STRINGS

violin and piano

1989

Eleanor Hovda

for Stephanie Chase

commissioned by the Schubert Club

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STRINGS was commissioned by the Schubert Club for violinist Stephanie Chase. I used metaphors from multidimensional string theories, where energy is conceived as infinite "strings" in space/time, and the Universe is said to have extra hidden dimensions. I have been working, for some time, on articulating lemniscates (figure-of-eight ribbons) as sonic sculpture. I'm also intrigued by an often unexplored timbral resource of stringed instruments: the "sound around the sound" of overtones, harmonics.

I visualize the piece as sound choreography, where the violin spins sonic "strings" and the piano is resonator, afterimage or "shadow universe". The pitch structures in the piece derive from the harmonic series, and are shaped by bending, twisting and stretching those basic pitch relationships as much as possible without "breaking" them, or turning them into something else. The piano functions as an accumulating resonance field throughout the piece.

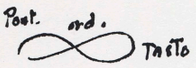
TIME: The piece is notated metrically, for the most part, as a scaffolding for the performers to use in early rehearsal. Ideally, performers will work with an intuitive "breathflow" interaction in performance.

PIANO: The piano, in this piece, as an extended resonator in relation to the violin. The sustaining pedal should be depressed throughout the piece, allowing an accumulation of resonances to occur. Since the piece never gets very loud, the accumulation won't become overwhelming.

There are several extended sections where the piano alters its chord field to serve as an "afterimage" for the violin. It is not necessary to rigorously follow the violin each time it changes (even though such changes are notated for piano). The goal is to subtly add resonance to the violin when feasible. It is important that the violinist be free to work somewhat ad.lib. in those section, with respect to exact numbers of repetitions and order of pitch sequences. In these sections, the piano and violin are heterophonous. In "Chant" sequences, the violin and piano work in unison.

VIOLIN:

BOWINGS - In many cases, the violinist is asked to bow very slowly and, using a figure-of-eight motion, to traverse pont.-ord.-tasto.

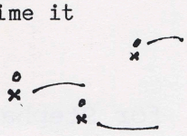


Bowing variations: speed of bow, pressure of bow, angle of bow, full bow-point of bow

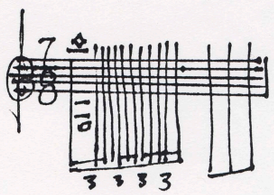
Timbral changes: fundamental/harm., register, pont-ord-tasto, string selected

STRINGS, to a large extent, is about the "hidden universe" of harmonics and overtones which exist "around" the fundamental pitches. It is important for the violinist to imagine enticing these more volatile sounds out of the instrument. It is essential to be very conscious of breathflow and being centered while taking the time it takes to excavate and articulate the sounds.

HARMONICS - get as clear and "floating" a tone as possible for long-tone harmonics. Image of "sound coming out of the walls".



OPEN G/OVERTONE RHYTHMIC PATTERN - touch an overtone/harmonic quickly and release in the rhythmic pattern noted. Use figure-of-eight bowing, point of bow/larger sweep, and work in the pont-tasto areas. Bow VERY SLOWLY to allow overtones and "airsounds" to unfold.



