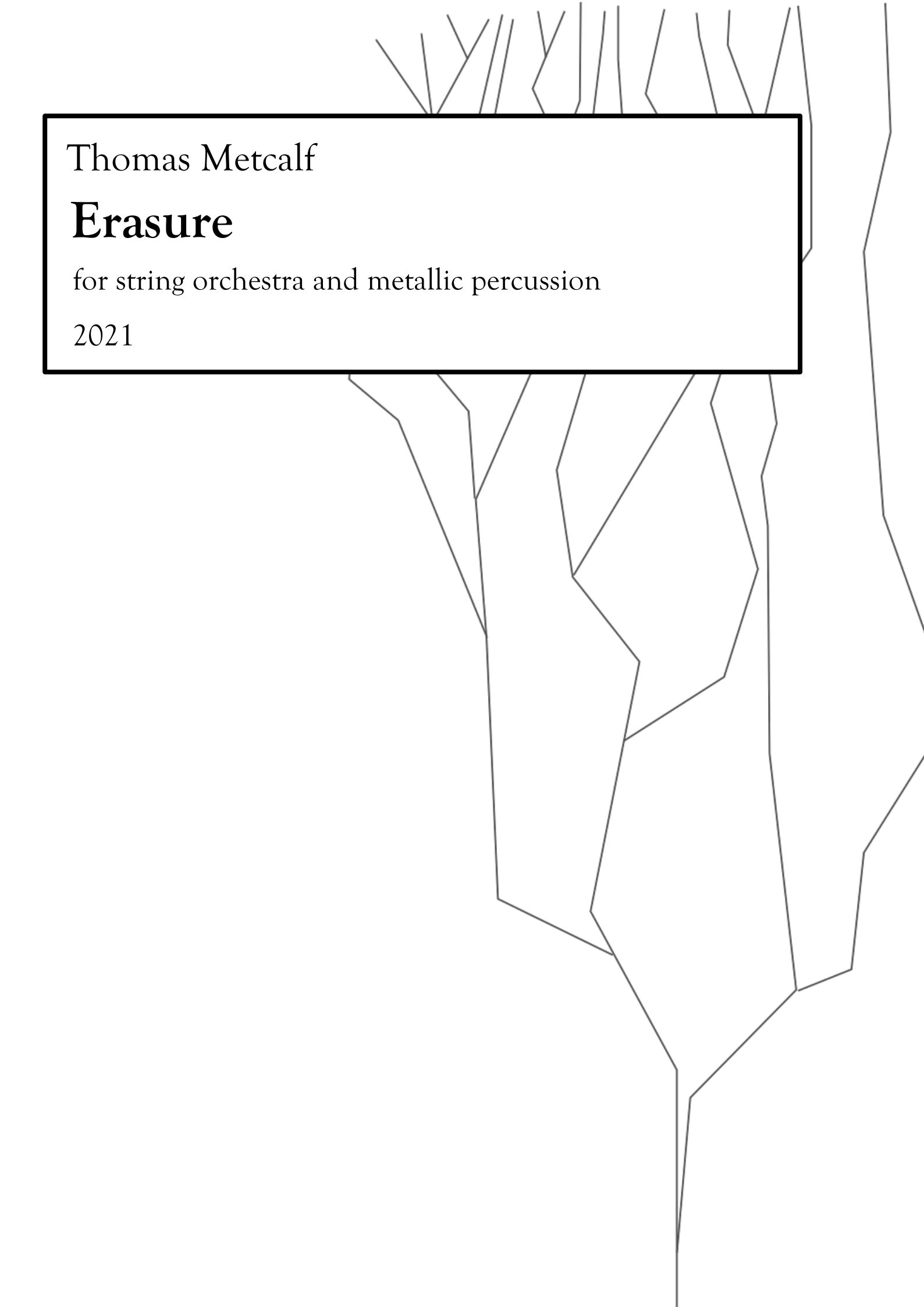
Thomas Metcalf

Erasure

for string orchestra and metallic percussion

2021



Composer's Note

Erasure is a work which responds to the tensions between natural and urban environments, primarily through an exploration of two musical generators: **arborescences** and **pixelation**. An arborescence, or tree-like structure, was constructed and is varyingly pixelated over the course of the piece, with rhythmic cells and melodic contouring determined through these representations. The behaviour of the ensemble is characterised by strings as representative of nature, and percussion as the city. The increasing influence of the metal percussion upon the strings enacts ruptures and divergences in behaviours (shifting 'clouds' of glissandi, pizzicato etc. to lyrical solo lines), acting as a disruptive force.

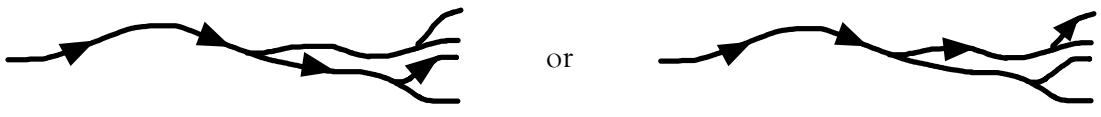
The use of graphical insertions alongside the determinate notations is intended to act as both a form of embodiment, as well as eco-critical commentary. The indeterminacy of these performative images allows both the arborescence shapes to 'speak' for themselves (subduing my own agency), but also allows their degradation to be heard through the insertion of pixelated versions. It also speaks to the role of the individual within the collective, something that is at the heart of this work's conception as well as narratives of environmentalism.

There is no attempt to project a 'dominant' force, since this belies the issue of finding a solution. Nature and modernity must co-exist sustainably; *Erasure* is a commentary on the urgency of a need to find this balance.

Performance Directions

<u>Strings</u>

Where there are graphics inserted into the score, the performers are instructed to perform a glissando, starting on the indicated pitch, that matches the contour of the shape. Where there is a divergence in the path, the performer should make a choice as to which should be followed. Once the end of the path is reached, they should stop playing, and repeat as instructed; varying path choice.

e.g.  or

Similarly, pixel graphics are to be interpreted as pizzicati, reading the graphic as an ostinato utilising proportional notation. Variance in speed is indicated in the score and, where deemed necessary, pizzicato must utilise multiple strings (i.e. double/triple stopping). Pitch is approximated to the expanded stave, and the full pitch spectrum (including microtones) should be utilised.

Do not articulate small, bracketed notes at the end of glissandi.

o.p. = overpressure bowing

 = highest pitch possible beyond the fingerboard (indeterminate)

 = snap pizzicato

 = air noise; 'rauschen' (bow with fully muted strings)

 = quarter–sharp  = quarter–flat

Percussion

Linear graphics are to be performed using friction mallets, repeating the shape as indicated, as if superimposed on the thunder sheet. The same applies to pixel graphics, but instead prodded with the handle of a mallet. If a repeat is not marked, the duration of the gesture should be one bar.

Instrumentation

Violin I [min. 5]

Violin II [min. 4]

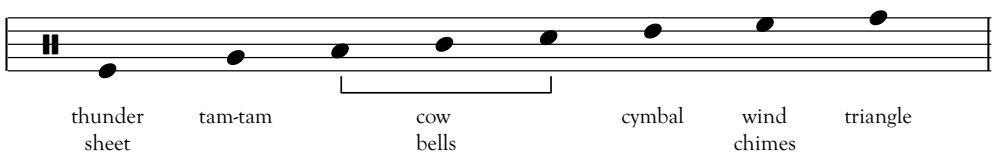
Viola [min. 3]

Cello [min. 3]

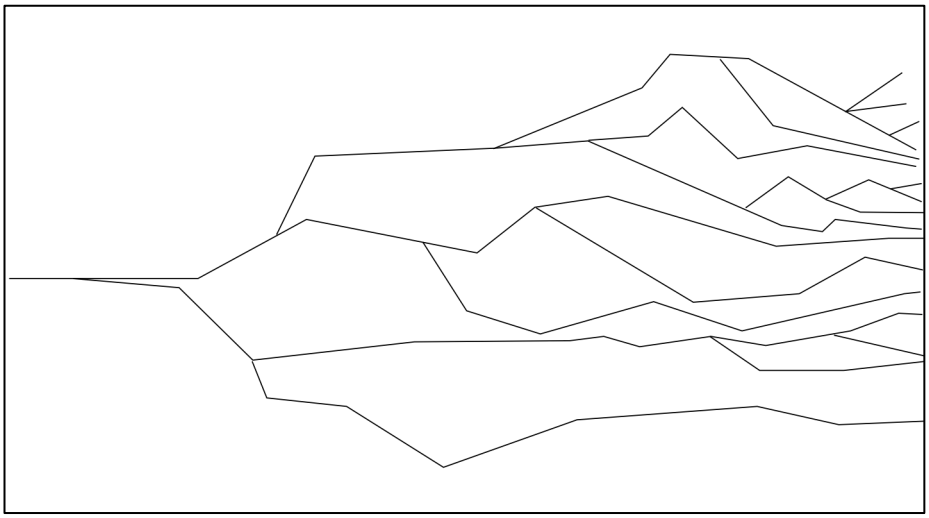
Double Bass

Percussion:

thunder sheet (or any large metallic sheet); tam-tam (with bow); 3 cow bells; wind chimes; cymbal



Duration: 9'



