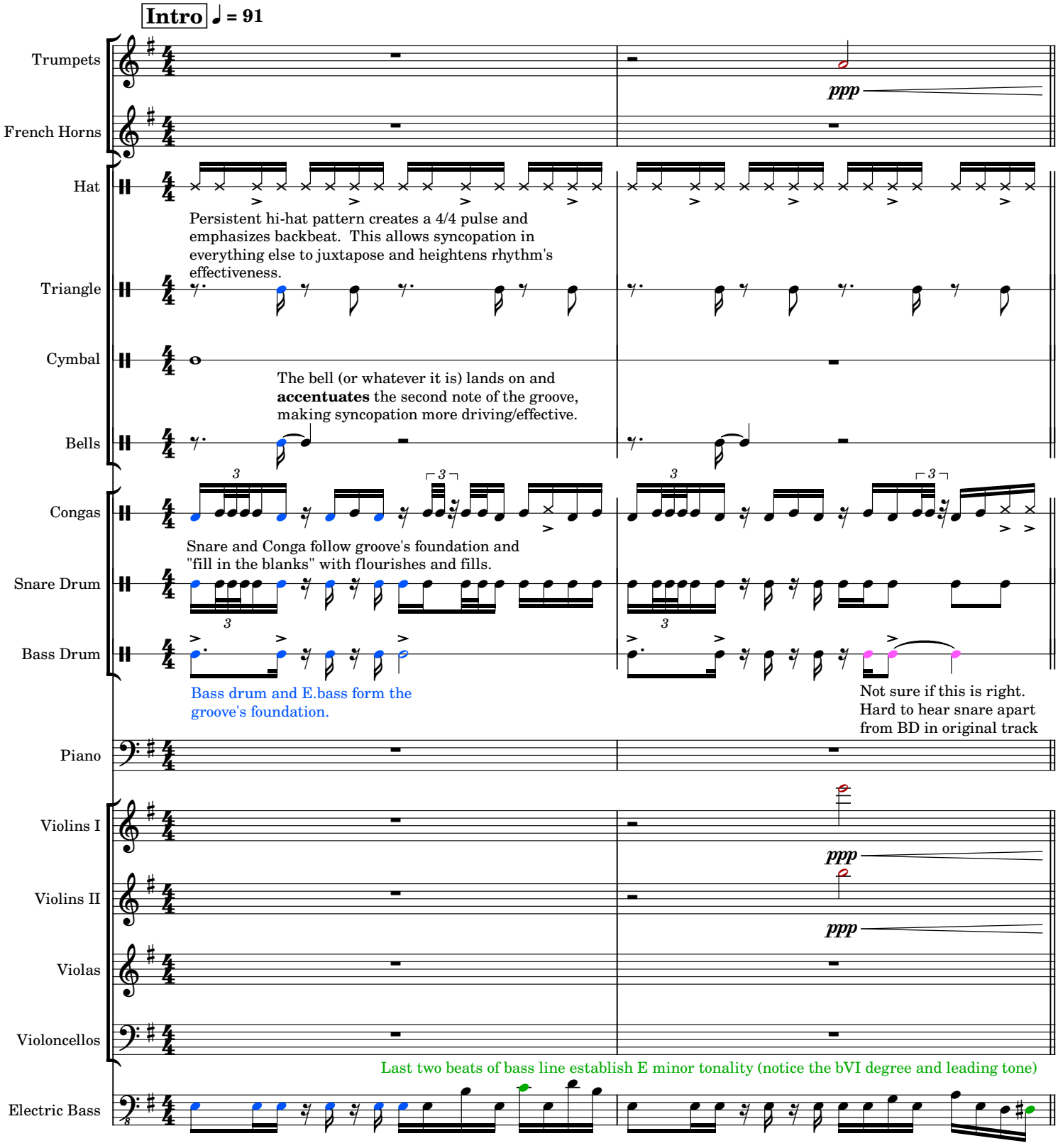
VIDEO GAME MUSIC ANALYSIS

- For Educational Use Only -

The Brink of Death

from Chrono Cross

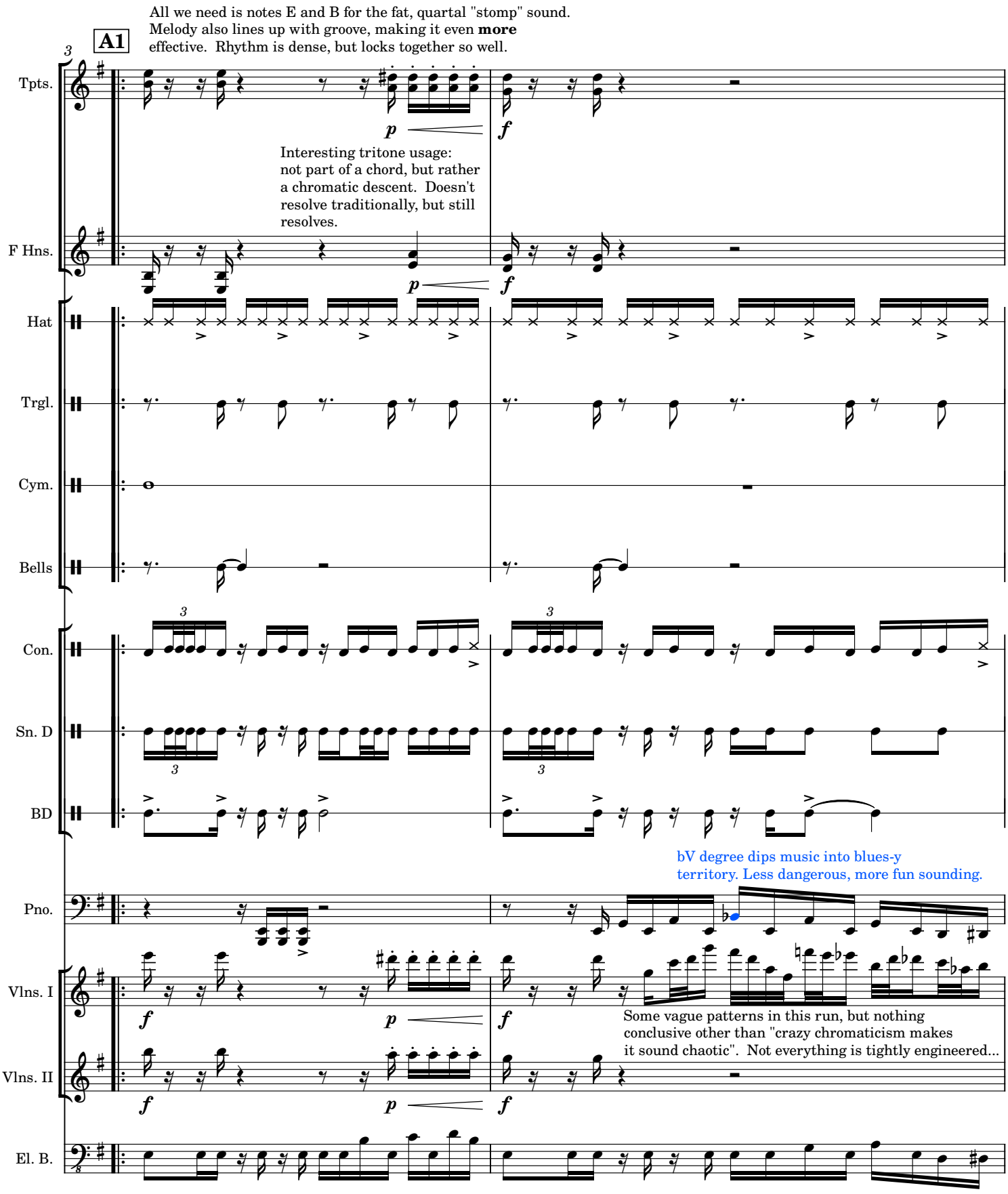
Composed by Yasunori Mitsuda
Transcription/Analysis by Seventh Sam
www.seventhsam.com



