Part One:
Getting Started with your Cymbals

Fig. 1

How to wear your cymbals

Holding your cymbals is like putting on a glove: one goes on the left hand, one on the right - and if you mess that up, things are going to become much more difficult and complicated than they need to be. Figure 1 shows a proper marching cymbal strap. Figure 2 shows a left-handed cymbal on the left, and a right-handed cymbal on the right. How can you tell? The way that the straps lay will indicate which cymbal belongs on which hand. As you can see, one piece of the strap lies over the other. The side of the strap that lies on top indicates the hand that you wear the cymbal.

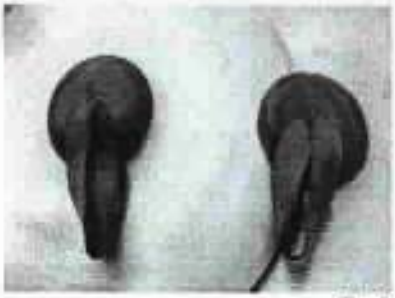


Fig. 2

To wear your cymbals properly, slide your hand through the strap, as it would do so naturally so that the point where the straps meet and enter the cymbal rest between your index finger and thumb (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3

What happens if the cymbal straps do not fit quite right? Are they too tight? Too loose? If so, you will have to tighten or loosen the knot that holds the cymbal straps on the cymbals.

How to tie a cymbal knot

Figure 4 shows what a proper cymbal knot looks like. To begin, it is important to know that the way that the four strips used to tie the knot are inserted through the cymbal is very important in making sure that the cymbal can be played on the appropriate hand when you are finished. You do not want two left-handed knots because then you would have two left-handed cymbals, and no one has two left hands! It is an easy fix though; just make sure that the straps lie correctly on the exterior face of the cymbal, and insert the strips through so that you do not lose the position of the straps.

Fig. 4

To tie the knot, take one strip and place it at a 90* angle over the adjacent strip. Fold the second strip over the first and then repeat the 90* angle over the third. Repeat. When you fold the fourth strip over the third, insert it through the hole made by folding the first strip over the second. Fig. 5-9 illustrates this step by step. Tighten the knot to fit your hand and pull from the strap side to make sure that the knot holds. Fig. 10 shows the proper tension for a hand: it should be comfortable but snug.

Fig. 5-9

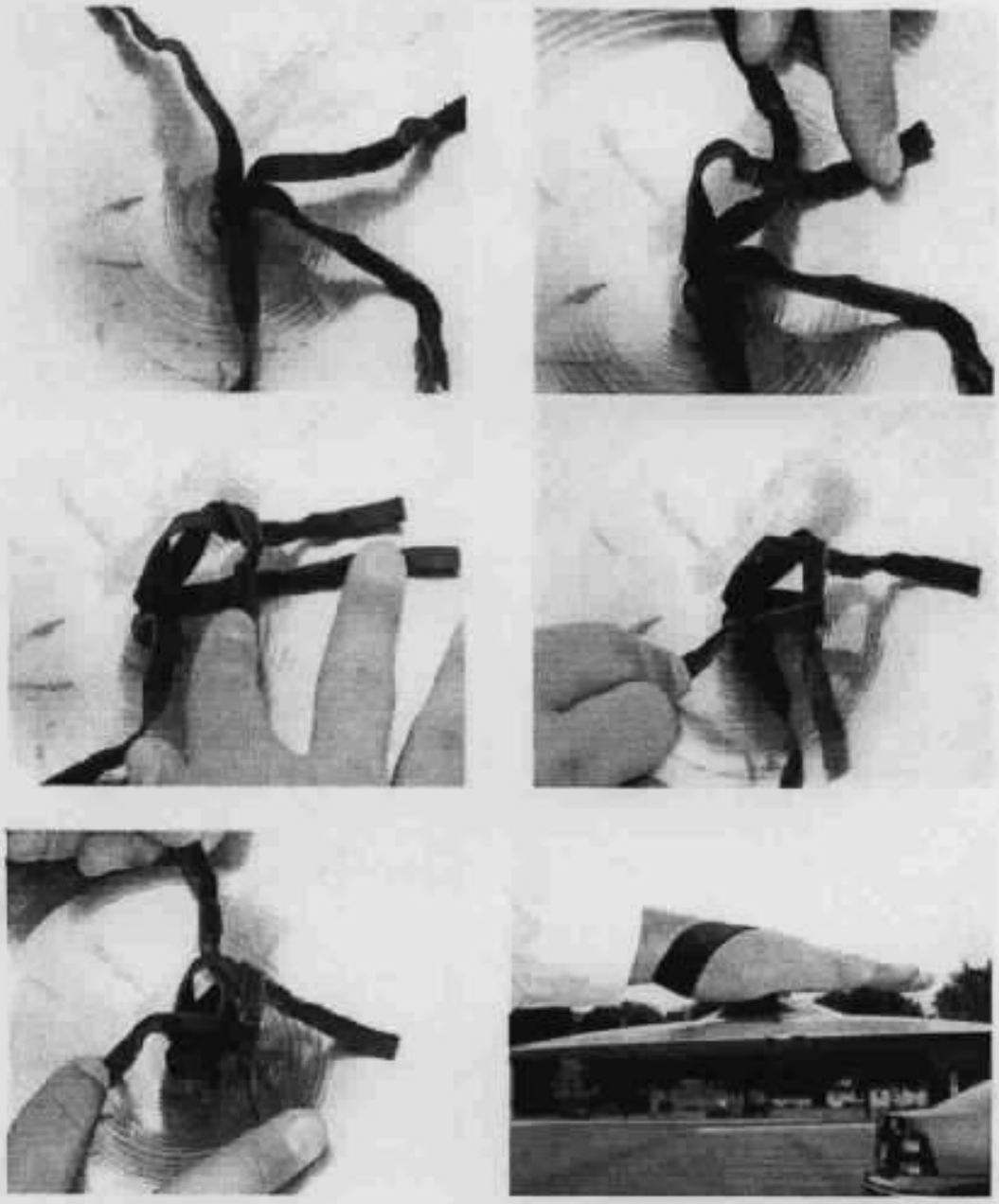


Fig. 10

Ready, Set...

When in rehearsal, there are three "positions" to consider. One position is called "set" position, and the another is called "parade rest." There will be downtime between segments of rehearsal that you will not necessarily be in set position or parade rest, yet you will need to be ready to move into a position at a moment's notice.

Fig. 11

Parade rest can be seen in Figure 11. The cymbals rest against your front, the right cymbal tucked into the left. Although the any resting position is common, it is quite possible that your instructor will ask you to take a parade rest for visual purposes.

Set position is initiated by your instructor before the tap-off. It is a quick, snappy movement that demonstrates that you are prepared to move into a position for playing. When moving from parade rest to set, it is as if someone is tightening back two strings attached to your elbows. Figure 12 is set.

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Notice Figure 13 is an example of when the set position is too high. The cymbals should NOT be resting over your hips like a shield. This is drumline, not a medieval battle.

Playing Positions

Part Three: You've Got the Music

Now that you know how to hold your cymbals, you can start the exciting part: playing! Within the three different playing positions, there are several different sounds you can make. Each sound has its own distinct features both aurally and aesthetically, so it is important that you execute them appropriately. The most important thing to remember when playing: the RIGHT HAND INITIATES THE SOUND.

"Clamp" The left hand remains stationary while the right hand pulls the edge of the right cymbal furthest from your body up and then firmly pushes it back down into the left cymbal without letting the edges closest to your body come apart. Think of the cymbals as a giant Pac Man munching along.

"Sizzle" The left hand remains stationary. The right hand moves the cymbal across the other horizontally, down and away, while gently touching the cymbals against each other creating a buzzing or "sizzzzzzzzzling" sound.

"Suck" The left hand remains stationary. With the cymbals touching, the right hands moves horizontally down and away without making a sound, but then the right cymbal quickly pulls back together with the left cymbal to create a vacuum between the two as though the cymbals were "sucked" together. It is a bit tricky, so do not worry if you need to practice a bit before you get it.

"Crash" The most used cymbal sound, once again, the left hand remains stationary while the right hand pulls back towards the torso before initiating the sound. The "crash" is made through pushing the right cymbal forward and away from the body while striking the left cymbal. After the sound has been made, the right cymbal crisply snaps back into playing position.

"Ping" The left hand remains stationary while the right hand taps the edge of the cymbal against the tip of the other. Be careful though! The movement is not from the wrist, but comes from the elbow using the forearm as a fulcrum.

"Scrape" The left hand remains stationary while the tip of the right cymbal begins in the center of the left cymbal. The tip then pulls across the bottom edge of the left cymbal while the right hand once again uses the 90° motion from the elbow and the forearm to create a "scraping" sound as the two pull across each other.

Clamp Position

Here, the cymbals are tilted slightly to the left, with the left cymbal touching the forearm and the edge of both cymbals touching the belly. In this position, the "clamps," and "hi-hats" are played.

Second Position

In this position, the cymbals are no longer touching the belly, and are shifted slightly higher. They are at roughly a 30* angle. This position is used to play a "sizzle," "sizzle-suck," "choke," and "suck," "smash," "gong," "crash."

First Position

Cymbals are at roughly a 70* angle. However, the arms are now at head height. This places the cymbals at face level. You should be able to see between the cymbals like a sight, though the cymbals are barely separated. This position is used to play a "crash," "choke," "sizzle," "sizzle-suck," "smash," "ping," and "scrape" are played in this position.

Part Four: Looking the Part

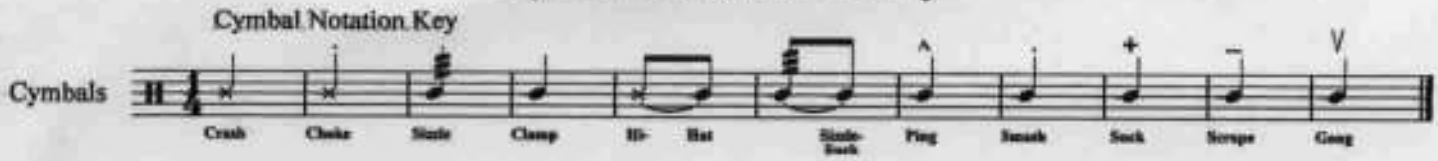
All for One

Just like the rest of the drumline, it is important that all the members of the cymbal line look uniform. Uniformity helps create a professional, clean look. Plus, being a member of the cymbal line: it is up to you to make the very first visual impression. In order to create uniformity in the line, it is important that all the cymbals are held at the same angles and in the correct position (see Part Two). In addition, it is important that the cymbals are uniform vertically as well. Below, you see two different sets of individuals together. In one set, two are similar in height. In the other, two are different in height. This requires compensation on both players' parts to make sure that their cymbals are at uniform height from the ground, and not according to individual members of the line.

Oooooh, Aaaaaaaaah!

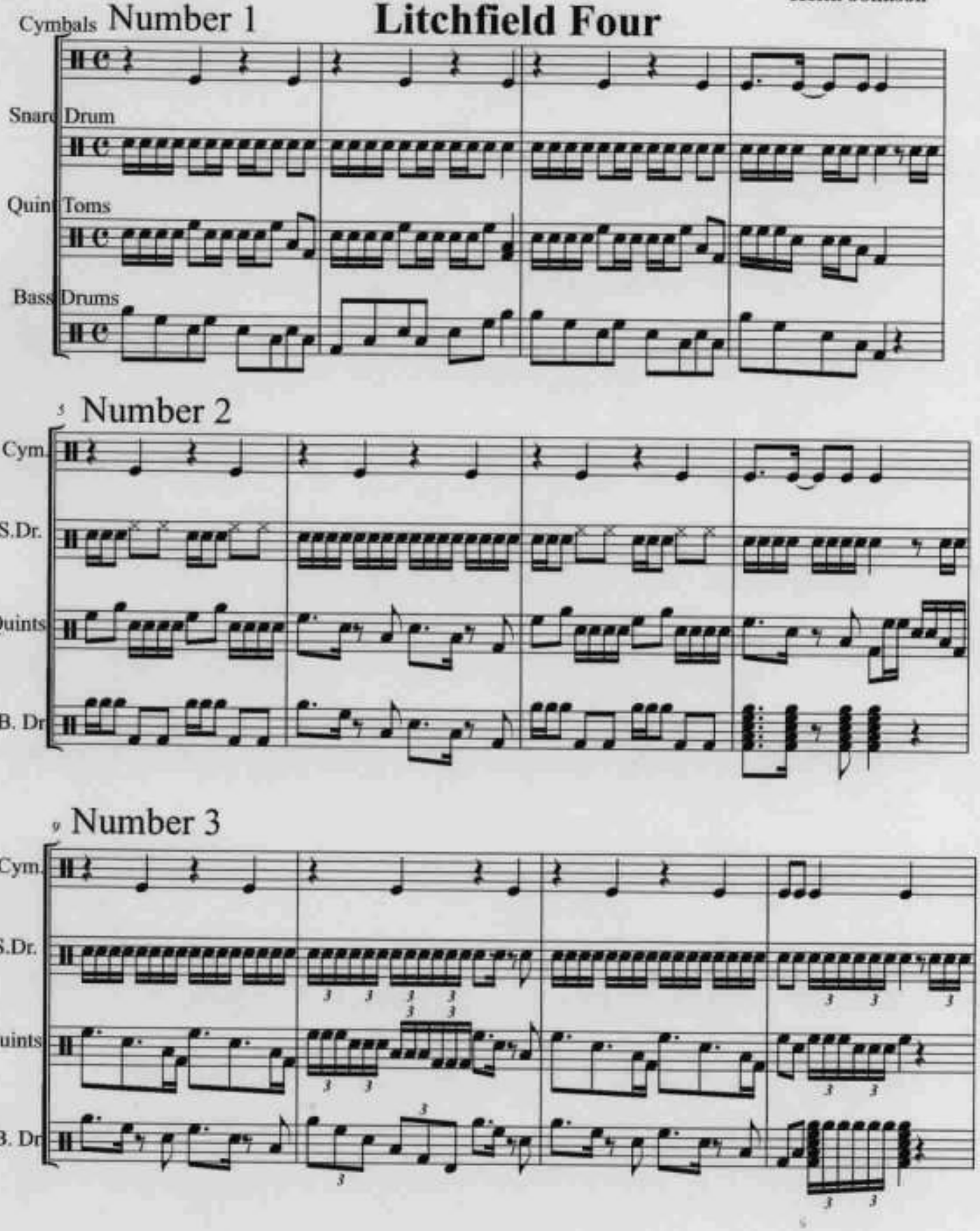
Also, part of the exciting part of playing cymbals are the sweet visuals you get to portray wielding giant, shiny, round pieces of metal. People like shiny things. People like visuals. So, therefore, people LOVE cymbals with visuals. Below are a few examples.