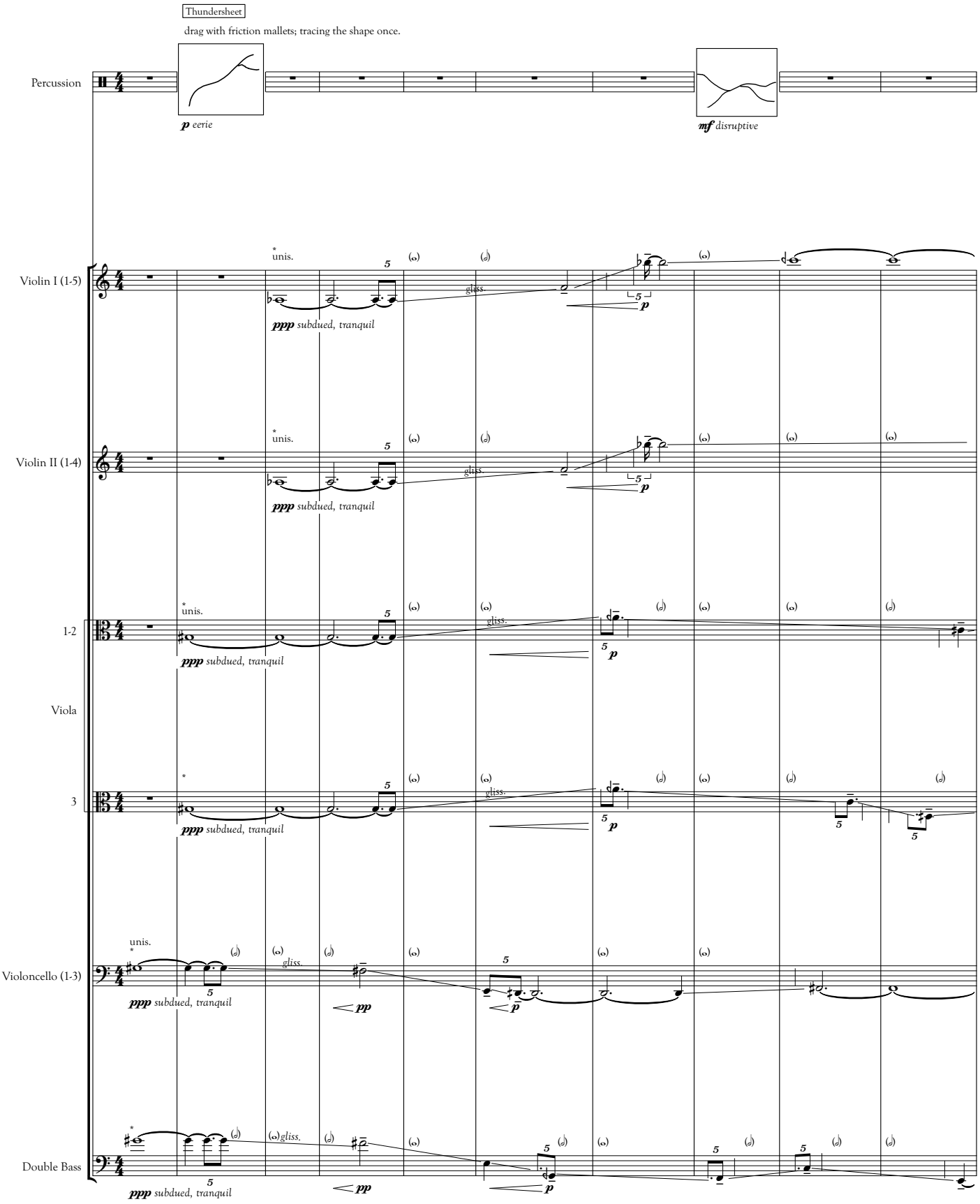
Does smoke talk with the clouds?

– Pablo Neruda, *The Book of Questions* (1974)
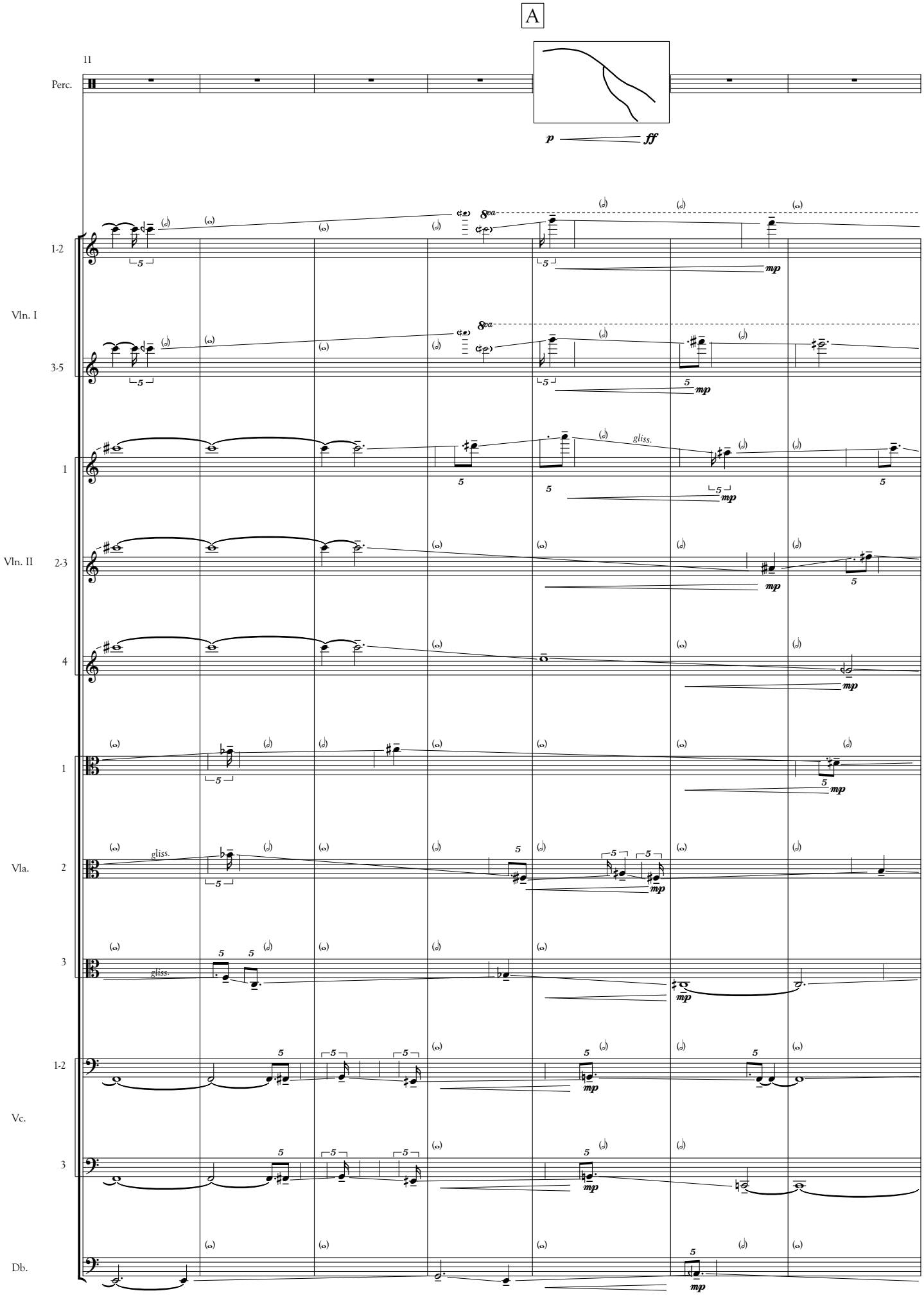
ERASURE
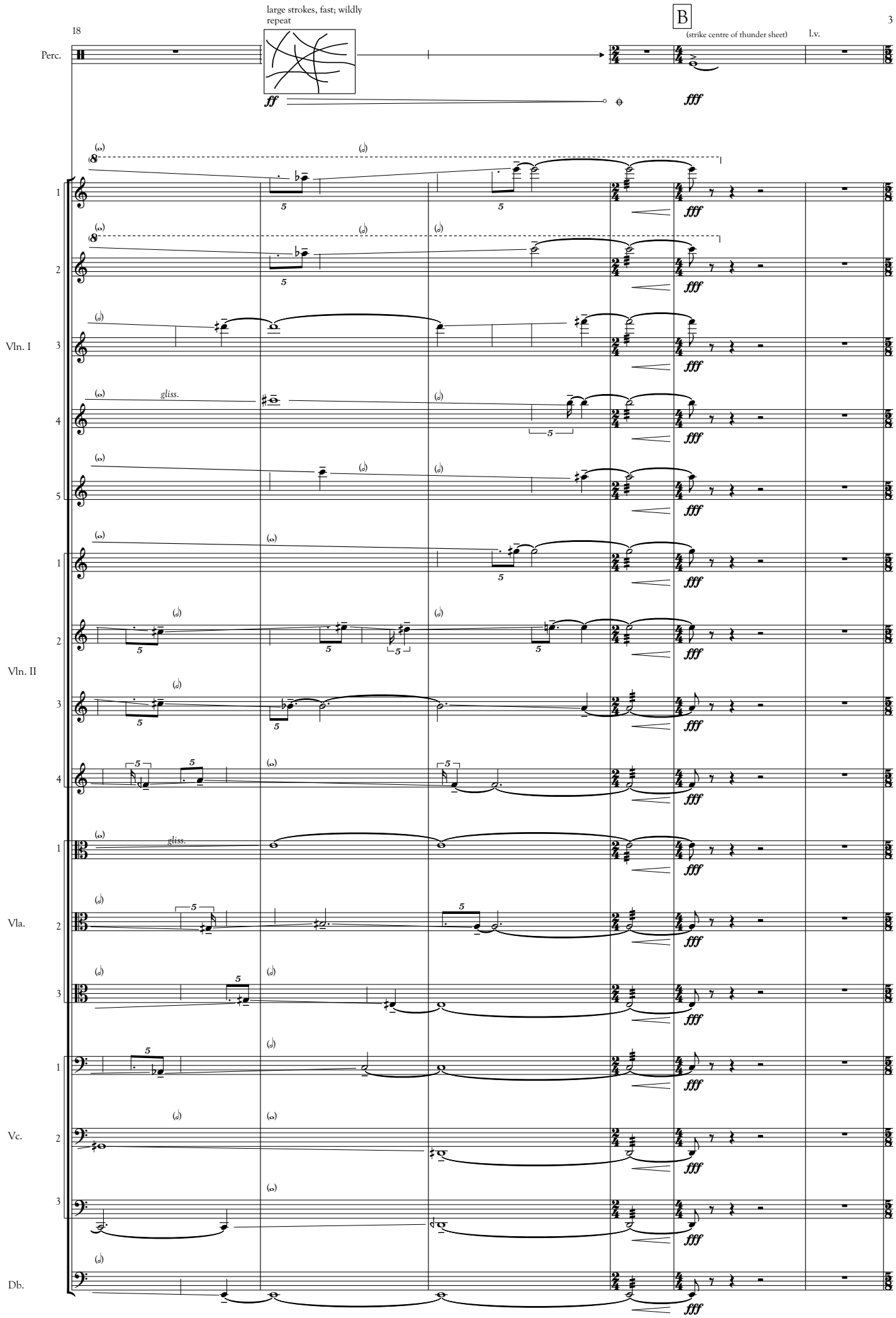
Thomas Metcalf (b. 1996)