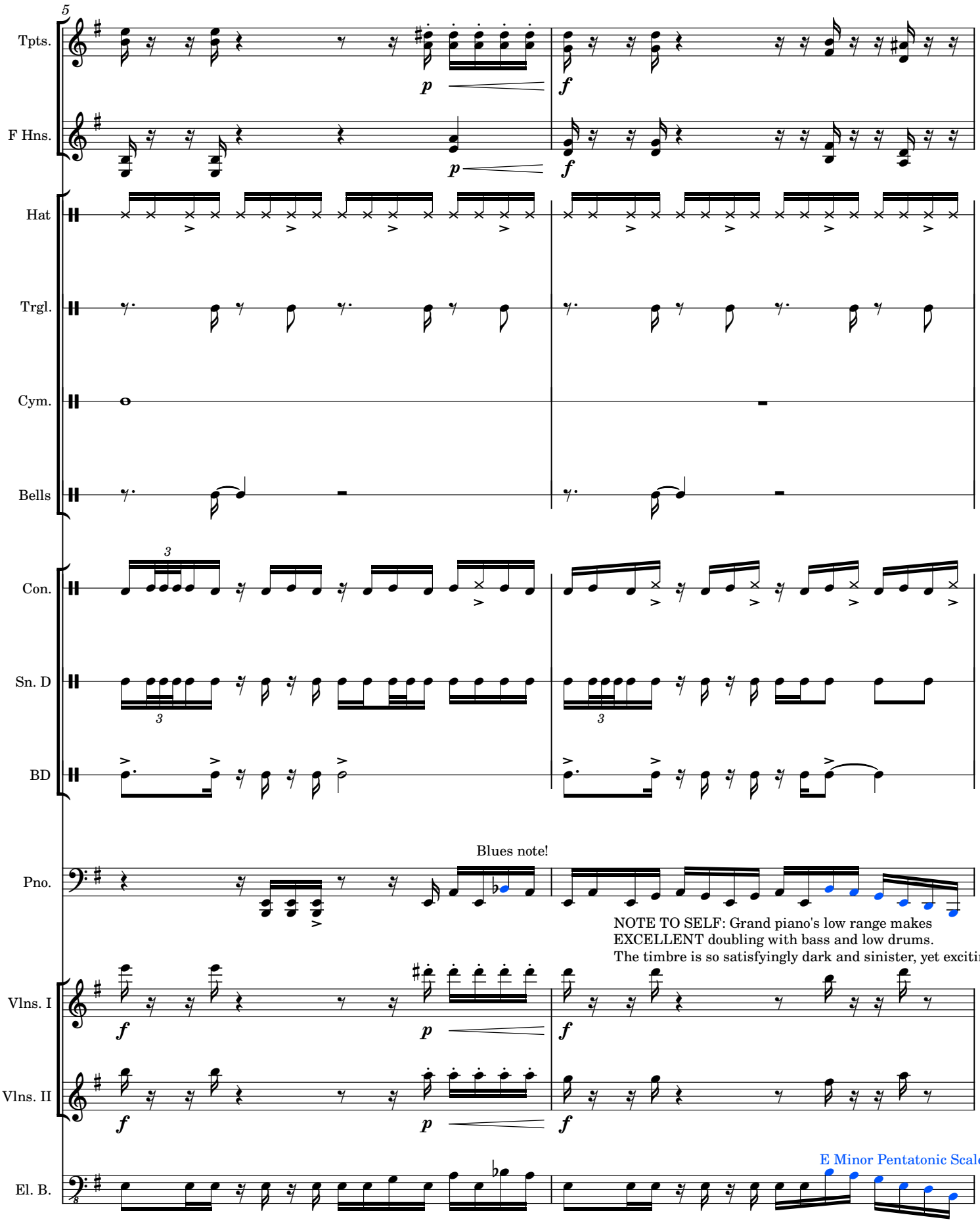
STRUCTURE:
INTRO - Establishes groove and nearly identical to last section, facilitating looping.
A - Primary section. Repeats itself.
B - Bridge section.
C - Primary section. Repeats itself, with through-composed melody.
D - Bridge section.
OUTRO - Mimics intro with some added flair, loops right back to A as if starting the track over again.

