Henry Purcell (?1659 - 1695)

Fantasias no.5 in B♭ Z736 & no. 6 in F Z737 for 4 viols

Transcribed for **Flexible Wind Quartet** *by Toby Miller(2017)*

Oboe, Clarinet, Horn & Bassoon: Oboe and/or Horn may be replaced by Clarinet(s), Oboe by Flute & Bassoon by Bass Clarinet

Purcell by John Closterman, 1695

Henry Purcell was acknowledged by his contemporaries during his short lifetime as Britain's foremost composer. He was born probably in 1659 to Henry Purcell senior, the master of the choristers at Westminster Abbey, and his wife Elizabeth. When Henry was five his father died and his mother moved the six children to a smaller house. He was a chorister in the Chapel Royal, had keyboard lessons from the son of composer Orlando Gibbons, and in 1677 he himself became composer for the King's Violins. In 1679 John Blow resigned his post as organist of Westminster Abbey in favour of his precocious pupil (he was re-appointed on Purcell's early death).

Purcell composed his 15 surviving Fantasias (also written 'Fancies' or 'Fantazias') in a short burst of inspiration over the summer of 1680, between June 10 and August 31. A Fantasia was a polyphonic form of composition where parts enter fully independently in imitation of each other, often with other tricks of counterpoint such as turning the musical subject upside down. It allowed the composer free rein to juxtapose several sections in different speeds or metres, which could have either related or unrelated subjects. It had been very popular from the late 16th century onwards and was traditionally written for a 'consort' of viols. From the early 17th century the violin had gradually supplanted the viol at court, but in amateur circles this took somewhat longer.

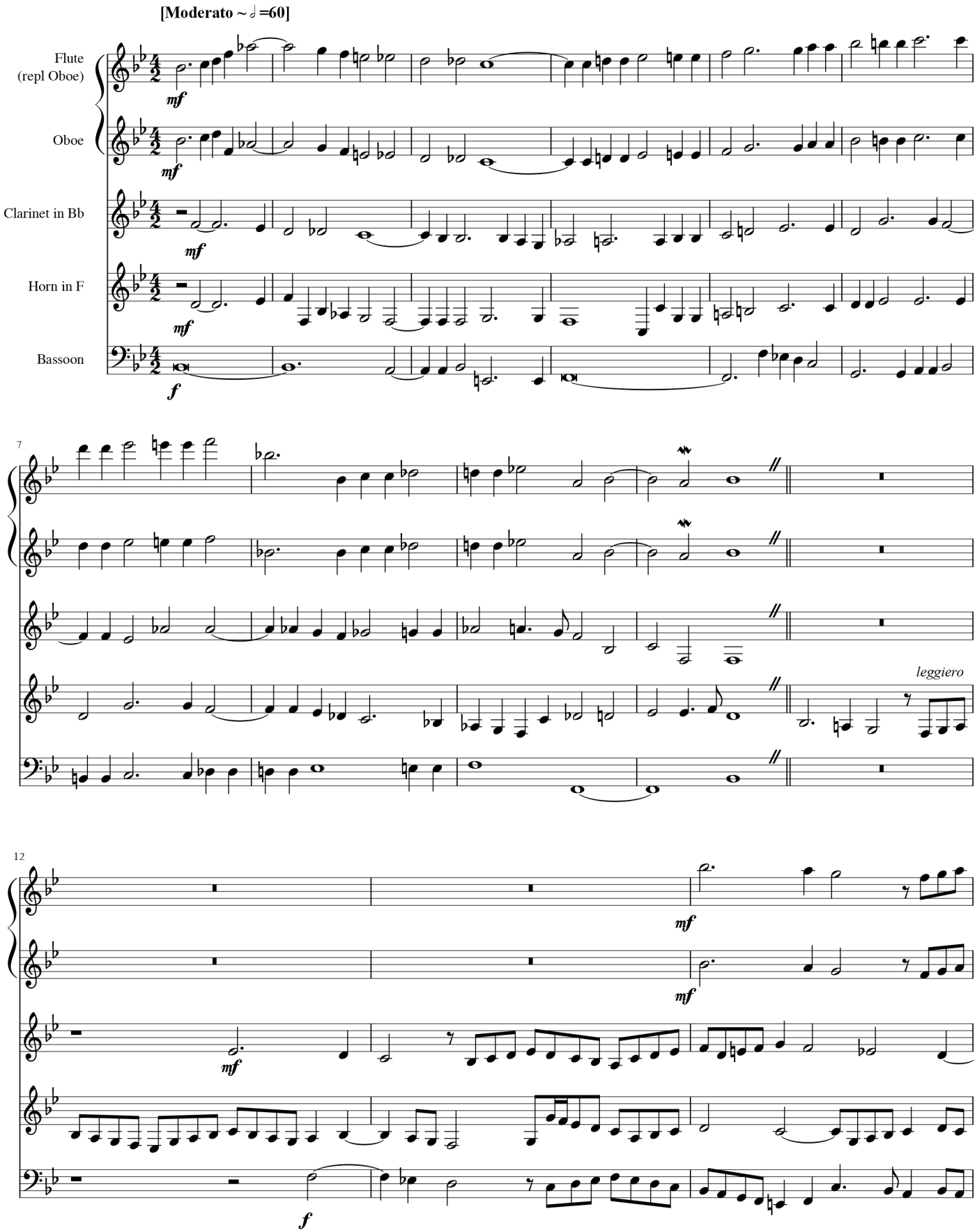
Both the form and the instruments were becoming old-fashioned by the time of Purcell. His Trio Sonatas, a simpler form influenced by Italian composers in which the middle parts of the musical texture were played on a keyboard and the upper parts by violins, show the composer responding to this new style. However Purcell's Fantasias, in the older style, demonstrate his astonishing mastery of contrapuntal writing at the age of 20 or 21.