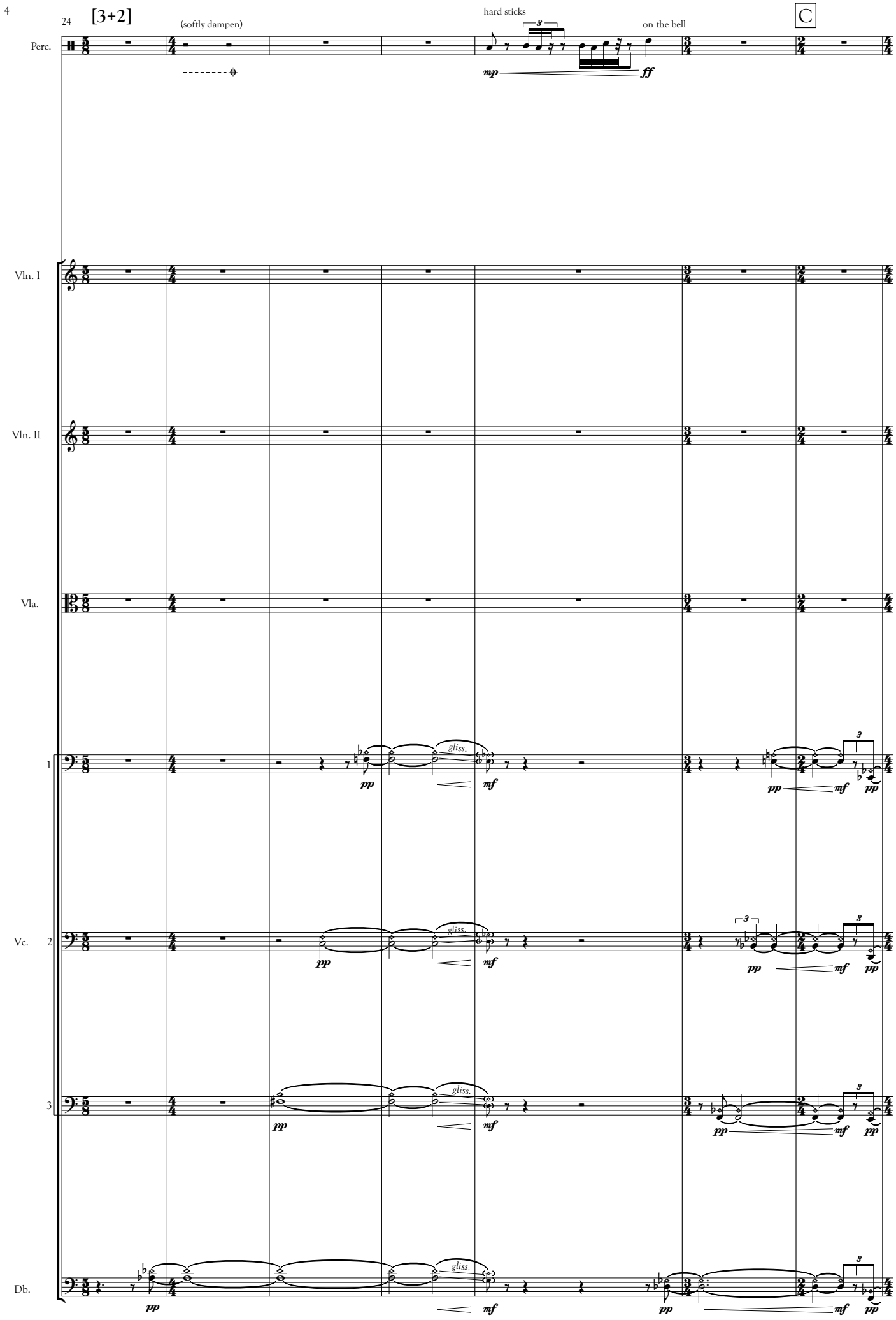
Solemn ♩ = 66
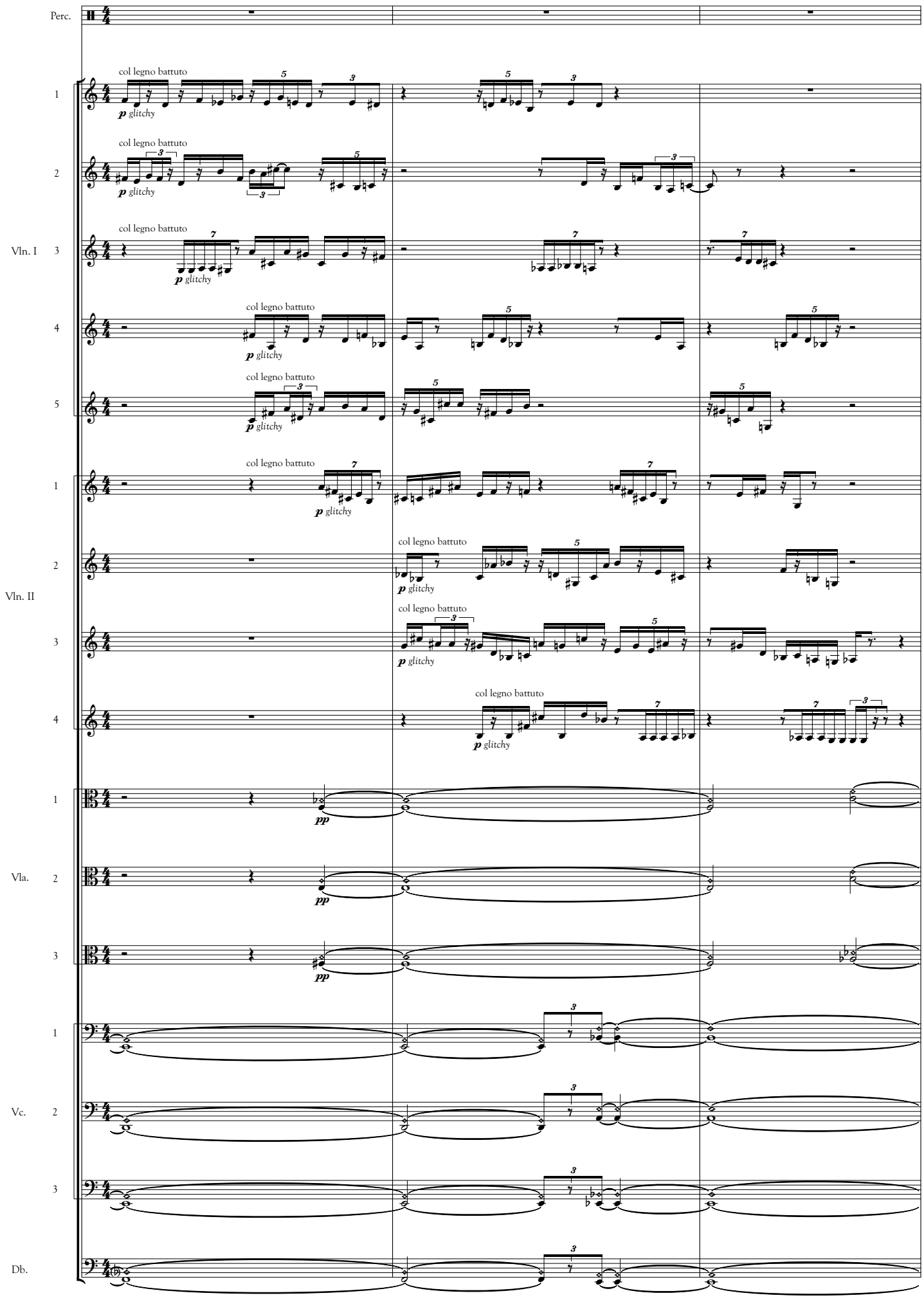