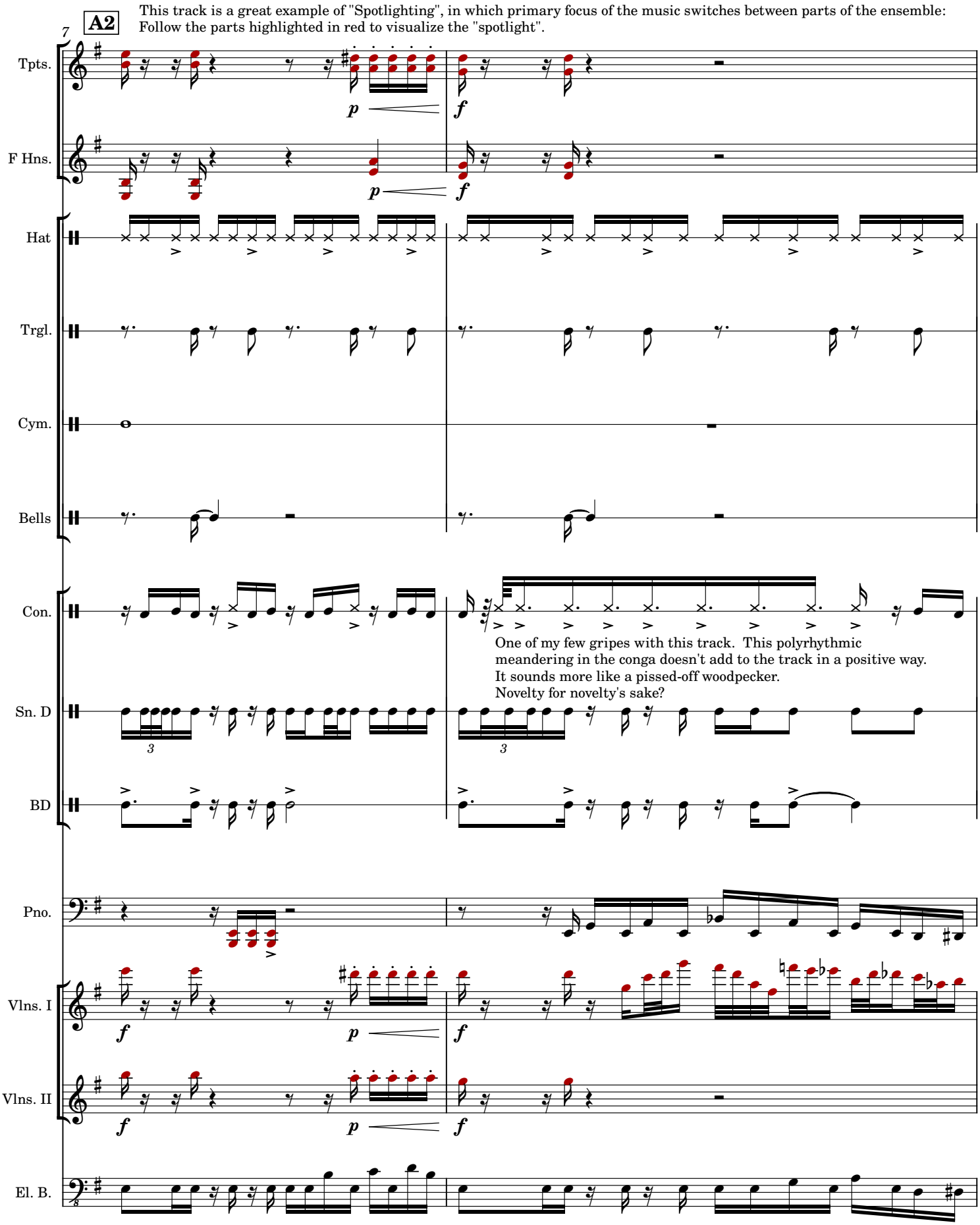
E_{sus^4}

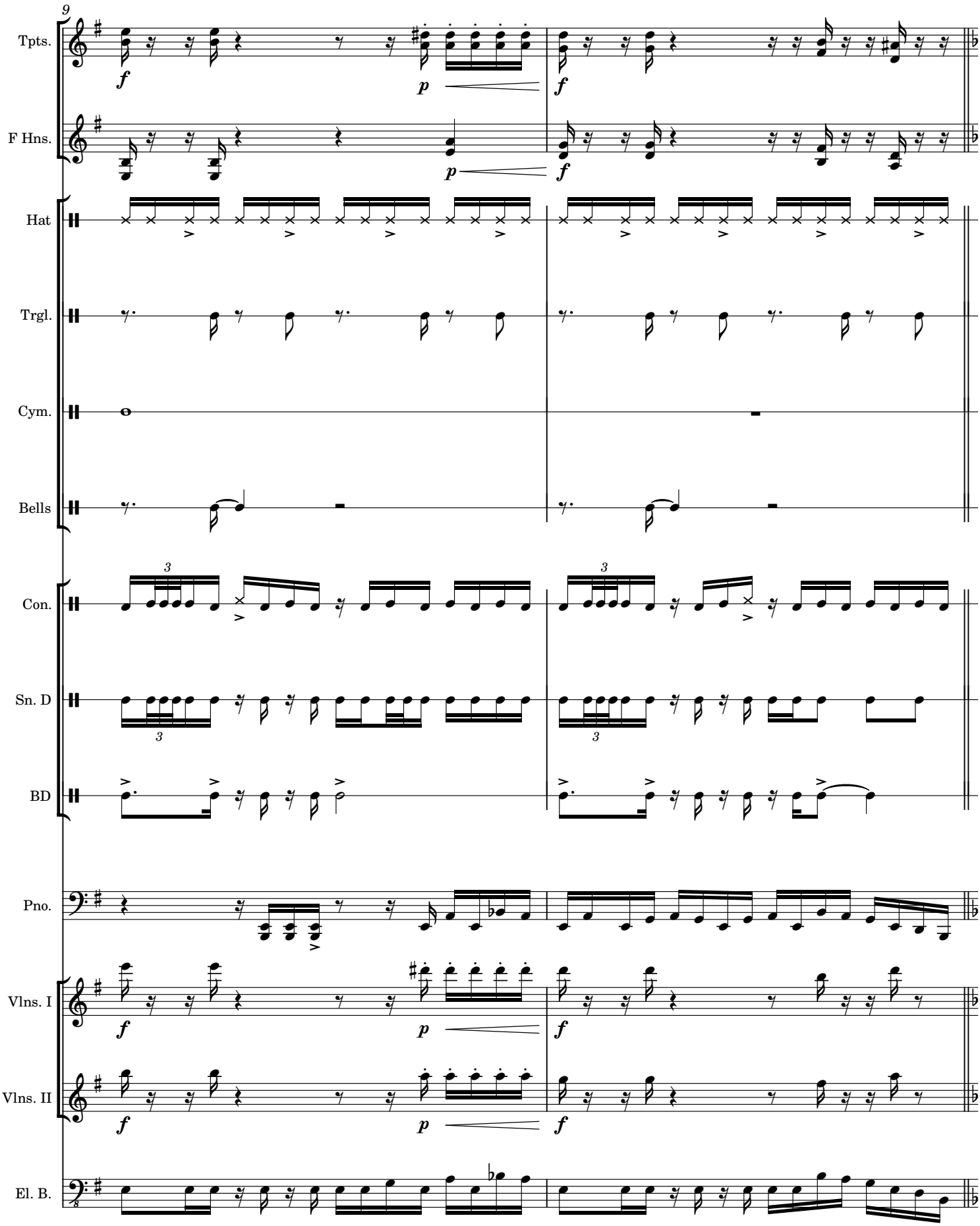
Not really a sus chord:
actually a quartal/quintal sound.
Label is sus4 for convenience.

