Brittle Star

by Alissa Voth, for the Unheard-of Ensemble

III	V	vii°	iii	V	vii°
VI	**iii**	III	vi	V	iii
ii°	iv	VI	ii	IV	vi
III	V	vii°	iii	V	vii°
VI	**vi**	III	vi	**I**	iii
ii°	iv	VI	ii	IV	vi
III	V	vii°	iii	V	vii°
VI	**ii**	III	vi	**IV**	iii
ii°	iv	VI	ii	IV	vi

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My composition "Brittle Star" was the first time that I utilized what I have come to call a weaving technique.

I created a cell of material using fragments of a folk song. The pitches within the cell is in C major pentatonic, which I then distributed among the piano, clarinet, violin, and cello. From this cell I began applying an algorithmic process, using a matrix called "choral space." In this matrix, chords that are diatonically related are presented in a box around a tonal center; where they are placed reflects their relatedness to a listener's sence of tonality. This matrix can be seen on the title page of the score.

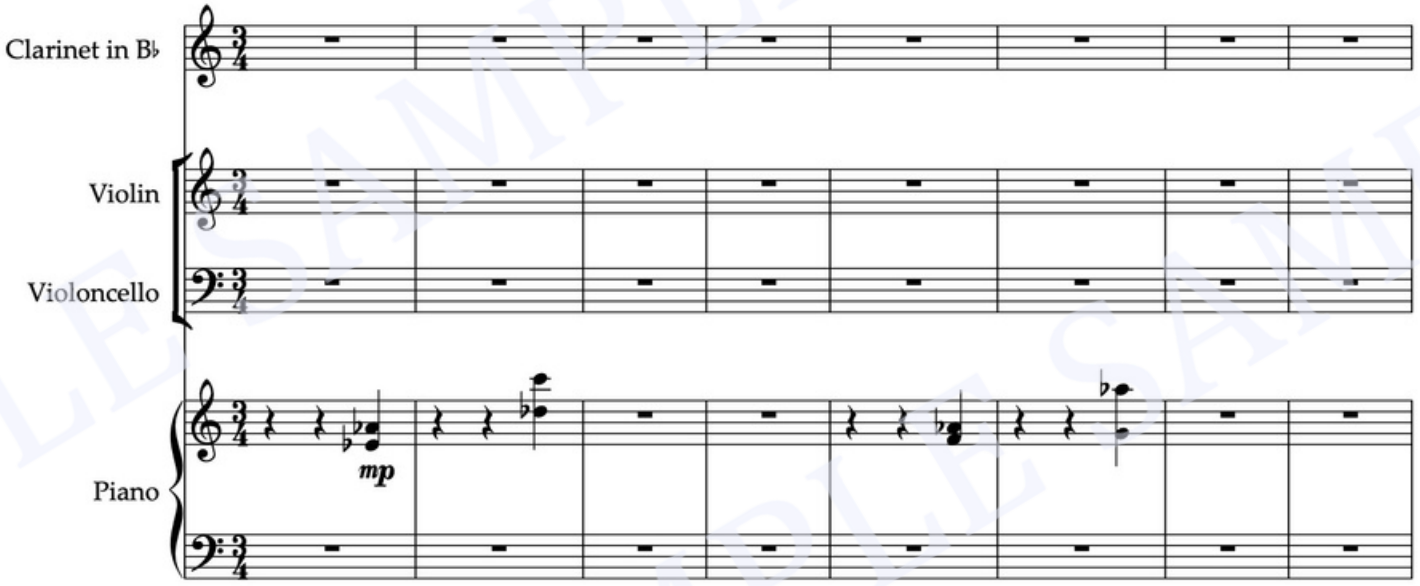
I created a process around this matrix, where the scale degrees of the C Major pentatonic scale begin to drift in a spiral around the matrix, gradually moving down the circle of fifths. For example, scale degree 3 in the I/C is E, and then scale degree 3 in the V/C is B, and then scale degree 3 in the viio/C is D, and et cetera. The effect of this process is a subtle experience of unrest, where relative degrees of tonality weave in and out of each other so that there is never a total departure fomr a key center, but also never a confirmation.

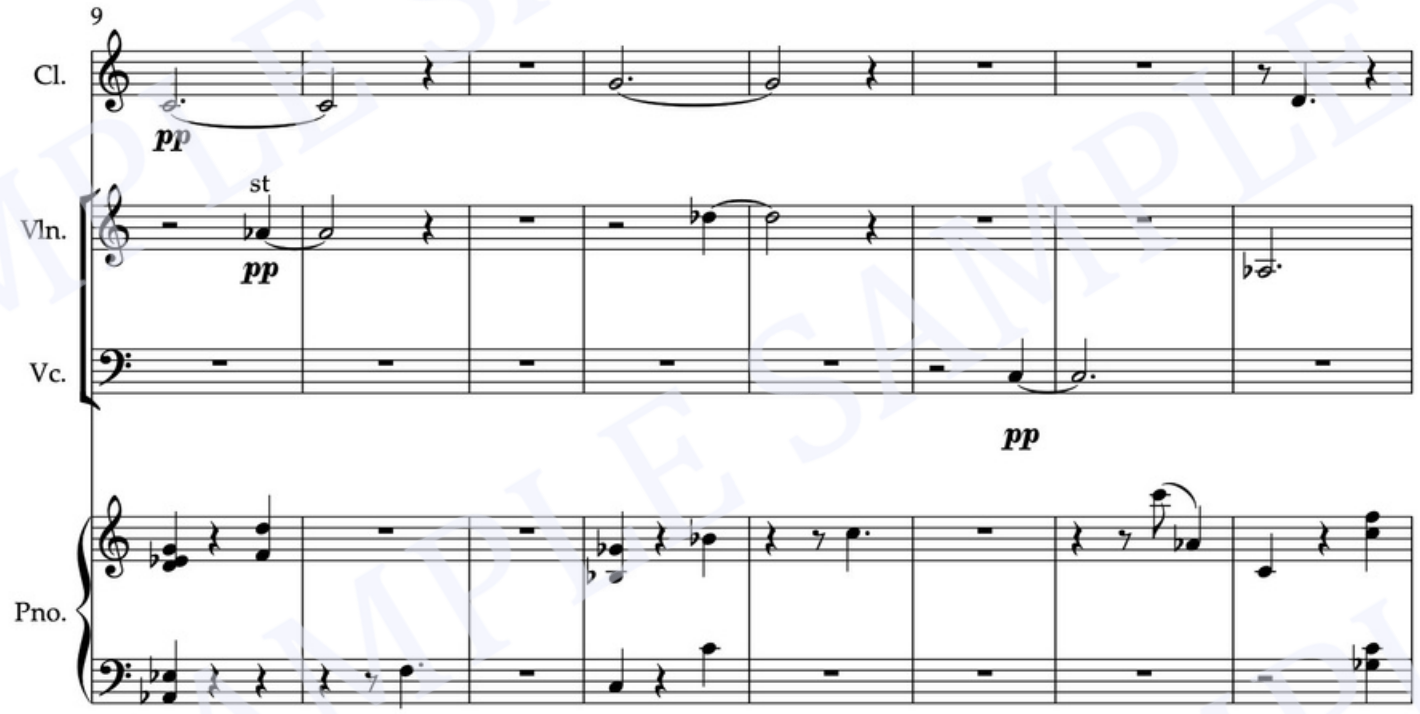
I named this piece after a deap sea creature, the brittle star, which crawls along the abyssal floor with spindly tentacles. I thought this was relevant to the aesthetic of the piece, a slow and winding expansion, and to the idea that this process might be playing with our subconscious evaluations of tonal stabilities. The reult, I hope, is a sense of longing.

