un petit mot crabe-c'est-ma-faute

for trombone and percussion

Chris Dench

un petit mot crabe-c'est-ma-faute

(2021)

for trombone and percussion

from the **iso-études (#7)**

for Cian Malikides & Alexander Meagher

Commissioned by the Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) as part of The ANAM Set (2021) [1]

un petit mot couresse	a little word couresse
un petit mot crabe-c'est-ma-faute	a little word through-my-fault-crab
un petit mot pétale de feu	a little word petal of fire
un petit mot pétrel plongeur	a little word diving petrel
un petit mot saxifrage de tombeaux	a little word tomb saxifrage

From ***internonce*** (internuncio) by Aimé Césaire

Note: this piece requires use of a **plunger** and a **harmon** mute; percussionist also plays **melodica**

Duration: circa 15 minutes

© Chris Dench 2021

[1] The ANAM Set was funded by the Restart Investment to Sustain and Expand (RISE) Fund – an Australian Government Initiative.

Program note:

Many years ago I was reading the mesmerising late poems of Aimé Césaire, and I came upon a reference to a *crabe-c'est-ma-faute*[2] from his native Martinique.

un petit mot couresse	(...a little word couresse
un petit mot crabe-c'est-ma-faute	a little word through-my-fault-crab
un petit mot pétale de feu	a little word petal of fire
un petit mot pétrel plongeur	a little word diving petrel
un petit mot saxifrage de tombeaux	a little word tomb saxifrage)

From *internonce* (internuncio) by Aimé Césaire, in *moi laminaire* (1982)

This seemed to me such a strong image that I did more research and discovered that they are the French cousins of fiddler crabs. I watched footage of these crabs and realized that in display, with claws extended, (*pace* violinists), they looked like trombonists playing *pavillon en l'air*.

Now, I'm not much given to writing nature music *per se* (the elements of nature that interest me are usually either inconveniently tiny or vast) but I became aware of the almost-tangible salt tang of the Caribbean tidal pool evoked by the poem taking hold of my compositional imaginings. To fully realise these poetic and paradisiacal dreams necessitated adding a percussionist to the trombone to heighten this flavour.

https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crabe_violoniste - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leptuca_pugilator

[2] According to Lafcadio Hearn, in *Two Years in the French West Indies*, 1890, the *through-my-fault-crab* is: "a crab having one very small and one very large claw, which latter it carries folded up against its body, so as to have suggested the idea of a penitent striking his bosom, and uttering the sacramental words of the Catholic confession, 'Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.'" Thus, *Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*.

Percussion:
[see note 9 below]

Melodica
(any instrument with F3–C6—see note 4 below)

Chime bar (in A 440)
CBAR

Kick bass drum
KBD

Metal/wood rod
(long) **ROD**

Slide flute
(unpitched) **SF**

Triangle
TRI

Counter bell—shop type
CB

Piccolo snare drum
(snares on throughout) **PSD**

Snare drum
(snares on throughout) **SD**

Tomtom
(large/floor) **TOM**

Rototom
(single) **ROTO**

Claves—one laid flat
CL

Ratchet—mounted
RAT

Slapstick/whip
(mounted clapper) **WHIP**

Maraccas—mounted
MAR

Guero—mounted
GUE

Anvil—mounted
ANV

Woodblock—mounted
(large) **WB**

Temple block—mounted
(medium) **TB**

Cowbell—mounted
(medium) **COW**

Cymbal
(large) **CYM**

Sizzle cymbal
(medium/large) **SCYM**

Tamtam
(medium/large) **TAM**

Kitchen bowl
(medium: ceramic) **KBC**

Kitchen bowl
(large: stainless steel) **KBSS**

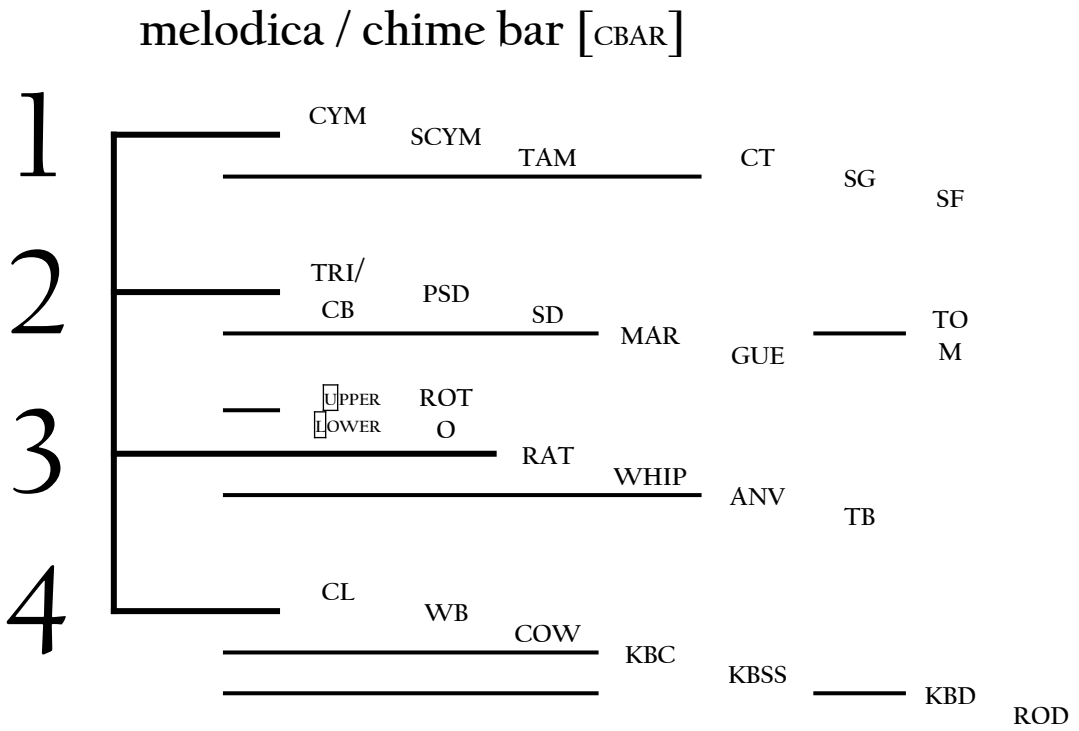
Ceramic tile
(medium-small) **CT**

Shot glass
SG

⊣ = damp

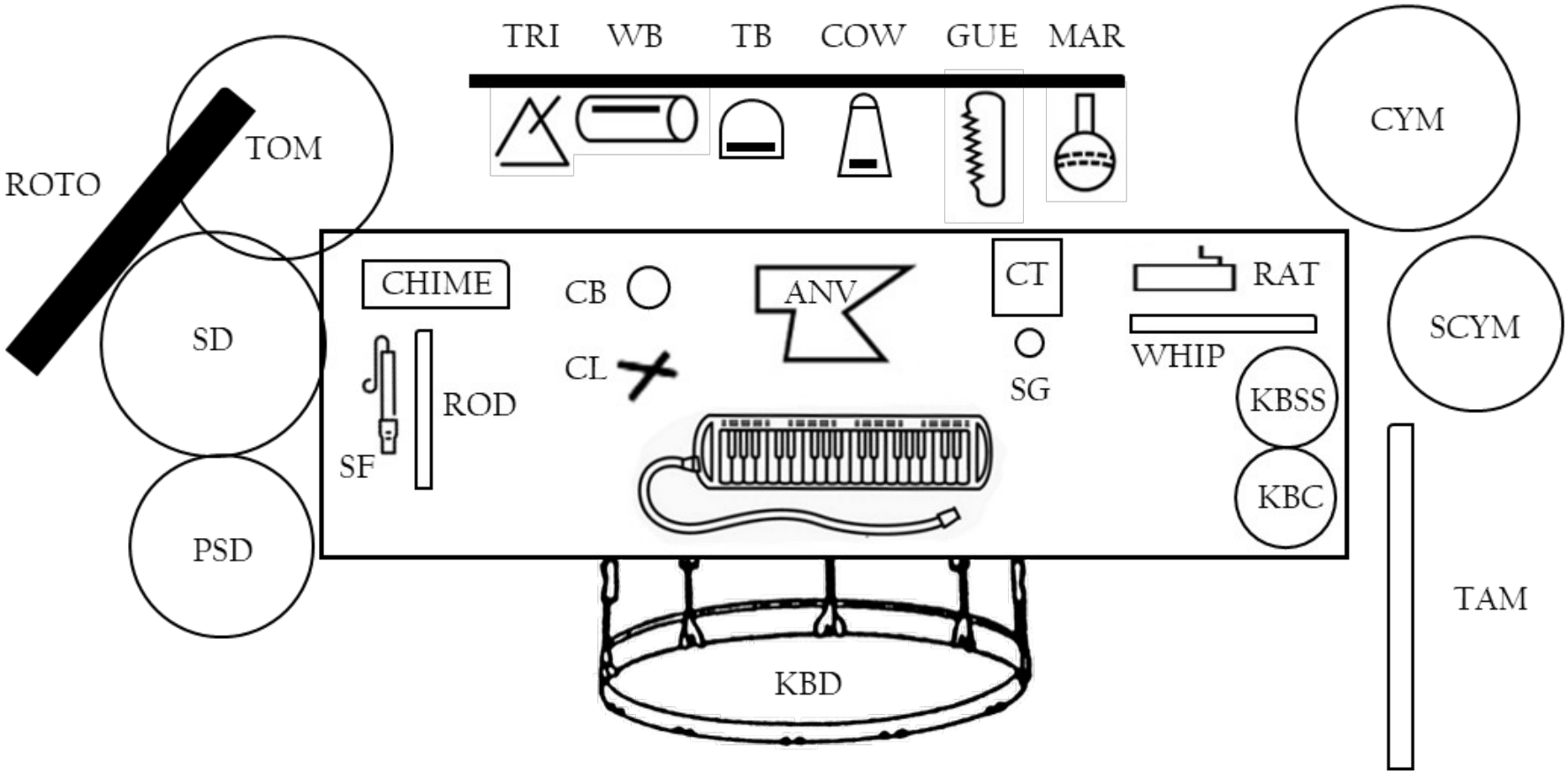
Sticks: VERY HARD: VH – SOFT: S – wire brushes [WBR] – plastic/bamboo chopsticks (or knitting needles, etc) – metal sticks (skewers, etc) small hammer – (contrabass) bow

Score layout:



Percussion layout suggestion:

(not to scale)



Performance notes:

1 Although it is perfectly acceptable to perform this work statically using an iPad or similar score display technology, the piece was originally conceived as being performed using a sequence of music stands across the stage, with the trombonist moving from one to another, stage left to stage right and back (boustrophedon), emulating the movement of a crab. This is best achieved by mounting the A4 score pages in groups of four, on a single A2 card, with the first 18 pages across the top, left to right, and pages 19-36 across the bottom in reverse order, right to left. Players are encouraged to consider using this score layout—if enough music stands are available, of course (nine are required).

2 Accidentals only apply to the notes they immediately precede except in the case of rapid immediate repetition, in which case they apply until a new pitch is introduced.

3 The score is notated at a nominal 3cm = 1 second, but this need not be observed slavishly; all tempi are suggestions, and approximate. Performers should bend the tempo and apply judicious *rubato* as they see fit.

4 **Dynamics**—there are eight degrees of dynamic in this piece:

ppp—pp—p—mf—f—ff—fff—ffff

Dynamics should be not be treated as a simple linear soft→loud: they function as variations in the *local* context. Note that there is no *mp* dynamic: ***mf*** is midway between ***p*** and ***f***. The extreme dynamics are rarely used and should be considered primarily rhetorical, as 'stage-whisper' and 'cry out' respectively. *Sforzati* increase in loudness: ***mfz—fz—sfz***, etc.

5 **Trombonist**: an F attachment is essential. All playing positions are up to the player. In a few instances the slide positions have been suggested as a reflection of compositional strategies, but these are by no means obligatory.

Mutes: both a simple plunger, and a harmon mute are required. The tube should have been completely removed from the harmon, making it a 'bass-cut filter'. For plunger mute, o = open, ⊕ = half-open, and ● = closed. A straight line after any of these means that it continues until contradicted; an arrowed line → indicates a transition from the first technique to the second; a slash /, or a double glyph—o●—means a sudden change. o●o●o●... indicates a mute 'trill' on a single note, and a degree of rattle is expected; the trill need not be between completely open and completely closed, just sufficiently different to be noticeable.

A trill-like wavy line ⇝ over a note indicates a rapid microtonal quiver—equidistant above and below the pitch, lipped or with slide—as fast as possible. This is sometimes accompanied by a mute 'trill'; they should be coordinated, approximately.

Bell up and **bell down** are indicated by Ⓤ bell up, and Ⓓ bell down (= normal playing position). These are approached gradually, ↗ and ↘ indicate the movements. Similarly, swinging the bell across left to right is indicated by →Ⓛ→Ⓡ→(normal/ord); this can be either continuous or a sudden swing across at each change. V*ice versa* (ie →Ⓡ→Ⓛ→) is also fine.

A series of gracenotes with staccato dots indicates fast-as-possible tonguing/striking.

Voice (VOX) is indicated by ◆ on the relevant pitch—duration of singing is indicated graphically above or beneath the stave by a horizontal line following the diamond head stem.

Traditional fluttertongue is not used in this piece, but a **throat growl** is. This should be fairly aggressive and distort the pitch somewhat. The usual flutter slashes are used on the stem and GR¬ indicates durational extent.

Kate Sullivan, who created the percussion diagram, points out that the performance instruction HYPERBOLICALLY *CANTABILE* could have simply said *CAN BELTO*.

6 **Optional: trombonist** could have either or both of a vertically-mounted snare drum (snares on) and a large resonant metal drum (a dustbin, for instance) suitably positioned. S/he would then play into these at the indicated points in the score, and should place the drums accordingly.

7 **Prosodic indications**: the indications above the beam have to do with metric stress—they are mostly found in the percussion. The emphasis mark ‾ doubles as indicating a strong stress, and ˘ indicates a weak; they can appear in either order. The dynamics should underline these patterns.

8 **Melodica** is performed by percussionist—the part is fairly simple—and is notated in an intermittent treble stave immediately above the percussion lines. It should have a range including F3 to C6, such as the Hohner Student 32, and need not be particularly good quality. It should have a long air-tube attached to the mouthpiece so the player does not have to hold the instrument up—the material is designed to be *played onehandedly* with either hand. It is used here for its *colour*—it is preferable that other electronic keyboards not be substituted unless unavoidable.

9 **Percussion details**:

Almost all the percussion instruments used in this piece appear singly: *one* woodblock, *one* cowbell, etc. As they have to match the trombone sound, they should be midrange to large in size, and chosen to be consonant with the trombone sound.

Sticking indications are somewhat idealised and function as *suggestions*—it is understood that concessions will inevitably be made. Many of the rapid changes can be achieved by having two sticks in each hand, one soft, one hard, or a chopstick, etc. Only a couple of hardnesses are actually suggested: VH and S; otherwise the player should select appropriate sticks. Similarly, the ROD and chopstick designations could also be achieved by instead using the grip end of normal sticks: their slight whippiness being a sonic benefit. The player is invited to solve the sticking as they best choose, and use whatever seems serviceable.

- **Chime bar**: only one is required, in A440, and is notated in an intermittent single stave-line immediately above the percussion lines, similarly to the **melodica.**
- **Cymbal** should be noticeably larger than **sizzle cymbal**—the abbreviations D and R mean **dome** and **rim** respectively.
- **Tamtam** should be as big as can be reasonably sourced.
- For **sizzle cymbal**, **cymbal**, and **tamtam** note that M = midface—when not indicated D, R, or M, strike as normal (between midface and rim). The arrow from one to the other means a movement across the face of the cymbal/tamtam either as a single stroke (a sweep) or as progressive repeated notes. Edge, E, means striking the thin side of the cymbal/tamtam rather than the face. BOW indicates bowing the edge of the cymbal/tamtam for the notated duration: standard bowing marks apply (ᵛ up-bow; ⊓ down-bow).
- **Sizzle cymbal**, **cymbal**, **tamtam**, **triangle**, and all other sustained sounds should always be allowed to ring on, except where the *damp* sign ⊣ appears.
- **Counter bell** is precisely that: the sort of bell with a striker on top that is used to get attention in shops and hotels.
- For the *coperto* sections, a heavy cloth is put on the skin of the **tomtom**—this should be upholstery-weight material.
- The **claves** will need to be firmly fixed in place; an alternative resonant dry wood sound is acceptable if this proves problematic (but *not* another woodblock).
- The **anvil** can be any solid but resonant largeish piece of metal, but the effect should be fairly dry.
- The **ratchet** is required to make controlled repeated clacking sounds—any such device will do, but if nothing satisfactory can be found a second, higher-pitched **woodblock** can be substituted.
- The **whip/slapstick** should be a clapper that can be played flat.

- **Rod** can be either metal or wood (cooking skewers, say, which can also be used as sticks), and is tapped from the grip end upwards and downwards against a solid surface, such as the table-edge (or **anvil**, etc). The effect should be of a rising and falling impact—the sound should be predominantly that of the **rod**, not the table/anvil. A louder version of the same effect is also achieved by similarly tapping a side drum stick against the edge of the table.
- If wished, a larger bass drum could substitute for the **tomtom** in sections 28-33, where the extended *coperto* use is called for—the performance instruction is ***PESANTE*, SEISMICALLY**. Or the front skin of the kick bass drum could be struck, if this were possible while also bowing the metals.

10 There are three degrees of pause in this piece:

indicating a brief suspension of activity, for instance, to change sticks;

indicating a medium-long hiatus, a rhetorical beat of several seconds; and

meaning a long pause.

internonce from *moi, laminaire*
by Aimé Césaire

© Editions du Seuil, 1982

internonce

il m'arrive de le perdre
des semaines
c'est ma créature mais rebelle

un petit mot couresse
un petit mot crabe-c'est-ma-faute
un petit mot pétale de feu
un petit mot pétrel plongeur
un petit mot saxifrage de tombeaux

petit mot qui m'atteste je te lance tiaulé

dans le temps et les confins
assistant à ton assaut sévère
spectral et saccadé
et de mon sang luciole parmi les lucioles

internuncio

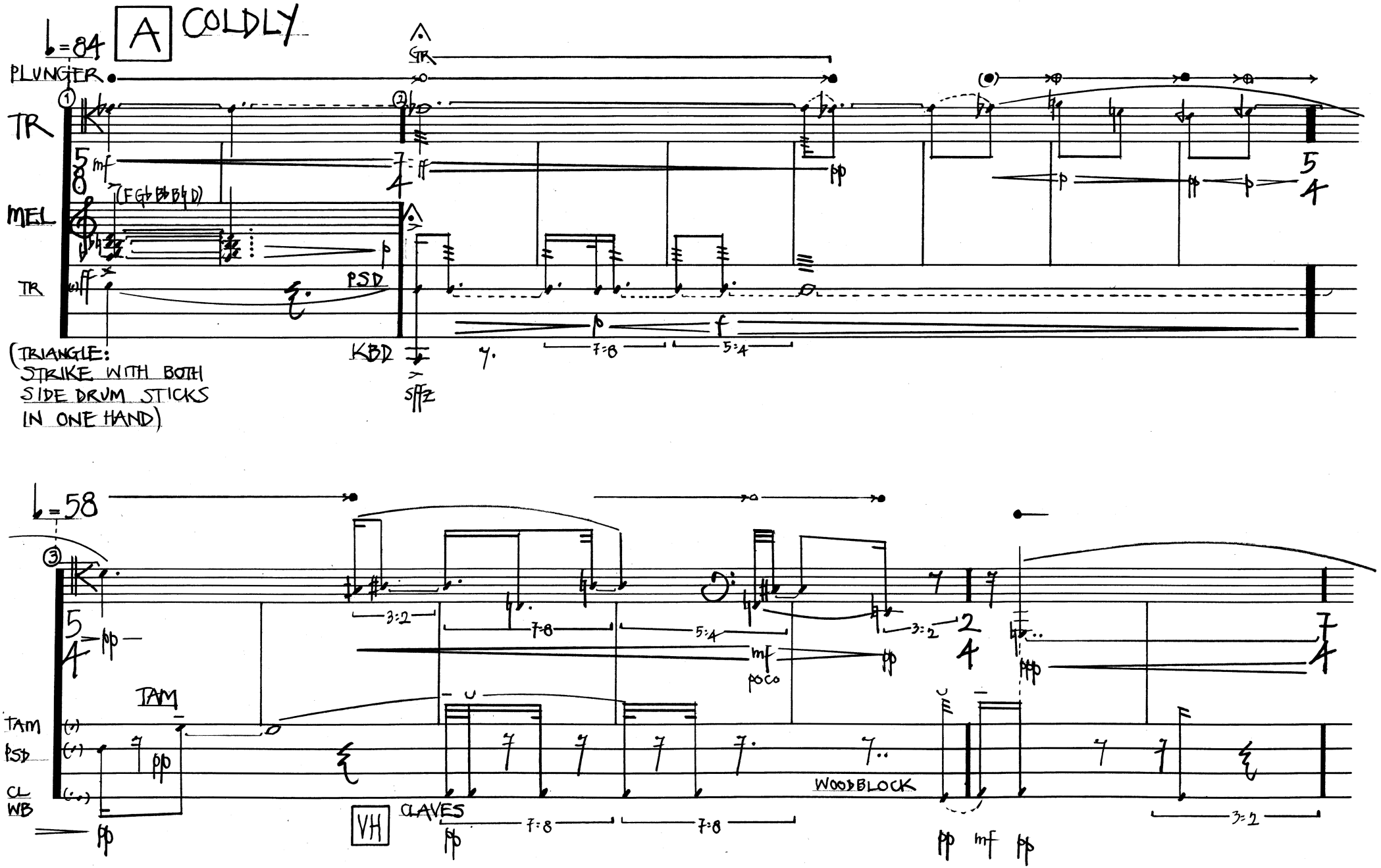
off and on i lose it
for weeks
it is my creature but a rebellious one

