Commissioned for SaxOpen - XVII World Saxophone Congress & Festival - Strasbourg 2015

What If

composed for and premiered in July 2014 by an ensemble of …

101 saxophones*

*12 soprano + 12 alto 1 +12 alto 2 +12 alto 3 +12 alto 4 +12 alto 5 +12 tenor +16 baritone + 1 alto soloist

with electro-acoustic music and percussion *(optional)*

(2014)

(duration: c. 12 minutes)

Mark Phillips

*requires a minimum of 10 players
scored for 8 ensemble parts (with some divisi in baritone part)
plus 1 alto saxophone soloist

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performance notes:

Where and How to begin:

What if requires 10 saxophonists to cover all parts, but is designed for performance by as many saxophone players as possible up to 101, including the soloist. Care should be exercised to ensure that balance is achieved between the eight sections. In particular is important to have enough baritone saxophones to provide a strong sonic foundation for the ensemble. The baritone sax part is also the only part that can not able be doubled by alto saxophone. If the ensemble and/or the space is large enough, miking the alto saxophone soloist is an option to consider. Just be sure to set a level for the first movement that does not cause the soloist to sound harsh or for listeners to become uncomfortable.

Throughout the first movement, all performers have a great deal of freedom to interpret the notation of their motifs — especially as it pertains to the duration of notes and periods of silence. It is the role of the conductor to shape the performance in a manner that adheres to the overall plan and structure of the movement, using cues and (probably) a stopwatch. There are 15 numbered cues for the conductor to communicate to the ensemble in this movement. These could easily be conveyed with hand signals, or perhaps with 15 numbered sheets of paper or flash cards. Beyond these cues, the conductor and the soloist may also wish to work out cueing details for passages between these 15 cues.

The performance could begin with many of the ensemble members scattered throughout the hall (in the wings just off-stage, in the aisles, etc.). They could even remain offstage throughout most of the first movement, if so desired. During the opening alto saxophone cadenza (or again during the closing alto saxophone cadenza), members of the ensemble could make their way onto the stage. In any case, by the start of movement 2, the ensemble should be assembled into a typical concert arrangement, so that the conductor can more accurately and effectively communicate beats and tempo in a conventional manner.

Regarding the Boxed Motifs in Movement I:

Performers are free to choose among the musical motifs given in their part, playing any number of them in any order. Wide latitude is granted in the interpretation of these motifs in terms of pacing, note duration, and length of silent pauses. Performers should avoid exact synchronicity with other players as much as possible and should not repeat any motif in exactly the same manner. Whenever performers are currently playing as a new cue is directed toward them, they should finish whatever motif they are currently playing before beginning to play motifs from the new set. This will have the desired effect of smoothing out the transitions between cues. The written dynamic levels for the ensemble parts in movement 1 are soft throughout, but do note that in cues 9-11, the dynamic level rises a couple of notches to mezzo piano. Then at cue 12, the top dynamic falls again to pianissimo. Players are welcome to use an airy, breathy tone throughout most of the piece, but especially in the beginning. On rare occasions and at the conductor's discretion, individual ensemble players could be encouraged to exceed the global dynamic level, so that their playing briefly emerges as a distinct sound above the rest of the ensemble, but never to the point that it obscures the soloist. It will be easy to overdo this concept, so use it sparingly! The best strategy would probably be to add this element rather late in the rehearsal schedule, once cueing, balance, and pacing issues are well under control.

Additional Sonic Resources:

An electronic/computer music soundscape consisting of computer-processed saxophone drones will accompany movement I. Playback volume should be loud enough to make the players feel comfortable as they improvise independently on their chosen motifs, but not so loud that the audience cannot hear any individual ensemble performers. In other words, there should be a balance between being able to hear individual players at times and losing the individuality of parts in a cloud of saxophone sounds.

Movement II

This movement calls for a steady rhythmic ostinato in quarter notes throughout. It should begin very softly, emerging gradually out of the ending of the first movement. It is possible to do this using computer-generated audio and/or live percussion (a large bass drum, two tom-toms, cymbal, and large tam-tam). Bowed double bass (amplified, if necessary) could also be added to this line. Especially in situations where there is a very large ensemble and a large performing space, use of live percussion is desirable, as it will facilitate balance and enhance the conductor's control of tempo.

Near the beginning of the second movement, there a short solo for one tenor saxophone player. Throughout the movement, especially at the beginning, the score has several passages marked as *soli (~ 3 players)*. If the ensemble is large enough, these passages should be played by three players, or perhaps a few more. (If the ensemble is rather small, these passages could be performed by a single player.) In either case, each time this *soli* marking occurs, the passage could be assigned to a different group of players within the section, to create antiphonal effects.

At letter **G** in this movement, the score calls for approximately half of a section to play some passages. Again, each time the marking occurs, it could refer to a different subset of players within the section.