Brittle Star

♩ = 80-85
slowly spreading outwards

Alissa Voth 2023
written for the Unheard-of Ensemble





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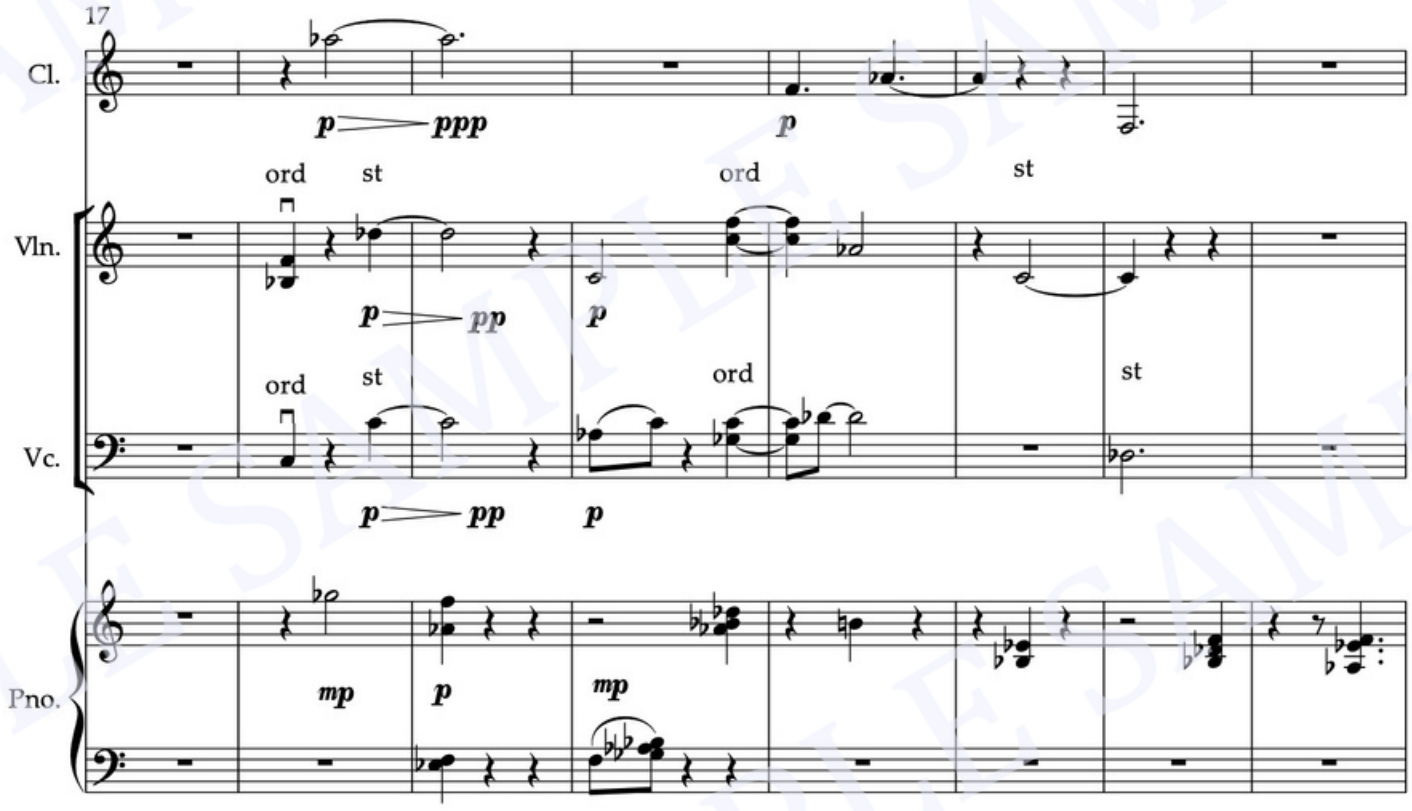
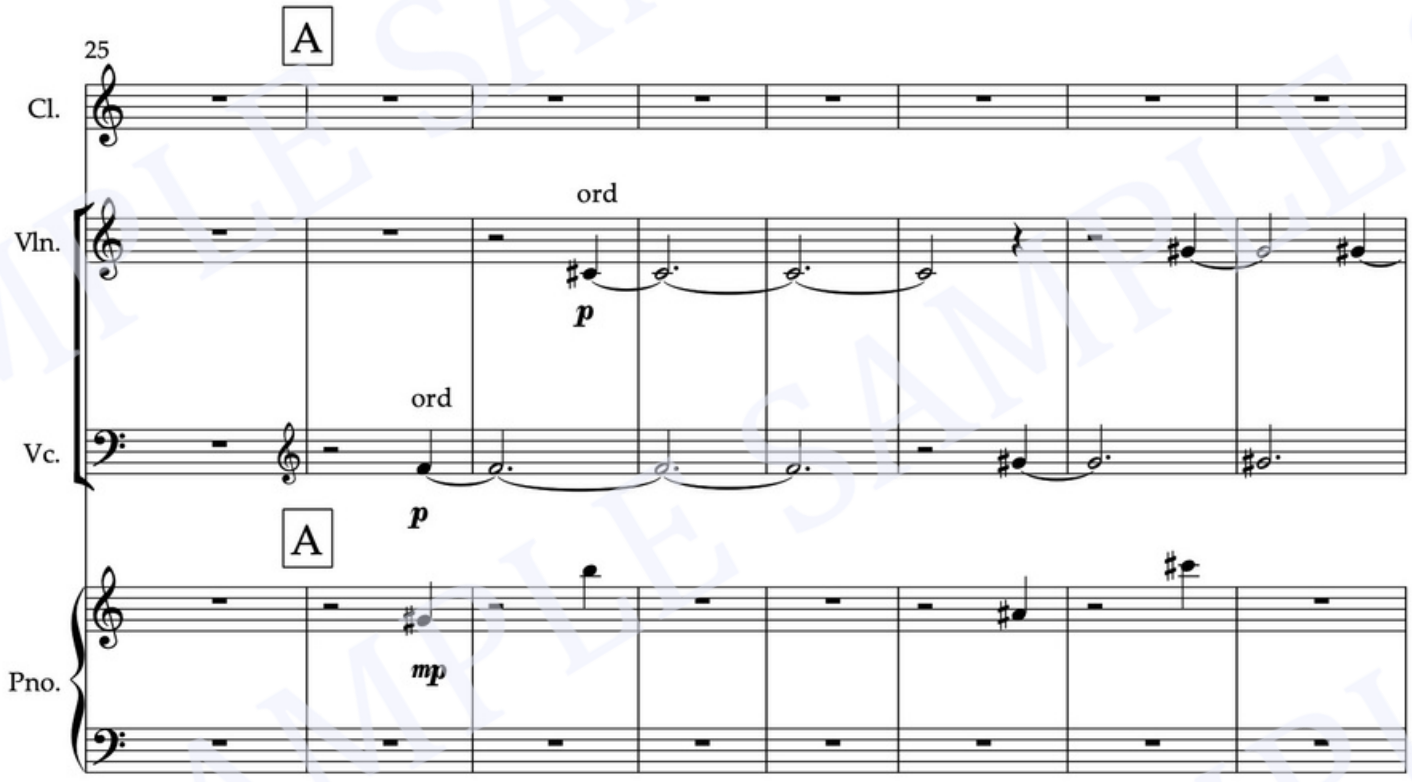
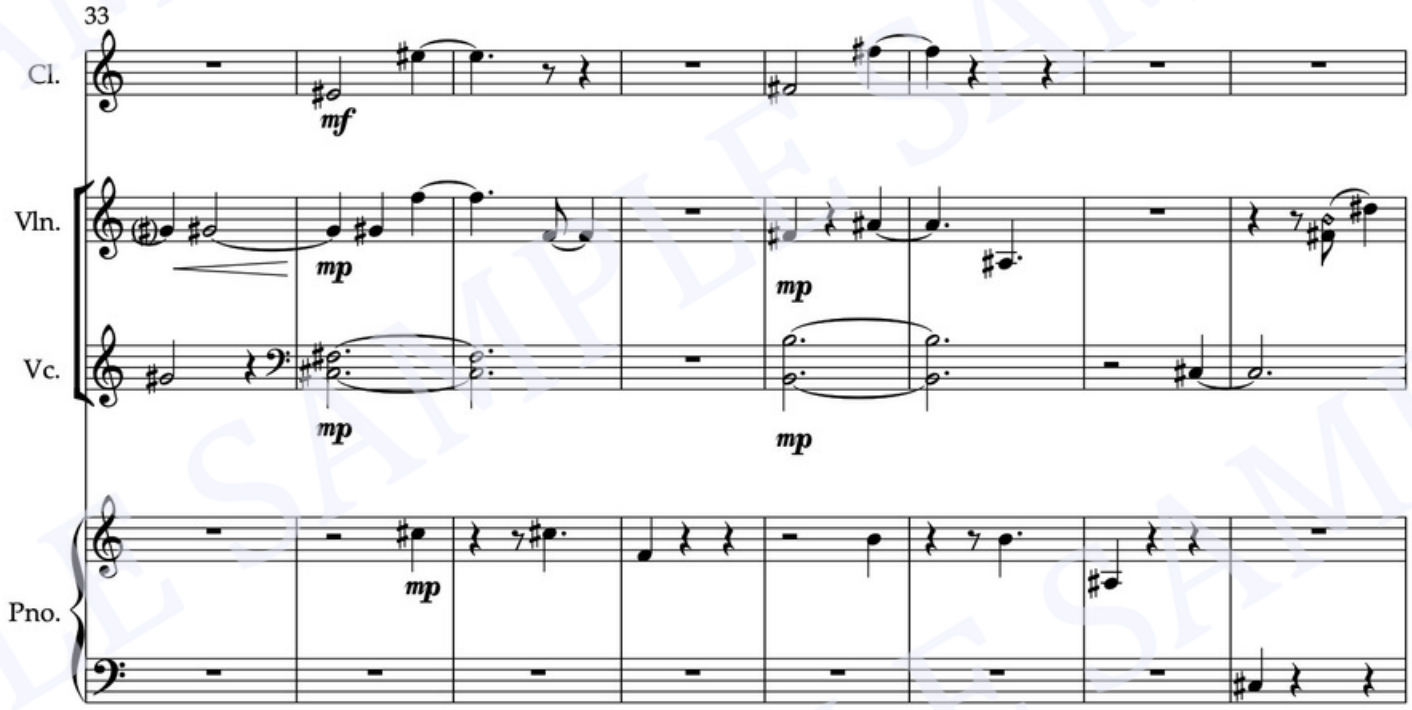
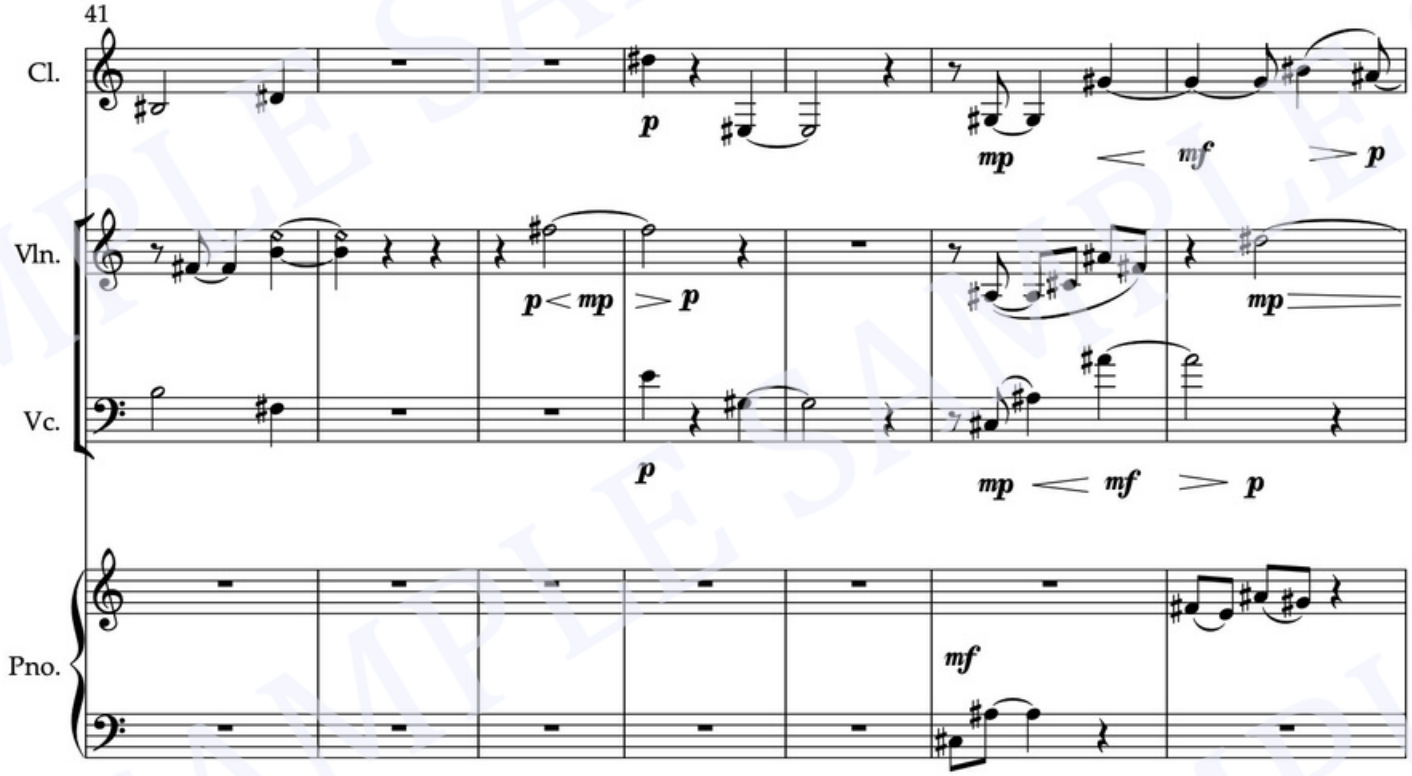

