Daniel-François-Esprit Auber

Le Concert à la cour, ou La Débutante

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber
Le Concert à la cour, ou La Débutante

Opéra-comique en un acte

Paroles de Eugène-Augustin Scribe
et
Mélesville

Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D. F. E. Auber as a member of the Institut (1832). Lithograph by Planta

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INTRODUCTION

Le Concert à la cour, ou La Débutante, an *opéra-comique en un acte*, with libretto by Eugène Scribe and Mélesville, was first performed at the Opéra-Comique (Salle Feydeau) on 3 June 1824. It enjoyed considerable success, remaining in the repertoire from 1824-38 (apart from 1837), and receiving 207 performances. There were two revivals: in 1842 (given 24 times), and 1851-52 (15 times). In all the number of performances in Paris totalled 246.

The cast was:

Frédéric, prince de Wurtemberg (Louis-Auguste Lemonnier)
Victor, a painter and musician (Louis-Antoine-Eléonore Ponchard)
Astucio, superintendant of the prince's music (Vizentini)
Adèle, a prima donna (Antoinette-Eugénie Rigaut)
Carline, wife of Astucio (Marie-Julienne Boulanger)

The story is set in Stuttgart at the Court of Württemberg in the early nineteenth century.

Adèle, a young soprano, has come to the court at Stuttgart to obtain a position as a singer and finds her old friend Victor there as painter to the court. The Kapellmeister Ascanio not only refuses to help Adèle, but rejects her in an audition. The Prince finds Adèle in tears and arranges for her public debut. Ascanio ruins it by conducting the accompanying orchestra in erratic tempos. Victor senses what is afoot, pushes the conductor out of the way, and accompanies her in another aria, which secures the approval of the Court.

The libretto is amusing, and the music witty, comprising as it does 8 short numbers. Contemporaries recognized in Astucio an apparently well-deserved caricature of the composer Ferdinando Paër (1771-1839). The B-flat major overture and the conclusion of the opera are melodically attractive, and the finale offers opportunities for imaginative stage presentation. There are also some piquant couplets for Carline ("Comme il me lançait") and the Prince ("Pourquois pleurer"). Nos. 7 and 8, the *Morceau d'ensemble* and *Finale* for the whole company, are handled well, and provide a showcase for the soprano, with chorus, variations, melodrama, and a highly decorated vocal line. The great aria, No. 4, the *grand air à vocalises* "Entendez-vous au loin l'archet de la folie" (also known as "Espérance, confiance"), is a parody of the Italian styles so much in vogue at the time, but also includes some fleet and spicy touches that are Auber's own. The librettists have divided it into several sections, each capturing an aspect of the described Venetian carnival—from the distant sound of merrymaking, the rush to join the festive throng, the brilliant costumes and masks, the physical assault on the senses, to the fusion of vision, sound and motion in the passage of the festal gondolas. Each section is varied in rhythm and length to provide a metrical model for the composer's imagination.

Entendez-cous au loin l'archet de la foule?
Venise dans ses murs voit la foule accourir;
La raison elle-même en ce moment s'oublie;
Le carnaval vient de s'ouvrir.

Voyez que cette marche est belle!
C'est Cassandre donnait la main
À la séduisante Isabelle,
Qui gaiment lorgnait Arlequin.

Povera
Signora
A des migrianes;
Povera
Signora
Gémit tout bas!
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah!

Voici venir sur leurs riches nacelles
Les gondoliers, qui rament en chantant;
Ils ont à bord gentilles pastourelles,
Donts les cheveux flottent au gré du vent...
Entendez-vous? Quel tintamarre!
La mandoline et le guitare,
Du galoabel le son bruyant,
Tout à la fois, ah! C'est charmant.

Auber integrated parts of this famous aria ("Povera signora") into his composite score for the ballet *Marco Spada* (1857). A classic recording of the aria was made by Alice Verlet on 8 June 1909 (2-033000 3117f) (transcribed to CD, Symposium 1331).

The cast were among the most famous singing in Paris at the time, and constituted a brilliant repertory team at the Opéra-Comique during the 1820s, and in some cases into the 1830s. Louis-Auguste Lemonnier assumed the baritone parts in all Auber's early works up to *La Fiancée* (1829). Louis-Antoine-Eléonore Ponchard sang at the house from 1812 to 1837, won great fame as the as *premier ténor* by creating Georges Brown in Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche* and also Roger in Auber's *Le Maçon* (both in 1825), and became a renowned singing teacher at the Paris Conservatoire. Vizentini was the house *basse chantante* until 1825 (when he created Baptiste in *Le Maçon*). The two women were very successful artists: Antoinette-Eugénie Rigaut, as *première chanteuse légère*, created all Auber's soprano leads from *Le Testament et les billets doux* (1819) to *Fiorella* (1826): while the mezzo-soprano Marie-Julienne Boulanger, during her long career, became one of the most celebrated singers in the history of the Opéra-Comique, creating leading roles, often with strong comic elements, in all the Auber operas from *La Bergère châtelaine* (1820) to *Le Domino noir* (1837).

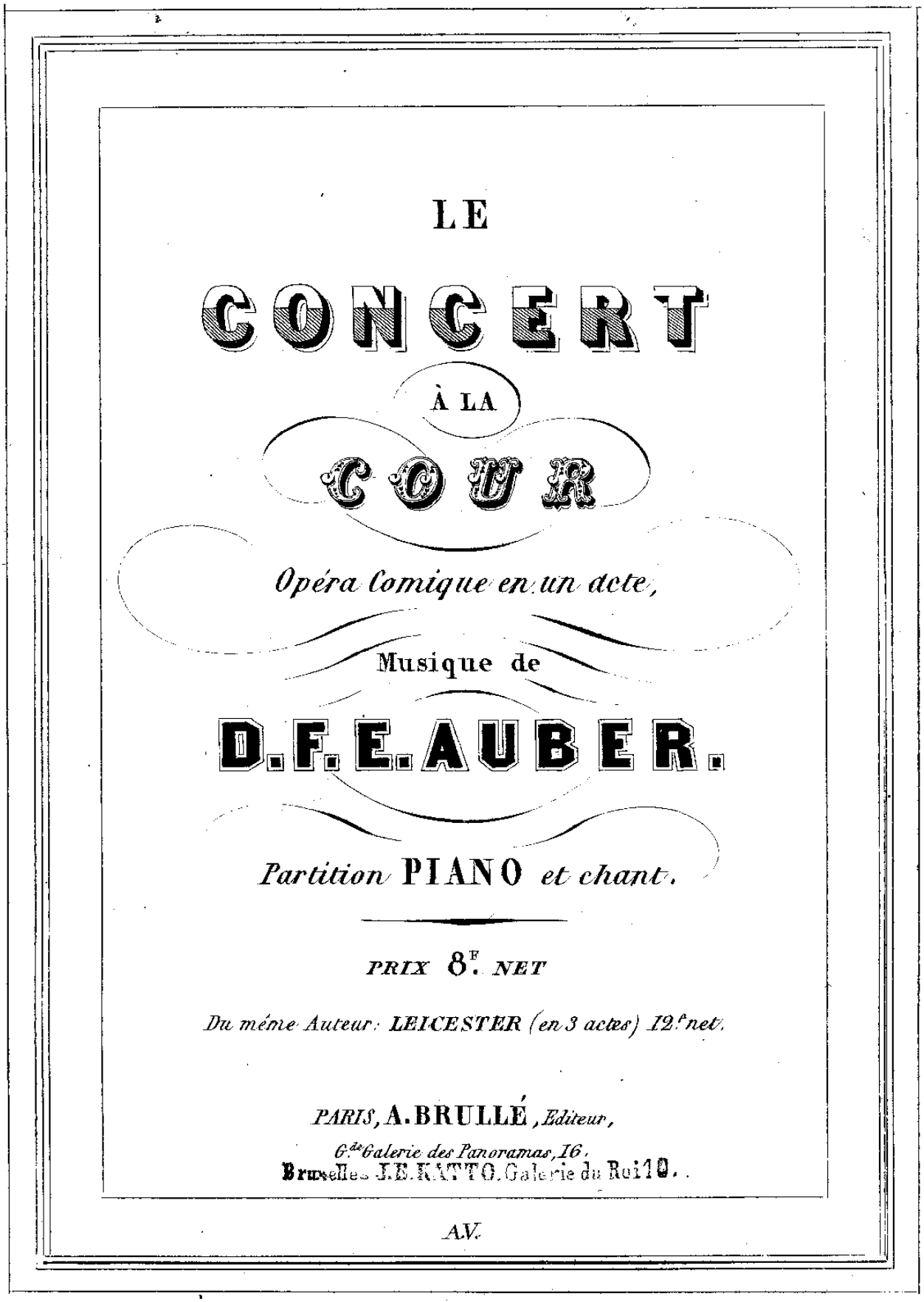
Coming as it did near the beginning of Auber's Parisian success and international fame, *Le Concert à la cour* presents a succinct one-act distillation of several aspects of the composer's art. The elegance and finesse of his style are amply in evidence, as are his delight in the overture form, his innate response to the fundamental cell of the *opéra-comique*, the couplets (with two excellent examples), as well as deft handling of the bigger concerted forms, like the trio and big ensemble (for Adèle, Victor, the Prince, Astucio, the Dames de la cour, courtisans and chorus). But the opera (as reflected in the overture) is built around the central soprano aria, and in the part of Adèle we have a prototypical portrayal of recurrent type in the work of Scribe and Auber—the heroine, who is a fusion of *soubrette* and *soprano leggiero*, archetypically embodied in Zerlina (*Fra Diavolo*, 1830), and quintessentially realized in Angèle (*Le Domino noir*, 1837) and Catarina (*Les Diamants de la couronne*, 1841).

