Simon Hellewell

From Ancient Rocks

I. Such Land Spread Out
II. Sky Clings to the Trees
III. … and the Biting Wind
IV. All the Day I Could Sit Still

For mezzo-soprano, violoncello,
and percussion

Text

I have sketched a lot of this work in standard English, however I took a lot of influence from the folk music of my native Scotland. I suggest that singers who are not acquainted with Scots use the English substitutions in … *and the Biting Wind*. If you are well acquainted with a form of Scots, I recommend adapting the text to suit this as you see fit.

Such Land Spread Out
'The longest day of the year, wandering over the land
With sun on my back, and a breeze in the cool air
I lost track of time hopping from peak to peak all day long
Seeking the next horizon to greedily collect the views
From Quinag to Coigach, from Eddrachilles to Ardmair
Such land spread out with hours to spend
Those Summer days and west coast turquoise
From ancient rocks round lively heather
So free, such a captive.

Sky Clings to the Trees
Sky clings to the trees
Dripping down the ancient bark
Sighing in soft wind
Shedding bright autumnal leaves
I sigh with them and move on

… and the Biting Wind
And the biting wind dragged across the corries, wrapping us in the mist. Our faces against a whetstone of ice. We couldn't see far enough to know how bleak the world was until we found after half hour we had come full circle.

All the Day I Could Sit Still
Only a light breeze
Casting off some moody cloud
I rest on the grass
All the day I could sit still
Gazing off from Raasay Hill'

Scottish placename pronunciations

I believe that most of these names written in their anglicised forms should read fairly clearly, however note the Gaelic/germanic 'ch' (as in 'Bach').

Coigach ('Coi' as in 'Coy')
Ed-ra-chi-liss (i as in 'hill')
Rah-say

Percussion list

Instruments: Marimba, tam-tam, crotales, suspended cymbal, snare drum, wood block.

Beaters: Gong beater, marimba beaters, soft beaters, crotale beater, triangle beater, brushes, bow.

Performance Directions

There is a lot of freedom throughout, especially around rhythm. I encourage ad-libbing and embellishment, especially around repetitions. I only ask that you maintain the feel of the piece and the hint of Scottish folk music around the vocal lines.

The fourth movement is a postcard piece. The material for this movement is contained in a pouch at the back of the score.

A number of these pages explore the shape of the score, and this extends to some unusual orientations of lines. As this is music often sparse and unsynchronized, you have time to rotate the page as necessary for clearer reading.

As the amount of material used is relatively minimal, building familiarity with the material, should lessen this necessity.

Playing this piece and have any observations or questions? Just want to let me know that you're performing it? Don't hesitate to get in touch with me at simonhellewell@gmail.com

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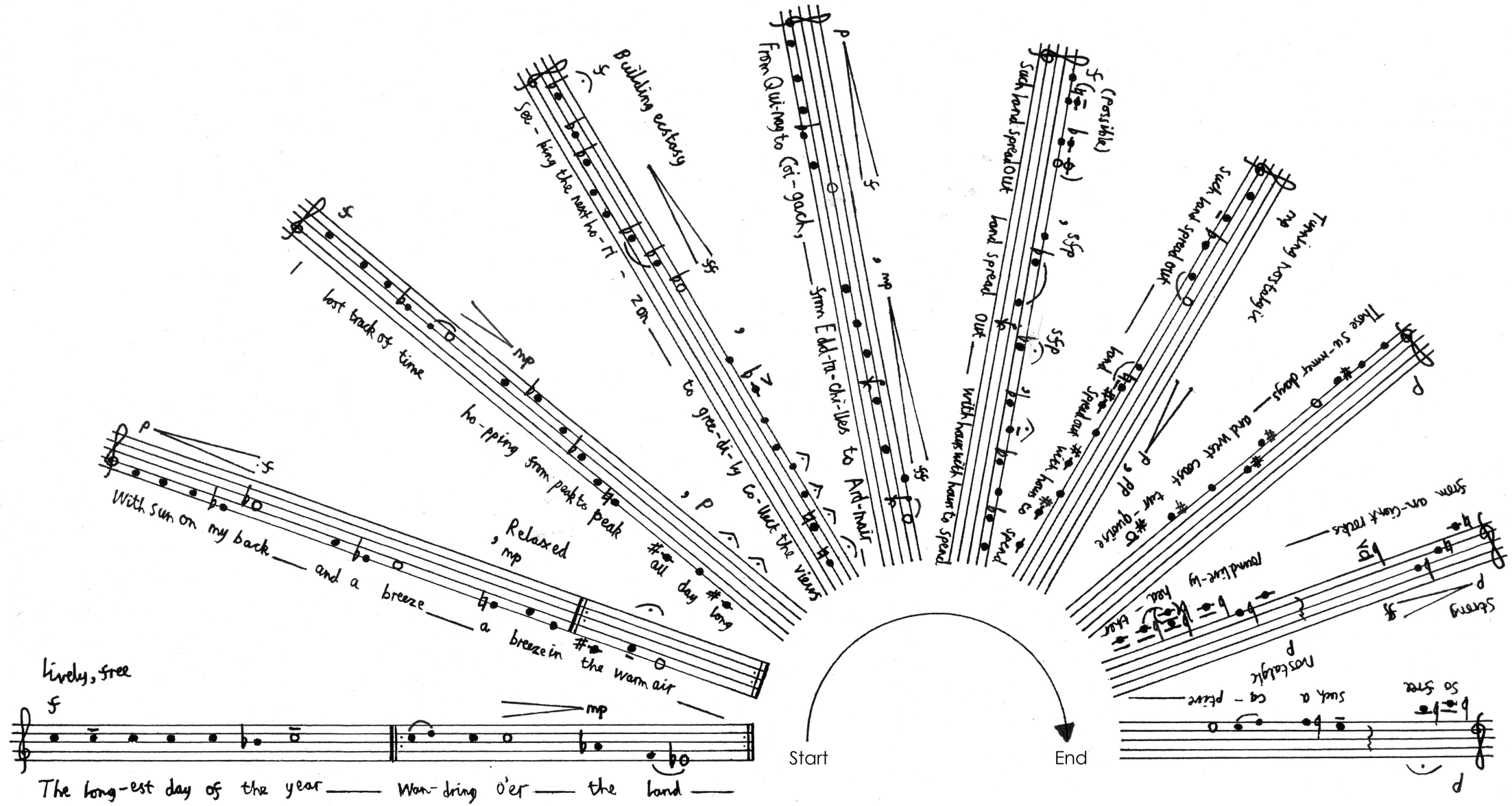
'Such Land Spread Out'

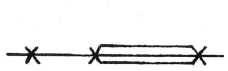
mezzo-soprano

- Begin after the percussion reaches its marimba drone. Alternate rays with percussion, always entering on this drone.
- Free ad-lib on repeats using as little or as much of the repeating bar as wished, beginning anywhere in the bar.
- While the percussion is playing a ray, be silent or quietly hum material from a previous line.