17
Cl.
p
ppp
p
Vln.
ord
st
ord
st
p
pp
p
Vc.
ord
st
ord
st
p
pp
p
Pno.
mp
p
mp


25
A
Cl.
Vln.
ord
p
Vc.
ord
p
A
Pno.
mp





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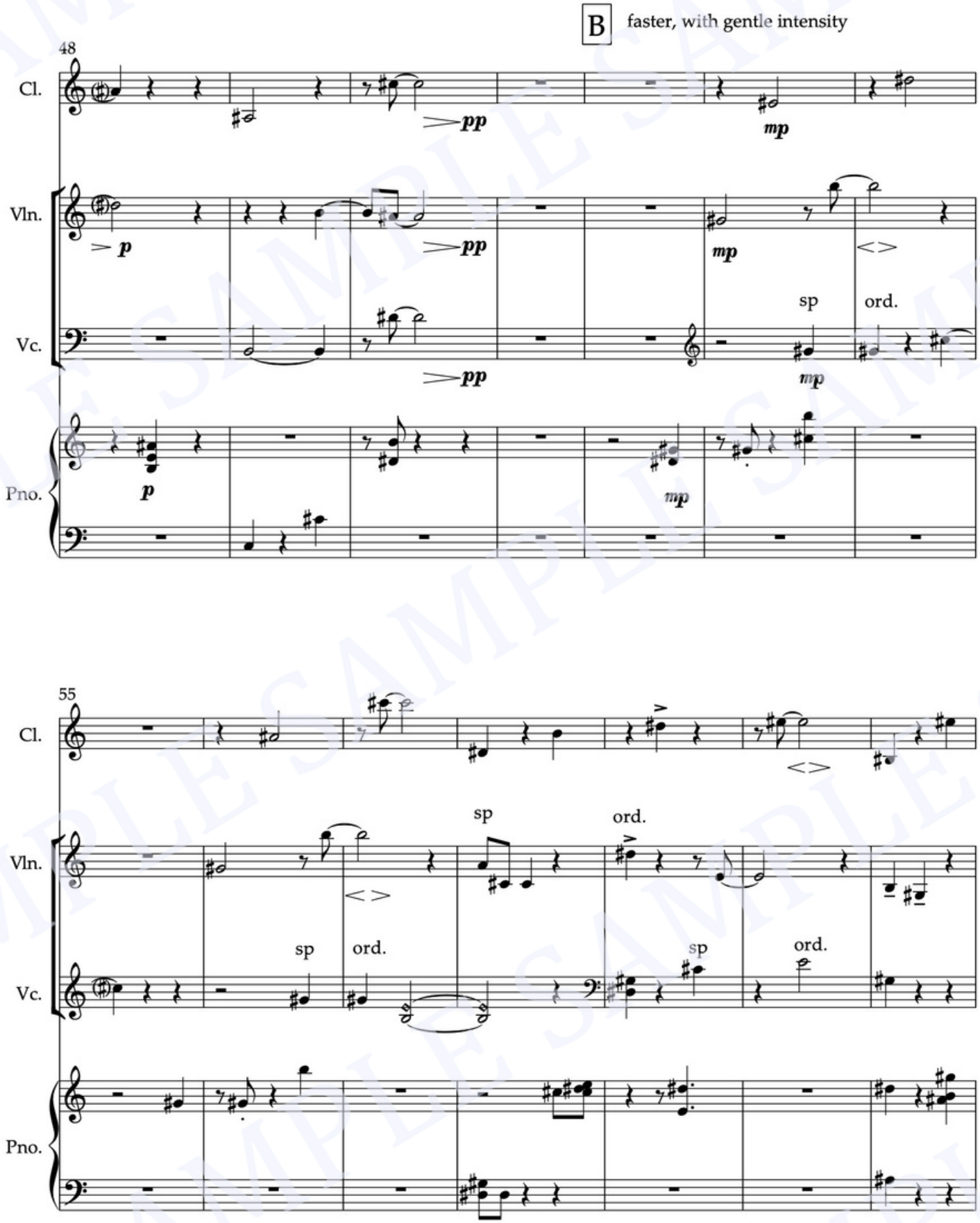
