Constructions I - VI

For guitar, five-string bass & percussion

2005-2007
Revised 2019

Alex T. Robilotta

Dedicated to
Dr. Donald Chittum

Some thoughts on the 2019 edition...

These 6 short pieces are among my earliest attempts at serious composition. Written during, and shortly after, my time as a jazz performance major at University of The Arts in Philadelphia, they represent a time when I was rebelling against the jazz idiom as it was taught at UArts and searching for new templates for improvised music. The idea was to use the performance practices of a jazz trio but for the written material to be based in serialism and the improvisation influenced by modern creative music, free of the idiomatic norms of "Jazz" that felt so oppressive to me at the time.

I decided to revisit these pieces after completing *Constructions VII-XII* for solo piano. I started by proof reading the scores and found a few errors. I updated the layout and presentation. And I slightly changed some instructions in the score to be more in line with my intentions. The only change to the music was in the voicing of the 6-note chord at the end of Construction I. The original chord voicing was a bit too much of a stretch for most guitarists, myself included!

This series had no dedication when I first wrote it. I've decided to dedicate the piece to Dr. Donald Chittum. I studied 20th century music and serial technique with him at UArts. I didn't know him very well but he was one of my favorite professors and what I learned from him profoundly changed my approach to music.

The original 2007 composition notes that follow are not my best writing and my opinions on the performance of these pieces have changed. A lot has changed since 2007. But I feel it is useful for performers to know my original intent. I still feel that these pieces should be played with jazz performance practices in mind. But over years of playing jazz I've come to realize that I can use jazz tune in any way I want. It doesn't have to follow the Head-Solos-Head formula. Do what you will with these pieces. Any instructions included in the following text should be taken as mere suggestions. Performers should discover their own truth in these pieces. All the data you need is in the notes on the page.

Alex T. Robilotta
2019

Original Composition Notes [2007]

Constructions I-VI is an attempt at creating serial jazz. After hearing Milton Babbitt's *All Set*, I was very impressed by the sound, but disappointed to find out that the entire piece was written out except for the drum part. My goal was to create a new creative space for improvisation using serialism as a basis. Babbitt definitely considered the traditional form of a jazz tune, but he did not think about truly capturing the spirit of jazz by using elements of improvisation, other than the drum part. Babbitt succeeded in writing a serial piece for a jazz ensemble, but he did not write "Serial Jazz." He successfully described the sound of jazz using serialism. The constructions describe serialism using jazz improvisation.

Each Construction should be performed in the form of a jazz tune but with the mentality of a twenty-first century non-idiomatic musician. Each Construction is the "head" of the tune and the tone row used for each piece is the basis for improvisation and takes the place of the chord changes that would be the basis for improvising in jazz. A typical performance of one of the constructions would progress just like a bebop tune; the head opens the construction, then the members of the ensemble take turns improvising solos using the row as a theme, then the head is played again and the construction ends. Any of the typical techniques used by small jazz ensembles can be employed, like trading lines after the solos or playing background lines at the end of each solo. While the form of the construction is based on the bebop format the music played must be in a non-idiomatic style using the tone row and the musical ideas from the head to develop improvised ideas. Rhythm should be freely interpreted in the solo sections. Although I'm not against the idea of having a steady rhythm at times during the solos, I do not want the tempo of the written section of the piece to be continued into the solos. The solos rhythm should develop out of nothing.

