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Snake Oil

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University of California

for Dave Hall and the UNL Percussion Ensemble

GREG SIMON (2019)

SNAKE OIL

for seven percussionists

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SNAKE OIL

INSTRUMENTATION

Percussion 1
Floor Tom
Vibraphone (Stage Left)
Concert Bass Drum (shared)
Marimba (shared)

Percussion 2
Mid Tom
Vibraphone (Stage Left)
3 Metal Mixing Bowls (shared - Perc. 3)
Water Cymbal (w/ Perc. 5)
Chekere
Police Whistle

Percussion 3
Swishknocker Block
Tuned Gongs (shared)
Trash Cymbal Stack
Brake Drum
Kick Drum
Mark Tree
3 Metal Mixing Bowls (shared - Perc. 2)

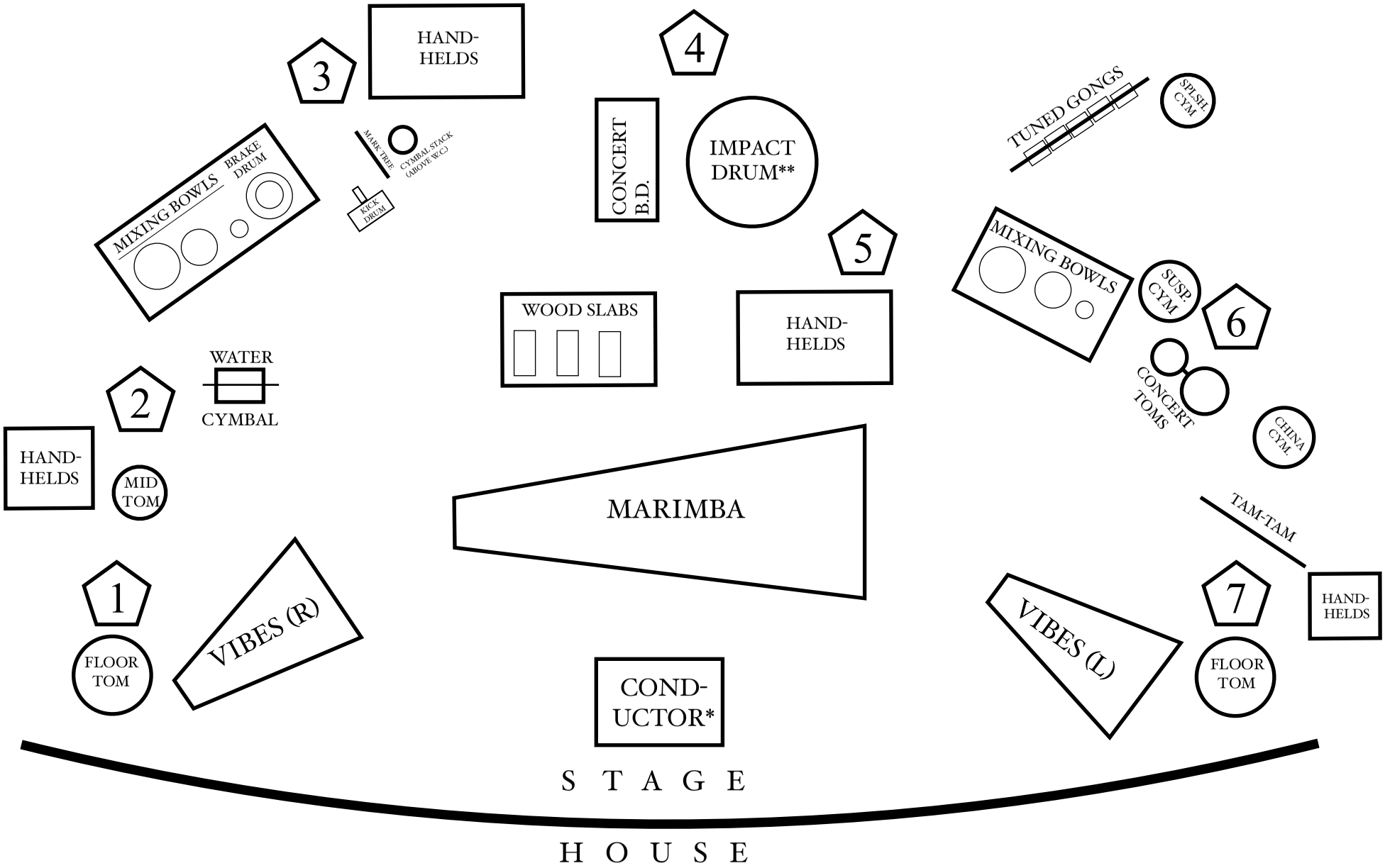
Percussion 4
Impact Drum
Concert Bass Drum (shared)
Marimba (shared)
3 Wood Slabs

Percussion 5
Swishknocker Block
3 Metal Mixing Bowls
Suspended Cymbal
2 Concert Toms (shared)

Percussion 6
2 Concert Toms (shared)
Vibraphone (Stage Right)
China Cymbal
Marimba (shared)
Tuned Gongs (shared)
Splash Cymbal

Percussion 7
Floor Tom
Vibraphone (Stage Right)
Tam-tam
Large Shaker

SUGGESTED STAGE LAYOUT



**If no impact drum is available, use the Concert Bass Drum tilted on its side for the entire piece.

Numbers indicate starting positions for each performer.
*Use of a conductor is optional.

SNAKE OIL

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The metal mixing bowls in Percussion 3 and 5 should sound metallic and cutting, but with distinct pitches. The premiere performance used rubber-bottom bowls struck with rubber mallets.

A wide variety of toms should be used, with a broad range of pitches represented.

The shout-singing beginning at mm. 188 sounds 8vb from written. The entire ensemble should sing in unison. The objective isn't to sound like "trained singers," but to create the feeling of a crazed, taunting dance ritual.

The scream in Percussion 2, mm. 230, should be shrill and terrifying, like something from a horror movie. Either a male or female voice is acceptable as long as it cuts through the ensemble. If no member of the group has the right voice, a loud, piercing police whistle may be used instead.

PROGRAM NOTES

Since as early as the 1700s, "snake oil" had been sold as a cure-all or panacea for all sorts of conditions, ranging from the nuisance to the life-threatening. Almost invariably, the oils being sold were essentially solutions of herbs like camphor, useful for only a few minor conditions and often harmful for those battling others. Following consumer protection laws passed in the early 20th century, snake oil fell out of favor; but the use of medicine to prey on our fears of disease, aging, and weakness was not going anywhere.

During the time I was working on this piece, revelations began coming on a daily basis about the opioid crisis and the role of pharmaceutical companies in proliferating drugs that are addictive and lethal, often when those companies were fully aware of the risk. This is hardly an isolated example of modern medicine being used as a weapon, of course; the cases of Martin Shkreli and Novo Nordisk's insulin prices are still fresh in memory, too. I was thinking about this predatory side of the medical world when I began writing a piece for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's percussion ensemble, directed by my great friend and colleague Dave Hall, to take to their second consecutive performance at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention (PASIC) 2019. The use of drums as a healing instrument transcends culture, and after some conversations with Dave about his ensemble, I became obsessed with the idea of "a healing dance that doesn't work:" heavy grooves and prayer-like chorales that get more and more desperate, until finally — maliciously — the healing dance is revealed as a fraud.

The working title of this piece was *Abrakadabra,* after a Roman ritual to fight malaria. When several people convinced me that title would have too many "magical" connotations, it was a short journey to find another concept that conveyed a similar story, one of a cure offered by a greedy entity but which does nothing as the disease continues to ravage. Thus, the piece became *Snake Oil.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Snake Oil is a composition written by a community. Dave Hall, associate professor of percussion at UNL and my close friend and collaborator, was the impulse behind the project and an invaluable guide in defining its focus and direction. Louis Raymond-Kolker, an MM student in percussion and composition, took it upon himself to spruce up early drafts of the marimba parts and make the music more percussionist-friendly; he also became the informal "quarterback" of the premiering ensemble. The UNL Percussion Ensemble members who premiered the piece in Fall 2019 were fearless in their tackling of this piece, with all its challenges, theatrics, and problems in need of solutions. Over six weeks of rehearsal the piece evolved into something bigger and more special than I'd thought possible from a 7-minute percussion work, all because of these musicians' relentless drive to make it shine. Adam Arslan, Ryan Kimball, Anthony McIntosh, Jonah Payne, Louis Raymond-Kolker, Colton Reddoch, Conner Viets, and Alex Richard (whose scream was an amazing last-minute addition to the music): you're awesome. Thanks.

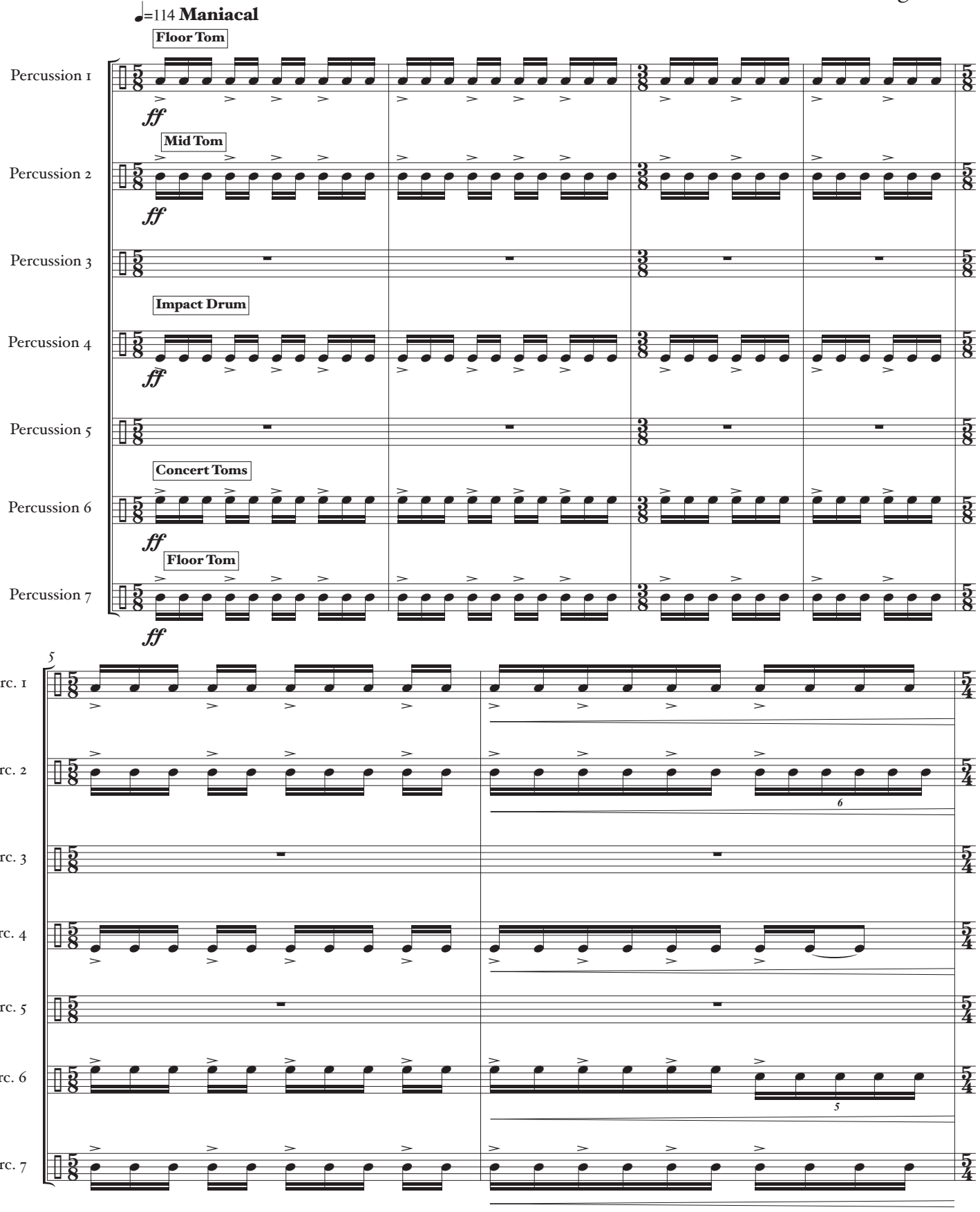
Score

Dedicated to Dave Hall and Louis Raymond-Kolker

SNAKE OIL

for seven percussionists

Greg Simon



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SNAKE OIL

7

Perc. 1: to Vibraphone L (white-key side)

Perc. 2: to Vibraphone L (black-key side)

Perc. 3: **Swishknocker Block** Sticks — *mp* *whispering*

Perc. 4: (on shell) — *mf*

Perc. 5: **Bass Drum** — *sub.* ***p*** — **Swishknocker Block** Sticks — ***mp*** *whispering*

Perc. 6: to Vibraphone R (white-key side)

Perc. 7: to Vibraphone R (black-key side)

11

Perc. 1: **Vibraphone L** Bowed — ***pp*** *ghostly*

Perc. 2: **Vibraphone L** Bowed — ***pp*** *ghostly*

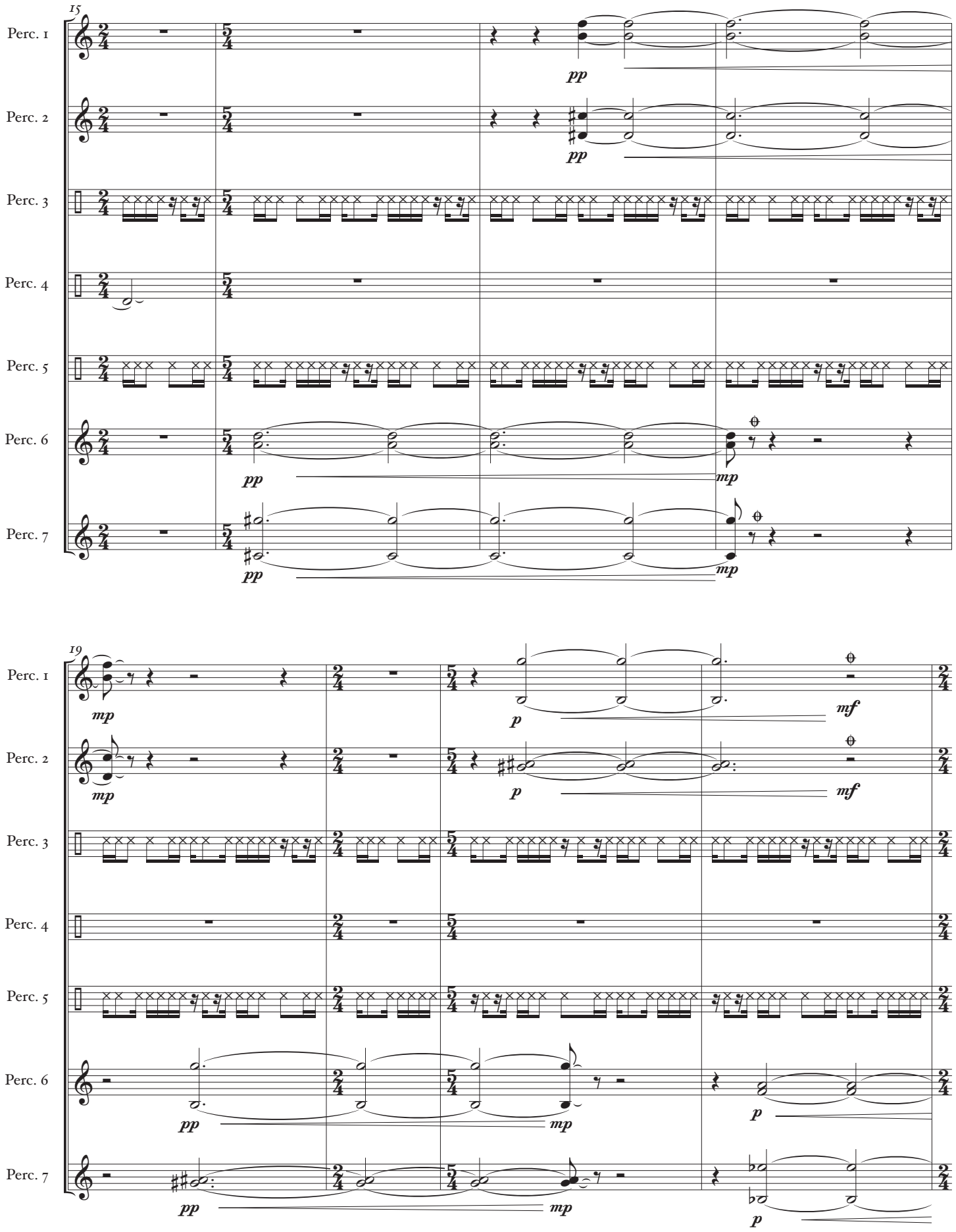
Perc. 3

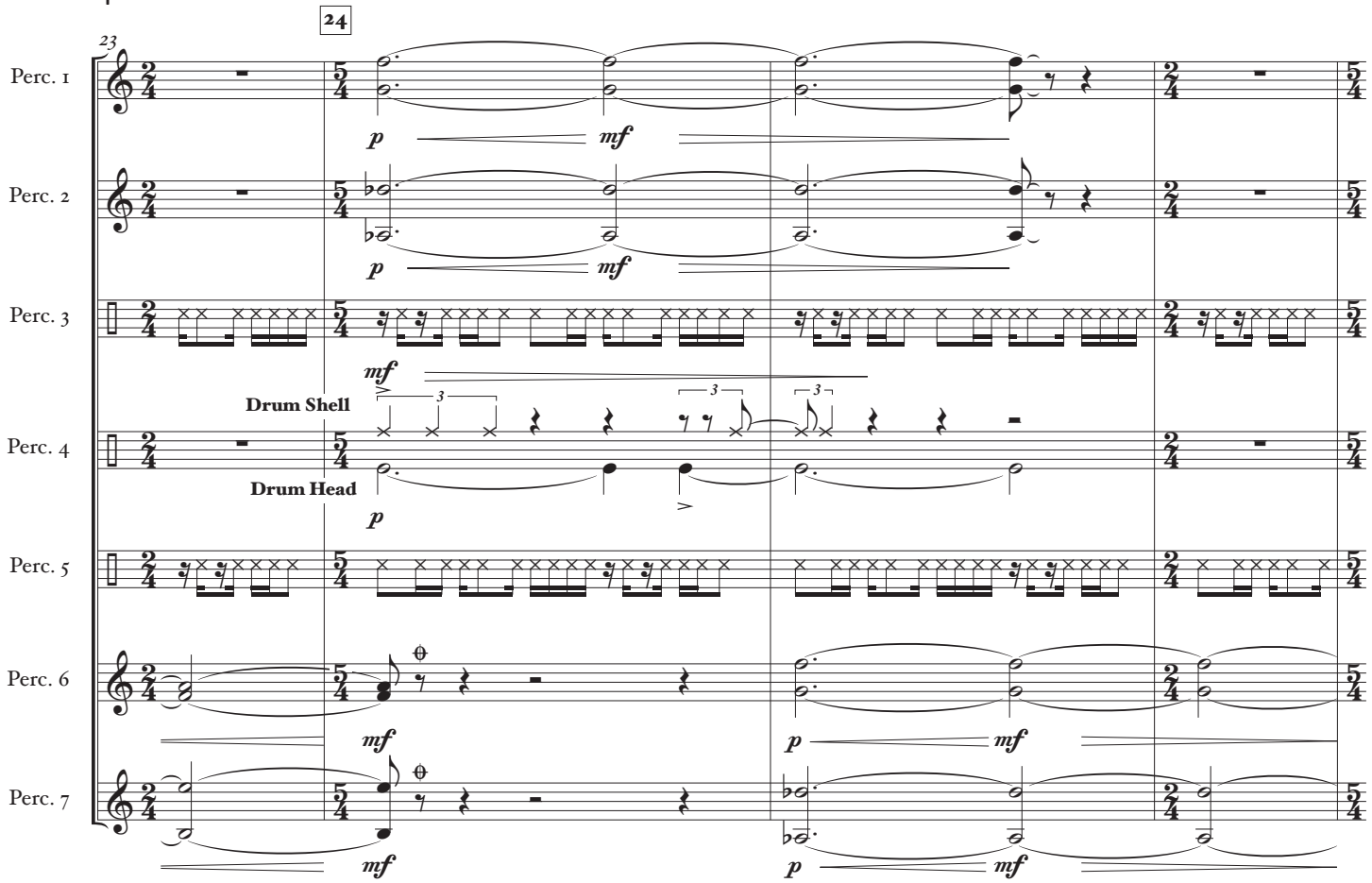
Perc. 4 — ***p***

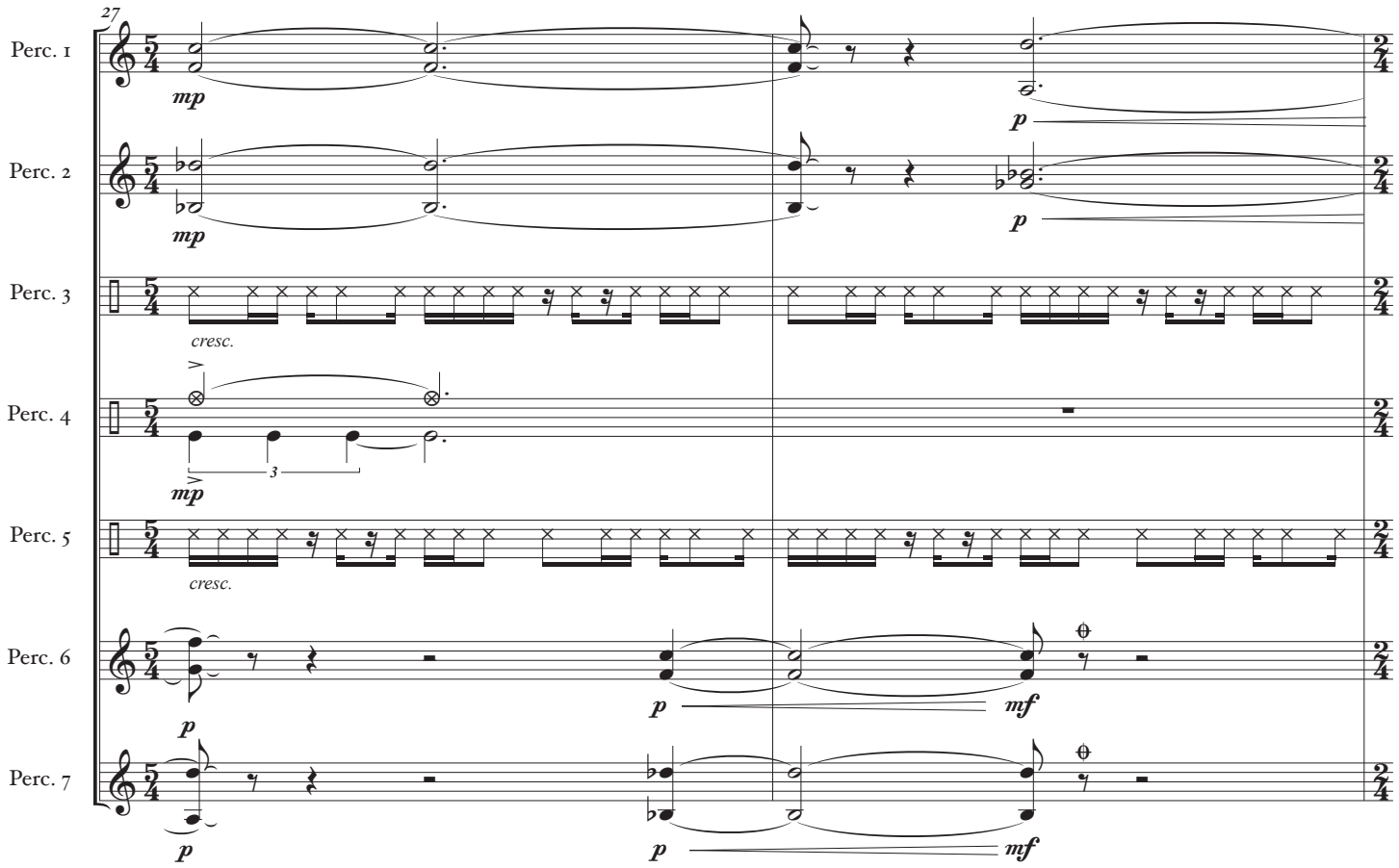
Perc. 5

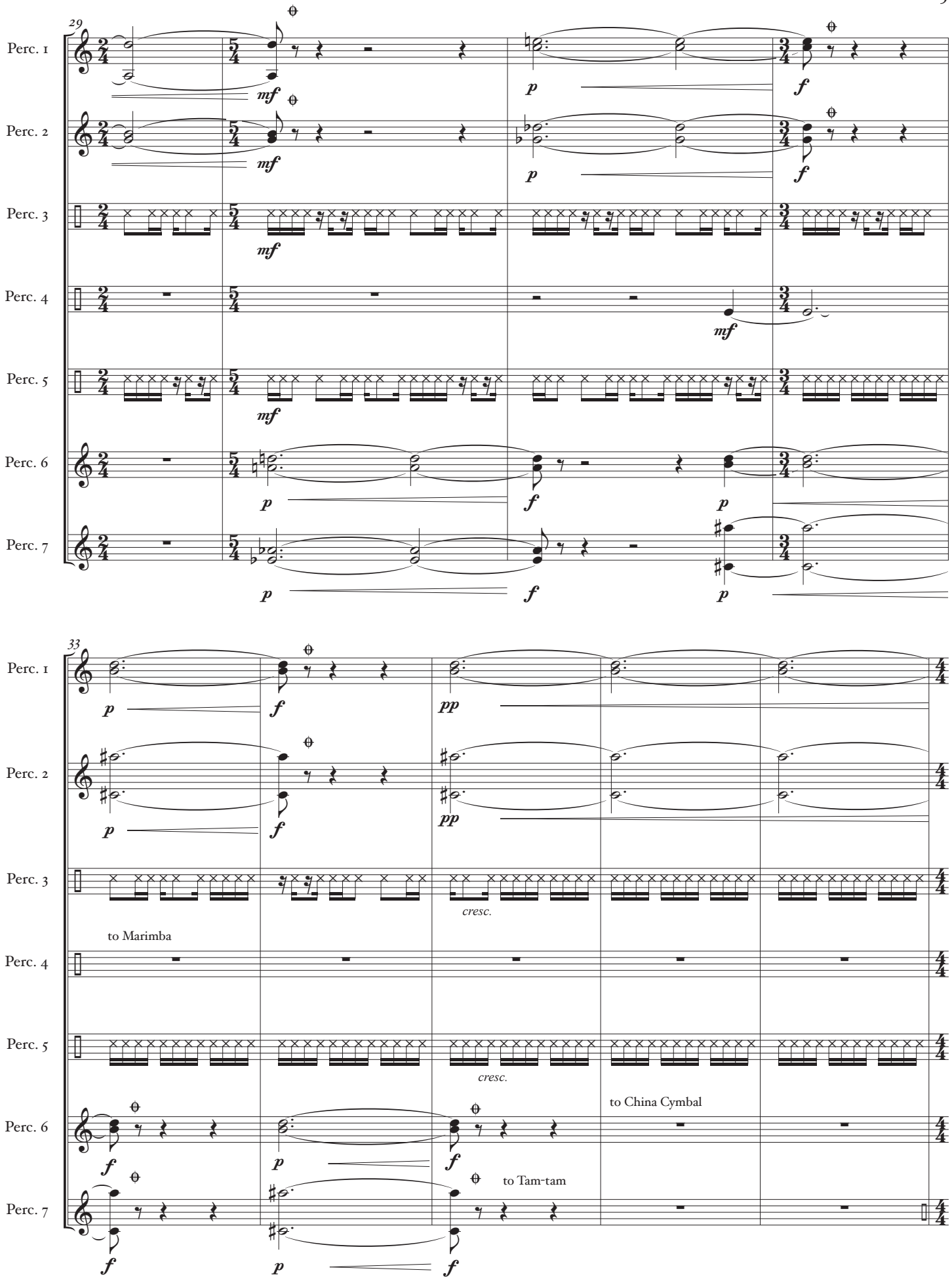
Perc. 6: **Vibraphone R** Bowed — ***p*** *ghostly*