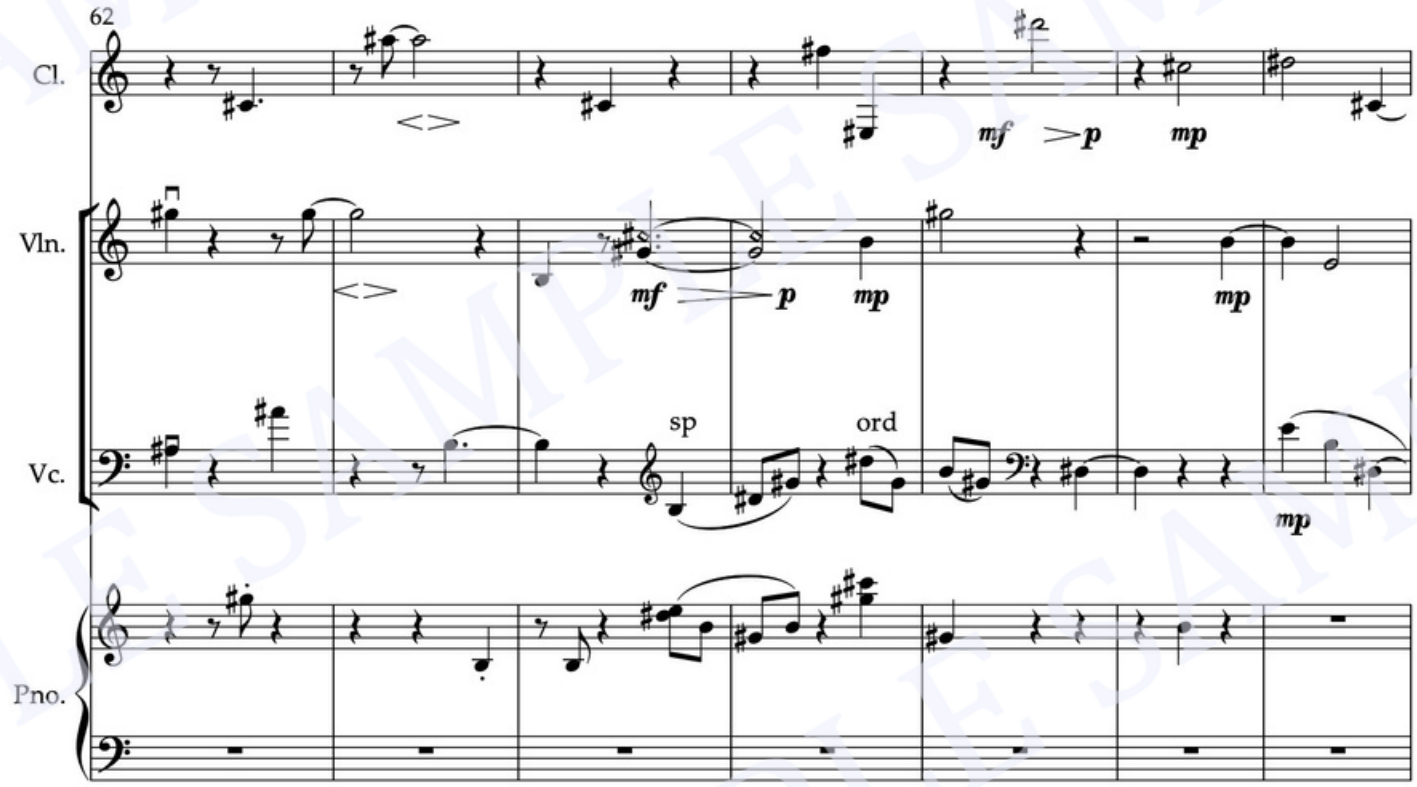
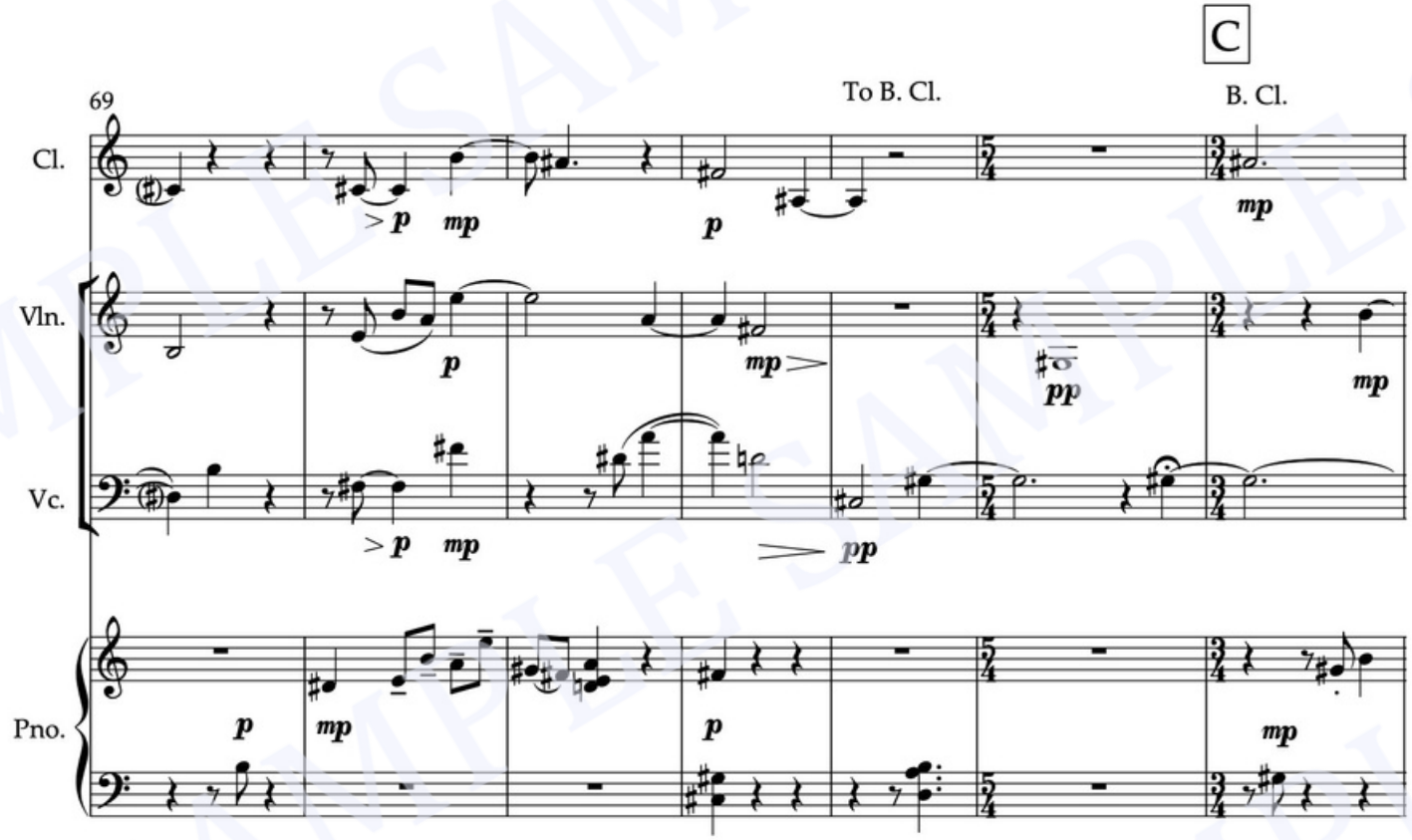
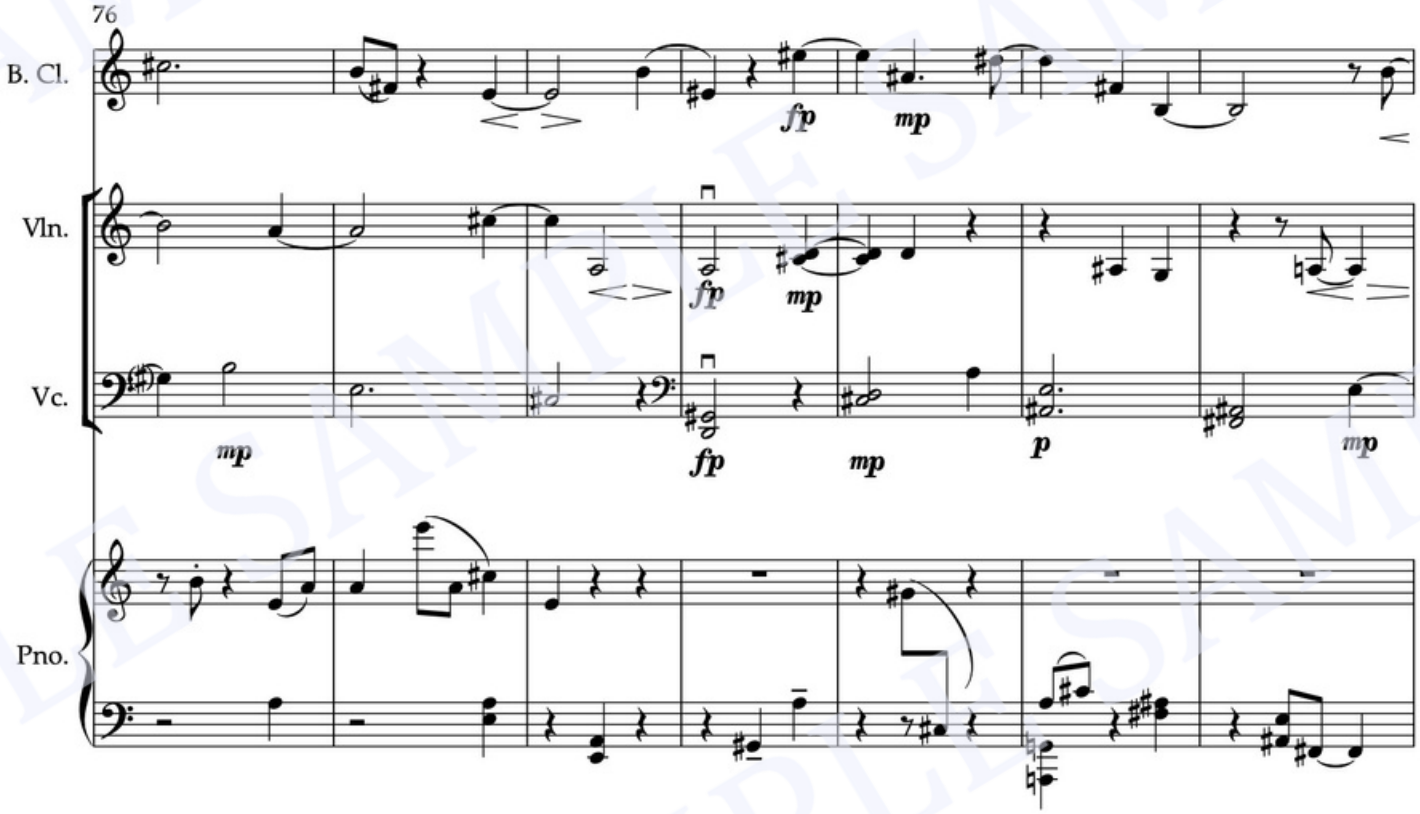
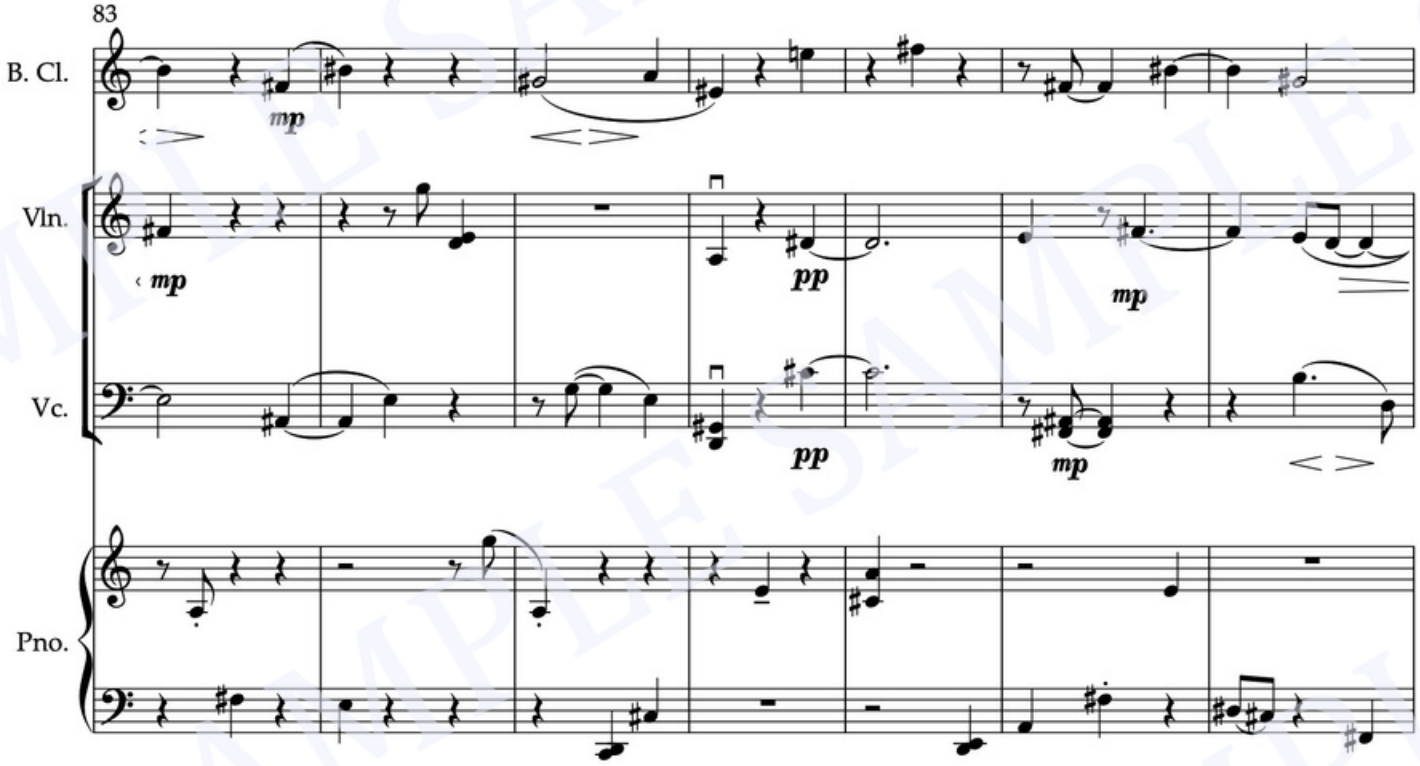
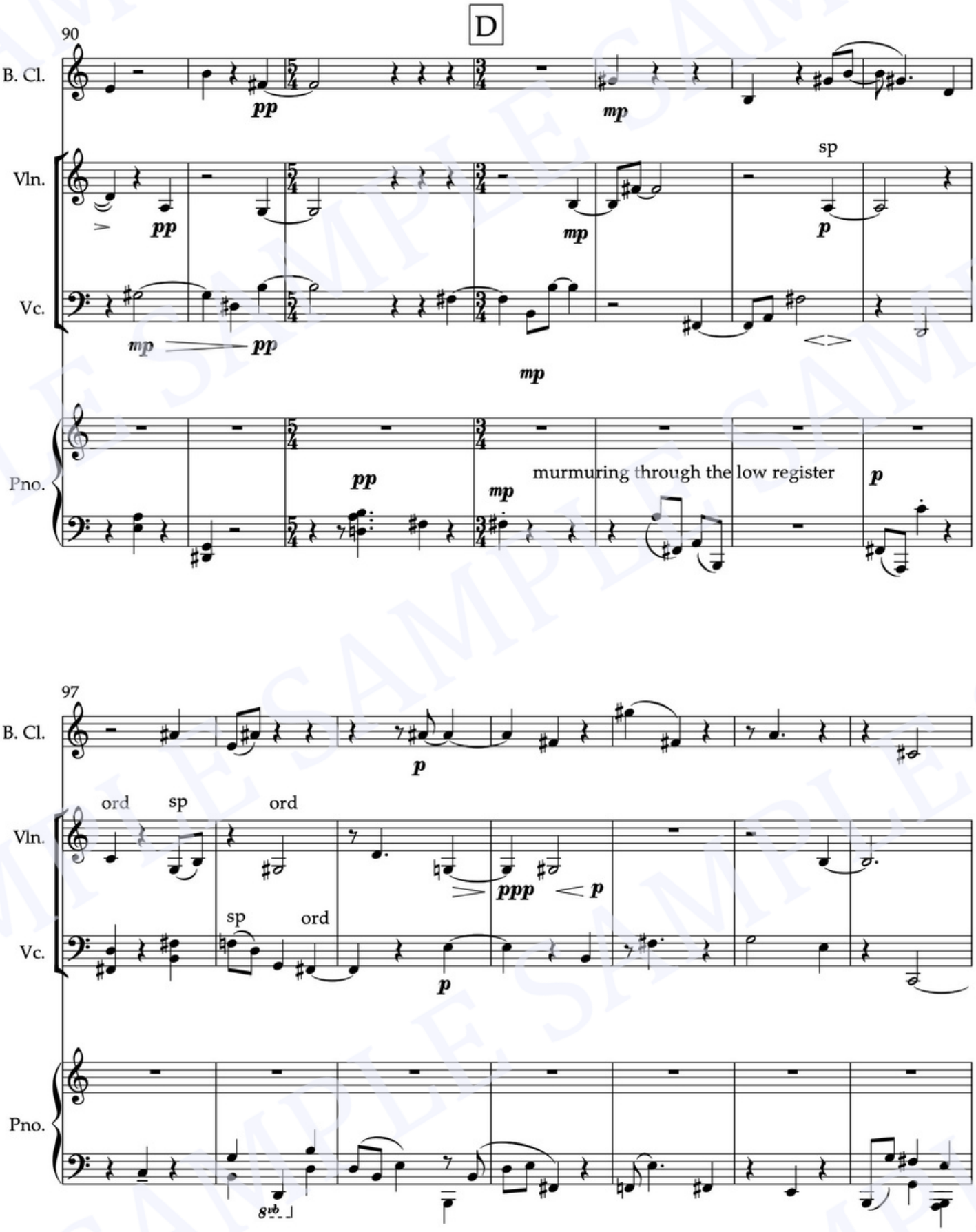

