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Ephemera in 5 Movements

Sebastian Phlox
Poem by Emma Carmody

Ephemera in 5 Movements is written in five short stanzas, or movements, with each part describing a different thought or moment. The piece is based around a poem of the same name by Emma Carmody that evocatively depicts these ephemeral experiences in a compact form, which I felt would make for an interesting musical setting. Each of the five stanzas of the poem conjure an impression of a short-lived but vivid moment, through strongly evoking smells and sounds in addition to visual portrayal. These scenes are all contrasting, and seem almost like random thoughts one might have while looking over five particular landscapes. In setting this to music, I have tried to maintain the feeling of volatility by being very direct and simple in the treatment of the text. The piece is scored for the minimal ensemble of flute, violin, cello and percussion, with text recited in turn by the players. I have taken the approach of not being unnecessarily subtle in how the music alludes to the words, since the text itself is sufficiently abstract in the way it carries its meaning. This results in quite a bit of unconcealed word-painting.
In the final verse, the viewer's perception of the world appears to fall apart - so the music ends incoherently, as if it couldn't remember its train of thought...

Ephemera in 5 Movements was commissioned by the Soundstream New Music Collective as a result of my participation in their 2012 Young Composers' Award, and was my second collaboration with Australian poet Emma Carmody. My heartfelt thanks go to the Soundstream Collective for performing my work, and especially to Gabriella Smart for making this opportunity possible.

Ephemera in 5 Movements

Emma Carmody

Ephemera 1

I remember you
tenderising angelica in the pestle,

the bruised,
white petals on my tongue,

trying to sublimate desire
with their faintly medicinal taste.

Ephemera 2

When I was fourteen, a priest swung
a silver chalice from side to side

and chanted Arabic verse. You'd
bought your frankincense in Morocco,

and believed that all wonder
resided in my breasts.

Ephemera 3

And me, standing on the threshold,
listening to the lake freeze over.

Wondering if setting water
is audible.

Filled with visions
of someone's paradise.

Ephemera 4

Perhaps the world was sprung from this alpine wilderness? –
A spasm of pine needles

And cities, deserts, horizons were born,
Like the lone tree that quakes it passion,

A tambourine struck by wind,
Its leaves the birth of music.

Ephemera 5

To speak of reason,
as if it were the flickering verge of a star,

the coming and going of light:
there are nights

when candling voices into sunrise,
he dissembles the universe itself,

sign by sign,
motion by motion,

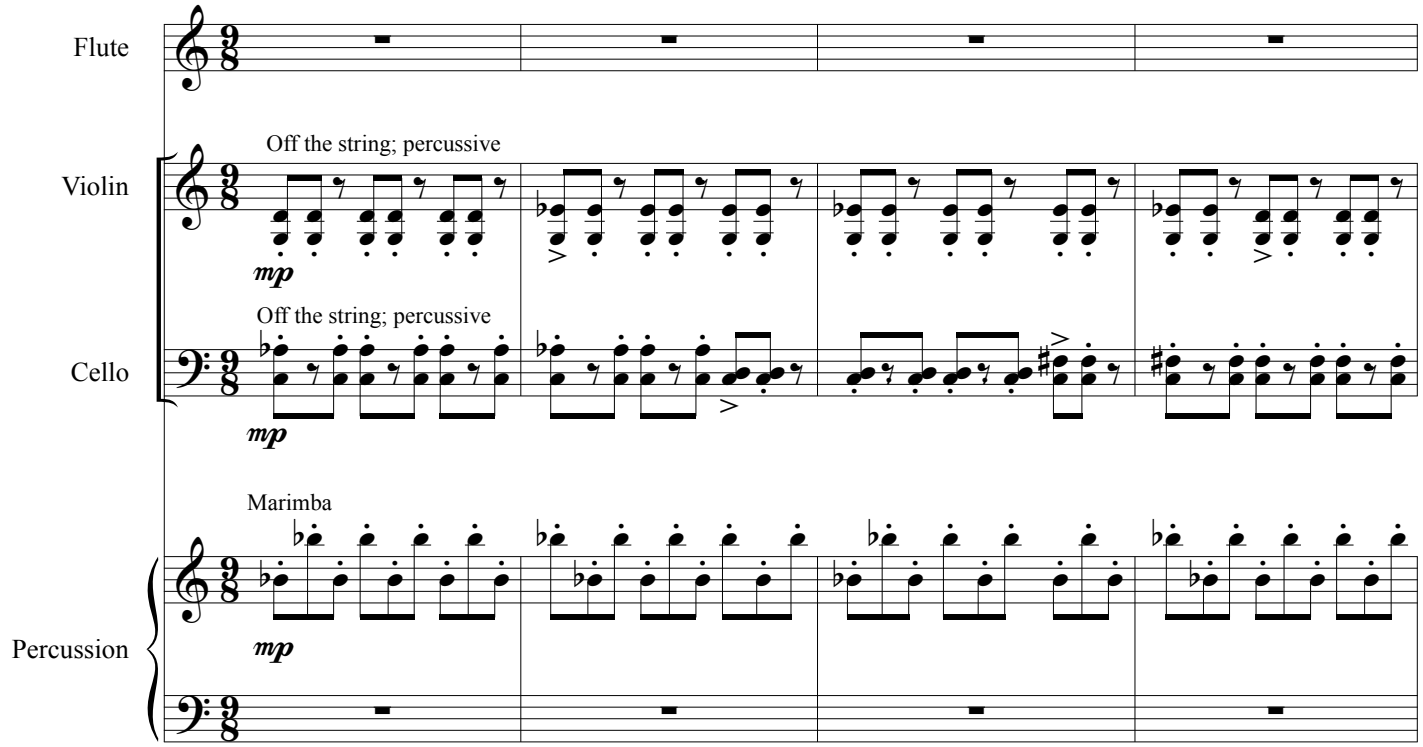
his wounds prospering in symbol,
the incandescence of exhaustion.

