# **LIGHTNESS**

sound and light theatre

for 3 musicians

playing safety matches, sandpaper, sand and water,
with amplification
and lighting

Juliana Hodkinson 2015 **LIGHTNESS** was commissioned by SPEAK Percussion, with support from the Danish Arts Foundation for the commission and for a creative development residency in Copenhagen, October 2014.

SPEAK Percussion (Eugene Ughetti, Louise Devenish and Matthias Schack-Arnott) gave the first performance at the Züricher Tage für Neue Musik on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2015. ICTUS Ensemble (Dirk Descheemaeker, Tom Pauwels and Michael Schmid) nurtured and premiered the revised version in March 2017.

#### STAGE SET-UP

Three musicians perform at three separate stations – I Stage Right, II Stage Centre, III Stage Left - each facing the audience frontally. Each musician requires a stand or table: dimensions c. 60 x 40cm, height 90 cm. Small low risers may be needed to compensate for height differences between the players. Use a camera during rehearsal to check that the heights of players' arm and hand positions are identical. The entire stage set-up must be black. The stage must be clear of all other equipment – no chairs, no music-stands, no instruments. (A black grand drape or hard teaser may be drawn behind the *Lightness* set-up.)

#### **SAFETY**

The piece is performed in total darkness – both stage and auditorium. The following hazards must be taken into account: hazard of fire on stage, hazard of musicians stumbling or falling onstage, including edge of raised stage, hazard of audience stumbling or falling in auditorium. These hazards must be addressed ahead of the production, and solutions provided that are sensitive to the performance (e.g. auditorium guides with torches, stage cleared of all minor and major obstructions, marking of stage-edge with luminescent tape, fire extinguishers/buckets of water and/or fire personnel positioned in the wings).

#### **AMPLIFICATION**

A full-range stereo PA system is to be rigged at stage level, with monitor speakers next to each player or in-ear system.

Each musician's station is enhanced with slight amplification - either using miniature mics on the musicians' wrists, or stationary/hanging mics, or a combination. Contact mics attached directly to each musician's table may be used additionally. Take care that no mics/stands interrupt sight lines from audience. Using mini mics, the musicians can precisely control their dynamics.

# **CLICKTRACKS**

Due to the black-out, coordinating the tempi and metres between the parts will probably require the use of in-ear click-tracks for all three musicians.

#### LIGHTING and TABLETS

The basic lighting setting is pitch black. Wherever possible all auditorium exit signs, stair lighting and similar in the venue should be turned off or blacked out. This requires clearing <u>fire and safety checks</u> ahead of the production.

The musicians must learn their parts off by heart or perform using electronic tablets. Notation should be loaded with <u>inverted white script on black background</u>, and the screens dimmed as much as possible. <u>Footswitches may be used for page-turning</u>.

Some thought should be given to the beginning of the piece – whether the musicians will enter the stage in darkness, when the house lights will go down, etc. Several solutions are possible, but the piece must begin with precision and purposefulness.

At bars 223-4 there is 'a blaze of electric light', which lasts 5 seconds. The light may be directed from above onto the players, from side-lights, or into the auditorium – it should be sharp, and cued very precisely.

#### **DRESS**

Players must wear all black, with long sleeves.

#### REHEARSING

Use a video doing rehearsal, to finetune arm heights, head positions, etc.

# **OBJECTS and MATERIALS REQUIRED**

# Off-stage fire extinguishers / water in buckets

#### For each player:

- safety matches
- safety-match boxes (in 2 or more sizes)
- extended striking surfaces, or 'runways', made up of several ignition strips
- sandpaper (sanding discs): grit sizes c.40 (coarse), c.150 (medium) and c.240 (fine)
- sand and water (for extinguishing matches) in small, black, fire-proof containers
- amplification (see above)
- electronic tablet with footswitch
- click track with in-ear phone

# In addition:

#### Player I (Stage Right)

2 'shakers'	matchboxes filled with matches and played by shaking, like a
	rhythm egg

2 'bongos' empty matchboxes, with drawer adjusted to give 2 different

pitches, played with fingers

2 'bass drums' larger empty matchboxes, maybe two different sizes, or with

drawers adjusted differently

#### Player II in Centre

2 'shakers' matchboxes filled with matches and played by shaking, like a

rhythm egg

'military drum' filled matchbox, played with matchsticks (box may be

modified to distort more)

'side drum' empty matchbox, played with matchsticks 2 'snare drums' filled/semi-filled matchboxes of 2 different

sizes, modified to sound higher, played with matchsticks

2 'bass drums' larger empty matchboxes, maybe two different sizes, or with

drawers adjusted differently

# Player III (Stage Left)

'shaker' filled matchboxes, played by shaking, like a rhythm egg

'tambourine' larger matchbox, filled with normal-size

matches or other modified material, e.g. flakes of metal,

played by shaking like a tambourine

'snare drum' large matchbox, filled with normal-size

matches and played with (longer) matchsticks

'lion's roar' see below

#### LION'S ROAR:

<u>To make the lion's roar</u>, use: 1 matchbox, 2 matches, 1 length of black cotton thread (c. 40-50 cm long), 1 needle

With the needle, prick a hole in the matchbox lid. Tie one end of thread to a match and place in matchbox tray. Thread the needle and pull through the hole. Put the tray inside the lid. Tie the other end of thread to the other match.

<u>To play the lion's roar</u>: hold the second match in one hand and press the little finger of that hand down onto the matchbox lid, to keep it down. Loop the thread around the fingers of the other hand. Pulling the thread taut, twist the second match back and forth to create a friction sound.

#### PERFORMANCE NOTES

Safety matches, matchboxes and sandpaper are used as special agents of music and sound. Most of the notation is intended as action notation – the outcome may be quite different, depending on the volatility of the matches. Matches may or may not ignite as indicated, they may burn for a little or a long while. Even where precise rhythmic and duration values and strict metres are notated, this must be balanced by the challenge of accepting that things will often turn out differently.

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This is a sound piece.

It advances by hollowing out the darkness with tiny spades of sound and light.

It advances by destruction, opening, closing, re-opening and closing again. The piece has to constantly restart itself, it is a jump-starting exercise.

Each strike, each flame contains a drama that plays out over few or many seconds. Light consumes the darkness that consumes the flame.

Each match dies at some point that is both controlled and uncontrolled – in varying and unequal proportion. It is a free fall into certain extinction.

So listen, do not search.

Let the drama unfold before your eyes and ears – without ritual, without inserting theatricality.

Exchange breaths with the duration and character of the flame.

The power you have over the flame is balanced by its volatility.

It cannot be mastered.

It grows, advances step by step, towards its continual and repeating self-destruction.

All comes from the ear, as from memory, preceding thought.

The matches are dice that are thrown, cast, rolled and come to rest - a flame returns as an echo.

Rhythm here is not a feat of musicianship – it is a divinatory technique.

Like this we advance across the long night by listening to what follows.

# LEGEND RH

 $\rm LH\,/\,RH-$  these are not interchangeable. The three musicians' hand movements must be very closely coordinated for visual precision.

Even in the pitch black, musicians should adhere to the left- and right-hand allocations – as the audience becomes accustomed to the dark, they will likely be able to see the players' movements to some extent.

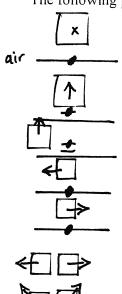
The principle of indicating alternate hands also allows for one hand to prepare the next match for striking while the other hand is still busy with the preceding flame, and so ensures where necessary that strikes follow on from the end of the preceding flames without pause.

#### SPATIAL INDICATIONS

Visual discipline is important – details such as the height of the three players' matches when struck and held in unison are to be as precise as possible. Compensate for differences in players' heights with low risers (or high heels). Ensure that any sightline obstacles such as optional music stands are taken into account with the final positioning of the flames.

The flames should generally be seen by the audience within (or sometimes beyond) the space of an imaginary frame.

The following positions and directions are indicated, e.g. bars 226 to end.:



Default position, centre front of musician's body at head height (above any sightline obstacles such as music stands)

- c. 15 cm higher than default position
- c. 30 cm higher than default position
- c. 20 cm left (stage left) of default position
- c. 20 cm right (stage right) of default position

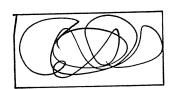
Beyond the above coordinates

At/beyond the corners of the imaginary frame

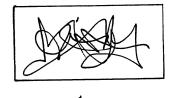
#### **MATCHBOXES**

Matchboxes are mainly used as membranophones; explore variations in the resonance of the box by tapping different places.

