GIOVANNI GABRIELI

c. 1554/57–1612

# Canzon prima a 4

*"La Spiritata" · Ch. 186*

for two Trumpets in C or B♭ and two Trombones

*from* Canzoni per sonare con ogni sorte di stromenti
*Venice: Alessandro Raverii, 1608*

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Edited, with editorial dynamics, preface, and commentary,
by Christopher Delgado

SCORE

*Performing edition. Musical text not collated with the 1608 partbooks.*

TRUMPETOWN EDITION

Giovanni Gabrieli, *Canzon prima a 4*, “La Spiritata,” Ch. 186. From *Canzoni per sonare con ogni sorte di stromenti* (Venice: Alessandro Raverii, 1608).

Performing edition. The musical text is a modern arrangement for brass quartet and has not been collated with the 1608 partbooks. The dynamics, which are all editorial and printed in square brackets, and the preface and commentary are the present editor’s.

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Parts available: Trumpet 1 and Trumpet 2, each in C and in B♭; Trombone; Bass Trombone.

TRUMPETOWN EDITION

TE-003

Arrangement after M. Rondeau, IMSLP (Werner Icking Music Collection), CC BY 3.0.

# PREFACE

*The source, the instruments, and the question of dynamics*

## The source

The *Canzon prima*, headed "La Spiritata" in the partbooks, is the first of four four-part canzonas by Giovanni Gabrieli that open Alessandro Raverii's anthology *Canzoni per sonare con ogni sorte di stromenti a quattro, cinque, & otto, con il suo basso generale per l'organo*, printed in Venice in 1608 (Plate 1). The collection gathers thirty-six canzonas by Gabrieli, Claudio Merulo, Gioseffo Guami, Girolamo Frescobaldi, and others, with a *basso generale* for the organ. Gabrieli is represented by the four canzonas *a 4* (Ch. 186–189) and by two canzonas *a 8* (Nos. 27 and 28). The catalogue numbers are those of Richard Charteris.[1]

The title page calls for performance *con ogni sorte di stromenti*, "with every kind of instrument." In Venetian practice around 1600 that meant, above all, cornetts and trombones, the core of the instrumental establishment at San Marco, alone or doubled by strings and organ.[2] A quartet of two trumpets and two trombones is a modern descendant of that sound, and the present edition is written for it.

## The question of dynamics

The 1608 print contains no dynamic indications of any kind (Plate 2). That silence is not evidence that the music was played at one level. As Matthias Thiemel puts it in *Grove Music Online*, dynamic variation "can normally be assumed even when indications for it are mainly or even entirely absent from the notation," and already in the Renaissance "dynamic values were reflected in changes in the number of voices and their registers."[3] Gabrieli himself is the best witness. In the *Sacrae symphoniae* of 1597 he printed the words *Pian* and *Forte* in the parts of the *Sonata pian e forte* (Plate 3), and the placement is systematic: a single choir sounding alone is marked *pian*, and the two choirs together are marked *forte*. Dynamic level follows the number of choirs sounding.

Michael Praetorius, writing in 1619 for German musicians learning the new Italian music, confirms the principle. The Italians, he reports, mark *forte* and *piano* in their parts "because of the changes in both voices and choirs," a practice he approves, provided it is used with moderation.[4] The instruments were equal to it. Girolamo Dalla Casa, the first director of instrumental music at San Marco, wrote in 1584 that the cornett "is played piano and forte and in every sort of key, just as the voice." Jamie Savan, who translates the passage, suggests that the two words described tone quality, soft and hard, as well as level.[5]

Every dynamic in this score is therefore editorial, every one is printed in square brackets, and each is justified in the Commentary. The edition follows the practice Thomas Hiebert singled out for praise, in which editorial suggestions are "clearly differentiated" from the source.[6] Players who prefer the bare text can ignore the brackets.

1 Richard Charteris, *Giovanni Gabrieli (ca. 1555–1612): A Thematic Catalogue of His Music with a Guide to the Source Materials and Translations of His Vocal Texts* (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1996).

2 For the instrumentalists at San Marco see Eleanor Selfridge-Field, "Bassano and the Orchestra of St Mark's," *Early Music* 4, no. 2 (1976): 153–58, at 155 (for Christmas 1602, six trombones, three cornetts, two violins, and violone were hired), and her *Venetian Instrumental Music from Gabrieli to Vivaldi*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Dover, 1994). See also Denis Arnold, *Giovanni Gabrieli and the Music of the Venetian High Renaissance* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), and, on the divided choirs of San Marco, David Bryant, "The *cori spezzati* of St Mark's: Myth and Reality," *Early Music History* 1 (1981): 165–86.

3 Matthias Thiemel, "Dynamics," *Grove Music Online* (2001; bibliography updated 2013), §1, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.08458. Thiemel cites Josquin's *Missa "Pange lingua"*, where paired imitation builds from two voices to four.

4 Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum III* (Wolfenbüttel, 1619), trans. and ed. Jeffery T. Kite-Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); quoted from Hans Lampl, trans., "Praetorius on Performance: Excerpts from *Syntagma Musicum III*," selected with commentary by S. E. Plank, *Historic Brass Society Journal* 6 (1994): 244–68, at 248–49.

