uspud

ballet chrétien en trois actes
christian ballet in 3 acts

argument de/*storyline by*
J.P.Contamine de Latour

musique de/*music by*
Erik Satie

english translation by
Antony Melville

musical arrangement by
Andrew Hugill

History of the work

In 1887 Erik Satie was introduced into Rodolphe Salis' cabaret *Le Chat Noir*, situated at the foot of Montmartre, as a 'gymnopédiste' ("a fine profession" declared Salis). At that time in Paris, a species of shadow-theatre, known as Les Ombres Chinoises, was becoming increasingly popular and shadow puppeteers such as Henri Rivière achieved celebrity in this medium. These puppets were silhouettes, sometimes with articulated joints, cut with extraordinary precision, and operated by a team of puppeteers using rods and batons. The genre of Chinese Shadows had a history stretching back to 1784, when it was a favourite entertainment at the Palais-Royal and beyond. The nineteenth century shadow puppeteers revived a number of the old shows.

One of these was a short piece entitled *The Temptation of St. Antony,* a title made more famous by Flaubert with his 'novel' of the same name. This story was based upon folk legend of an hermetic and ascetic saint who is plagued by demons and visions of the Christian Church. A programme from the *Chat Noir* indicates that the show was directed by Henri Rivière and, amongst the small orchestra which provided musical accompaniment, featured two names which are well-known today: on percussion, Alphonse Allais and, on harmonium, Erik Satie.

In 1892, Miguel Utrillo i Morlius (the presumed father of the painter Utrillo) founded a rival shadow theatre at another cabaret: *L'Auberge du Clou.* In November of that year Satie, in conjunction with the Spanish writer 'Patrice' Contamine (also known as 'Lord Cheminot' and, here, J.P. Contamine de Latour), prepared first a text and then music for a shadow-play which bore a startling and parodistic resemblance to *The Temptation of St. Antony*. Nicolas Bataille, a present-day shadow-puppeteer, has confirmed that the second act of *Uspud* is lifted wholesale from *The Temptation...* and that the other two acts are satirical in tone. He has also observed that the preparation of the puppets would require at least four months' labour, all of which leads one to suppose that the 'run-through' which took place at the *Auberge du Clou*, witnessed by Debussy, must have comprised the music on harmonium, a recitation of the text, and, perhaps, the sketchiest of shadow-plays using the puppets from *The Temptation...*, or, indeed, no shadow-play at all. In any case, the run-through was not a success and all present were harsh in their criticism of Satie's intensely minimal score.

It is an indication of how important the work was to Satie that, incensed by the criticism, he declared defiantly that he would have the work staged at the Paris Opera within a year. To this end, he appended the title Cristian Ballet, pruned the text, and wrote to M. Bertrand, Director of the Théâtre National de l'Opéra. This gentleman failed to reply to Satie's letter. When it became apparent that Bertrand had no intention of replying at all, Satie forced the issue by challenging him to a duel!

> *Erik Satie to Ernest Legrand*
> *Paris, the 18th of the month of December 1892*
>
> *Mon cher et venerable Maitre*
> *(...) Bertrand received me yetserday together with Latour; this leads me to believe in the early performance of Uspud at the Opéra in the winter of 1927, or, at the latest, that of 1943.*
>
> *A toi de tout coeur et d'esprit*
> *Erik Satie*

Of course, no such performance took place, but, as a last gesture Satie published a booklet containing the text and excerpts from the score, the title page of which declares proudly: "présenté a l'Opéra", a nice distinction being implied between 'présenté' and 'représenté'.

The Music

Satie's music, written in 1892 and published, at the authors' own expense, in 1893, is typical of his Rose+Croix period: mosaic construction, references to plainchant, chromatic scales derived from Ancient Greek modes, intensely pared down textures. Perusal of programmes from the *Chat Noir* shows that the music accompanying shadow-plays was performed by an ad-hoc band, usually including piano, harmonium and percussion, but the instrumentation would vary. A perplexing aspect of Satie's score is the scattering of indications above the staves which apparently denote an orchestration for: "flutes", "harps", "quartet". The music given to these instruments is unplayable (notes off the instrument, impossibly long held notes for flute, etc.). Whilst admitting the possibility that these may be "interiorisations" for a pianist, in the manner of the later *Sports et Divertissements,* (i.e. "think of a quartet as you play this"), it is my suggestion that they are in fact the names of stops on a harmonium (such stops did exist). Certainly the sustained chords at the start of Act 3 only work on harmonium or organ. Furthermore, the only portrait of Satie from this period shows him playing the harmonium, an instrument he preferred to the piano.

To make an 'authentic' arrangement of *Uspud* is, therefore, rather problematic. I have followed the shadow theatre practice in using the resources available: in this instance the line-up of the ensemble "George W. Welch", who gave the U.K. première* at the "next-to-last thoughts" Festival, Blackheath Concert Halls, London on Friday 2nd February, 1990, supported by funds from the Arts Council of Great Britain. This ensemble included harmonium, piano, clarinet, tuba, and string quartet, which retains a certain echo of Satie's apparent intention, and I had also studied Satie's notebooks on orchestration, so had some feeling for his views on the subject which I took into account when preparing the present version.

This first performance also included three sound effects (in Act 1 at the words: "a terrible clap of thunder", a thundersheet; "from their midst fly stars", a tinkling bell-tree; "a great convulsion of nature", a massive tam-tam hit) and recitation. Both of these elements conformed with known shadow-theatre practice, and the presence of a reading of the text in no way corresponds to the forbidden practice of reading aloud Satie's humorous inscriptions in the later piano pieces. Despite this, it is not essential to reproduce these elements in any subsequent performance. In the absence of a shadow-play, "George W. Welch" commissioned slides from Mark Thomson. These set the scene for each act with a typographic treatment of Contamine's staging directions.

(To the best of my knowledge this was a U.K. première. The music for Uspud was incorporated into a mixed-media stage show by Robert Doisneau, performed in 1979 at, ironically enough, the Opéra Comique, Paris. An orchestration by Robert Caby has never been played).*

The Text

The original published version of the text is an early example of lower-case typography. There are precedents: an early nineteenth-century handwriting primer for German children, illustrated with fables in lower case, and, towards the end of the century, the international phonetic alphabet, perhaps better known then due to the popular interest in philology. But twenty years would pass before Dada and the full bloom of lower case.

An earlier, unpublished version of the text is more detailed, including a family tree for Uspud, more varied apparitions and many of the detailed instructions necessary for the realisation of a shadow-play, but the storyline is essentially the same.

Antony Melville, in a footnote to his translation, notes that certain of the "animals" that appear in Act Two have not so far been identified, except that *pogos* is the ancient Greek for a beard, and for *cuculu* (French), which he renders cuckooloo, one should perhaps refer to the cucubu, explained in the *Dictionnaire de l'Ancien Français*, as a 'legendary spider which goes upon the water of fountains'. *Pacre* and *bonti* still remain a mystery.

It is ironic that, after all the researches conducted by Ornella Volta and myself, perhaps the biggest mystery of all is the origin of the word "uspud" itself. The Larousse dictionary of the time contains an entry: "pudenda (peu us)" - i.e. little-used. I have toyed with the idea of a wordplay poking fun at the saint's celibacy, but it is impossible to be certain....

My thanks to Ornella Volta, La Fondation Erik Satie, Antony Melville, Mark Thomson, L'Académie de Muséologie Evocatoire and the Arts Council of Great Britain for their help in the development of these researches.

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PERSONNAGE UNIQUE
SOLE CHARACTER

USPUD

SPIRITUALITES
SPIRITUALITIES

L'EGLISE CHRETIENNE, SAINTS MARTYRS ET CONFESSEURS; LE CHRIST EN CROIX; ANGES, SERAPHINS, ET DEMONS.

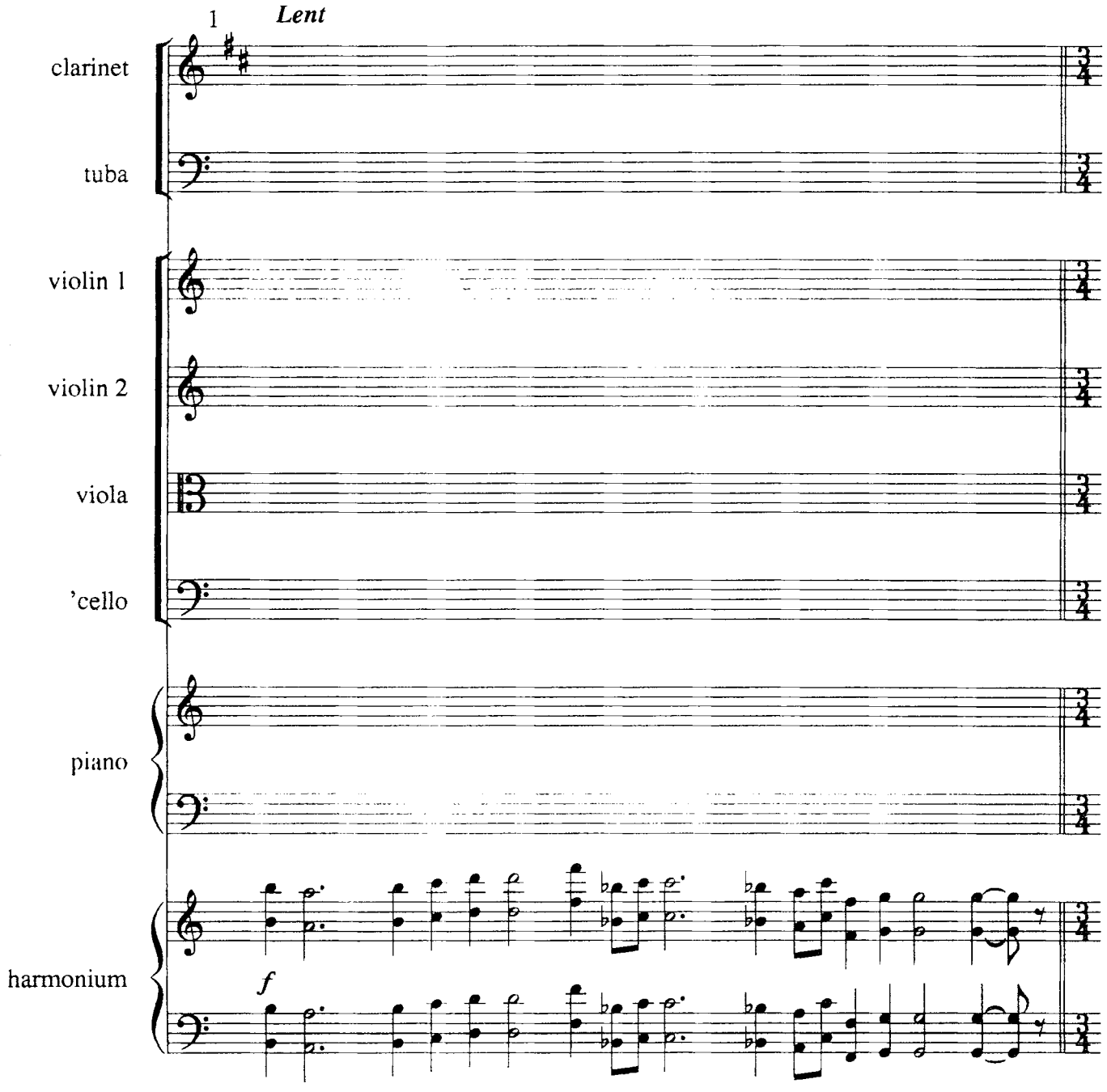
THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, SAINTS MARTYRS AND CONFESSORS; CHRIST ON THE CROSS; ANGELS, SERAPHIM AND DEMONS.

ACTE PREMIER
FIRST ACT

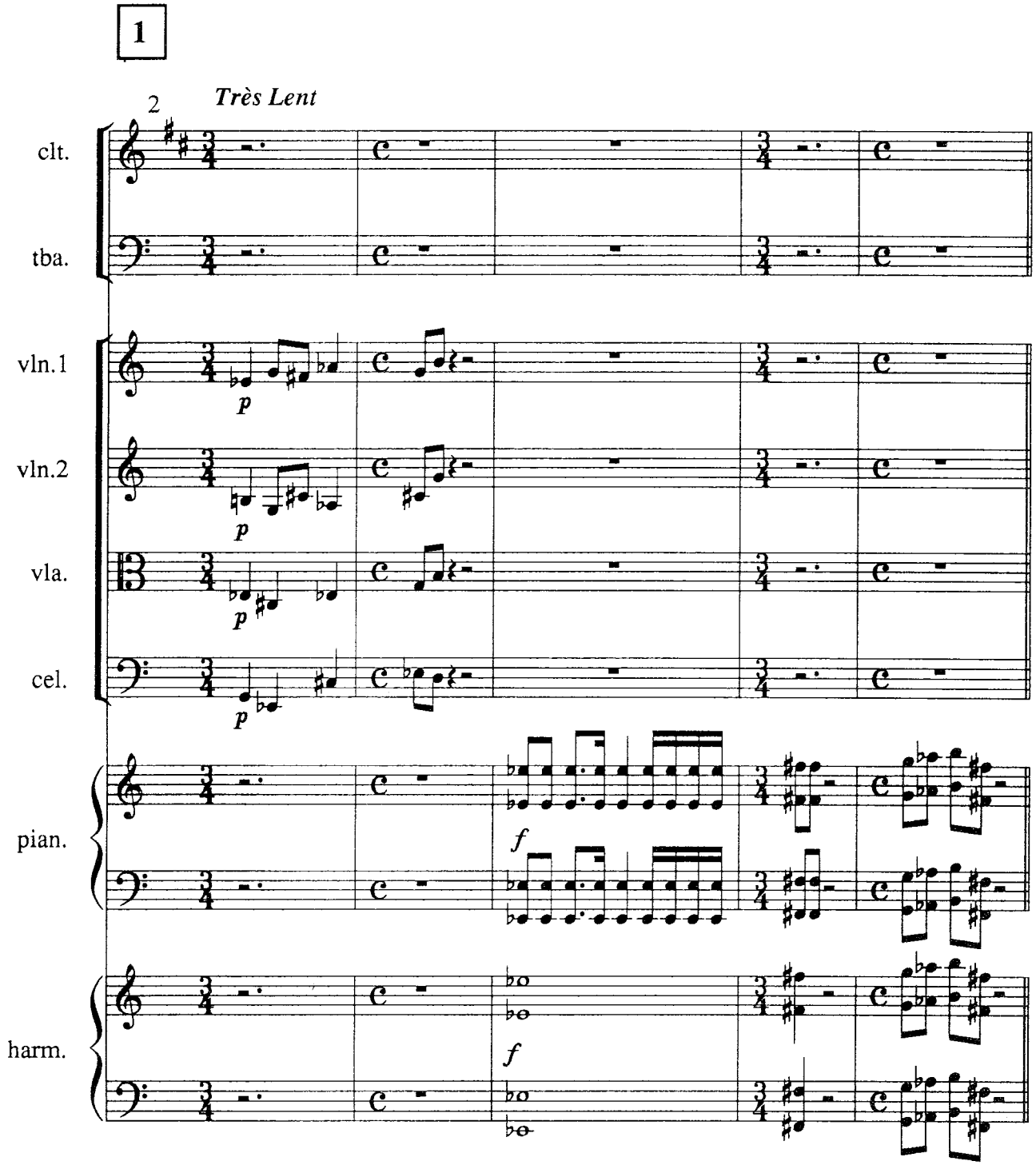
une plage déserte; au milieu une statue; au loin la mer
a deserted beach; in the centre a statue; in the distance the sea

uspud vétu à la persane
uspud in persian dress

il vient d'assister au supplice des chrétiens et rapporte des reliques.
he has returned from witnessing the martyrdom of the christians and brings with him relics.

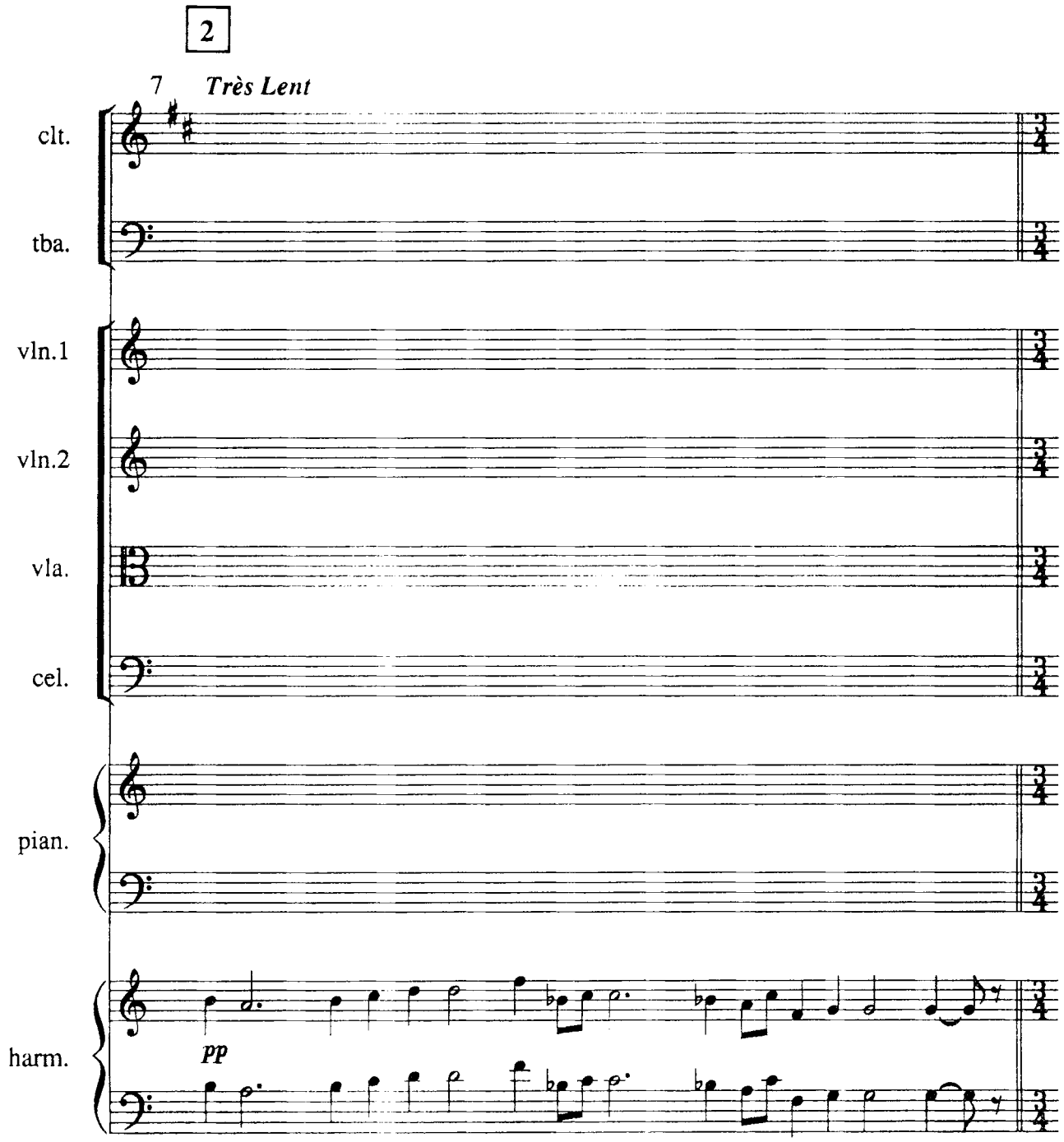


il les entasse au pied de la statue et les brûle:
he makes a pile of them at the foot of the statue and sets fire to them:

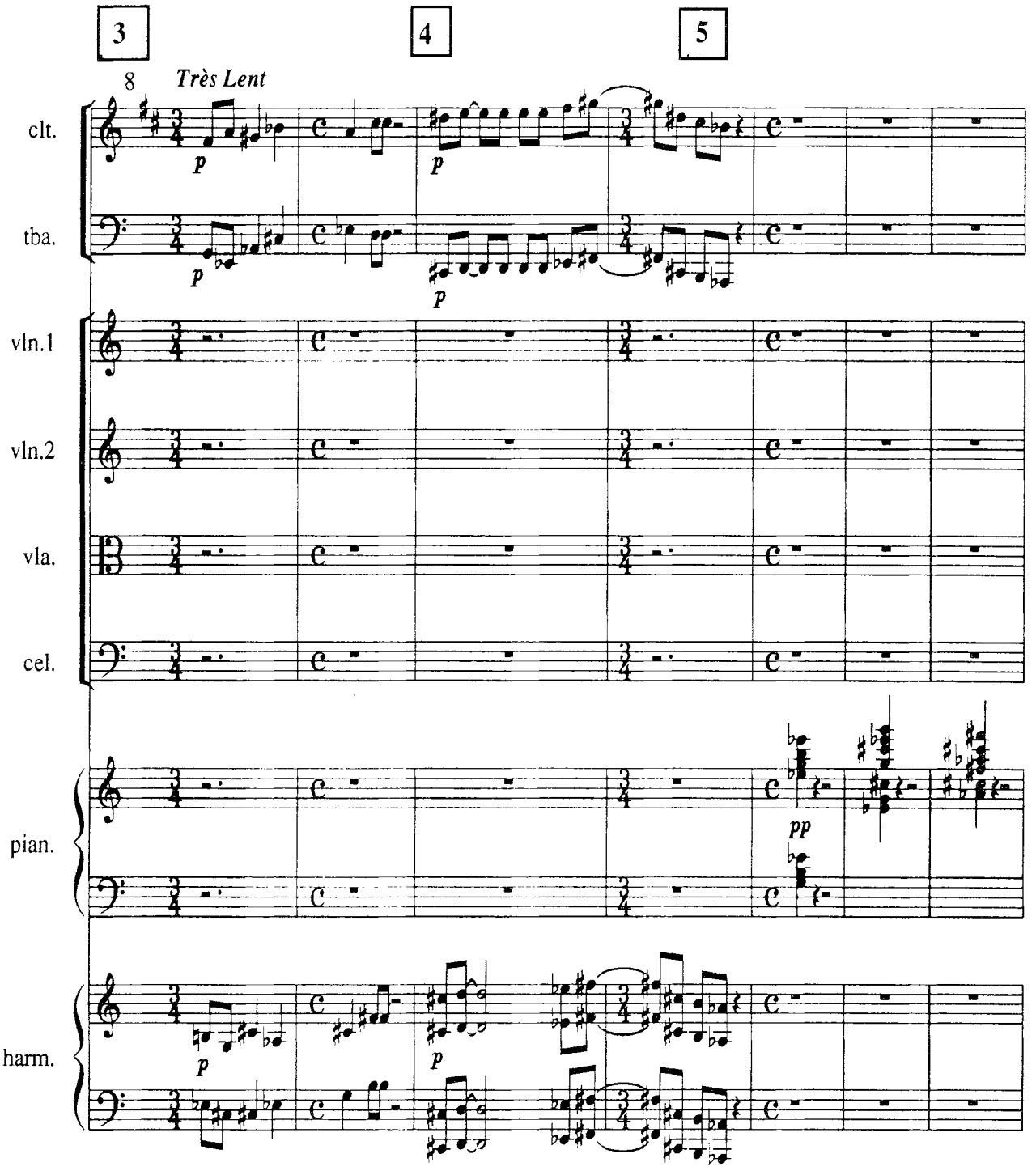


la fumée qui s'en dégage se change en séraphins qui s'évanouissent dans l'espace.
the smoke that rises from them turns into seraphim which fade into the air.

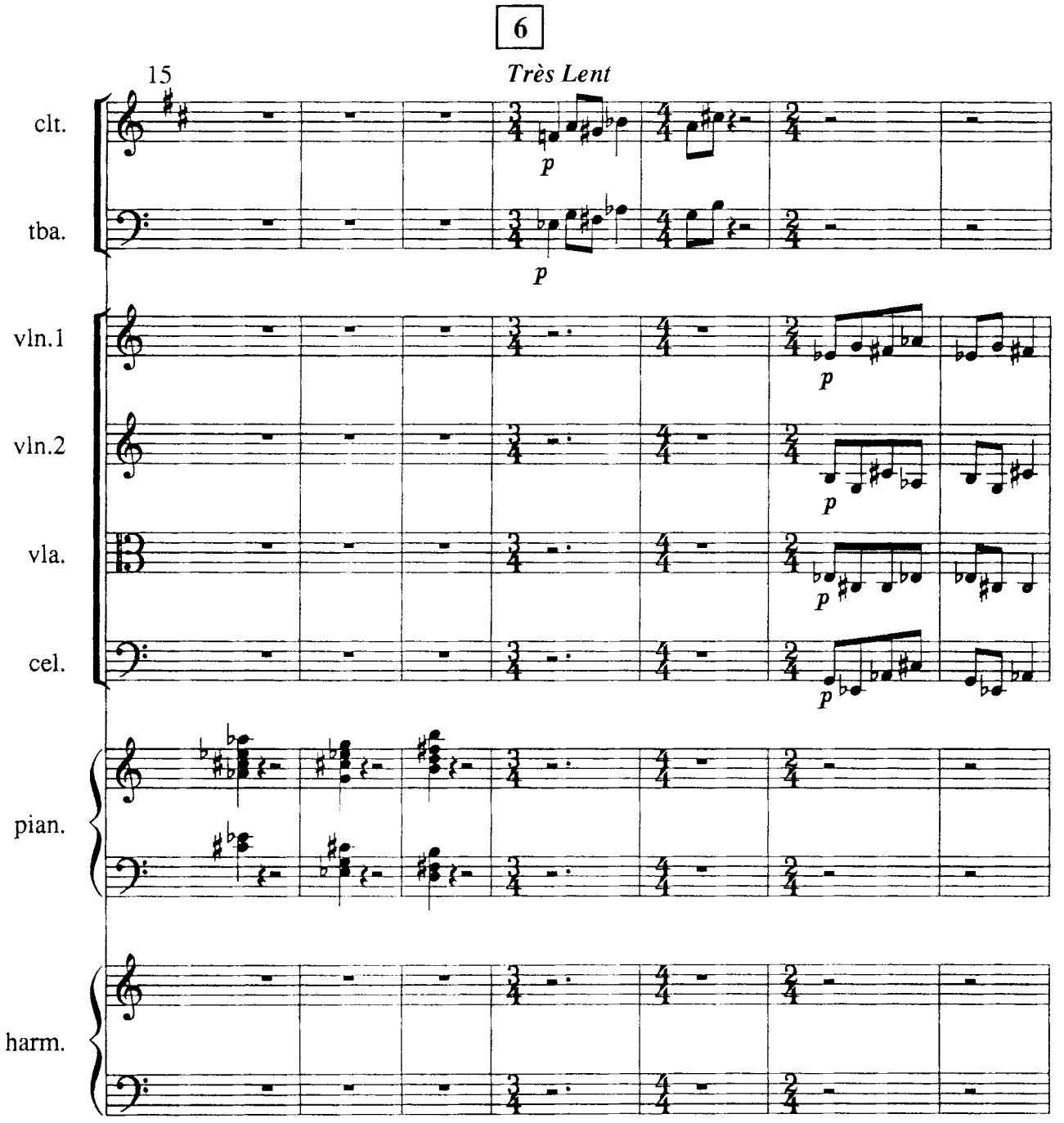
un coup de tonnerre formidable retentit;
there is a terrible clap of thunder;



la statue tombe en morceaux.
the statue falls to pieces.

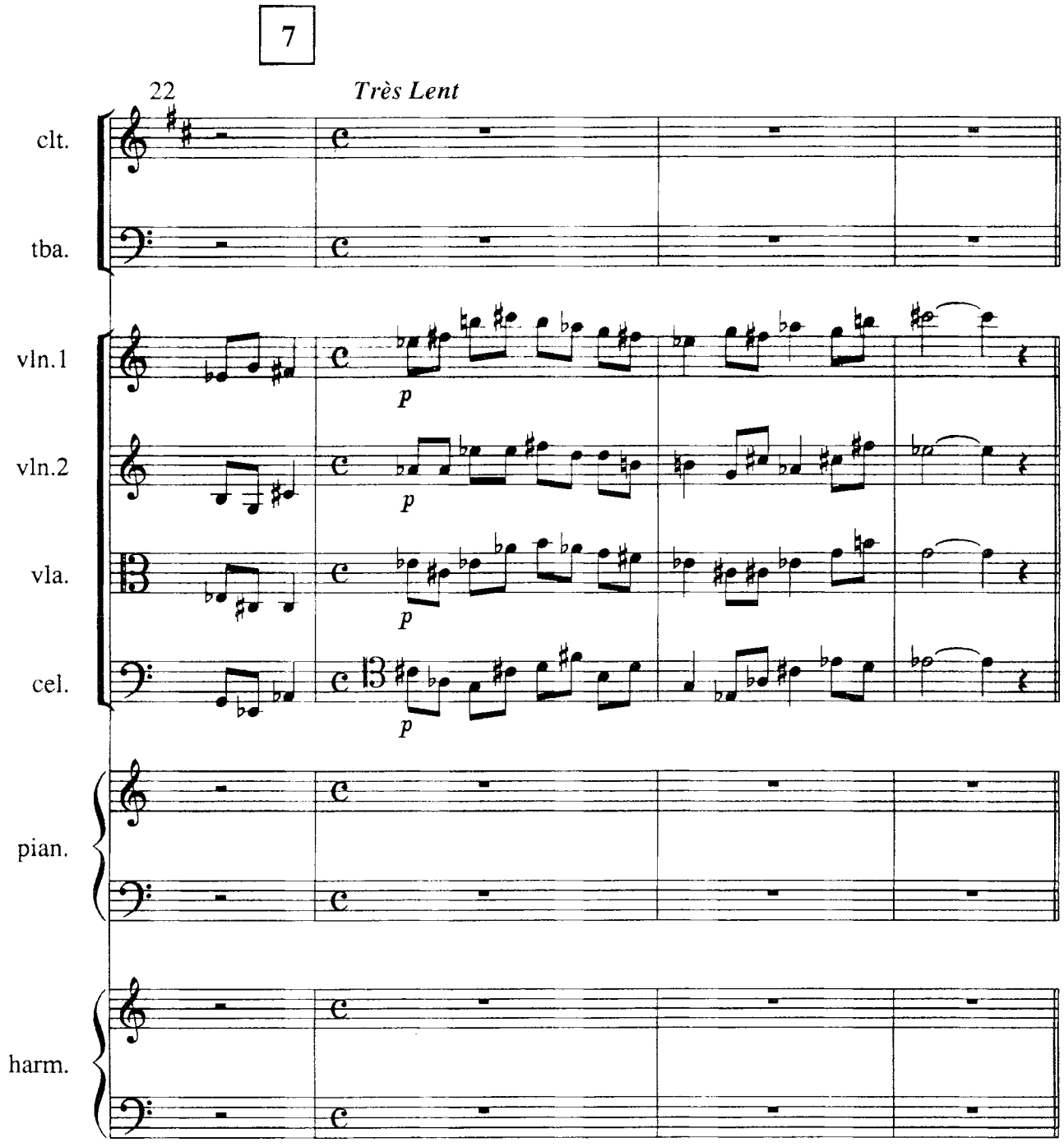


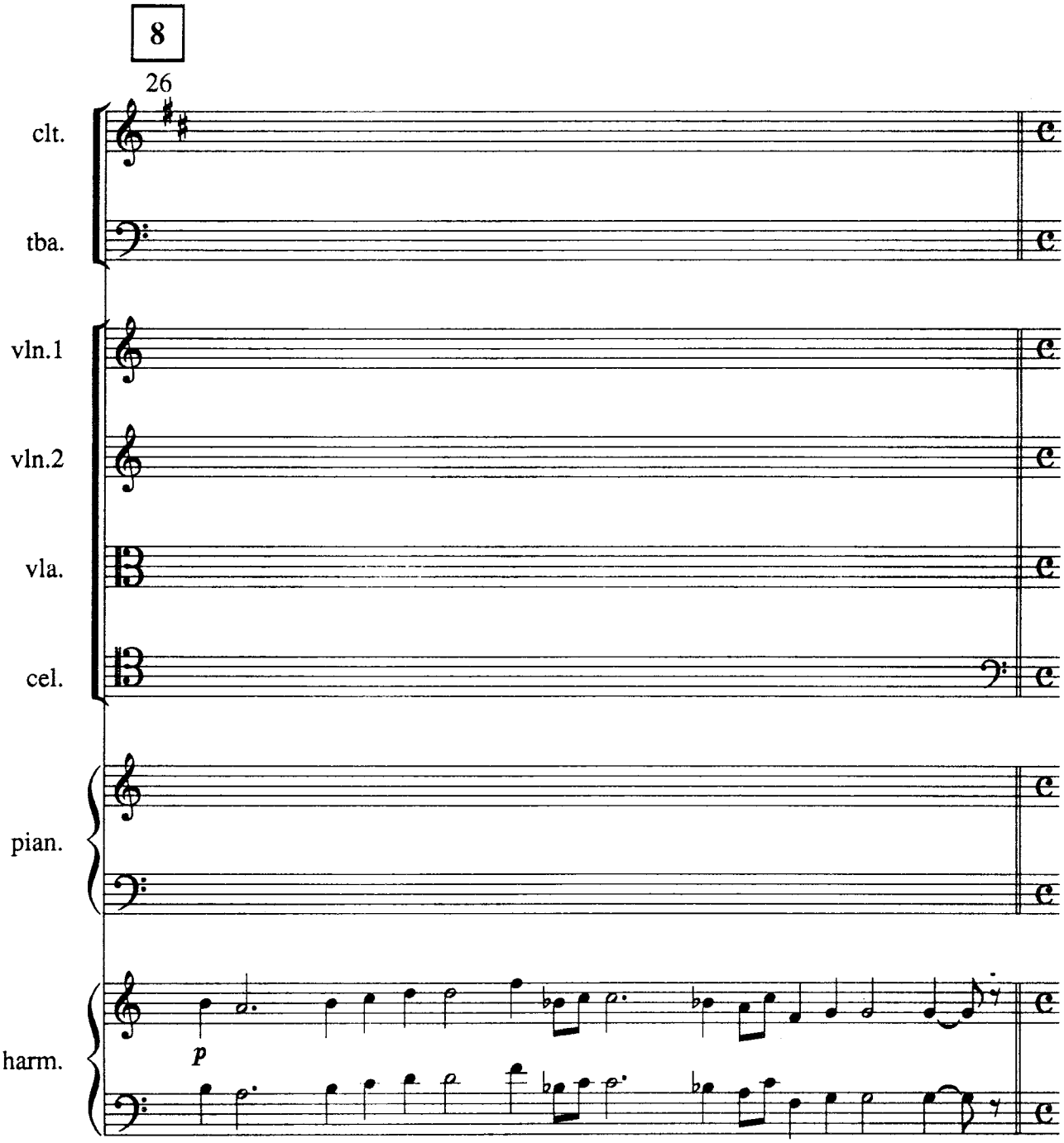
uspud est consterné
uspud is aghast



tout à coup le ciel devient blanc

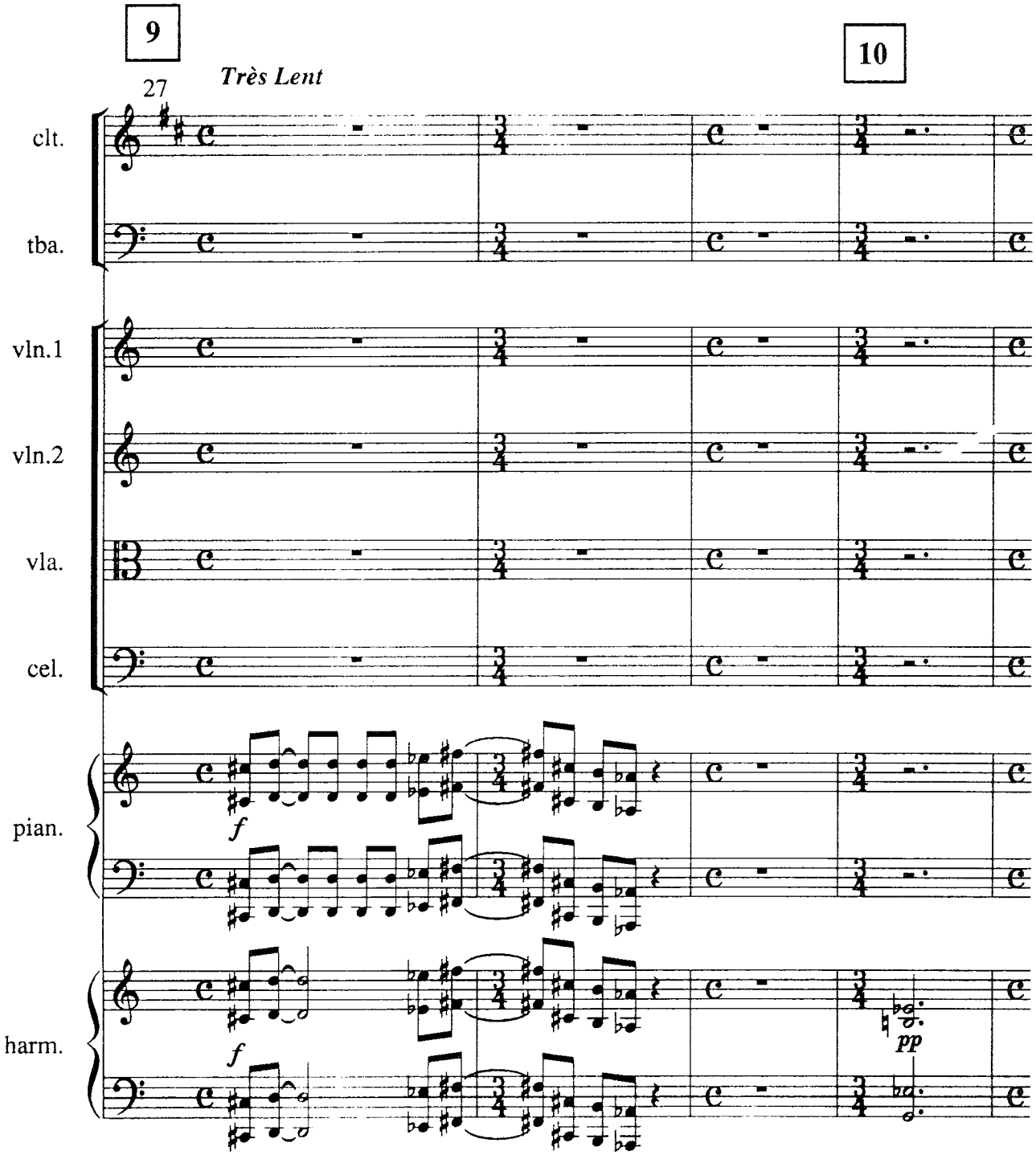
suddenly the sky turns white

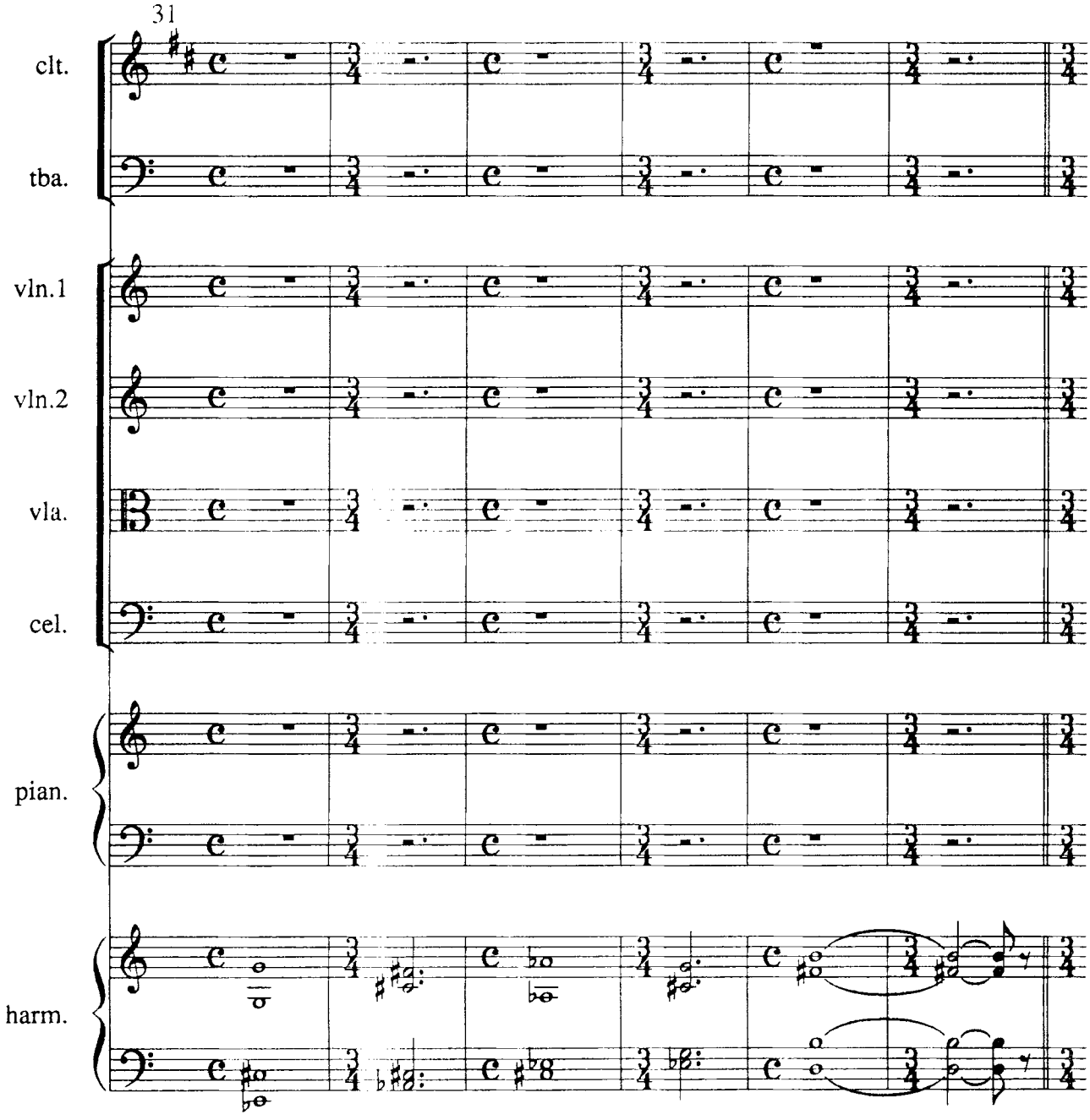



8
26
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
p

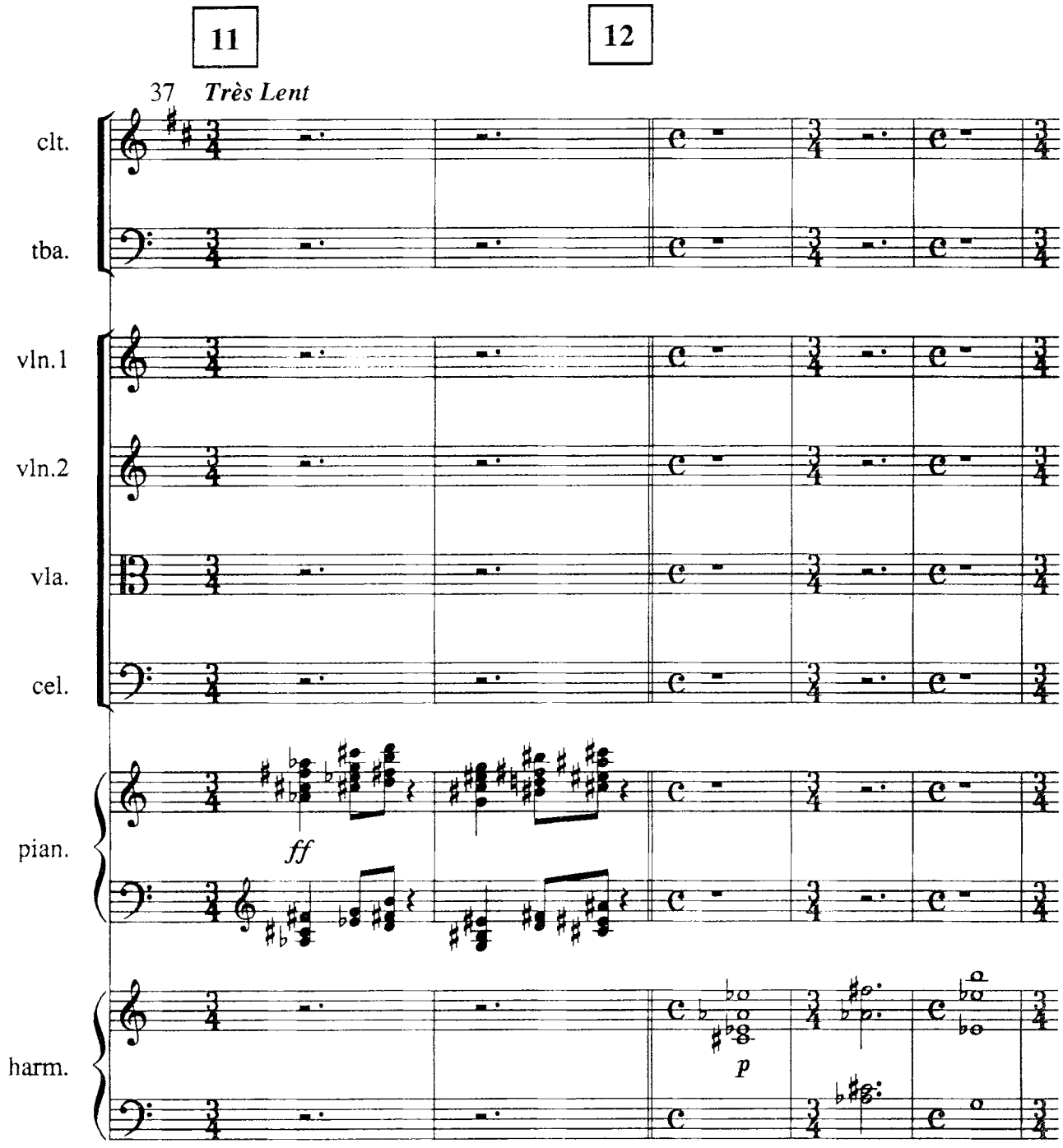
une femme, d'une grande beauté, couverte d'une tunique d'or et la poitrine percée d'un poignard, apparait devant uspud et lui tend les bras. c'est l'eglise chrétienne.

