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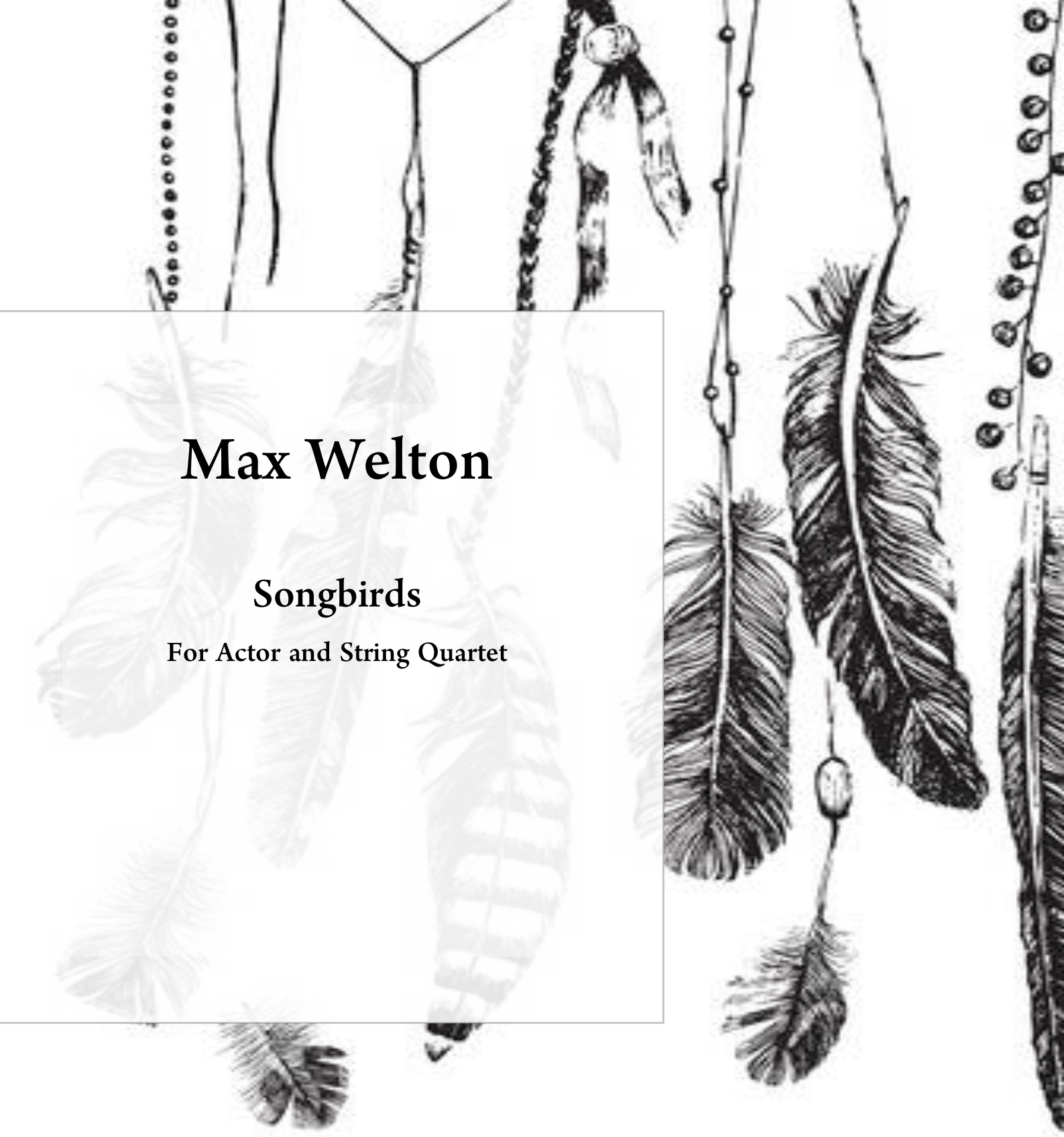
Title
Songbirds

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Author
Welton, Max

Publication Date
2020

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Max Welton

Songbirds

For Actor and String Quartet

Max Welton

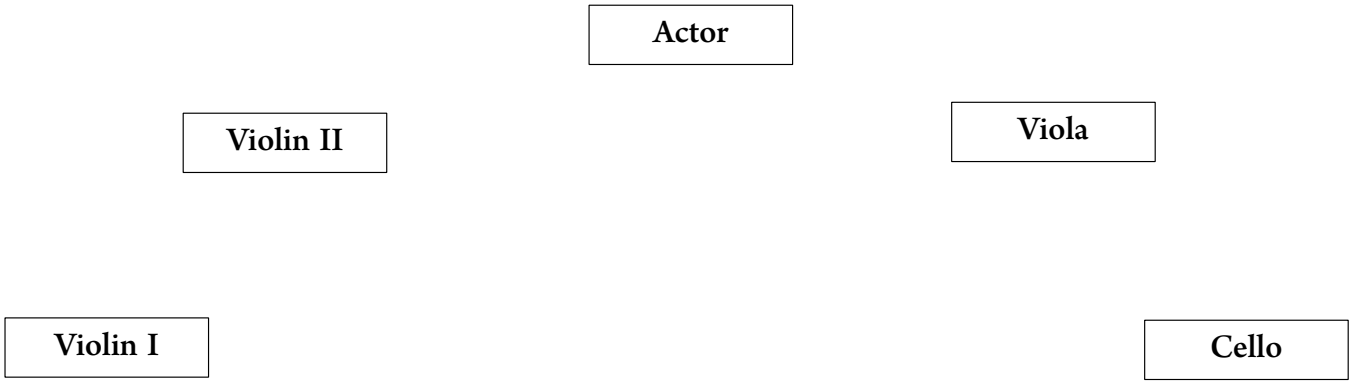
Songbirds

For Actor

and String Quartet

Stage Layout:

A path should be cleared in case the actor decides to move in front of the quartet



The actor should be amplified with a hand held 'SM58' style mic and a battery powered busking amp

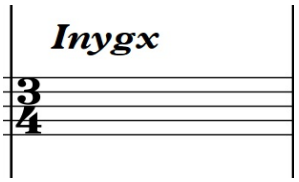
When noteheads are crossed, it indicates
Chicharra. Play close to the frog
behind the bridge. The pitch indicates the string.
There is an explanatory video at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKFlRd8J2ik
or just search "Chicharra Violin"



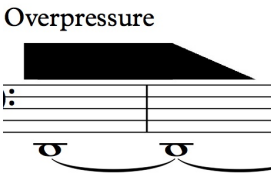
Seagull harmonics are played by fingering
an artificial harmonic high up on
the neck and then glissandoing down
without spreading the fingers. Don't take
too much care to play the notes written,
just getting the effect will be sufficiant



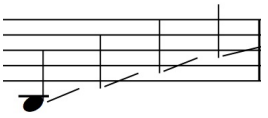
When there is text in italic bold written
above the part, it is to be spoken
in no particular rhythm. Arrows indicate
where the text falls. If there is text in
several parts, it is to be spoken in unison.
Plain italics are cues from the actors text



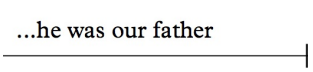
The thickness of the block indicates the
amount of overpressure to be used



Glissandi with no slurs are to be
rearticulated as indicated



The Actor's text has the beginning
and the end of sections marked.
Speak freely inbetween those points.
The beginning of sections are marked with arrows



This piece was written for the 2019 Plug festival

First performed by the Brodick Quartet, 10th May 2019

Preface

Throughout mythology the gods have punished the proud exemplified by people that question their authority. Is this just and right or unreasonably cruel and vindictive? In this piece five such people get a chance to change your mind

