st304.1.71

sumtone

:

michael edwards

don’t flinch

for acoustic-electric guitar and computer

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sumtone
Neckarhalde 38
D-72070 Tübingen
Germany
info@sumtone.com
www.sumtone.com

programme note

The title is taken from the poem "Don't Flinch" by Adrienne Rich:

Lichen-green lines of shingle pulsate and waver
when you lift your eyes. It's the glare. Don't flinch
The news you were reading
(who tramples whom) is antique
and on the death pages you've seen already
worms doing their normal work
on the life that was: the chewers chewing
at a sensuality that wrestled doom
an anger steeped in love they can't
even taste. How could this still
shock or sicken you? Friends go missing, mute
nameless.. Toss
the paper. Reach again
for the Iliad. The lines
pulse into sense. Turn up the music
Now do you hear it? can you smell smoke
under the near shingles?

The bottleneck guitar sound was utmost in my mind from the very beginning of working on this piece. I have a very strong and fond memory of watching Ry Cooder play the guitar with a bottleneck on the now defunct UK TV music show "The Old Grey Whistle Test" when I was about three or four years old. The sound of this has remained with me my whole life and is strongly associated with the guitar for me personally.

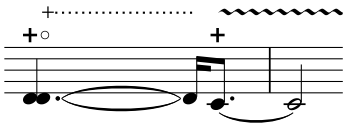
Other techniques specific to the guitar were also used in this piece: string rattles created by delicately touching a vibrating open string with either the fingernail or the bottleneck; different plucking positions, from near the bridge to on the fingerboard; tremolo with and without a plectrum; glissandi; exaggerated vibrato with and without the bottleneck; various single and double harmonics; and pitch bends.

Viewed historically, this is essentially an instrument-plus-tape piece. The computer is used only to trigger stereo sound files, sometimes at the push of a pedal, other times once the onset of a guitar note is detected. Simplicity was utmost in my mind in choosing to use the computer in this way as I wanted Yvonne and perhaps other guitarists to be able to perform the piece without my presence being necessary.

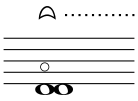
The piece is definitely out of the ordinary in having what is essentially a conventionally notatable computer part. Most electronic components in music of this kind consist mainly of sounds that could only be made—perhaps especially rhythmically—with computers or other electronic equipment. I was attracted in this piece to the idea of creating an almost acoustic instrumental trio, but having the luxury of continuously modifying, refining, and spectrally shaping two of the voices through digital production techniques.

In addition to software samplers and synthesizers, several other sounds were mixed in: a recording of myself improvising on tenor saxophone; myself reciting Rich's poem; recordings of sheep; and Artaud's "Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu". The latter was used purely for its sonic and not its semantic content.

notes



- + indicates fingering with a metal bottleneck.
- The wavy line indicates molto vibrato (very exaggerated). In order to create a loud enough sound, it is recommended to apply this technique across all the strings no matter which note is to be played. To create vibrato on an octave harmonic, first strike the harmonic without vibrato, then immediately begin vibrato on the normal fingered note.
- The + followed by a dotted line indicates delicately placing the bottleneck on the vibrating open string (or other, as indicated) so that the two come into contact and produce a buzzy rattle. These sounds might not last as long as the indicated line; they may indeed be considerably shorter, though effort should be made to make them sound as long as indicated (the note can be made to sound longer by gently tapping the string with the bottleneck).



- Similar to the bottleneck rattle, this symbol indicates the same effect but created with the finger nail.

- *sul tasto estremo*: pluck very close to the fingers of the left hand.
- *soundhole*: pluck normally, over the soundhole.
- *pizz.* only applies to a single note, unless a bracket is used.
- Harmonics are indicated as usual by a small circle over the sounding note (open strings are indicated by the numeral 0). Most harmonics are of the simple octave variety but if others are required, then the nodal point at which the string is touched is indicated by a diamond notehead below the sounding note.
- Unless using the plectrum, tremolandi are to be played with two or more fingernails. All tremolandi are unmeasured and as fast as possible. Tremolando chords imply repetition of all notes unless otherwise indicated (i.e. stems up and down, only one of which has tremolo). In every case, the main note should stand out at the beginning and the tremolo should be very much in the background of it, like a shadow.
- Pause length can vary widely—from negligible to very long—according to the acoustic and the taste of the performer.
- Accidentals carry throughout the bar but are repeated in parentheses as deemed necessary. They do not repeat at octaves in either chords or melodic lines.
- Meter and barlines are for visual organisation only; they imply no metrical stress.
- The computer part is notated on three staves below the guitar part. Only pitched sounds are indicated.
- Blue downward arrows indicate computer trigger points. The sound file number is indicated next to these (for information only). Sound will generally enter at the next point indicated in the computer part. Two pedals, Left and Right, are used to trigger the sound files. These are indicated by the letters L and R, in red, above the blue arrow. The left pedal arms the computer so that the next guitar note triggers a sound file. The right pedal triggers immediately.
- Quoted words in blue are in the computer part; these occur synchronously with the indicated notes (not all audible words are notated, however).

Duration c. 13.5 minutes.

performance requirements

- acoustic-electric guitar.
- guitar amplifier: output from the guitar should be fed and played through the amp, as well as being sent out to the computer.
- two high-quality microphones to further amplify the 'acoustic' guitar.
- computer: preferably a quiet Macintosh laptop running the performance software (unless Macintosh, this will need MaxMSP 5; 'runtime' version acceptable). The performance software can be ordered from http://sumtone.com/performance-materials.php
- good quality sound card (2 mic and 1 line inputs; stereo output)
- two pedals attached to the computer and recognisable by the performance software. Keith McMillen Instruments' Softstep preferred.
- two high-quality speakers positioned either near to and to the left and right of the guitairist, or as part of a PA.
- stereo analogue volume control knob (optional).

computer setup

The computer is used during the performance to trigger sound files played on the two speakers.

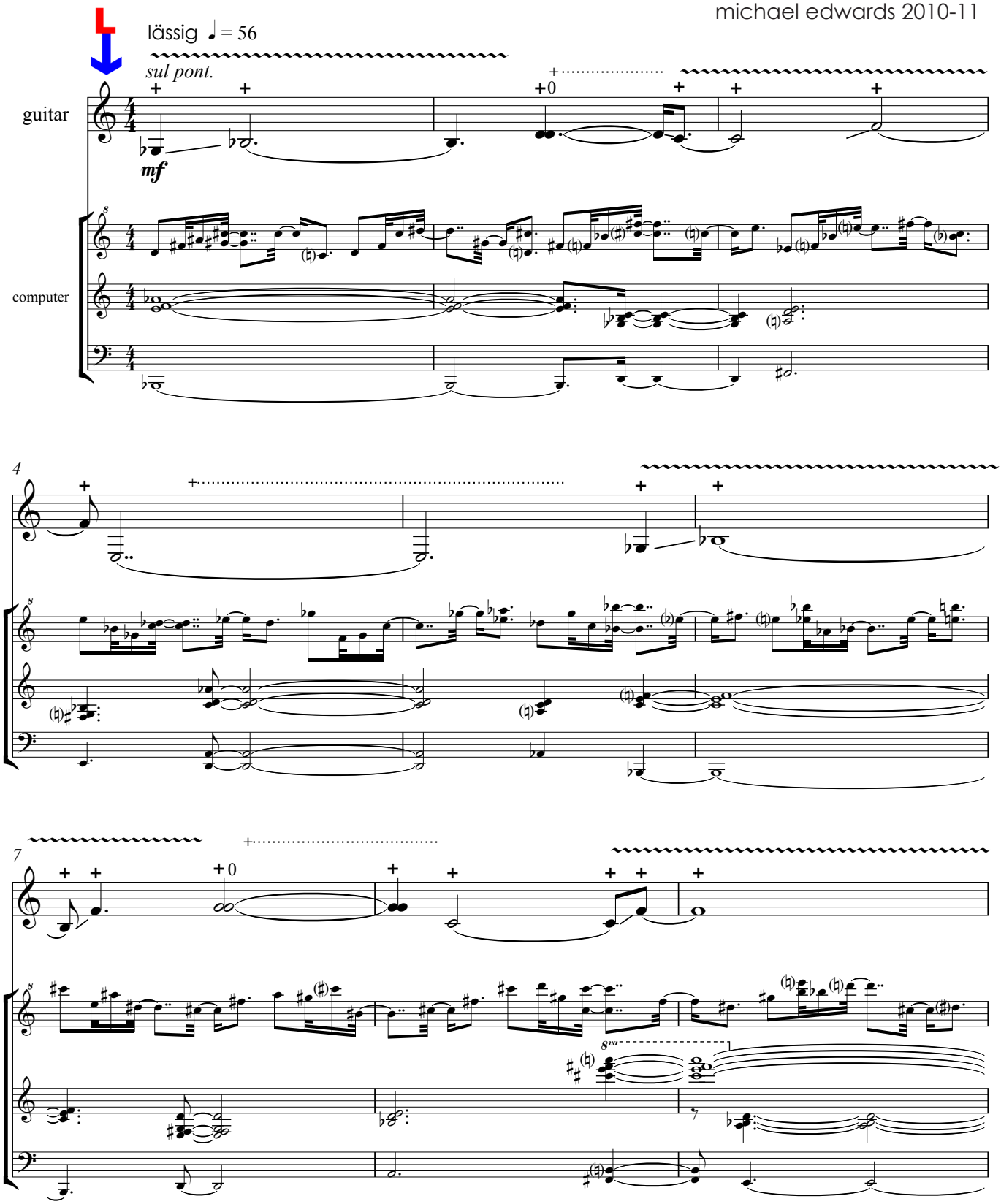
The sound files have been mixed so that they balance well with the live guitar at the point at which they are playing. No gain adjustment should be necessary during performance, i.e., no sound engineer is required (though this may be desirable). There is, however, provision in the software for adjusting levels during performance, if more than two pedals are available. See the readme.txt file that comes with the software for more details about this and other aspects of the computer system.

