Alex Stephenson

CHAMBER CONCERTO

(2022)

for nine players and electronics

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

Score
2024.11.29.1

Dedicated with warmest gratitude to all my friends, colleagues, and mentors at UC San Diego

First performed by Michael Jones, Rebecca Lloyd-Jones, Shaoai Ashley Zhang, Kyle Adam Blair, Ilana Waniuk, Pauline Ng, Alex Taylor, Peter Ko, and Matthew Kline
Steven Schick, conductor
Conrad Prebys Concert Hall, UC San Diego, La Jolla, California
May 31, 2022

DURATION: 20 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION

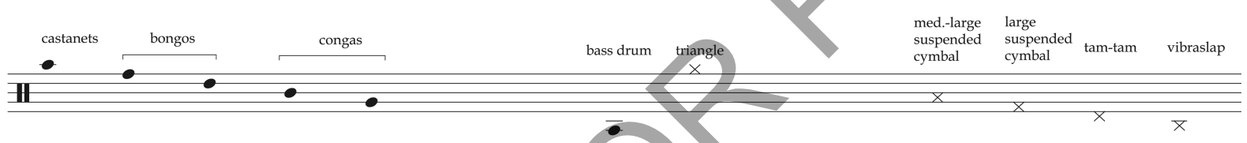
Percussion (2 players; see requirements below)

Piano (doubling Keyboard)
Keyboard

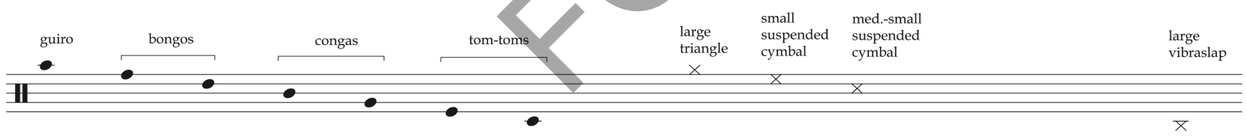
2 Violins
Viola
Violoncello
Double Bass (with low C extension)

PERCUSSION REQUIREMENTS

Player 1: Vibraphone, Crotales (both octaves), and the following non-pitched instruments:



Player 2: Vibraphone and the following non-pitched instruments:



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PERFORMANCE NOTES

Accidentals remain in effect for the remainder of the measure. Qualifying accidentals have been added in some passages for ease of reading.

Percussion

S = Scrape with a triangle beater. The instruction remains in effect only for the note to which the symbol is applied.

Keyboards

In both the score and parts, keyboards are always notated *as played*. In some passages, certain pitches will sound microtonally higher or lower than played. Descriptions of the cues in the score and parts indicate when the keyboards are dynamically retuned in this way.

Strings

s.p. Sul ponticello.

s.t. Sul tasto.

. . . . . Jèté. Please let the bow bounce freely and naturally. It is not necessary to aim for a precise number of bow bounces.

From m. 326 (rehearsal C1) to m. 381 (rehearsal H1), the strings should tune to the just intervals heard in the sine tones produced by the keyboards. To provide players with an approximate reference point, the string parts show approximations of these intervals to the nearest twelfth-tone, or about 16 cents. **N.B.** This twelfth-tone notation is intended for orientation purposes only. Players do not need to reproduce these tempered microtonal intervals precisely. They should instead tune according to the sine tones.

↑ approximately 1/6 tone higher (+ approx. 33 cents).

↗ approximately 1/12 tone higher (+ approx. 16 cents).

↘ approximately 1/12 tone lower (– approx. 16 cents).

↓ approximately 1/6 tone lower (– approx. 33 cents).

Electronics

Digital elements of this piece are controlled via a computer running a Max 8 patch and Pianoteq software. The Max 8 patch is available from the composer. Cues for the patch are advanced by playing the highest key on the keyboards, as described in the score and parts. Each keyboard should be equipped with a dedicated speaker placed close to the instrument onstage. Additionally, some cues trigger sound files to be diffused throughout the performance space, instead of through the dedicated keyboard speakers. Ideally, there should be a surround sound array of speakers in the performance space for this purpose. At the premiere performance, six speakers (front L&R, side L&R, rear L&R) were used. Versions of the sound files for four speakers (front L&R, rear L&R) are also available. If surround sound is not possible, stereo versions of the files are also available.

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TO CONTACT THE COMPOSER
alex@alexstephenson.com

PROGRAM NOTE

Chamber Concerto is a celebration of instruments and the musicians who play them. Although a certain emphasis is placed on the synthesizers of the ensemble—with their ever-shifting tuning and timbral identities often articulating the work's form—this is not only a synthesizer concerto: ultimately, everyone has their say and comes to the fore as soloist. And, at the apex of the piece, the paradigm of soloist-versus-tutti is set aside altogether: here, the entire ensemble metaphorically breathes together, as if a single organism.

After having made a series of intensely focused, inward-facing works amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, I see *Chamber Concerto* as a more gregarious type of piece that celebrates the multiplicity of its materials. Aspects of some of my earlier works make appearances here, sometimes in direct quotation, sometimes in more abstract ways.

Chamber Concerto unfolds in a single, continuous movement. Many may wish simply to listen and form their own impressions, but for those interested in a "guided tour" of the form, a rough outline follows:

1. A rhapsodic, microtonal synthesizer solo is joined by an atmospheric ensemble accompaniment. Gentle clouds of spatial audio briefly encircle the audience. The tempo quickens into a quasi-waltz, leading to…

2. A B-flat-minor outburst on the piano—an apparition of Rachmaninoff? Almost as soon as it appears, the music is again microtonally inflected by the synthesizer and winds its way back to the opening texture. Suddenly…

3. A brisk, playful toccata begins. Wooden and skin percussion instruments feature prominently, as do synthesized harpsichord and harp timbres. The toccata eventually topples into…

4. Another fast section, this one more impassioned in character. A hyper-expressive line is passed between the cello and viola, winding its way down in register while being interrupted by fast, aggressive gestures.

5. The ensemble eventually settles into a calmer mode. Spatial audio returns, as does the Rachmaninoff-esque material, now sounding like a faded memory. Up to this point in the piece, the cello's lowest string (typically a C) has been tuned down to B-flat. This fact is now overtly revealed in a series of gently pulsing B-flat overtone chords. The "apotheosis" of the B-flat string having now been reached, the music progresses to…

6. A dreamlike "tuning interlude." The ensemble and audience are constantly enveloped by spatialized sound as the cellist tunes the B-flat string back up to C. Immediately following this interlude…

7. The ensemble plays a long, calm meditation on falling perfect fifths. The synthesizers (now generating sine tones) and strings tune harmonies in just intonation. Bowed vibraphones continually outline the fifths cycle. A simple yet expressive viola solo grows out of the texture. Suddenly…

8. The music snaps out of its dream: the fast toccata material returns. After being the sole focus of attention for an extended passage, the toccata becomes something of a formal "hub," enabling several other ideas from earlier in the piece to be revisited as well. The work concludes in a manner both playful and reflective.

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Score

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Chamber Concerto

Alex Stephenson (2022)

Slow, flexible, mysterious (♩=48)

Percussion 1
Vibraphone: motor off sempre
Suspended Cymbals
wire brushes
l.v.
f
long – ca. 6"
shorter – ca. 4"
Crotales
arco
very long
ca. 8", do not wait for soundfile to fade completely
l.v.
p
Suspended Cymbals
mallets
l.v.
mp *pp*

Percussion 2
Vibraphone: motor off sempre
Suspended Cymbals
(mallets)
l.v.
mp *pp*
S l.v.
mp
S l.v.
Vibraphone
p
Suspended Cymbals
wire brushes
l.v.
f

Piano (doubling Keyboard 1)
Piano
p

KEYBOARD: Throughout the piece, the highest key of the keyboard (C8) is silent and should be used to advance cues at the moments specified on the cue staff. A brief description of the effect of each cue is also given.

Keyboard Cues
1 modified piano timbre
within this cue, the six lowest keys of the keyboard (A0–D1) are also silent; these keys are notated with diamond noteheads and, when played, dynamically adjust the keyboard's tuning
2 play soundfile (cc-sf004.wav)
(A0–D1 continue to retune keyboard)

Keyboard 2
SOLO
f *rhapsodic*
p *f* *p* *f* *mf* *p* *f*

Violin 1
I
pp

Violin 2
s.t., senza vib.
pp

Viola
s.t., senza vib.
pp
ord., con vib.
mf

CELLO: Tune IV to B♭ prior to start of piece

Violoncello
p
legato sempre

Double Bass
II
legato sempre
p

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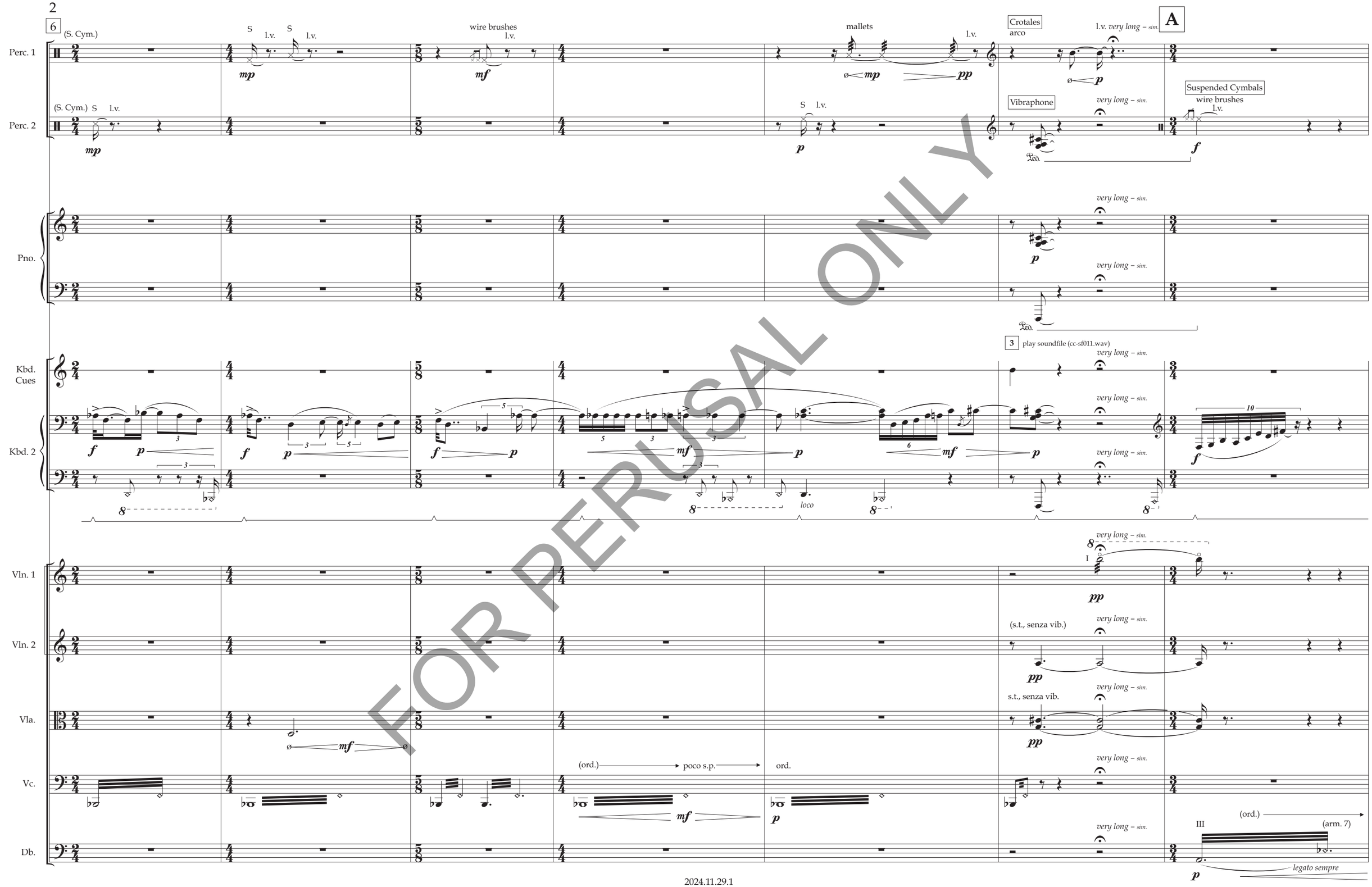

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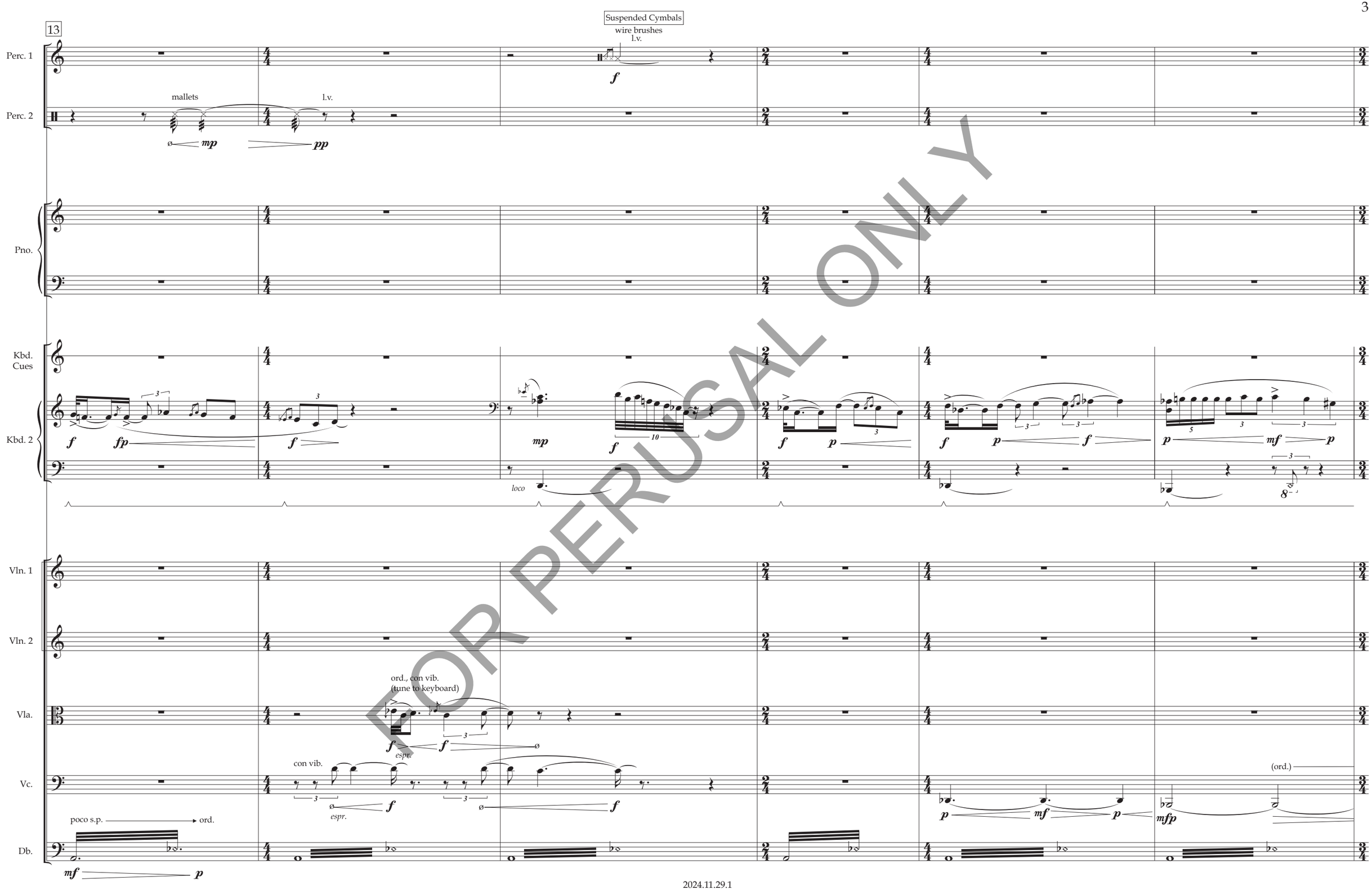

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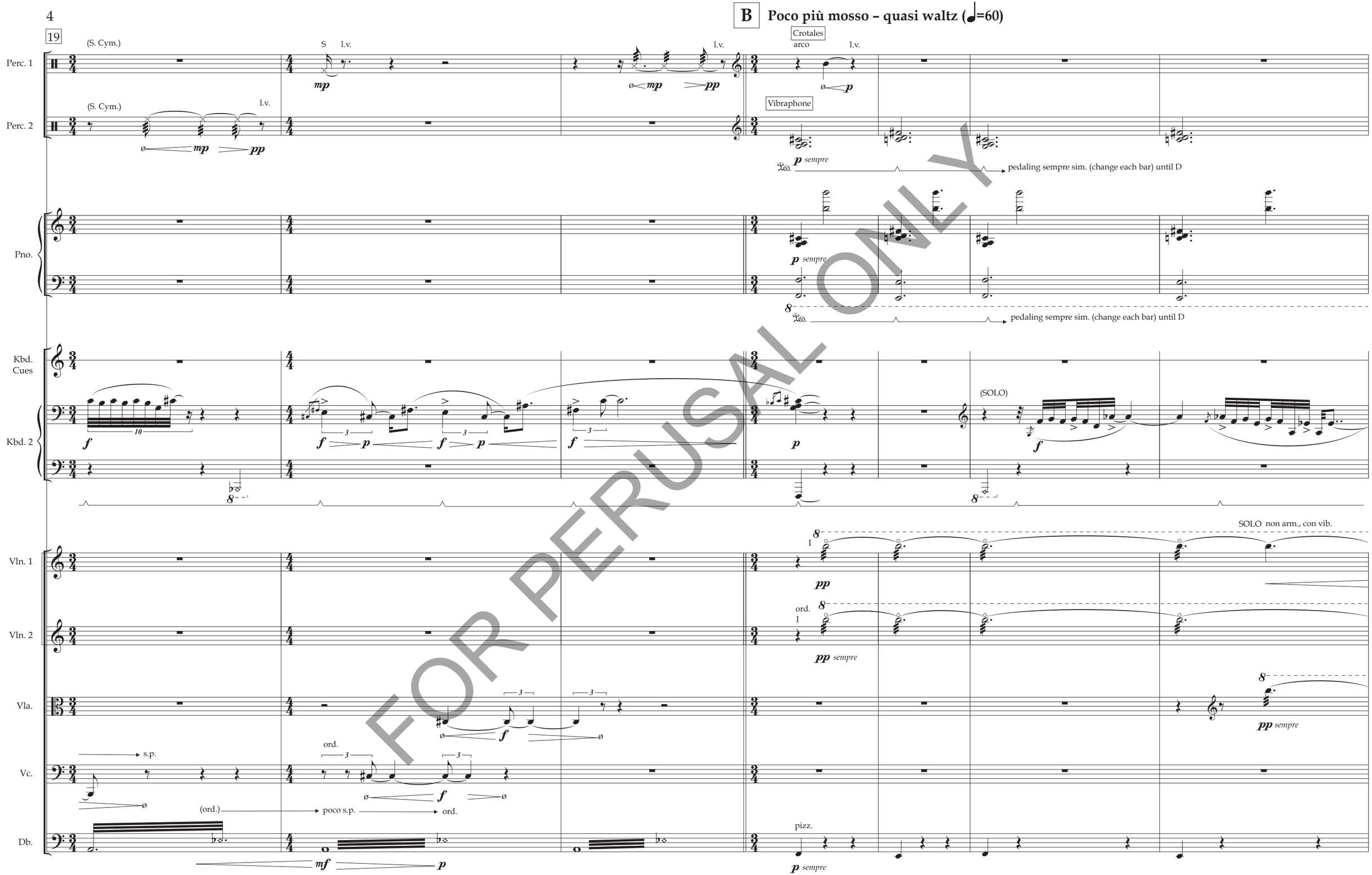

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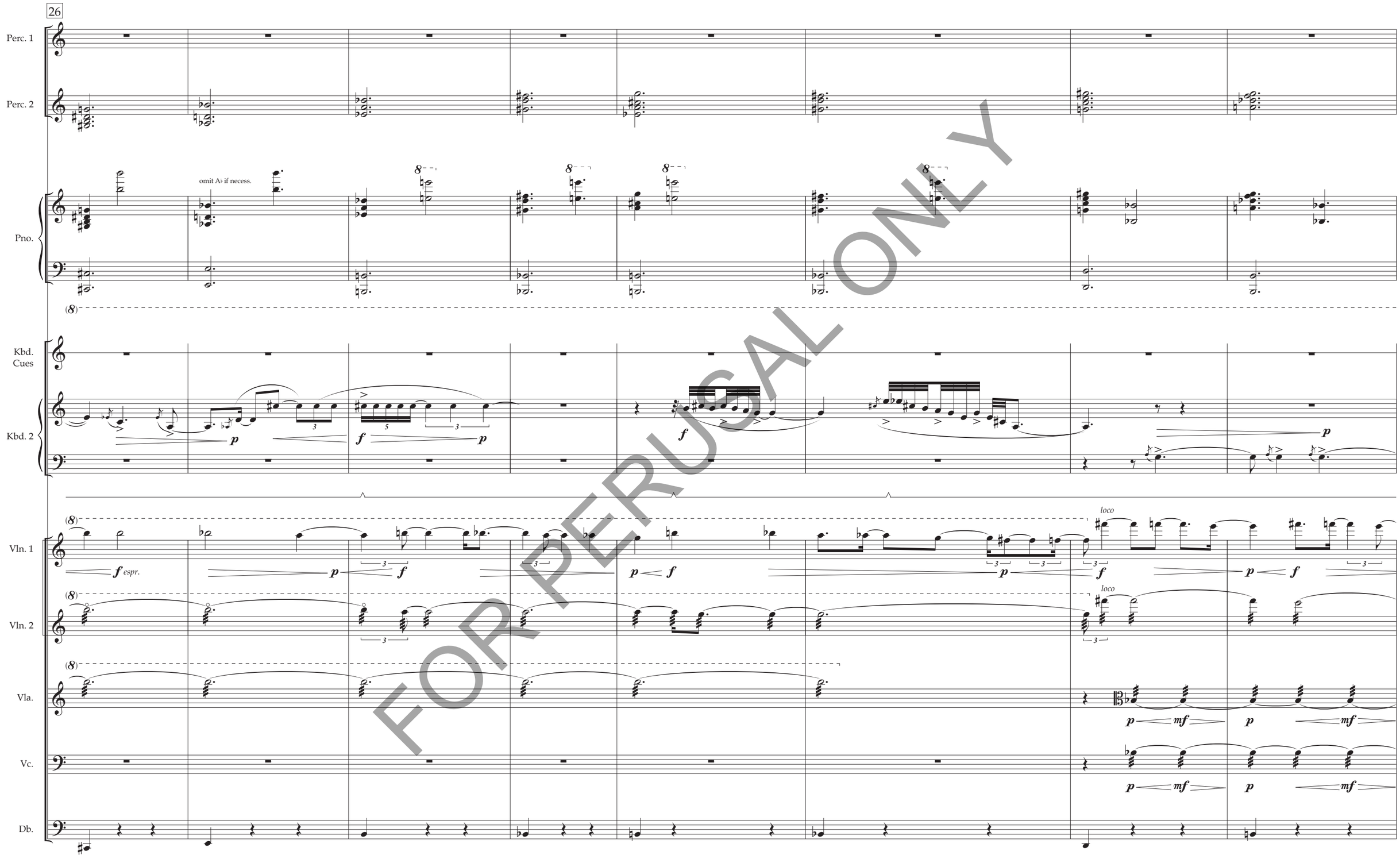

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

34

C

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

(Vibes)

Pno.

omit G if necess.

omit B if necess.

(8)

Kbd. Cues

Kbd. 2

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

sempre

arco
con vib.