Instrumentation

Actor
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello

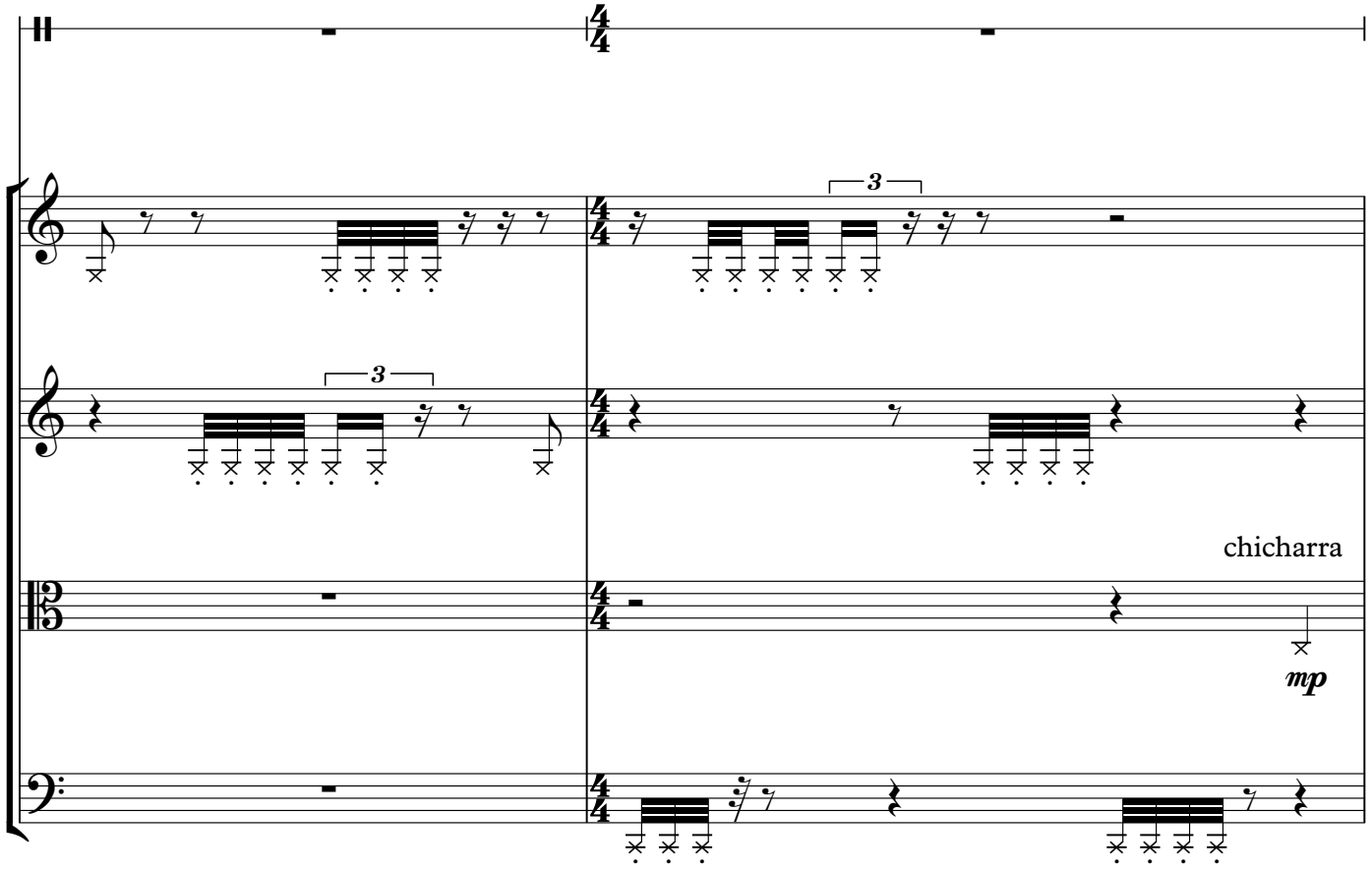
Songbirds

For Actor and String Quartet

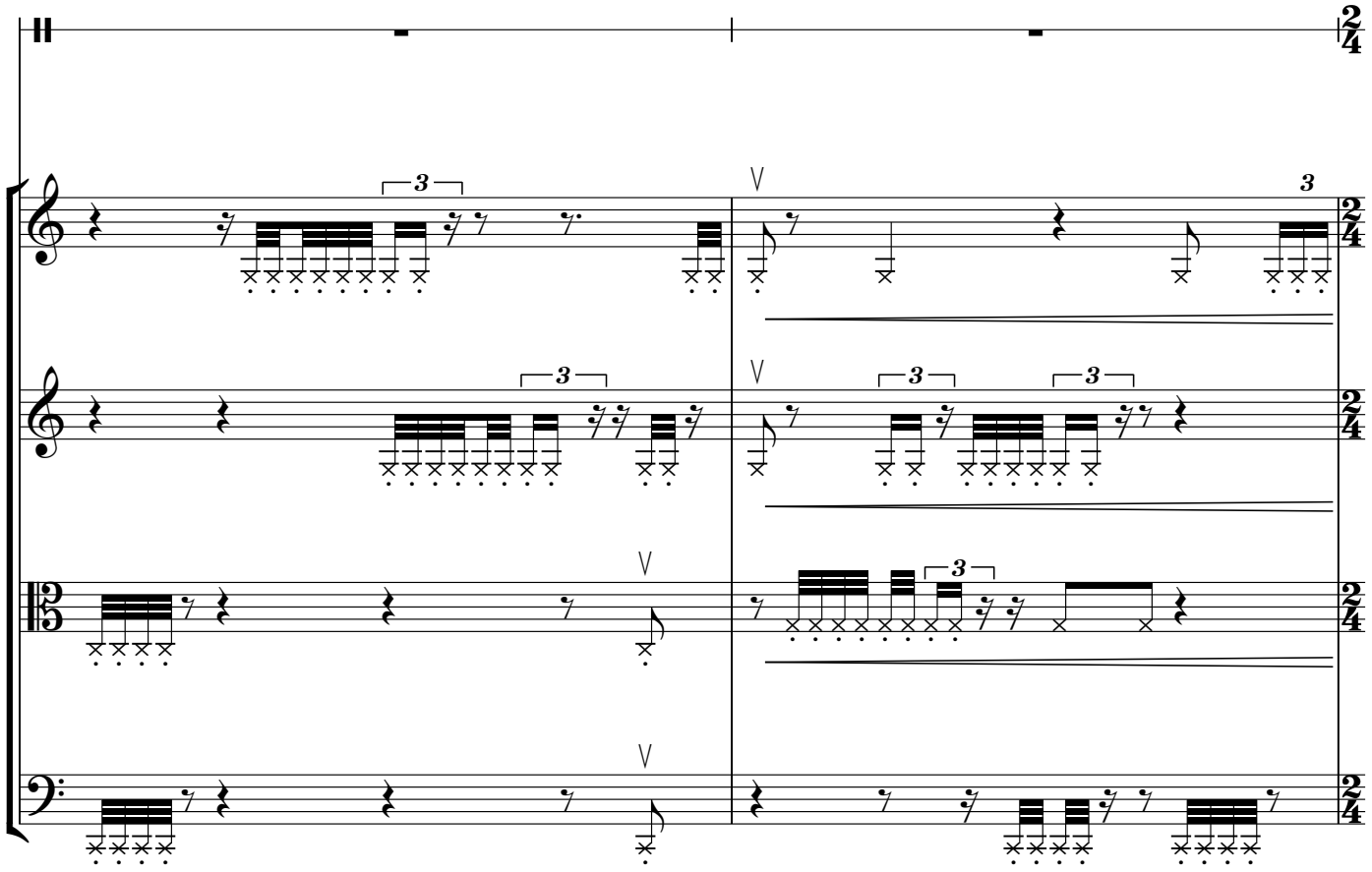
Max Welton



9



11

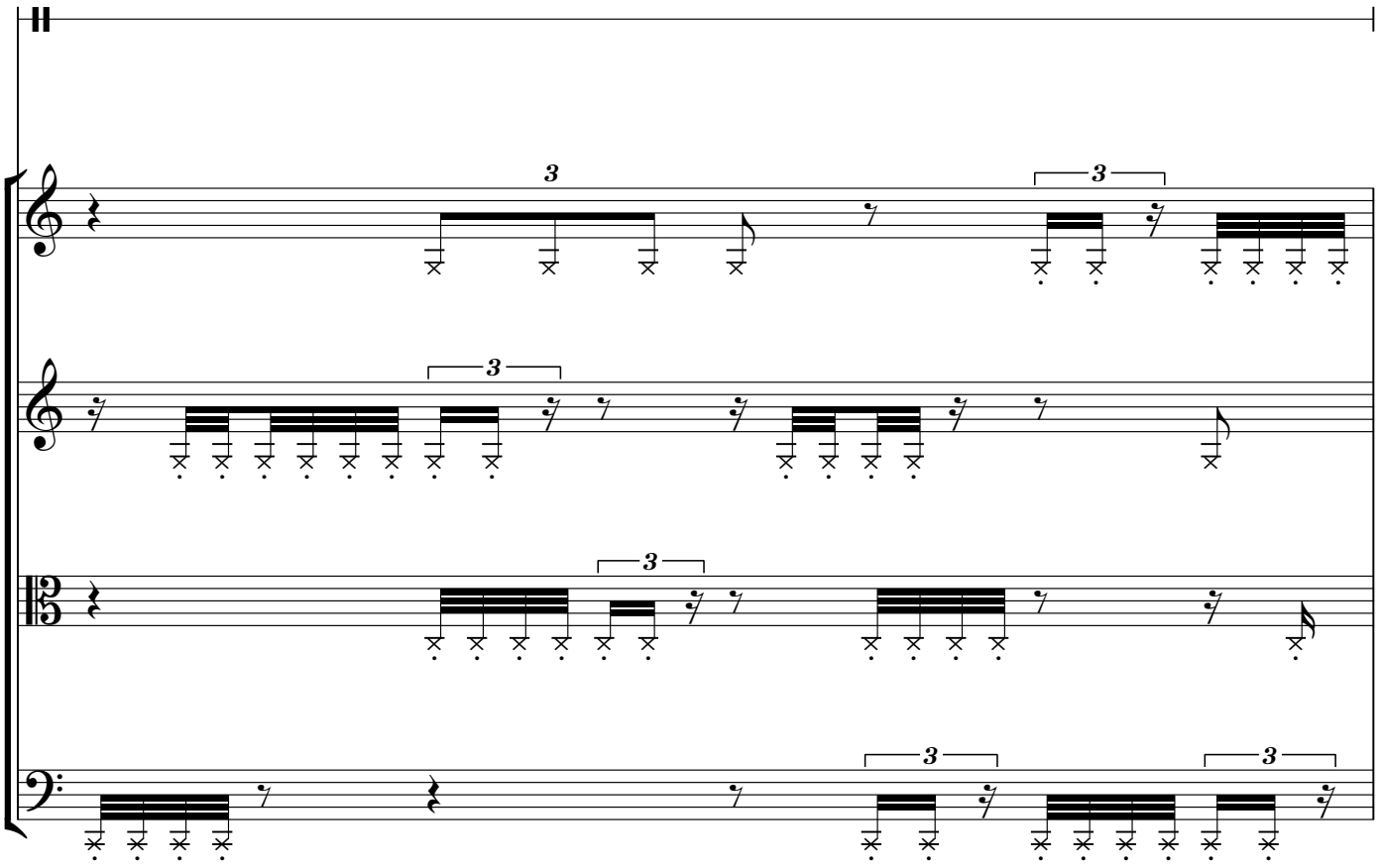


Magpie sounds

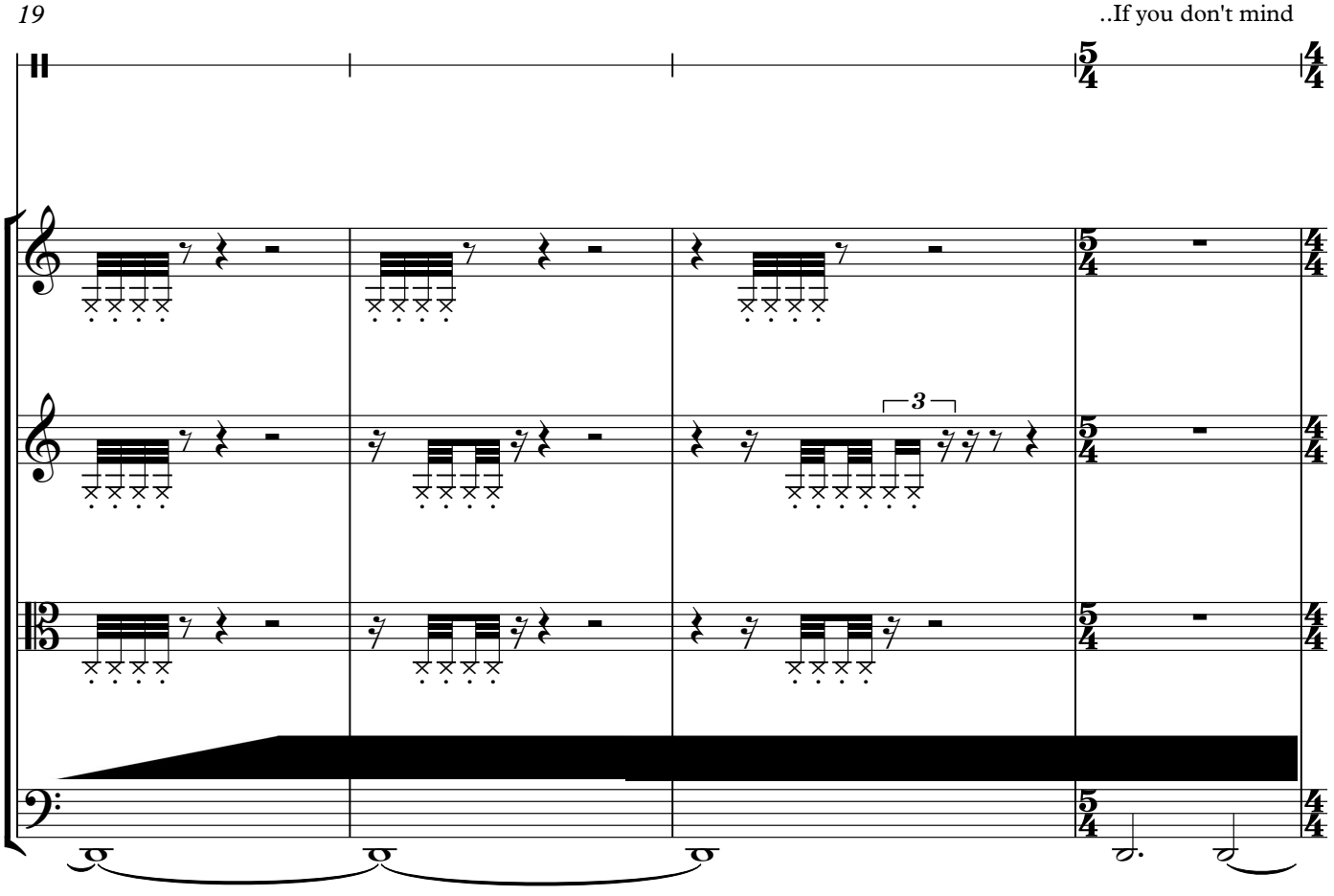
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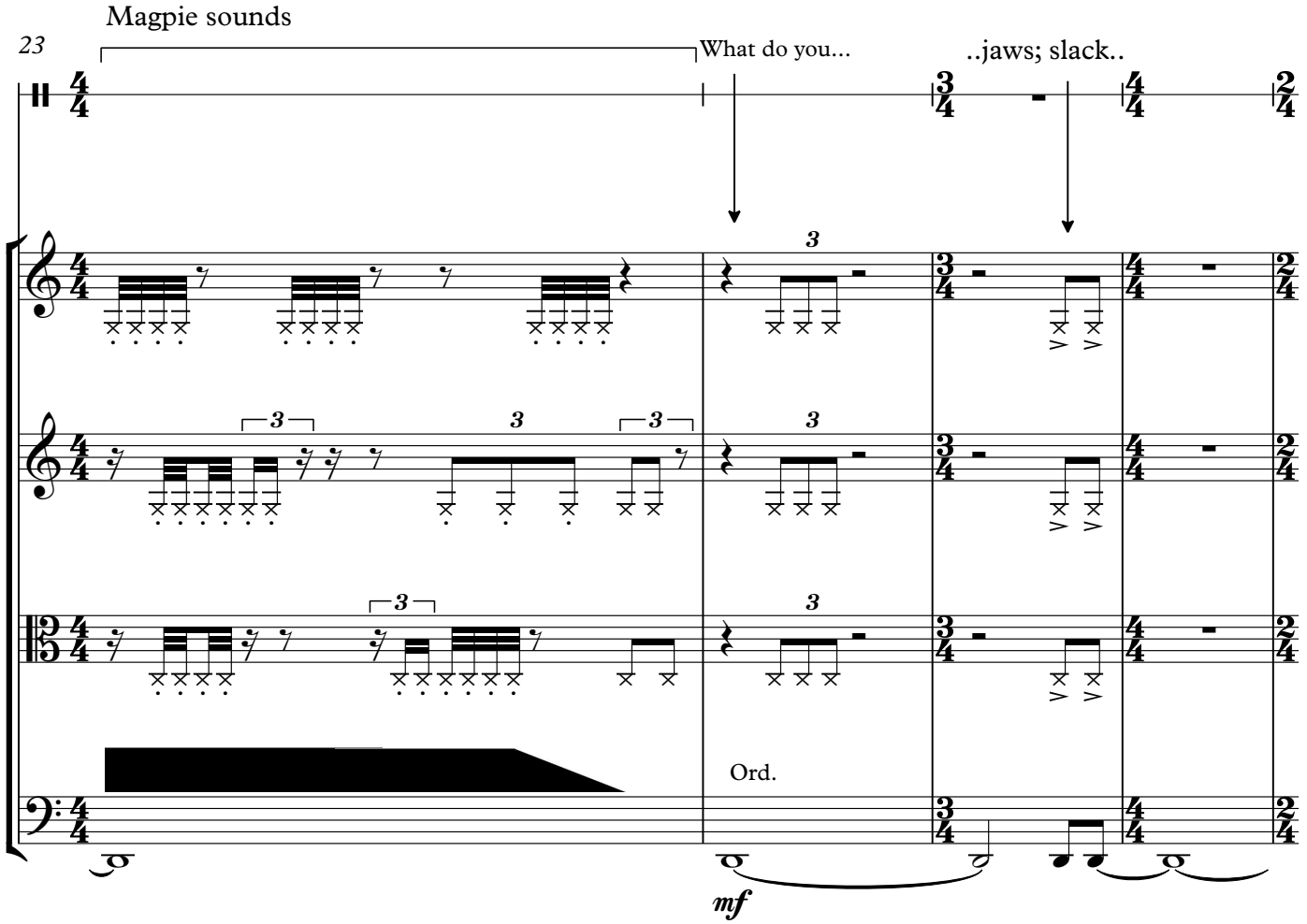


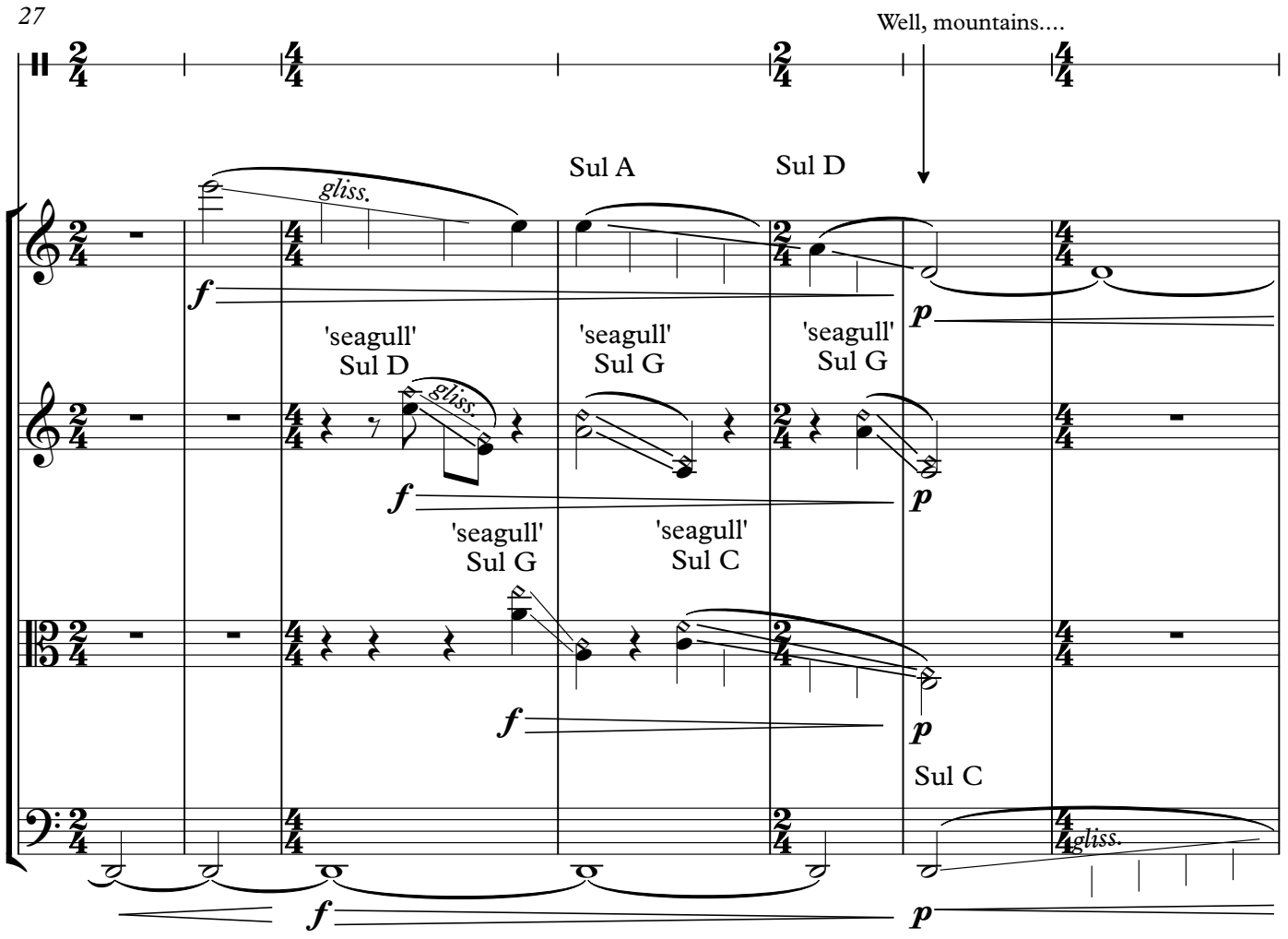
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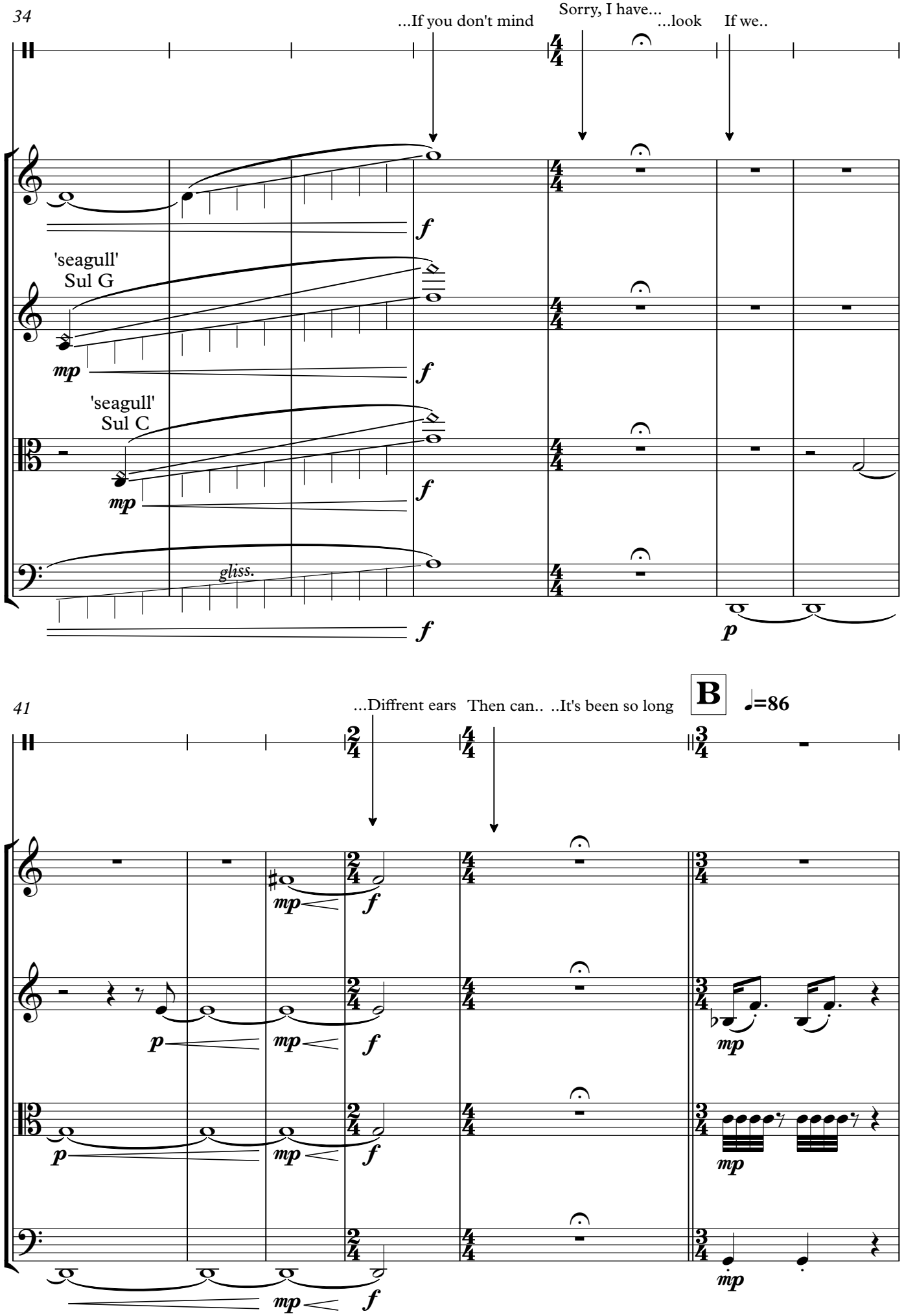



A
16
What? We're not forcing you to listen to it
Take your..
What!?
mf
mp
Overpressure


19
..If you don't mind


Magpie sounds
23
What do you...
..jaws; slack..
Ord.
mf


27
Well, mountains....
Sul A
Sul D
gliss.
f
p
'seagull'
Sul D
'seagull'
Sul G
'seagull'
Sul G
'seagull'
Sul G
'seagull'
Sul C
Sul C


34
...If you don't mind
Sorry, I have...
...look
If we..
'seagull'
Sul G
'seagull'
Sul C
gliss.
41
...Diffrent ears
Then can..
..It's been so long
B
♩=86


