Canto

for percussion quintet

José del Avellanal Carreño

2022

Composer's Note

This work was born out of the idea of approaching drums as not just resources for rhythm, colour and accent, but also as melodic instruments in their own right. I challenged myself to focus intensely in the sonic possibilities of the tom-toms, looking beyond the apparent simplicity of the instruments with the aim of developing an organic and quasi-melodic approach to their writing. In essence, I wished to try to make the tom-toms sing - or actually, as a more accurate statement, I wished to try to make the tom-toms *try to* sing -, something that is referenced in the title of the piece 'Canto', which is the Spanish word for 'chant'.

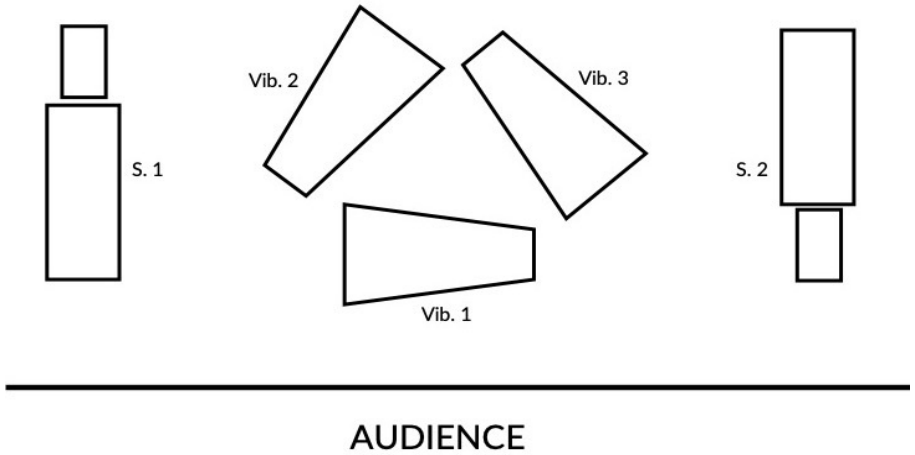
Clash, disruption, exchange, control and failure are very important concepts in my creative thinking, and the percussion setup used by Les Percussions de Strasbourg for their performance of Xenakis's *Pléïades*, consisting of three concentric circles of keyboards, skins and metals helped me envision a clear scenario and dramaturgy for their integration: physical effort against light easiness, damaged expressivity against measured rigidness, blind attempts at coordination against ruthless simplicity. An encounter with an ending determined from the start. Desperate half-songs drowning in a sea of resonance.

José del Avellanal Carreño (2022)

Instrumentation

2 skins players (4 tom-toms, 2 bongos each) - playing with soft mallets and hands
3 vibraphone players - playing with hands and prepared vibrators (see performance notes)

The intended stage plan for the work is as follows:



Variations on the stage plan, if needed, are possible as long as the following requirements are met:

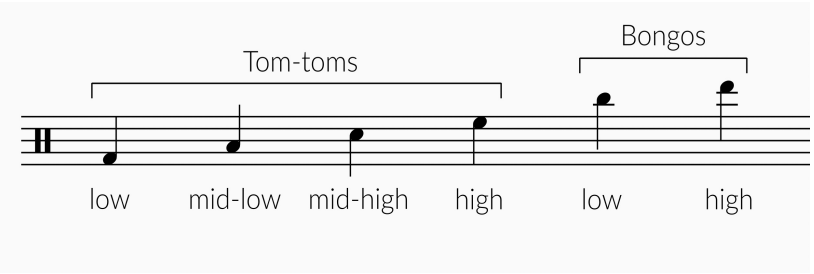
Both skin players should stand turning their back towards the other players, without any visual contact with anybody.

Vib. 1 should be able to have a clear view of both skin players.

Vib. 2 should have a clear view of S. 2

Vib. 3 should have a clear view of S. 1

Legend (skins):



*Both players' bongos should be muted with a piece of cloth or fabric inside the drums. The muting should be enough to dampen the usually bright sound of the instrument, but should not kill the sound completely since the opposite player will need to hear the hit in order to coordinate their entries.

Additional notation (tom-toms):

: hit top skin of drum (ord.) : hit bottom skin of drum : hit body of drum : mute top skin of drum : mute bottom skin of drum

+ : keep mallet/hand pressed against skin of drum after hit

Performance Notes

The piece makes active use of the imbalanced dynamics between the performers as a result of their positioning on stage. Due to this, the structure of the work is coordinated through a series of visual and auditive cues, and is therefore necessary that all performers play from the general score in order to follow the other players' parts.

The coordination of specific events in the score is indicated through the use of a vertical dashed line connecting them. Additionally, specific sections include subdivision in bars in order to facilitate the performance of fragments in which subgroups of players are to be coordinated throughout.

↑ : An upwards arrow on top of a rest indicates the player to prepare the following hit by giving an upbeat cue. The nature of these gesture is at points performative, but it's also used as a visual cue for the vibraphone players to coordinate hits amongst themselves or with any of the skins players.

For the vibraphone players, when playing semiquavers with fingers the approach to coordinated events should be fairly relaxed, not playing the indicated event immediately but waiting until the next downbeat introduce a change. During these sections, keeping a stable sense of pulse should always be the priority!

// : A caesura sign is used to indicate that a specific part does not continue playing in measured time, and that the performance of the following event will be indicated by a cue.

Performance Notes (2)

There is a section in which the skins players are asked to play with one mallet and one empty hand. As a general rule, unless explicitely indicated, toms are to always be played with mallet and bongos are always to be played with hand. In cases in which this rule is not followed this will be indicated through the markings H (hand) and M (mallet).

In the final section of the work, the vibraphone players make use of prepared vibrators (2 per player), which are used to generate new sound on the vibraphone. The vibrators should be small (bullet) and prepared with 2-3 layers of smooth tape around the whole body (everything but the tip). For any questions regarding preparation do not hesitate to contact the composer.

The vibrators are used in 2 ways during the piece:

: first use, the vibrator is placed in horizontal position in the space between the two indicated notes and left to vibrate, producing a ringing drone. The tape preparation should help make the sound of this drone as smooth and with as little noise as possible.

: second use, grab the vibrator with the hand and place the tip in the space between the two indicated notes, with the aim to produce a much harsher and noisier sound. After a while, feel free to slowly explore other areas of the vibraphone and try out new notes and registers.

Depending on the characteristics of the performance venue, the instruments may be amplified.

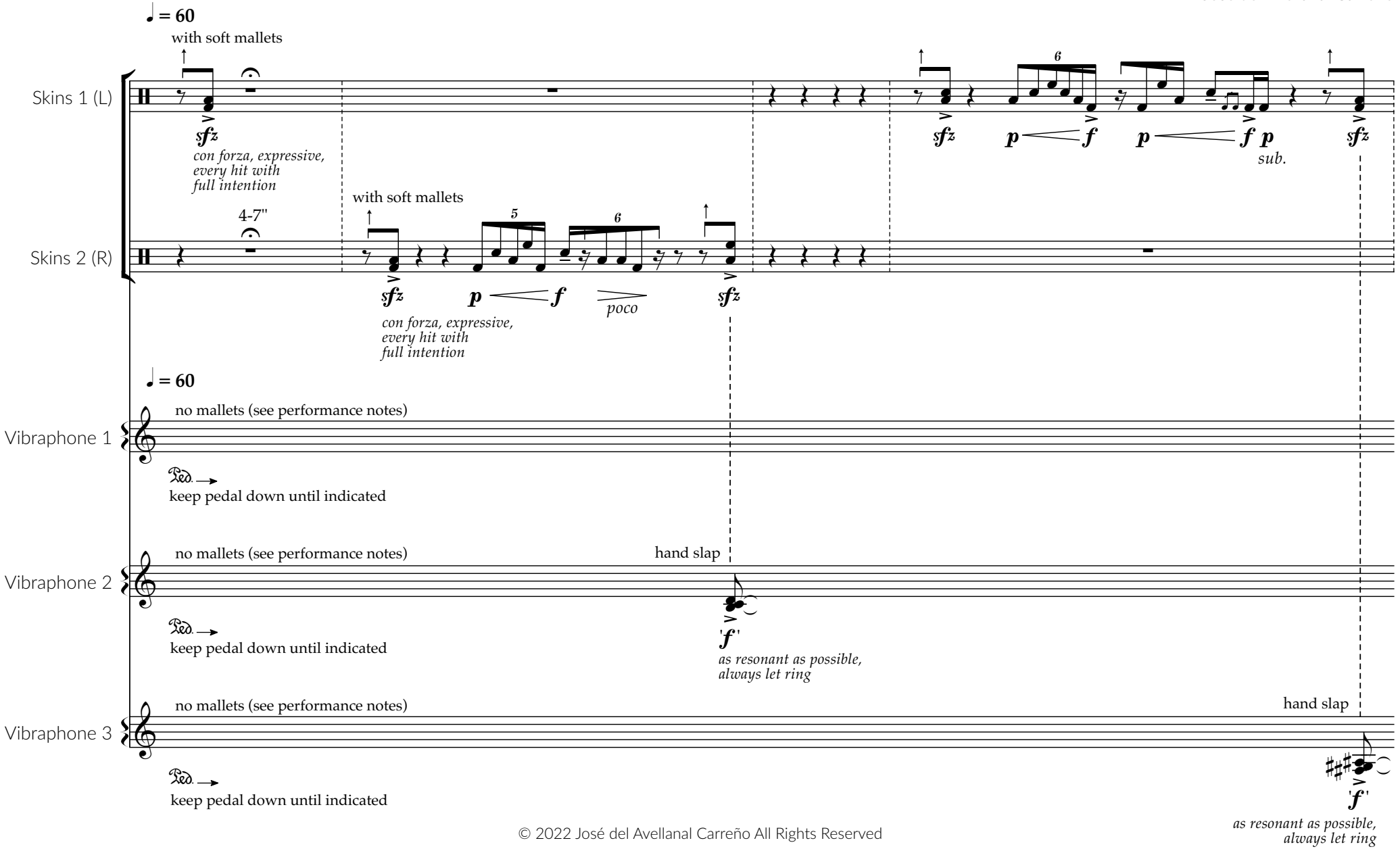
Duration: c. 8'

Written in 2022 for Les Percussions de Strasbourg, to be premiered as part of the IYCA Ticino 2022

