Five Reflective Fragments

For Piano, Percussion, and String Quartet

Aaron Gervais

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June 2006

Duration: 9'00

About the Piece

Five Reflective Fragments is based on a sequence of very brief text fragments extracted from a much longer poetic work, entitled *I Lost Everything* by poet Sarah Lang:

drove
gun
my head
two hours
Pasadena

The piece always presents this series of word-units in order and without overlap. Each unit is spoken—not sung—at the beginning of a musical gesture, and always by the performer who is playing the gesture. Each unit is also repeated multiple times.

I have decided on this approach in order to distance the text from any fixed narrative. The music instead provides a space for these language objects to be observed in, and in which the listener can choose to create or not create his or her own narrative. Presented in this monolithic manner and detached from the contextualization of language prepositions, *Five Reflective Fragments* sets up the opportunity for a kind of mythological reaction to develop around the preconceptions of the listener. The word-units combine with the music to create hints, but hopefully hints that will take each listener in a different direction.

Instrumentation

piano, with headset mic
percussion, with headset mic
2 violins
viola
cello

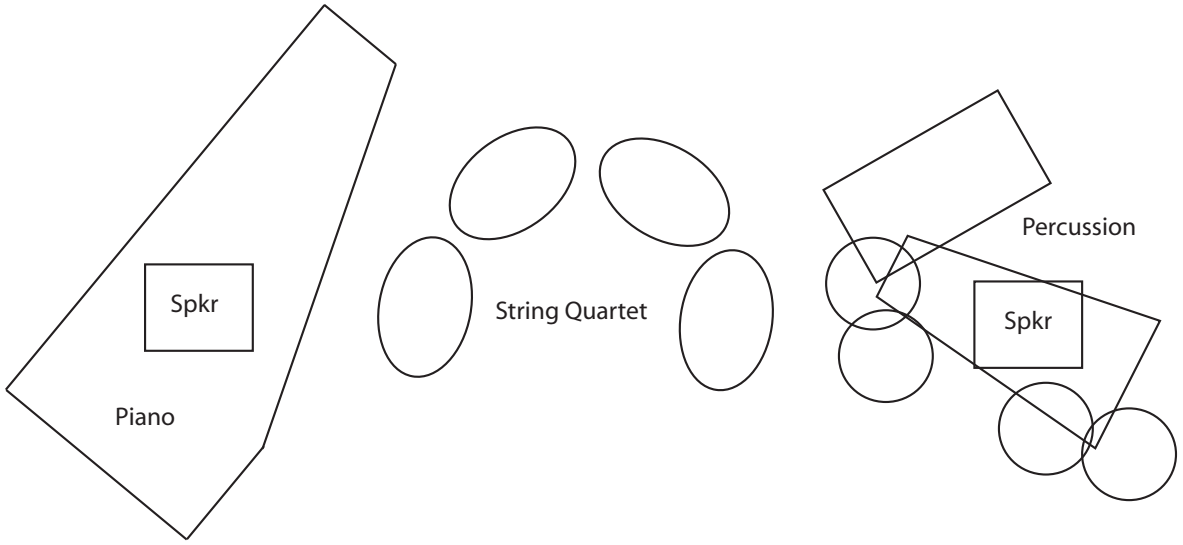
Percussion Instrumentation

vibraphone
snare drum (tuned very low)
4 suspended cymbals
china cymbal
finger cymbal (suspended)
finger cymbal (upside-down on foam)
2 triangles
bell tree
2 woodblocks

Technical Requirements and Staging

The headset microphones for the pianist and percussionist should each be connected to one speaker, directly beneath, and projecting toward, the soundboard or sounding area of the respective performer's instrument. Therefore, the pianist's headset microphone projects through a speaker directly beneath the piano and the percussionist's microphone to a speaker directly underneath the centre of his/her setup. Angled monitor-style speakers would be ideal in this respect and would be easy to position. It may also be necessary to have some kind of material available to adjust the height of these speakers—they need to be as close to the sounding area as possible. If angled monitors are used, simply having boxes or boards to place them on should work well.

The following diagram demonstrates how the ensemble should be positioned on the stage:



Performance Notes

- The strings should always play **without vibrato** unless otherwise marked.
- **Relative tempo** is very important; all changes in tempo should be performed carefully, and those marked "suddenly" should be executed in such a way that the audience is most likely to hear them.
- **Metric accents** should be avoided throughout.
- **Rehearsing with the microphones** is important in order to work out balance issues. The perceived loudness of the player's voice in all cases should be approximately equal to the perceived loudness of his/her acoustic instrument—in other words, if the player plays a mezzoforte, s/he also speaks a mezzoforte.
- **Dynamics** within the ensemble may need to be adjusted to match the amplification. The players should decide on the meaning of a dynamic marking based on the combined sound of the amplified voices and the instruments, not simply the acoustic sound of the instruments alone.
- **Boxed text** in the music indicates the ways in which a word-unit is to be pronounced. This text specifically describes the desired amount of variation in vocal pronunciation between successive iterations of the same word-unit. For example, "slight variation" indicated that the words should be spoken in a similar manner throughout, but not mechanically. Variation should be similar to what would occur naturally in speech if repeating a word. The performers should avoid vocal inflections that are overly dramatic, bizarre, or comical.
- The syllables of the vocal parts are usually divided into phonemes and connected with **dotted slurs** for clarity of enunciation. This does not imply that the sounds of the words should be broken up artificially or that these phonemes should be exaggerated. This phoneme notation is only to assist with the proper placement of speech elements in musical time.
- The **beginning of each syllable** should fall on the start of the beat. For example, at rehearsal A, "drove" should be spoken with the "dr" on the beat, not the "ove".

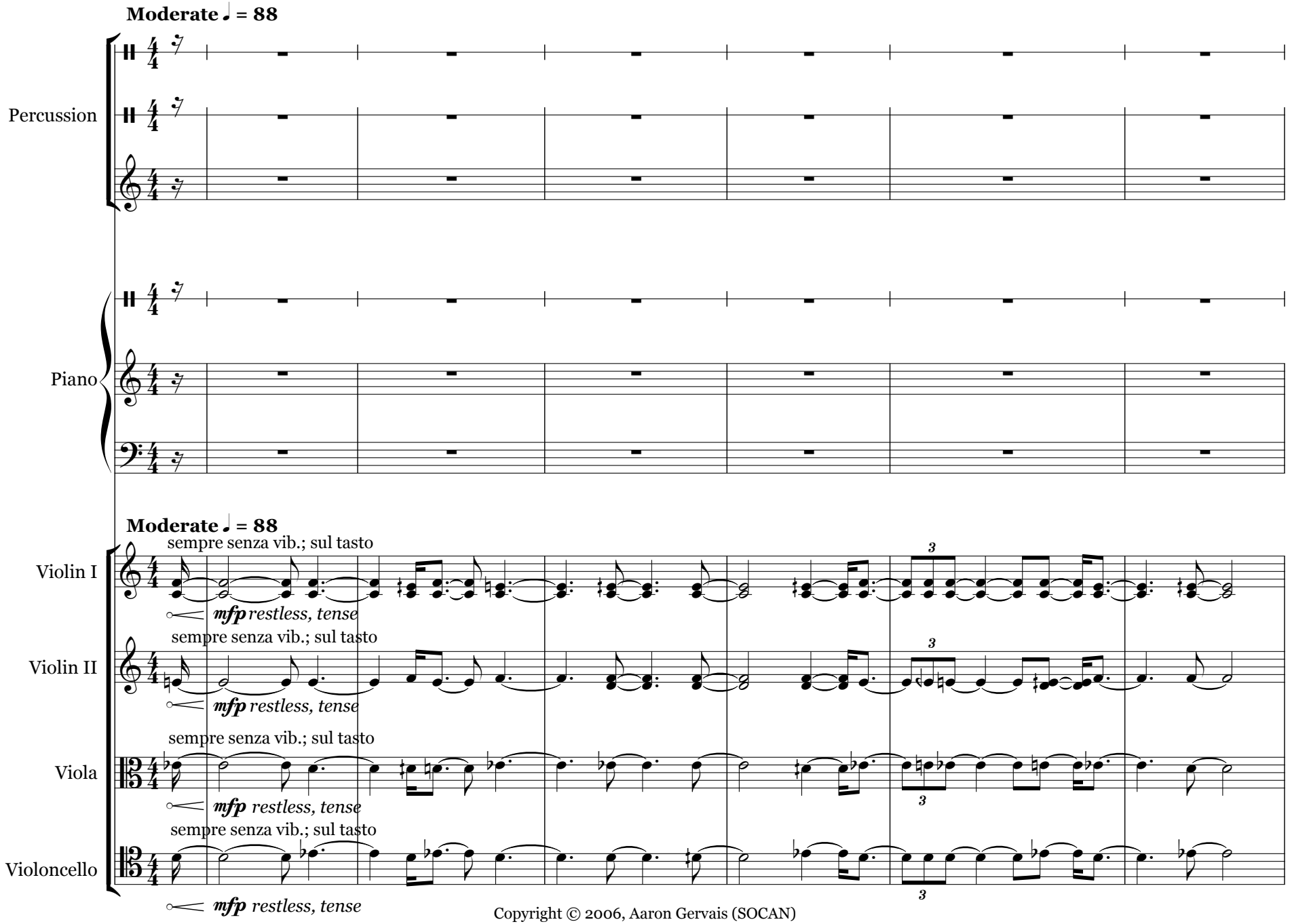
The following chart demonstrates the quartertone notational system used:

Preparation of Percussion Instruments

- The **vibraphone** motor should remain off throughout.
- At rehearsal O, the vibraphone is to be prepared with **aluminum foil**. Several lightly-crumpled sheets of varying sizes should be placed over the lower bars. They should be placed slightly above the node closest to the percussionist so that only a small portion of the bars is visible. The desired result is that even when playing the vibraphone very quietly, the foil should create an audible buzz.
- Also at rehearsal O, the percussionist is to shuffle a **piece of paper** with one foot while playing. This shuffling should not be in any particular rhythm. The player should try to make the shuffling as random-sounding as possible.
- One **finger cymbal** should be laid upside-down on a piece of hard foam so that it can be played with both hands. The player should use thin triangle beaters or very small brass mallets. The finger cymbal should be positioned so that the resonance is approximately equal to that of the piano. It is also preferable that a cymbal with a similar pitch to the piano is used. A second finger cymbal of a slightly different pitch should be suspended.
- The **snare drum** should be tuned very low, almost to the point of wrinkling the drumhead. The snares should also be fairly loose, but should still be partially excited by quiet strokes. A piccolo snare drum is preferable if available.

Five Reflective Fragments

Aaron Gervais



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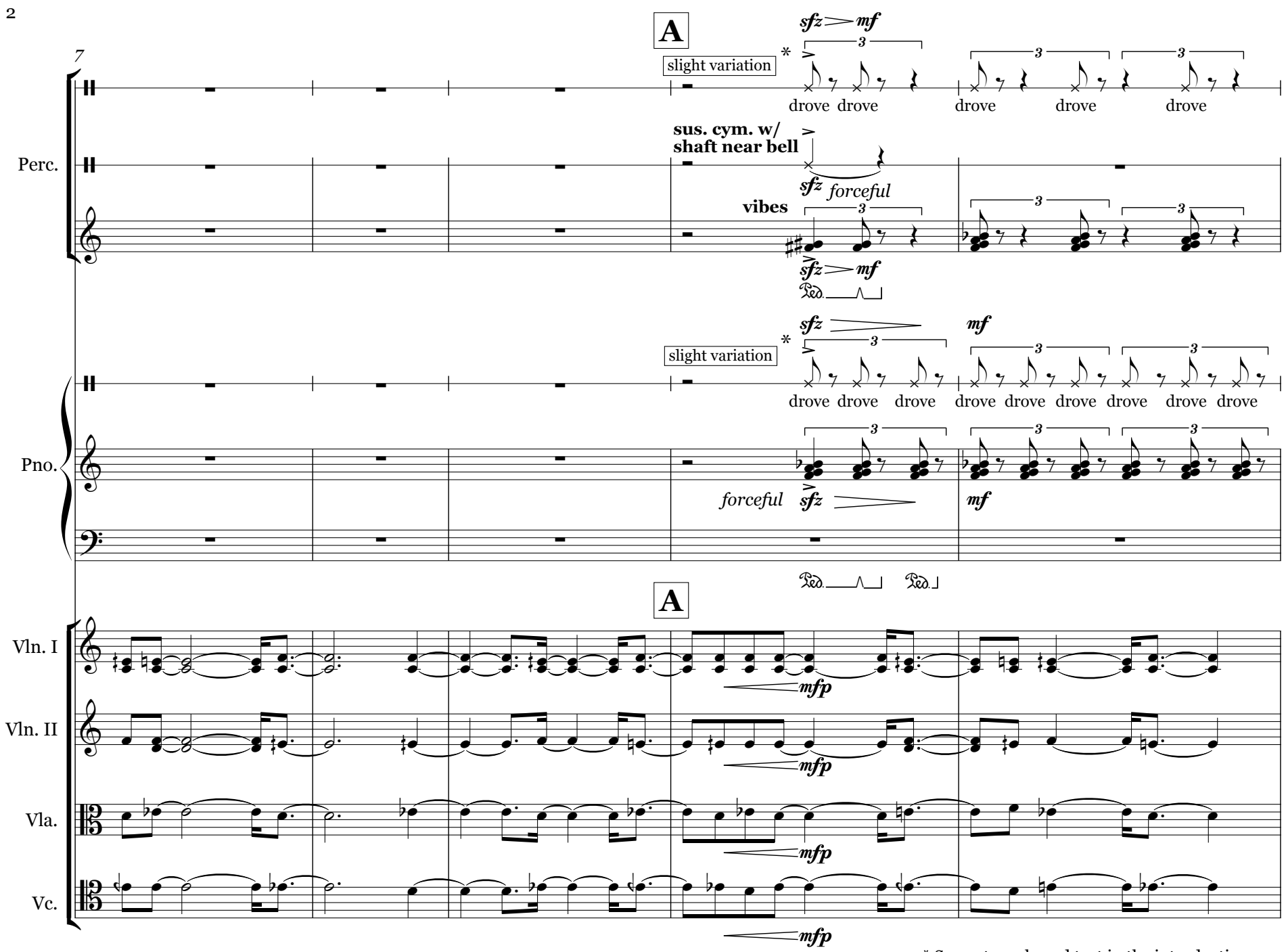
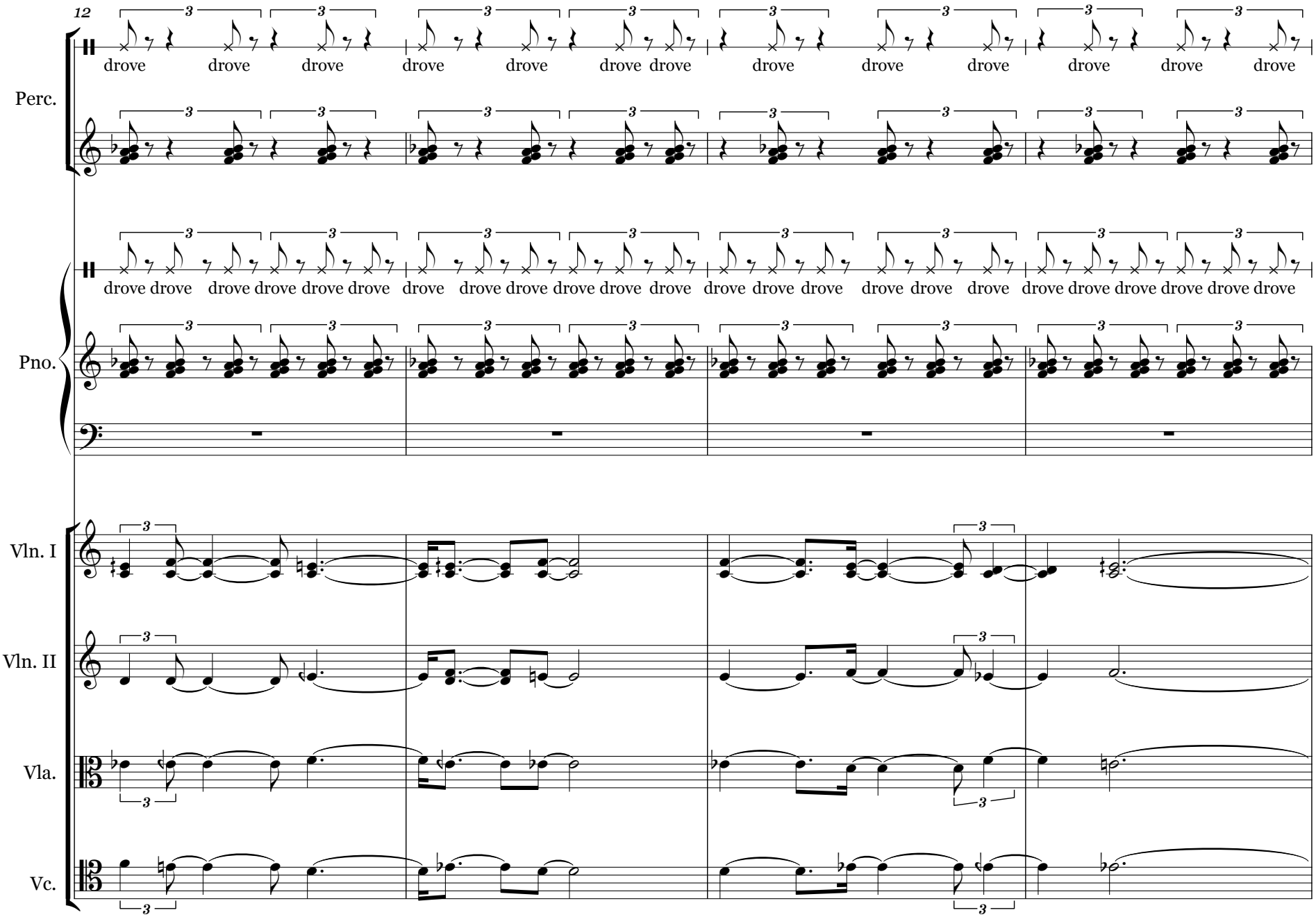
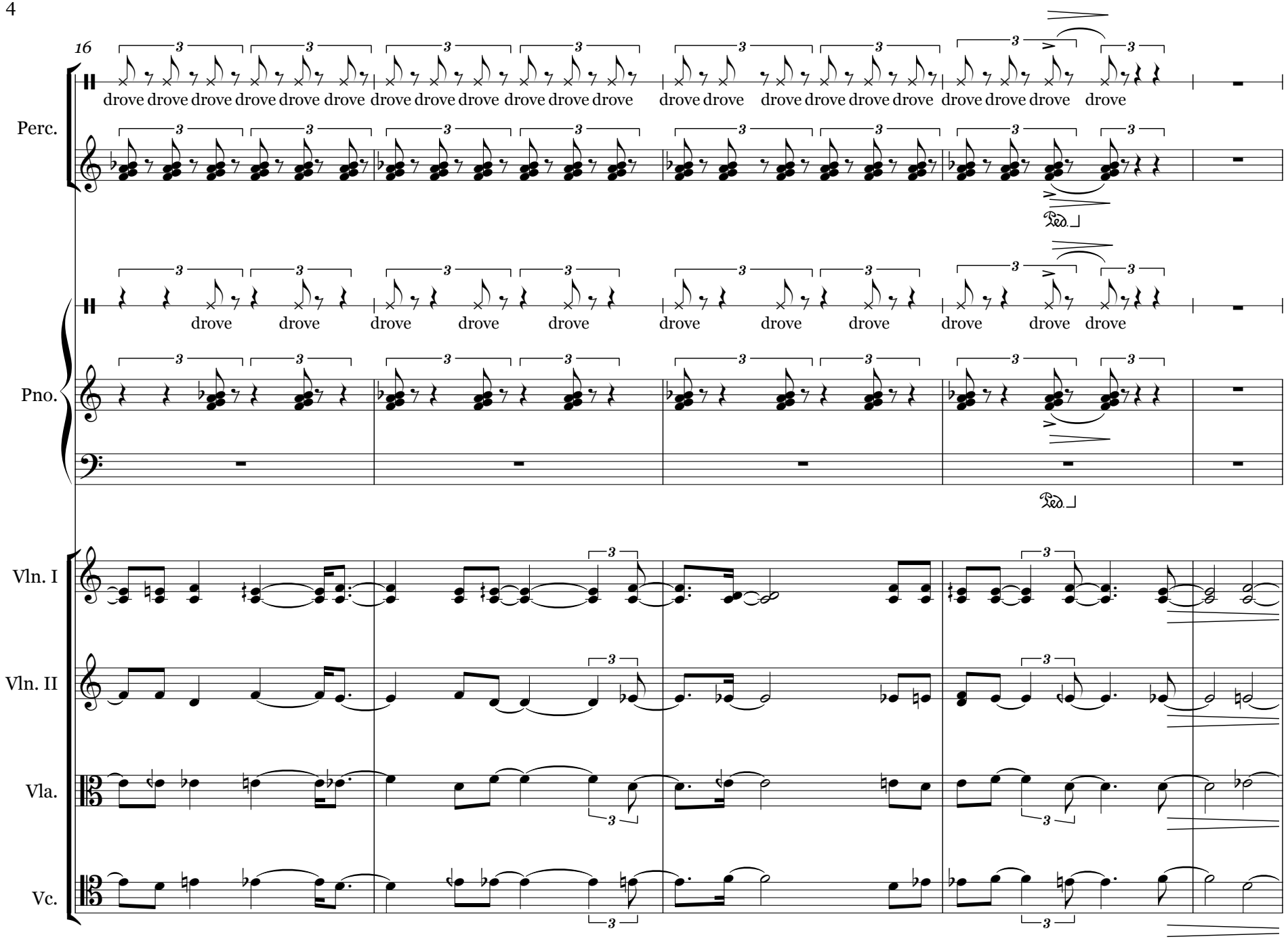
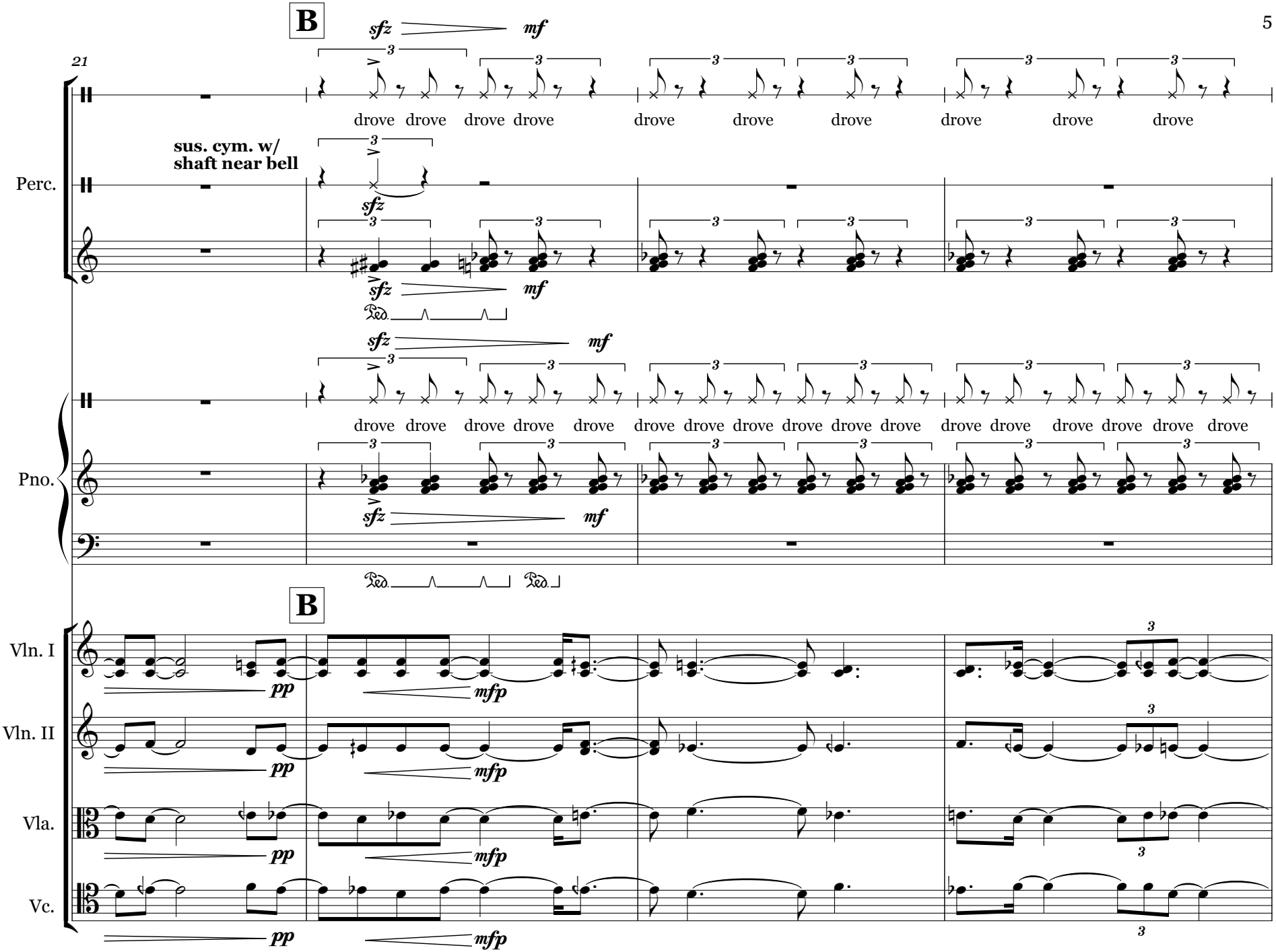
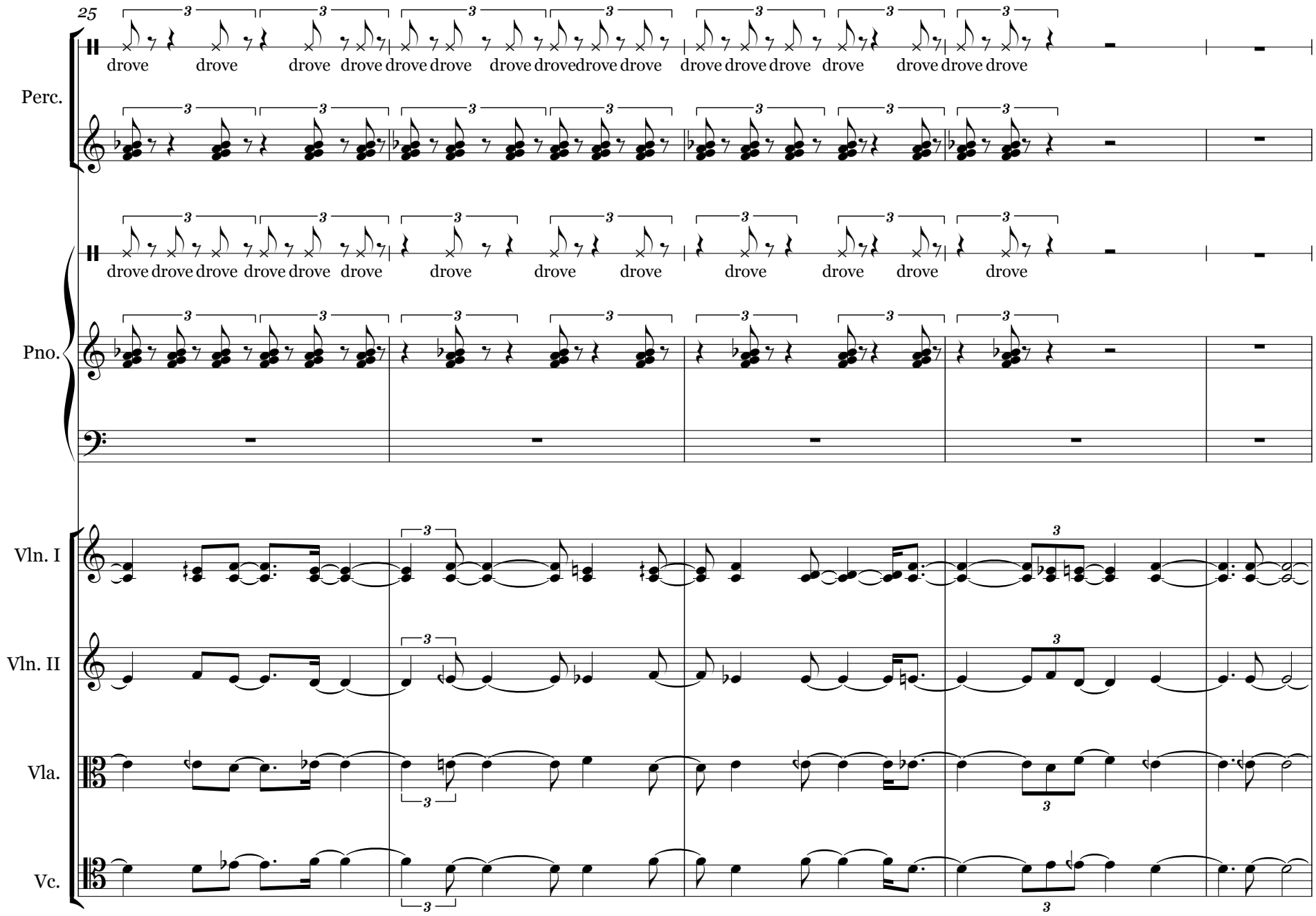


