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Further Letters from the Earth

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Sarah Bassingthwaighte

Further Letters from the Earth

for flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon,
horn, tuba, percussion, piano, and strings

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Further Letters from the Earth – Sarah Bassingthwaighte
Performance Notes

Percussion I:

- Splash cymbal (w/ bow)
- Vibraphone (w/ bow)
- Rain stick
- Thundersheet
- Slapstick
- Ratchet
- Superball or hard rubber mallet

Percussion II:

- Bass drum
- Flexitone
- Bull roar
- Gravel box (I will provide if needed)
- Pot of water (I will provide)
- Bedsheets (I will provide)
- Vibraslap
- Maracas
- Snare

Piano

Some techniques are performed inside the piano. These include flexibility bands, ping pong balls, and quarters.

Flexibility bands – any wide, thin piece of rubber will work (so will fishing Line). The band is to be strung around all of the strings of a given pitch. To play, slowly pull the band back and forth to vibrate the string.

Ping pong balls – these are to be dropped in the specified section of the piano, but not on specific pitches. With 3 or 4 balls, the speed (as well as stopping and starting) can be controlled.

Quarters – these are to be drawn across the top of the wound strings (low pitches) inside the piano. Moving side to side can provide an additional glissando effect.

Winds

Varied wind sounds means both pitched and unpitched sounds, in various ranges, lengths, and textures.

Flute – include airy flutter tongue, whistle tones, bent tones
Clarinet – include airy flutter tongue, bent tones, quiet multiphonics
Oboe – include whistle tones (can be done on the inhale), no reed, only reed
Bassoon – include airy flutter tongue, no reed, only reed, quiet multiphonics
French Horn – include mouth piece whistles, reverse mouthpiece, sing & play quiet flutters, glissandi
Tuba – include quiet growl tones, fluttering keys, sing & play, didgeridoo effects

Strings

Extended techniques include scratch tones, pizz glissandi, quarter tone bends

Further Letters from the Earth
By Sarah Bassingthwaighte
Program Notes

Further Letters from the Earth is a piece for chamber orchestra written for the "After Y2K" concert given by The Sound Ensemble in Seattle, WA on January 7, 2017.

The piece is made up of 4 continuous movements: Playful, Heat, Unleashed, After. The motivation for the piece was my interest in exploring our complex relationship with the natural world since the year 2000. The 1st movement, Playful, is full of the sounds that I associate with being outdoors – running, splashing, birds calling, wind blowing. I'm like thousands of other Pacific Northwesterners in that I love to spend time out in the mountains, and the soundscape is as special as the visual landscape. In order to summon these sounds, the players engage in quite a few extended techniques, such as creating wind sounds, dropping ping pong balls in the piano, special articulation techniques, and so on. The 2nd movement, Heat, is a continuation of the first, but with an increase in tension. Here I tried to imitate the sounds I associate with Heat, including melting, burning, scorching, and steam. Also, with increased heat comes increased disease, and the discomfort and sickness is part of the tension that I hoped to convey. The 3rd movement, Unleashed, is the sound of the storms we've seen increase over the last 17 years: typhoons, hurricanes, earthquakes. Many of these have been affected by human activity, and there promises to be more storms as we all continue our disruptive behaviors. The 4th movement, After, is a reflection on what happens after the humans have either extinguished themselves or have come to some sort of uneasy peace with the natural world. While I don't believe humans to be separate from the natural world, I do see human behavior as having an enormous effect on the non-human world. We live in a time when our choices will affect not only the health and well-being of all people, but of the entire living planet.

Every member of the ensemble is asked to perform in an unusual manner in the piece. Almost every player at some

point gets up from their seat to manipulate sound inside the piano, and also every player explores timbral possibilities in their instrument.

Questions for Sarah Bassingthwaighte:

1. Can you tell us a bit about your piece that Sound Ensemble is premiering in the Life After Y2K performance?
(i.e. What does it sound like? What is the instrumentation? What inspired it?) Will you be performing the work?
2. What are you most looking forward to with the Life After Y2K performance, and with the future of the Sound Ensemble?

It is my hope that performing this piece, and listening to it, is actually pretty fun. Each player explores unusual sounds on their instruments, from multiphonics to wind sounds to percussive techniques, and most of the players get up out of their chair at some point to make sound inside the piano (so there's a bit of a visual element to the piece).

The inspiration for Further Letters from the Earth is the complex relationship between humans and the natural world since the year 2000. I spend a lot of time in our beautiful mountains, as well as on the water, and the first part of the piece are some of the sounds that I enjoy so much: splashing water, rain, wind, birds. I use a drone to represent the sense of quiet I experience when I'm out backpacking – this might be inappropriate or ironic, since it actually is the escape from the drone of everyday electronic noise and traffic that I love. Then the tension increases, and the sounds of heat, melting, burning and stress replace the playful sounds. This gradually leads to the third section, called "Unleashed," which is driving and energetic. This section is inspired by the hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes and so on that have occurred in the last decade and is in part human-caused. This section is the most rhythmically compelling, and the most traditional musically. The last section, called "After," represents an uneasy peace with the natural world.

The sounds throughout the piece are interesting and "other-wordly." I call for exercise bands threaded through the strings of the piano (and operated by the other instrumentalists) – these create an eerie sound that has no attack, that sort of floats above the rest of the music. Each instrument has special capabilities – such as helicopter tonguing in the bassoon, growling in the tuba, or singing while playing the flute. I strive for a timeless quality for at least parts of the piece. I really enjoyed experimenting with ping pong balls on the strings of the piano – a great sound!

The Sound Ensemble is an exciting and inspiring group for me to work with. Everyone in the group has a sense of adventure as well as technical mastery of their instrument, and the energy is so positive and stimulating. Bobby is a strong, organized and inspirational leader, and helps pull together this amazing group of musicians. On this concert, we've got a great mix of contemporary music. While all the pieces are interesting, I'm especially excited to do Paczkowski's Deep Decline for chamber ensemble and live electronics (written in 2016). And, at the concerts, the players mix with the audience at every opportunity, and discuss the music and the instruments. I'm hoping that some audience members will be interested in our unusual instruments and techniques, and give us the opportunity to demonstrate.