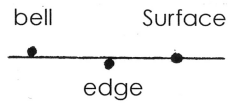


'Such Land Spread Out'

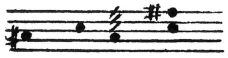
percussion



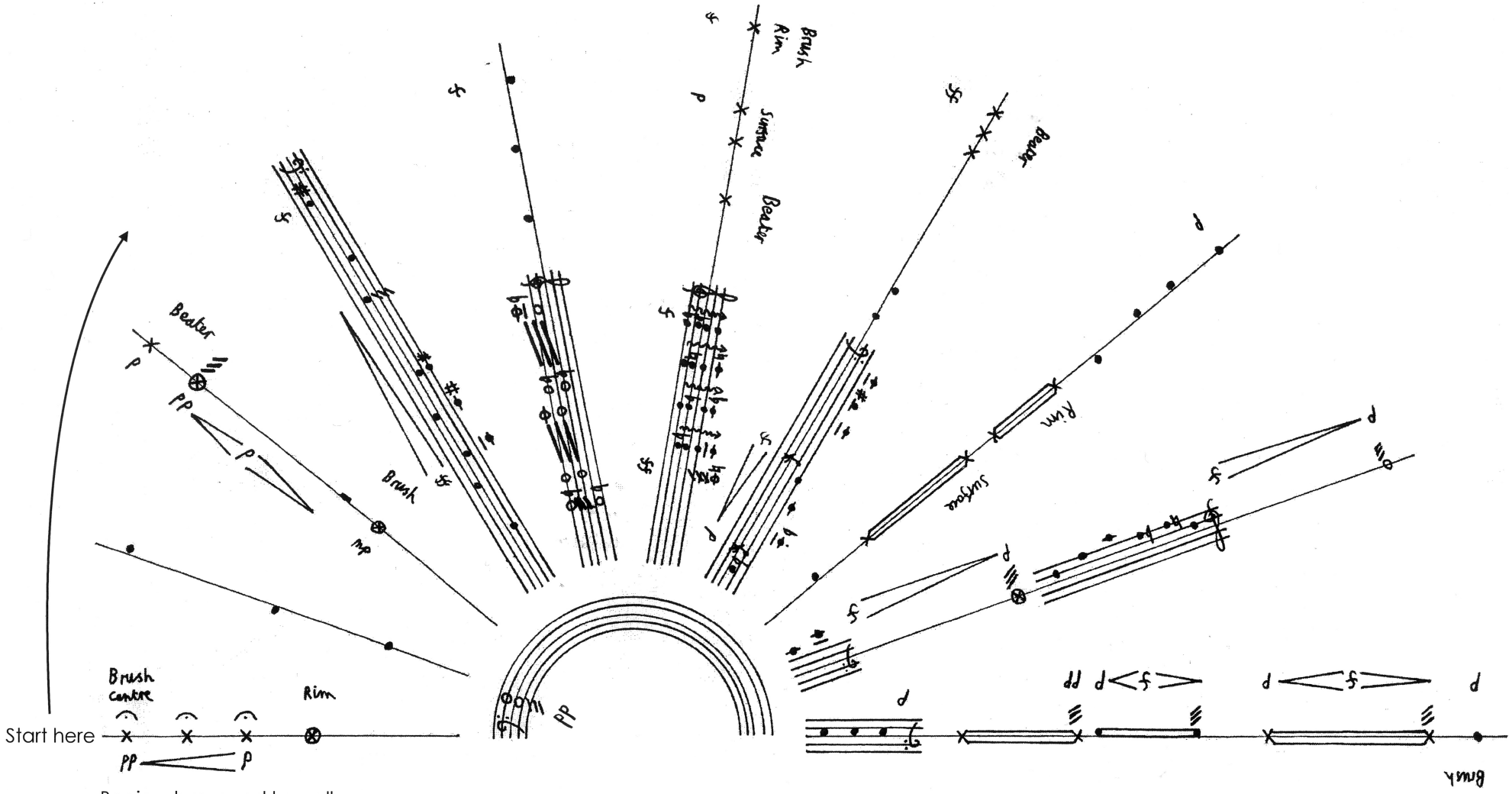
Tam-tam, gong beater or brushes. Longer symbol means continuous circular brushing unless tremolando.



Suspended cymbal. note placement = position on cymbal. Marimba beater or brush.



Marimba. Always using marimba beaters



Begin when cued by cello.
Alternate segments with voice, returning to the central drone under each vocal line.

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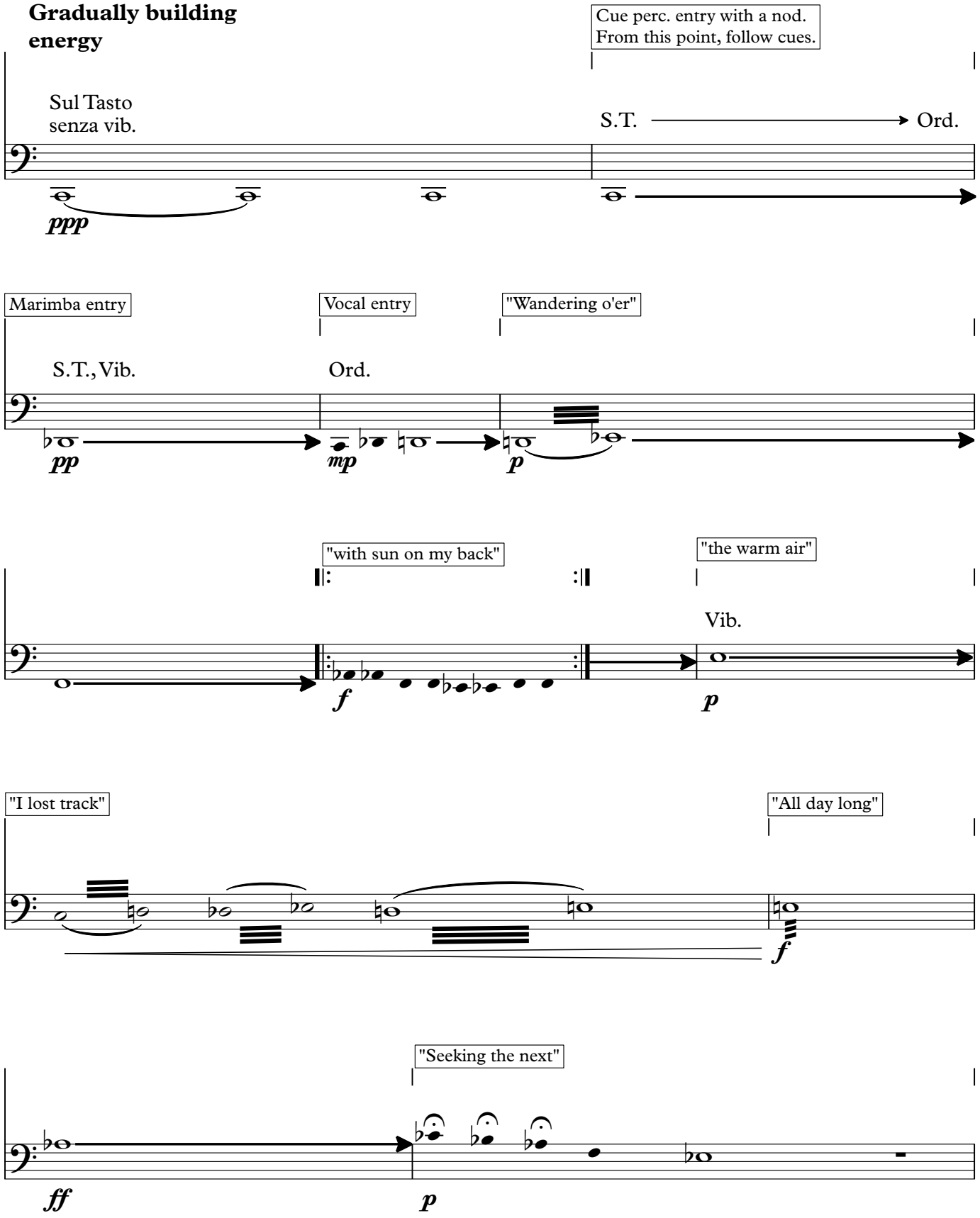
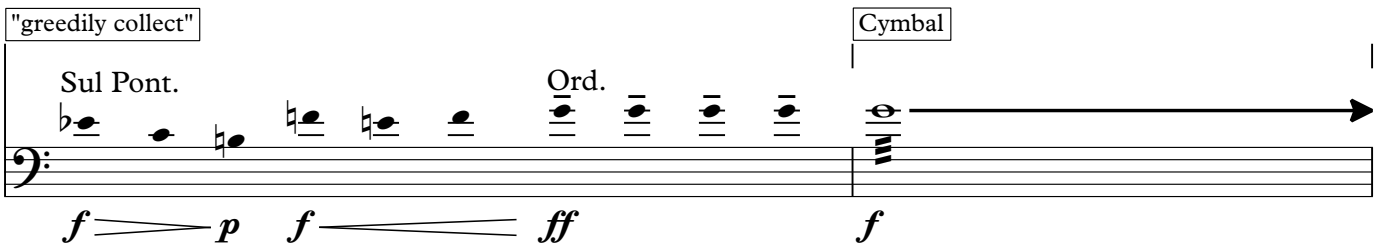
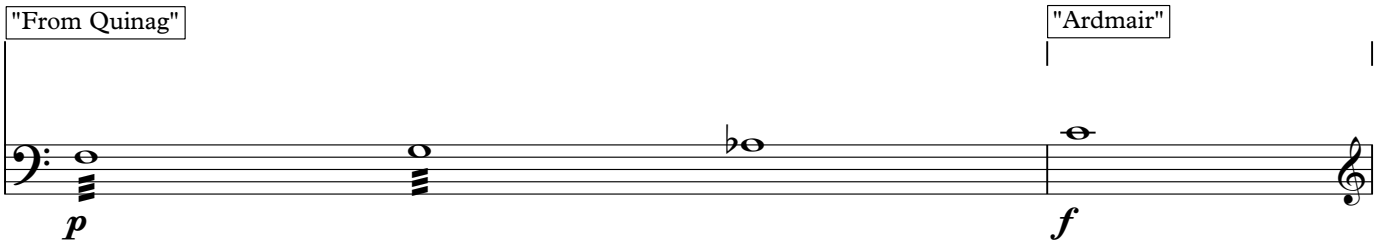
violoncello