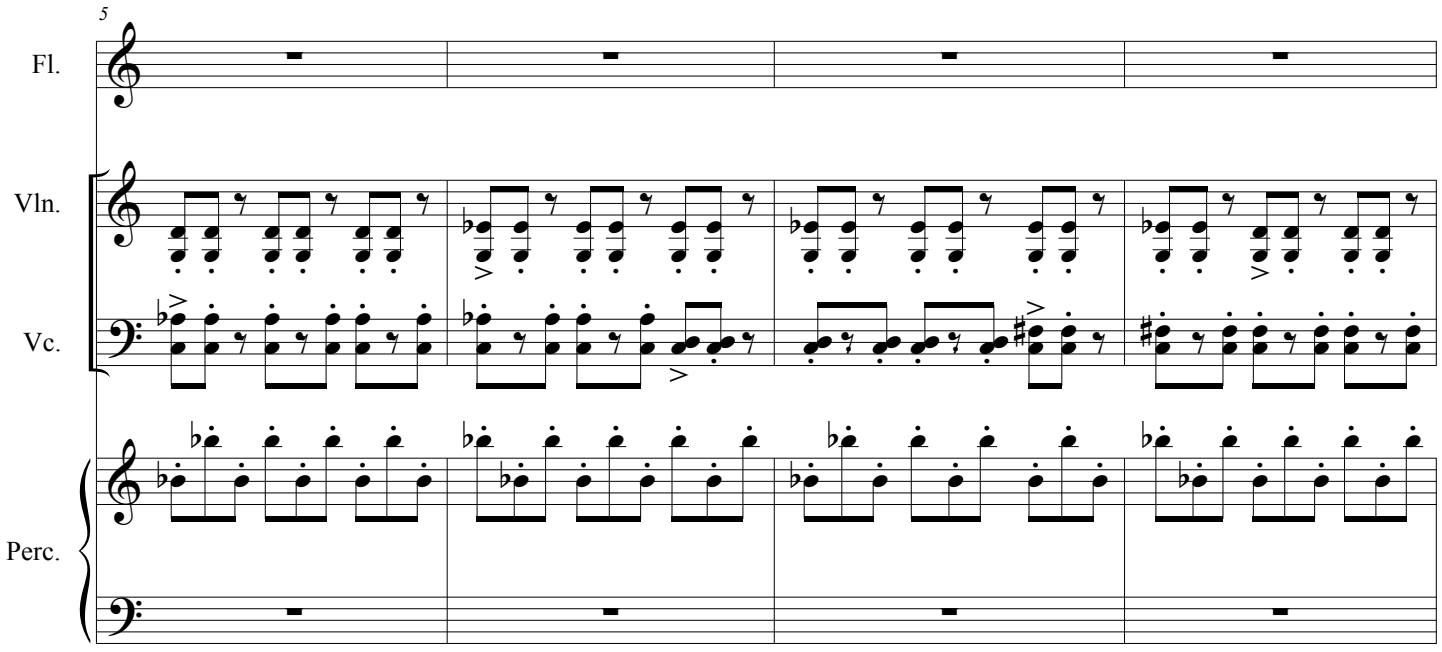
Ephemera in 5 Movements

For the Soundstream Collective

Sebastian Phlox
Text by Emma Carmody

Ephemera I





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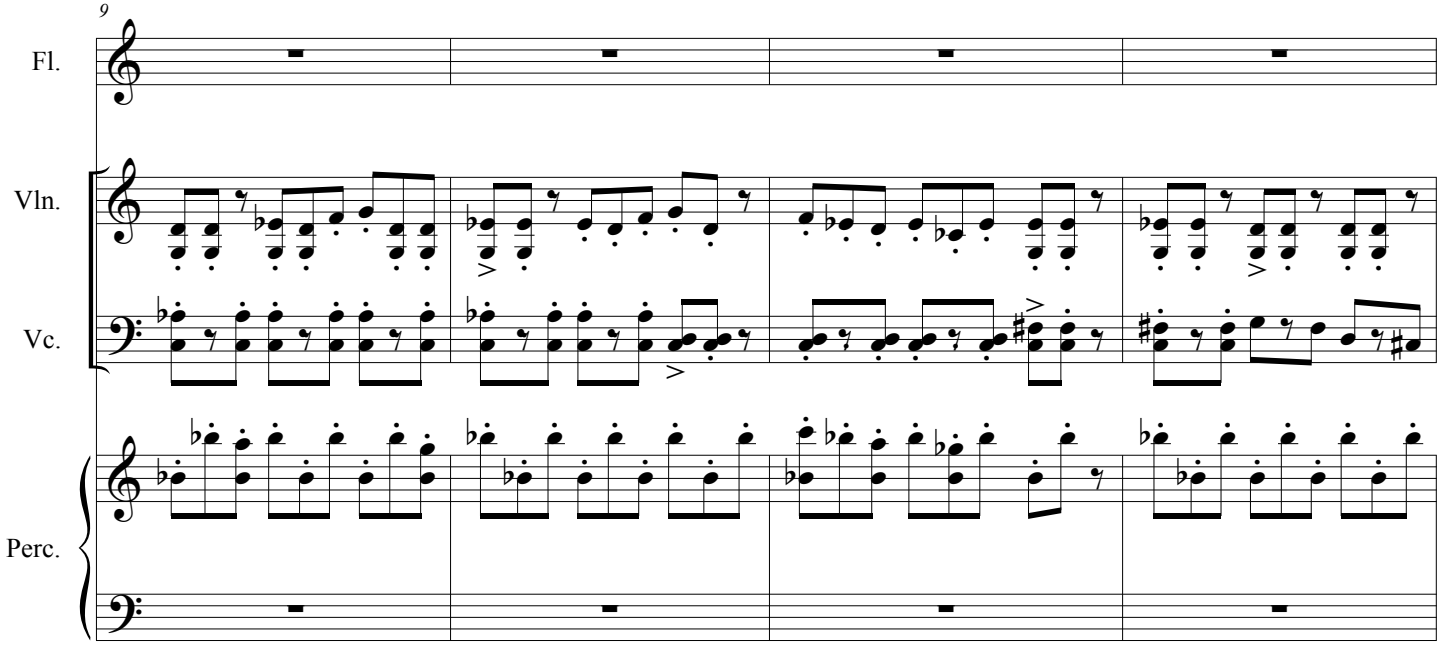
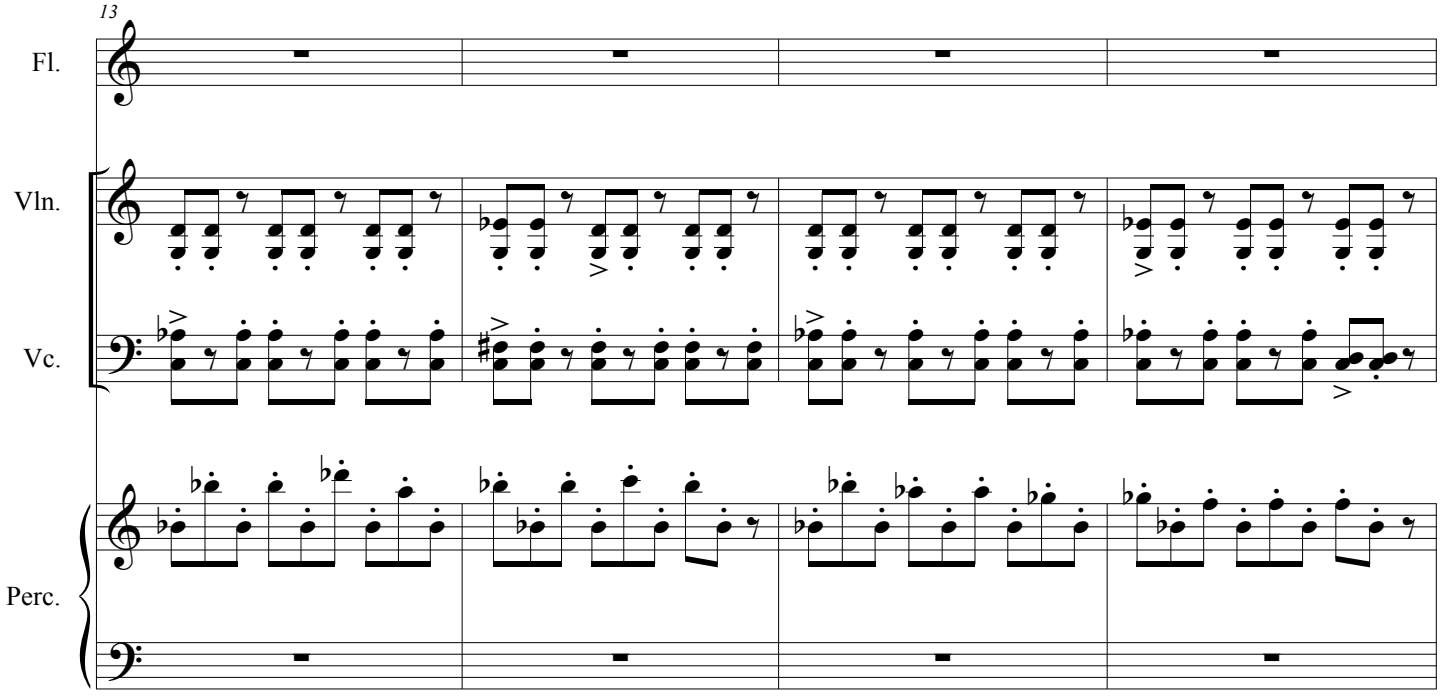
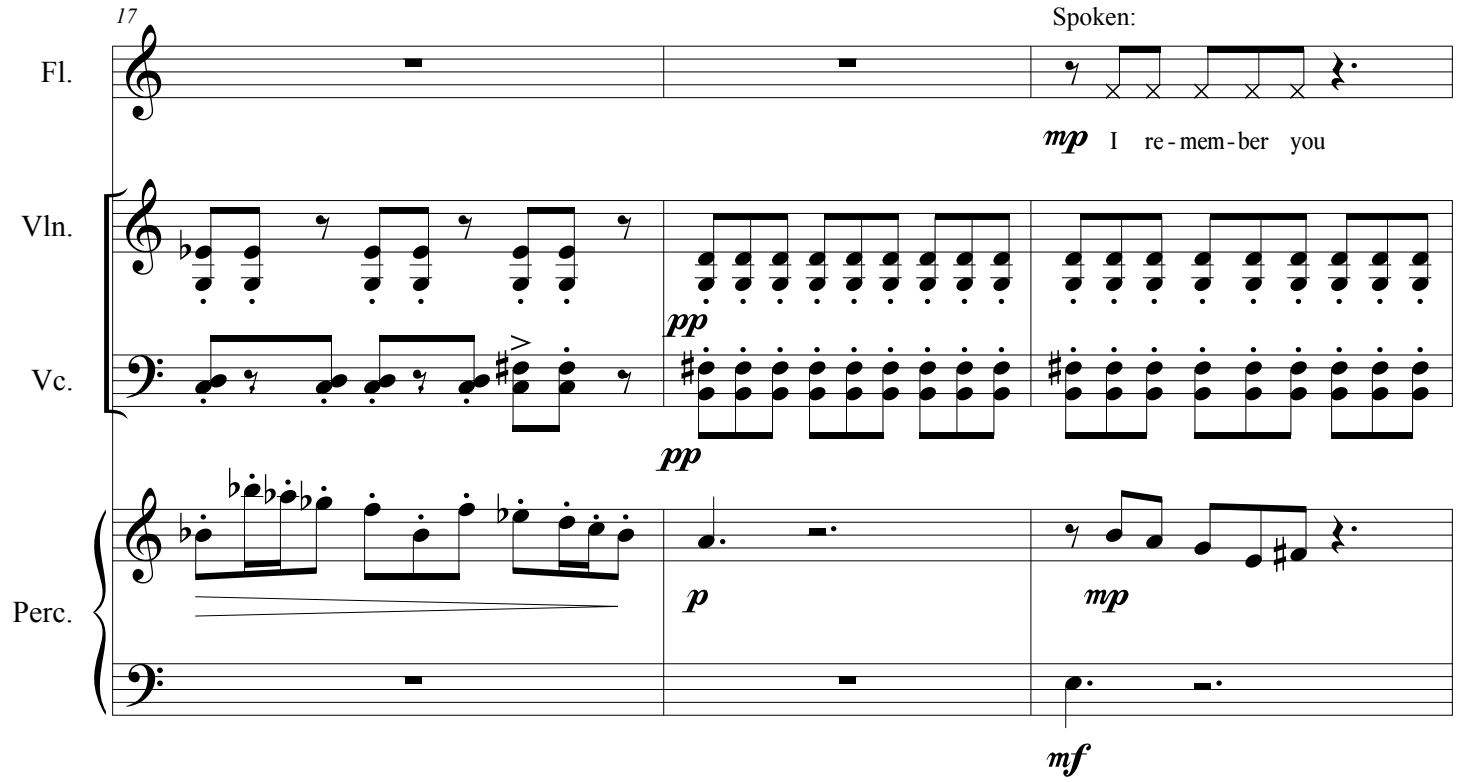
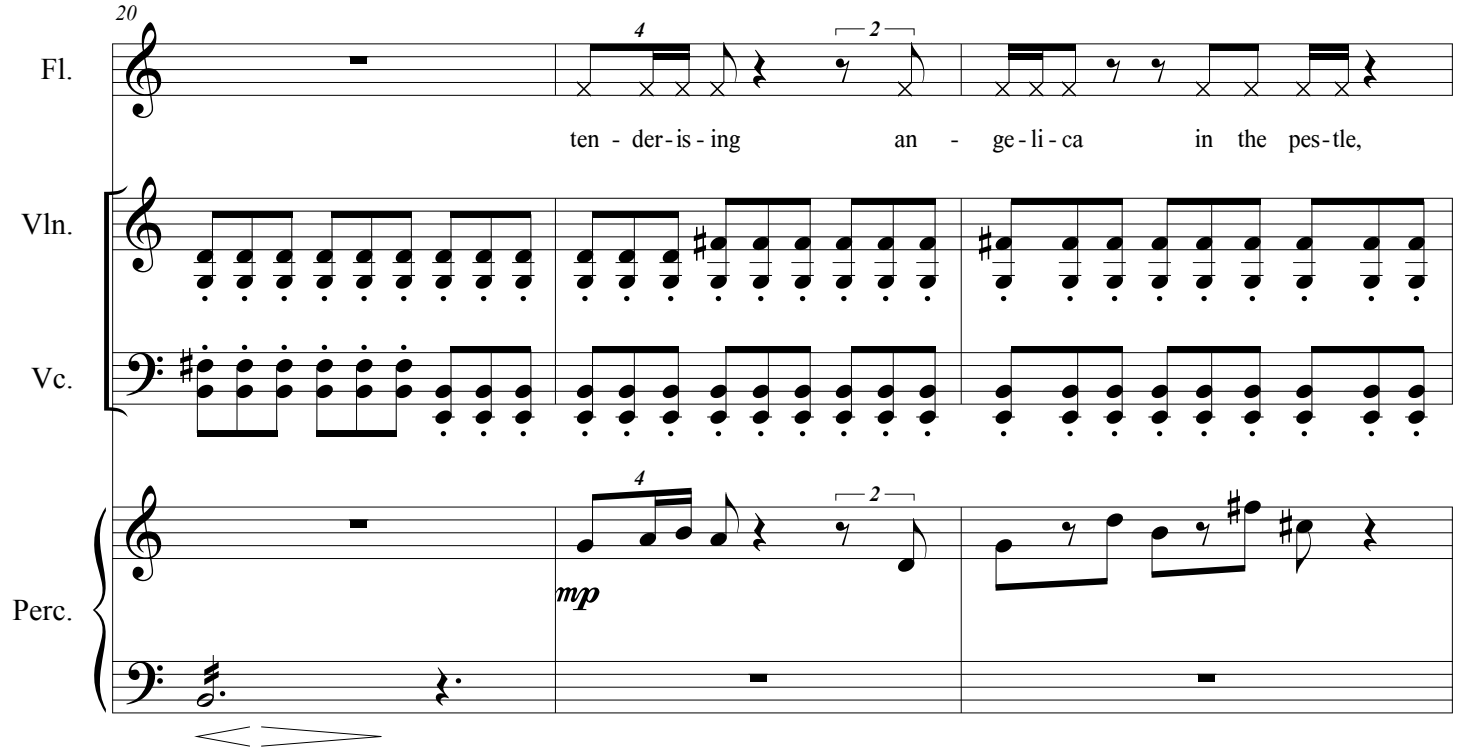
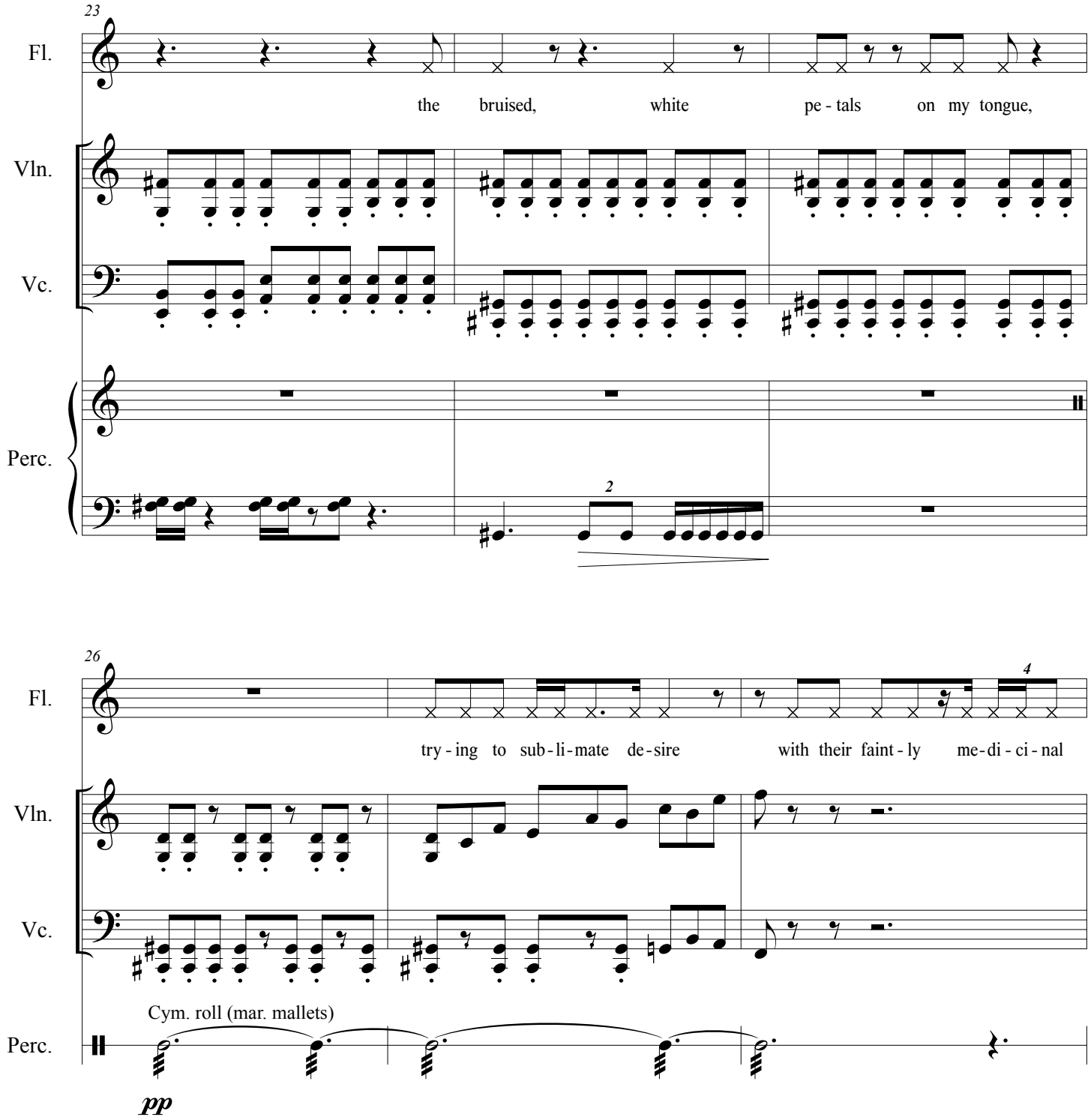
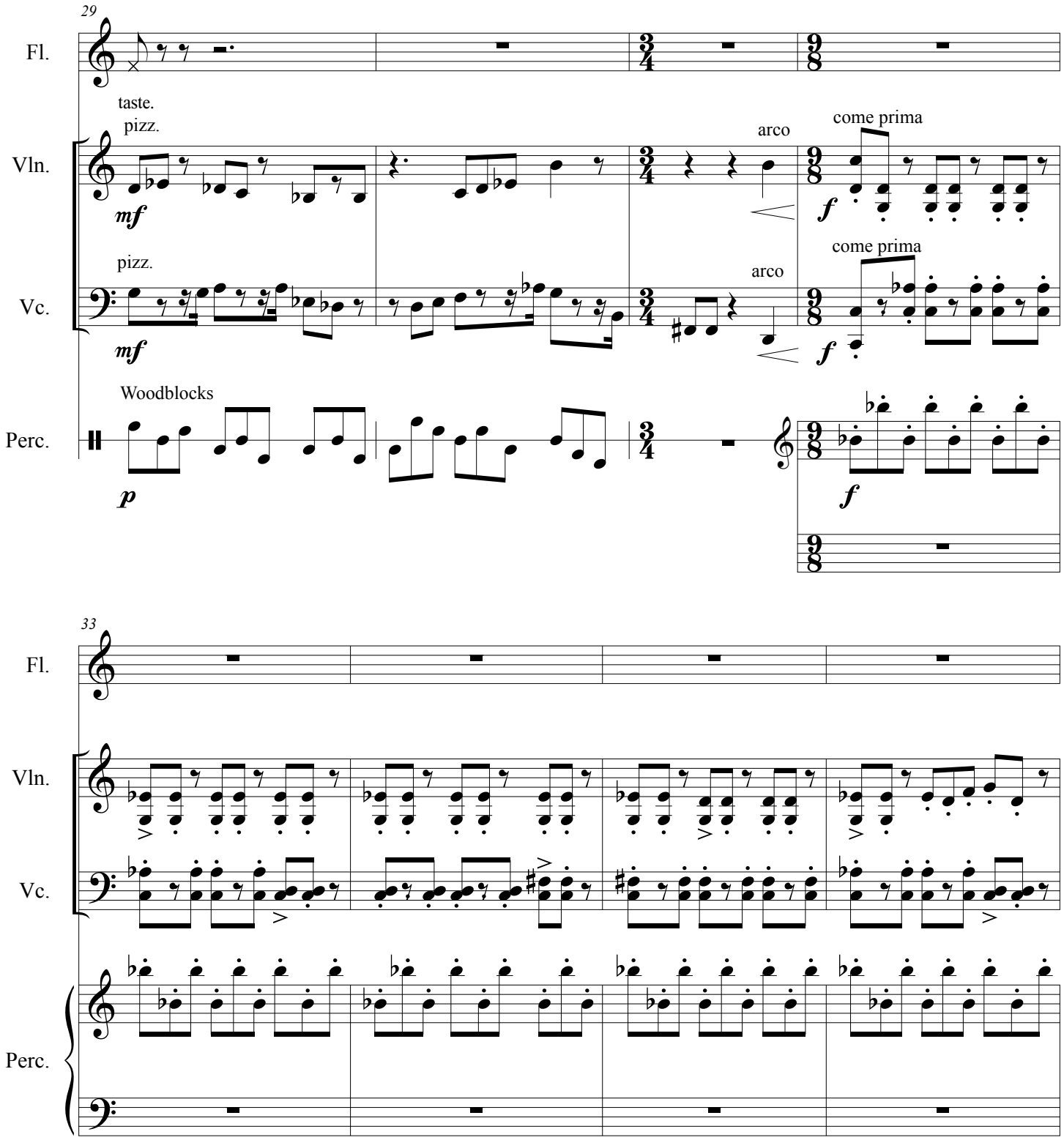