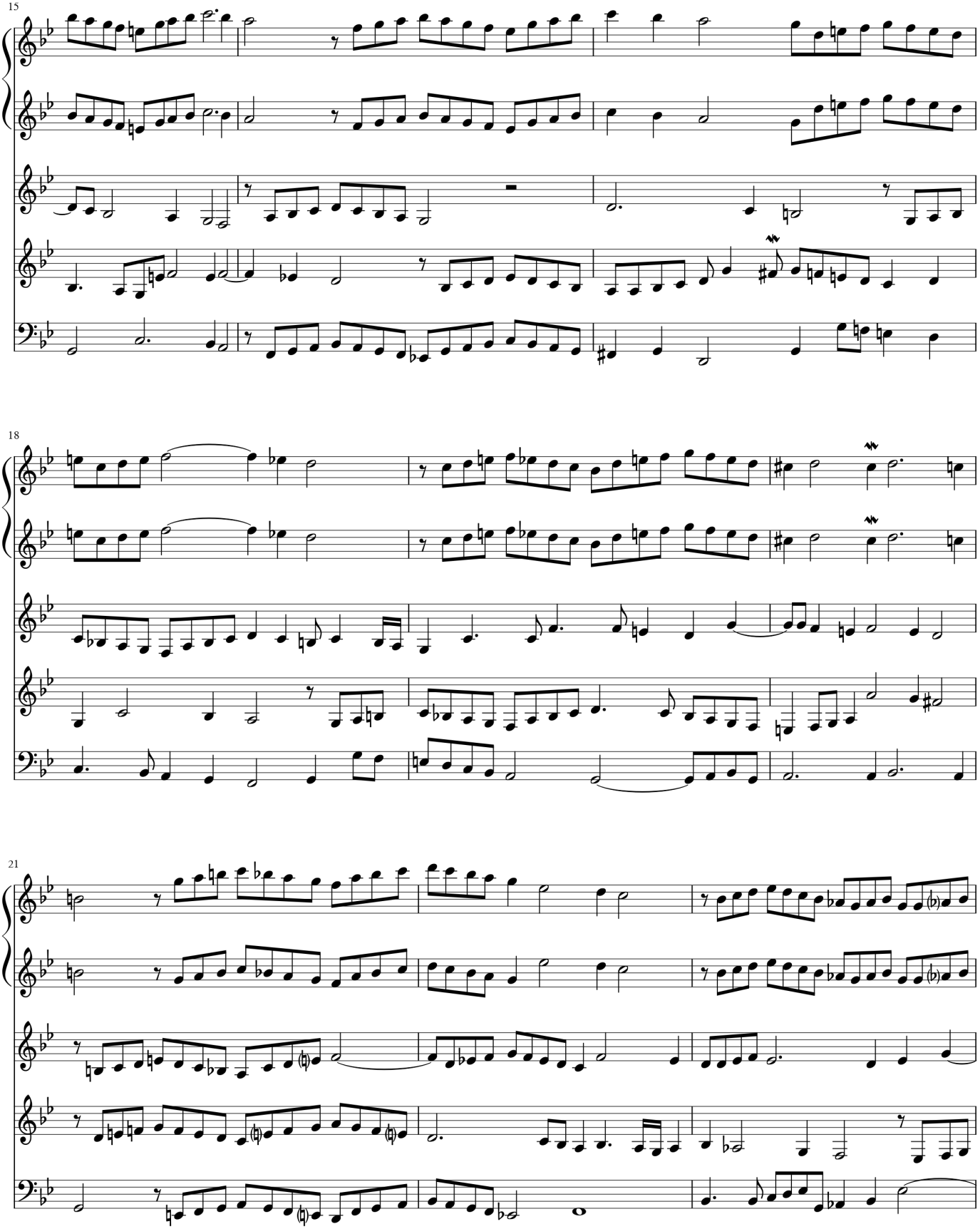
At the beginning of the 20th century, the amateur music patron W W Cobbett wished to resurrect the Fantasia as a musical form and over several years first sponsored a competition, and then commissioned specific composers such as Frank Bridge and Ralph Vaughan Williams, to write new works in this form (polyphony was no longer a requirement).

