Pande Shahov

Around

a study for three percussionists

2007

Composer's notes:

Around for three percussionists was 'composed around' the Macedonian folk song *Se sobrale voyvodite (The Dukes have gathered)*, adapted from the collection of Revolutionary Macedonian Folks Songs (Makedonska Kniga, 1974). The transcription of the song in this compilation was only a starting point for me. I decided to adapt it rhythmically, alternating various irregular metric combinations. The words and the message of the song are irrelevant to the piece; I wanted to use the rhythm as the main structural element.

Irregular metric grouping of 5/8, 7/8, 9/8 (the last one in unequal division) are common in Macedonian folk music (and other regions in the Balkans). The various combinations of groups of two and three (quavers or semiquavers) are known as *aksak* (a Turkish expression for 'limping'). This term was introduced by Constantin Brăilu and used by Bartok and Ligeti. The effect of these rhythms on me (while listening or dancing to them) has always been that of anticipation (expecting the unexpected accents) rather than confusion (brought by the wrong downbeat); I could never sense 'limping' in these patterns.

Most of the folk songs with irregular rhythms keep the same metre throughout. Some, however, have patterns (of two or more 'bars'), which then repeat throughout the song. This song is changing the time signature I wanted to start the compositional process by creating a longer succession of bars, each of them changing the time signature. The desired effect was of an even stronger 'confusion' (or, for me, anticipation of unexpected accents).

I employed only commonly used groupings of three, five and seven and combined them in the following pattern: 3733735375. The combination of the groups of two and three notes within these time signatures is: 332233322332332232.

This 10-bar pattern then served as the theme of a 'metric passacaglia' of 24 variations. The borrowed melodic quote (rhythmically adapted) appeared towards the middle of the piece, so the composition was built 'around' it.

Before the quote is brought in by the vibraphone, only unpitched percussion is used. After its first statement, the quote is used as a *cantus firmus* for several rhythmic and melodic counter-subjects. Whereas the piece starts with three unpitched instruments, it ends with three pitched ones.

This study is aimed at percussionists who want to explore irregular rhythms in a small ensemble setting. The minimum number of players required is three. However, in order to involve more performers, other instruments can be added and double up the unpitched percussion parts. When choosing additional unpitched instruments, attention should be given to dynamics and balance: the pitched percussion parts should always be clearly heard whenever present. Instruments with similar timbre should be doubling the parts of already chosen instruments.

The choice of mallets is left to the performers. Pedalling on the vibraphone is also left to the performer to decide on. However, it is to be used very carefully, so it does not undermine the above effect of the unexpected accents within the irregular rhythmic patterns. The vibraphone motor is to be switched off.

Instrumentation:

Perc 1:

Xylophone
2 Bongos
Bass Drum

Perc 2:
Vibraphone
Suspended Cymbal
Snare Drum
Tambourine (mounted)
2 Congas

Perc 3:
Marimba
Tam-tam
Triangle
2 Wood Blocks
4 Temple Blocks
Large Drum

The pedalling marking on the vibraphone is left to the performer. Half-pedal should be used whenever necessary.

Around

[Okolu]