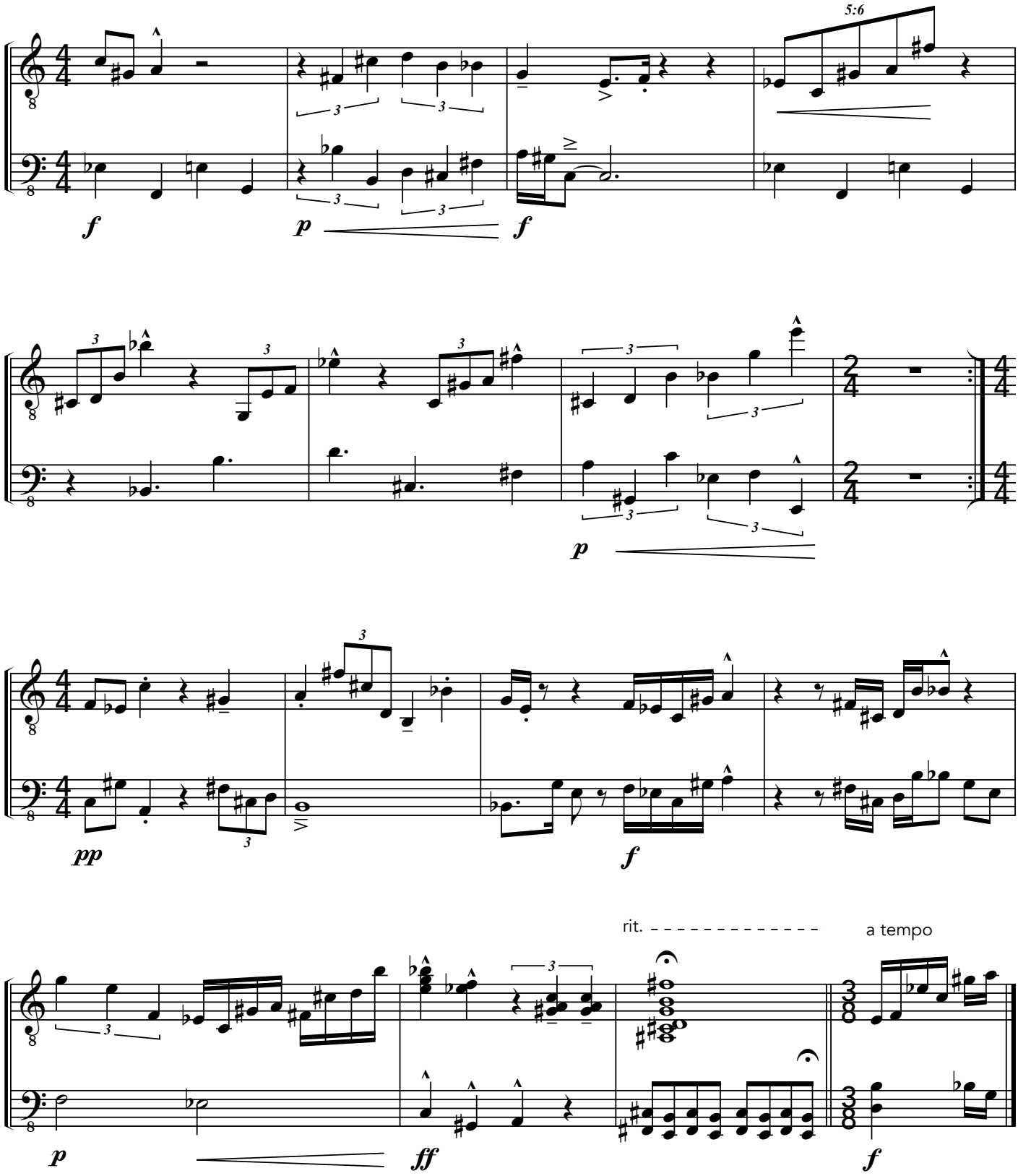
The first construction was written in 2005 to be segued into from a jazz tune. I had been learning about serialism with Dr. Donald Chittum, at The University of The Arts. This piece was based on a row he gave as an example in class. I have not yet been able to figure out what piece this row came from. In my senior recital at UArts I performed the Rogers and Hart tune "Softly, as a Morning Sunrise" and progressed into Construction I. The solo section began very contained in the jazz idiom and slowly drifted to atonality and serialism, until it ended with Construction I. After graduating I decided to expand the ideas into a series of Constructions based on tone rows from my favorite serial pieces. In this first series of Constructions, one through six the music is very strictly based on the tone rows used, and often only uses two versions of the row, typically, the original row and one retrograde or inversion. The next series of Constructions, numbers seven through twelve, will use a looser interpretation of serialism allowing the rows to be used as a thematic basis for the pieces, rather than the only tonal material used to create the piece.

