Vesper Trains

for percussion quartet

Marc LeMay

2012

Marc LeMay Music

MARC LEMAY

VESPER TRAINS

for percussion quartet
(2012)

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Commissioned by Peter DiLeo.

Premiered April 14, 2012, McIntosh Theatre, University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance; with Peter DiLeo, Darren Lin, Jon Brown, and Paul Owen.

Full score and parts available for rental or purchase from the composer:
marc@marclemaymusic.com

Published by Marc LeMay Music
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ISMN Pending
First Printing: March 2012
Second Printing: November 2012

Music engraving by the composer.
Cover design by Colin Fulton.
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BIOGRAPHY

Marc LeMay (b. Birmingham, AL, 1982) is a composer, arranger, musician, and educator currently living and working in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where he earned his Master of Arts in Composition from the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance in 2010.

Marc writes with a spirit of ecstasy and intensity, humor and indulgence. His music has been performed in concert halls, clubs, and theatres throughout the United States, including New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Ann Arbor, and Birmingham, as well as a recent performance in Munich, Germany.

In his youth, Marc was heavily involved in the theatre community of Birmingham, working as an actor, stage manager, assistant director, and sound designer. He meanwhile taught himself guitar, wrote dozens of songs, and played them in venues around the city. In 2003, he decided to pursue a degree in Music Technology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, with the intent of learning how to record his own music. He began composing while a member of the UAB Jazz Combo and the UAB Computer Music Ensemble, writing new pieces for both ensembles. This soon led to him writing concert music and deciding to pursue graduate studies in composition at the University of Michigan.

In line with his background in theatre, Marc now regularly collaborates with other artists on interdisciplinary projects, most recently with choreographers Austin Selden and Derek Crescenti, theatre directors Jim Manganello and Kacie Smith, and singer-songwriter Steven Lamphear. His goal with such projects is to foster a spirit of creativity and innovation that extends beyond the ambition of a single creator.

As a performer, Marc has played guitar and mandolin in a variety of settings, from musical theatre and the classical concert stage to jazz clubs and coffee shops. He also occasionally conducts his own music.

Marc studied composition with Bright Sheng, Erik Santos, Michael Angell, and Ronald Clemmons. He is currently completing commissions and collaborative projects as a freelance composer.

–December 2012

COMPOSER'S NOTE

This piece is inspired by the rhythms and sounds of my newly-adopted home city, Ann Arbor: the chirping birds, construction noise, cars, helicopters, pedestrians, and trains. The town's rail lines intersect every place I live, shop, and work. Their horns and the clanking of alarm bells call up memories of old friends and lovers, places traveled, places lived, the beauty and impermanence of it all.

Vesper Trains is scored for four players, each with a battery of non-pitched percussion instruments. After an opening flourish, the players alternate a rhythmic pattern on the large Japanese drum, the odaiko, consisting of a strike to its deeply resonant center, followed by a steady pulse established at the edge of the drumhead. The pattern escalates toward its goal: twelve strikes of the odaiko center, three for each player. But as the pattern reaches nine strikes, its momentum is interrupted by a new thought: a cheeky statement by the gongs and woodblocks. This brief song is gradually swept aside by the insistence of the train alarm bells.

The odaiko returns, faster this time, embellished by unison outbursts from the other instruments. It reaches its tenth repetition and is once again interrupted by the gongs and woodblocks in canon. The odaiko strikes then return, once again faster. They reach eleven strikes as the other instruments alternate instrument families in turn: skin, wood, and metal, leading to a coda in which the odaiko finally reaches its complete twelve-strike pattern, only to be undermined as a satisfying conclusion by the relentless quiet of the alarm-bell repetitions.

This piece was commissioned by Peter DiLeo for his senior recital at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre, and Dance. I am very grateful for Peter's input, advice, and tireless effort throughout the genesis of this piece.

–Marc LeMay

INSTRUMENTATION

Percussion (4 Players)

Mallets: all instruments can be played with the large butt-ends of mallets, wrapped in moleskin.

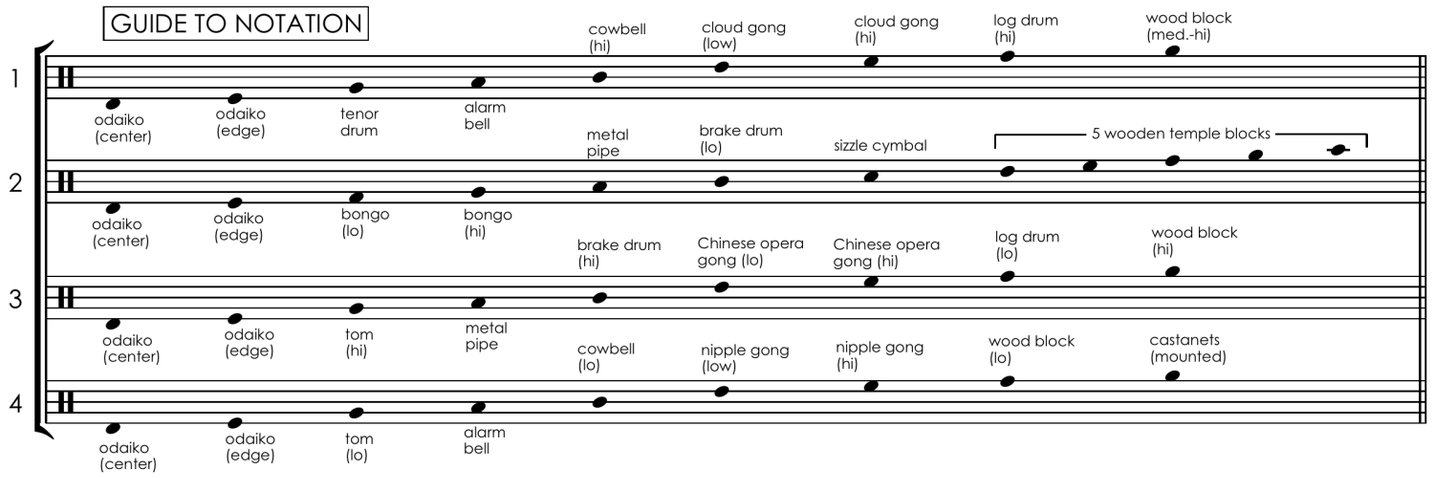
Odaiko (shared by all; "edge" means to play at the edge of the head, near the rim)

1. Tenor Drum, Alarm Bell*, Cowbell (high), 2 Cloud Gongs (low and high, laid flat on foam)**, Log Drum (high), Wood Block (medium-high)
2. 2 Bongos (low and high), Metal Pipe (small-diameter), Brake Drum (low), Sizzle Cymbal (suspended)**, 5 Wooden Temple Blocks
3. Tom (high), Metal Pipe (medium-diameter), Brake Drum (high), 2 Chinese Opera Gongs (low and high; low gong has descending pitch, high gong has ascending pitch; laid flat on foam)**, Log Drum (low), Wood Block (high)
4. Tow (low), Alarm Bell*, Cowbell (low), 2 Nipple Gongs (low and high; laid flat on foam)**, Wood Block (low), Castanets (one pair, mounted)