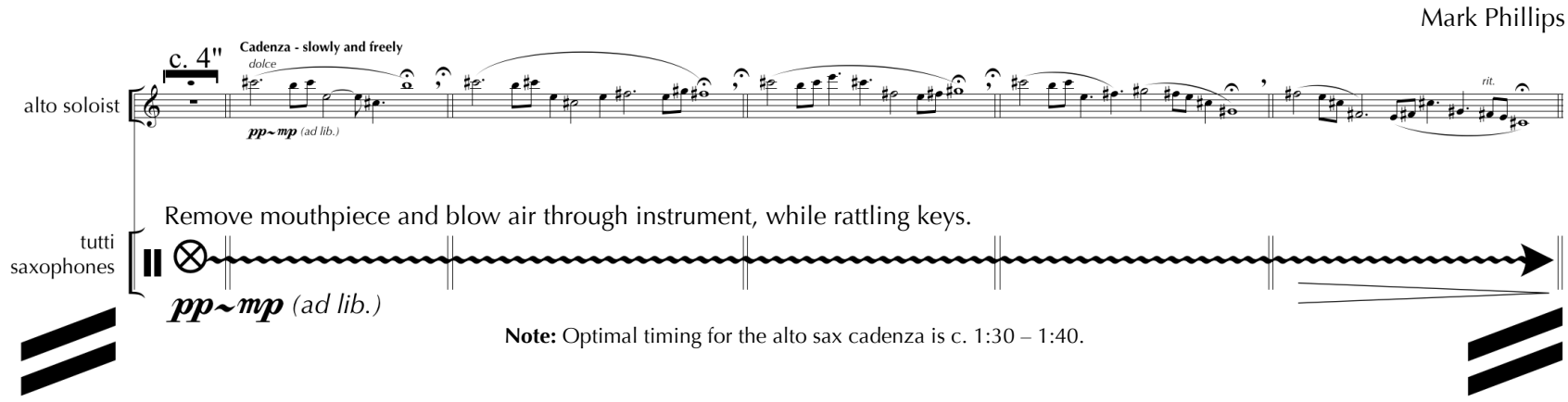
Extra/Auxiliary Parts Provided

Parts suitable for performance on Alto Saxophone are available for both the Soprano Sax part and the Tenor Sax part.

(transposed score)

What If

Mark Phillips



Note: Optimal timing for the alto sax cadenza is c. 1:30 – 1:40.

(start stopwatch)

1 — 0:00

Baritone

2 — 0:10

Tenor

3 — 0:15

Alto 5

ppp ~ pp (ad lib.)

Performers choose freely among the musical motifs in their boxes, playing any number of them in any order. Wide latitude is granted in the interpretation of these motifs in terms of pacing, note duration, and length of silent pauses. Performers should avoid exact synchronicity with other players as much as possible and should not repeat any motif in the exact the same manner.