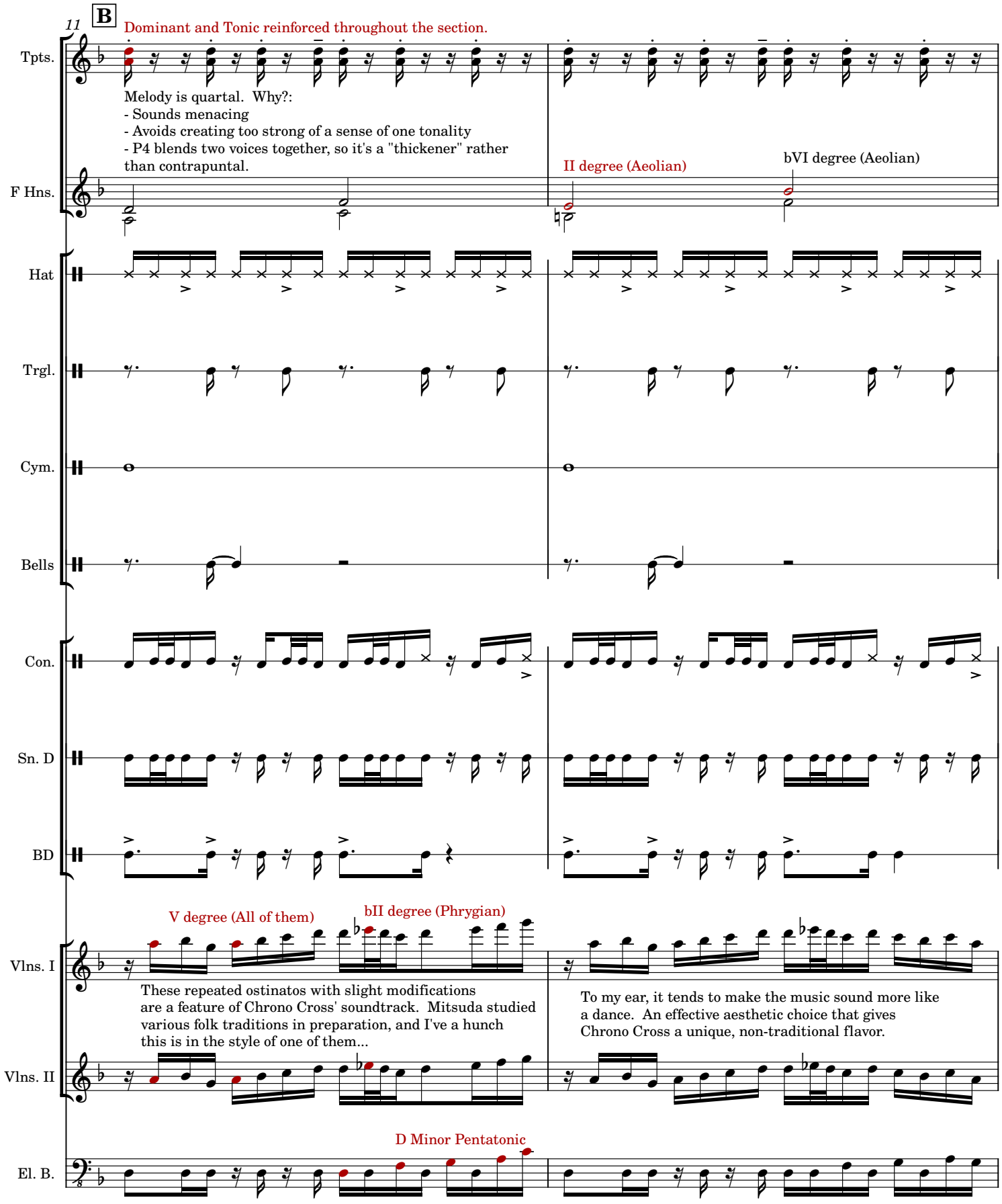


ON THE TONALITY: The A section is in E...something. Minor/Aeolian/Phrygian/Dorian/Blues/Pentatonic...
It switches back and forth so liberally (and uses quartal/quintal harmony so frequently) that it's more apt to say it's using a plethora of minor modes centered around E. Harmony is non-functional and quartal/quintal, so RNA is N/A.

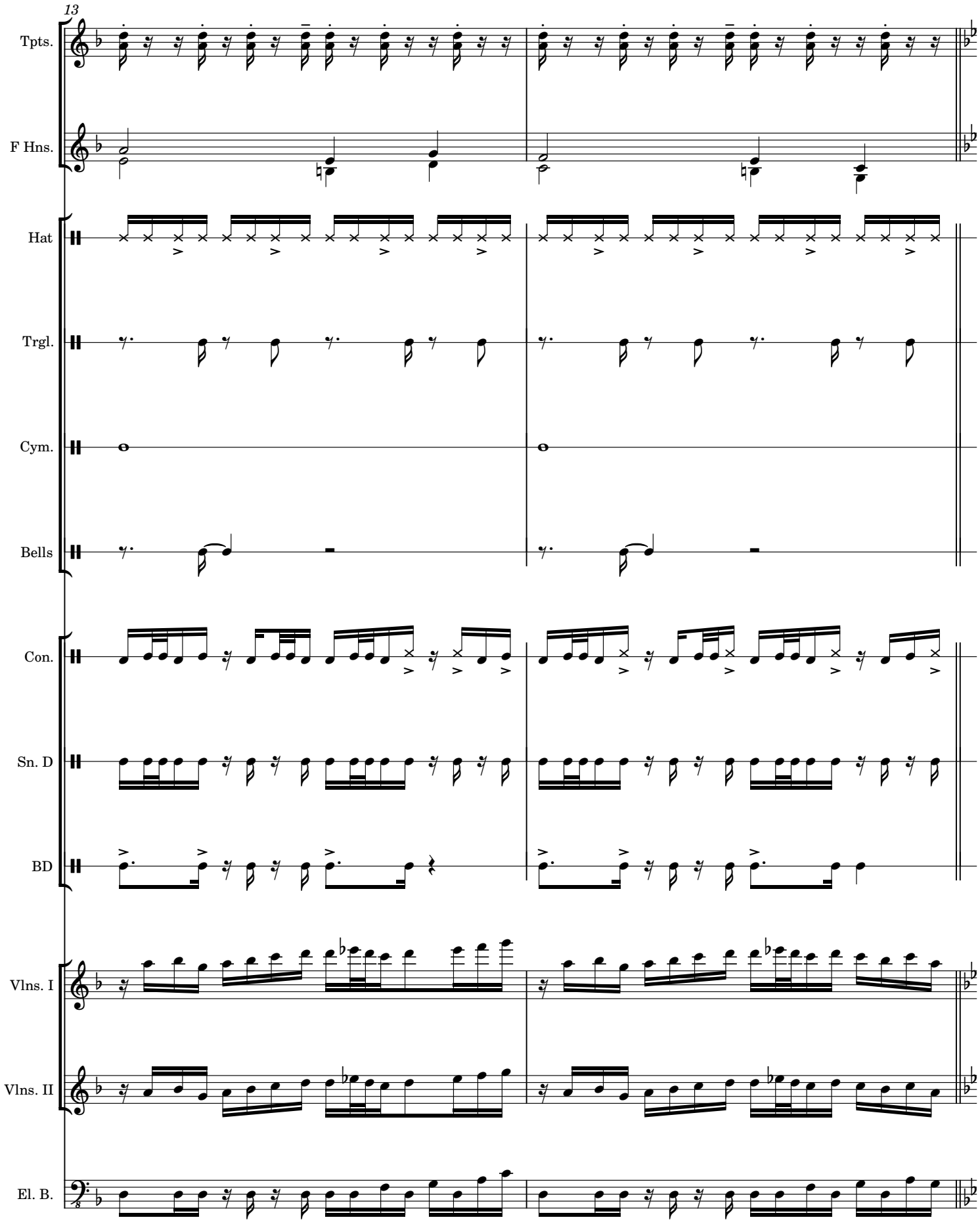

5
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Pno.
Blues note!
NOTE TO SELF: Grand piano's low range makes
EXCELLENT doubling with bass and low drums.
The timbre is so satisfyingly dark and sinister, yet exciting.
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
El. B.
E Minor Pentatonic Scale