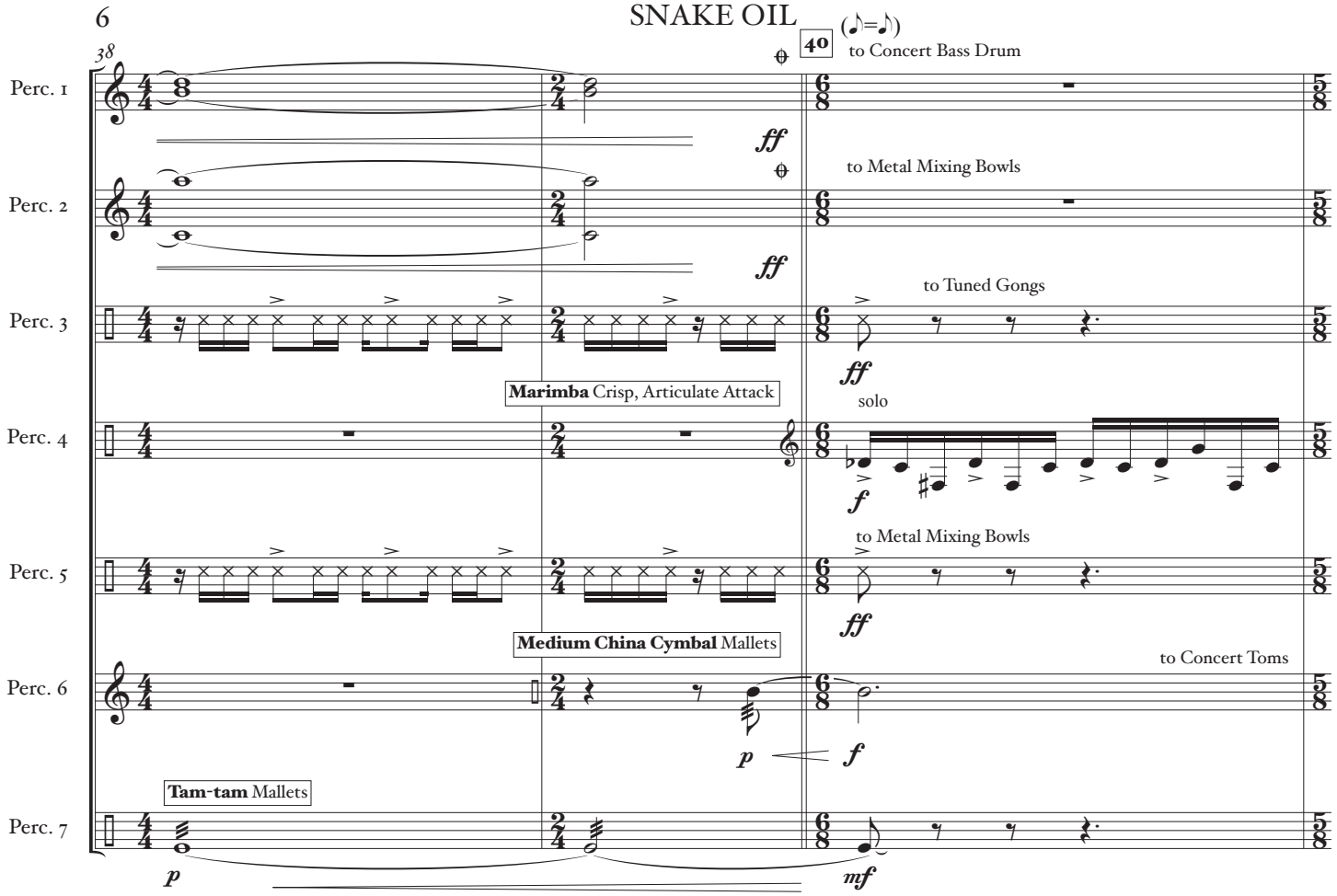
Perc. 7: **Vibraphone R** Bowed — ***p*** *ghostly*

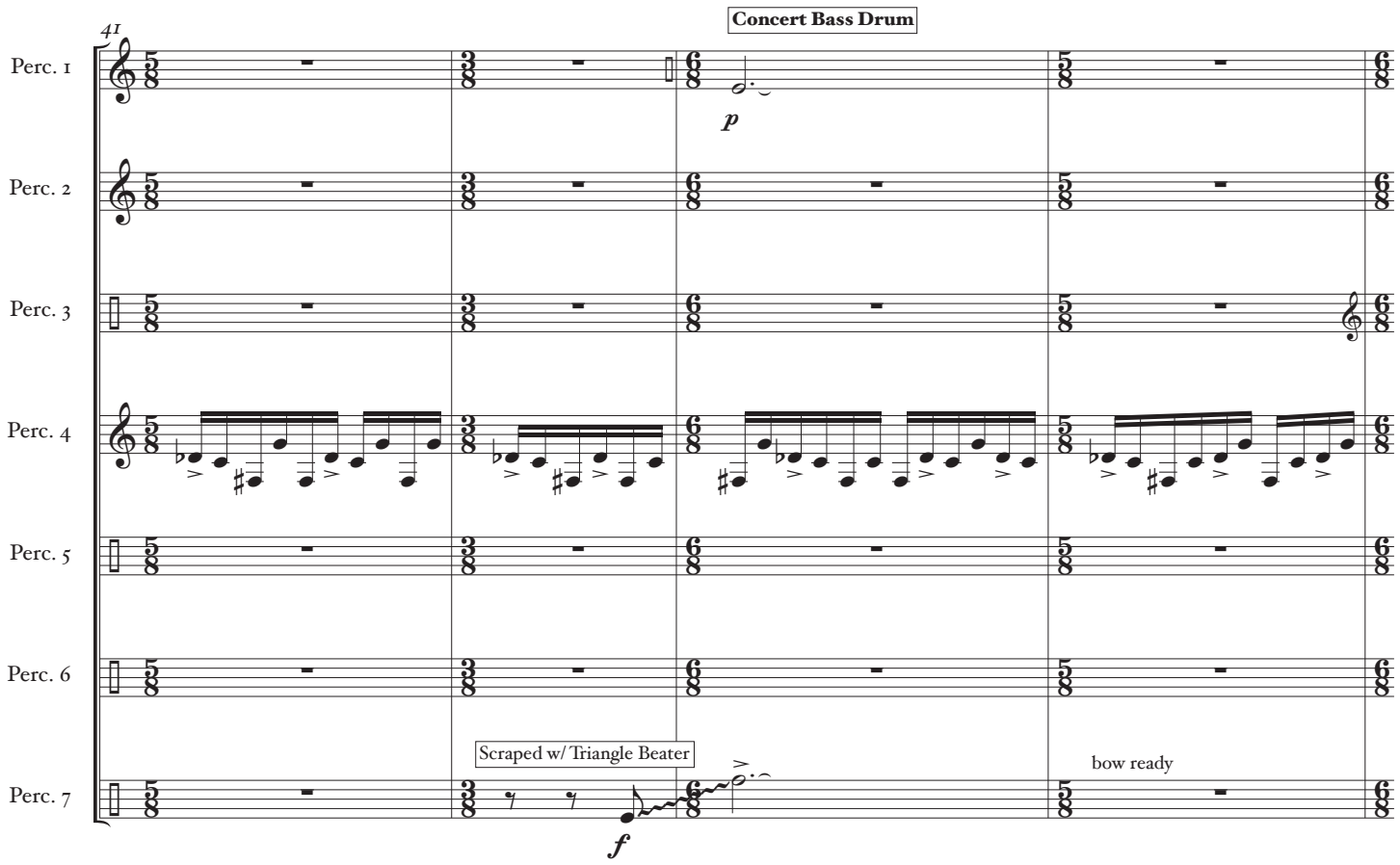

15
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
pp
mp
19
p
mf

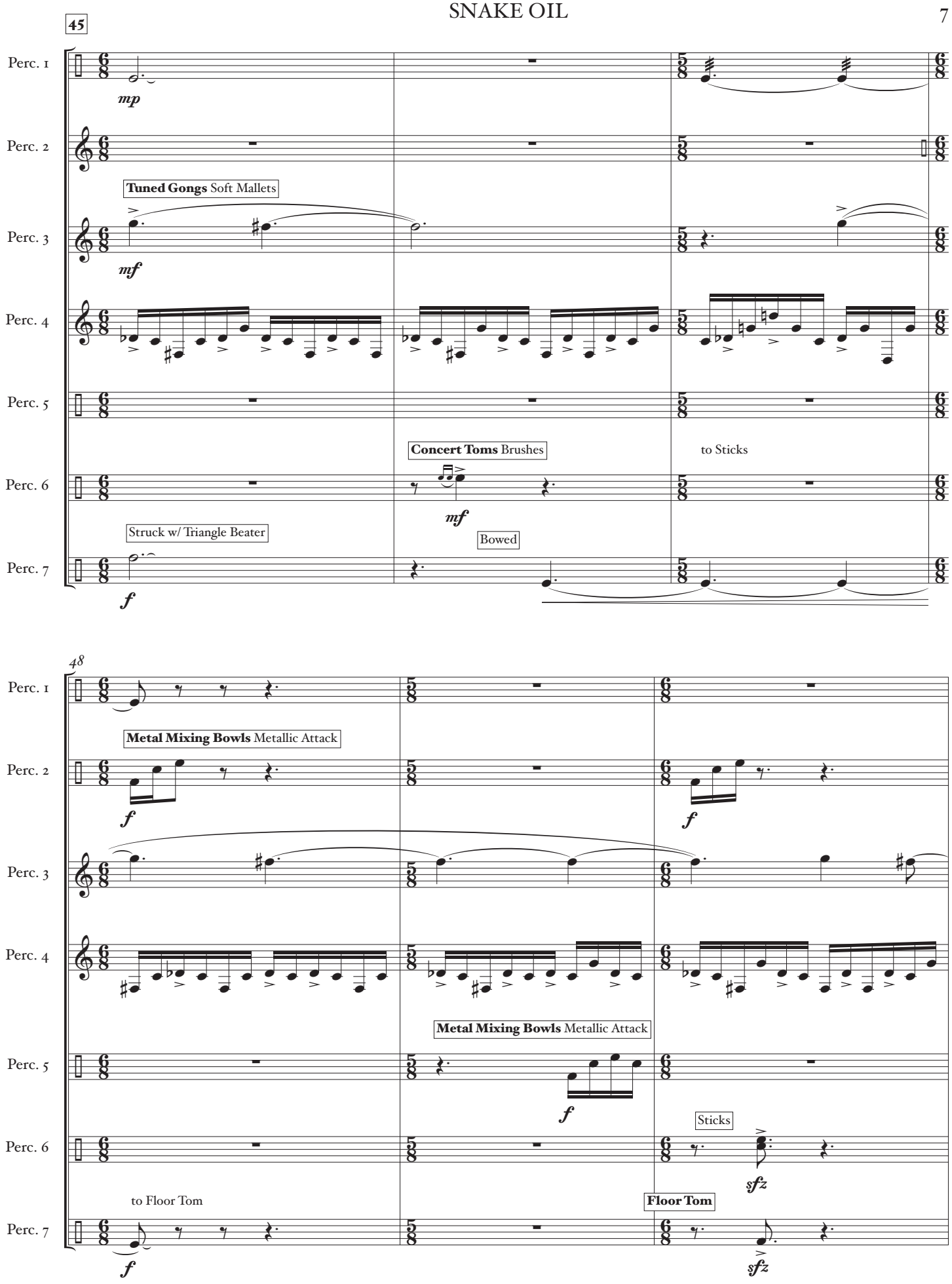

24
23
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
mf
Drum Shell
Drum Head
3

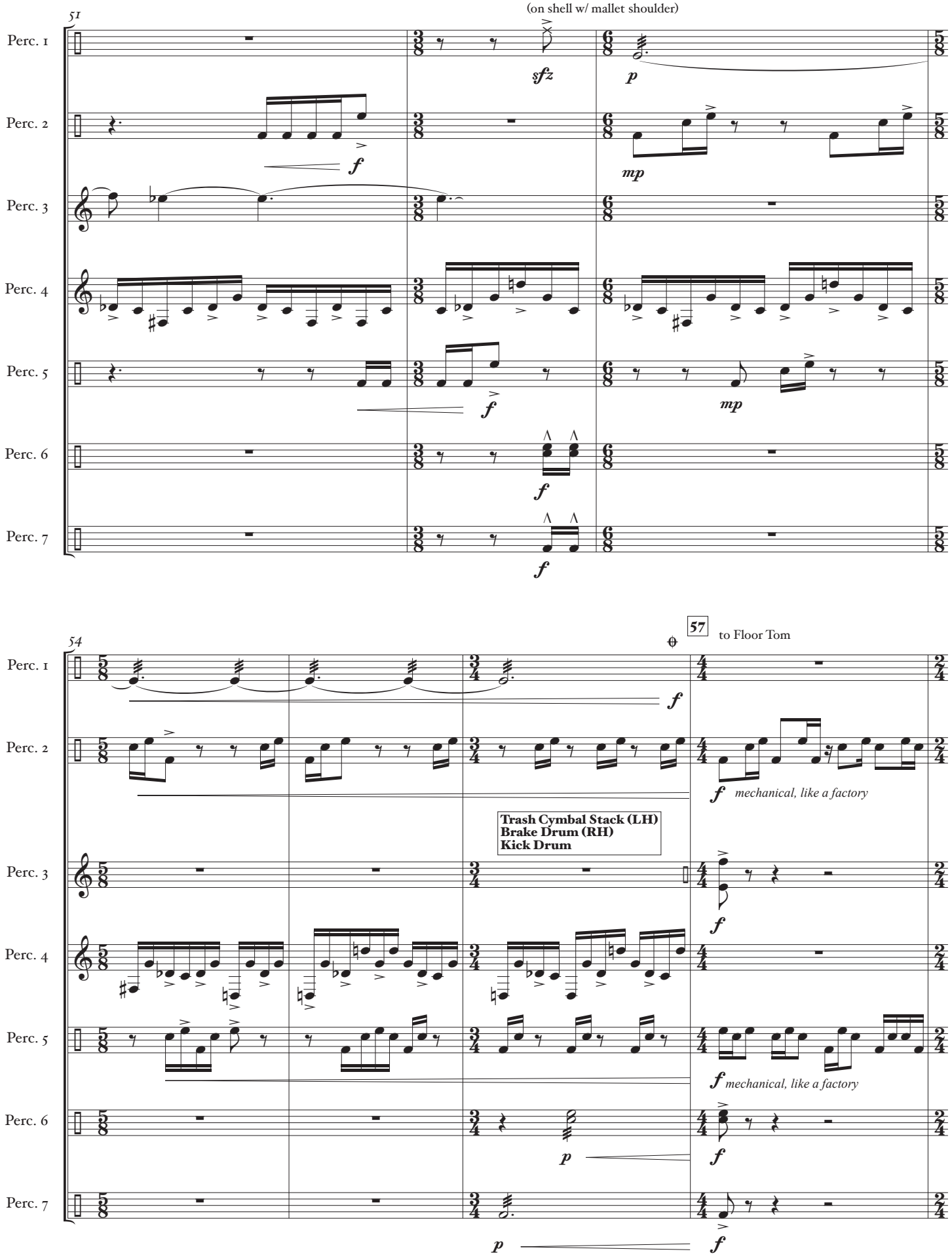

27
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mp
p
mf
cresc.
3

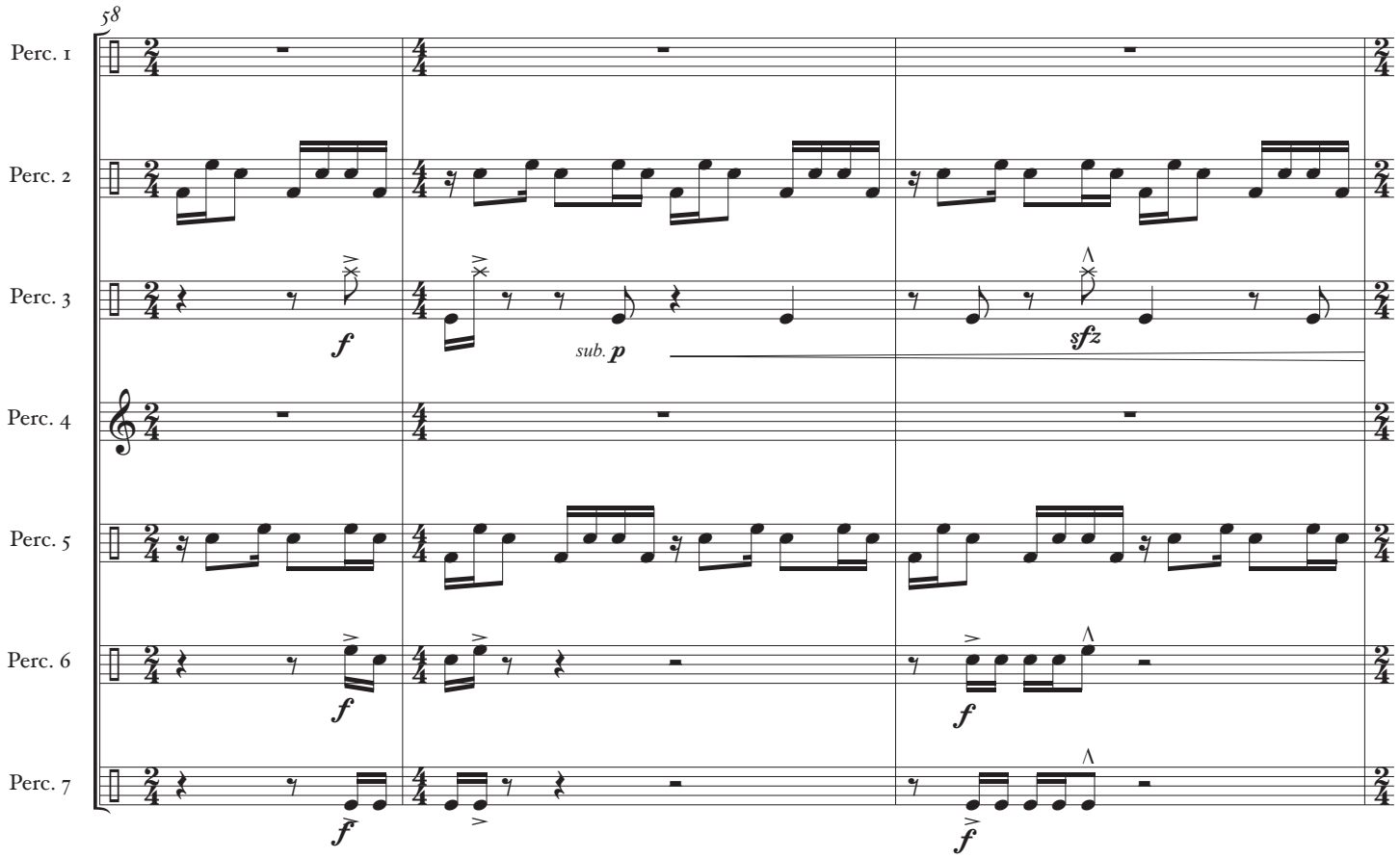

29
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
33
cresc.
to Marimba
cresc.
to China Cymbal
to Tam-tam

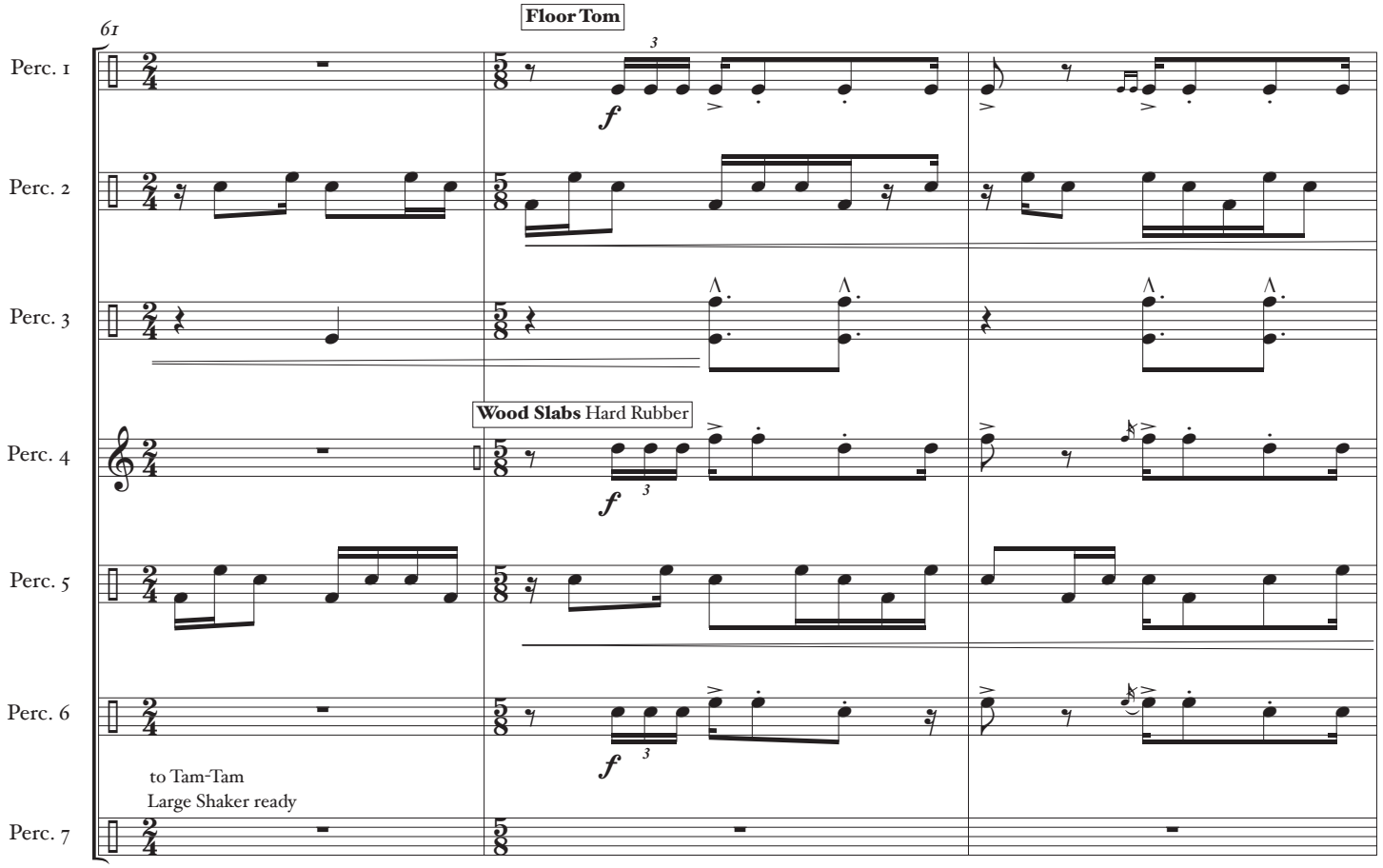

38
40
(♪=♪)
to Concert Bass Drum
Perc. 1
ff
to Metal Mixing Bowls
Perc. 2
ff
to Tuned Gongs
Perc. 3
ff
Marimba Crisp, Articulate Attack
solo
Perc. 4
f
to Metal Mixing Bowls
Perc. 5
ff
Medium China Cymbal Mallets
to Concert Toms
Perc. 6
p
f
Tam-tam Mallets
Perc. 7
p
mf

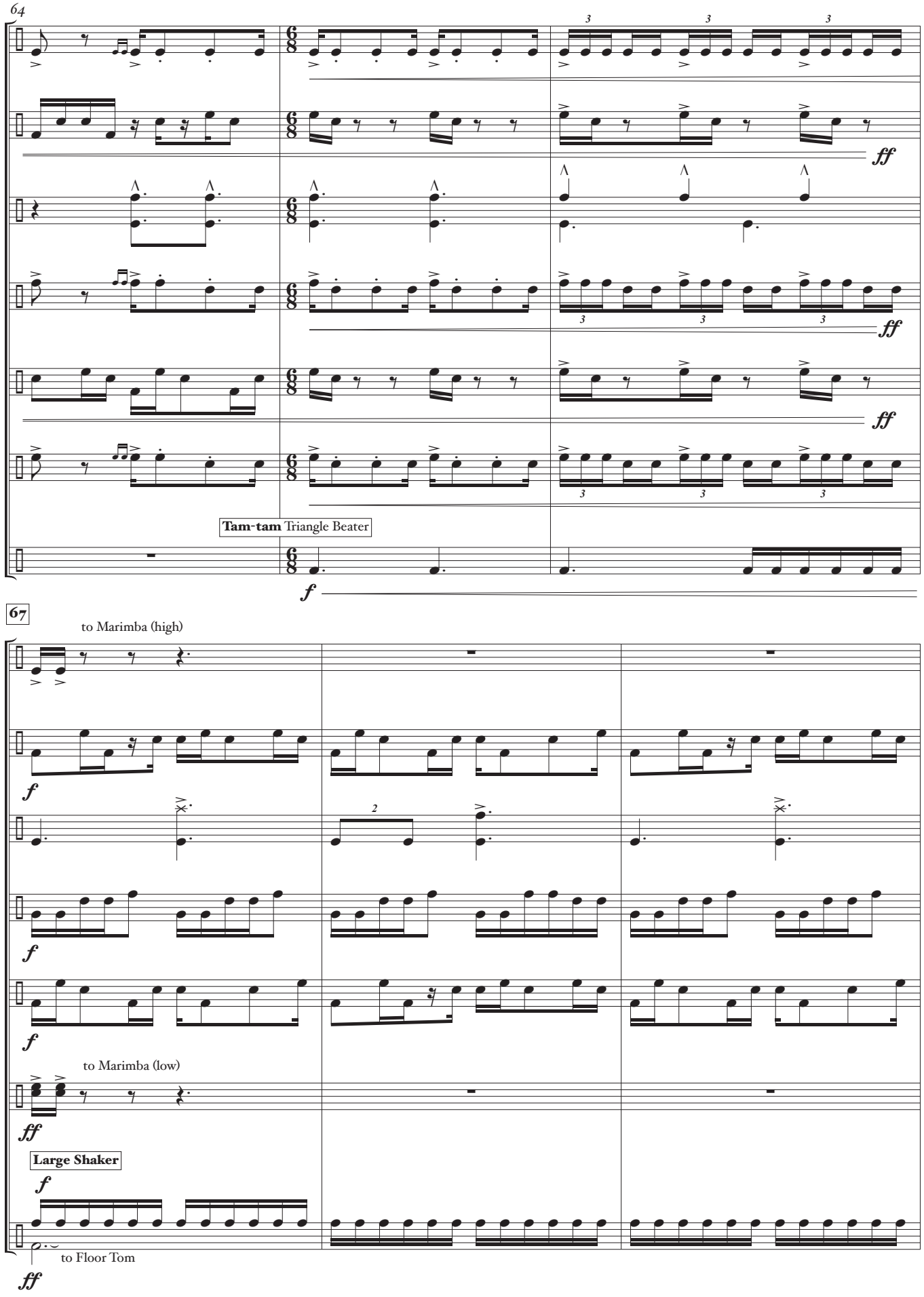

41
Concert Bass Drum
Perc. 1
p
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Scraped w/ Triangle Beater
bow ready
Perc. 7
f

