ALEX TEMPLE

↖ SWITCH ↘

A SCIENCE-FICTION MICRO-OPERA

for singing cellist,
flute, violin, percussion
& pre-recorded electronics

SCORE IN C

composed in 2013 for Cadillac Moon Ensemble

↖ INSTRUMENTATION ↘

cello / voice (range: E3 to B4)
flute / alto flute
violin
percussion: vibraphone / hi-hat / suspended cymbal

↖ SYNOPSIS ↘

SWITCH takes place in a parallel universe in which left- and right-handed people are assigned distinct social roles. Lefties are expected to be irrational and intuitive, to take jobs in creative fields, and to dress in wild, colorful patterns, while righties are expected to be rational and analytical, to take jobs in practical fields, and to dress conservatively. This setup is justified by both religious tradition and modern pseudoscience.

The opera's nameless protagonist is designated a "hand offender." Specifically, she was born right-handed, but now lives as a lefty. Over the course of the piece, we learn that she was the leader of a movement to establish an alternative society called the Free Zone in the plains states. But this utopian dream came to an abrupt and violent end when the government was taken over by right-wing extremists, who turned the Free Zone into a toxic wasteland known as the Dark States. The protagonist lives in the ruins with four other people, still clinging to the vain hope of creating the Free Zone anew.

↖ PERFORMANCE NOTES ↘

SWITCH is in six parts:

1. Confessions of a Hand Offender
2. Song of the Free Zone
3. Radio Rant
4. Invasion [tape interlude]
5. Aftermath
6. Song of the Dark States

All sections are attacca, except for "Radio Rant," which leads into the electronic interlude called "Invasion." The interlude begins while the musicians are still playing, but continues unaccompanied for a while after their parts end. Part 5 begin as it fades out.

Spoken passages are sometimes written as a block of text under an arrow-shaped notehead. The arrow indicates when the text should begin; the vocalist is free to deliver it in any rhythm that seems dramatically effective, as long she finishes the line in time to start the next one.

There are no dynamics written in the vocal part. The vocals may be amplified or not; the most important thing is that the words always be clearly comprehensible.

↖ LIBRETTO ↘

1. Confessions of a Hand Offender

I have a confession to make: I was born right-handed. Does that shock you? I realize that my telling you this is dangerous, given the current political situation. But I've always been inclined to take risks. It's part of why I found it impossible to live as a righty. That sober lifestyle never suited me. And besides, you're here, which means you're in violation of the Transit Code. Turn me in, you'll be turning yourself in too. And don't think you can make an anonymous phone call either. They can trace it. If you want to hold on to the scraps you call freedom, you'll take my secret to your grave.

Why did you come here, anyway? Nobody spends ten hours riding an unlicensed bus through thick black smoke without a good reason. Someone must have told you that there was something important out here. It's true: There are things they don't teach you in Civilization. Things you're not allowed to talk about.

I was born in what now seems like an enlightened age. Traditional roles were beginning to dissolve. Righties were making art. (Cerebral art, naturally.) Lefties were opening businesses. (Eccentric ones, of course.) And lefties were gaining political rights for the first time: the right to vote, the right to run for office, the right to live independently without a righty to watch over them.

But for me, it wasn't enough. I couldn't form an image of myself as a righty. Even as an artist, I was expected to be cold, rational, businesslike, to favor drab blues and grays. I felt sick when I wrote with my right hand, and people called me sick when I didn't. So I left, and started a life as a lefty in the Dark States.

They weren't called the Dark States back then. That scorched, ruined landscape hasn't always been there. A few years ago, it was a fertile plain called the Free Zone.

A new world, unbound by the rules of Civilization! The first colony was only 60 people. By the end of the second year, we were over 60,000 strong. Heretics, dissidents, dropouts. Off the grid. Self-sustaining. No need for assistance from the East.

2. Song of the Free Zone

I think often of the people that I knew there—
The misfits who willingly withdrew there
So they could cast off the shackles of Taboo there:

Roger, who had been accused of flagrant
Mockery of nature, just for writing ambidextrously.
Donna, who'd been living as a vagrant.
I don't know what happened; she was never quite direct with me.

And Harry, once a lefty, now a righty.
Carolyn, who worshipped Aphrodite.
And Martin, who'd been known to use his fingers in his sex life.
Jack, who was convinced he'd reach nirvana in his next life.

We knew that we were entering an era
Where there'd be no such thing as impropriety.
If it's true that art's a hammer, not a mirror,
We would hammer out a perfect new society!

No landlords there to check which hand you write with.
No codes of dress, de jure or de facto.
No judges that you have to be polite with
To keep your reputation intact. Oh,

We watched our rebel state continue growing.
The future had been written in advance.
Our luck would always rise, without plateauing,
And a backlash from the old guard? Not a chance.

But we received a startling transmission
In October of the third year:
The voice of a rabid rhetorician
Filling the airwaves with absurd smears,
Invoking the glory of tradition
And using us to stir fear.
We heard clearly:

3. Radio Rant

Righties and lefties have occupied traditional roles for centuries! Yes, it's true, as my opponents say, that in the Middle Ages lefties were considered "sinister" and persecuted. But *I've* never dragged a lefty through the street, bound and screaming, affixed them to a post and set them on fire! Nor have my parents! Nor have my parents' parents! Nor have my parents' parents' parents! Why must we righties be made to answer for the crimes of our ancestors? All this talk of "right privilege" is nothing but simple bigotry! And however excessive our Medieval forebears may have been, at least they understood the Law of Nature! AND THE LAW OF NATURE MUST BE ENFORCED BY THE LAW OF THE LAND.

God made lefties and righties with different temperaments so that they might occupy separate spheres in our society! *Science* tells us that the left brain, seat of rational thought, controls the right hand, while the right brain, seat of creativity, controls the left! And what is the meeting point of God and Science? What else but the Law of Nature? AND THE LAW OF NATURE IS THE ONLY LAW THAT EXISTS.

So now lefties complain of being second-class citizens. But they are only encouraged to express their natural strengths! And likewise, if a righty is insulted or ostracized or beaten for degrading their hand class by *painting* or *playing music*, surely they must understand that they are only being set back on the straight and narrow path — the Path of the Law of Nature! AND THE LAW OF NATURE HAS A STRONG HAND AND A LONG ARM.

And is it any coincidence that this country's strong, firm, decisive party is called The Right Wing, while the soft, gentle, nurturing party is called The Left Wing? And does it not follow from the names of these parties that it is the intrinsic, inescapable and incontrovertible *duty* of the Right Wing to take its soft and gentle counterpart in *hand*, to care for it, to lead it away from the temptations of the bizarre and perverse agenda promoted by those delusional agitators in the Free Zone? Must we not remind our colleagues on the opposite side of the aisle that we were put on this Earth to lead them through the wilderness, in accordance with the Law of Nature?

4. Invasion

[tape interlude]

5. Aftermath

They crushed us completely. Burned the trees, blackened the sky, crucified the heretics, and mutilated the hand offenders. There are things they don't teach you in Civilization. Things you're not allowed to talk about.

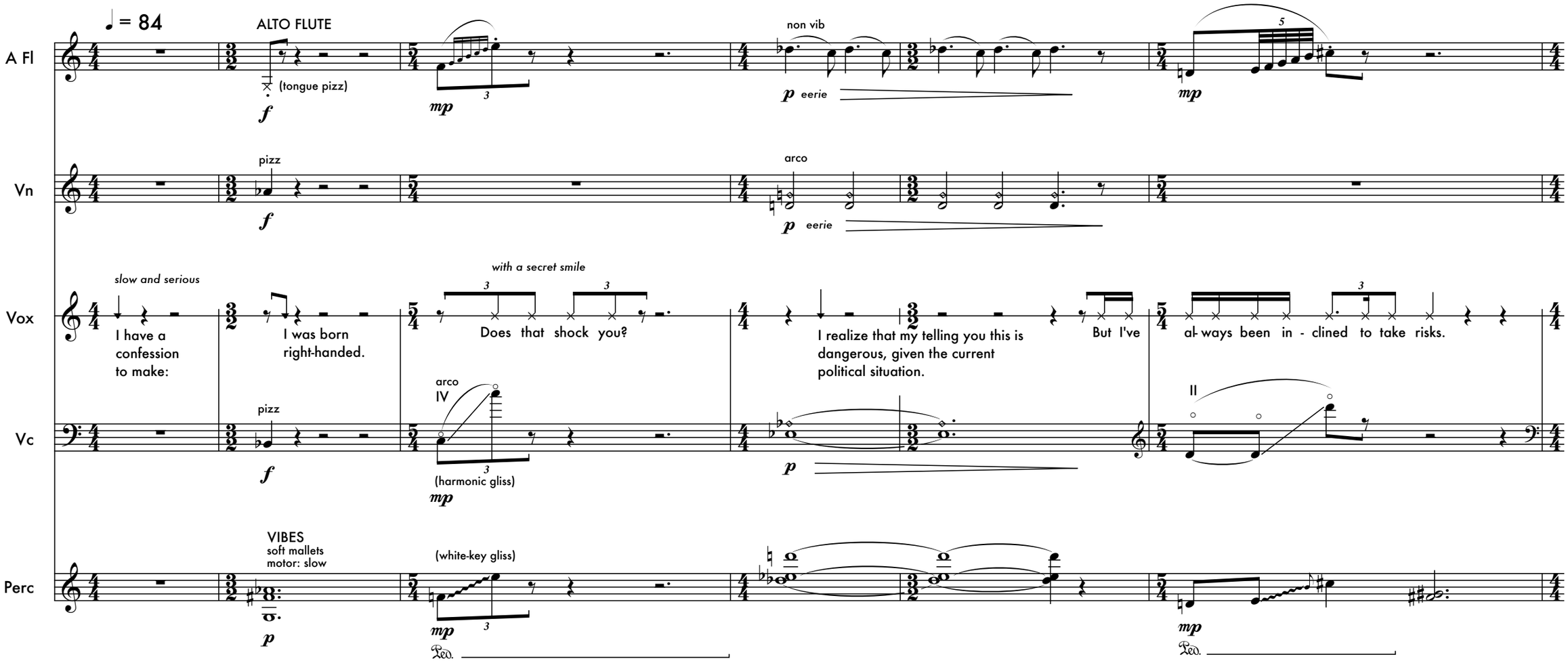
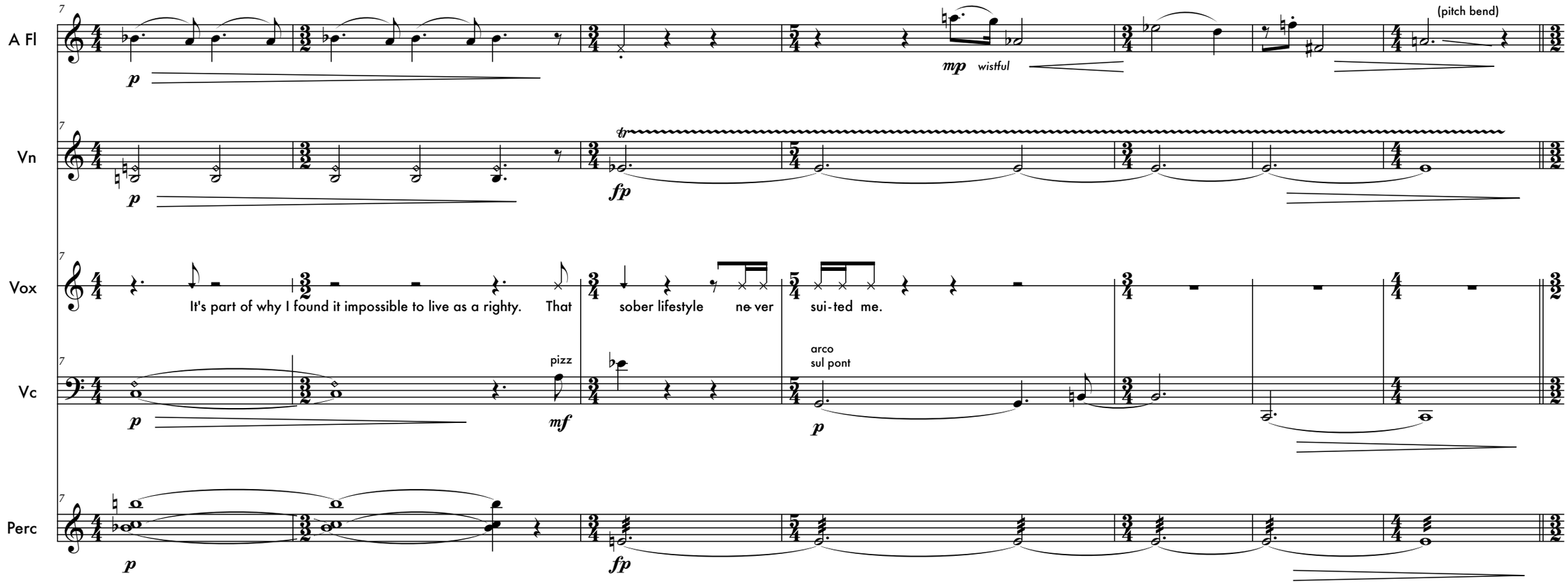
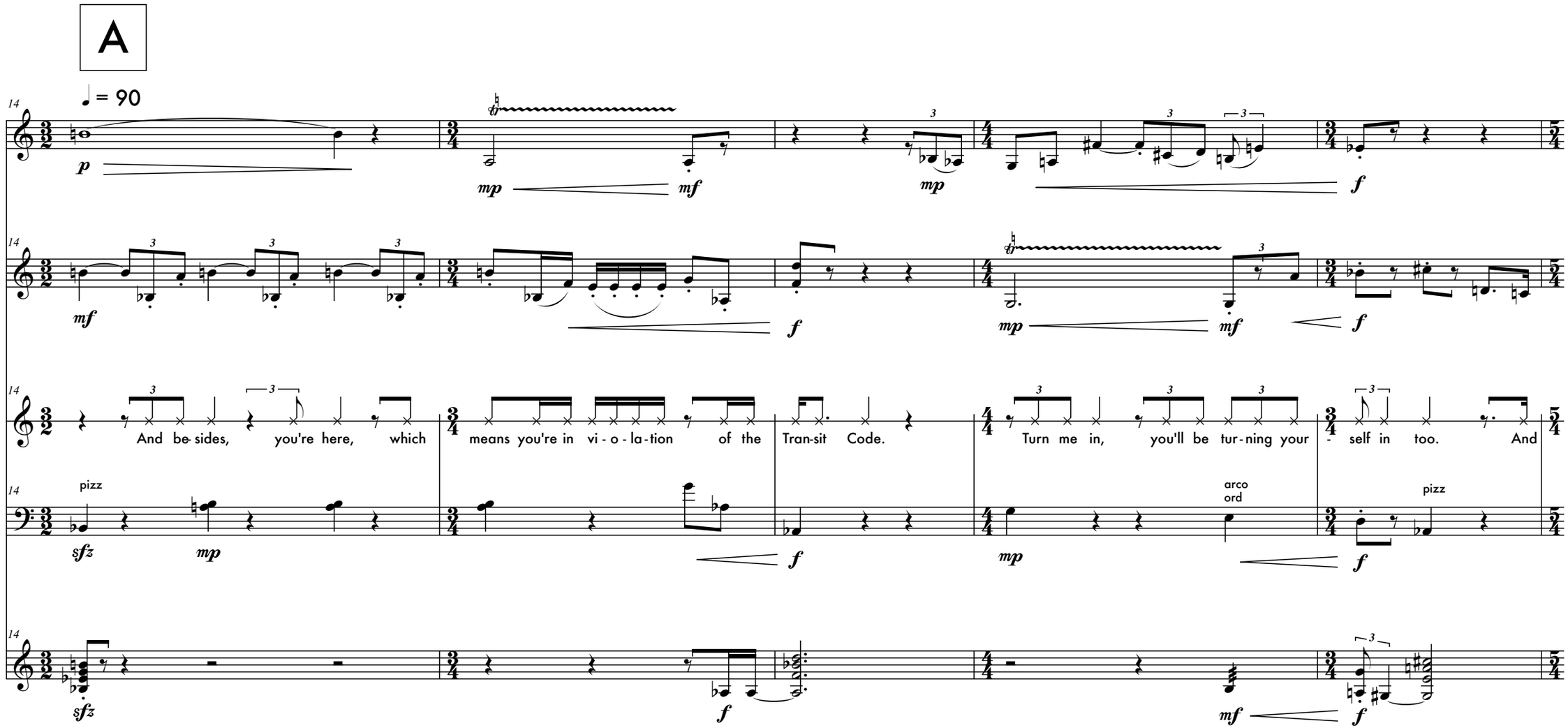
But I'm here, hands still attached, fingers unbroken. And I'm not the only one. There are five of us. And we're building something new, out in the glow of the oil field fires. We've started clearing rubble. We've assembled some structures out of scrap metal.