5 Girolamo Dalla Casa, *Il vero modo di diminuir* (Venice: Angelo Gardano, 1584): "Questo stromento si adopera piano, & forte, & in ogni sorte di Tuono, si come fa la voce"; trans. Jamie Savan, "Unlocking the Mysteries of the Venetian Cornett: *ad imitar piu la voce humana*," *Historic Brass Society Journal* 28 (2016): 31–56, at 50. On Dalla Casa's post see Selfridge-Field, "Bassano and the Orchestra," 153.

6 Thomas Hiebert, review of *Salzburger Hornduette*, ed. Johannes Brand, *Historic Brass Society Newsletter* 10 (1997): 38.

### Principles of the editorial dynamics

Gabrieli's *Sonata pian e forte* is written for two choirs; this canzona is written for one. The edition extends the principle of the sonata to a single four-voice texture by analogy, and states openly that it does so. The rules are those of the first volume of this series (TE-001), applied to a piece built, more openly than its companions, on the exchange between two pairs of instruments.

*Texture determines level.* Where voices drop out and a new point of imitation is entered by single voices, the level is [*p*] or [*mf*]. Where all four parts join in rhythmically unified writing, it is [*f*]. Where the scoring alone produces the increase, as in the opening exposition, no marking is printed; [*f*] appears only where the voices also move together.

*Changes of level fall at the seams.* Changes of level fall at cadences and at the start of new points of imitation, not in the middle of a phrase. Where a voice runs on across a cadence, its marking is placed at the start of its next phrase. This is not a claim that the music was played in flat blocks of sound. Thiemel calls the twentieth-century idea of "terrace dynamics" erroneous, and the period sources describe the swelling and fading of the voice and of wind instruments: Caccini's *crescere e scemare della voce*, and Fantini's instruction of 1638 that long notes on the trumpet be held "in a singing fashion," swelling to the middle of the note and fading again.[7] The brackets mark only the level from which such shaping starts. No hairpins are printed; the shaping is left to the players.

*Two pairs.* The canzona is laid out for two pairs of voices. The subject is stated by the two upper parts alone (bars 1–4) and then by the two lower parts, which repeat the same music an octave lower (bars 5–8). In the triple-time passage (bars 28–35) the exchange becomes literal: the trumpets play two bars alone, the trombones answer with the same two bars an octave lower, and after a two-bar duet for the second trumpet and the trombone (bars 32–33) all four join. This is the closest the canzona comes to the *Sonata pian e forte* itself, and it is marked accordingly: each pair sounding alone [*p*], both pairs together [*f*]. The duet of bars 32–33, a reduced texture of two voices, stays at [*p*]. Both pairs receive the same level, so that the answer is never an echo of the statement.

*Where the pairs are not marked.* In the exposition the same exchange is left at [*mf*], the edition's neutral level for presenting a subject. A [*p*] for the lower pair in bars 7–8 would turn the second statement into an echo of the first, which is the effect the edition avoids. The two imitative sections in duple time (bars 36–49, ending on a half cadence on D, and 63–78), in which all four parts are active and the pairs overlap rather than alternate, are marked [*mf*]. The section from bar 50, in which all four parts begin together, each pair in rhythmic unison, and which settles into block chords in bars 54–56, is marked [*f*].

### Balance on modern instruments

The trumpet and trombone of today are louder and more brilliant than the cornett and sackbut, and the cornett in particular was prized for its likeness to the human voice. The bracketed dynamics should therefore be read as relationships, not as absolute levels. A bracketed [*f*] in this music is the full, rounded sound of a cornett and sackbut ensemble, not a modern orchestral forte. Period-instrument players have argued for more range, not less: the cornettist Jean Tubéry, recalling "what Dalla Casa says about playing loud and softly," suggested that players "can go further in that direction."[8] Modern players should explore the full range between [*p*] and [*f*] while keeping the relationships between the parts.

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7 Thiemel, "Dynamics," §§1–3; Giulio Caccini, *Le nuove musiche* (Florence, 1602), preface, ed. H. Wiley Hitchcock (Madison: A-R Editions, 1970; 2nd ed., Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2009); Girolamo Fantini, *Modo per imparare a sonare di tromba* (Frankfurt, 1638), 3, as translated in Steven E. Plank, "Trumpet and Horn," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Stewart Carter, rev. and expanded by Jeffery Kite-Powell, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 143–44. A sign for the swell and decay of a single note appears in print only later, in Domenico Mazzocchi's madrigals of 1638.

8 Susan Smith, "A Cacophony of Cornettists," *Historic Brass Society Newsletter* 9 (1996): 26–32, at 28. Conversation with Michael Collver, Bruce Dickey, Stephen Escher, Douglas Kirk, Jean Tubéry, and Jeremy West.

