Jimside the Score

** this is a still in early draft stages, please excuse any spelling errors, clerical errors, or otherwise!**

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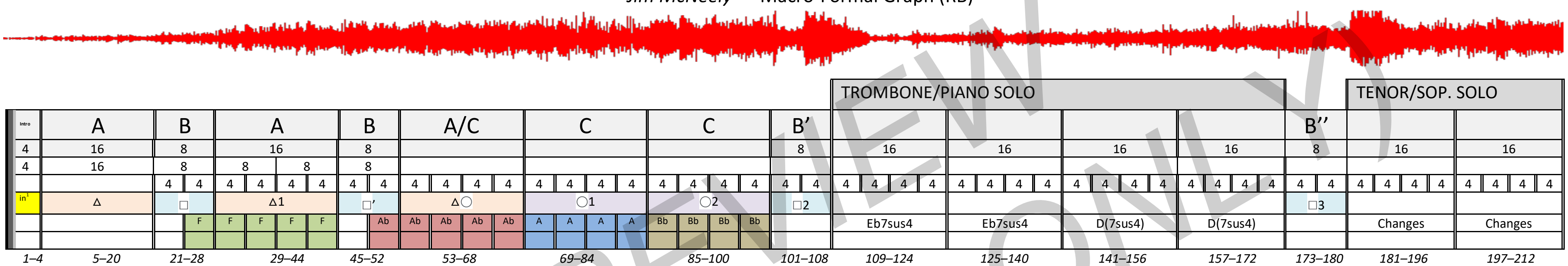
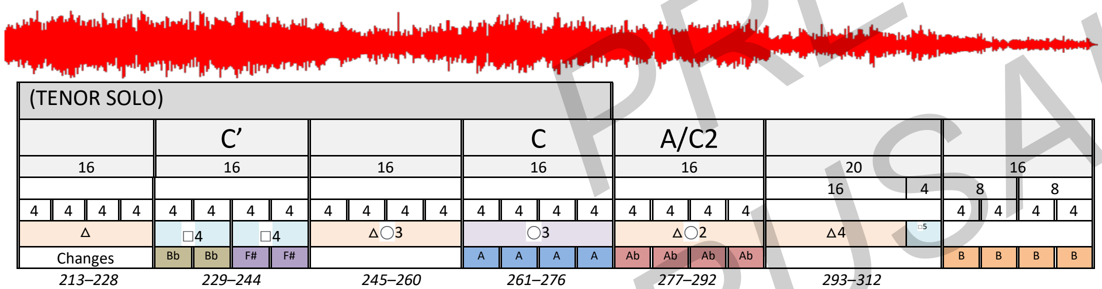
Jim McNeely — Macro-Formal Graph (RB)





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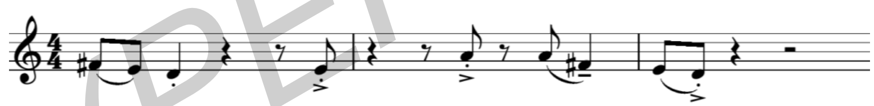

Palate Cleanser/
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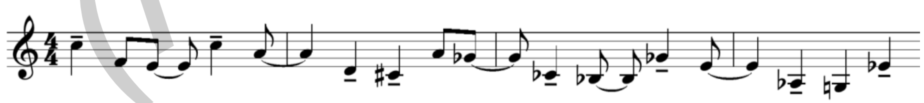

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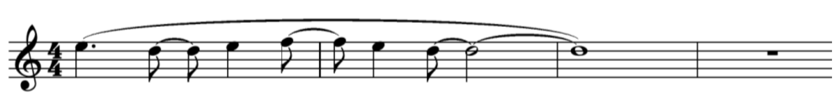
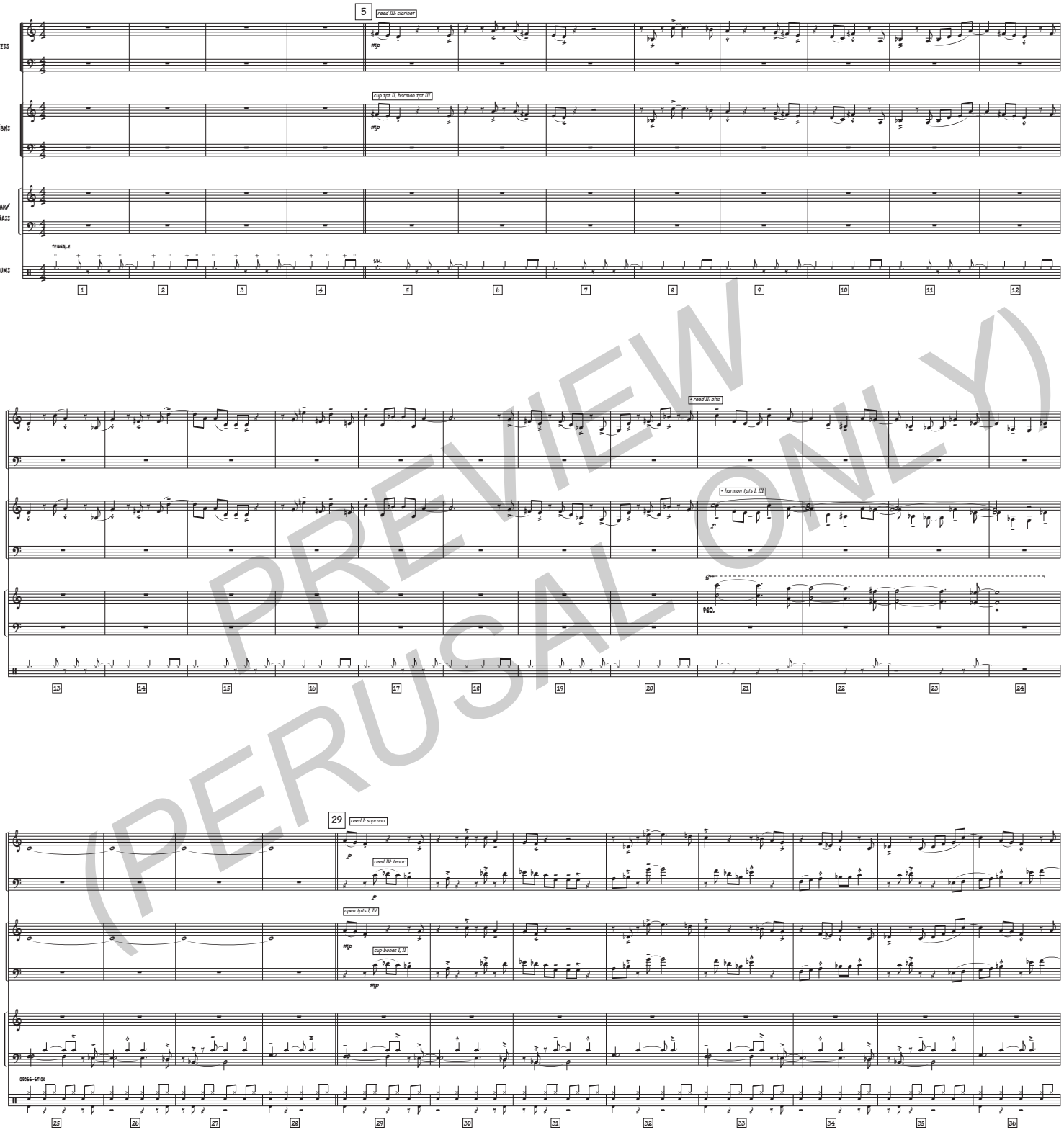


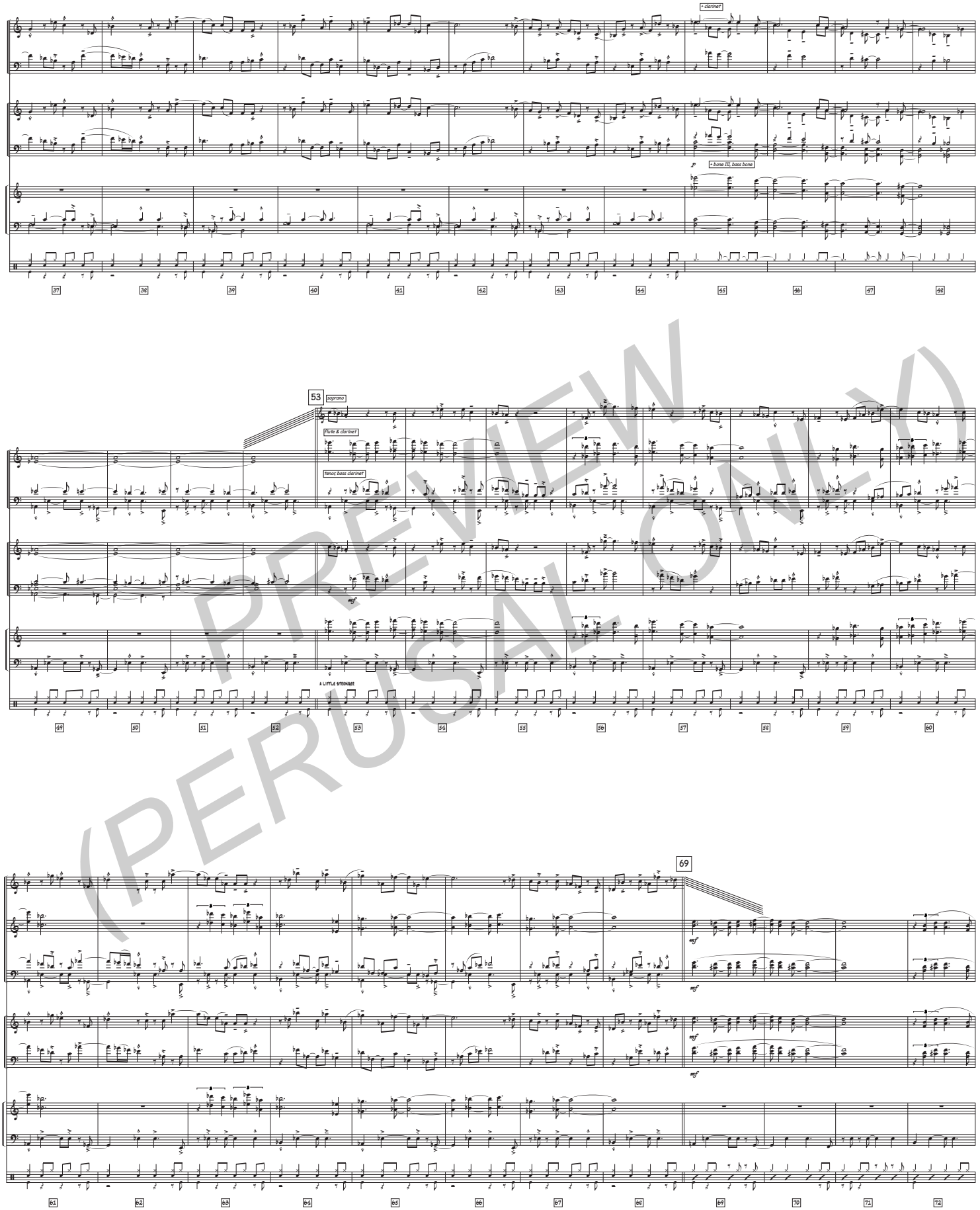
SCORE REDUCTION - (EF)

