the heavens can make light and flame and ice and water

AARON HOLLOWAY-NAHUM

2022

Score in C [omits register octave doublings]

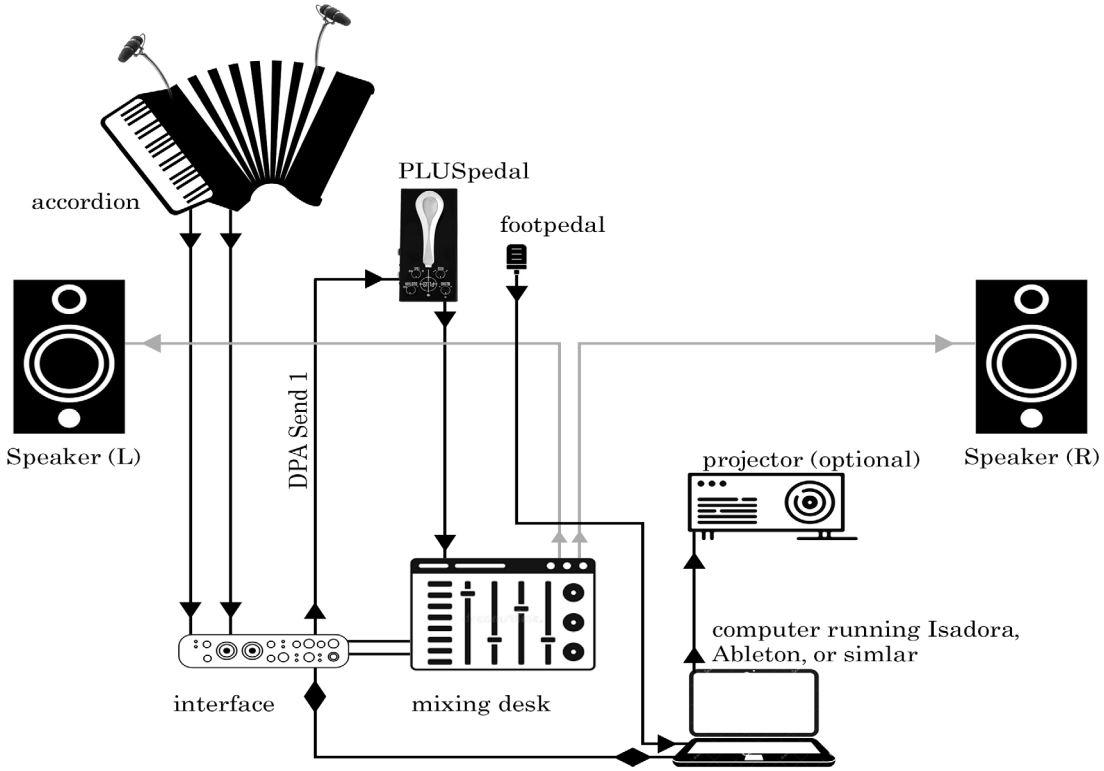
Duration ca. 7’

Performance Note
This piece includes eight triggered samples [shown with triangles], optional video elements, and sustain effects achieved using the GameChanger Audio “Plus” Pedal [shown using an encircled “S”]. It is vital that the ‘live’ accordion remains the most important/fundamental part of the sound in balancing the electronics.

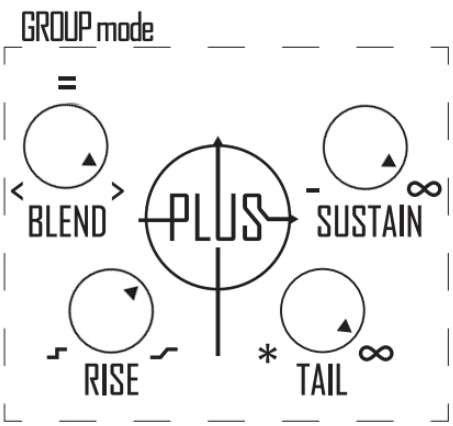
To feed the PlusPedal and to achieve this balance, the Accordion is amplified using two DPA4099 microphones.

An Isadora Patch (which can be run in a free version of the software) is available from the composer and can handle all triggering and video elements. Alternatively, the performer may load and trigger samples from any live software such as Ableton (if no video element is desired).

Patch Diagram



Plus Pedal Settings



Programme Note

the heavens can make light and flame and ice and water was commissioned by the Royal Academy of Music as part of their Bicentenary 200 Commissions Project.