### Dynamics in the hands of players

Musicians of Gabrieli's own generation added dynamics to his music where the print had none. In a score book begun in 1599, the Augsburg composer and teacher Adam Gumpelzhaimer copied Gabrieli's ten-voice motet *Domine exaudi orationem meam* from the *Sacrae symphoniae* of 1597. The book names its players, on instruments that include cornetts, trombones, and a bassoon, and Gumpelzhaimer supplied dynamic indications throughout, alternating *Pian* and *Forte*. Richard Charteris, who describes the source, reads it as "a record of how the instrumentalists treated this work."[9] Bruce Dickey notes that *piano* and *forte* in music of the period usually mark echo effects or the contrast of tutti and solo sections, and Gary Towne writes that dynamic markings of the period "merely signal to players the size of the ensemble playing at any given moment," and warns against over-interpreting them.[10]

### The instruments and their model

In their practical guide of 1975, Clifford Bartlett and Peter Holman observe that Gabrieli and his contemporaries treated the cornett and the violin as alternatives, and conclude that it is "far better to replace them with violins than with anachronistic oboes or trumpets."[11] This edition answers the objection in how the trumpets are played. Dickey, writing for players of the cornett and sackbut, names the human voice as "the principal model (and not the modern trumpet or trombone!)" for tone, articulation, and dynamic range.[12]

The title page advertises *il suo basso generale per l'organo*, and Bartlett and Holman call the organ "the obvious accompanying instrument" in church music of the period.[13] The arrangement omits it; an organist reading from the *basso generale* would restore a sound the print provides for.

### Articulation

Dickey identifies articulation as the area in which modern and historical playing differ most. Wind players of the period used pairs of unequal syllables, *te che*, *te re*, and *le re*, in a kind of double tonguing whose aim was not evenness but inequality: metrically strong, consonant "good" notes slightly stressed, weak and passing "bad" notes unstressed. Dickey recommends a compound tonguing for "all notes of the speed of eighth notes or faster," with repeated and leaping notes single-tongued; for *re* he suggests the soft *t* of a relaxed American "water."[14] The arrangement halves the note values of the print (its semiminims appear here as quavers), so Dickey's eighth notes are the semiquavers of this score.

### Tempo

The print gives no tempo. Its notation, under the cut C and full of semiminims and fusae, is what George Houle calls "canzona style." Houle explains that such music was beaten with the tactus on the semibreve, and that this tactus was taken slower than in music notated in long values, "so as not to rush the fast notes"; he cites Marin Mersenne's normative tactus of 1636, "about MM 60."[15] One original tactus is thus one minim of this score, and the arranger's crotchet = 80 puts the tactus at 40 a minute, slower than Mersenne's norm. The editor suggests a minim pulse, one to each tactus.

9 Richard Charteris, "The Performance of Giovanni Gabrieli's Vocal Works: Indications in the Early Sources," *Music & Letters* 71, no. 3 (1990): 336–51, at 342. The score book is Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Mus. ms. 40028.

10 Bruce Dickey, "Ornamentation in Early Seventeenth-Century Italian Music," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, ed. Stewart Carter, rev. and expanded by Jeffery Kite-Powell, 2nd ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 308; Gary Towne, "Choral Music in Italy and the Germanic Lands," ibid., 63.

11 Clifford Bartlett and Peter Holman, "Giovanni Gabrieli: A Guide to the Performance of His Instrumental Music," *Early Music* 3, no. 1 (1975): 25–32, at 27.

12 Bruce Dickey, "Cornett and Sackbut," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, 109.

13 Bartlett and Holman, "Giovanni Gabrieli," 27.

14 Dickey, "Cornett and Sackbut," 111–12.

15 George Houle, "Meter and Tempo," in *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth-Century Music*, 353.

*Christopher Delgado*
*New Jersey, November 2026*

# COMMENTARY

*The editorial dynamics, bar by bar*

**Sources.** *R* = *Canzoni per sonare con ogni sorte di stromenti* (Venice: Alessandro Raverii, 1608), partbooks Canto, Alto, Tenore, Basso, Basso generale; consulted for the absence of dynamics only; the musical text has not been collated. *SS* = Giovanni Gabrieli, *Sacrae symphoniae* (Venice: Angelo Gardano, 1597), *Sonata pian e forte*, cited as the model for texture-based dynamics. *T* = the modern arrangement used for the musical text (see imprint).
**Abbreviations.** Tpt 1, Tpt 2 = Trumpets (parts in C and in B♭); Tbn = Trombone; B Tbn = Bass Trombone (in the score: Tpt. in C 1, Tpt. in C 2, Tbn., B. Tbn.); all = all four parts. Bar numbers follow *T*.

