LUKE LEWIS

FIVE PORTRAITS

for string quartet

2021

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1. Painting
2. Going, somewhere…
3. Study
4. Con Brio
5. Song

Total duration c. 3-4 minutes

PERFORMANCE NOTES

GENERAL

s.p. = sul ponticello

s.t. = sul tasto

ord. = ordinary playing Glissandi with slur = in one bow stroke

Glissandi without slur = re-bow on new note

Notes in parentheses may be omitted if too difficult

Commas = a slight breath-like break in texture

No. 5

The tremolo music may be best *sul ponticello*, at least a bit. This is especially true of the two opening passages where the quartet could move from s.p. to ord. This tremolo music should always be a background to whomever is playing the melodic material. By bar 22 everyone, incl. cello, is equal.

The rhythms should be thought of as an ideal – they are a precise speech transcription. If especially difficult, feel free to simplify the rhythm prioritizing the 'feel' of those tricky phrases, musicality and lyricism.

Written for and first performed by the Solem Quartet on 24th May 2021 in the Chapel of New College, Oxford

COMPOSER'S NOTE

These five short portraits were written for the Solem Quartet to mark the election of composer Joseph Horovitz as Honorary Fellow of New College, Oxford. The concert happened to come at the same time as Joseph's 95th birthday and so these are as much a little birthday card from the college as anything else.

All musical material in the piece derives from speech transcriptions I made of Joseph being interviewed by Royal College of Music Librarian Pamela Thompson and conductor John Wilson about his life and music. Two things Joseph said struck me and so with the help of computer software I discerned their melodic and rhythmic content. The first quote sees him discuss his entry to New College in 1943 and in second he notes that after studies in Oxford, 'I paid for my studies with Boulanger with five portraits, which I did'. Clearly, this quote provided more than just musical material…

The transcriptions of each are below. The first concerning the entry to New College provides the material for portraits one, two and four, and is often used in retrograde. The second – about Boulanger and funnily enough in B major – is the basis of portraits three and five.

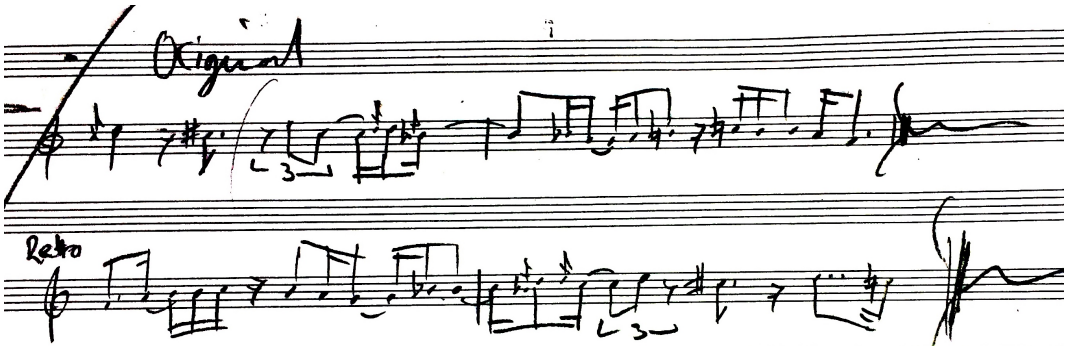
In general, the portraits are not strictly *of* Joseph but are more inspired by the events and imagery described in the interview. The quick brushstrokes and lines of portrait one are inspired by Joseph being 'more interested in painting' when he first came to New College.

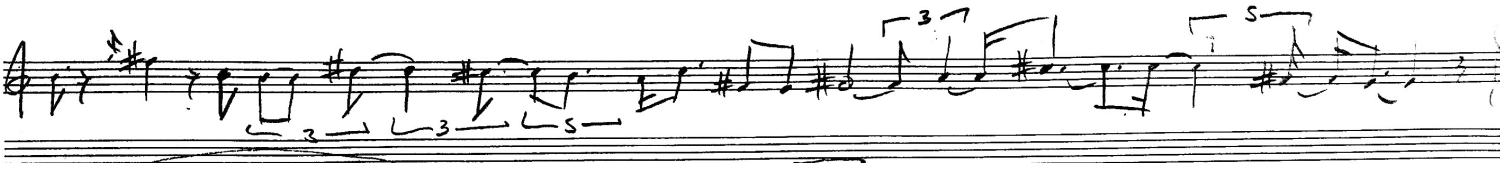
The second's meandering takes inspiration from how the fledging young musician and 'Enemy Alien Class C (Friendly)' saw out the last years of the Second World War educating service-people in music appreciation. He'd be driven in a car with blacked-out windows from New College Lane to an unknown military base each week!

A third portrait is a simple study in the strictest canonic counterpoint whose title relates both to the compositional approach and it being the transcription of Joseph talking about studies with Nadia Boulanger. I had in the back of my mind Joseph's poignant slow movements, that I can never listen to just once in a sitting. The *Lento* of the Concerto for Clarinet and Strings being cherished most of all.

Portrait four is a fun divertimento consisting of dyads from the first transcription, in its original form and retrograde. The title is taken from the famous final movement of Joseph's Sonatina for Clarinet and is inspired by the infectious twists and turns in some of his jazzier music.