9
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.

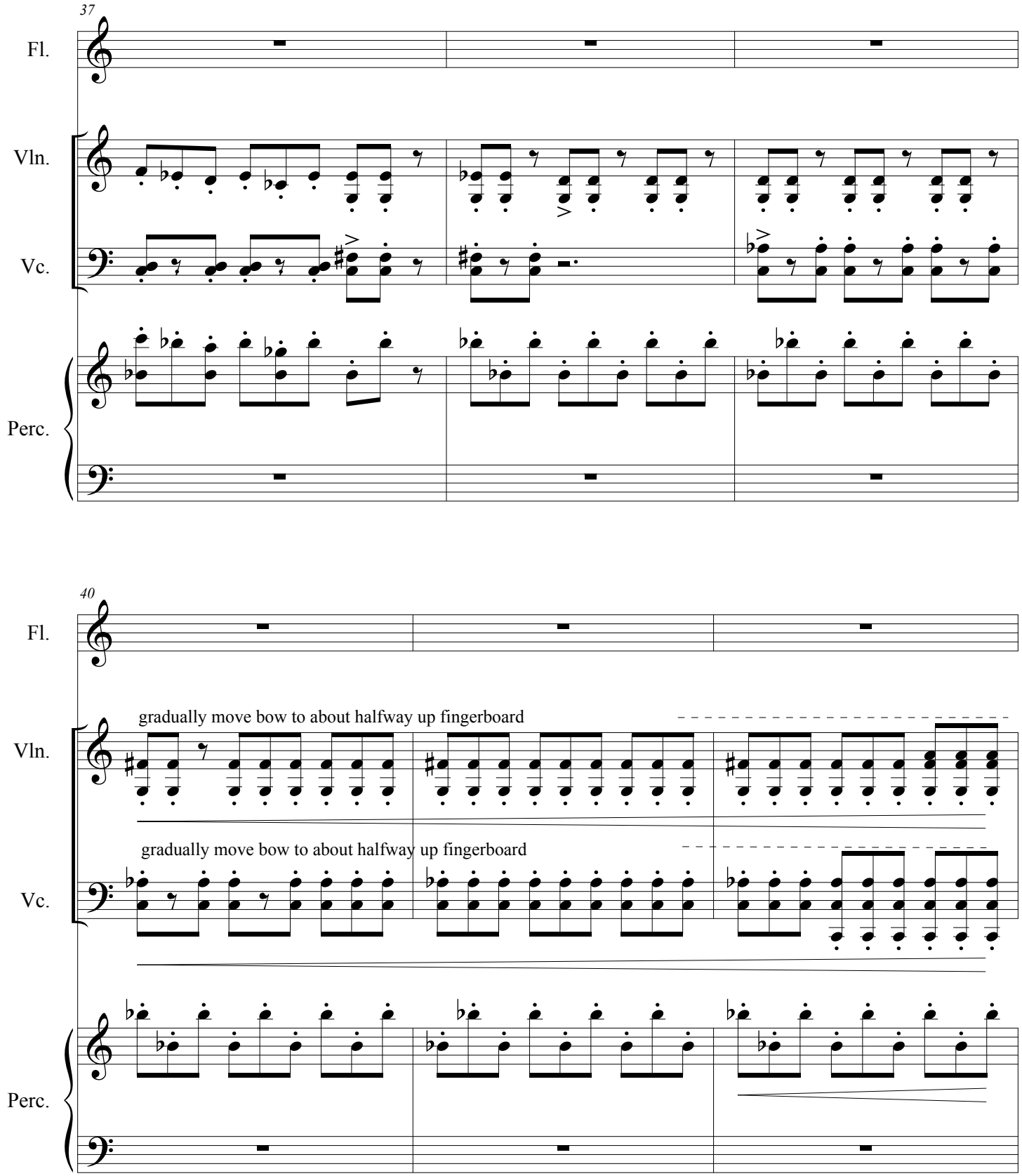

13
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.

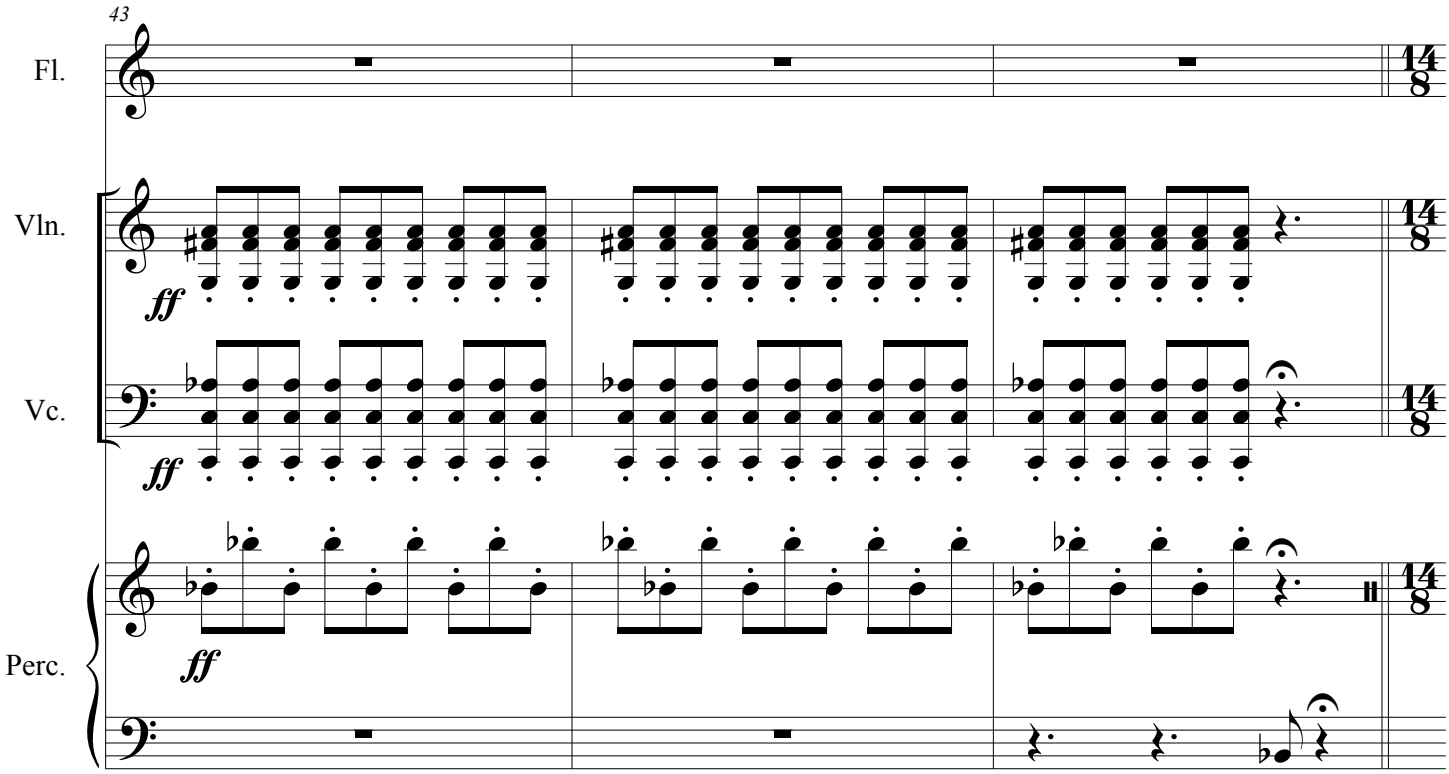

17
Spoken:
Fl.
mp I re-mem-ber you
Vln.
Vc.
pp
pp
Perc.
p
mp
mf


20
Fl.
4
2
ten - der-is-ing an - ge-li-ca in the pes-tle,
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
4
2
mp

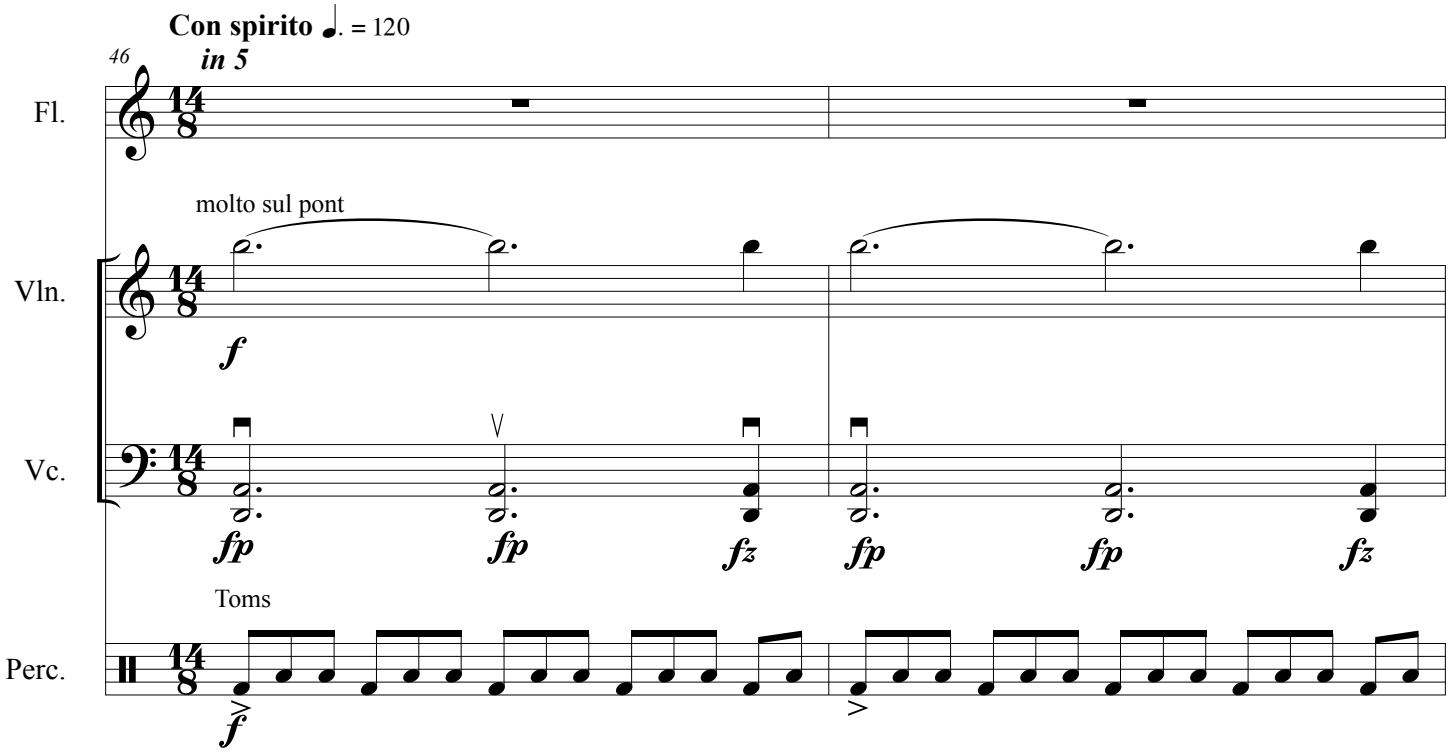

23
Fl.
the bruised, white pe - tals on my tongue,
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
2
26
Fl.
4
try - ing to sub - li - mate de - sire with their faint - ly me - di - ci - nal
Vln.
Vc.
Cym. roll (mar. mallets)
Perc.
pp