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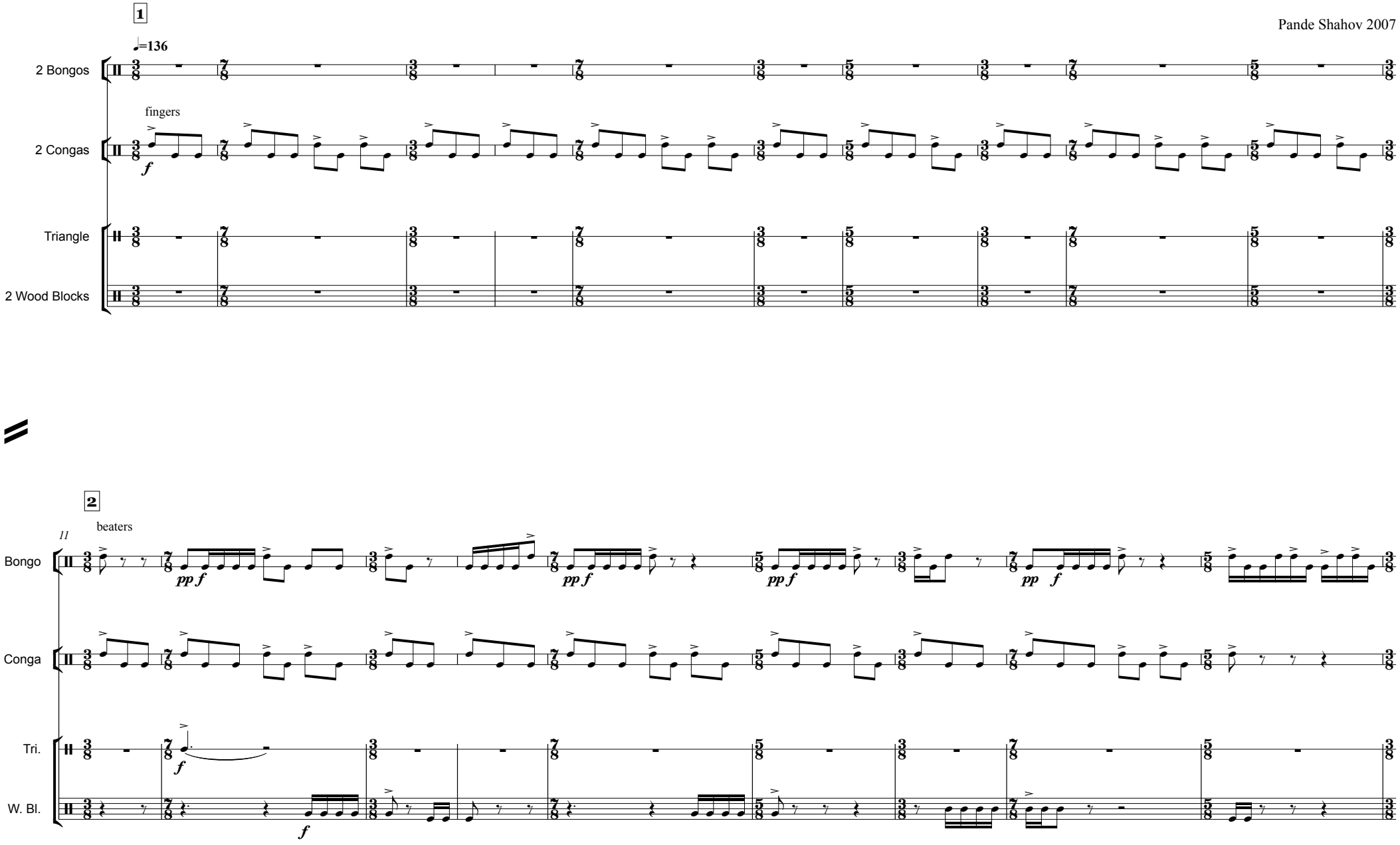