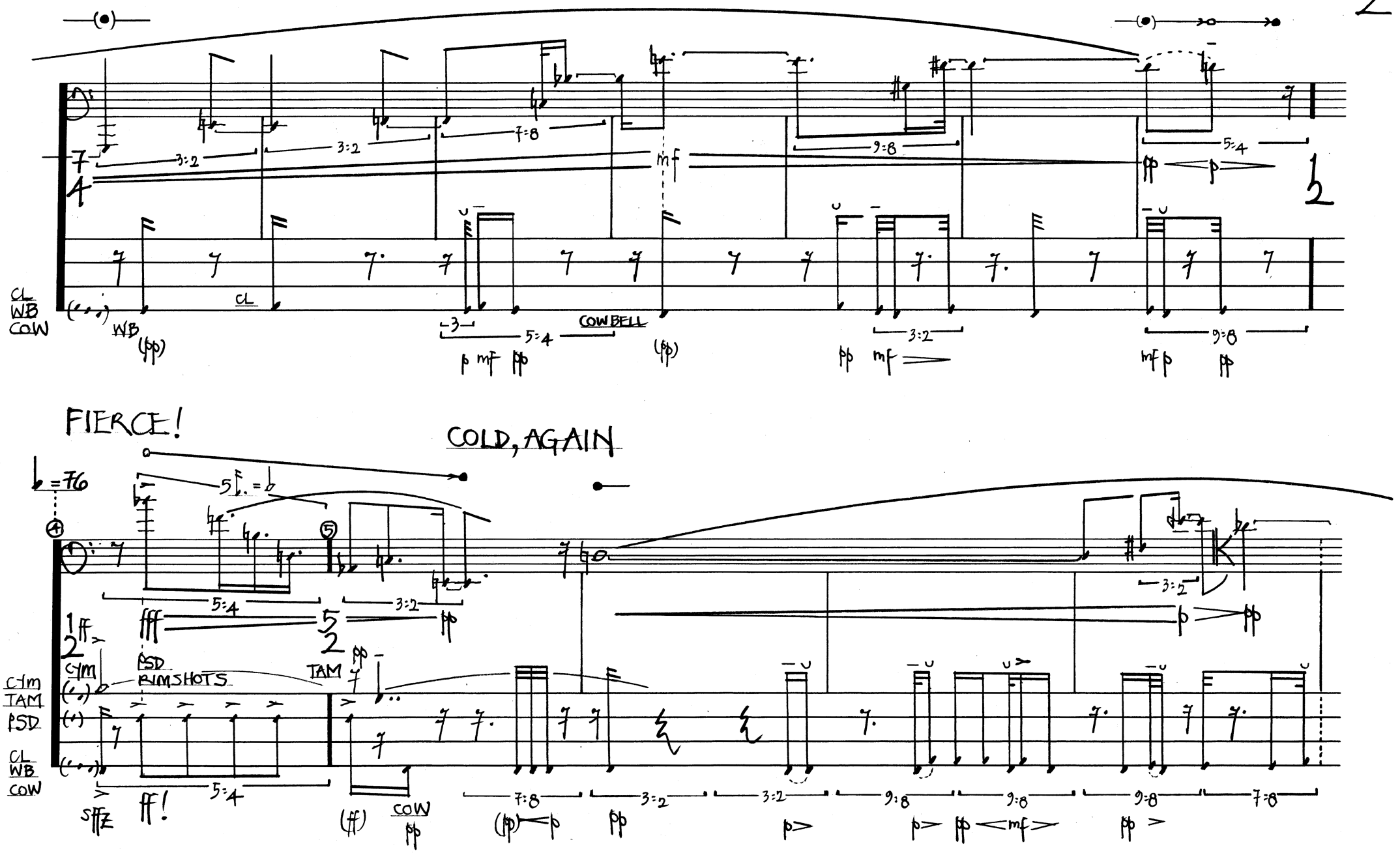
a little word couresse
a little word through-my-fault-crab
a little word petal of fire
a little word diving petrel
a little word tomb saxifrage

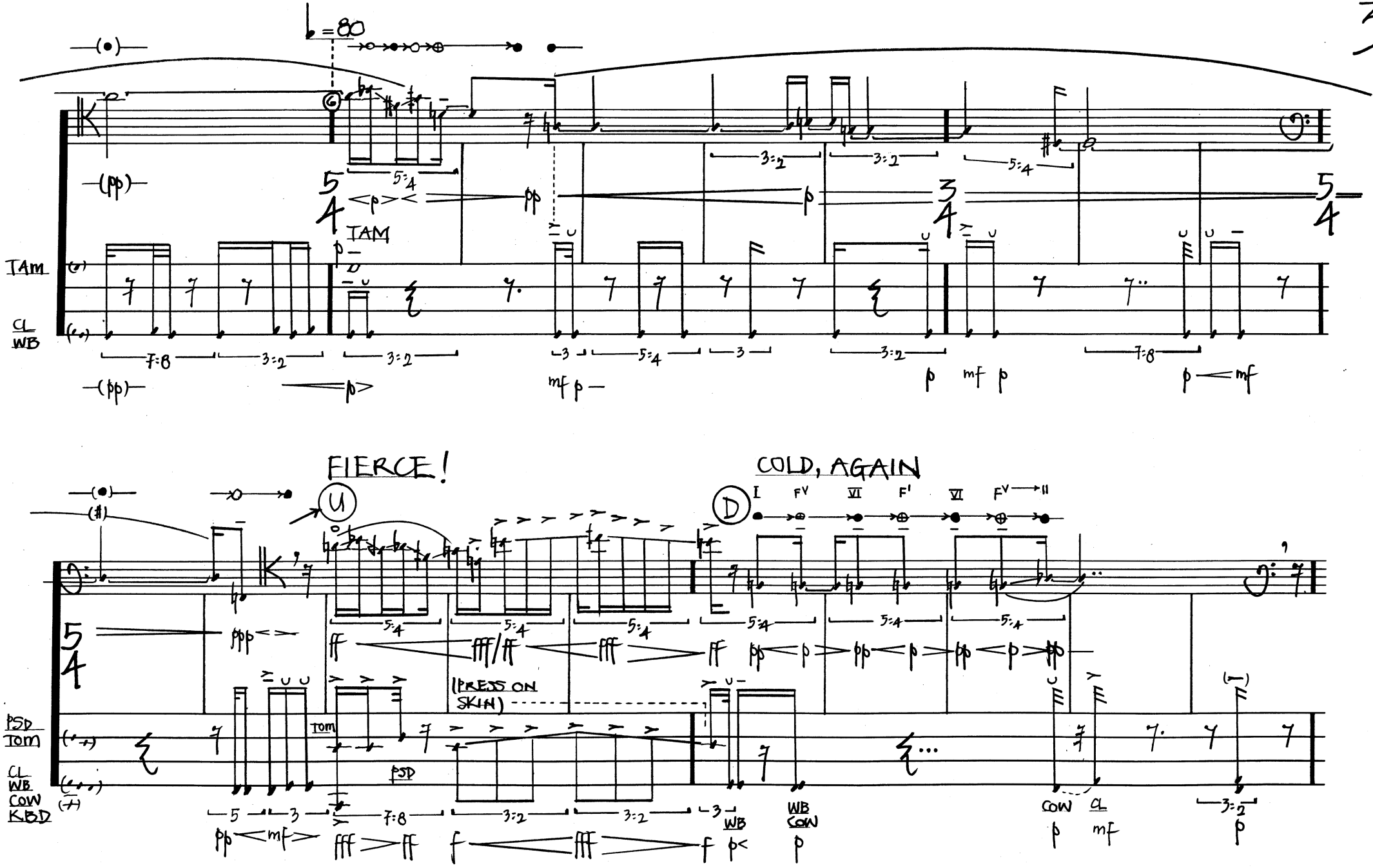
little word that gives evidence of me i throw you
trillando
into time and the outer reaches
witnessing your severe assault
spectral and spasmodic
and of my own blood a firefly among the fireflies

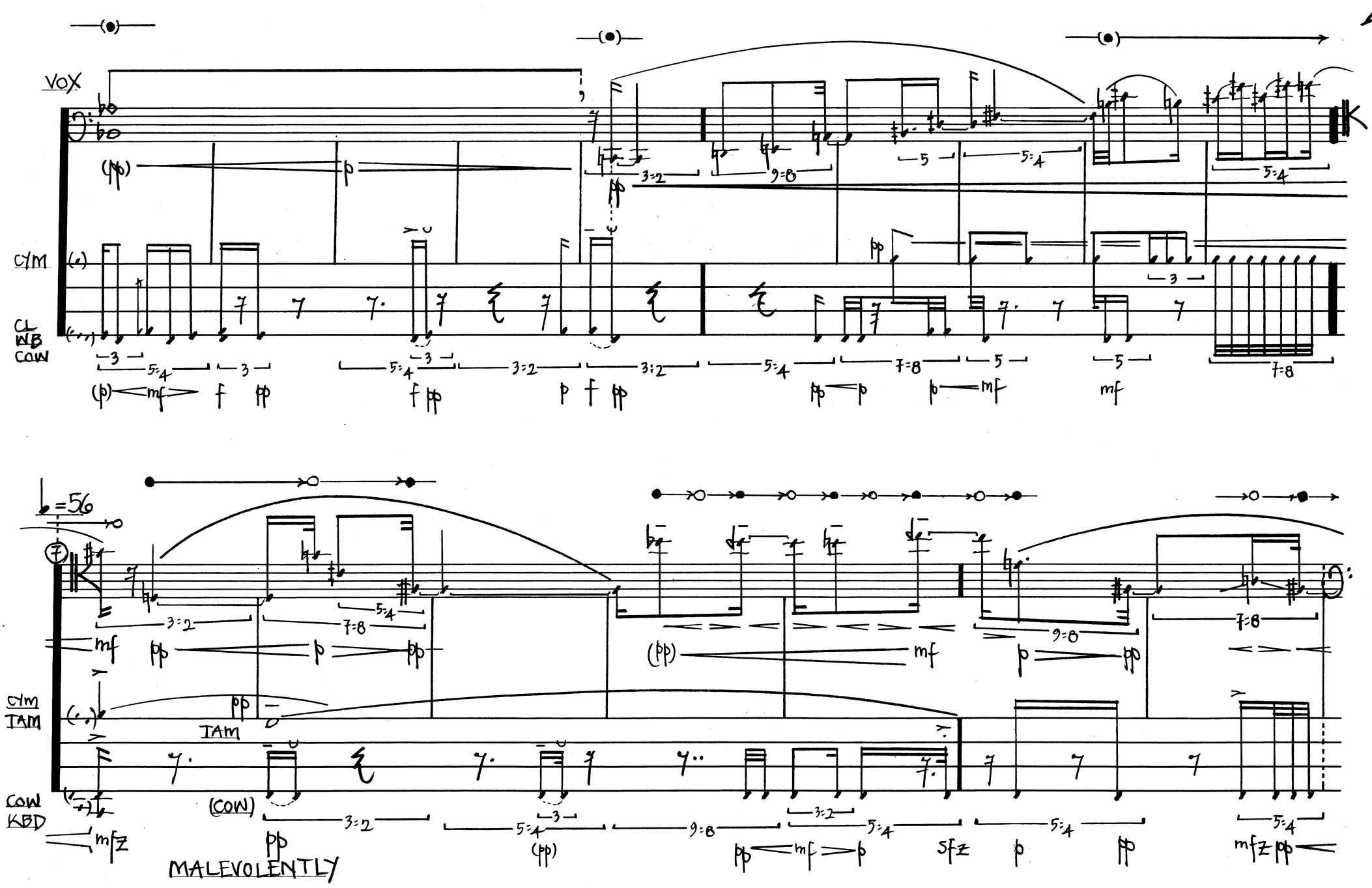
Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith

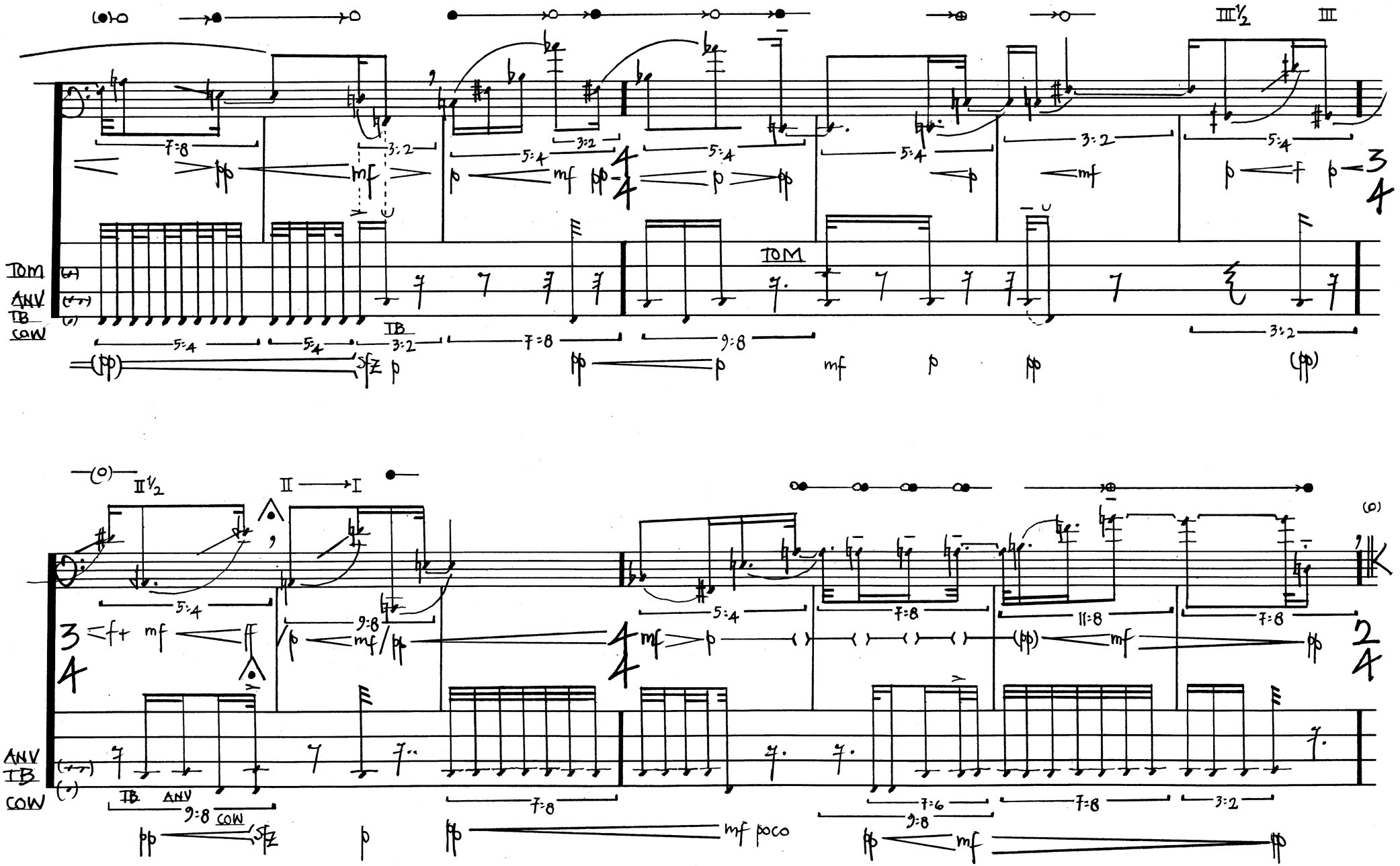
© Caraf Books, the University Press of Virginia, 1990

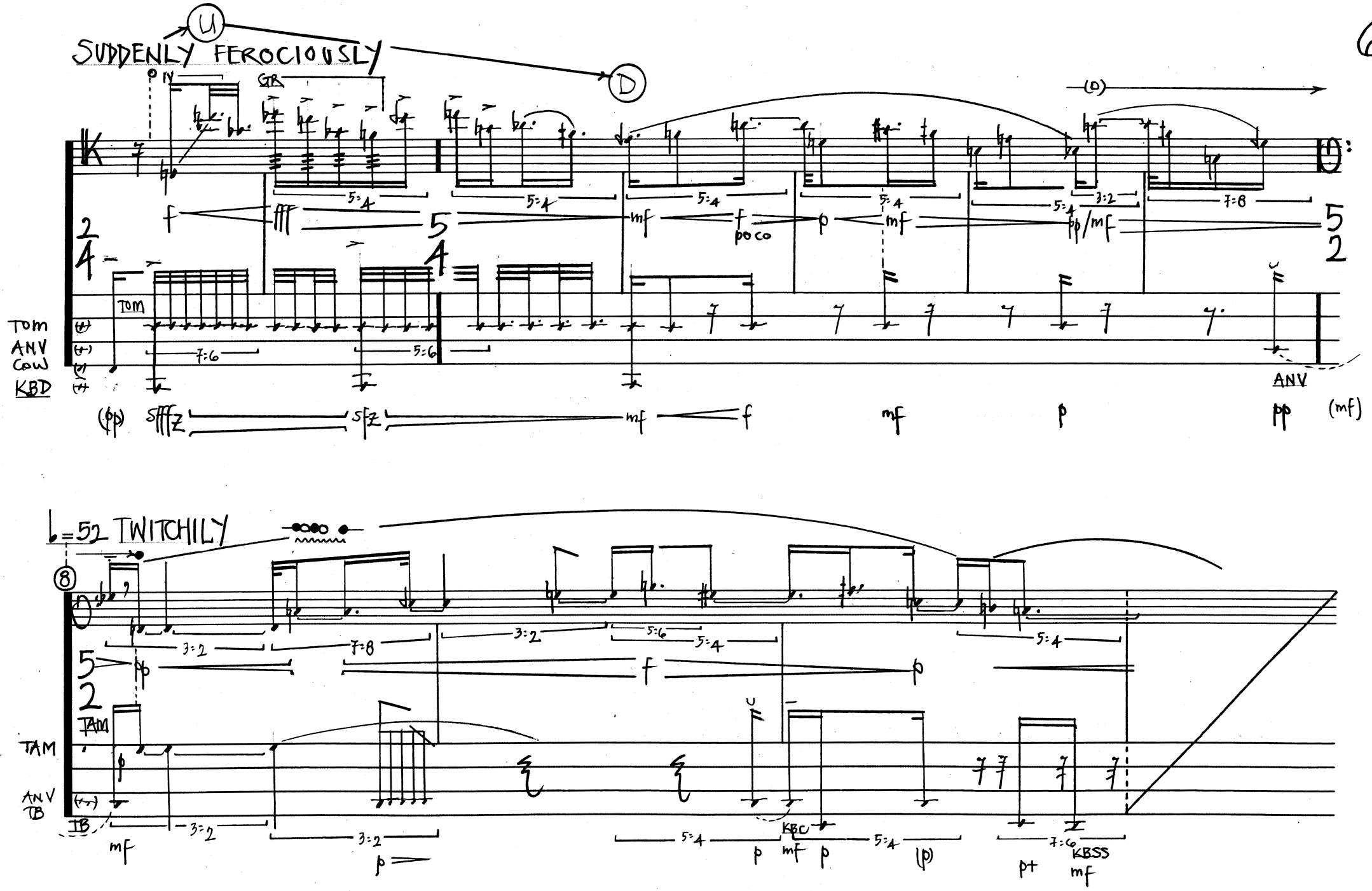

♩=84
A
COLDLY
PLUNGER
STR
TR
MEL
TR
PSD
KBD
SFFZ
(TRIANGLE: STRIKE WITH BOTH SIDE DRUM STICKS IN ONE HAND)
♩=58
TAM
TAM
PSD
CL
WB
VH
CLAVES
WOODBLOCK
poco