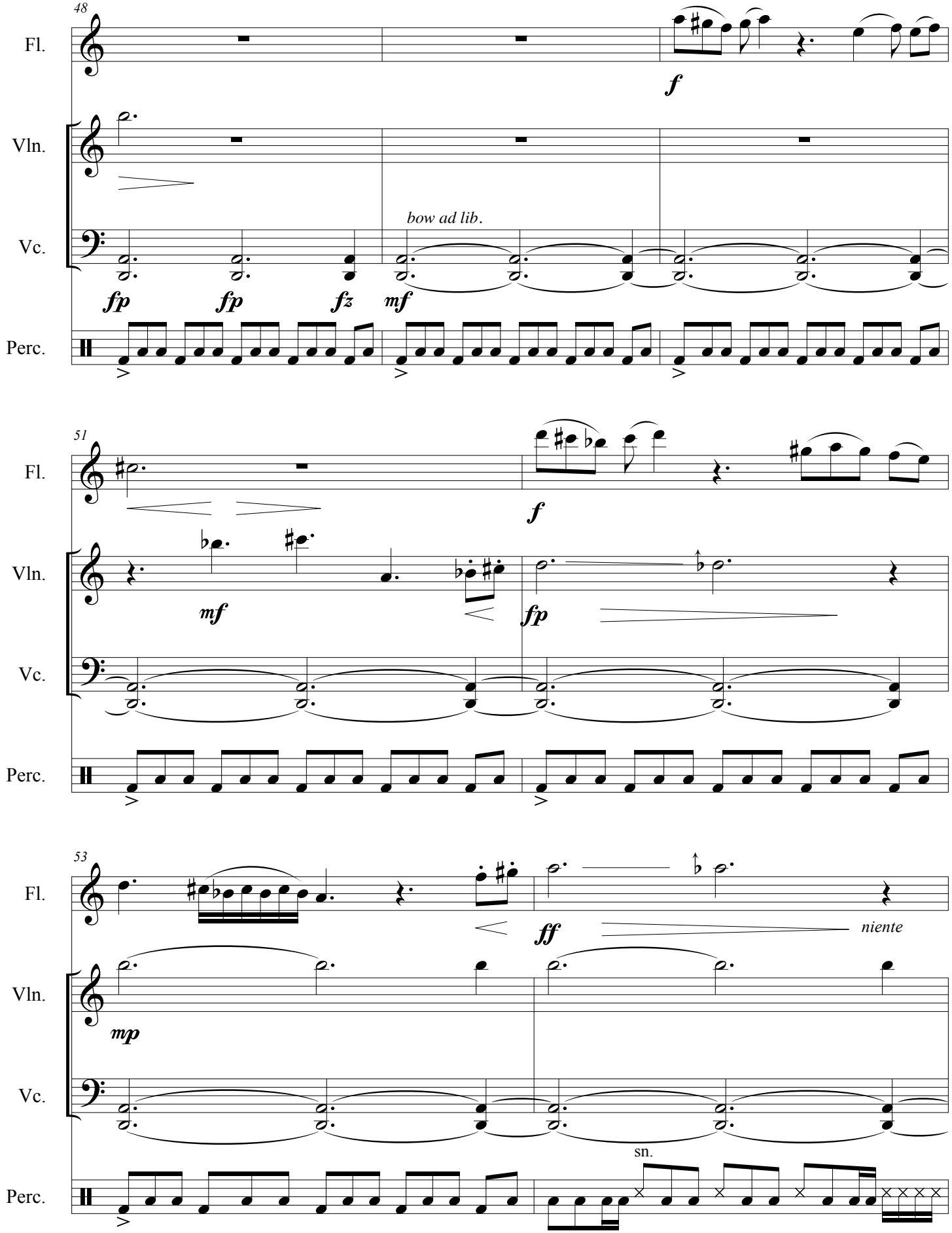

29
Fl.
taste.
Vln.
pizz.
mf
arco
come prima
f
Vc.
pizz.
mf
arco
come prima
f
Perc.
Woodblocks
p
f
33
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.

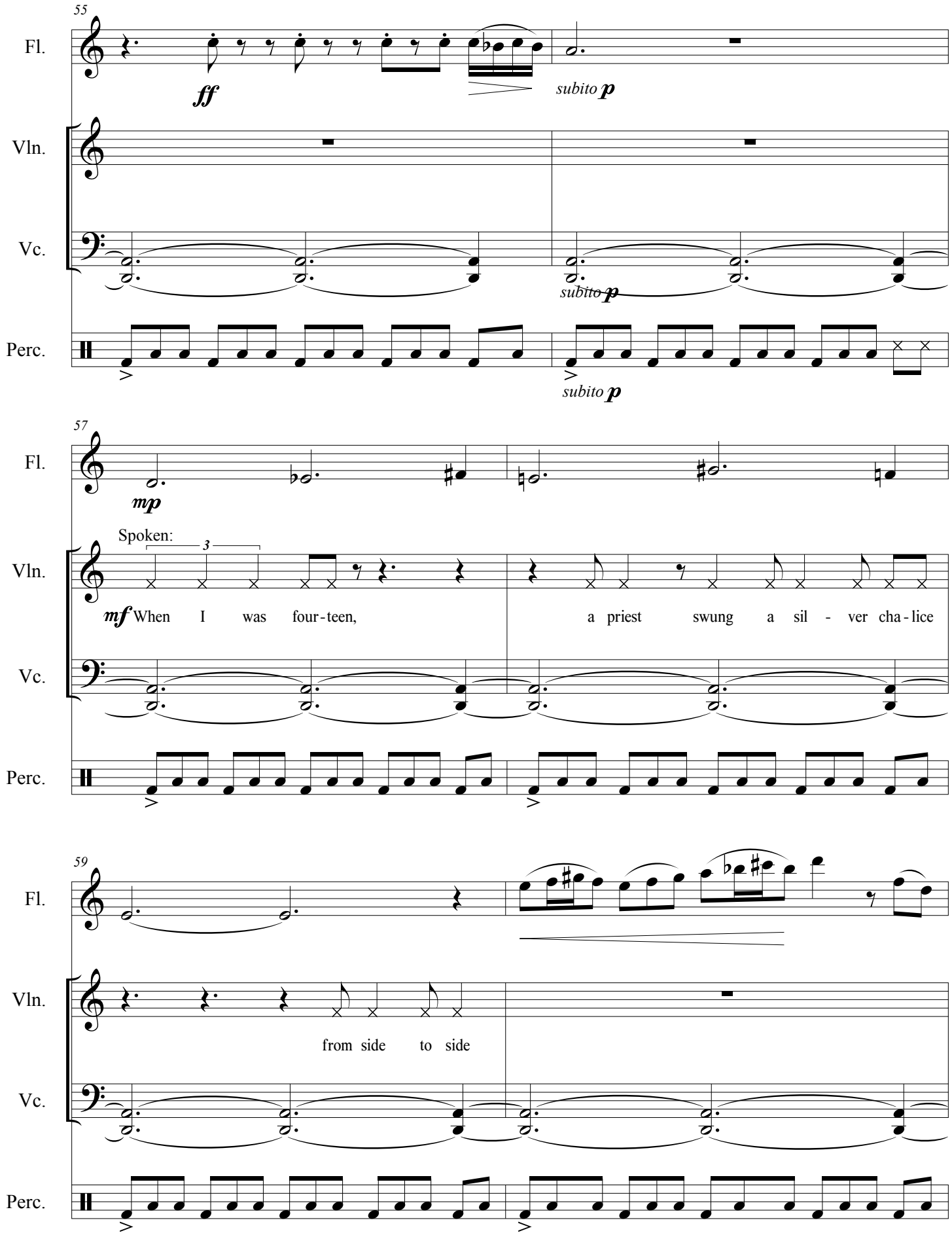

37
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
40
Fl.
gradually move bow to about halfway up fingerboard
Vln.
gradually move bow to about halfway up fingerboard
Vc.
Perc.