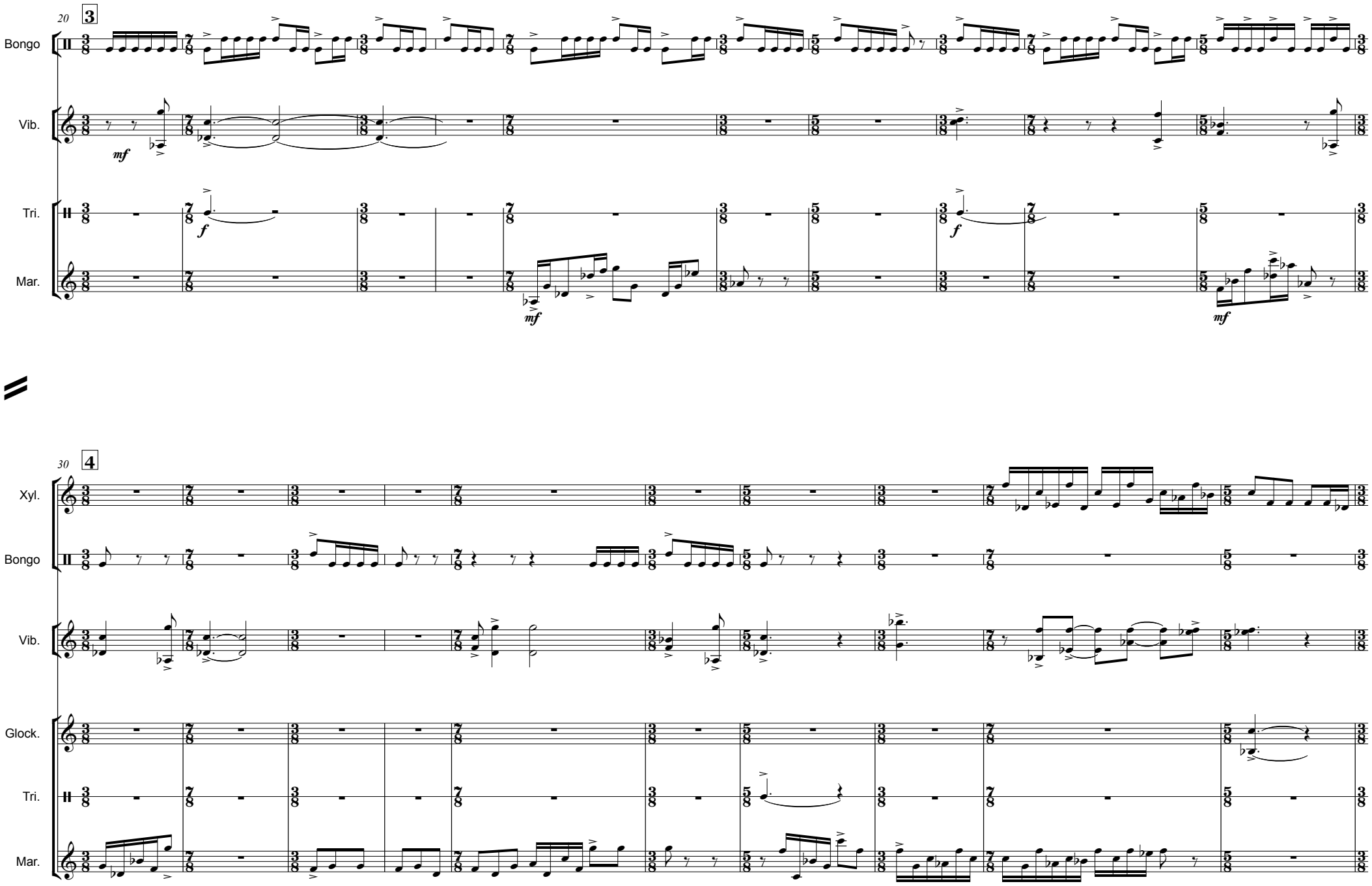