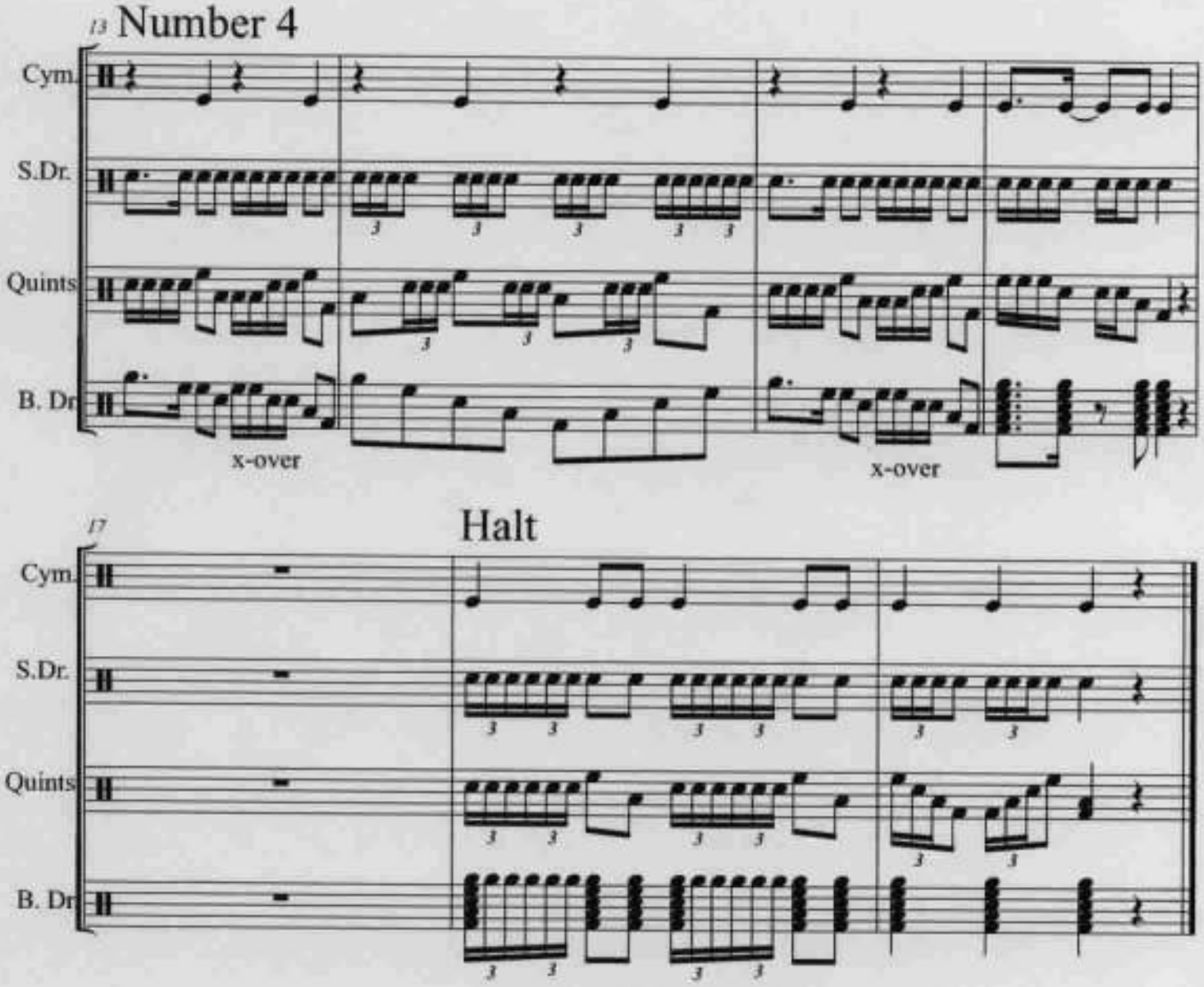
Cymbal Notation Key



Keith Johnson

Litchfield Four

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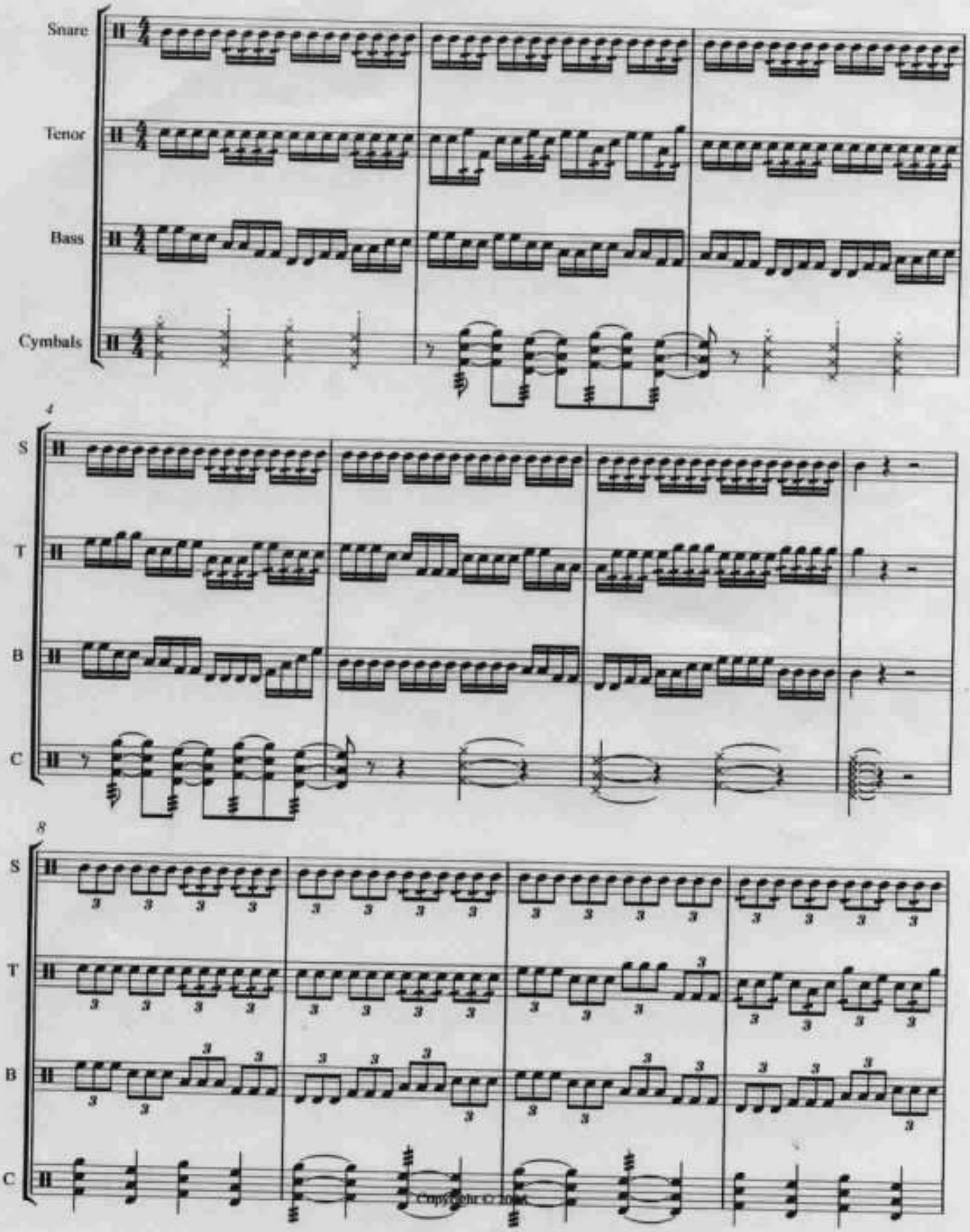

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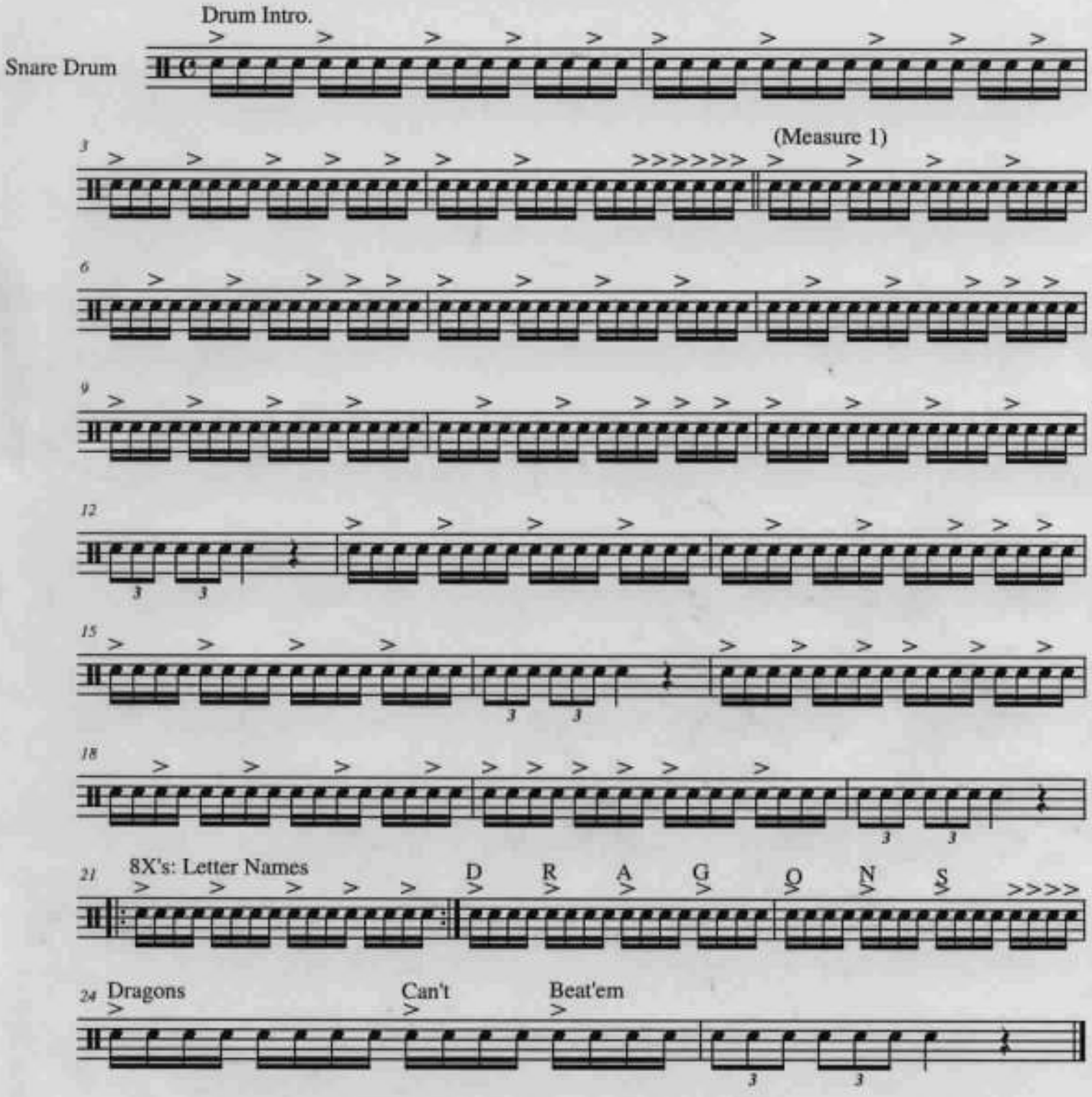
Litchfield Rouser