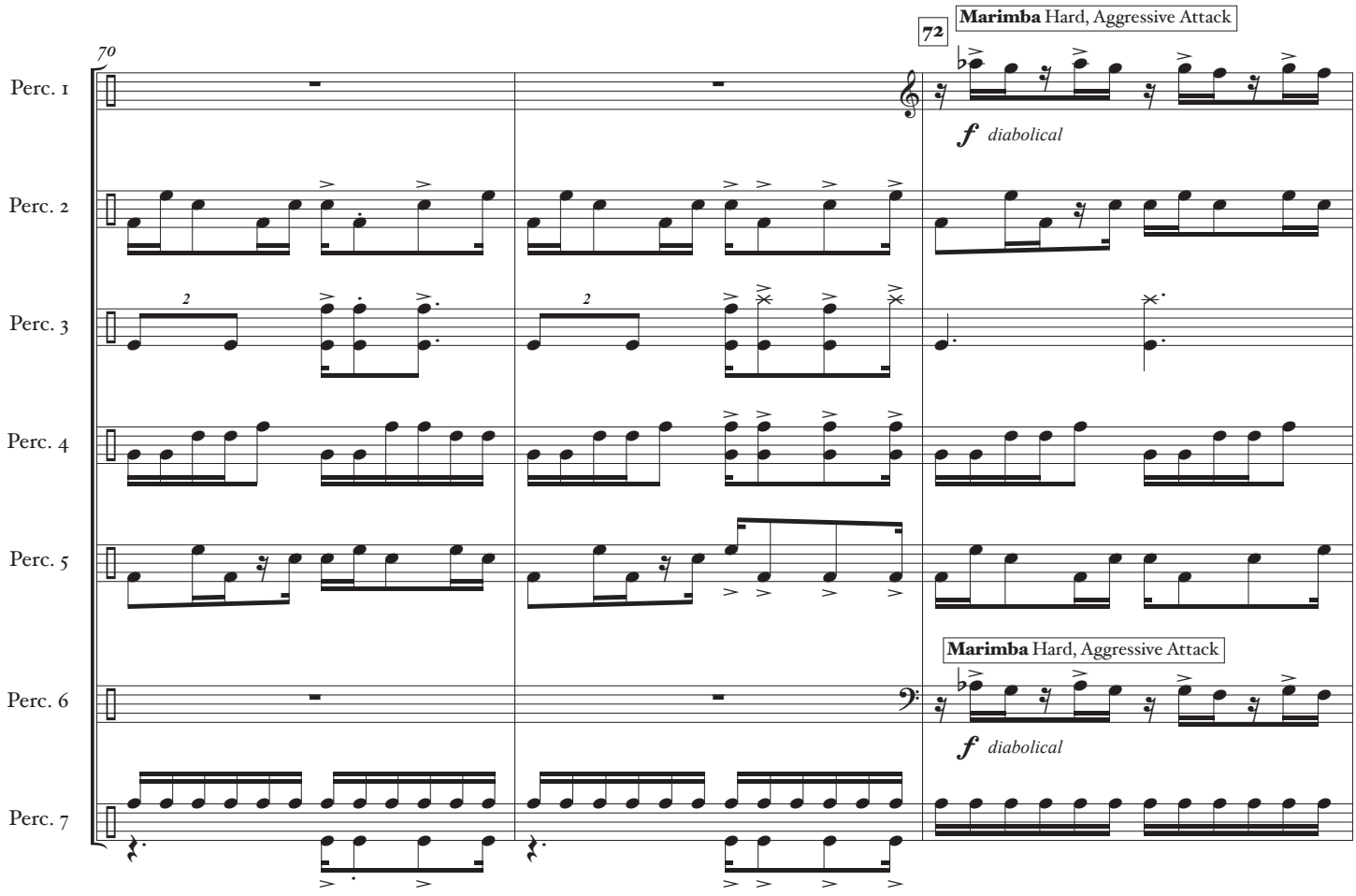

45
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mp
Tuned Gongs Soft Mallets
mf
Concert Toms Brushes
to Sticks
mf
Struck w/ Triangle Beater
Bowed
f
48
Metal Mixing Bowls Metallic Attack
f
f
Metal Mixing Bowls Metallic Attack
f
Sticks
sfz
to Floor Tom
Floor Tom
f
sfz

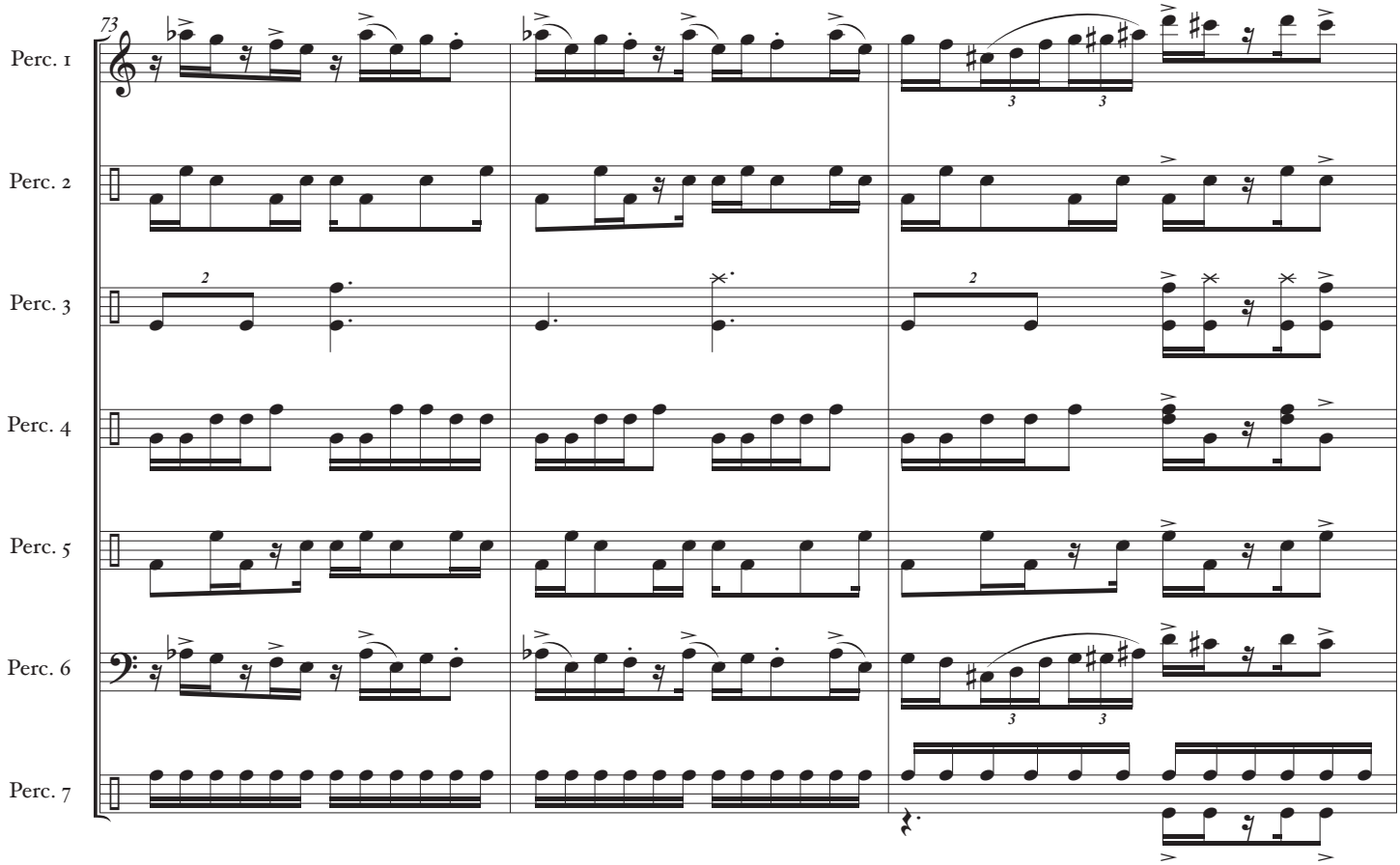

51
(on shell w/ mallet shoulder)
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
sfz
p
f
mp
54
57
to Floor Tom
mechanical, like a factory
Trash Cymbal Stack (LH)
Brake Drum (RH)
Kick Drum

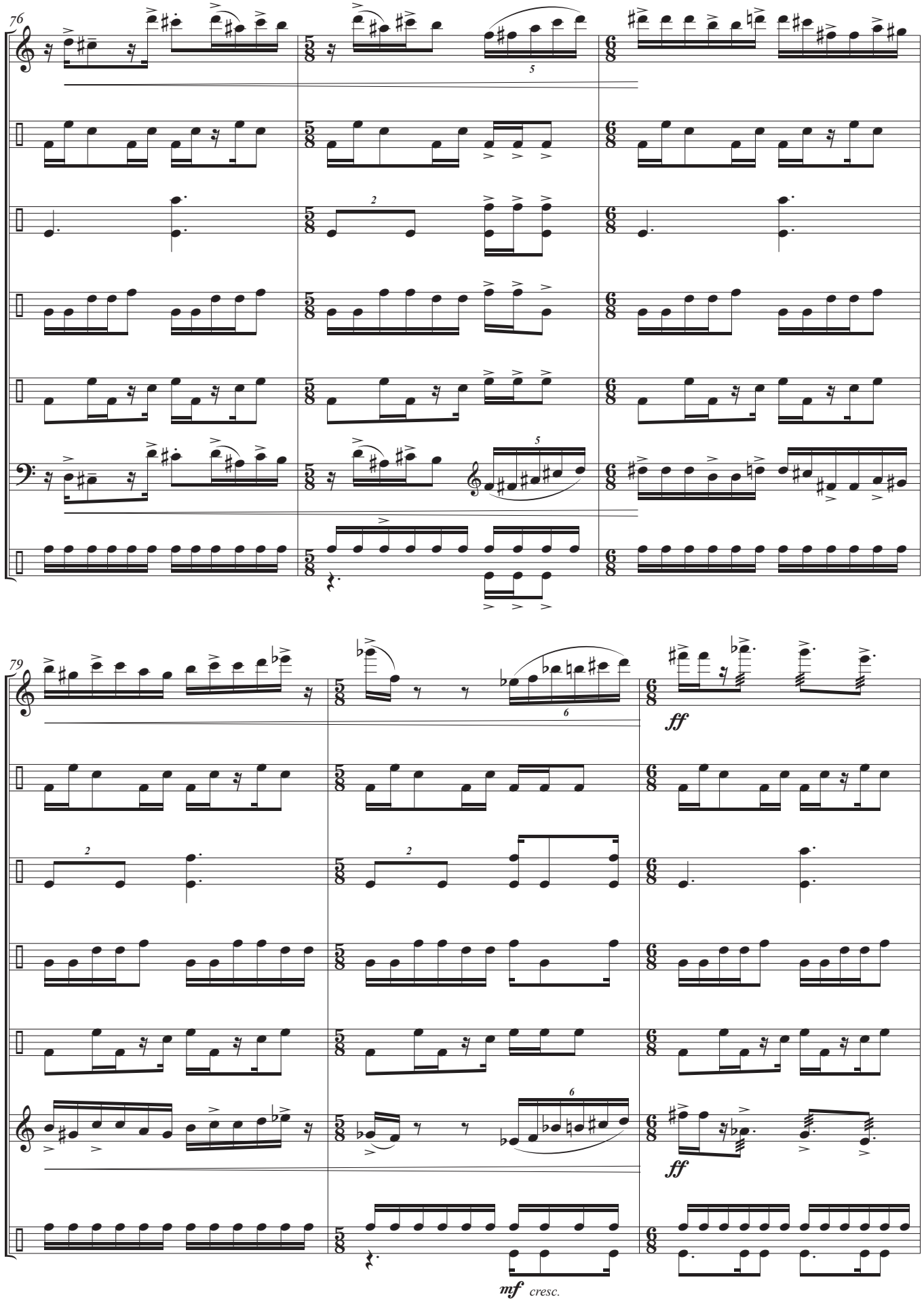

58
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
f
sub. p
sfz

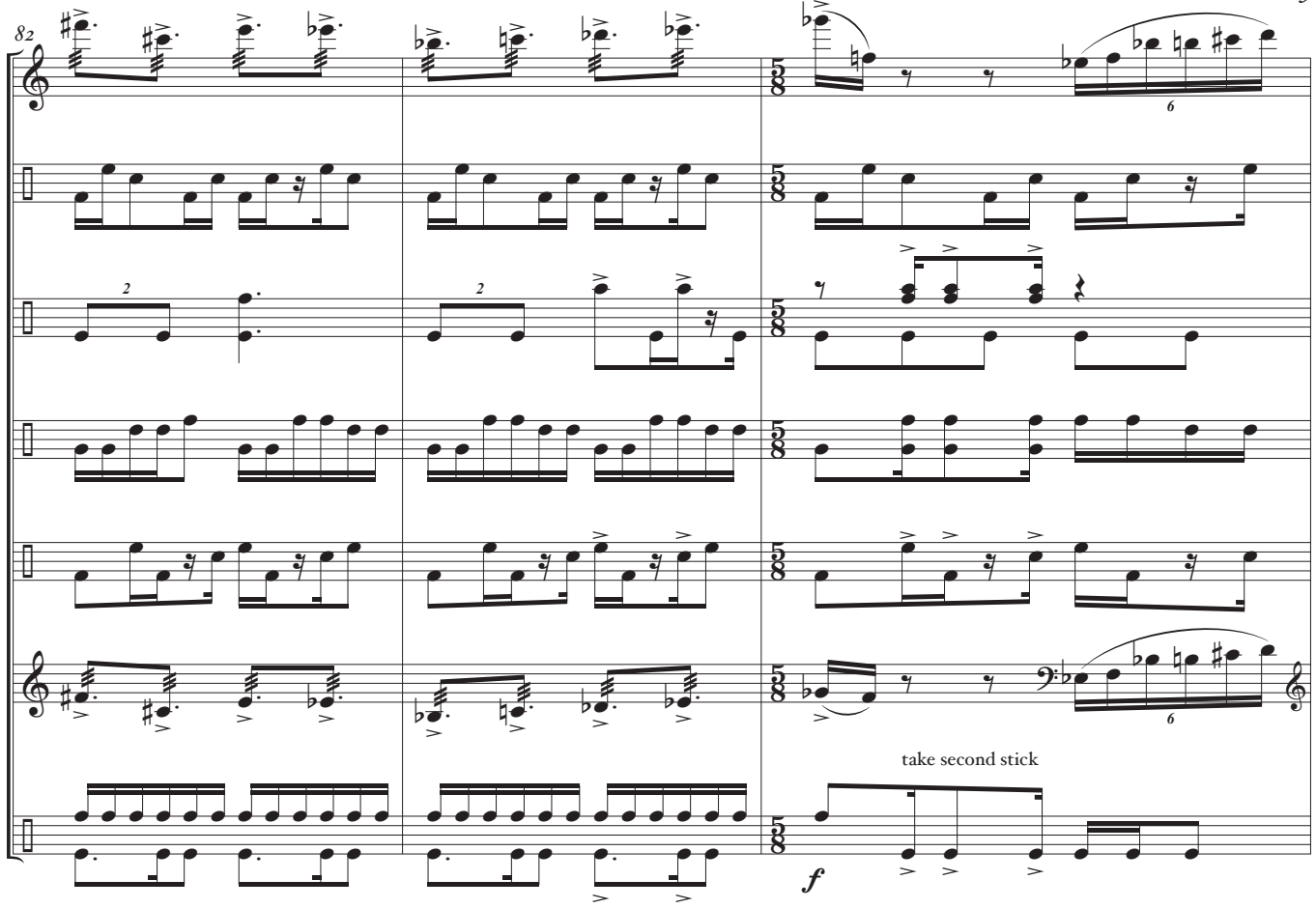

61
Floor Tom
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Wood Slabs Hard Rubber
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
to Tam-Tam
Large Shaker ready
Perc. 7
f

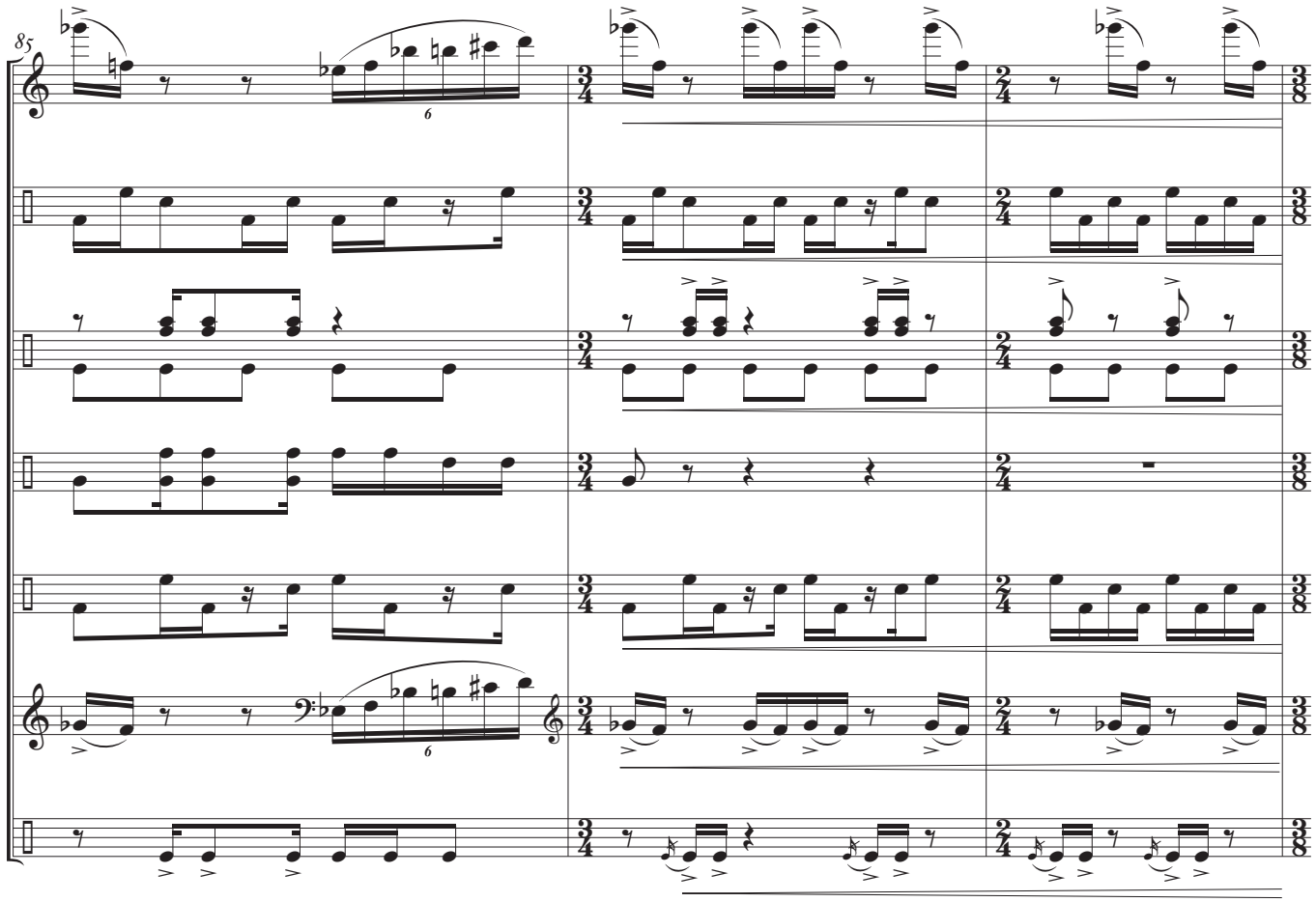

64
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
ff
Tam-tam Triangle Beater
f
67
to Marimba (high)
f
to Marimba (low)
ff
Large Shaker
f
to Floor Tom
ff

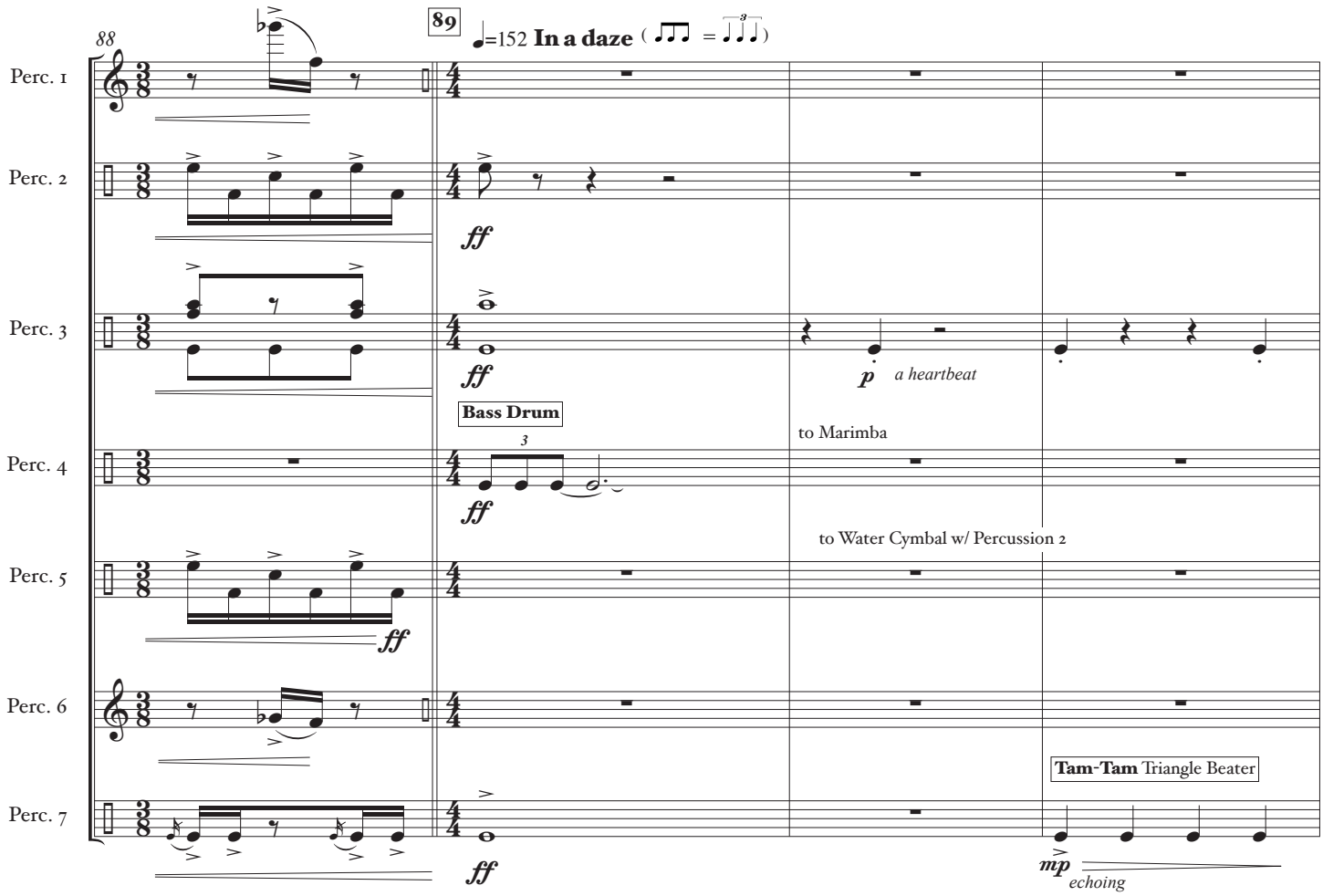

70
72
Marimba Hard, Aggressive Attack
f diabolical
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Marimba Hard, Aggressive Attack
Perc. 6
f diabolical
Perc. 7

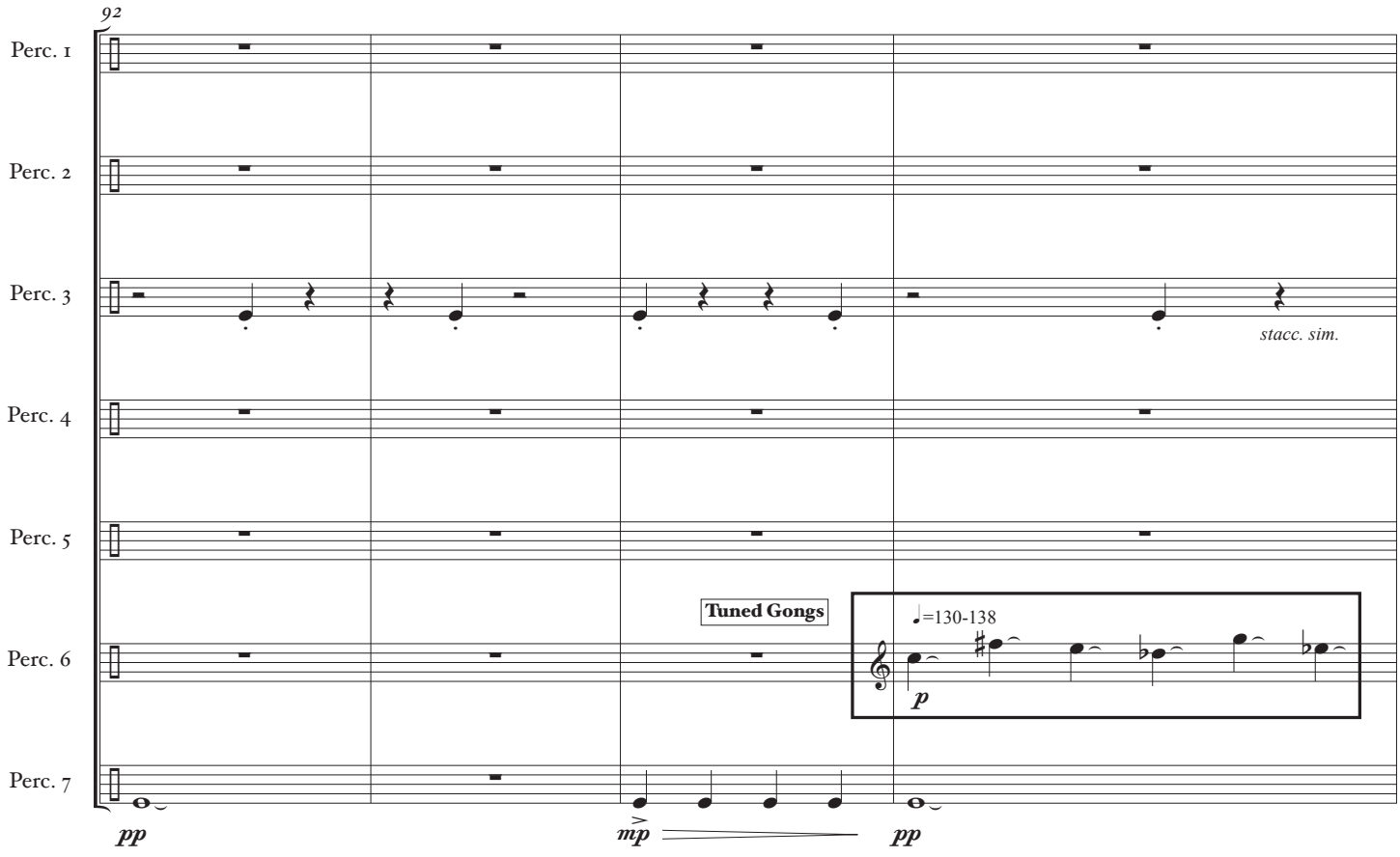

73
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

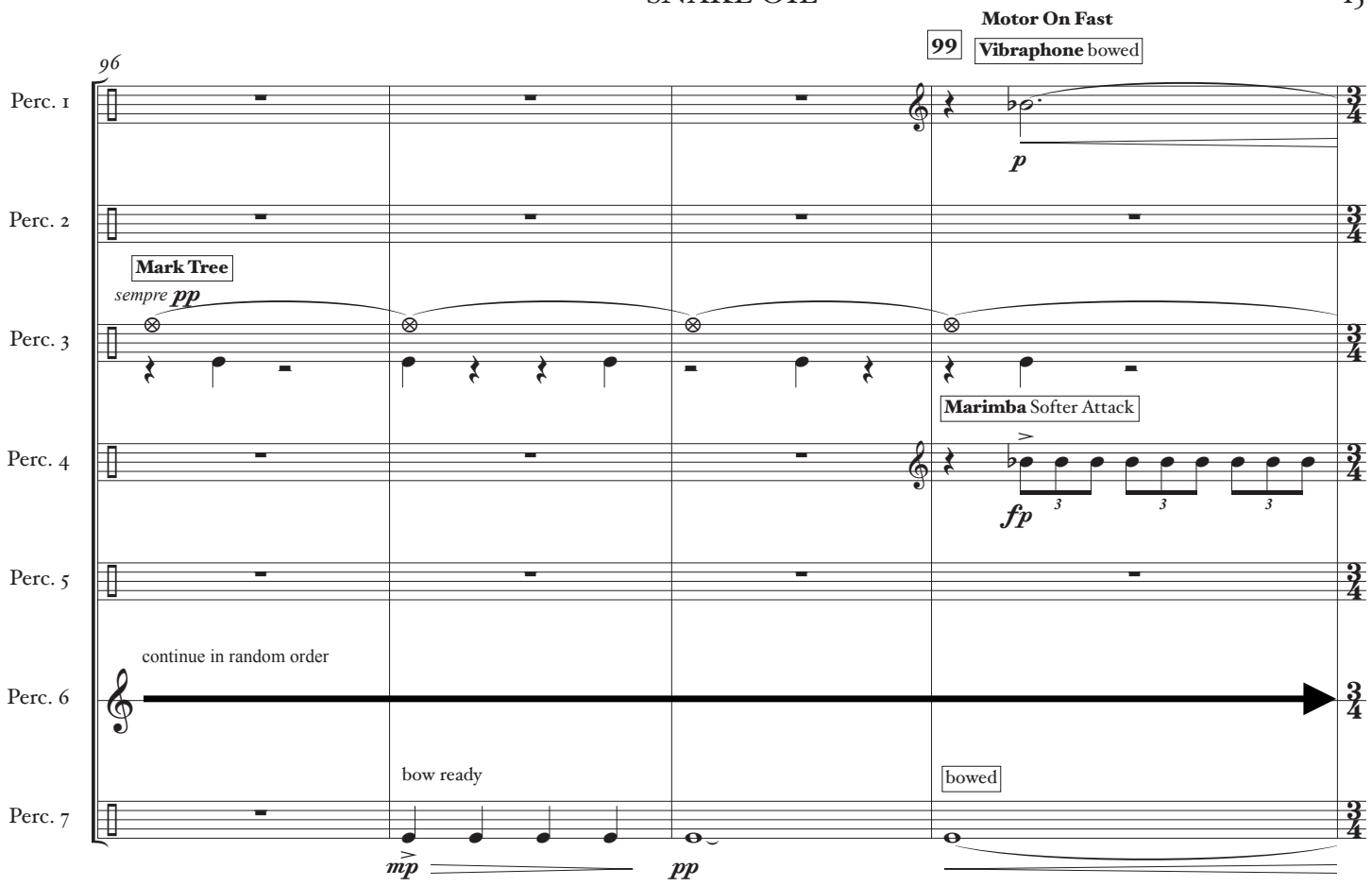

76
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
79
ff
ff
mf cresc.