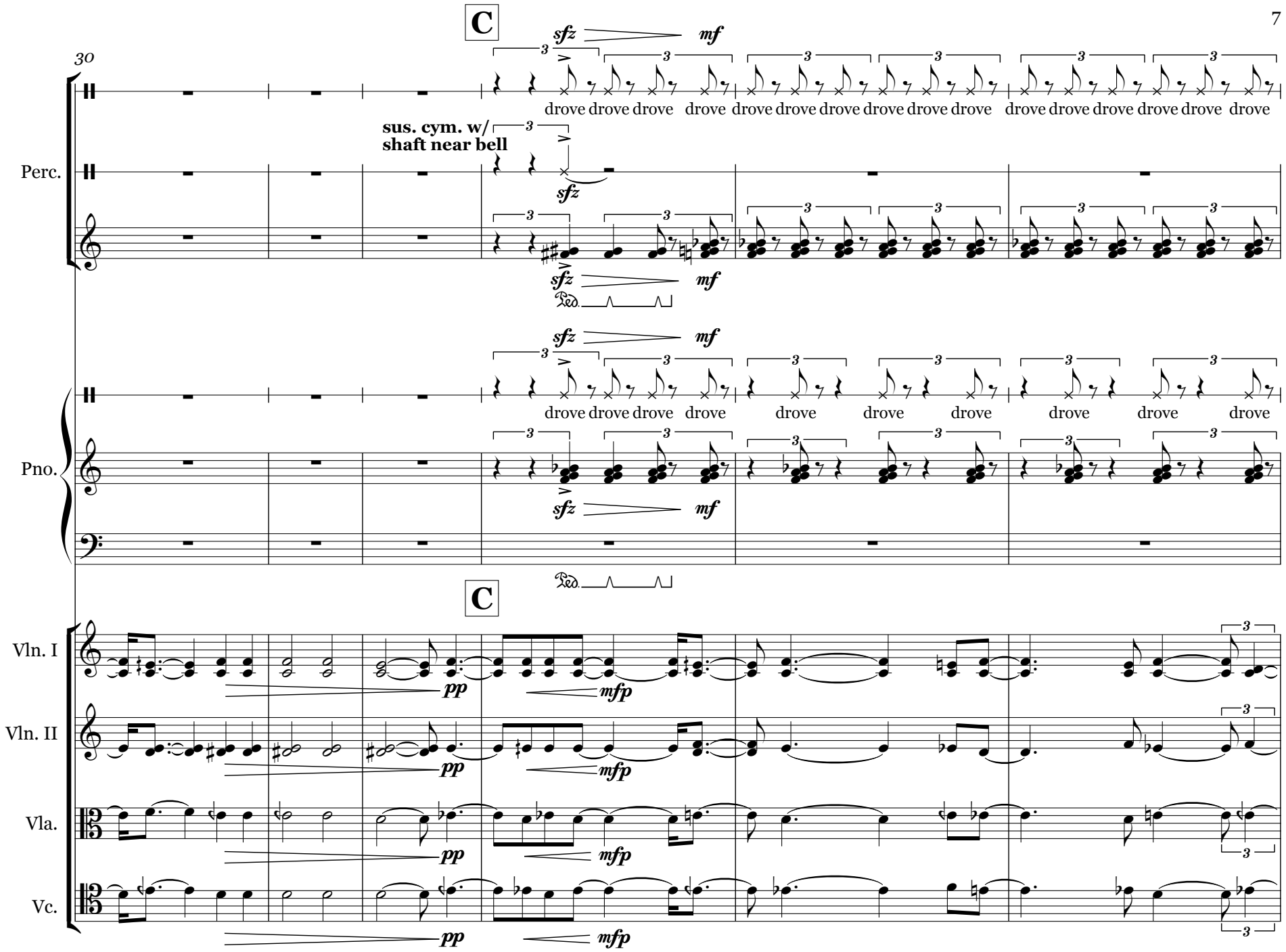
* See note on boxed text in the introduction.

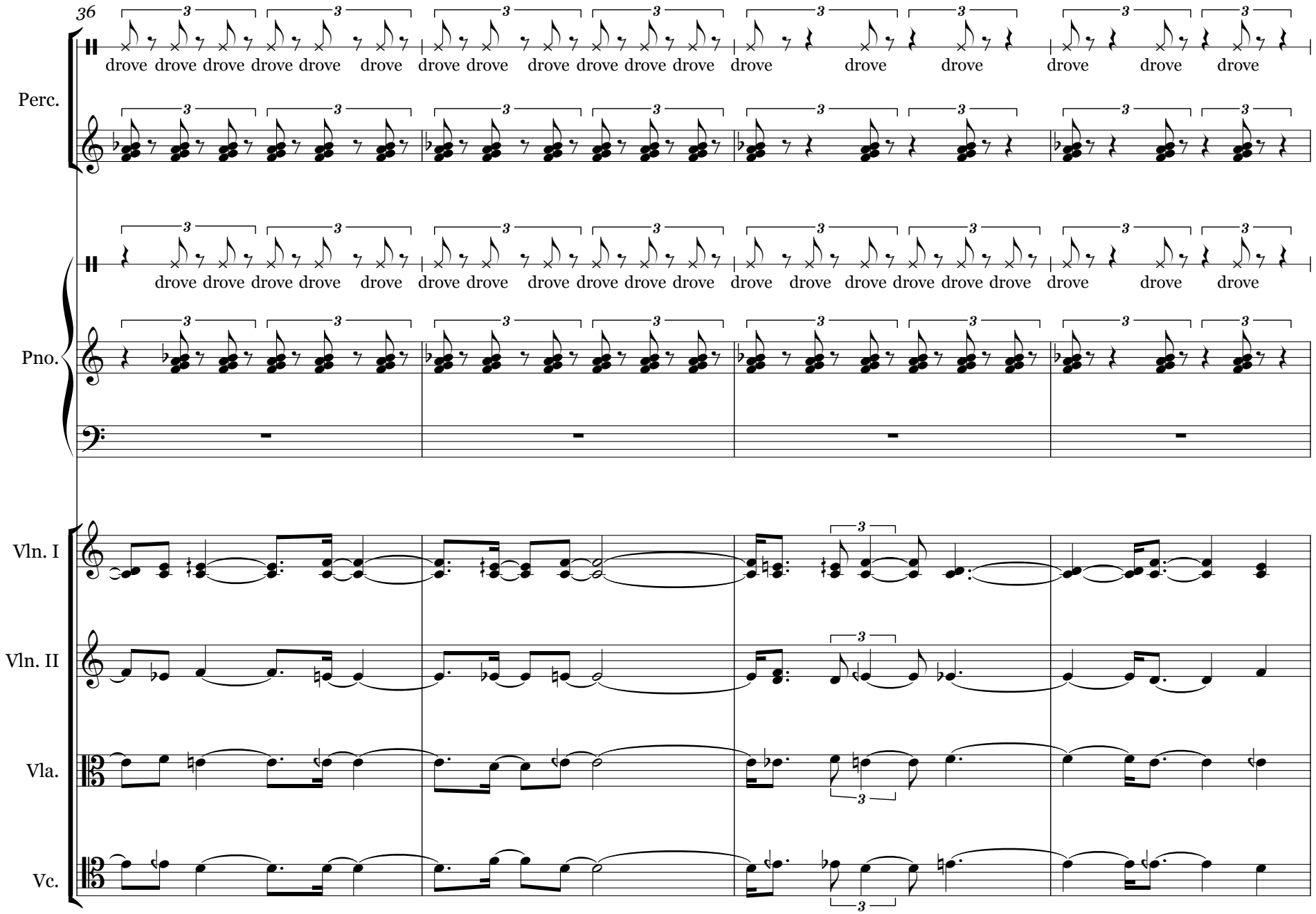

12
Perc.
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

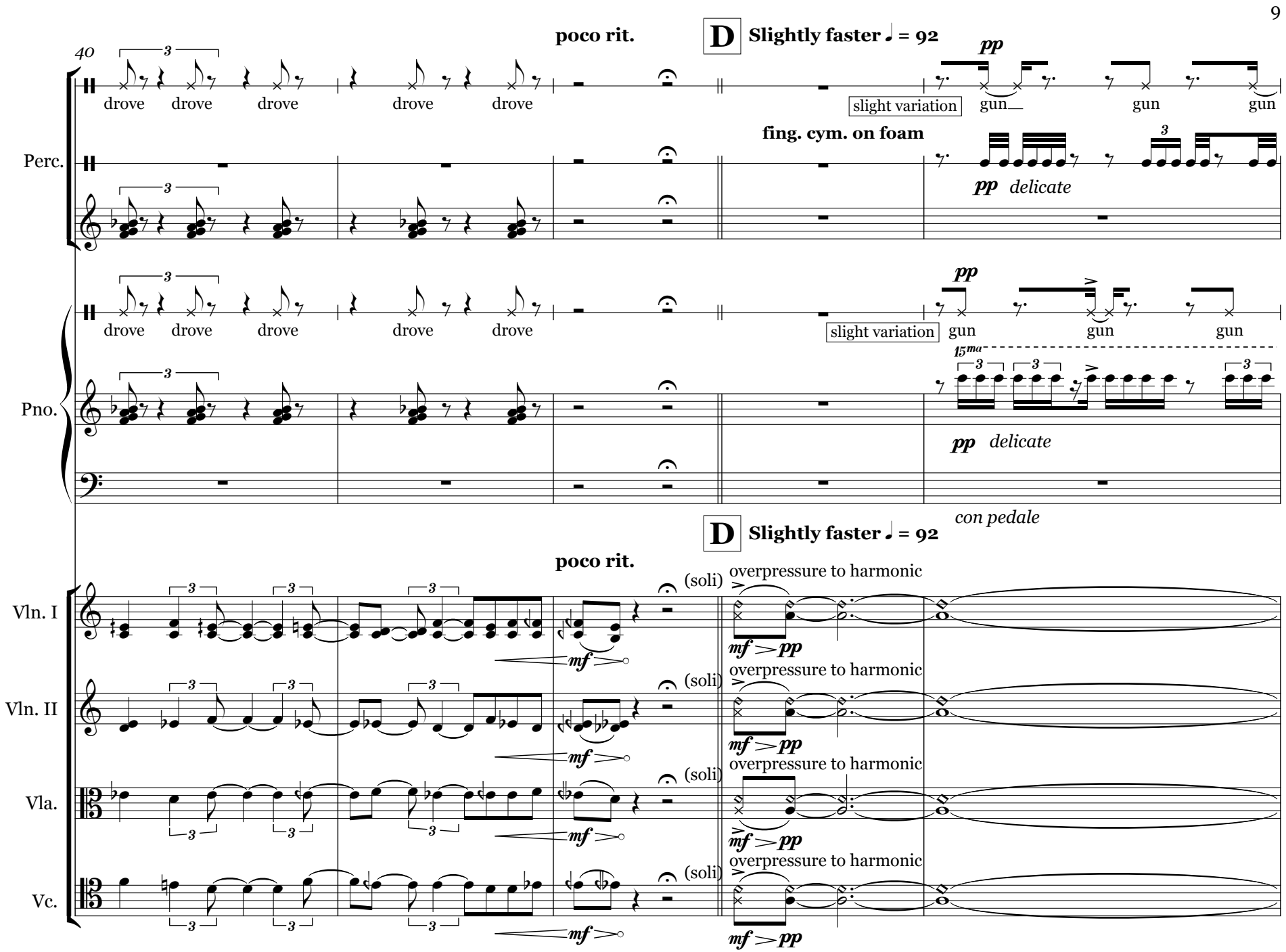

16
Perc.
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
Ped.
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
Pno.
Ped.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

