Words Without Songs

Ben Rieke

2023

for ensemble

Duration: 10:30 approx.

Instrumentation:

Clarinet in Bb

Trombone (with plunger and harmon mutes)

Percussion

- 2 timpani (32” and 29”)
- 4 toms
- 3 Almglocken (D4, F#4, A#4)
- Tamtam
- Suspended cymbal
- Superball mallet, bow

Piano

Violin

Cello

Double Bass

This score is written at sounding pitch with the exception of the double bass.

Program notes:

We have an understanding that there are such things as "primary" texts (Shakespeare, the Bible, Foucault lectures, concert music scores) that are endless veins of deep wisdom to be mined by the "secondary texts" (dissertations, articles, program notes). How is this hierarchy derived? In a lecture later titled “The Order of Discourse”, Foucault claims that “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.”

The discourse of a single piece of music is governed by equally murky procedures. The composer has a mental image of material that must be sculpted on the page, which must then be delivered to the performer who filters it through their own interpretive language, then played to the audience who will receive the sonic result to their own biases and tastes. Like that of the "primary" and "secondary" text, this web of dependencies is in fact nonlinear: is the performer motivated by audience response or the demands of the score? Is the audience selecting the composer? Is the notation? It is in this nonlinearity that questions of materiality hide.

Words Without Songs attempts to explicitly frame the discursive process of concert music by taking as its material the rhythmic and pitch contours of "primary texts" (though the words themselves are obviously hidden), as well as a number of vocal artifacts: whispering, shouting, grunting, weeping. If there are no questions about this material (which has little implication by itself as a relatively unaestheticized representation of text), maybe it is possible to focus on the procedures to which these are subjected to as the actual material of the piece—an analogue of the procedures by which Foucault claims that discourse is governed.

Performance notes

General:

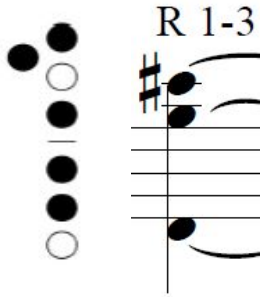
Except for the piano and percussion, square noteheads indicate a mode of playing that I will refer to as “sprechstimme”. Like the vocal technique, notes are to be played as if spoken, with normal rhythmic precision but with a generous amount of pitch indiscretion. Be sloppy with intonation and include subtle sliding artifacts in between notes (but not so much as an explicit portamento). A good way to achieve this on the string instruments would be playing with a single finger; on the trombone, a relaxing of slide precision; on the clarinet, a variety of embouchure tensions.

Other different manners of playing are described in their locations in the score and parts.

Clarinet:

Spectral multiphonics are notated with a separate staff above the written notes that indicate the relative degree of overblowing from normal (line at the bottom of the auxiliary staff) to as extreme as possible (line at the top). See Grisey's "Anubis".

There is a single multiphonic, taken from Rehfeldt’s “New Directions for Clarinet”, with the following fingering and pitch:



If this multiphonic doesn’t speak, the clarinetist should choose a different one at their discretion so long as it has a large possible dynamic envelope.

Trombone:

There is extensive use of the plunger and harmon mutes in this piece. A “+” indicates that the mute is fully closed and a “o” indicates that it is fully open. Arrows may be drawn between one or the other to show a closing or opening and both symbols followed by a trill line indicating to do so rapidly.

Percussion:

There are a few passages that call for the timpani to be played on the center of the skin with rapid changes of pedal in between hits to produce a muffled muttering effect. Try as much as possible to limit reverberation and focus on achieving the relative contour rather than hitting the exact pitches with the pedal. These passages are indicated in the score.

In addition to the usual implements for the listed instruments, a bass bow and superball mallet are needed. Beginning at measure 114, the timpani is to be played by scraping the superball mallet over the skin in a figure-8 pattern so as to produce a sustained sound modulated in pitch by the pedal as before. Changing the volume may introduce some deviations in pitch—these are welcomed, but try to maintain the contour of the line with the pedal as much as possible.

Piano:

Clusters are indicated by black rectangles that span the approximate length of the keyboard to strike. In the cases where they become too large to handle with hands alone, use forearms as directed in the score/part.

Strings:

s.t. s.p. m.s.t. m.s.p.: sul pont, sul tasto, molto sul tasto, molto sul pont
clb - col legno battuto
- ricochet

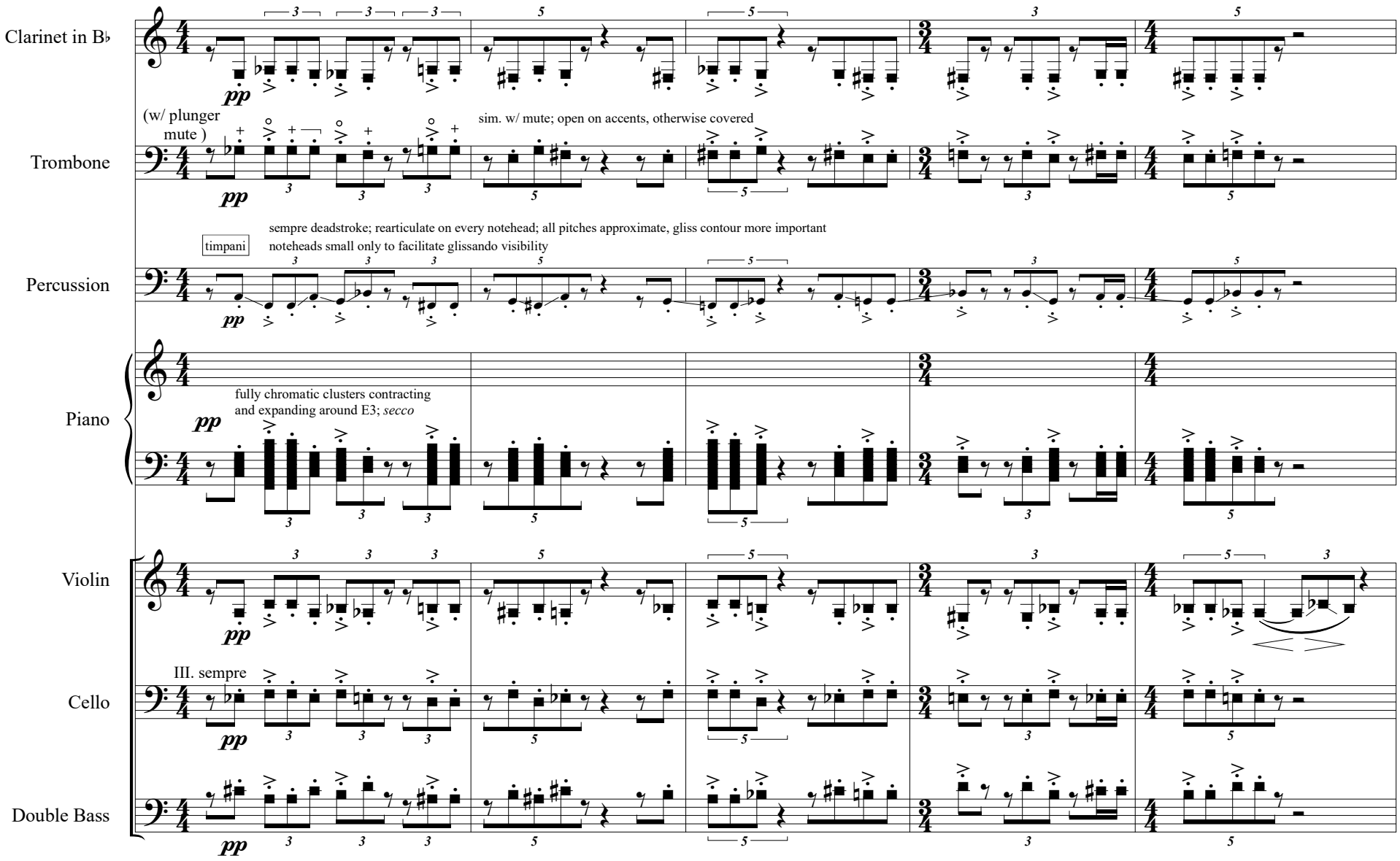
Manhattan USA
March-May 2023

Score in C

Words Without Songs

Ben Rieke

With intensity ♩ = 100



* square noteheads = "sprechstimme" (except piano); see performance notes

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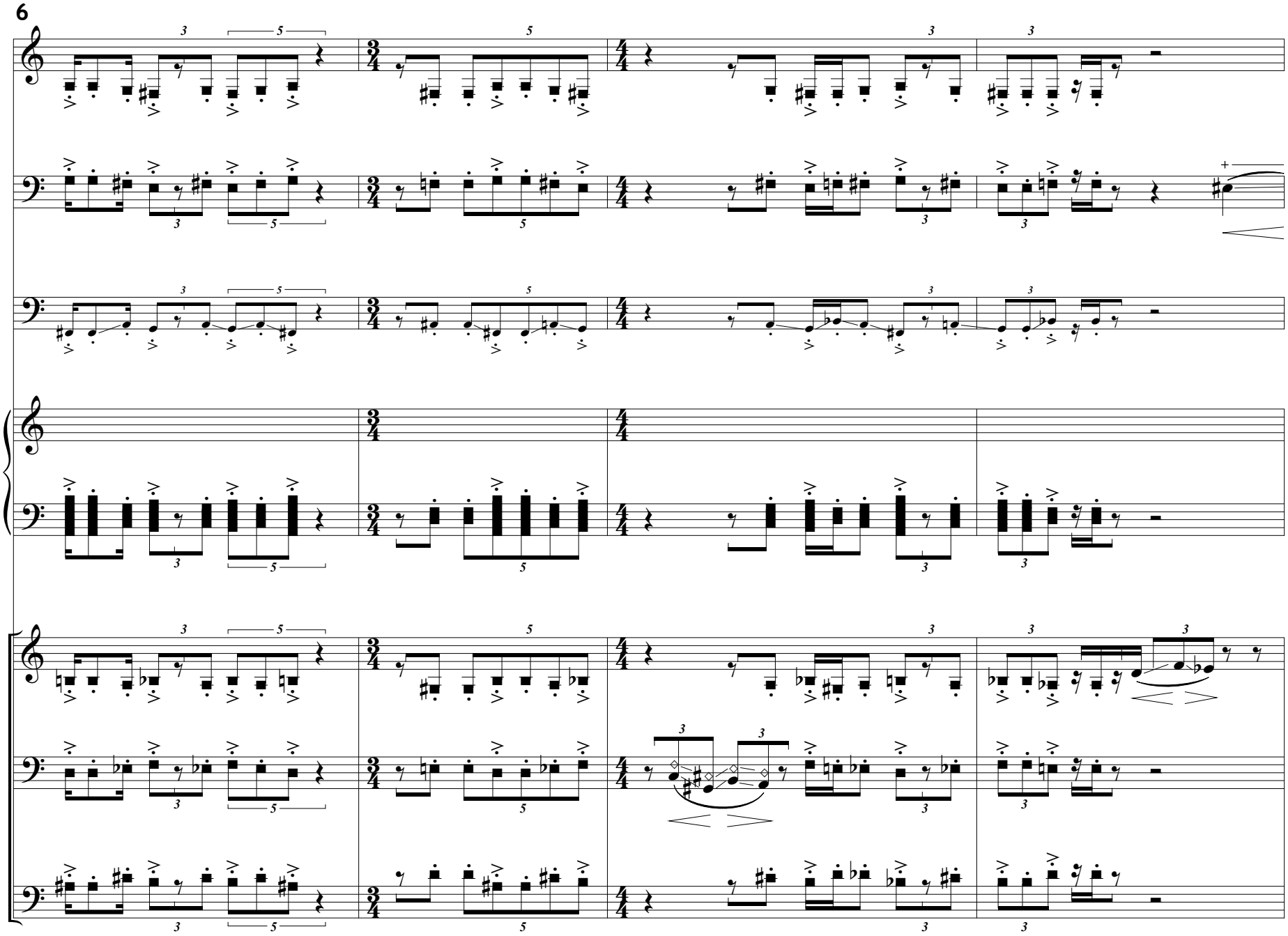
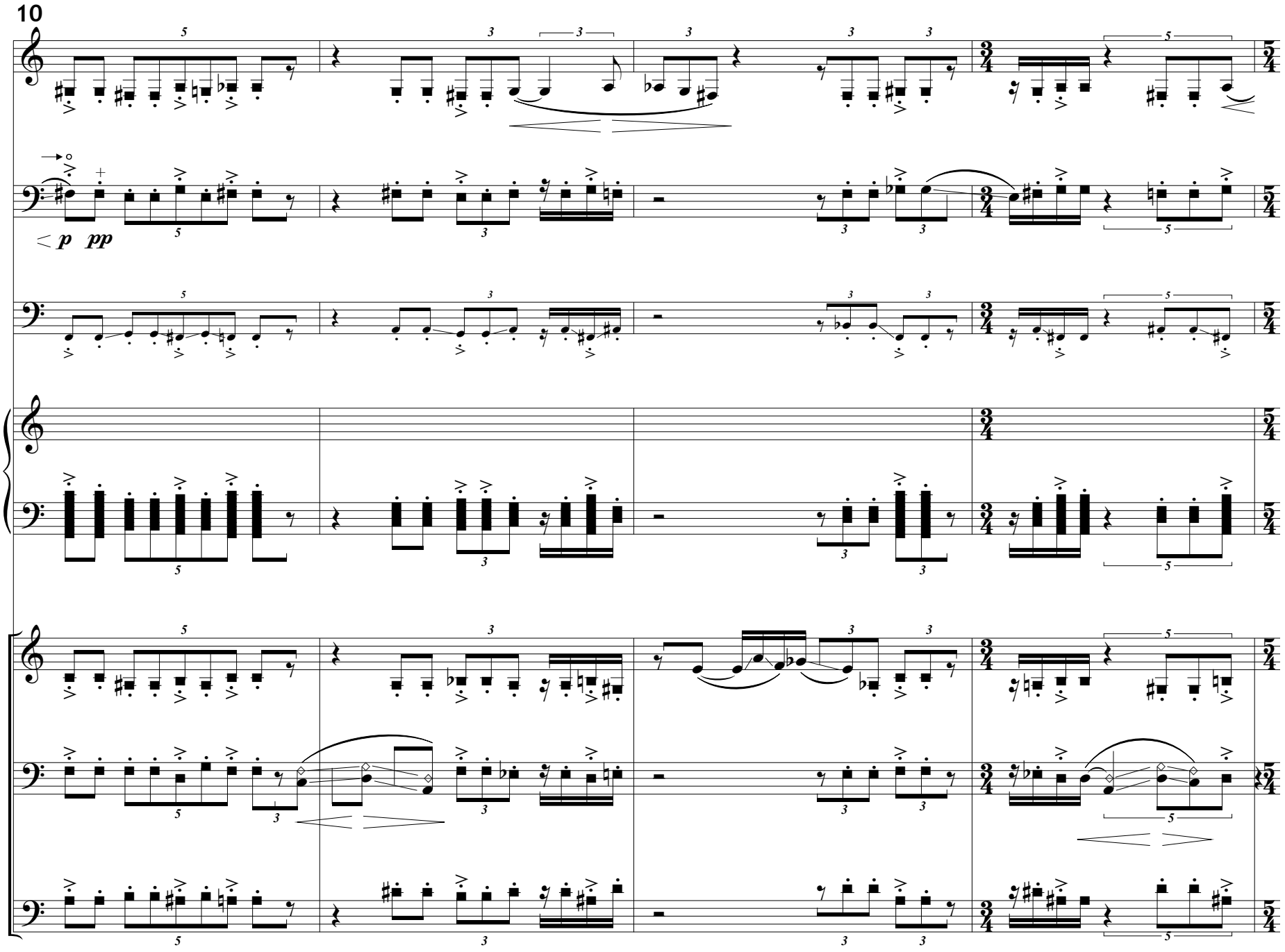
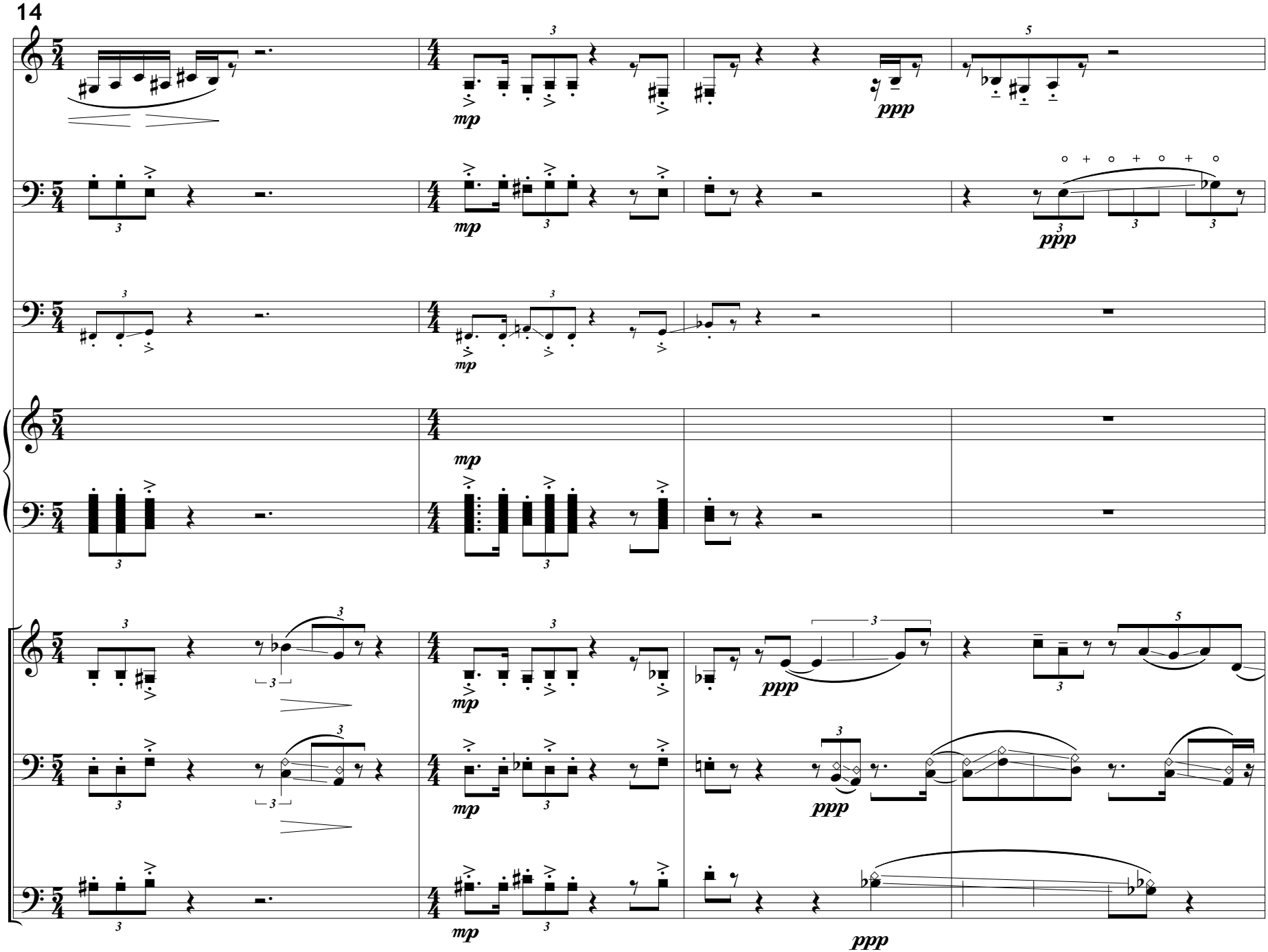
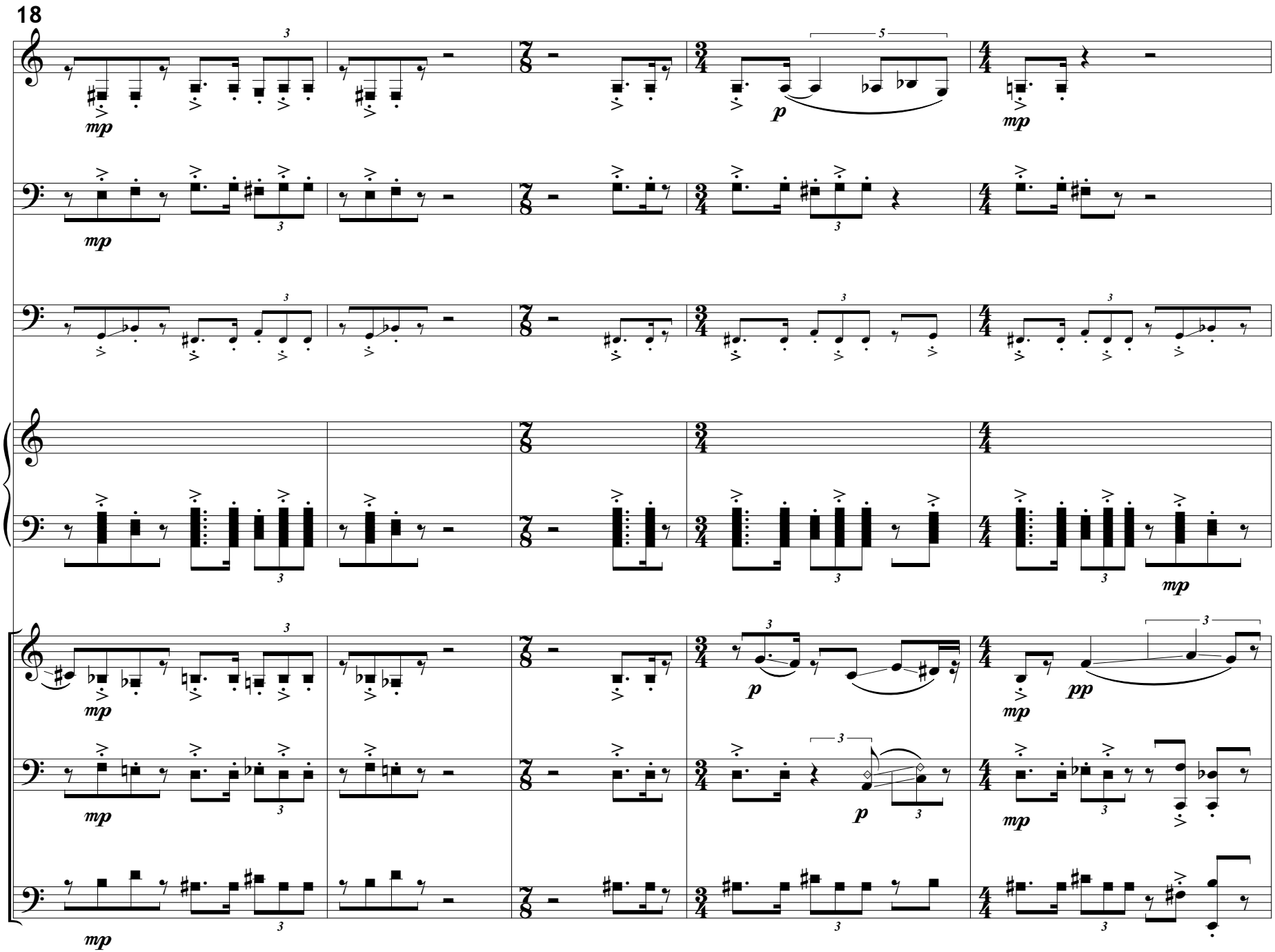
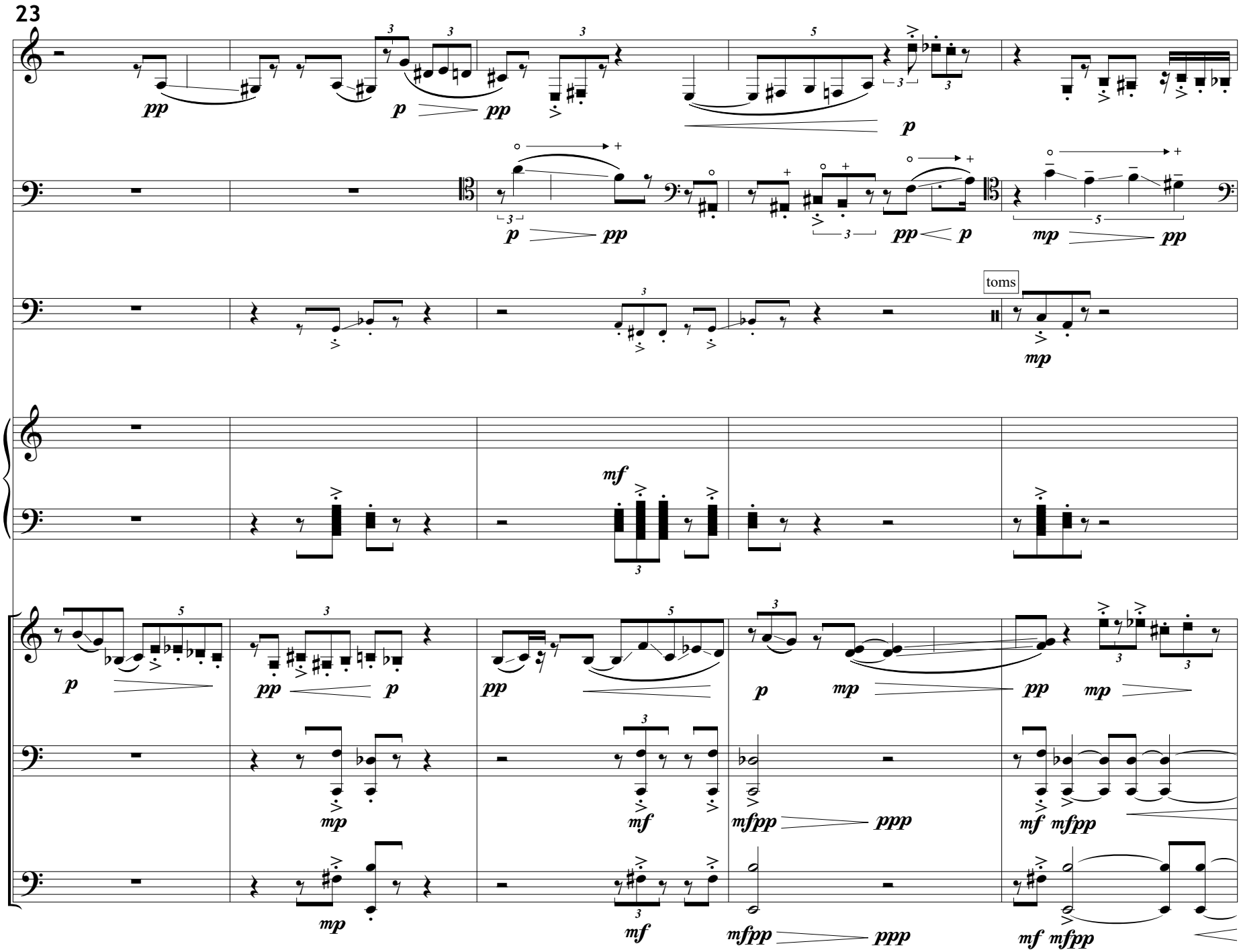
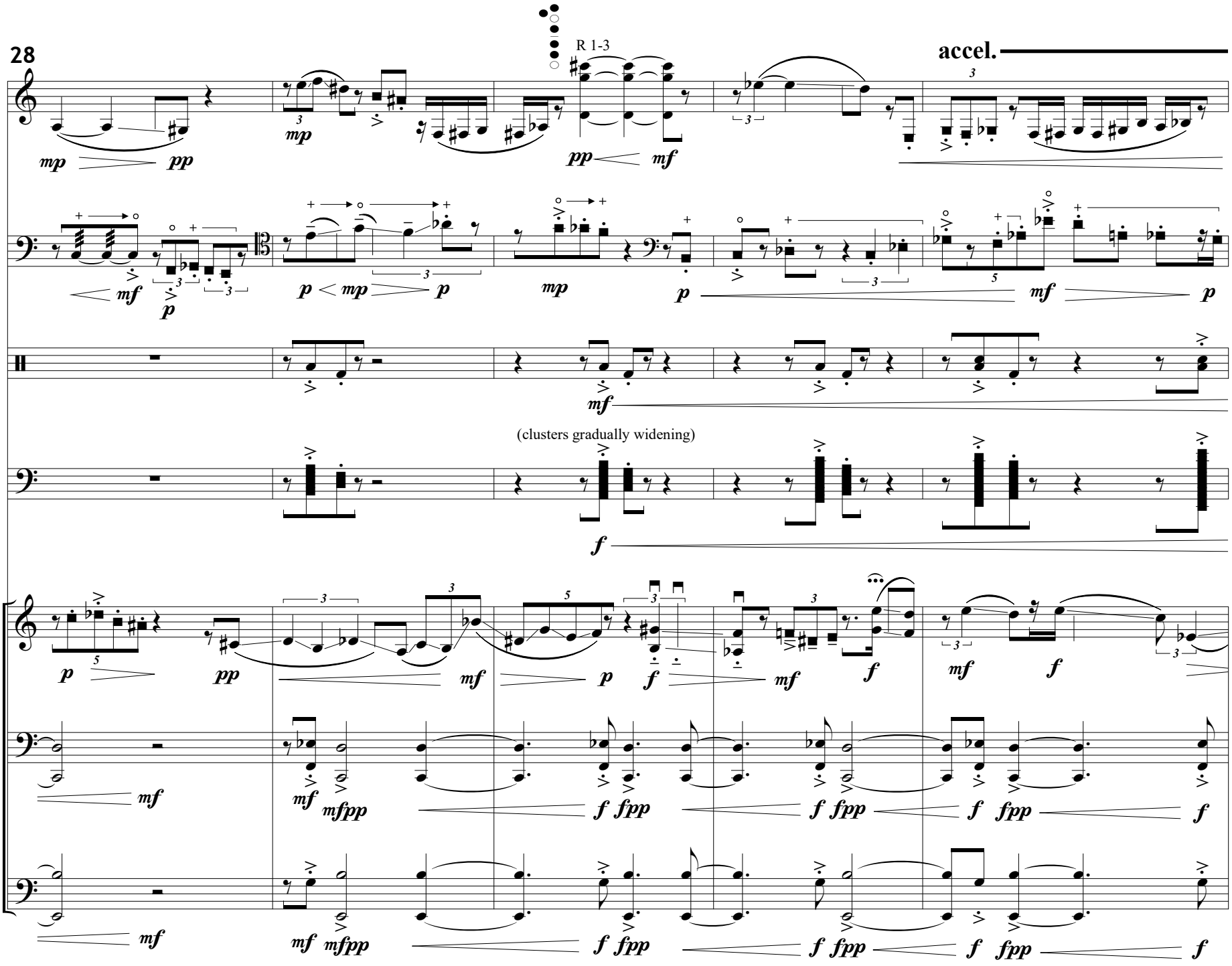

