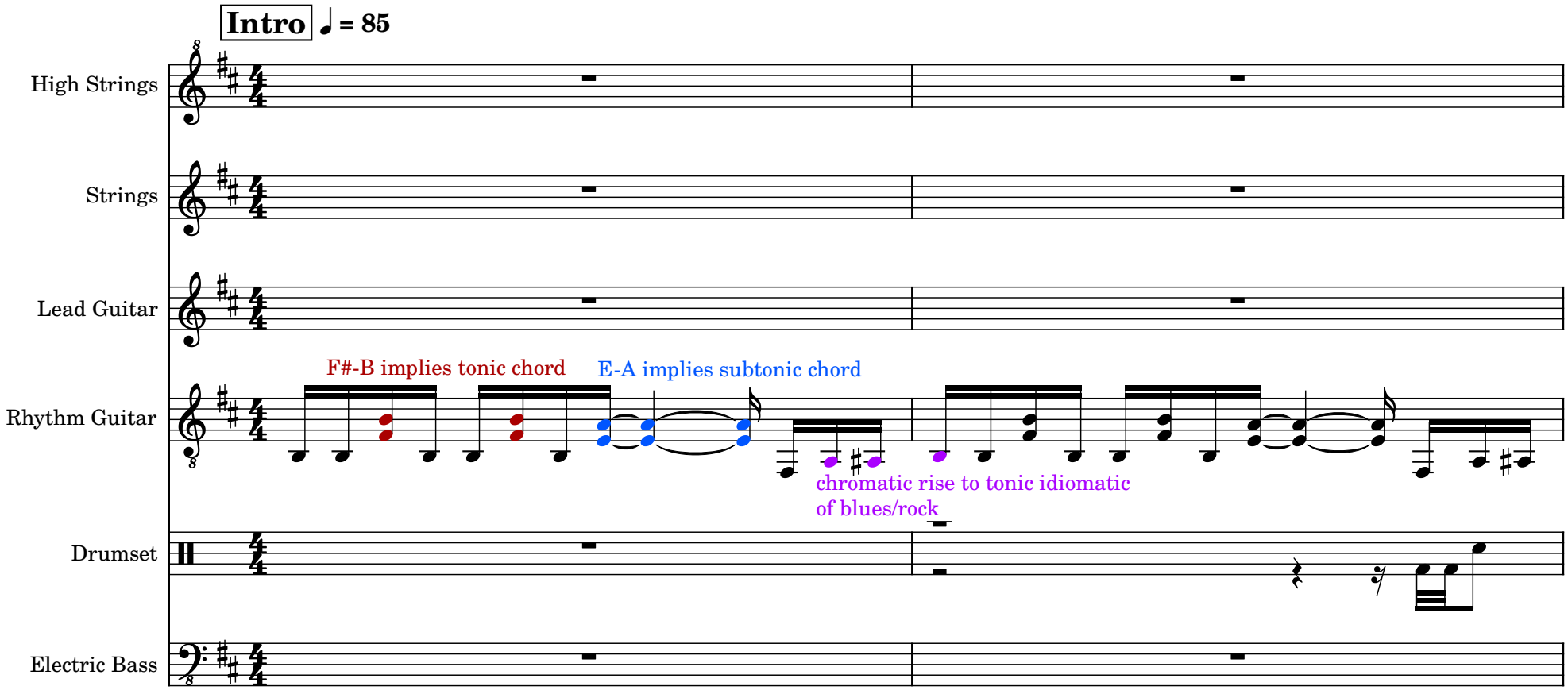
VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