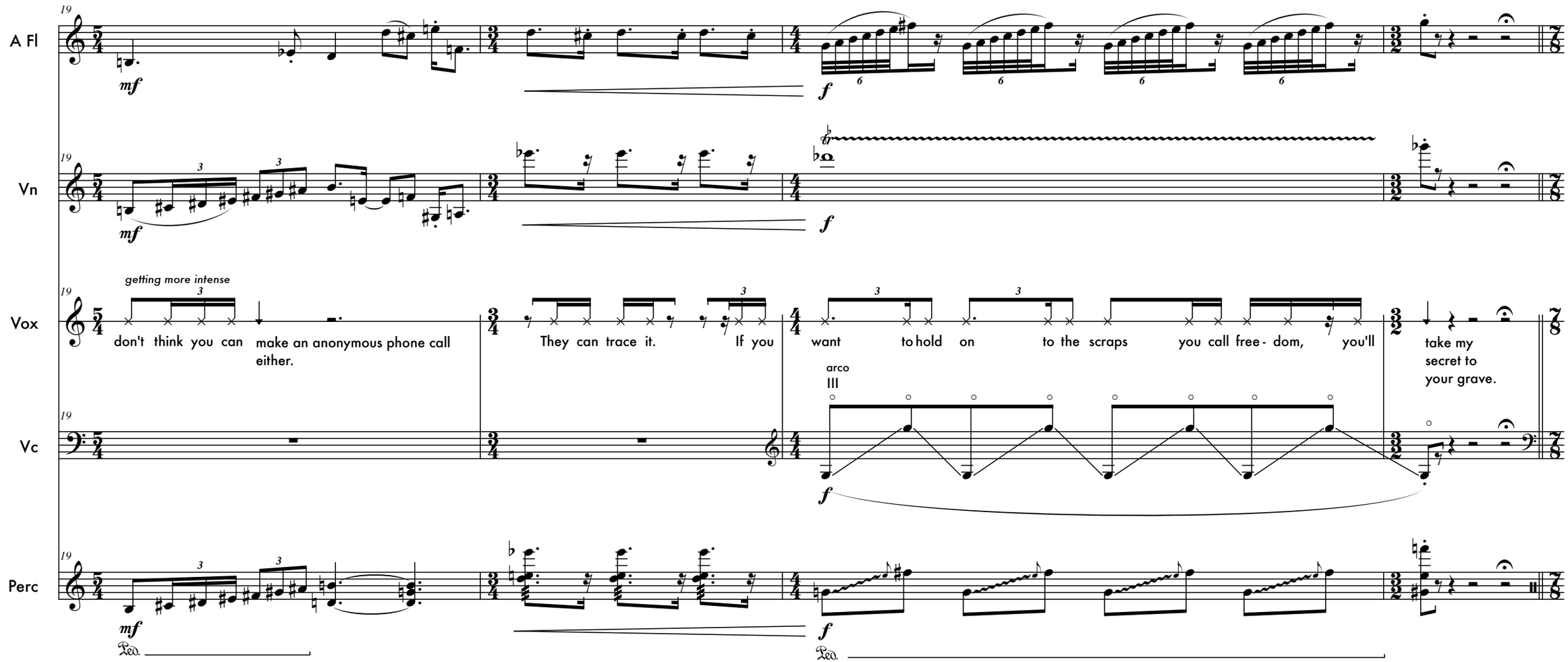
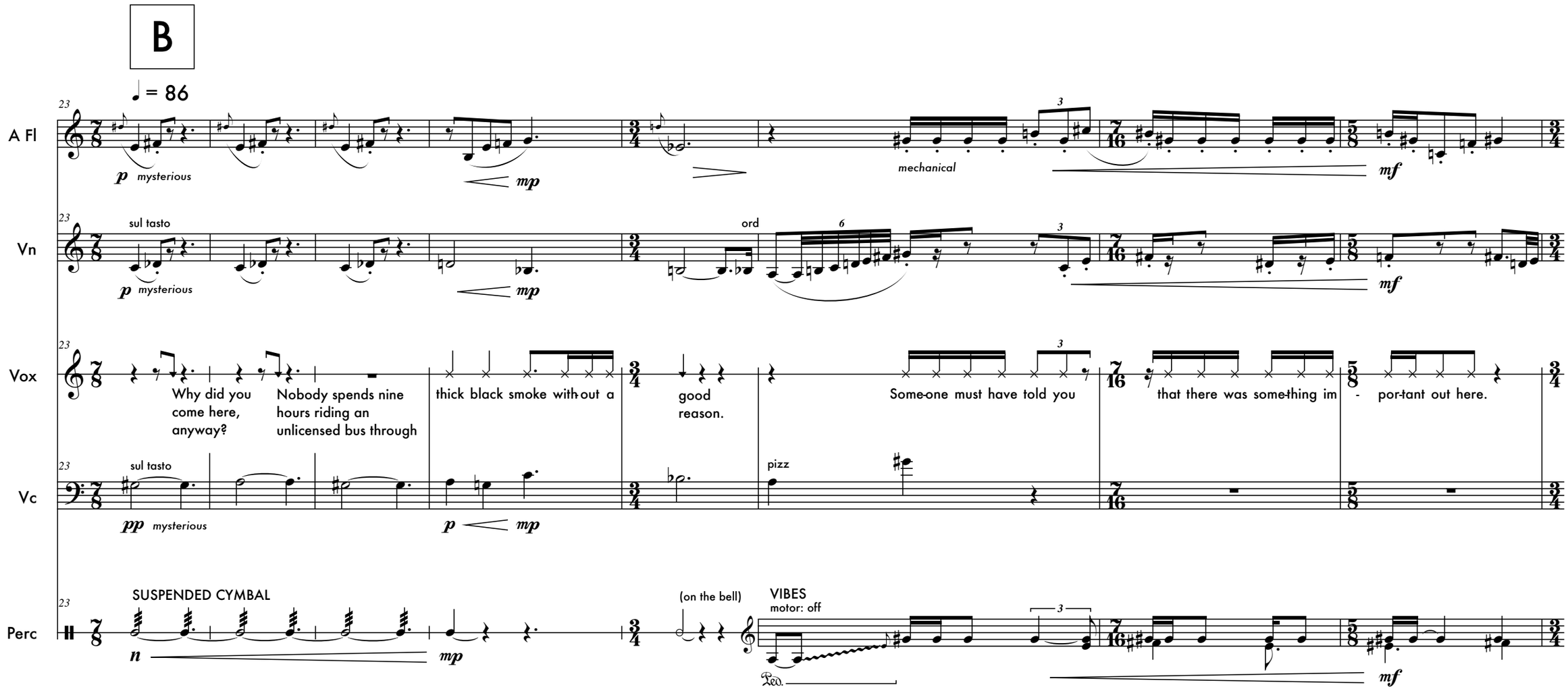
Somebody told you that there was something important out here. It's true. But we need your help. Go back to Civilization. Identify potential dissidents, and send them to us. Be careful. Be discreet. And remember, you know what we're up to, which means you're in violation of the Knowledge Code. Turn us in, you'll be turning yourself in too.

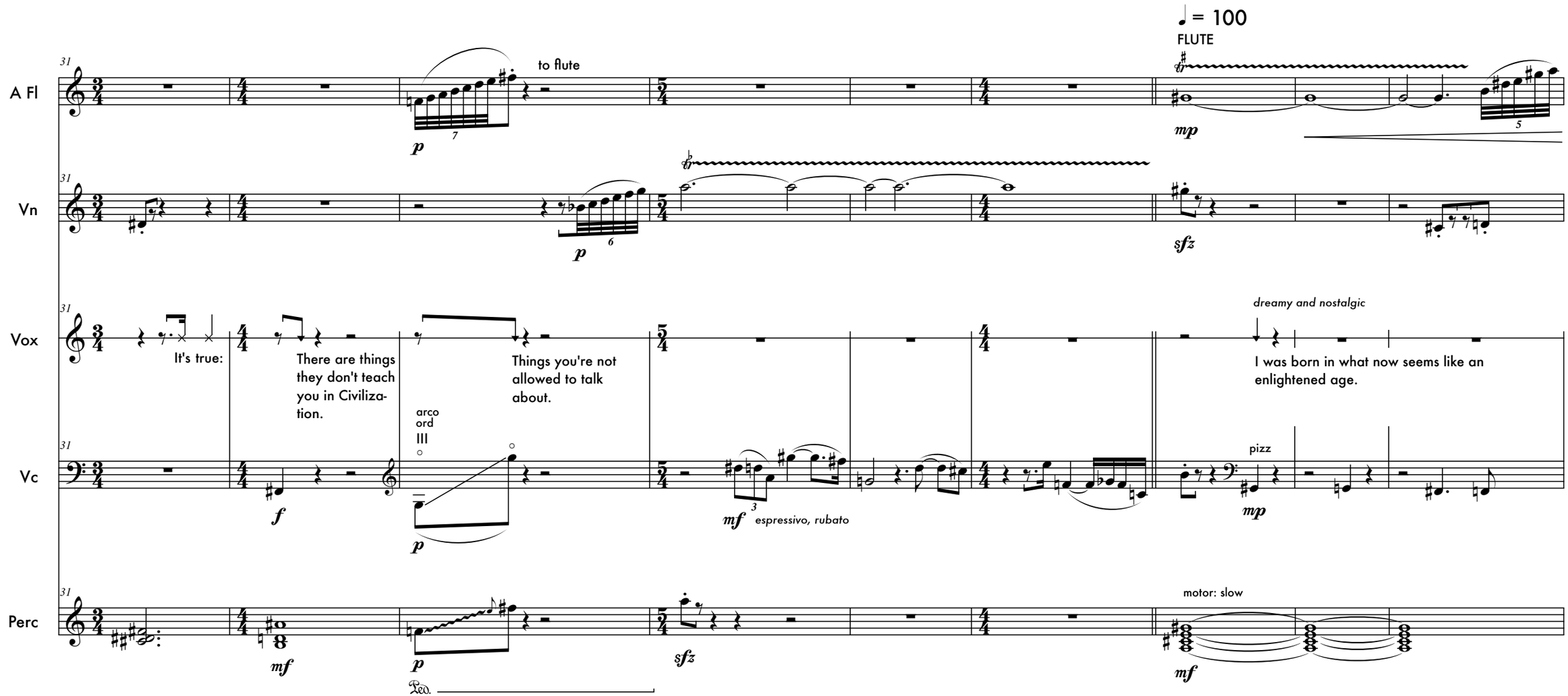
6. Song of the Dark States

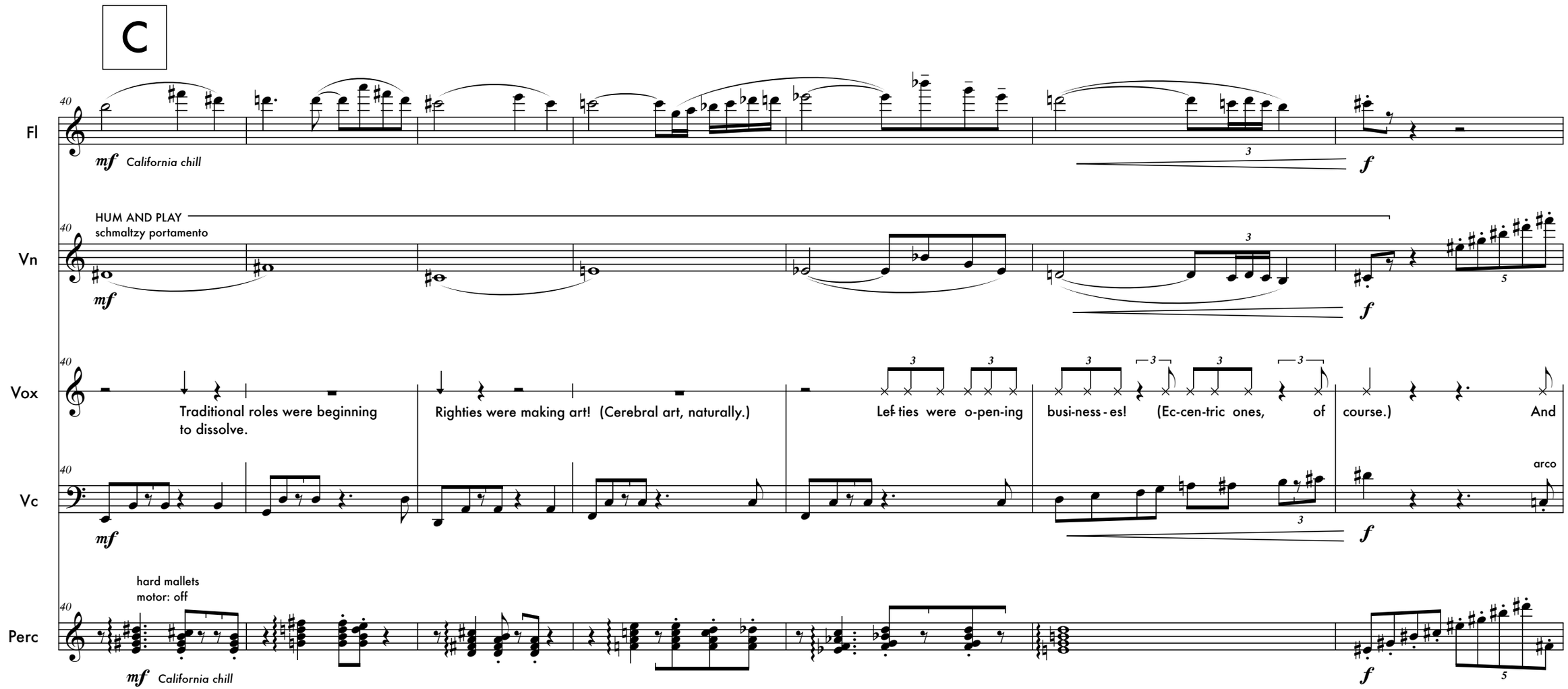
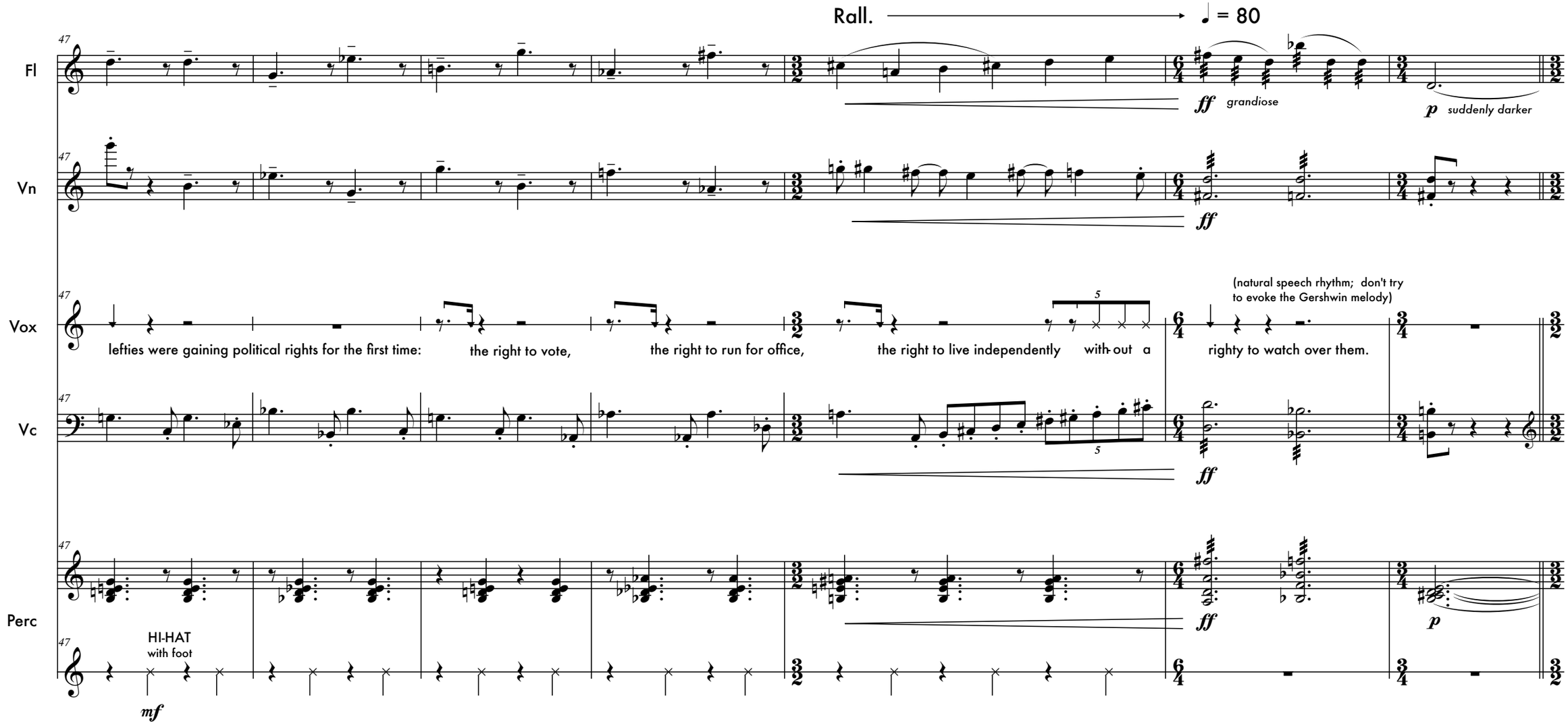
I know that some day we'll unscorch the earth here,
Stop the fires and turn the water blue again.
And once we've set the stage for a rebirth here,
We'll break the chains of stigma and taboo again.

In the course of this neverending night, we
Have come to see the dangers of myopia.
But now we're looking through our glasses brightly,
And there's still time to reify utopia...

1. Confessions of a Hand Offender

A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
7
p
mp wistful
(pitch bend)
tr
fp
It's part of why I found it impossible to live as a righty. That
sober lifestyle ne-ver
sui-ted me.
pizz
mf
arco
sul pont

A
♩ = 90
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
And be-sides, you're here, which
means you're in vi - o - la-tion of the
Tran-sit Code.
Turn me in, you'll be tur-ning your
- self in too. And
pizz
arco
ord
pizz


19
A Fl
mf
f
Vn
mf
f
getting more intense
Vox
don't think you can make an anonymous phone call either.
They can trace it. If you
want to hold on to the scraps you call free- dom, you'll
take my secret to your grave.
Vc
arco
III
f
Perc
mf
Ped.
f
Ped.

B
♩ = 86
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
p mysterious
mp
mechanical
mf
sul tasto
ord
pp mysterious
Why did you come here, anyway?
Nobody spends nine hours riding an unlicensed bus through
thick black smoke with-out a good reason.
Some-one must have told you
that there was some-thing im - por-tant out here.
pizz
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
n
(on the bell)
VIBES
motor: off
Ped.


♩ = 100
FLUTE
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
31
to flute
p
mp
sfz
It's true:
There are things they don't teach you in Civiliza-tion.
Things you're not allowed to talk about.
dreamy and nostalgic
I was born in what now seems like an enlightened age.
arco
ord
III
f
mf
espressivo, rubato
pizz
motor: slow
Ped.


C
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
mf California chill
HUM AND PLAY
schmaltzy portamento
Traditional roles were beginning to dissolve.
Righties were making art! (Cerebral art, naturally.)
Left-ties were o-pen-ing busi-ness-es! (Ec-cen-tric ones, of course.) And
arco
hard mallets
motor: off
f

Rall.
♩ = 80
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
47
ff grandiose
p suddenly darker
ff
(natural speech rhythm; don't try to evoke the Gershwin melody)
lefties were gaining political rights for the first time: the right to vote, the right to run for office, the right to live independently with- out a righty to watch over them.
5
HI-HAT
with foot
mf
p

D

♩ = 100

♩ = 108

Fl

54

to alto flute

ALTO FLUTE

wide, slow vibrato

p *mysterious*

Vn

54

sul tasto

pp

pizz

sfz

p

Vox

54

as if struggling to explain

But for me, it wasn't enough.

I couldn't form an image of myself as a righty.

