Full Score

Buttery Popped Corn

for Brass Quartet
and Silent Performer

Sam C Henderson

perusal score

Program Notes

Inspired by real events, watch as havoc ensues when a college student attempts to pop popcorn in his dorm's microwave.

"Buttery Popped Corn" is comedic chamber piece / theatrical skit for brass quartet and silent performer. It is simultaneously an experiment in set-based quasi-atonal writing in which much of the emphasis was put on free-form composing; as ideas would "pop" into my head, those same ideas would find their way into the piece. While much of the piece was structured around a set of pitches and two rhythmic motifs, much of the organization of pitches, miscellaneous effects, and narrative "skits" were, once devised, immediately translated to the piece. The end result is a chaotic piece that at times feels a bit out-of-hand – much like an inexperienced college student who doesn't quite know when to stop cooking a bag of popcorn.

Skits

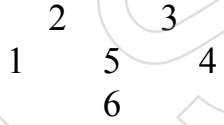
Materials

- Box crudely made to look like a microwave
  - Box must have an open side and must be large enough to fit two fully popped bags and one unpopped bag of popcorn.
  - Suggested approach: staple five pieces of printer paper on each of the five external sides of the open box. On the side directly opposite of the open side of the box, hastily draw a microwave door and scrawl the word "microwave" in large letters.
- Two fully popped bags of popcorn
  - One bag should be made to look burnt. This can be done via permanent marker, black construction paper, etc. or, at your own discretion, actually burning the bag of popcorn **in a controlled, safe, and isolated environment with easy access to safety equipment**.

- One unpopped bag of popcorn, still in the plastic wrapping
    - Suggested approach: to better prepare for Skit 2, put a slight tear in the wrapping so that it is easier to remove quickly.
- A phone, preferably turned off for the performance

Pre-Performance

The stage is set up with four chairs and stands for the quartet in an arc. The two middle chairs (2, 3) should be placed slightly further apart. In addition, there is one bench (5) and one table/stand (6) placed in the focal point of the arc facing each other. It will look like this from the audience's perspective:



The box with the two popped popcorn bags inside is placed on the table/stand (6), the open side facing away from the audience.

The trumpet stand will also have a triangle clamped to it.

(In between skits, Silent Performer may elect to "play" on phone or participate in other silent time-wasting activities.)

Skit 1

Ensemble comes on stage to applause. Once ensemble members are seated and applause dies down, Silent Performer enters and sits on bench (5). They throw unpopped bag of popcorn into the box.

Skit 2

After the intro, SP remembers the bag of popcorn is wrapped. They unwrap the popcorn and throw it back into the microwave. (The wrapping may be discarded on the stage or, for potential additional comedic effect, thrown into the microwave as well)

Skit 3a

After the end of the extended non-metered popping section (m. 40), SP gets a phone call, gets up from the bench, and walks towards the exit.

3b SP opens the door and walks out.

Skit 4a

SP enters from offstage.

4b SP walks to bench, sits down, and pulls out a fully popped bag of popcorn (unburnt). They shake it around, contemplate opening it, then throw it back in the microwave.

Skit 5a

SP hears hissing and starts to look increasingly concerned.

5b When the alarm sounds, SP freaks out, brings hands to face out of frustration, messes with box, etc. They get up, rush towards the exit, and leave. (Alternatively, a second silent performer – backstage personnel, assistant, etc. – opens the exit door and signals wildly to SP that they need to leave quickly. SP begrudgingly acknowledges the gestures and rush towards the exit.)

Skit 6

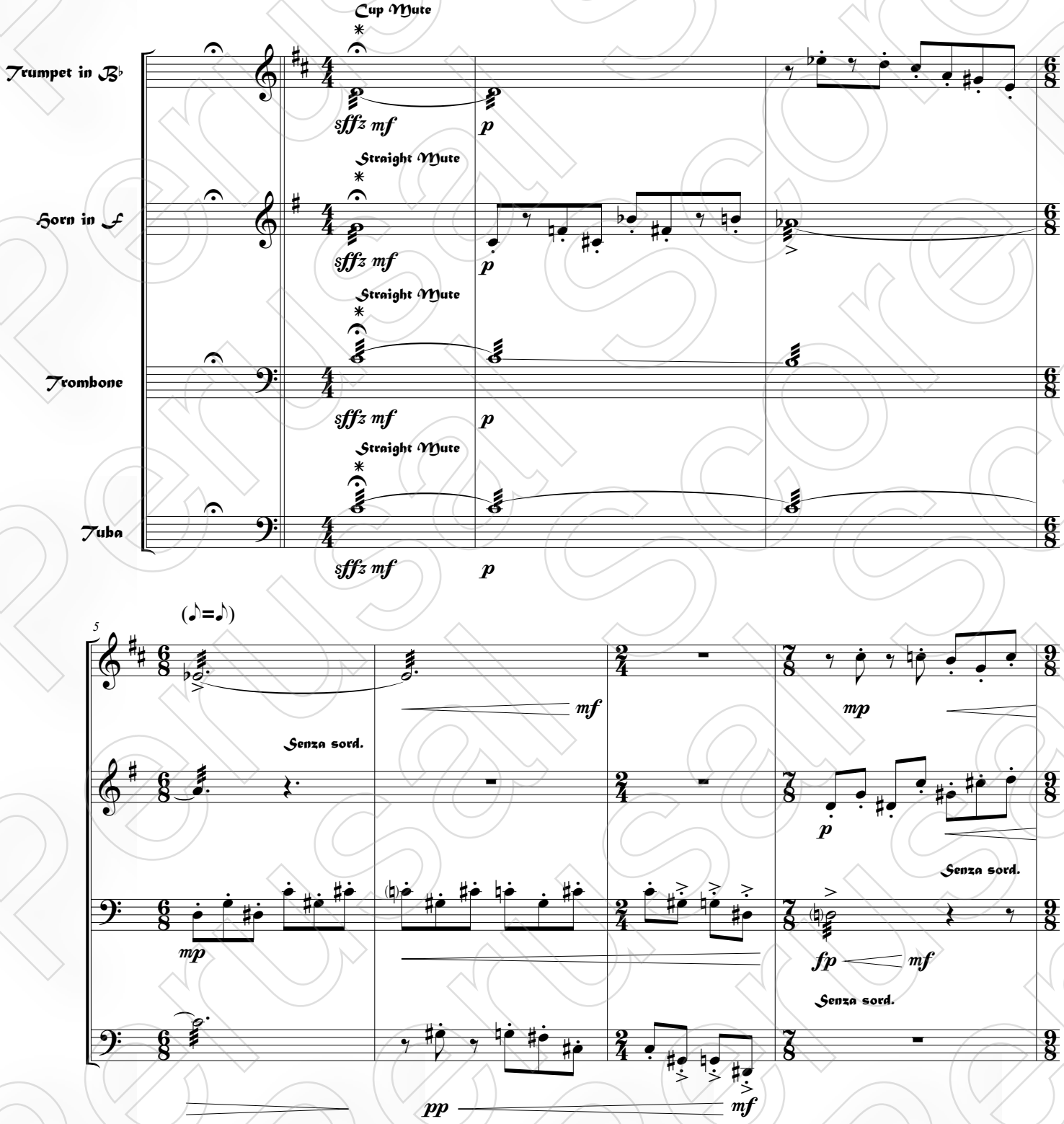
SP enters, shamefully acknowledges the smoky microwave, and sits down. They cautiously take the burnt bag of popcorn out of the microwave, fumble and drop it (as it is incredibly hot), then sit back, dejected and defeated, with an optional facepalm.

