Ethan Braun

what we call progress

for 33 piano trios (32 digital, 1 real)

Note on the Composition

> A Klee painting named Angelus Novus shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.

what we call progress is for 33 piano trios (32 digital and 1 real). I specify this because the more typical phrases– "for piano trio and electronics" or "fixed-media" or the like–do not give due diligence to the nature of the electronics involved in this case given their particular relationship to the live trio. This relationship of digital to real should be understood as an illusory relationship: the trios mirror each other. Indeed it's a trio in a hall of endless mirrors. So where's the real music? Where's the mirror music? If a mirror reveals something of its onlooker, what would the analog here be? Original, real music that looks itself up and down, handsoming itself up?

The only sample in the electronics not a piano, violin, or cello, is a synthesized sound from which all the work's material is derived. This is the first thing heard in the work, so is that the real music? Or, given the depth of processing, and what this material developed into, is it a distant reflection?

what we call progress asks what musical progress is. It wonders if transforming a source sound or material into music constitutes something progressive; it thinks aloud as to whether or not live performers can keep up with digital ones; it

Performance Notes

Amplification

The live trio must be amplified and run through a small amount of reverb for the purpose of blending with the electronics. This facilitates the effect of illusion as to who's playing what and when.

Articulation

The violin performing *pizzicato* throughout, always situated quite high on the instrument, should help form an iciness in the sound. The piano's higher register should emphasize this iciness through a generally sharp articulation, while the Cello and piano's left hand should add body to the sound. Given the largely unison playing throughout, the ensemble should think of itself in each movement like a long, winding melody that slowly explores itself. Each melody has a slightly different character, but all share a robustness and directness.

The piano should employ as little pedal as possible, but the cello should generally feel that they hold their pitch into the next beat, facilitating an l.v. however possible.

Click Track

A click track will be provided to facilitate ensemble playing. This can be disseminated to the players through a small headphone amp set on stage behind the pianist in the center. Long cables are recommended to accommodate for large distances between the performers, and it is also necessary that the headphones be black ear buds so as to be inconspicuous.

Electronics

The electronics take the form of a simple .wav file. The audio has been mixed down into stereo, but stems are available for finer control if needed. In certain cases the live ensemble and electronics should be sent through the same reverb (as light as possible) to effect their occupying as similar a space as possible.

Staging

The trio should be positioned as far upstage as possible. The piano in the center, violin stage left and cello stage right. The piano should be turned such that the pianist's face is visible to the audience. Butterflies should be used to diffuse lighting over the faces of each of the performers. Aside from the lighting on the faces of the performers, the hall should be in complete darknerss, obscuring the speakers from view.

