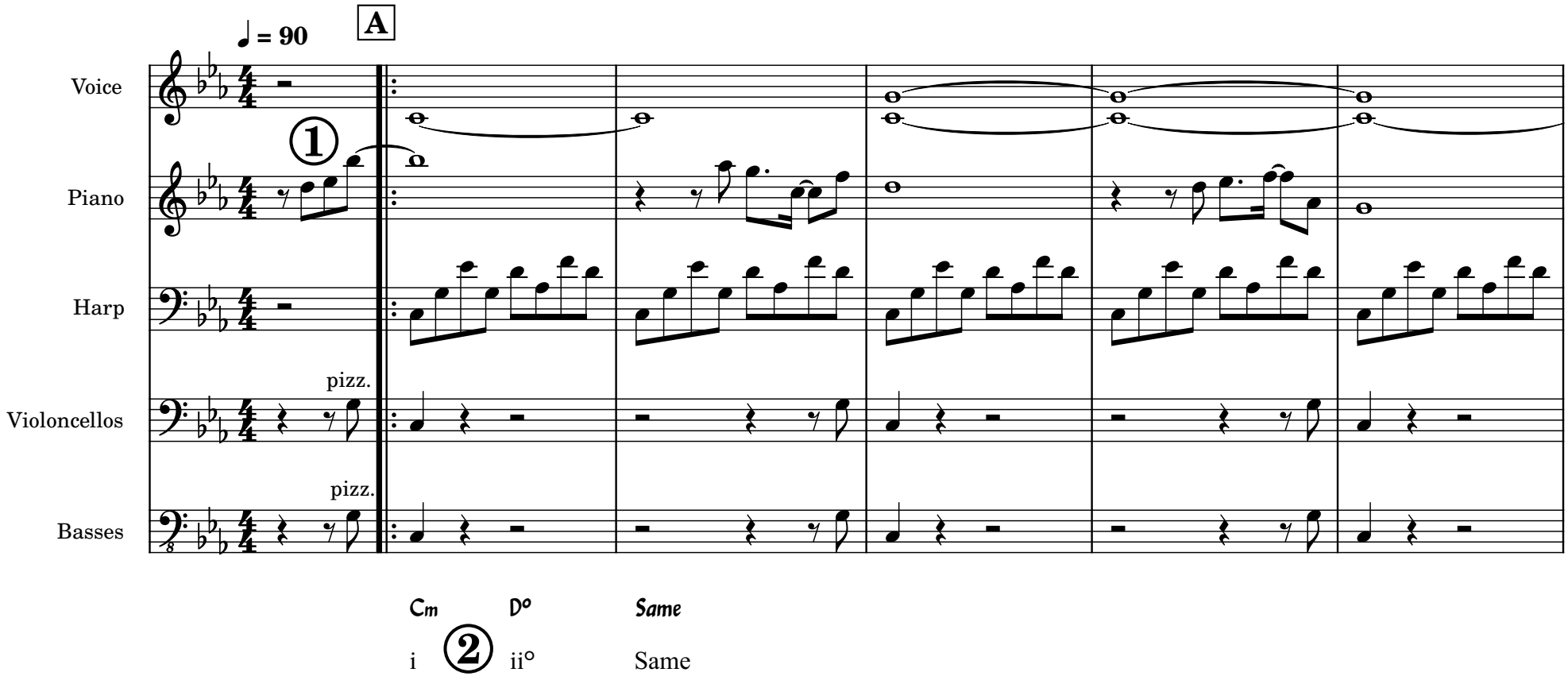
VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

Dead Sea

from Chrono Cross

Composed by Yasunori Mitsuda
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
www.seventhsam.com