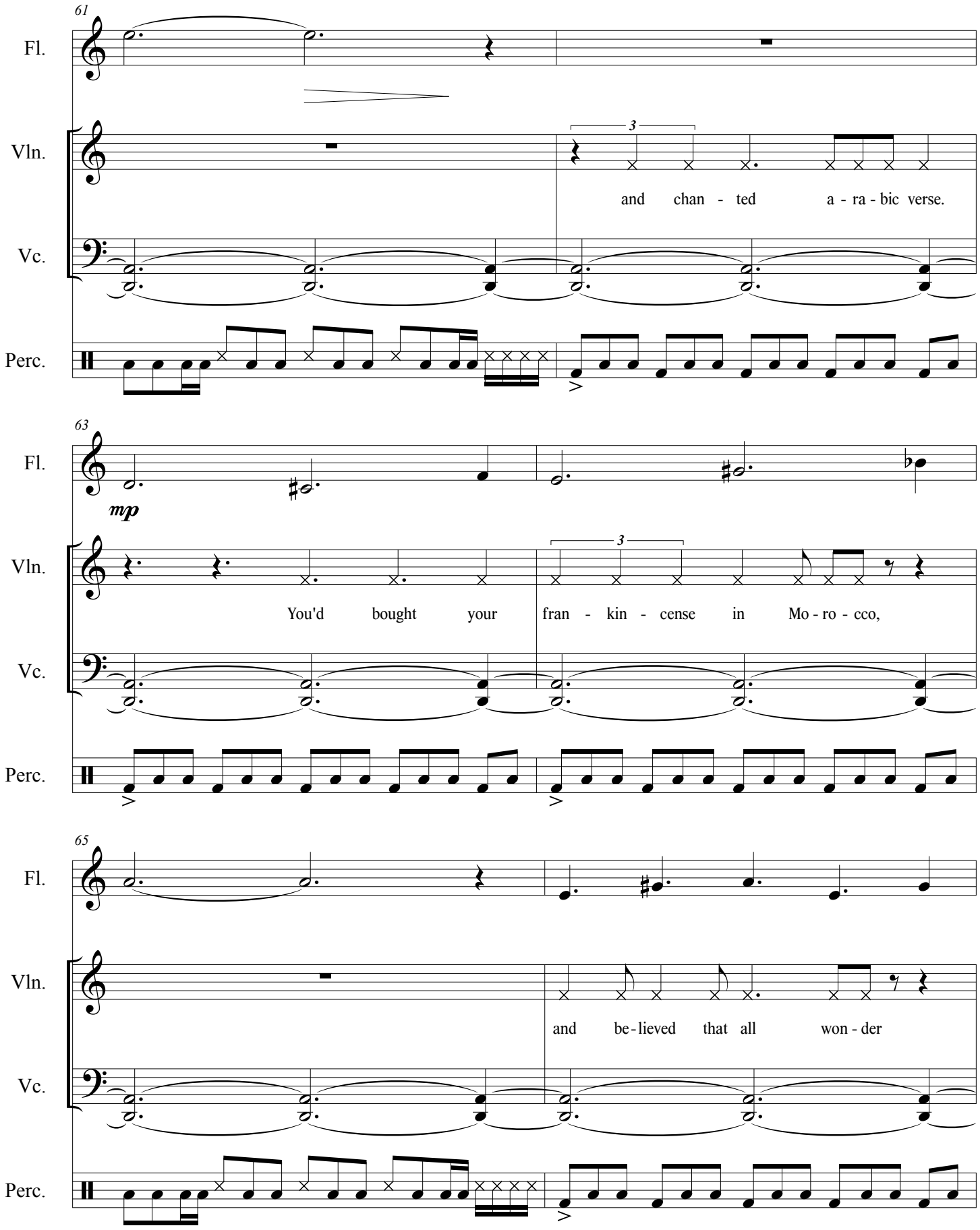

43
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
ff
ff
ff
14
8

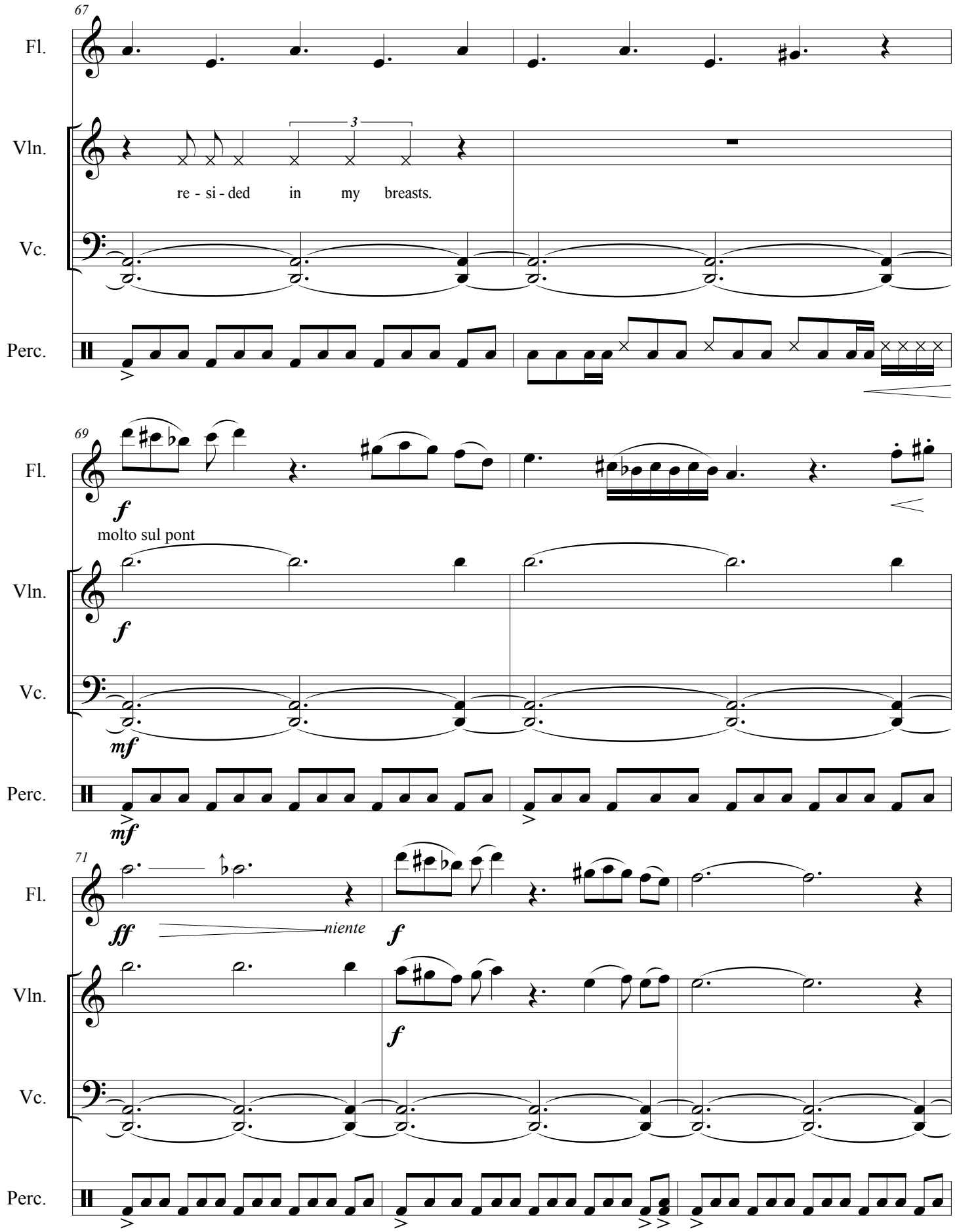
Ephemera 2

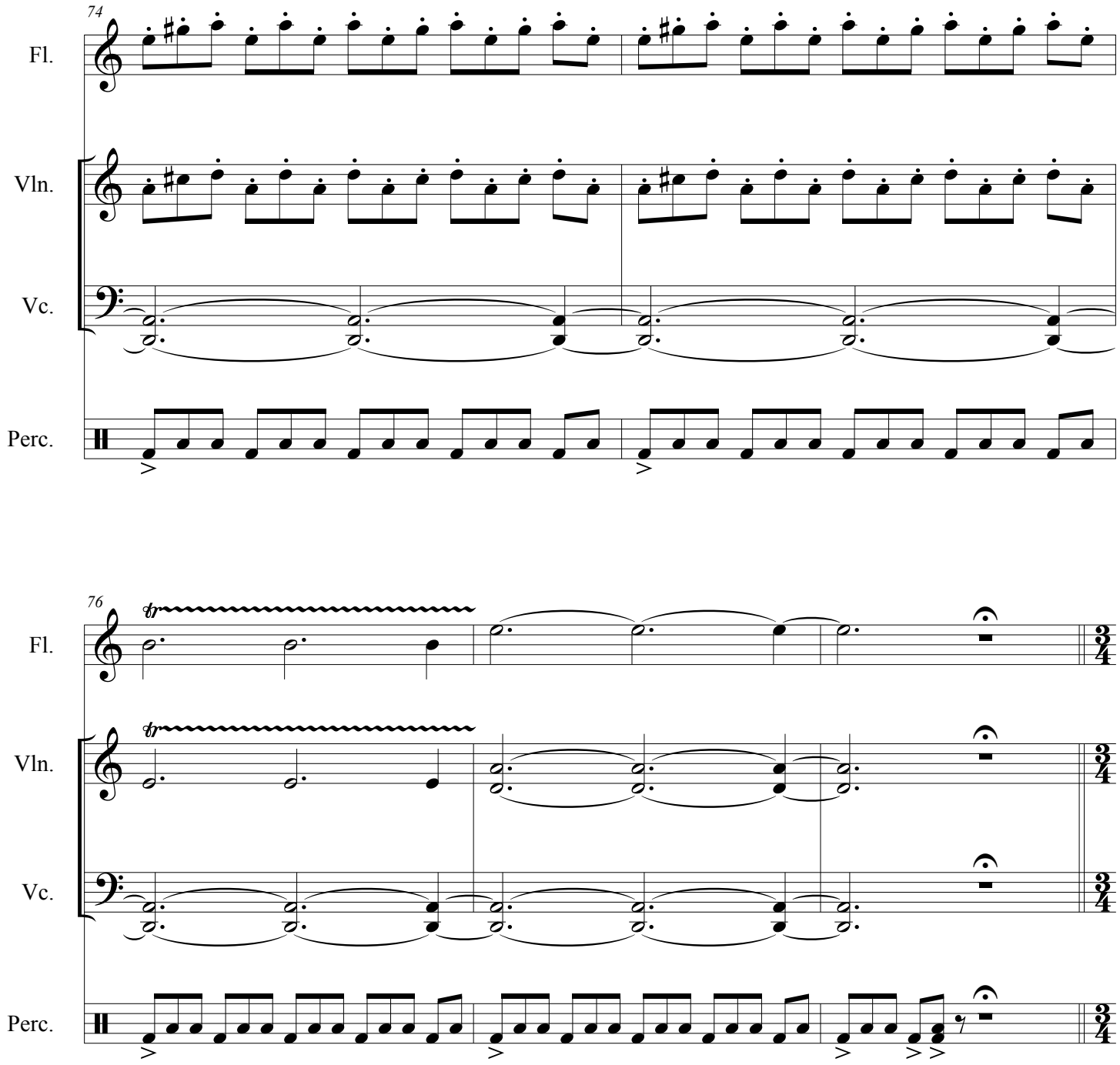

Con spirito ♩. = 120
in 5
46
Fl.
molto sul pont
Vln.
Vc.
Toms
Perc.
f
fp
fp
fz
fp
fp
fz
f
14
8


48
Fl.
f
Vln.
Vc.
bow ad lib.
fp
fp
fz
mf
Perc.
51
Fl.
f
Vln.
mf
fp
Vc.
Perc.
53
Fl.
ff
niente
Vln.
mp
Vc.
sn.
Perc.

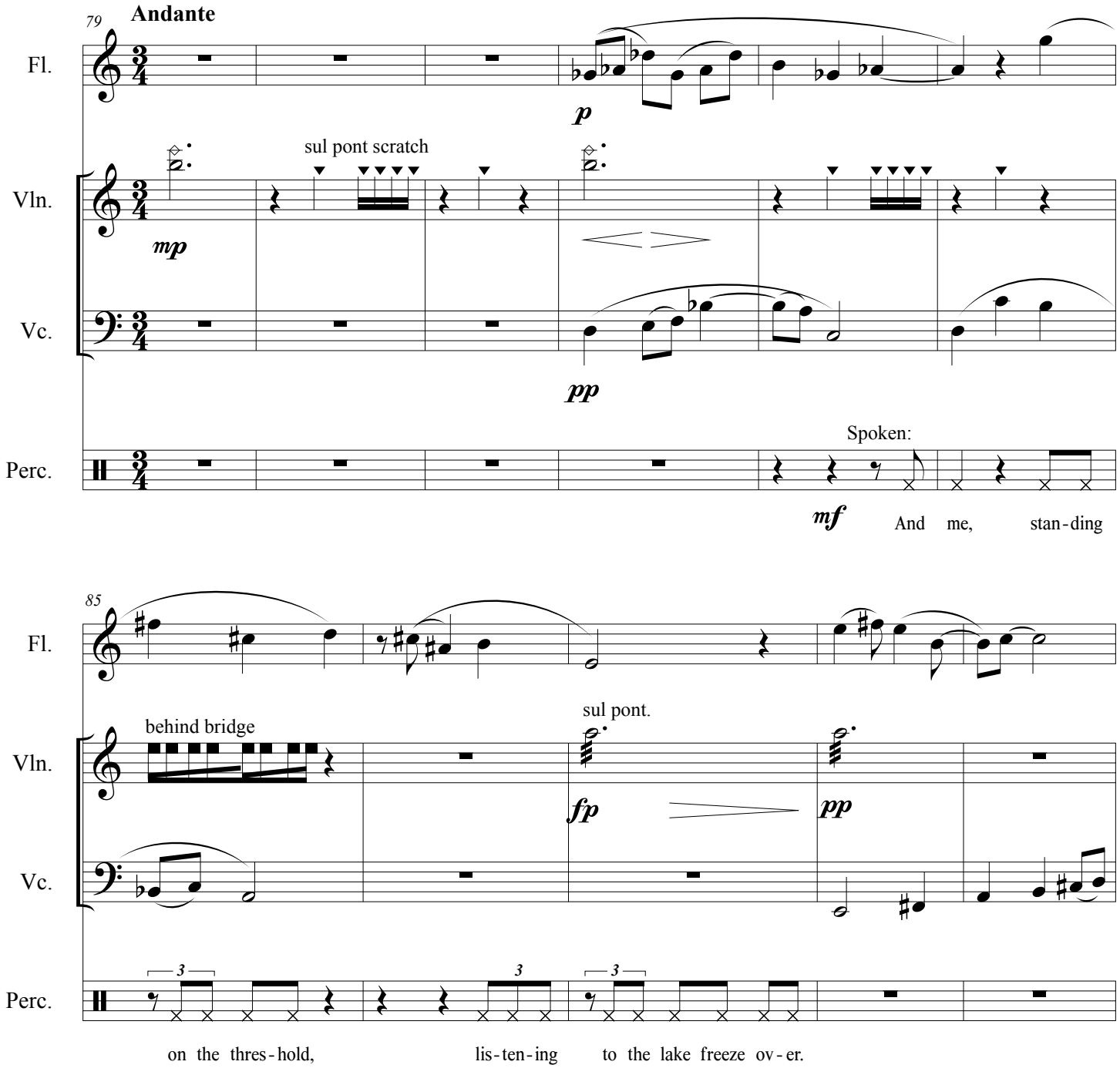

55
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
ff
subito p
subito p
subito p
57
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
mp
Spoken:
3
mf When I was four-teen, a priest swung a sil - ver cha-lice
59
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
from side to side

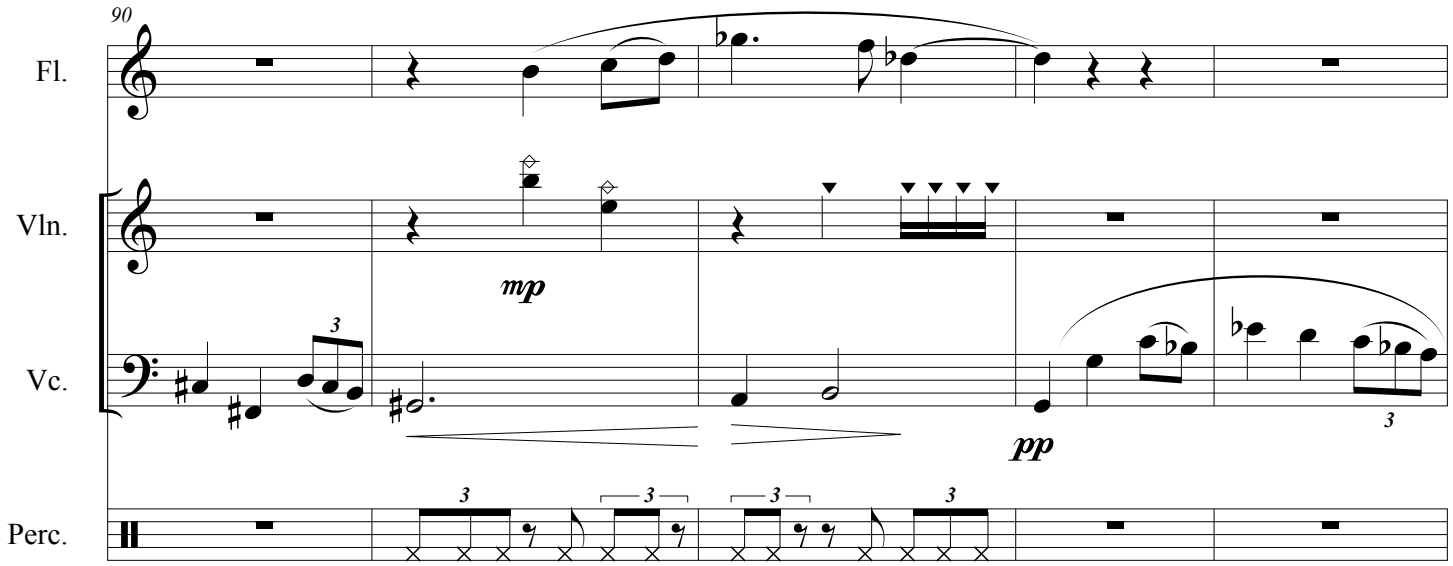

61
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
3
and chan - ted a - ra - bic verse.
63
mp
You'd bought your fran - kin - cense in Mo - ro - cco,
65
and be - lieved that all won - der

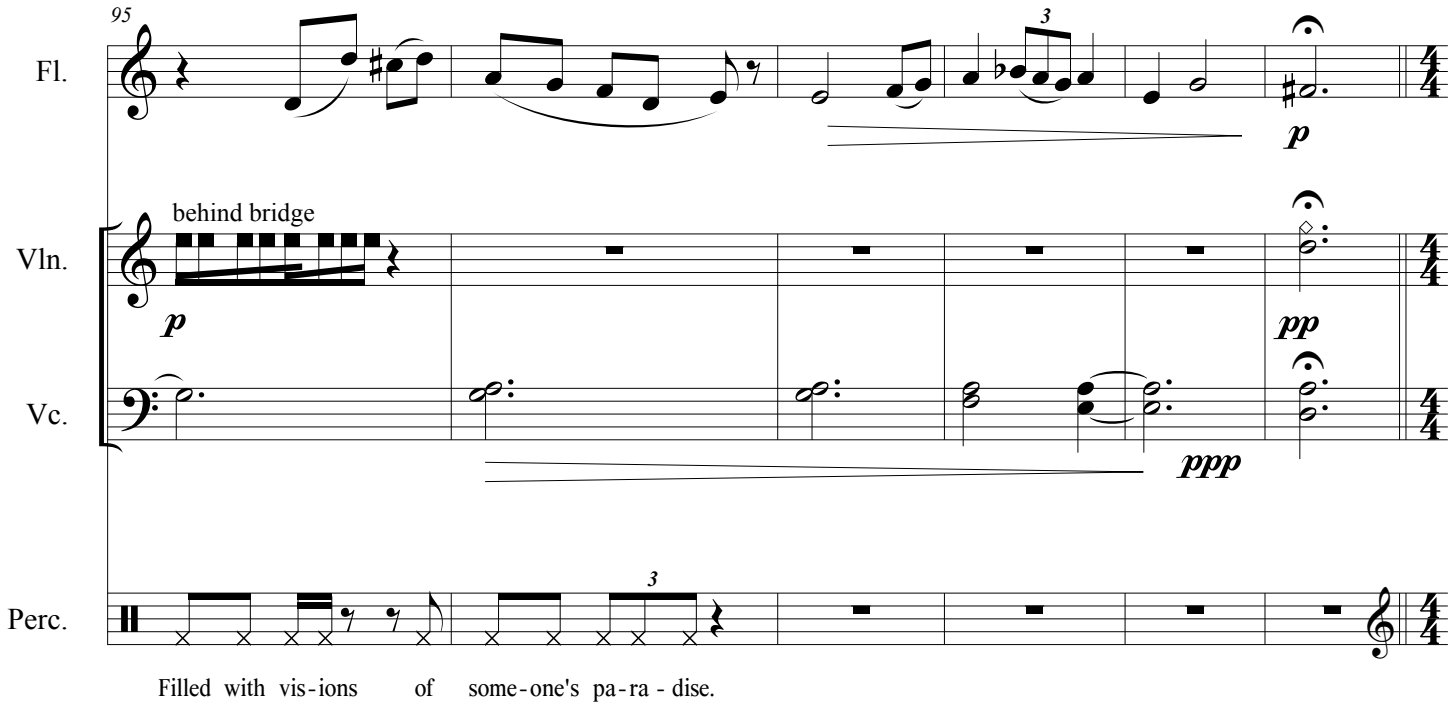

67
Fl.
Vln.
3
re - si - ded in my breasts.
Vc.
Perc.
69
Fl.
f
molto sul pont
Vln.
f
Vc.
mf
Perc.
mf
71
Fl.
ff
niente
f
Vln.
f
Vc.
Perc.