Copyright © 2021, Thomas Metcalf
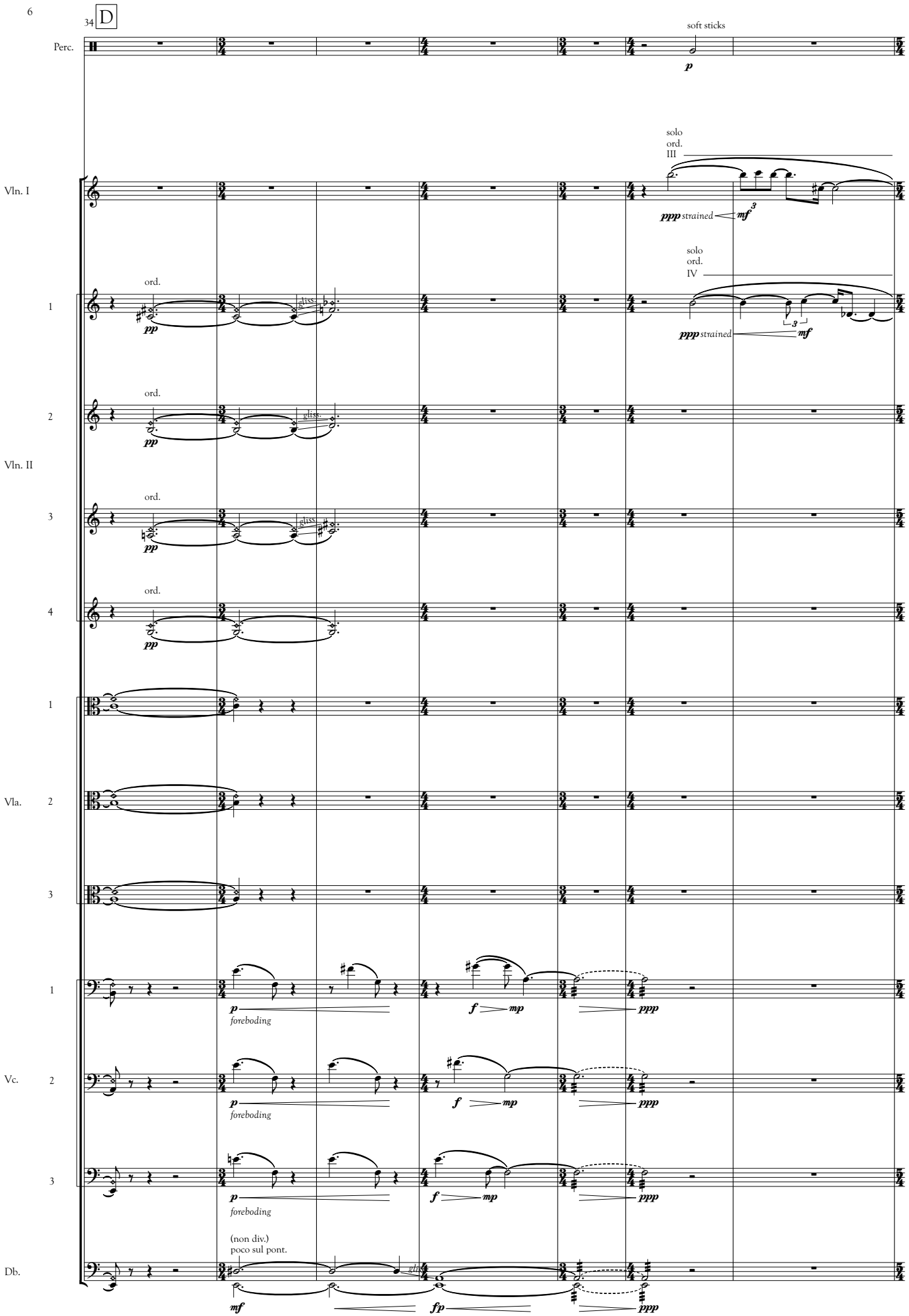

A
11
Perc.
p
ff
1-2
Vln. I
8va
mp
3-5
5
1
gliss.
Vln. II
2-3
4
Vla.
Vc.
Db.


18
large strokes, fast; wildly repeat
B
(strike centre of thunder sheet)
l.v.
3
Perc.
ff
fff
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.
gliss.


24
[3+2]
(softly dampen)
hard sticks
on the bell
C
Perc.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
1
Vc.
2
3
Db.
gliss.
pp
mf
ff

31




34
D
Perc.
soft sticks
p
Vln. I
solo
ord.
III
ppp strained
mf
3
ord.
1
pp
gliss.
solo
ord.
IV
ppp strained
mf
3
ord.
2
pp
gliss.
Vln. II
ord.
3
pp
gliss.
ord.
4
pp
1
2
Vla.
3
1
p
foreboding
f
mp
ppp
Vc.
2
p
foreboding
f
mp
ppp
3
p
foreboding
f
mp
ppp
(non div.)
poco sul pont.
Db.
gliss.
mf
fp
ppp

[3+2]

41

E

Perc.

hard sticks

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

solo
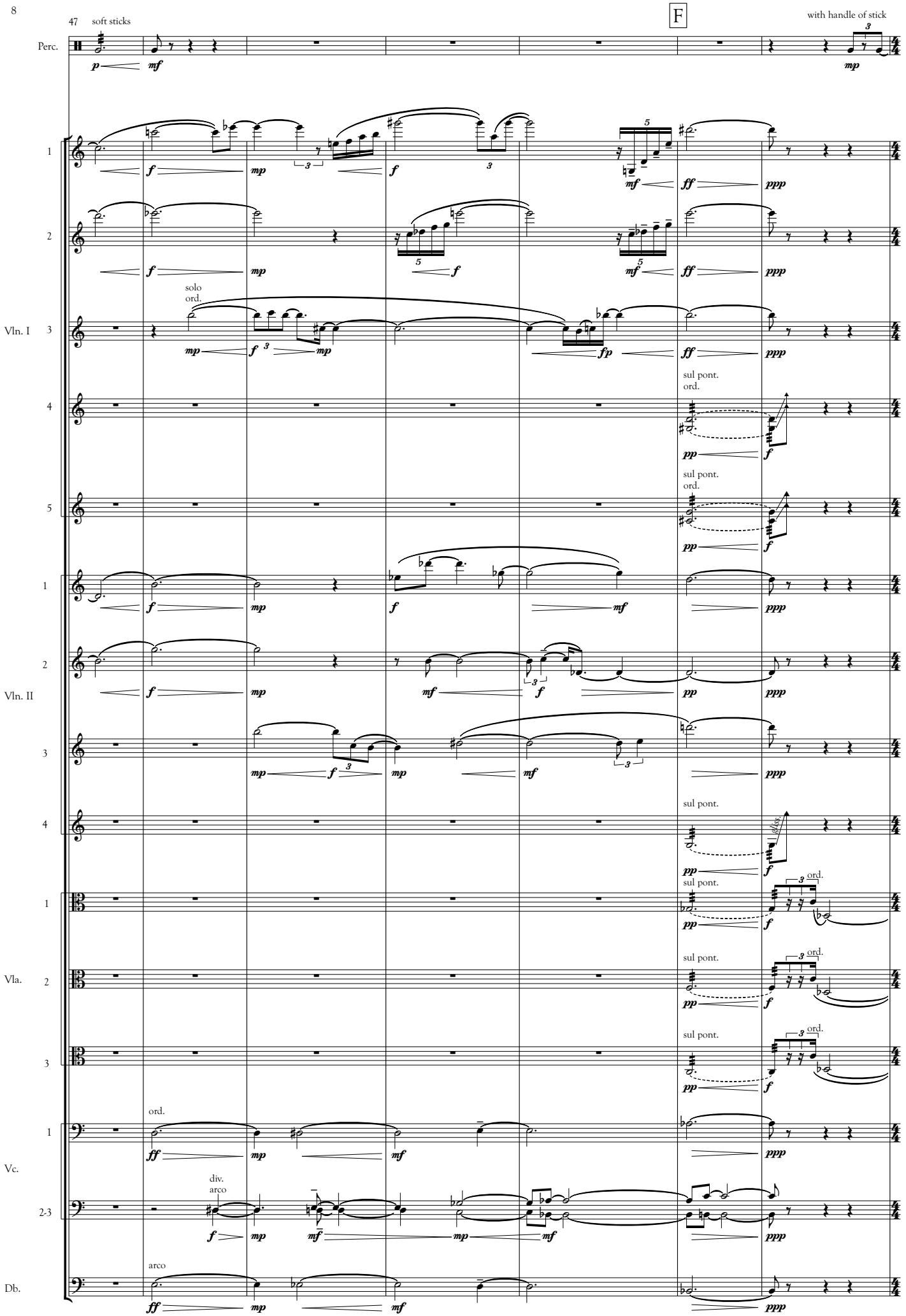
ord.
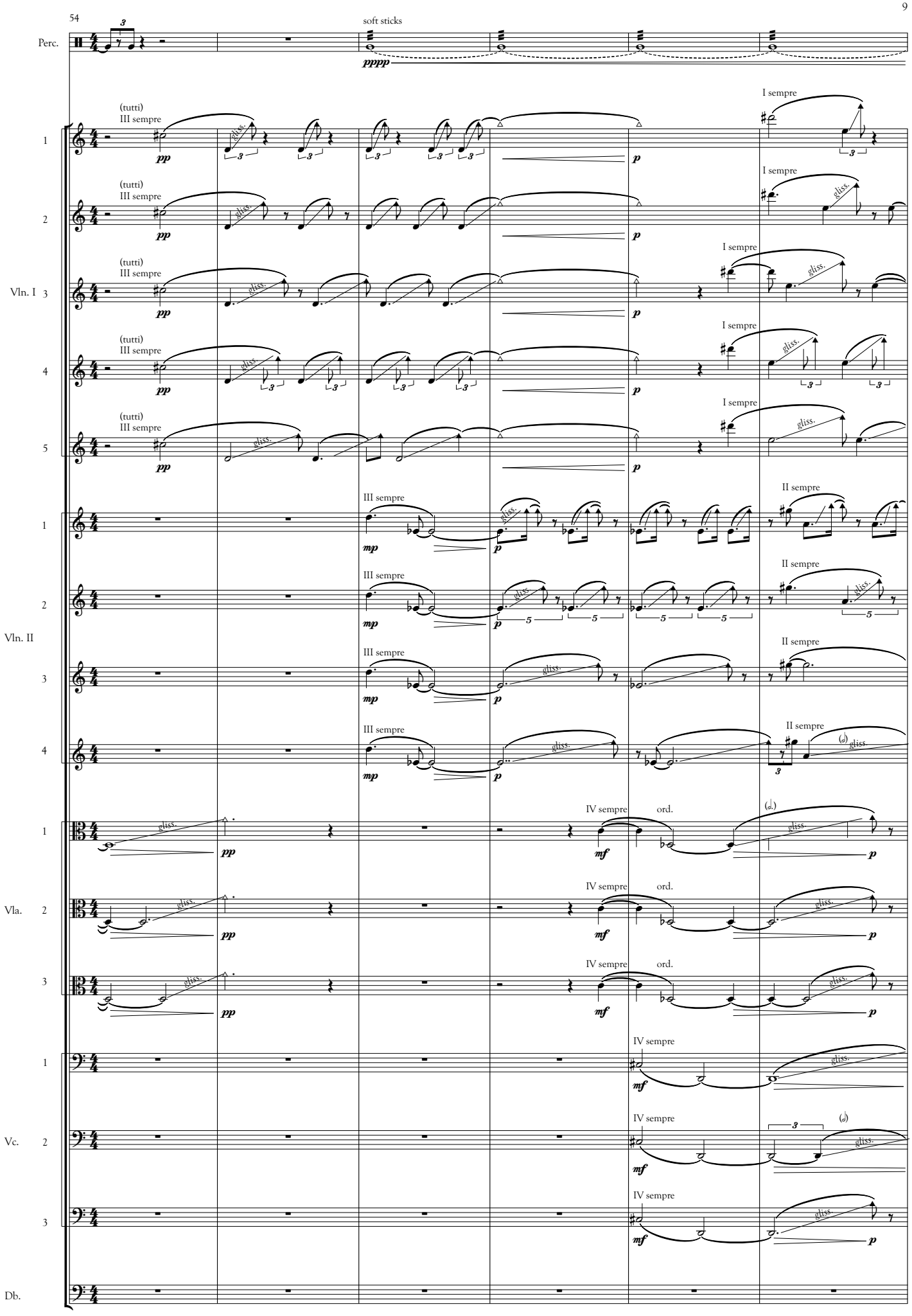
gliss.