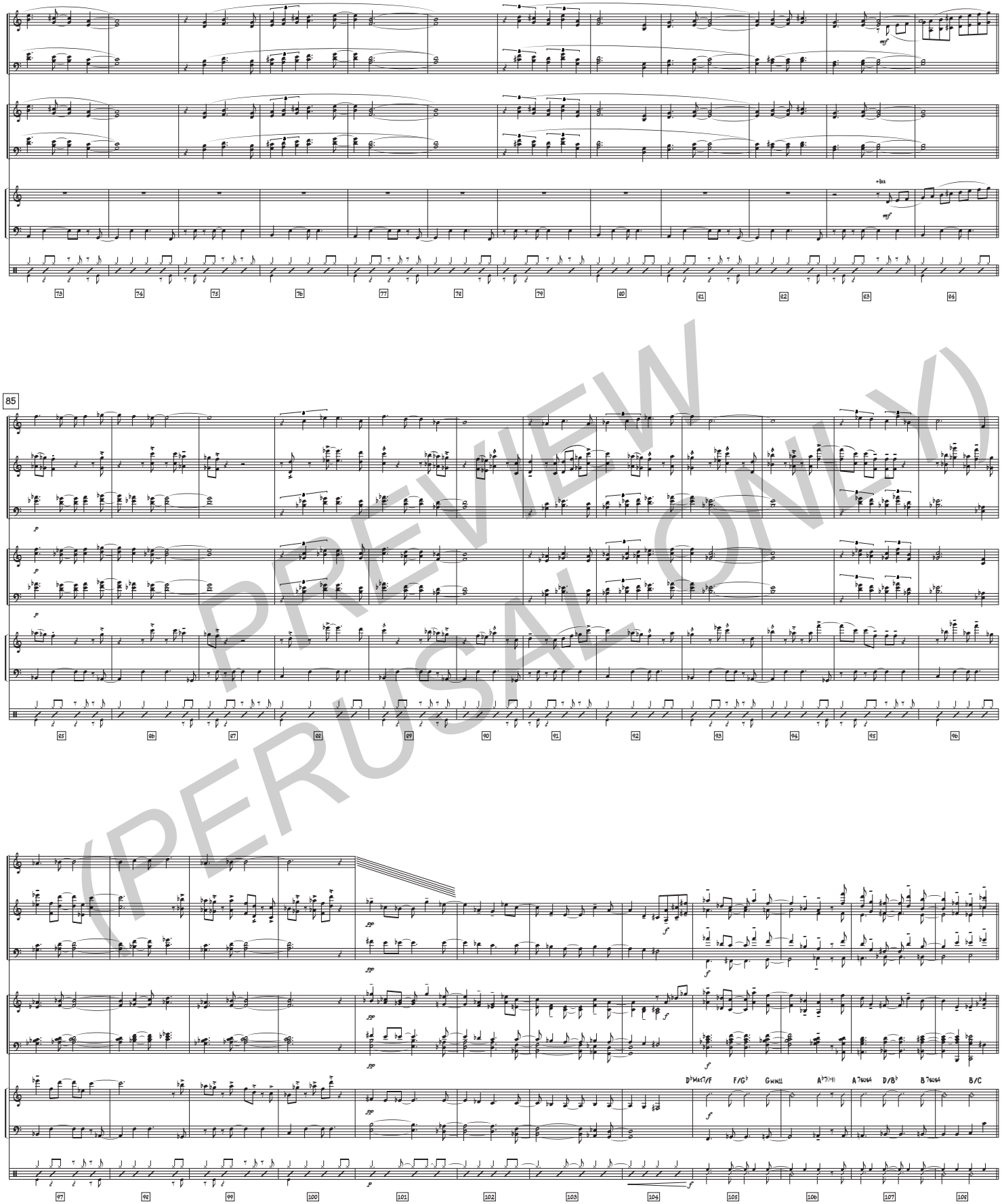
Ad Parnassum

Composed by Jim McNeely

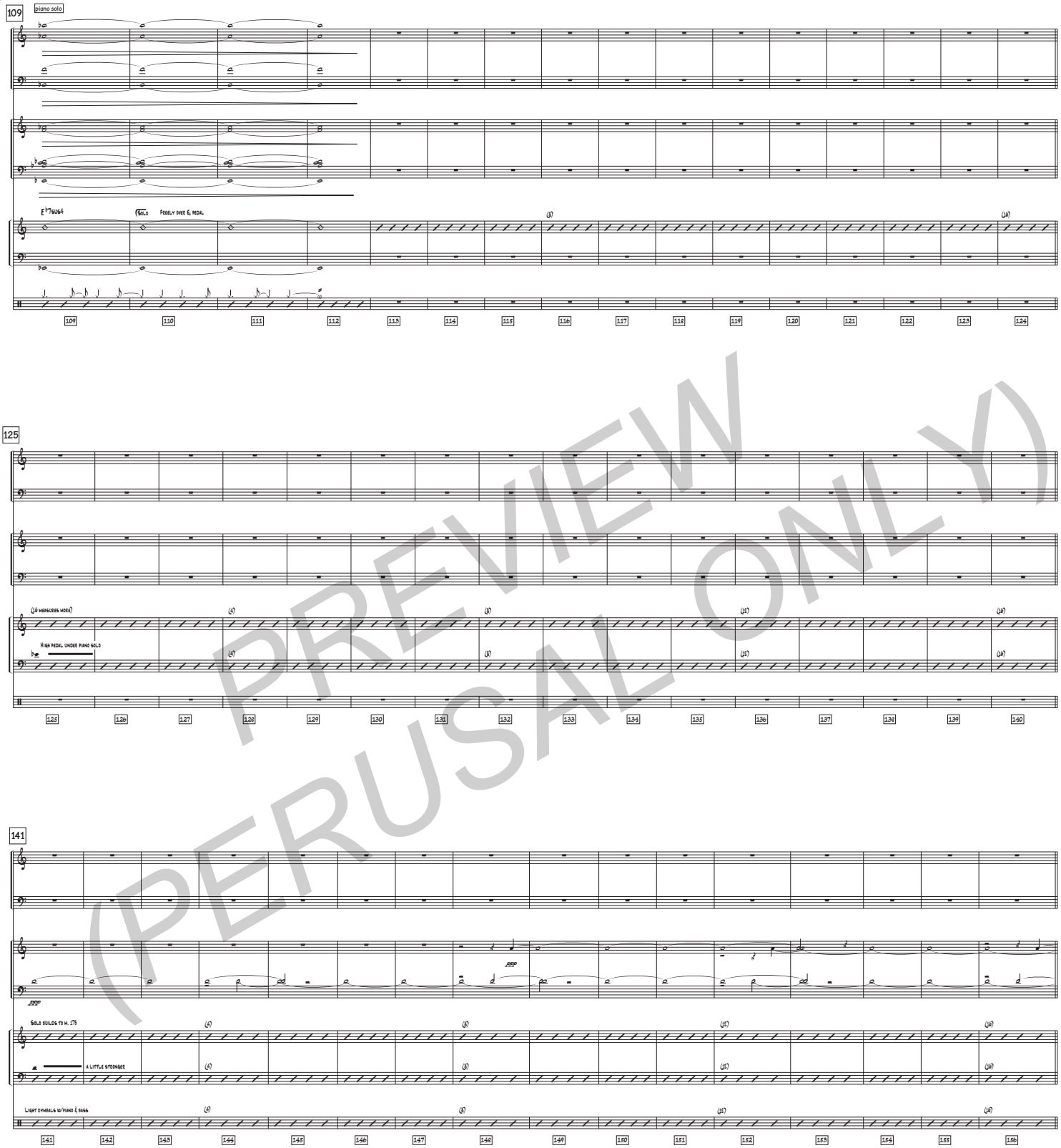


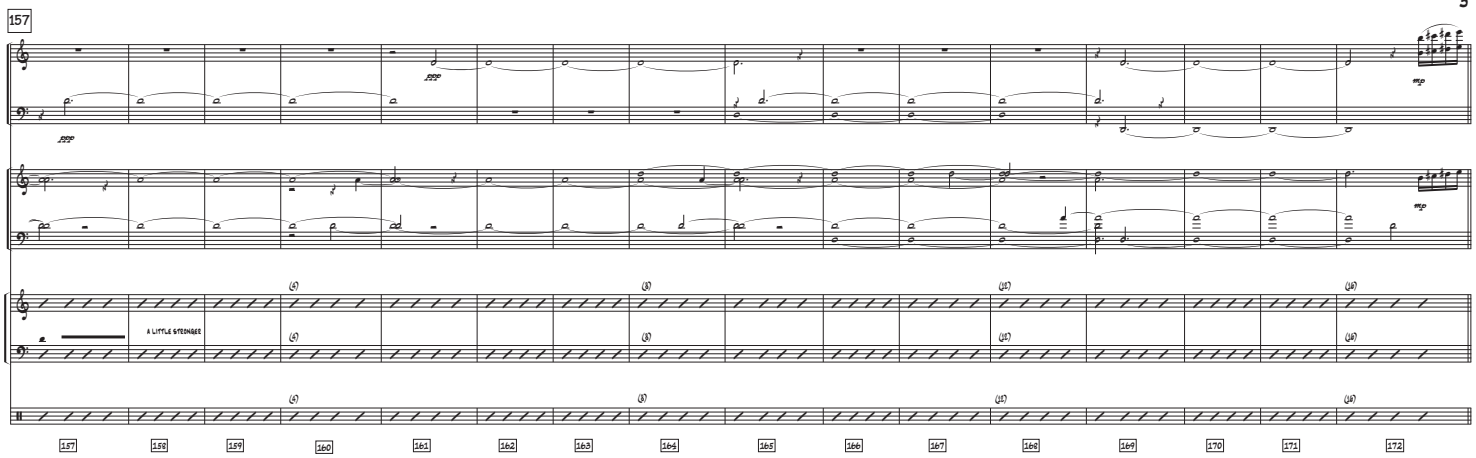
Ad Parnassum

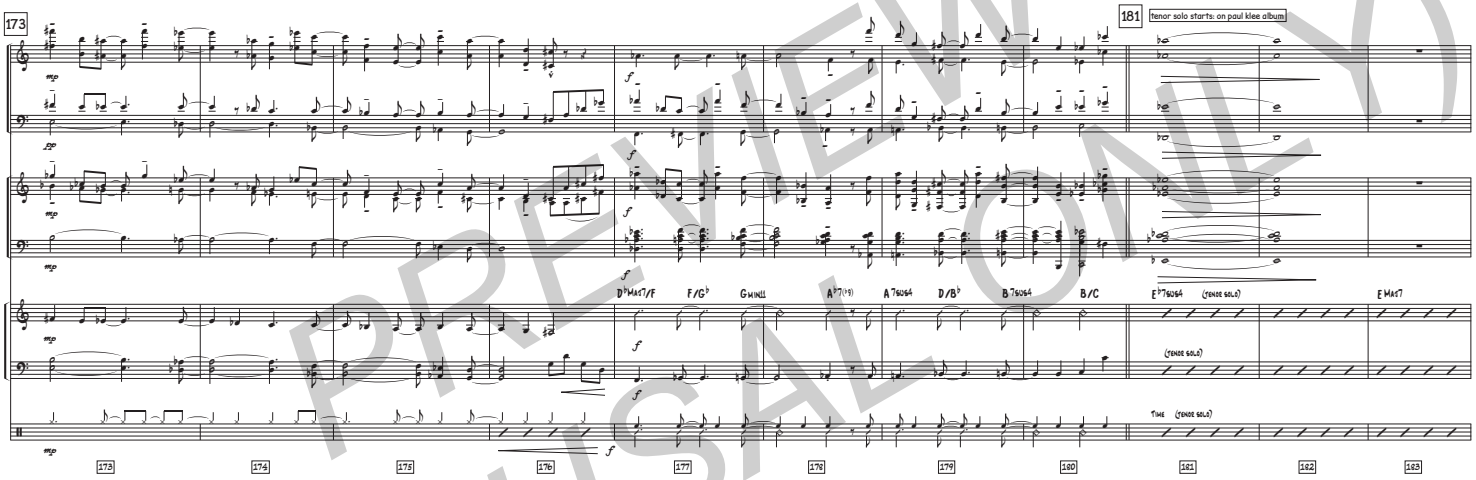


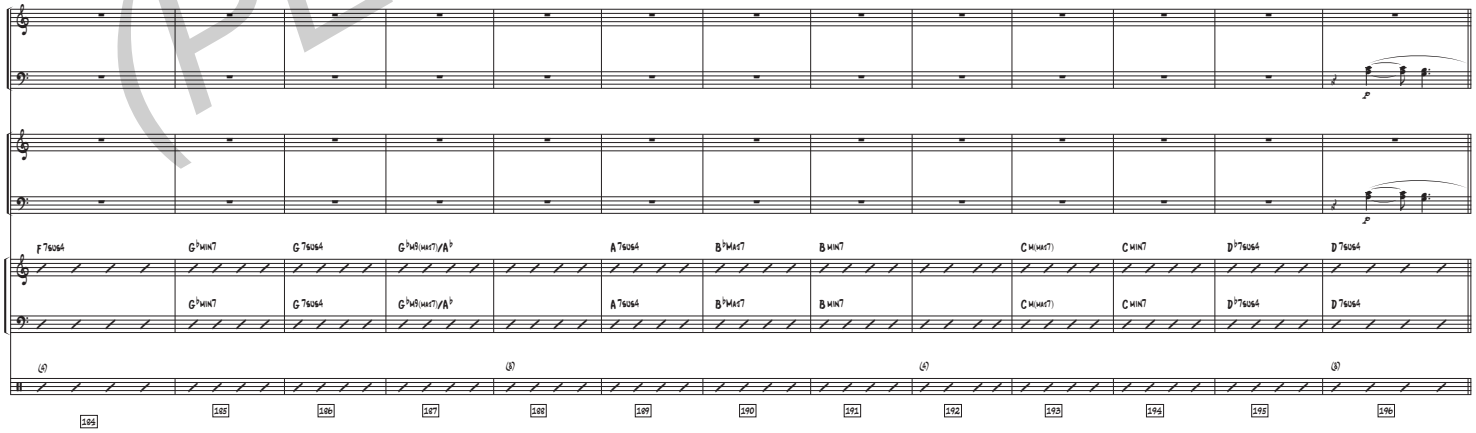


Ad Parnassum

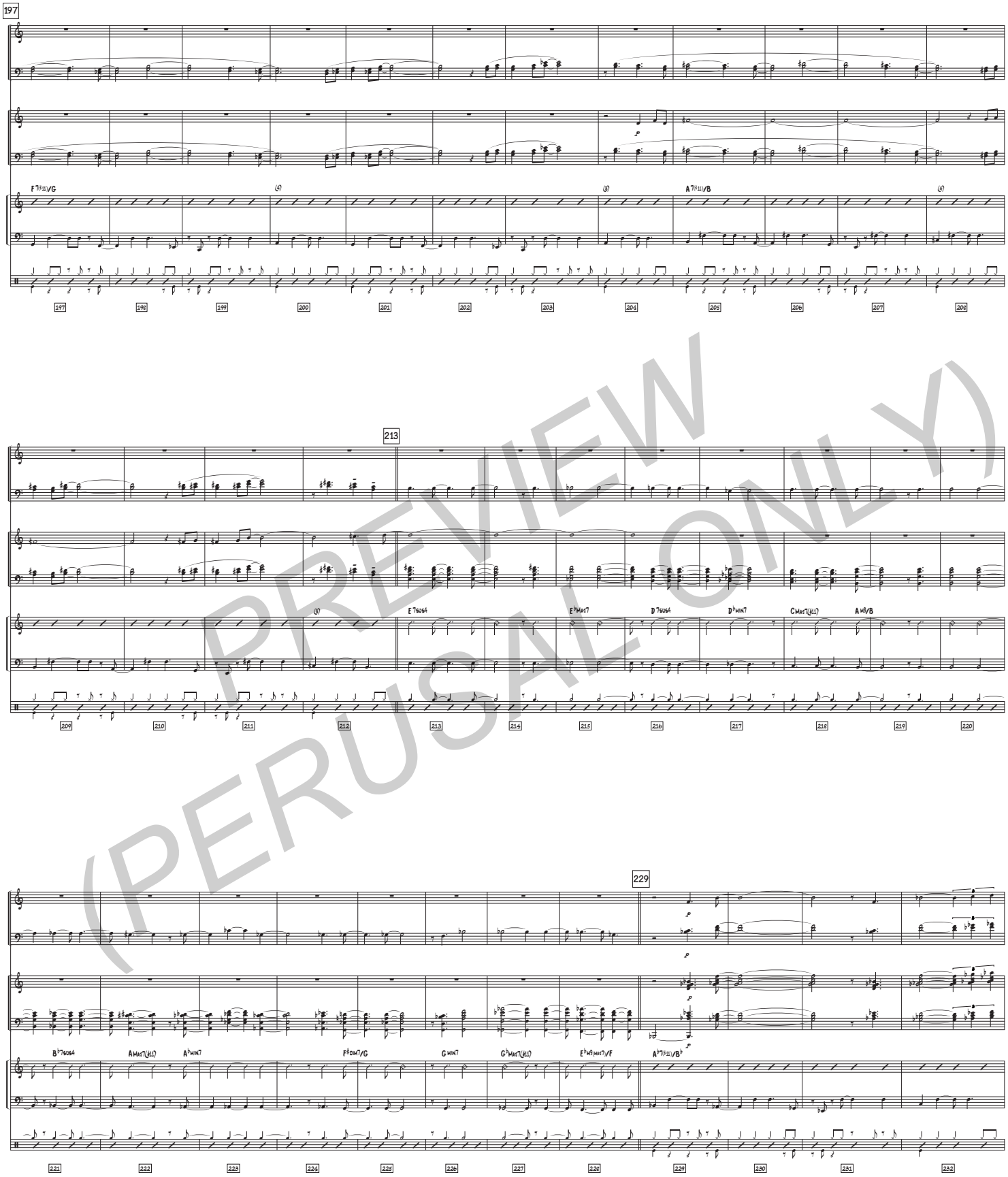


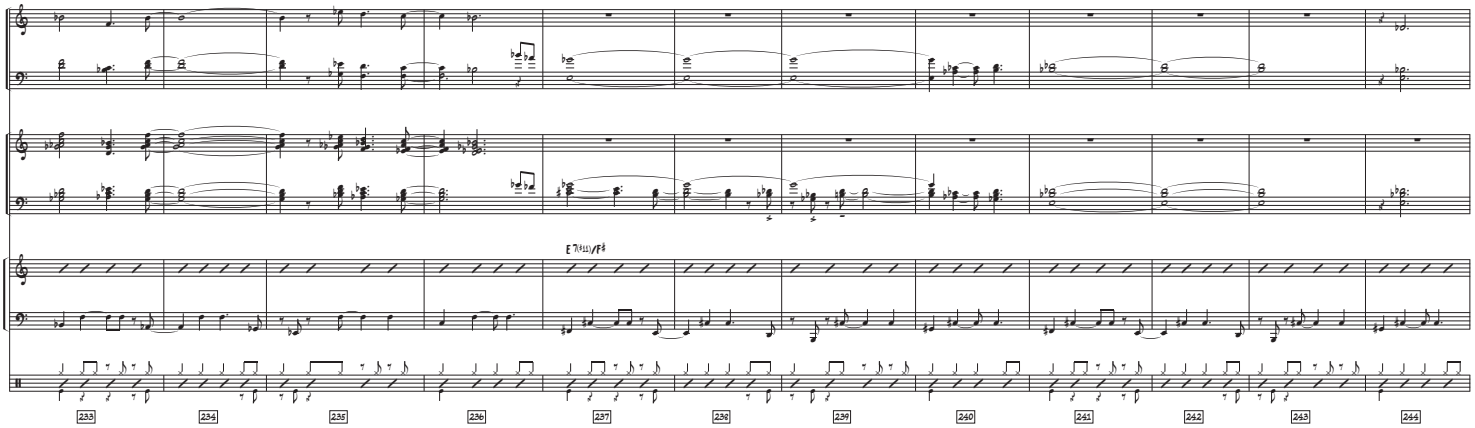


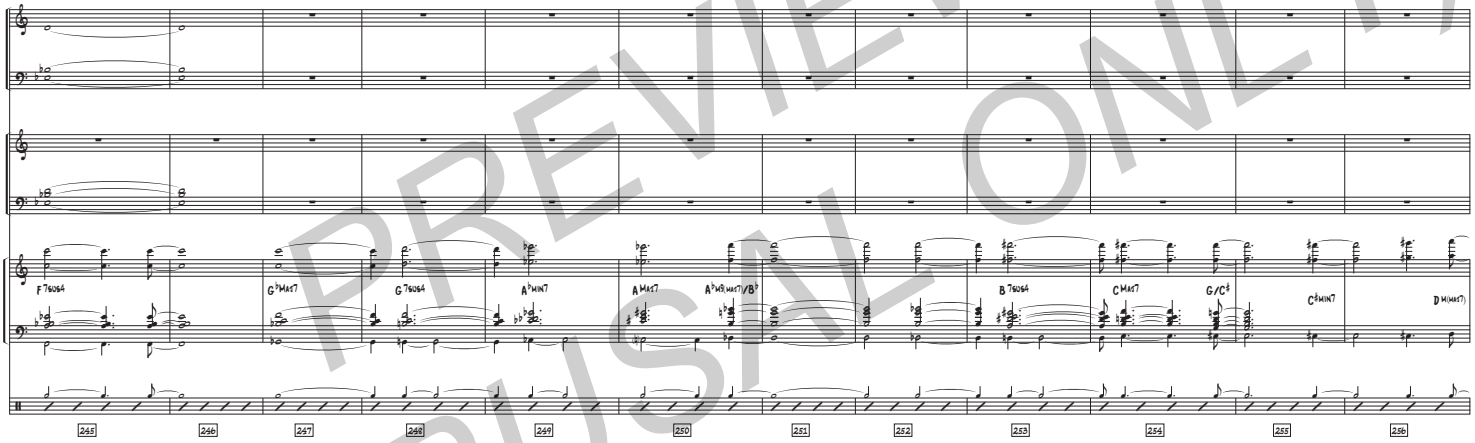


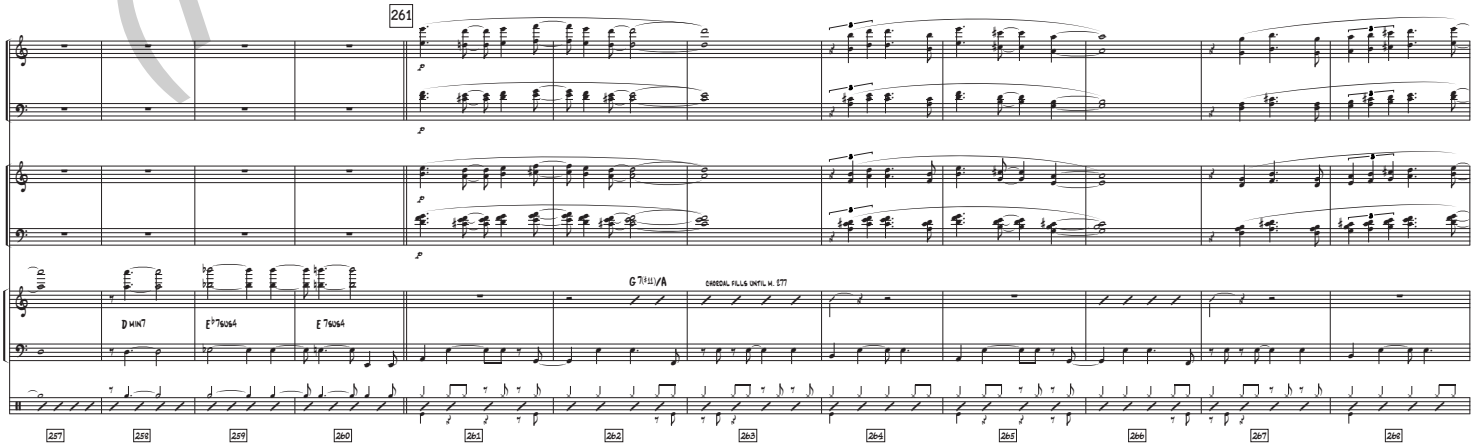


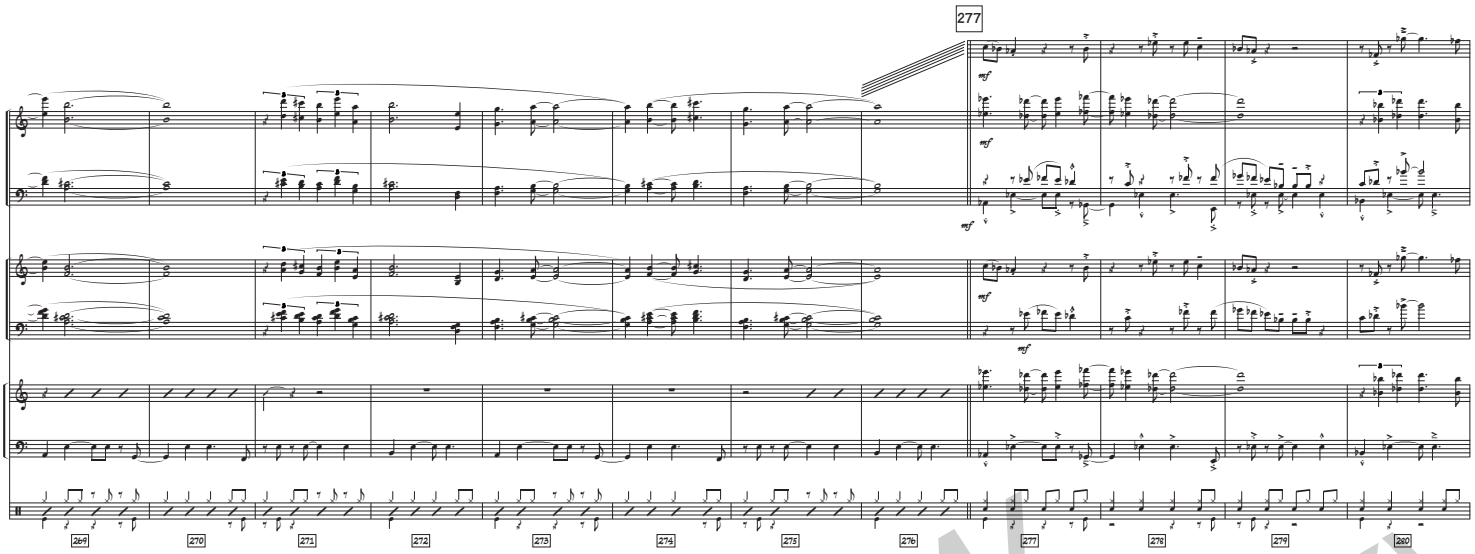
Ad Parnassum

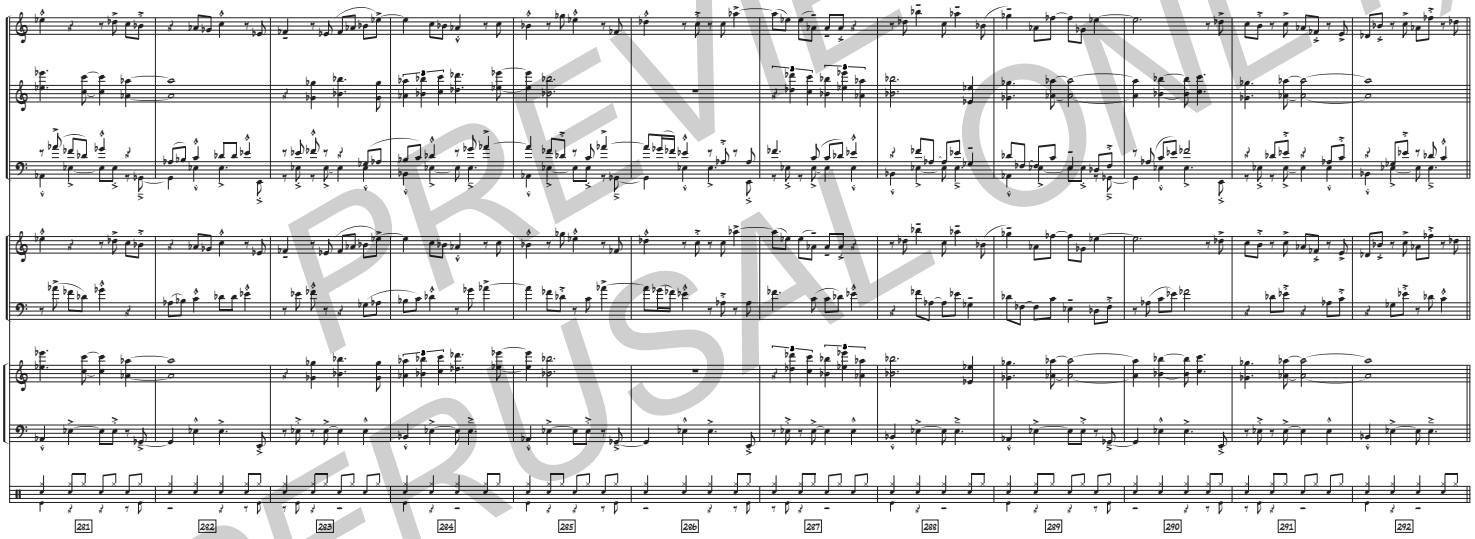


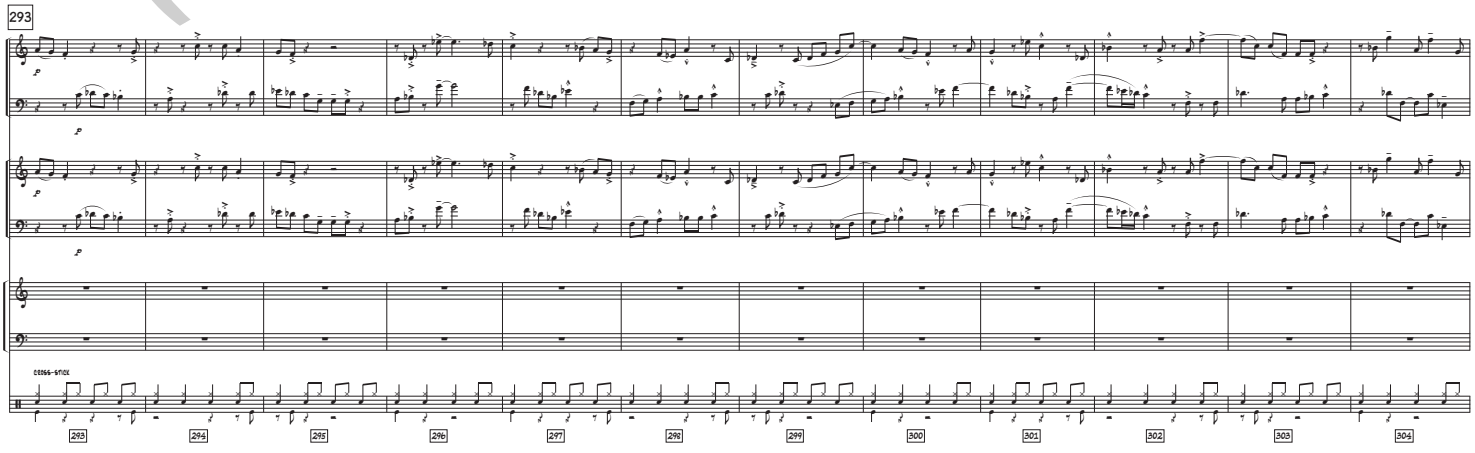


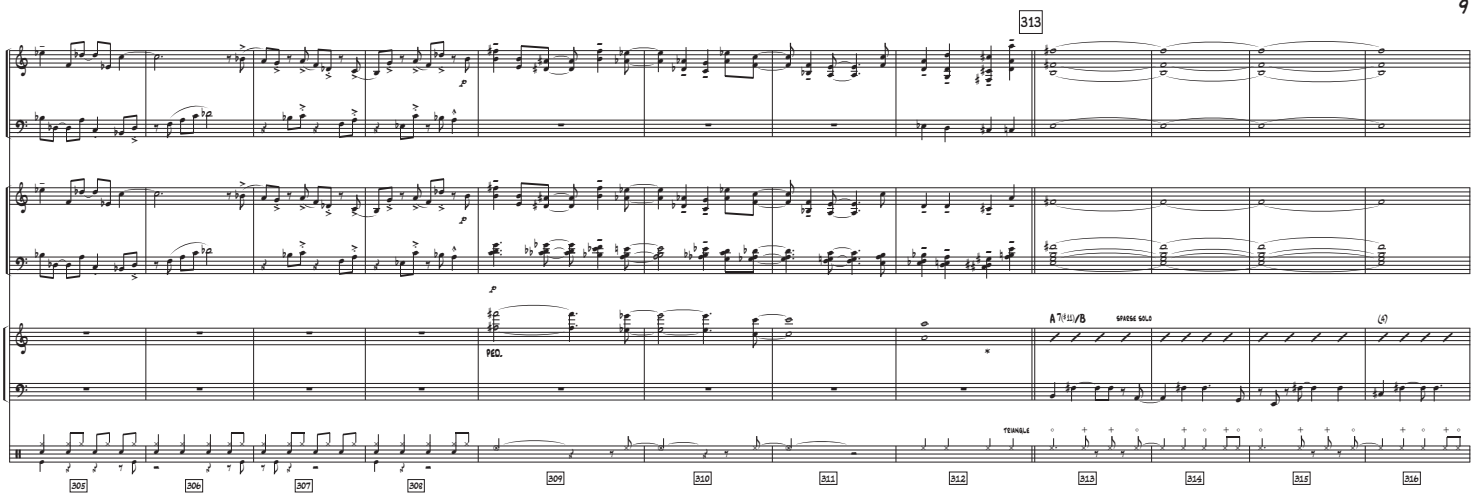


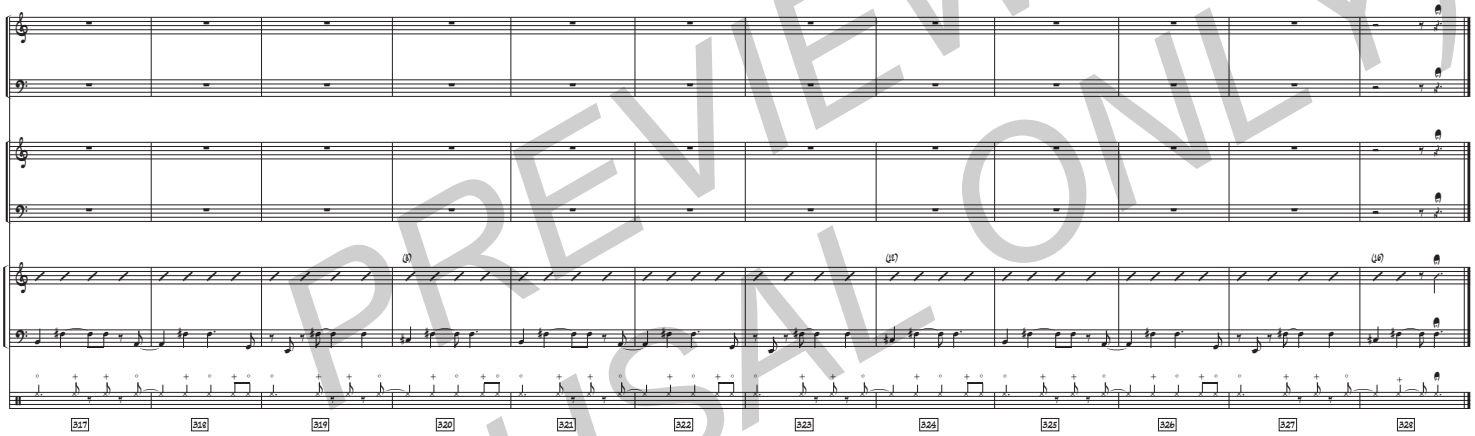












TRANSCRIPT OF *AD PARNASSUM* INTERVIEW:

** these interviews have been condensed & some order of things have been re-arranged for clarity and cohesion. This interview would be best understood in conjunction with the score **

Eliana: The Paul Klee project was commissioned by George Robert, the musical director of the Swiss jazz orchestra. Could you talk a little bit about how the commission came about and what the parameters of it were?

Jim: I was at the IAJE convention one year in New York — and I ran into Phil Wood's wife, Jill Goodwin, who asked if I wanted to join them for dinner with the Yamaha guys. So I went to this Italian restaurant with Phil and Jill, and George was there because he's a Yamaha artist. He said that he'd like to talk to me about writing music for a CD based on paintings by Paul Klee, and I said, *yeah great! I've always loved Paul Klee ever since I was a kid*. Actually, I got interested in modern art mainly because of the cover of Dave Brubeck's *Take Five,* the Joan Miró painting on it. Then I got into Klee, but I didn't really know much about him.

So George gave me about 30 postcard size reproductions of Paul Klee paintings and told me to look through them, and I whittled it down to about 12. I also found some other paintings in some books I thought were really interesting, but it turned out we could only use paintings that were controlled by the Paul Klee foundation. Some of these other paintings I was interested in were owned by the MET or in private collections, so it would have been too much of a problem to get the rights to use it because they wanted to put the images in the booklet. So eventually I chose the paintings — some of them had very objective, recognizable things in them, and some were quite abstract.

Eliana: We remember you saying something about how just looking at the postcards and trying to play the piano wouldn't really give you ideas, and eventually you did a lot of reading and research on the life of Paul Klee. We would like to hear a little bit about that research and how it started to form, inspire and dictate your initial ideas and sketches about the pieces in this project?

Jim: So at first I would put a postcard on the piano and I thought *ok what does this say* and then of course.. nothing. So I decided I ought to start reading about Klee and get into his head some. I read biographical material about him and also some of his diaries, which were still in German, but I can pluck through German enough to understand what he was saying. I started to realize a few things about Klee, like he was a musician.

When he was around 20 he made a choice to pursue visual art as a career because he thought music for him was a dead end and thought there was more of a future in visual art. I read about his life and his teaching at the Bauhaus, he made extensive notes for his lectures. The Bauhaus was a place that had multi-medium artists like fabric artists, furniture designers, sculptures, and even kitchen designers. I remember once the MOMA has an exhibit about the Bauhaus. You would see a kitchens designed by one of the Bauhaus people, and it would look like Paul Klee's kitchen, you would see all of these visual motifs in there. You would start to say *does this look like Paul Klee's kitchen or does this kitchen look like a Paul Klee painting?* All of these artists fed off each other and really influenced each other.