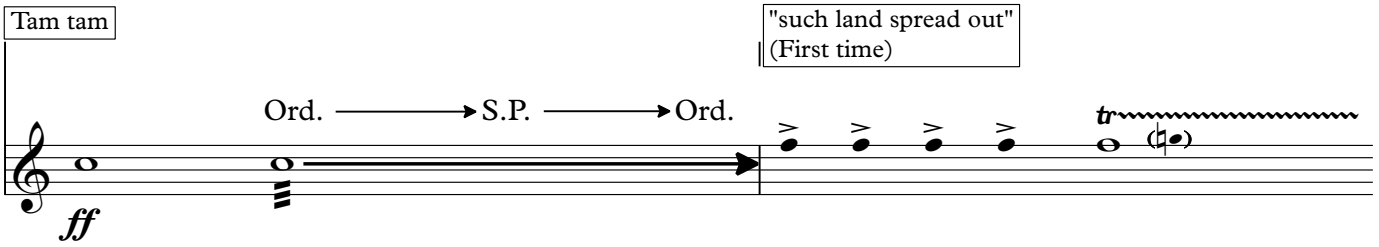
'Such Land Spread Out'

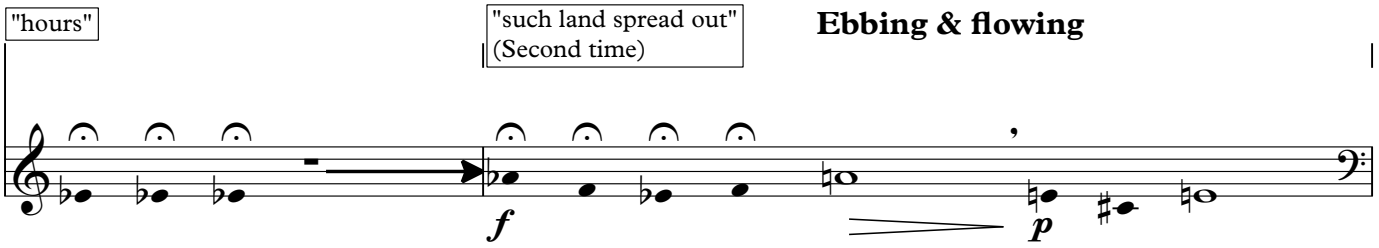


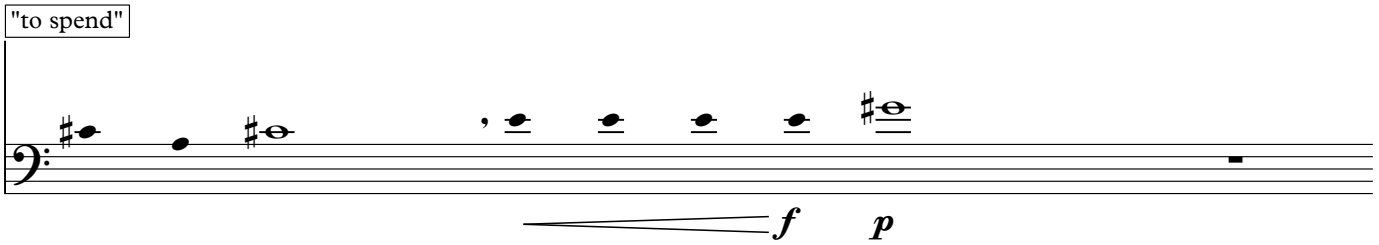
Exhuberantly

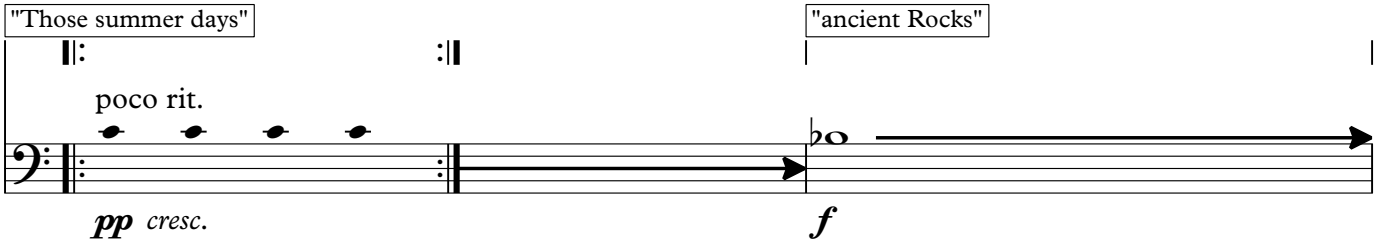




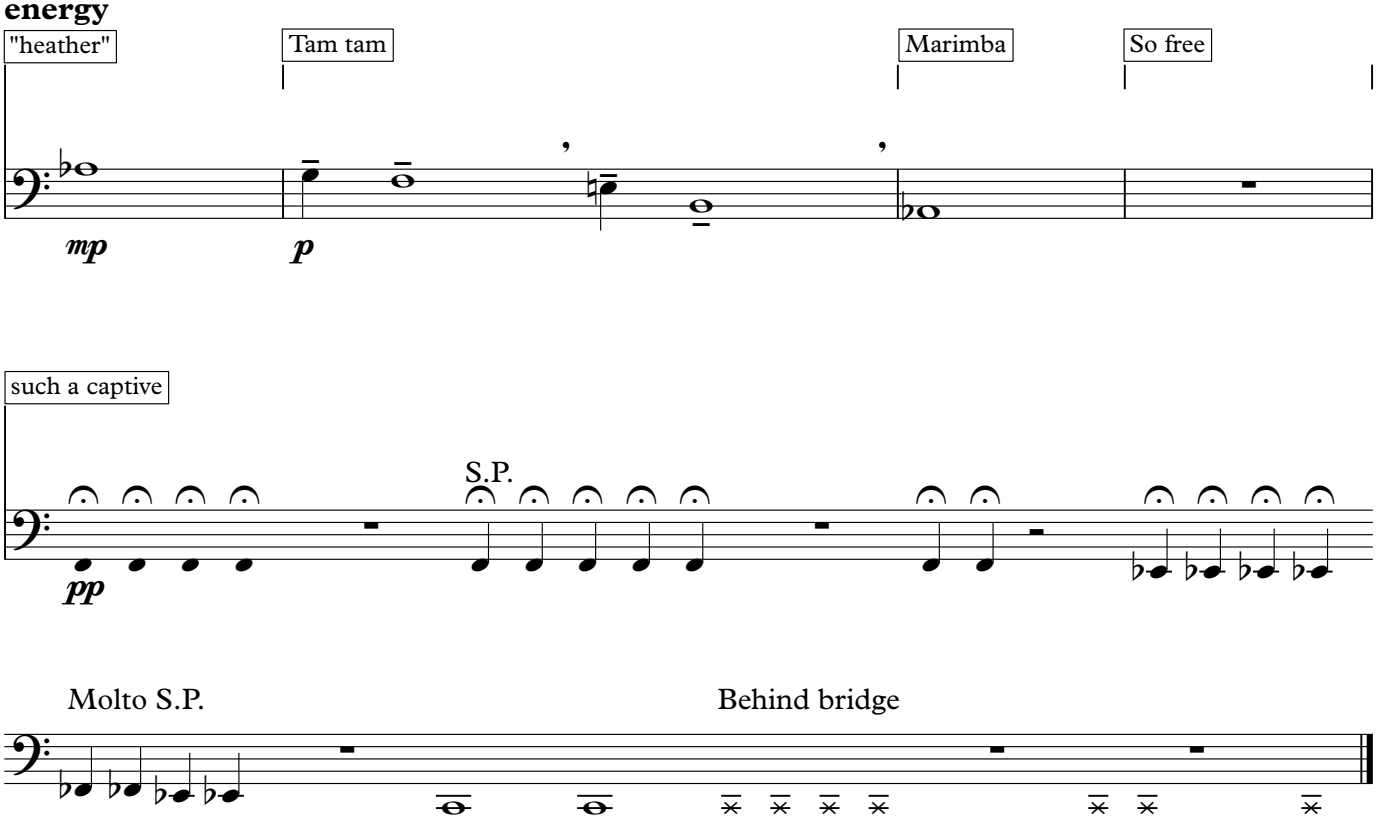








Gradually losing energy



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‘Sky Clings to the Trees’

mezzo-soprano

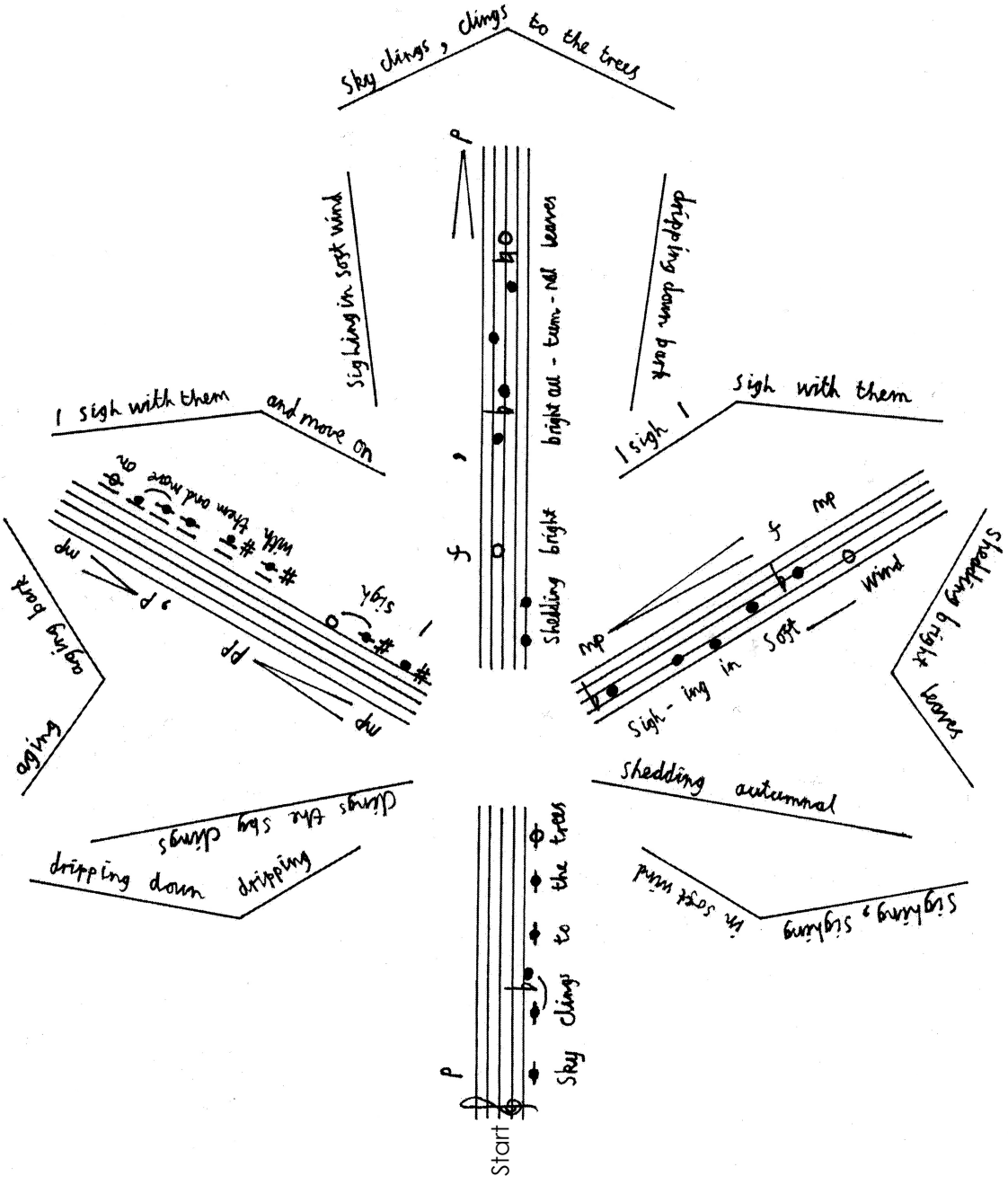
- Explore the lines of the score, beginning from the ‘start’ segment.

- Begin when the percussionist strikes the tam-tam. Tail off quickly when they do so a second time.

- Explore the lines of the score. At the end of each line, pick an adjoining line.

- For the purposes of navigating the score, you may follow lines in either direction, however you should not perform the line backward.

- Hold the score in your hands and turn performatively as you read, as though exploring a map.



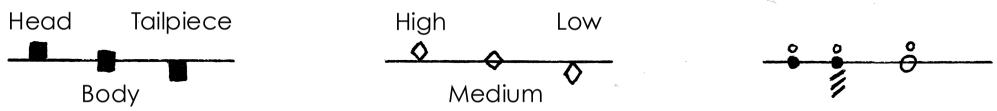
‘Sky Clings to the Trees’

Percussion

- From the beginning, follow the marimba line down each side of the leaf. Alternate between each marimba bar and any central segment.

- As usual, turn page as necessary to read, but particularly note the turn at the halfway point, where the leaf changes direction.