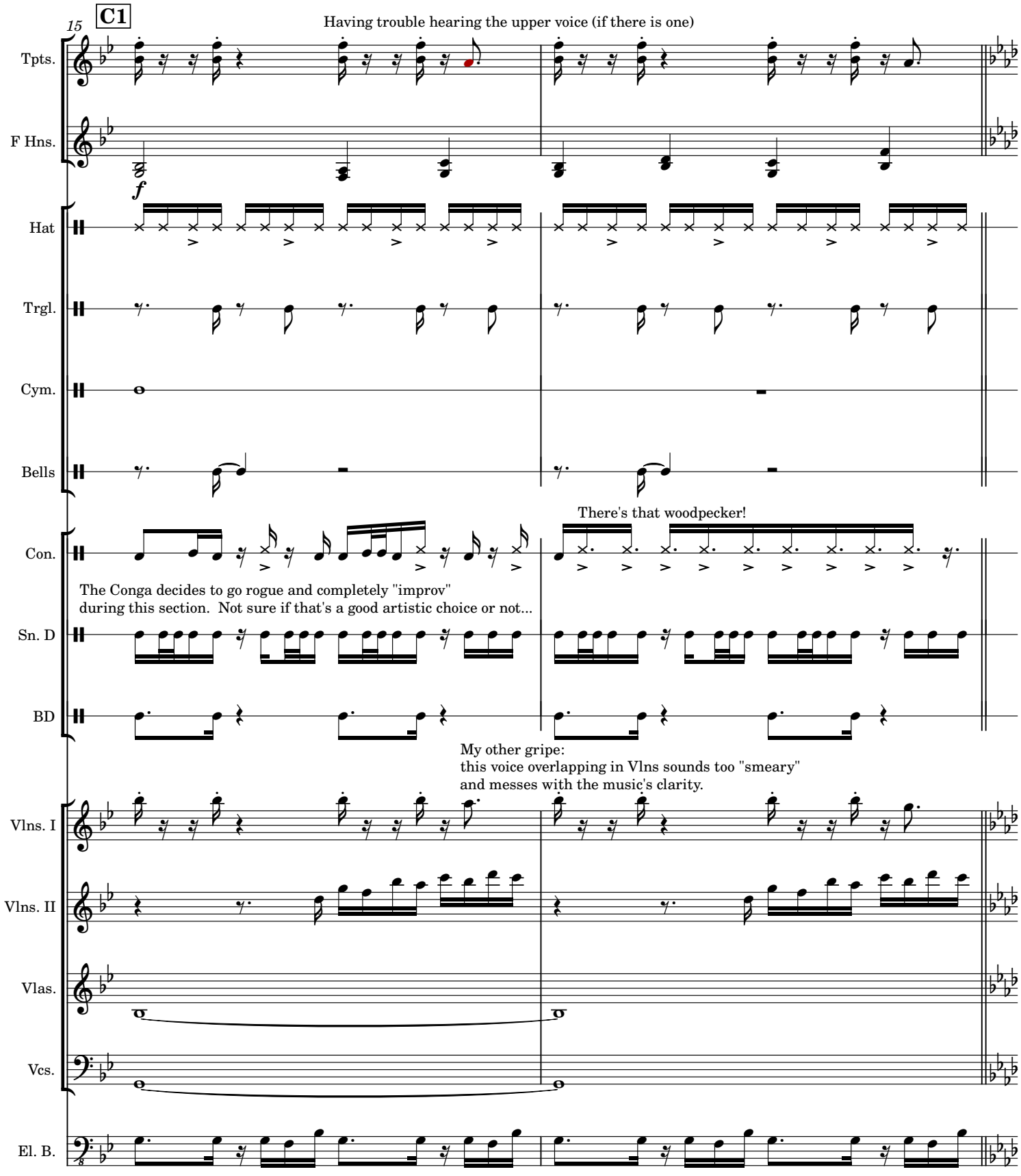

A2
This track is a great example of "Spotlighting", in which primary focus of the music switches between parts of the ensemble:
Follow the parts highlighted in red to visualize the "spotlight".
7
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
One of my few gripes with this track. This polyrhythmic
meandering in the conga doesn't add to the track in a positive way.
It sounds more like a pissed-off woodpecker.
Novelty for novelty's sake?
Sn. D
BD
Pno.
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
El. B.


9
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Pno.
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
El. B.



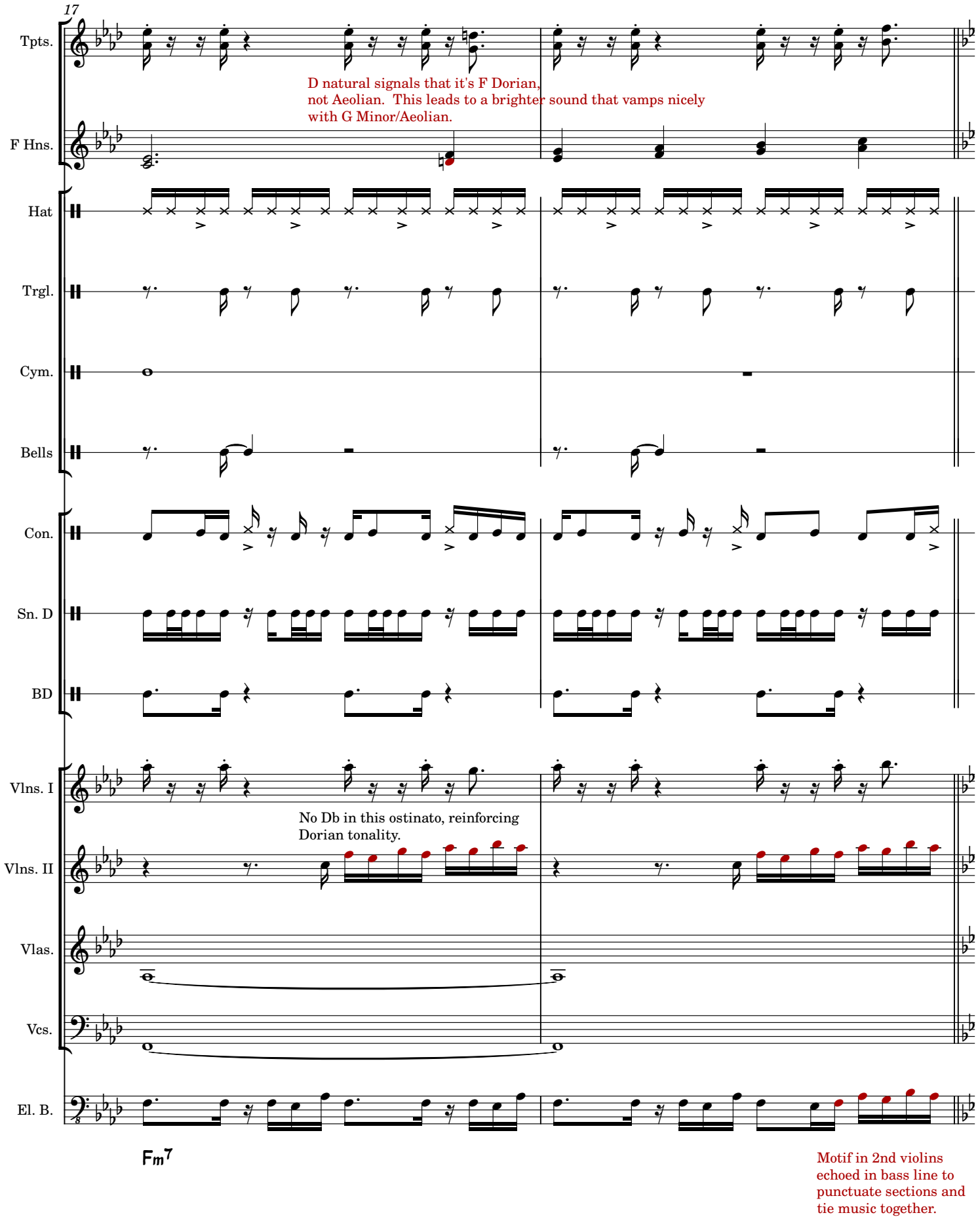
TONALITY: Shifted a whole step down to D. Still a lot of mode mixture, but the tone is unmistakeably darker. The battle went from "this is cool!" to "oh, shit, it's getting difficult now..."