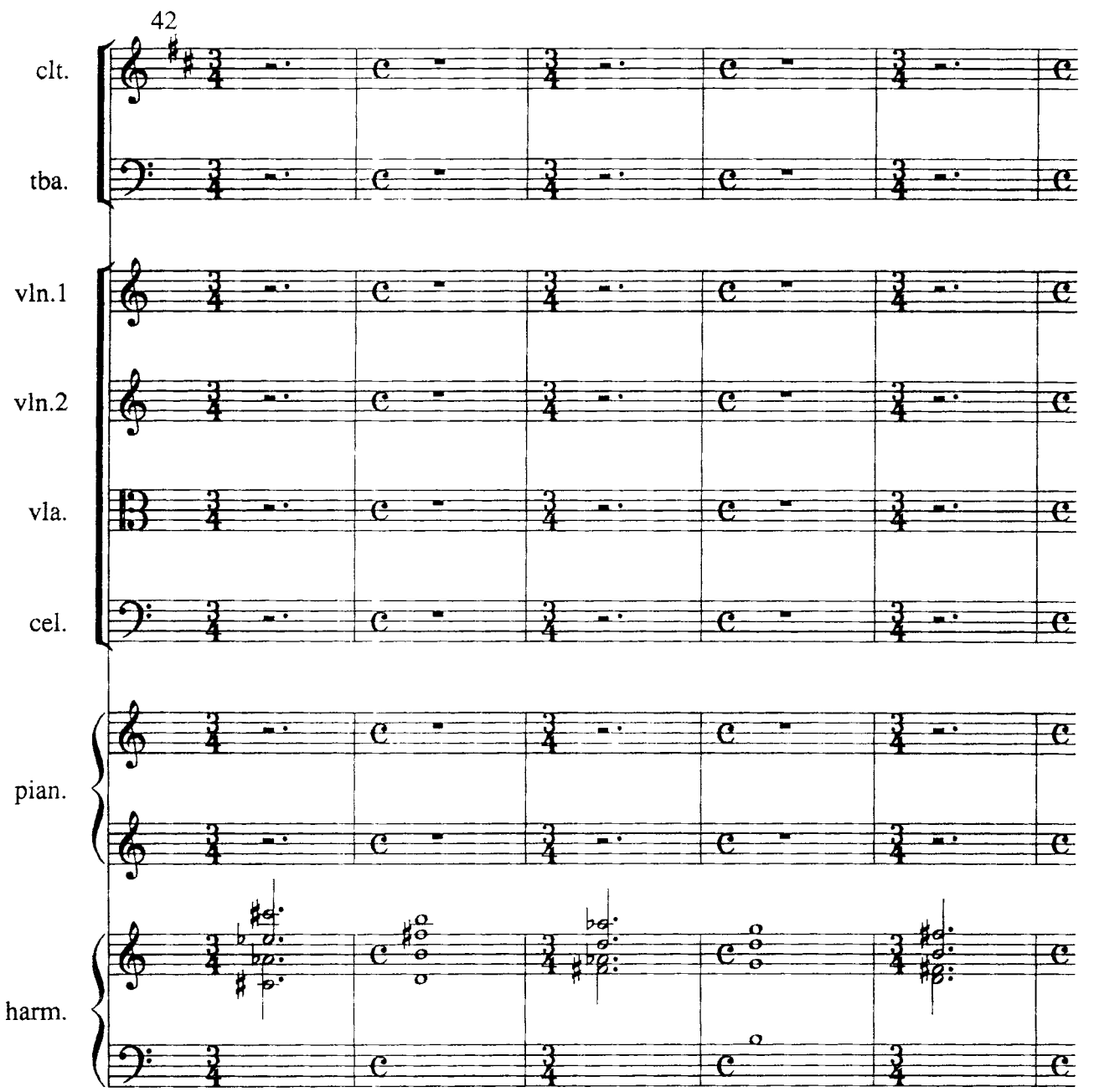
a woman of great beauty, clad in a golden tunic with a dagger piercing her heart, appears before uspud and stretches out her arms to him. it is the christian church.




31
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.

uspud étonné prend du sable et s'en frotte les yeux
uspud in surprise picks up some sand and rubs his eyes with it

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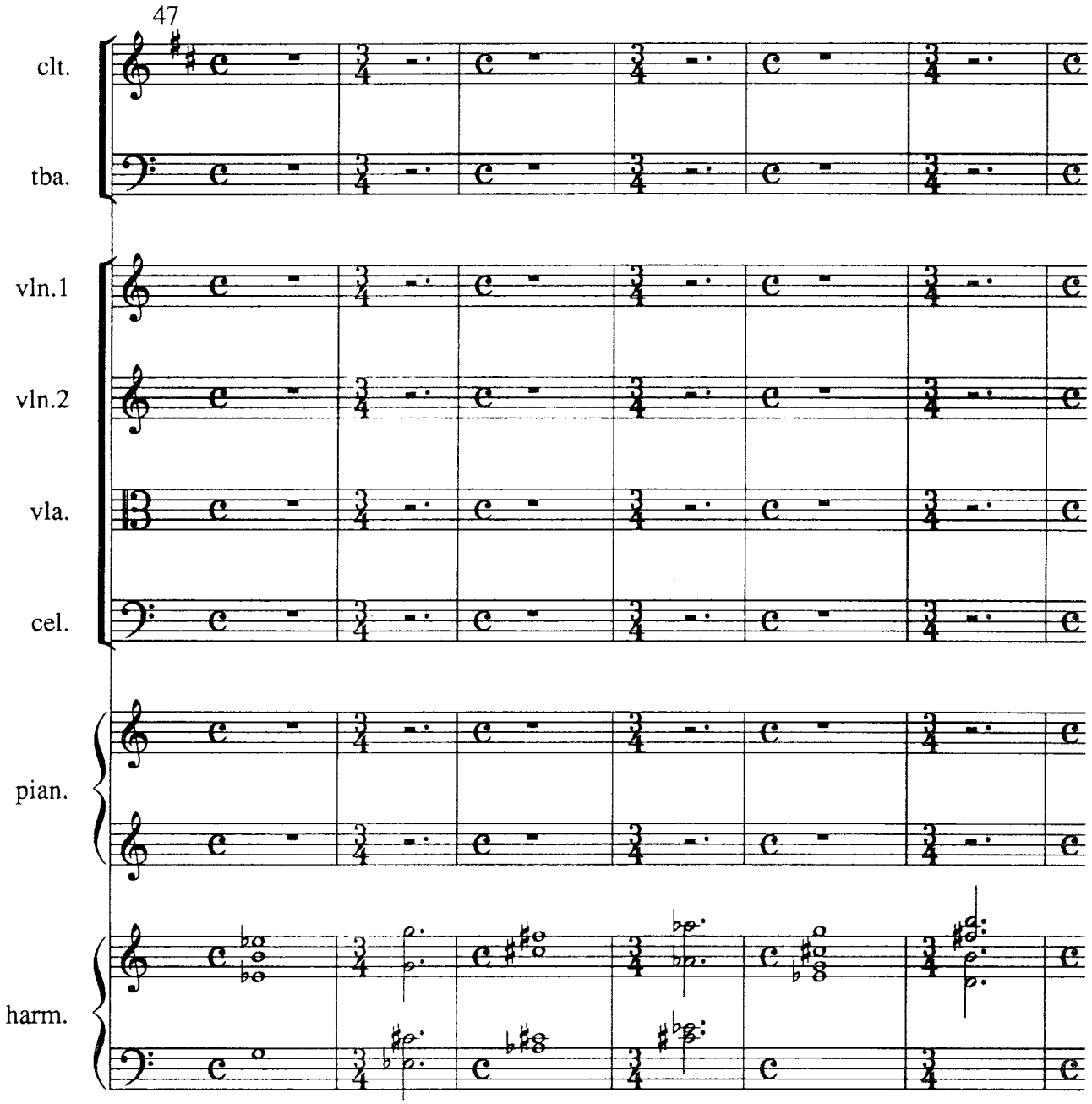
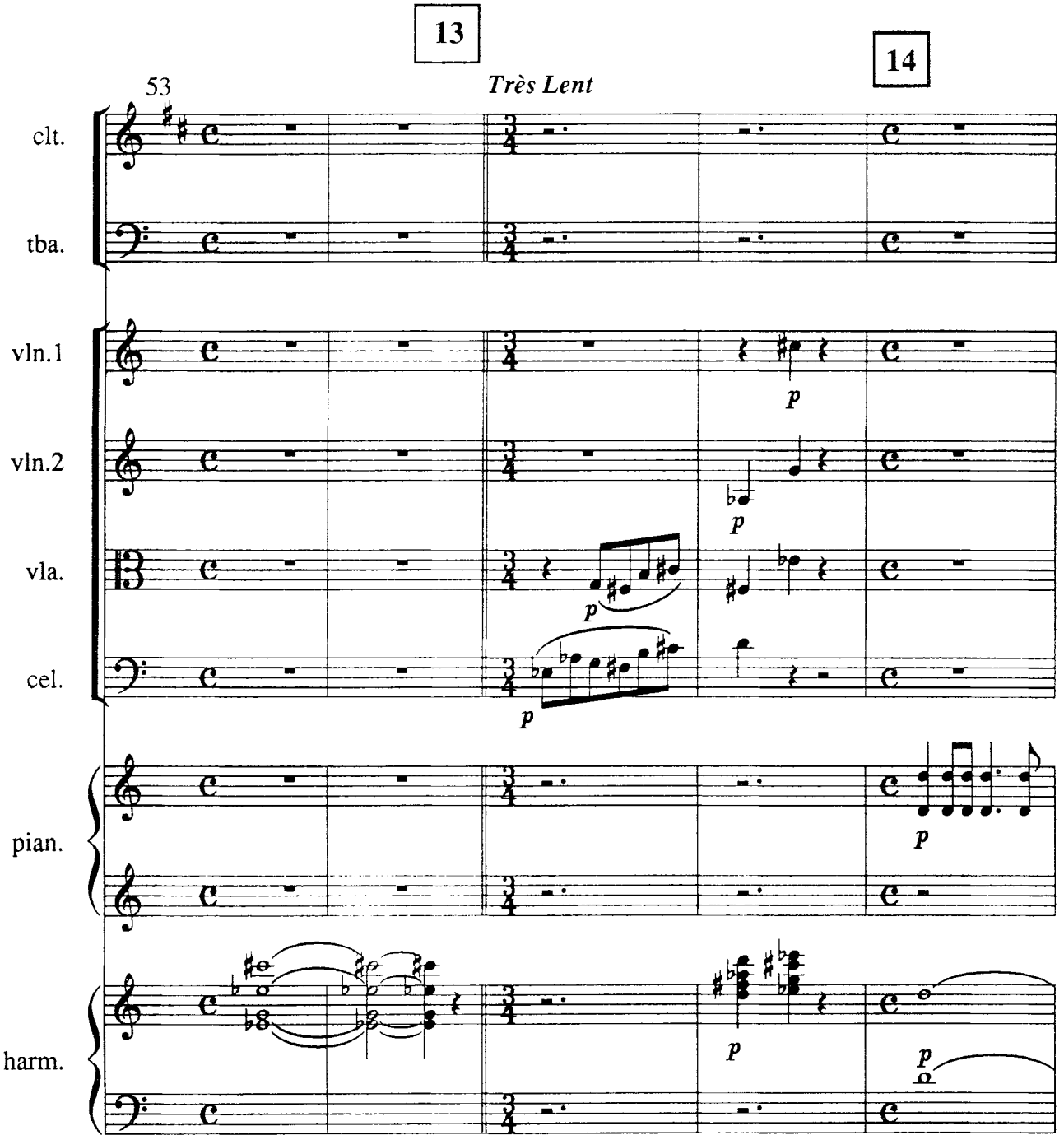
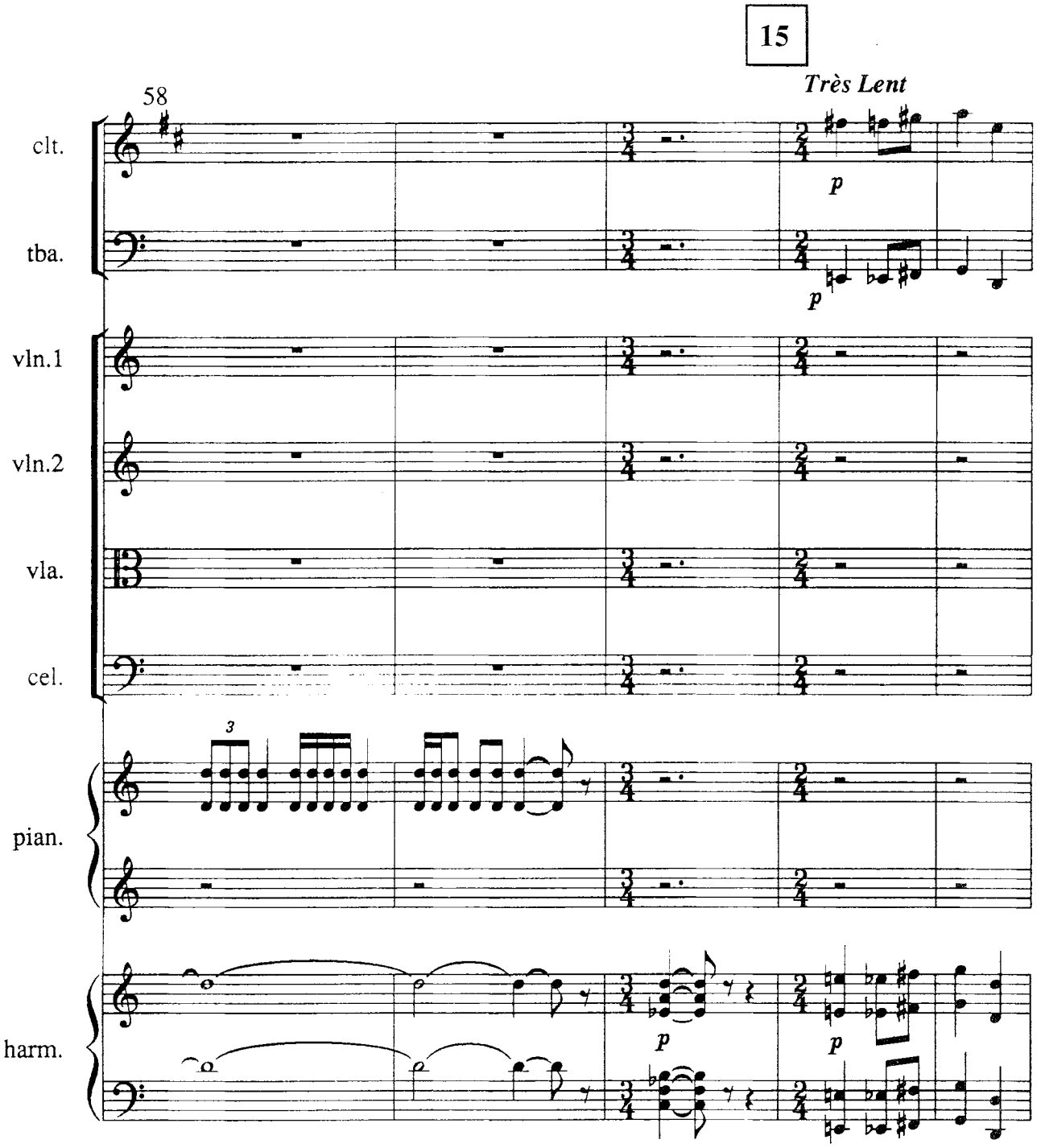
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.

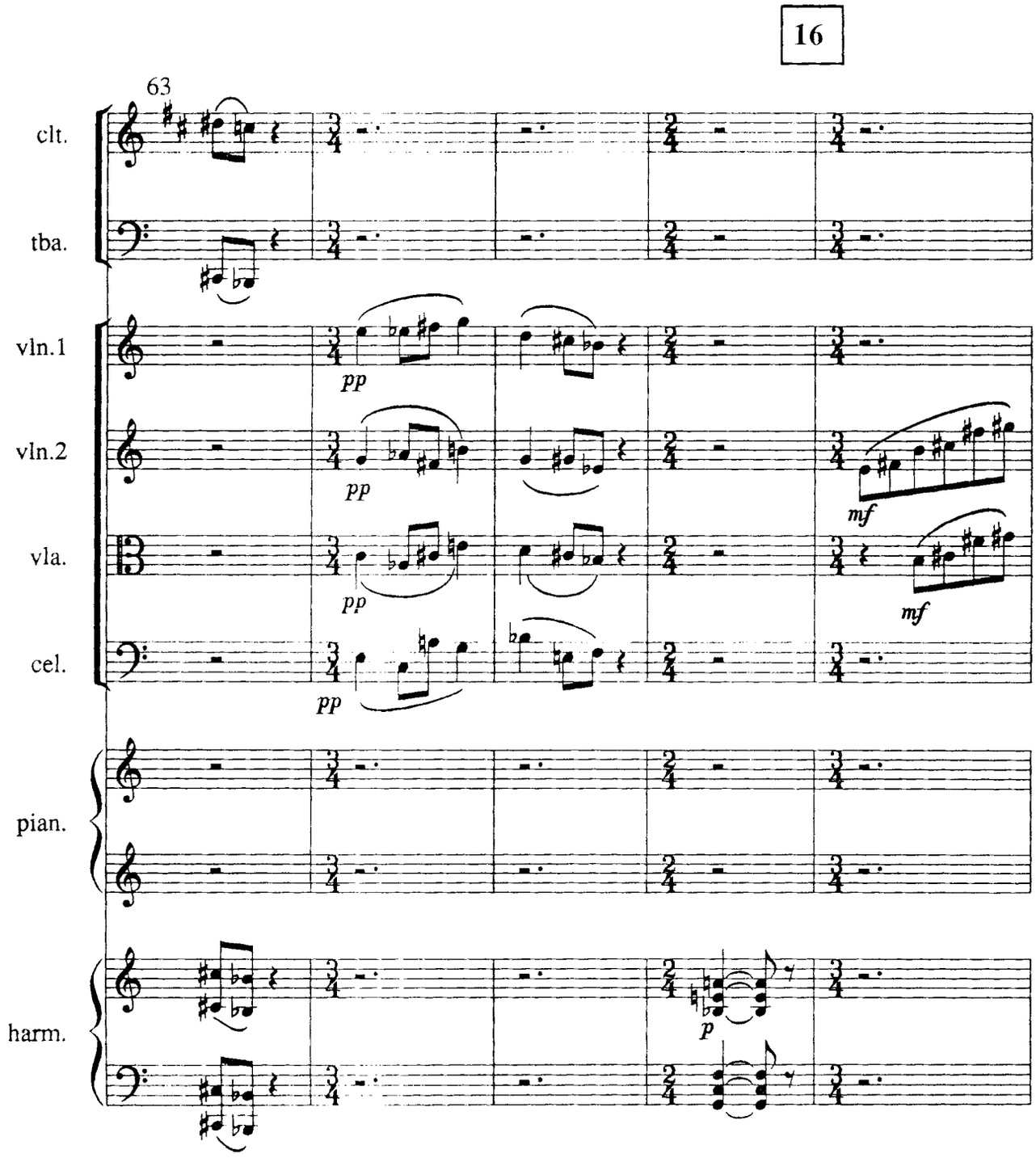

47
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.

sonnerie des trompettes
a fanfare of trumpets

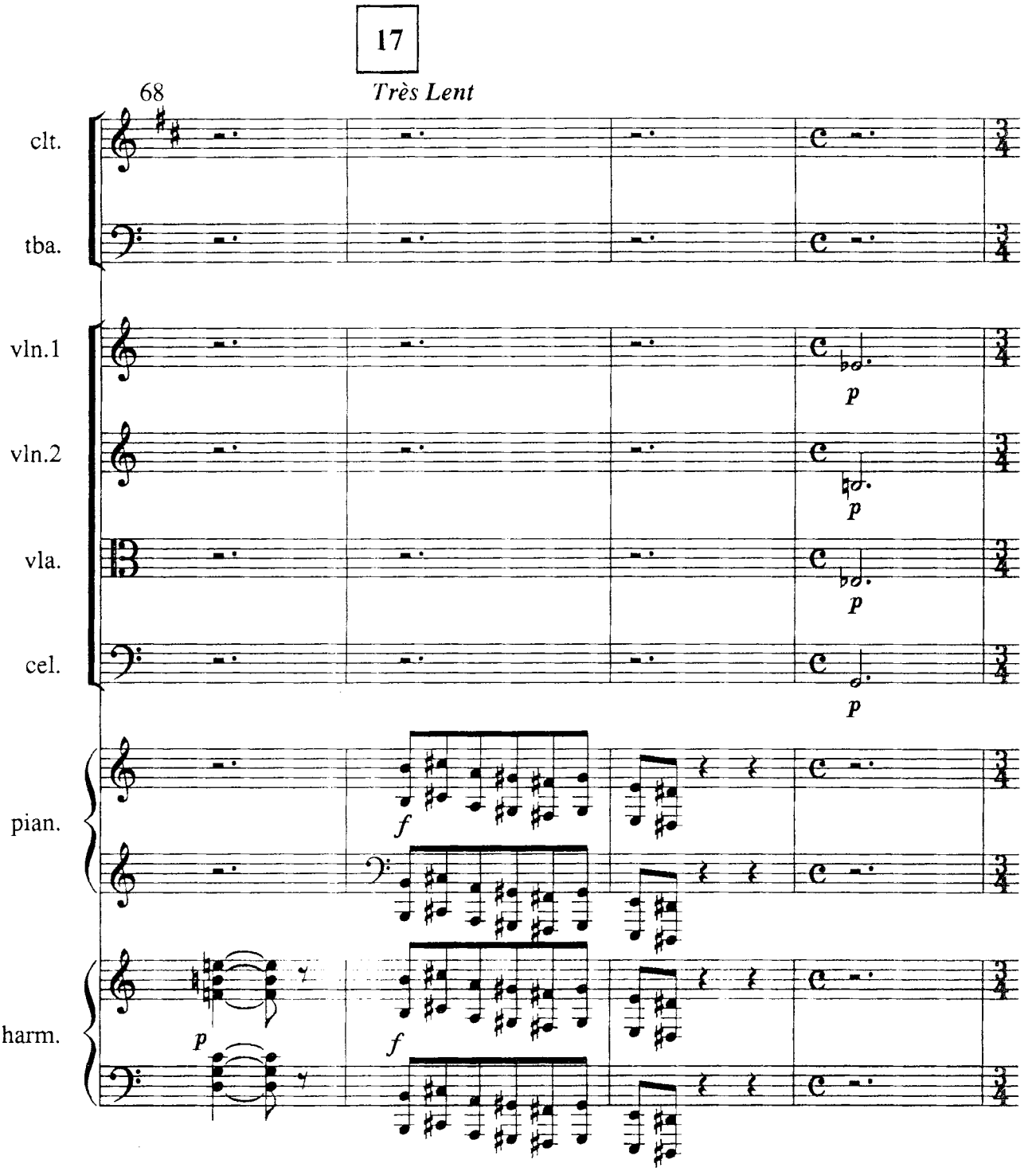


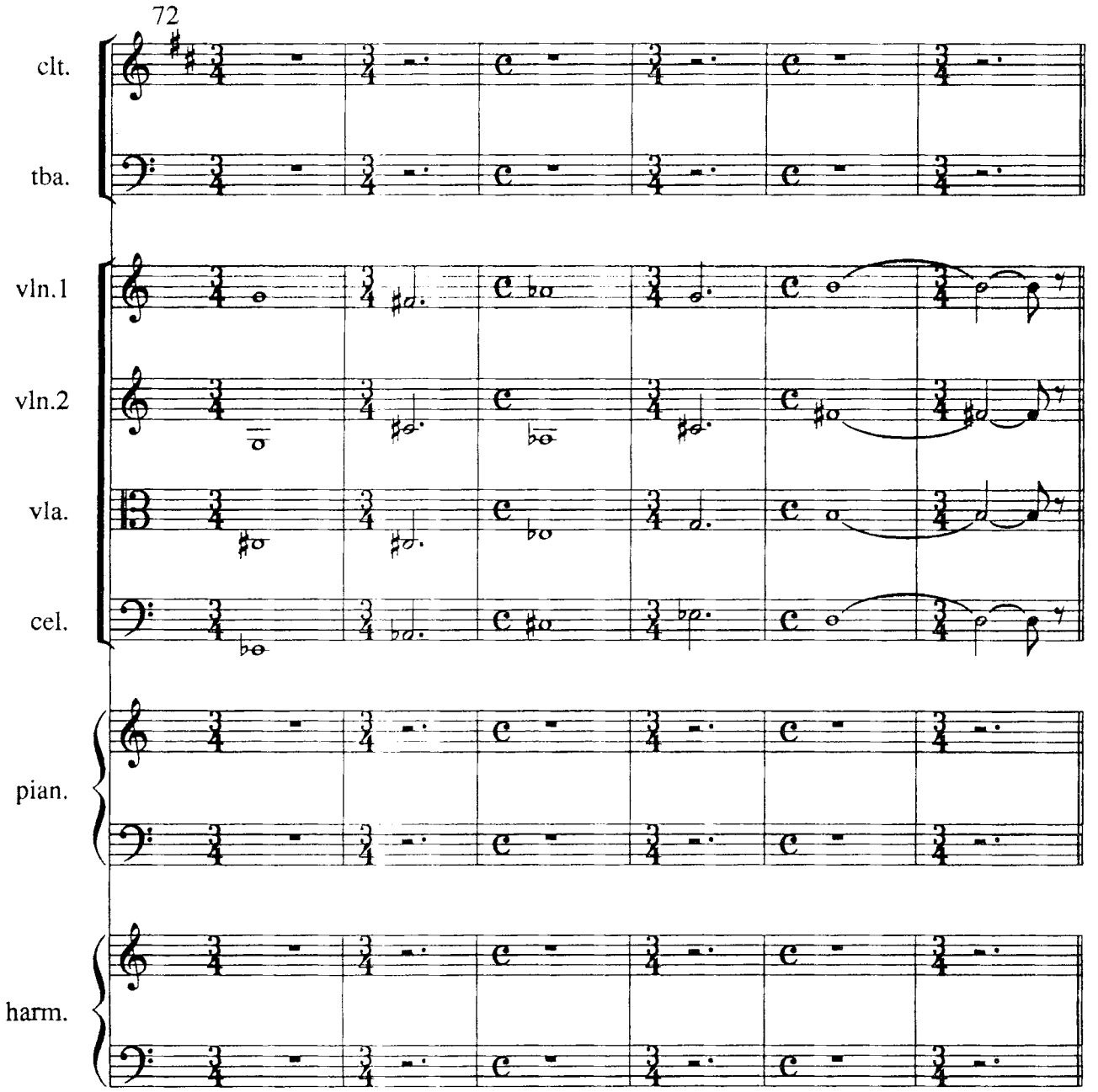

15
Très Lent
58
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
p
p
3
p
p

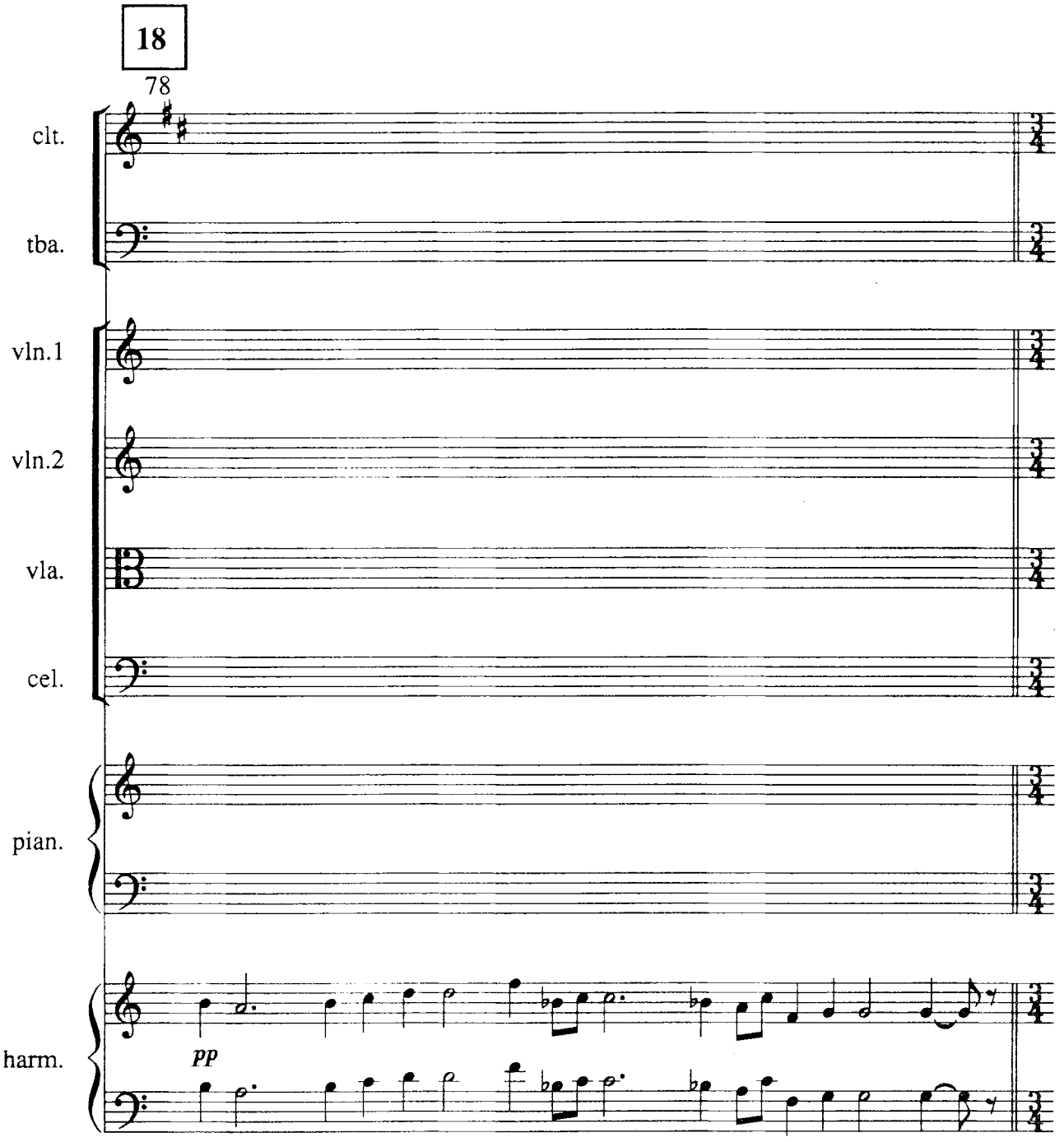
défilé aérien des martyrs qui maudissent uspud
an aerial parade of martyrs cursing uspud

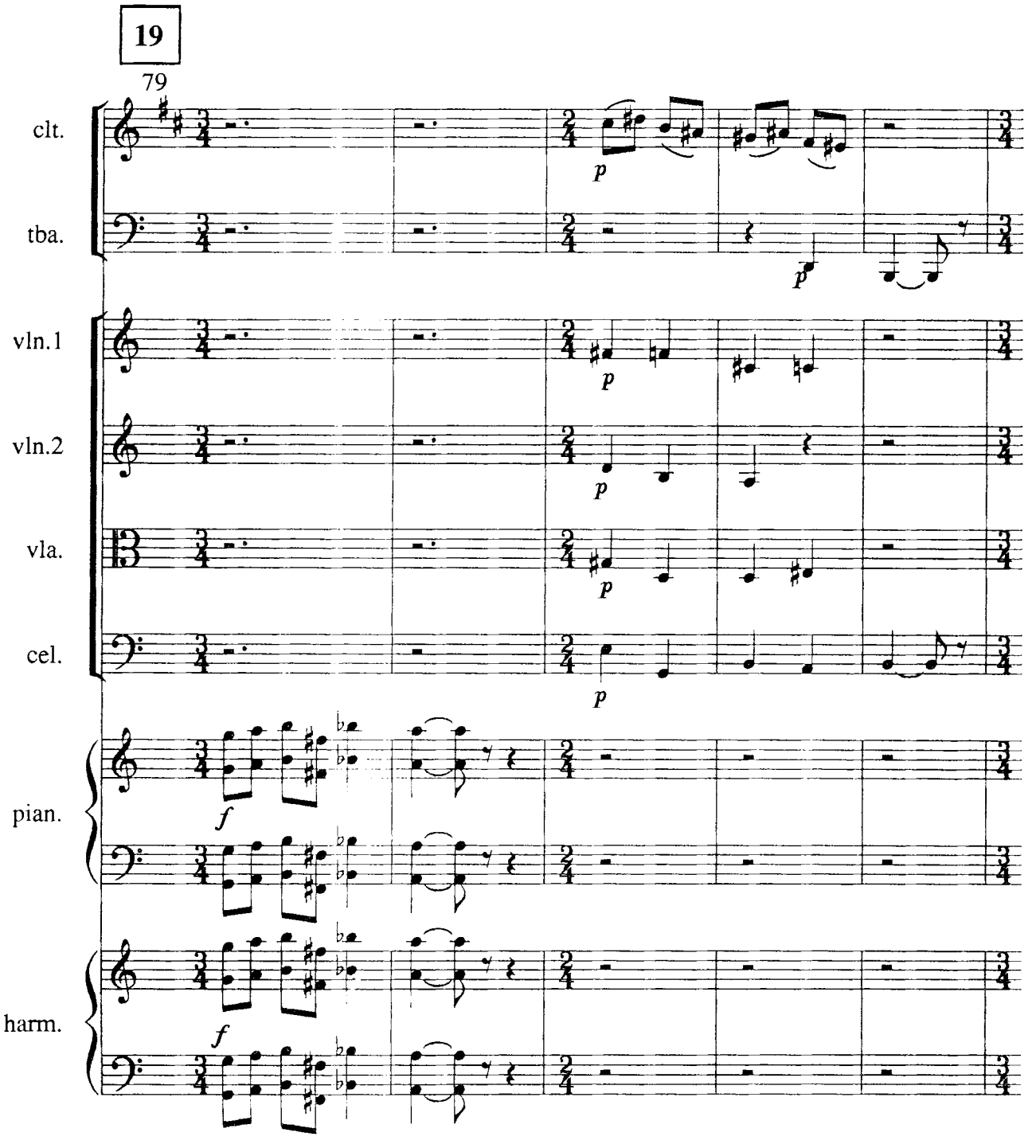


uspud ramasse des pierres et les jette à l'église chrétienne;
uspud picks up stones and throws them at the christian church;

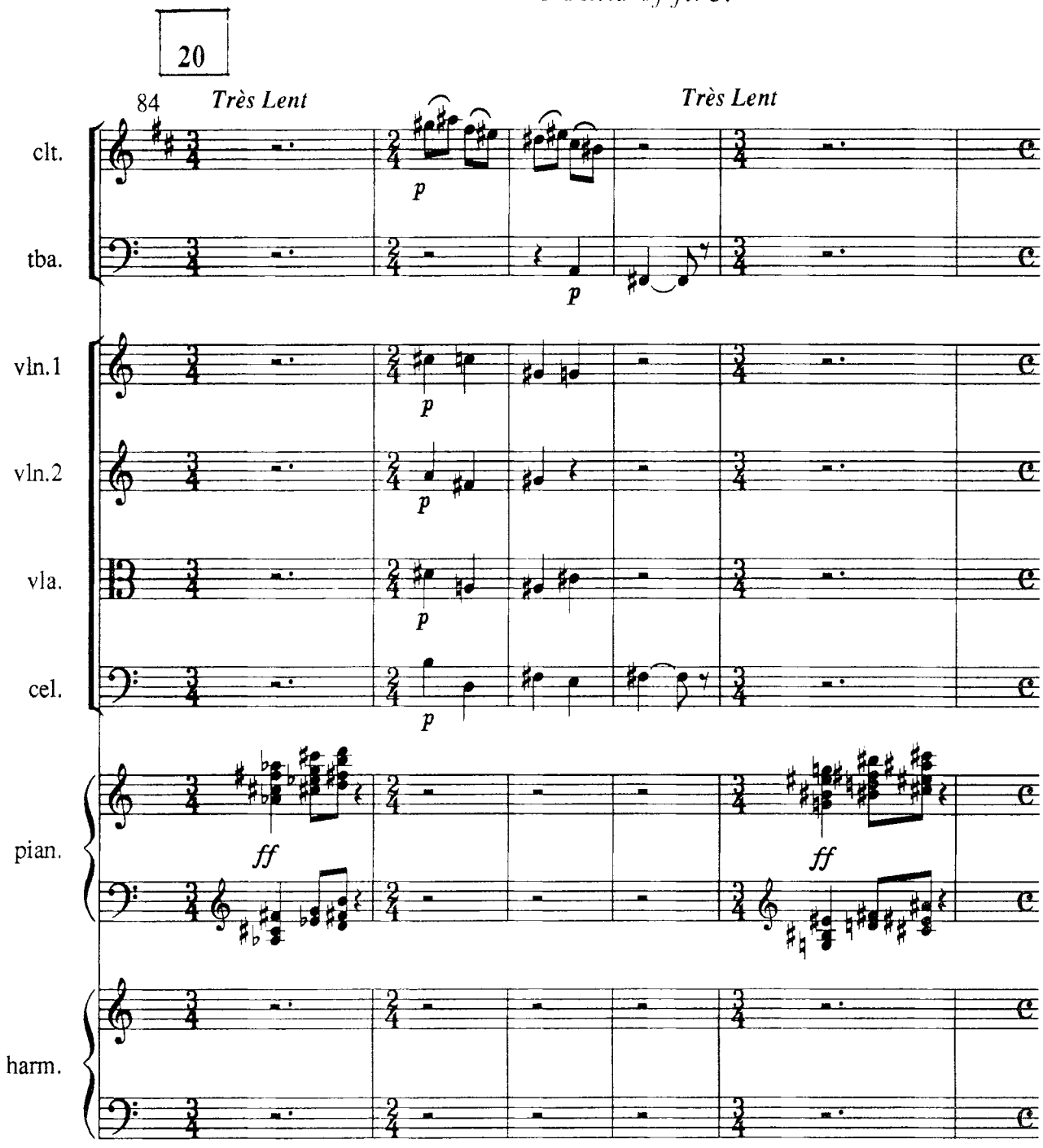



72
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.