Storm Eagle Stage

from Mega Man X

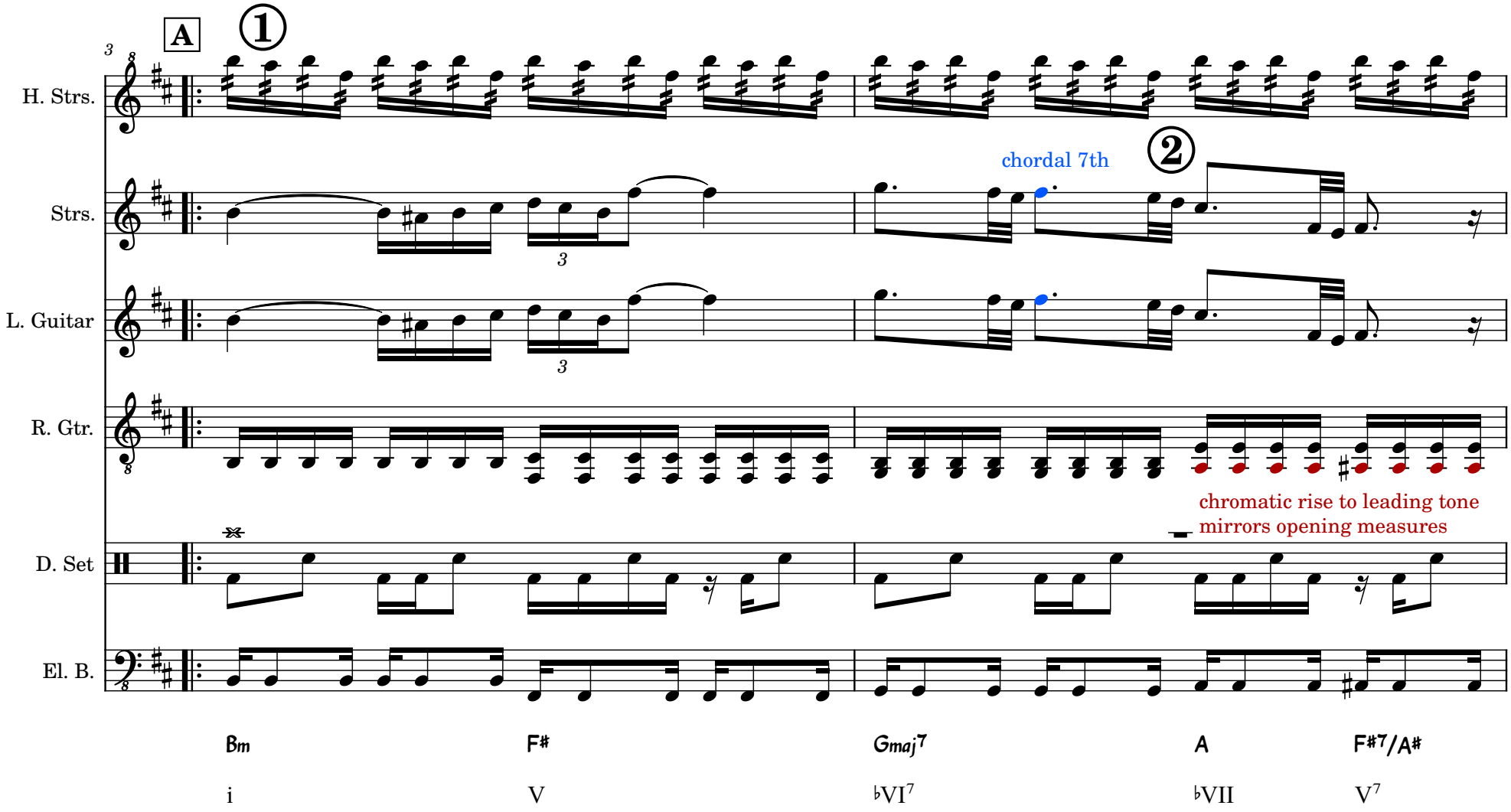
Composed by Makato Tomozawa
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
www.seventhsam.com



Mega Man X's OST is - above all else - a love letter to the power metal genre (and all its rock/blues influences). The opening two measures of this stage are no exception: open fourths (creating a powerchord-ish sound) punctuate a syncopated rhythm guitar riff that plants the listener's mind in B Minor without any of the classical trappings.