Begin/end



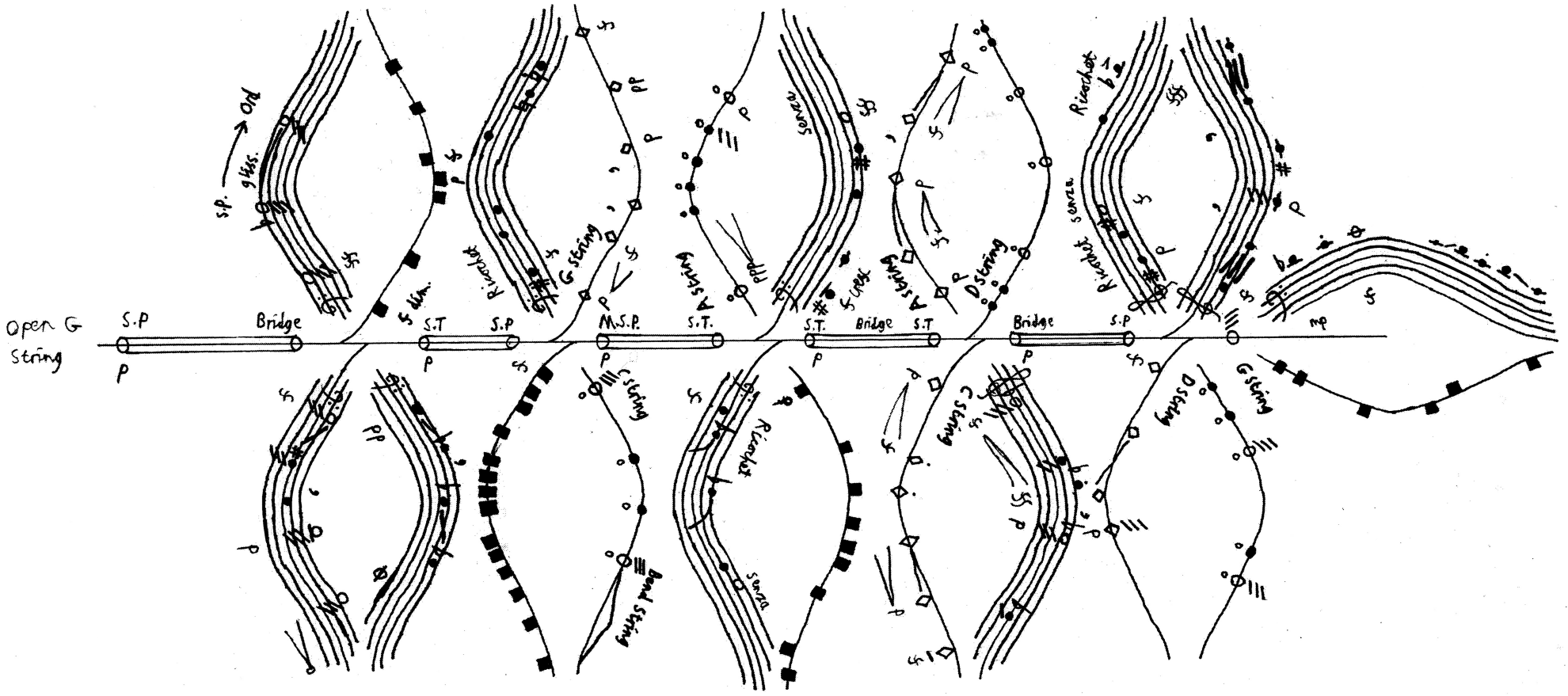
Flick instrument at specified point

Unspecified natural harmonics. Glissandi played without pressing.

Very low bow pressure, airy sound. Open string.

'Sky Clings to the Trees'

violoncello



Follow the stem up and down, occasionally deviating down any leaf. Play a leaf beginning with the line connecting to the stem, followed by the other. Each line moves away from the stem.

And the Biting Wind

Voice and cello

Your score comprises of a number of musical cells one after the other. These should be sung or played in order, with ad-lib pauses between. Where cells are repeated, repetitions should be ad-lib, with space during and between repetitions.

Each cell has an arrow pointing from it to the next cell from either the voice or the cello. The instrument with the arrow should lead into the next cell and the other follows as soon as the player feels makes musical sense, as these moments are rarely strictly synchronised. The players should ideally time changes in such a way that the singer is not in the middle of a long phrase and can adapt.

Where synchronized entries are required, there is an arrow connecting the lines.

Begin together, following the percussion entry.

Cello notations:

A glissando marked from a harmonic indicates that the marked note should be touched lightly as though playing a harmonic and then moved up or down the string.

An X notehead denotes High Bow Pressure (H.B.P.). The pressure should be such that the sound is heavily distorted but with some of the pitch still present.

Ord. is used in relation to bow position (as opposed to Tasto or Ponticello)
Nat. is used to cancel out effects such as pizz. or High Bow Pressure.

Be wary of changes of clef from one cell to the next.

Percussion

You enter this piece first, with the other players following approximately ten seconds later.

Your score is based on a snowflake. To begin, choose one of the six outward points of this snowflake and gradually find a route from this outside tip of the snowflake to the centre. Where lines intersect you must pick a line to follow. You should gravitate indirectly towards the centre of the snowflake and pick a route back out from the centre to a different outside tip, whereupon this process is repeated using a different pair of tips. If all ends have been played, the process repeats afresh.

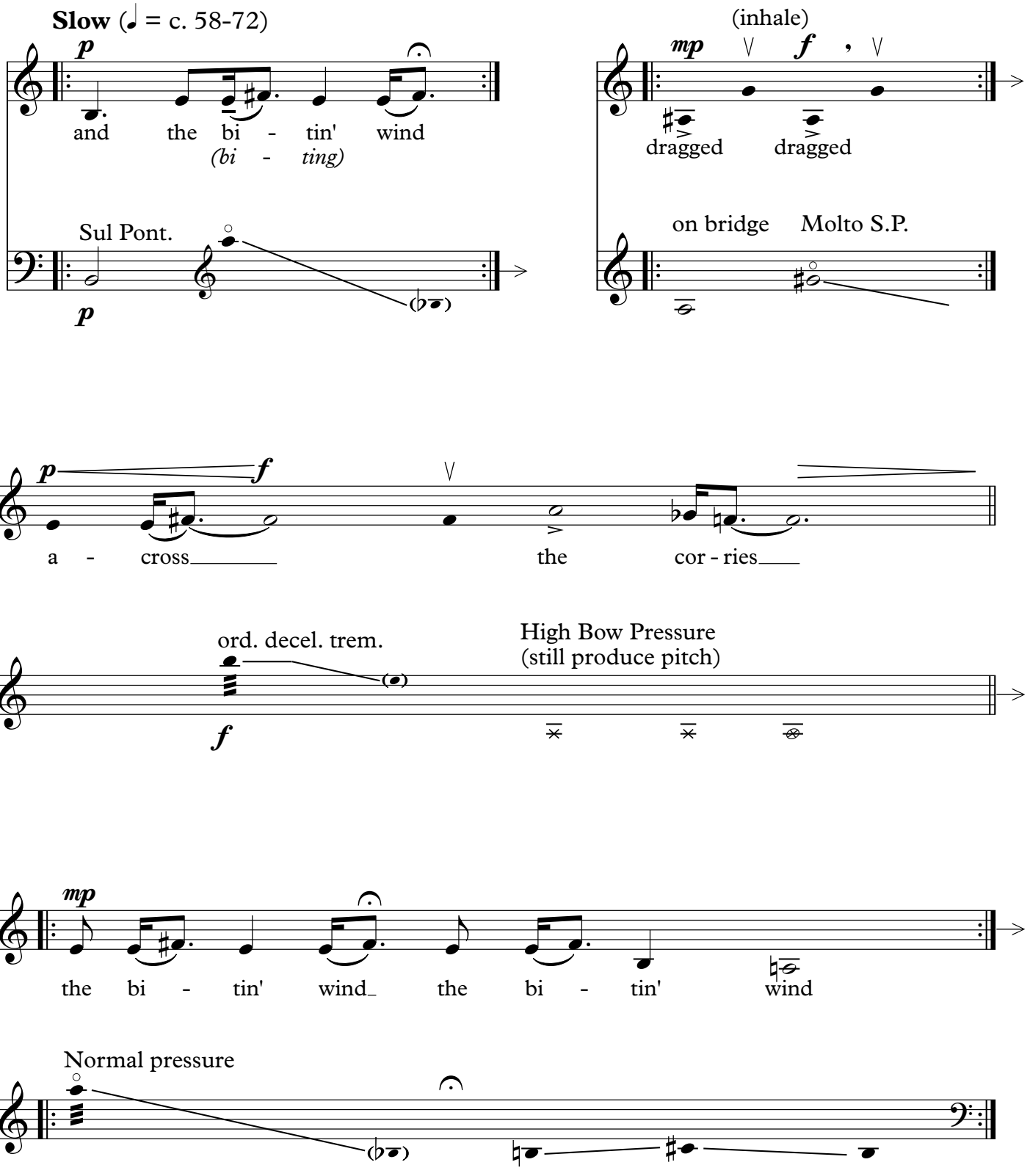
The process ends when the vocalist sings the words ‘come full circle’ at which point, regardless of position, you should gravitate towards the centre of the snowflake and end.