The piece takes - as its starting point - a reading of a translation of a poem by Ukrainian poet Kateryna Babkina. This reading was analysed (for pitch and rhythmic content), processed heavily (in the electronic samples) and reflected upon constantly while I was composing the piece.

Throughout the piece, the player is directed to perform (in general) *extremely quietly* with violently loud accents. The effect is one of a text, or spoken dialogue that is half-remembered by the listener. The electronics alternatively veil the performance further, or illuminate it concretely with snippets of text and moments of concrete interaction with the live performer.

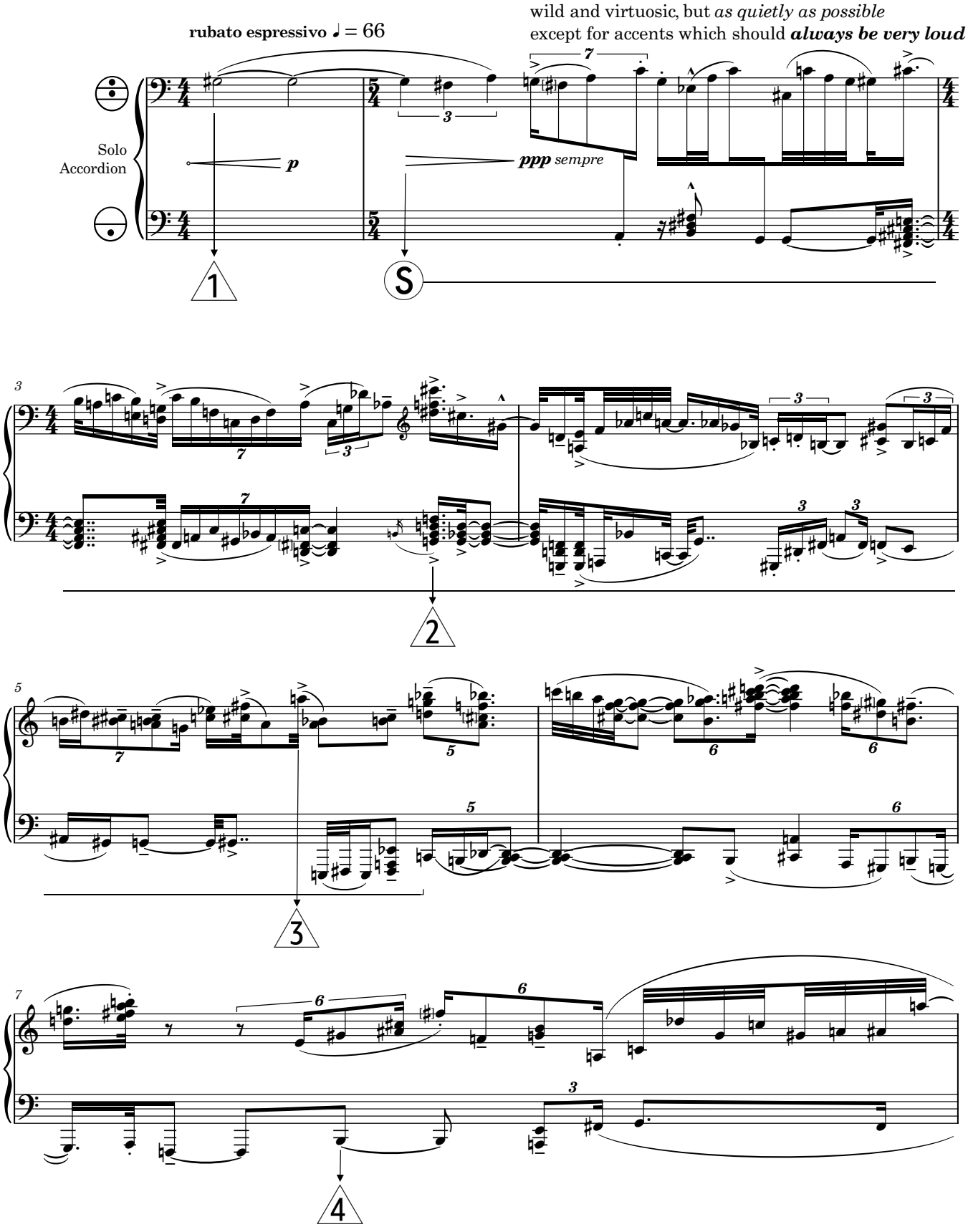
Though the piece was composed mostly in 2021, it was completed and premiered three weeks into the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, in March 2022. It carries within it every resonance of sadness, anger, helplessness, smallness, and loss which I have felt in watching that criminal tragedy unfold.

