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CHAPTER 6

DYNAMIC ASPECTS

6.1 Dynamic indications

It has to be admitted that the oboe, like other reed instruments, has a comparatively limited expressive range. The most important characteristic in this range is dynamic control (Goossens & Roxbourgh 1980:81-82).

Shostakovich's use of dynamic indications for the oboe and cor anglais range between *pp* and *ffff*. In all the Symphonies the *f* - *ffff* dynamic indication accompanied by expressive indications like *marcato* and *espressivo* is used much more often than the *p* - *mp* dynamic level. The *piano* dynamic level is used mainly for lyrical solo passages and phrases with exposed textures. In many instances there are as few as two or three *piano* phrases as opposed to an entire movement of *ff* dynamic levels. Bearing in mind the limited dynamic range of the oboe and cor anglais it is questionable whether the dynamic level exceeding *fff* is practical, especially in the high register. It can therefore be concluded that the hard, dry quality of the high register and excessive dynamic indications required of the oboe and cor anglais form the predominant timbre Shostakovich calls for in his symphonies.

The following is an example from the first movement of Symphony No. 7 of an excerpt in a *piano* dynamic level in which the first oboe and first bassoon share a passage in which imitation is the main feature (Ex. 6-1). The oboe and bassoon are accompanied by the cellos and double basses with their repetitive ostinato *pizzicato* figure, and the snare-drum with a rhythmic figure in which semiquavers predominate. The oboe solo lies mostly in the middle register although m. 220 poses a challenging repeated middle C which should be carefully articulated as it could result in an unwanted accent, owing to the difficulty in playing *piano* in the lower register. The reason for the inclusion of this example is that it is one of the very few lengthy examples where the oboe's dynamic level remains constantly *piano*.

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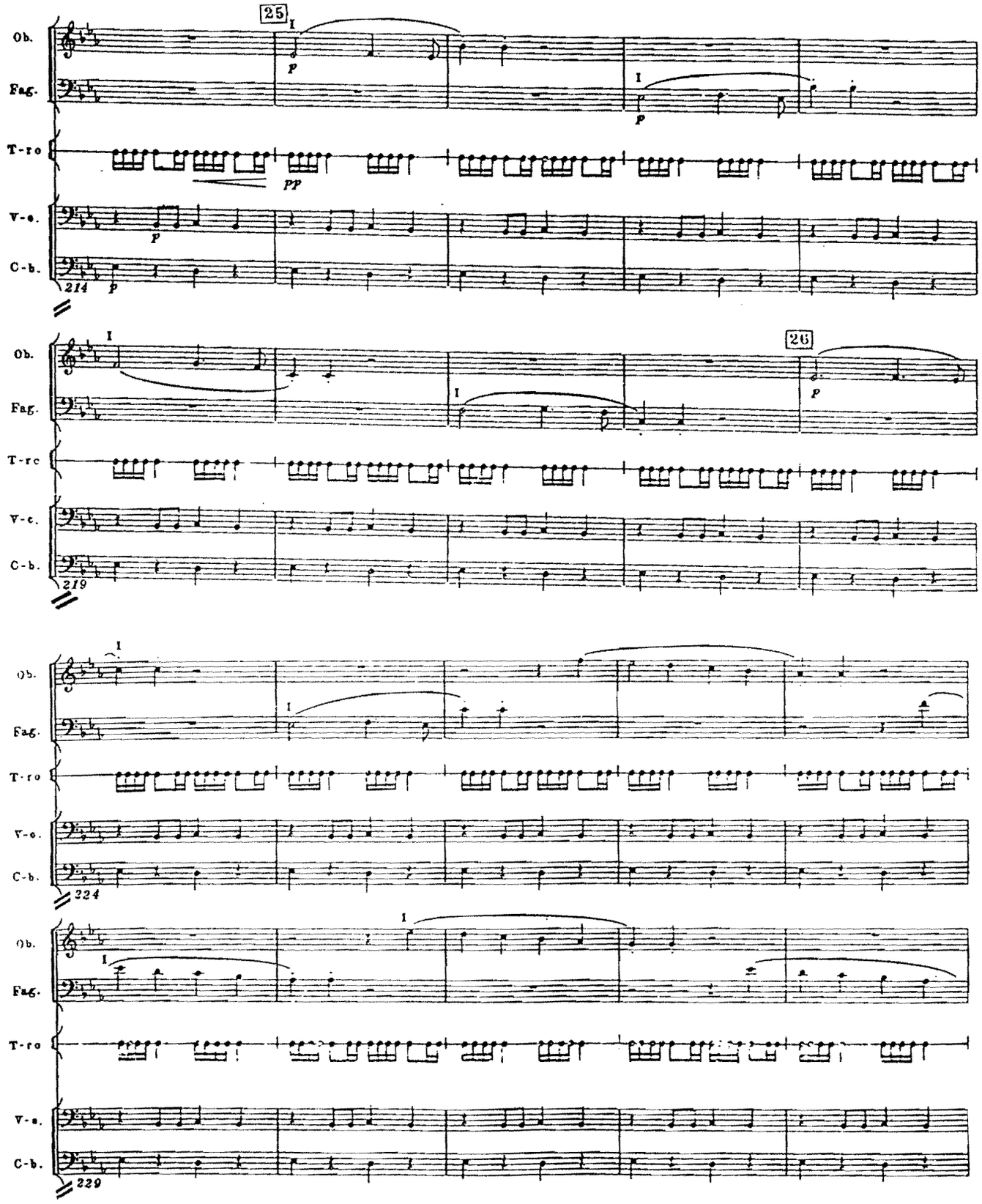
Example 6-1: Symphony No. 7, first movement, mm. 214-248



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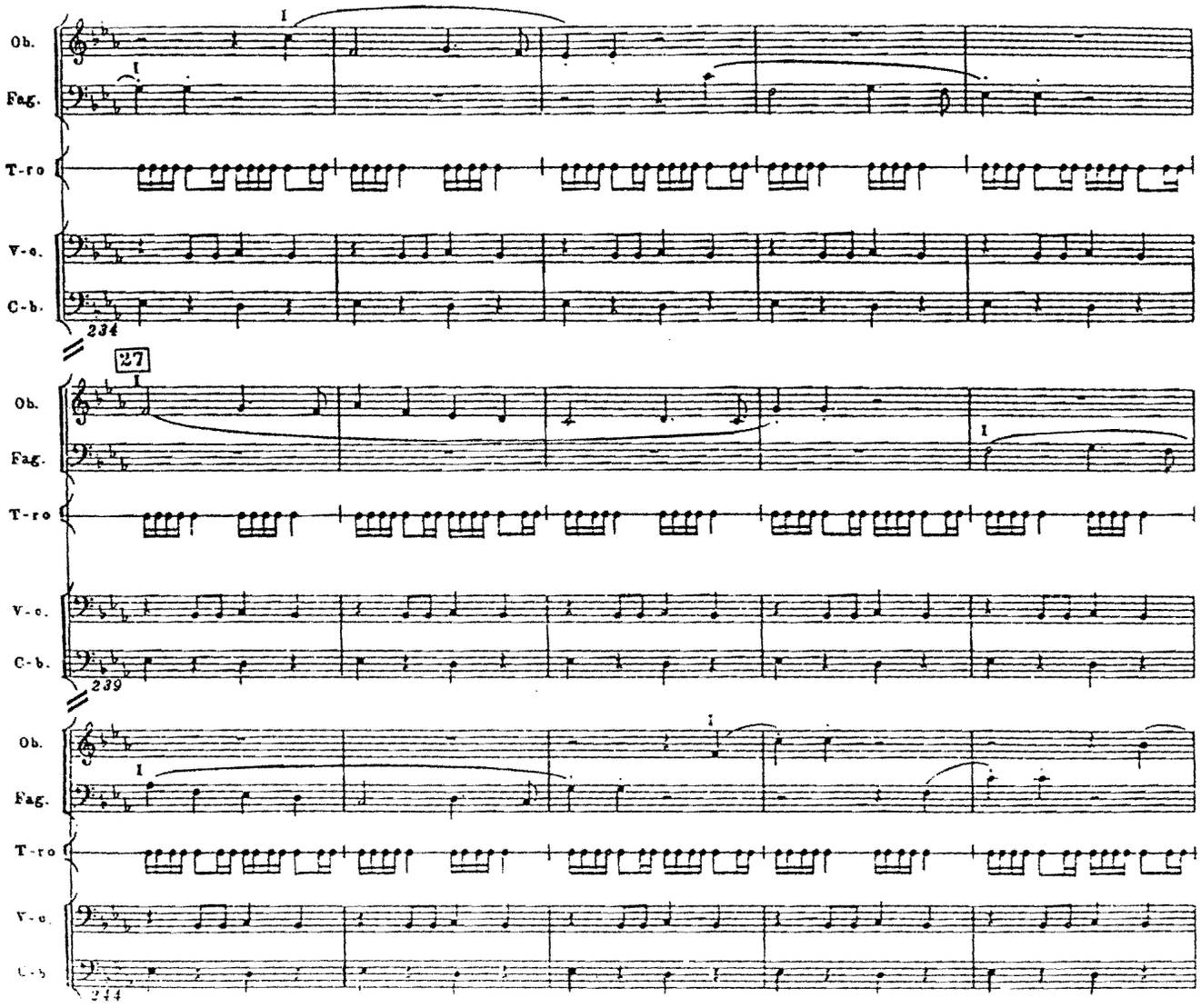

