The Cry of the Double Bass: A Chamber Opera

Vol. II

Full Score

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Birmingham Conservatoire
Birmingham City University

CHARACTERS

(5 singers, 2 actors)

Soprano 1: BOY (Acts 1 & 3)

Soprano 2: TEACHER (Act 1), GIRLFRIEND (Act 2), LOVER (Act 3)

Mezzo-soprano: MOTHER (Acts 1, 2 & 3), LANDLADY (Act 3)

Baritone: PRIEST (Act 1), YOUNG MAN (Acts 2 & 3)

Bass: GRANDFATHER (Acts 1 & 2), PROFESSOR (Act 3), OLD MAN (Act 3)

Actor: FATHER (Acts 1, 2 & 3), DOCTOR (Acts 1 & 3), BOSS (Act 3)

Physical theatre actor: BIG C (Acts 1 & 3), WAITER (Act 2)

ENSEMBLE

(17 players)

Flute (doubling Piccolo + Bass Flute)

Clarinet in Bb (doubling Bass Clarinet)

Horn

Tuba

Percussion (2 players)

Piano

1 violin

2 violas

3 cellos

4 double basses (1 with C extension)

THE SCORE IS IN C

Transposed instruments: Piccolo, Toy piano and Xylophone sound an octave higher than notated; Glockenspiel sounds two octaves higher than notated; Bass flute and double basses sound an octave lower than notated.

PERCUSSION INSTRUMENTS

Player 1:

Suspended Cymbal

Vibraphone (bow)

4 Temple Blocks

Snare Drum

Glockenspiel

Wind Chimes

2 Wood Blocks

Whip

3 Bongos

1 Conga

Maracas

Xvlophone

Bass Drum

Party Blower

Tambourine

Marimba

Tam-tam

Rattle

Hammer on wooden plate

Guiro

Triangle

Player 2:

Timpani

2 Wood Blocks

Suspended Cymbal

Glockenspiel

2 Bongos

Bass Drum

4 Tom-toms

Tubular Bells

Xylophone

Vibraphone (bow)

Whip

Shaker

Iawbone

Whistle

Tam-tam

Tambourine

Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, Xylophone, Bass Drum, Wood Blocks, Bongos, Whip, Tambourine and Tam-tam can be shared between players.

CHANGING DISPOSITION OF SINGERS AND INSTRUMENTS

ACT 1:

The ensemble is on-stage. It only includes: flute, clarinet, horn, tuba, percussion (2 players), toy piano, violin, viola 1, cello 1, double bass 1.

At figure 79 soprano 2 and double bass 3 are off-stage.

At figure 134 soprano 2, mezzo-soprano, baritone and bass sing from off-stage

ACT 2:

The ensemble is off-stage. Only piano and toy piano are on-stage.

At figure 136 the following instruments are on-stage: flute, percussion 1, violin, viola 1. They leave the stage at figure 156.

At figure 190 the following instruments are on-stage: clarinet, percussion 1, double bass 1. They leave the stage at figure 198.

ACT 3:

The full ensemble is on-stage.

The double bass quartet at figure $\boxed{223}$ is positioned centre-stage. They silently return to position with the ensemble during figure $\boxed{248}$.

Double bass 1 is positioned centre-stage from figure 277 to figure 284. They return to position with the ensemble during figure 285.

Percussion player 1 leaves the stage in bar 669.

From figure 300 all the players gradually leave the stage as indicated in the score.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

The toy piano is played in Acts 1 and 2 by MOTHER and BOY as indicated in the score.

In figures 15 and 246 the woodwind and brass players are required to remove the mouthpiece and blow into the instruments. They can interrupt the sound to breathe as needed.

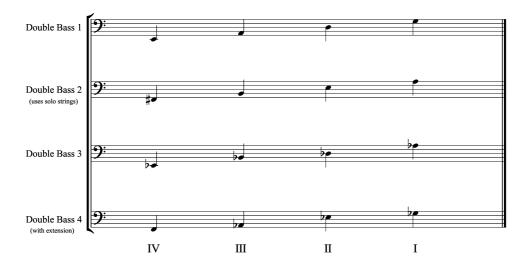
In figures 235 and 236 the brass players are required to tap the bell of the instruments with a coin. The dynamics should be followed as precisely as possible.

In Episode 22 the first percussion player plays a hammer on a wooden plate. The quality of it can be rough, and it should be placed on a plain surface without been fastened to it and free to vibrate.

In Episode 22 the piano is prepared with a metal plate placed on the strings between Bb3 and G4. The glissandi inside the piano should be as continuous as possible without crossing the inner bar. The metal plate is removed when indicated on the score.

Double bass 3 is tuned without *scordatura* for the off-stage duet in figure 86

From figure 205 the double basses are tuned according to the following *scordatura* diagram:



All fermatas have an indeterminate duration unless notated.

Amplification

Amplification for the singers through wireless microphones should only be used if the venue acoustics require so, or if the stage dimensions do not allow enough distance between ensemble and singers.

Physical theatre actor (BIG C) should be amplified throughout with a wireless microphone, with some reverb on. The sound should be projected through a speaker, elevated on one side of the stage.

The toy piano should be amplified if the venue acoustics require so.

At figure 79 soprano 2 and double bass 3 off-stage should be lightly amplified.

The four double basses should be lightly amplified from figure $\boxed{223}$ to $\boxed{229}$, and from figure $\boxed{242}$ to $\boxed{245}$. The use of a moderate amount of reverb is advised.

Double bass 1 can be amplified for the whole Episode 28 if the venue acoustics require so.

STAGING AND MOVEMENTS NOTES

(By Mike Carter)

Each of the three acts of *The Cry of the Double Bass* tells the story of a phase in the protagonist's development as a musician and composer. Within each act, the protagonist passes through key episodes, which are numbered and given titles. These function to present transparency of structure in the libretto and the score, yet, in performance, the action will be continuous, and these markings not apparent.

The action of the opera is set within the interior landscape of the protagonist's mind, which calls for a specific theatrical language. The action is a series of memories; it is not realism, and any use of 'set' should reflect that. The text calls for an empty playing space (with the orchestra on stage in Acts 1 and 3), and this openness of staging enables fluidity of action, free from cumbersome scene changes, so that we move easily from episode to episode, with characters entering and exiting as though they are drifting in and out of a dream.

Whilst specific physical locations are indicated occasionally in the text, this is merely to communicate a sense of movement and transition. Physical locations, where the memories of the protagonist occur, are incidental; it is more important how they happen, rather than where they happen. Transitions in the text and in the music will naturally be supported by lighting and a minimal use of furniture and properties.

In an opera whose subject is a musician, it is inevitable that many directions will indicate the 'playing' of instruments: a toy piano and a double bass. In the case of the double bass, it is not being suggested that singers should actually play it, nor should they attempt to mime realistically. The opera calls for a consistent, stylised (abstract and/or expressionistic) approach to movement and it is recommended that the company works with a movement director to 'choreograph' all physical action, including the playing of the double bass.

SYNOPSIS

(By Mike Carter)

This contemporary opera tells the story of an unnamed artist, charting (in episodes) his journey from childhood to being an accomplished musician and composer. The work explores his changing relationship to music and the double bass, as he battles to fulfil his soul's desire. Richly symbolic and told as a mythic 'folk tale', it blends comedy and pathos, as it grapples with challenges many artists will know only too well.

Act One: The first act portrays the protagonist's childhood, focusing on the conflict between his musical dreams and the narrow expectations of his family and community.

A Boy is inspired by a mystical tune to make music of his own and he dreams about being a famous musician. But he is dogged by the fantastical Big C: a personification of the negative psychological forces that work against an artist's self-belief and creativity. His Mother's hysterical perception, that he is somehow not 'normal', is confirmed by other authority figures in his life: they believe his artistic tendencies should not be encouraged. The Boy has an ally in the shape of his Grandpa, a retired double bassist who encourages his musical ambitions. When his Grandpa dies, the boy accuses Big C of murder and swears revenge. Grandpa bequeaths the Boy his double bass, but he is too small to play it and his parents discourage him from taking music seriously. He tries to change their perceptions by giving them a concert of pieces he's composed, but to no avail, and his passion is relegated to a hobby. Finally, Big C persuades the Boy to give up the struggle his musical dreams entail.

Act Two: This central act embodies the protagonist's years as an undergraduate, focusing on the 'seismic shift' from the absence of music in his life to his decision to learn the double bass and study music.

Years have passed since Act One, and the Boy is now a Young Man. His parents throw a party for him, at which he announces he's going to stay in his home town, live with his Girlfriend and study geology. In a series of escalating episodes, the Young Man struggles with his buried desire for music, in particular to play double bass. He tries to focus on his studies and be content with his Girlfriend, but the 'call' of the instrument is too strong and he begins to play it in secret. When his Girlfriend discovers this, she's upset, and the Young Man vows to finish his relationship with the double bass. The couple celebrate their engagement with the Young Man's parents, but the Young Man cannot suppress his musical desires and he suffers a breakdown. In a vision, his Grandpa sings an impassioned warning about the consequences of not following your soul's desire. The Young Man announces his resolve to learn the double bass and study music at university, but his parents have sold his instrument, with the knowledge of his fiancée, to pay for the wedding. Furious, the Young Man breaks off the engagement and his parents practically disown him.

Act Three: The final act presents the Young Man's struggles as a music student, from his first double bass lessons to recognition as a musician and composer.

Supporting himself in his studies and trying to make up 'lost ground', the Young Man wrestles with various personal and musical challenges. Because he is in pursuit of his dream once again, Big C returns to undermine him and, when the Young Man is diagnosed with tendonitis, his life spirals out of control. He hits crisis point and threatens to guit his studies, but his Professor offers him some 'time out' in his cottage in the mountains. Alone in this place of beauty and peace and with no more 'excuses', the Young Man is forced to confront himself and Big C. The Young Man is 'visited' by the Boy, and together they seek out Big C's cave. There they discover the truth of the foe they have been battling for years: he is an embodiment of their own fears. Empowered by this knowledge, the Young Man finds a new resolve and spiritual calm. He begins to compose and his tendonitis heals. When he returns to university, the Professor, who is impressed by his composition, gives him a double bass: he'd bought it at an auction some years ago and it is the very same instrument left to the boy by his Grandpa. The Young Man gives a concert of his work, and his parents witness his success. Proudly, they see their son off as he embarks on the next phase of his musical life. The Young Man is once again hounded by Big C but, as a result of his experiences, he is able to control him.

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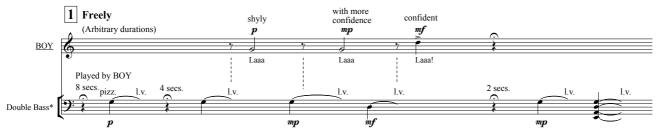
The Cry of the Double Bass

Chamber opera in three acts

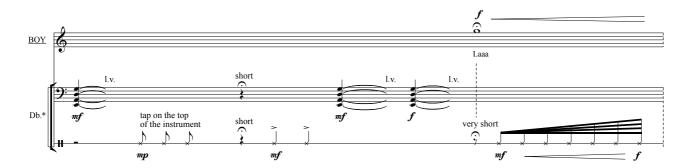
TEXT BY Mike Carter MUSIC BY Sebastiano Dessanay

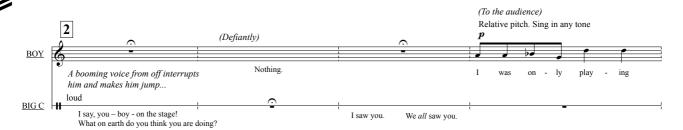
PROLOGUE

The stage is set for a concert, although the performers have not yet arrived. A BOY enters and surveys the stage. He approaches the toy piano and strikes a few chords. He examines some sheet music. He goes to the conductor's stand, takes up the baton and swishes it around. He creeps over to the double bass and, fascinated, he plays with it. He explores its potential with growing confidence.

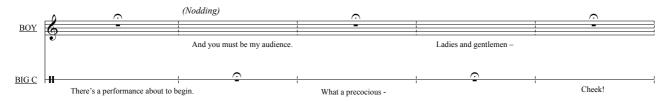


* The ensemble double bass





MUSICIANS enter and take up their instruments throughout...













ACT 1

SCENE 1

1: The Call

The BOY enters a scene of dull domesticity.

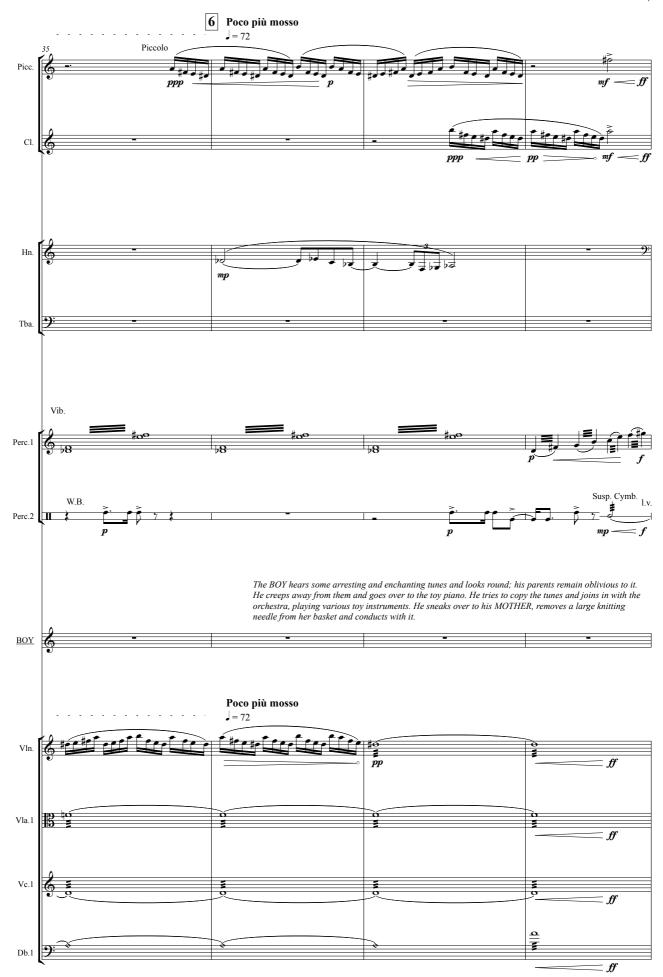
His MOTHER and FATHER occupied with embroidery and the newspaper respectively.

The BOY plays with toys at their feet. He becomes bored and restless.





