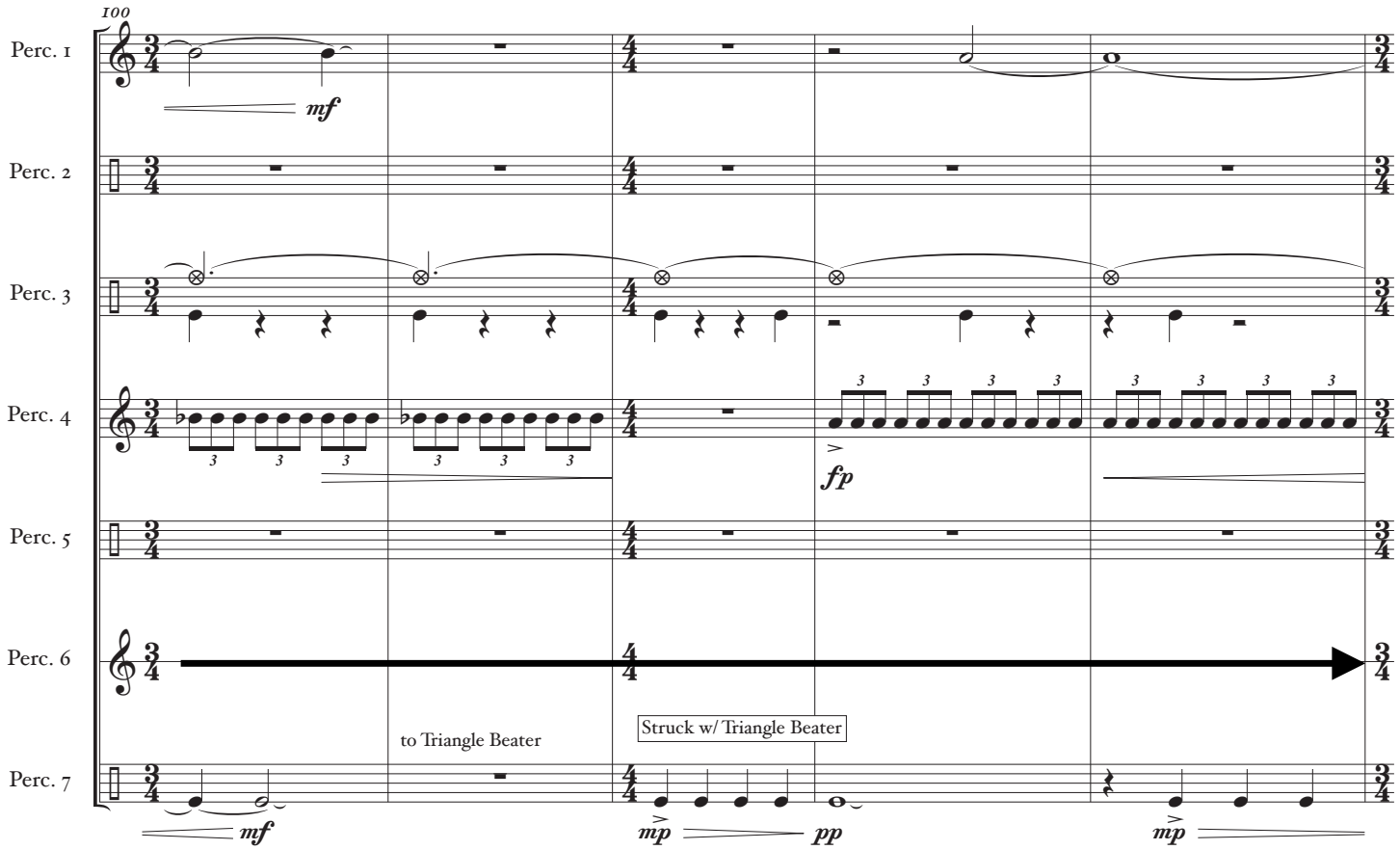

82
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
take second stick
f

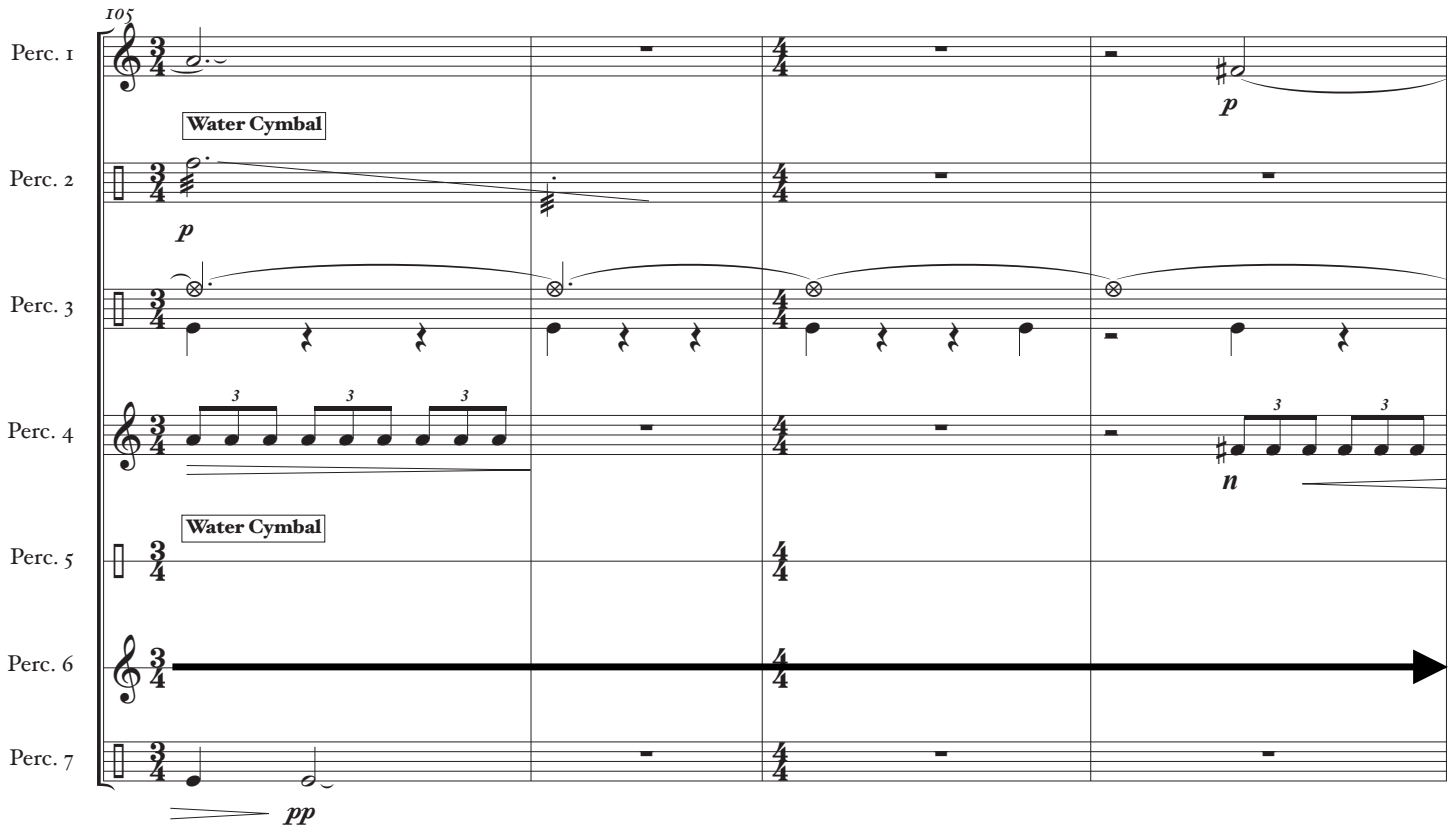

85
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

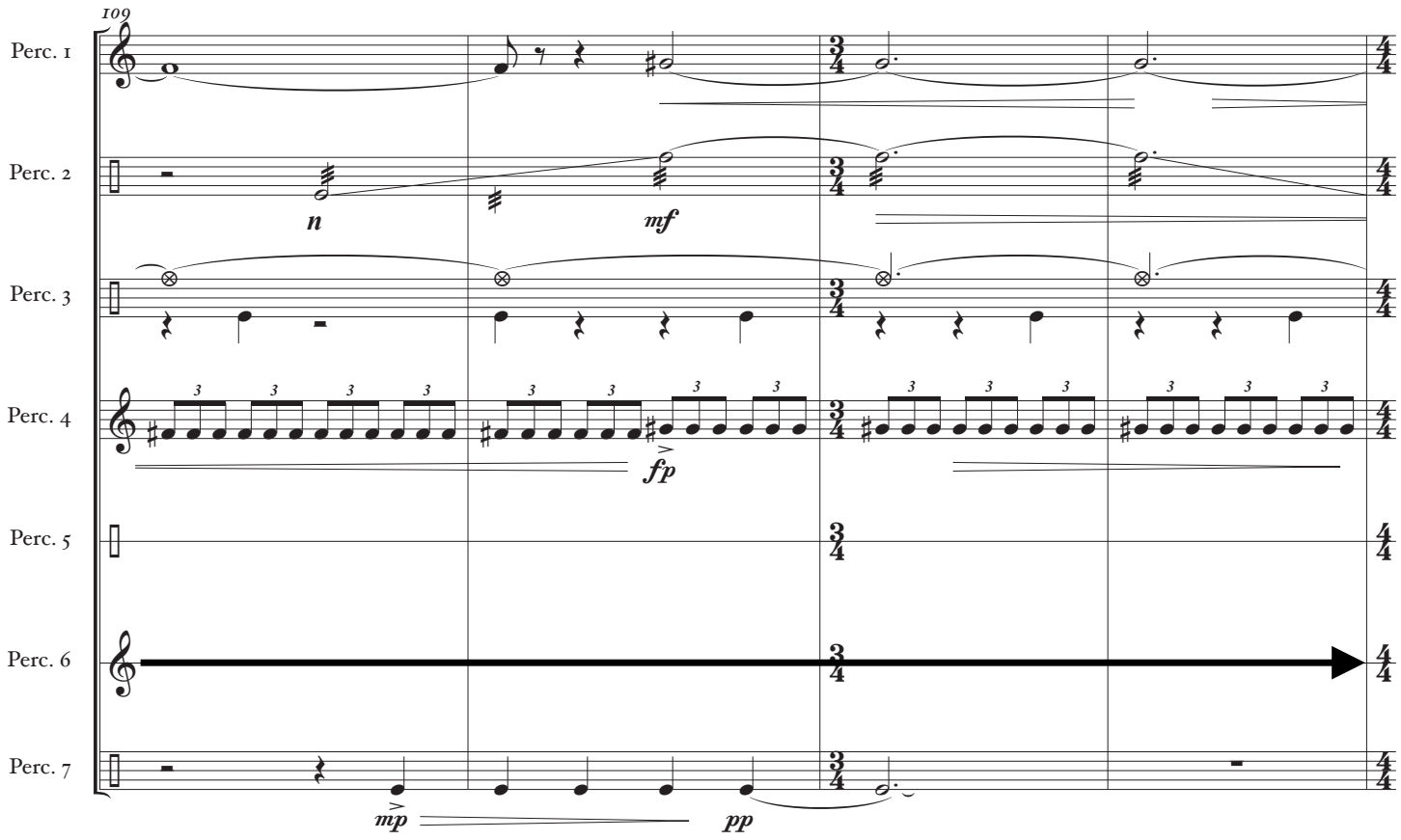

88
89
♩=152 In a daze (♫ = ♫³)
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
ff
p a heartbeat
Bass Drum
to Marimba
to Water Cymbal w/ Percussion 2
Tam-Tam Triangle Beater
mp echoing

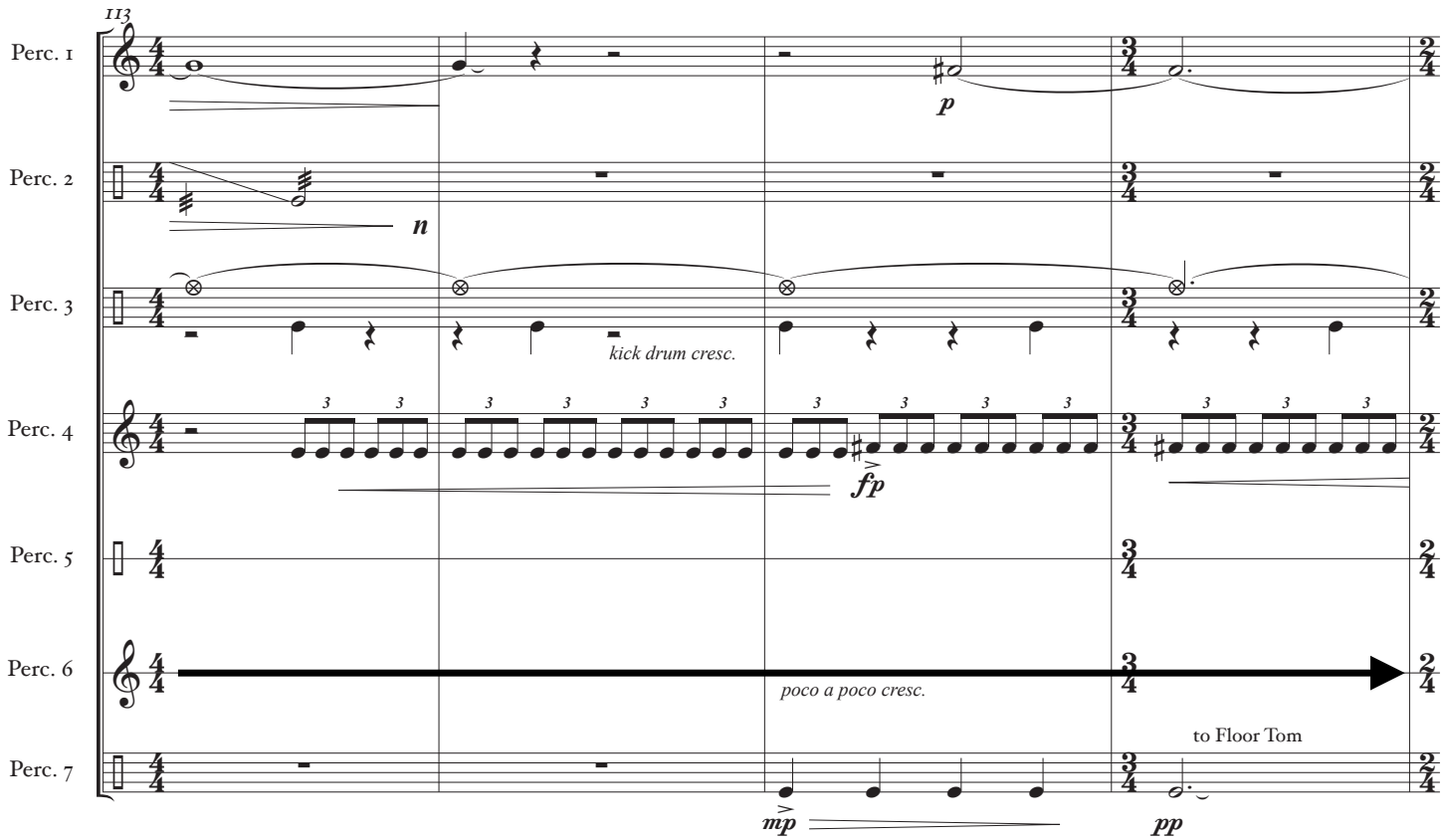

92
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
stacc. sim.
Tuned Gongs
♩=130-138
p
pp
mp
pp

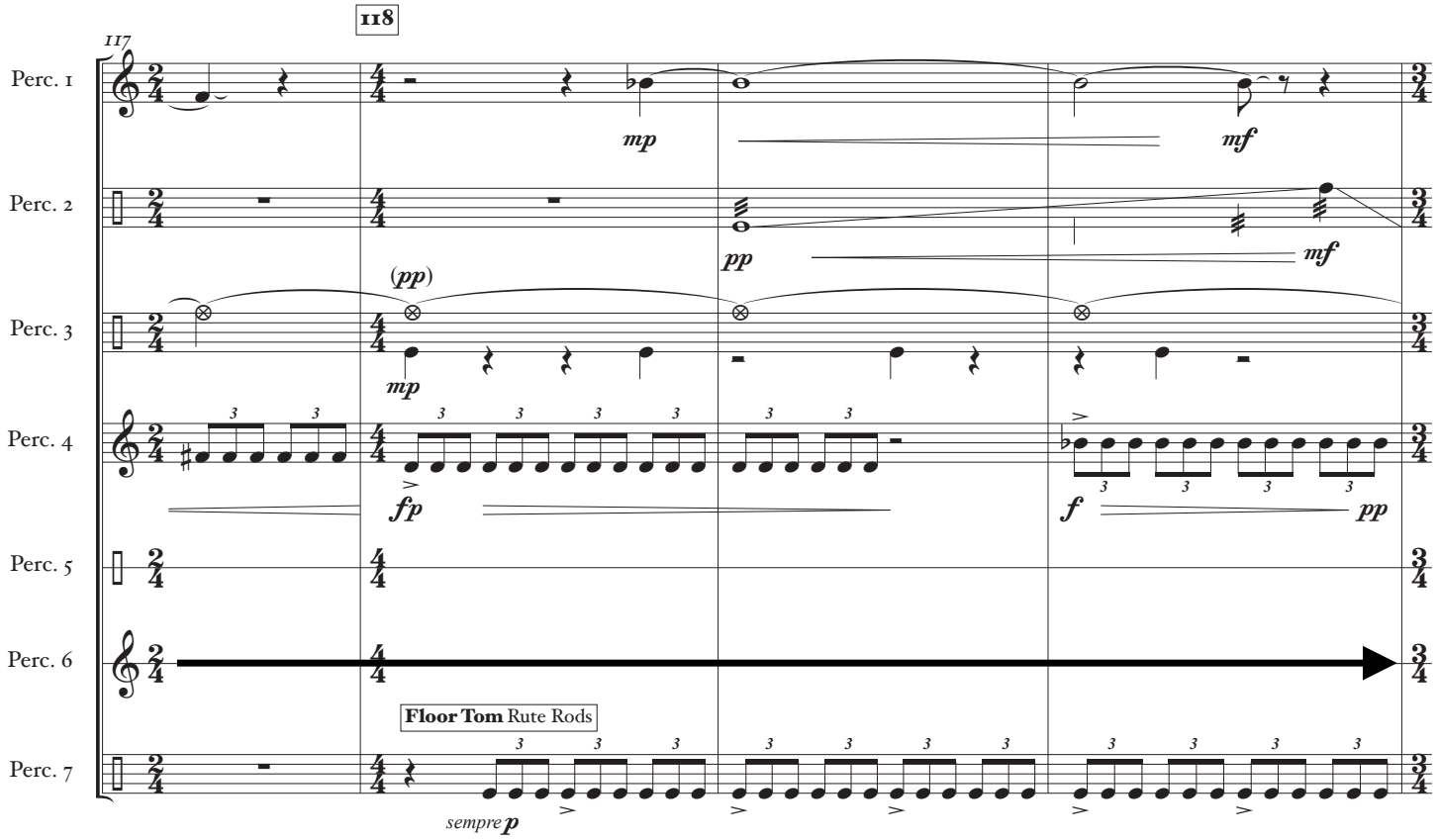

96
99
Motor On Fast
Vibraphone bowed
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
Mark Tree
sempre pp
Marimba Softer Attack
fp
continue in random order
bow ready
bowed
mp
pp

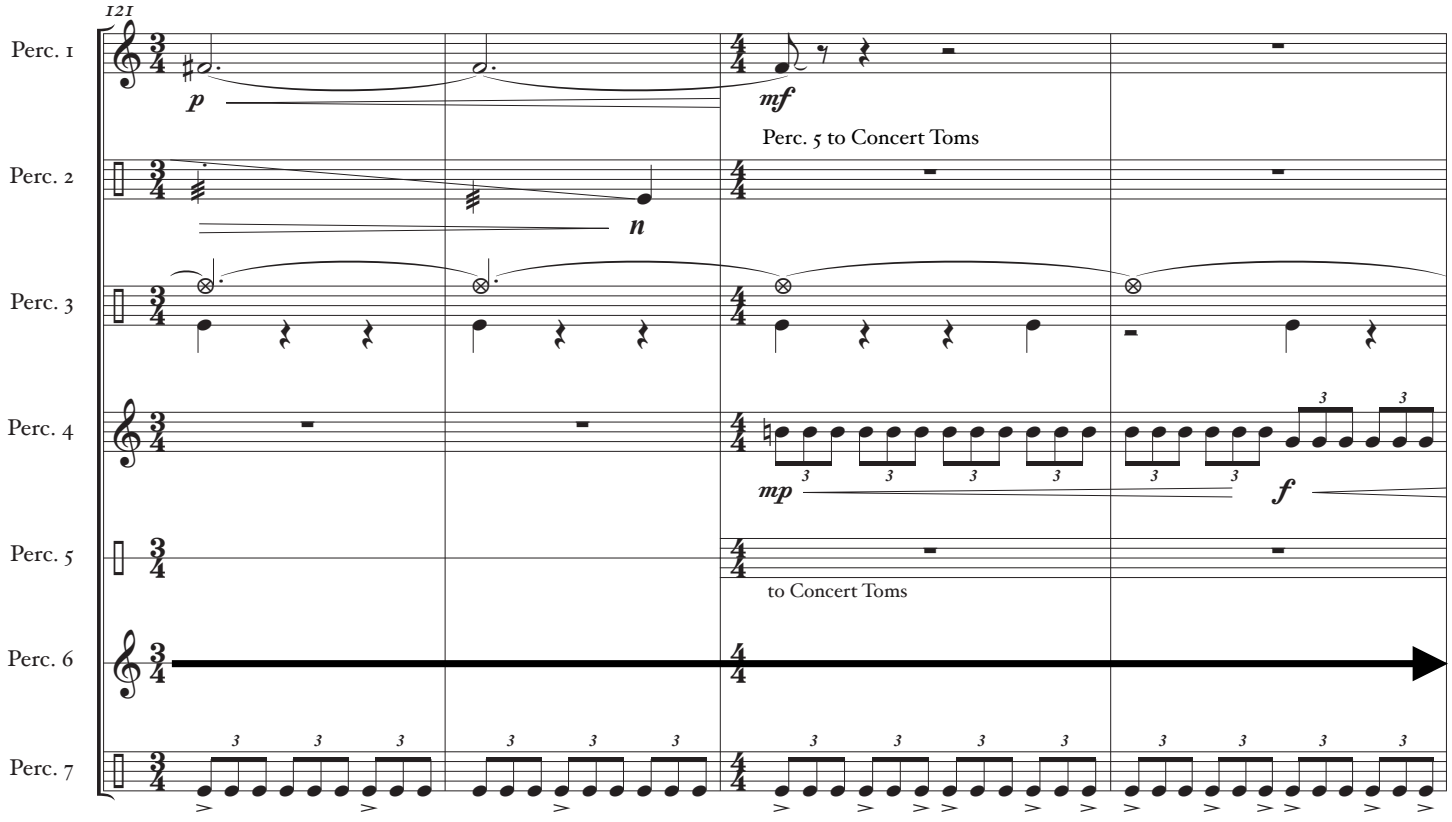

100
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mf
fp
to Triangle Beater
Struck w/ Triangle Beater
mf
mp
pp
mp

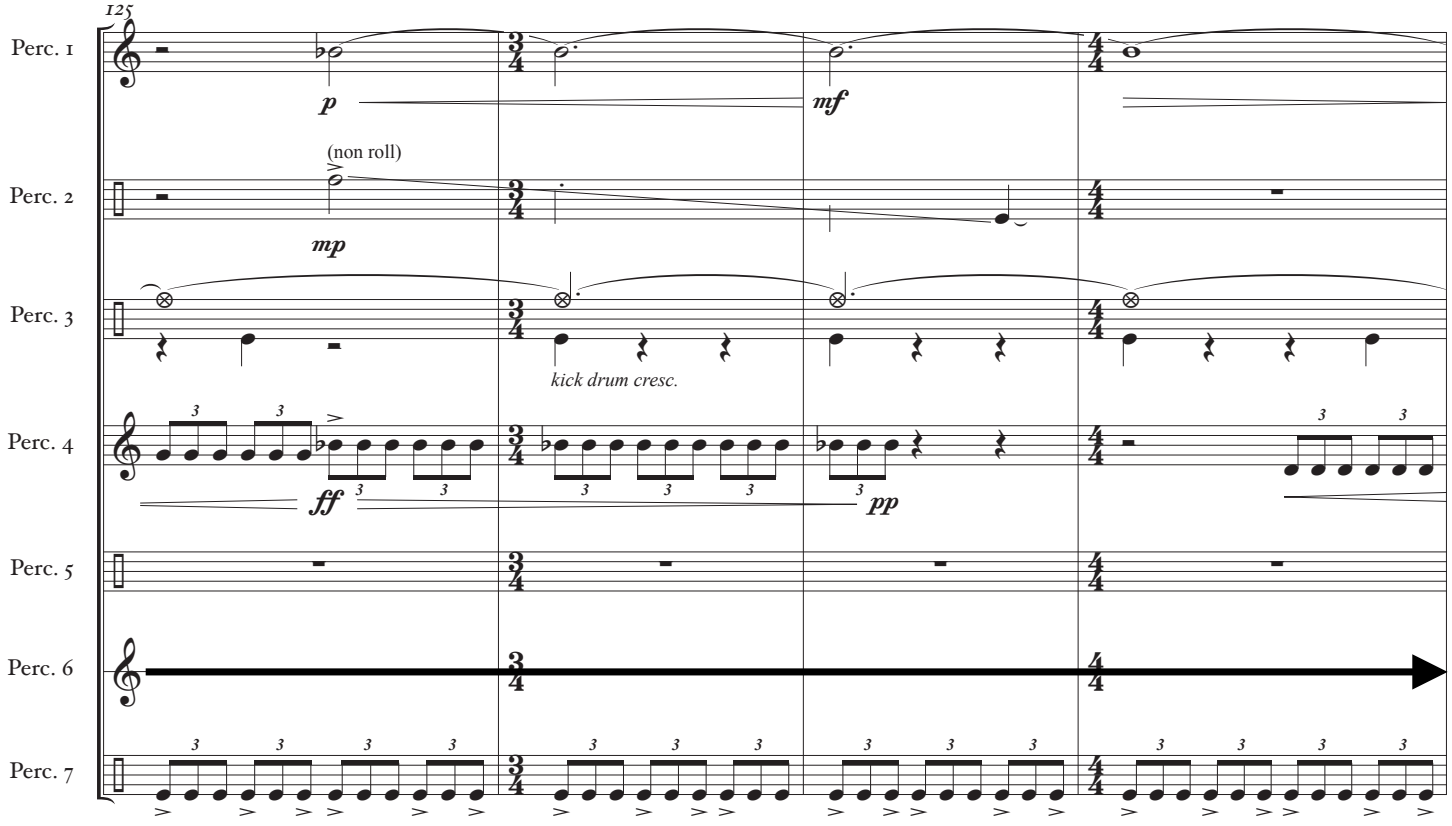

105
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Water Cymbal
Water Cymbal
p
p
n
pp