For Les Percussions de Strasbourg

Canto

José del Avellanal Carreño



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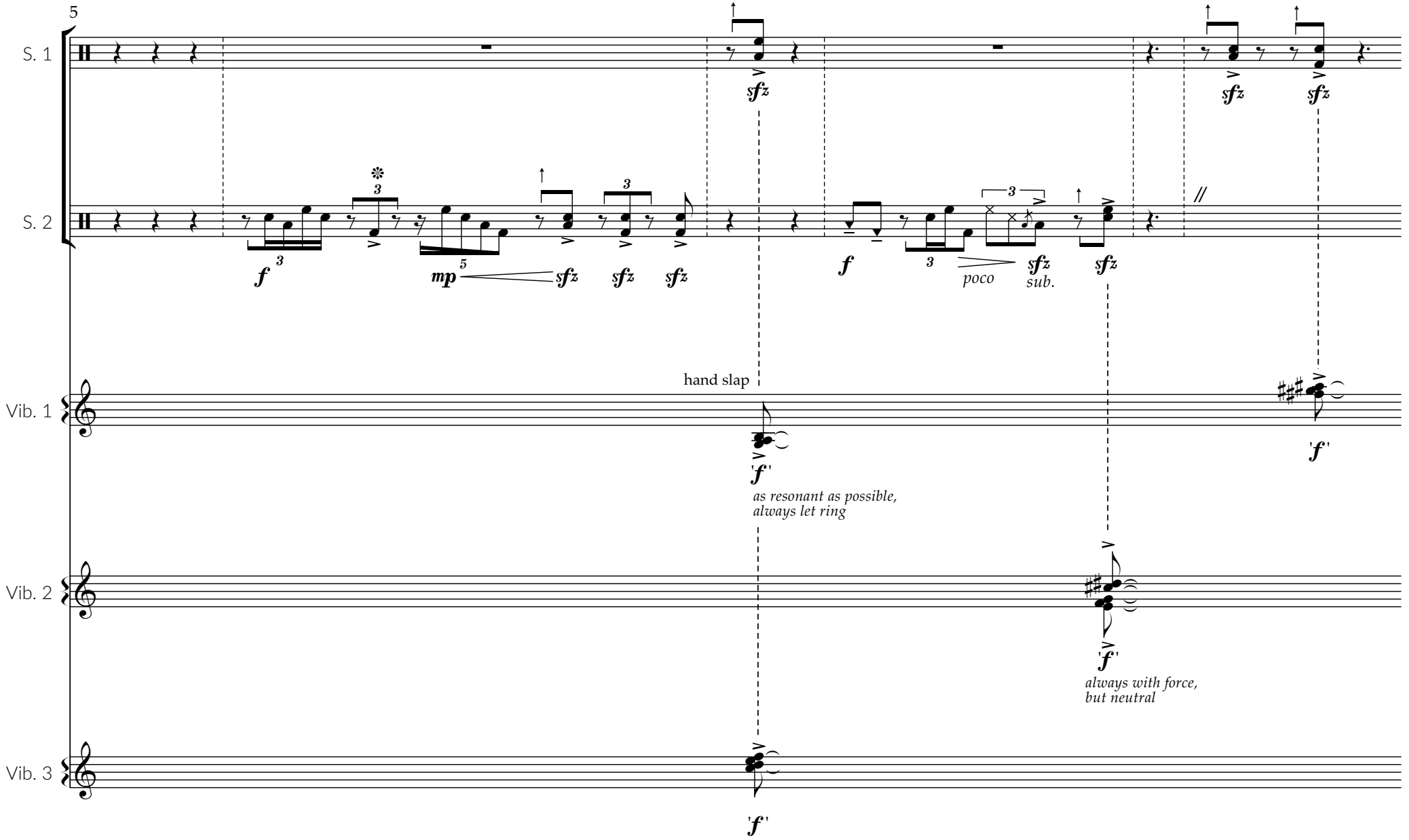