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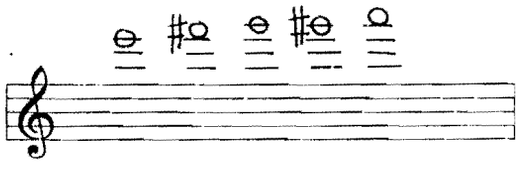
6.2 *Piano* passages in the high register

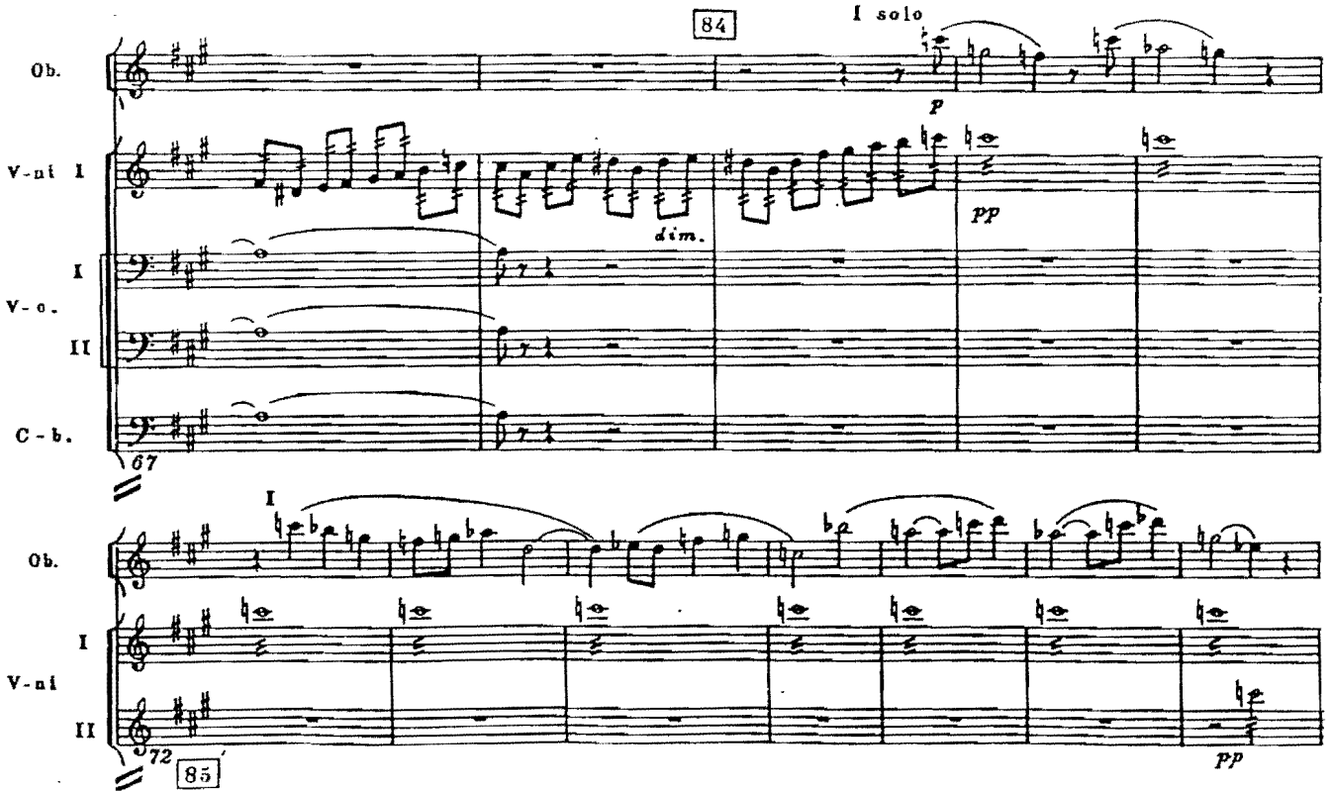
Upwards from A above the staff the oboe tone gradually becomes thinner, and above D begins to sound less like an oboe. These high tones do not possess the warmth of the range below A, but they are useful for adding brilliance to the woodwinds. Of the higher notes, G-sharp and A are impractical (see Ex. 6-2). They are insecure of production and lack quality. F-sharp and G-natural are not often used but are more playable. (Piston 1982:152-153.) Fortunately Shostakovich seldom uses the notes F and F-sharp above the stave and never the notes higher than G.

Example 6-2: The high notes of the oboe and cor anglais



Symphony No. 5 contains an example of a beautiful *piano* solo for the oboe in the high register. Bearing in mind the "hard, dry" character of the high register (Korsakov 1964:19), Shostakovich nevertheless manages to create a meditative emotional atmosphere with the theme on solo oboe supported by tremolo first violins on a C pedal.

Example 6-3: Symphony No 5, third movement, mm. 67-78



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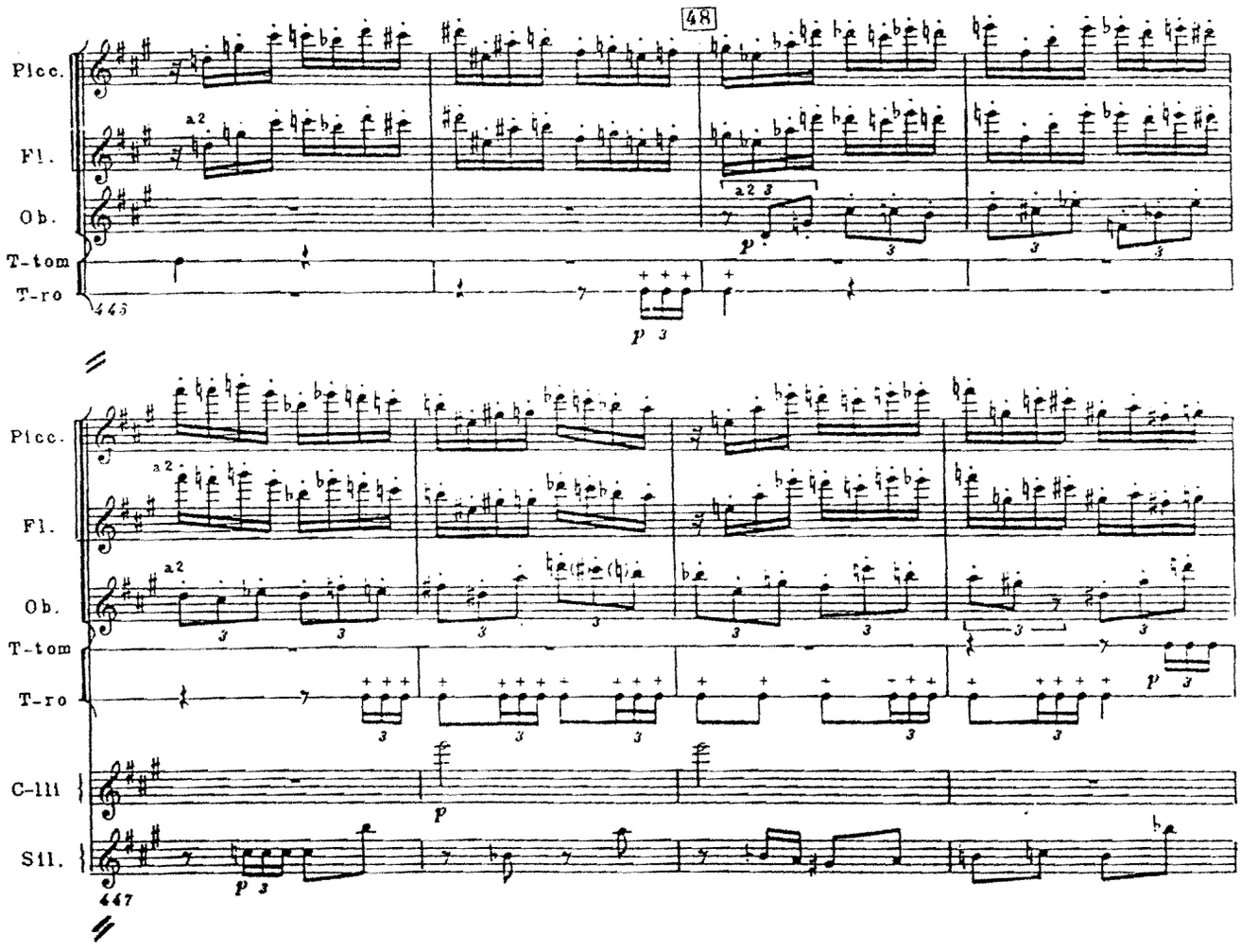
In the opening *Allegretto* of Symphony No. 15, known for its "teasing, witty, relaxed" character (Ottoway 1978:64), Shostakovich uses the high register of the oboes (doubling in unison) in a fast staccato passage in a complicated rhythmic texture. In m. 443 the two flutes doubled by the piccolo one octave higher begin with a semiquaver figure, followed by the oboes playing triplets in m. 445. The clarinets and bassoons follow with a quintuplet figure in m. 451. From m. 448 the oboe part becomes progressively higher and reaches an F-natural above the stave in m. 454 and m. 455. The staccato articulation makes it considerably easier to play the high notes.