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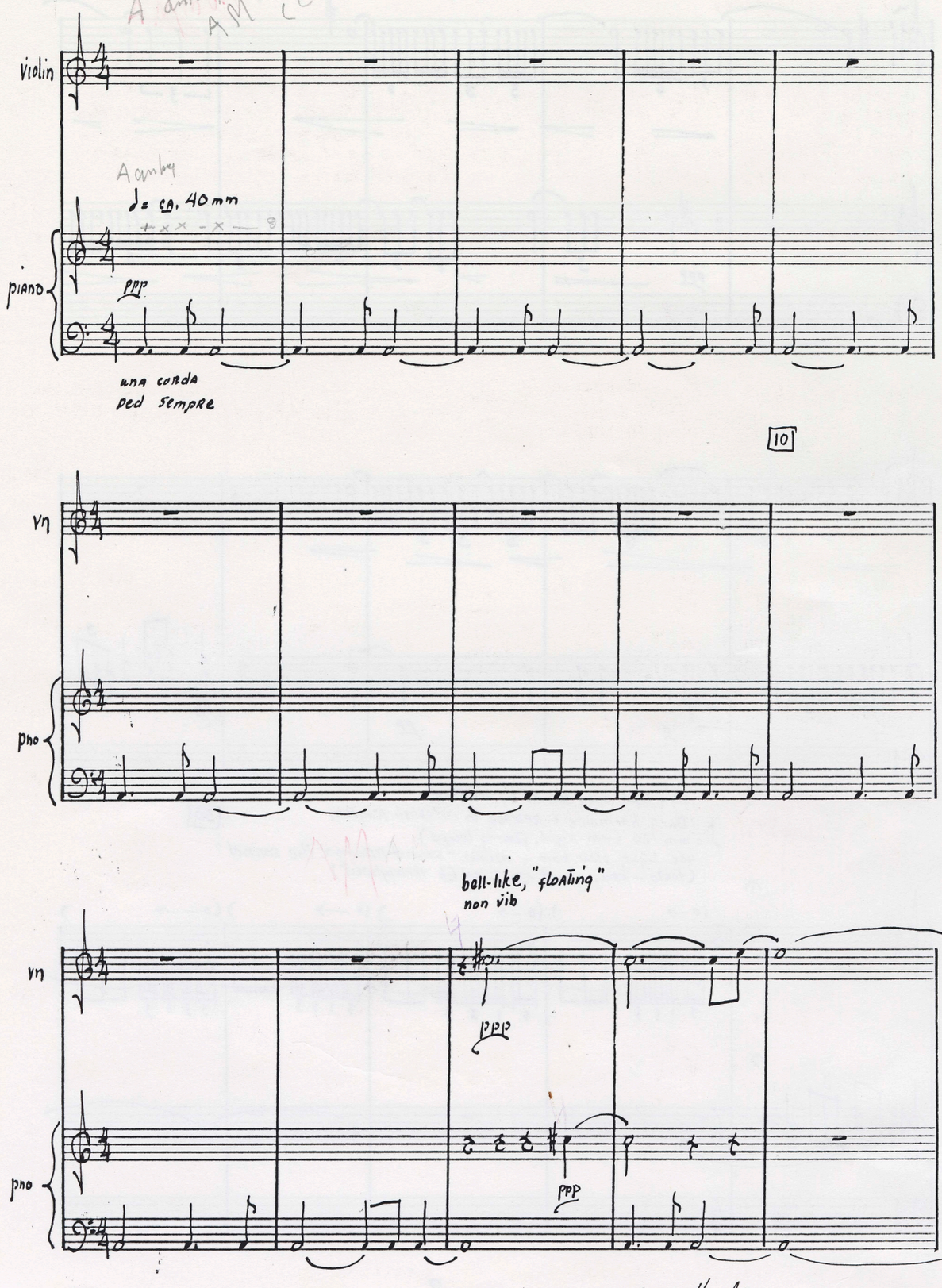