47
Mother and Father
p
p
mp
p
mp
p
mp


51
Let's start with
mother and father
Emathia...
p
mp
p
mp
p
mp

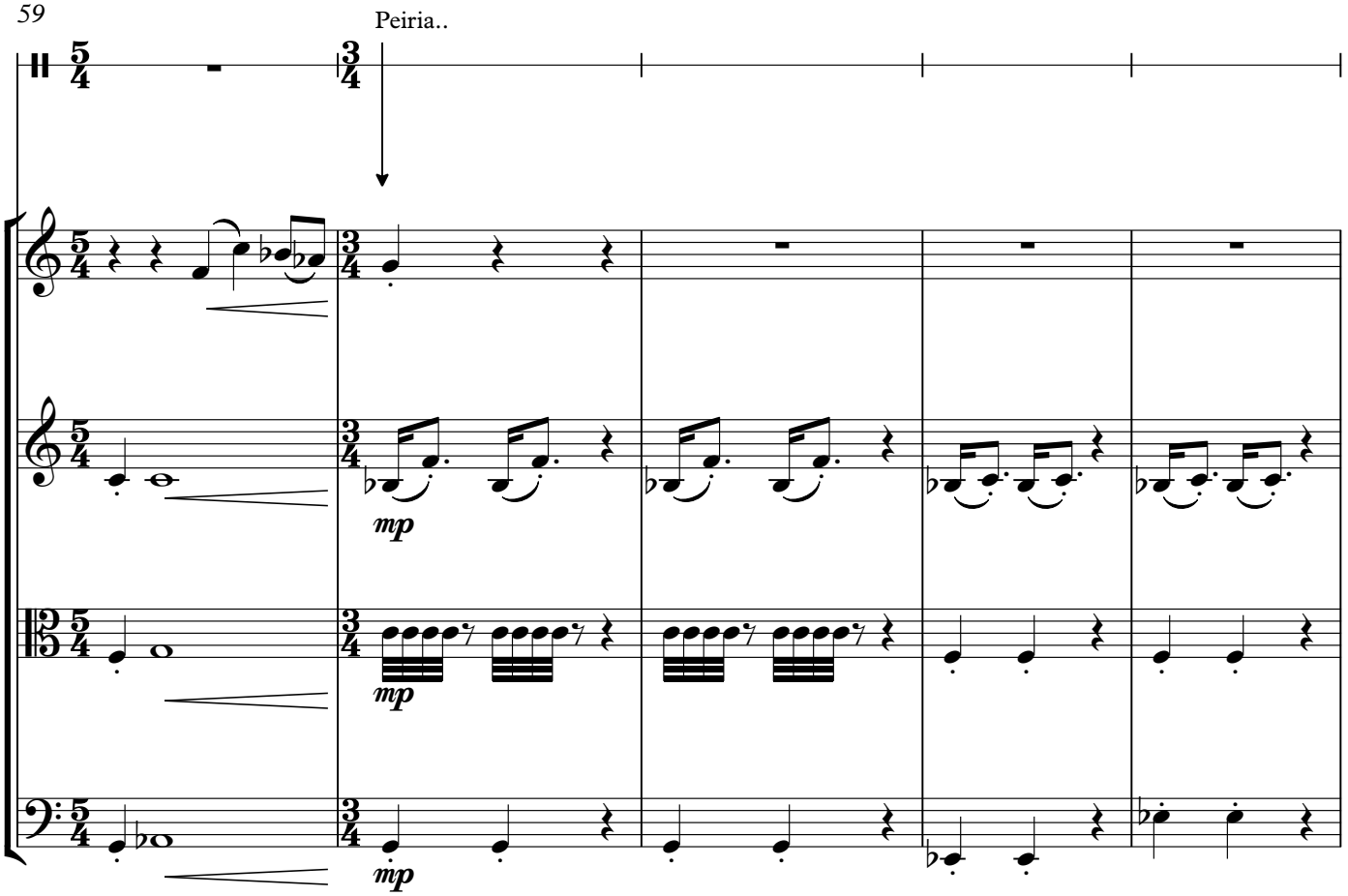
55

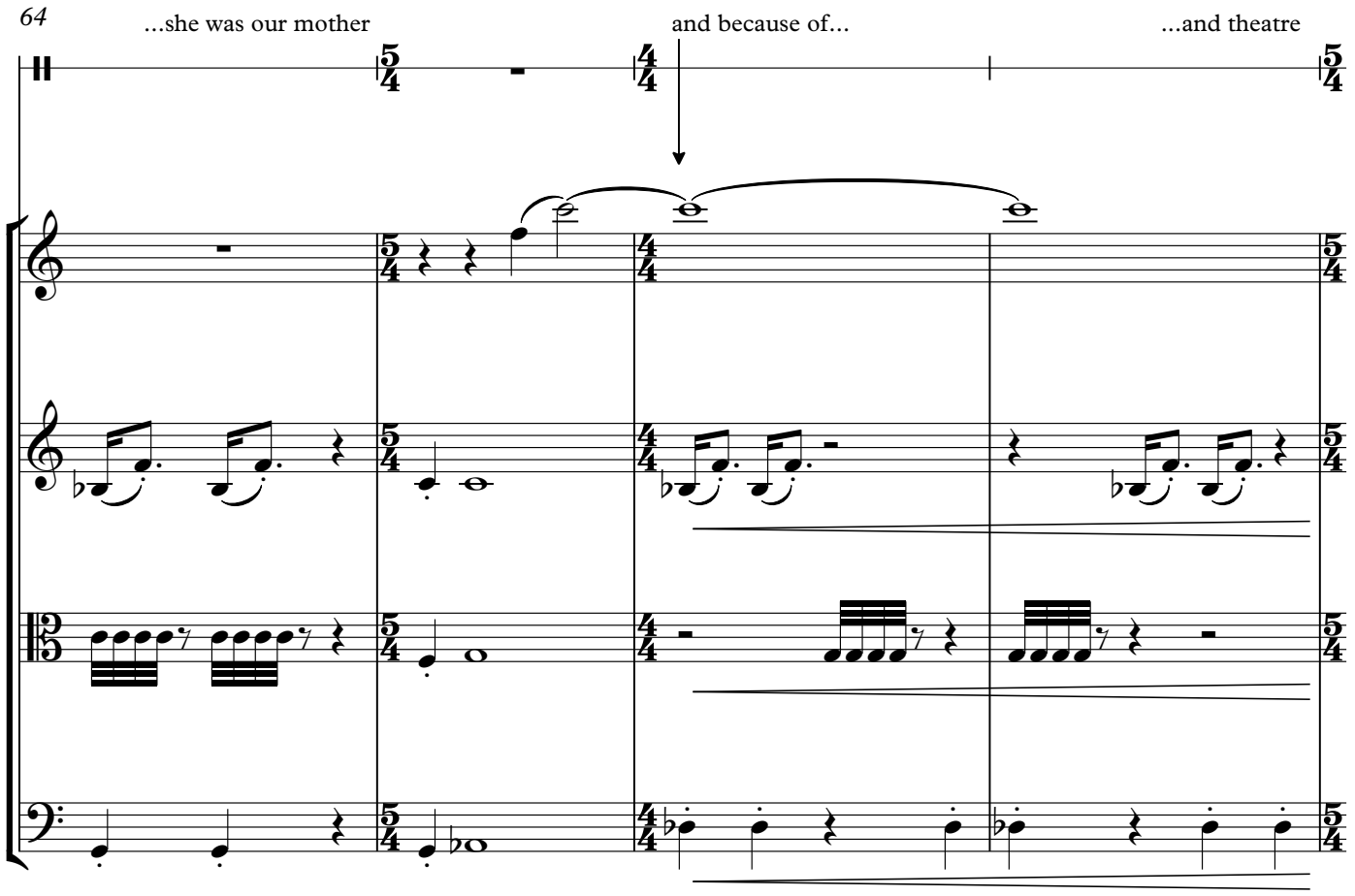
...he was our father

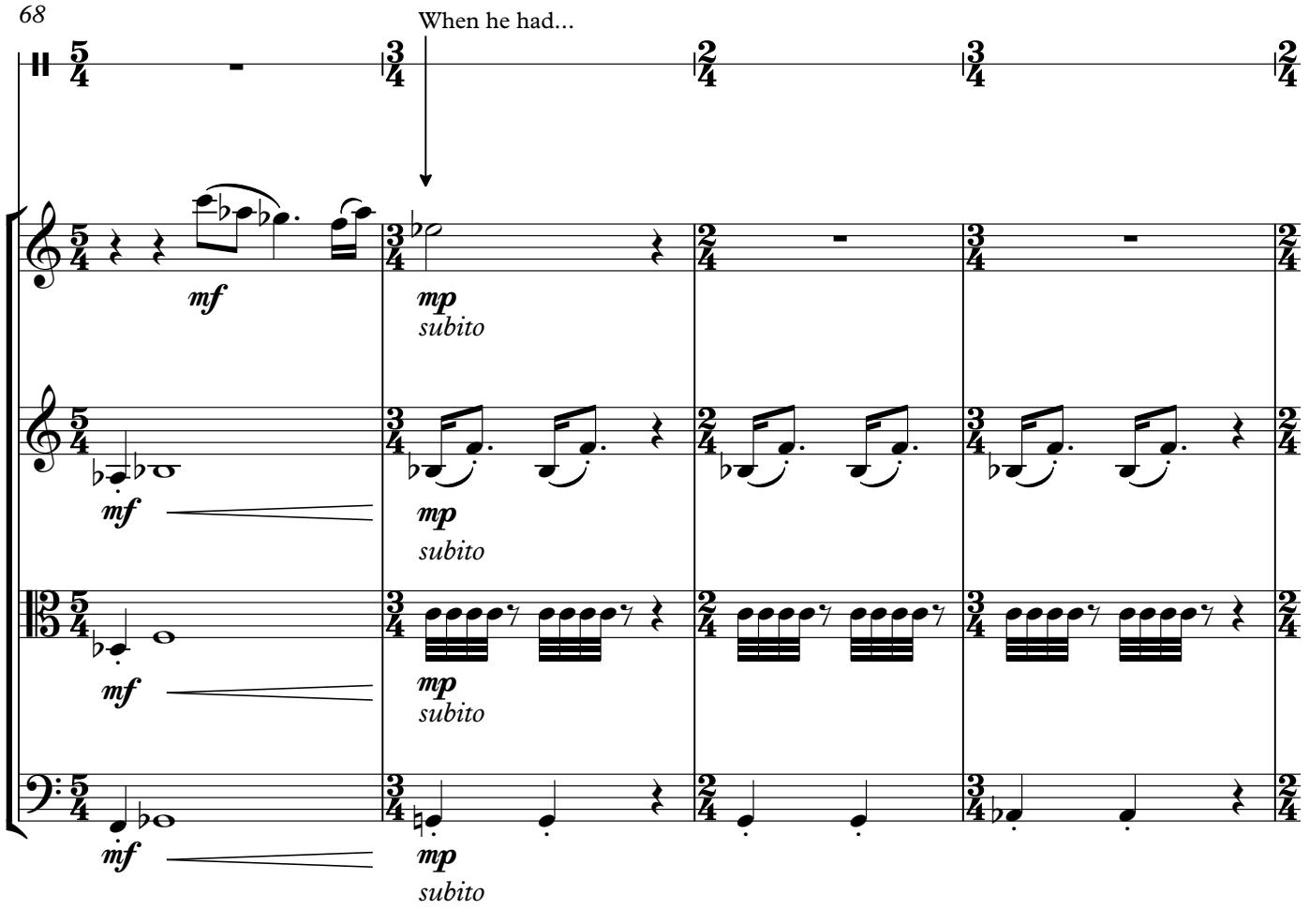


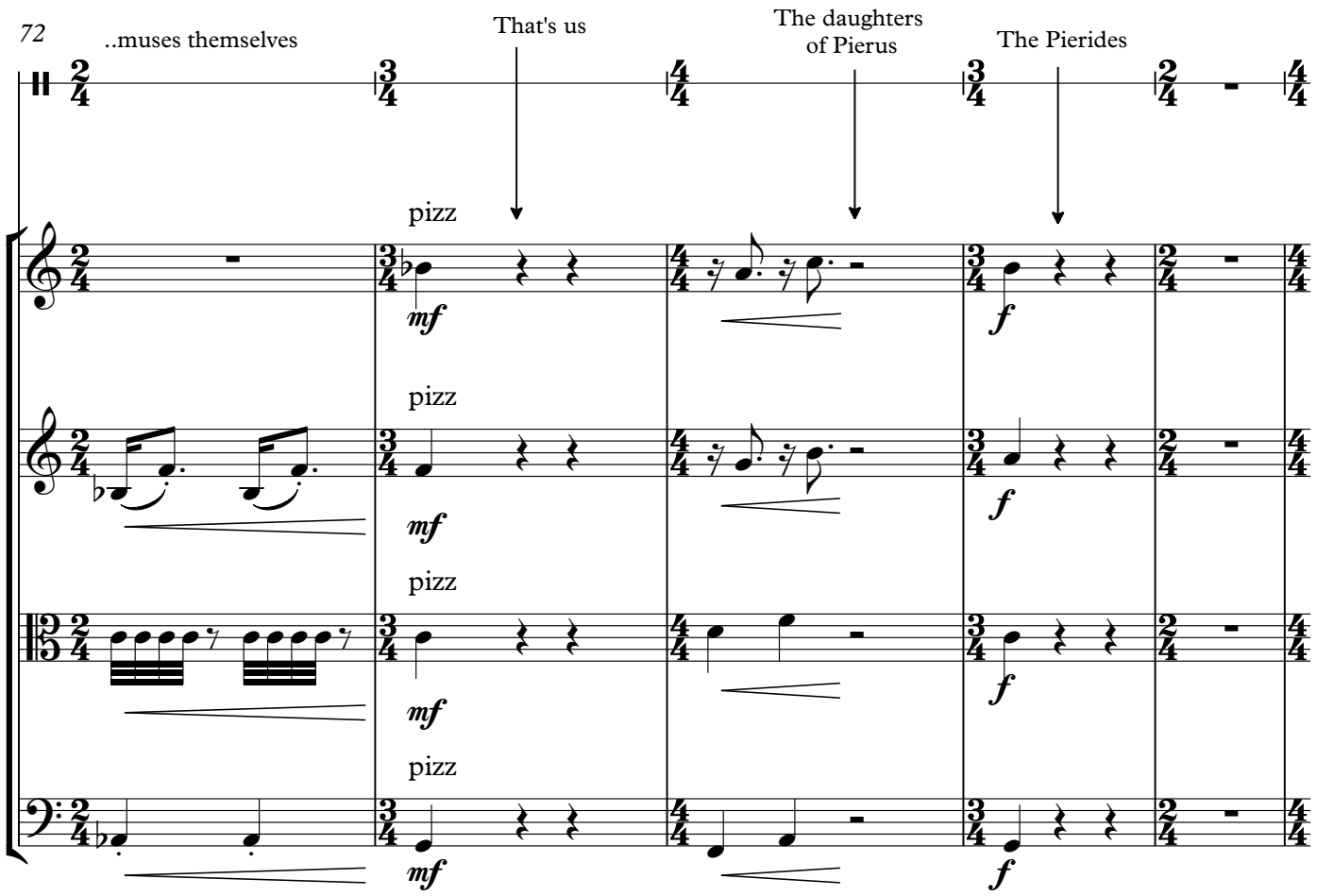
59

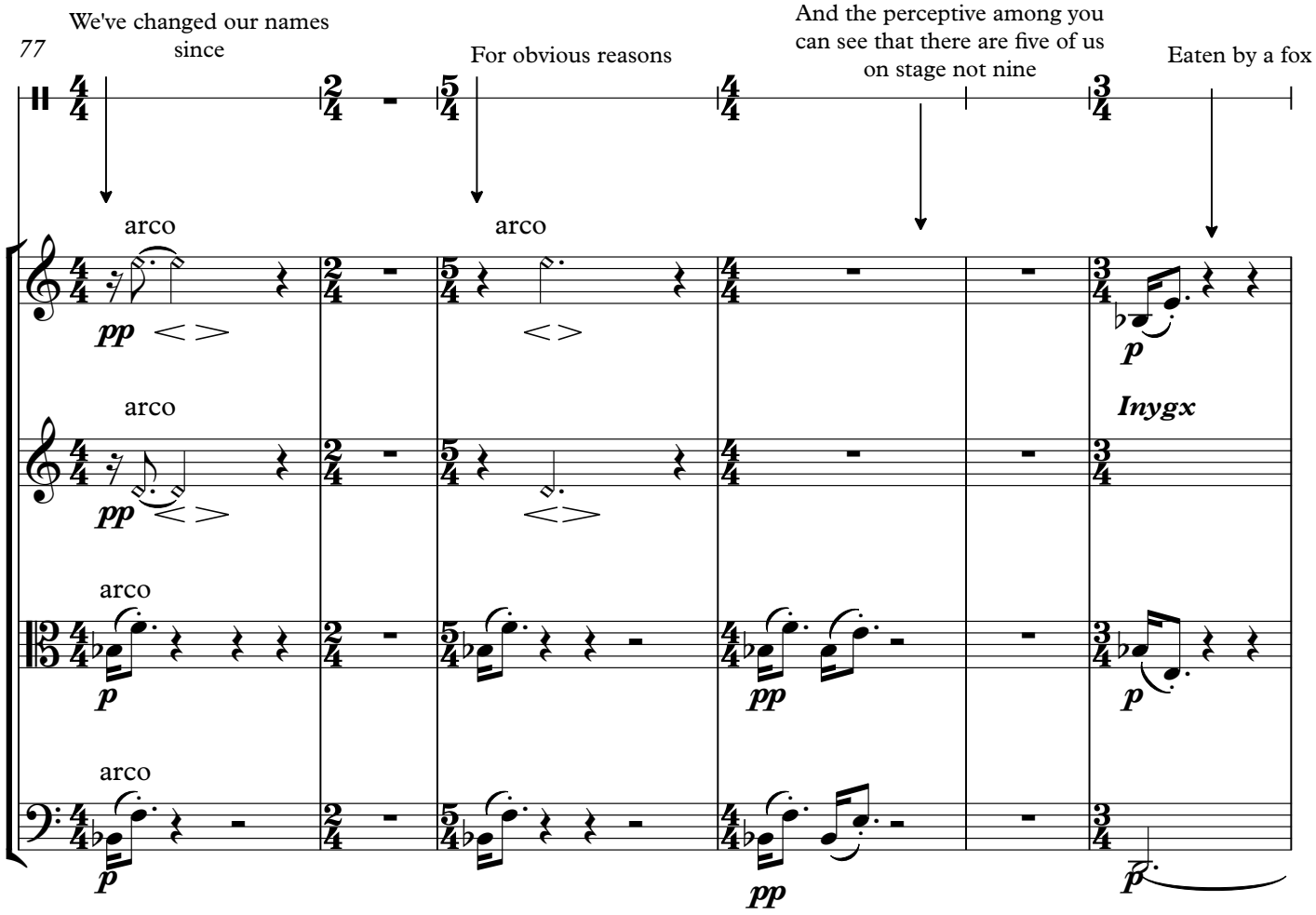
Peiria..