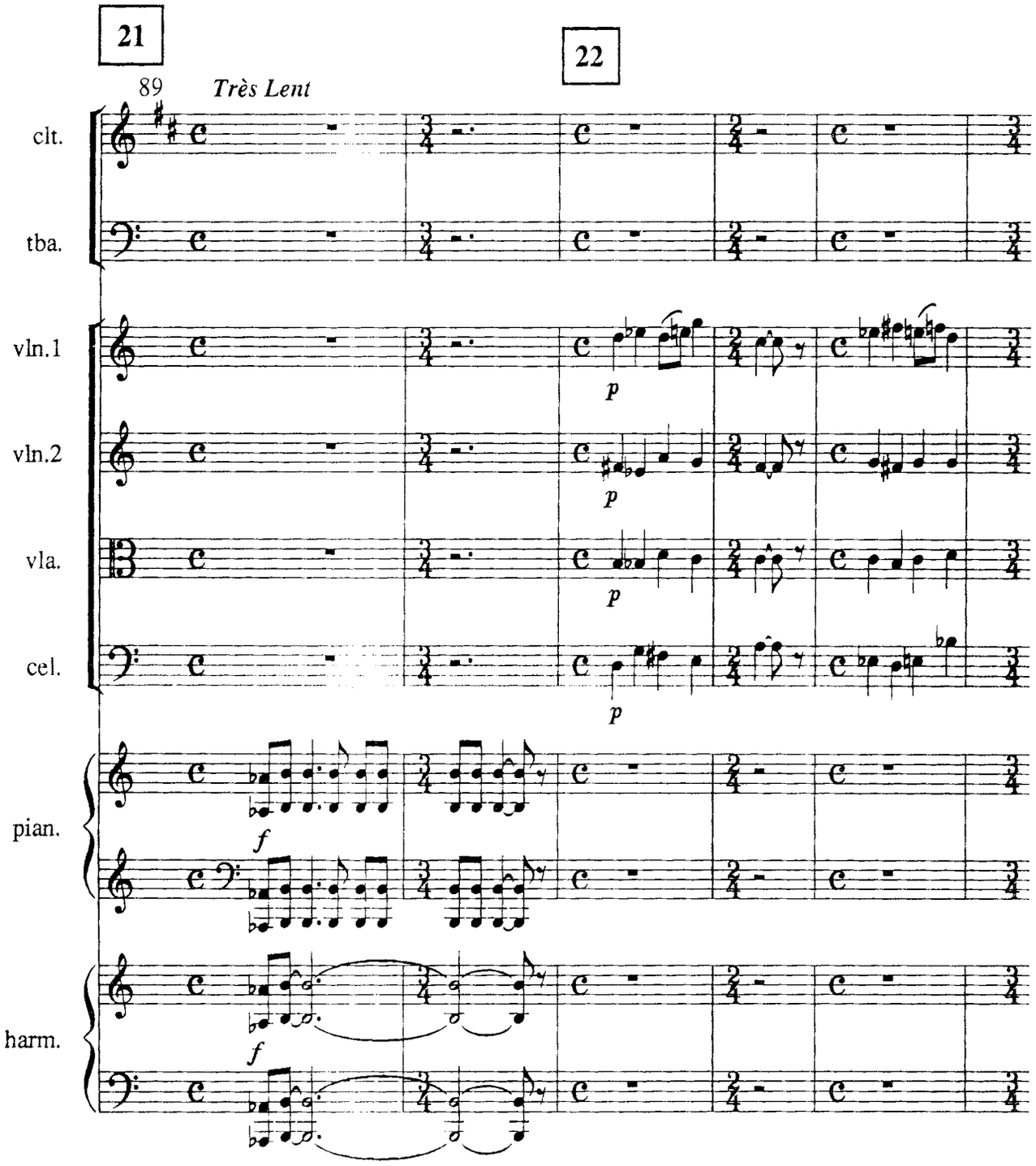

18
78
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
pp

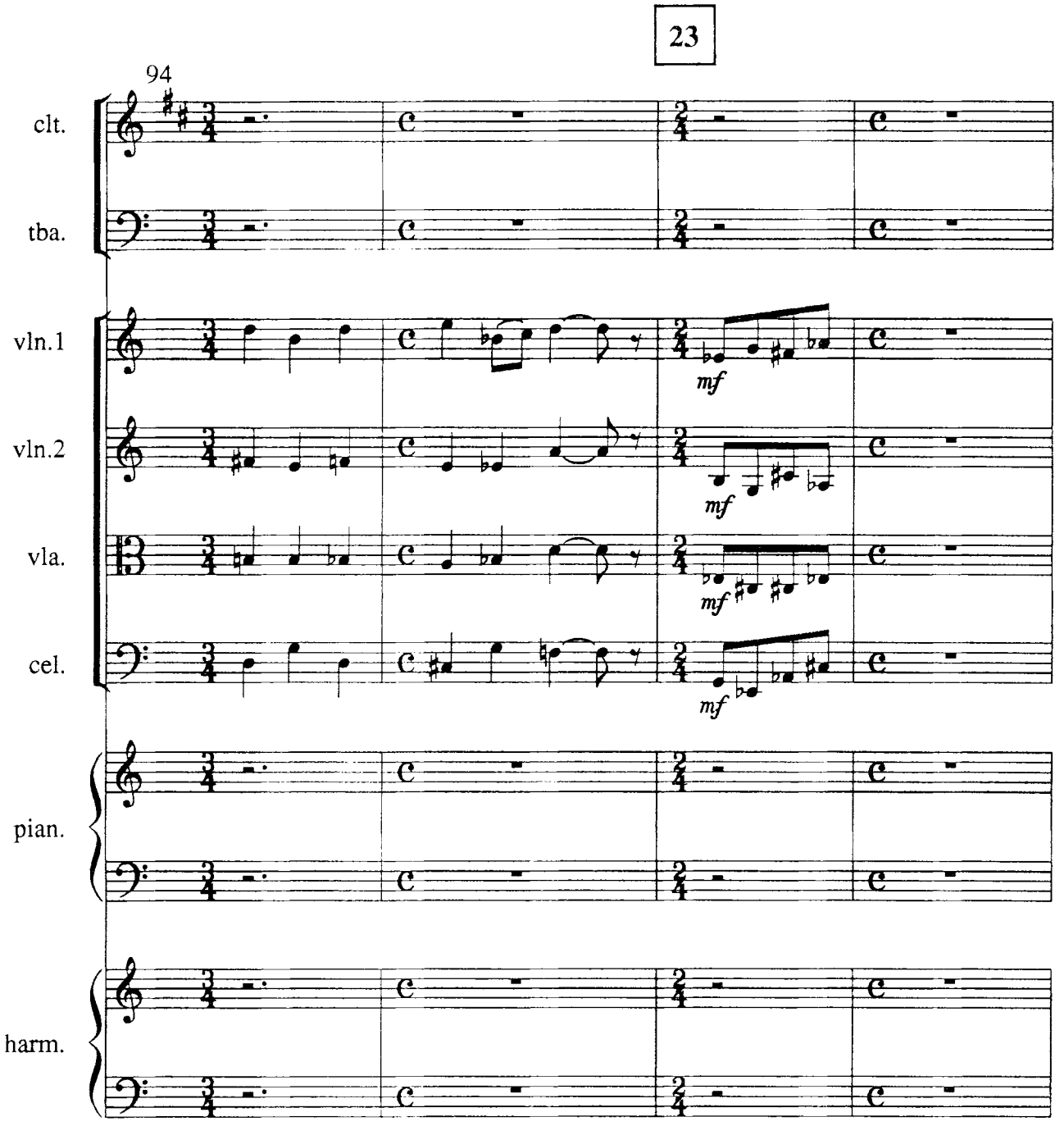

19
79
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
p
f

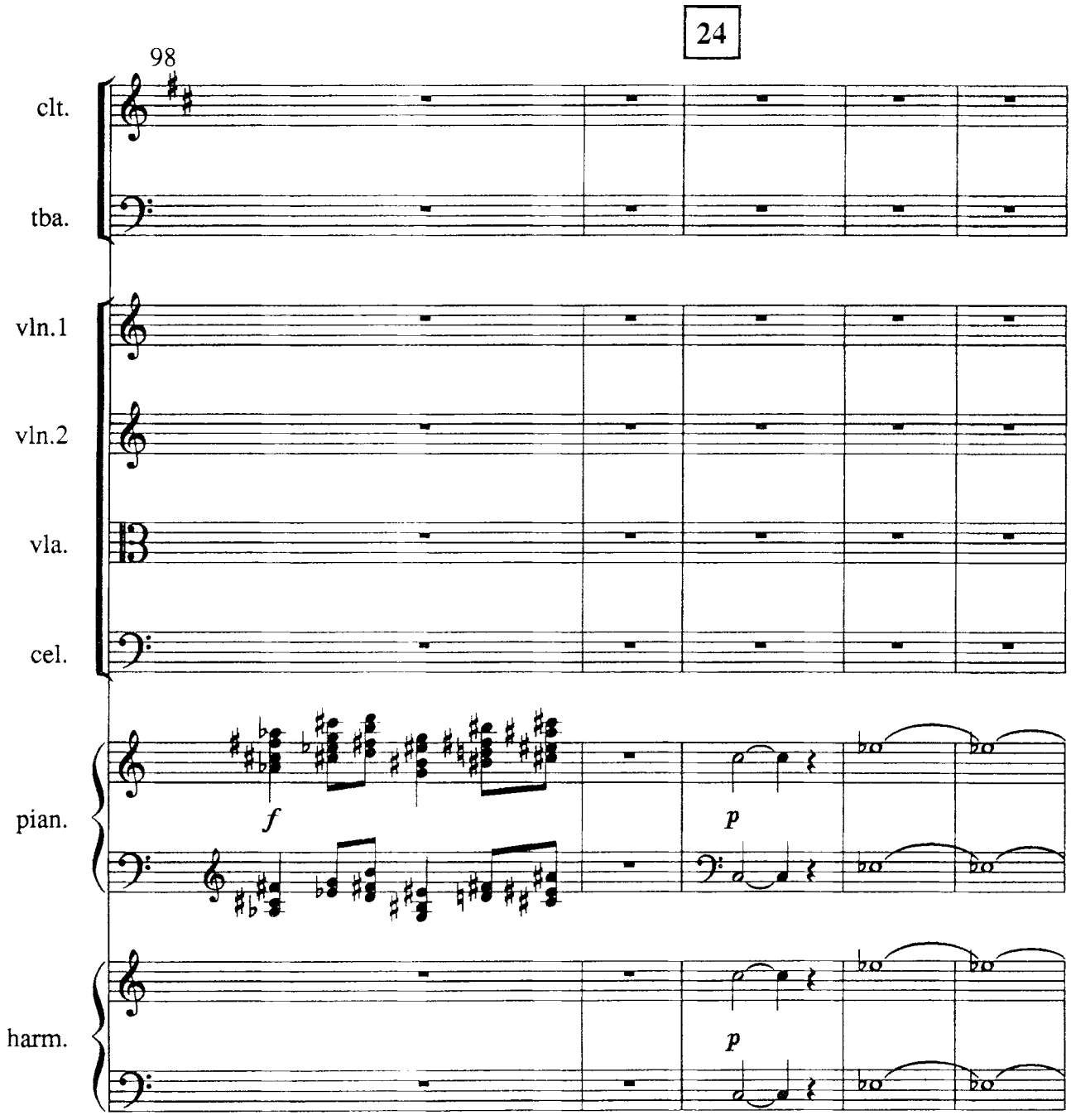
les pierres se changent en globes de feu.
the stones become balls of fire.



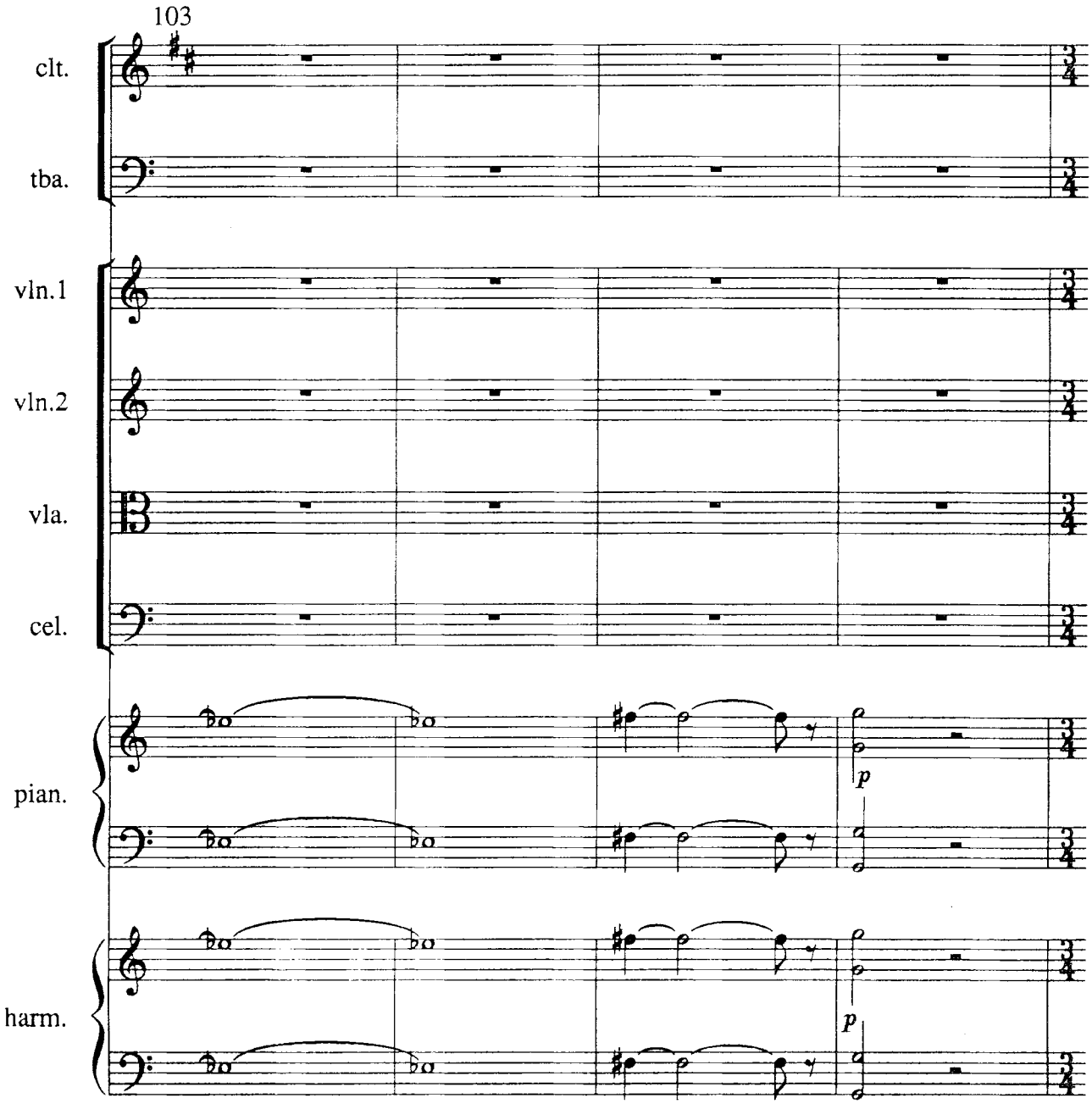
fureur d'uspud.
uspud's fury.

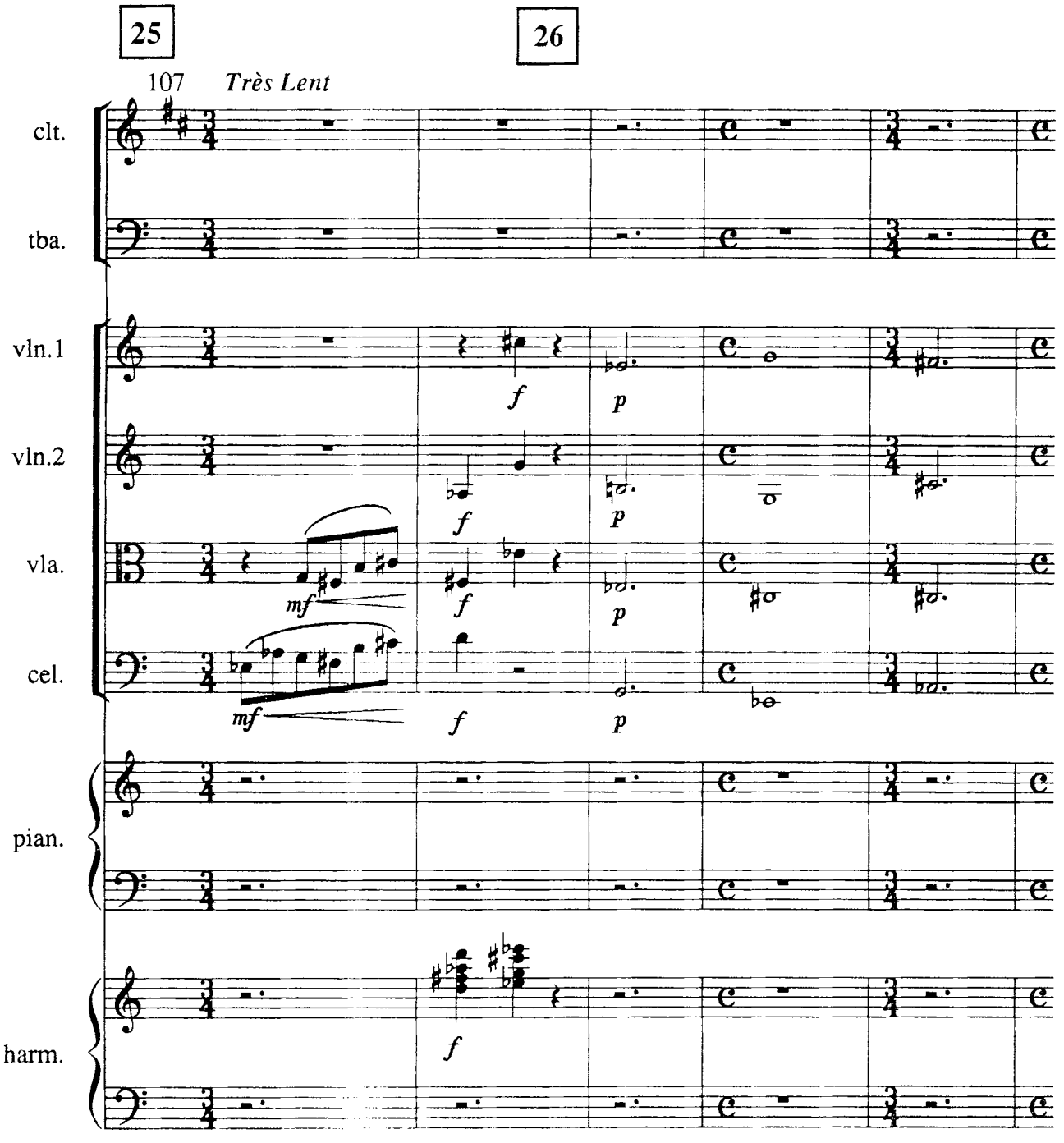


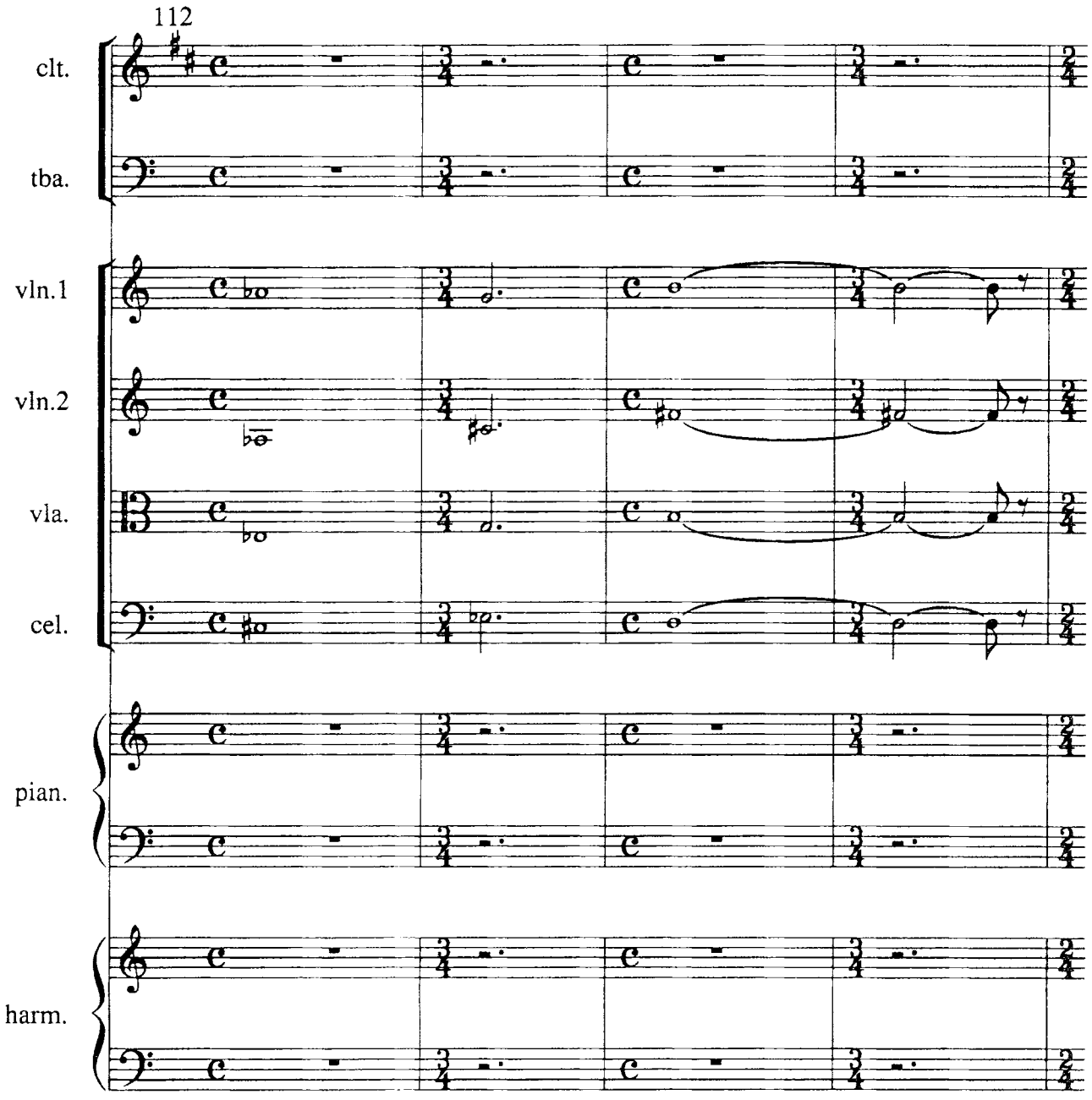

23
94
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
mf
mf
mf
mf

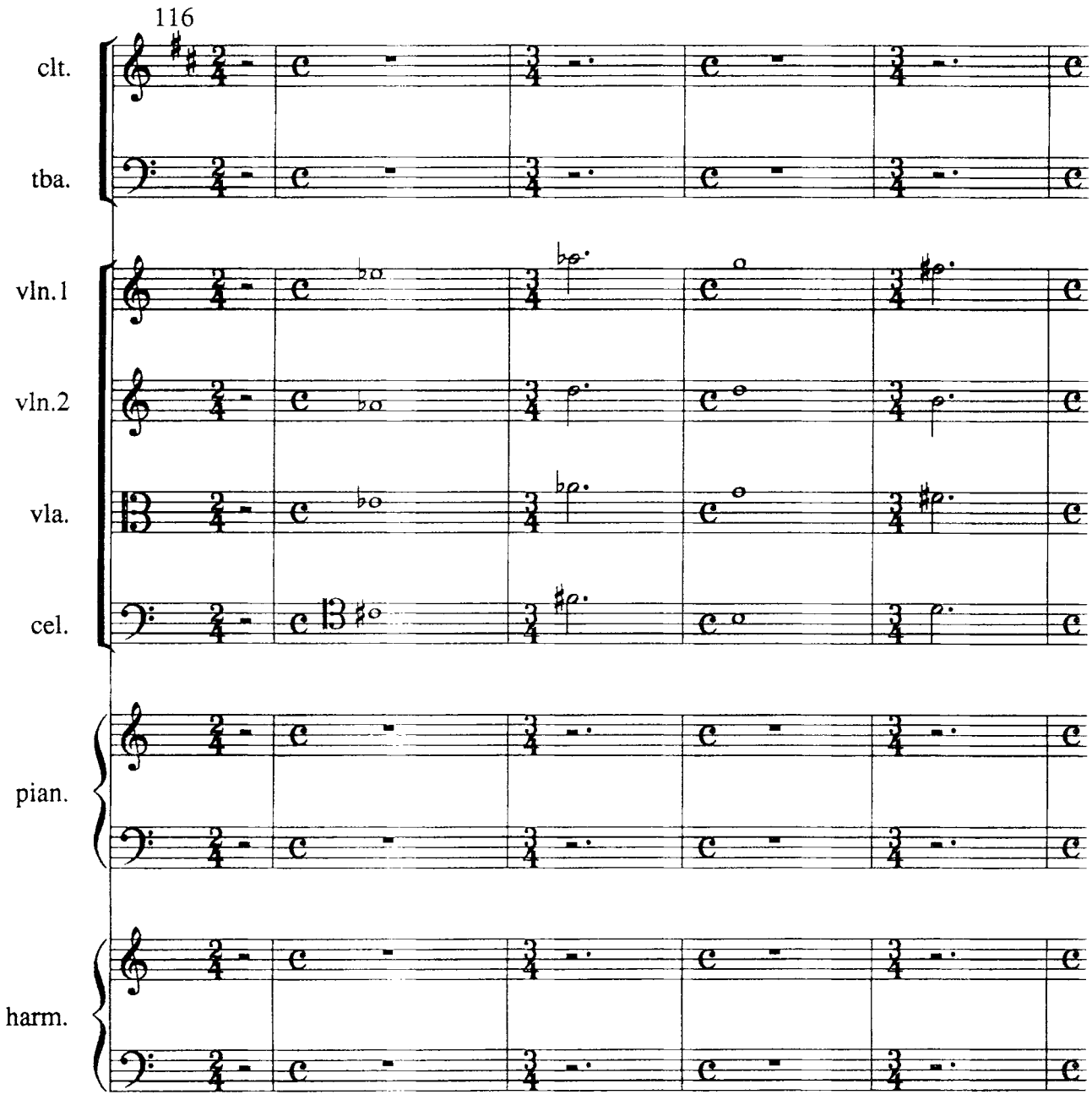

24
98
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
f
p
harm.
p

il prend une pierre plus grosse qui éclate avec fracas; des flammes surgissent du sein desquelles s'échappent des étoiles.
he takes up a bigger stone which bursts with a great crash; flames rush forth and from their midst fly stars.




25
26
107
Très Lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.
mf
f
p


112
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.


116
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pian.
harm.

grande convulsion de la nature
a great convulsion of nature

27

121

Très Lent

clt.

tba.

vln.1

vln.2

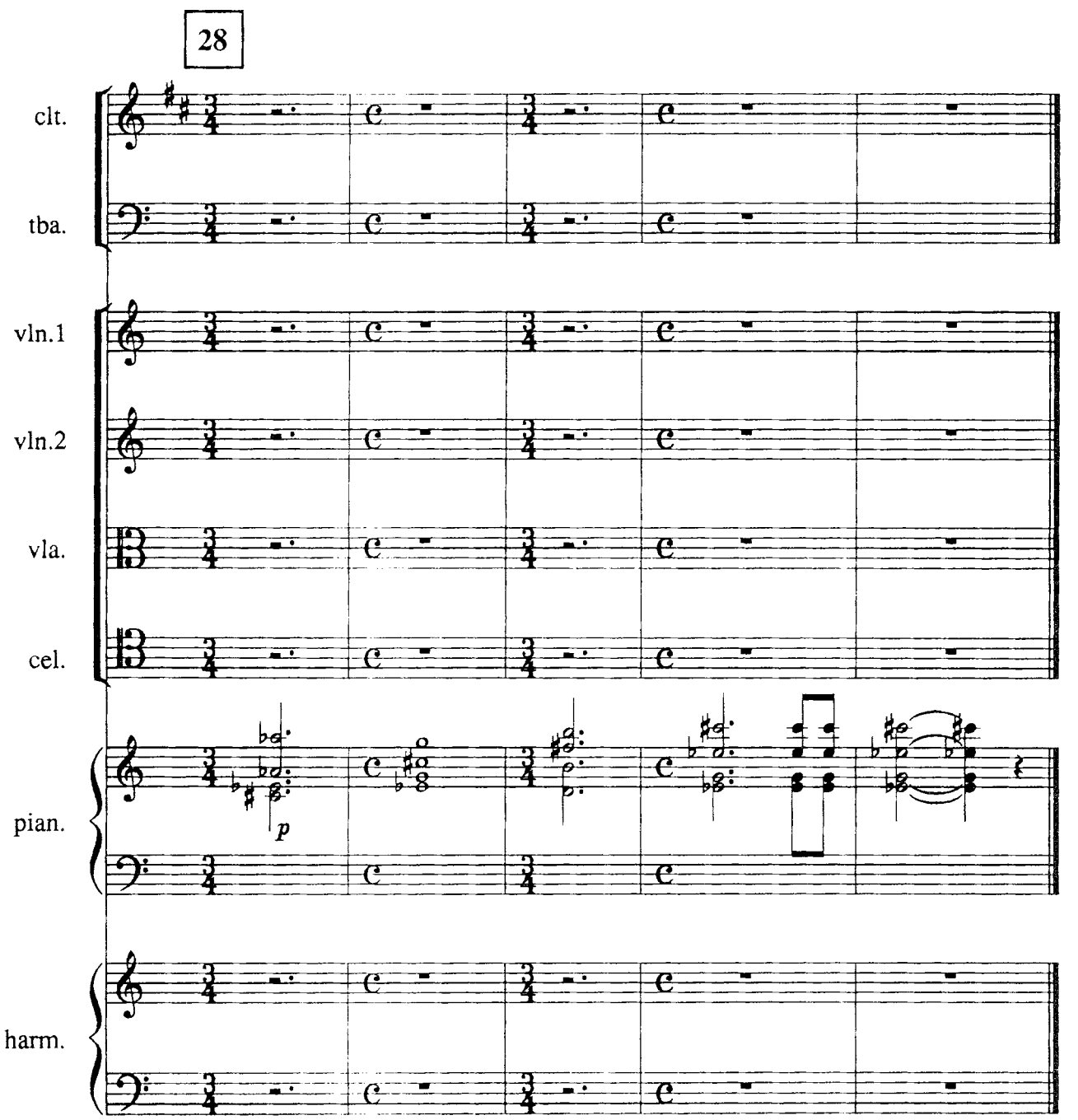
vla.

cel.

pian.

harm.