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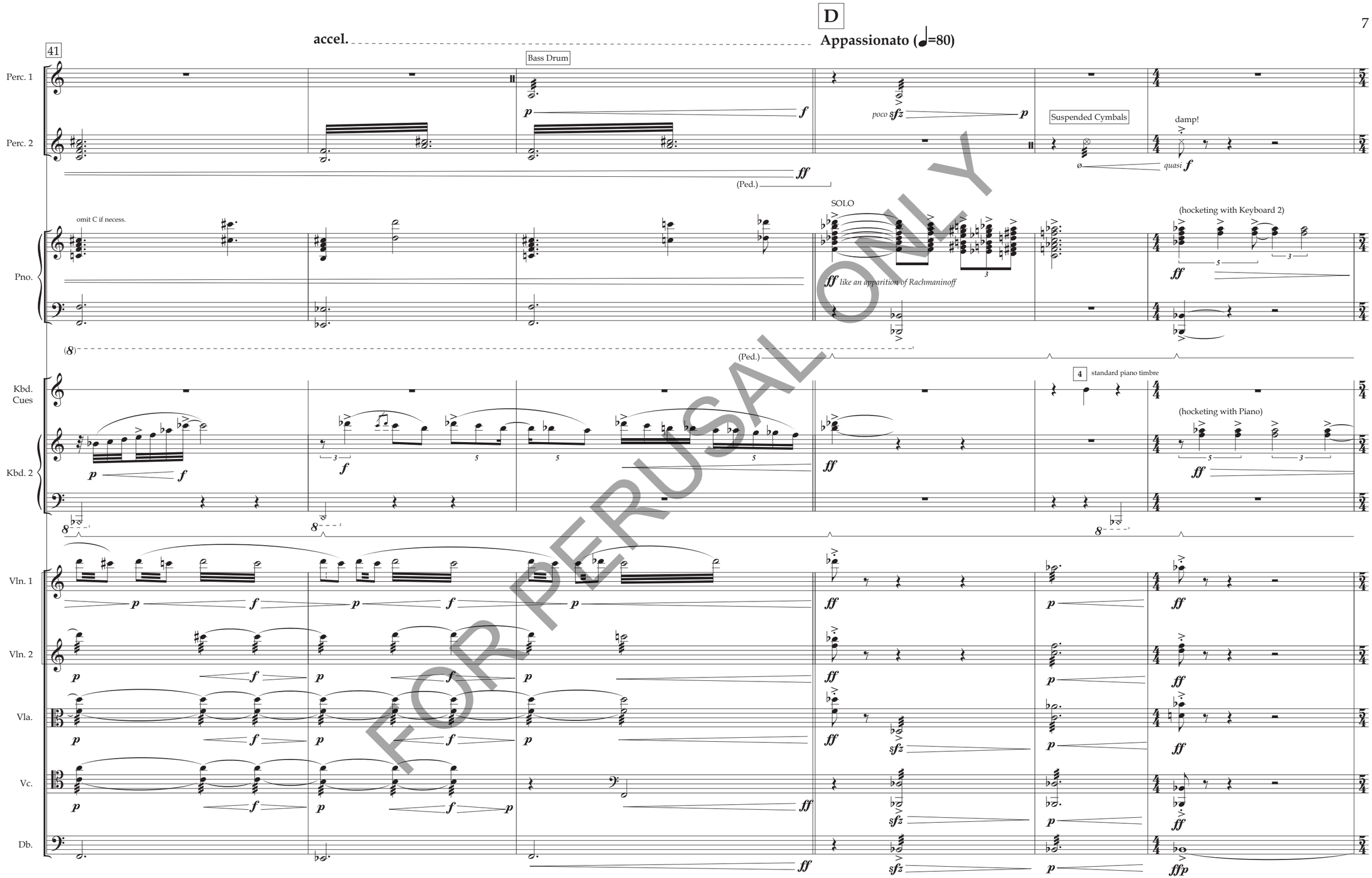

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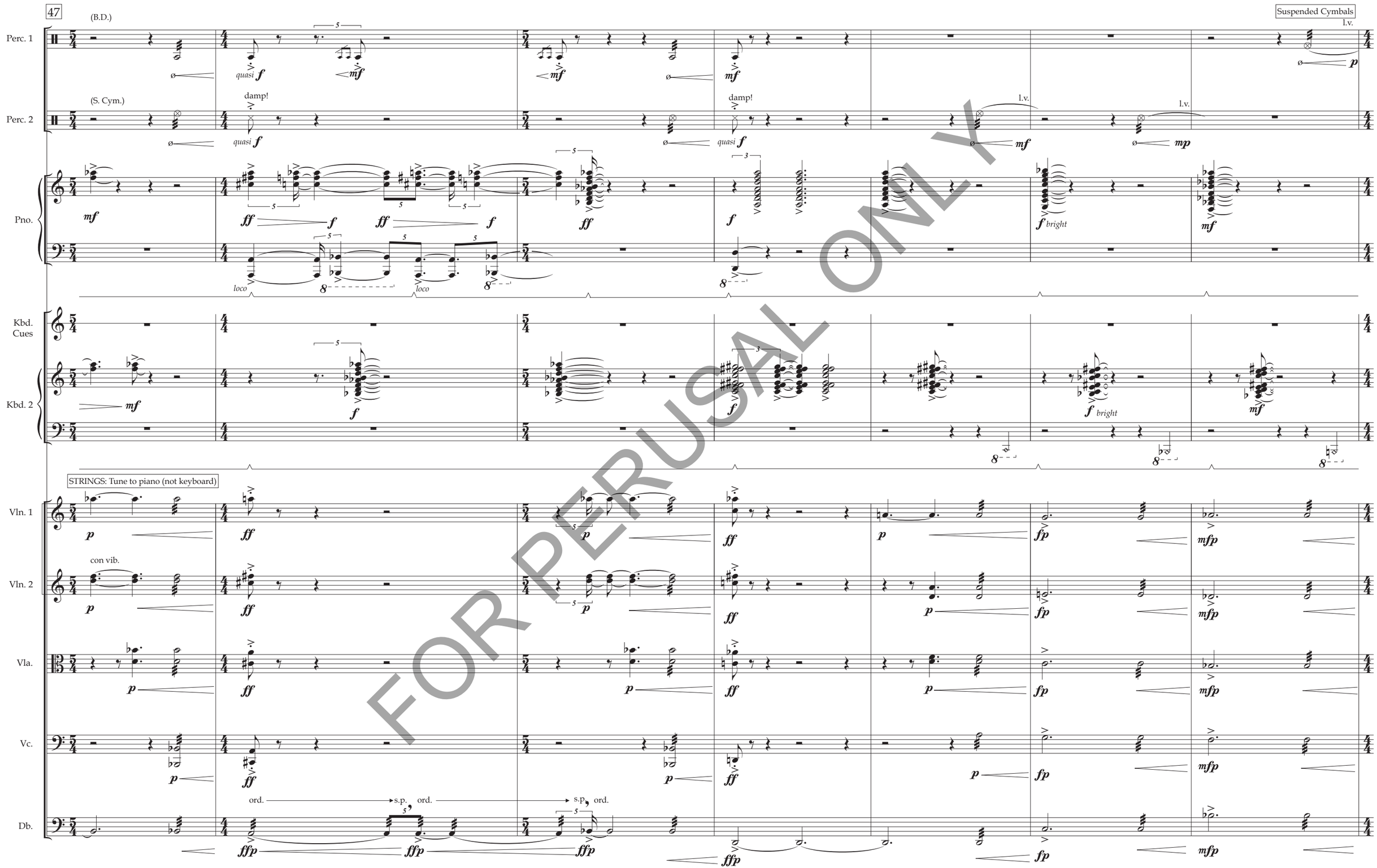

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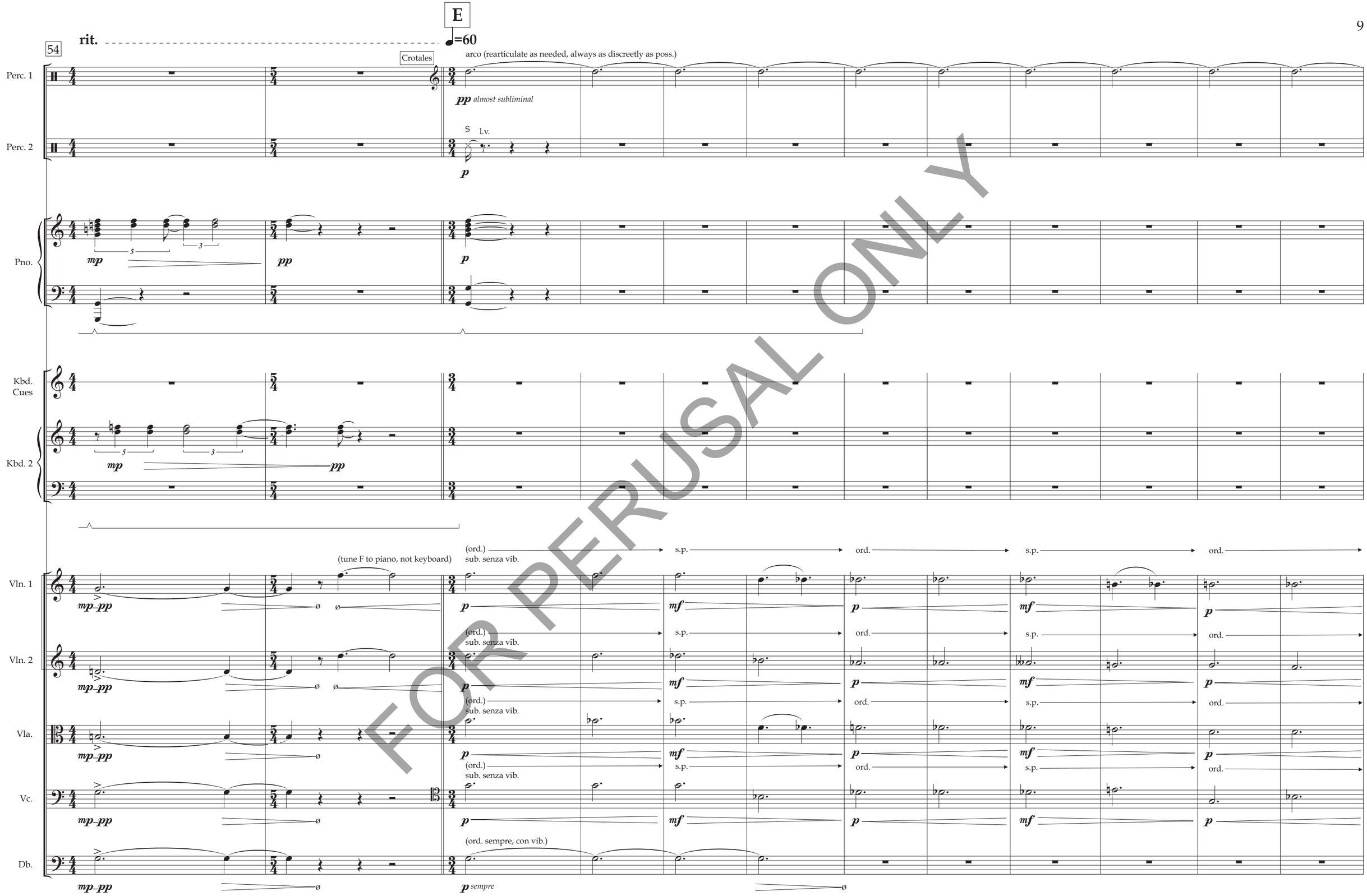

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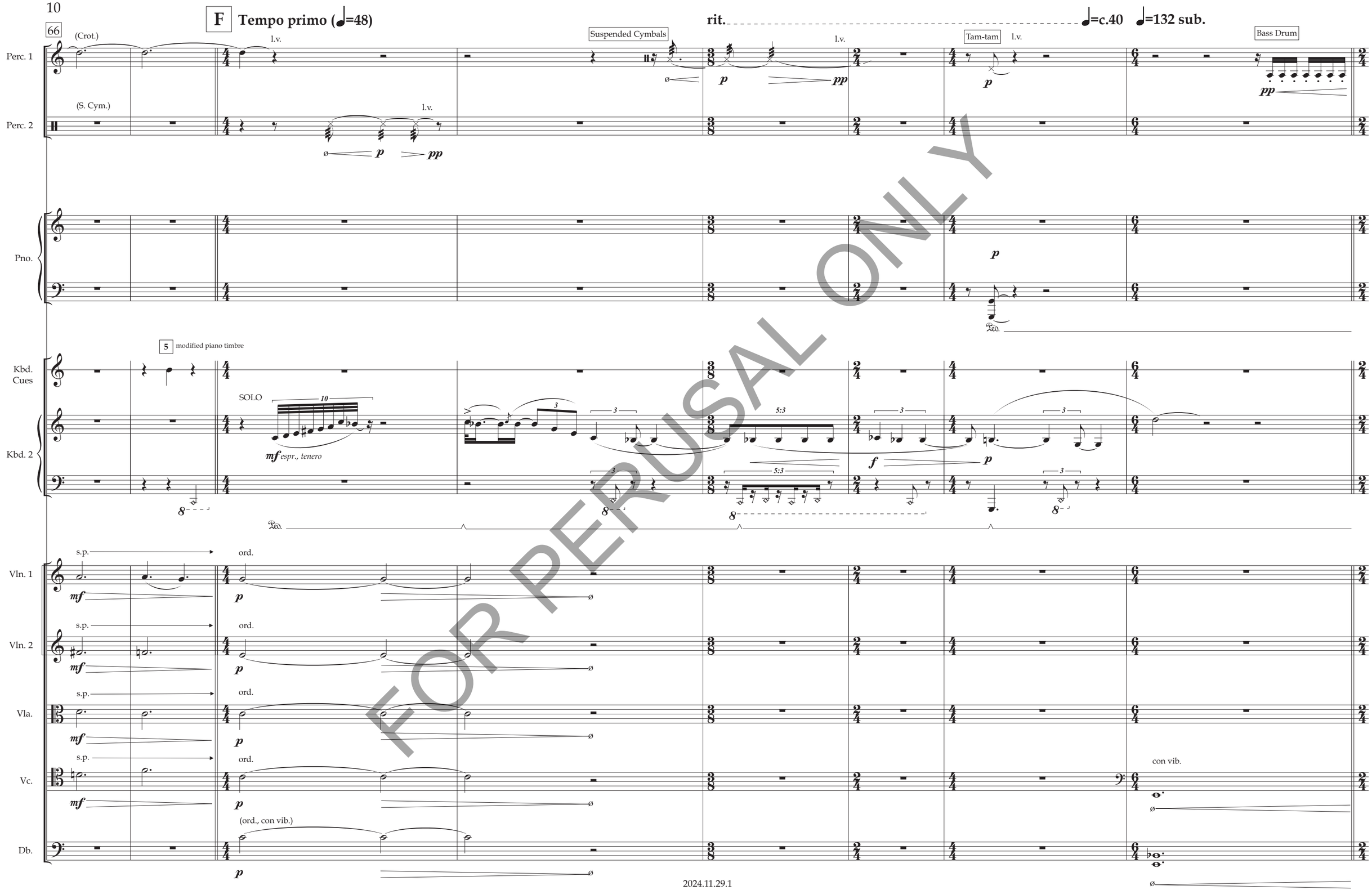

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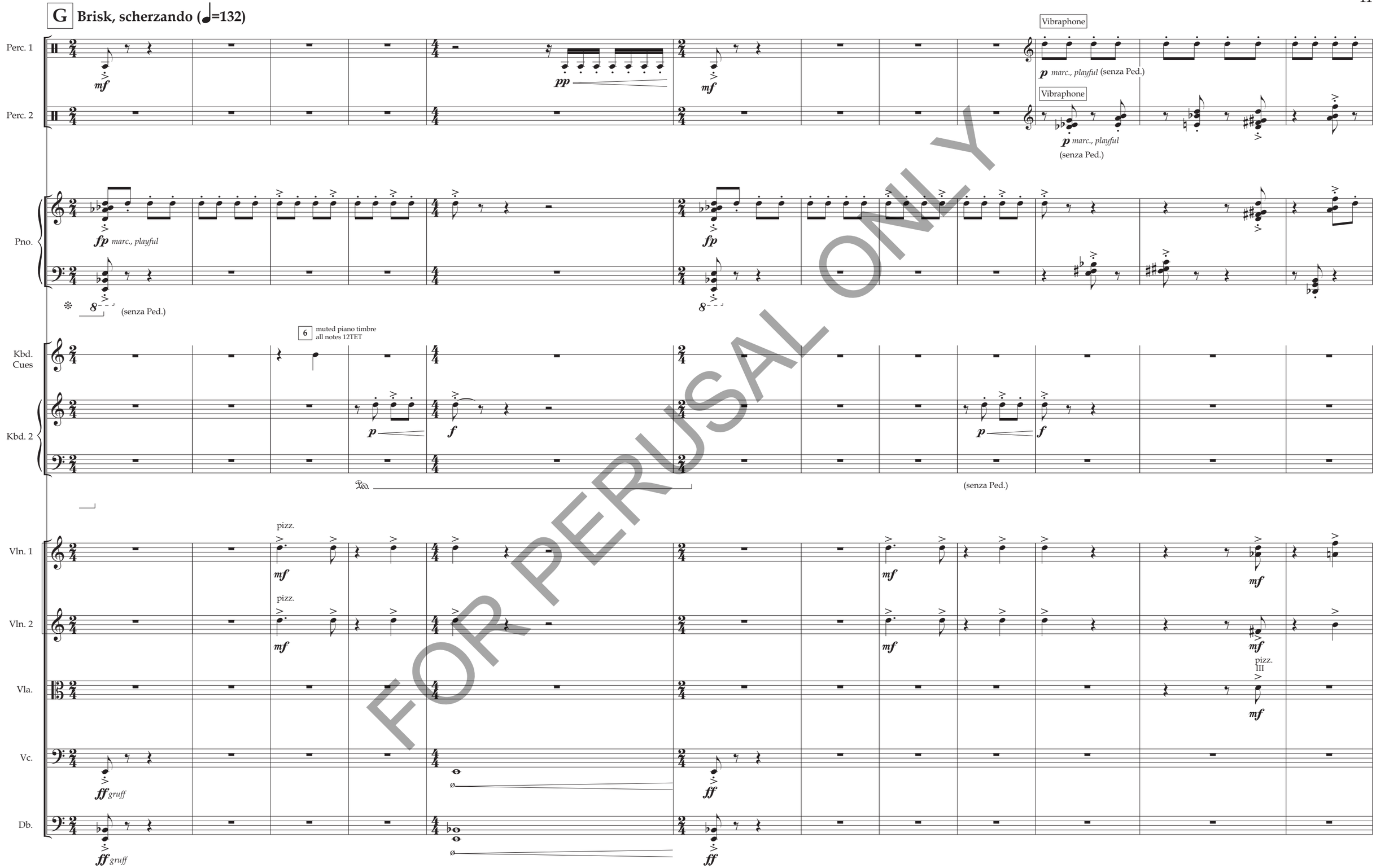

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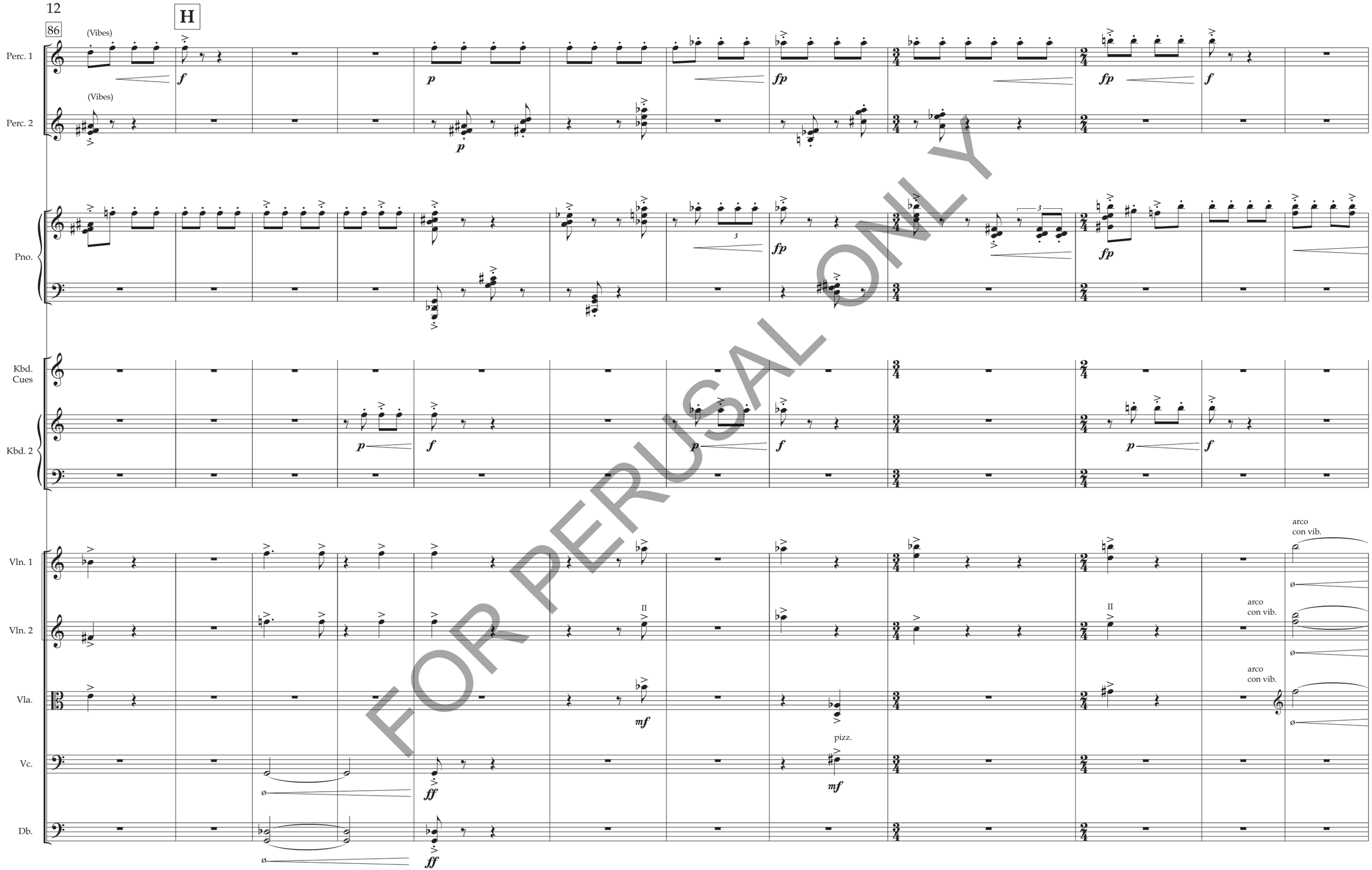

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

98

I

Perc. 1

Vibraslap

l.v.

l.v.

Vibraphone

Perc. 2

Large Vibraslap

l.v.

Vibraphone

omit if necess.

Guiro

Pno.

Kbd. Cues

7 harpsichord timbre

8 harp timbre

Kbd. 2

SOLO

SOLO

Vln. 1

pizz.

Vln. 2

pizz.

Vla.

pizz.

Vc.

arco

Db.

