

# VASILISSA THE INVINCIBLE

FOR PIANO QUARTET

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COMPOSED 2018

COMMISSIONED BY THE KINGSTON CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL  
FOR FIRST PERFORMANCE BY THE CLAROSA QUARTET

# *Vasilissa the Invincible*

Carl Schimmel

## Program Note

In 2016, I began to explore the possibility that the emotionality and frequent shifts of mood in my compositions derive from my interest not only in character and personality in music, but in these aspects of the literary arts, and in narrative form in particular. My early research on theories of narrative focused particularly on the structural analysis of folk tales. I recalled how, when I was a boy growing up in Rhode Island, there was a year or two in which I was keenly interested in the folk tale collections of Ruth Manning-Sanders (illustrated by Robin Jacques). Her collection *A Book of Enchantments and Curses* included her telling of *Vasilissa Most Lovely* (known also as *Vasilissa the Lovely* or *Vasilissa the Beautiful*). One of the most iconic of Russian folktales, *Vasilissa Most Lovely* resembles the classic Cinderella story in that the heroine is a good and innocent girl who, mistreated by her stepmother and stepsisters, triumphs in the end. But while some versions of *Vasilissa Most Lovely* do end with a wedding to the Tsar, the marriage functions as a kind of epilogue to the main tale, which can be summarized as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a good and beautiful young girl known as Vasilissa the Lovely. She had a happy childhood until her mother fell gravely ill. On her deathbed, Vasilissa's mother gave her a magical doll which would help Vasilissa if ever she were in need; she had only to give it a little to eat and a little to drink. Her mother soon died, and after a time, Vasilissa's father remarried. The new wife and Vasilissa's two stepsisters were very cruel to her, and when the father left town on business they devised a plan to get rid of her by sending Vasilissa to fetch a light from the witch Baba Yaga. On her way through the forest to Baba Yaga's hut, three mysterious horsemen rode past her (the first dressed in white, the second in red, and the third in black). At night, she came to a house that stood on chicken legs and was surrounded by a fence made of human bones, the posts mounted with skulls, their eye sockets aglow. At this moment, a wind arose, and Baba Yaga flew down through the woods in a mortar, whereupon Vasilissa explained that she needed a light for her family; the witch commanded her to care for her hut by performing three impossible tasks, under threat of death. With the help of the magical doll, Vasilissa succeeded, and when the witch asked her how she was able to complete the tasks, the girl answered "by my mother's blessing." Because Vasilissa had the blessing of her mother, Baba Yaga threw her out of the hut, sending her home with a skull-lantern full of burning coals as promised. Vasilissa went back through the dark wood, and again the three horsemen passed her as dawn turned to day and day turned to night, and upon her arrival, the eye-sockets of the skull-lantern blazed so fiercely that they burned the stepmother and stepsisters until nothing was left of them but a pile of ashes.

To me, there are several intriguing aspects to *Vasilissa Most Lovely*. One is that all of the main characters are female – the father is mentioned only in passing, and in fact it is his absence which initiates the action. Another is its shockingly brutal ending, a conclusion which may to some extent be satisfying but cannot be considered "happy." A third intriguing aspect is that the evil witch is in fact Vasilissa's helper, and that evil is punished by evil, while good is simply the messenger. Fourthly, and related to this plot point, Vasilissa does not do anything truly heroic, and she does nothing of her own accord – in most versions I have read she is not even described as brave, she is simply good (and beautiful). The source of her strength (and arguably the true protagonist) is the little doll which has been given to her by her mother – her mother's "blessing."

It is interesting, I think, to consider that Vasilissa's goodness and strength are gifts from her loving parent, that this grotesque and bizarre fairy tale functions also as an allegory about how a parent's love (or "blessing") can cultivate in a child the resilience and integrity needed to overcome even the most daunting obstacles. This interpretation resonated with me as a parent, and it seemed to me that to derive the new work from this unusual folk tale might be appropriate, given that the Clarosa Quartet takes its name from the children of the principal players in the ensemble. And because Vasilissa's most important character traits in the story are her strength and resilience, I did not entitle the piece *Vasilissa Most Lovely* but rather *Vasilissa the Invincible*.