Performance Score

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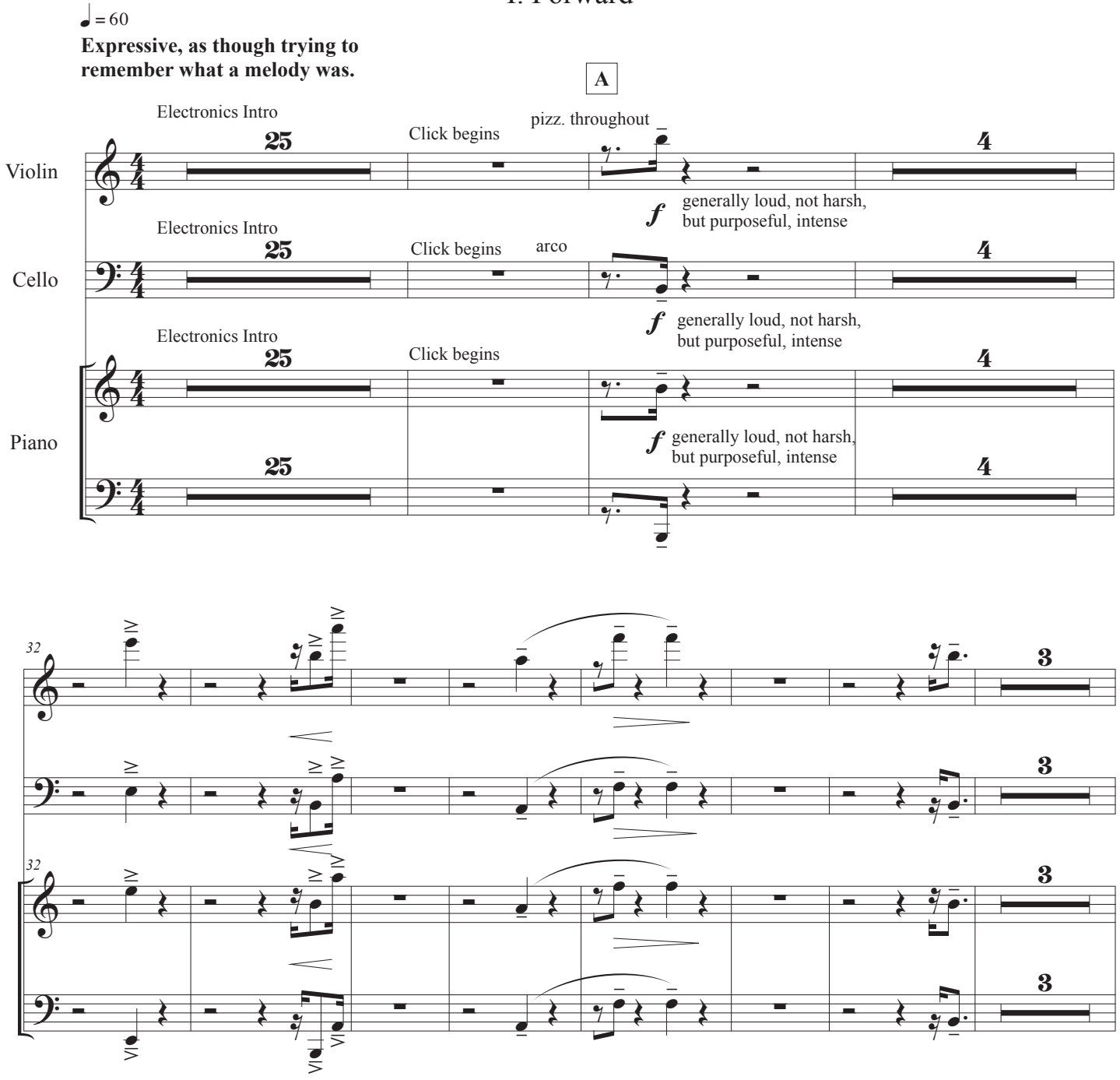
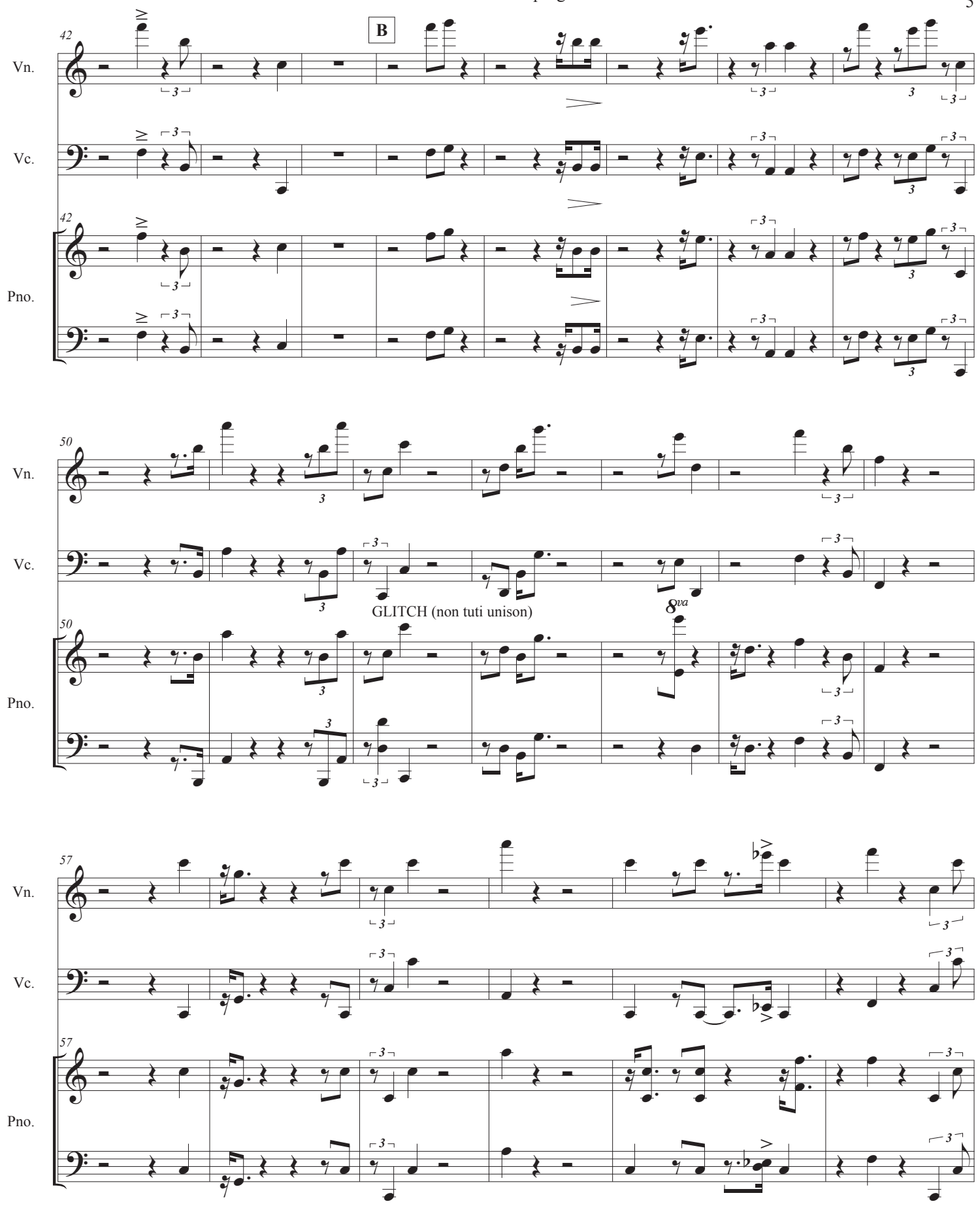
I. Forward