Buttery Popped Corn

Sam C Henderson

Skit 1

Allegro con commedia (♩ = c 152)



*Notes with a tremolo marking can be either flutter-tongued or growled. It is encouraged that you switch between the two at different points throughout the piece.

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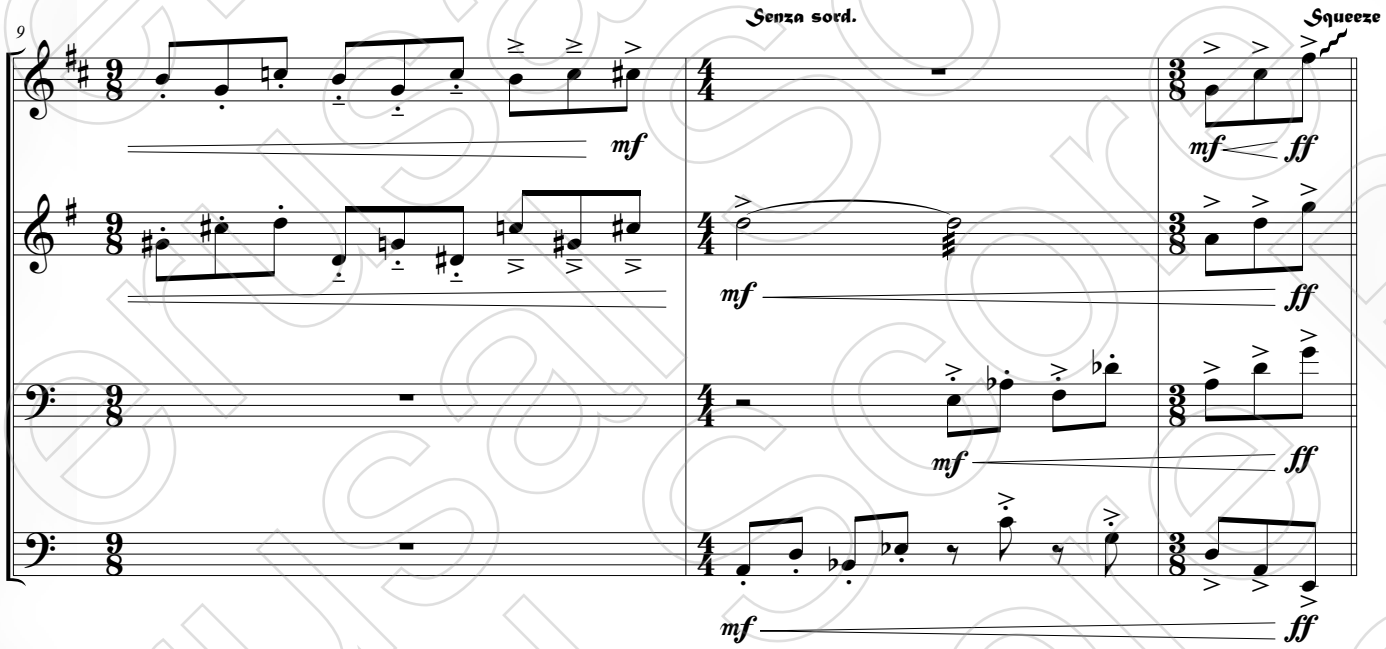
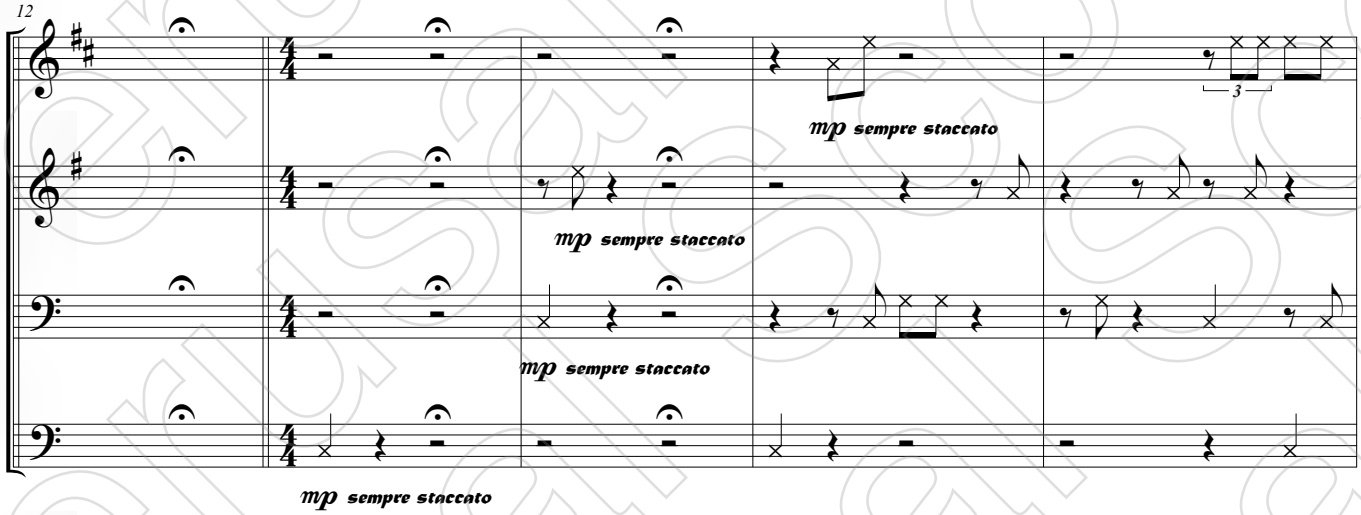
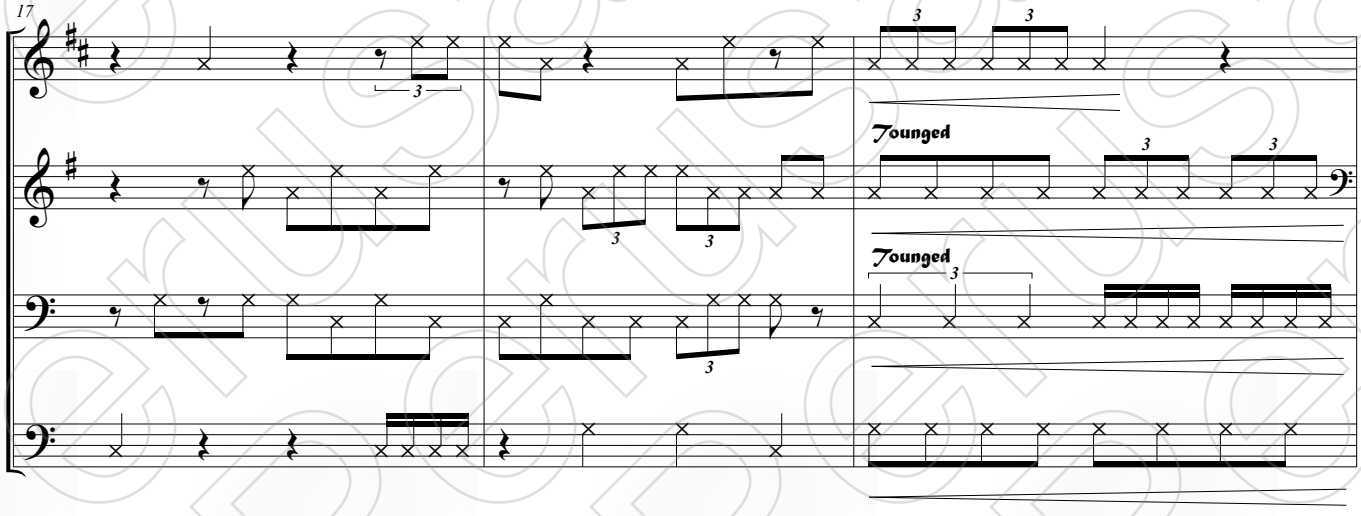
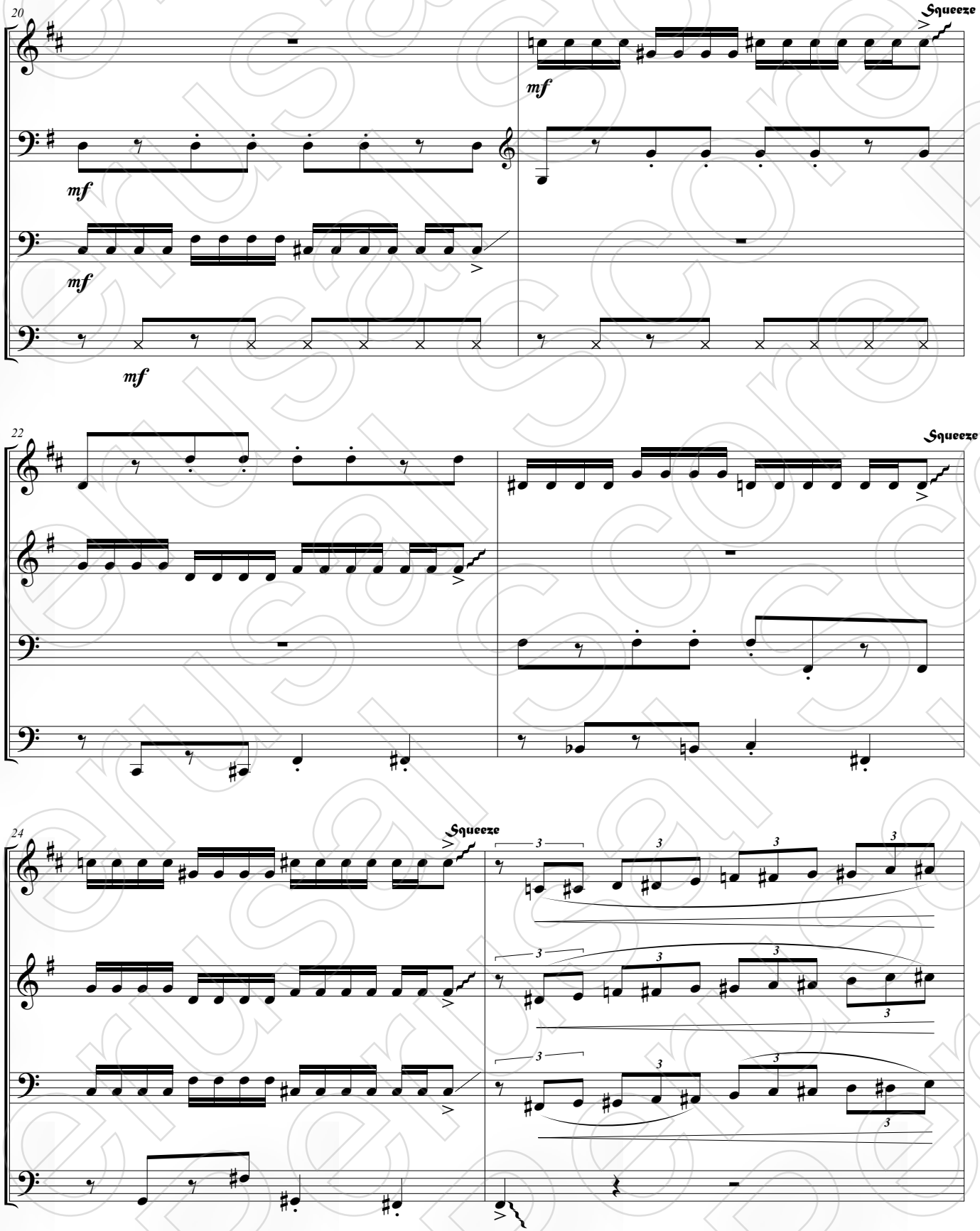