The final portrait returns to the Boulanger material but sets it very freely, the motives passing between players before somewhat colliding into the closing cadence. Though also derived from the transcription, the tremolo accompaniment has whispers of the well-known birthday song. Formally-speaking, whilst reusing material from the third movement, this final movement was conceived as a macro version of the first.





for Joseph Horovitz on his 95th birthday

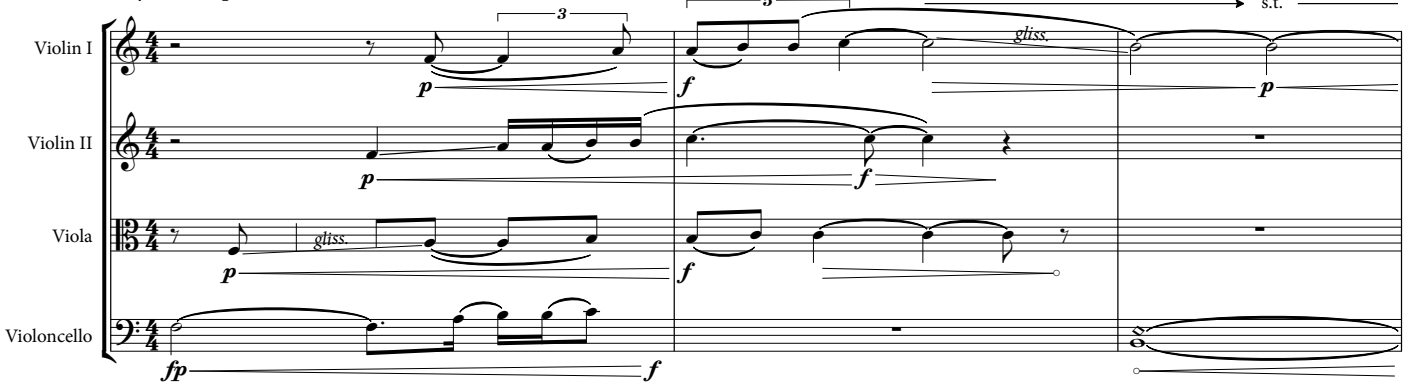
five portraits