42
B
Vn.
Vc.
Pno.
50
GLITCH (non tuti unison)
8va
57

C

w/pno rh

unison again

Vn.

w/pno lh

unison again

Vc.

63

Pno.

68

Vn.

Vc.

68

Pno.

D

73

Vn.

Vc.

73

Pno.

77

E

Vn.

Vc.

Pno.

82

87

F

93

Vn.

Vc.

93

Pno.

100

Vn.

Vc.

100

Pno.

104

Vn.

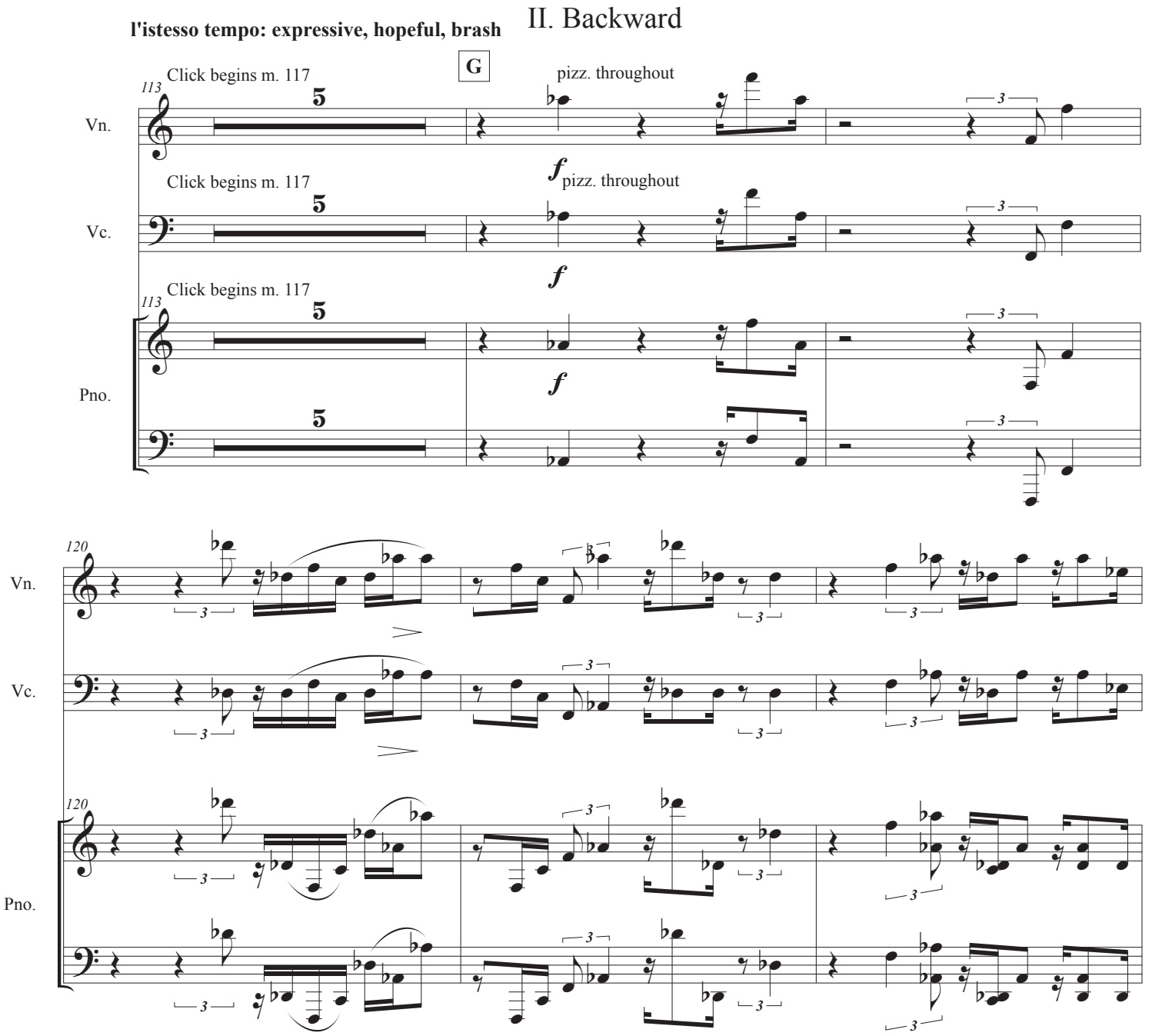
Vc.

104

Pno.

attacca

II. Backward


l'istesso tempo: expressive, hopeful, brash
G
Click begins m. 117
pizz. throughout
Vn.
Vc.
Pno.
113
120
5
3
f

10

H

Vn.

Vc.

123

Pno.

126

Vn.

Vc.

126

Pno.