In addition, *Le Concert à la cour* is the first example of a very special type of drama created by Scribe and Auber—the 'artist opera'. These scenarios, with contemporary settings, explored the nature, calling, vicissitudes, cabals, trials and triumphs of the artistic spirit, invariably focused on a singer protagonist, a topos that features as a recurrent concern of the creators' aesthetic perspectives. Indeed, each decade of their creative collaboration saw the emergence of an opera on this theme, addressed each time in terms of the changing style, emphases and gestures of Auber's subtly varied musical expression. So Adèle (1824) looks forward to Henriette in *L'Ambassadrice* (modelled on the famous soprano Henriette Sontag) (1836), Carlo in *La Part du Diable* (based on the legendary castrato Carlo Broschi who sang for Philip V of Spain) (1843), Fabio and Cafarini in *La Barcarolle* (centred on the rivalry between fictional court musicians) (1845), and Jenny in *Jenny Bell* (another soprano role revisiting the career of Sontag, with elements of the life of Jenny Lind) (1855). Artistic skill coupled with kindness, shrewdness and sagacity are celebrated as sensible and helpful choices in life.

Le Concert à la cour enjoyed considerable success during the century across Europe (and even reaching South America), with productions in:
Brussels: 31 October 1824 (in French)
Berlin: 11 October 1825 (in German, translated by C. A. Herklots) and 31 October 1835 (in French)
Budapest: 31 March 1826 (in German, translated by F. Ellmenreich)
Prague: 17 June 1826 (in German)
Graz: 31 July 1826 (in German)
Munich: 1826 (in German)
Vienna: Josefstadt 10 January 1827 (in German, with additional music by Riotte) and Kärntnertor-Theater 9 March 1827
Stockholm: 7 February 1834 (in Swedish, translated by P. U. Huldberg)
Frankfurt: 25 December 1836 (in German)
St Petersburg: 28 December 1836 (in German)
Copenhagen: 20 October 1839 (In Danish, translated by T. Overskou)
Rio de Janeiro: 1846 (in French)
London: St James's Theatre 26 February 1849 (in French)
Breslau: 29 April 1862 (in German)
Budapest: 1 March 1888 (In Hungarian, translated by E. Abrányi)

Louis-Antoine-Eléonore Ponchard

Marie-Julienne Boulanger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À LA

COUR

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A.V.

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J.J.810

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ou

LA DÉBUTANTE

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en un Acte et en Prose

Paroles de Mr. Mr. Scribe et Mélesville

Musique de

D. F. E. AUBER

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BIBLIOTHEQUE DU THEATRE VILLE DE GENEVE

PERSONNAGES. ACTEURS.

FREDERIC, Prince Allemand ..... Mr. LEMONNIER.

VICTOR, jeune Peintre ..... Mr. PONCHARD.

ADELE, Cantatrice Française ..... Mme RIGAUT.

ASTUCIO, Surintendant de la musique ..... Mr. VIZINTINI.

CARLINE, sa Femme ..... Mme BOULANGER.

SEIGNEURS et DAMES de la Cour.

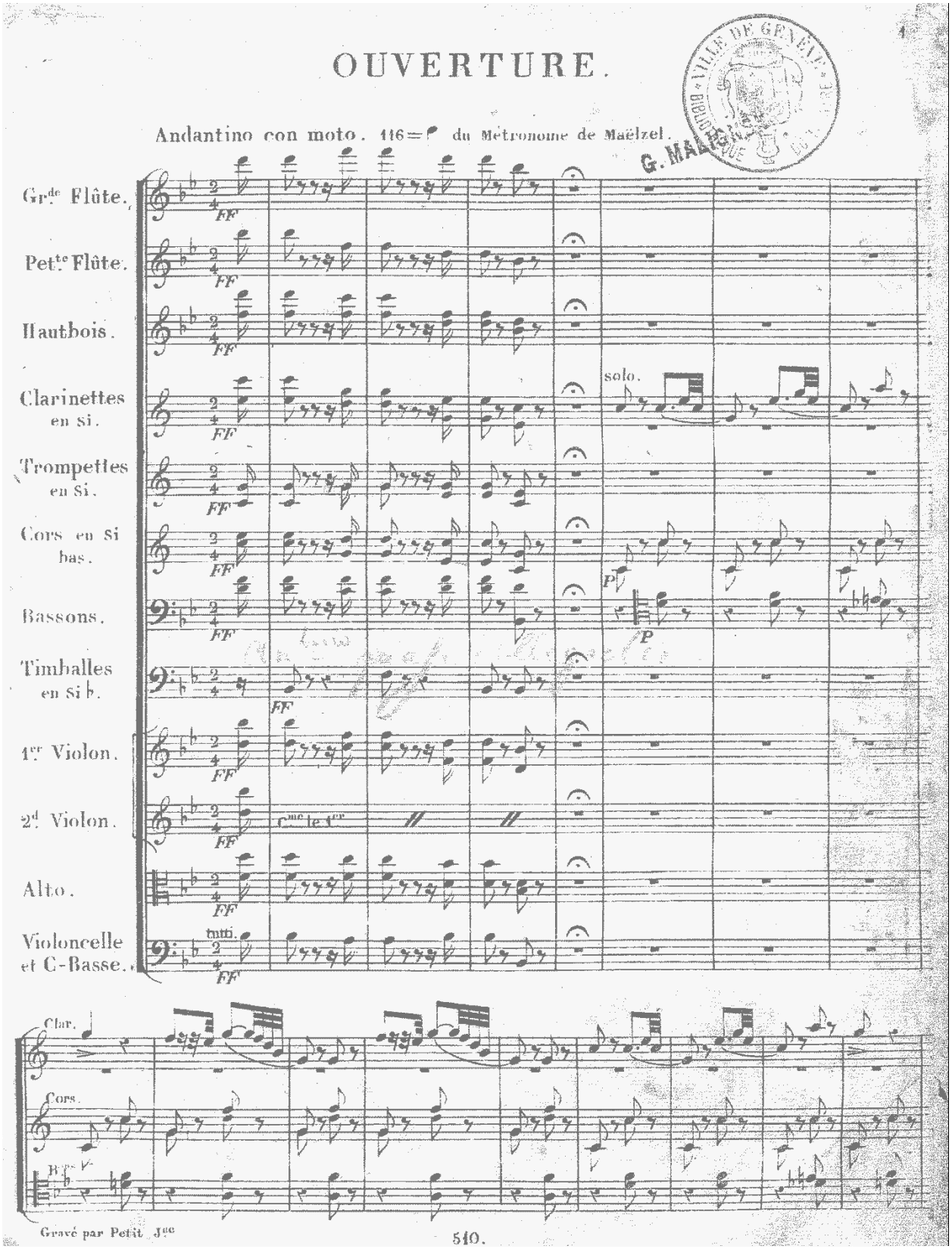
Musiciens.