The first movement captures the essence of Vasilissa and depicts the prologue of the fairy tale, the bestowal of the doll and the mother's death. The second movement depicts the remainder of the fairy tale, from the introduction of the stepmother and stepsisters to their eventual destruction. There are themes for all of the main characters of the story, including the eerie emergence and disappearance of the mysterious galloping horsemen. The work was commissioned by the Kingston Chamber Music Festival for the Clarosa Quartet, for first performance in Kingston, Rhode Island, August 2018.

# VASILISSA THE INVINCIBLE

for piano quartet

*composed for the Clarosa Quartet*

Carl Schimmel

## I. Vasilissa, Beloved

Love, long ago ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 108$ )      *poco*      *poco accel.*      *poco rit.*

Violin

Viola

Cello

Piano

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

9

9

*a tempo*      *poco*      *poco accel.*

*poco*

*a tempo*      *poco*      *poco accel.*

*poco rit.*

Vln. 17 *a tempo* *poco*

Vla. *poco*

Vc. *poco*

Pno. 17 *ppp* *p* *poco accel.*

(♩ = ca. 120) *poco rit.*

Vln. *Tempo I*

Vla. *mf* *p* *f*

Vc. *mf*

Pno. 25 *mf* *pp* *mf*

(♩ = ca. 120) *poco rit.*

*Tempo I*

Pno. 25 *mf*

34

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

*f*

34

*p*

38

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

*f*

38

*f* *pp*

*p*

41

Vln. ritardando

Vla. Freely (♩ = ca. 60) lunga

Vc. pp

Pno. ritardando

*molto accelerando*

49

Vln. 4

Vla. 4

Vc. 5

Pno. 5

Revelation ( $\bullet = \text{ca. } 144$ )  
(accelerando if possible)

52

Vln. 3

Vla. 3

Vc. 3

Revelation ( $\bullet = \text{ca. } 144$ )  
(accelerando if possible)

52

Pno. 3

Tempo I, but funereal

Vln. 56      senza sord.

Vla.      senza sord.

Vc.      senza sord.

Pno. 56      arco      ff      pp      8va

Tempo I, but funereal

Vln. 61

Vla.      dolcissimo      > p      ppp      p      n

Vc. 61

Pno. mp      pp      8va

Impassioned ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 132$ ) *molto ritardando*

Vln. 70 

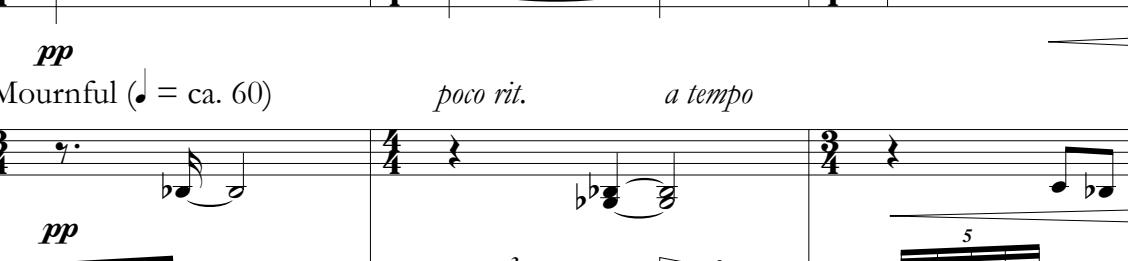
Vla. 

Vc. 

Pno. 70 

Mournful ( $\bullet = \text{ca. } 60$ )      *poco rit.*      *a tempo*

78 Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

Pno. 

*accelerando*

81

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Crying out ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 72$ )

83

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Crying out ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 72$ )

83

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Musical score for orchestra and piano. The top section shows three staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Bass (Vc.). The bottom section shows two staves: Piano (Pno.) and a bass staff. Measure 85 starts with a forte dynamic. The strings play eighth-note patterns, while the piano provides harmonic support. Measure 86 begins with a ritardando instruction. The strings continue their eighth-note patterns, and the piano maintains its harmonic function.