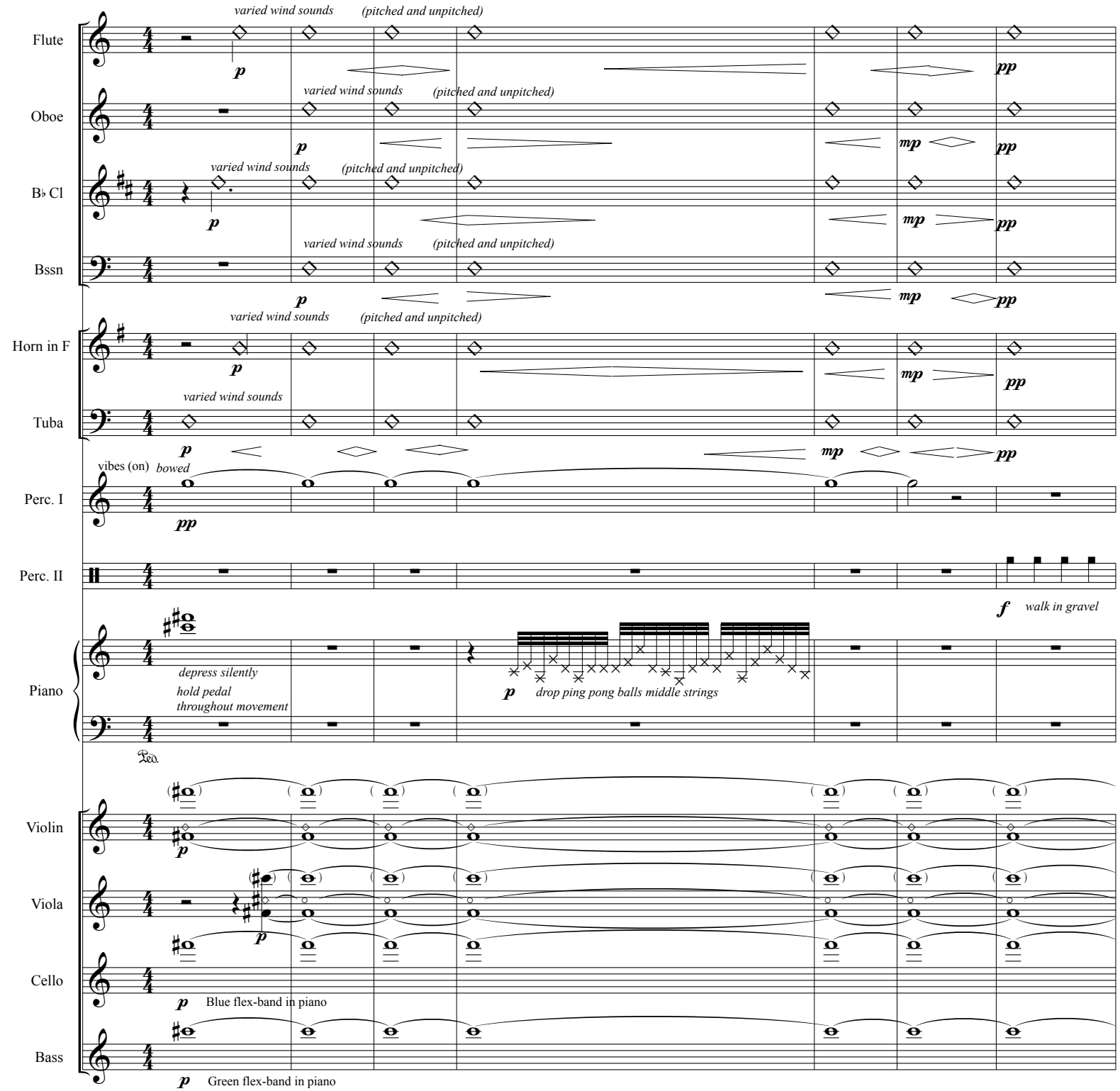
Score

Further Letters from the Earth

for chamber orchestra

s. bassingthwaighte
2017

I. Playful ♩ = 56



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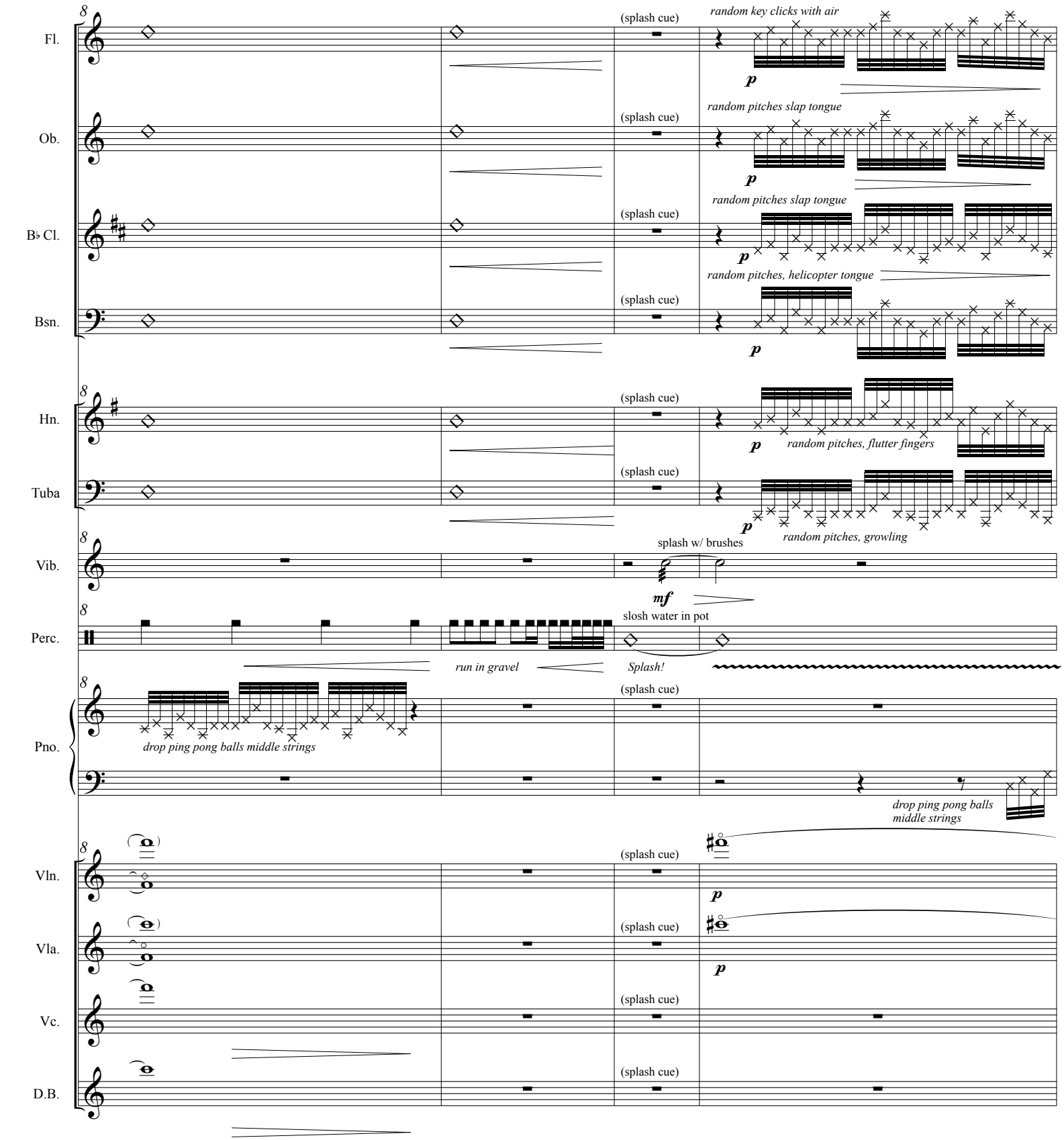
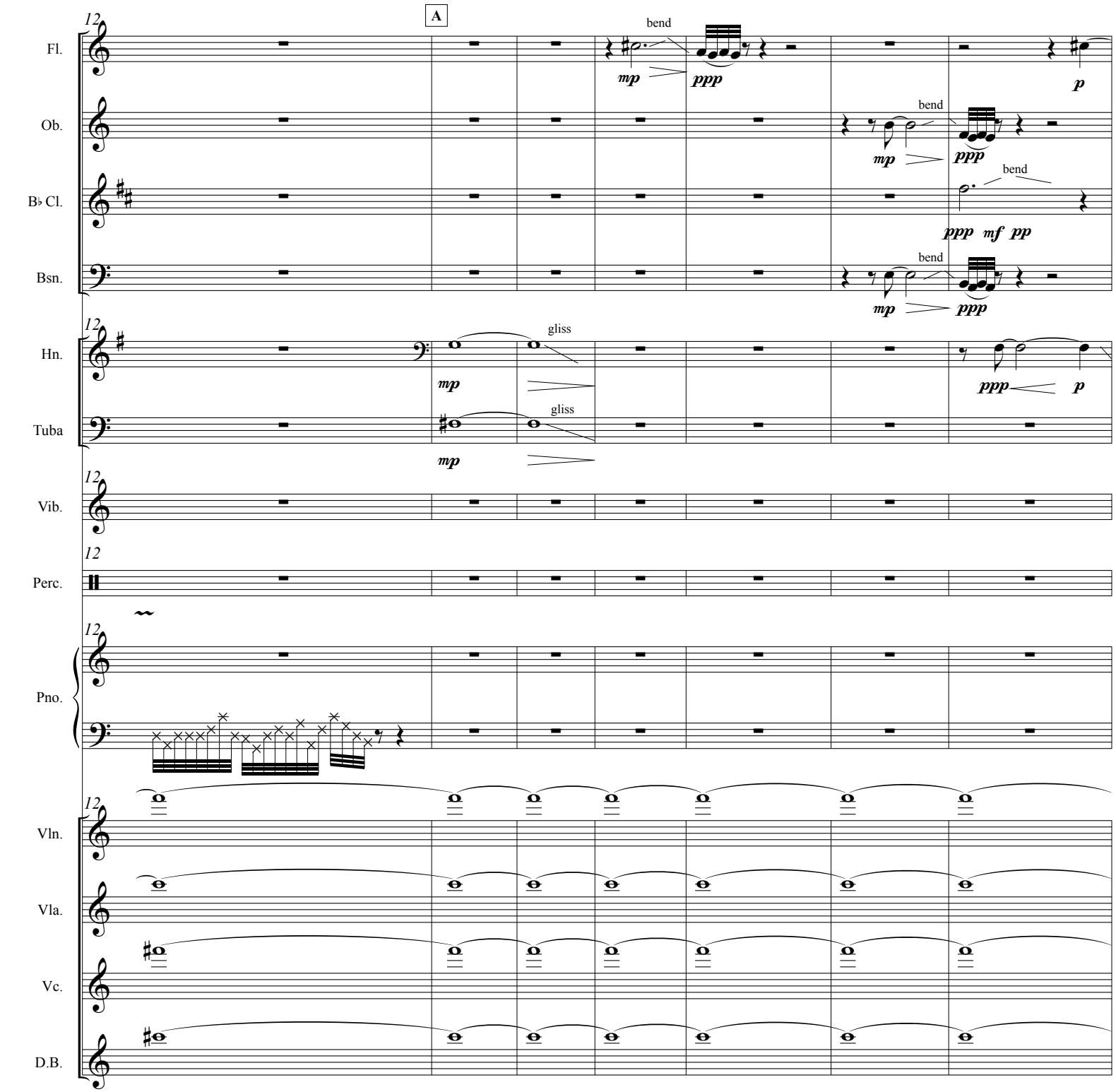
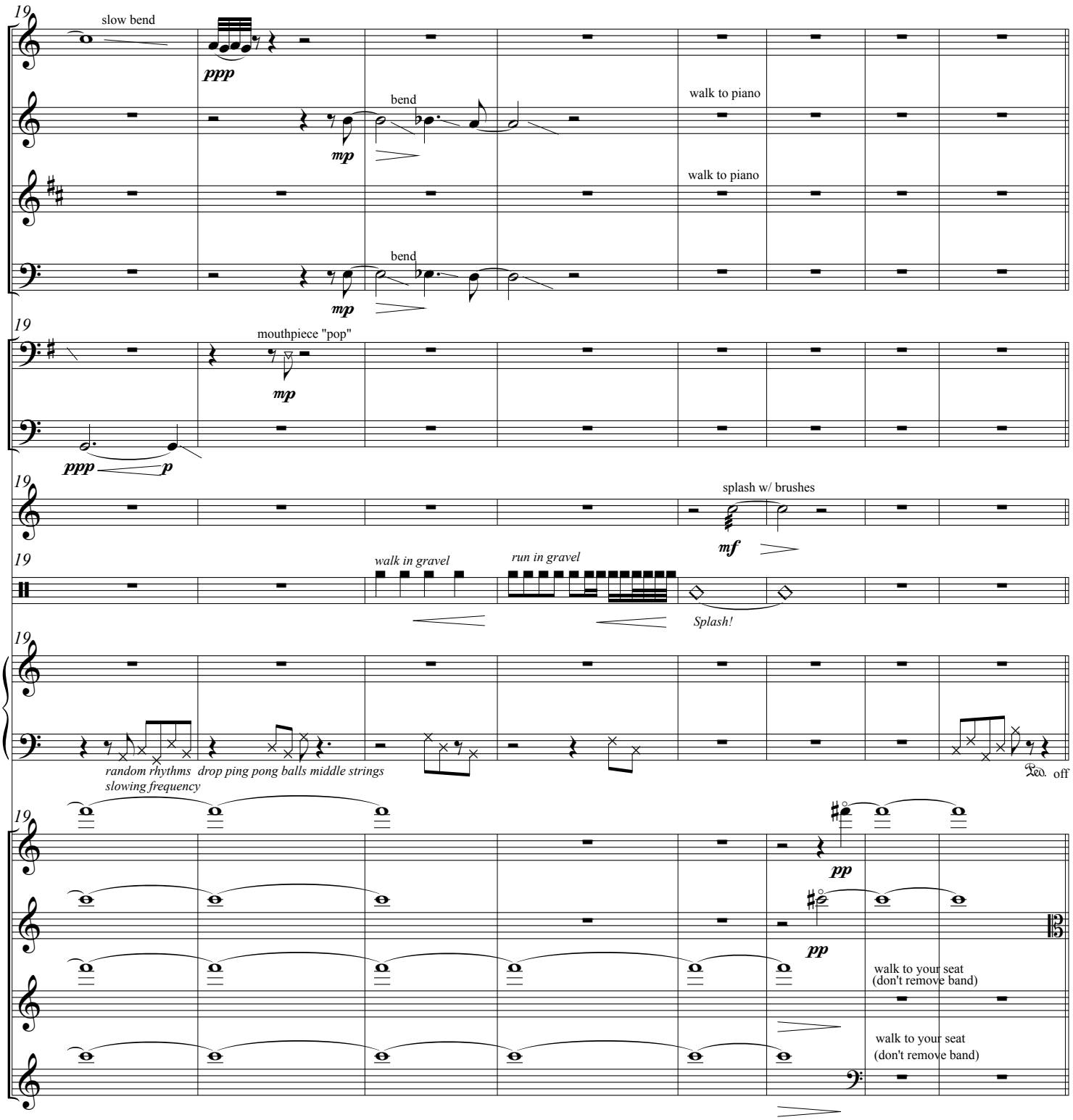
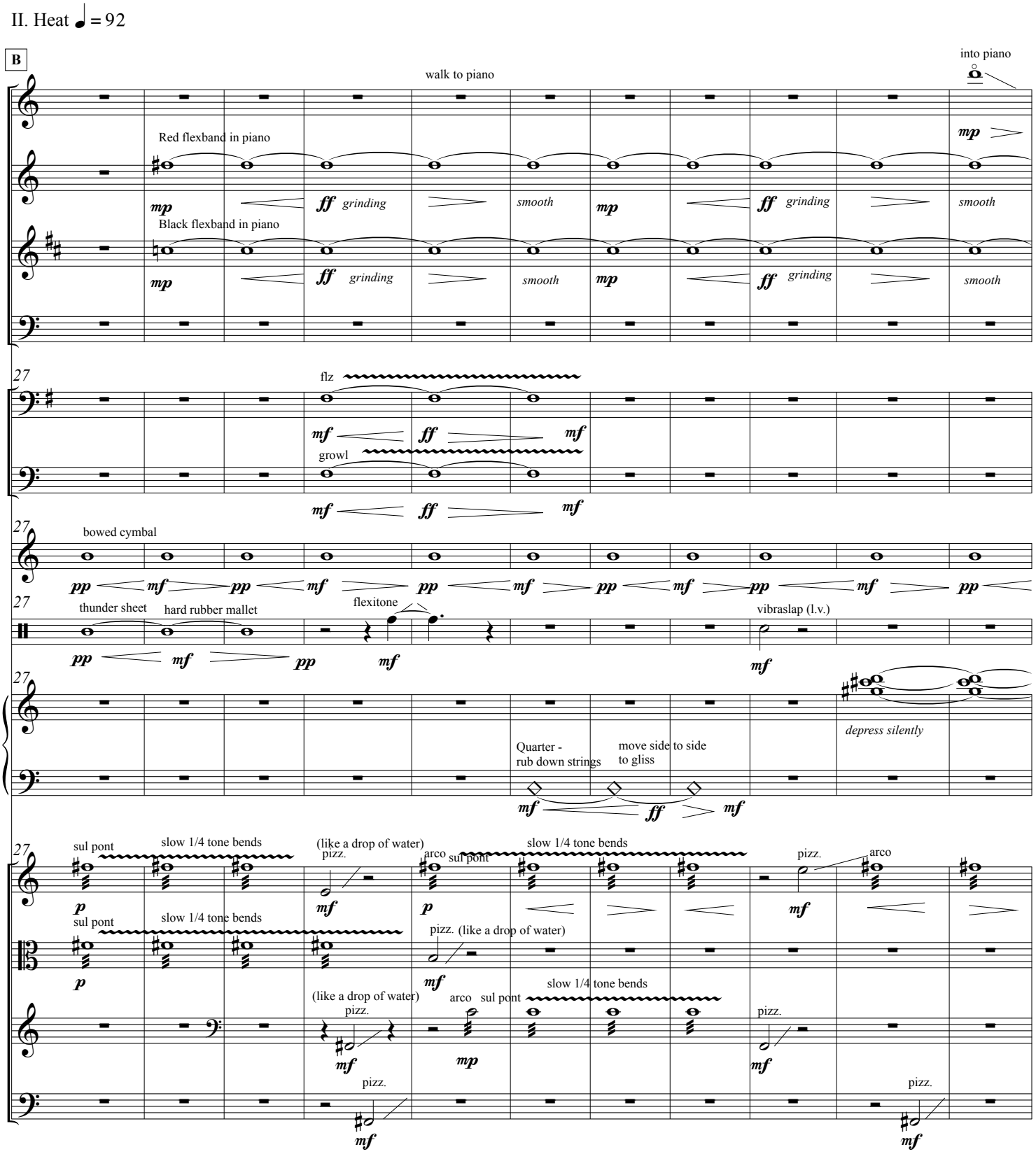
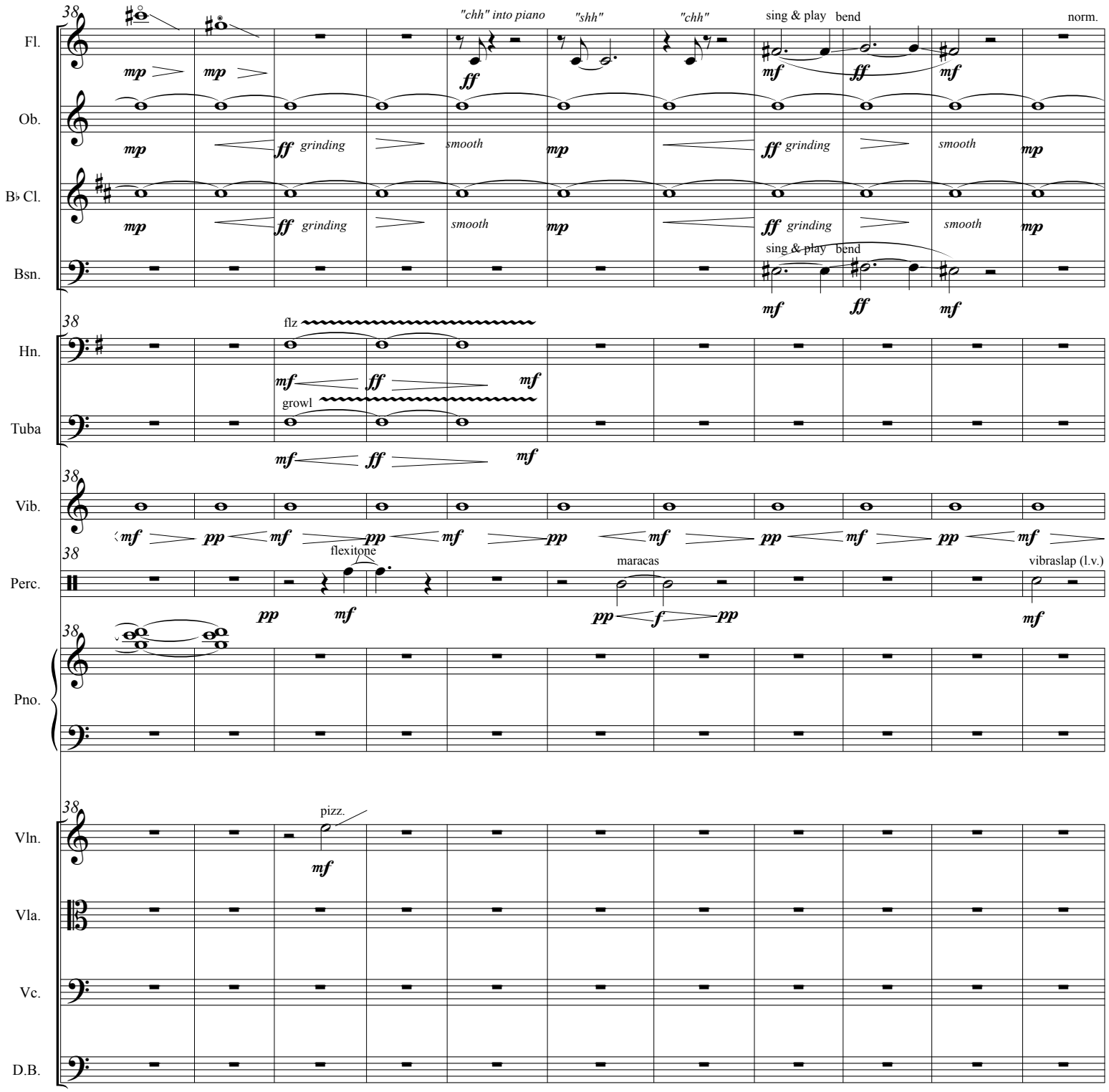
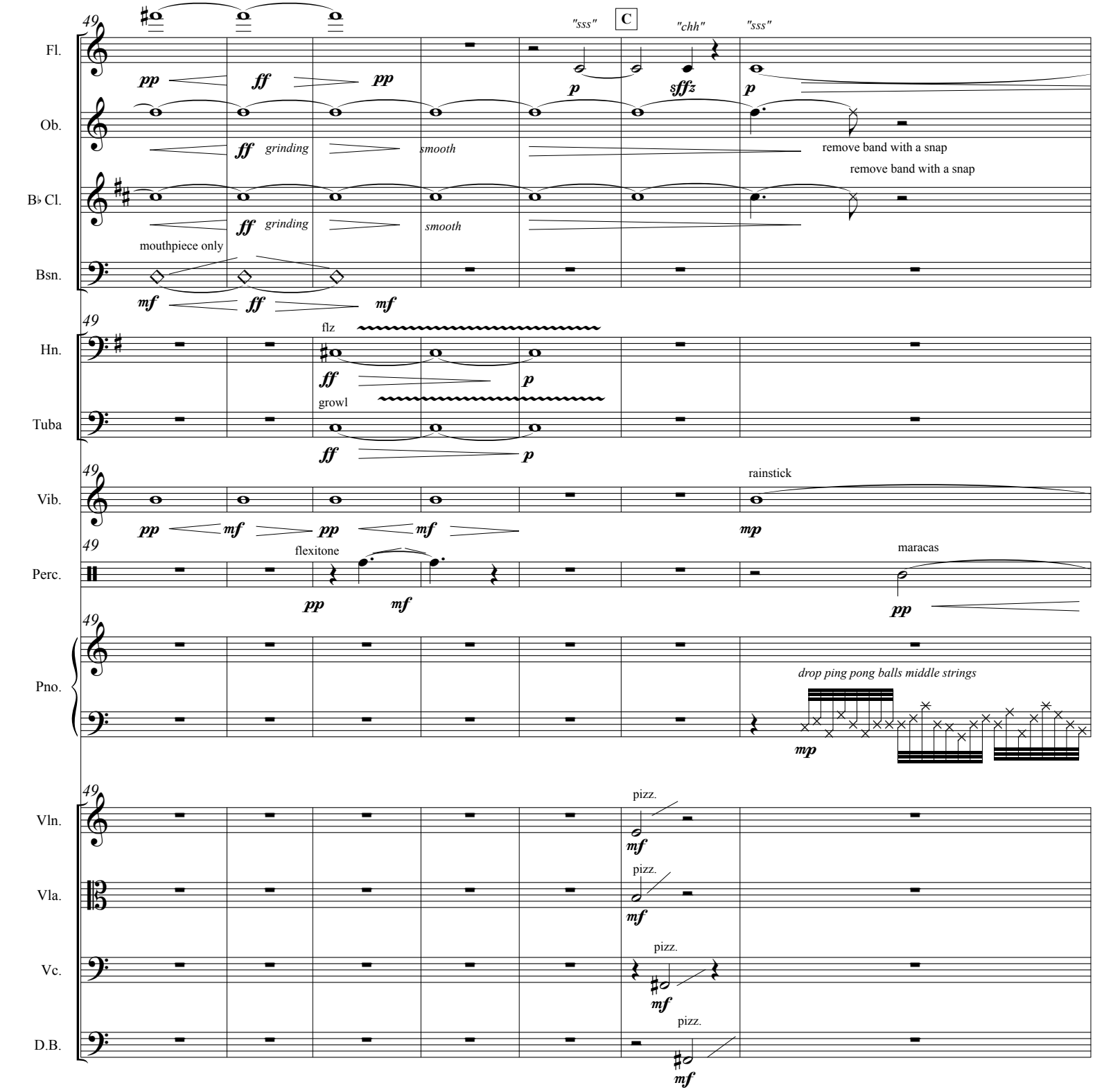

Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
(splash cue)
random key clicks with air
random pitches slap tongue
random pitches slap tongue
random pitches, helicopter tongue
random pitches, flutter fingers
random pitches, growling
splash w/ brushes
slosh water in pot
run in gravel
Splash!
drop ping pong balls middle strings
drop ping pong balls middle strings