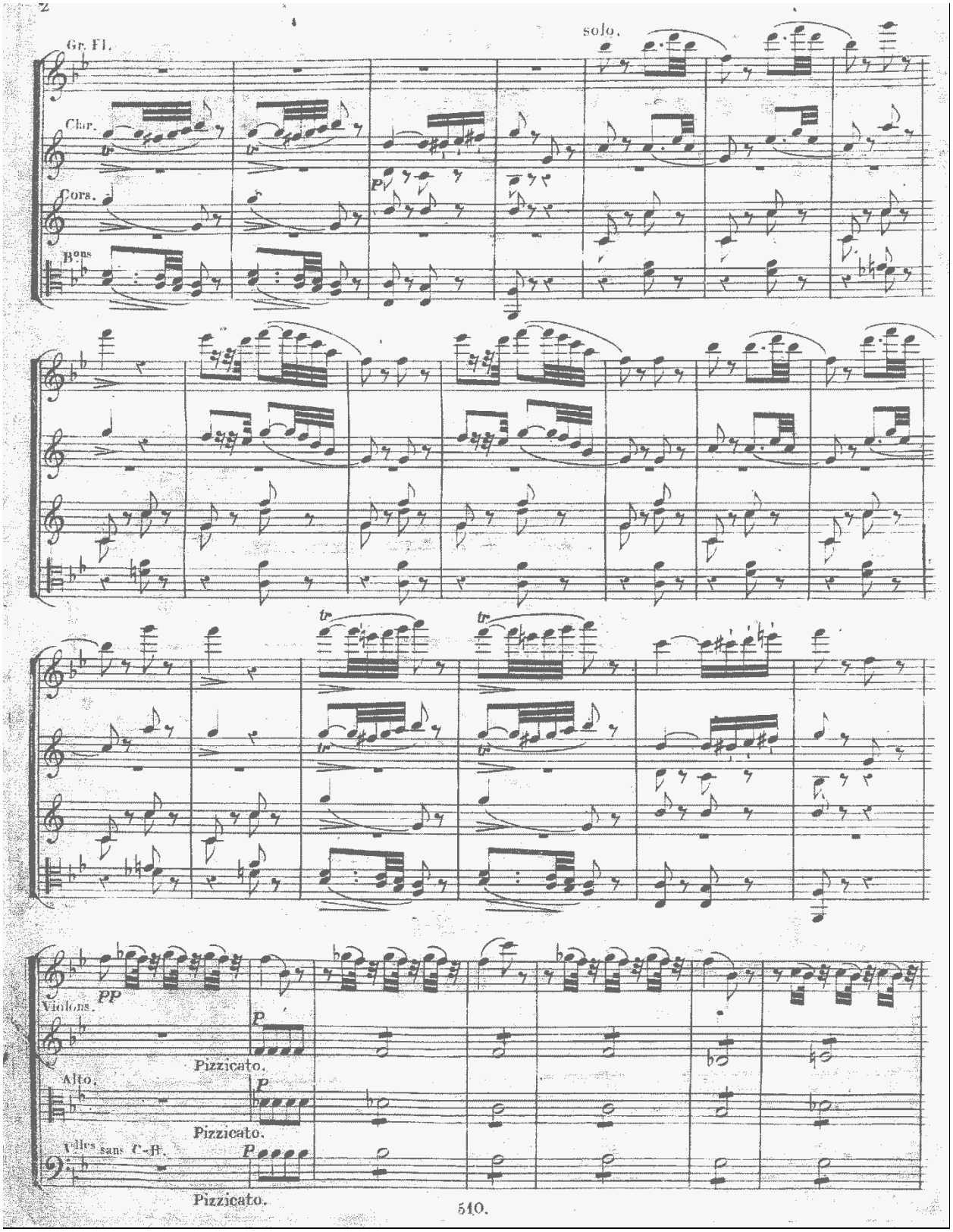
Valets.

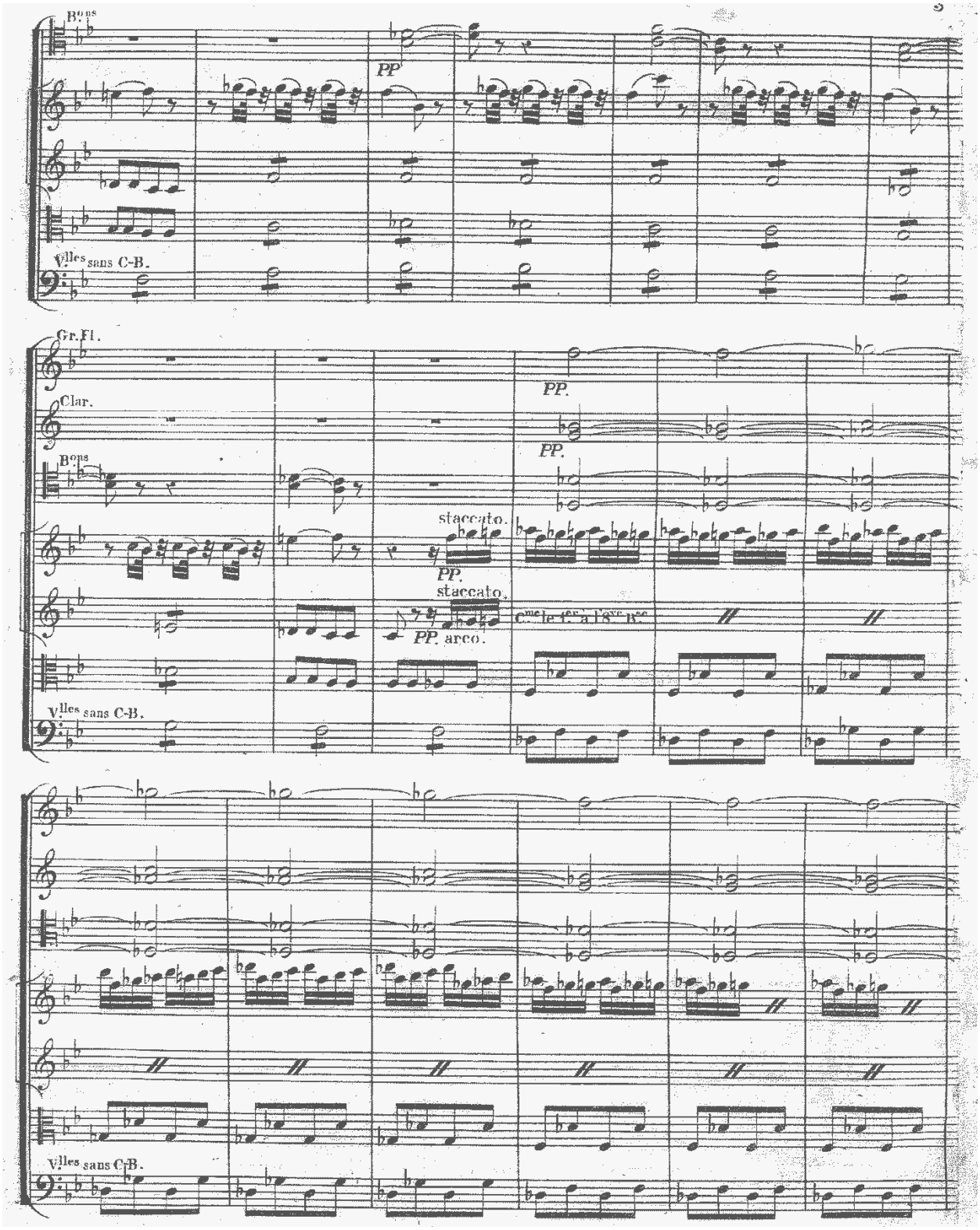
La Scène se passe à Stutgard.

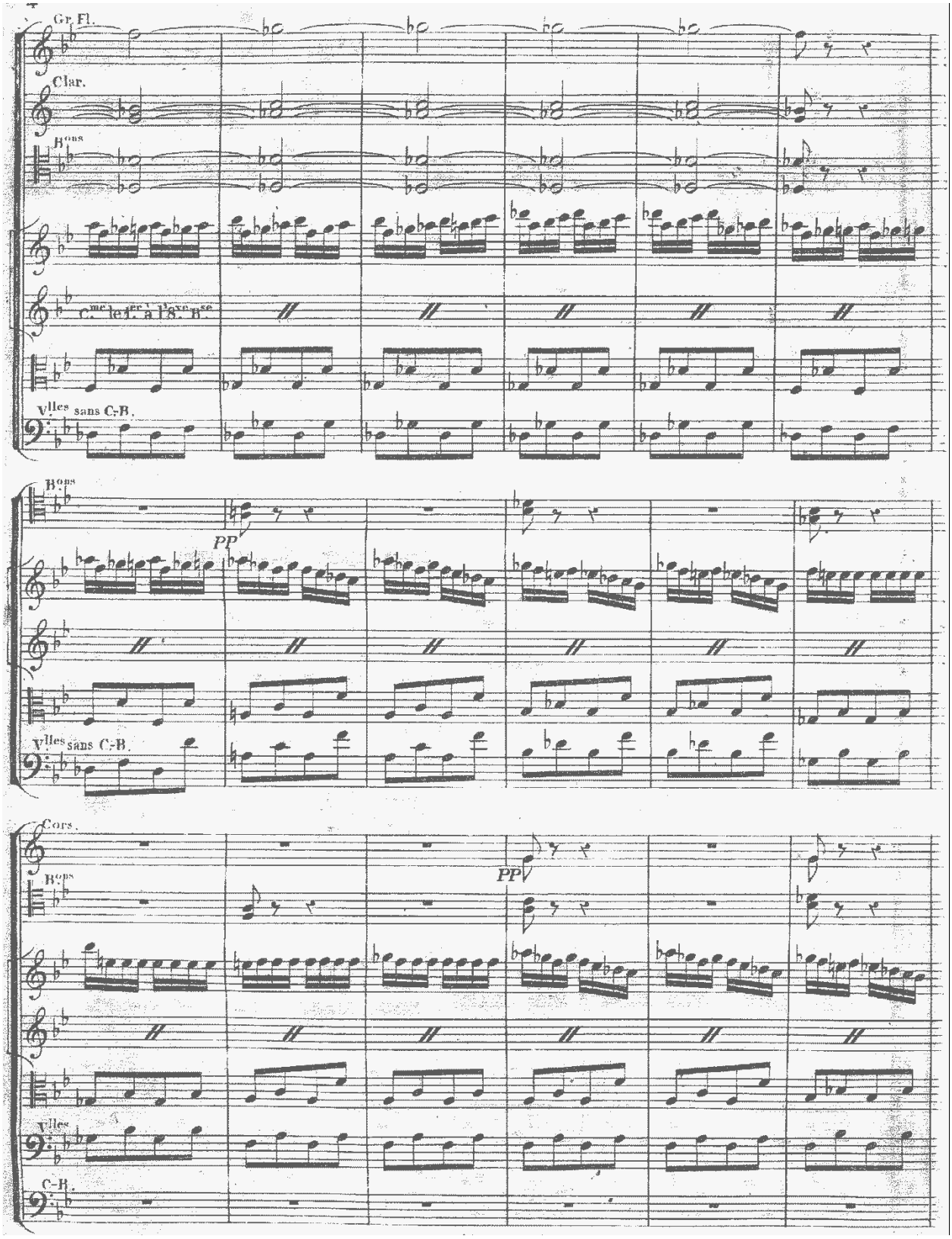
Le Théâtre représente un riche salon. Porte au fond et deux latérales. A gauche du spectateur, une table ronde couverte d'un tapis vert, et cinq sièges autour. A droite, vers le fond, un piano.