Mournful ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 60$ )  
*molto ritardando*

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

87

ff

ff

ff

Mournful ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 60$ )  
*molto ritardando*

87

>

ff

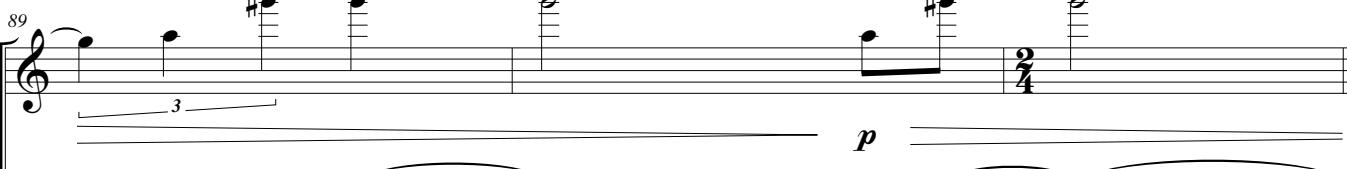
10

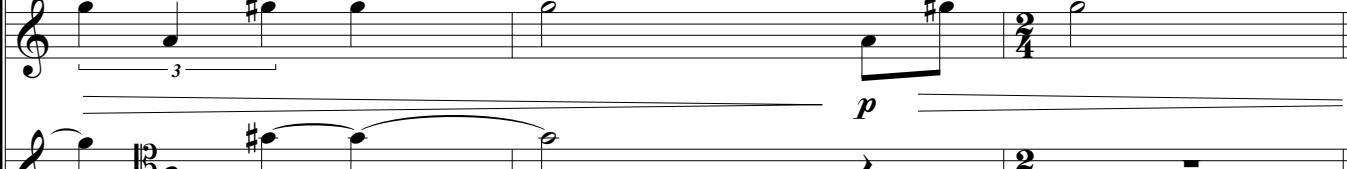
19

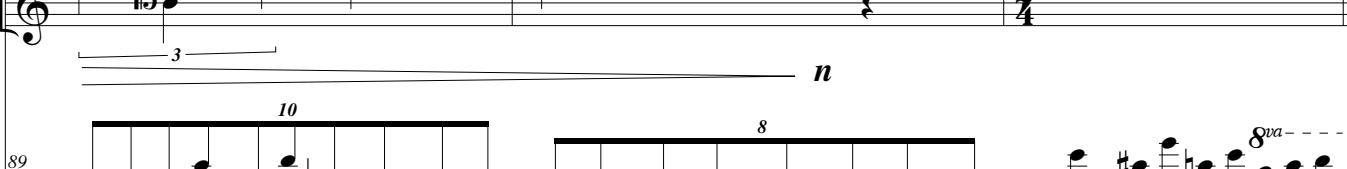
*Ric.*

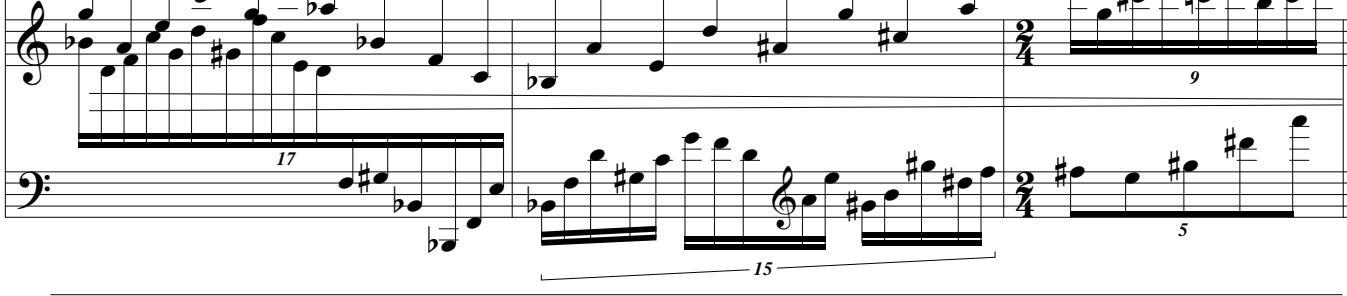
*Ric.*

89

Vln. 

Vla. 