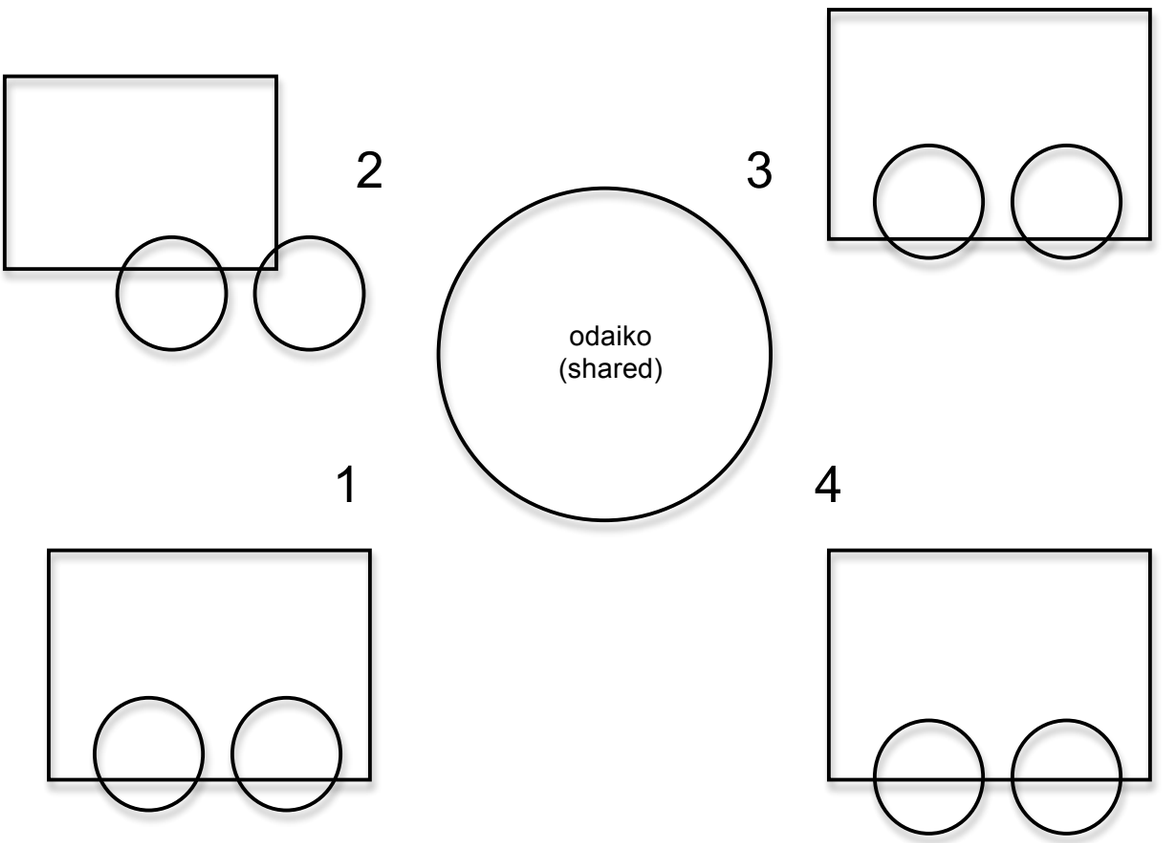
* Ideally, the alarm bells will be railroad crossing alarm bells, or any resonant metal plate roughly 8-12" in diameter. It is best that they have a richly-warm resonance, but they need not be suspended.

** All gongs and cymbals are to be played *laissez vibrer*, unless otherwise noted in the score.

GUIDE TO NOTATION



STAGE SETUP



Duration: 7.5 minutes

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12-09-12

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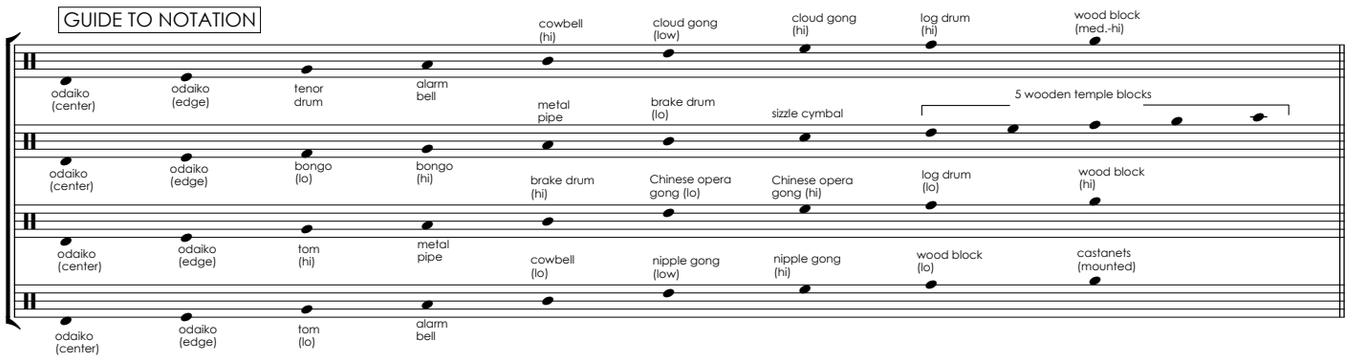