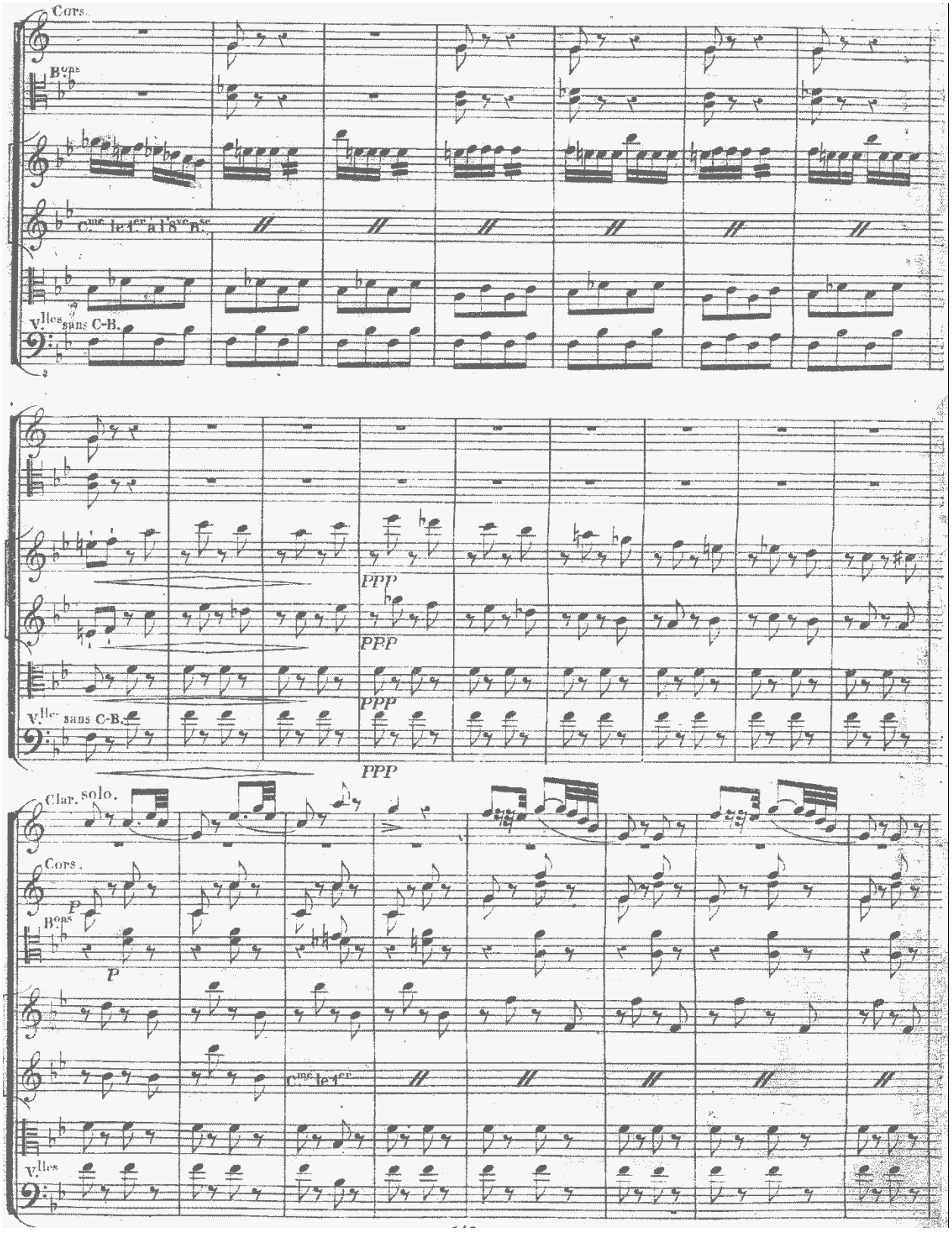
A 53

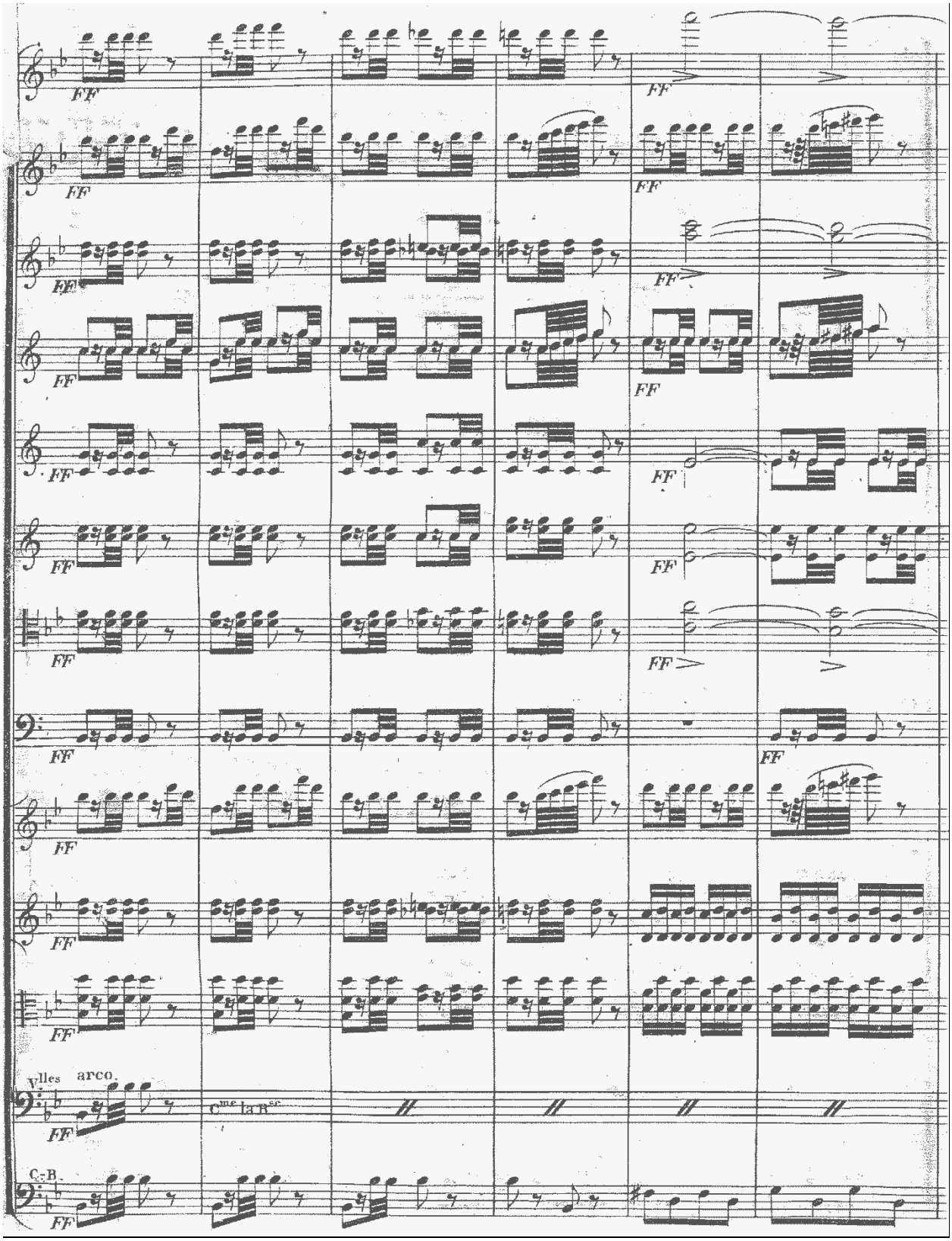

OUVERTURE.
Andantino con moto. 116=♩ du Métronome de Maëlzel.
Gr.de Flûte.
Pet.te Flûte.
Hautbois.
Clarinettes en si.
Trompettes en Si.
Cors en Si bas.
Bassons.
Timballes en Si b.
1.er Violon.
2.d Violon.
Alto.
Violoncelle et C-Basse.
FF
solo.
P
tutti.
Comme le 1.er
Clar.
Cors.
Fag.
Gravé par Petit Jne
540.