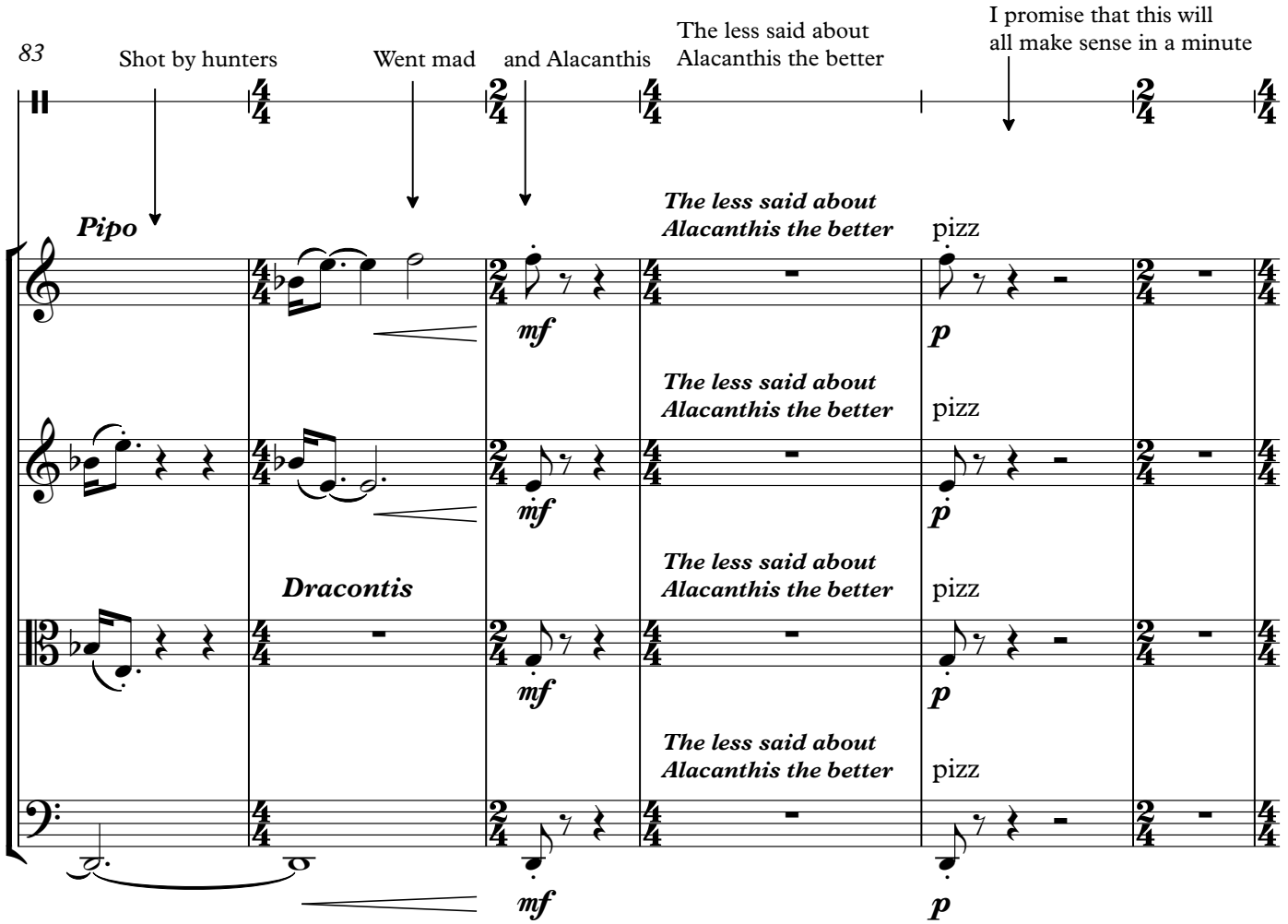


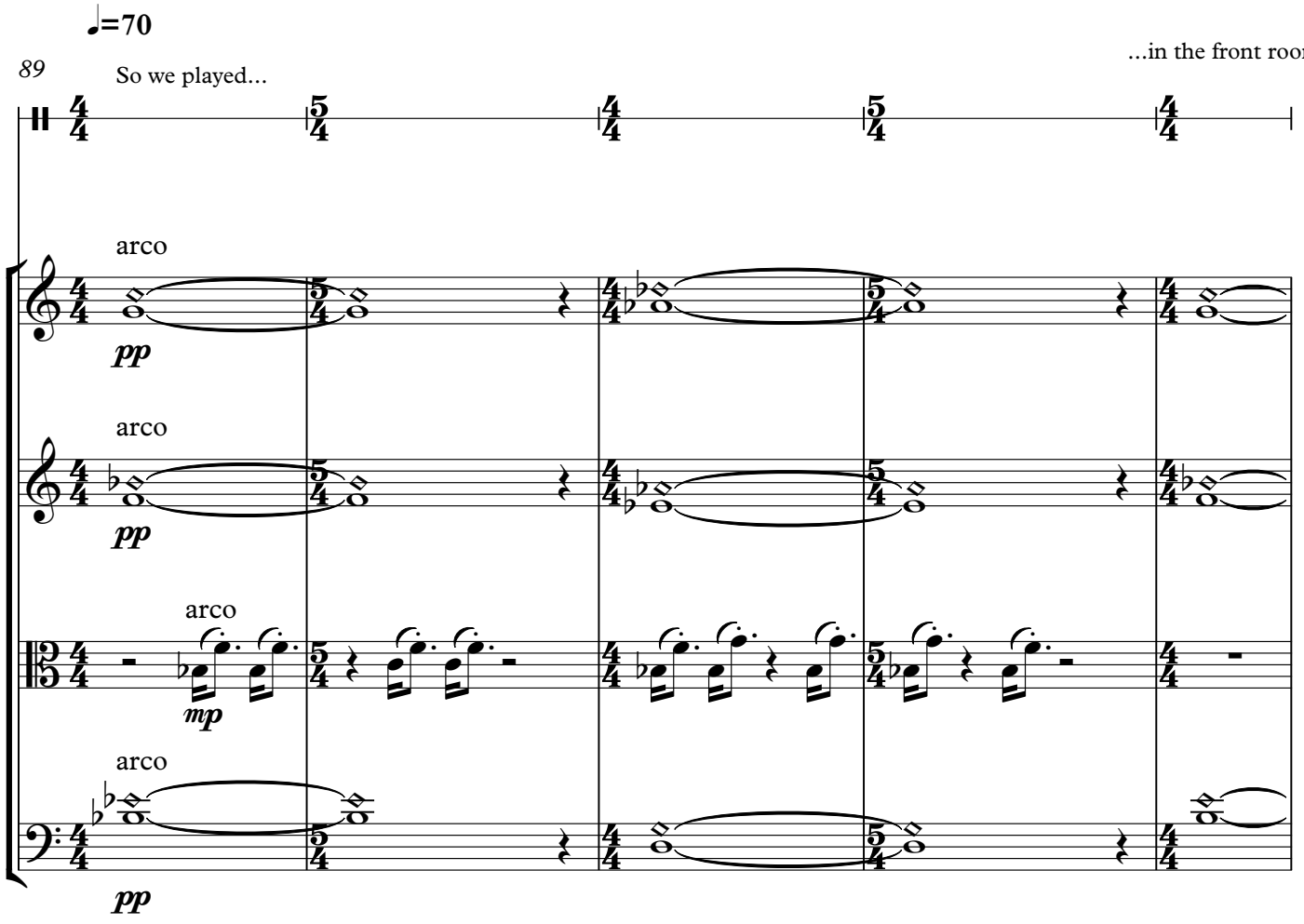

64
...she was our mother
and because of...
...and theatre

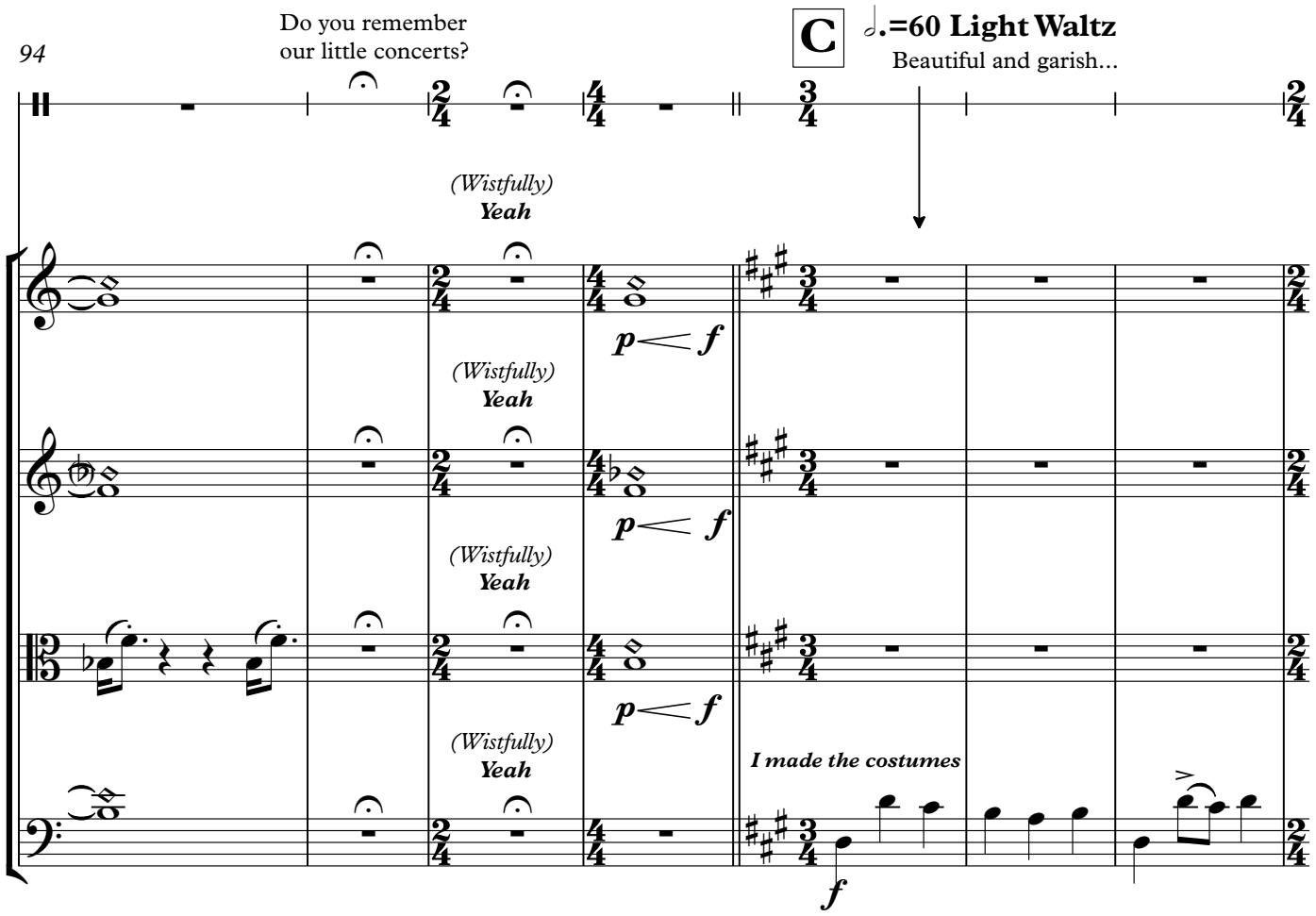

68
When he had...
mf
mp
subito


72
..muses themselves
That's us
The daughters of Pierus
The Pierides
pizz
mf
f

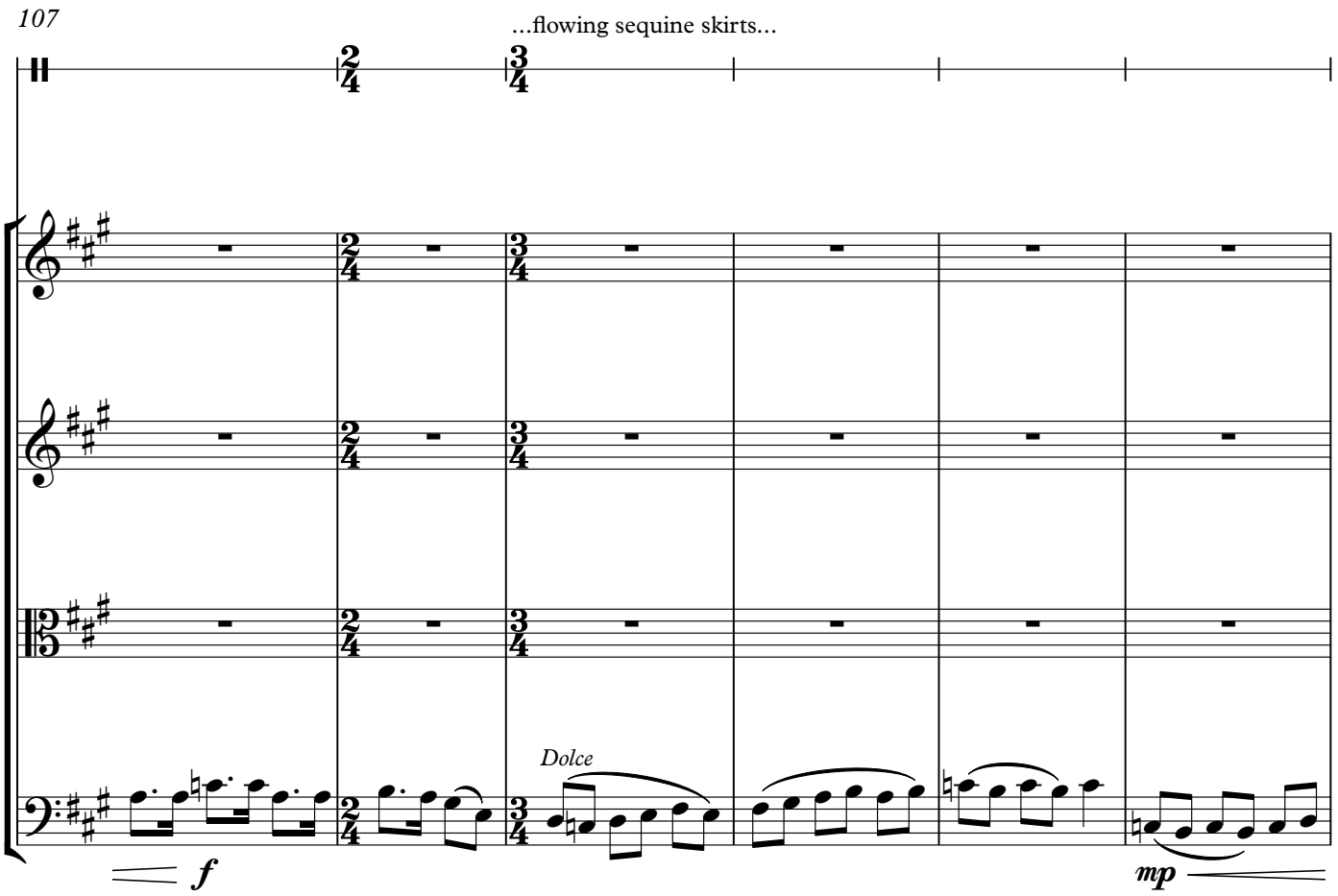

77
We've changed our names since
For obvious reasons
And the perceptive among you can see that there are five of us on stage not nine
Eaten by a fox
arco
pp
p
Inygx

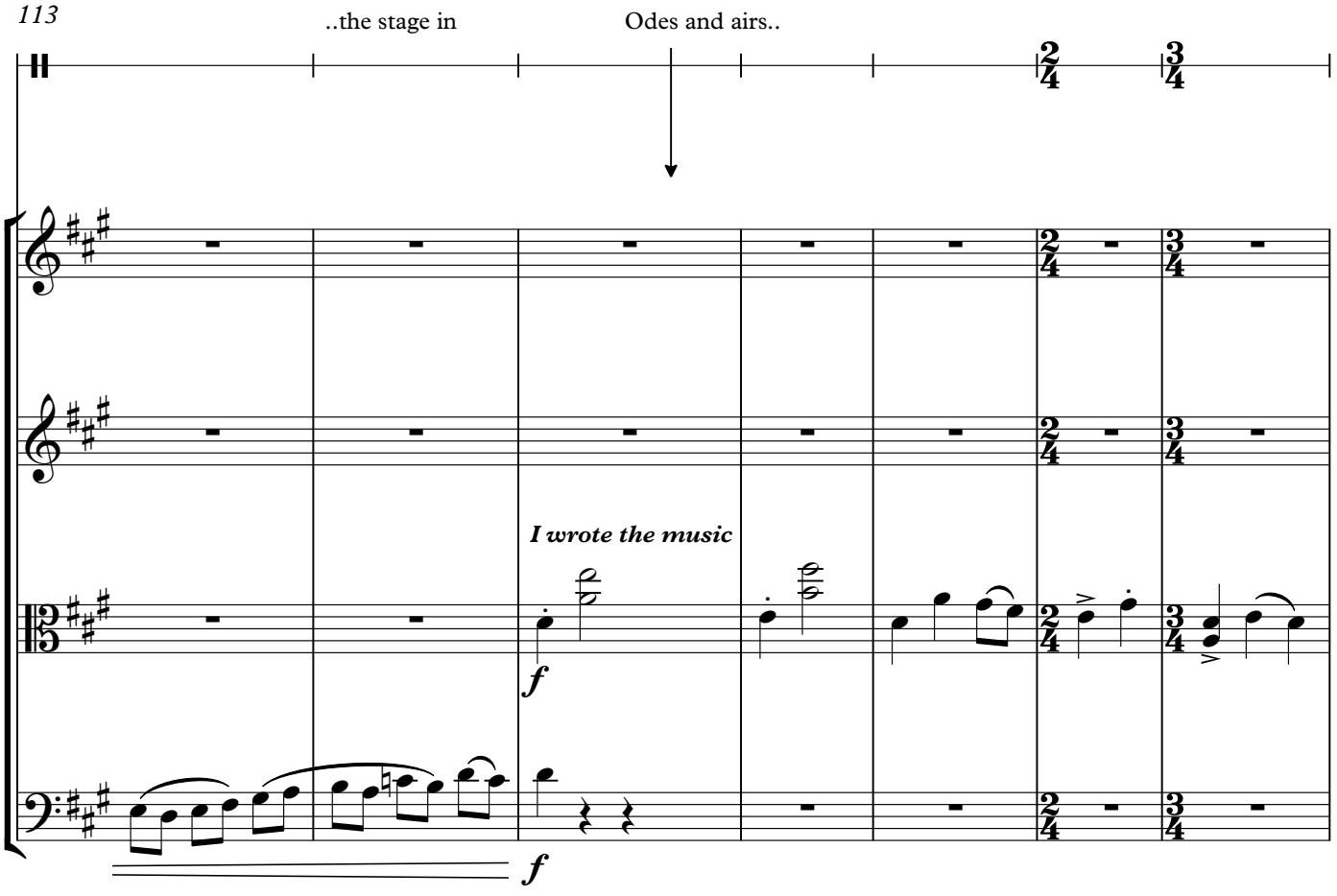

83
Shot by hunters
Went mad
and Alacanthis
The less said about
Alacanthis the better
I promise that this will
all make sense in a minute
Pipo
Dracontis
The less said about
Alacanthis the better
pizz
mf
p