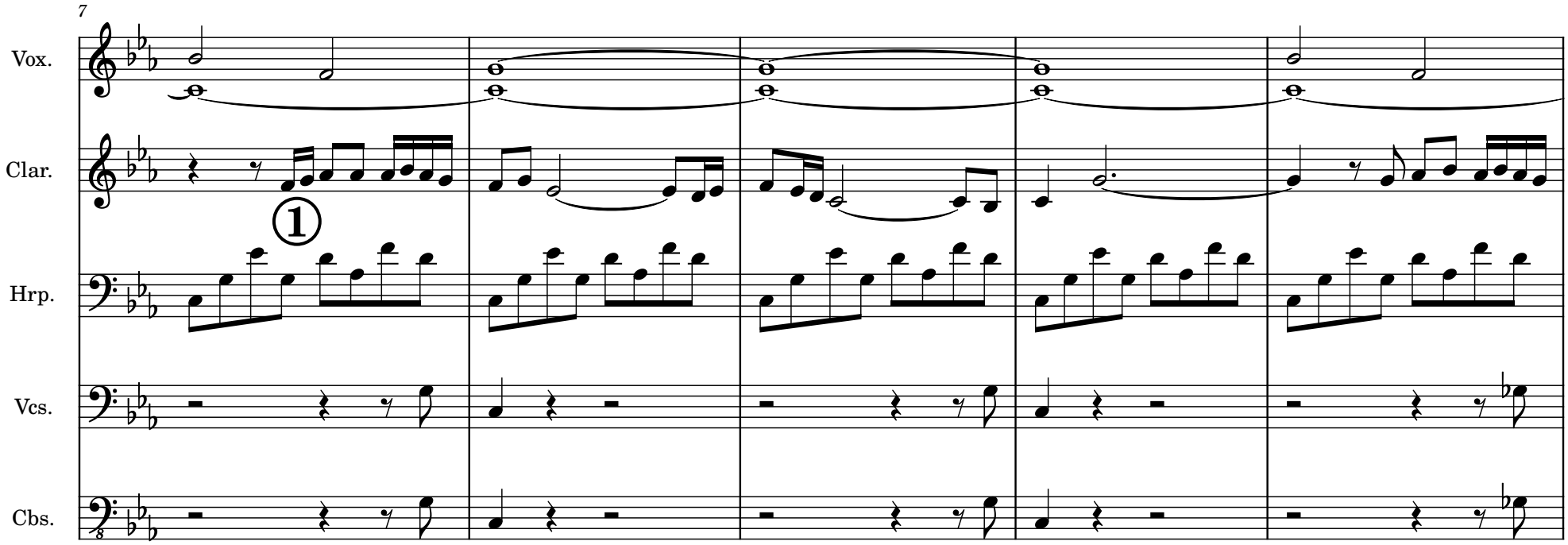
(1) - This pickup measure is how Mitsuda makes this track's loop work. The track is through-composed, with three fairly contrasting sections (instrumentation-wise). By introducing the listener to this motif that ties into the main section, the loop is achieved by placing this seem motif at the very "end" of the track (mm. 31), ushering in the familiar section.

(2) - The track's unrelenting, dismal atmosphere is achieved via two main techniques:

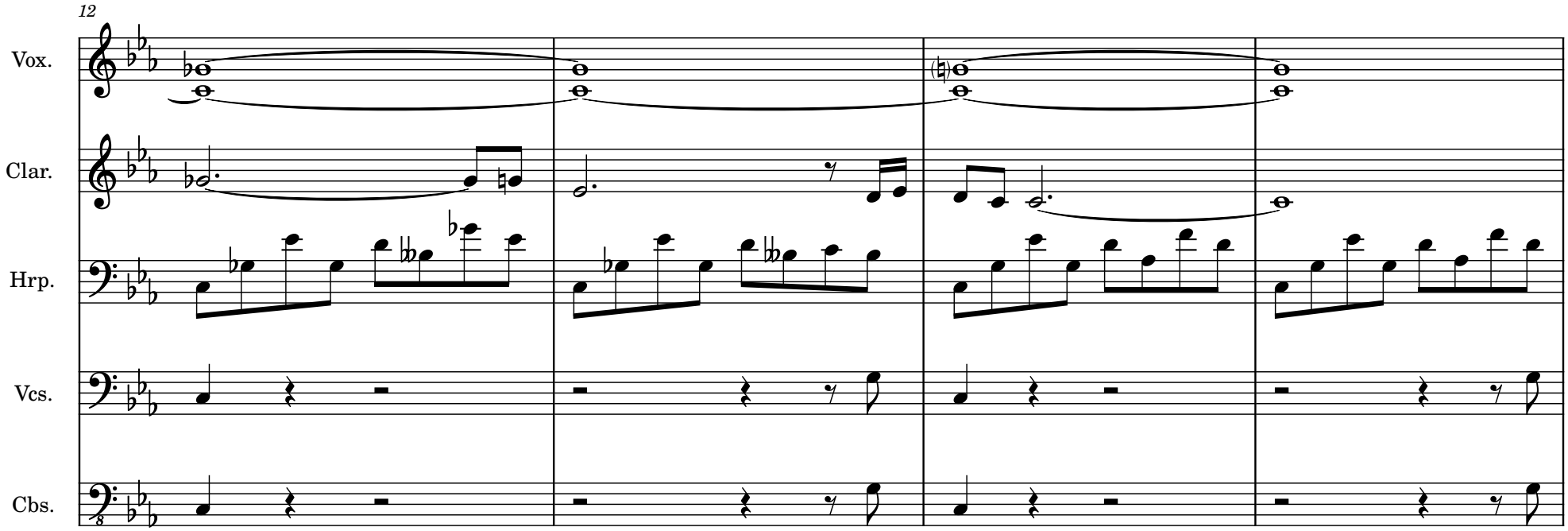
a) The harmony is anchored firmly in C minor, the tonic chord insistently ringing in the listener's ears via a nocturne-like arpeggio in the harp. Furthermore, *every chord aside from the tonic is a diminished chord* (either the vii or ii degree). This paints an unquestionably melancholy picture, one that refuses to let up.

b) The choice of instrumentation alongside the reverb-drenched soundscape lends a ghostly, haunting timbre to the track. A prevalence of plucked sounds ensure that the cavernous reverb has time to ring out, reminding the listener of a vast, empty space. Even the "voice" sounds become percussive at one point. In a sense, Mitsuda is using the percussive instruments to "play the space", a consideration and technique that digital music creators can certainly learn from!

(3) - These piano phrases are expertly crafted, displaying internal contrast (wide leaps, followed by stepwise motion). It may seem a tiny detail, but internal contrast in motifs/phrases is key to their effectiveness and memorability.