Like Babbitt, I have left the drum parts of these pieces entirely up to the percussionist. I considered notating suggestions to the percussionist, but decided that it wasn't necessary. Babbitt knew that a well-trained jazz drummer would have no problem improvising an appropriate part to accompany his piece, and I feel confident that a well-trained 21st century non-idiomatic improvising percussionist will have no problem improvising an appropriate part for these pieces. The main thing for all the performers to remember when playing these pieces is that all the Constructions should describe the improvised essence of jazz through the medium and technique of modern non-idiomatic improvised music. Much in the same way that Babbitt defined the precision and science of serialism through the jazz idiom.

Alex T. Robilotta
2007

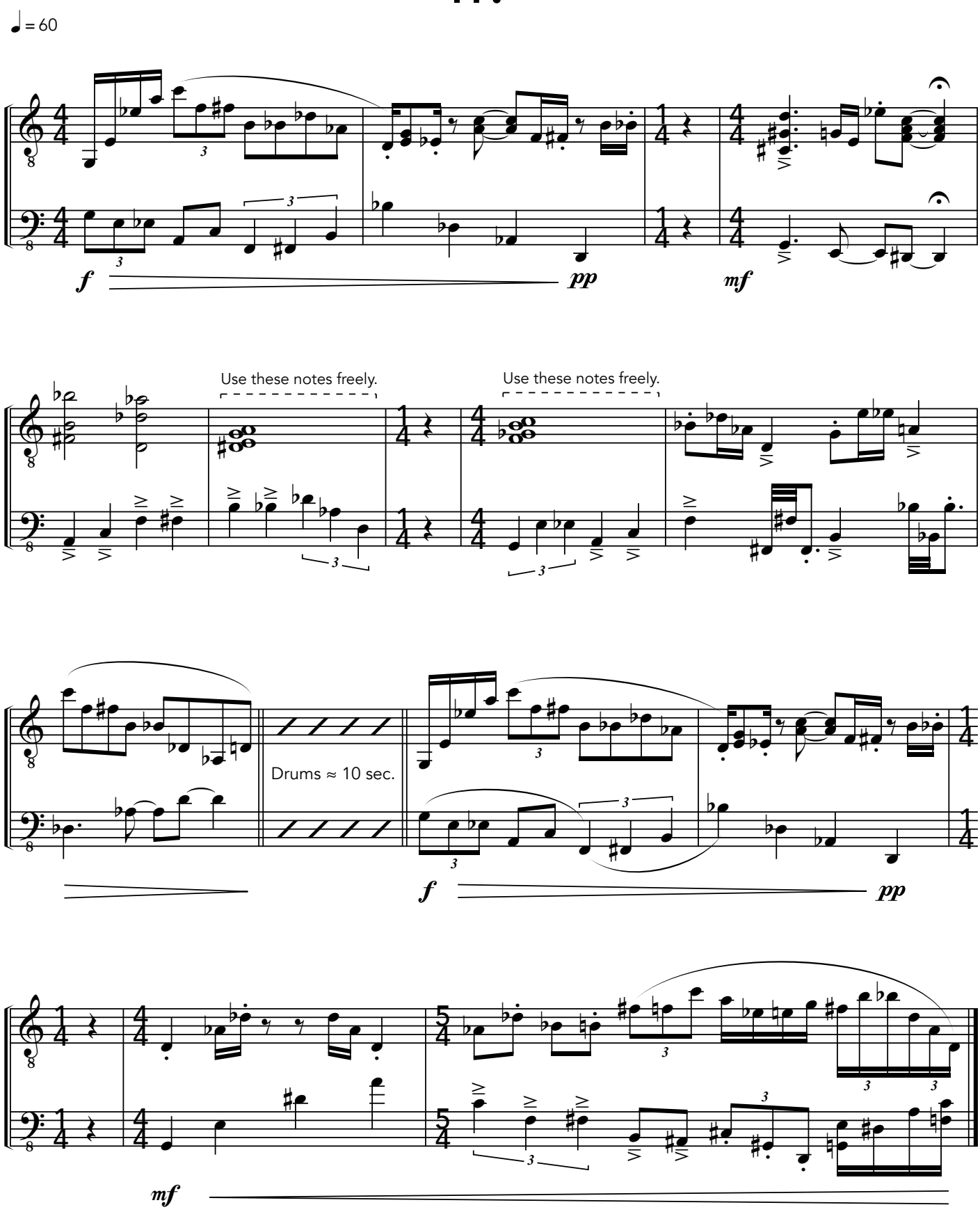
I.