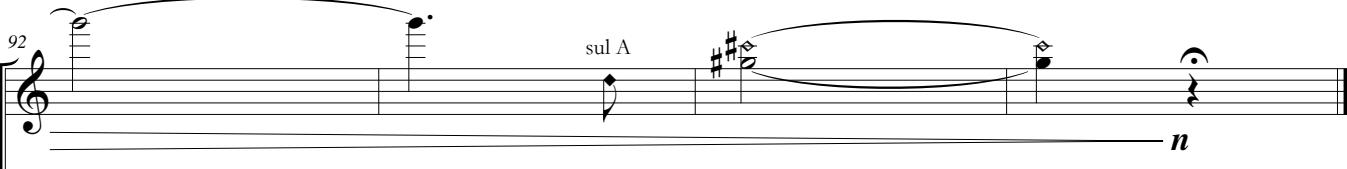
Vc. 

Pno. 

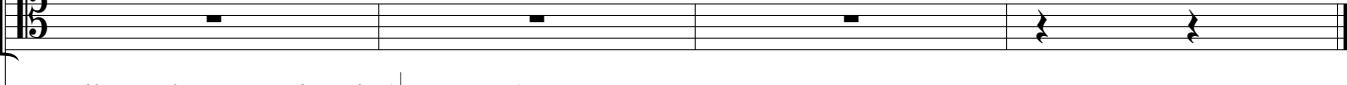
10  
17  
8  
2  
9  
5  
15

Like embers, nearly ash ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 20$ )

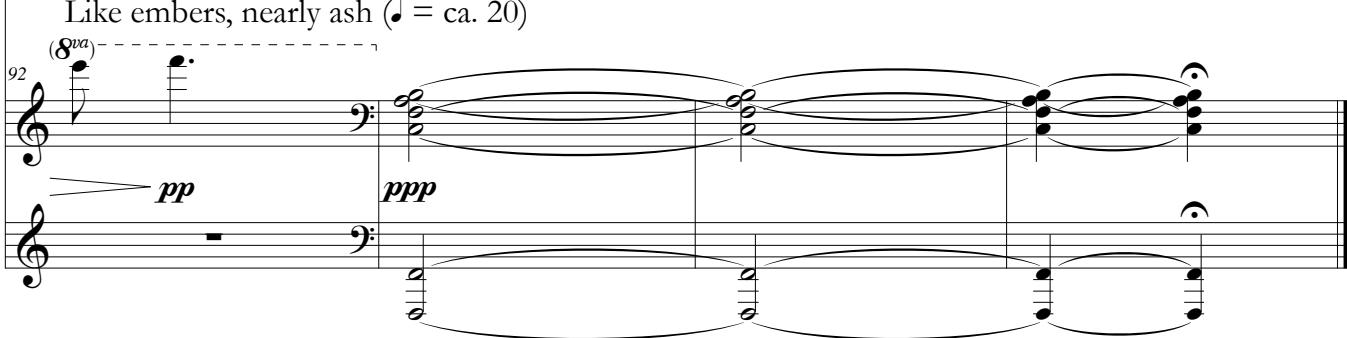
92

Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

Like embers, nearly ash ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 20$ )

( $8^{\text{va}}$ ) 

## II. Vasilissa, Avenged

Forlorn, woebegone ( $\bullet$  = ca. 96)

Musical score for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano. The score consists of four staves. The Violin (G clef) and Cello (Bass clef) play eighth-note patterns. The Viola (C clef) and Piano (G clef) provide harmonic support. The piano part includes bass notes and chords. Measure numbers 1 through 8 are indicated above the staves. Articulation marks like *pp*, *ff*, and *fff* are present. The score concludes with a repeat sign and two endings.

Musical score for strings and piano, page 9. The score consists of four staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello/Bass (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Viola parts begin with dynamic *poco accel.*, followed by *a tempo*. The Violin has a dynamic *ff* at measure 5. The Viola has a dynamic *ff* at measure 5. The Cello/Bass part has a dynamic *ff* at measure 5. The Piano part has dynamics *ppp*, *ppp*, and *ppp*. The score includes various slurs, grace notes, and dynamic markings like  $\textcircled{\text{e}}$  and  $\textcircled{\text{o}}$ . Measure numbers 9 and 10 are indicated.

*molto accelerando*

The musical score consists of four staves. The top three staves are for the Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Bass (Vc.) respectively. The bottom staff is for the Piano (Pno.). Measure 16 begins with a dynamic of *pp*. The Vln. and Vla. play eighth-note patterns, while the Vc. and Pno. provide harmonic support. Measures 17-18 show a transition with changing time signatures (3/2, 4/4) and dynamics (*mp*, *f*). The Vln. and Vla. continue their eighth-note patterns, and the Vc. adds eighth-note chords. The Pno. maintains harmonic stability with sustained notes. Measures 19-20 conclude the section with sustained notes and a final dynamic of *f*.