| Bar | Part | Marking and rationale |
|---|---|---|
| 1, 2, 5, 6 | Tpt 2, Tpt 1, B Tbn, Tbn | [*mf*] at each entry of the subject (Tpt 2 bar 1, Tpt 1 bar 2, B Tbn bar 5, Tbn bar 6). The subject passes from the upper pair to the lower; the increase is written into the scoring, so no further marking is printed. Bars 9–27 restate the exposition in fuller texture (Tpt 2 re-entering in bar 9, Tpt 1 in bar 13) and stay at this level. |
| 28, 30 | Tpt 1, Tpt 2; Tbn, B Tbn | [*p*]. Triple-time section (bars 28–35). The trumpets play bars 28–29 alone; the trombones answer in bars 30–31 with the same music an octave lower, beneath the trumpets' held cadence notes. Each pair sounding alone is treated as a choir sounding alone (*SS*: *pian*); both receive the same level. Tpt 2 and Tbn continue at this level in bars 32–33. |
| 34 | all | [*f*]. Both pairs together for the first time in the triple-time section (Tpt 1 re-entering after three bars' rest), to the cadence on D at the start of bar 36: the direct analogue of the Sonata, *SS*: both choirs together = *forte*. The trumpets move in one rhythm; the trombones support them in longer values. |
| 36, 38 | Tpt 1, Tpt 2; Tbn, B Tbn | [*mf*] at each entry of a new point after the cadence (Tpt 1 bar 36 beat 1½, after its cadence note; Tpt 2 bar 36 beat 2½; Tbn bar 38 beat 1½; B Tbn bar 38 beat 2½). Four-voice imitation, the pairs overlapping, to the half cadence on D in bar 49. |
| 50 | all | [*f*]. On the resolution to G that opens the repeated section (bars 50–72), all four parts begin together, each pair moving in rhythmic unison, and the section settles into block chords in bars 54–56; the texture stays at three or four voices through the cadence on D at bar 63. The marking applies again when the repeat returns to bar 50. |
| 63, 64 | Tpt 1, Tpt 2; Tbn; B Tbn | [*mf*]. A new section after the cadence on D in bar 63. The trumpets' marking is placed on their second semiquaver, after the cadence note, as at bar 36; the trumpets move in parallel while the trombones answer with a quick descending figure (Tbn bar 63, second semiquaver of beat 2; B Tbn bar 64, second semiquaver of beat 1; each after a rest). All four parts are active and the pairs overlap rather than alternate, so this is the middle level. The level holds to the end. |

### Markings deliberately not added

No hairpins (see Preface). No [*p*] for the lower pair in bars 7–8 or 18–19, where it would make the restatement an echo (see Preface). No echo effects elsewhere. No final [*f*]: the closing bars continue the imitative section that begins in bar 63 and converge only at the final cadence, so the level of that section holds. No dynamic for the final fermata. No articulation has been added to *T*.

### Editorial method

This is a performing edition. The musical text is a modern arrangement for brass quartet (see the imprint page), which sets the four partbooks for two trumpets and two trombones. Its pitch level, note values, barring, metre signatures, tempo indication (*Allegro*, crotchet = 80), the changes of metre (2/4, with 3/4 in bars 28–35), the repeat of bars 50–72, and the final fermata belong to the arrangement and do not appear in this form in the 1608 print, which is notated in the long note values and unbarred partbooks of the period. The text has not been collated with the four Raverii partbooks, and the assignment of the partbooks to the four modern parts has not been verified. The present editor's contribution is confined to the bracketed dynamics, the preface, and the commentary.

# SOURCES AND LITERATURE

*Works cited in the preface and commentary*


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CANTO
CANZONI PER
SONARE CON OGNI
SORTE DI STROMENTI
A Quattro, Cinque, & Otto,
Con il suo Basso generale per l'Organo,
Nouamente raccolte da diuersi Eccellentissimi
Musici, & date in luce.
LIBRO PRIMO.
CON PRIVILEGIO.
IN VENETIA,
Appresso Alessandro Rauerij. M.D.CVIII.

**Plate 1.** *Raverii, Canzoni per sonare (Venice, 1608), title page of the Canto partbook.*

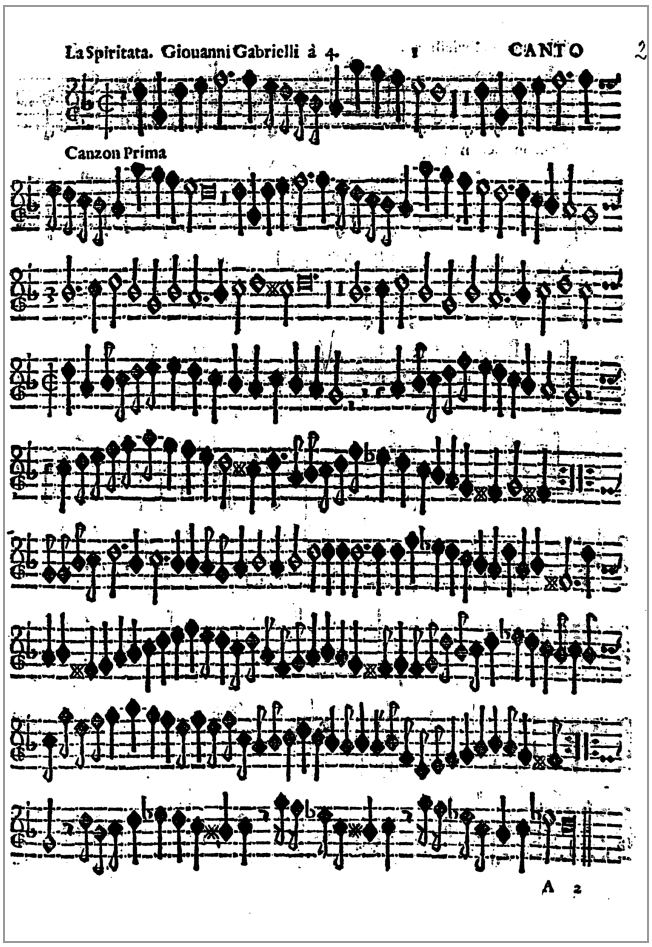

La Spiritata. Giouanni Gabrielli à 4. 1 CANTO 2
Canzon Prima
A 2

**Plate 2.** *Raverii 1608, Canto partbook, p. 1: the Canzon prima, headed "La Spiritata." The print marks the repeated section with the sign :||: at the end of the fifth and eighth staves. It carries no dynamic indications.*