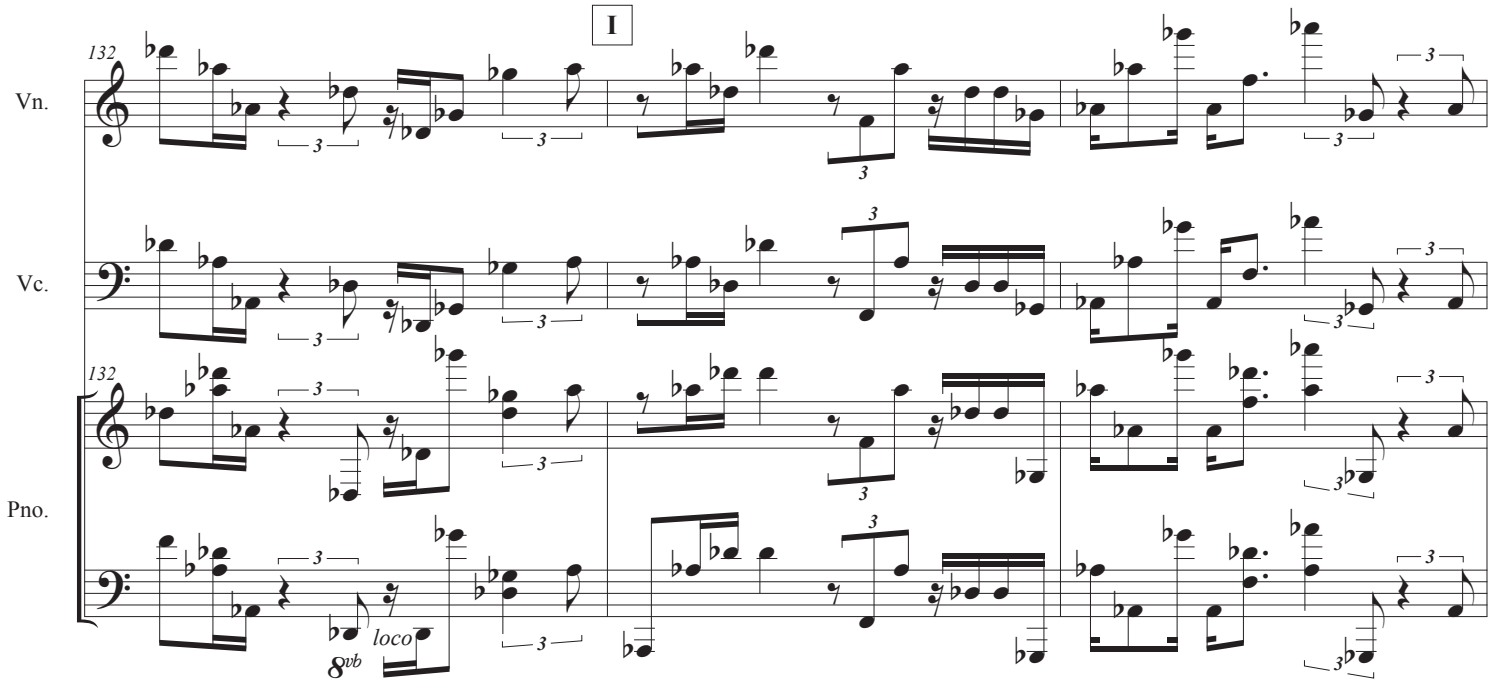
129

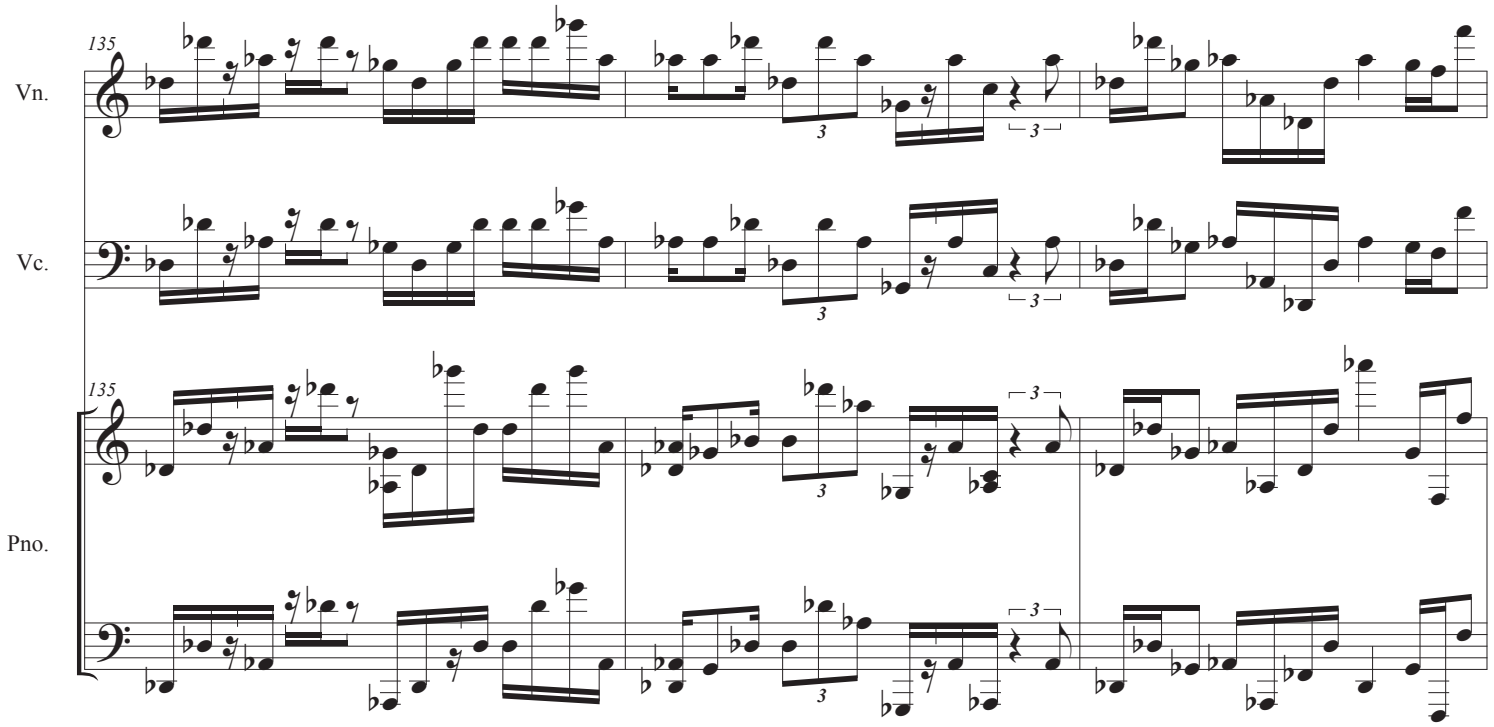
Vn.

Vc.

129

Pno.


I
132
Vn.
Vc.
132
Pno.
loco
8vb


135
Vn.
Vc.
135
Pno.

138

Vn.

Vc.

138

Pno.

141

Vn.

Vc.

141

Pno.

144

Vn.

Vc.

144

Pno.

147

Vn.

Vc.

147

Pno.

Theme appears in Electronics

J

Vn.

Theme appears in Electronics

Vc.

Theme appears in Electronics

150

Pno.

155

Vn.