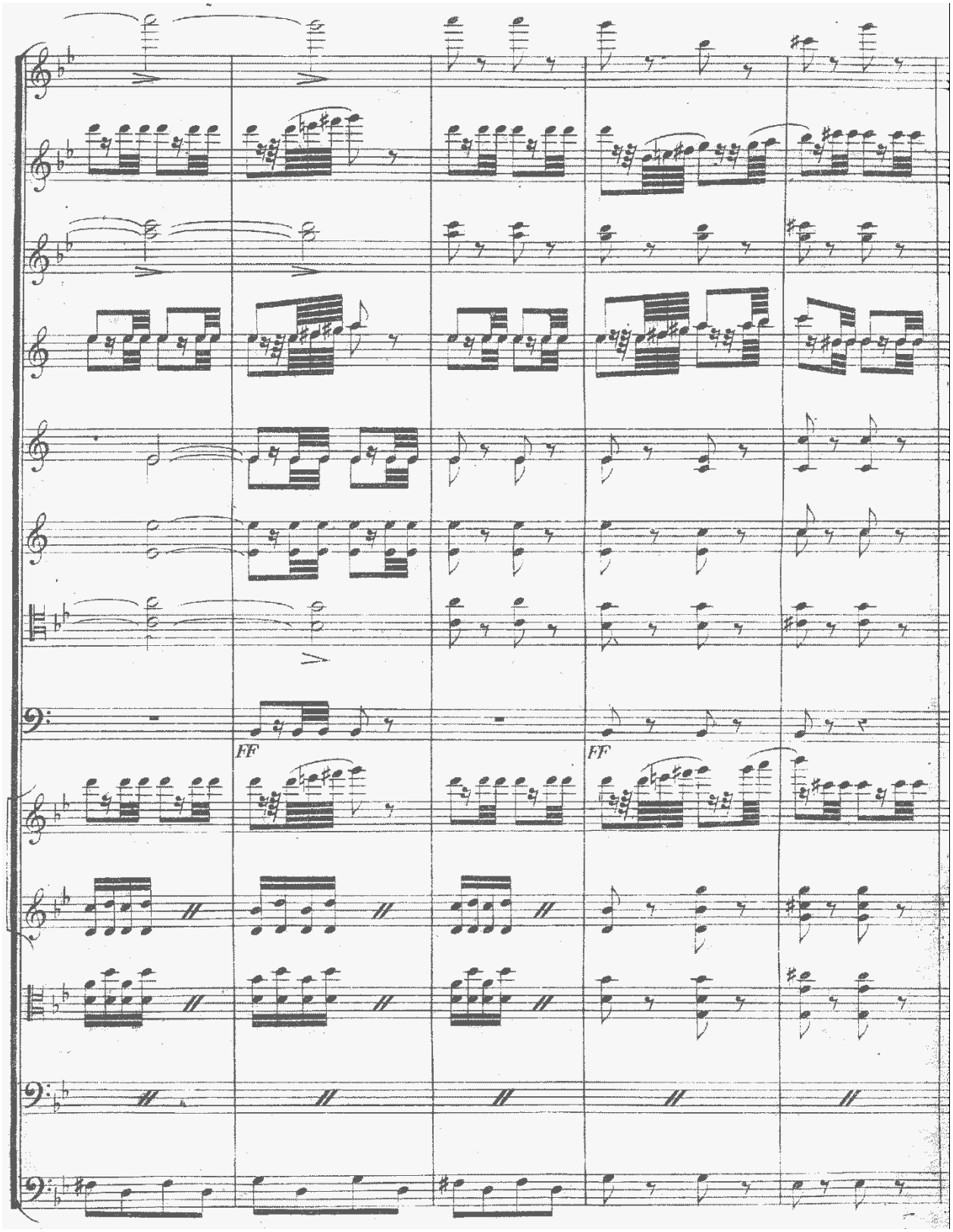

2
4
solo.
Gr. Fl.
Clar.
Cors.
Bons
Violons.
Pizzicato.
Alto.
Pizzicato.
Vlles sans C.-B.
Pizzicato.
510.

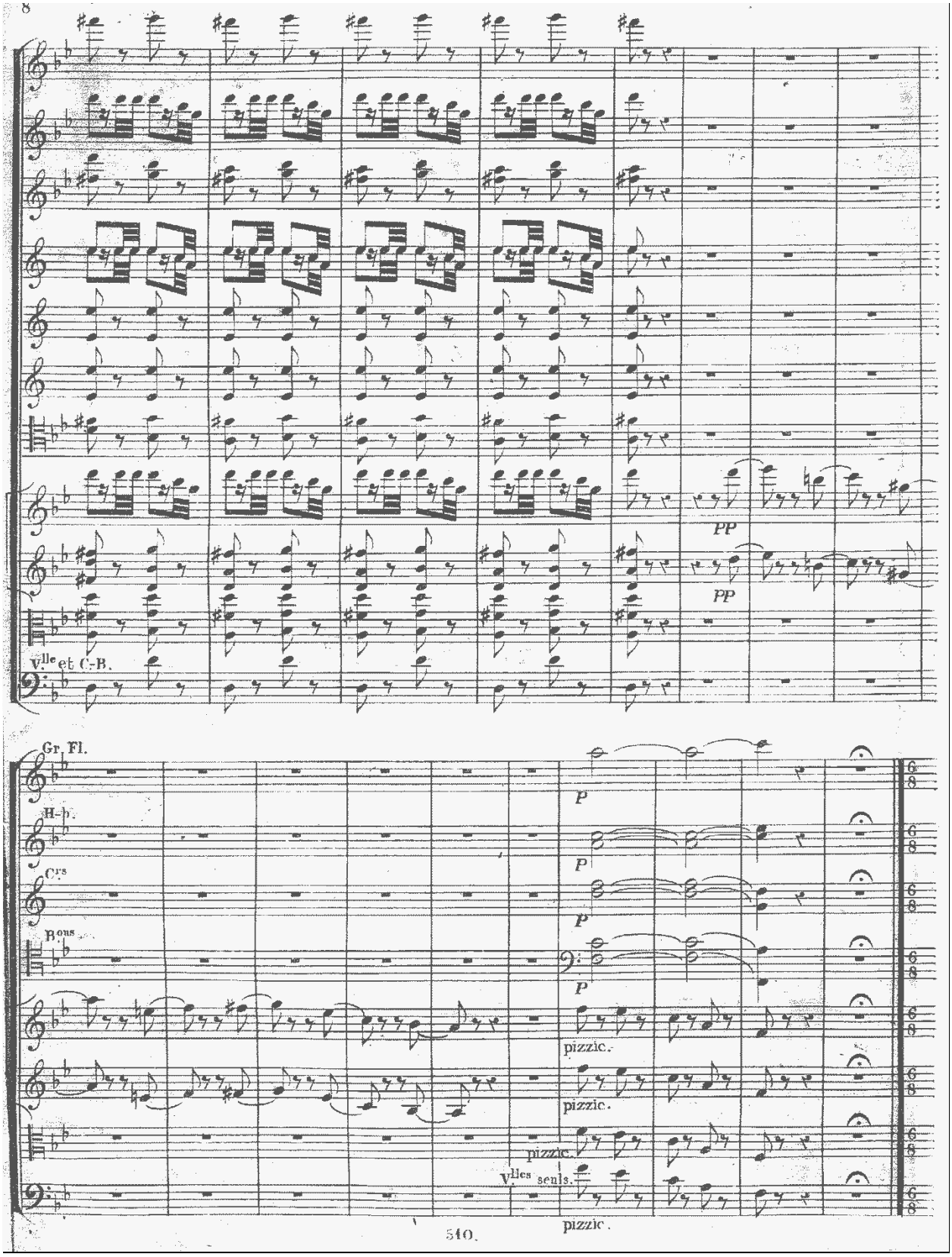

Bons
PP
Vlles sans C-B.
Gr. Fl.
Clar.
Bons
PP.
PP.
staccato.
PP.
staccato.
PP. arco.
Vlles sans C-B.
Vlles sans C-B.