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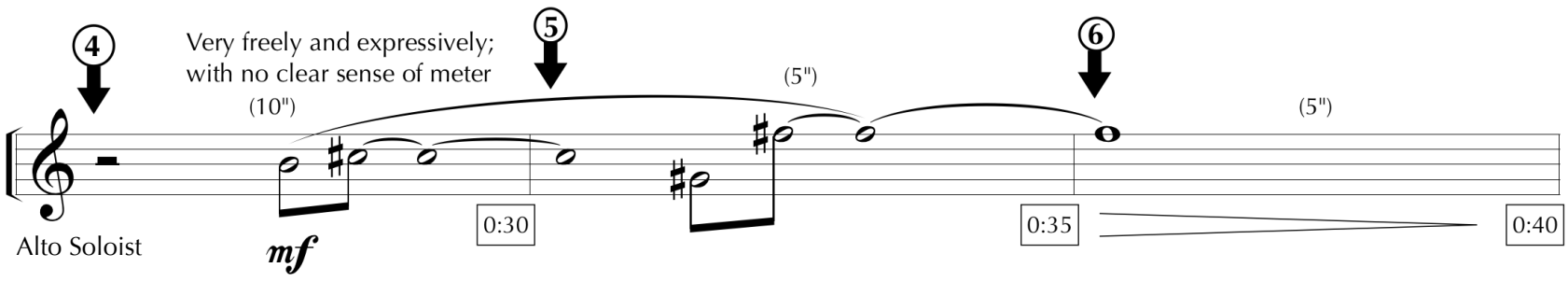
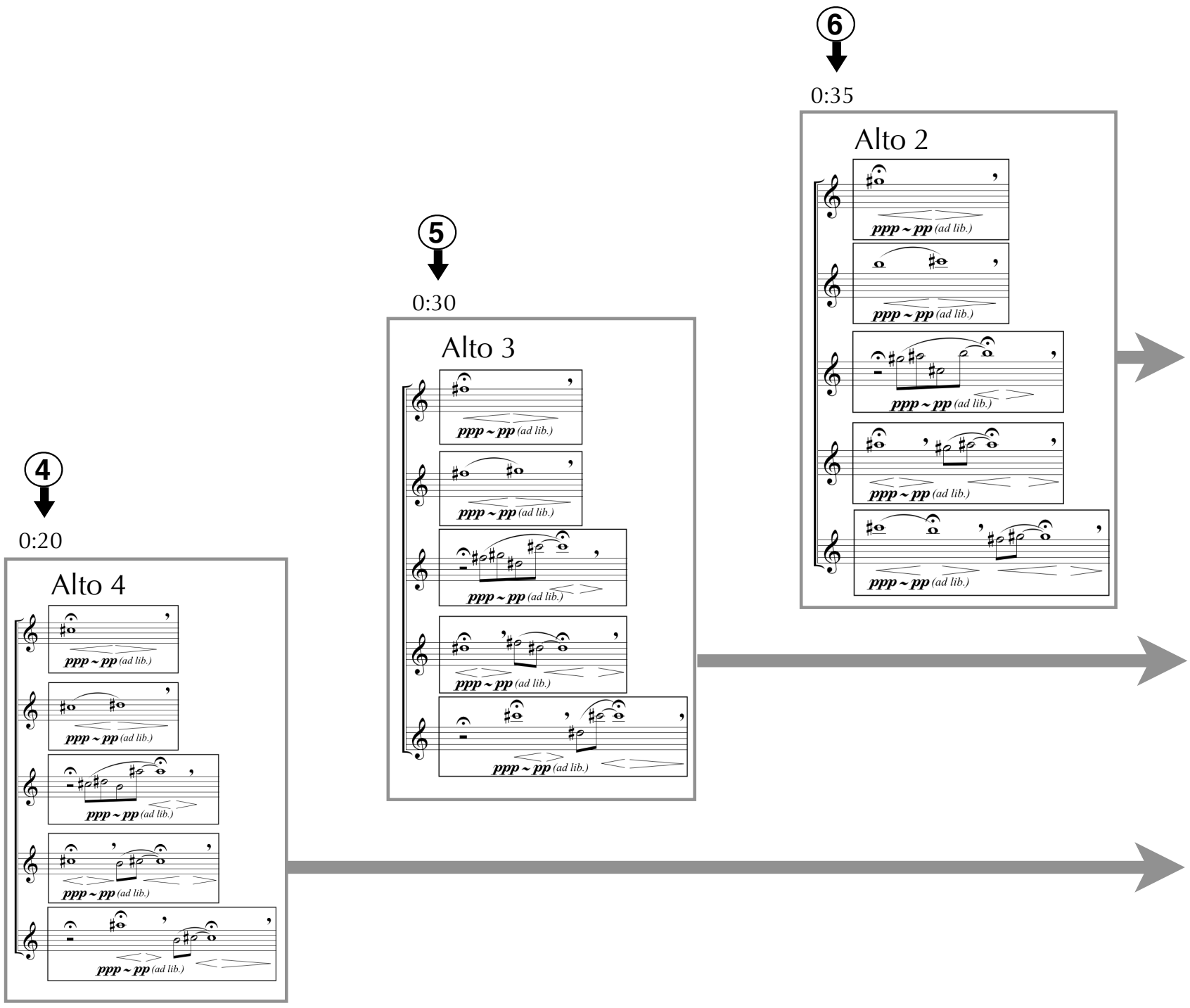
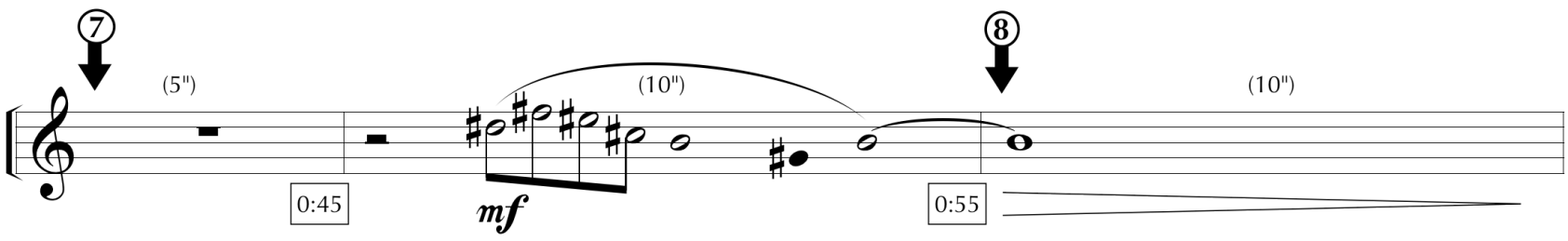
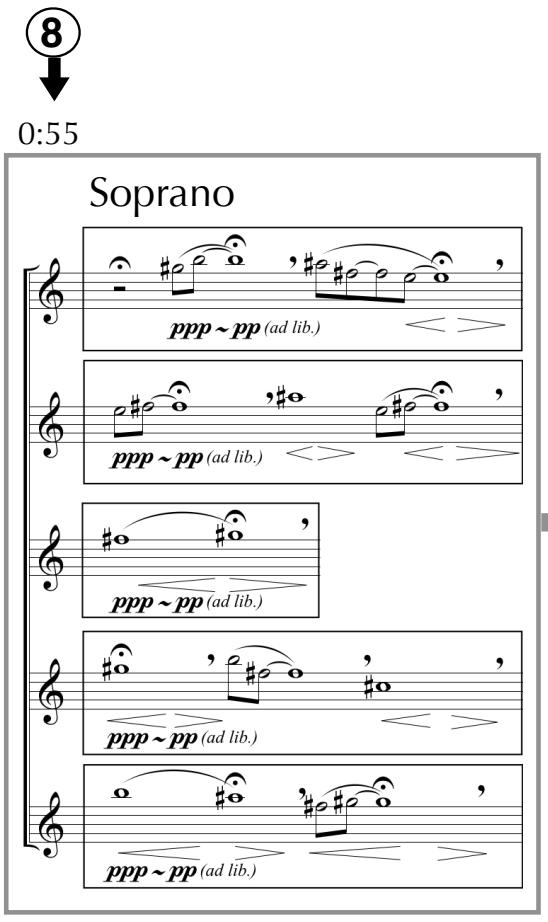
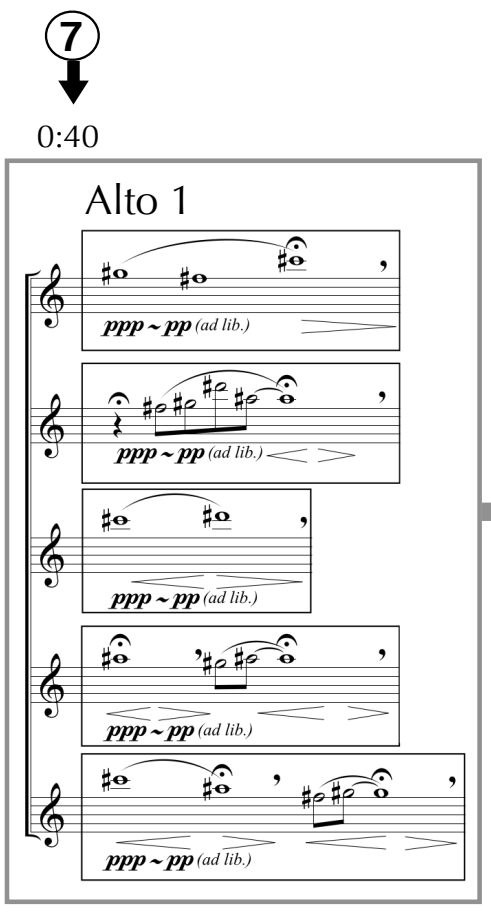