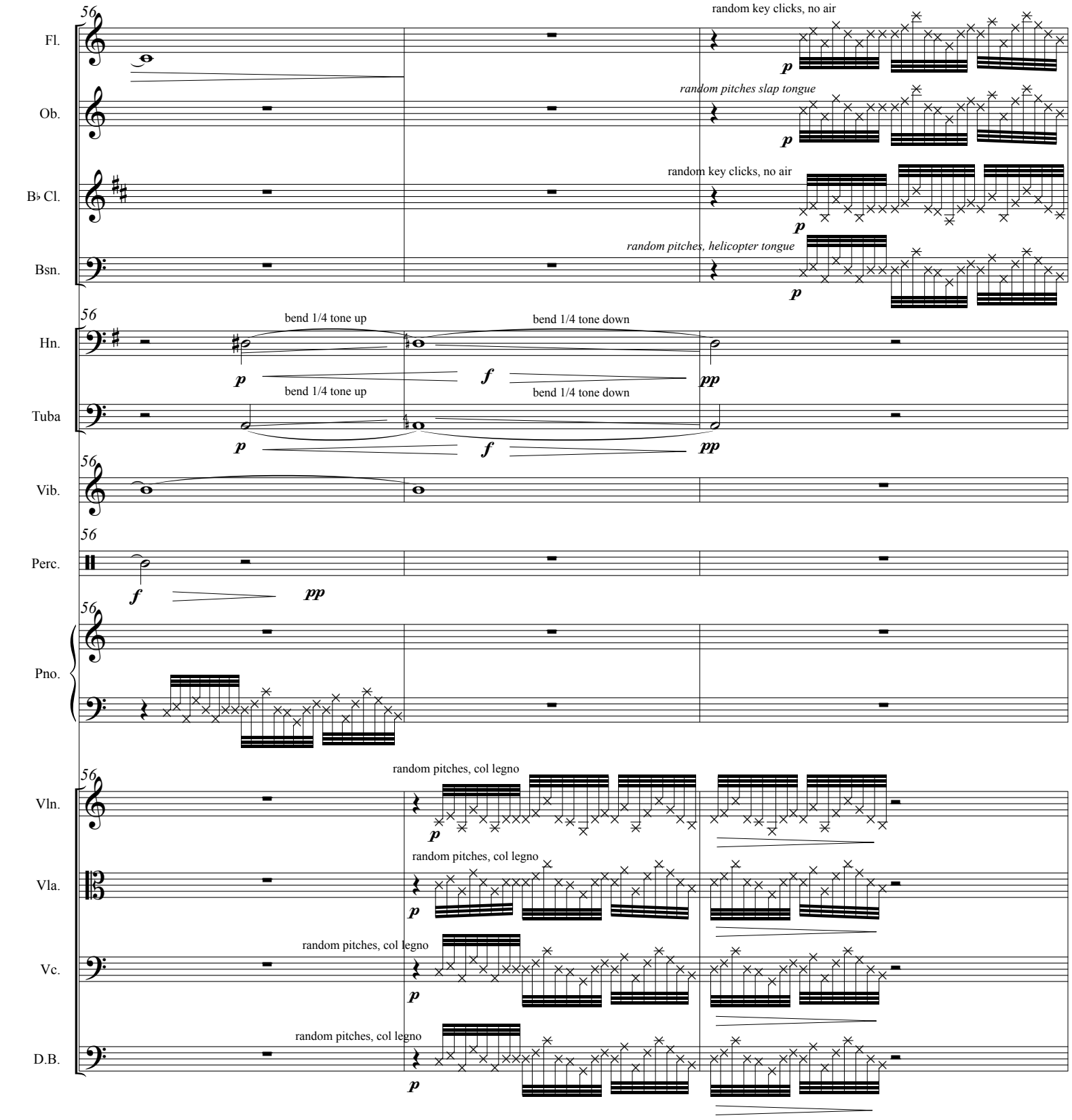

A
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
bend
gliss
mp
ppp
p
mf
pp

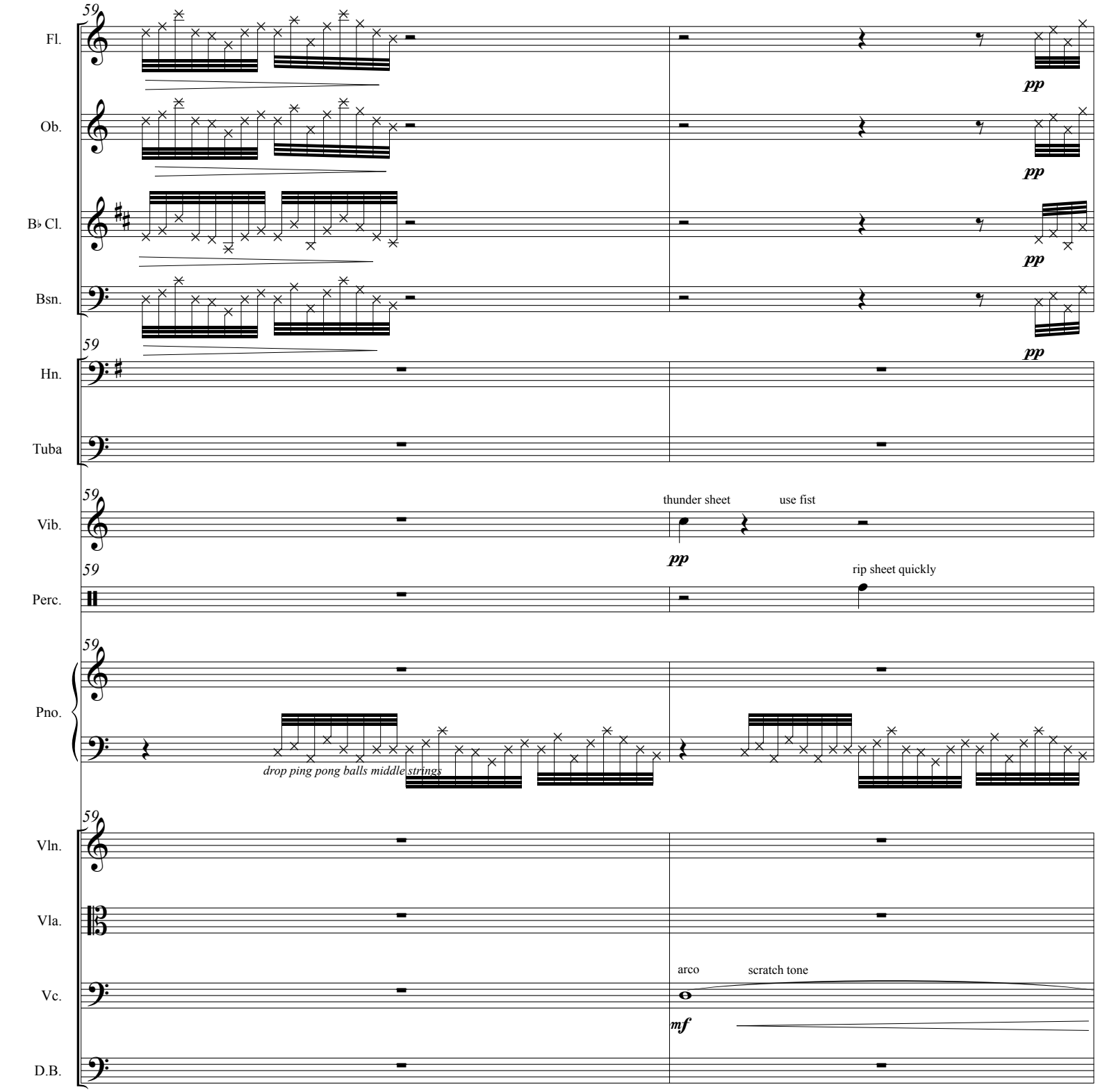

19
Fl.
slow bend
ppp
Ob.
bend
mp
walk to piano
B♭ Cl.
walk to piano
Bsn.
bend
mp
19
Hn.
mouthpiece "pop"
mp
Tuba
ppp
p
19
Vib.
splash w/ brushes
mf
19
Perc.
walk in gravel
run in gravel
Splash!
19
Pno.
random rhythms
slowing frequency
drop ping pong balls middle strings
Ped. off
19
Vln.
pp
Vla.
pp
Vc.
walk to your seat
(don't remove band)
D.B.
walk to your seat
(don't remove band)

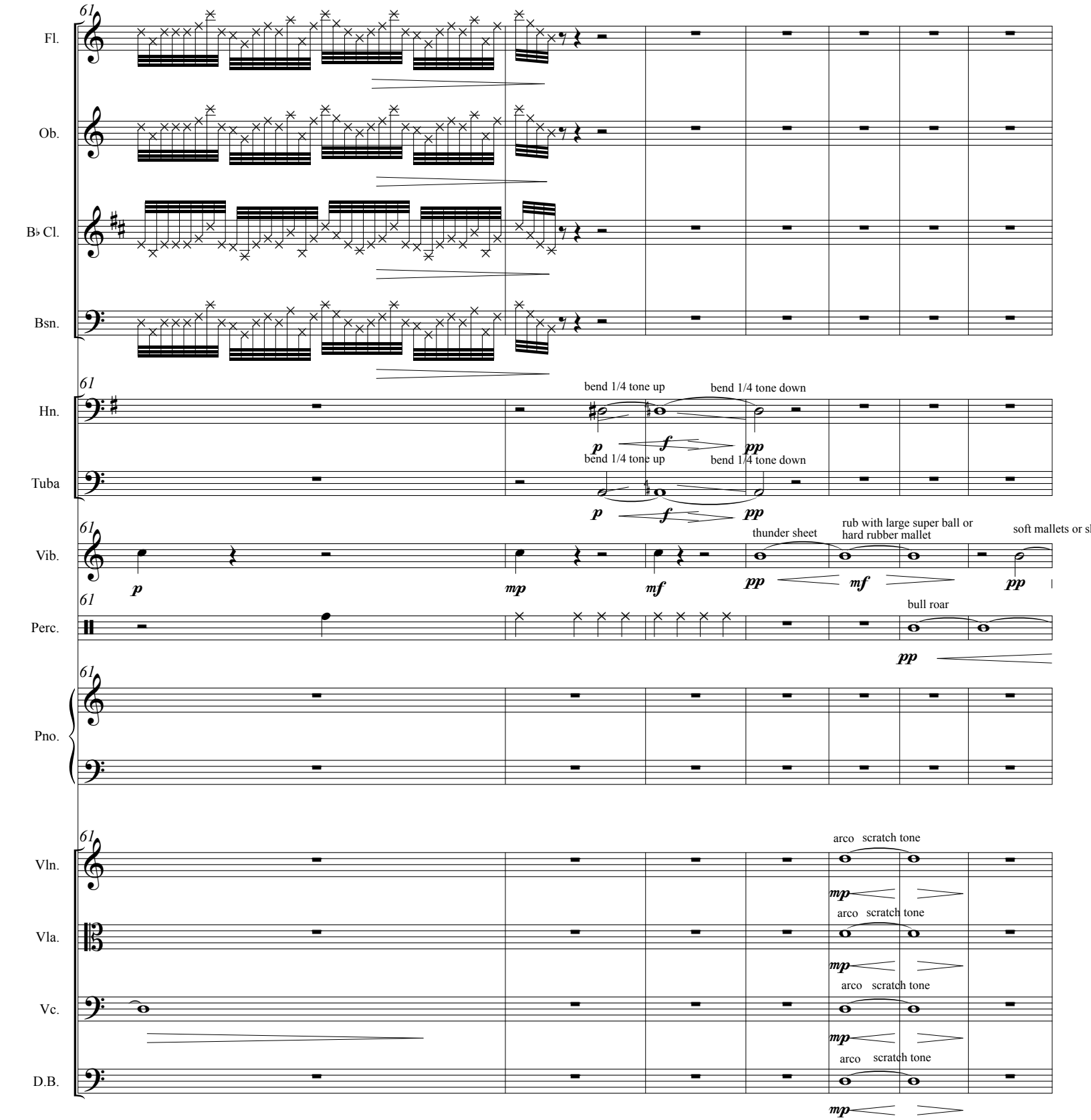

II. Heat ♩ = 92
B
walk to piano
into piano
Fl.
Ob.
Red flexband in piano
mp
ff grinding
smooth
mp
ff grinding
smooth
B♭ Cl.
Black flexband in piano
mp
ff grinding
smooth
mp
ff grinding
smooth
Bsn.
27
Hn.
flz
mf ff mf
Tuba
growl
mf ff mf
27
Vib.
bowed cymbal
pp mf pp mf pp mf pp mf pp mf pp mf
27
Perc.
thunder sheet
hard rubber mallet
flexitone
vibraslap (l.v.)
pp mf pp mf mf
27
Pno.
depress silently
Quarter - rub down strings
move side to side to gliss
mf ff mf
27
Vln.
sul pont
slow 1/4 tone bends
(like a drop of water)
pizz.
arco
sul pont
slow 1/4 tone bends
pizz.
arco
p mf p mf
Vla.
sul pont
slow 1/4 tone bends
pizz. (like a drop of water)
p mf
Vc.
(like a drop of water)
pizz.
arco
sul pont
slow 1/4 tone bends
pizz.
mf mp mf
D.B.
pizz.
pizz.
mf mf

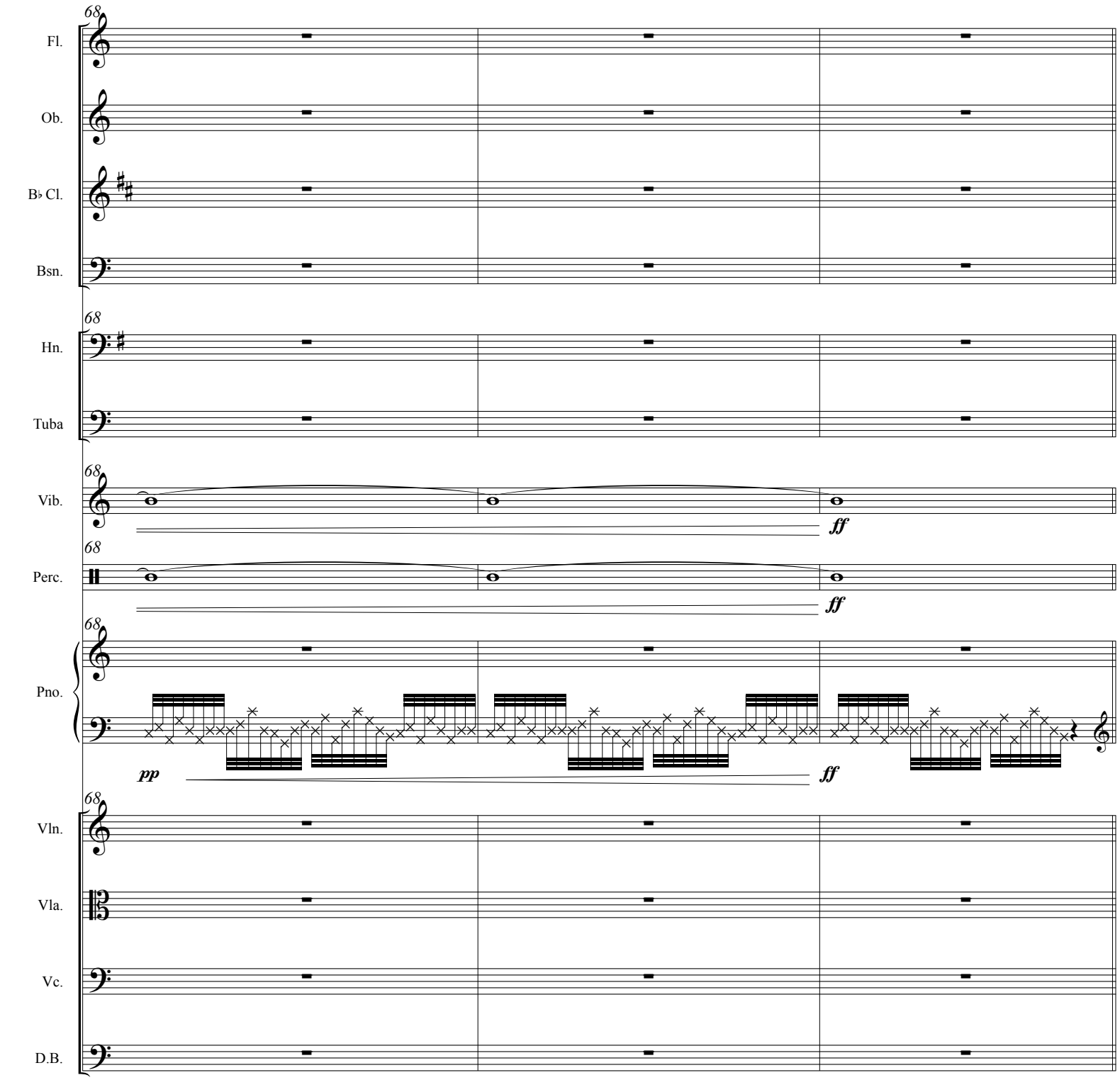

38
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
"chh" into piano
"shh"
"chh"
sing & play
bend
norm.
grinding
smooth
flz
growl
flexitone
maracas
vibraslap (l.v.)
pizz.