6
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

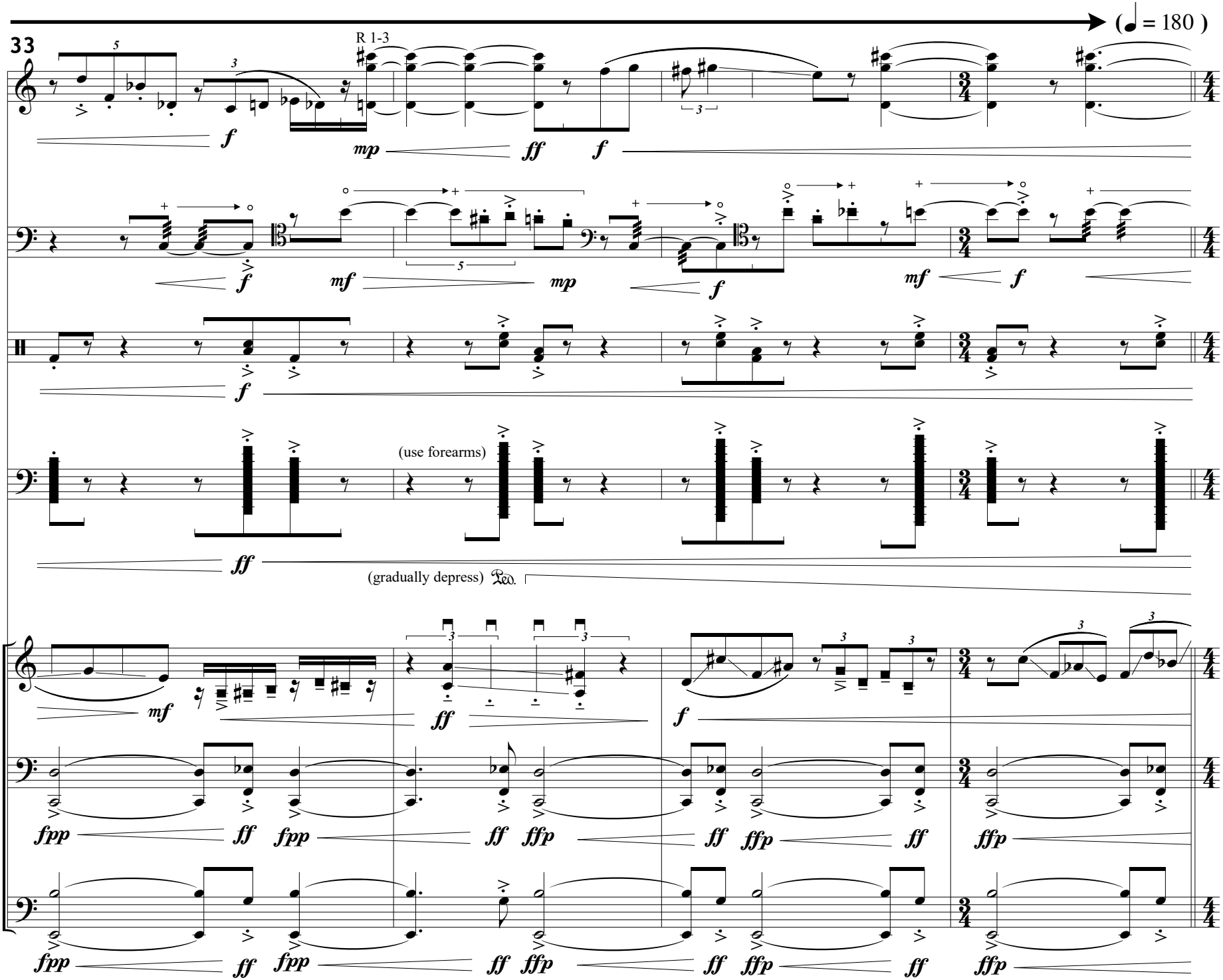

10
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
p pp
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

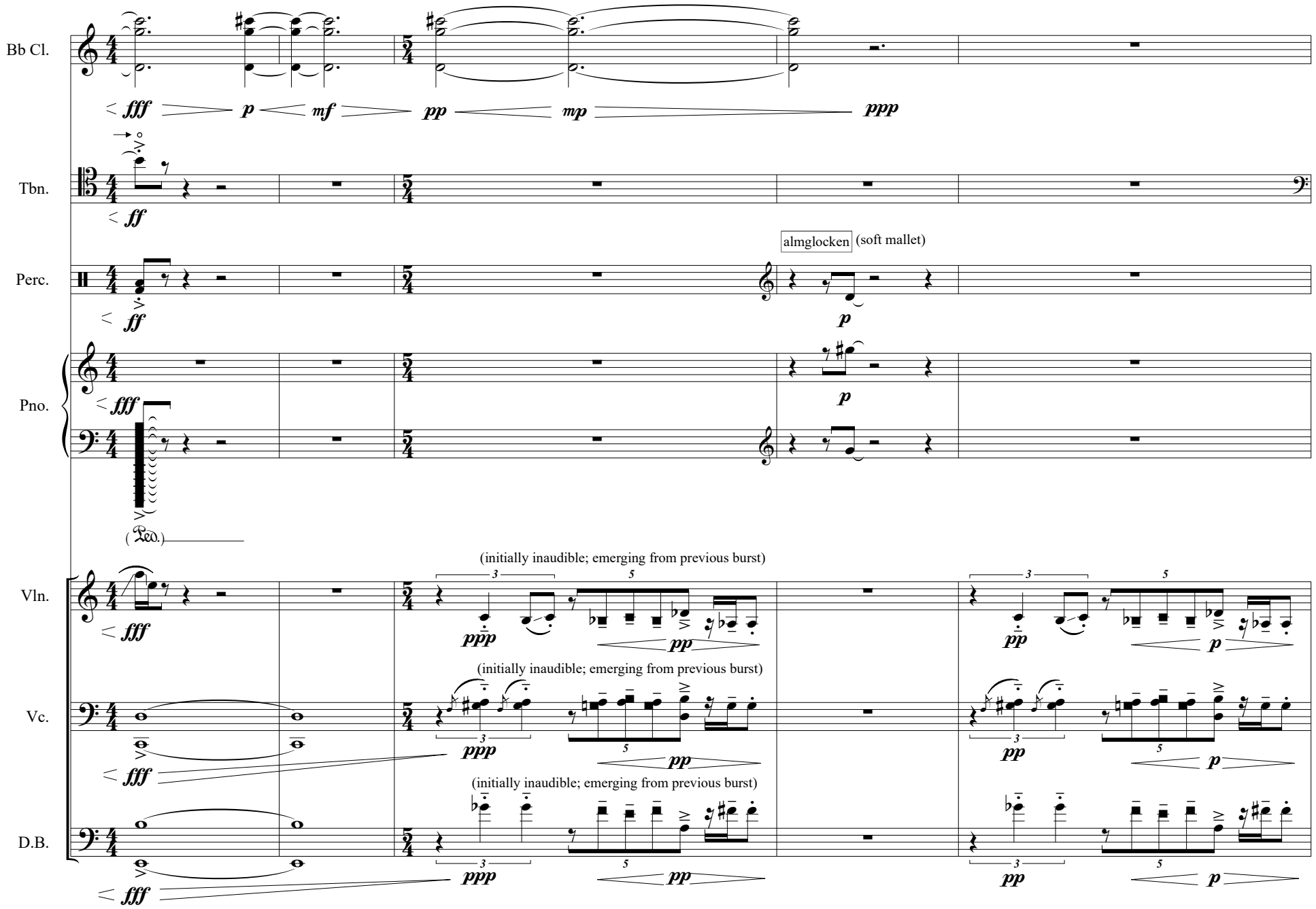

14
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
mp
ppp

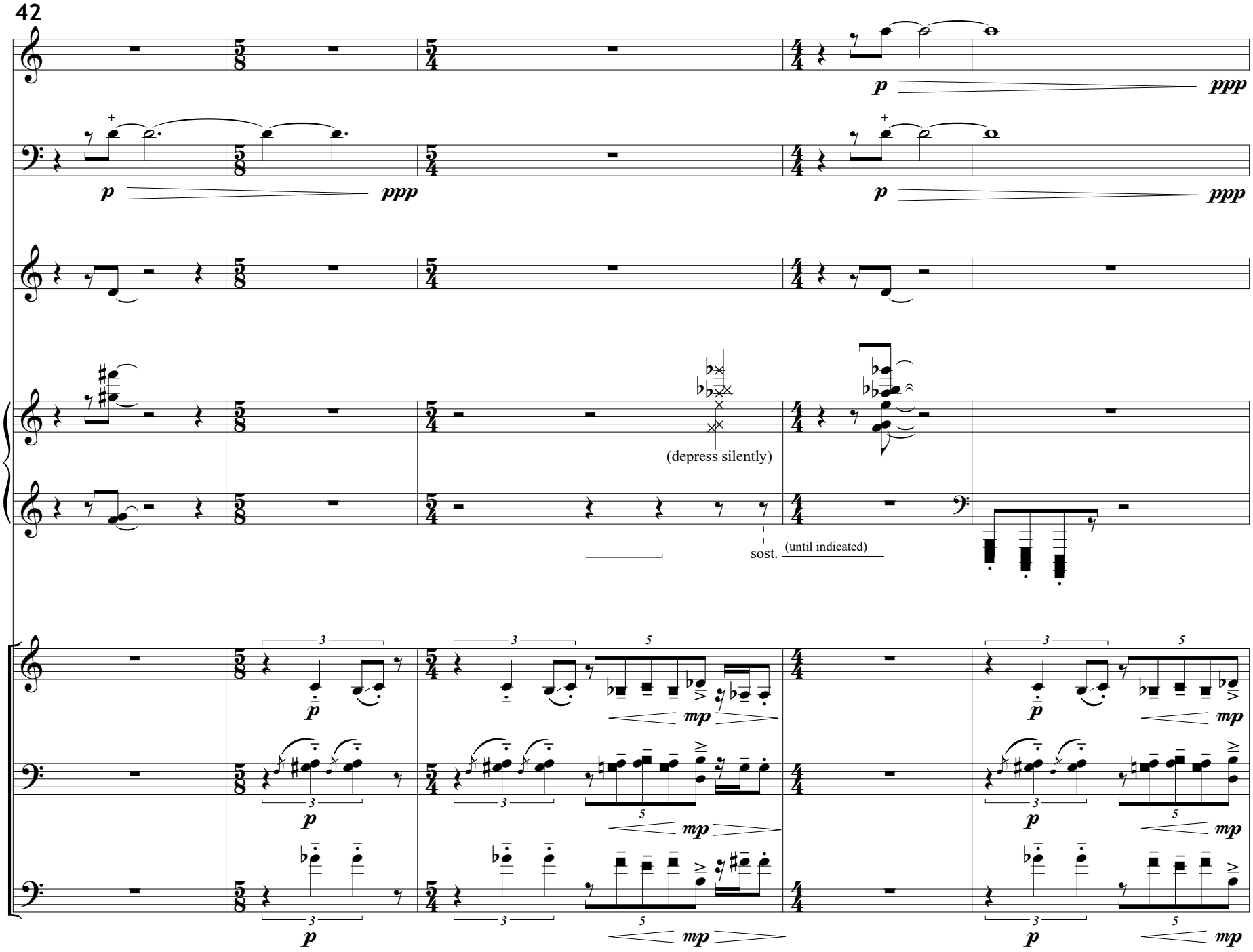

18
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
mp
p
pp

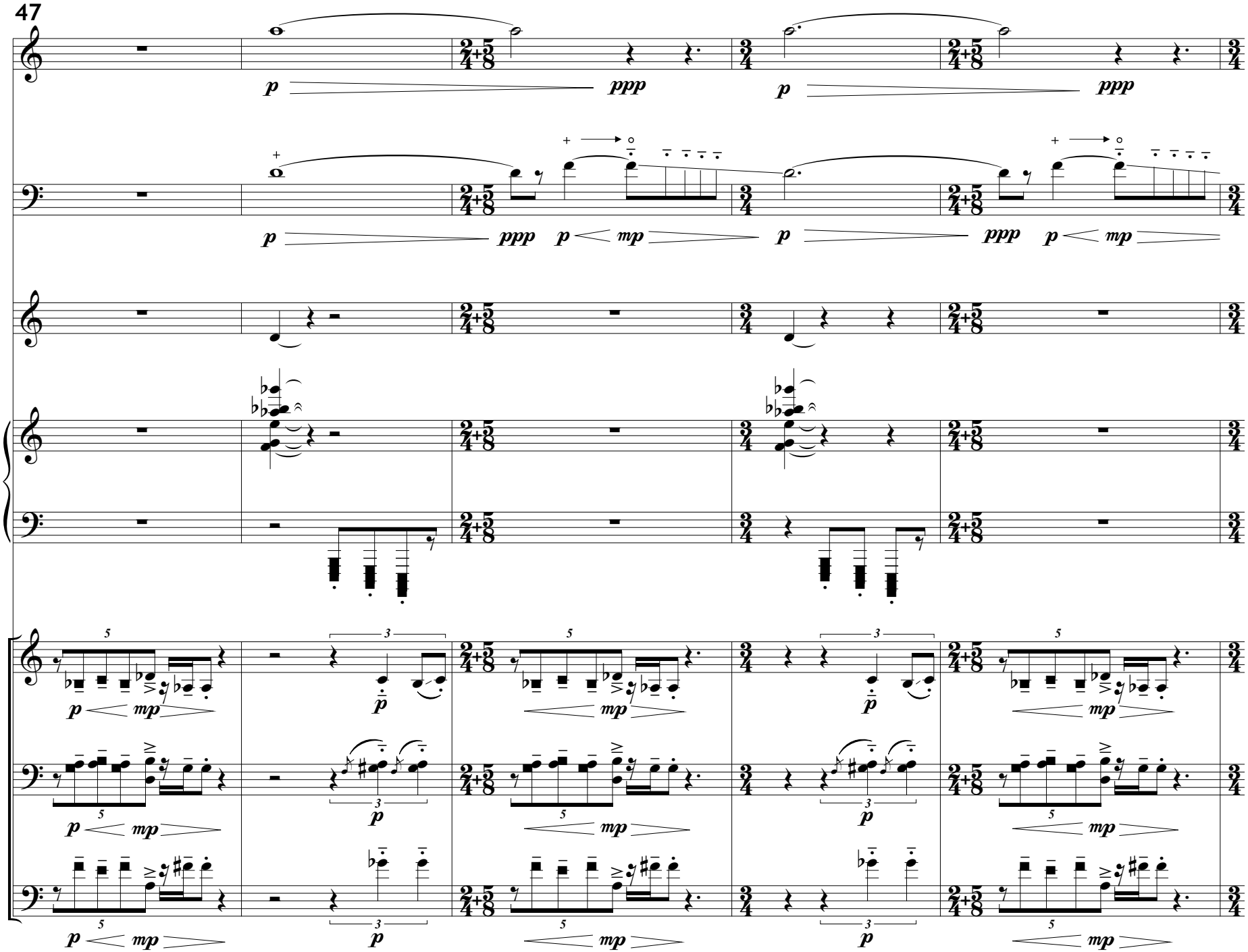

23
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
toms
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

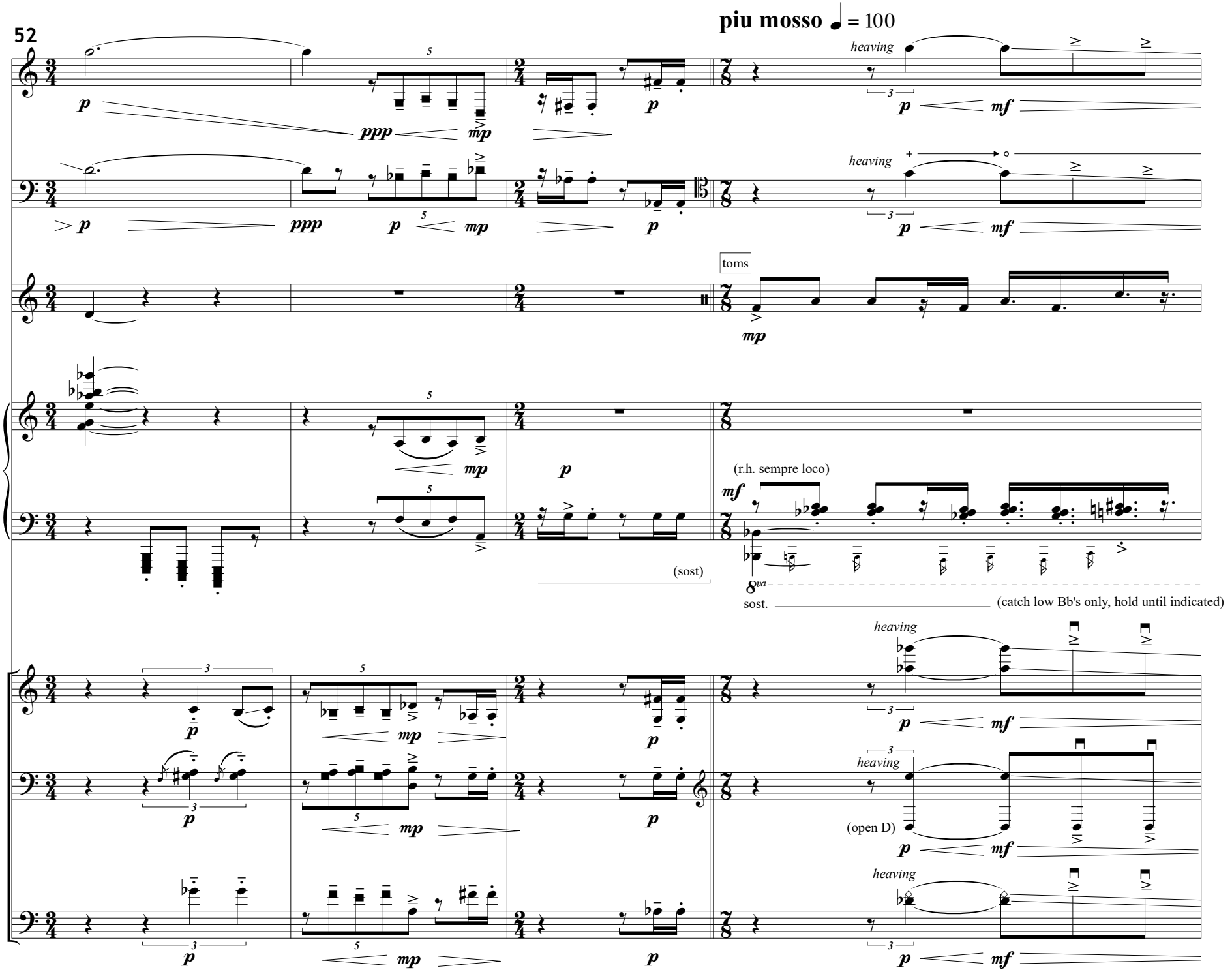

28
R 1-3
accel.
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
(clusters gradually widening)
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