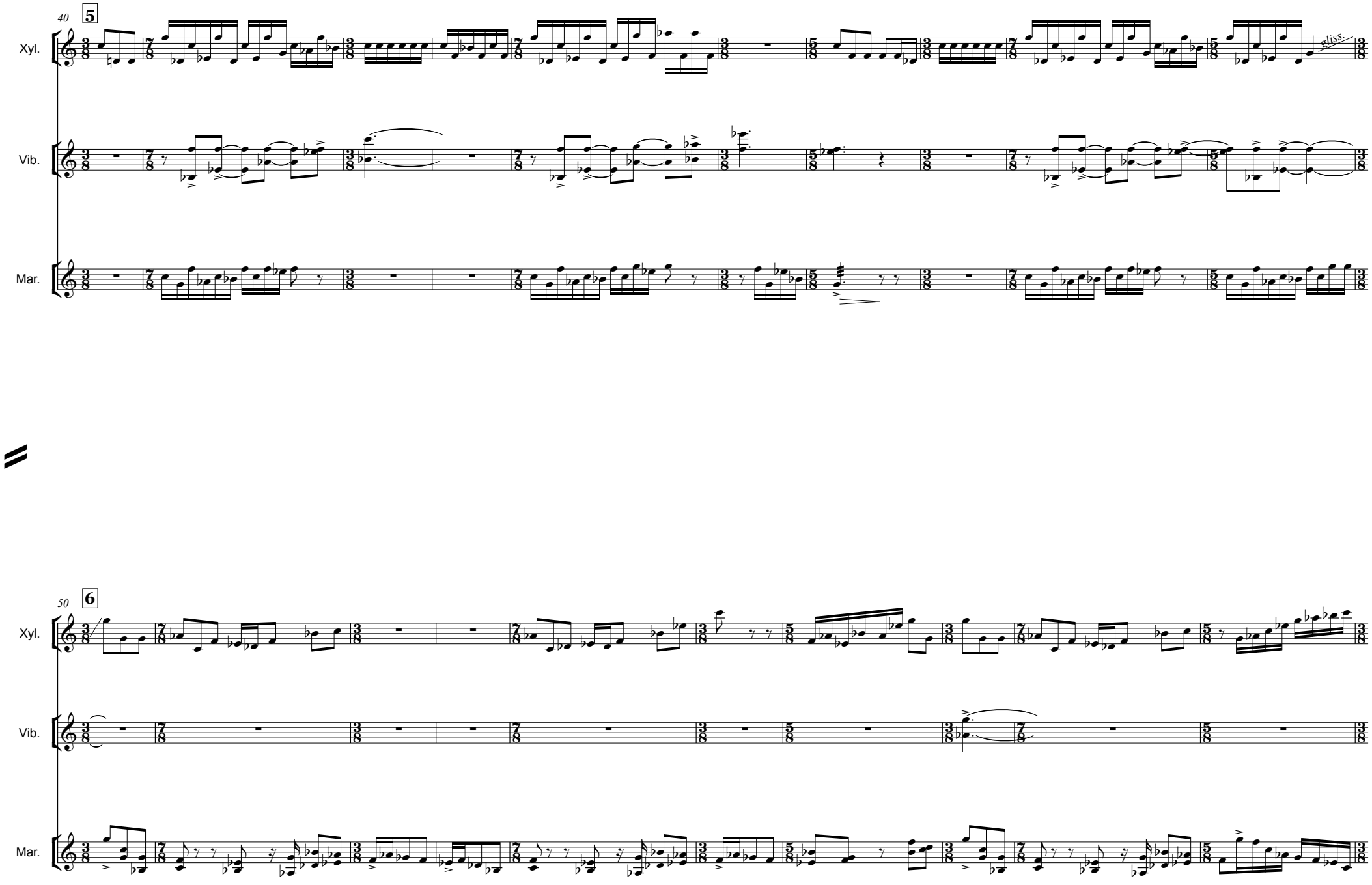
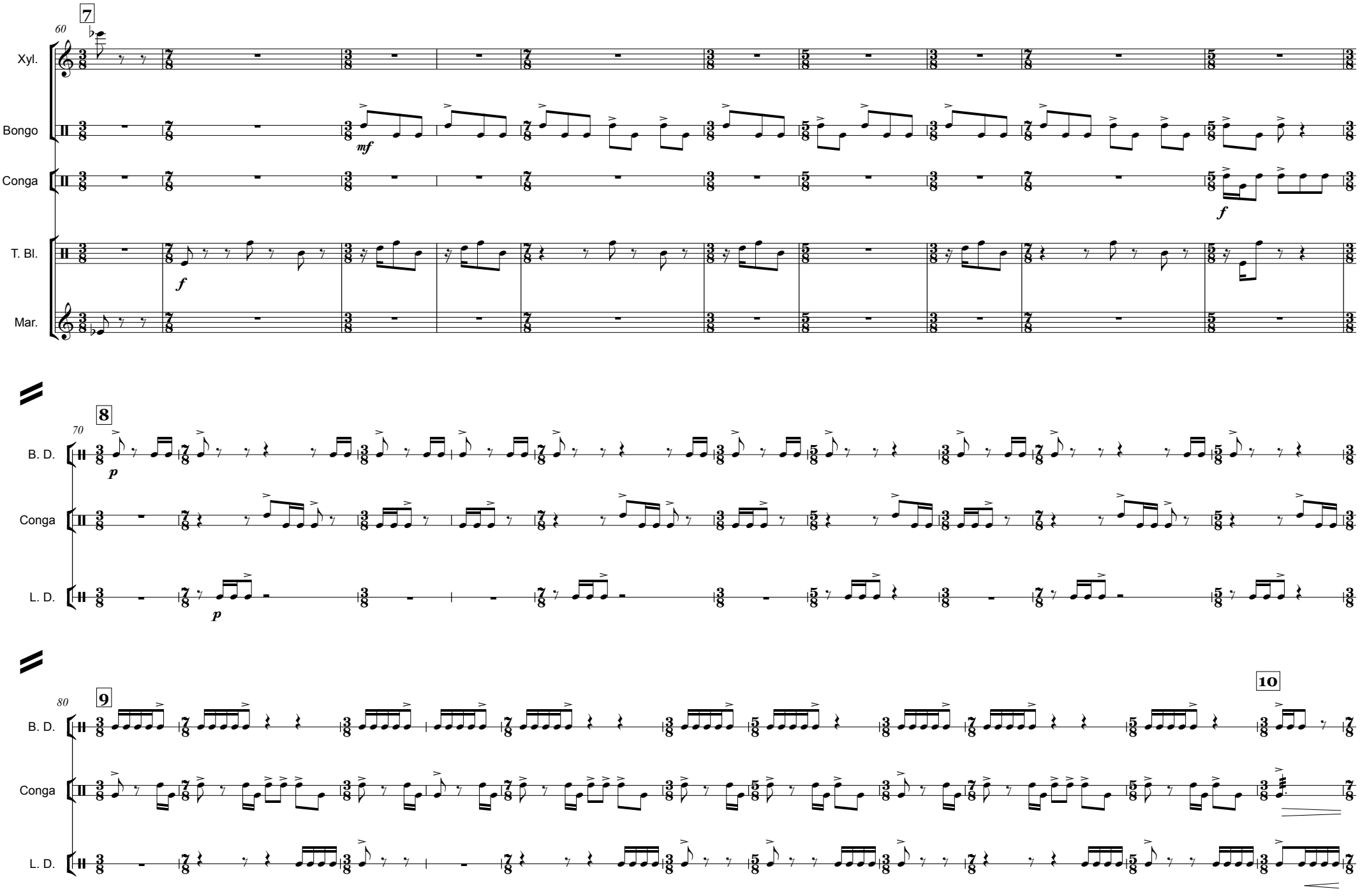