Eight On a Hand

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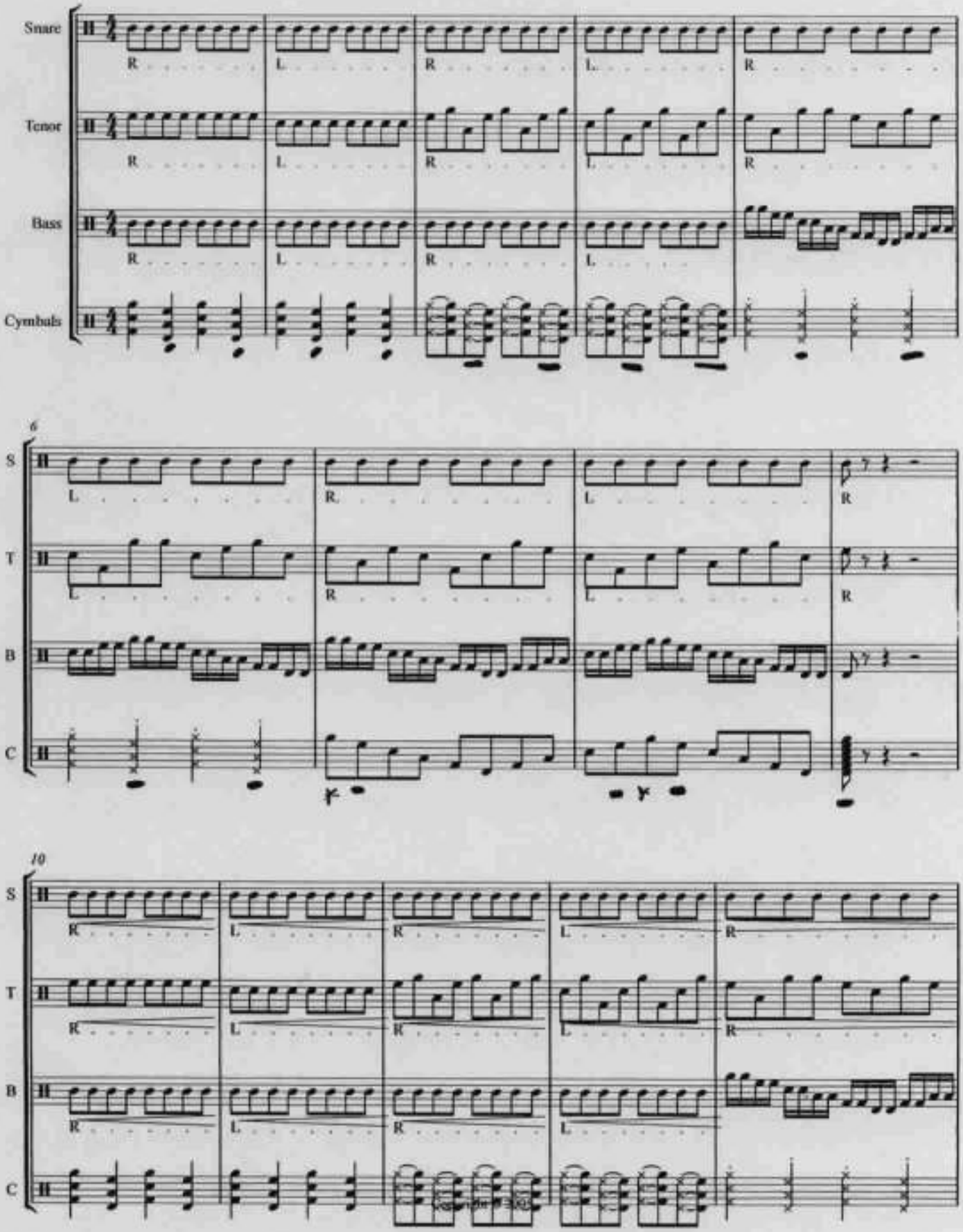

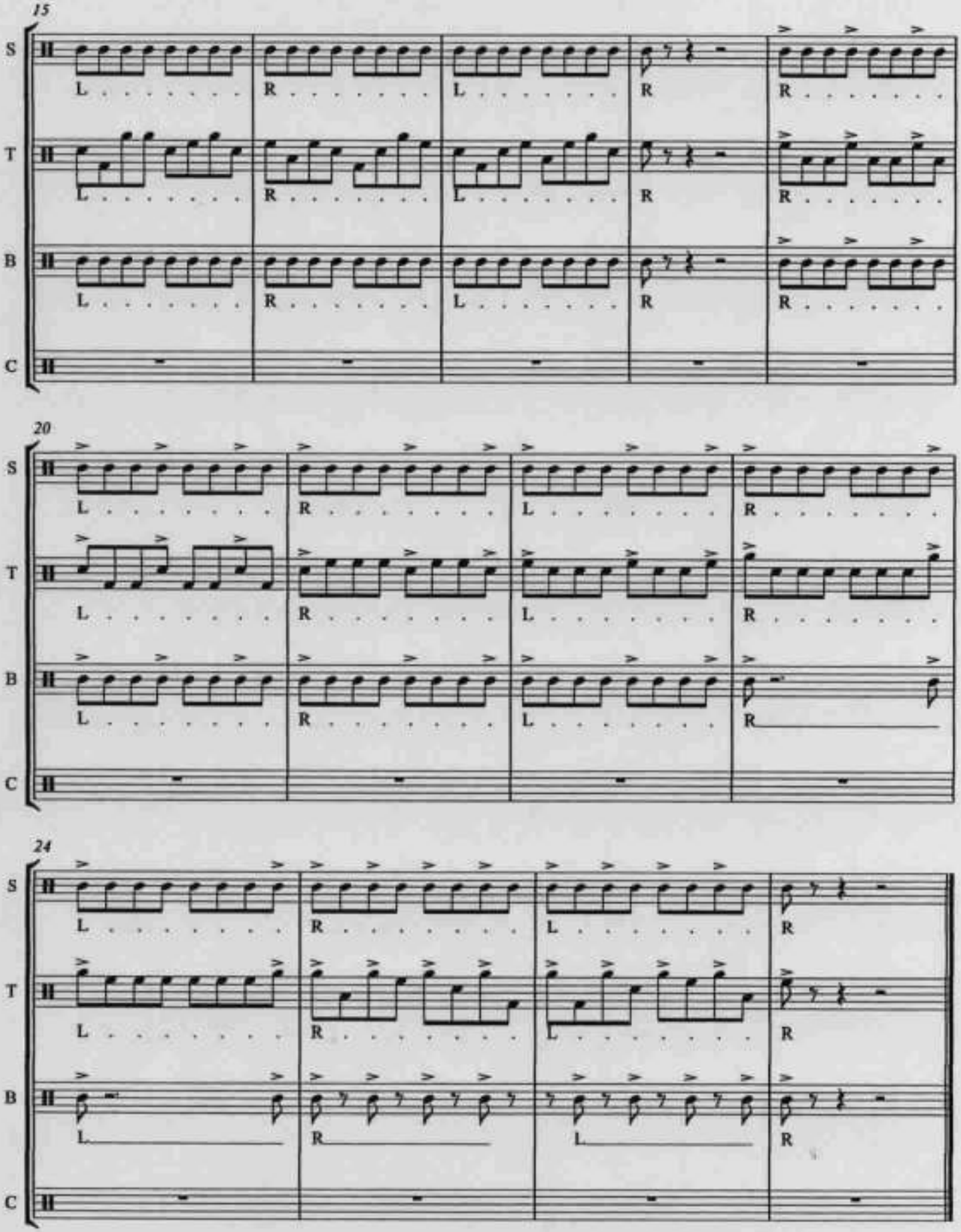
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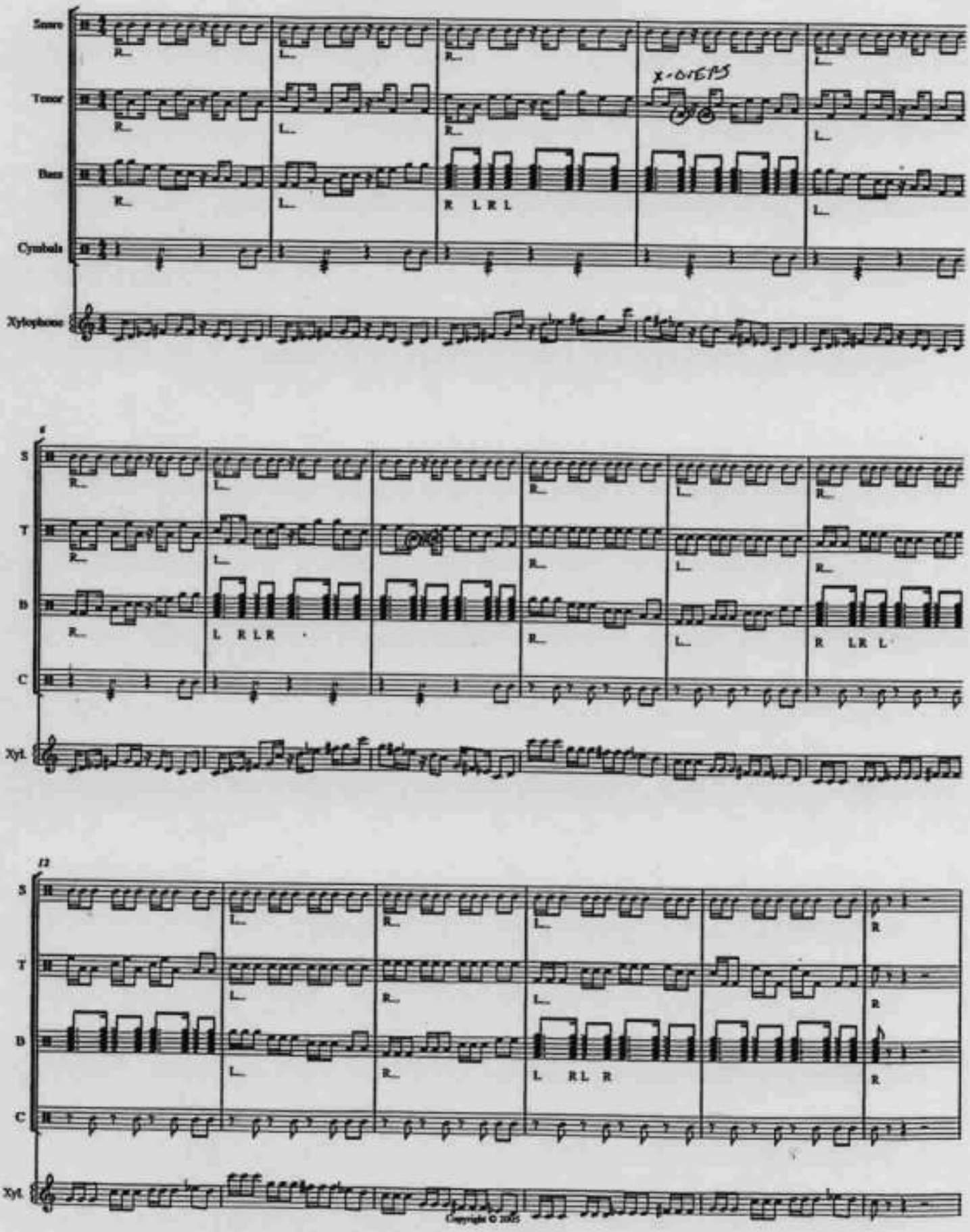
Sanford Double Beat Triple Beat



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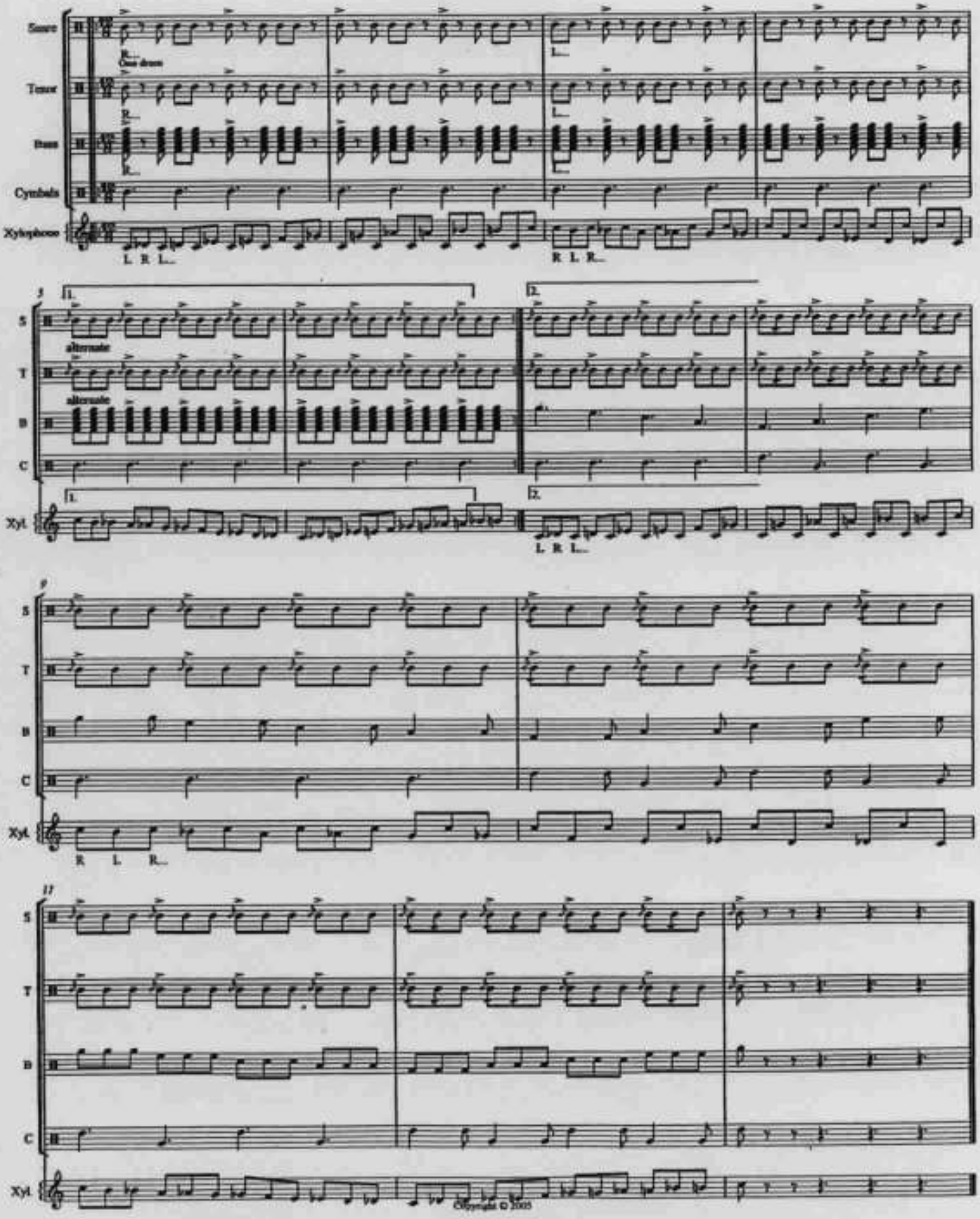
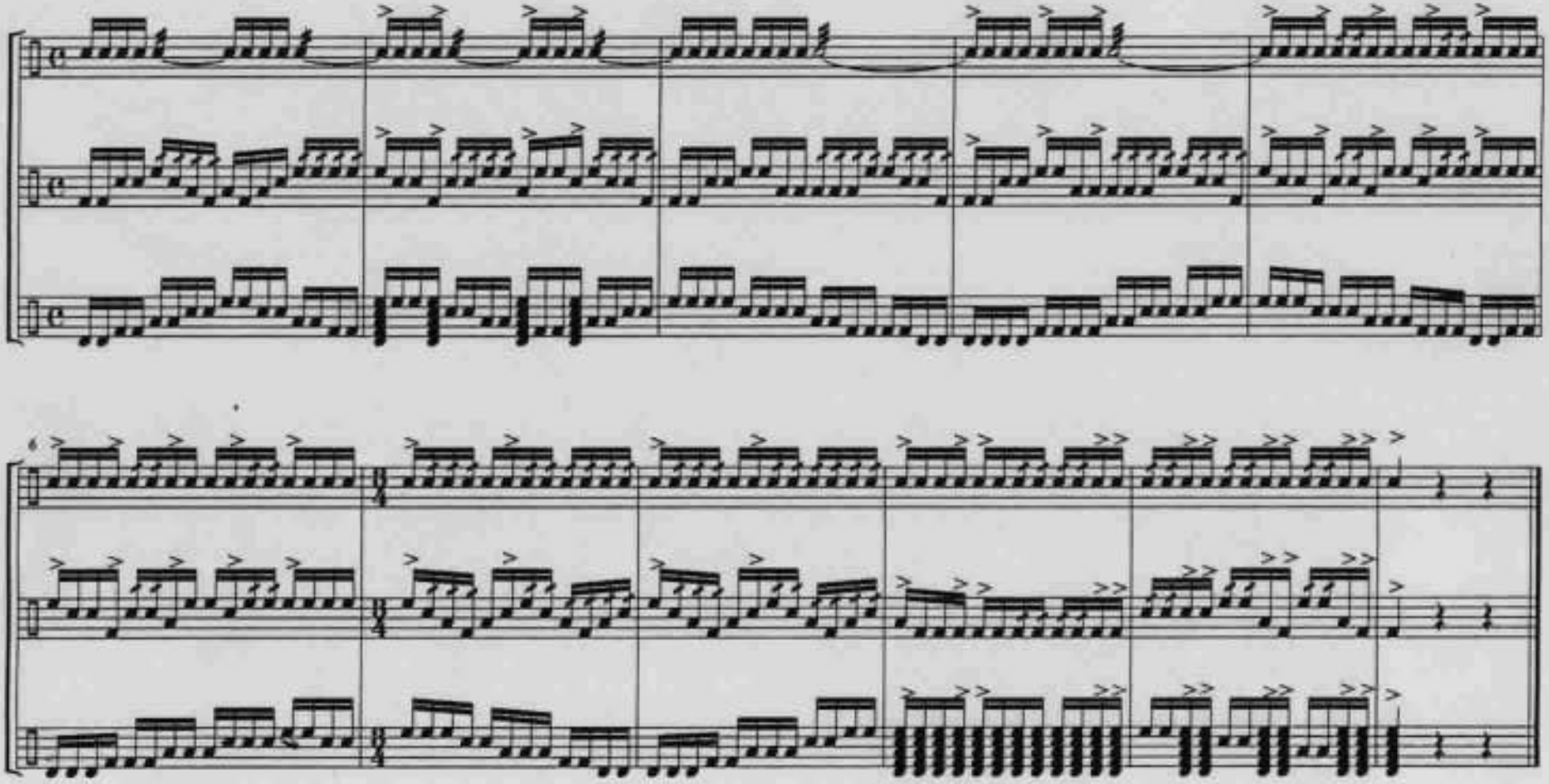
Universal