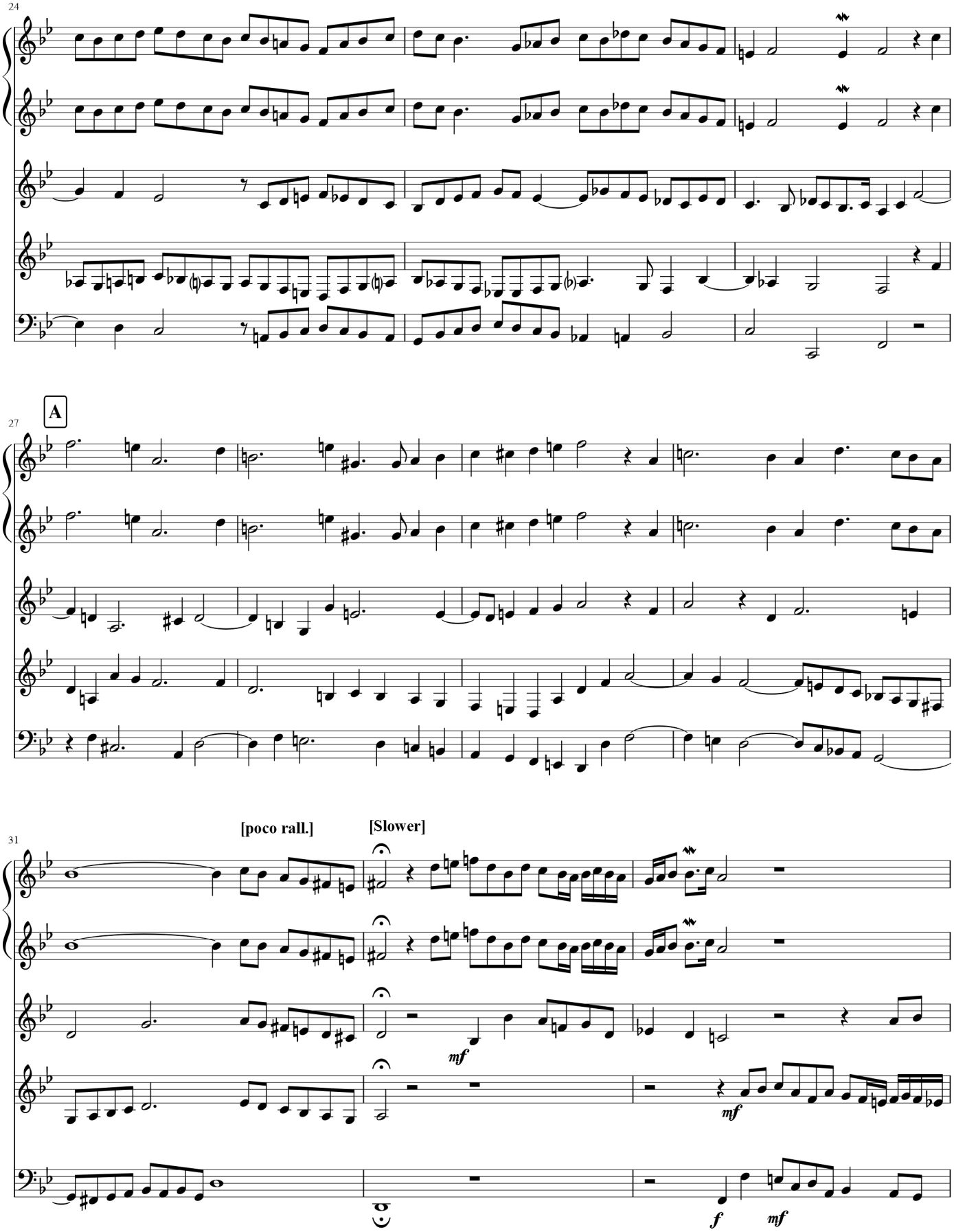
There is no indication of instrumentation, dynamics or speeds in Purcell's Fantasias. However tempo changes suggested by the notation (long/short note values) can be enhanced. Apart from a few bars where parts have been swapped to avoid extremes of range, and one or two changes of octave to ensure the flute (if used) can be heard, this transcription is unchanged from the original.

