

e fere aspre e salvaggie

Ten reductions of a phrase from Monteverdi's "Zefiro torna",
arranged for quintet by Alex Ness

Instrumentation

- (Mezzo-)soprano (range: D4–E5)
- Flute
- Violin
- Viola
- Cello

Duration

6 minutes

Introduction

I wrote this piece for the [Società Italiana Musica Contemporanea](#), to celebrate Monteverdi's 450th birthday. I was inspired in particular by Webern's orchestration of Bach's "Ricercar a 6" from *The Musical Offering*, and more generally by the work of composers such as Peter Ablinger and Amnon Wolman, who are interested in the imagination's role in shaping our listening experience.

The composition is based on the following magnificent phrase near the end of Monteverdi's "Zefiro torna" (from the Madrigals, Book 6):

e fe - re as - pre e sel - vag-gie e fe -
 e fe - - re,
 e fe - re, e fe - re, e fe - - re, e
 e fe - - re, e fe - re, e fe -
 e fe - re as - pre
 e fe - re as - pre

116

- re, e fe - - re, e fe - re as
 e fe - - re, e fe - - re, e fe -
 fe - re a - - spre e sel -
 re as - pre e sel - vag - gie, e fe - re as -
 e fe - re as - - pre sel -
 e fe - re as - - pre sel -

(edition: Peter Rottländer, available [online](#))

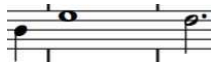
Over ten iterations, I gradually strip away Monteverdi's masterful polyphony to expose various layers of construction: first, the motives holding the polyphony together; underlying the motives, an ascending chain of suspensions; finally, at the deepest level, a simple ascending scale. As

each layer is removed, the listeners reimagine the music they've already heard, becoming aware of details that, on first listen, were perceived unconsciously.

Performance suggestions

I leave the details of musical expression in the hands of the individual musicians. If the musicians feel that they need some expressive guidance, here are some ideas:

- **Overall shape of the phrase:** start quiet and get gradually louder, to bring out the increase in tension of the suspension chain.
- **Articulation and dynamics:** exaggerate the articulation of the underlying



motive: separate the fourths, and slur the steps (as my notation indicates). Add swells to bring out the dissonance of the suspensions.

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e fere aspre e selvaggie

Ten reductions of a phrase from "Zefiro torna"

Claudio Monteverdi,
arr. Alex Ness

♩ = 80 1

(Mezzo-) soprano

Flute

Violin

Viola

Cello

e fe - re as - pre e sel - vag - gie e fe -

7

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

- re, e fe - re, e fe - re

13 2

Sop. e fe - re,

Fl.

Vln. pizz. arco

Vla.

Vc.

19

Sop. a... e fe...

Fl.

Vln. pizz. arco pizz.

Vla. pizz. arco

Vc.

25 3

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

31

Sop.


Fl.

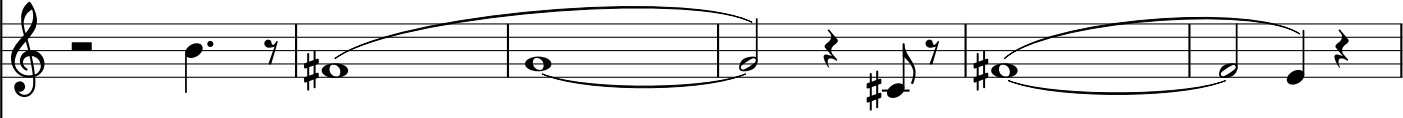
Vln.


Vla.

Vc.


37 4

Sop.  e fe - re, e


Fl. 

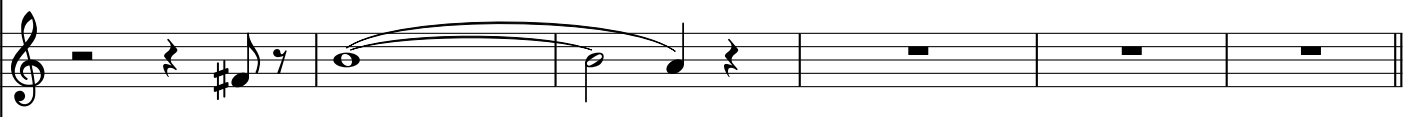
Vln. 