Klee kept meticulous notes about polyphony, rhythm, even an analysis of a Bach piece that he made an artistic rendering of. So it started to make sense why some of the visual motives he used in his work were things like bass clef, or f-holes from violins and also conductors patterns were a big one, these big sweeping motions. This started to explain why so many musicians have been inspired by Klee's work, more so than any other artist even. Klee had inspired more than 400 pieces of music, next in line was Picasso at about 250, but anyway the point is that Klee has always spoken to musicians. I started to learn about his approach to rhythm, and how even in his abstract paintings, he would talk about the rhythm created as the eye grazes around the painting. You start to create rhythms with your

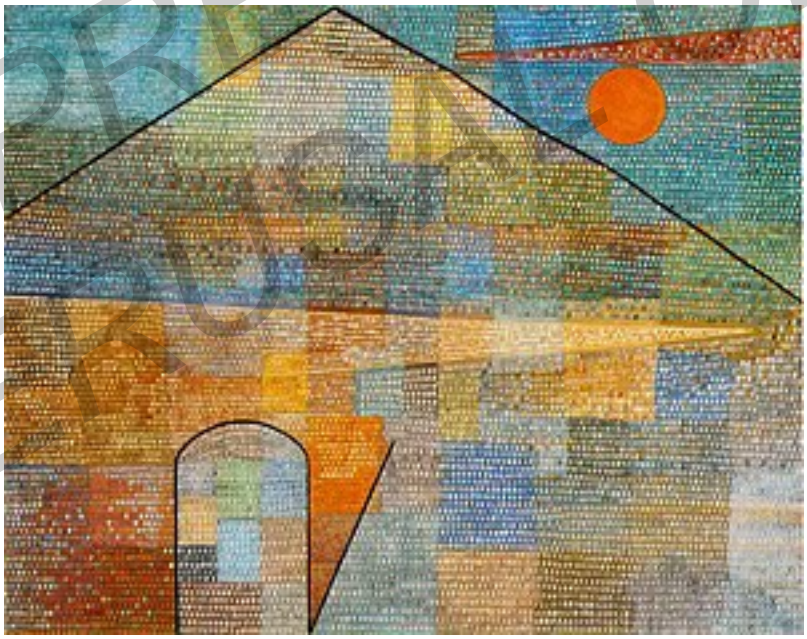
eye moving around, so then I started to look at the paintings in a different way. Eventually, I made the decision that my job wasn't to express the painting, my job was to try to figure out what he was expressing, and try to express that through music, like a feeling or atmosphere **behind** the paintings.

Eliana: So taking that "behind the painting" concept for the specific piece/painting we chose for this analysis project — *Ad Parnassum* — could you tell us about things you found specifically in the *Ad Parnassum* painting and what kinds of initial ideas it birthed for the music?

Jim: This painting in particular, *Ad Parnassum,* is quite small. Most of them were a little bigger than my computer monitor. *Ad Parnassum* is an example of what he called polyphonic painting. There are several layers going on there. First of all, you can see there is a background pattern of color squares that kind of blur together. To me, that's like a harmonic background of a tune, it's the structure that holds the whole thing together and gives context to the rest of the painting to be layered over it.

Then on top of those squares, if you see this up close, there are thousands of tiny little white, milky dots. He applied each one of those dots. Then on top of that there are the lines that he drew. Not only the bold black lines, but also these secondary, more subdued lines. It's another layer that colors the background layer in a certain way by these other shapes being superimposed on top of them.

Then of course there is that sun, which immediately draws your attention and is a focal point. Again, that's another layer over the background layer. So for this piece, I decided to write some kind of polyphonic thing that expressed the relationship among the different layers of *Ad Parnassum.* So then I thought about 3-4 polyphonic lines coming in one at a time, then gelling together to a more monophonic structure. So that's how I got into this.



Eliana: So now moving into the chart, let's start with talking about some of the main themes, which we gave shapes to in our macro-formal analysis (*labeled on reference page). There is theme ▵, which is the first theme we hear, and it's secondary lower voice that comes in at 29. We wanted to start by ask about composing theme ▵ as a separate entity before getting into the polyphonic and counter-puntal relationship between all the stuff. When composing that initial theme ▵, were you thinking about certain intervals, or scalar tonality, leaving space etc? Did you write it over the bass ostinato?

Jim: Yes, I had the ostinato in mind first, but I decided to start with theme ▵ without the ostinato in the chart. It's based on mixolydian ♭6 scale, which you hear throughout. I wrote the first theme with a couple of things in mind. First of all, leaving space was important, because I knew other lines would be introduced under and over it, and I didn't want the first line to be taking up all of the space. The other thing, was that large leap in the 4th measure of the phrase. I chose to do that so that whenever it was introduced in or with any of the other voices, you could hear it, it's a marker.

Eliana: So now when composing that second voice that comes in at 29, could you tell us about composing counter-puntally that way, and what kinds of things you were thinking about when writing the secondary voice?

Jim: That second voice that comes in under ▵ at 29, it's not just a cannon. It's a different melodic voice, but again there is a leap in there that follows the leap in the first voice. Sometimes the leaps come together, sometimes the second voice kind of trails the lead voice up, like at measure 35. If you look at the rhythmic interaction, that to me is one way to look at this whole counterpoint thing. **proceeds to sing through the rhythm of both lines starting at measure 29*.* It's really a two handed thing, the spaces I intentionally left in the line when I wrote the first melody, are gradually being filled in here and there by the second line.

Eliana: And then when you were writing theme ○ on top of all of that (which is first heard in measure 53 in the flute, clarinet and high piano register), you had to think about something other than filling in space since all the space is already filled out with those two voices. Other than register, were you thinking about elongating the phrases and adding more held out notes to counteract the very articulated, more short motivic, space filling theme ▵ and its under voice we just talked about?

Jim: Exactly. That's over the two chatter lines, we have this long, lyrical line. That was the point there, to have it lightly stated in the piano, flute and clarinet. I was looking for a long, very mellifluous thing that would layer up over theme ▵, I probably also looked at the intervallic relationship on the long held out notes. But mostly looking for something that broke the mold of previous themes. At 53, the interaction at this point between the two chattery lines is still the main focus. This theme ○ is more transparent at first, but then becomes the main more monophonic focus at 69.

Eliana: Yes, and then at 85, when it's back to more polyphonic structure, it all reverses. Theme ○ that was more transparent at first, becomes the foregrounded theme and theme ▵ is the backgrounded theme this time.

Jim: Exactly right, but also the initial theme ▵ starts on 3-2-1 but at 85, it becomes 7-6-5. So the relationship to the scale is different.

Eliana: How do you think about that 4 bar theme/motif that starts at 21? We called it kind of a palate cleanser, or exhale, even kind of like a tag? We labeled it as motif or theme □.

Jim: Yeah, it's not really a theme as the others are, but it comes up as this transitional thing. It ends each of the first big sections, except the last one, it doesn't happen there…but then it come back bigger. Yeah, it's not really a theme, but palate cleanser is a good term for it. I'm sure there is some official, musicological term for it that I'm not aware of.

Eliana: The next focus concept of this piece we noticed was the use of color, which is something that is synonymous to both music and painting of course. Scanning the chart, there is a new instrument color

added or new instrument combination at almost every formal section all the way until measure 229, before it palindromes back. What were you thinking about when choosing instrument color choices?

Jim: All I know for certain, is that I wanted to go from very transparent to a lot less transparent. The first thing you hear is the clarinet with a harmon and cup trumpet. The trumpet is in a low register, and the clarinet is kind of in a wimpy part of the clarinet range, so I wanted a more weak and transparent sound. Then at 21 the soprano gets added to those instruments which starts to open things up. Skipping a little ahead, at 69, the flugels are introduced with some open trombones. So you don't hear that more transparent muted brass anymore, but it's still not quite open trumpets yet, so it's just continuing to gradually open up. If you continue to look down that list you have there of the instrument colors, it's all gradually opening up, and that was all by design. Then yes, I palindrome it or reverse it at the end of the chart.

Eliana: So yes, talking about palindrome, which is kind of about balance, we wanted to ask about the use of balance on a macro-level of this piece. The whole opening is so heavily articulated, very specific rhythmically, every part is fully written out and then suddenly at 109 the piano solo is totally free over an open large space. Over a free high bass pedal starting on E♭.

Jim: Yeah, yeah. If you talk about the composer or arranger exerting control of a situation, in the beginning up to the piano solo, I'm exerting maximum control over the orchestration, rhythm, shape, volume, color with all of this counterpoint. By 109, I just wanted to kind of give it up. The piano player in the band is a really talented guy, so I knew if I just gave him a pedal to do something over that slowly builds up he could go anywhere.

There is a lot of control in the opening, and then I hand it over to someone else in real time rather than me exerting control in suspended time as a writer. That to me, is one of the great challenges and concepts behind jazz composition, the balance between the two, and knowing when to give up the control and when not to.

Eliana: Definitely, and that melodic Ornette project you did, arranging the late Ornette tunes is kind of combining all of that, that was probably quite a challenge to figure out a balance there.

Jim: Yeah, well you have a big band, you can't just have them play free all the time…well you could..but for me, that was about shaping the energy flow, and leaving space for the four soloists. That was very important.

Eliana: Yeah, right, ok, we have to ask about where the tenor solo changes come from? We spent so long trying to find all of these connections, but can't really figure it out so decided to just ask you. We have a few abstract ideas, but wanted to hear from you.

Jim: Ha, you know, every once in a while I do a presentation on this piece and we get to the tenor solo… and I just can't remember where they came from. So I'd like your thoughts on that.

Eliana: Our first thought was about how during the □ theme, in a few of its harmonic realizations, the bass moves chromatically. So we thought the tenor solo having the bass motion move in extended chromatic scale motion could have connected to that. The quality of the chord doesn't seem to have a particular connection, so I thought it was about the bass motion.

Jim: Let me see that section, yeah. That could be it…I know that there is a thing at the end of the tenor solo, that's the reverse of that motion. Oh wait, not it's still the ascending thing there — boy, you know, I do not remember.

Somewhere, I'm sure in my old manuscript paper notes, there would be the answer to this question. But you know, you might be right, that it's just the extension of the palate cleansing chromatic progression. Then the dominant #11 sound, like at 205 in the solo section, the A7(#11)/B. That's that domi-

nant ♭6 sound from the beginning. There is also a particular bass motion about how the tonic moves in the opening of the piece.

Eliana: Right, well we will continue our own nerdy search and keep looking into it and see if we can find any answer to that.

Jim: If you can find where those changes come from…well…drinks on me! I know at the time, I have a vague feeling of an ascending progression, but I can't remember if I related it to anything else. The closest thing is that palate cleansing progression.

Eliana: Well that is pretty much all of our questions for now, and as we analyze more, I'm sure more will pop up. Oh yes, we did have a more general question. While all of the arts are closely related, many composers/musicians tend to draw direct influences from other musicians, composers and music they are studying or checking out at the the time. I imagine having to draw influence from a painting felt very different than the norm. Could you tell us a little bit about that? Did it perhaps feel more freeing? Or more constraining?

Jim: Definitely, it was more freeing in a way. Rather than sitting at the piano, rummaging around trying to find things, or using pitch cell or artificially imposed systems, you have this outside inspiration to work with. The challenge at first, I had to grapple with the idea of what my role was — like was it to interpret the visual, or meaning, all of those kinds of issues — but it was really interesting to have this visual inspiration rather than thinking *ok, what am I hearing now* while sitting a piano.

With Klee's stuff, he certainly painted on canvas from time to time, but he painted on cardboard and cloth too. One of the painting in the suite is called *Death and Fire,* and that is painted on potato sack material. So when he applied the paint to that fabric, the fabric absorbed some of the paint, so you can't draw a sharp line on this stuff. So it's all kind of blurry on this material, and it gave this specific feeling, the texture and physical sensation of it. That can give all kinds of musical ideas. Seeing it person, is when it all kind of started to click.

Another one on the record, the *Individualized Measurement of Strata* painting, completely just layers of stuff. For that I used this method of grazing my eye around and finding rhythmic patterns. I also did a whole nerdy analysis of the 16 levels of the thing and made rhythmic patterns of each level, all those kinds of stuff. That one was the most abstract of the group, probably also the one I got closest to actually representing what's on the painting. I used the physical structures in the painting as the source of rhythmic material and form.

**** chatted about off topic random material ****

Eliana: In an interview we read, Brookmeyer talks about how when Skylark is played live, the audience always stays quiet for about four bars before applauding. This opened a door for him in thinking about how audience is involved in compositions. In any performance of you music, was there a time that you felt or noticed energy/emotion/reaction from the audience that you could put into words?

Jim: I got to think about that, I remember when Bob was doing the book with Dave Rivello, he had something I had never heard him say before. He said something about how he wrote several things where he leaves endings of pieces for the audience to decide. There was the *American Express* ending ** *Jim plays it at the keyboard* ** where he kind of just ends it there, suspended. At the time he was listening to this Egberto Gismonti record *Nó Caipira* a lot. Egberto had all of these little vampy kind of things ***Jim plays at the keyboard*****.* All of a sudden, Bob's music started getting full of these Egberto types vamps that end of them hanging. We'd play it in the club, and finally one person would dare to clap and be the first.

I mean, there is a ballad a wrote called *In This Moment.* I've played it sometimes in live concerts, and sometimes there is a stunned silence after that. The opposite of that though, like when the Vanguard band plays A-That's Freedom, the Hank Jones tune that Thad arranged. It's got this amazing shout chorus, and at the end of the shout chorus the audience applauds. When I wrote the chart I dedicated to

Thad, my goal was to make people applaud after the shout chorus, it happens about half the time..ha. With Thad's shout chorus, it's every single time. Actually I have to say…that shout chorus is probably is what got me to move to New York. Hearing the record of Thad and Mel playing it *Live at the Vanguard*, I said, ok I gotta go there.. I have to go to there.

Other than that, maybe actually the end of *Ad Parnassum,* it's a little triangle hit, it leaves people kind of suspended for a moment as well. Oh a funny story, also in *American Express* the piano plays a note and there is this long pause, and then Mel would start and we'd finally play the ending. Once in a while during the long pause, haha..you hear this guy in the front row go *how bout that* and the band cracked up. You know, Bob would create that little trap there… is it over? Ooo not yet!

**** off topic material ****

Jim: (talking about playing with Thad & Mel big band). I remember when I started playing with the big band I would sometimes try to match a voicing I heard that was held out. I would try to find it, and if I got it right it was almost like the keys of the piano would light up! I learned a lot just by playing along to the tuttis.

Eliana: Did you ever meet Roland Hanna?

Jim: Oh yeah, of course! He's a great piano player…

Eliana: Totally underrated.

Jim: Yeah, great, piano player. He's about 5.5 tall and he used to call me Big Jim. Hank Jones used to call me Rather Large Jim..he was a little more colorful…haha. Roland Hanna for me was the model on how to play with that band. There is a video on YouTube where they play *Groove Merchant.* He plays a long introduction with the trio, and it's just remarkable playing.

Eliana: I love the *Live at Basle* record. Roland is featured all over that record, not just on the solo piano feature *Bible Story,* but throughout all of the charts. The energy is never-ending, it's so engaging the whole time.

Jim: That was one thing that always appealed to me about that band. I had a chance when I was still kind of in and out of college, I was living in Champaign-Urbana, be in for a while and out. But, I had the chance to hear Woody Herman's and Buddy Rich's band when they would come through town. The word came down to me that both of those bands were looking for a piano player, and would I want to go audition, but neither of those bands appealed to me. Specifically, the role of the piano, you get to play a couple choruses of blues in front of one chart once a night and that was about it.

The thing about Thad and Mel, they started out with Hank and then Roland on piano. Thad, I think he developed his idea about the role of the piano from Basie. Because with Basie, there was never just a piano solo, it always had a function. It maybe started things off, or was a bridge between two sections, or the big shout chorus would happen and then as the dust would settle the piano would go tinky-tinky-tinky. The piano always have a big structural function in the chart, that appealed to me. So when I had a chance to play with the band, I jumped at it. Most other big bands, great musicians in the band, but playing with those bands never really appealed to me.

Corcovado (Featuring Luciana Souza)

Jim McNeely — Macro-Formal Graph (RB)

Intro	VOCAL *(head-in)*				SOLO				TUTTI *(arranger's chorus)*				VOCAL *(head-out)*				*Outro*
Intro	A	B	A	B′	A	B	A	B′	A	B	A	B″	A	B	A	B′	Outro
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8 4	8	8	8	4 6	8	8	8	4 6	8	8	8	4 8	8	8	8	4 6	4 2
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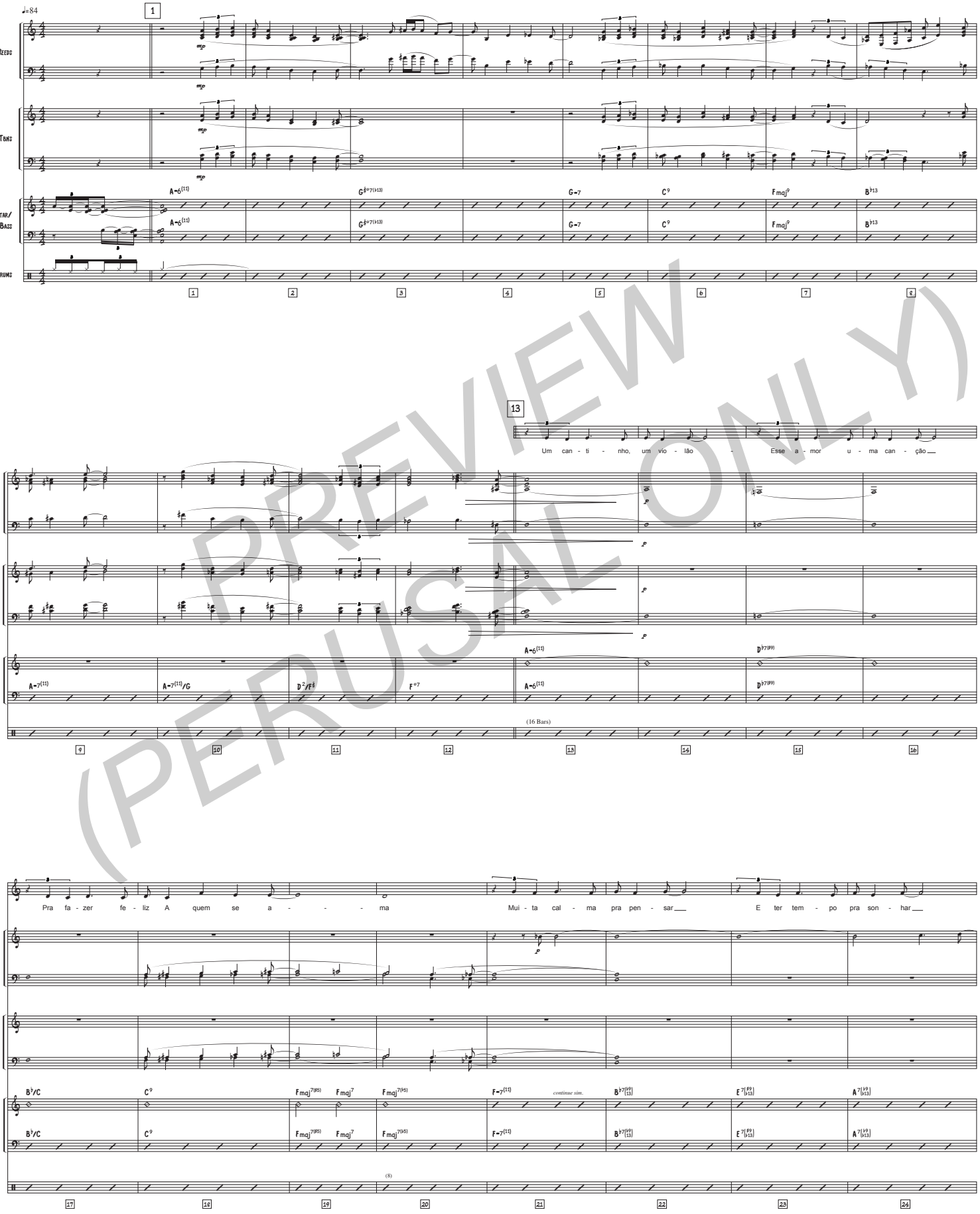
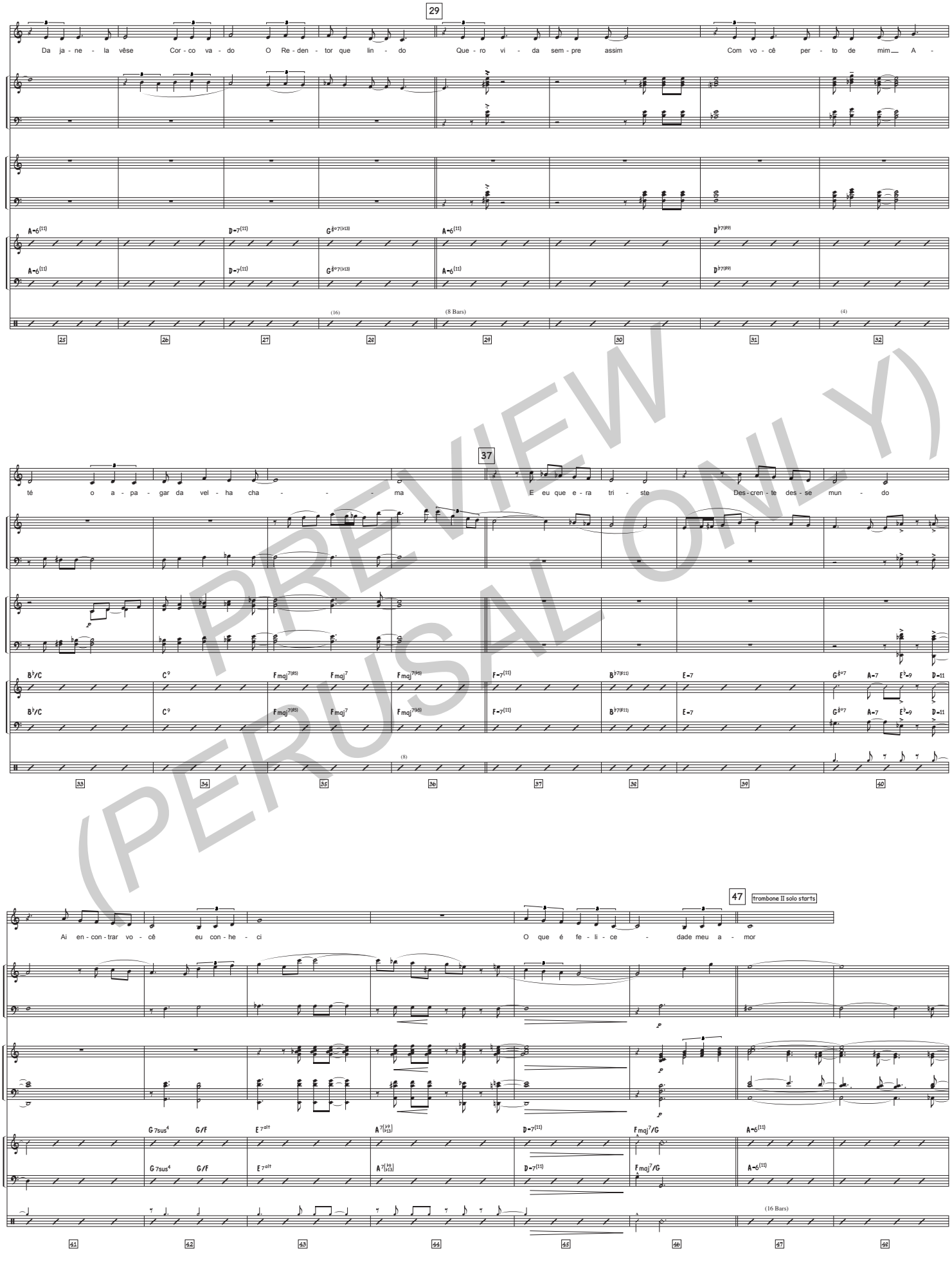
SCORE REDUCTION - (EF)