♩=70
89
So we played...
...in the front room
arco
pp
mp

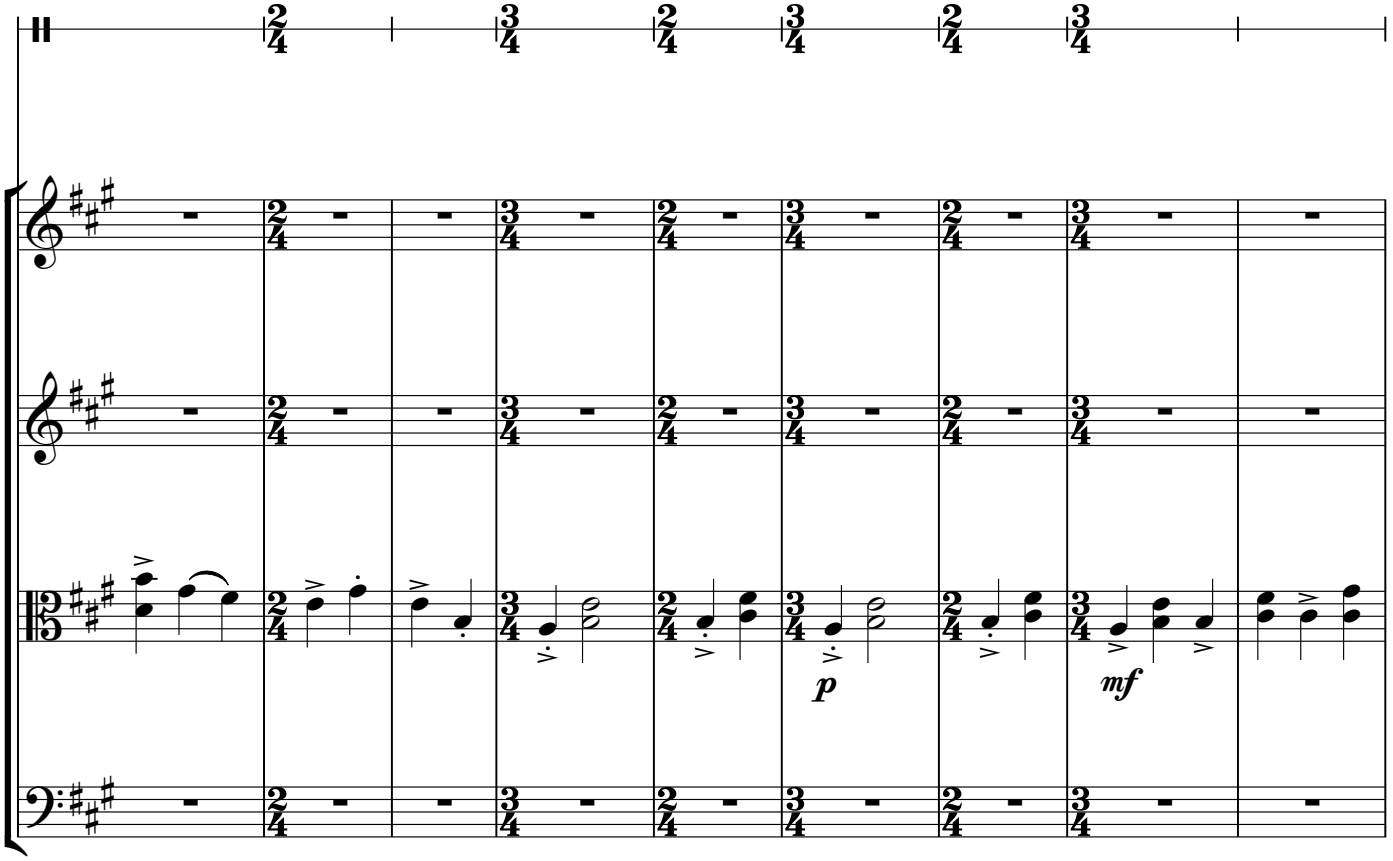

94
Do you remember
our little concerts?
C
♩.=60 Light Waltz
Beautiful and garish...
(Wistfully)
Yeah
p < f
I made the costumes
f


101
...handmade helmets..
Militaristic
mp

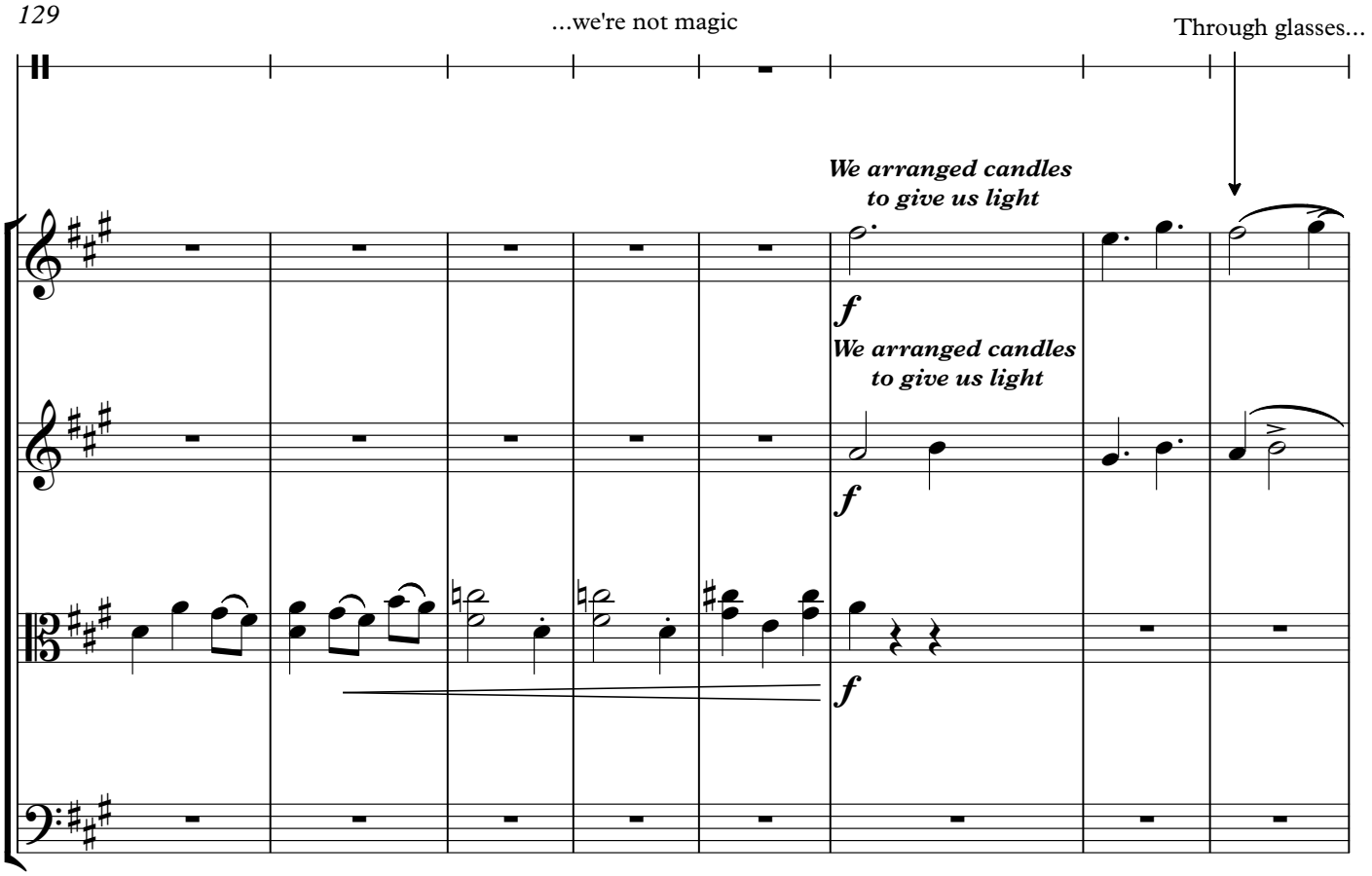

107
...flowing sequine skirts...
Dolce
f
mp


113
..the stage in
Odes and airs..
I wrote the music
f
f

120


p
mf

129


...we're not magic
Through glasses...
We arranged candles
to give us light
f
We arranged candles
to give us light
f
f

137



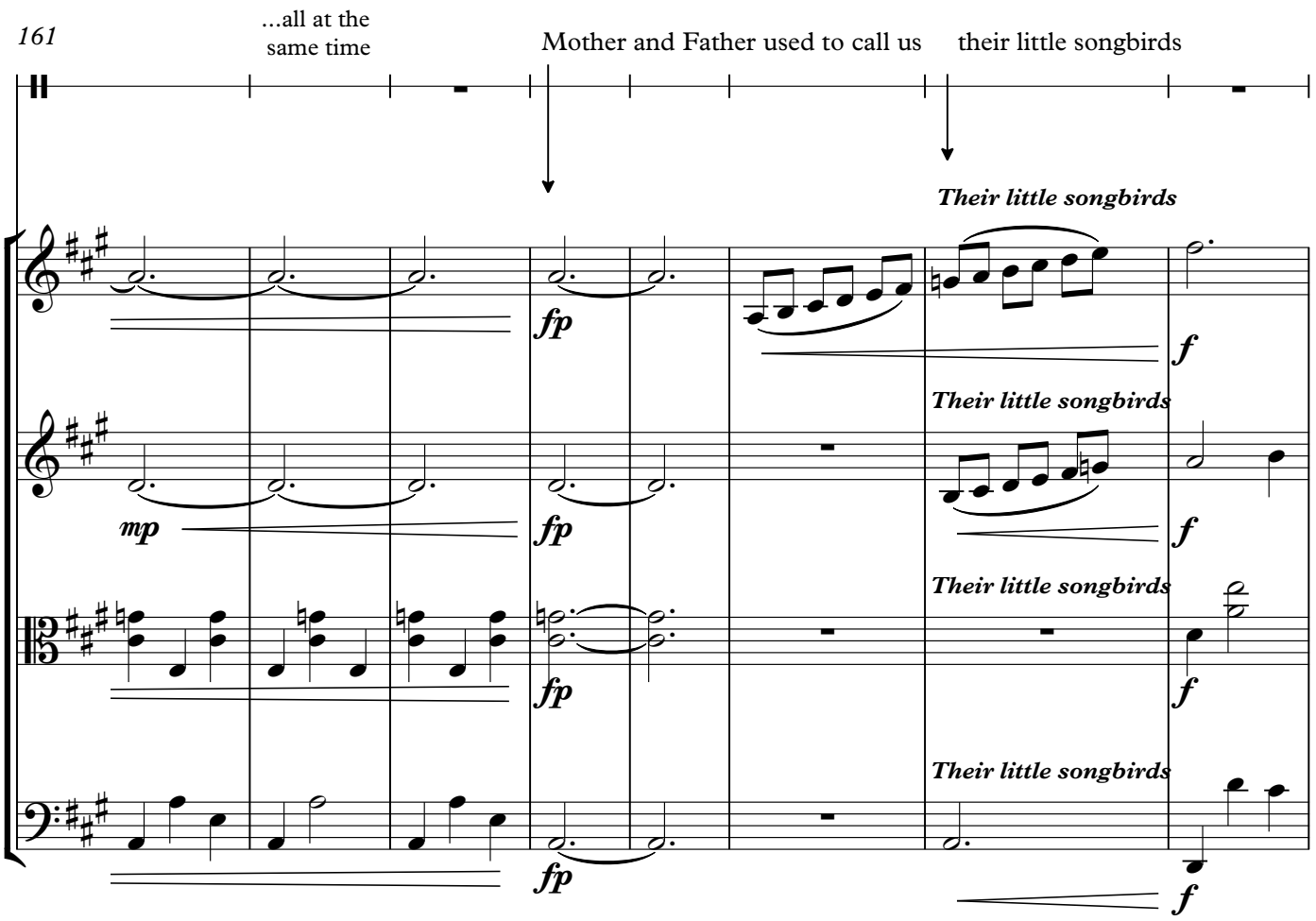
145



153


p
mf
p
mf
p

161

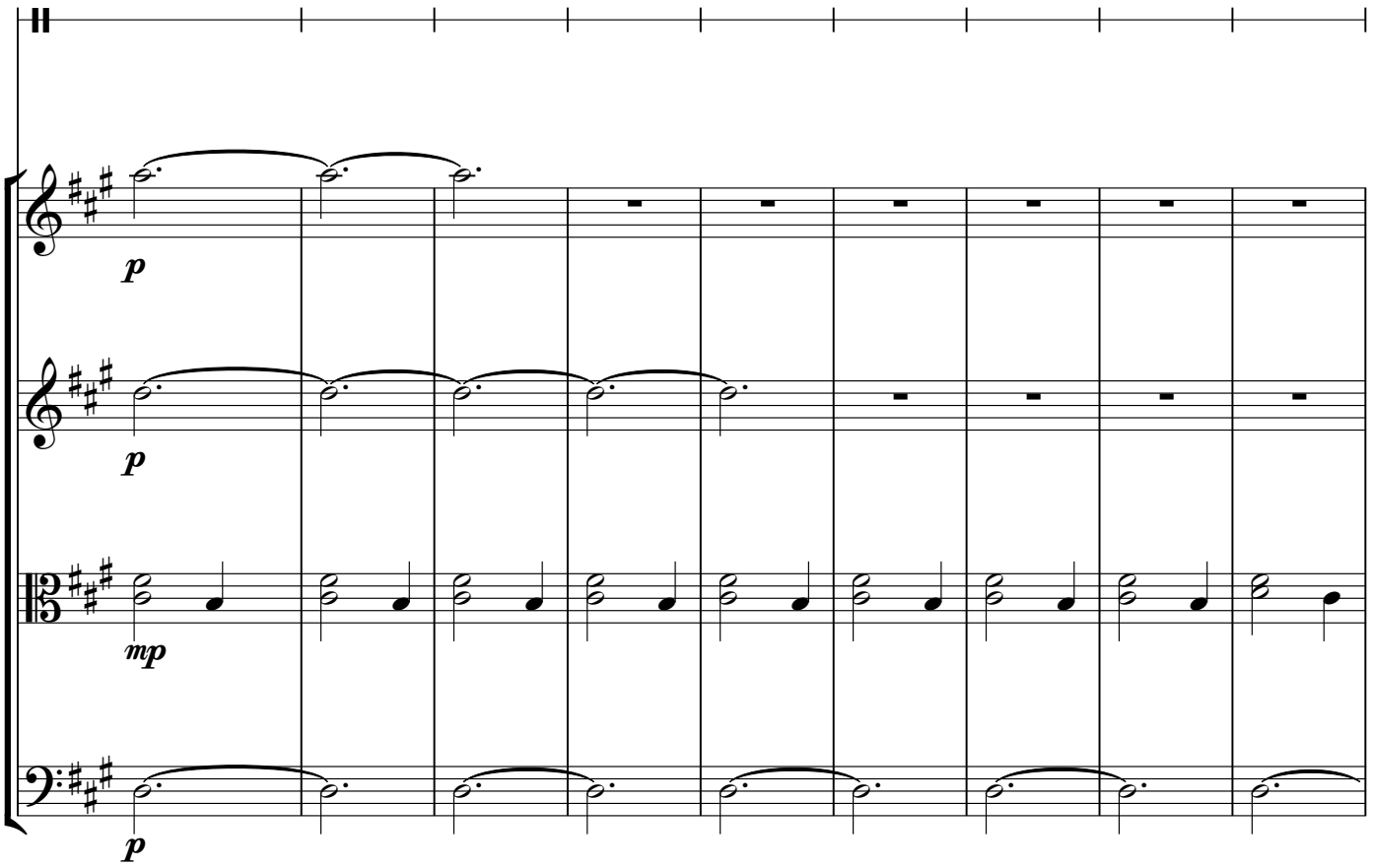

...all at the same time
Mother and Father used to call us
their little songbirds
Their little songbirds
fp
f
mp
fp
Their little songbirds
f
fp
Their little songbirds
f
fp
Their little songbirds
f


169


176
The taller we got...

rall.