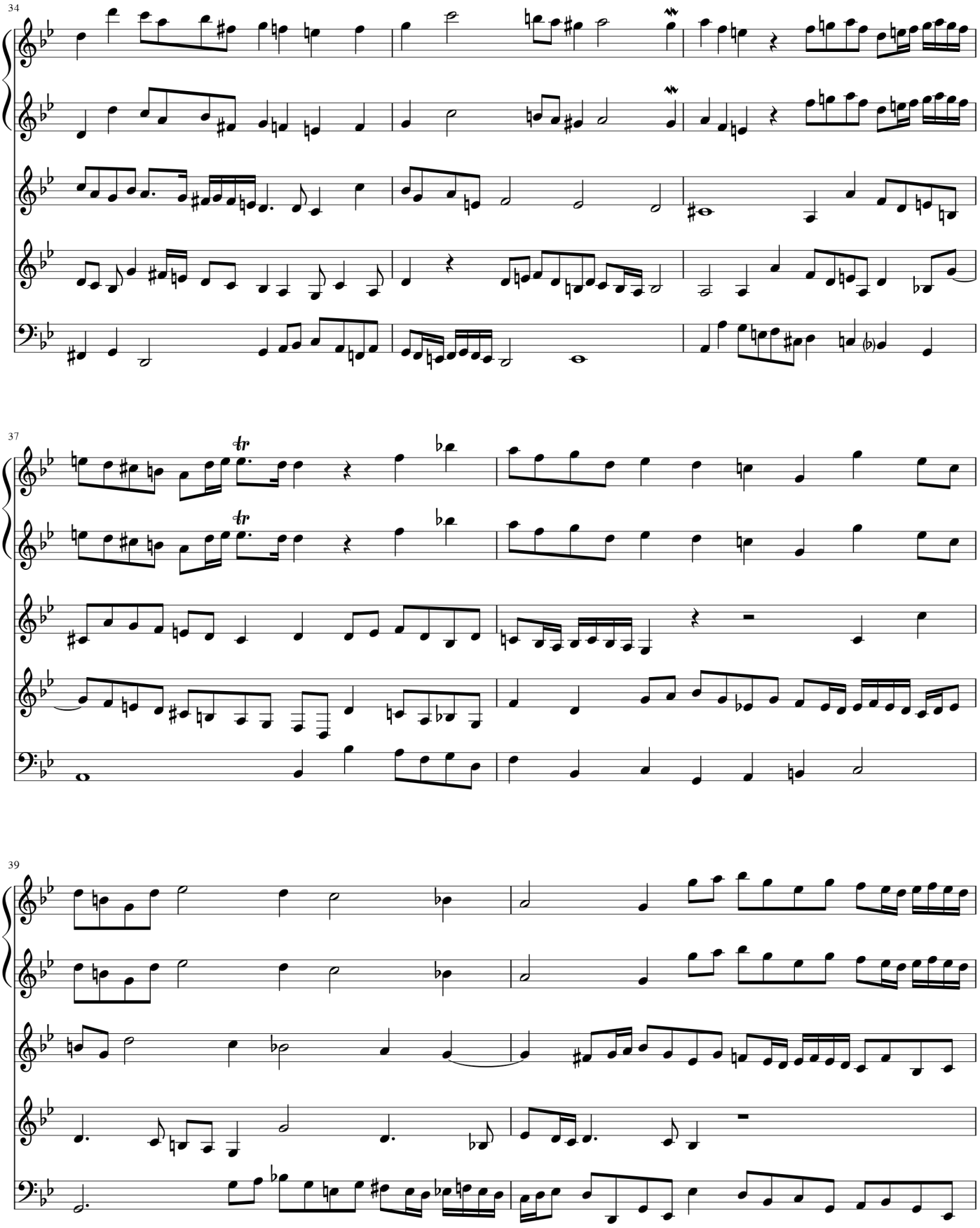
Fantasia no 5 in Bb for 4 instruments transcr. for wind by Toby Miller