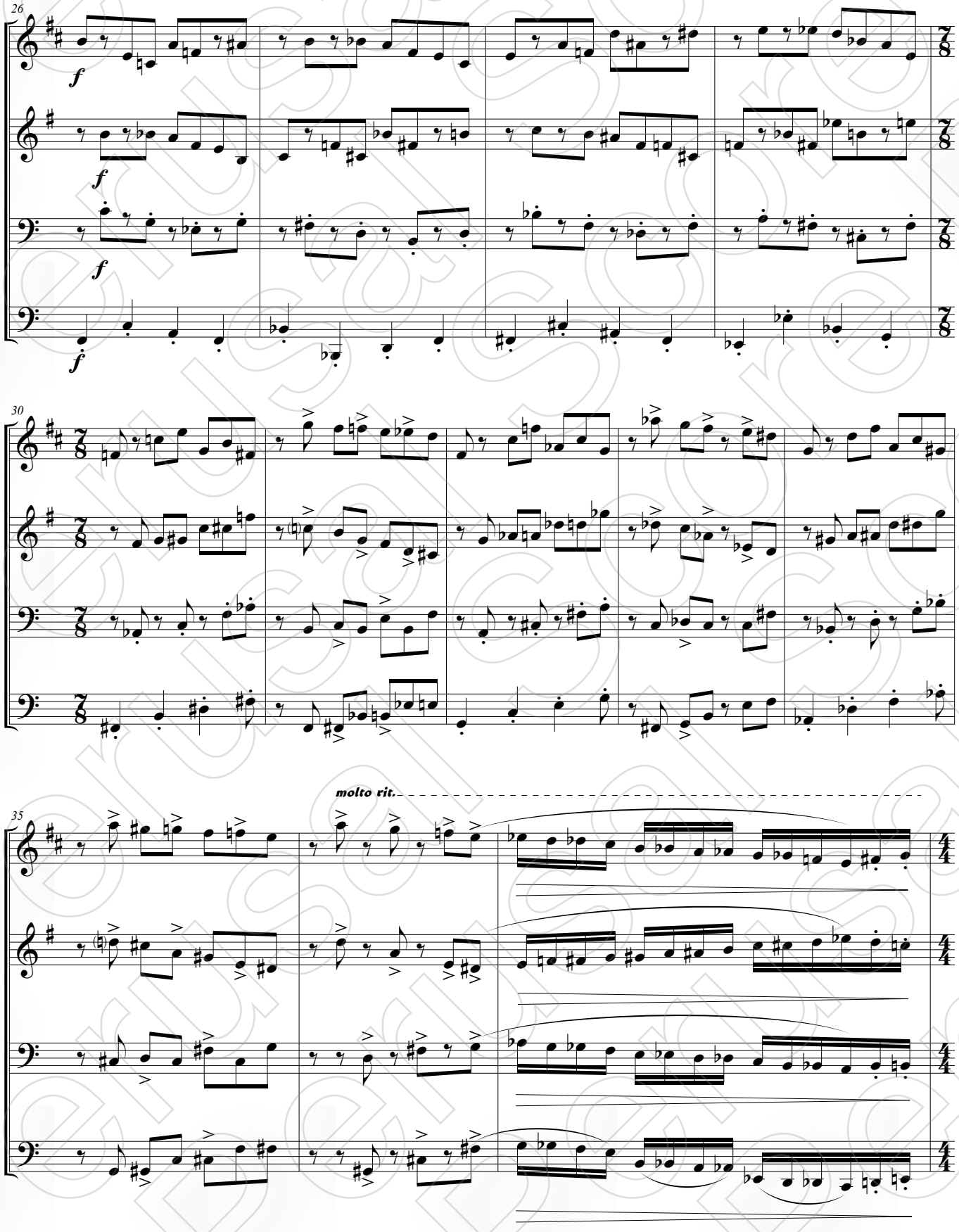
Skit 2*

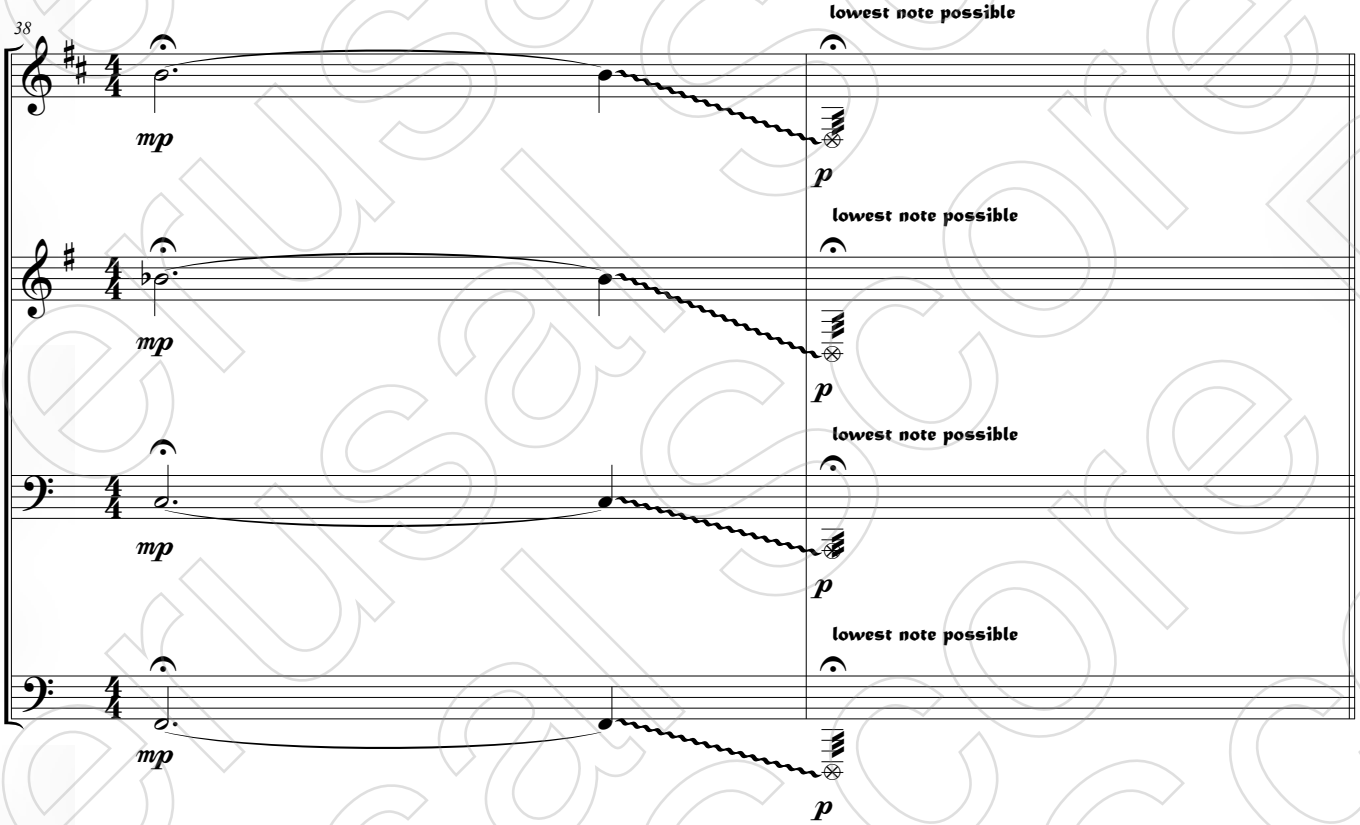


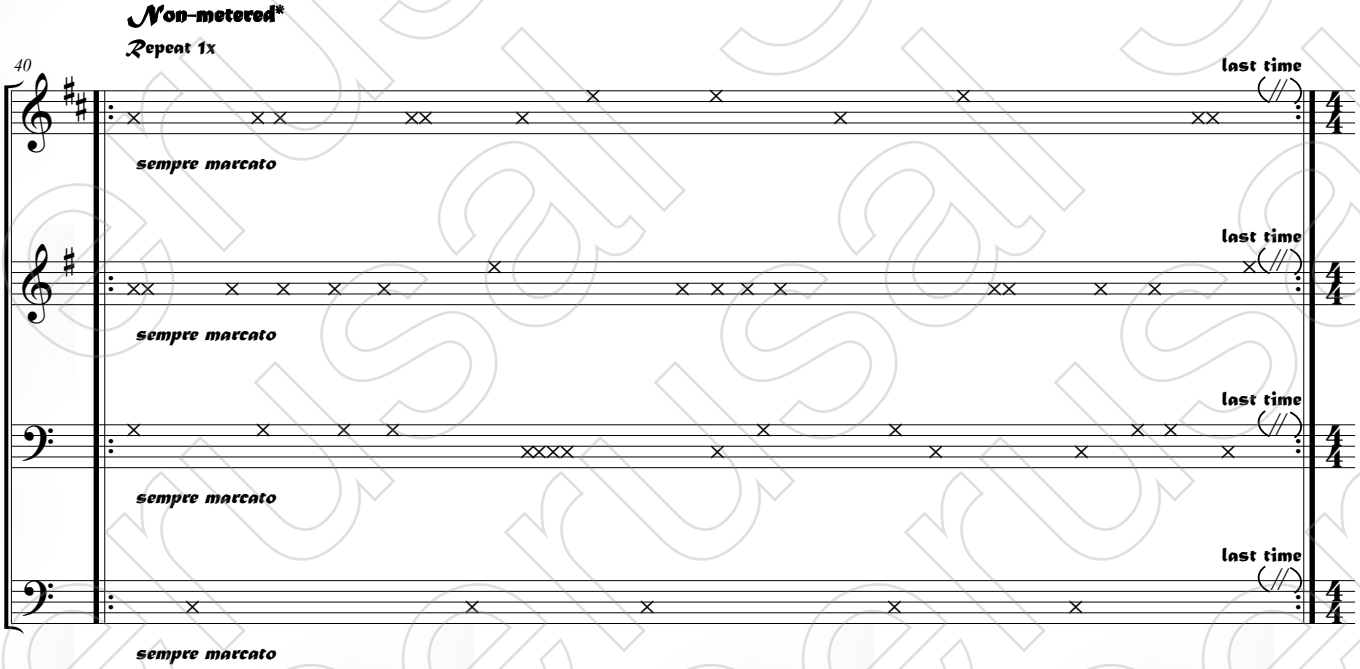


*The lower note is to either be played such that no sound is produced past the initial tonguing of the note or palmed on the mouthpiece with moderate force. The higher note is a tongue click away from the instrument.