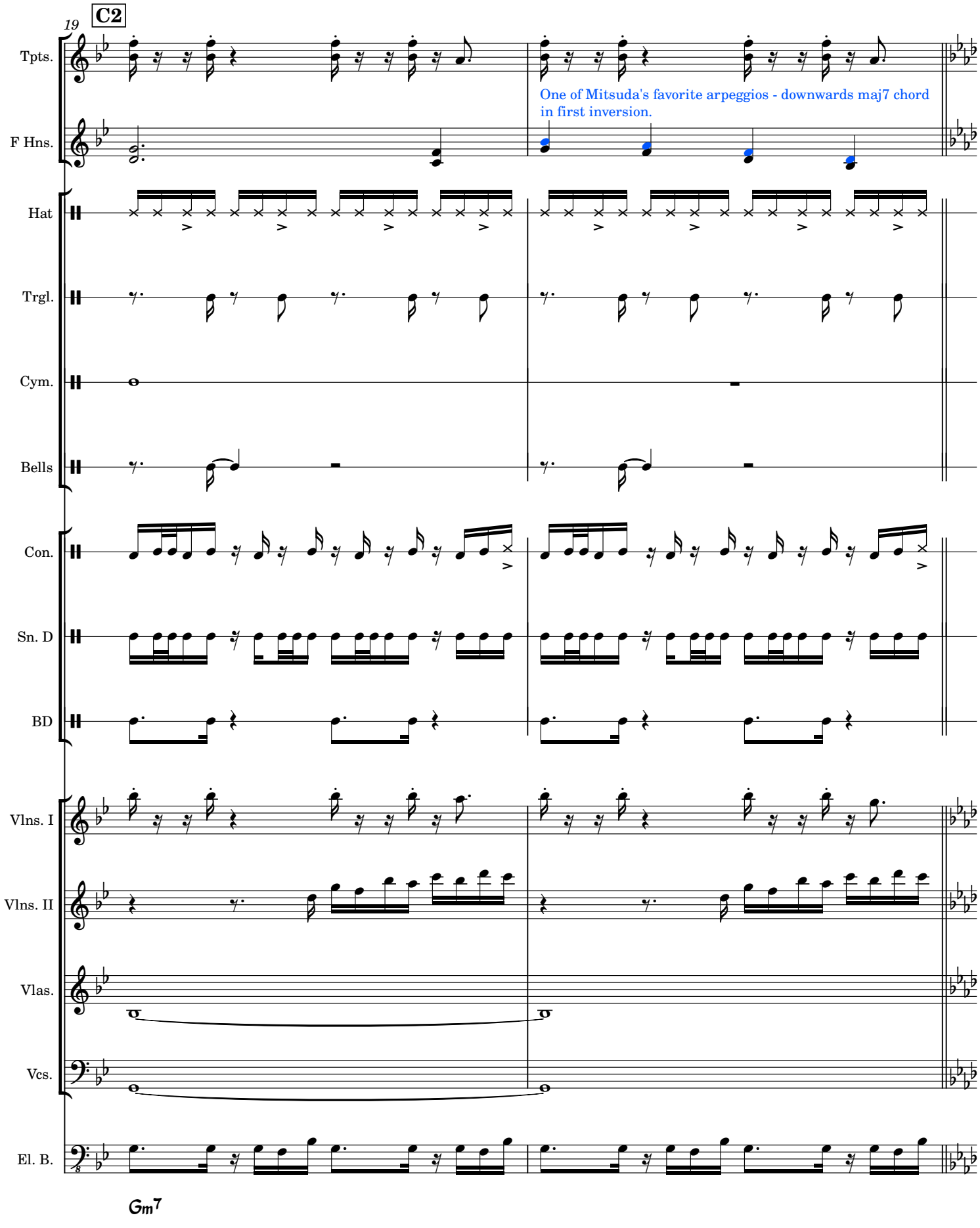

13
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
El. B.