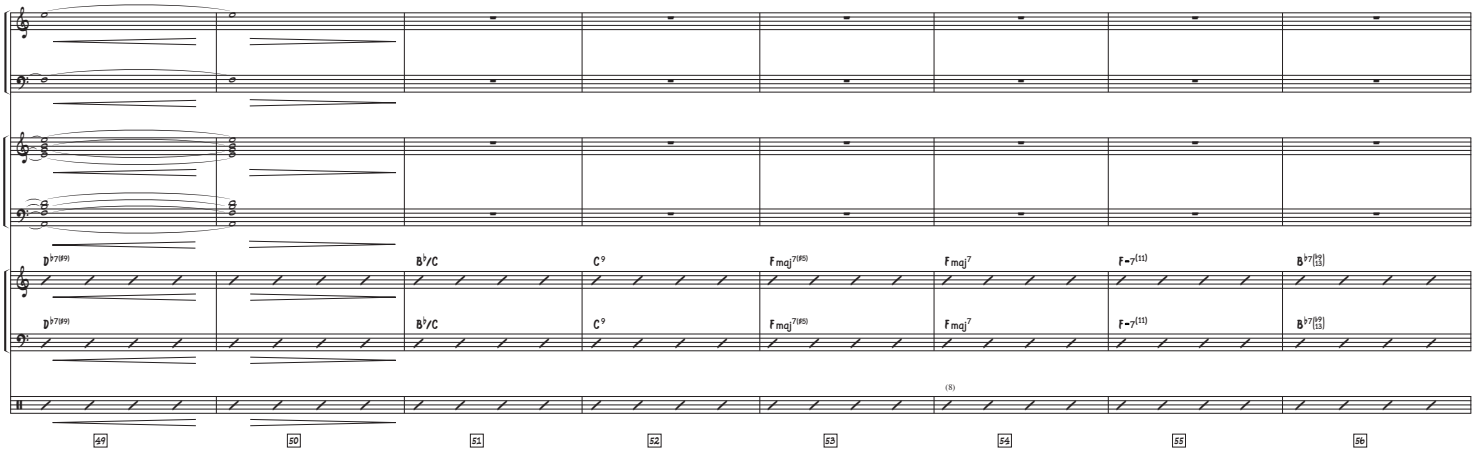
Corcovado

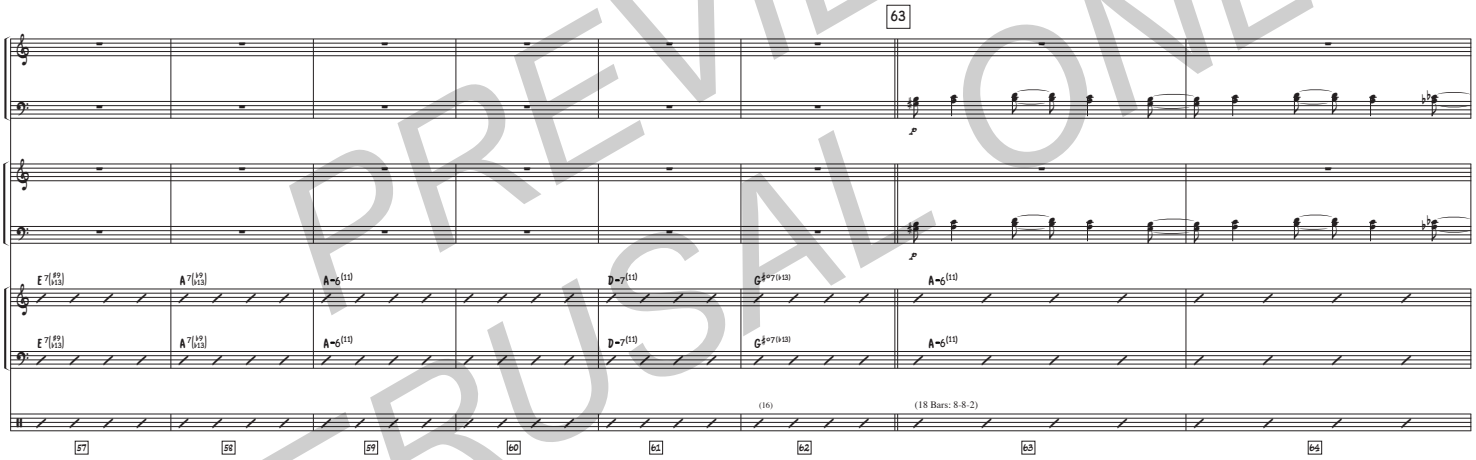
Composed By: Antonio Carlos Jobim
Arranged By: Jim McNeely