Higga Digga Bur

James Madison University



Double Beat 2004

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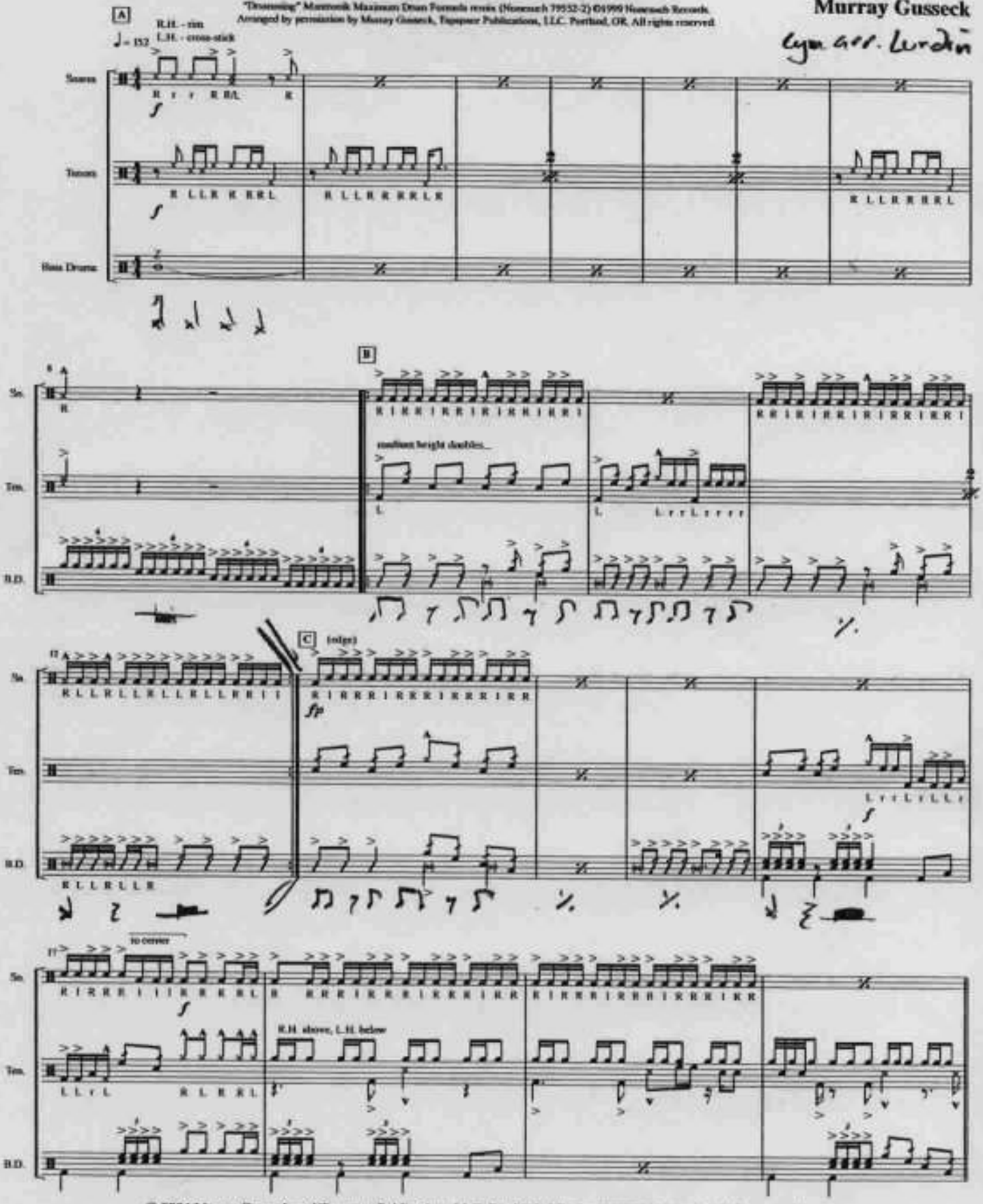
Murray Gusseck

Cym. arr. Lurdin



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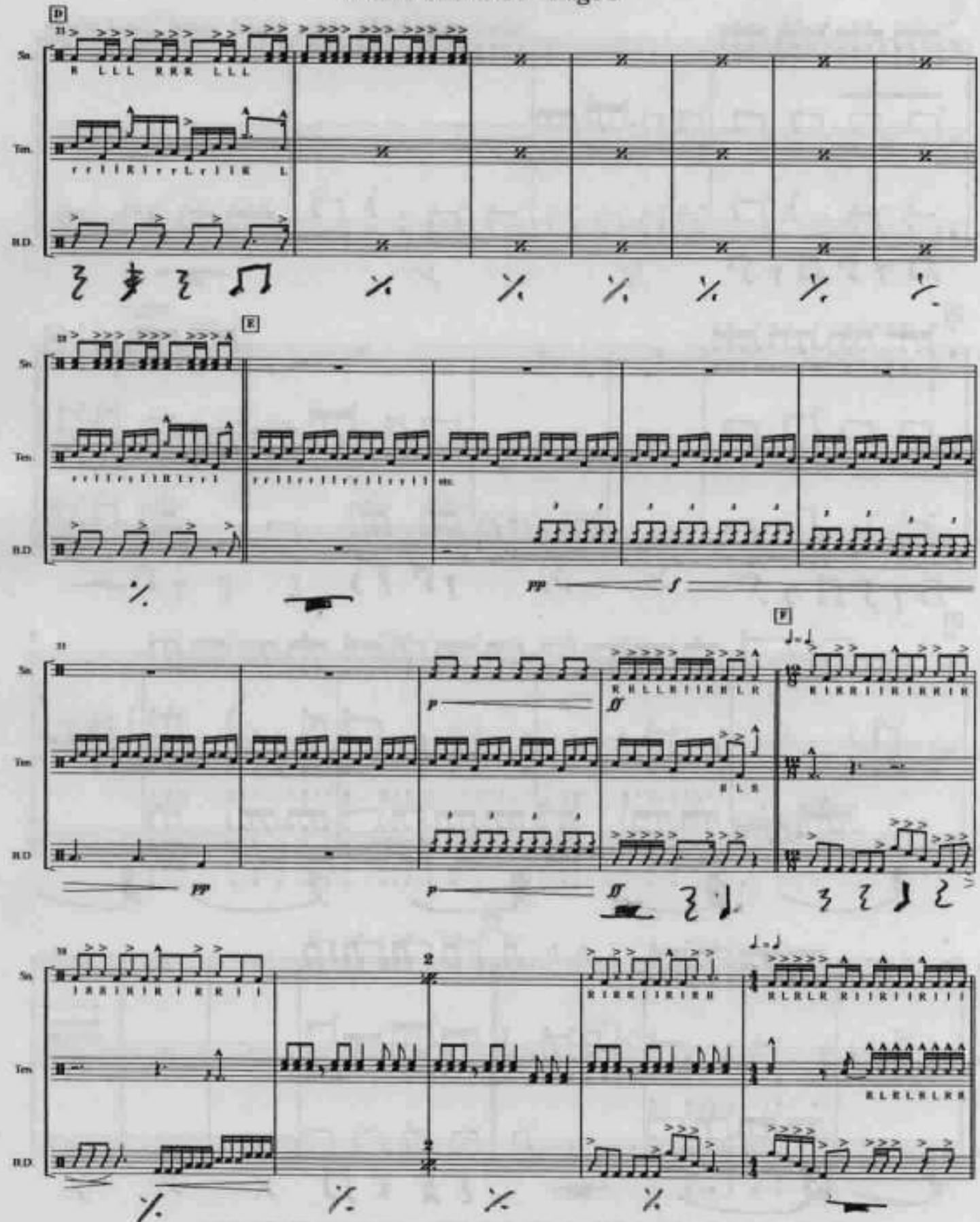

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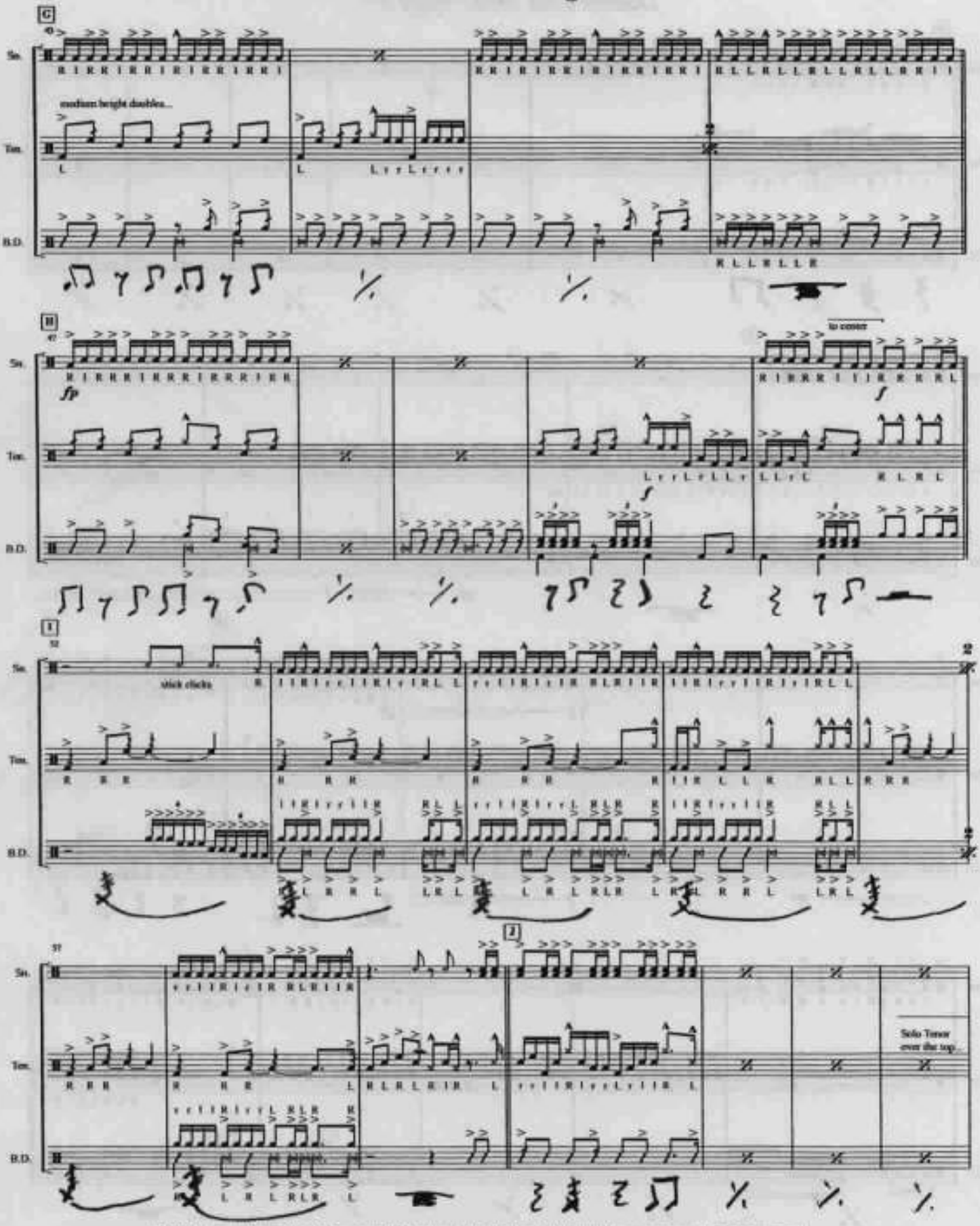