Even as an artist, I was expected to be cold, rational, businesslike,

Vc

54

sul tasto

pp

pizz

sfz

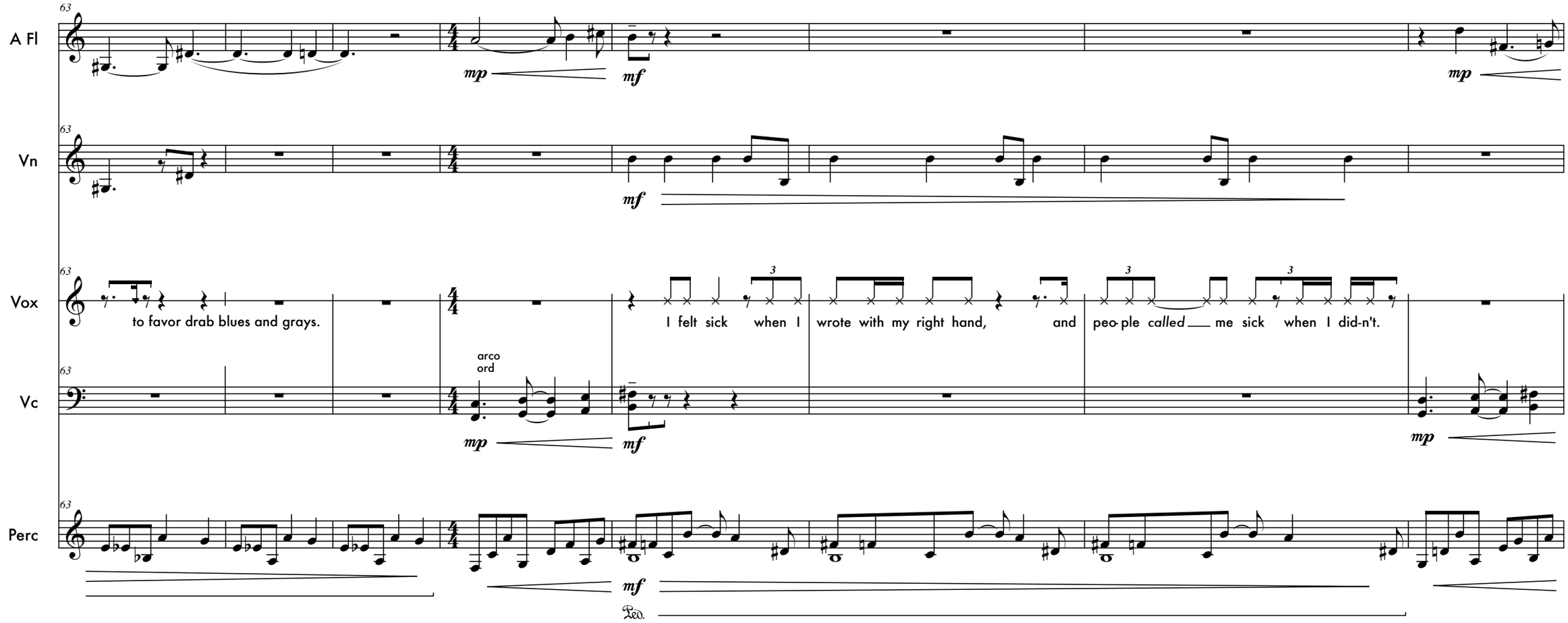
Perc

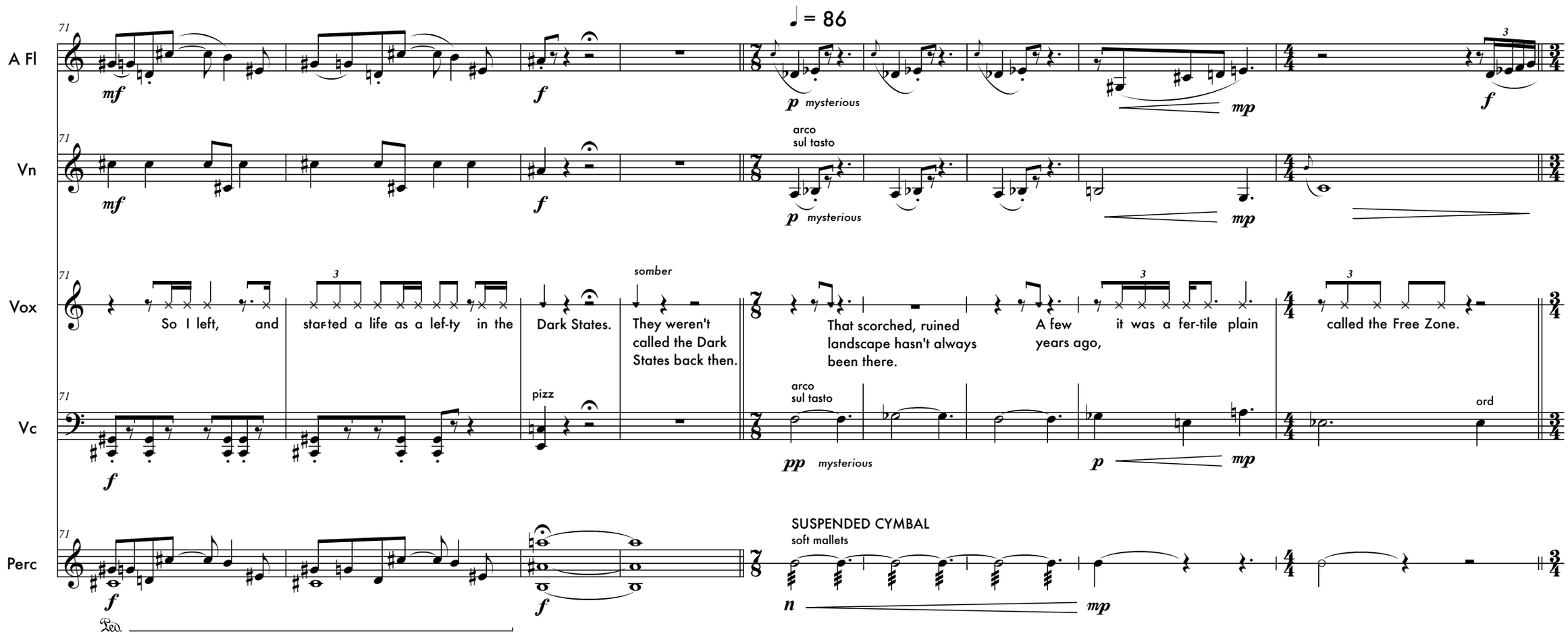
54

motor: slow → motor: off

pp

mf *mysterious*

Ped.

63
A Fl
mp
mf
mp
63
Vn
mf
63
Vox
to favor drab blues and grays.
I felt sick when I wrote with my right hand, and peo-ple called me sick when I did-n't.
3
3
3
63
Vc
arco
ord
mp
mf
mp
63
Perc
mf
Ped.


♩ = 86
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
71
mf
f
p mysterious
mp
arco
sul tasto
somber
pizz
ord
pp mysterious
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
soft mallets
n
So I left, and
star-ted a life as a lef-ty in the
Dark States.
They weren't
called the Dark
States back then.
That scorched, ruined
landscape hasn't always
been there.
A few
years ago,
it was a fer-tile plain
called the Free Zone.
Ped.

E

♩ = 98

A Fl

warm 1960s psychedelic rock feel

to flute

FLUTE

mf

Vn

pizz

f

mp

mf

Vox

dreamy and nostalgic

A new world! Un- bound by the rules of Civilization.

Vc

mp

mf

Perc

VIBES
motor: slow

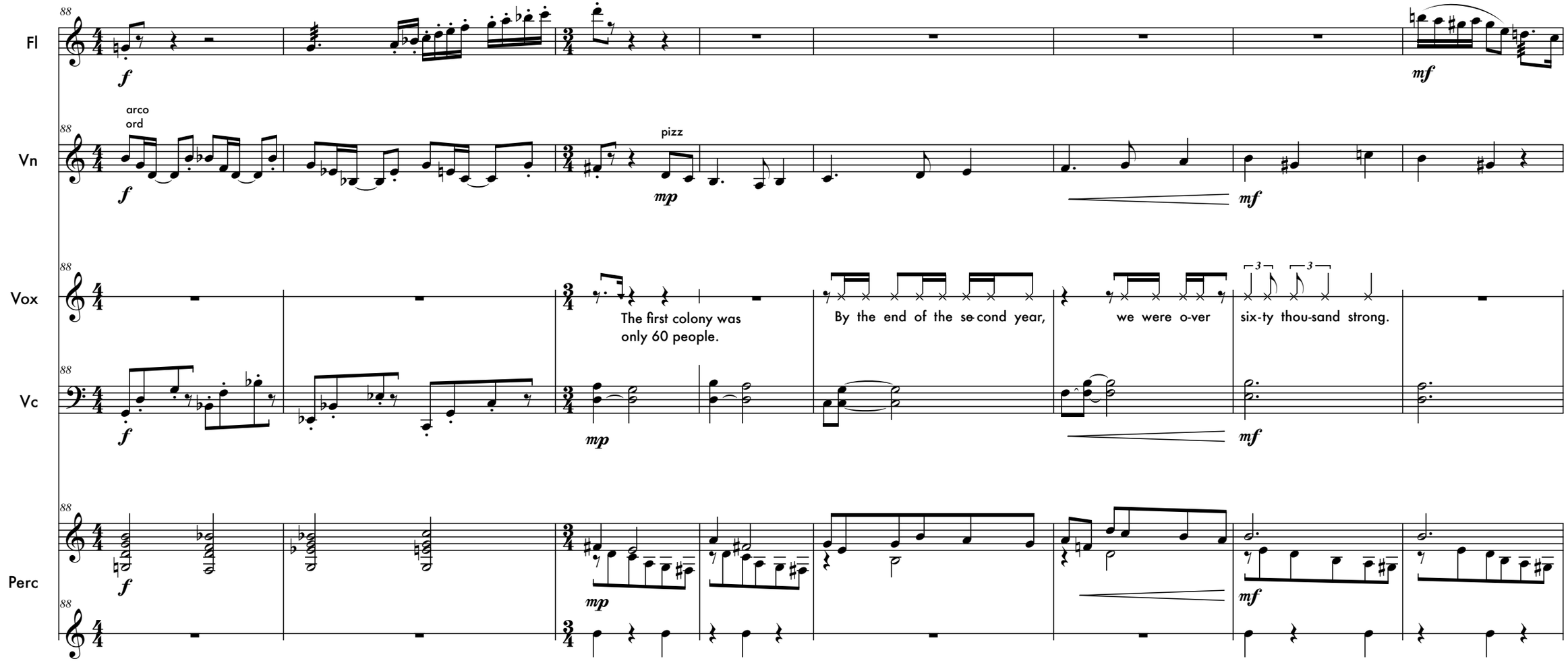
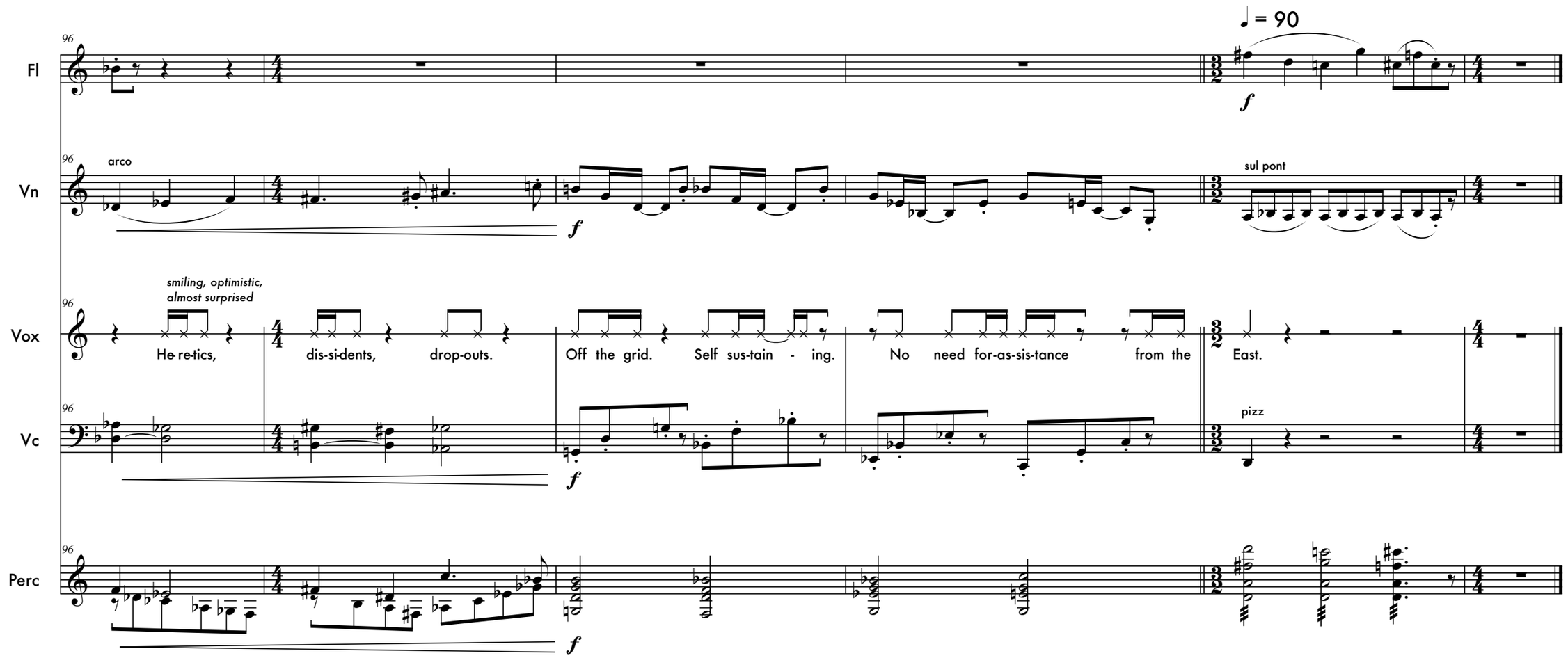
warm 1960s psychedelic rock feel