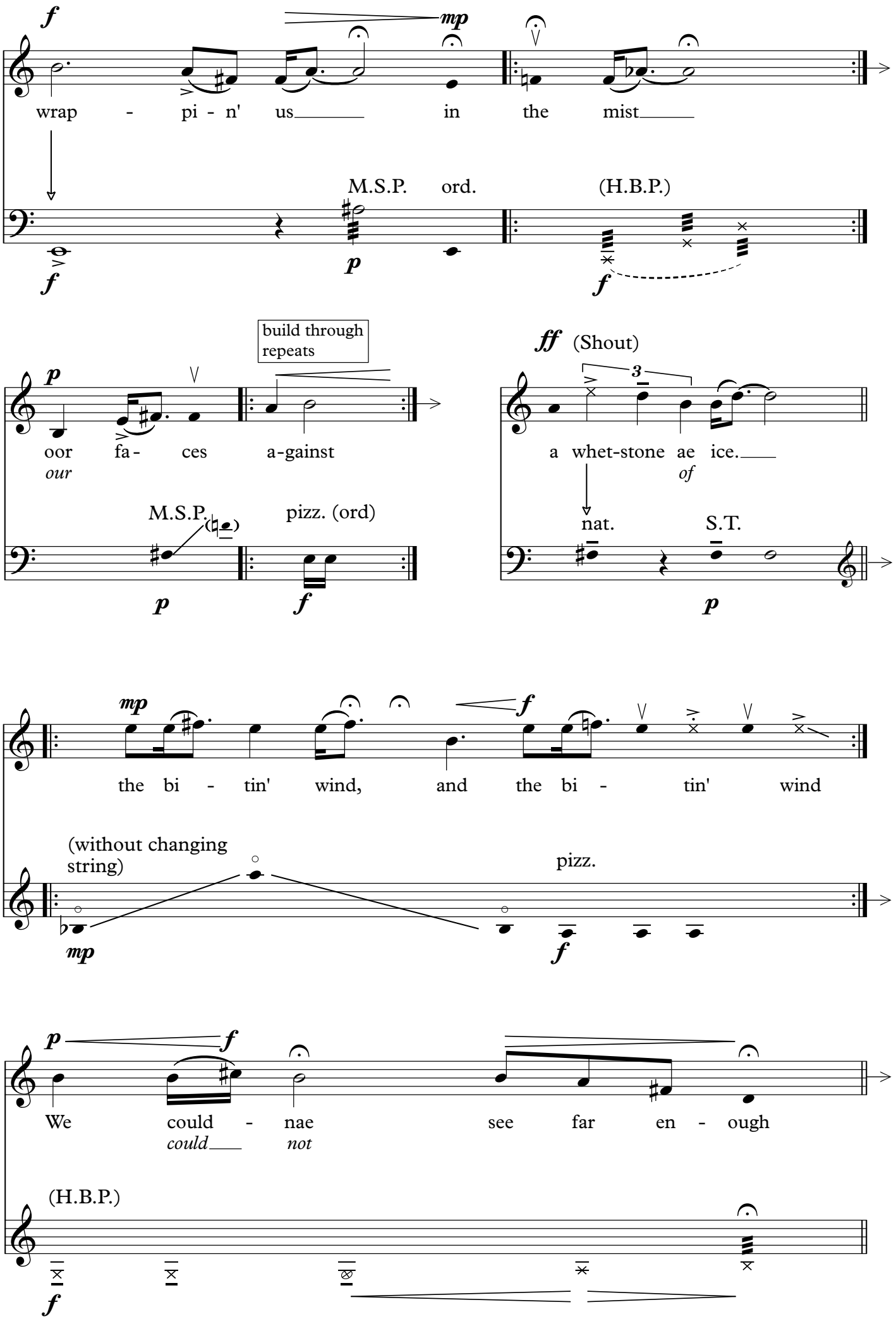
You may take pauses at junctions as you wish.

