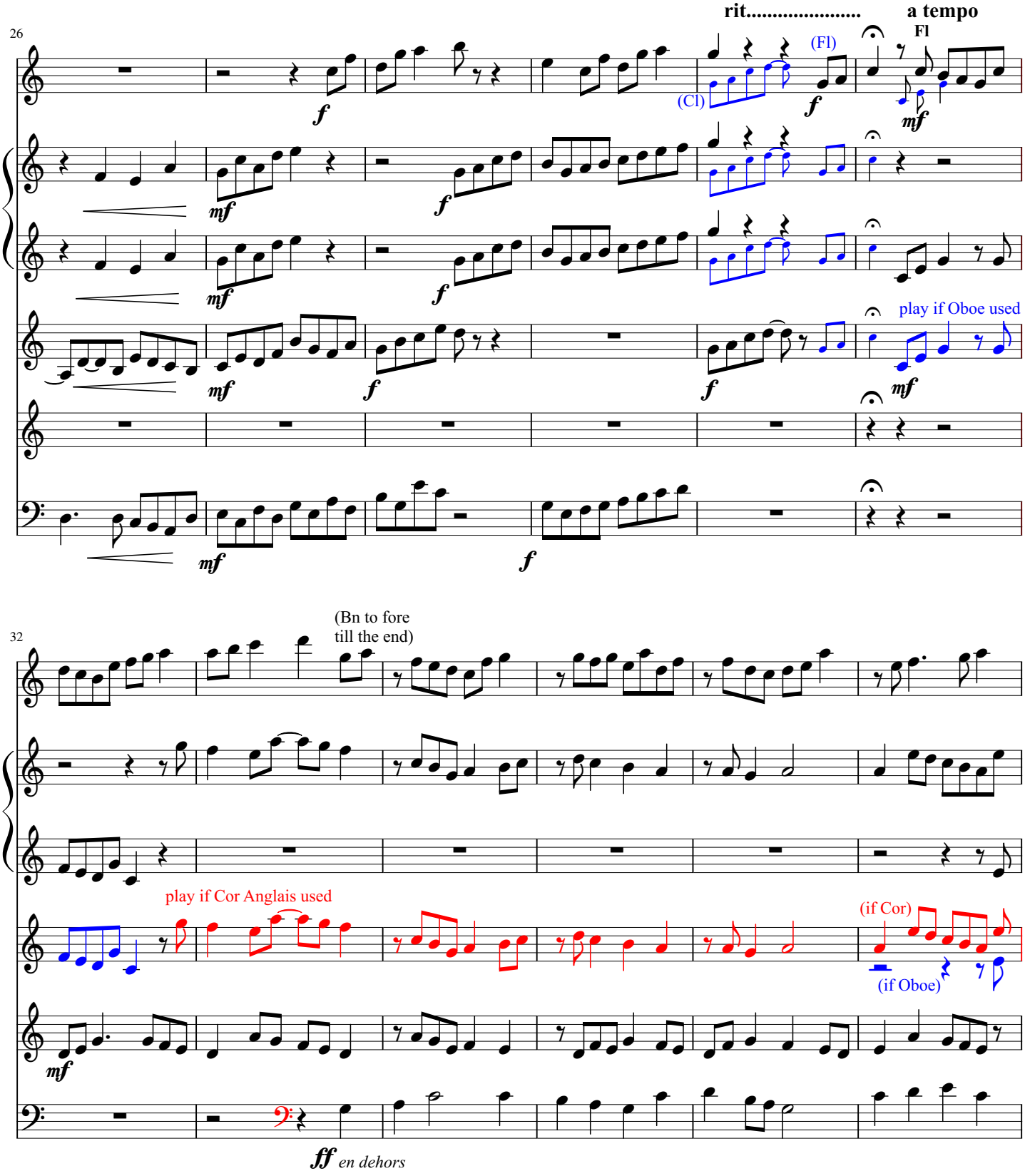

31
pochiss. rit.
a tempo
pp
mf
(to fore)
pp
mf
(to fore)
mp
p
mp
39
dim. e rall.
pp
pp
pp
mf