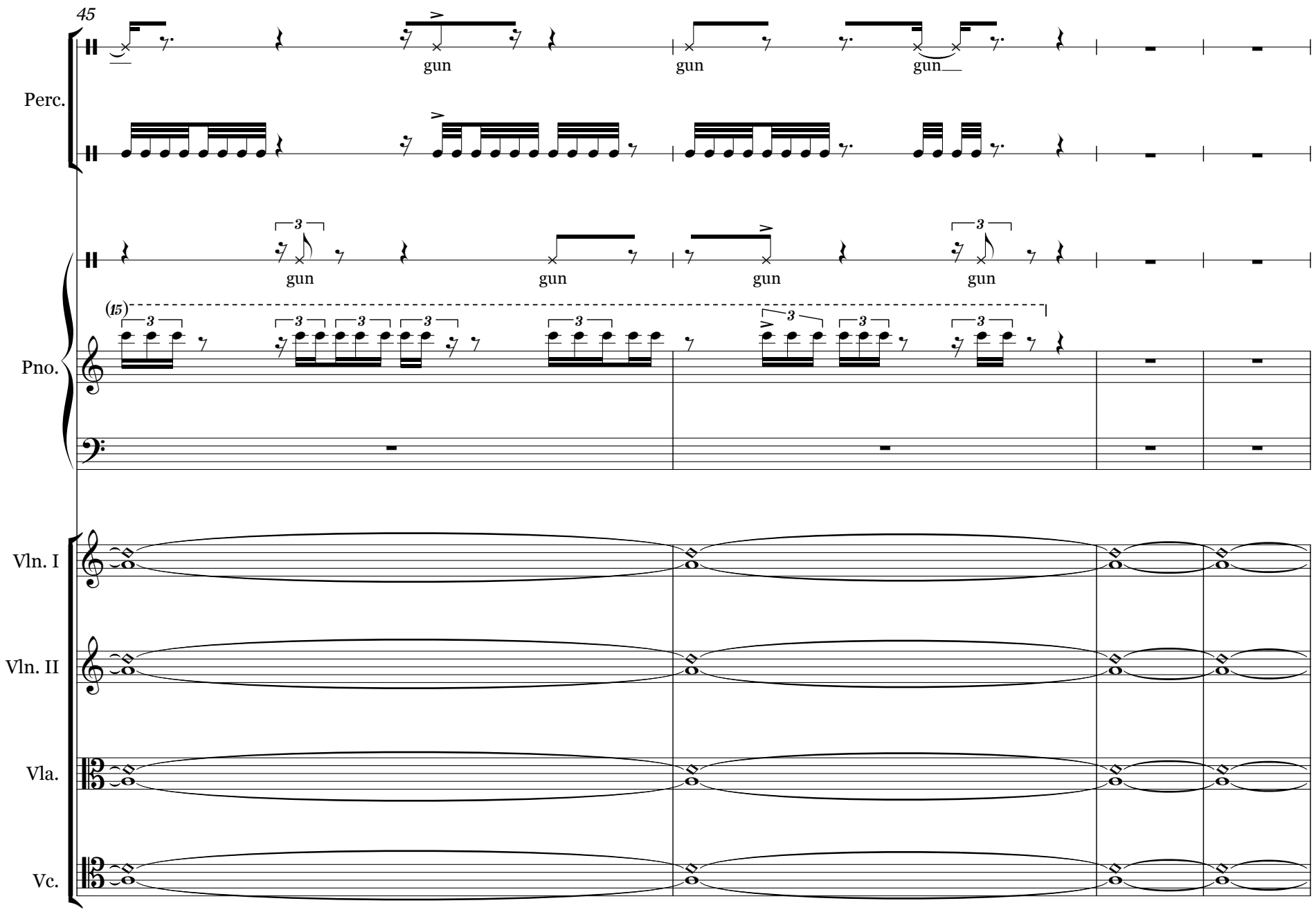

B
sfz
mf
21
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
Perc.
sus. cym. w/
shaft near bell
sfz
mf
Pno.
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
B
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pp
mfp

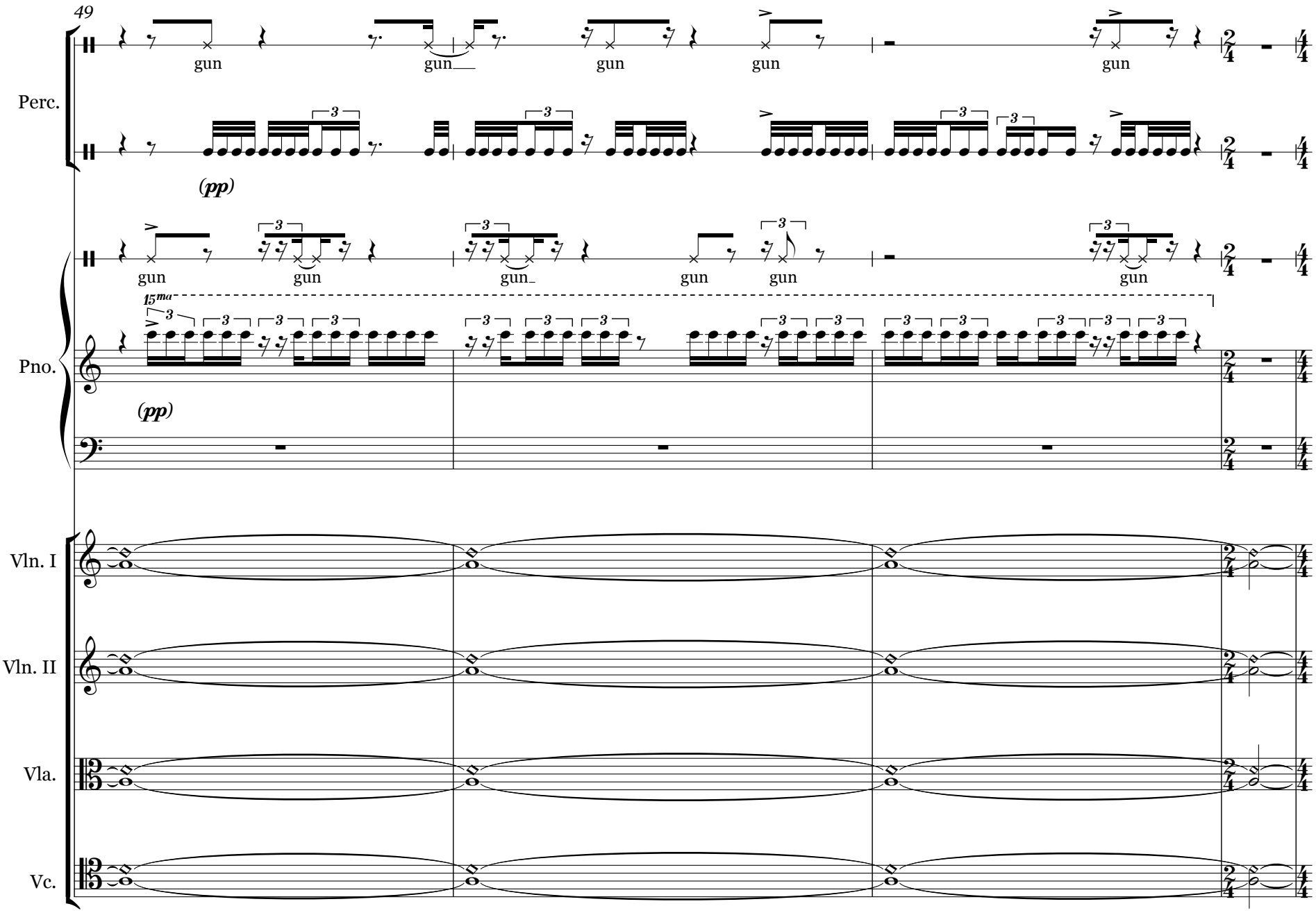

25
Perc.
drove drove drove

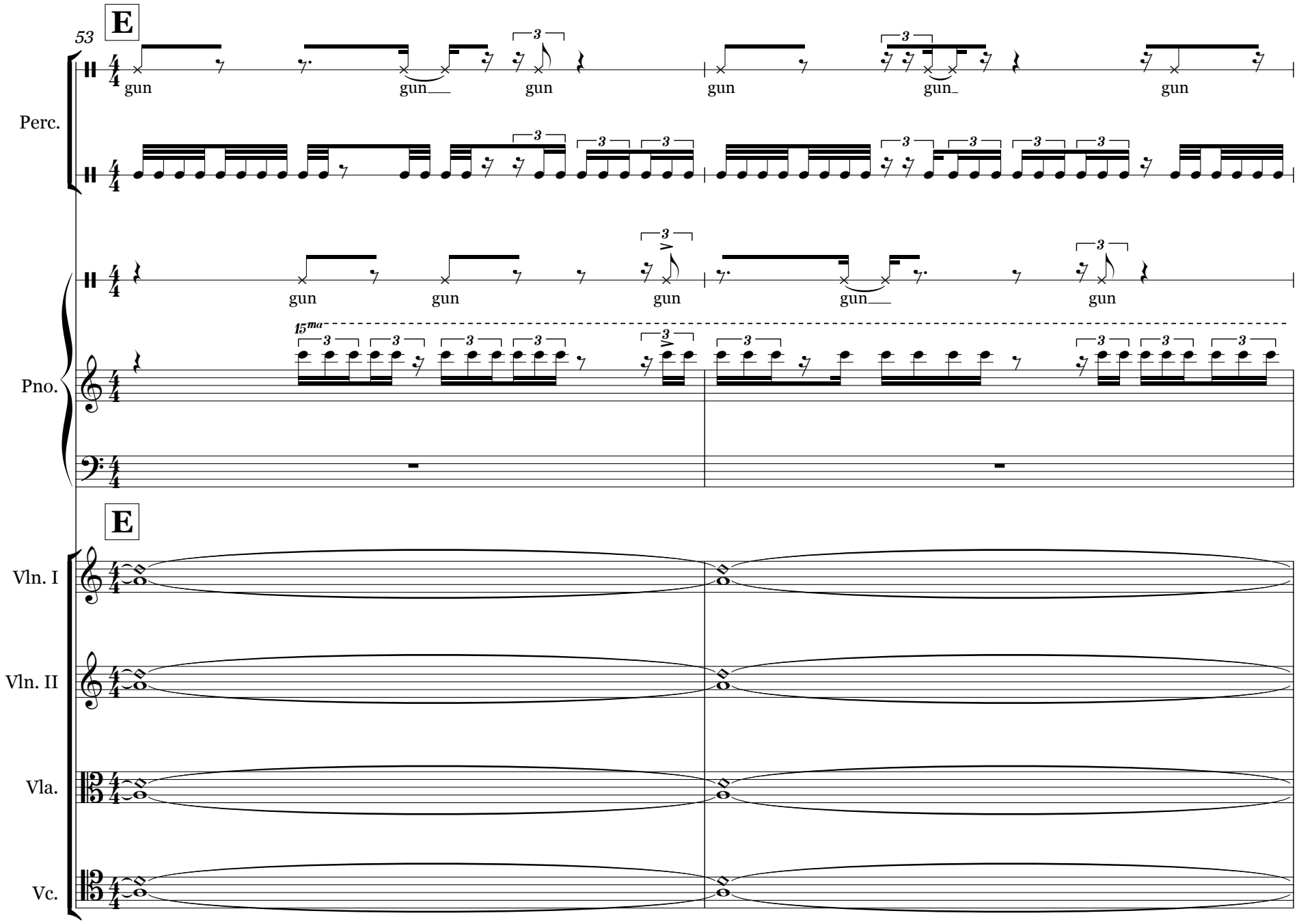

C
30
sfz
mf
drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove drove
sus. cym. w/
shaft near bell
Perc.
Pno.
Ped.
C
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
pp
mfp

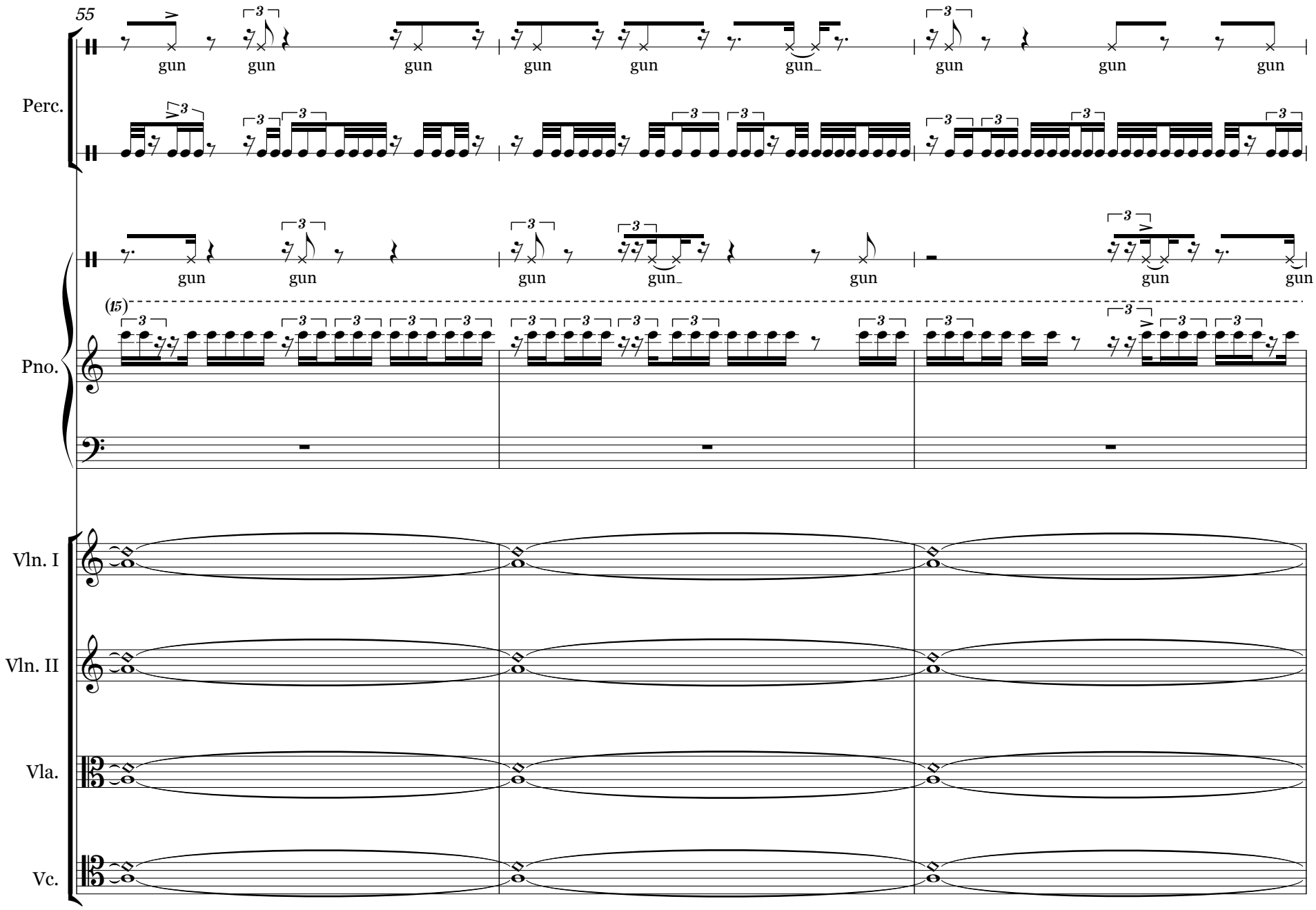

36
Perc.
drove drove drove

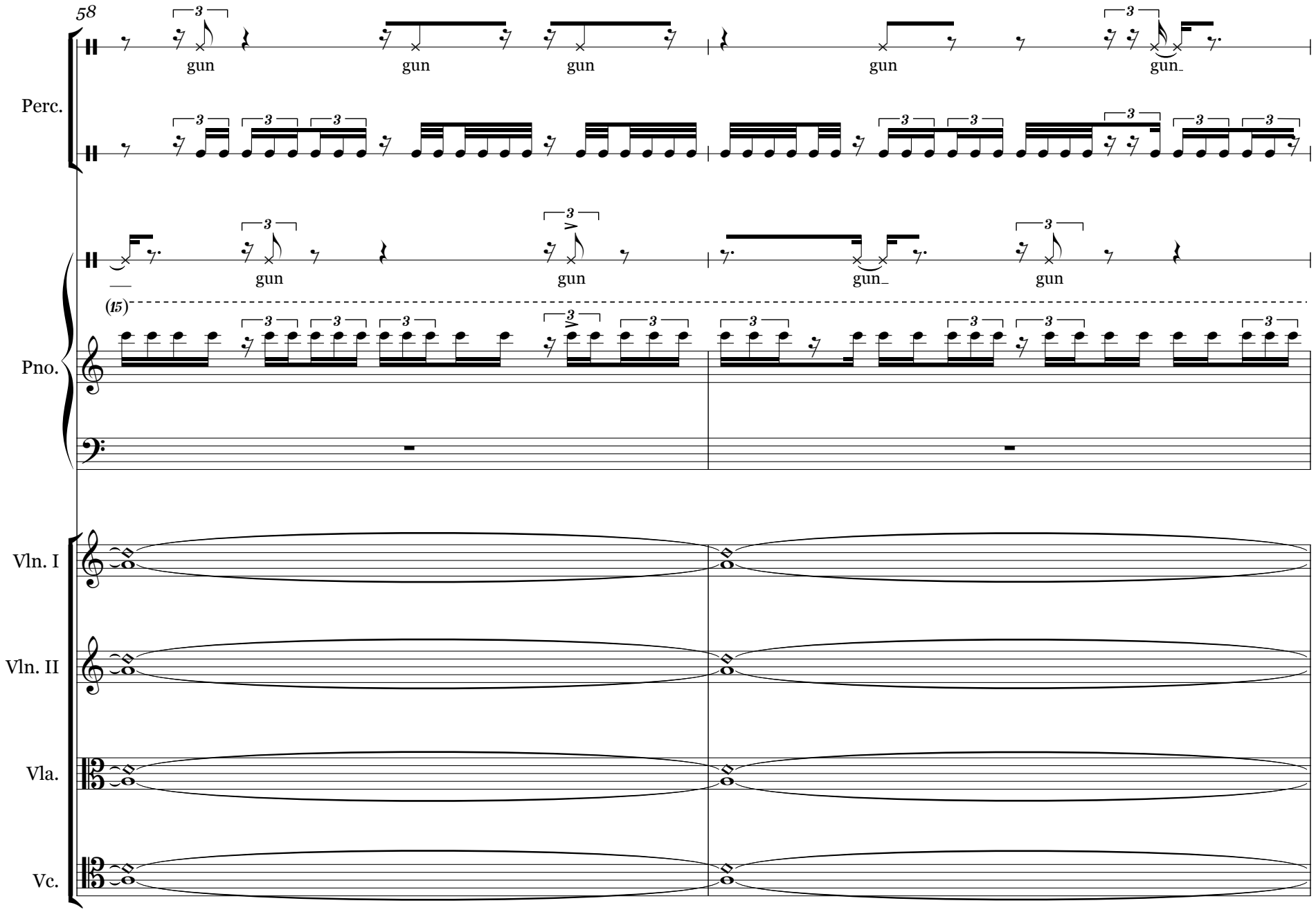

40
poco rit.
D Slightly faster ♩ = 92
drove drove drove drove drove
pp
slight variation
gun gun gun
fing. cym. on foam
pp delicate
Perc.
drove drove drove drove drove
pp
slight variation
gun gun gun
15ma
pp delicate
con pedale
Pno.
D Slightly faster ♩ = 92
poco rit.
(soli)
overpressure to harmonic
mf pp
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