♩ = 120



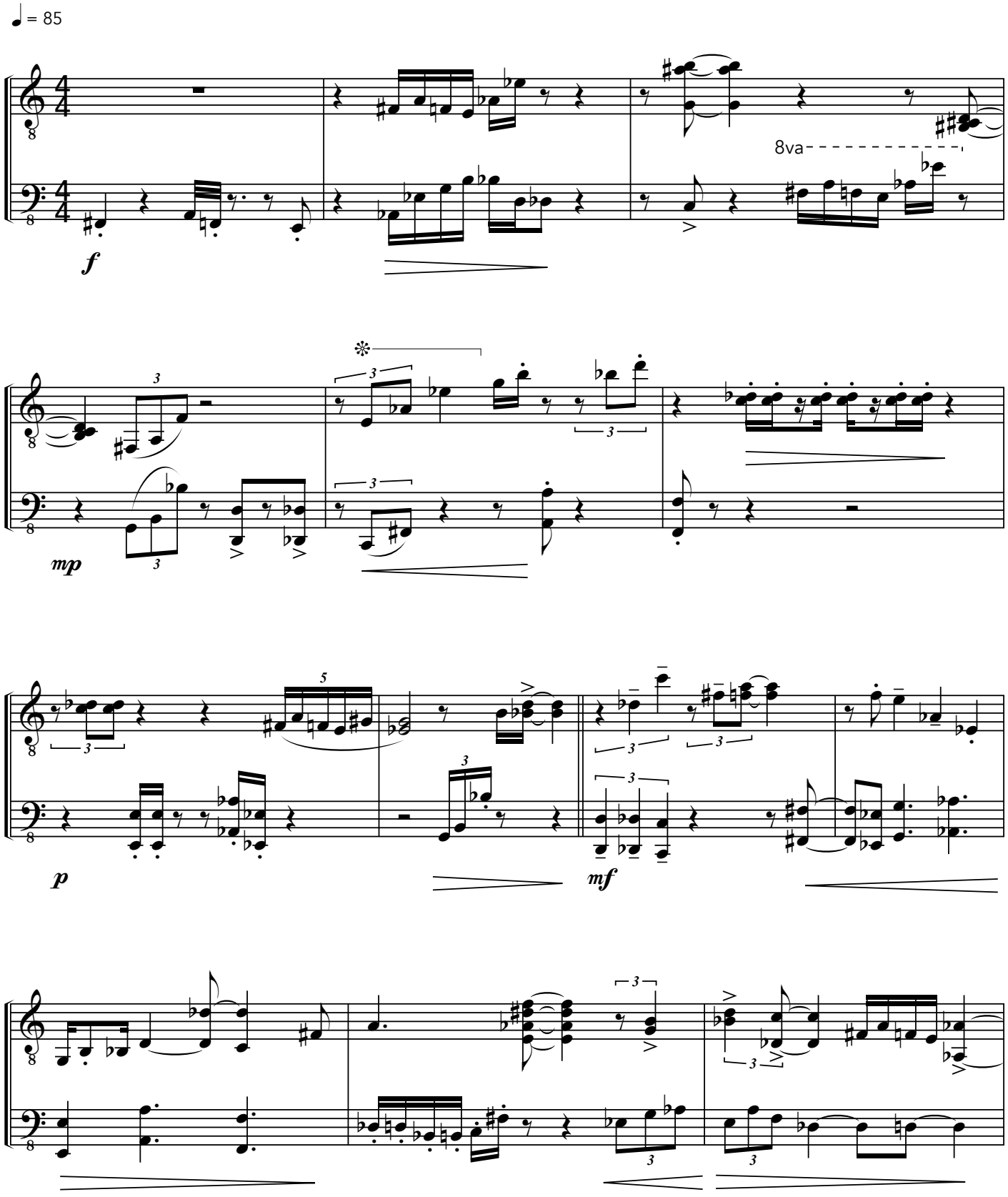
©2019

II.