1	Play using matchsticks (usually the head)
W W	Play matchbox using fingers
$\leftrightarrow$	Holding the matchbox horizontally, shake it horizontally from side to side
2	Holding the matchbox horizontally, shake it along a diagonal axis
$\boxed{\updownarrow}$	Holding the matchbox horizontally, shake it vertically up and down
(A)	Holding the matchbox horizontally, make circles in the air – one revolution for each semiquaver



Smooth, free circling movements in various directions



Mix smooth, flowing movements with jerky, accented bursts of movement

The matchboxes' resonance is additionally altered by hand-muffling:

0	unmuted
+	slightly muffled/half muted
+///0	alternate rapidly between muted and unmuted
<b>+</b>	muffled/muted, e.g. by cupping a hand around the box, or by pressing the top of the drawer down

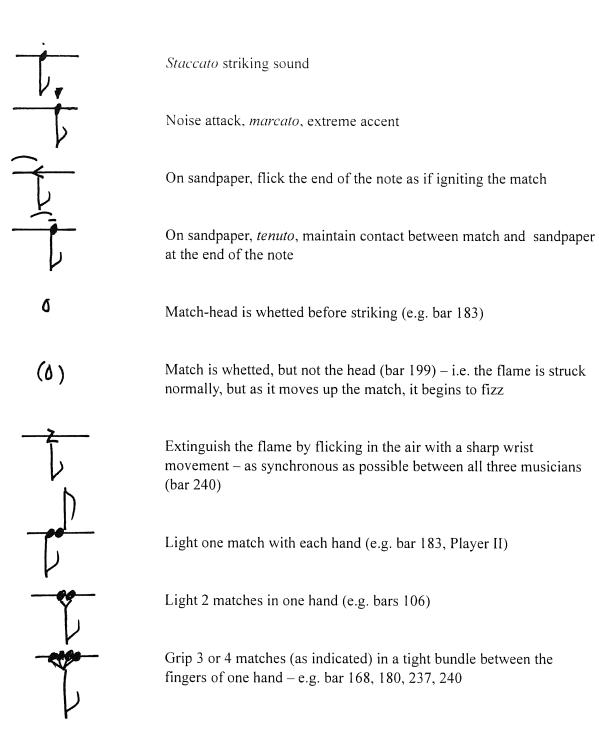
#### MATCHES: FRICTION/IGNITION

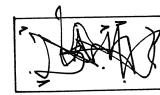
Three grades of sandpaper are used: c. 40 grit, c. 150 grit and c. 240 grit. Runways are made of matchbox sides, cut out and stuck down firmly.

RW	ignition runway(s)
SP 240	sand paper/sanding disc grade c. 240 grit
SP 150	sand paper/sanding disc grade c. 150 grit
SP 40	sand paper/sanding disc grade c. 40 grit

The notation tries to take account of the volatility of matches' point of ignition or combustion. Sometimes, the production of a sound of striking, and its attendant range of articulations (short/long, stroked/hit, loud/quiet) is in focus; at other times, the visual rhythm of the flames must be controlled as tightly as possible.

Ö	Circular movement: complete revolution(s)
	Circular movement: half revolution (short, or slow)
A D	Circular movement: quarter revolution (very short, or very slow)
П	Towards body
V	Away from body





Extremely chaotic, jerky movements (with matchstick on sandpaper)

#### MOUTH



At bars 132 and 222, all three musicians speak text, fast and voicelessly; only unvoiced consonants are heard – these may be exaggerated



Blow out flame, very precisely, without head movement (bar 183)



Whistle – a high, fragile sound, any pitch (not coordinated between the players) – maybe unstable, maybe including multiphonics (bars 223-4)



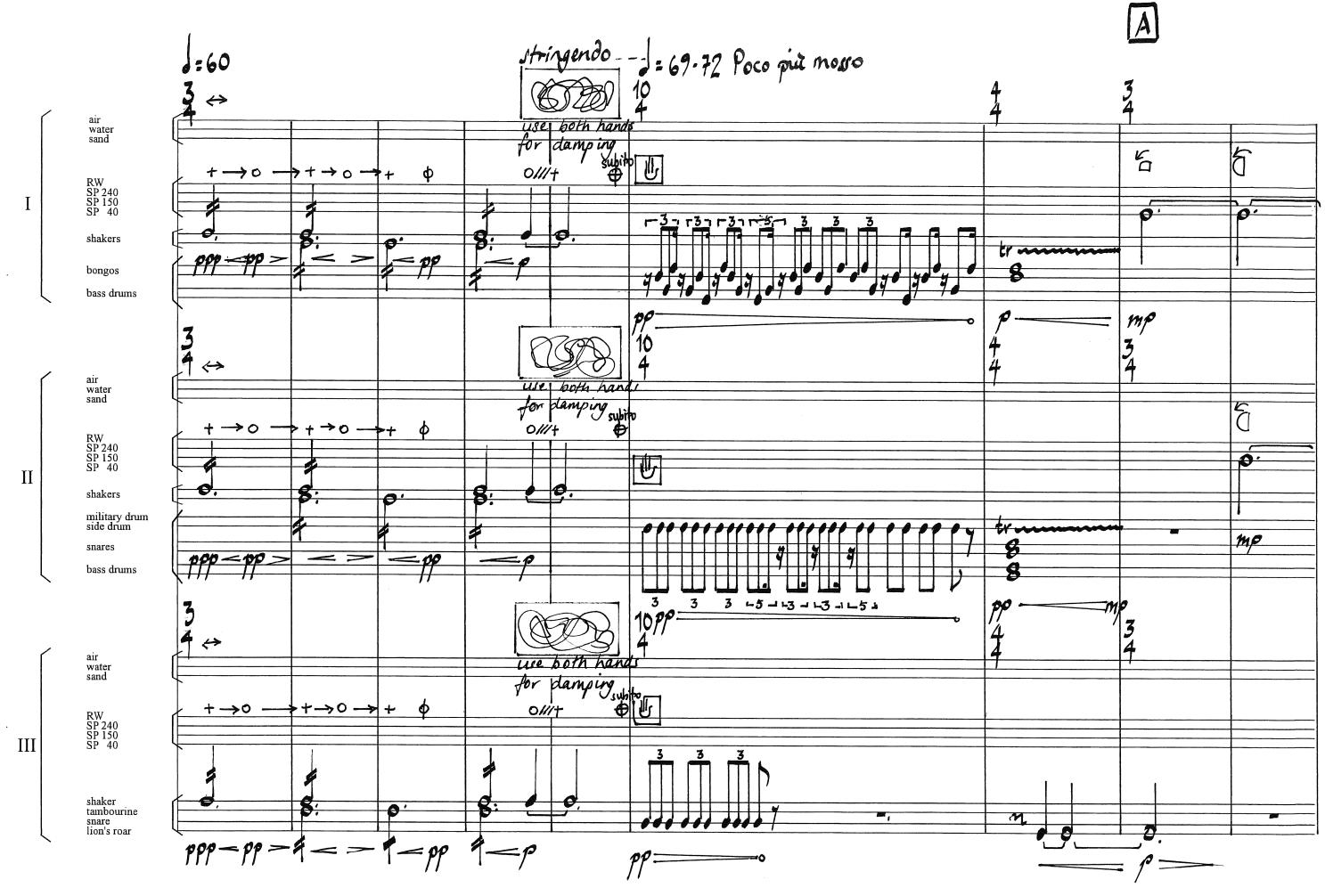
Alternating freely between the sounds'th' and 's:', make air-noise, flitered by tongue, lip, teeth, saliva: allow high whistle tones to come through, extremely sparsely and irregularly, at any pitch (bar 239)