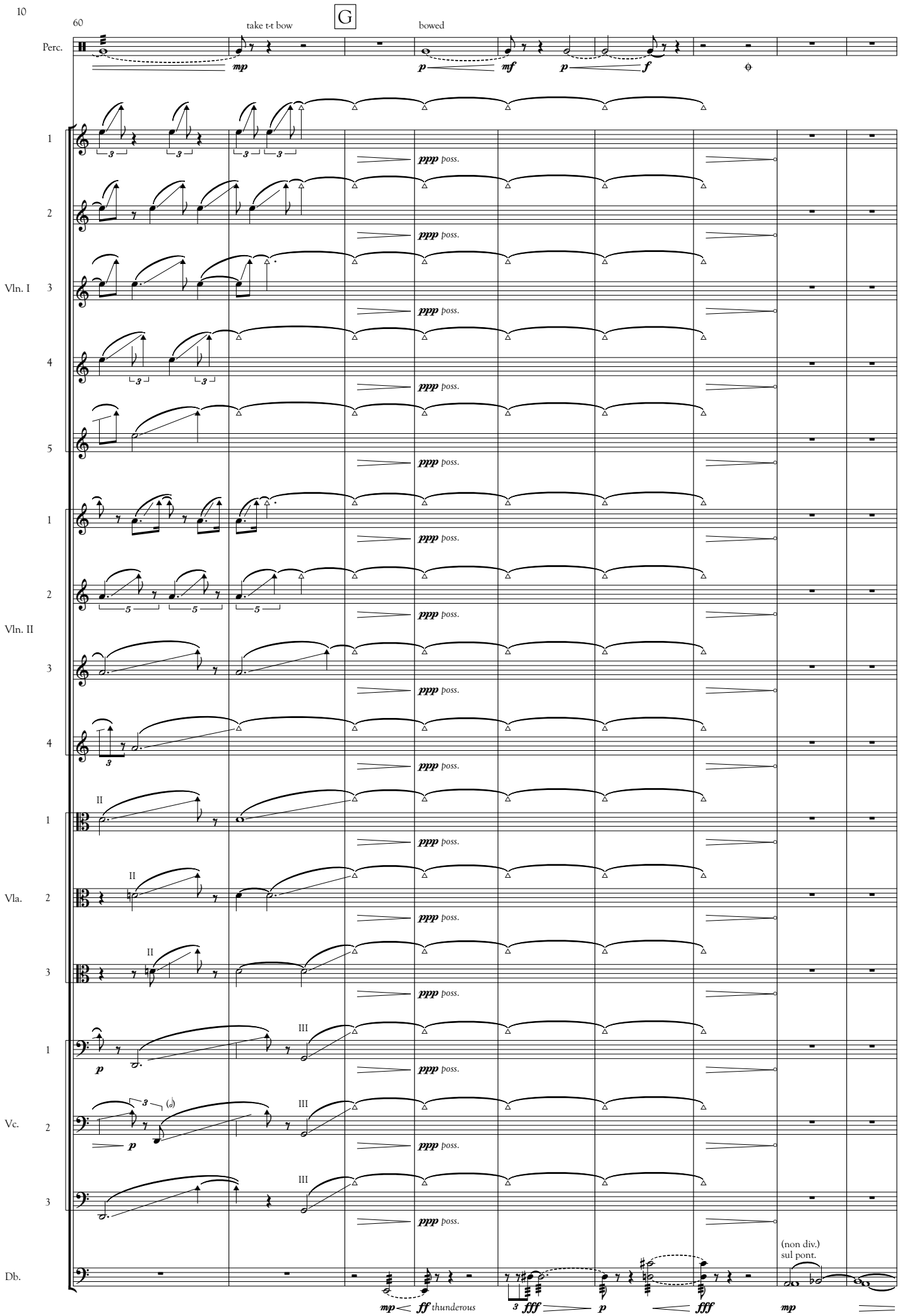
col legno battuto

glitchy

pizz.


47
soft sticks
F
with handle of stick
Perc.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.
solo
ord.
sul pont.
ord.
div.
arco
arco
gliss.


54
Perc.
soft sticks
pppp
(tutti)
III sempre
pp
p
I sempre
Vln. I
III sempre
mp
II sempre
Vln. II
IV sempre
ord.
mf
Vla.
Vc.
Db.
gliss.


60
take t-t bow
G
bowed
Perc.
mp
p
mf
p
f
1
2
Vln. I
3
4
5
ppp poss.
1
2
Vln. II
3
4
II
1
II
Vla.
2
II
3
III
1
p
III
Vc.
2
III
3
Db.
(non div.)
sul pont.
mp
ff thunderous
fff
p
fff
mp

H

69

(high to low)

take triangle beater

[3+2]

scrape

on the bell

Perc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

solo
non vib.

mp *mf* *p* *ff* *ppp* *ambivalent* *fierce* *tr*

78

I

Perc.

soft sticks

pp

1

sim.

tr

ppp p

2

ord.

mp

Vln. I

3

4

5

1

Vln. II

div.

2. 3.

4.

2-4

mf

1

Vla.

unis.

2-3

(solo)

Vc. 1

Db.

82

J

[2+2+3]

Perc.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

1

Vc.

2-3

Db.

solo

jeté

non vib.
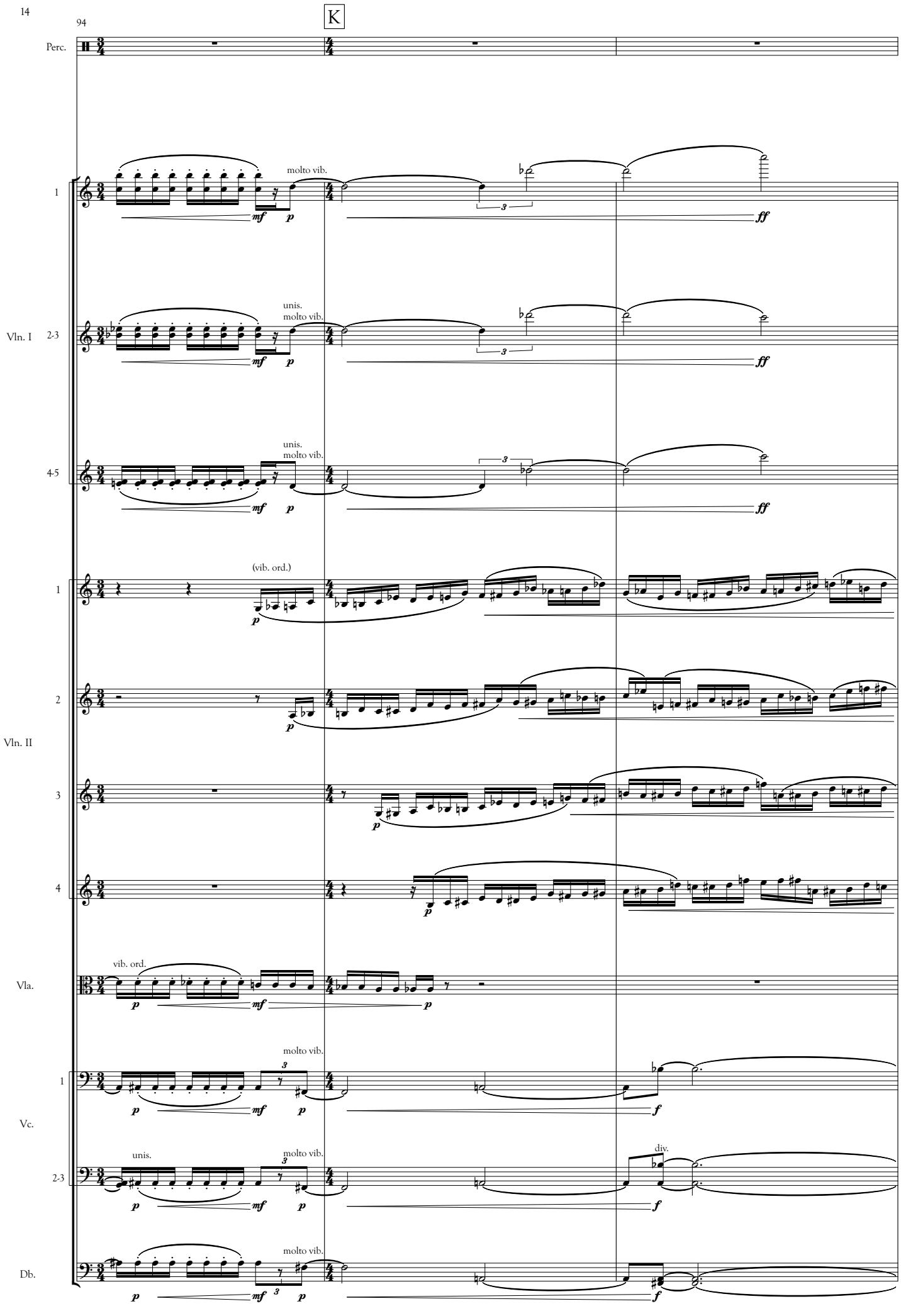
div.