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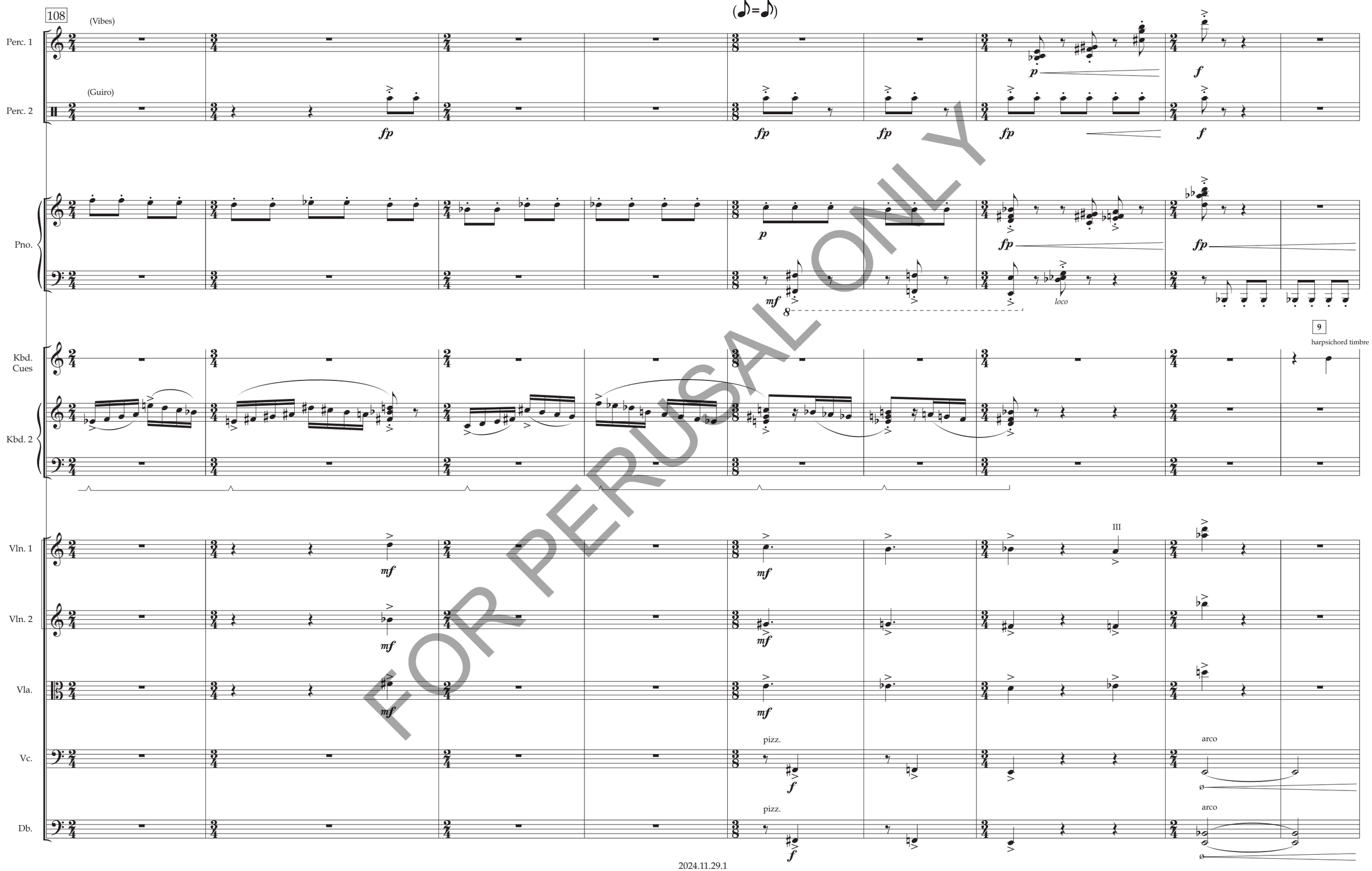

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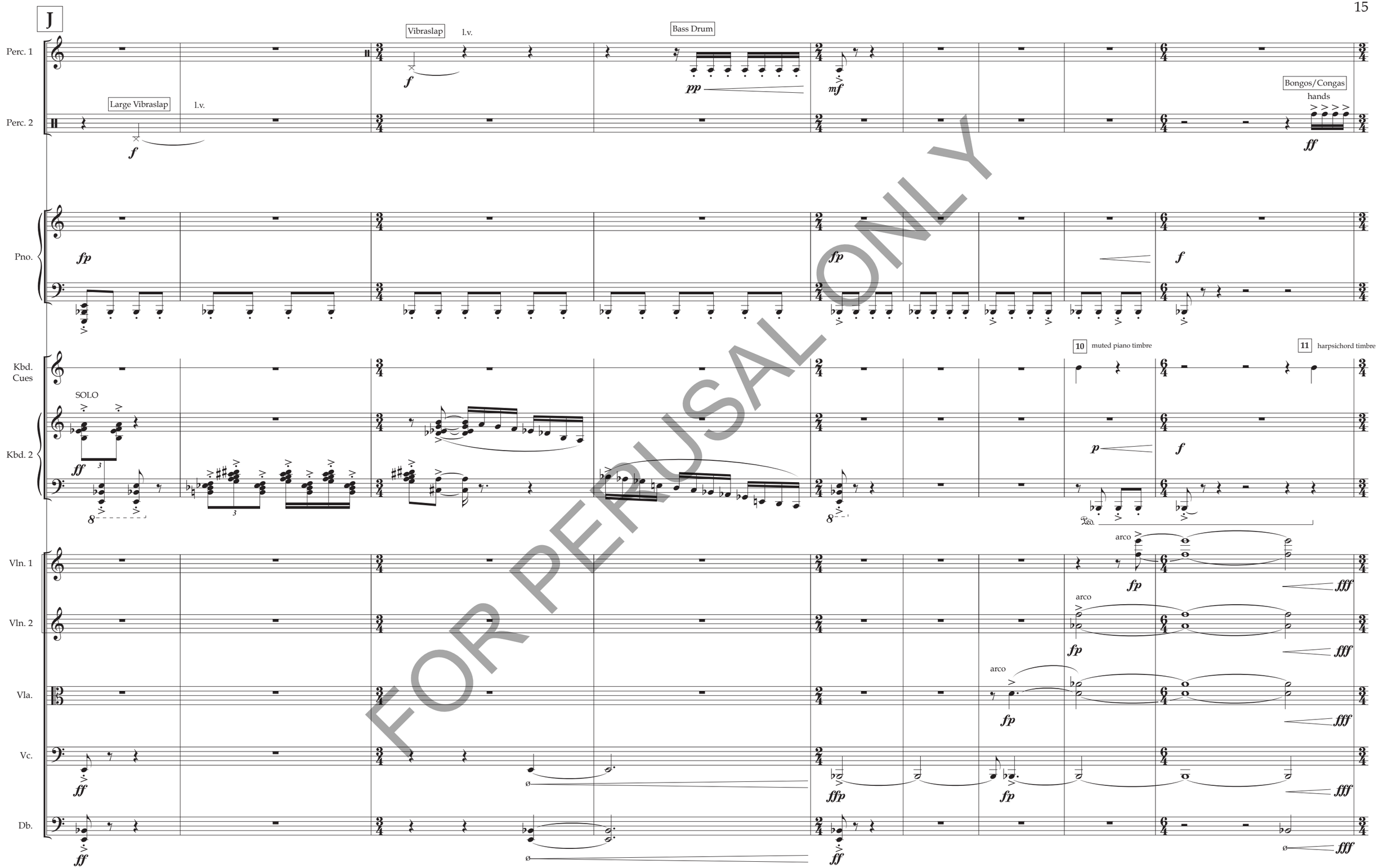

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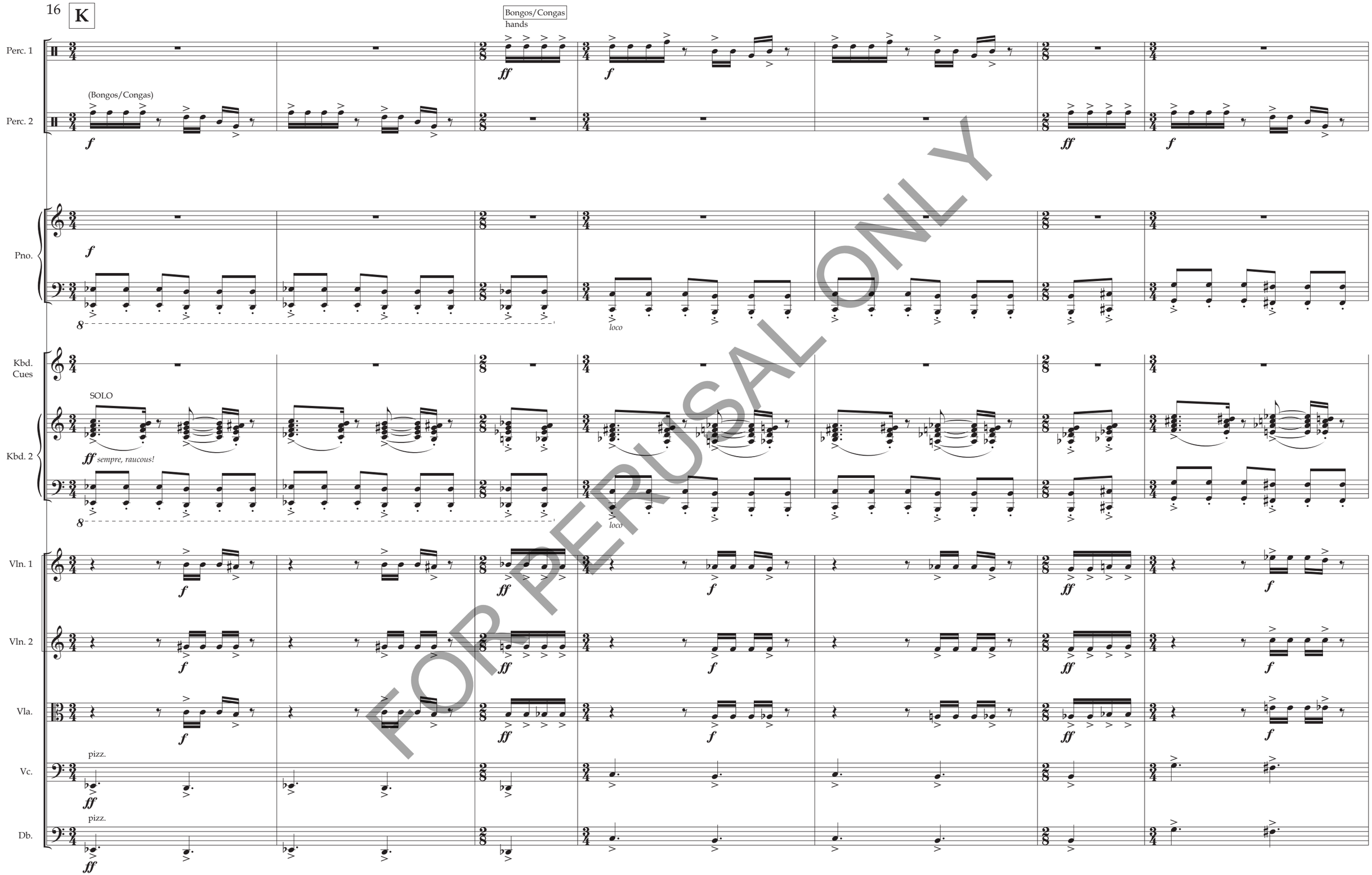

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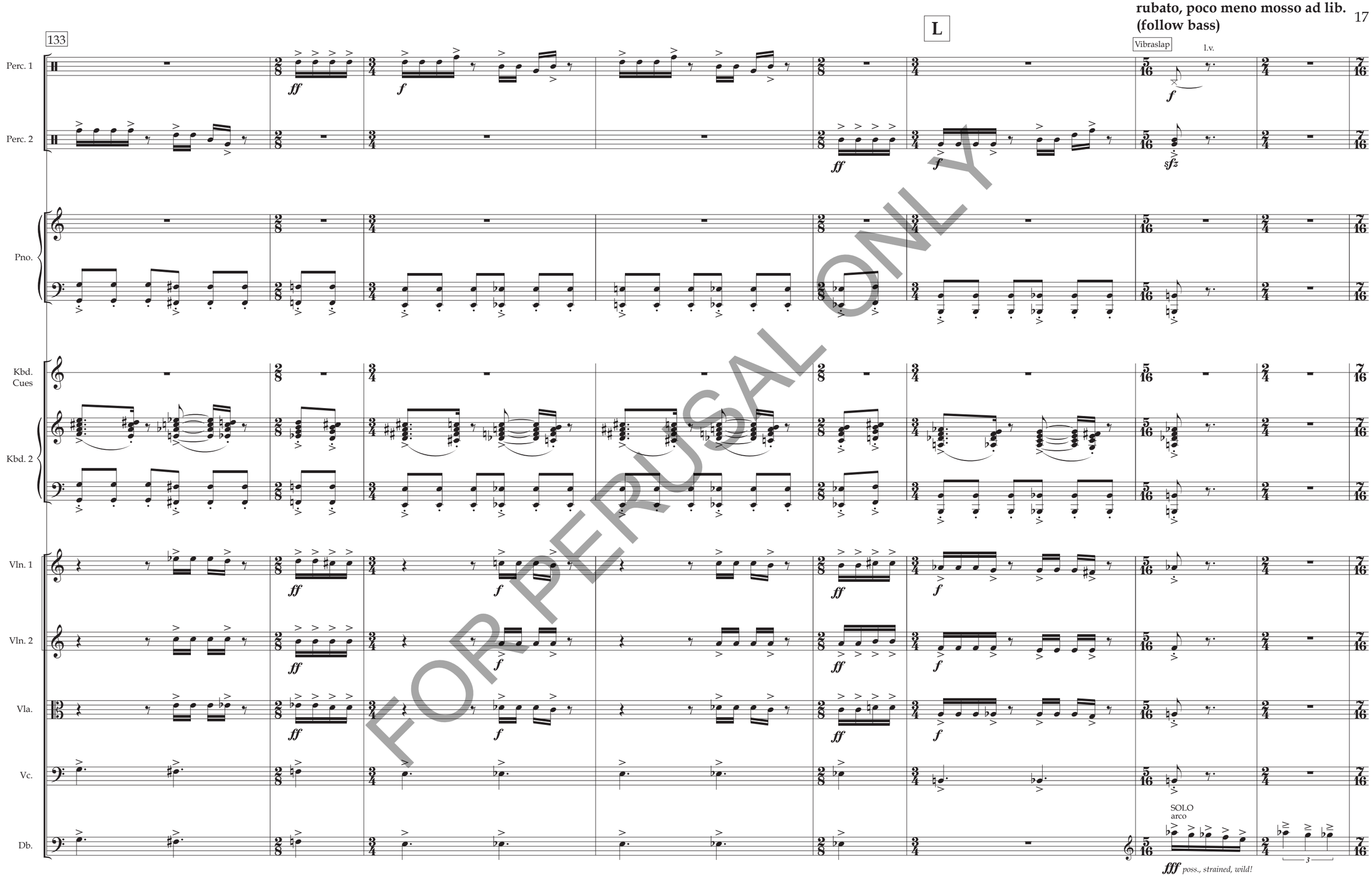

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

141

a tempo (♩=132)

sim.

M a tempo

sim.

Perc. 1

Bongos/Congas

Vibraslap

l.v.

Perc. 2

Large Vibraslap

l.v.

Bongos/Congas

Pno.

Kbd. Cues

Kbd. 2

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

149

a tempo

sim.

Bongos/Congas

Large Vibraslap

l.v.

12 A0–D1 retune keyboard (harpsichord timbre continues)

arco

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

Pno.

Kbd. Cues

Kbd. 2

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

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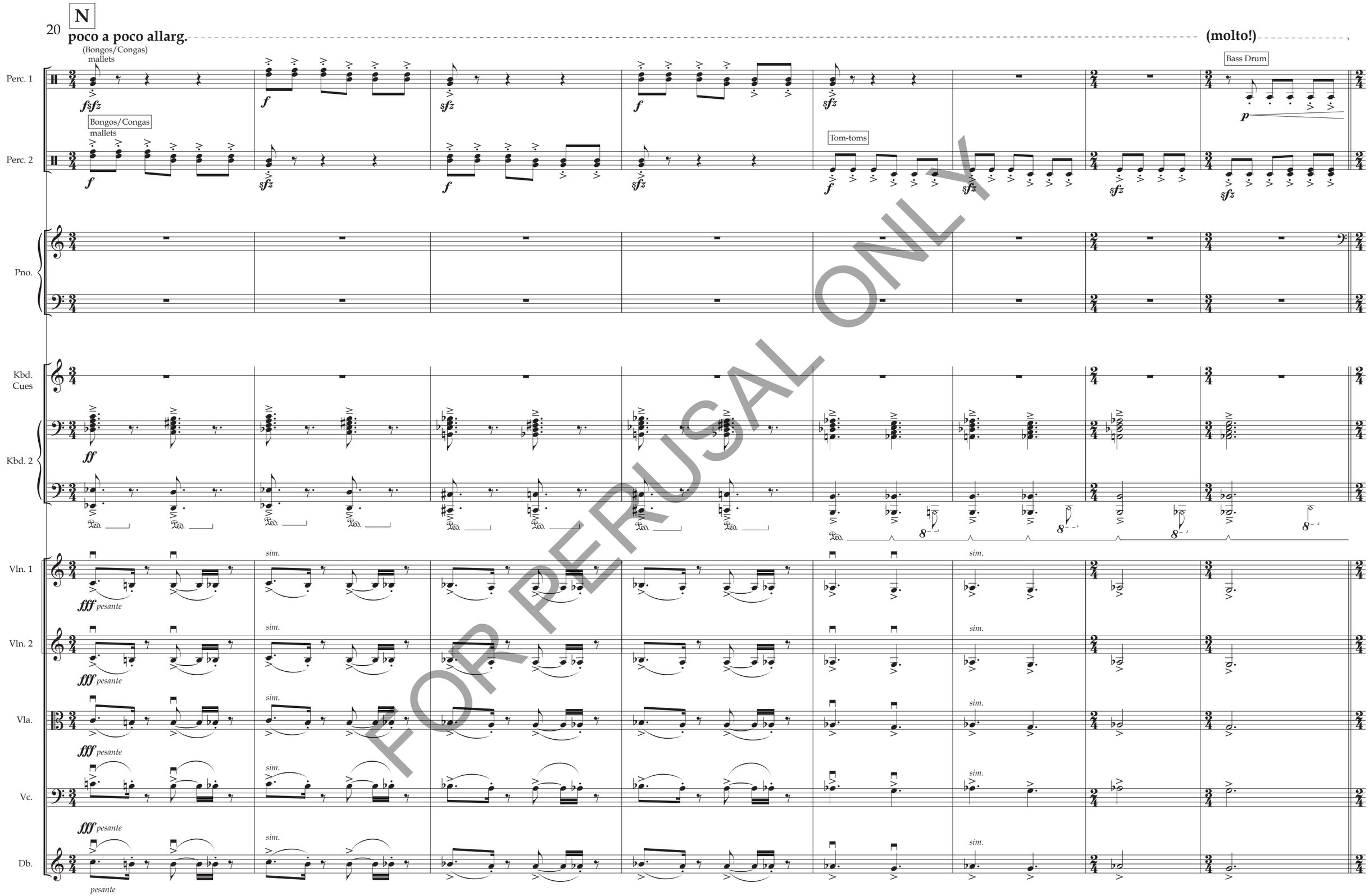

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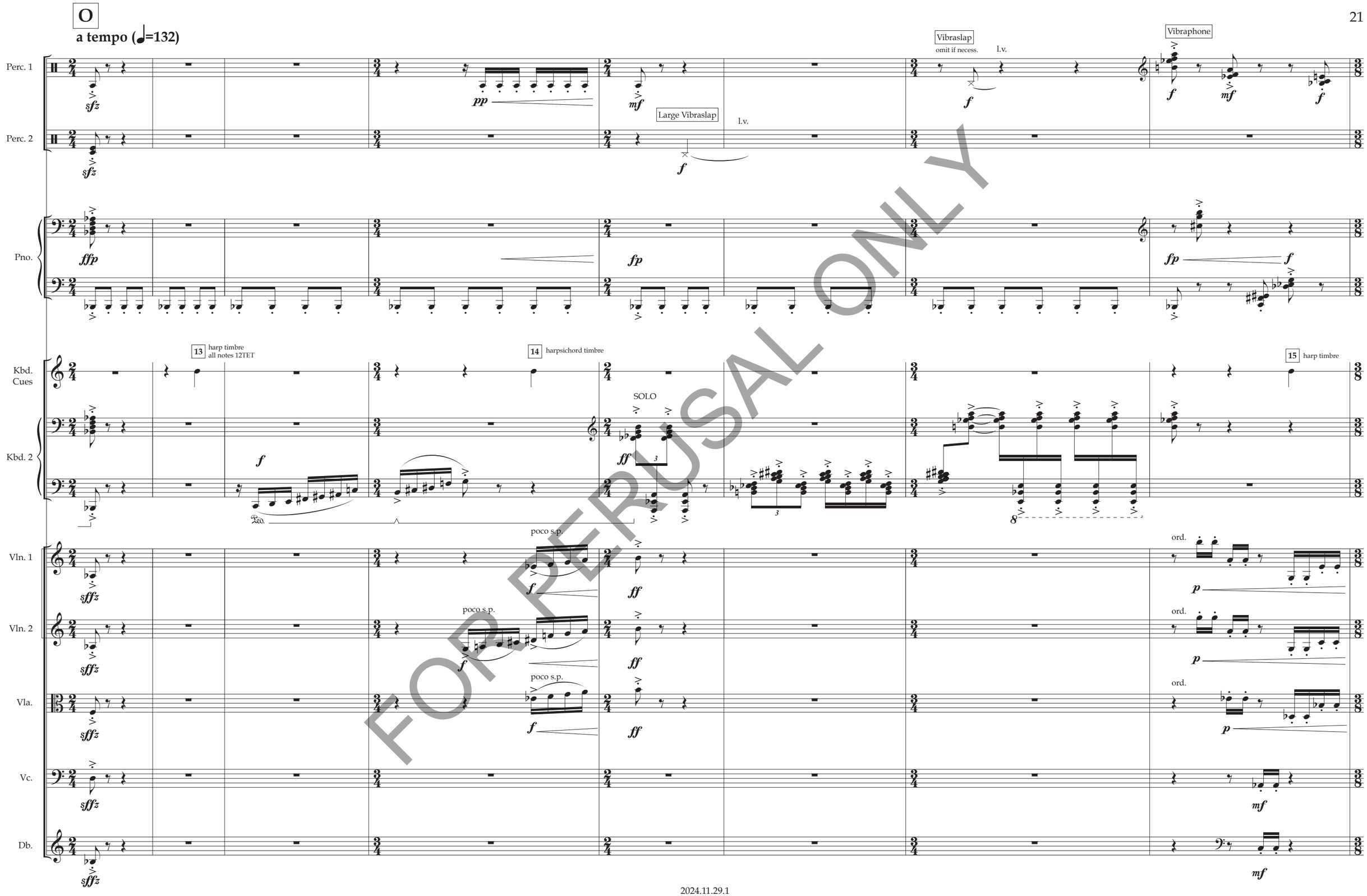

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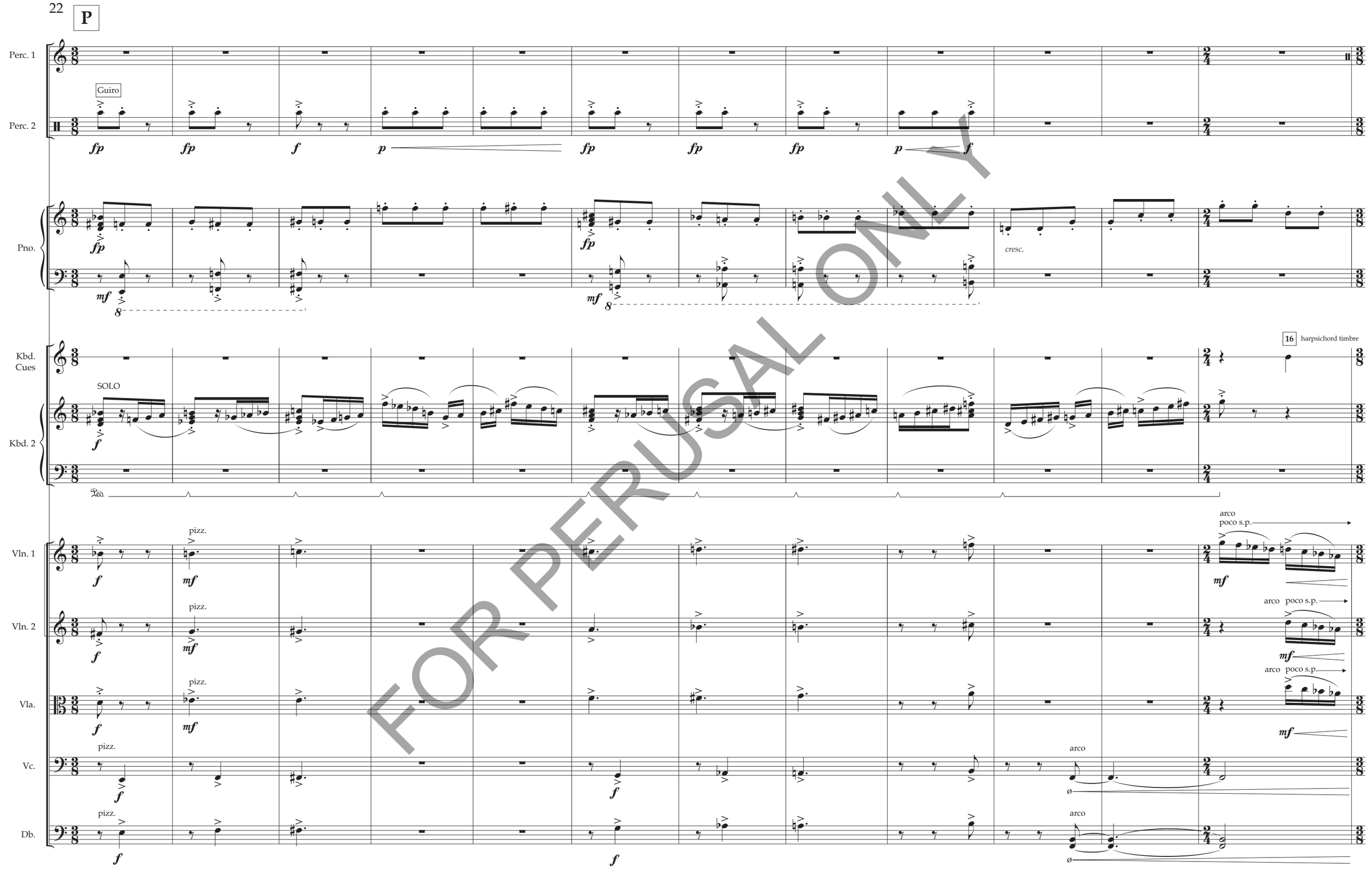