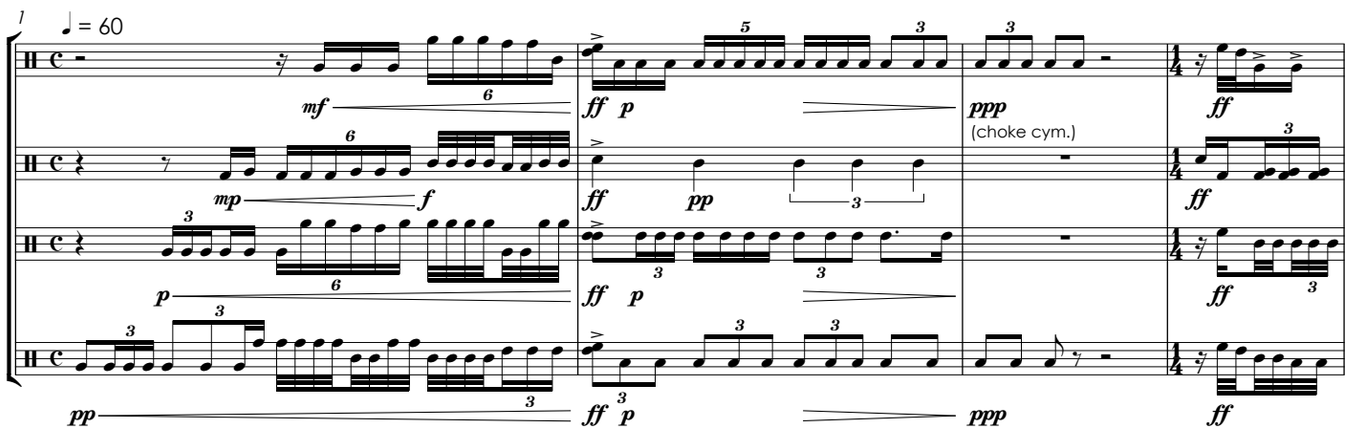

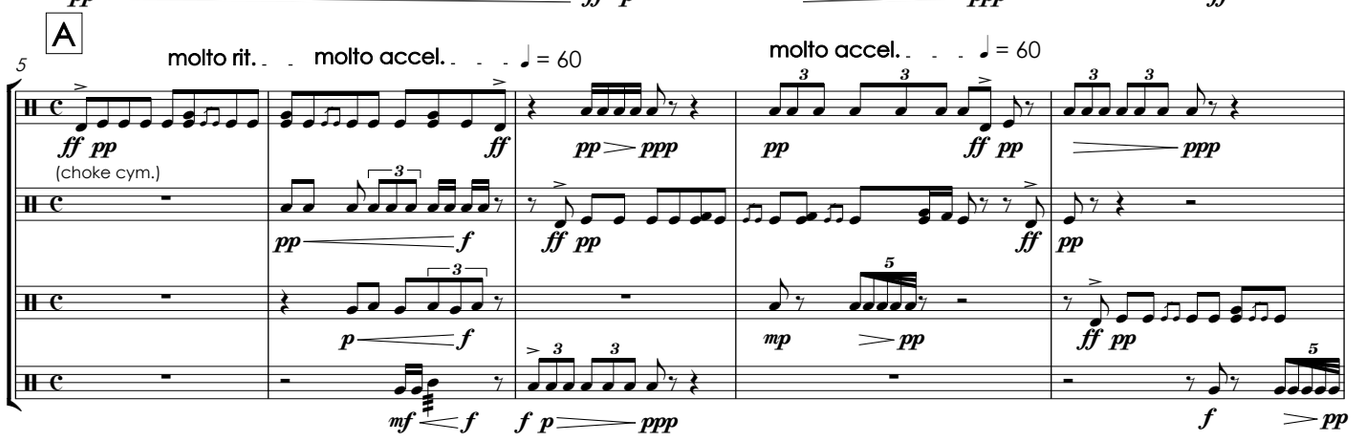

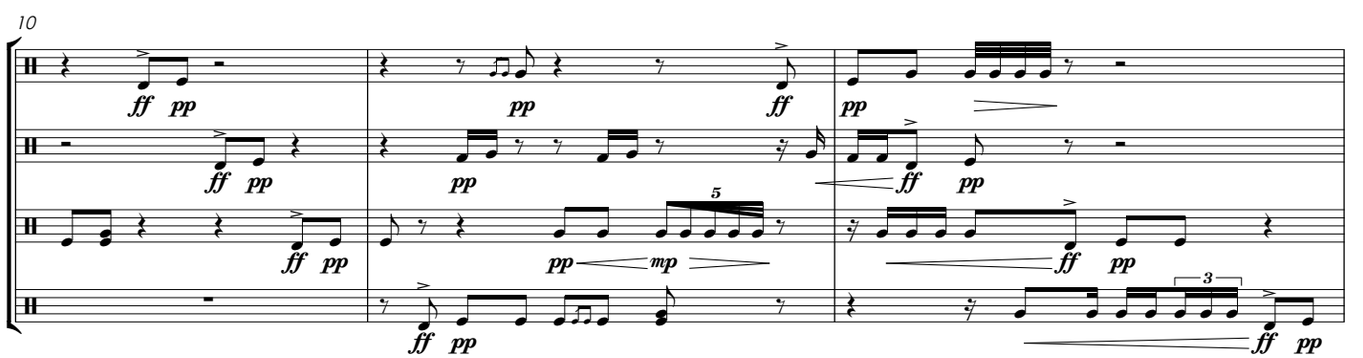