2: Mother

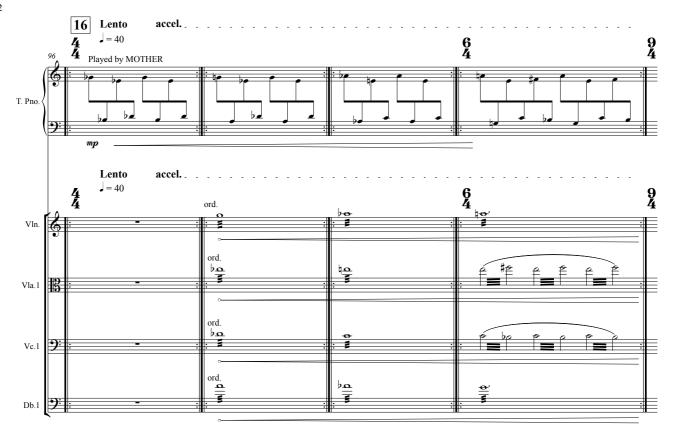


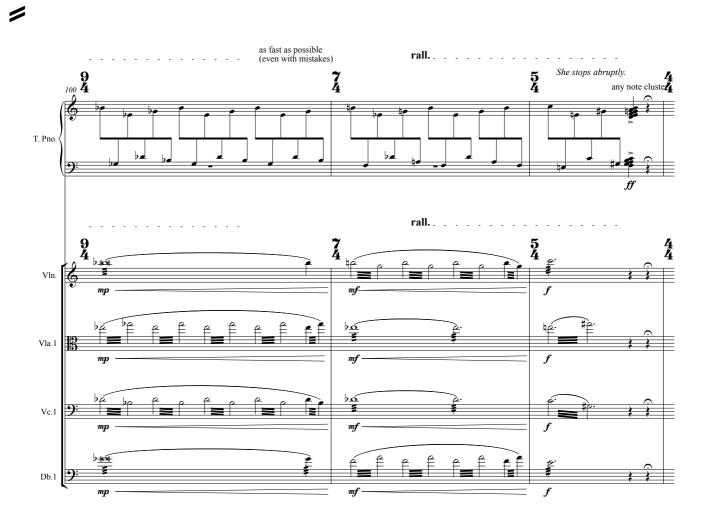








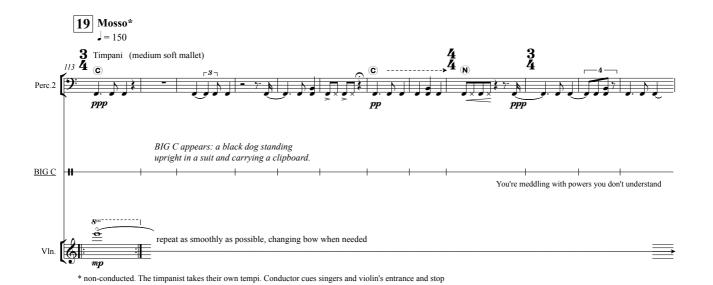


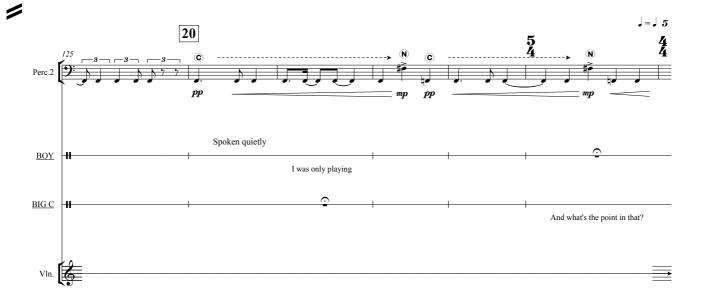


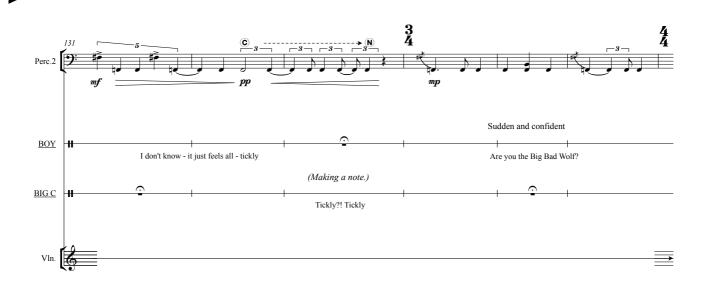


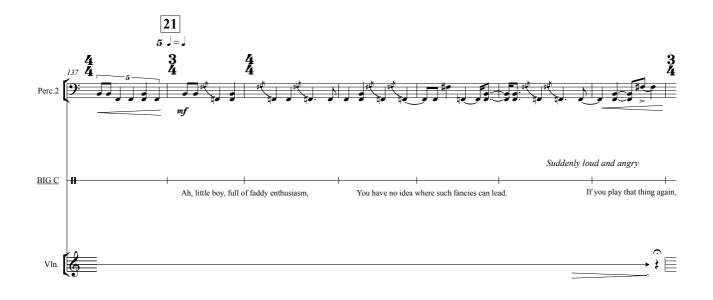


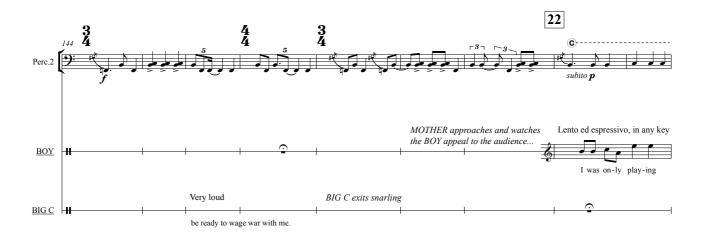
3: Big C

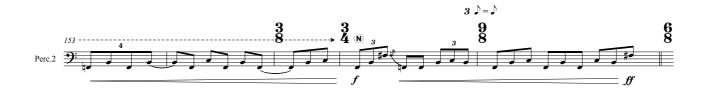












4: Normal









































































SCENE 2

5: Grandfather













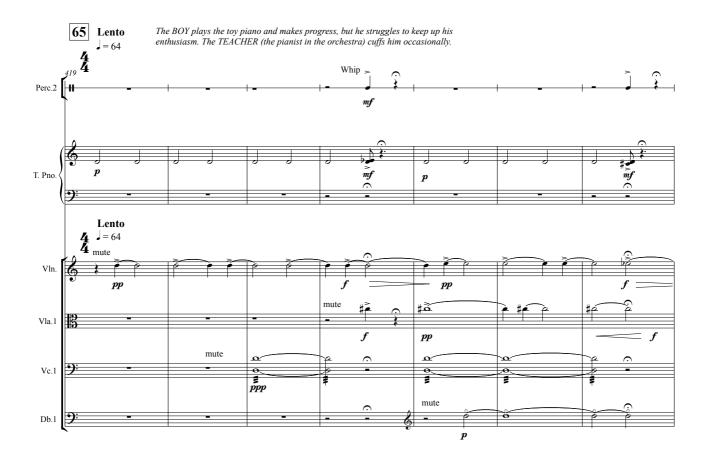








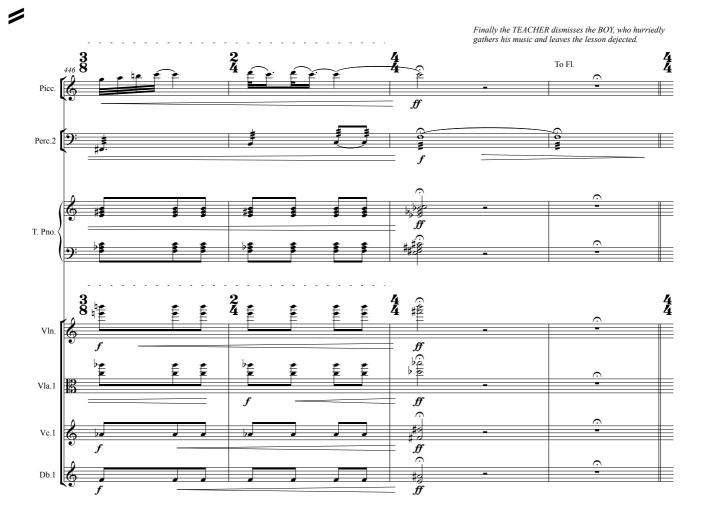
6: Lesson



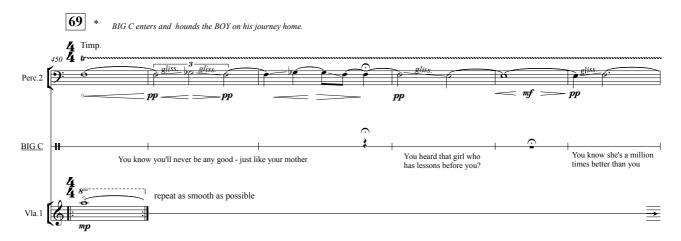




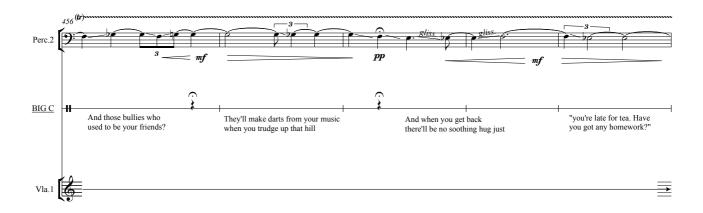


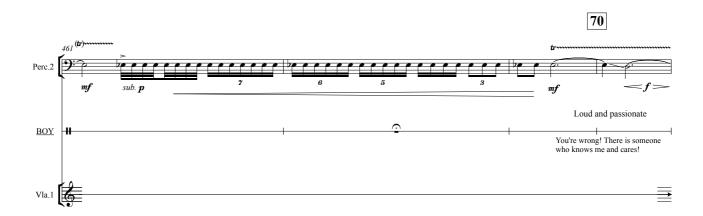


7: Climbing the hill

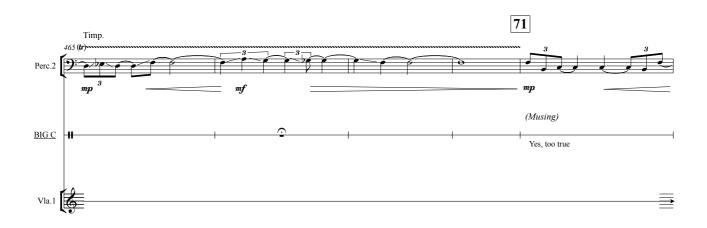


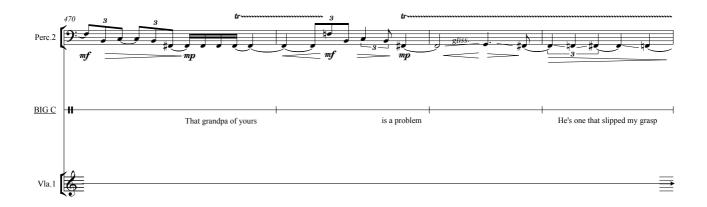
^{*} non-conducted. The timpanist takes their own tempi. Conductor cues singers and viola's entrance and stop



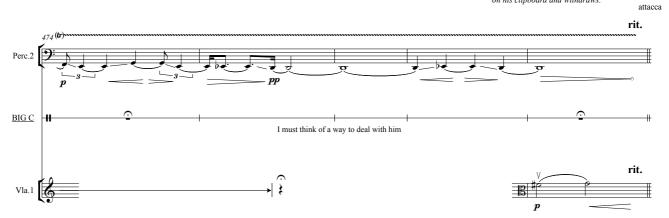


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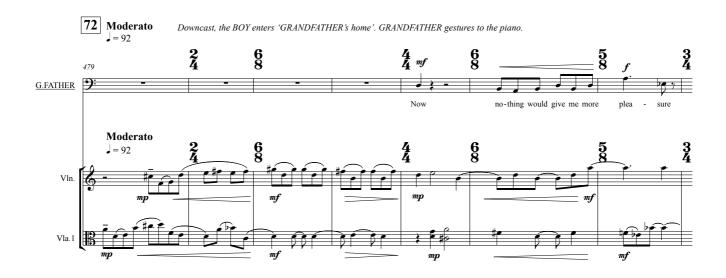




The BOY glares at BIG C, who makes a note on his clipboard and withdraws.



8: The Double Bass

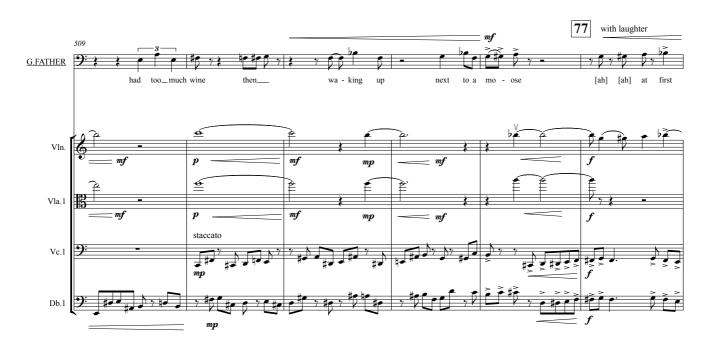








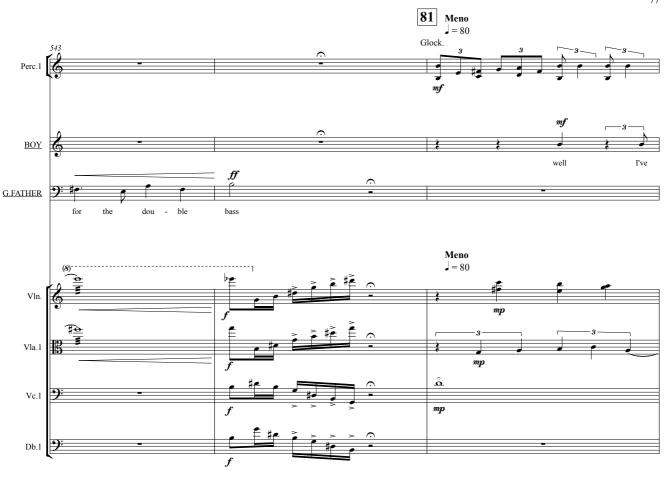








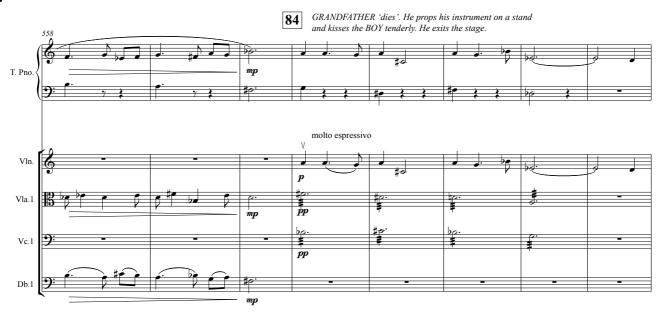


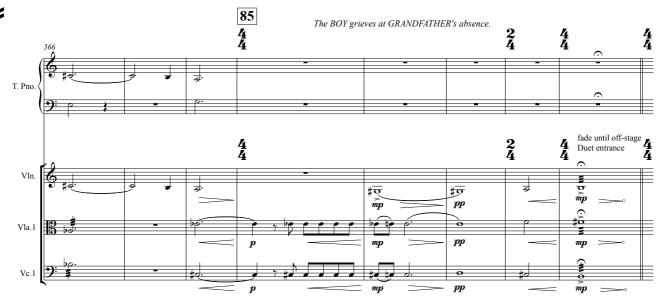




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SCENE 3

9: Requiem for Grandpa

OFF-STAGE DUET

The following duet is played off-stage by the second soprano and the second double bassist. Both should be amplified, with a light reverb on.