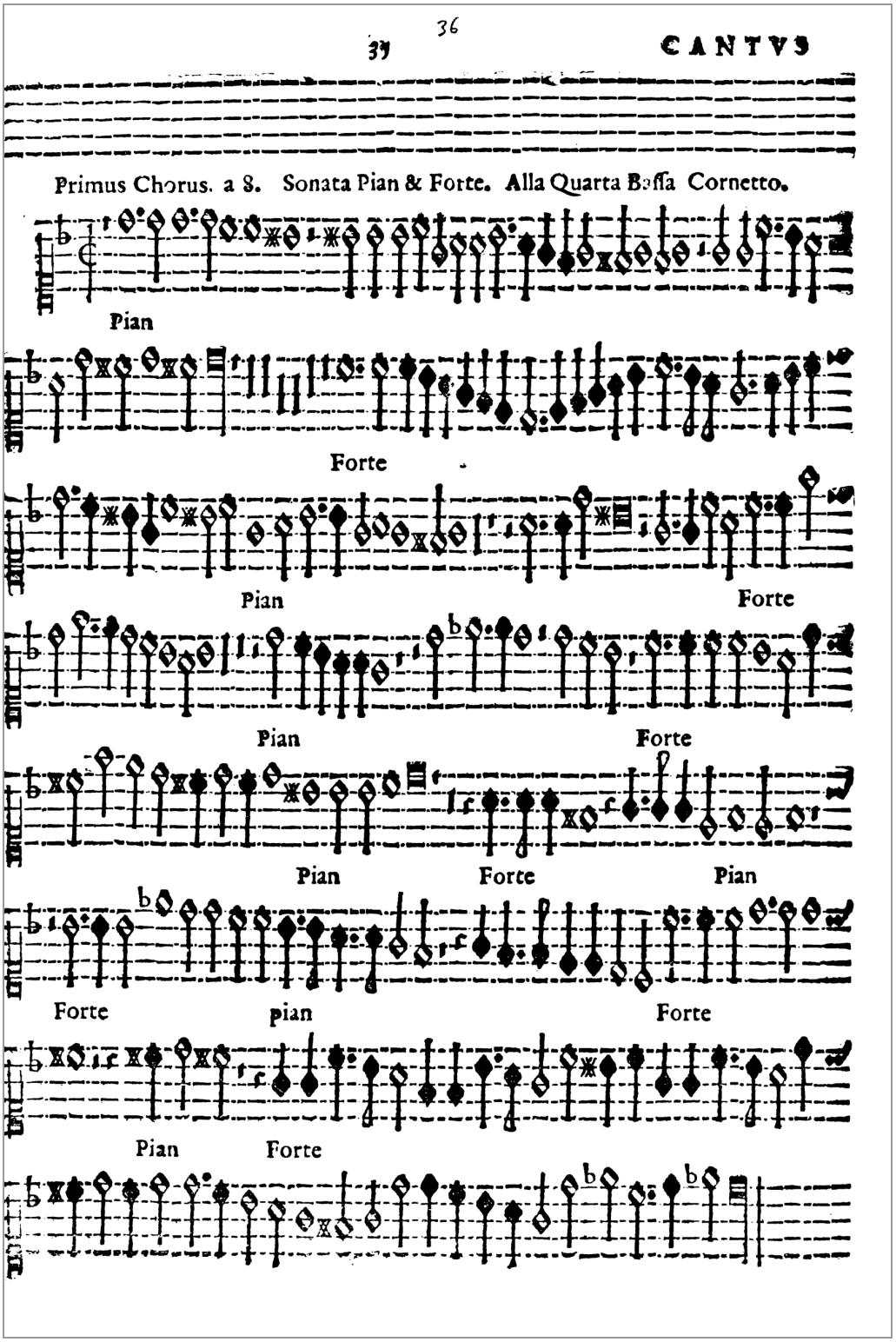
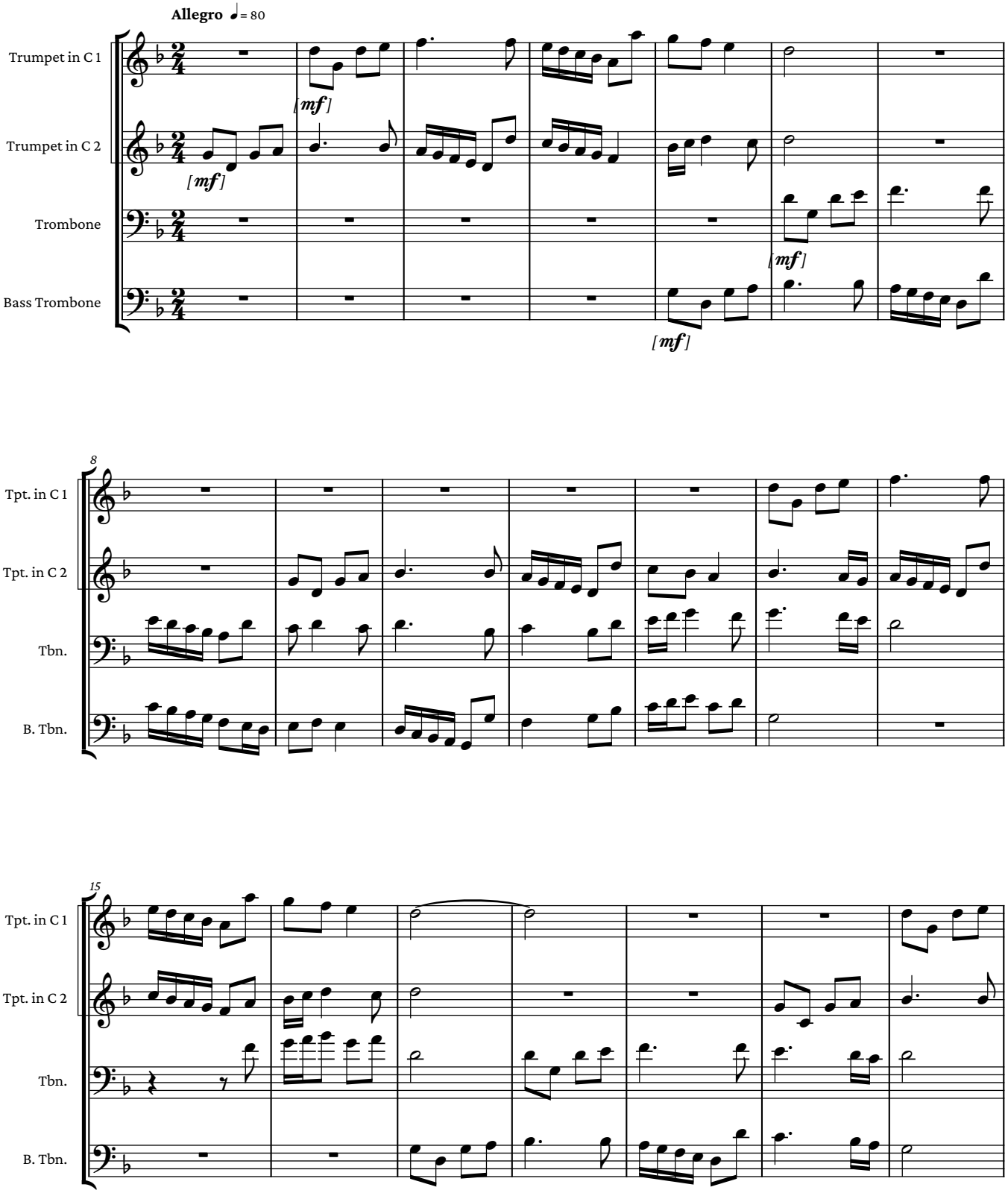