4
Very freely and expressively;
with no clear sense of meter
(10")
5
(5")
6
(5")
Alto Soloist
mf
0:30
0:35
0:40

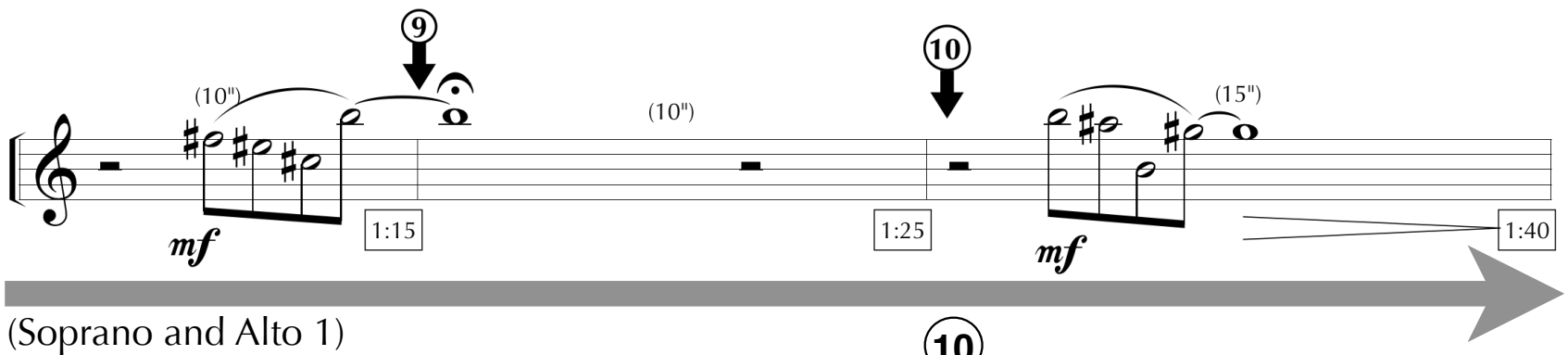

4
0:20
Alto 4
5
0:30
Alto 3
6
0:35
Alto 2
ppp ~ pp (ad lib.)
Alto 5
Tenor
Baritone







(Bari, Tenor, and Altos 2-5)



(Soprano and Alto 1)

(Alto 2-5)

(Bari & Tenor)

9
1:15

Tenor

Baritone

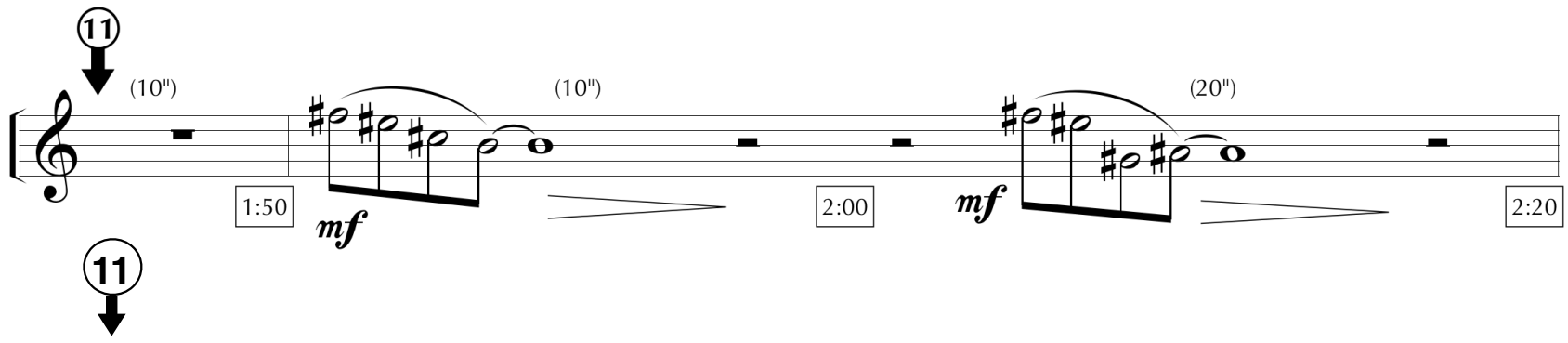
10
1:25

(Alto 2)