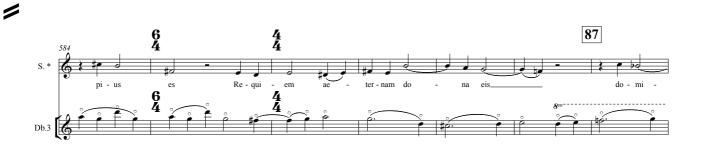


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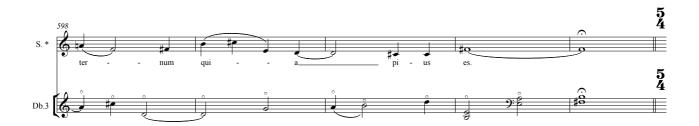
MOTHER and FATHER enter and console the BOY. MOTHER weeps. During the following, MOTHER dresses the BOY in black tie and armband, and combs his hair. The PRIEST leads a procession with a double bass case carried like a coffin. MOTHER, FATHER and BOY join the procession which ends with a graveside tableau. Towards the end of this piece the mourners disperse and the family goes 'home'.



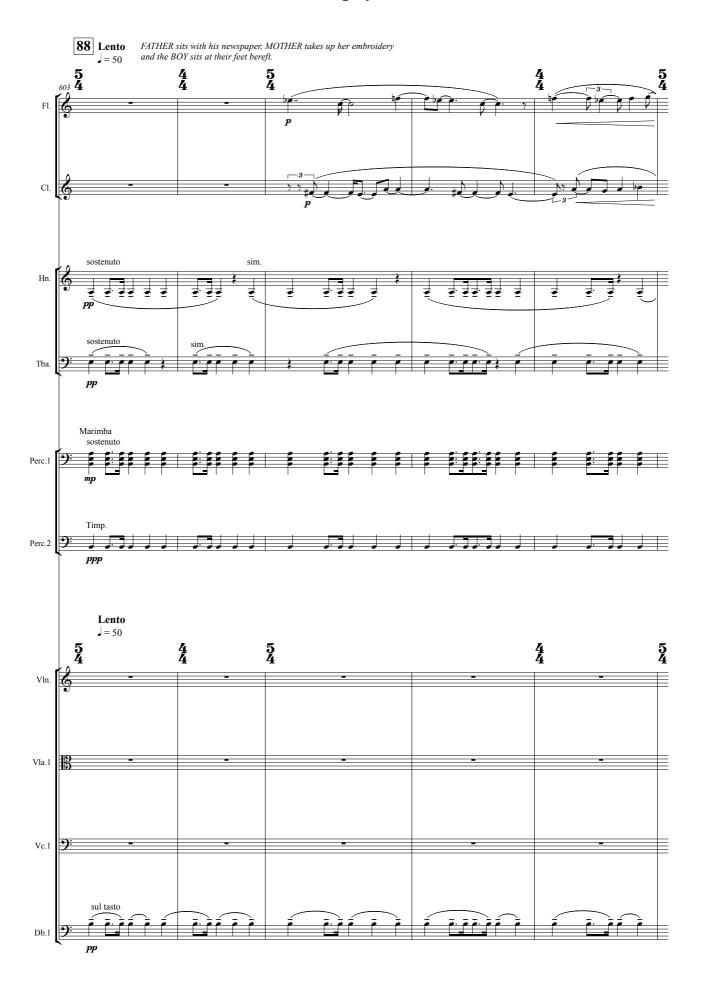




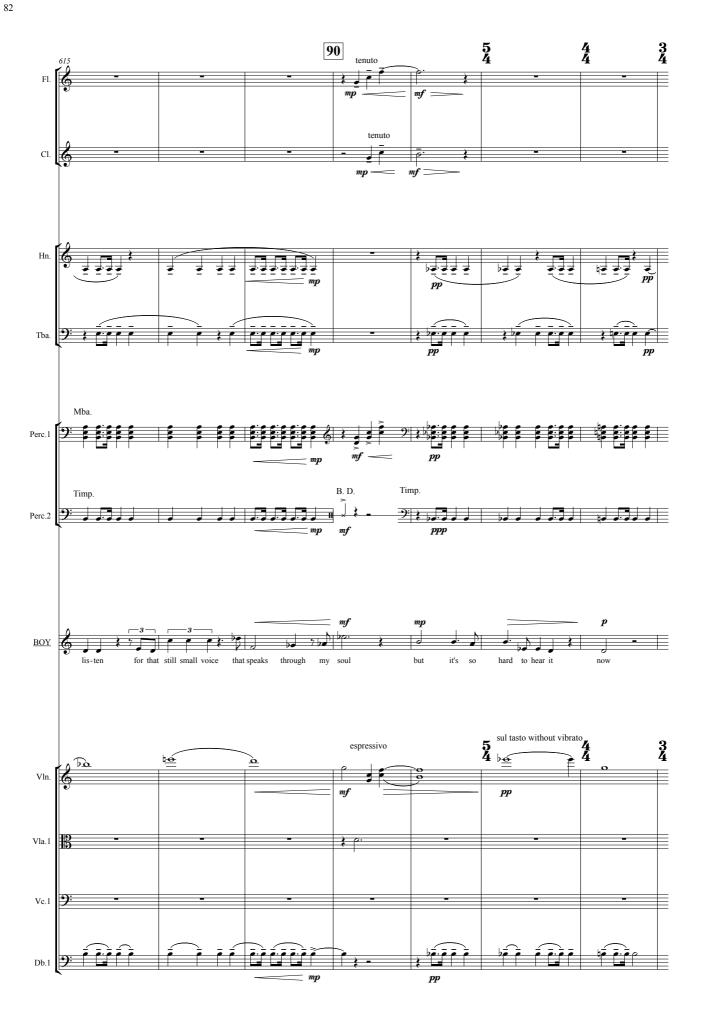




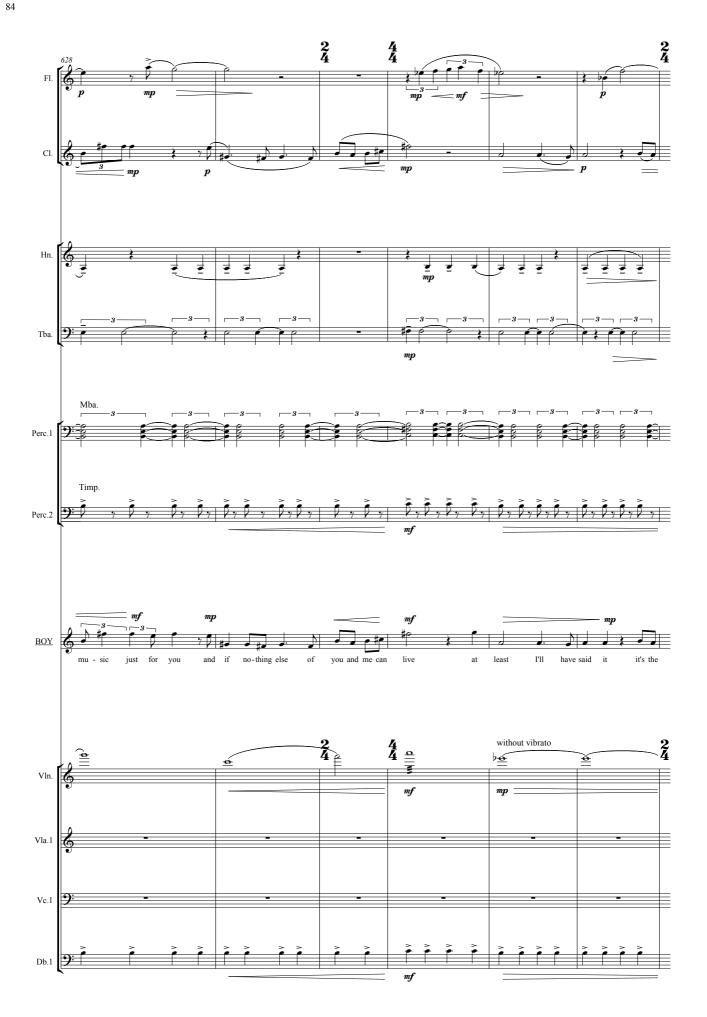
10: Legacy

















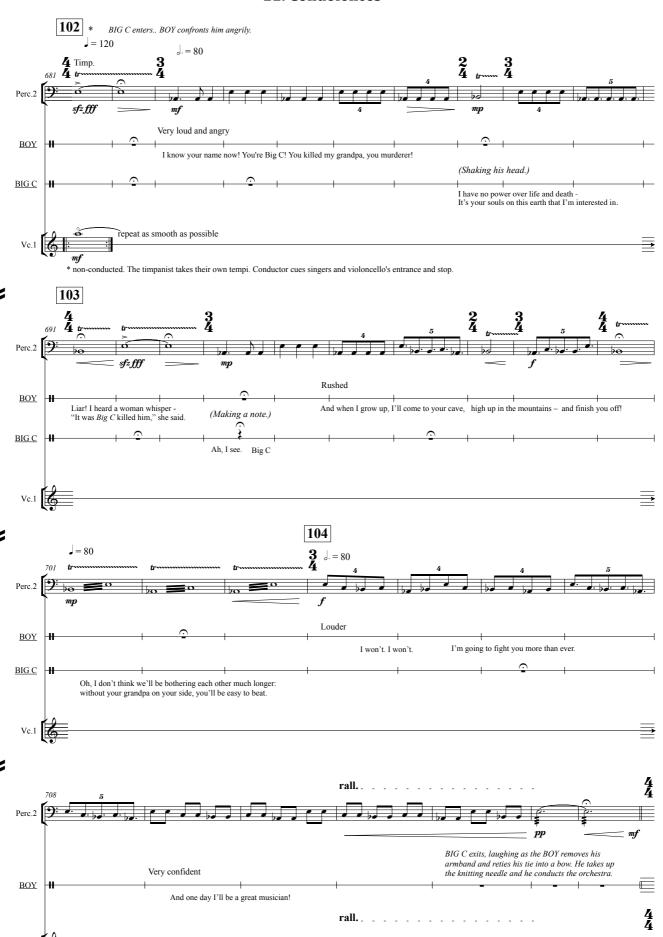








11: Condolences



12: The Concert







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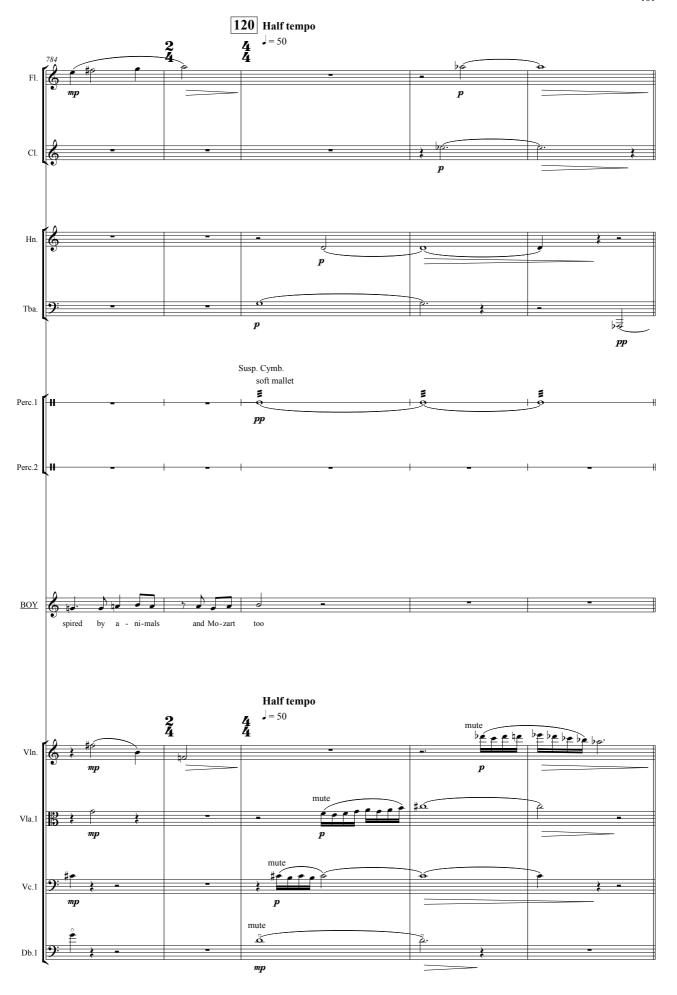