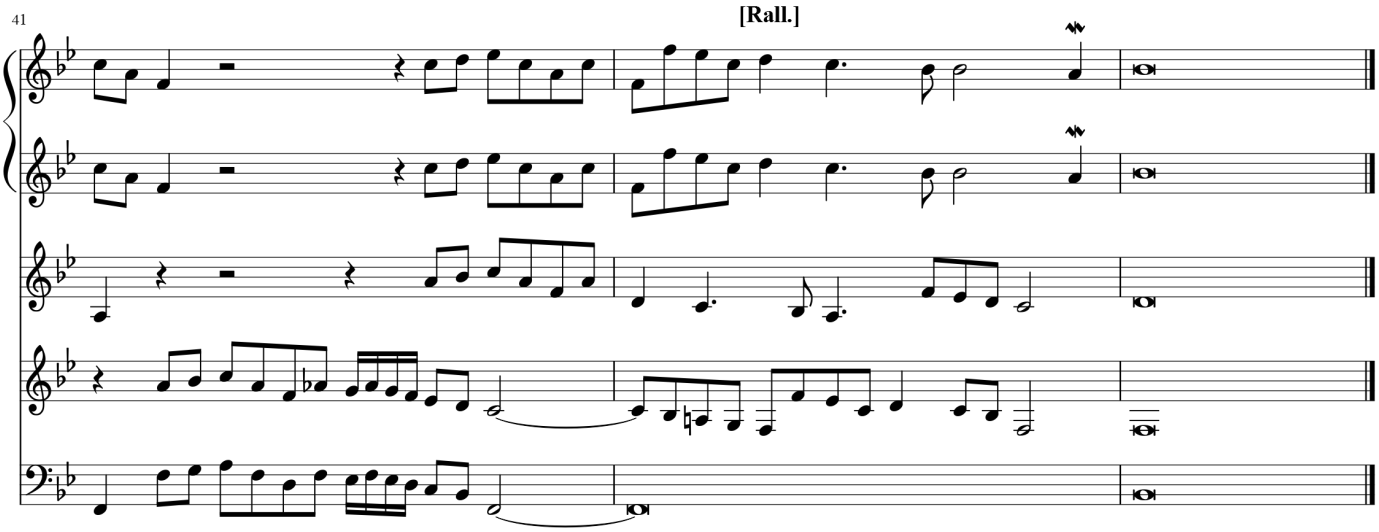
Score (concert pitch) Z 736 Purcell




15
18
21

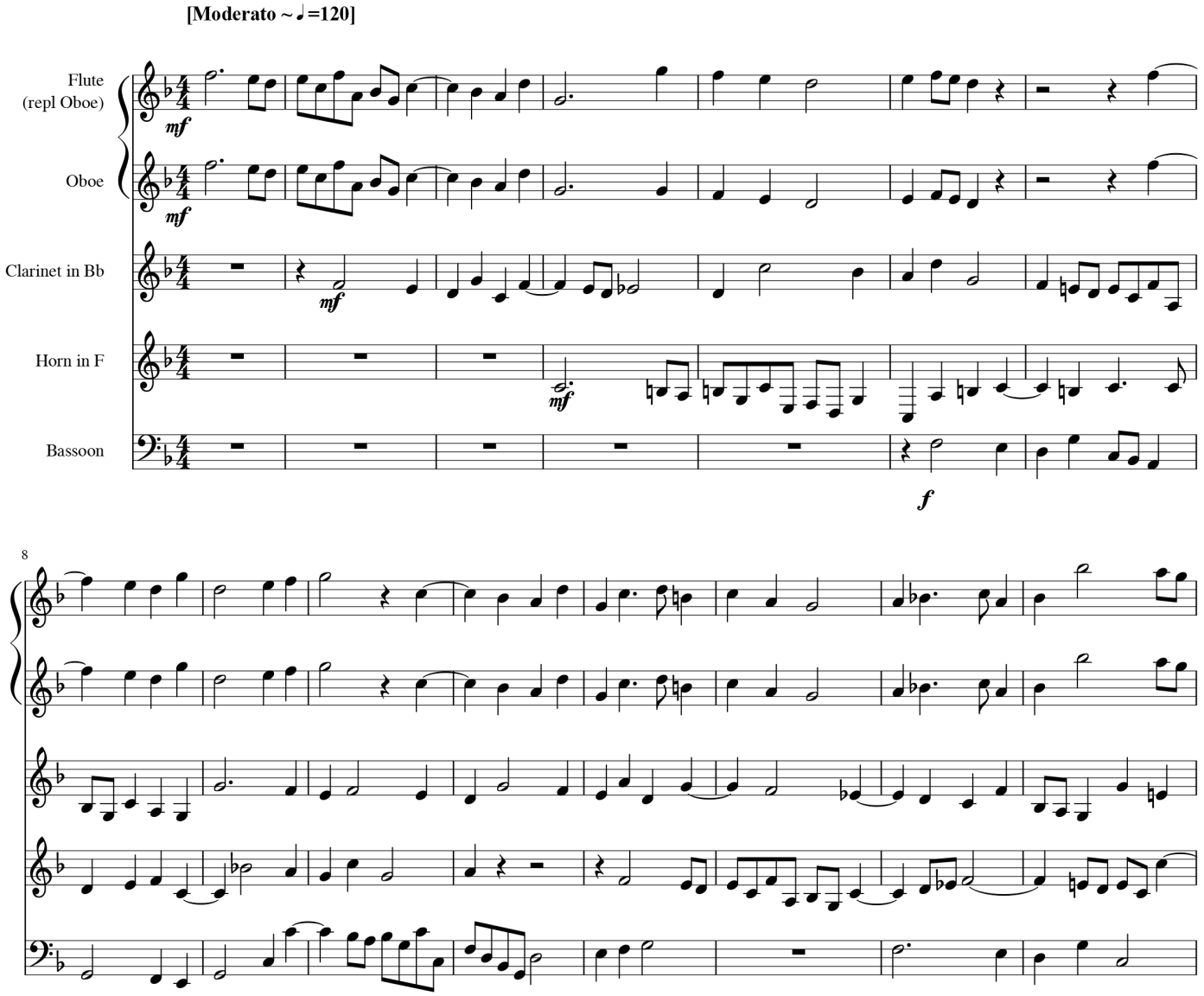