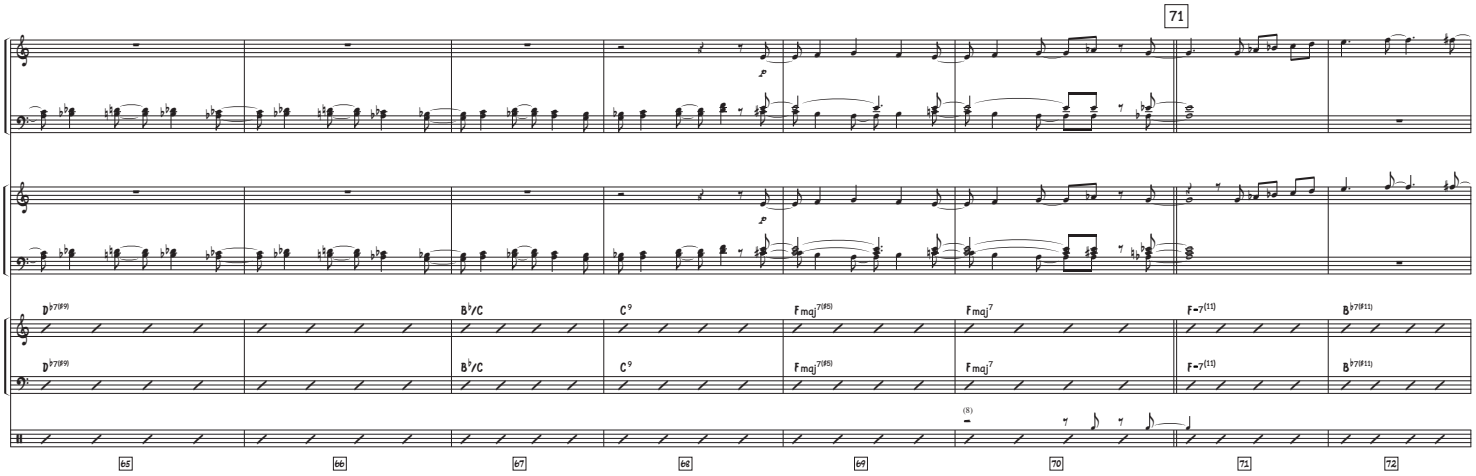


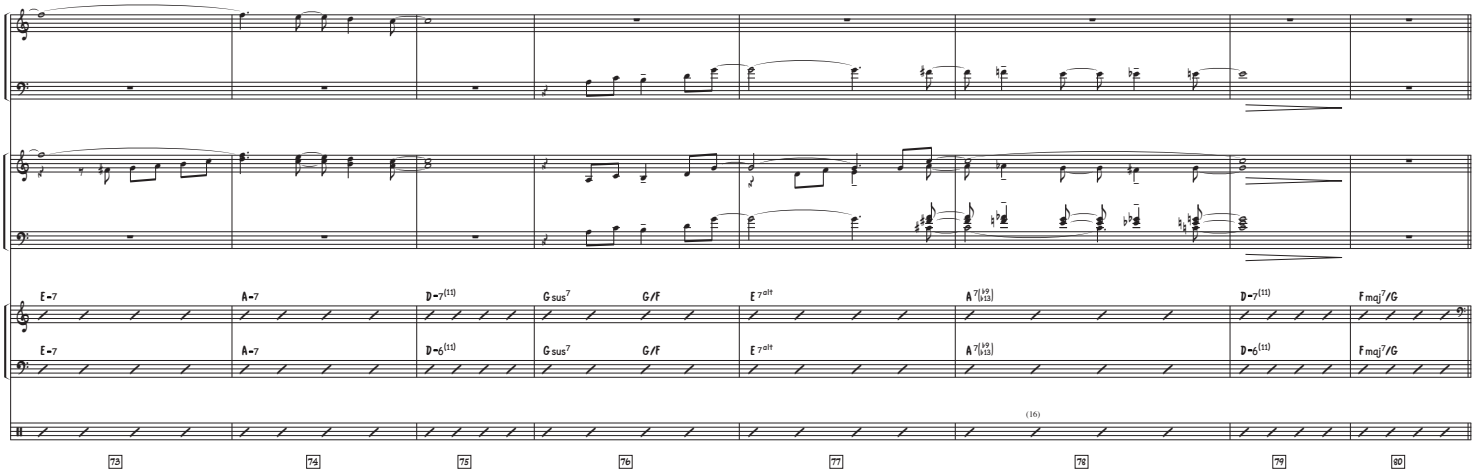
Corcovado

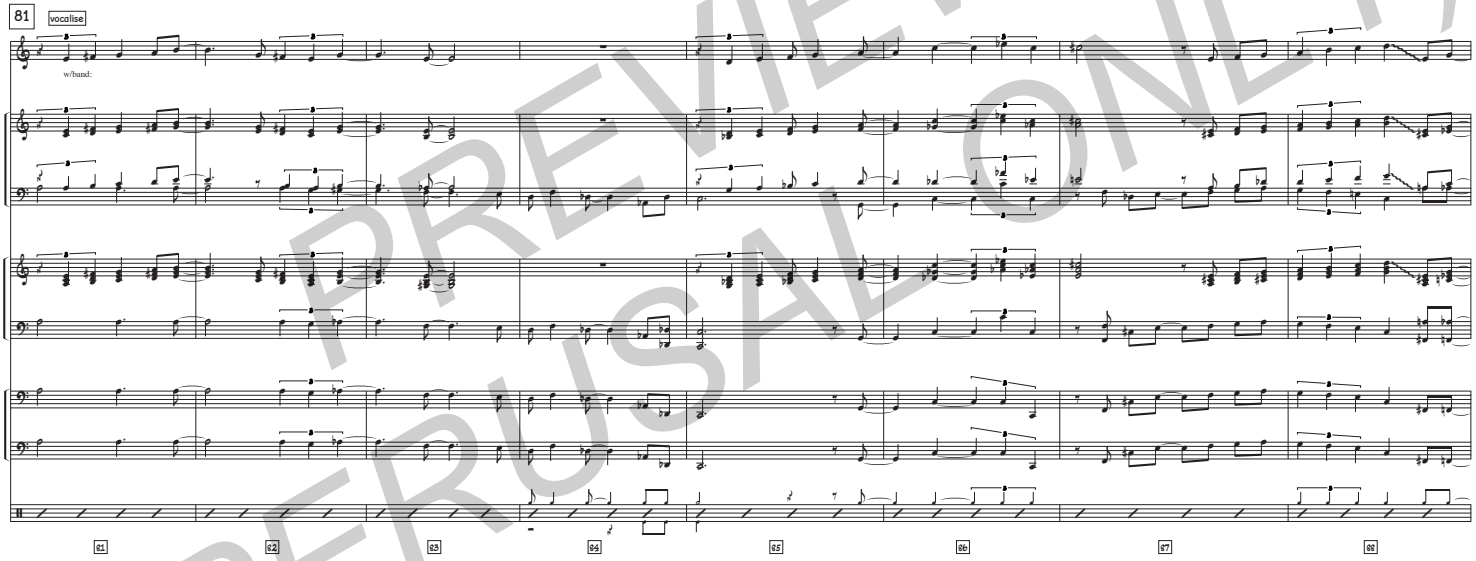


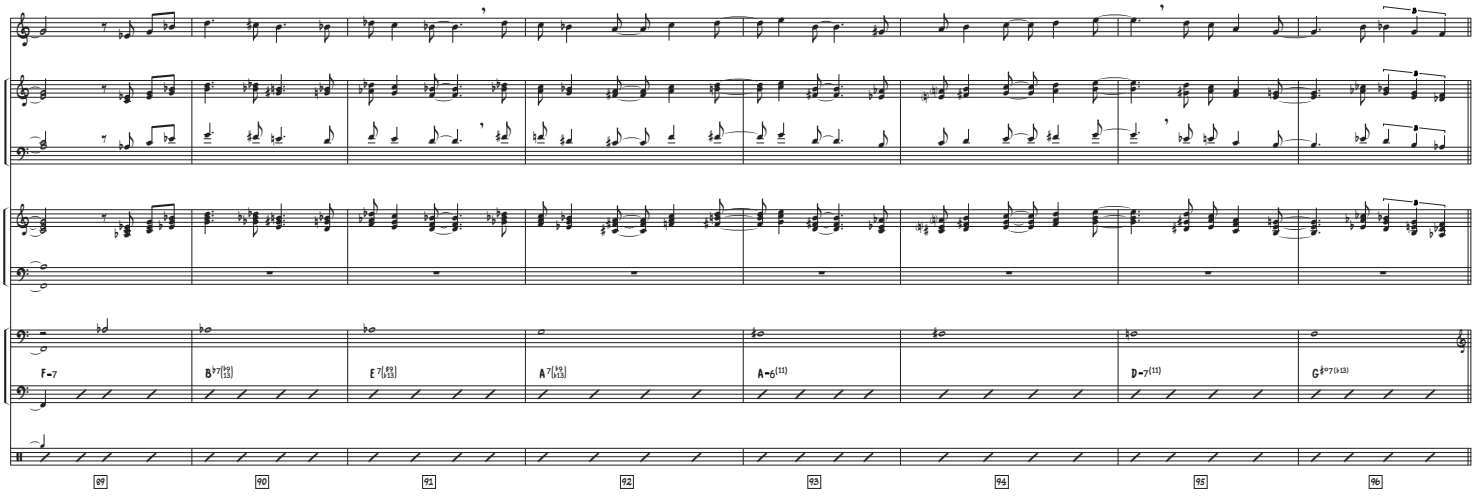


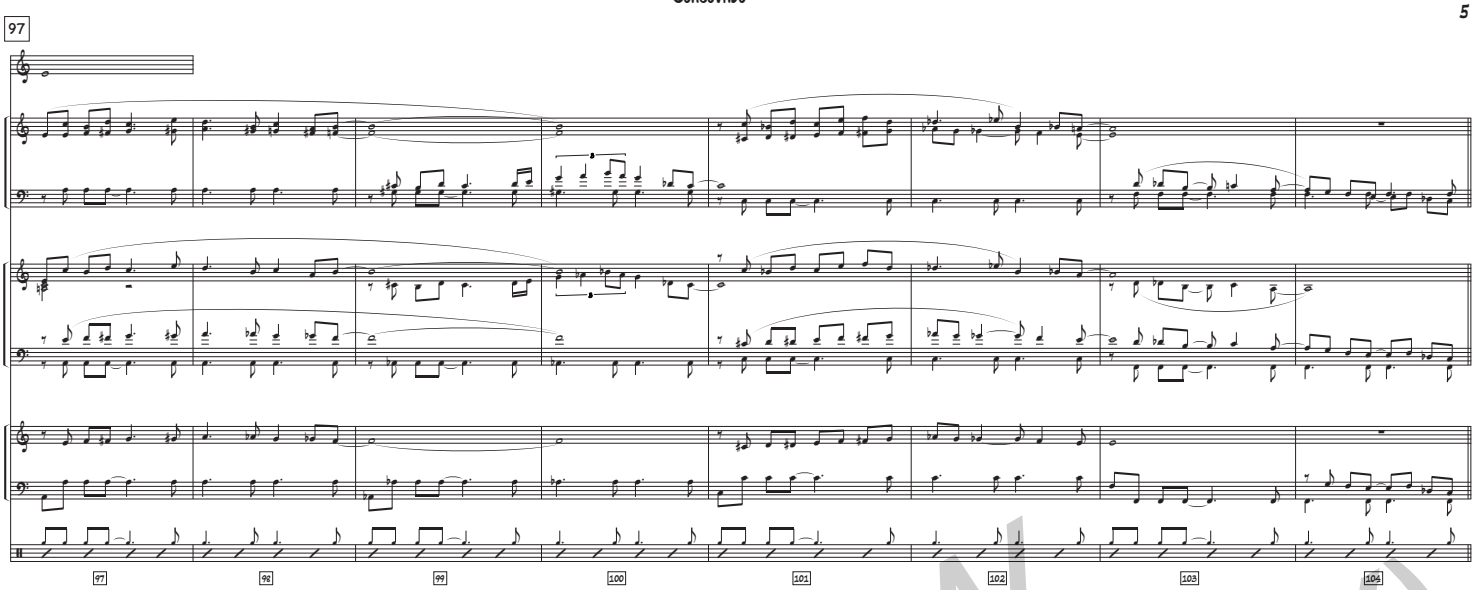


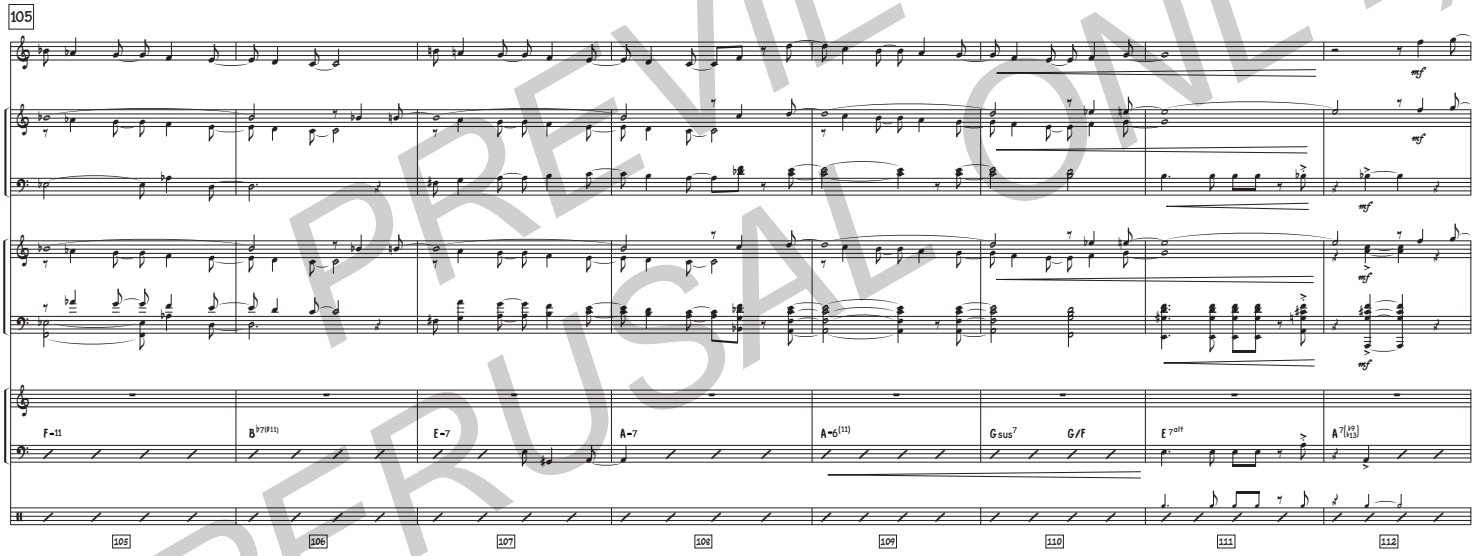


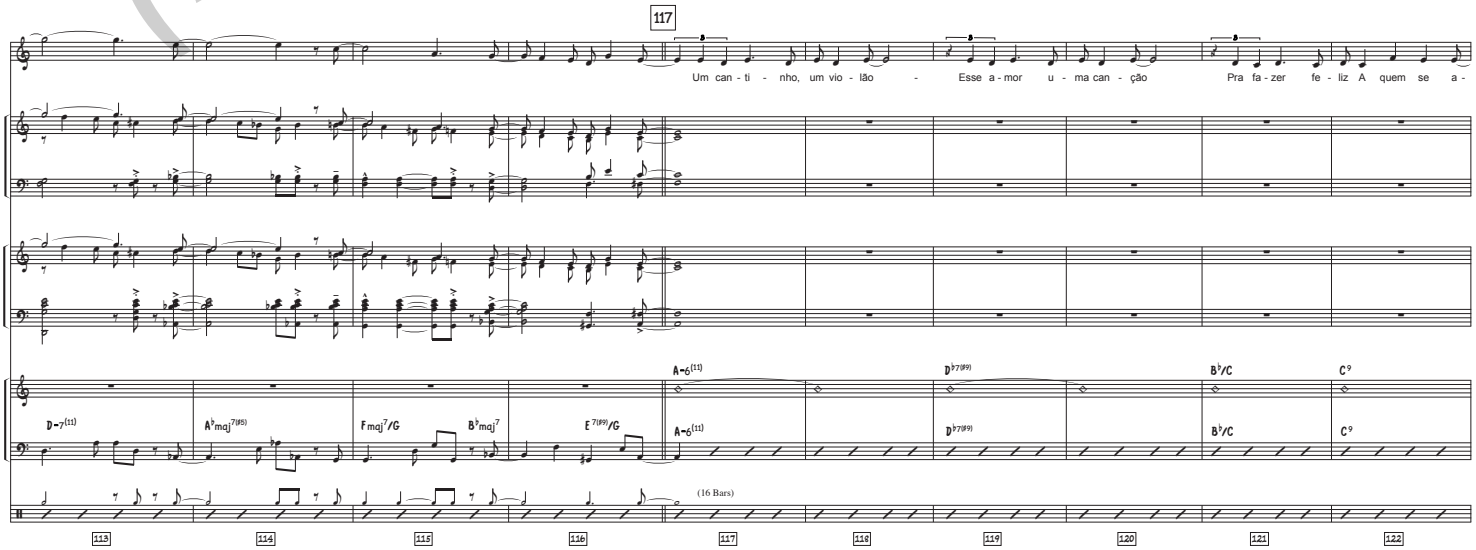


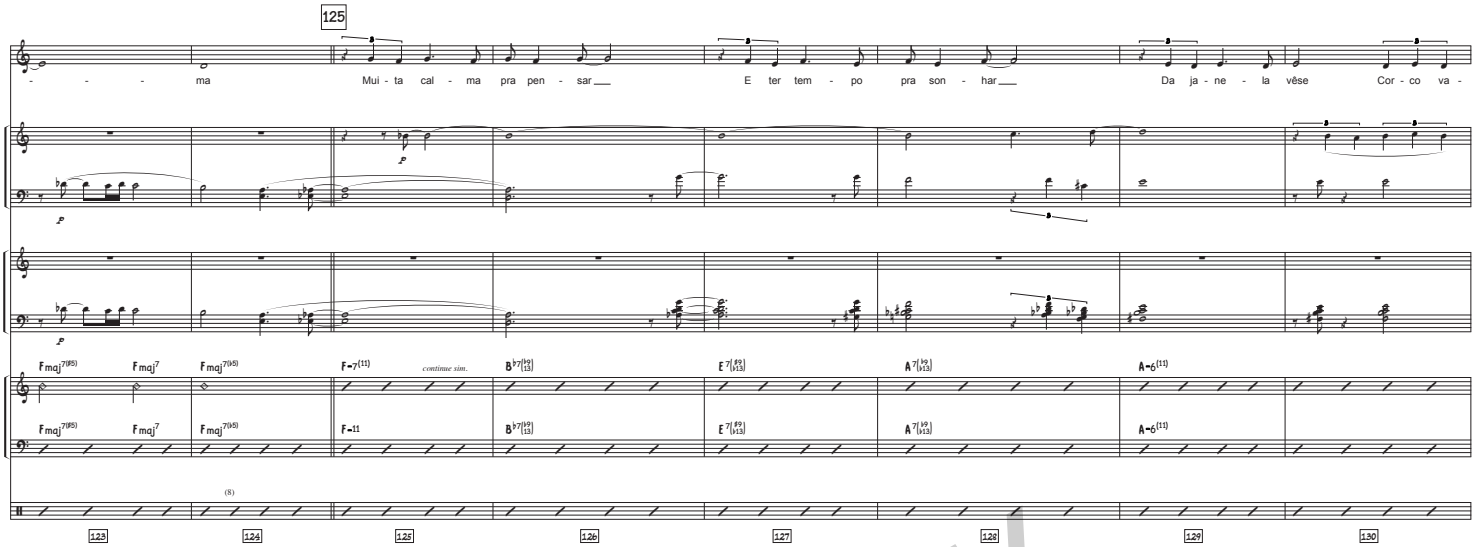


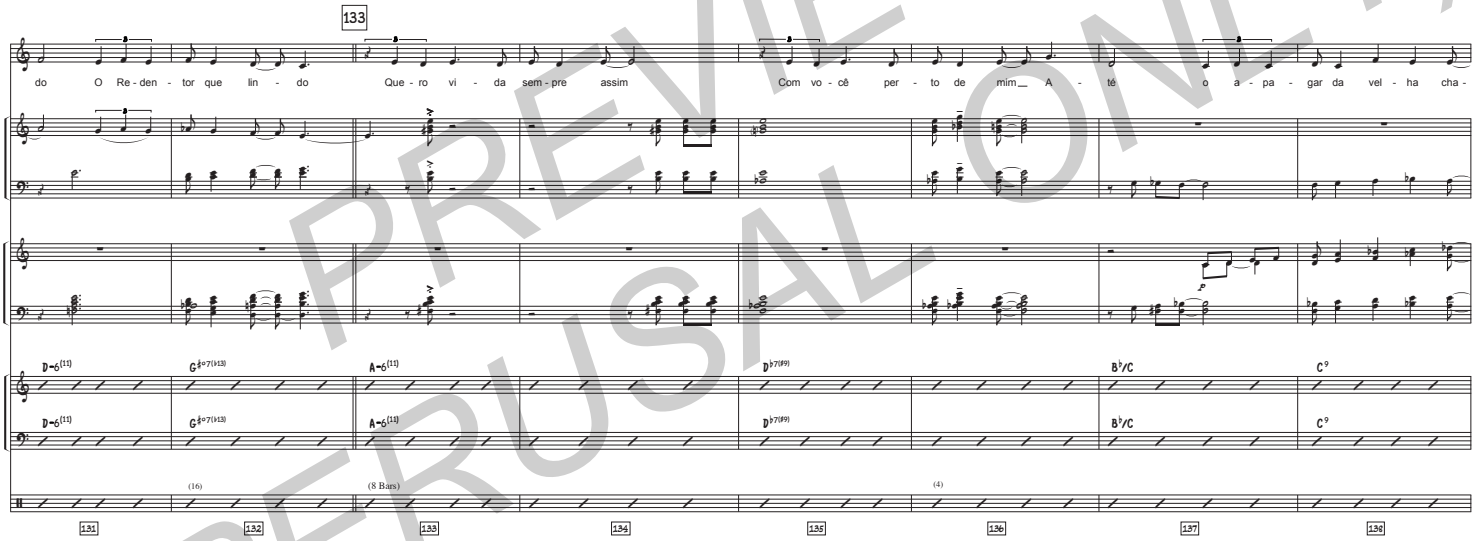


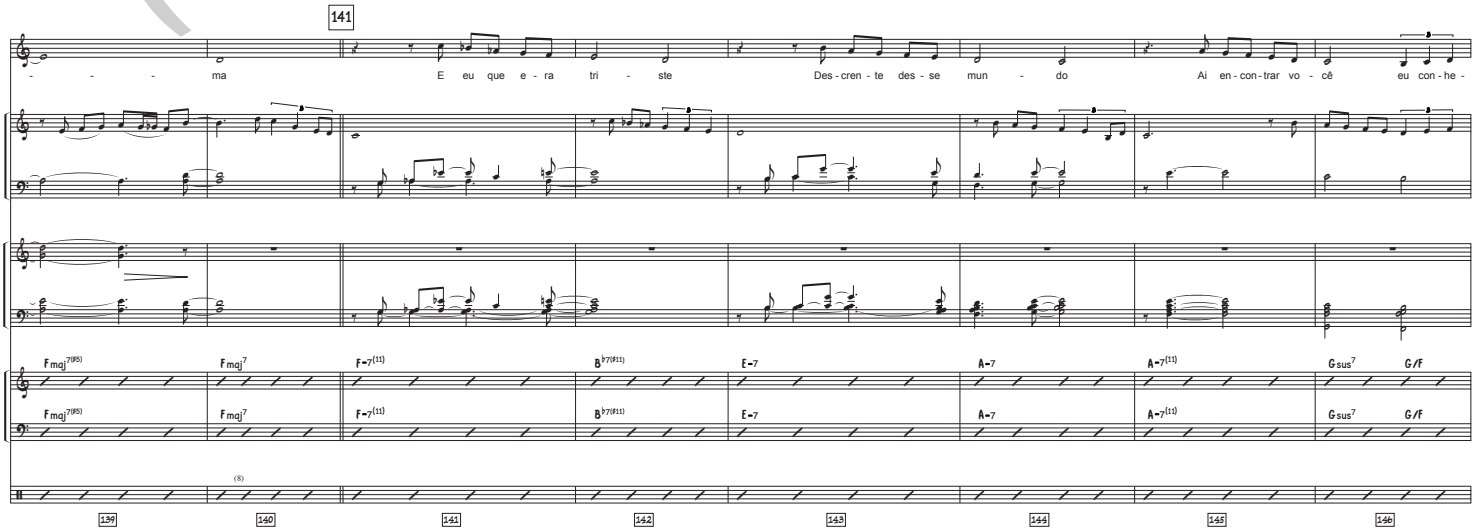


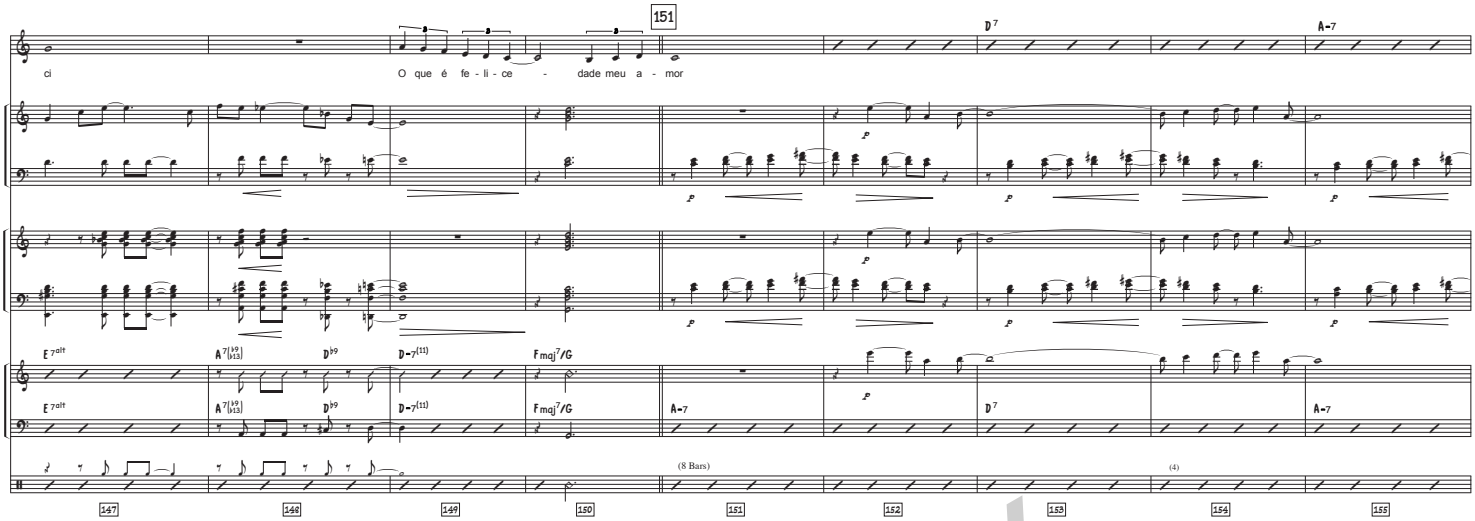


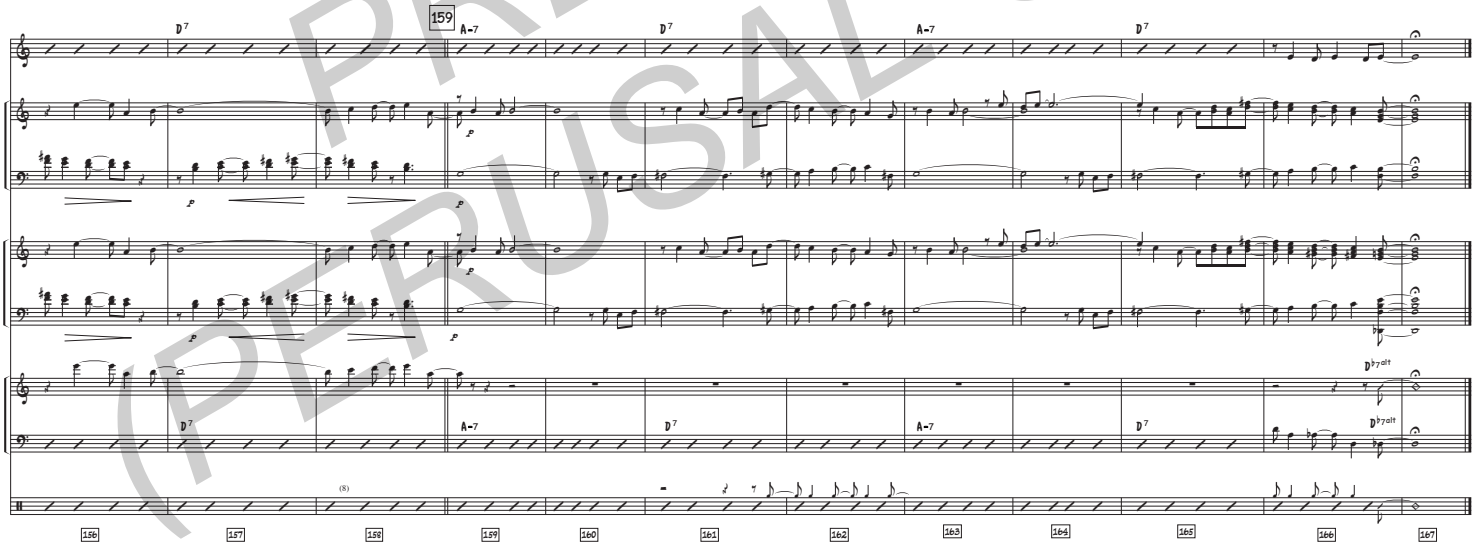












TRANSCRIPT OF *CORCOVADO* INTERVIEW:

** these interviews have been condensed & some order of things have been re-arranged for clarity and cohesion. This interview would be best understood in conjunction with the score **

Rob: So this was from a concert with you did HR Big band and Brazilian vocalist, Luciana Souza. If you don't mind starting out by talking about this particular project first, and how it came about? Also, some of your initial ideas about it after hearing Luciana's recordings, and talking to her about what she wanted as well?

Jim: Yeah, the way that we worked on this, it's typical of the way I do most of the projects with guest soloists. We got in touch by email and so forth, and we talk over the phone. She sent me about 2-3 CD's of stuff from her own records, of her doing all kinds of different stuff. Some was really straight ahead jazz, some were her own compositions, some of it was a series of duos she did with different guitar players. This one guitarist, Romero Lubambo was unbelievable, he's a great player. And then, also doing a lot of Brazilian music and so forth.

So I listened to everything and made a large short list of possibilities. Then we talked on the phone and talked about how she wanted to approach the sets, so we finally ended up deciding on the repertoire. It ended up being two of her own tunes, several Jobim compositions, and there is a Hermeto Pascoal piece, and a couple other things by Brazilian composers.

So for *Corcovado,* I used her recording of it as a reference point. I used to play this with Stan Getz, and from that…the way he played the melody, I really got an appreciation for how beautiful the melody is. But, so Luciana's recording of it is much slower than I had played with Stan. I thought *oh this is nice*. So right away, I started to think about the timbre of the thing. One thing about the radio band is that they have a lot of alto flutes — and the combination of those with bucket mutes is really nice. So right away, I had an idea of the sound of the arrangement. I just wanted it to be this really lush kind of sound.

Then I started to work on the tune, I came up with the introduction — which is the original intro to it. **plays at keyboard**. I wanted to use this drop-two thing that I've used quite a bit in my writing. It's all flugels and bucket mutes bones a — doubled by alto flutes and bass flute. The flutes are a luxury I don't get very much, when I have the capability to use them, I jump at the chance. I just knew how the first phrase would sound. When we did the rehearsal the first time, I just heard it and thought *..ahhhh*. You know, I just wrote it down on paper, but it's such a beautiful sound, the combination of those instruments.

The flutes…I was thinking about all these records I heard with Jobim, and he has these flute lines. A lot of the time they were doubled by a Fender Rhodes and they were higher lines than this. I was writing for alto flutes, I wanted a nice middle register thing in unison there. So it's the sound and vibe or the arrangement I was thinking about and it came from two things. Just thinking about how Stan used to play the melody, and Luciana's tempo that she wanted with at.

Then, I think the changes of the tune are from Luciana's lead sheets. She sent me several lead sheet, there were a number of tunes I had to transcribe from the recording that she didn't have sheets for. For this, she had her own changes, and sent me the piano parts.

Rob: Yeah, while on the topic, we noticed you willingness in this arrangement to mess around with the changes a little bit. Like the third bar of the A section, you have D♭7(♯9) rather than the pivotal A♭ diminished chord.

Jim: Yeah those are her changes, and I liked it. Actually, first of all, most people play the tune wrong, they play the first chord as D-9. It's not, it's an A-6, which Jobim used all the time. Then the voice leading of the bass notes is just chromatic. Even *Girl from Ipanema* has that motion, because with Gilberto playing it, the voice leading on the guitar, the bass note was just chromatic. So anyway, yeah Luciana, instead of the diminished chord, she made is the D♭ dominant sound, and I thought it was a nice sound.

Rob: Yeah it's beautiful, especially as it leads to that sus sound after that. So those are Luciana's changes.

Jim: Yeah, yeah.. one of the great things about working with her, she's a great musician. A tremendous singer. She loves counterpoint. I respected the times when she made changes to the tunes, because I thought they were good ideas.

Rob: That's great. So for each piece we also wanted to ask about what was going on in your life at the time? What were your priorities, interests and how they might have worked their way into your writing at the time?

Jim: Yeah, I forget. Oh you know, you guys know the Jobim Institute? I saw this thing, they had the complete 5 volume set of every tune he ever wrote. The price was quoted in Brazilian cruzeiros. I punched in a credit card number and an address, it was about $200, not cheap…but I thought let's just throw caution to the wind. Nothing happened for a while, and I kind of forgot about it. One day, three months later — this box shows up from Brazil.

I was headed to Frankfurt for another project, but I packed those books with me because I thought I would start working on her stuff. I remember sitting in the hotel with those books and typing, that's when I really learned to use the lyric tool in finale, which to me was always like a dark back room I never went into.

You know, I had been artist in residence with the band from 2008, but I think I had just signed the contract to become chief conductor. All of the sudden, the projects I was doing had higher visibility. I thought on one hand, that it's really important I do this well, and I respected her so much, I really wanted to make sure this project worked out well.

Rob: Anything in the political climate at the time that was affecting your compositional output? If any external thing was dripping into your writing, like one would assume the Trump presidency would drip into all of our writing?

Jim: Yeah thats a good word for it, drip into it, like a piece of rotting meat…but no nothing really around 2011.. **ominous keyboard sounds start on zoom** oh, by the way here is our new cat, Mr. Pip, who does this on the keyboard once in a while. This is the game we play where I gently toss him off my lap. He's here, yep, he's learned to stay away right until about this time of day, and he'll come down. His nickname is Mr. Mayhem, we have two cats, and the brother is just completely chill. This guy, gets into some stuff, he's a real trouble maker. Anyway!

Rob: Can you talk generally about your relationship with the lyrics? In what ways did your understanding of the lyrics inform the orchestration? You know, was your relationship with the lyrics primarily through Luciana's arrangement or it individual study that you did as well?

Jim: Actually, you know, the only English lyrics I'm aware of are the Gene Lees' *Quiet Nights and Quiet Stars* lyrics. So seeing these are interesting, there's always something about the Redeemer. Yeah this is interesting. I know that even Gene Lees' lyrics, it's about *quiet.* I was thinking of the whole thing being quiet, and I knew it was about love, so I wasn't really trying to engage in any verbal painting of the lyrics. I was just thinking of the whole atmosphere of the lyrics that I knew about.

Rob: So on a similar theme, were you thinking about the *sound* of Luciana singings the Portuguese lyrics? Perhaps she elongates, but you know especially with Bossa Nova style, the elision of words is a big part of it. Was that sound in your head?

Jim: Yeah, the sound of the Portuguese lyrics of course. Having to actually type the lyrics into the scores, and all of the elision, the way the end of one word is the beginning of another word being linked together under the same note. I didn't really know what they were talking about, but it's such a beautiful language, especially the Brazilian form of it for lyrics.

You know, Claudio Roditi, I was hearing him in a club over in Switzerland once, singing. And I said to him *you know you could be singing about taking out the garbage and it would just sound gorgeous.* And he laughed. I also told him *you know if I die I want you to sing Corcovado at my funeral.* And he said *you know Jim, you don't have to die, maybe we just have a party and I sing it. It doesn't have to be that drastic..*haha.

But yeah, the elision, what you hear sounds like a word, but it's actually two or three words all tied together. So I would say, I learned a lot by typing the lyrics into finale. The main thing I was thinking of was the sound of her voice, whether she's singing in English or in Portuguese, but still the main thing was still the sound.

Rob: Okay, so you had mentioned something about Luciana's original music being intense in some interview. Can you talk about Luciana's other original music and her sound, and how that affected your arrangement and working with her in general?

Jim: Right so I talked about how Corcovado was slower in her version *plays Luciana's version*, yeah I think it's even slower than the big band version. But her own music, here is another one *plays Luciana's *I Shall Wait.** Oh and another one of hers we did, *No Wonder,* *plays Luciana's *No Wonder*.*

So her more "modern jazz recordings", there is an intense quality to them that I really like. Part of it is the players she picks, but there is this kind of energy underneath. You can get into this thing where her voice is a very smooth surface, but also some where there is a pot boiling underneath it, and you try to keep that going in the band.

Rob: Can you specify the name of that record?

Jim: It's called *North and South*. I think it's Scott Colley on bass, and Edward Simon on piano? I forget exactly. The one danger with her, is that she could easily be pigeon-holed as just a Brazilian singer. But she has such a broad range of what she does. She does all of it great.

Rob: Yeah so going back to the sound of her voice, you probably think of Luciana's voice as it's own timbre.

Jim: Yeah, well first of all her voice is low. So I had to leave more room for things above it. In a live performance, the singer is in front of the band with some room away from the horns. But I think about degrees of transparency where open brass are the heaviest, then you have saxes, muted brass and then woodwinds and strings. That's one reason to use the muted brass, it gives more transparency to the brass section so that she can project a bit better.

You can't limit yourself to just writing under the voice, otherwise you know, the melody is pretty low **play at piano**, and I can't just write under it. Also, something I learned from Vince and his Joni Mitchell stuff, he pointed out that when Joni Sings the orchestra does't do much, but when she takes a breath, the orchestra does stuff. Same thing when you listen o Frank Sinatra records with Nelson Riddle and Billy May.

You're not writing over the melody, but instead leaving space for the singer and filling in the blanks. I'm still learning to write for the voice, but in general trying to remember to leave space and make comments, or create underlines.

What I tend to avoid, is doubling the melody, especially in the same octave. For a vocalise, where the voice is kind of like any other instrument in the band, it's different. But when the vocalist has

to deliver a lyric, all of the *p*'s and *t's* have to be heard. If there is an instrument playing in unison with that, it interferes with the diction.

Rob: That last point, for anyone watching this in the future, this is 300 years from now, this is *very* important. So, in this arrangement, it seems like Luciana has a lot of space — but the horns are consistently present throughout the arrangement in various forms, even by just being a simple held out note. There isn't really any part where it's just Luciana for 8 bars alone. There is some sort of texture always carrying through, which works really well since it's still so tasteful and because of the tempo, but aren't necessarily leaving empty space for her.

Jim: Well, what I was doing — the countermelody at 15, that's bucket muted trombones which is pretty transparent. Then this is secondary voice that comes in under her at measure 18, as a lower harmony to the melody. All of this is still leaving her free to phrase how she wants on top of it.

Then that thing in measure 20, the B♭, it's flutes above her — so it's kind of like a string line comment.

Then to your point, in the next section starting at 29, it's more full, but it's these comping accents. **sings through rhythm*.* And again, it's mostly the woodwinds, the trombones are the foundation, but main sound is mostly flutes. It's not, well I hope it's not getting in the way of the whole thing. Can you go down to 37?

*Rob: **scrolls to 37***

Jim: Yeah, that's top line is just designed to harmonize with the melody.

Rob: Right, it's important to keep in mind that your backgrounds are never the same thing for 8 bars. It's always changing up, and morphing into new things during the head. That makes it feel like interplay rather than just, *ok here are backgrounds* — yours are more involved in the composition of it.

Jim: Exactly, it's meant to weave around the vocals. And again to your point, the first time we hear the full brass is at 43. This is the one time there is this big brass fill, relatively speaking, it's when Luciana is holding out a note. So the one big event texture wise in whole the first chorus, happens in a space in her line.

Rob: Yeah, definitely. So speaking of textures, we wanted to move onto asking you a little bit about the arrangers chorus. This starts at 81. If we could talk ask about the beginning of the arrangers chorus, which has a very present bass counterpoint. It follows the original changes — A to A♭ bass movement but then kind of outlines the D♭ dominant sound as well.

Jim: Yeah, there I was probably thinking of the A♭ diminished, but then I go for the D♭ in the fourth bar — the section is about those upper structures. So whatever you put underneath it, it becomes that chord. The line starts as a diminished and then becomes the D♭ altered sound. The important thing was leading to that low C.

Rob: Luciana is doubling the lead in the entire arrangers chorus…

*Jim: ..*Yeah I wanted her voice to color the top line, that's the melody and I wanted it to be reinforced. One thing I learned is when you double a line with a vocalist, it becomes the melody. Something about the effect of the human voice, no matter where it is, it becomes the melody. The timbre of the melody here is Luciana's voice doubled by lead flugel and lead flute together.

Rob: Yeah, it sounds so full — sometimes it's hard to believe it's just these triads during the chorus.

Jim: It does, because every note is pretty much tripled. Also, the timbre of lead voice influences how you hear the under voices. If the timbre of the lead voice is that 3 part combination, it hints that the rest of it is voiced by those sound, even though it's not. It's a little bit like smoke in the mirror, you create an illusion of it being full when the lead voice is really full.

This triadic thing that happens there, it's a kind of thing I really like writing. These tradic solis without much any comping going on.

Rob: What is the role of the single whole note piano comping notes at 81, outlining fundamental guide tones?

Jim: Oh yeah, I wanted the piano to do that. Jobim used to do that. One time I was playing *O Grande Amor* with Stan, and I started to do that behind him. Stan turned around and said *yeah! that's what Jobim would do.* These single line comping things, because otherwise you play all kinds of crap. So just give the basic suggestion of guide notes — just enough to establish the basic harmony and nothing more, because the triads are the colors there.

Rob: Oh speaking of colors, we wanted to ask about measures 113-115. You have this beautiful top line in the flugels and flutes, that keep converging on major seconds, before the bottom line starts moving away.

Jim: Oh yeah, when you have all of those seconds, they resolve immediately. I always think about bumper cars, where once in a while they bump into each other and then you both go your merry way. So sometimes the lines bump into each other at these seconds once in a while, but then they move away from each other.

Rob: Haha..yeah that's really funny. So to wrap up, we wanted to ask a little bit about rehearsal process with this? Specifically what do you look for in an ensemble that programs this piece?

Jim: One thing I'm sure we rehearsed is intonation of some of the lines. You put a mute in a brass instrument and then a flute is sitting there for half hour, then the guy picks it up to play it, there's bound to be intonation issues. We have the luxury in that band of time, so we really have time to rehearse intonation. So each person knows who they are doubling.

I'm just thinking of the baritone sax player, if he's playing bass flute and doubling the line in the second trombone line which is all the way on the other side of the band, and behind him…especially with social distancing now where there are two meters between each player. They have to know who they are playing with so they can make sure they are playing in tune together.

You know, I wouldn't give this soli to just any singer. She hadn't seen it in advance and I threw it at her the first rehearsal. She either read it perfectly, or pretty quick. There were a couple things I did that I thought might be kind of risky, I wasn't sure how they would work, but I was very pleased. Because of her ears, she just nailed it.

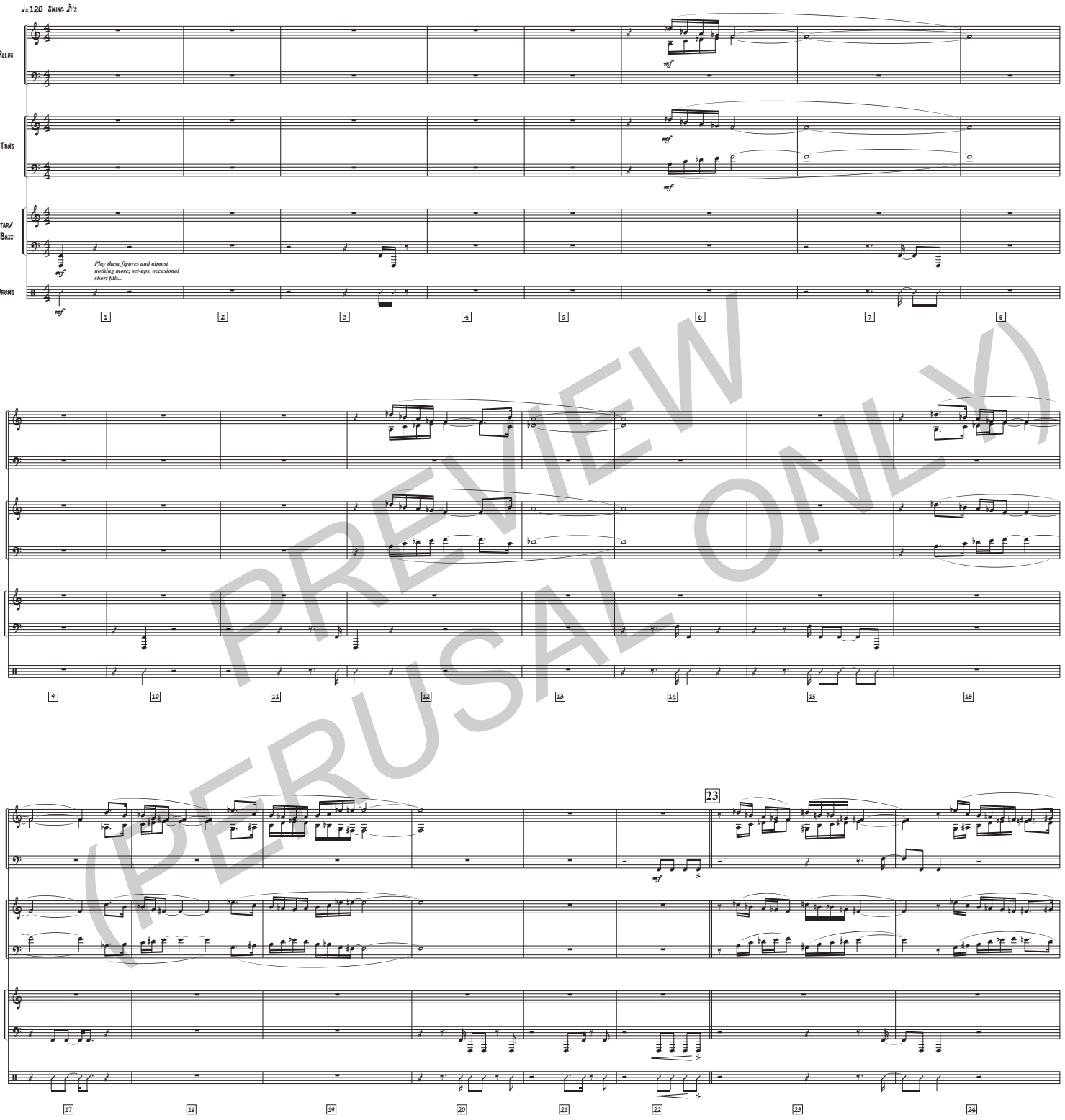
One of the reasons my arrangements done for this band don't travel really well is because you don't have many bands with 3 alto flutes, bass flute and alto clarinet. So then it's a matter of re-doing the parts for saxophones or something. In the places where it's muted brass and flutes, maybe do away with the flutes, but yeah that's one thing that would be a concern for any student band, or even professional ensemble. You have to adapt when the doubling situation is different, not all bands have things like bass flute or contra-bass clarinet.