(Alto 3)

(Alto 4)

(Alto 5)

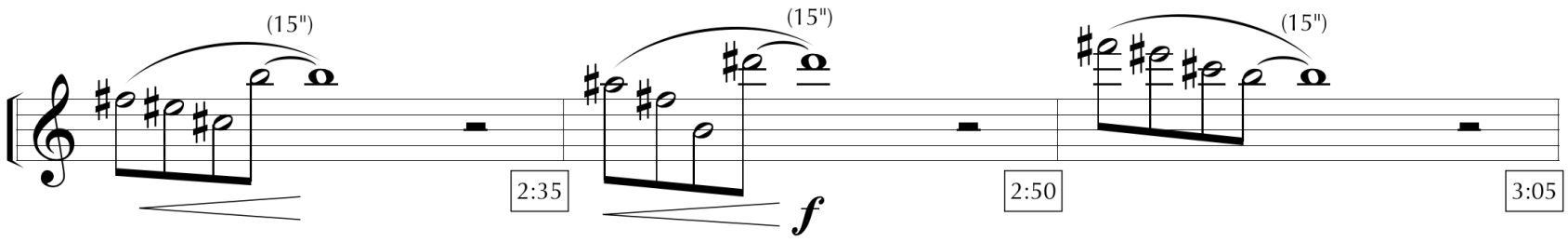


(Soprano)

(Alto 1)

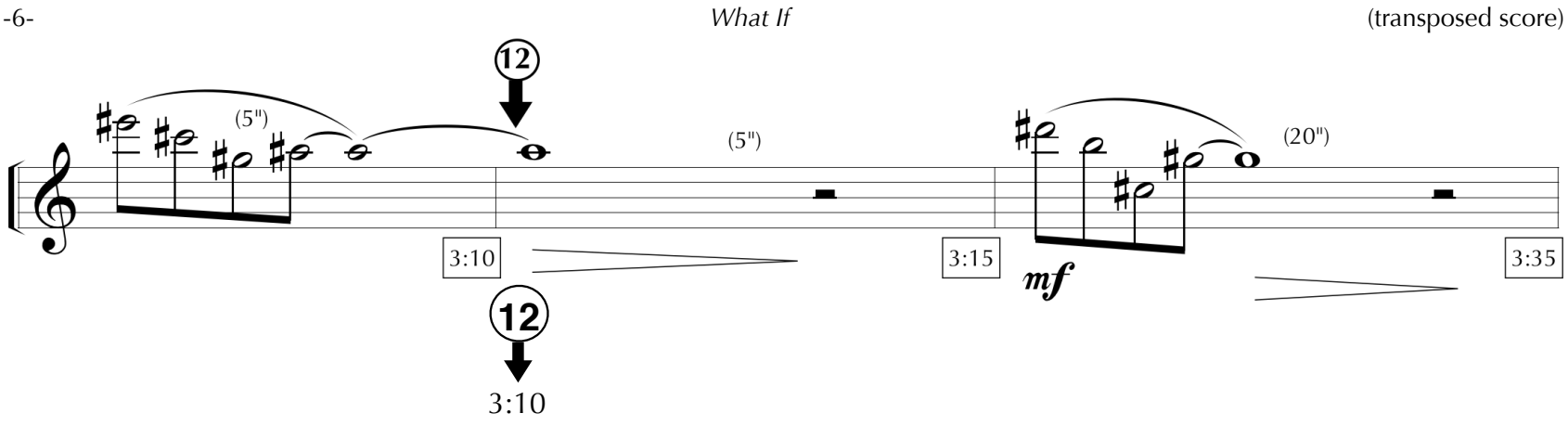
(Soprano & Alto 1)