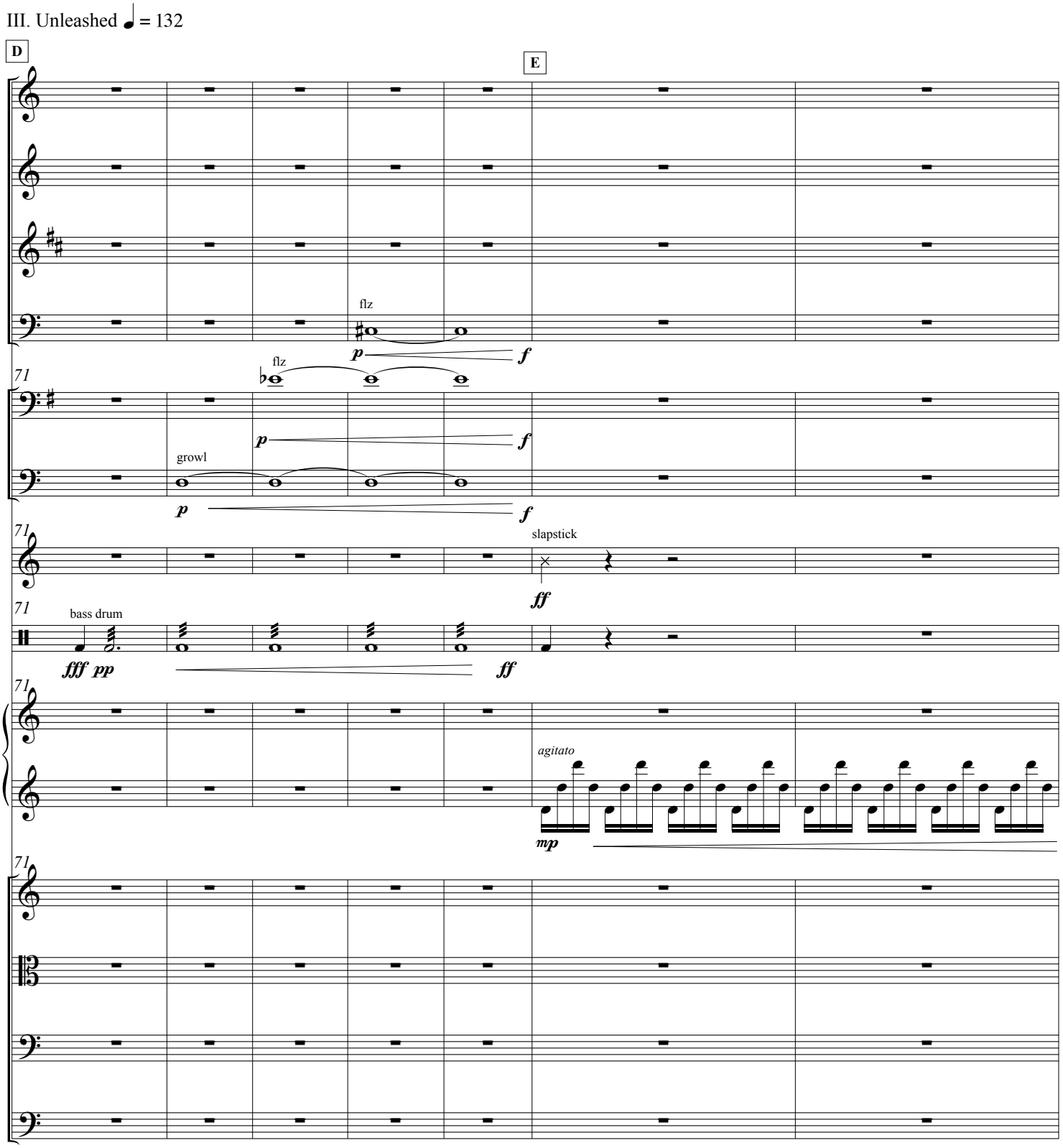

49
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
pp
ff
mf
p
sffz
mp
"sss"
C
"chh"
"sss"
grinding
smooth
remove band with a snap
remove band with a snap
mouthpiece only
flz
growl
rainstick
flexitone
maracas
drop ping pong balls middle strings
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.
pizz.

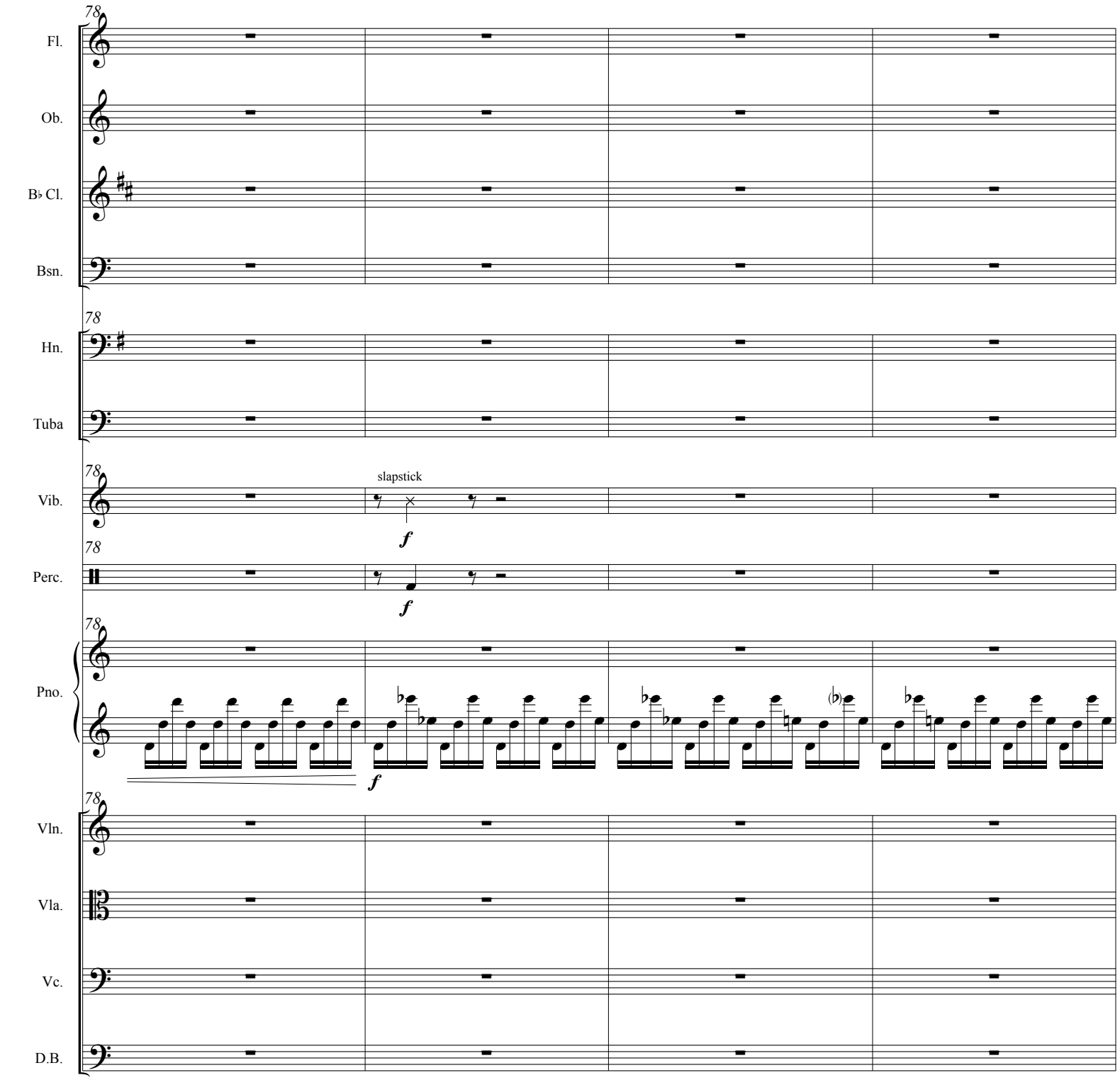

56
Fl.
random key clicks, no air
p
Ob.
random pitches slap tongue
p
B♭ Cl.
random key clicks, no air
p
Bsn.
random pitches, helicopter tongue
p
56
Hn.
bend 1/4 tone up
bend 1/4 tone down
p
f
pp
Tuba
bend 1/4 tone up
bend 1/4 tone down
p
f
pp
56
Vib.
56
Perc.
f
pp
56
Pno.
56
Vln.
random pitches, col legno
p
Vla.
random pitches, col legno
p
Vc.
random pitches, col legno
p
D.B.
random pitches, col legno
p

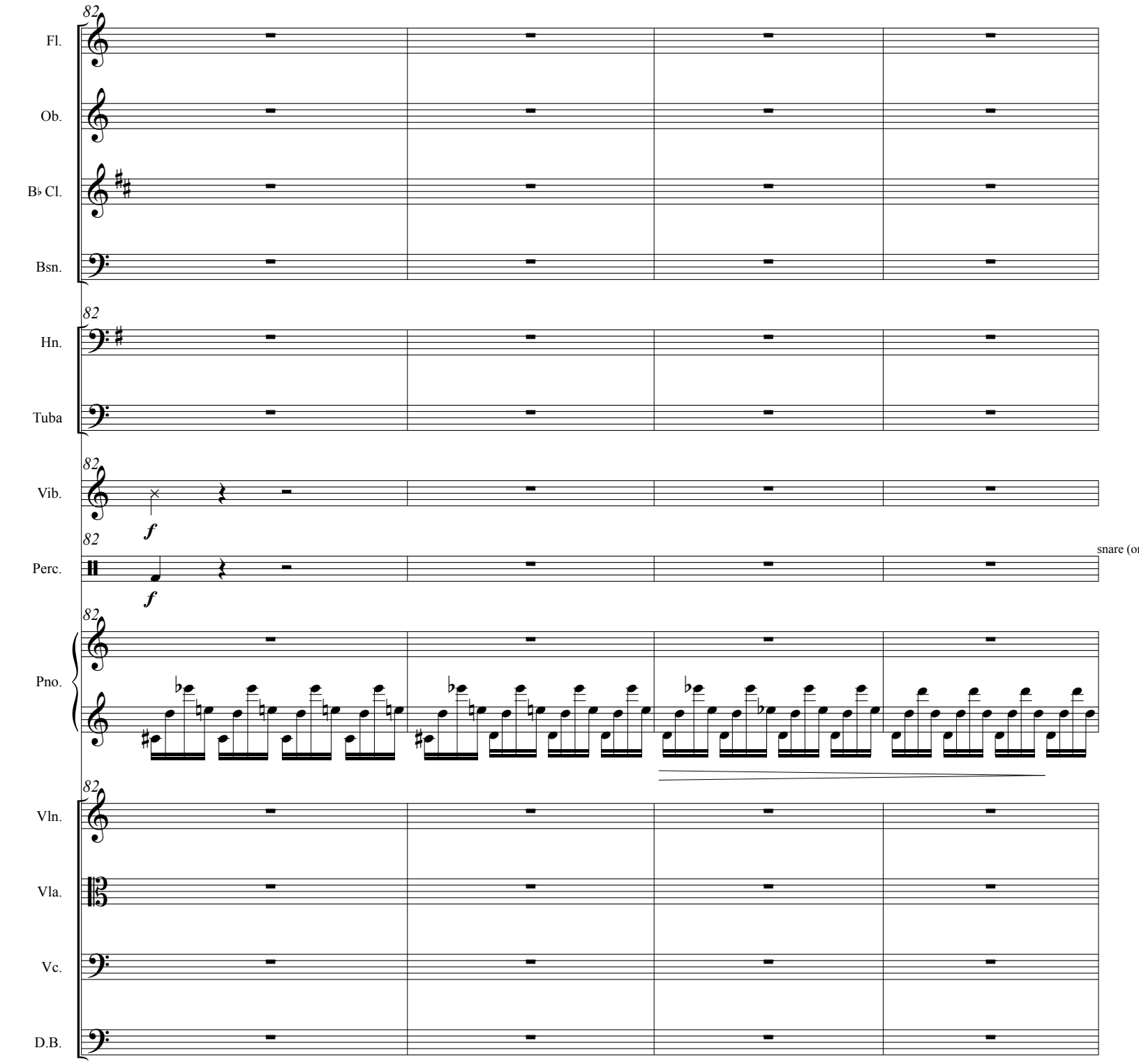

59
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
pp
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
thunder sheet
use fist
Perc.
rip sheet quickly
Pno.
drop ping pong balls middle strings
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
arco
scratch tone
mf
D.B.

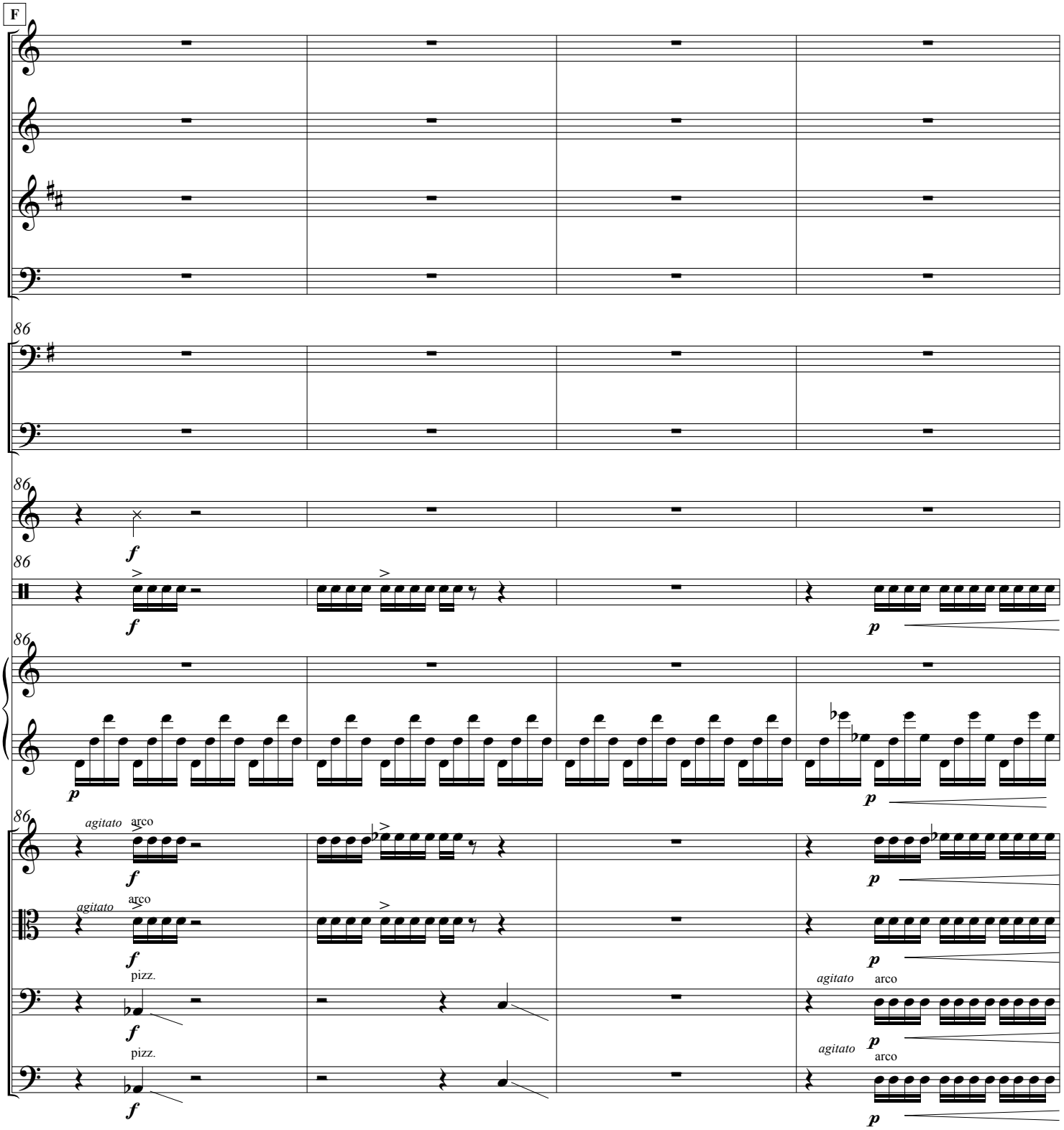

61
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
61
Hn.
bend 1/4 tone up
bend 1/4 tone down
p
f
pp
Tuba
bend 1/4 tone up
bend 1/4 tone down
p
f
pp
61
Vib.
p
mp
mf
thunder sheet
pp
rub with large super ball or hard rubber mallet
mf
soft mallets or sl
pp
61
Perc.
bull roar
pp
61
Pno.
61
Vln.
arco scratch tone
mp
Vla.
arco scratch tone
mp
Vc.
arco scratch tone
mp
D.B.
arco scratch tone
mp