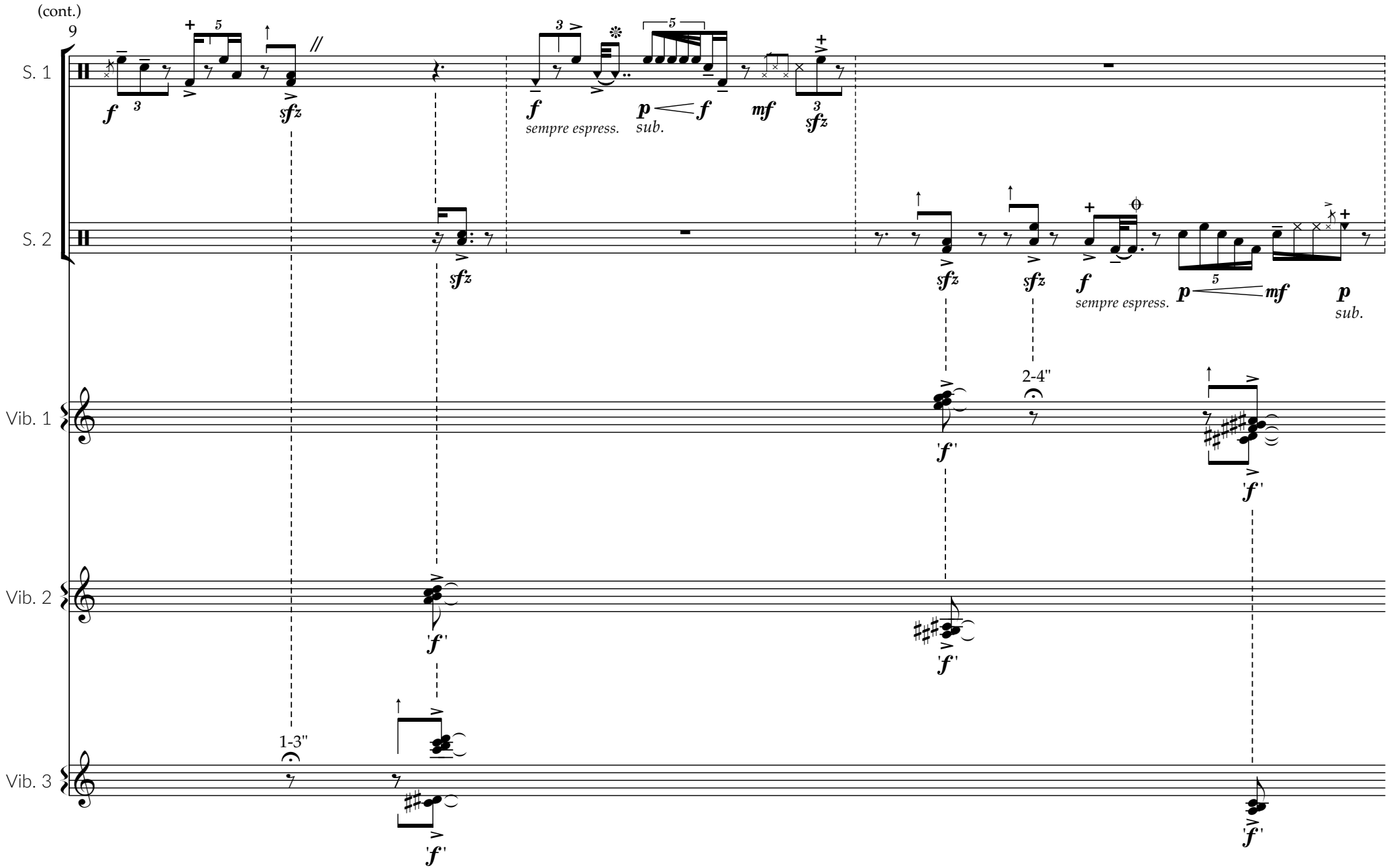
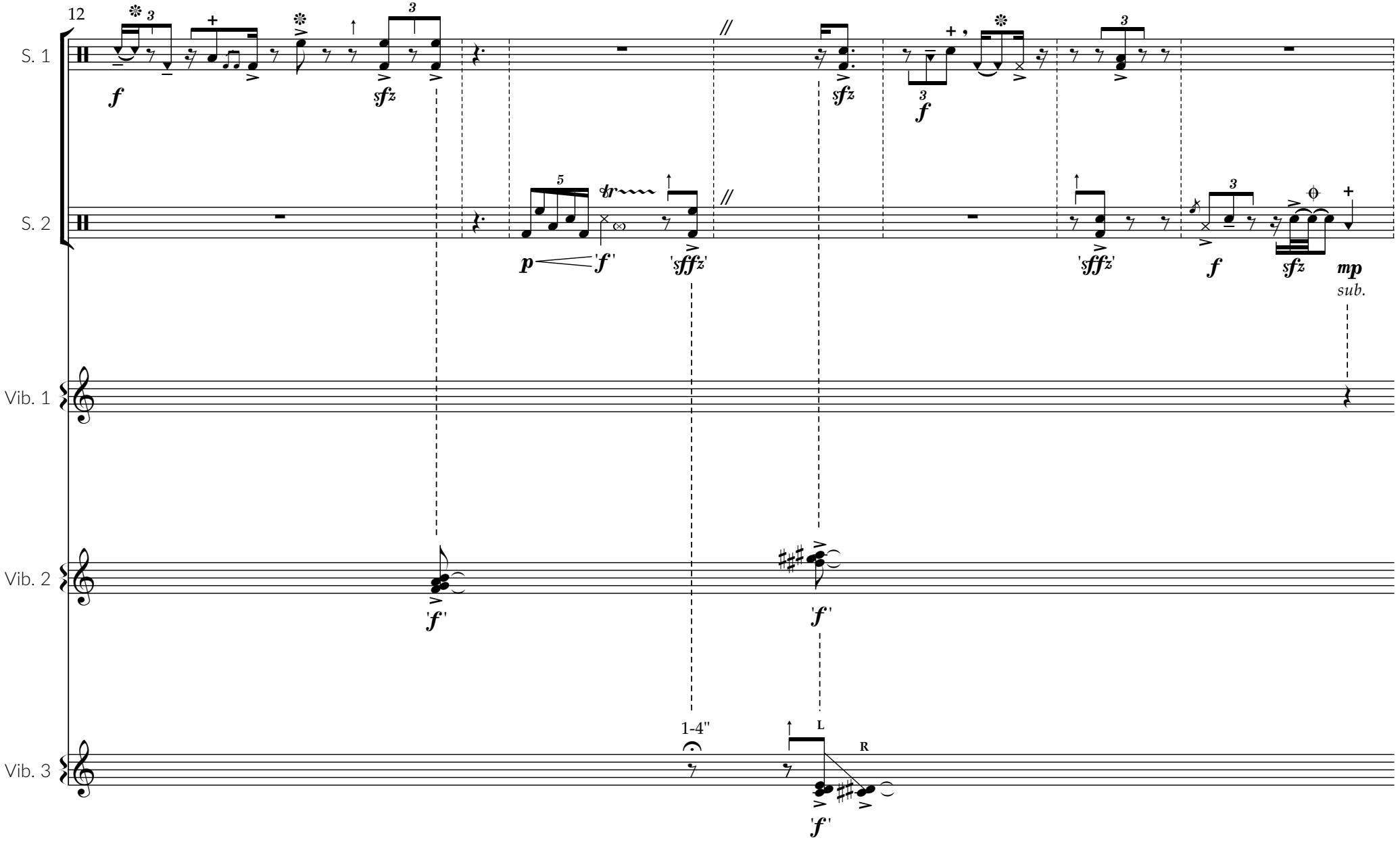
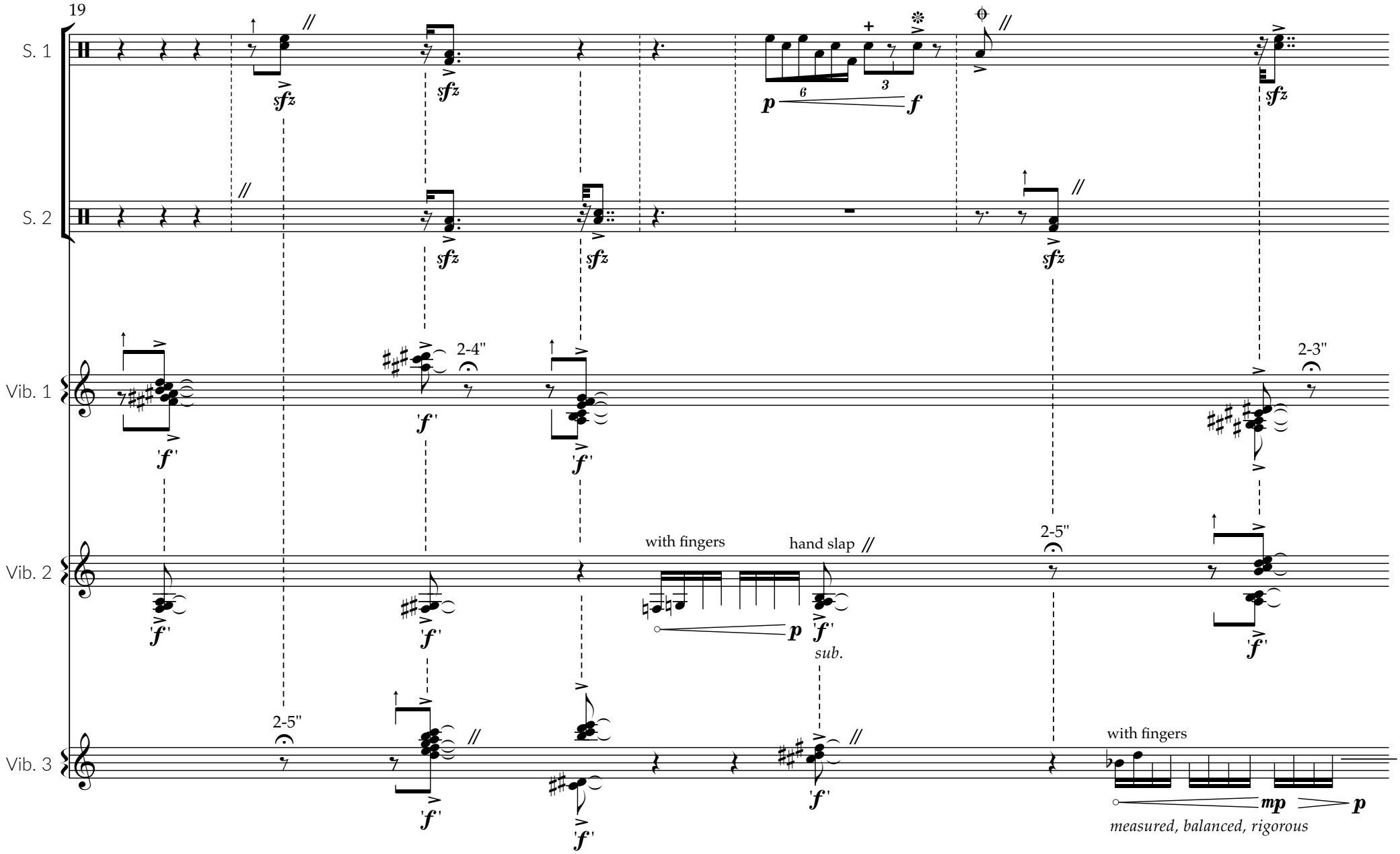
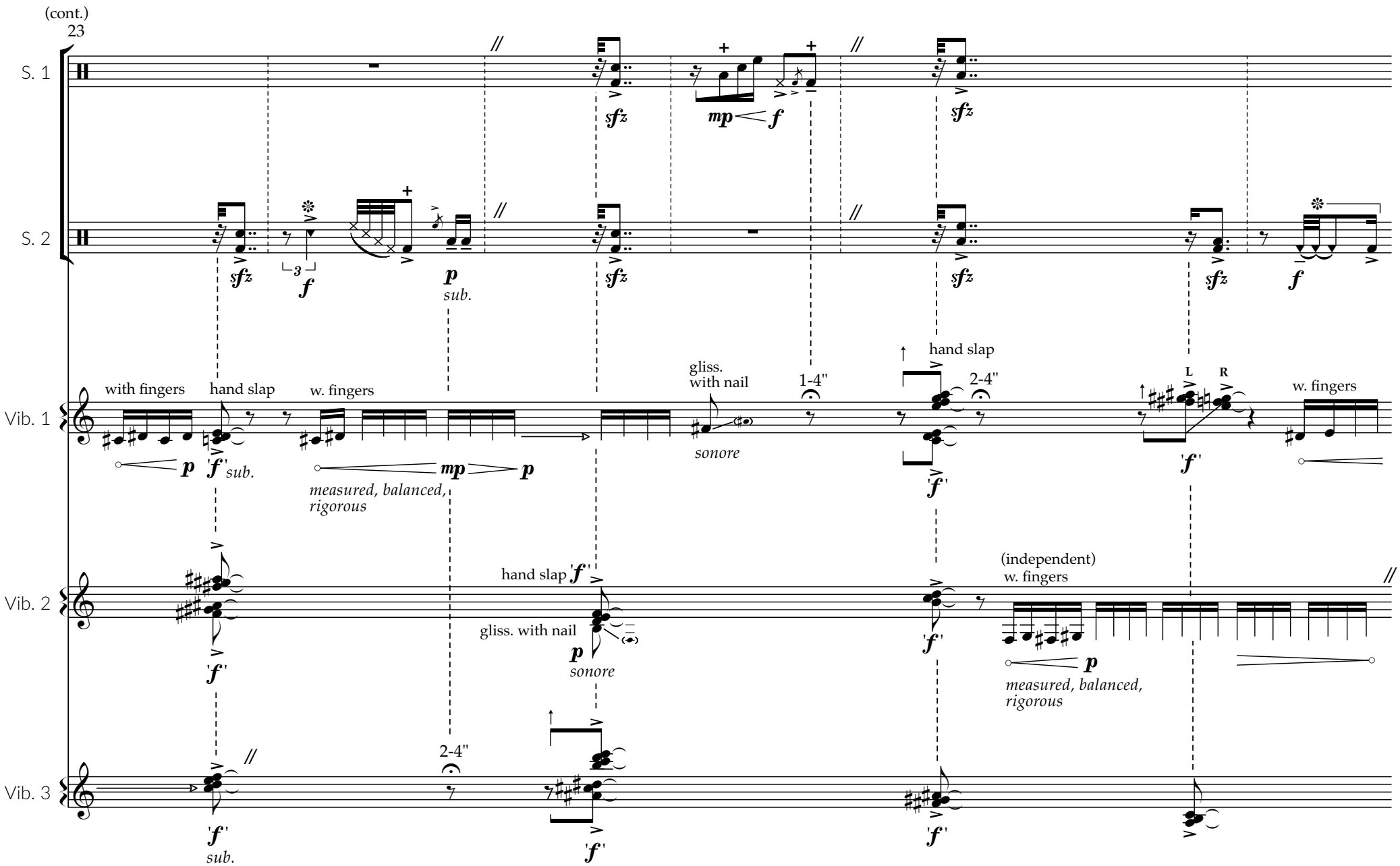
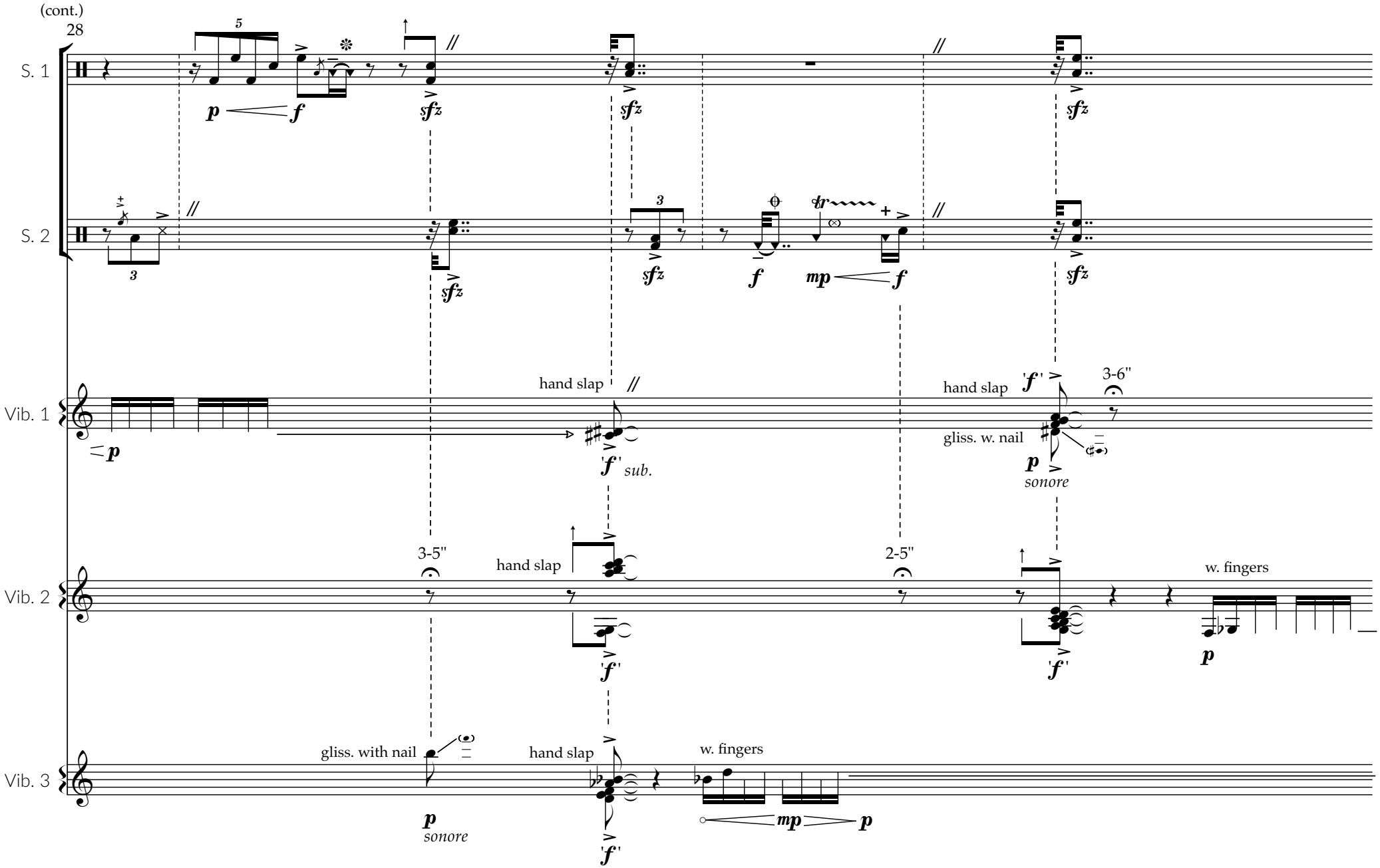