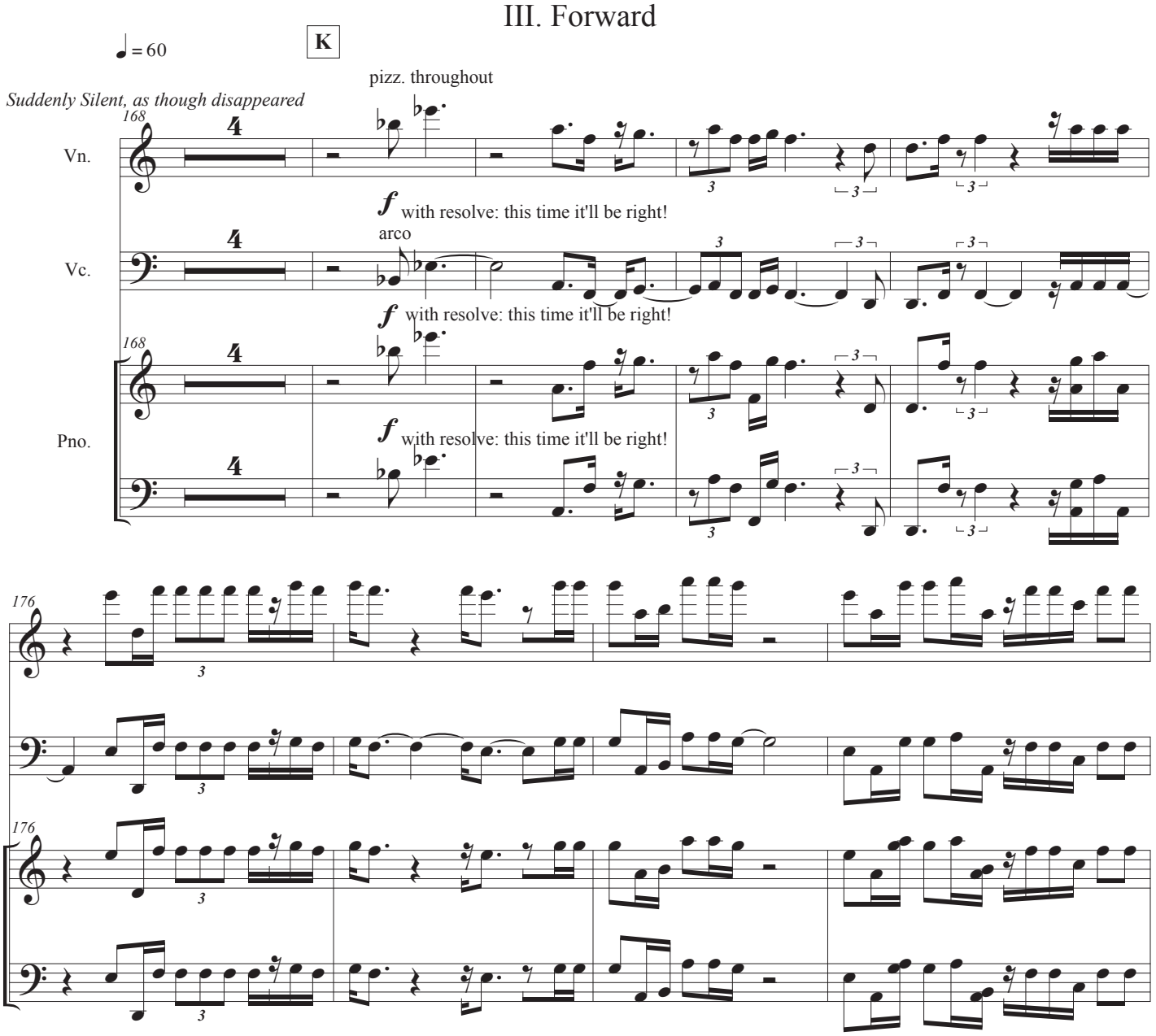
Vc.

Pno.

160

attacca

III. Forward


♩ = 60
K
pizz. throughout
Suddenly Silent, as though disappeared
168
Vn.
f with resolve: this time it'll be right!
arco
Vc.
f with resolve: this time it'll be right!
168
Pno.
f with resolve: this time it'll be right!
176
Vn.
Vc.
176
Pno.

180

Vn.

Vc.

180

Pno.

L

Vn.

Vc.

184

Pno.