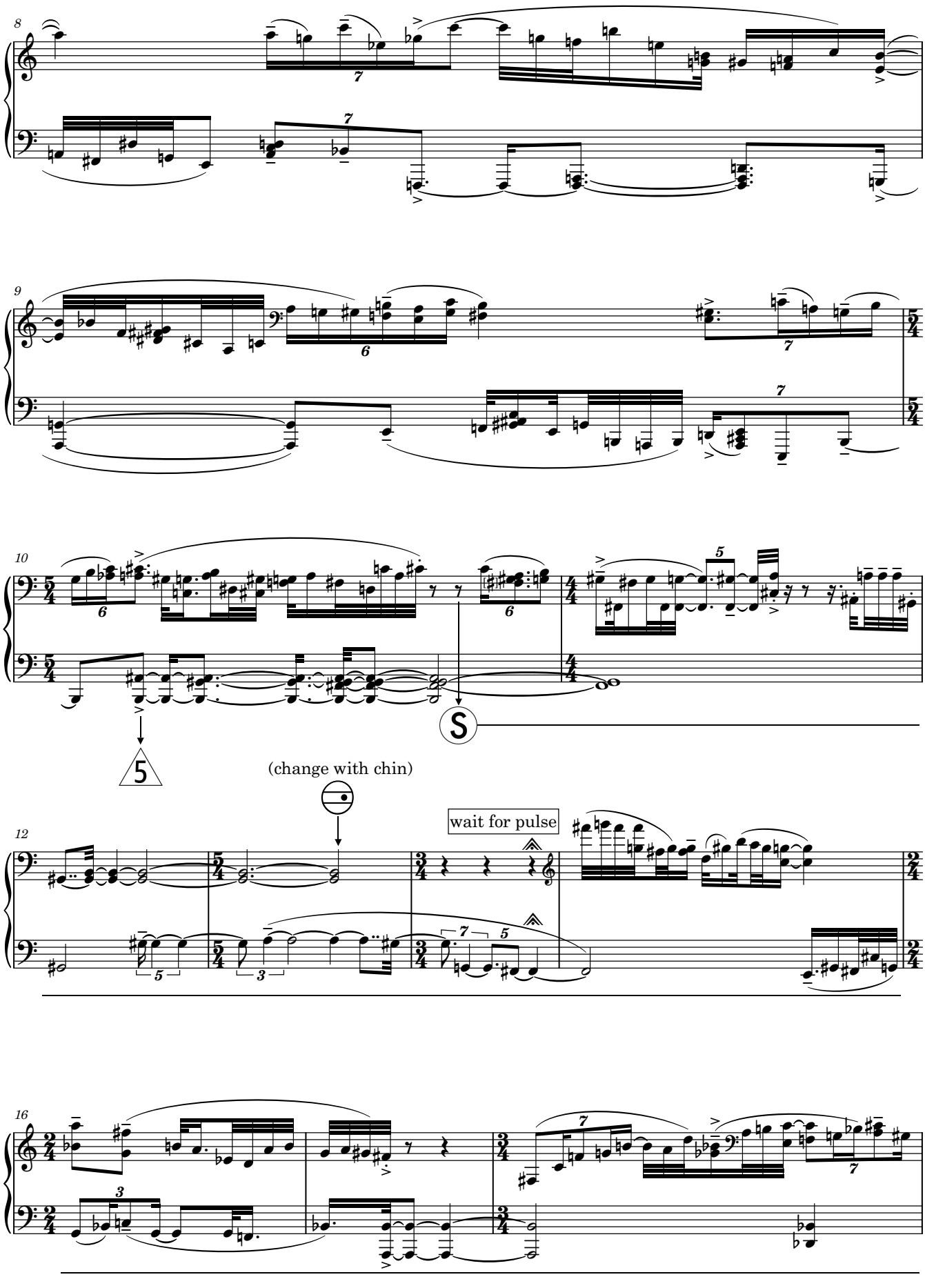
> The heavens can make light and flame and ice and water –
> and you're as small and weak against them as an insect,
> a wrinkled berry on a frozen hawthorn in December,
> the shadow of a bird that fades across the snowy steppe –
> yes, this is you, so small against the heavens. All-embracing,
> they will envelop everything around you in their arms –
> held tightly in their clasping velvet, rigid, black, abrasive,
> you'll stand as though up to your neck in water, warm and dark.
> And now you stand as though before the heavens begging –
> timidly, you raise your lowered eyes without permission:
> perhaps the sky, on such a night, as one might for a baby,
> will turn some music on for you and set the stars in motion.
>
> Kateryna Babkina
> Translated from the Ukrainian by Uilleam Blacker