74
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
76
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.

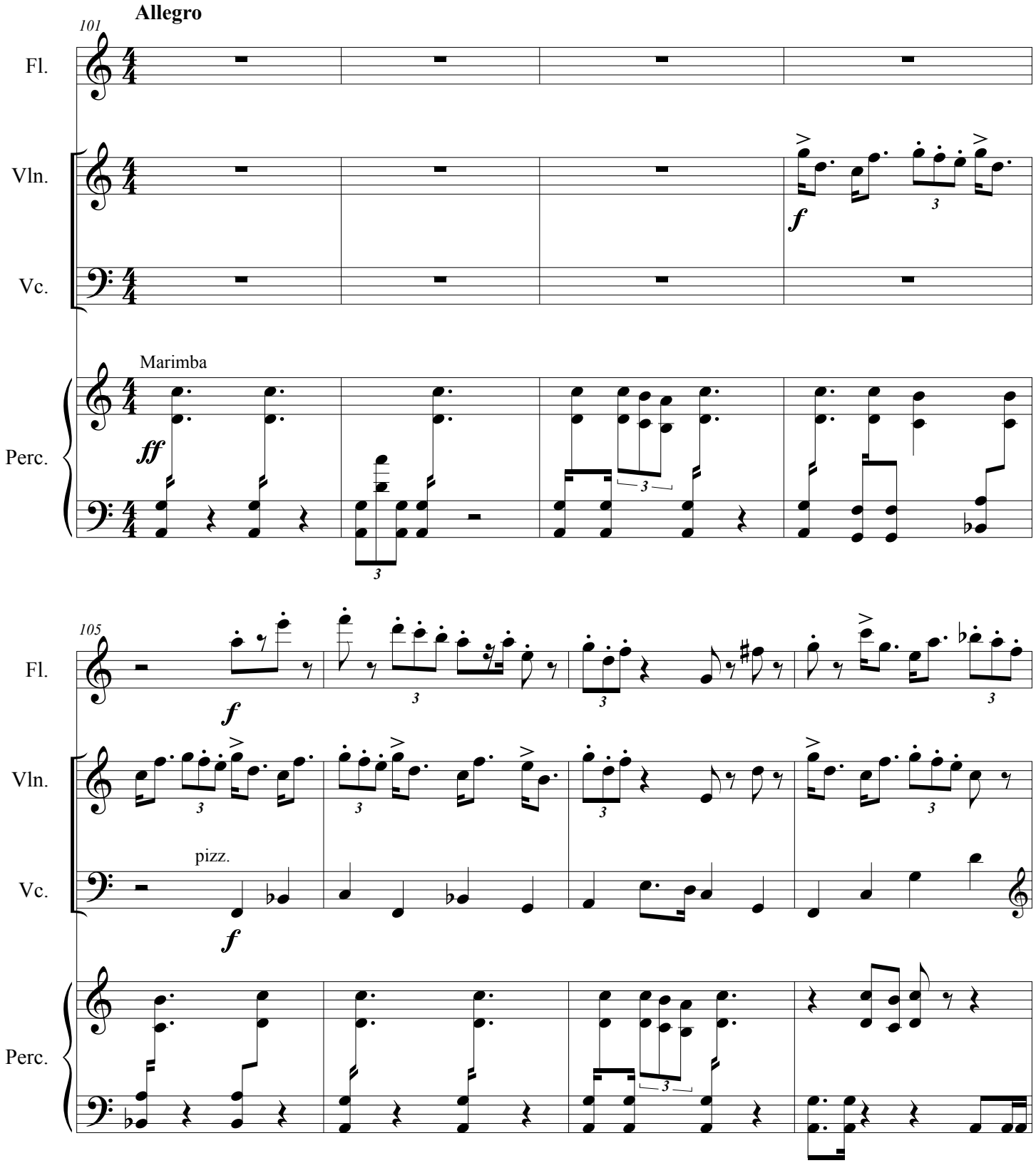
Ephemera 3

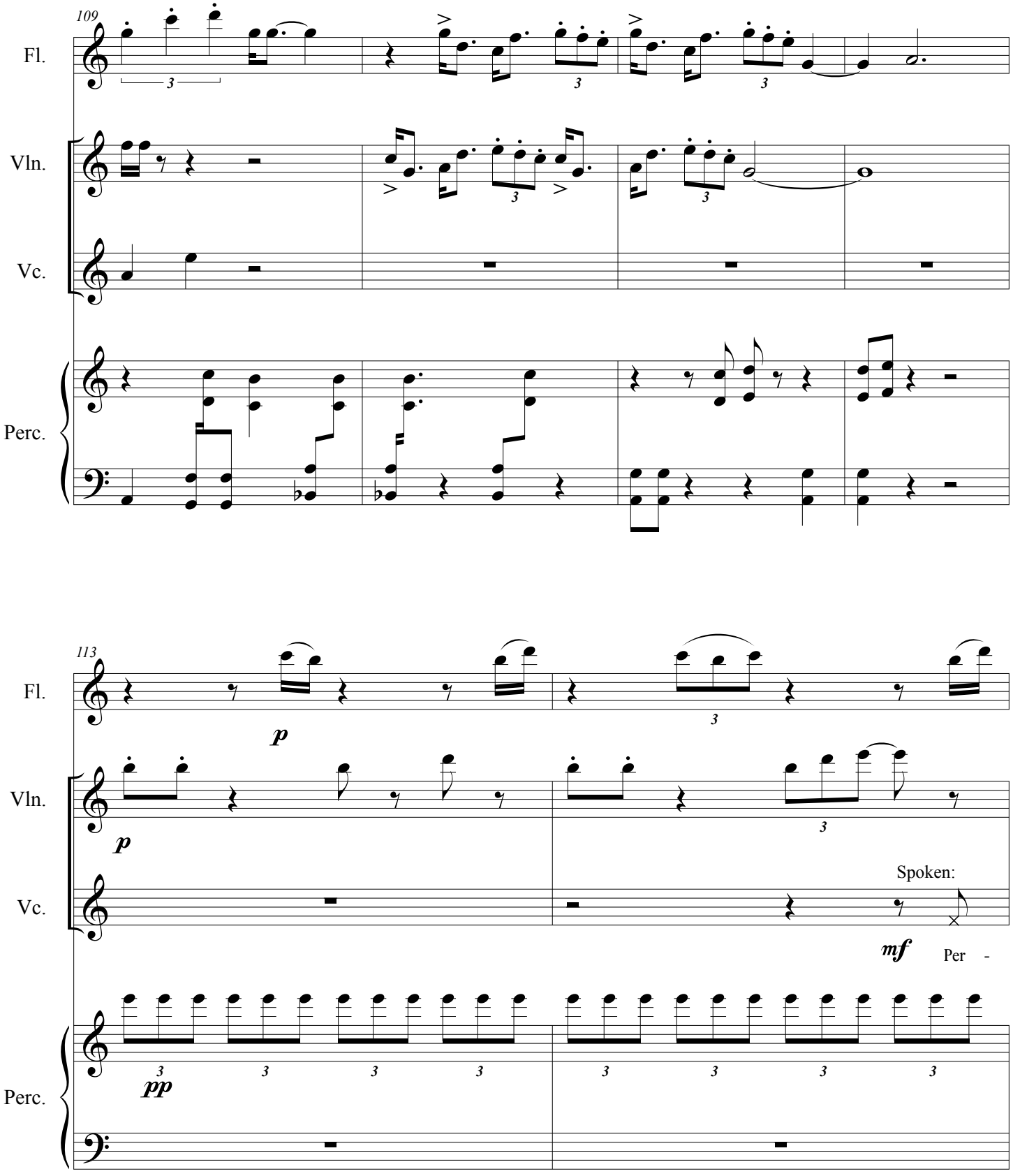

79
Andante
Fl.
p
sul pont scratch
Vln.
mp
Vc.
pp
Spoken:
Perc.
mf
And me, stan-ding
85
Fl.
behind bridge
sul pont.
Vln.
fp
pp
Vc.
3
3
3
Perc.
on the thres-hold, lis-ten-ing to the lake freeze ov-er.

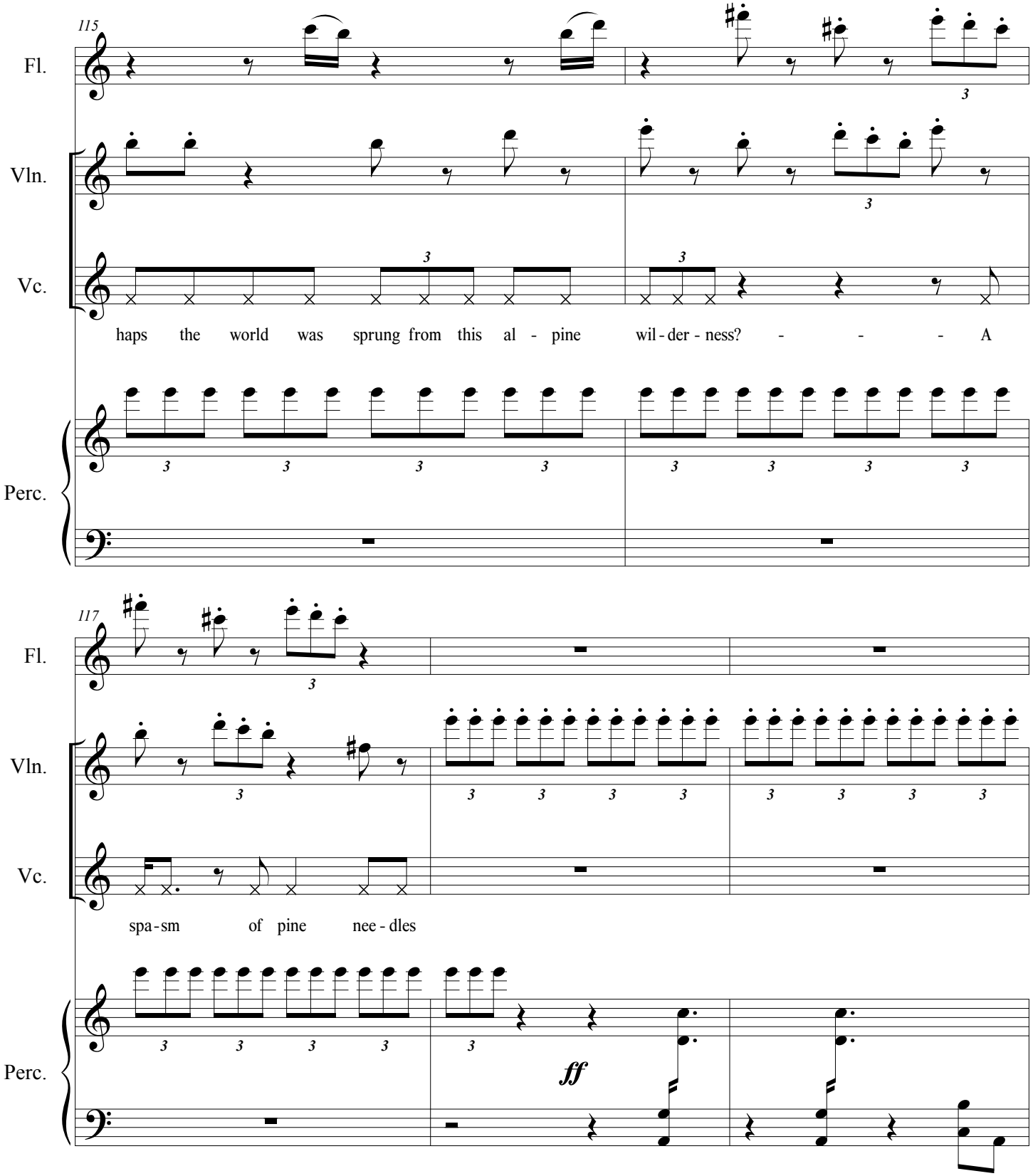

90
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
mp
pp
Won-der-ing if set-ting wa-ter is au-di-ble.