90 [3+2+2] Unstable ♩ = 115
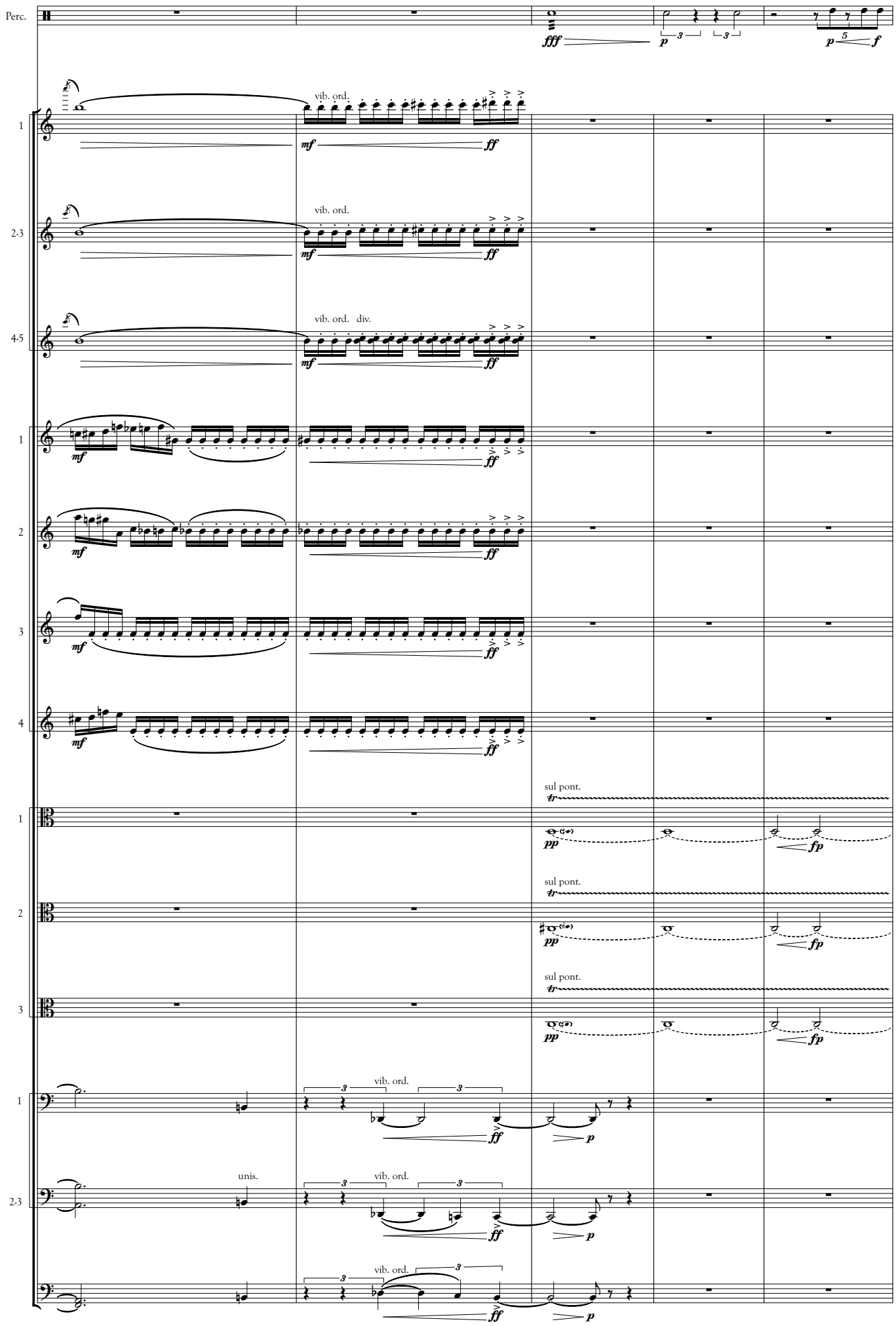
tutti

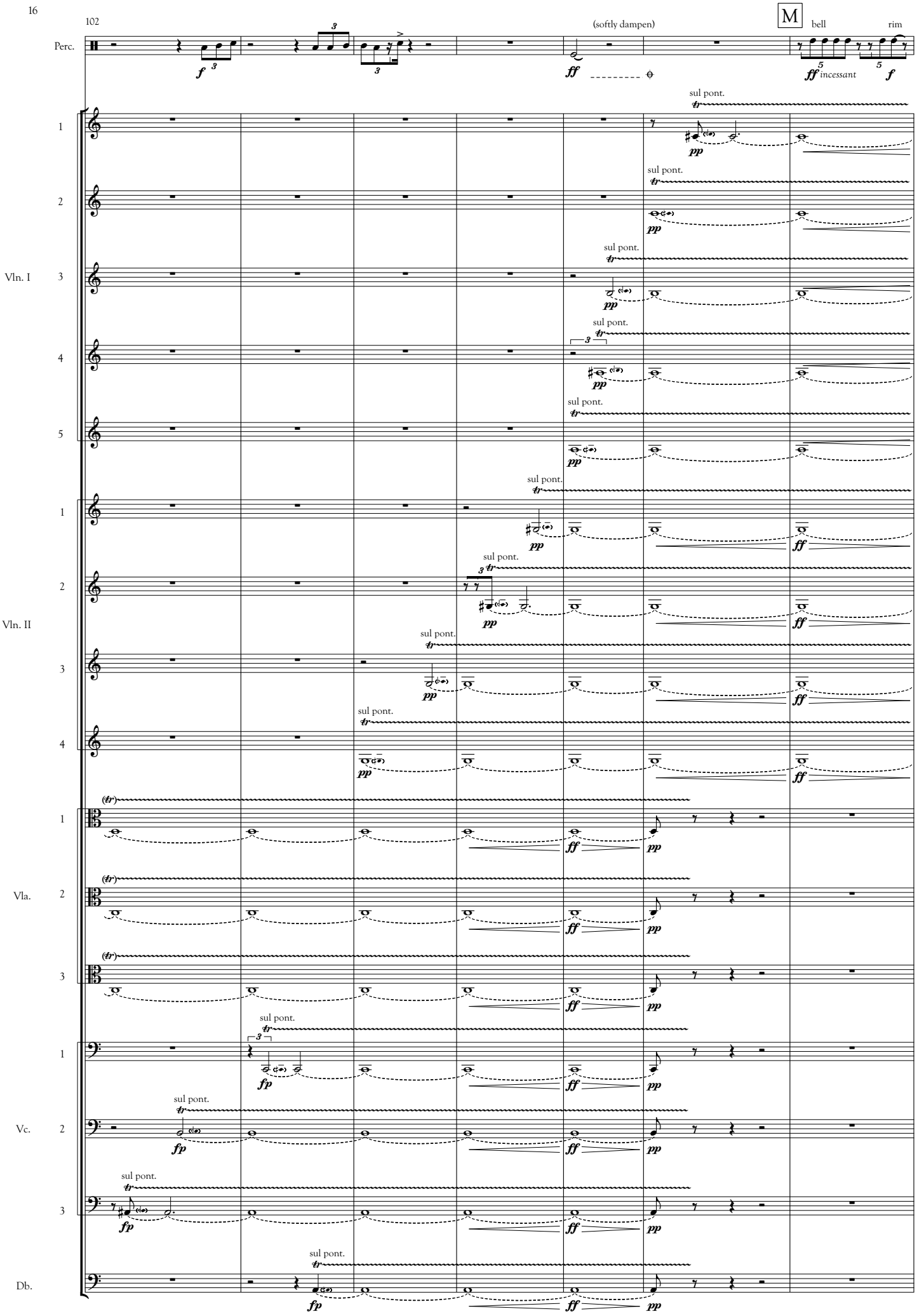
molto vib.

molto espress.


94
K
Perc.
1
molto vib.
mf
p
3
ff
Vln. I
2-3
unis.
molto vib.
mf
p
3
ff
4-5
unis.
molto vib.
mf
p
3
ff
1
(vib. ord.)
p
2
Vln. II
p
3
p
4
p
Vla.
vib. ord.
p
mf
p
1
molto vib.
p
mf
p
3
f
Vc.
2-3
unis.
molto vib.
p
mf
p
3
div.
f
Db.
molto vib.
p
mf
p
3
f