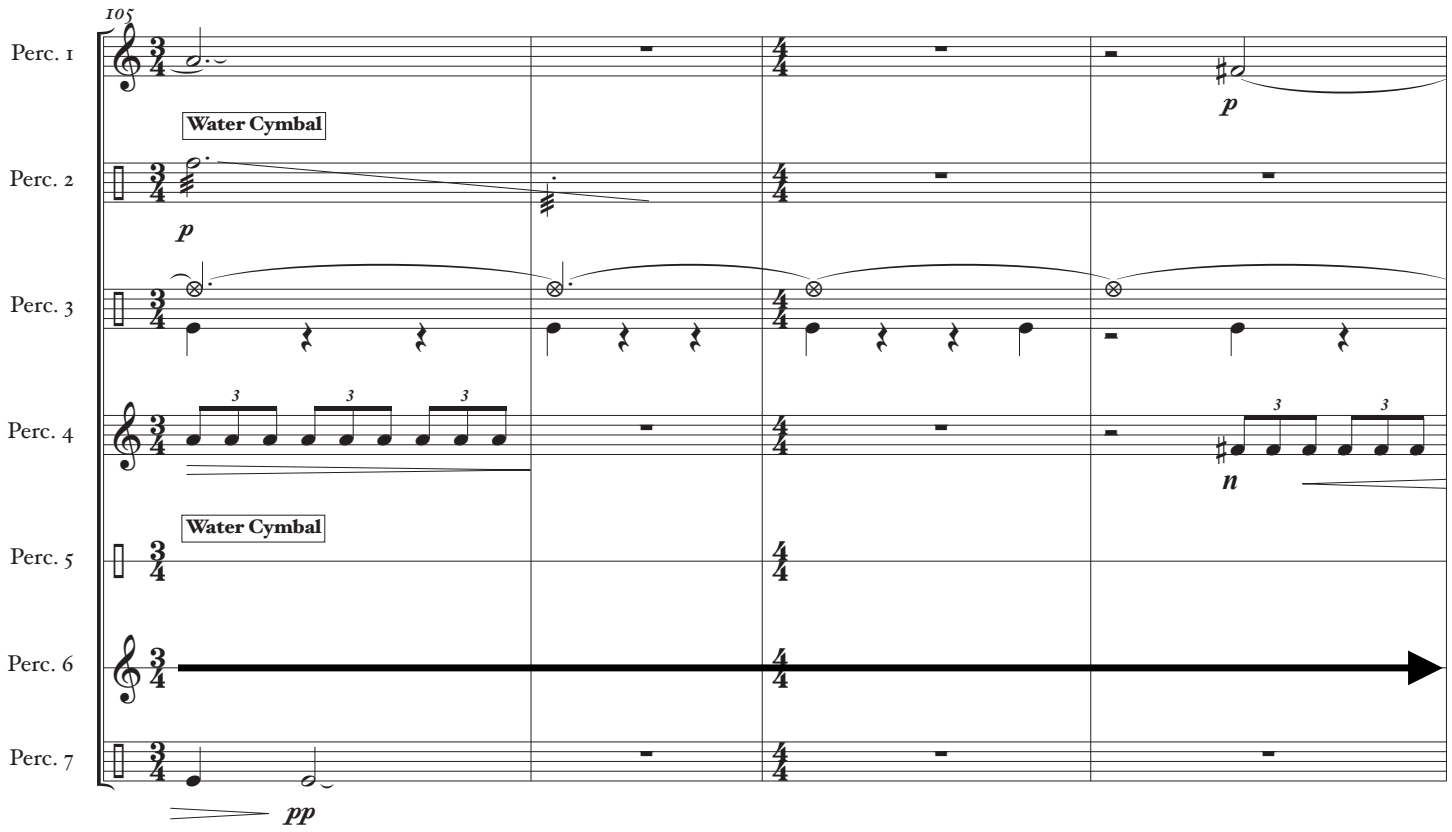

109
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
n
mf
fp
mp
pp

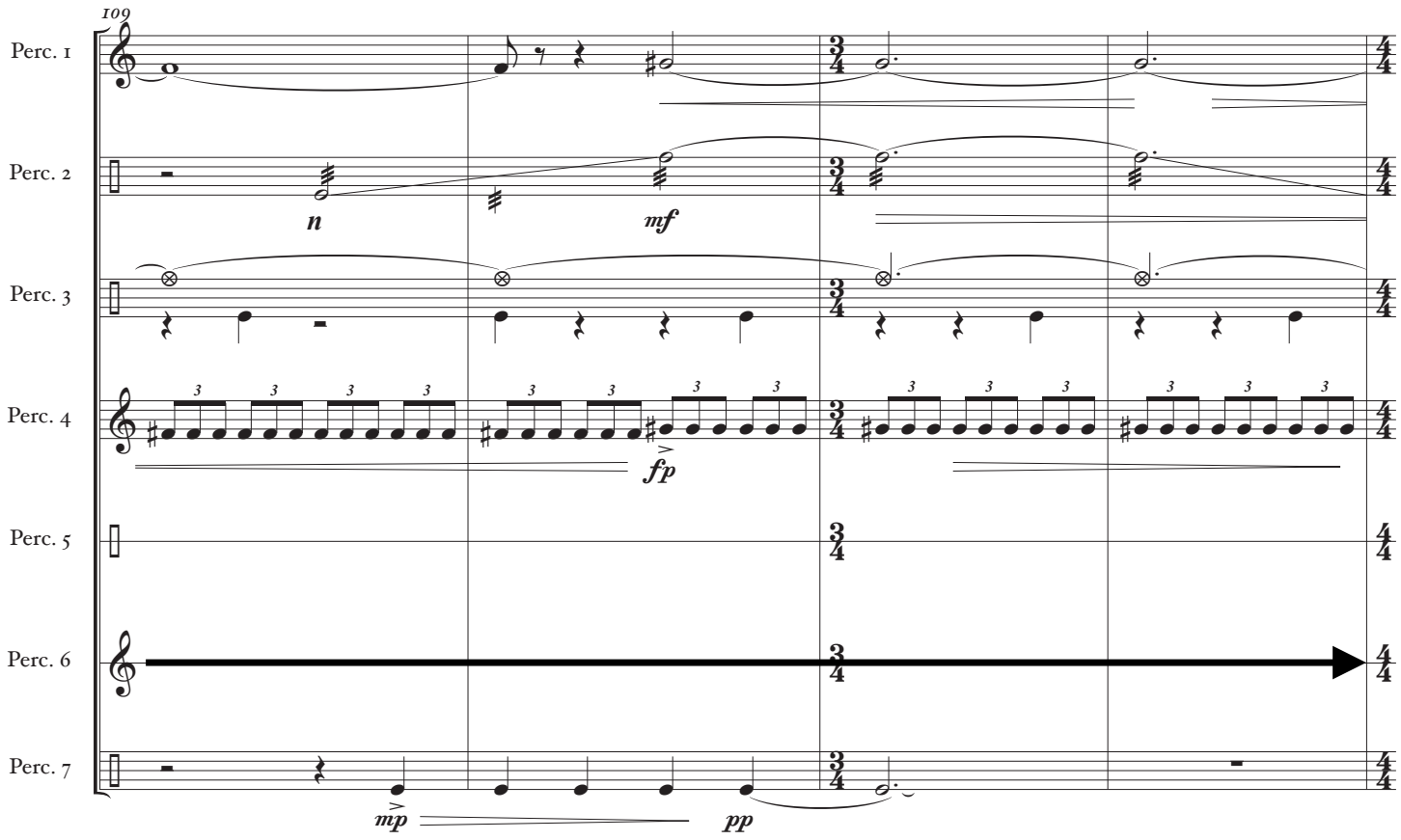

113
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
n
kick drum cresc.
fp
poco a poco cresc.
to Floor Tom
mp
pp

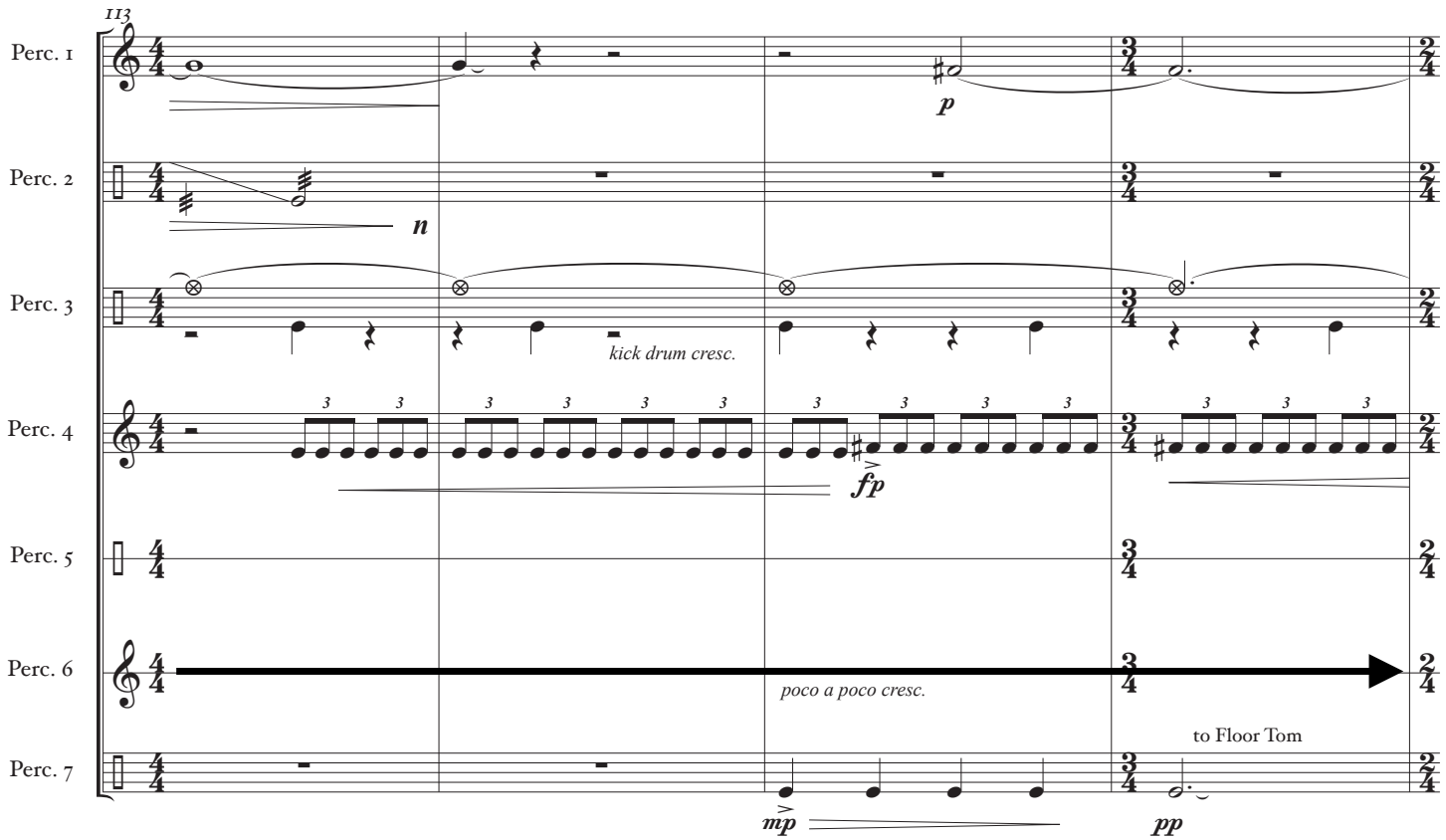

118
117
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mp
mf
pp
(pp)
fp
f
Floor Tom Rute Rods
sempre p

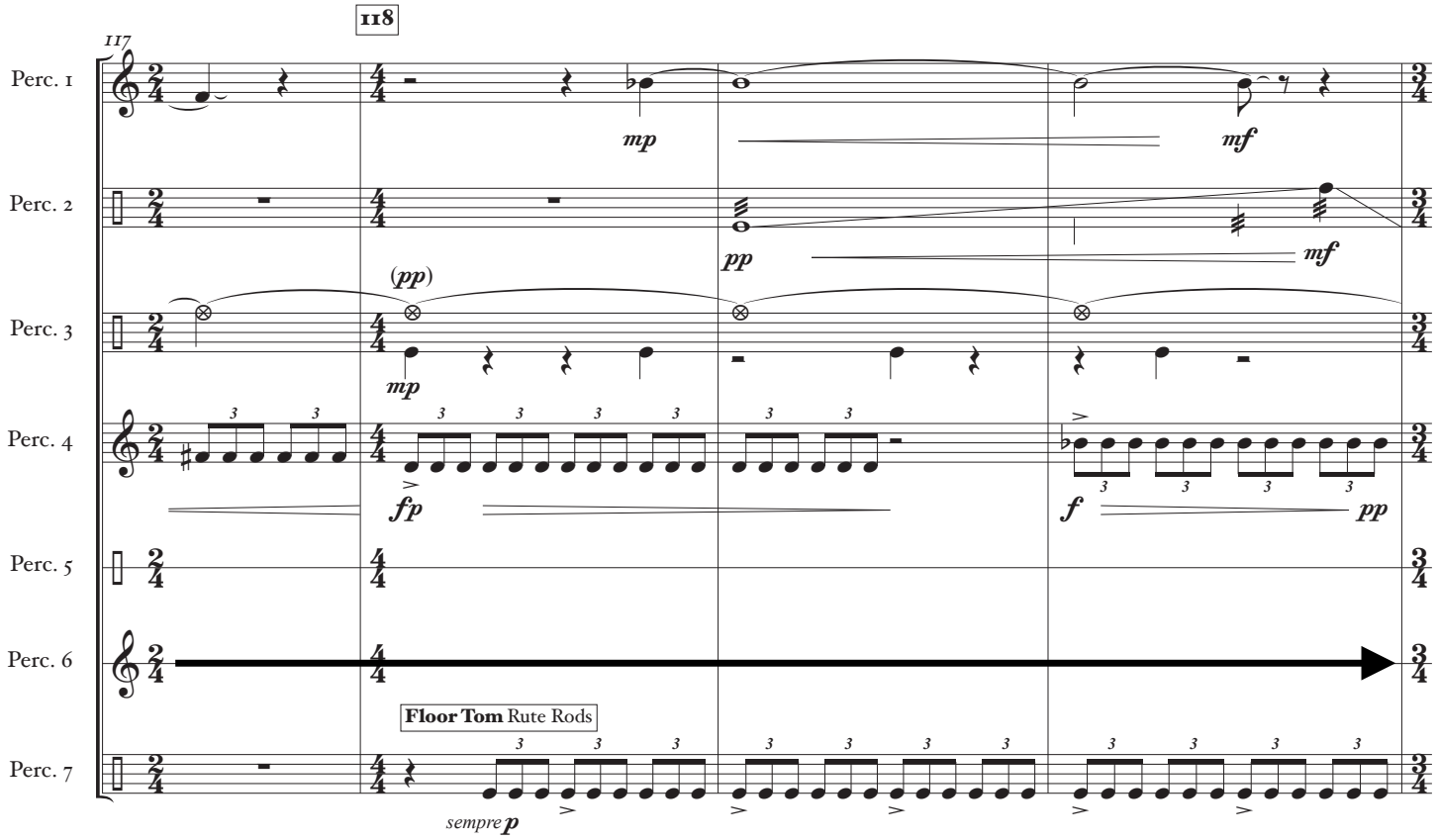

121
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
mf
Perc. 5 to Concert Toms
n
mp
f
to Concert Toms

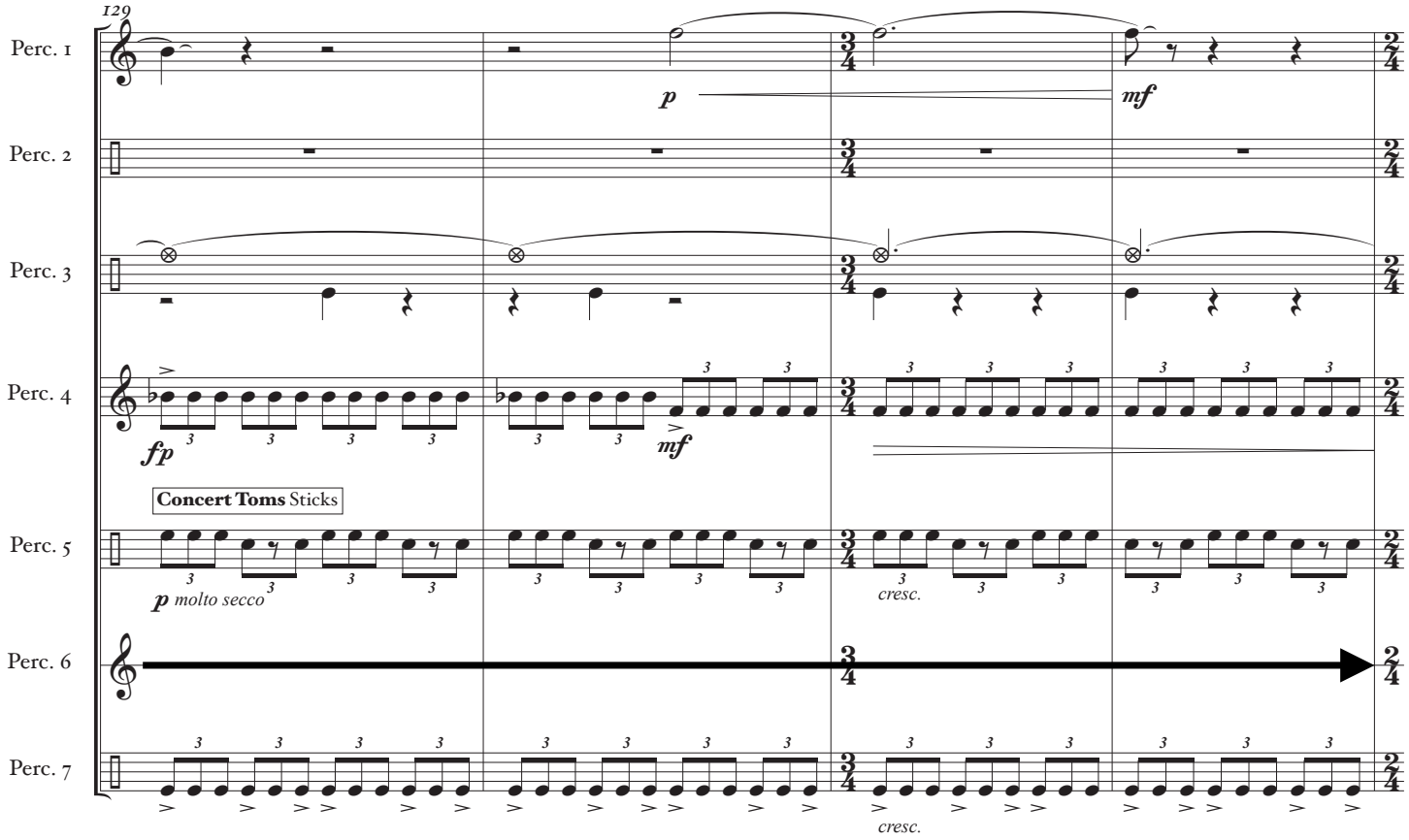

125
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
mf
(non roll)
mp
kick drum cresc.
ff
pp

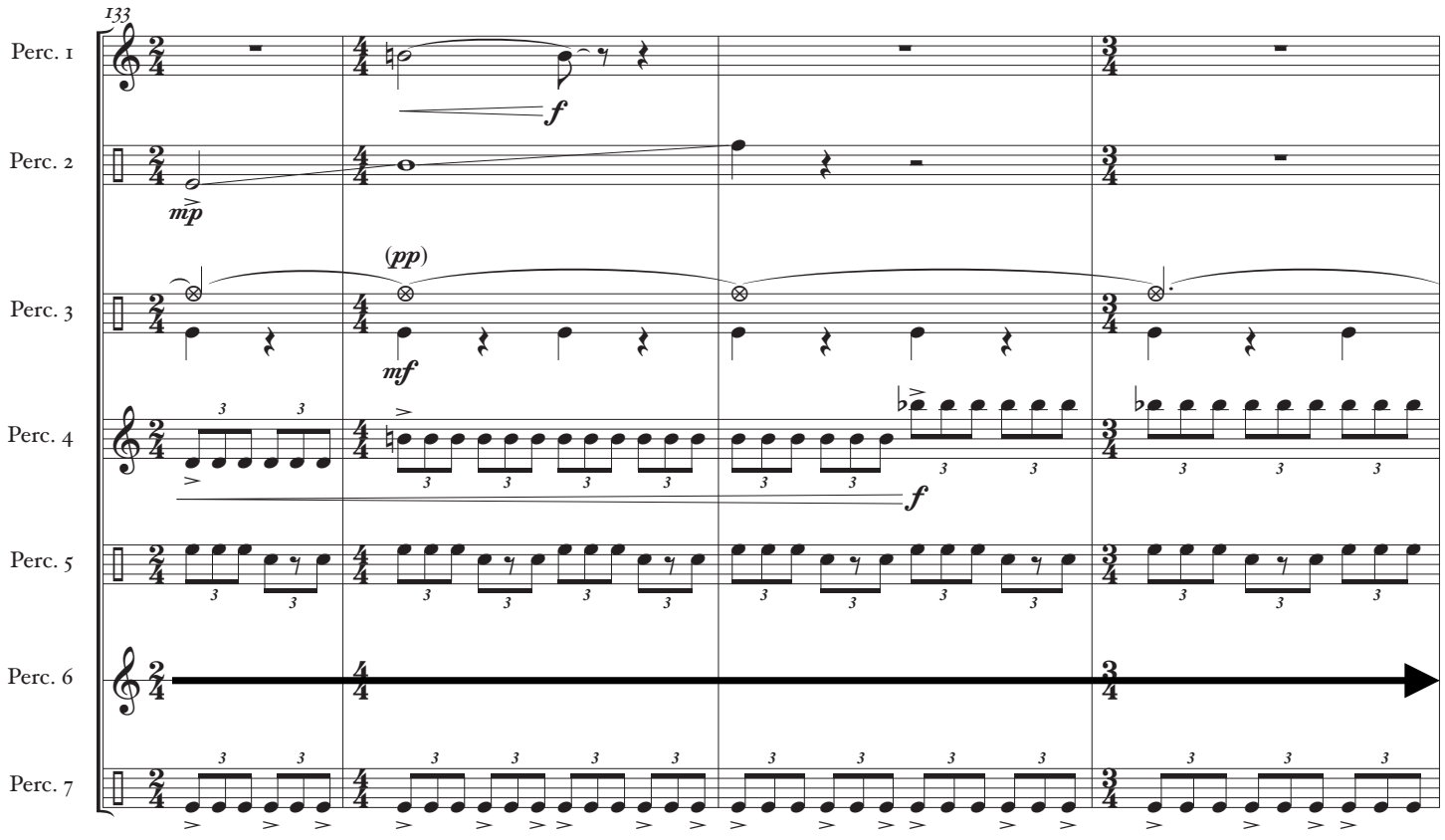

105
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Water Cymbal
Water Cymbal
p
p
n
pp

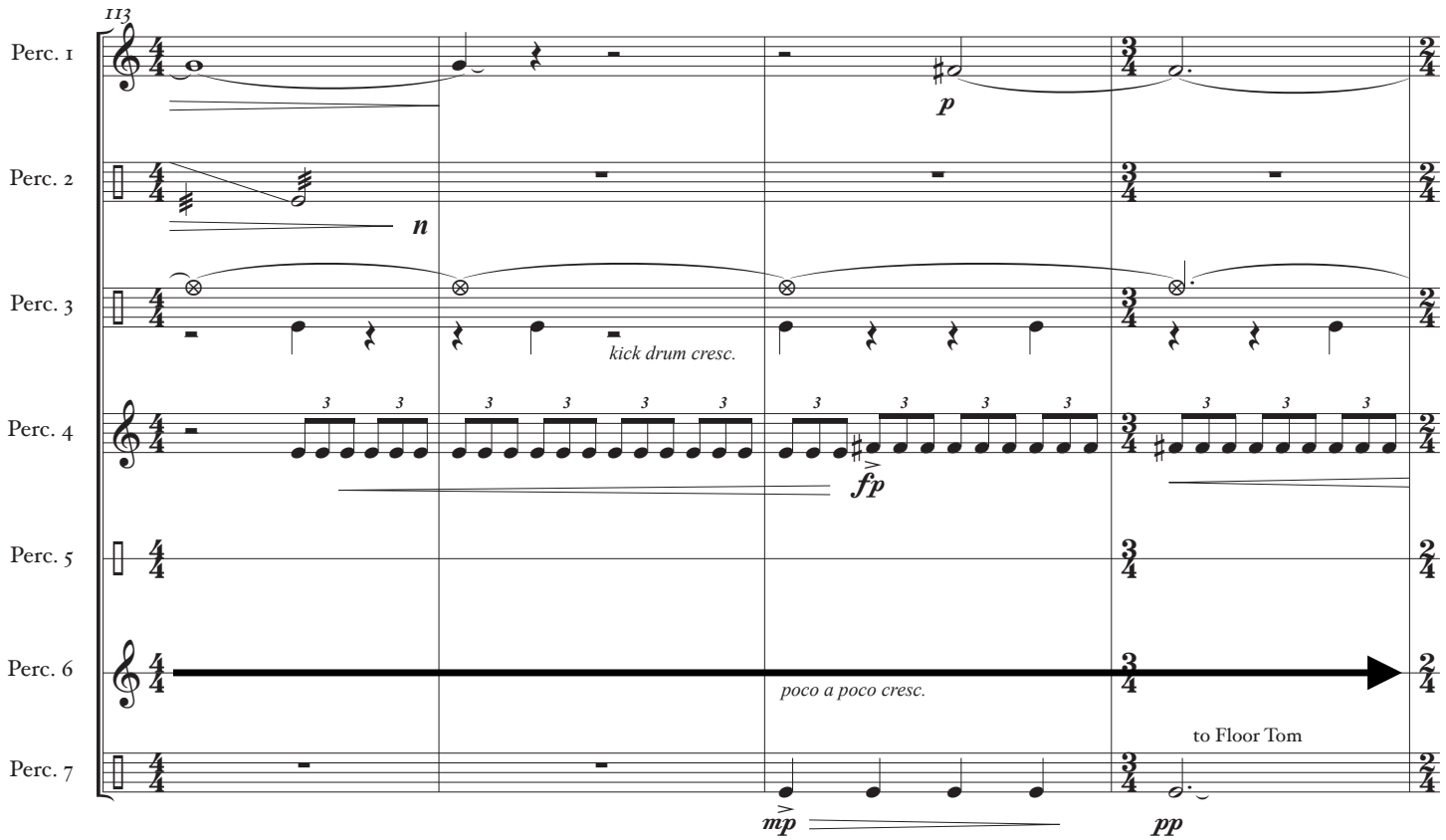

109
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
n
mf
fp
mp
pp

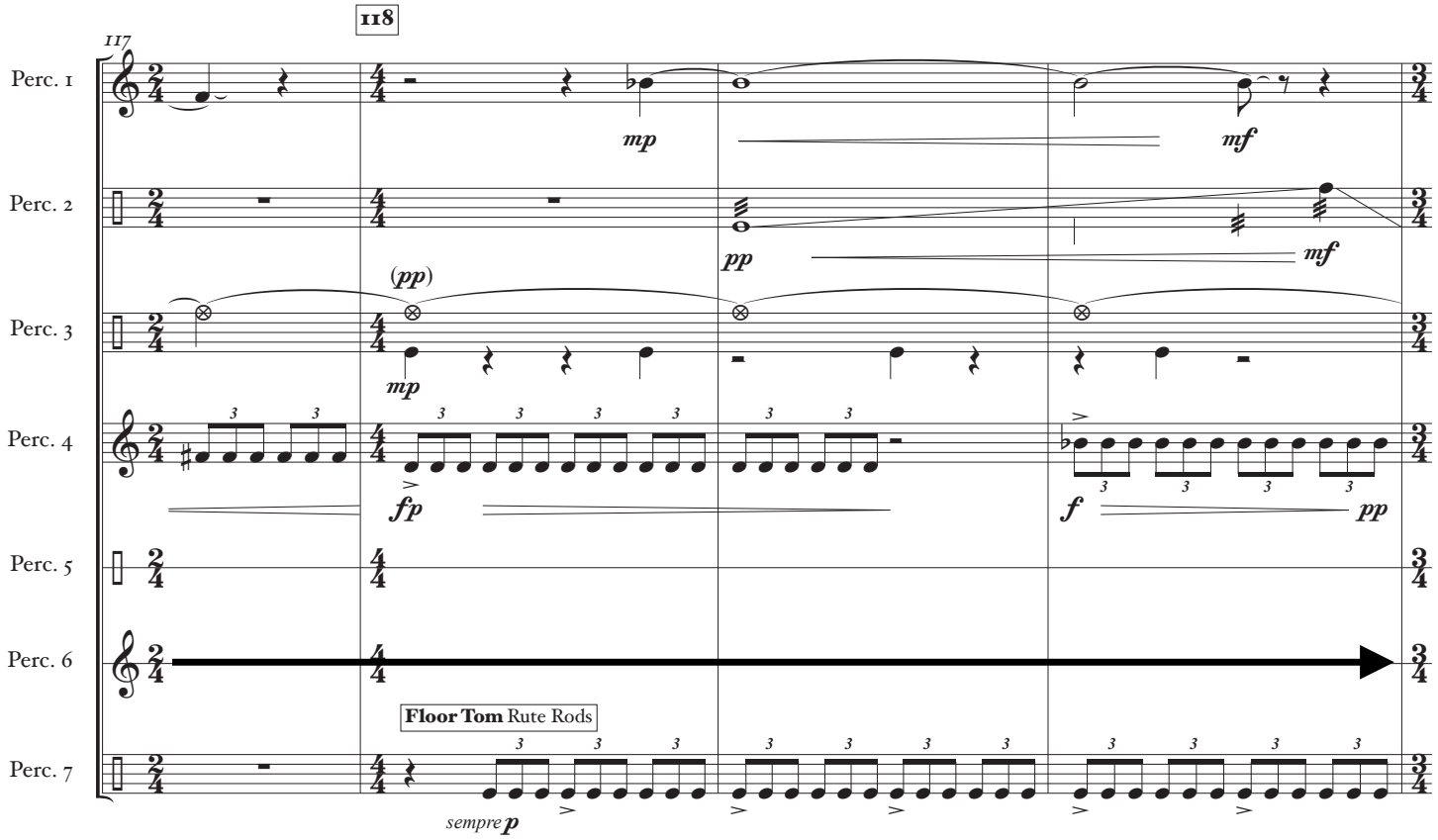

113
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
n
kick drum cresc.
fp
poco a poco cresc.
to Floor Tom
mp
pp