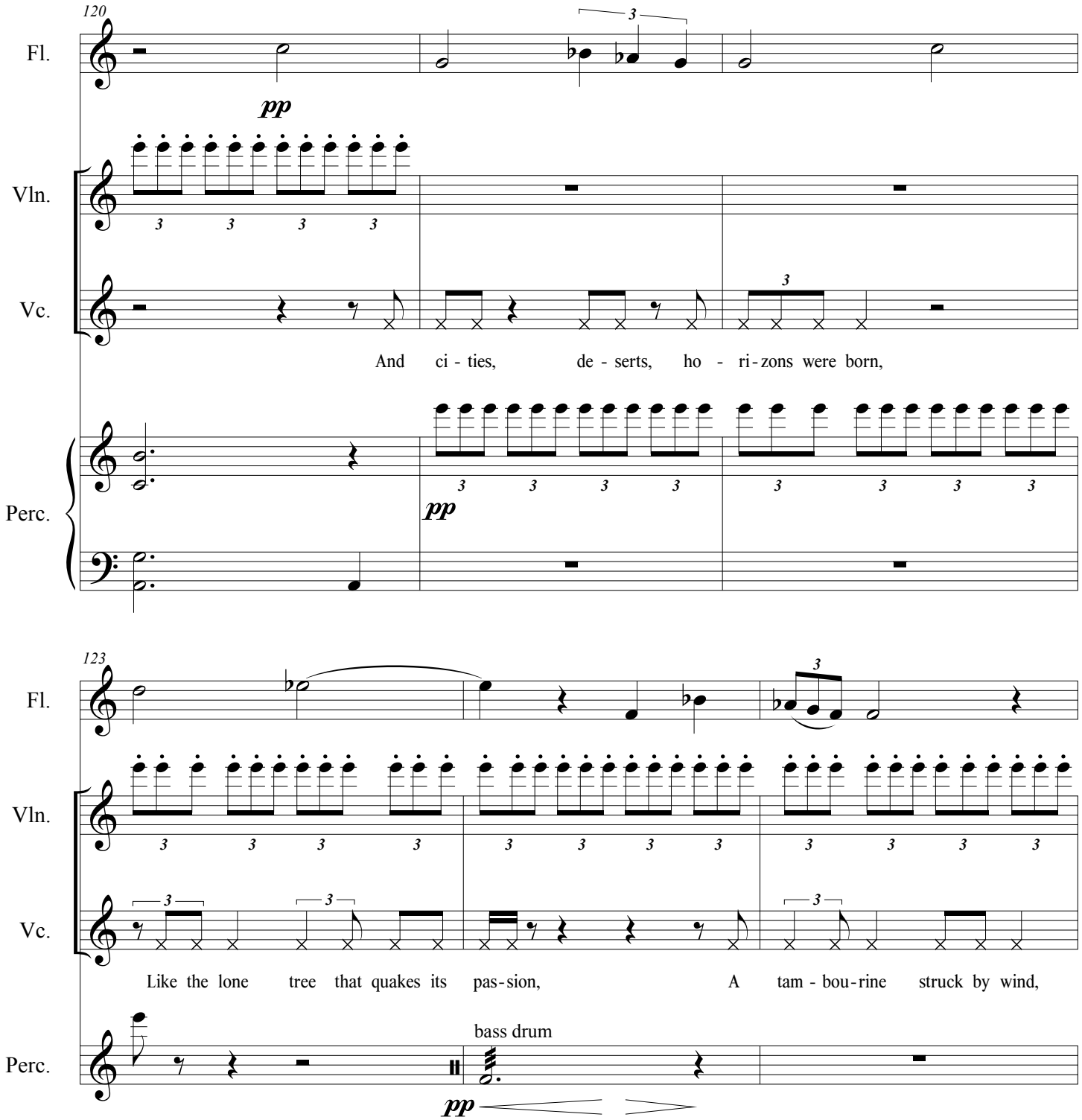

95
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
behind bridge
p
pp
ppp
Filled with vis-ions of some-one's pa-ra-dise.

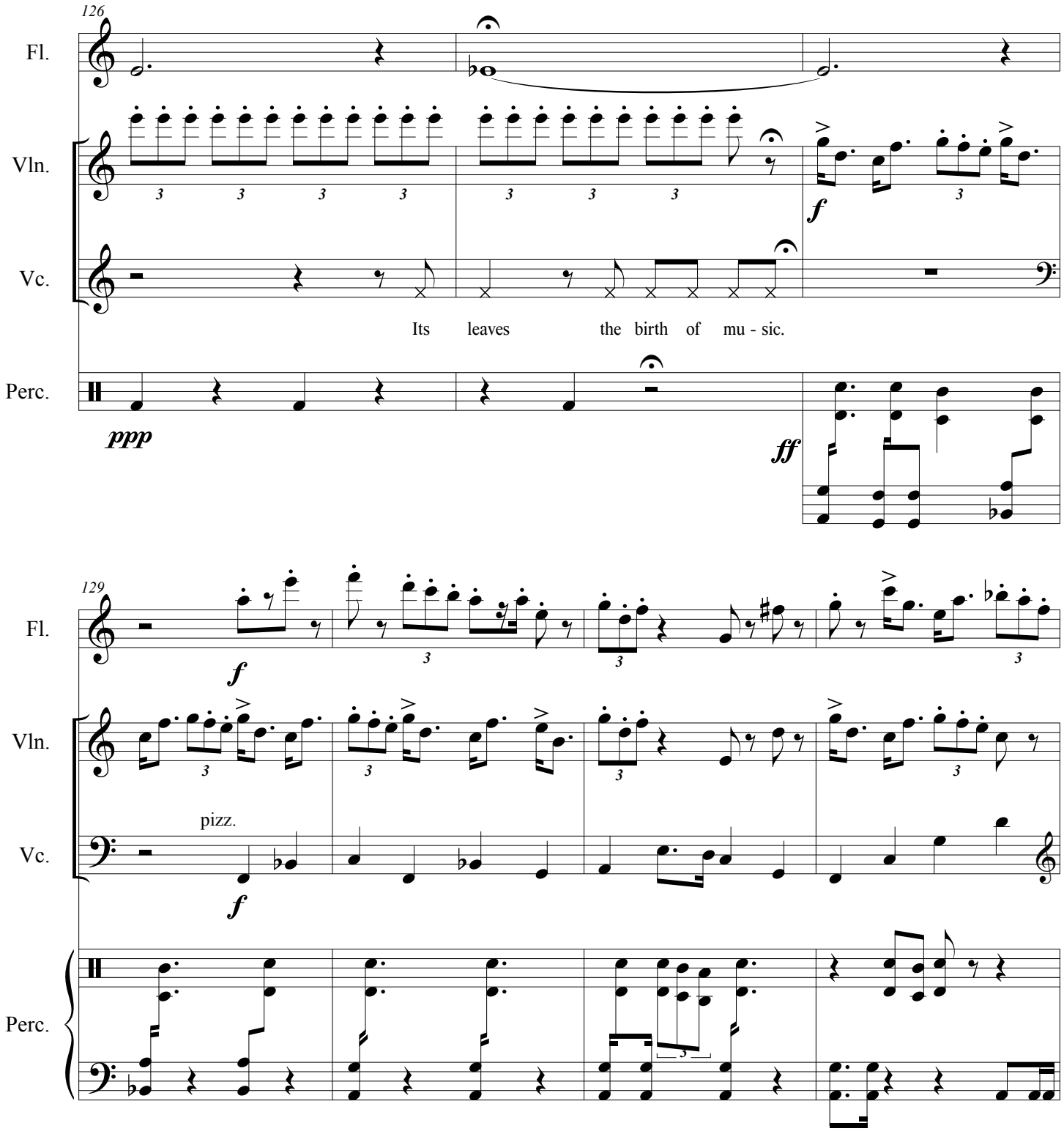
Ephemera 4

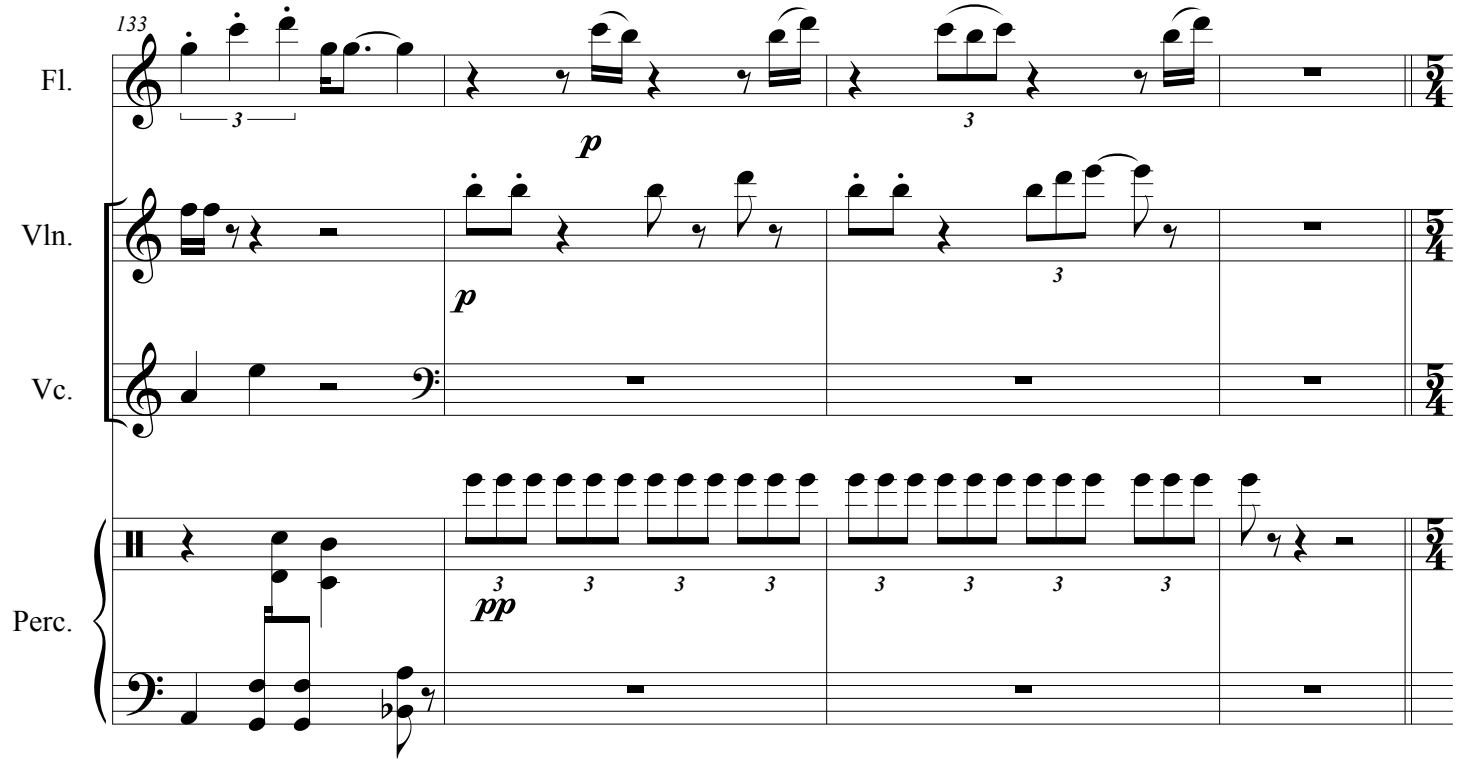



109
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
113
Fl.
p
Vln.
p
Vc.
Spoken:
mf
Per -
Perc.
pp

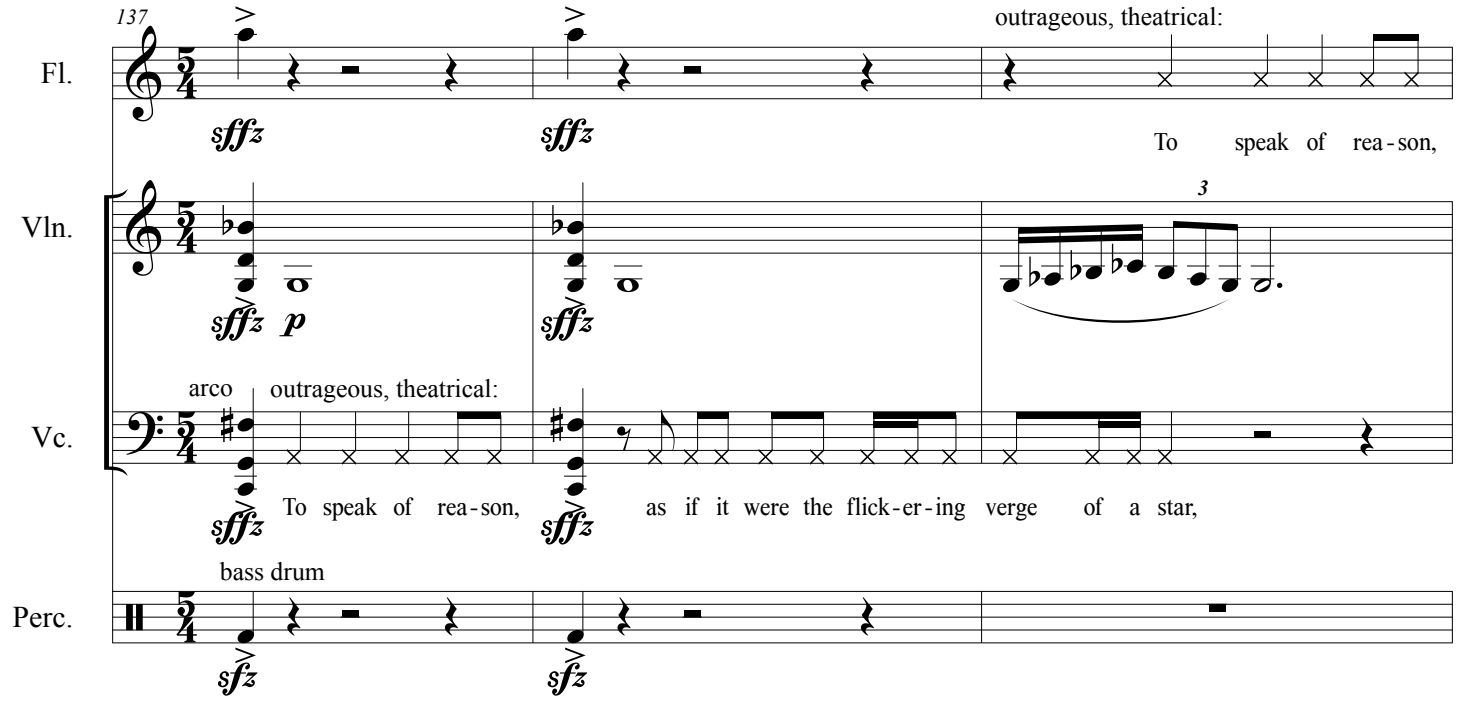

115
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
haps the world was sprung from this al - pine wil - der - ness? - - - A
Perc.
117
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
spa - sm of pine nee - dles
Perc.
ff