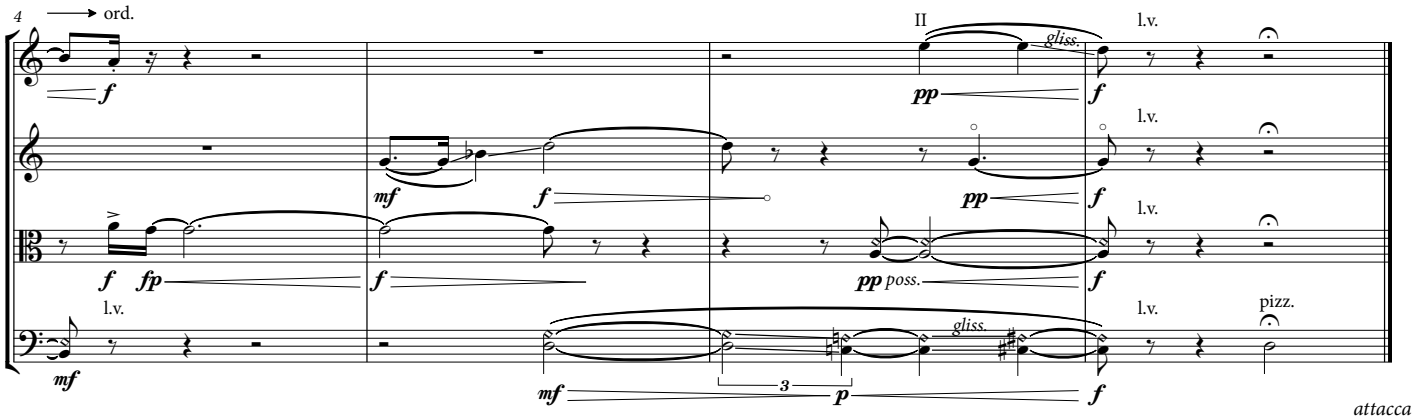
for string quartet

1. Painting

Luke Lewis

Joyous sweeps of the brush, ♩ = c.88

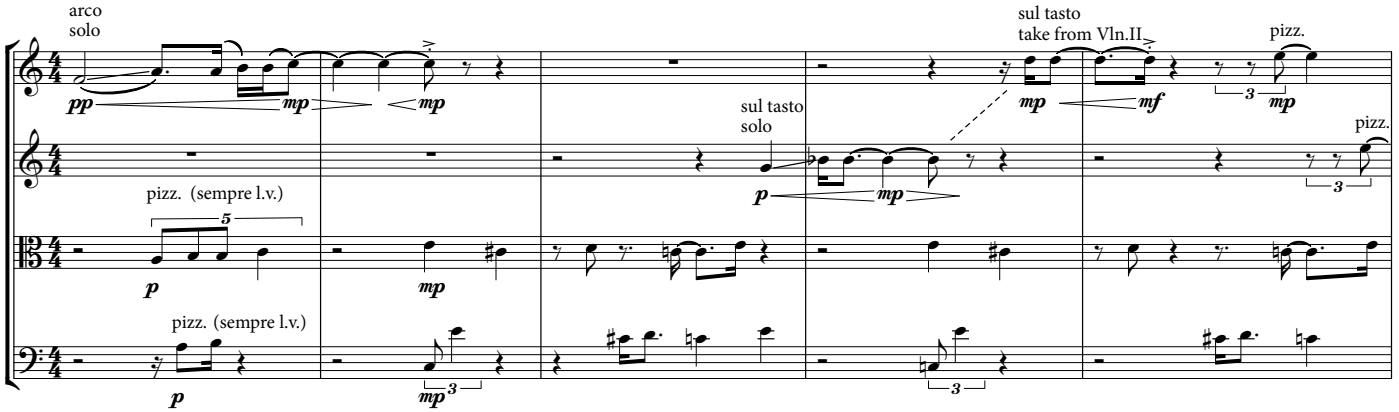


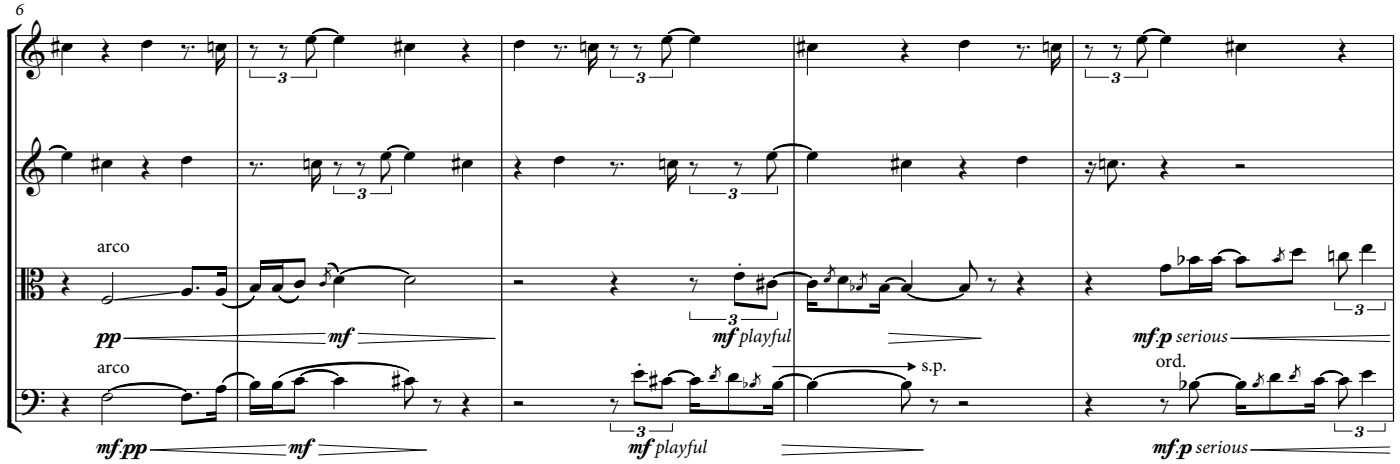


attacca

2. Going, somewhere...

Playful, ♩ = c.88

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arco
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mf playful
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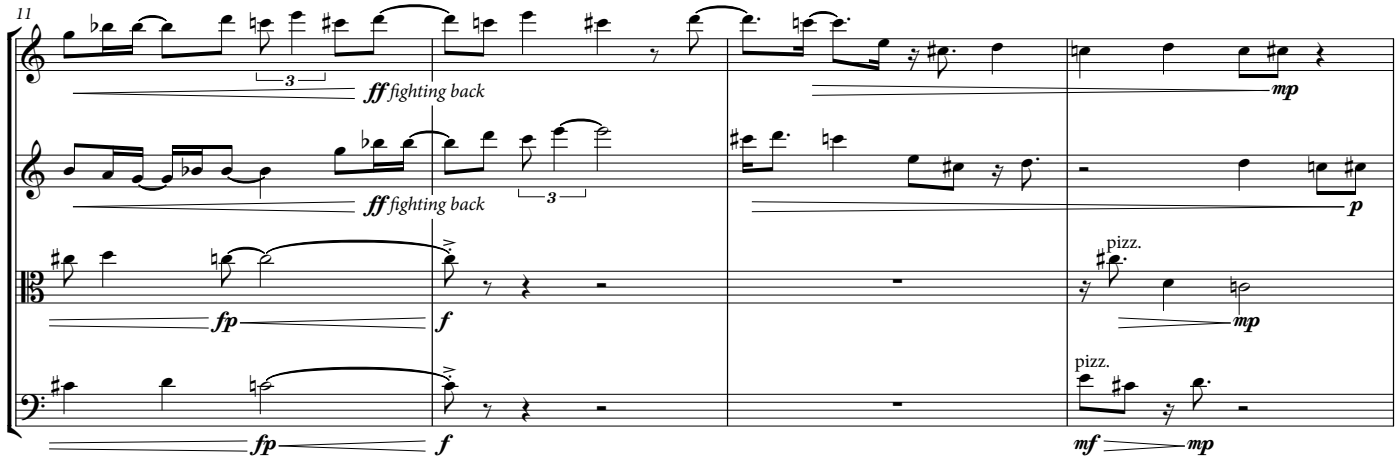
ord.
arco
mf pp
mf
mf playful