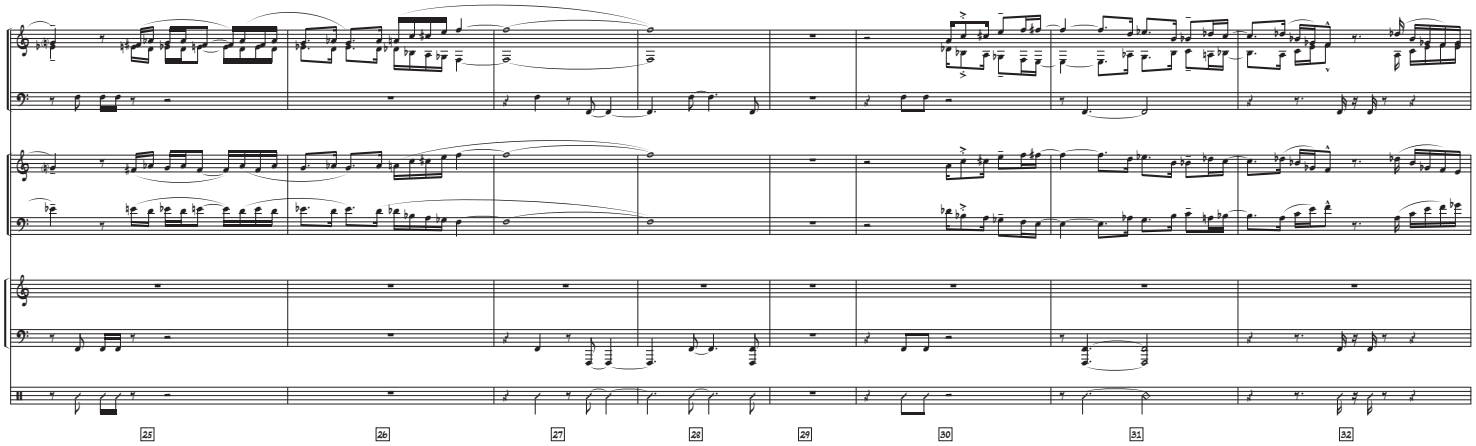
Rob: Right, of course. Well, thank you so much. Let's move onto the next piece!

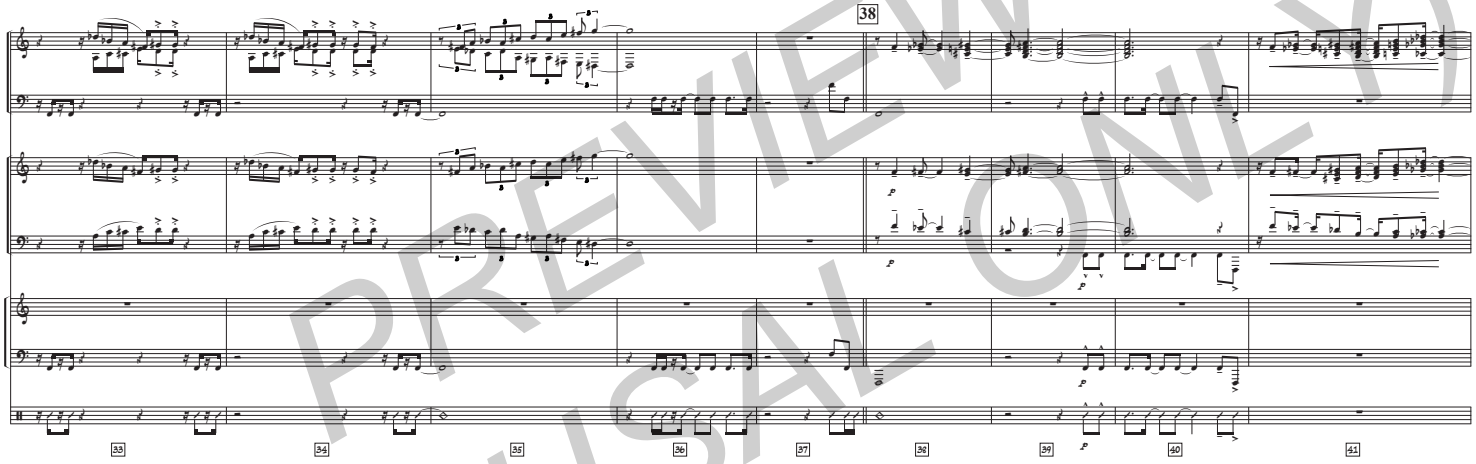
SCORE REDUCTION - (EF)