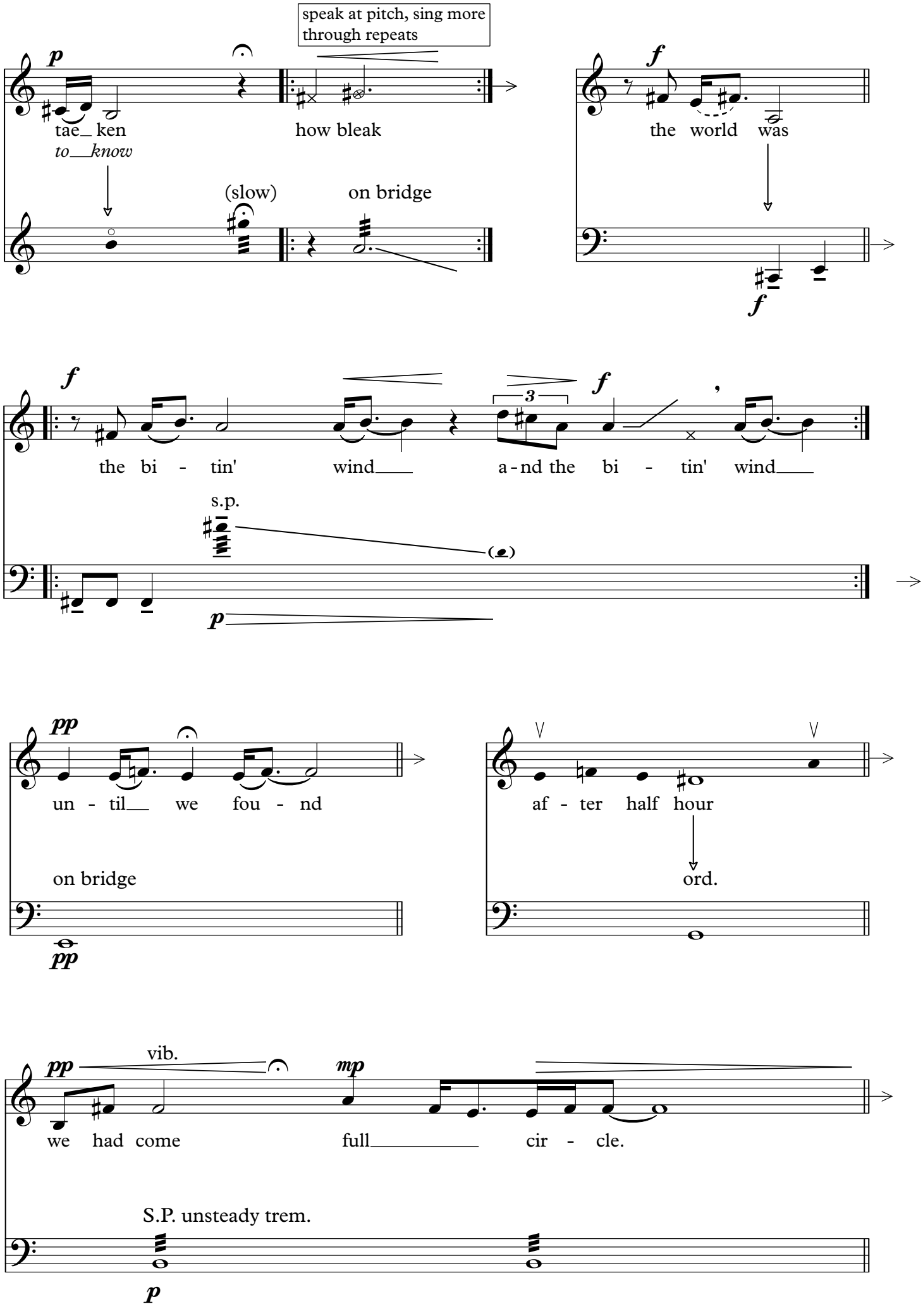
mezzo-soprano & violoncello

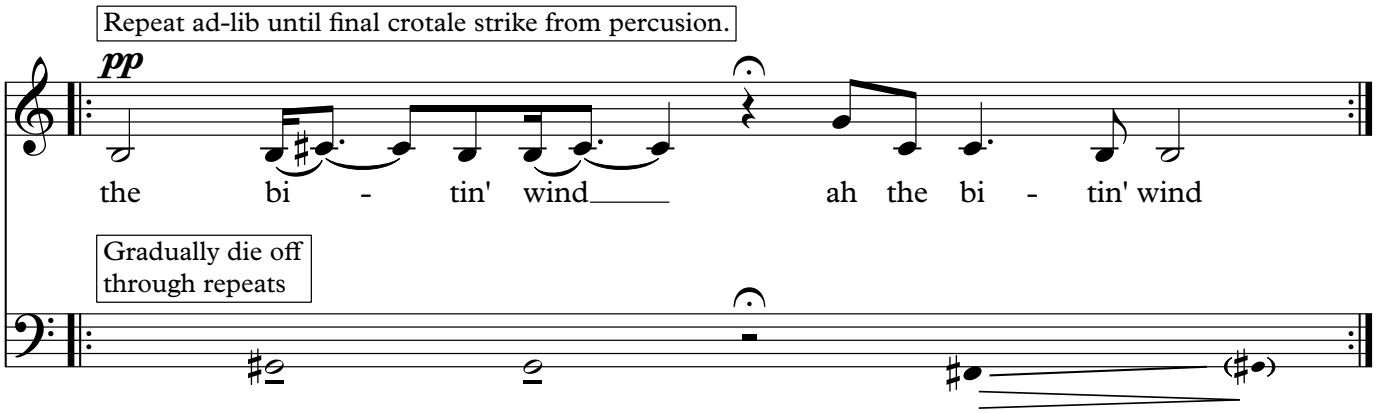
'... and the Biting Wind'

10" Tacet
during percussion entry




f
mp
wrap - pi - n' us in the mist
M.S.P. ord. (H.B.P.)
f
p
f
build through repeats
p
oor fa - ces a-gainst
our
M.S.P. pizz. (ord)
p
f
ff (Shout)
3
a whet-stone ae ice.
of
nat. S.T.
p
mp
f
the bi - tin' wind, and the bi - tin' wind
(without changing string)
pizz.
mp
f
p
f
We could - nae see far en - ough
could not
(H.B.P.)
f

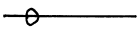

speak at pitch, sing more through repeats
p
tae_ ken
how bleak
to__know
(slow)
on bridge
f
the world was
f
f
the bi - tin' wind___
a - nd the bi - tin' wind___
3
s.p.
p
pp
un - til___ we fou - nd
on bridge
pp
af - ter half hour
ord.
pp
vib.
mp
we had come
full_____ cir - cle.
S.P. unsteady trem.
p


Repeat ad-lib until final crotale strike from percusion.
pp
the bi - tin' wind ah the bi - tin' wind
Gradually die off through repeats

'… and the Biting Wind'

percussion

Key



Crotales. Strike softly with a triangle beater. Pitch is given with each occurrence

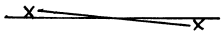
Ocean Drum. Hold and tilt in a circle. Thickness of the marking denotes speed of movement (thicker = faster)

Snare drum roll with drum stick. Width of marking denotes speed and dynamic (thicker = faster)

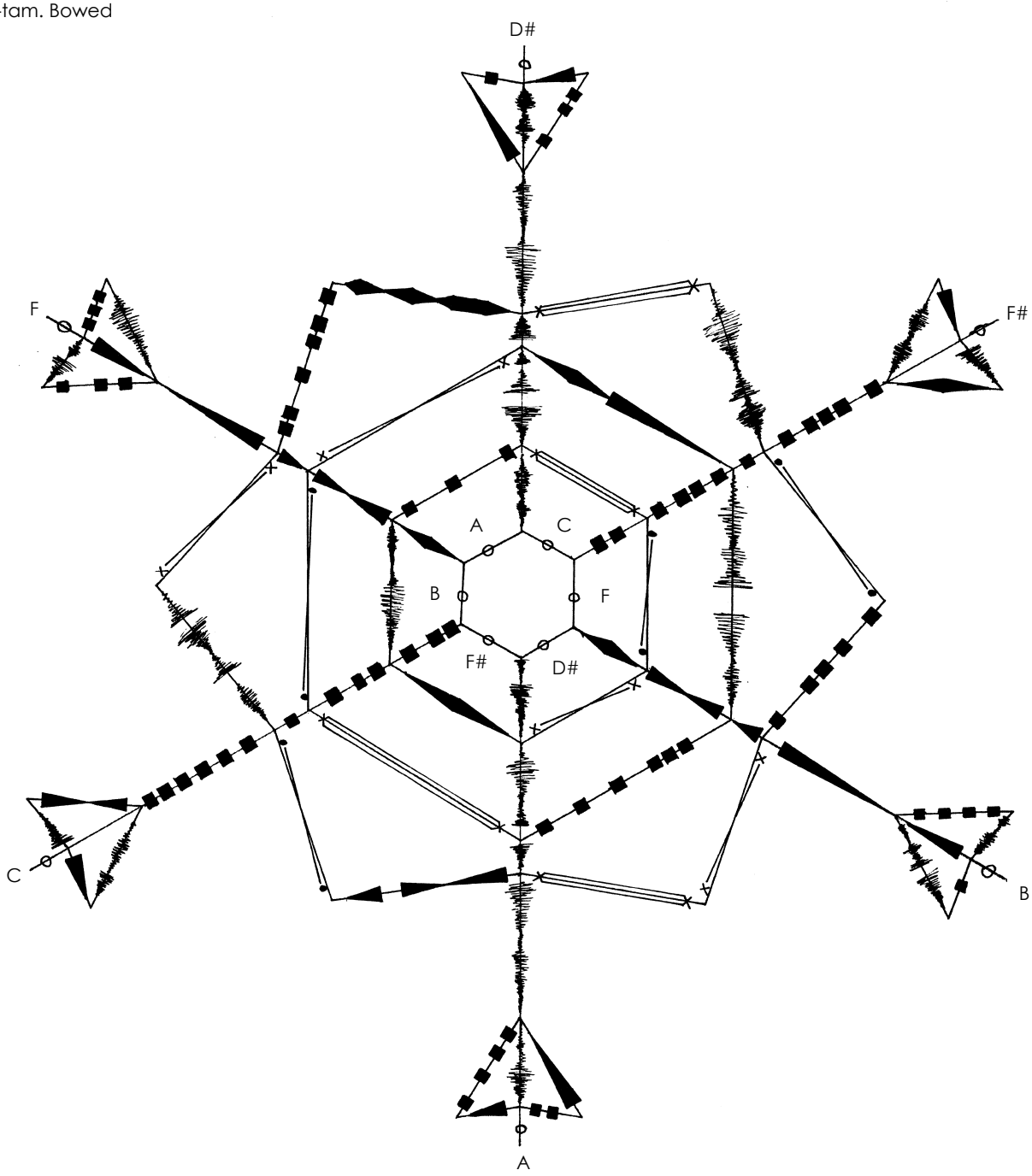
Tam tam. The edge should be scraped with a triangle beater

Suspended Cymbal. Bowed.