mf p serious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ff fighting back
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ff fighting back
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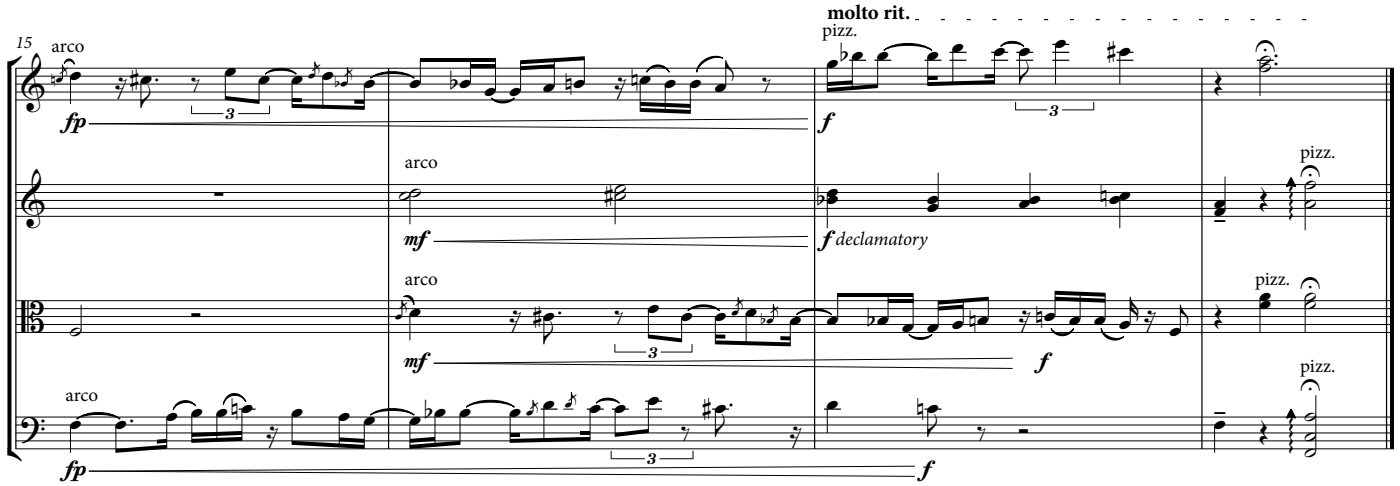
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molto rit.
arco
pizz.
fp
f
arco
pizz.
mf
f declamatory
arco
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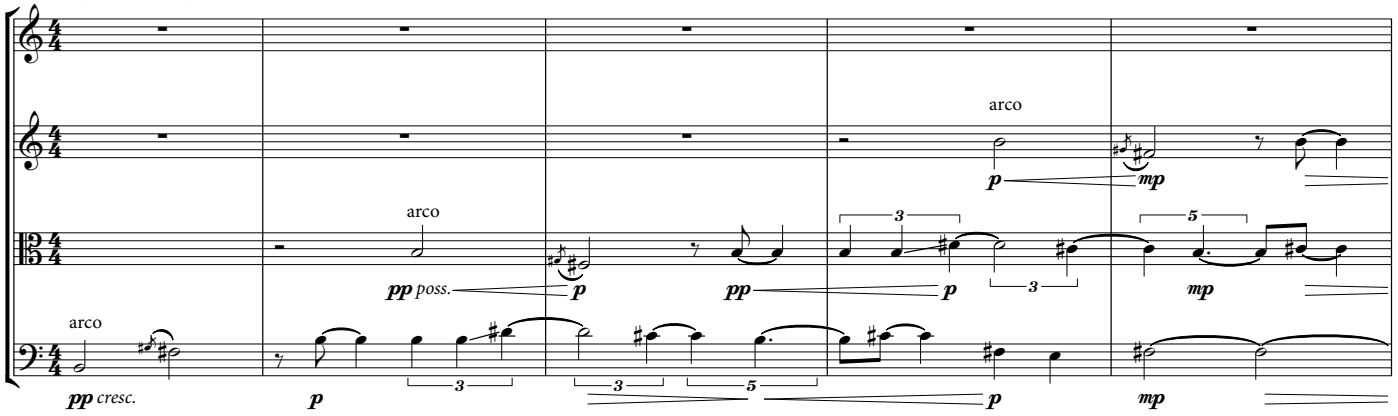
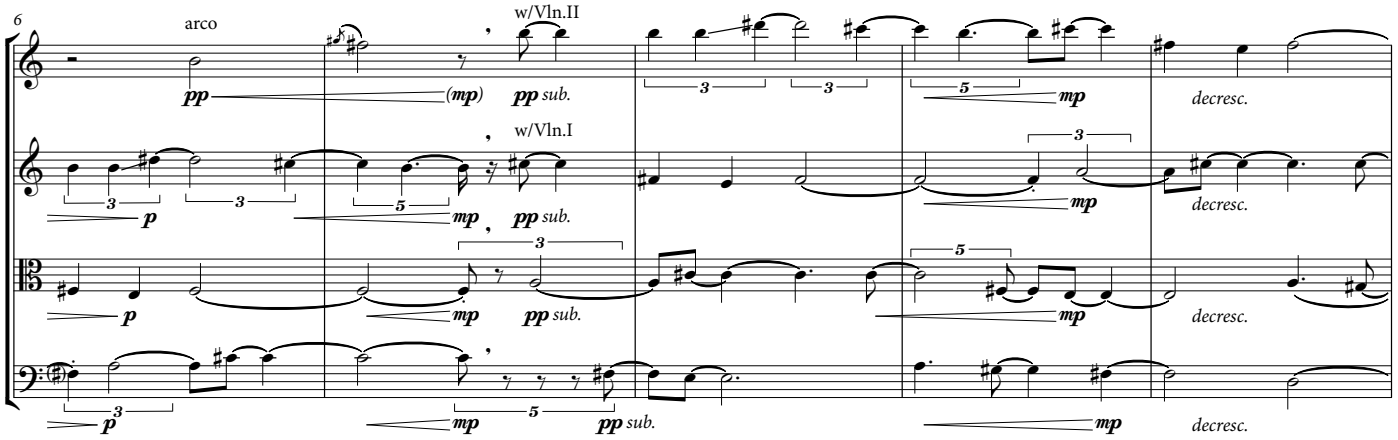
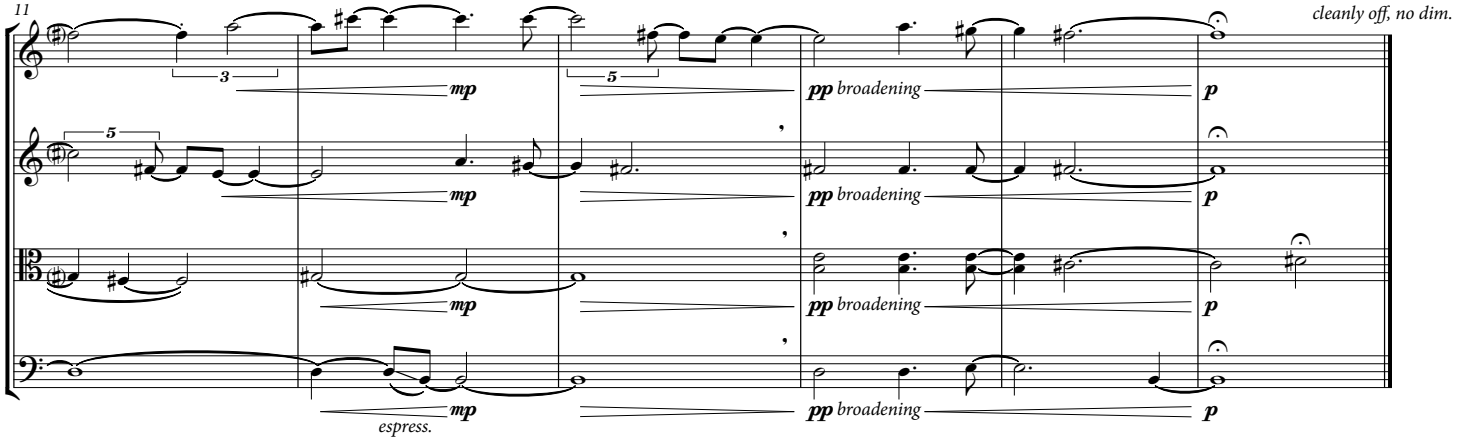
3. Study