23

(♩ = ca. 144) *poco rit.*

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Half tempo (♩ = ca. 120)

*fff*

*poco accel.*

*fff*

*fff*

23

15<sup>ma</sup>



14

## Vasilissa the Invincible

(♩ = ca. 144)

Unsettled (♩ = ca. 132)

33

Vln. 

Vln. 

38

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

38

R.H. R.H.

*Reo.*

40

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

40

*n*

*n*

*ff*

*Reo.*

## Vasilissa the Invincible

43

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

43

49

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

49

*ppp*  
L.H. R.H. etc.

51

Vln. - *n*

Vla. *n*

Vc. *n*

Pno.

52

*Reo.*

54

Vln. *ff*

Vla. *f* *n ff*

Vc. *f* *n ff*

Pno. *fff* *Reo.* *Reo.* *Reo.*

60

Vln. > > > >

Vla. > > >

Vc. > >

Pno. { *ppp* R.H. R.H. R.H.

*Reo.*

63

Vln. *o*

Vla. n

Vc. 4

Pno. { *(R.H.)* *Reo.*

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 16, measures 65-66. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The piano part features a basso continuo line. The music is in common time (indicated by '4') until measure 66, where it shifts to 6/16 time. Dynamics include *fff*, *n*, and *ff*. Measure 66 concludes with a repeat sign and the instruction *Reo.*

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 71, measures 9-10. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The piano part features dynamic markings *n*, *pp*, and measure numbers 9 and 10. The violin, viola, and cello parts have slurs and grace notes.

## Vasilissa the Invincible

Vln. Vln., Vla., Vc. play eighth-note patterns. Pno. plays eighth-note chords. Measure 77: dynamic *fff*. Measure 15: dynamic *mf*. Measures 16-17: dynamic *fff*.

Vln. Vln. plays eighth-note patterns. Vla. and Vc. play eighth-note patterns. Pno. plays sixteenth-note patterns. Measure 80: dynamic *pp*. Measures 81-82: dynamic *ff*. Measures 83-84: dynamic *pp*. Measure 85: dynamic *ff*. Measure 86: dynamic *pp*. Measure 87: dynamic *8va-*.

82

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

(8<sup>va</sup>) - - -

84

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

In this passage, the piano doubles the cello;  
it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally

(8<sup>va</sup>) - - -

86

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

(8<sup>va</sup>) - - - - -

88

Vln.

sul pont.  
ff mf

Vla.

sul pont.  
ff

Vc.

sul pont.  
pp

Pno.

88

8<sup>va</sup> - - - - -

90

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

(8<sup>va</sup>)

92

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

→ ord.

→ ord.

→ ord.

(8<sup>va</sup>)

Calm ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 108$ )  
*ritardando*

94

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

(8va) - - - - -

97

Vln. Vla. Vc.

// Unsettled again ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 132$ )

piano part:

*In this passage, the piano doubles the cello; it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally*

(8va) - - - - -

piano part:

*This can be renotated on two staves if you prefer*

99

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

In this passage, the piano doubles the viola; it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally

101

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

103

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

This musical score page contains four systems of music, each with four staves: Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The score is numbered 99 at the top left, with measure numbers 99, 101, and 103 indicated above the staves. Measure 99 begins with a rest for the Vln. and Vla., followed by eighth-note patterns for Vc. and Pno. A dynamic instruction 'ff' (fortissimo) is placed above the Vc. staff. A callout box with the text 'In this passage, the piano doubles the viola; it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally' is positioned above the Vc. staff. Measure 101 starts with a rest for the Vln. and Vla., followed by eighth-note patterns for Vc. and Pno. A dynamic 'ff' is placed above the Vla. staff. Measure 103 begins with eighth-note patterns for Vln., Vla., and Vc., followed by sustained notes from the Pno. throughout the measure.

105

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

**9 16**

105

Pno.