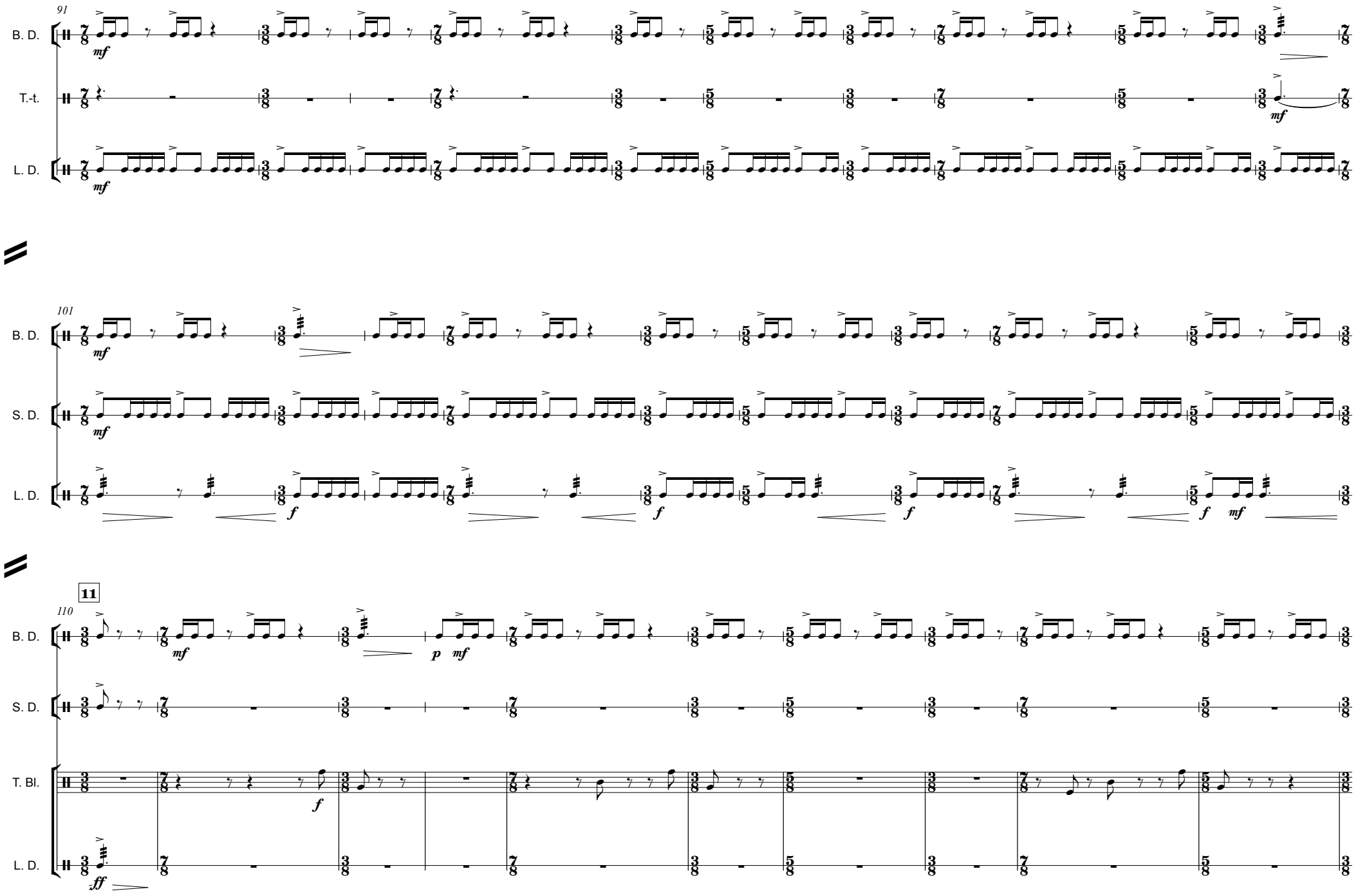
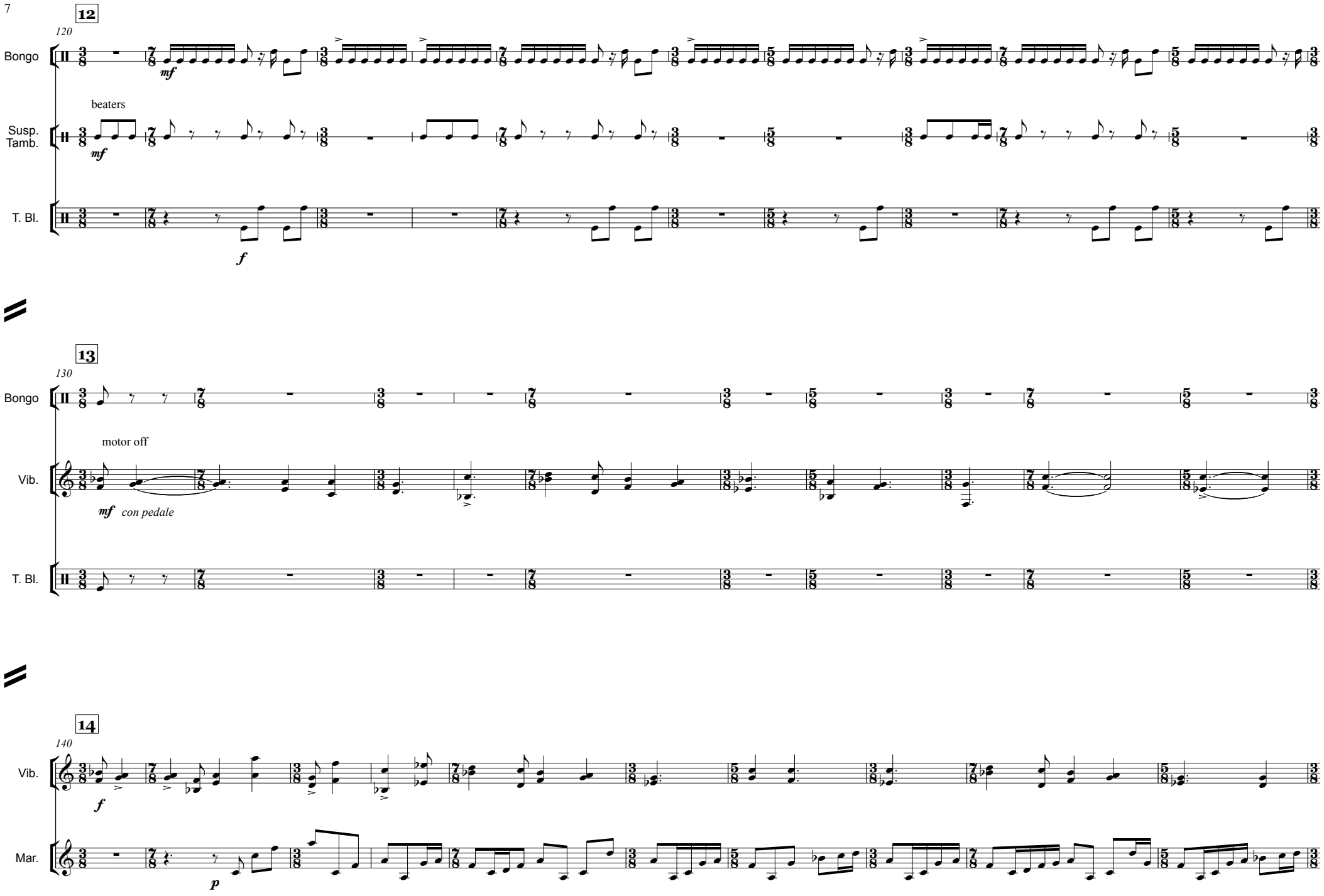