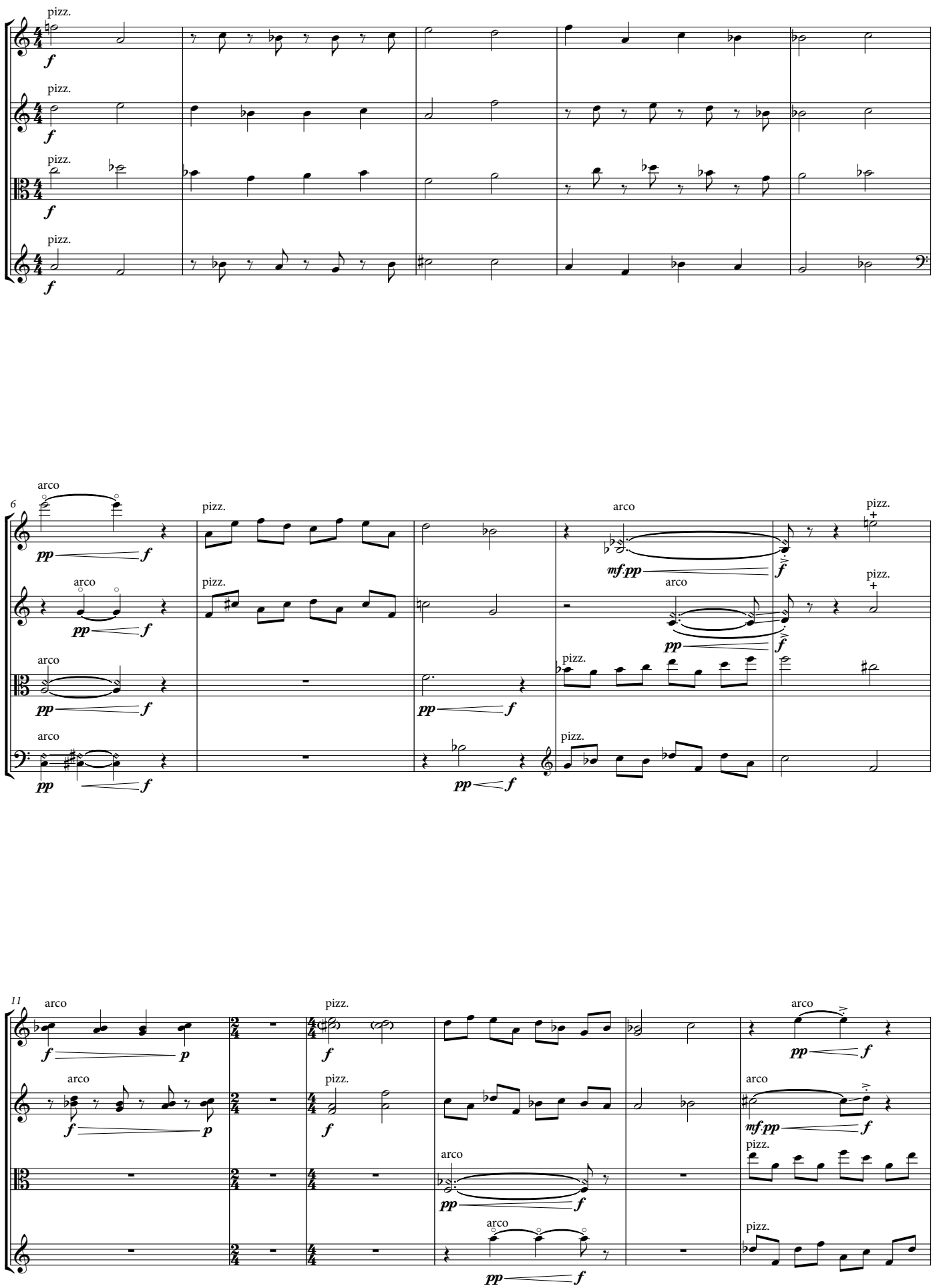
Very slow, with great expression, ♩ = c.40