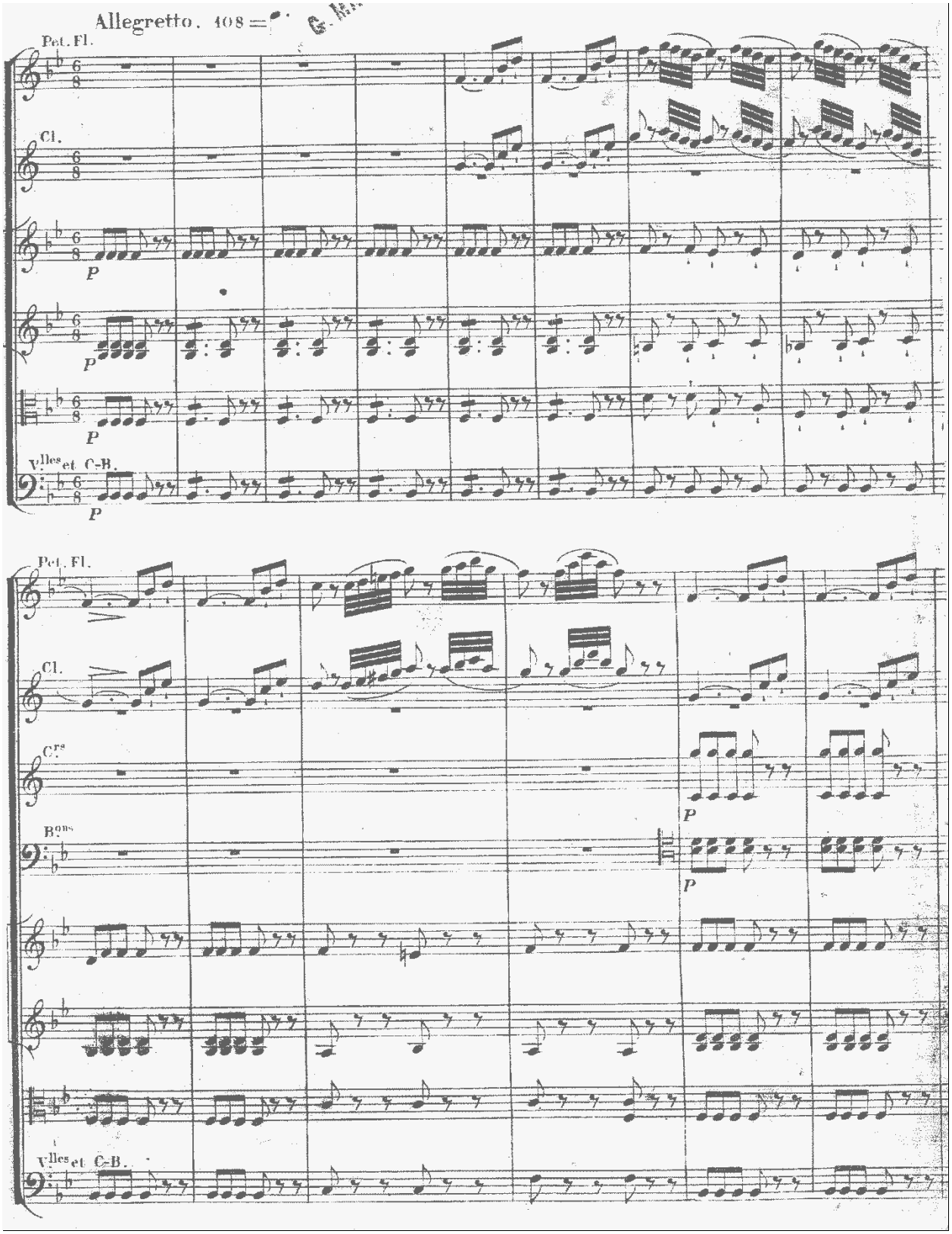

Gr. Fl.
Clar.
Bons
Vlles sans C.-B.
PP
Cors.
C.-B.

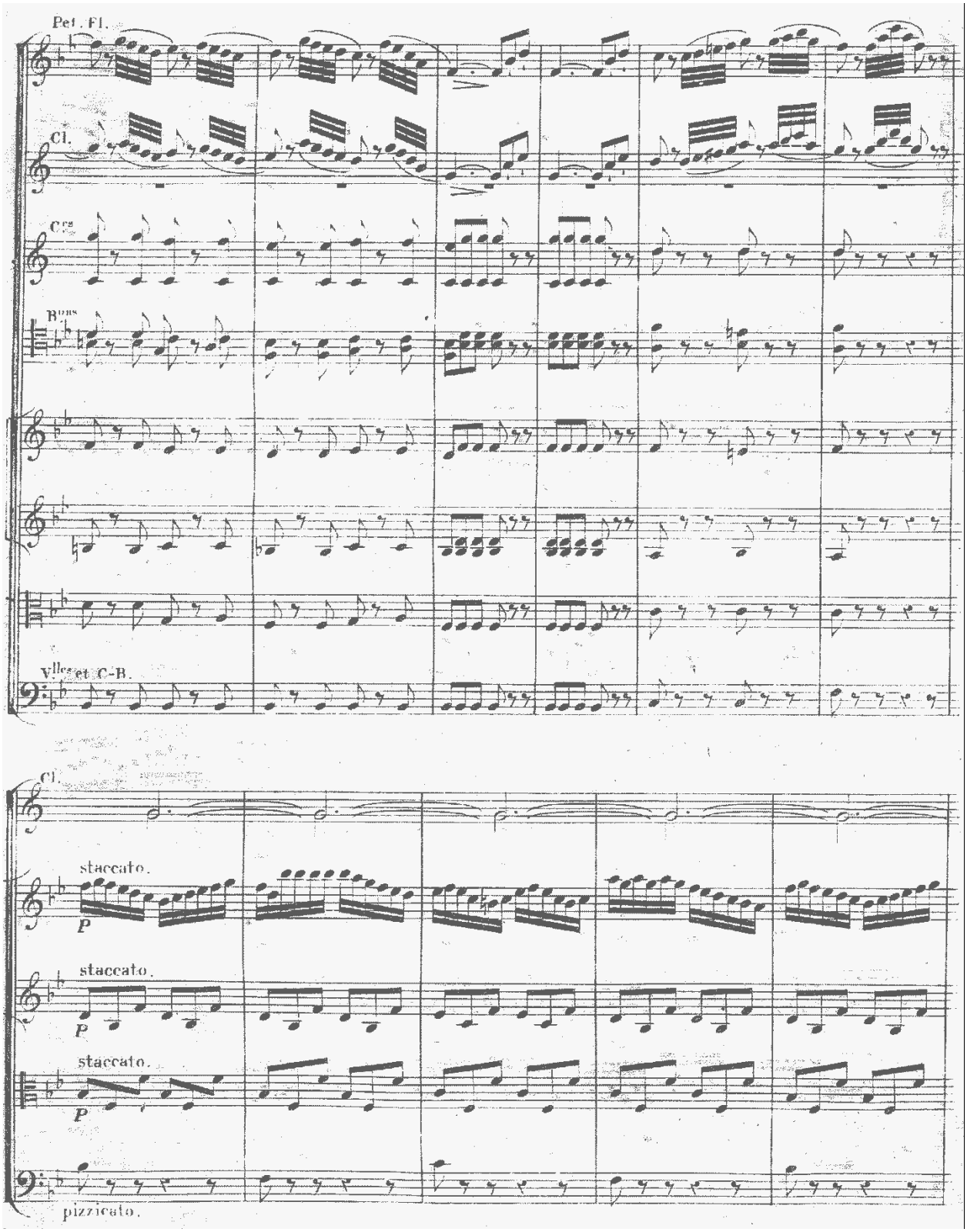

Cors.
Bons
Cme le 1er à l'8ve Bse
Vlles sans C-B.
PPP
PPP
PPP
PPP
Vlles sans C-B.
Clar. solo.
Cors.
P
Bons
P
Cme le 1er
Vlles