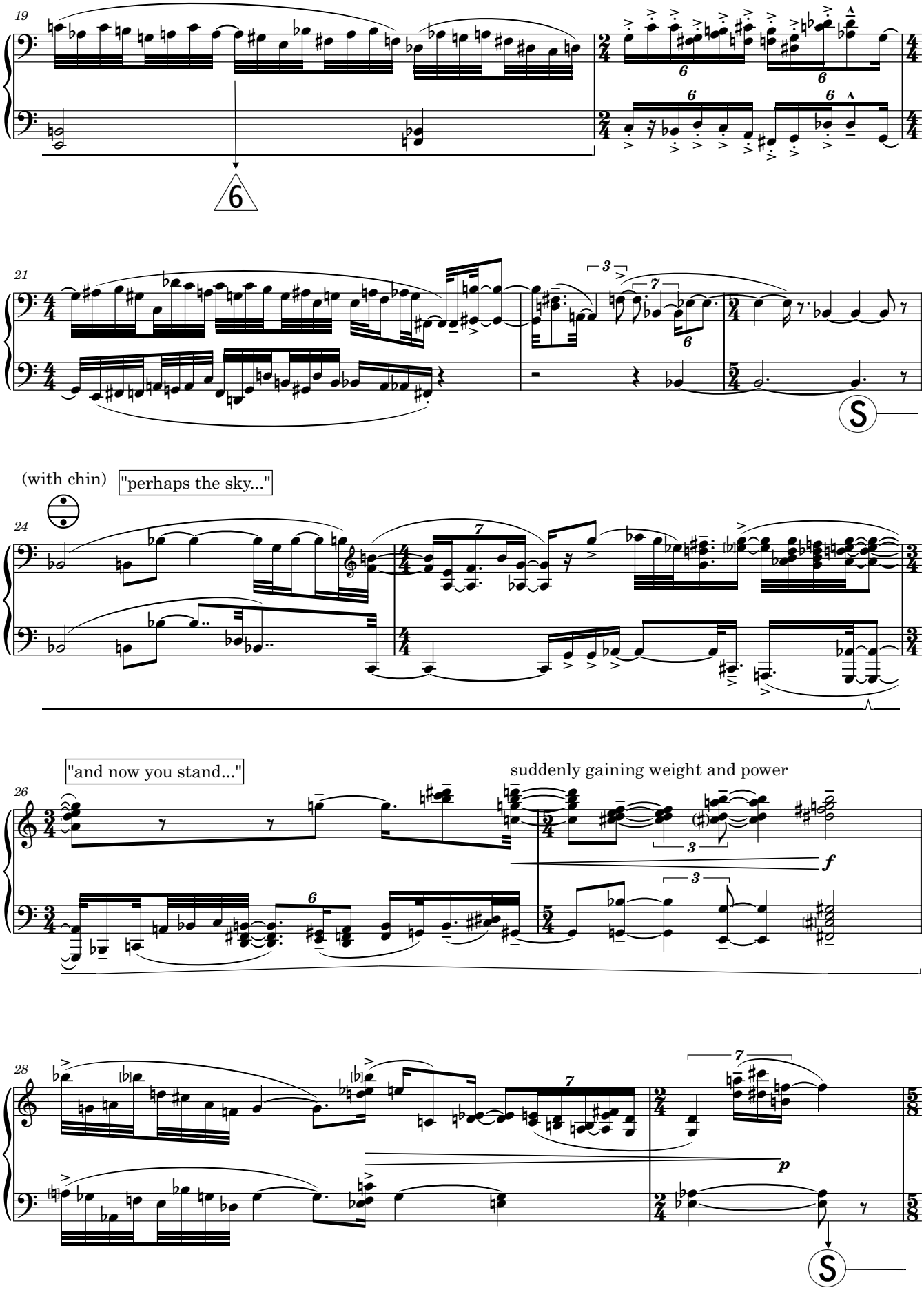
for Phil

the heavens can make light and flame and ice and water

Aaron Holloway-Nahum
2022



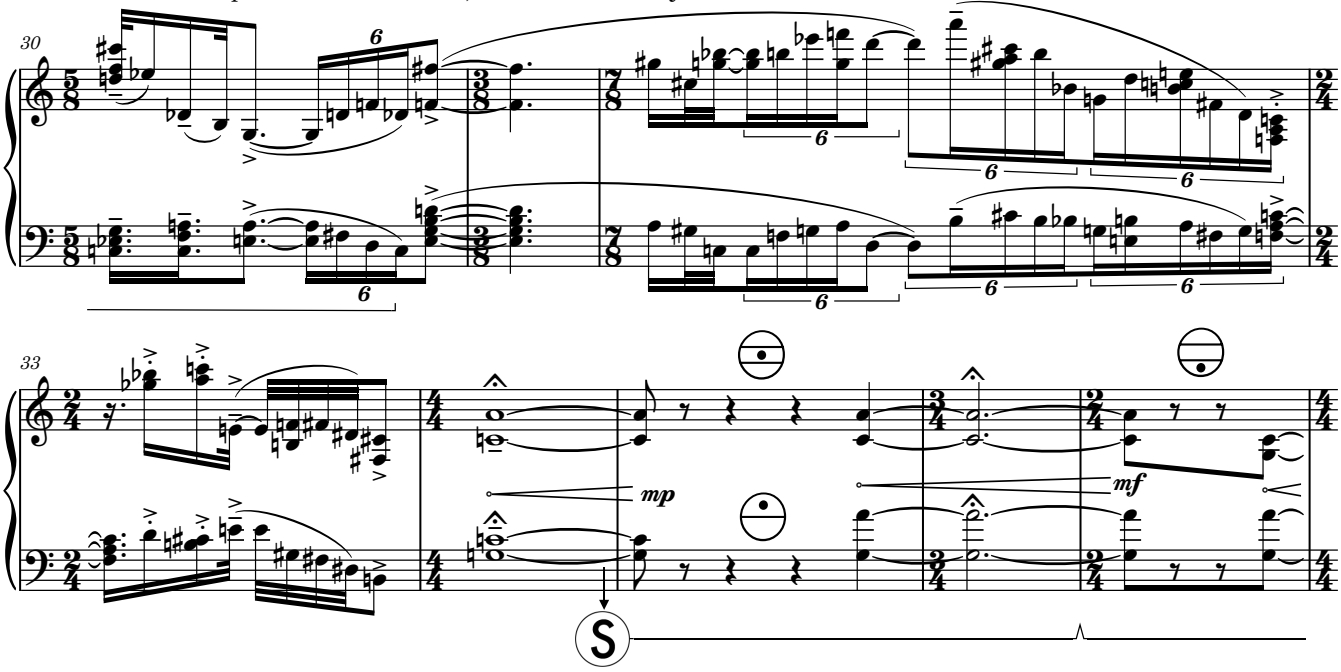

8
9
10
S
5
(change with chin)
12
wait for pulse