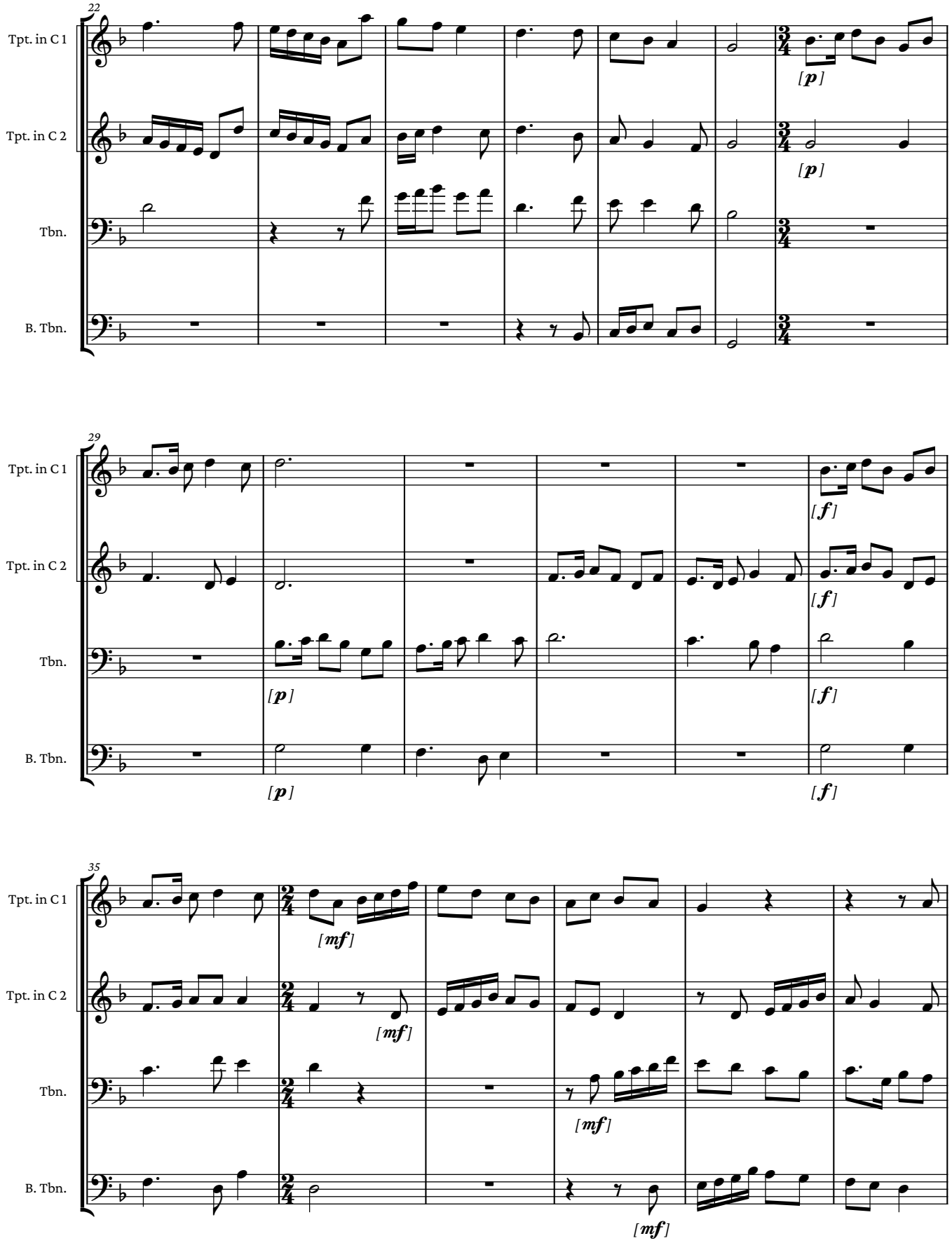

**Plate 3.** *Gabrieli, Sacrae symphoniae (Venice, 1597), Cantus partbook, Sonata pian & forte, Choir I cornetto part: the printed Pian and Forte mark where this choir plays alone and where both choirs sound. Vienna, ÖNB.*

