Skeuomorphic Tendencies

for chamber orchestra

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(2011)

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Instrumentation:

Flute (doubling Piccolo)
Oboe
Clarinet in B♭ (doubling Contrabass Clarinet)
Contrabassoon
Horn in F
Trumpet in C
Trombone
Percussion 1
small triangle, 2 cowbells (large and medium), 2 ceramic tiles (medium and high), 2 tom toms (low and medium, shared with Perc. 2)
Percussion 2
xylophone, large bass drum, medium kick drum, 2 tom toms (shared with Perc. 1)
Piano
2 Violins
2 Violas
2 Cellos
Double bass

Clarinet and horn parts are written in transposition. (The score is not in C.)
The double bass sounds one octave lower than written, including harmonics, regardless of clef.

Program notes:

My program notes sometimes function as a graveyard of discarded dissertation topics, and here's one half-baked idea:

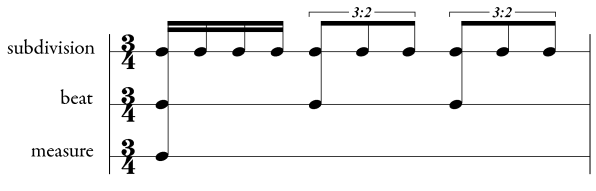
When a particular technology emerges (e.g., the harpsichord), it comes bundled with a particular set of capabilities and limitations (e.g., the ease of playing many notes quickly on the harpsichord, and the lack of dynamic control over a single note). Composers find practical solutions to these limitations (e.g., octave doublings, trills, and heightened rhythmic activity in passages that ought to sound loud), and these devices become accepted as aesthetically appealing, ensuring their continued use after the original technology has been replaced or new technologies developed (e.g., similar musical solutions in the loud passages of a Haydn piano sonata, despite the instrument's dynamic control).

According to the dictionary.com app on my phone, a "skeuomorph" is "an ornament or design on an object copied from a form of the object when made from another material or by other techniques." A feature I find in my own work and that of my peers is a tendency to be interested in connections between electronic music and instrumental music, technologically distinct but, musically, increasingly related.

Skeuomorphic Tendencies is dedicated to my partner, Doug Brooks, for our tenth anniversary (during which I was editing this score).

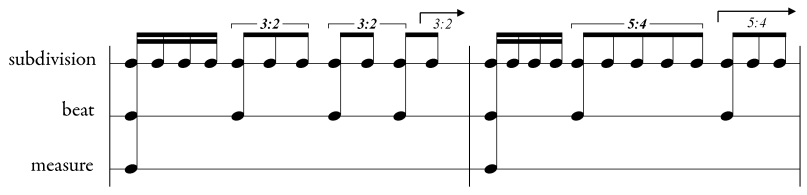
A note on meter:

Traditional meter is organized hierarchically, typically with three levels of rhythmic emphasis within a measure:



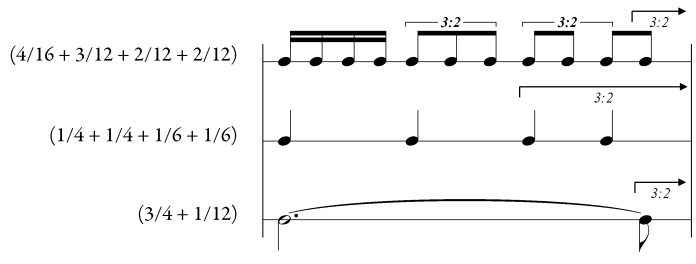
The traditional time signature 3/4 implies that the downbeat is accented, beats 2 and 3 carry weaker accents, and the remaining subdivisions are unaccented.

Meter in *Skeuomorphic Tendencies* operates in the same manner, but with occasional irregularities at all three levels, for example:



The downbeat of every measure carries an implicit strong accent. Each beam group implies a weaker accent. For this reason, triplets are beamed variably in groups of two or three. Additionally, tuplets are often truncated (normally at the end of a measure), as indicated by an arrow pointing to the right.