5
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
hand slap
as resonant as possible,
always let ring
poco
sub.
always with force,
but neutral

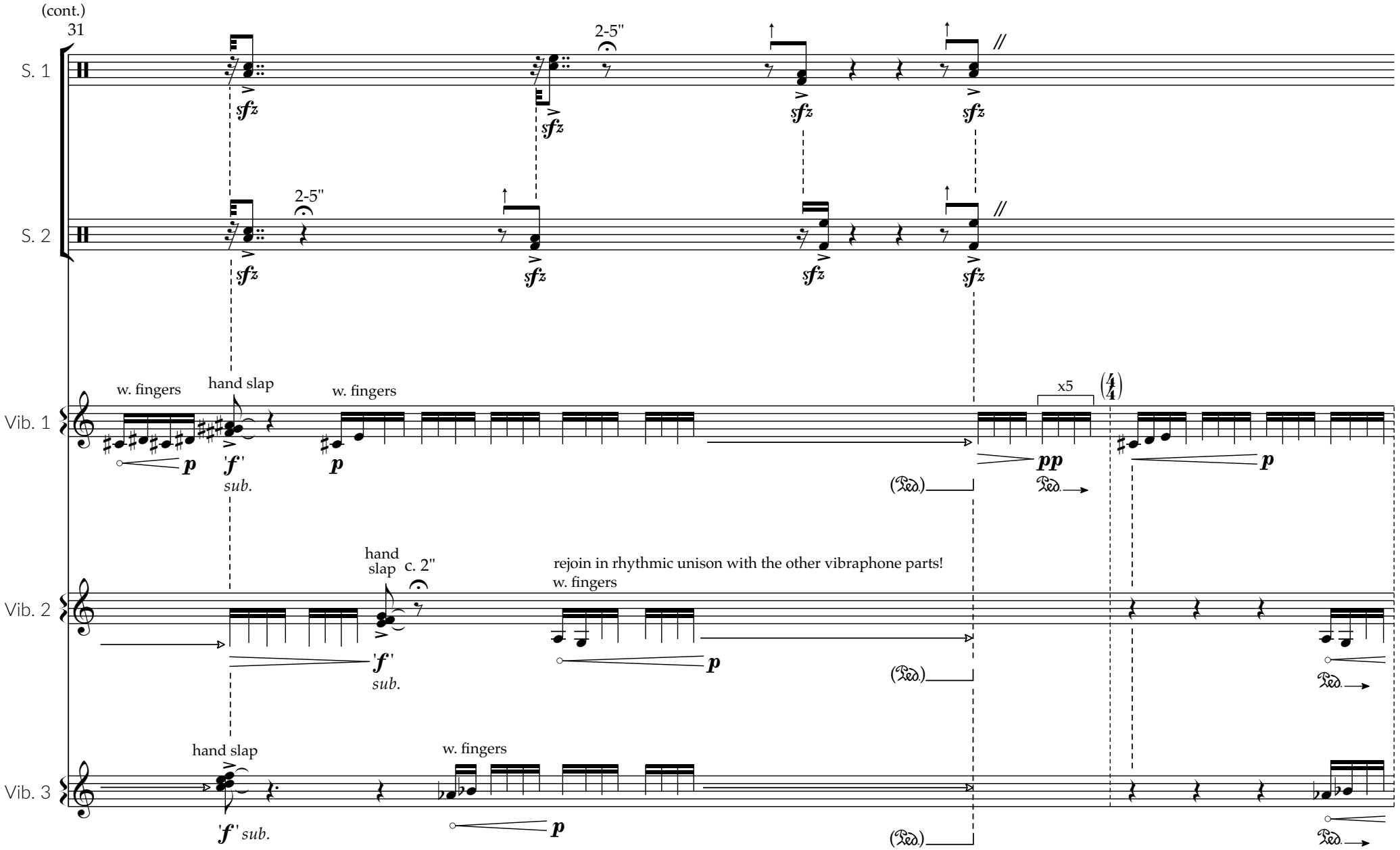

(cont.)
9
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
f
sempre espress.
p
sub.
mf
sfz
1-3"
2-4"

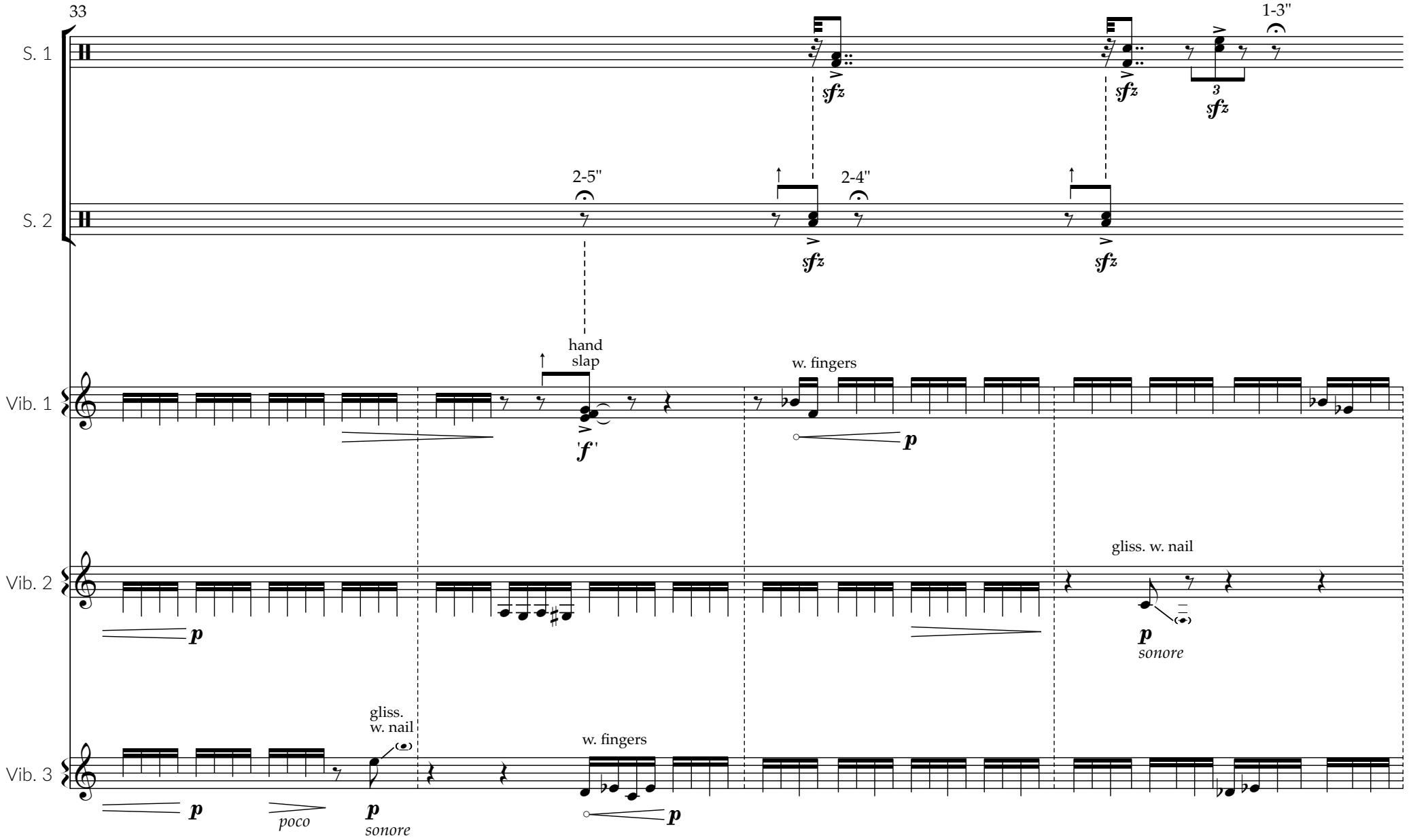

12
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
f
sfz
p
'f'
'sfffz'
mp
sub.
1-4"
L
R