p

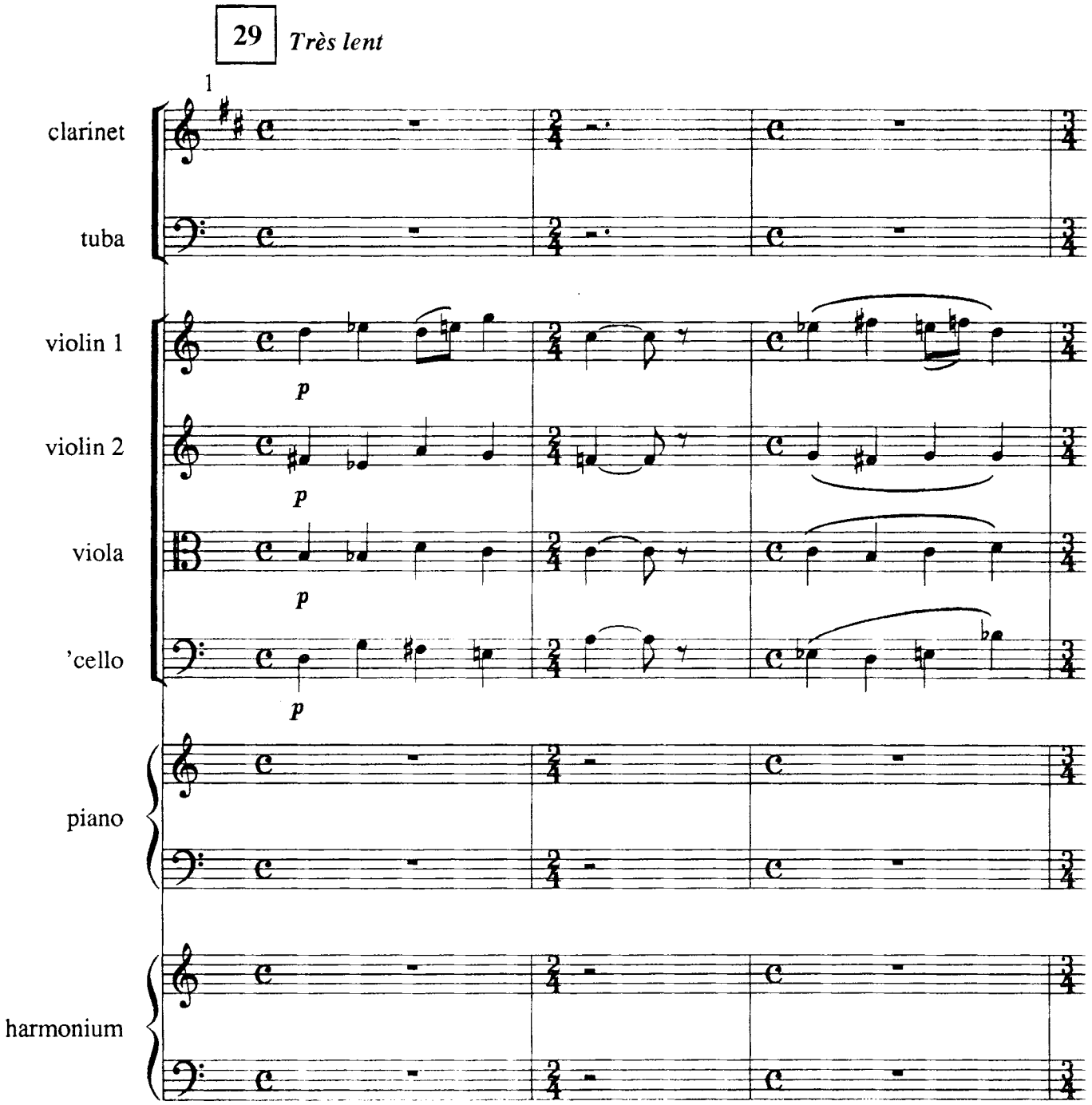


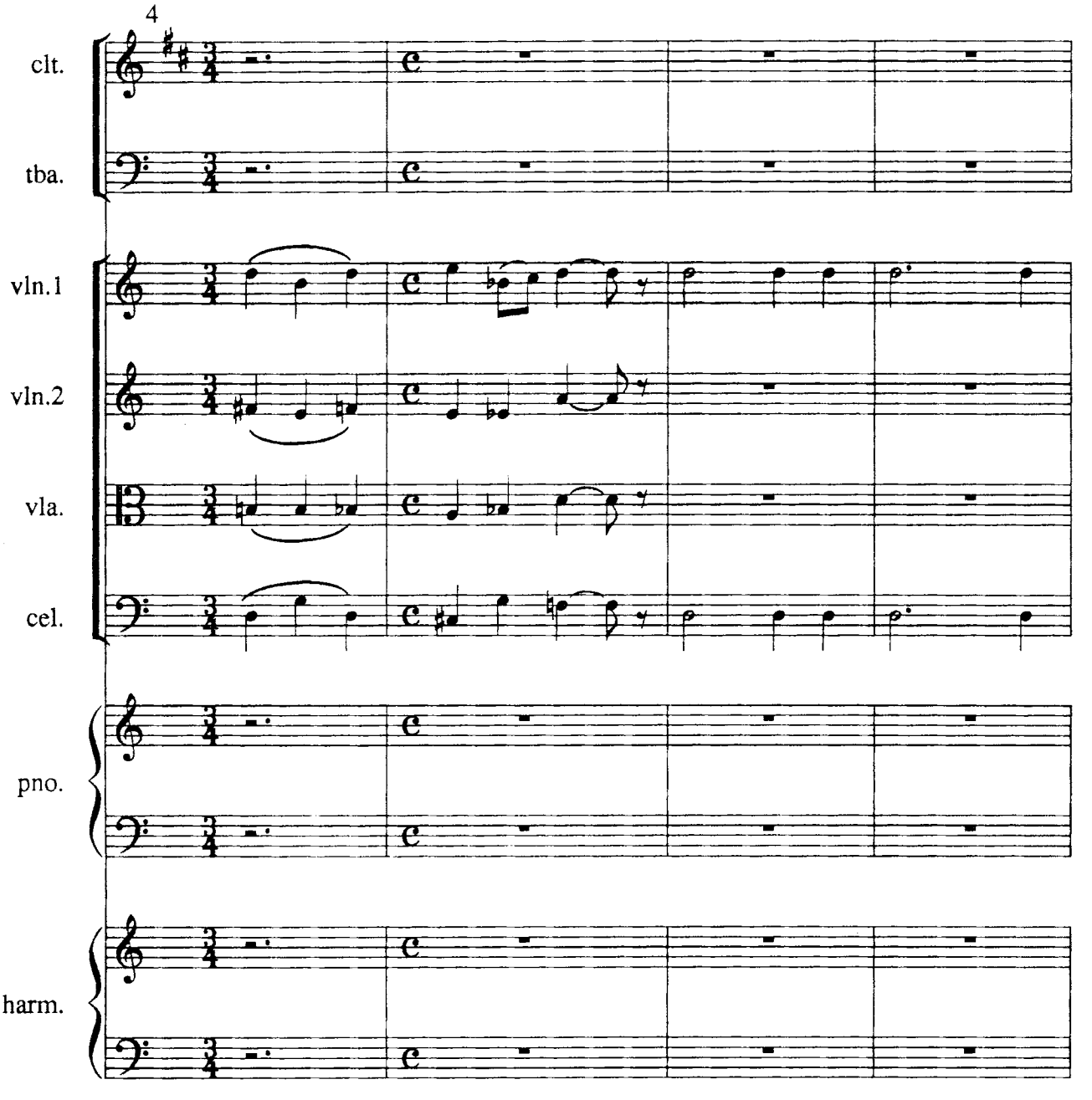
fin du premier acte
end of first act

SECOND ACTE
SECOND ACT

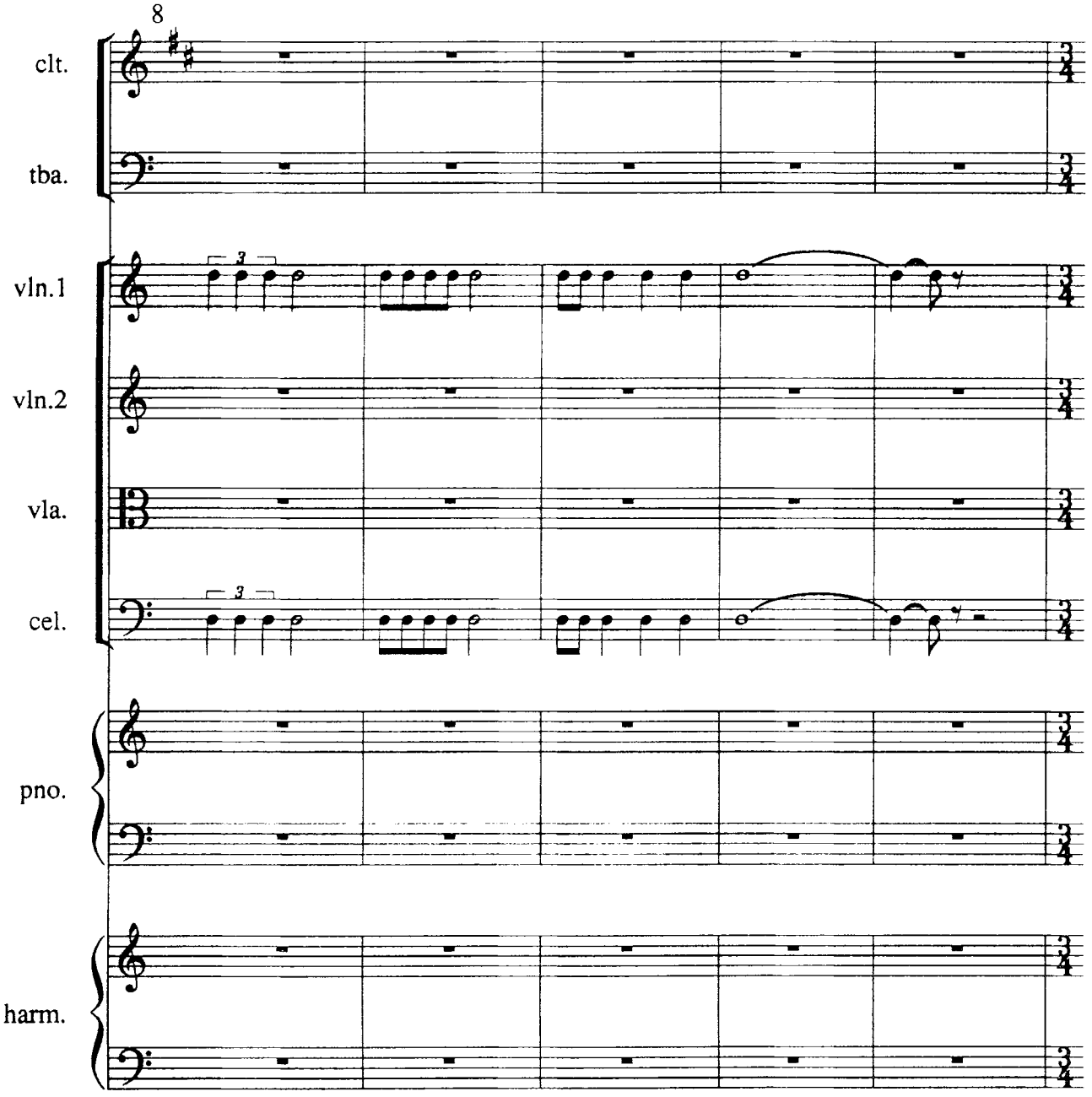
la maison d'uspud
uspud's house

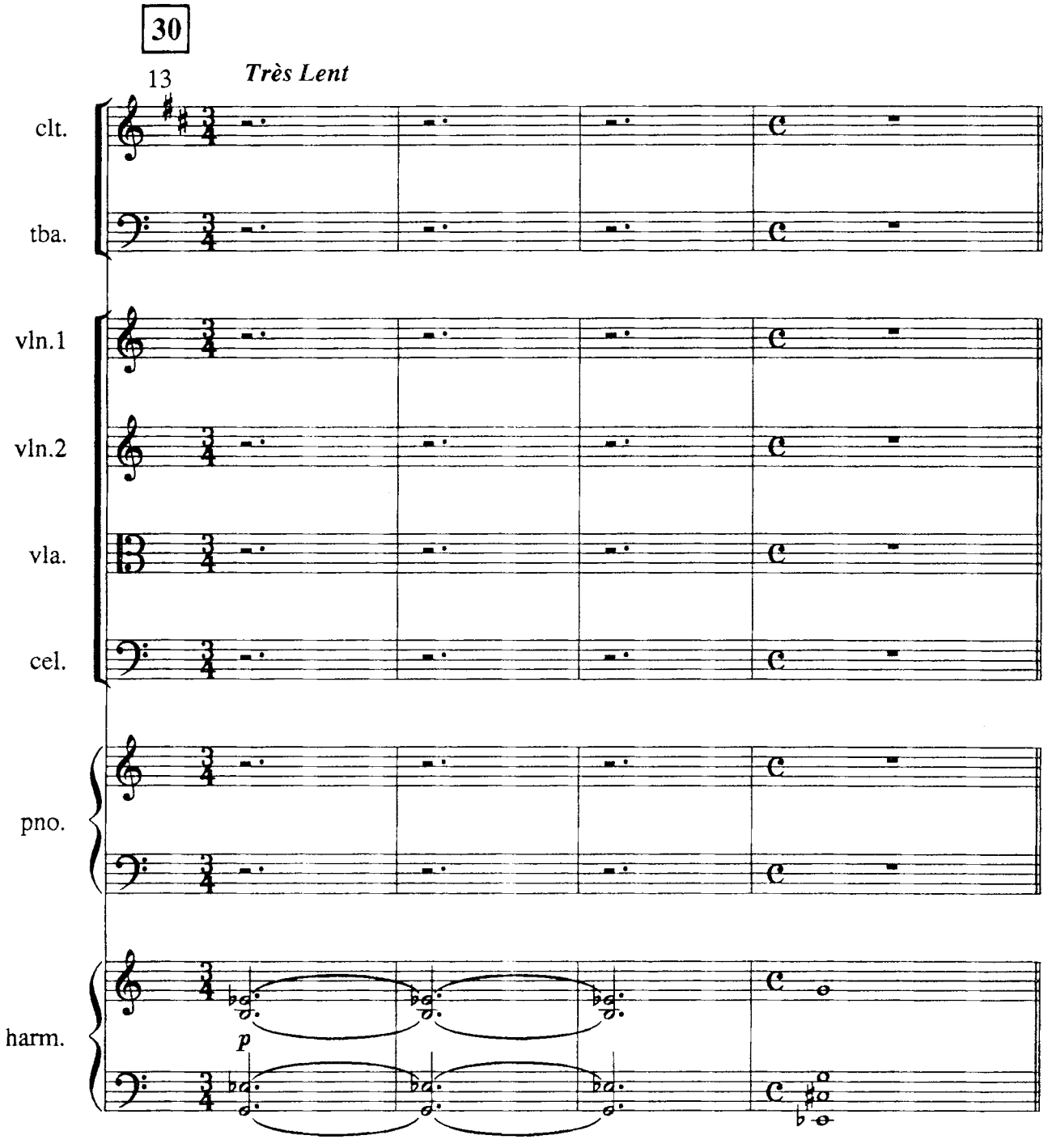
uspud implore ses dieux lares
uspud beseeches his household gods

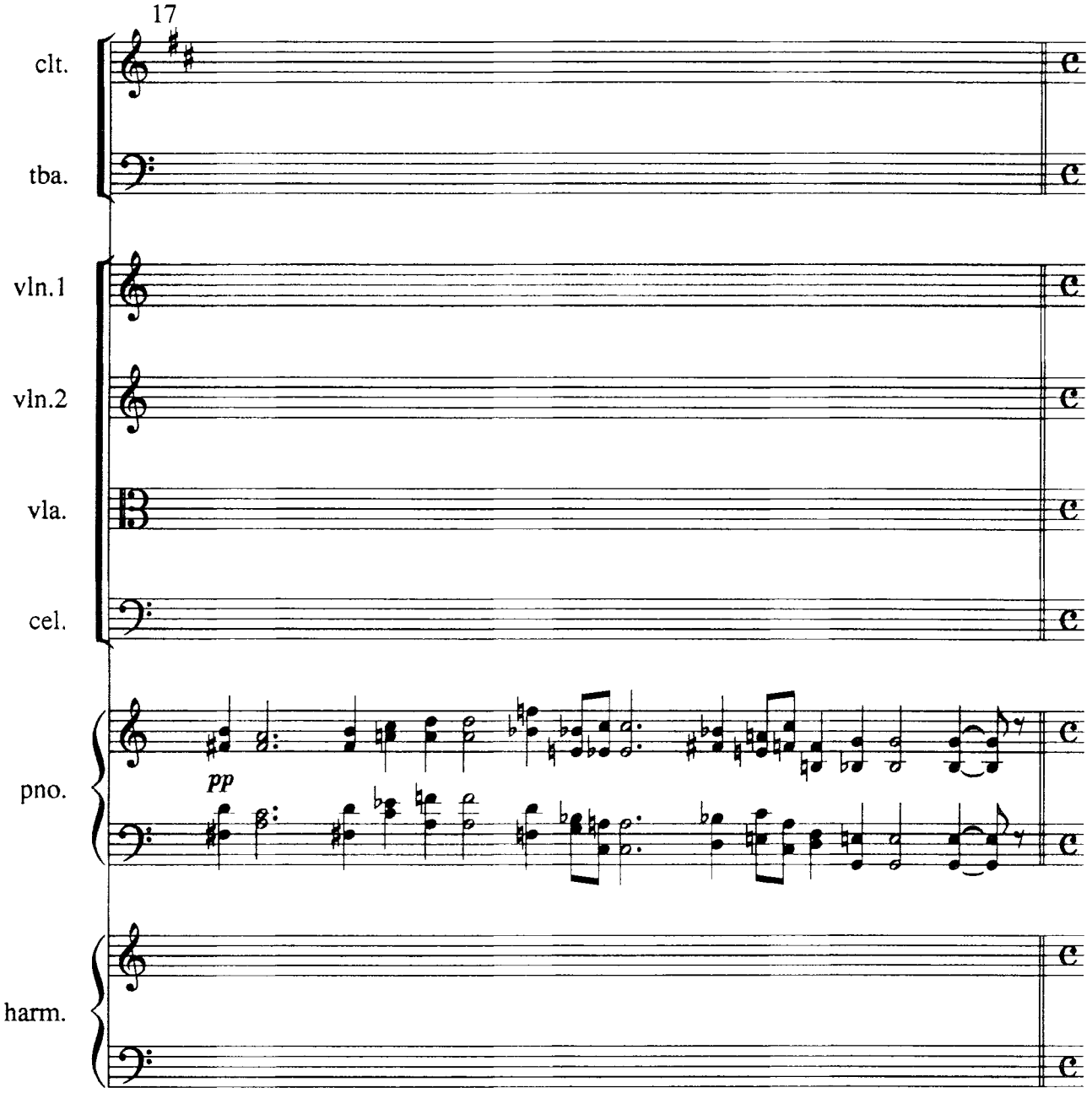



4
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

des démons surgissent et disparaissent aussitot;
demons come forth and instantly disappear;

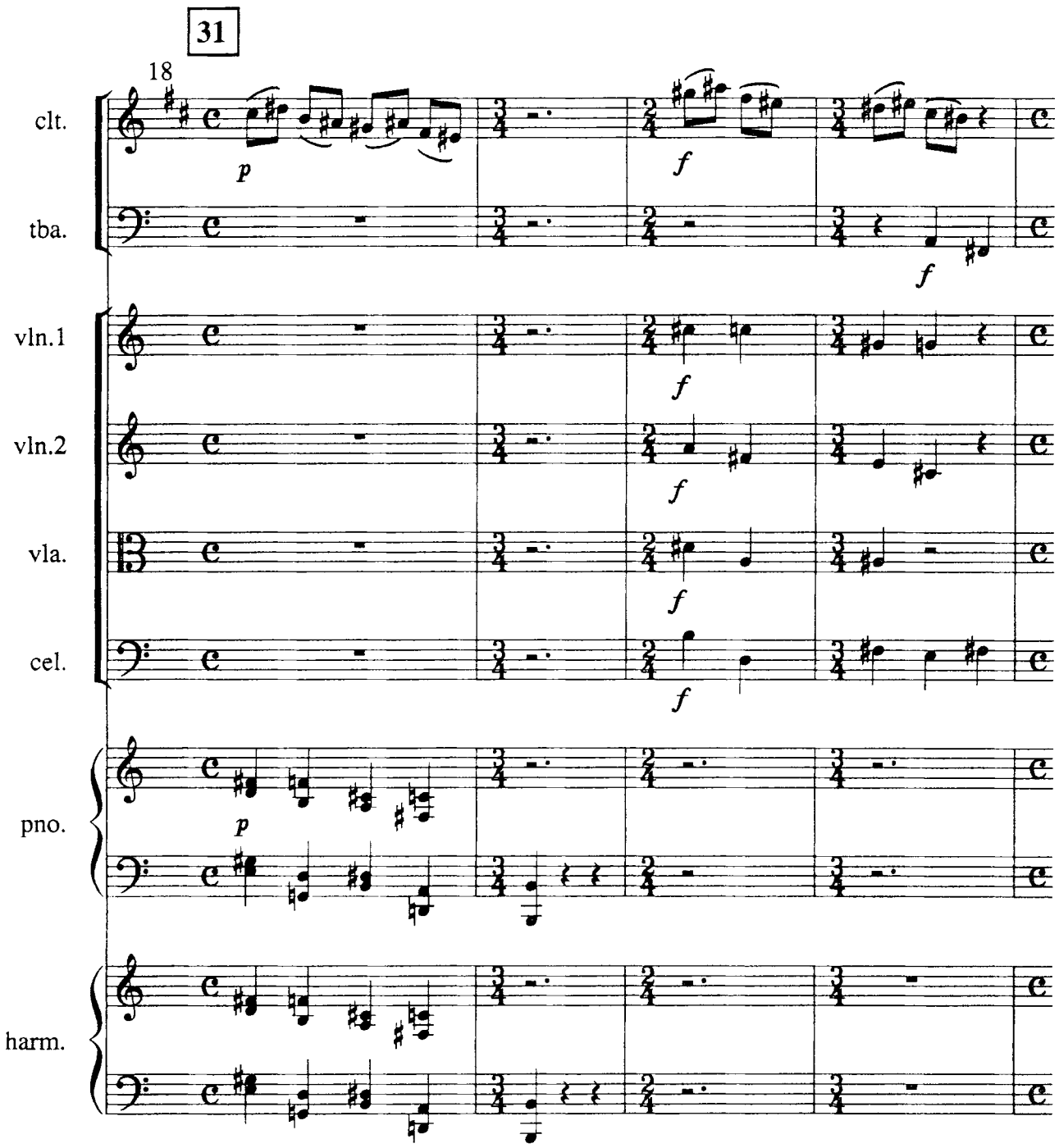


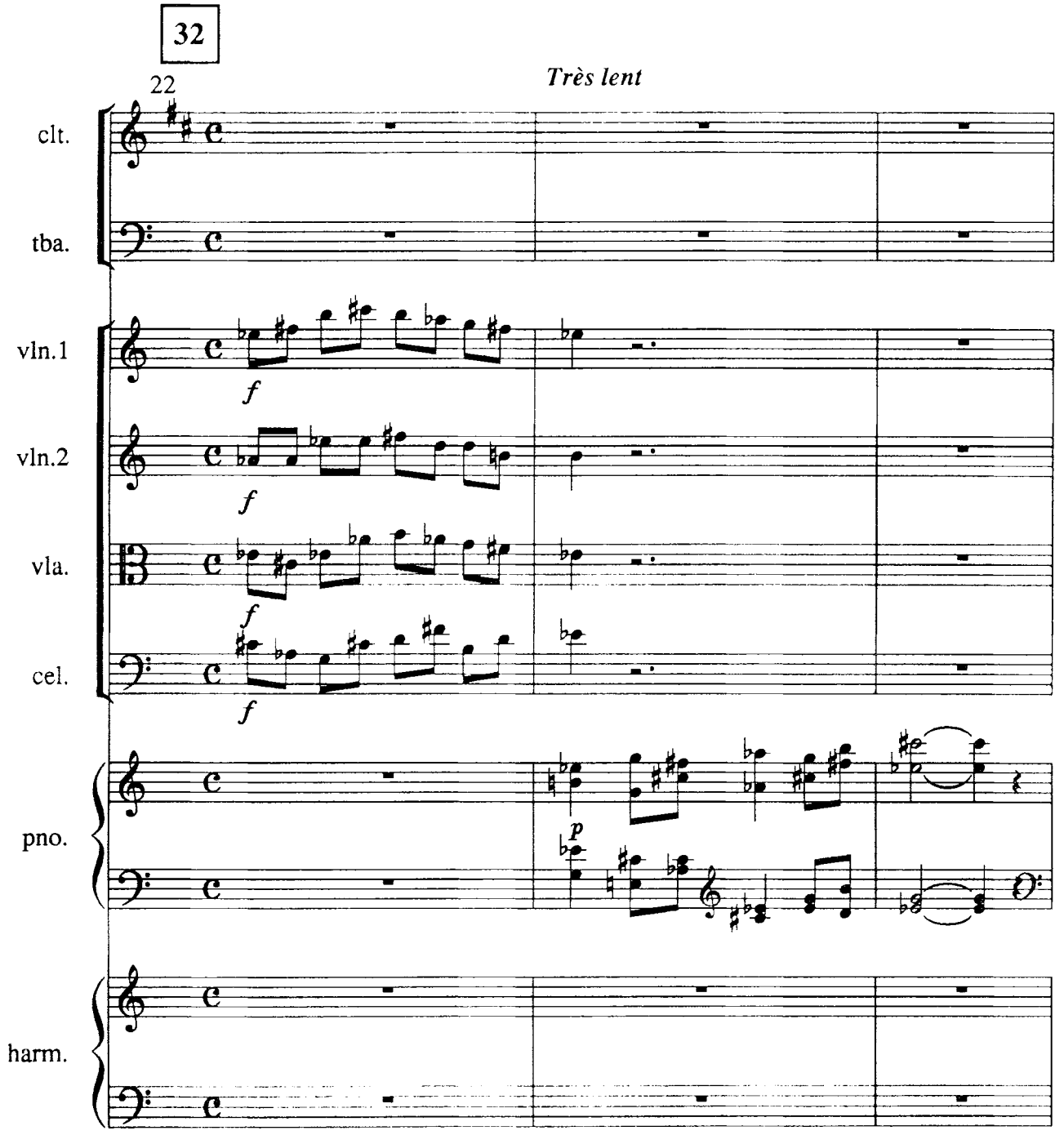

30
13
Très Lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
p


17
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
pp
harm.

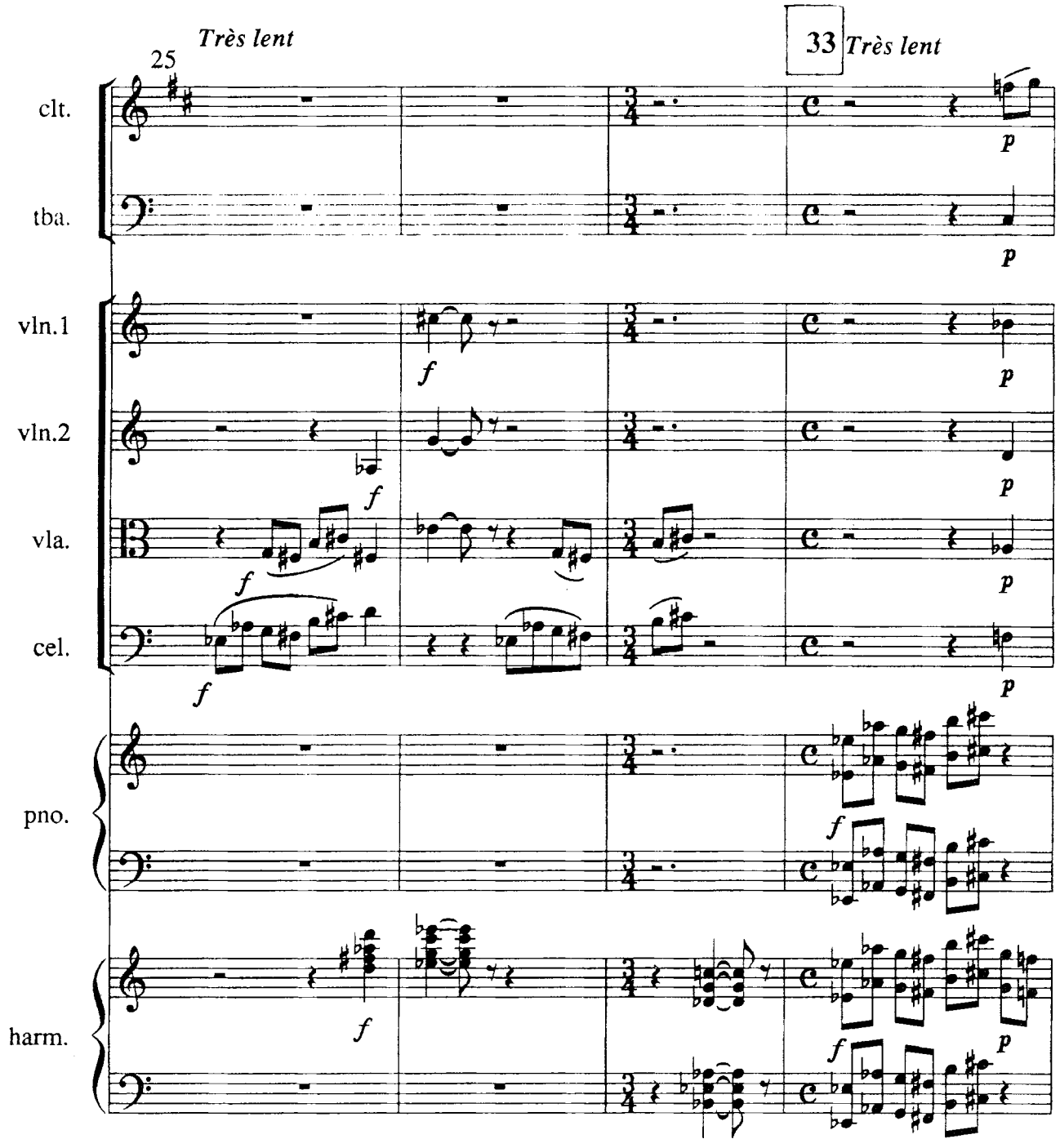
ils affectent la forme d'hommes contrefaits avec des têtes d'animaux tels que:
they take on the shape of deformed men with animal heads such as:

chien, chacal, tortue, chèvre, poisson, lynx, tigre-loup, boeuf, bécasse de mer, licorne, mouton, autilope, fourmi, araignée, gnou, serpent, agouti, bouc bleu, babouin, cuculu, crabe, albatros, pacre, autruche, taupe, secrétaire, vieux taureau, chenille rouge, bonti, pogos, sanglier, crocodile, buffle, etc.
dog, jackal, tortoise, goat, fish, lynx, tiger-wolf, ox, snipe, narwhal, sheep, antilope, ant, spider, gnu, snake, agouty, blue goat, baboon, cuckooloo, crab, albatross, pacre, ostrich, mole, secretary, old bull, red caterpillar, bonti, pogos, wild boar, crocodile, buffalo, etc.

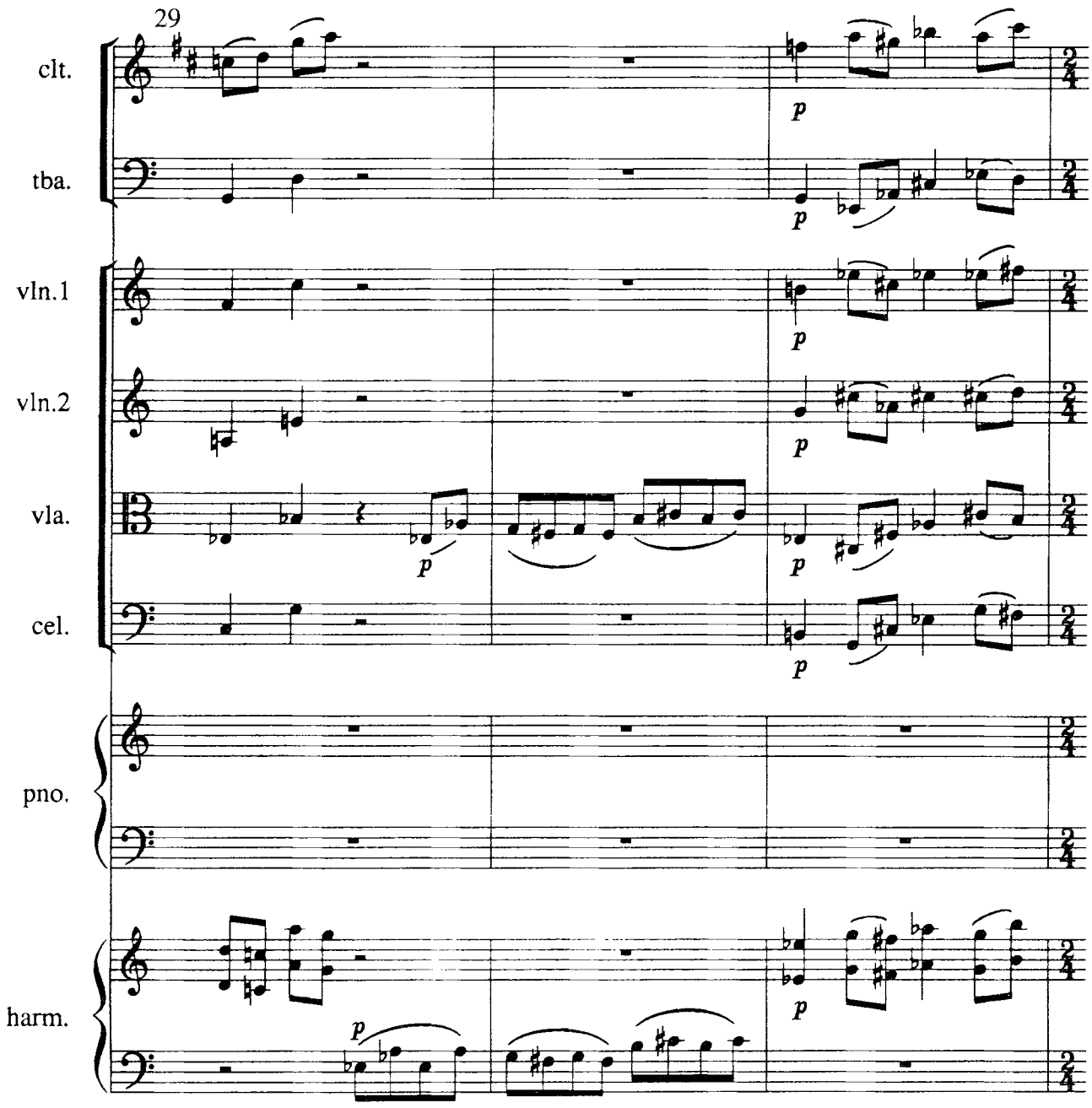



32
22
Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
f
p

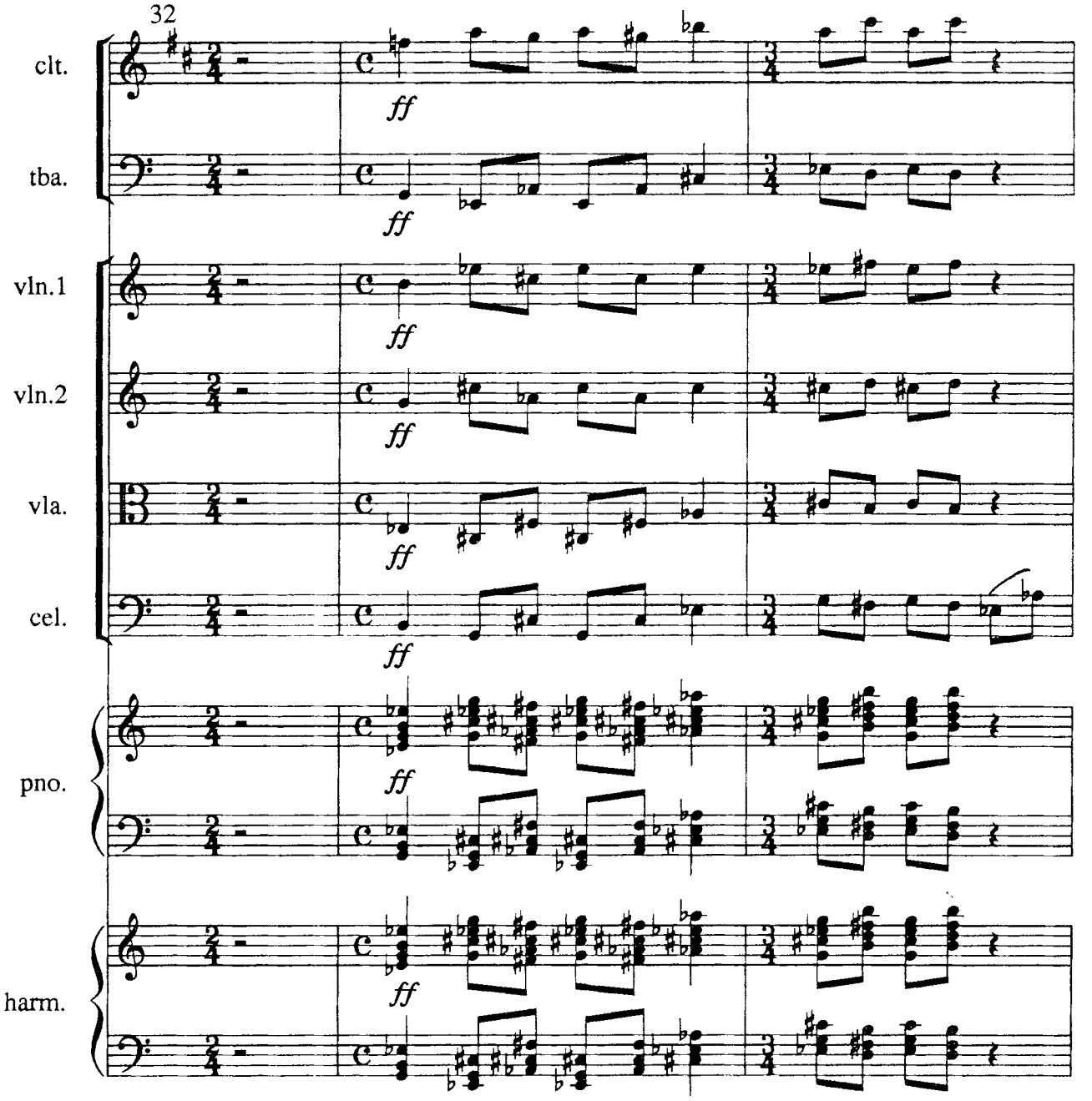
uspud effrayé veut s'enfuir, mais les démons l'entourent et le bousculent; il essaie de se broyer la tête, mais les murs reculent et suintent le sang.
uspud is afraid and tries to run away, but the demons surround him and knock him down; he tries to smash his head, but the walls draw back and seep blood.



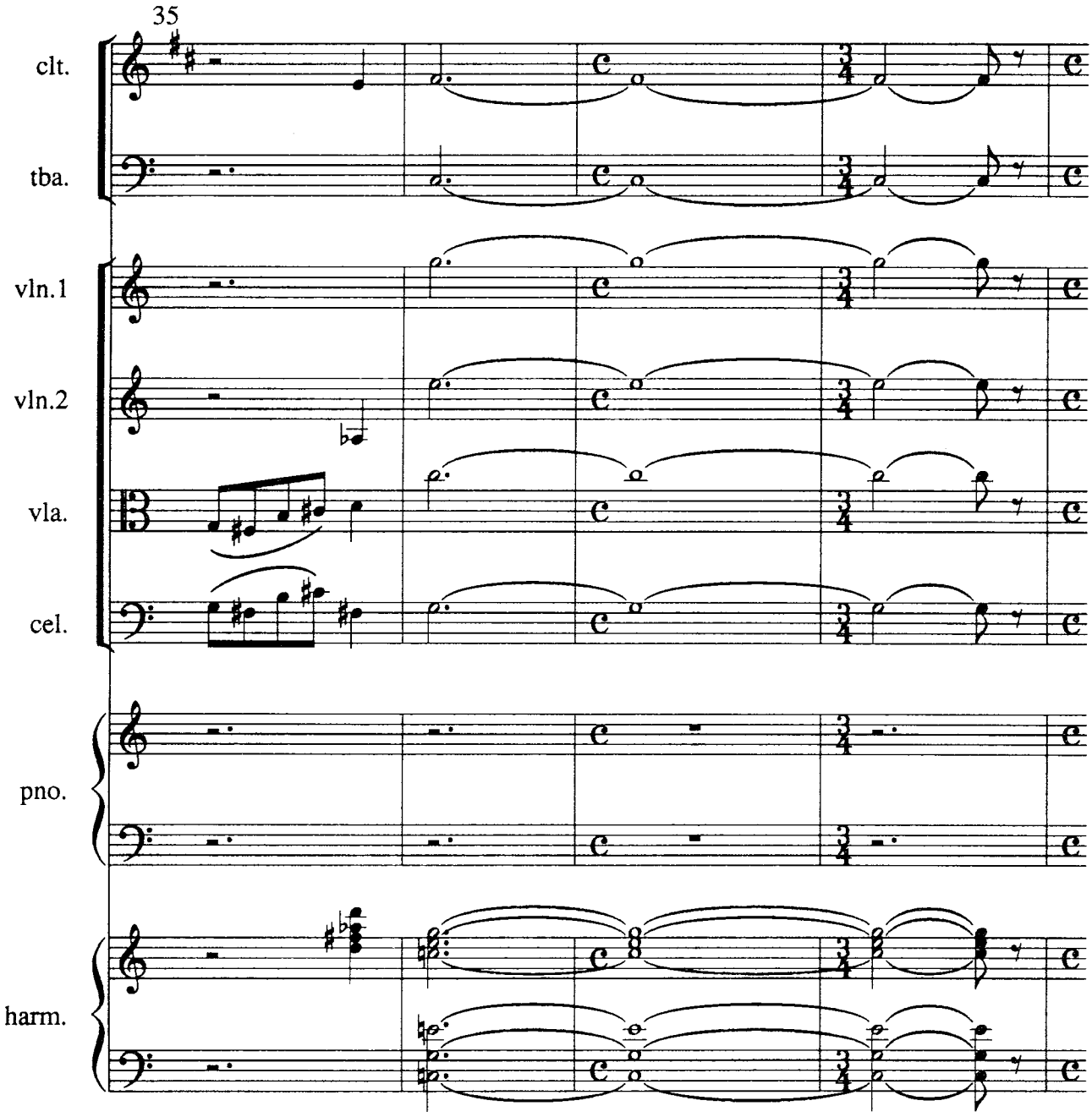
dans l'air on voit la vision d'un tribunal paien, devant lequel on torture les victimes.
in the air can be seen a vision of a pagan court of justice, before which victims are tortured.



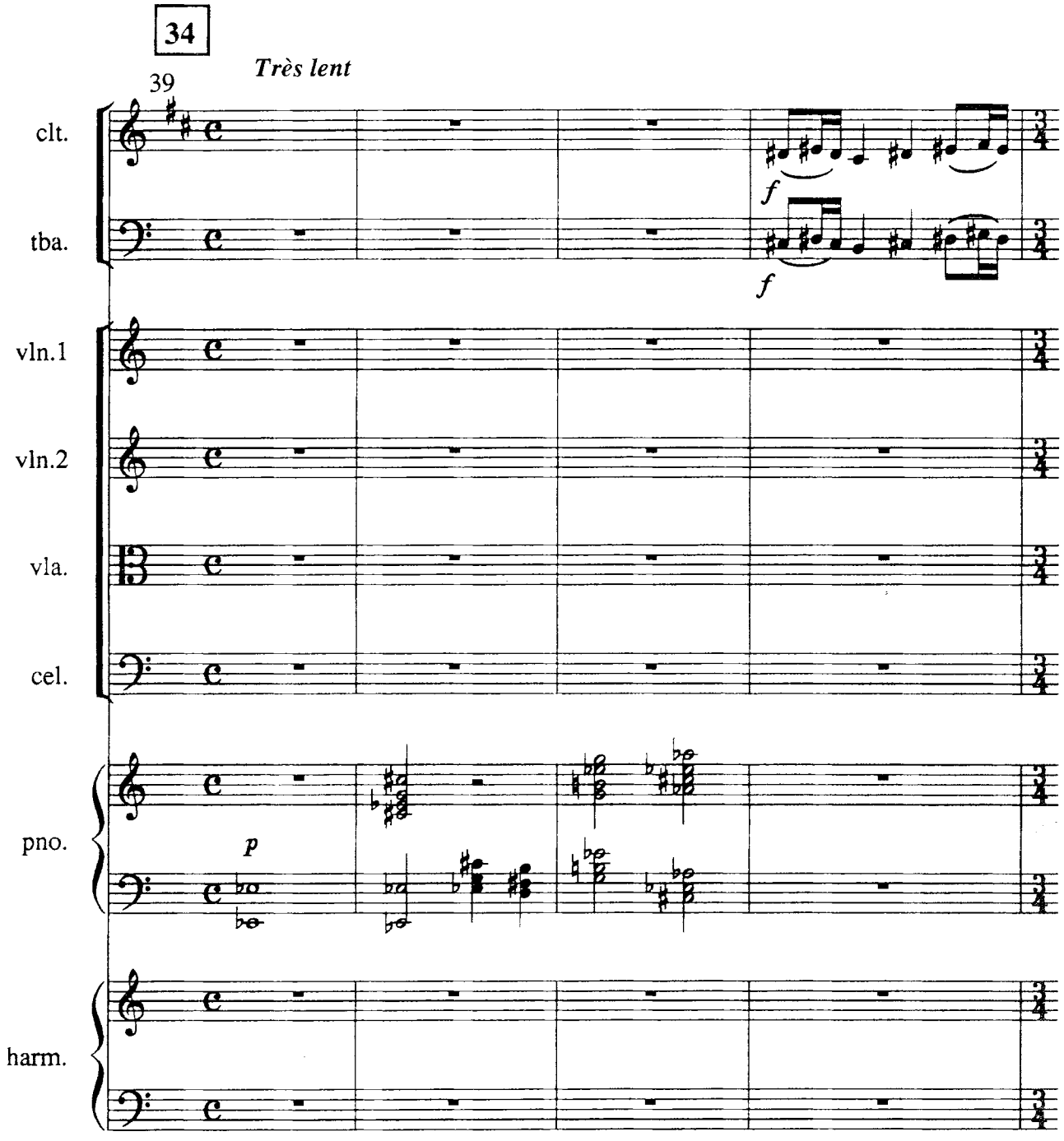
uspud dans son angoise, implore le ciel.
uspud in his anguish calls upon heaven.



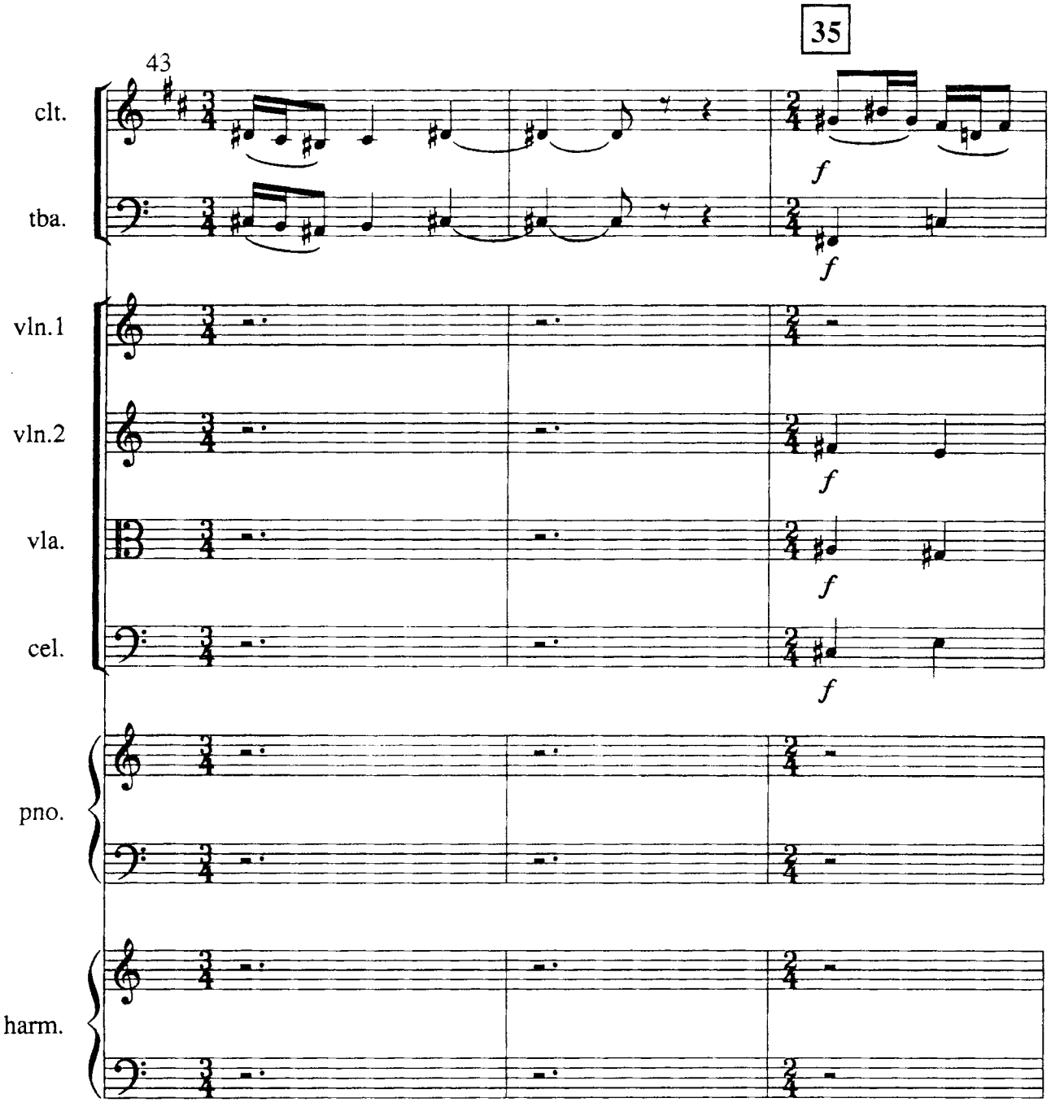
l'église chrétienne apparait de nouveau, blanche comme la neige et transparente comme le cristal; des lotus naissent sous ses pieds.
the christian church appears once more, white as snow and transparent as crystal; lotus flowers bloom beneath her feet.