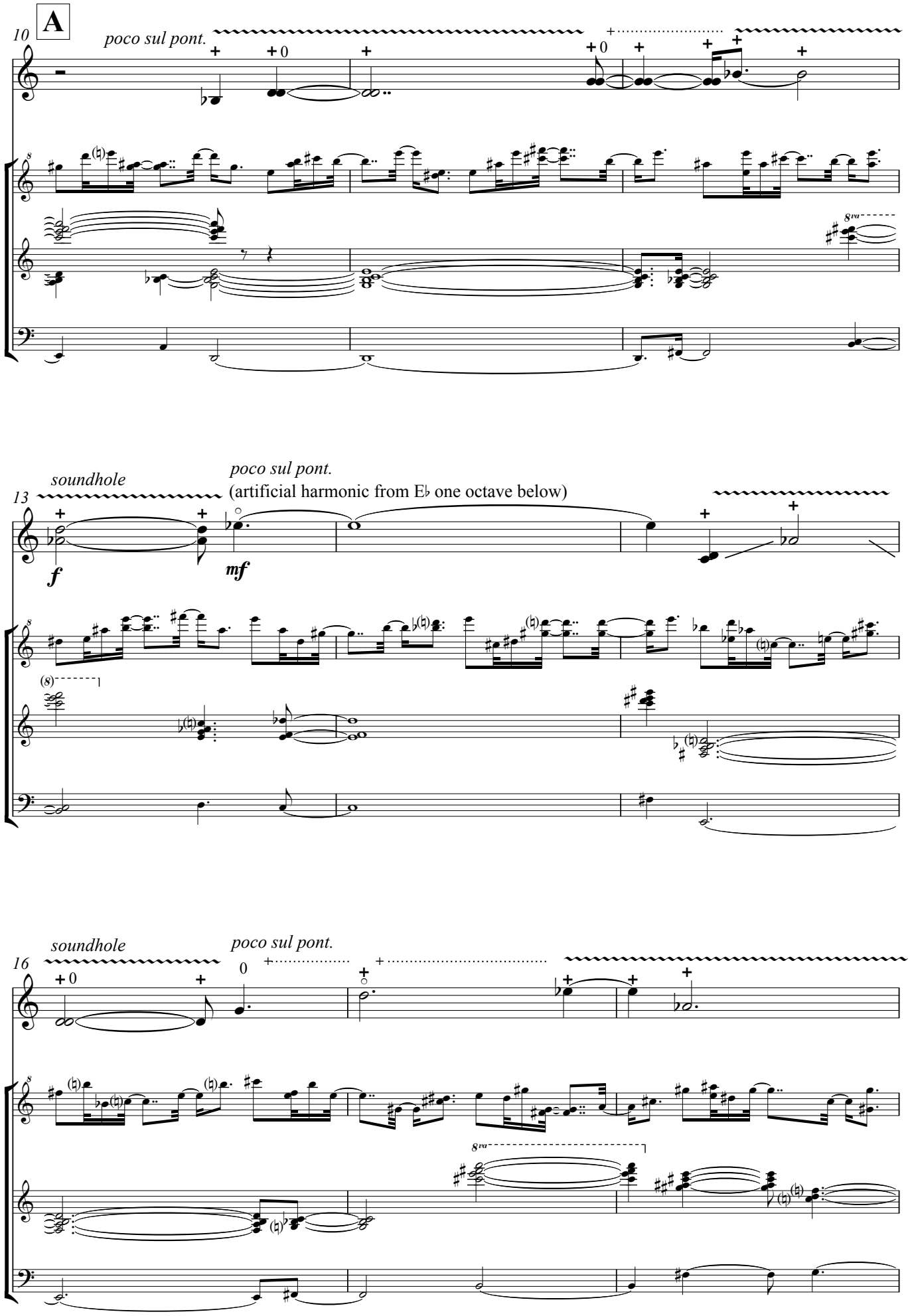
Overall gain should be set during rehearsal using either the gain sliders on the software provided, and/or, preferably, with a stereo analogue level control knob (this will offer instant and secure control over levels should the computer or sound card crash). The levels should be set so that the guitar is clearly audible but in equal balance with the sound files at the beginning.