B
faster, with gentle intensity
48
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
pp
mp
p
sp
ord.
55
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
sp
ord.

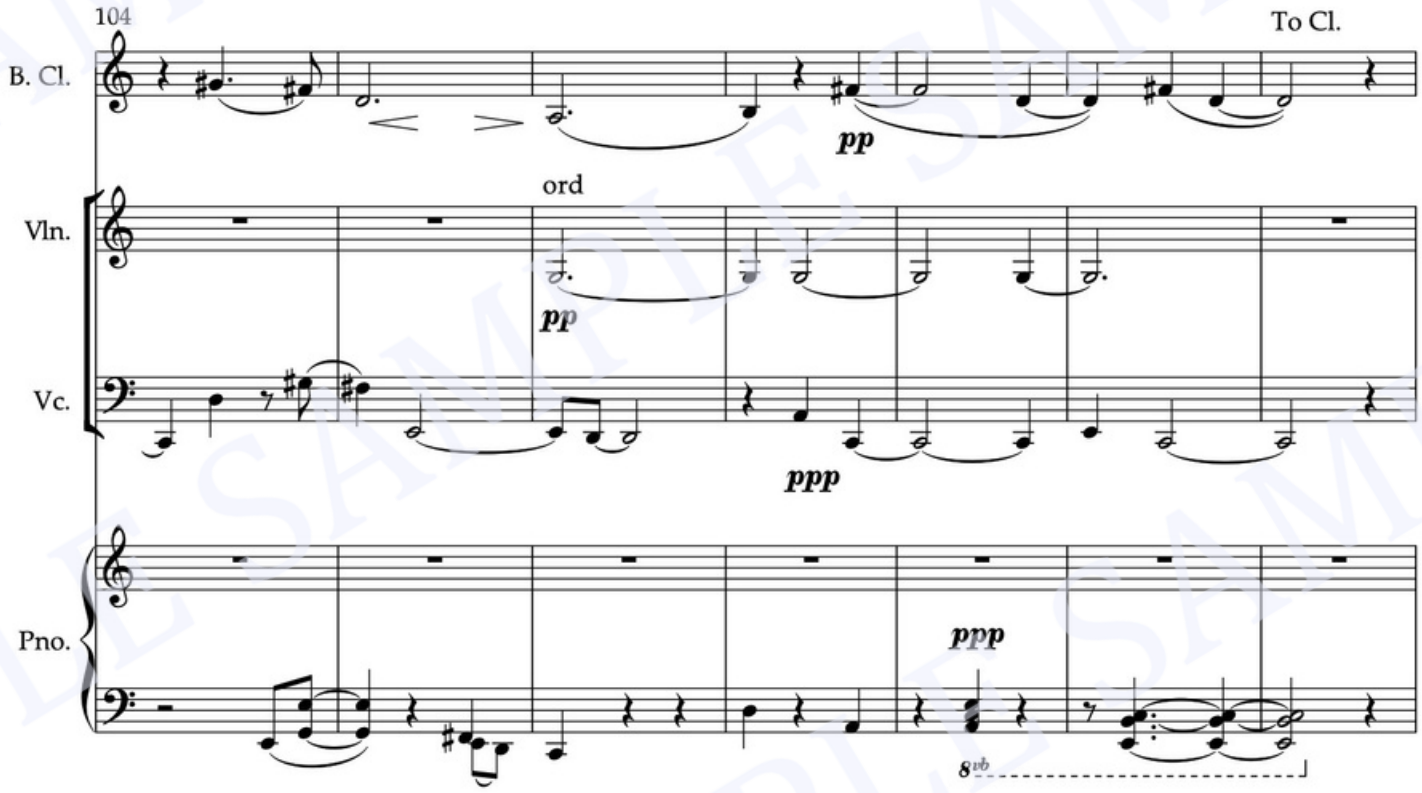

62
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
mf
p
mp
sp
ord

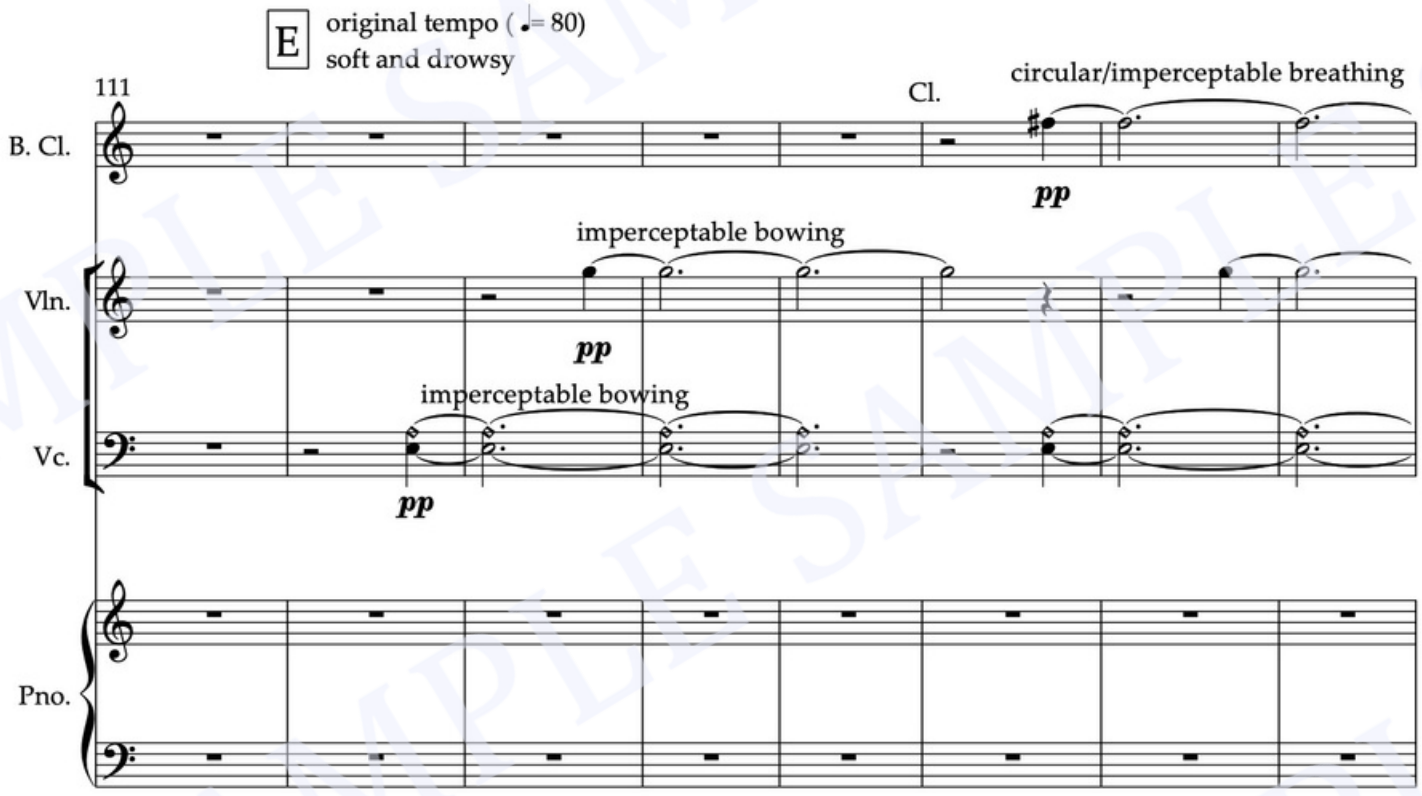

C
69
To B. Cl.
B. Cl.
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
p
mp
pp