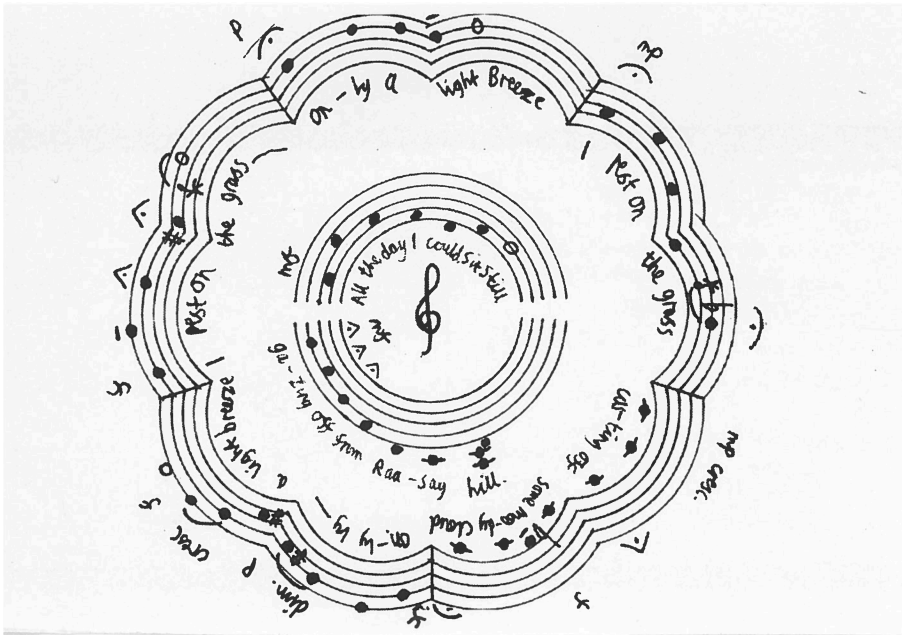
Snare drum. Individual hits with drumstick.



Tam-tam. Bowed



‘All the Day I Could Sit Still’



Mezzo-Soprano

POST CARD

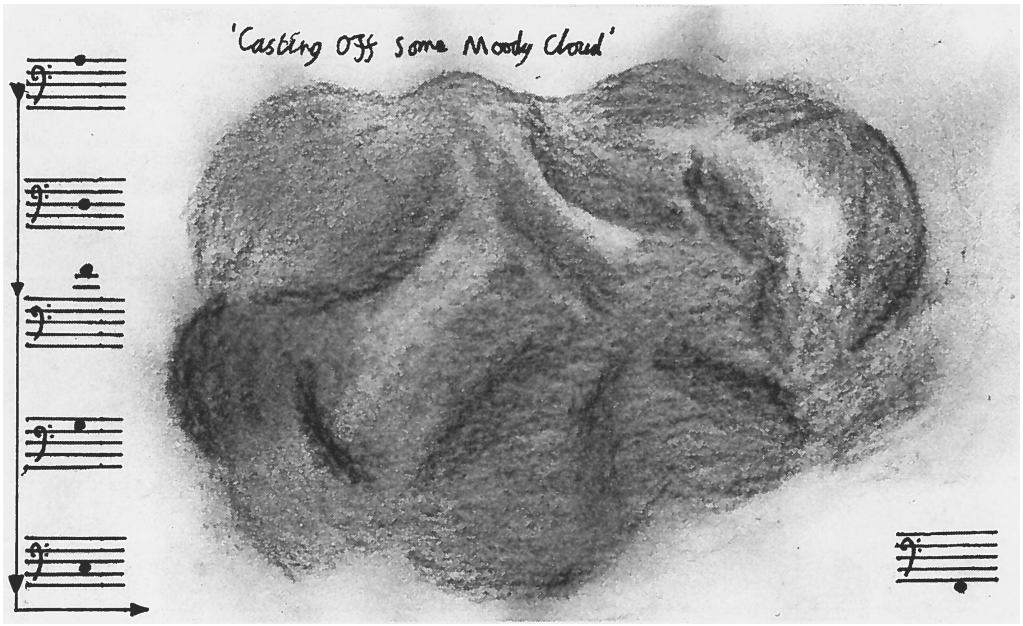
THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

Sing four cells from the outside of the flower followed by the centre cell 'all the day I could sit still', then four outside cells again before the centre cell 'gazing off from Raasay Hill'. Do this five times, pausing regularly between cells to breathe the fresh air.

You may include the same outside cell multiple times within your group of four.

You may deviate from the given expression across different instances of the same cell. Pick any of the 3 notes for 'hill', varying throughout.

‘All the Day I Could Sit Still’



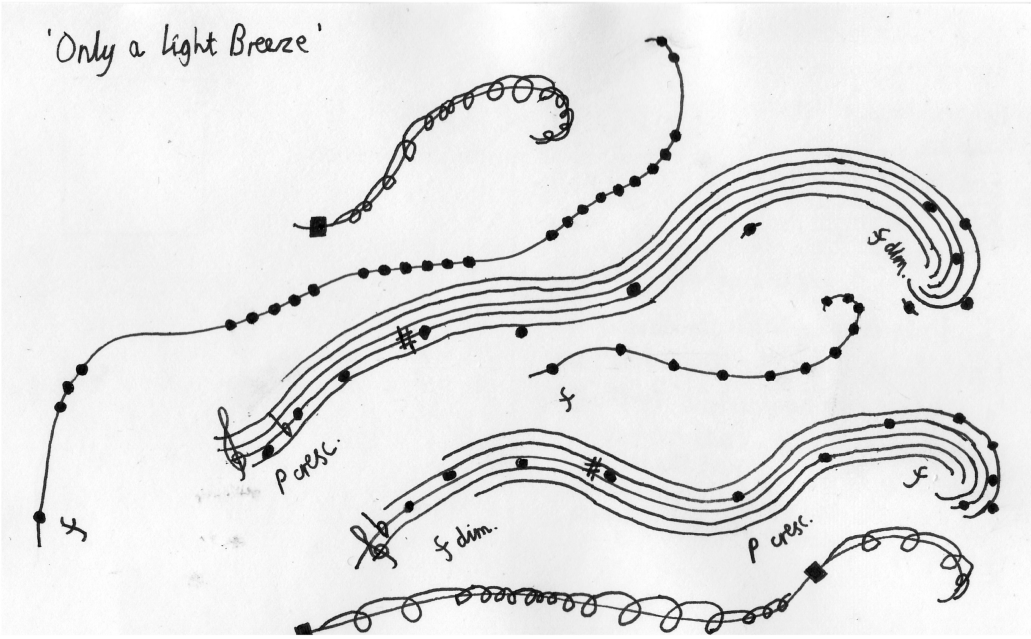
Play the pitches in order, following the arrows.
Move to the next pitch any time 'gazing off from Ramsay Hill' is sung.
Remain on your final note until you alone are still playing, then gradually die off.
Each pitch should be sustained and/or repeated, bowing as necessary.
With each note, explore and respond to the shifting shapes & shades of the cloud drawing in the centre.
Explore timbre & intensity, but do not vary pitch.

cello

POST CARD

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE

‘All the Day I Could Sit Still’



Play lines in any order.
Play the whole line each time.
Tempo may vary.
When 'gazing off from Raasay hill' has been sung for the sixth time, steadily die off leaving just the cello playing.

Brush circles on snare drum (snares on)

Hit wood block with brush

Pitched material = Crotales

Percussion

POST CARD

THE ADDRESS TO BE WRITTEN ON THIS SIDE