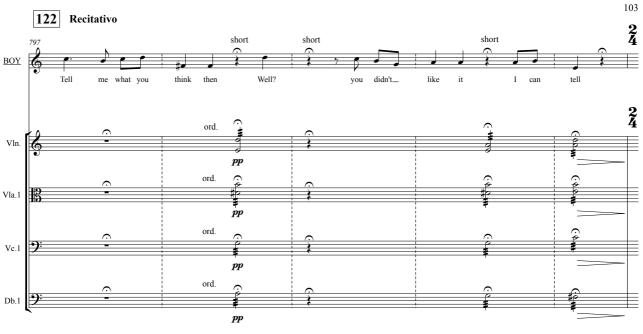


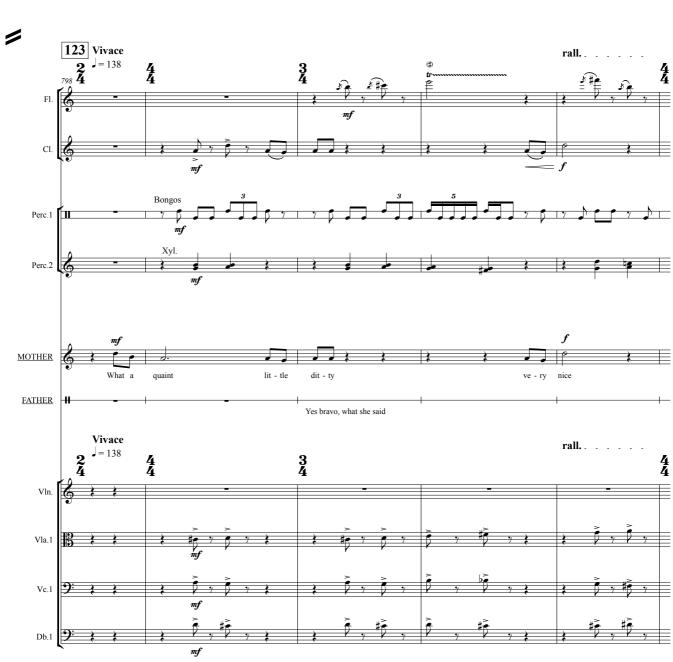








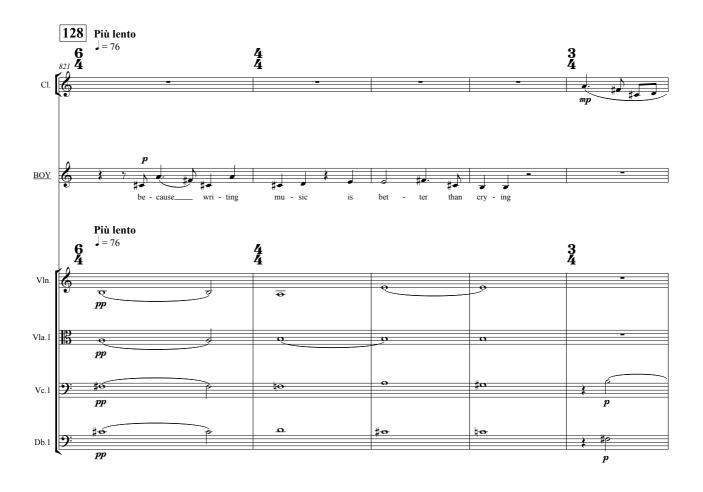


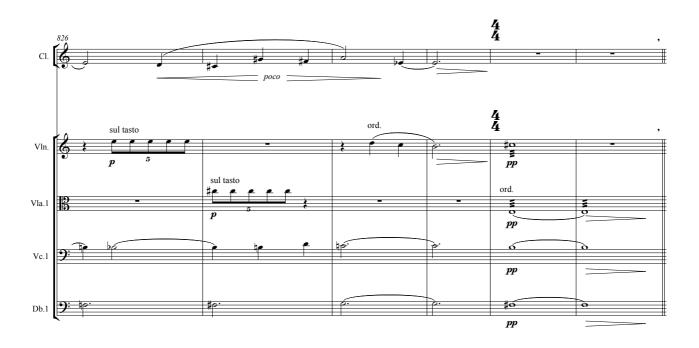








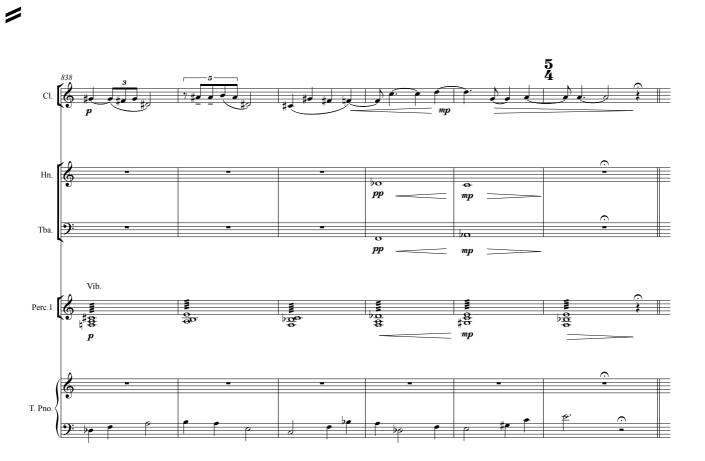




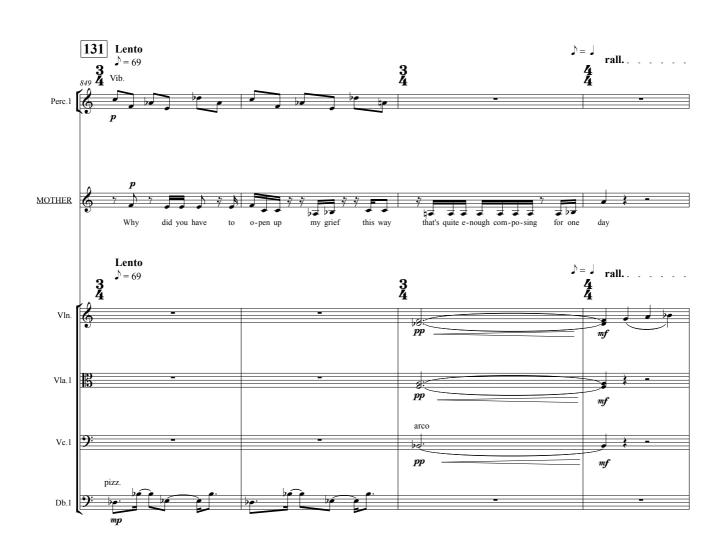
129 GRANDFATHER

Played by BOY

Adagio BOY = 66molto espressivo BOY plays his piece and conducts the ensemble with his right hand. When the piece ends MOTHER is moved. pp Tba. pp Vib. soft mallet #8















13: Let go your dreams



End of Act 1

pp

ACT 2 113

SCENE 1

14: Geology

A bottle of champagne pops open and we are at a party hosted by MOTHER and FATHER. J = 120 The Y.MAN drinks, and he and his GIRLFRIEND pet. MUSICIANS become guests at the party...















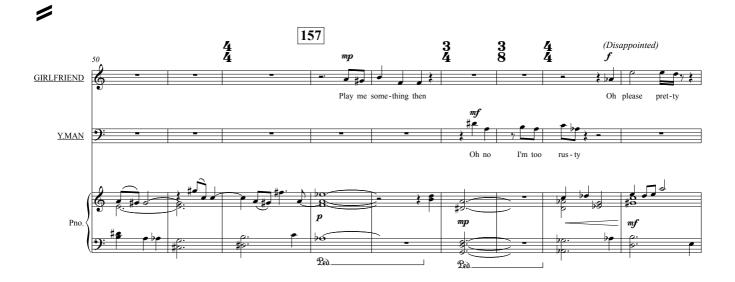


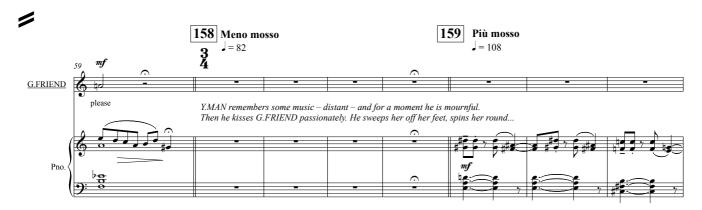


15: Little Flat

Like a waltz J = 100 The Y.MAN and G.FRIEND have sloped off to the 'music room' for some privacy. As they kiss, they lose balance and Y.MAN falls onto the keys. They giggle.

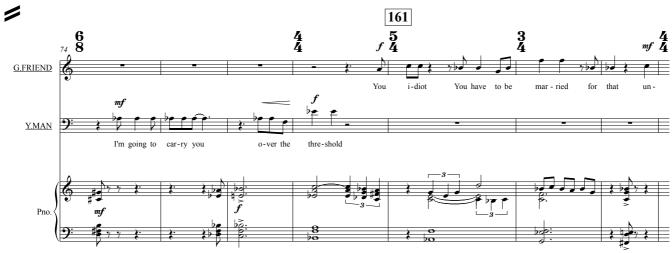


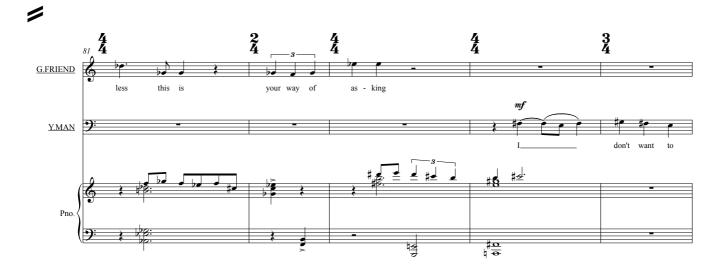










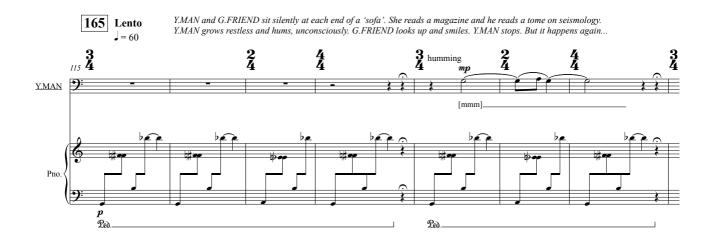


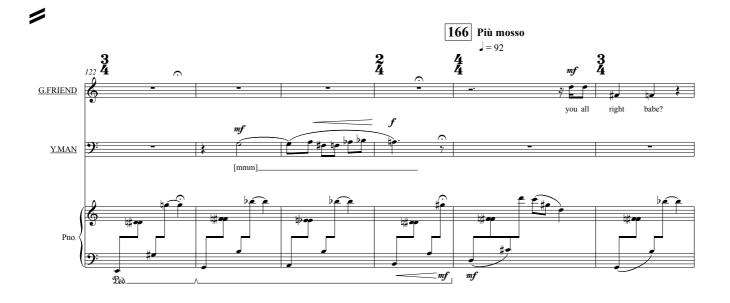


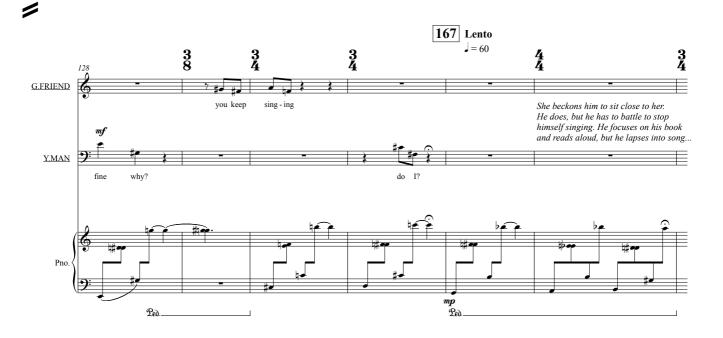


SCENE 2

16: Seismic Activity









The Y.MAN leaves the room (and lights fade on G.FRIEND). G.FATHER's double bass stands in its case in a spot, 'calling'.

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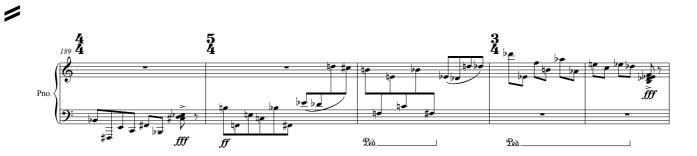
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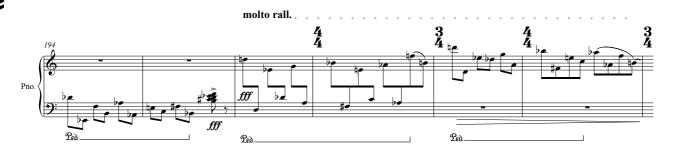


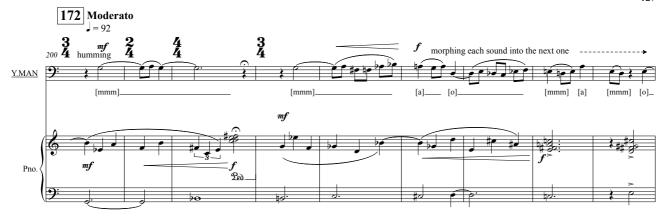


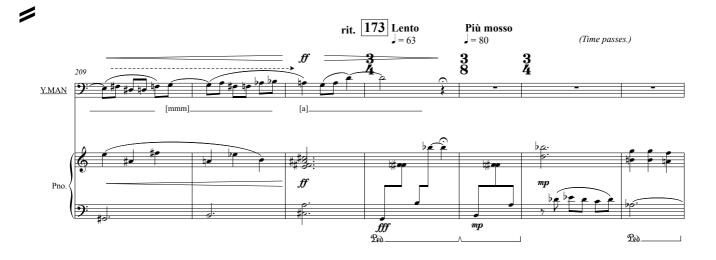






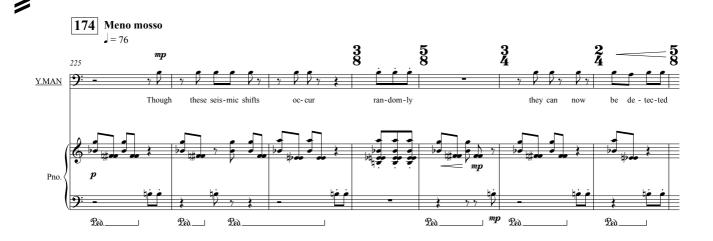






In the 'flat', G.F.RIEND sits on sofa, reading from magazine. She looks over to Y.M.AN sitting at his desk, reading from his book on seismology. He recites...

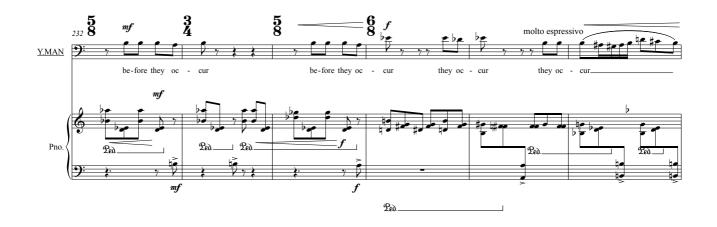




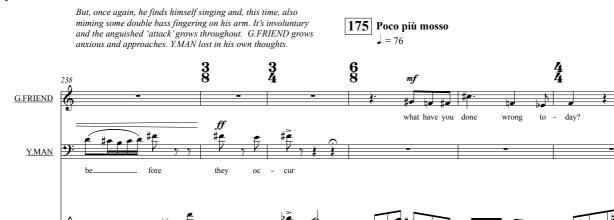
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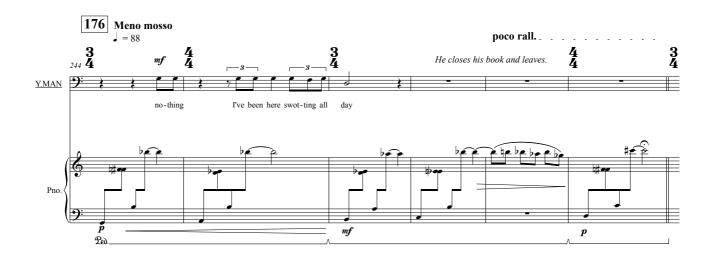
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177 Second Call

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Again lights fade on 'home' and he runs compulsively to the double bass. This time he dares himself to open the case to reveal the instrument. Breathlessly, he strokes the wood and caresses the strings.