**9 16**

107

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

**9 16** **9 16** **9 16**

*mp*

*fff*

*mp*

*3*

This can be renotated with a single beam if you prefer

**9 16** **9 16**

*ff*

*mp*

*ff*

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 109. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The piano part is bracketed under the heading "Pno.". The score shows various musical measures with dynamic markings such as *ff* (fortissimo) and *mp* (mezzo-forte). The piano part includes a measure number 109 and a rehearsal mark "3". The cello part has a measure number 109. The piano part concludes with a dynamic marking *ff mp* and a tempo marking *Rec.*

Musical score for strings and piano, page 20. The score consists of five staves. The top staff is for the Violin (Vln.), the second for the Cello (Vcl.), the third for the Double Bass (Vc.), the fourth for the Piano (Pno.), and the bottom staff is a common bass staff for both Cello and Double Bass. The music is in 3/4 time. The strings play eighth-note patterns with various accidentals (sharps and flats). The piano part features eighth-note chords and bass notes. Dynamics include *ff*, *pp*, and a measure of *pp* followed by a measure of *ff*. Measure numbers 3 and 20 are indicated.

## Vasilissa the Invincible

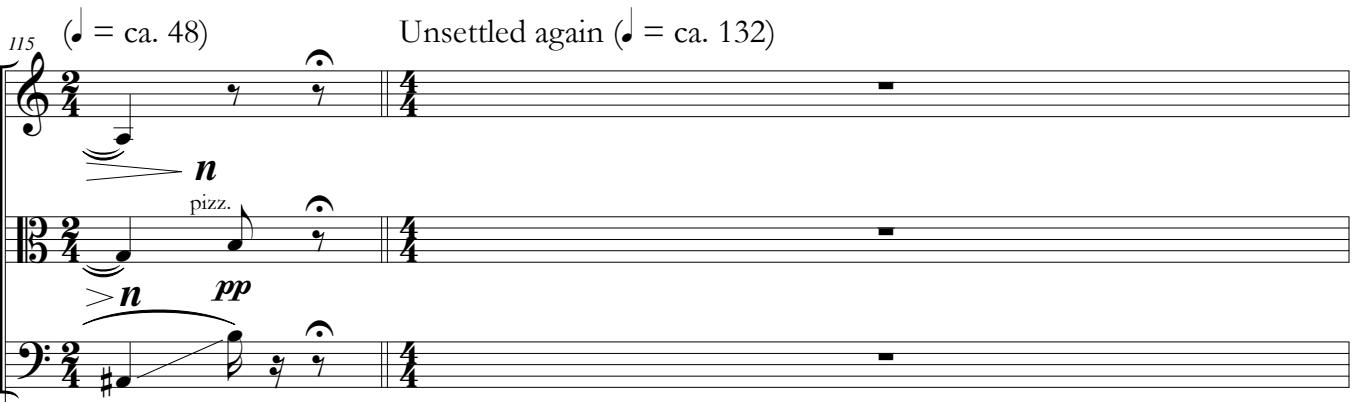
Calm ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 108$ )*molto rit.*

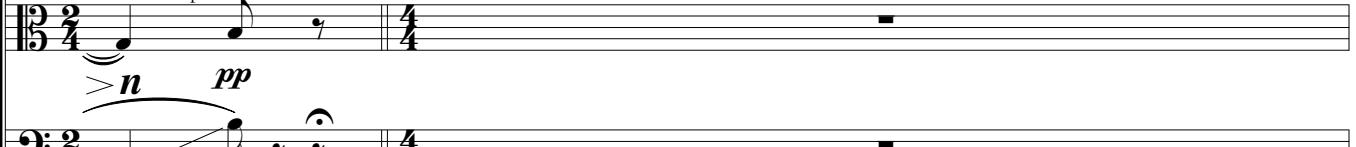
Vln. 

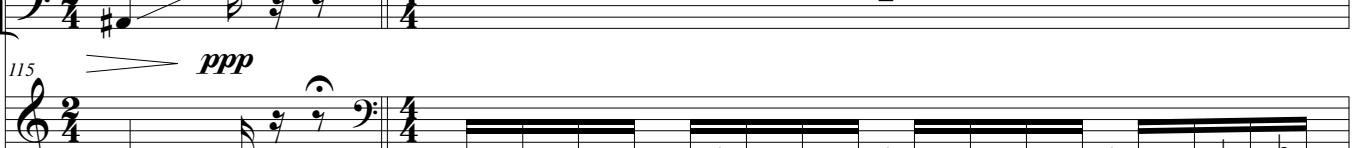
Vla. 