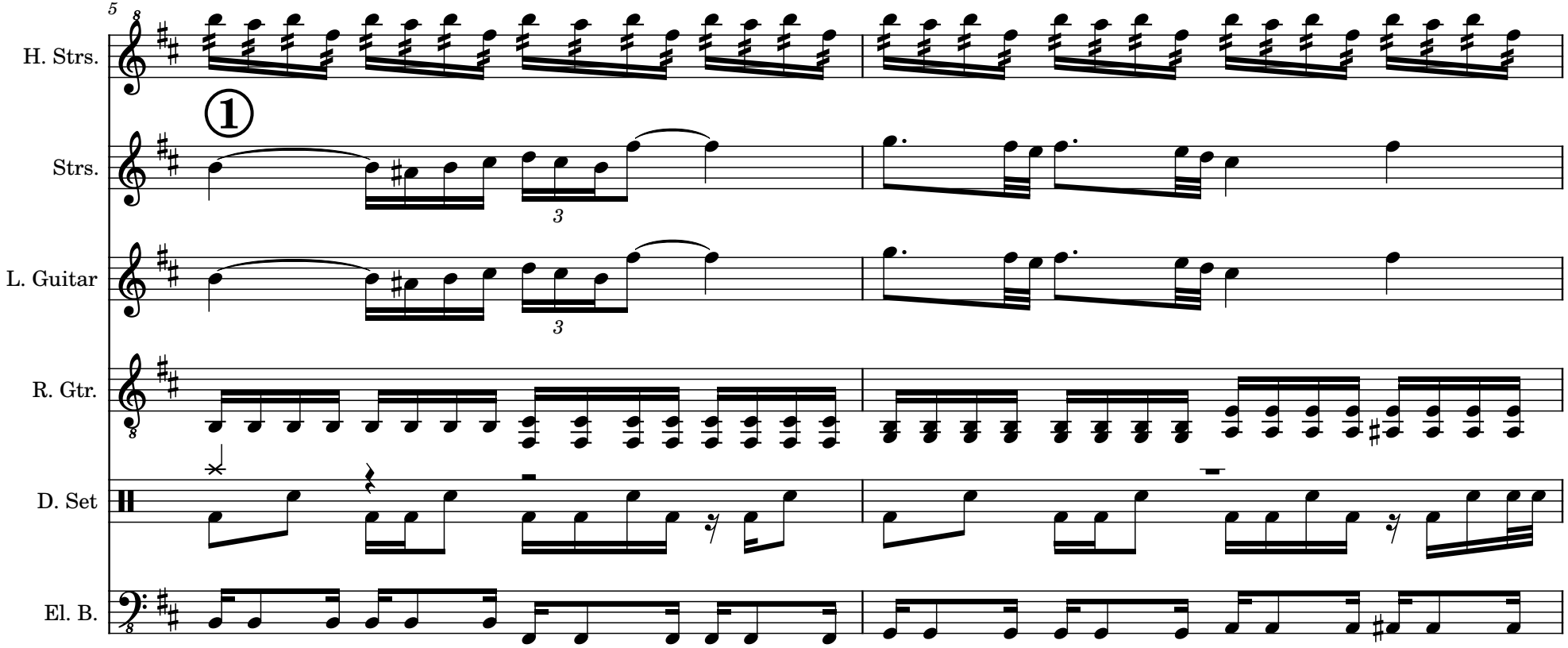
One might ask: *why* is Mega Man X's music (and the rest of the series, for that matter) essentially a bunch of power metal? The most honest answer I can think of is: **because.** Functionally, the non-stop (often syncopated) rhythmic grooves, electrifying timbre of guitars and synths, the hyperactive, pulse-pounding melodies, and the oh-so-satisfying sound of powerchords all lend themselves extremely well to the game's visual style as well as the gameplay itself (non-stop platforming action). But I highly doubt a panel of deliberative musicologists sat in a meeting at Capcom one day and weighed the pros and cons of this genre vs. that genre; I think they just like metal and wanted metal, so metal it was!

I ain't complaining. I *love* this stuff!