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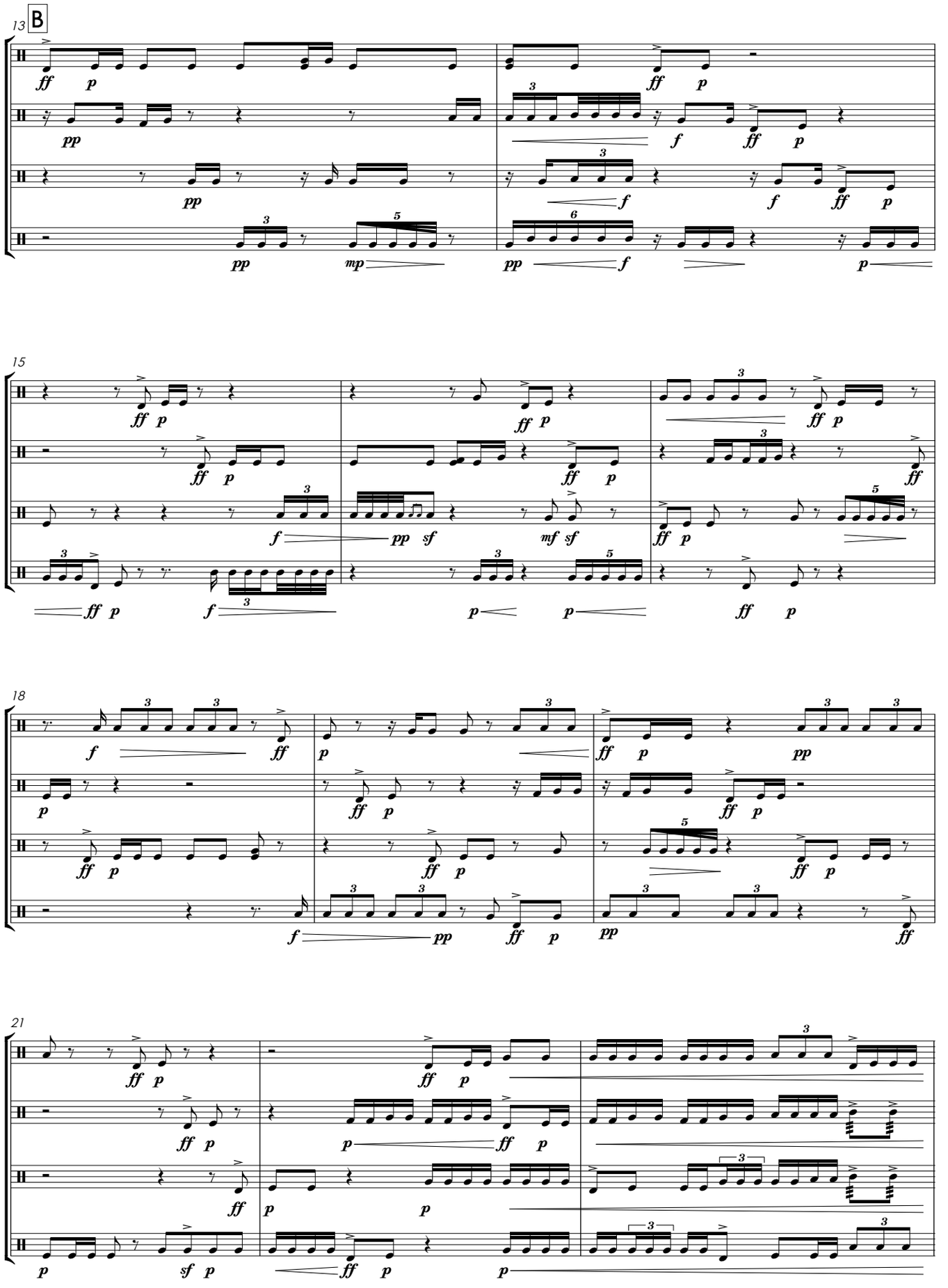
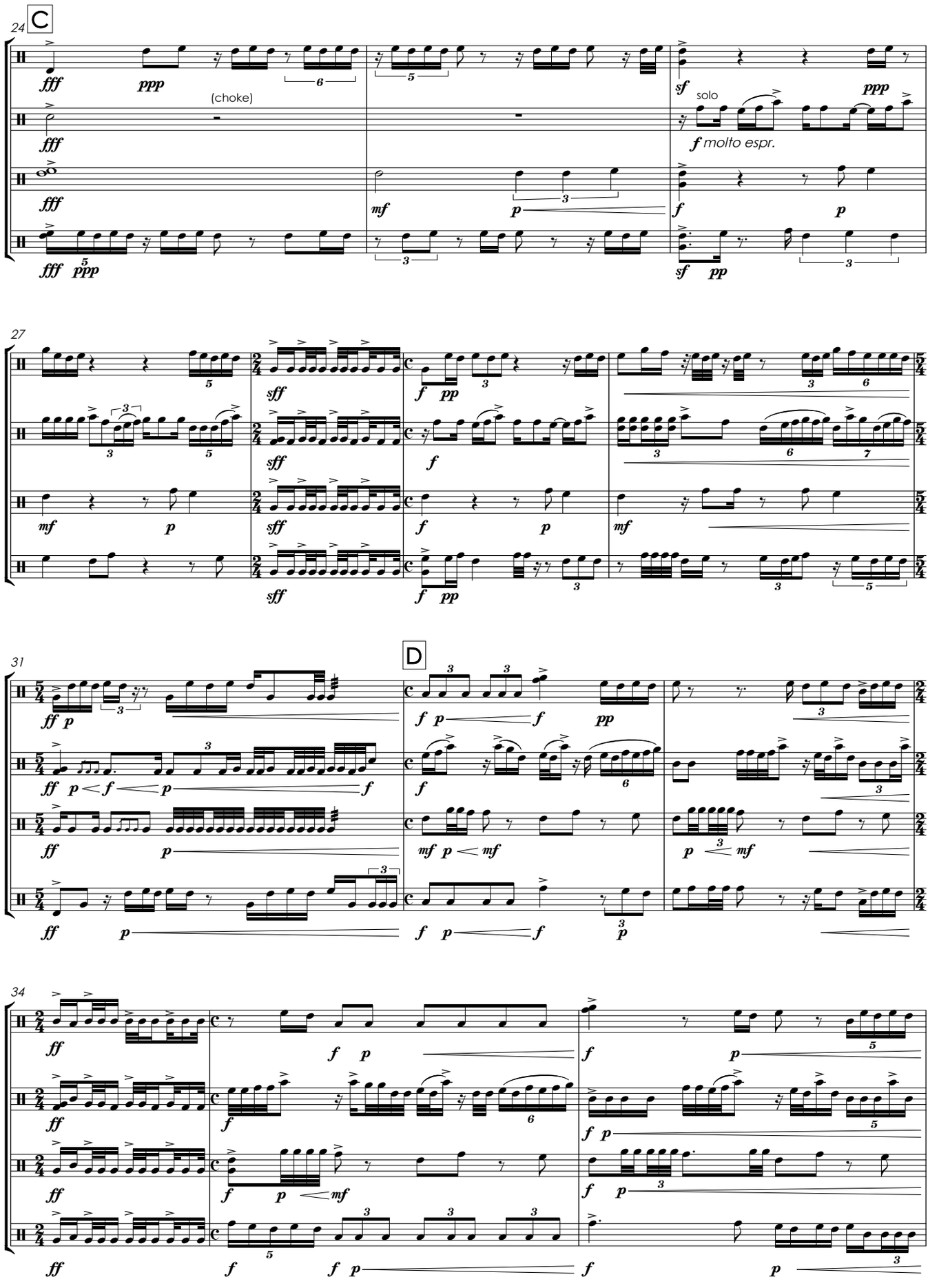
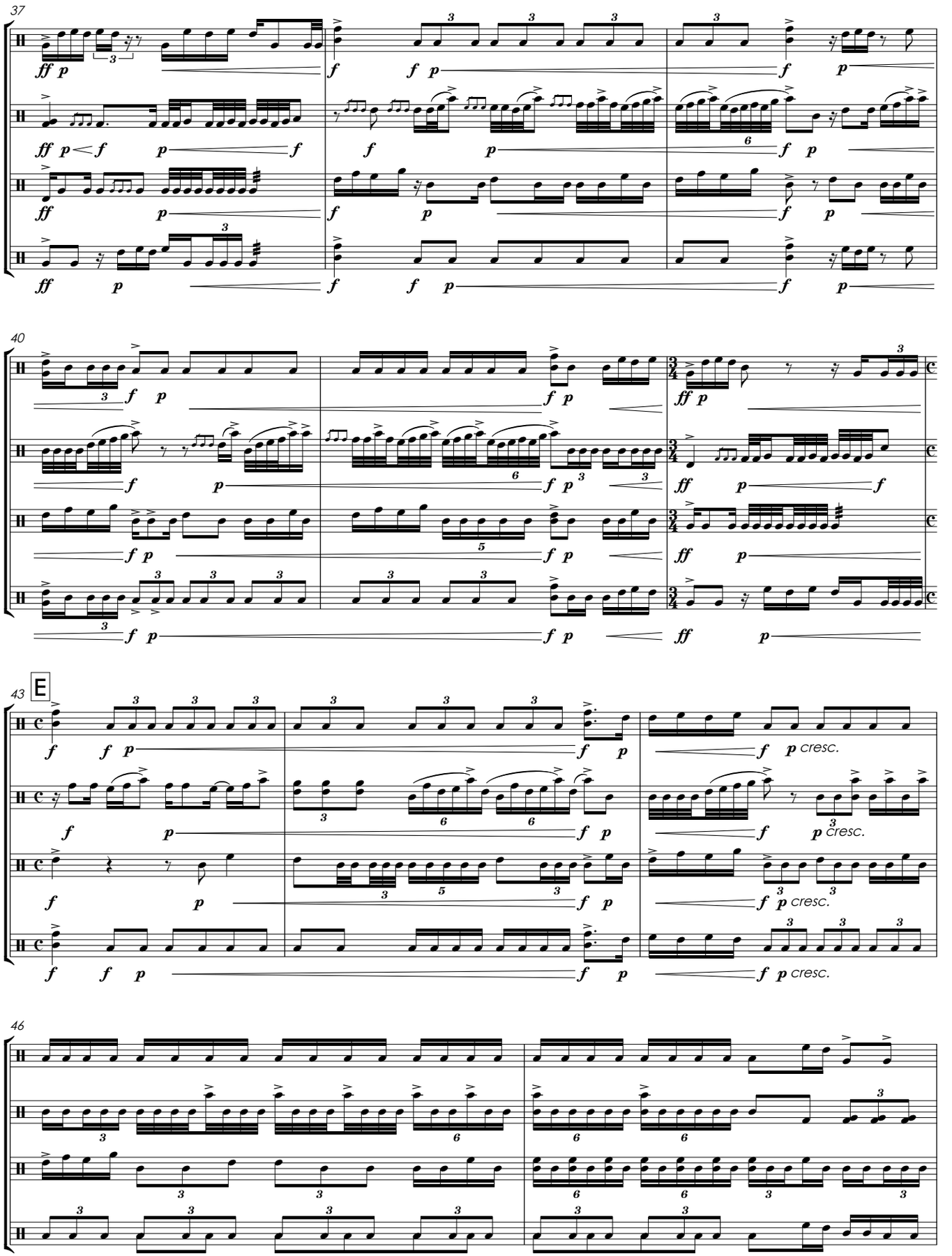