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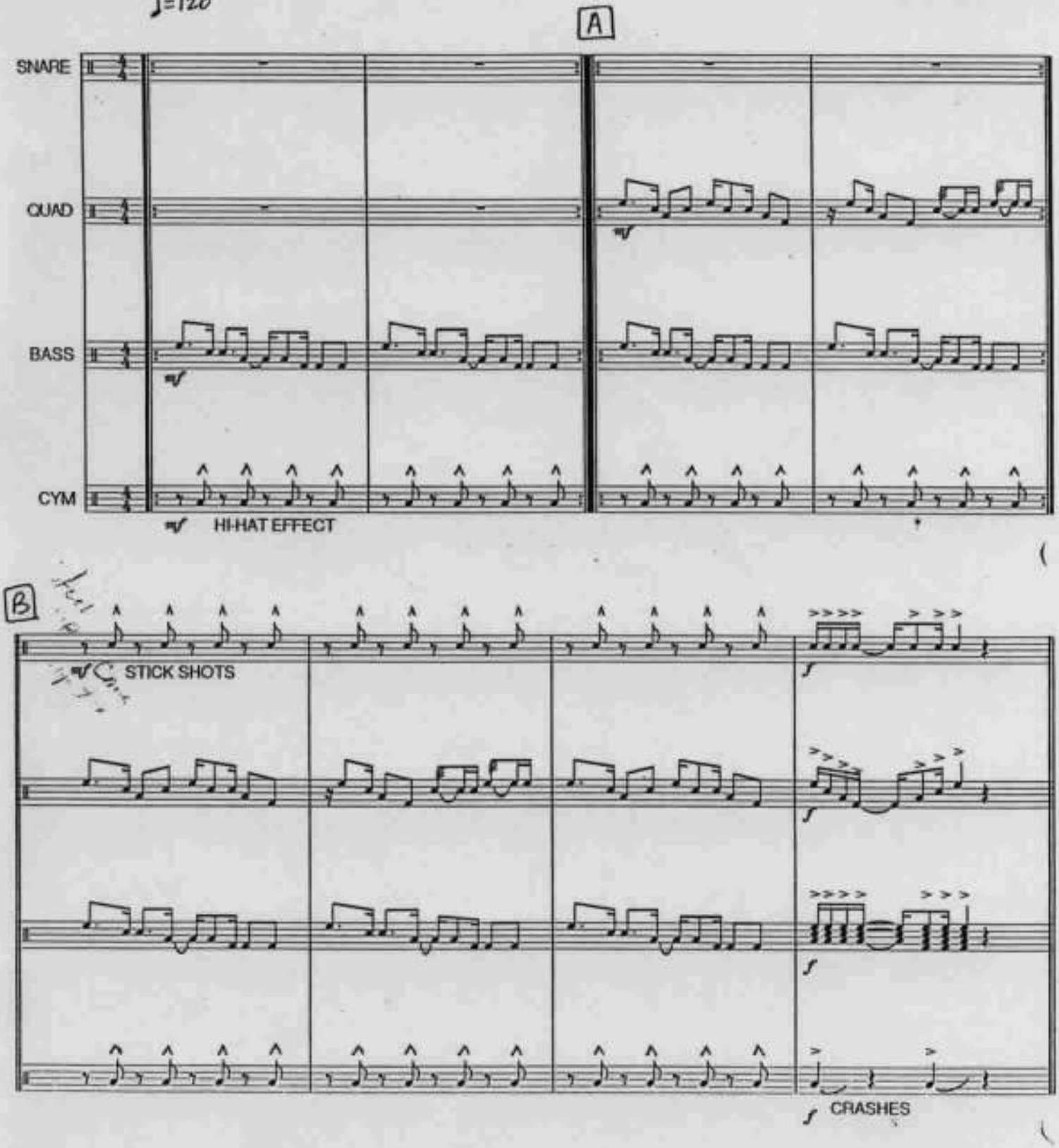
CADENCE

PERCUSSION

ALAN KEOWI



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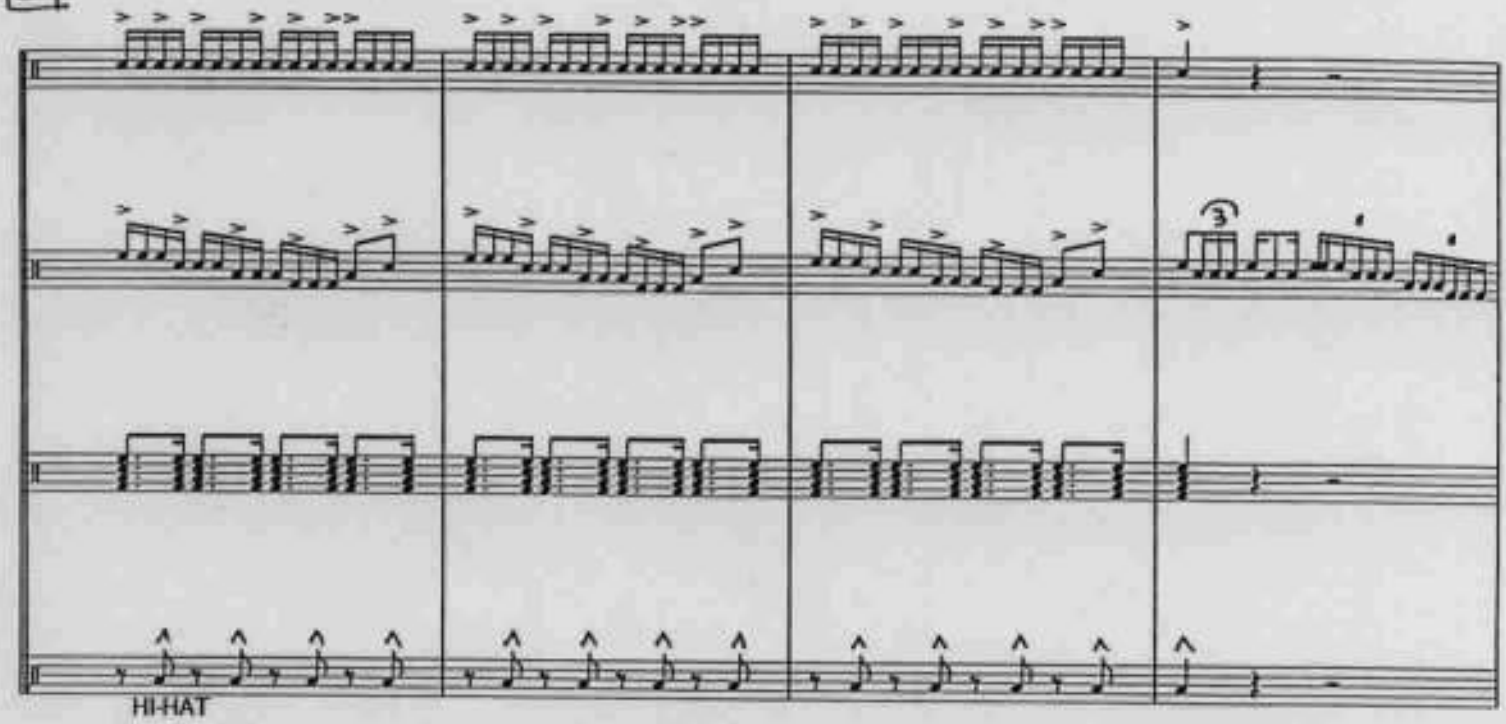

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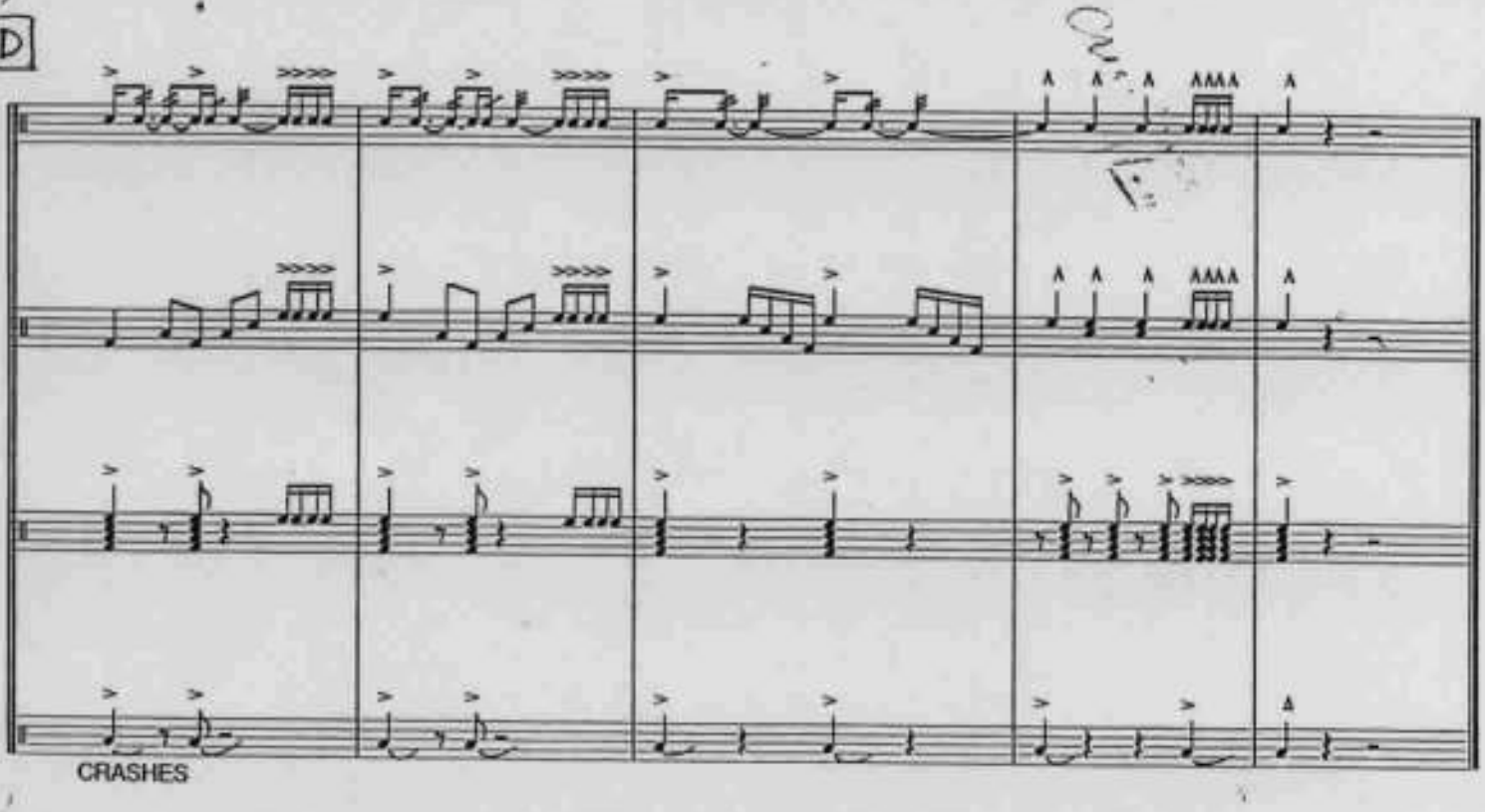