16


19
6
21
3
7
6
S
(with chin)
"perhaps the sky..."
24
7
"and now you stand..."
suddenly gaining weight and power
26
6
3
f
3
28
7
7
p
S

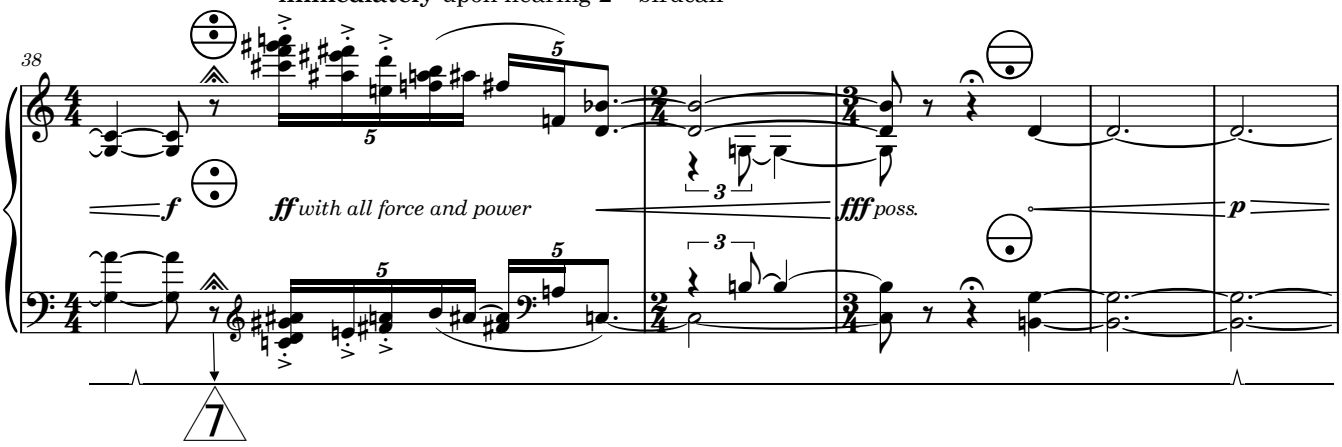
"...and set the stars in motion..."