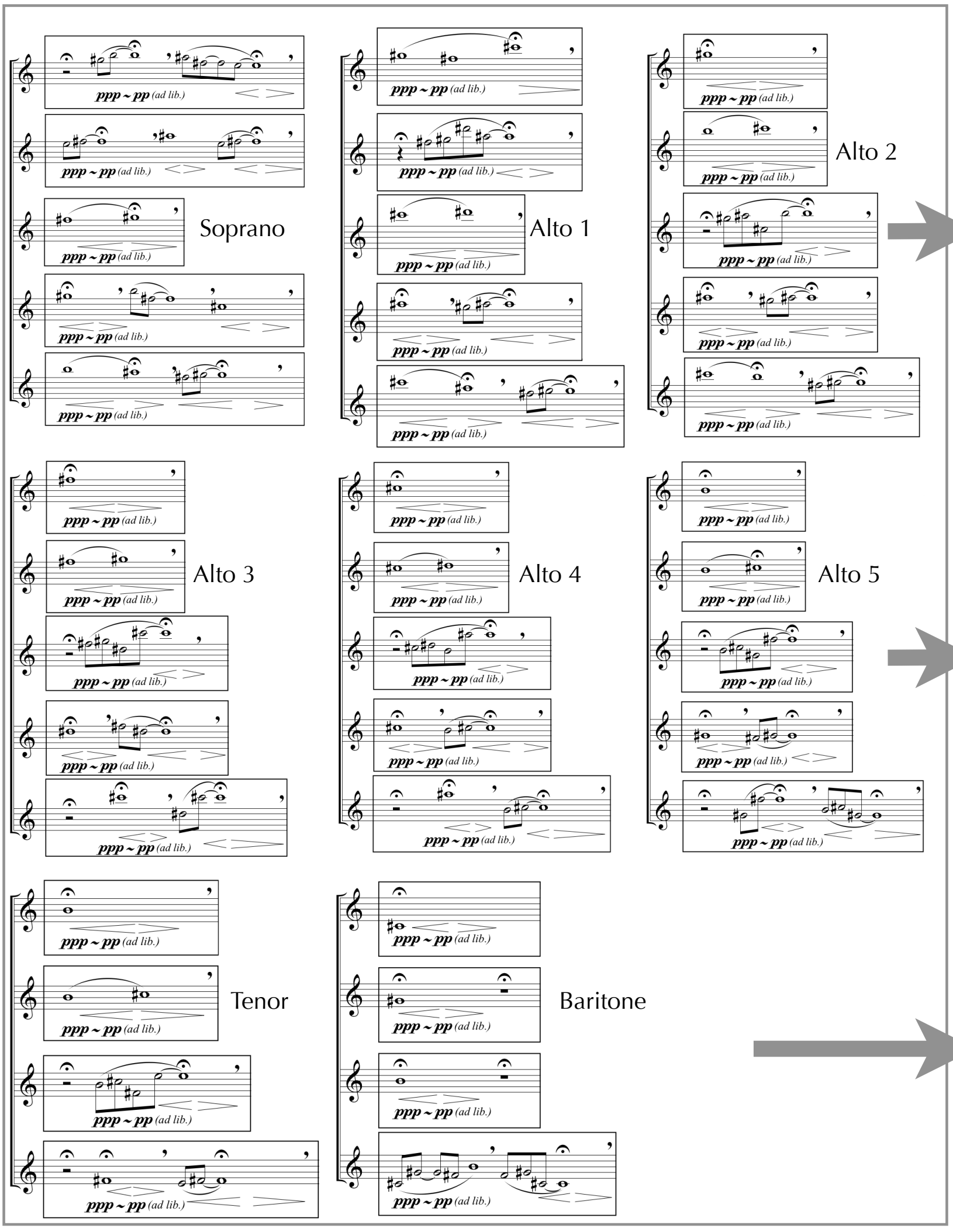
(Alto 2-5, Bari, & Tenor)