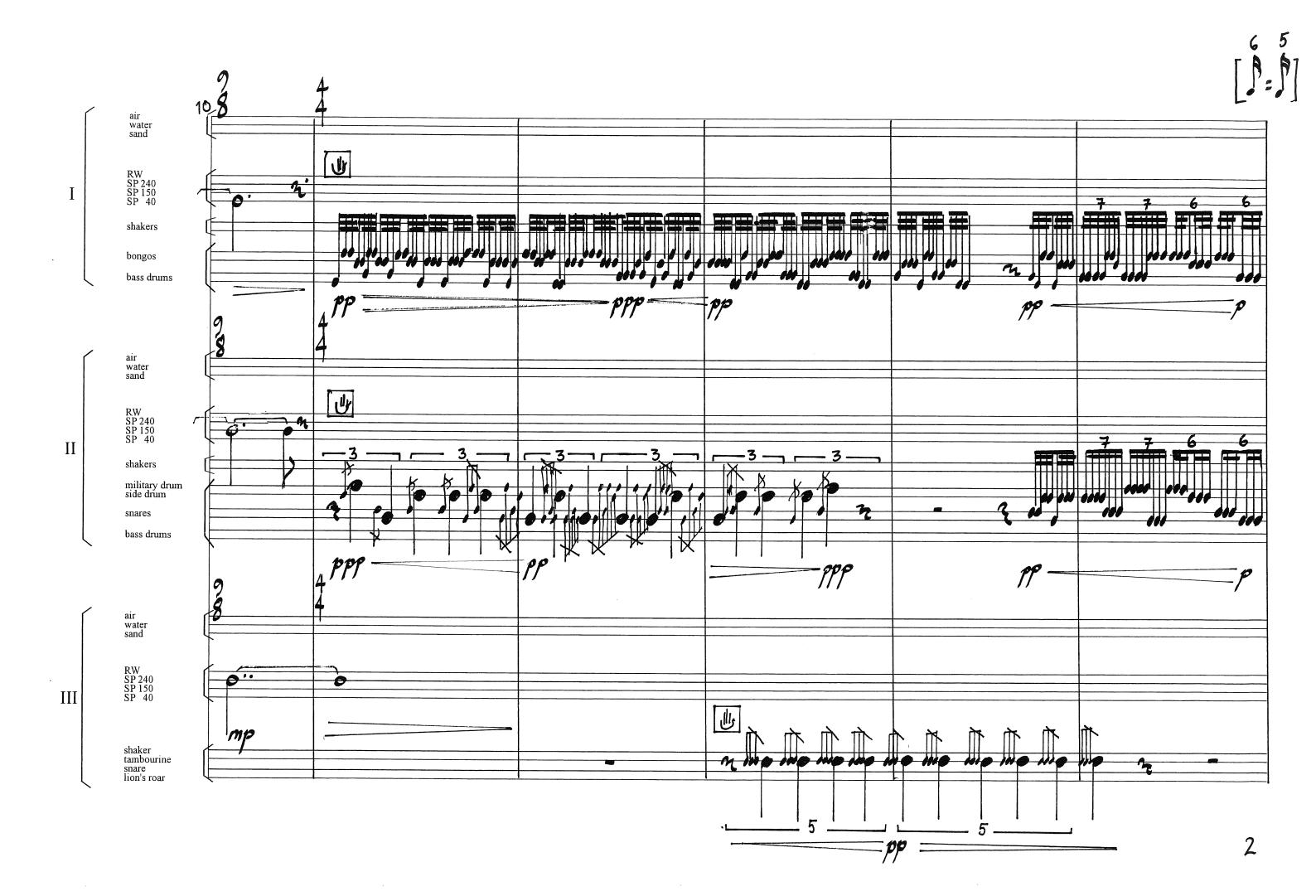


Let saliva rattle between tongue and roof of mouth (bar 241)

# METRE and SENZA MISURA

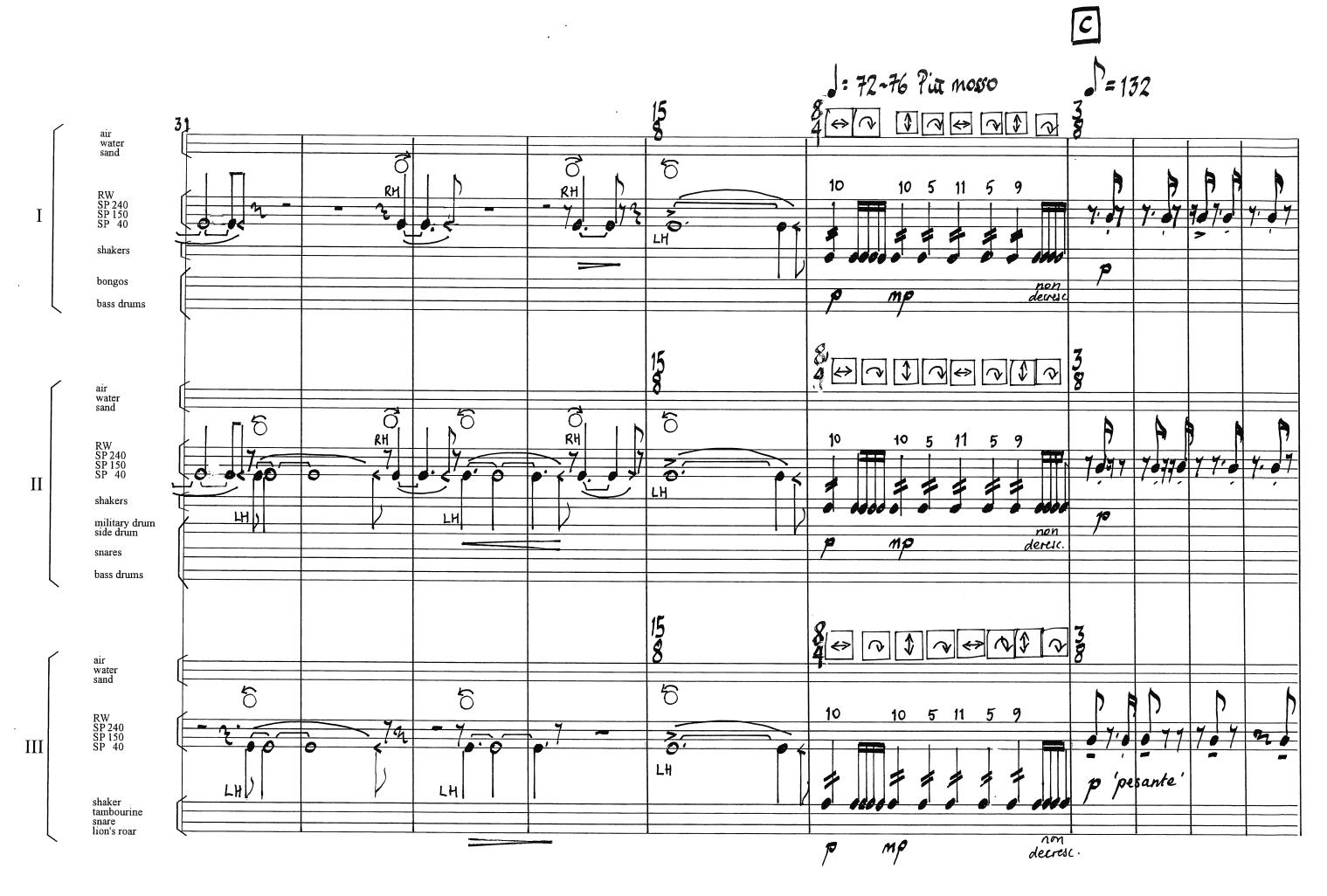
Towards the end of the piece (from bar 238), the metrical and tempo indications give way to *senza misura* passages, where duration is determined by the behaviour of the match-flames. Here, the general principle applies that musicians should each wait until every match has gone out before proceeding to the next bar. *Senza misura* bars may therefore last a few seconds or up to half a minute. (The difference in written lengths of the bars from bar 238 onward does not represent relative durations, but is simply due to the amount of information represented.)