CL
WB
COW
WB
CL
COWBELL
FIERCE!
COLD, AGAIN
CYM
TAM
PSD
CL
WB
COW
PSD
RIMSHOTS
TAM
COW

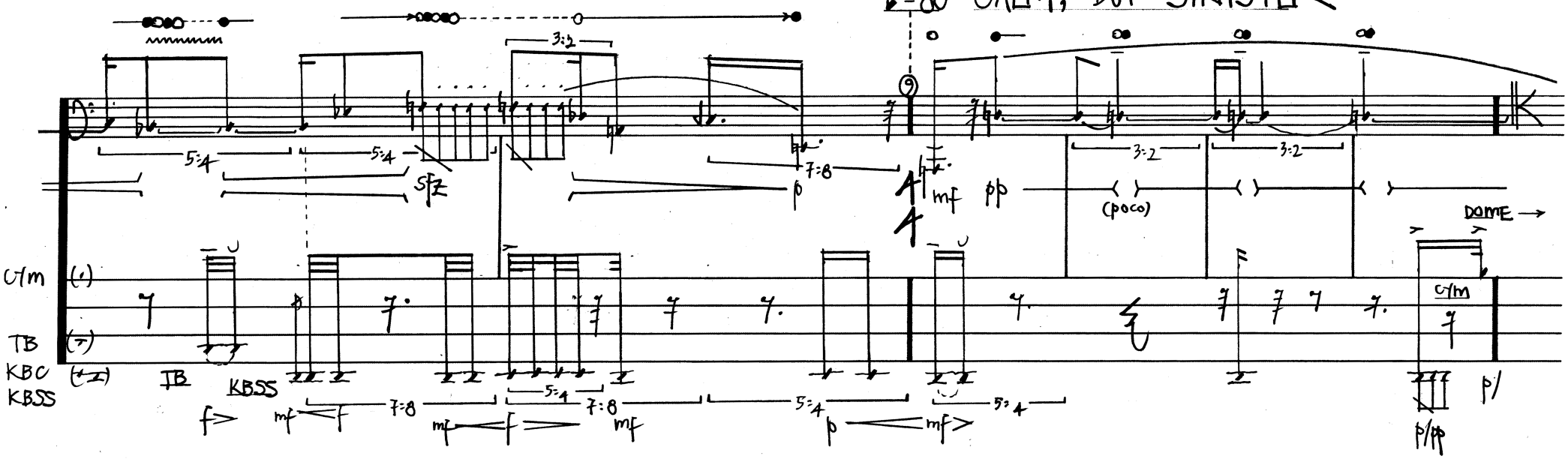

♭=80
TAM
CL
WB
FIERCE!
COLD, AGAIN
(PRESS ON SKIN)
PSD
TOM
CL
WB
COW
KBD
WB
COW
COW
CL

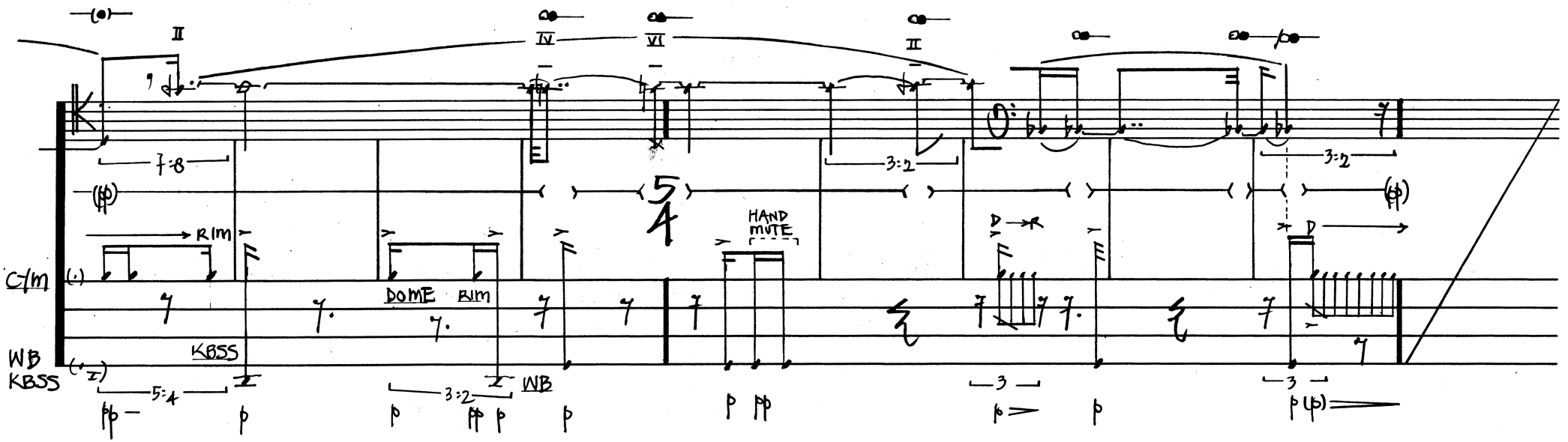

VOX
CYM
CL
WB
COW
=56
CYM
TAM
TAM
COW
KBD
(COW)
MALEVOLENTLY

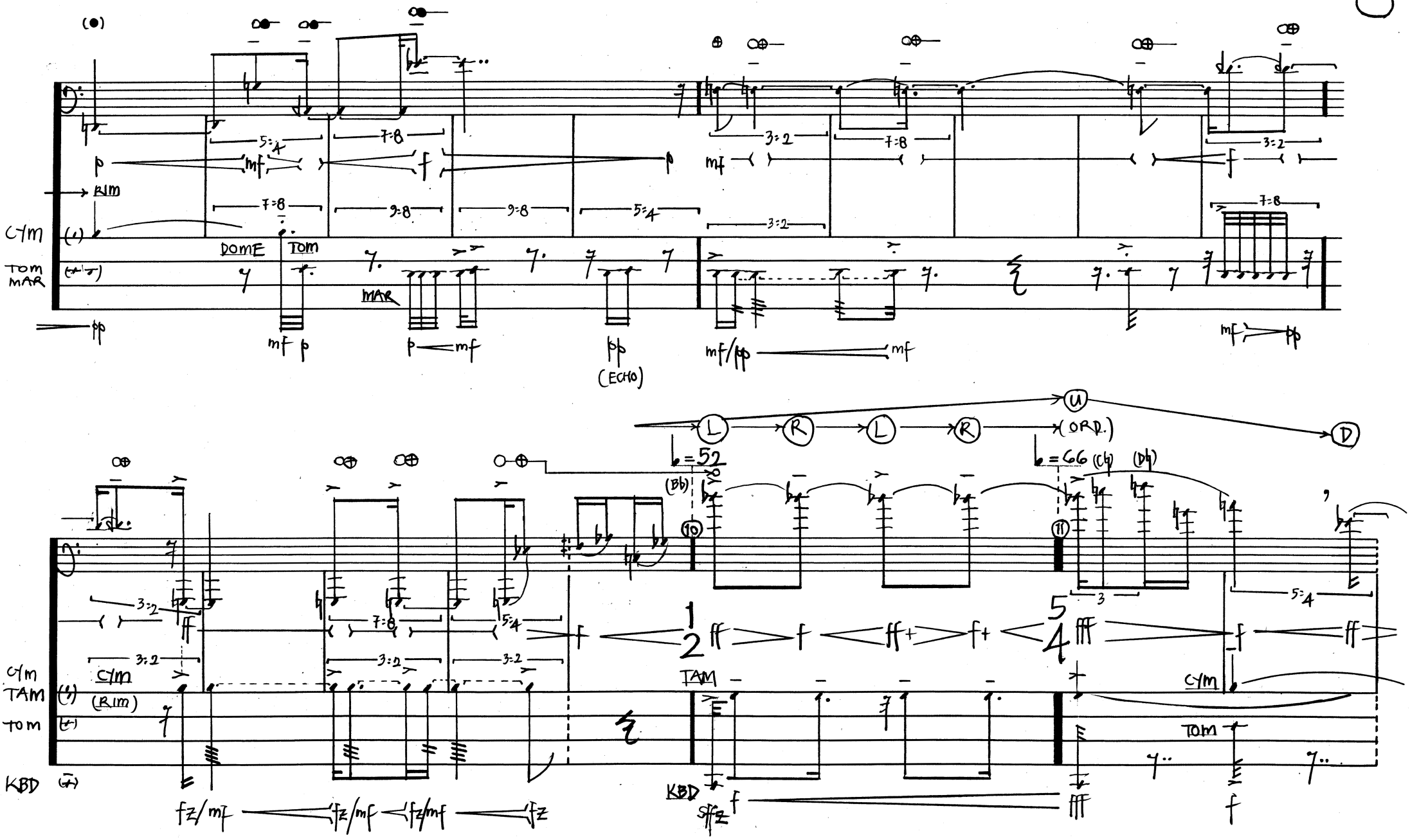

III½
III
TOM
ANV
TB
COW
TOM
TB
II½
II → I
ANV
TB
COW
TB ANV
COW
mf poco


SUDDENLY FEROCIOUSLY
U
D
IV
GR
TOM
TOM
ANV
COW
KBD
poco
ANV
♩=52 TWITCHILY
TAM
TAM
ANV
TB
TB
KBC
KBSS

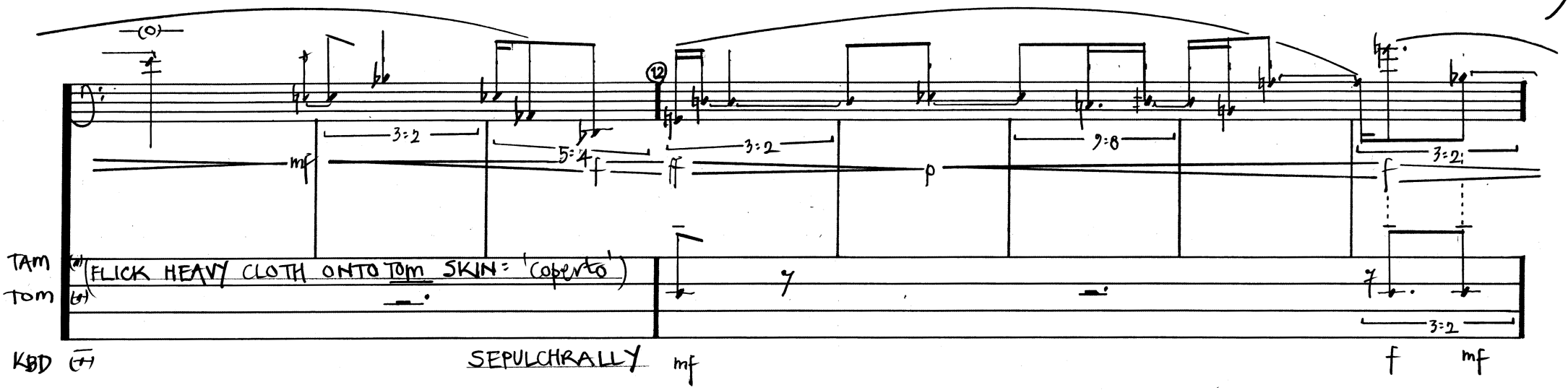
♩=80 CALM, BUT SINISTER

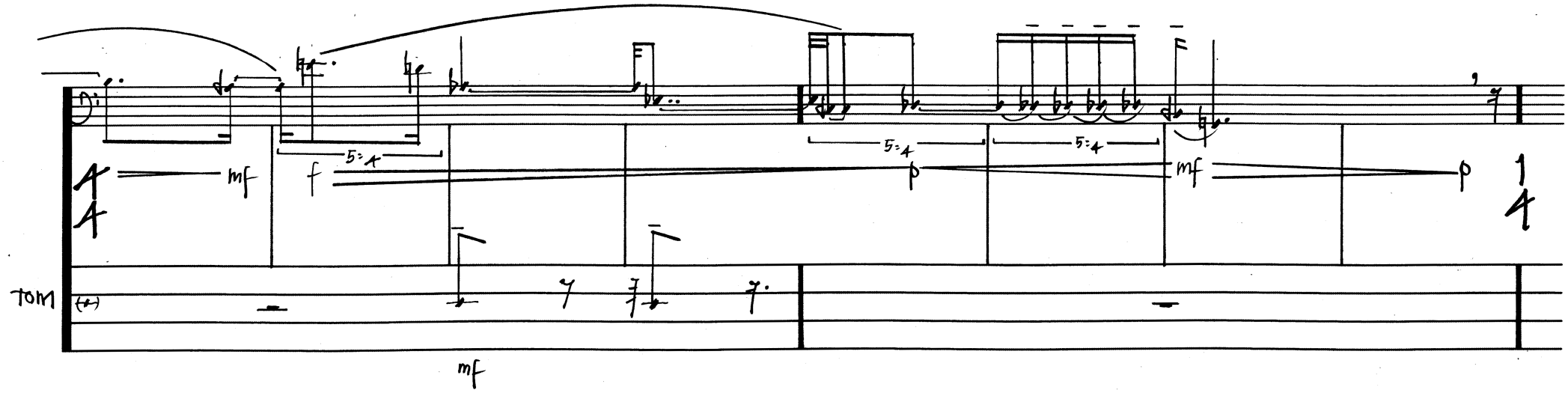




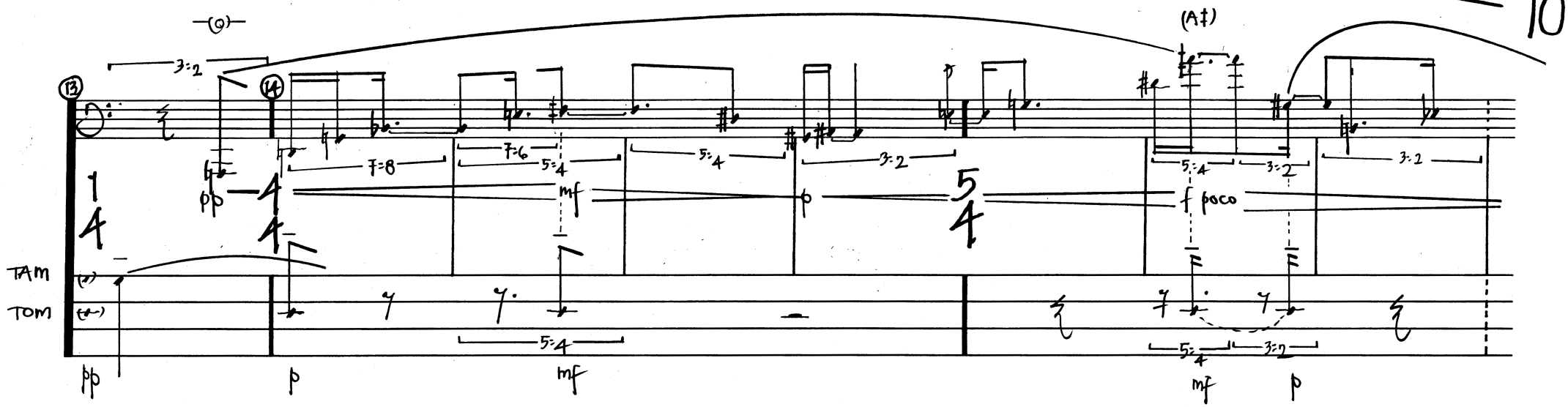

CYM
TOM
MAR
RIM
DOME
TOM
MAR
(ECHO)
L
R
L
R
U
(ORD.)
D
♩=52
(Bb)
♩=66
(Cb)
(Db)
CYM
TAM
TOM
KBD
(RIM)
CYM
TAM
TOM
KBD