Example 6-4: Symphony No. 15, first movement, mm. 443-458



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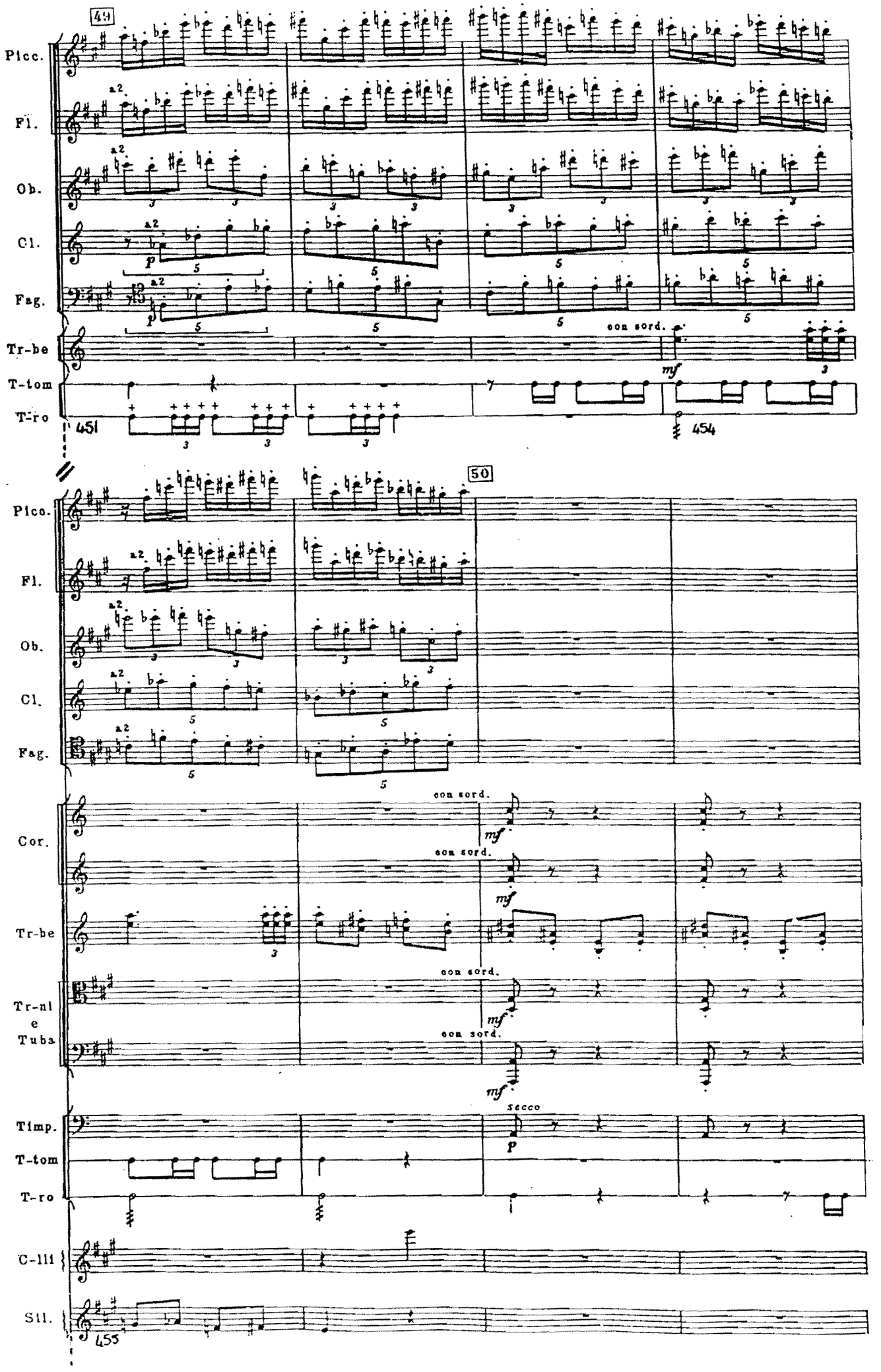

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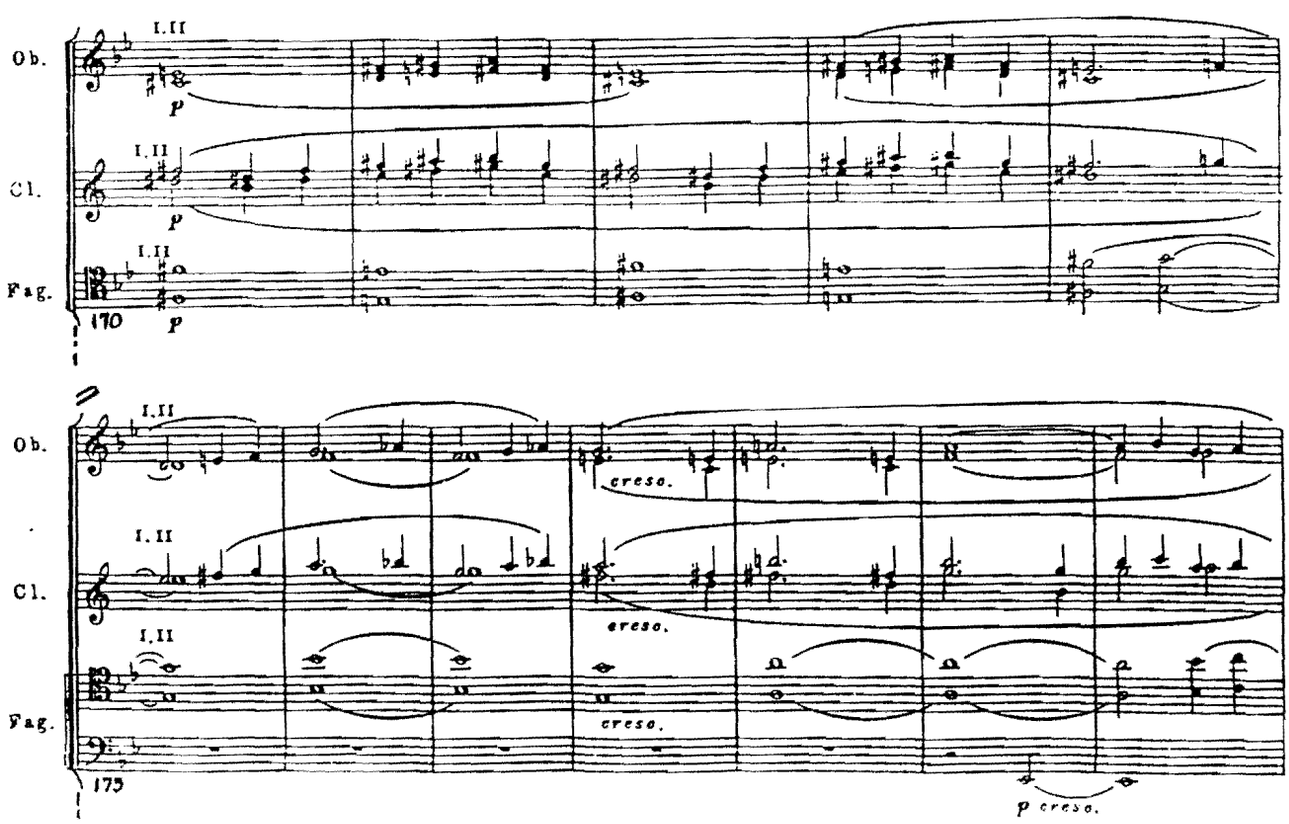
6.3 *Piano* passages in the low register

The oboe's very quality of penetrating expressiveness can also be a mixed blessing, especially, for instance, in the low register which is very hard to control at a soft dynamic level (Del Mar 1983:171). This causes difficulties when trying to match the soft ensemble of other woodwinds. In direct contrast to the flute the oboe increases in intensity in the lower fifth of its range. Here it is the problem of the oboist to subdue the natural tendency to loudness and even coarseness. The low B-flat is seldom found in scores. It cannot be attacked softly, and it is more appropriate for music of a robust character (Piston 1982:152). The cor anglais, however, in its lower fifth or sixth is richly beautiful, with tremendous expressive carrying power (Adler 1982:174).

There are very few examples of oboe passages in the low register in the 15 symphonies.

The following is an example found in the first movement of Symphony No. 12 of a passage written for the oboes in the lower register. The second oboe has the difficult task of articulating a C-sharp below the stave at a *piano* dynamic level in mm. 170, 172 and 174. Fortunately this passage is not too exposed, as the oboes, clarinets and violins have unison material.