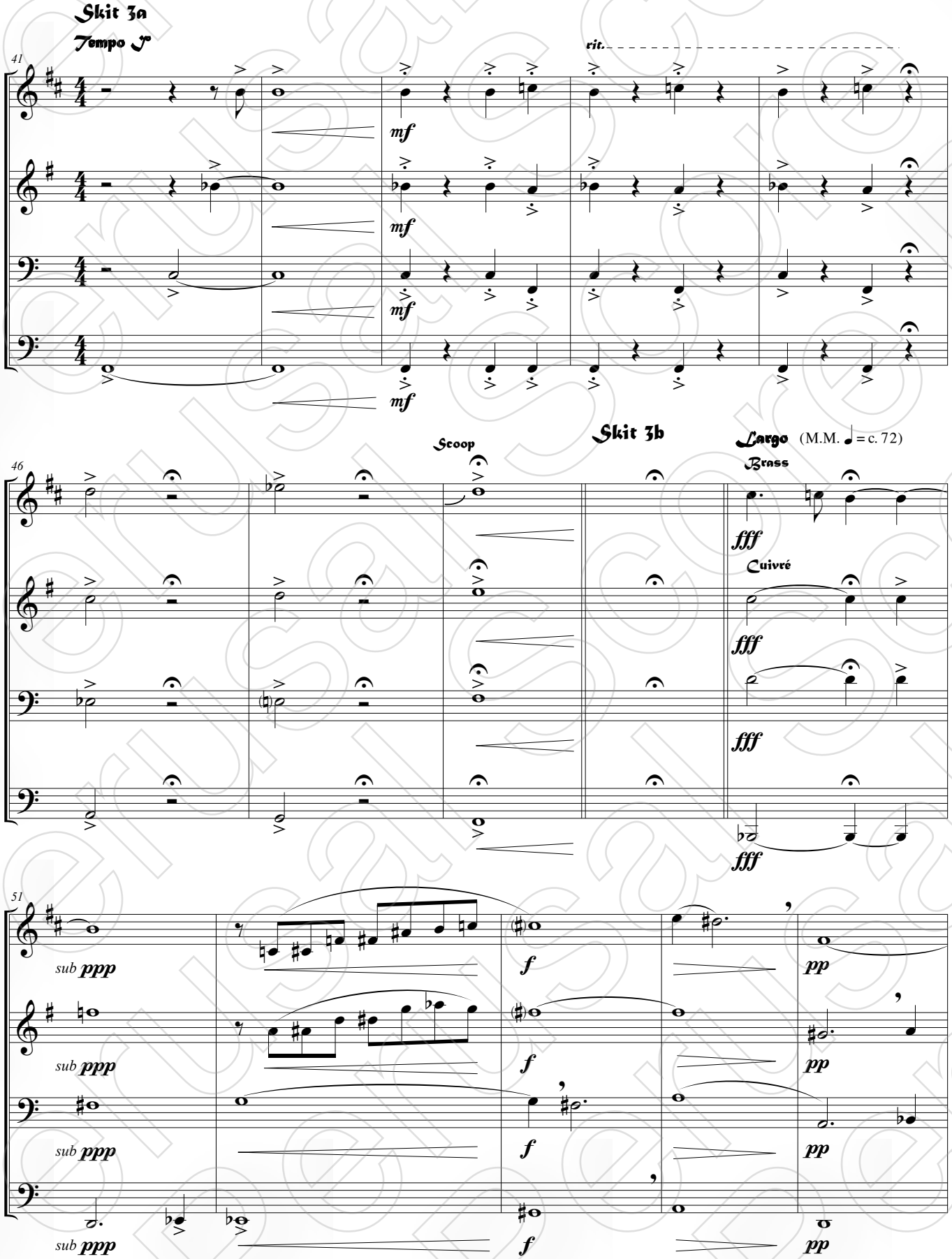

20
Squeeze
mf
mf
mf
mf
22
Squeeze
24
Squeeze
3

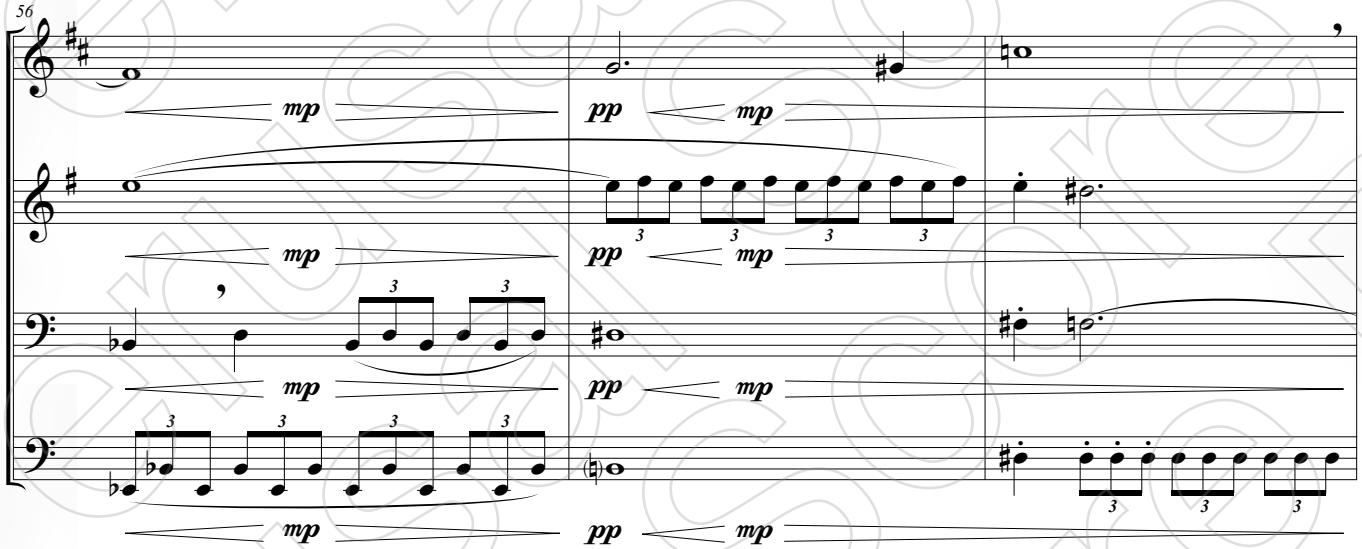

26
f
30
molto rit.
35

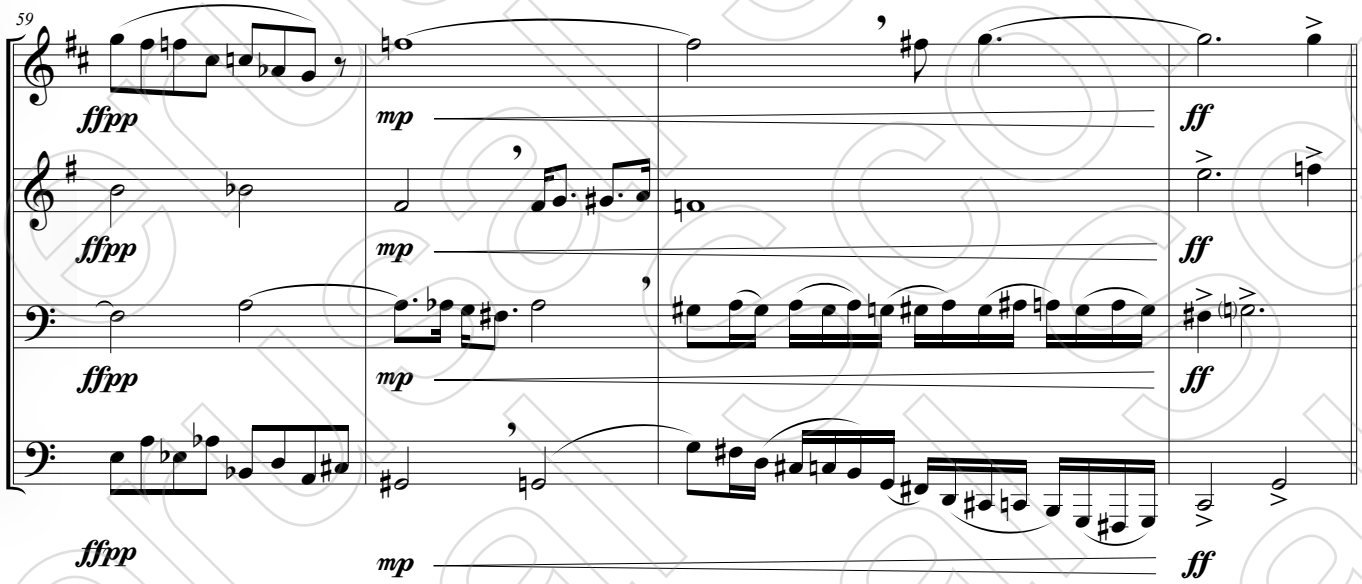


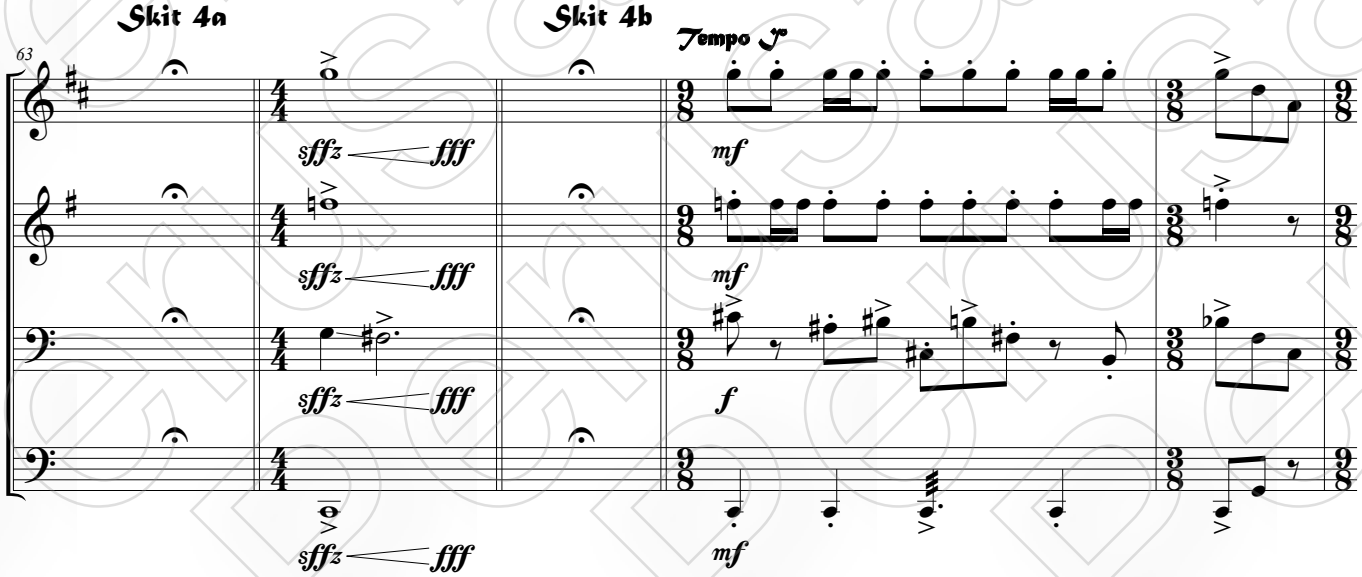


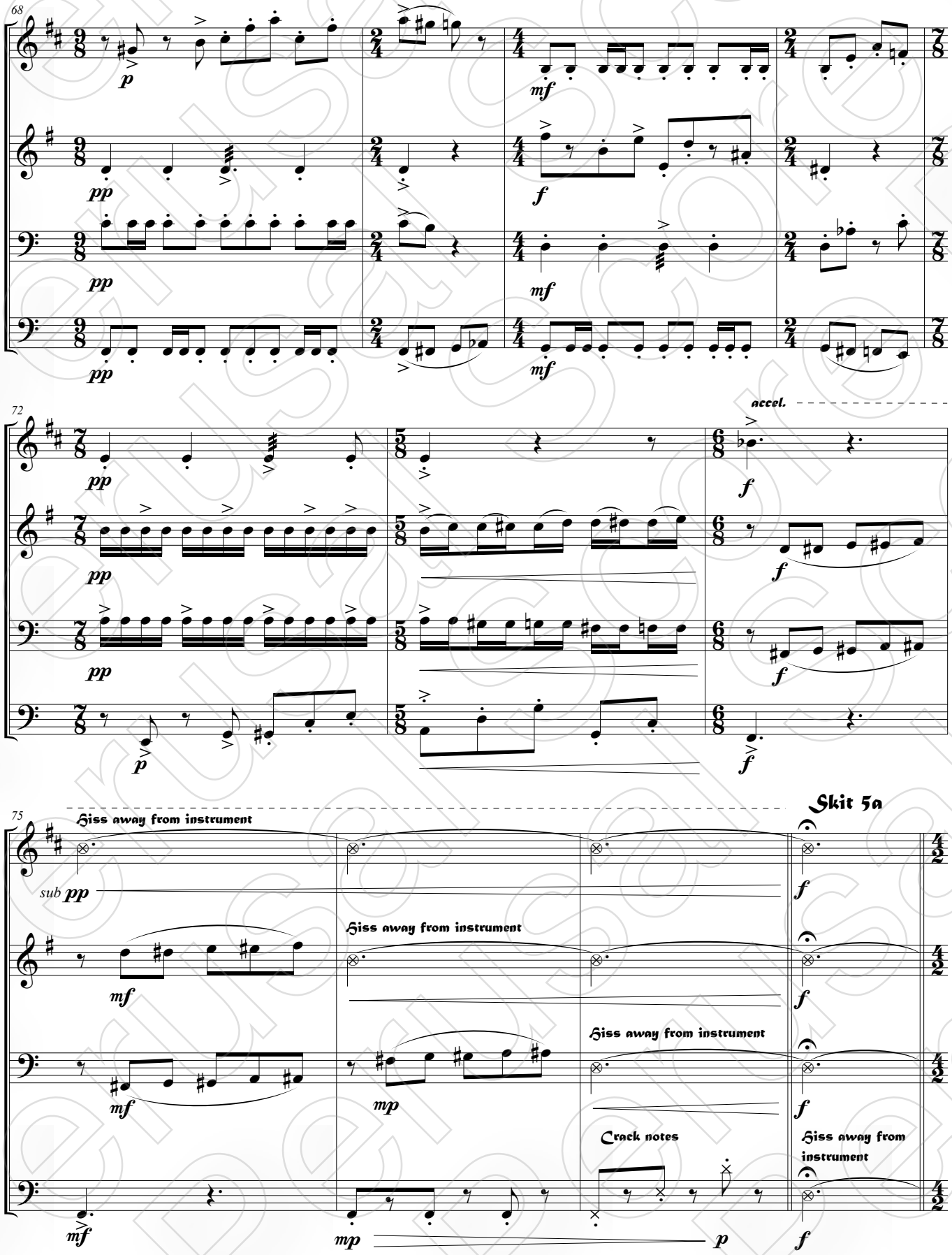
*Approximate rhythms for each repeat, then wait until everyone stops before going on to the m. 41. It is not necessary to line up each part exactly as seen.


Skit 3a
Tempo I°
41
rit.
mf
mf
mf
mf
Skit 3b
Largo (M.M. ♩ = c. 72)
Scoop
Brass
46
fff
Cuivré
fff
fff
fff
51
sub ppp
sub ppp
sub ppp
sub ppp
f
f
f
f
pp
pp
pp
pp


56
mp
pp
mp


59
ffpp
mp
ff


Skit 4a
Skit 4b
Tempo J
63
sffz
fff
mf
f


68
72
accel.
75
Hiss away from instrument
sub pp
Hiss away from instrument
Hiss away from instrument
Crack notes
Hiss away from instrument
Skit 5a

Skit 5b

Alarming (𝅗𝅥 = c. 69)

79

ff

Vamp until Silent Performers exit

fff

fff

Approx. pitches

ff

Sing high to low

ff

Tempo ♩

82

mp *pp*

mp *pp*

mp *pp*

mp *p*

Skit 6

86

fff

fff

fff

fff

Triangle

p