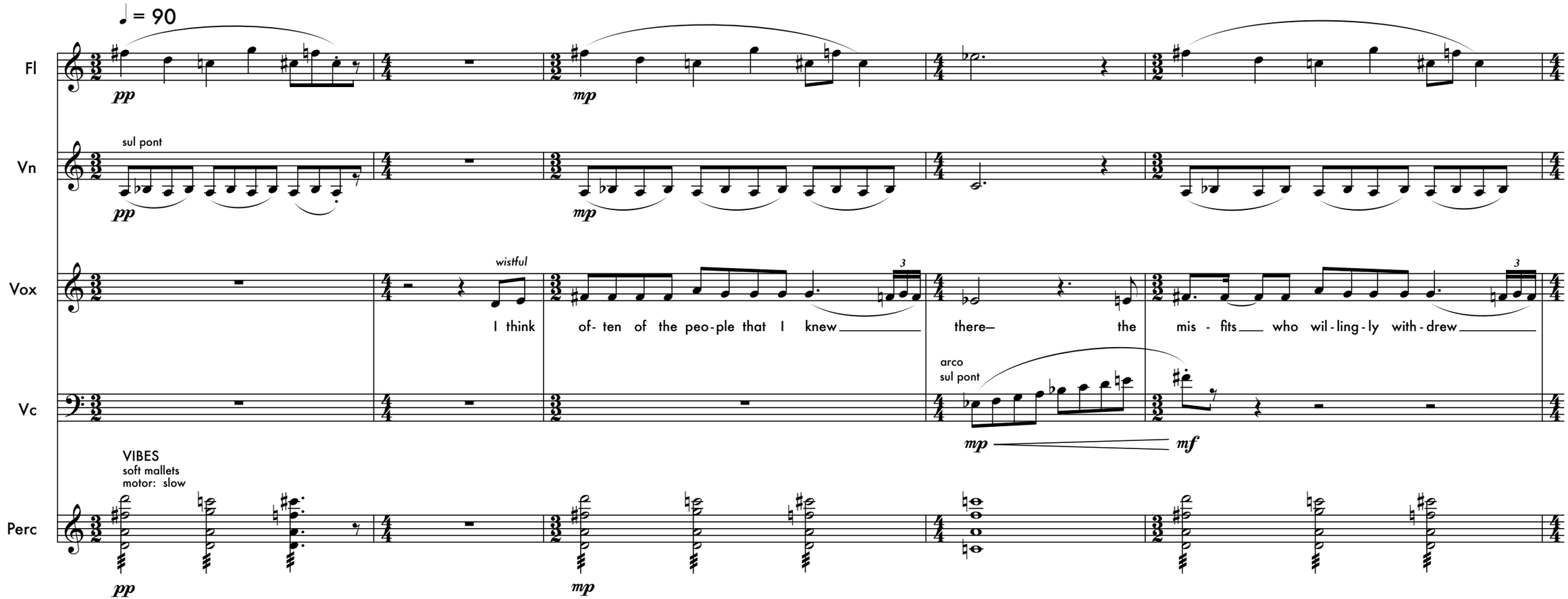
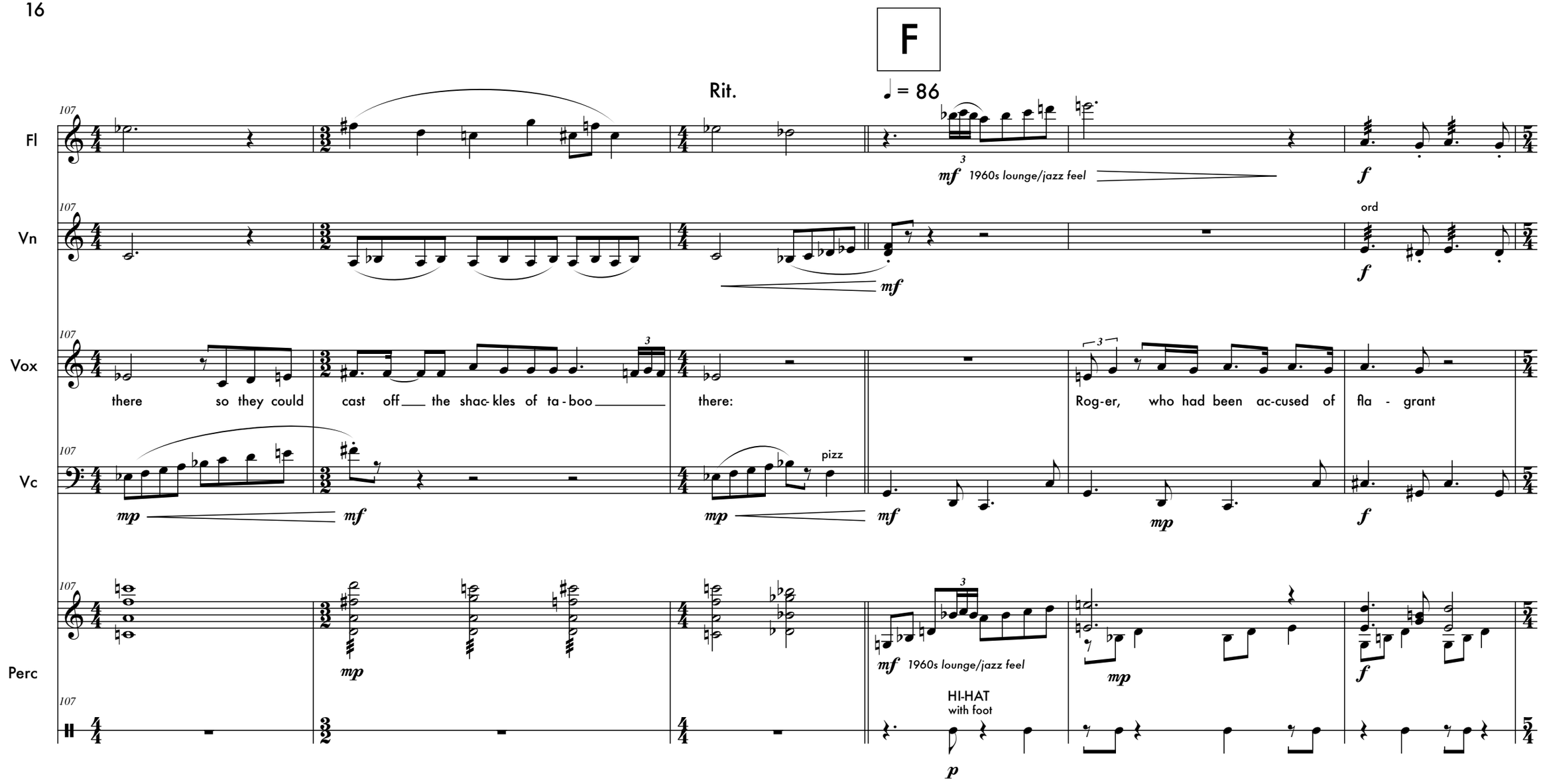
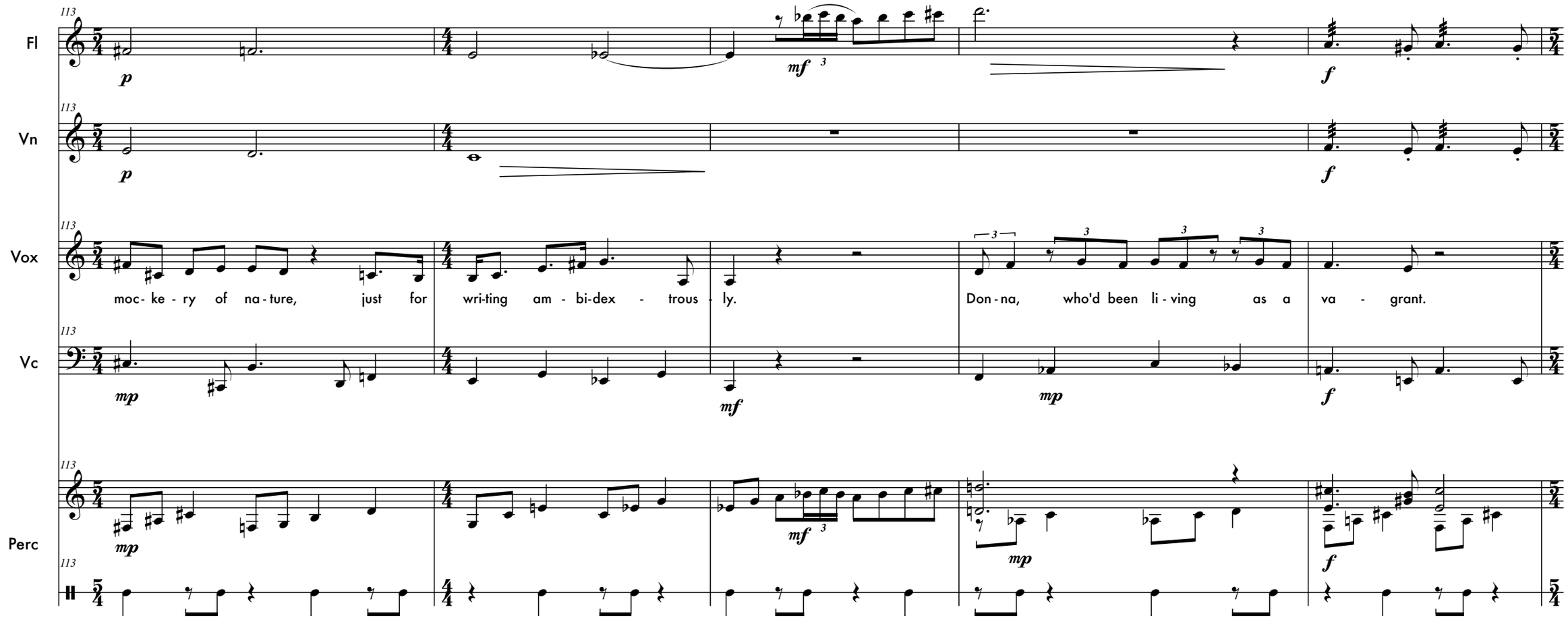
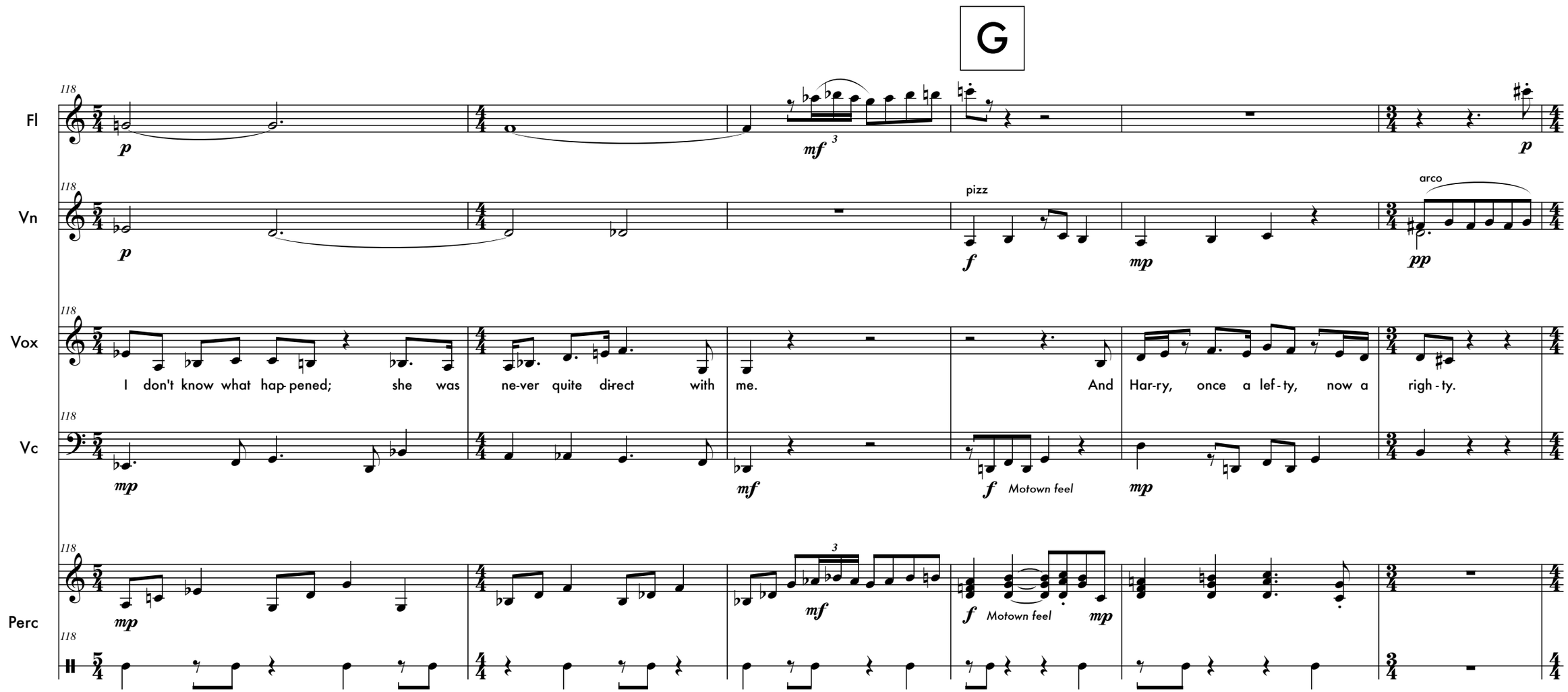
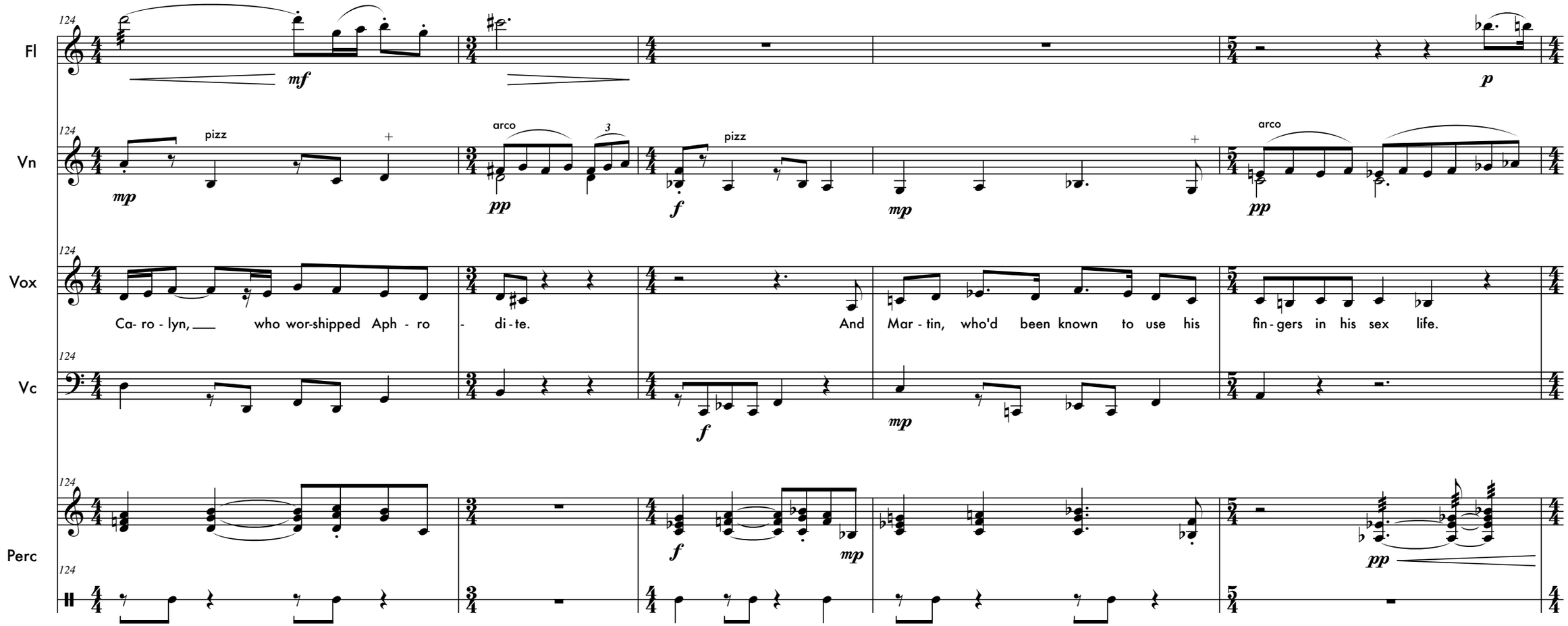
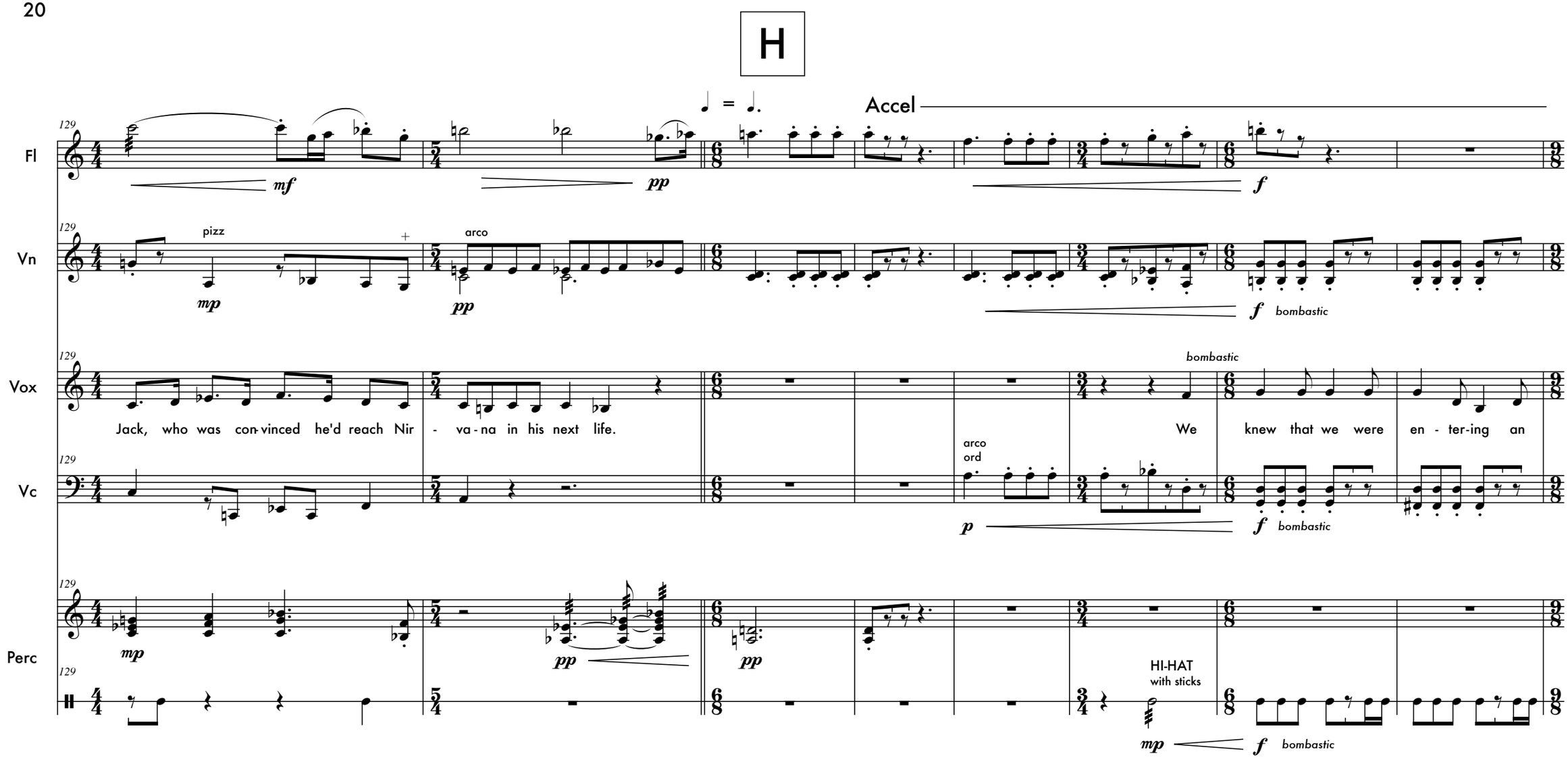
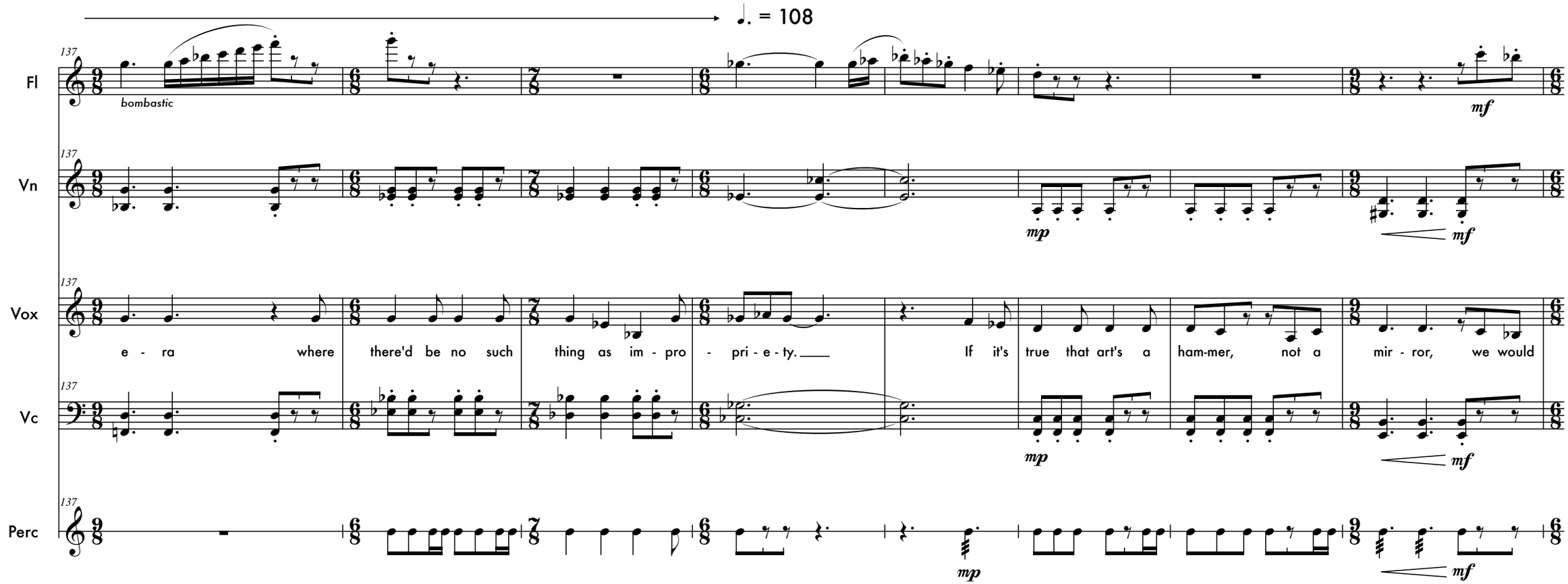
f