L hard sticks




102
M
(softly dampen)
bell
rim
Perc.
incessant
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.
sul pont.

109

N

Perc.
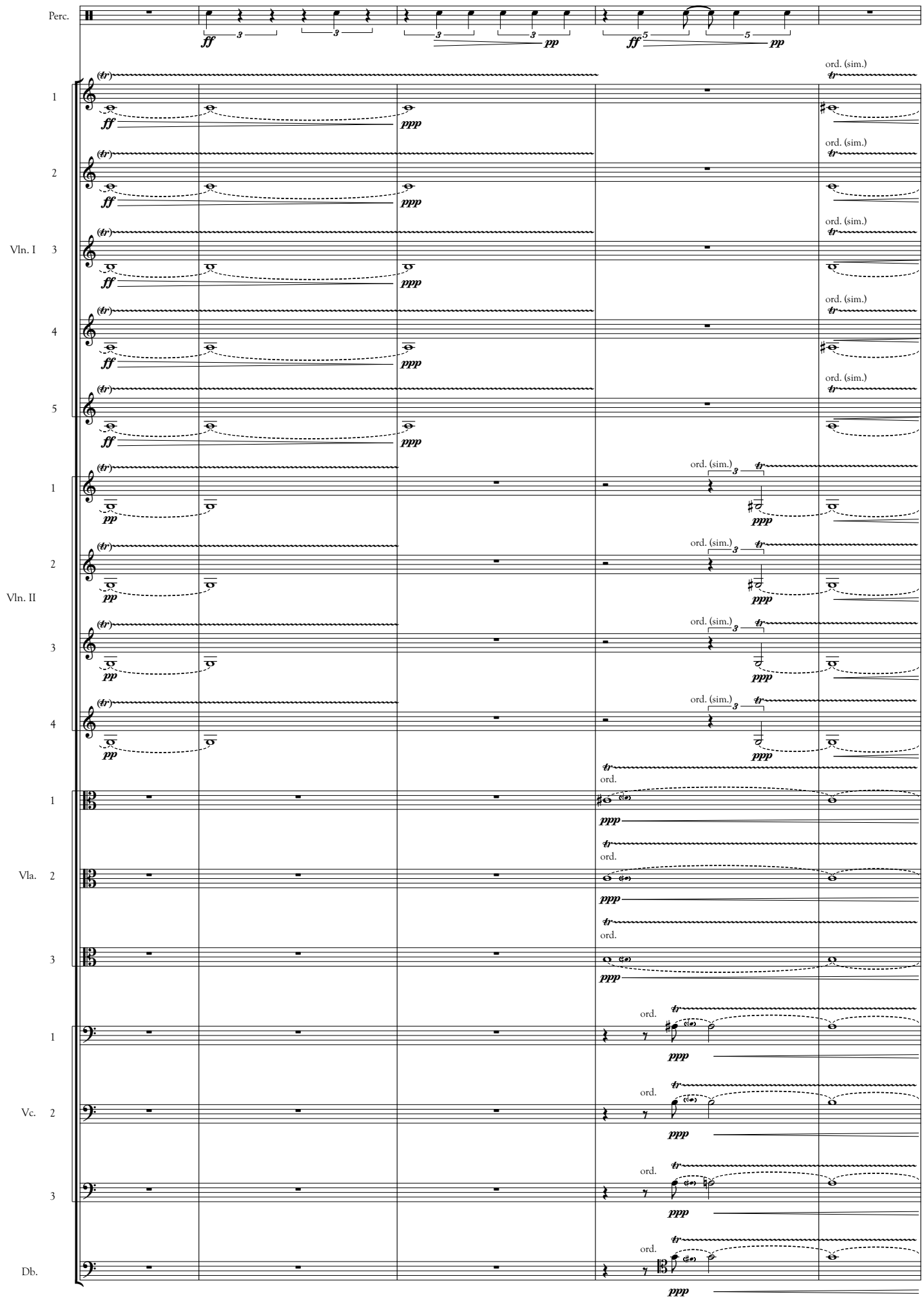
Vln. I 1 2 3 4 5

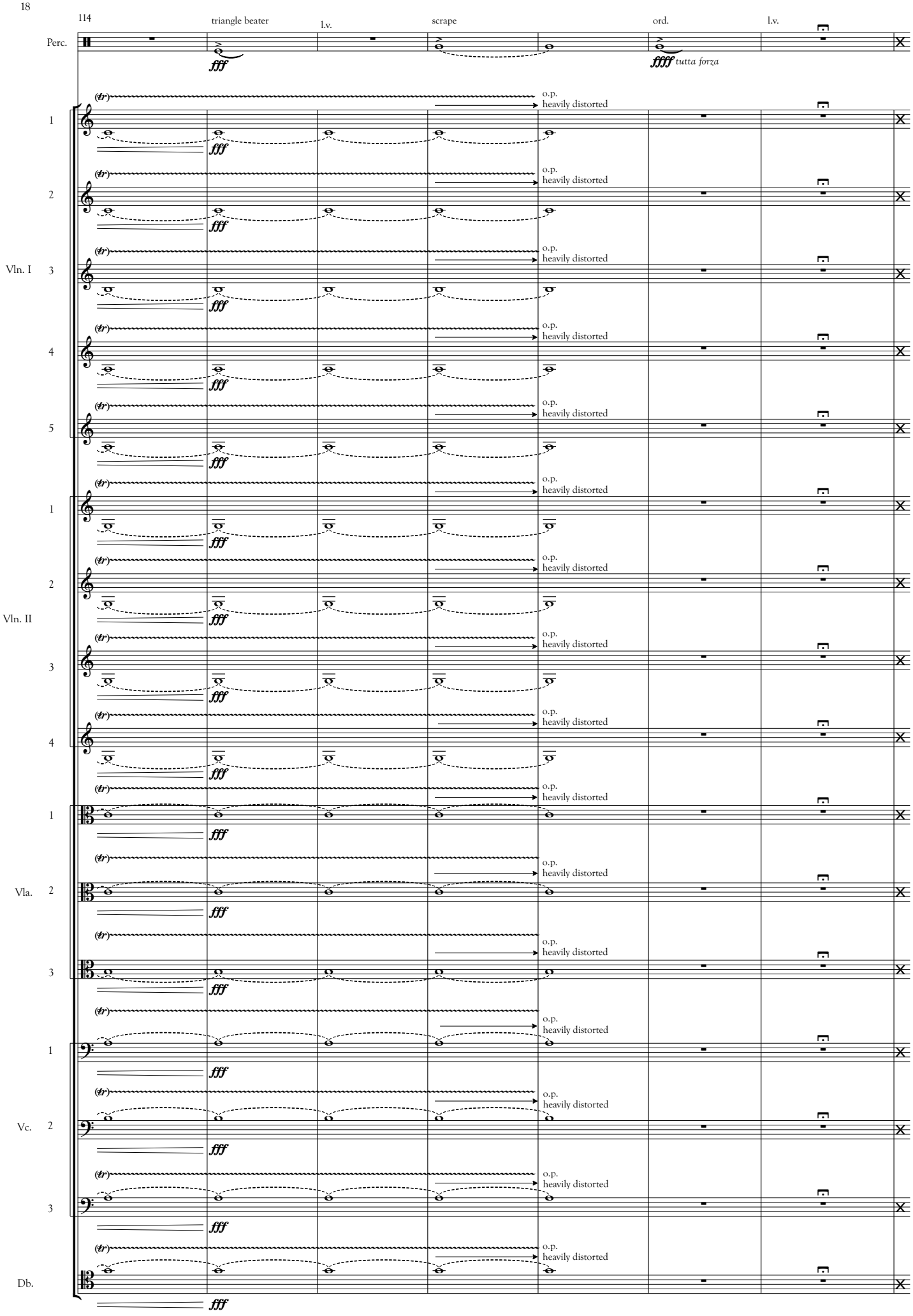
Vln. II 1 2 3 4

Vla. 1 2 3

Vc. 1 2 3

Db.




114
triangle beater
l.v.
scrape
ord.
l.v.
Perc.
fff
ffff tutta forza
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Db.
(tr)
o.p.
heavily distorted

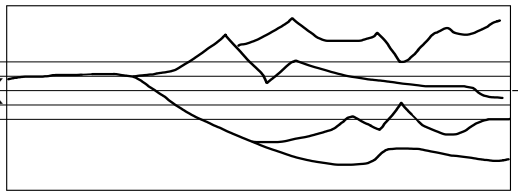
121

c. 45"

Perc.

Vln. I

div. a 5 (un-coordinated)
glissando: follow a path through the graphic at your own speed;
repeat, varying speed and path choice, until conductor cues.
sul pont.



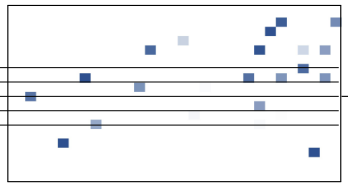
pp *cresc. poco a poco*

(mf)

c.10"

Vln. II

div. a 4 (un-co-ordinated)
pizz.
Interpret the pixels as an ostinato in proportional notation, with pitch approximated to the stave (use full chromatic range).
Repeat, varying speed, until conductor cues.

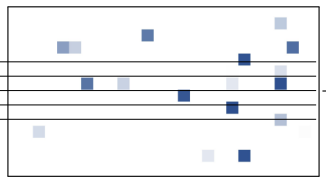


p *cresc. poco a poco*

(mf)

Vla.

div. a 3 (un-coordinated)
pizz.,
Interpret the pixels as an ostinao in proportional notation, with pitch approximated to the stave (use full chromatic range).
Repeat, varying speed, until conductor cues.

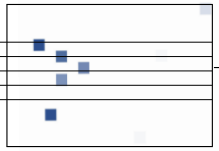


p *cresc. poco a poco*

(mf)

Vc.

div. a 3 (un-coordinated)
pizz.
Interpret the pixels as an ostinato in proportional notation, with pitch approximated to the stave (use full chromatic range).
Repeat, varying speed, until conductor cues.

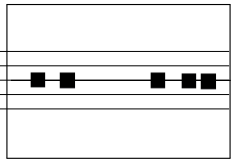


p *cresc. poco a poco*

(mf)

Db.

Knock on the most resonant part of the instrument.
Read the pixels as an ostinato in proportional notation.
Vary speed on each repetition, until conductor cues.



mp *cresc. poco a poco*

(mf)

P

c. 15"

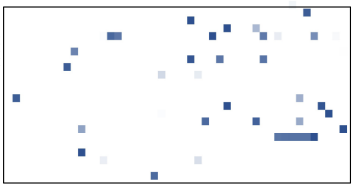
c. 15"

Thunder sheet

Tap the thunder sheet with the handles of two beaters, mimicking the layout of the pixels in the box.
Freely; not too quick. Repeat until cued.

122

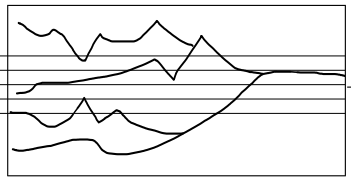
Perc.



pppp *cresc. poco a poco*

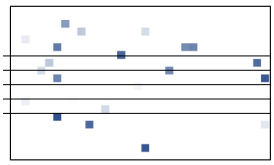
(***mp***)

Vln. I



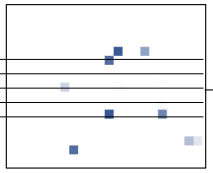
ff *sub.*

pizz.
Interpret the pixels as an ostinato in proportional notation, with pitch approximated to the stave (use full chromatic range).
Increase speed each time, until conductor cues.



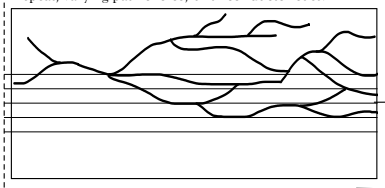
p ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf***

Vln. II



mf ***ff***

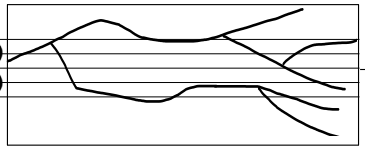
arco
glissando: follow a path through the graphic, as fast as possible.
repeat, varying path choice, until conductor cues.



fff ***p***

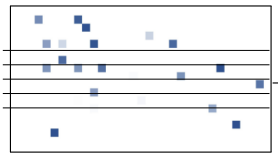
Vla.

arco
glissando: follow a path through the graphic at your own speed.
repeat, varying speed and path choice, until conductor cues.



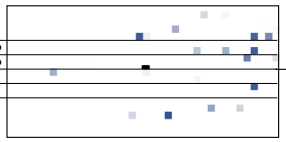
ff *sub.*

pizz.
increase speed each time, until conductor cues.



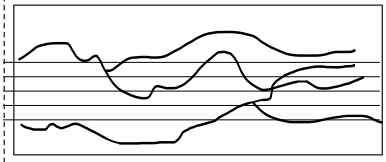
p ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf*** ***sf***

Vc.



mf ***ff***

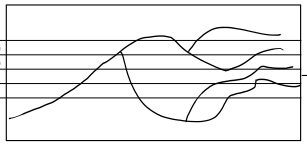
arco
glissando: follow a path through the graphic, as fast as possible.
repeat, varying path choice, until conductor cues.



fff ***p***

Db.

arco
glissando: follow a path through the graphic, as fast as possible.
repeat, varying path choice, until conductor cues.



ff *sempre*

much slower

G.P.