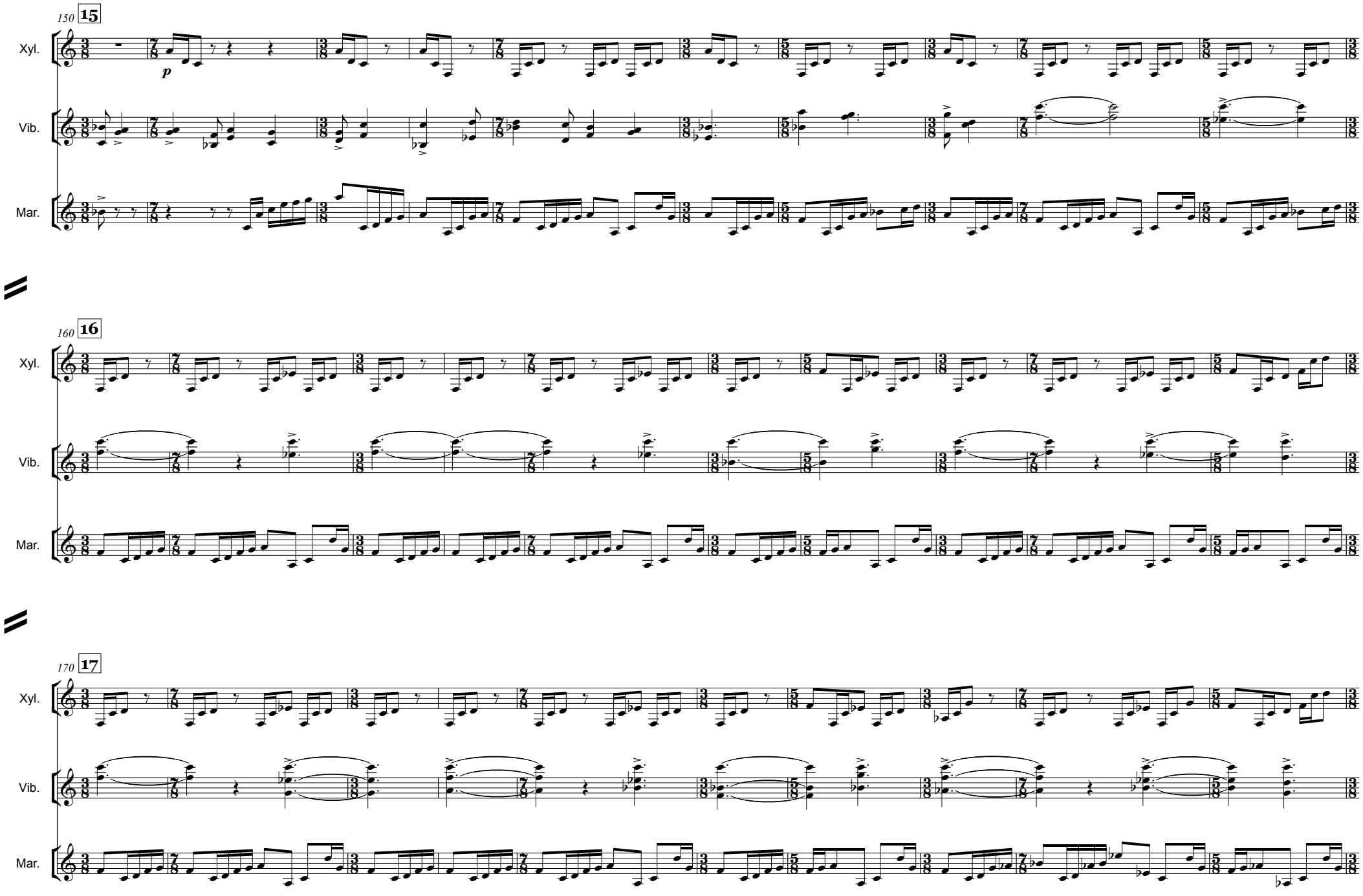

20
3
Bongo
Vib.
Tri.
Mar.
mf
f
mf
f
mf
30
4
Xyl.
Bongo
Vib.
Glock.
Tri.
Mar.