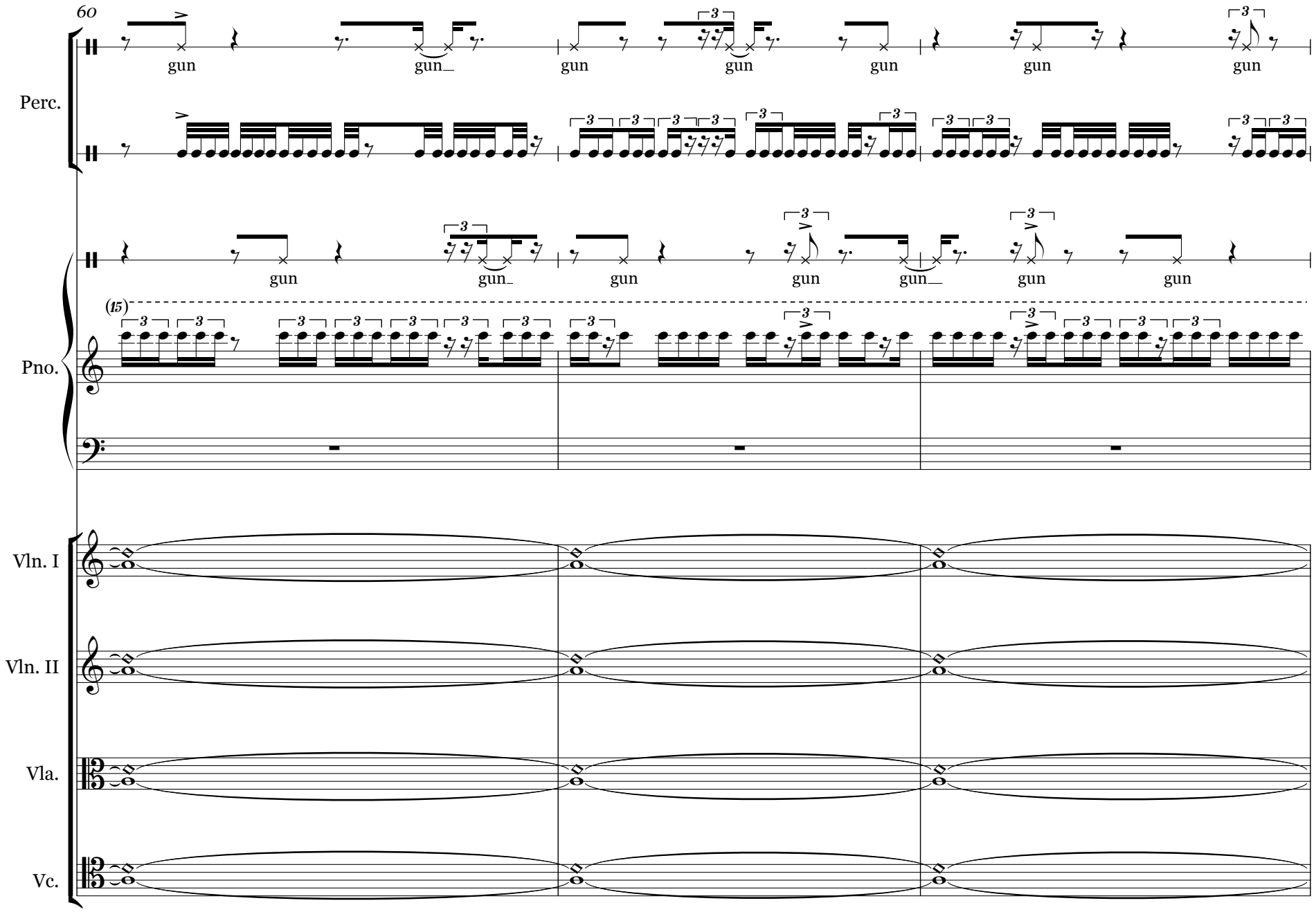

45
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
(15)
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

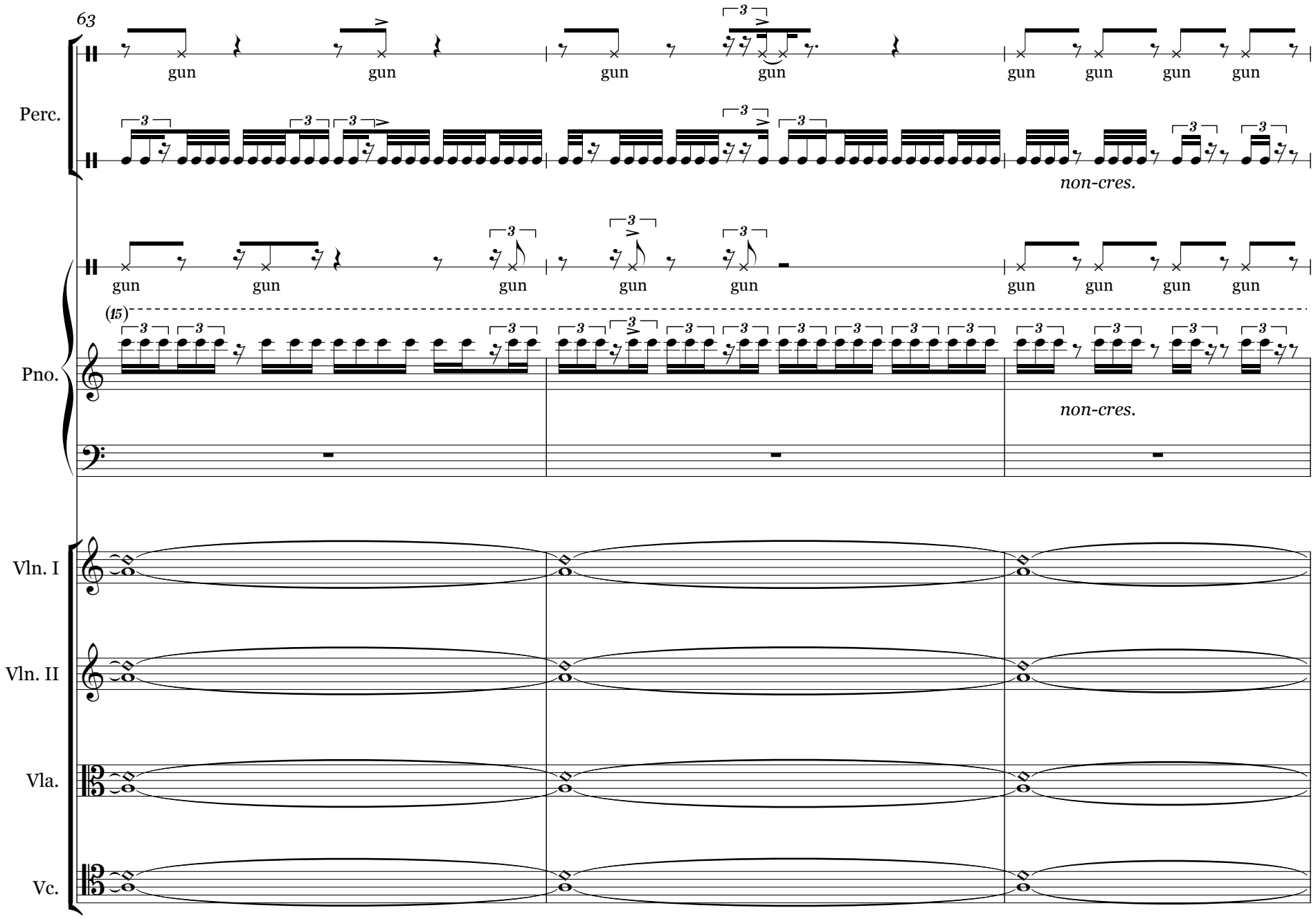

49
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
(pp)
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
Pno.
15ma
(pp)
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

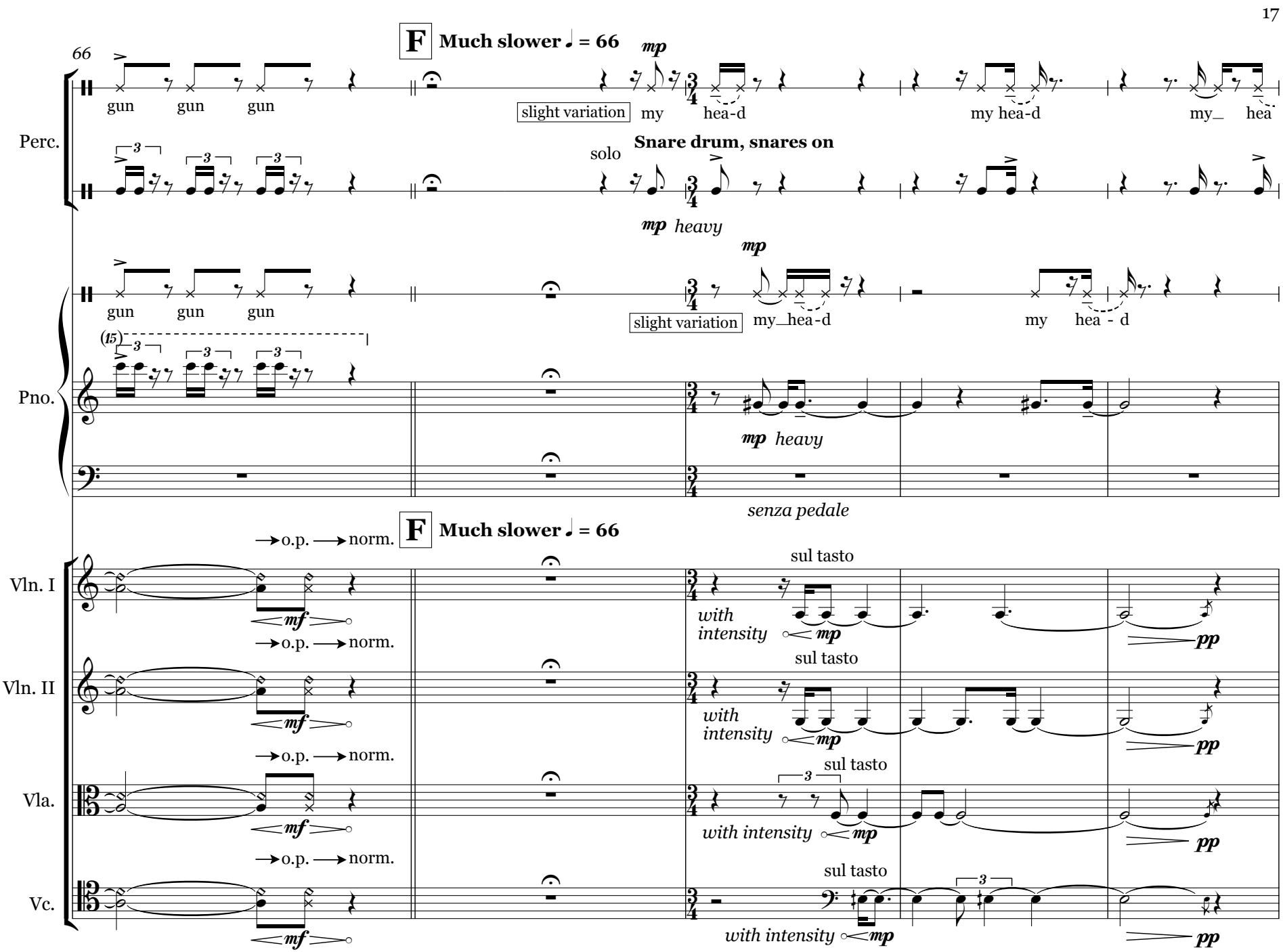

53
E
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
Pno.
15ma
E
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

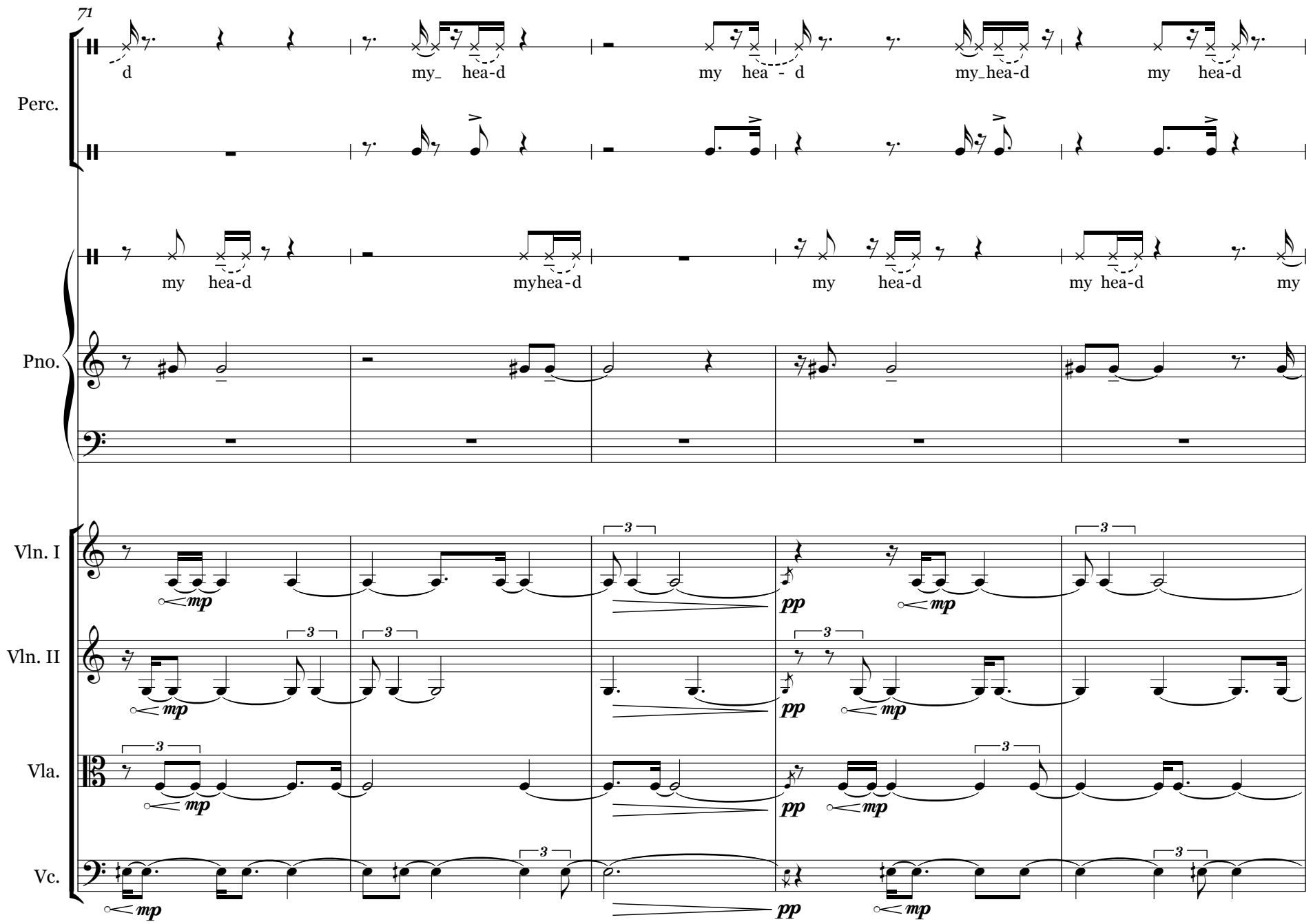

55
Perc.
gun gun gun gun gun gun gun gun gun
gun gun gun gun gun gun gun
(15)
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

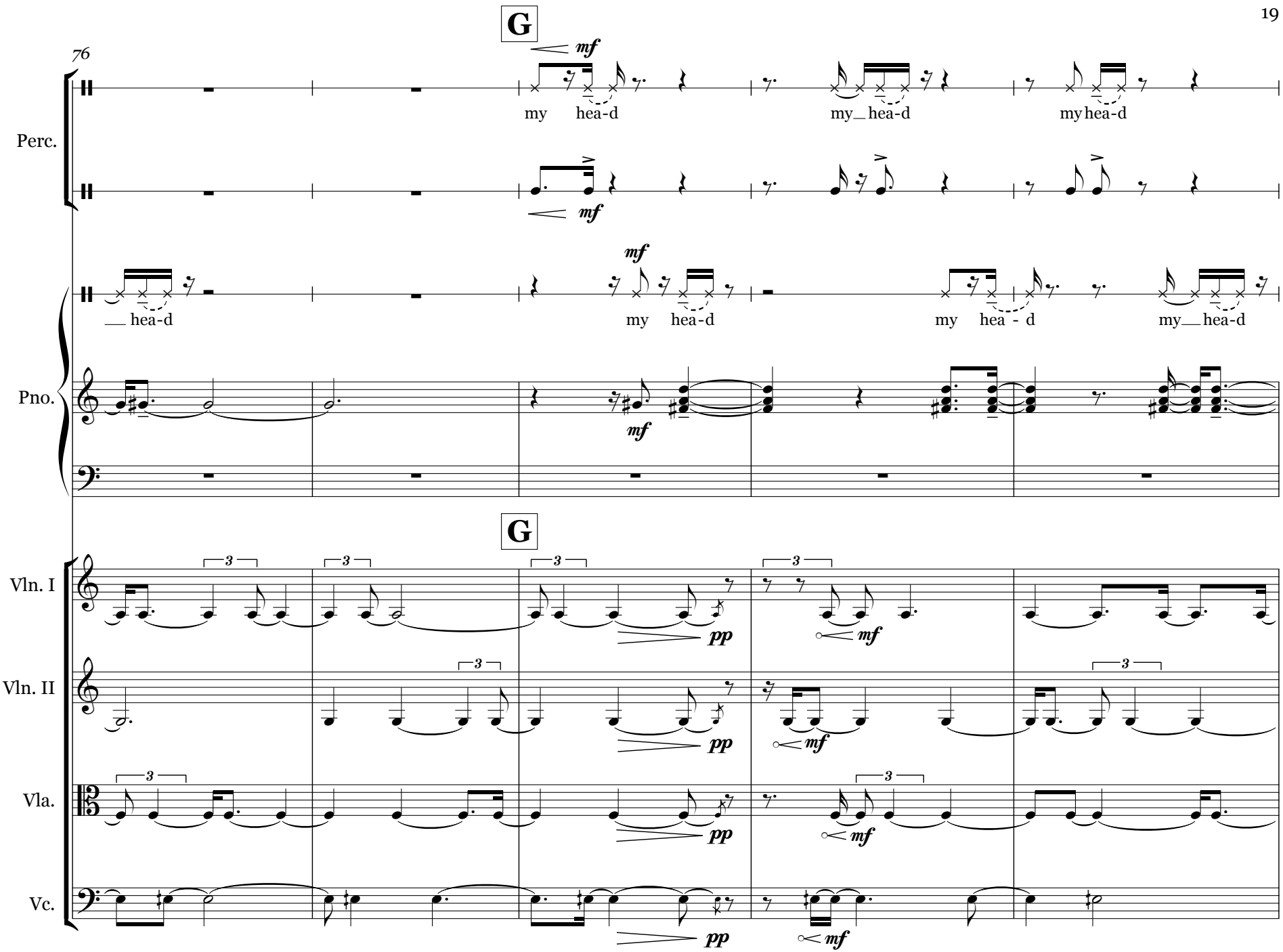

58
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
(15)
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