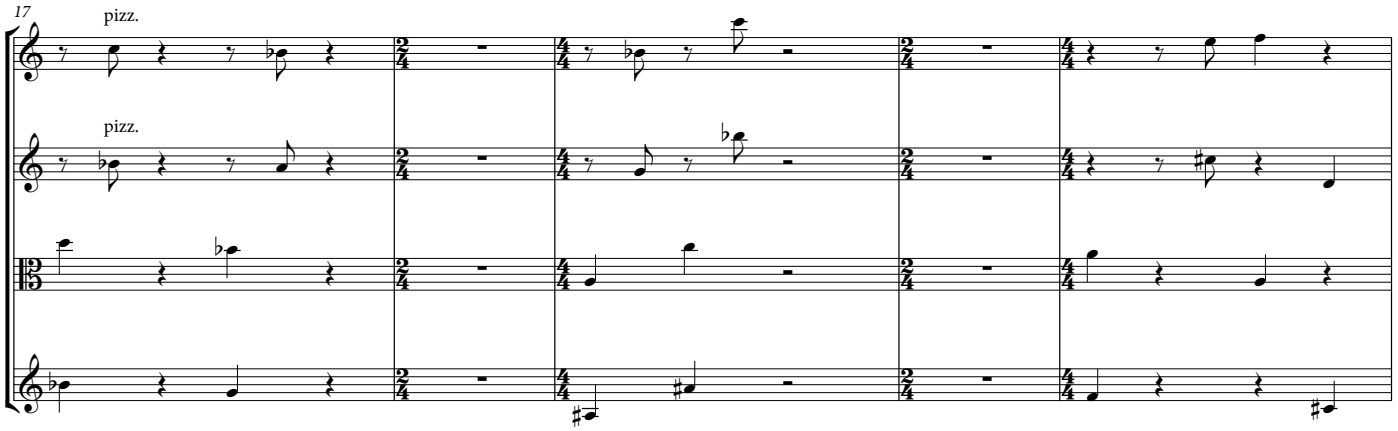


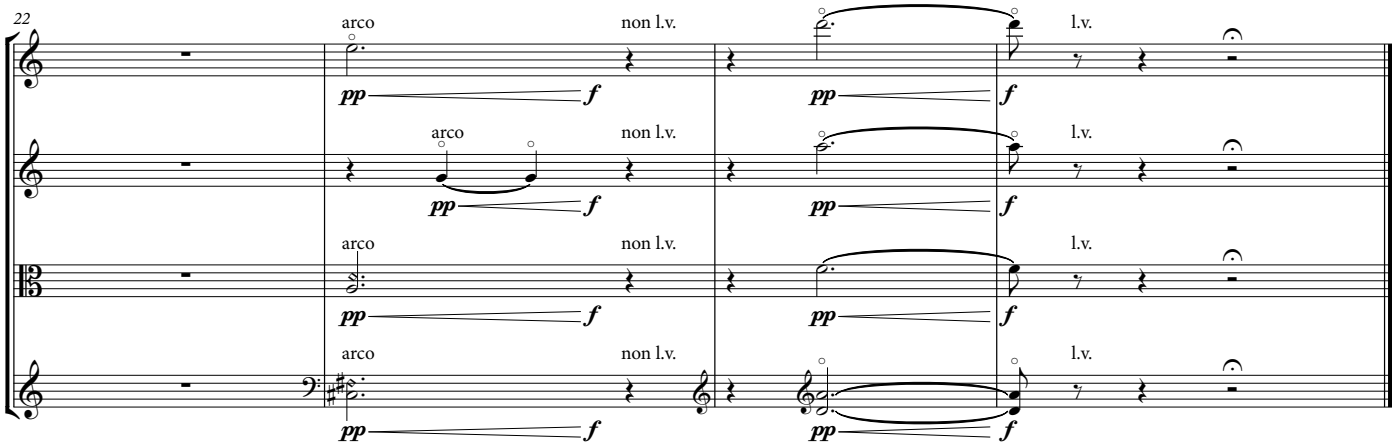




4. Con Brio

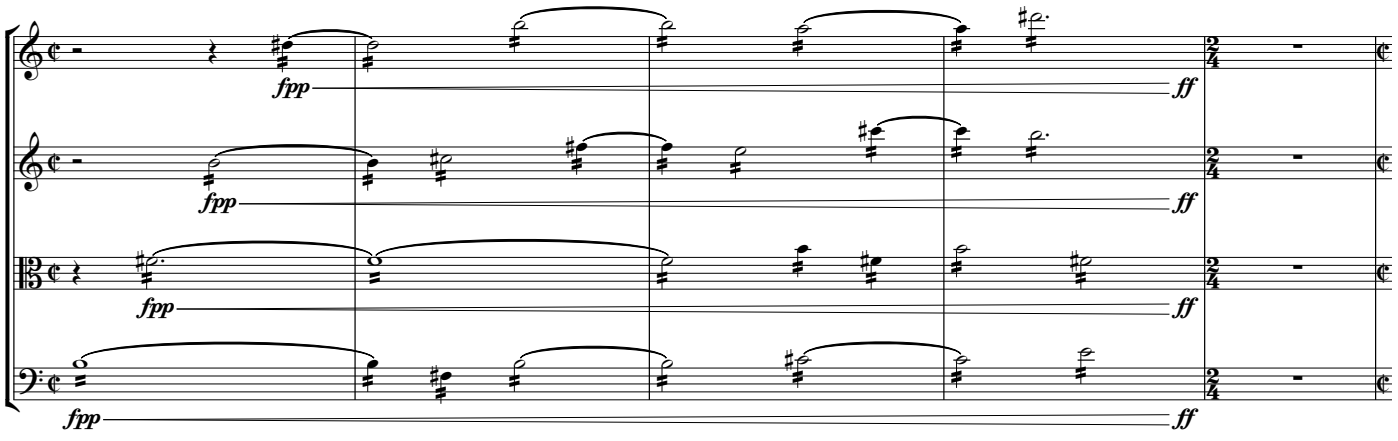






5. Song

Spiritely, as close as possible to ♩ = c.176