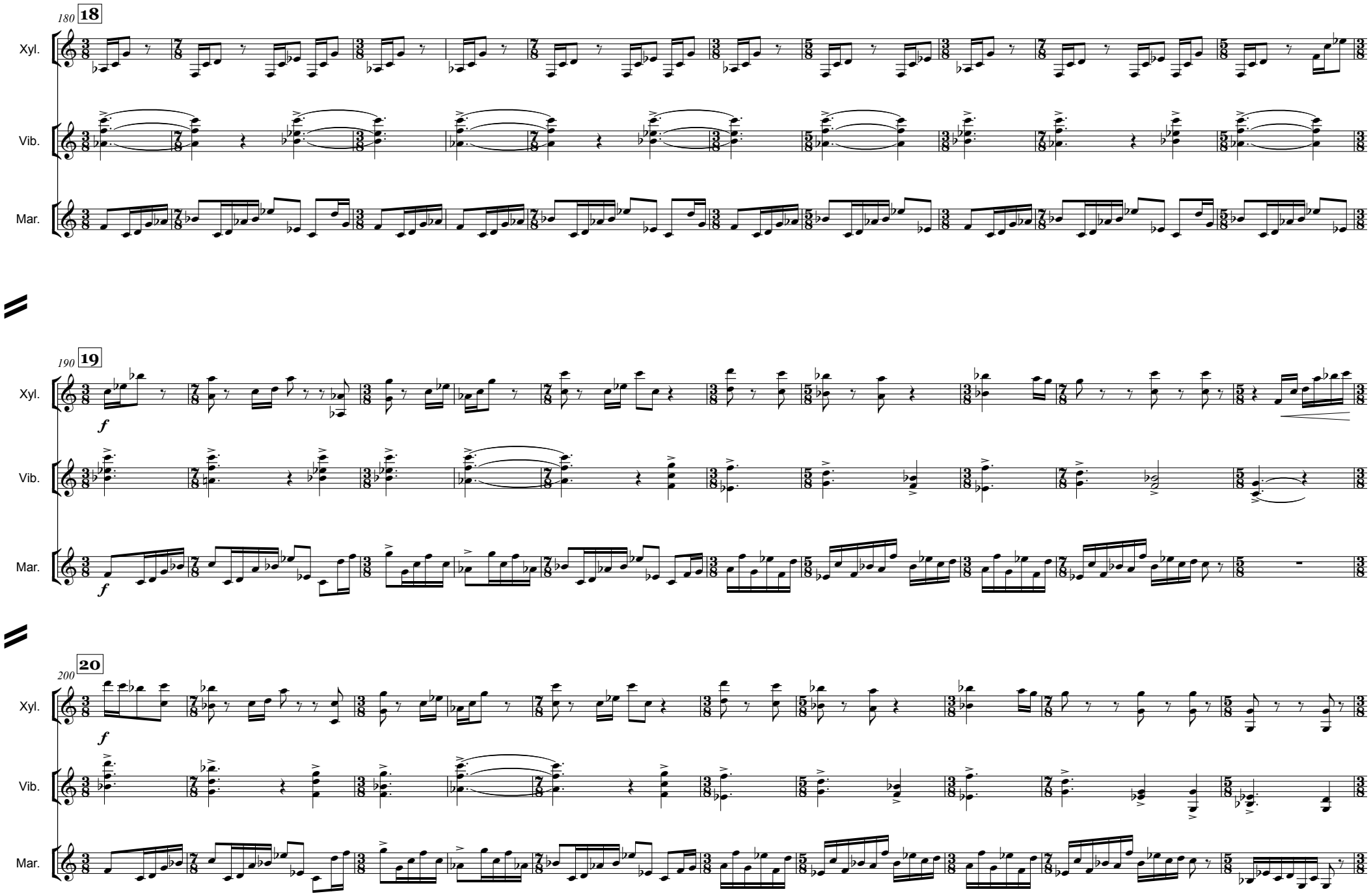

40
5
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
gliss.
50
6
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.