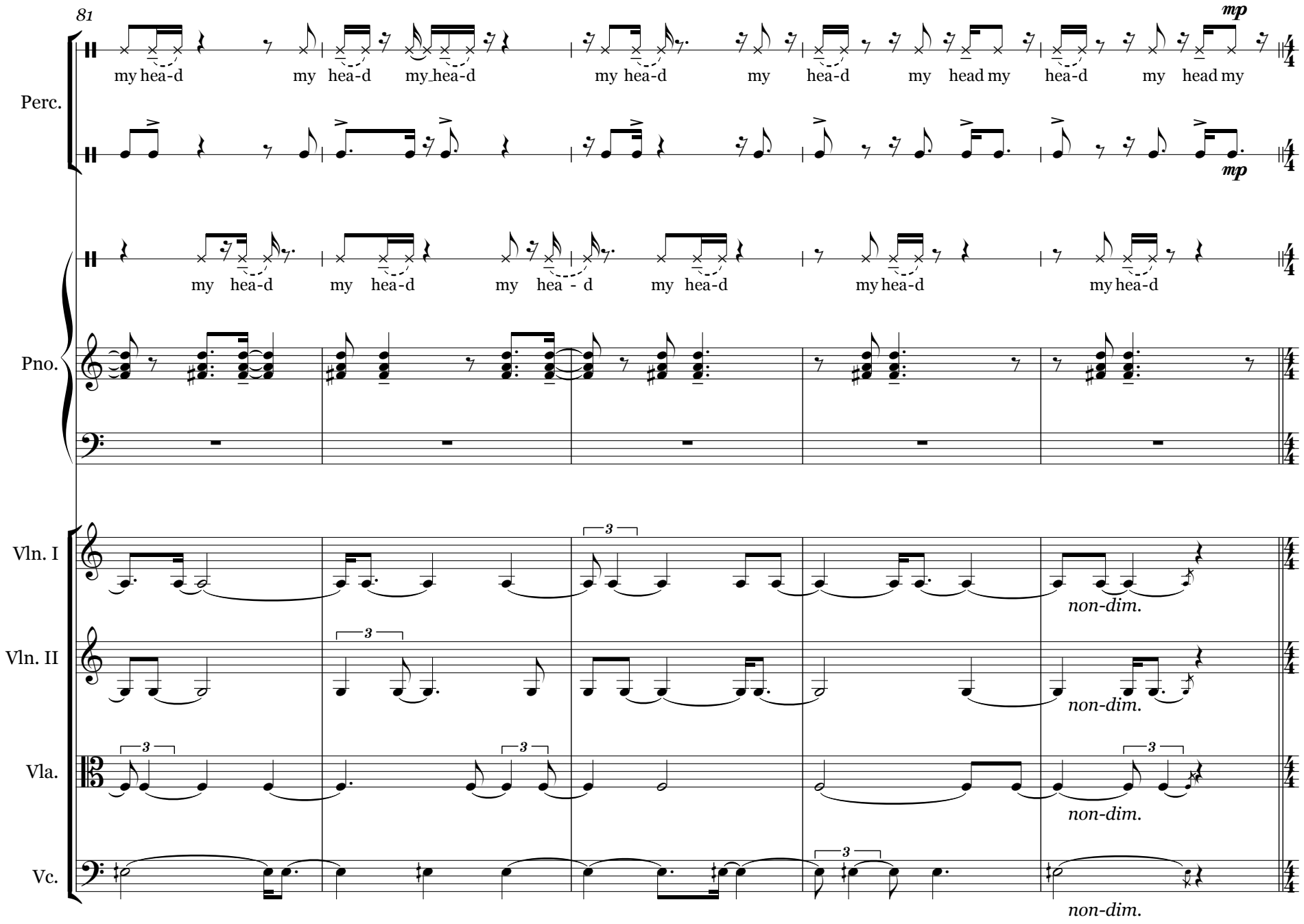

60
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
(15)
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

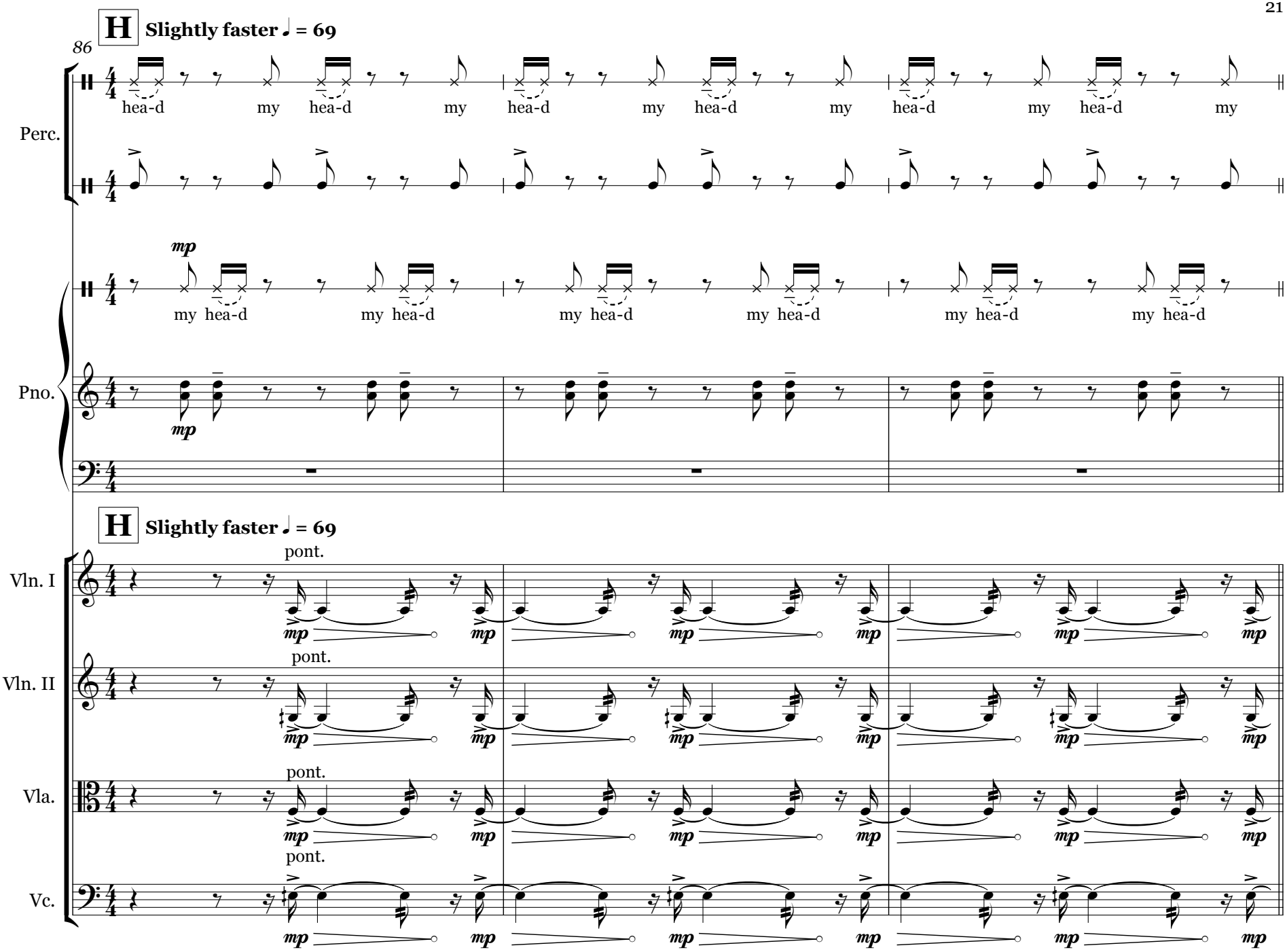

63
Perc.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
non-cres.
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
gun
(15)
Pno.
non-cres.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

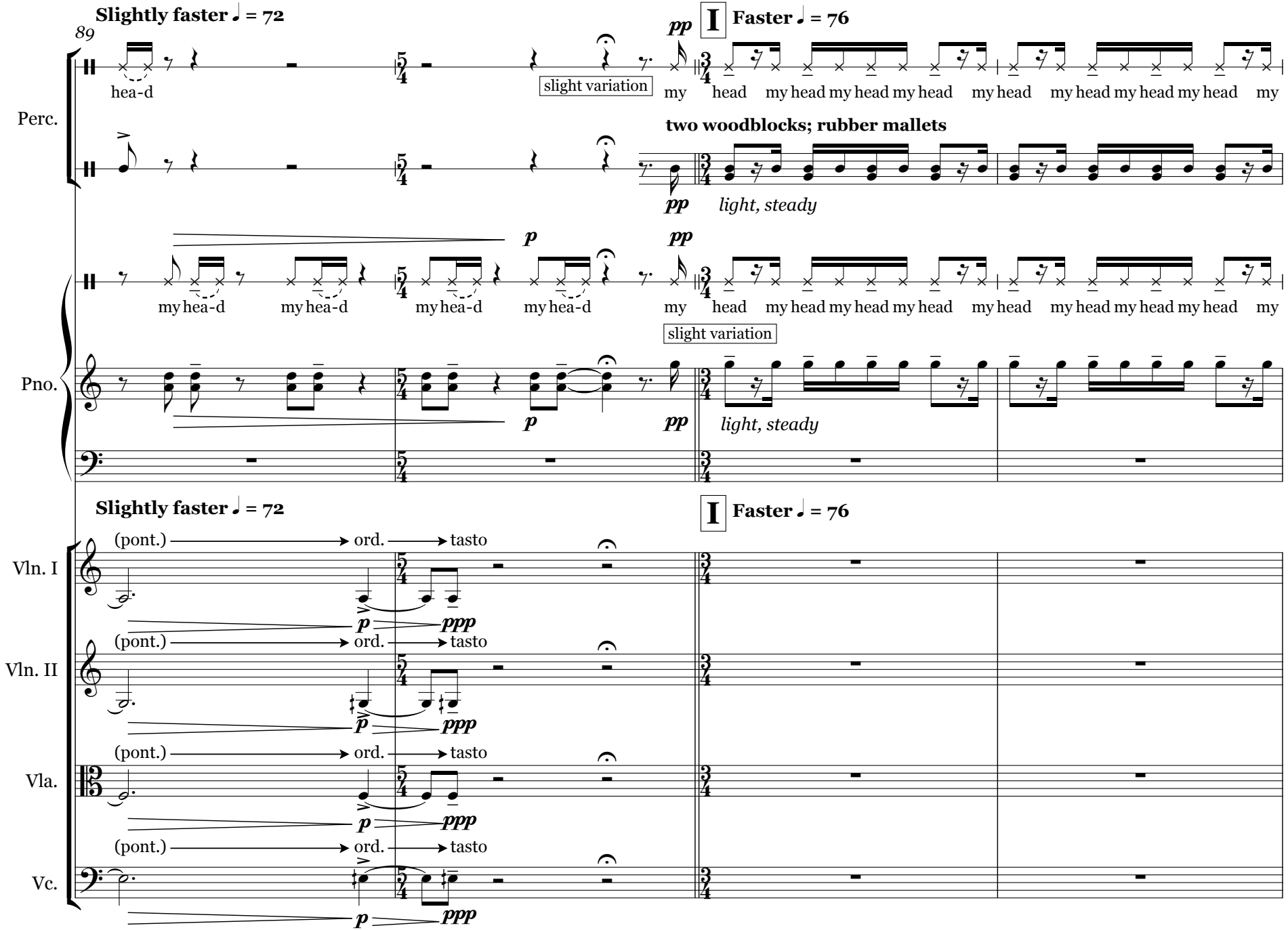

66
F Much slower ♩ = 66
mp
gun gun gun
slight variation my hea-d my hea-d my_ hea
Perc.
solo
Snare drum, snares on
mp heavy
mp
gun gun gun
slight variation my_hea-d my hea - d
(15)
Pno.
mp heavy
senza pedale
F Much slower ♩ = 66
o.p. norm.
sul tasto
Vln. I
mf
with intensity mp
pp
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

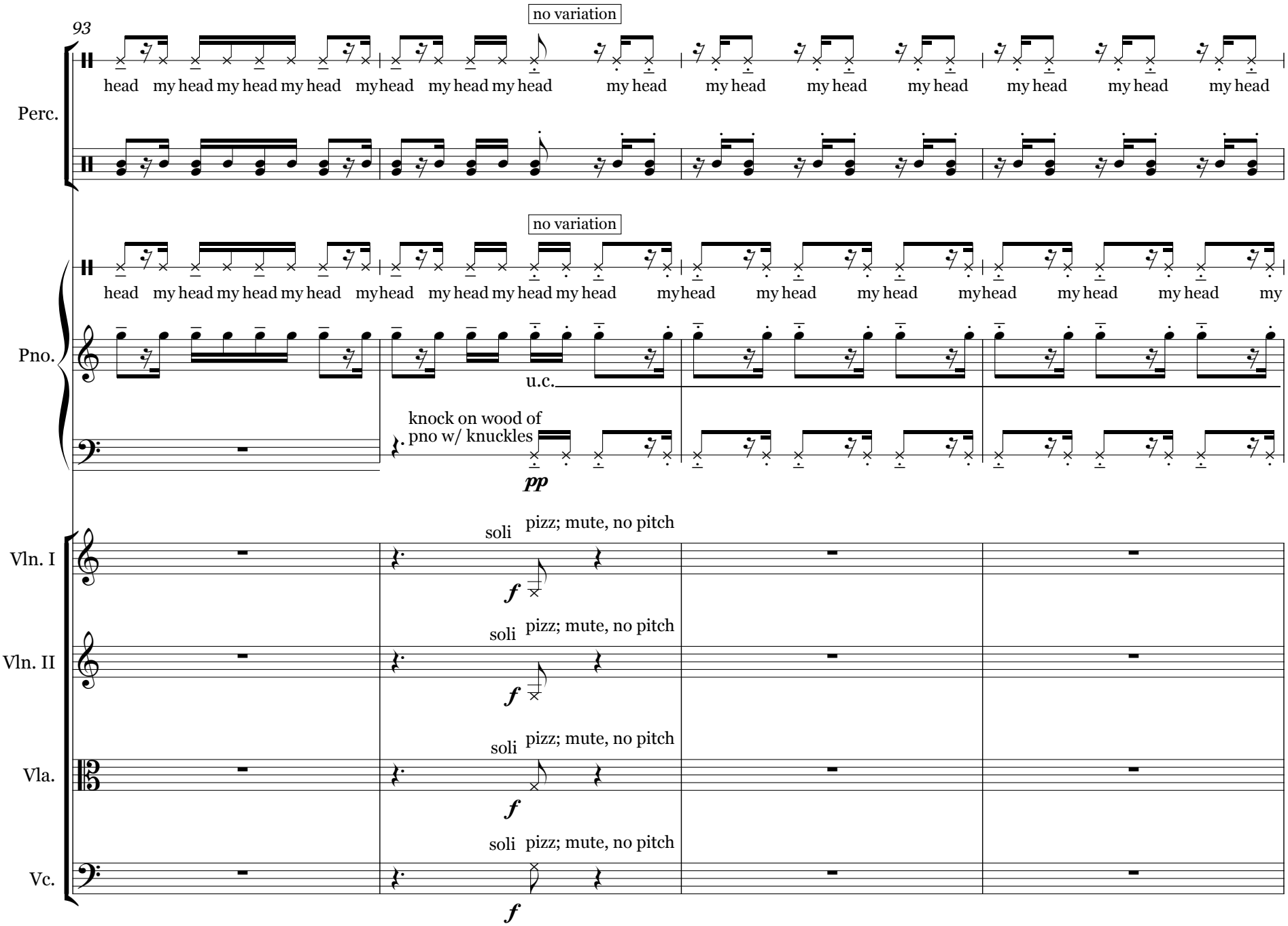

71
Perc.
d
my_ hea-d
my hea - d
my_hea-d
my hea-d
my hea-d
myhea-d
my hea-d
my hea-d
my
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
mp
pp
3

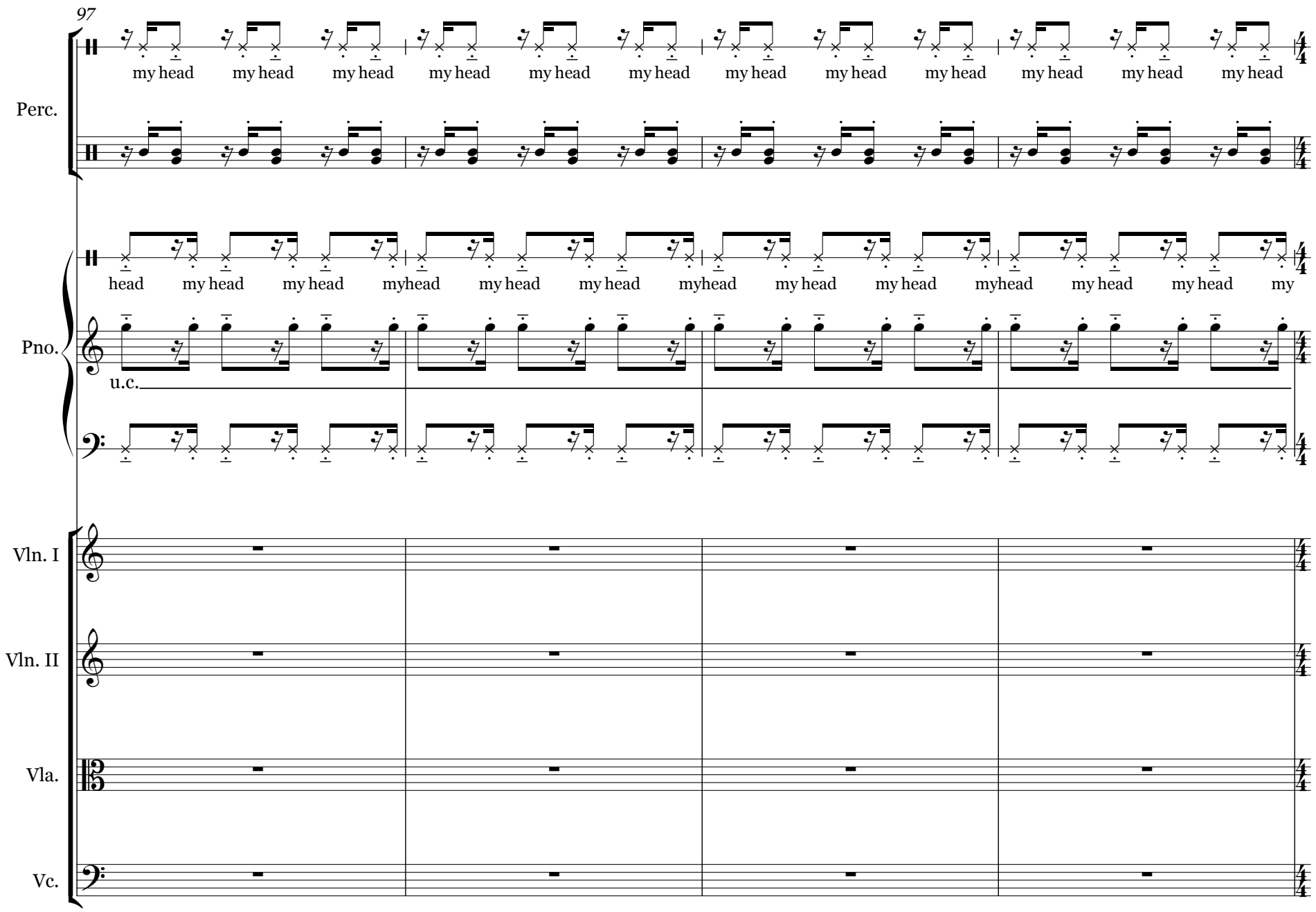

G
76
mf
Perc.
my hea-d
my hea-d
my hea-d
mf
mf
hea-d
my hea-d
my hea - d
my hea-d
Pno.
mf
G
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
3
pp
mf

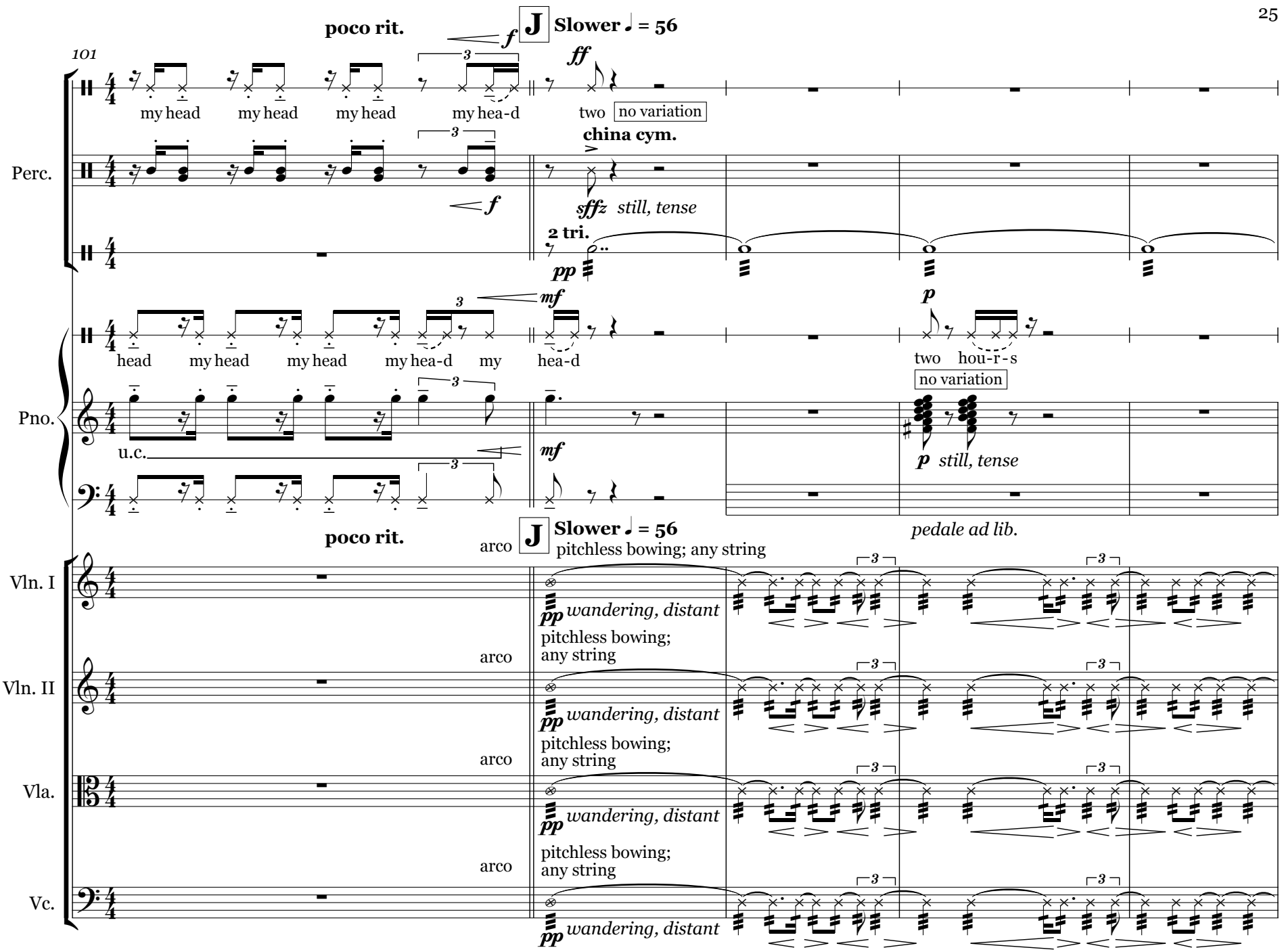

81
mp
my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my head my hea-d my head my
Perc.
mp
my hea-d my hea-d my hea - d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
3
non-dim.