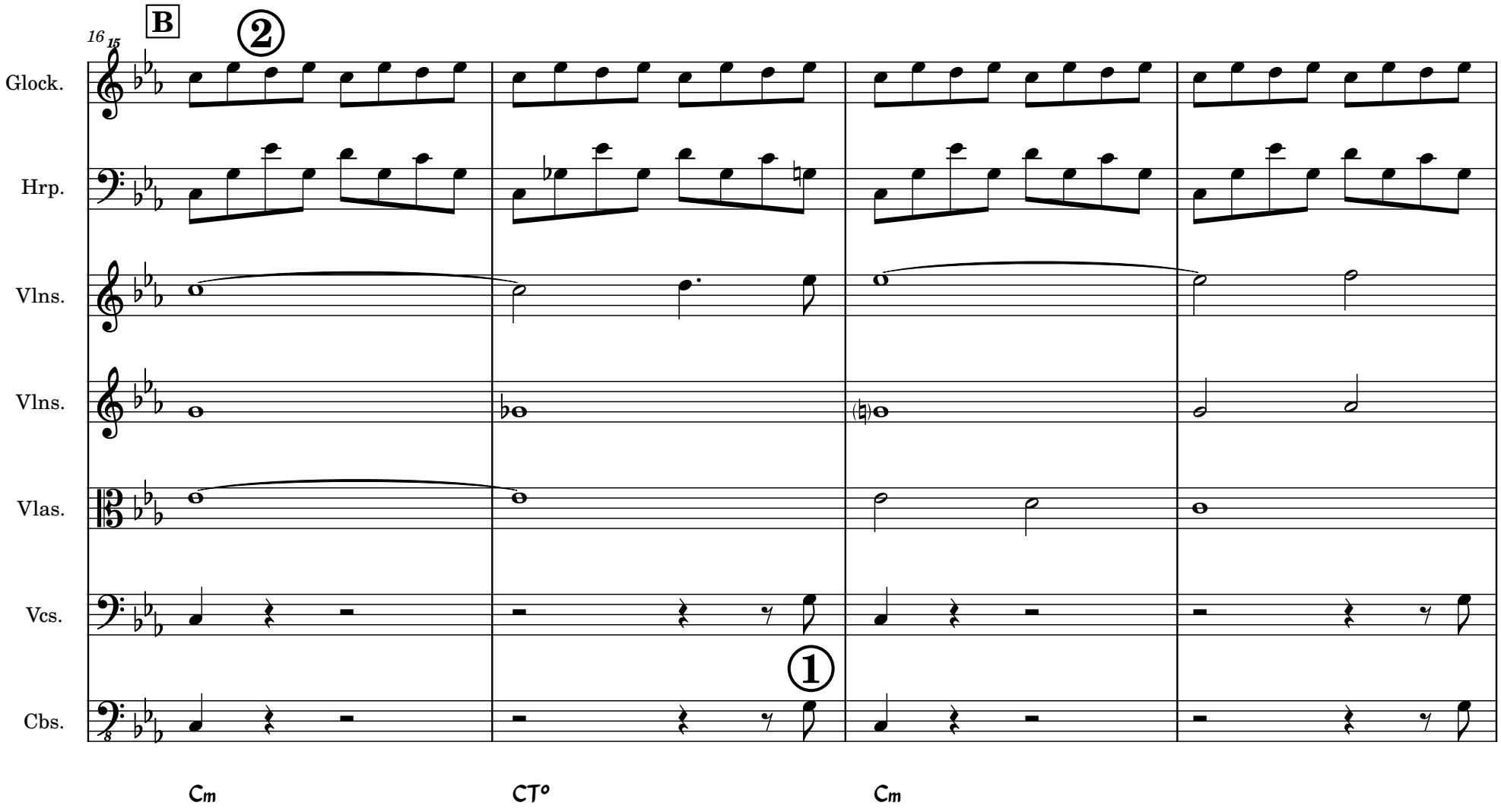


(1) - Clarinet is an interesting choice to take the melody over from the piano. This not only has the effect of introducing contrast and interest within the section, but creating a tiny bit of a story as well, abstract as it may be. The piano is a mournful sound, signalling despair. The clarinet, on the other hand, has a slightly more "human" sound to it. Amidst every other haunting sound in the track, it stands alone...somewhat like the player (who has found themselves in a massive, frozen landscape outside of the flow of time, populated only by echoes of the past).