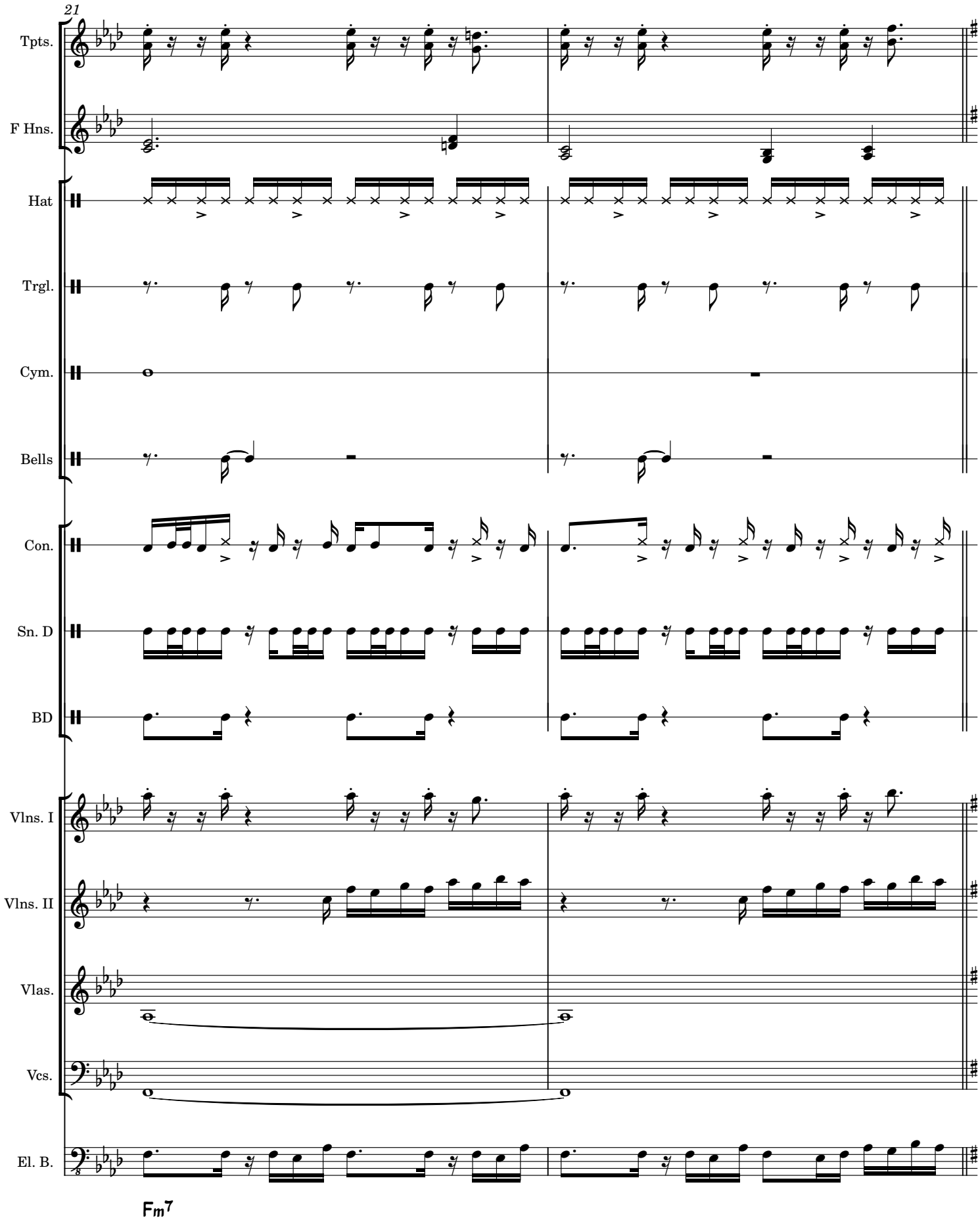


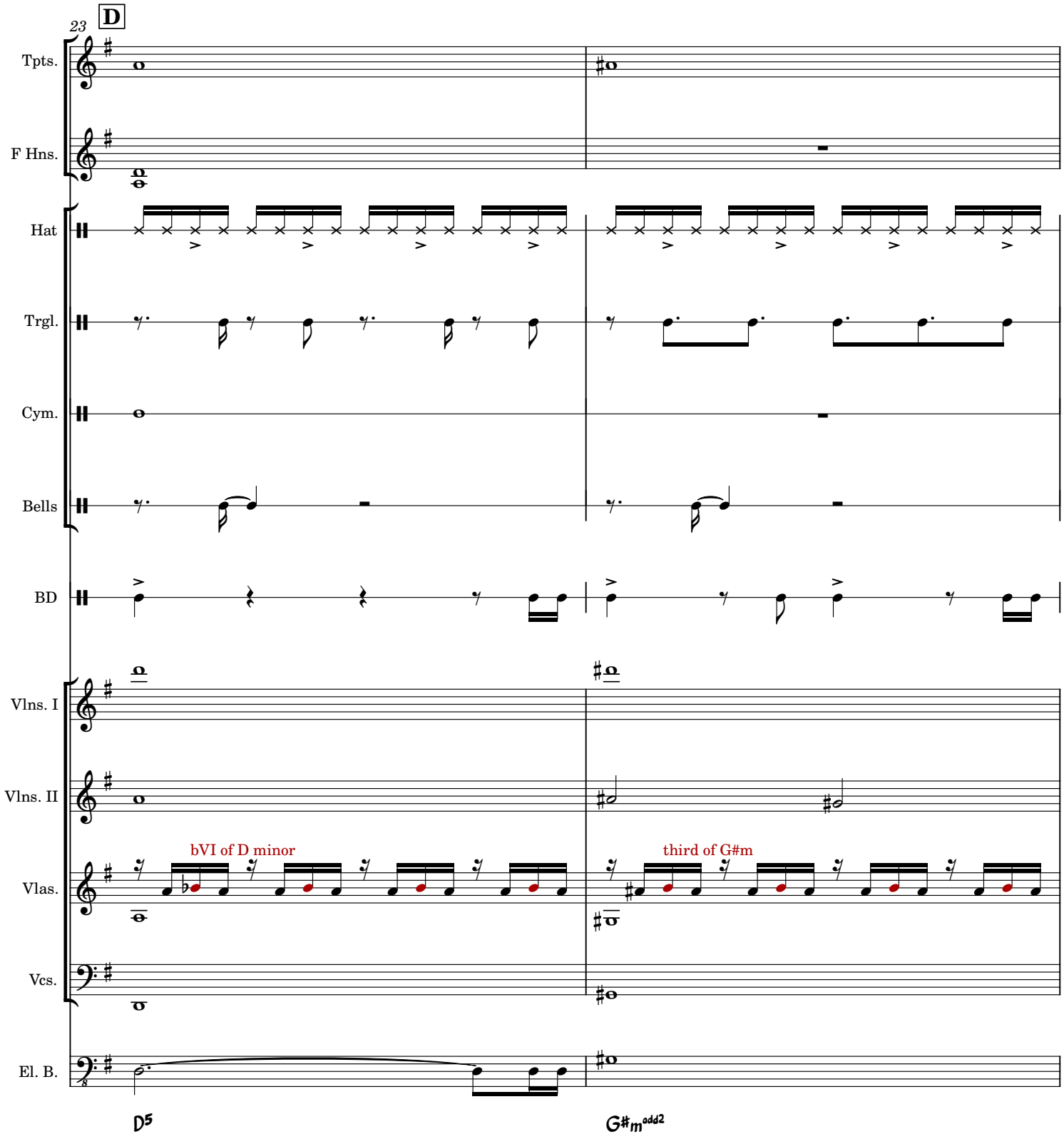
Gm7

TONALITY: The C section uses a vamp between Gm7 and Fm7 (both mellow sounding harmonies) to contrast dark B section with brightness. This creates an uplift, "ray of hope" effect in the musical storytelling. Notice the lack of leading tones and prevalance of subtonics - much more adventurous, hopeful sounding.


17
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
Vlas.
Vcs.
El. B.
D natural signals that it's F Dorian, not Aeolian. This leads to a brighter sound that vamps nicely with G Minor/Aeolian.
No Db in this ostinato, reinforcing Dorian tonality.
Fm7
Motif in 2nd violins echoed in bass line to punctuate sections and tie music together.