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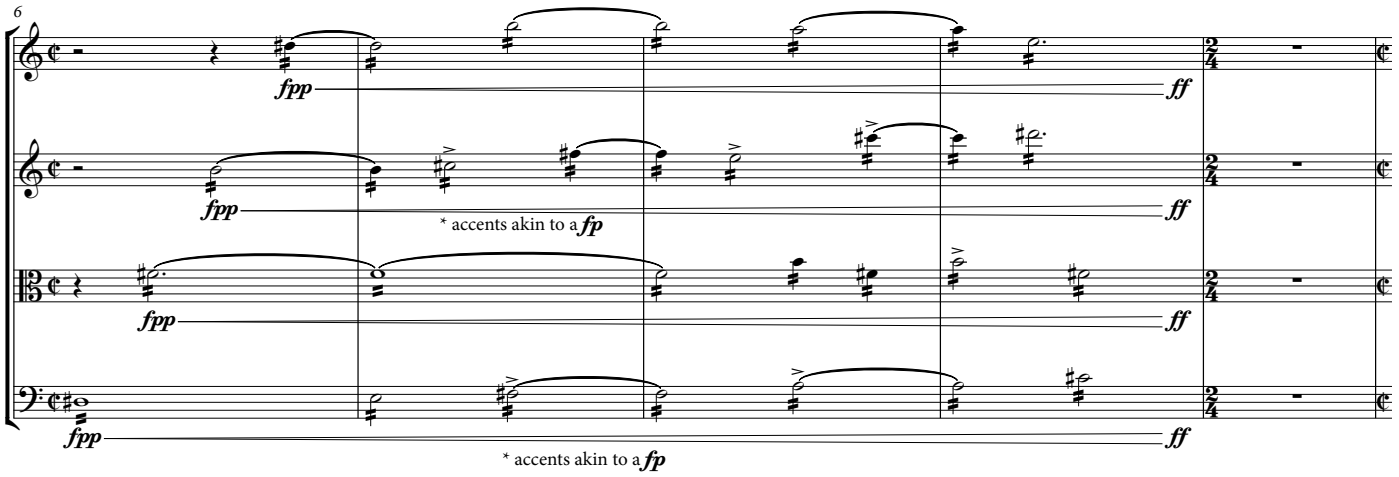

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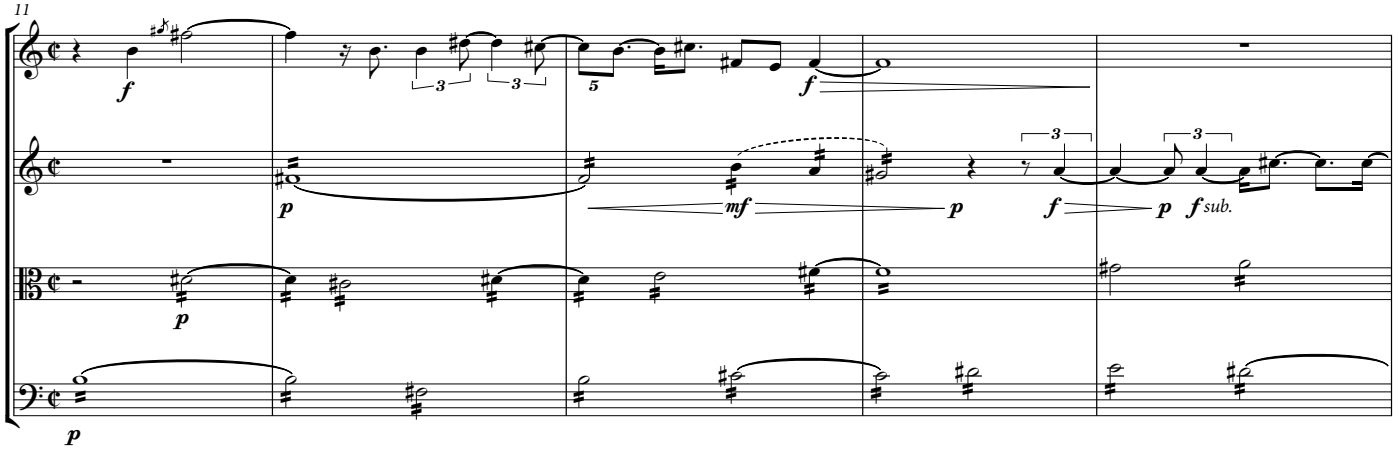

