Nicky Sohn

Three Questions That Began From A Small Flame

For String Quartet

(2021)

Instrumentation

Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Cello

Duration - ca. 18 minutes

Composer's program note:

"Three Questions That Began From a Small Flame" contains three movements and were actually ideas that sprouted from a single movement string quartet titled "Burning", which I wrote over the winter of 2020. "Burning", in a musical sense, opened me up to the intricacies of string quartet writing and filled me up with self propelled inspiration for the next projects to come. However, in a personal sense, it casted my instability and doubtfulness in concrete—it left me mixed up with ominous questions for myself. After things had settled, it was clear that these questions were threefold, rather simple in a superficial way, and horrible to let sit in my head for too long. Contrary to self-interest, I wrote a movement for each question.

"Can you stop the time? (no)", out of the three, is the easiest to answer and the hardest to accept. Currently taxiing on the runway into my 30's, looking back at my 20's in disbelief that it's already over, I can only wonder where it went—how I spent so much time and what I did in the last decade. Time is sometimes killed, we say that time is at a crawl, we know a minute is 60 seconds, a year 365 days. With time, we can make back so much of what we've lost, but never a moment in time. A moment is a phenomenon that happens so quickly it is considered a miracle if you manage to capture it, if that's even possible. Having lived almost entirely past my twenties has perhaps made me a bit more knowledgeable in the various rules of the universe, but mostly it's ingrained in me the rules of time, and how important it is to recognize time as we are spending it.

"Are we too late? (maybe)" is a question, tinged with doubt, for when you make a leap into anything—when you fall in love, or when you fall out of love, or when you are trying fix something broken, or before you start something, or as the planet is dying—it's a question echoing inside of me and this generation as a whole. Where a small apology would do a world of healing is not when you ask it. It's when everything has gone a bit too far off center and an uncertainty is everywhere that hope also is. As our relationships get distant, as the sea level rises, and as we are inventing a solution to our problems because predicaments this big have never yet been figured out, a "maybe" is our only burning torch in the roughness of "Are We Too Late?", and our questions do not end there.

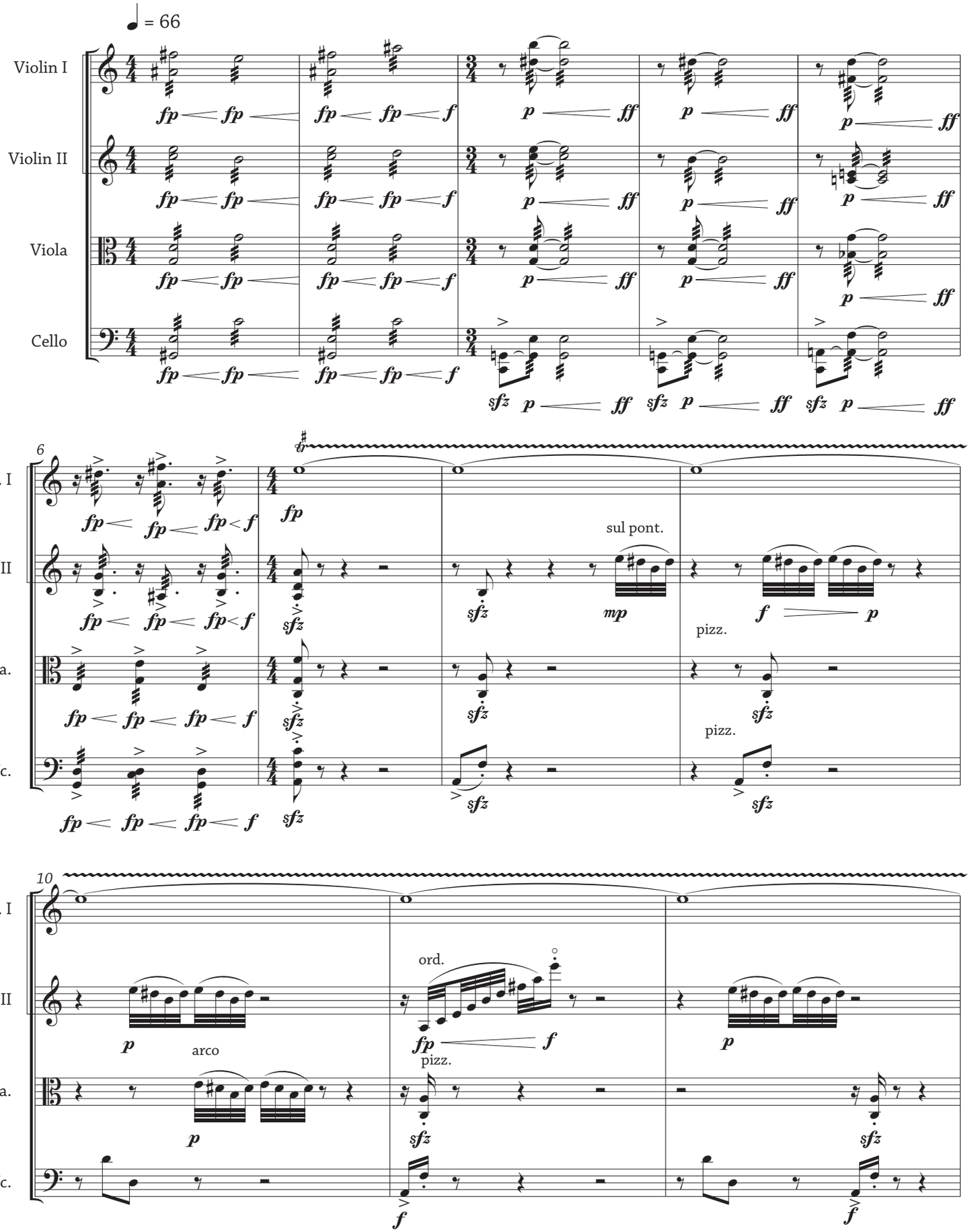
I ask (and answer) the final question "Can I change? (yes)" as a 29 year old who has keenly felt her own flaws and knows how it will affect the future if nothing is done to improve on them. So much time is spent obsessing things over beyond our control, sparking an internal conflict on entirely external things. I've noticed this particularly during the pandemic, a time of isolation greater and more widespread than the world has ever experienced. You couldn't leave your house, and it just so happened that the biggest room in the house was your own head. Although this could be a great way to improve upon yourself, it's a shortcut to a loop of negativity with no one to pull you out. But despite the low points, this time of reflection on black eyes and regrets in my life made my faults incredibly clear. The question I now ask myself was once directed at the people around me, asking in frustration whether they could change. Now that I've refined my questions to just three and have answered them, it's time to start moving.