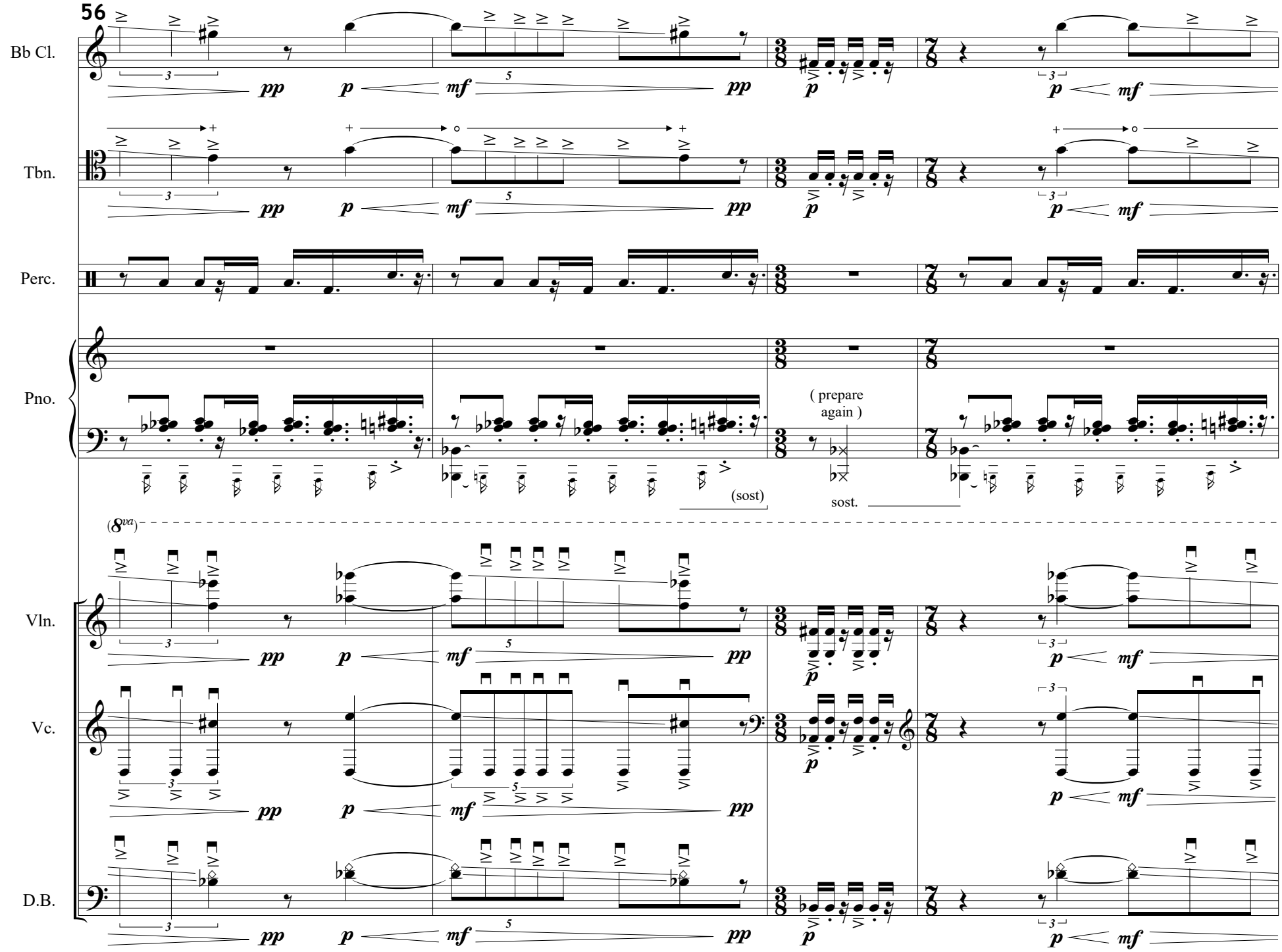

33
R 1-3
(♩ = 180)
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
(use forearms)
(gradually depress)
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

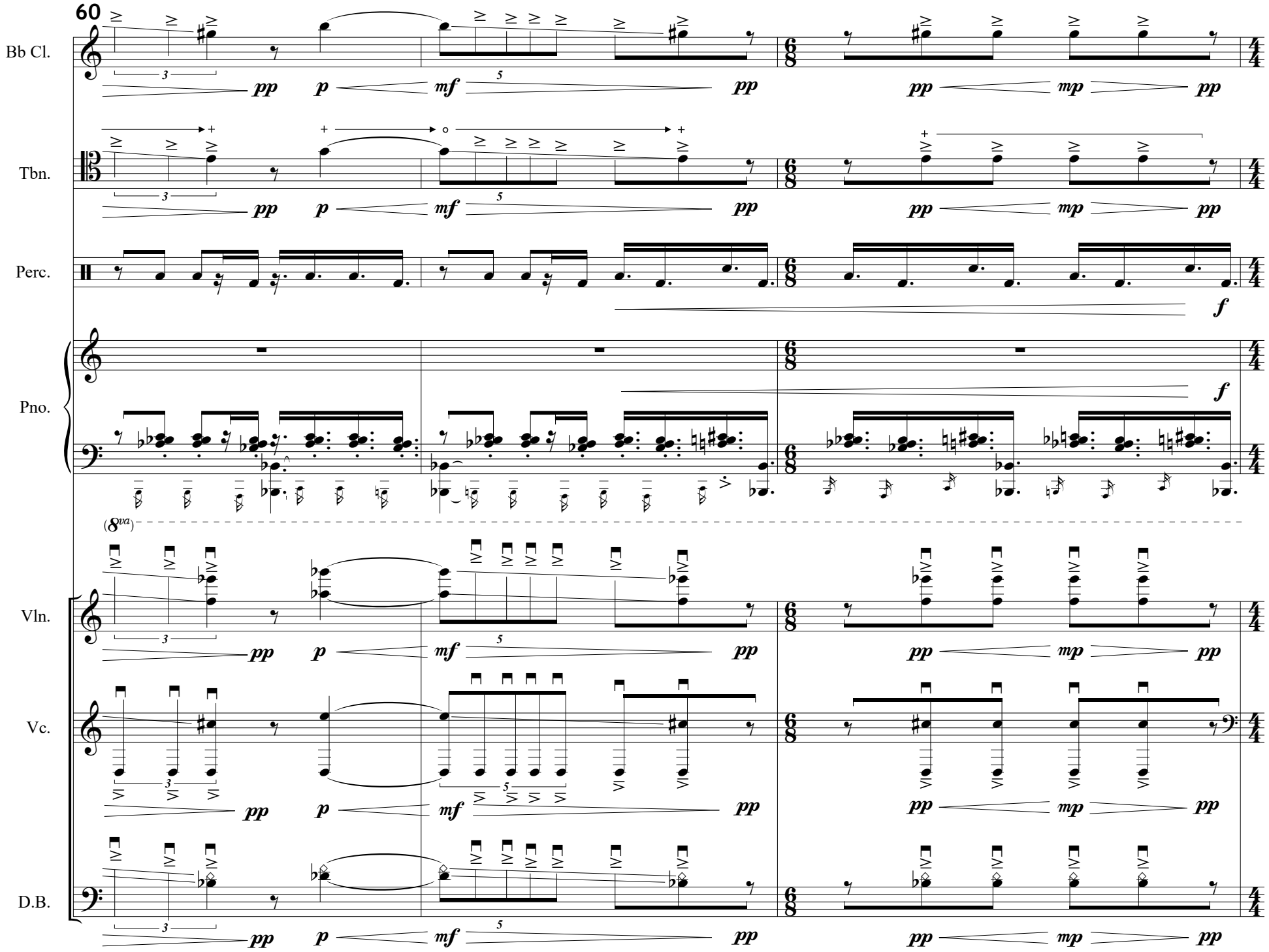

Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
almglocken (soft mallet)
(initially inaudible; emerging from previous burst)
(initially inaudible; emerging from previous burst)
(initially inaudible; emerging from previous burst)

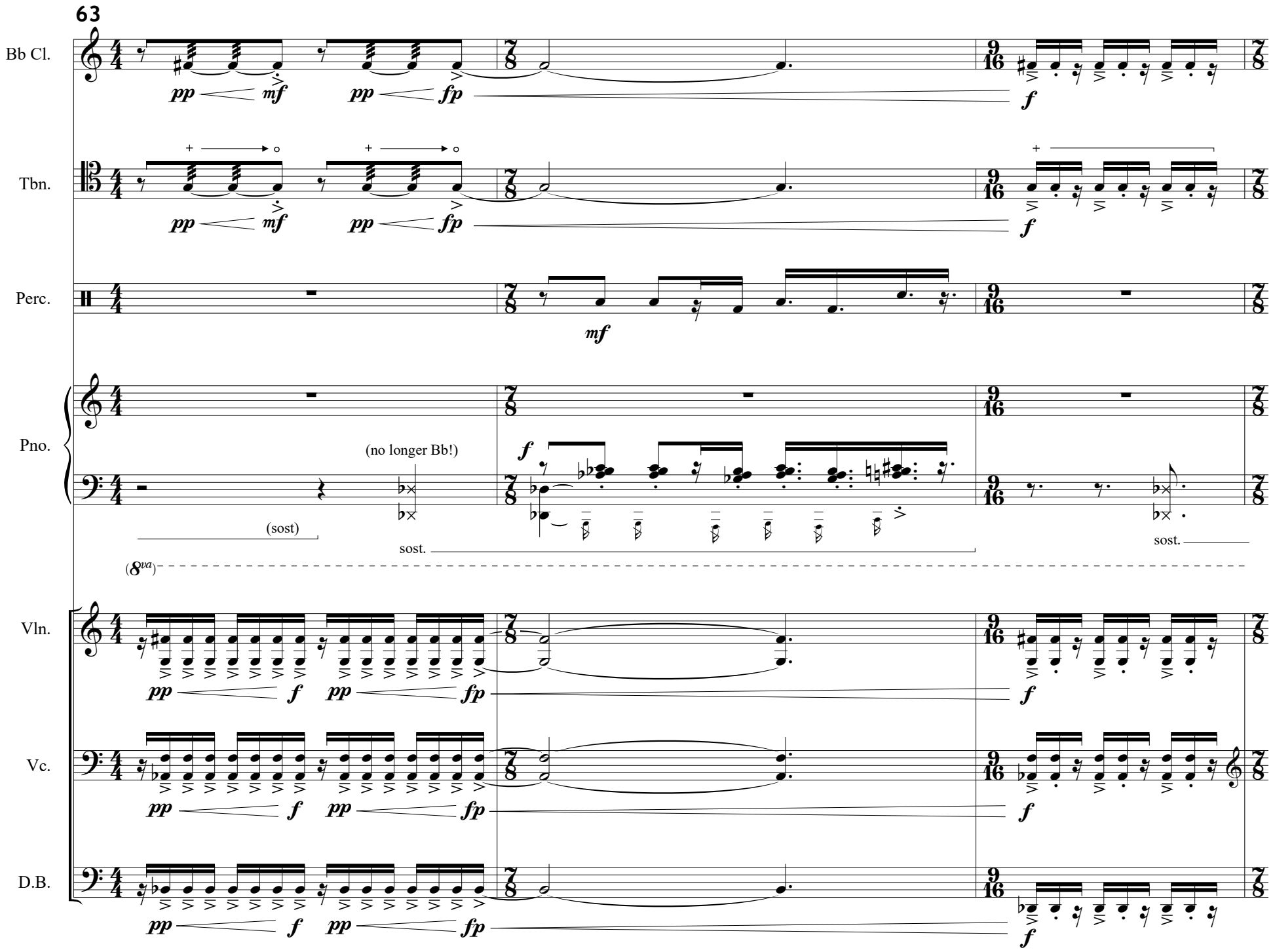

42
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
p
ppp
(depress silently)
sost.
(until indicated)
mp

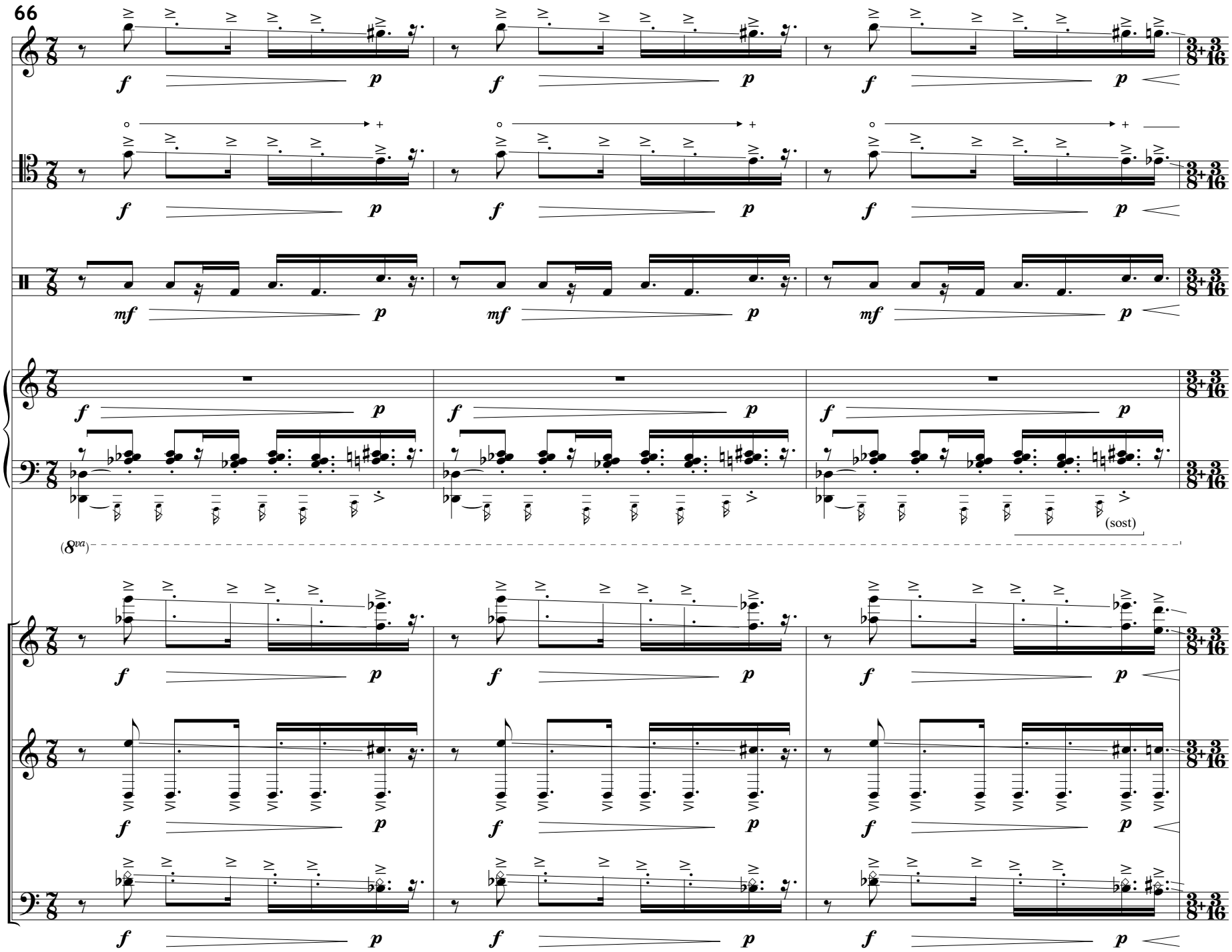

47
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

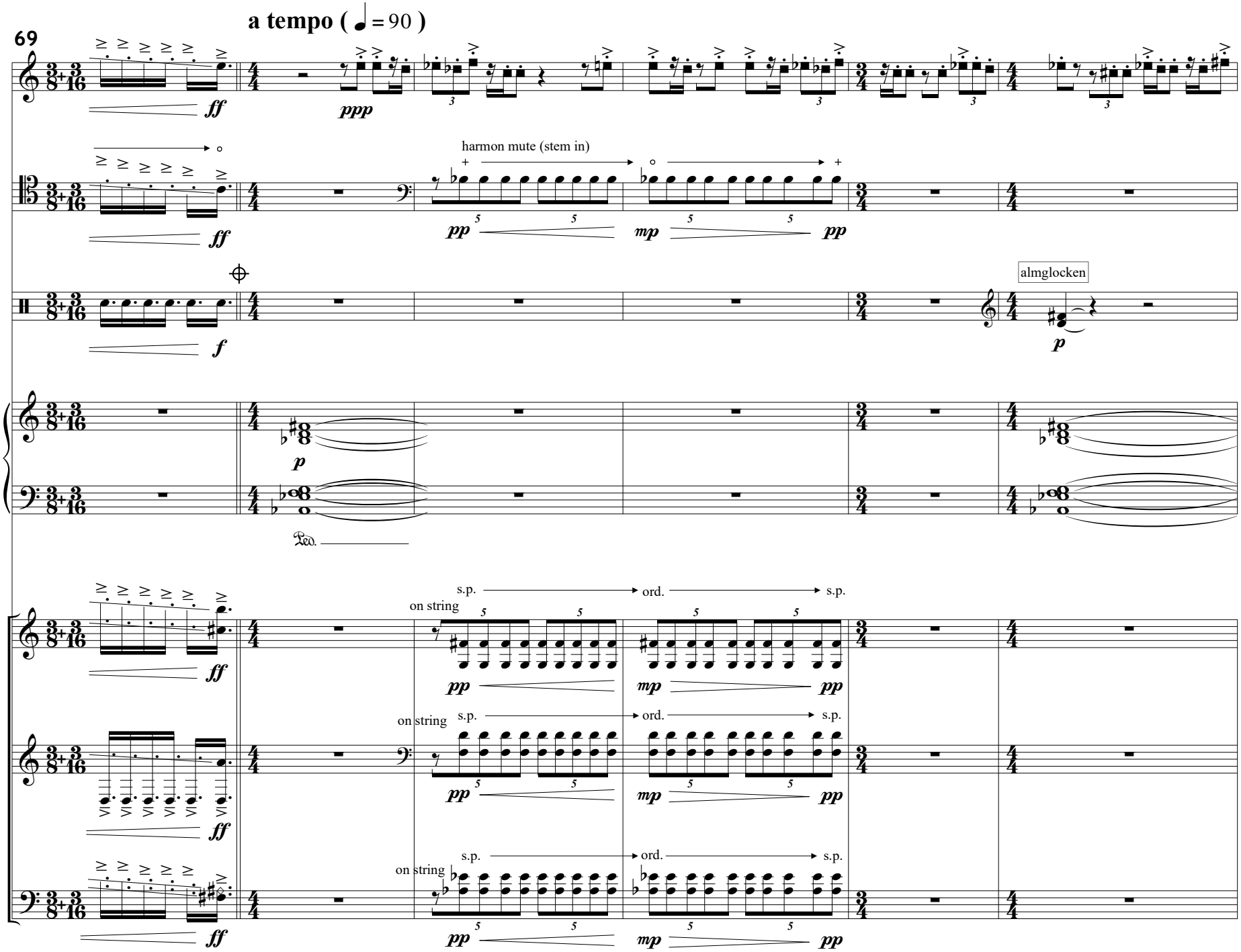

52
piu mosso ♩ = 100
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
heaving
toms
(r.h. sempre loco)
(sost)
8va
sost.
(catch low Bb's only, hold until indicated)
(open D)

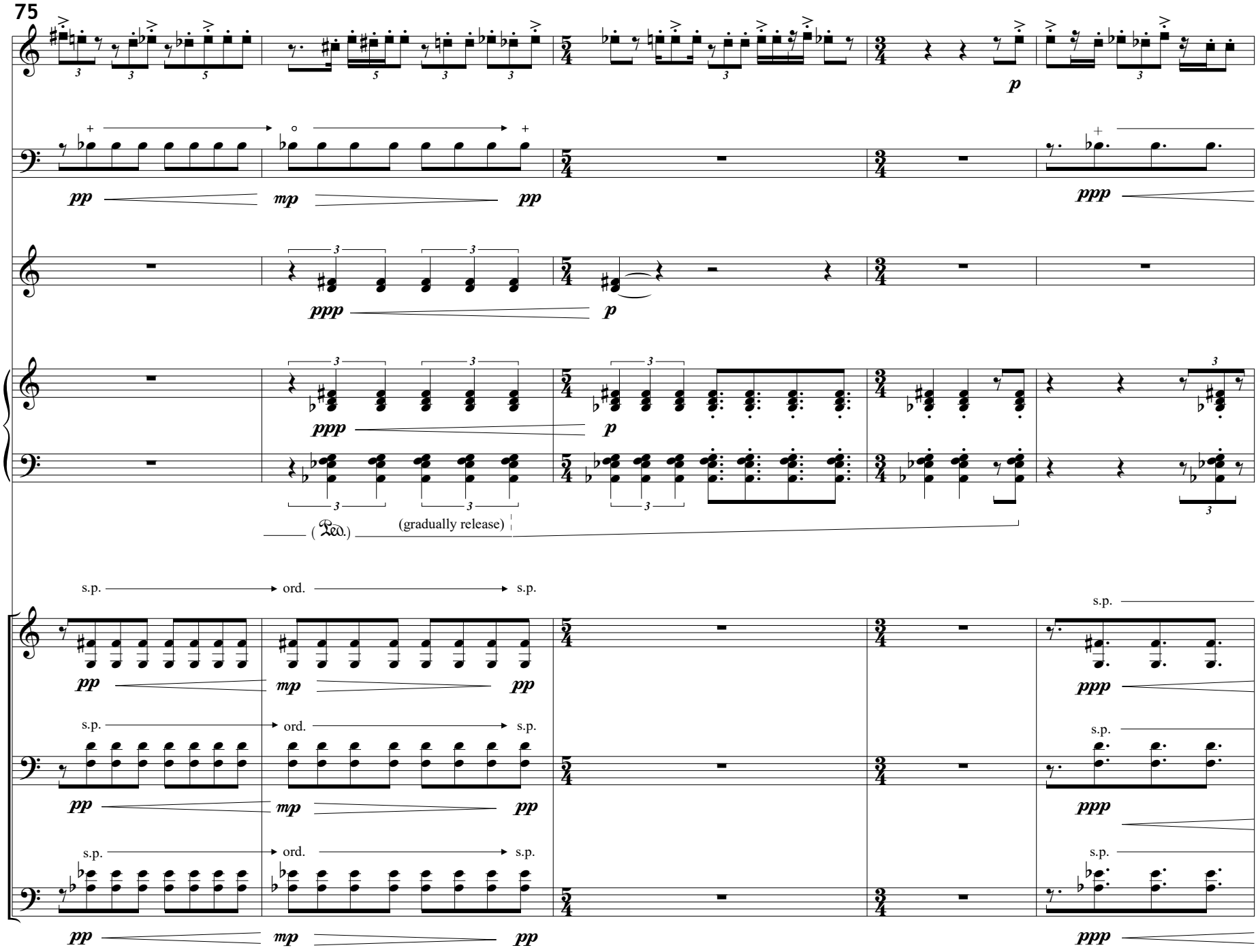

56
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
(prepare
again)
(sost)
sost.
(8va)
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pp
p
mf

