A History of Descent

For Solo Double Bass

Alex Hills
London, October 2021
Duration c. 6mins

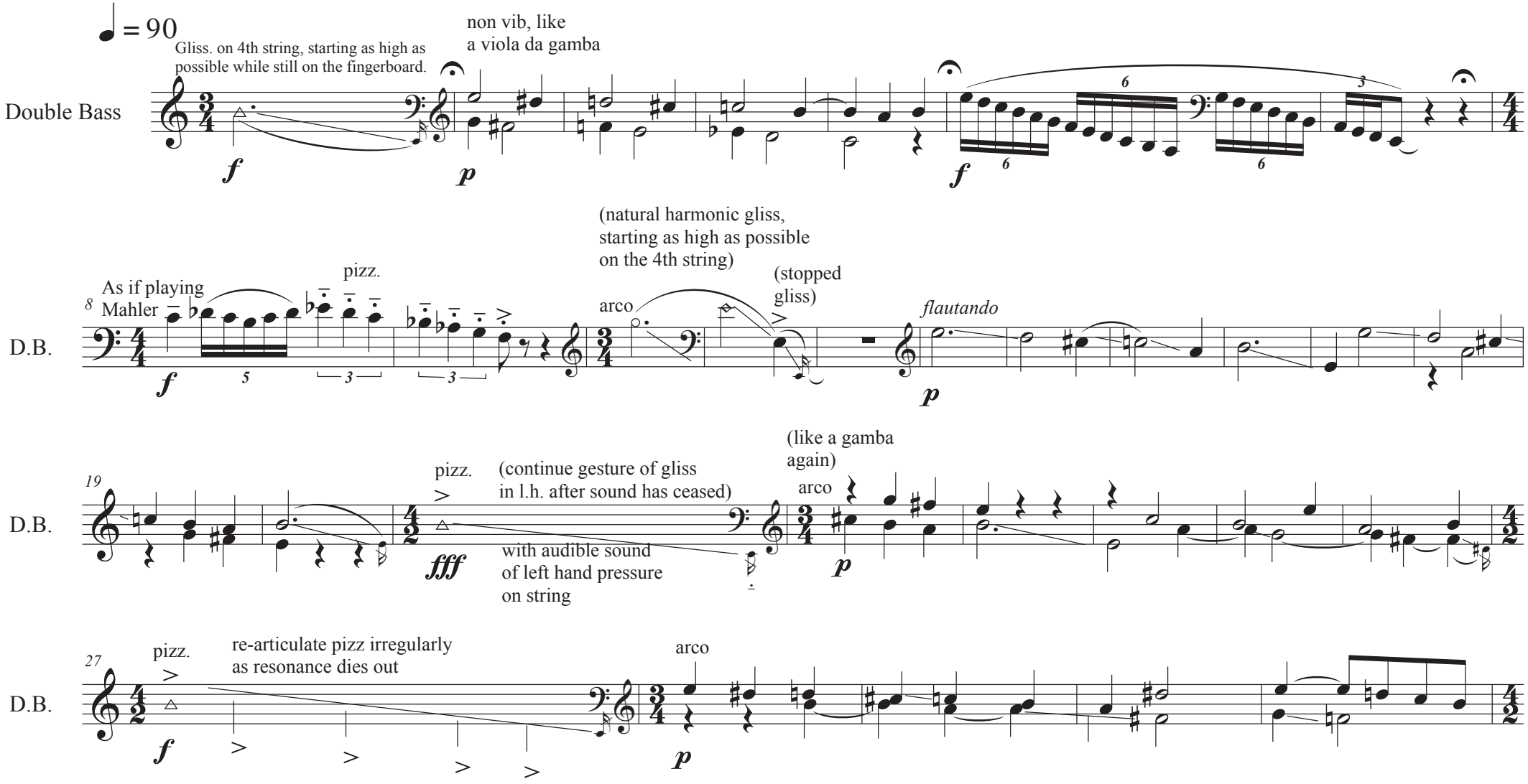
Like many solo pieces I write, this started from a rather basic consideration of the physical nature of the instrument: the double bass has very long strings and its size and lowness seemed to imply a sense of gravity, and therefore falling, to me. I then thought about the different ways music makes descent: a smooth glissando without individual notes, scales, a sequence of suspensions, a more romantic melodic figure that owes a little bit to Mahler. It struck me that these come with historical baggage – there are styles attached. The piece begins as a bit of a catalogue of this, but gradually brings them into a more continuous and unified musical line, that incorporates historical elements but also synthesizes them.