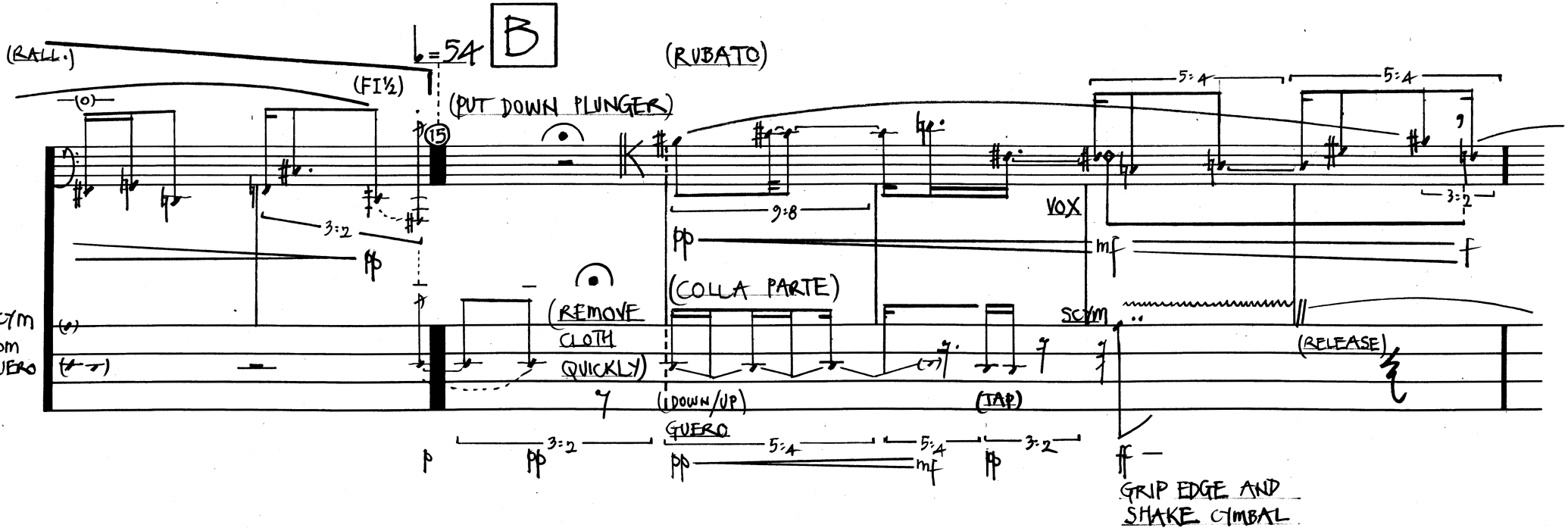
CANTABILE ESPRESSIVO

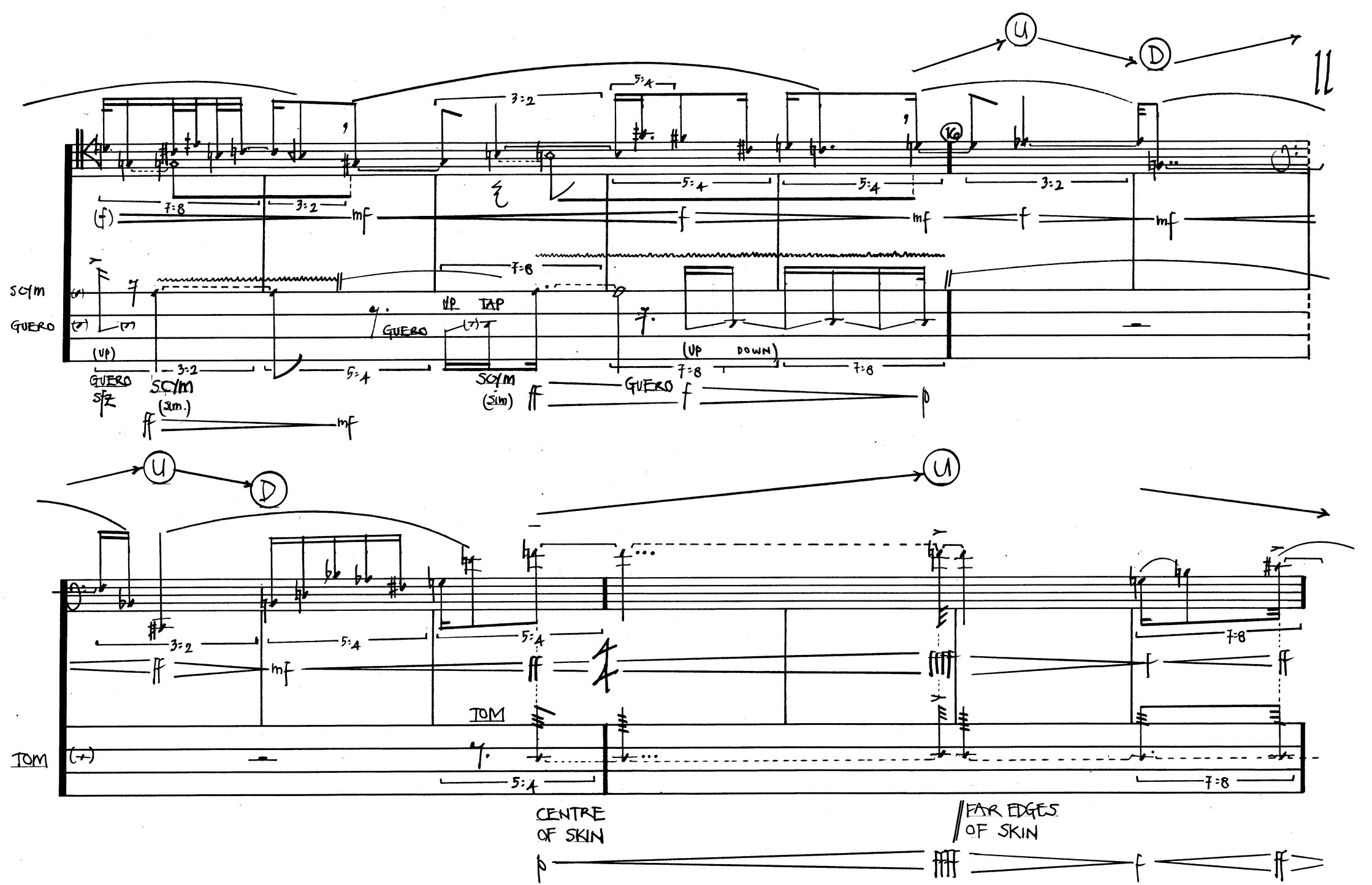




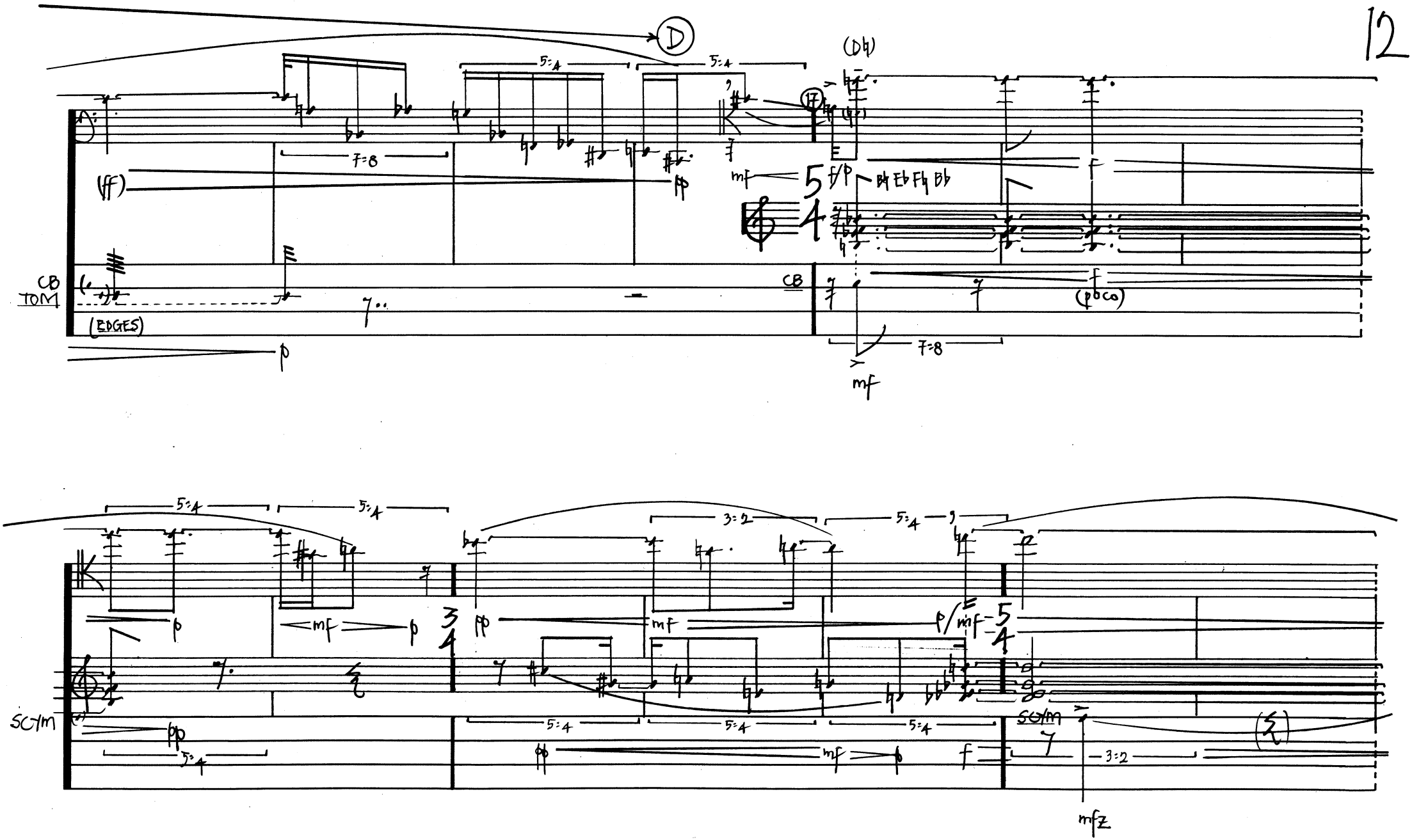
RALL.

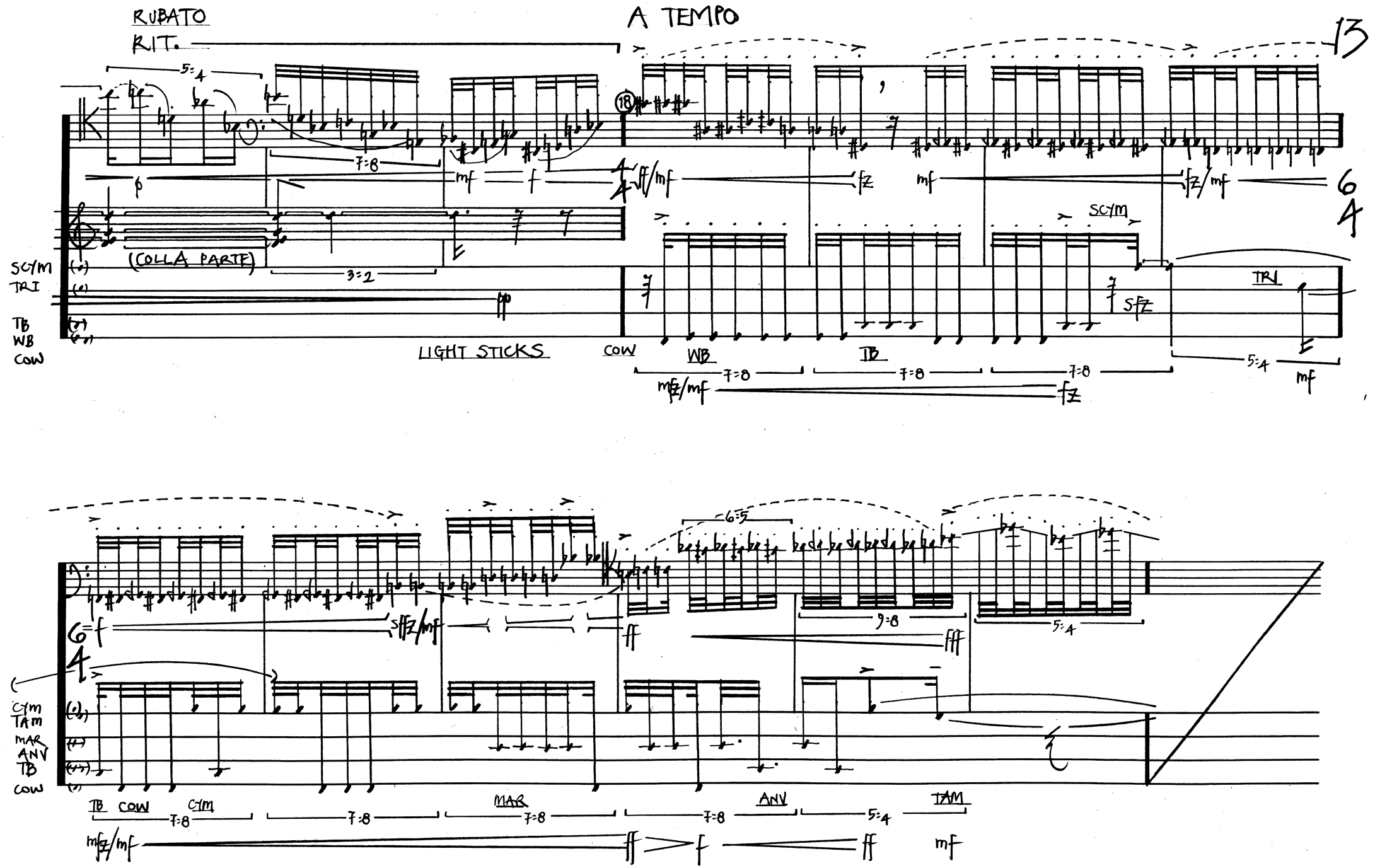

(A♯)
TAM
TOM
poco

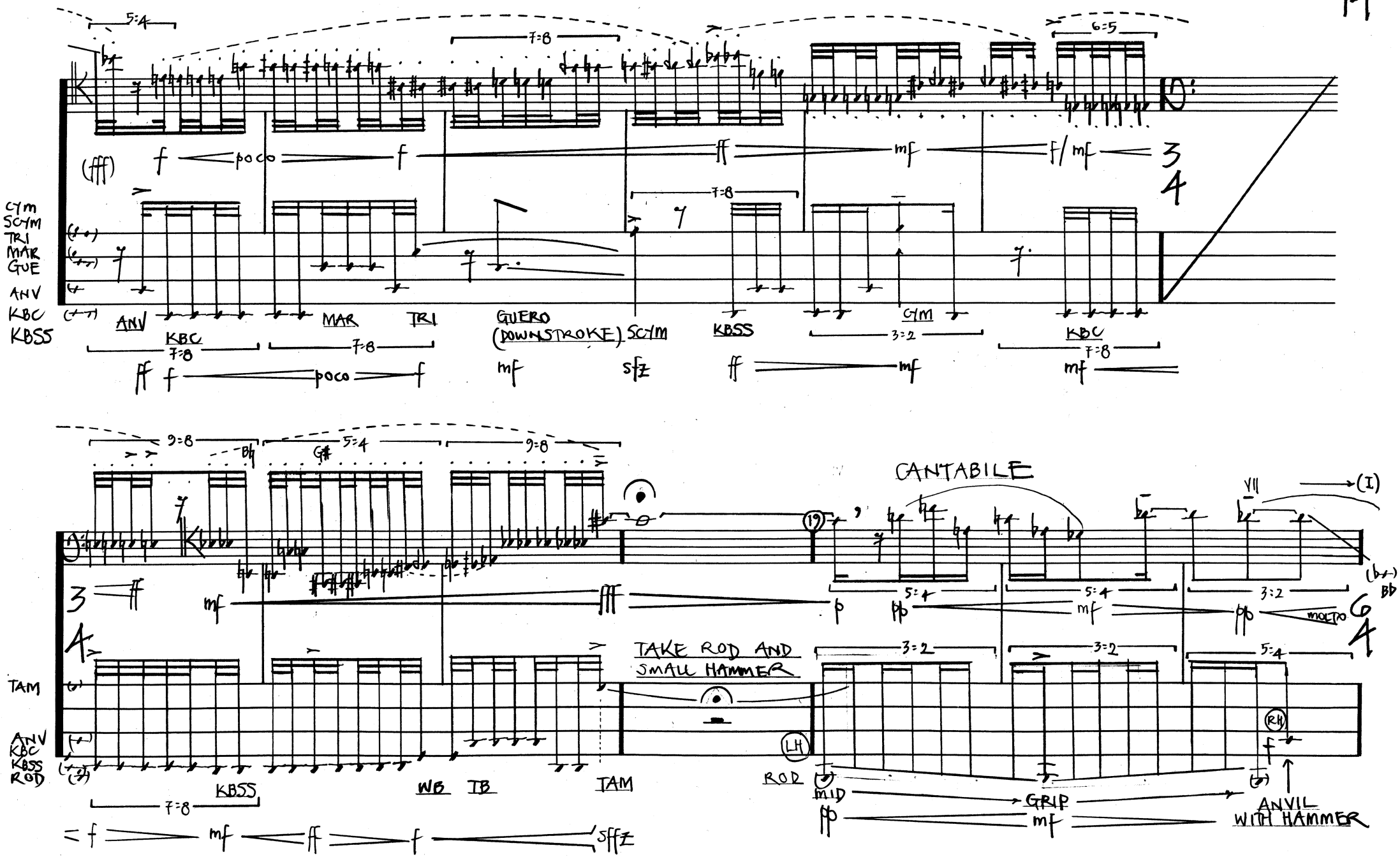

(RALL.)
♩=54
B
(RUBATO)
(FI½)
(PUT DOWN PLUNGER)
VOX
SCYM
TOM
GUERO
(REMOVE CLOTH QUICKLY)
(COLLA PARTE)
(DOWN/UP)
(TAP)
GUERO
SCYM
(RELEASE)
GRIP EDGE AND SHAKE CYMBAL

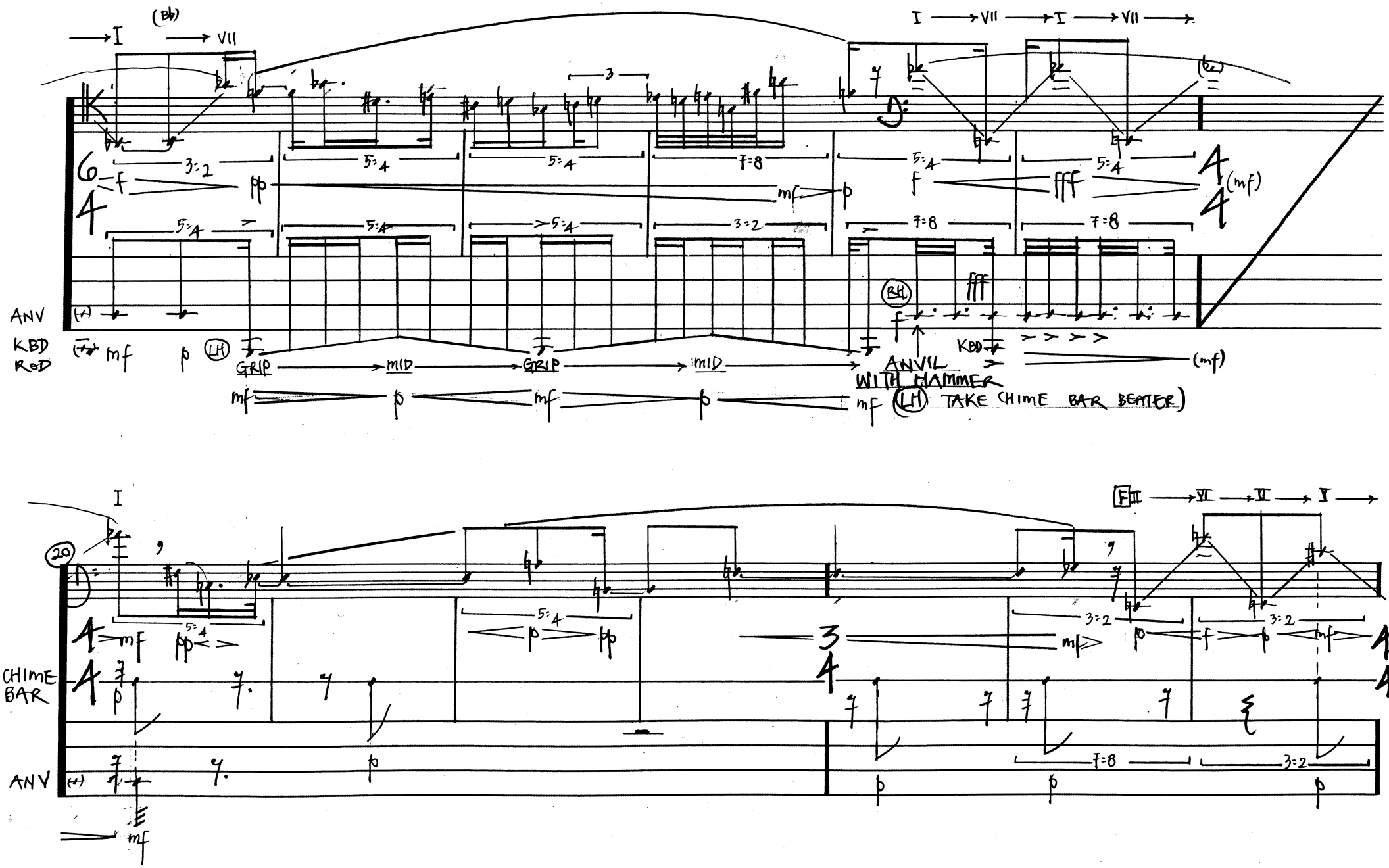


11
U
D
3:2
5:4
7:8
(f)
mf
f
SCYM
GUERO
(UP)
GUERO
SFZ
SCYM
(sim.)
ff
UP TAP
GUERO
SCYM
(sim)
(UP DOWN)
p
TOM
CENTRE
OF SKIN
FAR EDGES
OF SKIN

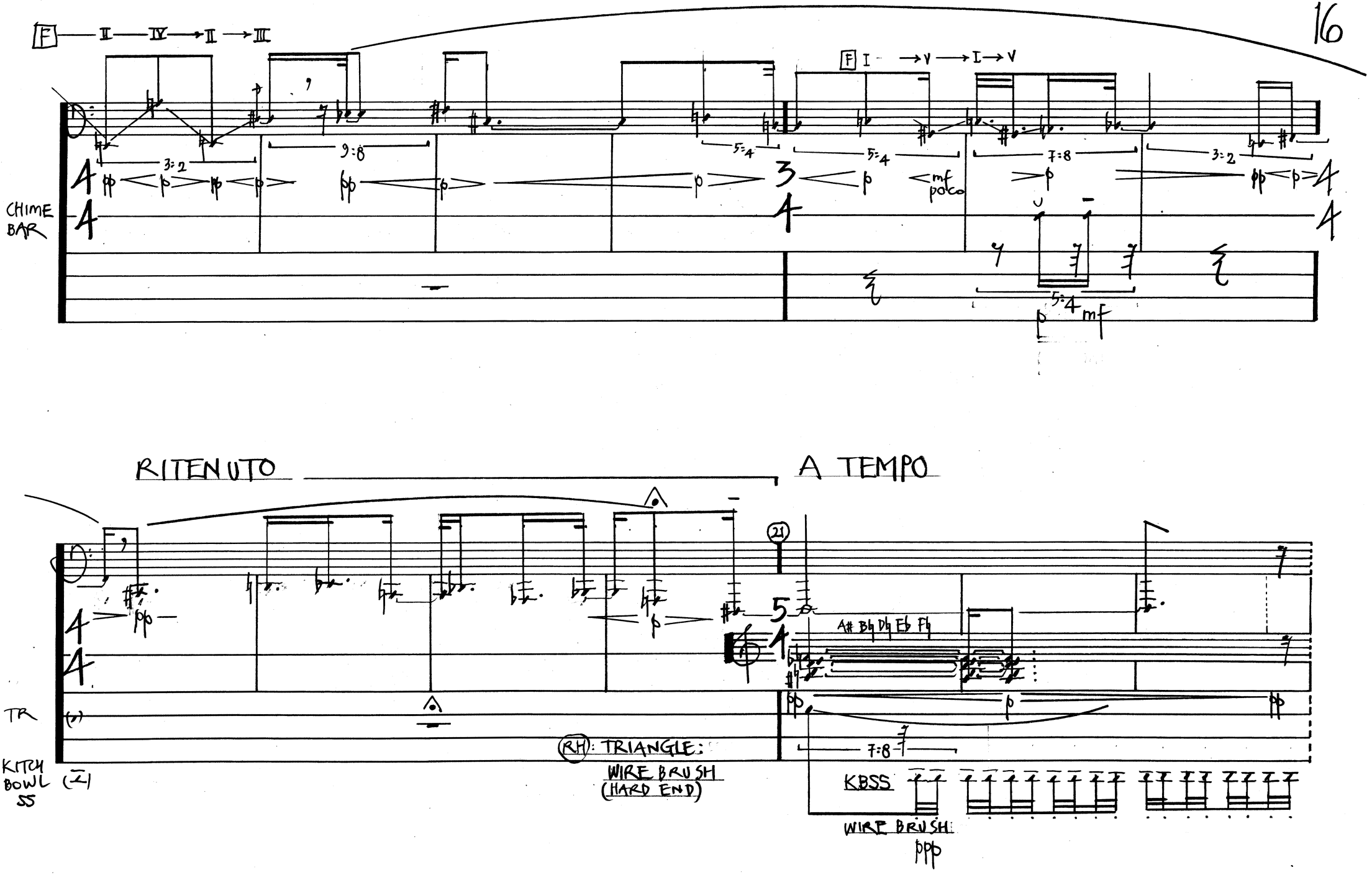

D
(DH)
17
5:4
5:4
7:8
(ff)
pp
mf
5
4
f/p
Bb Eb Fb Bb
CB
TOM
(EDGES)
p
CB
(poco)
f
7:8
mf
5:4
5:4
p
mf
p
3
4
pp
3:2
5:4
mf
p/mf
5
4
SCHM
pp
5:4
5:4
5:4
5:4
mf
p
f
SCHM
3:2
(5)
mfz