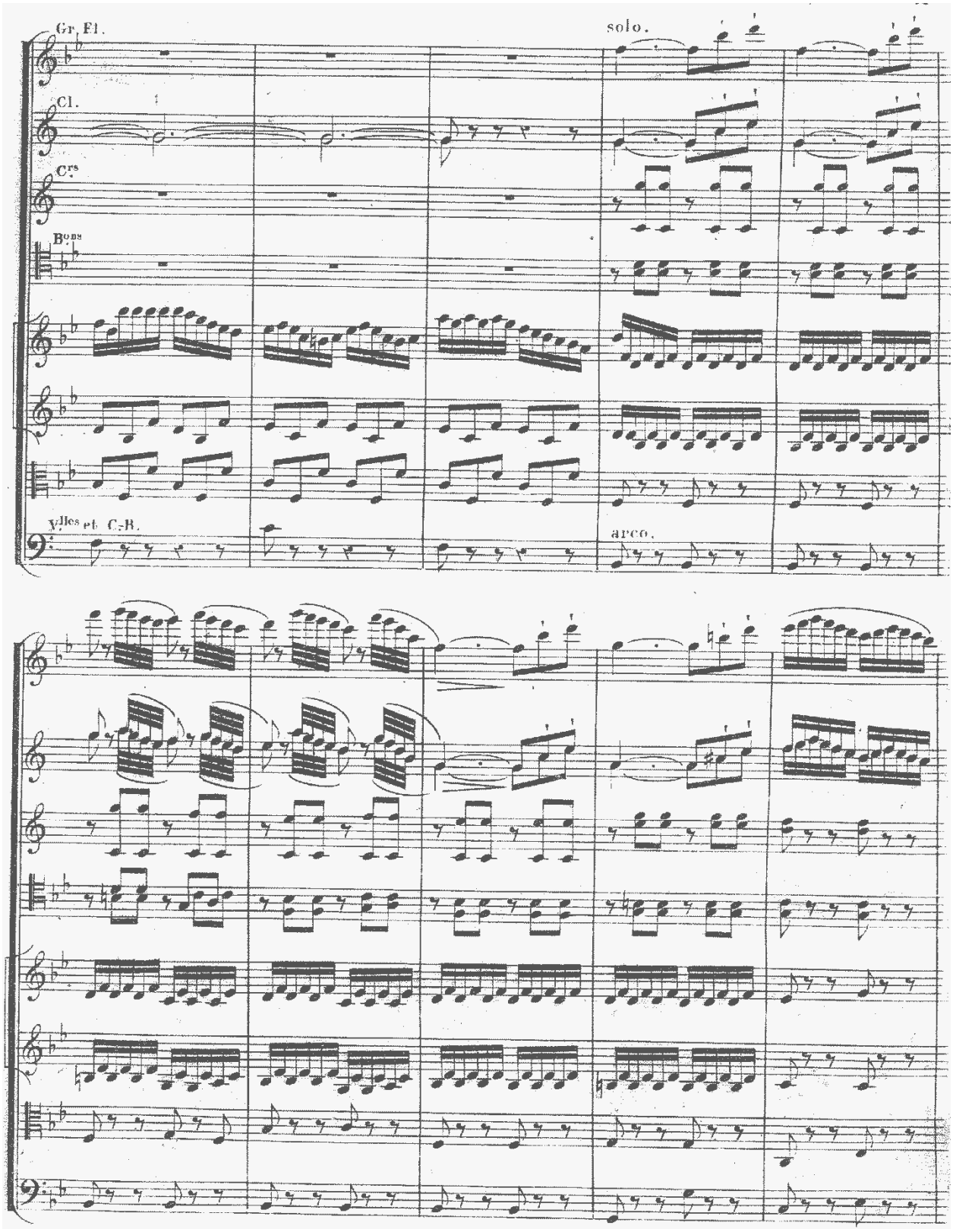

FF
Vlles arco.
C.-B.


FF
FF

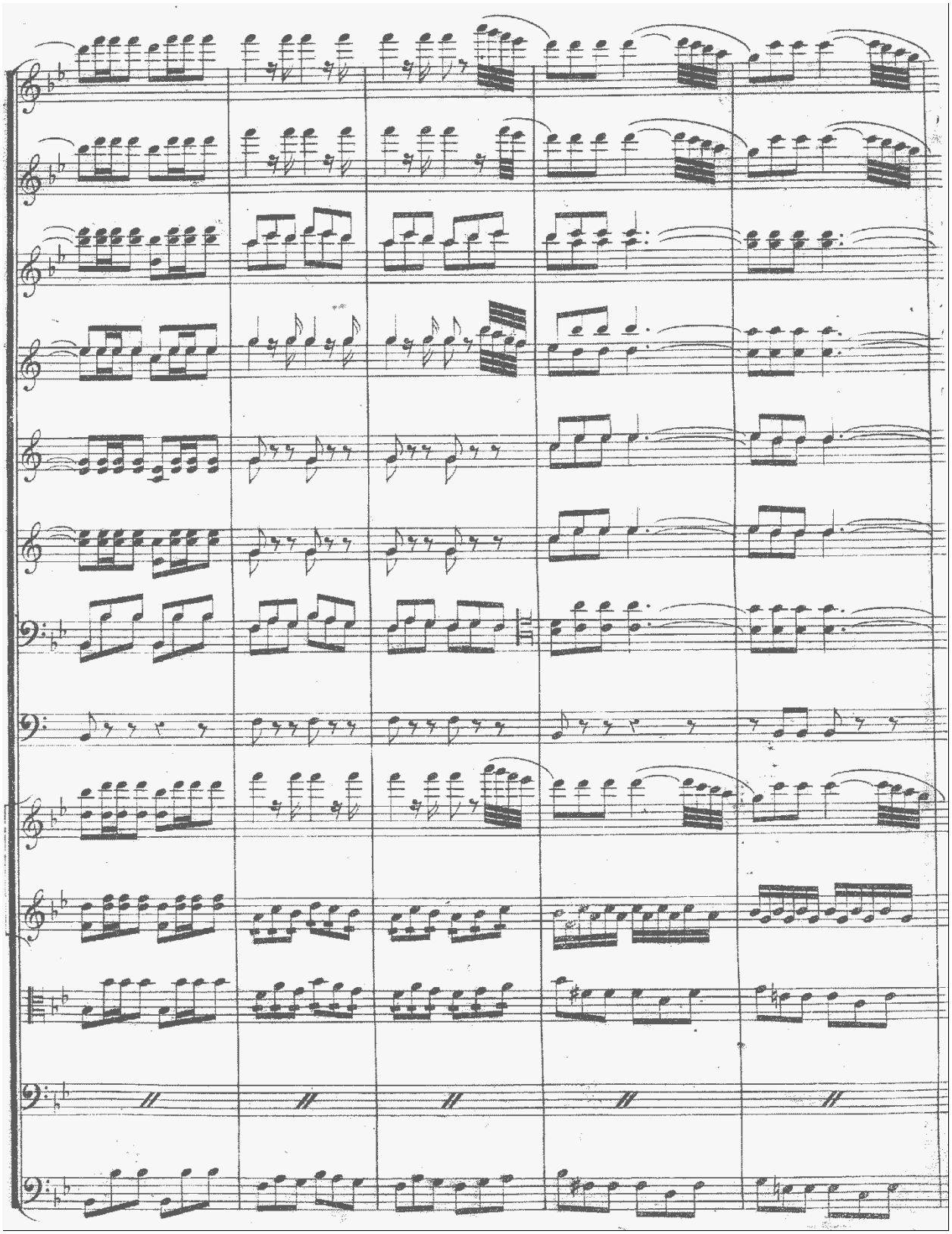

8
PP
PP
Vlle et C-B.
Gr. Fl.
H-b.
Crs
Bons
P
P
P
P
pizzic.
pizzic.
pizzic.
Vlles seuls.
pizzic.
6/8
540.

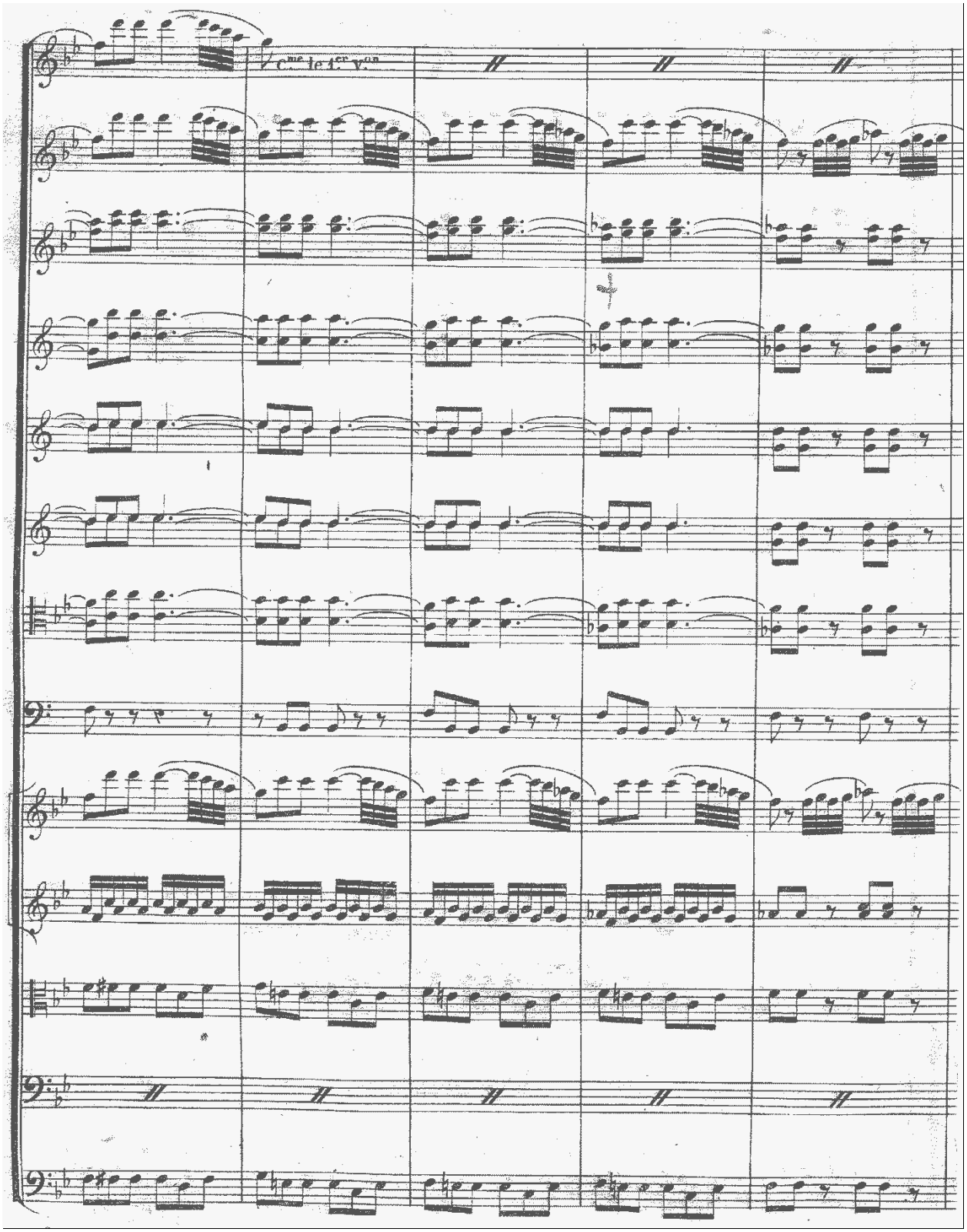

Allegretto. 108
Pet. Fl.
Cl.
P
P
P
V.lles et C-B.
P
Pet. Fl.
Cl.
Crs
P
Bons
P
V.lles et C-B.