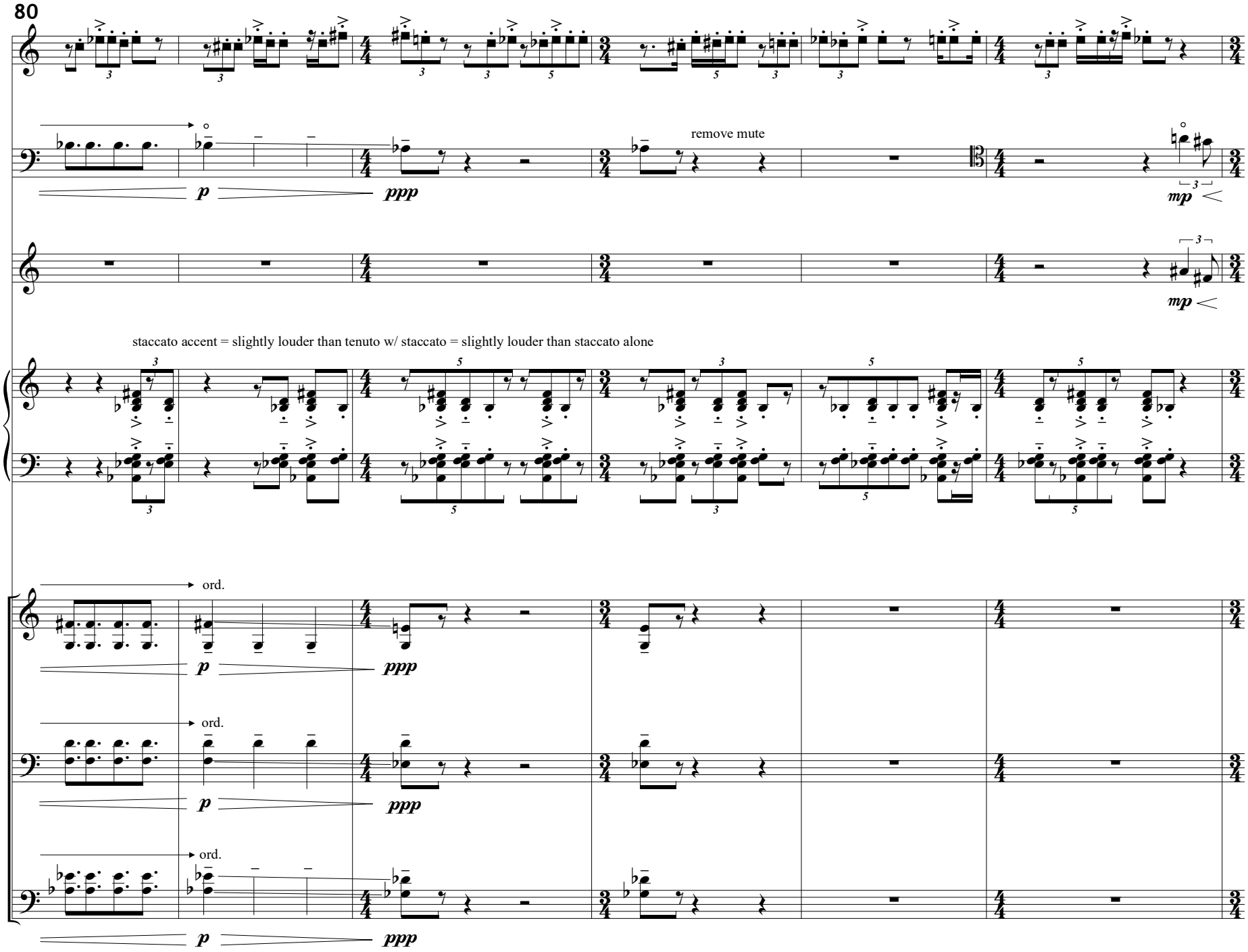

60
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(8va)
pp
p
mf
mp
f

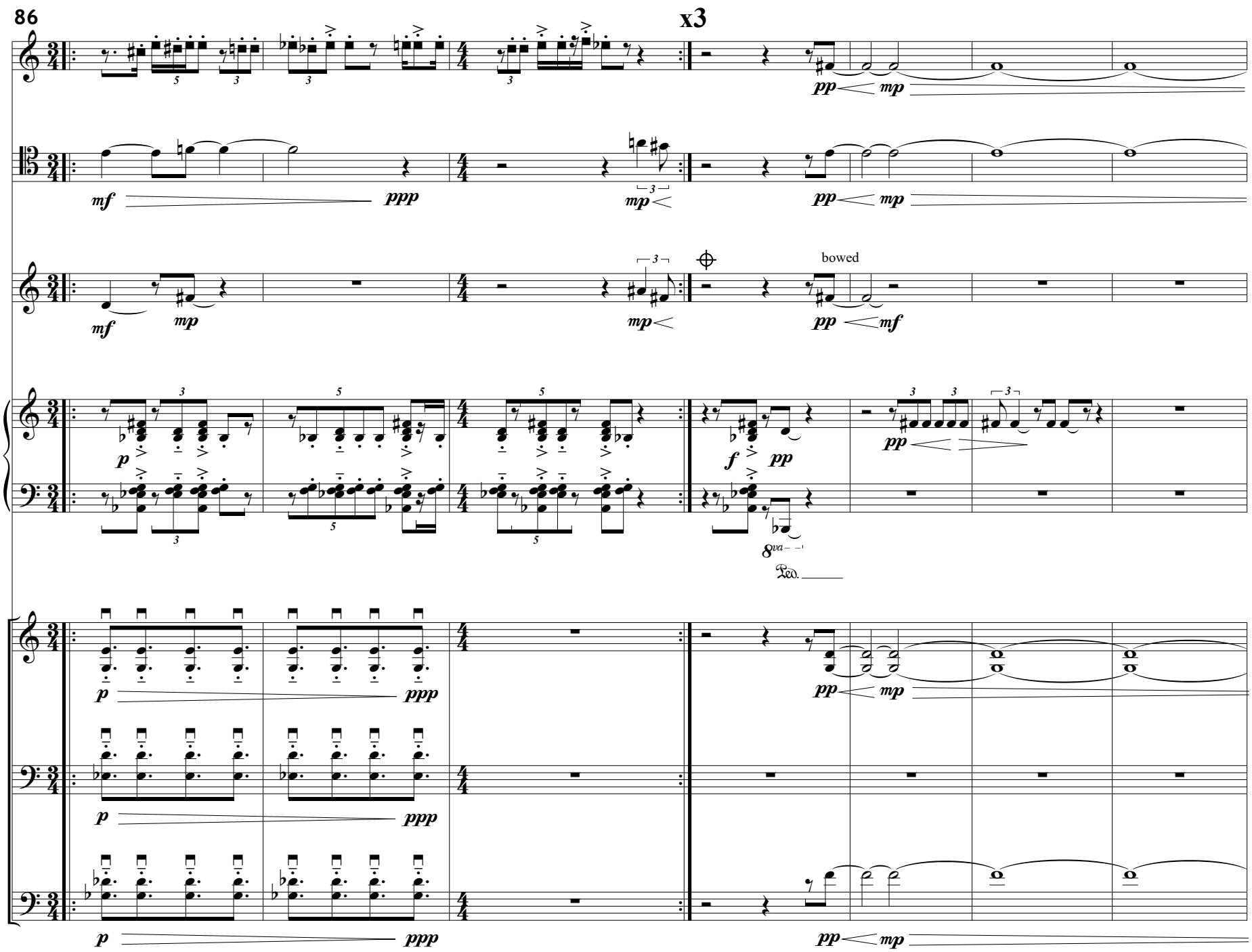

63
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pp
mf
fp
f
(no longer Bb!)
(sost)
sost.
(8va)

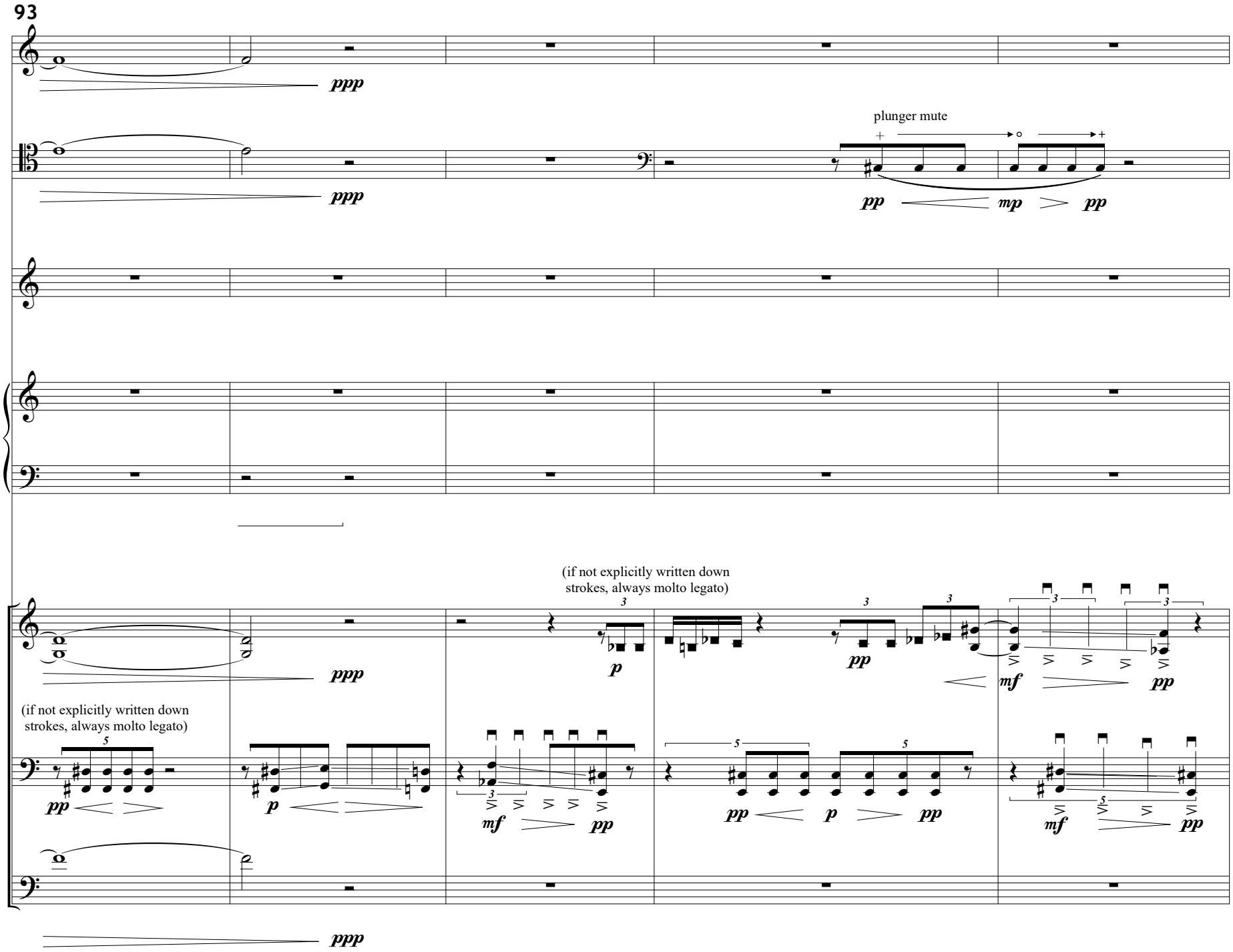

66
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(sost)
(8va)

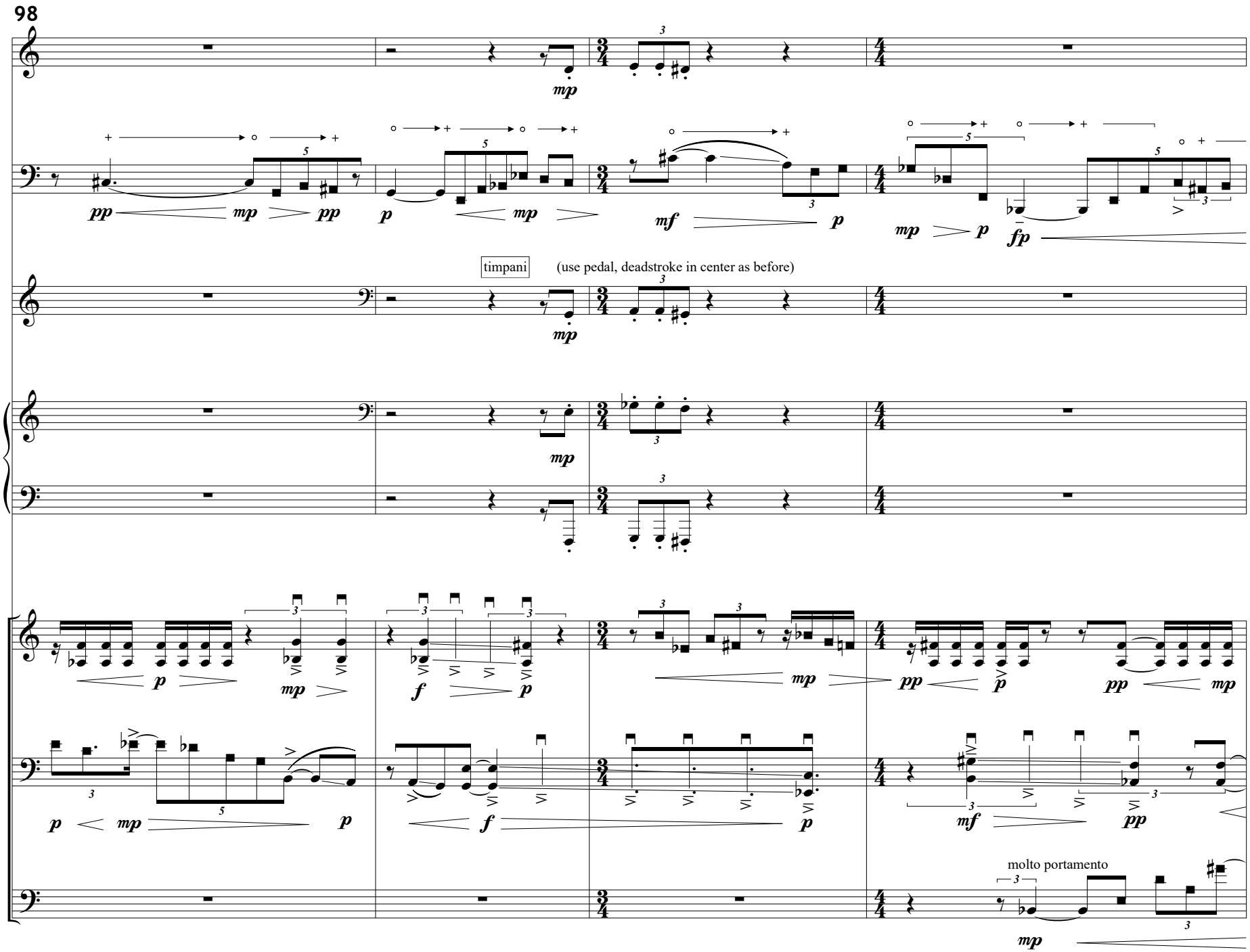

a tempo (♩ = 90)
69
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
harmon mute (stem in)
almglocken
s.p.
ord.
on string

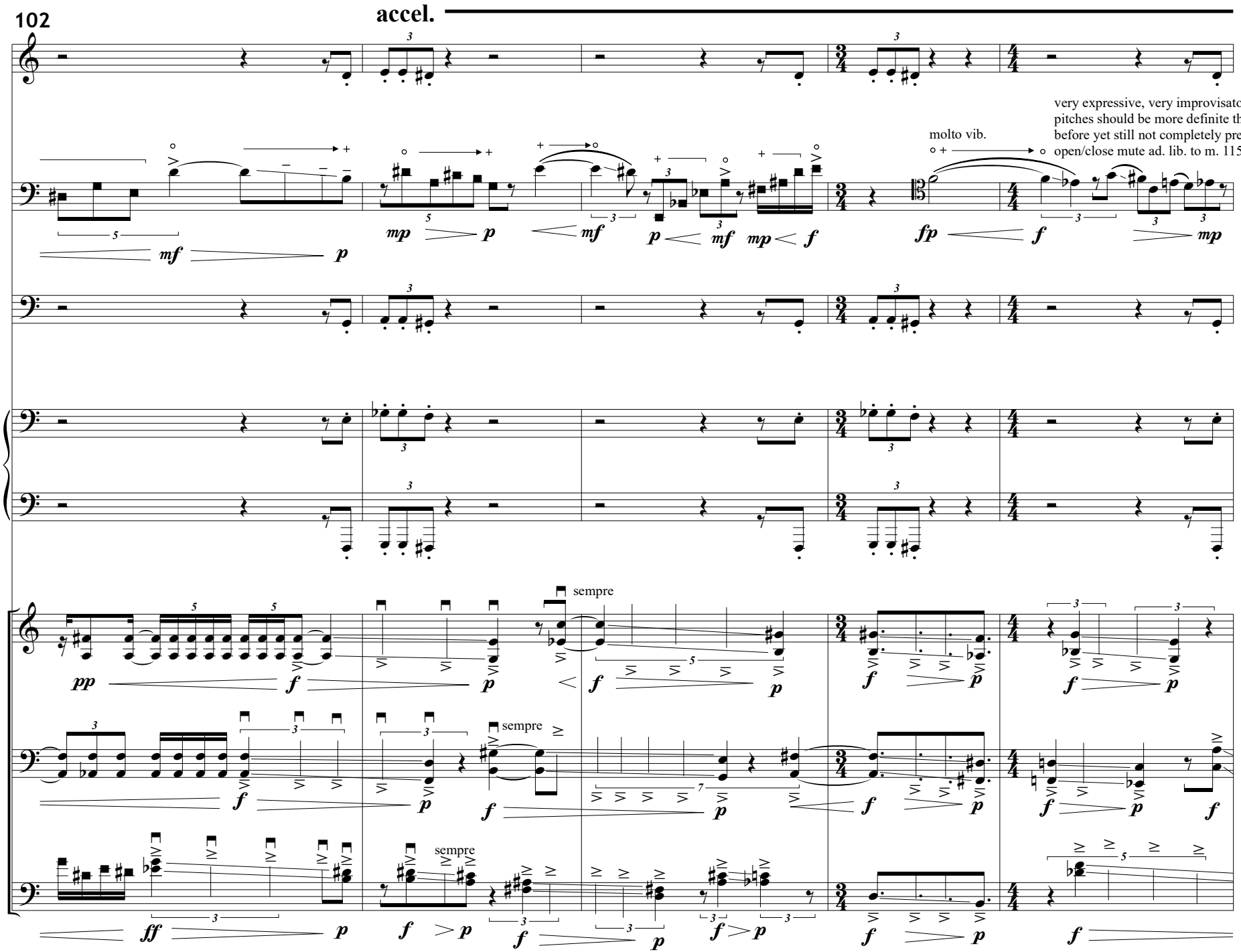

75
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pp
mp
ppp
p
s.p.
ord.
(Ped.)
(gradually release)

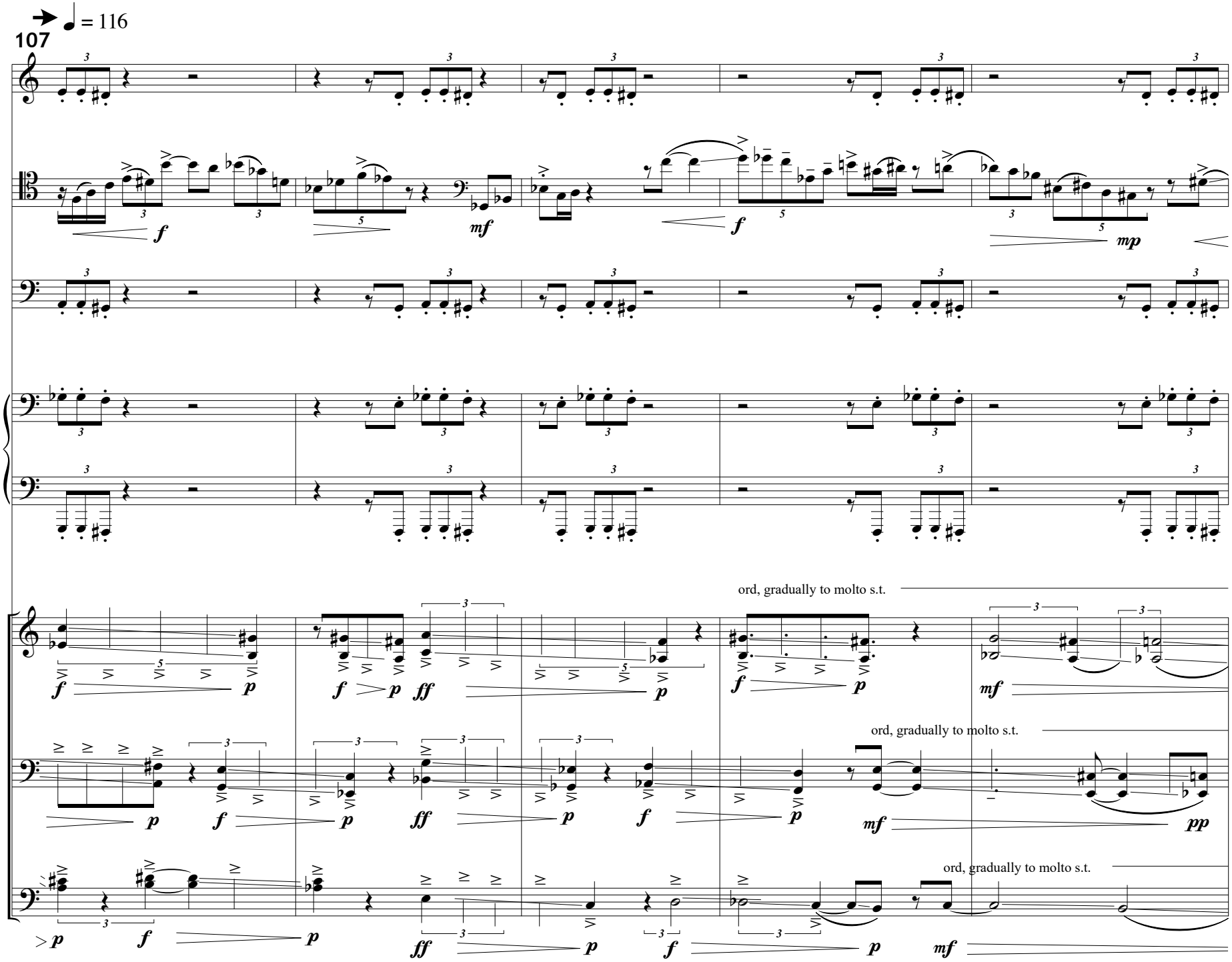

80
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
remove mute
Perc.
staccato accent = slightly louder than tenuto w/ staccato = slightly louder than staccato alone
Pno.
Vln.
ord.
Vc.
ord.
D.B.
ord.
p
ppp
mp

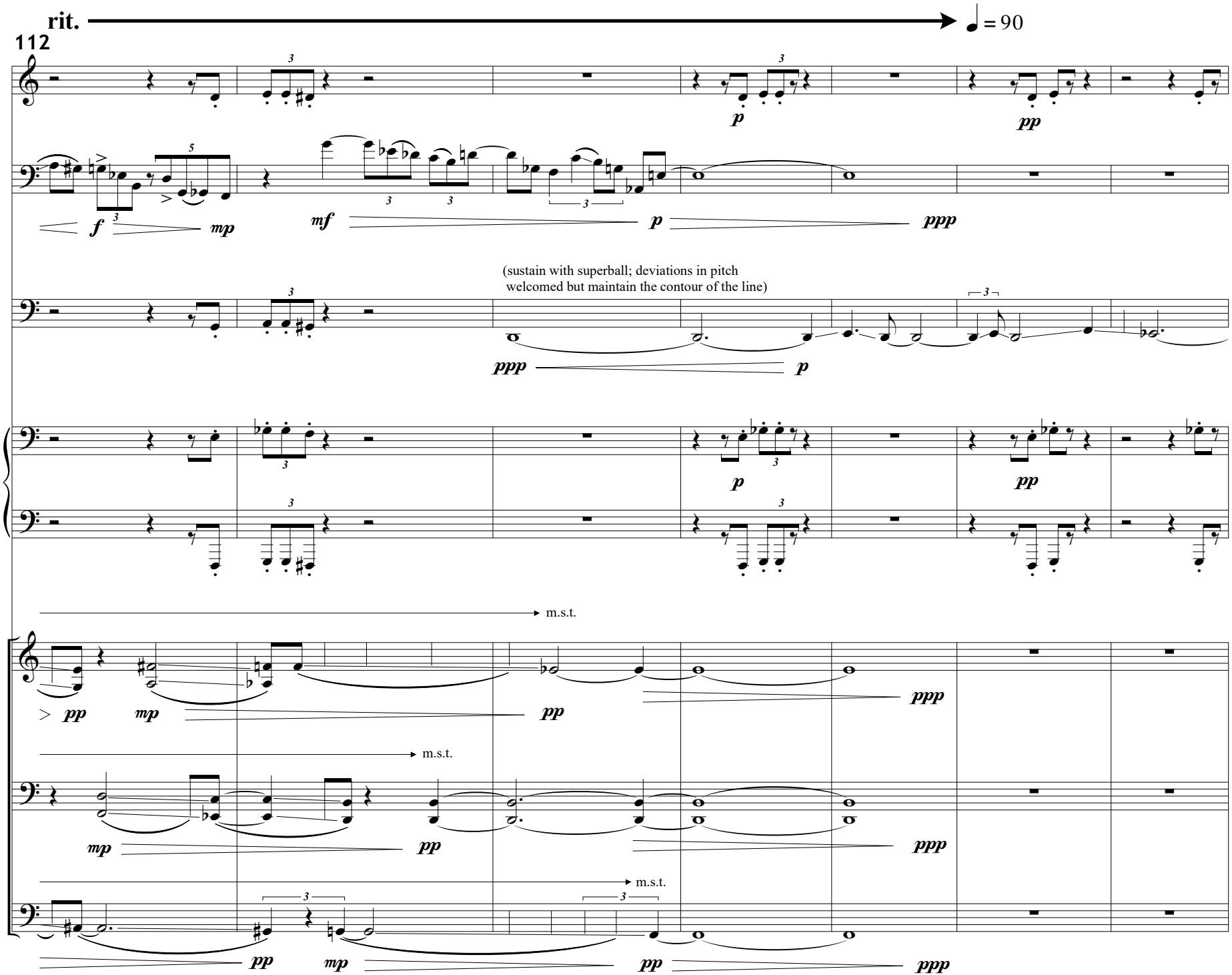

86
x3
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
bowed
8va
Ped.