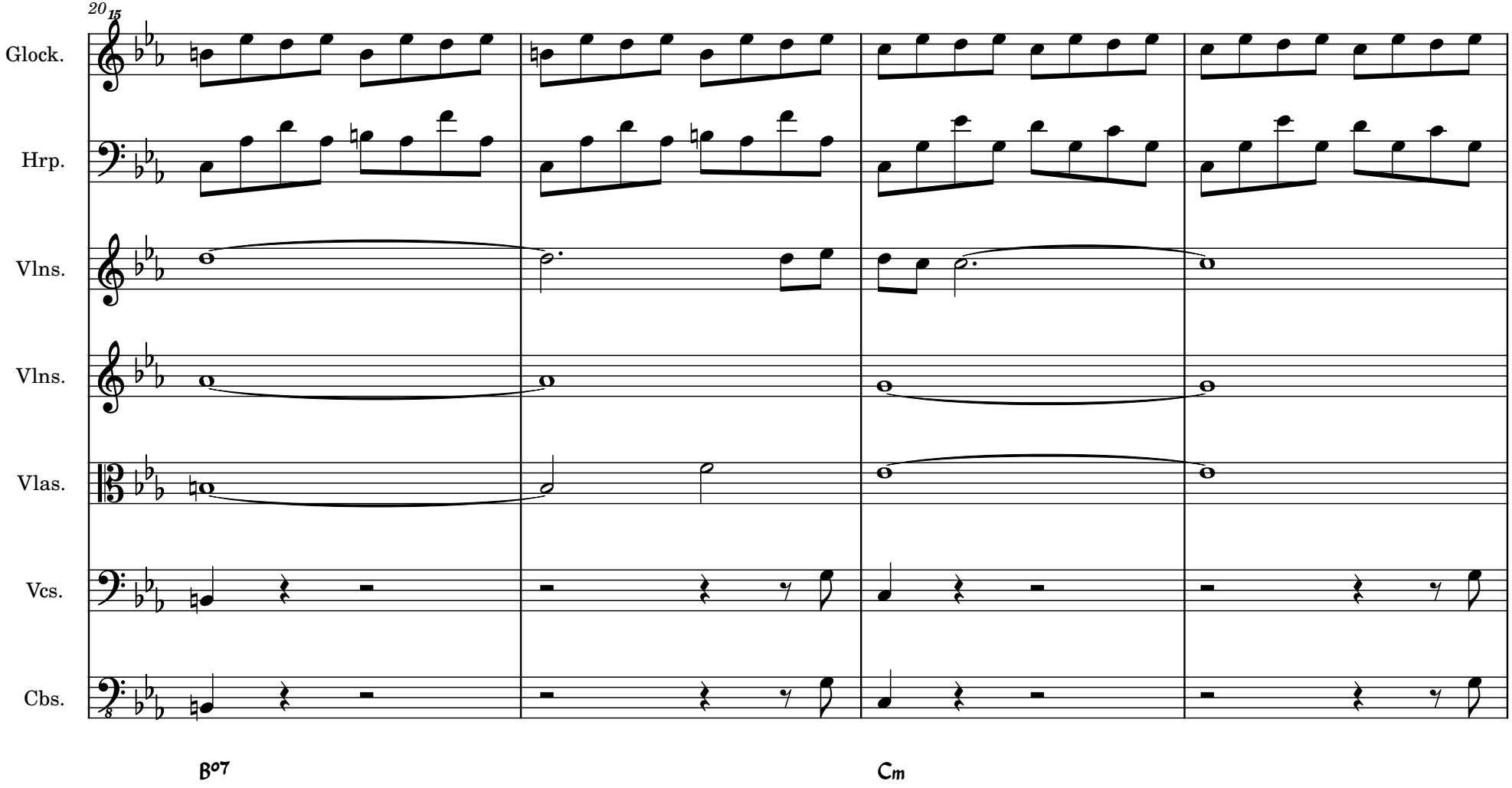
CT°

Not even the poor tonic chord can survive the onslaught of tritones and diminished chords...



(1) - You may have noticed that the P5 motion in the Cello+DB isn't letting up. This is another technique used in the composition of linear-looping VGM. Simply put, having a persistent ostinato of some kind that never changes (or slightly changes) provides an "anchor" around which the rest of the music can orbit and the listener's ears can stabilize themselves in. Important here is that the persistent "ka-THUMP" sound of the Cello+DB is *low* and *unobtrusive*; it sounds menacing, ominous, and big. If it were voiced with, say...trumpets, then it would get irritating to the listener very quickly.