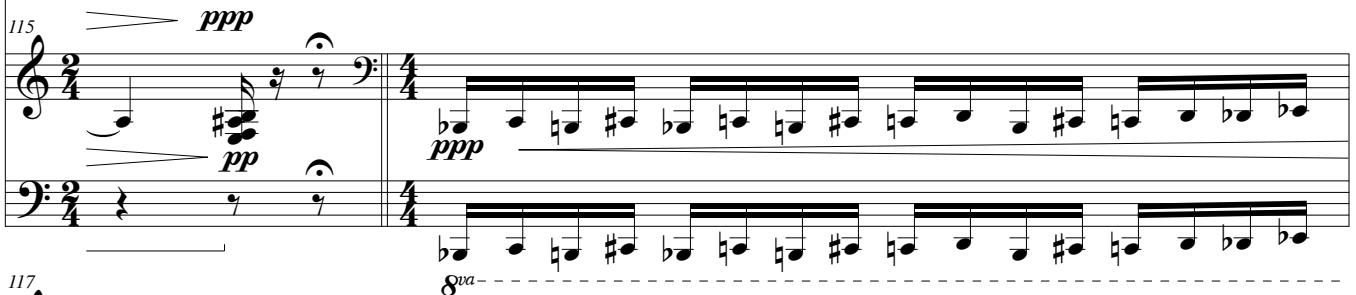
Vc. 

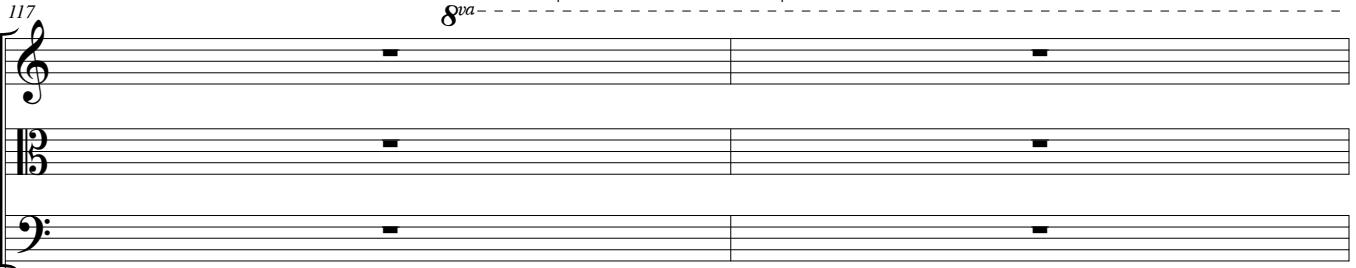
Pno. 

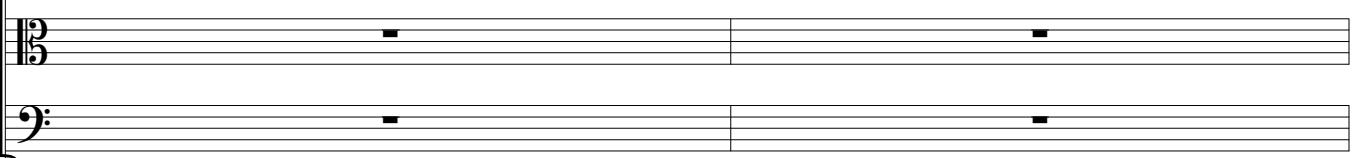
Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

Pno. 

Vln. 

Vla. 

Vc. 

Pno. 

## Vasilissa the Invincible

29

119

Vln. Vla. Vc.

arco

In this passage, the piano doubles the viola;  
it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally

***pp***

In this passage, the piano doubles the cello;  
it would be acceptable to drop a note occasionally

***pp***

***p***

Pno. (8<sup>va</sup>)

121

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

121

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

123

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

123

## Vasilissa the Invincible

30

125

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

If necessary, it would be possible to remove a few notes in some of the chords in this measure

## Vasilissa the Invincible

128

Vln.

Vla.

Vcl.

Pno.

128

*fff*

*fff*

*fff*

3

*ffff*

L.H. plays on both staves in this passage  
I can renotate for you as desired

*gva*

*ped.*

Musical score for strings and piano, page 8, measures 130-131.