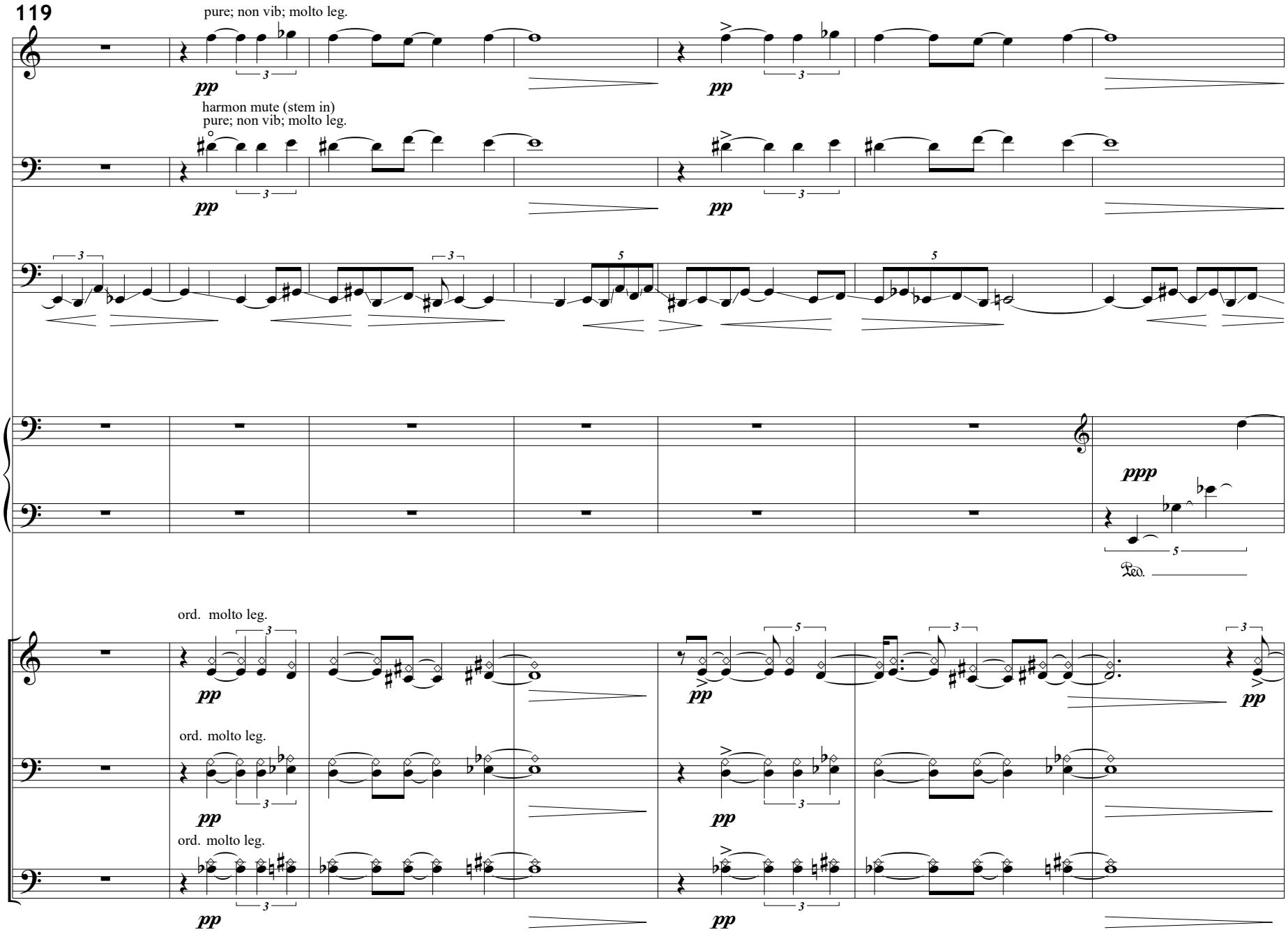

93
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
plunger mute
(if not explicitly written down strokes, always molto legato)
(if not explicitly written down strokes, always molto legato)

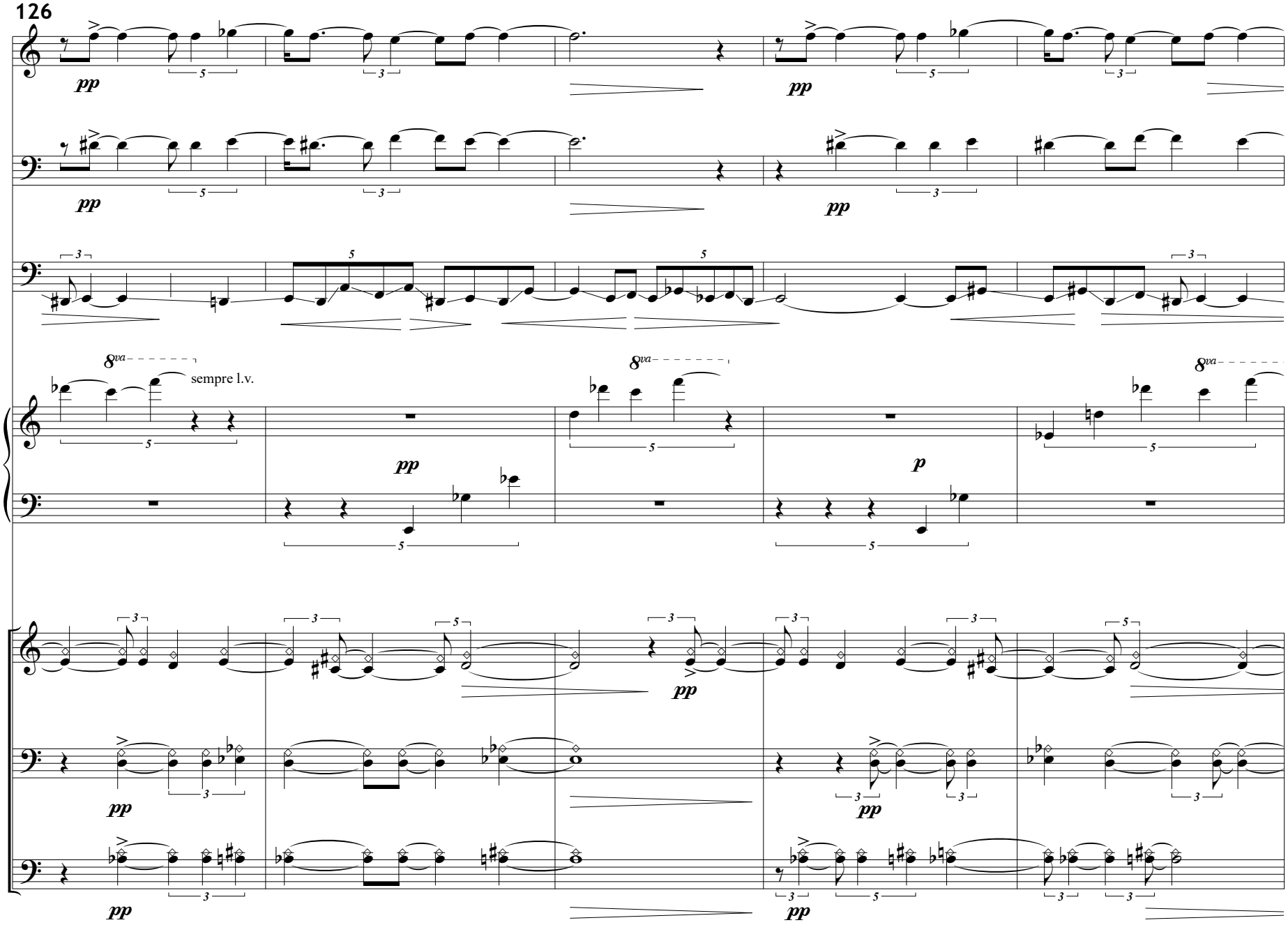

98
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
timpani
(use pedal, deadstroke in center as before)
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
molto portamento

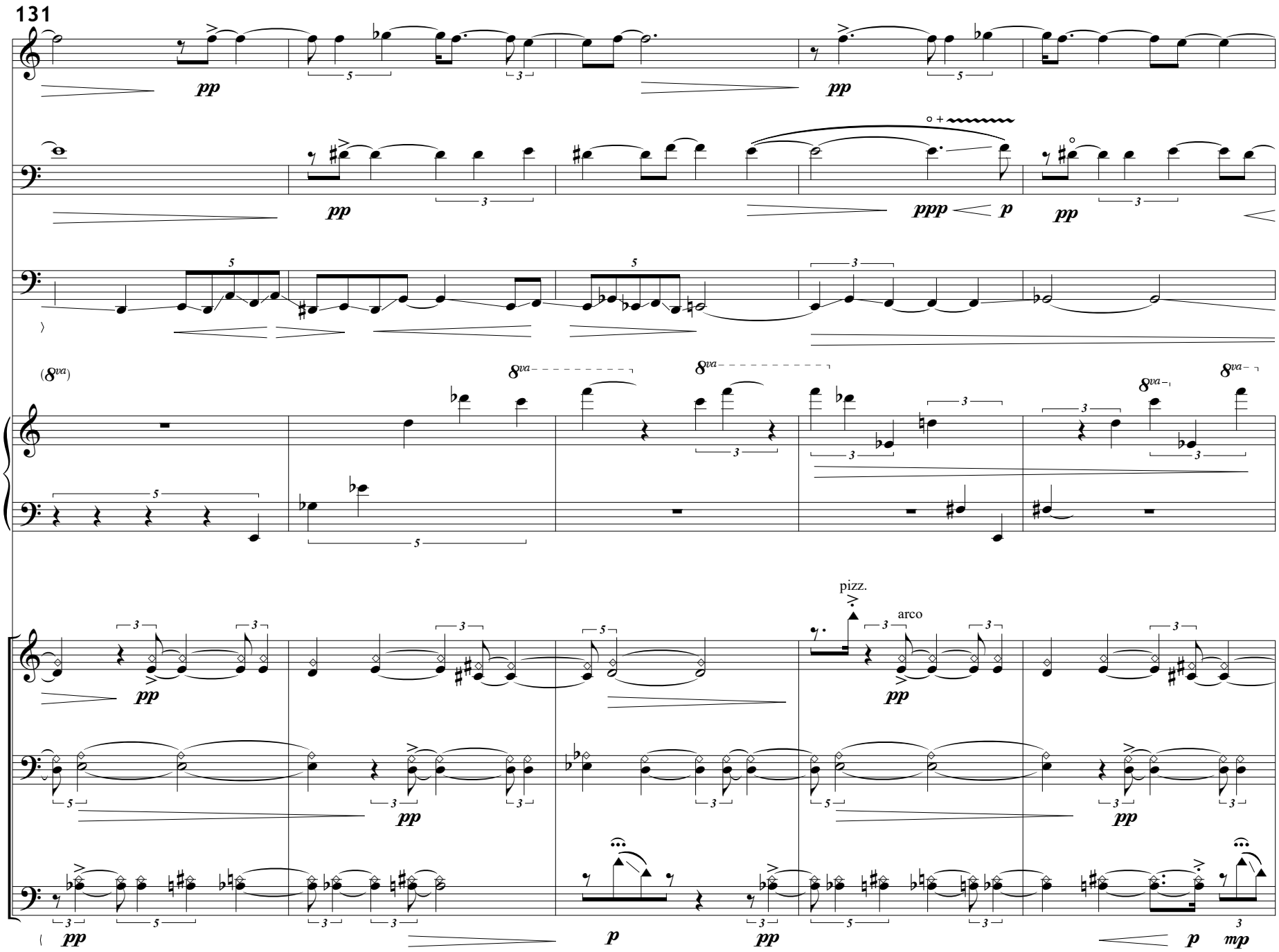

102
accel.
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
very expressive, very improvisatory
pitches should be more definite than
before yet still not completely precise
open/close mute ad. lib. to m. 115
molto vib.
sempre
sempre
sempre

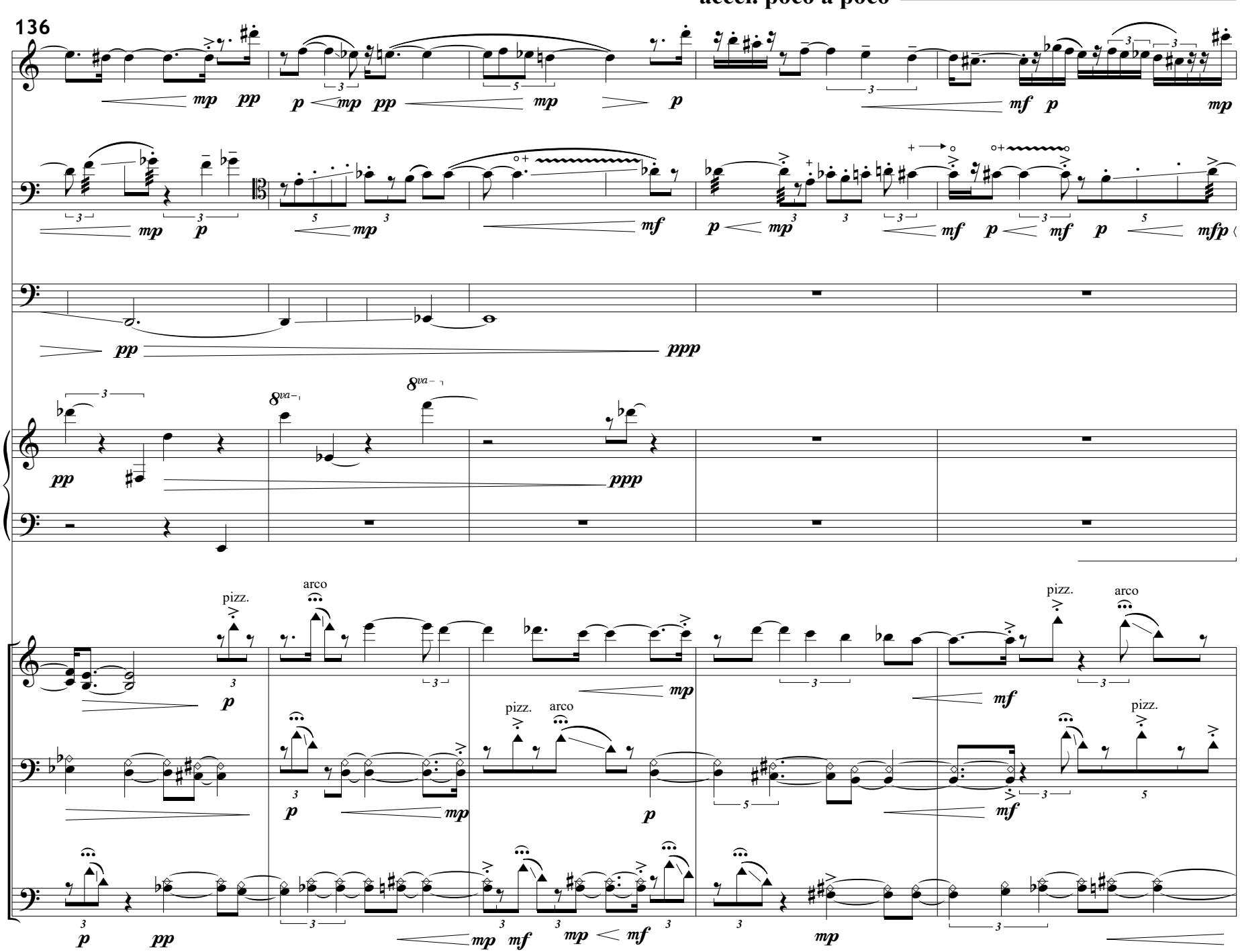

♩ = 116
107
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ord, gradually to molto s.t.
ord, gradually to molto s.t.
ord, gradually to molto s.t.

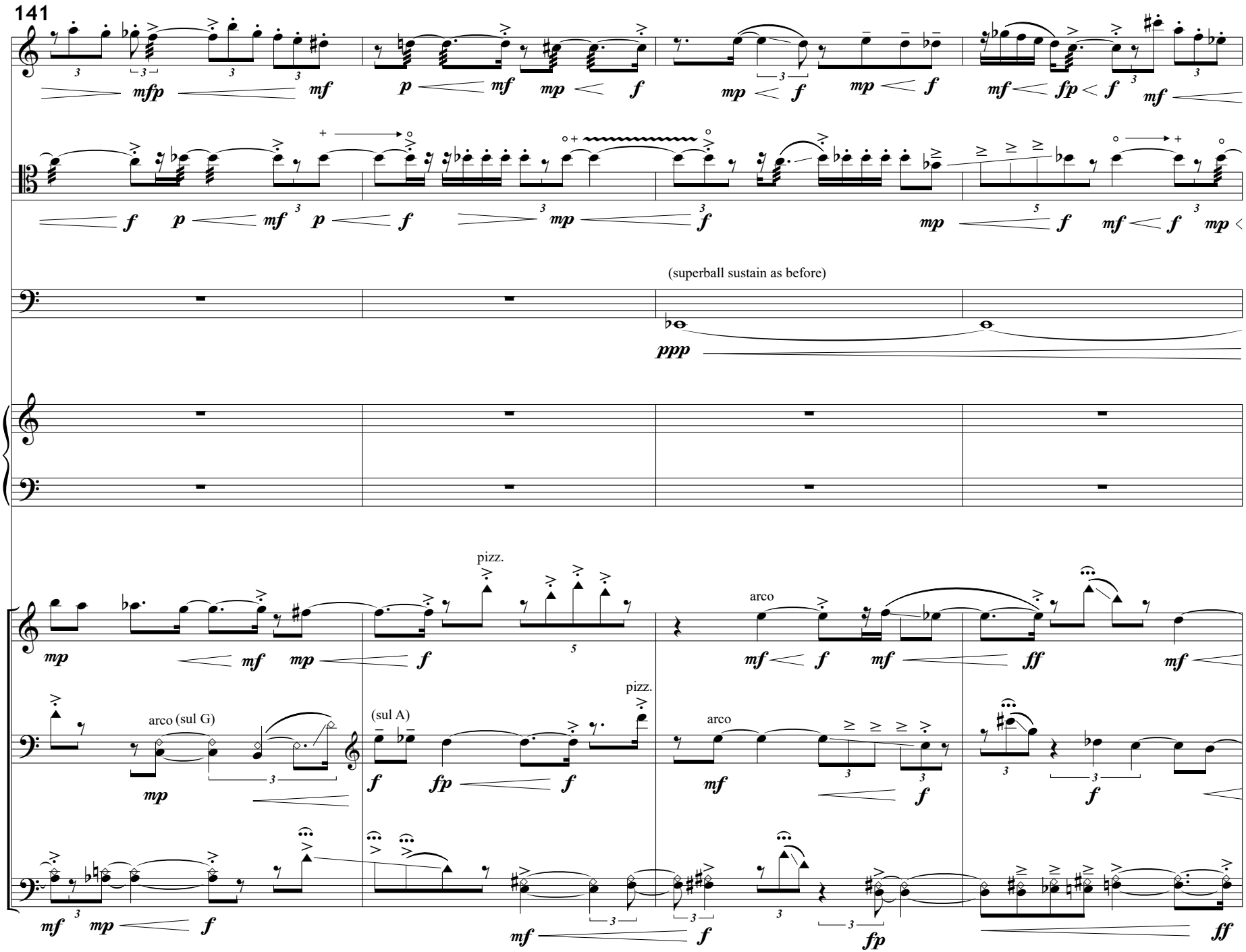

rit.
♩ = 90
112
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(sustain with superball; deviations in pitch
welcomed but maintain the contour of the line)
m.s.t.
m.s.t.
m.s.t.

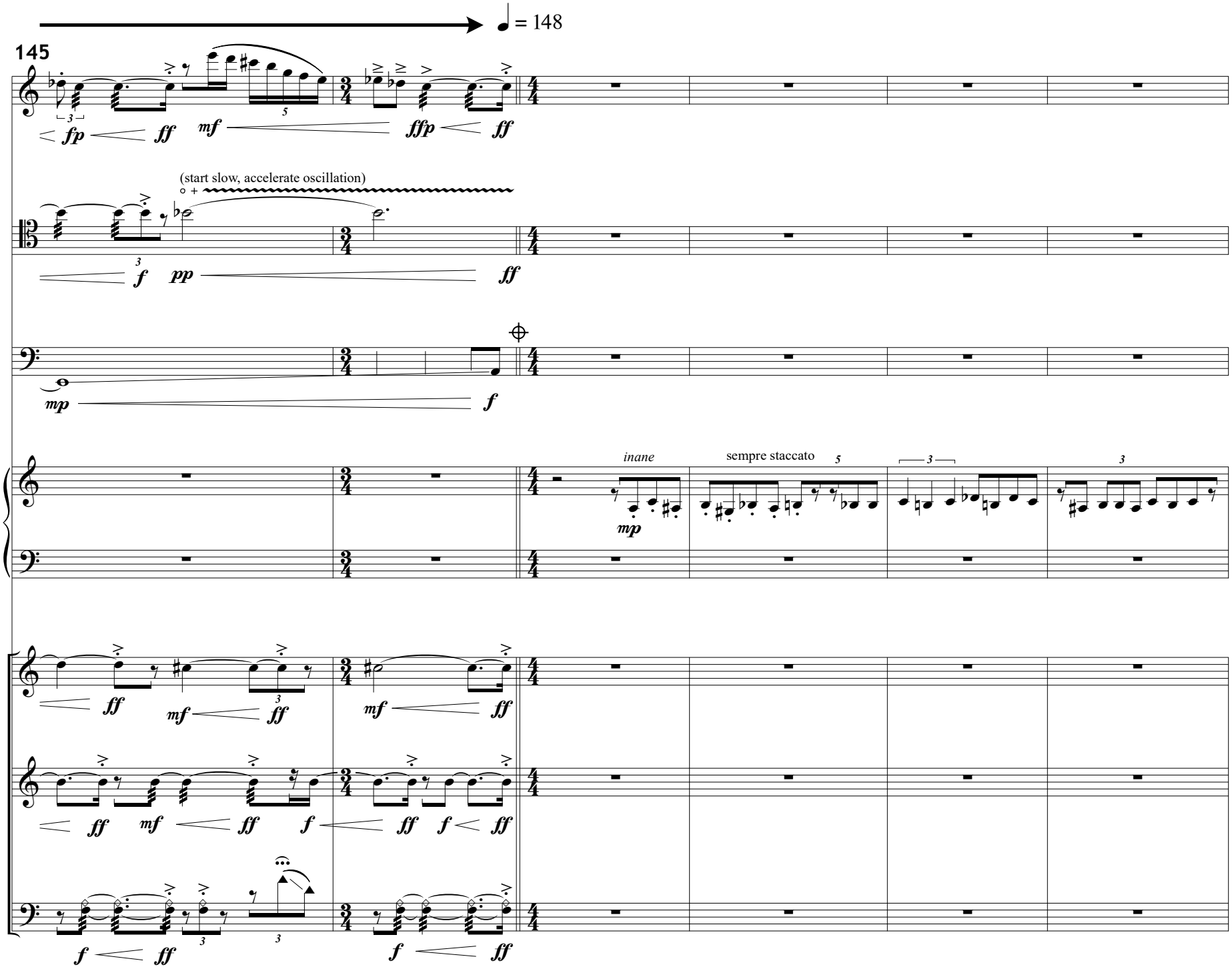

119
pure; non vib; molto leg.
Bb Cl.
pp
harmon mute (stem in)
pure; non vib; molto leg.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
ppp
Ped.
ord. molto leg.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

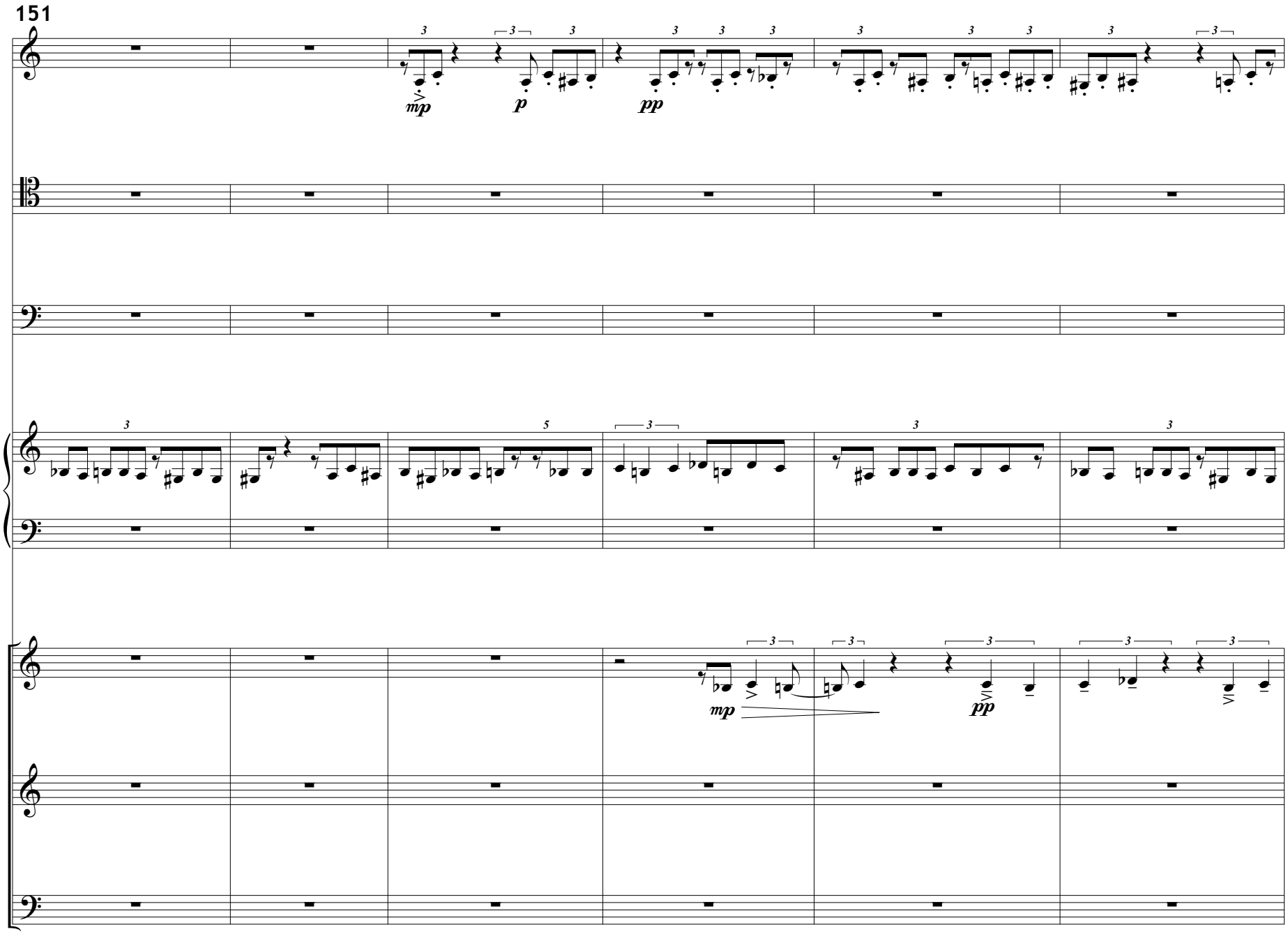

126
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pp
p
8va
sempre l.v.