Commissioned by The Carpe Diem String Quartet for the ensemble's 15th anniversary project, 15 for 15 with funding provided by [TBC].

Three questions that began from a small flame

I. Can you stop the time? (no)

Nicky Sohn



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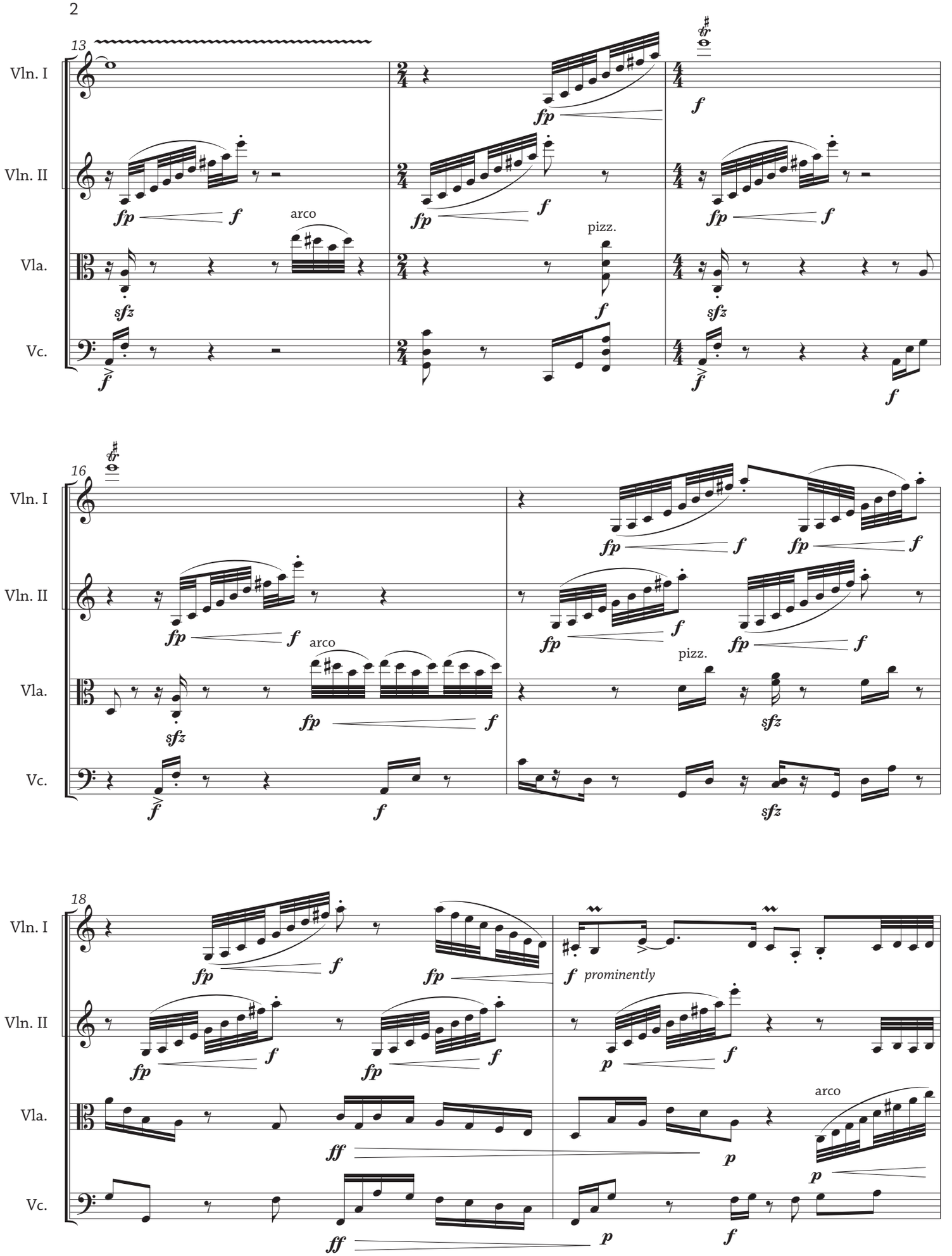
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Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
arco
pizz.
16
18
prominently