This particular stage (Storm Eagle's) is set in a futuristic flying airship/station miles above an enormous airport. How, then, does the music make the player feel like they're "high in the sky?":

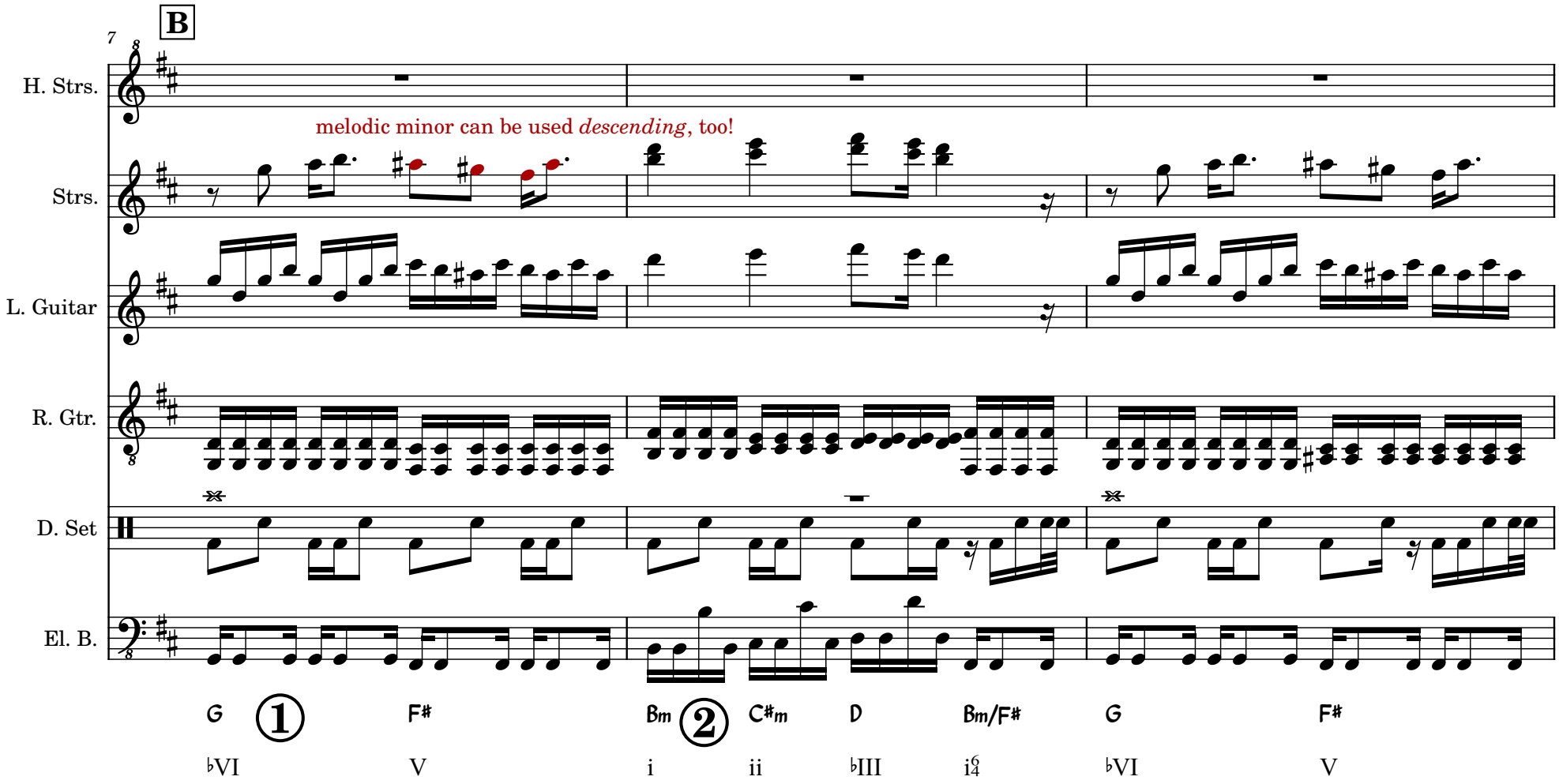
1) The extremely high pitched violin ostinato. Not only does the extremely high pitch automatically suggest "being high up", but the tremolo makes me think of things like whirring helicopter blades, aircraft machinery bleeping and blooping, and other such things. This is, of course, very subjective.
2) Speaking of subjective, these quick 32nd note melodic passing tones give the melody an angular, "hold-RUSH-hold-RUSH" effect that makes me think of a flying plane (or even animal) quickly swooping and swerving in its flight path.