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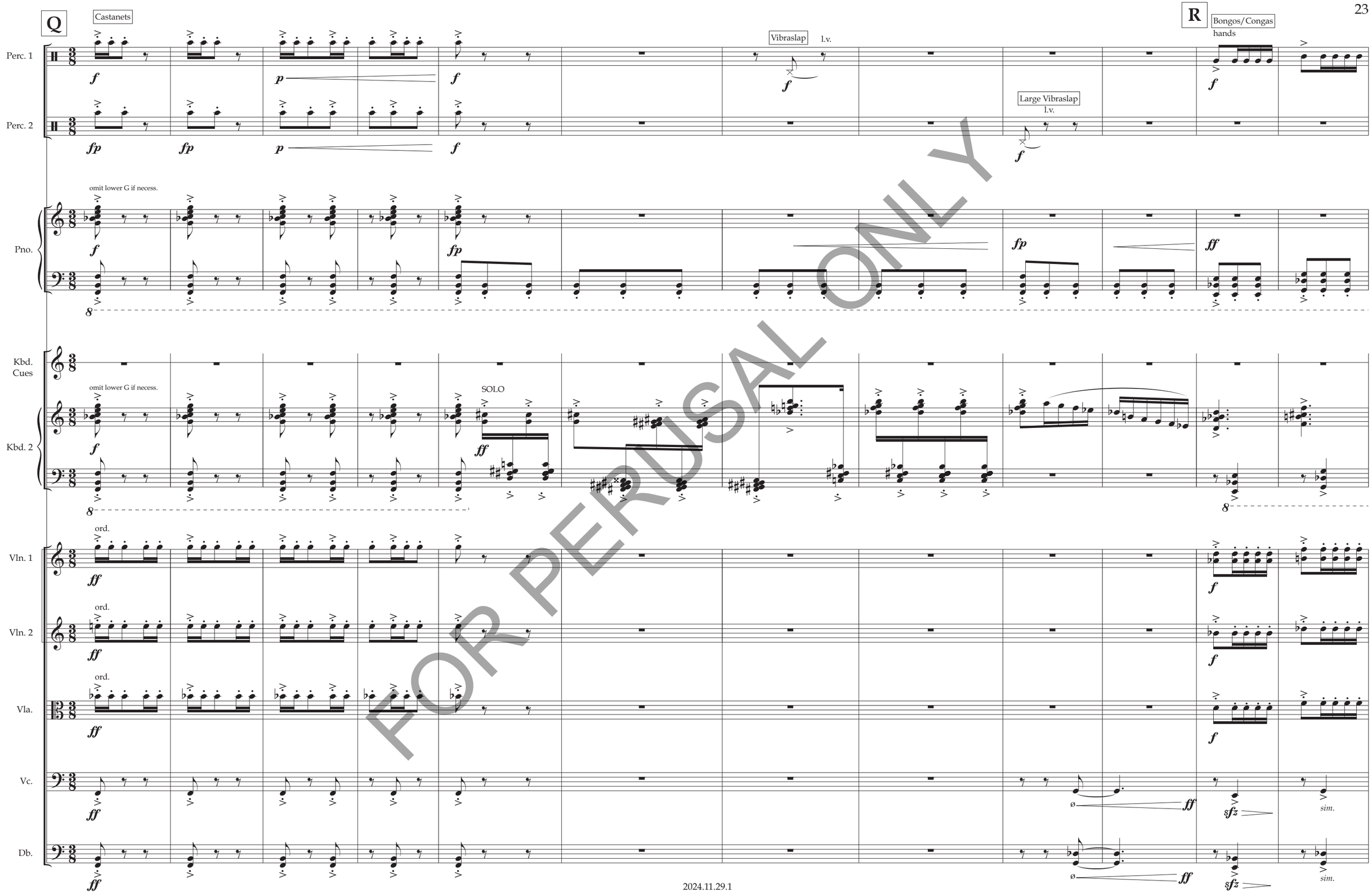

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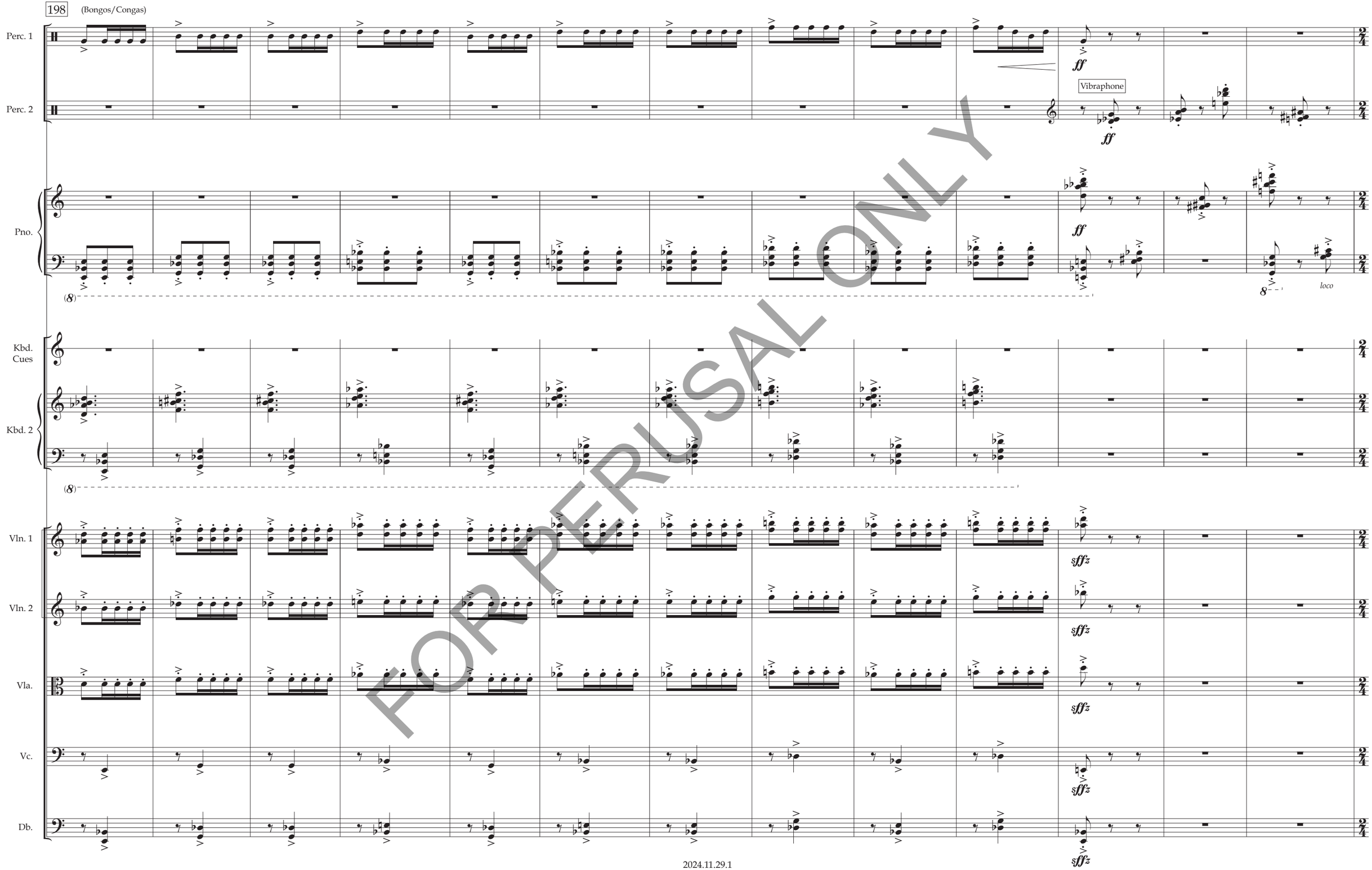

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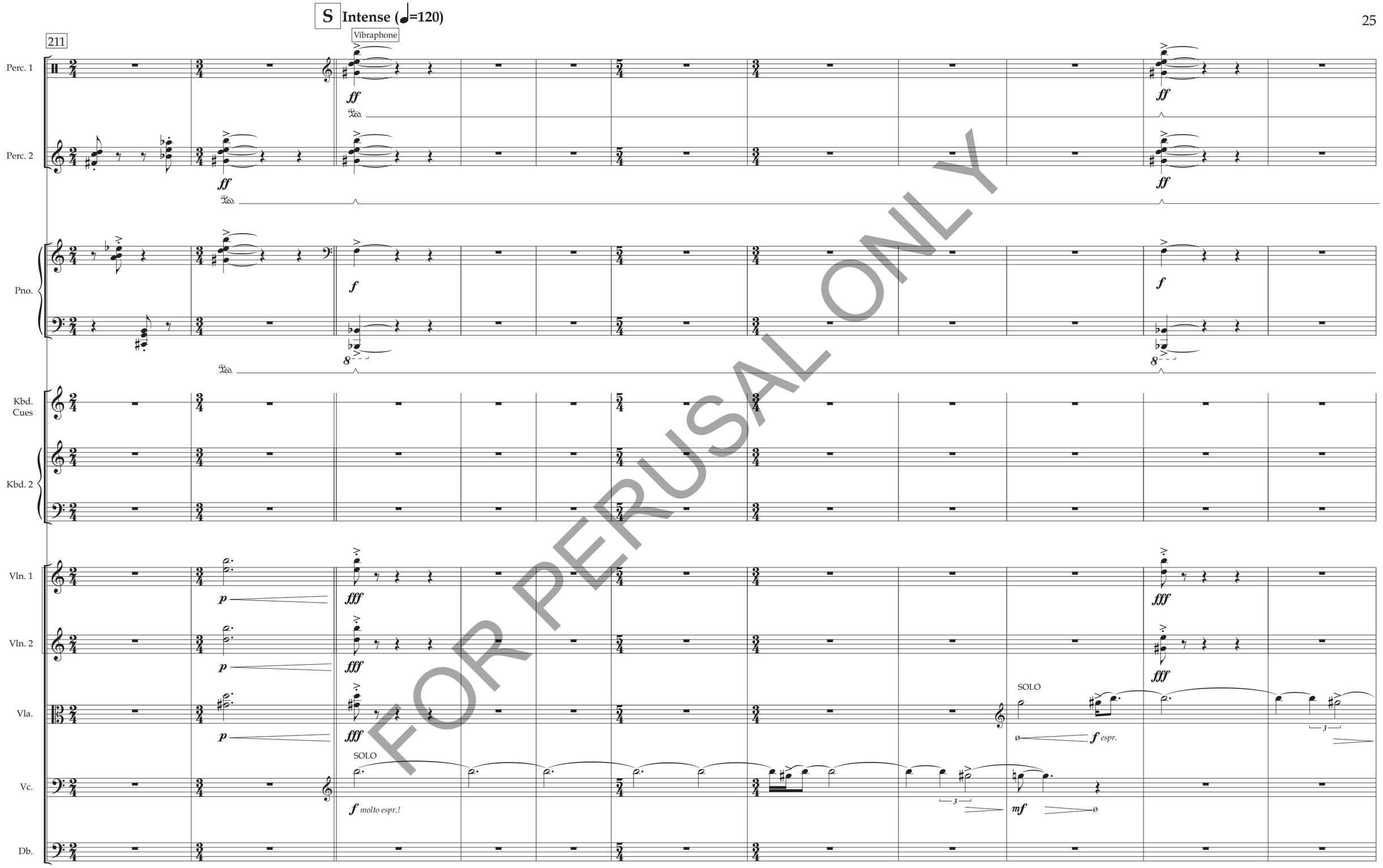

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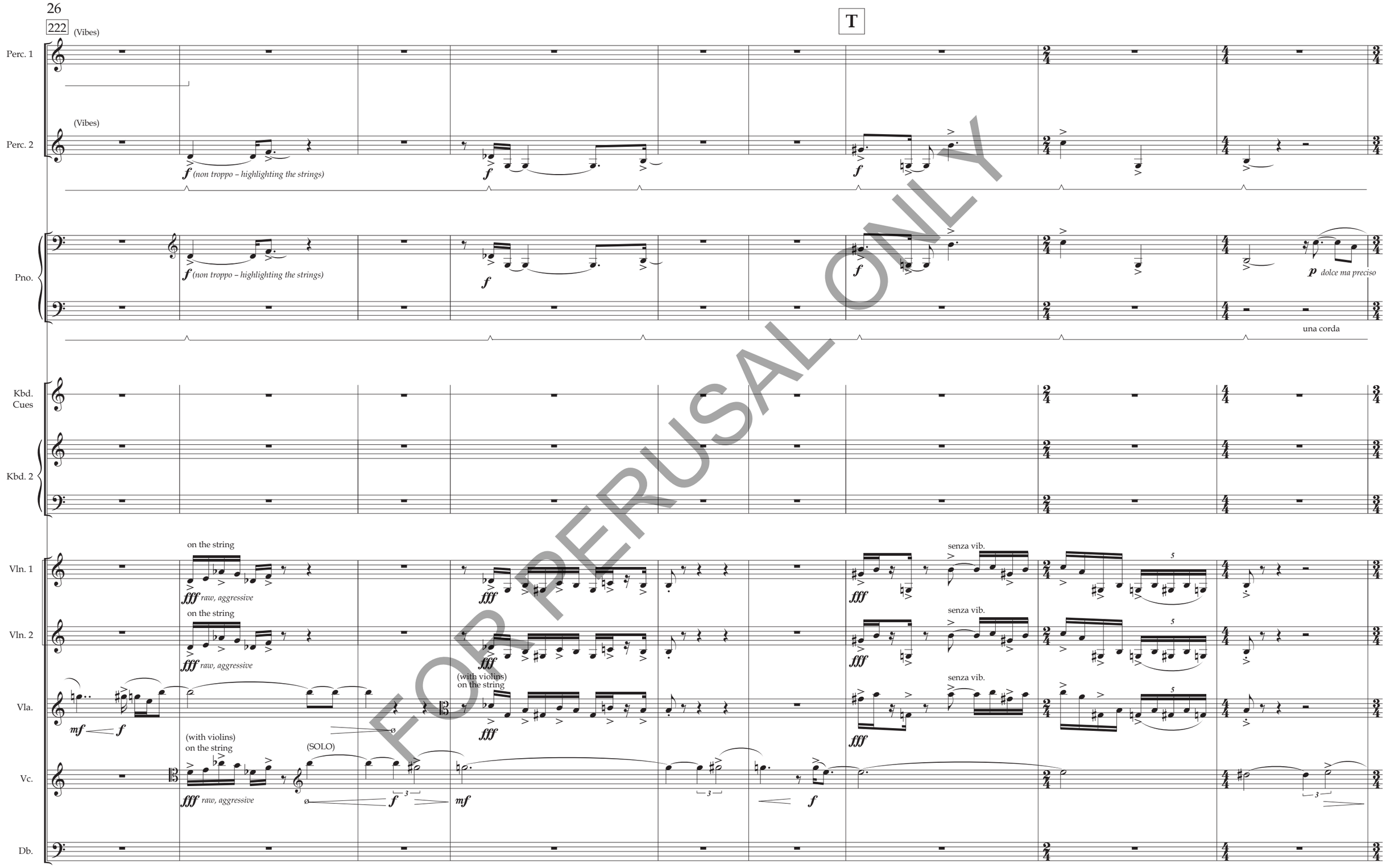

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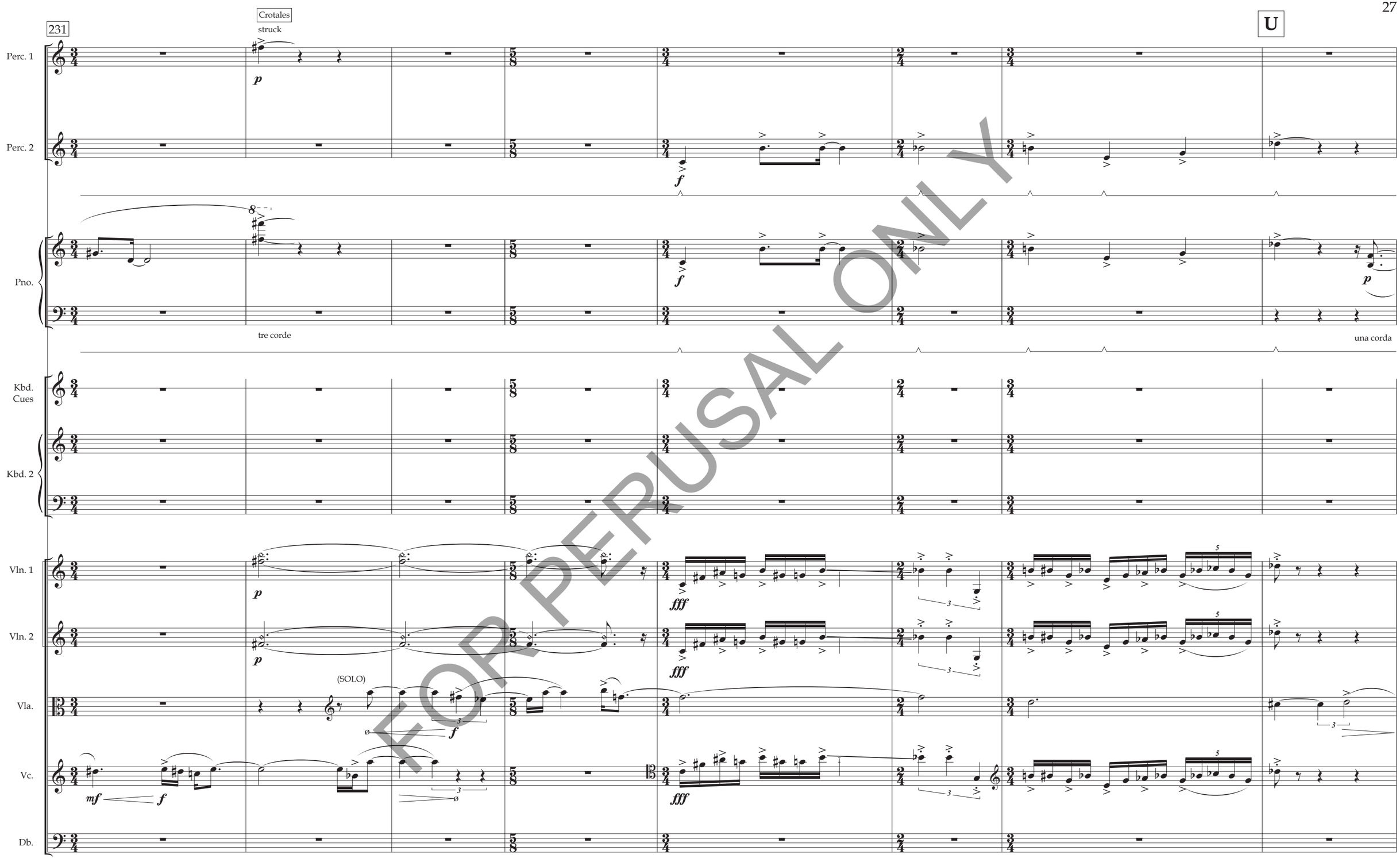

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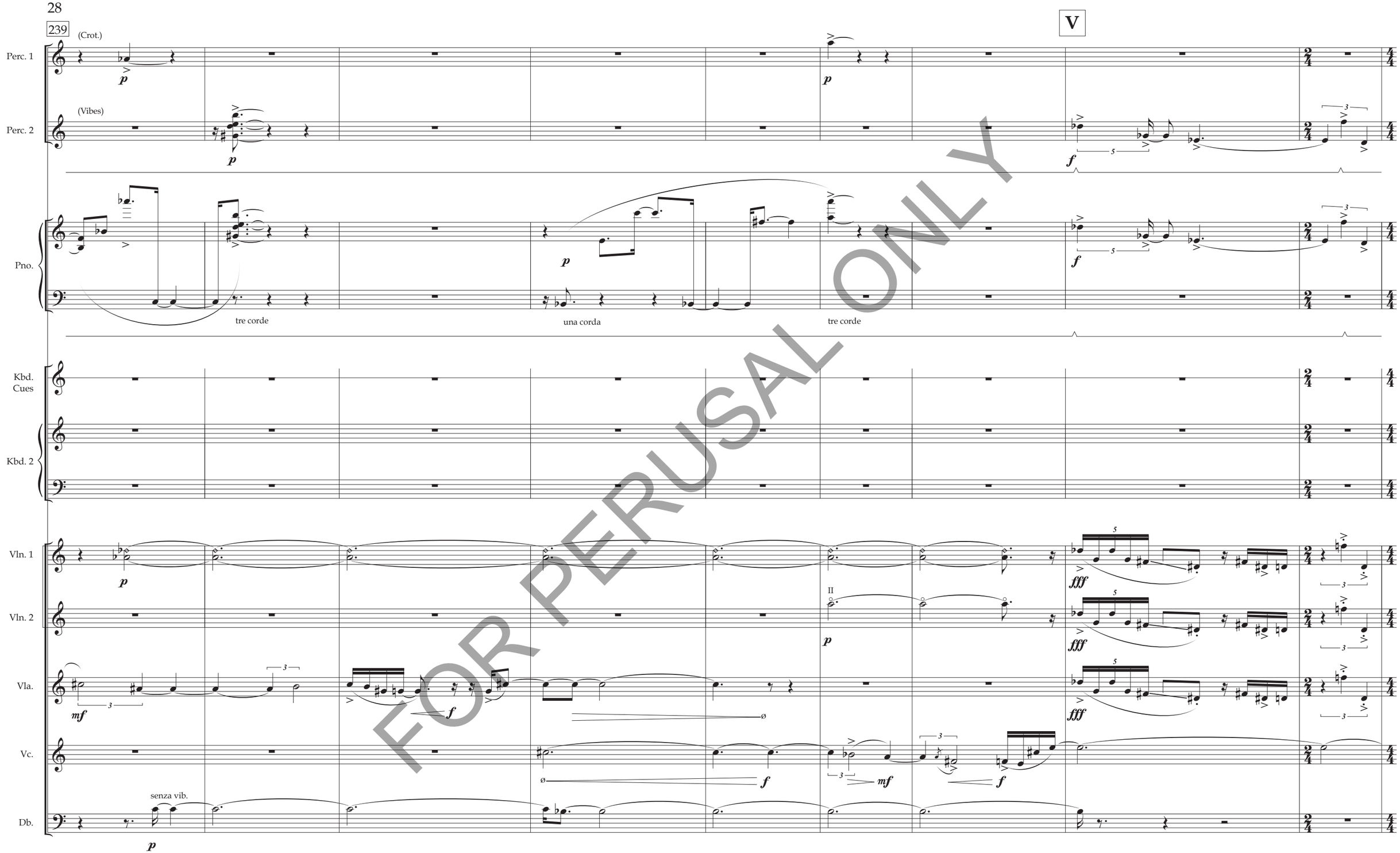

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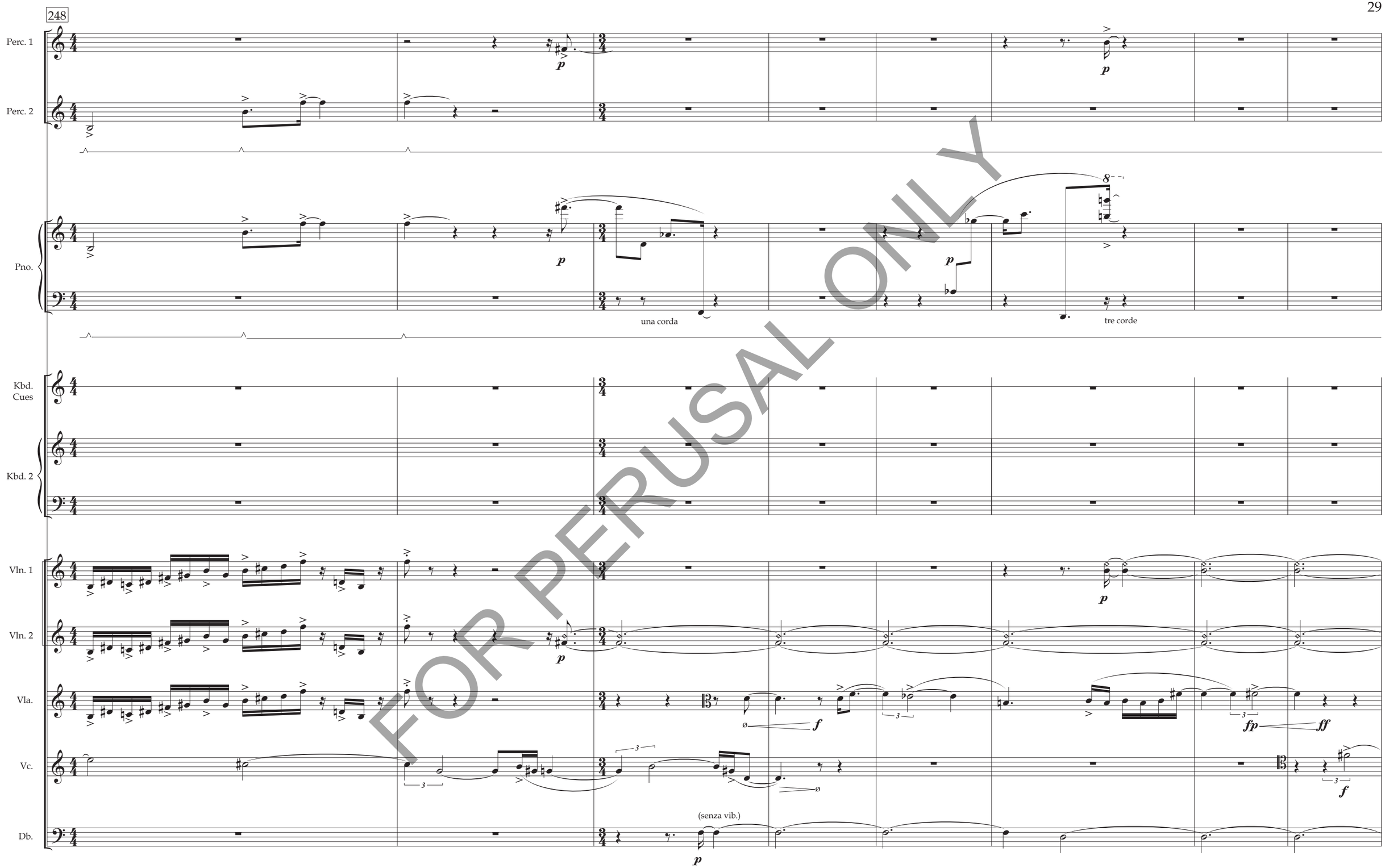

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

256 (Crot.)