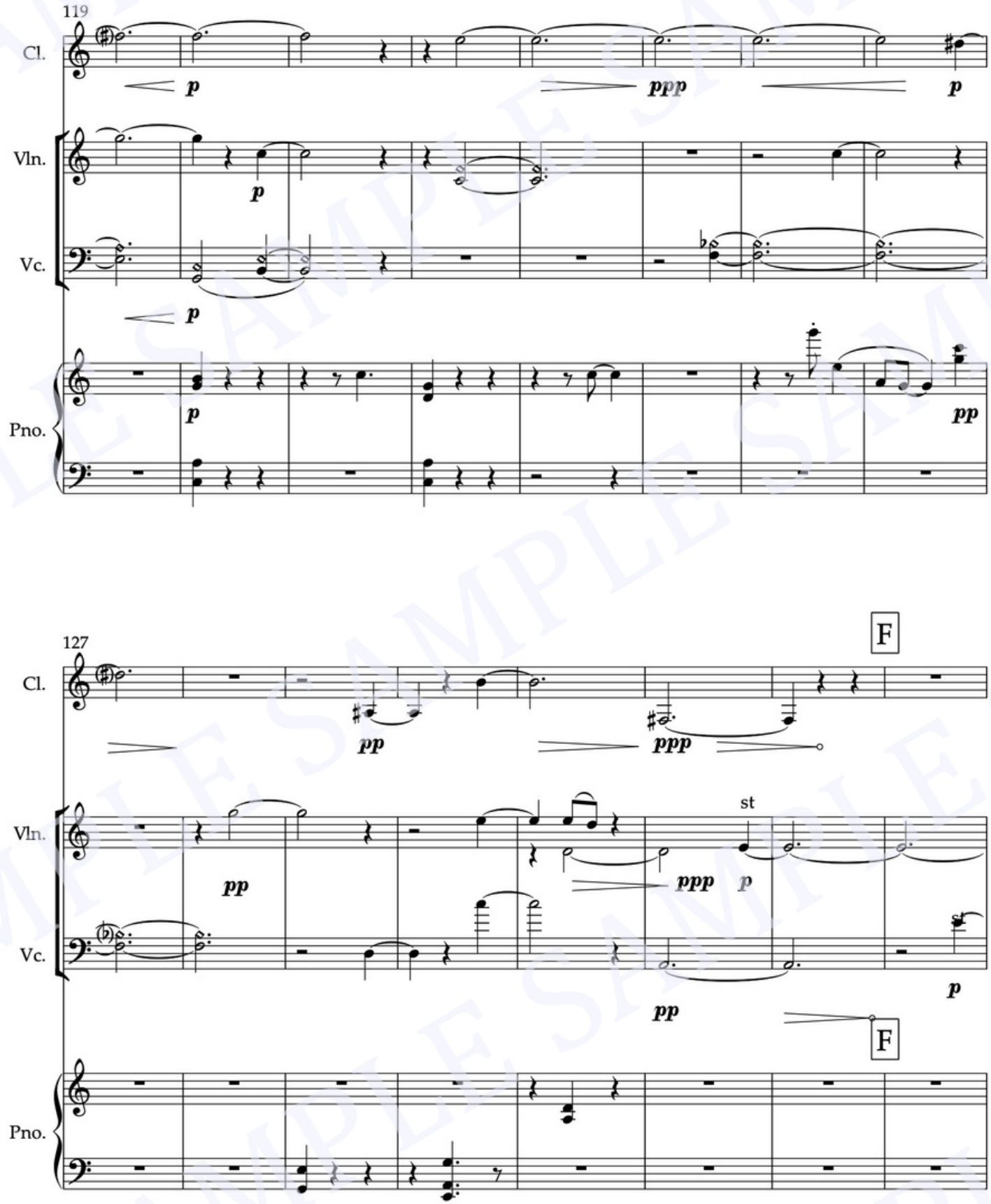

76
B. Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
fp
mp
fp
mp
mp
fp
mp
p
mp


83
B. Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
mp
mp
pp
mp
pp
mp


D
90
B. Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
Pno.
pp
mp
sp
p
murmuring through the low register
97
ord
sp
ord
ppp
8vb


104
To Cl.
B. Cl.
pp
ord
Vln.
pp
Vc.
ppp
Pno.
ppp
8vb


E
original tempo (♩= 80)
soft and drowsy
111
Cl.
circular/imperceptable breathing
B. Cl.
pp
imperceptable bowing
Vln.
pp
imperceptable bowing
Vc.
pp
Pno.



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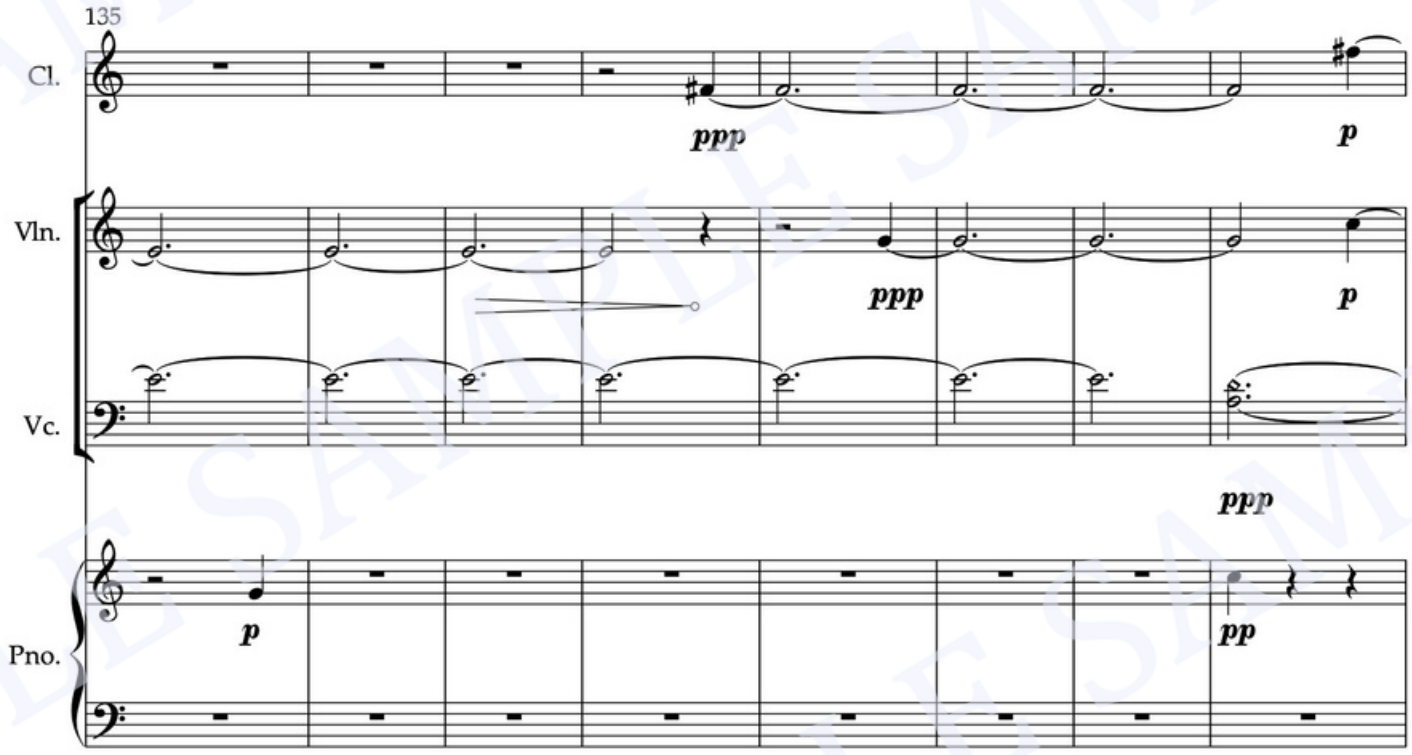