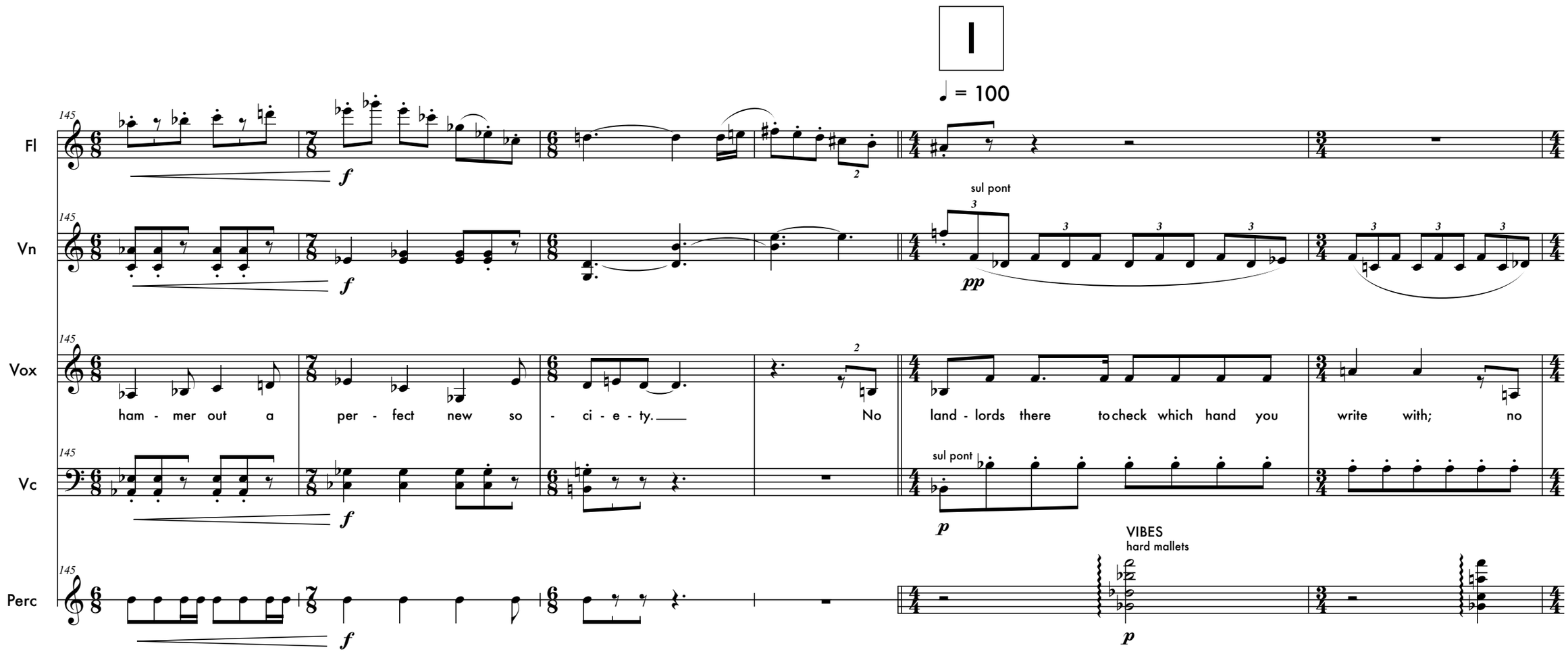
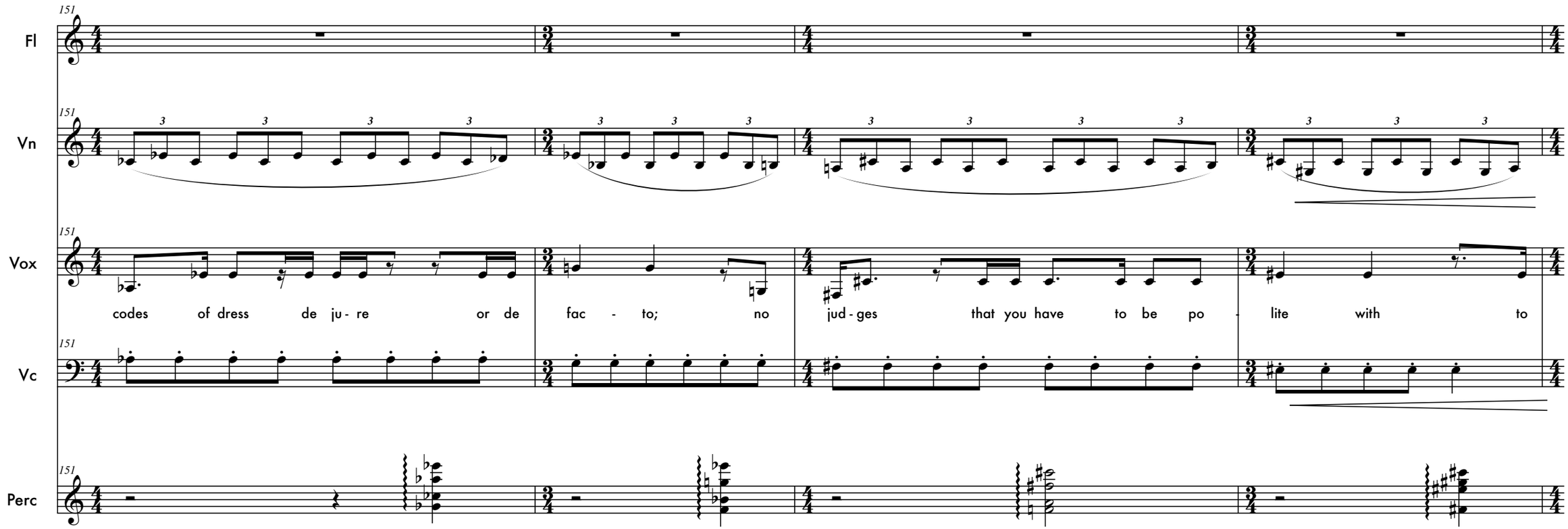
mp

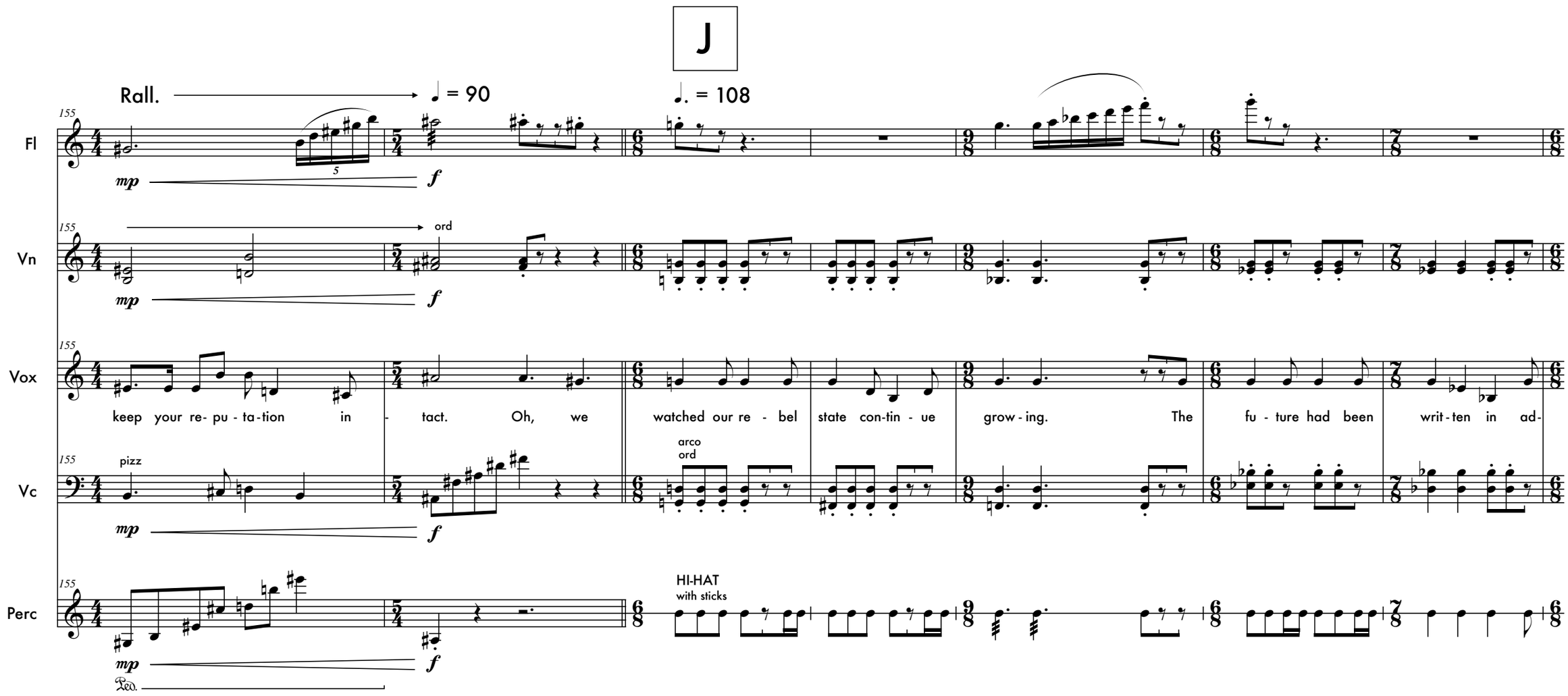
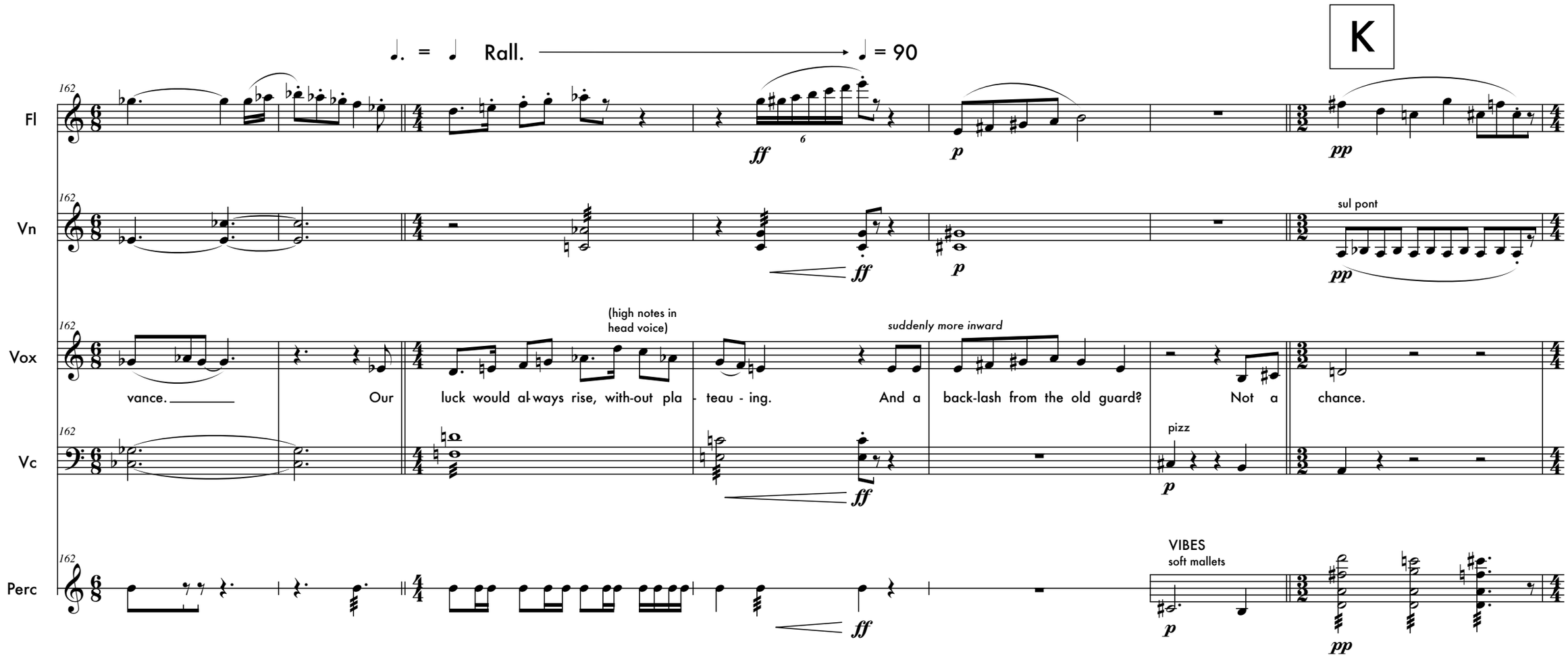
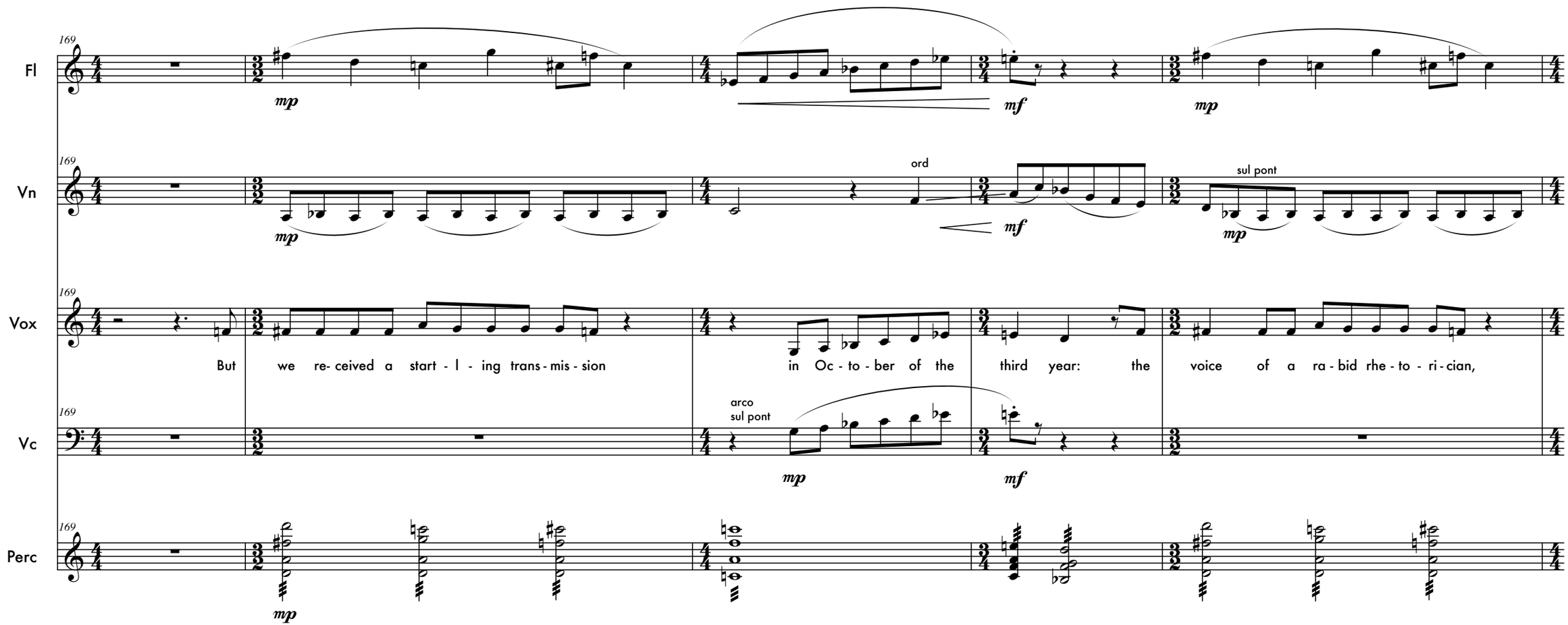
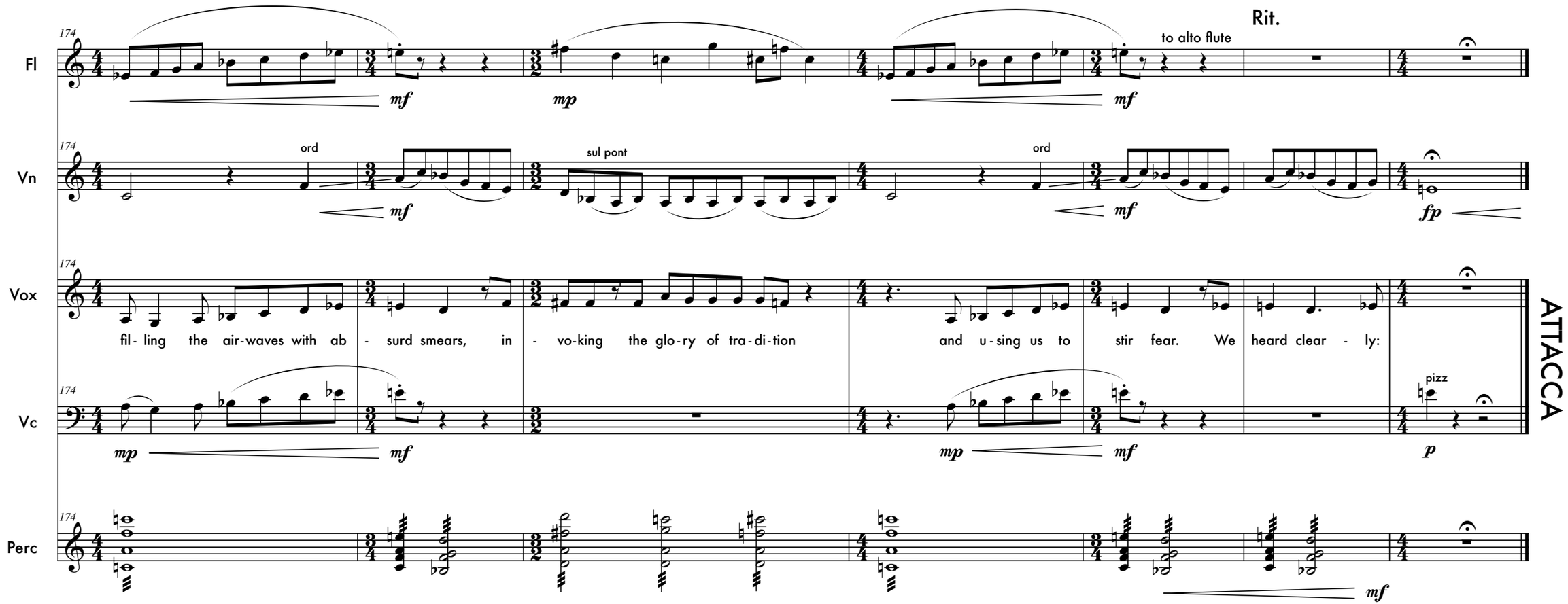
mf