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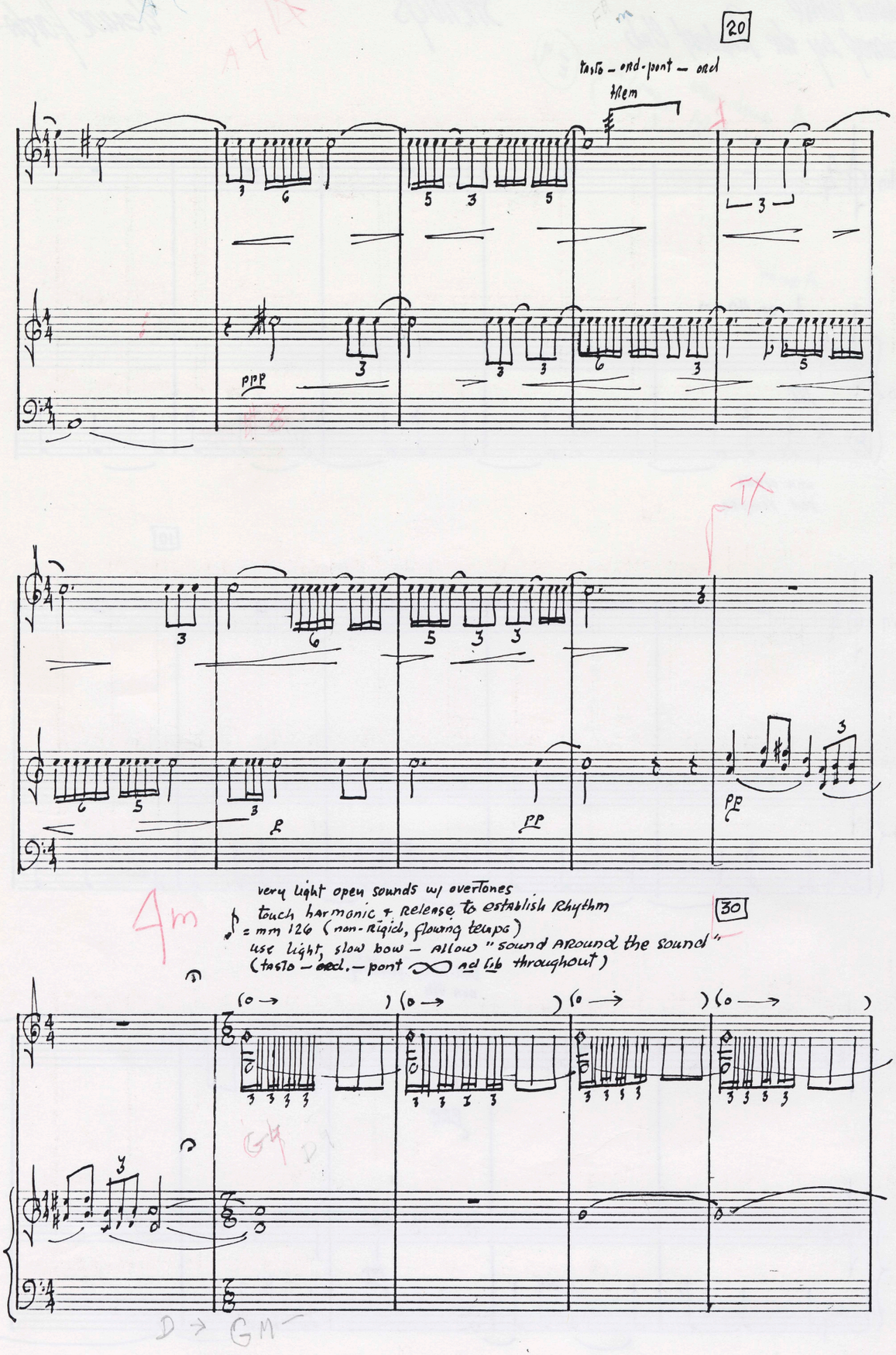