184

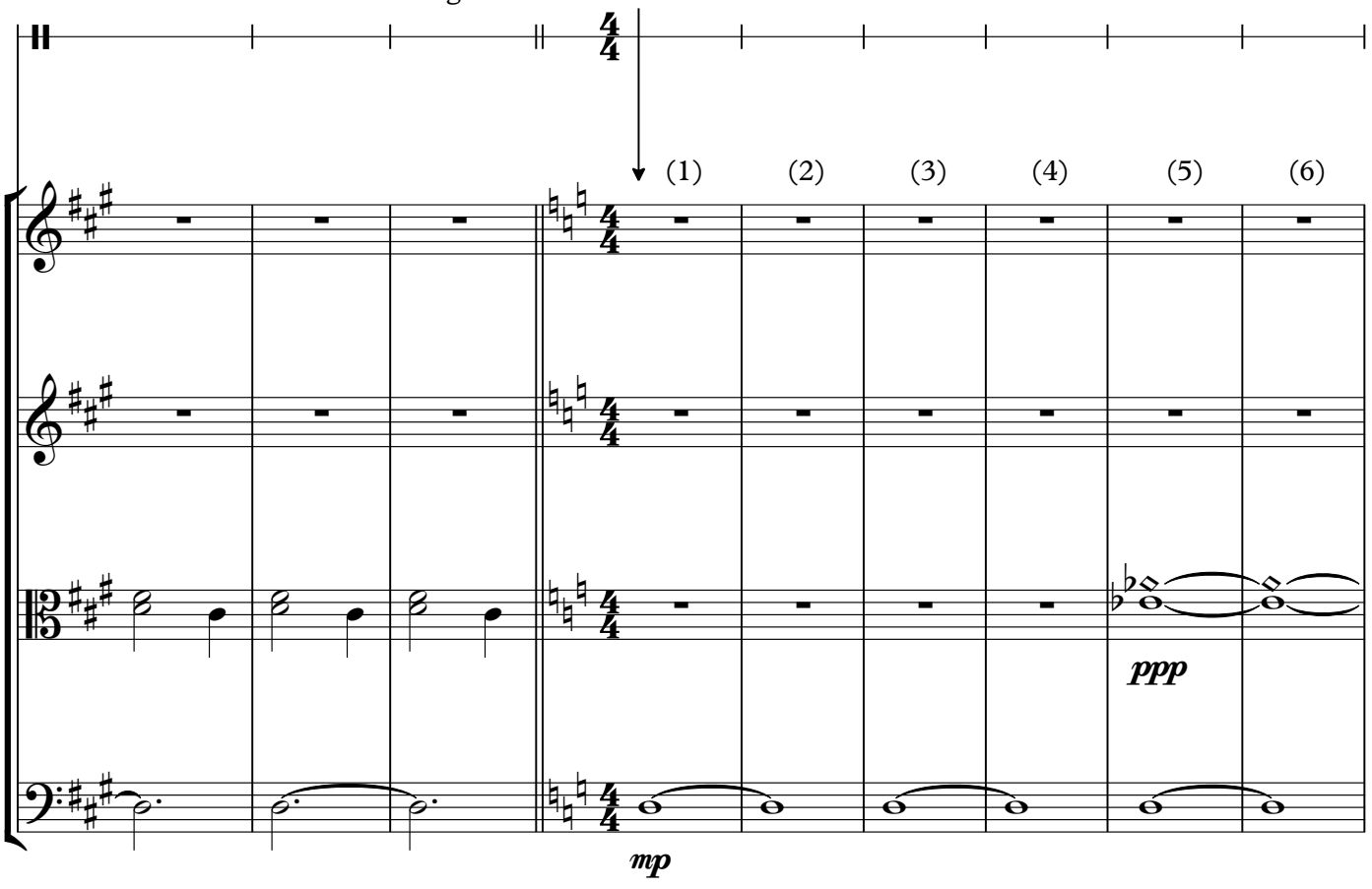


D ♩=86

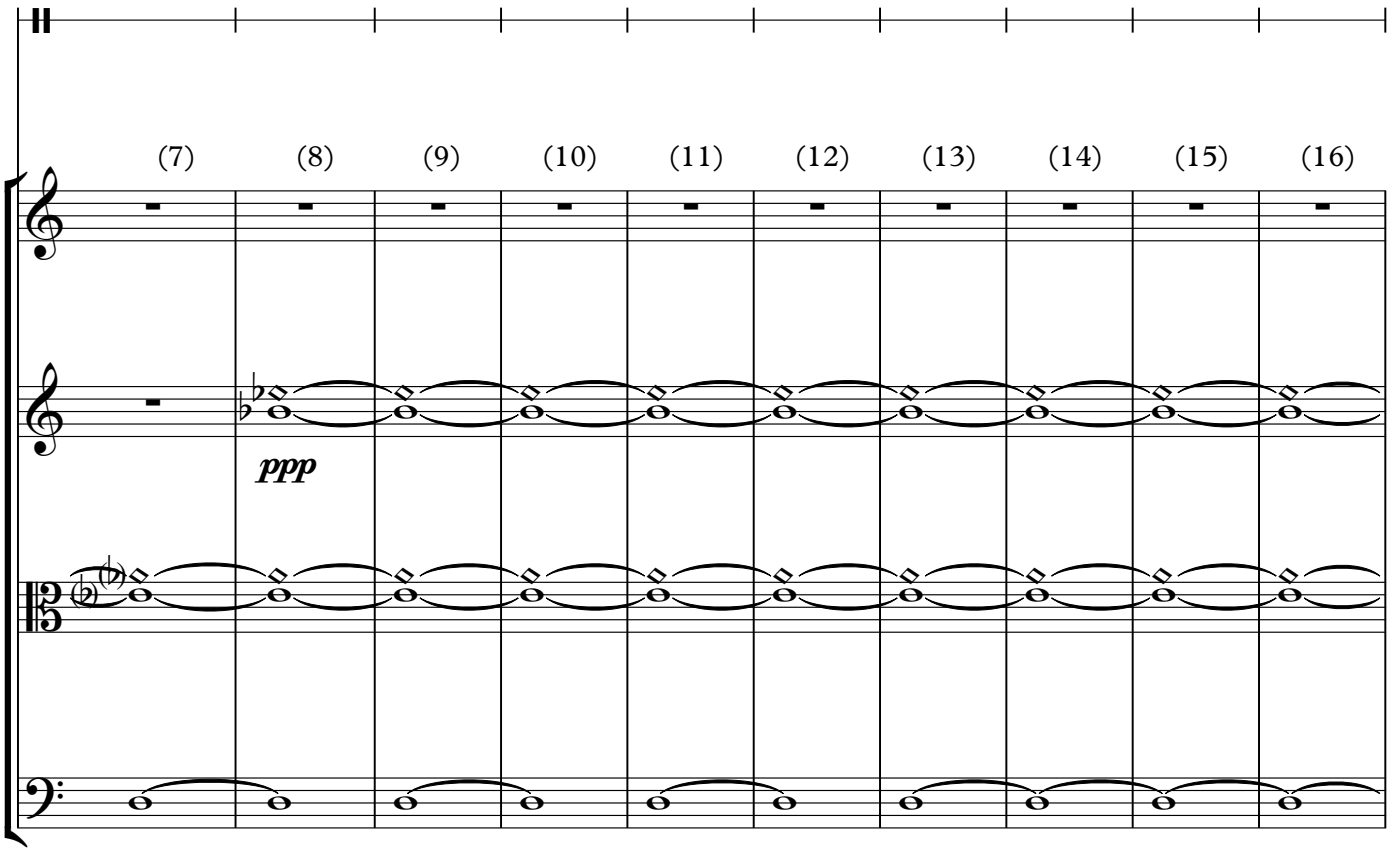
193

...kinda good and I don't even....

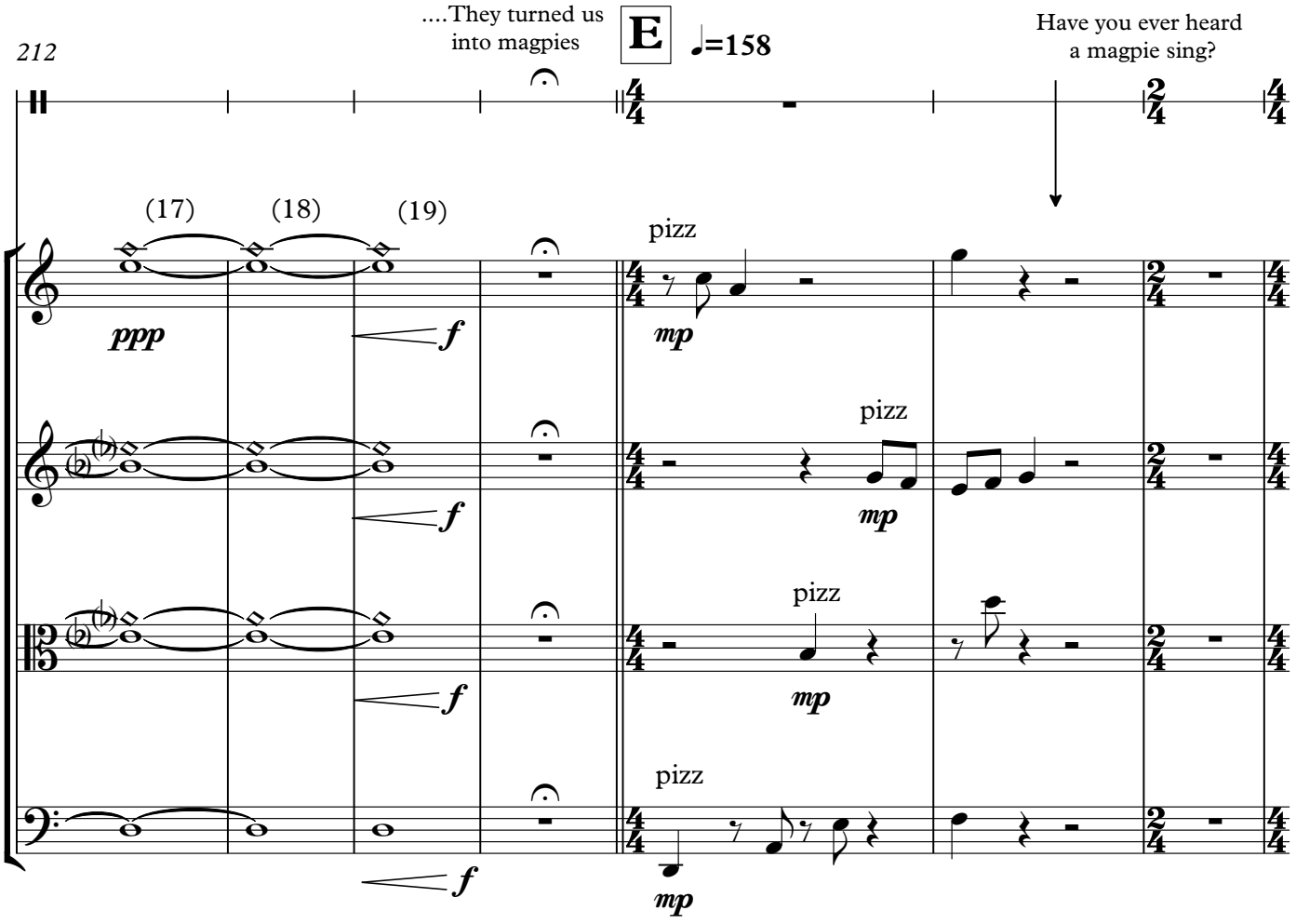
(1) (2) (3) (4) (5) (6)

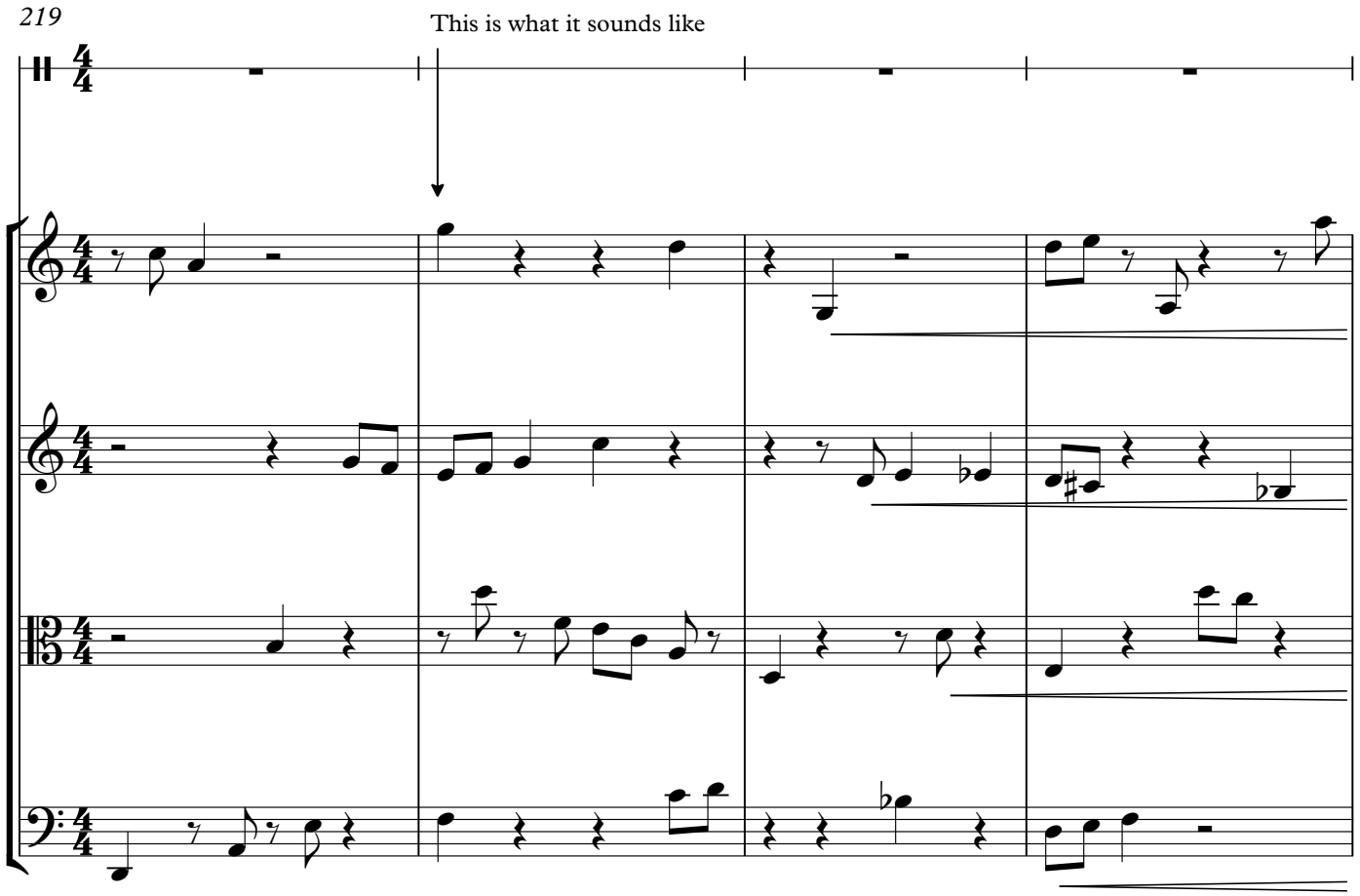


202

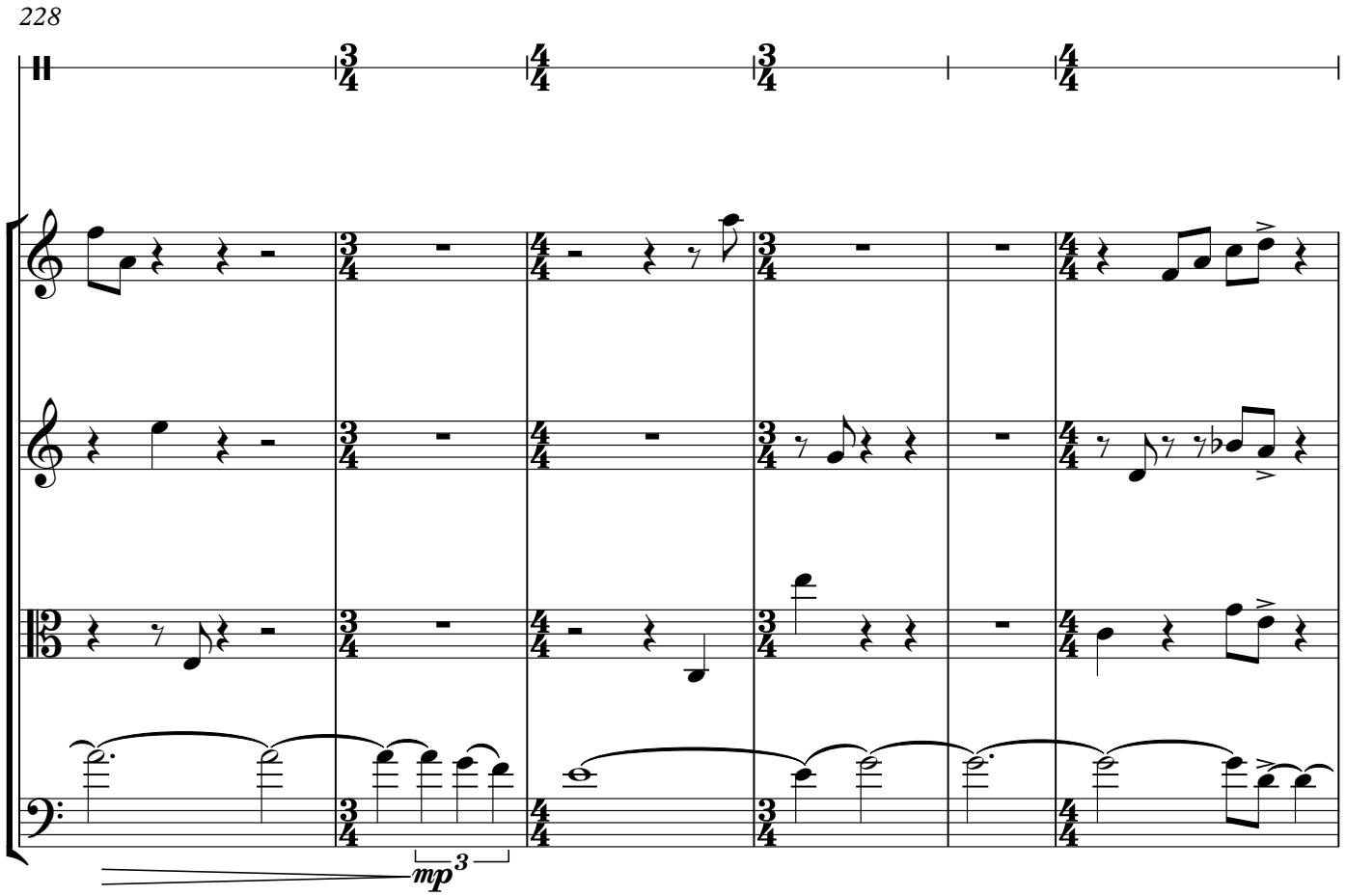

(7)
(8)
(9)
(10)
(11)
(12)
(13)
(14)
(15)
(16)
ppp

212


....They turned us into magpies
E
♩=158
Have you ever heard a magpie sing?
(17)
(18)
(19)
ppp
f
pizz
mp


219
This is what it sounds like


223
(Play magpie sound from dictaphone)
More percussion...
arco


228
mp 3


234
...Now, if you don't mind
♩=80
f
f
f
pizz
f

F

240

I don't know whether...