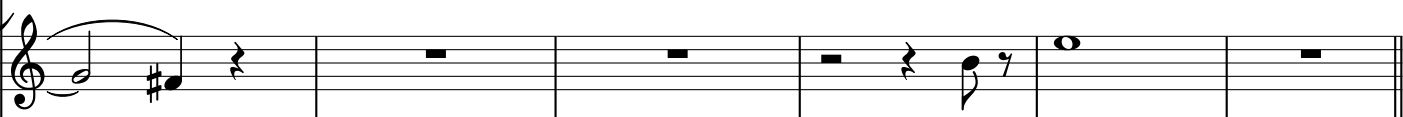
Vla. 

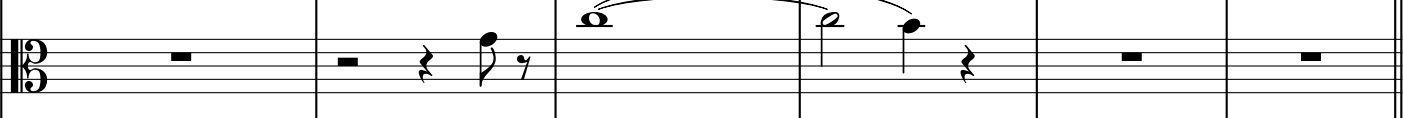
Vc. 

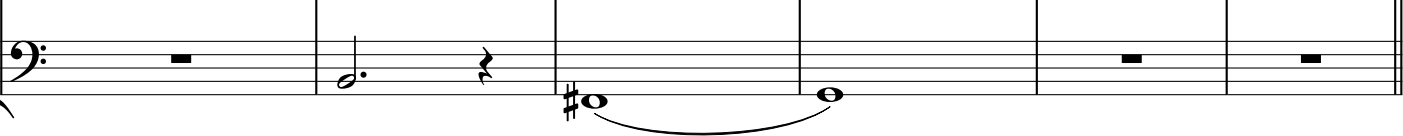
43

Sop.  fe - re, e fe..._____

Fl. 

Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

49 5

Sop.  e fe -

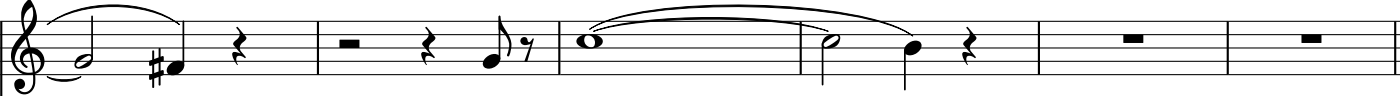
Fl. 


Vln. 

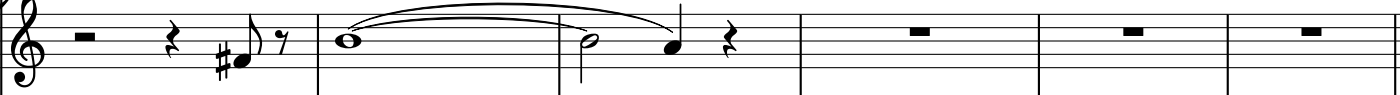
Vla. 


Vc. 

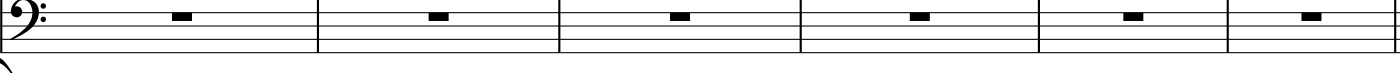
55

Sop.  - re, e fe - re,

Fl. 

Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

61 6

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

e

67

Sop.

Fl.