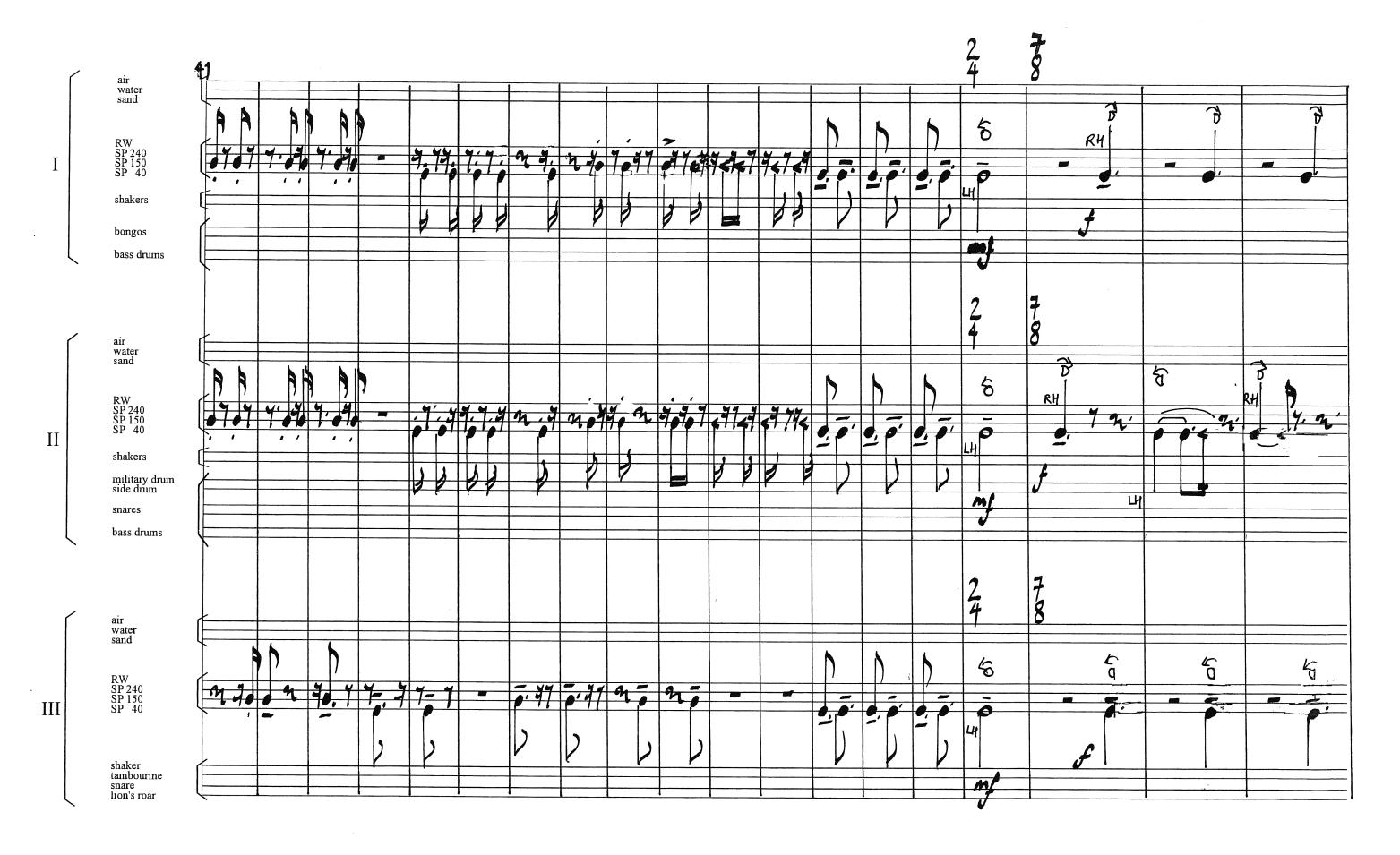


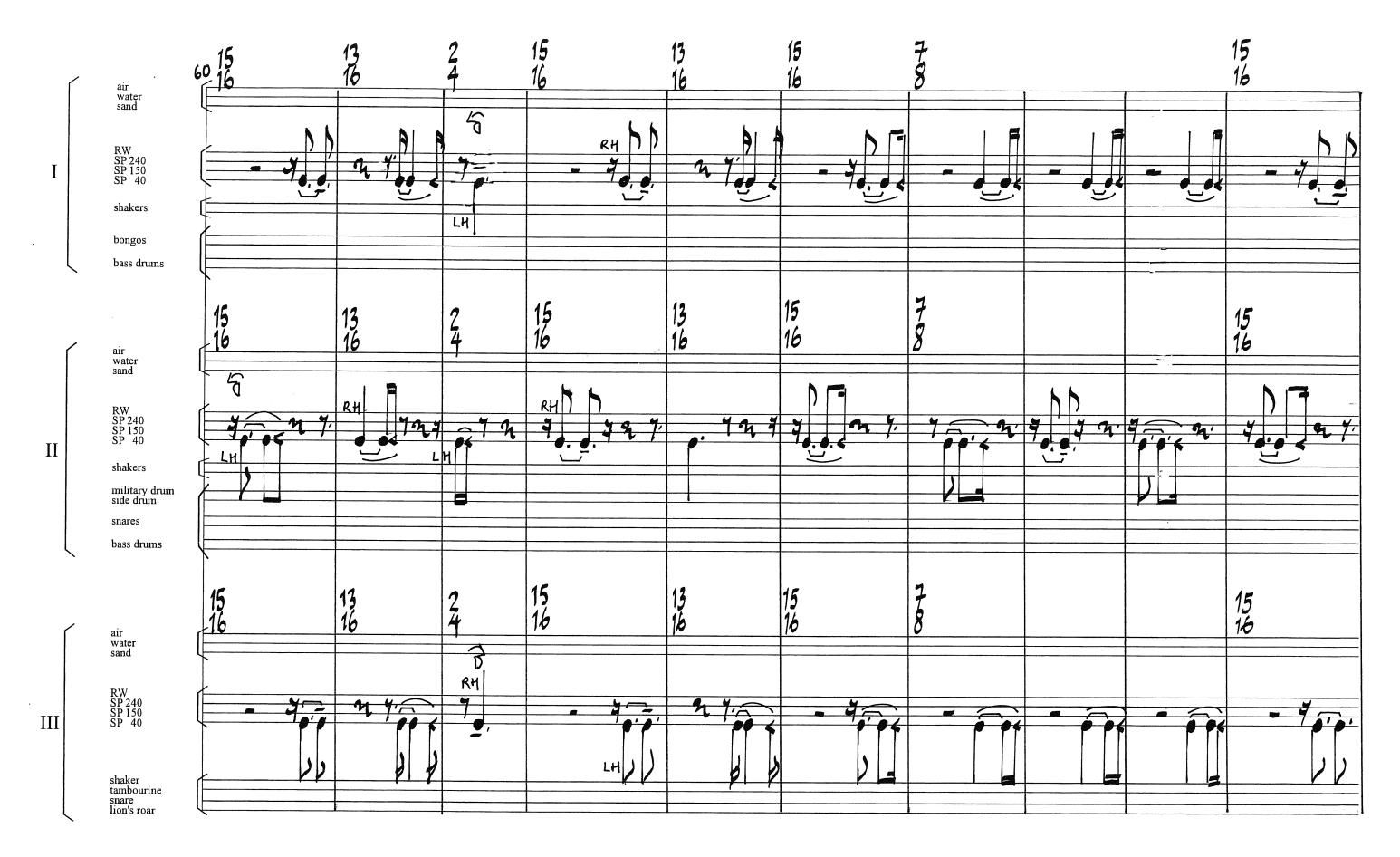