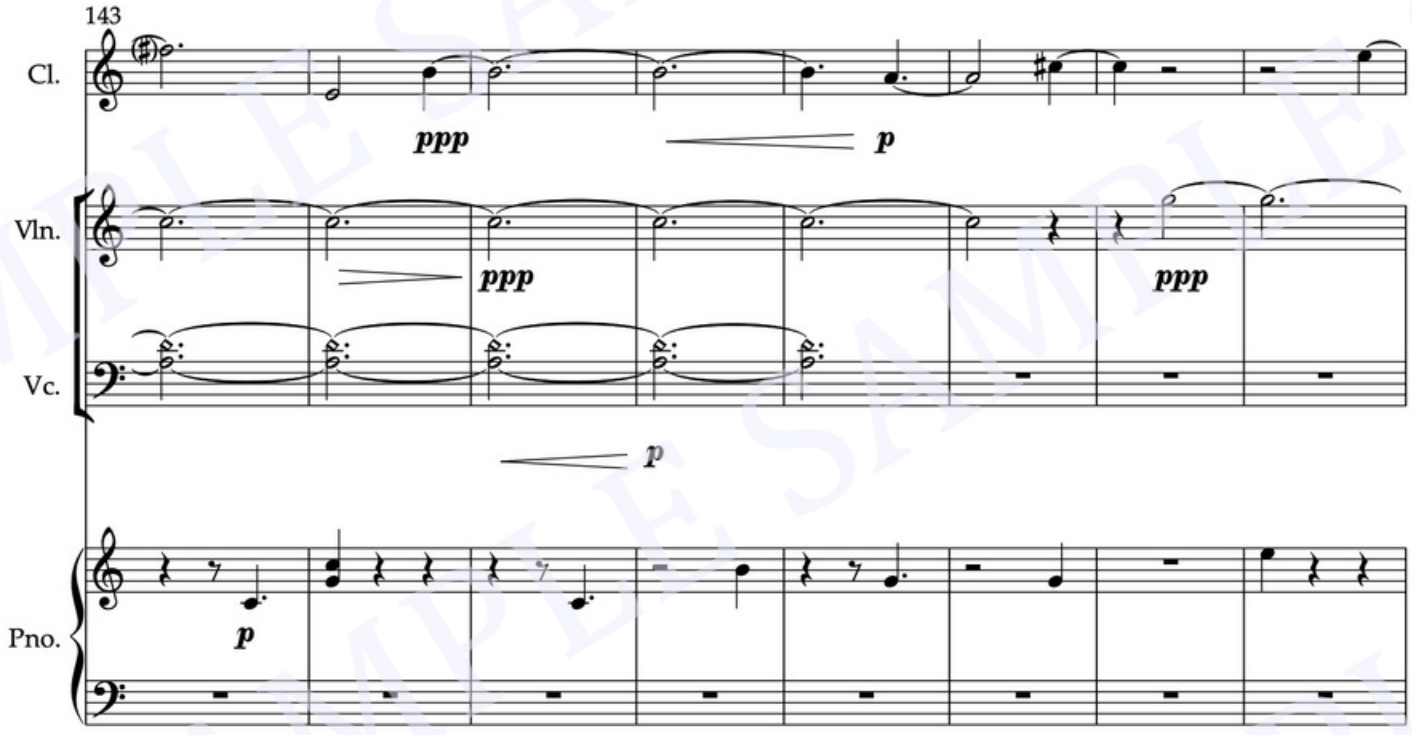

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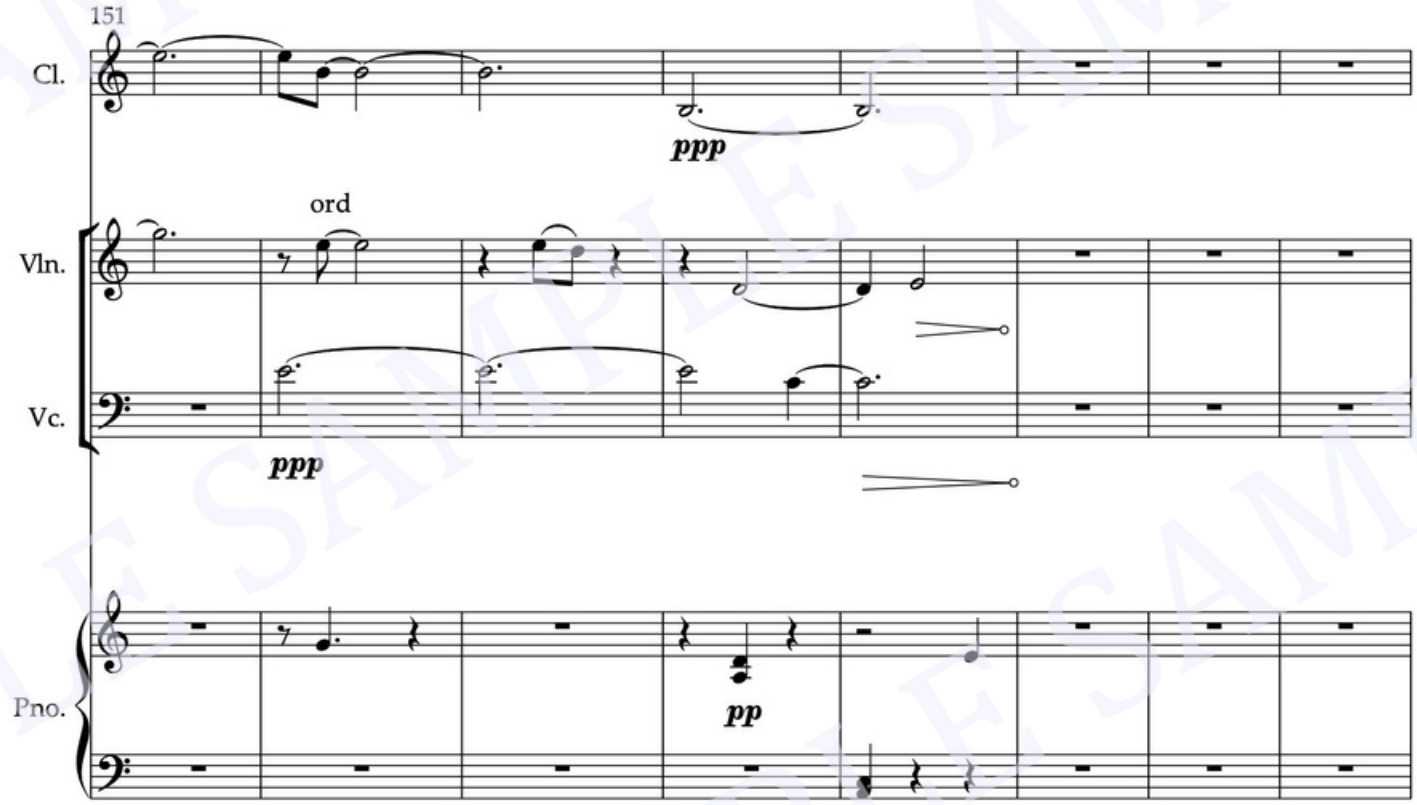