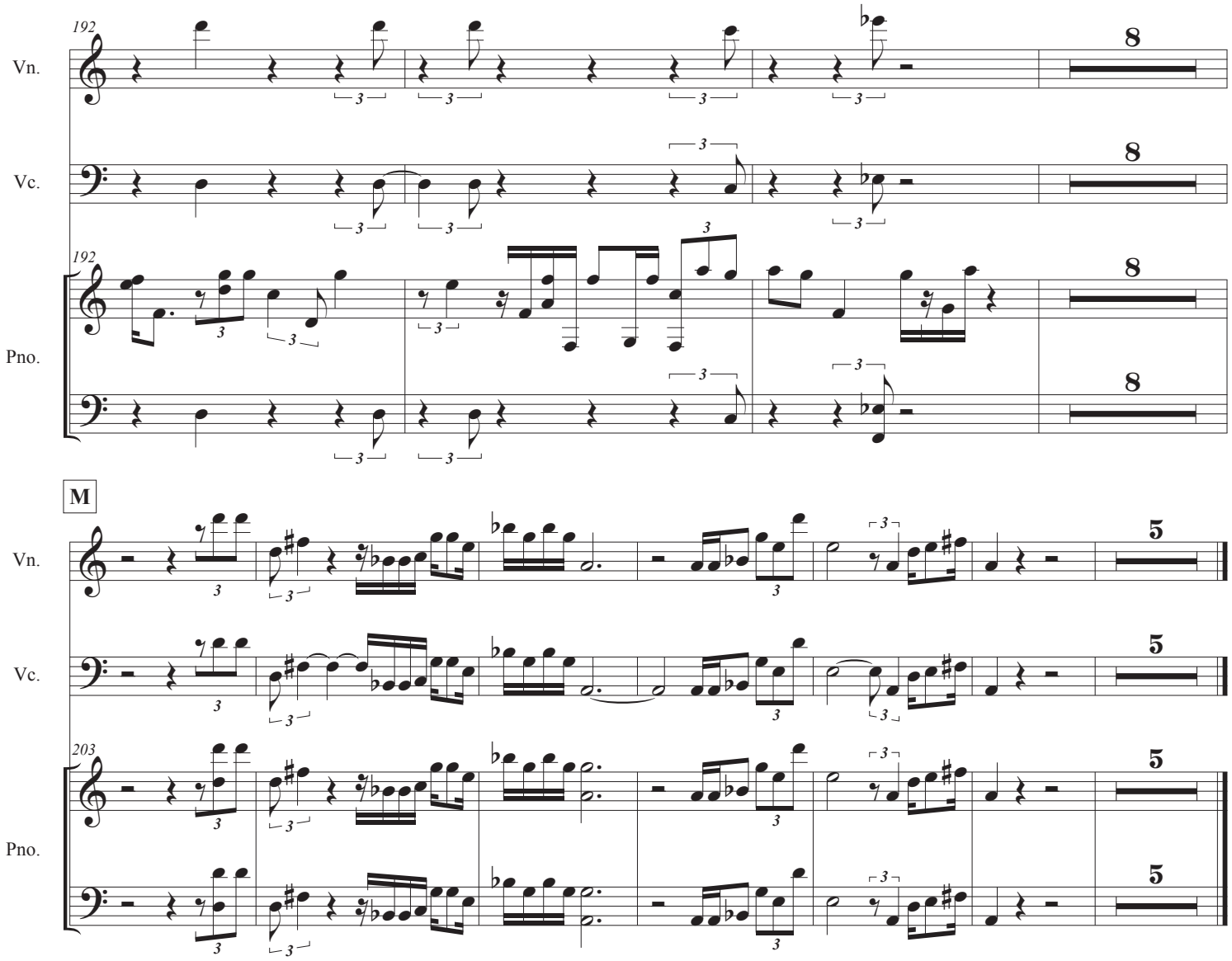
188

Vn.

Vc.

188

Pno.


192
Vn.
Vc.
192
Pno.
M
Vn.
Vc.
203
Pno.