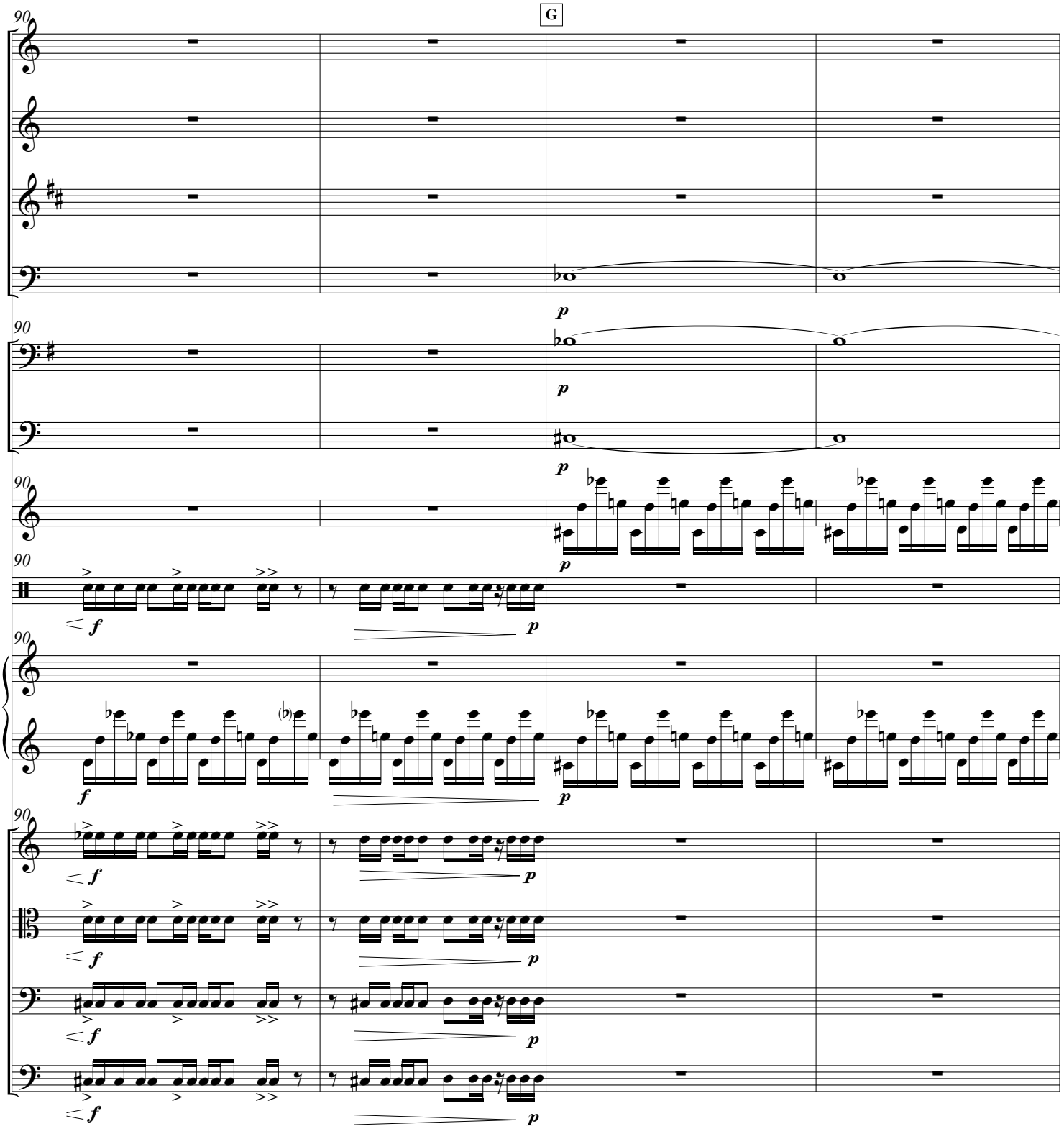

68
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
68
Hn.
Tuba
68
Vib.
ff
68
Perc.
ff
68
Pno.
pp
ff
68
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

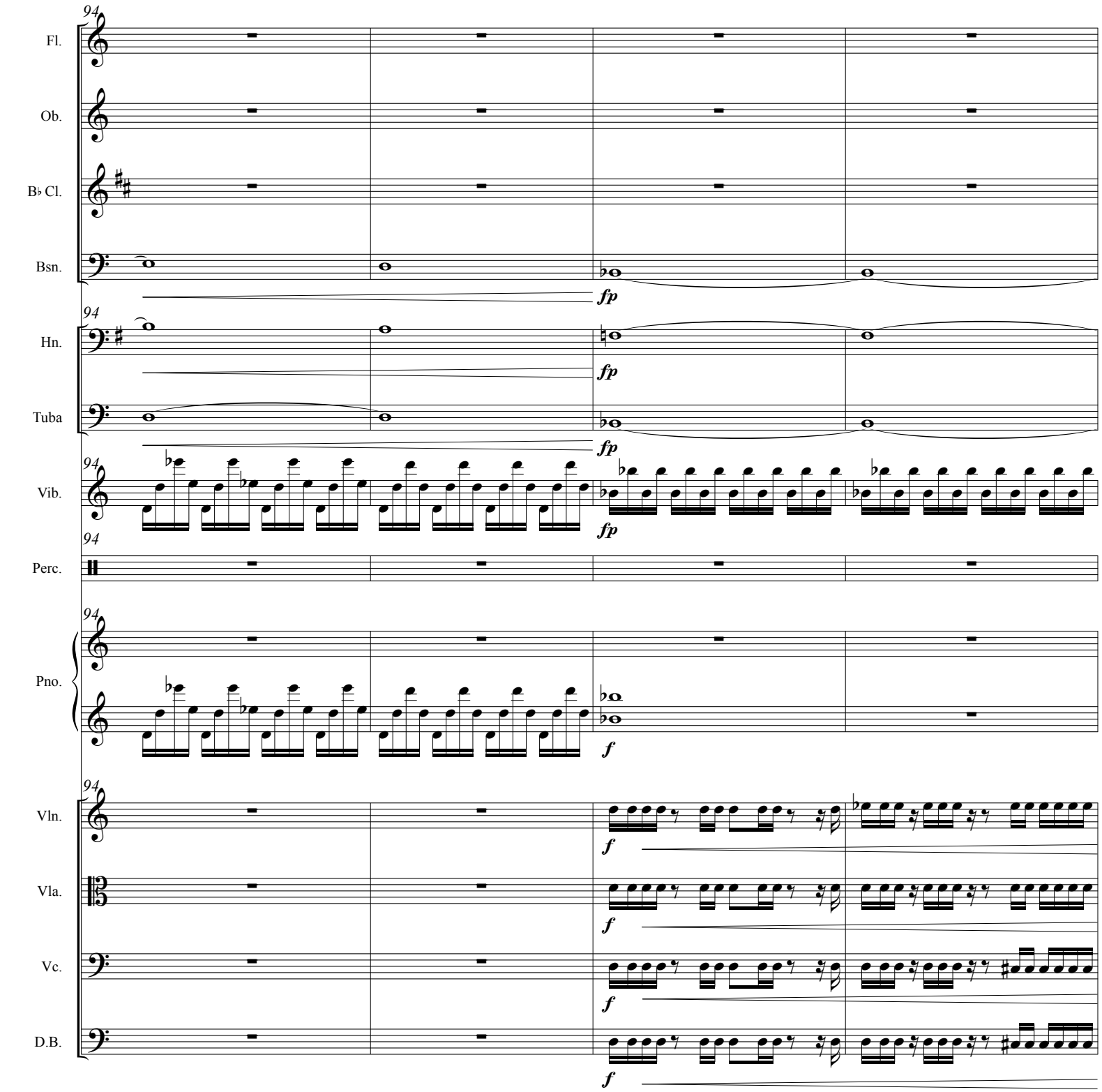

III. Unleashed ♩ = 132
D
E
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
flz
p
f
71
Hn.
Tuba
growl
Vib.
slapstick
ff
Perc.
bass drum
fff pp
Pno.
agitato
mp
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

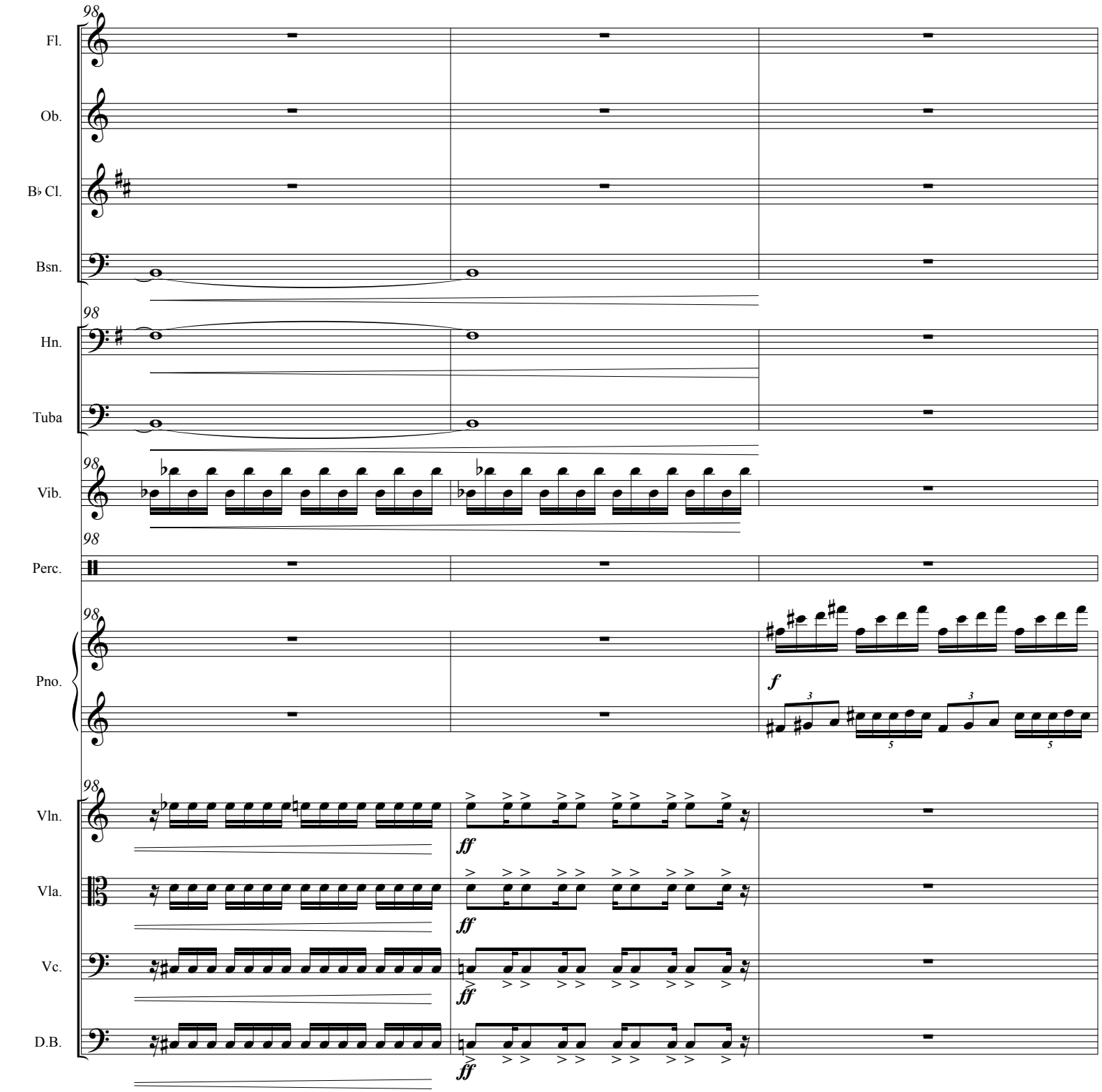

78
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
78
Hn.
Tuba
78
Vib.
slapstick
f
78
Perc.
f
78
Pno.
f
78
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

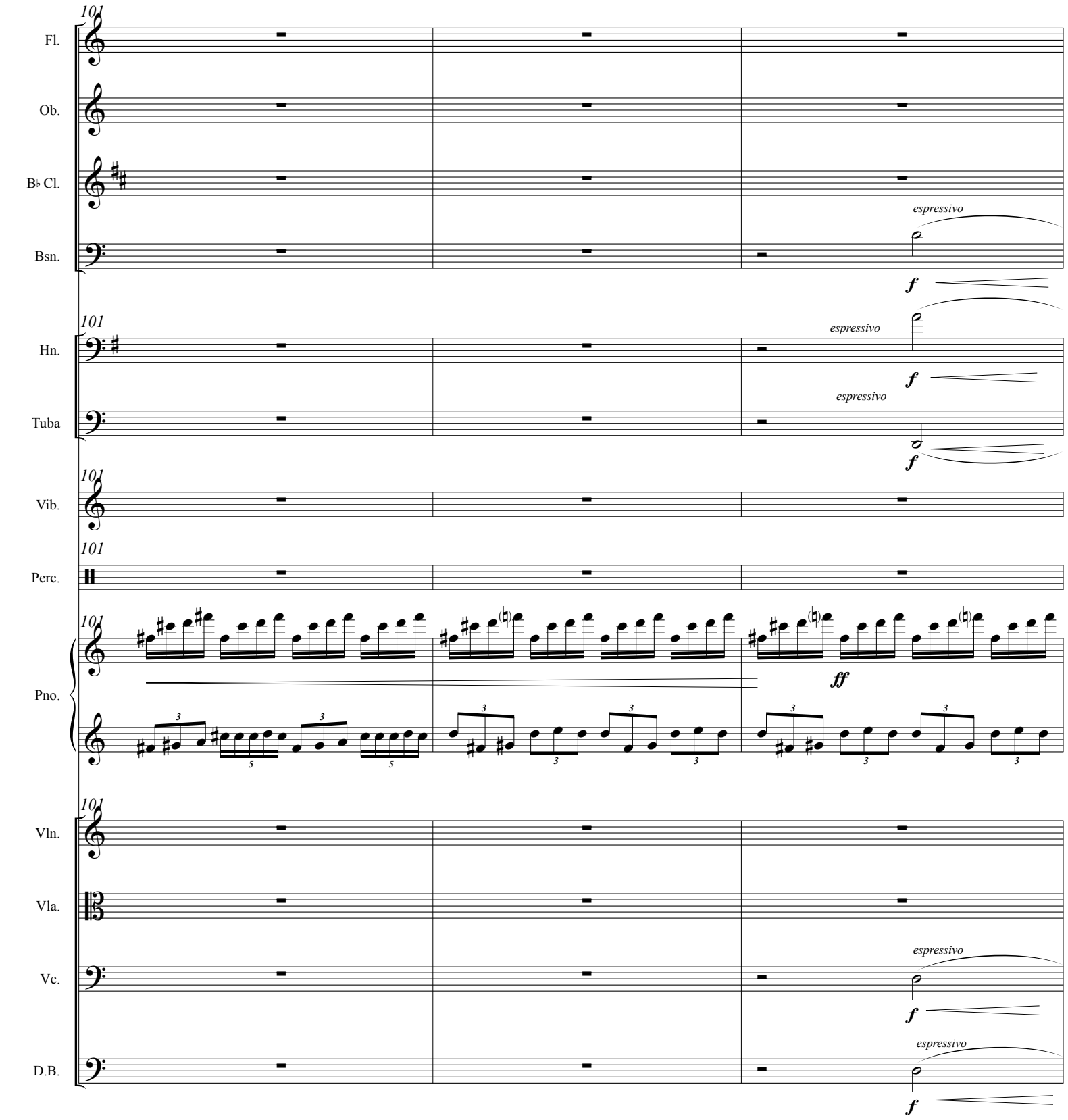

82
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
82
Hn.
Tuba
82
Vib.
f
82
Perc.
f
snare (o
82
Pno.
82
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