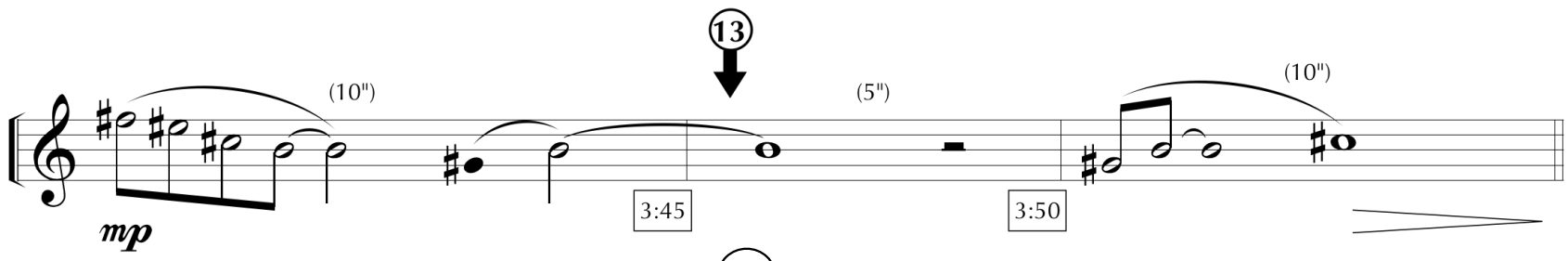


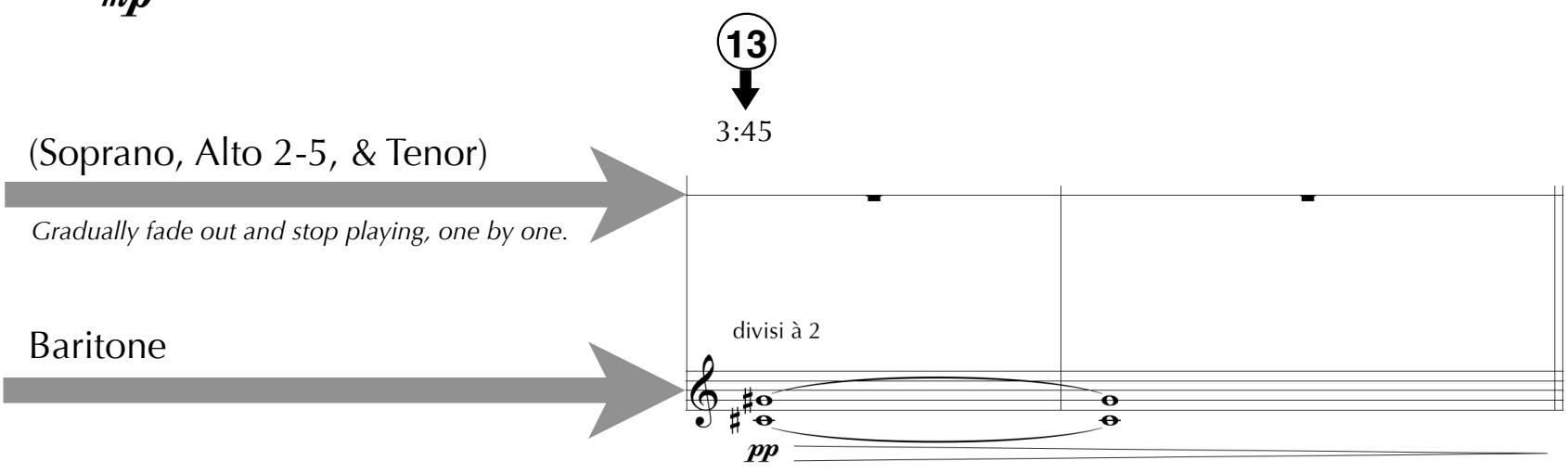
Tutti saxophones

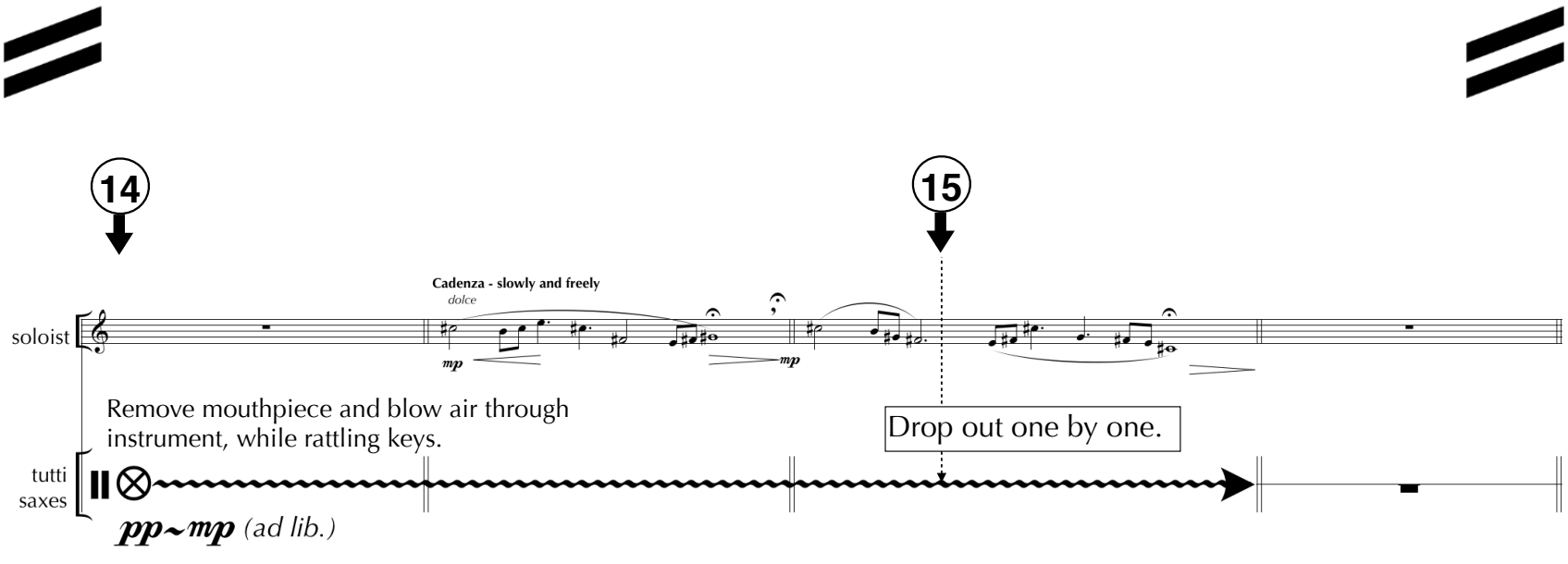
(Soprano, Alto 2-5, Tenor, & Bari)


12
(5")
(5")
(20")
3:10
3:15
3:35
mf
12
3:10


ppp ~ pp (ad lib.)
Soprano
Alto 1
Alto 2
Alto 3
Alto 4
Alto 5
Tenor
Baritone


13
(10")
(5")
(10")
mp
3:45
3:50


13
3:45
(Soprano, Alto 2-5, & Tenor)
Gradually fade out and stop playing, one by one.
Baritone
divisi à 2
pp


14
15
Cadenza - slowly and freely
dolce
soloist
mp
mp
Remove mouthpiece and blow air through instrument, while rattling keys.
Drop out one by one.
tutti saxes
pp~mp (ad lib.)

attacca

What if

(movement II)

♩ = 80-88

alto soloist

(repeart 2-4 times)

soprano (or alto)

alto 1

alto 2

alto 3

alto 4

soli (~3 players)

alto 5

soli (~3 players)

tenor (or alto)

soli (~3 players)

baritone

(repeart 2-4 times)

(gradually fade in)

synth

simile

percussion

2 tom-toms

B.Dr.

simile

8

solo

sop.

a 1

soli (~3 players)

a 2

soli (~3 players)

a 3

soli (~3 players)

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

16

A

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

solo (1 player)

23

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

soli (~3 players)

30

B

solo

sop.

a 1 — ~1/2 section — *mp*

a 2 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

a 3 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

a 4 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

a 5 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

T. Sx. — soli (~3 players) — *p*

bari

synth

perc.