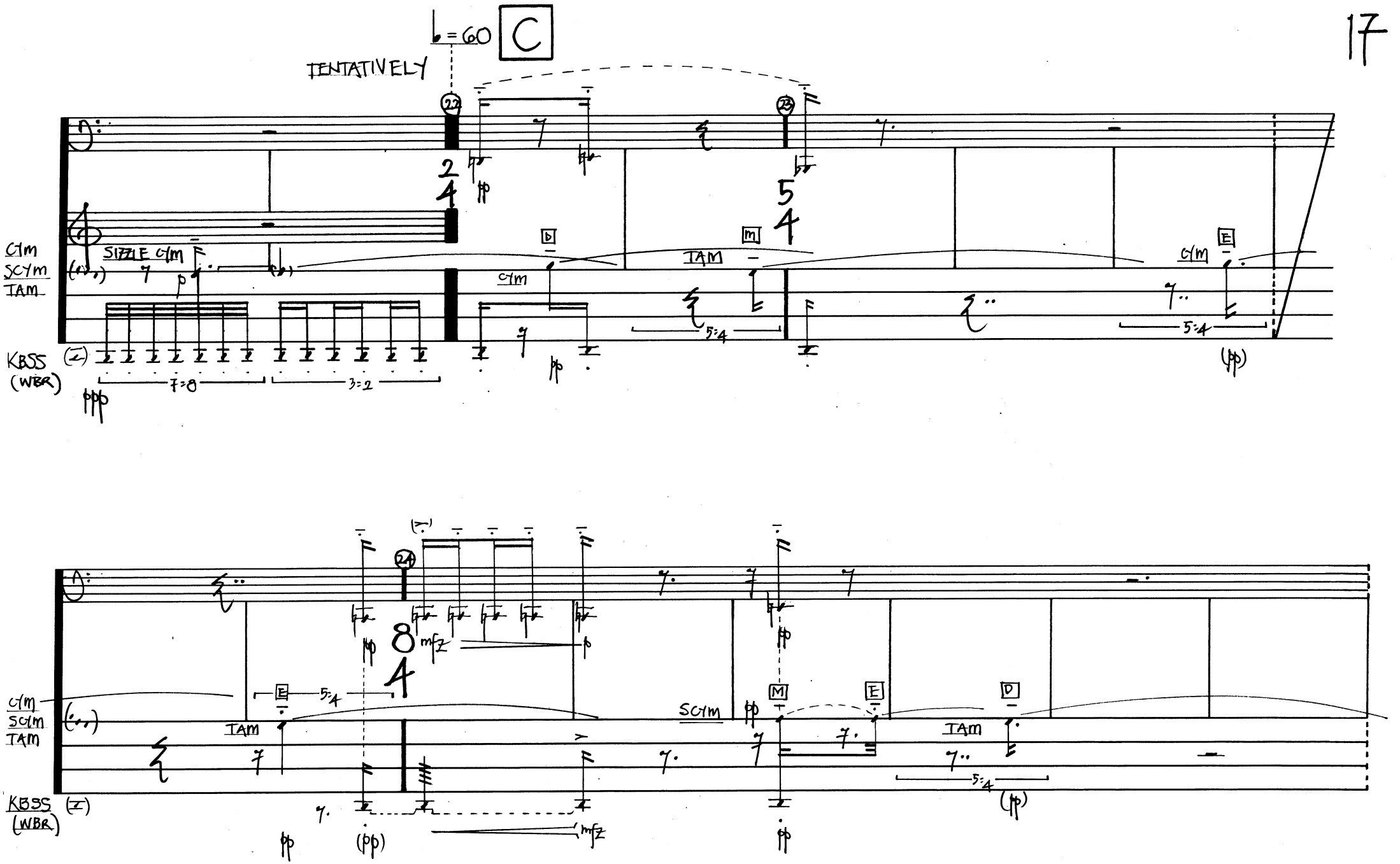

RUBATO
RIT.
A TEMPO
18
(COLLA PARTE)
SCYM
TRI
TB
WB
COW
LIGHT STICKS
WB
TB
SCYM
TRI
CYM
TAM
MAR
ANV
TB
COW
TB COW
CYM
MAR
ANV
TAM

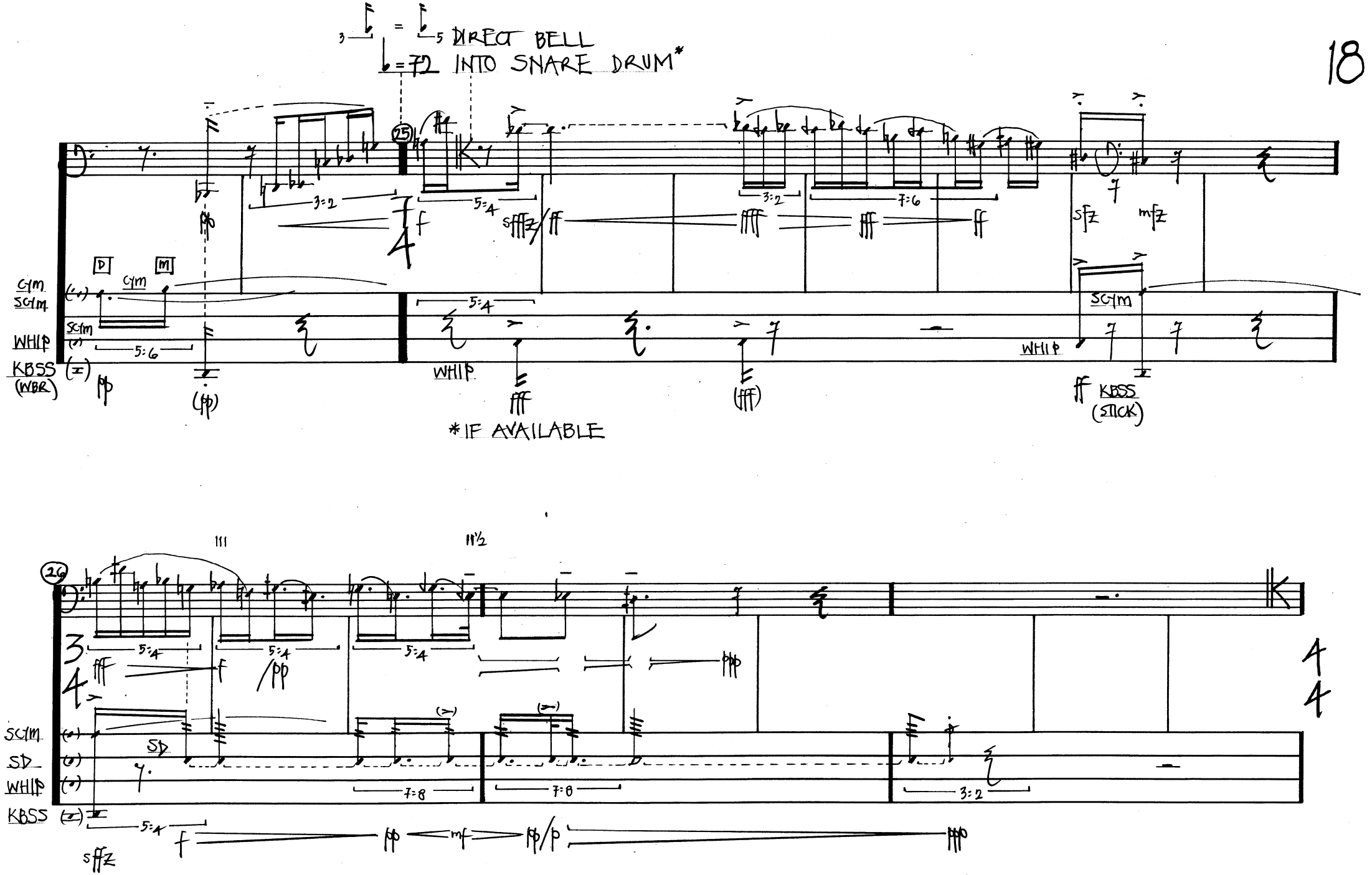

CYM
SCYM
TRI
MAR
GUE
ANV
KBC
KBSS
ANV
MAR
TRI
GUERO (DOWNSTROKE)
SCYM
KBSS
CYM
KBC
CANTABILE
TAKE ROD AND SMALL HAMMER
TAM
ANV
KBC
KBSS
ROD
KBSS
WB
TB
TAM
ROD
GRIP
ANVIL WITH HAMMER

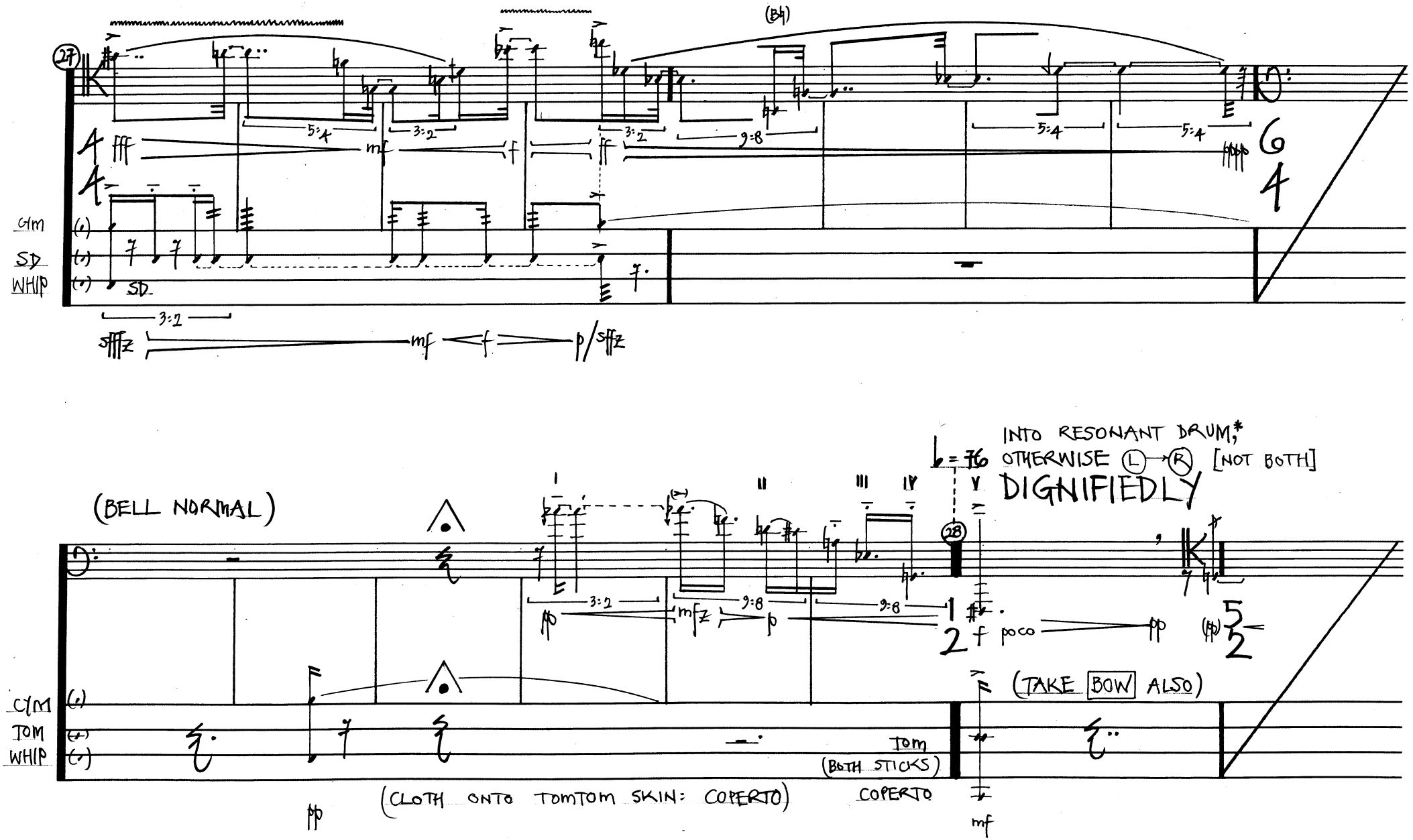


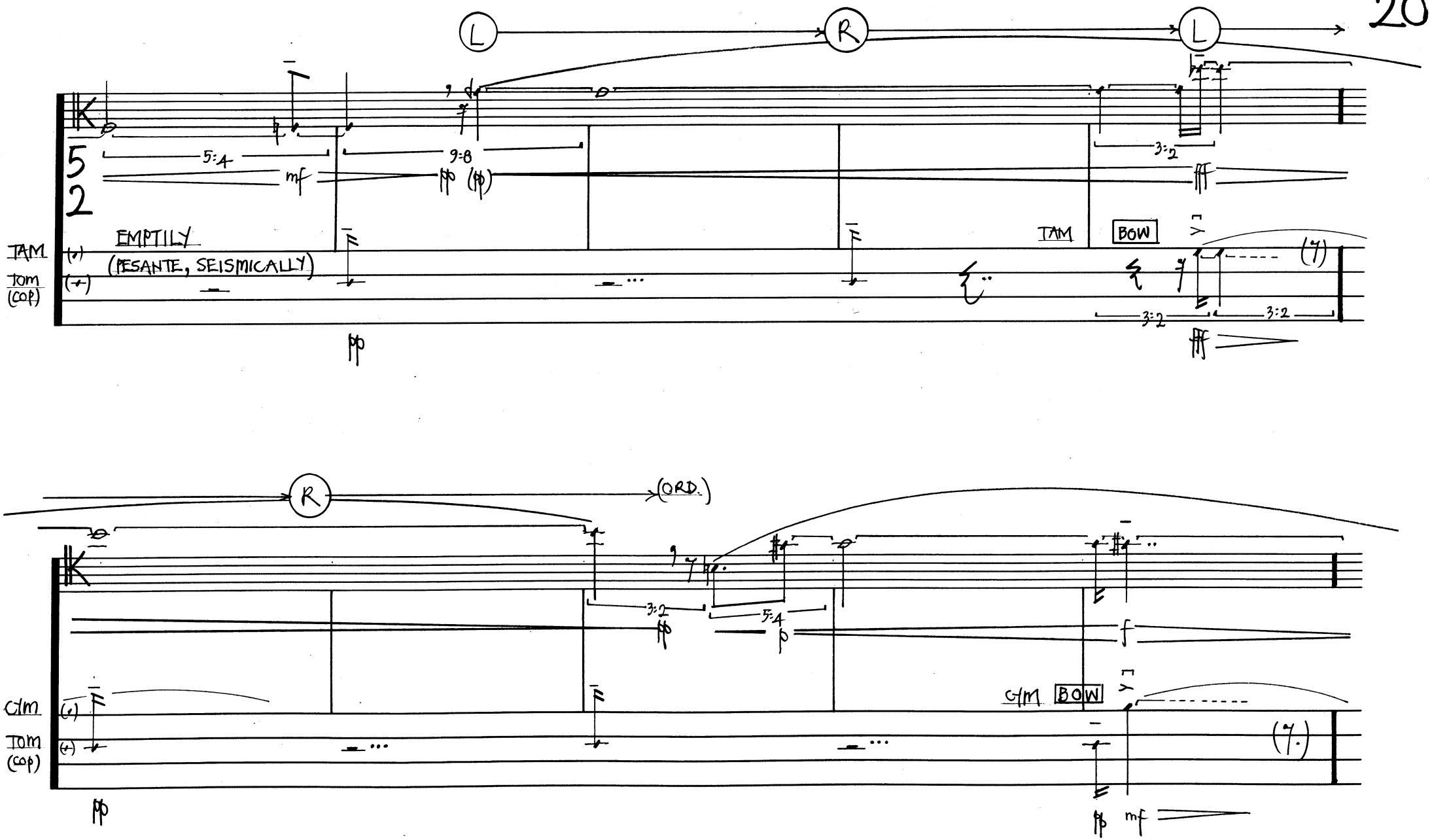
I
(B♭)
VII
I → VII → I → VII →
3:2
5:4
7:8
3:2
ANV
KBD
ROD
GRIP
MID
ANVIL
WITH HAMMER
(LH) TAKE CHIME BAR BEATER)
(mf)
20
CHIME BAR
ANV

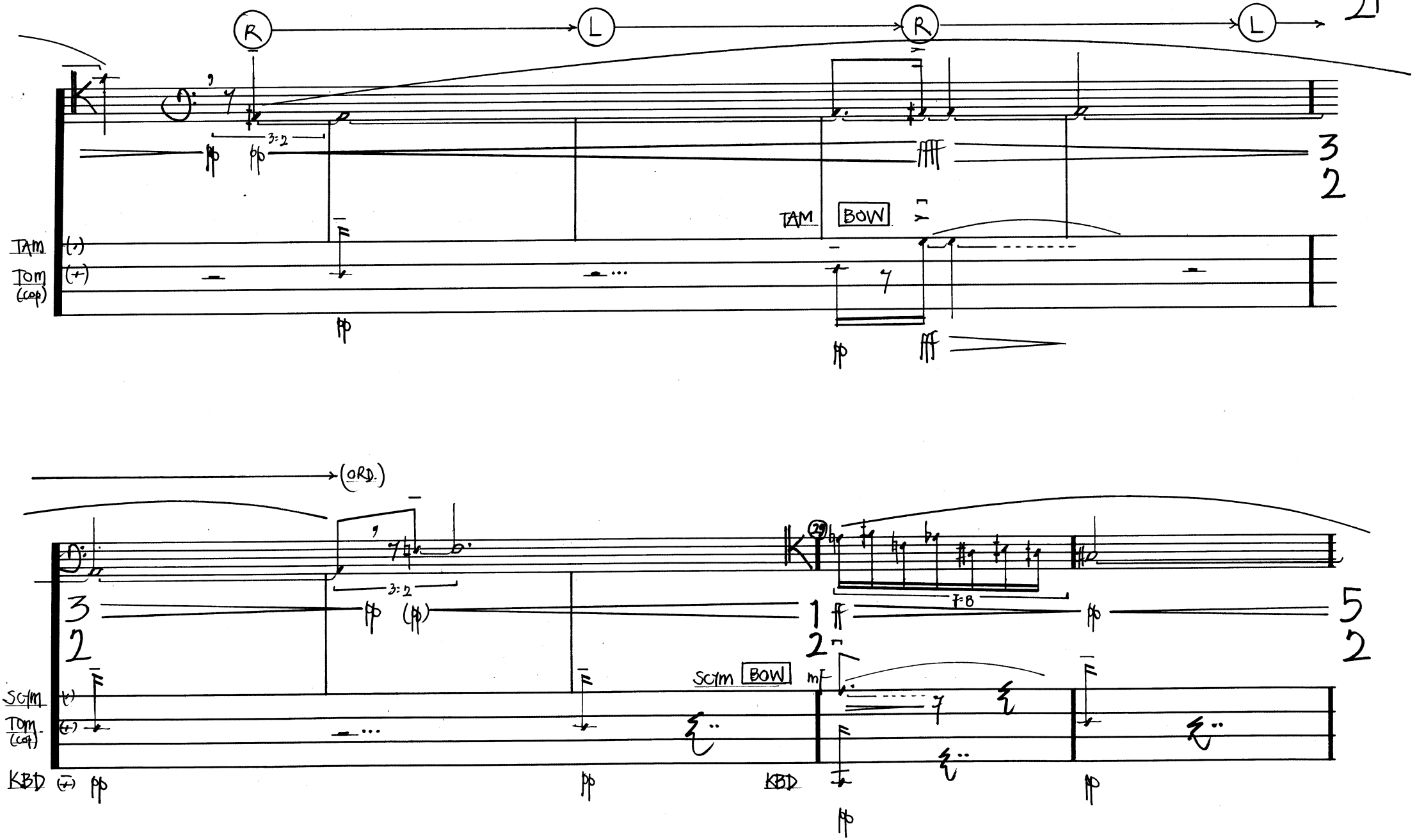

F II IV II III
F I V I V
CHIME BAR
3:2
9:8
5:4
5:4
7:8
3:2
mf poco
5:4
mf
RITENUTO
A TEMPO
21
A# B D E F
TR
KITCH BOWL SS
(RH): TRIANGLE:
WIRE BRUSH
(HARD END)
7:8
KBSS
WIRE BRUSH
ppp