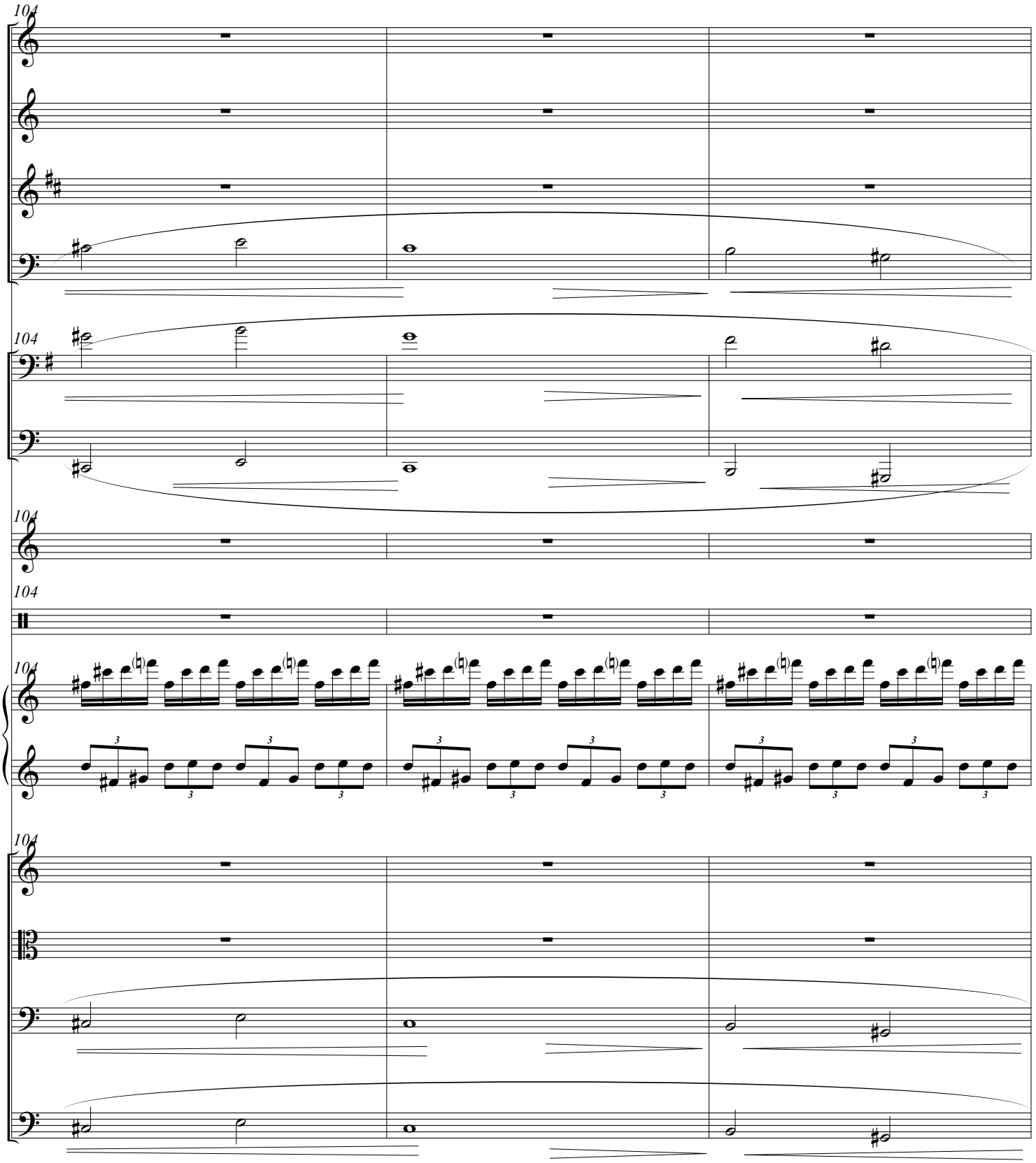

F
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
86
Hn.
Tuba
86
Vib.
f
86
Perc.
f
p
86
Pno.
p
p
86
agitato
arco
Vln.
f
p
agitato
arco
Vla.
f
p
pizz.
Vc.
f
agitato
arco
p
pizz.
agitato
arco
D.B.
f
p

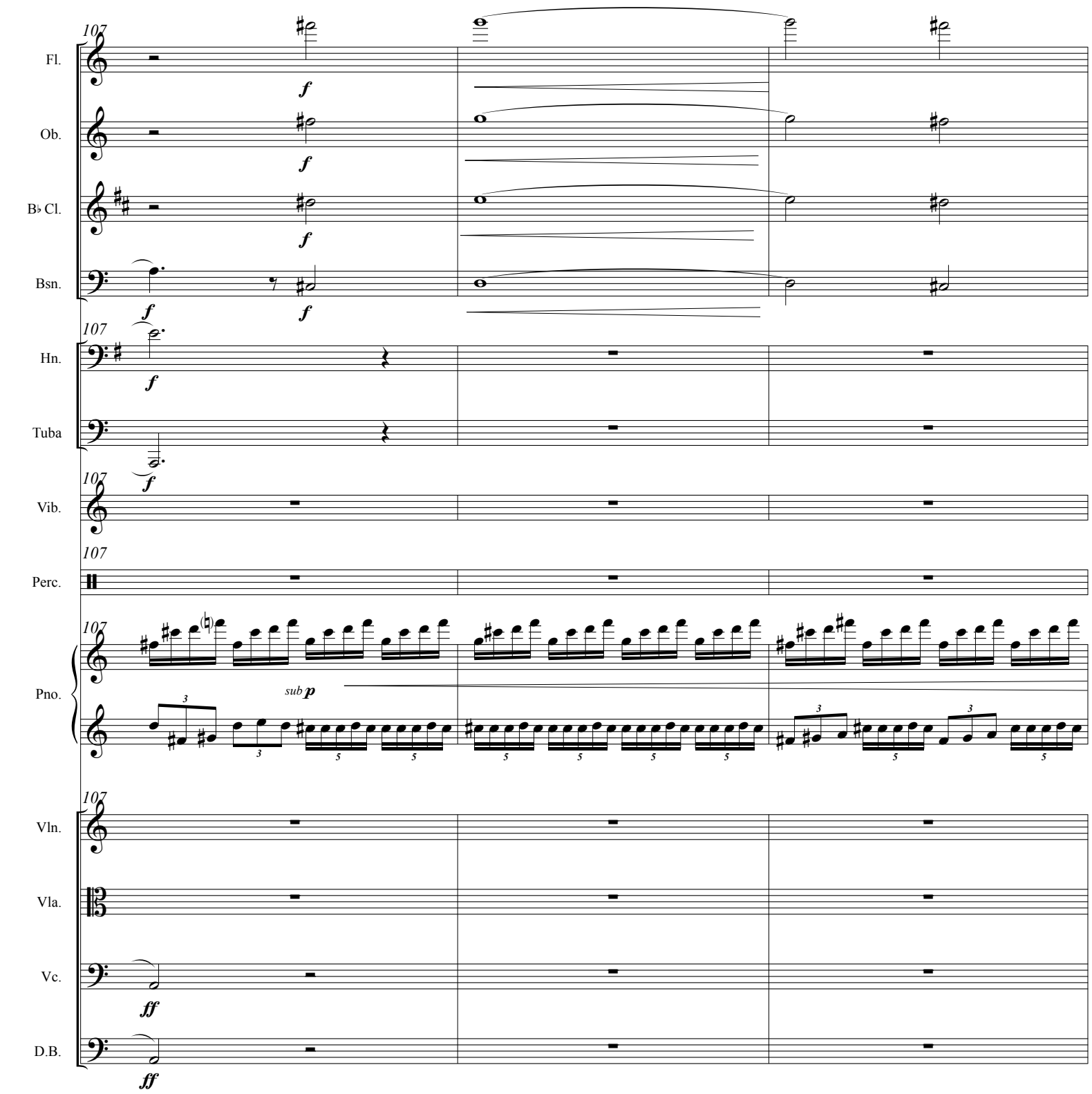

G
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
90
p
f

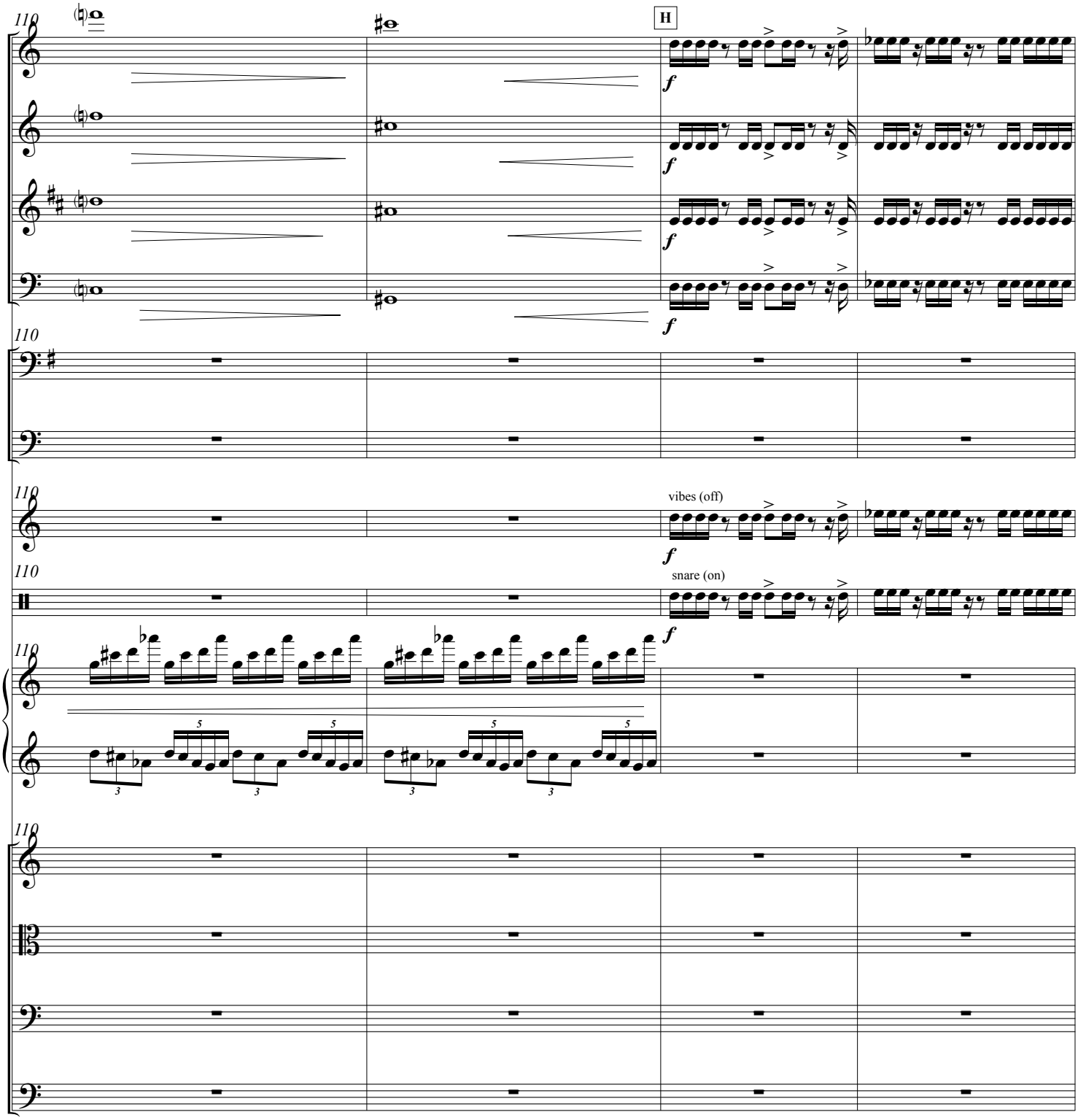

94
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
fp
94
Hn.
fp
Tuba
fp
94
Vib.
fp
94
Perc.
94
Pno.
f
94
Vln.
f
Vla.
f
Vc.
f
D.B.
f

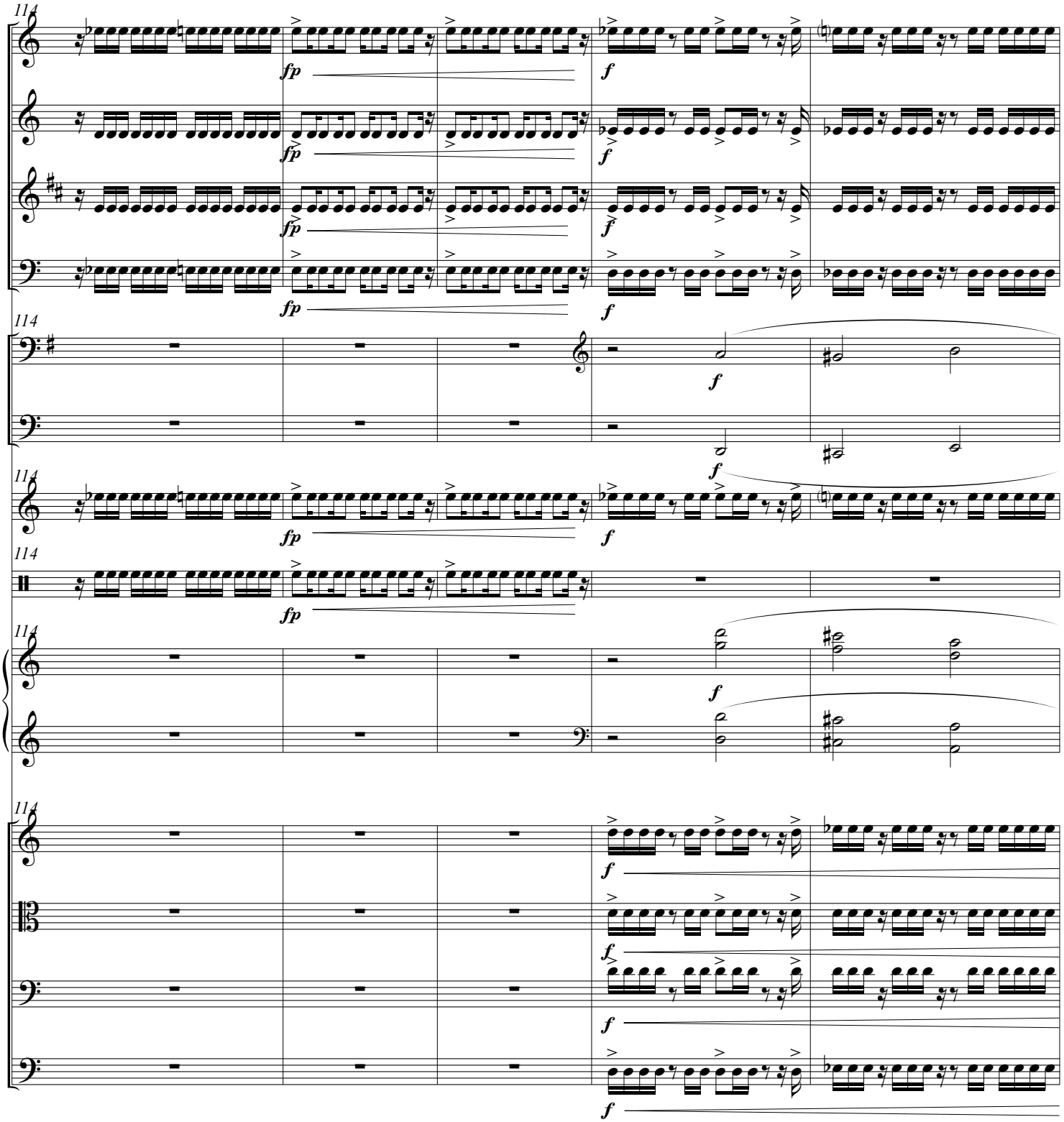

98
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
98
Hn.
Tuba
98
Vib.
98
Perc.
98
Pno.
f
3
5
3
5
98
Vln.
ff
Vla.
ff
Vc.
ff
D.B.
ff

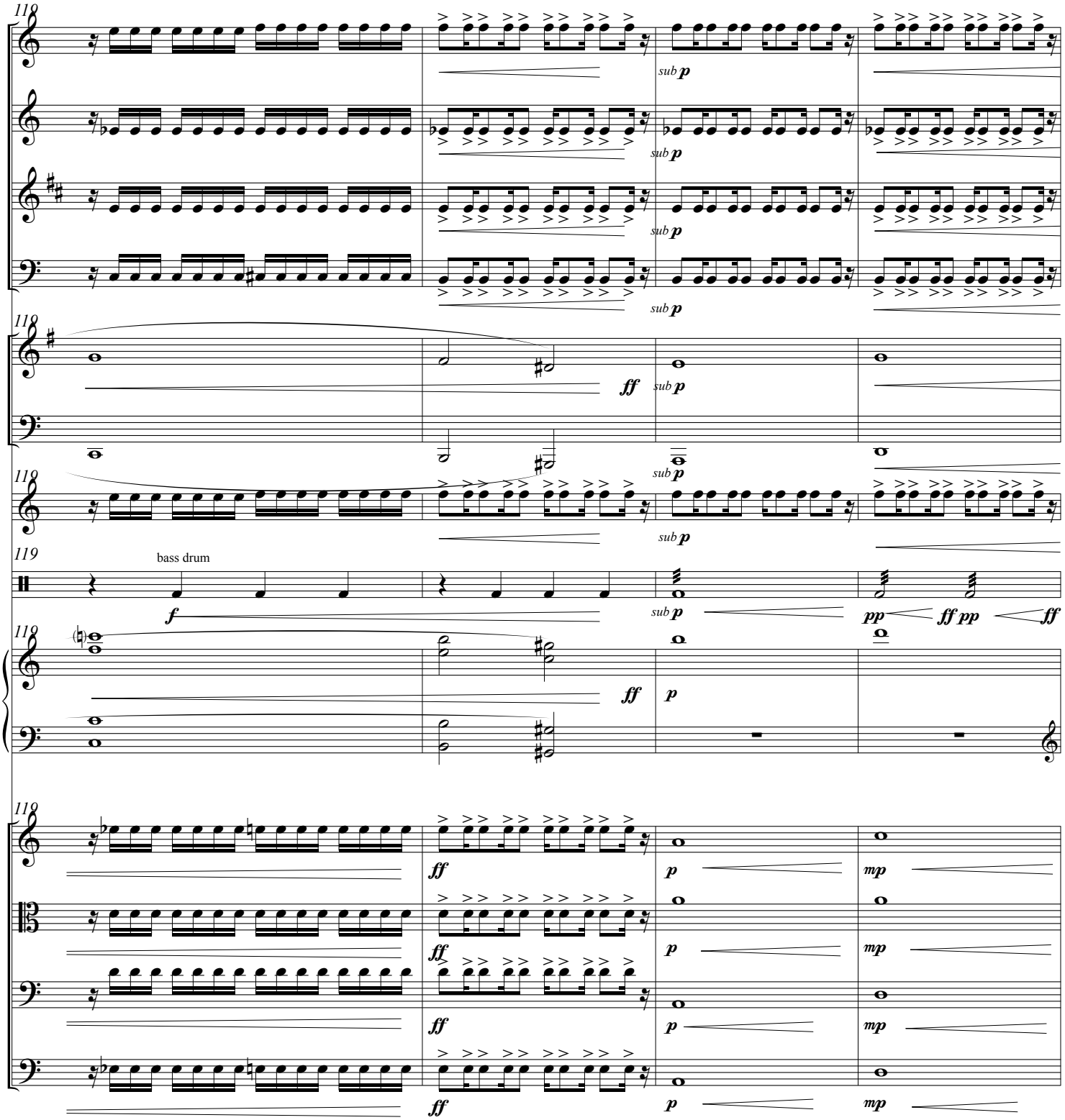

101
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
espressivo
f
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
ff
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