HI-HAT
with foot

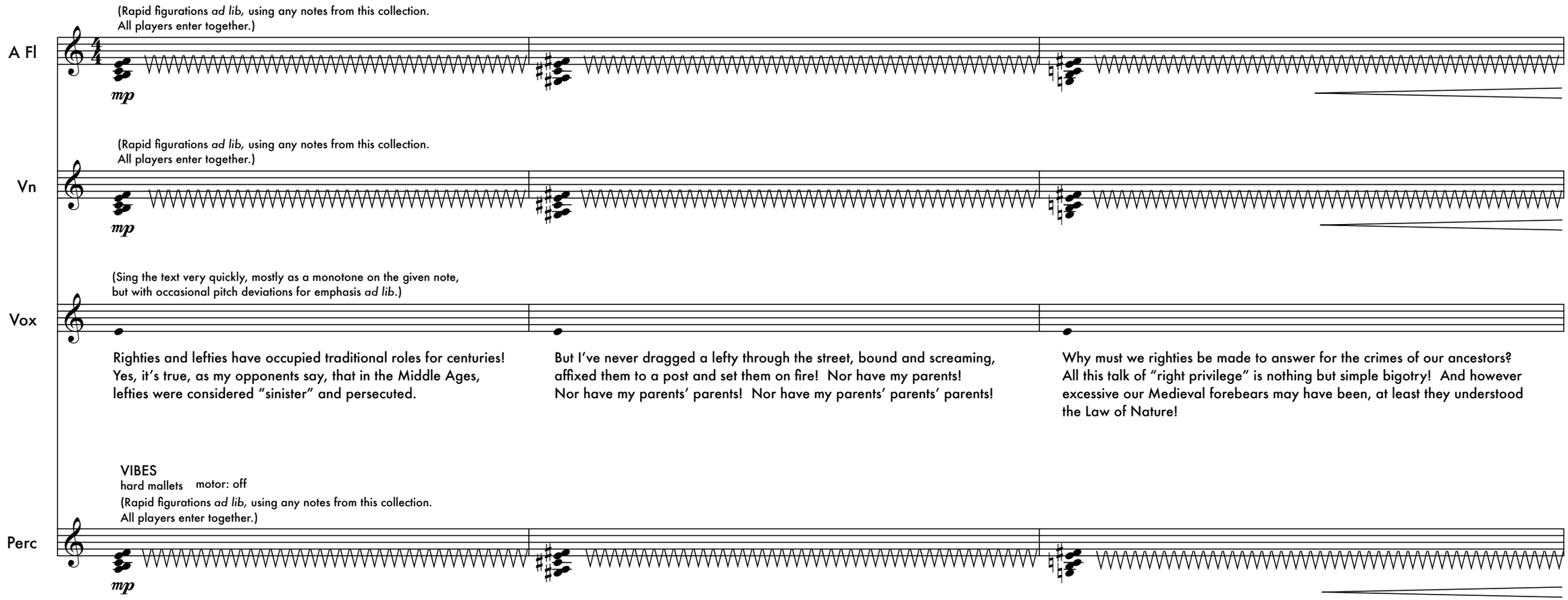
mf

Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
88
arco
ord
pizz
The first colony was
only 60 people.
By the end of the se-cond year,
we were o-ver
six-ty thou-sand strong.
3
3

ATTACCA after exactly four beats' rest

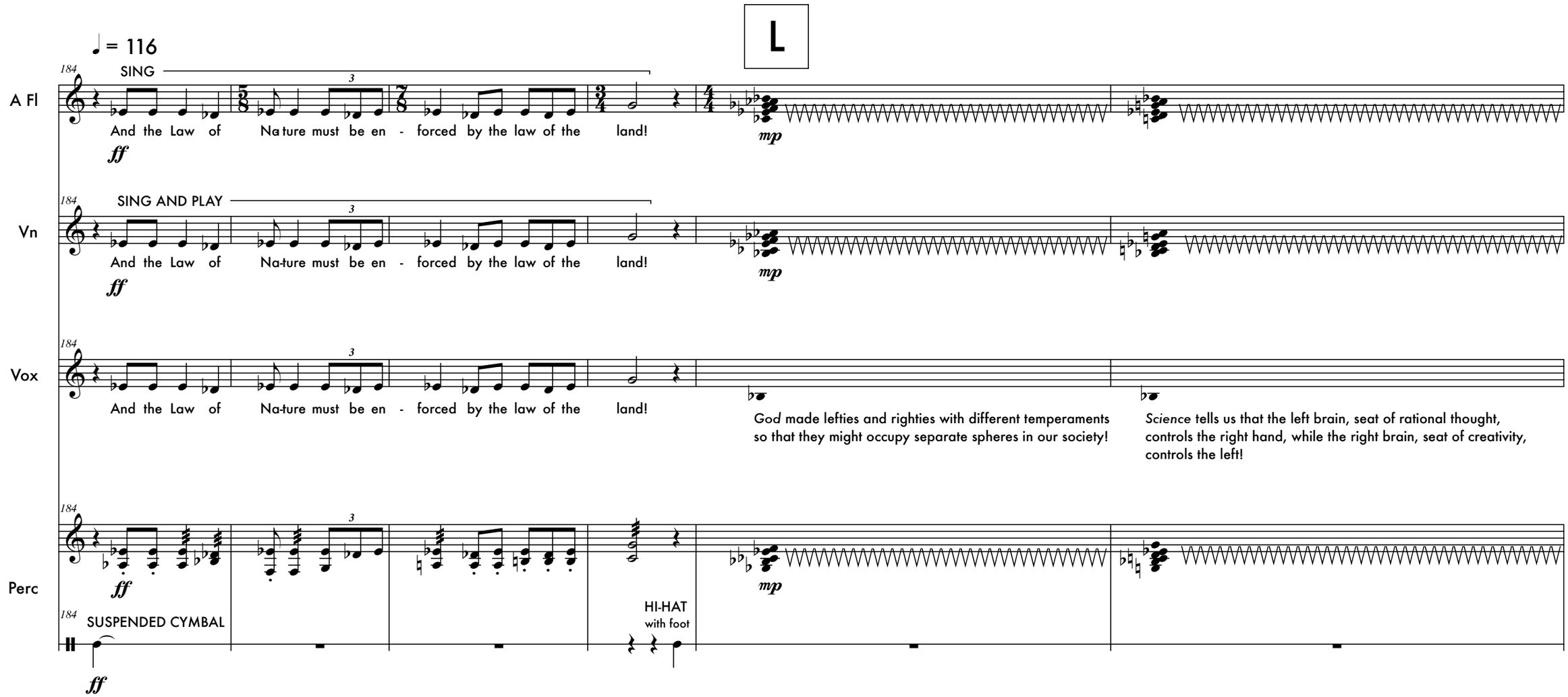
2. Song of the Free Zone


F
Rit.
♩ = 86
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
107
there so they could cast off the shac-kles of ta-boo there:
Rog-er, who had been ac-cused of fla - grant
mf 1960s lounge/jazz feel
ord
pizz
HI-HAT
with foot

Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
113
p
mf
f
mp
moc- ke - ry of na - ture, just for wri-ting am - bi-dex - trous - ly.
Don - na, who'd been li - ving as a va - grant.

G
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
118
p
mf
3
pizz
f
mp
arco
pp
I don't know what hap-pened; she was ne-ver quite di-rect with me.
And Har-ry, once a lef-ty, now a righ-ty.
Motown feel

Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
124
mf
p
pizz
arco
mp
pp
f
Ca- ro - lyn, who wor-shipped Aph - ro - di - te.
And Mar - tin, who'd been known to use his fin - gers in his sex life.

H
♩ = ♩.
Accel
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
129
mf
pp
f
pizz
arco
mp
bombastic
Jack, who was con-vinced he'd reach Nir - va-na in his next life.
We knew that we were en - ter-ing an
arco
ord
p
HI-HAT
with sticks

♩. = 108
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
137
bombastic
mf
mp
e - ra where there'd be no such thing as im - pro - pri - e - ty.
If it's true that art's a ham-mer, not a mir - ror, we would

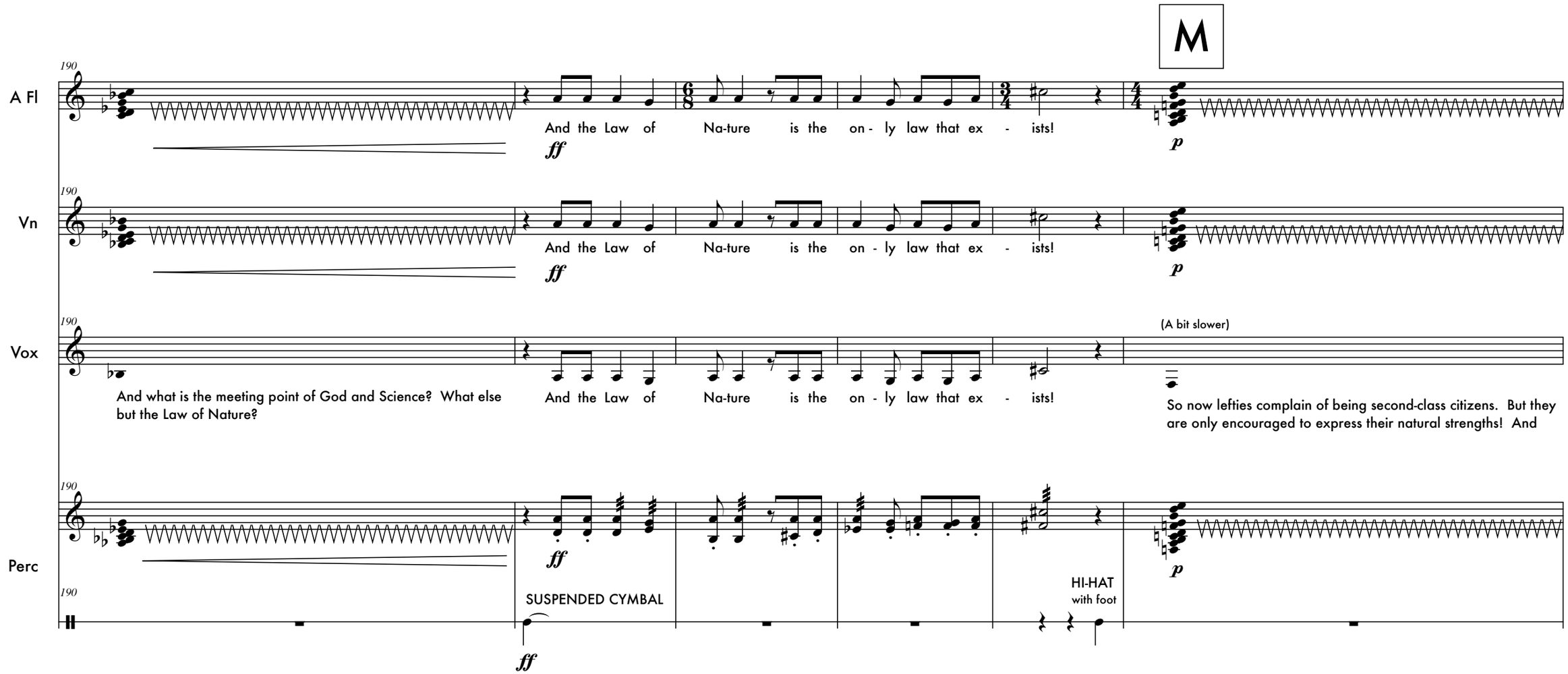

I
♩ = 100
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
145
f
pp
p
sul pont
ham - mer out a per - fect new so - ci - e - ty.
No land - lords there to check which hand you write with; no
VIBES
hard mallets

151
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
codes of dress de ju - re or de fac - to; no jud - ges that you have to be po - lite with to

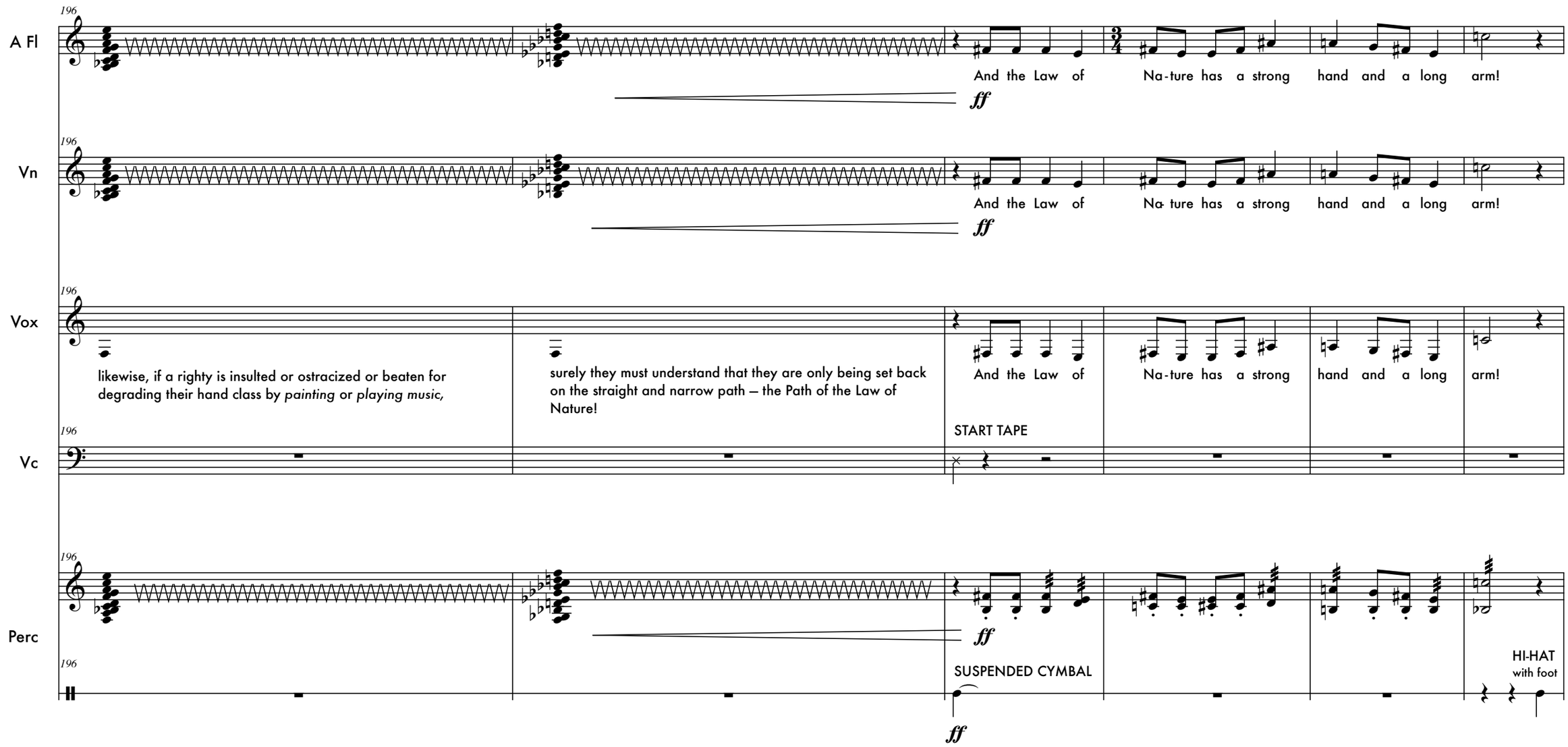

J
Rall.
♩ = 90
♩. = 108
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
155
mp
f
ord
keep your re- pu - ta-tion in - tact. Oh, we watched our re - bel state con-tin - ue grow - ing. The fu - ture had been writ-ten in ad-
pizz
arco
ord
HI-HAT
with sticks
Ped.

K
♩. = ♩ Rall. ♩ = 90
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
162
ff
p
pp
sul pont
(high notes in head voice)
suddenly more inward
vance. Our luck would al-ways rise, with-out pla - teau - ing. And a back-lash from the old guard? Not a chance.
pizz
VIBES
soft mallets

169
Fl
mp
mf
mp
169
Vn
ord
mf
sul pont
mp
169
Vox
But we re- ceived a start - l - ing trans - mis - sion
in Oc - to - ber of the third year: the voice of a ra - bid rhe - to - ri - cian,
169
Vc
arco
sul pont
mp
mf
169
Perc
mp

Rit.
to alto flute
ATTACCA
Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
174
ord
sul pont
ord
pizz
fil- ling the air-waves with ab - surd smears, in - vo-king the glo-ry of tra-di-tion and u-sing us to stir fear. We heard clear - ly:
mf
mp
fp
p

3. Radio Rant


A Fl
(Rapid figurations *ad lib,* using any notes from this collection.
All players enter together.)
mp
Vn
(Rapid figurations *ad lib,* using any notes from this collection.
All players enter together.)
mp
Vox
(Sing the text very quickly, mostly as a monotone on the given note,
but with occasional pitch deviations for emphasis *ad lib*.)
Righties and lefties have occupied traditional roles for centuries!
Yes, it's true, as my opponents say, that in the Middle Ages,
lefties were considered "sinister" and persecuted.
But I've never dragged a lefty through the street, bound and screaming,
affixed them to a post and set them on fire! Nor have my parents!
Nor have my parents' parents! Nor have my parents' parents' parents!
Why must we righties be made to answer for the crimes of our ancestors?
All this talk of "right privilege" is nothing but simple bigotry! And however
excessive our Medieval forebears may have been, at least they understood
the Law of Nature!
Perc
VIBES
hard mallets motor: off
(Rapid figurations *ad lib,* using any notes from this collection.
All players enter together.)
mp


L
♩ = 116
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Perc
184
SING
SING AND PLAY
And the Law of Na-ture must be en - forced by the law of the land!
ff
mp
God made lefties and righties with different temperaments so that they might occupy separate spheres in our society!
Science tells us that the left brain, seat of rational thought, controls the right hand, while the right brain, seat of creativity, controls the left!
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
HI-HAT
with foot


M
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Perc
190
And the Law of Na-ture is the on - ly law that ex - ists!
ff
p
And what is the meeting point of God and Science? What else but the Law of Nature?
(A bit slower)
So now lefties complain of being second-class citizens. But they are only encouraged to express their natural strengths! And
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
HI-HAT
with foot


196
A Fl
And the Law of Na-ture has a strong hand and a long arm!
ff
196
Vn
And the Law of Na-ture has a strong hand and a long arm!
ff
196
Vox
likewise, if a righty is insulted or ostracized or beaten for degrading their hand class by *painting* or *playing music,*
surely they must understand that they are only being set back on the straight and narrow path – the Path of the Law of Nature!
And the Law of Na-ture has a strong hand and a long arm!
196
Vc
START TAPE
196
Perc
ff
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
HI-HAT
with foot
196
ff

N

A Fl

(With occasional sustained notes *ad lib* among the quick figurations)

202

f

(Gradually fade out as tape gets louder)

Vn

(With occasional sustained notes *ad lib* among the quick figurations)

202

f

(Gradually fade out as tape gets louder)

Vox

202

(Initial speed)

And is it any coincidence that this country's strong, firm, decisive party is called The Right Wing, while the soft, gentle, nurturing party is called The Left Wing?