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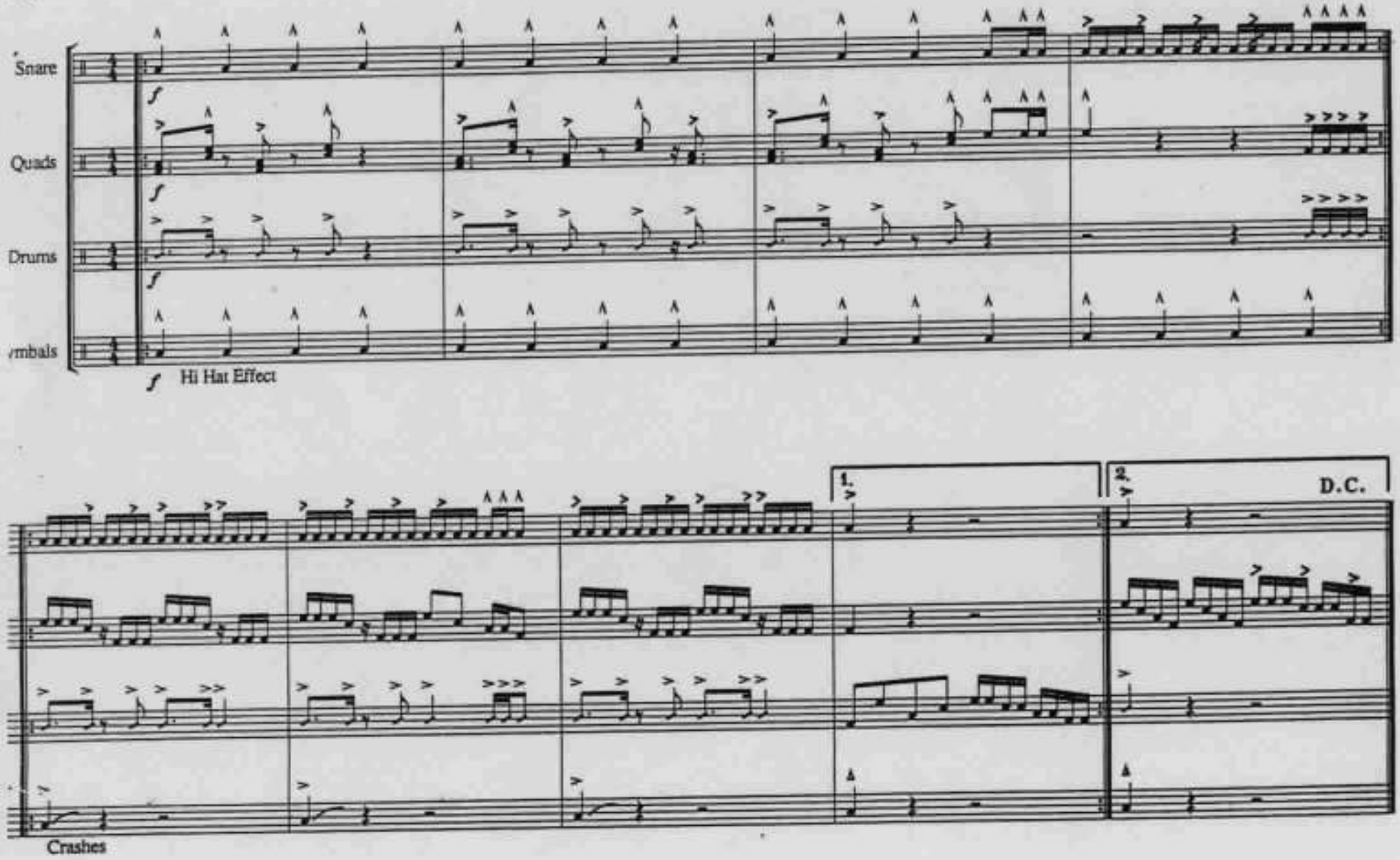

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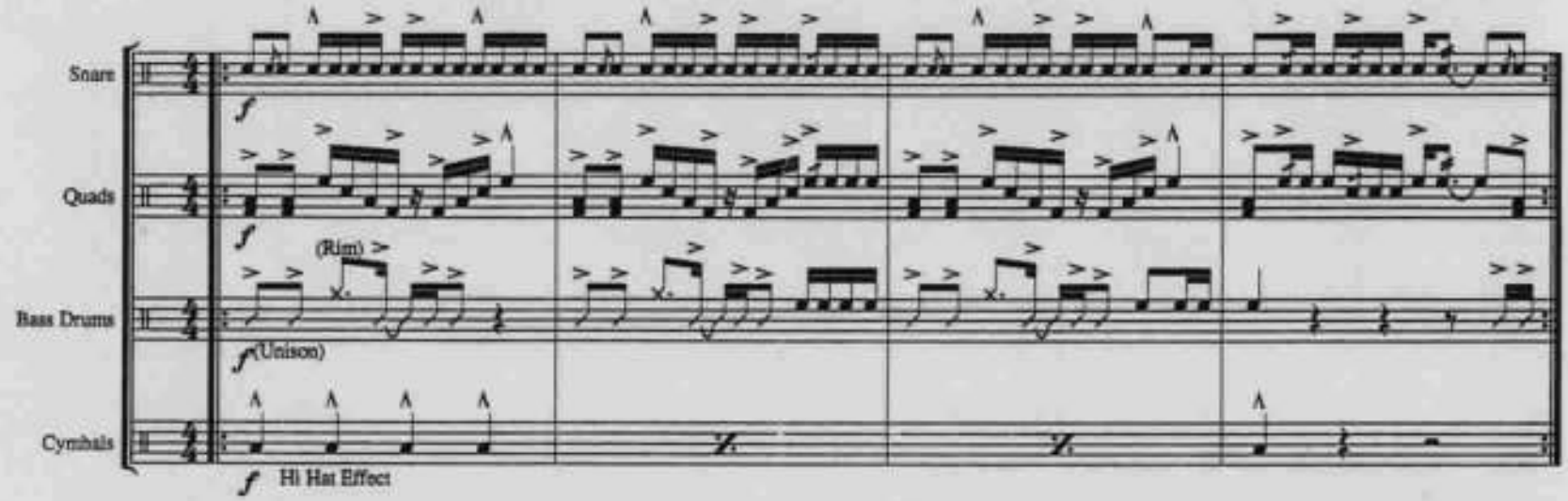

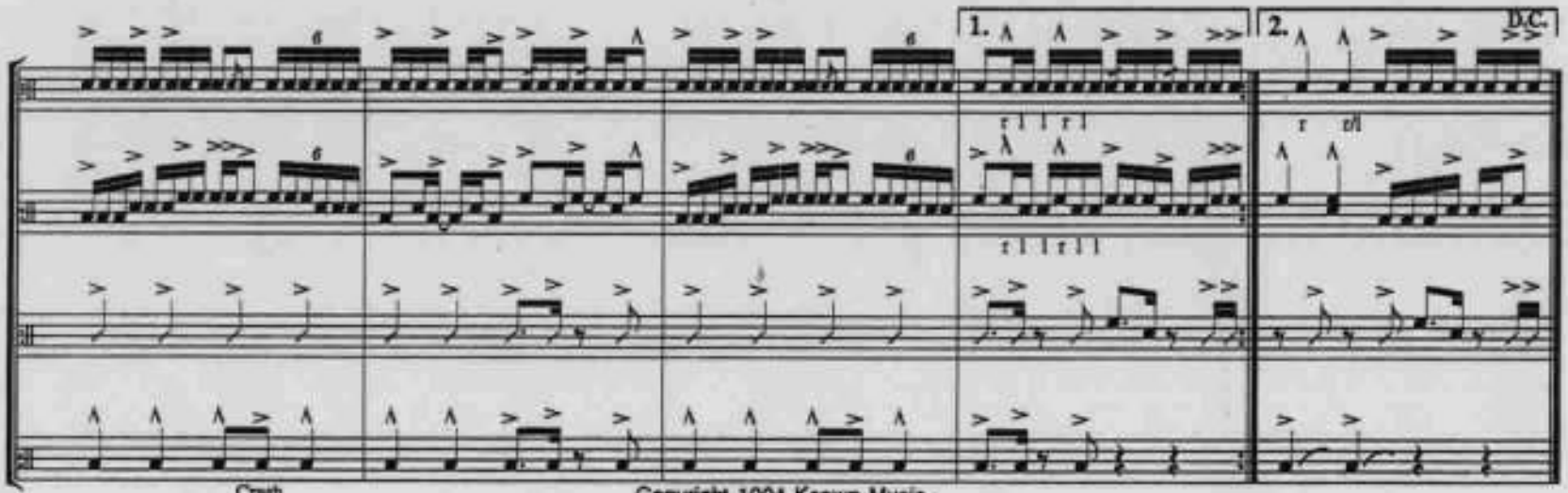

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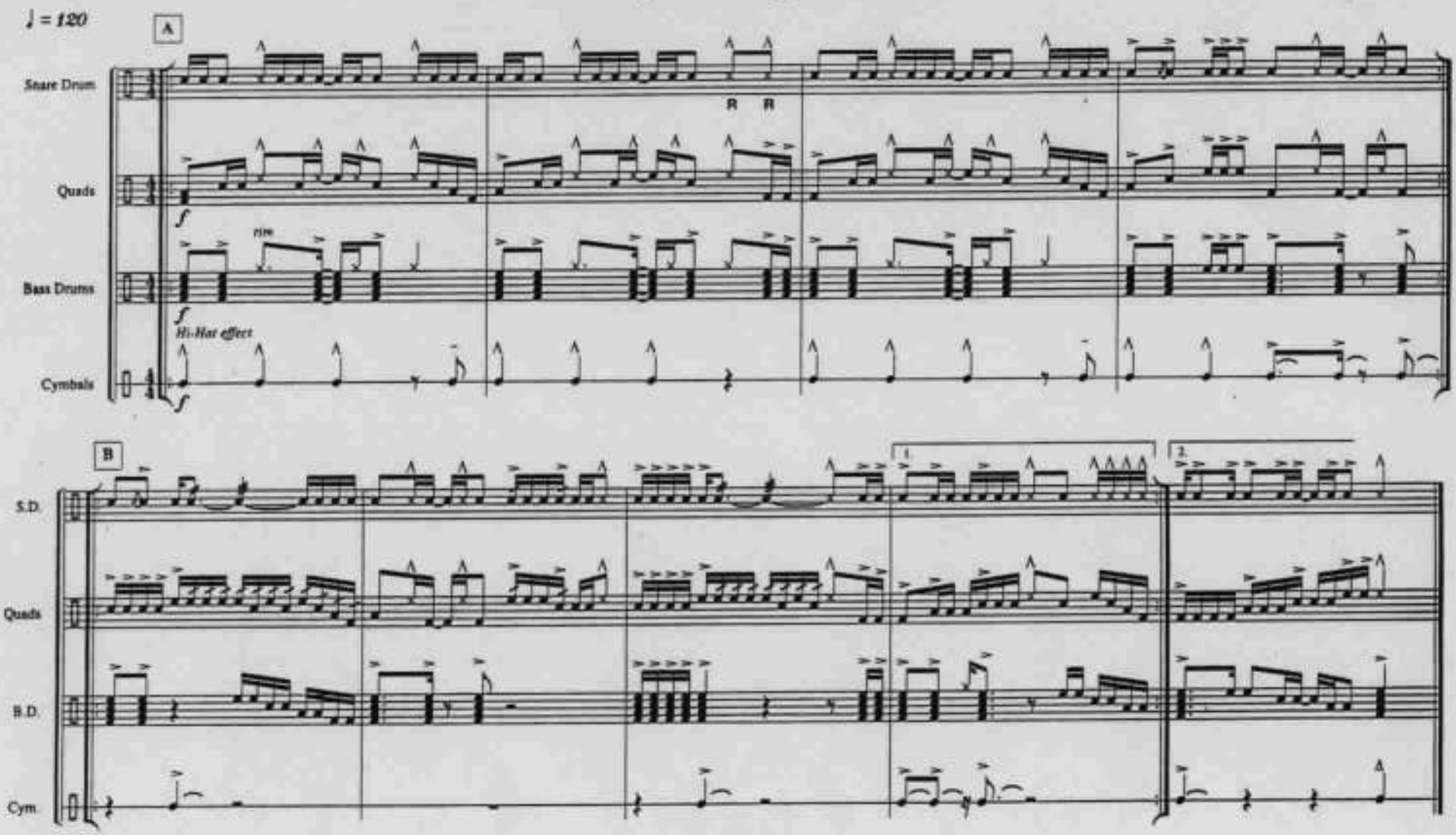

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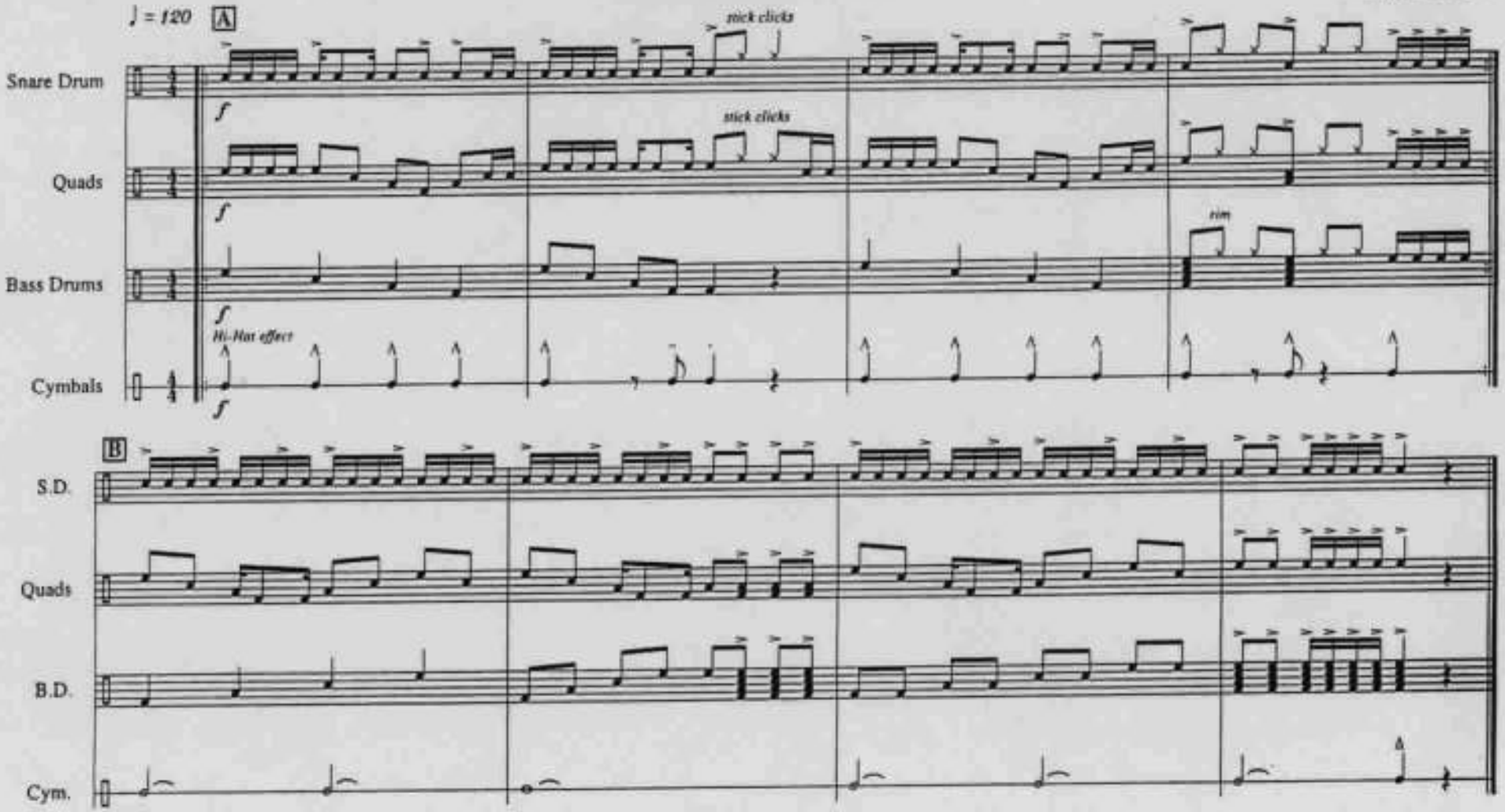