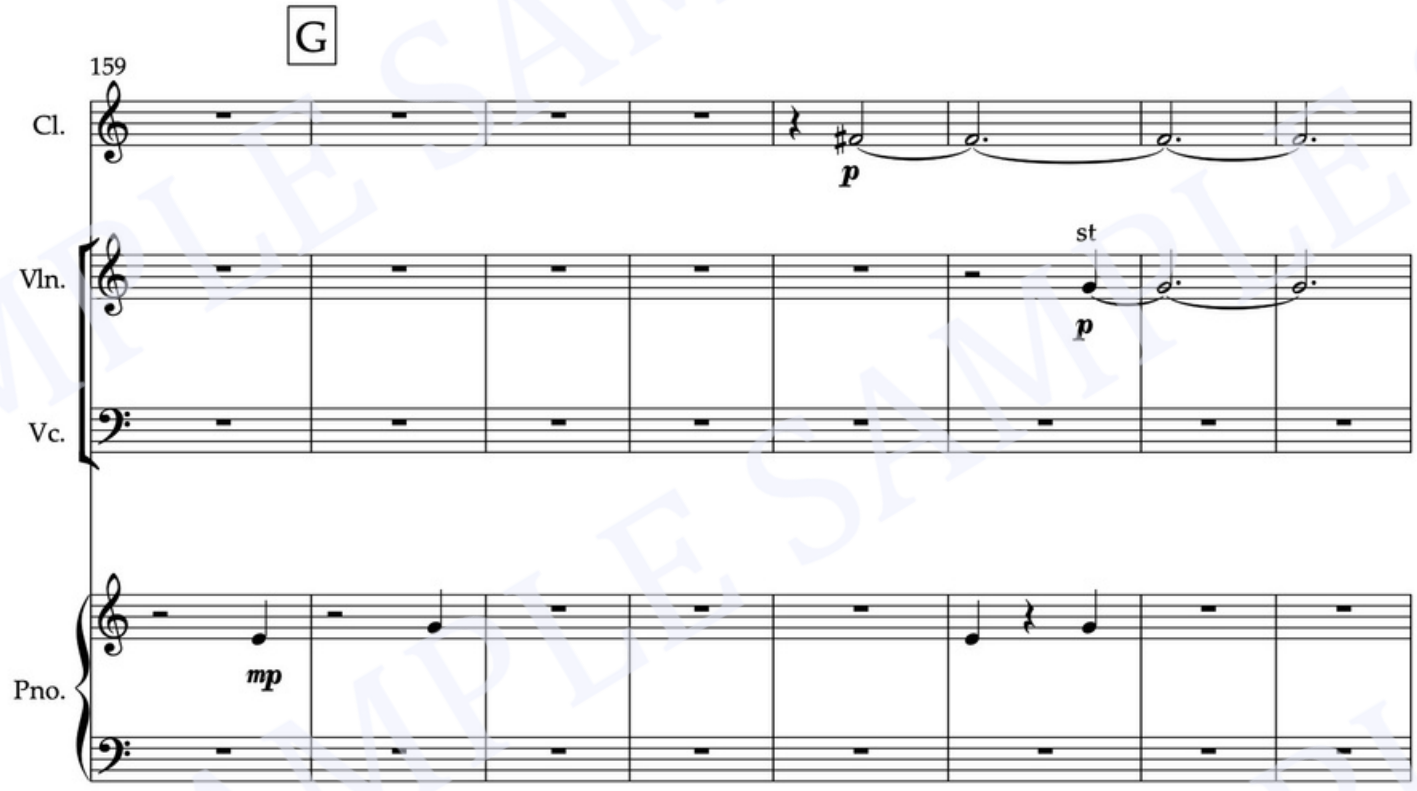

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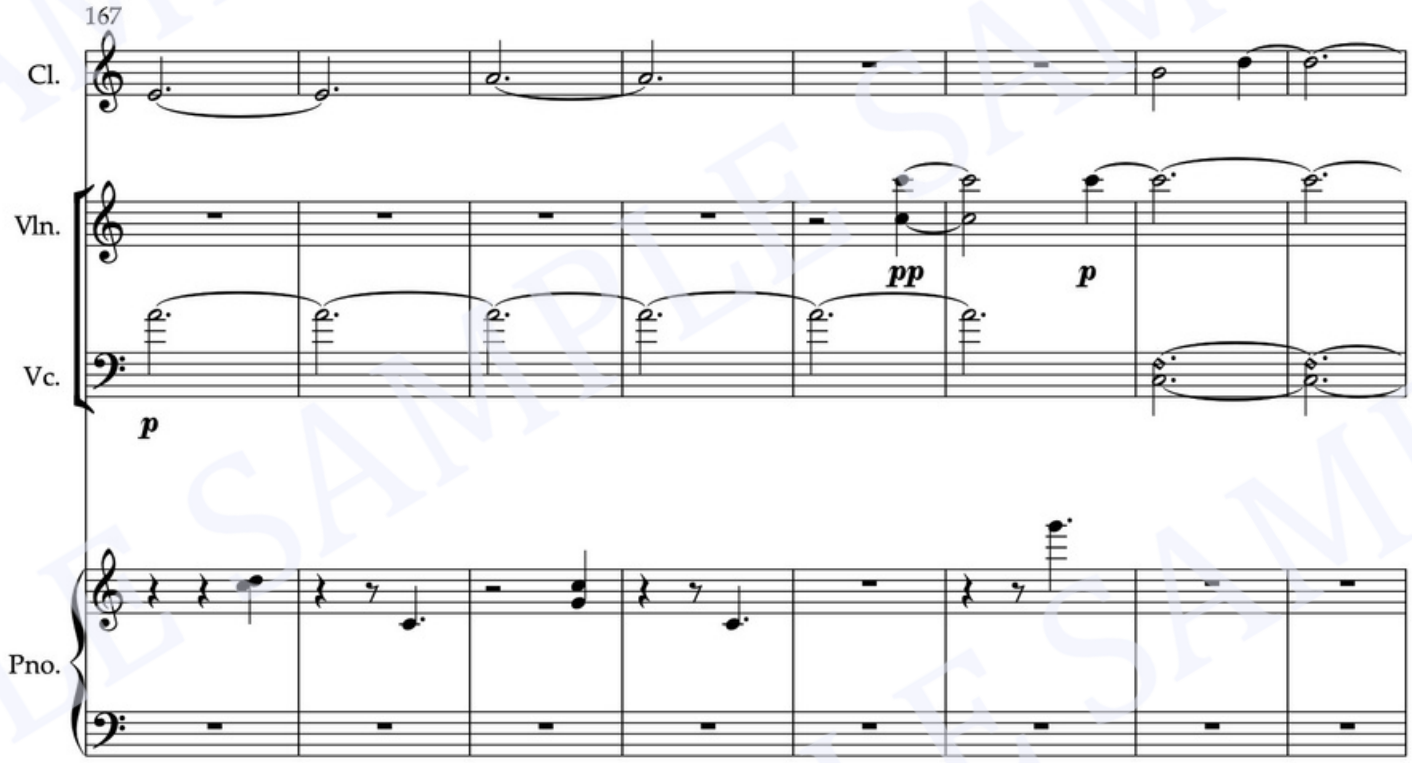

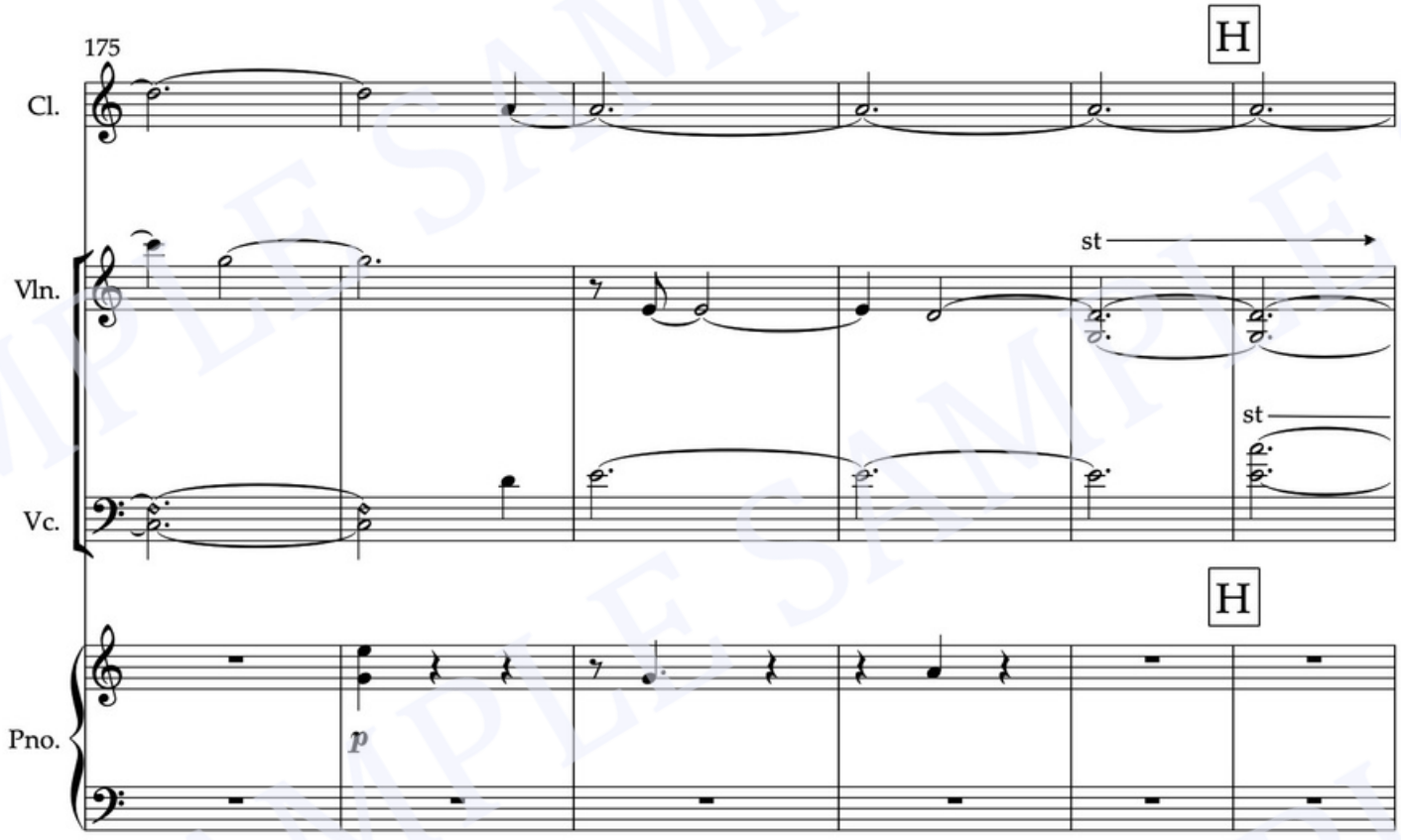

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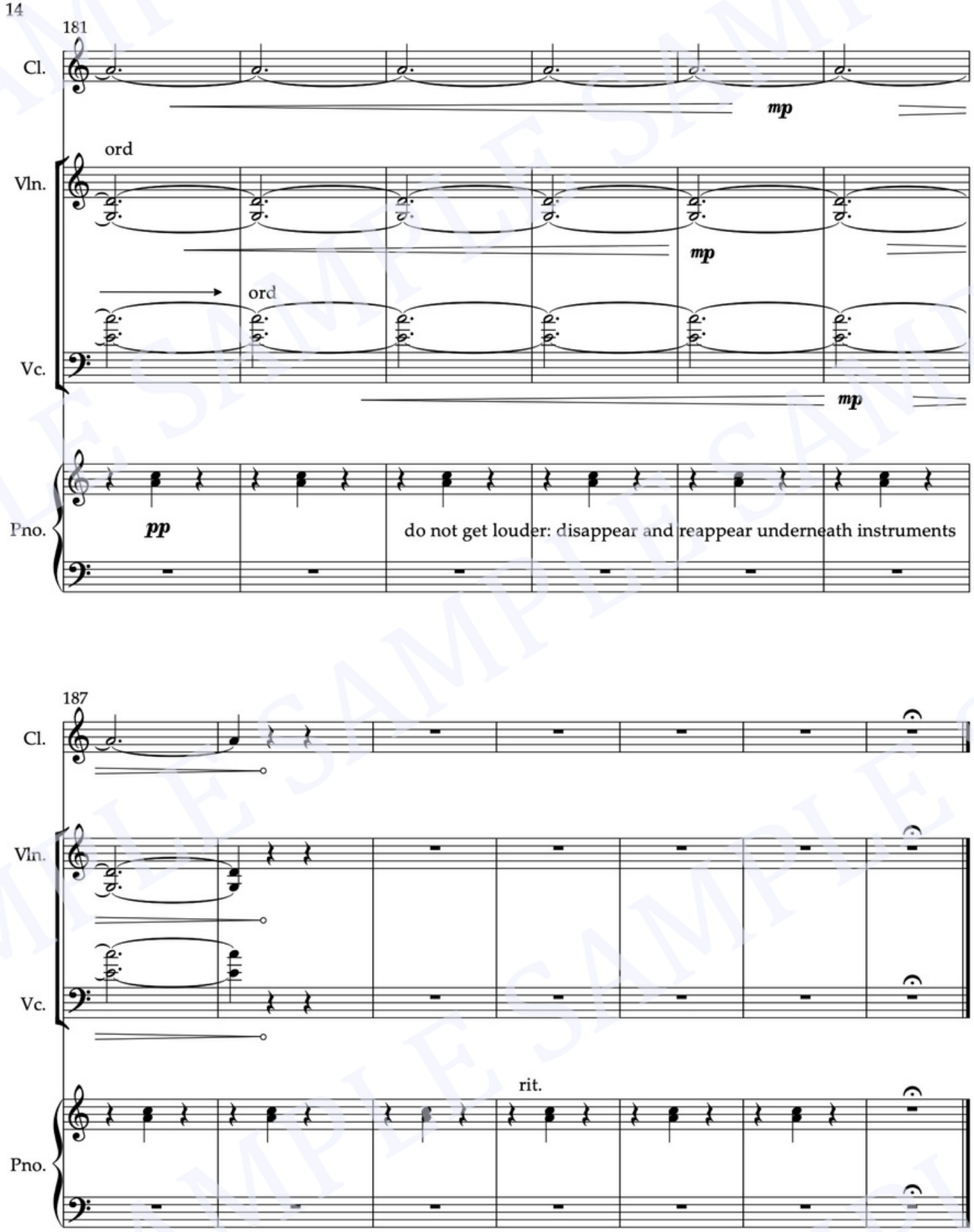
181
Cl.
mp
ord
Vln.
mp
ord
Vc.
mp
Pno.
pp
do not get louder: disappear and reappear underneath instruments
187
Cl.
Vln.
Vc.
rit.
Pno.