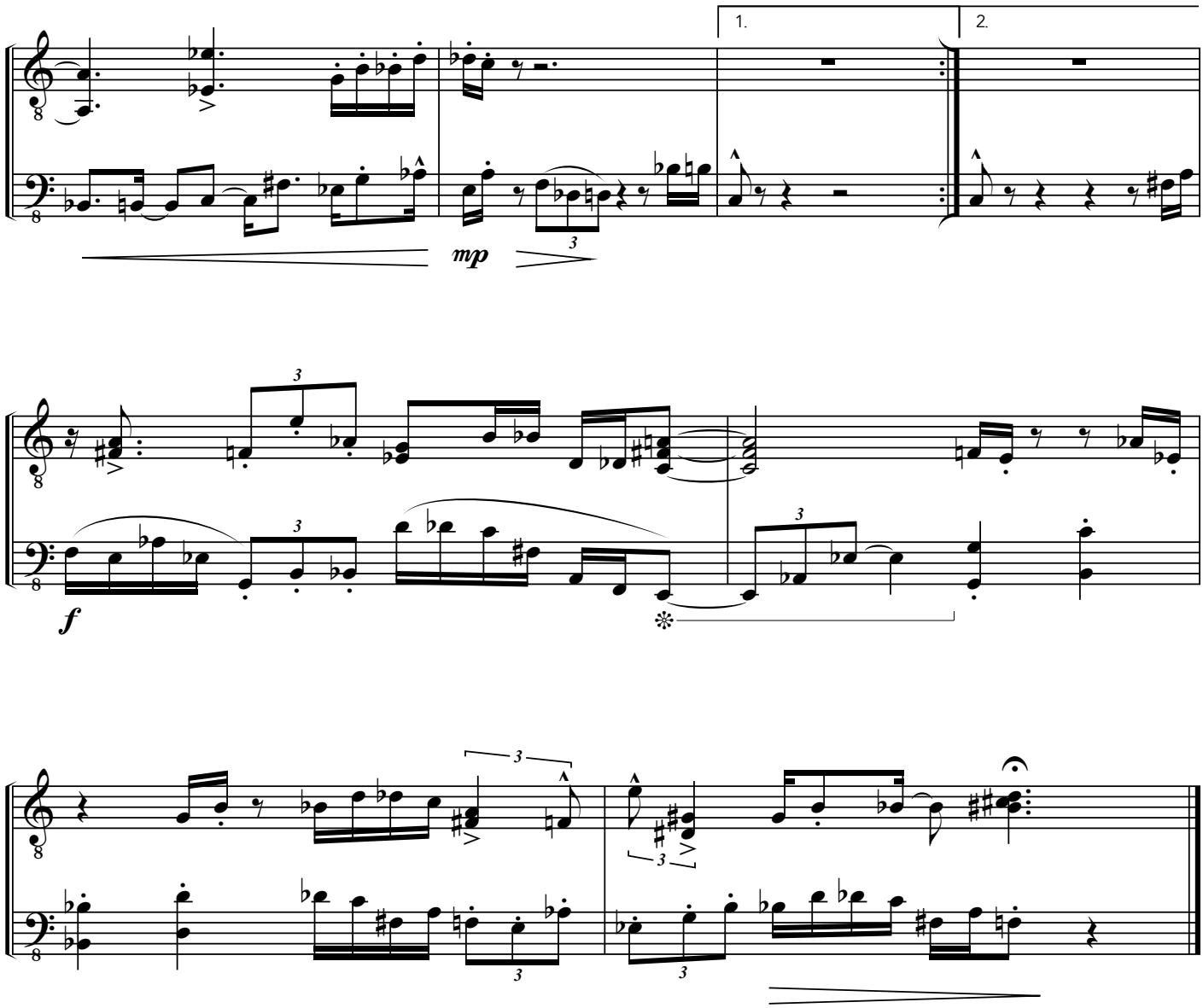

♩ = 60
f
pp
mf
Use these notes freely.
Use these notes freely.
Drums ≈ 10 sec.
f
pp
mf

©2019

III.