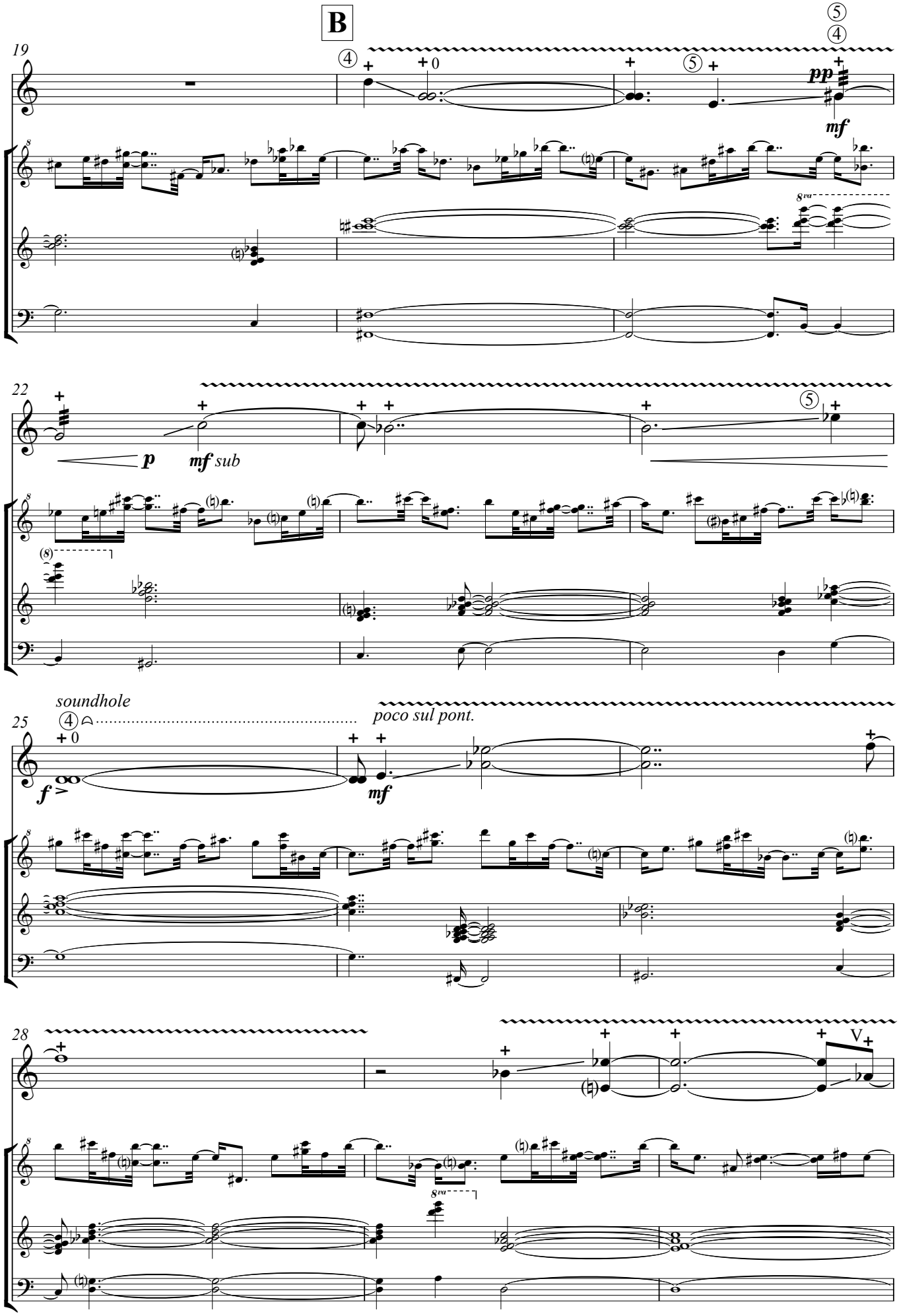
for Yvonne Zehner

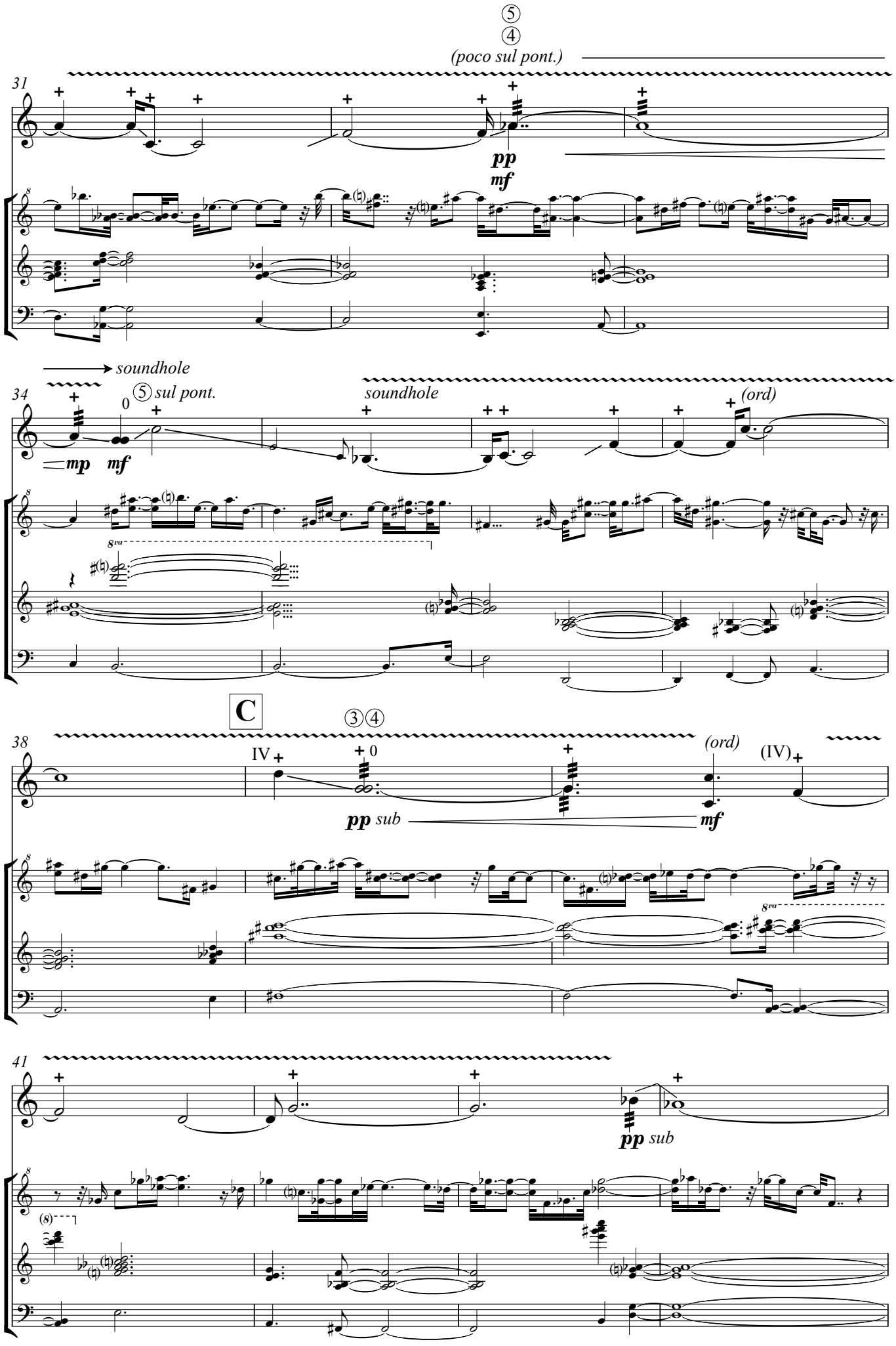
don't flinch

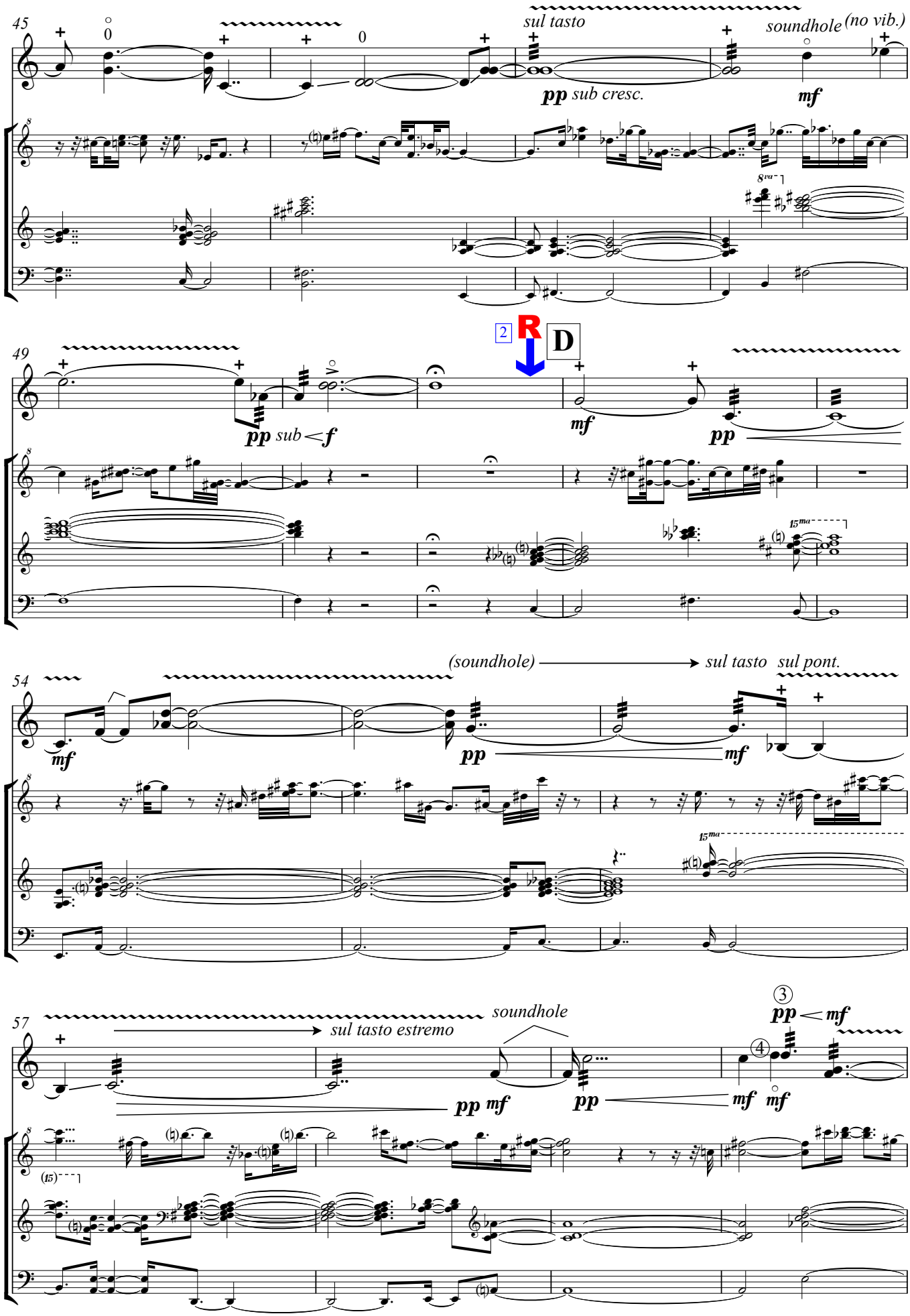
michael edwards 2010-11