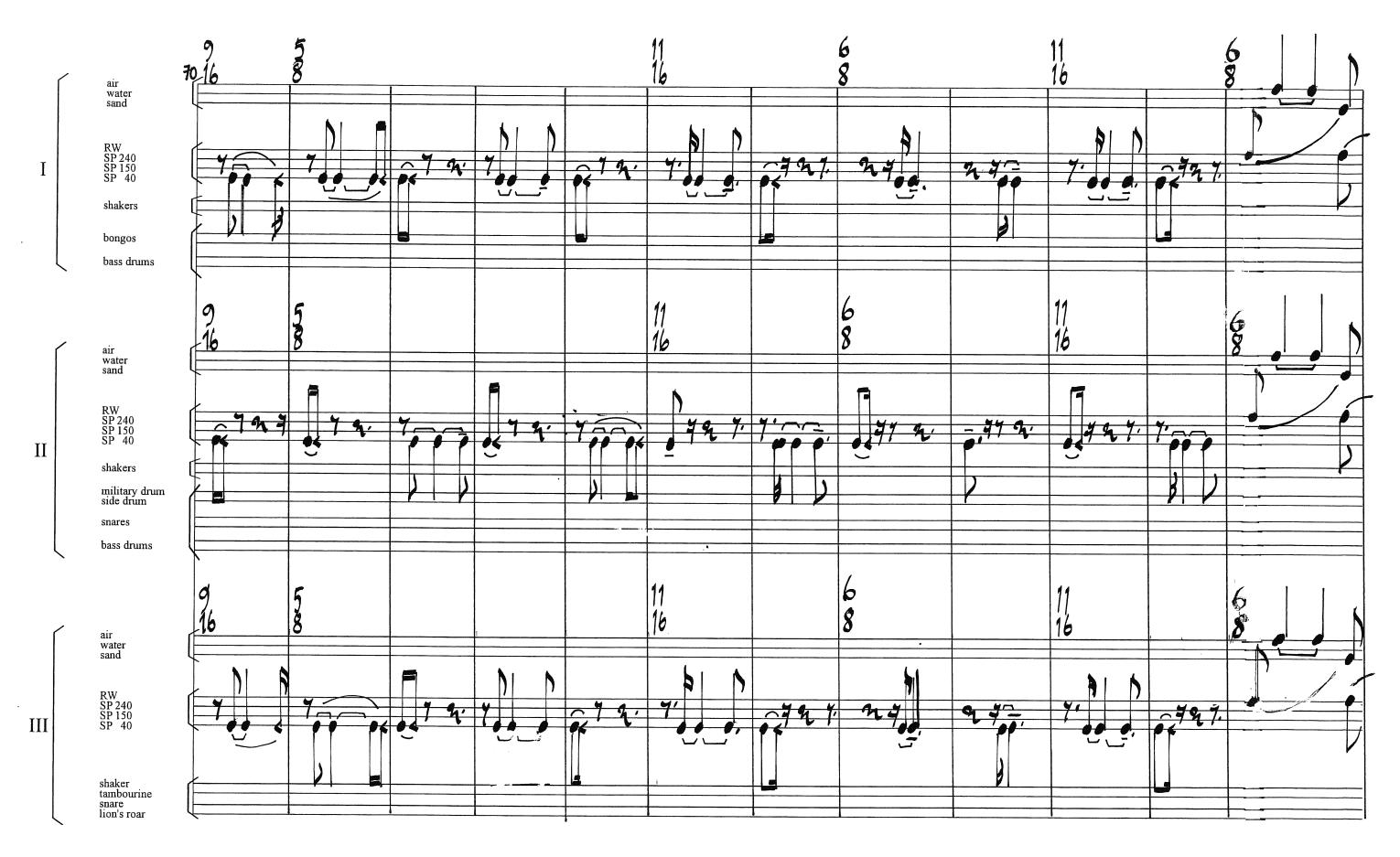


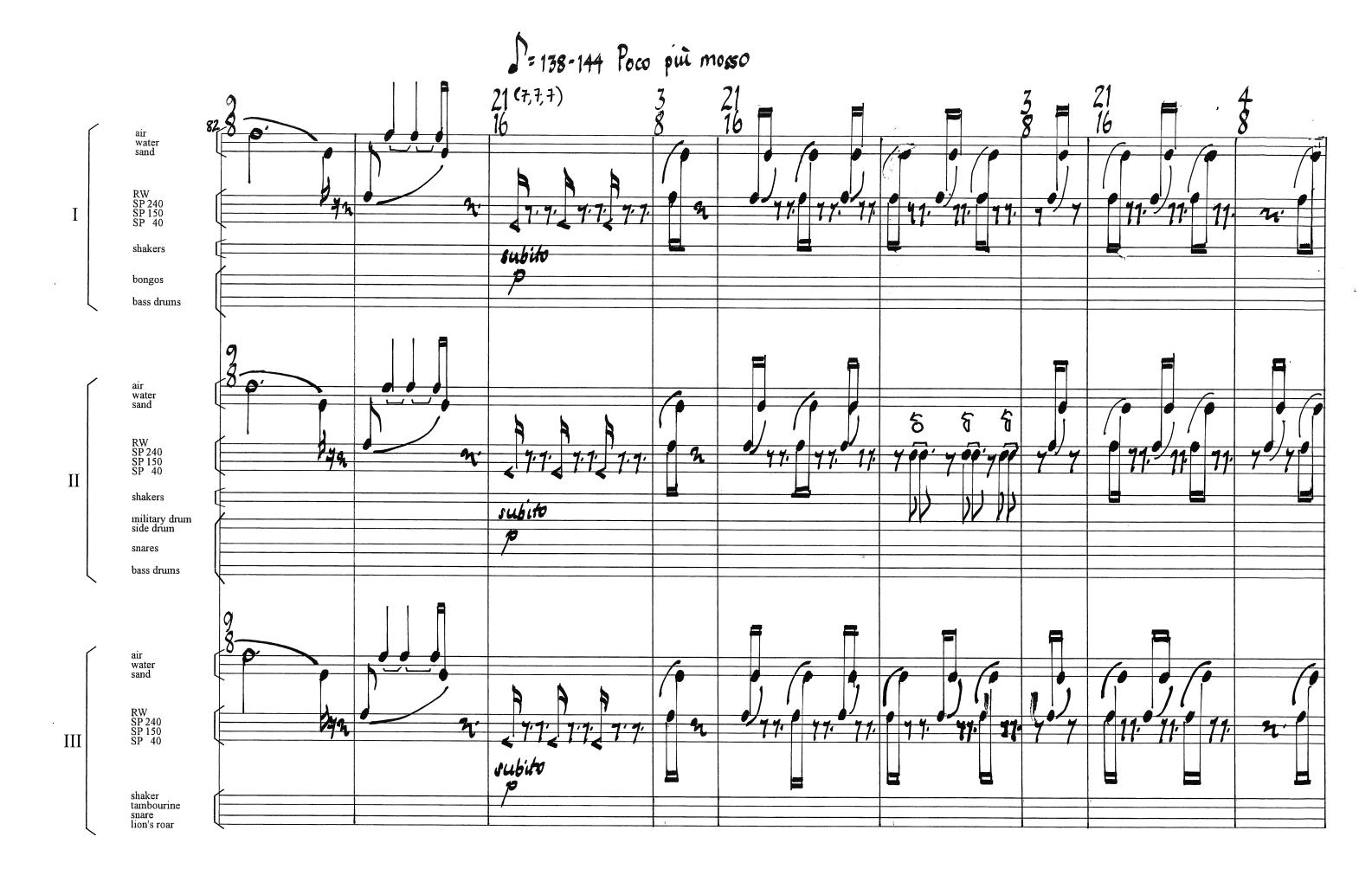






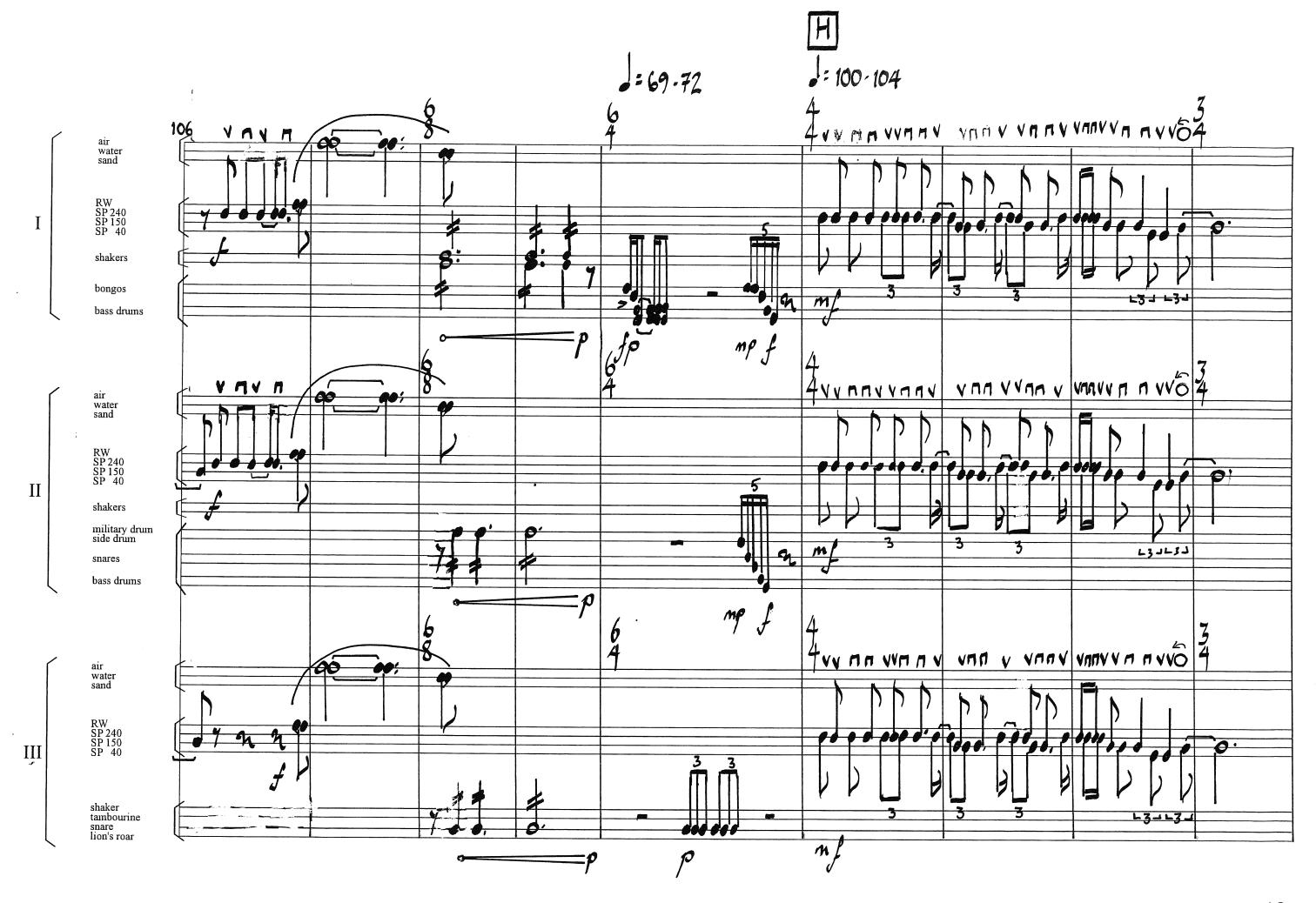