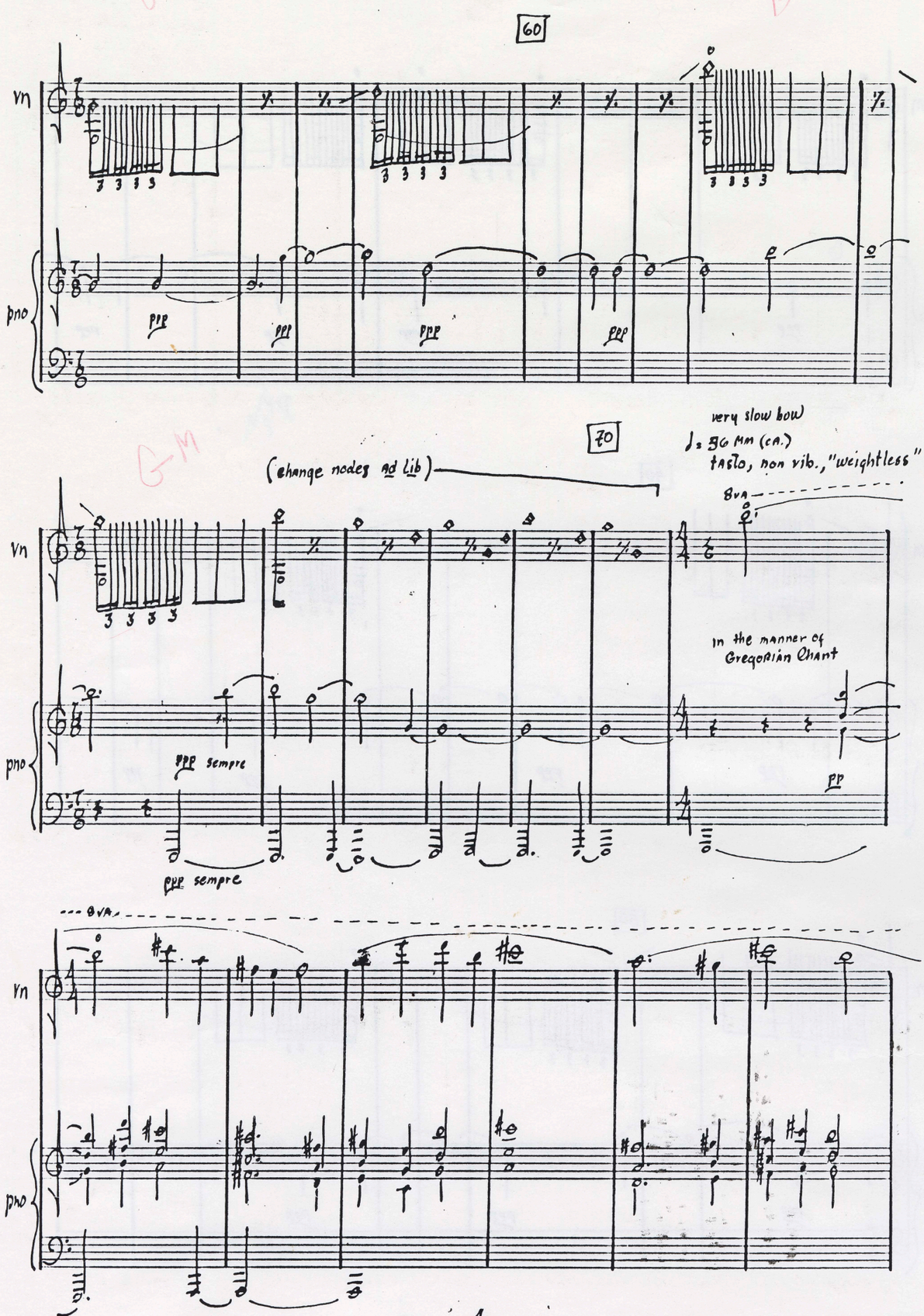
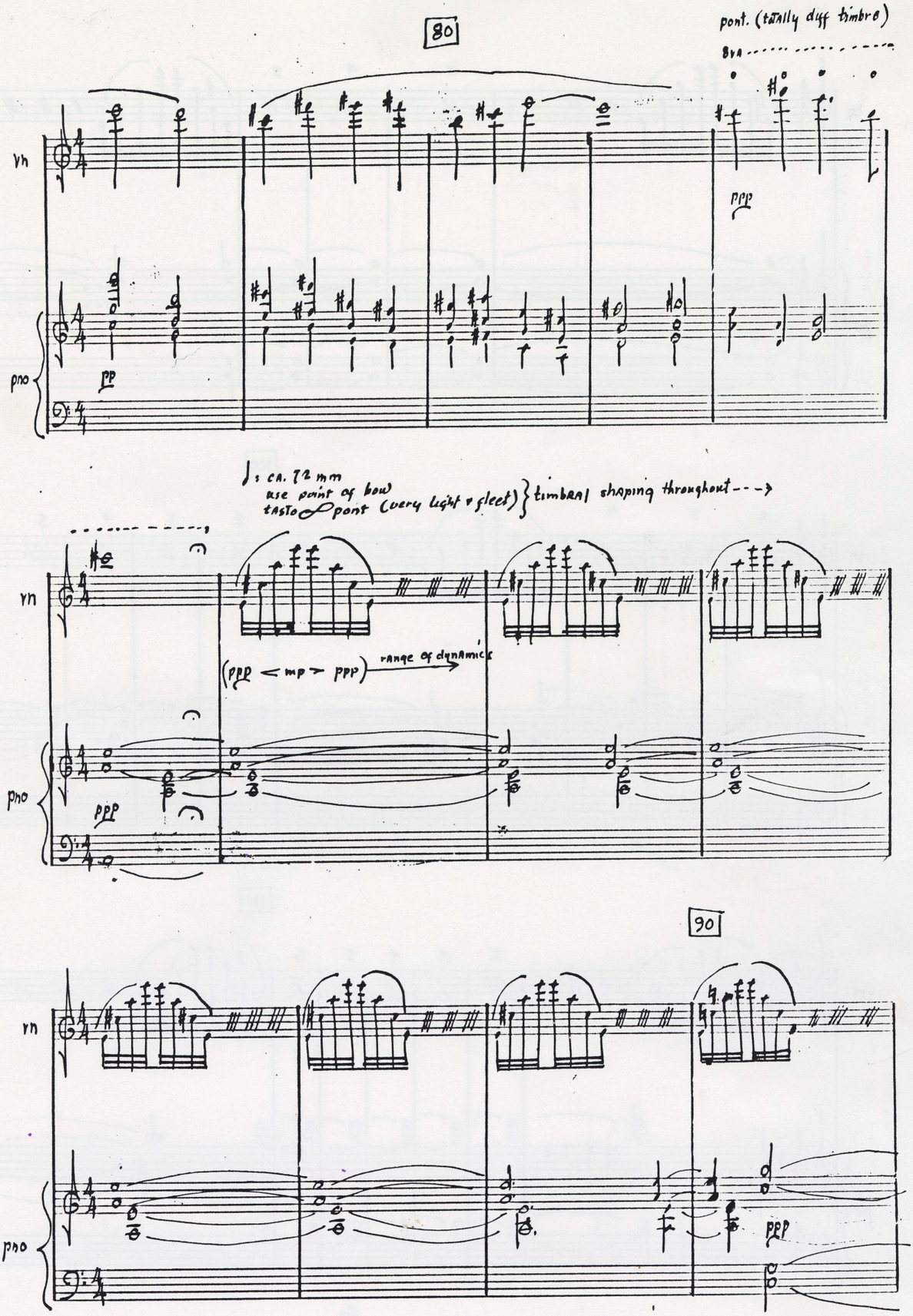
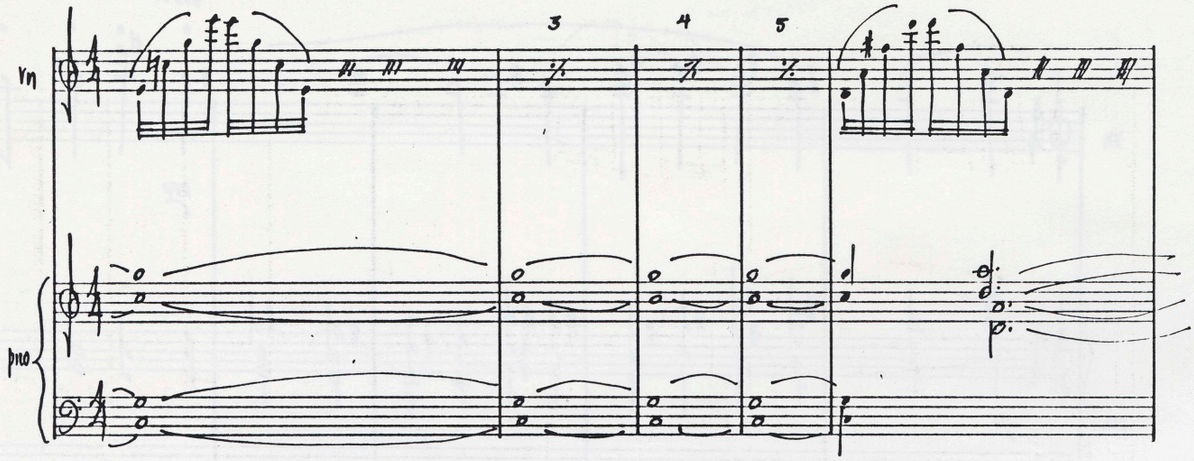