Example 6-5: Symphony No. 12, first movement, mm. 170-181



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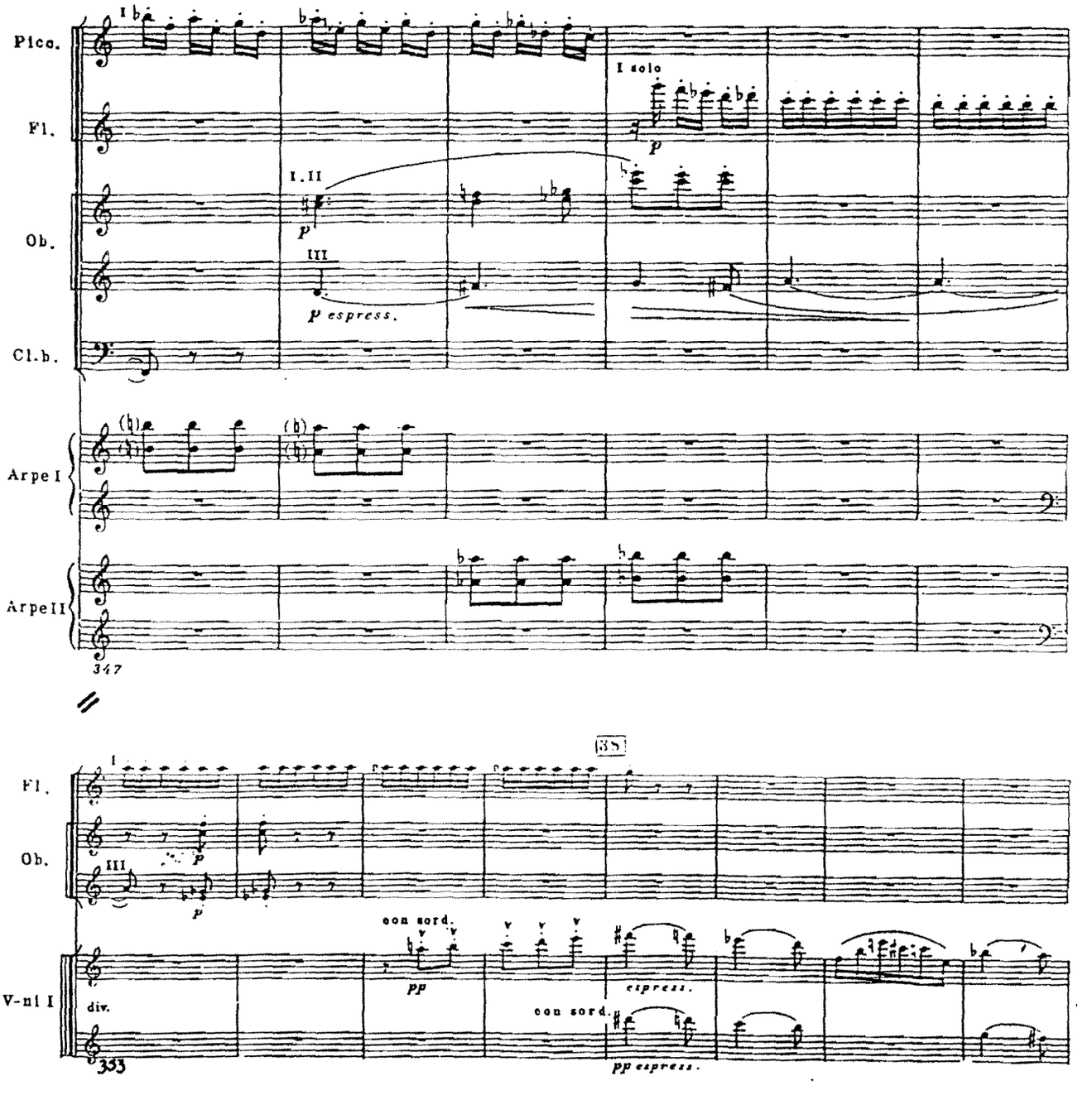
Example 6-6 below is taken from the first movement of Symphony No. 4 in which the third oboe has the daunting task in m. 348 of a very exposed *piano espressivo* entry in the low register. The tempo at this point is fairly slow and the first and second oboes and two harps are providing a chordal accompaniment to a solo *staccato* melody by the piccolo in mm. 347-349 which is taken over by the first flute in m. 350. Note the solo of repeated notes scored for the first flute from mm. 351-356. (This passage is similar to a passage with repeated notes for the cor anglais mentioned in Chapter 5, Ex. 5-14.)

Example 6-6: Symphony No. 4, first movement, mm. 347-360



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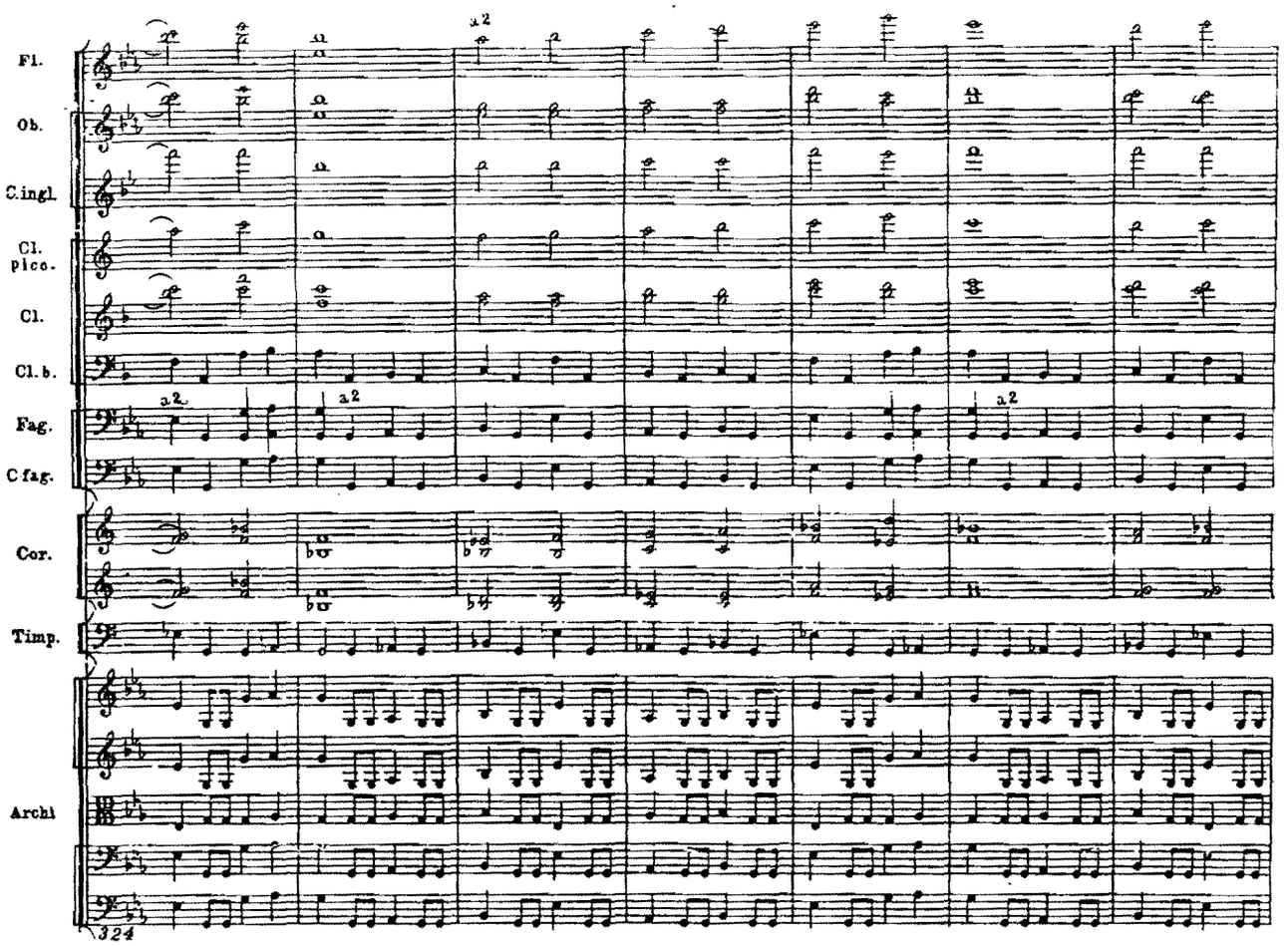
6.4 *Forte* passages in the high register

More frequent examples of *forte* passages in the high register are found scored for oboes than for cor anglais. The most prominent examples can be found in the following symphonies: 2:141-147, 227-228; 3:526-533, 886-890; 4:1:388-392, 914-915, 919-921; 4:3:345-350; 7:4:323-324 (Symphony No. 7 contains the most examples of passages for the cor anglais in the high register); 8:2:159-166; 8:4:1-3 (this movement begins with *fff* for oboe and cor anglais on C and E-flat above the stave); 11:2:703-724.

Below (Ex. 6-7) is an example from the fourth movement *(Allegro non troppo)* of Symphony No. 7 in which the cor anglais has a *ff* passage in the high register. Shostakovich's intention in this instance must have been a specific timbre, as the cor anglais loses its beautiful tone and volume in the high register. The cor anglais' sounding pitch is a perfect fifth lower than written and it is therefore reinforcing the second oboe in unison.