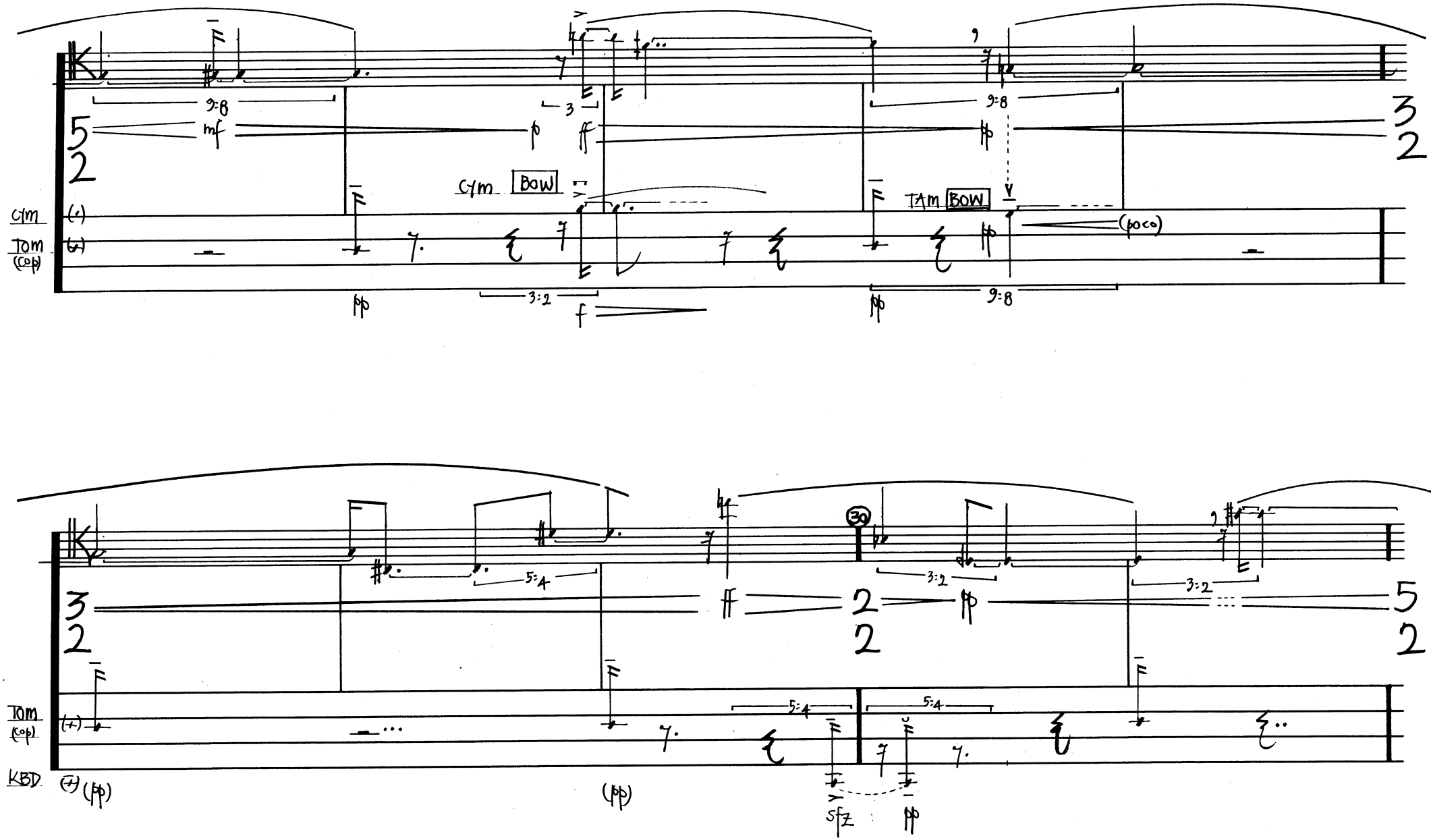

♭ = 60
C
TENTATIVELY
22
23
2
4
5
4
CYM
SCYM
TAM
SIZZLE CYM
D
M
E
CYM
TAM
CYM
KBSS
(WBR)
7:8
3:2
5:4
5:4
ppp
pp
(pp)
24
8
4
mfz
E
5:4
CYM
SCYM
TAM
TAM
SCYM
M
E
D
TAM
KBSS
(WBR)
pp
(pp)
mfz
pp
5:4
(pp)

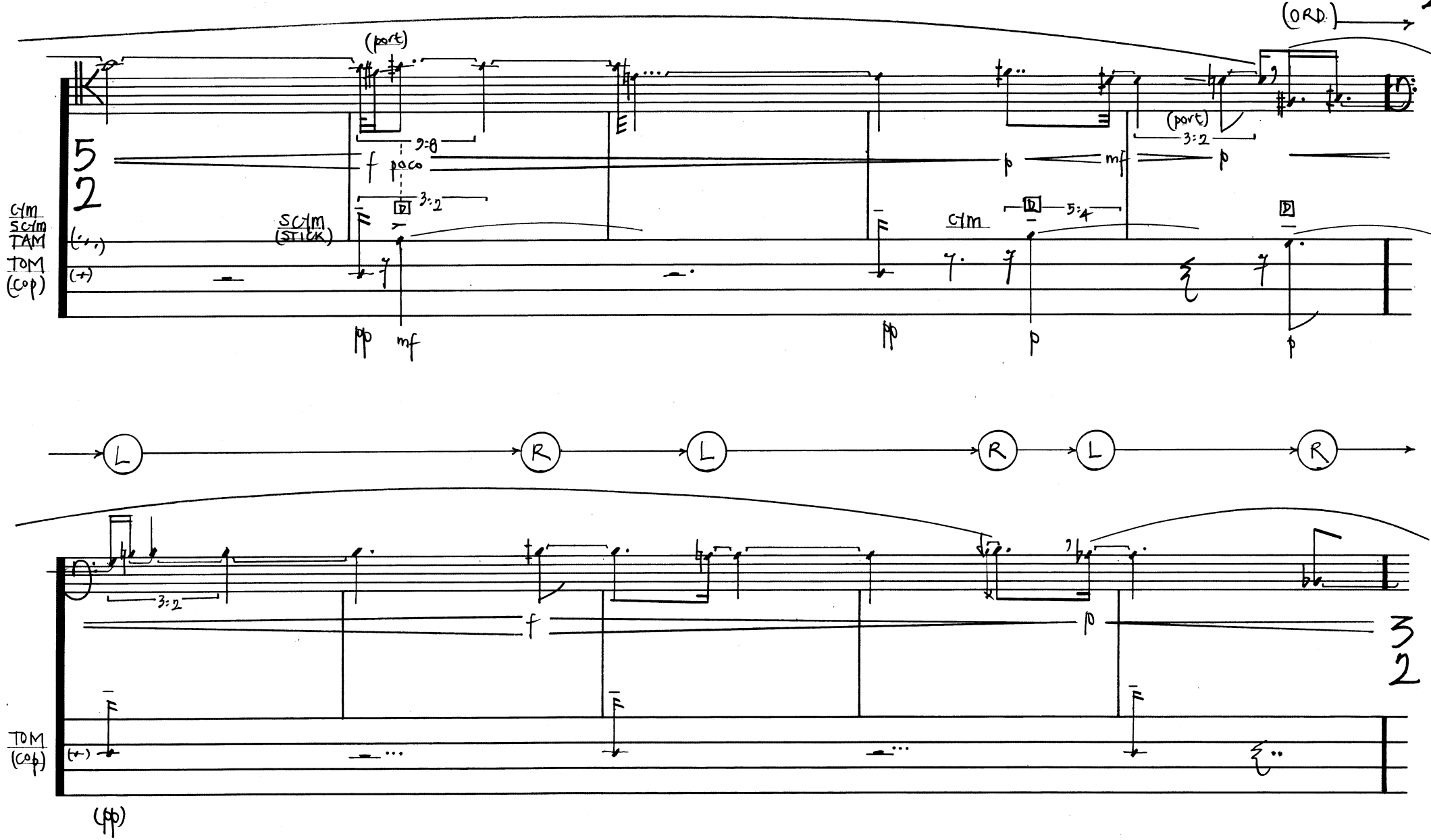

DIRECT BELL
= 72 INTO SNARE DRUM*
25
3:2
5:4
7:6
sfffz/ff
ffff
fff
ff
sfz
mfz
D
M
CYM
SCYM
WHIP
KBSS
(WBR)
5:6
(pp)
(fff)
KBSS
(STICK)
*IF AVAILABLE
26
111
11½
5:4
ppp
SD
7:8
3:2
sffz
f
pp
mf
pp/p

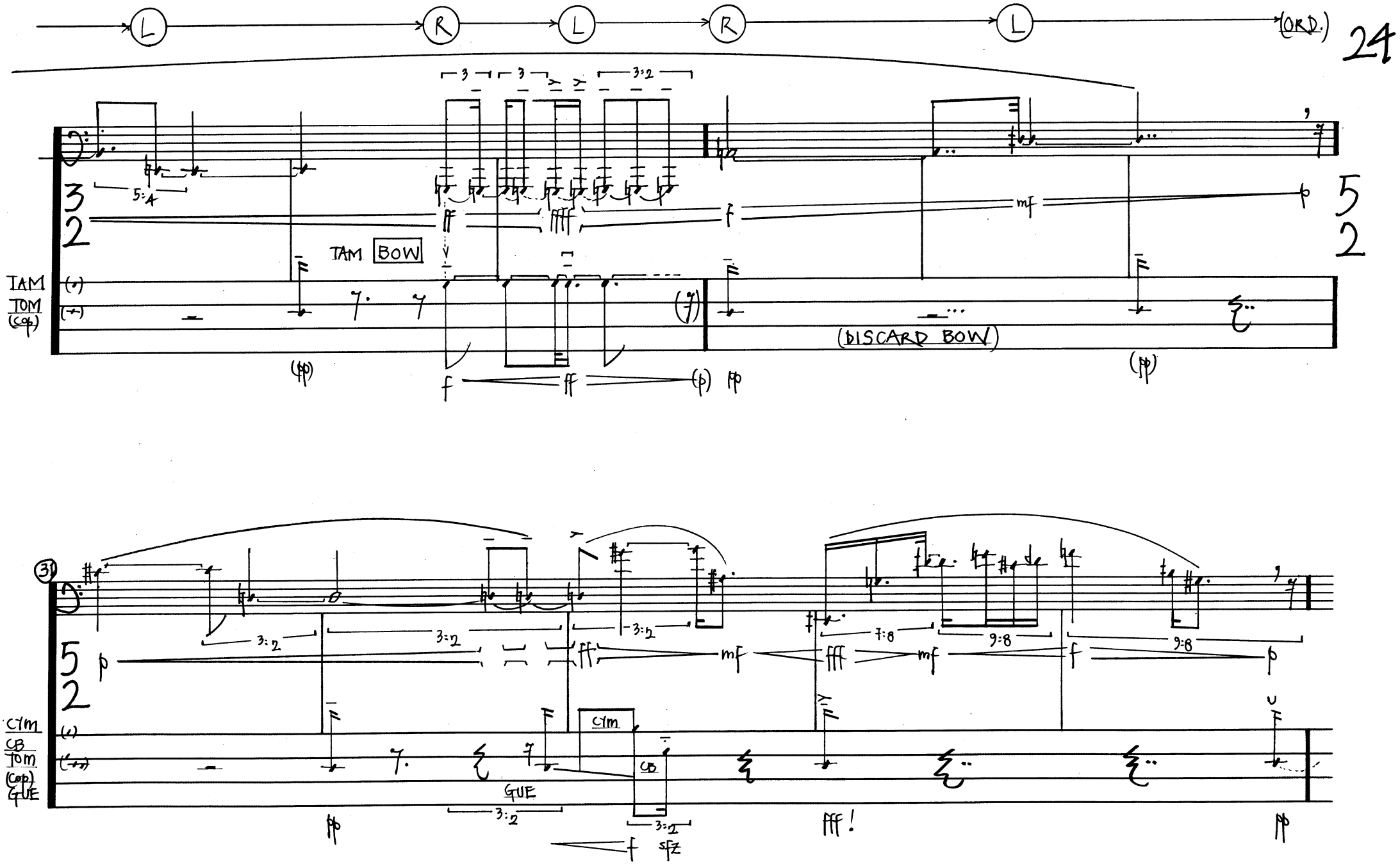

(BH)
27
5:4
3:2
3:2
9:8
5:4
5:4
6/4
CYM
SD
WHIP
SD
3:2
sfffz
mf
f
p/sffz
INTO RESONANT DRUM;*
OTHERWISE L → R [NOT BOTH]
♩ = 76
DIGNIFIEDLY
(BELL NORMAL)
I
II
III
IV
V
28
3:2
9:8
9:8
mfz
p
1
2
f poco
pp
5/2
(TAKE BOW ALSO)
CYM
TOM
WHIP
TOM
(BOTH STICKS)
COPERTO
(CLOTH ONTO TOMTOM SKIN: COPERTO)
pp
mf
*IF AVAILABLE

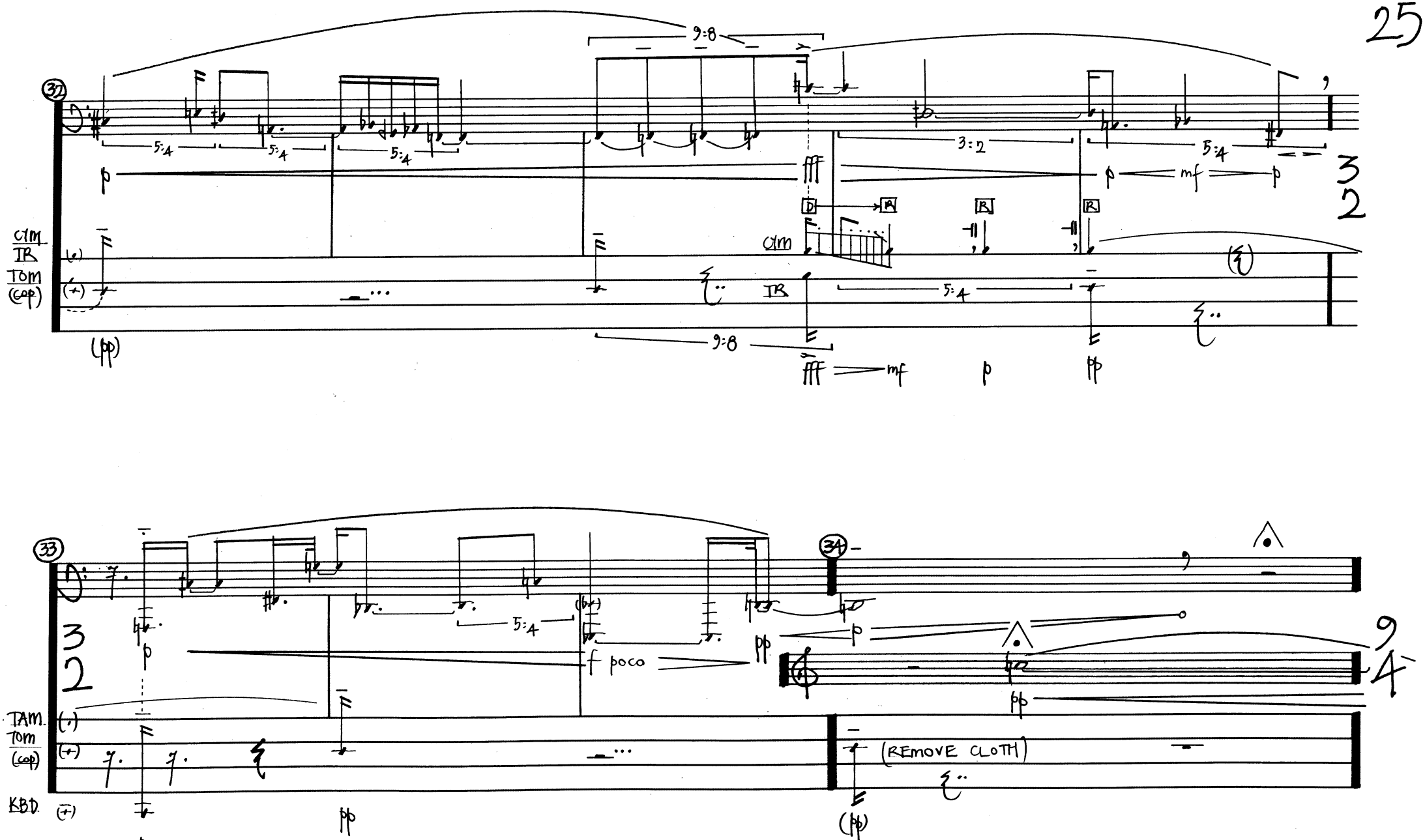

L
R
L
5
2
5:4
9:8
3:2
mf
pp (pp)
EMPTILY
(PESANTE, SEISMICALLY)
TAM
TOM
(COP)
TAM
BOW
(7)
3:2
3:2
pp
R
(ORD.)
3:2
5:4
pp
p
f
GM
TOM
(COP)
GM
BOW
(7.)
pp
pp
mf

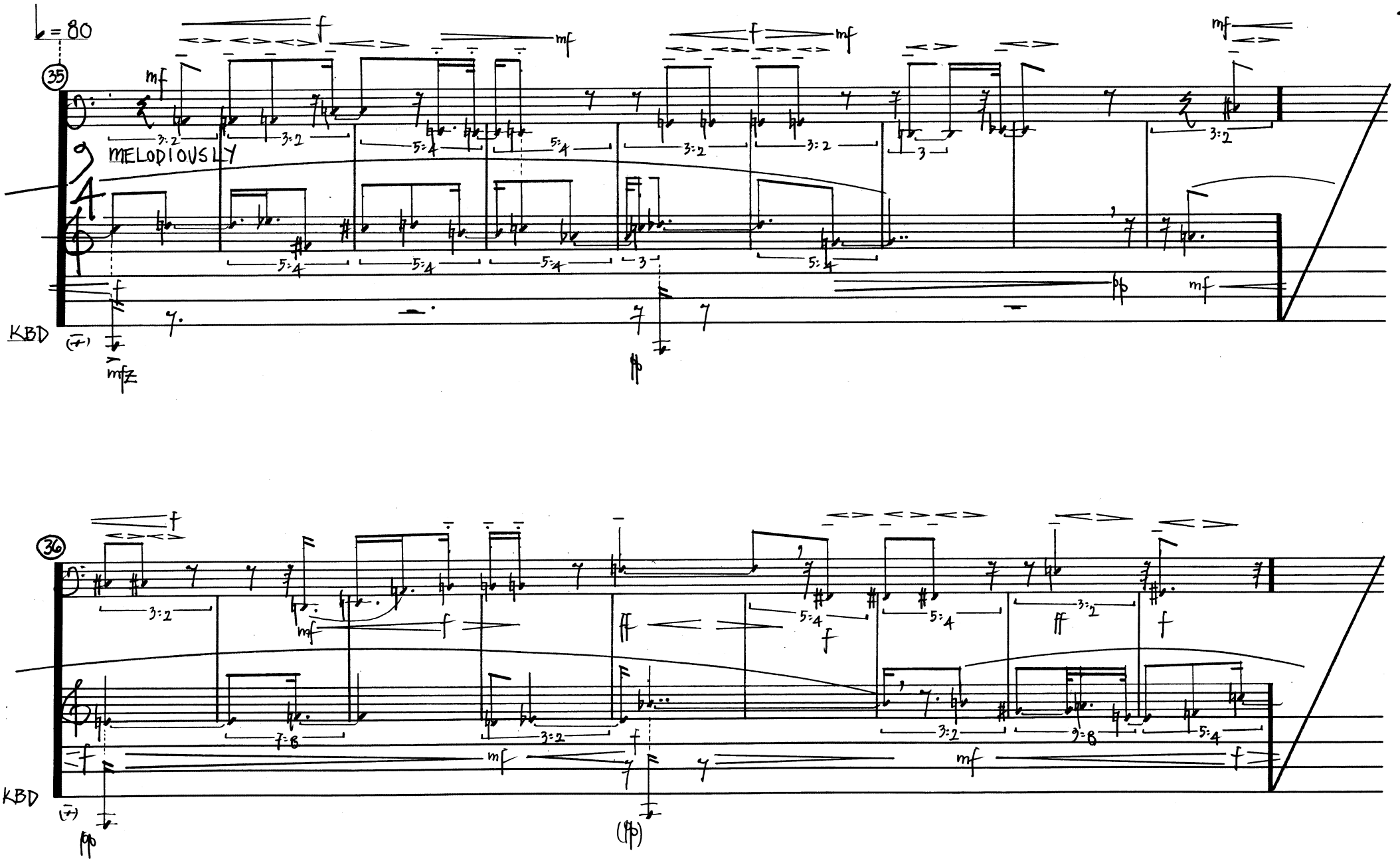

R
L
R
L
3:2
pp
pp
ffff
3
2
TAM
BOW
TAM
Tom
(cop)
pp
pp
ff
(ORD.)
3:2
3
2
pp
(pp)
29
7:8
1
2
ff
pp
5
2
SCYM
BOW
mf
SCYM
Tom
(cop)
KBD
pp
pp
KBD
pp
pp