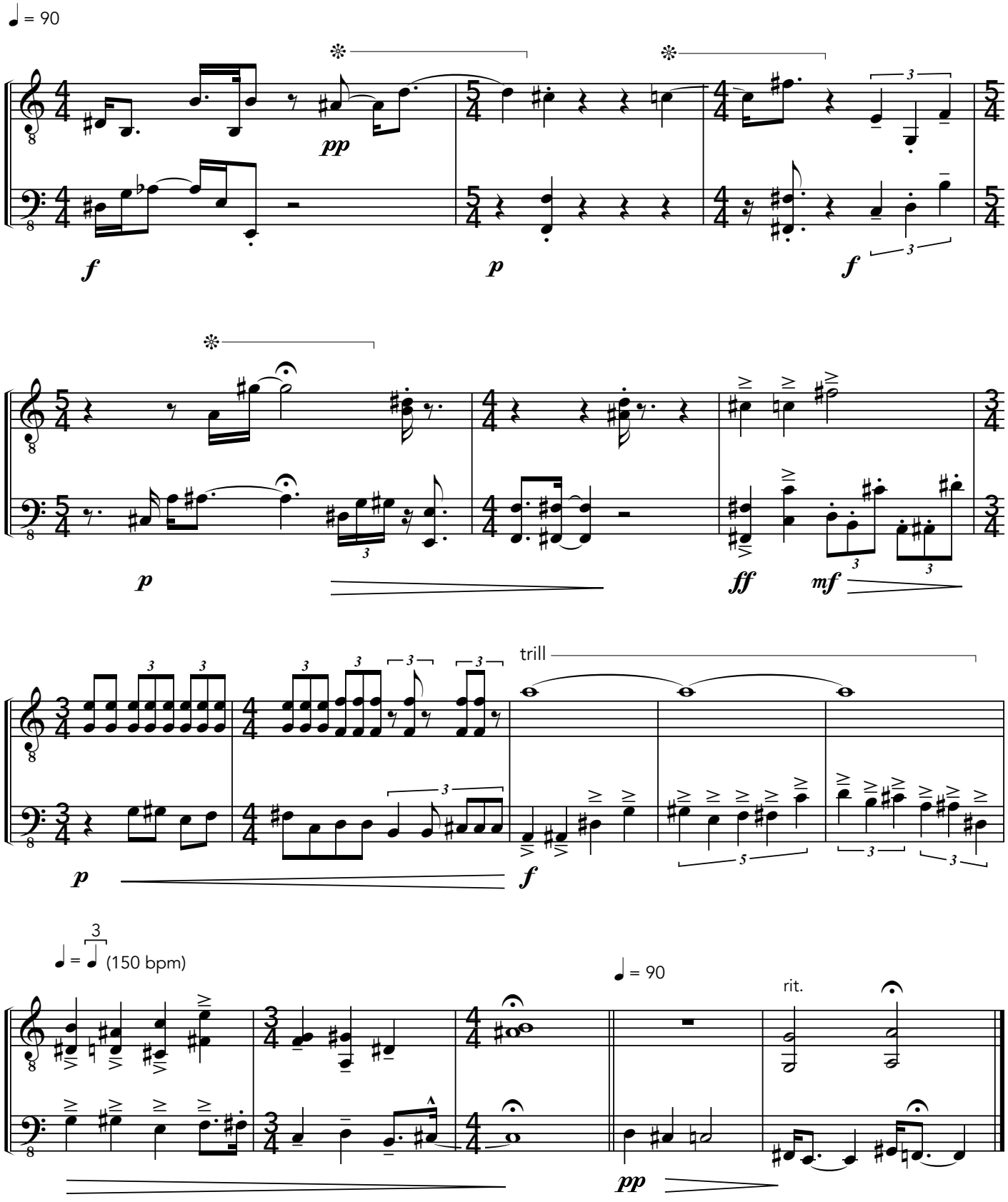


©2019