Example 6-7: Symphony No. 7, fourth movement, mm. 324-330



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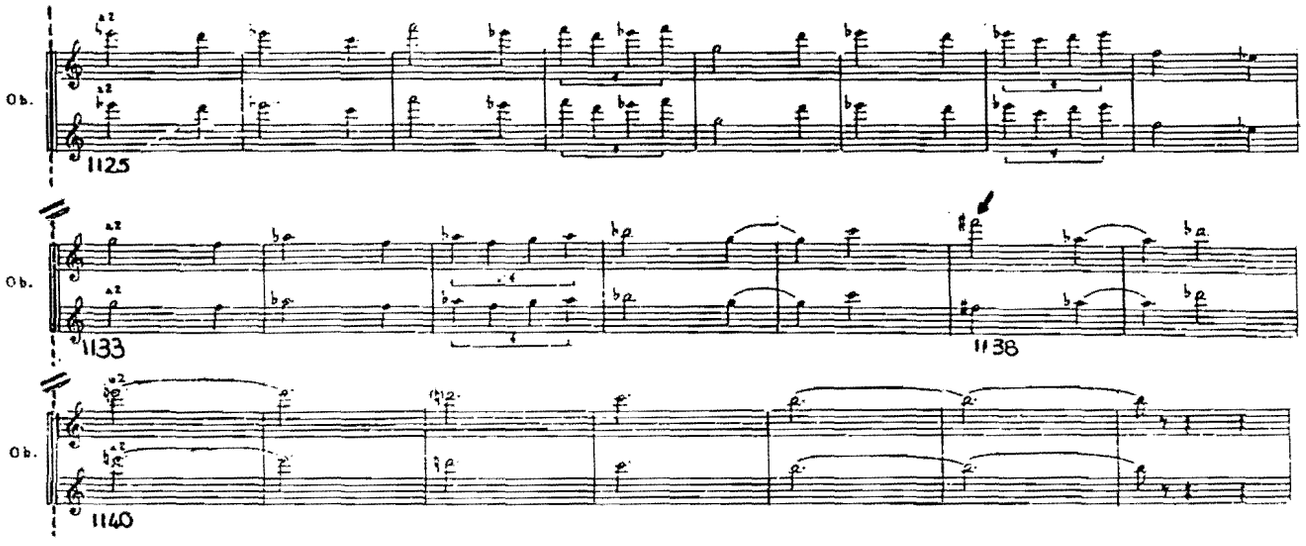
The following is a lengthy example from the third movement of Symphony No. 4 of a *fff* passage in the high register with a very dense texture (Ex. 6-8). The entire woodwind section plays in unison. All four oboes double in unison except for the very difficult F-sharp above the stave in m. 1138 when the third and fourth oboes double an octave lower. The tempo indication is *Allegro*.

Example 6-8: Symphony No. 4, fourth movement, mm. 1125-1146



The following example (Ex. 6-9) with high notes from Symphony No. 8 includes a challenging *fff* passage for two oboes and cor anglais. This example contains a melodic line with larger interval leaps than the previous example as well as a variety of articulation: *legato* (166-170.3), *staccato* (170.4-172.2) and *non legato* (172.4-174.3). The difficulty in this example lies especially in the high G-flat scored in mm. 166 and 179 for the oboes, and the recurring high F-natural for the cor anglais in mm. 166, 177 and 178.

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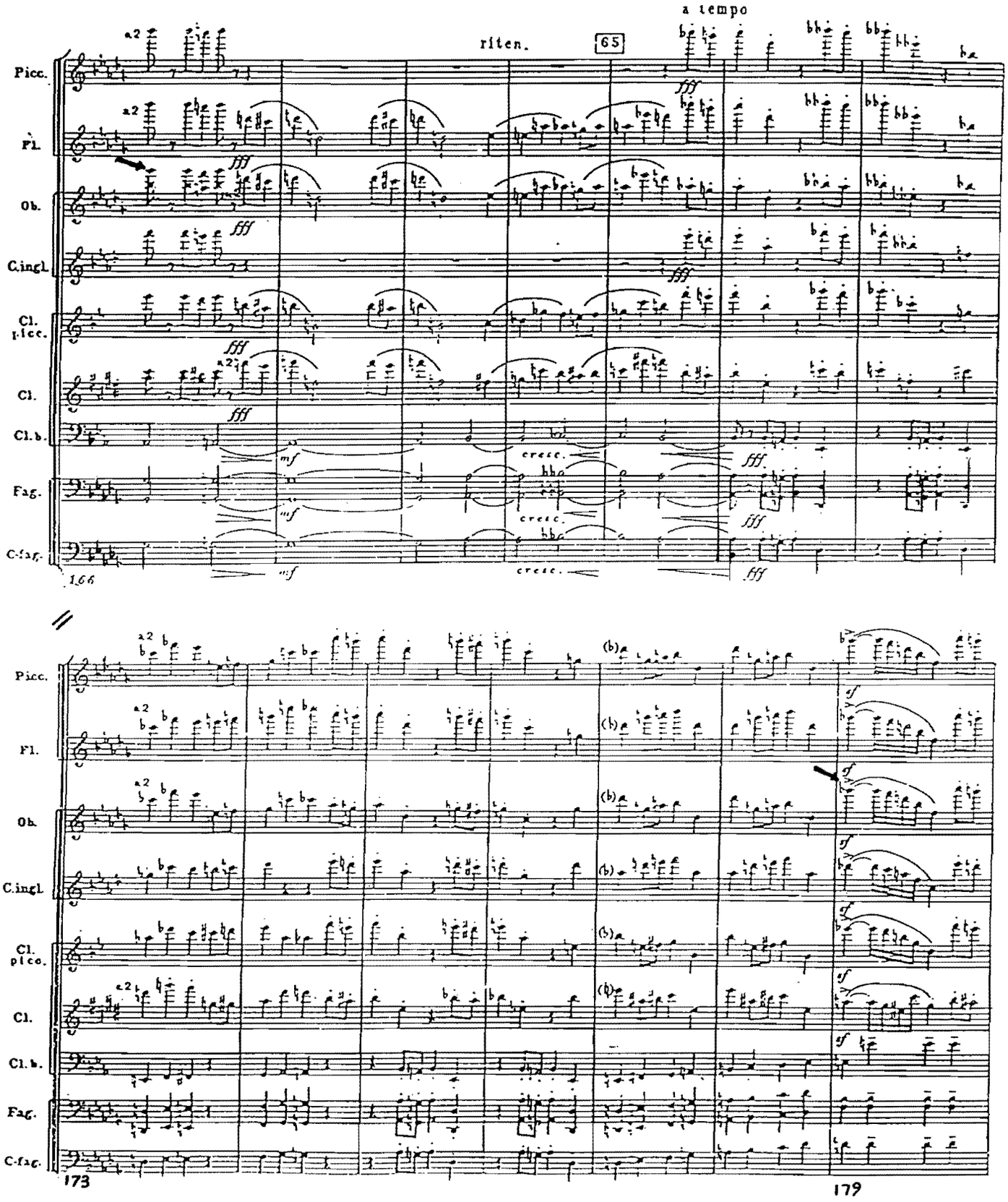
Example 6-9: Symphony No. 8, second movement, mm. 166-179



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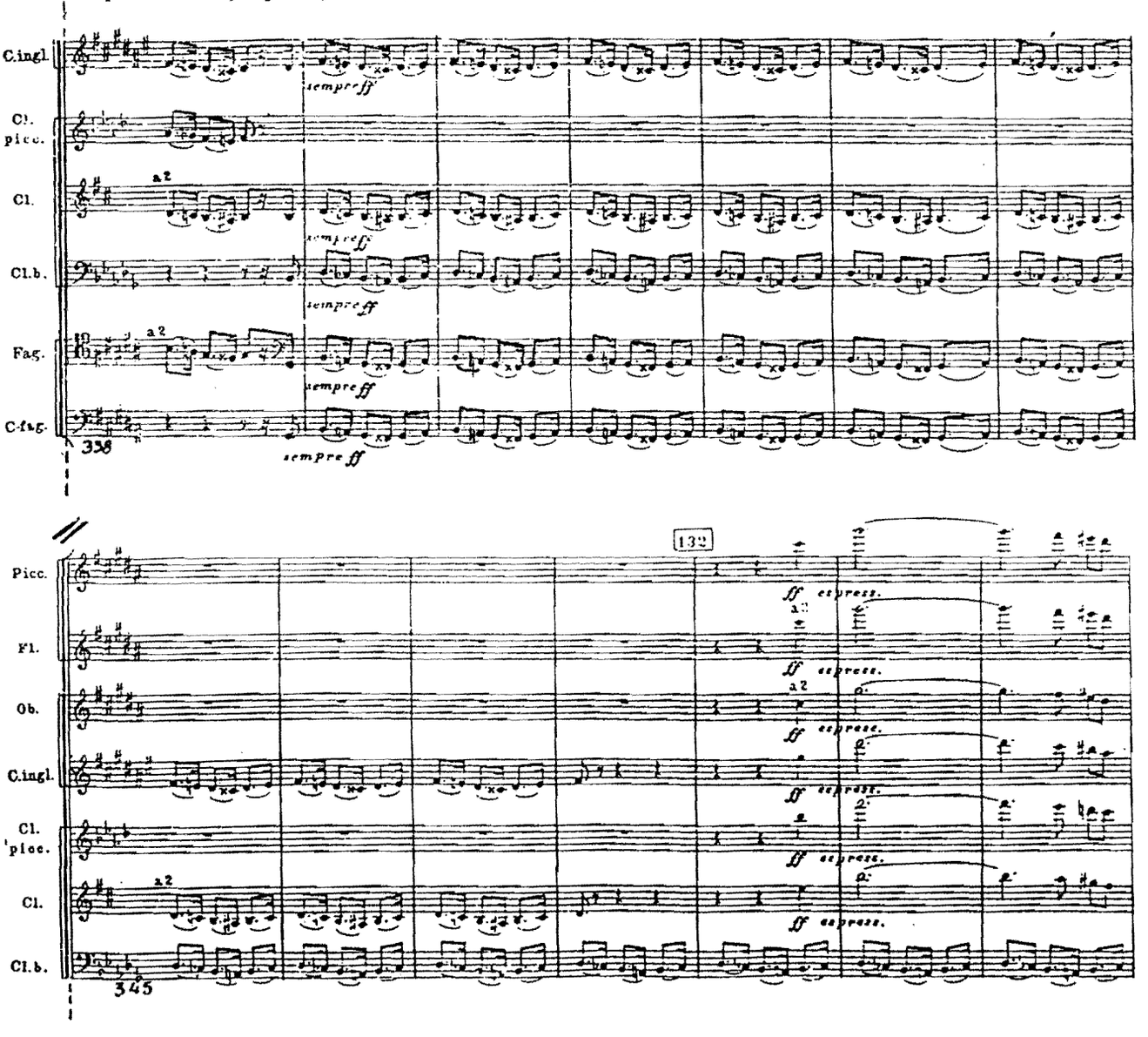
6.5 *Forte* passages in the low register