For Ruohua Li, as part of the Royal Academy of Music's 200 PIECES series of commissions.

△ notehead = stopped note as high as possible on fingerboard/

○ notehead = harmonic pressure note as close as possible to bridge.

A History of Descent



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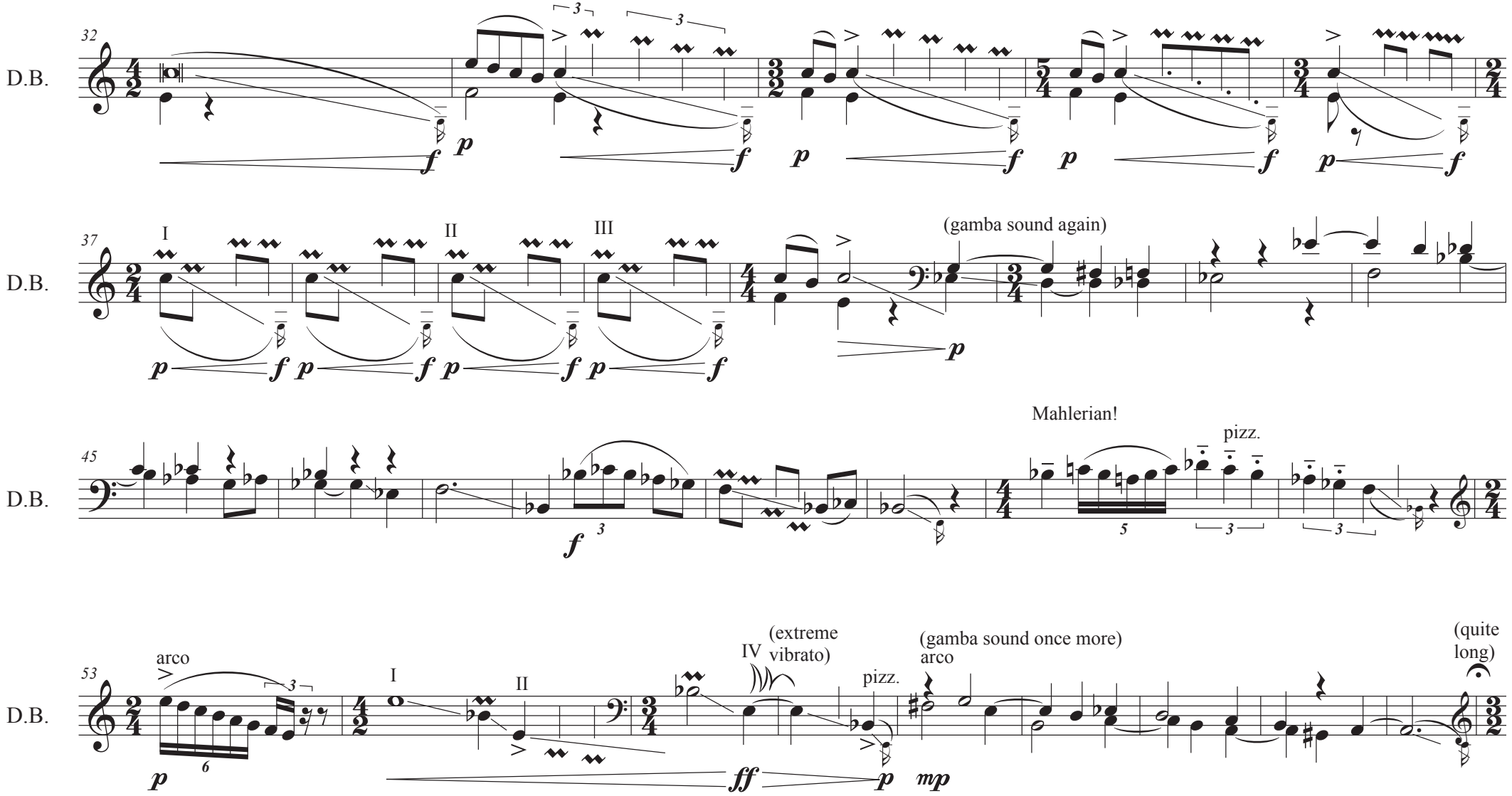
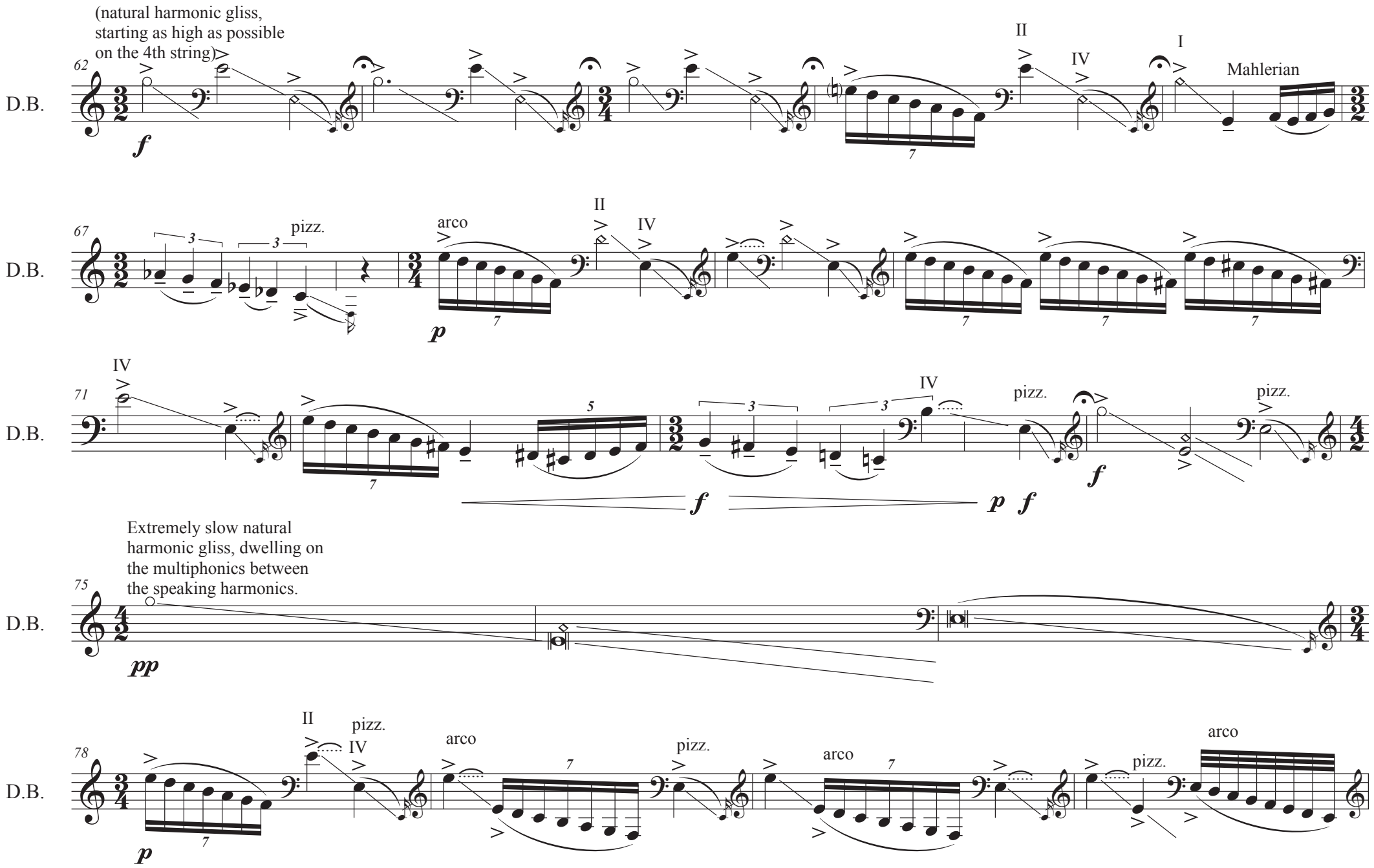