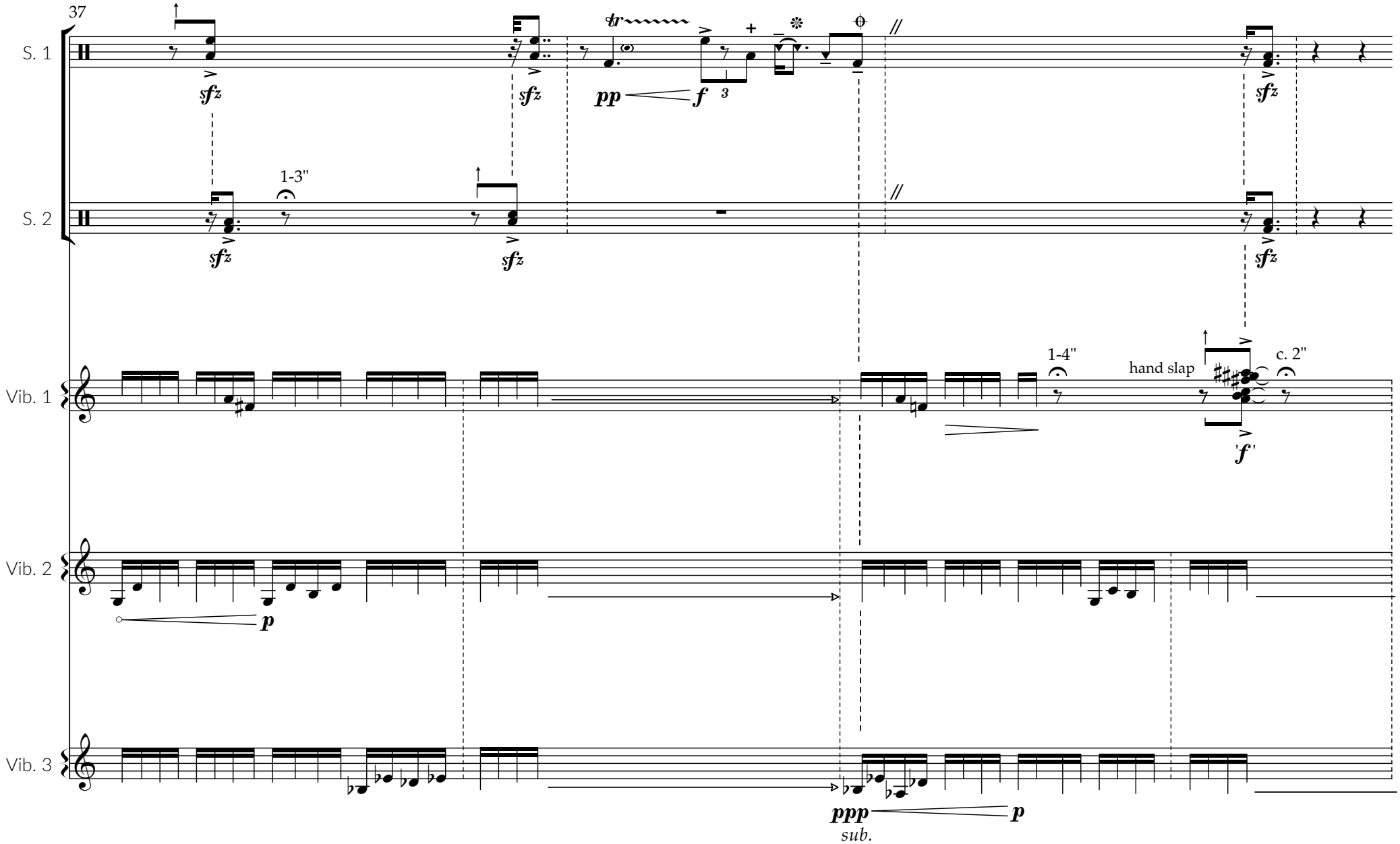

19
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
sfz
p
f
2-4"
2-3"
2-5"
with fingers
hand slap
sub.
mp
measured, balanced, rigorous

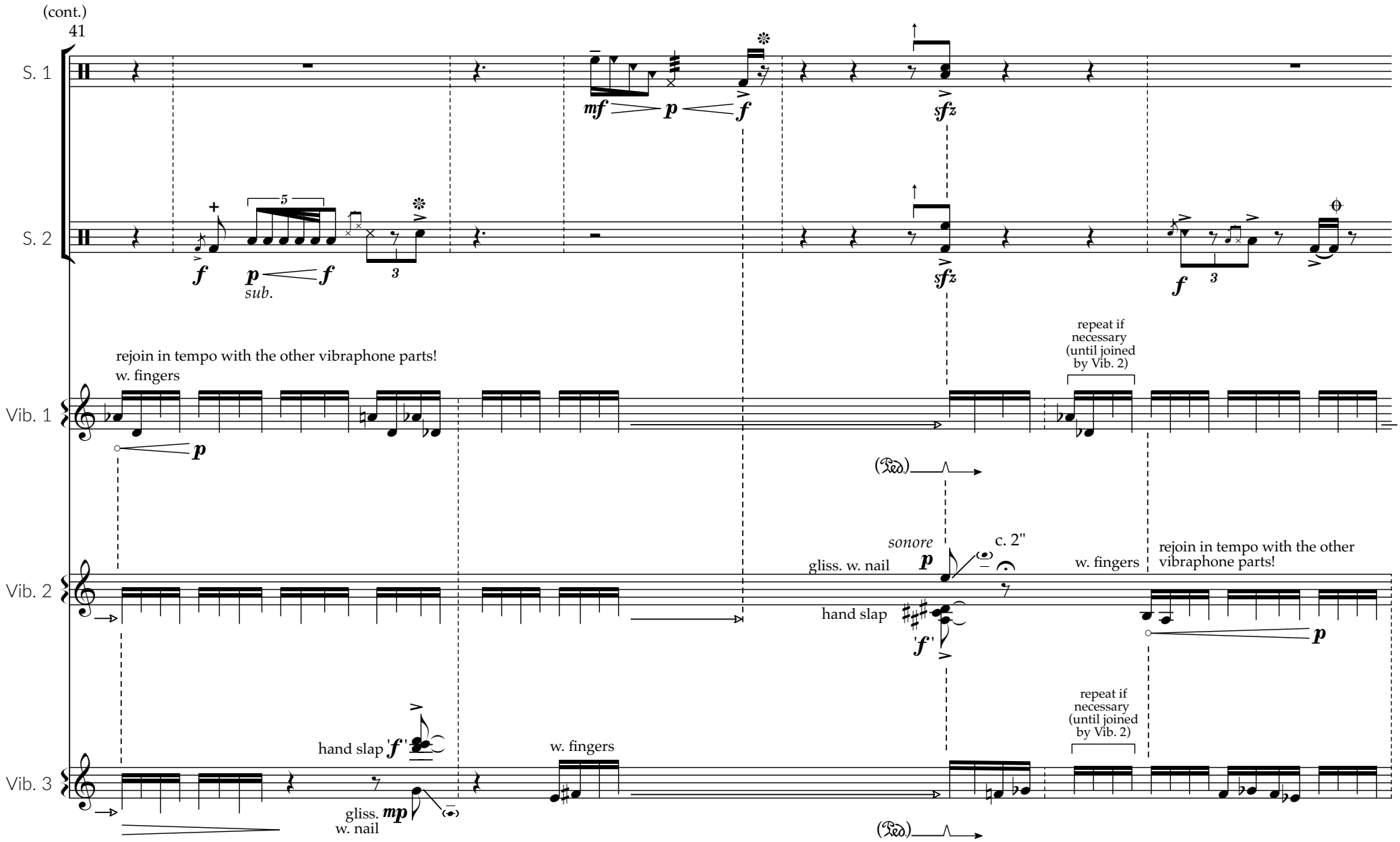

(cont.)
23
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
sfz
mp
f
p
sub.
3
with fingers
hand slap
w. fingers
gliss.
with nail
sonore
1-4"
2-4"
hand slap
L
R
measured, balanced,
rigorous
(independent)
w. fingers
gliss. with nail

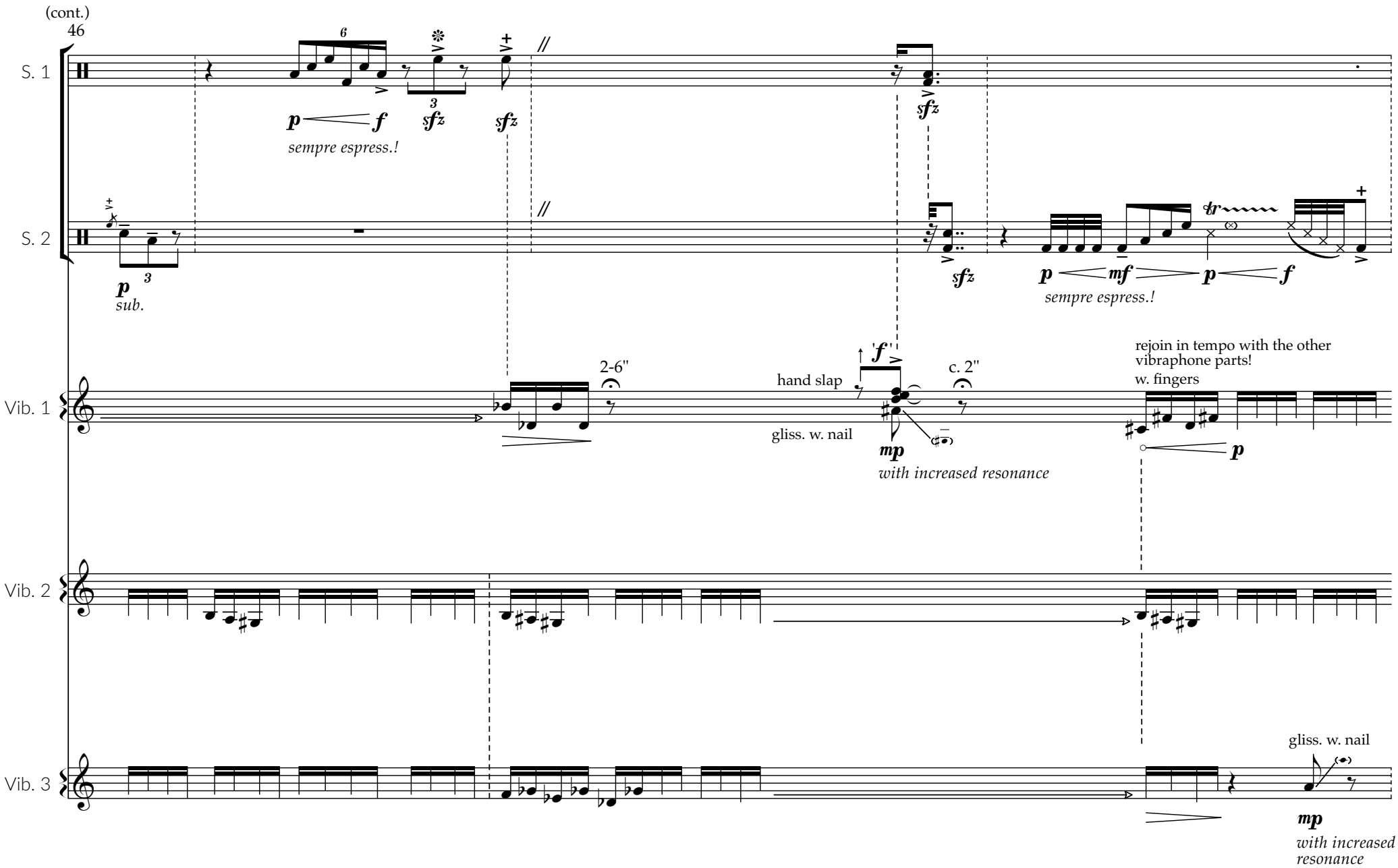

(cont.)
28
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
hand slap
sub.
3-6"
gliss. w. nail
sonore
3-5"
2-5"
w. fingers
gliss. with nail