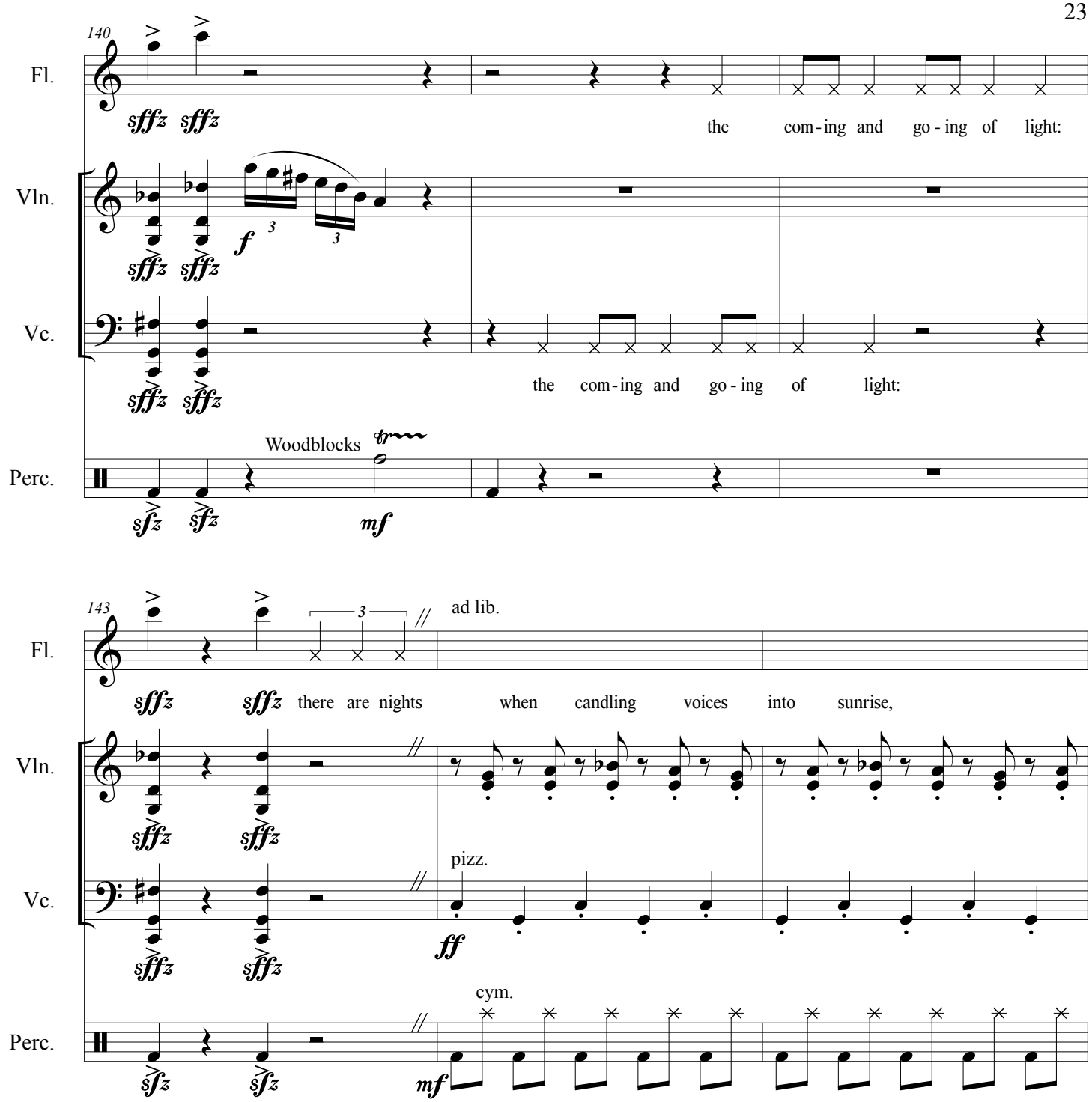

120
Fl.
pp
Vln.
Vc.
And ci - ties, de - serts, ho - ri - zons were born,
Perc.
pp
123
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Like the lone tree that quakes its pas - sion, A tam - bou - rine struck by wind,
Perc.
bass drum
pp

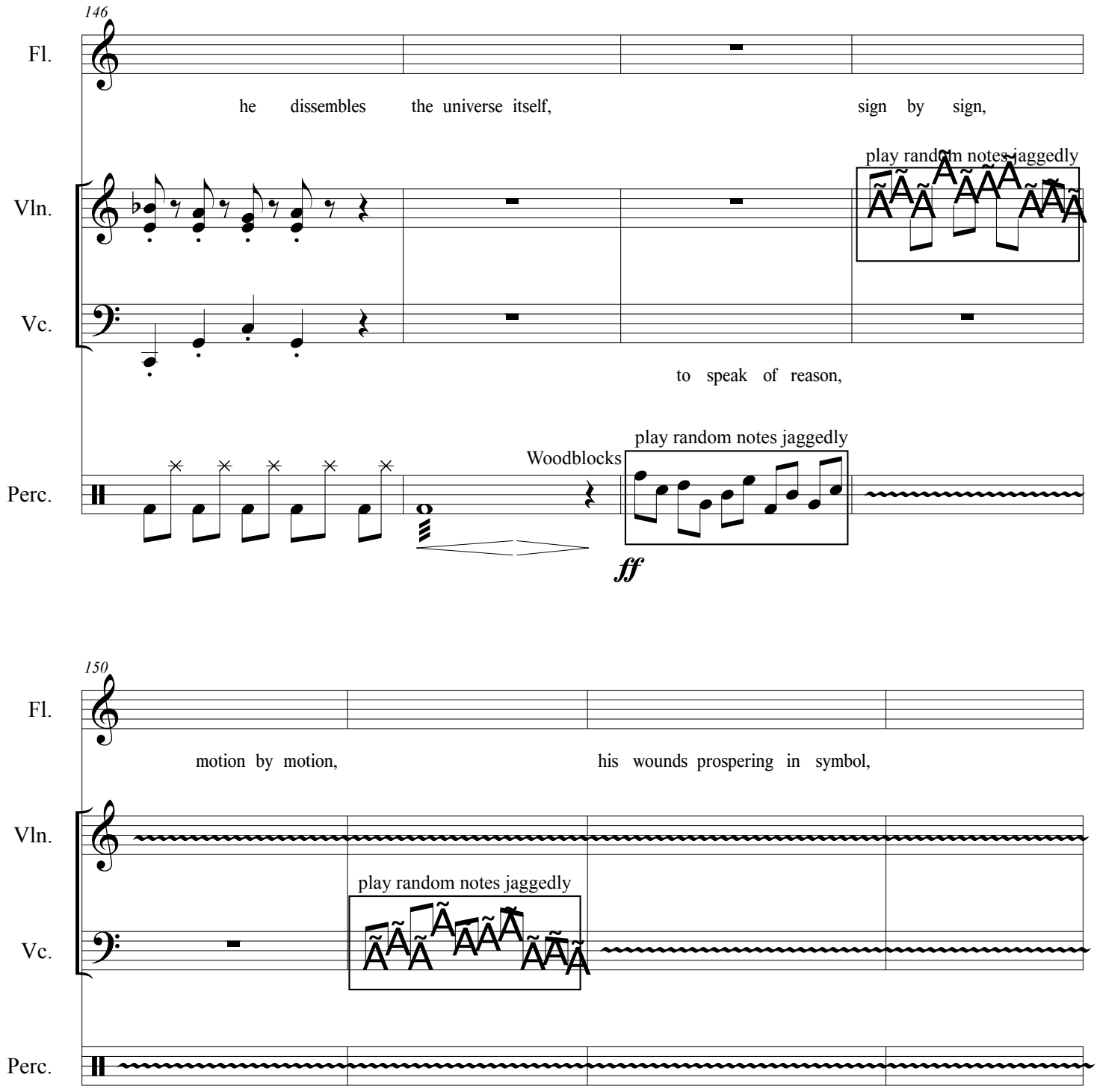

126
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
Its leaves the birth of mu - sic.
ppp
f
ff
129
pizz.

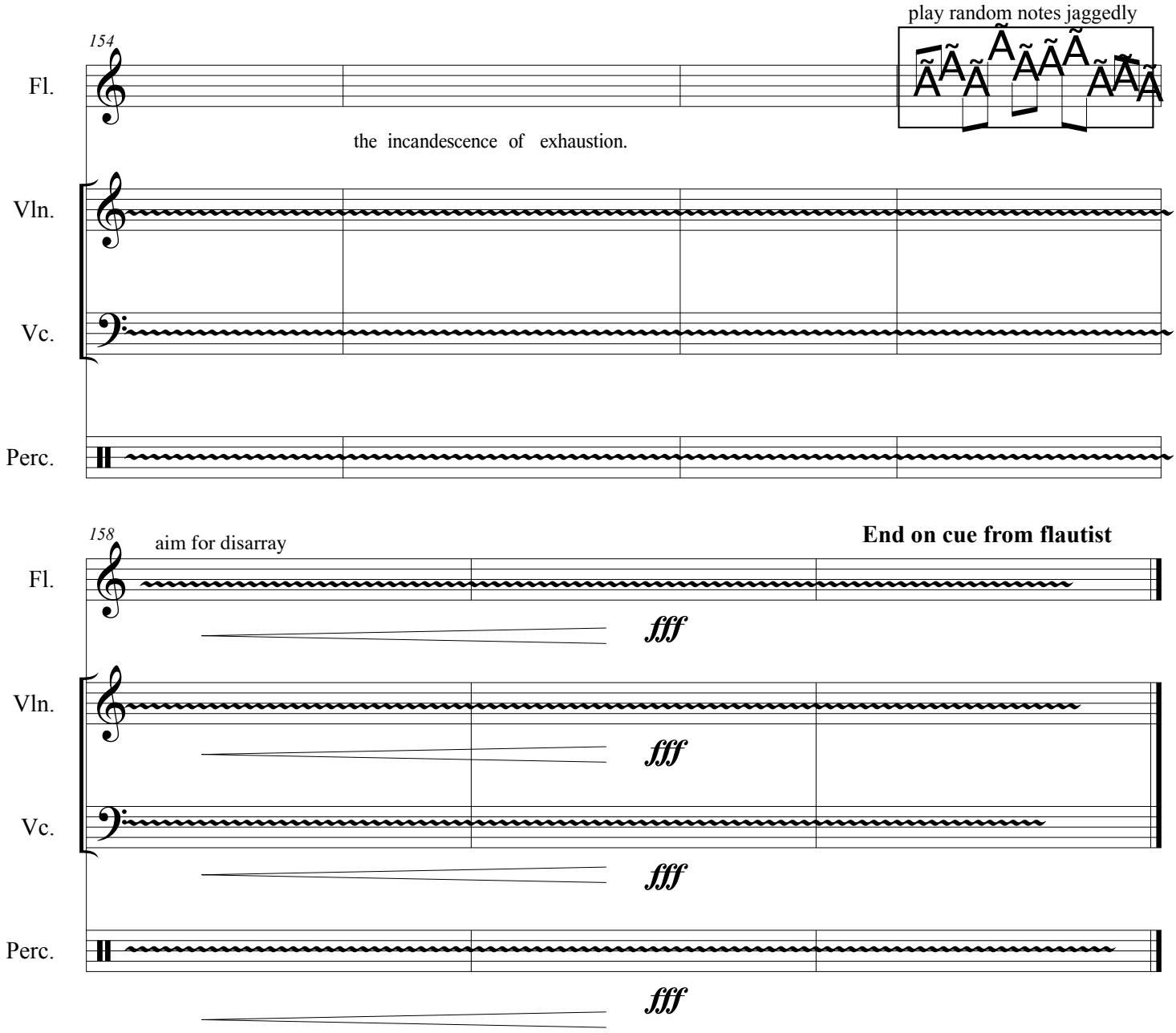

133
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
p
p
pp

Ephemera 5


137
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
outrageous, theatrical:
To speak of rea-son,
arco
outrageous, theatrical:
To speak of rea-son,
as if it were the flick-er-ing verge of a star,
bass drum


140
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
sfffz sfffz
the com-ing and go-ing of light:
f
3
3
sfffz sfffz
the com-ing and go-ing of light:
Woodblocks
tr
sfz sfz
mf
143
Fl.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
3
ad lib.
sfffz sfffz there are nights when candling voices into sunrise,
sfffz sfffz
pizz.
ff
sfffz sfffz
cym.
sfz sfz
mf


146
Fl.
he dissembles the universe itself, sign by sign,
Vln.
play random notes jaggedly
Vc.
to speak of reason,
Perc.
Woodblocks
play random notes jaggedly
ff
150
Fl.
motion by motion, his wounds prospering in symbol,
Vln.
play random notes jaggedly
Vc.
Perc.


154
play random notes jaggedly
Fl.
the incandescence of exhaustion.
Vln.
Vc.
Perc.
158
aim for disarray
End on cue from flautist
Fl.
fff
Vln.
fff
Vc.
fff
Perc.
fff