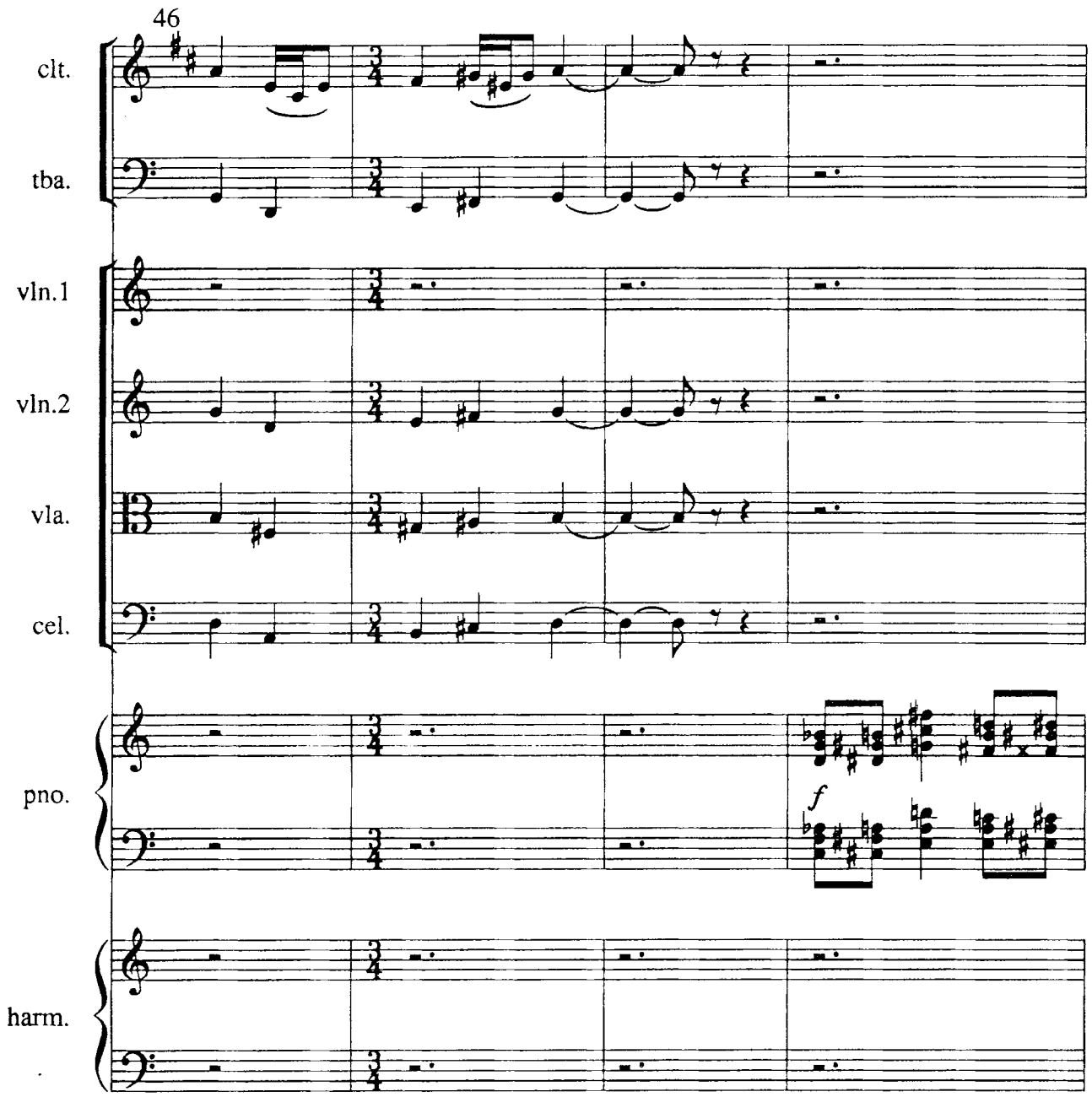


elle retire le poignard de sa poitrine et l'enfonce dans celle d'uspud;
she draws the dagger from her chest and plunges it into that of uspud;

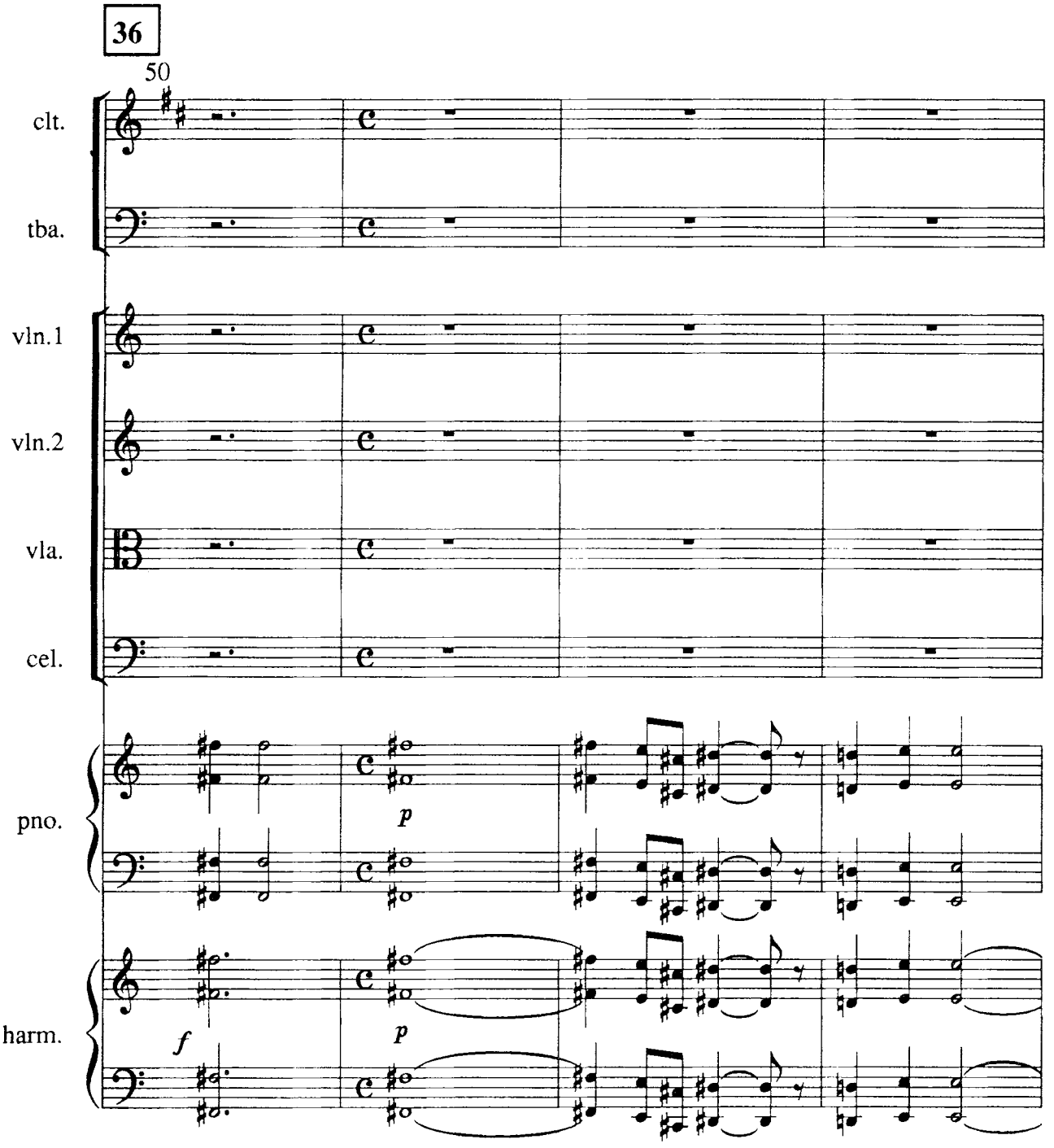


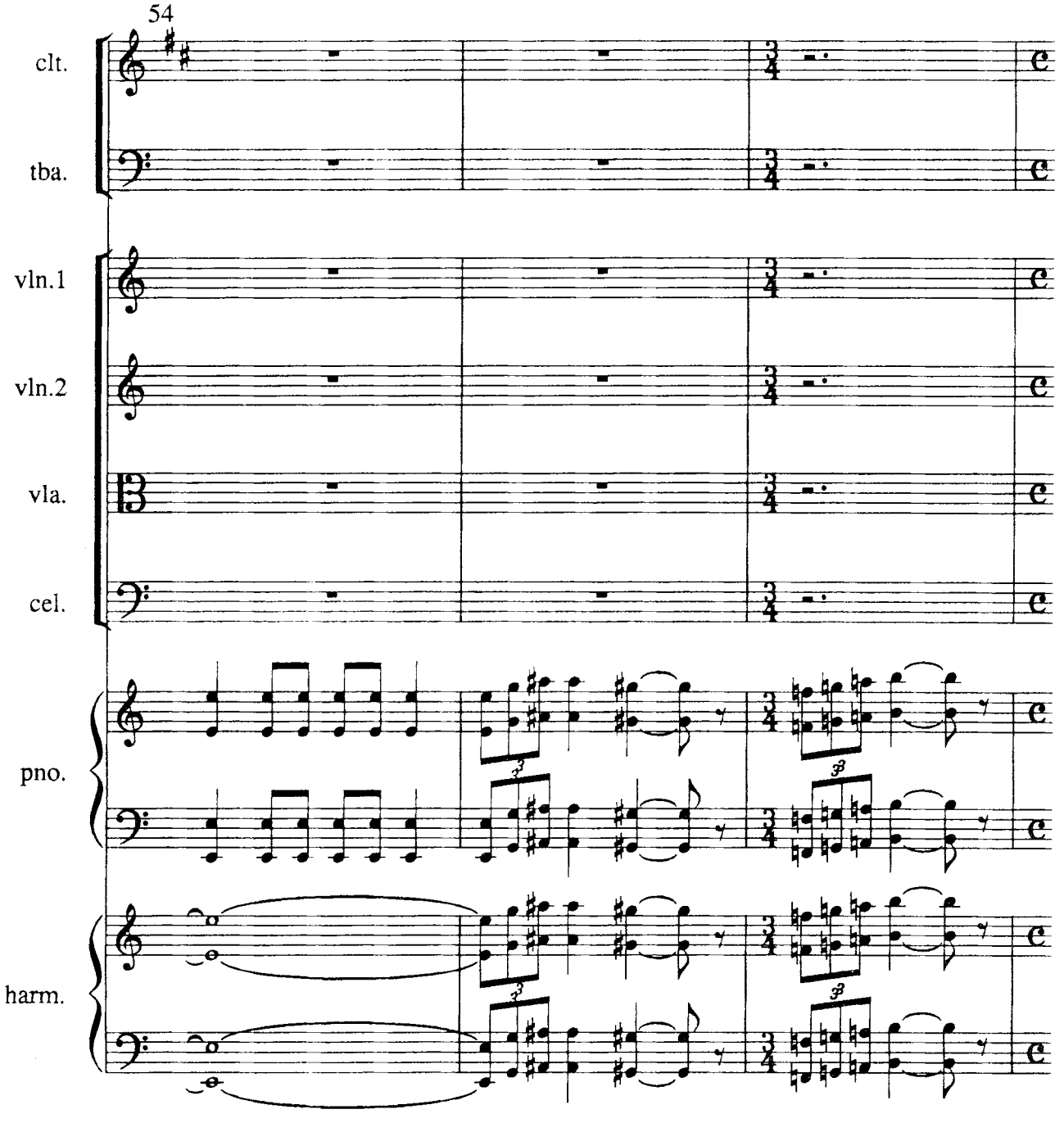
il entre dans l'extase.
he goes into ecstasy.




46
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
f
harm.

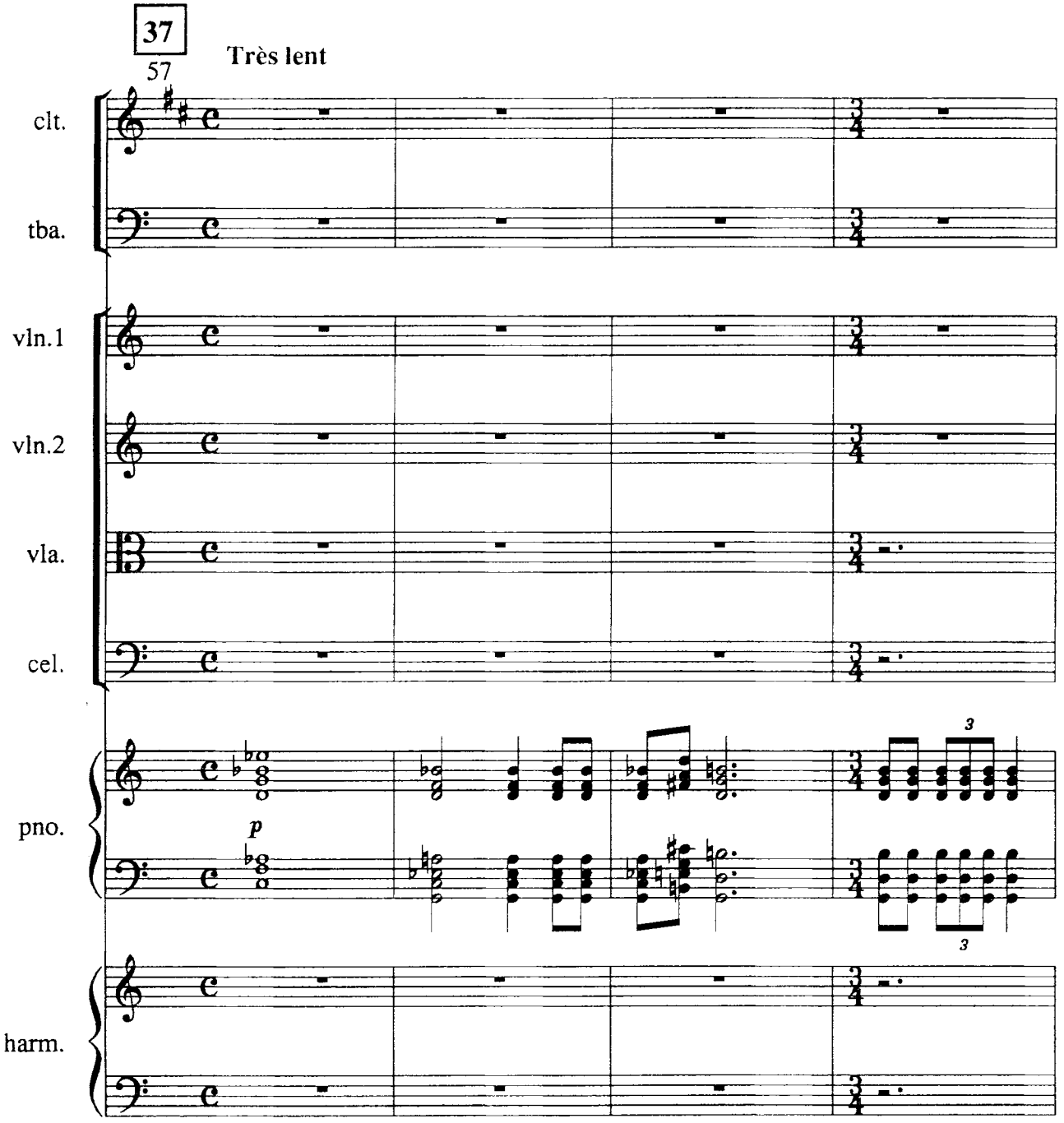
en meme temps un crucifix gigantesque sort de terre et s'éleve vers le ciel, entrainant à sa suite l'église chrétienne.
at the same time a vast crucifix comes from the earth and rises to heaven, drawing after it the christian church.

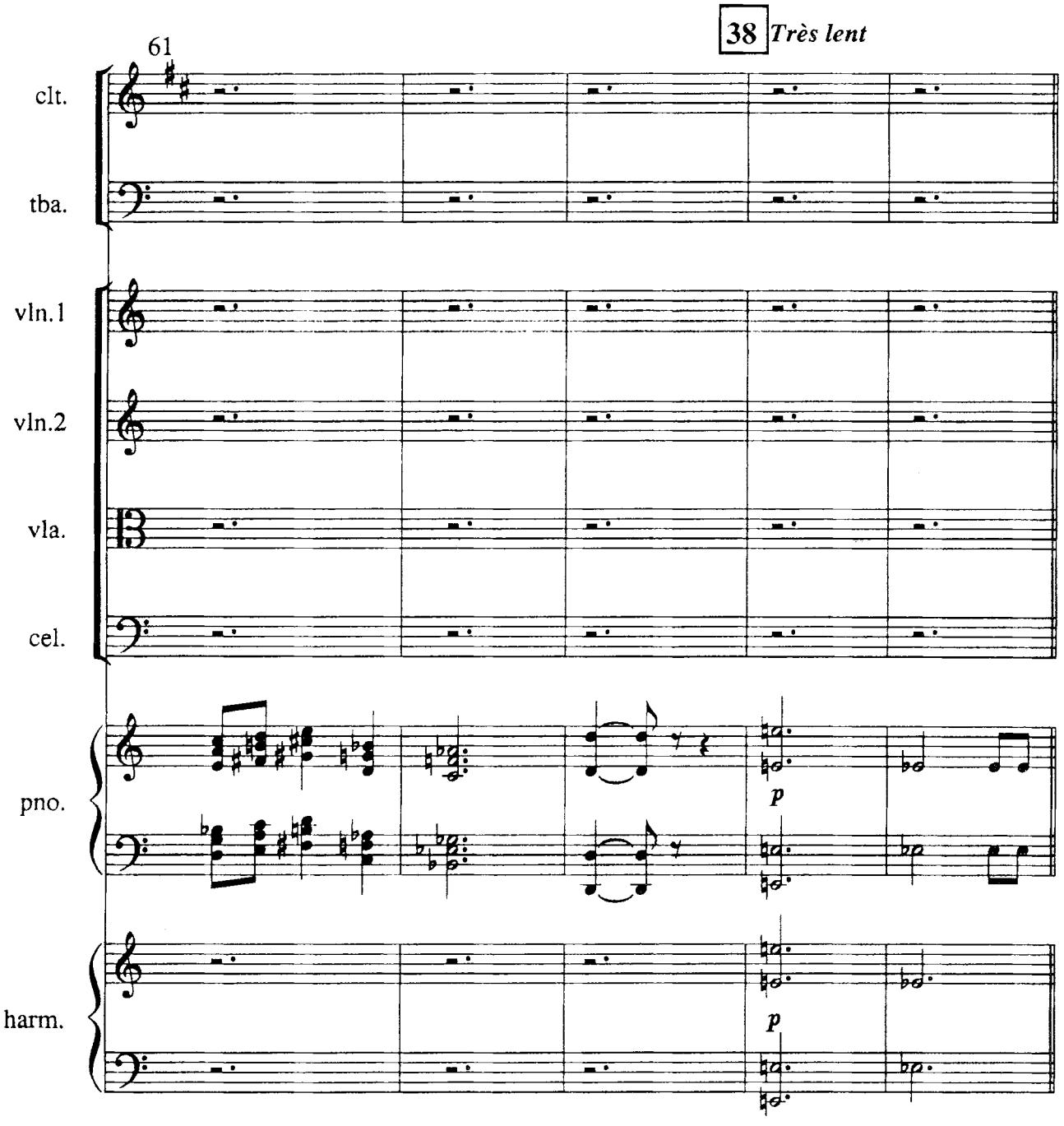


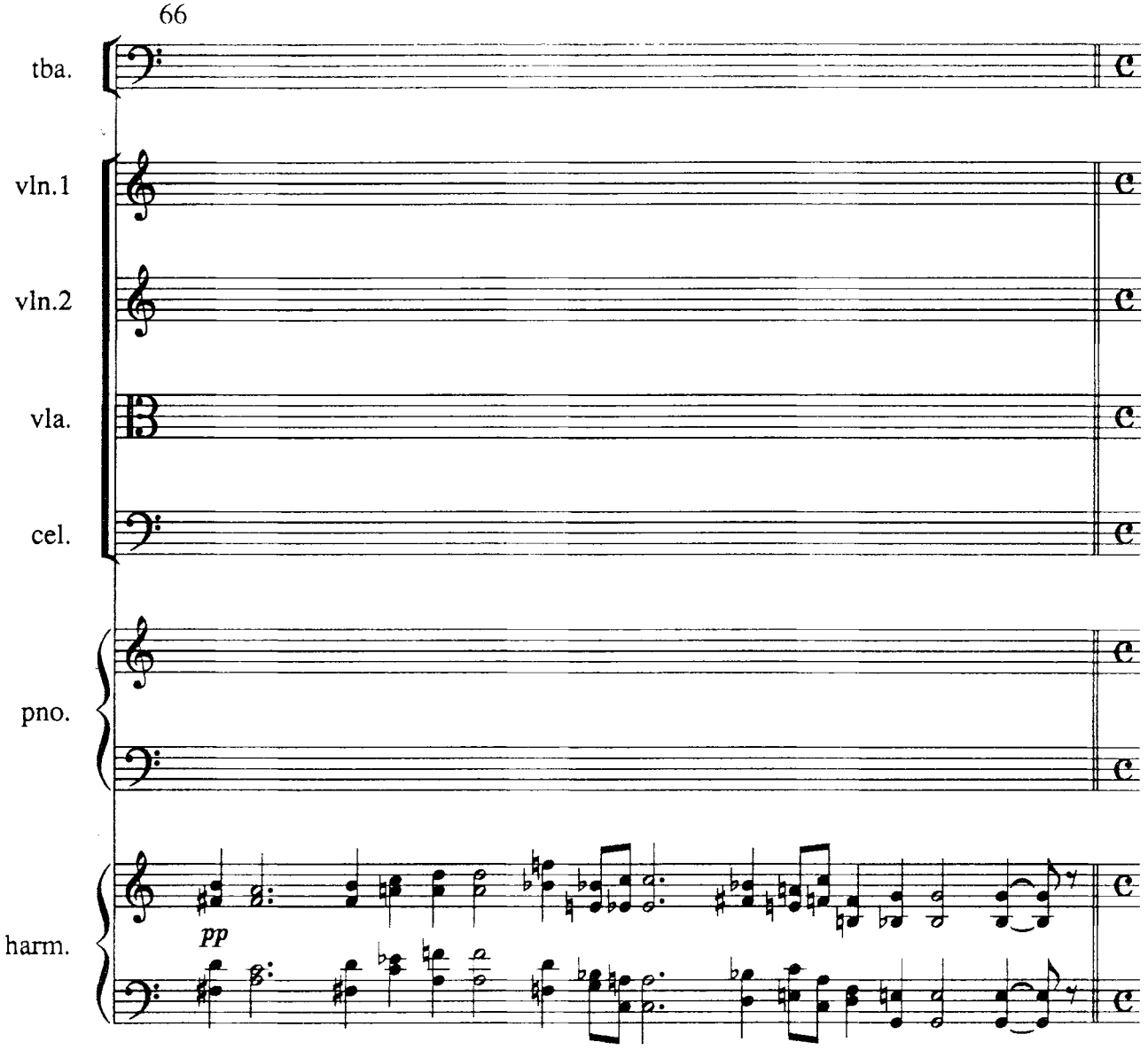

54
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

on entend les choeur des anges, archanges, séraphins, chérubins, trônes, puissances et dominations qui chantent un hymne au tres-haut.

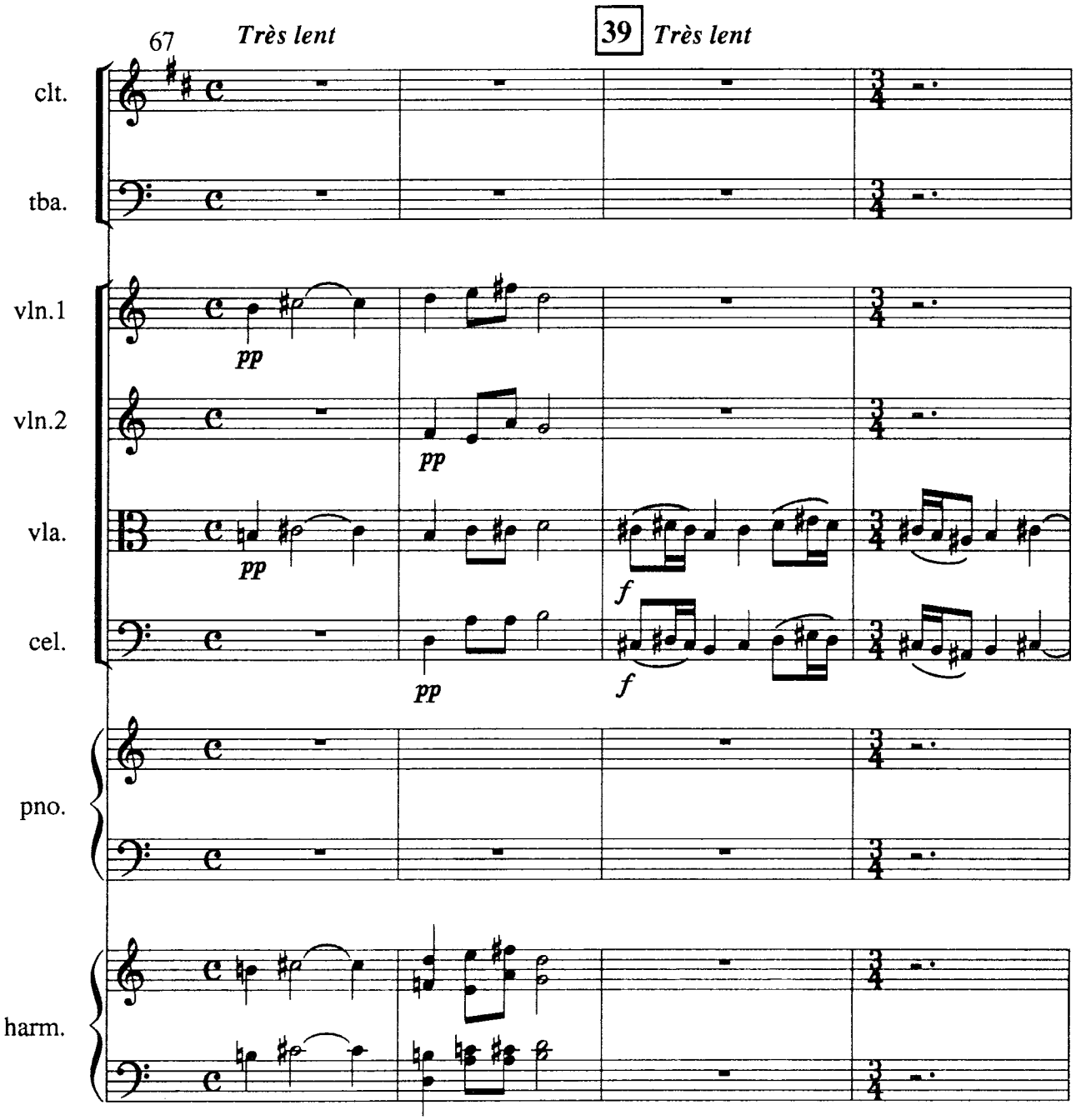
a choir is heard of angels and archangels, seraphim, cherubim, thrones, powers and dominations who sing praise to the lord on high.



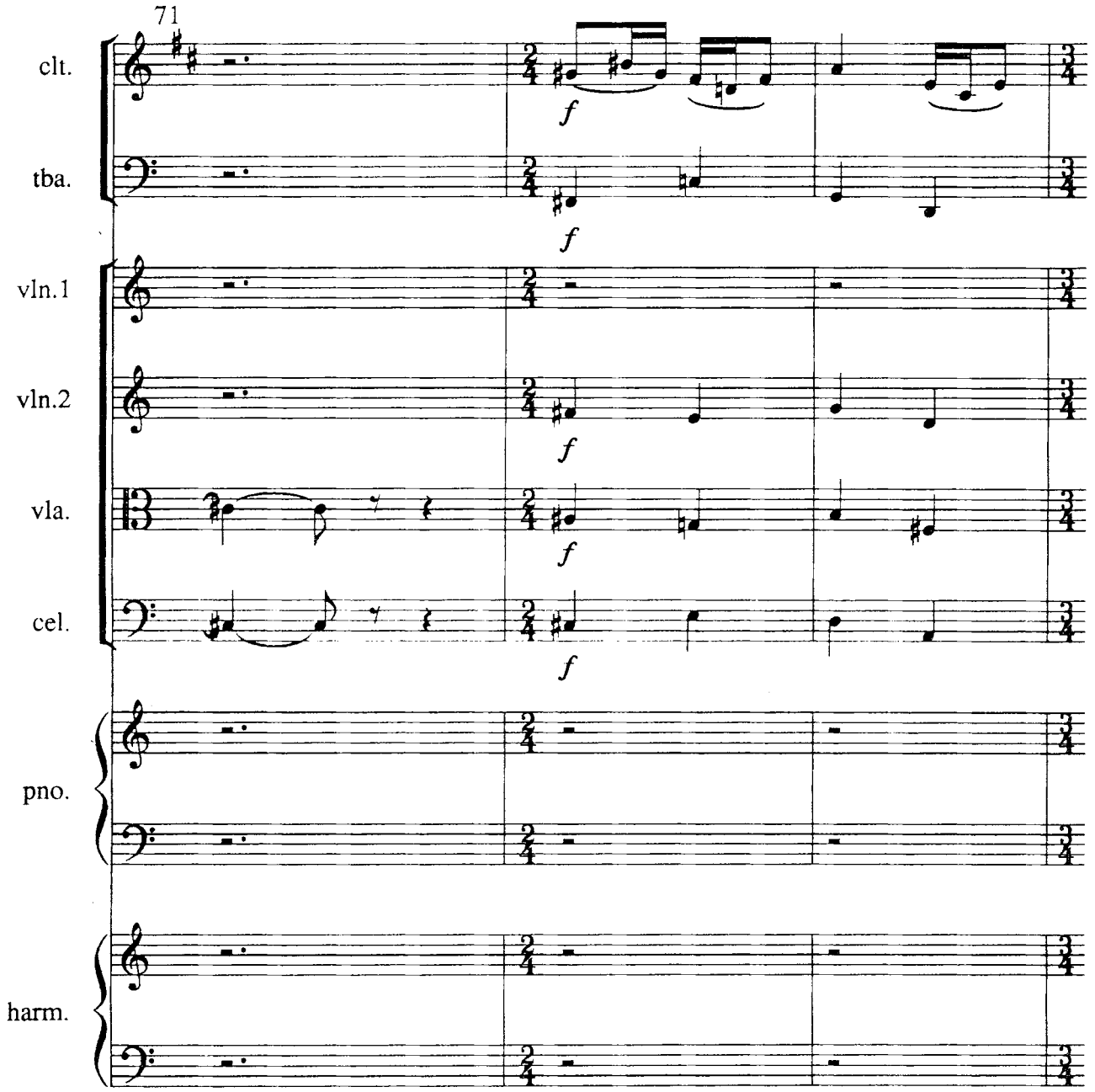

61
38 Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
p
harm.
p


66
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
pp

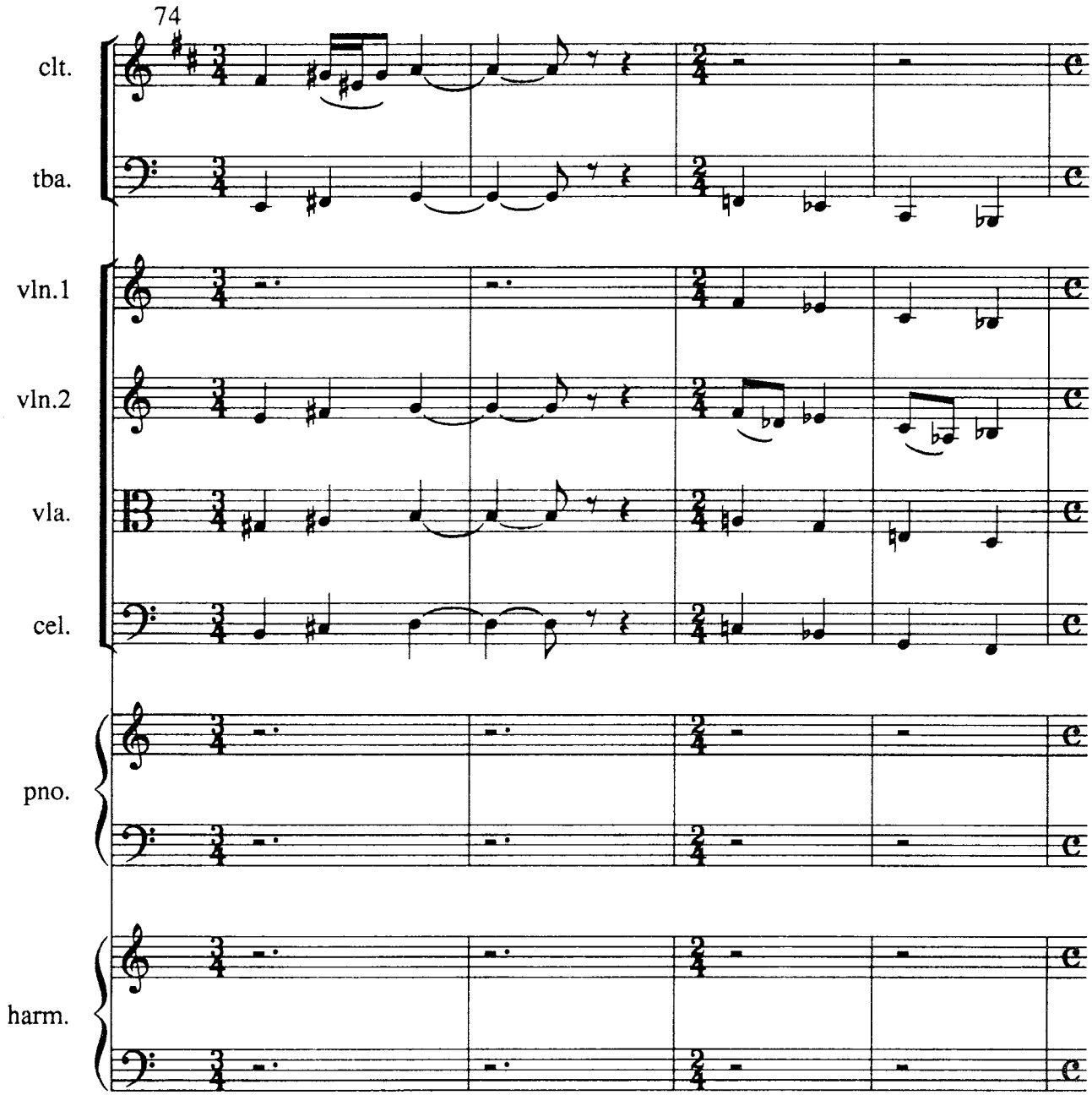
une grande lumière enveloppe uspud;
a great light surrounds uspud;

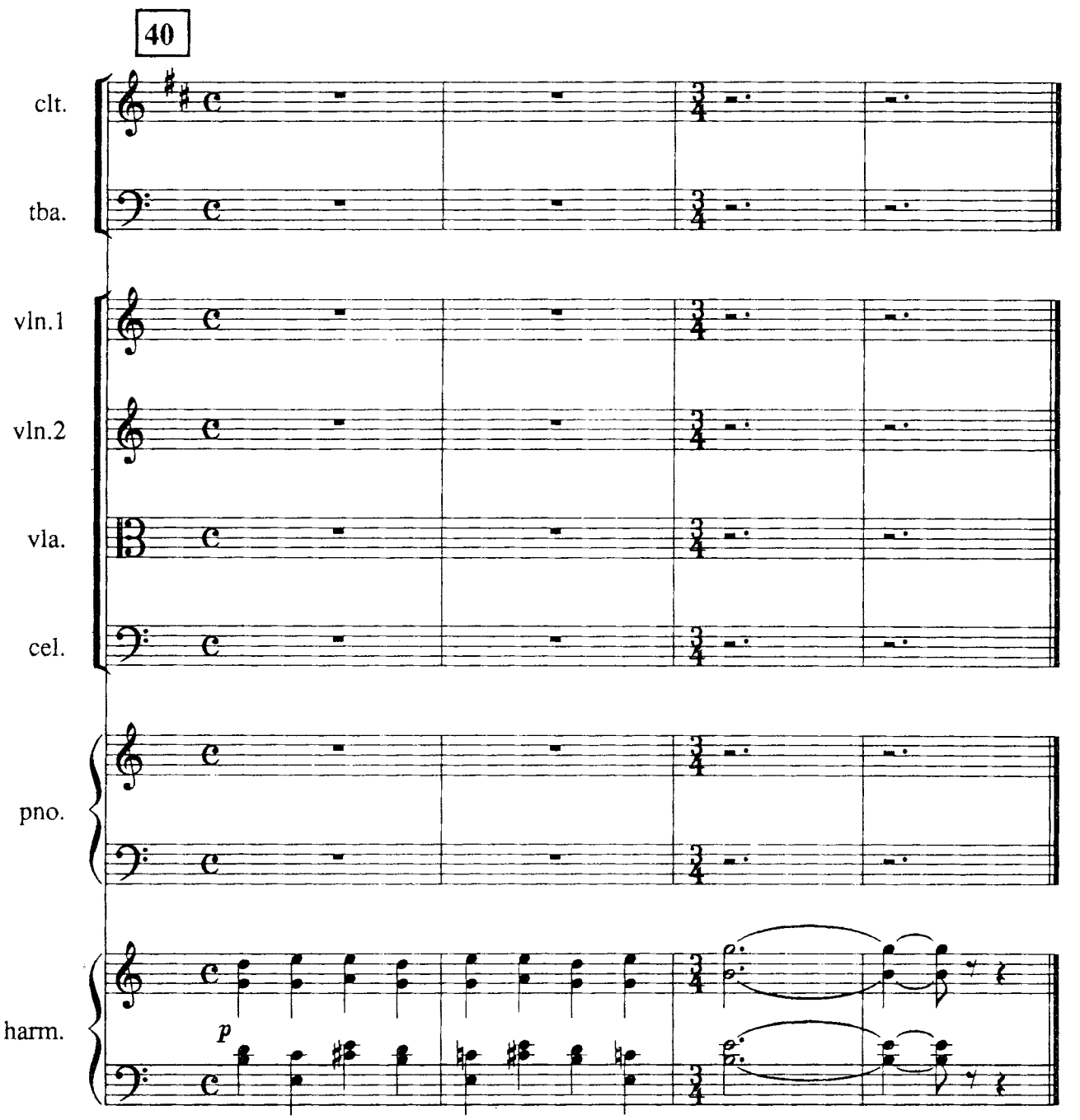


il tombe à genoux, en se frappant la poitrine.
he falls upon his knees, beating his chest.



il est converti.
he is converted.