Molto animato e aggressivo

J. = 76

259

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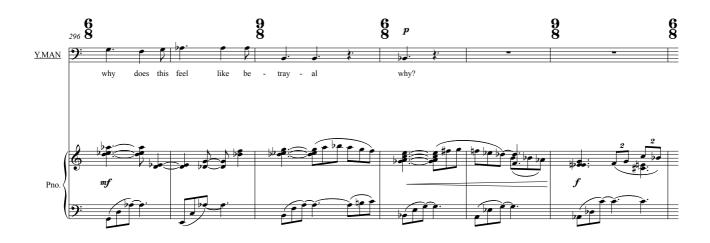


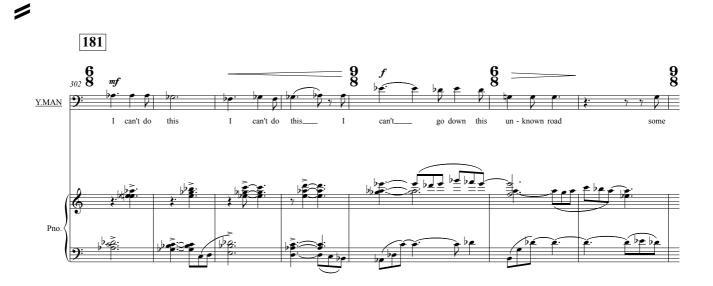


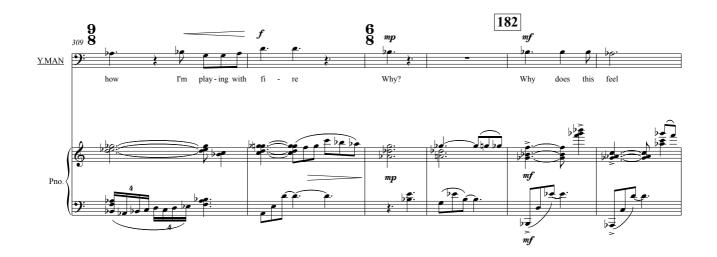


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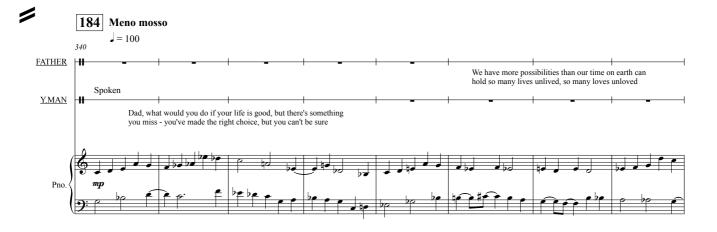


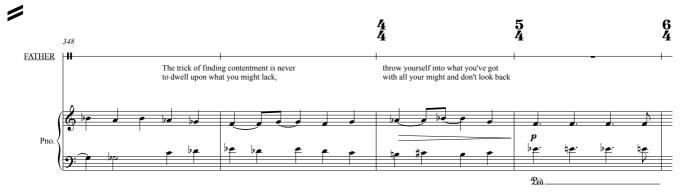


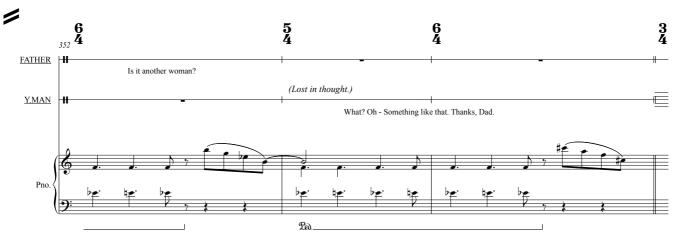






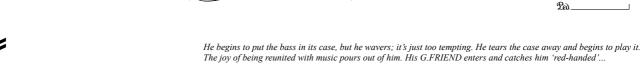


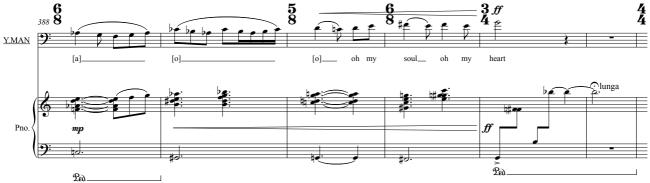


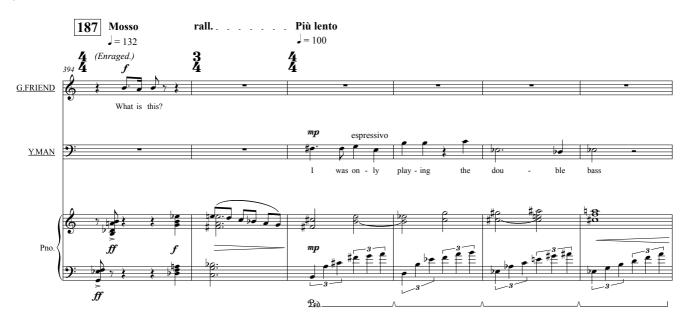


The Y.MAN leaves his FATHER and visits the double bass.
This time he is mournful. He picks up the case, determined to pack the instrument away for good.

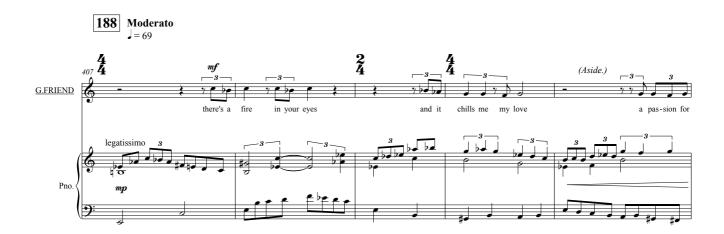












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SCENE 3

17: Restaurant









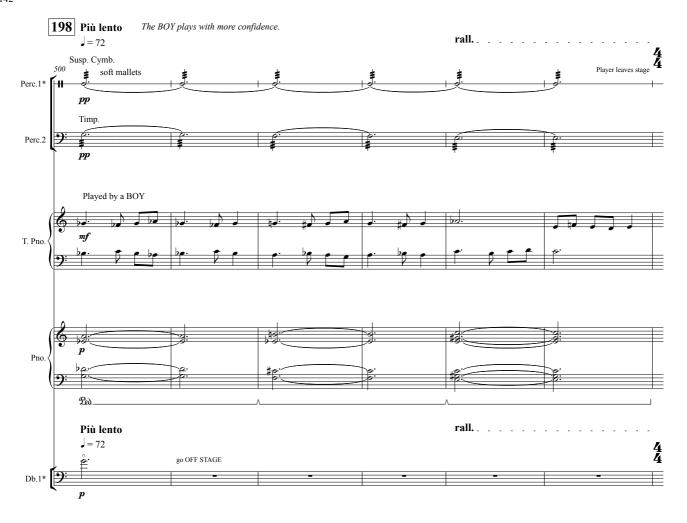


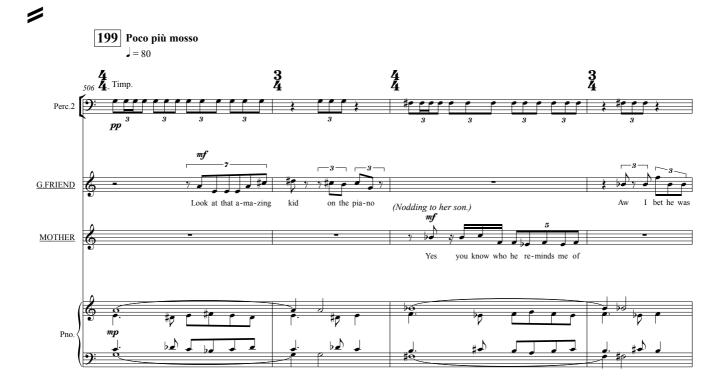






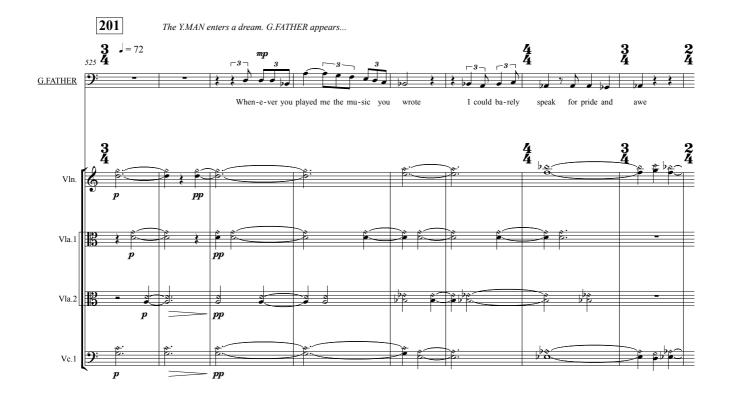


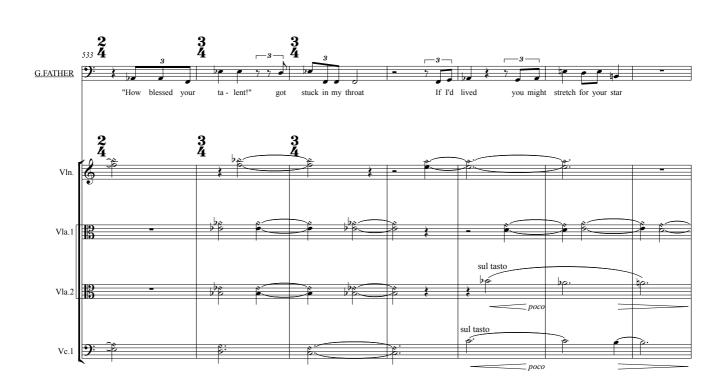


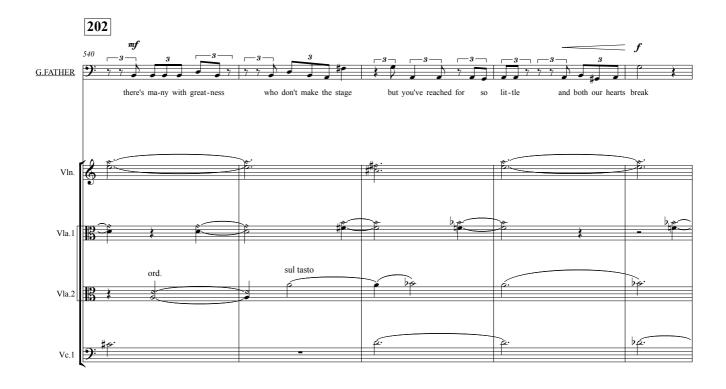


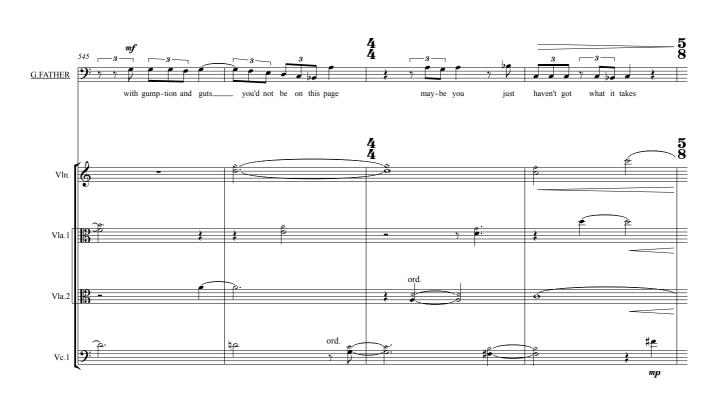


18: Grandfather's Song



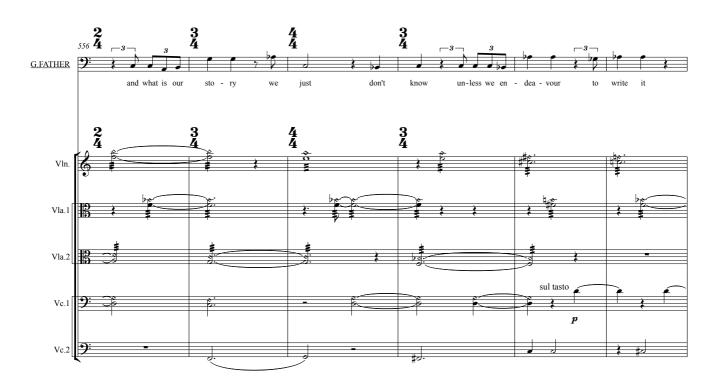






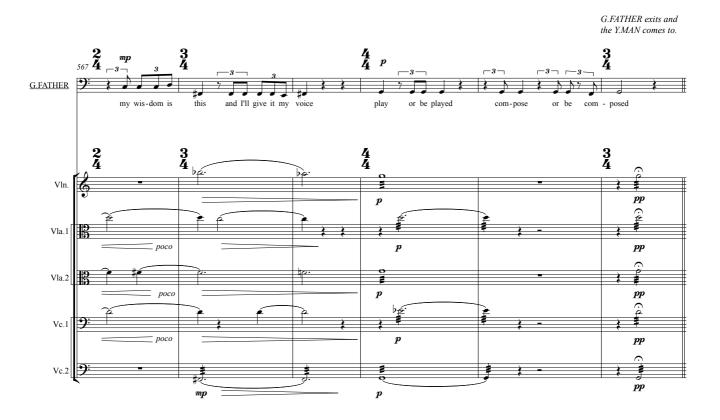












19: My Life Has Got To Change



























































174 **ACT 3**

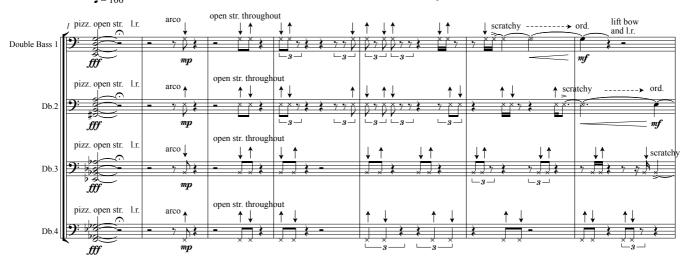
SCENE 1

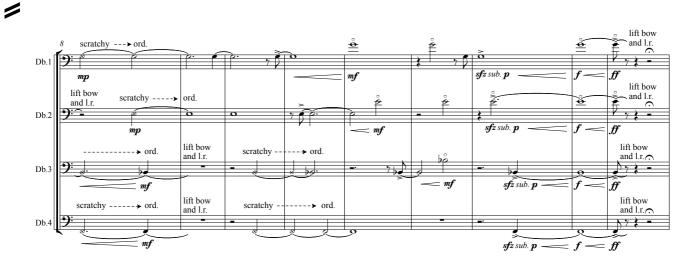
20: Lesson No.2

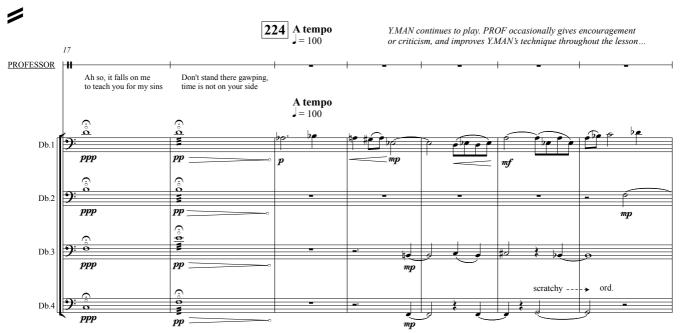
Moderato

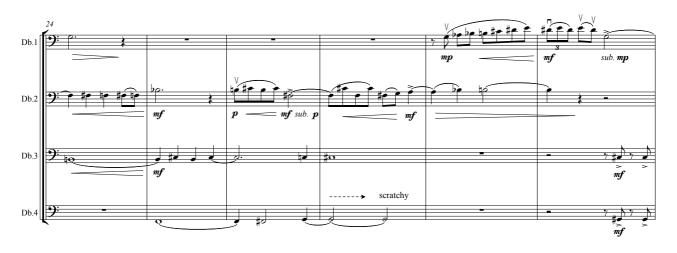
The YOUNG MAN enters carrying a cheap, tatty double bass. He plays the instrument throughout, until indicated otherwise.