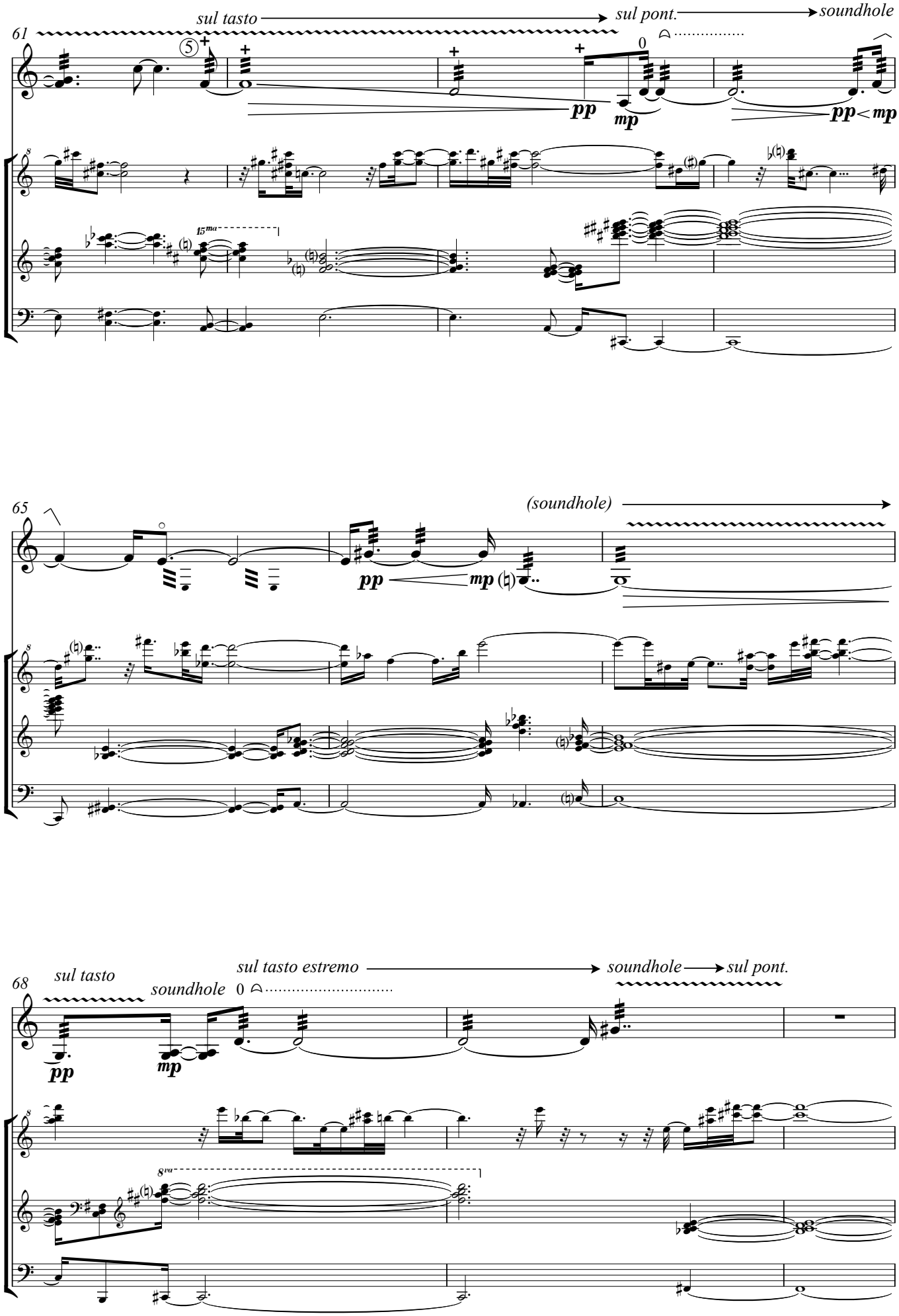


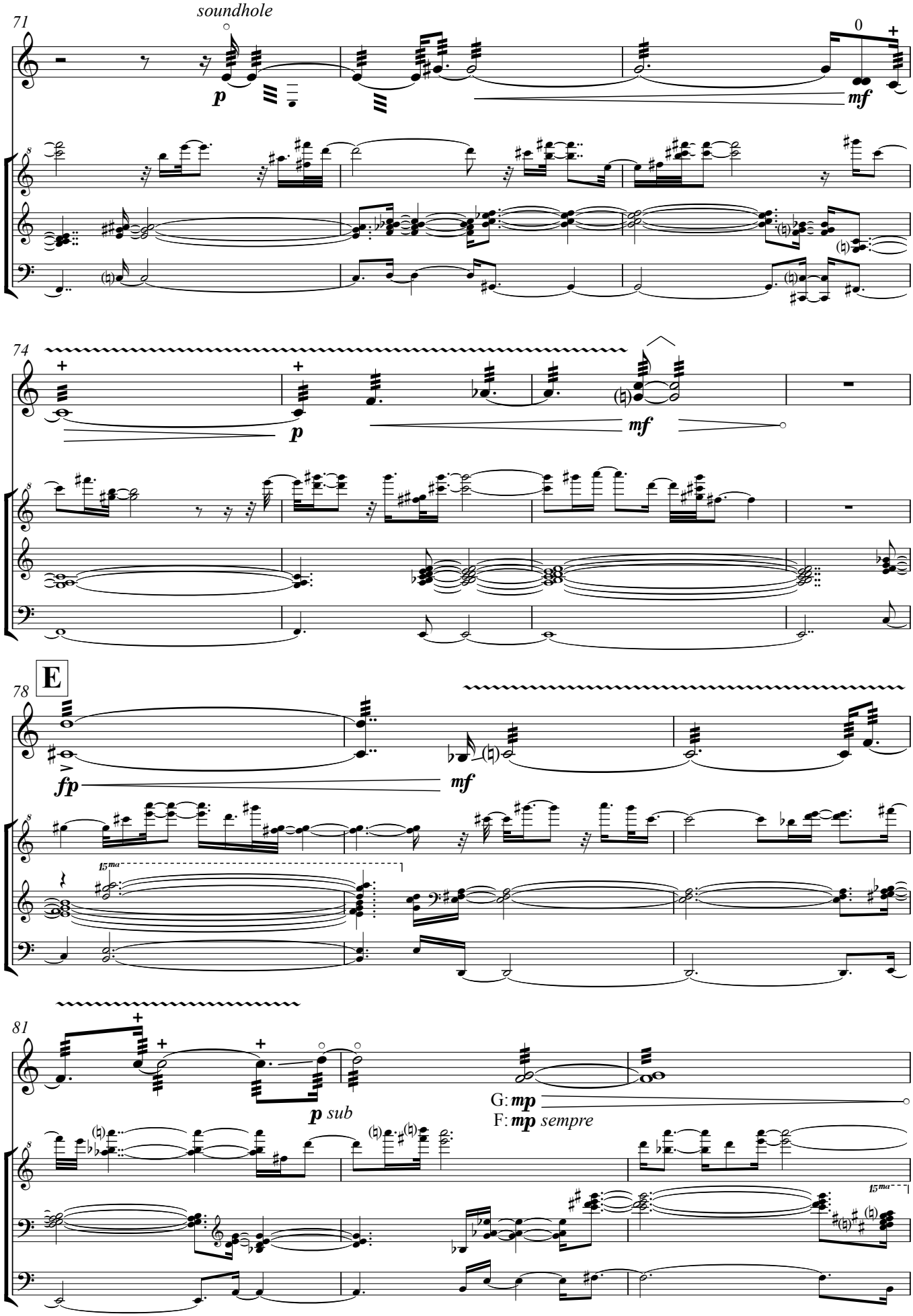

A
10
poco sul pont.
8va
soundhole
13
poco sul pont.
(artificial harmonic from E♭ one octave below)
f
mf
soundhole
16
poco sul pont.
8va