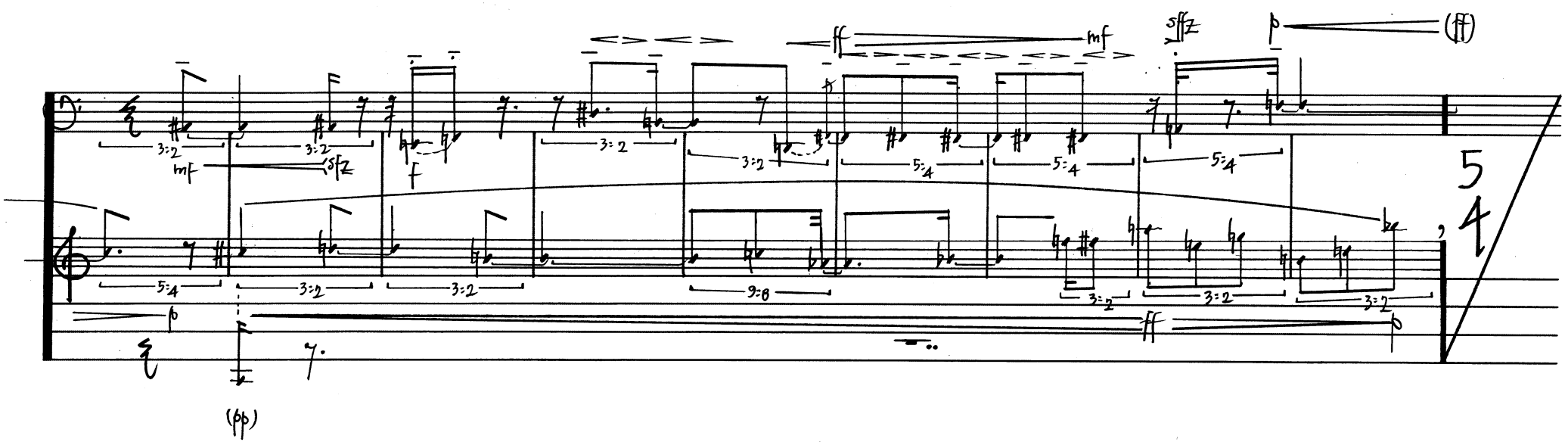

9:8
mf
p
ff
3
9:8
pp
CYM BOW
TAM BOW
(poco)
CYM
TOM (cop)
pp
3:2
f
pp
9:8
5:4
ff
30
3:2
pp
3:2
5:4
5:4
TOM (cop)
KBD
(pp)
(pp)
sfz
pp

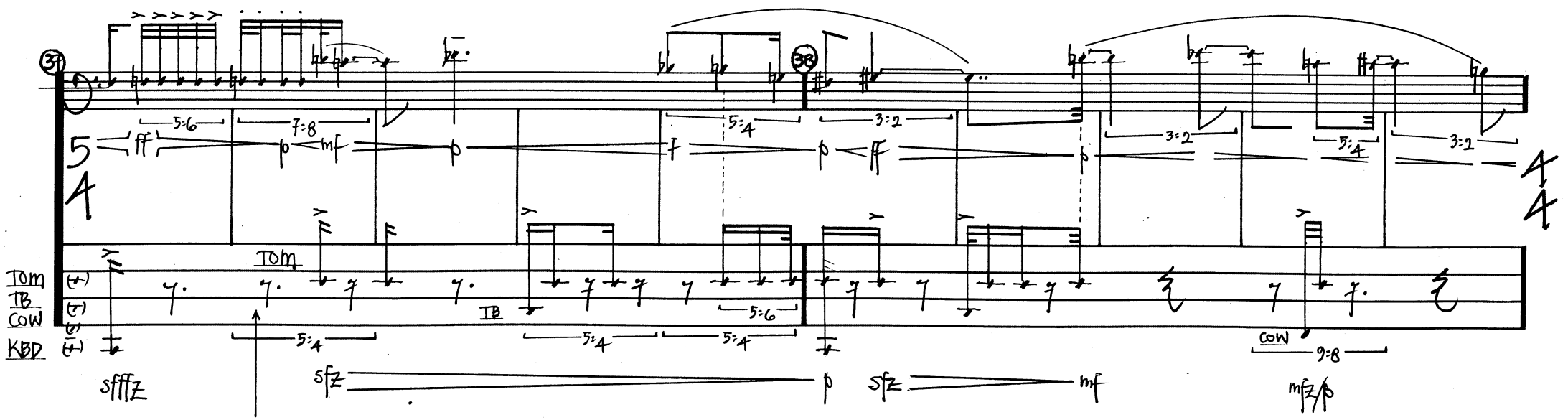

(ORD.)
(port)
(port)
5
2
9:8
f poco
3:2
p
mf
p
3:2
5:4
CYM
SCYM
TAM
TOM
(COP)
SCYM
(STICK)
CYM
pp
mf
pp
p
p
L
R
L
R
L
R
3:2
f
p
3
2
TOM
(COP)
(pp)


L
R
L
R
L
(ORD.)
TAM
TOM
(Cop)
TAM BOW
(DISCARD BOW)
31
CYM
CB
TOM
(Cop)
GUE
CYM
CB
GUE


32
9:8
5:4
5:4
5:4
3:2
5:4
p
fff
p
mf
p
3
2
D
R
R
R
CYM
TR
TOM
(cop)
CYM
TR
5:4
(pp)
9:8
fff
mf
p
pp
33
34
3
2
5:4
p
f poco
pp
p
pp
9
4
TAM.
TOM
(cop)
(REMOVE CLOTH)
KBD.
p
pp
(pp)