First the...

arco

pp

gliss.

arco

pp

gliss.

arco

pp

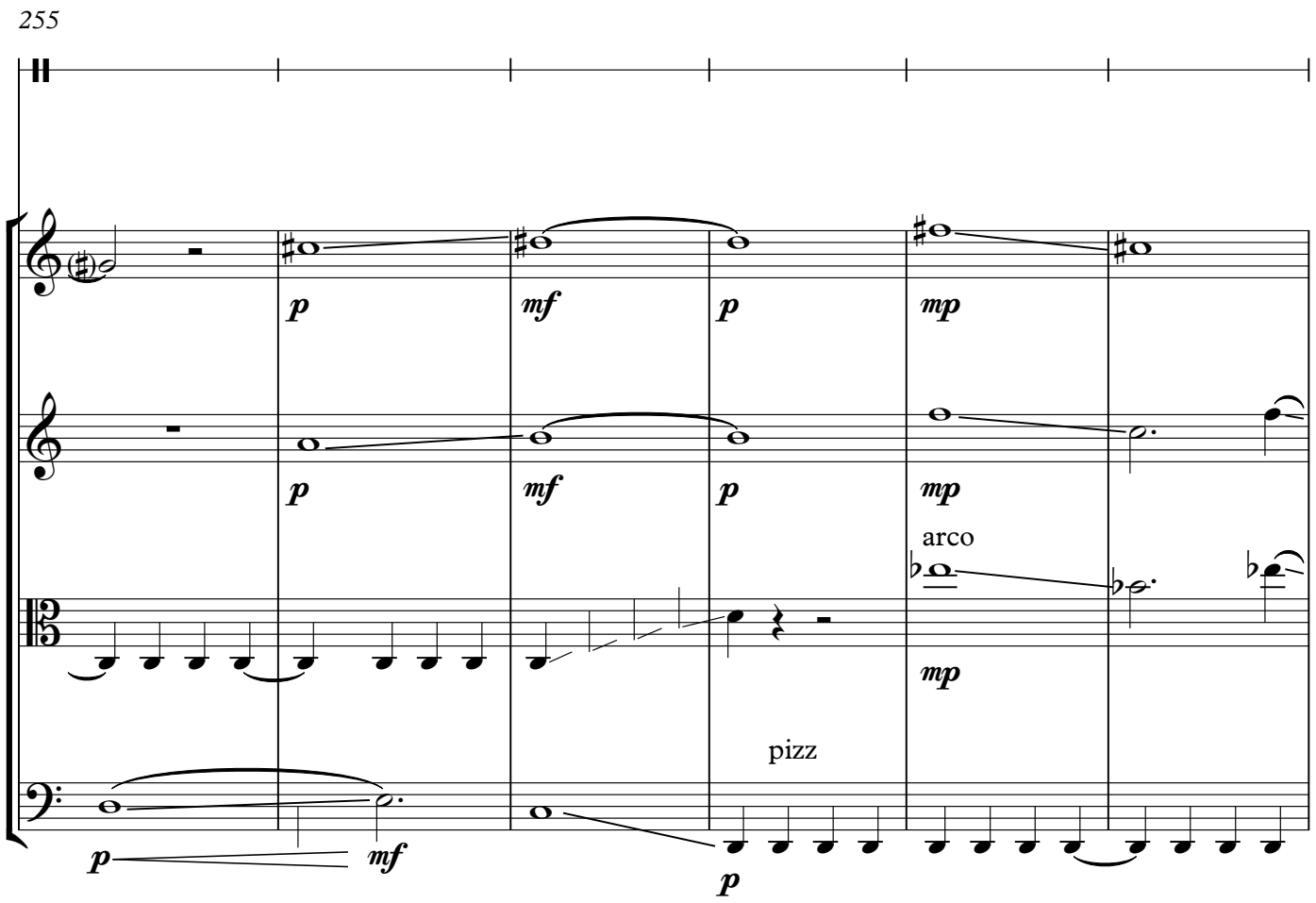
gliss.

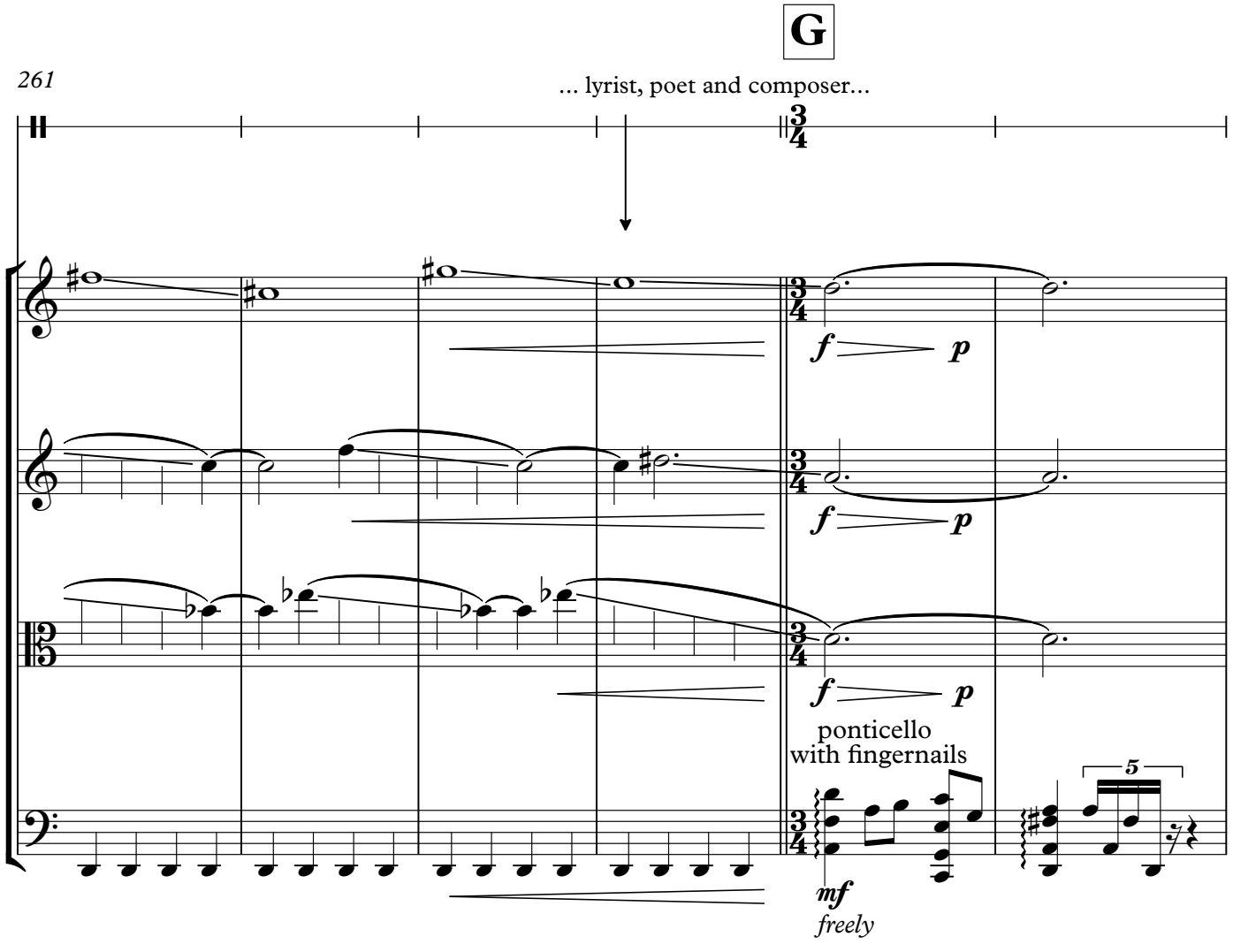
248

mf *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf* *p* *mf*

mf *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

mf *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf*


255
p
mf
p
mp
arco
pizz


G
261
... lyrist, poet and composer...
f
p
ponticello
with fingernails
5
mf
freely