The double bass PROFESSOR enters and examines the Y.MAN, who stares, open-mouthed, at the PROF's resemblance to his G.FATHER.







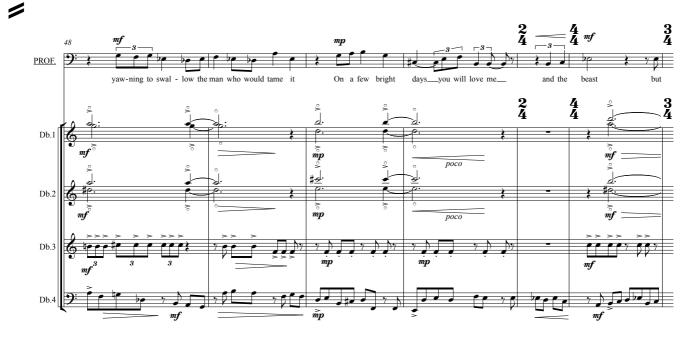


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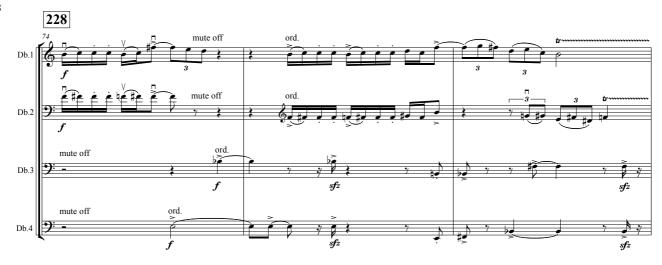