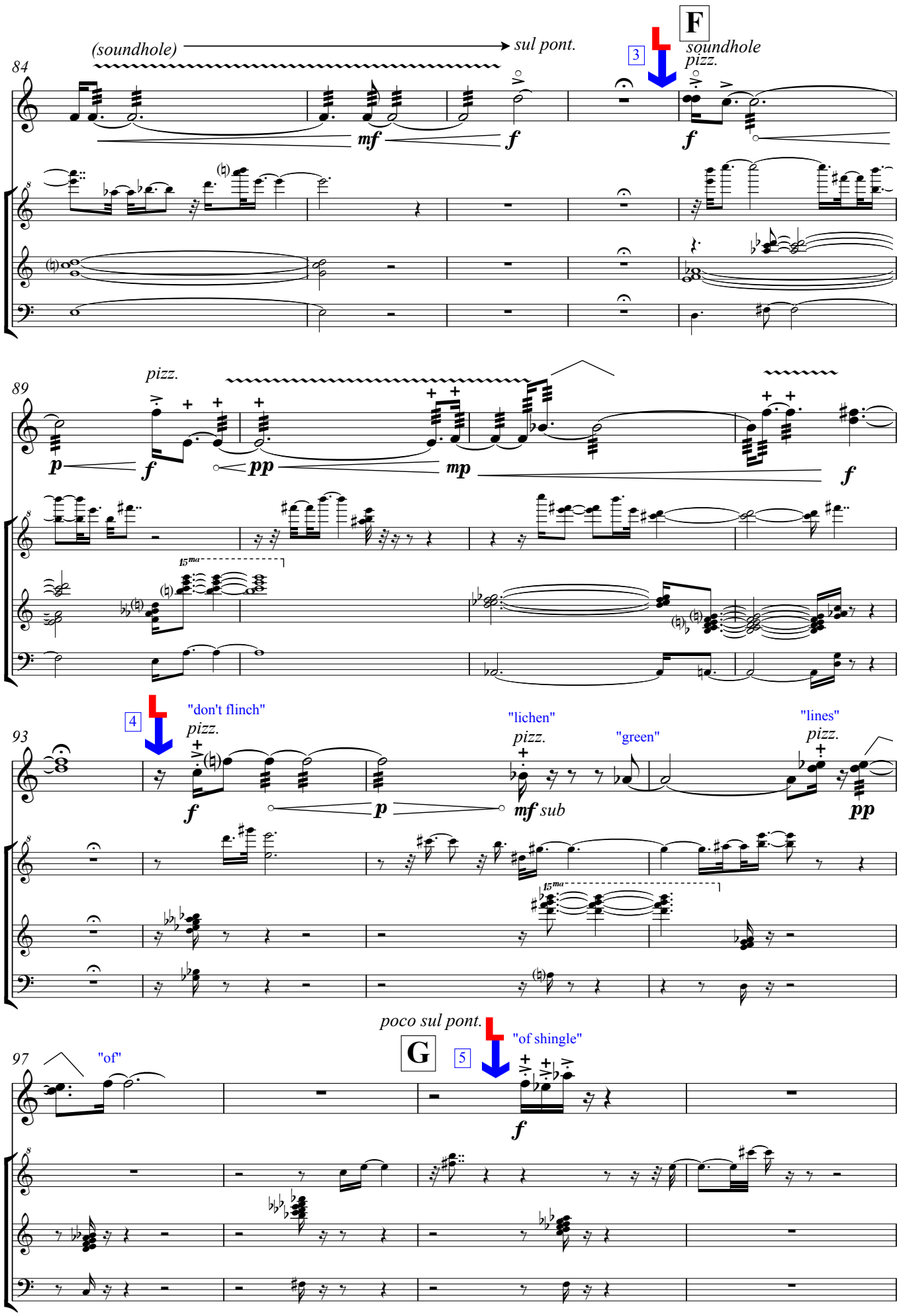

B
19
pp
mf
22
p
mf sub
soundhole
poco sul pont.
25
f
mf
28

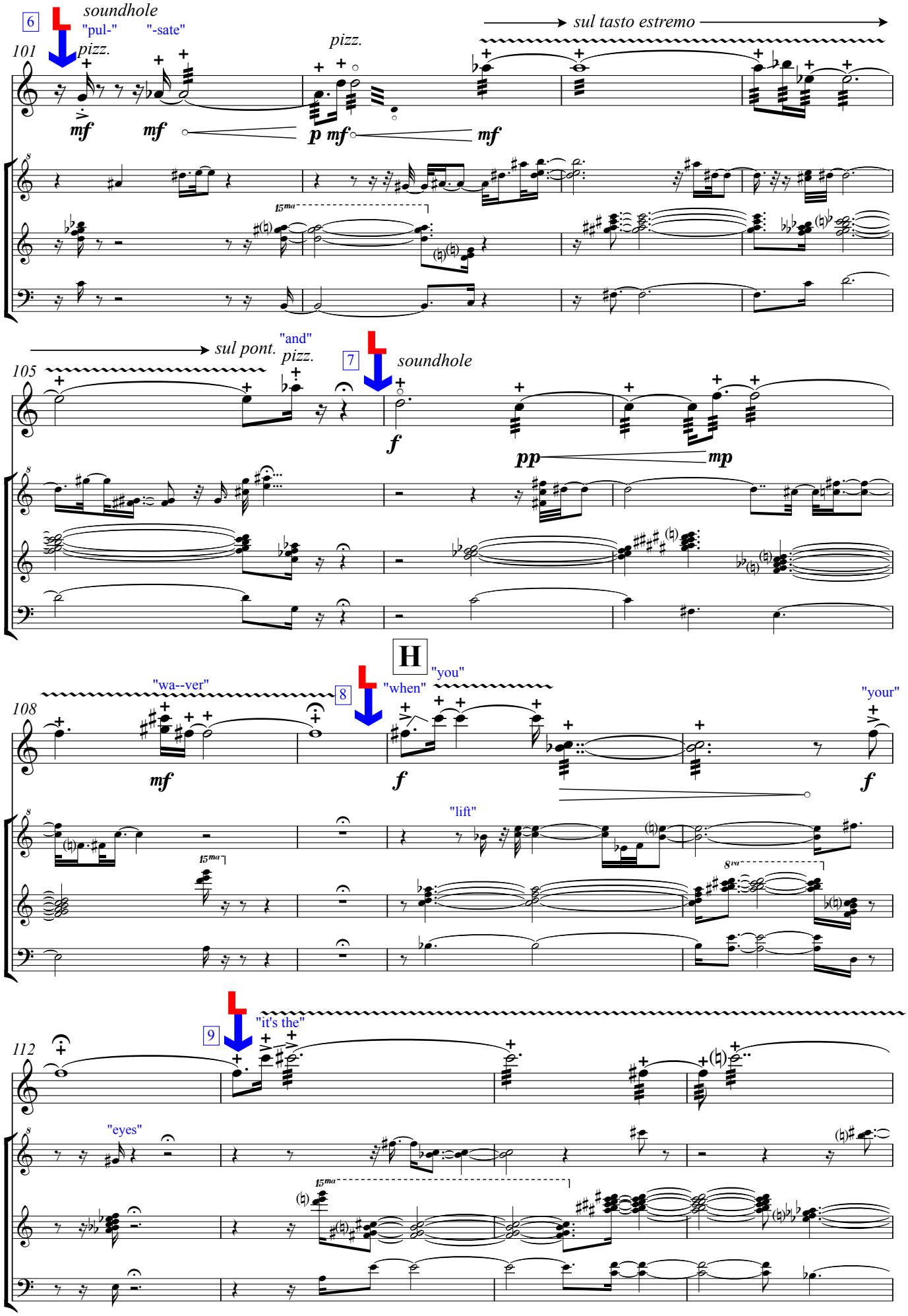

⑤
④
(poco sul pont.)
31
pp
mf
soundhole
34
⑤ sul pont.
soundhole
(ord)
mp
mf
C
③④
38
IV
(ord)
(IV)
pp sub
mf
41
pp sub