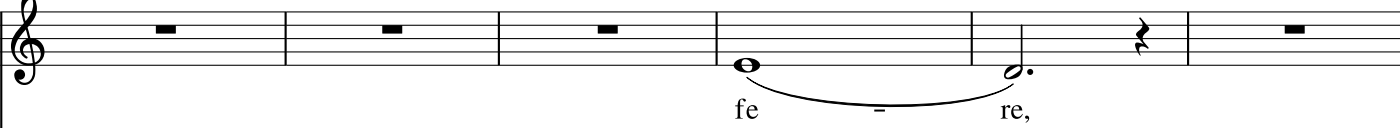
Vln.


Vla.


Vc.


fe - re, e fe...

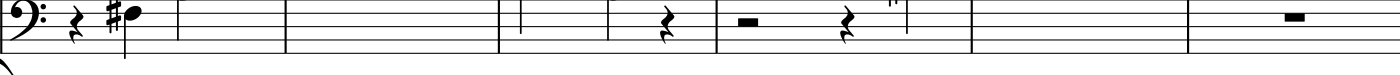
73 7

Sop.  fe — re,

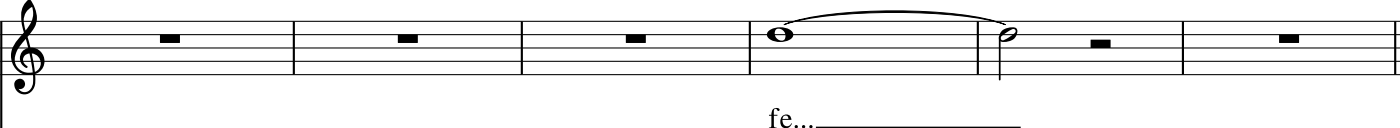
Fl.  pizz. arco pizz.

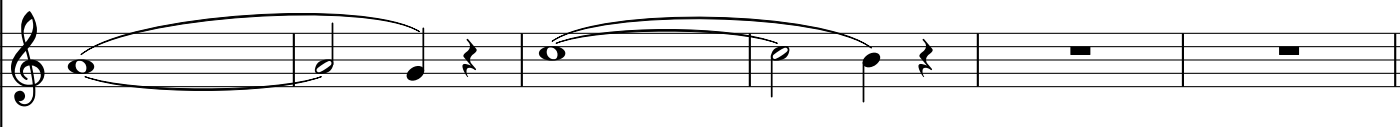
Vln.  pizz.

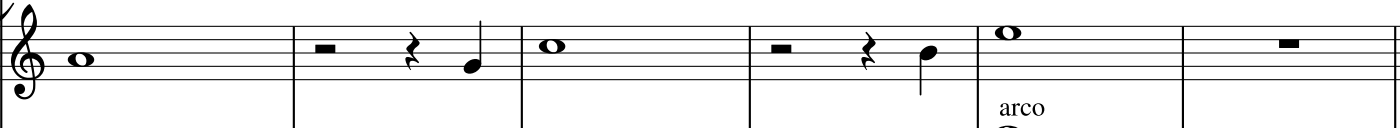
Vla.  pizz. arco pizz.

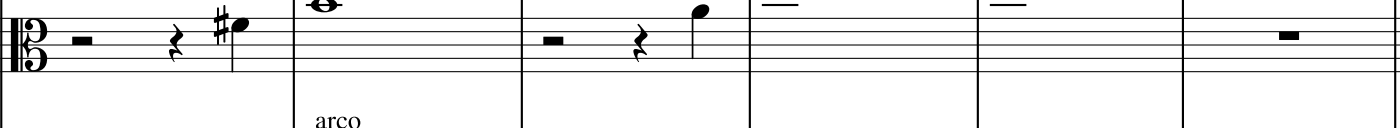
Vc.  pizz. arco pizz.


79

Sop.  fe...—————


Fl. 


Vln.  arco


Vla. 


Vc.  arco

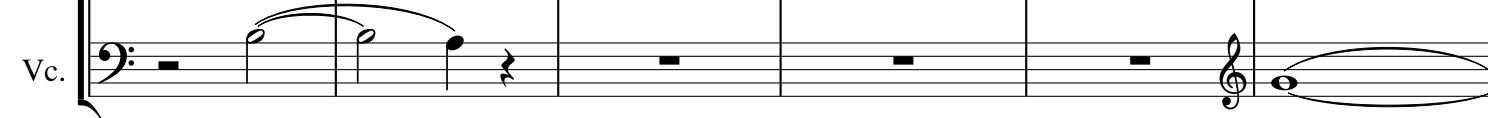
85 8

Sop. 