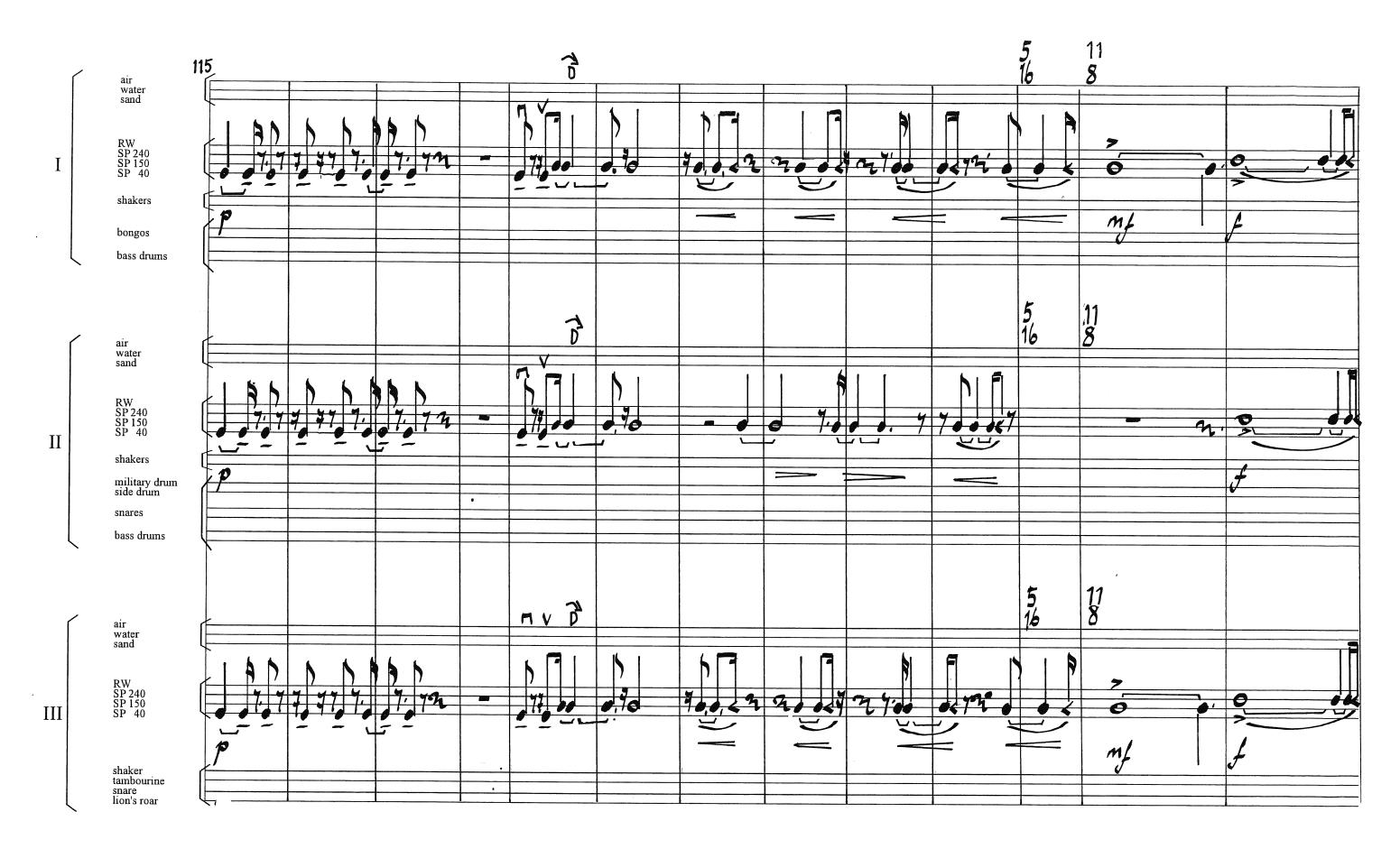




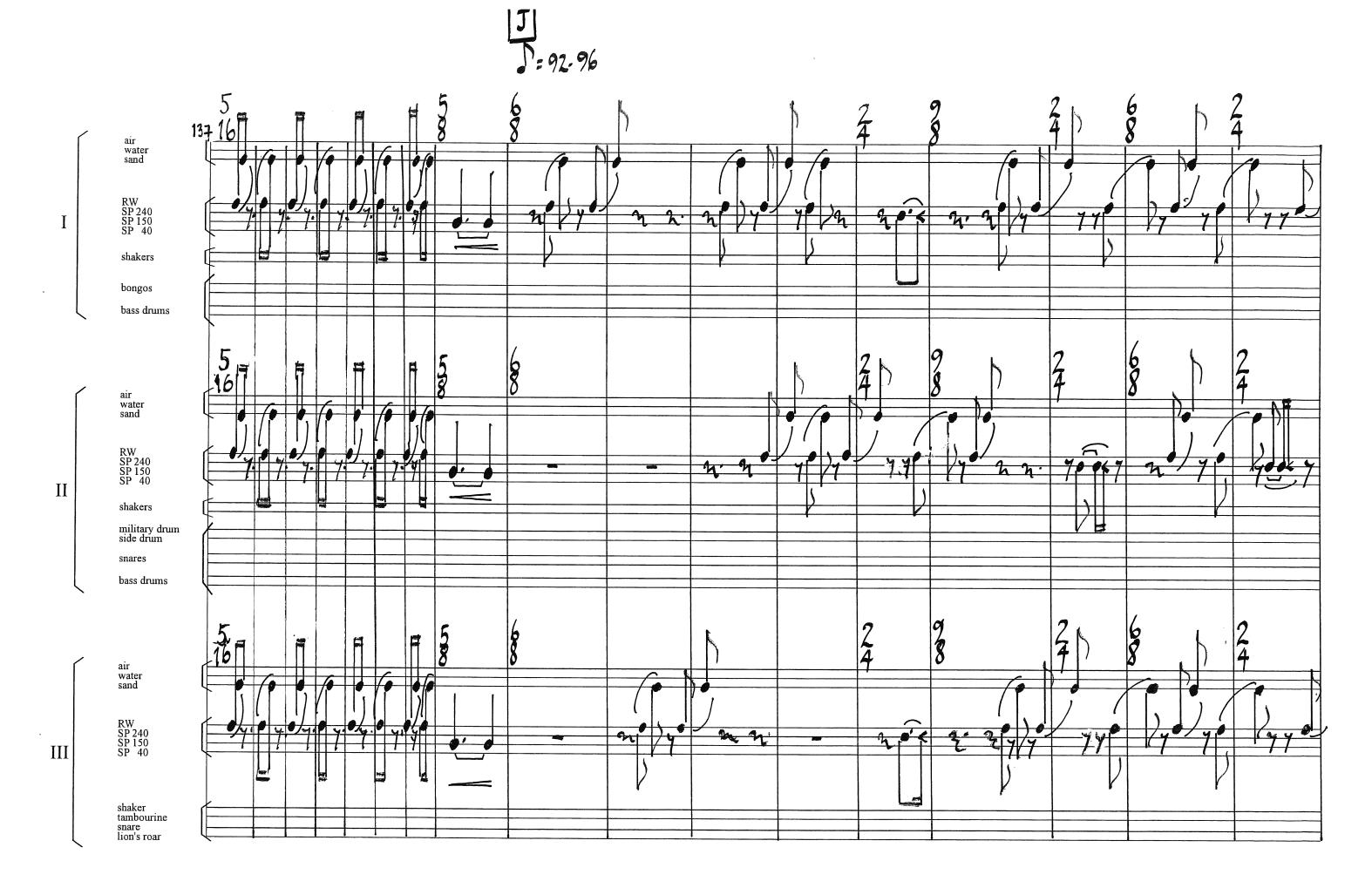