(2) - A bit of a cliche, certainly, but there's an effective amount of genre dissonance that's created when a sound like a Glockenspiel, Celesta, or Music Box (sounds that are associated with innocence, peace, and bedtime) are found in haunting, mournful, and unnerving music like this. One might say it's part of *why* this music is unnerving.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Hrp.
Vlns.
Vlns.
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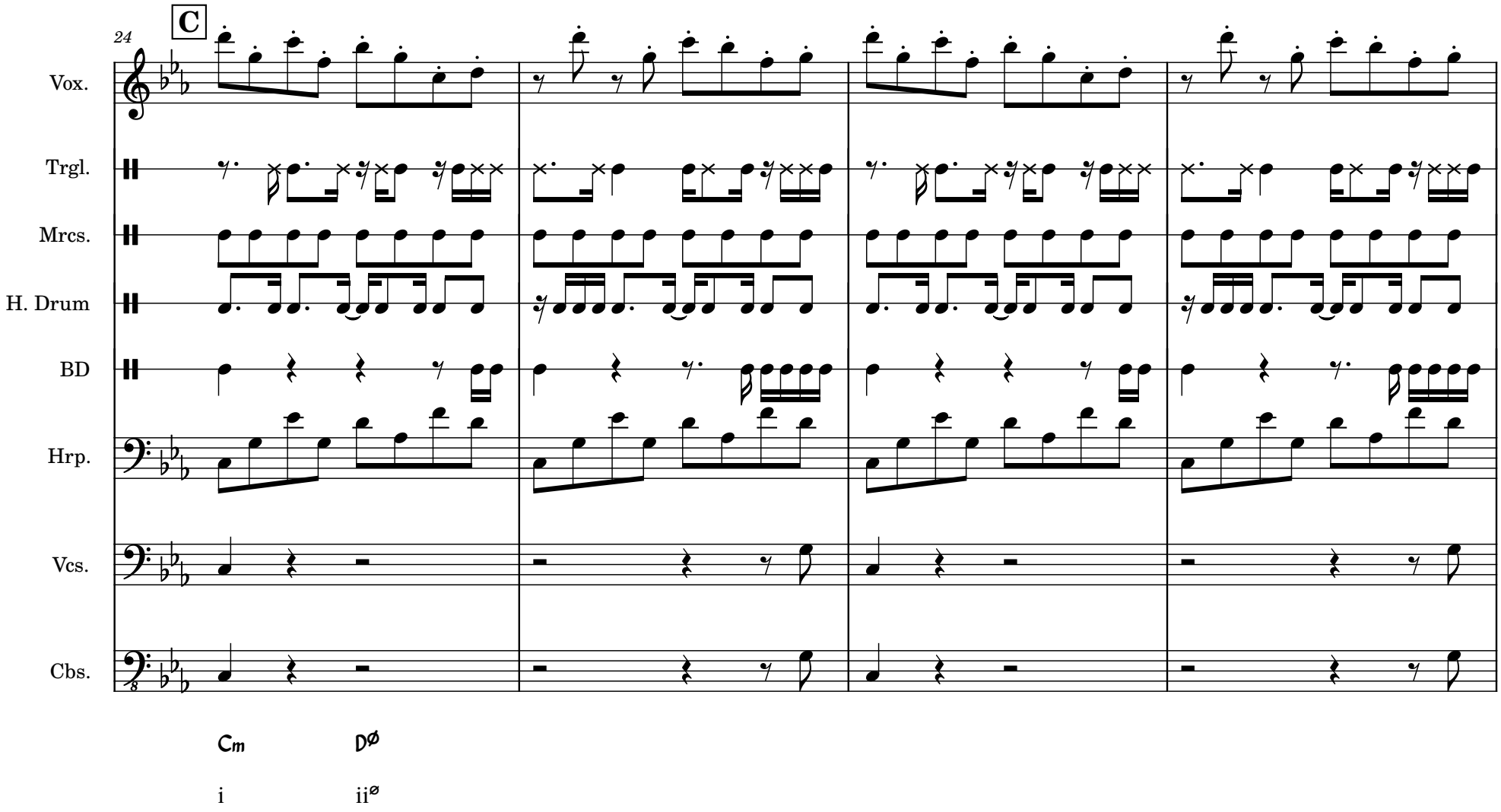