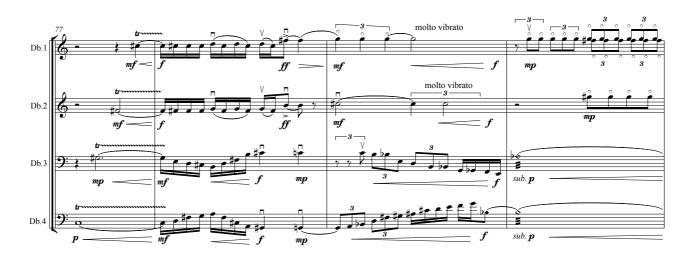


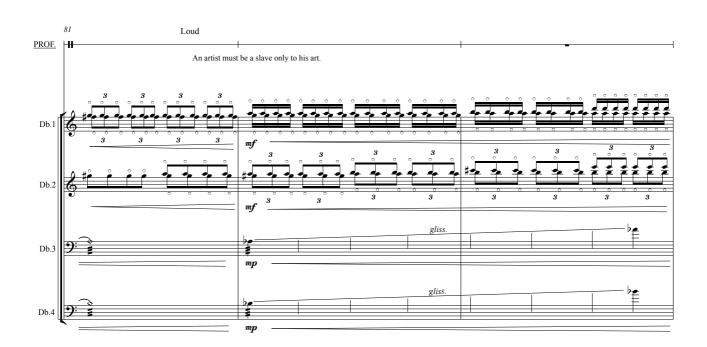


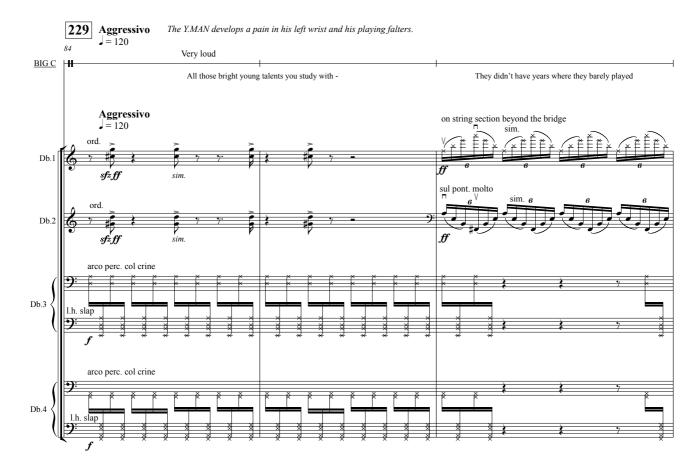




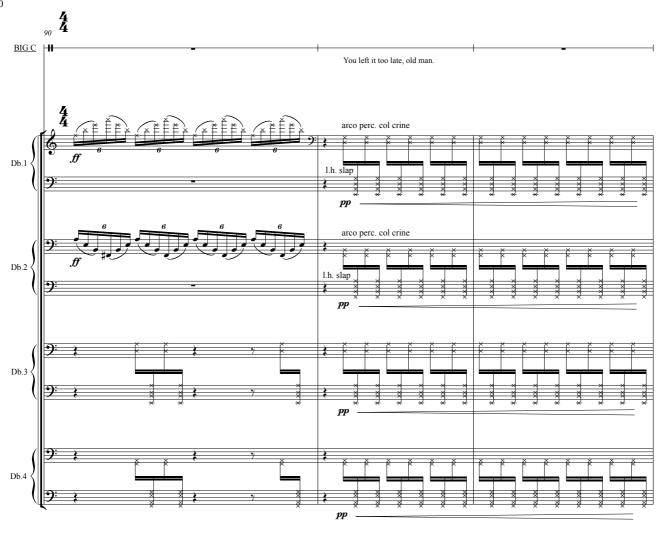


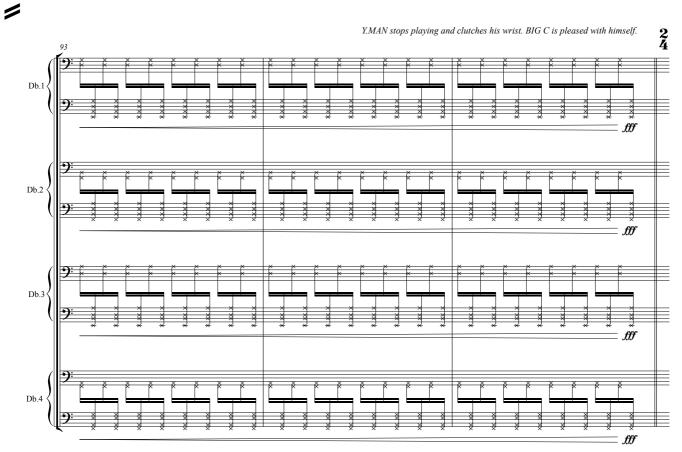




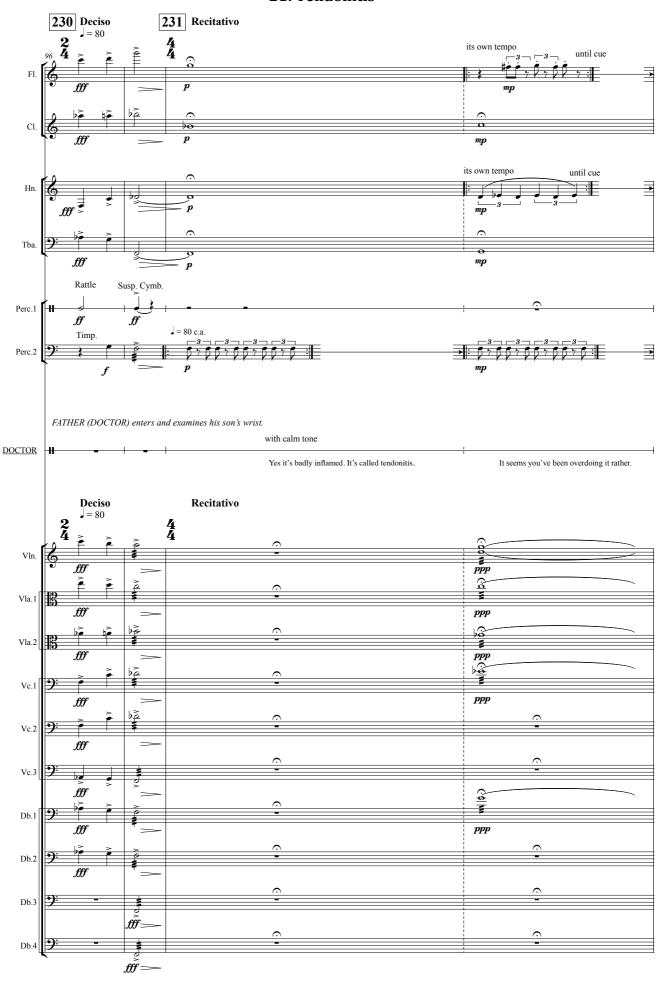


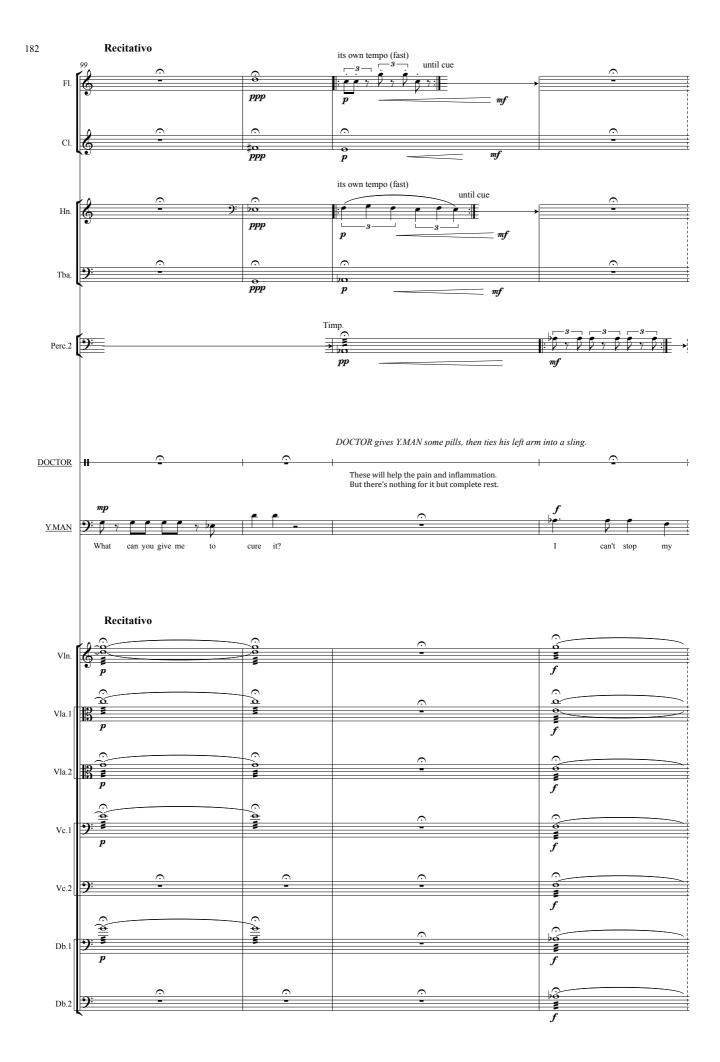


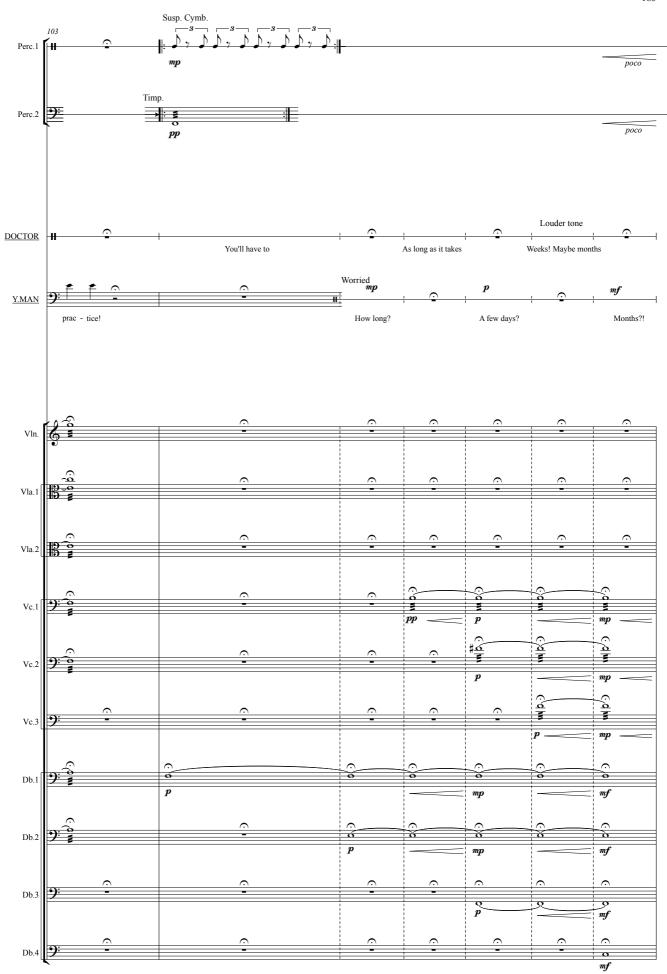




21: Tendonitis

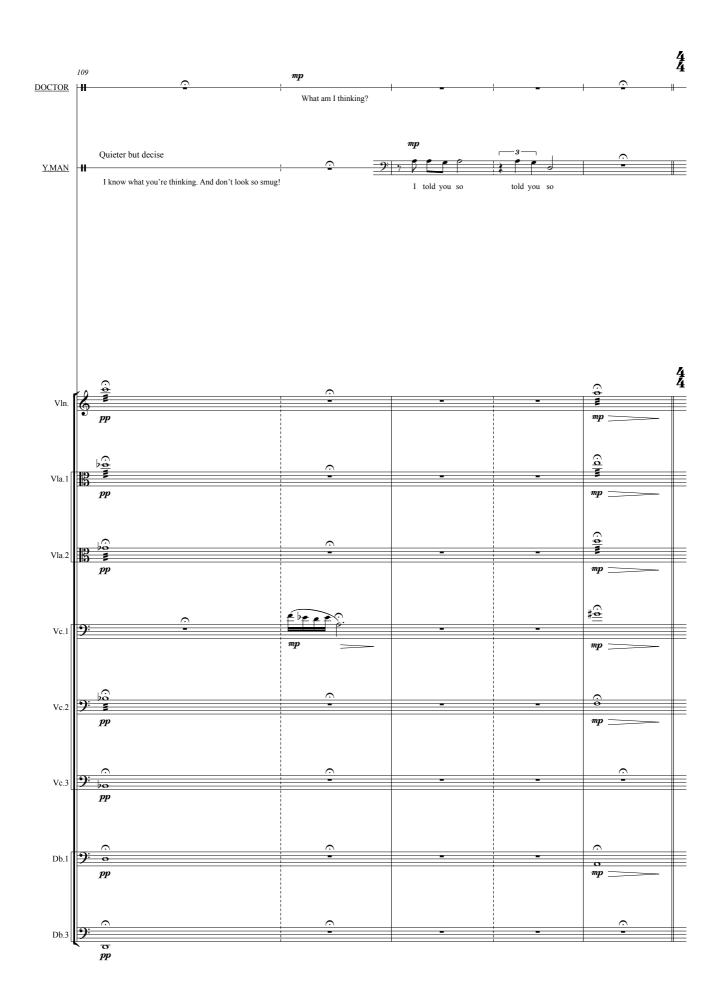








































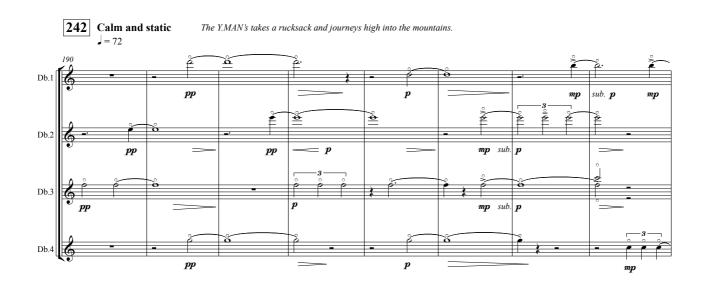




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SCENE 2

24: Silent Struggle

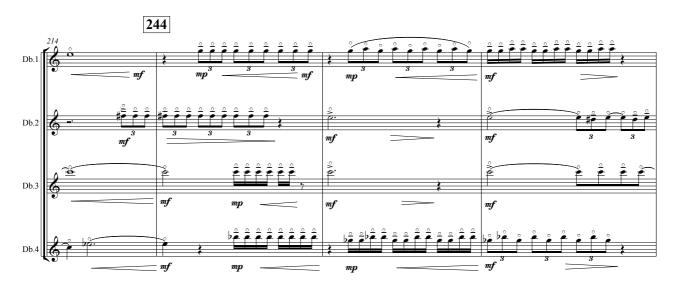




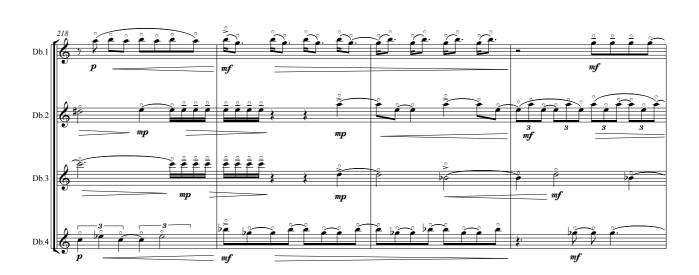


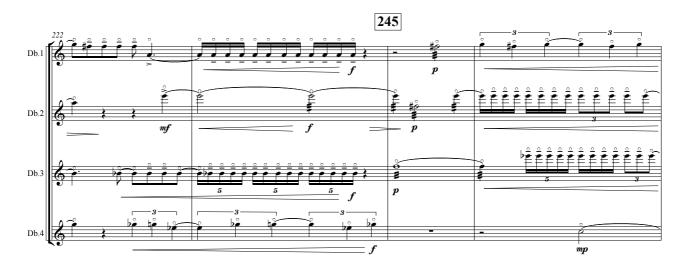


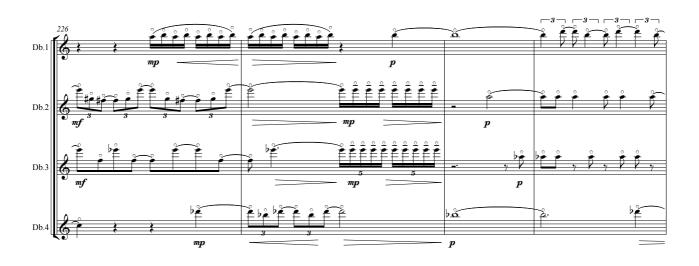


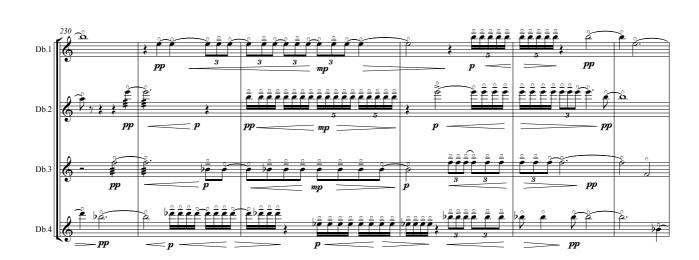


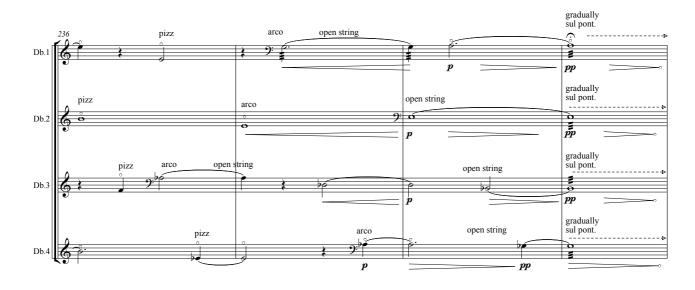










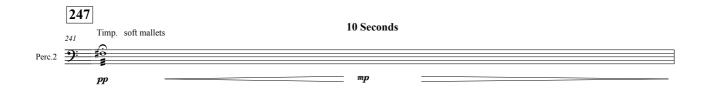


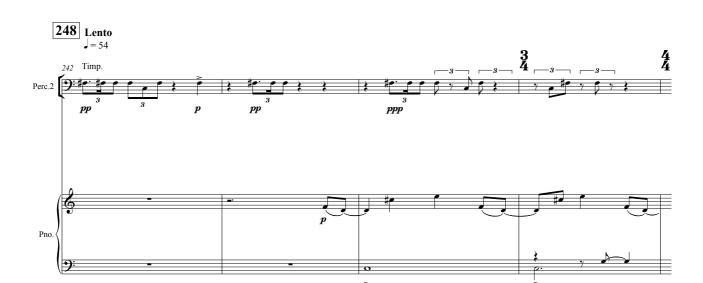
The Y.M.AN reaches his destination and perches on a 'ledge'. The silence becomes deafening; he covers his ears. He jumps to his feet and paces around. He notices the (toy) piano. He tries to play, but his left arm aches. He swallows some pills, puts his arm back in the sling.

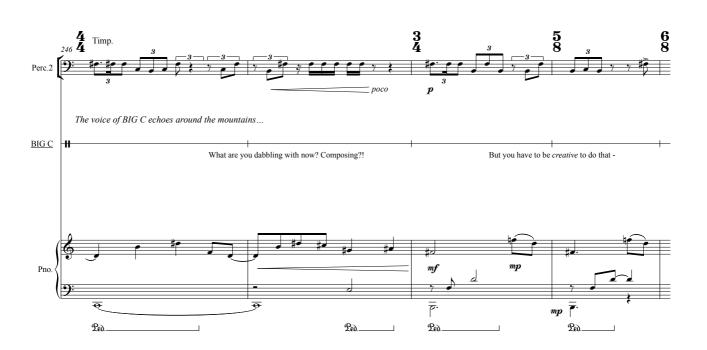
He takes a foldow of manuscript report from his bag. He begins to connece.

He takes a folder of manuscript paper from his bag. He begins to compose.

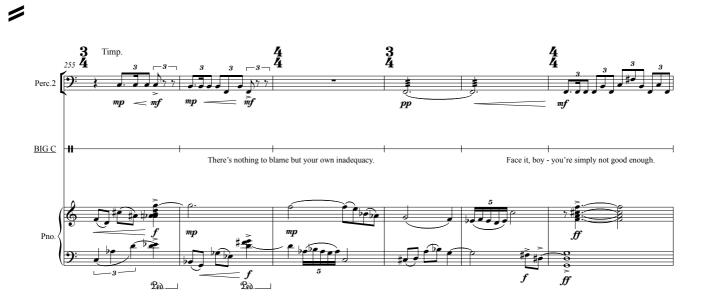
Remove the mouthpiece and quietly blow in the instruments without producing any pitch, like a gentle wind, leaving a few seconds interval between repetitions B. Fl. Remove the mouthpiece and quietly blow in the instruments without producing any pitch, like a gentle wind, leaving a few seconds interval between repetitions B. Cl. Remove the mouthpiece and quietly blow in the instruments without producing any pitch, like a gentle wind, leaving a few seconds interval between repetitions Hin. Remove the mouthpiece and quietly blow in the instruments without producing any pitch, like a gentle wind, leaving a few seconds interval between repetitions Toal

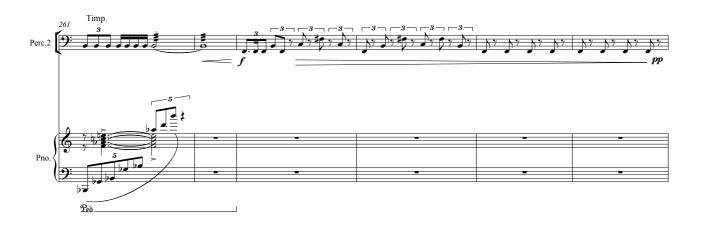












 $The \textit{ Y.MAN stops, screws up the manuscript and throws it down. In frustration he lays down under the stars. \textit{ The stage darkens.} \\$

25: The Cave



















258 Recitativo







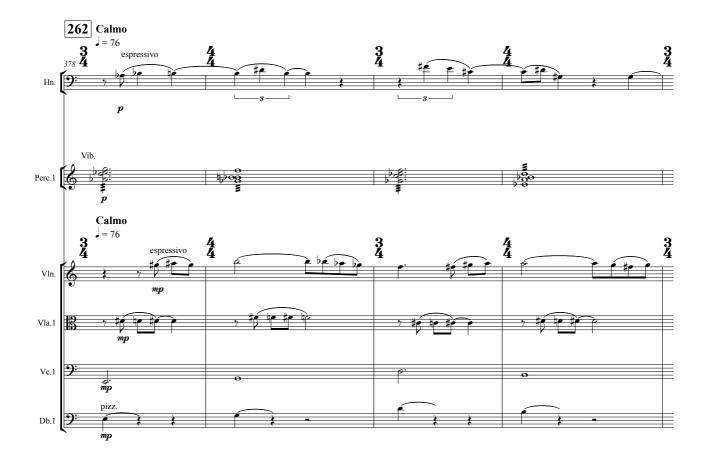














Perc.1



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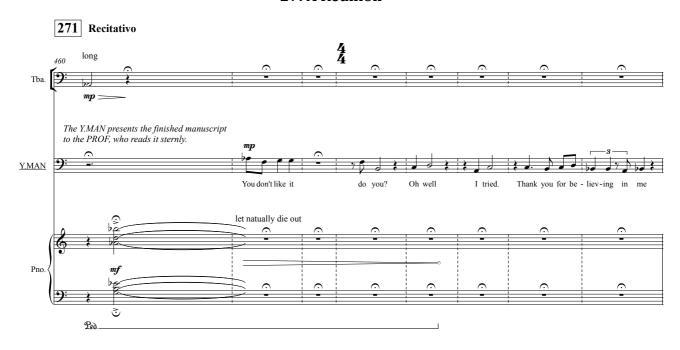


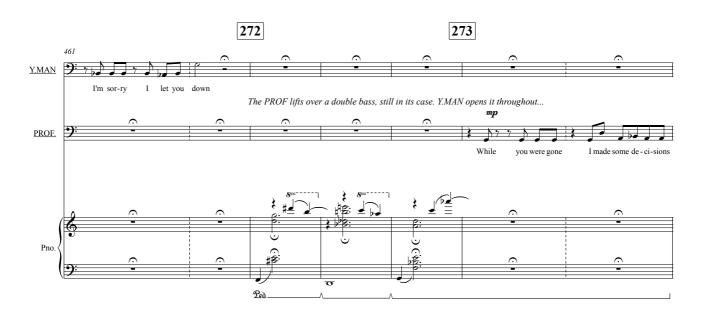




SCENE 3

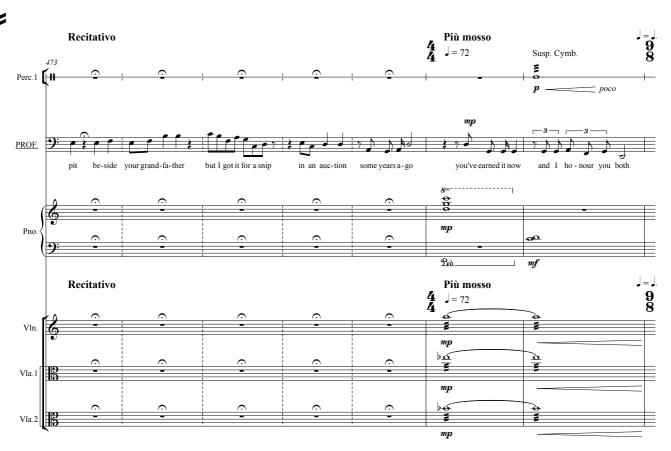
27: A Reunion













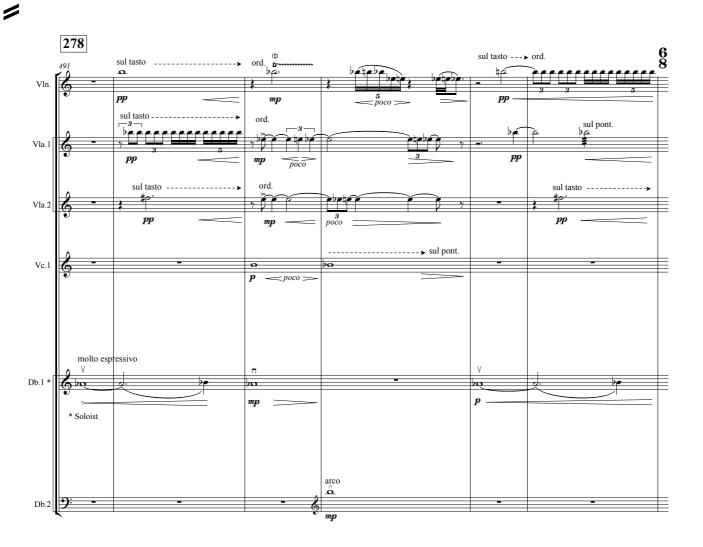
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28: Concert No.2

277 Andante J = 76

The Y.MAN dons a bow tie. He takes centre stage, in a spotlight, with his double bass. He performs his piece for double bass and orchestra.



