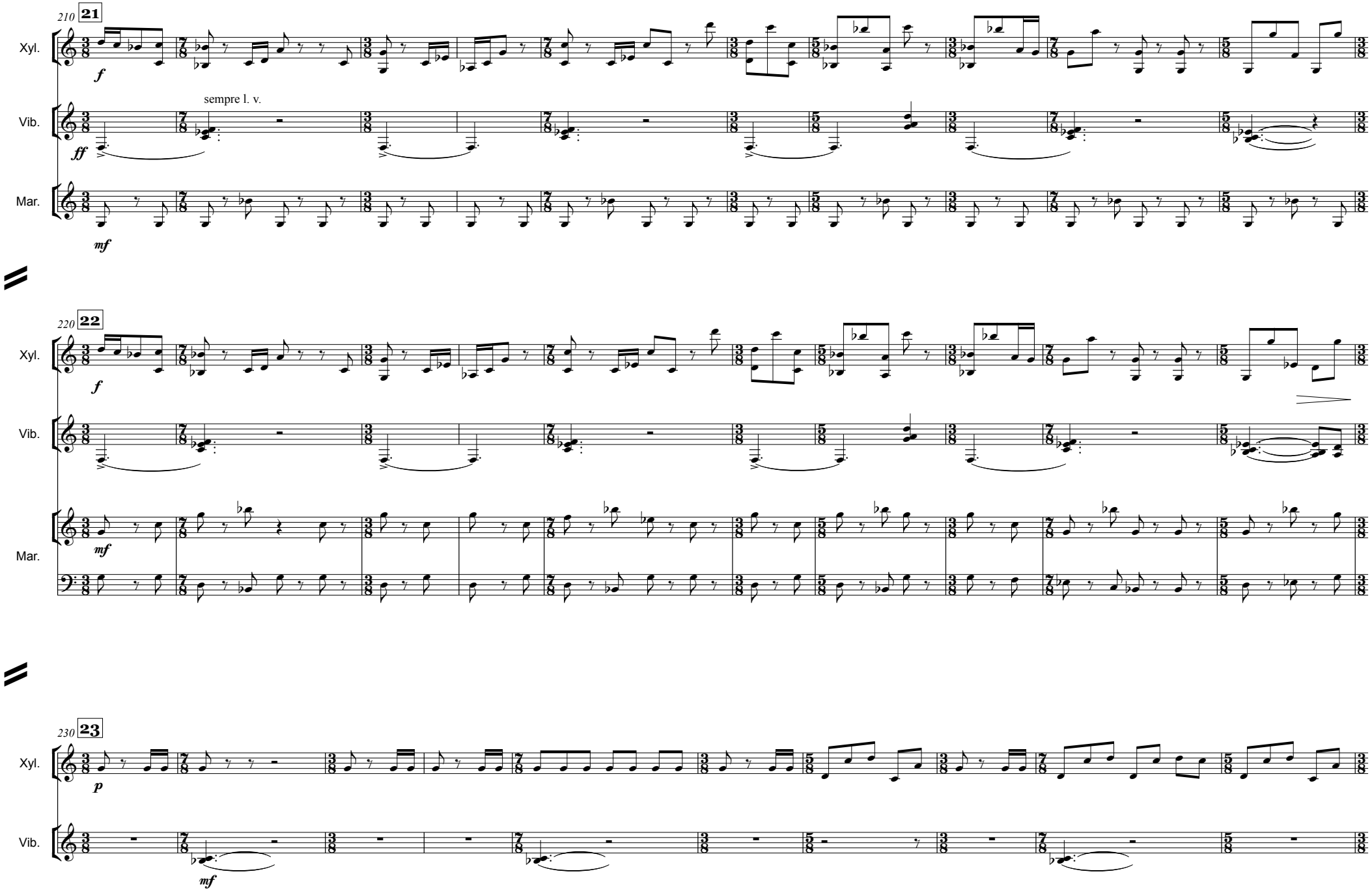

7
60
Xyl.
Bongo
mf
Conga
f
T. Bl.
f
Mar.
8
70
B. D.
p
Conga
L. D.
p
9
80
10
B. D.
Conga
L. D.

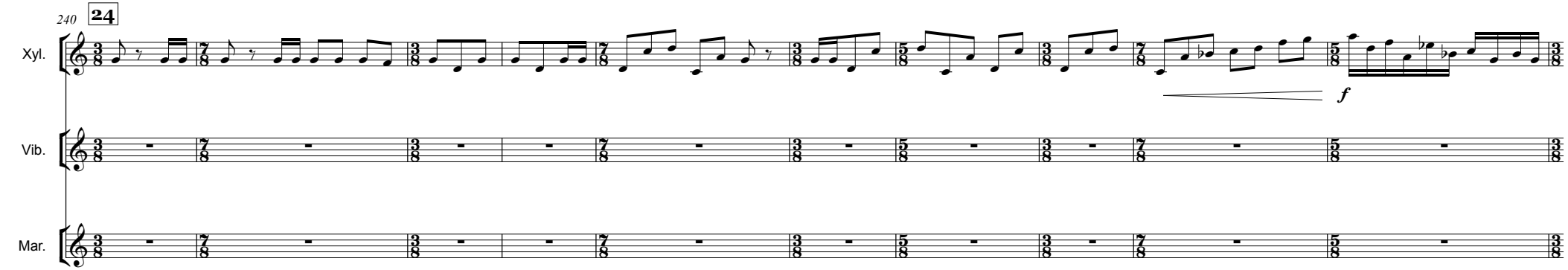

91
B. D.
T.-t.
L. D.
101
S. D.
11
110
T. Bl.

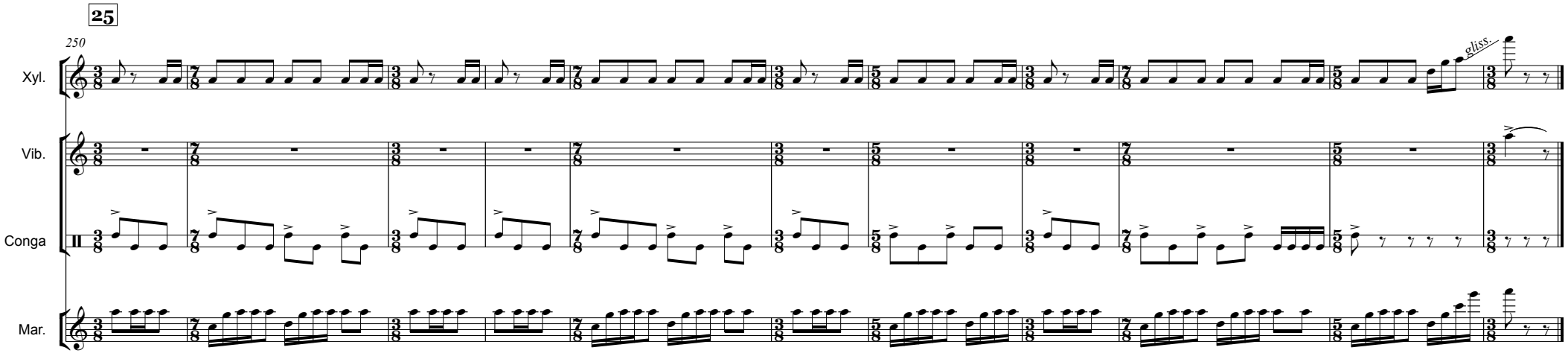

12
120
Bongo
mf
beaters
Susp.
Tamb.
mf
T. Bl.
f
13
130
Bongo
motor off
Vib.
mf con pedale
T. Bl.
14
140
Vib.
f
Mar.
p


150
15
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
p
160
16
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
170
17
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.


180
18
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
190
19
f
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
f
200
20
f
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.


210
21
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
sempre l. v.
220
22
230
23


240
24
Xyl.
Vib.
Mar.
f


25
250
Xyl.
Vib.
Conga
Mar.
gliss.