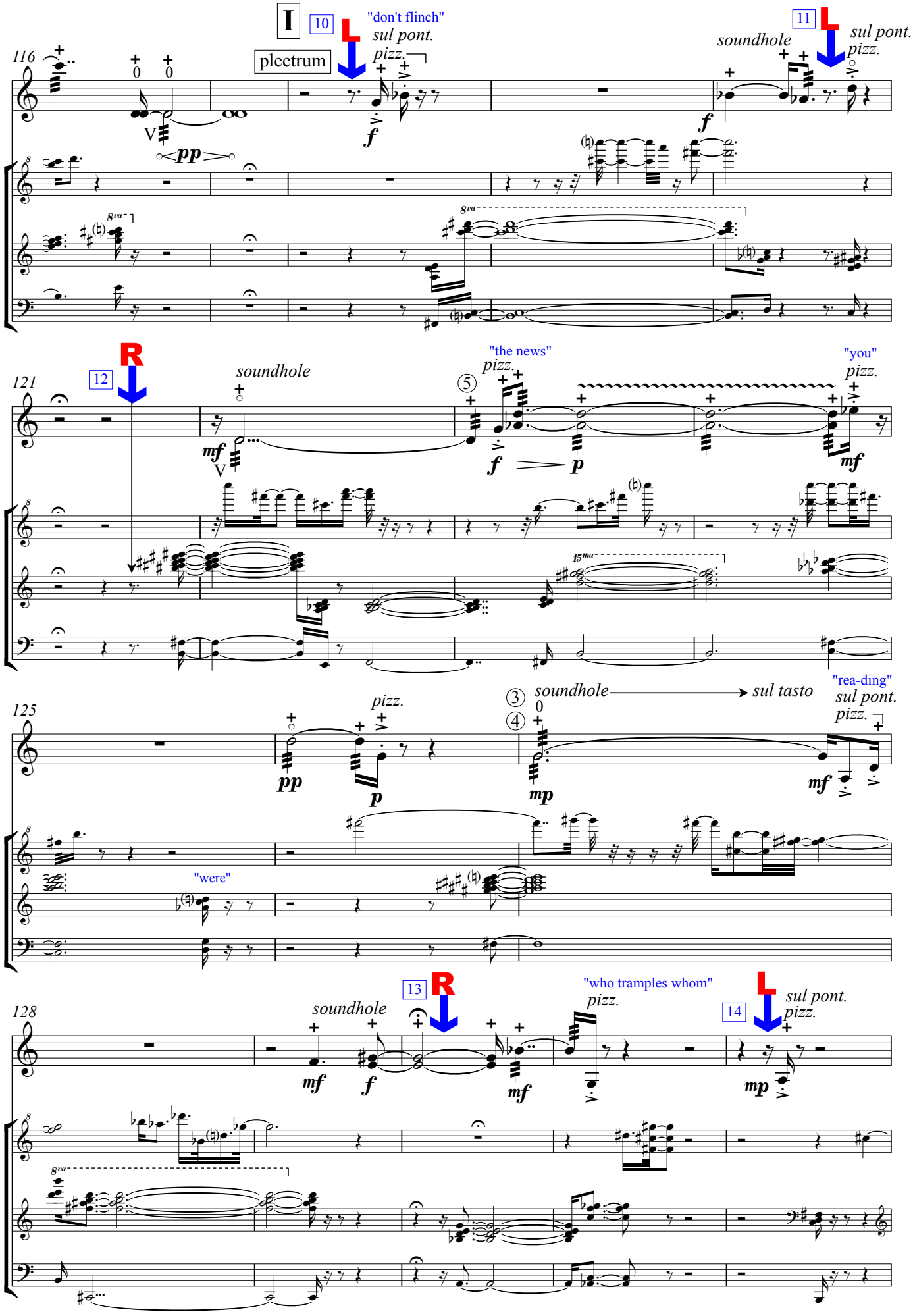

45
sul tasto
soundhole (no vib.)
pp sub cresc.
mf
8va
49
2
R
D
pp sub f
mf
pp
15ma
54
(soundhole)
sul tasto sul pont.
mf
pp
mf
15ma
57
soundhole
sul tasto estremo
pp mf
pp
3
pp mf
4
mf mf
(15)

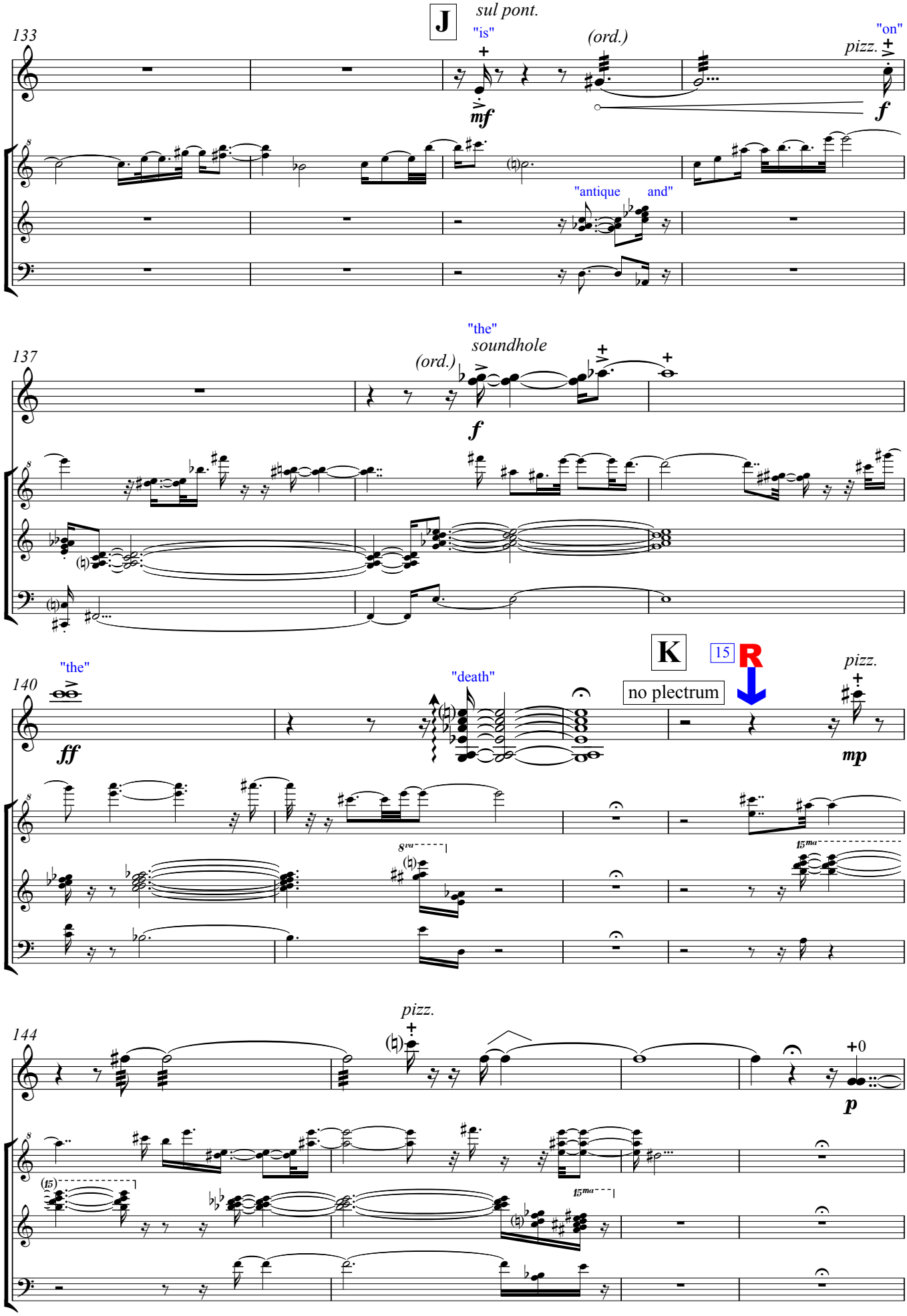

61
sul tasto
sul pont.
soundhole
pp
mp
pp < mp
65
(soundhole)
pp
mp
68
sul tasto
soundhole
sul tasto estremo
soundhole
sul pont.
pp
mp