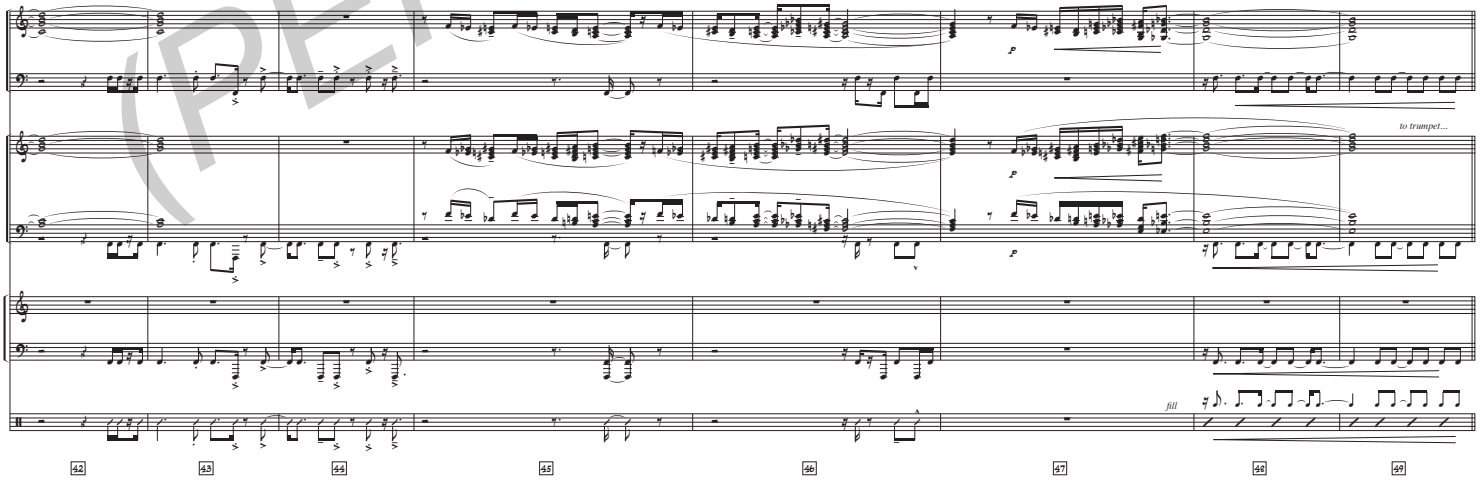
Bob's Here

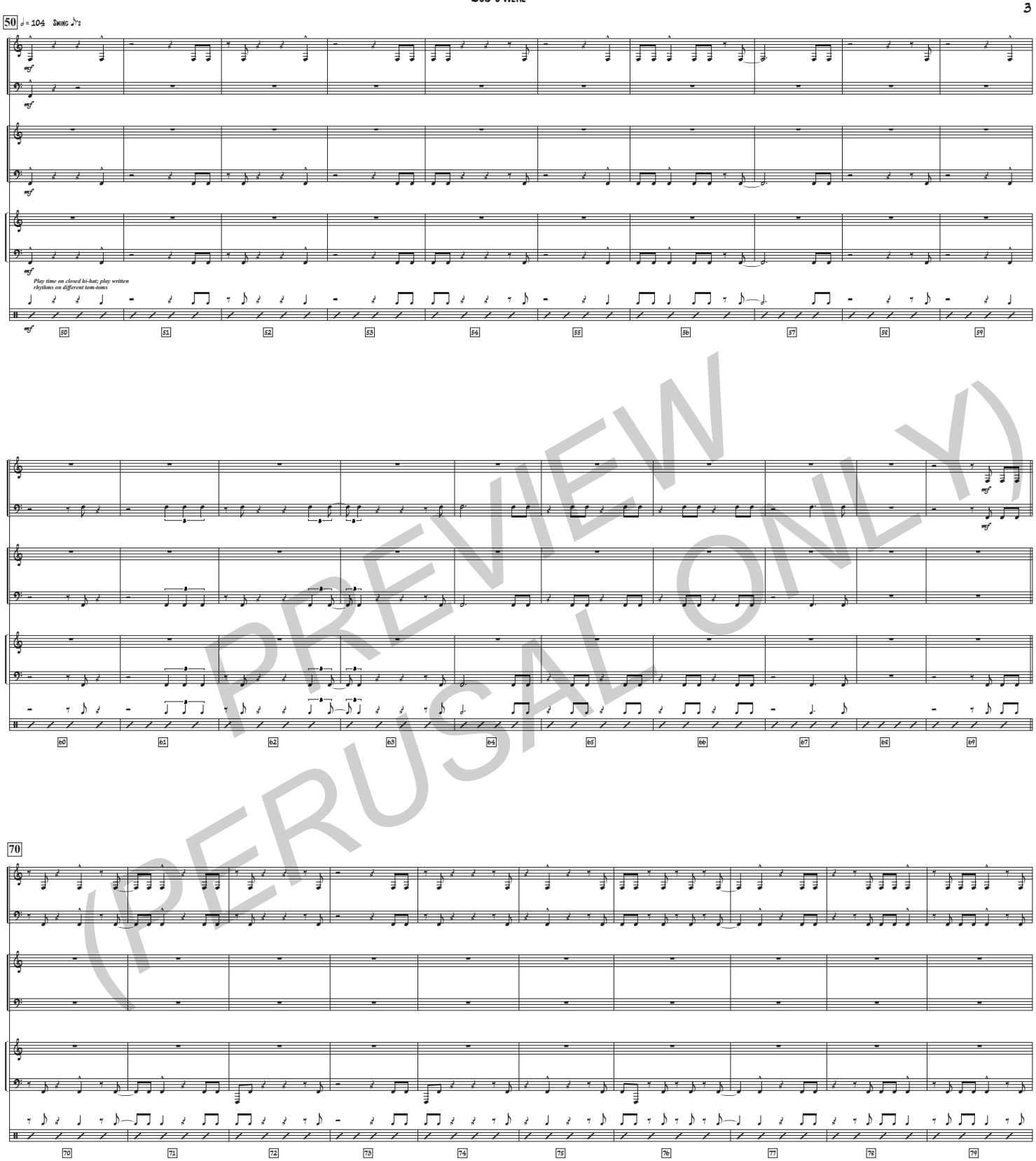
Composed by Jim McNeely

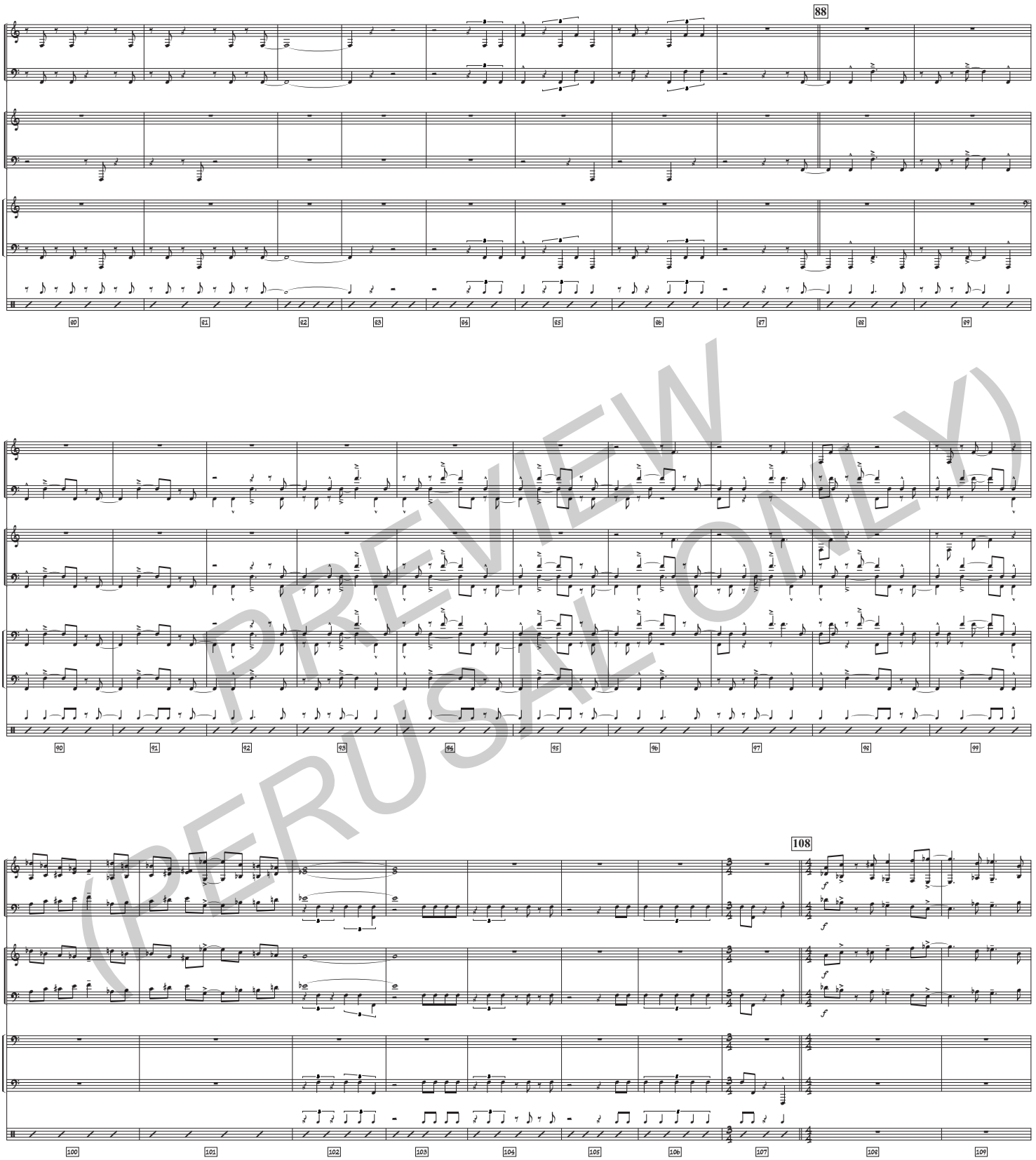


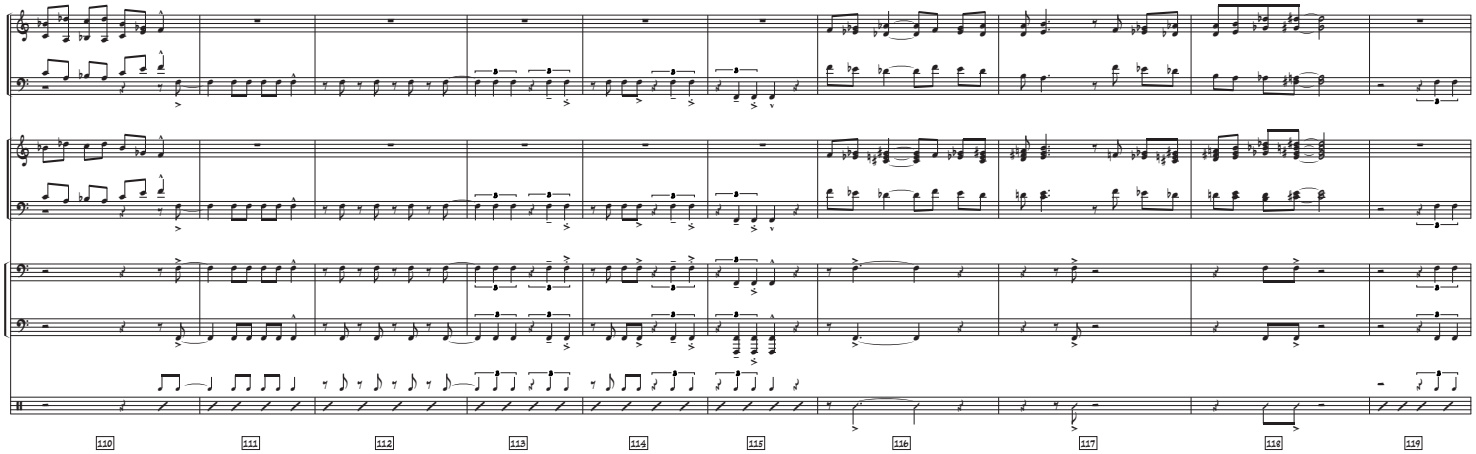


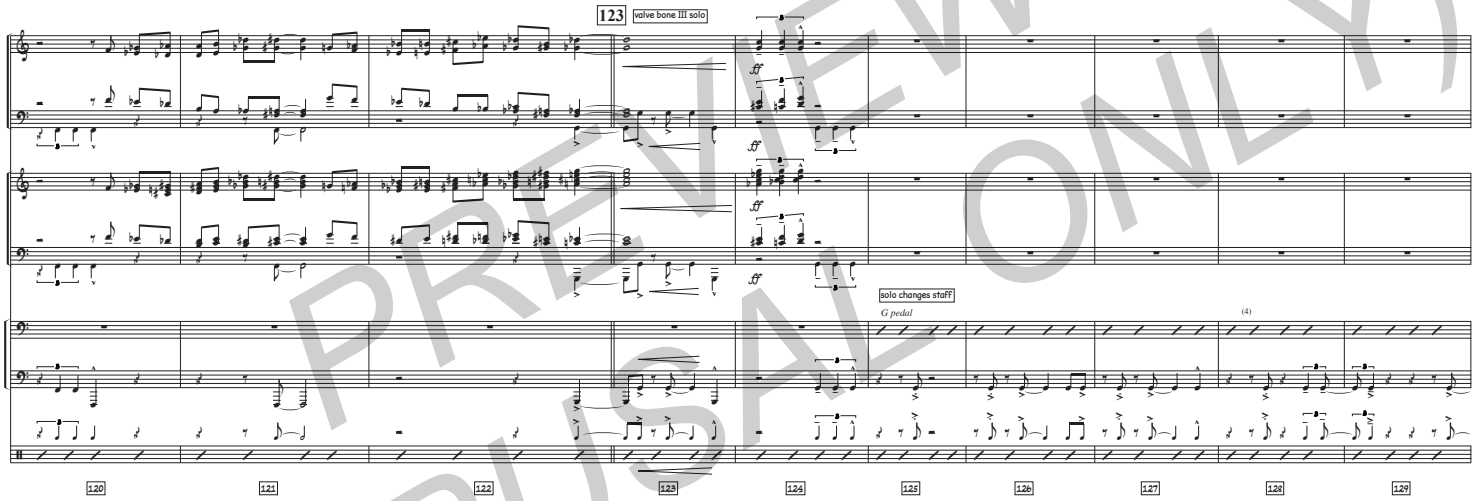


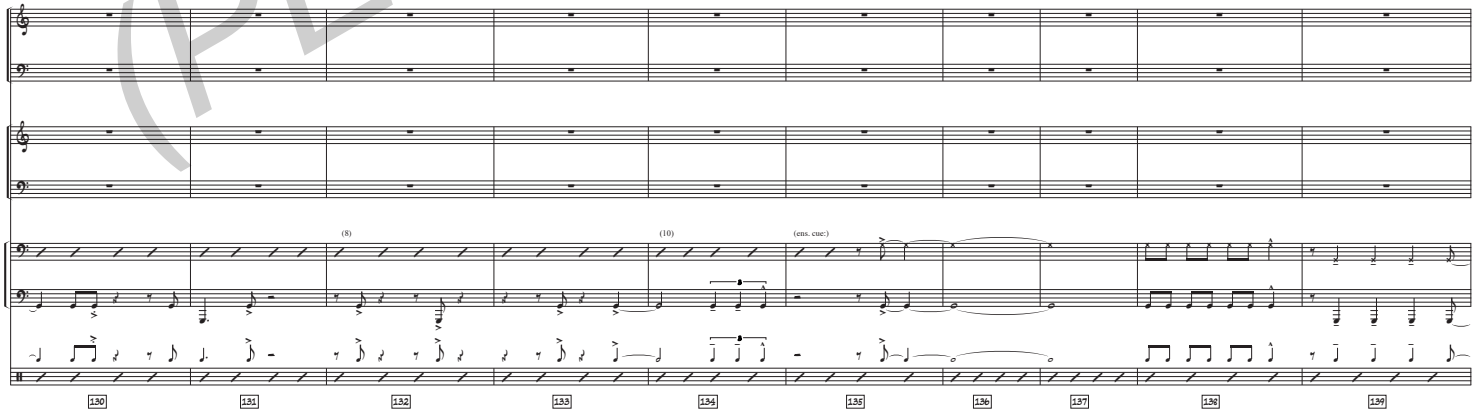


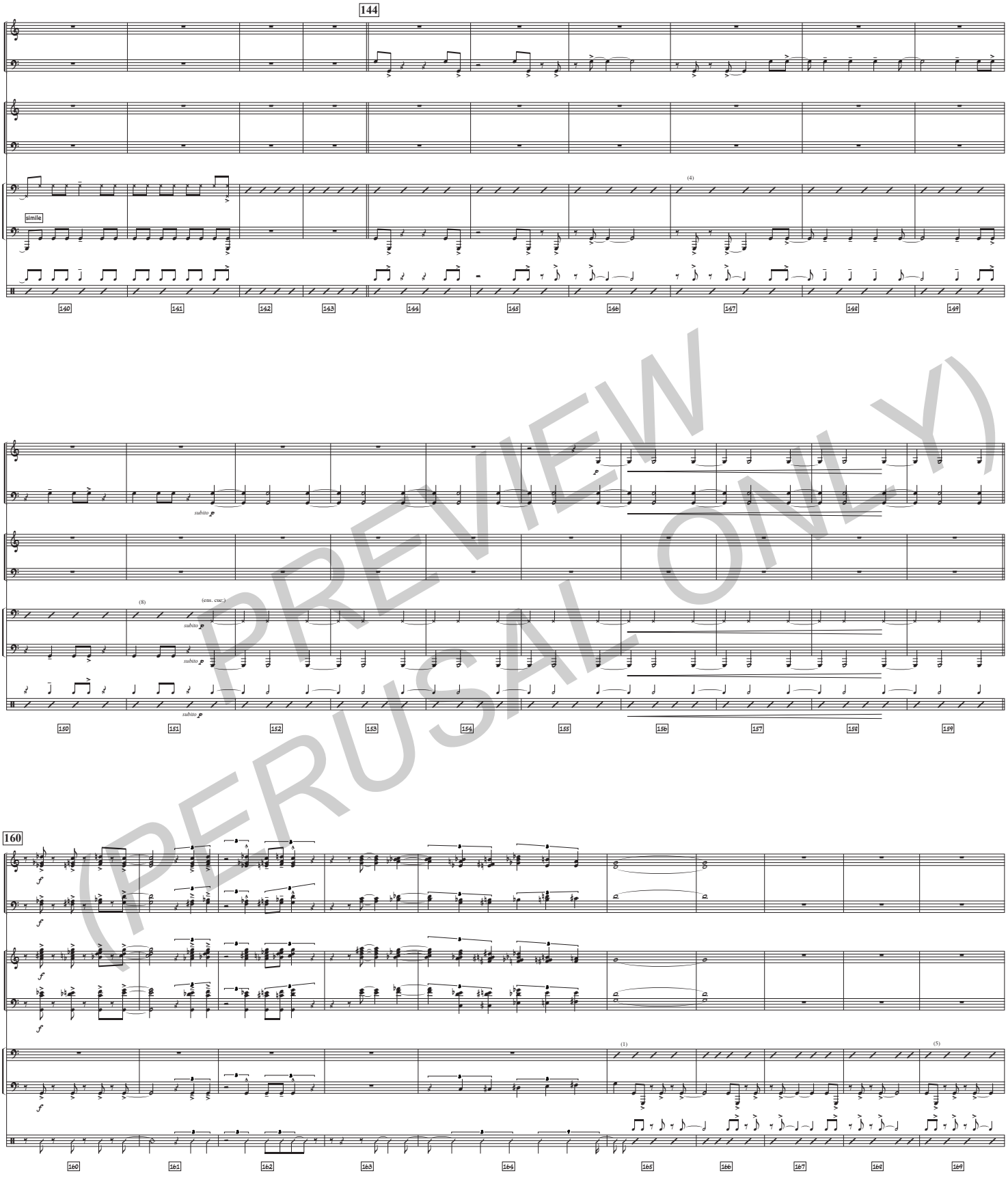


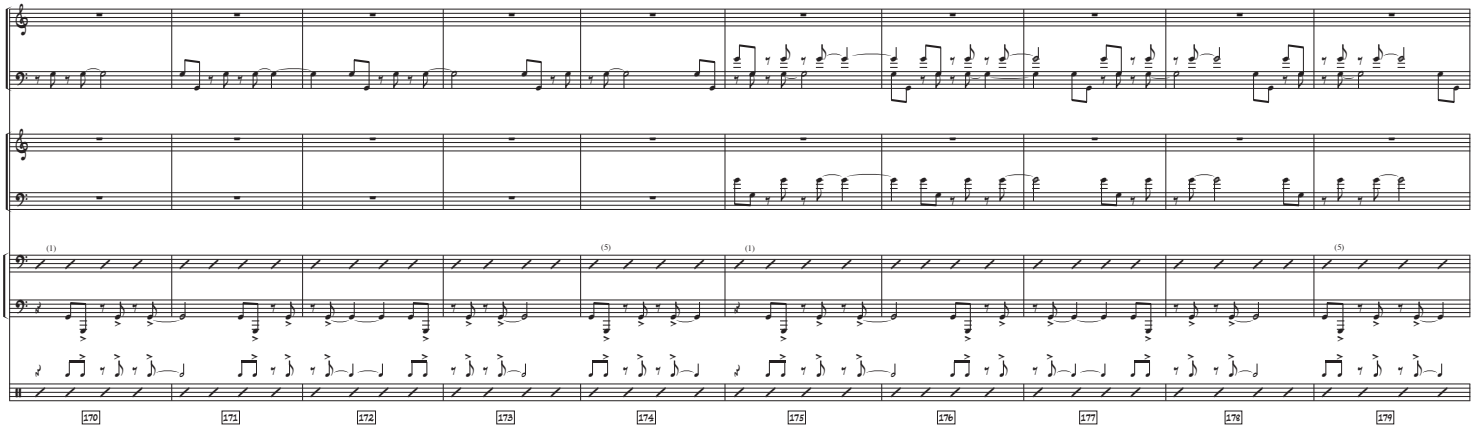


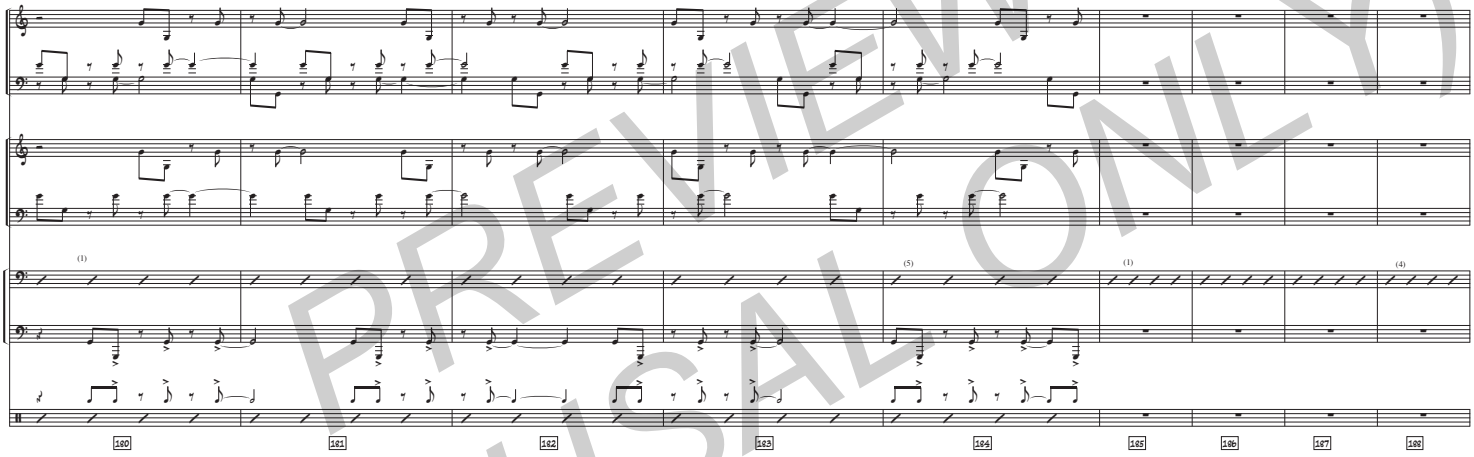


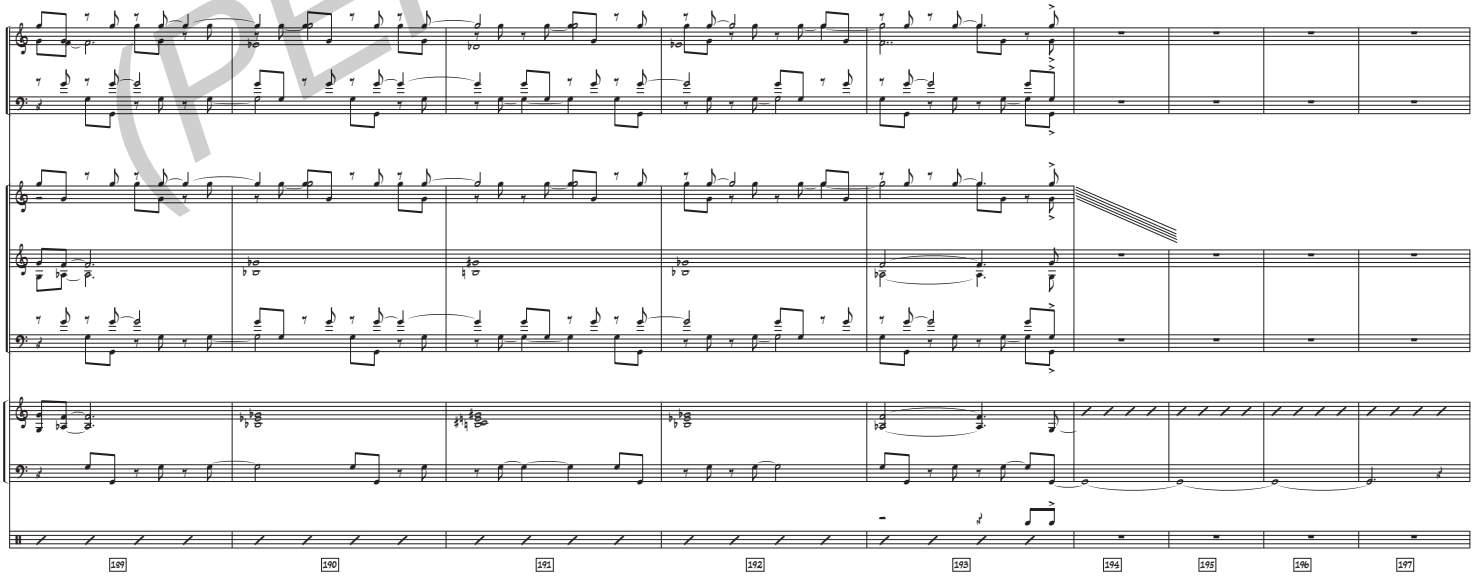


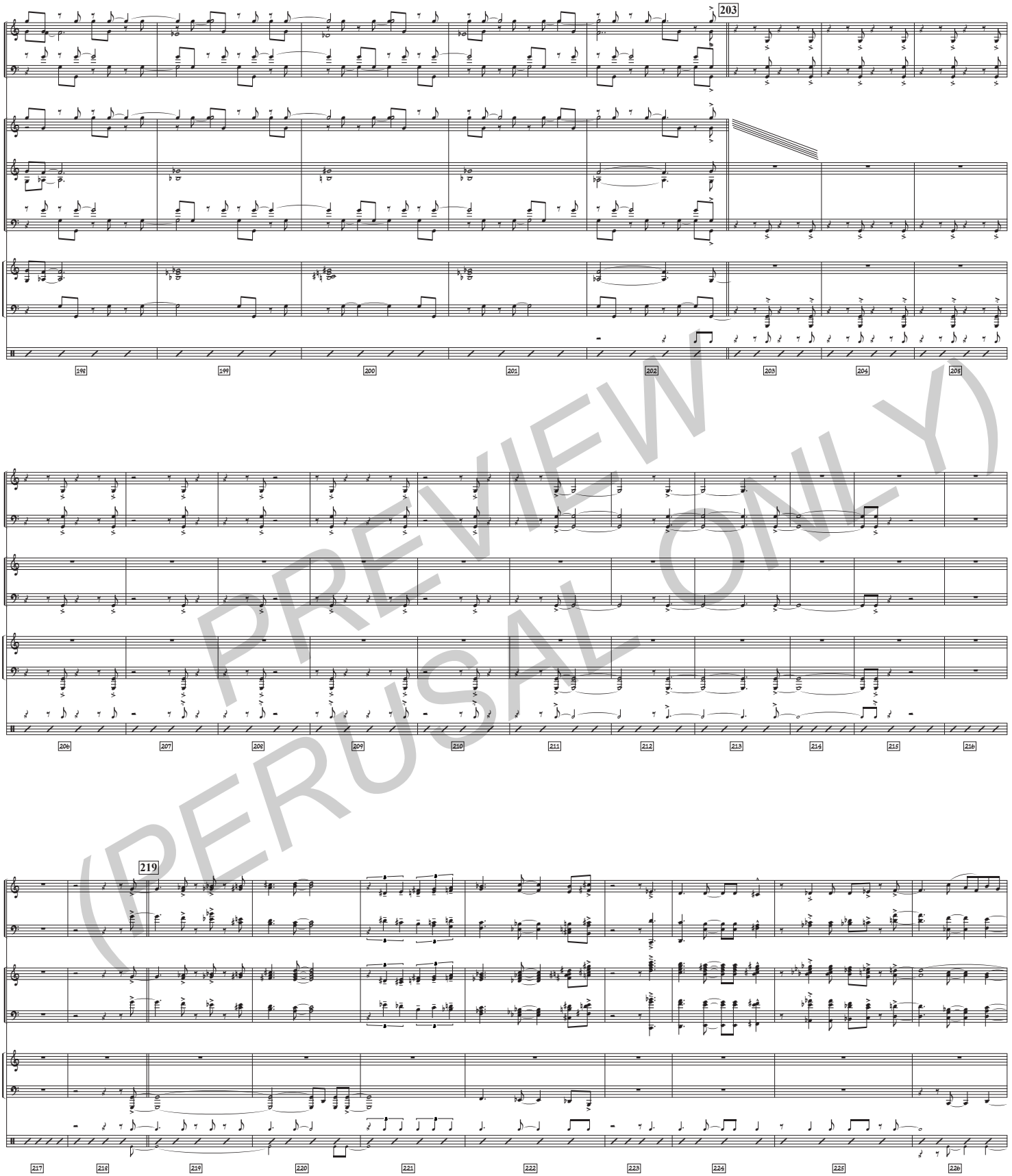


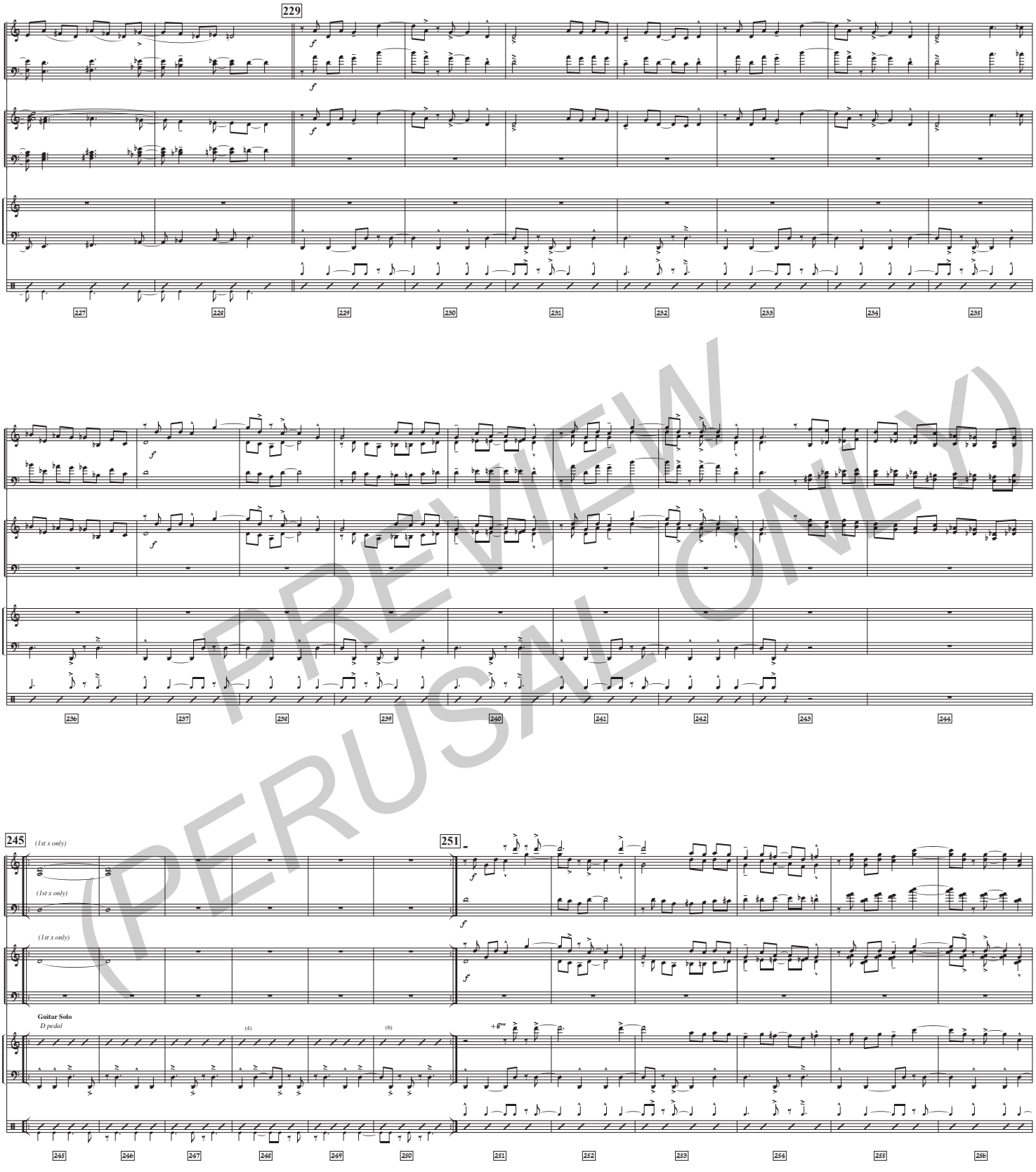


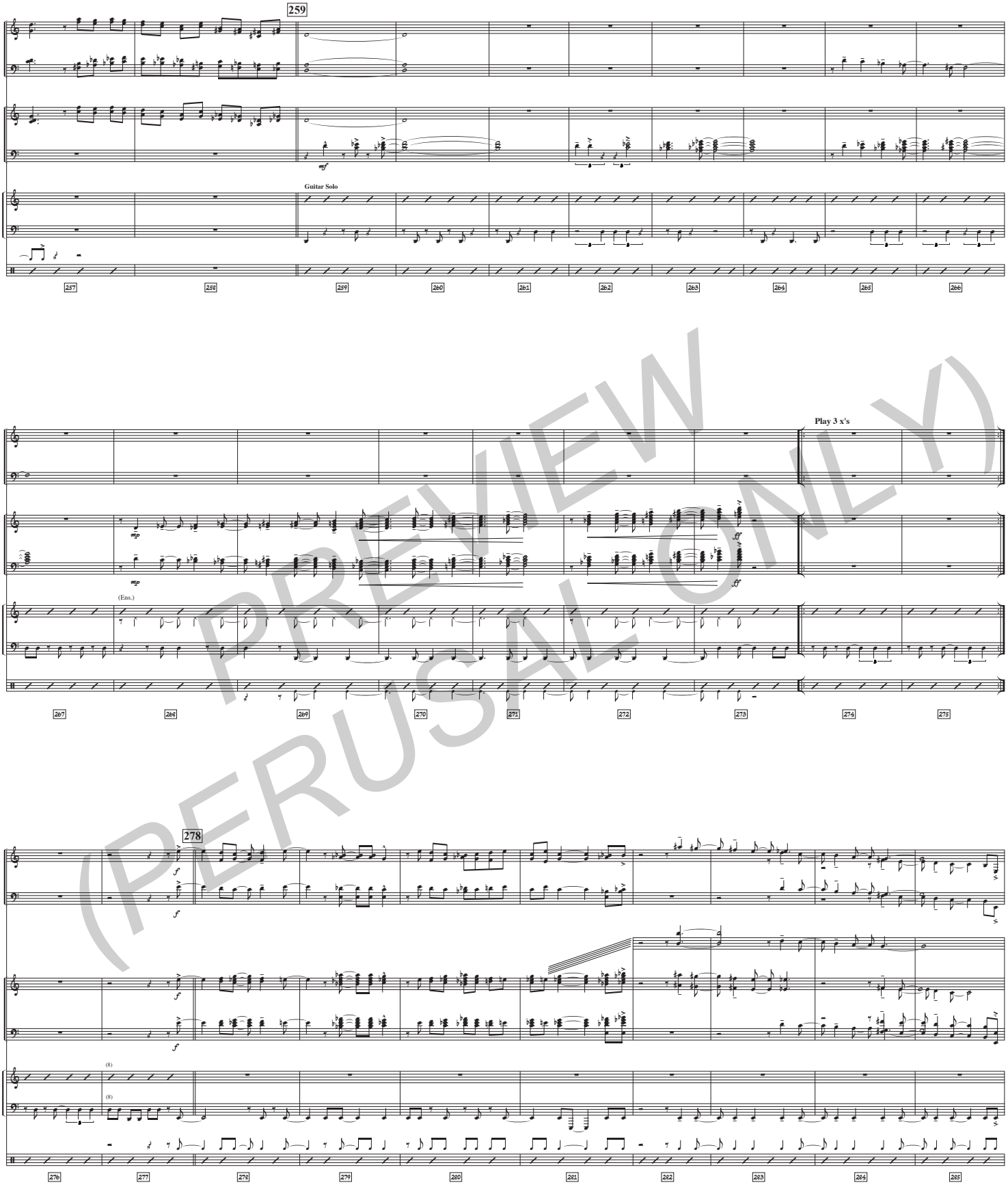


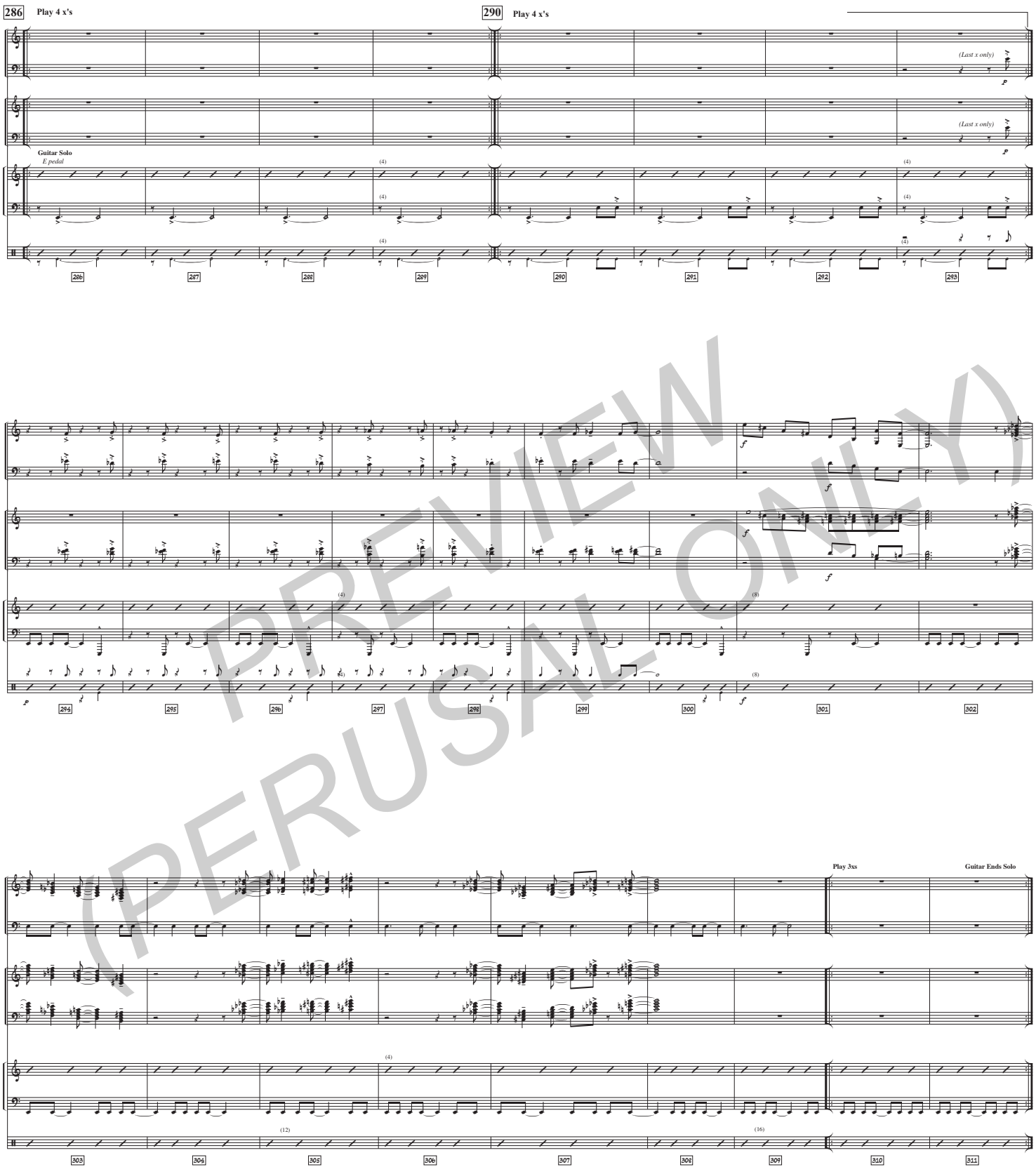


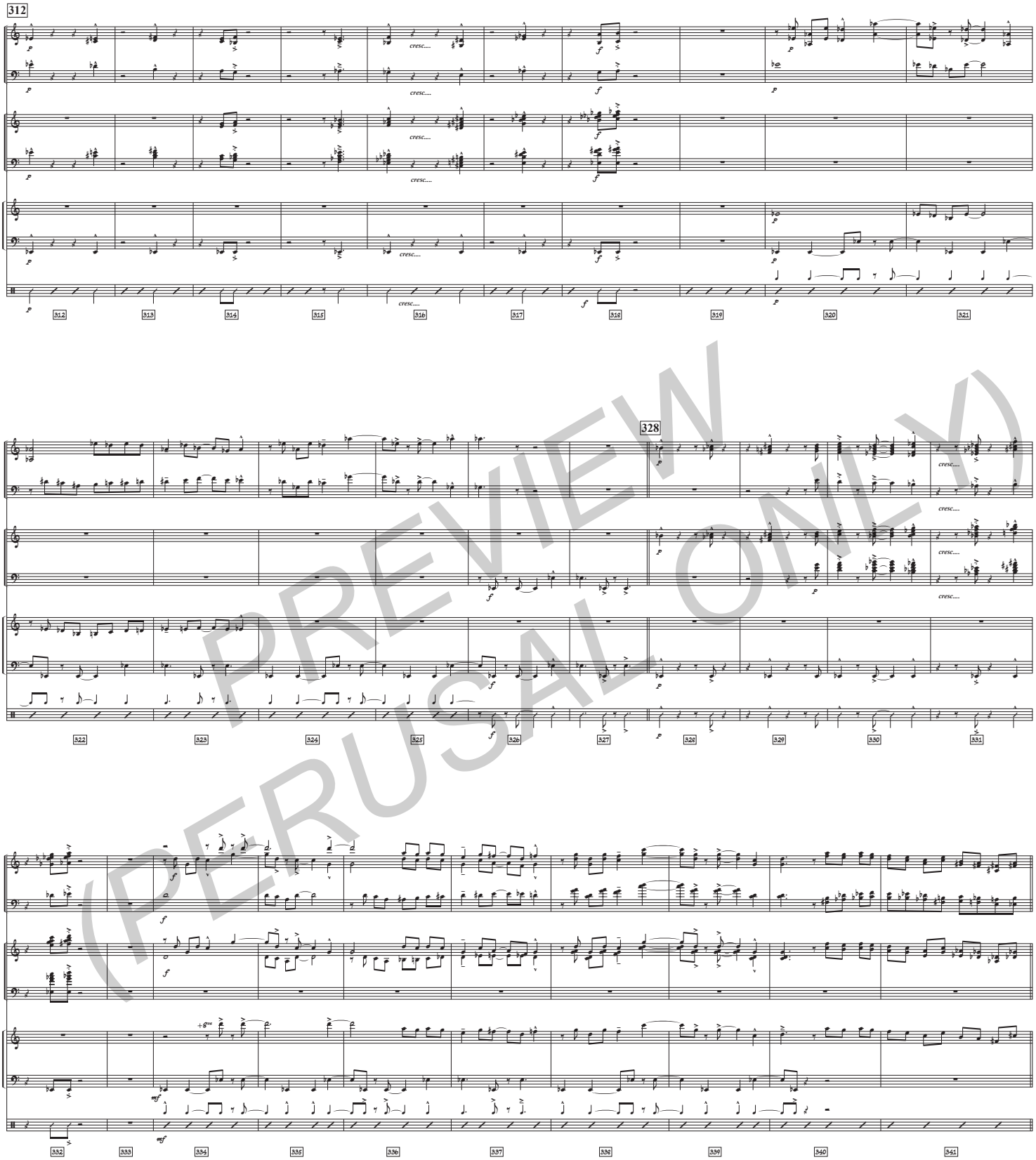


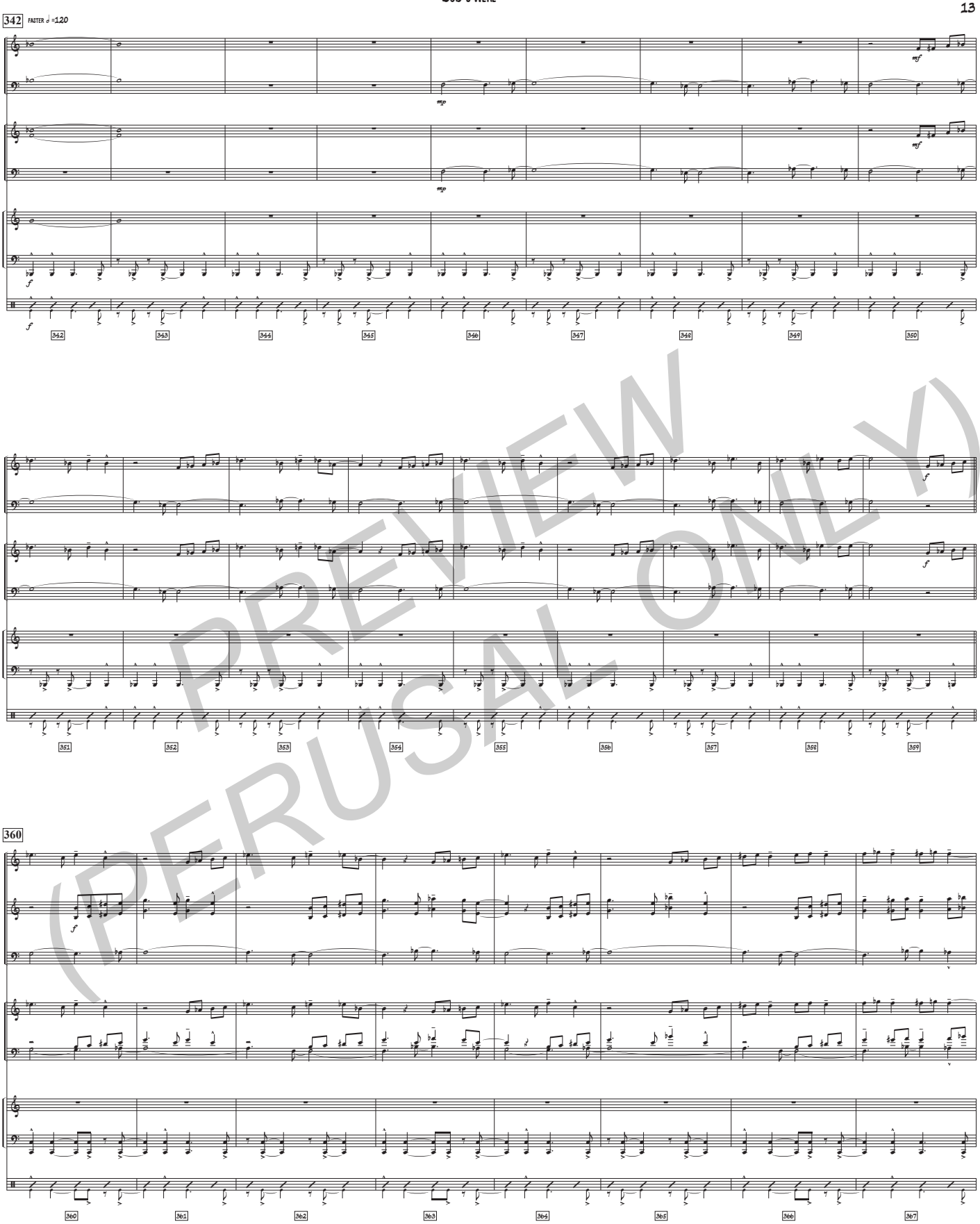


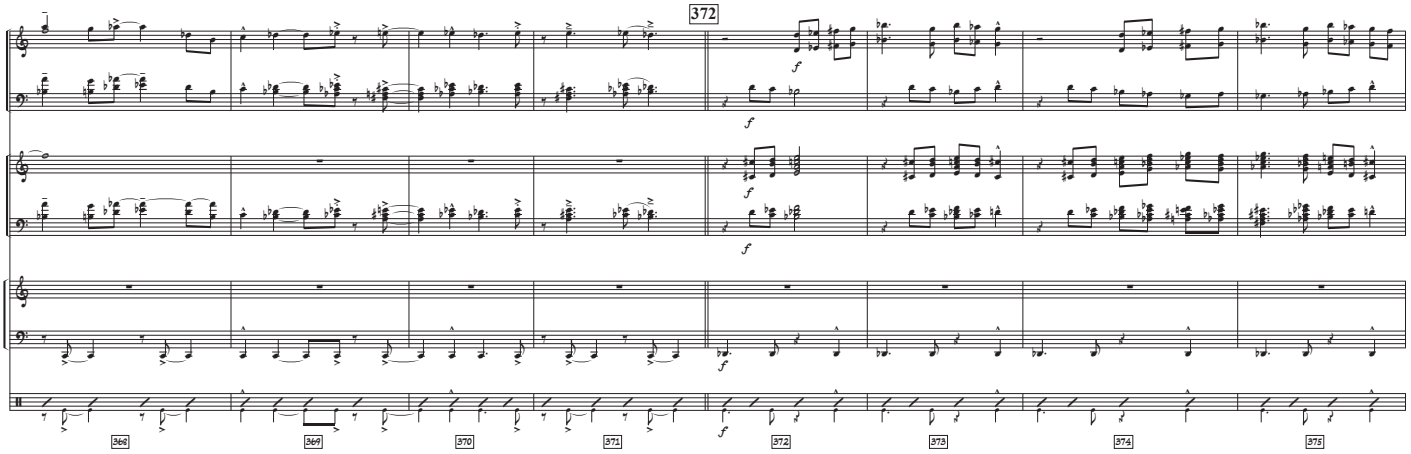


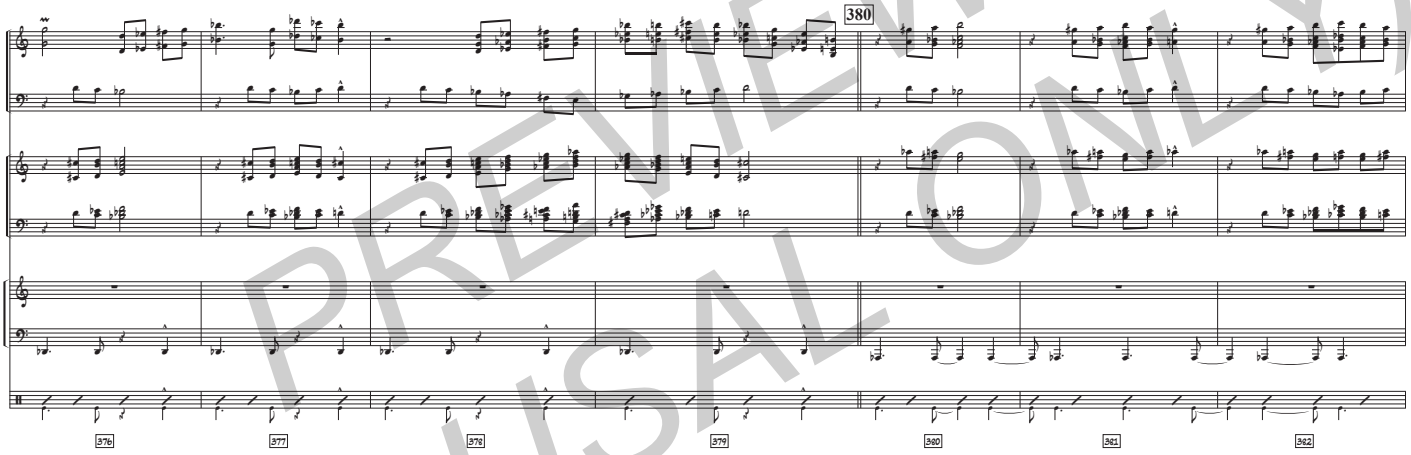


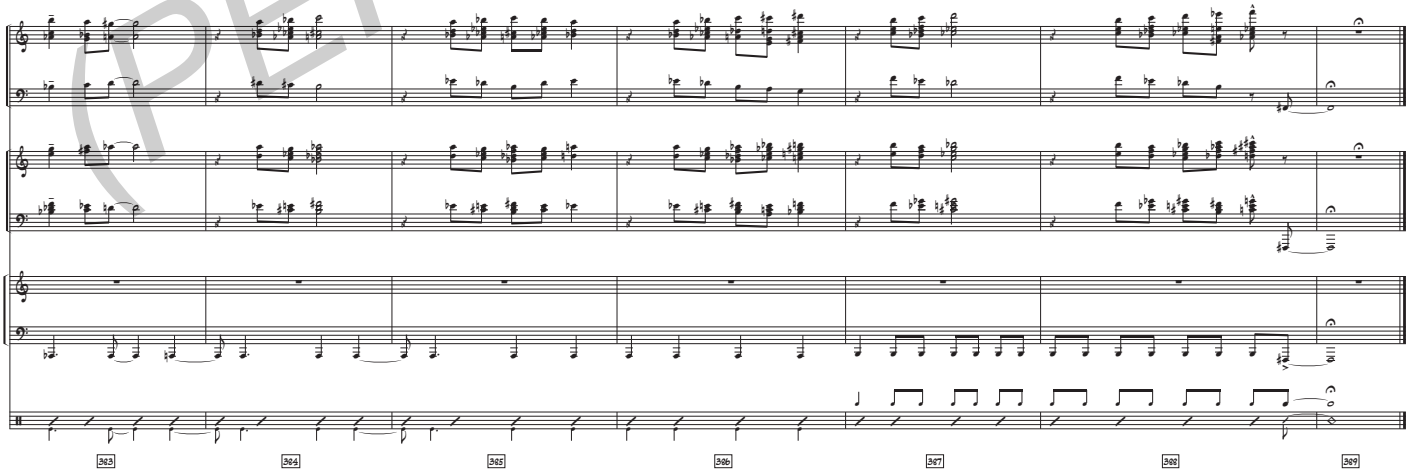












TRANSCRIPT OF *BOBS HERE* INTERVIEW:

** these interviews have been condensed & some order of things have been re-arranged for clarity and cohesion. This interview would be best understood in conjunction with the score **

Eliana: So to start, we wanted to ask about the birth of the piece and the album *Bob's Here* is from, which is from *Barefoot Dances and Other Visions*. What were some of your thoughts or opening abstract/conceptual ideas for *Bob's Here*? Anything on message, mood or feeling you were thinking about and colors or large formal concepts you were thinking about?

Jim: Well, before I even started writing the music, I made a big list of things. Hold on, lemme see if I can find it. **finds notes** This is the kind of thing I run across and try to remember in case someone would want to see if, but always forget where it is. Oh here it is, this was the start.

Yeah so it says 7-8 pieces, and I had several ideas. One was that there would be tributes to great writers, Don Redman is the only name I put down there. Tribute to playwrights, or certain figures in history like M.L.K. or Gandhi. Tribute to influences on me. Oh, one idea on here…I still might do this someday, was to do pieces on meetings that never happened. Like with Jelly Roll Morten, Wayne Shorter, Stravinsky or James Brown. Don Redman, Michael Brecker, J.S. Bach and Gene Ammonds. I mean stuff like that, like what would happen if Anton Webern met up with Jimi Hendrix…what would their music sound like haha.

One thing I had early on the list were the two clarinet trios, that appears in *Redman Rides Again*. Then I kind of came up with this number scheme, four was a central thing, but I forget how it turned out. I put different duos of soloists from the band together.

So in these notes, I have 1-7 numbered with really general notes. Number 1 which is *Bob's Here* says serious and medium. Well..it's serious but not medium. So then I started doing all of this scratch work of the cascading stuff. So that was some initial thinking.

When I wrote *Mel,* I had this idea where I took a Mel quote from this Thad Jones tune, that was the last thing Mel had ever played. The band starts by playing that and Mel materializes in the piece, like Mel's back. So I thought I would do that with Bob, so it's called *Bob's Here.*

So compositionally, I didn't really try to sound exactly like Bob, but Christian Jaskø, the valve trombone player in the band, he played with Bob's new art orchestra — he's really got that down. I wanted to write something for him. So that was the main inspiration, I used to call is *Bob's Back.* The main idea is that Bob returns and I create this context for him, but then it would zone out on this E pedal while guitar shreds on that for a while. That was to break all the brainy stuff from the opening, like the pedal point, mirroring voices that you mentioned — forget that now just E! Shred. Then there's the final section, I was thinking like a Whirling Dervish kind of thing, it just crescendos until the end and explodes.

Eliana: Right, so you've had a longstanding friendship and mentorship with Bob, were there any things he said to you about the composition process or otherwise that kept ringing in your head as you were writing this piece?

Jim: Hm…no not really. Well actually, wait, one thing. The opening, the F thing. I did hear Bob one time during a clinic talk about the length of a section. He was saying it's better to write too much than not enough. He talked about his whole thing of trying to keep an idea going as long as you can before you're ready to let it go. So I just wanted to see, how long can I keep this F pedal idea going. In the beginning it's broken up once in a while by the melodic figures, but starting at measure 50, it's just the F pedal. I wanted to see how long it could go until it was *really* time to give it up. That's something I used to hear Bob talk about, the persistence of the single idea.

Eliana: It definitely goes on for a very long time, and builds a lot of tension.

Jim: It does yeah, and when the trombone solo comes in the pedal finally jumps to G, it's like the pedal saying *uh oh, Bob's Here, better move up*!

Eliana: Haha, so what else outside of music was going on in your life at the time? Also how long had you worked with the HR big band by this point and what was your relationship to them?

Jim: Not much going on personally at the time, two years earlier we had moved to different town and a different house, we had been in the place in Montclair for 19 years, so that was a big change.

But I was just really looking forward to writing for the HR big band at this point, after working with and arranging for them for several years. By that point, I thought I knew them well enough to write pieces that would emphasize their strengths.

I had done that with the Danish radio band at the end of my time with them, in the last 6 months. I wrote *Dedication Suite*, we recorded that with them. I couldn't have written that when I first started to work with them, because then it would have just been big band music — but at that point I was actually writing for the people in the band. Same thing here with the HR big band, I felt that my relationship with the band had grown to the point where I could do something like this.

I became artist in residence in about 2008, so it had been about 6 years. I started with them in 2002, but I just did one project, I just brought charts from the Vanguard Orchestra. In 2004, I did another one, and in 2006 I did a third one. Then in 2007, I wrote this orchestra piece, and in 2008, they asked me to be their artist in residence, so that's when it became a steady thing.

Eliana: And so the album artwork from *Barefoot Dances and Other Visions,* where does that come from?

Jim: Hehe, that's Tom Bollino, the producer's wife, she's an artist. He just sent me some examples, and I chose the one that I liked!

Eliana: While on the topic of the album as a whole, I wanted to acknowledge that *Bob's Here,* the first track, transitions into *Black Snow*, then *Redman Rides* transitions into *Falling Upwards,* even though might be through something as simple as a pedal point. Since this PDF is aimed for younger composers, some of whom might eventually be thinking about album track orders, could you share what types of things you thought or think about when deciding things like album order? What pieces & why you chose to "connect" through these transitions?

Jim: Right yeah, all of those transitions are deliberate. One thing I think about when I'm sequencing tracks on an album is the sound of one piece going into another. I'll go through it by going to the end of one track to beginning to the next. I want to know what's the effect, or what's the feeling of the ending of this thing going into the beginning of the next one.

Then I jump ahead to the next track's ending and hear how it goes into the next beginning. Even if there isn't a connecting pedal point but just the traditional 5 seconds of silence. I still think about what is the final sound, and what comes after it. You have to organize the whole in that way, think about things like tempo, do you start out with something that grabs you by the throat, and so forth.

You know, the Vanguard band did a CD of different pieces of music written over the years that for some reason or another had never been recorded. It started with a Jimmy Giuffre thing called *Dragonfly* and the first sound is something like *plays dissonant interval* or maybe even *plays something even more dissonant* — it's some intense interval. They decided to put it on the CD first and when I got my copy and slip it in the tray and suddenly ***aargh** and I jumped out of my seat but I thought *well this really grabs you right away you.*

The first thing that you hear is important and on *Bob's Here* is just a downbeat F and then silence, I really wanted it to start ridiculously sparse and simple.

Eliana: Right, yeah it's apparent how silence like that really grabs a listener. The first thing you hear is that low F, and then there are like two bars of silence after that.

Jim: If you listen really closely, you hear me breathing and counting a little bit.

Eliana: Haha, yeah I have noticed that before! So moving onto more specific thoughts on *Bob's Here.* We hear it as an opening movement, not just because it's the first track of the album which we talked about, but within the piece itself. Measures 1-228, the whole opening, kind of feels like an introduction to the first more tangible, singable 8-bar melody we hear at m. 229. How do you personally think about it in terms of being an opening or introductory movement both within the piece itself?

Jim: Yeah, I do remember when I got to that melody at 229, I was thinking that it was time for some kind of real melody here, rather than this brainy interval stuff.

After that, there is the guitar solo. I remember it got to the point where I thought the trombone solo was over, he's gonna be spent. So I thought I'd just let the guitar go for it. I thought a little bit about how Bob wrote this piece for Jim Hall, we did a live version of it in Holland. He had Jim play through a wah-wah and a distortion pedal, just stuff you don't associate with Jim Hall. Jim was into it, he really loved it. So I thought about Bob a bit and his flirting with rock-n-roll guitar, and I thought I would go for that kinda thing there. This guitar player from HR is really versatile, he can play a lot of things, but one thing he loves to do is just crank. So I thought you know, after all the cerebral stuff, let's just go for it.