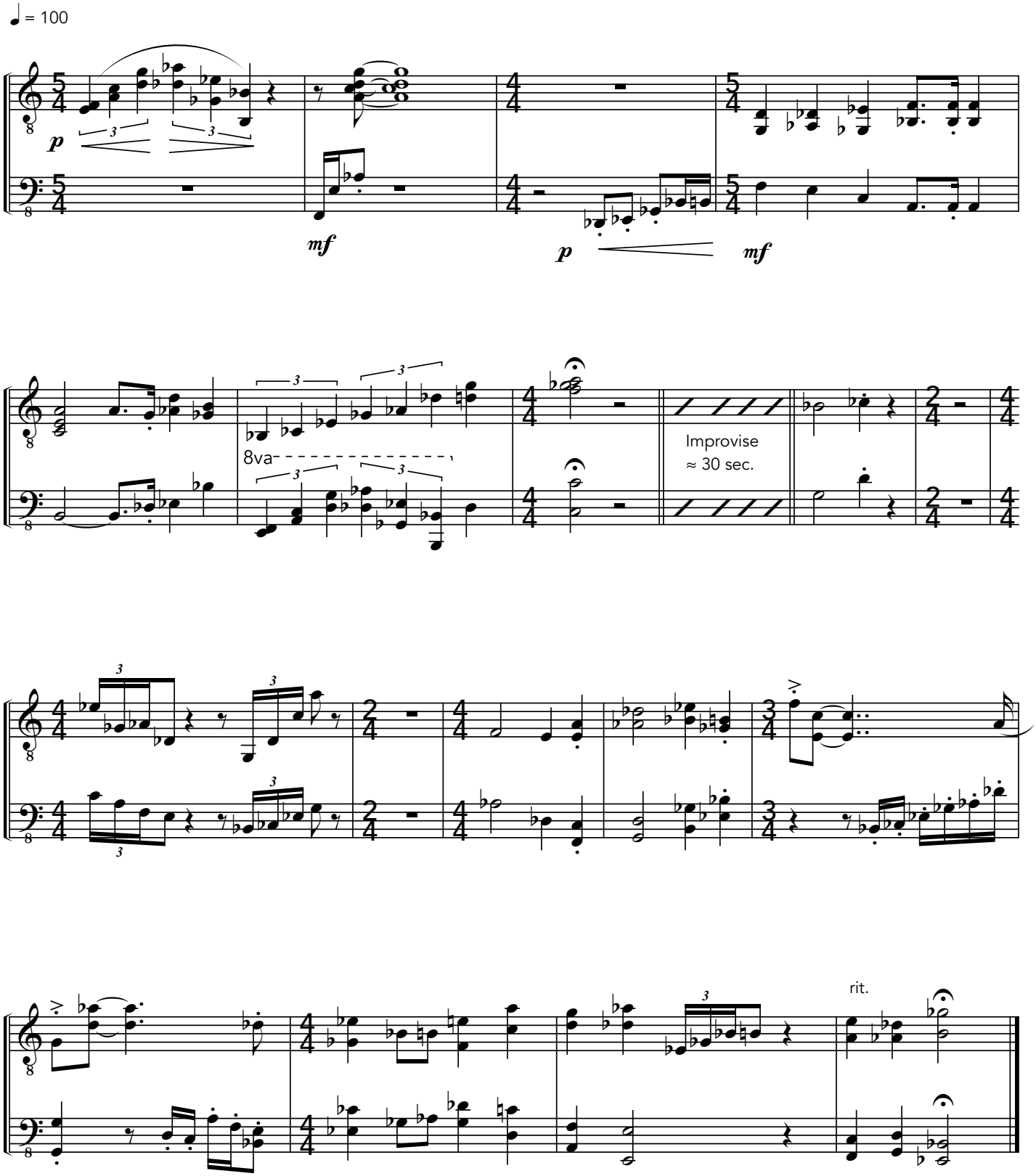
©2019

IV.