W

Perc. 1

(Vibes)

Perc. 2

Pno.

una corda

tre corde

Kbd. Cues

Kbd. 2

Vln. 1

Vln. 2

Vla.

Vc.

Db.

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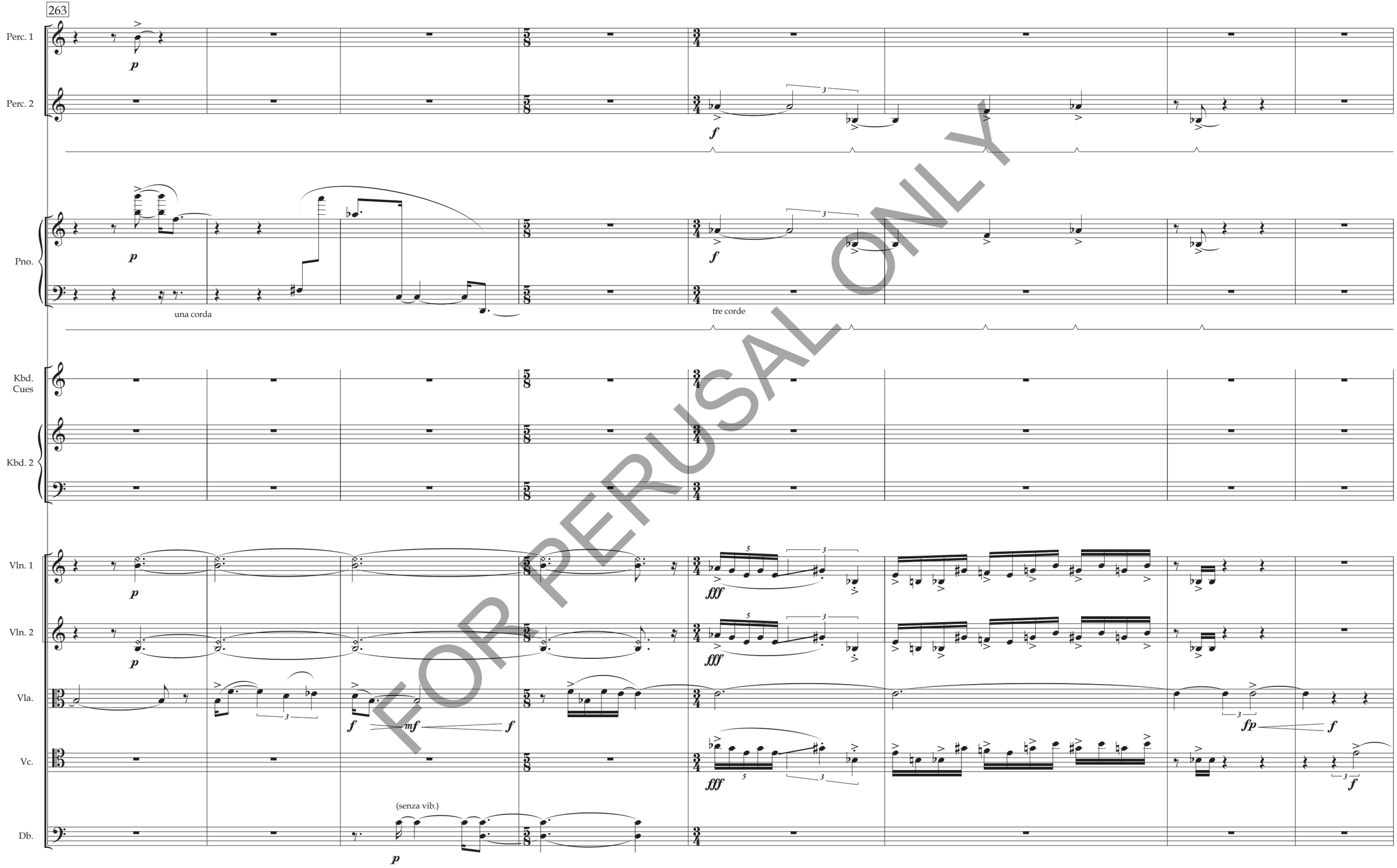

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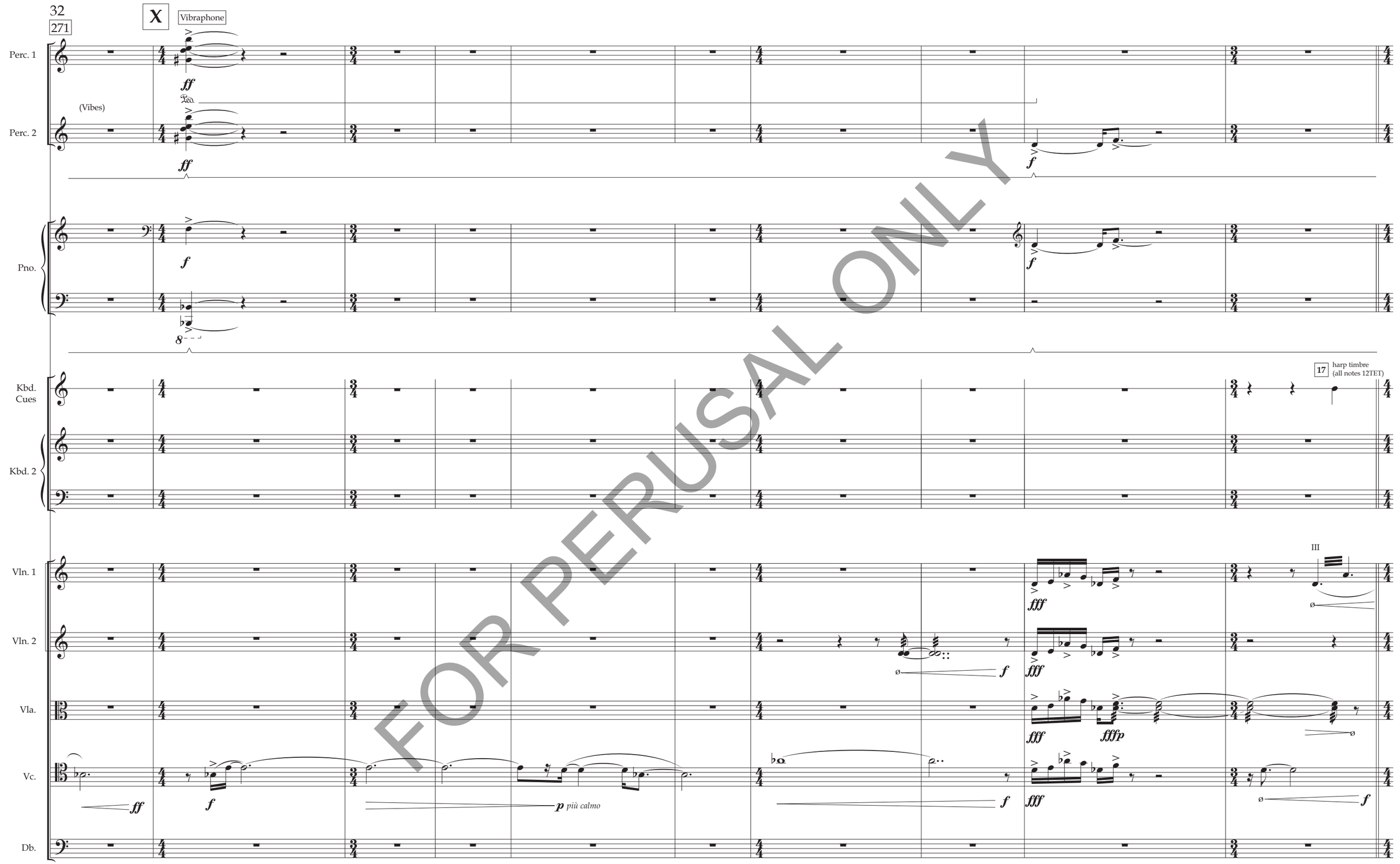

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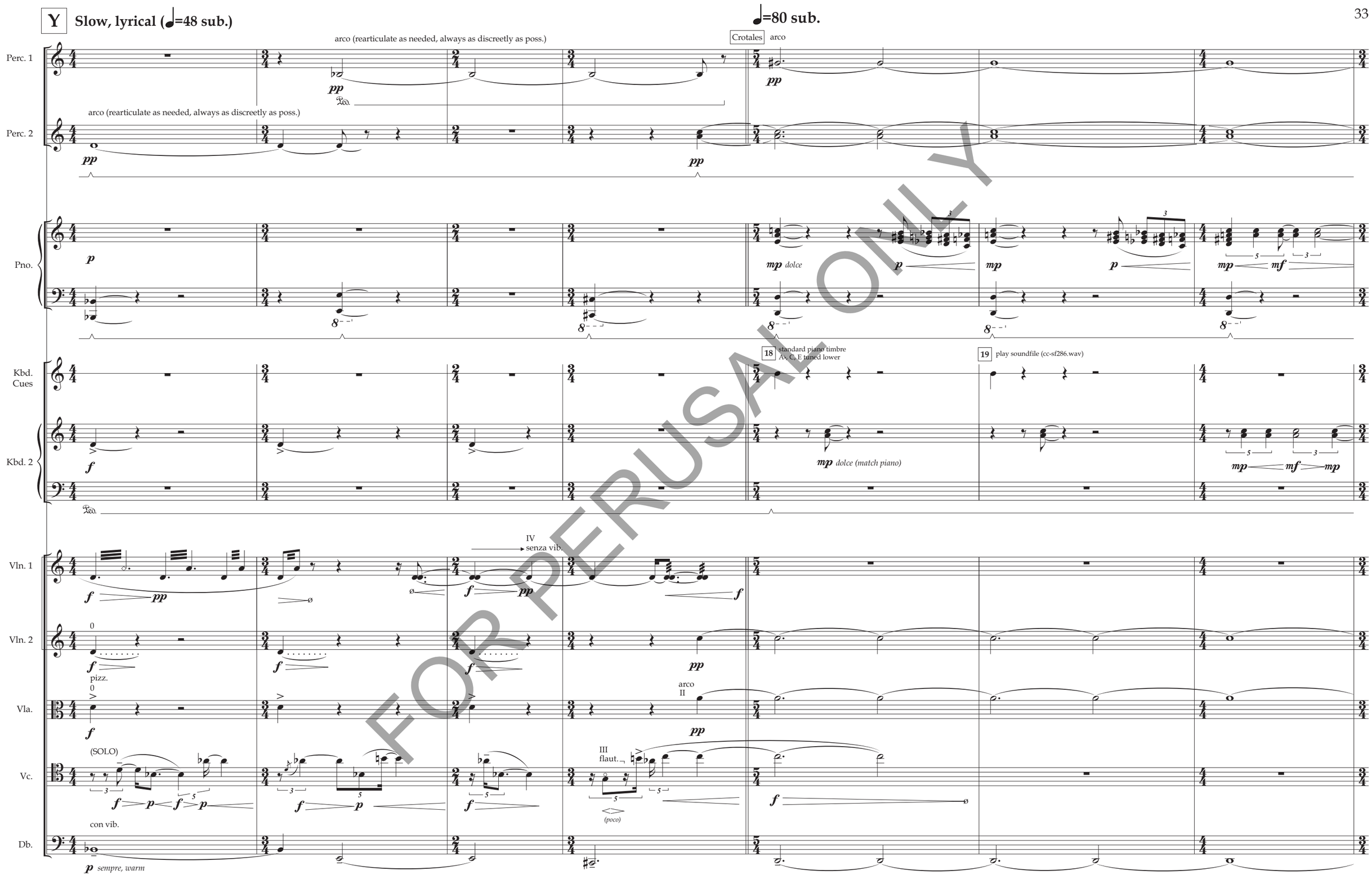

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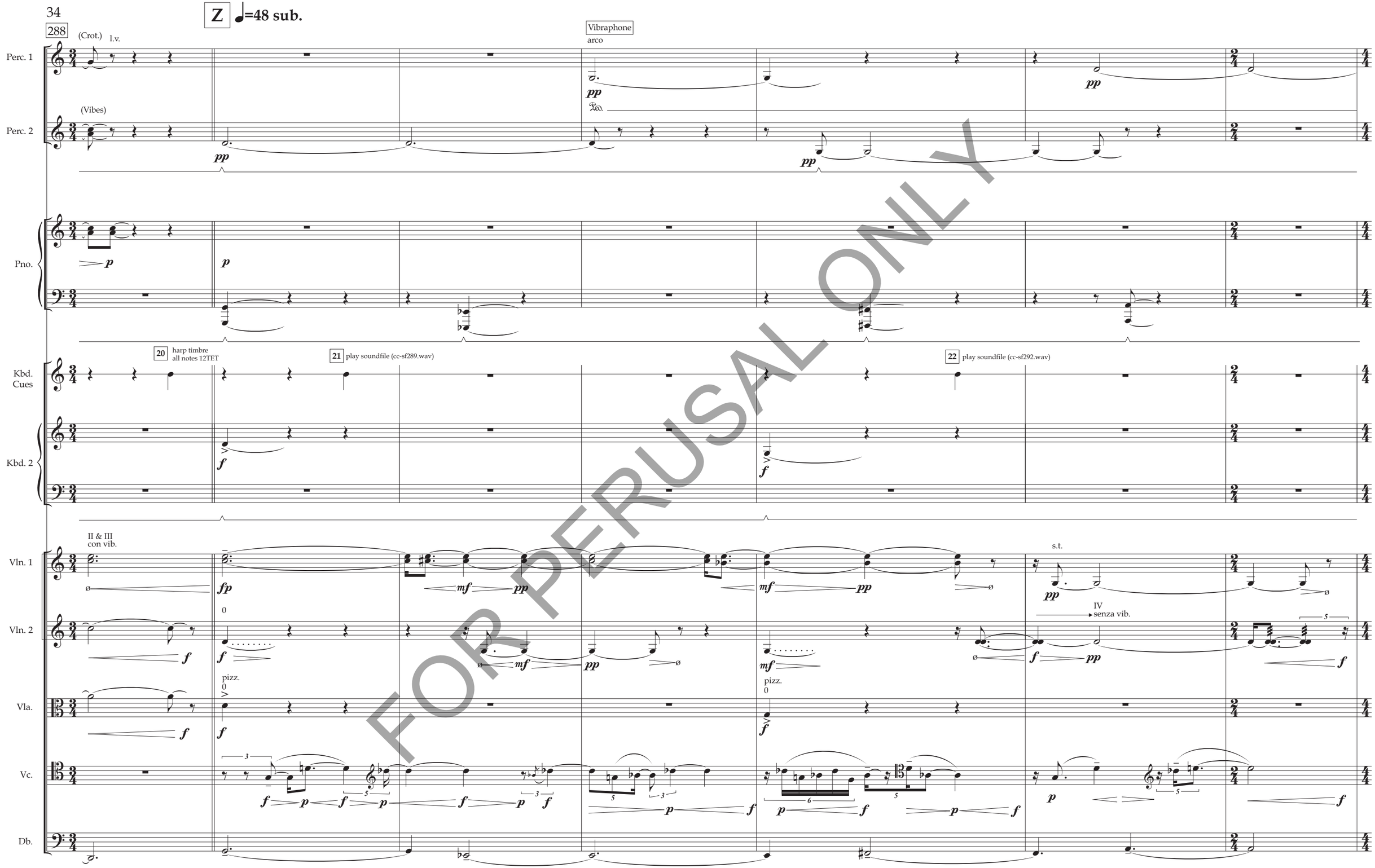

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

295

♩=80 sub.

Crotales arco

Perc. 1

Perc. 2

pp

Pno.

mp dolce

p

mp

p

mp

mf

23 piano timbre
A, C♯, F tuned lower

24 play soundfile (cc-sf299.wav)

Kbd. Cues

Kbd. 2

f

mp dolce (match piano)

mp

mf

mp

Vln. 1

ord. II & III

mf

pp

pp

Vln. 2

con vib.

f

espr.

f

pp

f

Vla.

arco

f

espr.

f

p

f

pp

Vc.

p

f

p

f

p

f

Db.

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

A1 ♩=48, as if gradually drifting to sleep

301

Perc. 1: (Crot.) l.v. | Susp. Cym. S l.v. sempre | Crotales struck l.v. sempre | Susp. Cym. S | Crotales | Susp. Cym. S | Crotales

Perc. 2: (Vibes) | Suspended Cymbals l.v. sempre

Pno.: *p* | *mf* *p* *dolce ma preciso* (tre corde sempre) | *mf* *p* | *mf* *p*

Kbd. Cues: 25 harp timbre, all notes 12TET play soundfile (cc-301.wav) fade out previous soundfile

Kbd. 2: *mf* | *f* | *mf* | *mf*

Vln. 1: *f* | pizz. 0 *mf* arco *mfpp* | III *mf* *pp* | *mf* pizz. 0 *mfpp* | pizz. 0 *mf* arco *mfpp*

Vln. 2: *mf* *mfpp* senza vib. | *mf* | *mf* arco (senza vib.) *mfpp* | *mfpp*

Vla.: *f* | III senza vib. *mfpp* con vib. *mfpp* *mf* | pizz. 0 *mf* | arco senza vib. *mfpp* con vib. *mfpp* *mf* | jèté 0 *mf* *mfpp* senza vib. | *mfpp* con vib. *mf*

Vc.: *f* | *mfpp* (ord.) s.p. | ord. *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* | *mfpp* ord. (ord.) s.p. | *mfpp* ord. (ord.) s.p. | ord. s.p.

Db.: *f* | senza vib. *mfpp* | *mfpp* | *mfpp*

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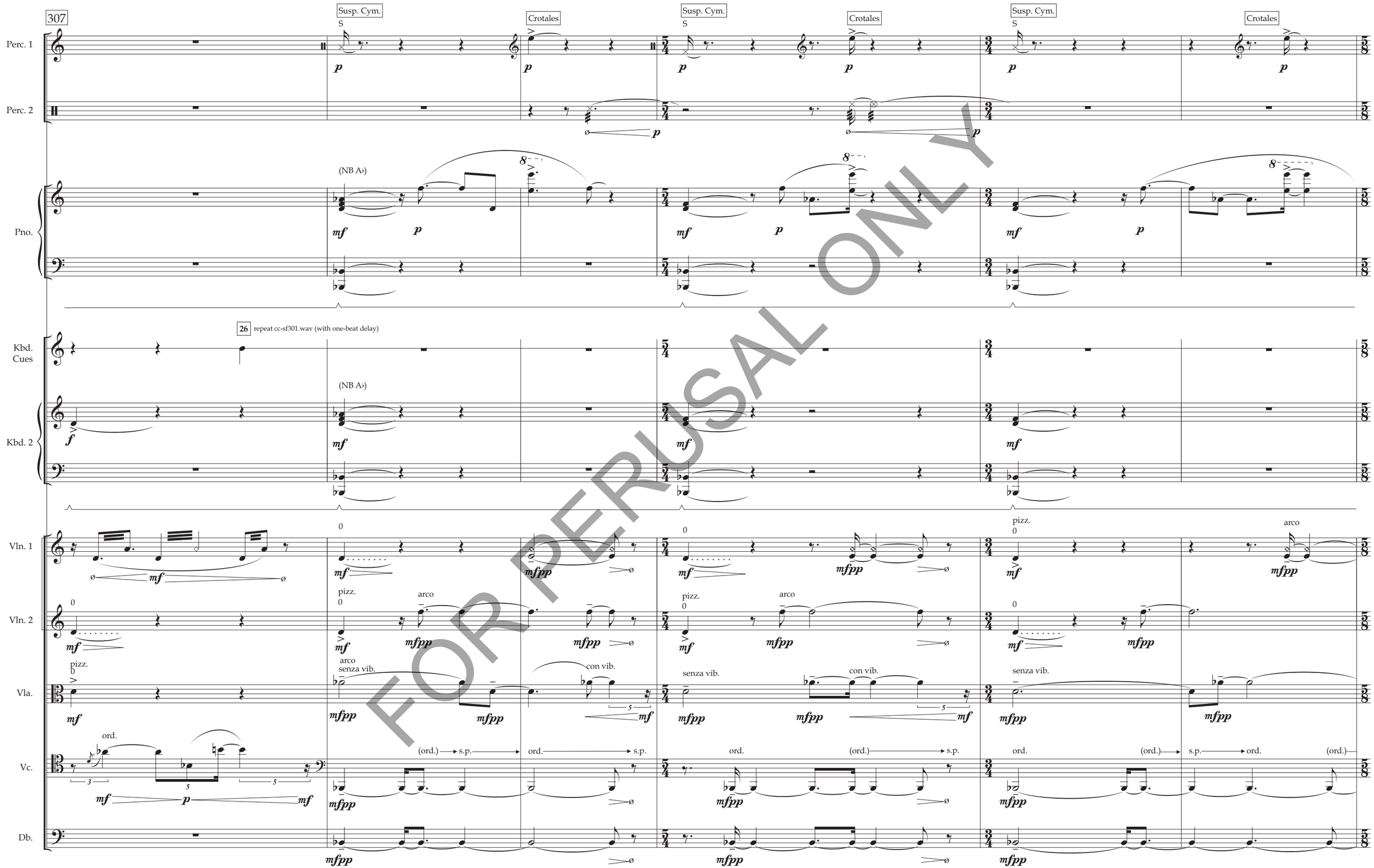

FOR PERUSAL ONLY

B1 **TUNING INTERLUDE**

Senza misura: calm, dreamlike

313

Perc. 1

Tam-tam
S l.v.

p

l.v.

mp

ø

Perc. 2

(S. Cym.)

ø *p*

Pno.

mf

8

Kbd. Cues

27 play cc-tuning-landscape.wav

Kbd. 2

mf

8

Vln. 1

pizz.
0

mf

arco
open strings

p

f

Vln. 2

mfpp

0

mf

p

f

Vla.

con vib.

5

mf

senza vib.

mfp

p

f

Vc.

s.p.

ø

(con vib.)

p

f

Db.

ø

mfp

f

ca. 12"
(soundfile is playing)

ca. 5-7"

♩=c.60, freely
look at pianist, as if asking for an A

I I

p (poco) sim.