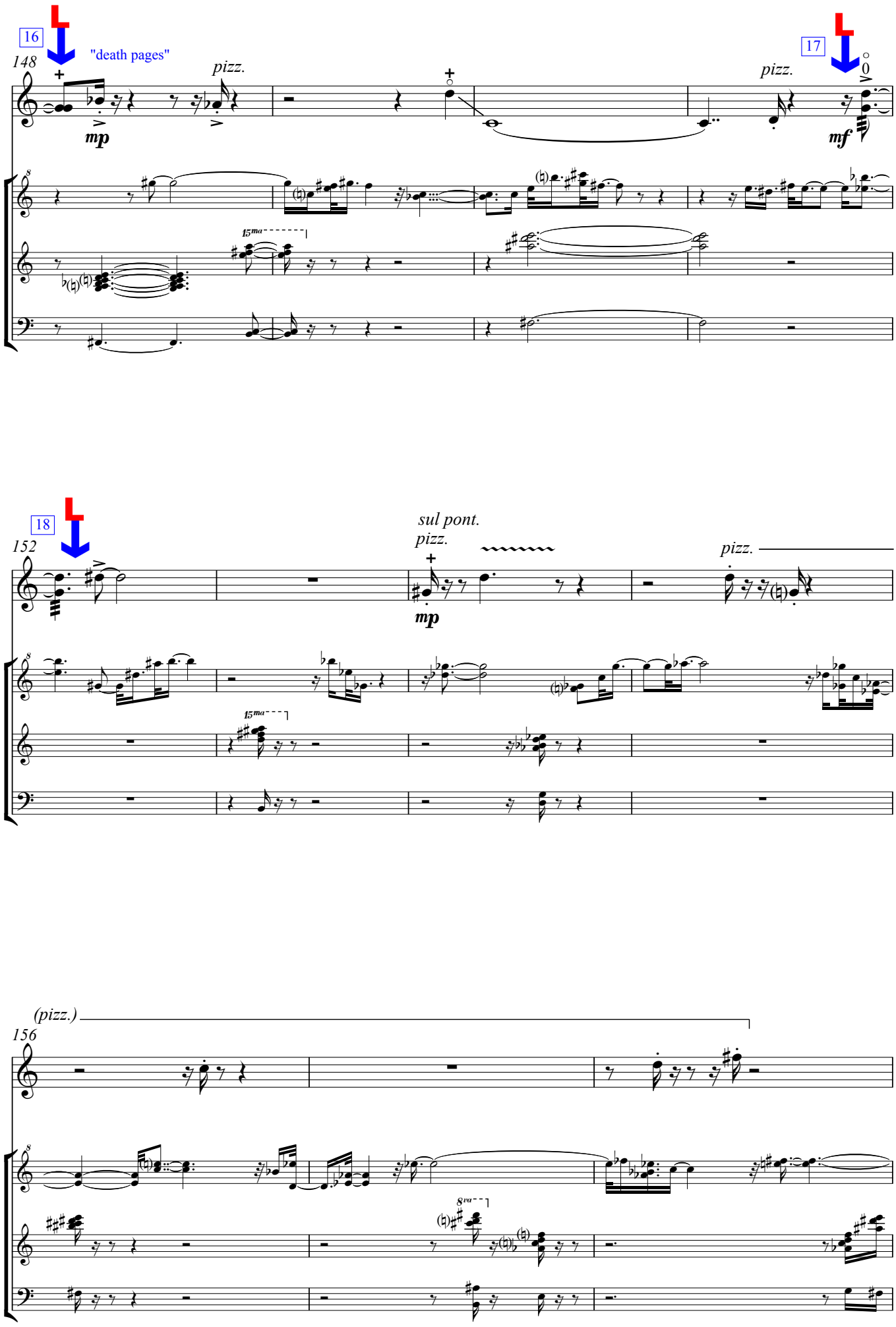

71
soundhole
p
mf
74
p
mf
E
78
fp
mf
15ma
81
p sub
G: mp
F: mp sempre
15ma

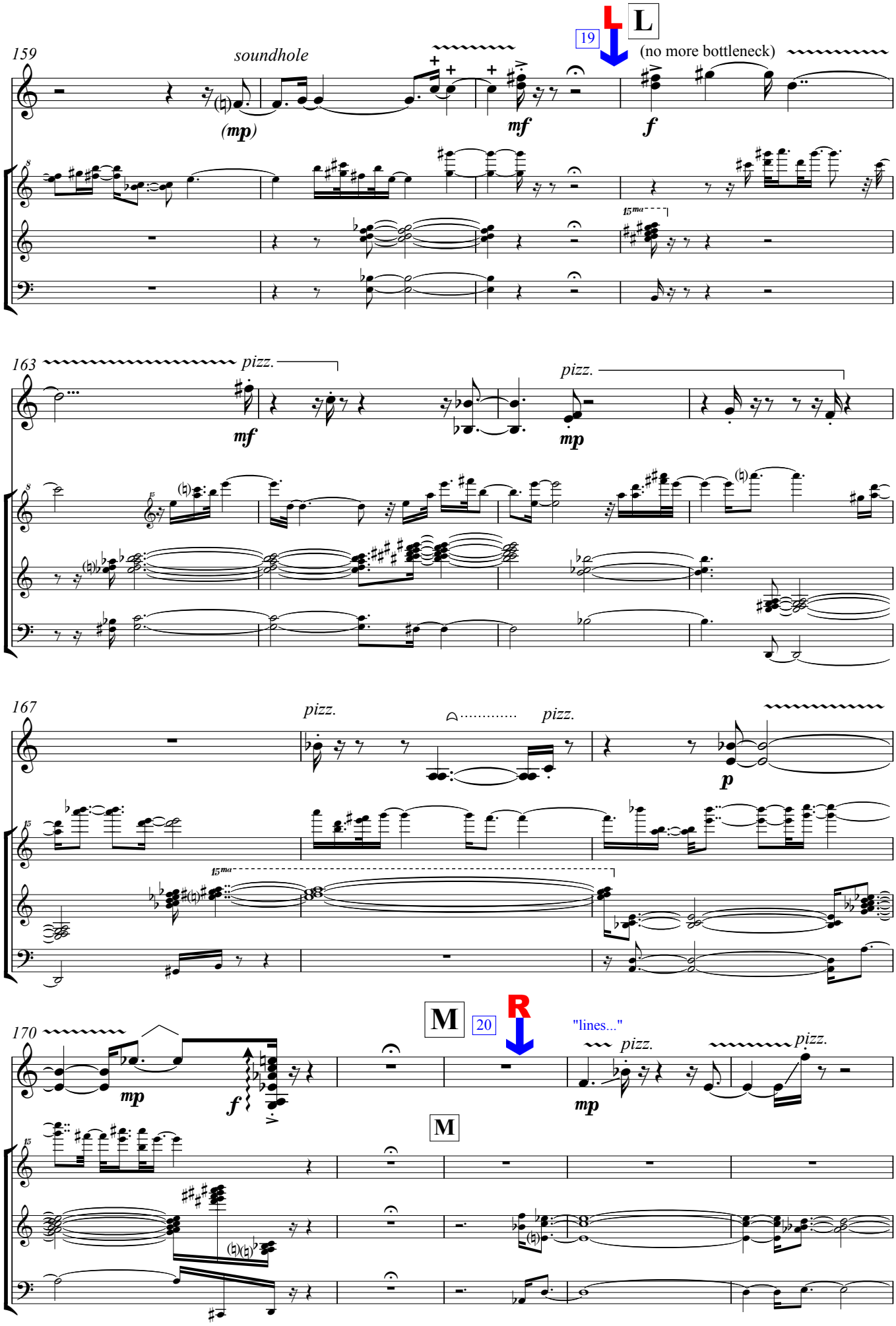

84
(soundhole)
sul pont.
mf
f
F
3
soundhole
pizz.
f
89
pizz.
p
f
pp
mp
f
15ma
93
4
"don't flinch"
pizz.
f
p
"lichen"
pizz.
mf sub
"green"
"lines"
pizz.
pp
poco sul pont.
G
5
"of shingle"
97
"of"
f