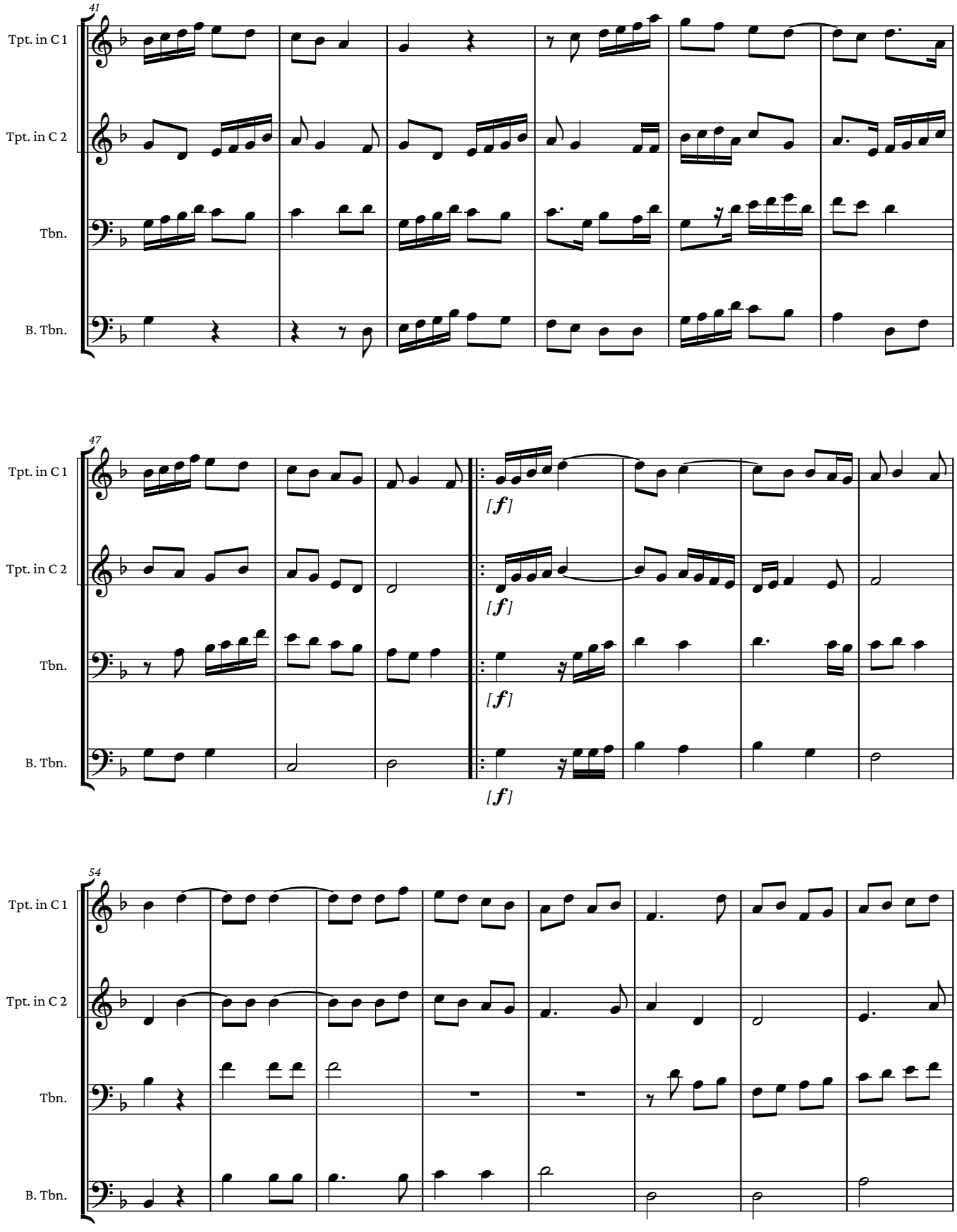
# Canzon prima a 4

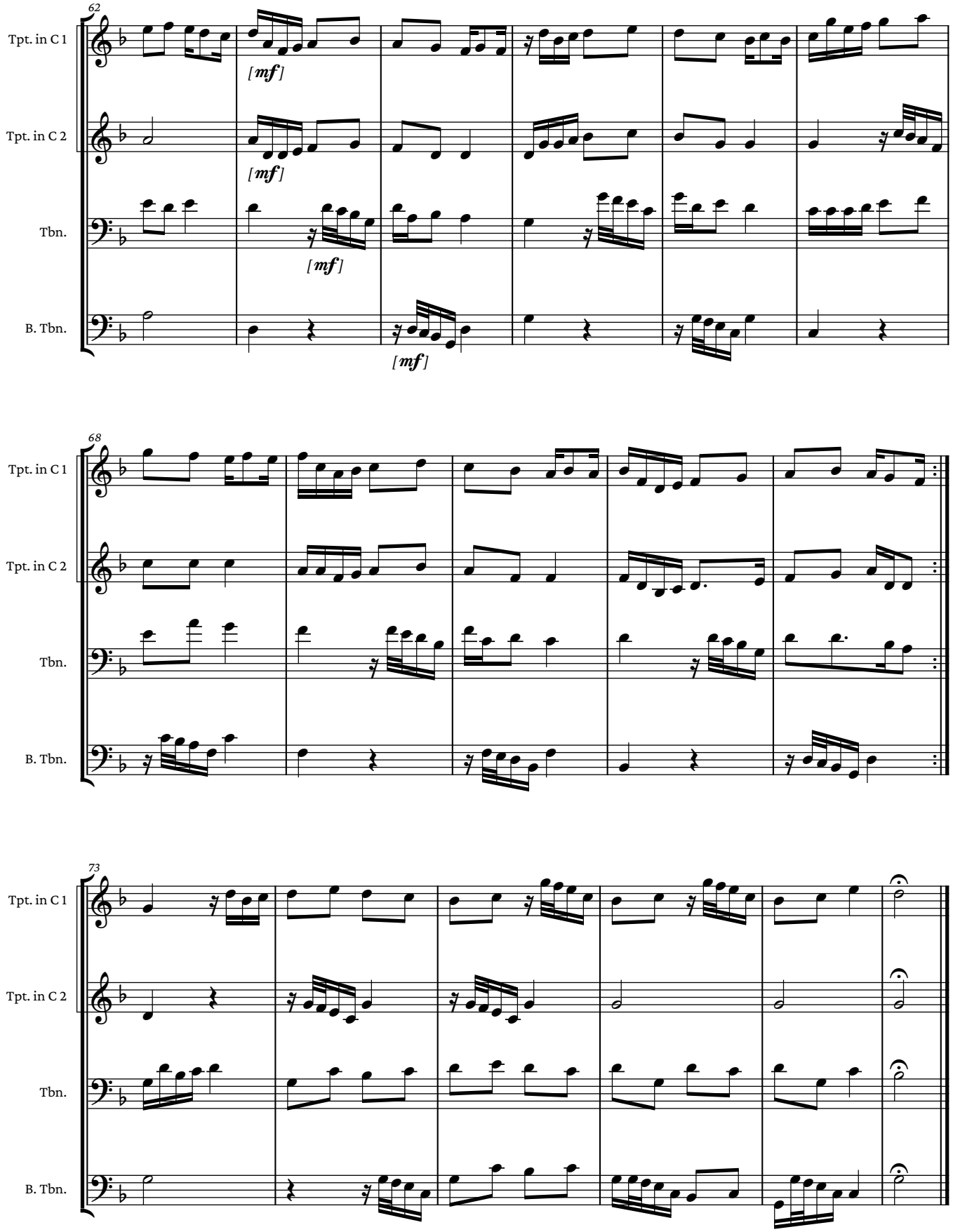
Giovanni Gabrieli (c. 1554/57–1612)
Edited by Christopher Delgado




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22
Tpt. in C 1
Tpt. in C 2
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
[p]
[p]
29
[f]
[f]
[p]
[p]
[f]
[f]
35
[mf]
[mf]
[mf]
[mf]


41
Tpt. in C 1
Tpt. in C 2
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
47
[f]
54


62
Tpt. in C 1
Tpt. in C 2
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
[mf]
[mf]
[mf]
[mf]
68
Tpt. in C 1
Tpt. in C 2
Tbn.
B. Tbn.
73
Tpt. in C 1
Tpt. in C 2
Tbn.
B. Tbn.