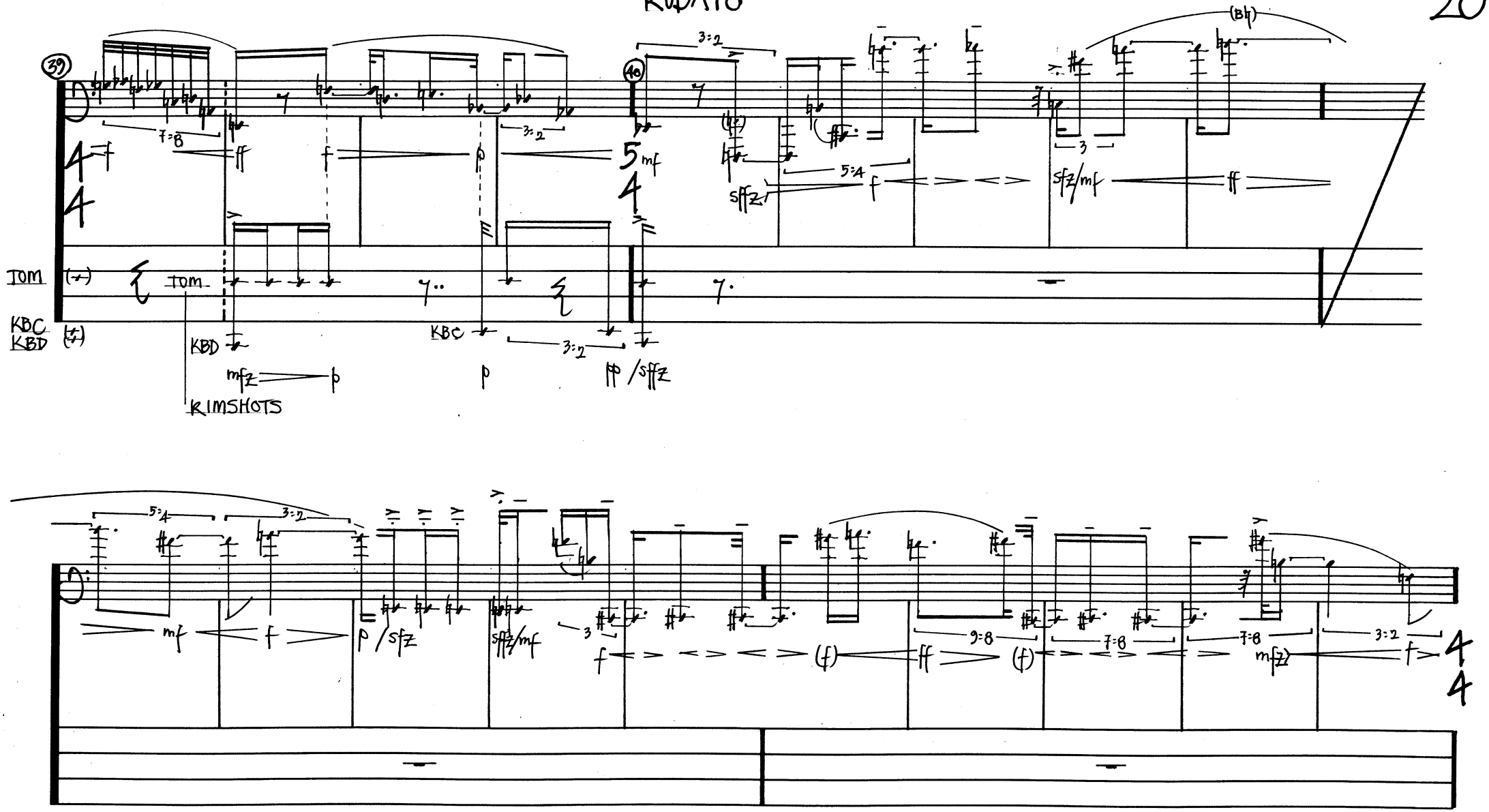

♩= 80
35
MELODIOUSLY
KBD
36
KBD



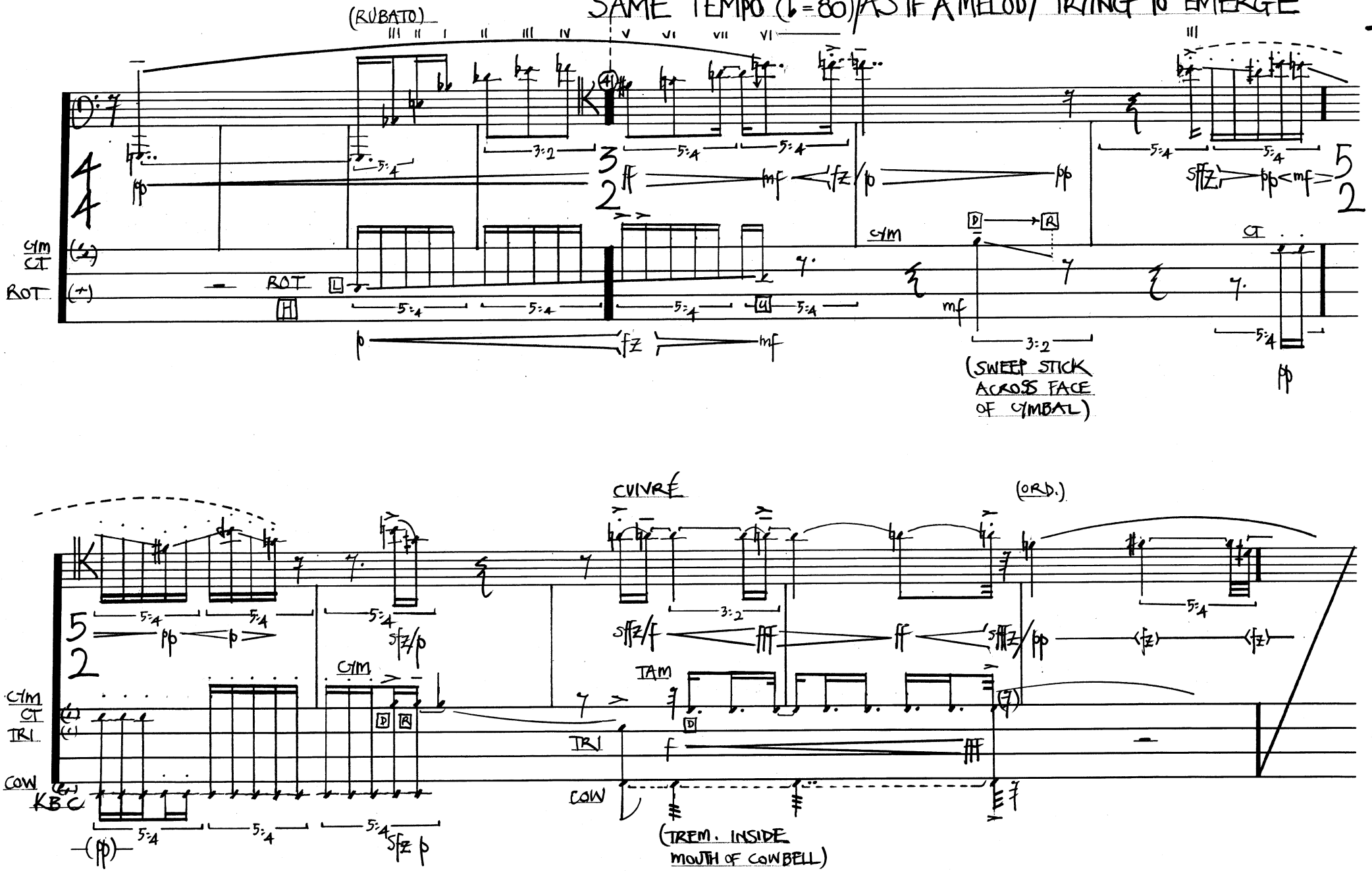


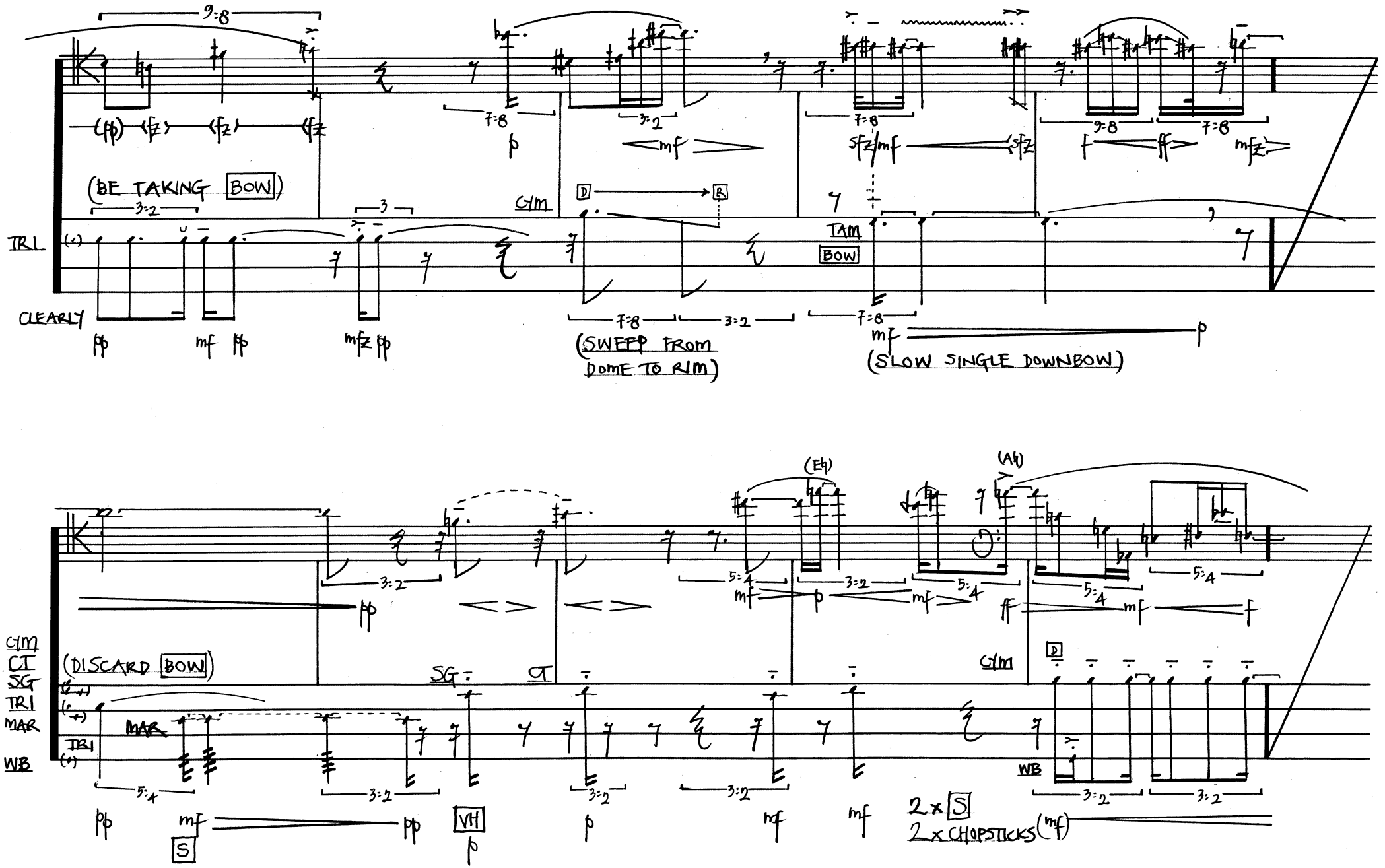
RIMSHOTS: LAY ONE STICK ACROSS RIM AND SKIN AND STRIKE IT WITH THE OTHER

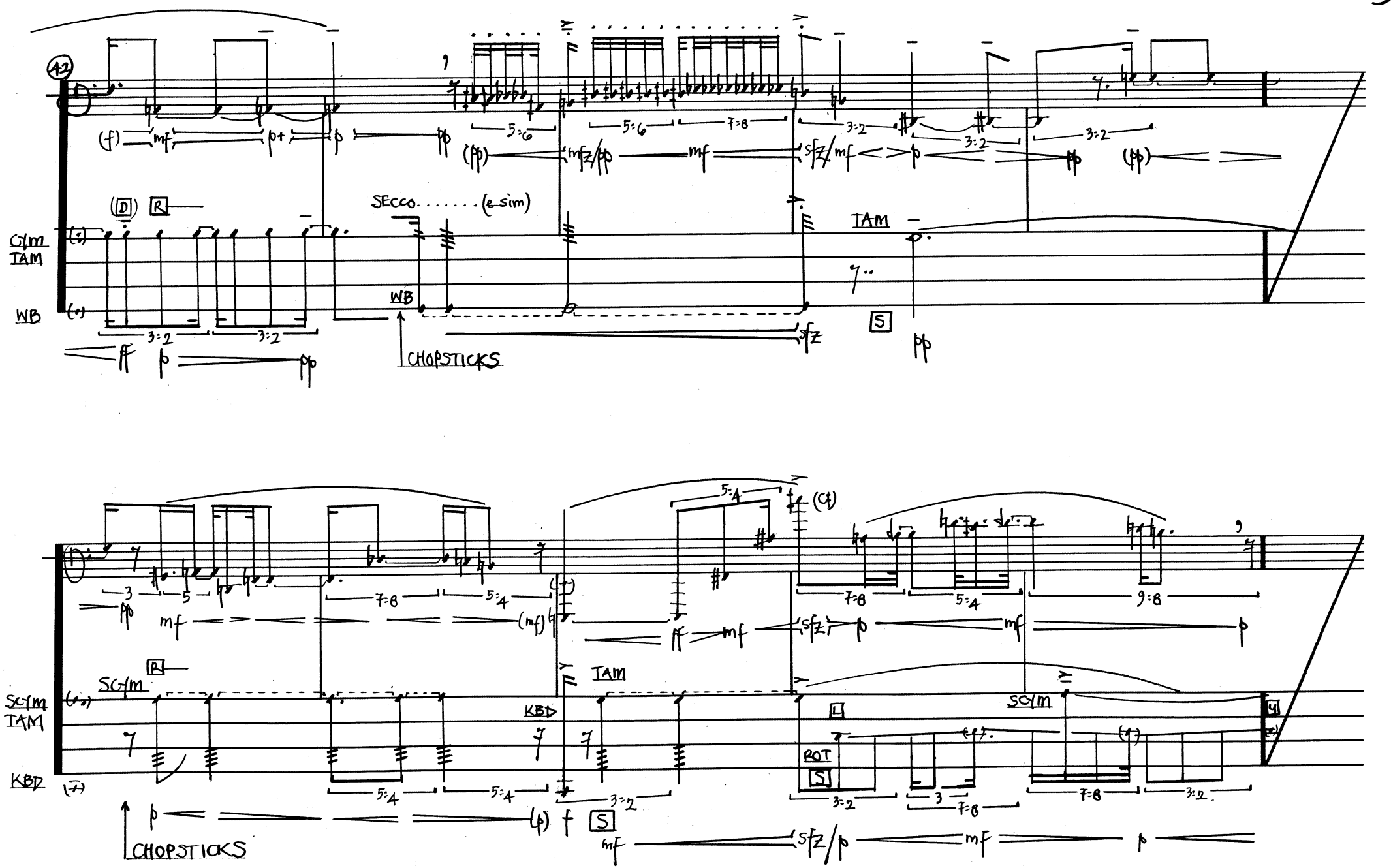
RUBATO

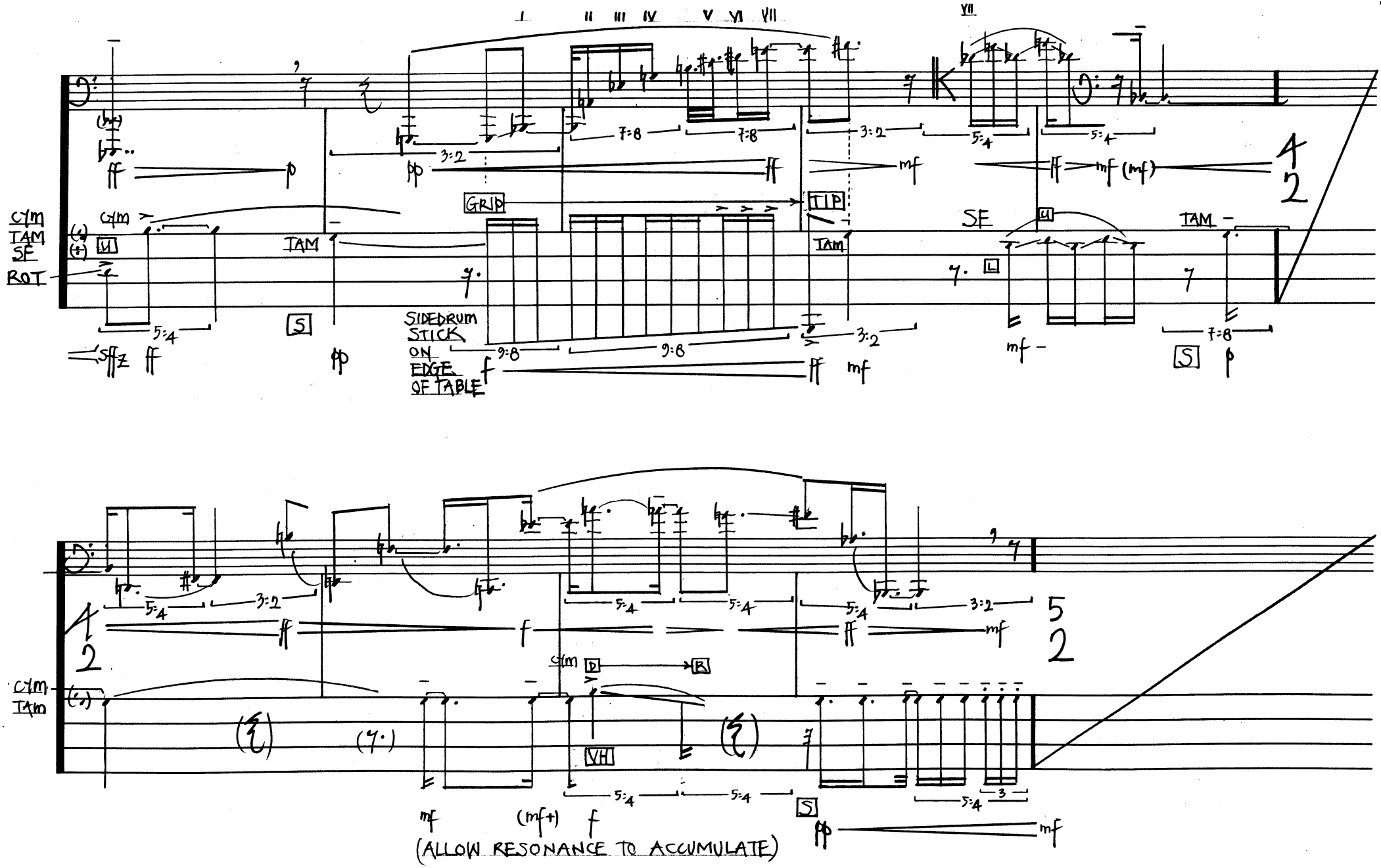


SAME TEMPO (♩=80) / AS IF A MELODY TRYING TO EMERGE

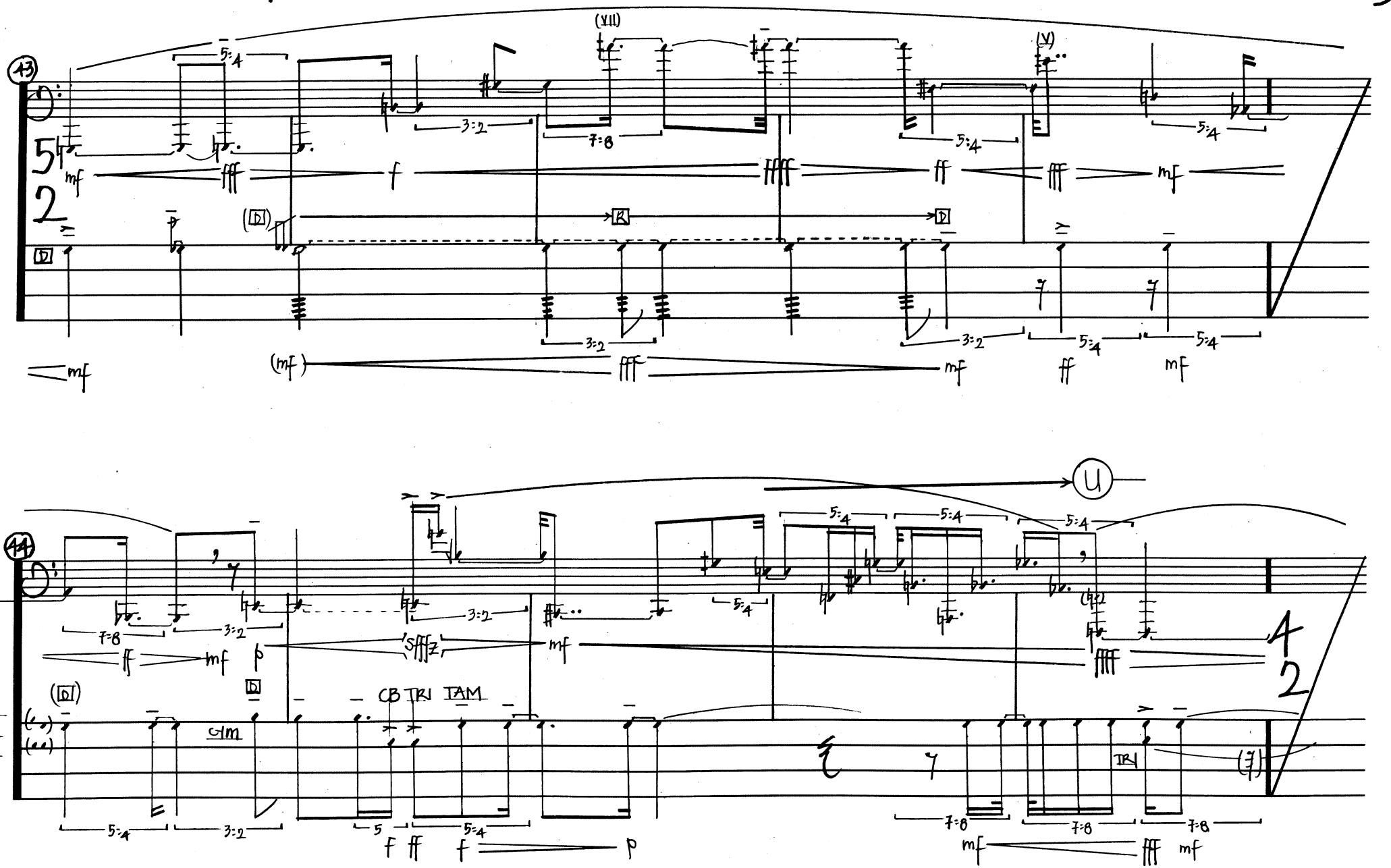


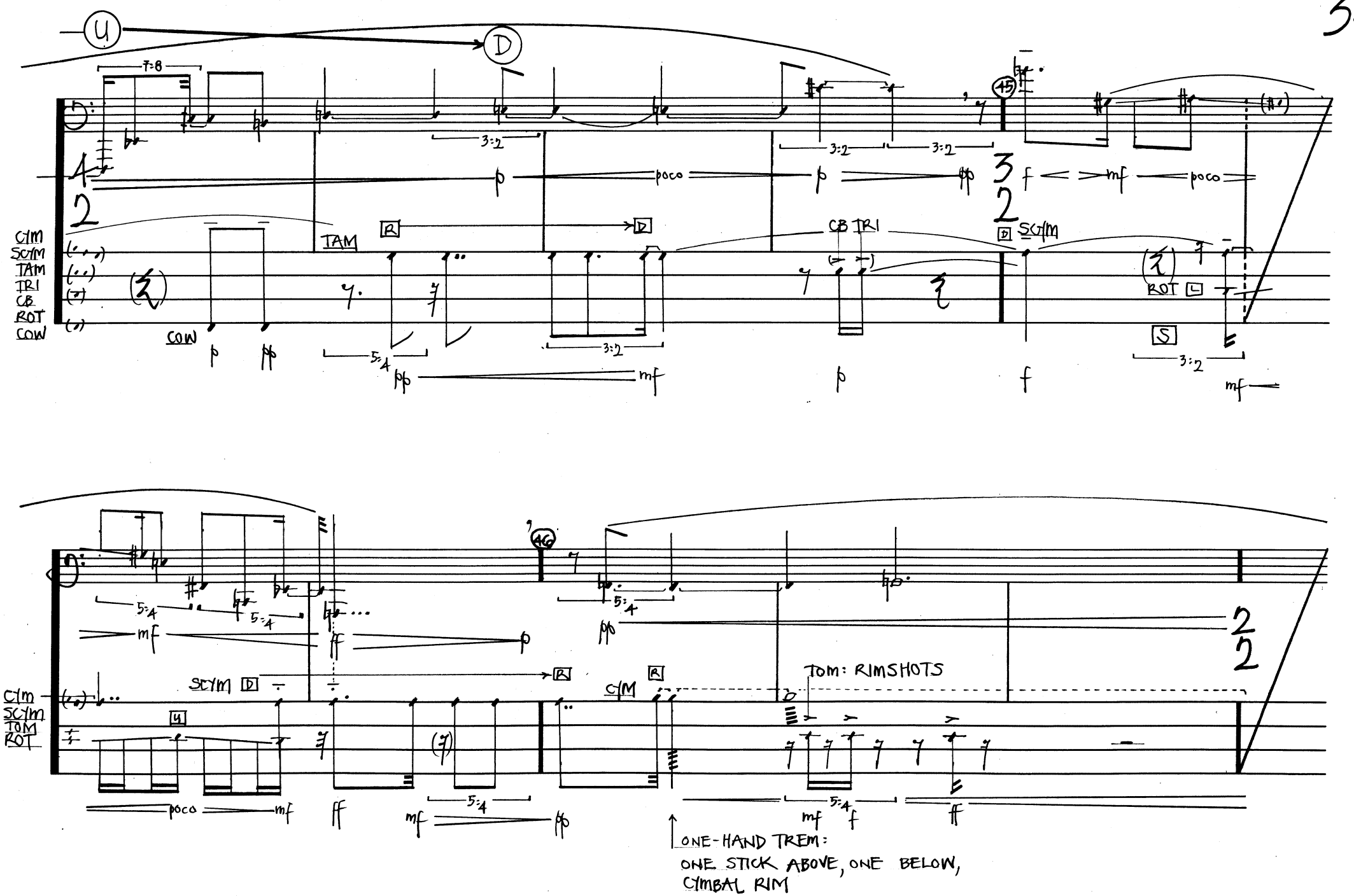

(BE TAKING BOW)
TRI
CLEARLY
CYM
TAM
BOW
(SWEEP FROM DOME TO RIM)
(SLOW SINGLE DOWNBOW)
(DISCARD BOW)
CYM
CT
SG
TRI
MAR
WB
VH
2 x S
2 x CHOPSTICKS

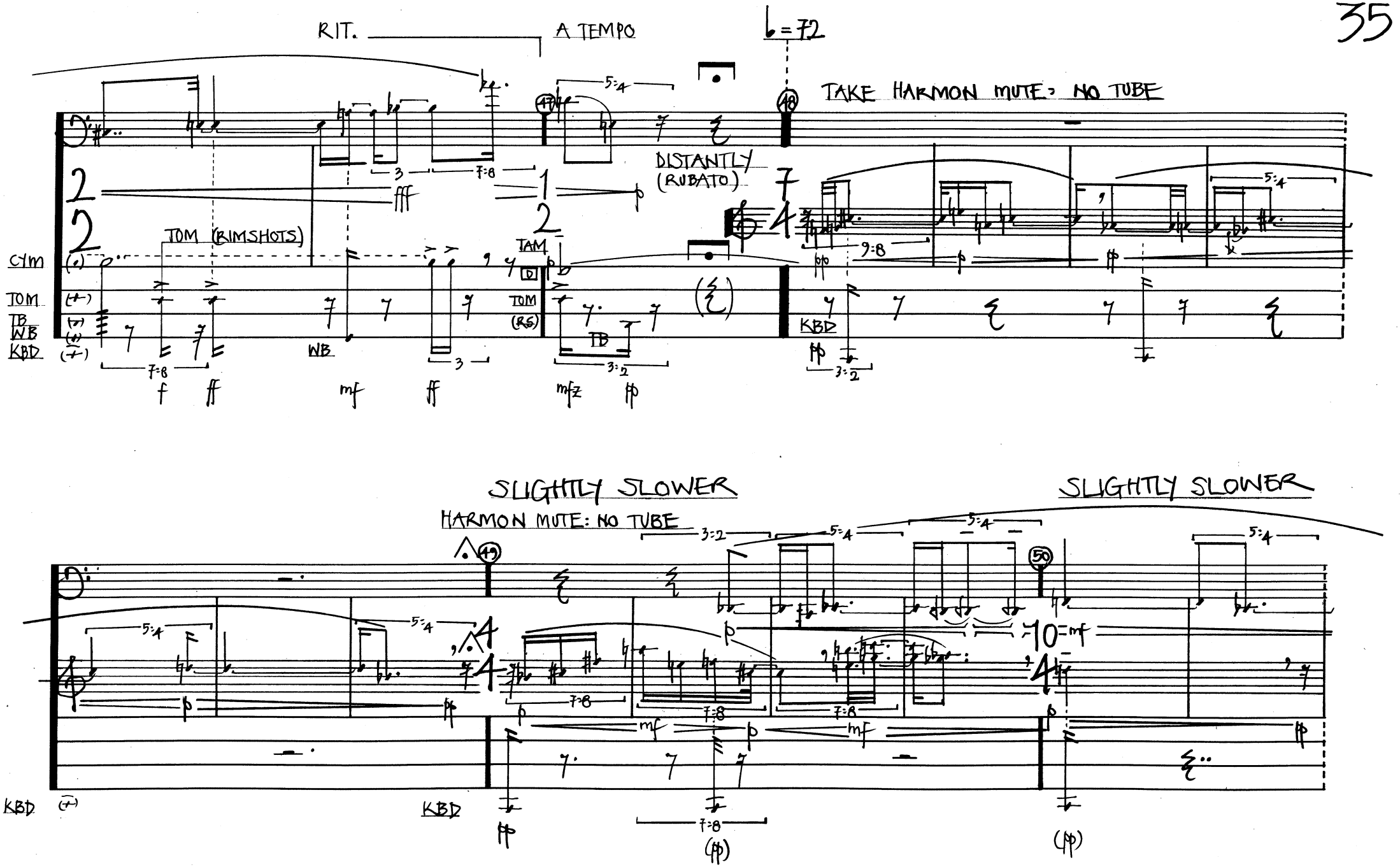

42
(f)
mf
p+
p
pp
5:6
5:6
7:8
3:2
3:2
3:2
(pp)
mfz/pp
mf
sfz/mf
p
pp
(pp)
(D)
R
SECCO.....(e sim)
TAM
Glm
TAM
WB
WB
3:2
3:2
ff
p
pp
CHOPSTICKS
sfz
S
pp
5:4
(ct)
3
5
7:8
5:4
7:8
5:4
9:8
pp
mf
(mf)
ff
mf
sfz
p
mf
p
R
SCIm
TAM
KBD
SCIm
TAM
KBD
5:4
5:4
3:2
L
ROT
S
SCIm
3:2
3
7:8
7:8
3:2
p
CHOPSTICKS
(p)
f
S
mf
sfz/p
mf
p


I II III IV V VI VII
VII
cym
TAM
SF
BOT
GRID
TIP
SF
TAM
SIDEDRUM STICK ON EDGE OF TABLE
(ALLOW RESONANCE TO ACCUMULATE)

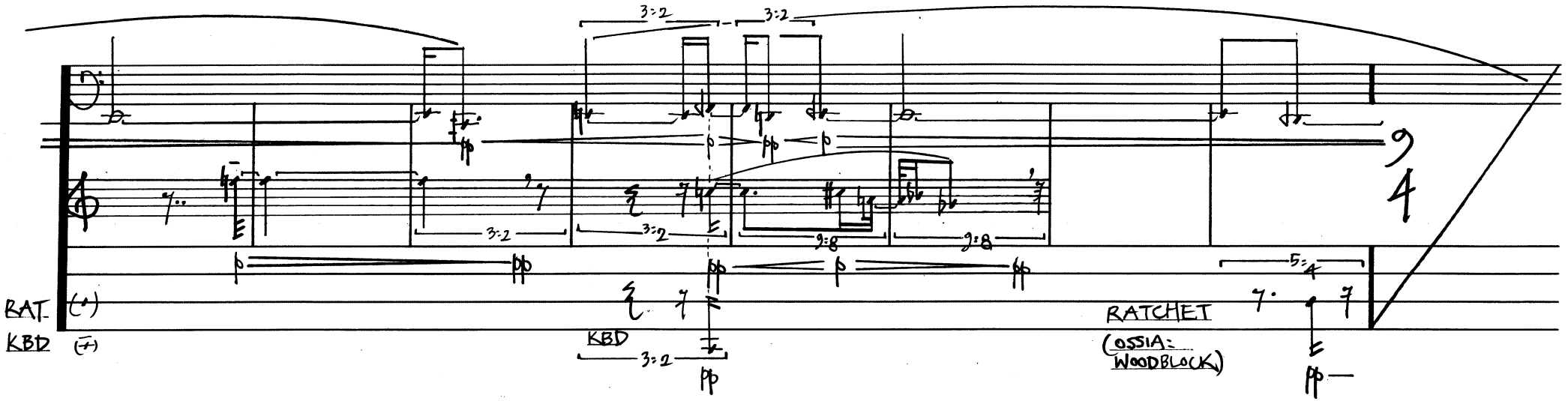
HYPERBOLICALLY CANTABILE



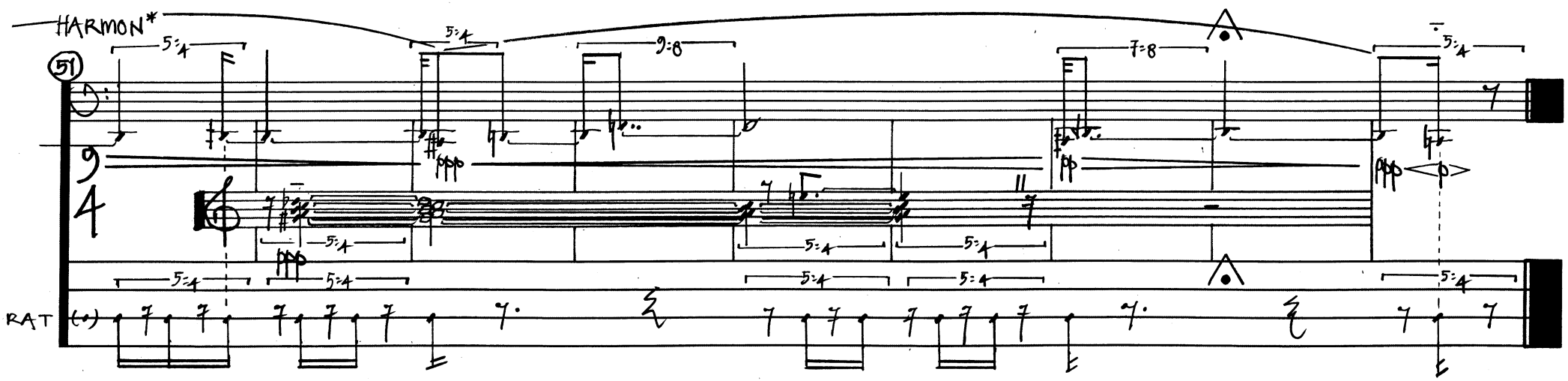

U
D
7:8
3:2
45
poco
TAM
CB TRI
SCYM
ROT
CYM
SCYM
TAM
TRI
CB
ROT
COW
5:4
46
TOM: RIMSHOTS
CYM
SCYM
TOM
ROT
ONE-HAND TREM:
ONE STICK ABOVE, ONE BELOW,
CYMBAL RIM


RIT.
A TEMPO
♩= 72
TAKE HARMON MUTE: NO TUBE
DISTANTLY
(RUBATO)
TOM (RIMSHOTS)
TAM
CYM
TOM
TB
WB
KBD
SLIGHTLY SLOWER
HARMON MUTE: NO TUBE
SLIGHTLY SLOWER

HARMON*



SLIGHTLY SLOWER



*NO TUBE

BLACK HILL STUDIO
MARCH — JULY 2021