**String Instruments:**

- Vln. (Violin): Playing eighth-note patterns with grace notes.
- Vla. (Viola): Playing eighth-note patterns with grace notes.
- Vc. (Cello): Playing eighth-note patterns with grace notes.

**Piano:**

- 130: Dynamics *fff*, *f*. The piano part consists of rapid sixteenth-note chords.
- 131: Dynamics *fff*, *f*. The piano part consists of sustained notes with grace notes.

Measure 131 concludes with a repeat sign and the instruction *Reo.*

*poco ritardando*

132

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

(8va) *leg.*

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 134. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The tempo is indicated as  $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 120$ . The piano part features a dynamic marking of  $f$  with *espressivo* and *con pedale*. The strings play eighth-note patterns, with the violins and violas marked *espressivo*. The cello part has sustained notes with grace notes. The piano part includes a basso continuo (B.C.) staff with a bassoon (Bassoon) part.

## Vasilissa the Invincible

33

137

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

Unsettled again ( $\bullet = \text{ca. } 132$ )

139

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

sul A  
fff pp

140

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

$\text{R} \ddot{\text{o}}$

hold pedal down until m. 177

141

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

141

Vln. Vla. Vc. Pno.

## Vasilissa the Invincible

144

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

146

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

*ppp*

146

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

## Vasilissa the Invincible

35

151 > > > > >

Vln. *n*

Vla. sul A  
3 *ppp*

Vc.

Pno. 151 *n*

156

Vln. *ppp*

Vla. 3 3

Vc.

Pno. 156

158

Vln.

Vla. 3

Vc.

Pno. 158 *ppp*

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 160. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Viola (Vla.), Cello (Vc.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Viola parts begin with dynamic *p*, followed by a melodic line in 6/16 time. The Cello part also begins with *p*. The Piano part features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The score concludes with dynamics *ff*.

Musical score for orchestra and piano, page 165. The score includes parts for Violin (Vln.), Cello (Vcl.), Double Bass (Vla.), and Piano (Pno.). The Violin and Double Bass play eighth-note patterns with dynamic markings > and n. The Cello and Double Bass play eighth-note patterns with dynamic markings >, n, and ppp. The Piano part features eighth-note chords with dynamic markings pp and 4. Measure numbers 165 and 166 are indicated.

170

Vln. -

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

*ppp*

*ppp*

172

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

*sul D*

*sul C*

*I*

*II*

*16*

*16*

*16*

*16*

## Vasilissa the Invincible

I can renotate these three bars  
using mostly 6/16 meter  
if that is preferred

174

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

176

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

*accelerando*

178

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

178

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

180

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

183

Vln. Vla. Vc.

Pno.

*Reo.*

*Reo.*

*Reo.*

*Reo.*

These measures can be renotated if you like  
Also, I can remove a note or two if you need me to

Terrifying ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 168$ )

185

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

$8^{\text{va}-1}$

$\text{Ped.}$

hold pedal down until m. 206

*accelerando*

187

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

$8^{\text{va}}$

$3$

$3$

$3$

$7$

$7$

$3$

$3$

$13$

190 ( $8^{\text{va}}$ )

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

$fff$

$fff$

$fff$

$15^{\text{ma}}$

$II$

$9$

(*sempre fff*)

$7:8$

Burning ( $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 184$ )

194 (8<sup>va</sup>)

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

194 (8<sup>va</sup>)

*ffff*

8<sup>va</sup>

202 (8<sup>va</sup>)

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Pno.

202 (8<sup>va</sup>)

*ffff*

*ffff*

*ffff*

*ffff*

Stunned ( $\bullet = \text{ca. } 120$ ) *molto accelerando*

Vln.      These two bars are effectively a glissando down --  
the notated pitches are inexact

Vla.      sul pont.  $\xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}}$  ord.

Vc.       $\xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}}$  ord.

Pno.       $\xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}}$  ord.

**207**      **17**      **18**      **ffff**

**n**      sul pont.  $\xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}}$  ord.

**17**      **17**      **ffff**

**n**      sul pont.  $\xrightarrow{\hspace{1cm}}$  ord.

**17**      **18**      **ffff**

**15<sup>ma</sup>**      **ffff**

**mf**      **ffff**

**8va**      **ffff**