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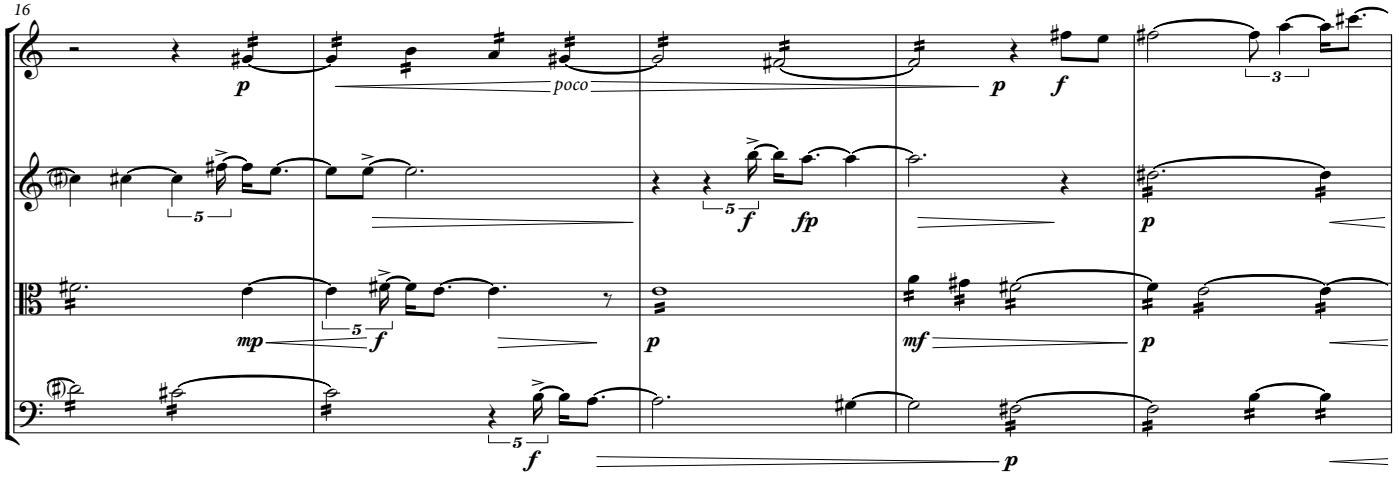

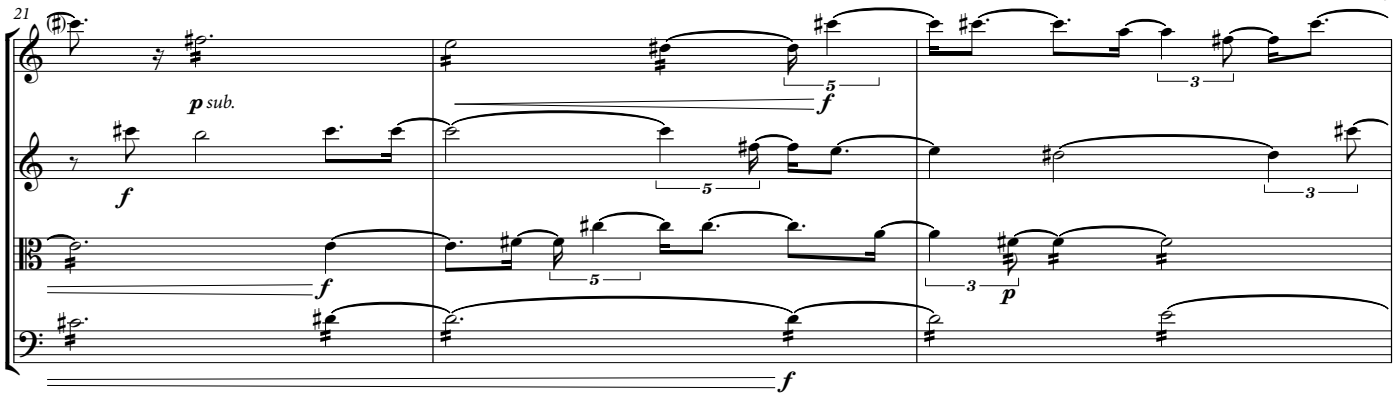
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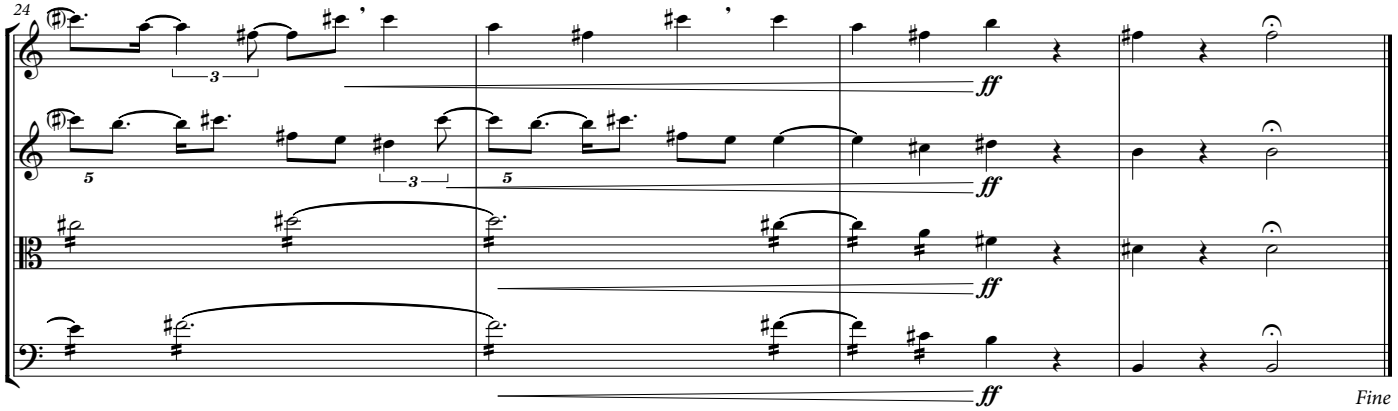
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