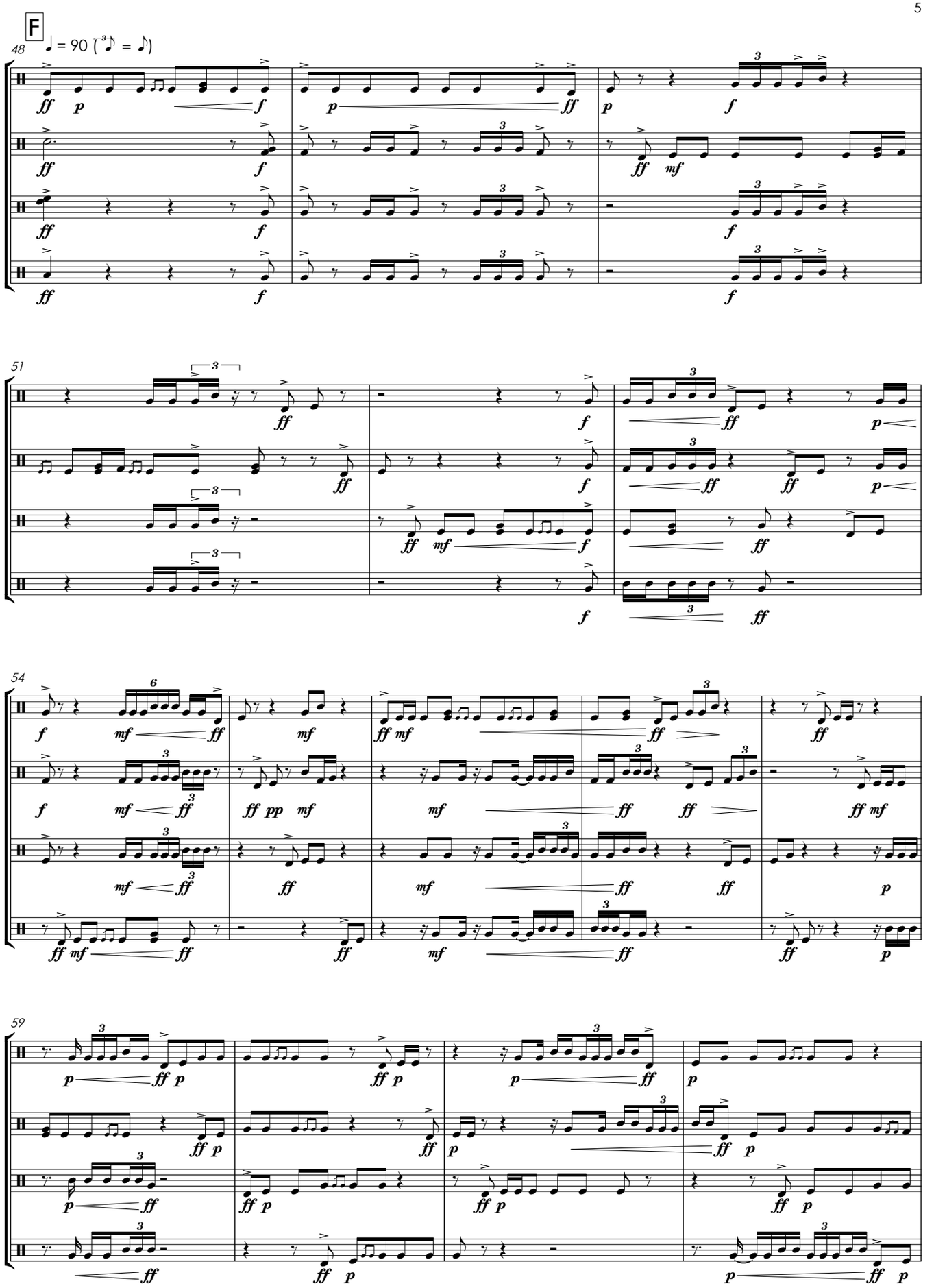
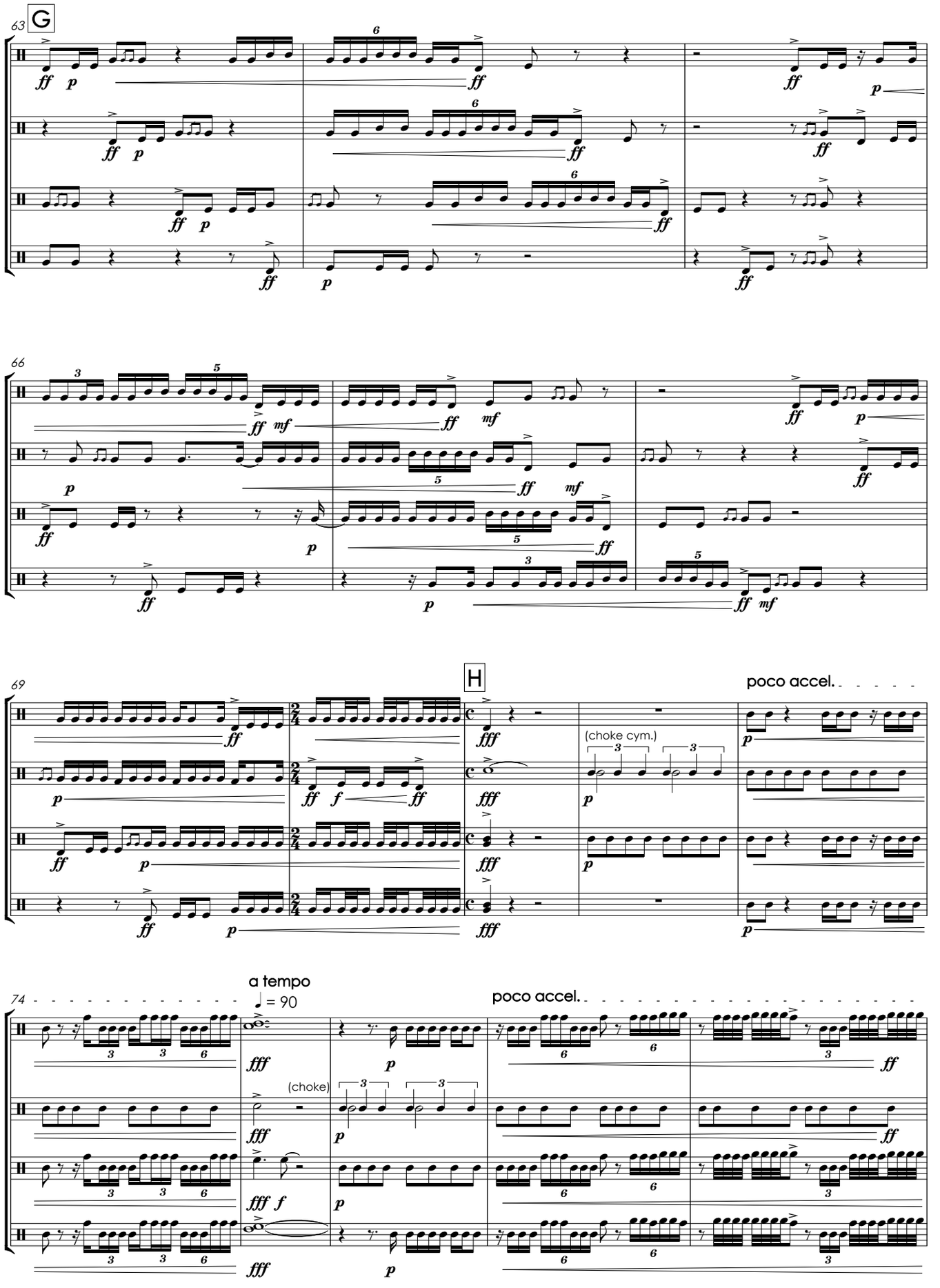
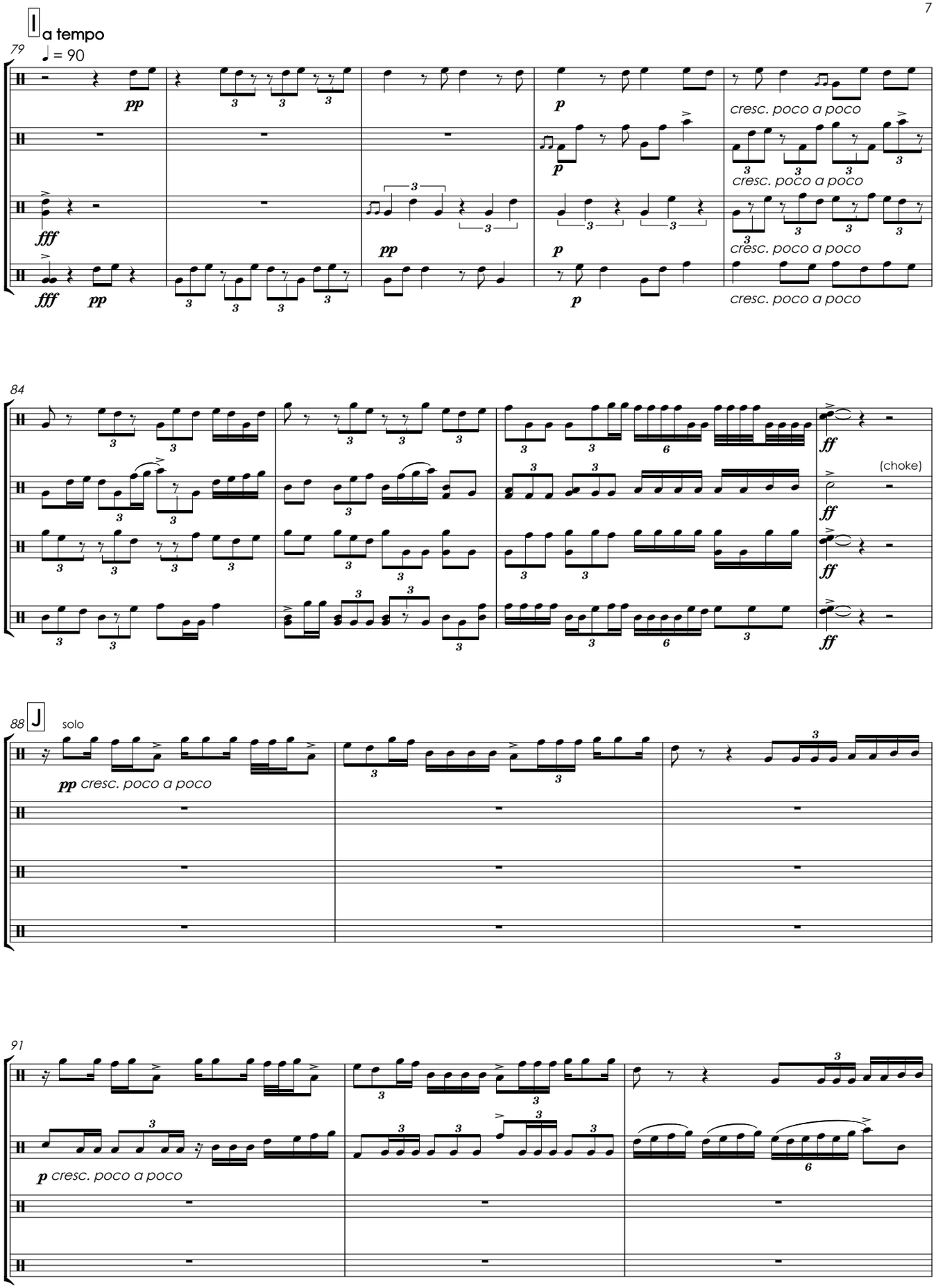