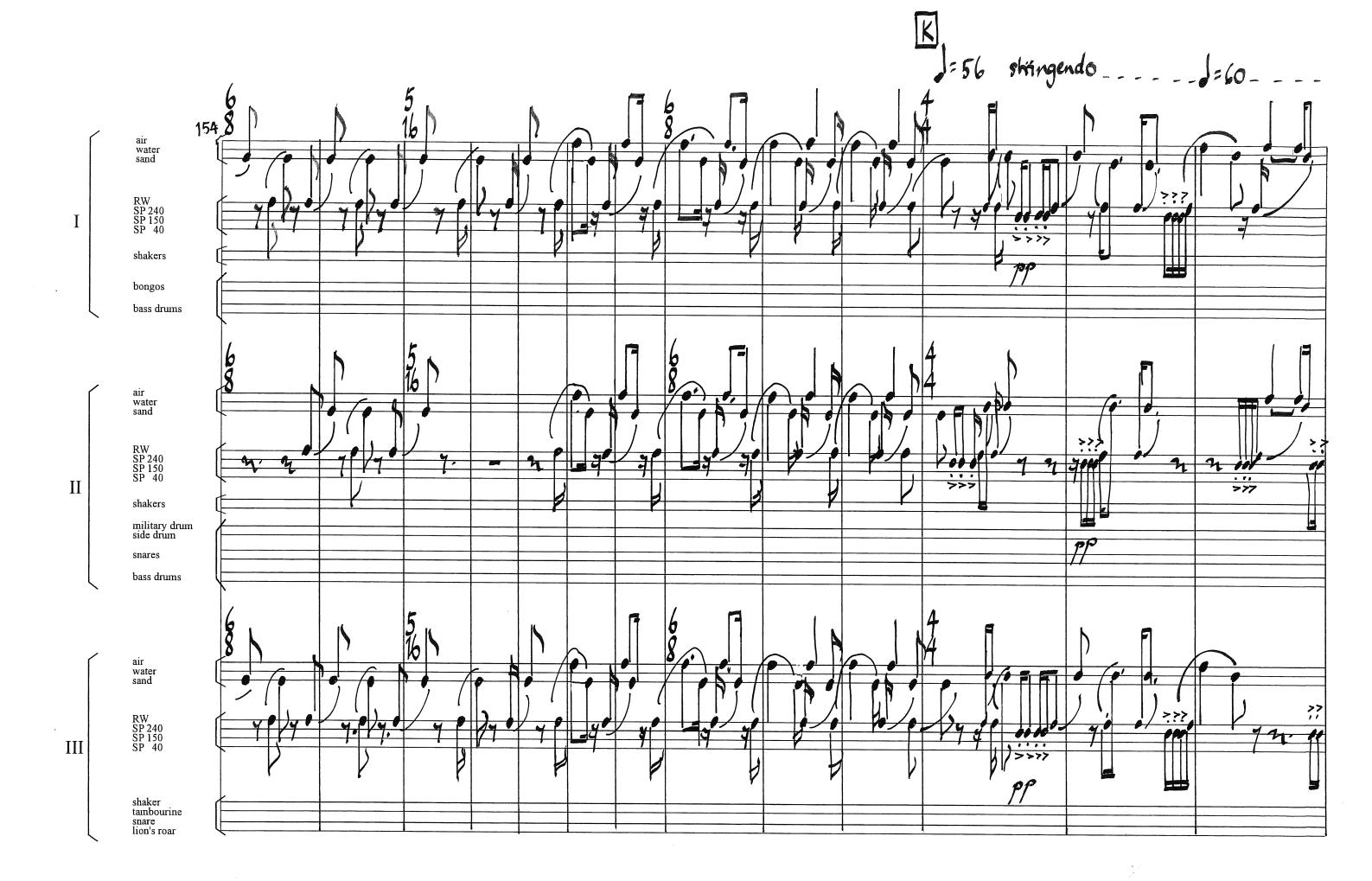


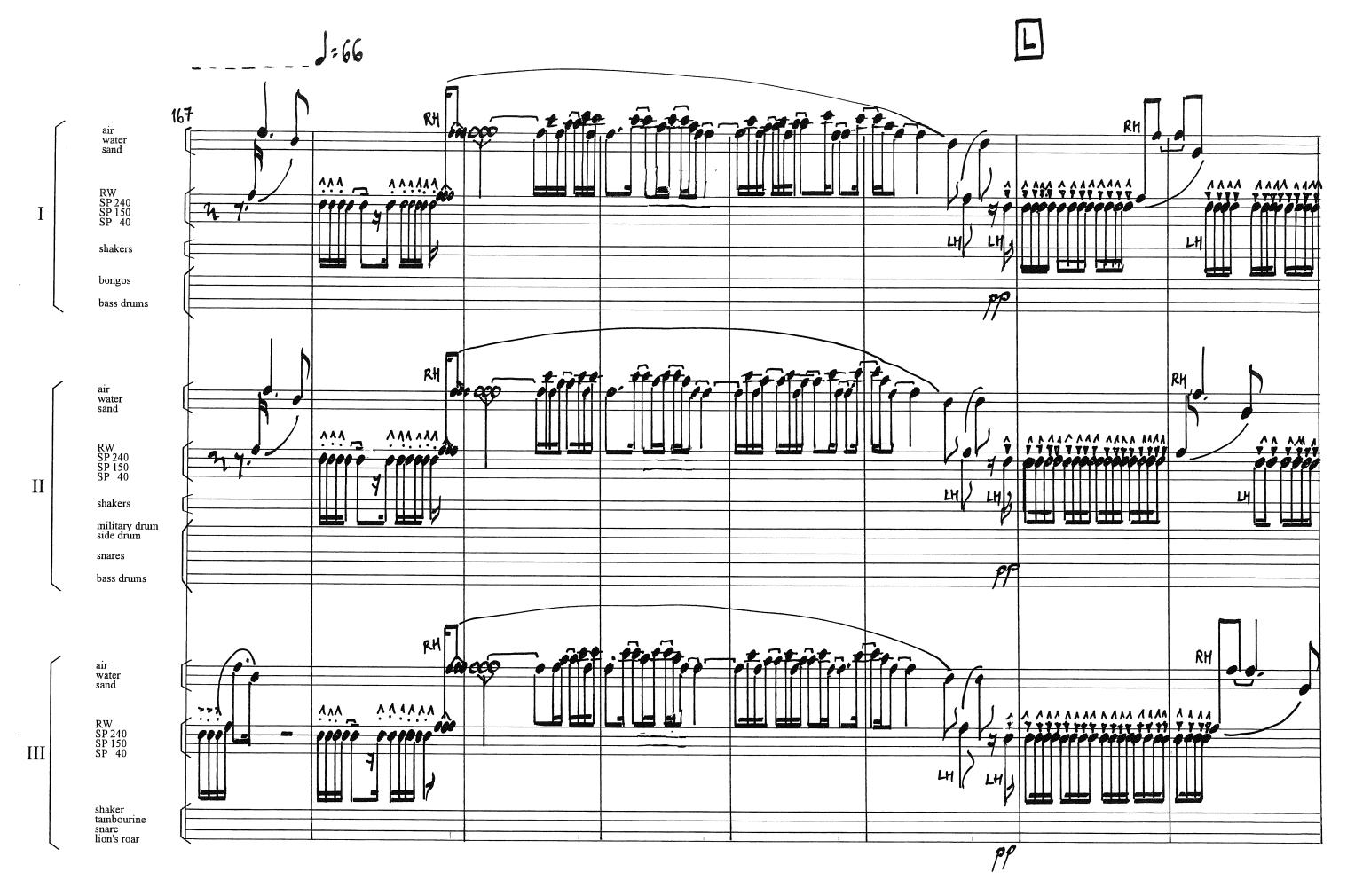


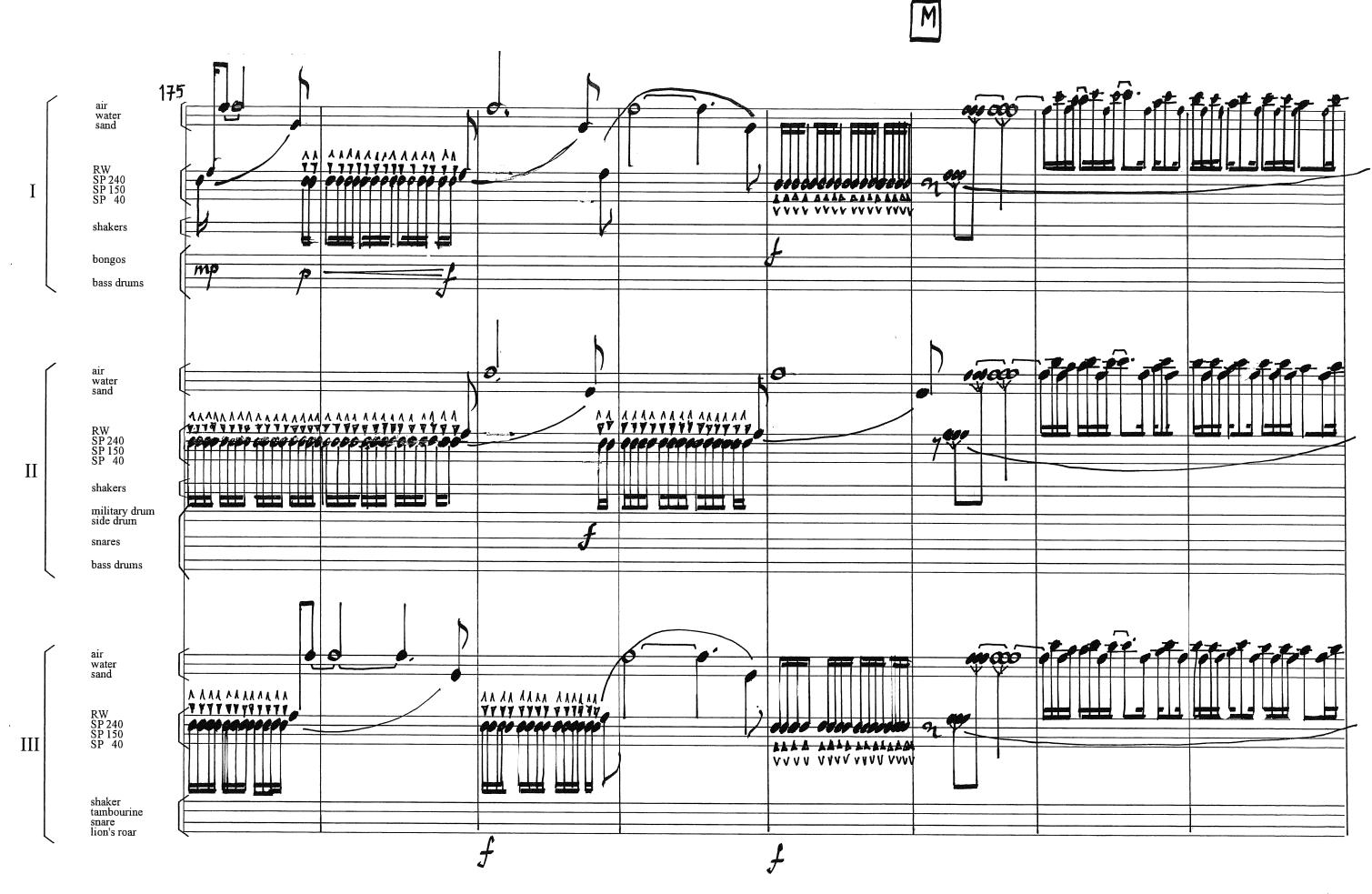