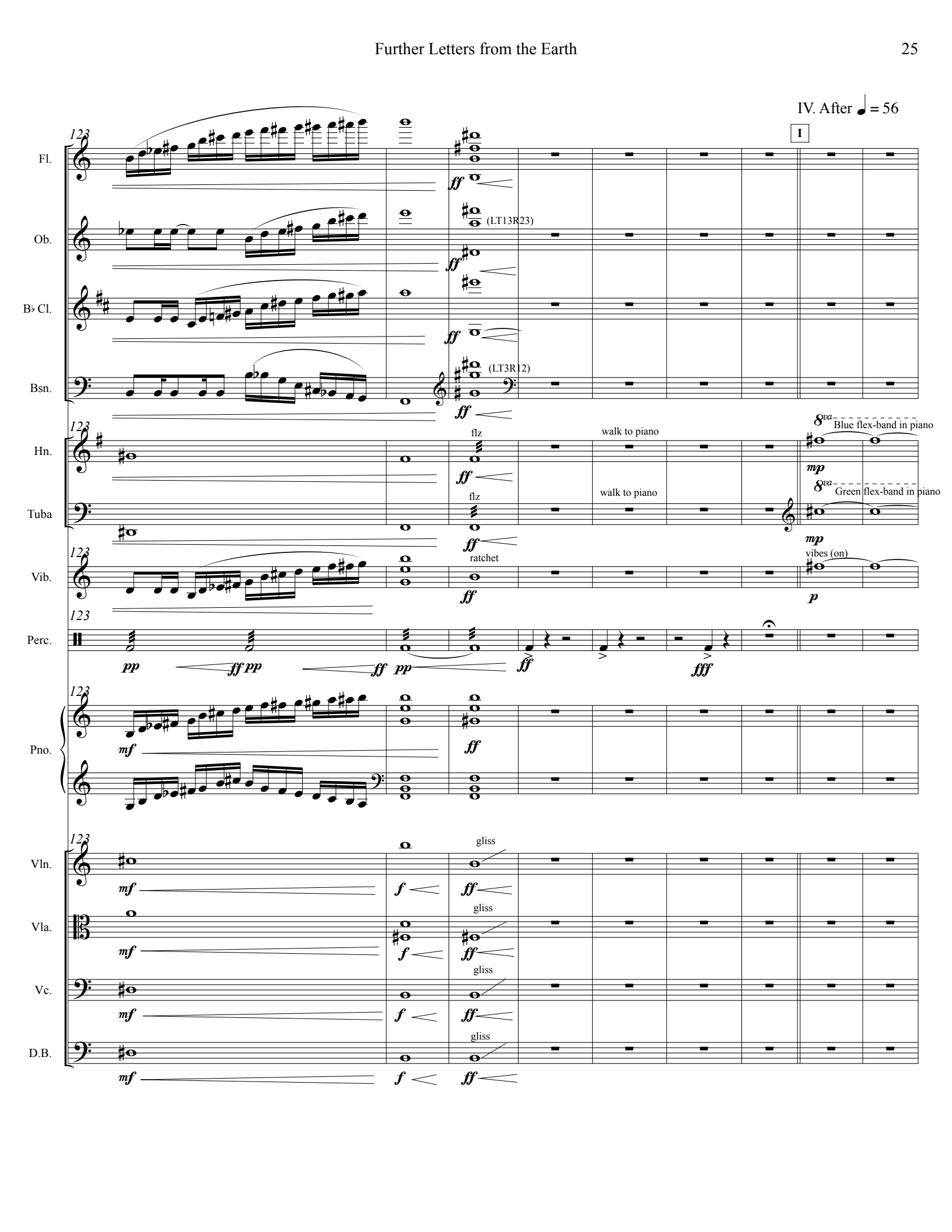

104
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
104
Hn.
Tuba
104
Vib.
104
Perc.
104
Pno.
104
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

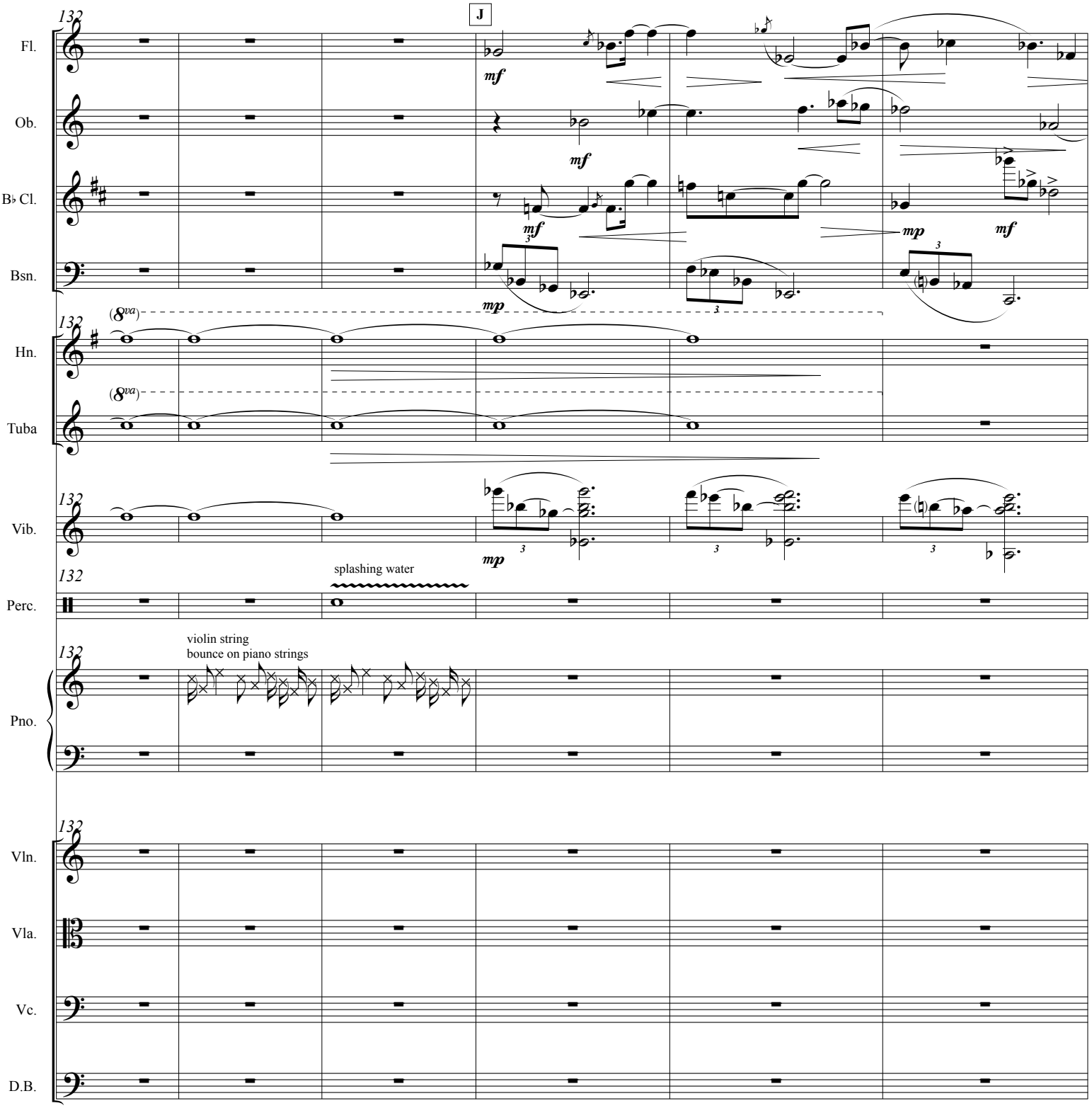

107
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
f
sub p
ff

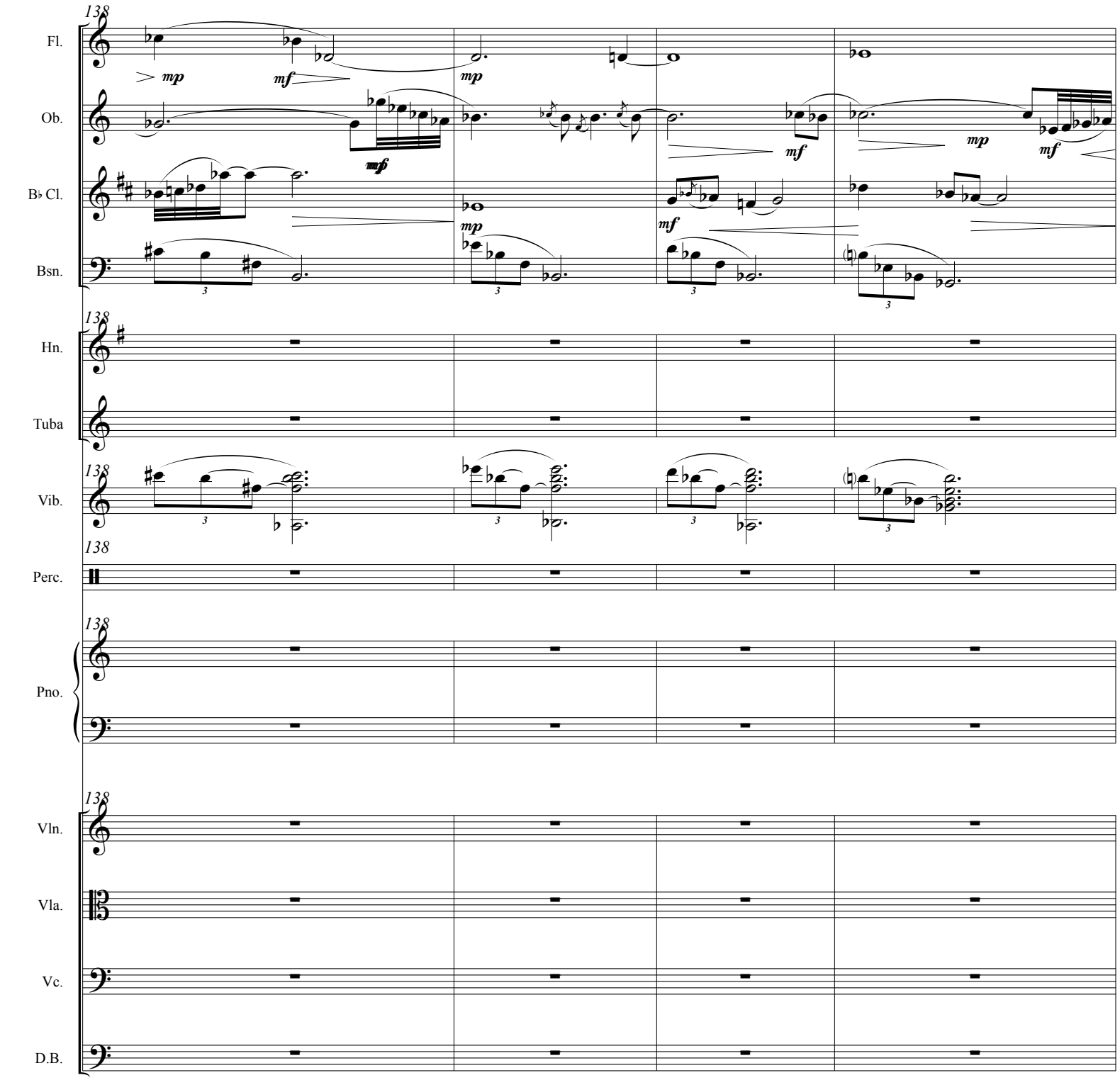

110
H
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
f
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
vibes (off)
Perc.
snare (on)
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.