24
A
27
[poco rall.]
[Slower]
31
mf
mf
f
mf

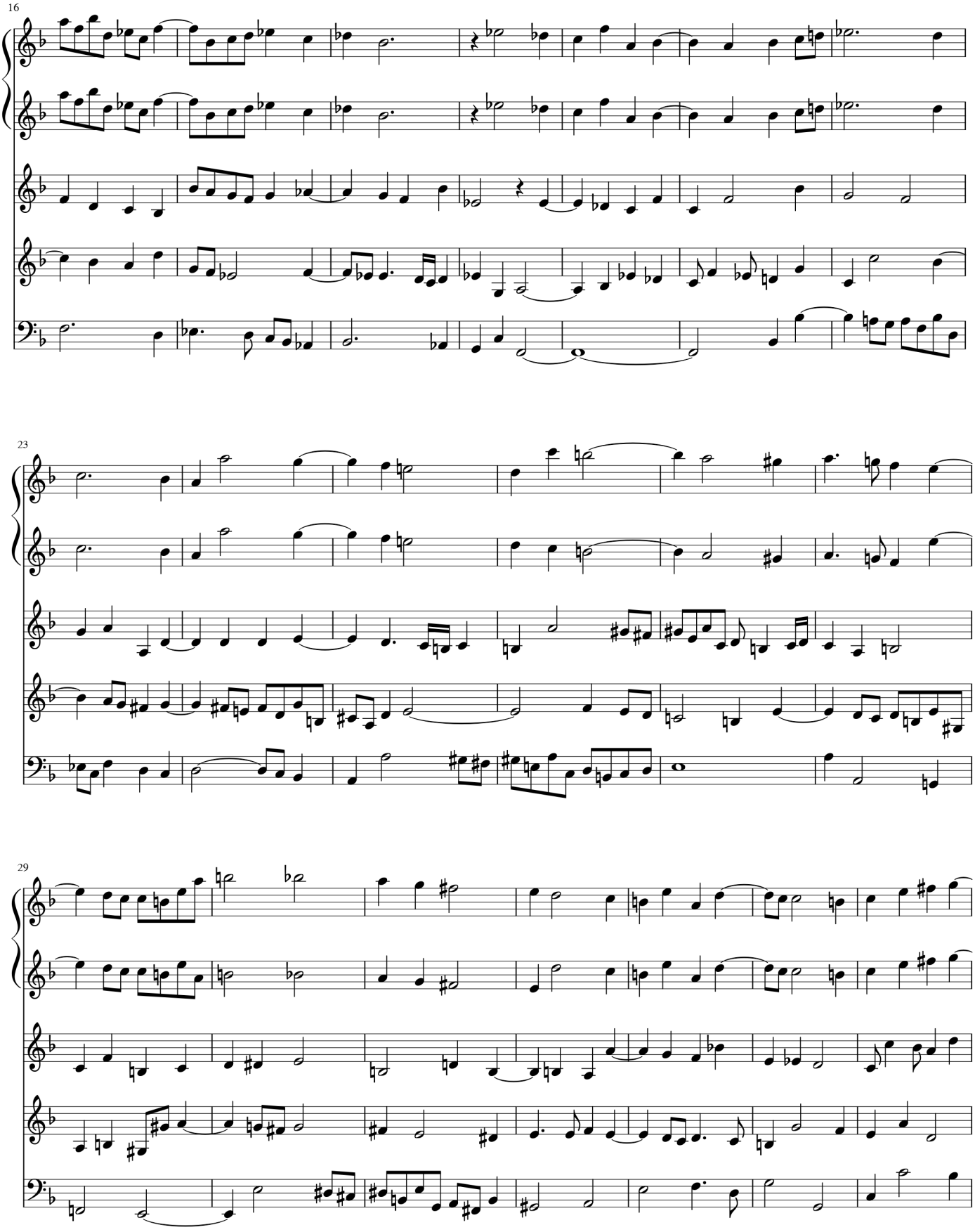

34
37
39

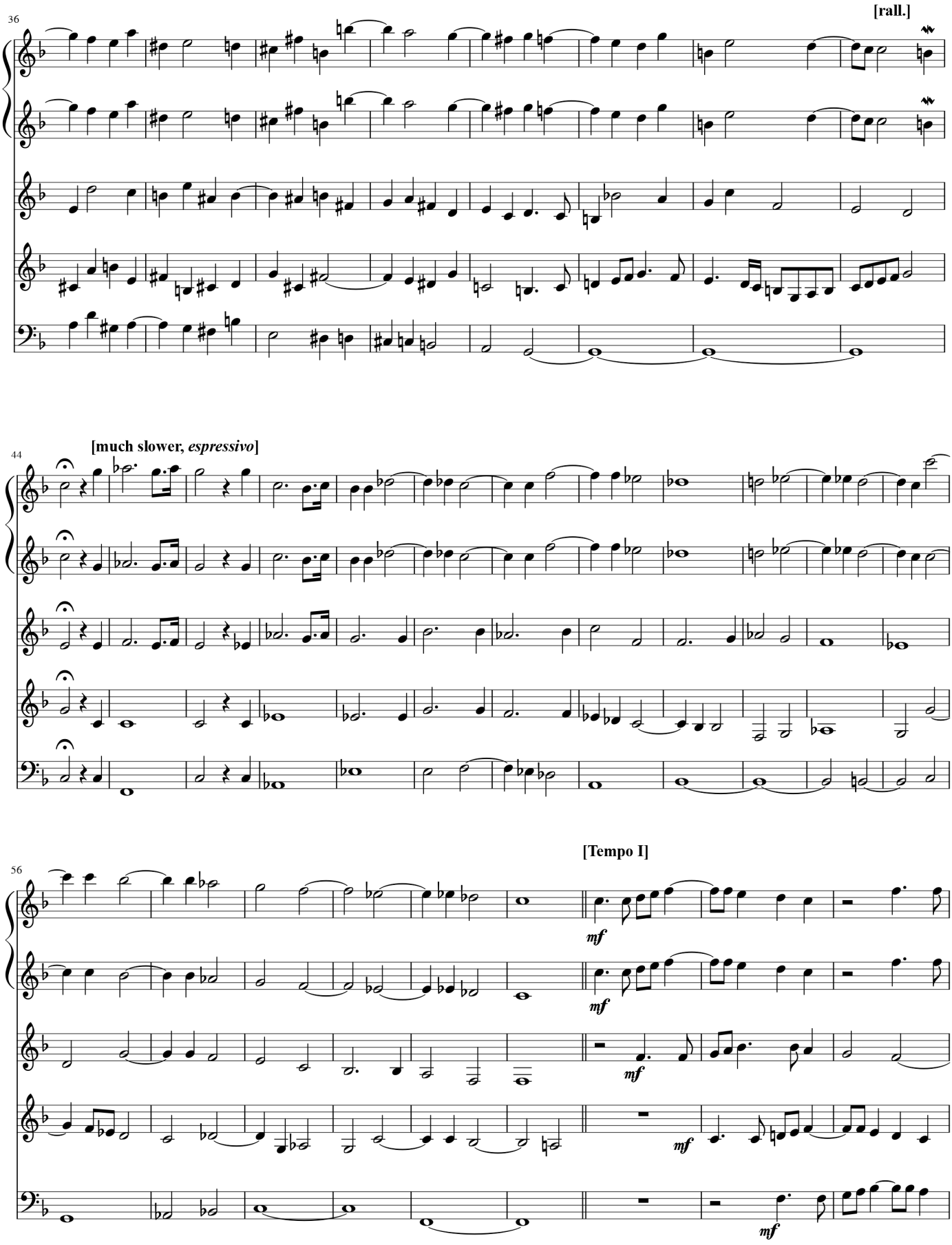