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Grunge

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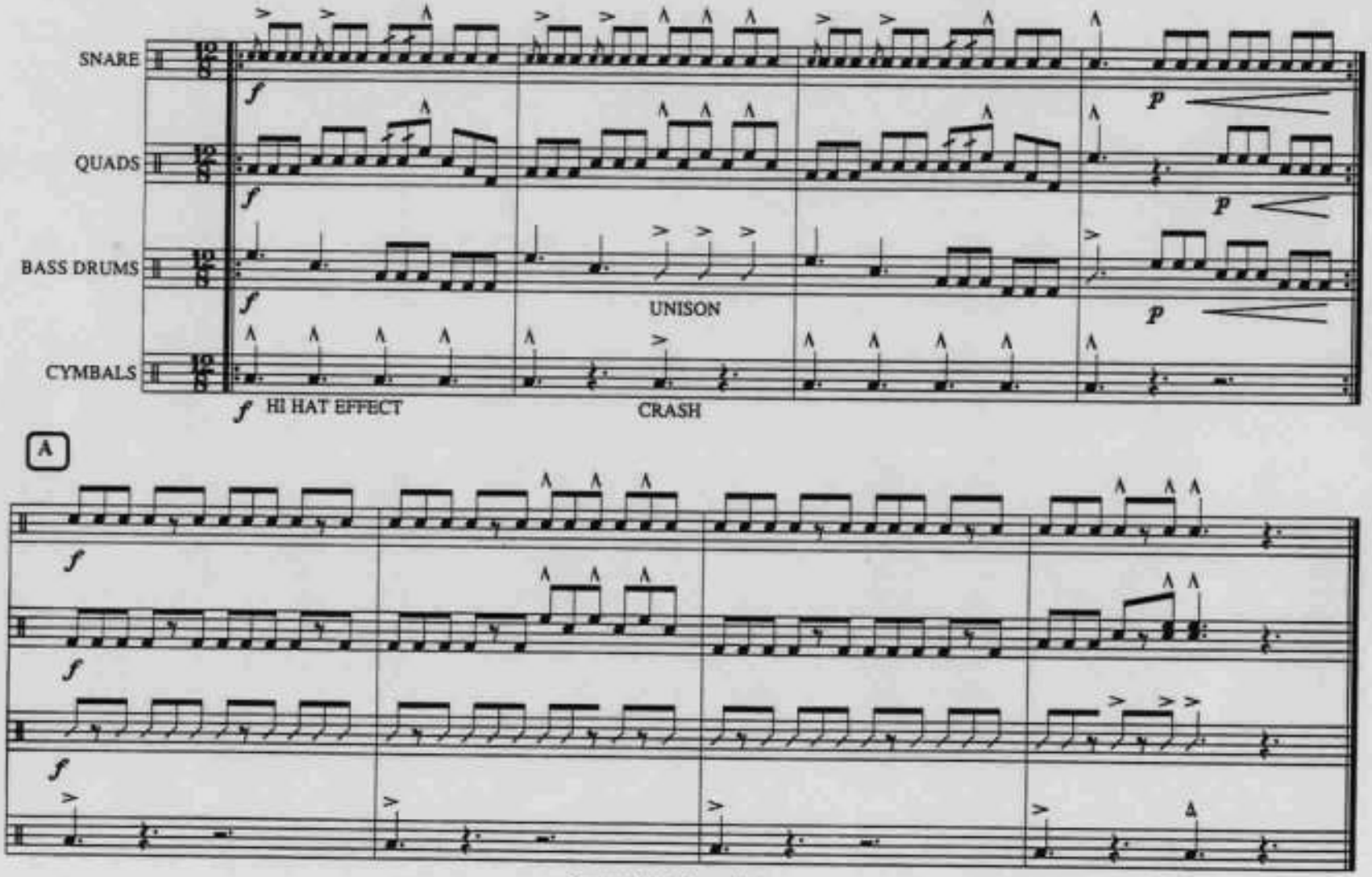

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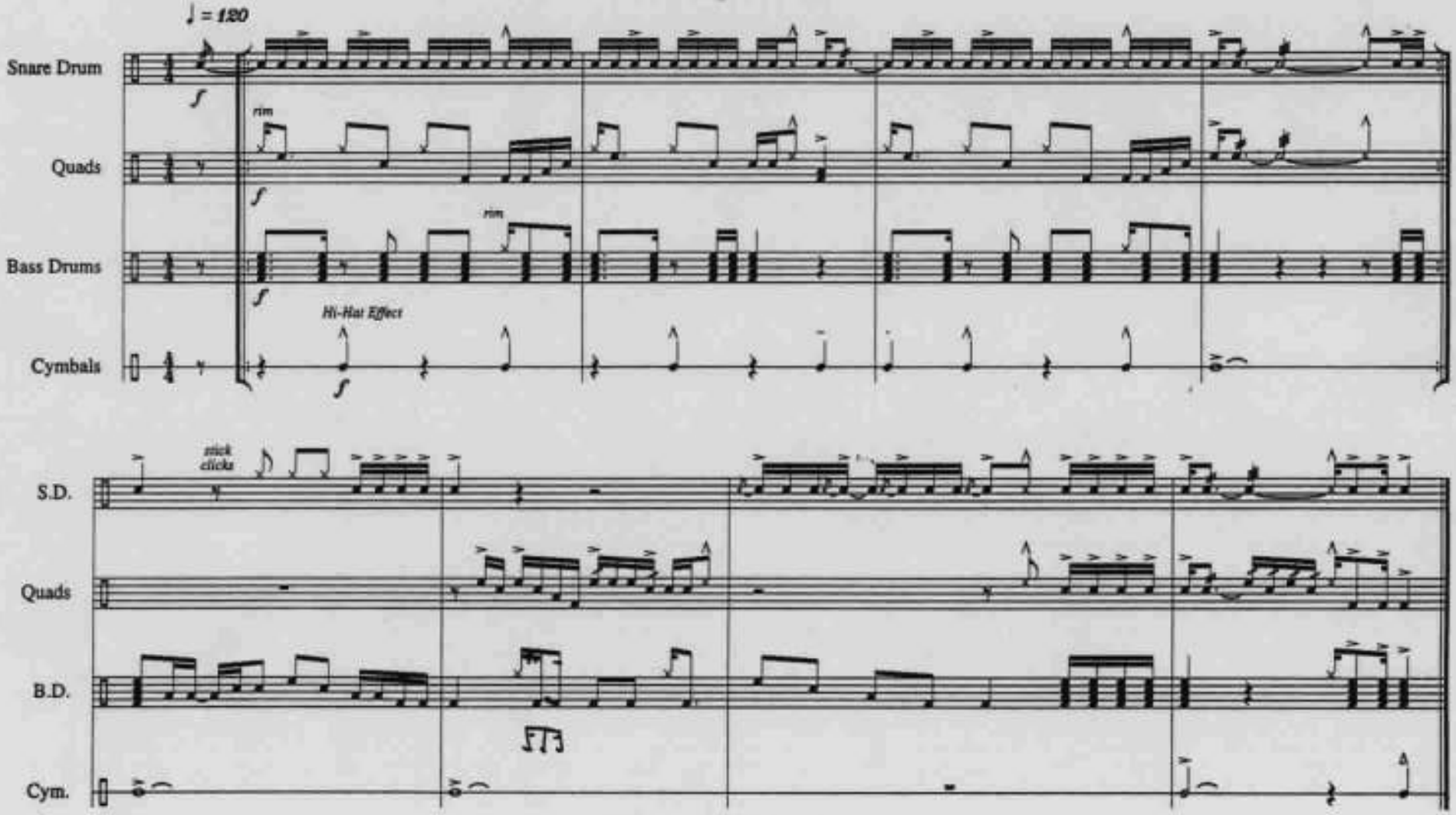

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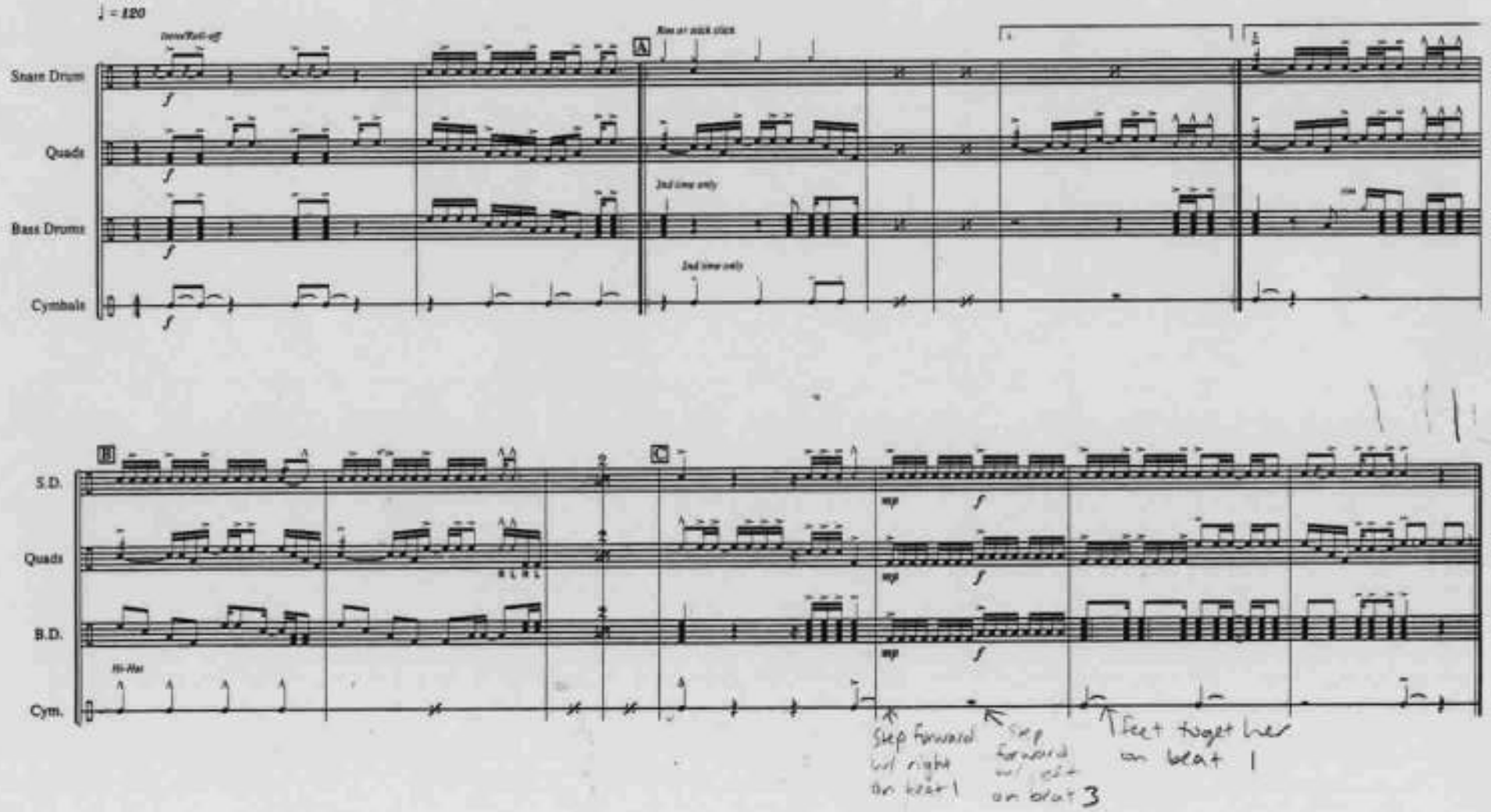