And does it not follow from the names of these parties that it is the intrinsic, inescapable and incontrovertible *duty* of the Right Wing to take its soft and gentle counterpart in

(Gradually fade out as tape gets louder)

hand, to lead it away from the temptations of the bizarre and perverse agenda promoted by those delusional agitators in the

Free Zone? Must we not remind our colleagues on the opposite side of the aisle that we were put on this Earth to lead them through the

wilderness, in accordance with the Law of Nature?

Vc

202

arco

(long, sustained notes)

f

Perc

(With occasional sustained notes *ad lib* among the quick figurations)

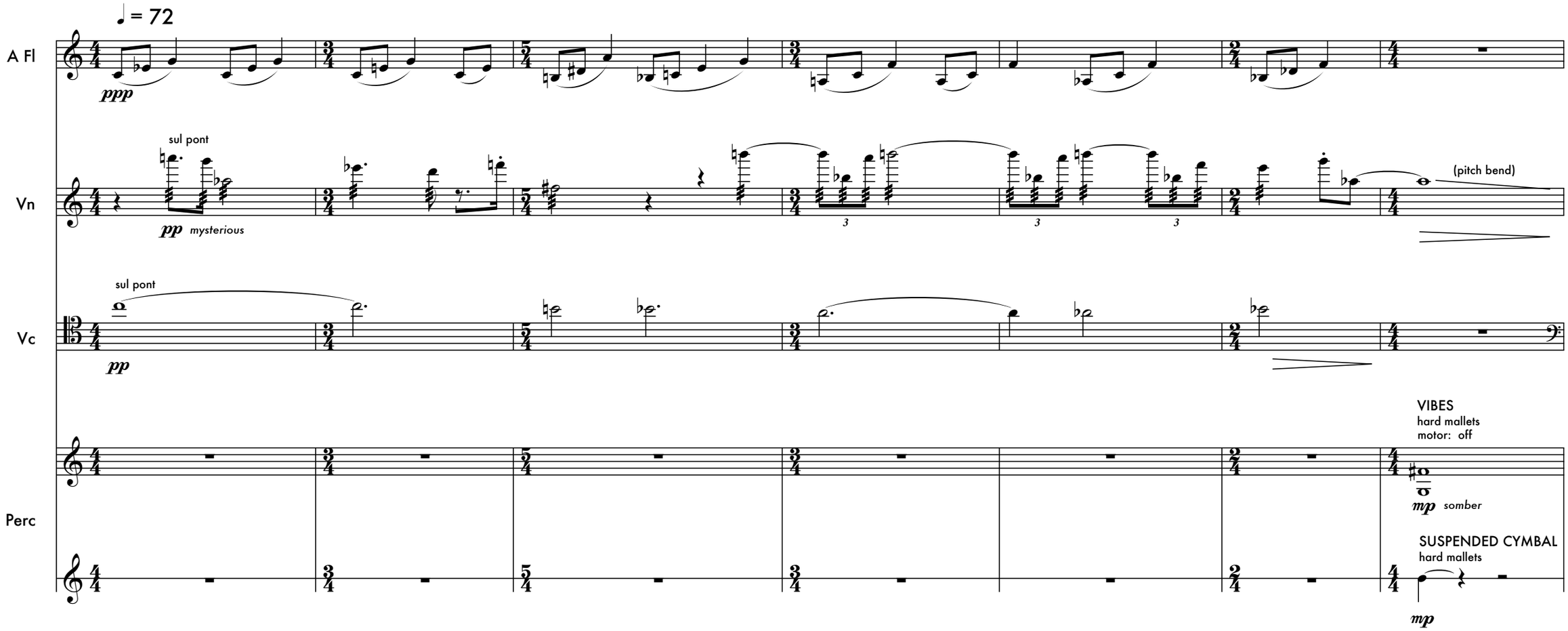
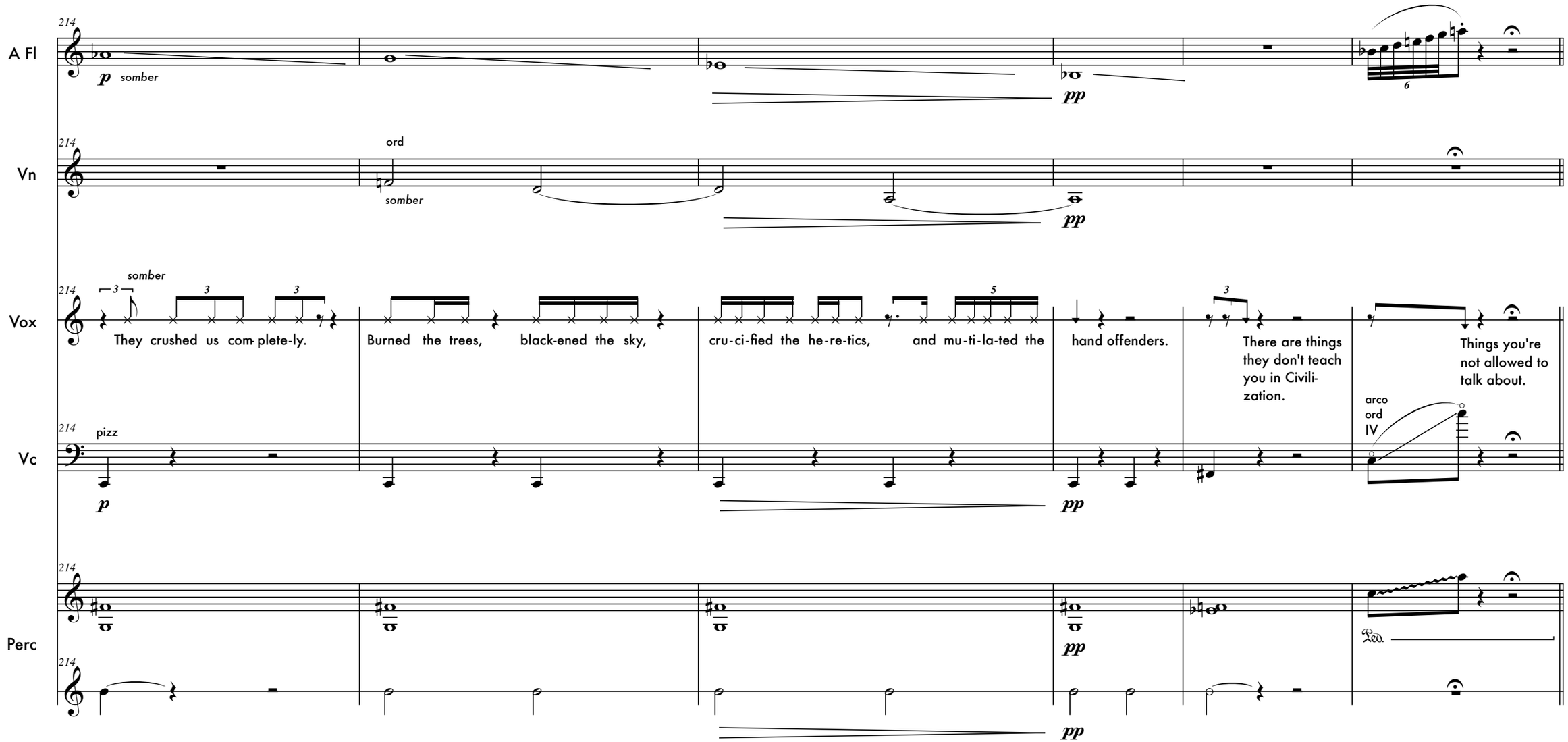
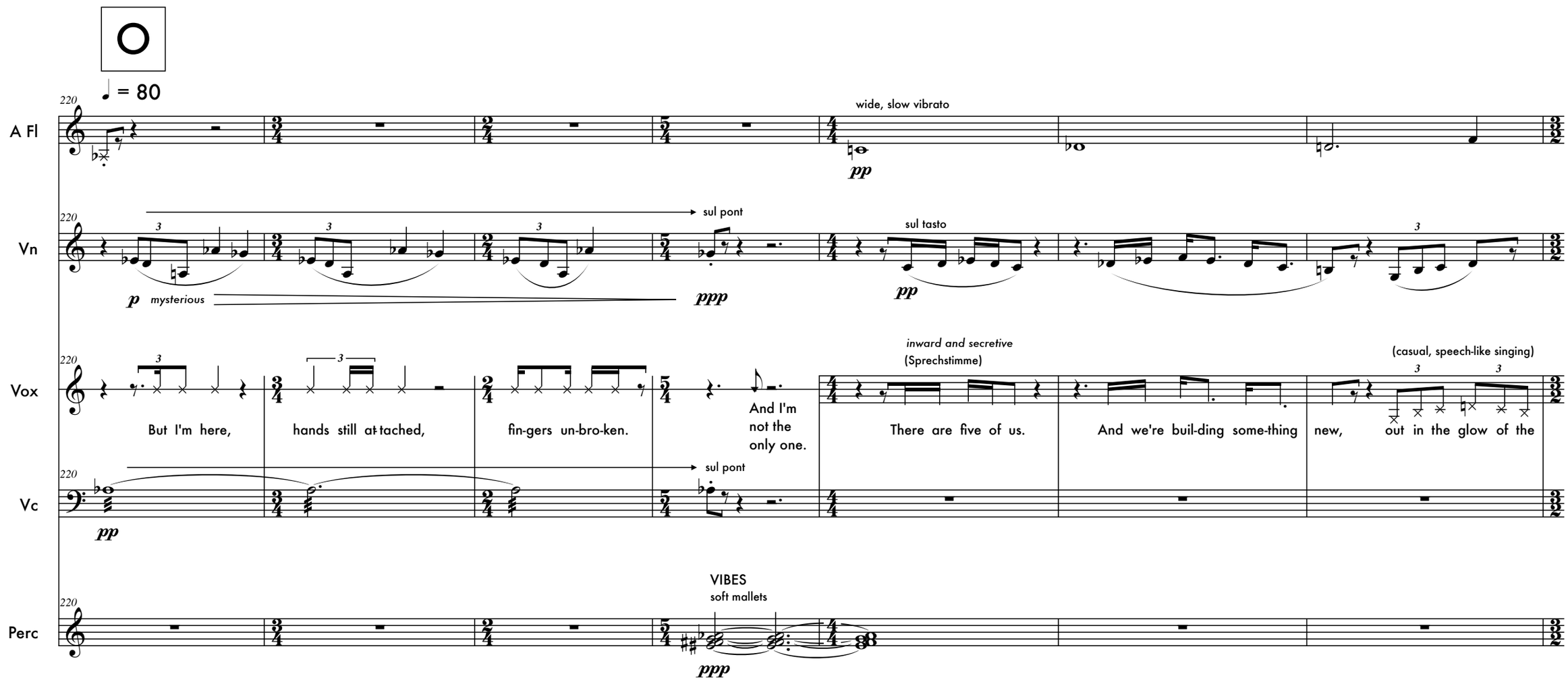
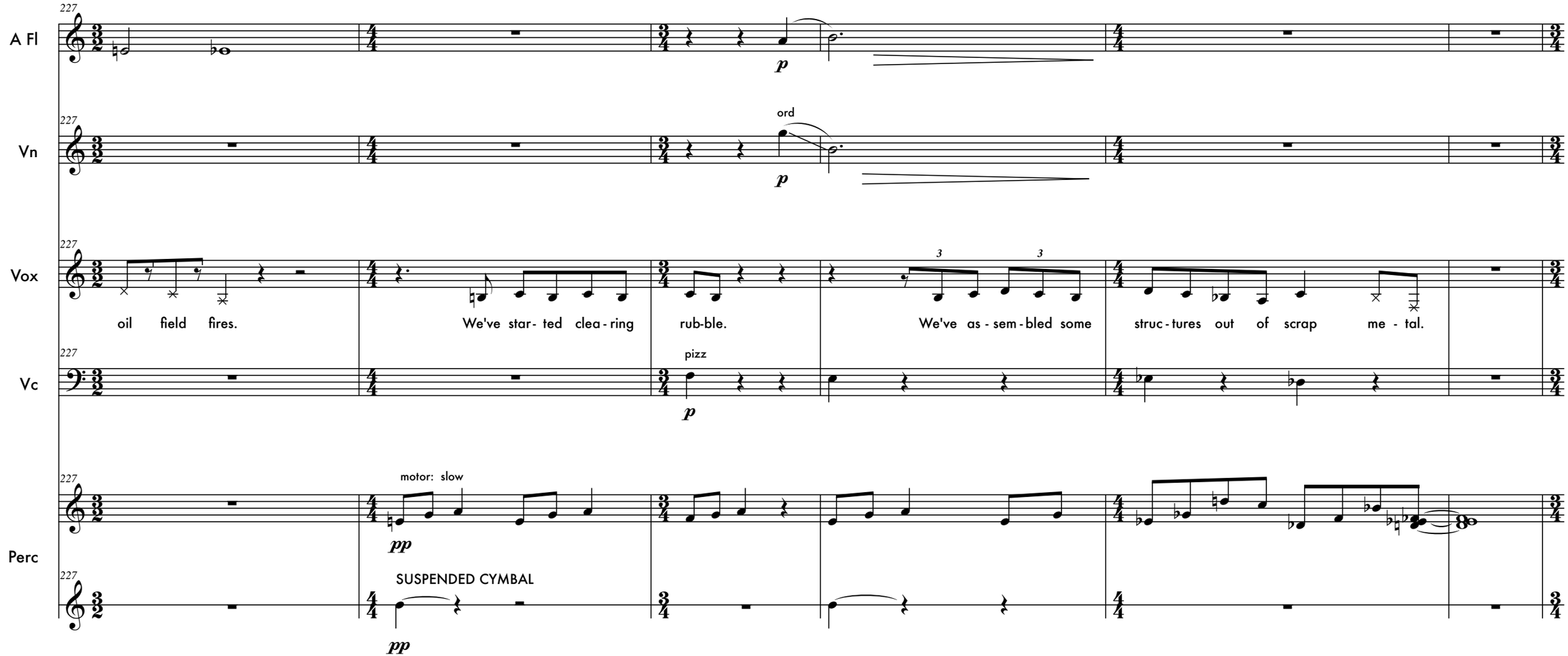
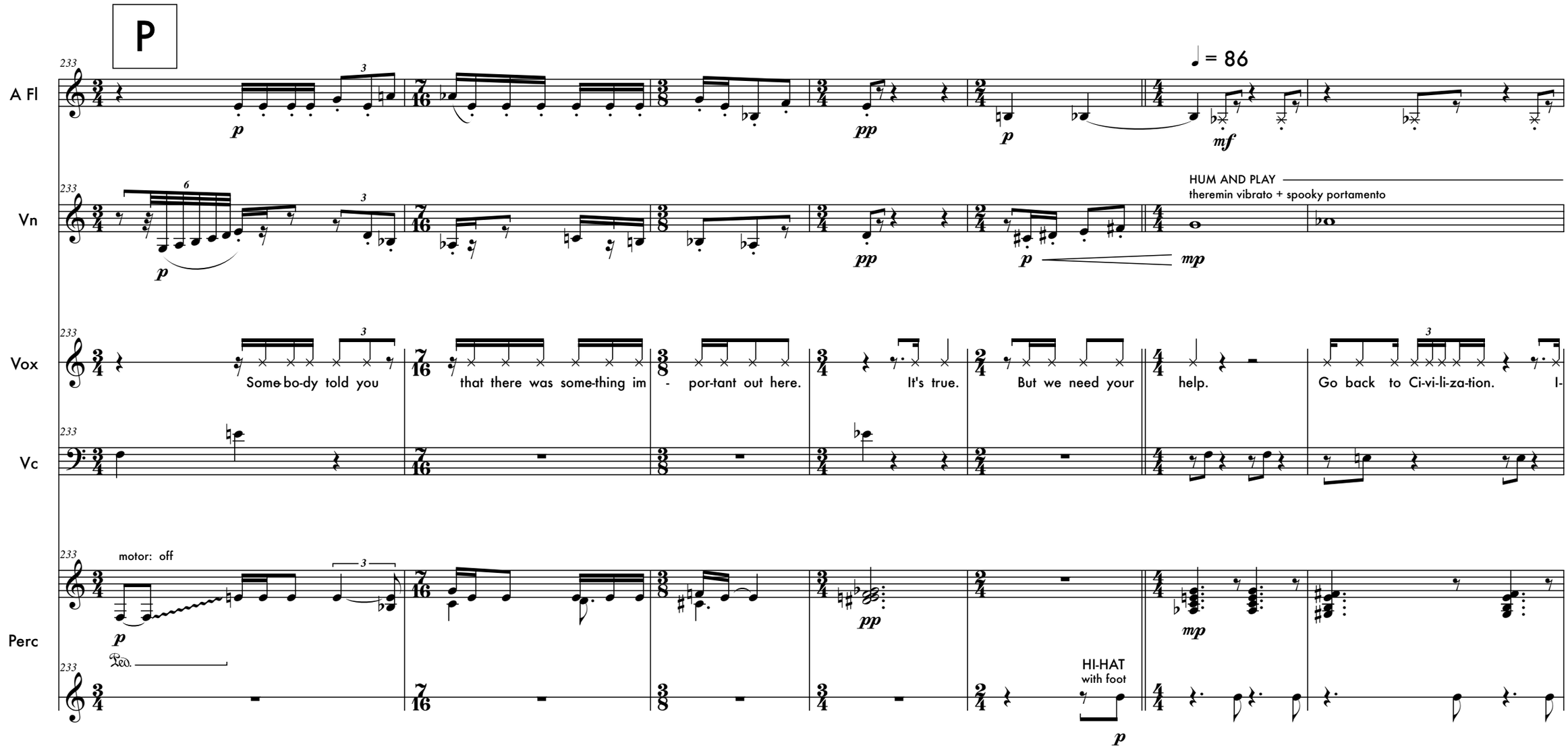
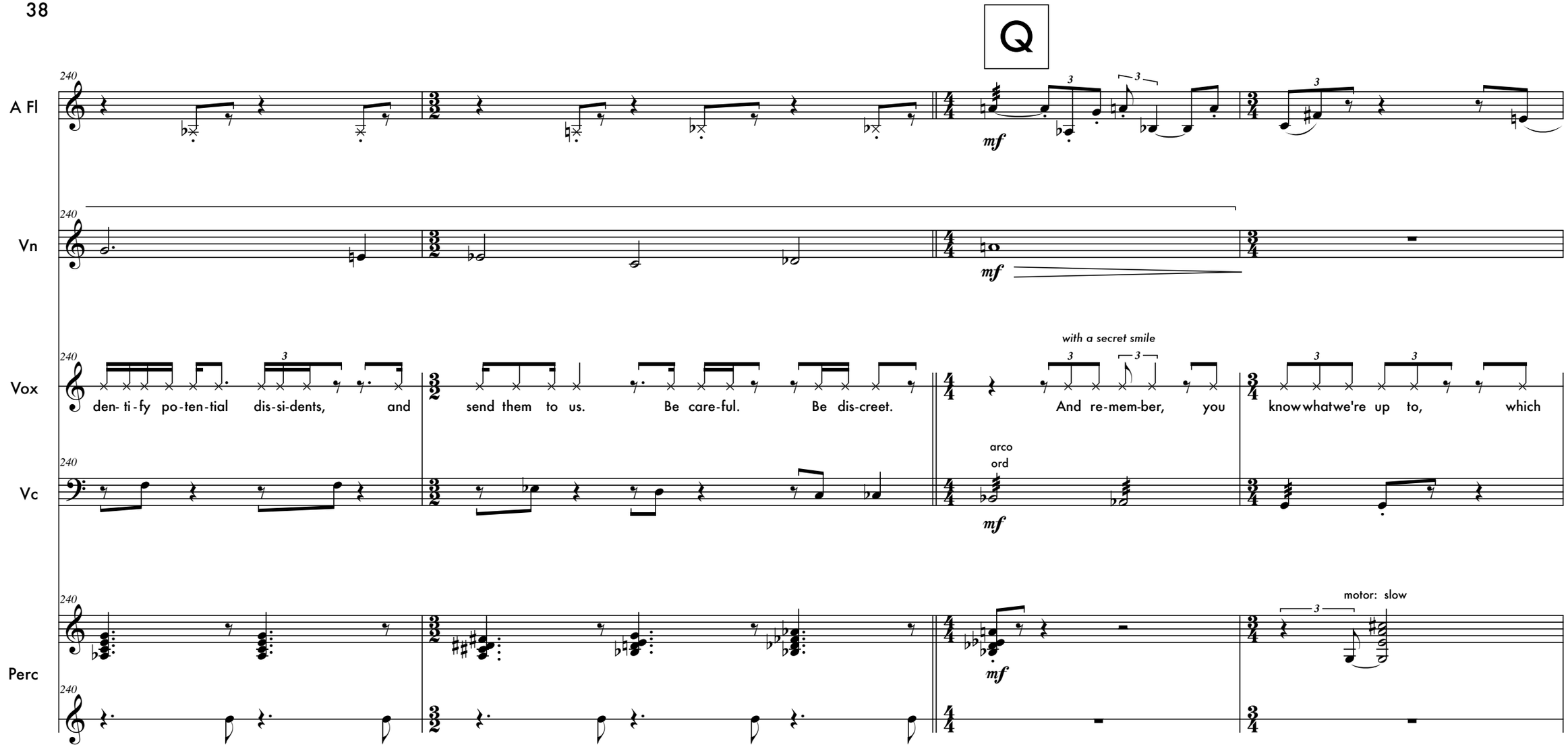
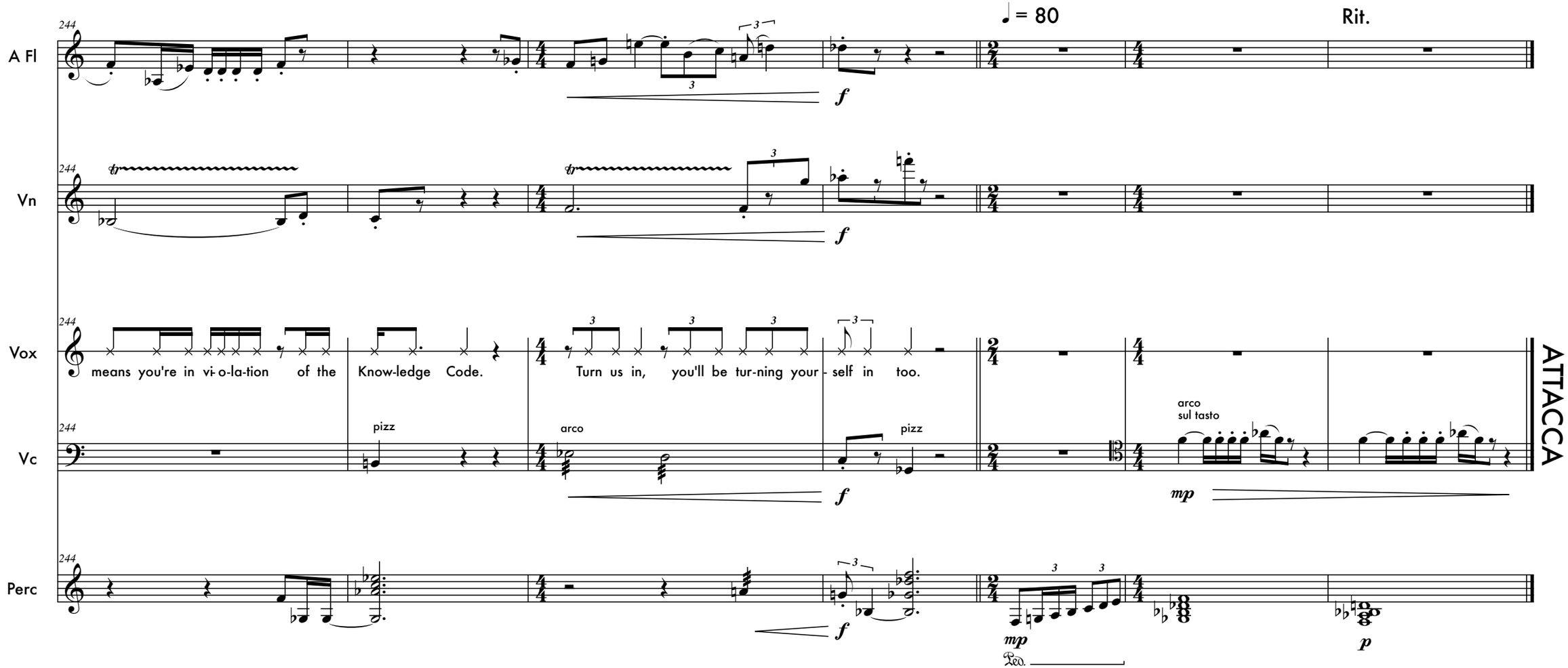
202