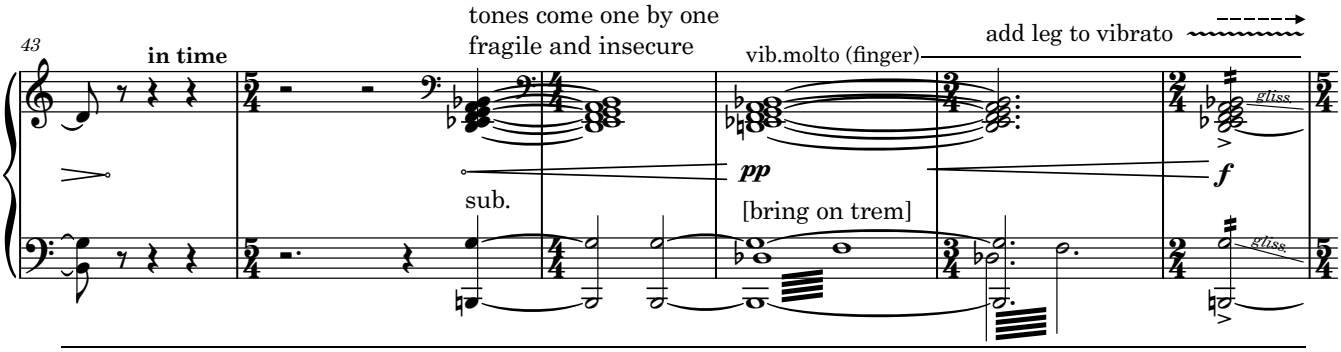
4

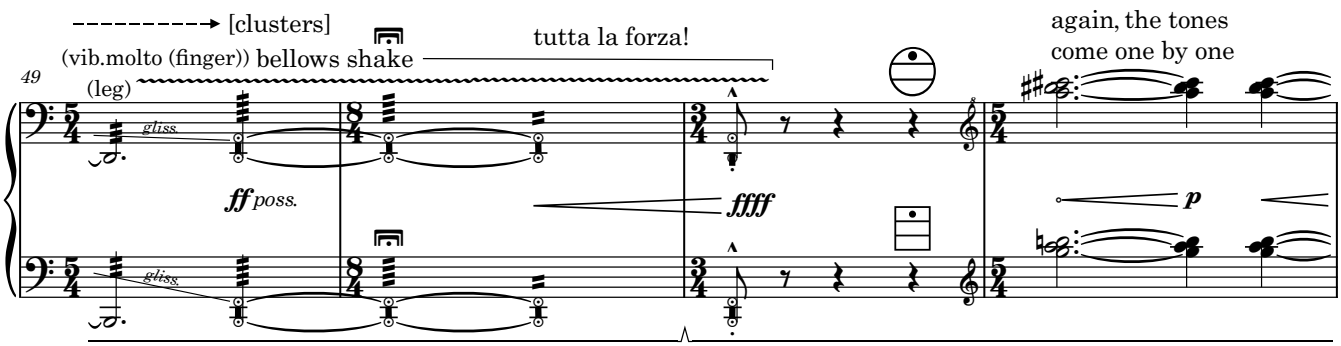
with more presence than before, ***accents still very loud***