Fl. 

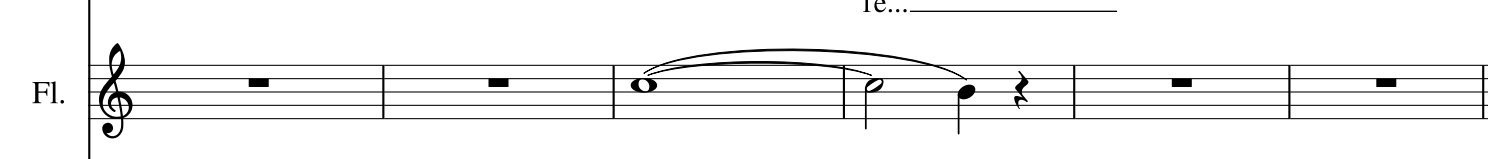
Vln. 

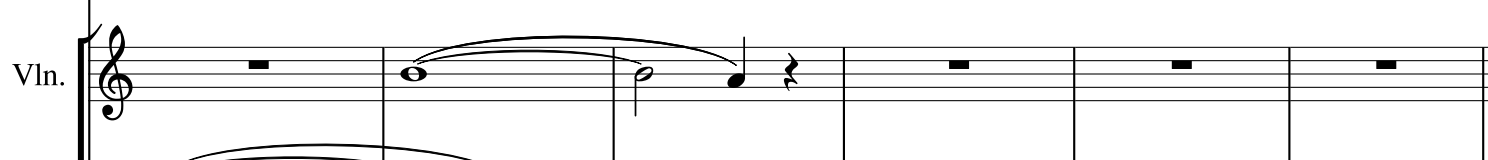
Vla. 

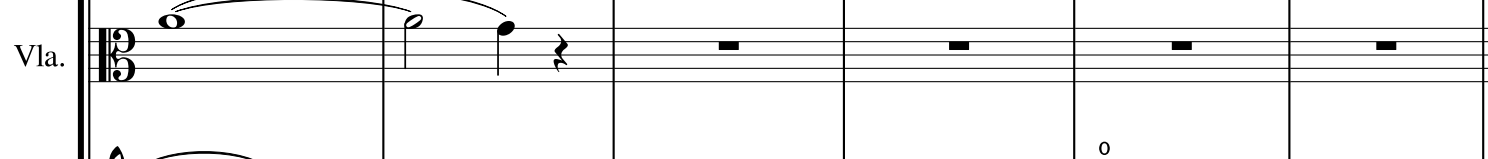
Vc. 

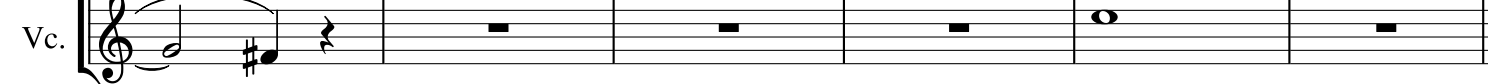
91

Sop. 

Fl. 

Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

97 9

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

103

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

109 **10**

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Detailed description: This system contains measures 109 through 114. The Soprano and Flute parts consist of whole rests for most of the measures. The Violin part has a melodic line starting in measure 109, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 110 and 111, and a sharp sign in measure 112. The Viola part has a melodic line starting in measure 110, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 111 and 112. The Violoncello part has a low line with a slur at the end of the system in measure 114.

115

Sop.

Fl.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

fe...

Detailed description: This system contains measures 115 through 120. The Soprano part has a melodic line starting in measure 115, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 116 and 117, and the text 'fe...' below it. The Flute part has a melodic line starting in measure 115, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 116 and 117. The Violin part has a melodic line starting in measure 115, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 116 and 117. The Viola part has a melodic line starting in measure 115, moving up stepwise, with a slur over measures 116 and 117. The Violoncello part has a low line with a slur at the end of the system in measure 120.