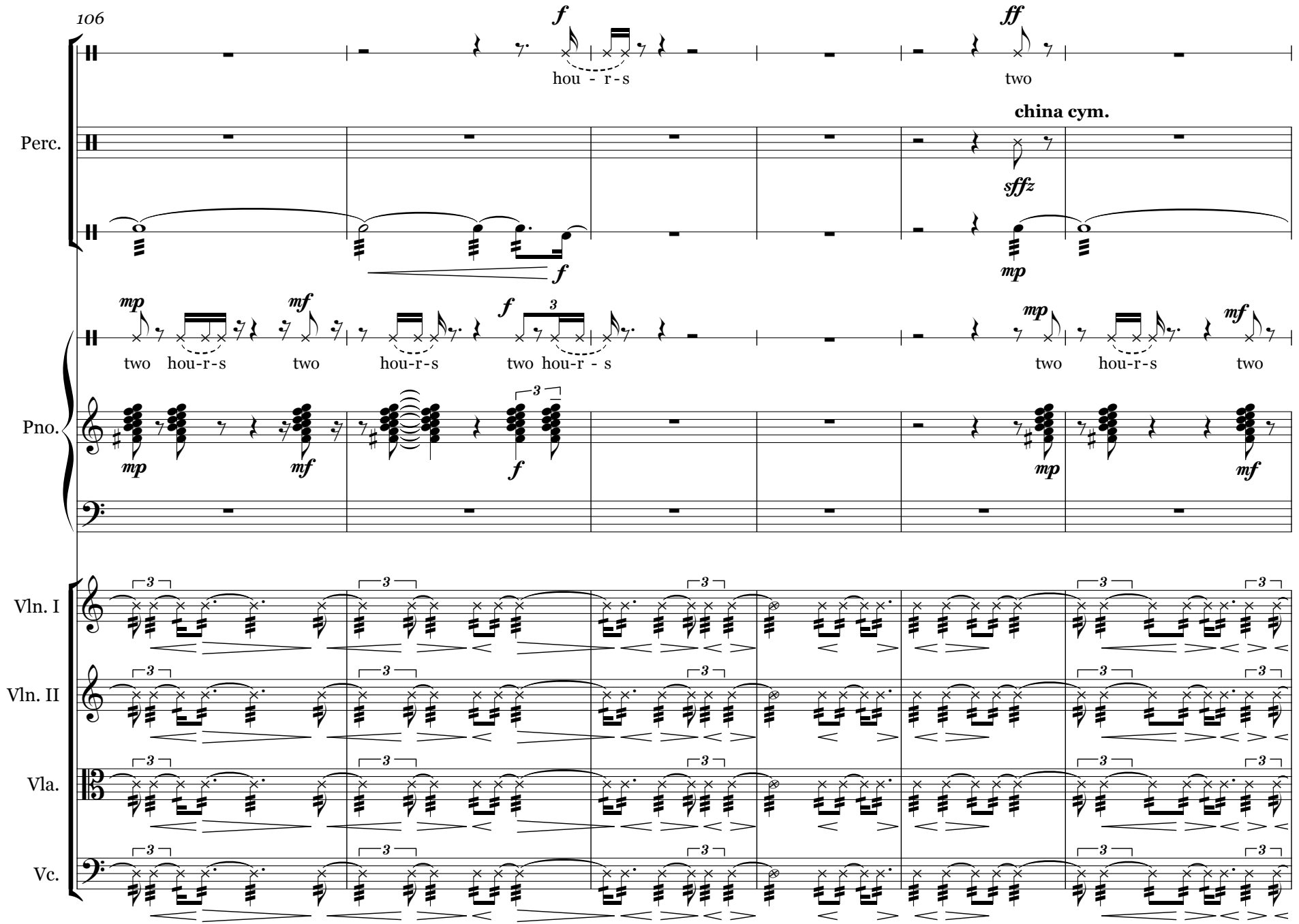

H
Slightly faster ♩ = 69
86
Perc.
hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my
mp
my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d
Pno.
mp
H
Slightly faster ♩ = 69
Vln. I
pont.
mp
Vln. II
pont.
mp
Vla.
pont.
mp
Vc.
pont.
mp

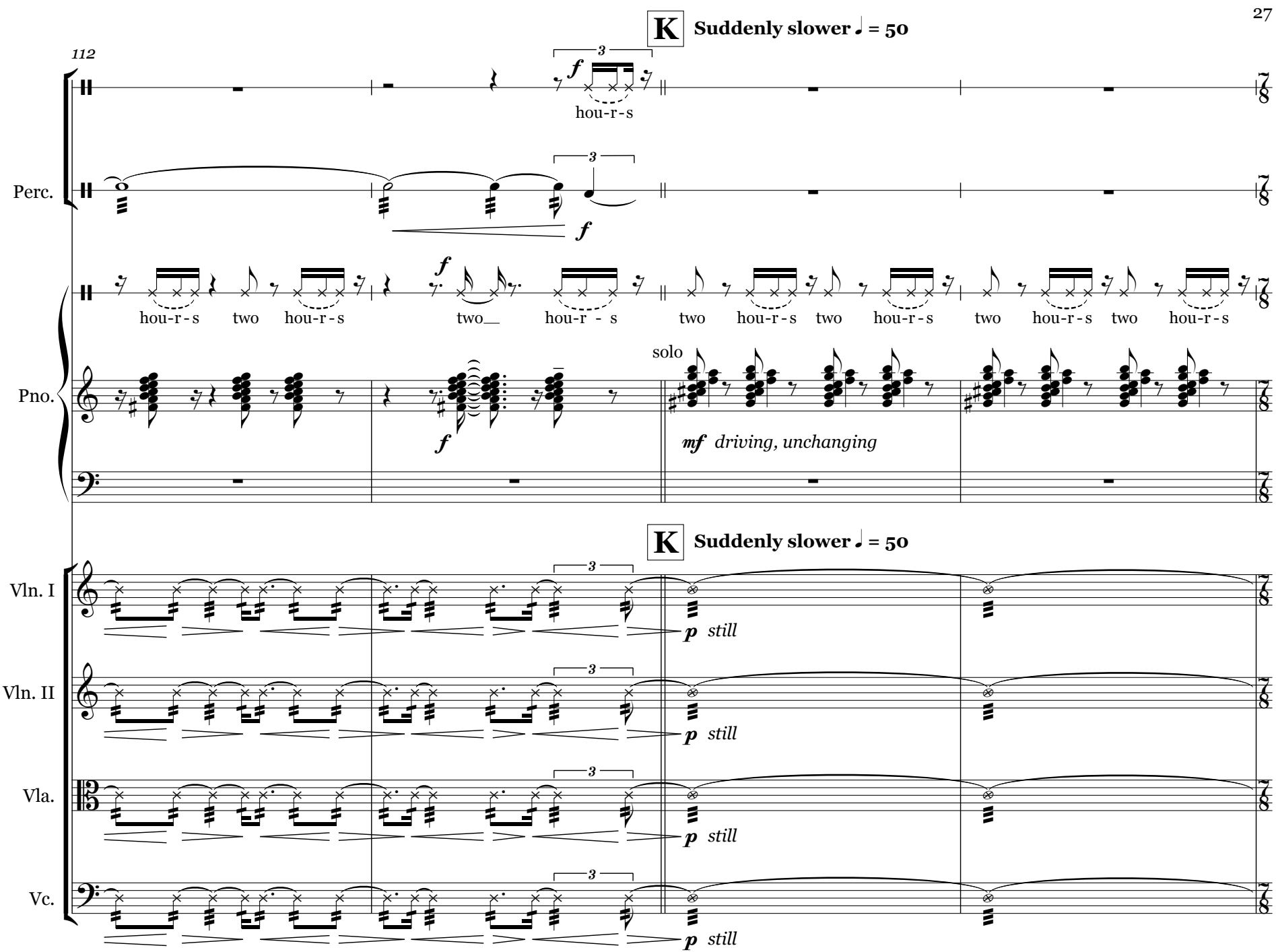

Slightly faster ♩ = 72
89
Perc.
hea-d
slight variation
pp
I
Faster ♩ = 76
my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my
two woodblocks; rubber mallets
pp light, steady
p
my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d my hea-d
pp
my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my
slight variation
Pno.
p
pp
light, steady
Slightly faster ♩ = 72
I
Faster ♩ = 76
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
(pont.) ord. tasto
p ppp

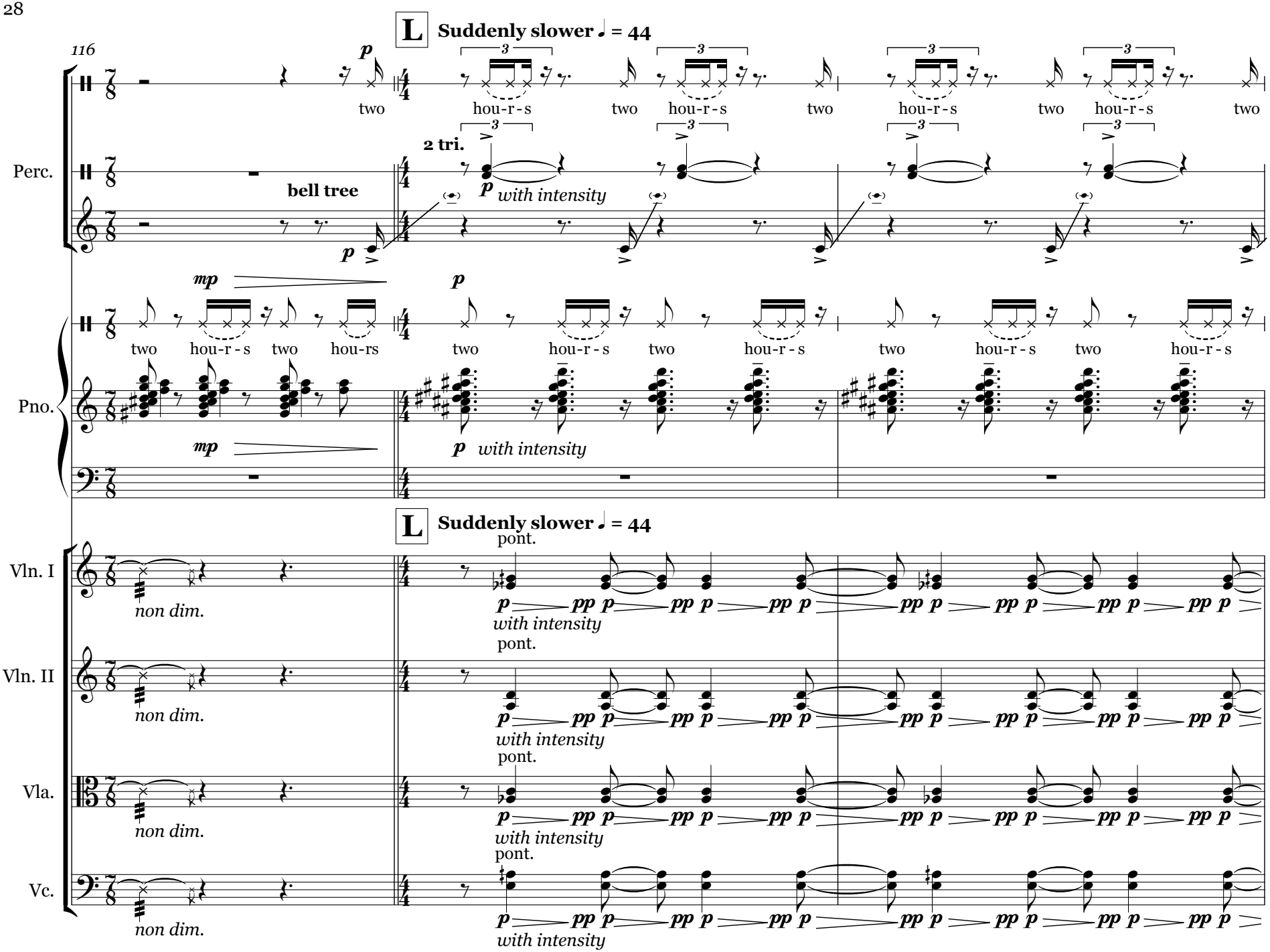

93
no variation
head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head
Perc.
no variation
head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my
Pno.
u.c.
knock on wood of
pno w/ knuckles
pp
Vln. I
soli
pizz; mute, no pitch
f
Vln. II
soli
pizz; mute, no pitch
f
Vla.
soli
pizz; mute, no pitch
f
Vc.
soli
pizz; mute, no pitch
f

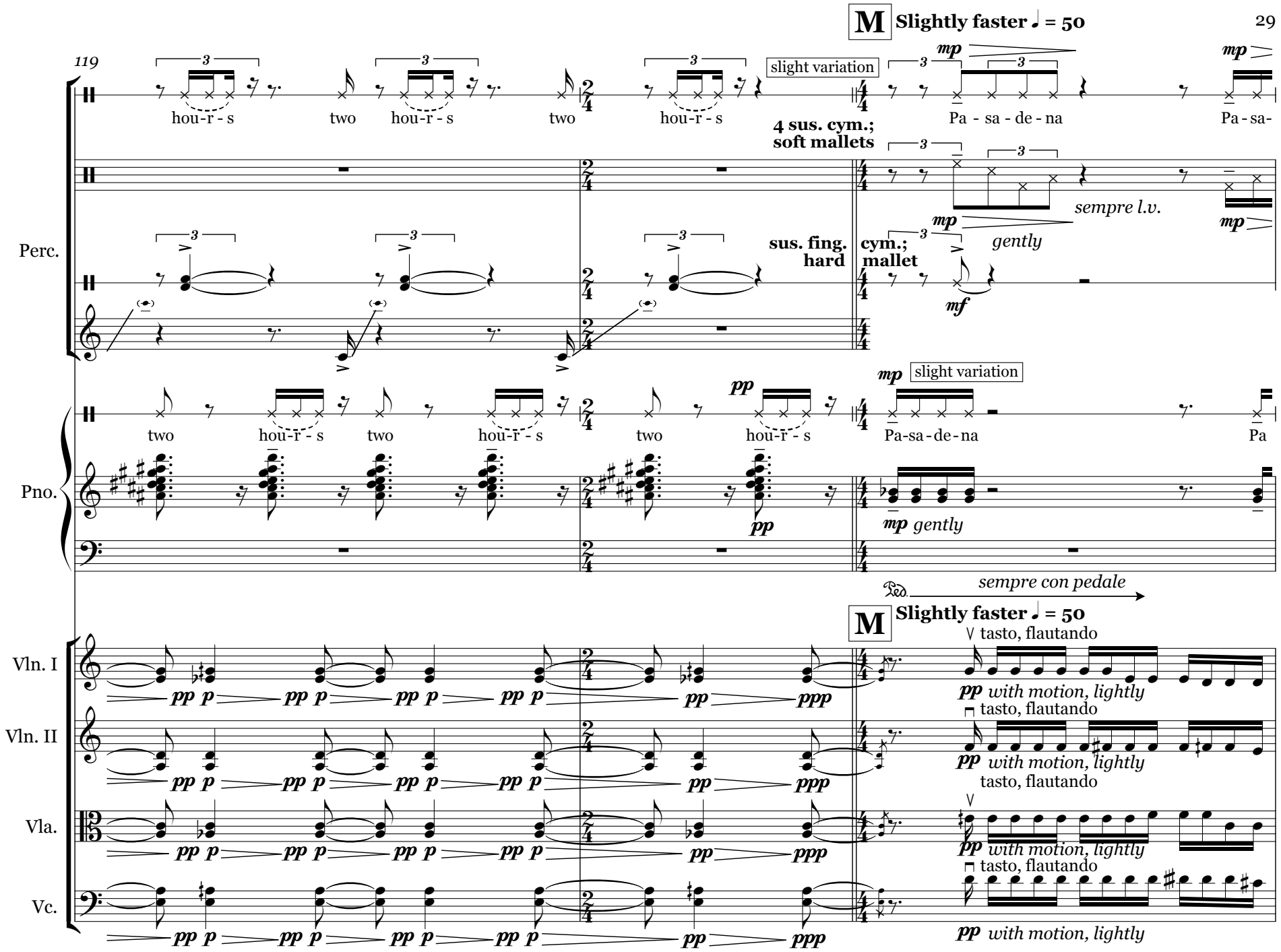

97
Perc.
my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head my head
head my head my head myhead my head my head myhead my head my head myhead my head my head my
Pno.
u.c.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