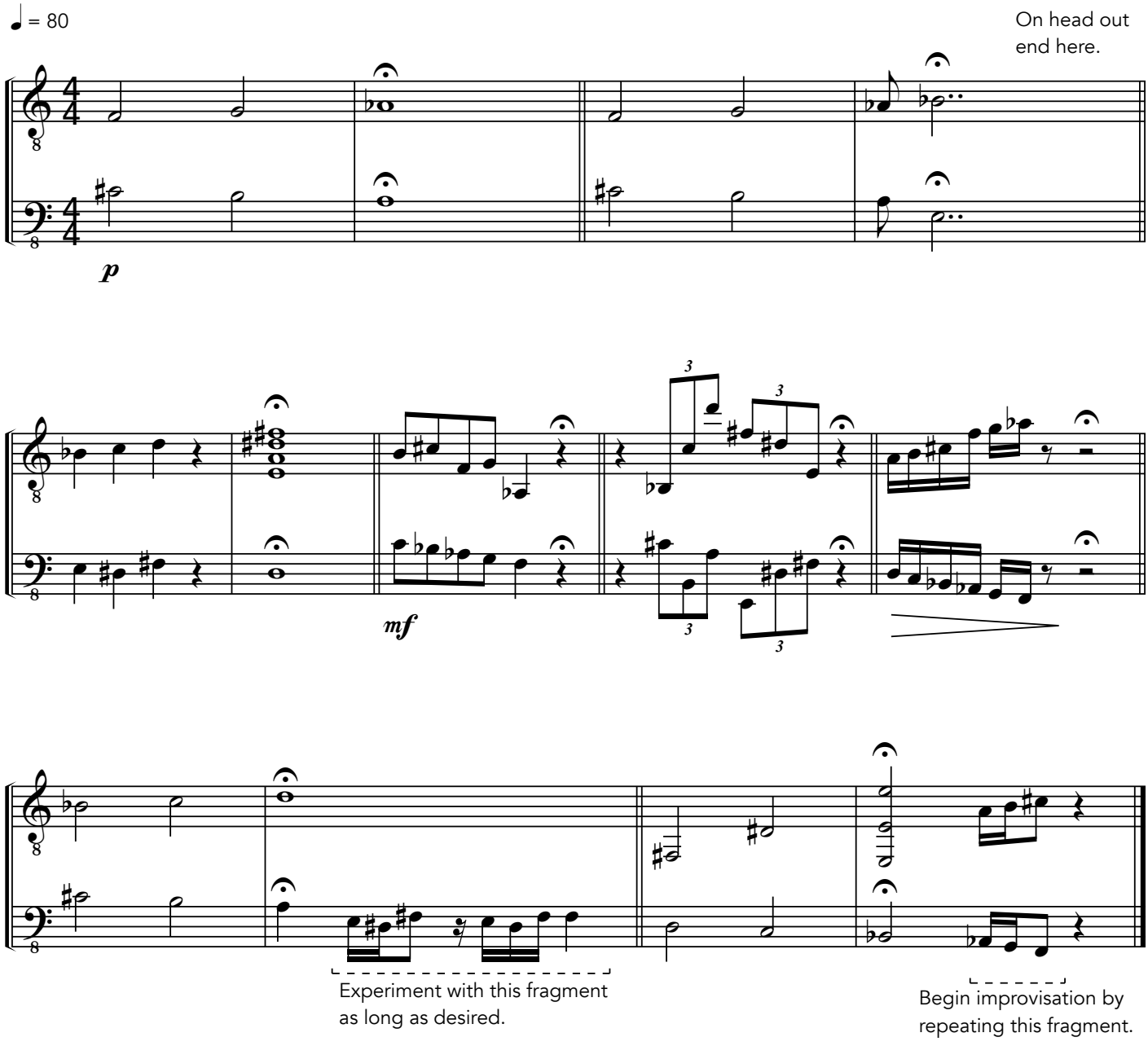
©2019

V.



©2019

VI.


♩ = 80
On head out
end here.
p
mf
Experiment with this fragment
as long as desired.
Begin improvisation by
repeating this fragment.

©2019