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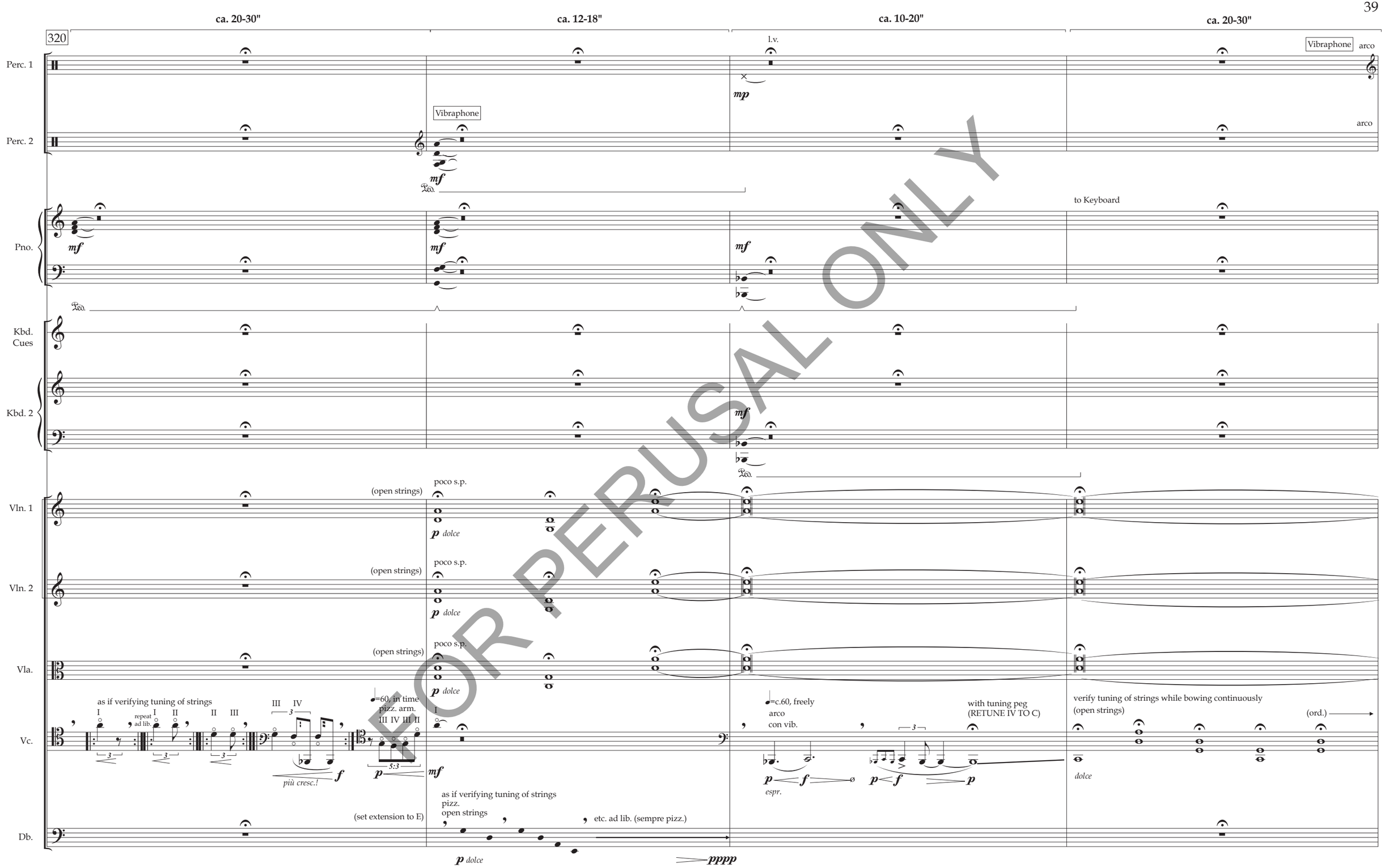

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324

ca. 10" ca. 30"

C1 **Serene, meditative; a bit flexible, like ebbing and flowing waves (♩=48)**

Perc. 1

(Vibes) stagger bow changes with perc. 2

pp sempre

down sempre (until m. 385)

Perc. 2

(Vibes) stagger bow changes with perc. 1

pp sempre

down sempre (until m. 385)

KEYBOARDS: Effect notated fade-ins and fade-outs by gradually depressing or lifting the sustain pedal.
N.B. Starting with cue 31, and until cue 46, cues are advanced in alternation between Keyboard 1 and Keyboard 2:
Keyboard 2 advances odd-numbered cues in this range; Keyboard 1 advances even-numbered cues.

Pno.

Keyboard

p

Kbd. Cues

28 start resonators on E5

29 start soft vinyl crackling
tune sine tones to E(+2) fundamental

30 fade out cc-tuning-landscape.wav (very gradually)
vinyl continues

31 tune sine tones to C(+16) fundamental

Kbd. 2

p

STRINGS: Throughout this section, until m. 381, tune to the just intervals in the sine tones (played by the keyboards).
As an approximate reference point, approximations of these intervals are shown in the string parts using 12th-tone accidentals. See preface for an explanation of these accidentals.

Vln. 1

(poco s.p.) molto s.p.

con vib.

II

mf

Vln. 2

(poco s.p.) molto s.p.

con vib.

II

mf

mf

Vla.

(poco s.p.) molto s.p.

con vib.

mf

Vc.

poco s.p. molto s.p.

con vib.

mf

Db.

arco
con vib.

mf

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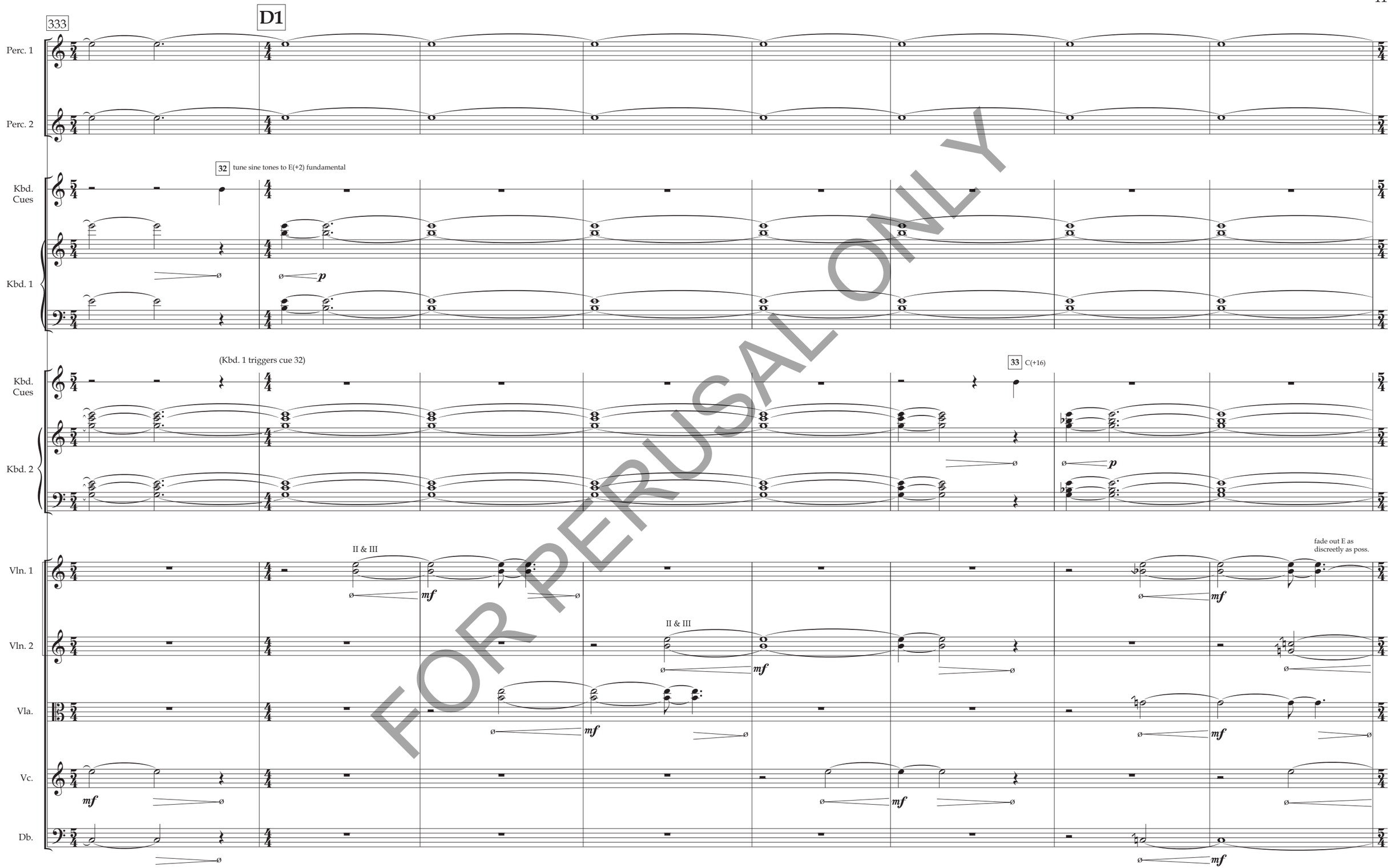

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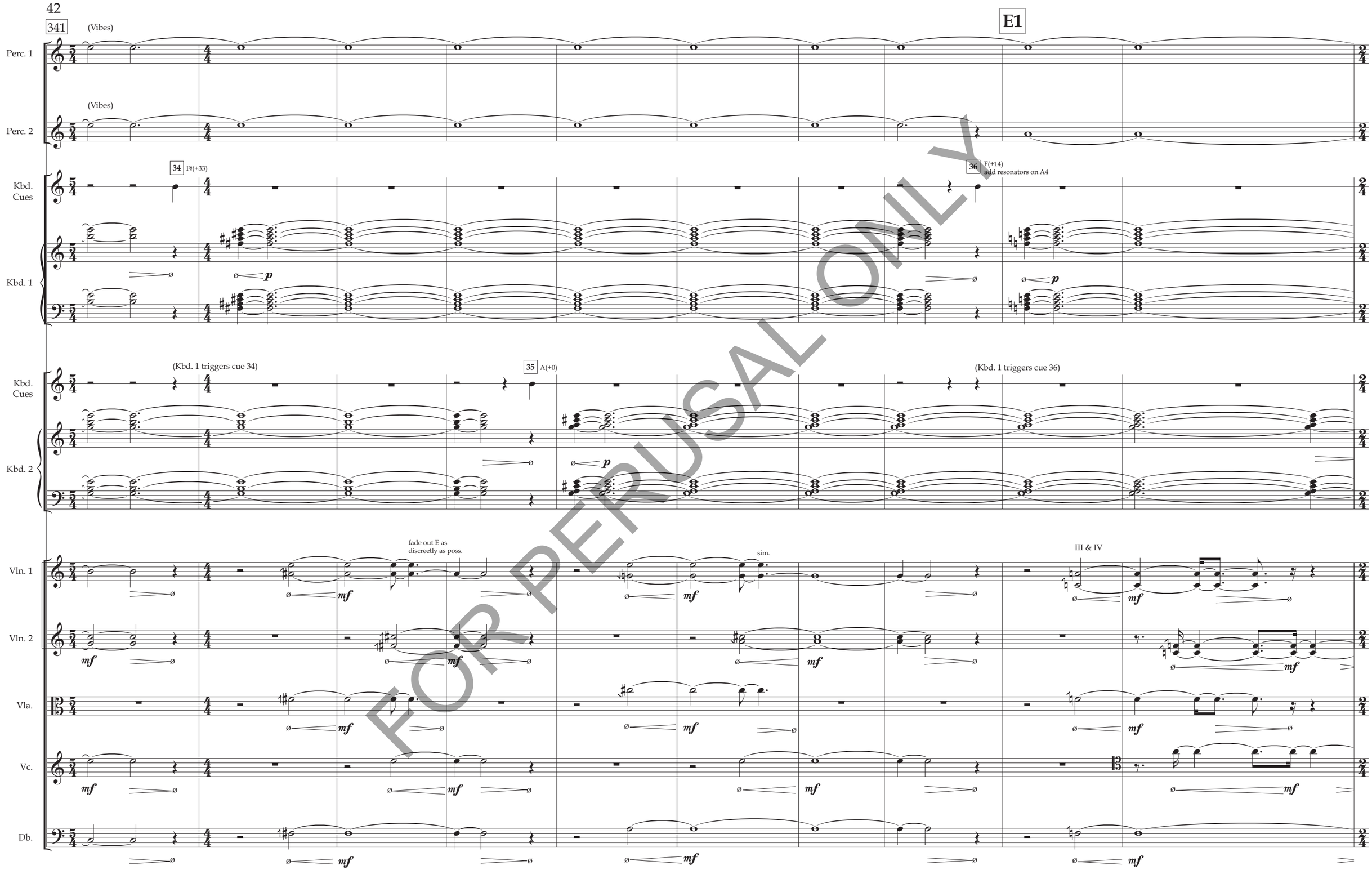

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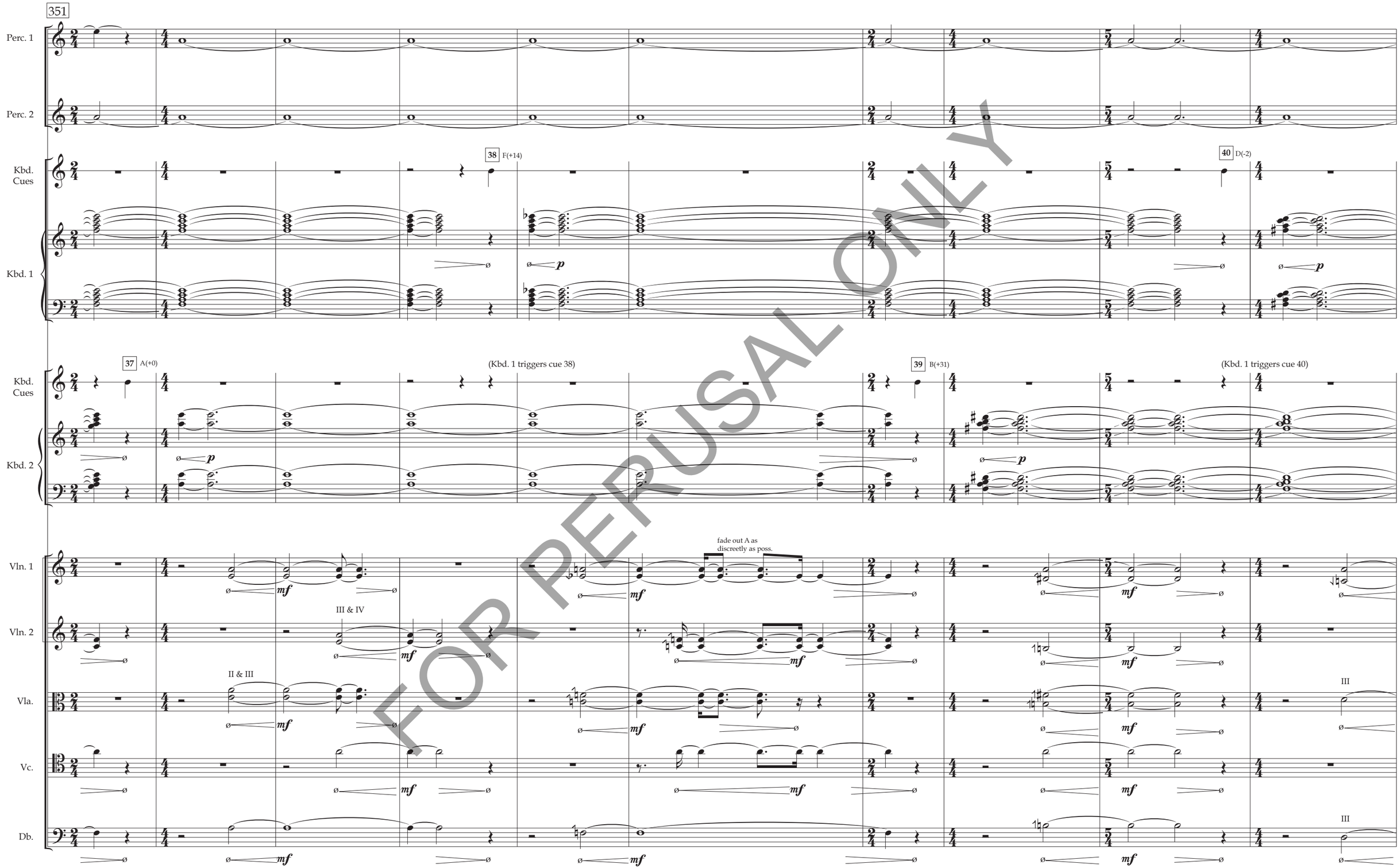

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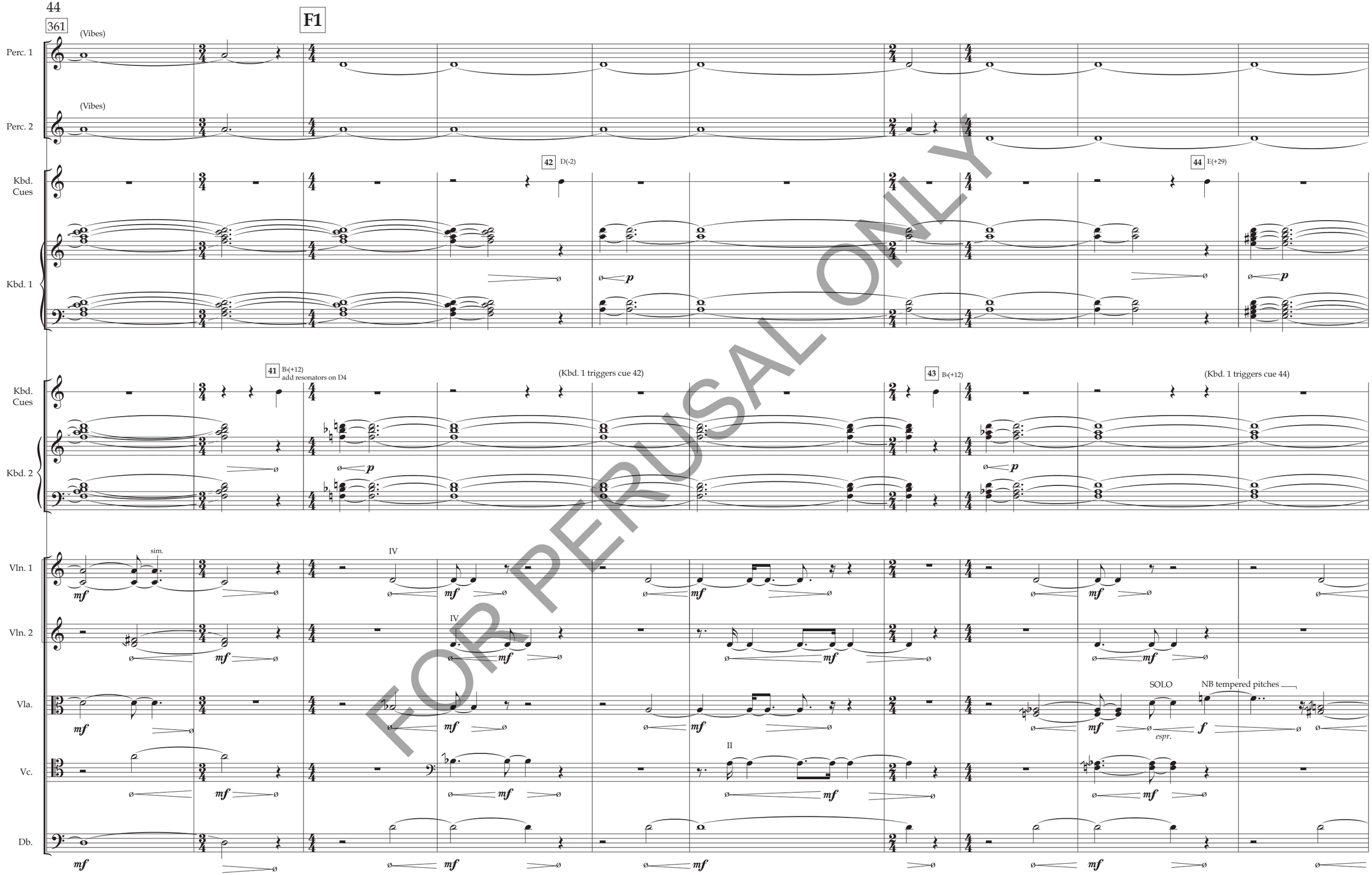

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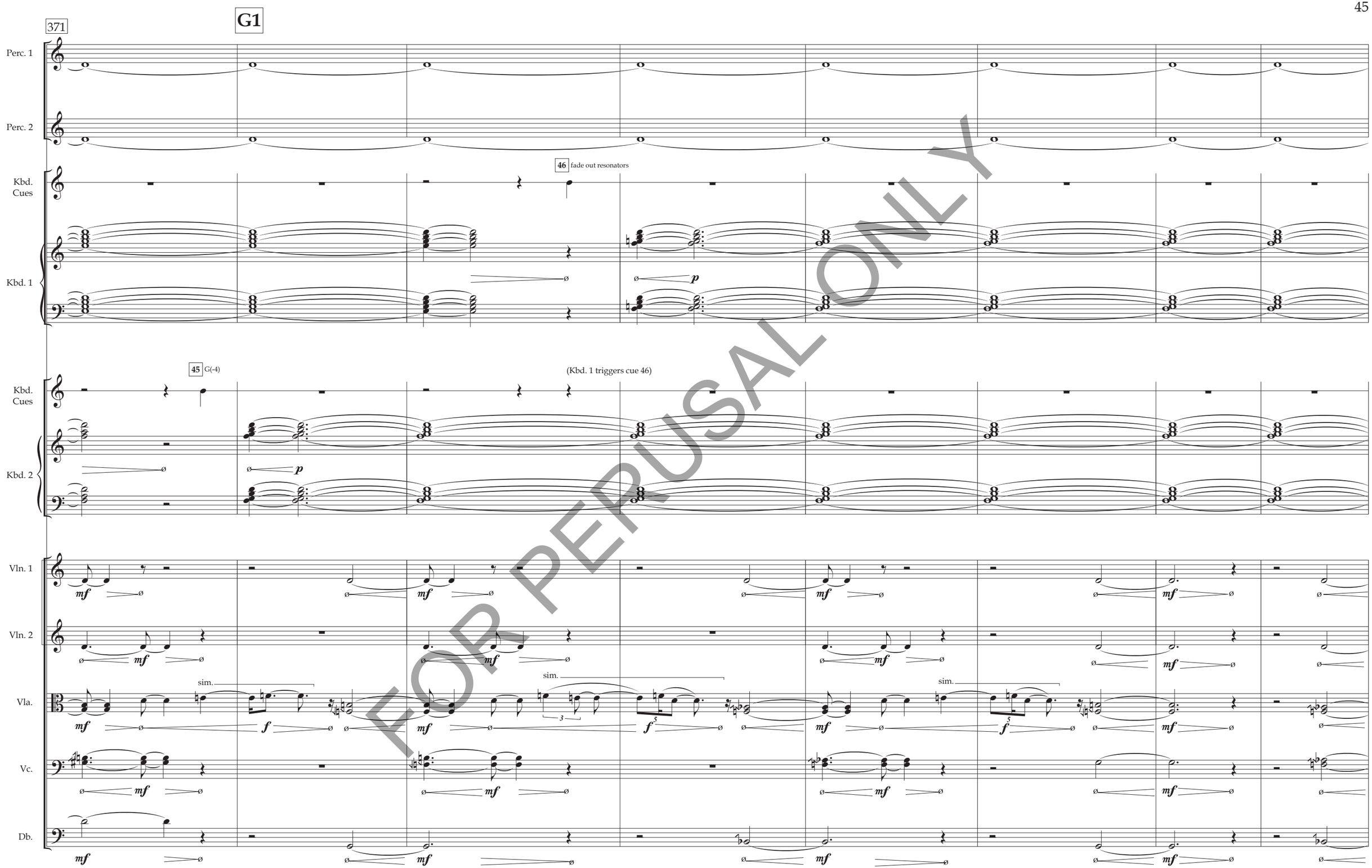