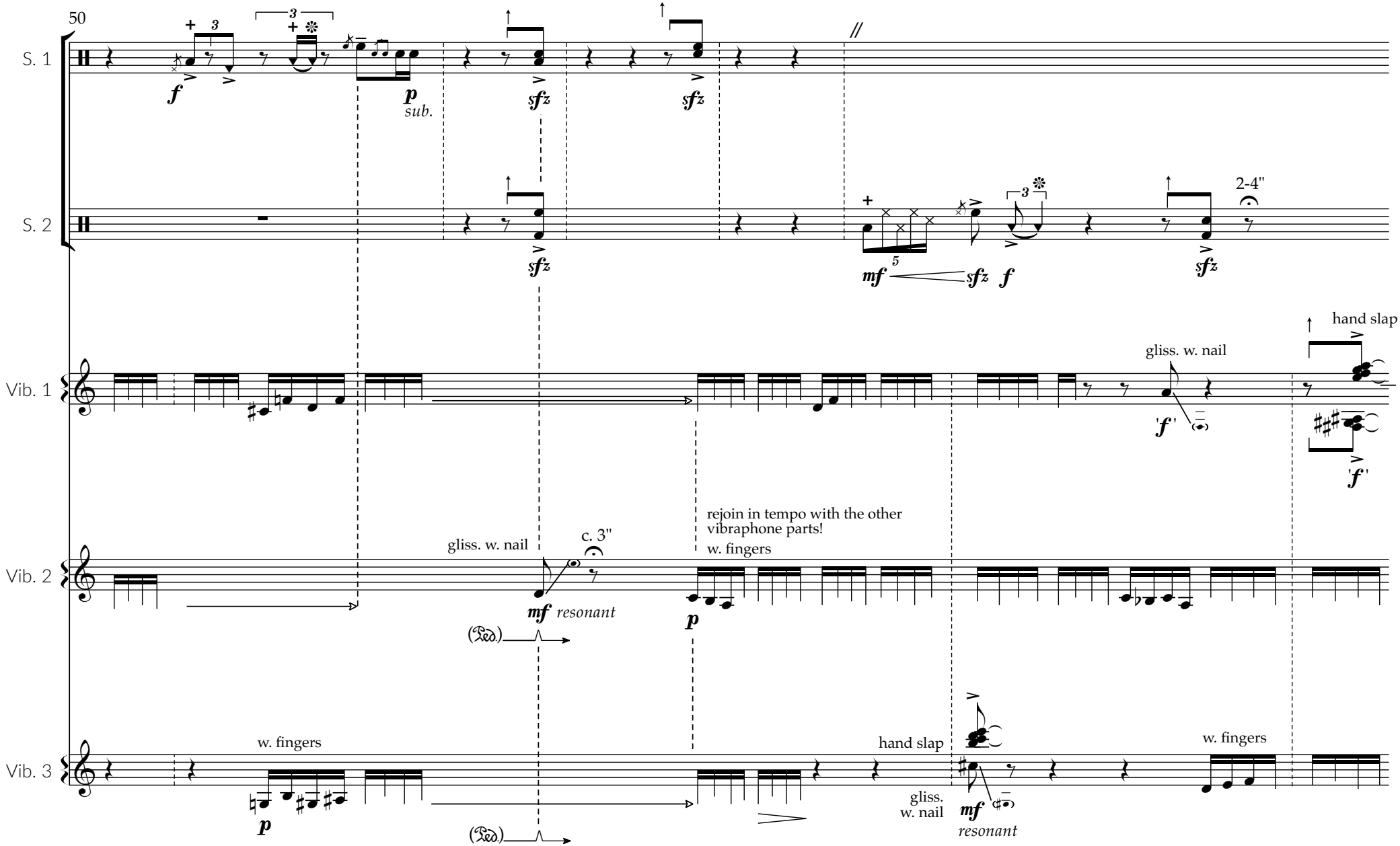

(cont.)
31
S. 1
S. 2
2-5"
2-5"
sfz
Vib. 1
w. fingers
hand slap
w. fingers
p
'f'
sub.
p
x5
pp
p
Vib. 2
hand slap
c. 2"
rejoin in rhythmic unison with the other vibraphone parts!
w. fingers
'f'
sub.
p
Vib. 3
hand slap
w. fingers
'f' sub.
p
Ped.

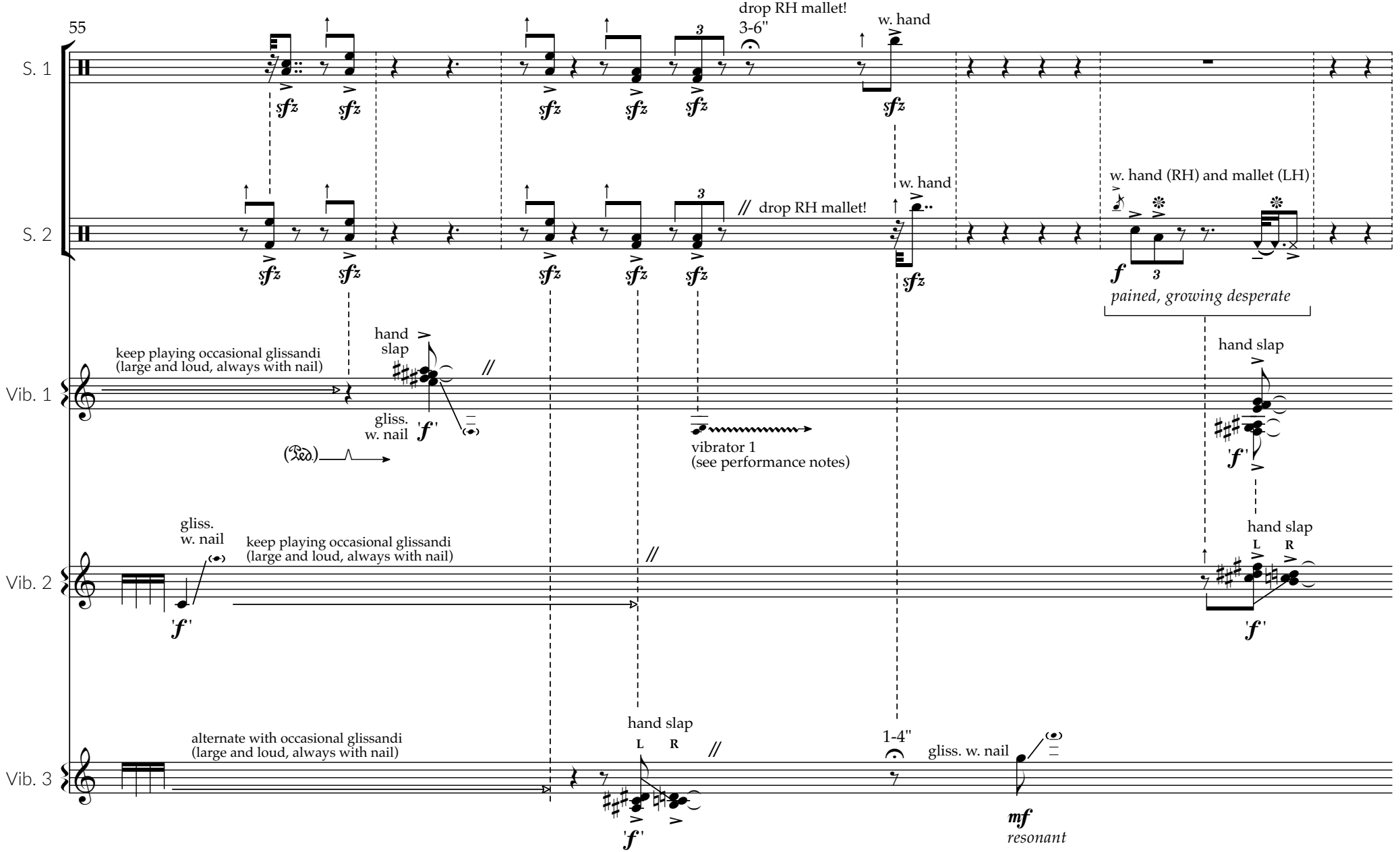

33
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
2-5"
2-4"
1-3"
sfz
hand
slap
'f'
w. fingers
p
gliss. w. nail
sonore
gliss.
w. nail
poco