Same

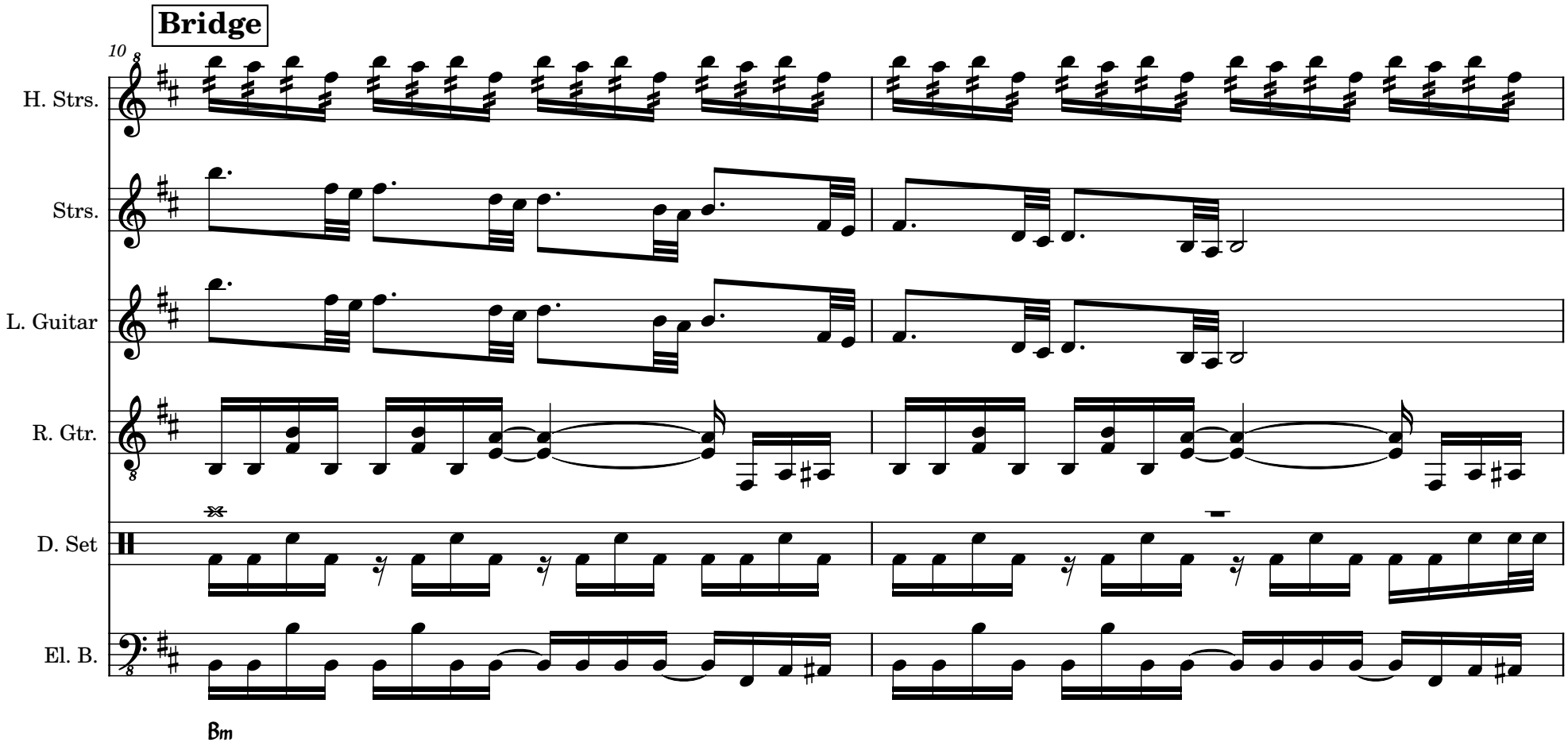
Same

1) Since this ostinato doesn't change its notes along with the harmonic motion of the other parts, I think of it more like a "pedal ostinato" that continually reiterates the key center (B natural minor/Aeolian, via the notes B (tonic), A (subtonic), and F# (dominant)). It's important to note that this doesn't seem to screw up the chord progressions in the melody proper precisely because the pitch of this ostinato is so high (and it sits back in the mix).