37

C

solo — *mp*

sop.

a 1

a 2 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

a 3 — *p*

a 4 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

a 5 — soli (~3 players) — *p*

T. Sx. — *p*

bari

synth

perc.

44

D

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

ff tutti

ff divisi

f cym

50

unison *ff*

53

E

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

ff

divisi

57

unison

61

F

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

fff

ff

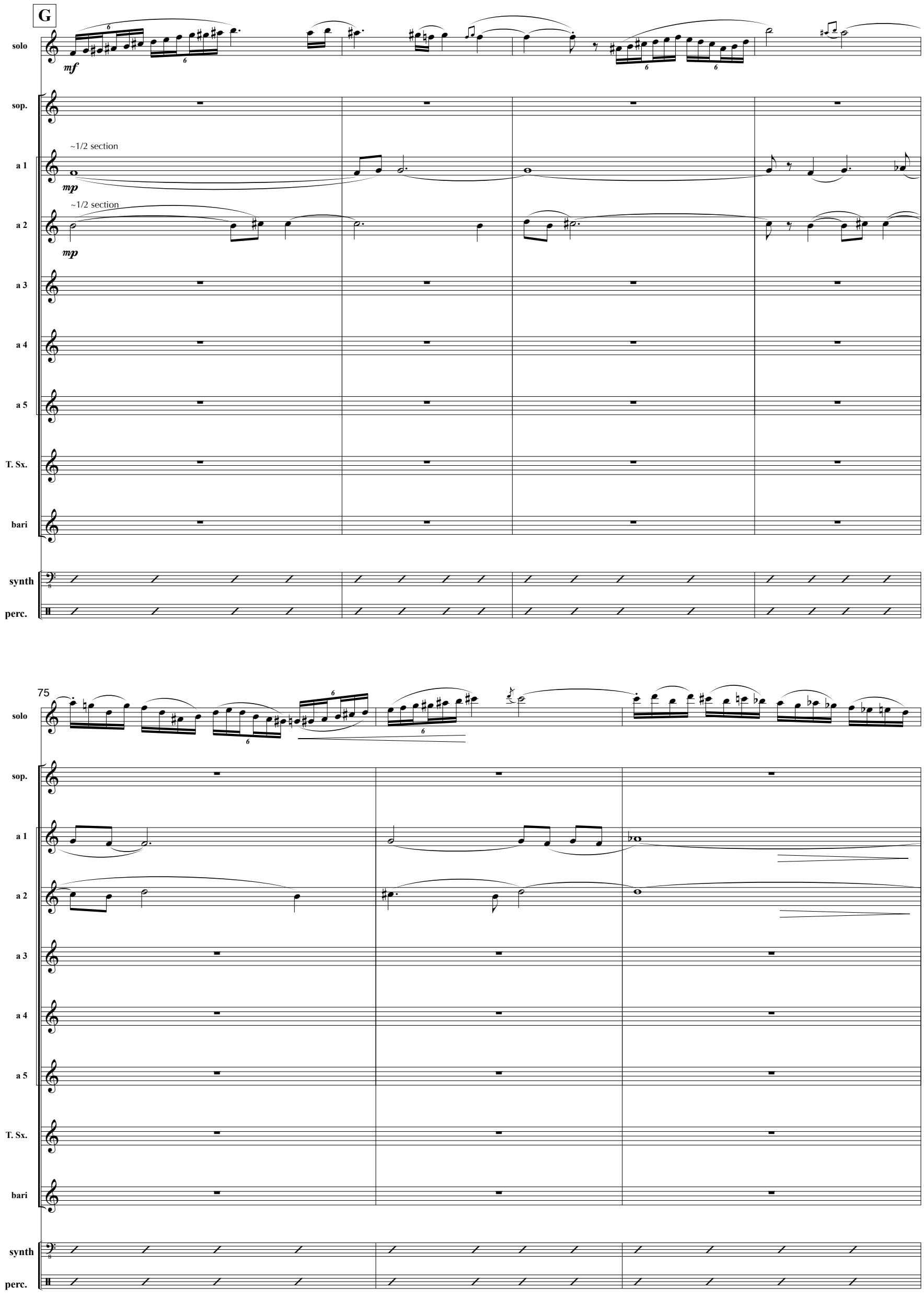
divisi

65

f

mp

unison


G
solo
sop.
a 1
a 2
a 3
a 4
a 5
T. Sx.
bari
synth
perc.
mf
mp
~1/2 section
~1/2 section
75

H

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

synth

perc.

~1/2 section

mp

f

81

84

solo
sop.
a 1
a 2
a 3
a 4
a 5
T. Sx.
bari
synth
perc.

ff
~1/2 section
mp

87

I

F♯ side B♭
G side B♭

ff
tutti
fff
tam-tam

92

solo
sop.
a 1
a 2
a 3
a 4
a 5
T. Sx.
bari
synth
perc.

95

solo
sop.
a 1
a 2
a 3
a 4
a 5
T. Sx.
bari
synth
perc.

99

J

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

ff

a 4

ff

a 5

ff

T. Sx.

ff

bari

divisi

ff

unison

synth

perc.

102

K

solo

sop.

a 1

a 2

a 3

a 4

a 5

T. Sx.

bari

divisi

unison

divisi

unison

synth

perc.

107

solo
sop.
a 1
a 2
a 3
a 4
a 5
T. Sx.
bari
synth
perc.

ff
mf *p*
divisi unison
f *mf*

110

sffz *p*
f *ff*