13
B
15
18
21

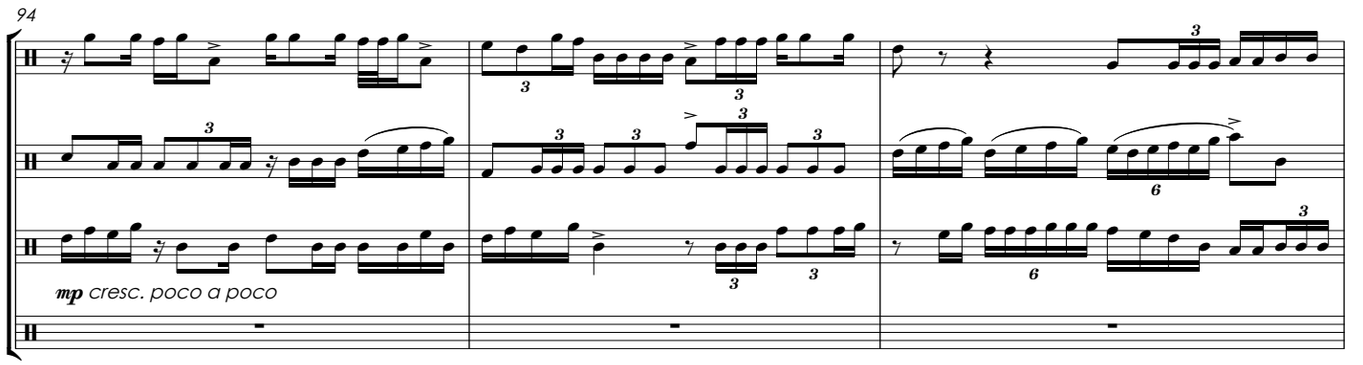

24
C
(choke)
solo
f molto espr.
27
31
D
34

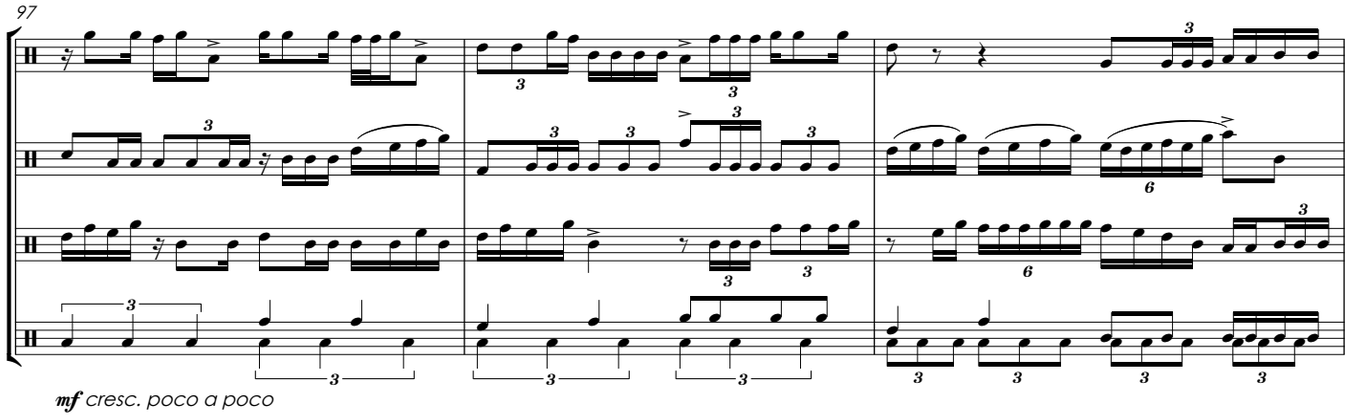

37
40
43
E
46
cresc.