20
tasto – ord. – pont – ord
trem
ppp
TX
pp
very light open sounds w/ overtones
touch harmonic + release to establish Rhythm
= mm 126 (non-rigid, flowing tempo)
use light, slow bow – allow "sound around the sound"
(tasto – ord. – pont ∞ ad lib throughout)
30
D → GM

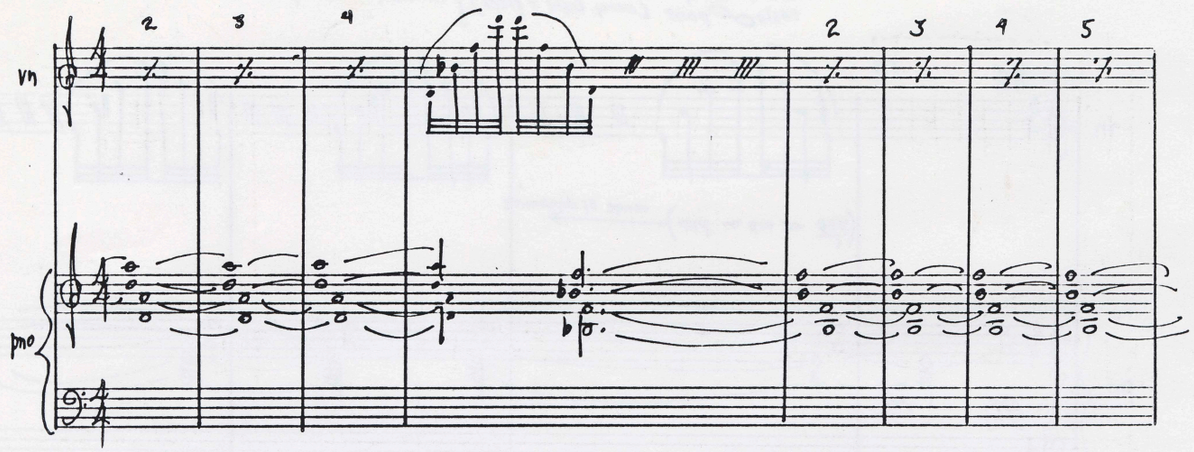
Va
pno
ppp
40
50


60
70
very slow bow
♩= 80 MM (ca.)
tasto, non vib., "weightless"
(change nodes ad Lib)
8va
in the manner of
Gregorian Chant
vn
pno
ppp
ppp sempre
pp