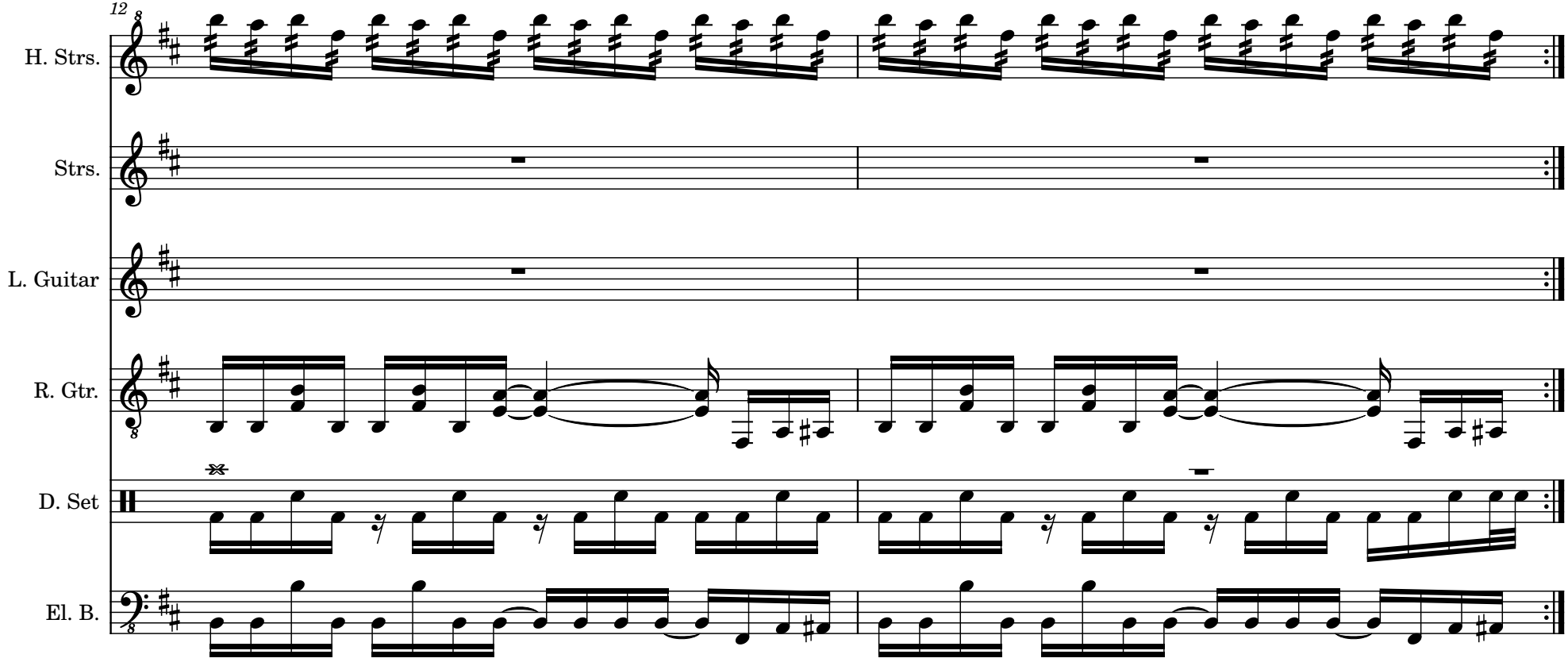


1) A common and effective technique for creating a contrasting section in a minor-key track is to begin the contrasting section with the bVI chord. Here's a textbook example: the bVI leads beautifully into the V chord via half step. In other tracks, it may resolve to the relative major (via bVII -> bIII or by way of plagal bVI -> bIII) or do something different altogether. In any case, it's a handy tool to have in the harmonic toolbox!

2) These chords are implied by the rising third motion in the melody. The important thing about this progression is in the *bass*: it resolves to a second-inversion tonic which, by definition, contains the V of the scale in the bass. This rises chromatically to the bVI of the scale in the next measure: smooth voice leading.



A descending, ornamented B minor (tonic chord) arpeggio leads the listener smoothly back into a four-measure bridge section. This section echoes the intro and parts of the A section with such similarity that the track loops completely seamlessly. Short and sweet.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L. Guitar
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