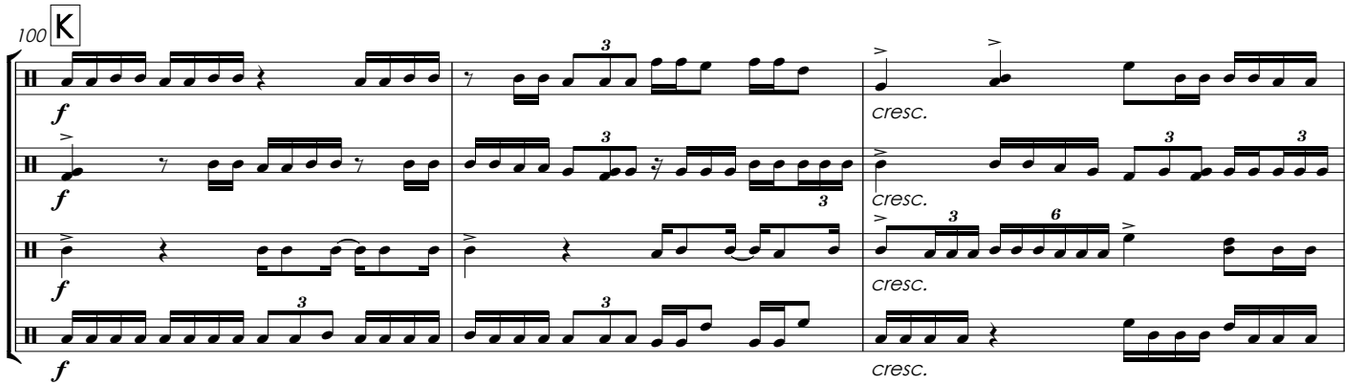

F
48
♩ = 90 (3♪ = ♪)
51
54
59

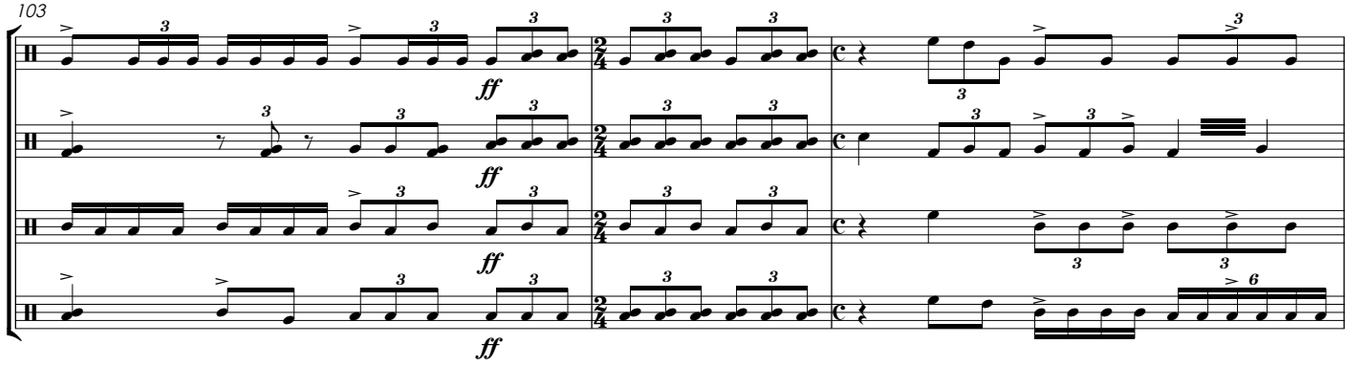

63
G
66
69
H
poco accel.
(choke cym.)
74
a tempo
♩ = 90
poco accel.
(choke)

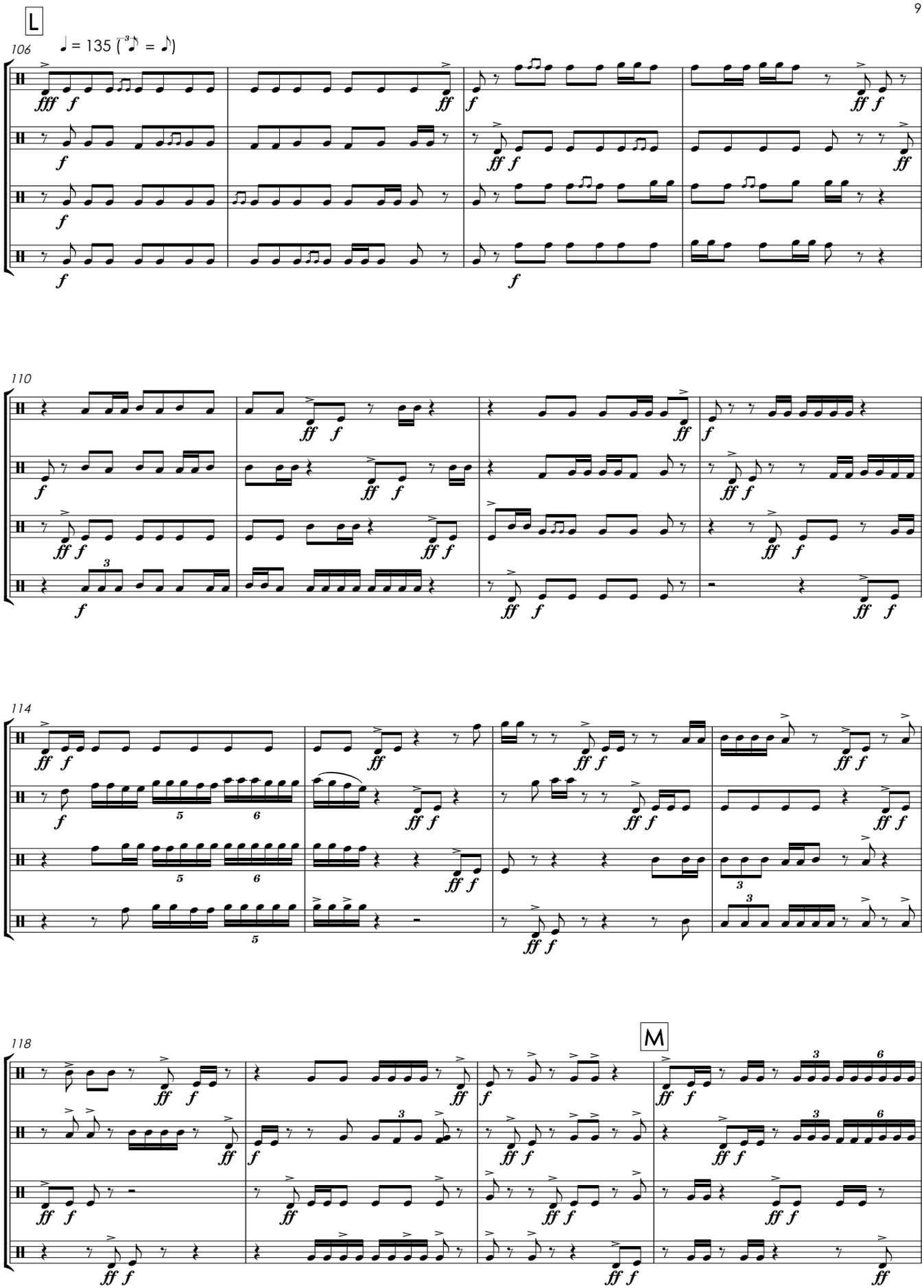

I
a tempo
♩ = 90
79
pp
fff
p
cresc. poco a poco
84
ff
(choke)
88
J
solo
pp cresc. poco a poco
91
p cresc. poco a poco