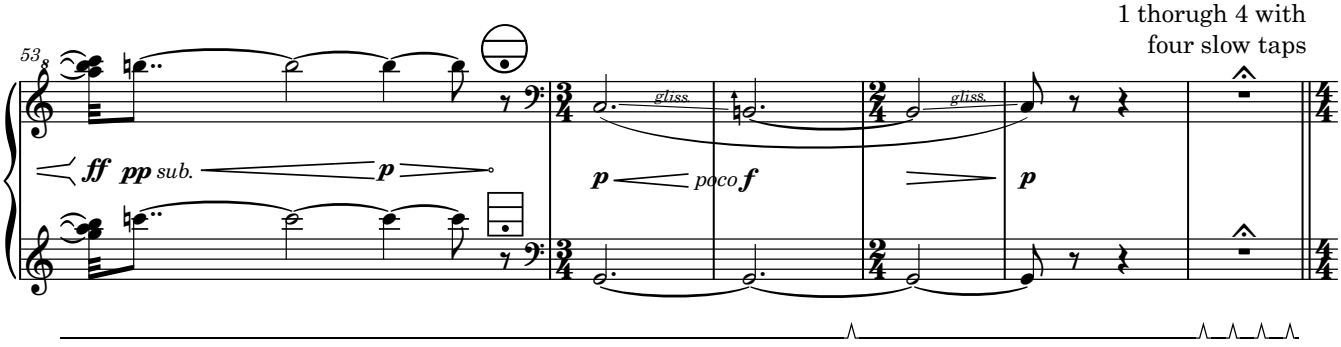
immediately upon hearing 2nd birdcall



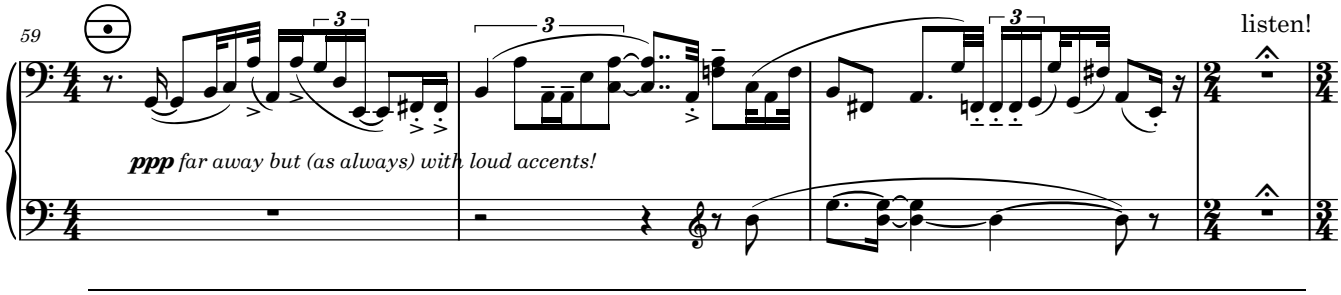




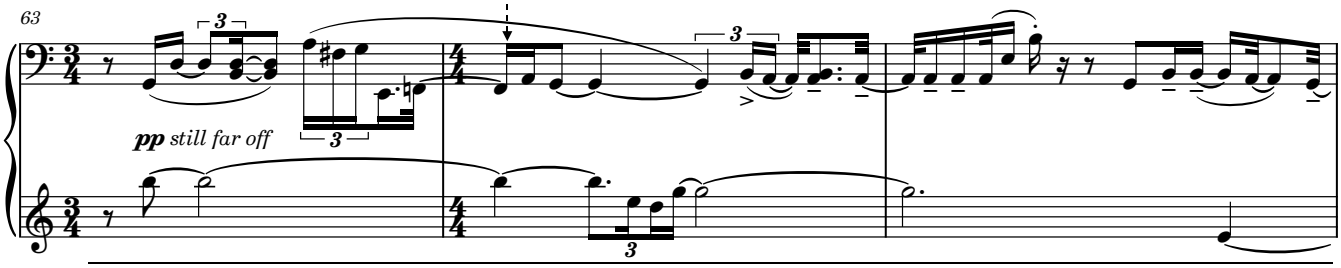
clear sustain layers
1 thorugh 4 with
four slow taps



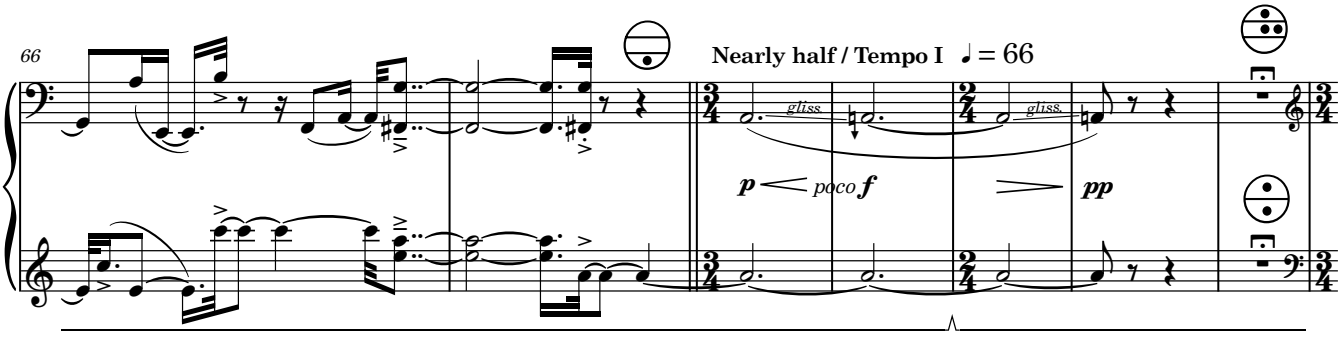
fast and delicate (the speed of the sine tone beating) (♩ = 128)