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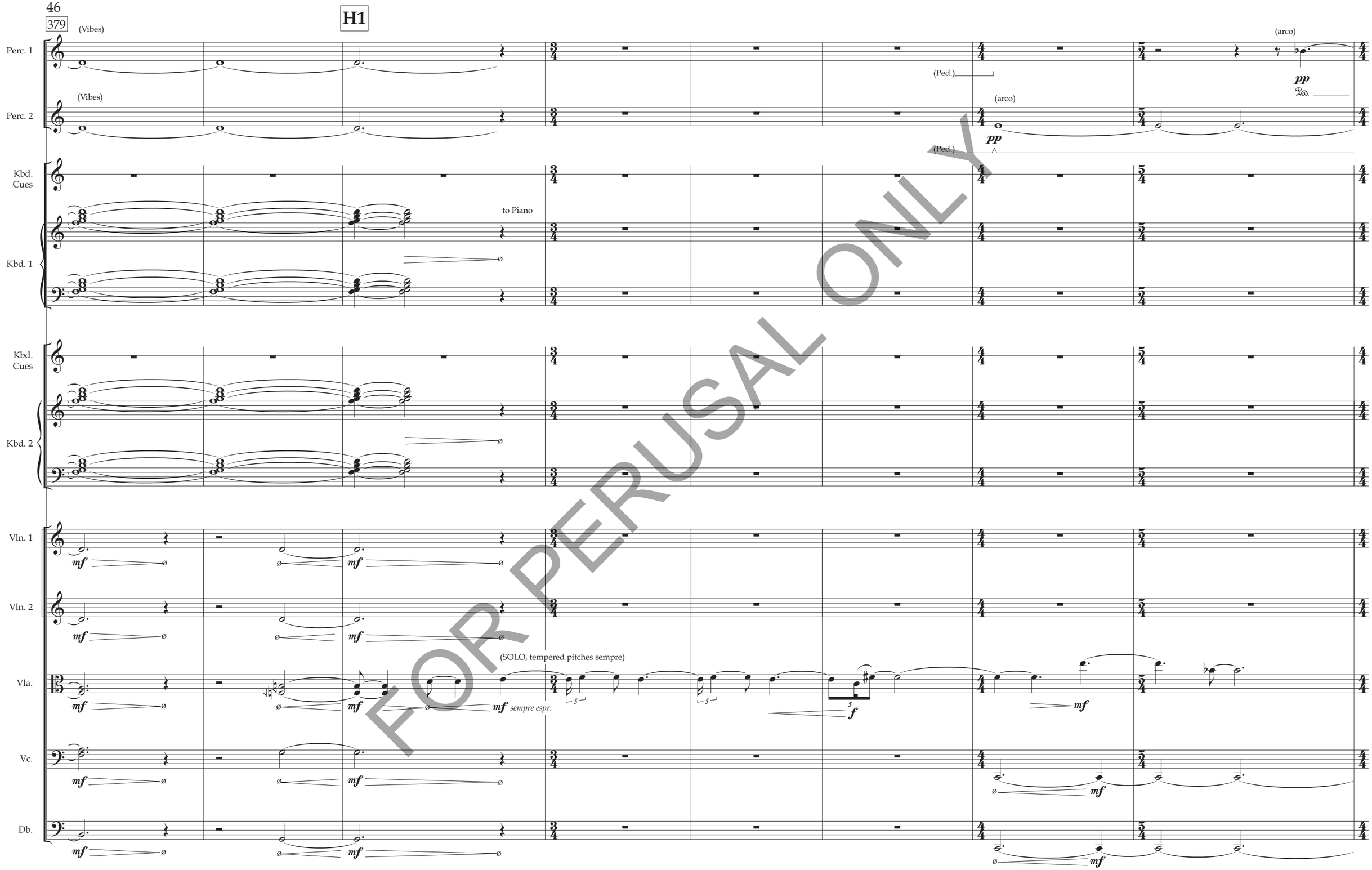

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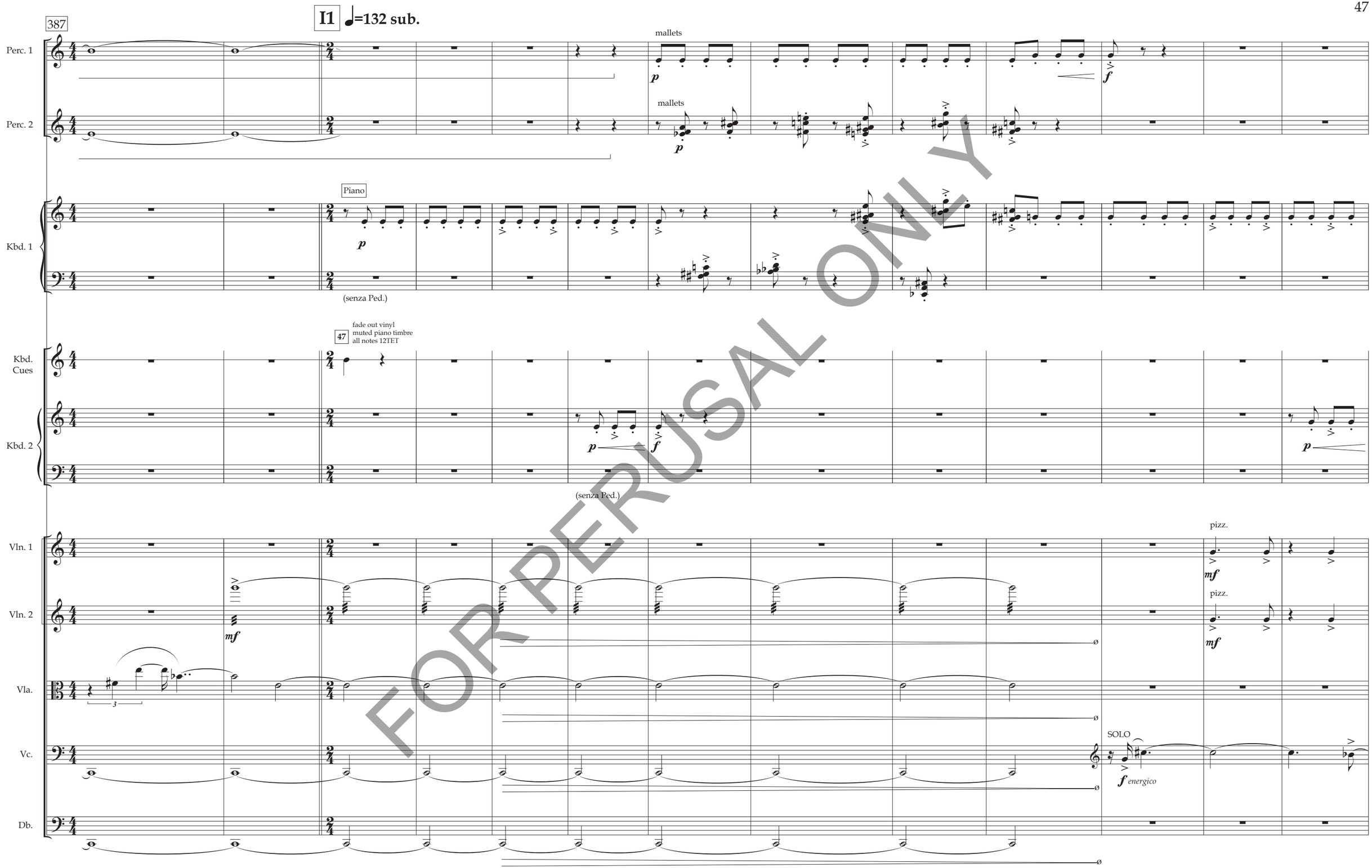

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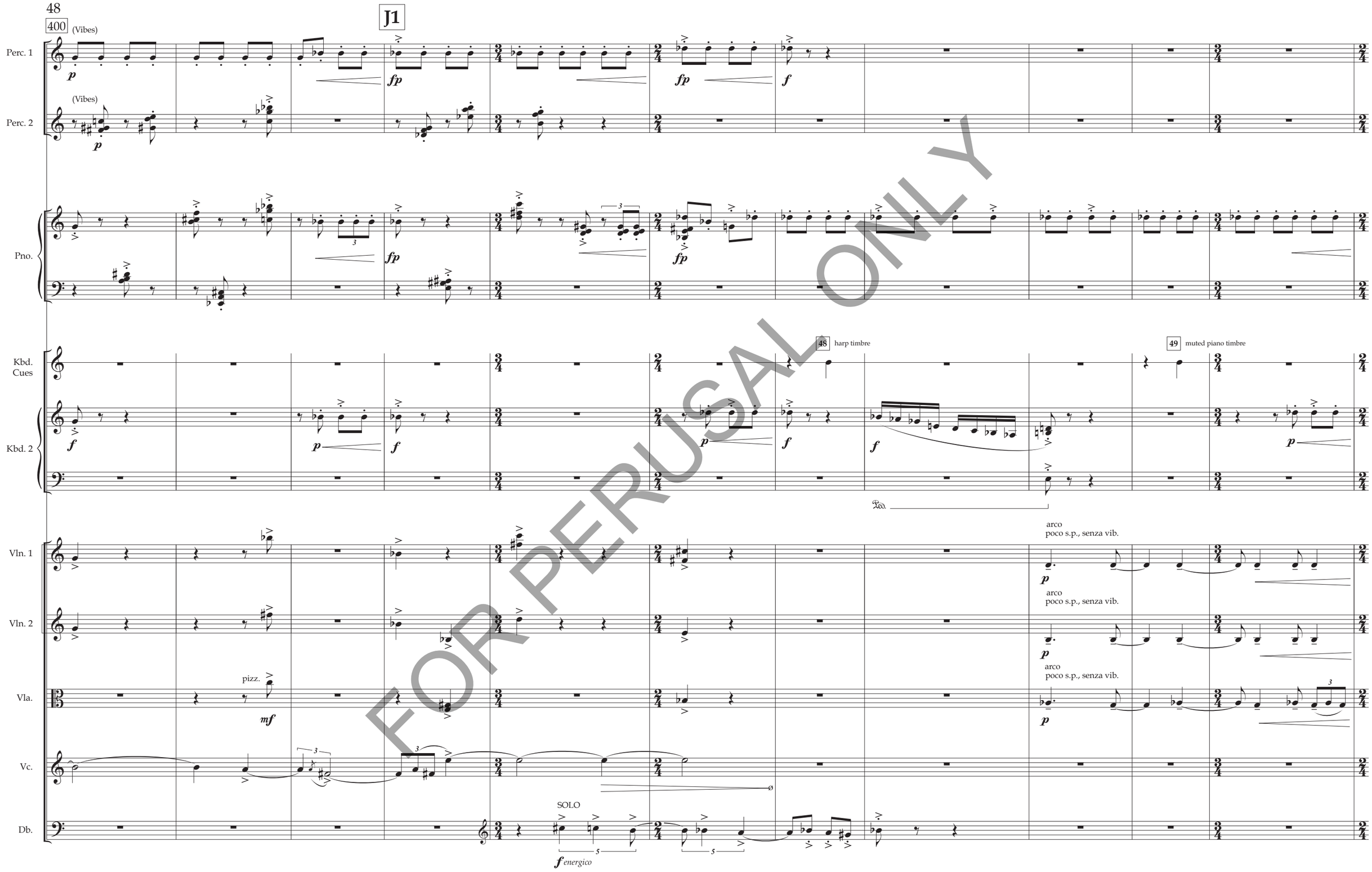

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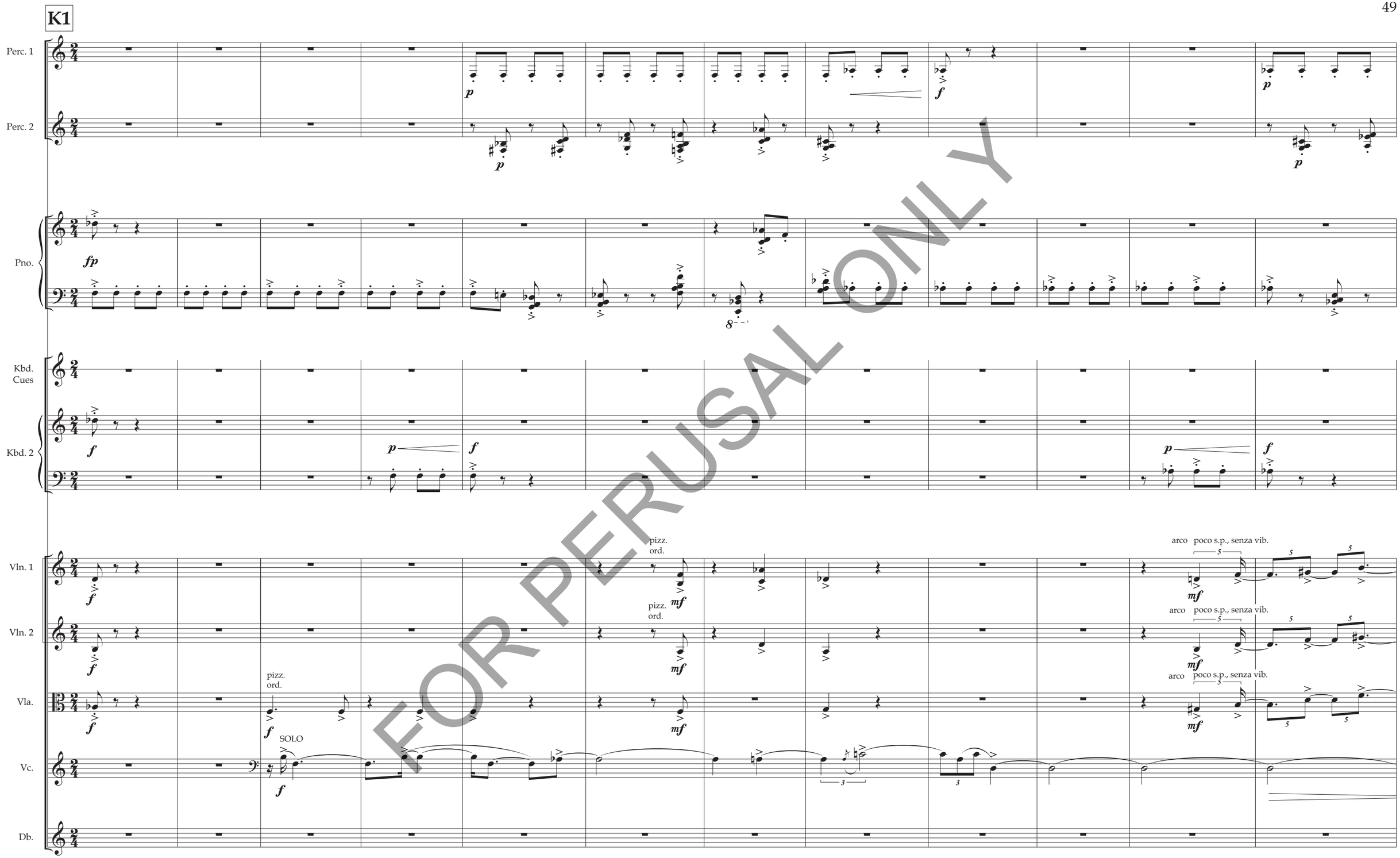

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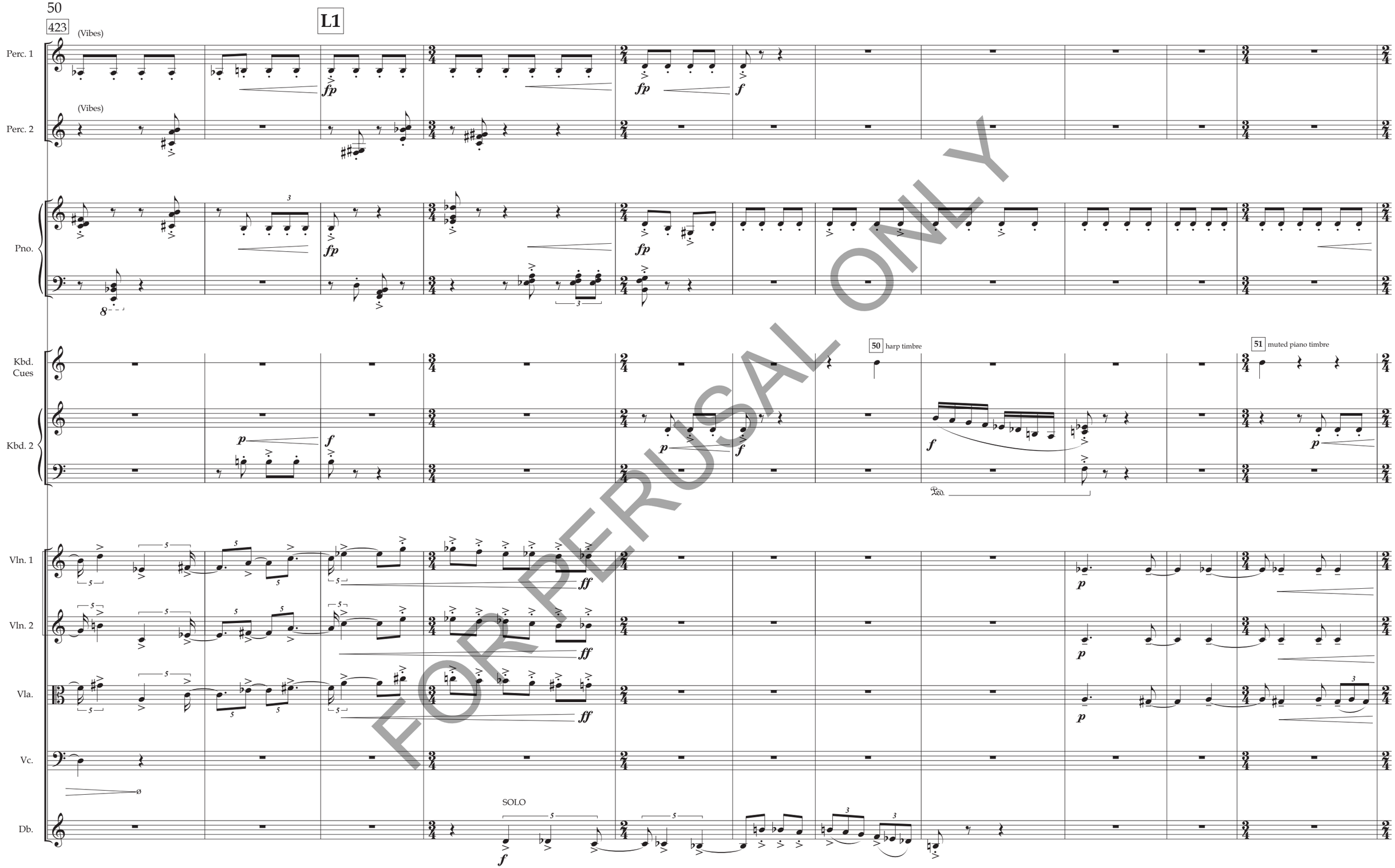

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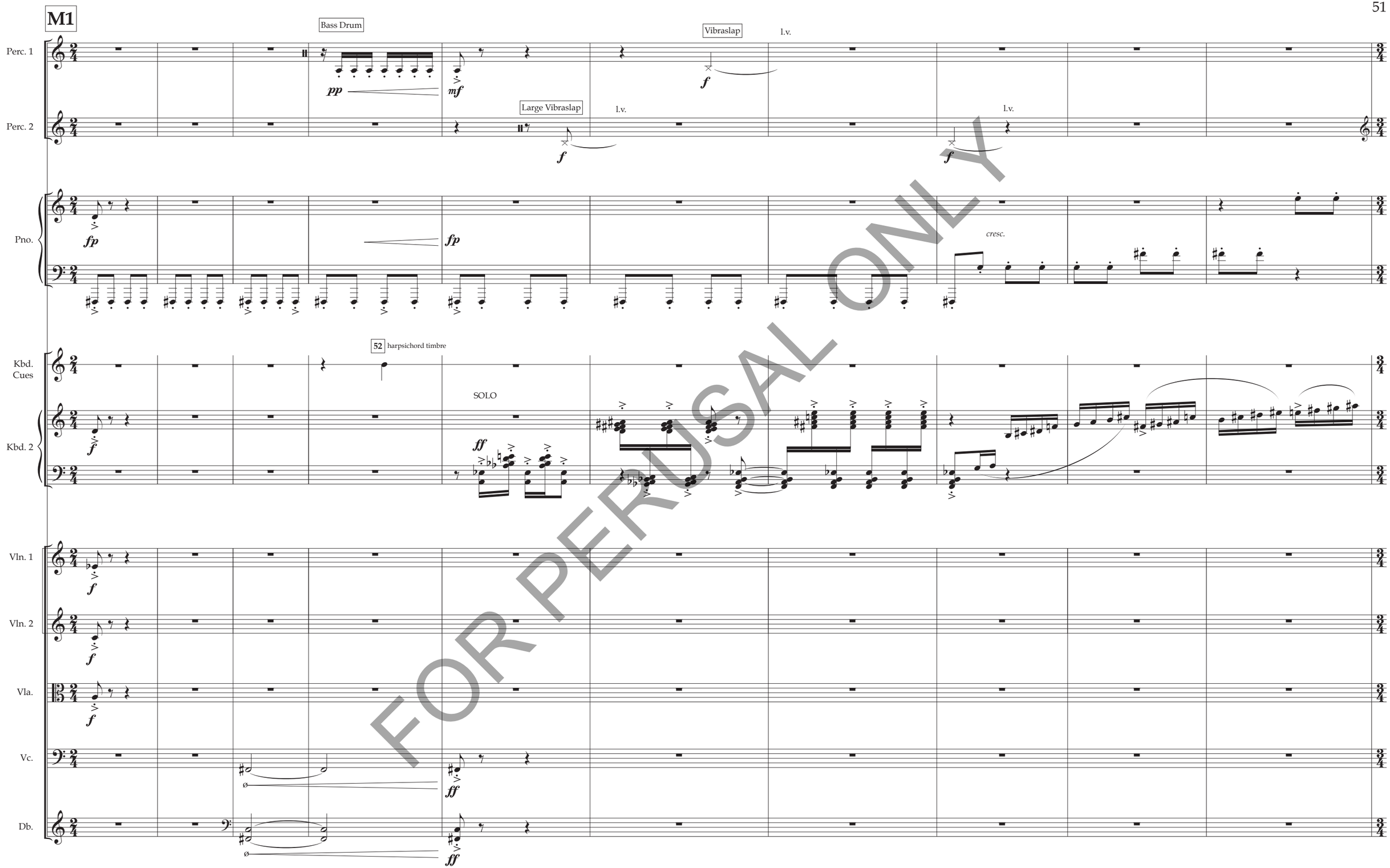

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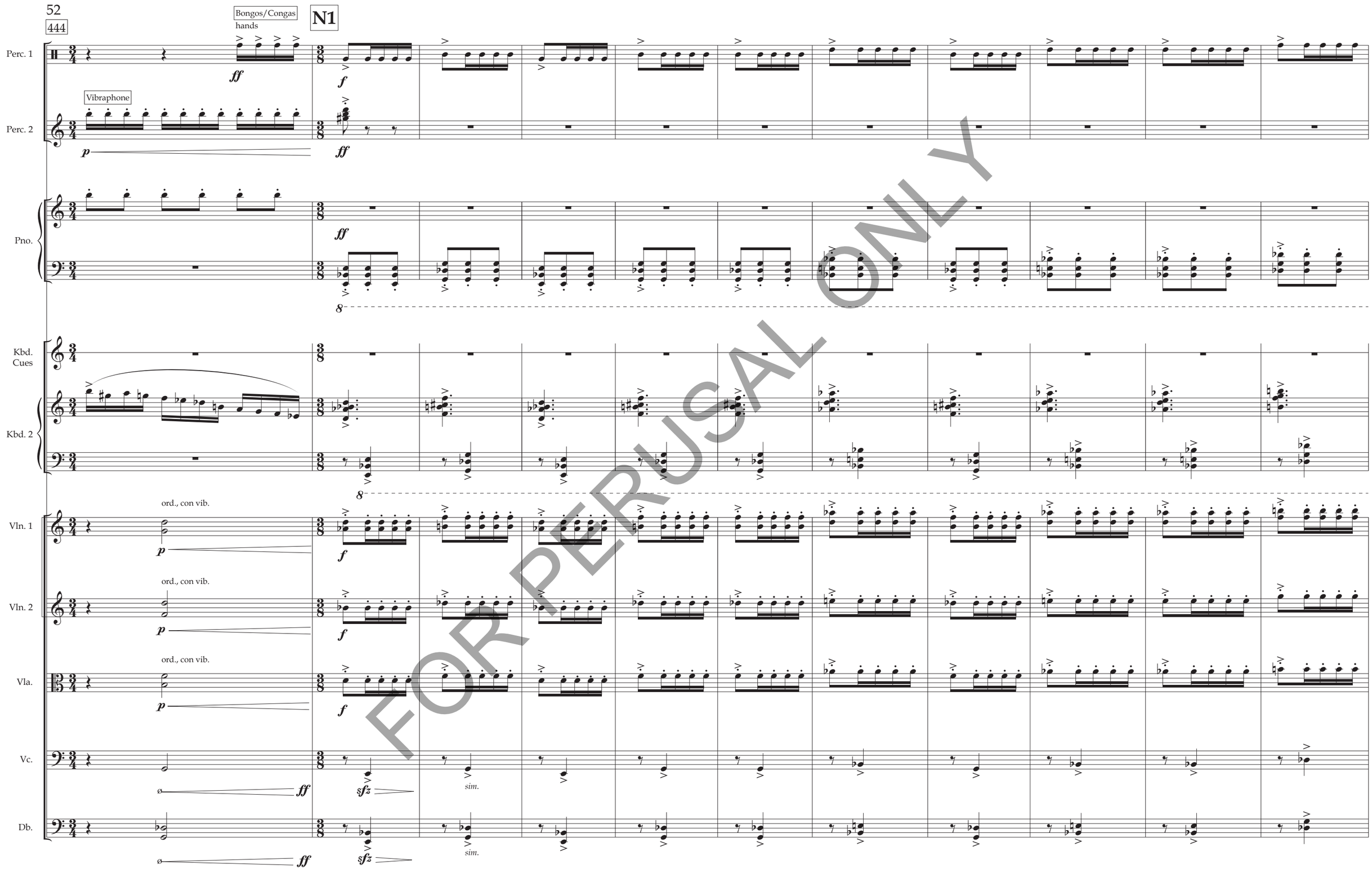