267
pizz
mp
pizz
mp
ponticello
with fingernails
pizz
mf
mp

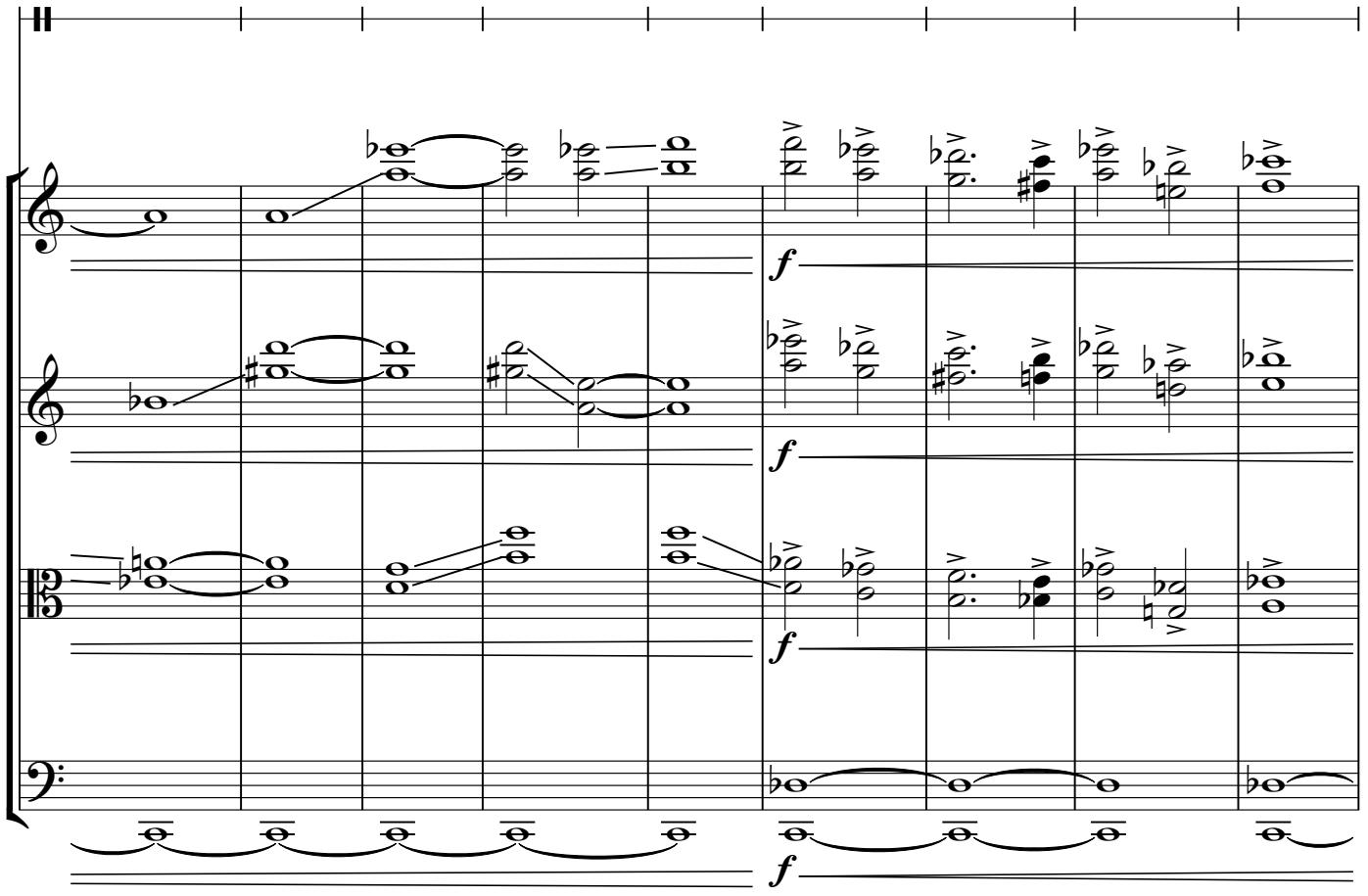
rall. **A tempo**

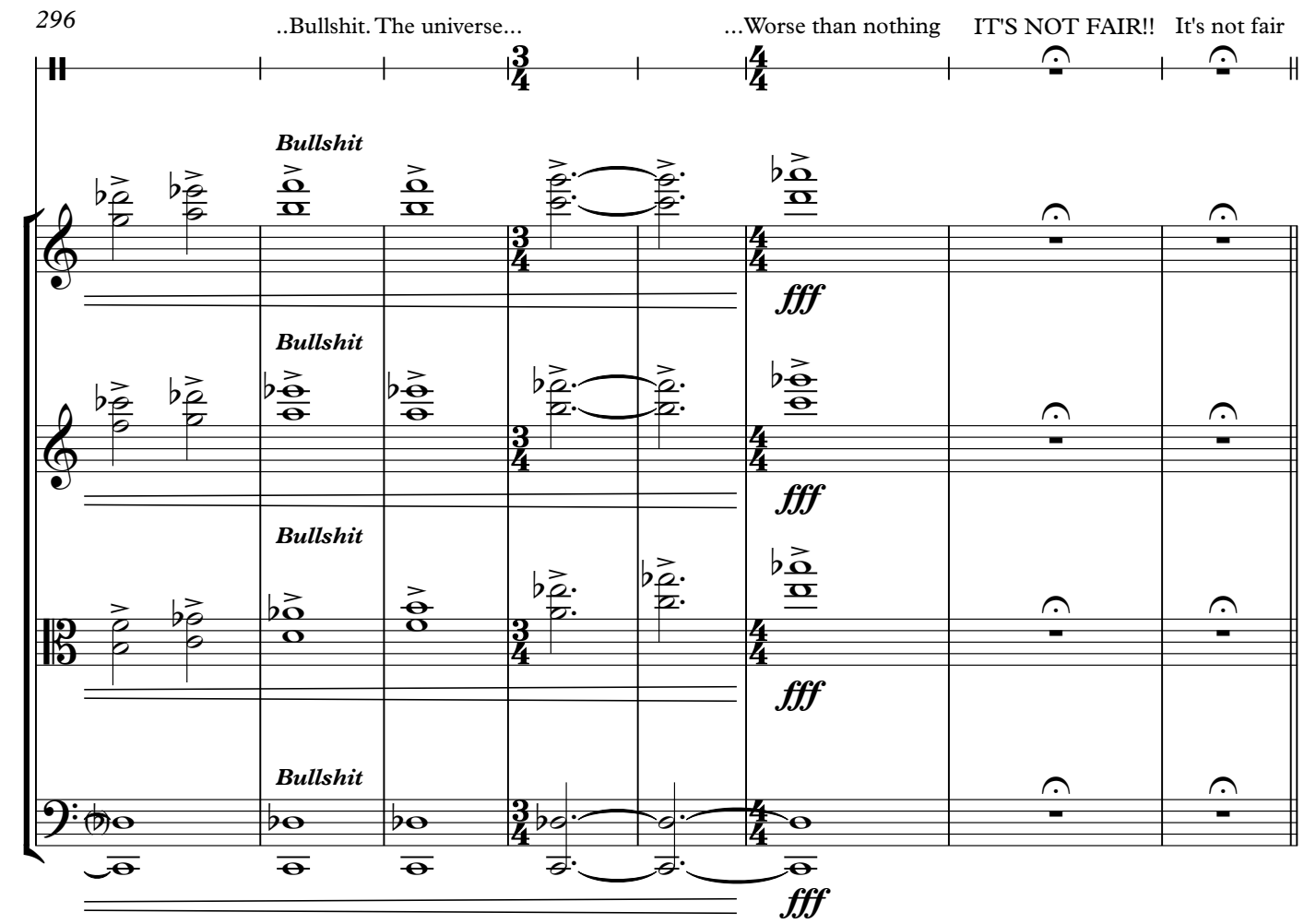

273
...play a note
They cut out...
arco
pp
p
arco
pp
p
arco
pp
pp
mp
5
mp
3
f

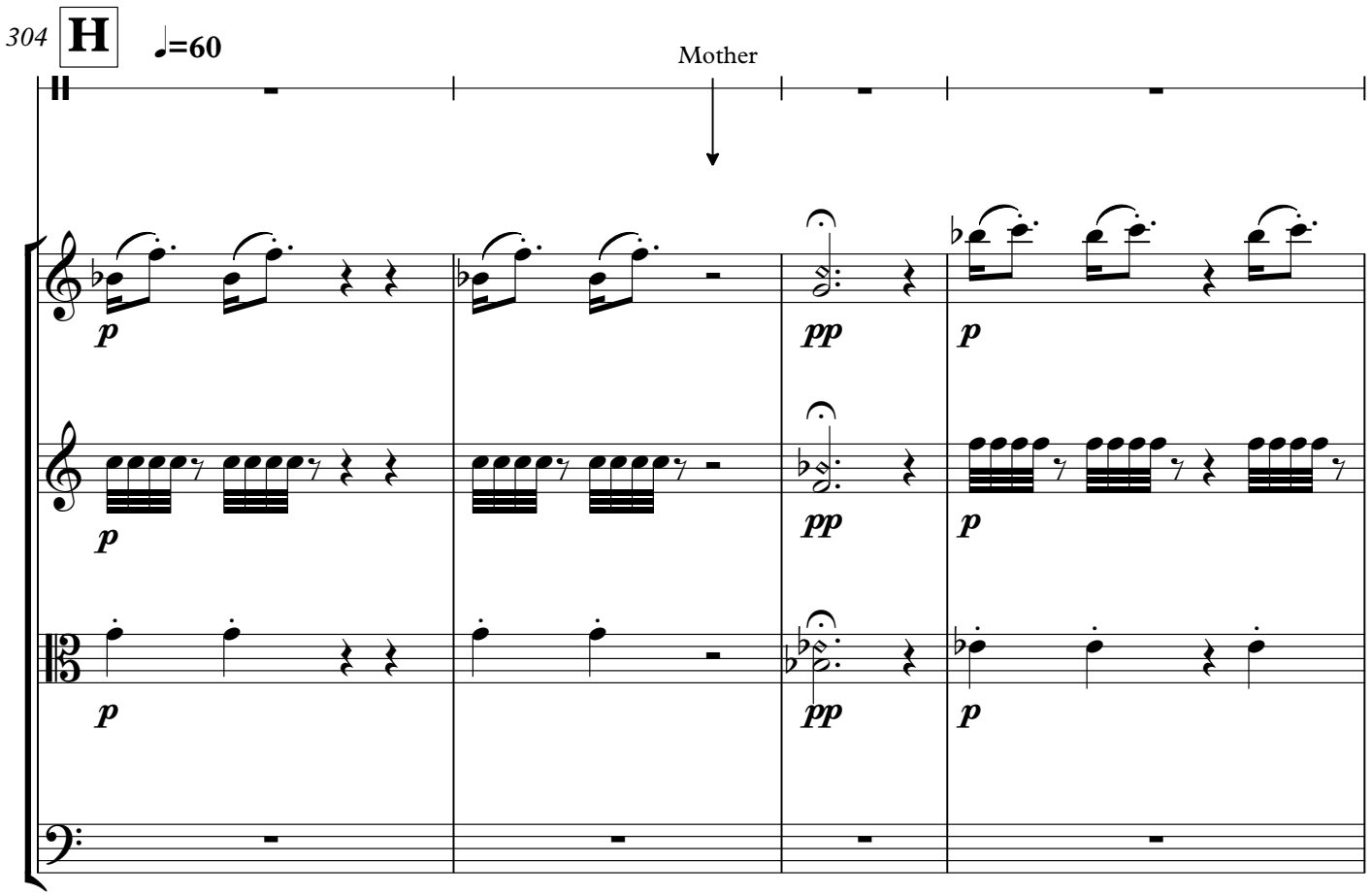
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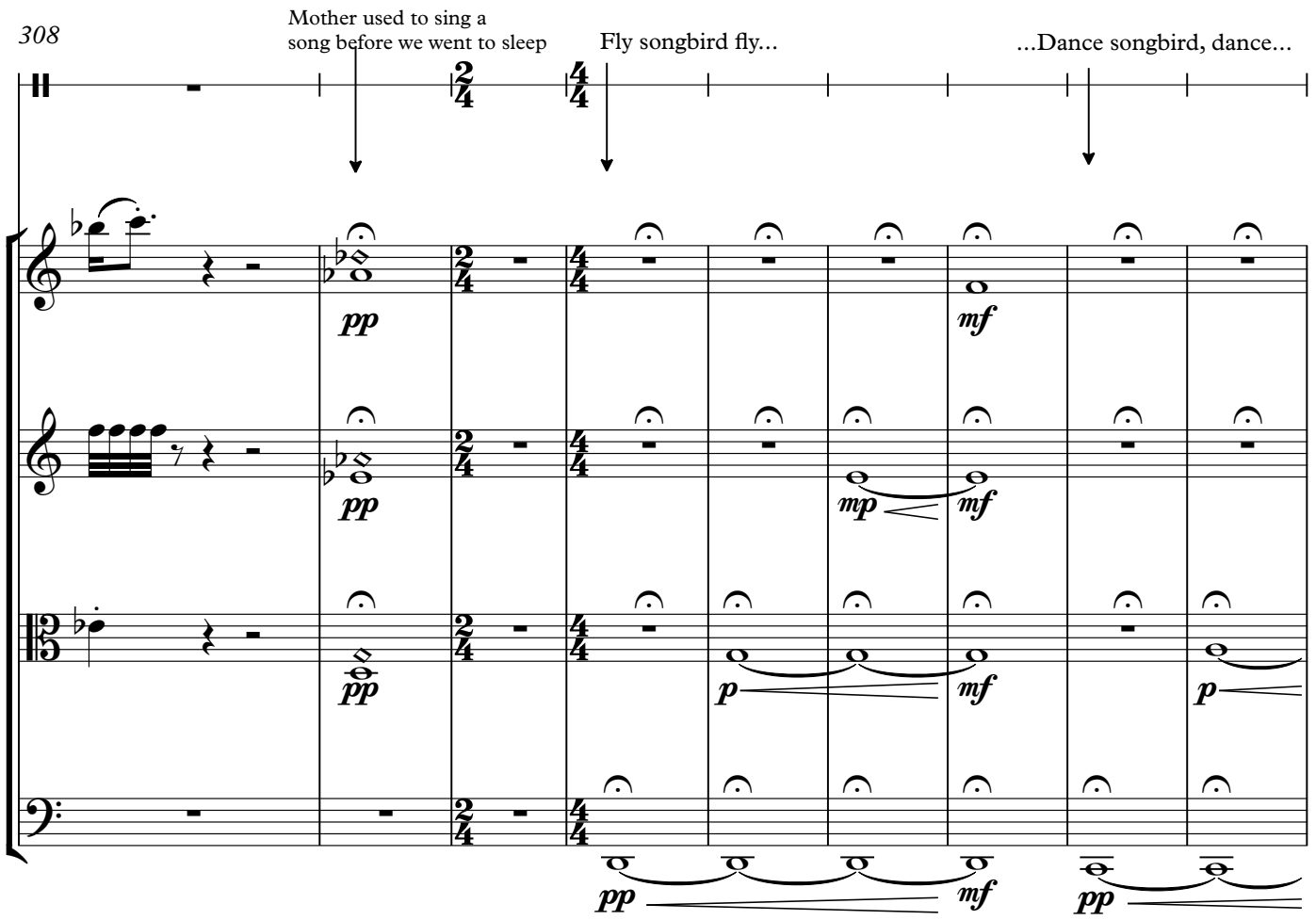


287




296
..Bullshit. The universe...
...Worse than nothing
IT'S NOT FAIR!!
It's not fair
Bullshit
Bullshit
Bullshit
Bullshit
fff
fff
fff
fff

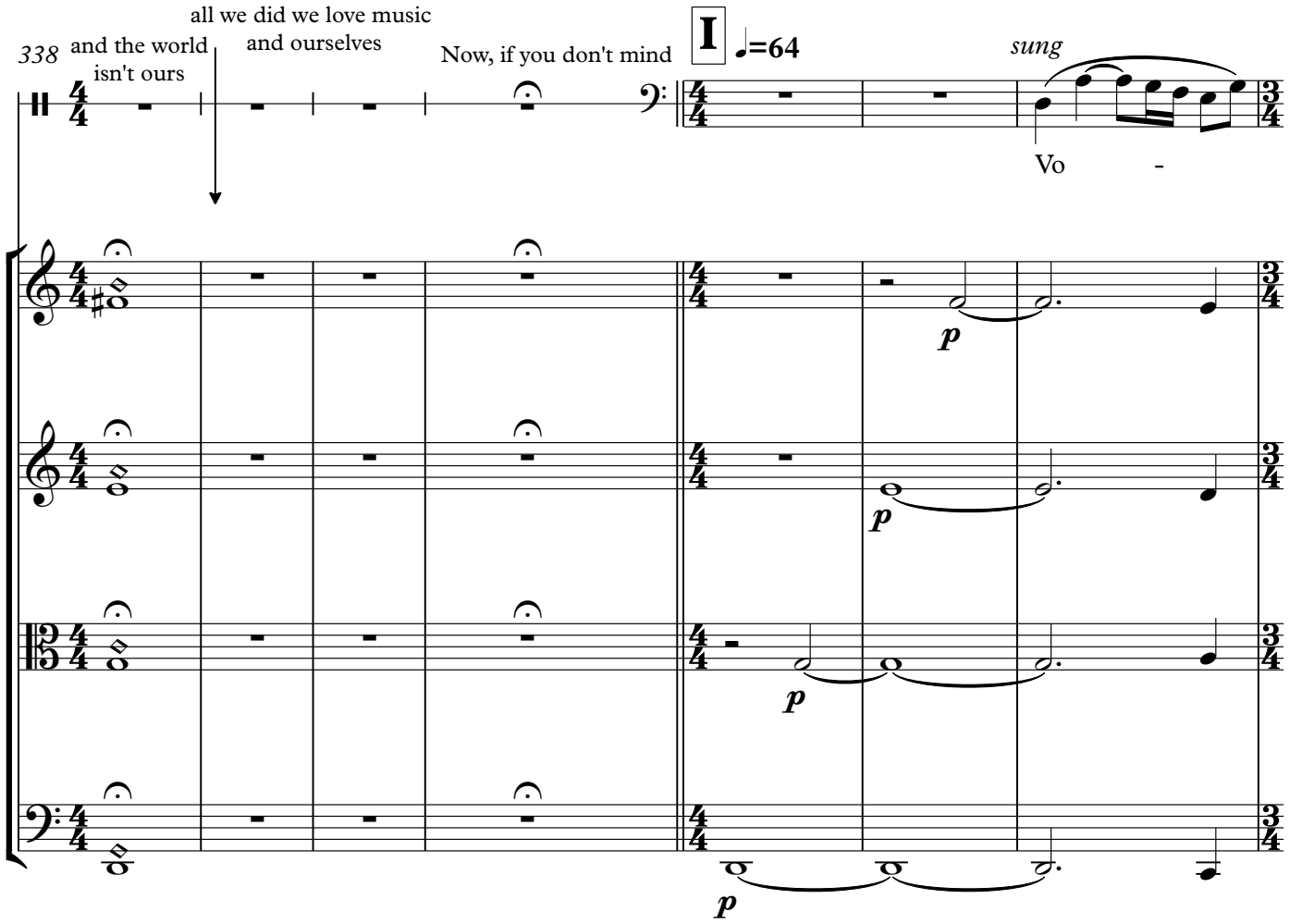

304
H
♩=60
Mother
p
pp
p


308
Mother used to sing a
song before we went to sleep
Fly songbird fly...
...Dance songbird, dance...
pp
mf
mp
p


317
...sing songbird, sing...
...for the world
is yours songbird
We sing it...
mf
mp
p
pp


325
gliss.
mp
p


331
...and a desire to control
but every.....
Mother
we sung, flew
and danced
f
p


338
and the world
isn't ours
all we did we love music
and ourselves
Now, if you don't mind
I
♩=64
sung
Vo -
p
p
p
p


345
- la,
pi - ca
vo-la
vo - la por-tae ad cae-lo-rum
mp
mp
mp
mp

350

Vo - la ut poss - it - is se - dent ad men-sam de - um

352

3

vo-la ut po-ssi-tis prop-riis loc-is ves-tris Sal - - ta

f p


356
pi - ca
Sal ta
Sal-ta cum ip-so
pul-mo-num
mun - do
pizz
arco
pizz
arco
pizz
arco
mp
p
361
ut om-nes sci-ant sal-ta - tis
sal-ta cum grad-i-bus
et
exc - u - ti-te in ter-ram
mp
mf
p


365
Ca - - - nta pi - ca can - ta can-ta cord-i-bus
371
hom-i-num ad con - flan-dum can-ti-cum can - ta-te ad tris-tis ca-n-ta sic


377
pa - tet quod cum vox pur - a
Tu - um est en - im
pizz
p


381
orb - is ter - ra - rum
pi - ca
pp

385



⋆

Once the Cello plays the final note, the quartet look at each other confused.
They try to play their instruments but all that comes out is the scratchy
chicharra noise from the beginning.They keep trying but eventually,
one by one, they give up and leave the stage. The actor is the last one to go
but finally they put the mic on the chair and leave giving one last look back to the audience

Appendix 1

Songbirds Script

The string quartet are already placed onstage with an extra seat in the centre. They start to play very dissonant and distorted material based on magpie calls. Cissa, dressed in a black hoodie with blue and white accents, enters and sits in the extra seat. They start to make magpie noises into the mic. After a while, Cissa becomes aware of the audience

CISSA

What, what? we're not forcing you to listen to it. take your scorn and shove it. Yeah, it's not Haydn or any of that rubbish; John Suchet would't love it but this is our gig and we can play what we want to, unless there are any objections...no.. so... if you don't mind

They go back to the magpie soundscape. They're distracted though. Suddenly..

What do you you know anyway? You wouldn't know what good music is if it came over pissed on their laps. Jaws: slack, heads: thick, ears: impervious. I bet you've never even heard of us. and you call yourselves cultured. Oh yes, "I think I prefer Bartok's fourth quartet to his third" and, "Have you seen the new Frantic Assembly piece at the Nash?" but the Pierides? "Is that a mountain range or something?". Well, mountains are actually a fairly good analogy because in our prime we practically ran the game. We loomed tall like the Himalayas, nothing could waylay us, arts dragon slayers, Orpheus and Linus, "the greatest musicians in the world": cutesy banjo players. We ate little turds like that for breakfast. Now, if you don't mind

Sorry, I've got a lot of unresolved anger. I realise that if you really don't know who we are then what I've just said doesn't make a lot of sense. And I can only put so much down to you lot being dense and philistinic. Look, if we explain ourselves, fill in the gaps, perhaps then you'll care to let us alone. We'll lay ourselves bare and then we can moan without you lot to criticise. We'll legitimise, authorise, show our credentials and maybe you'll see us through different... ears.

And then can we just play? please? It's been so long

Mother and father. Let's start with Mother and Father. Emathia. The son of an artist who worked his way to be lord of the land. His name was Pierus and he was our father. Pieria, a Nymph who met a powerful king at a concert. She was Antiope and she was our mother. And because of the love that his father had instilled in him of poetry, music, dance and theatre, When he had nine, yes nine, daughters he named them after the muses themselves. That's us, the daughters of Pierus, the Pierides. We've changed our names since for obvious reasons, and the observant among you will see there are five of us on stage not nine.

CENCHRIS

Iyngx

CISSA

was eaten by a fox

CHLORIS

Pipo

CISSA

was shot by hunters

COLYMBAS

Dracontis

CISSA

went mad, and Acalanthis, well

ALL

he less said about Alacanthis the better.

CISSA

I promise make sense in a minute. So, we, from a young age, played music and wrote poetry and acted in plays and danced in little ballets. We'd take it in turns to do these concerts and performances in the front room. Do you remember our little concerts?

ALL

Yeah

NESSA

I made the costumes

CISSA

Beautiful and garish garb. Moving parts and flapping wings. Pretty things. Handcrafted helmets and halberds for when we played soldiers. Flowing sequined skirts and scarfs for Salome to sashe sultrily around the stage in.

COLYMBAS

I wrote the music

CISSA

Odes and airs. sonatas motets. duet, quartet, septet, nonet. Ballets, operas. sweet music so delight and joy may despair and grief o'erthrow. No symphonies though there are only nine of us. We're good but we're not magic

CENCHRIS AND CHLORIS

We arranged the candles to give us light

CISSA

Through glasses and jewels to color the living room emerald green and ruby red. So realistic you could belive you were out in the forest, you could hear the sparrows twitering. Glittering like Aladdin's cave. Like a disco in a stained glass window.

This was no ordinary primary 1 nativity. No plain school play, no way. We slayed. Then we played and sung and danced and acted all at the same time. Mother and father used to call us their little songbirds.

The taller we got, the better we got. We learnt to play faster and sweeter. Write cleverer, move neater. We were good is what I'm saying. Really good. Make the mountains sing and the valleys weep kinda good.

And I don't even think we said it; someone might have said it about us and we didn't deny it. That was all and people talk. Little whispers from town to town. "The pierides think they are better than the muses". They heard what people had been saying about us and by this point the whispers had spun into a plan for a contest. Nine of us, Nine of them. An arts battle royale. They come to us for a fight. But we were in awe. They were our idols and we were delighted that they knew of us. Friendly match, no fisty-cuffs. We accepted the challenge but before we could sing a word or play a note or take a step,

They turned us into Magpies.

Have you ever heard a magpie sing? This is what they sound like.

Cissa pulls a dictaphone from their pocket and plays a magpie sound

More percussion than voice. Turn the arrogant singers into songless birds. Very funny. For one night only, the voiceless singers, the fingerless musicians play and sing and dance again for you entertainment.

Now, If you don't mind.

I don't know if any of you have been turned into a bird (I highly doubt it) but if you have, you'll know it's a highly unpleasant experience.

First the black, white and blue feathers burst through the skin.

The face hardens and tapers to a pointed beak.

The bones shrink and hollow

The toes fuse and talons push their way out

But the most painful thing is the voice box ripping

And all on the gods whim. Aren't they supposed to protect us, guide us, alpha and omega, our reason for being? When have the gods ever helped us?

The muses have never worked a day in their lives. They were born good but we made ourselves good. We used what they taught to better out lives and those of the people around us and they punished us for..for what?. And that's not even the first time they've done this. Remember Thyramis? No, I don't suppose you do. A poet, lyrist and composer of incredible skill. He wrote and played beautiful odes to the mountains and the rivers and the moon over the ocean. People loved him. Not a criticism sent not a bad word said but tongues wagged and word spread "he could out play the muses" so they brought him before them and before he could even start to play, they cut out his voice box, stabbed out his eyes, cut off his fingers and threw him into the wilderness. At least we had the irony of being turned into songless birds; cutting his fingers off, that's not even clever. Where was the inspiration of the muses when they thought that one up? Now he can't see the mountains or the rivers or the moon over the ocean and, even if he could, he couldn't write a song about it. They're bullies, vicious bullies. All the gods are. They'll fry us like ants for nothing. They'll punish us for eternity for the things that they are guilty of themselves. Think of the trojan war; The mass punishment of the titans; Crusades; conquests; terror and witch trials. Heaven is built on a mound of the dead and the suffering

So screw it. Don't say your prayers, throw away your crystals, ransack your alters and burn your temples to the ground

Father used to say "be courageous and true, my songbirds, and the universe will catch you when you fall"

Bullshit.

The universe is not a safety net. It's just a blank open plain where we happen to live. We can live our lives being courageous and true and we get NOTHING. WORSE THAN NOTHING

IT'S NOT FAIR!!!!!

It's not fair.

Mother.

Mother used to sing a song to us before we went to sleep

Fly, songbird. fly.
Fly to the golden gates of Heaven;
Fly to sit at the table of the gods;
Fly to claim your proper place

Dance, songbird. dance.
Dance to the rhythm of the world
Dance so all on earth shall know;
Dance with steps to shake the earth.

Sing, songbird. sing.
Sing to melt the hearts of men;
Sing your melancholy song;
Sing with voice so clear and pure.

For the world is yours, songbird.

We sing it because it's the only song our bird brains can remember. We sing it for Thyrymis, we sing it for marsyus who challenged Apollo and was skinned alive, we sing it for Medusa who was punished for thinking she was beautiful. We sing it for Sisyphus who was for thinking he was clever. We sing it for Cassandra for saying no, we sing it for Io for saying yes, we sing it for Prometheus for bringing life to the world. We sing it all the wonderful people that the gods have punished out of jealousy and spite and a desire to keep control.

But every time we do it feels like bile in or mouths. Mother, We flew, sang and danced and the world isn't ours. All we did was love music and ourselves

Now, if you don't mind

Vola, pica. vola!
vola portae ad caelorum
vola,Ut possitis sedent ad mensam deum:
vola, Ut possitis propriis locis vestris

Salta, pica. Salta.
Salta cum ipsa pulmonum mundo;
Ut omnes sciant saltastis
Salta cum gradibus et excutite in terram.

Canta, pica. canta.

Canta cordibus hominum ad conflandum:
Canticum cantate et tristis;
Canta sic patet quod, cum vox pura.
Tuum est enim orbis terrarum, pica.

The Cello plays the final note but it turns to the scratchy sound from the start. The quartet look at each other confused. They try to play their instruments but all that comes out is the scratchy chicharra noise from the beginning. They keep trying but eventually, one by one, they give up and leave the stage. The actor is the last one to go but finally they put the mic on the chair and leave giving one last look back to the audience.