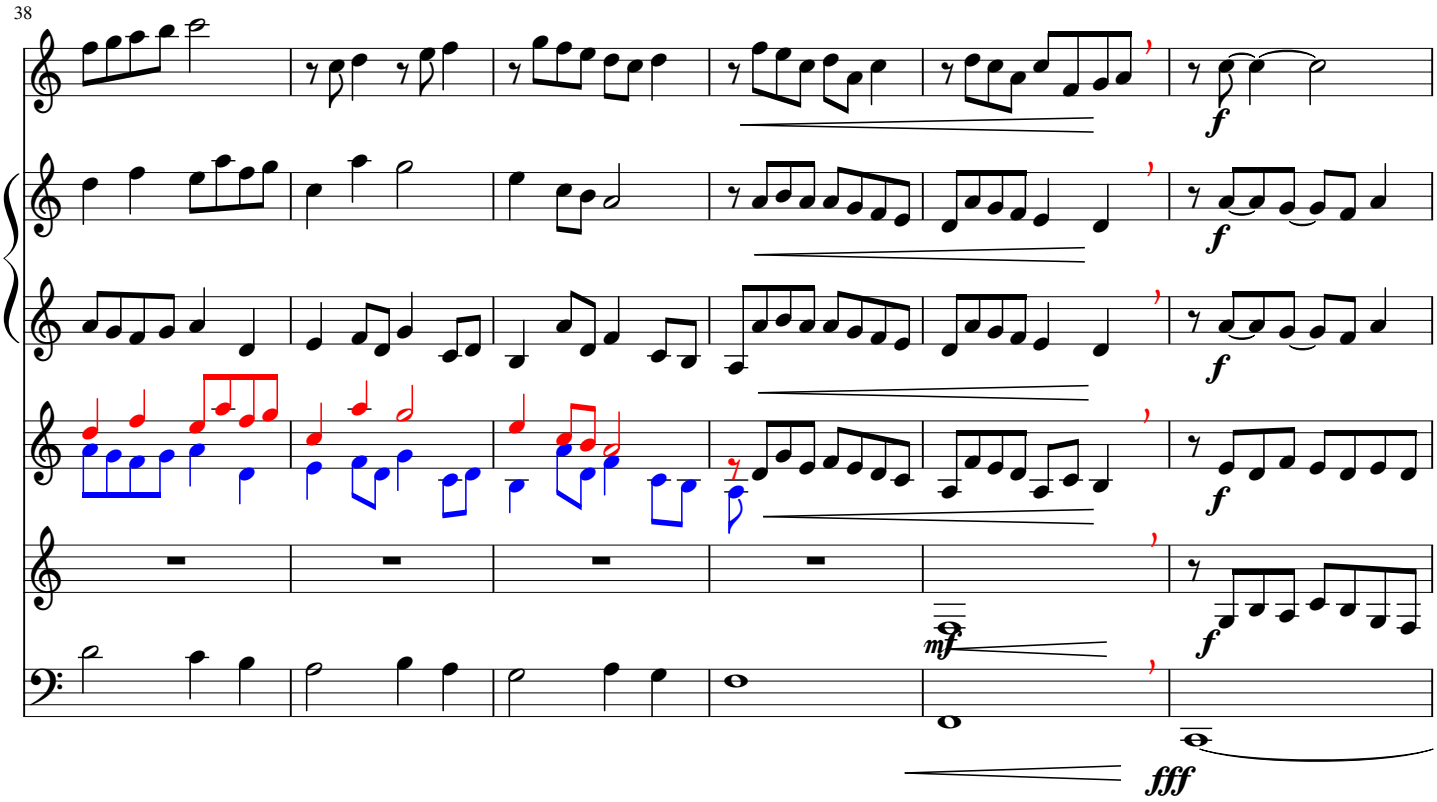
Variation 2 **Moderato**

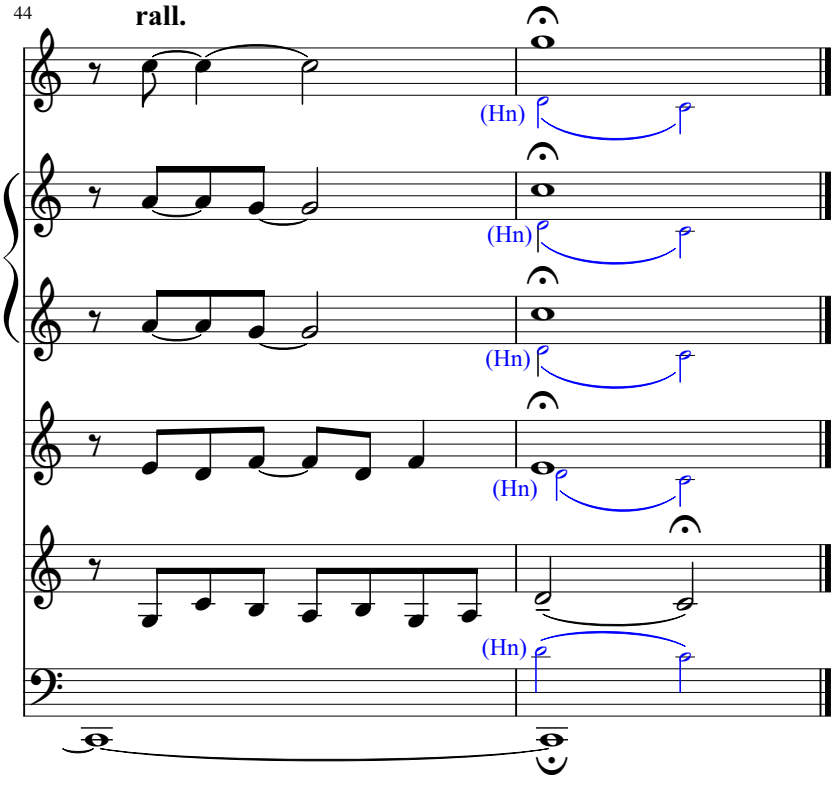



14
mf
mf
quasi legato


20
p
p
mp
p
mp


rit.....
a tempo
26
(Fl)
Fl
(Cl)
play if Oboe used
32
(Bn to fore
till the end)
play if Cor Anglais used
(if Cor)
(if Oboe)
ff en dehors


38
f
f
f
f
mf
f
fff


44
rall.
(Hn)
(Hn)
(Hn)
(Hn)
(Hn)