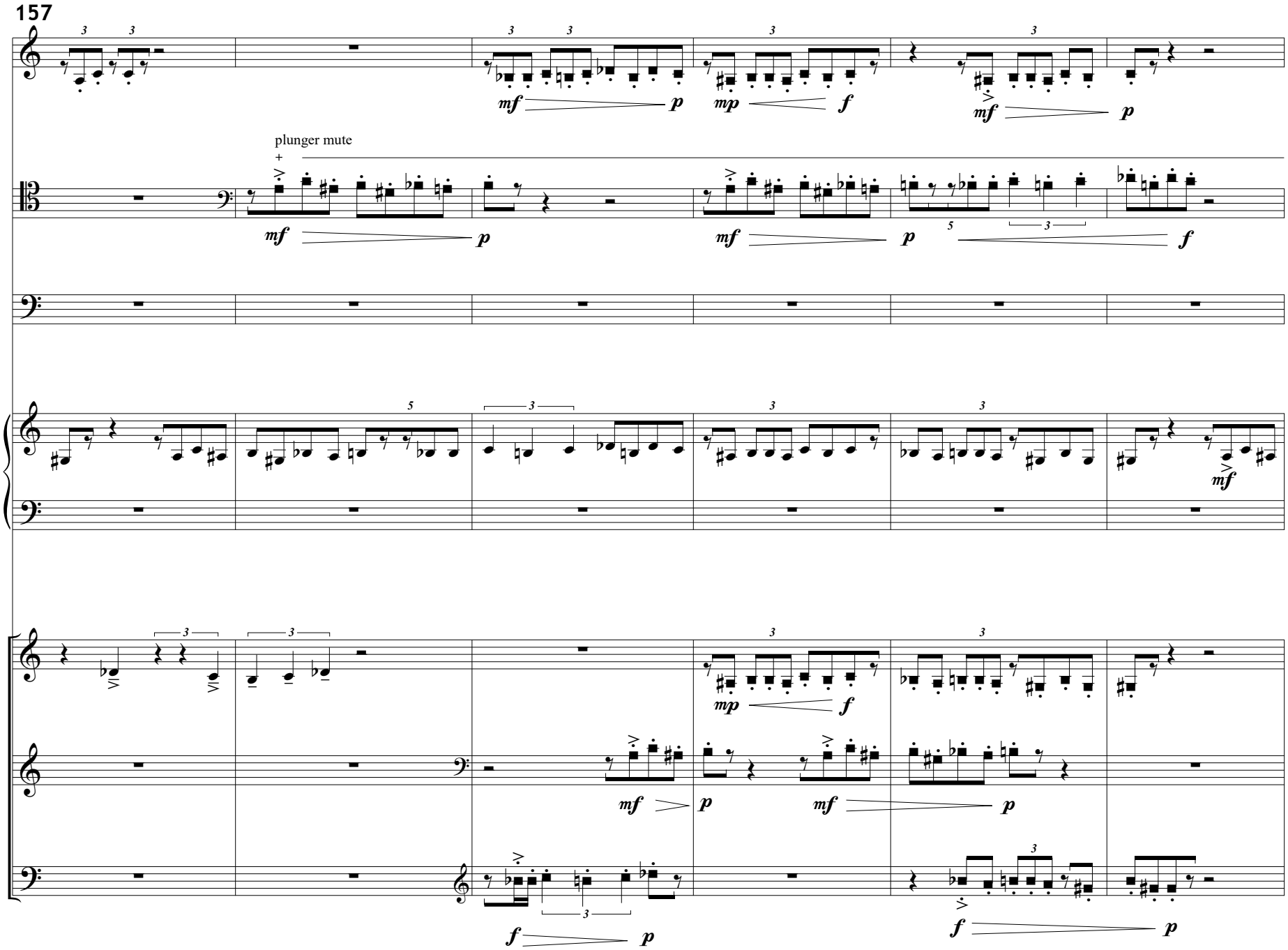

131
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pizz.
arco

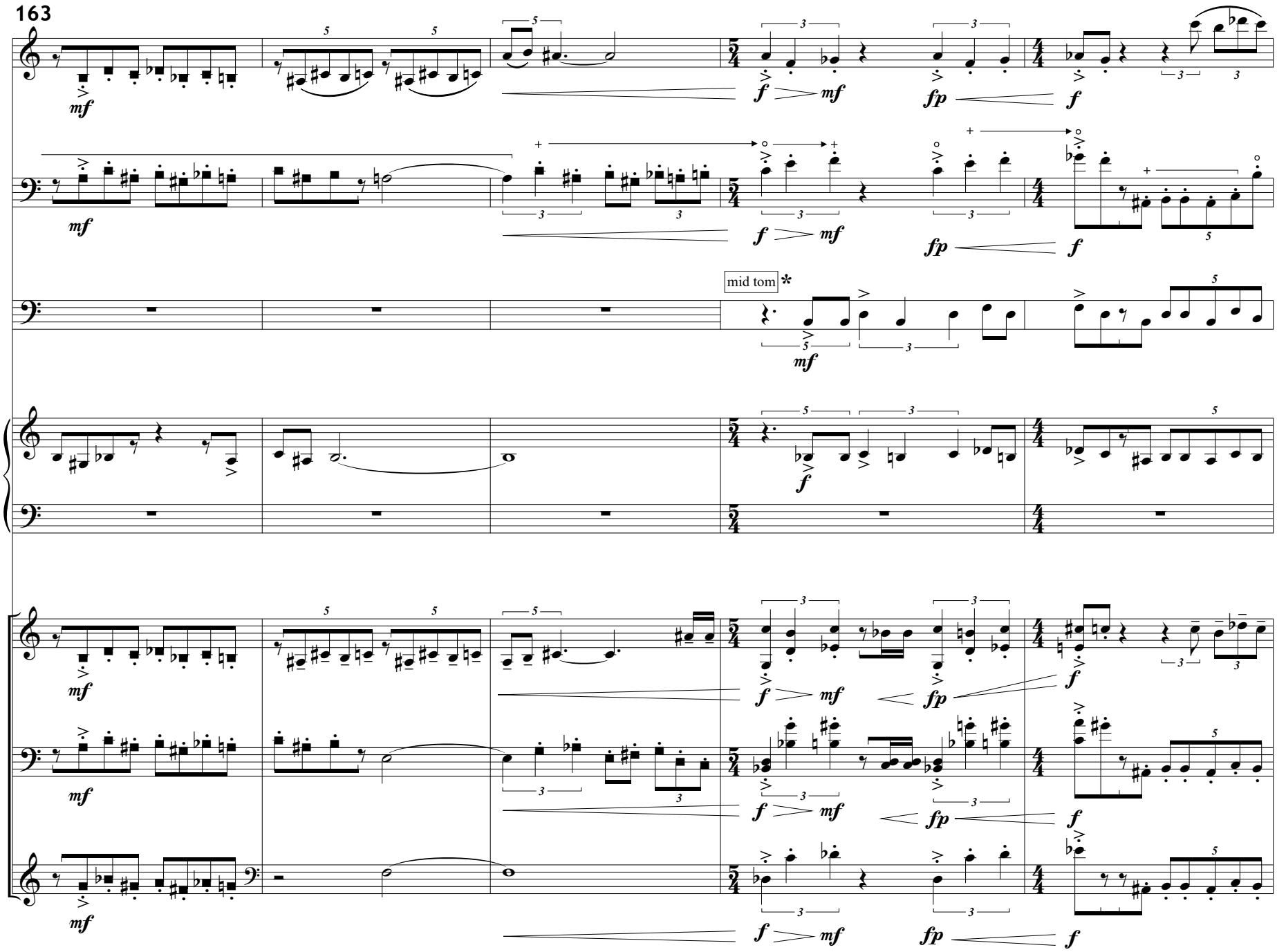

accel. poco a poco
136
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
pizz.
arco


141
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
(superball sustain as before)
Pno.
Vln.
pizz.
arco
Vc.
arco (sul G)
(sul A)
pizz.
arco
D.B.

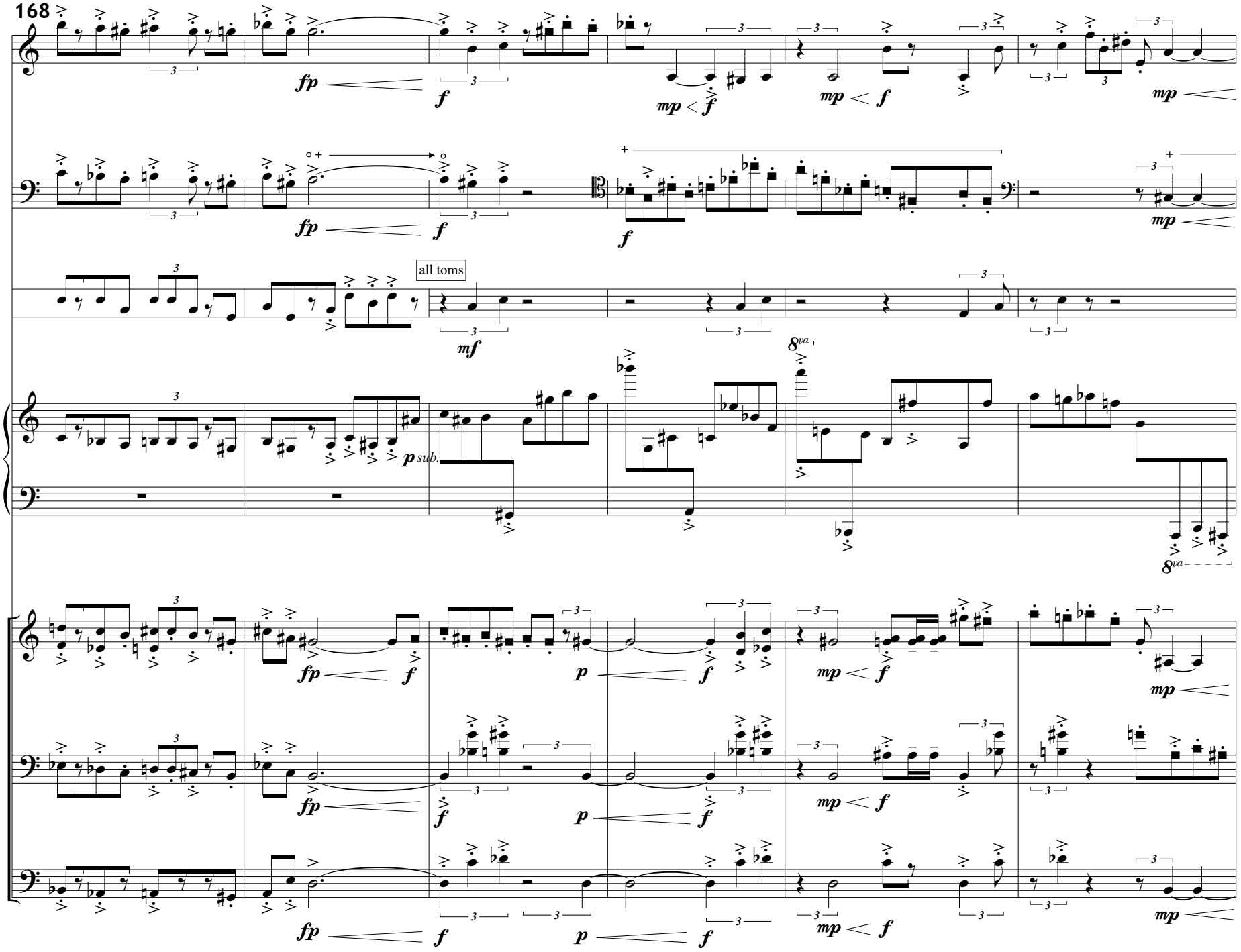

♩ = 148
145
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(start slow, accelerate oscillation)
inane
sempre staccato

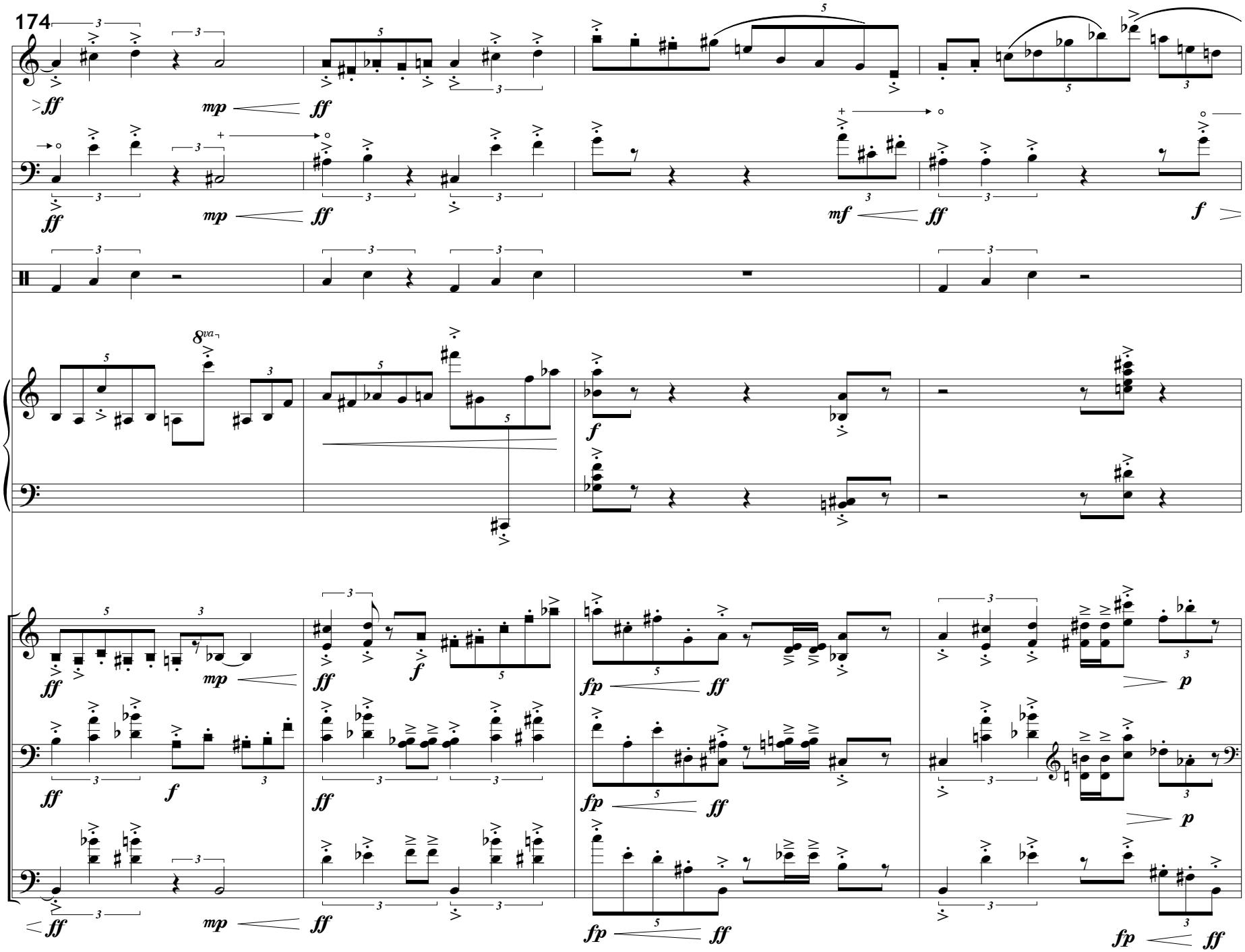

151
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
mp
p
pp
mp
pp

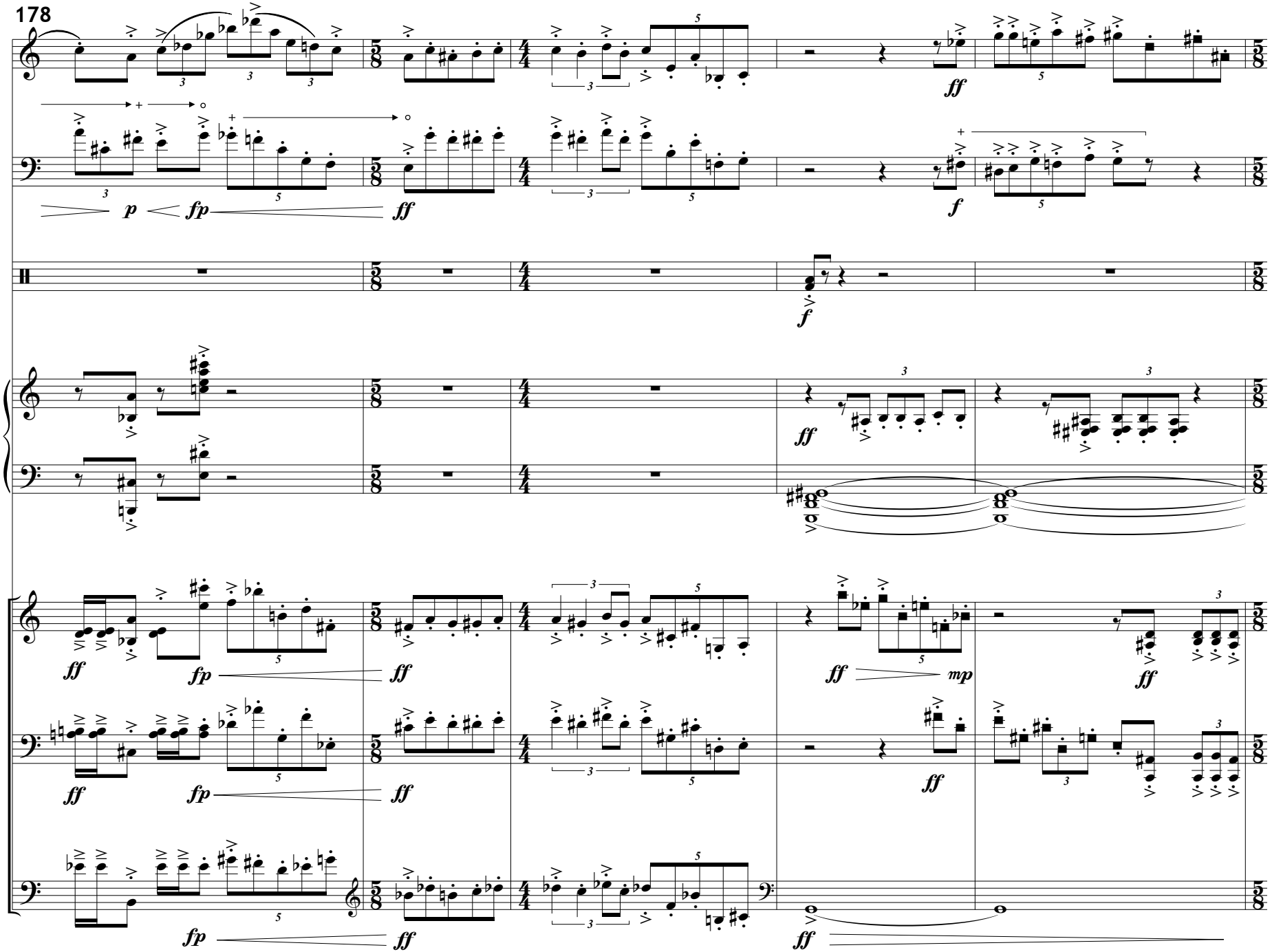

157
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
plunger mute
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

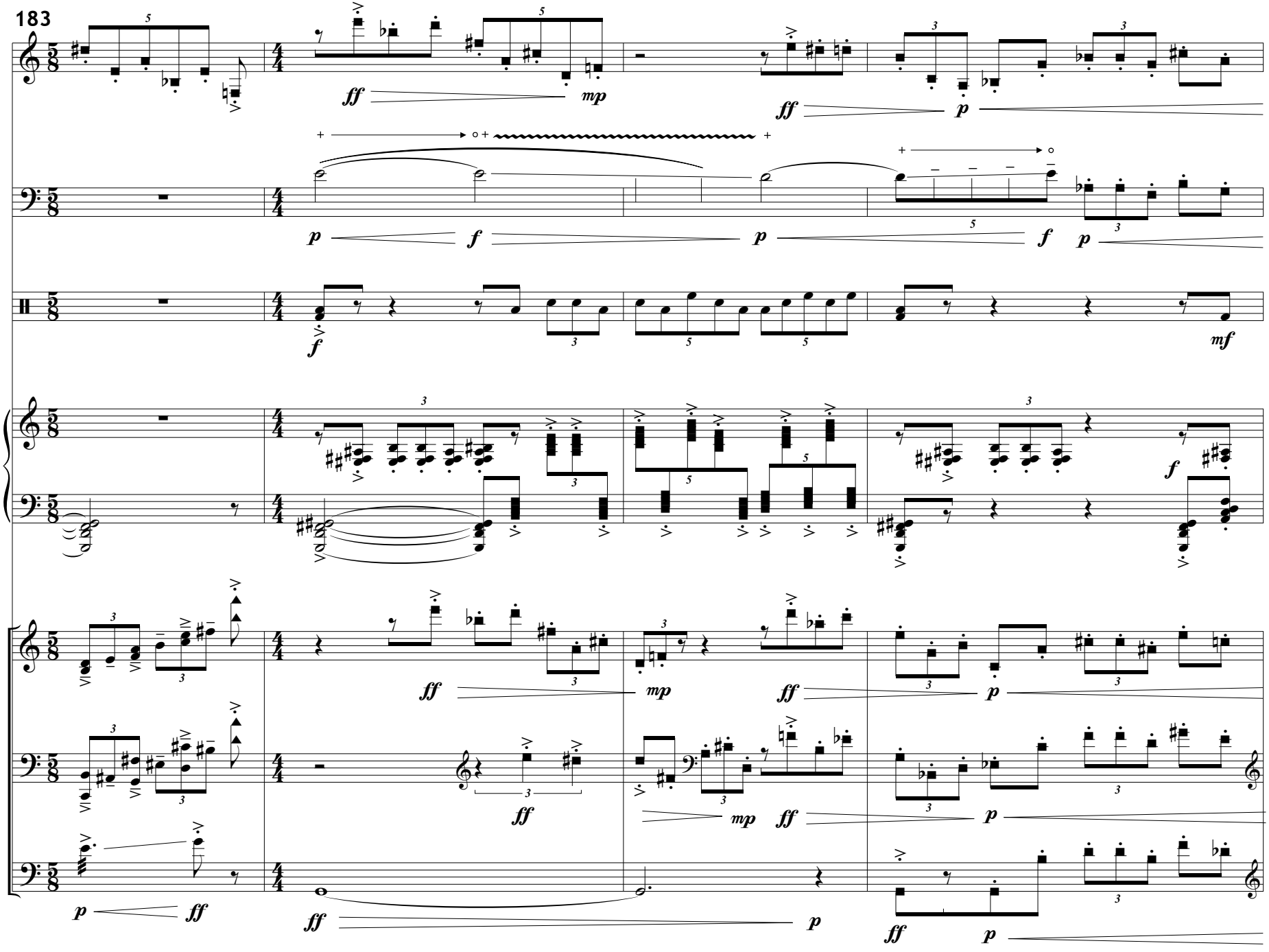


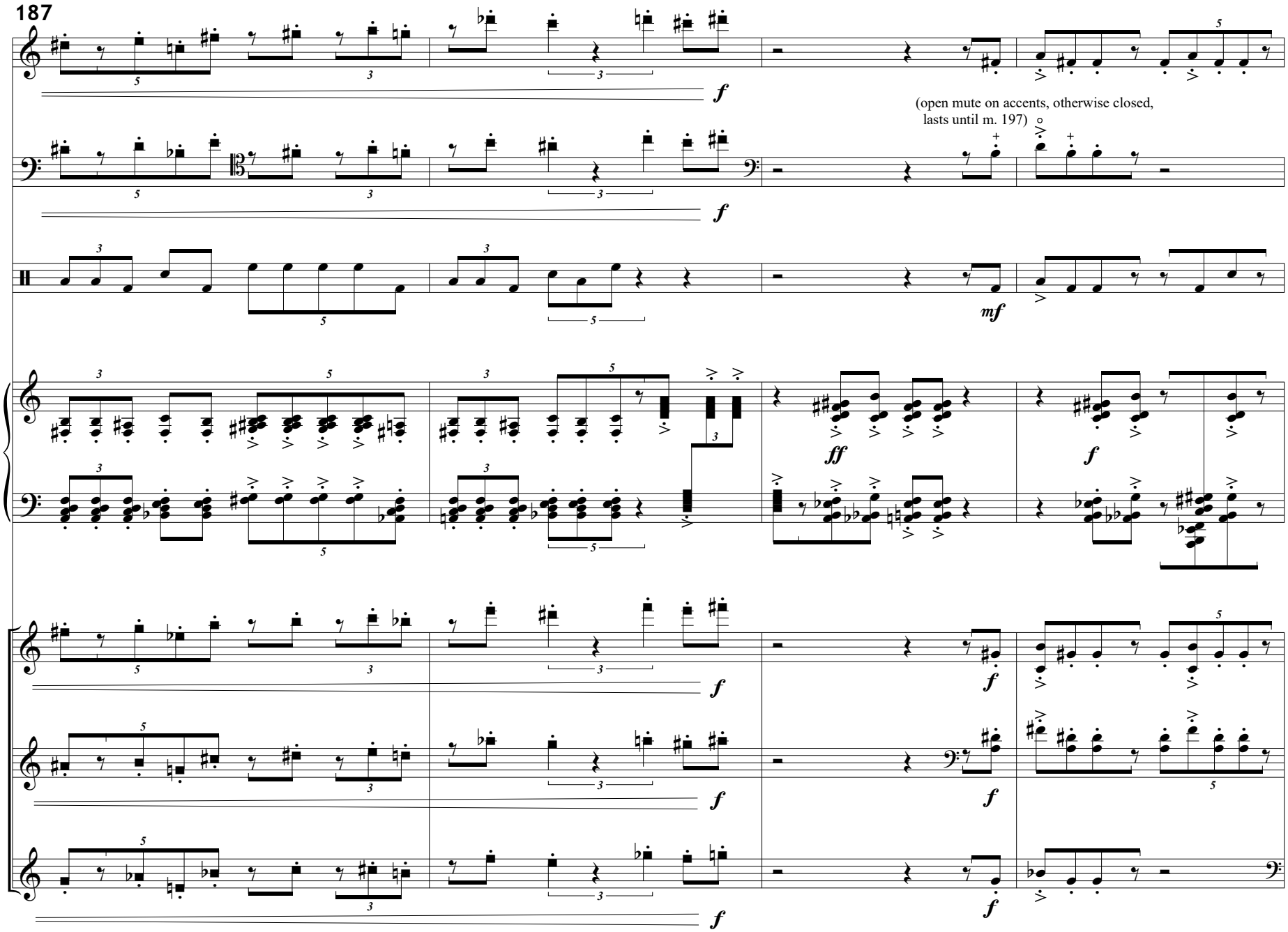
* Use elbow to modulate the pitch of the drum. Lower on the staff = no pressure/normal pitch; higher on the staff = max pressure/highest pitch