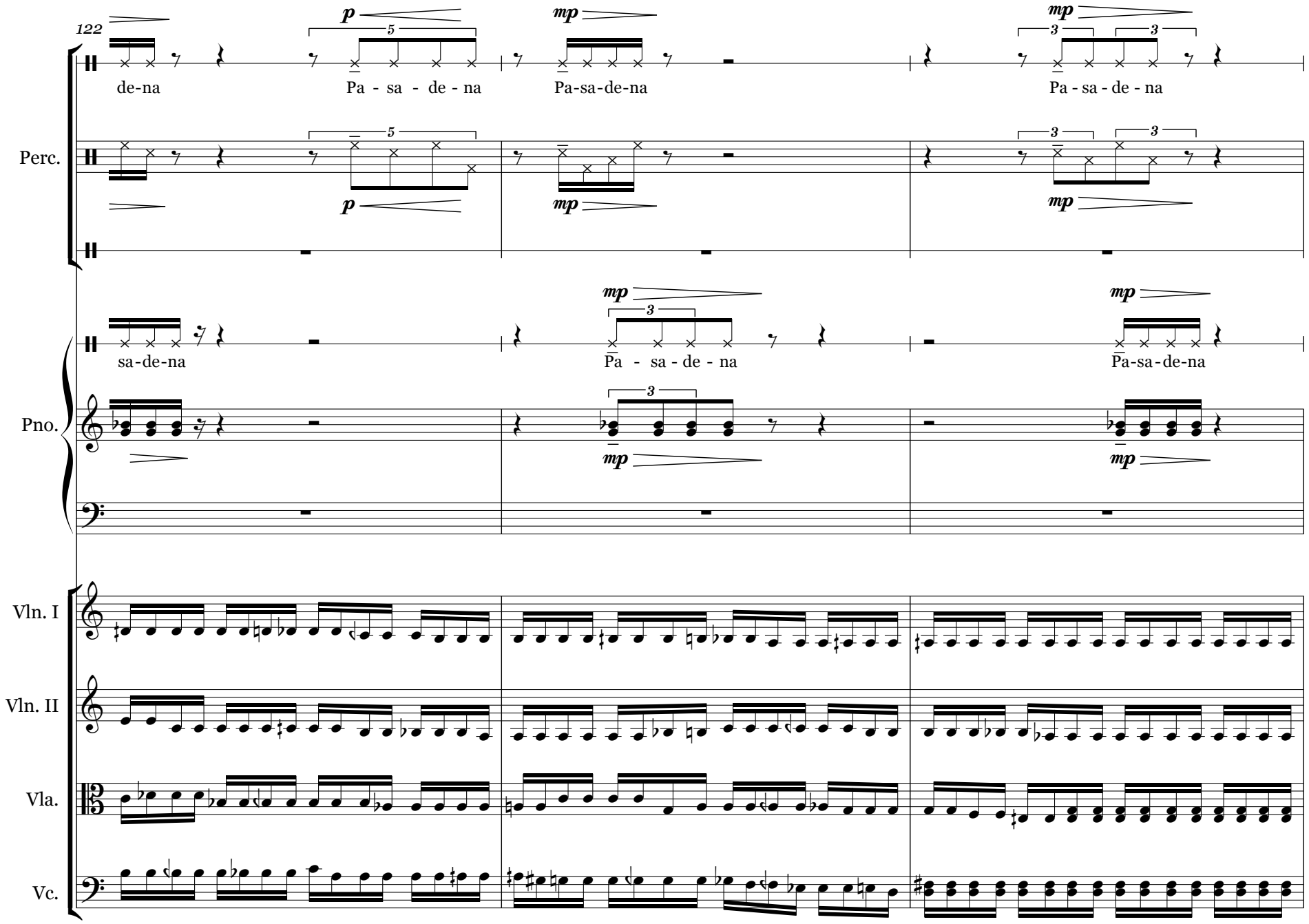

101
poco rit.
f
J
Slower ♩ = 56
ff
my head my head my head my hea-d
two
no variation
Perc.
china cym.
f
sffz still, tense
2 tri.
pp
mf
p
head my head my head my hea-d my hea-d
two hou-r-s
no variation
Pno.
u.c.
mf
p still, tense
pedale ad lib.
poco rit.
J
Slower ♩ = 56
arco
pitchless bowing; any string
Vln. I
pp wandering, distant
pitchless bowing;
any string
arco
Vln. II
pp wandering, distant
pitchless bowing;
any string
arco
Vla.
pp wandering, distant
pitchless bowing;
any string
arco
Vc.
pp wandering, distant

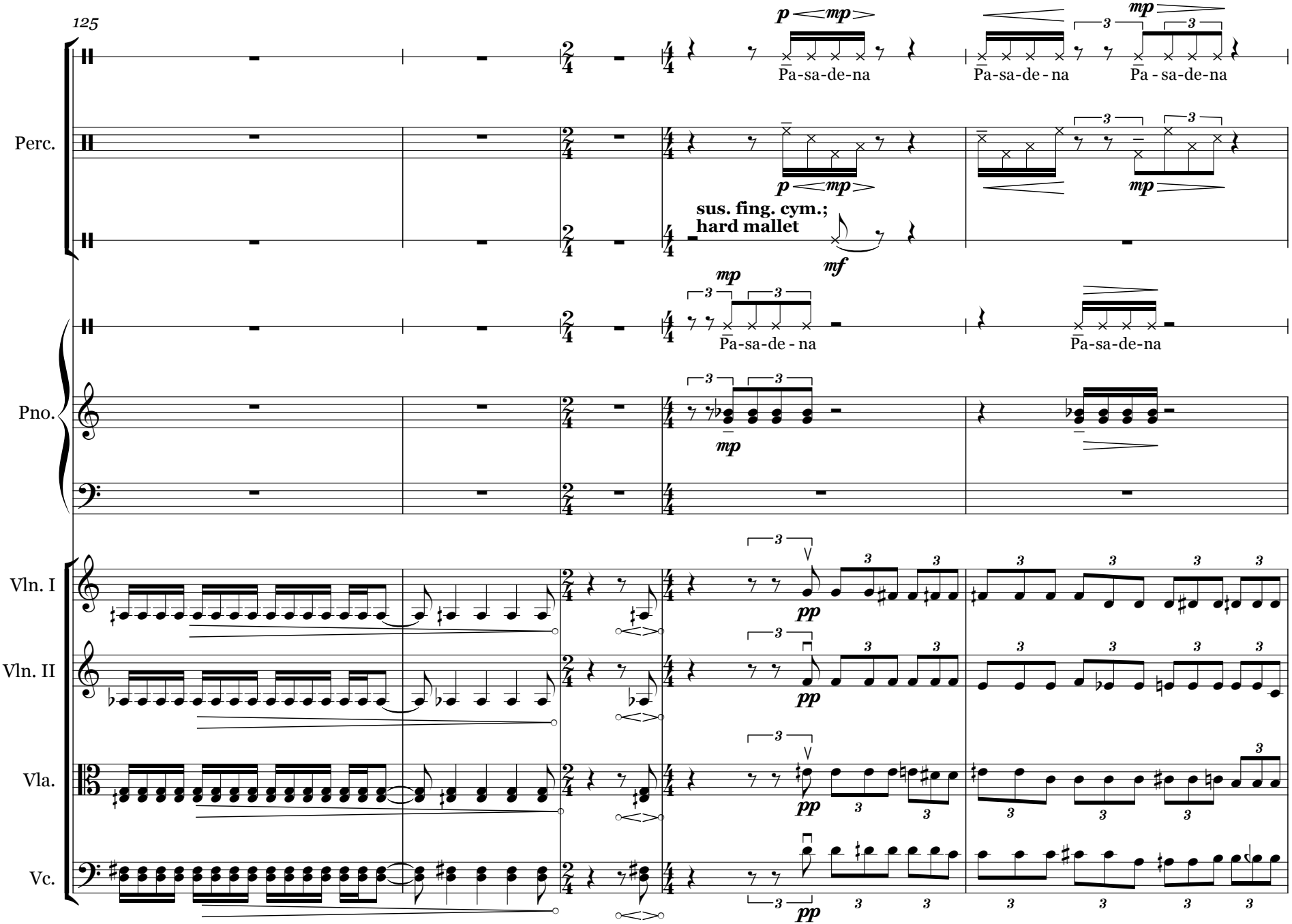

106
f
hou - r-s
ff
two
china cym.
Perc.
sffz
mp
f
mp
mf
f
3
two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r - s two hou-r-s two
Pno.
mp
mf
f
mp
mf
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

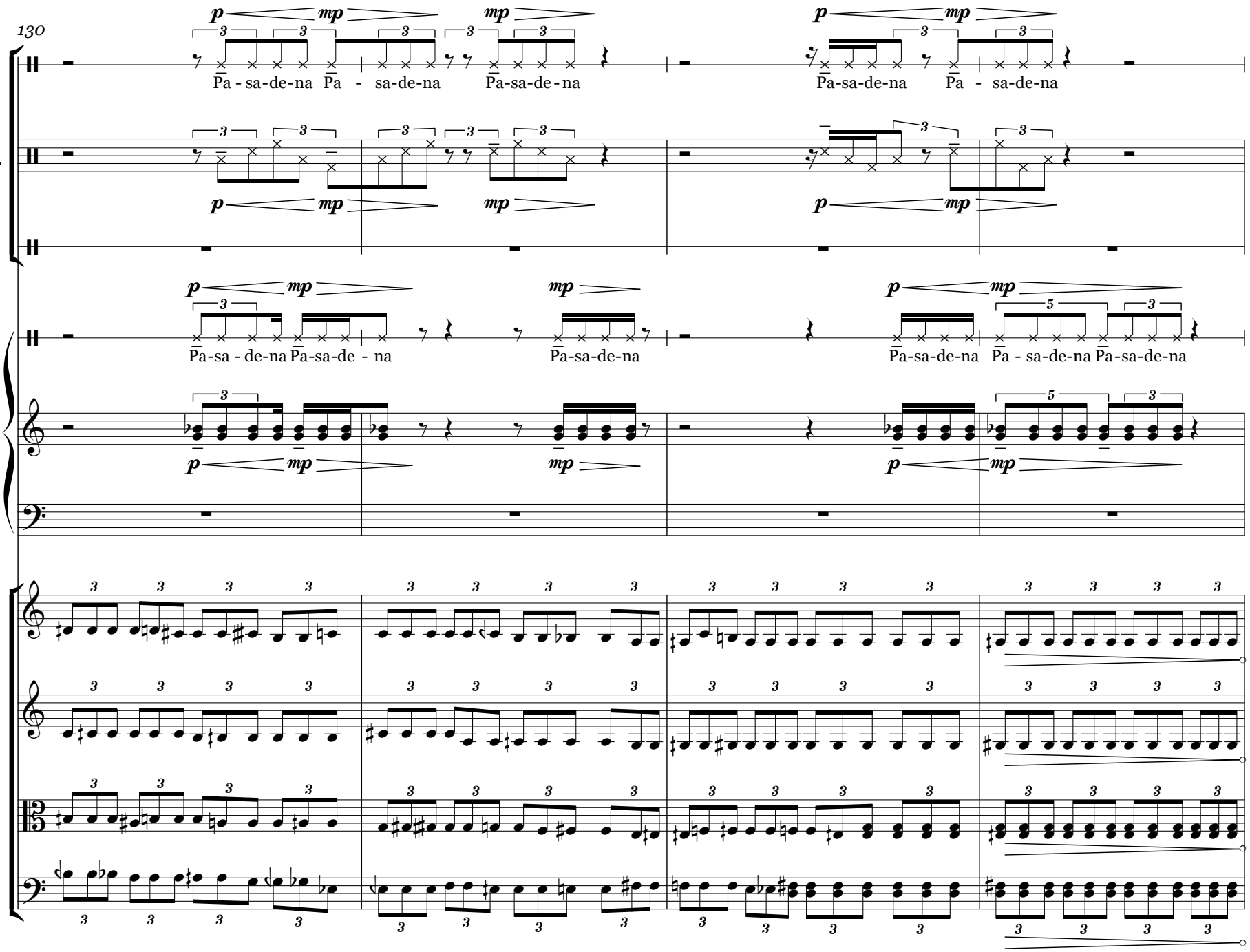

K Suddenly slower ♩ = 50
112
Perc.
hou-r-s
hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r - s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s
Pno.
solo
mf driving, unchanging
K Suddenly slower ♩ = 50
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
p still

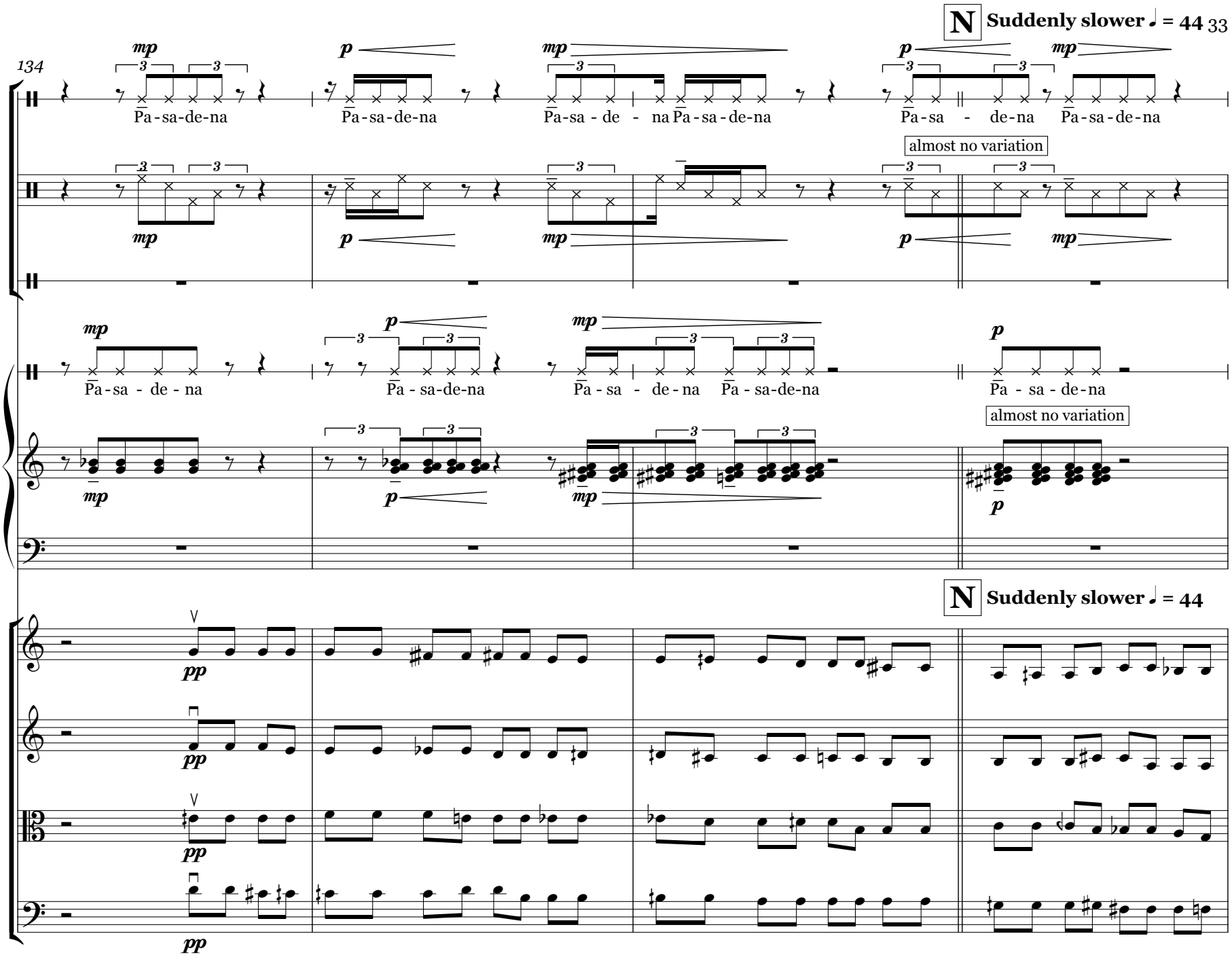

116
L
Suddenly slower ♩ = 44
Perc.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two
2 tri.
bell tree
with intensity
two hou-r-s two hou-rs two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s two hou-r-s
pont.
non dim.

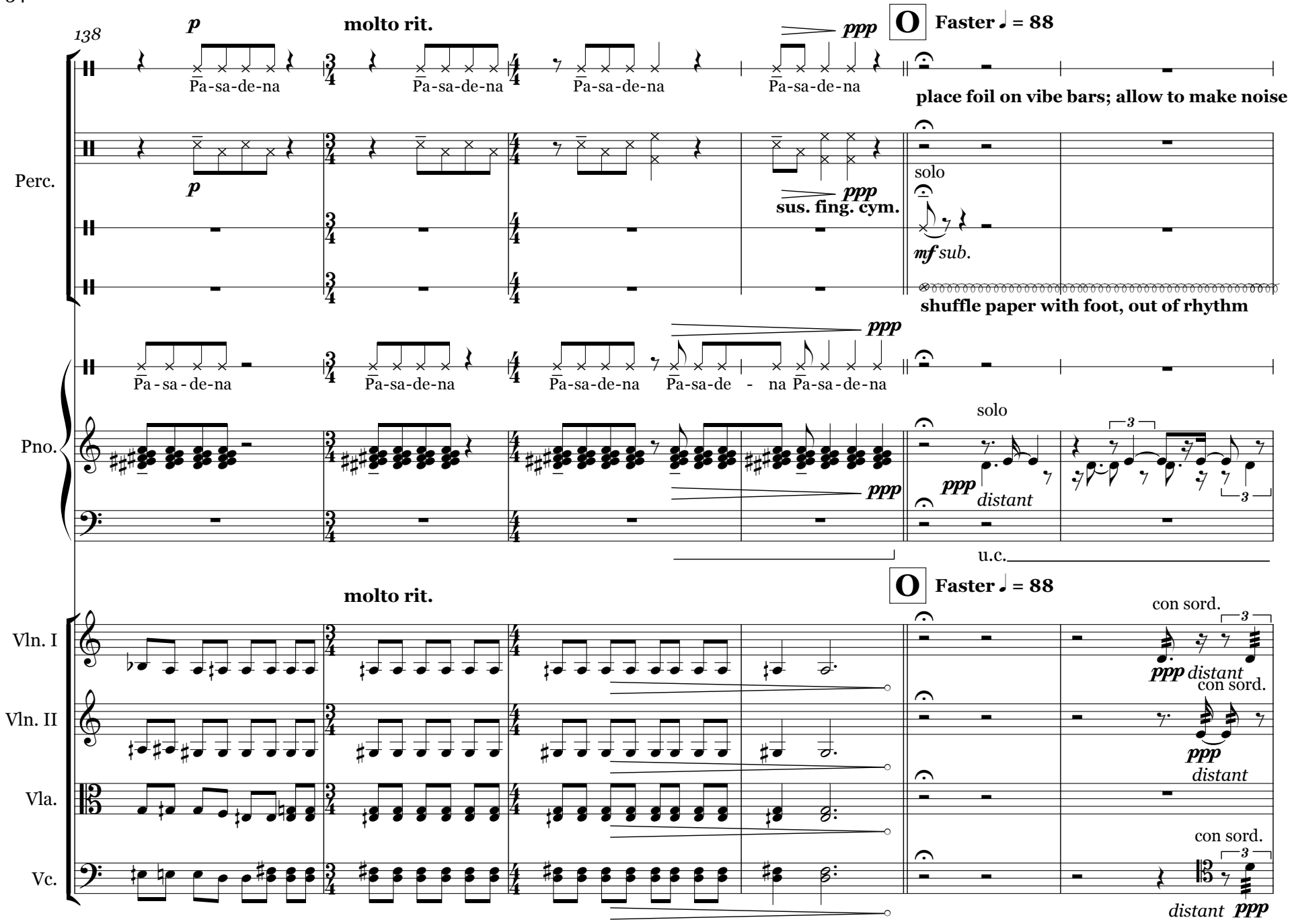

M Slightly faster ♩ = 50
119
slight variation
4 sus. cym.; soft mallets
sus. fing. hard
cym.; mallet
Perc.
hou-r - s
two
Pa - sa - de - na
Pa - sa-
sempre l.v.
gently
Pno.
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa
sempre con pedale
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
tasto, flautando
with motion, lightly

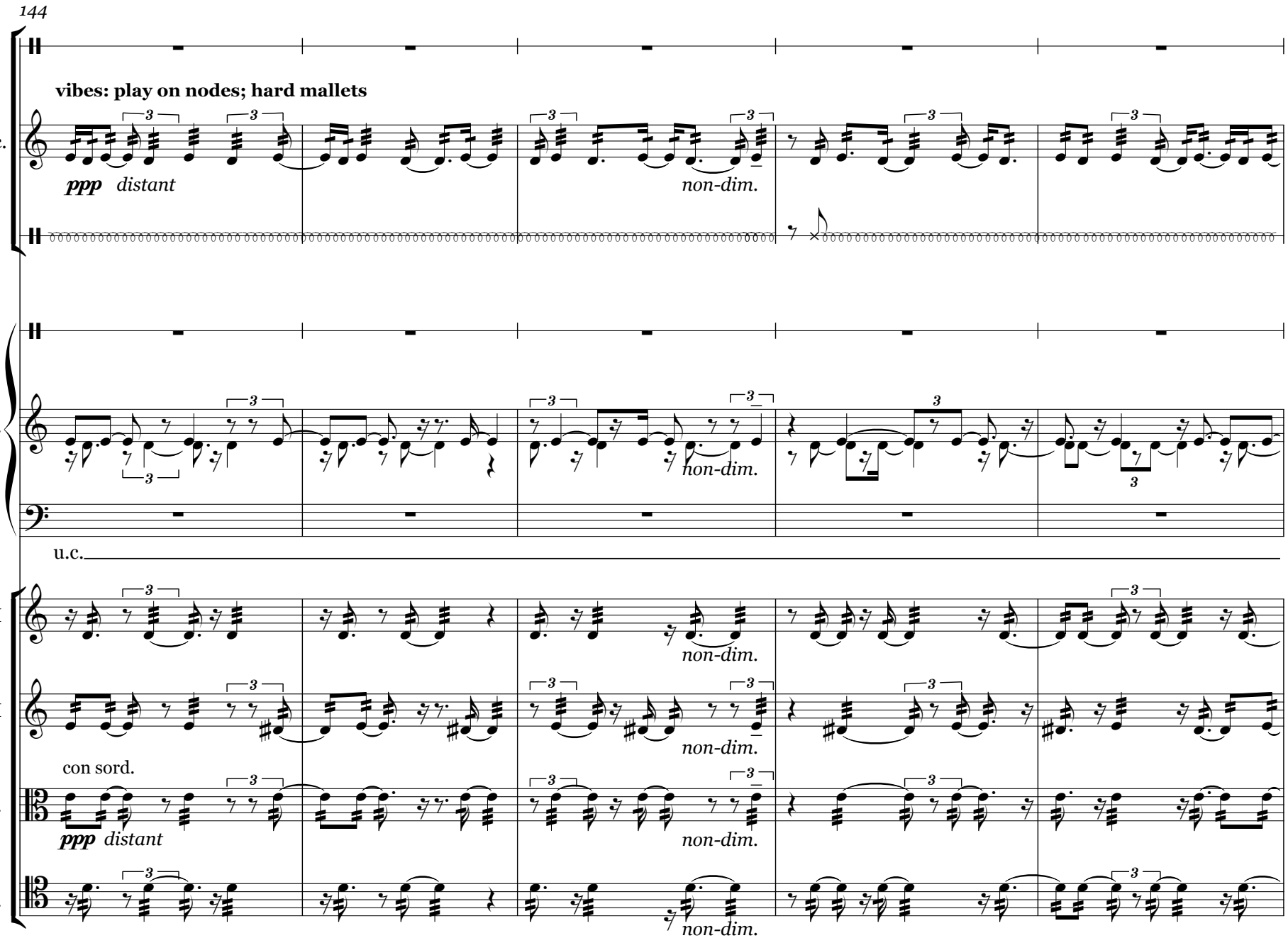

122
de-na
Pa - sa - de - na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa - sa - de - na
Perc.
sa-de-na
Pa - sa - de - na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.