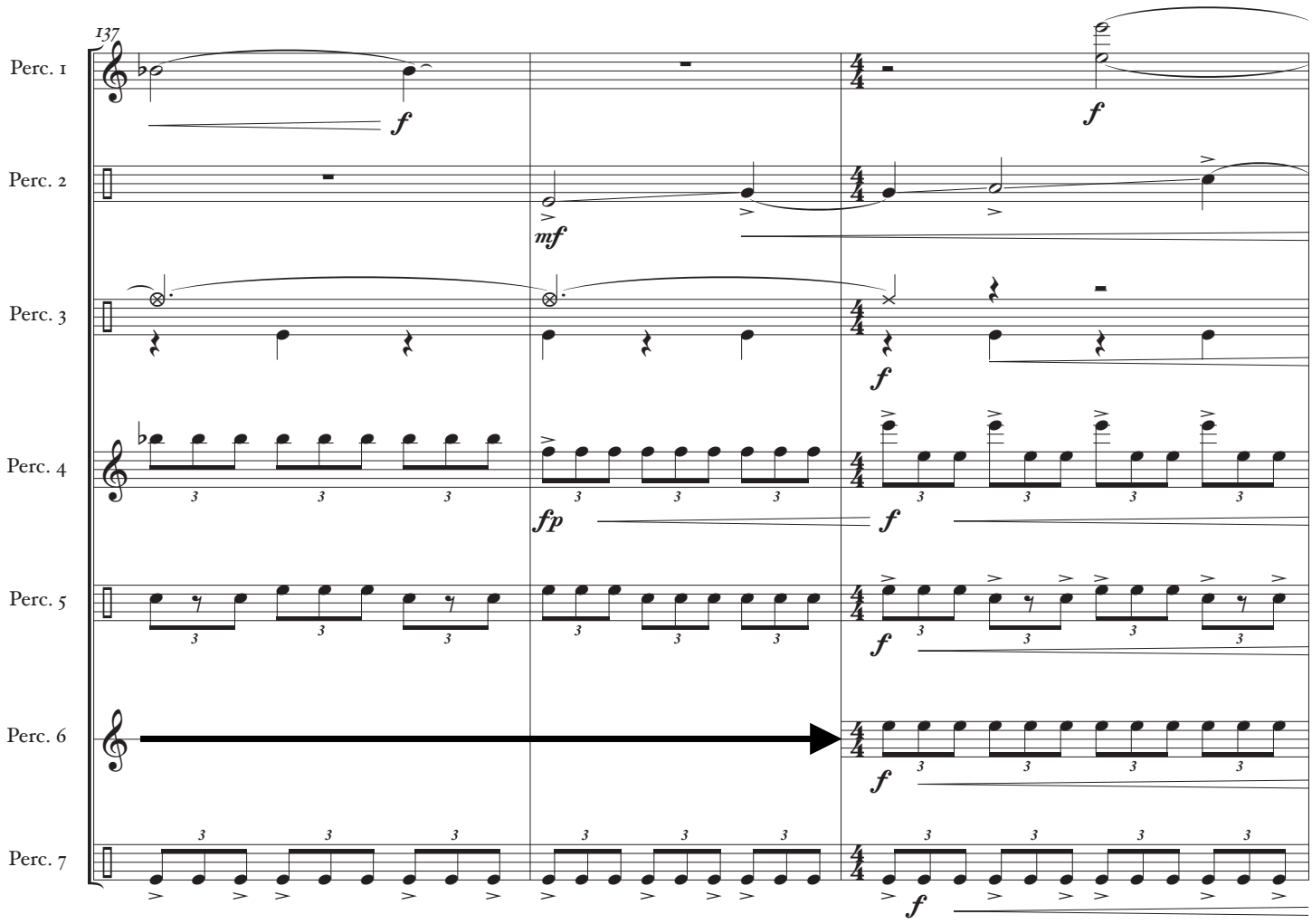

118
117
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mp
mf
pp
(pp)
fp
f
Floor Tom Rute Rods
sempre p

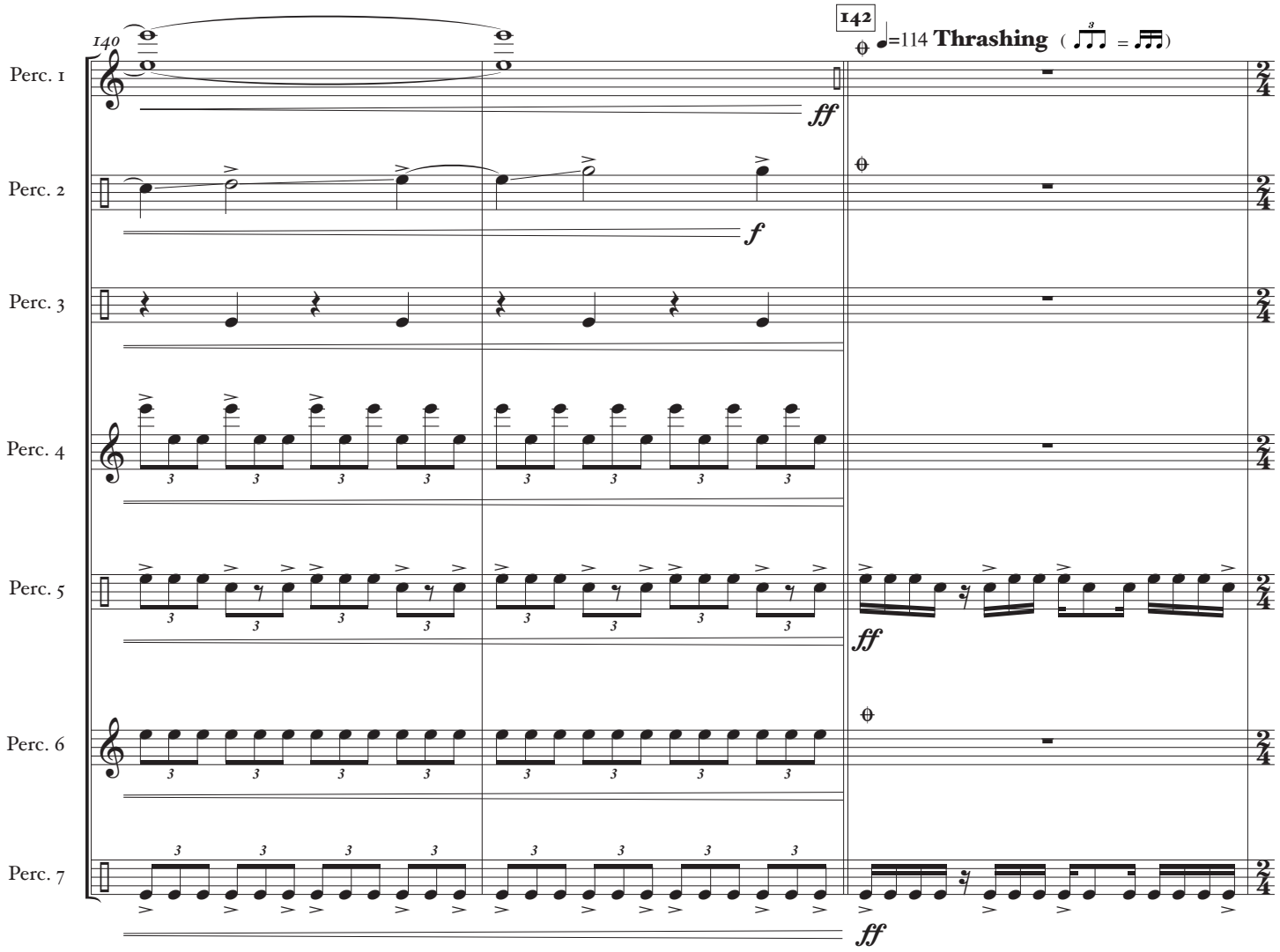

129
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
mf
fp
mf
Concert Toms Sticks
p molto secco
cresc.
cresc.

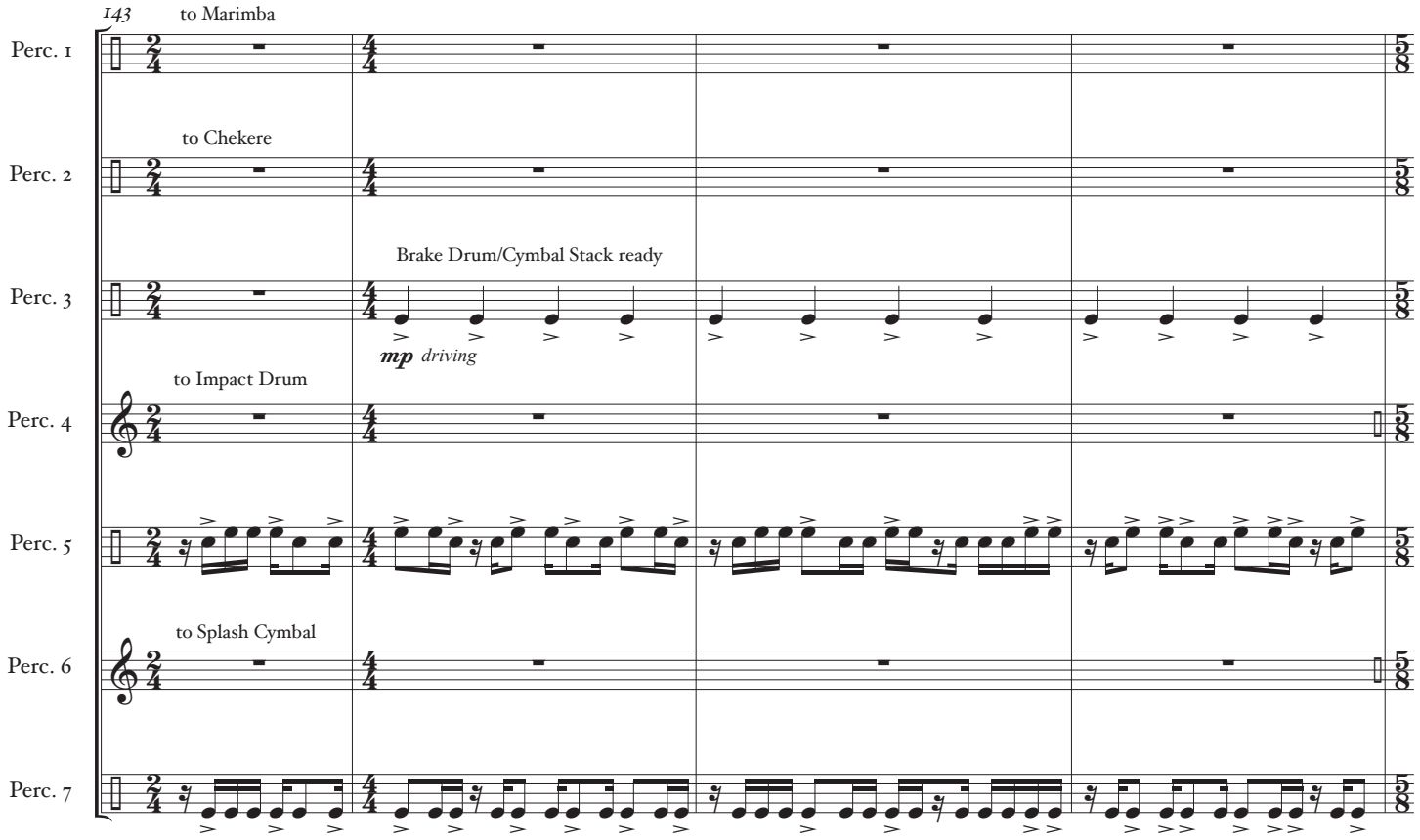

133
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
f
mp
(pp)
mf
f

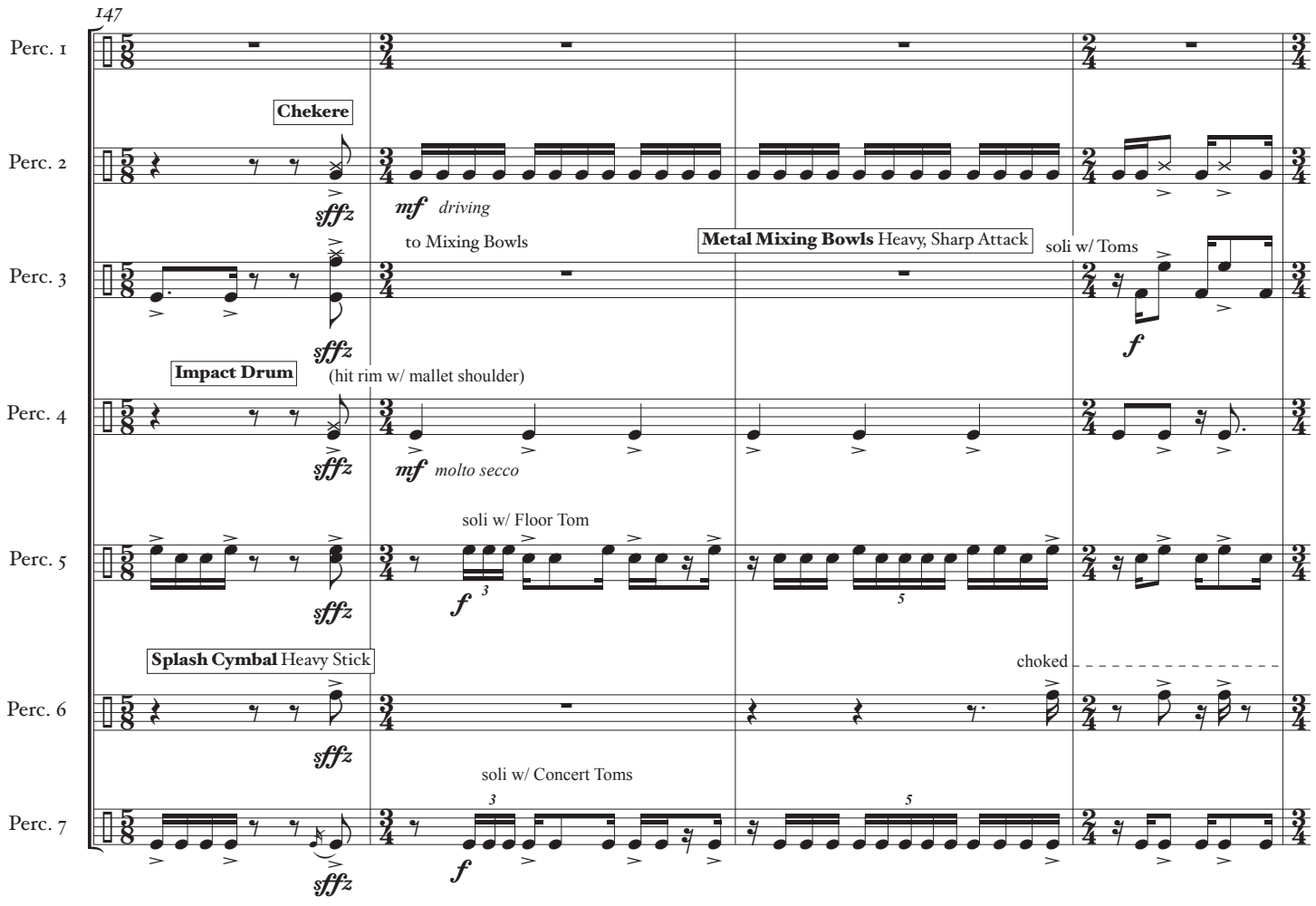

113
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
p
n
kick drum cresc.
fp
poco a poco cresc.
to Floor Tom
mp
pp


118
117
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
mp
mf
pp
(pp)
fp
f
Floor Tom Rute Rods
sempre p


137
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
f
mf
fp
f
f
f
f
f


140
142
♩=114 Thrashing (=)
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
ff
f
ff
ff


143
to Marimba
Perc. 1
to Chekere
Perc. 2
Brake Drum/Cymbal Stack ready
Perc. 3
mp driving
to Impact Drum
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
to Splash Cymbal
Perc. 6
Perc. 7


147
Perc. 1
Chekere
Perc. 2
sfffz
mf driving
to Mixing Bowls
Metal Mixing Bowls Heavy, Sharp Attack
soli w/ Toms
Perc. 3
f
Impact Drum
(hit rim w/ mallet shoulder)
Perc. 4
mf molto secco
soli w/ Floor Tom
Perc. 5
Splash Cymbal Heavy Stick
choked
Perc. 6
soli w/ Concert Toms
Perc. 7

151

Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

accent quarter notes sim.

choked

155

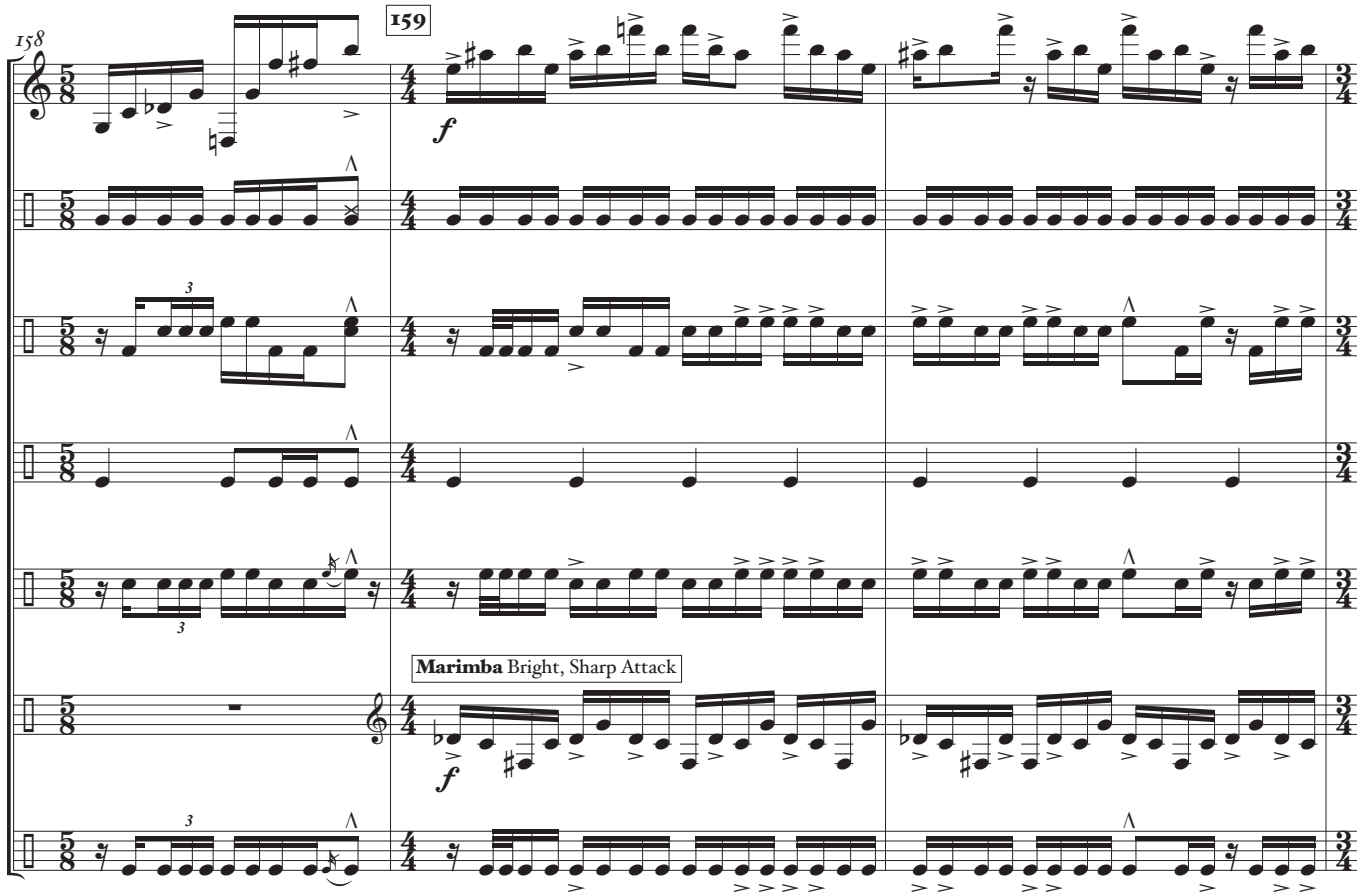
Marimba Bright, Sharp Attack

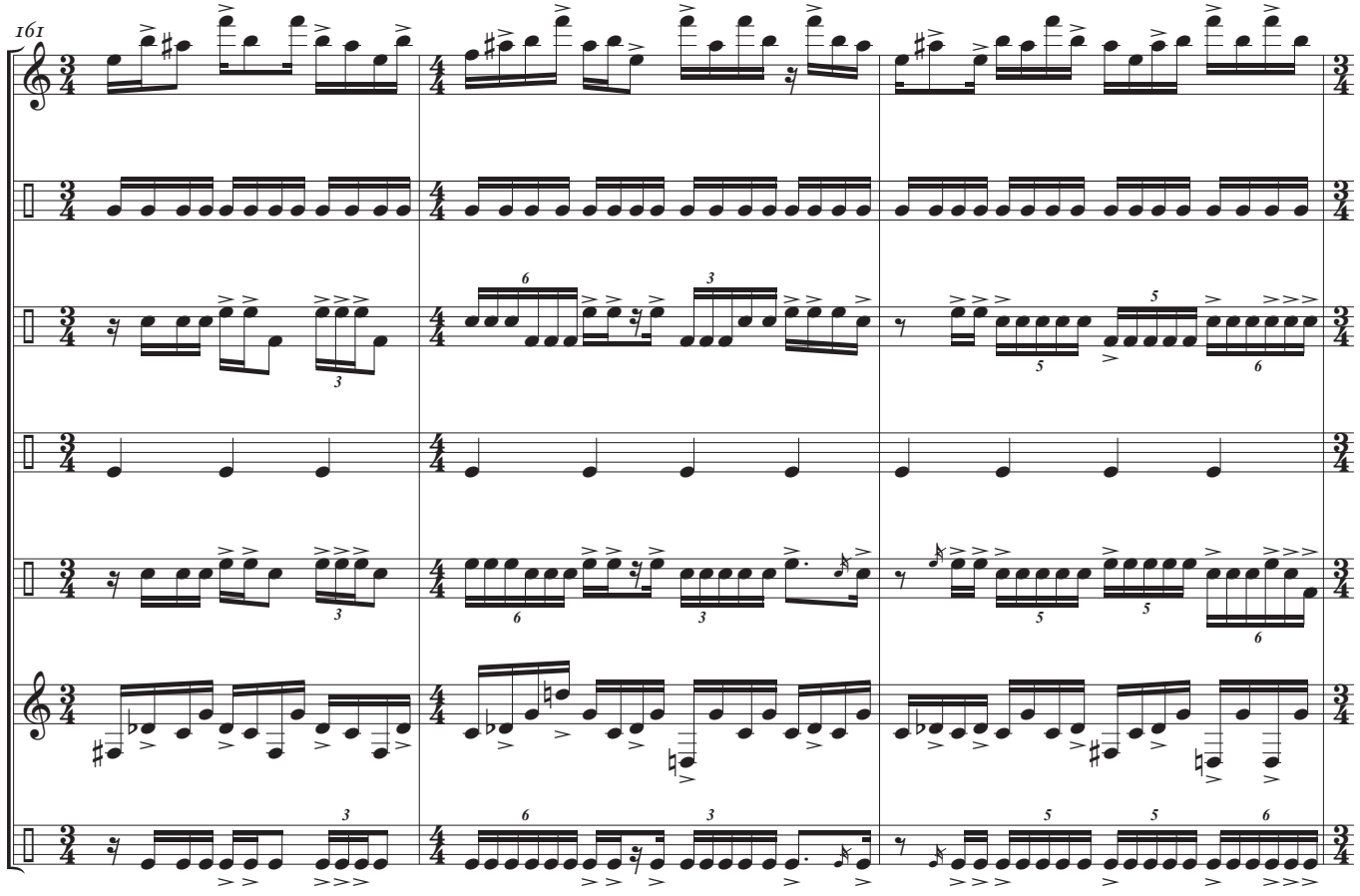
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