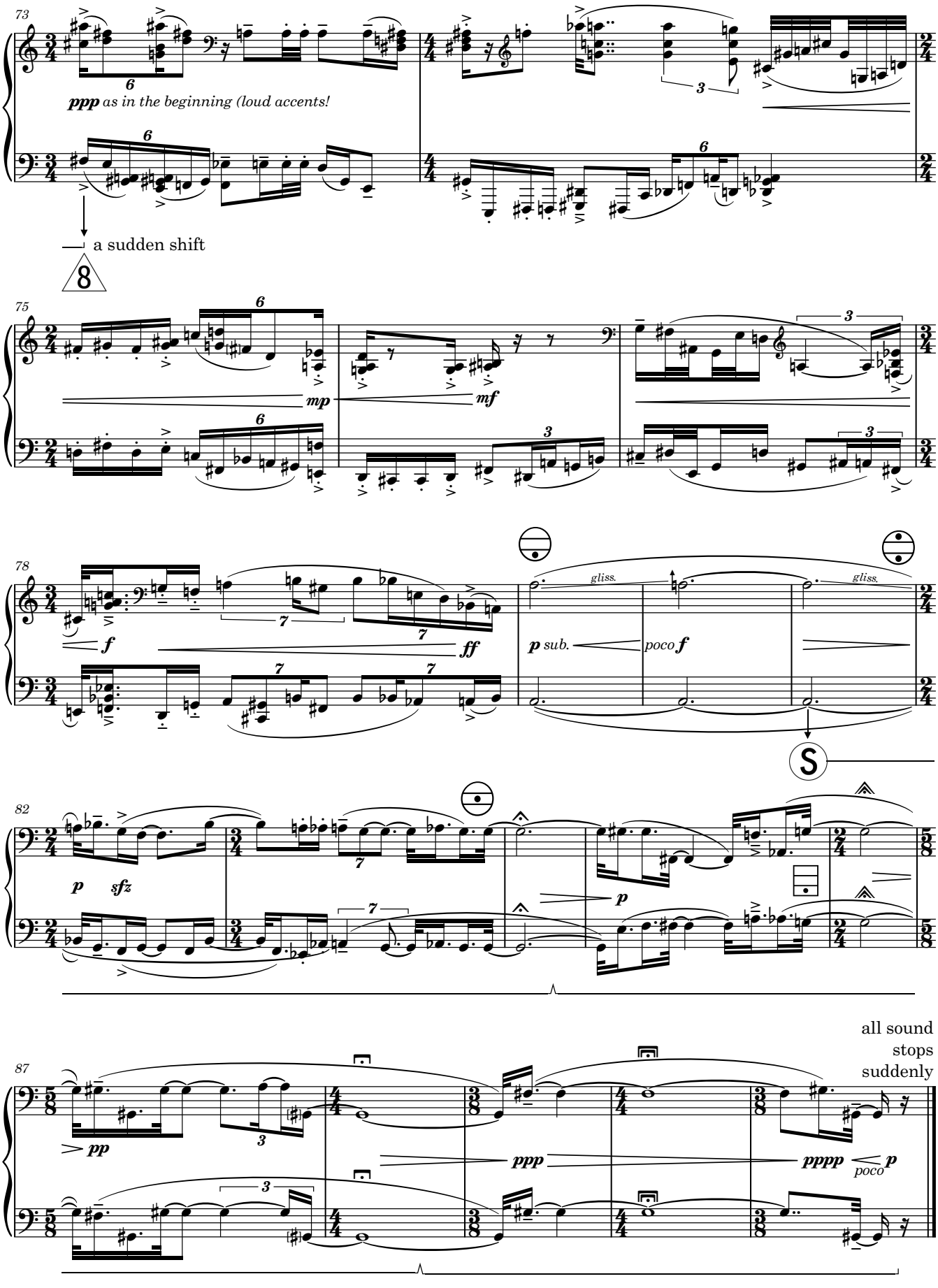


(with chin)



do not forget
to listen!




73
ppp as in the beginning (loud accents!
a sudden shift
8
75
mp
mf
78
f
ff
gliss.
p sub.
poco f
S
82
p
sfz
87
pp
ppp
pppp
poco p
all sound
stops
suddenly