A number of notational solutions exist for the so-called "irrational meters" that result. The measures above could be notated as 3/4 + 1/12 and 3/4 + 3/10 (reflecting the total duration of each measure), but this ignores the internal organization of each meter. More accurate time signatures may be expressed as 1/4 + 1/4 + 1/6 + 1/6 and 1/4 + 1/2 + 3/10 (reflecting the beat structure of the measure), or 4/16 + 3/12 + 2/12 + 2/12 and 4/16 + 5/10 + 3/10 (representing every subdivision), but such notation is cumbersome, visually disruptive, and entirely redundant.



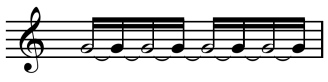
In this score, music in blue does not contain any time signatures because all pertinent metrical information can be gleaned from the music itself. Music in blue will not synchronize with the conductor, but each asynchronized part will have a chance to resynchronize (notated in red).

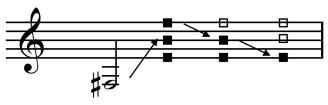
Performance notes:

General:

♯ = three quarter tones sharp
𝄲 = one quarter-tone sharp
𝄳 = one quarter-tone flat
𝄬 = three quarter tones flat
 = bend pitch roughly one quarter-tone

Winds:

 = timbral trill (open notehead refers to alternate fingering)

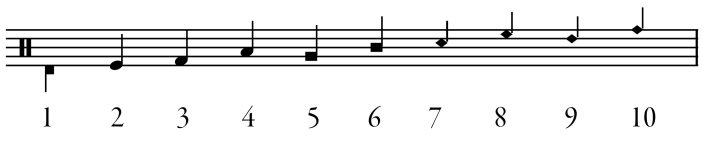
 = multiphonic (boxes refer to ranges, not specific pitches)

The trumpet and trombone parts call for harmon mutes (stems out) and plungers.

○ = open
\+ = closed
(Mutes should be open by default.)

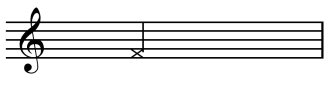
Diamond noteheads indicate notes to be sung
(Octaves can be adjusted if necessary.)

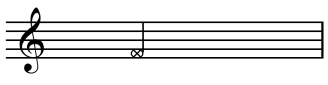
Percussion:

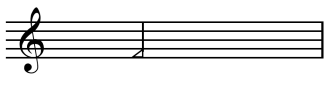


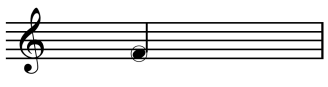
1) medium kick drum
2) large bass drum (on its side, muted to sound moderately dry, with additional muting added during the performance)
3) low tom tom (muted to sound very dry)
4) medium tom tom (muted to sound very dry)
5) medium ceramic tile
6) high ceramic tile
7) large cowbell
8) medium cowbell
9) large triangle
10) small triangle

Xylophone parts are indicated by conventional noteheads in the treble clef. Bars 1-18 call for the xylophone and kick drum to be played simultaneously; the kick is indicated with square noteheads.

 = rim click (or play with the back ends of mallets, or play xylophone over the strings)

 = play on head near rim

 = apply pressure to drumhead to change pitch

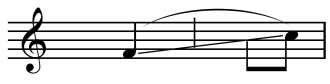
 = mute drumhead with hand

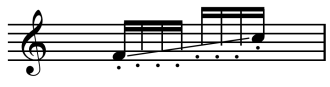
Piano:

Ped. ——┘ = depress damper pedal and hold as long as indicated
Ped. ——→ = depress damper pedal and continue holding
(Ped.) ——┘ = release damper pedal (which will already be depressed)
(Ped.) ——→ = reminder to continue holding damper pedal
(Ped.) ..... = gradually release damper pedal
(~~Ped.~~) = without pedal

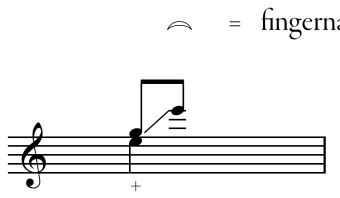
Strings:

ord = ordinario
msp = molto sul ponticello

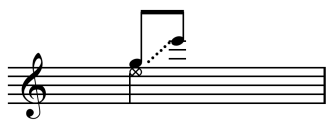
 = continuous glissando (noteheads are omitted and stems function as rhythmic placeholders)