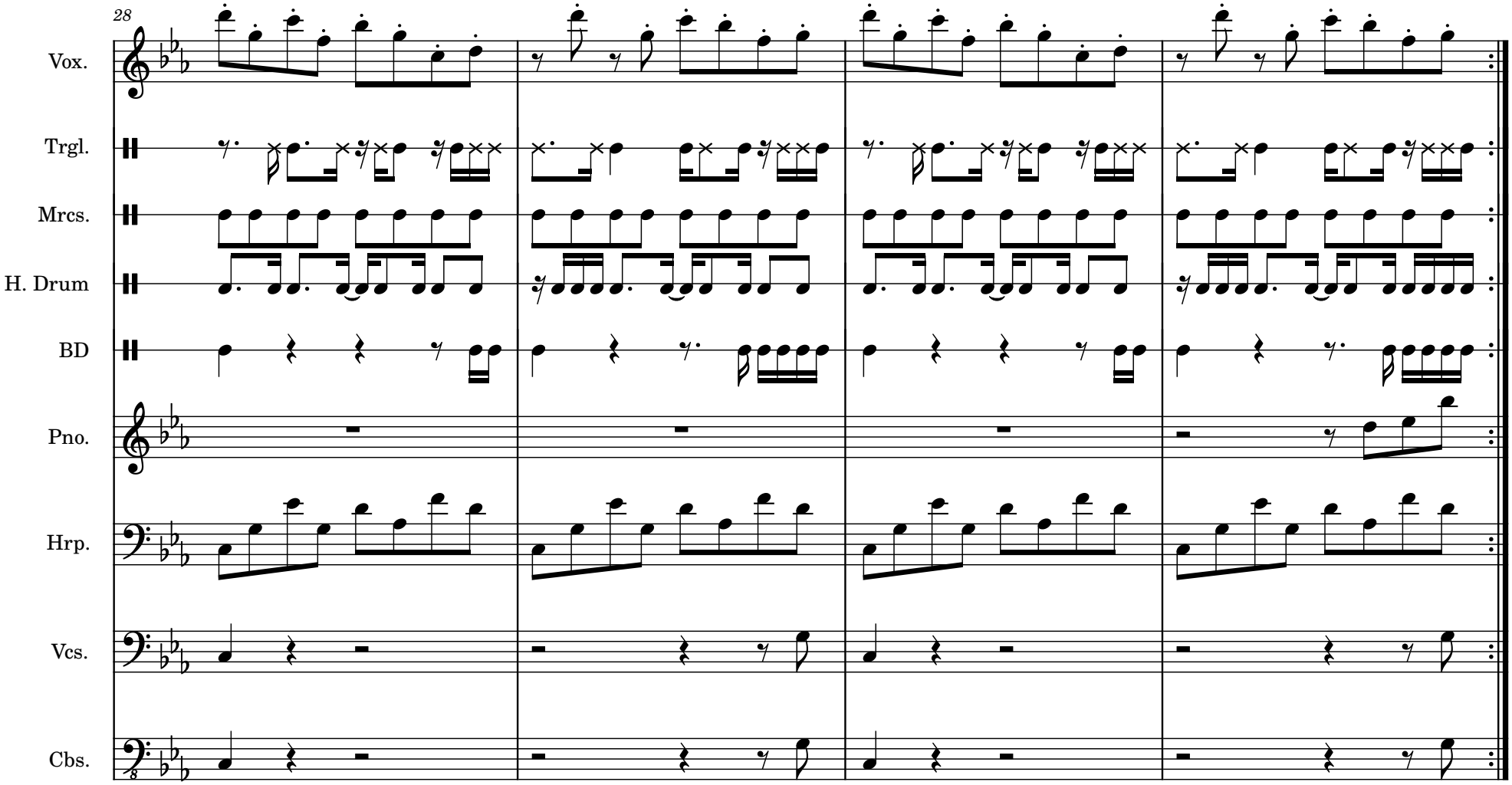
Vcs.
Cbs.
B°7
Cm



This section exists to give the track some needed contrast. It relies quite heavily on being unrelentingly somber, which means the melody, harmony, and texture need to more or less occupy that role. So, what can be changed? The rhythm! Mitsuda - groove-master that he is - introduces some percussion to give a *spark* of life to the listener and encourage them to keep exploring the mysterious Dead Sea.


28
Vox.
Trgl.
Mrcs.
H. Drum
BD
Pno.
Hrp.
Vcs.
Cbs.