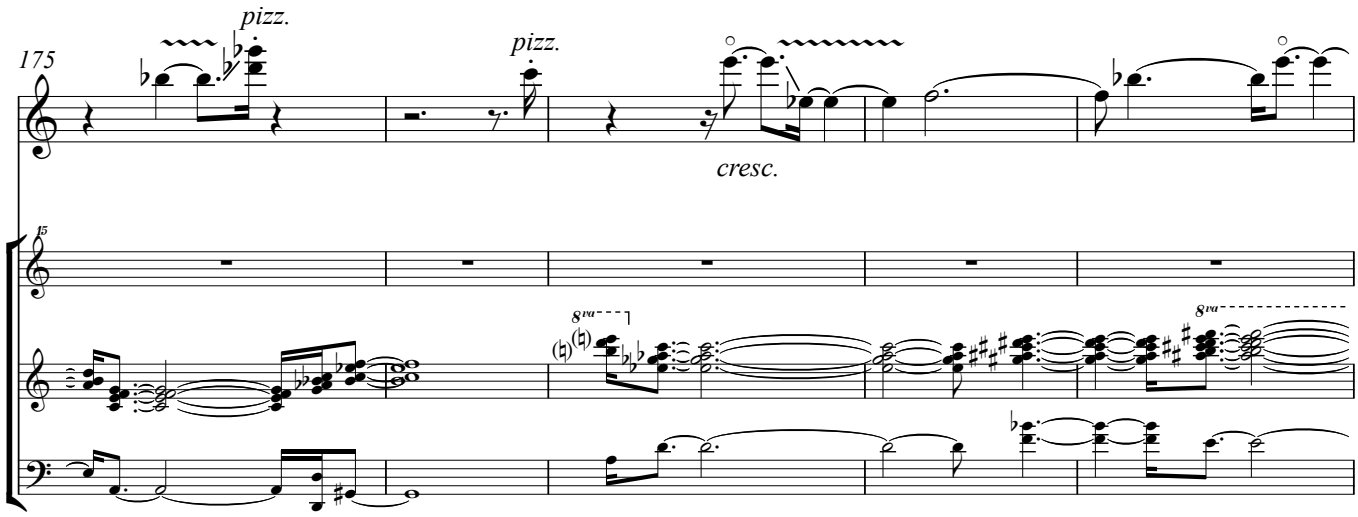

6
soundhole
"pul-"
"-sate"
101
pizz.
pizz.
sul tasto estremo
mf
mf
p mf
mf
15ma
sul pont.
"and"
pizz.
7
soundhole
105
f
pp
mp
H
"wa--ver"
8
"when"
"you"
108
"your"
mf
f
f
"lift"
8va
9
"it's the"
112
"eyes"
15ma

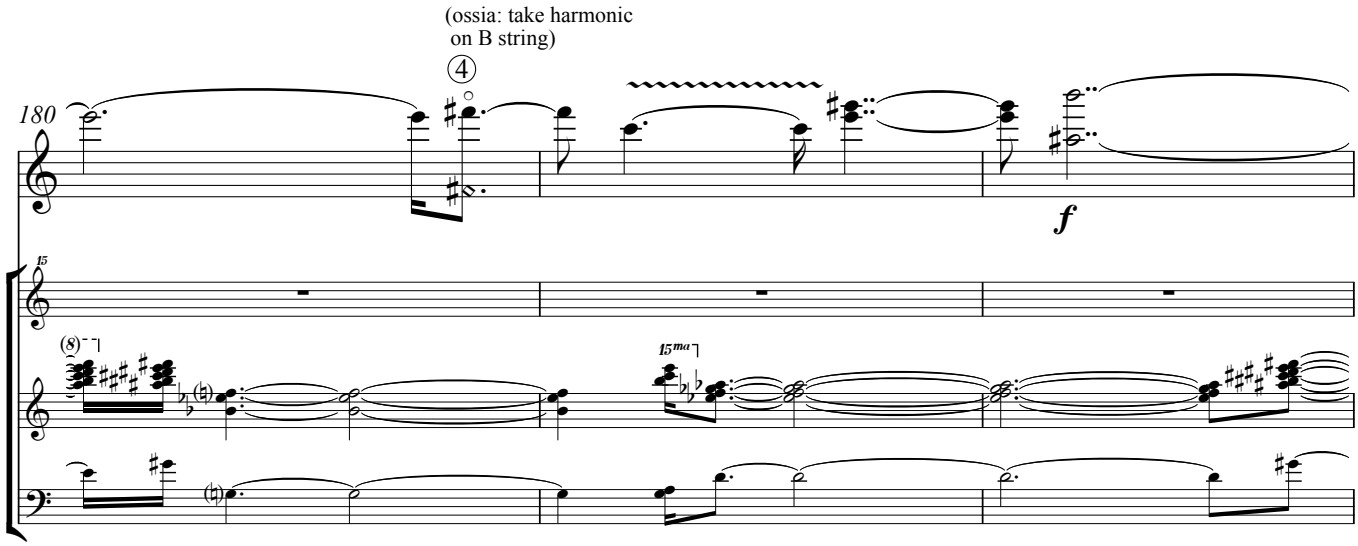

I
plectrum
10
"don't flinch"
sul pont.
pizz.
11
soundhole
sul pont.
pizz.
116
pp
f
12
R
soundhole
"the news"
pizz.
"you"
pizz.
121
mf
f
p
mf
125
pizz.
soundhole
sul tasto
"rea-ding"
sul pont.
pizz.
pp
p
mp
mf
"were"
13
R
"who tramples whom"
pizz.
14
sul pont.
pizz.
128
soundhole
mf
f
mf
mp

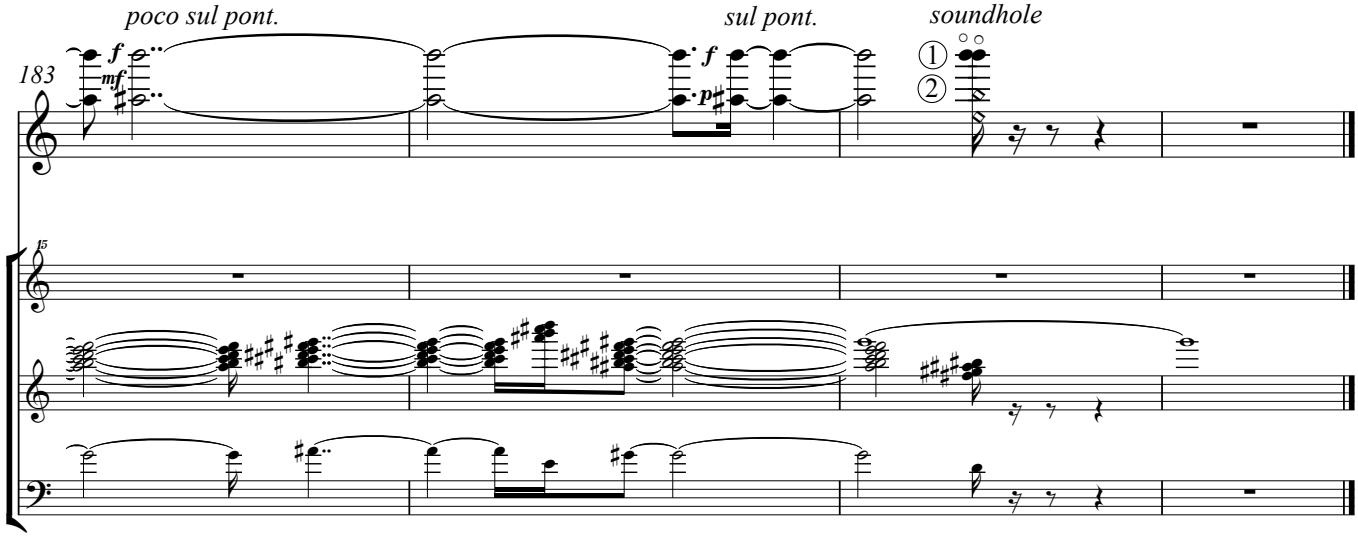

J
sul pont.
133
"is"
(ord.)
"on"
pizz.
mf
f
"antique"
and"
137
"the"
soundhole
(ord.)
f
K
15
R
no plectrum
"the"
140
"death"
pizz.
ff
mp
8va
15ma
pizz.
144
+0
p
(15)
15ma


16
"death pages"
148
pizz.
mp
17
pizz.
mf
18
152
sul pont.
pizz.
mp
pizz.
(pizz.)
156


159
soundhole
(mp)
mf
19
L
L
(no more bottleneck)
f
15ma
163
pizz.
mf
pizz.
mp
167
pizz.
pizz.
p
15ma
170
mp
f
M
20
R
"lines..."
pizz.
mp
pizz.
M


175
pizz.
pizz.
cresc.
8va
8va


(ossia: take harmonic
on B string)
④
180
f
(8)
15ma


poco sul pont.
sul pont.
soundhole
183
f
mf
f
p
①
②