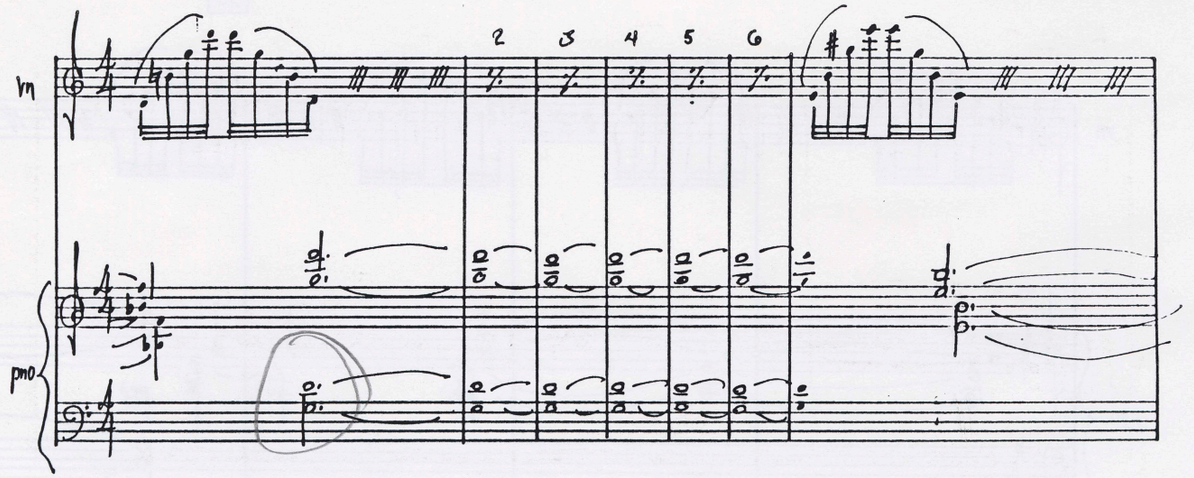

80
pont. (totally diff timbre)
8va
vn
pno
pp
ppp
♩: ca. 72 mm
use point of bow
taste of pont (very light + fleet)
timbral shaping throughout --->
(ppp < mp > ppp)
range of dynamics
90