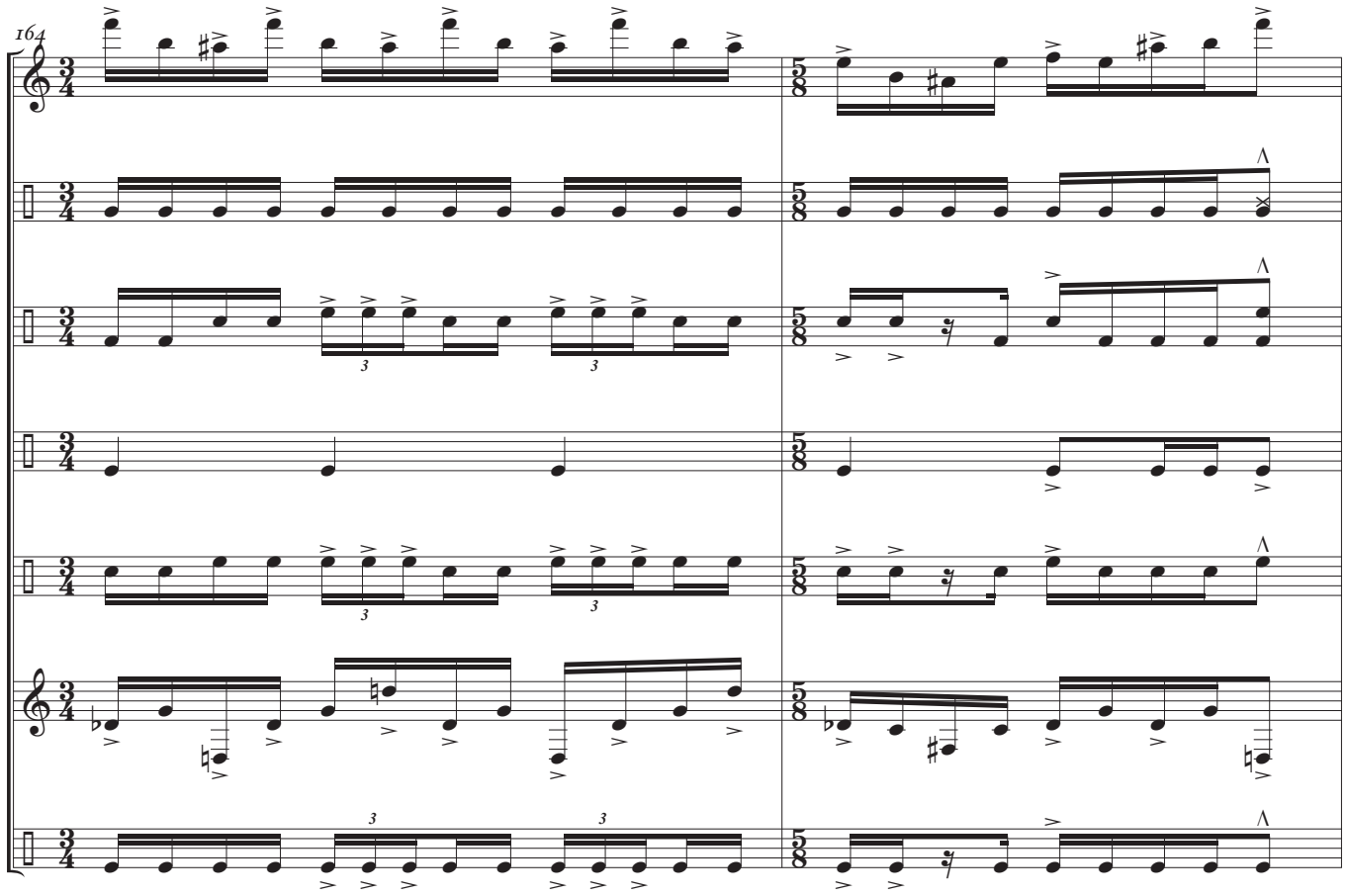
mf

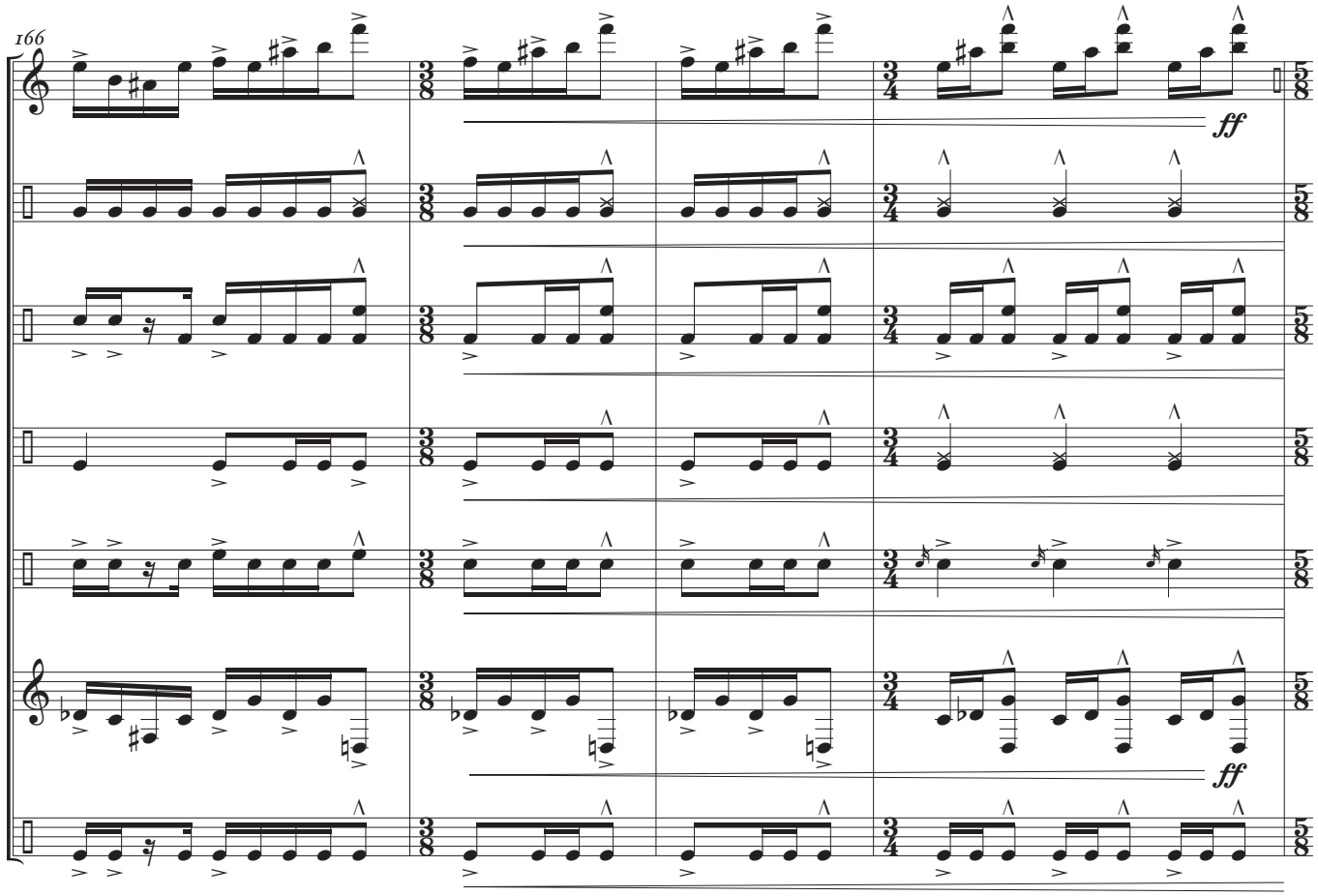
cresc.

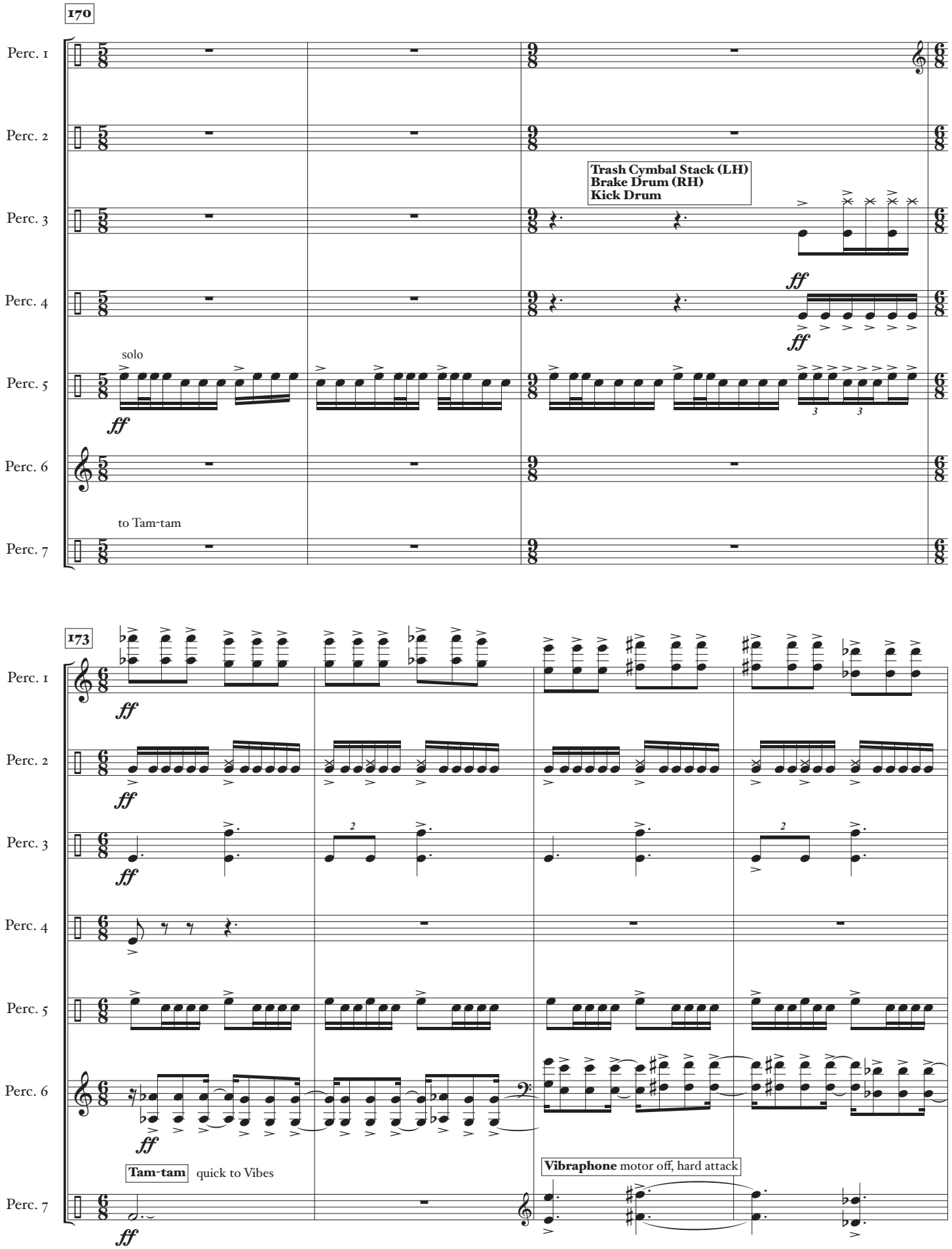
to Marimba

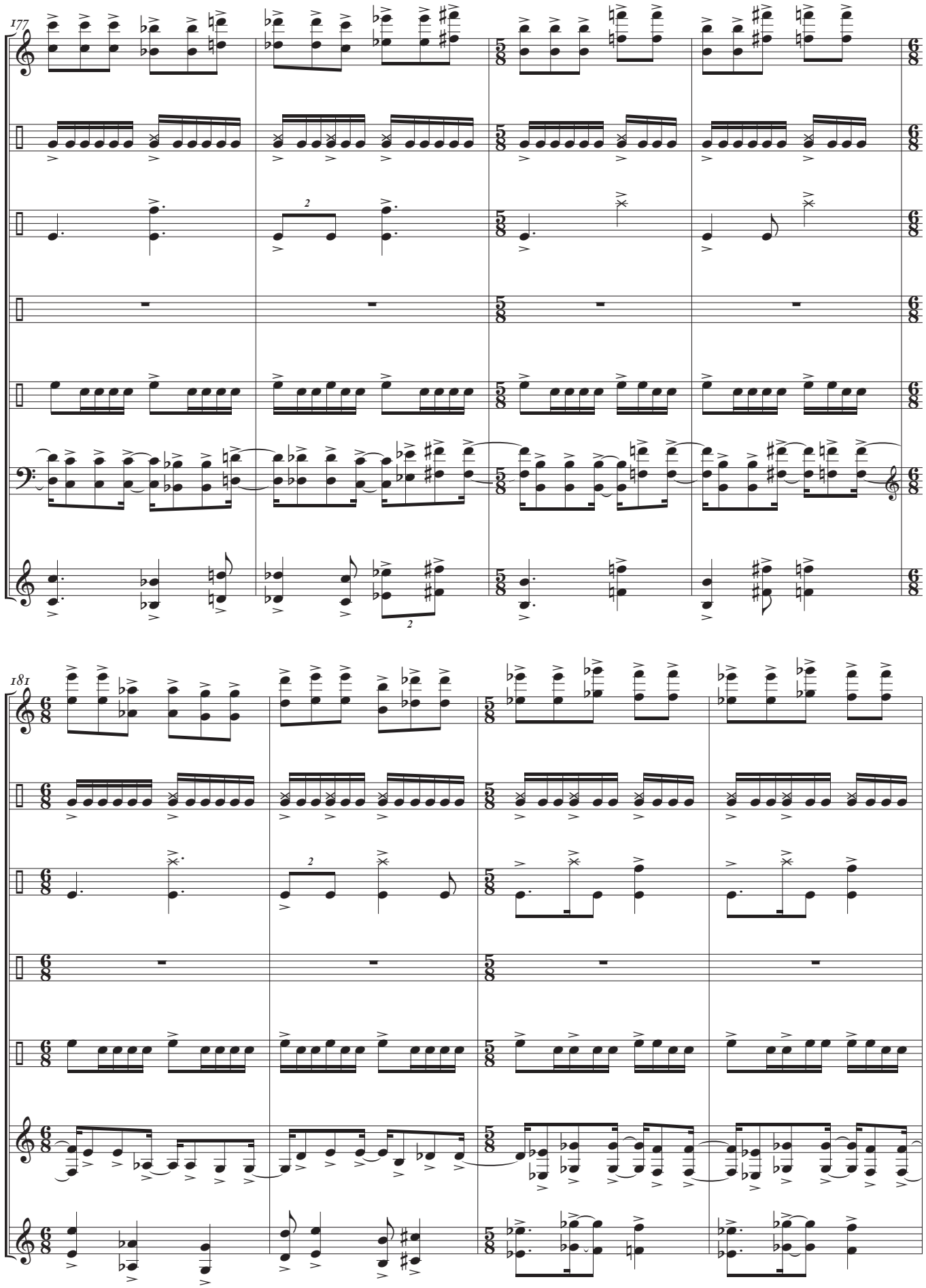

158
159
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
f
Marimba Bright, Sharp Attack
f

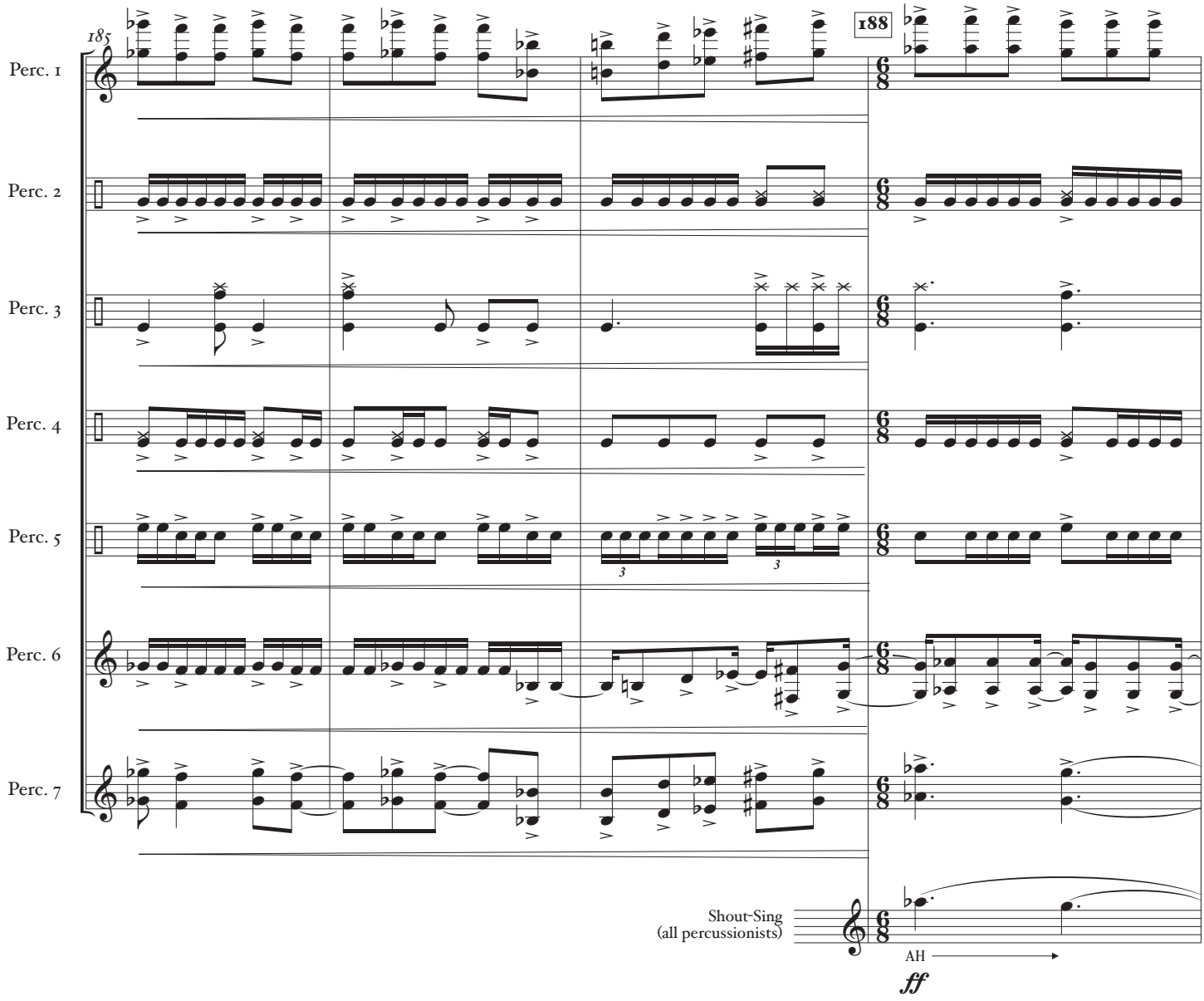

161
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

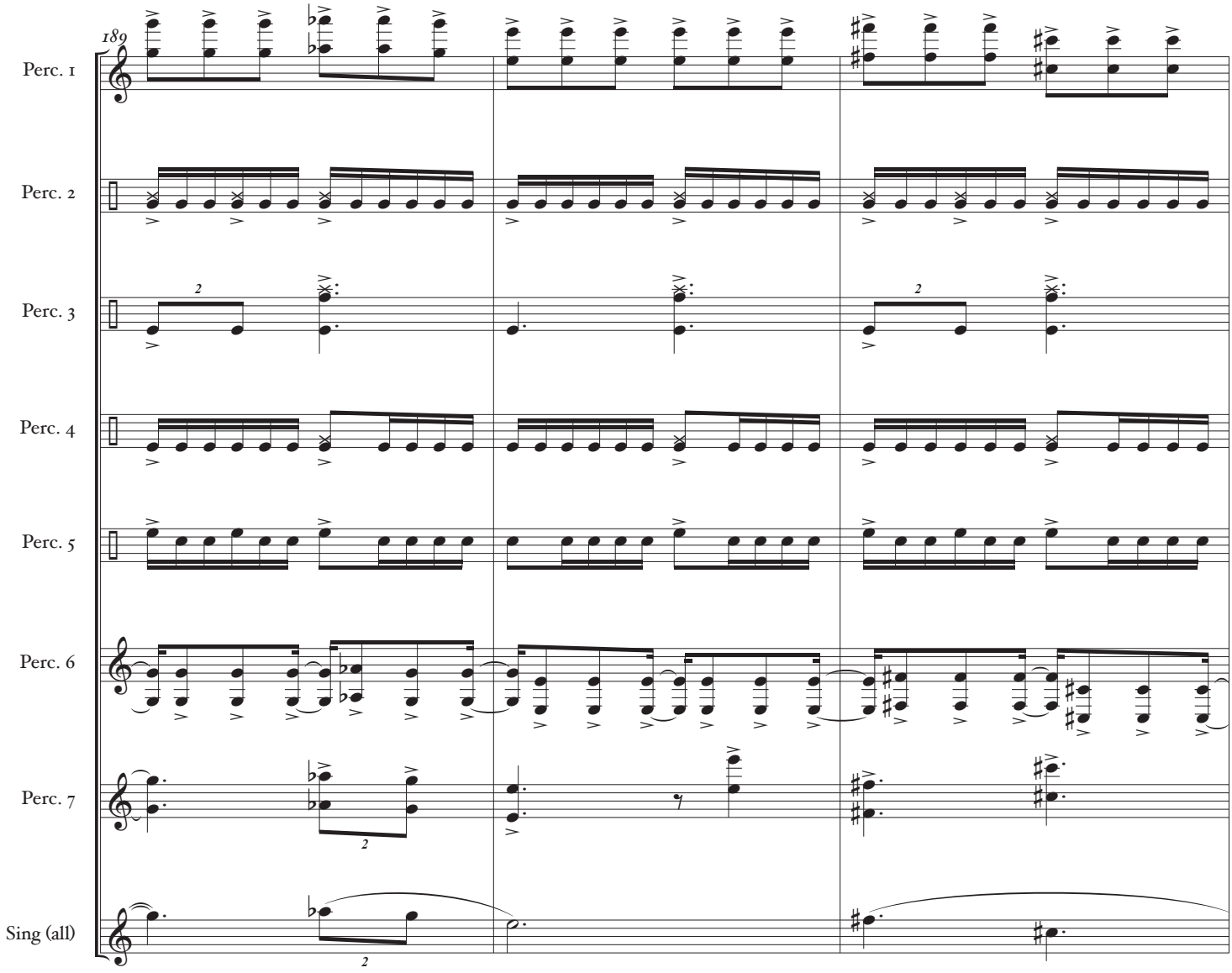

164
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

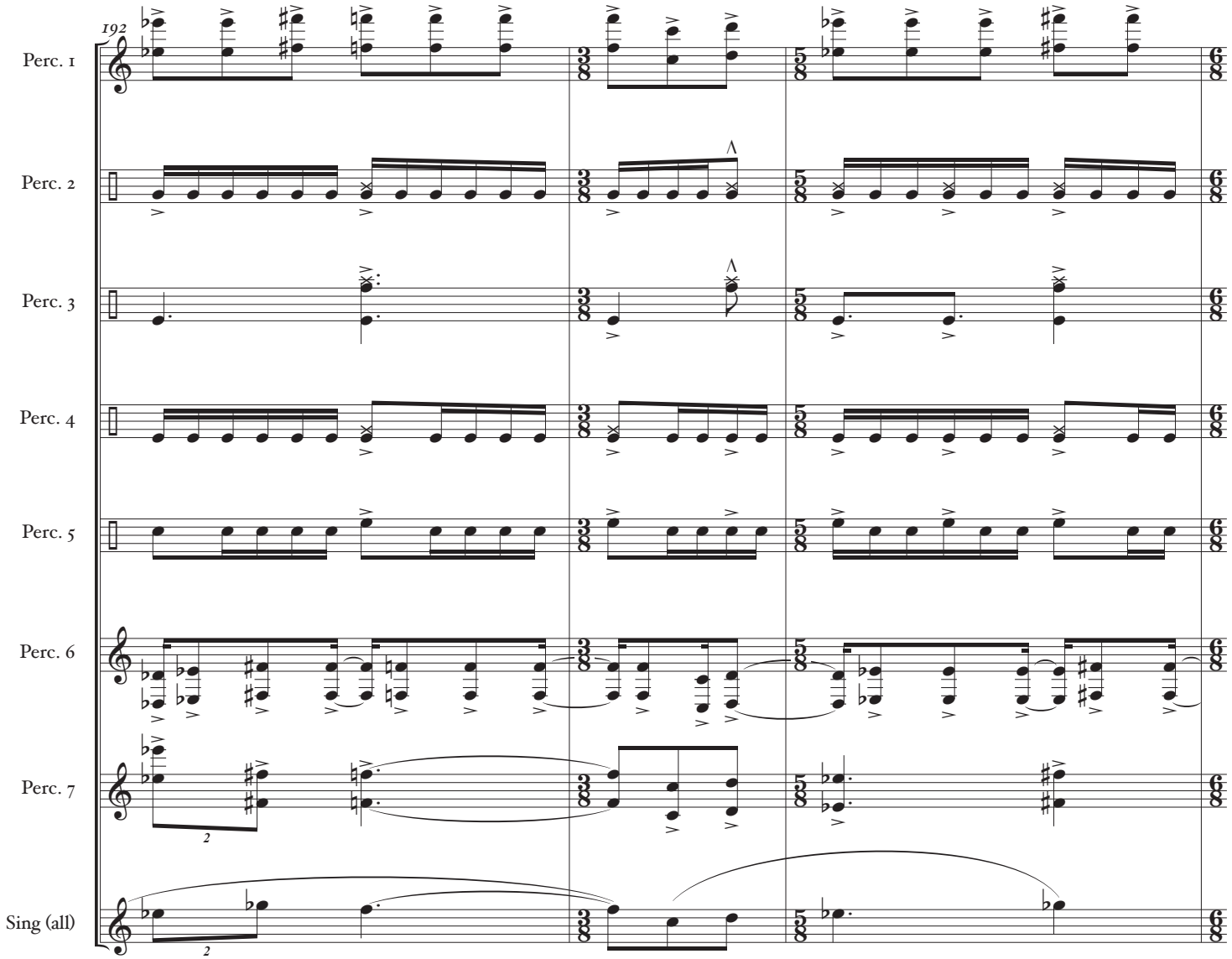

166
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
ff
ff

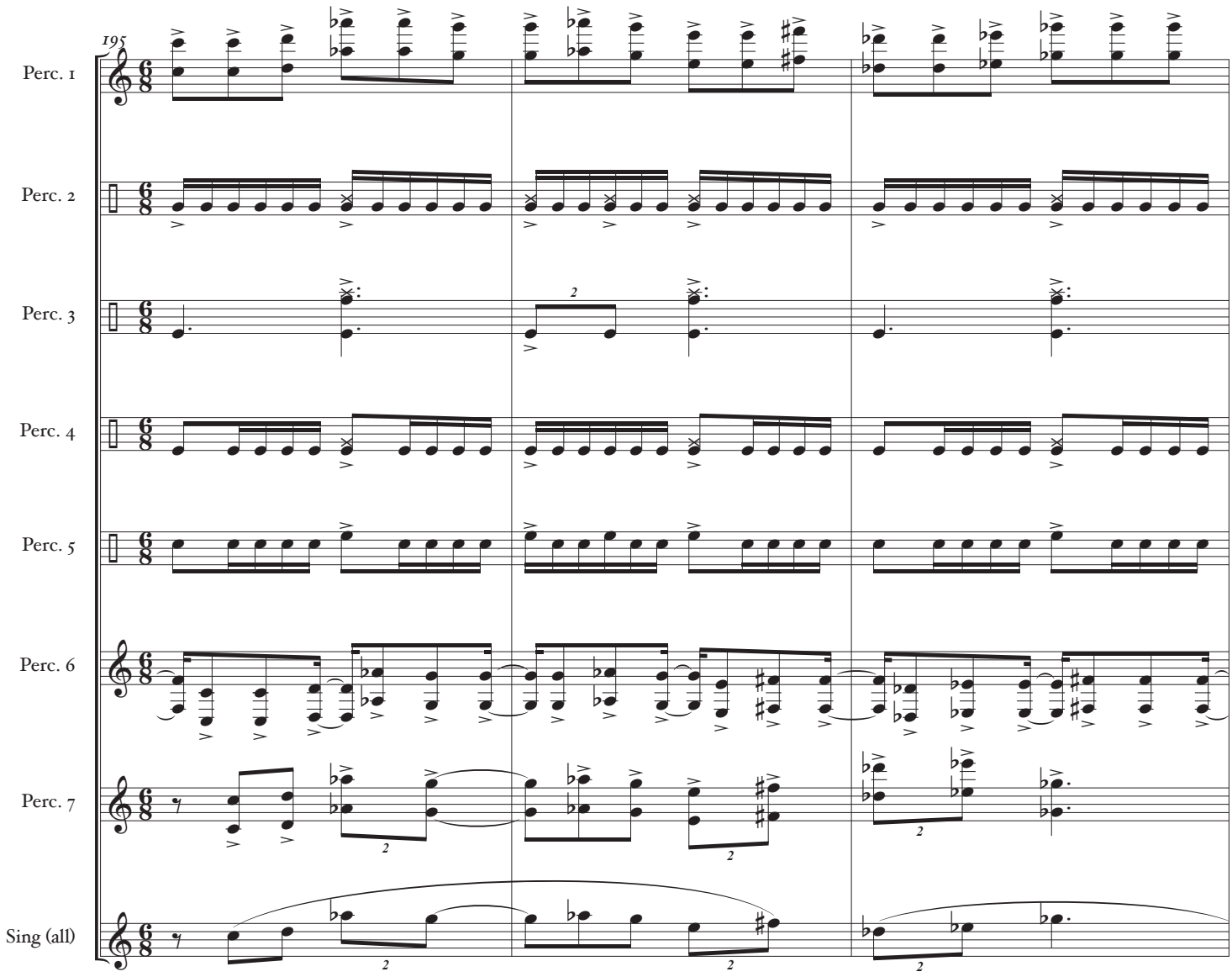

170
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Trash Cymbal Stack (LH)
Brake Drum (RH)
Kick Drum
ff
solo
to Tam-tam
173
Tam-tam quick to Vibes
Vibraphone motor off, hard attack