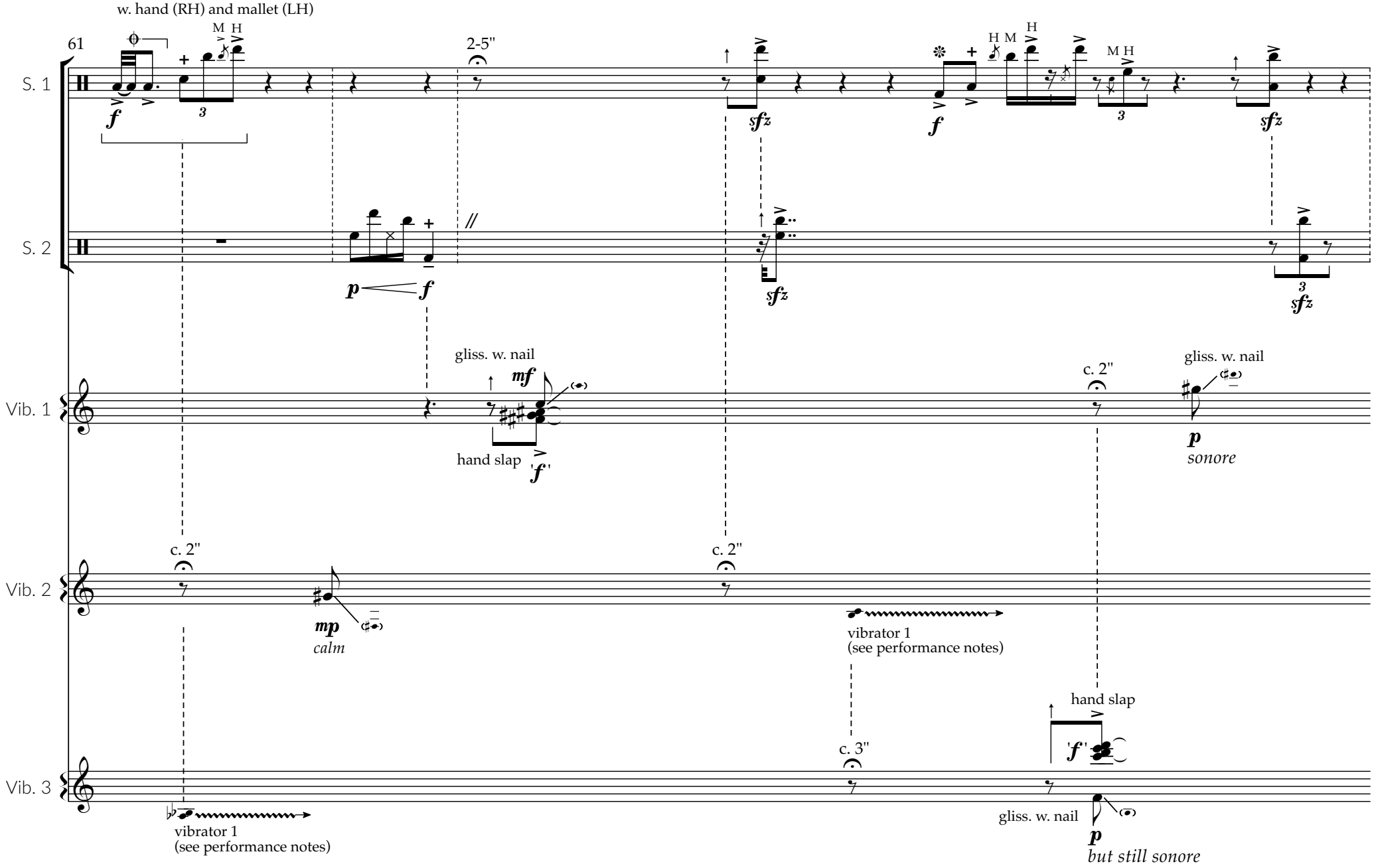

37
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
sfz
pp
f
3
1-3"
1-4"
hand slap
c. 2"
'f'
p
ppp
sub.
p

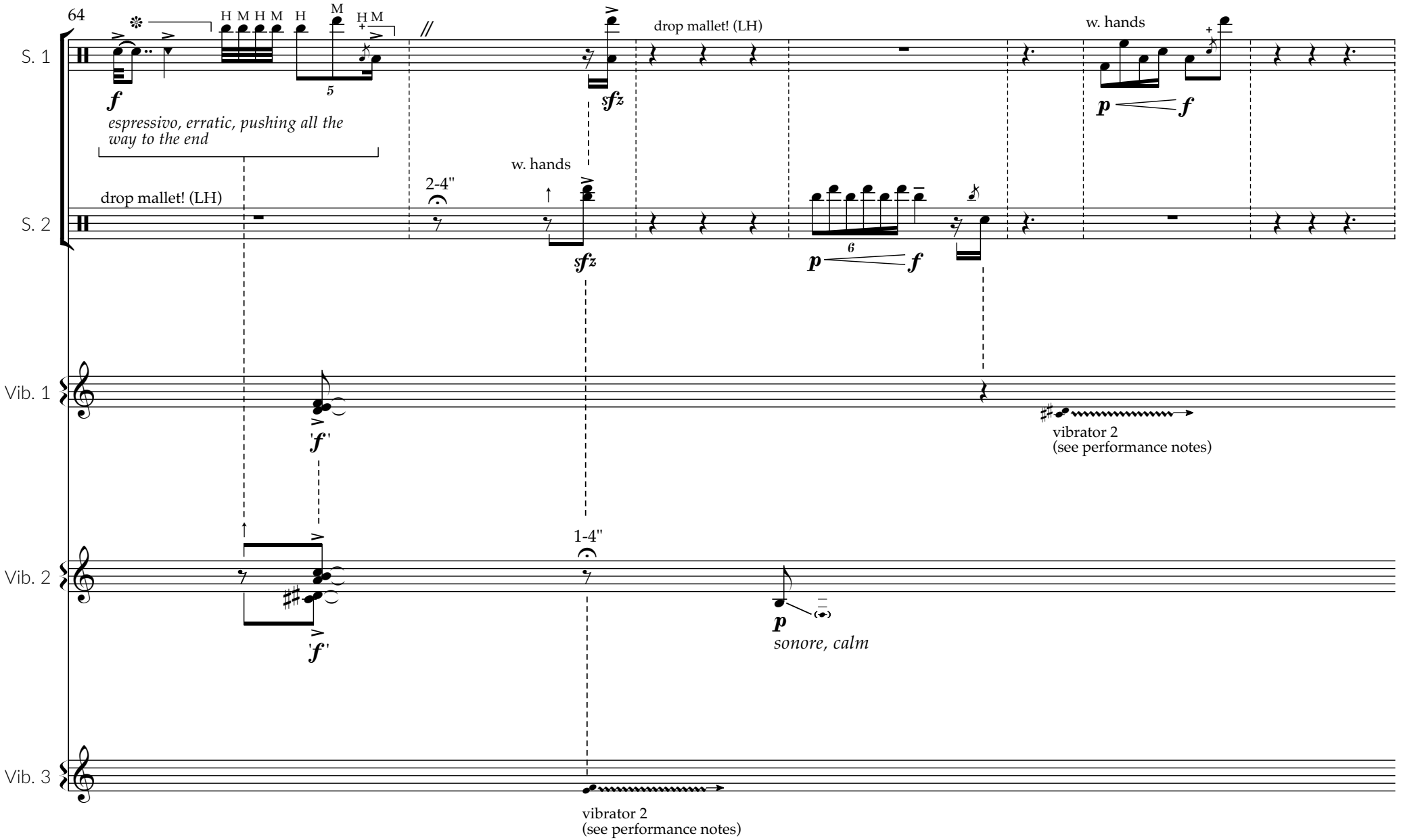

(cont.)
41
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
mf
p
f
sfz
sub.
rejoin in tempo with the other vibraphone parts!
w. fingers
repeat if necessary (until joined by Vib. 2)
(Ped)
sonore
c. 2"
gliss. w. nail
hand slap
mp
gliss. w. nail

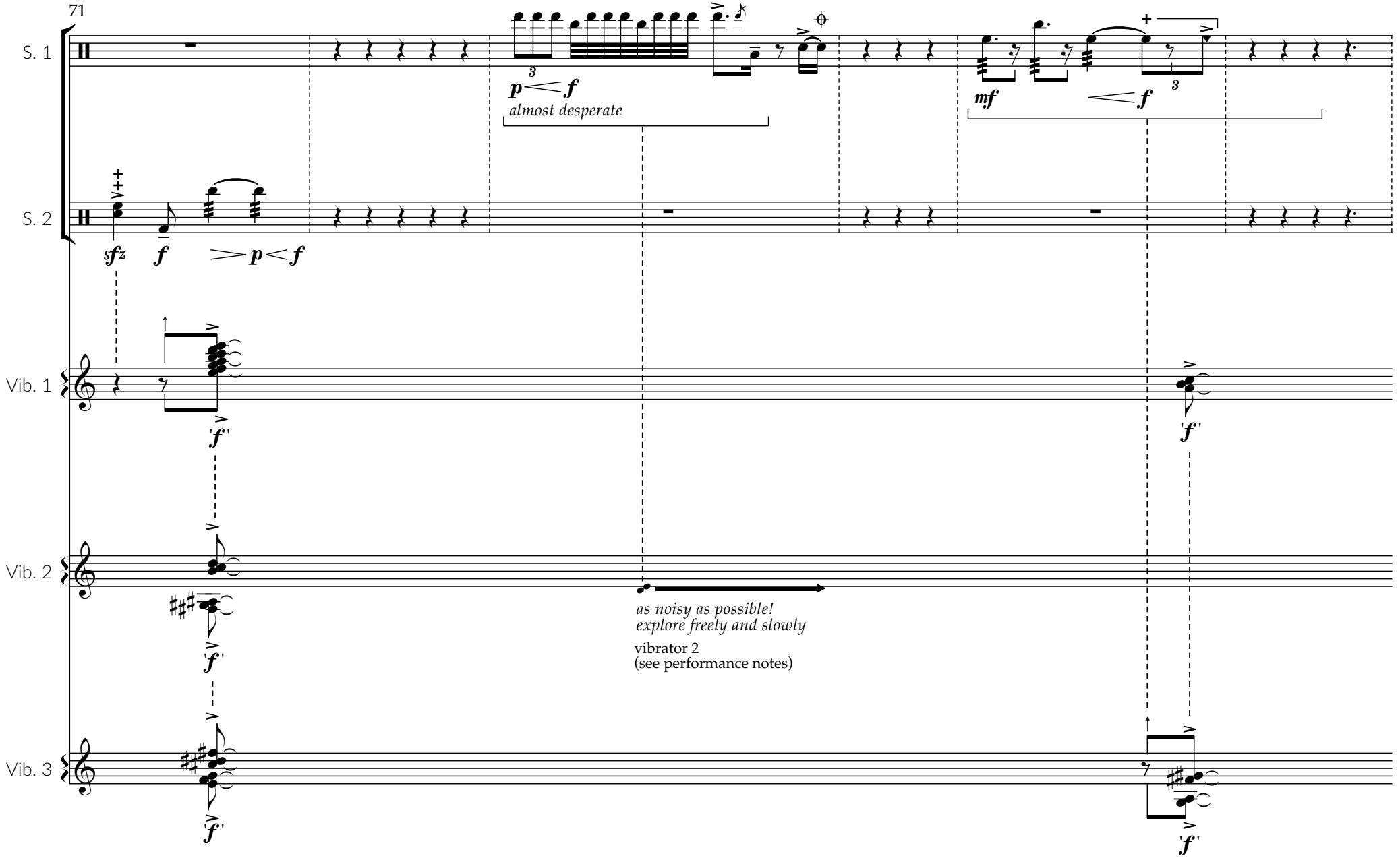

(cont.)
46
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
p
f
sempre espress.!
sfz
p
sub.
mf
p
f
sempre espress.!
2-6"
c. 2"
hand slap
'f'
gliss. w. nail
mp
with increased resonance
rejoin in tempo with the other vibraphone parts!
w. fingers
p
gliss. w. nail
mp
with increased resonance