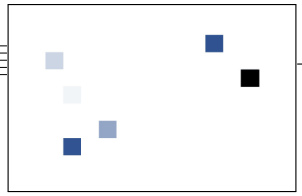
c. 20" | c. 8"

l.v.
take tt bow

Perc.

123

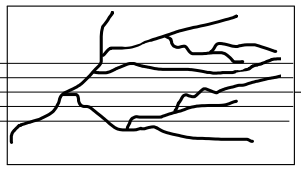
quicker → as fast as possible



mp cresc. ---------- *fff apocolyptic*

Vln. I

arco
as fast as possible
sul pont.



p → *fff wailing*

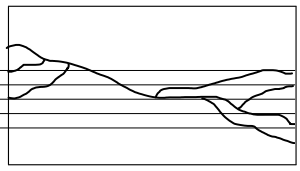
Vln. II

sul pont.

p → *fff wailing*

Vla.

arco
as fast as possible
sul pont.



p → *fff wailing*

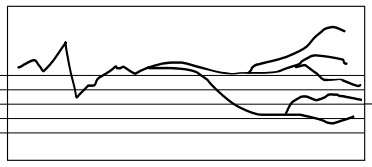
Vc.

sul pont.

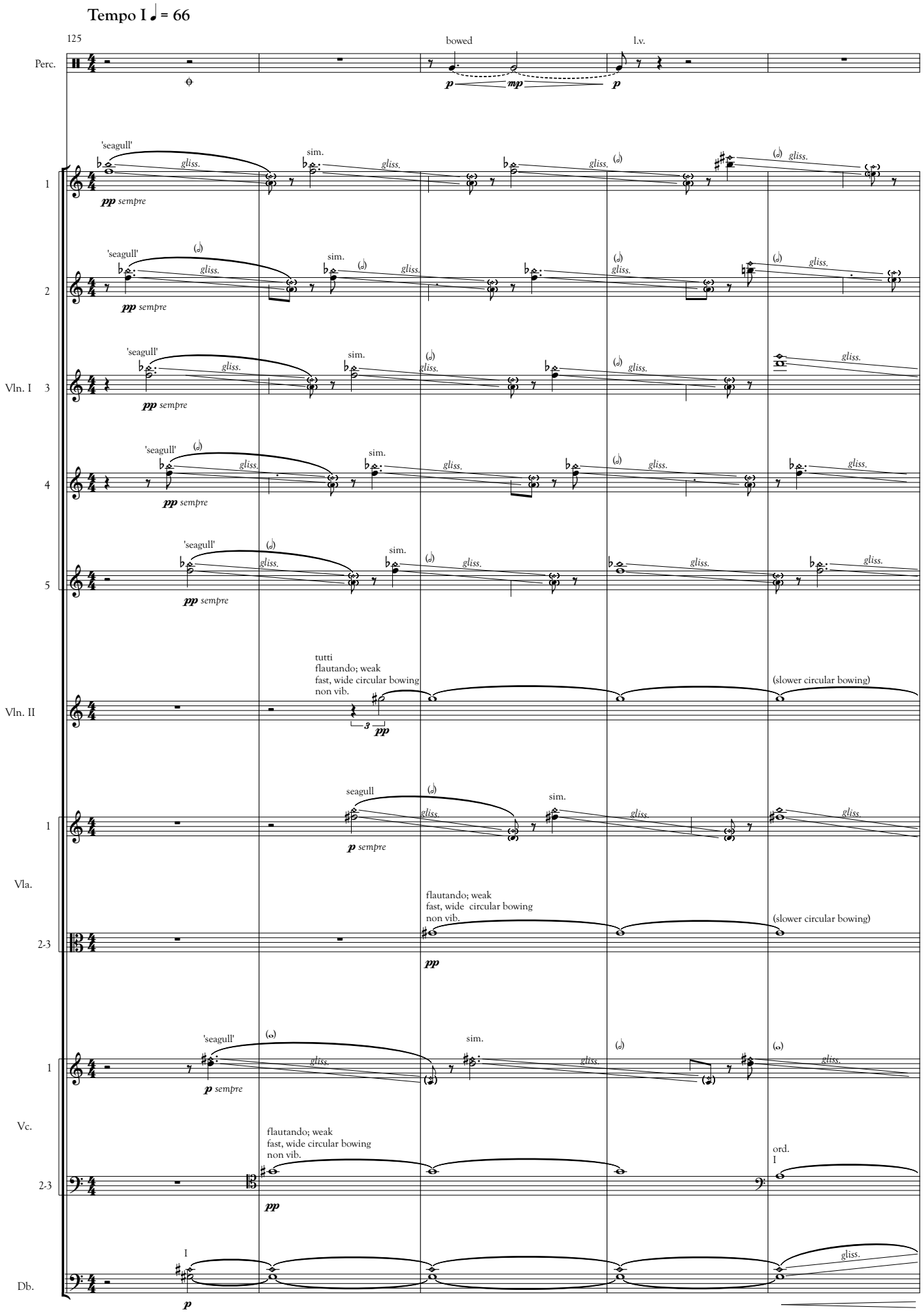
p → *fff wailing*
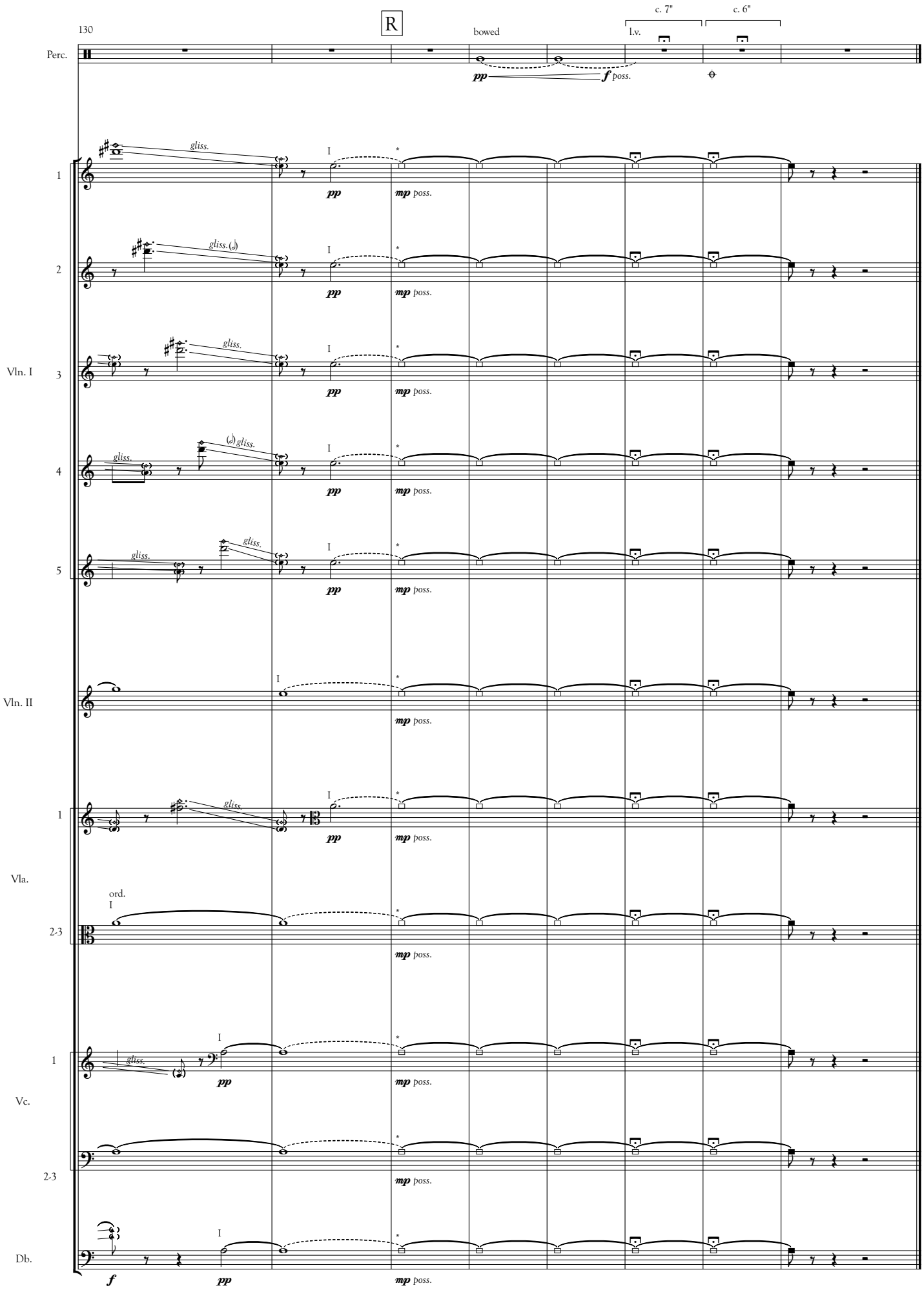
Db.

slow → as fast as possible
sul pont.



(*ff sempre*)


Tempo I ♩ = 66
125
bowed
l.v.
Perc.
'seagull'
gliss.
sim.
pp sempre
1
2
Vln. I 3
4
5
tutti
flautando; weak
fast, wide circular bowing
non vib.
(slower circular bowing)
Vln. II
seagull
p sempre
1
Vla.
flautando; weak
fast, wide circular bowing
non vib.
(slower circular bowing)
2-3
pp
1
Vc.
flautando; weak
fast, wide circular bowing
non vib.
ord.
I
2-3
pp
I
p
Db.


130
R
bowed
c. 7"
c. 6"
l.v.
Perc.
pp
f poss.
1
gliss.
I
*
pp
mp poss.
2
gliss.
Vln. I
3
gliss.
4
gliss.
5
gliss.
Vln. II
1
gliss.
Vla.
ord.
I
2-3
1
gliss.
Vc.
2-3
Db.
f
pp
mp poss.
* air noise; change bow as necessary.