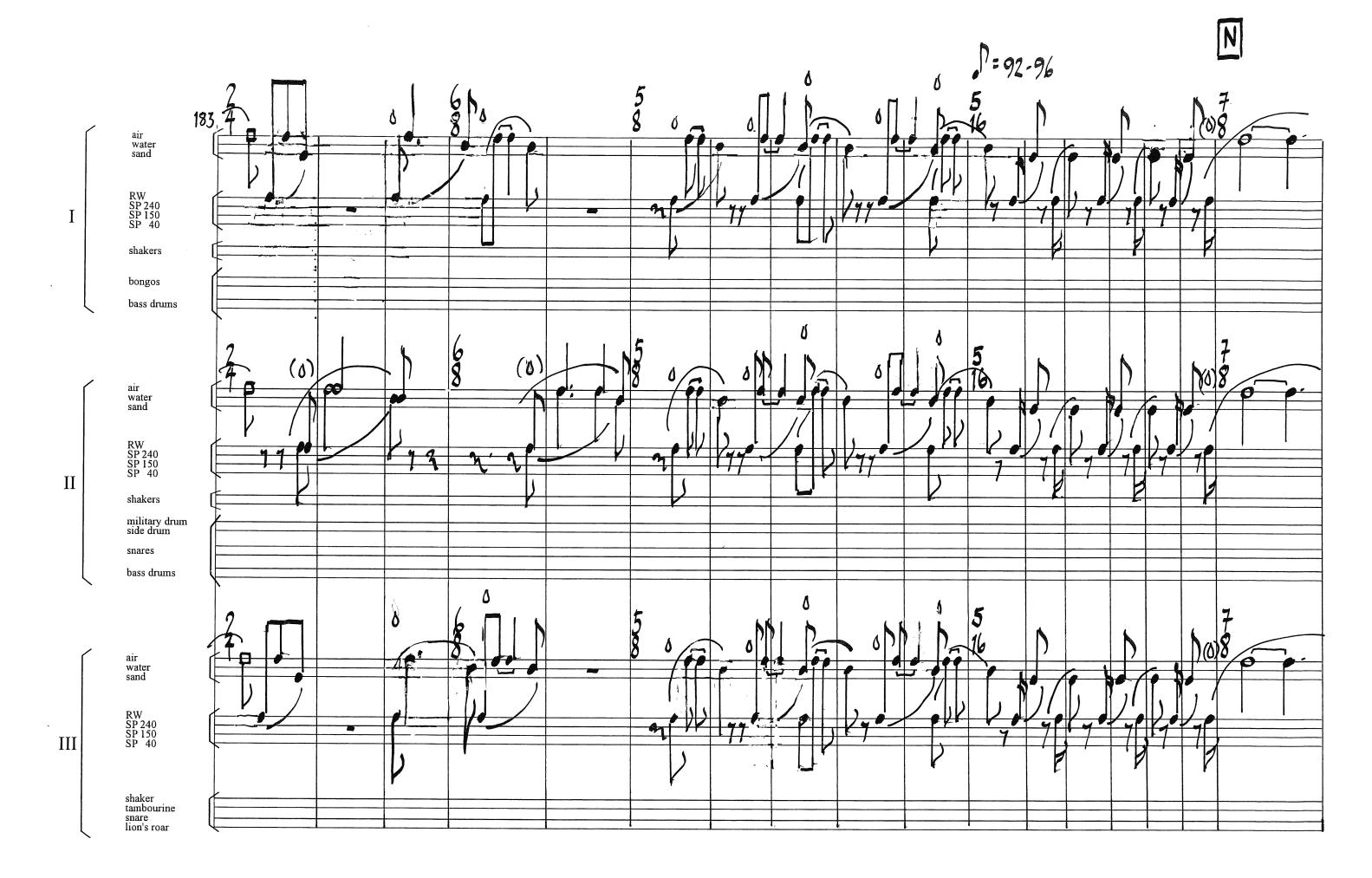
















# A BLAZE OF ELECTRIC LIGHT OFF