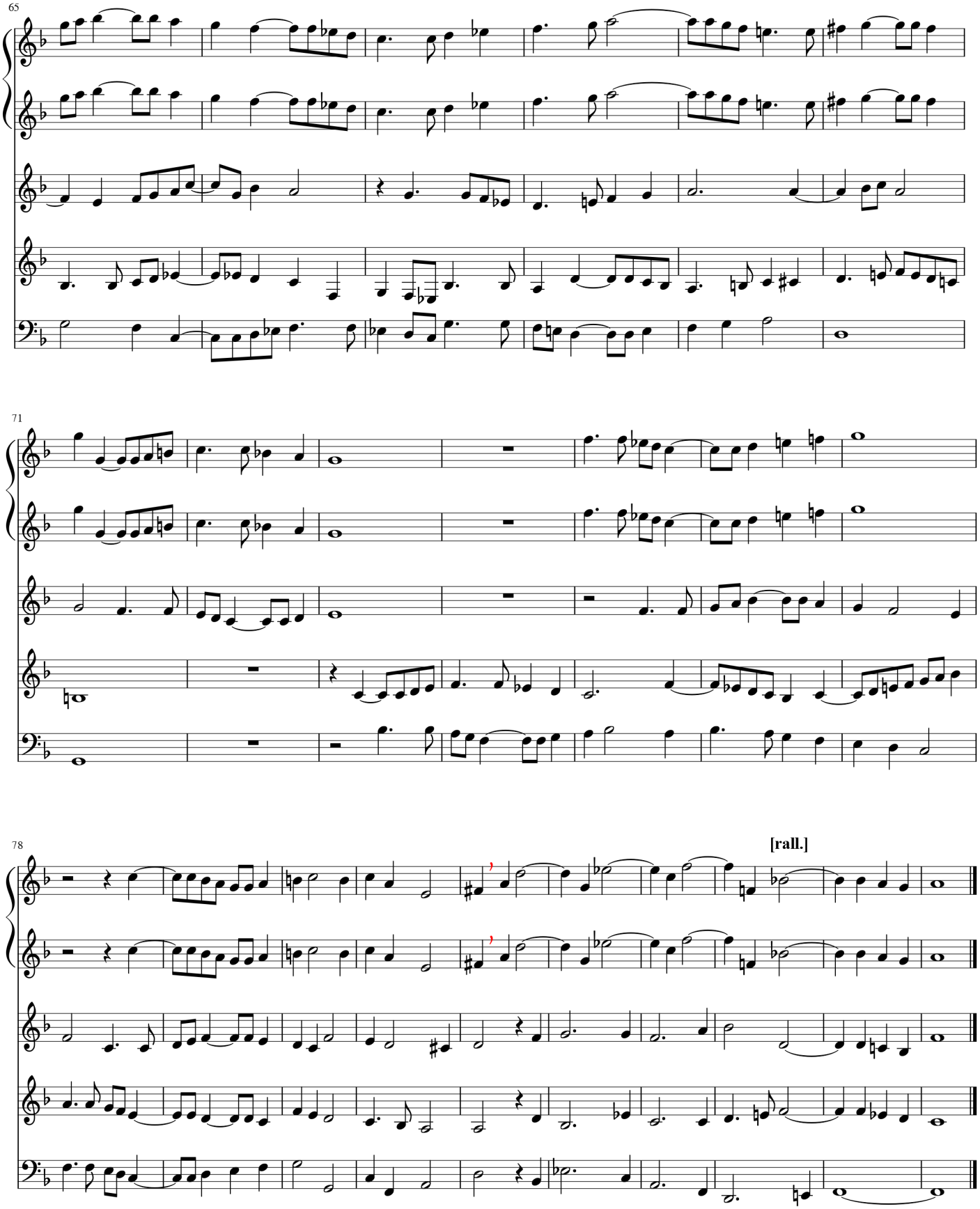
Fantasia no 6 in F for 4 instruments transcr. for wind by Toby Miller

Score (concert pitch) Z. 737 Purcell






36
[rall.]
44
[much slower, espressivo]
56
[Tempo I]
mf
mf
mf
mf
mf


65
71
78
[rall.]