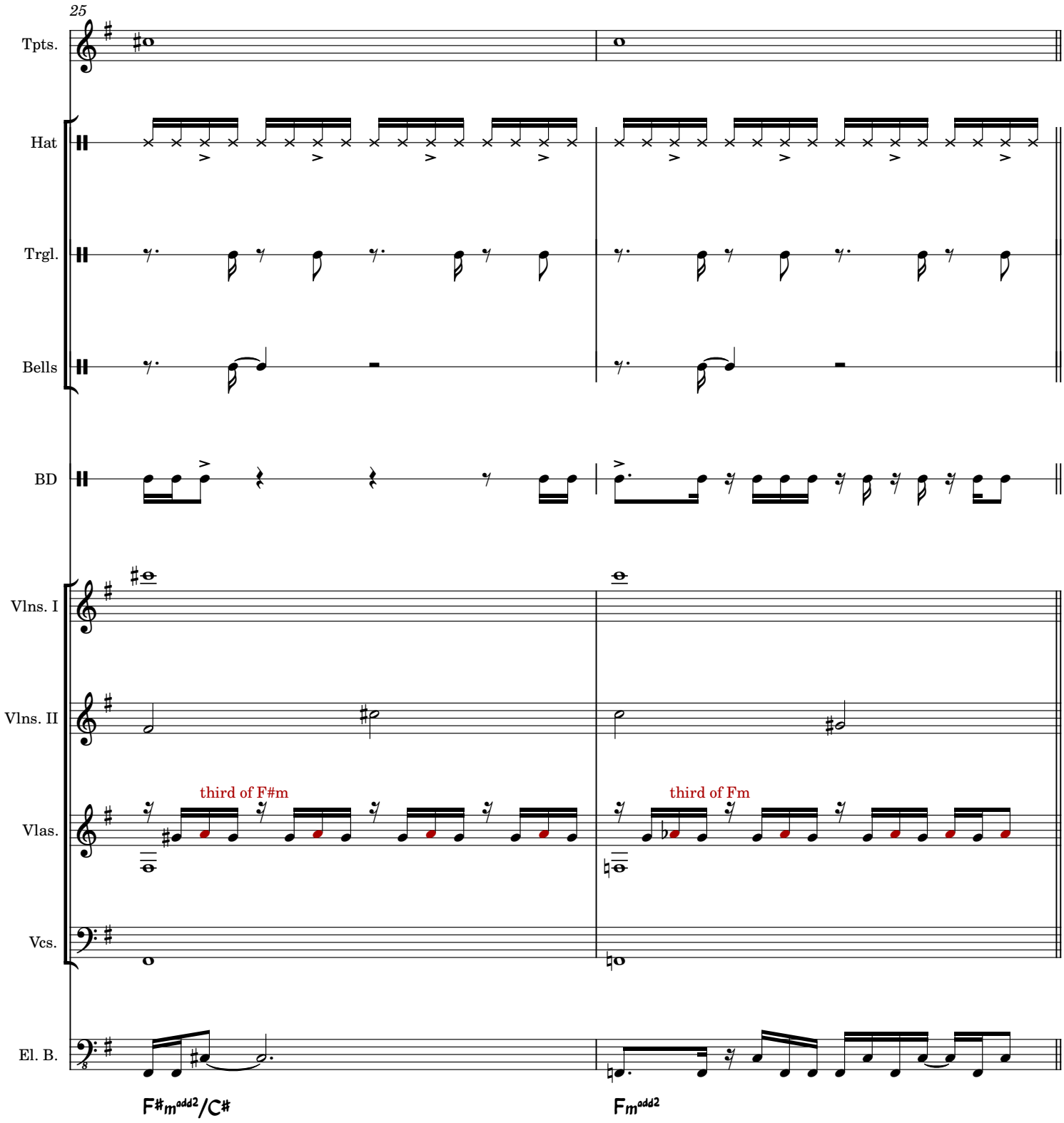

19
C2
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
Vlas.
Vcs.
El. B.
One of Mitsuda's favorite arpeggios - downwards maj7 chord in first inversion.
Gm7


21
Tpts.
F Hns.
Hat
Trgl.
Cym.
Bells
Con.
Sn. D
BD
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
Vlas.
Vcs.
El. B.
Fm7



Not a chord per se, rather a tonal center with a sharp m6 dissonance on top. Sounds very scary and threatening. The battle isn't nearly over!

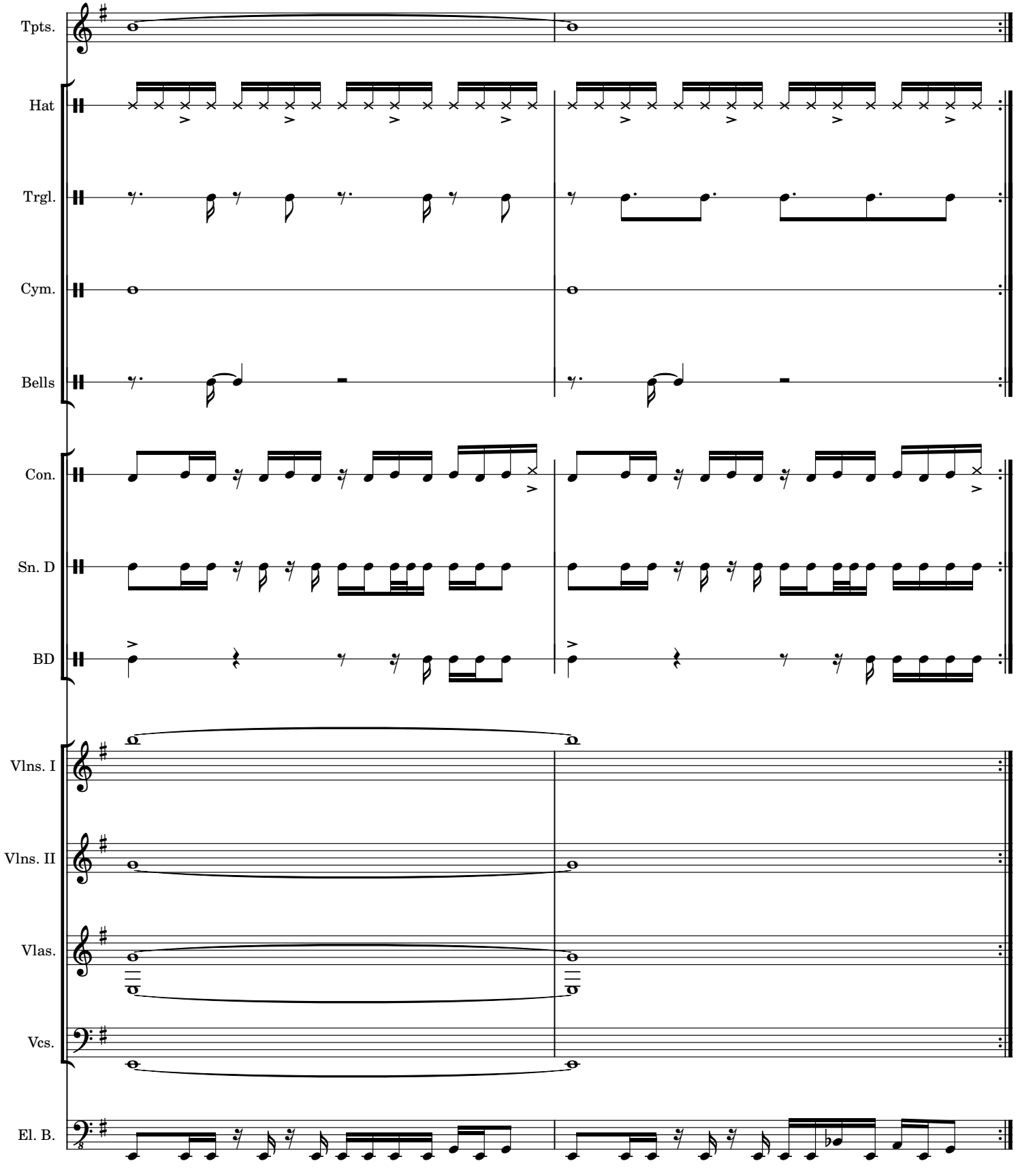
MODULATION:
Start with D, up a tritone to G#m(add2), down a whole step to F#m(add2), then chromatic planing until the target (Em) is hit.
Why m(add2)? It sound extremely dissonant and tense. Coupled with near chromatic root movement, it makes this section incredibly dark.
Also note: three of four notes in m(add2) chords sound out a quartal/quintal chord. The third of chord is voiced as an embellishment (see above), which allows the "quartal" notes to stand in sharp relief.


25
Tpts.
Hat
Trgl.
Bells
BD
Vlns. I
Vlns. II
Vlas.
Vcs.
El. B.
third of F#m
third of Fm
F#m^add2/C#
Fm^add2

Outro

I didn't transcribe the male war-chant shouts in the original, as those are unpitched and don't really tell me anything about the rhythm that isn't inherent in the other elements of the music.

27



Em

And...back to the home key, just in time for the loop.