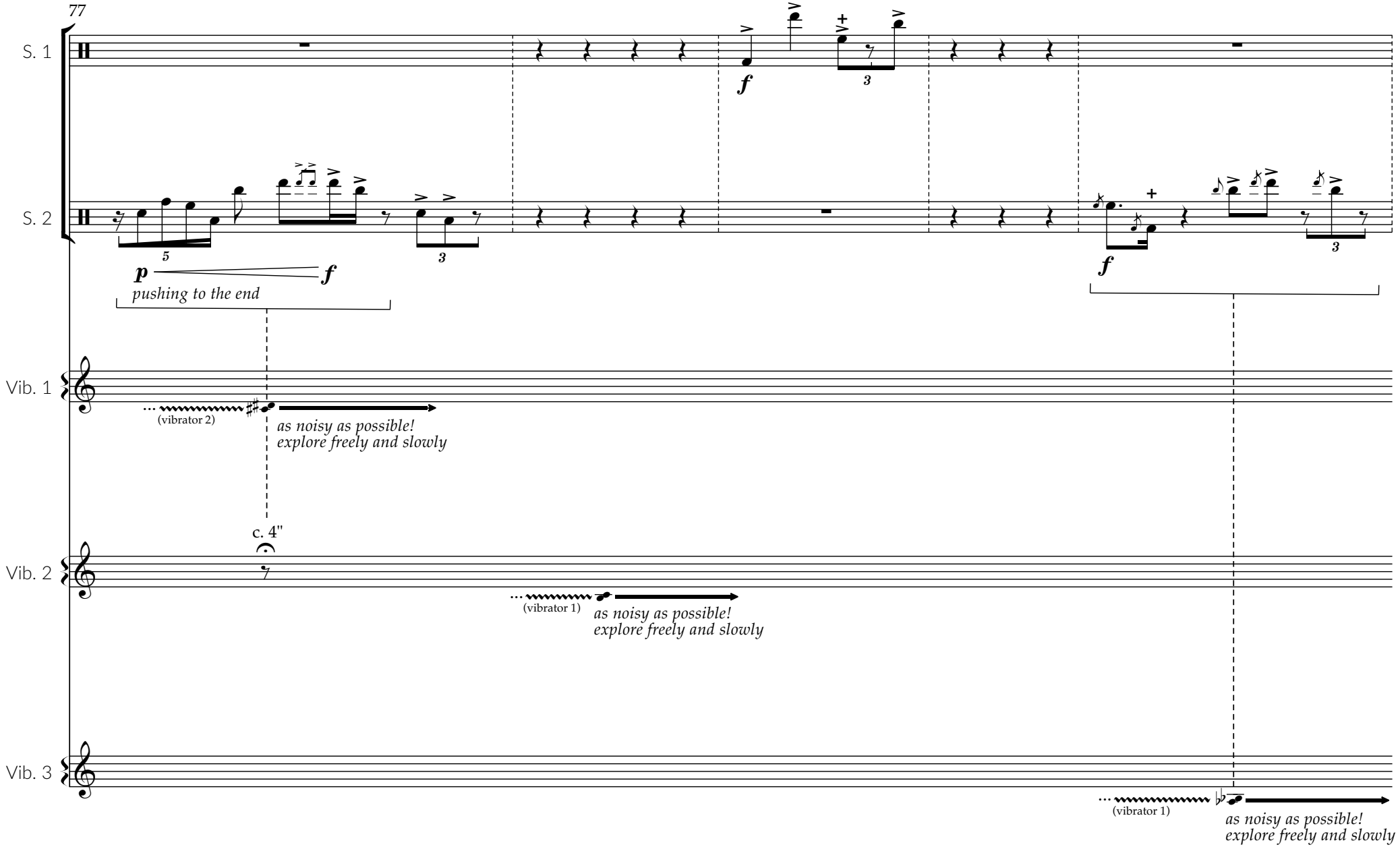

50
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
f
p
sub.
sfz
mf
2-4"
gliss. w. nail
hand slap
'f'
c. 3"
mf resonant
rejoin in tempo with the other vibraphone parts!
w. fingers
(Ped.)
gliss. w. nail
resonant

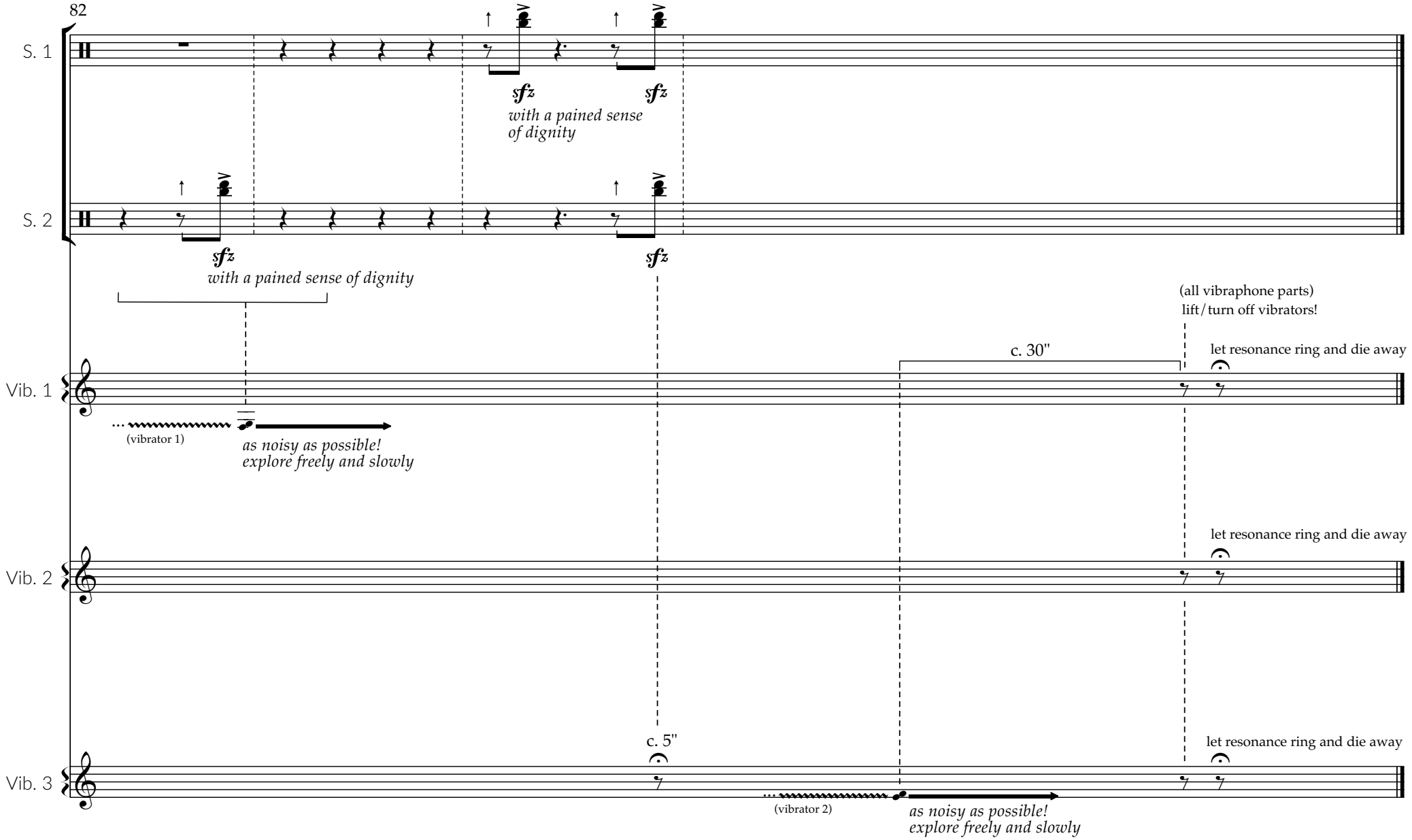

55
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
drop RH mallet!
3-6"
w. hand
// drop RH mallet!
w. hand
w. hand (RH) and mallet (LH)
pained, growing desperate
keep playing occasional glissandi
(large and loud, always with nail)
hand slap
gliss.
w. nail
vibrator 1
(see performance notes)
hand slap
gliss.
w. nail
keep playing occasional glissandi
(large and loud, always with nail)
hand slap
L R
alternate with occasional glissandi
(large and loud, always with nail)
hand slap
L R
1-4"
gliss. w. nail
mf
resonant


w. hand (RH) and mallet (LH)
61
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
2-5"
gliss. w. nail
hand slap
c. 2"
c. 3"
sonore
calm
vibrator 1
(see performance notes)
but still sonore


64
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
H M H M H
M
H M
f
espressivo, erratic, pushing all the way to the end
drop mallet! (LH)
2-4"
w. hands
sfz
drop mallet! (LH)
w. hands
p
f
vibrator 2
(see performance notes)
1-4"
p
sonore, calm
vibrator 2
(see performance notes)


71
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
sfz
f
p
f
p
f
almost desperate
mf
f
'f'
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly
vibrator 2
(see performance notes)


77
S. 1
S. 2
Vib. 1
Vib. 2
Vib. 3
p
f
pushing to the end
(vibrator 2)
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly
c. 4"
(vibrator 1)
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly
(vibrator 1)
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly


82
S. 1
S. 2
sfz
with a pained sense of dignity
sfz
sfz
with a pained sense of dignity
sfz
(all vibraphone parts)
lift/turn off vibrators!
Vib. 1
c. 30"
let resonance ring and die away
(vibrator 1)
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly
Vib. 2
let resonance ring and die away
Vib. 3
c. 5"
let resonance ring and die away
(vibrator 2)
as noisy as possible!
explore freely and slowly