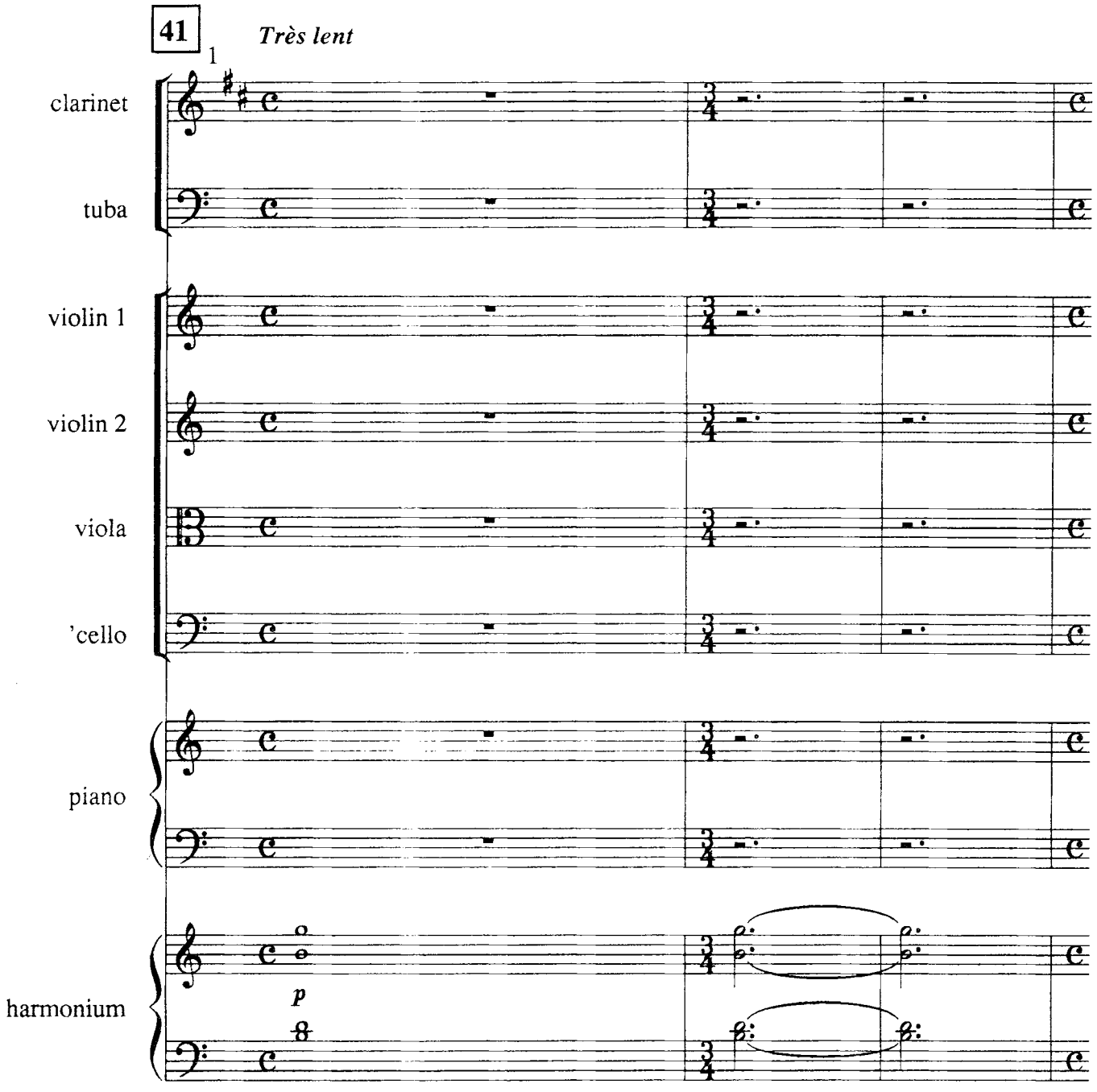


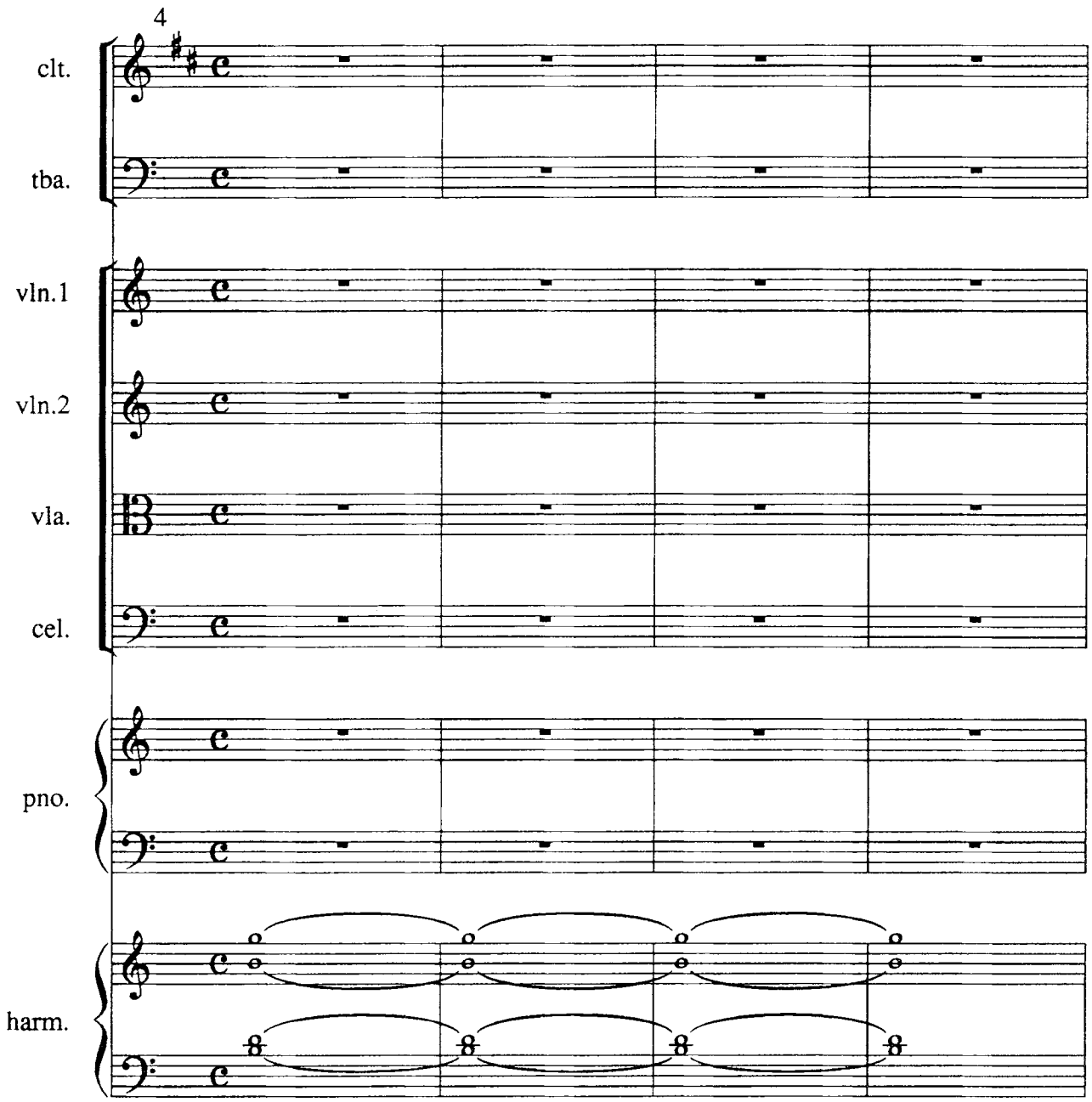
fin du second acte.
end of second act.

TROISIEME ACTE
THIRD ACT

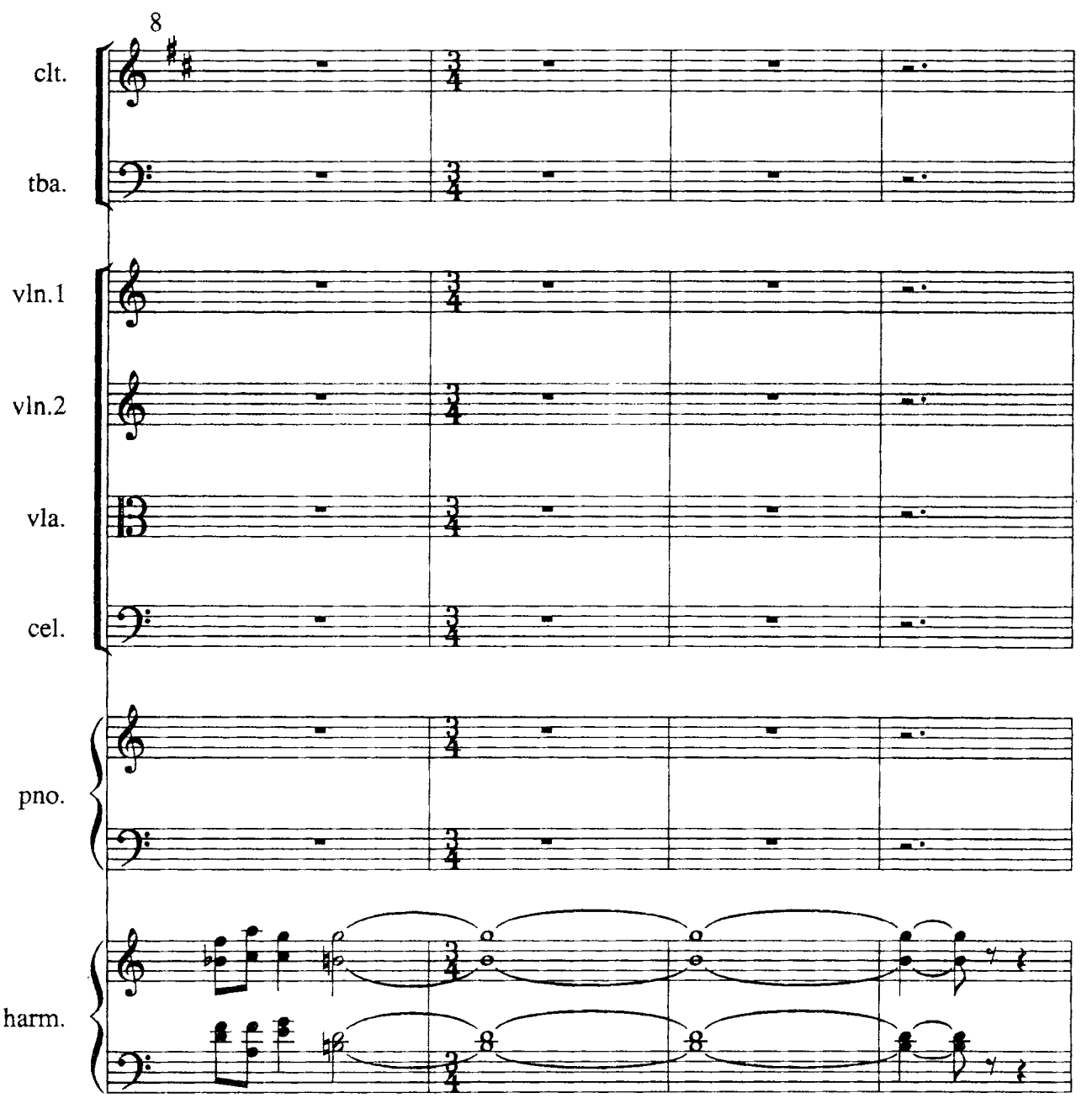
le sommet d'une montagne; au-dessus un crucifix
a mountain top; above it a crucifix

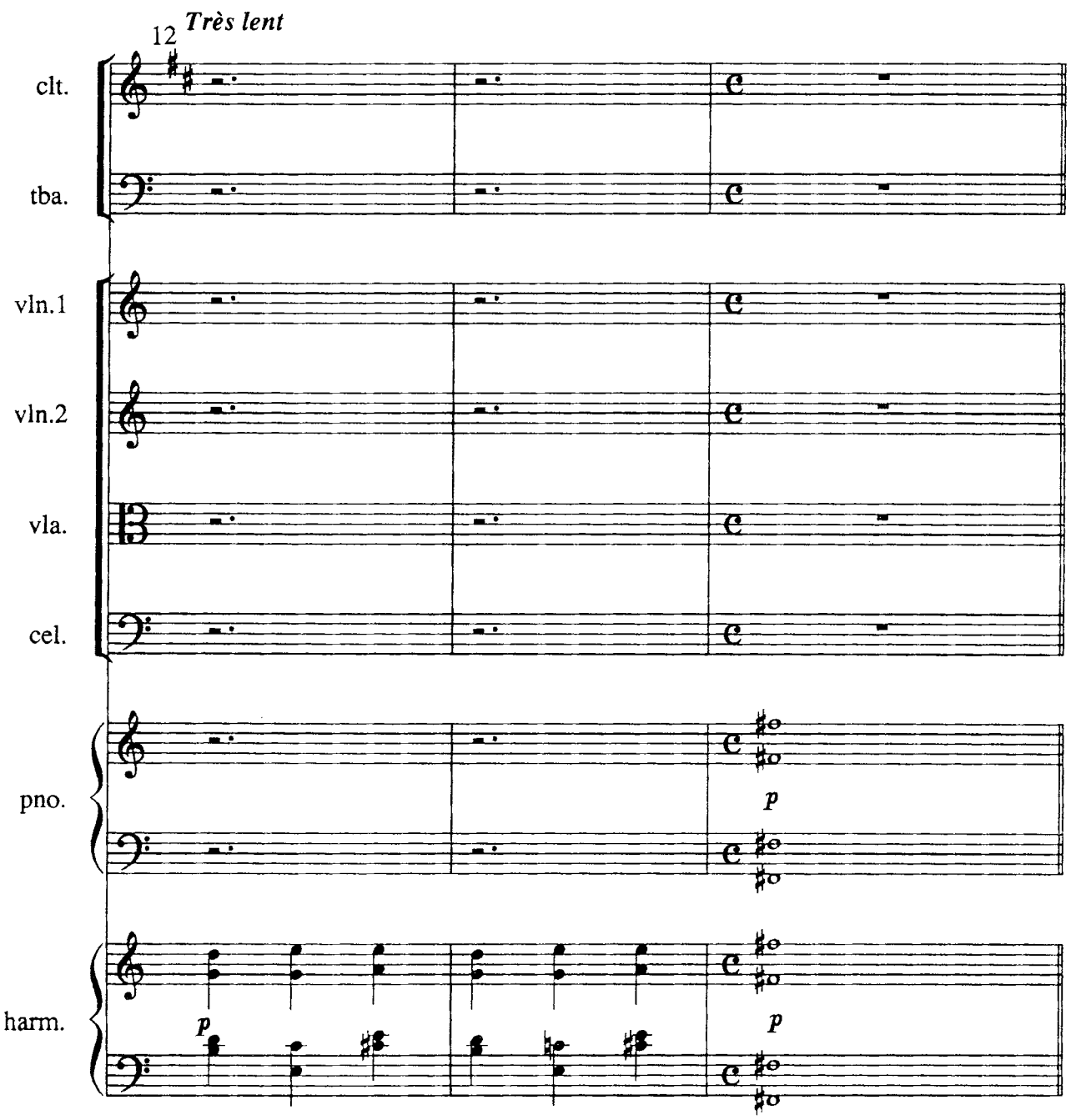
uspud, vêtu de bure, est prosterné devant le crucifix; pendant longtemps il prie et pleure.
uspud, dressed in a cowl, lies prostrate before the crucifix; for a long time he prays and weeps.

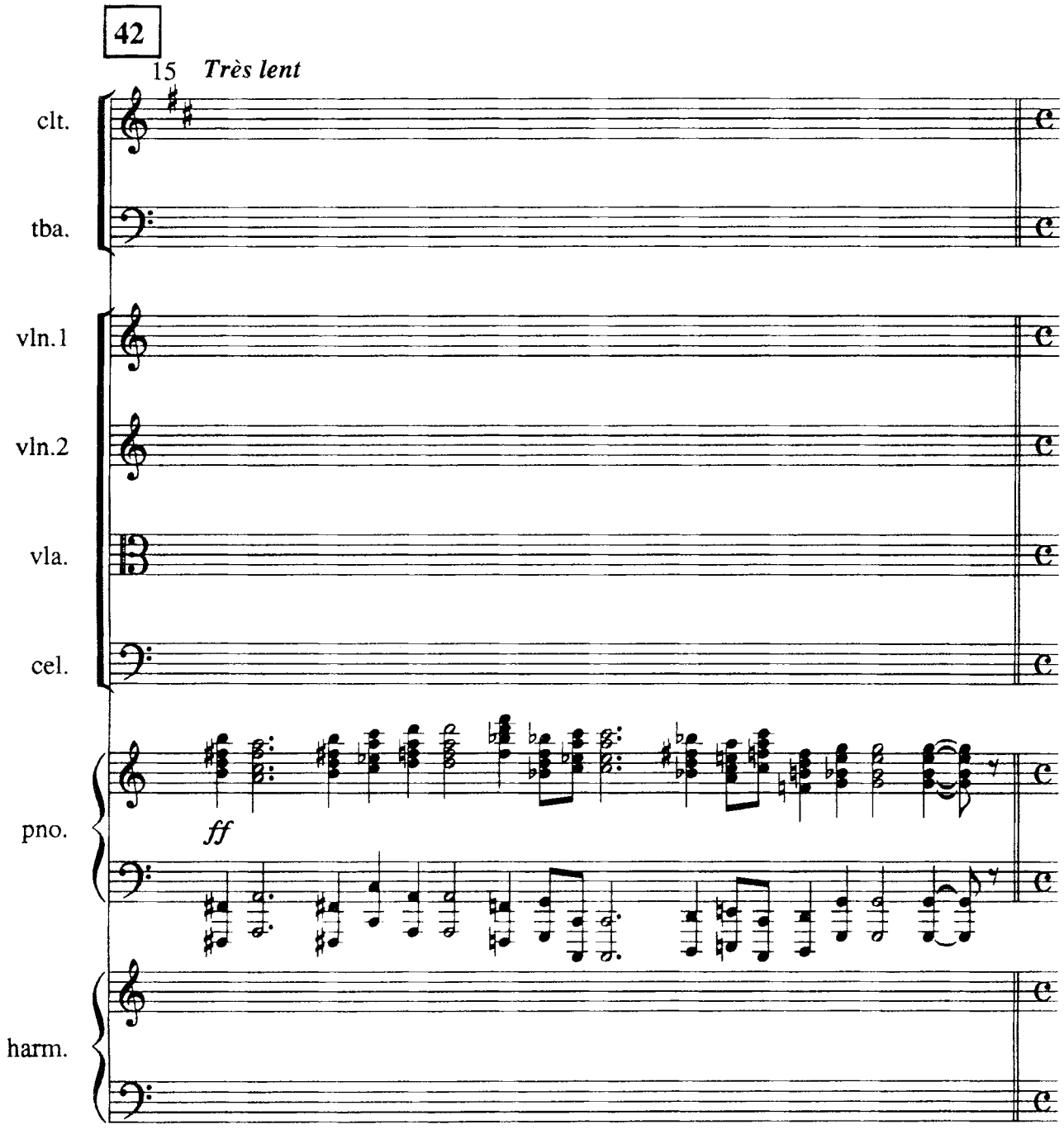


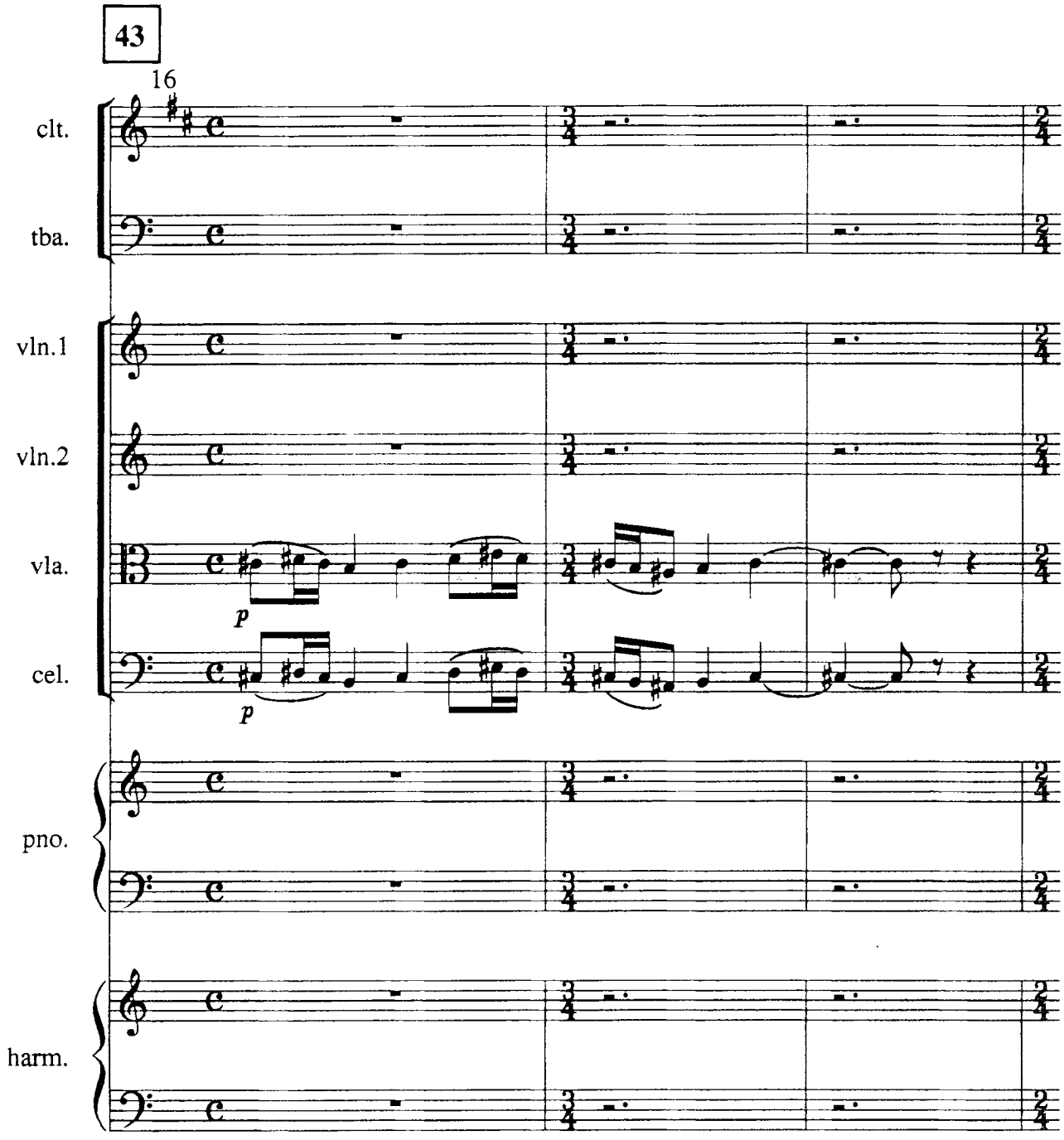

4
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

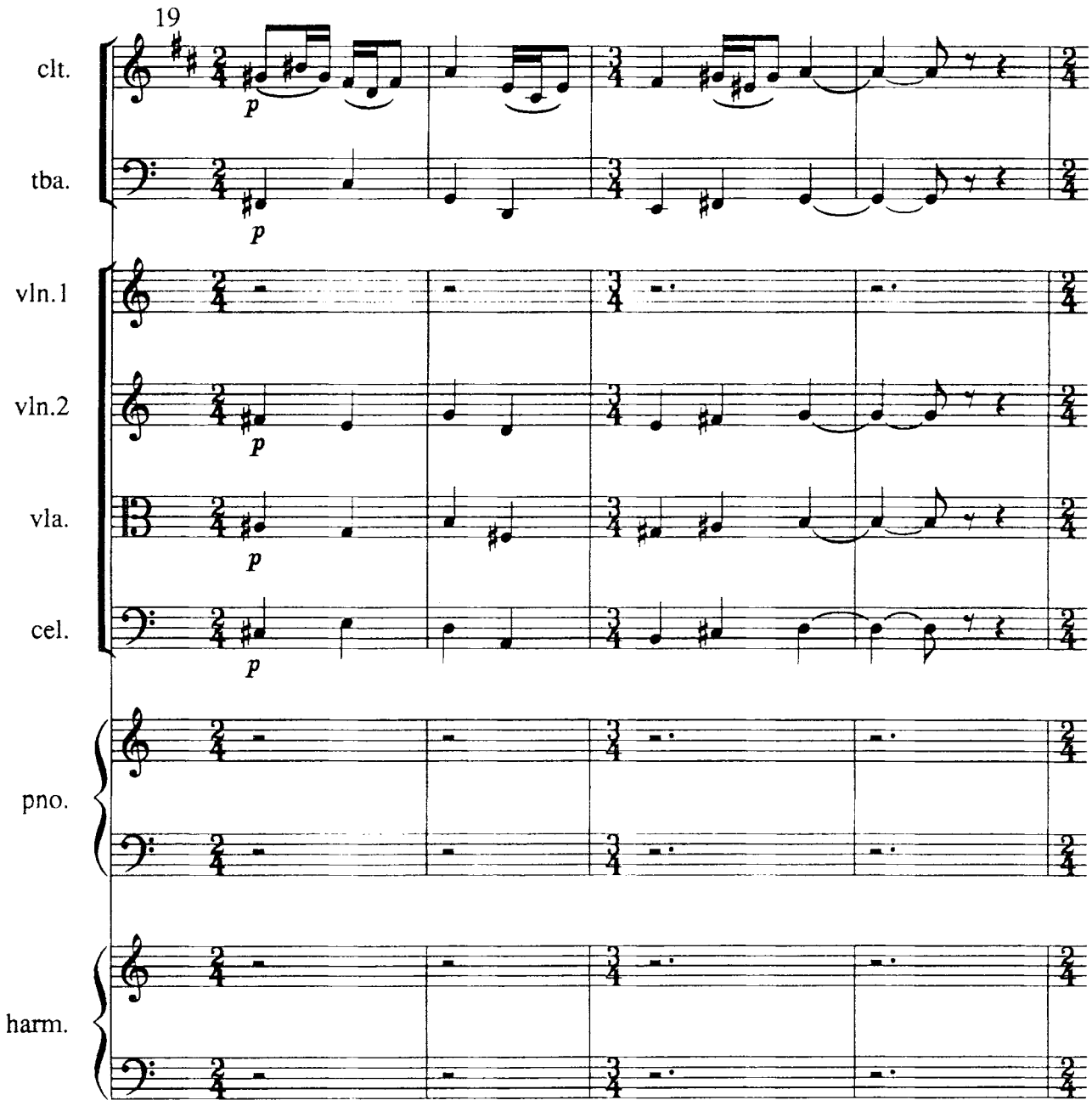
quand il releve la tête, le christ détache son bras droit de la croix, bénit uspud et disparait. l'esprit-saint pénêtre uspud.
when he lifts his head, the christ detaches his right arm from the cross, blesses uspud and disappears. the holy spirit is with uspud.



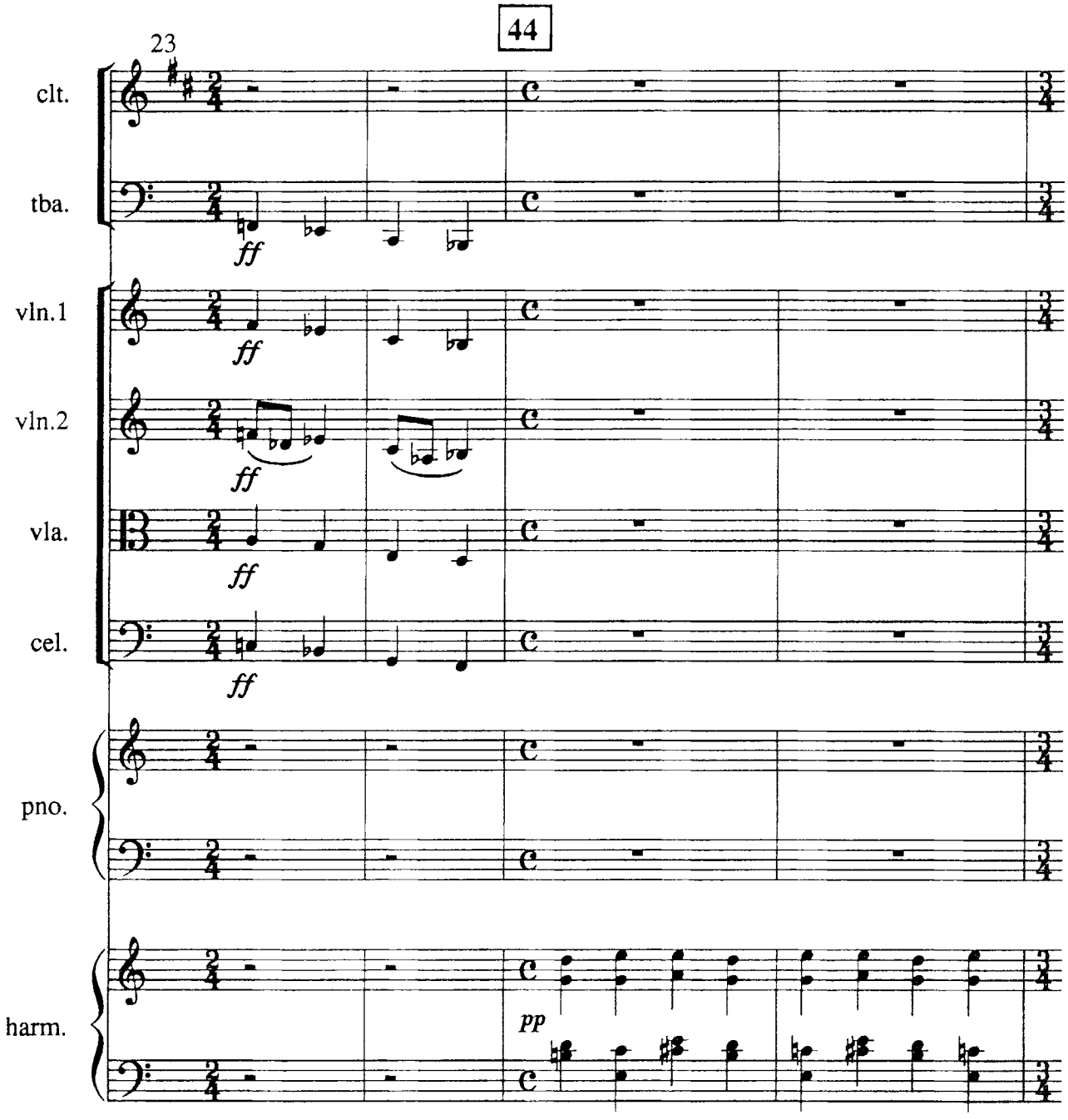

12
Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
p
harm.
p
p


42
15
Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
ff
harm.

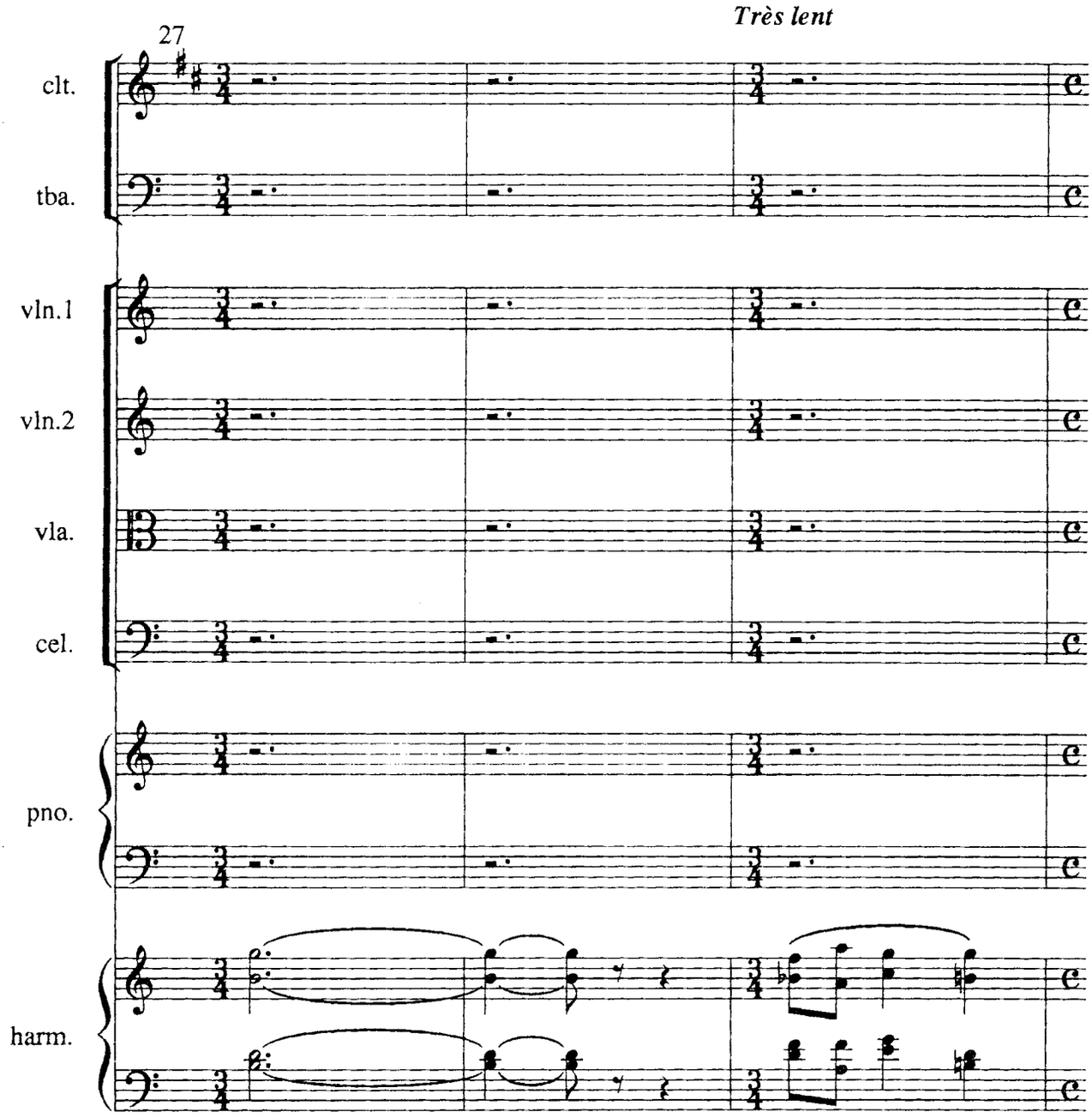

43
16
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
p
cel.
p
pno.
harm.

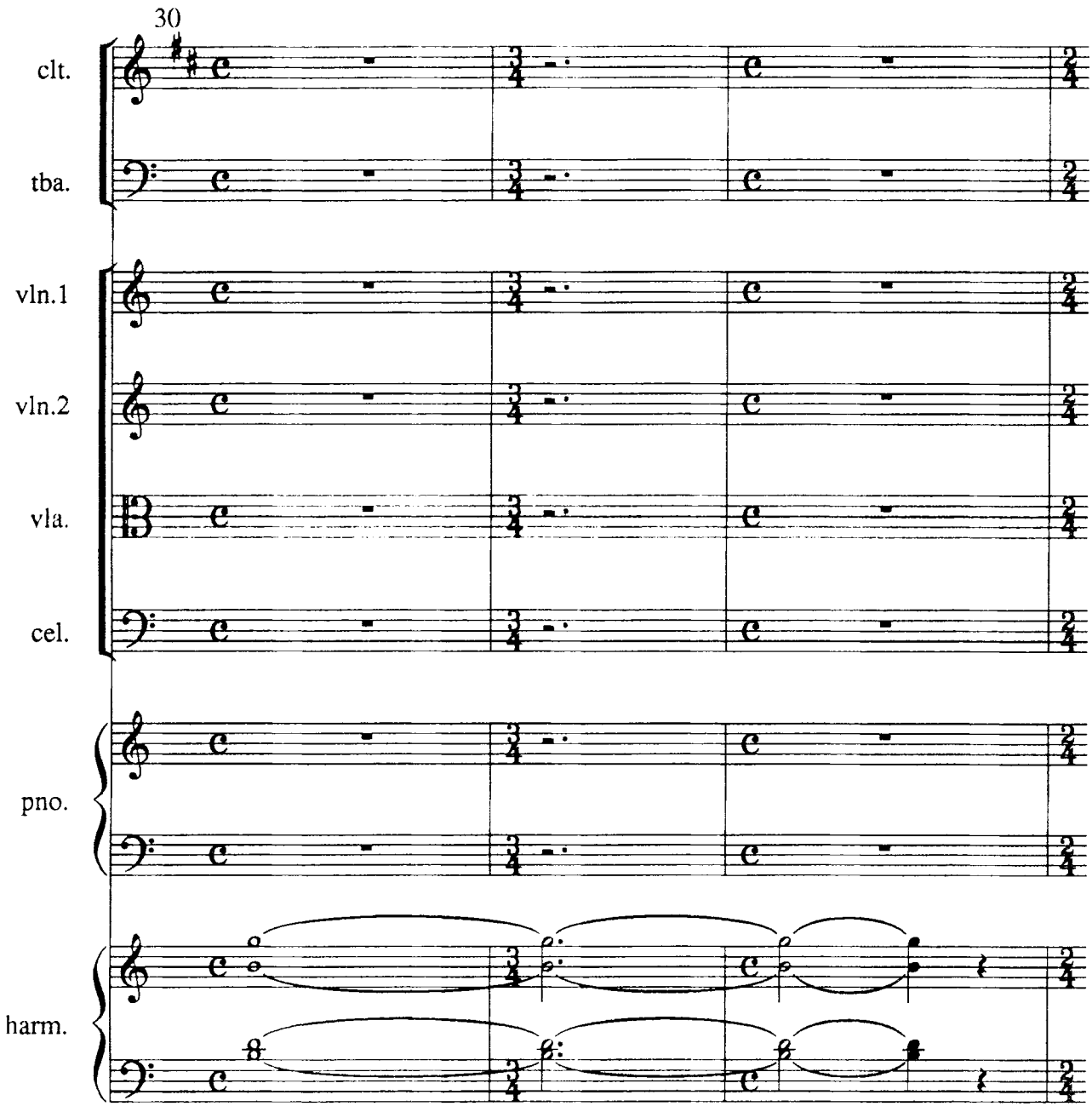

19
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
p
p
p
p

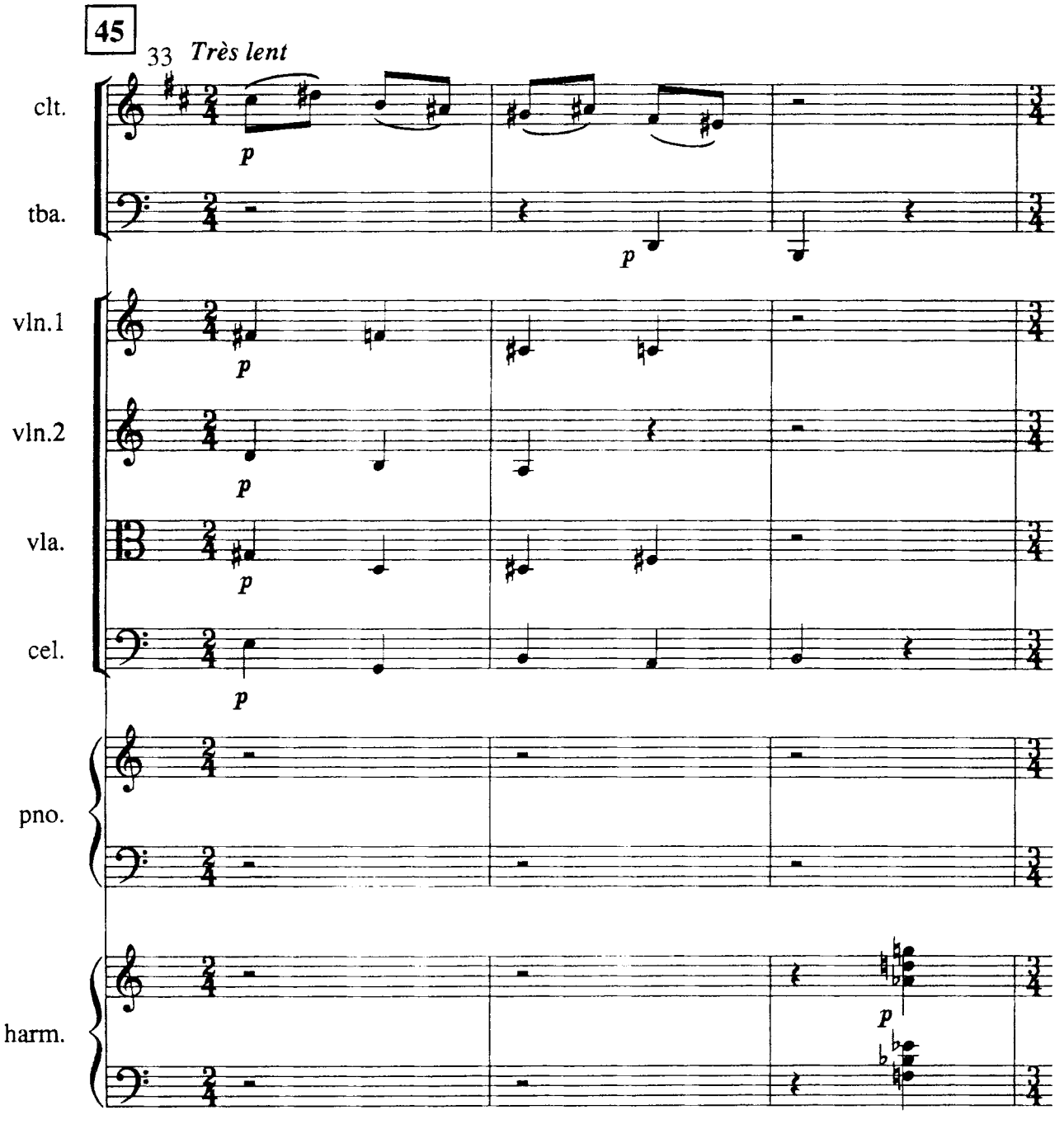
défilé de saints et saintes: saint cléophème crache ses dents dans sa main; saint micanar les yeux dans un plateau; le bienheureux marcomir, les jambes calcinées;
procession of saints: saint cleophimus spits his teeth out into his hand; saint micanar carrying her eyes on a salver; the blessed marcomir, with his legs burnt to cinders;