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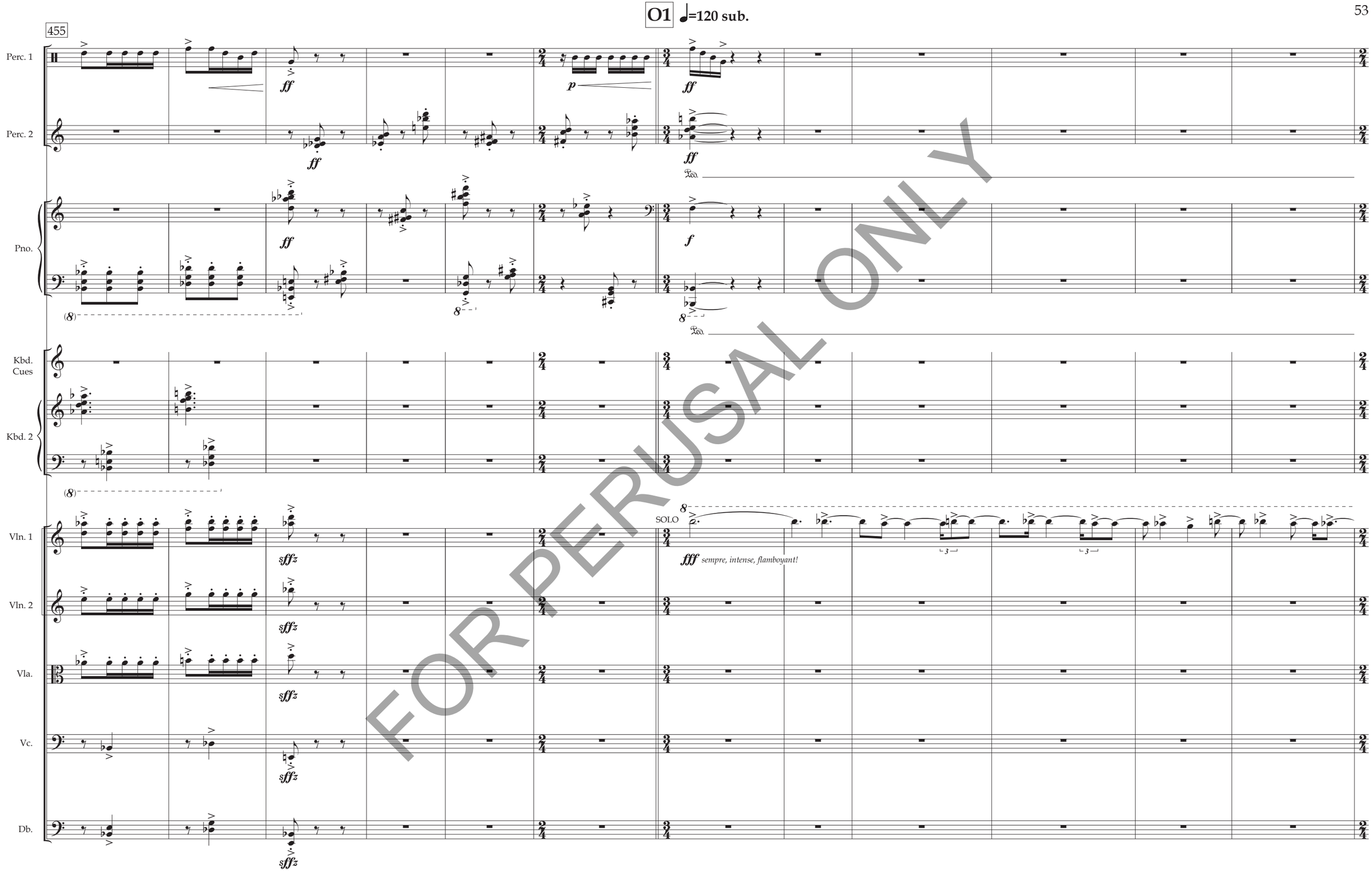

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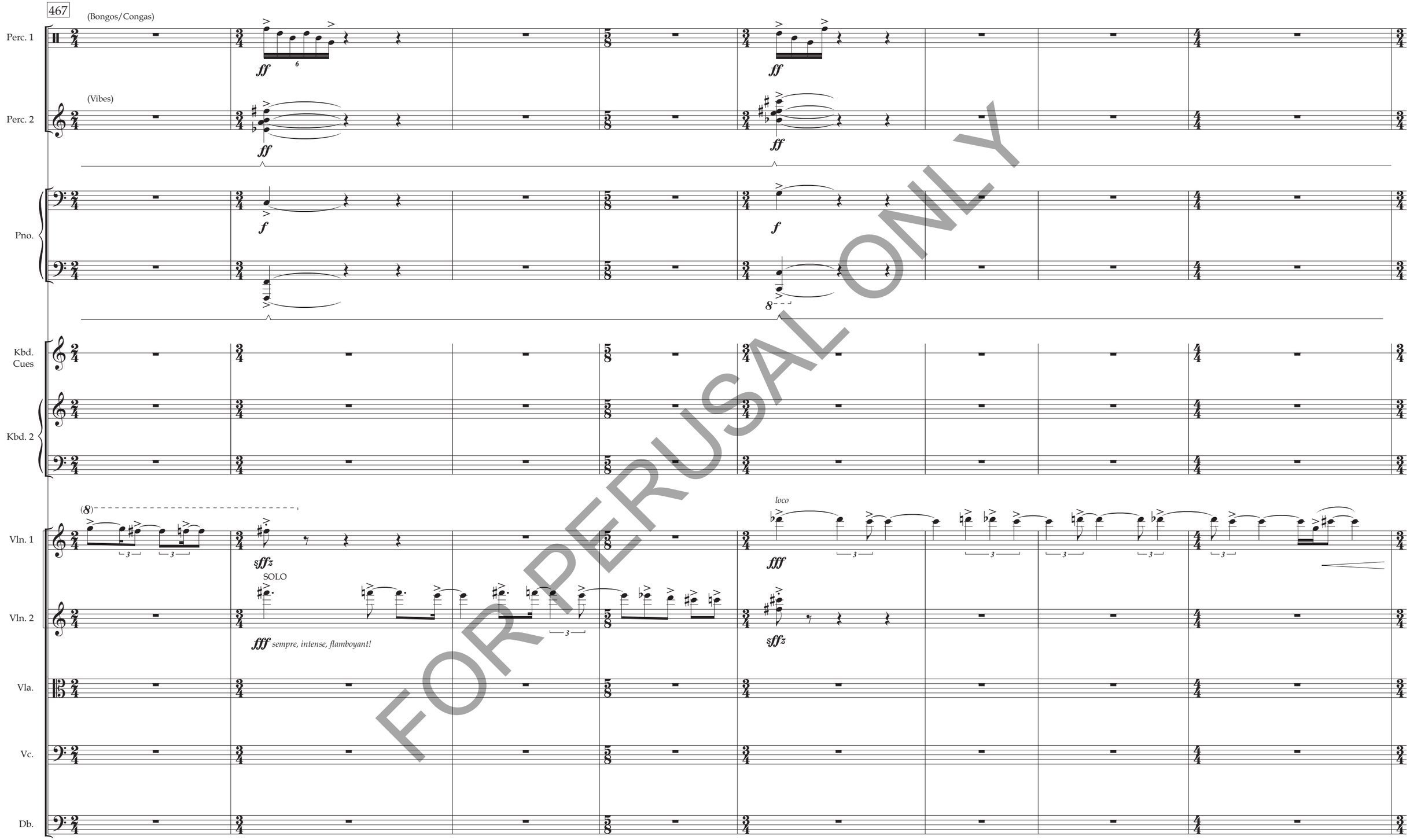

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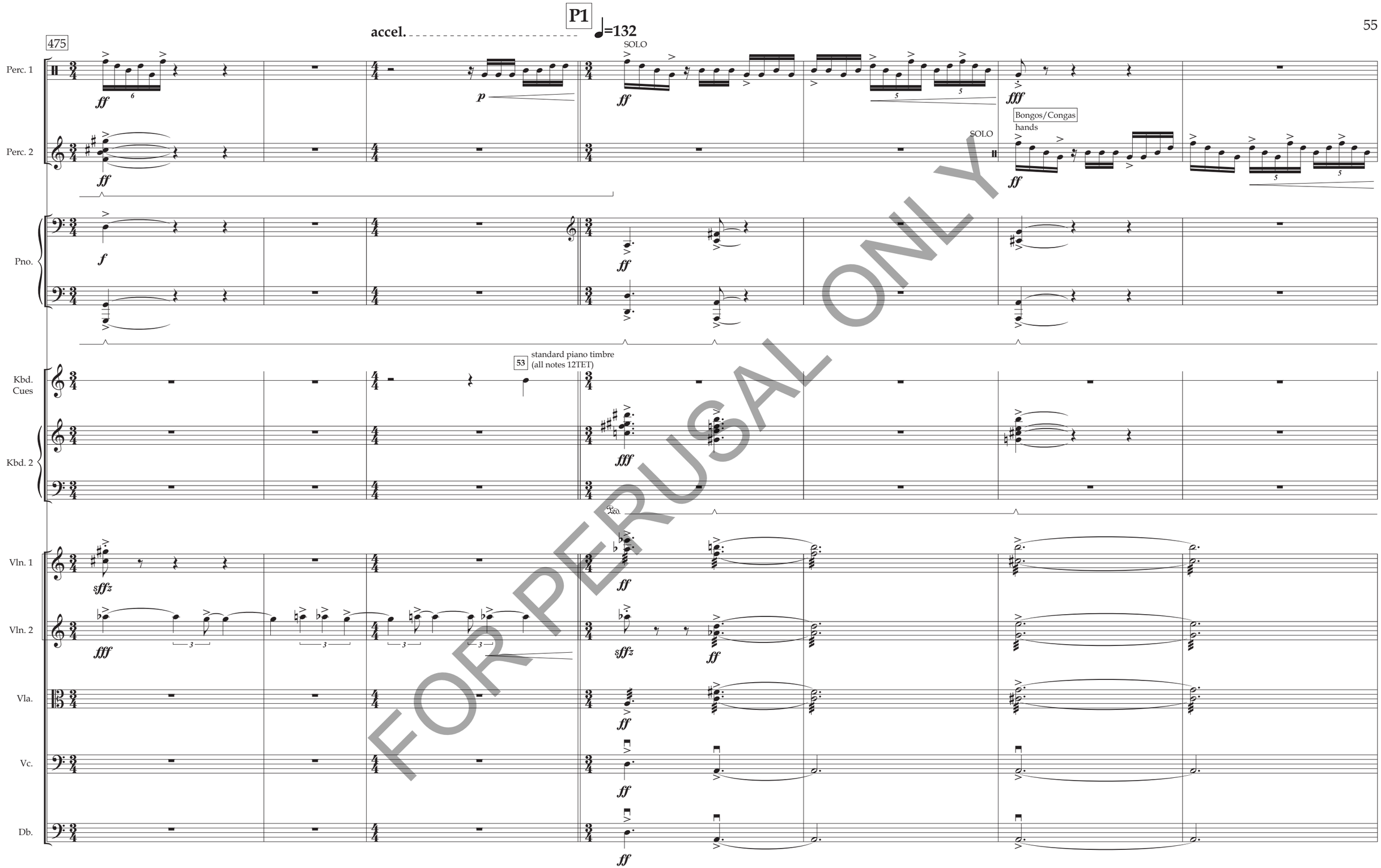

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482

Q1

♩=60 sub.

Perc. 1

(Bongos/Congas)

ff

fff

p sub.

fff

Perc. 2

(Bongos/Congas)

fff

Tom-toms

ff

mf

fff

Pno.

Kbd. Cues

54 modified piano timbre
A0–D1 retune keyboard

Kbd. 2

Vln. 1

from here through m. 502, drift freely between ord. and poco sul pont., independently of other players (con vib.)

p sub.

Vln. 2

from here through m. 502, drift freely between ord. and poco sul pont., independently of other players (con vib.)

p sub.

Vla.

from here through m. 502, drift freely between ord. and poco sul pont., independently of other players (con vib.)

p sub.

Vc.

Db.

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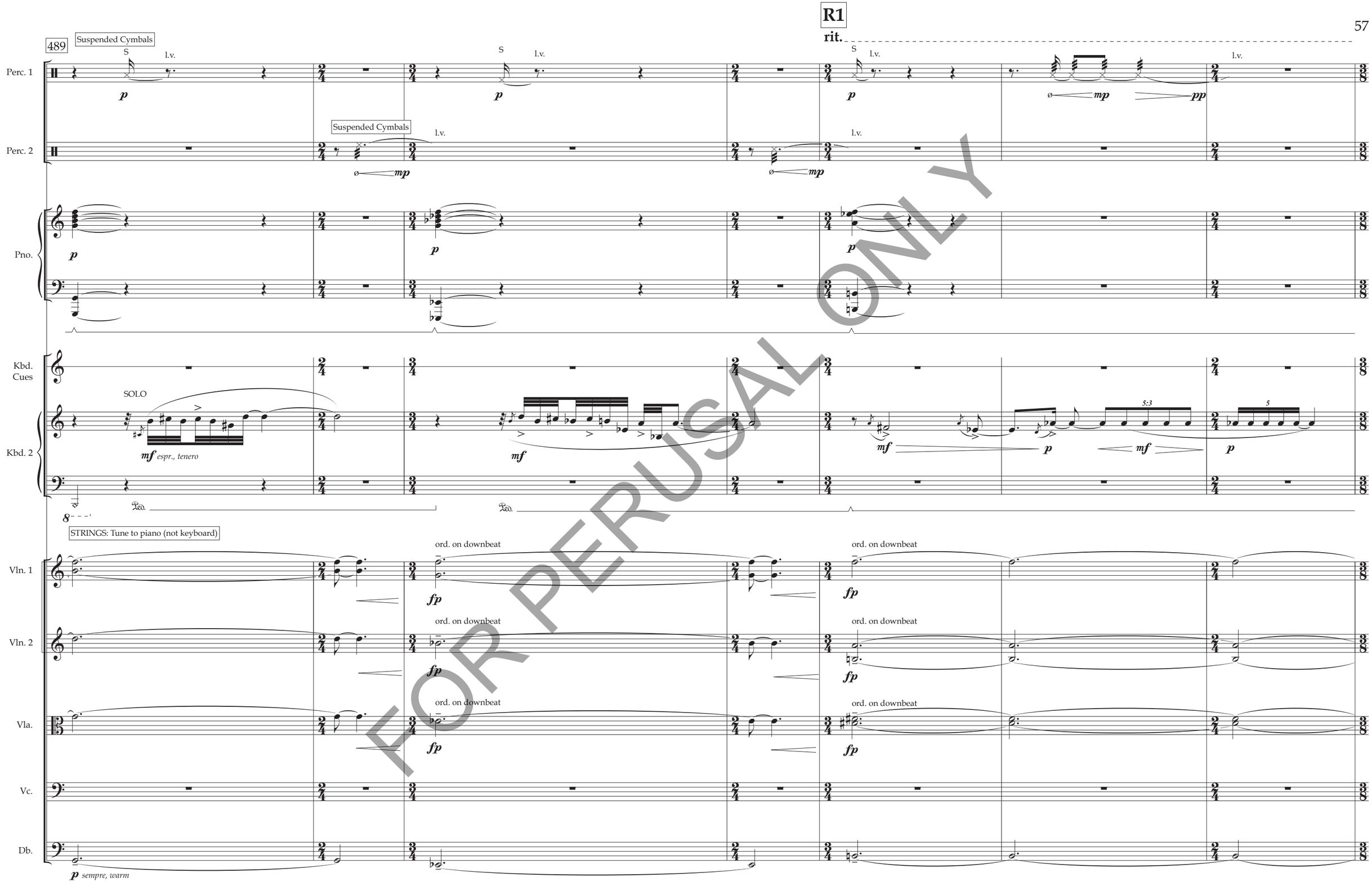

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496

♩=48, più rit.

♩=c.40

S1

♩=132 sub.

Perc. 1

(S. Cym.)

l.v.

Tam-tam

l.v.

Vibraphone

Perc. 2

(S. Cym.)

S

Pno.

Kbd. Cues

55 harp timbre all notes 12TET

Kbd. 2

5:3

dolciss.

loco

Vln. 1

ord. on downbeat

(stop drifting)

ord.

Vln. 2

ord. on downbeat

(stop drifting)

ord.

Vla.

ord. on downbeat

ord. (stop drifting)

Vc.

(ord.)

from here through m. 502, drift freely between ord. and poco sul pont., independently of other players

ord. (stop drifting)

(ord.)

Db.

sempre

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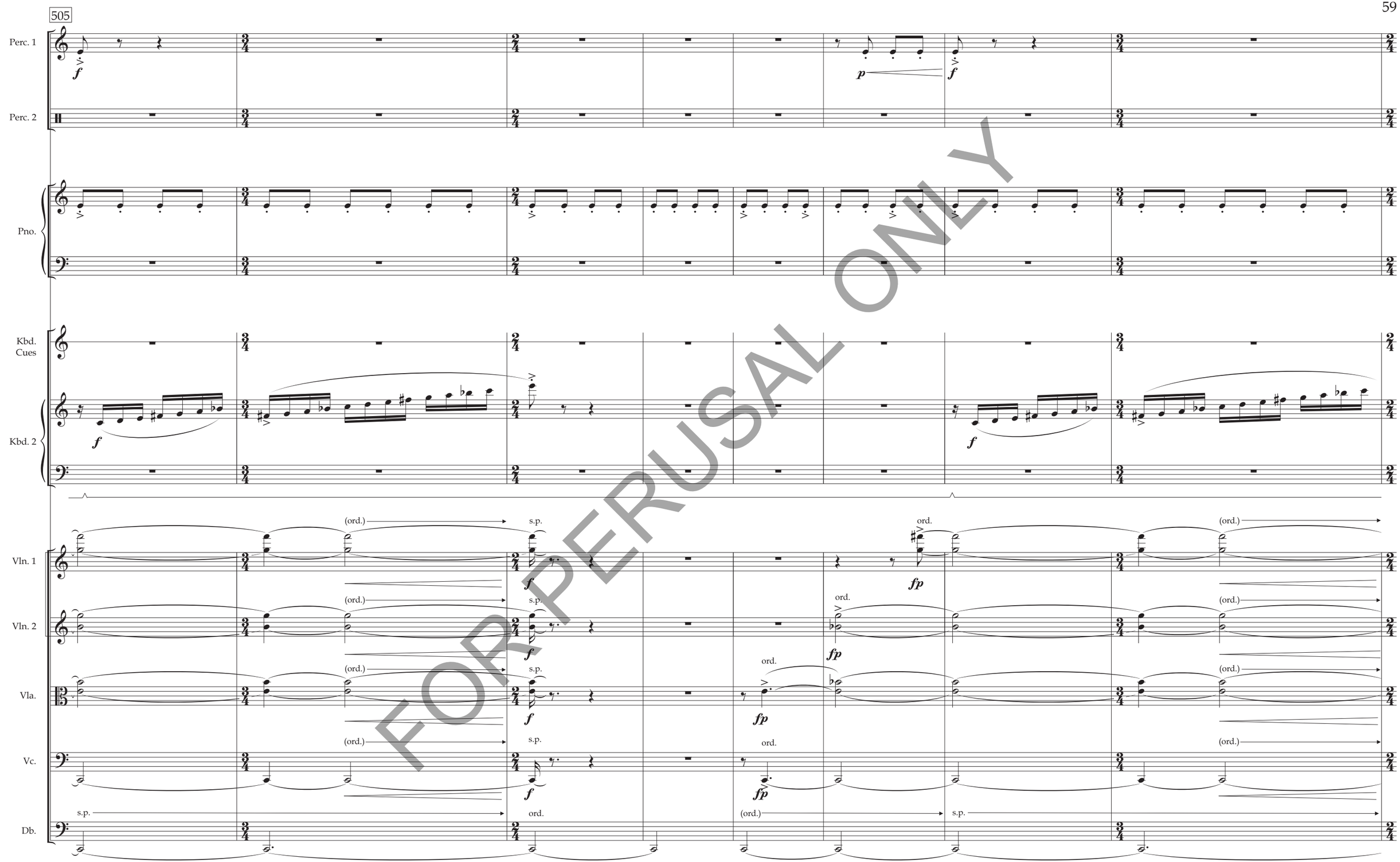

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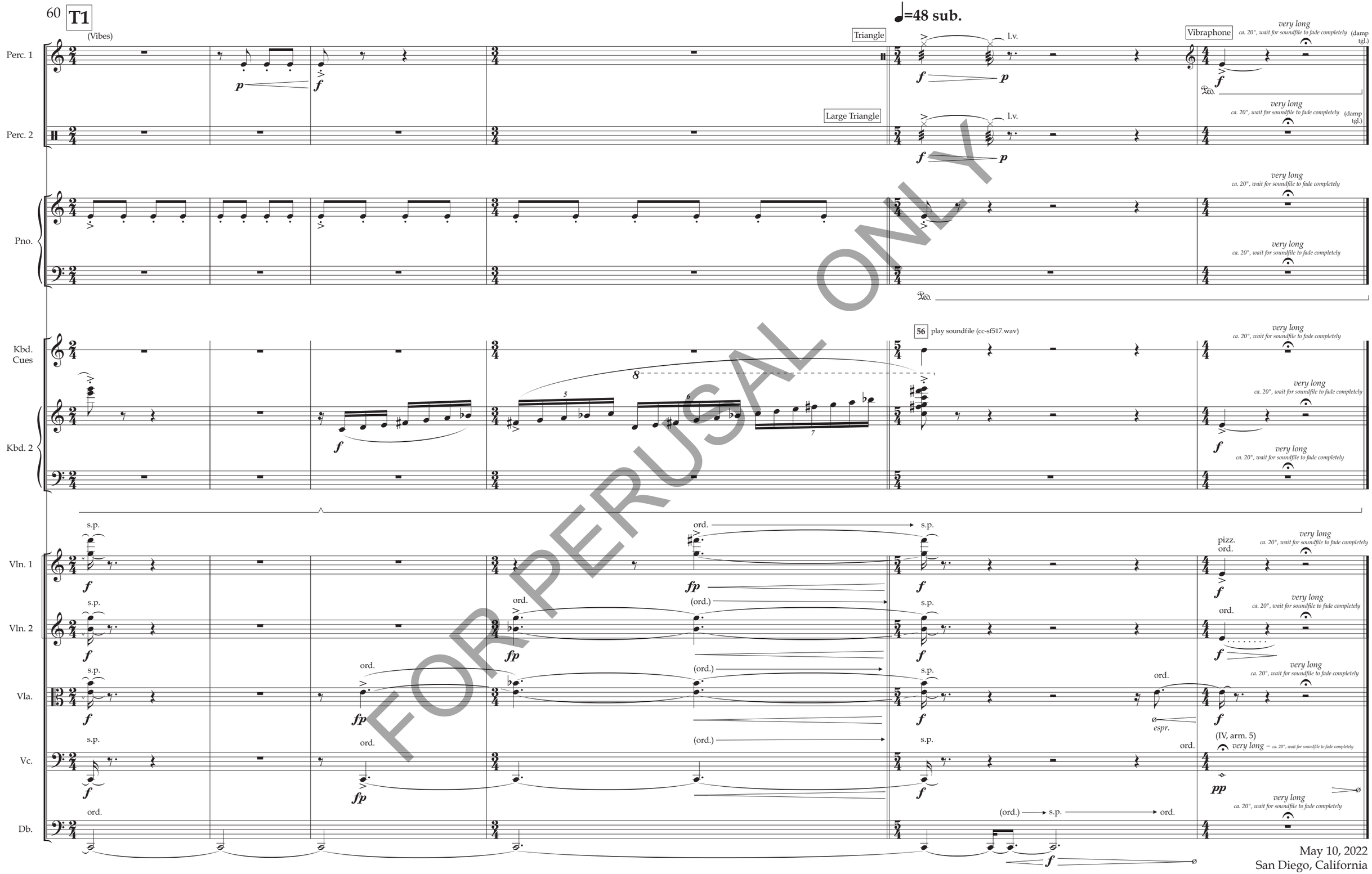

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May 10, 2022
San Diego, California