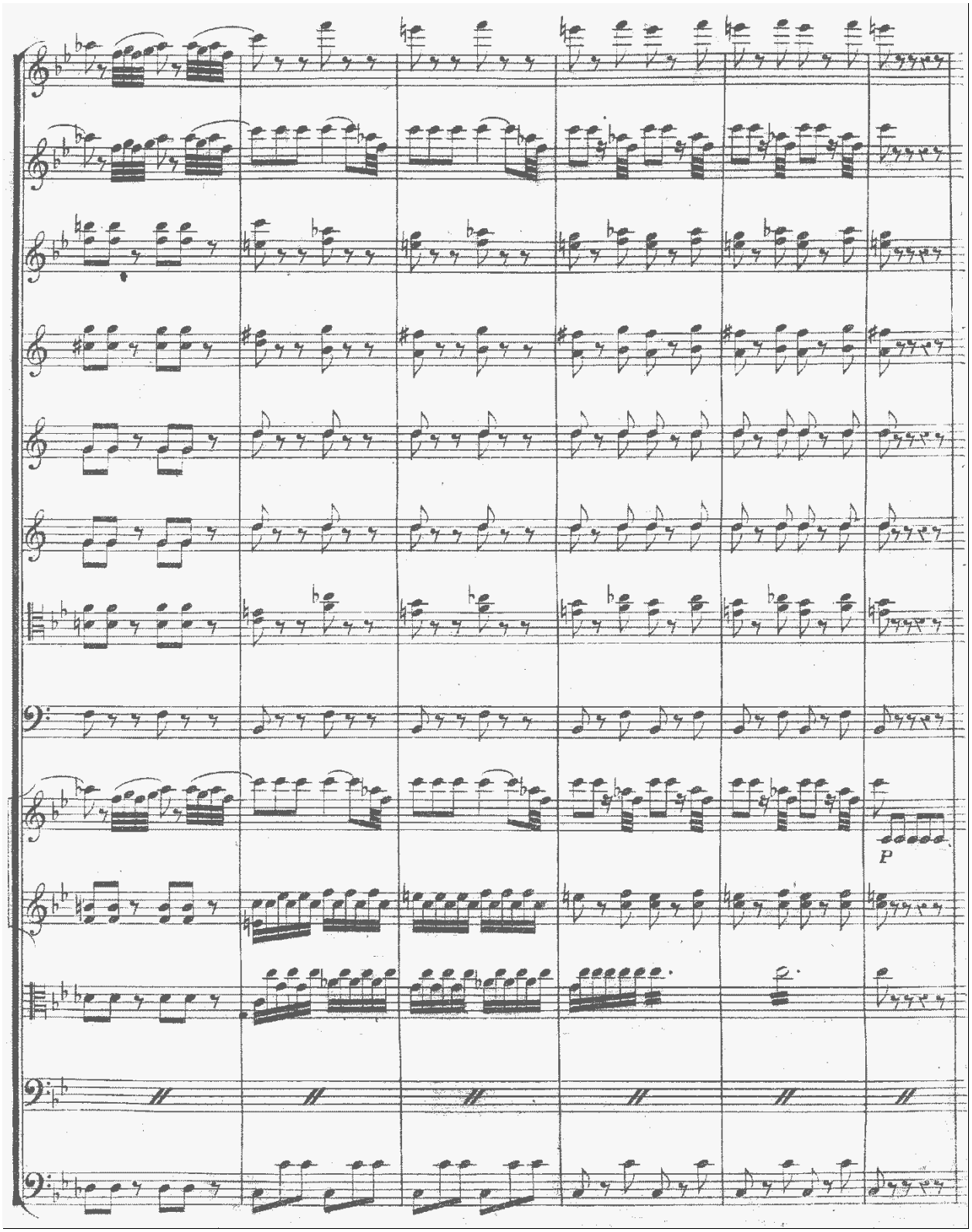

Pet. Fl.
Cl.
Cors
Bons
Vlles et C-B.
Cl.
staccato.
P
staccato.
P
staccato.
P
pizzicato.

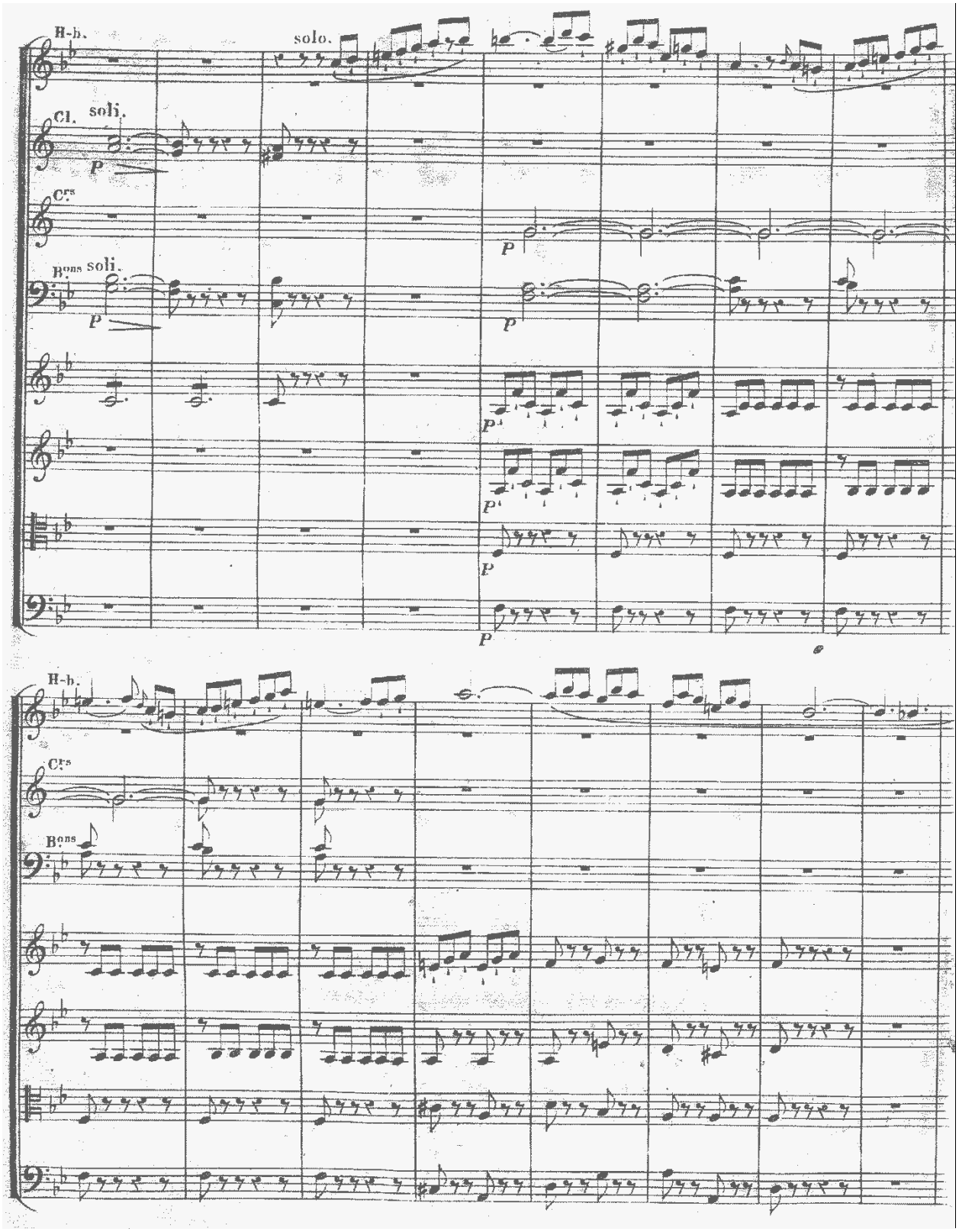

Gr. Fl.
solo.
Cl.
Cors
Bons
Vlles et C-B.
arco.

FF
Cme la Bse




Cme le 1.er V.on


P


H-b.
solo.
Cl. soli.
P
Crs
P
Bons soli.
P
P
P
P
P
H-b.
Crs
Bons