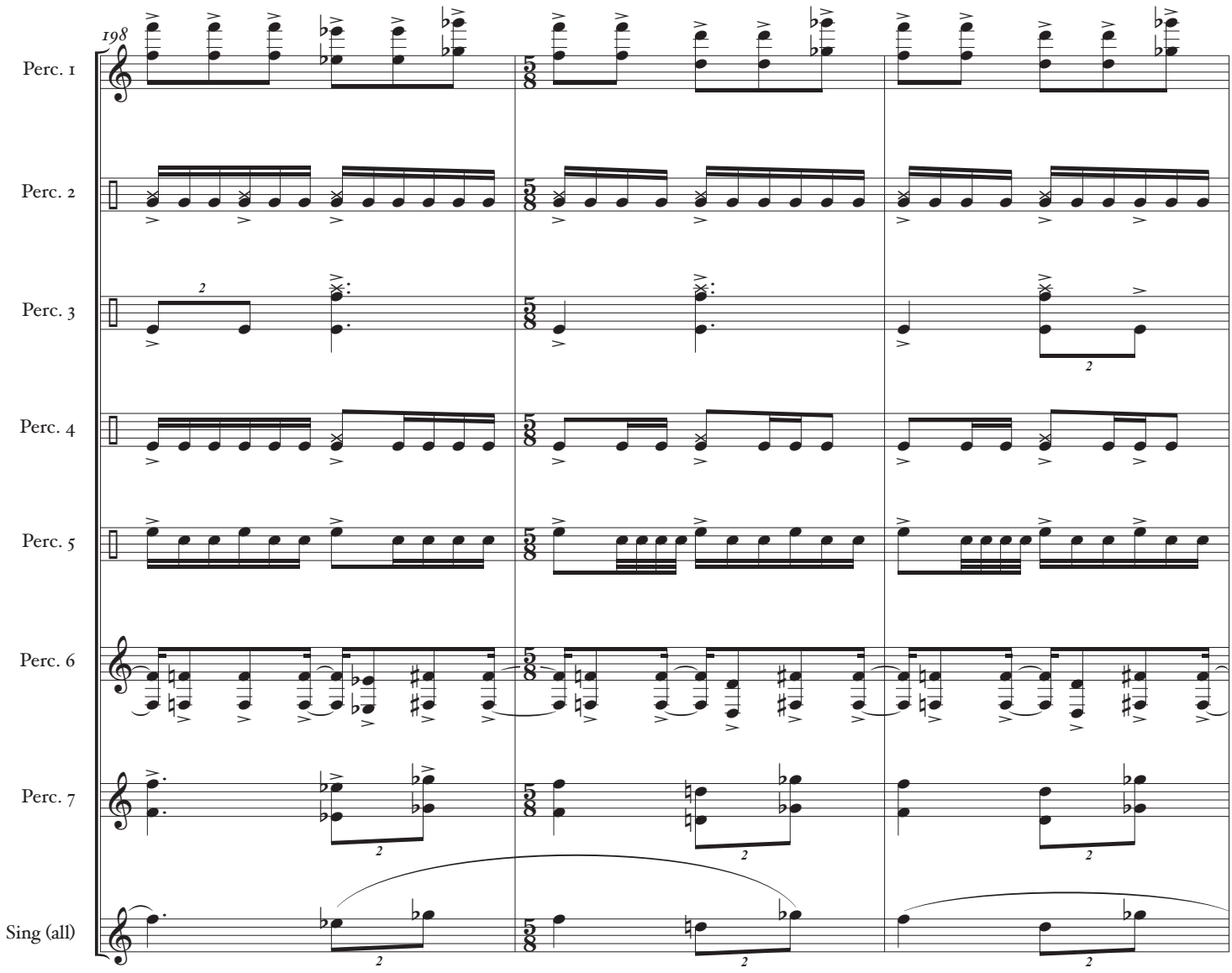

177
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
181
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7

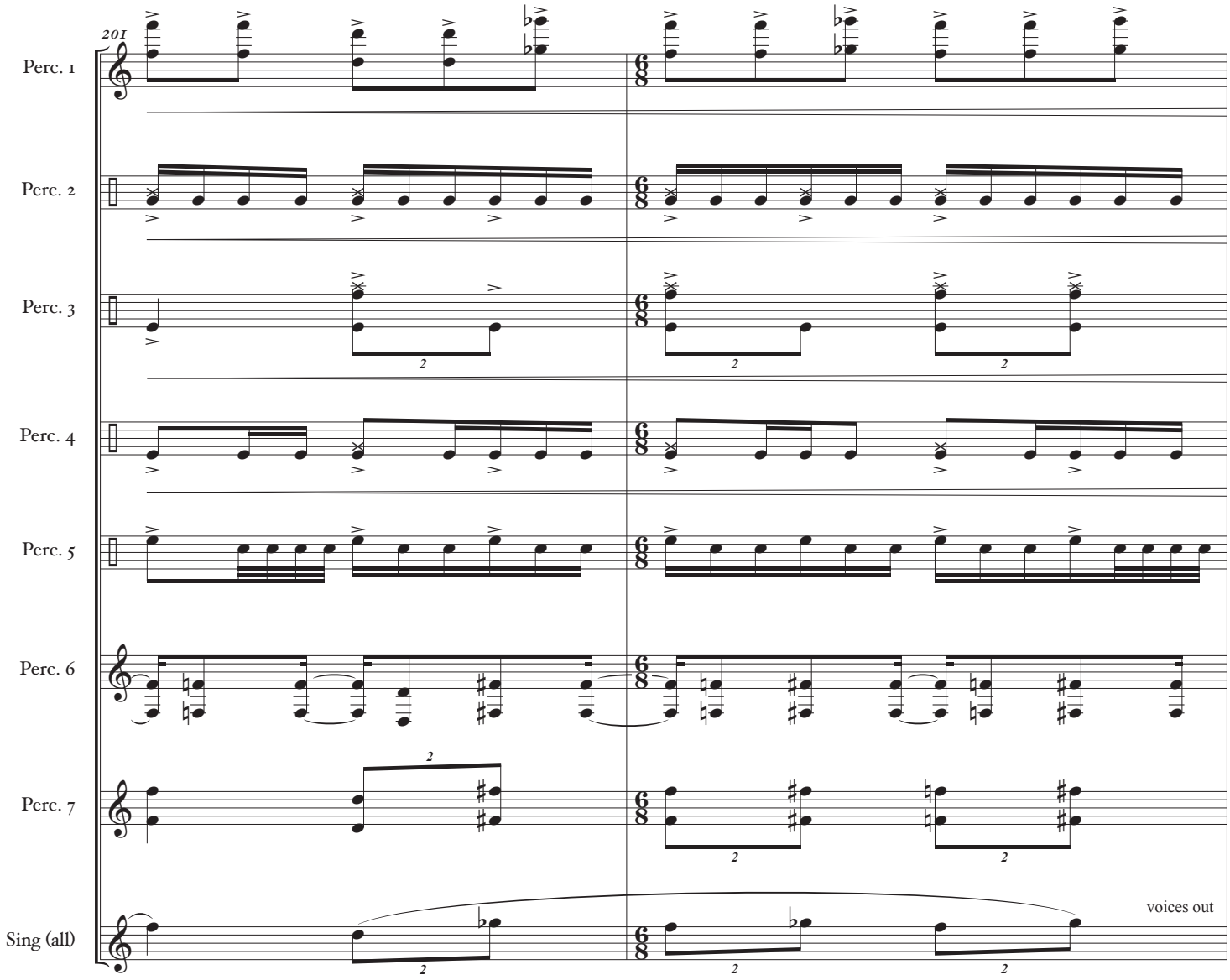

185
188
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Shout-Sing
(all percussionists)
AH
ff


189
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Sing (all)


192
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Sing (all)

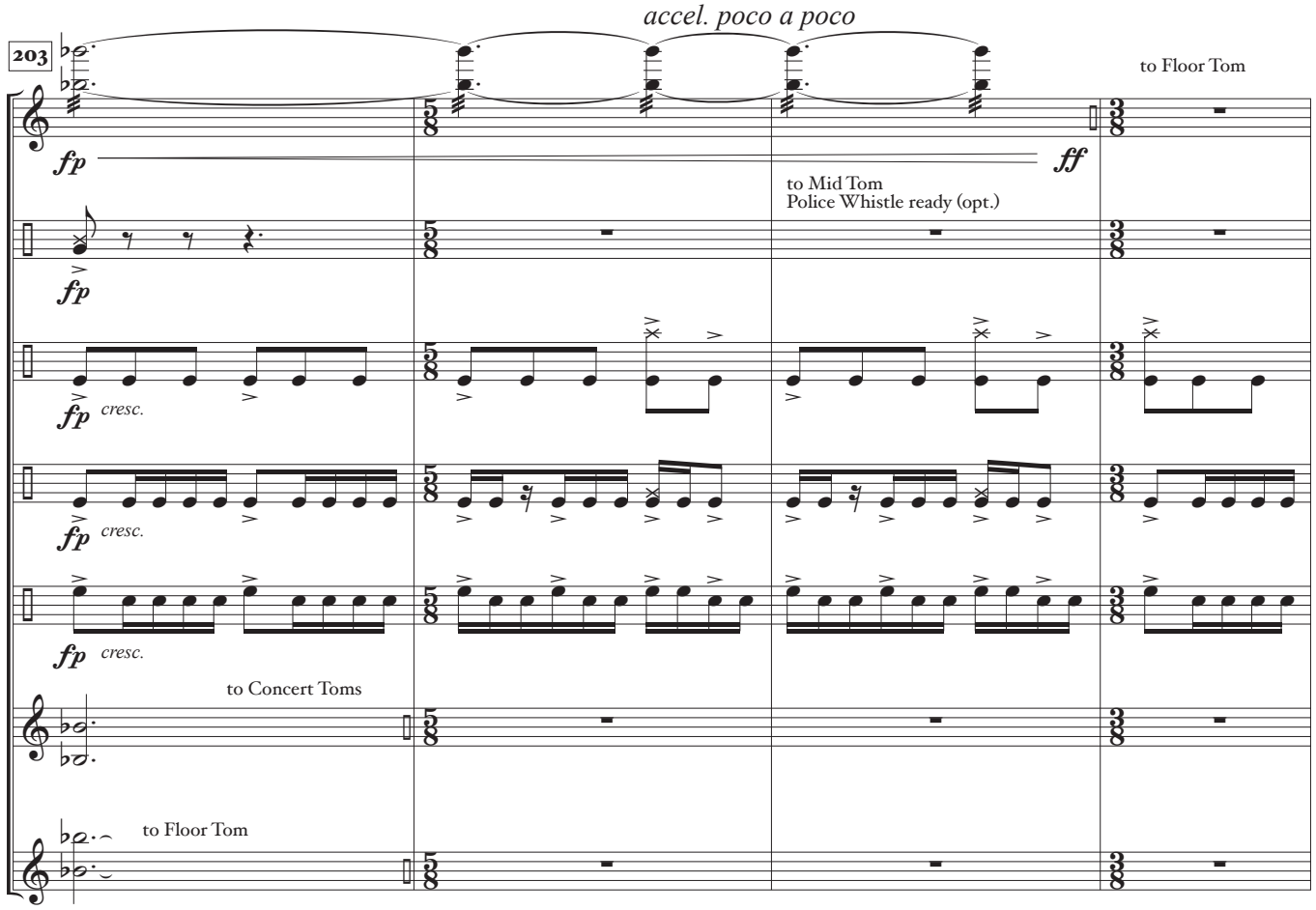

195
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Sing (all)

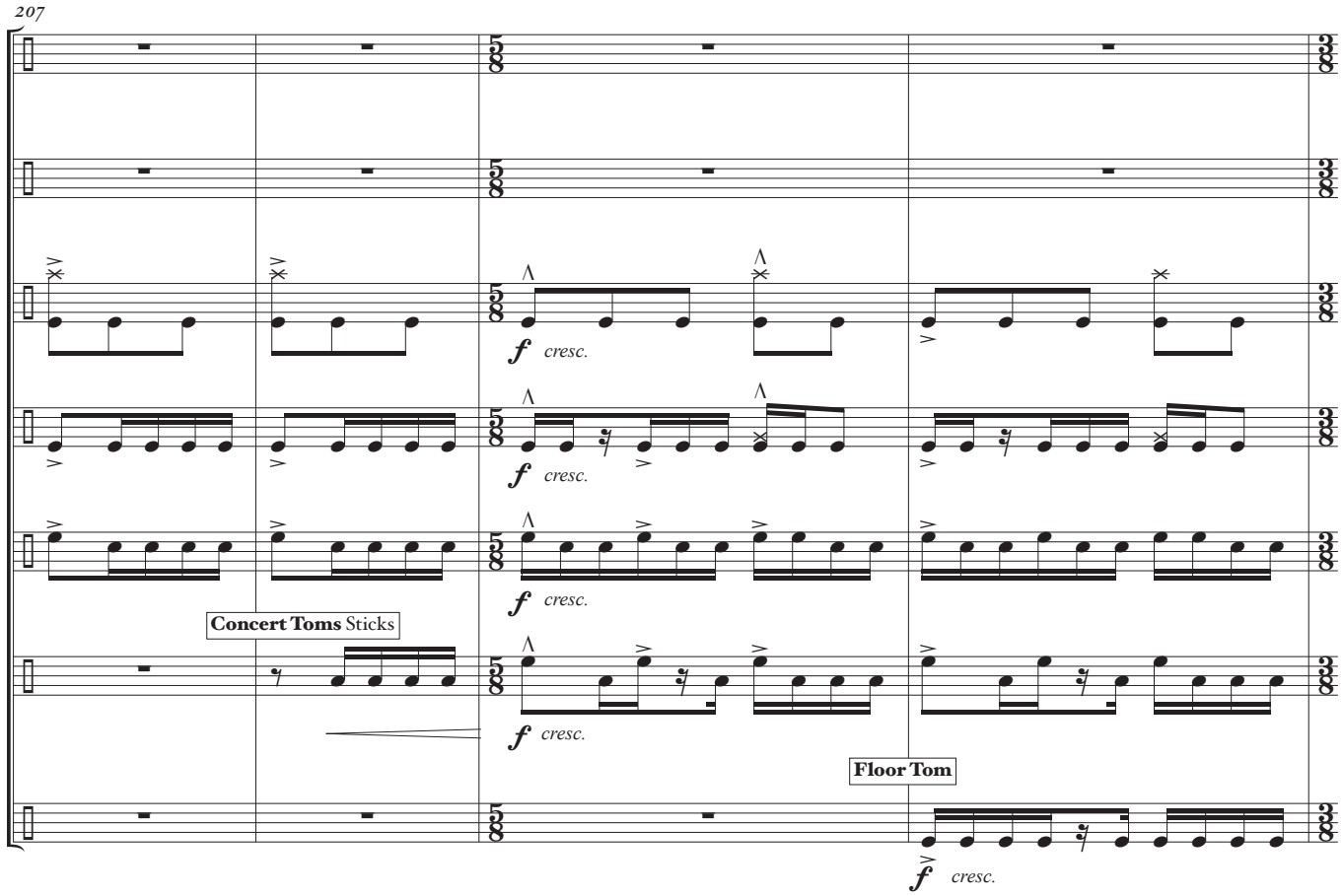

198
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Sing (all)

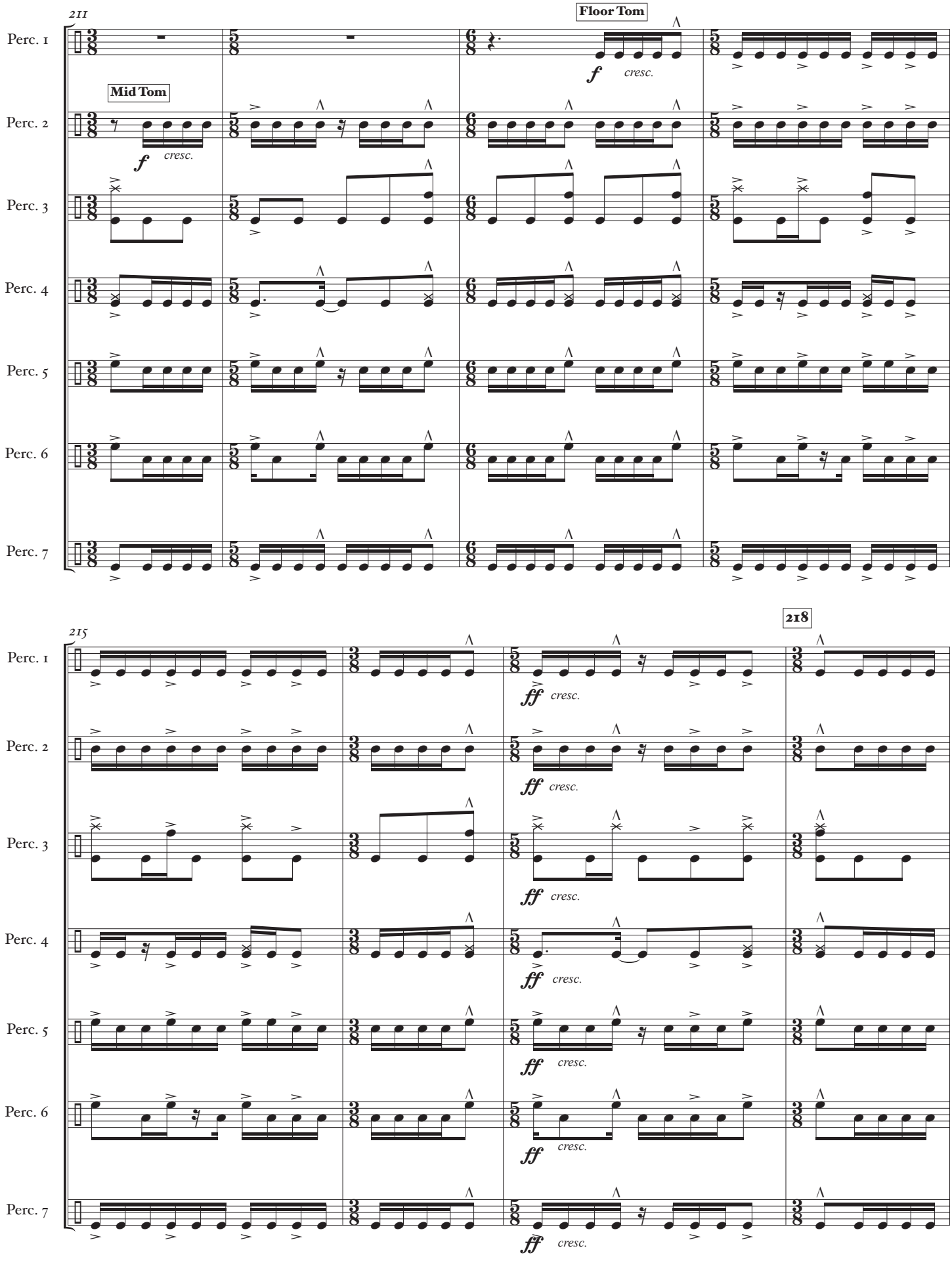

201
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
Sing (all)
voices out

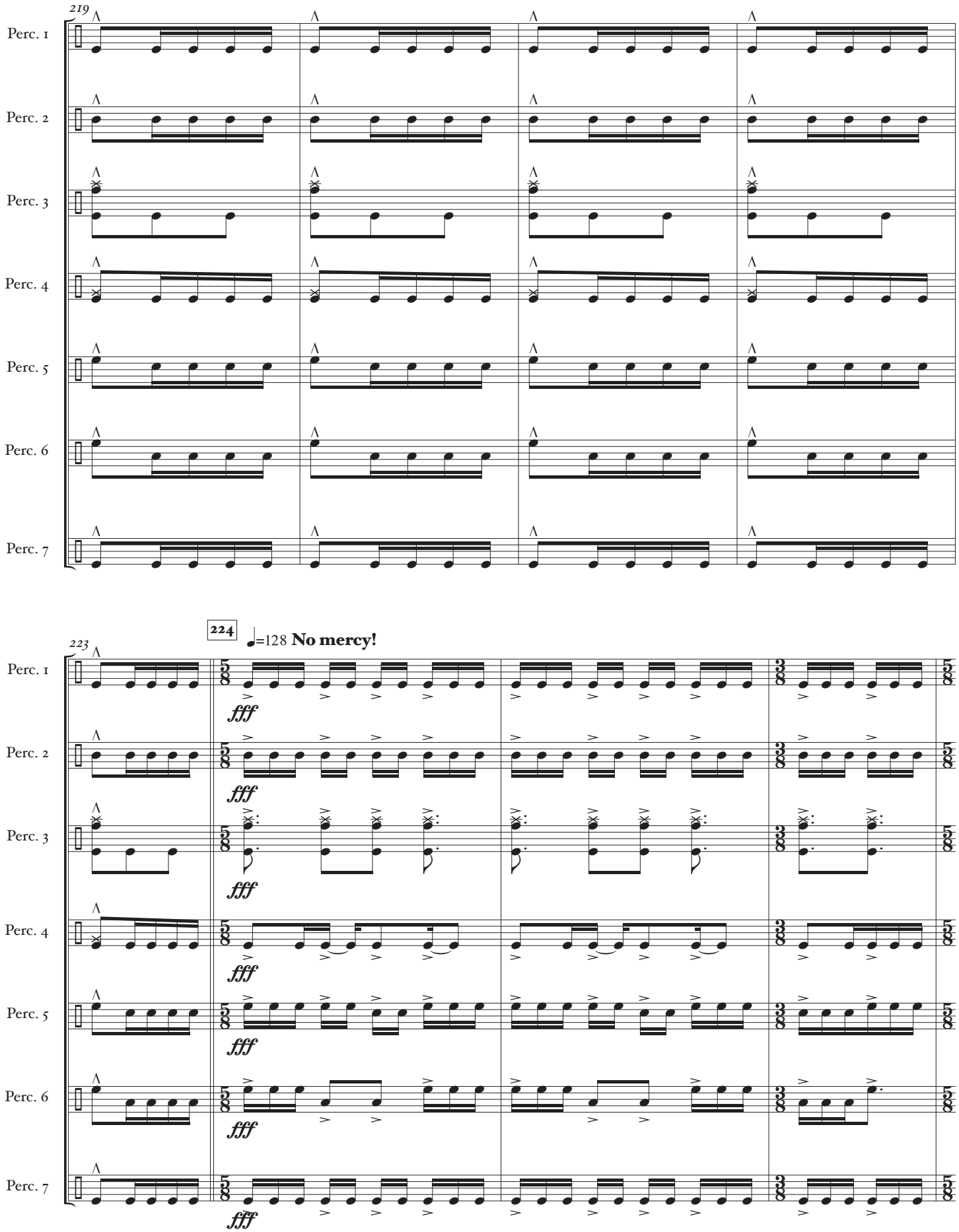
SNAKE OIL

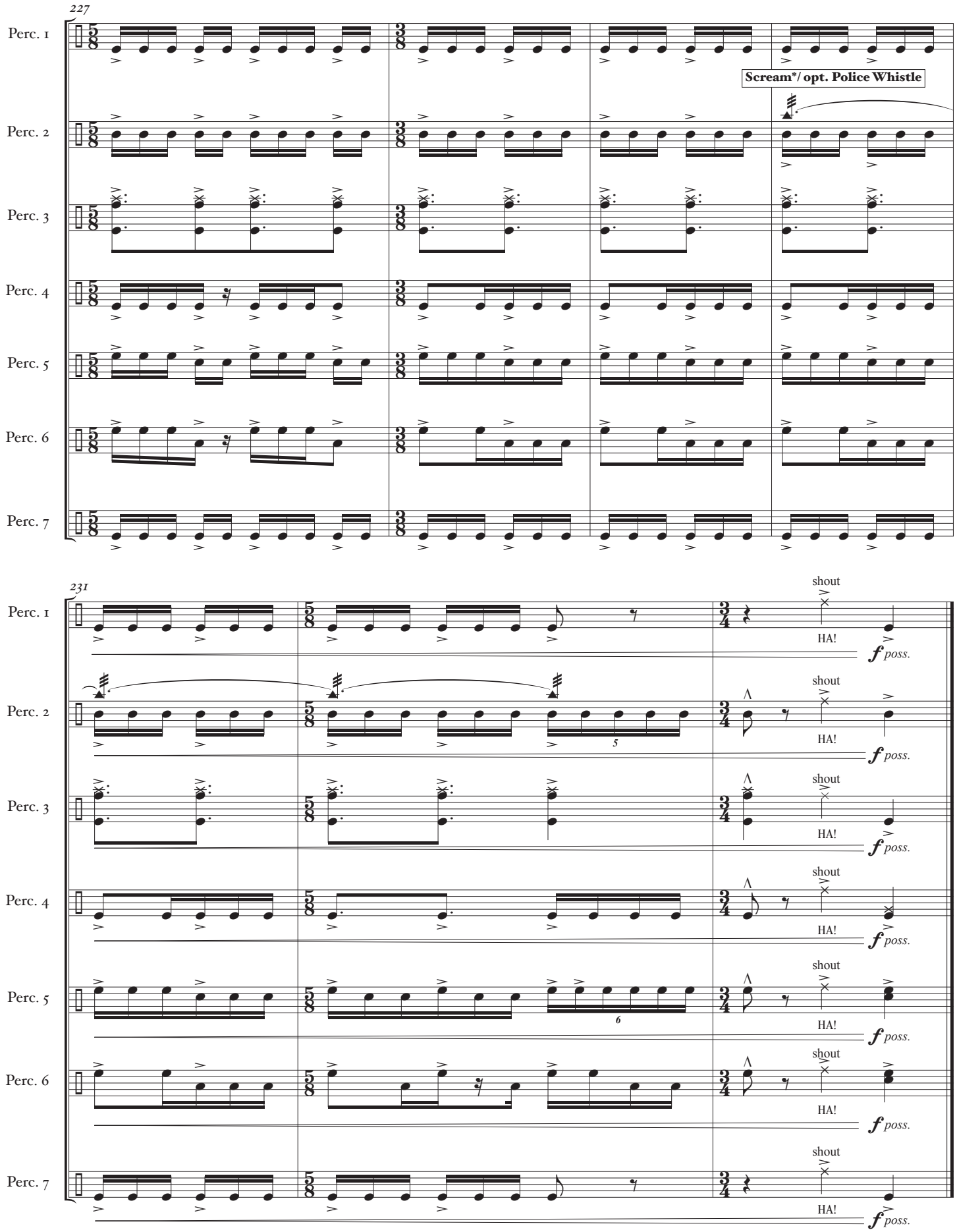
accel. poco a poco






211
Floor Tom
Mid Tom
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
f cresc.
215
218
ff cresc.


219
Perc. 1
Perc. 2
Perc. 3
Perc. 4
Perc. 5
Perc. 6
Perc. 7
223
224
♩=128 No mercy!
fff



*See performance notes.

September 2019 // Lincoln, NE