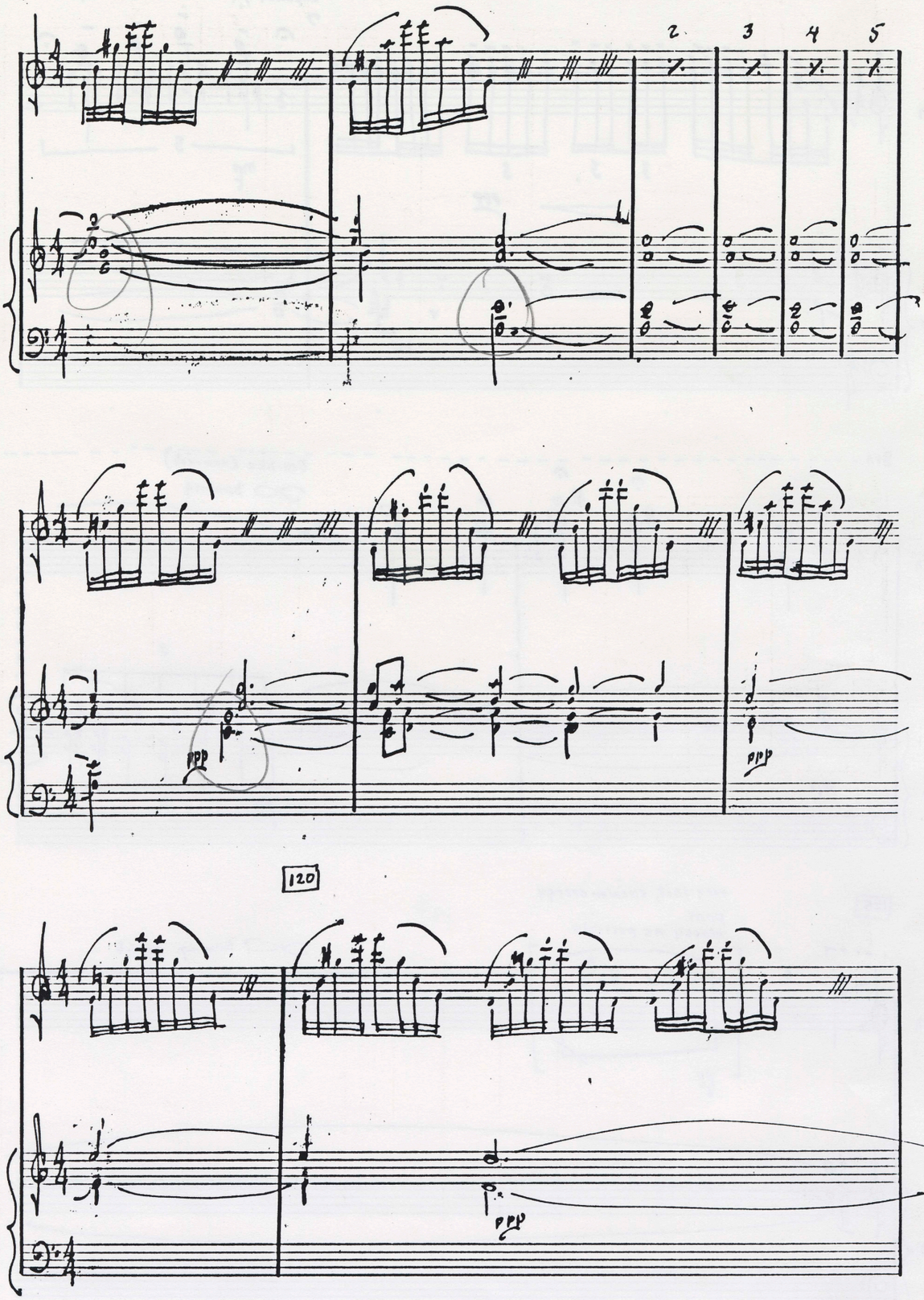


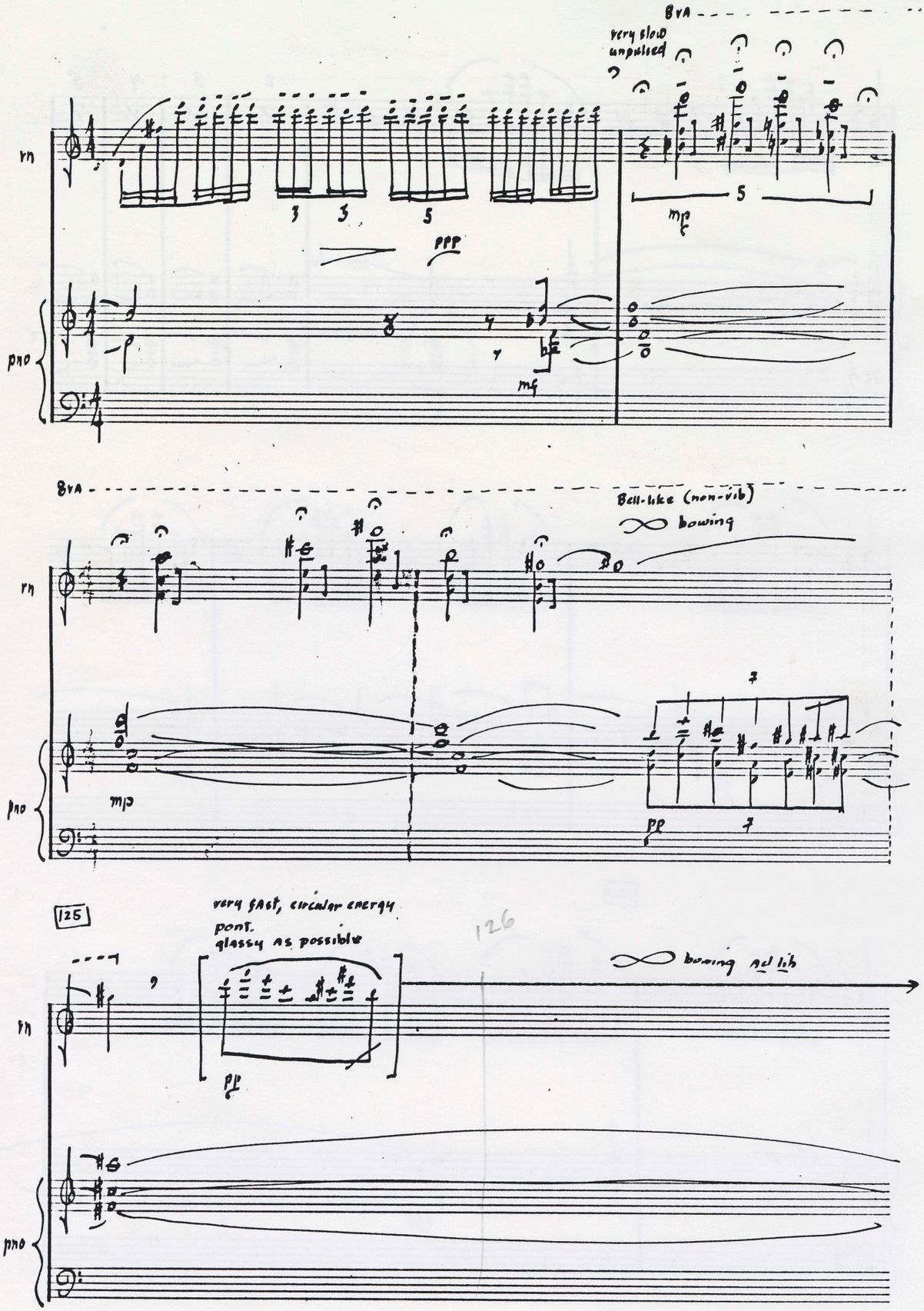
100

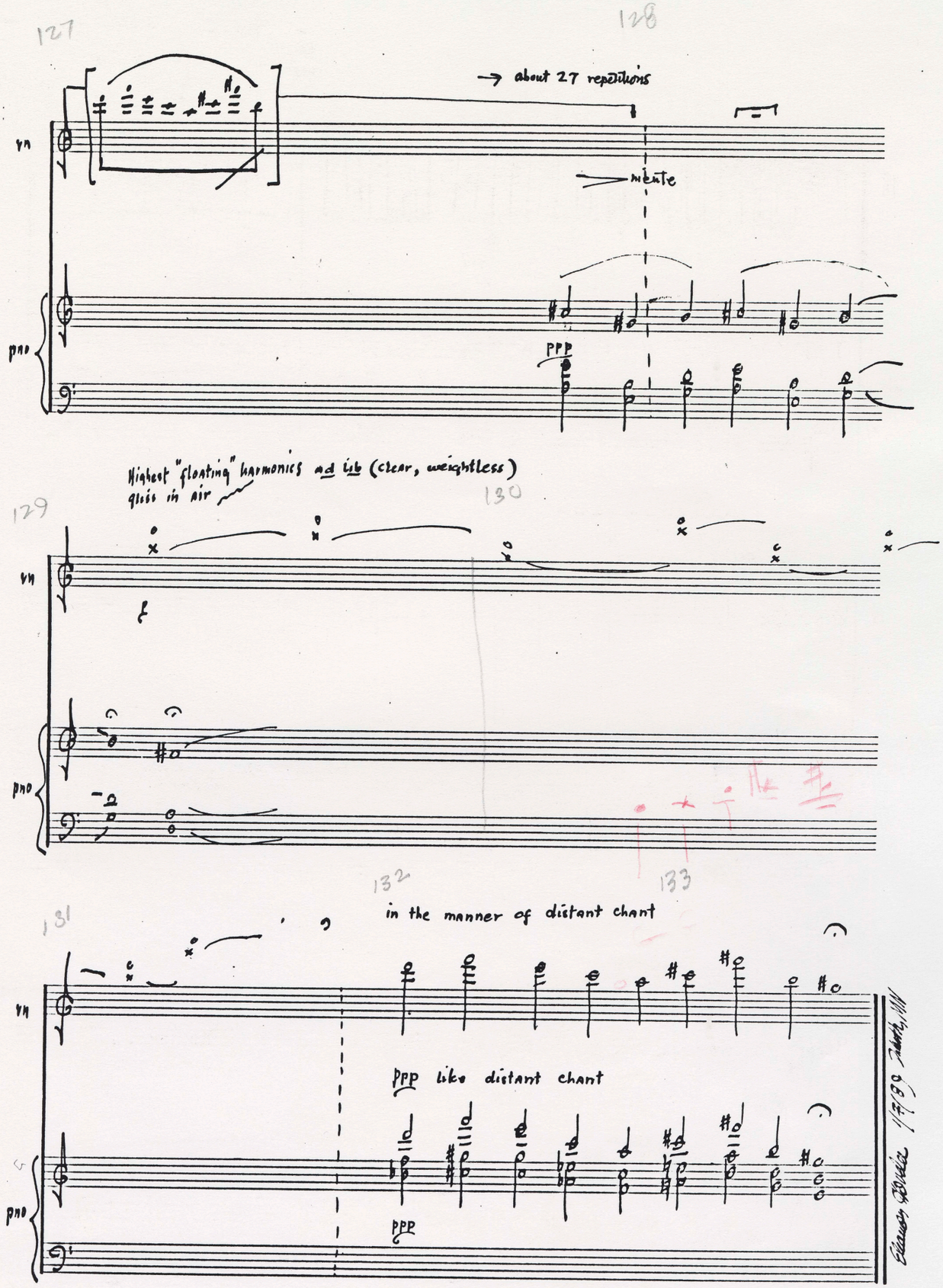


110




2
3
4
5
ppp
ppp
120
ppp


8va
very slow
unpulsed
va
pno
3
3
5
ppp
mp
5
mf
8va
Bell-like (non-vib)
bowing
va
pno
mp
7
pp
7
125
very fast, circular energy
pont.
glassy as possible
126
bowing ad lib
va
pno
ff


127
128
→ about 27 repetitions
vn
niente
pno
ppp
Highest "floating" harmonics ad lib (clear, weightless)
gliss in air
129
130
vn
f
pno
132
133
131
in the manner of distant chant
vn
ppp like distant chant
pno
ppp