 = rearticulated glissando

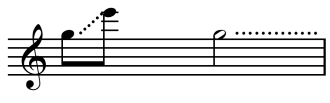
⊕ = mute strings suddenly to create a "reverse" envelope
pz = pizzicato
♀ = Bartók pizzicato
\+ = left hand pizzicato
⌒ = fingernail pizzicato



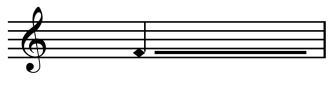
= pizzicato fluido (accomplished by pressing the tension screw of the bow against the string - the pitch will rise as the bow moves AWAY from the bridge)



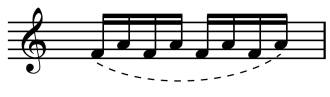
= legno saltando glissando: bounce the wood of the bow against the string while shifting the point of contact. Mute strings in order to hear only the notated pitches (at the points of contact).



= throw the bow at the string, creating as many bounces as possible (may be combined with a glissando)



= half-harmonic: use a light finger pressure (while muting the string behind your finger) with a light, fast bow in order to produce a very pale, somewhat noisy pitch (while retaining a faintly audible fundamental)



= no bow change

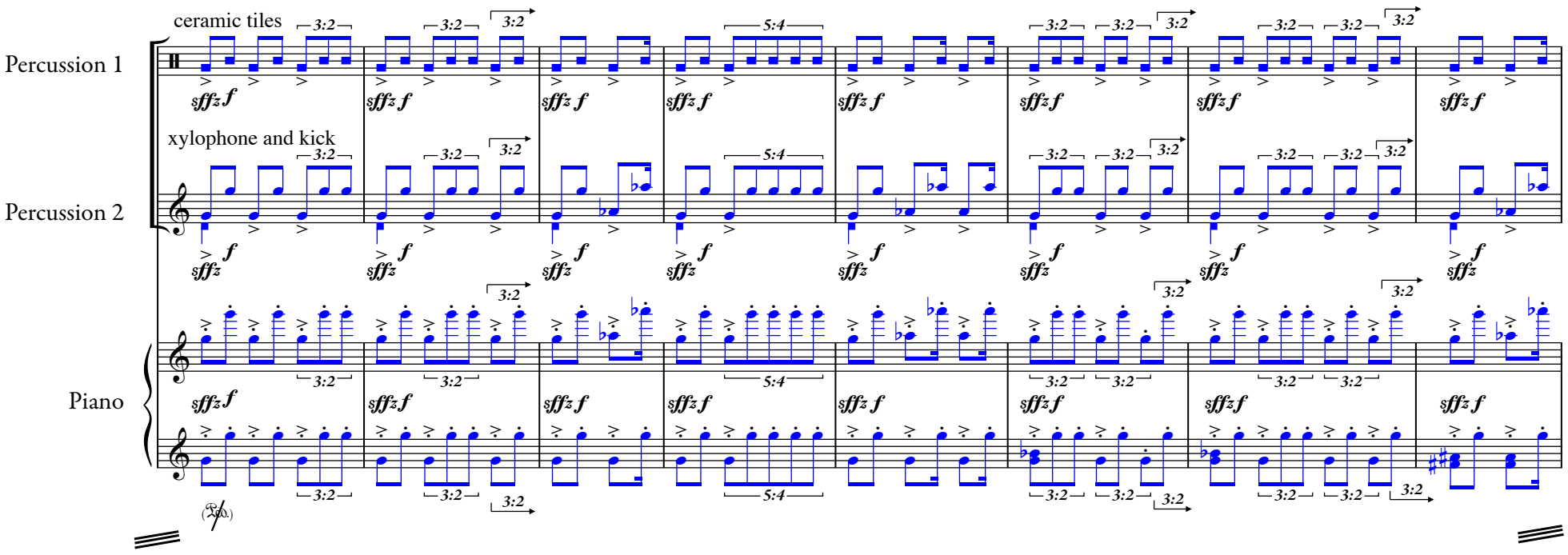
Skeuomorphic Tendencies

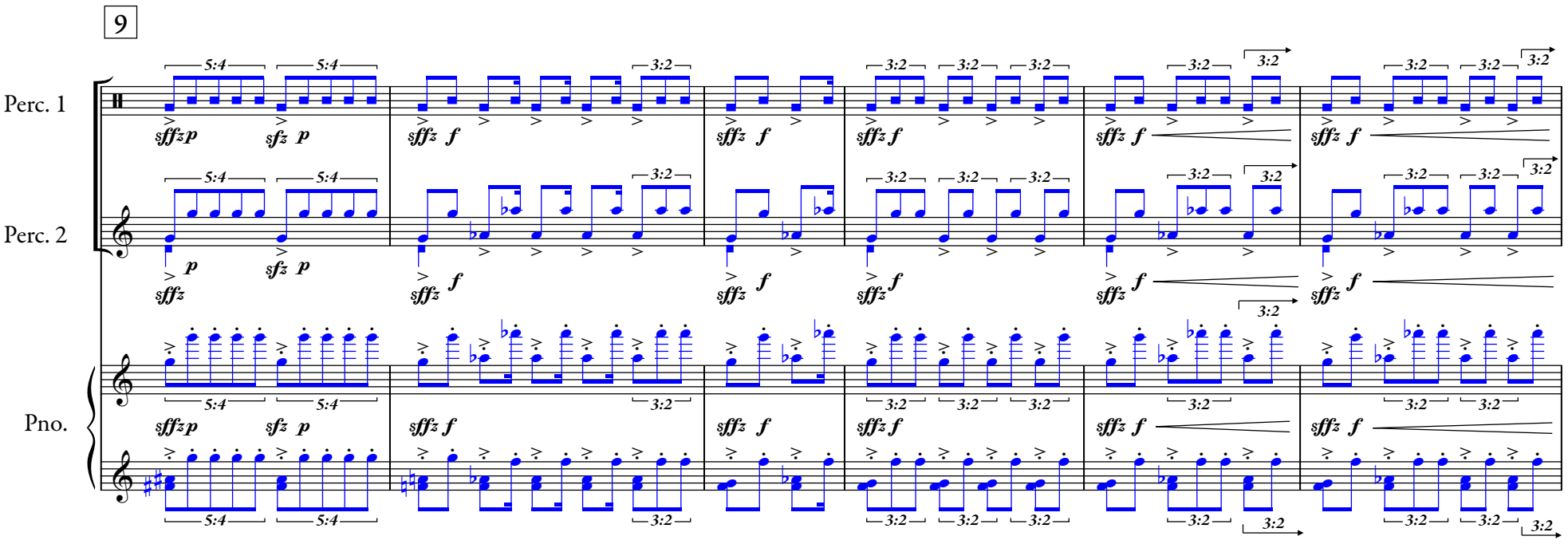
for the Metropolis Ensemble

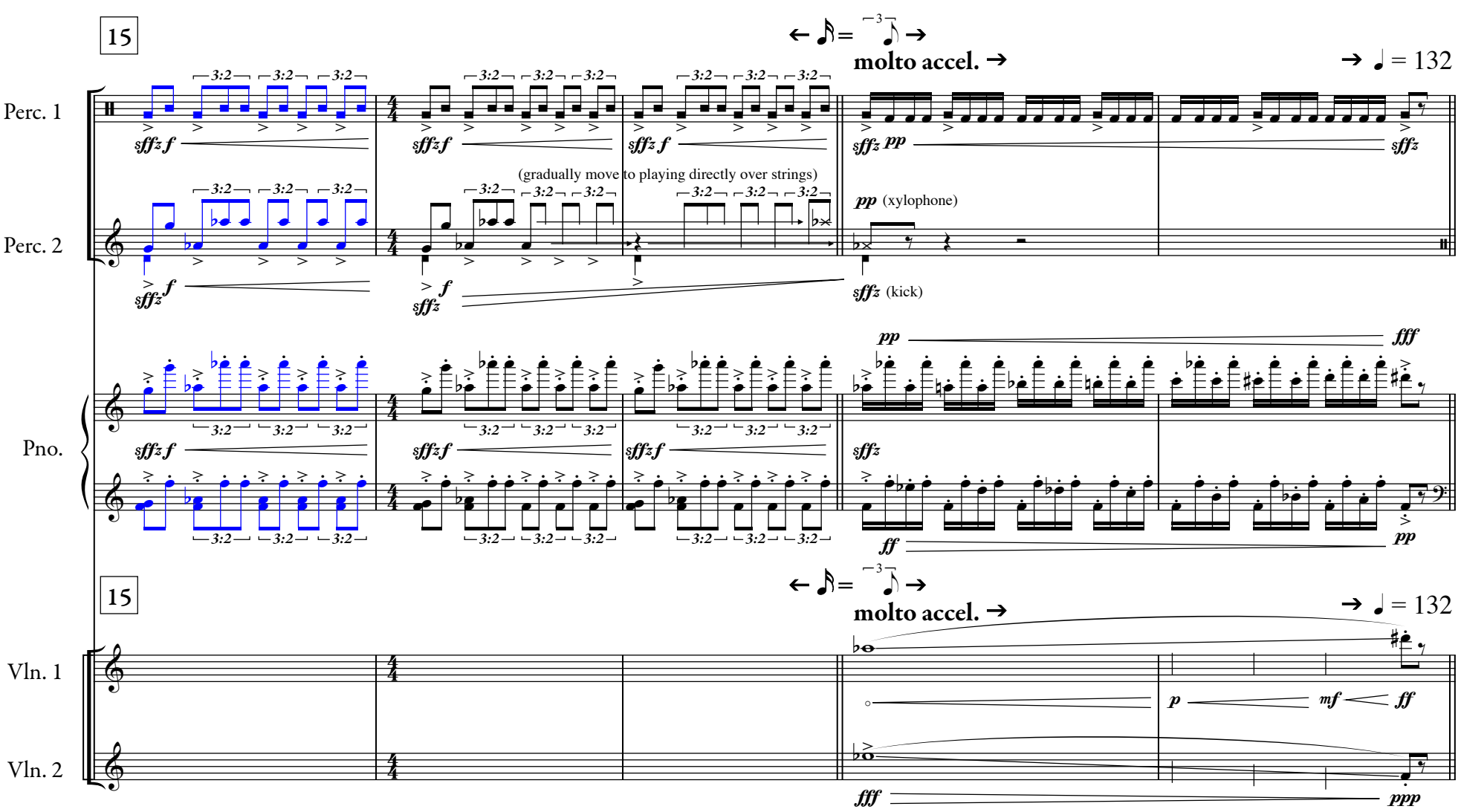
Ryan Carter

Precisely (♩ = 132)

The first 15 measures do not need to be conducted; they can function more as a chamber trio. All three parts should remain synchronized.
Time signatures do NOT apply to music in blue. All metrical information can be gleaned from the music. Details can be found in the prefatory notes.







A1

20 **Like a leprechaun on ecstasy** (♩ = 132)

Flute
Oboe
Clarinet in B♭
Contrabassoon
Horn in F
Trumpet in C
Trombone
Percussion 1
Percussion 2
Piano
Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola 1
Viola 2
Cello 1
Cello 2
Double Bass

with plunger mute

with plunger mute

cowbells, toms, and tiles

large bass drum (on side) and kick

notehead in circle = mute head with free hand

hold until all sound decays

20 **Like a leprechaun on ecstasy** (♩ = 132)

msp

ord

msp

ord

sim.

Fl.

Ob.

(B♭) Cl.

C. Bn.

Hn.

C Tpt.

Tbn.

Perc. 1

sempre ***f***

Perc. 2

sempre ***f***

(rim clicks)

Pno.

24

Vln. 1

pp

p < fff

pp

(still msp)

Vln. 2

msp

ord

Vla. 1

sim.

msp (alternate between ord and msp every measure)

Vla. 2

(sim.)

Vc. 1

< ff

f

sfz > p < fff

Vc. 2

D.B.