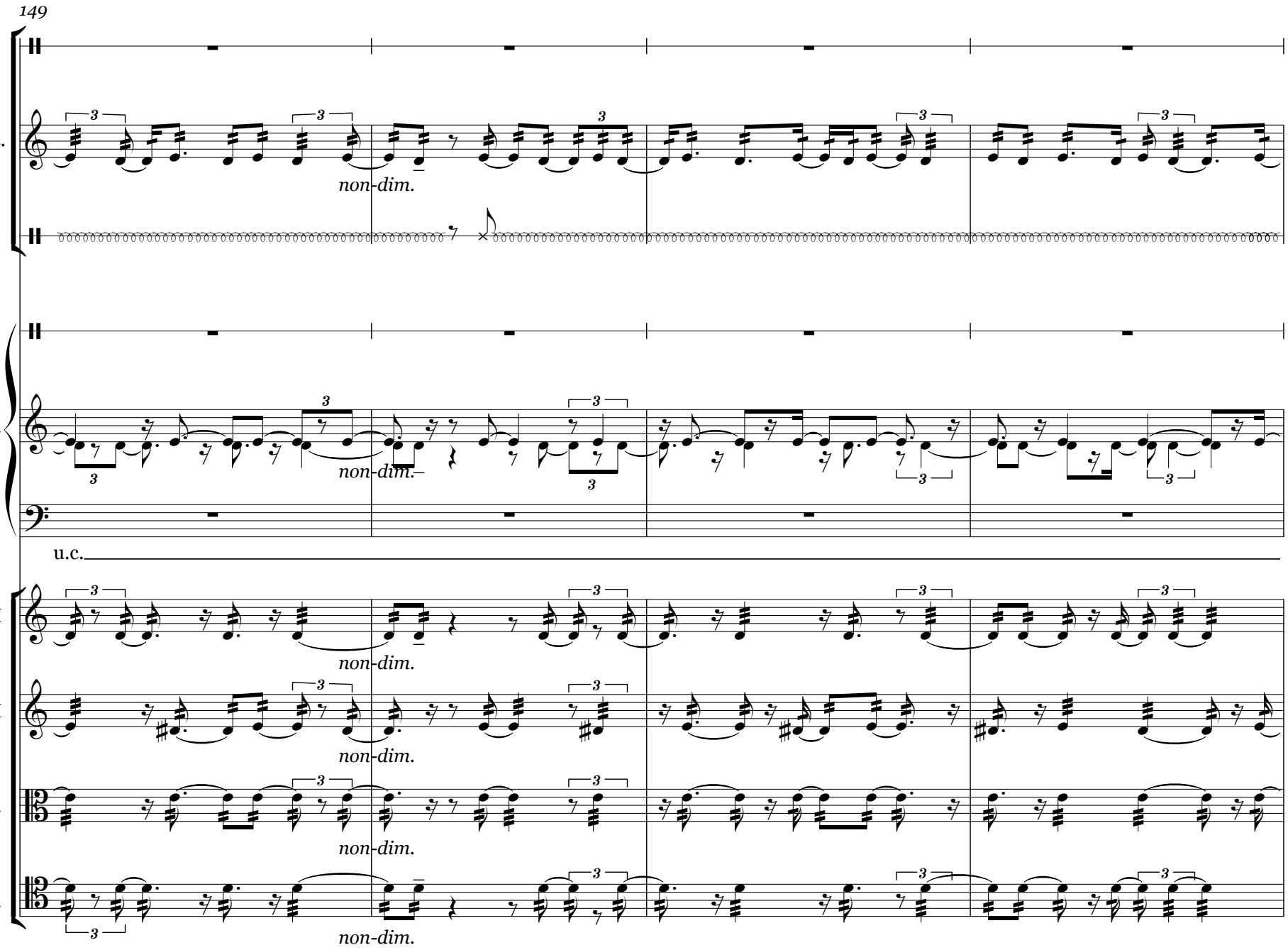

125
Perc.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
p mp
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de - na
Pa - sa-de-na
mp
sus. fing. cym.;
hard mallet
mf
pp

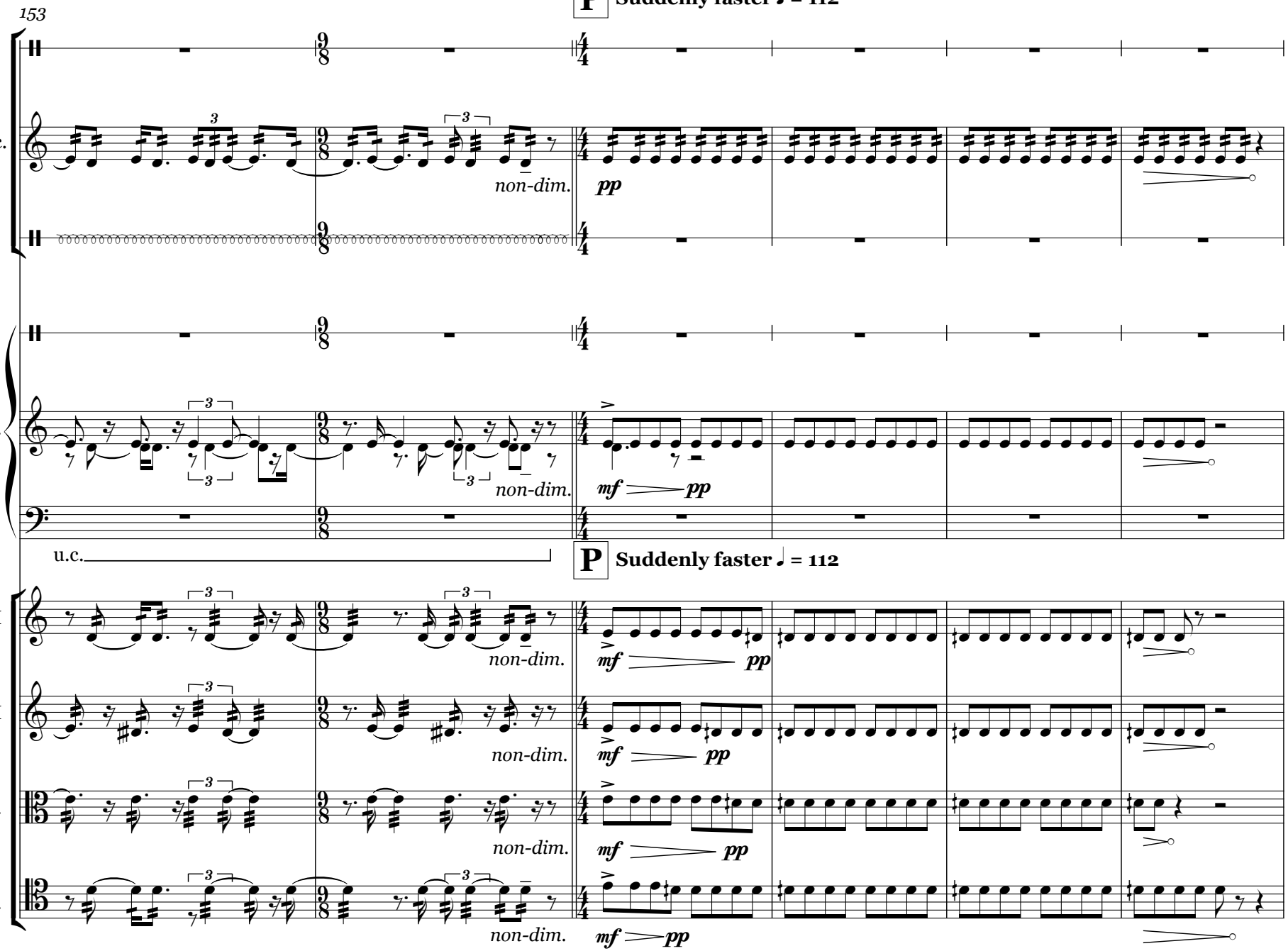

130
Perc.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Pa - sa-de-na Pa - sa-de-na Pa-sa-de - na
Pa-sa-de-na Pa - sa-de-na
Pa-sa - de-na Pa-sa-de - na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na Pa - sa-de-na Pa-sa-de-na

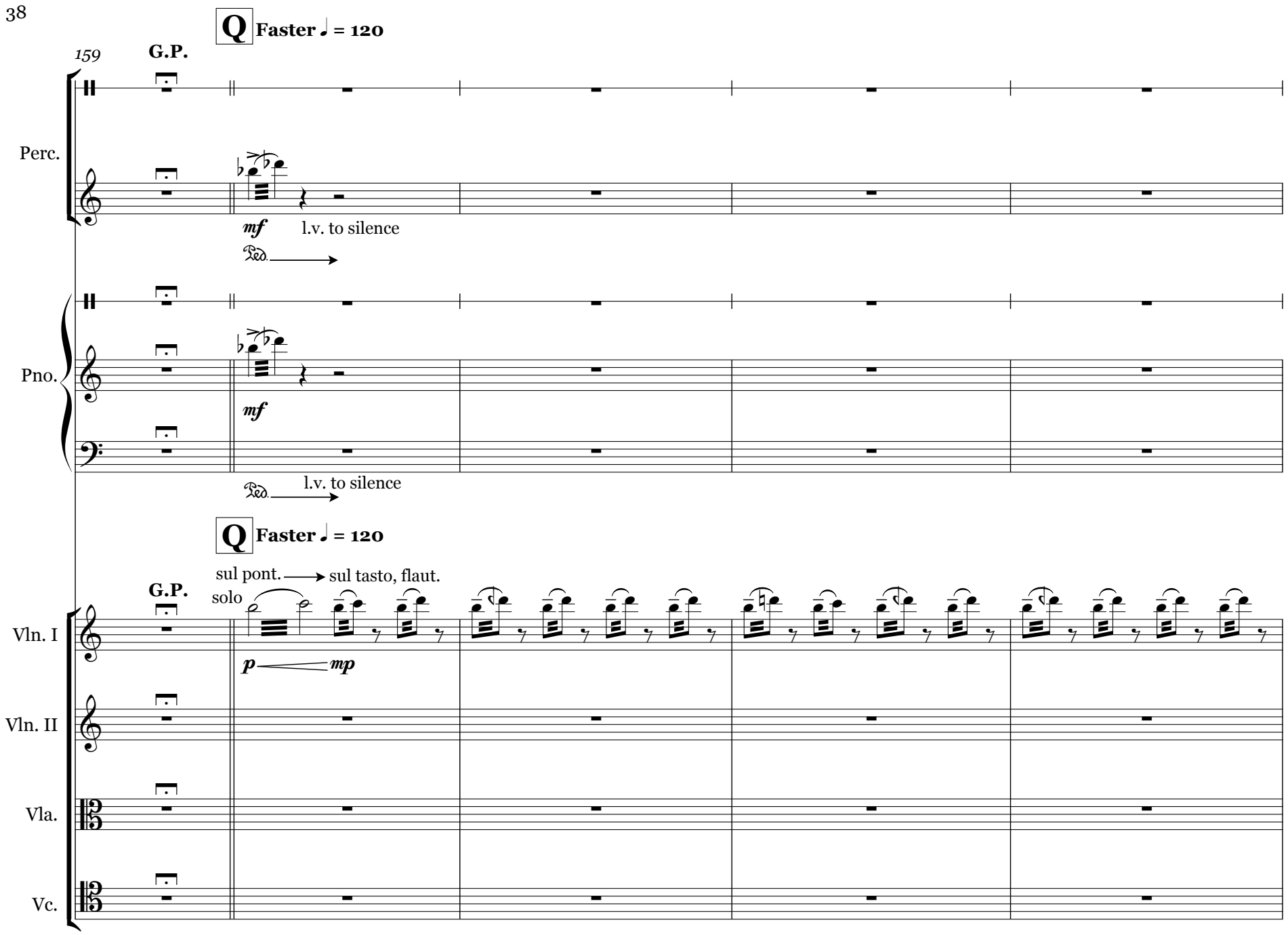

N Suddenly slower ♩ = 44
134
Perc.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
almost no variation
almost no variation
N Suddenly slower ♩ = 44

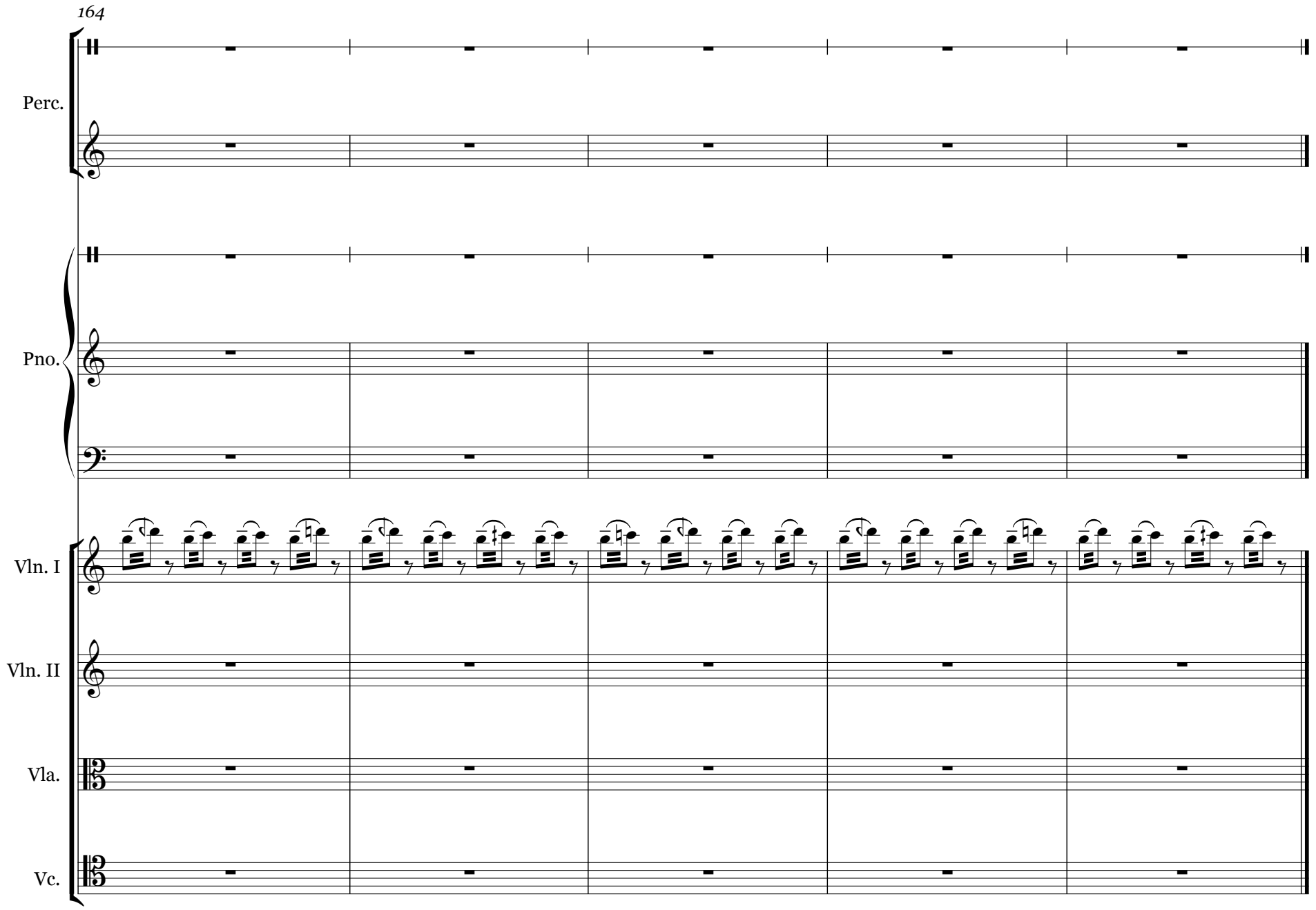

138
p
molto rit.
ppp
O
Faster ♩ = 88
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
place foil on vibe bars; allow to make noise
Perc.
p
ppp
sus. fing. cym.
solo
mf sub.
shuffle paper with foot, out of rhythm
ppp
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de-na
Pa-sa-de - na Pa-sa-de-na
Pno.
ppp
solo
ppp
distant
3
u.c.
molto rit.
O
Faster ♩ = 88
Vln. I
con sord.
ppp distant
Vln. II
con sord.
ppp
distant
Vla.
con sord.
Vc.
distant ppp


144
vibes: play on nodes; hard mallets
Perc.
ppp distant
non-dim.
Pno.
non-dim.
u.c.
Vln. I
non-dim.
Vln. II
non-dim.
con sord.
Vla.
ppp distant
non-dim.
Vc.
non-dim.


149
Perc.
non-dim.
Pno.
non-dim.
u.c.
Vln. I
non-dim.
Vln. II
non-dim.
Vla.
non-dim.
Vc.
non-dim.


153
P
Suddenly faster ♩ = 112
Perc.
non-dim.
pp
Pno.
mf
pp
u.c.
P
Suddenly faster ♩ = 112
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


Q Faster ♩ = 120
159
G.P.
Perc.
mf
l.v. to silence
Pno.
mf
l.v. to silence
Q Faster ♩ = 120
G.P.
sul pont.
sul tasto, flaut.
solo
Vln. I
p
mp
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.


164
Perc.
Pno.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.