There are no significant examples of *forte* passages in the low register in the early symphonies. Symphony No. 5 contains only two instances in the third and fourth movements. In the opening theme of Symphony No. 6 the cor anglais has a low B-natural (the lowest note possible) at a *f espressivo* dynamic level in unison with the clarinets, bassoons, violas and cellos. Symphony No. 7 presents the most examples of loud passages in the low register for both oboes and cor anglais.

The following excerpt taken from the third movement (*Adagio*) of Symphony No. 7 includes a *ff* passage in mm. 338-348 for cor anglais in the low register. The passage is not very exposed as the low woodwinds and strings have similar material.

Example 6-10: Symphony No. 7, third movement, mm. 338-351



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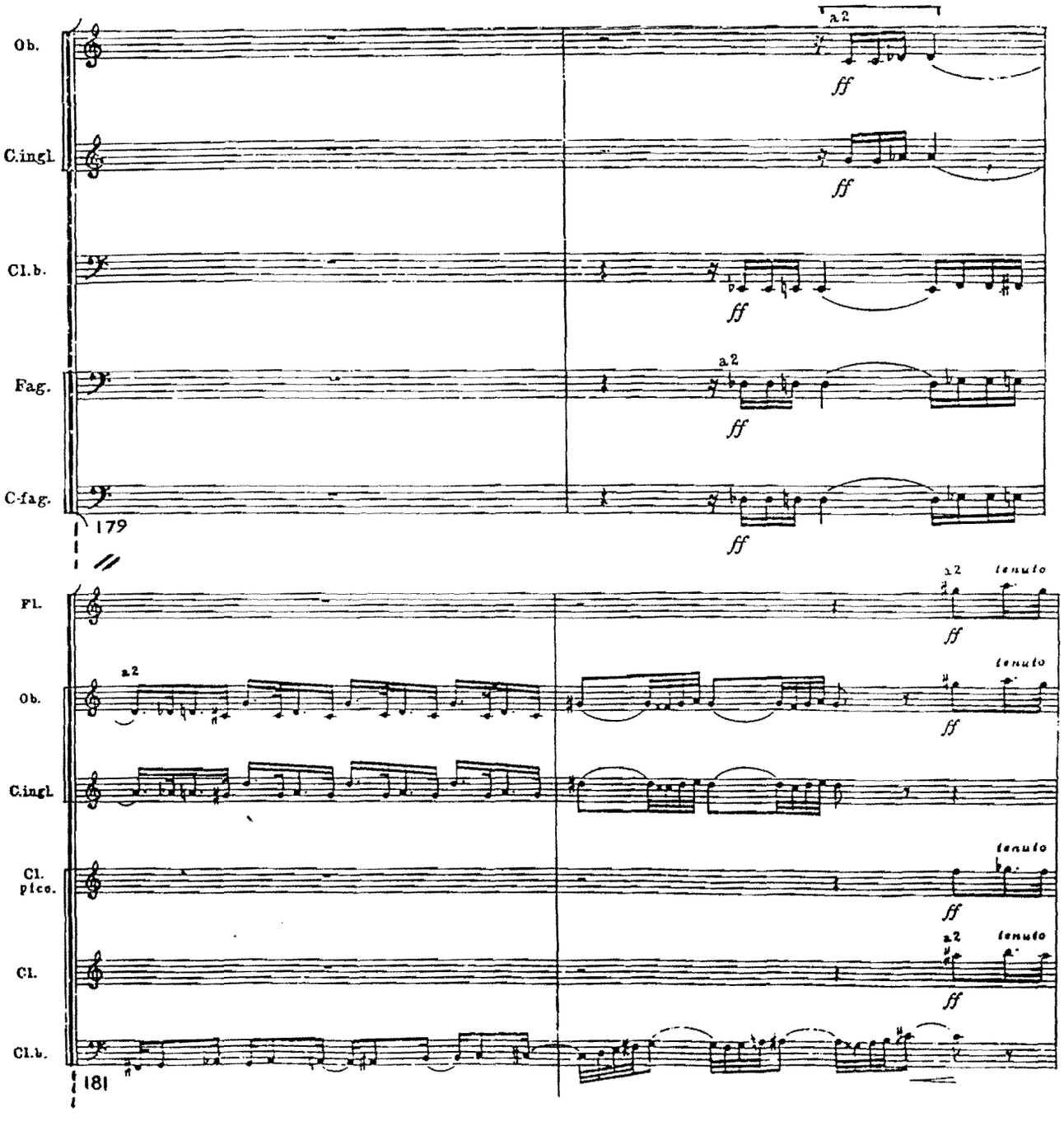
Symphony No. 8 presents another challenging passage for the oboes in their low register. The compromising repeated notes middle C and D-flat in m. 180 and the dotted rhythm in m. 181 for the oboes in their low register are made considerably easier because of the *ff* dynamic indication, the unison doubling with the cor anglais, and the rhythmic support of the strings. The bass clarinet, bassoons and contrabassoon, after having had melodic and rhythmic imitation in mm. 180 and 182, have opposing rhythmic and melodic material to the oboes and cor anglais in m. 181, creating an interesting canvas of rhythmic imitation and timbre.

Example 6-11: Symphony No. 8, first movement, mm. 179-182



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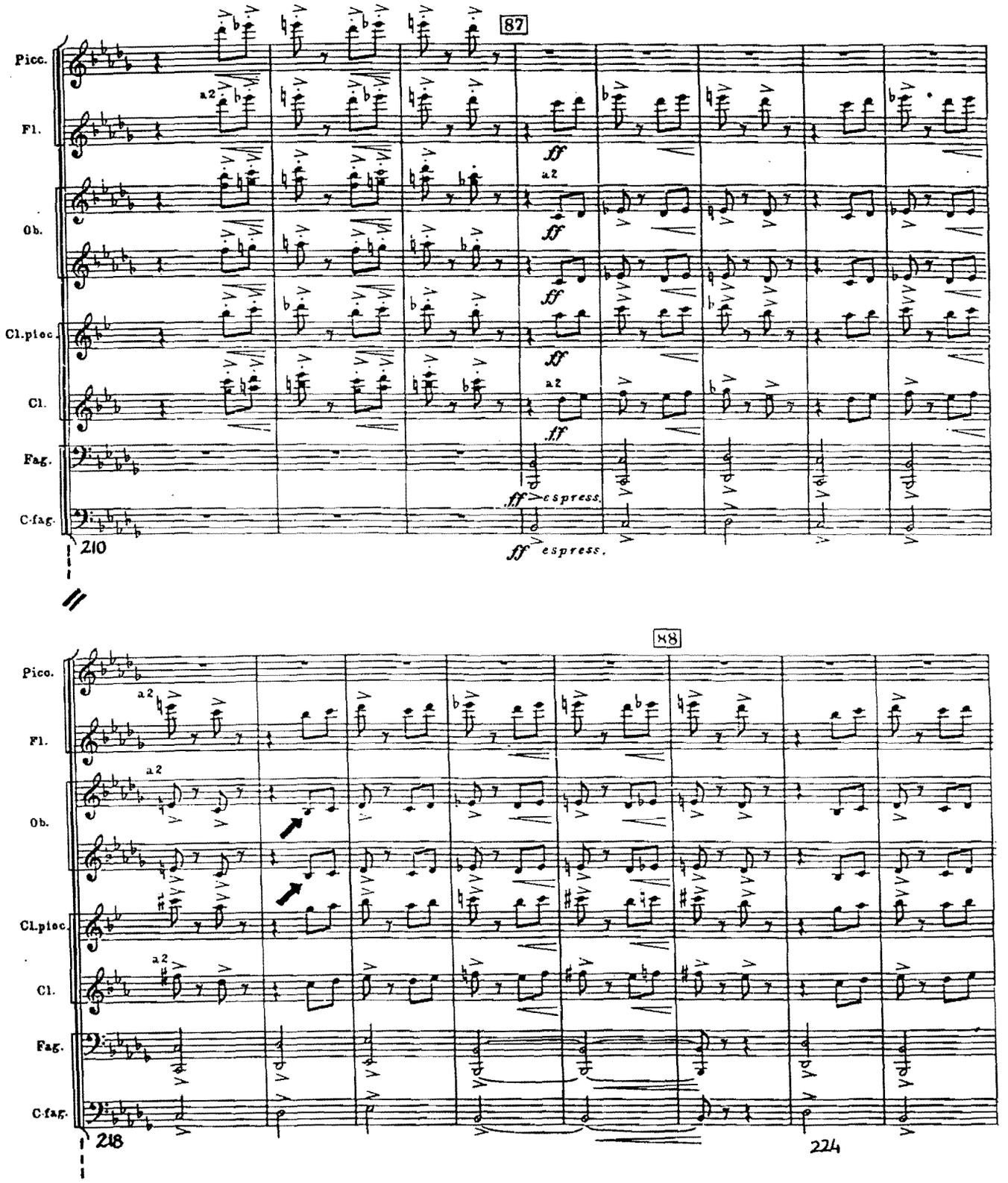
The second movement of Symphony No. 10 contains the following well articulated passage for three oboes doubling in unison at a *ff* dynamic level which includes a B-flat below the stave (the oboe's lowest note) in mm. 219 and 224.