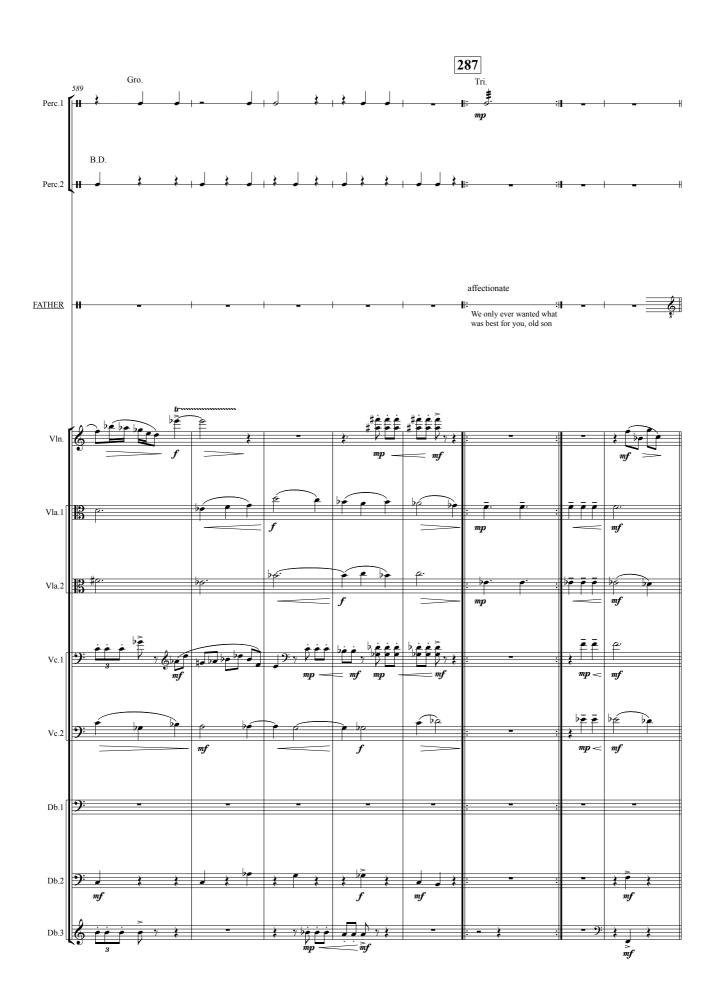


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29: And in the End







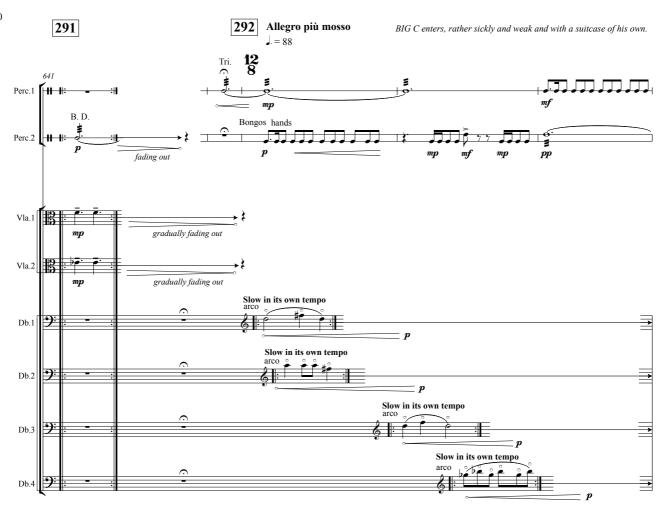


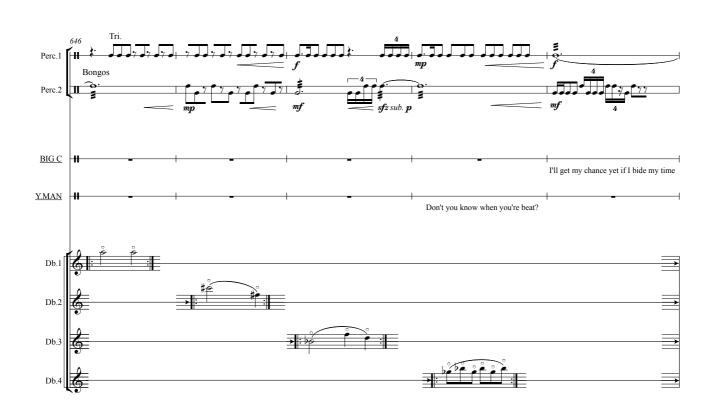


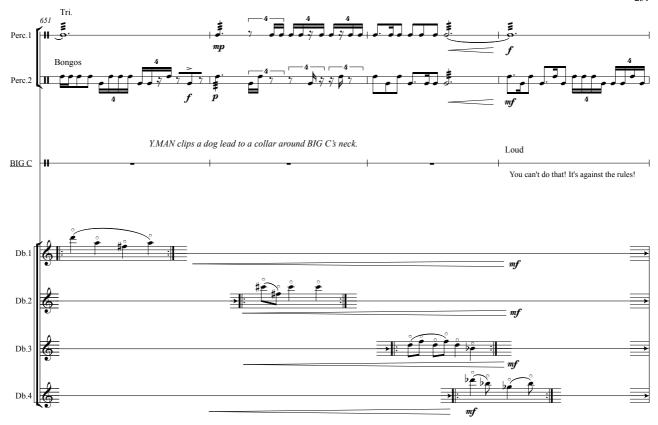


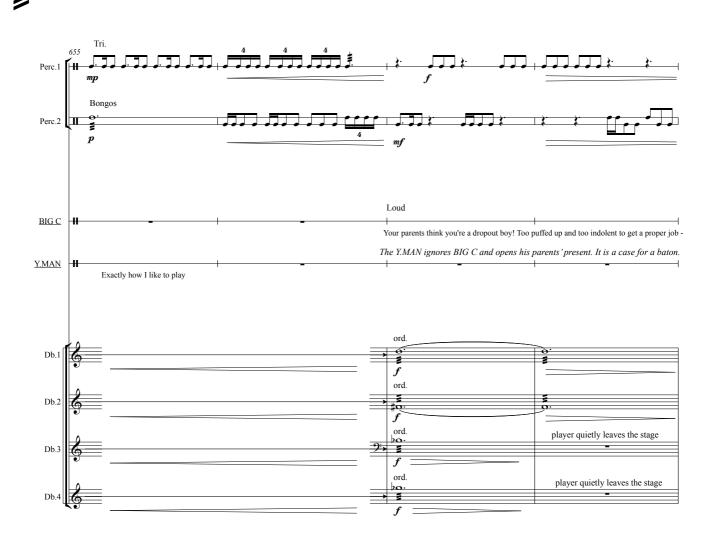


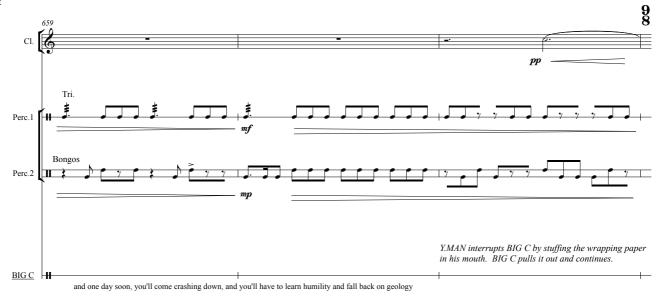
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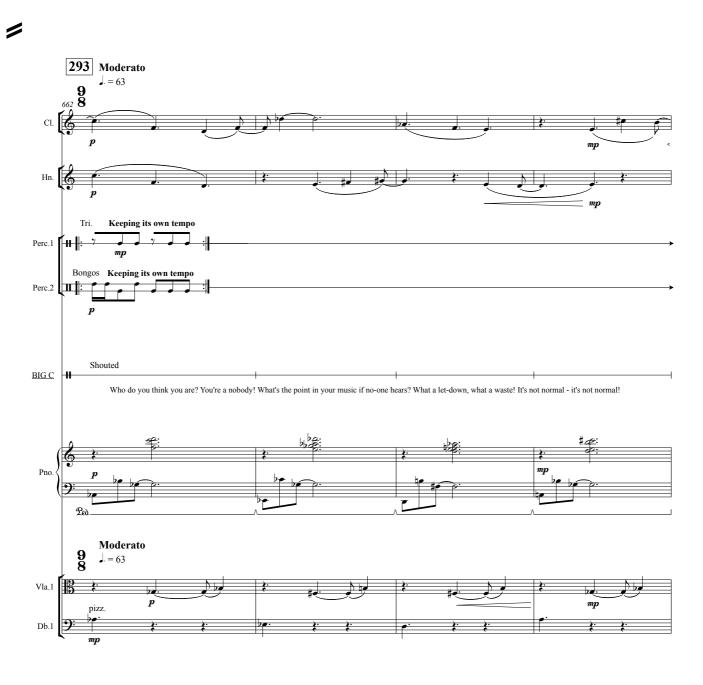


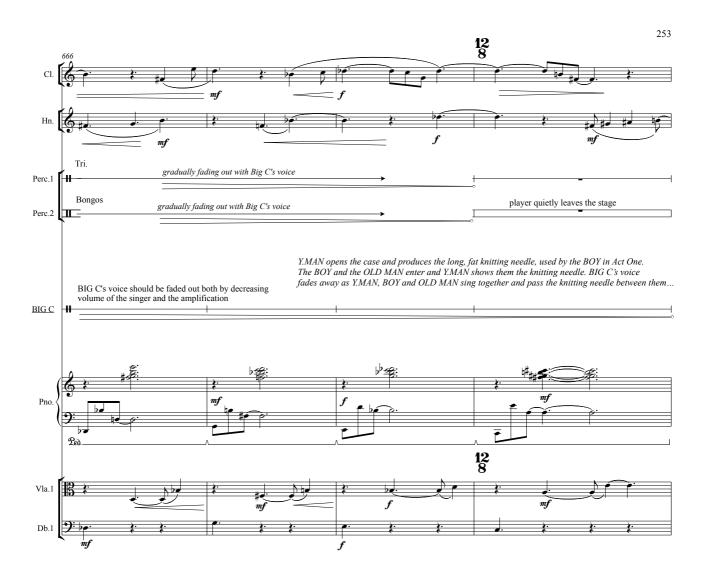


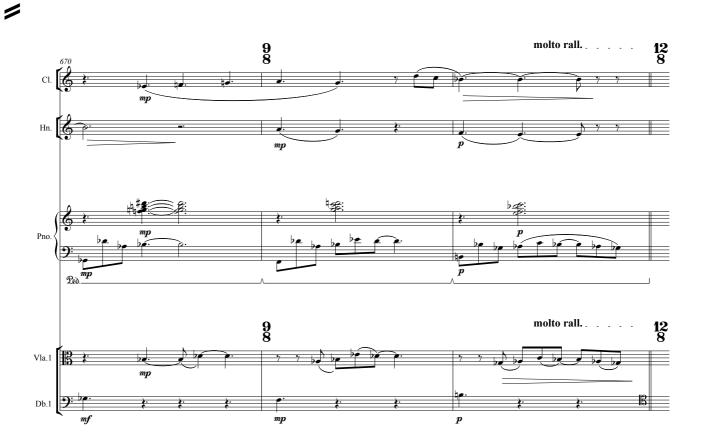






















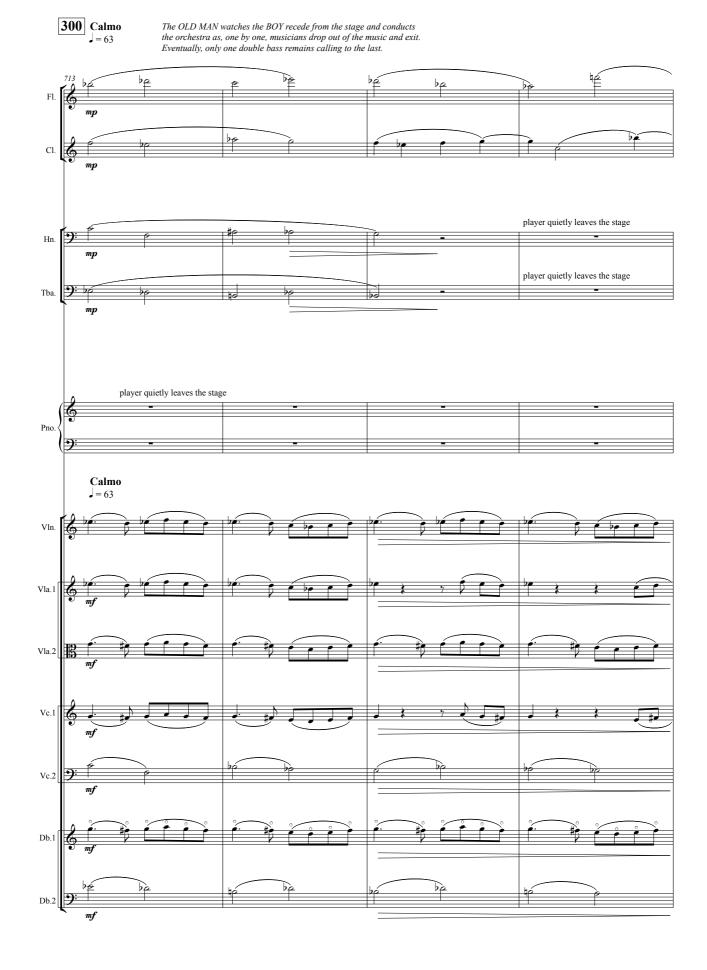








EPILOGUE









Conductor leaves the stage

unconducted molto rall.



Then the OLD MAN is left alone in silence, conducting with the knitting needle. BIG C's voice booms out...