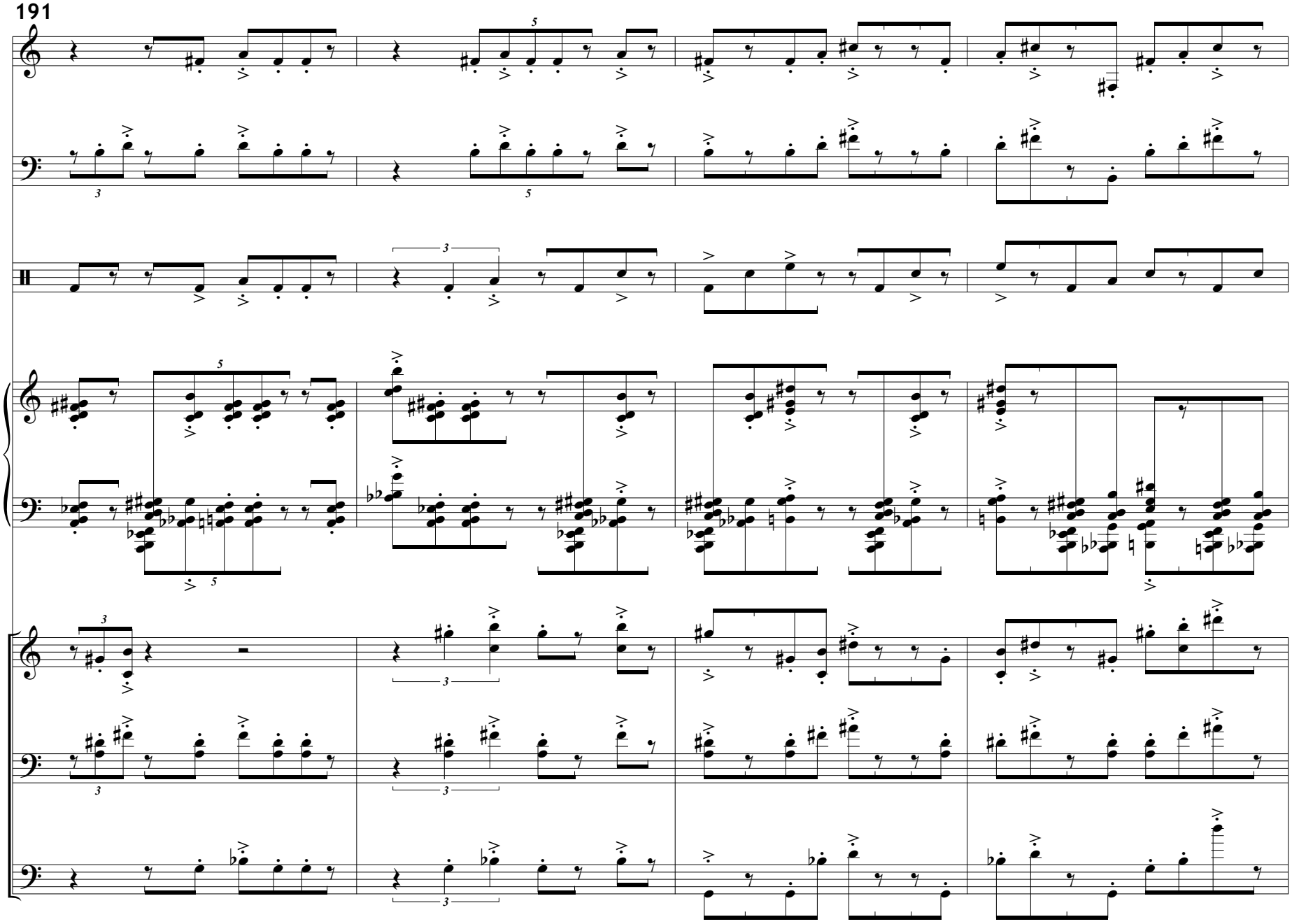

168
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
all toms
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
fp
f
mp
mf
p sub.
8va

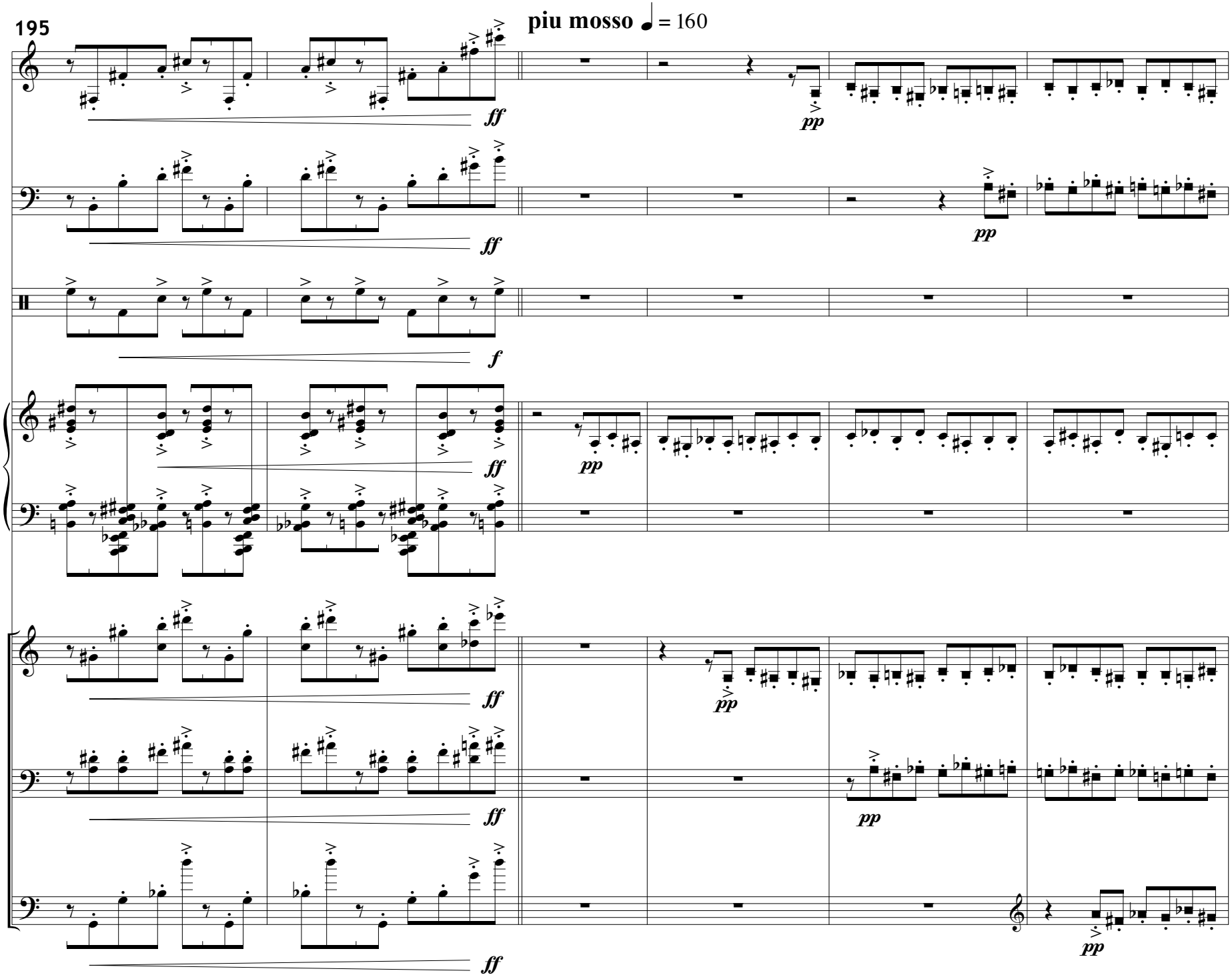

174
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
8va

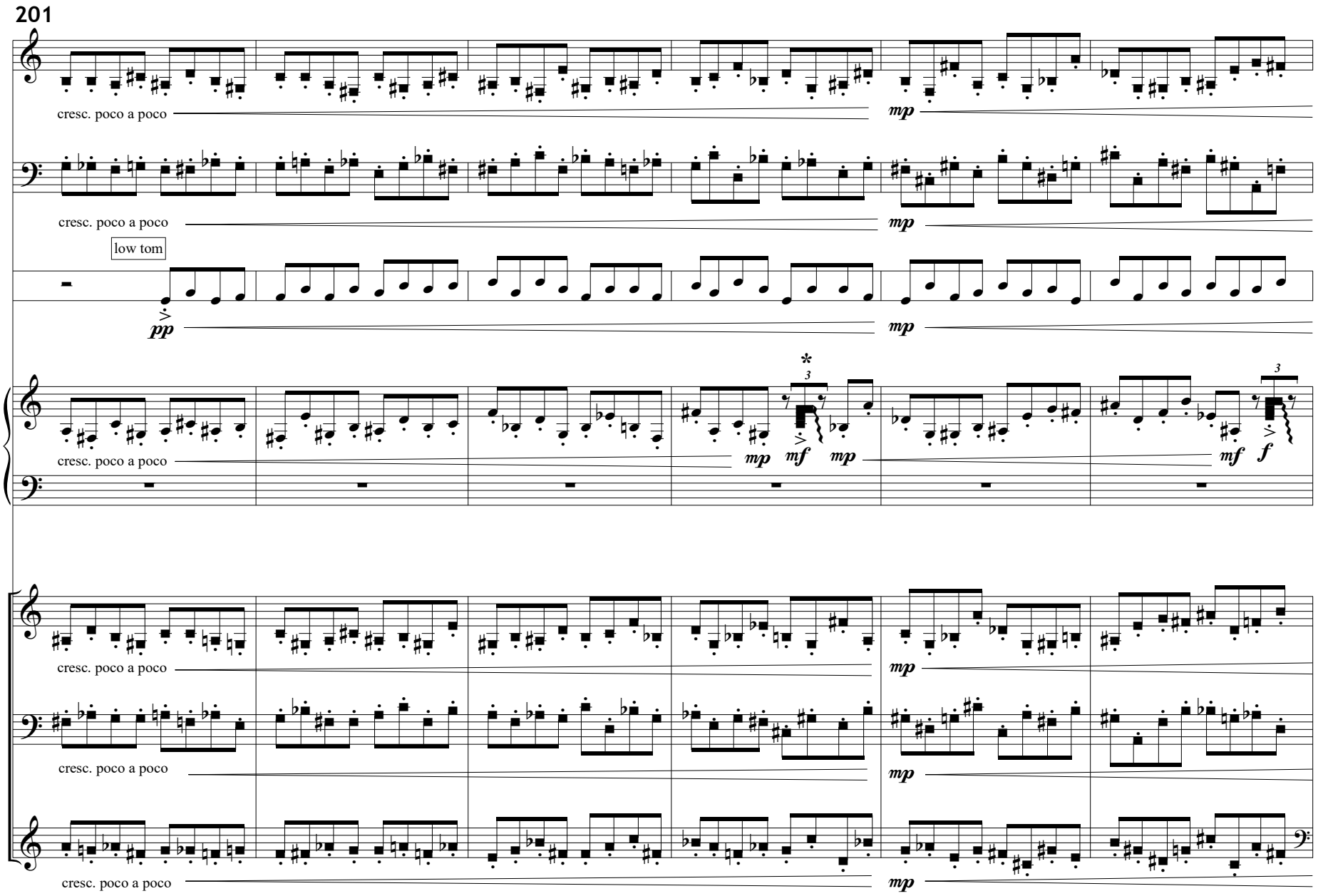

178
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.


183
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.

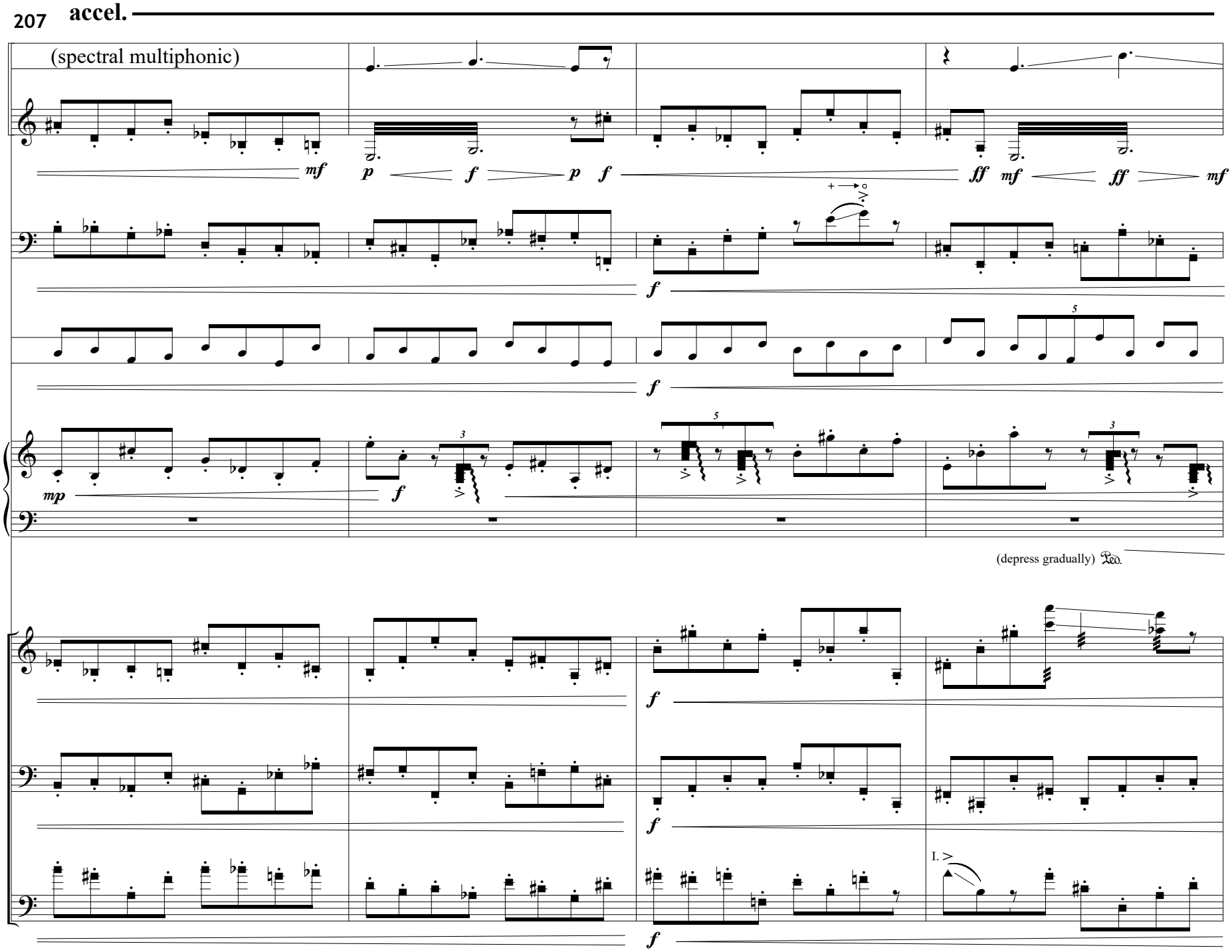

187
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(open mute on accents, otherwise closed, lasts until m. 197)

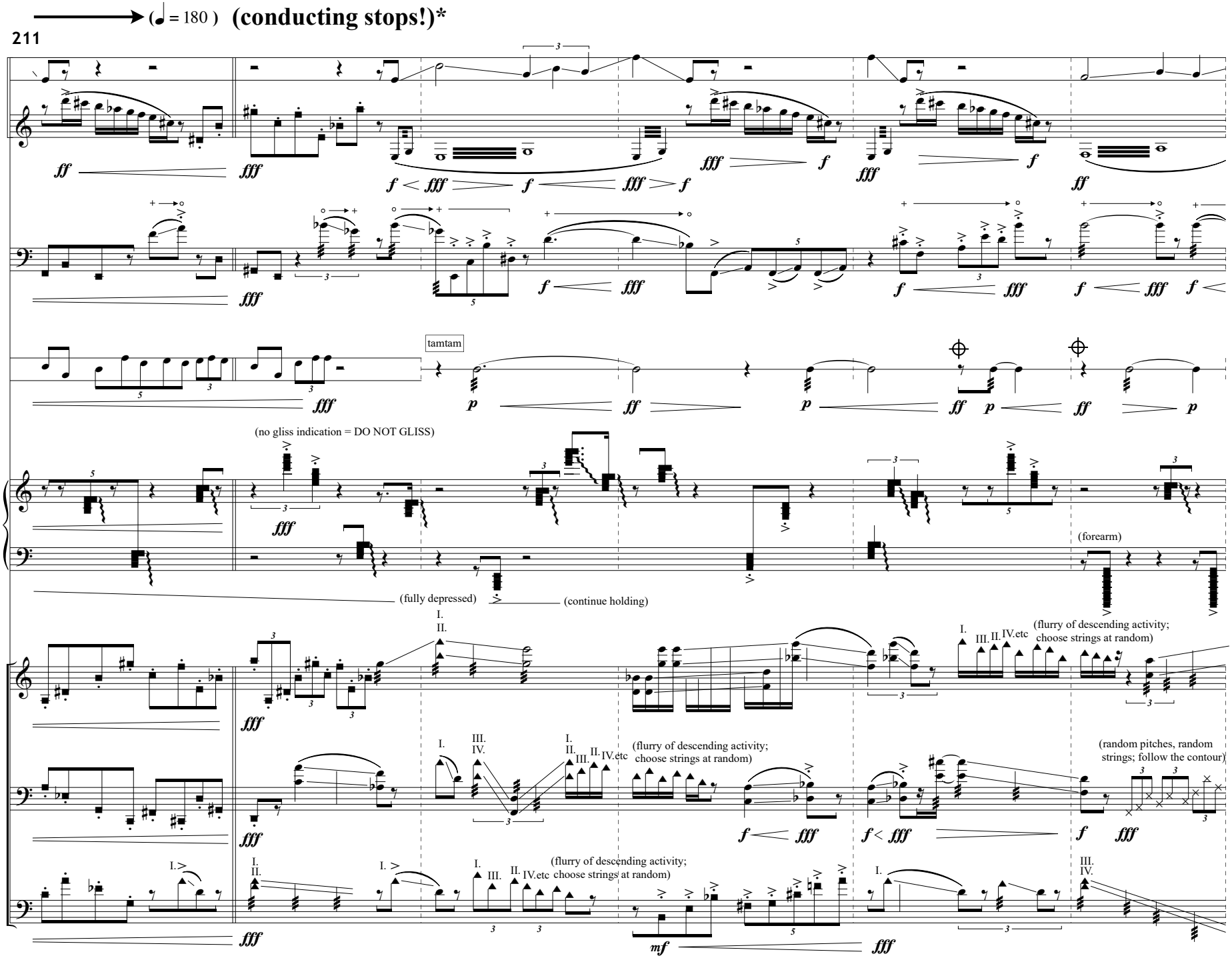

191
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.