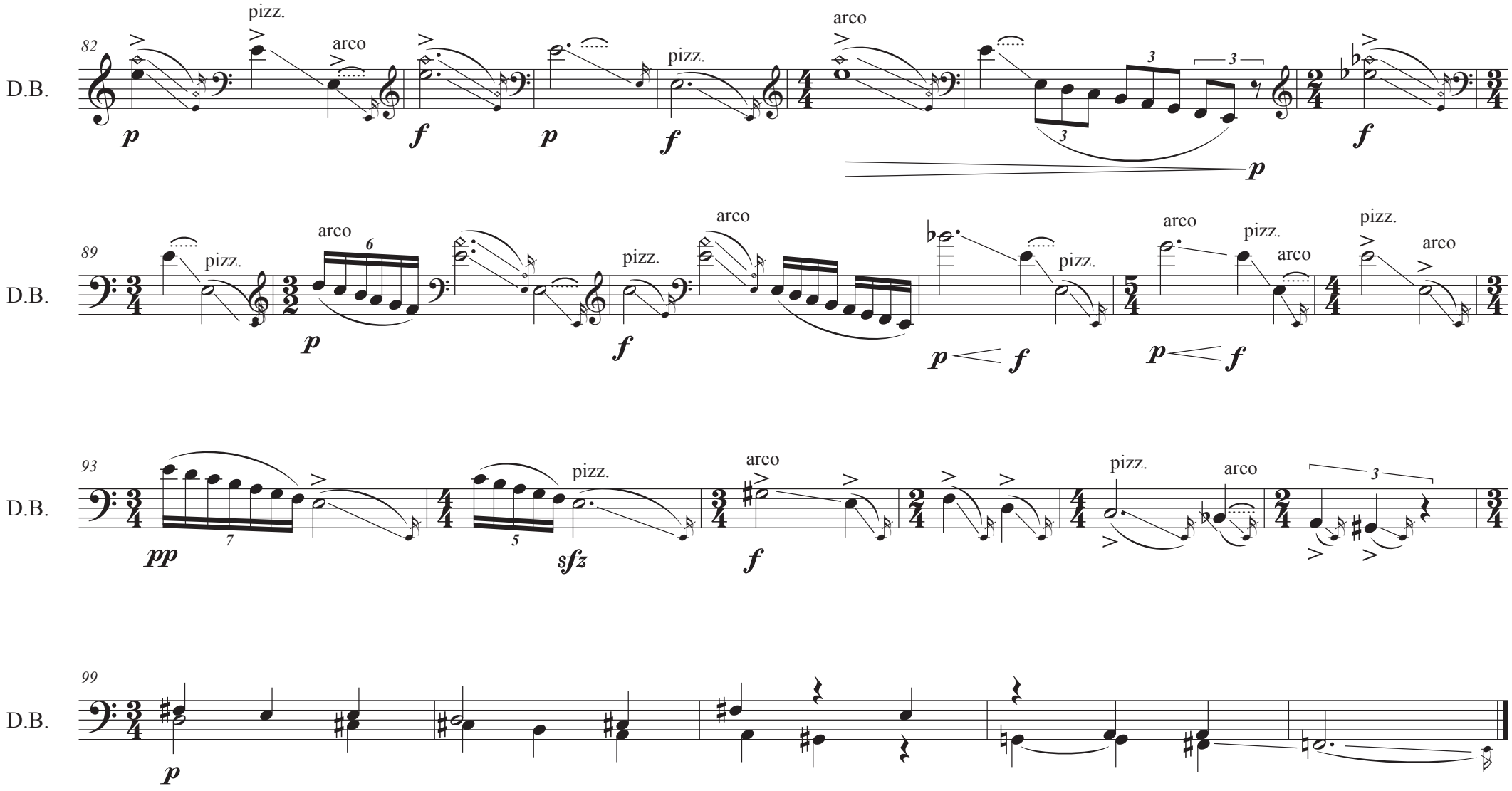
Gliss absolutely continuous so mordents end on a lower note than they start. Keep finger space for mordent constant, so interval gets narrower during descent. Start with a relatively wide interval.




(natural harmonic gliss,
starting as high as possible
on the 4th string)
62
D.B.
f
II
IV
I
Mahlerian
67
pizz.
arco
II
IV
p
71
IV
5
3
3
IV
pizz.
pizz.
f
p f
Extremely slow natural
harmonic gliss, dwelling on
the multiphonics between
the speaking harmonics.
75
pp
78
II
pizz.
IV
arco
pizz.
arco
pizz.
arco
p


82
D.B.
pizz.
arco
p
f
p
f
pizz.
arco
3
3
3
p
f
89
D.B.
pizz.
arco
6
p
f
pizz.
arco
p
f
pizz.
arco
p
f
pizz.
arco
93
D.B.
pp
7
pizz.
5
sfz
arco
f
pizz.
arco
3
99
D.B.
p