Example 6-12: Symphony No. 10, second movement, mm. 210-225



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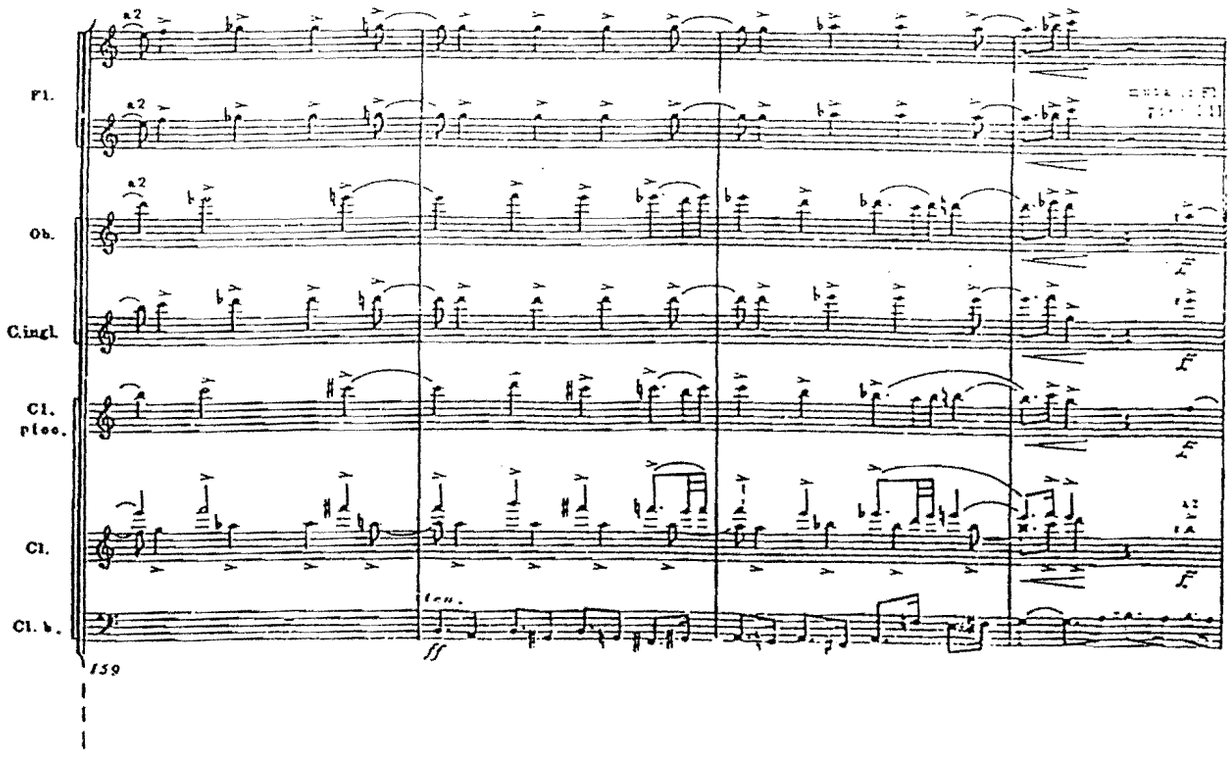
6.6 Accents

Staccato and accents are better suited to the oboe than to the flute. Accents for the oboe and cor anglais are also suitable in the lower range but can sound "rather rough". (Piston 1982:420.)

Shostakovich makes extensive use of accents throughout the symphonies, with the exception of Symphonies No. 2 and 3. The most frequently used accent is the following indication: >. It is notable that Shostakovich uses this accent mostly at a *forte* dynamic level and very seldom in *piano* passages. Very often the indication *fff espressivo* is used in combination with accents. The following symphonies contain examples of phrases in excess of eight bars in which accents are used at a *forte* dynamic level for virtually each note: Nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, and 15.

The following example from the first movement of Symphony No. 4 (Ex. 6-13) provides a colourful palette of rhythm enhanced by accents which are indicated on each note. Here the oboes and cor anglais have an accented syncopated rhythm in the high register. The dynamic indication is *fortissimo*. The violas and cellos provide rhythmic contrast with accents on each crotchet beat.

Example 6-13: Symphony No. 4, first movement, mm. 159-162



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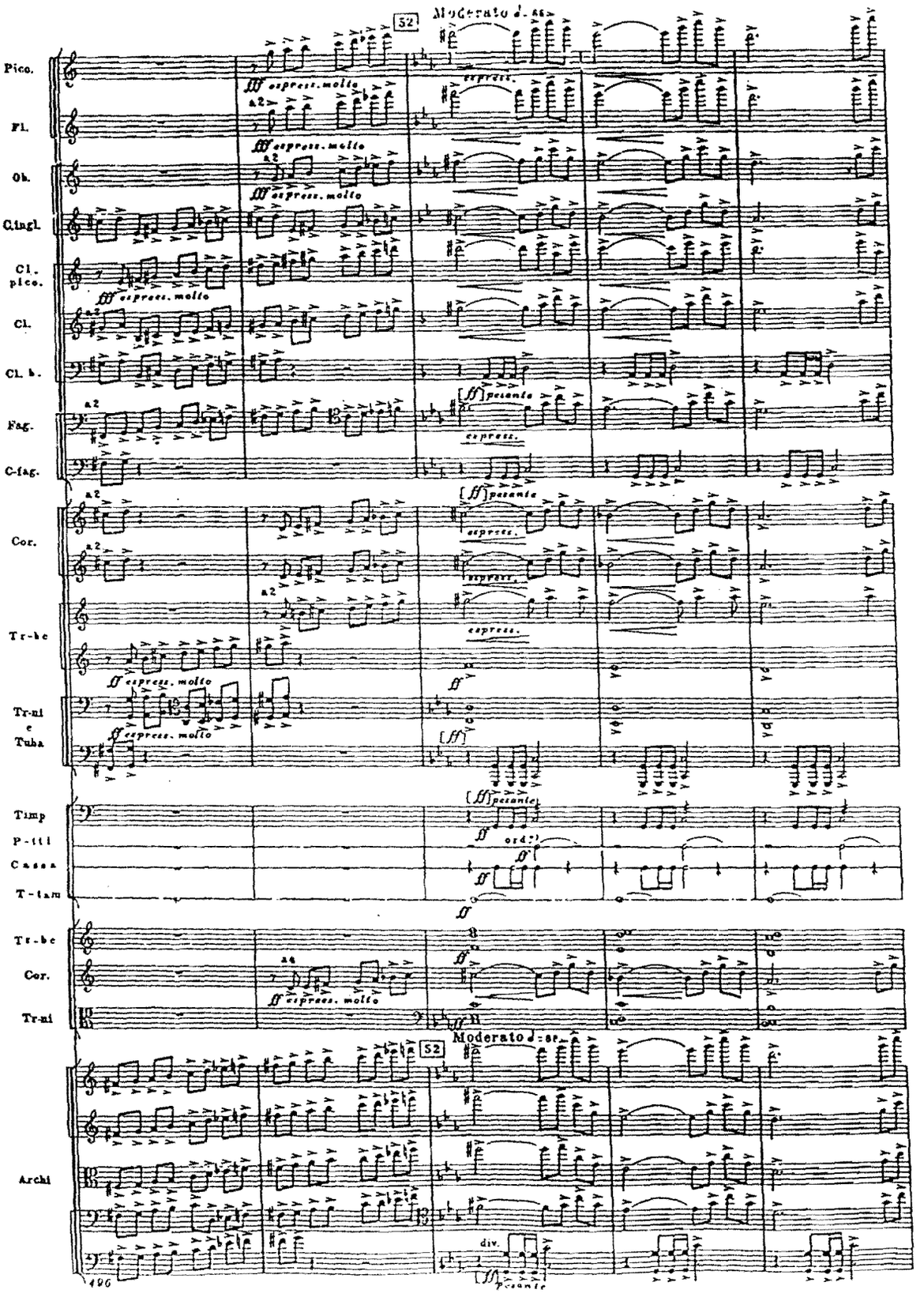
Shostakovich creates a tangibly tense atmosphere in the first movement of Symphony No. 7 (also known as the war symphony, "Leningrad") by scoring accents for the entire orchestra. Notice the characteristic *fff espressivo molto* indication in m. 497 for the high woodwinds, and also the crescendo marking in mm. 498 and 499.