195
piu mosso ♩ = 160
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ff
pp
f

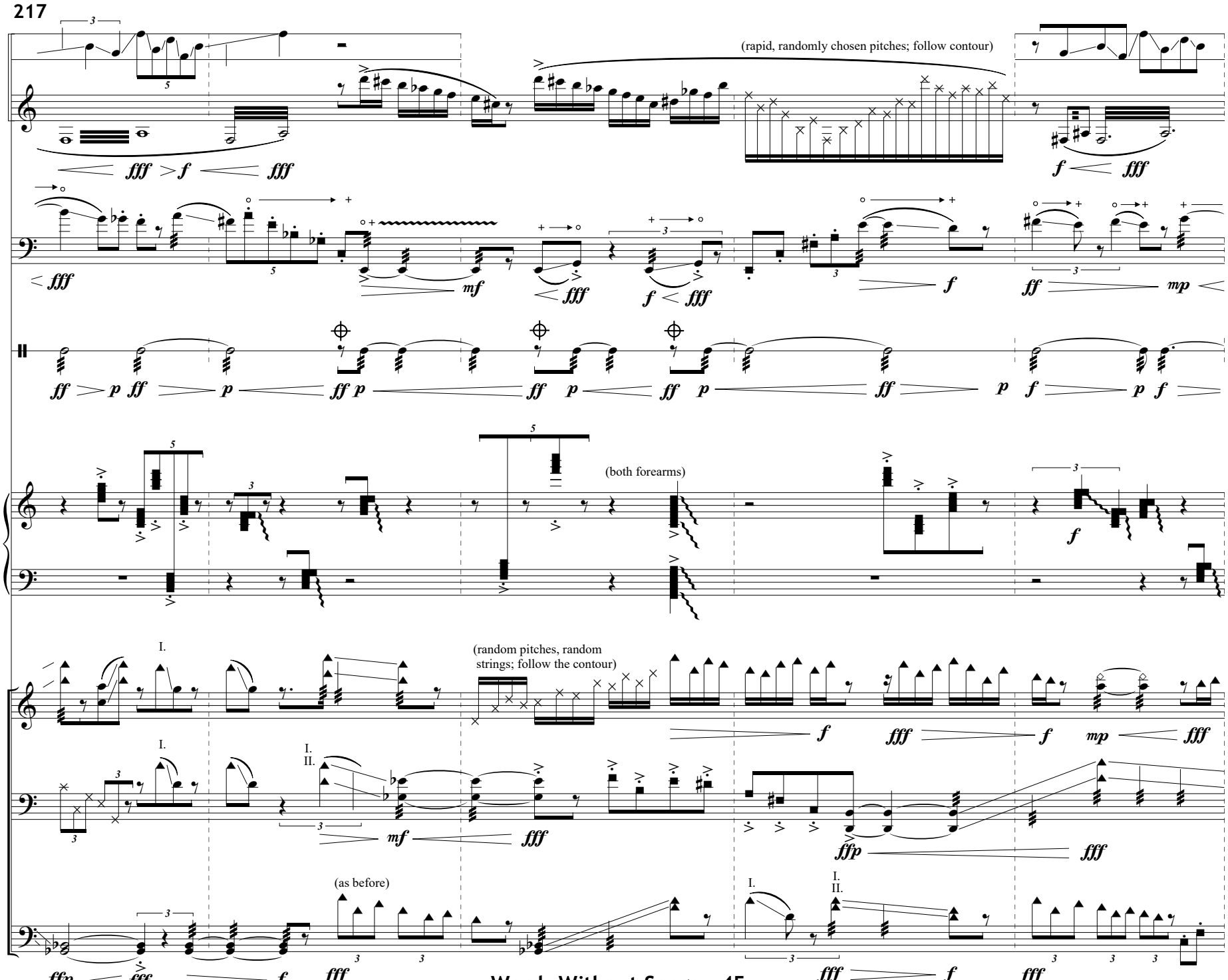


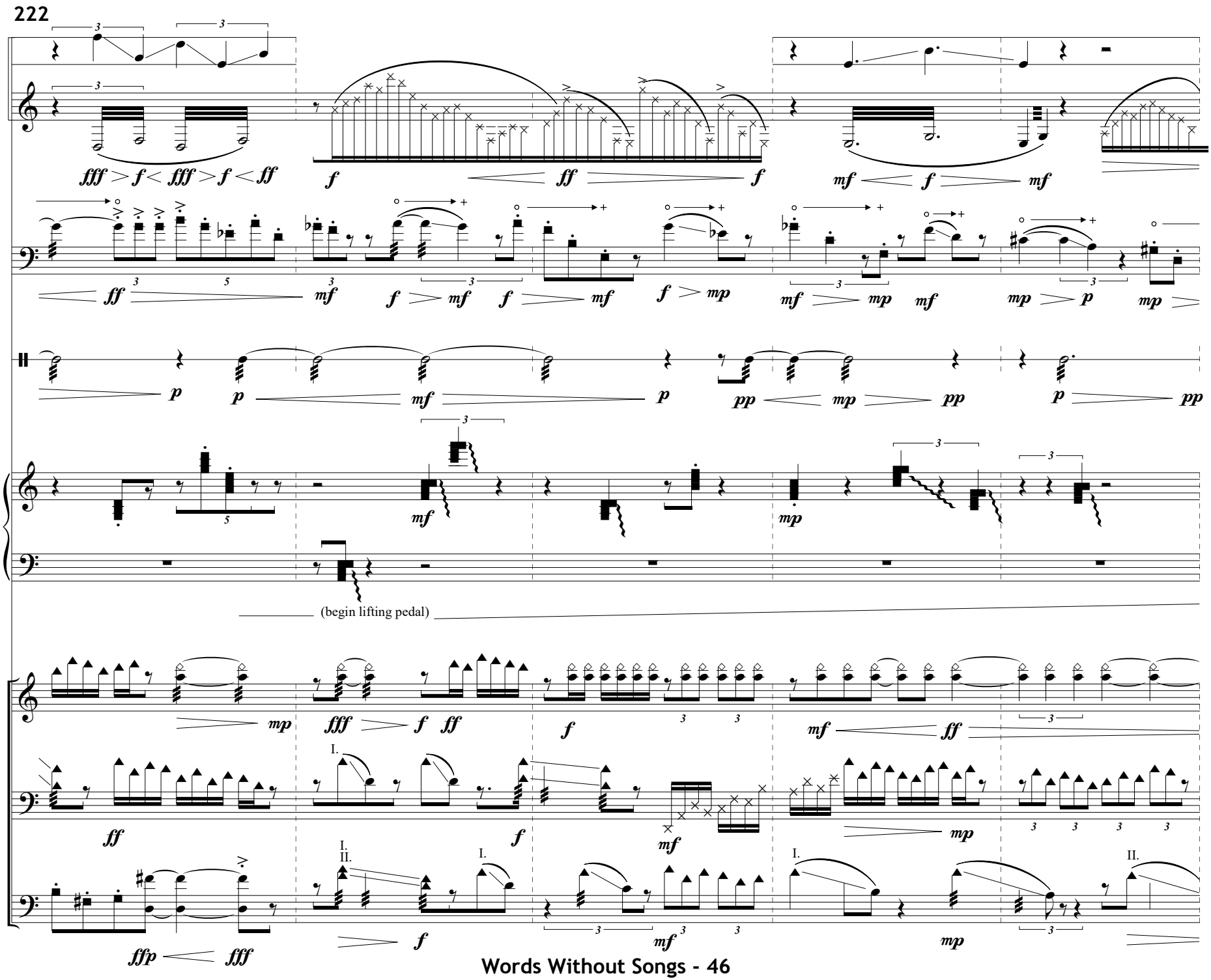
* For all such gestures, attack a cluster with the right hand and immediately gliss downward from the top of that cluster with the left over the length of an octave or so. This should always be heard as a single event; "shouting", not articulating a distinction between attack and gliss. Pitches/cluster locations and ranges all approximate/relative.

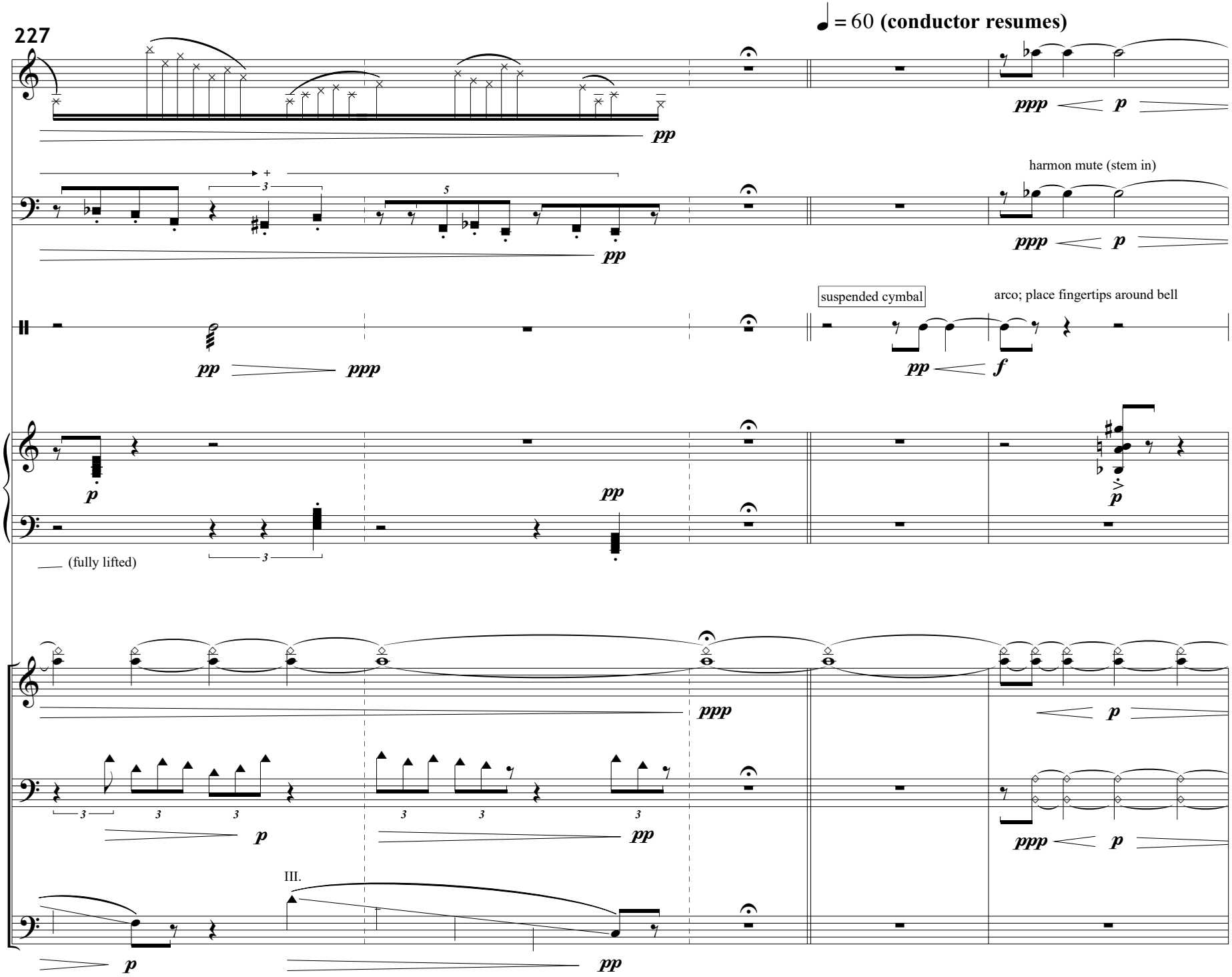

207
accel.
(spectral multiphonic)
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(depress gradually)
I.

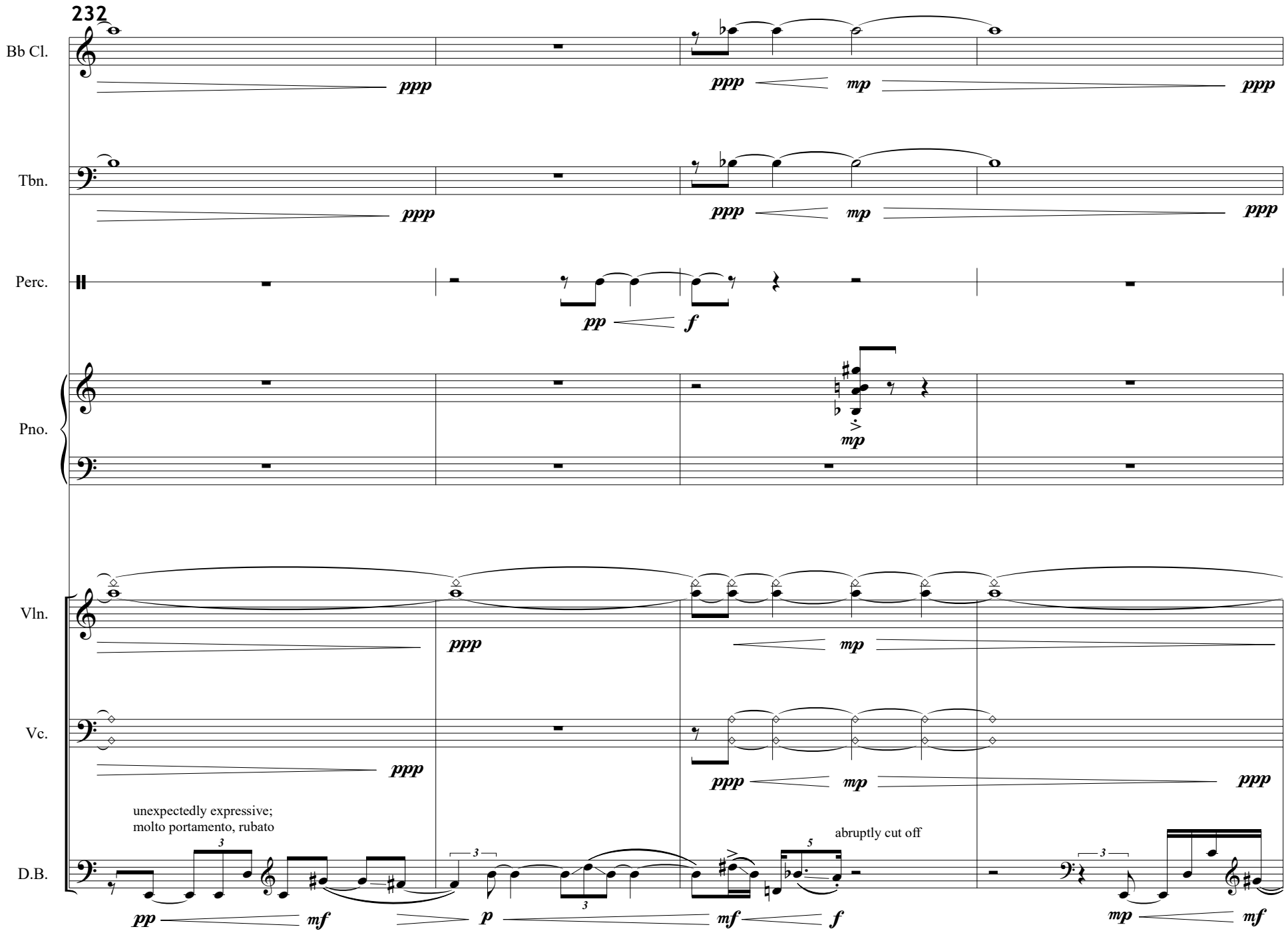


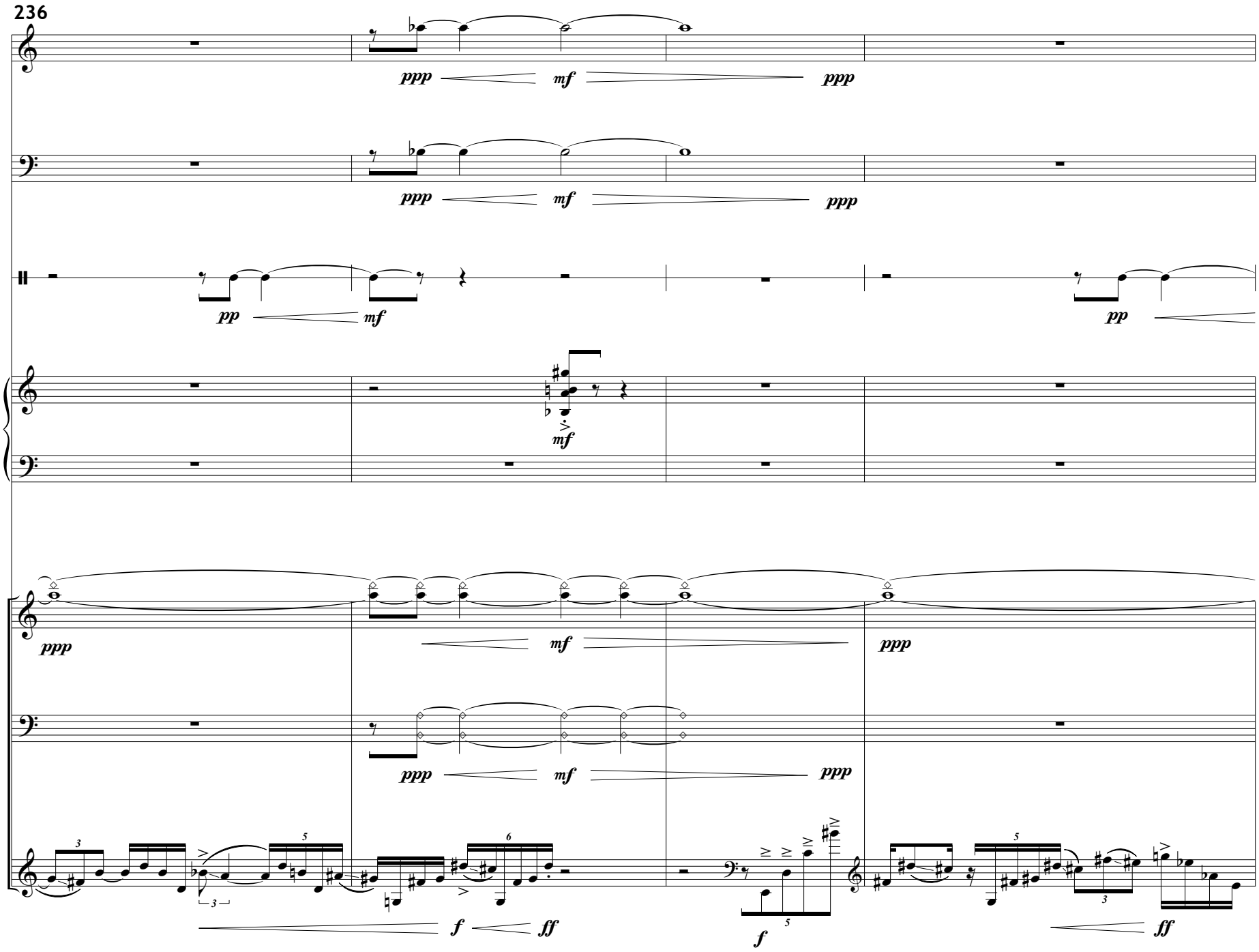
*At 212, the conductor should stop conducting. Players should continue to feel the relative rhythmic values but may adjust their personal tempo slightly faster or slower without heeding the activity of the other players. The conductor resumes by giving the downbeat to 230 for some time after all instruments but the violin have ceased playing.

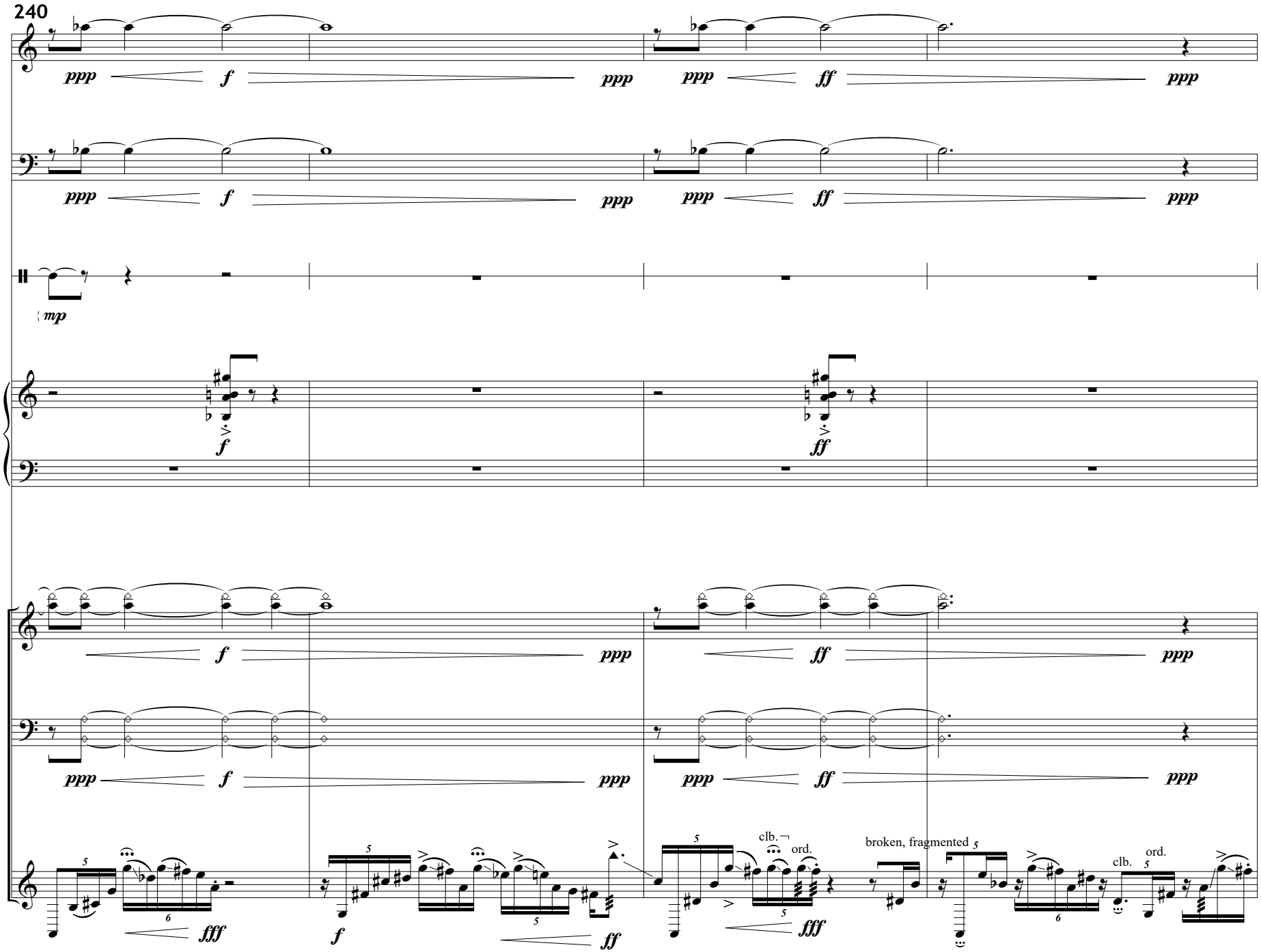

Bb Cl.
(rapid, randomly chosen pitches; follow contour)
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
(both forearms)
Vln.
(random pitches, random strings; follow the contour)
Vc.
D.B.
(as before)

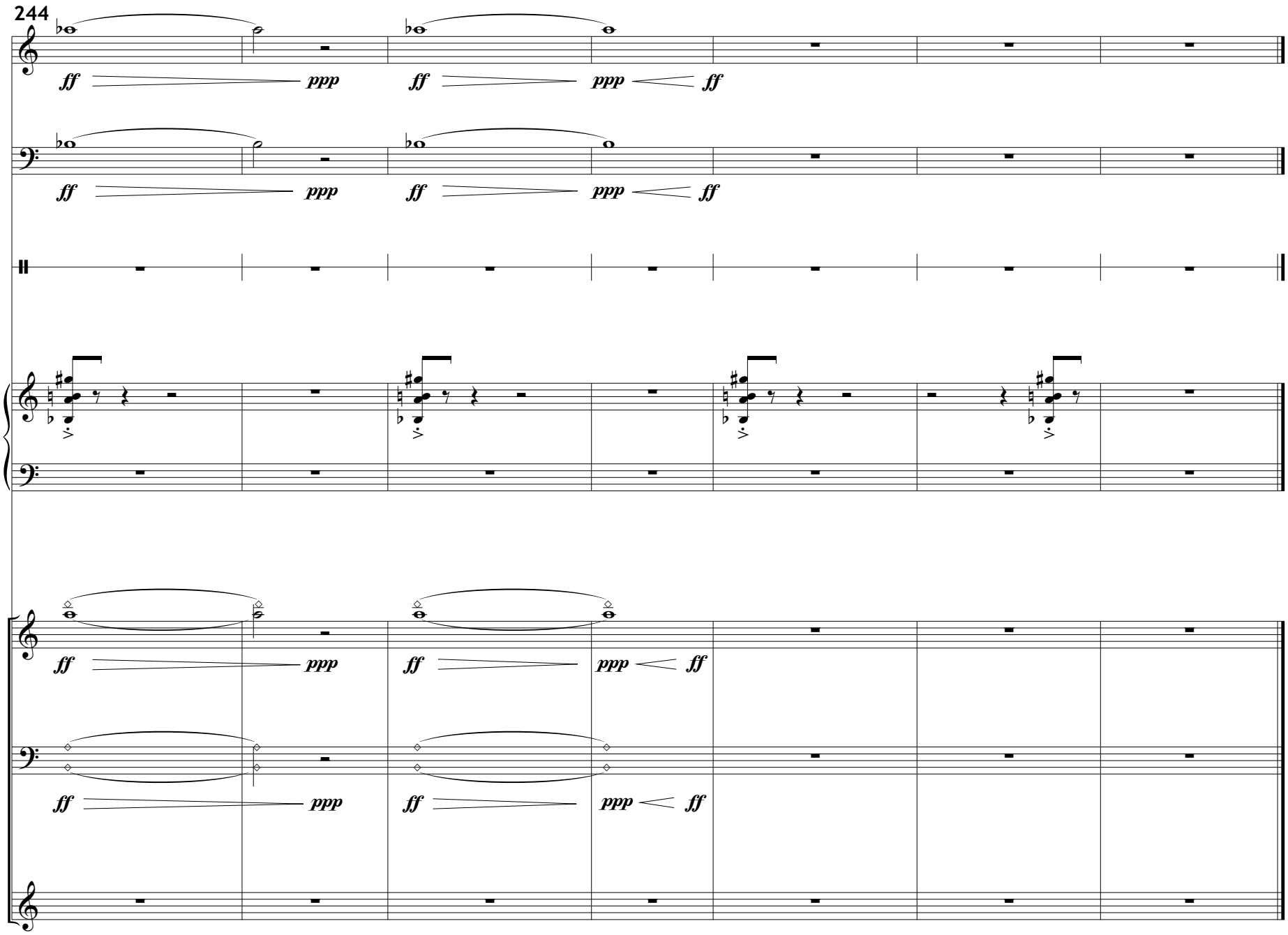

222
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
(begin lifting pedal)


227
♩ = 60 (conductor resumes)
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
harmon mute (stem in)
Perc.
suspended cymbal
arco; place fingertips around bell
Pno.
(fully lifted)
Vln.
Vc.
III.
D.B.


232
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ppp
mp
pp
f
unexpectedly expressive;
molto portamento, rubato
abruptly cut off
mf
p


236
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ppp
mf
pp
f
ff


240
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ppp
f
ff
fff
mp
clb.
ord.
broken, fragmented


244
Bb Cl.
Tbn.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vc.
D.B.
ff
ppp
ff
ppp
ff