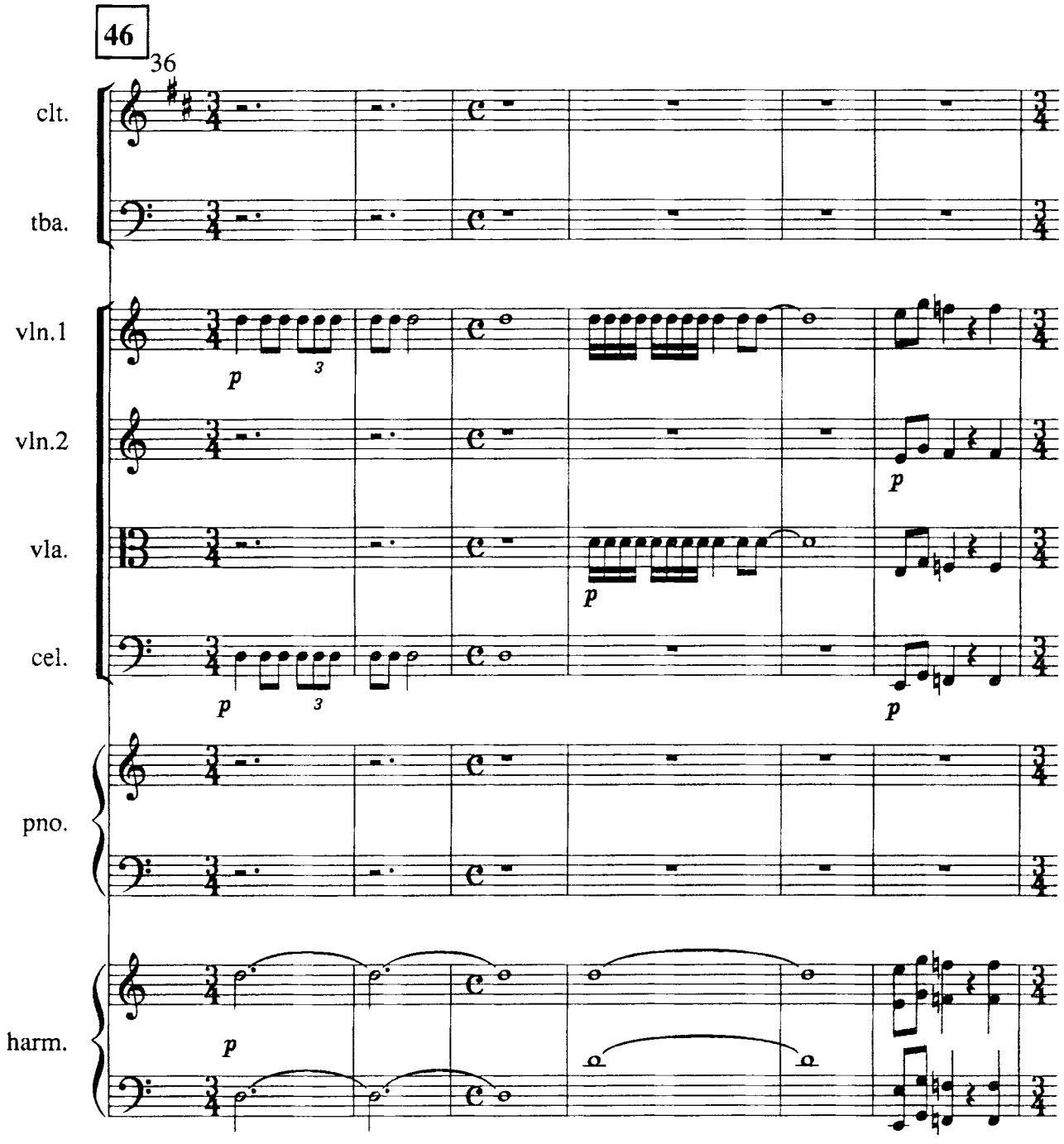
saint induciomare le corps percé de flêches; saint chassebaigre, confesseur, en robe violette; saint lumore avec un glaive; saint gebu avec des tenailles rougies; saint glunde avec une roue; saint krenou avec un mouton; saint japuis, le front ouvert et des colombes s'en échappent; sainte umbeuse filant la laine; le bien-heureux melou l'estropié; sainte vequin l'écorché;
saint induciomare with his body pierced by arrows; saint chassebaigre, confessor, in a violet robe; saint lumore with her blade; saint gebu with reddened talons; saint glunde with a wheel; saint krenou with his sheep; saint japuis with his forehead opened and doves flying forth; saint umbeuse spinning wool; the blessed melou the deformed; saint vequin the flayed;



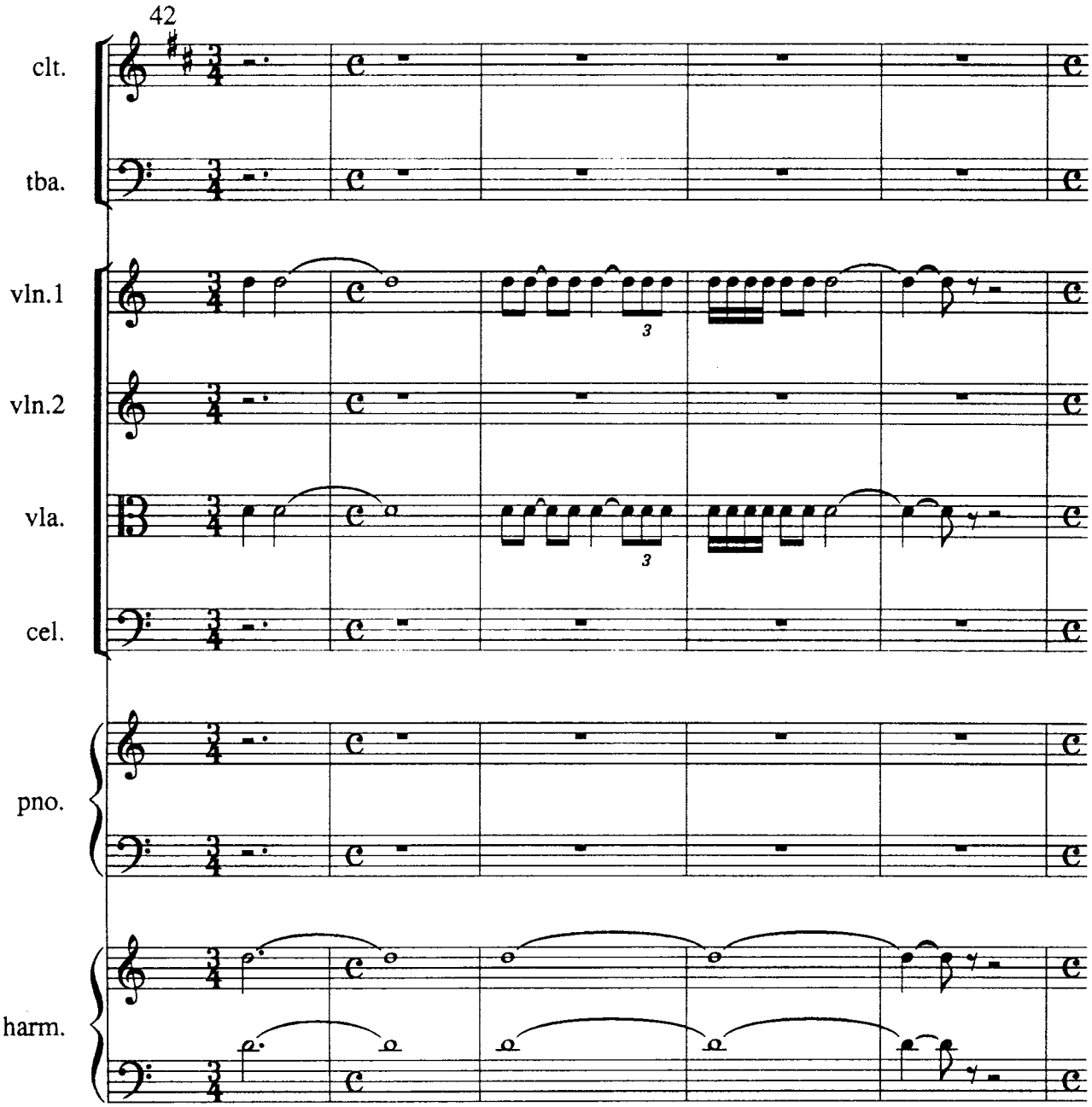

30
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.


45
33
Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
p

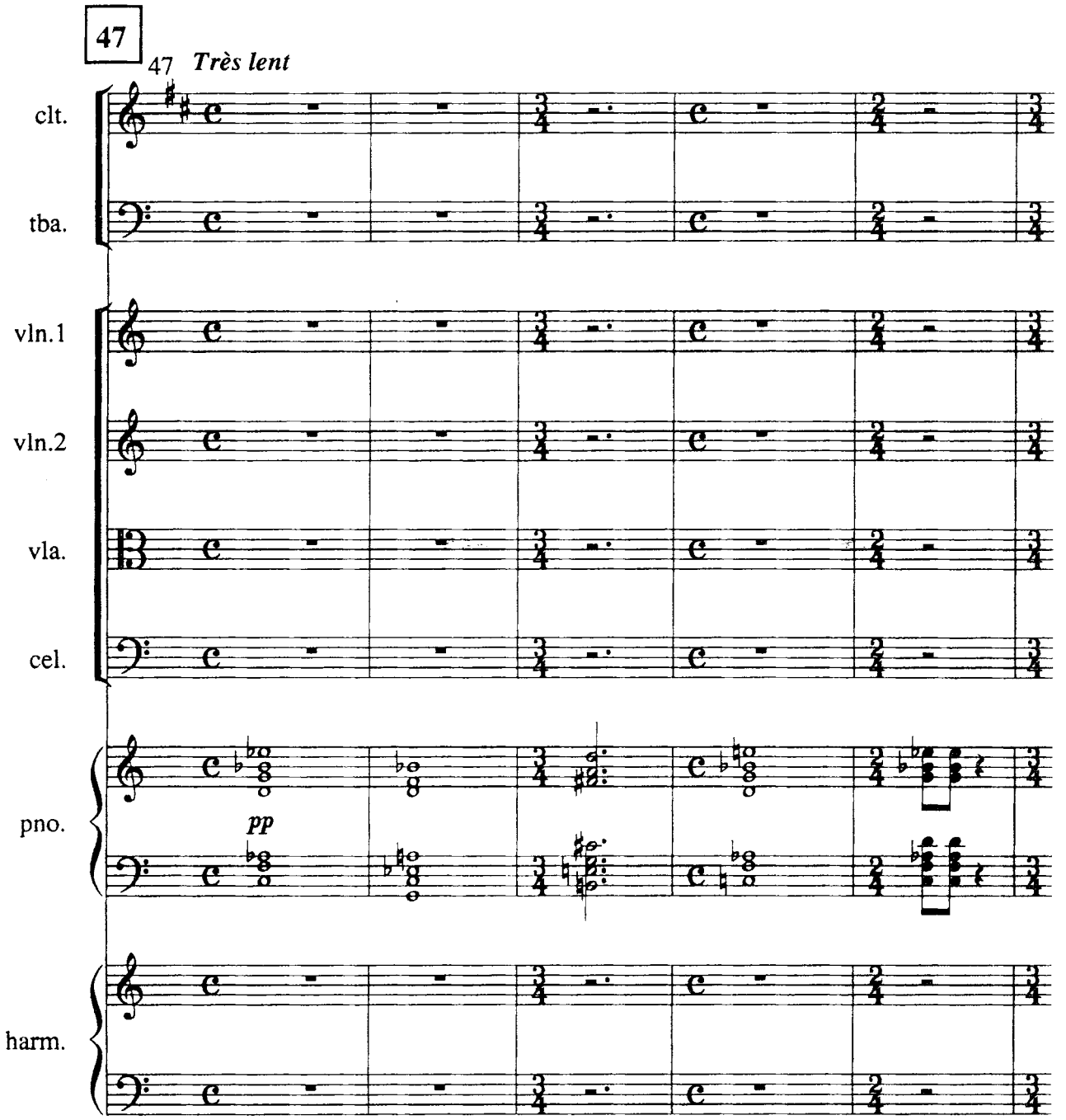
sainte purine la déchaussée; saint plau moine pécheur; sainte benu avec une hache; etc.
saint purine the shoeless; saint plau the fisher monk; saint benu with her axe; etc.

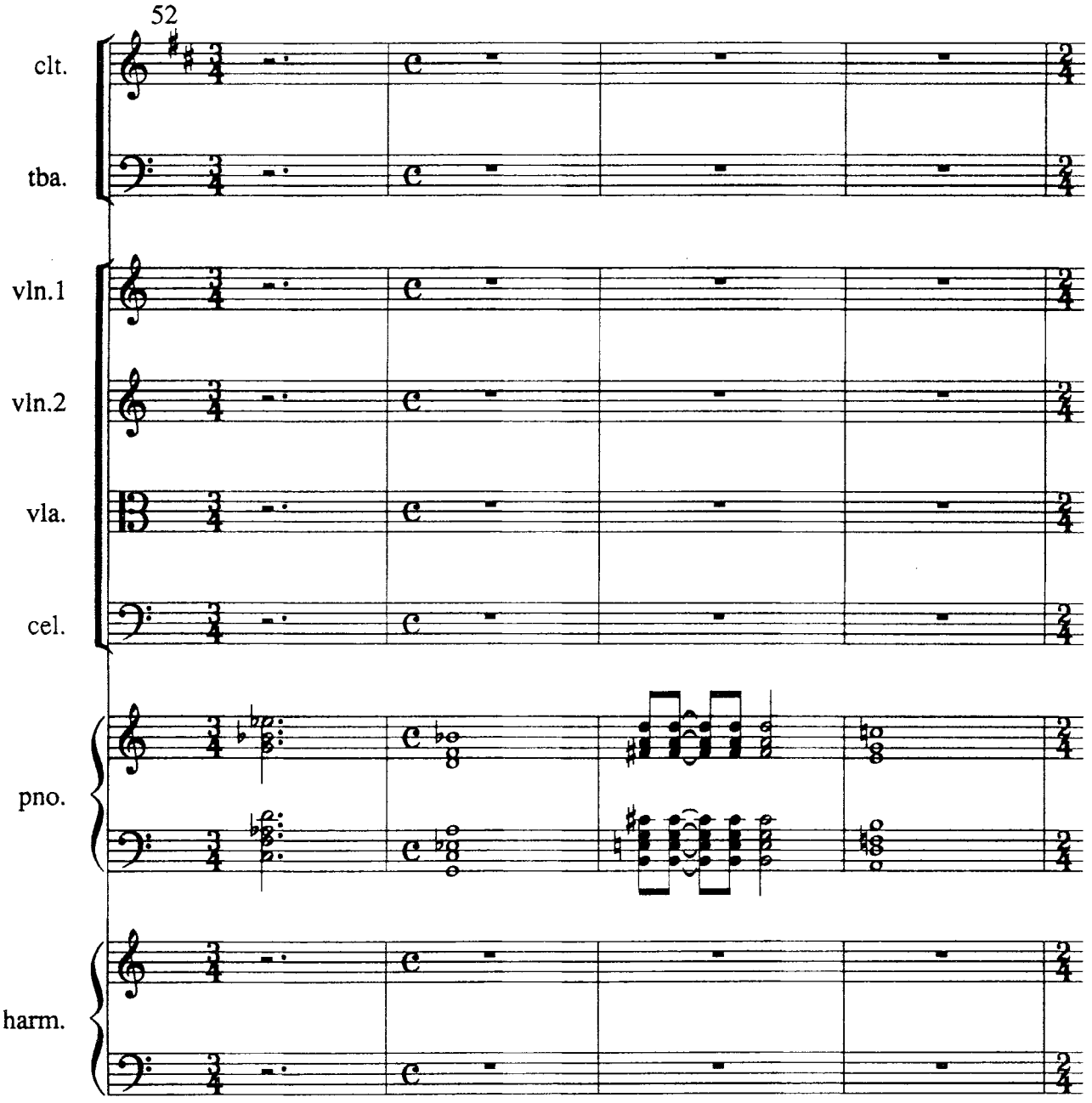


leurs voix appellent uspud au martyre.
their voices summon uspud to martyrdom.

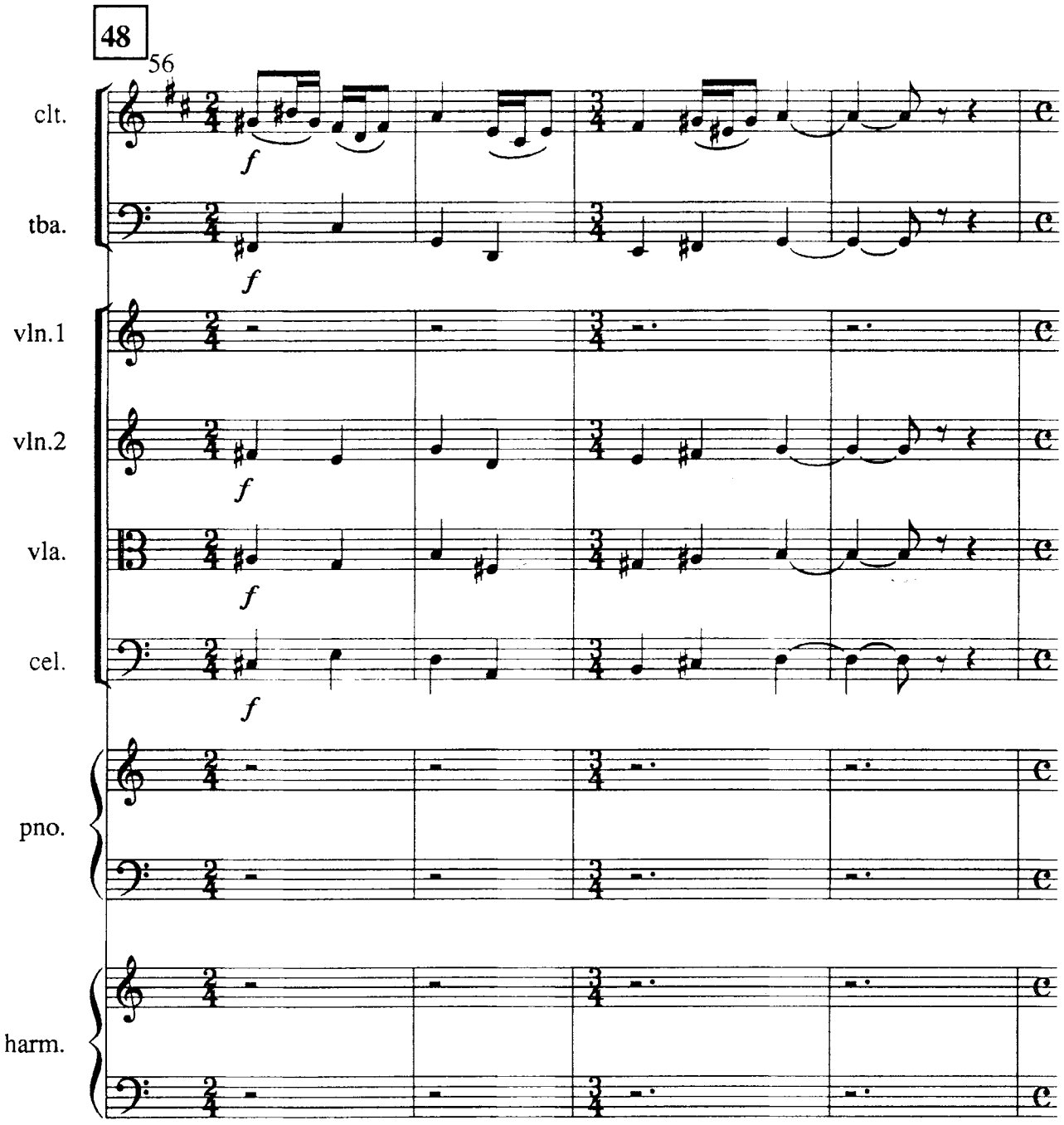


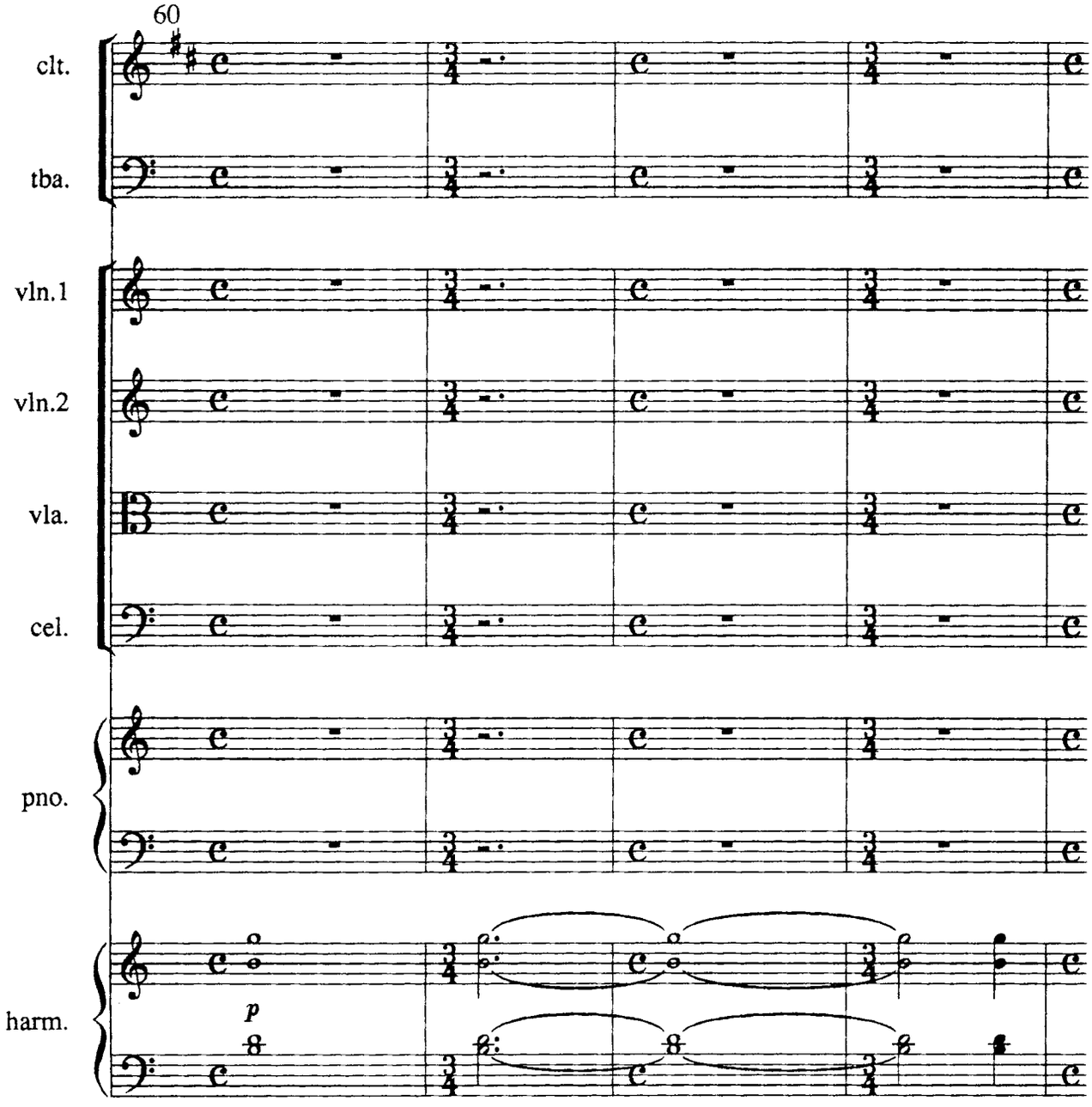
une soif inextinguible de souffrance le pénètre.
an unassuageable thirst for suffering comes over him.

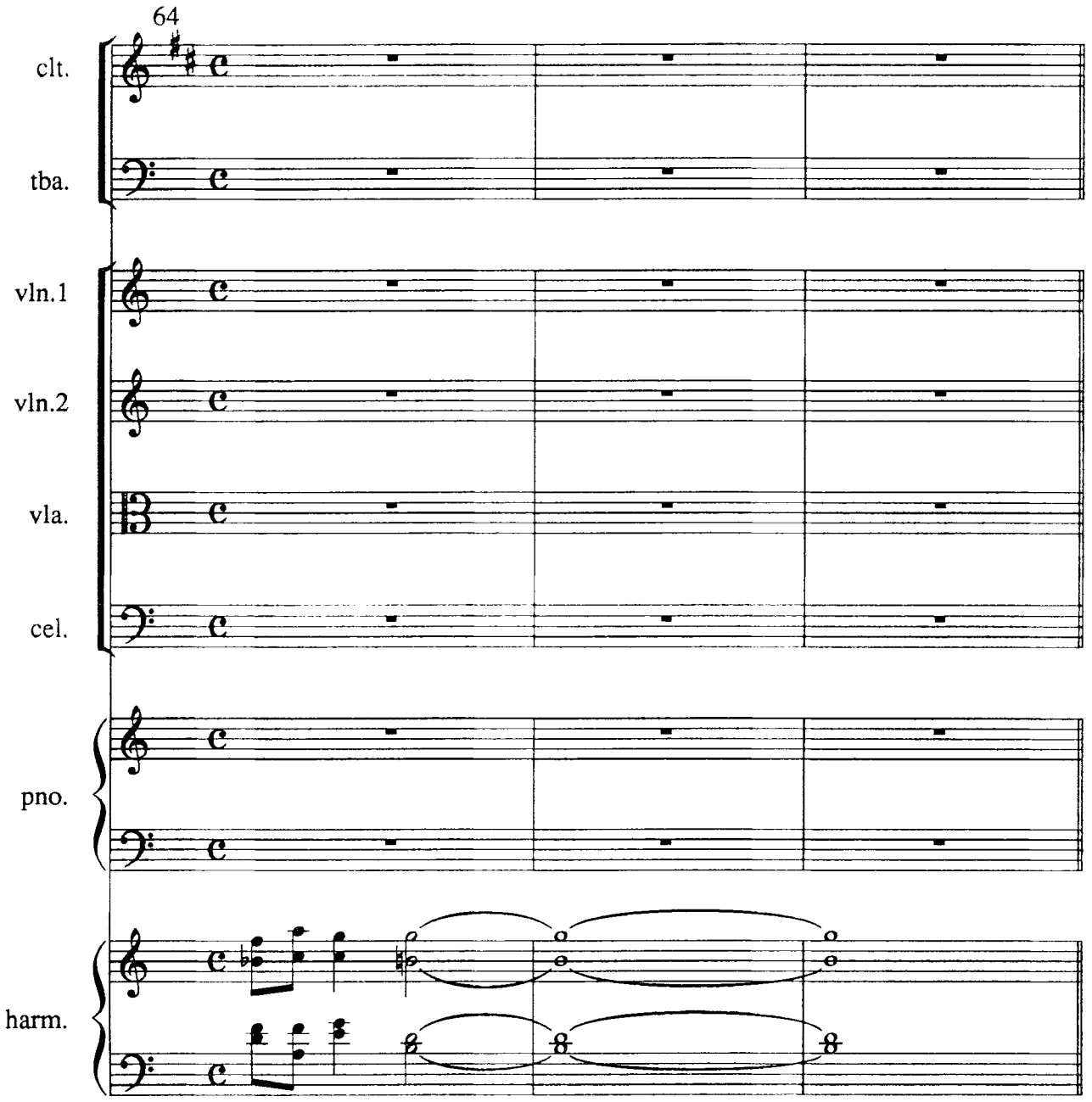


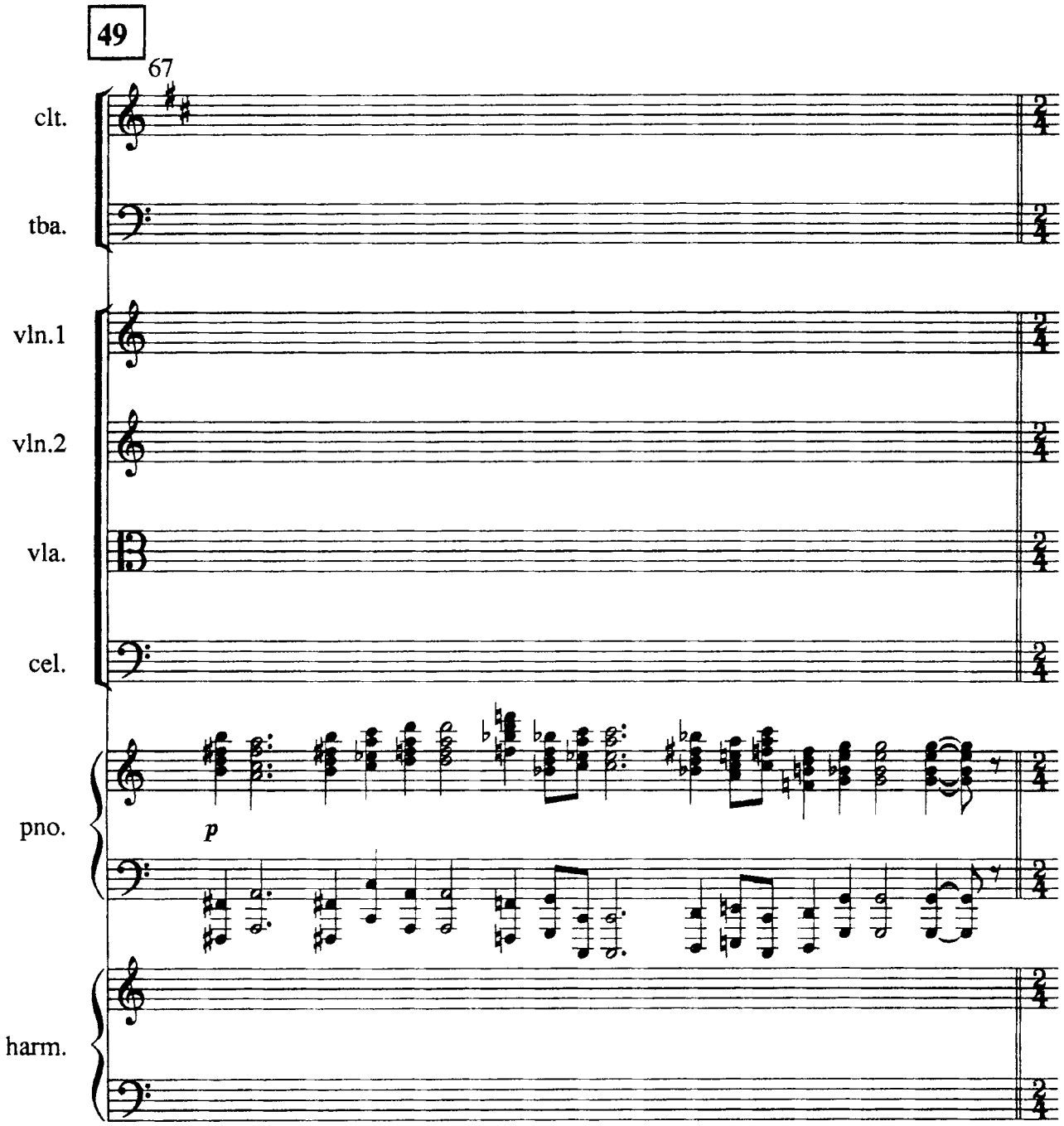

52
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

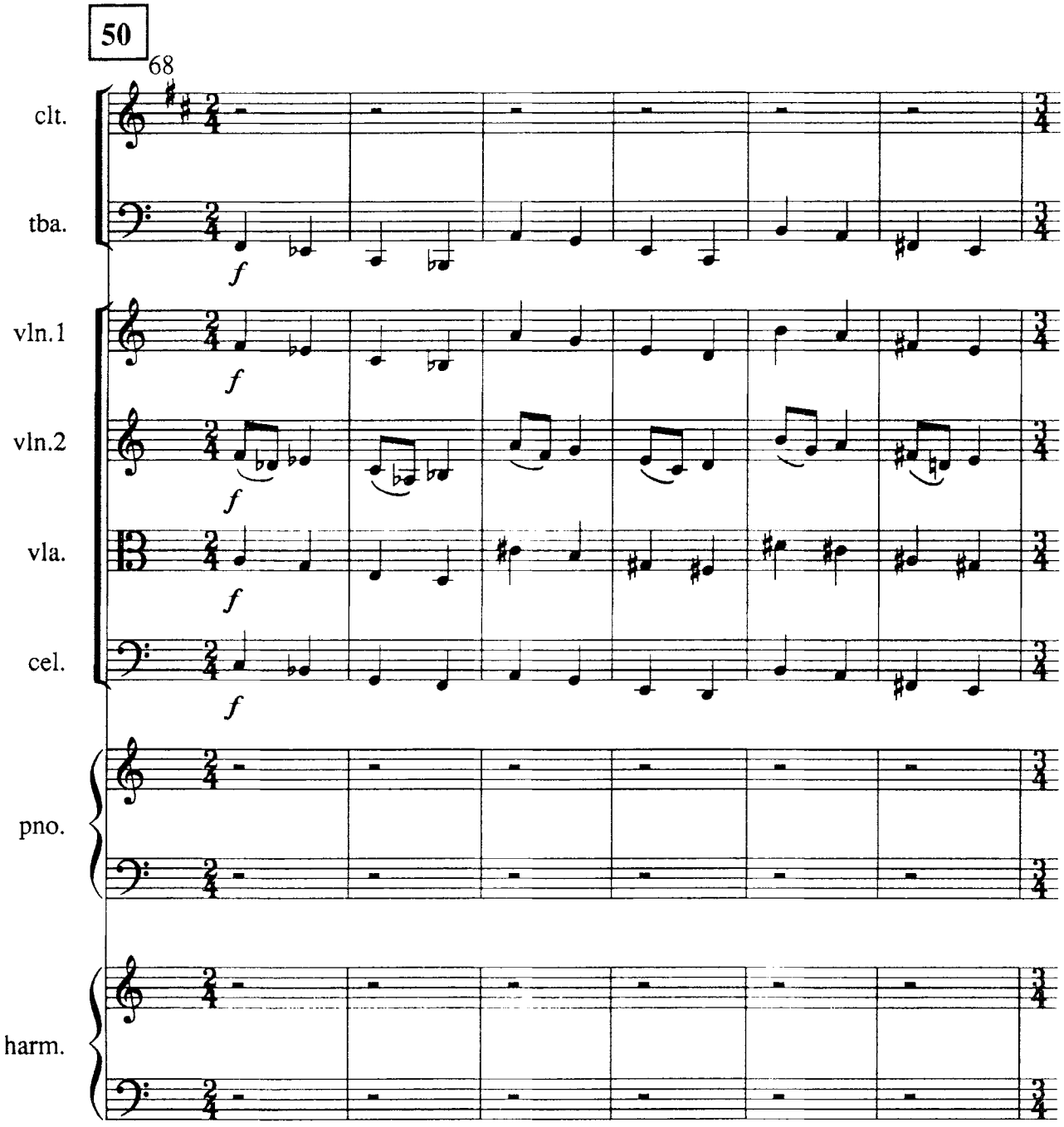
il déchire sa robe de bure et apparait vêtu de la tunique blanche des néophytes.
he rends his cowled cloak and is seen clothed in the white robe of the neophyte.