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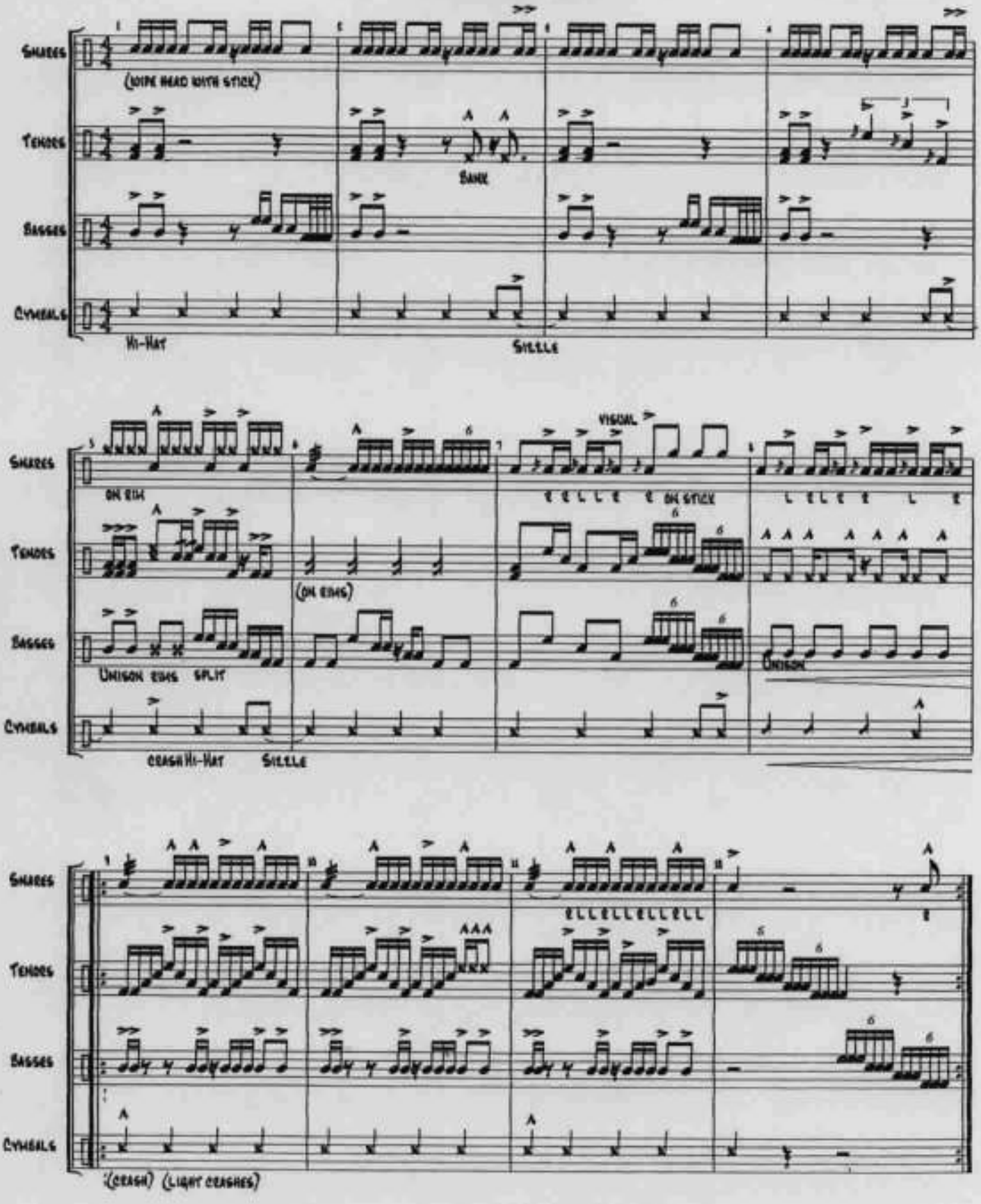
KADENCE

Arr. Jeremy Stafford
1998 Goldwater Drumline



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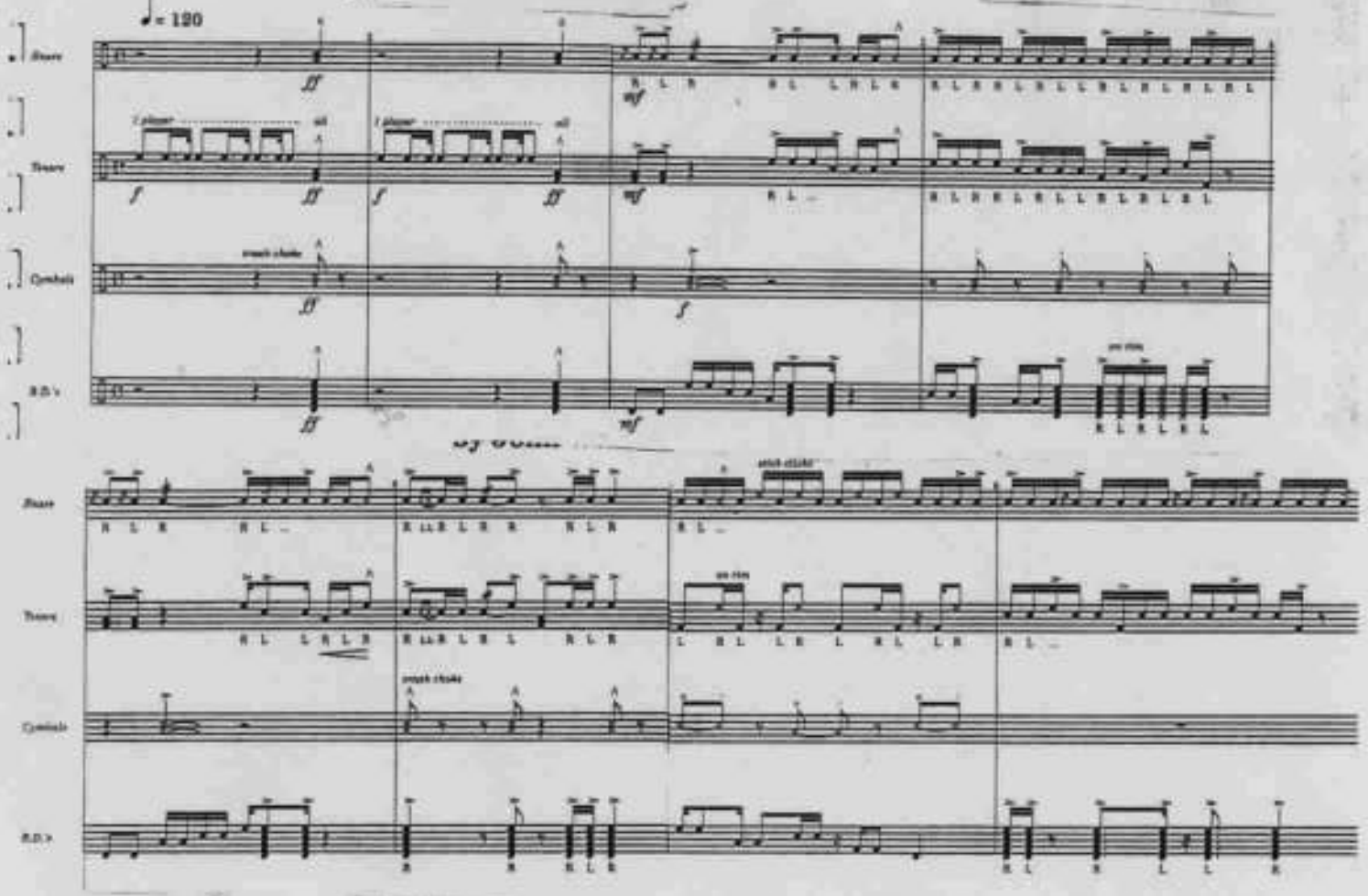

Bottom Feeders

Bass Cadence #2

5-Basses

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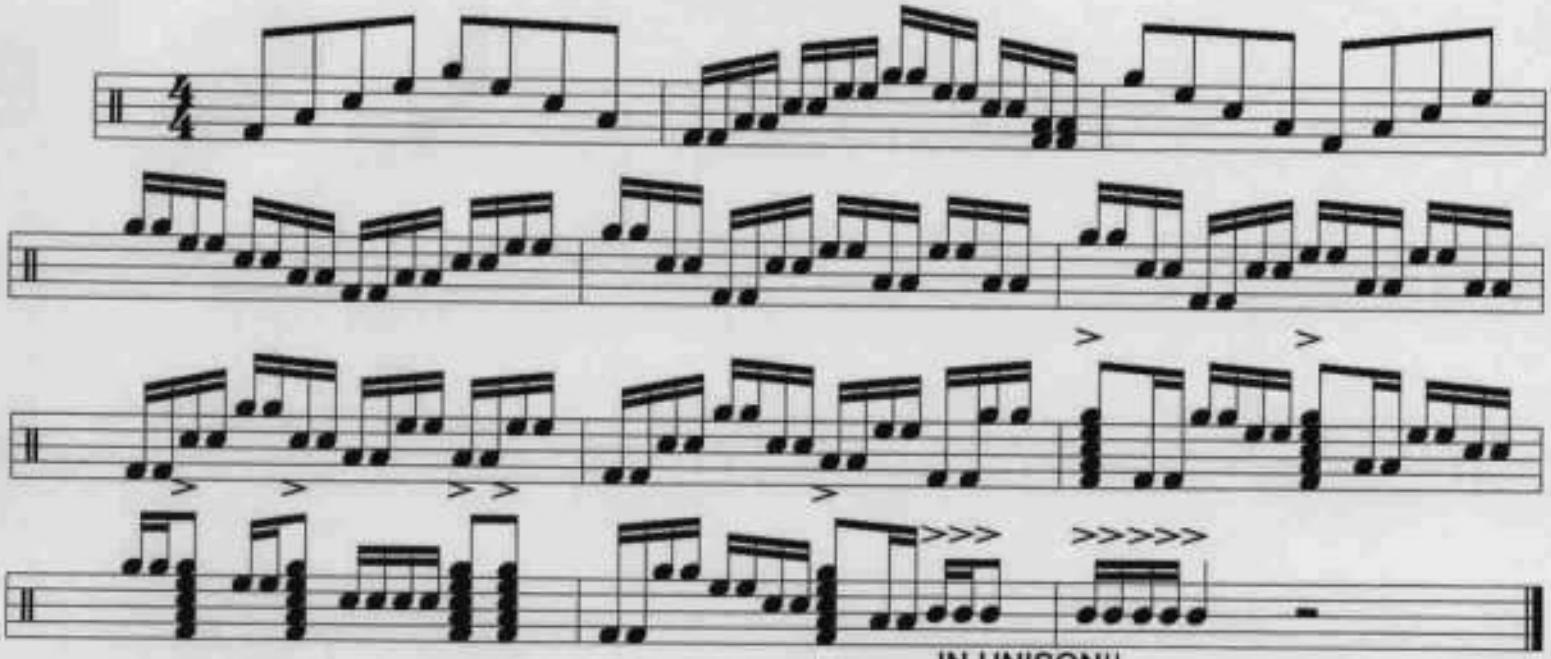

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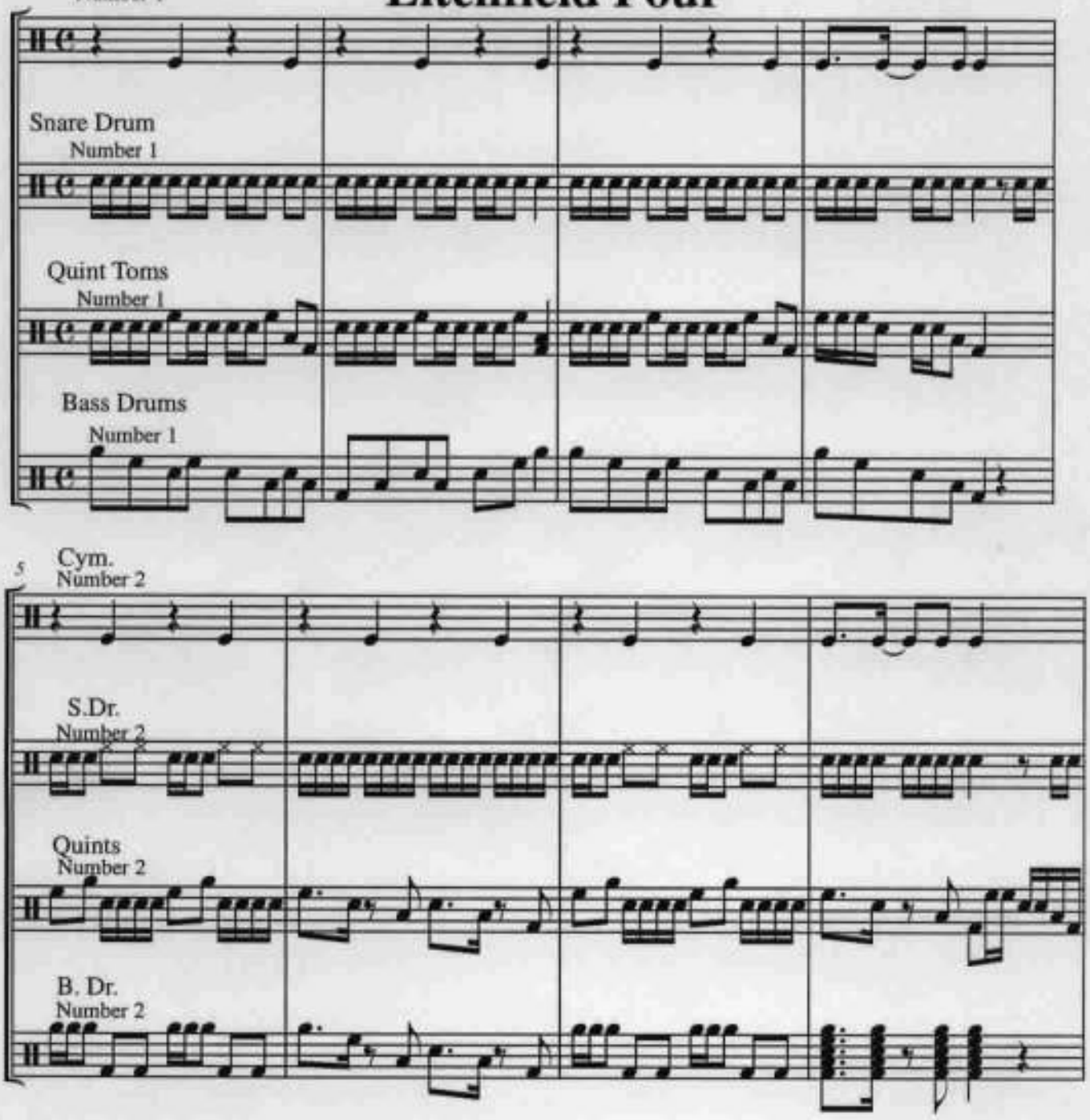

B.C.