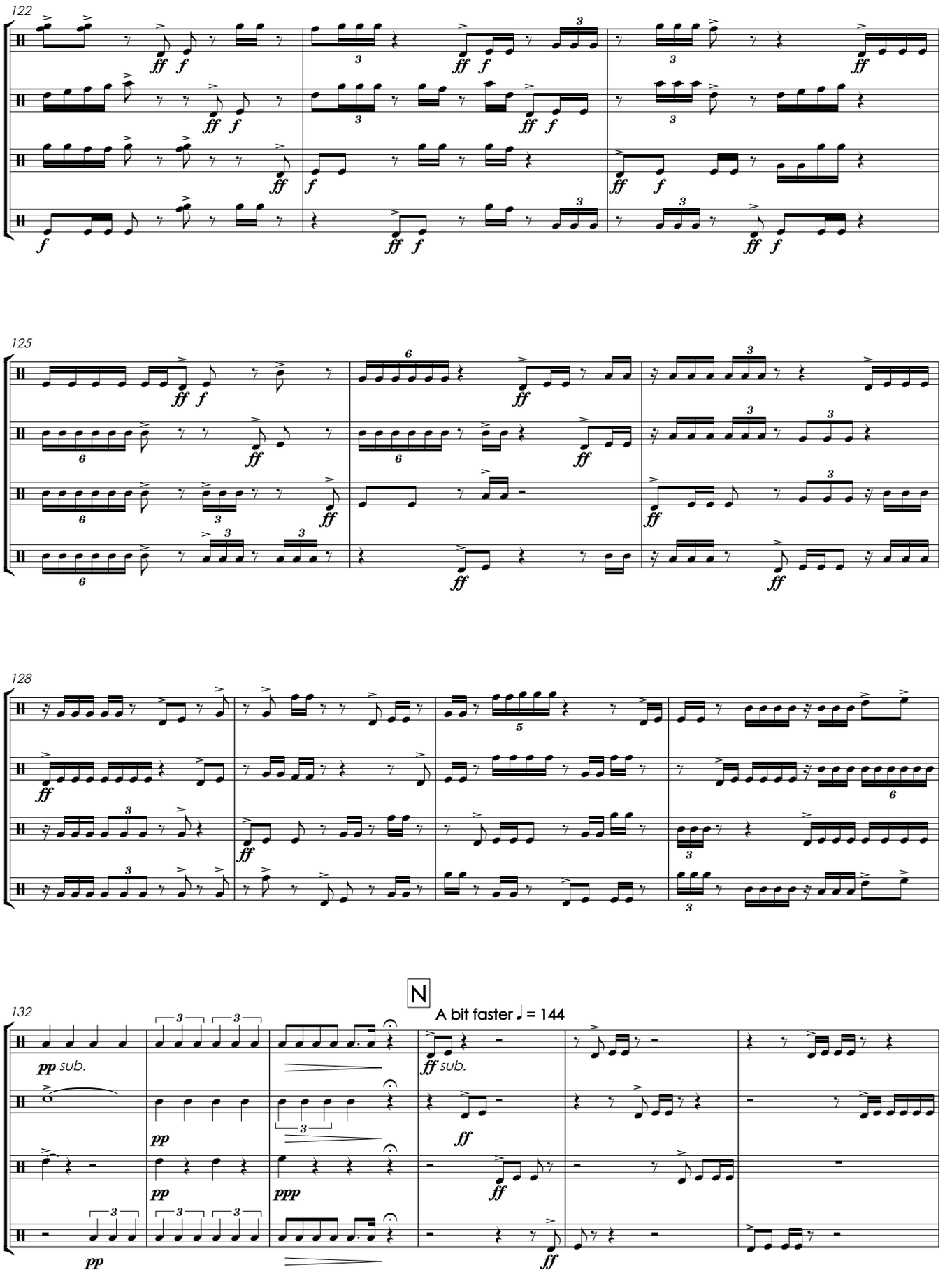

94
mp cresc. poco a poco

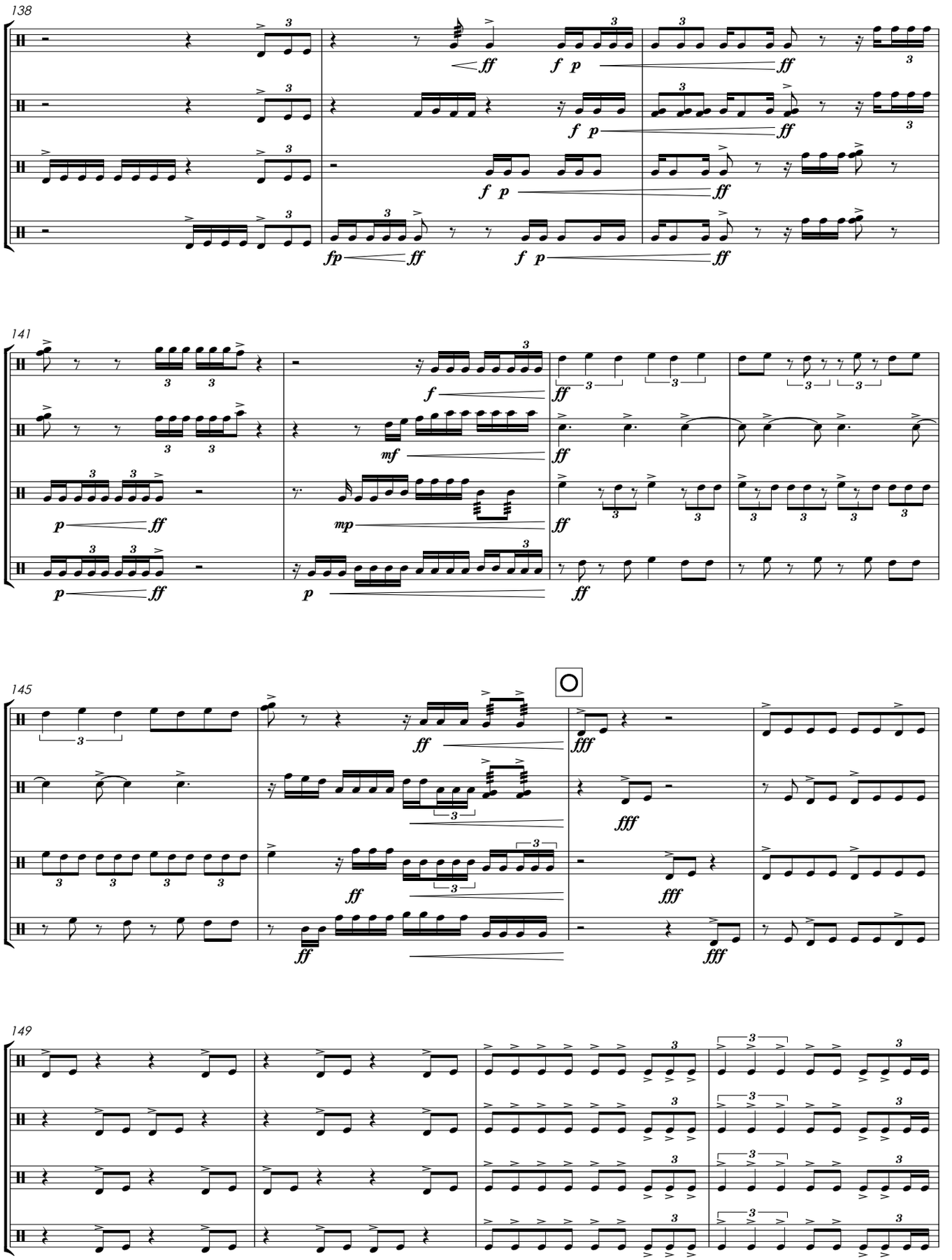

97
mf cresc. poco a poco

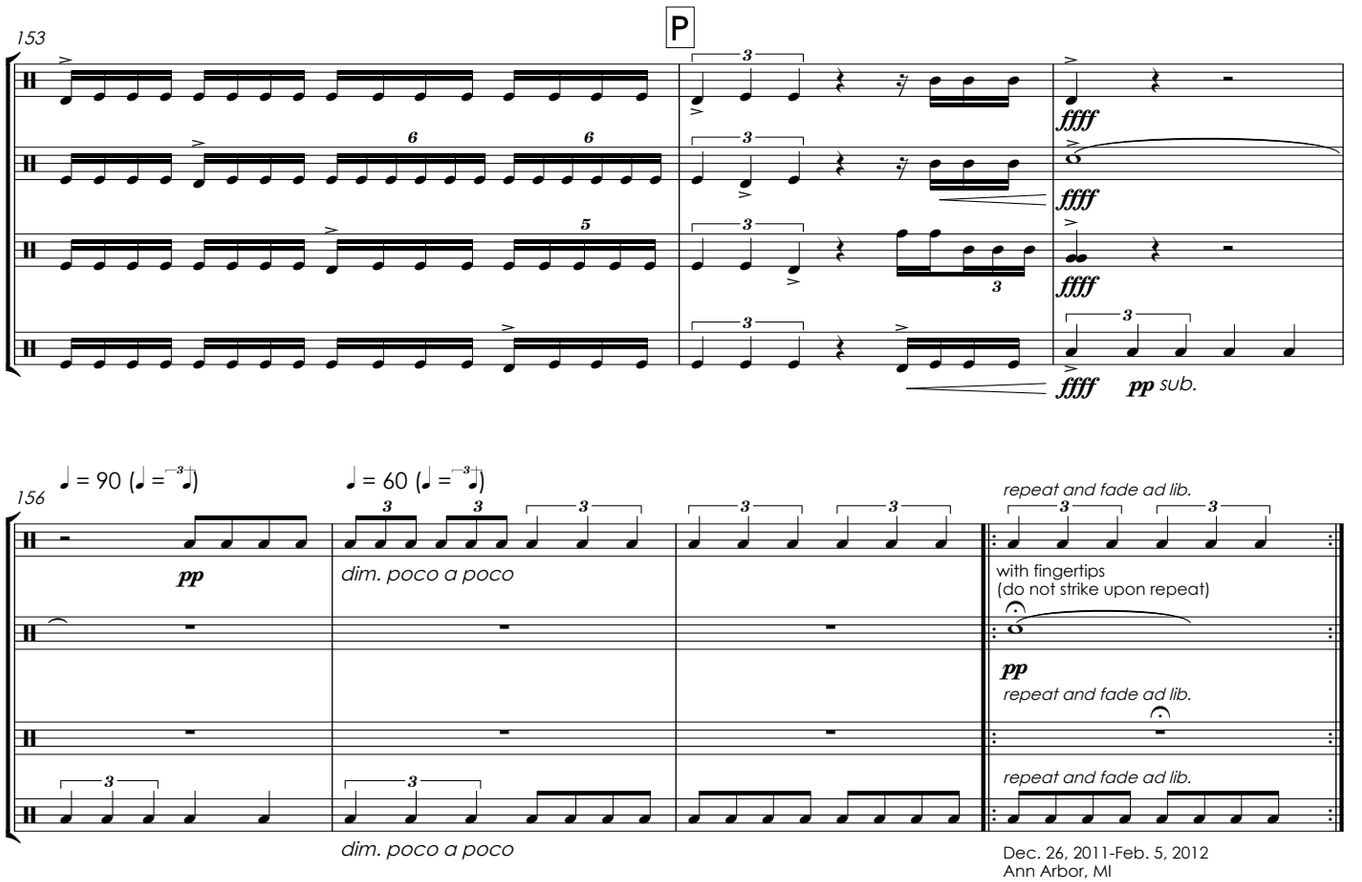

100
K
f
cresc.


103
ff


L
106
♩ = 135 (3 ♪ = ♪)
110
114
118
M


122
125
128
N
A bit faster ♩ = 144
132
pp sub.
ff sub.


138
141
145
149



Dec. 26, 2011-Feb. 5, 2012
Ann Arbor, MI