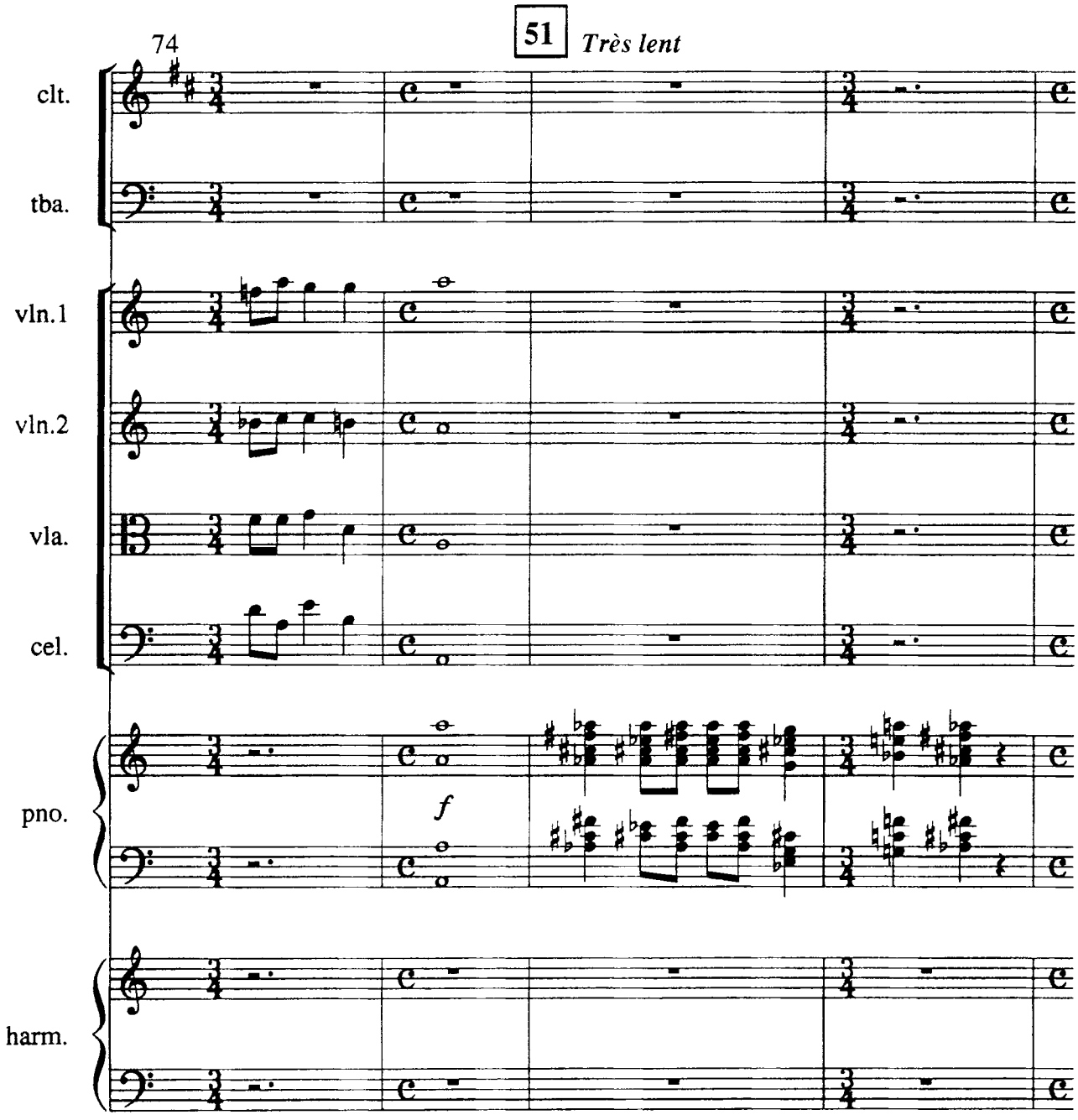

60
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
p

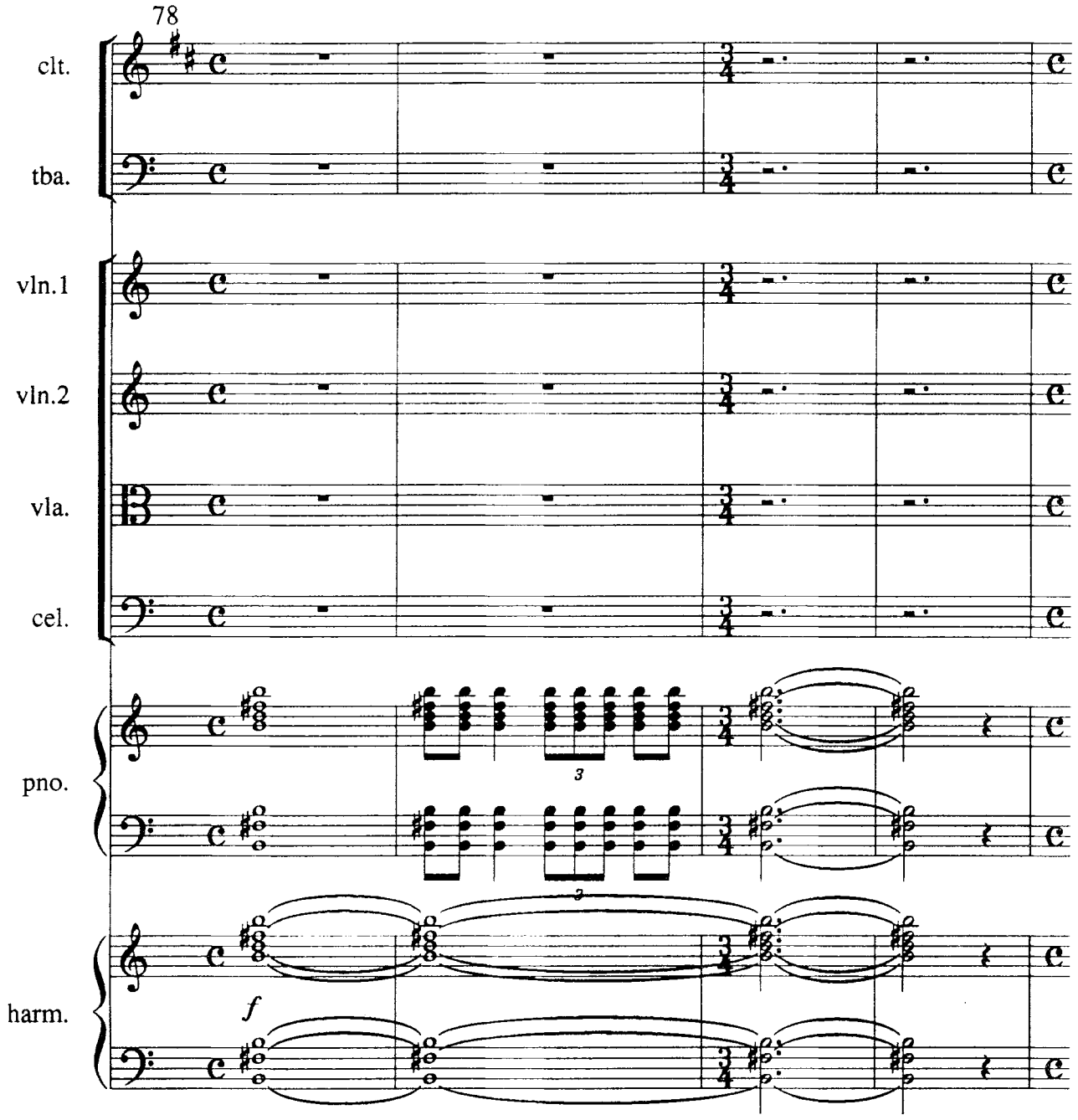

64
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

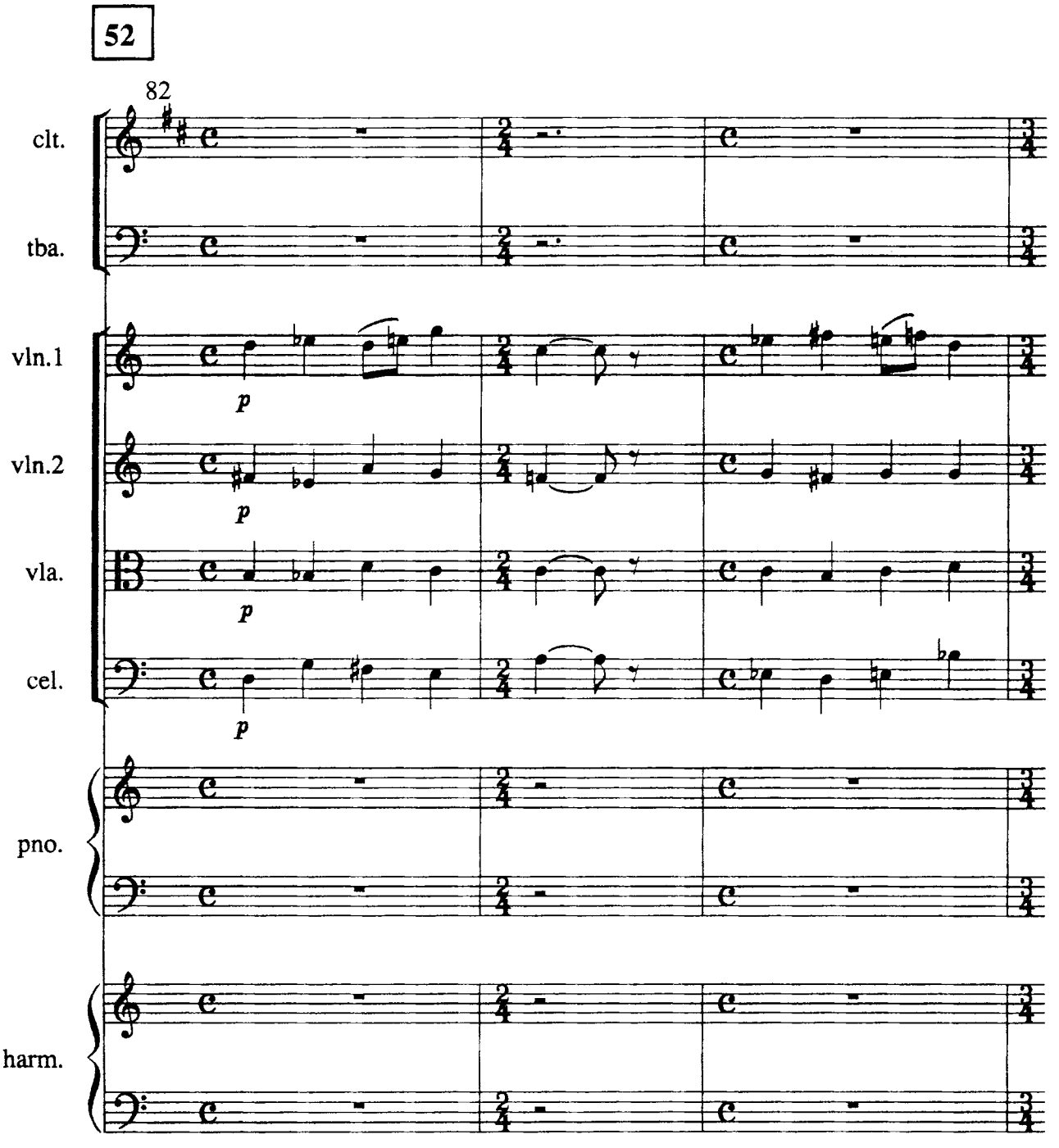

49
67
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
p
harm.

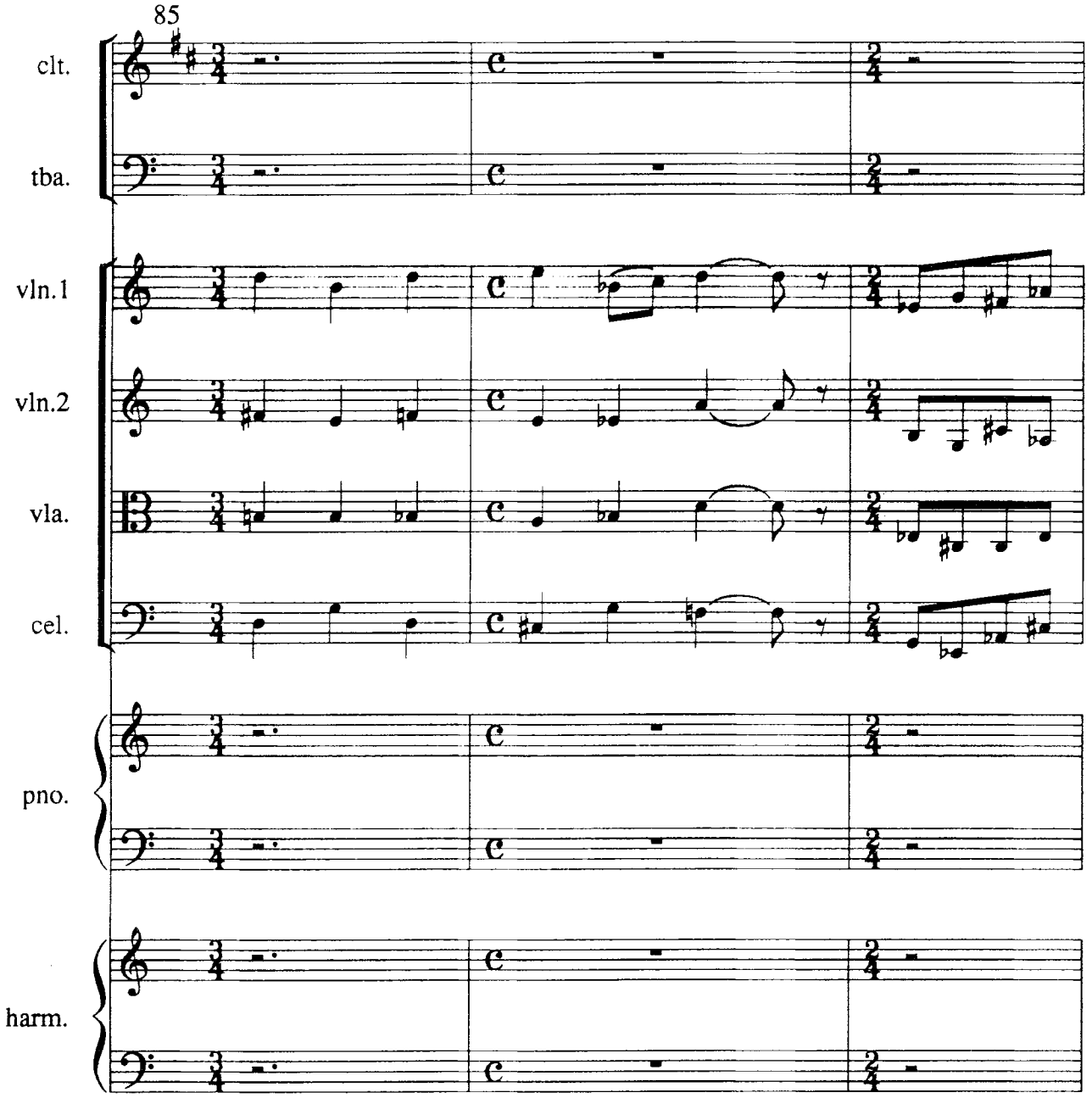

50
68
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
f

il se remet en prière.
he returns to his prayers.

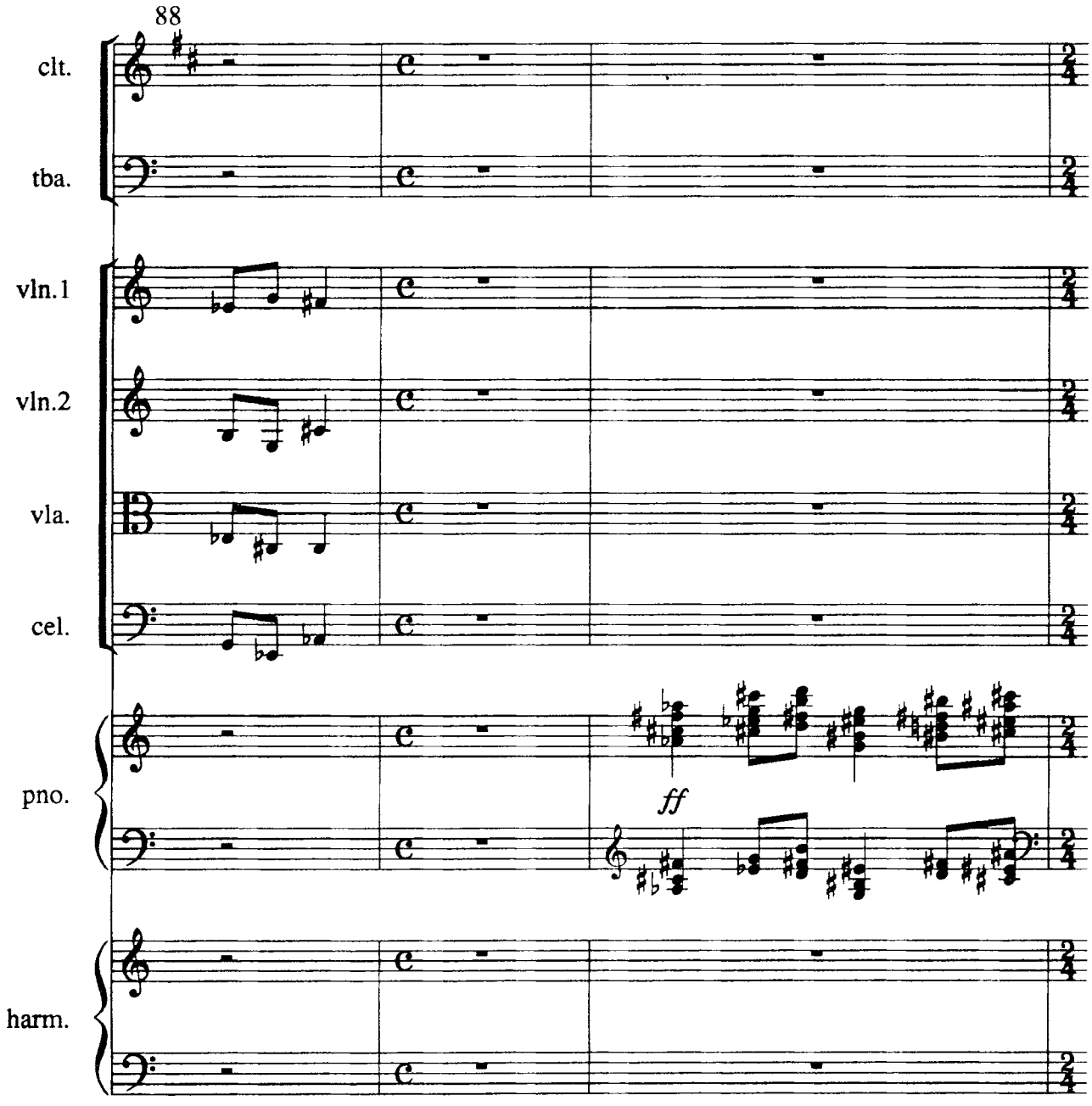


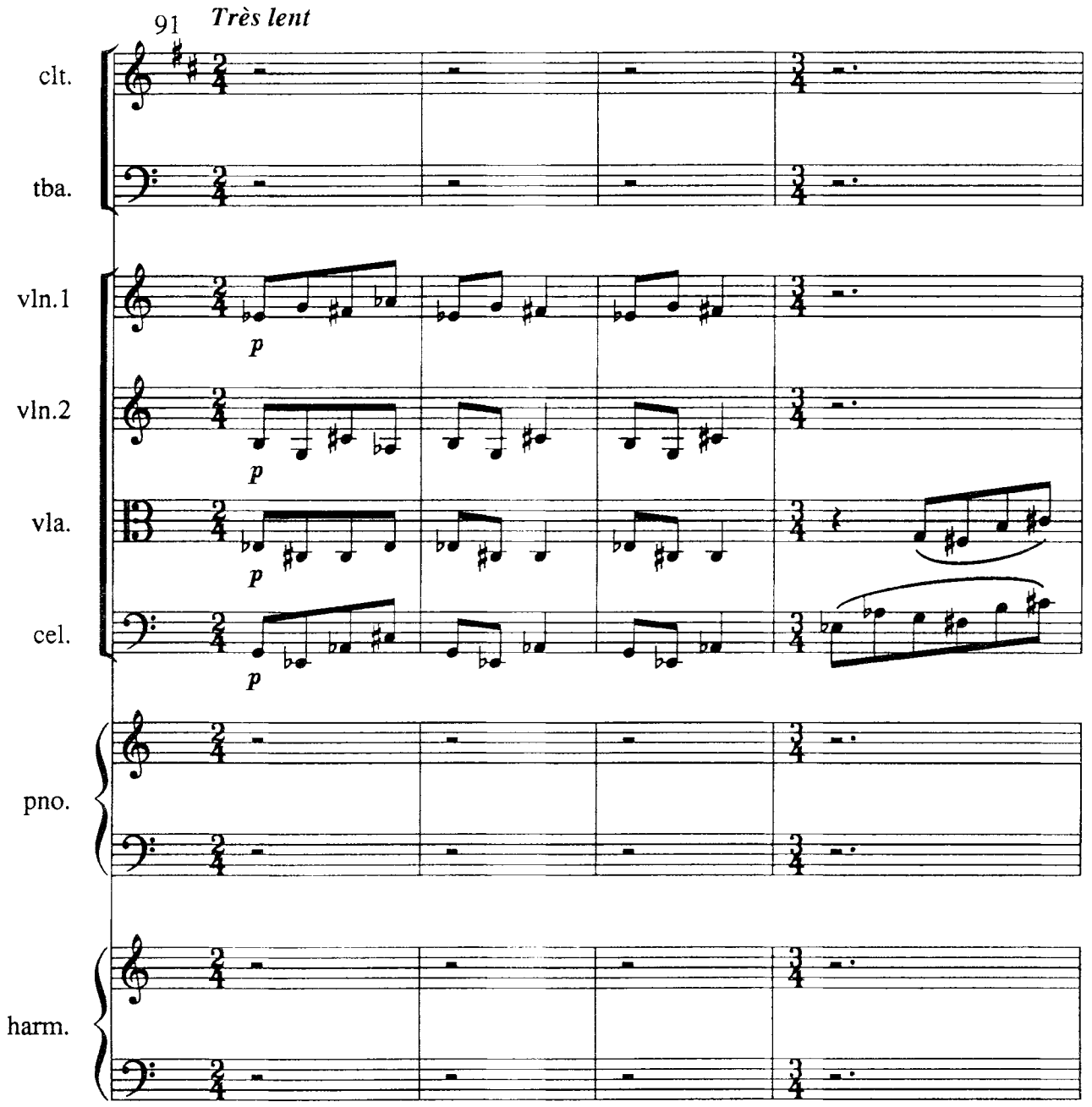

78
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.
f


52
82
clt.
tba.
vln.1
p
vln.2
p
vla.
p
cel.
p
pno.
harm.


85
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

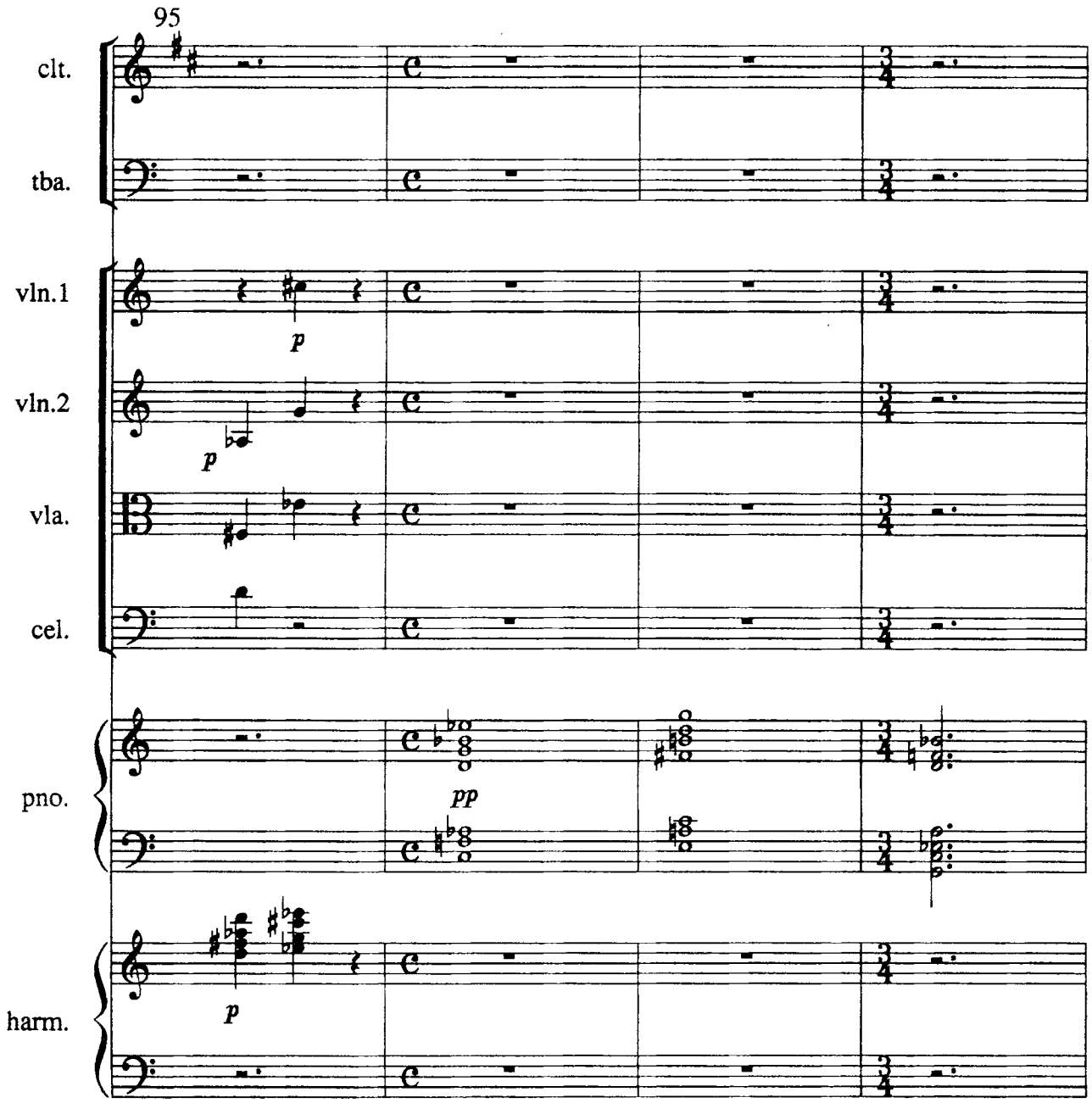
une légion de démons surgit de tous les côtés. ils revêtent des formes monstrueuses: chiens noirs avec une corne d'or sur le front; corps de poissons avec des têtes et des ailes d'oiseaux; géants au-chef de taureau, soufflant du feu par les narines; etc.
a legion of demons arises on every side. they take on monstrous forms: black dogs with golden horns upon their brows; fishes' bodies with bird's heads and wings; giants with bull's heads, breathing fire from their nostrils; etc.

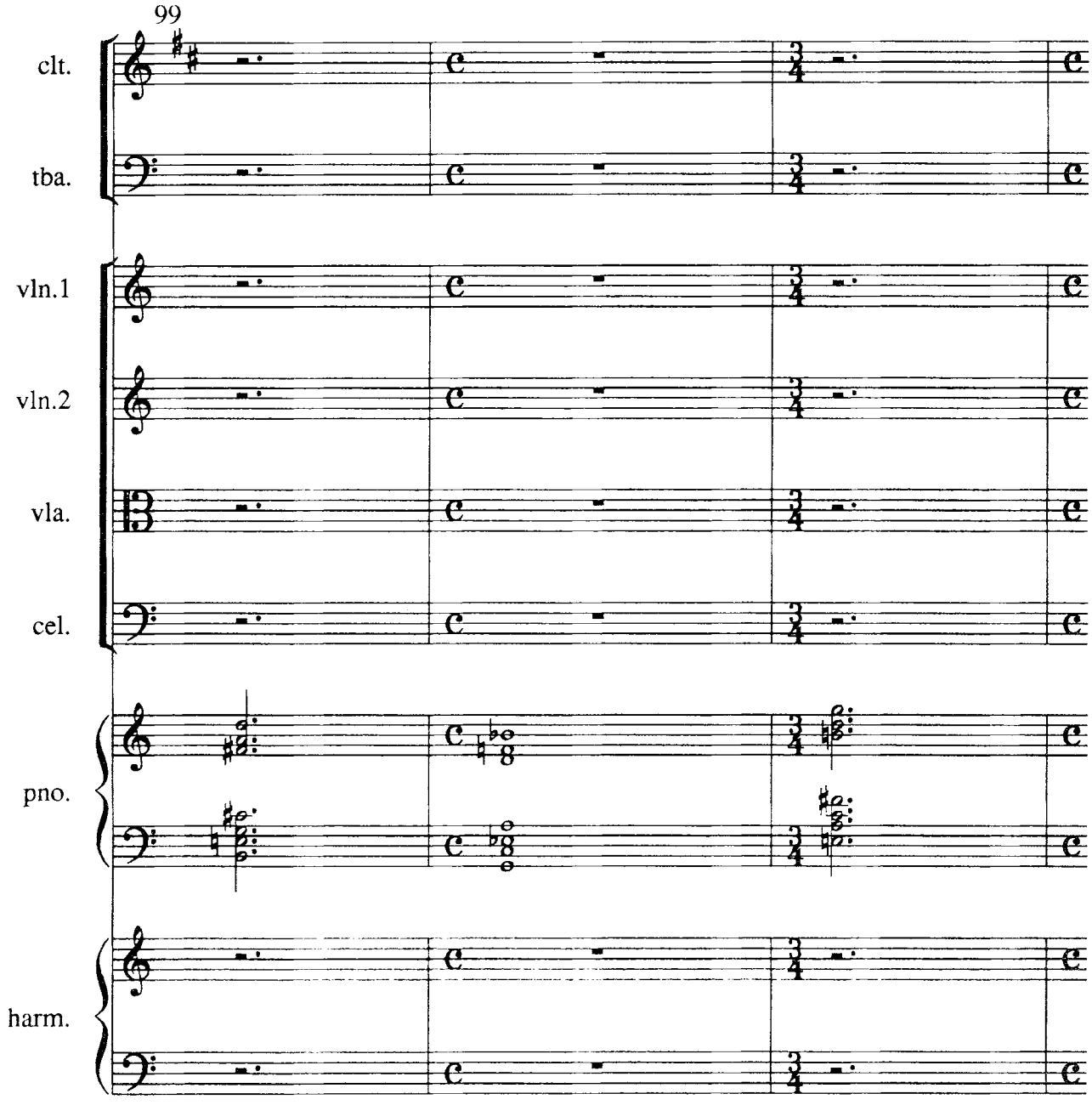


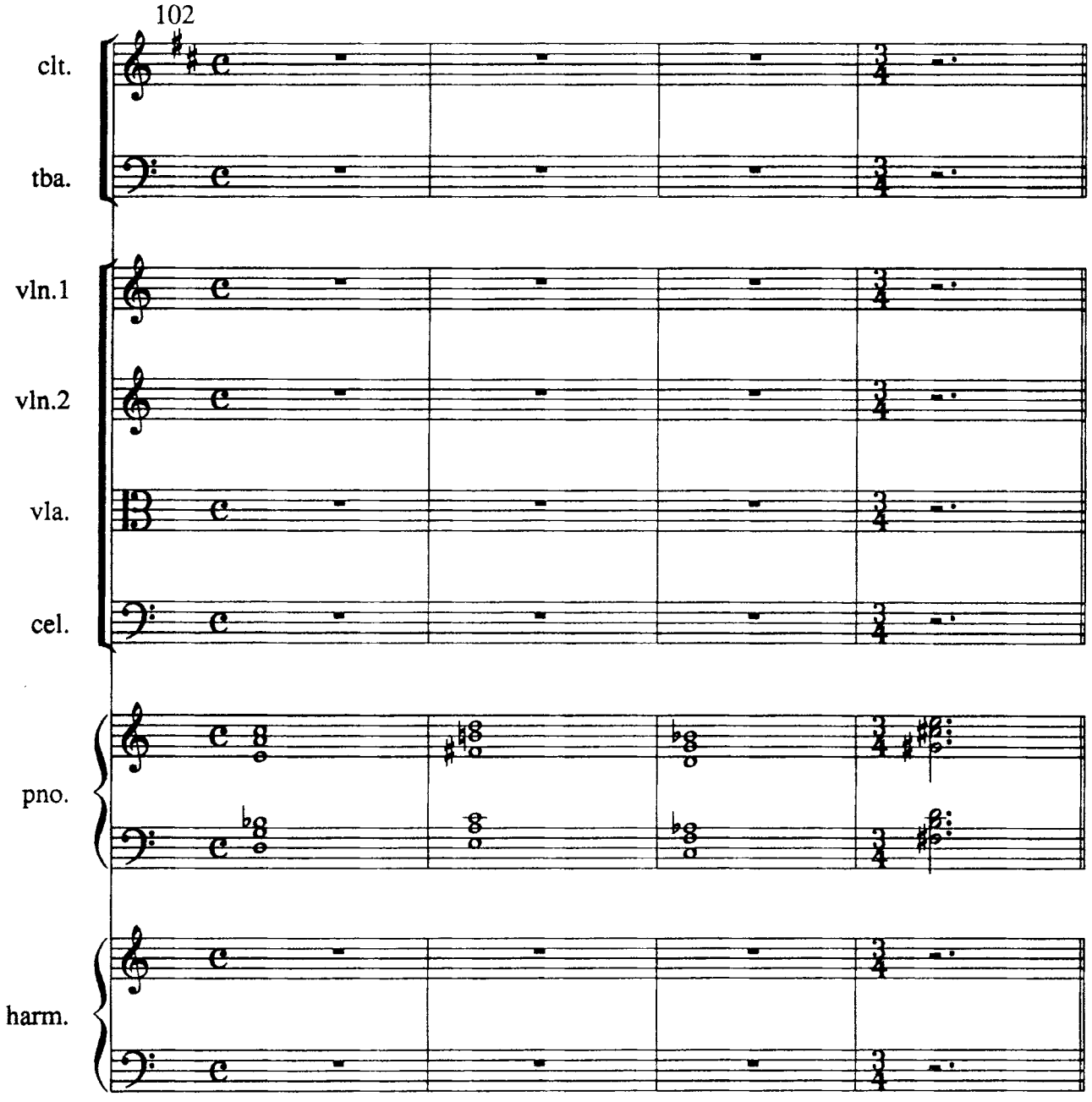

91
Très lent
clt.
tba.
vln.1
p
vln.2
p
vla.
p
cel.
p
pno.
harm.

uspud recommande son esprit au segnieur, puis se livre aux démons qui le déchirent avec fureur.

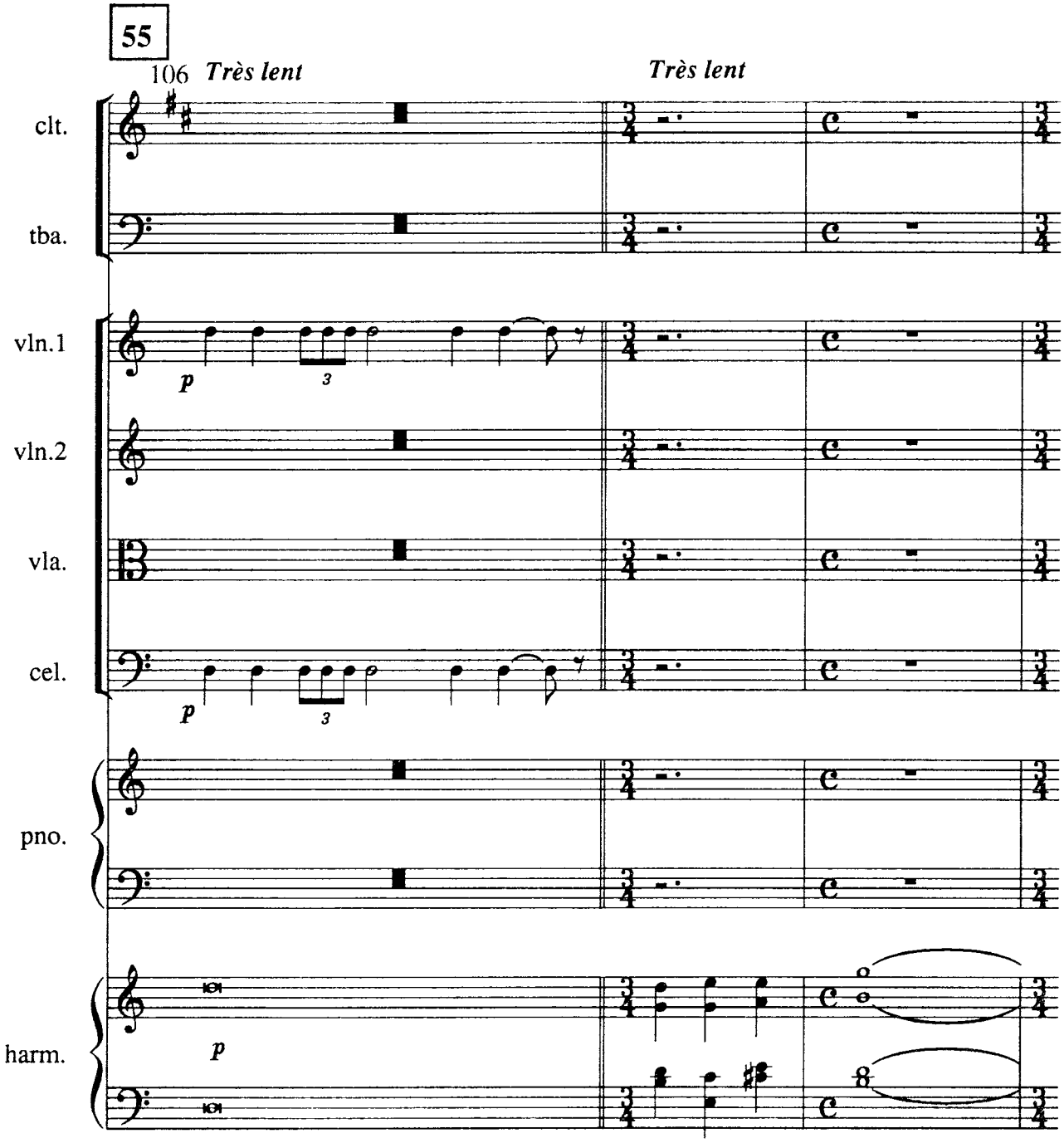
uspud commends his spirit to the lord, then gives himself over to the demons who tear him apart in fury.

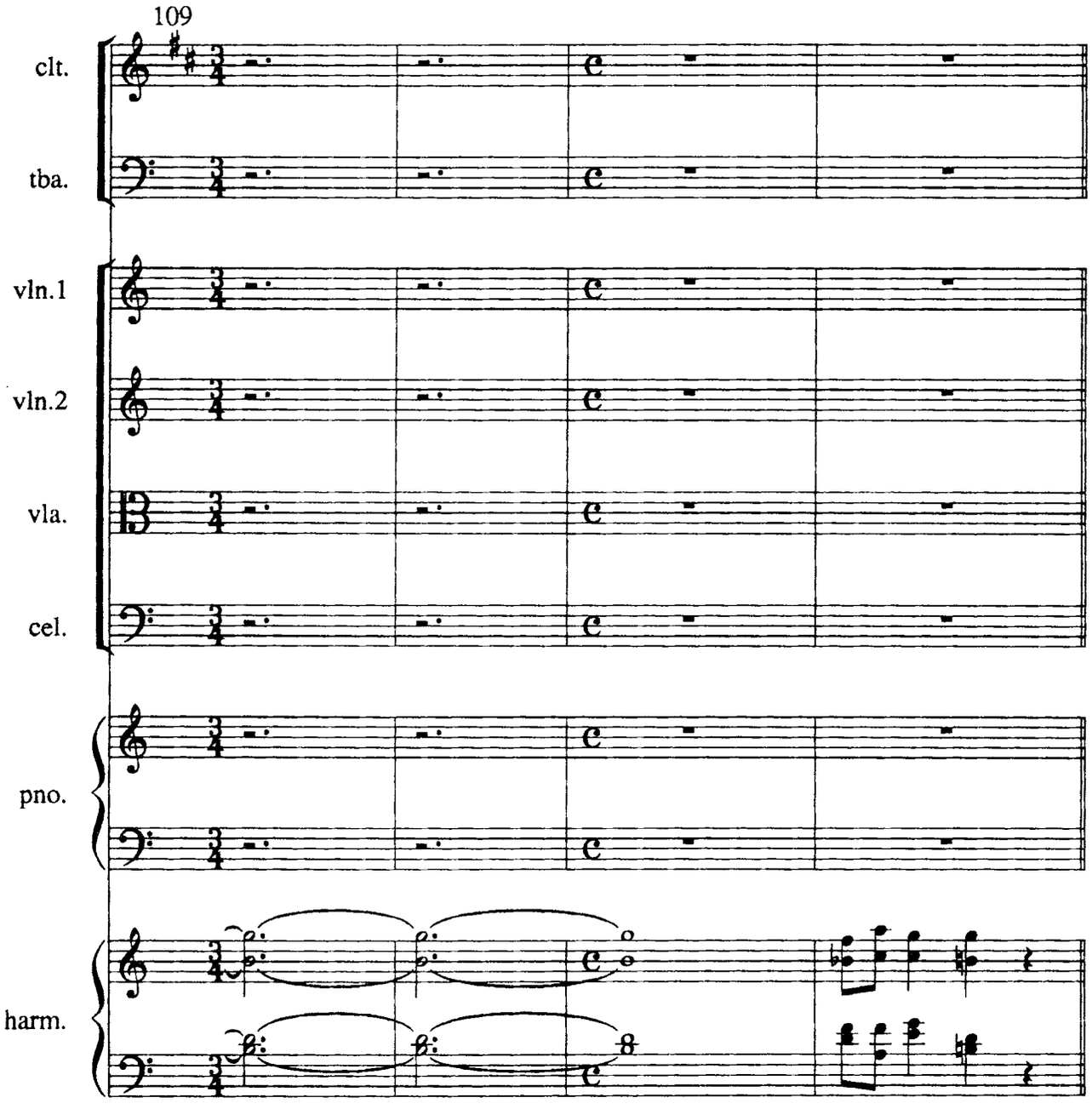



99
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

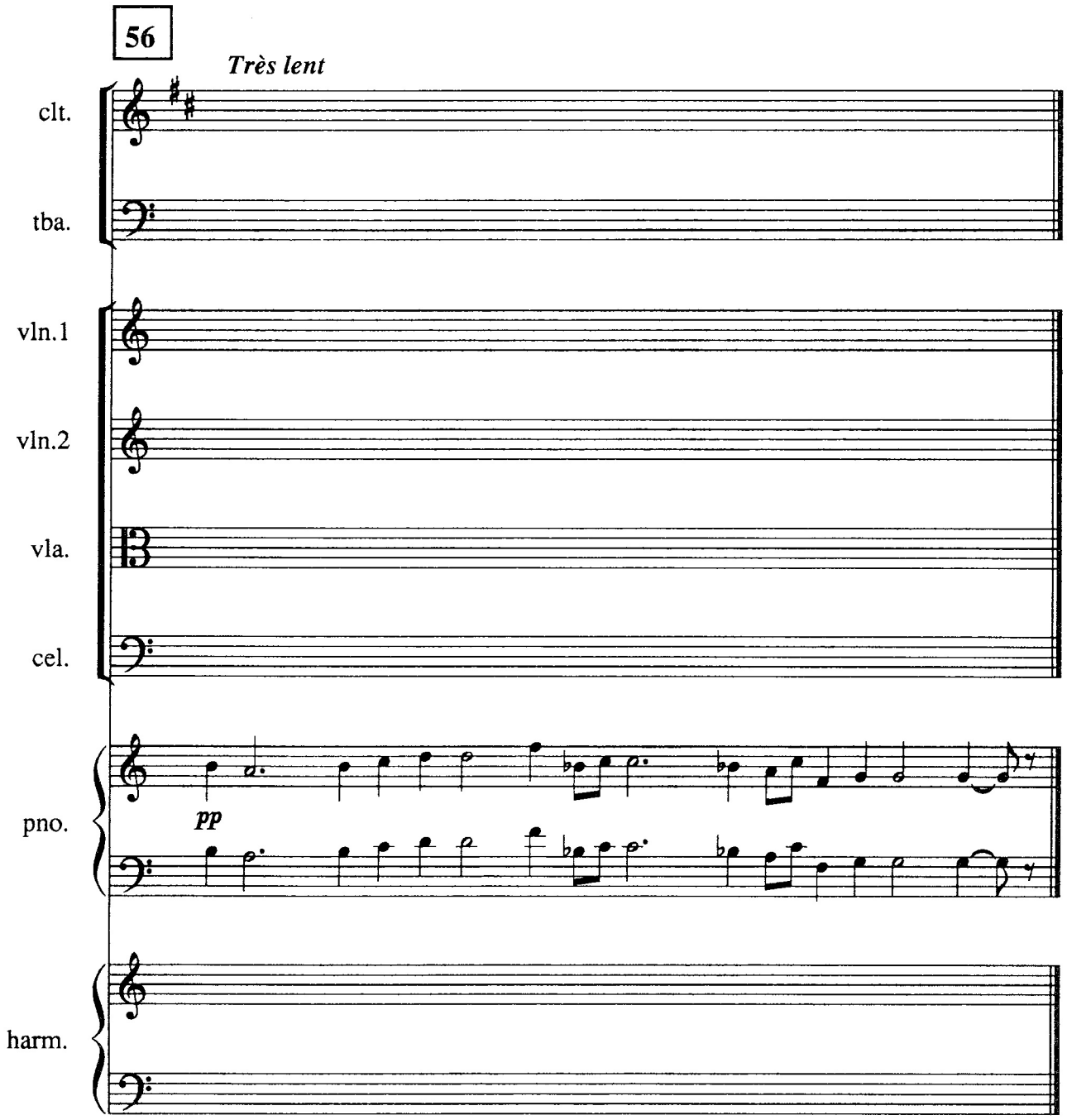

102
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

l'église chrétienne apparait, eblouissante de clarté et escortée de deux anges, portant des palmes et des couronnes.
the christian church appears, shining with clarity and escorted by two angels, bearing palms and crowns.




109
clt.
tba.
vln.1
vln.2
vla.
cel.
pno.
harm.

elle prend l'ame d'uspud dans ses bras et l'enlève vers le christ, qui rayonne dans le ciel.
she takes the soul of uspud in her arms and bears him towards christ who shines in the firmament.



fin du troisième acte.
end of third act.

rideau.
curtain.