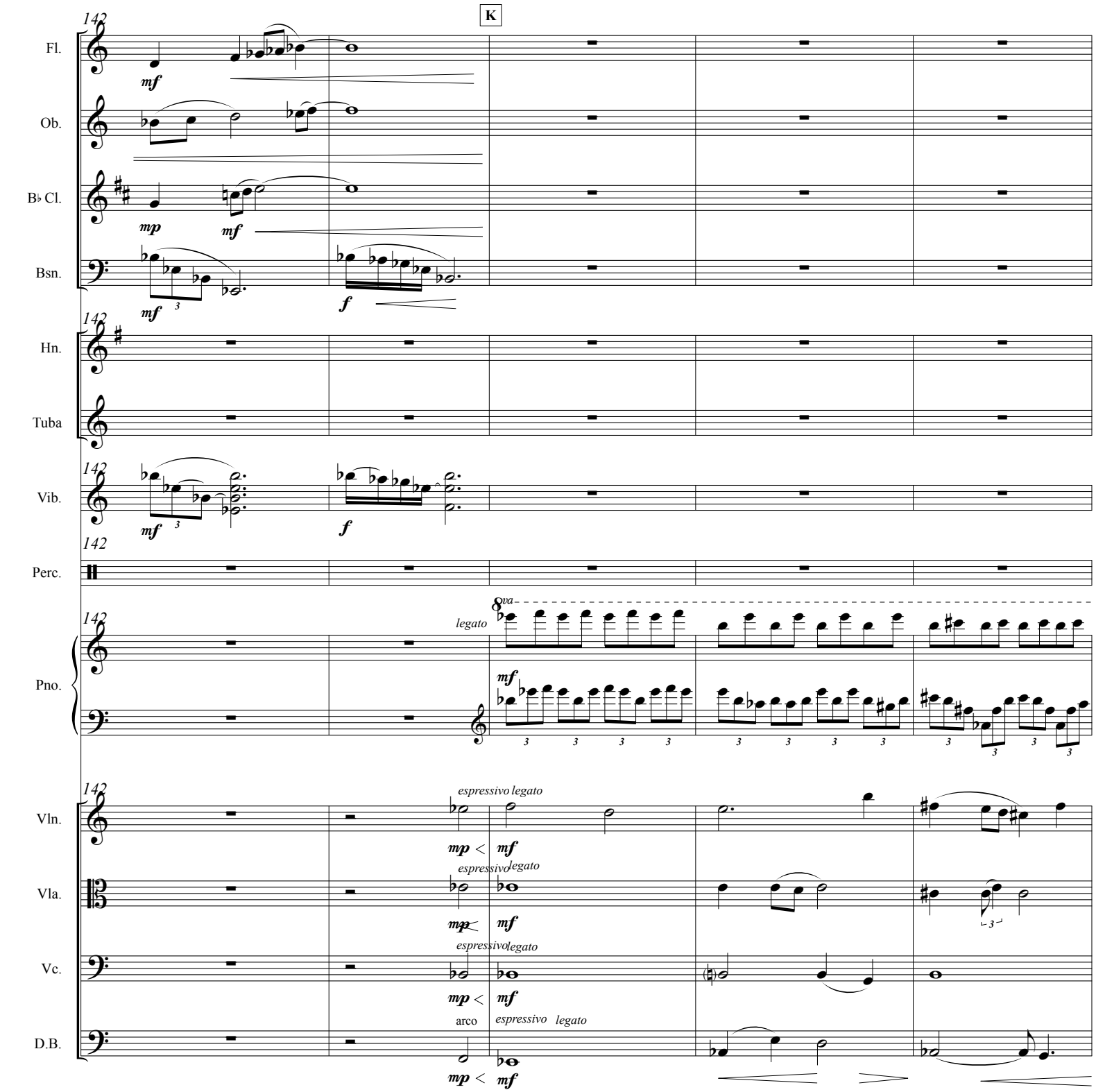

114
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
fp
f

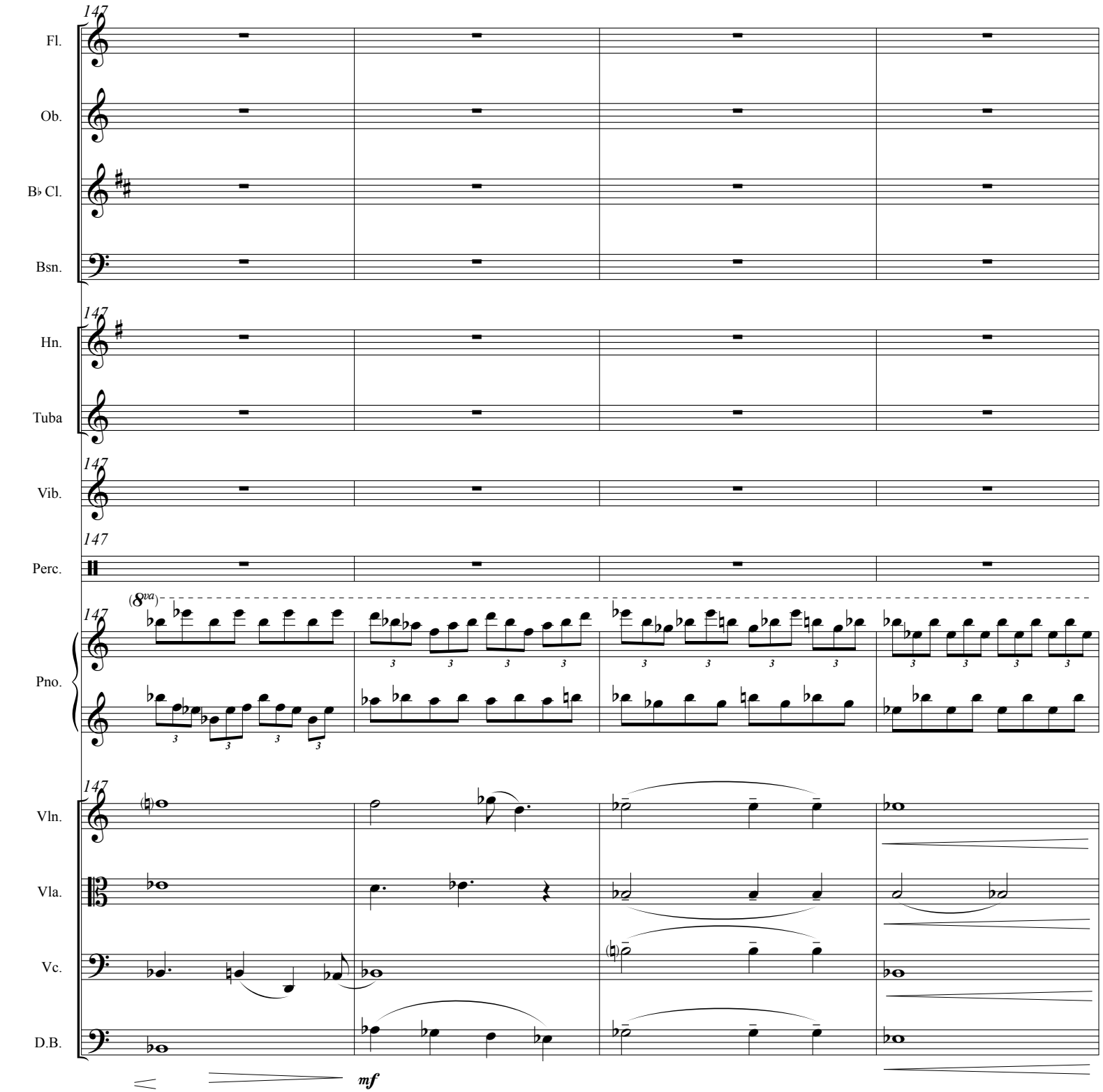

118
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
119
Perc.
bass drum
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
sub p
ff
f
pp
mp
p

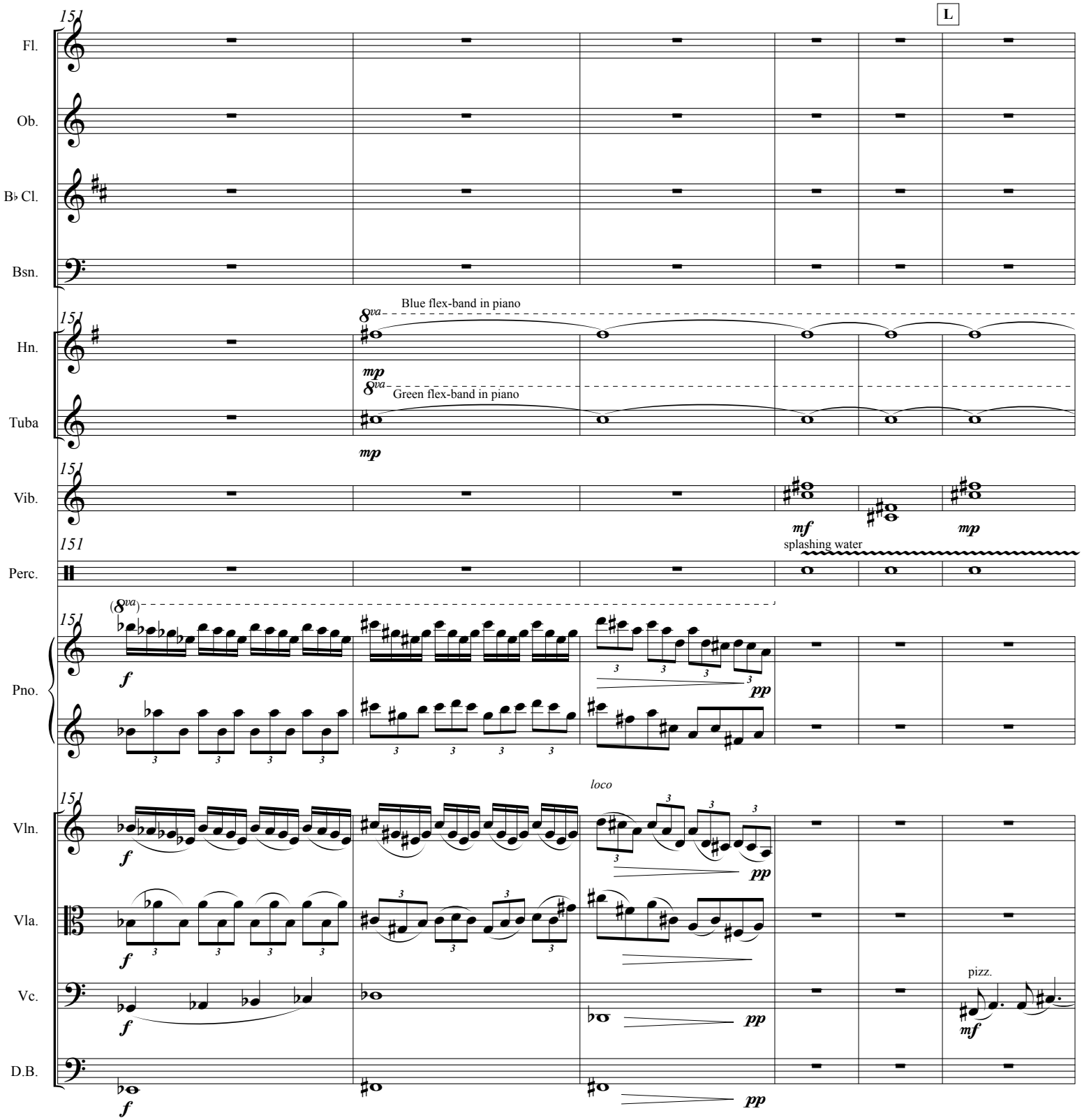

IV. After ♩ = 56
I
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
123
(LT13R23)
(LT3R12)
flz
walk to piano
8va Blue flex-band in piano
8va Green flex-band in piano
ratchet
vibes (on)
gliss

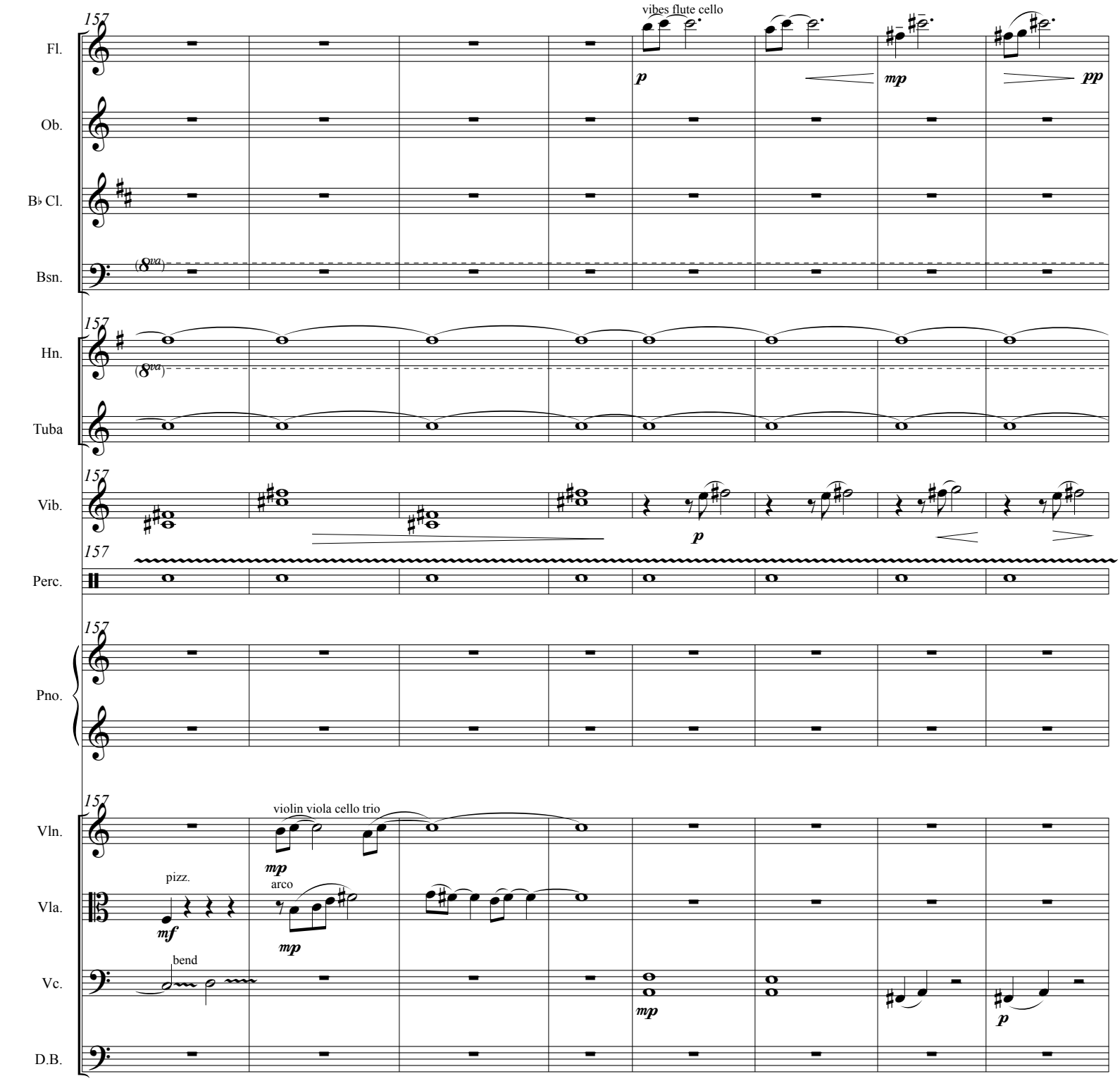

132
J
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
mf
mp
(8va)
splashing water
violin string
bounce on piano strings

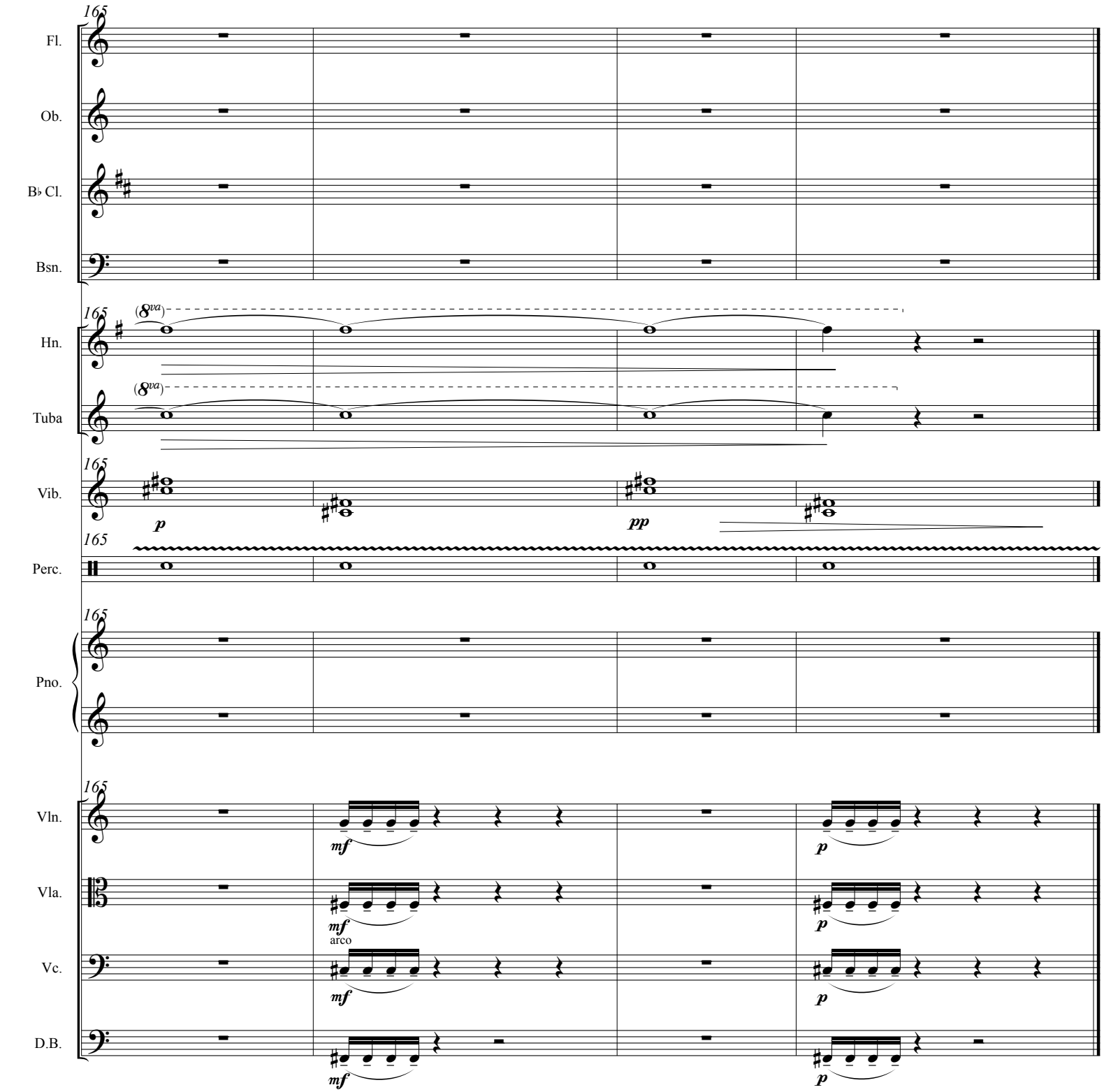

138
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
mp
mf
mfp


K
142
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
mf
mp
f
legato
8va
espressivo legato
arco


147
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
147
Hn.
Tuba
147
Vib.
147
Perc.
(8va)
147
Pno.
147
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
mf


151
L
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Blue flex-band in piano
8va
mp
Hn.
Green flex-band in piano
Tuba
Vib.
mf
mp
splashing water
Perc.
(8va)
f
pp
Pno.
loco
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
pizz.
D.B.


157
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
D.B.
vibes flute cello
p
mp
pp
(8va)
violin viola cello trio
mp
pizz.
mf
arco
mp
bend
mp
p


165
Fl.
Ob.
B♭ Cl.
Bsn.
(8va)
Hn.
Tuba
Vib.
p
pp
Perc.
Pno.
Vln.
mf
p
Vla.
arco
Vc.
D.B.