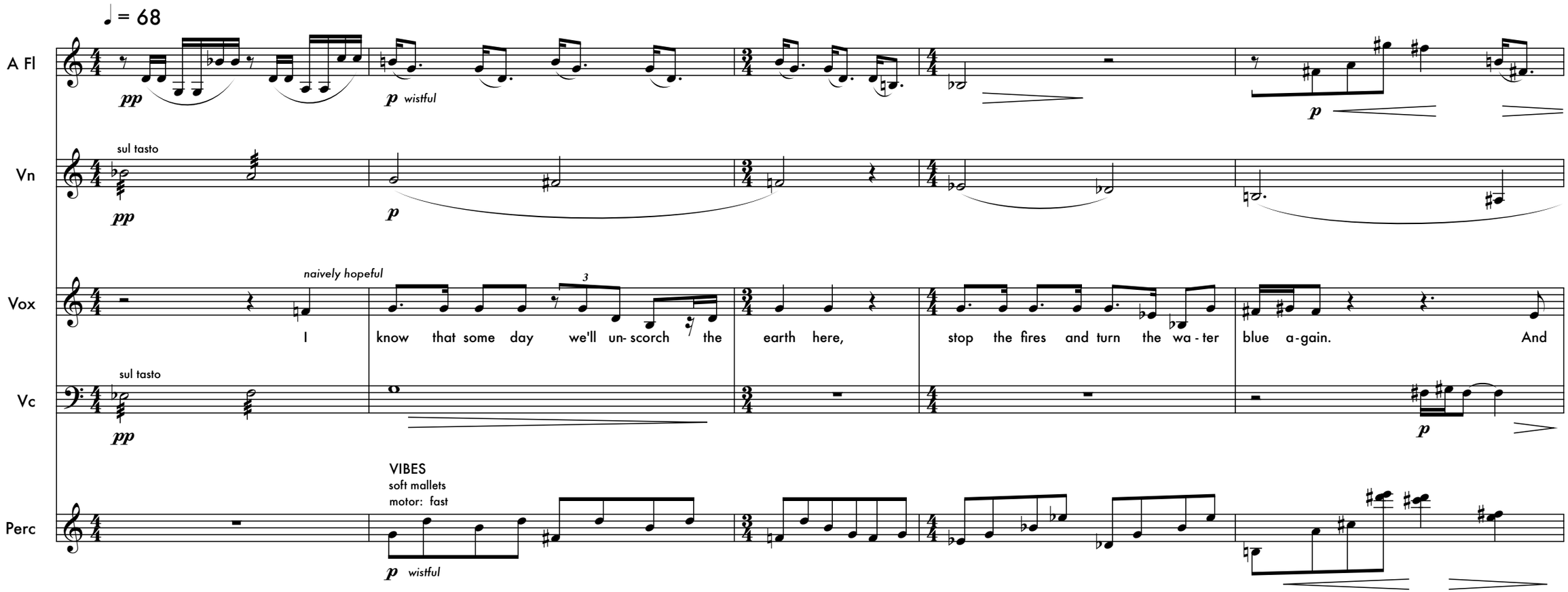
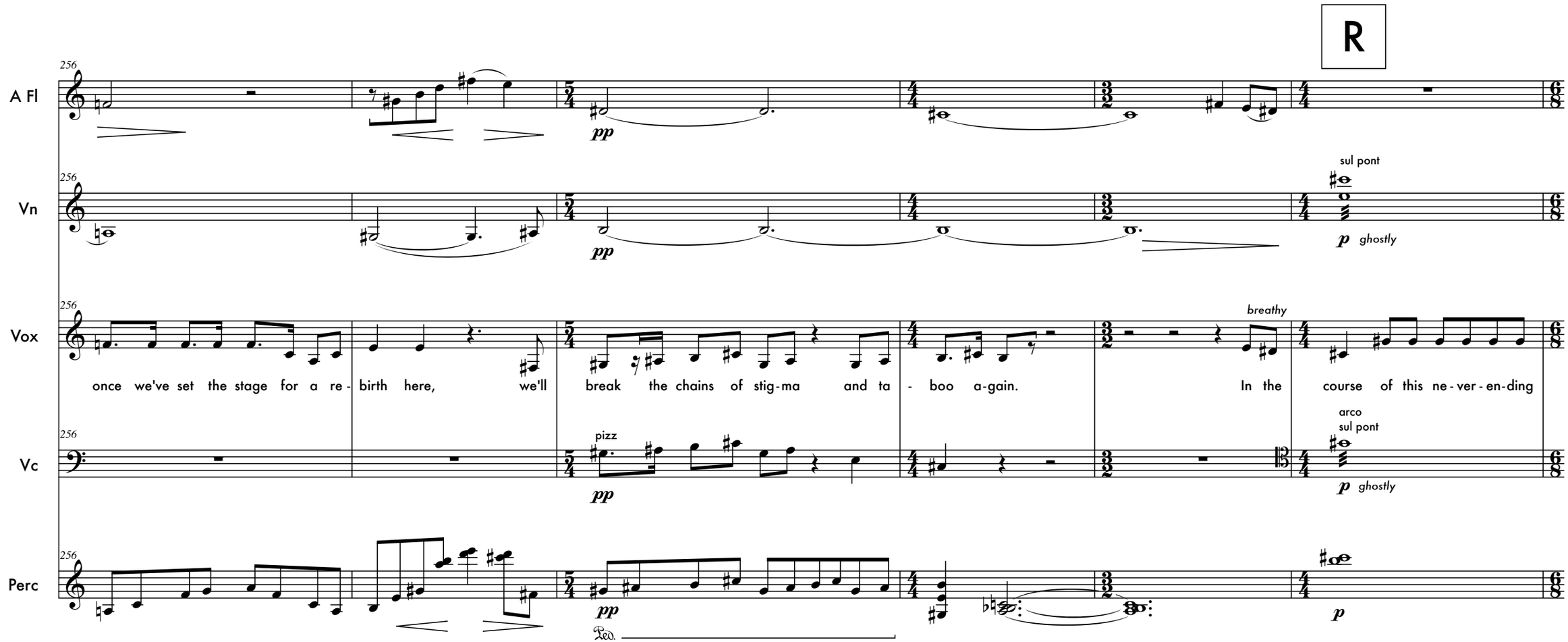
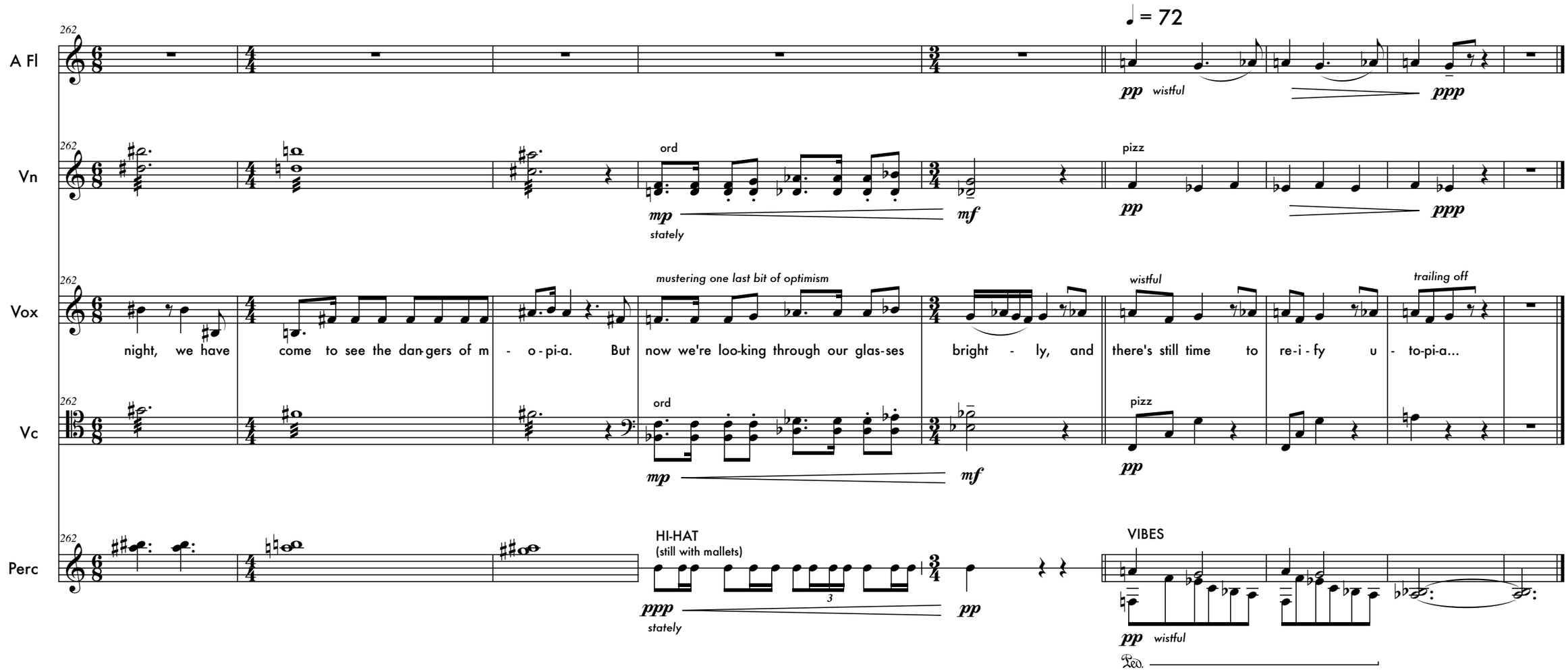
f

(Gradually fade out as tape gets louder)

CUT OFF when tape reaches gunshot sound at 0:33

5. Aftermath

Start this section on the chord at 2:10 in the tape part

A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
214
p somber
pp
ord
somber
somber
They crushed us com-plete-ly.
Burned the trees, black-ened the sky,
cru-ci-fied the he-re-tics, and mu-ti-la-ted the
hand offenders.
There are things they don't teach you in Civili-zation.
Things you're not allowed to talk about.
pizz
arco
ord
IV
Ped.

O
♩ = 80
220
A Fl
wide, slow vibrato
pp
Vn
sul pont
p mysterious
ppp
sul tasto
pp
Vox
inward and secretive
(Sprechstimme)
(casual, speech-like singing)
But I'm here,
hands still at-tached,
fin-gers un-bro-ken.
And I'm not the only one.
There are five of us.
And we're buil-ding some-thing new,
out in the glow of the
Vc
sul pont
pp
Perc
VIBES
soft mallets
ppp

227
A Fl
p
227
Vn
ord
p
227
Vox
oil field fires.
We've star- ted clea - ring
rub-ble.
We've as - sem - bled some
struc - tures out of scrap me - tal.
227
Vc
pizz
p
227
Perc
motor: slow
pp
SUSPENDED CYMBAL
pp

P
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
233
♩ = 86
HUM AND PLAY
theremin vibrato + spooky portamento
Some-bo-dy told you
that there was some-thing im
- por-tant out here.
It's true.
But we need your
help.
Go back to Ci-vi-li-za-tion.
motor: off
Ped.
HI-HAT
with foot

Q
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
240
mf
with a secret smile
arco
ord
motor: slow
den- ti - fy po - ten - tial dis-si-dents, and
send them to us. Be care-ful. Be dis-creet.
And re-mem-ber, you
know what we're up to, which

♩ = 80
Rit.
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
244
means you're in vi-o-la-tion of the Know-ledge Code.
Turn us in, you'll be tur-ning your-self in too.
pizz
arco
arco
sul tasto
pizz
ATTACCA
f
mp
p
Ped.

6. Song of the Dark States

R
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
256
pp
sul pont
p ghostly
breathy
once we've set the stage for a re - birth here, we'll break the chains of stig - ma and ta - boo a - gain. In the course of this ne - ver - en - ding
pizz
arco
sul pont
Ped.

♩ = 72
A Fl
Vn
Vox
Vc
Perc
262
pp wistful
ppp
ord
mp
stately
mf
pizz
pp
ppp
mustering one last bit of optimism
wistful
trailing off
night, we have come to see the dan-gers of m - o-pi-a. But now we're loo-king through our glas-ses bright - ly, and there's still time to re-i-fy u - to-pi-a...
ord
mp
mf
pizz
pp
HI-HAT
(still with mallets)
ppp
stately
3
pp
VIBES
pp wistful
Ped.