Example 6-14: Symphony No. 7, first movement, mm. 496-500



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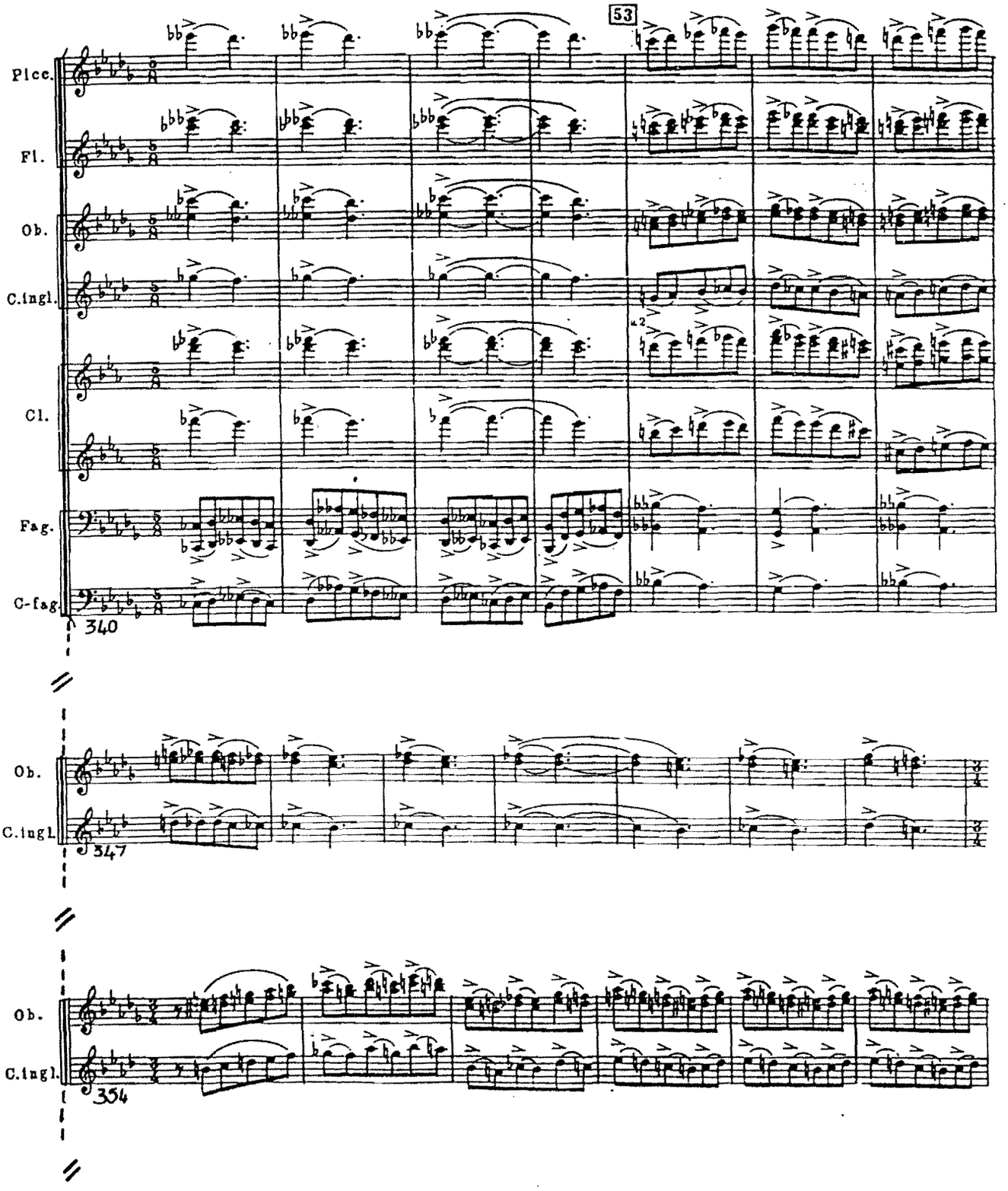
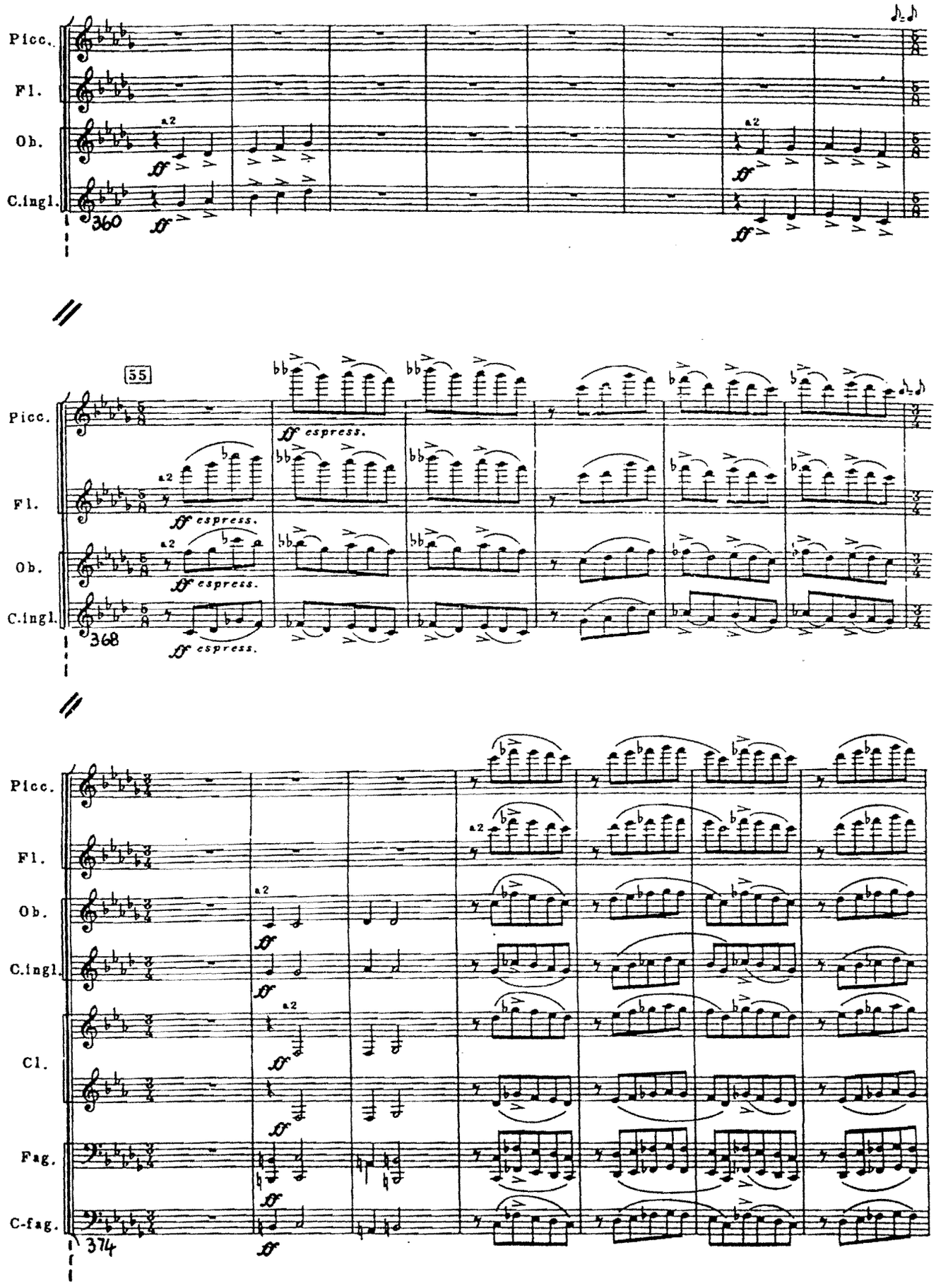
The following extract from the *Allegro* (second movement) of Symphony No. 11, "January 9", presents a fine example of the use of accents in 5/8 and 3/4 time. Shostakovich creates a two-part texture by scoring similar material for the high woodwinds and horns and alternately different material for the bassoons and strings in mm. 340-376.

Example 6-15: Symphony No. 11, second movement, mm. 340-380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