Oh, also, I don't know if we talked about this but I had made a scheme of the length of each pedal.

Eliana: So you knew exactly how many measures each pedal point would be on?

Jim: Mhm, in fact there are a couple of places where the pedal might change in the middle of the bar, it's because of the number of beats. But in a way, I mucked that up, because in the rehearsal we got the guitar solo and I thought after hearing this drastic change in texture, the guitar solo didn't go on long enough. So we doubled the length of the guitar solo, so that scheme of the ever compressing pedal point is broken up there a little bit.

Eliana: How did you choose the number of beats or measure per pedal point?

Jim: I think I worked backwards, you know, it's 1.6, the golden ratio. The last thing is one bar, and the next one is like 1.5 bars, and the next one is 4 — then it starts to accumulate. So by the time you get the 12th pedal point, it's 228 bars or something like that. Then I just worked backwards, so the longest one would be the first one and it gradually compresses. I've written several pieces with this kind of scheme.

Eliana: What other piece of yours has this scheme?

Jim: There is one called *Crunch Time* that I wrote for the Metropole Orchestra, I don't know if I've ever shown it to you guys, but it's the same idea. Just a compressed twelve tone pedal point thing.

Anyway, so the guitar solo it starts on D and then goes to E, and just slams the E string. Then the band comes in with more stuff. Then starting around 342, there is the accelerando into the final note, which I think of as the train going into the tunnel. The feeling I used to get when I would take NJ transit from Maplewood in the morning. You're on the train going through all these towns, and then when the train goes into the tunnel, you know it's the final part.

Eliana: The ending definitely feels like this rush to the last note. So moving more towards composition process, especially rhythmic composition in this piece. You write for 50+ measures on just one note, which is not easy (m. 50-108) and other places. You talked about how the point was to take that F pedal development idea as far as you could, squeezing it's last life.

There doesn't seem to necessarily be a clear rhythmic theme you're following in the pedal point development section. How did you approach composing this rhythmically, thematically on only one note in this area. Was it intuitive, or some set of rules you gave yourself?

Jim: First of all, it was intuitive, but if I remember correctly, the one thing I did think about was the change in octave that would happen sometimes. I was thinking about the placement in the octave.

When we did it live it went well, but when we went to record it, it didn't have life yet. I told them to put some character into this thing, the germans always ask *should we put character in this?* Haha, so it warmed up that way. I wanted it to almost sound like it was being improvised, except by magic everyone is improvising the same thing. It's an ongoing line.

Eliana: Right, so similar question on rhythmic composition of the melodic motives and lines. It seems like you got your melodic cells first. Then you have it's mirroring, expansion & development without any specific rhythmic constraint. Finally, you have the task of prescribing all these themes to a barline. How did structure these melodic cells rhythmically? Did you experiment with different versions? If yes, how did you experiment and how did you decide once it felt right?

Jim: Yes! That's my answer, let me see if I can find any. It might not be in this book. I'll have to think about that, I know that I have it somewhere.

Off the top of my head, I know I wanted space between the cells, and I wanted to gradually extend the line so it was a little longer every time. I wanted a sense of space between each statement. You know, there are a few characters I'm introducing. The thing that starts at 38, the expanding minor chords, that's one. Then you have the melodic cell from the beginning, the opening character. And one is the F pedal thing.

I think I mostly did it intuitively — but it definitely looks intentional that every time the melodic cells are heard in the beginning, there is no action in the bass. So it's back and forth between the bass pedal and the 16th note line statements

Eliana: Right, yeah, that was one of our next questions about that back and forth between the melodic cells and bass pedal statements, and creating interplay between the two. I would even call is rhythmic counterpoint of sorts, it seems like they are responding to each other. Eventually it gets closer and closer together.

Jim: You're right that's what the intent was, and finally in measure 31, that's the first time we've got the F pedal sound while the band is still playing. Then I end the whole first section with this change of texture starting around 38, all of the sudden the expanding minor chords come in. That's the cue for *okay, we're gonna slow this down and make it groove a little more now*, rather than just these isolated hits we heard in the opening.

Eliana: Yeah, right. So continuing to talk a little bit about this interplay — we wanted to ask a little about rhythm section vs. ensemble and the role of the rhythm section. Most of the piece it seems like rhythm section vs. horns, in the way that rhythm section is on the pedal point activity and the horns are on the melodic and thematic content. In a couple of specific places the bass breaks out of the pedal point and joins the horns to support the minor chords. The few places are about 1-2 measures each, measures 164, 222, and 226-228. We wanted to ask why you specifically chose those two areas to have the bass support and reinforce the ensemble content breaking its previous pedal role?

Jim: hmmm….das ist eine gute Frage…that's a good question. For some reason I guess to reinforce whatever harmonic implication was inherent at the time. It breaks the pedal.. for no good reason, in fact I remember I hadn't listened to this piece for a while, and a couple years ago I was in a class and I was talking about how this whole section is based on a G pedal and then I was listening to it and I thought *wait a minute, the bass breaks the pedal, haha so mostly a G pedal.*

Eliana: Well you know you also have the piano breaking out sometimes and doubling the melody or some horn phrase, so I guess it's as simple as you thought reinforcing whatever is going on in the ensemble is important there.

You know, we talked a little bit about the role of the drummer, especially in the beginning of the piece, about being really sparse. But looking at the drum part, its cue notes are overwhelmingly deter-

mined by the pedal point rhythms. During a few “shouts” it gets some ensemble parts, but mostly the pedal activity. What kinds of things did you have in mind for the role of the drummer here? Setting up, coloring in, etc?

Jim: Mainly like you said, that the drums were hooked up with the bass. Then as it gets more big bandy, the drum plays with some of the horn figures. Scroll to 223…yeah there I give the drums the cues with the band, that’s big band stuff you know. Then it goes back to the bass.

Eliana: We’d also like to talk about the role of the soloist in this piece. When working with some of your other charts on this analysis project, there were “direct solo areas” where here the solo section is a little different. It’s more through-composed of part of the composition of the piece, constantly intertwining with non-background band interjections. The soloist is given a canvas to respond to band material or pedal point material. Can you talk about the compositional process of writing for a soloist in this type of way? Specifically what were areas that you thought of the band a soloist maybe, or vice versa, where and how did you think about the soloist being realized as part of the composition of the chart?

Jim: Well, first of all behind the trombone solo is definitely not thinking of it as *backgrounds.* I really thought of it as the energy of the underpinning, the pedal, increasing. That’s what drives the solo form, not really as much what the ensemble does. You’re right, it’s not a chorus kind of thing with an open chorus and backgrounds coming in. I was really thinking of the relationship of the soloist and the ensemble, that’s really important. This one is more an open field with the band gradually throwing some figures at the soloist and then the soloist responding to them however they want.

As opposed to the guitar solo later, that functions more like an energy release. There are some ensemble things that come in there, but there, the guitar can crank up to 11, so you can write all kinds of loud band stuff, and the guitar screams over the whole thing. It’s not a supportive ensemble texture for the guitar solo, it’s more spurring him on.

I wasn’t thinking of the band as the soloist anywhere necessarily, but the soloist being part of the composition was all the way from the beginning ideas, right, the whole image is that *Bob is back*, so the piece was going to built around the sound of how he played as embodied by Christian.

Eliana: Christian really feels like part of the composition of that chart. Maybe it’s because we’ve been listening to it so much, but I notice I sing moments of his solo sometimes. It feels very integrated into the ensemble and into the piece overall.

Jim: He’s a very thoughtful player and he knew Bob, he played with the new art ensemble. So it’s not only a matter that he can replicate Bob’s style of playing, it’s that he puts a lot of thought into thinking about the whole form of the solo. Sometimes in a rehearsal, even on more conventional solos I write for him, the first few times through it he just won’t play. At first I’ll say *hey Christian everything okay?* And he says *yeah, I’m just listening!* He wants to listen to what’s going on so he can make some intelligent choices once he does start to solo, so he’s a very thoughtful player.

Eliana: Wow, yeah, and this solo requires a lot of pacing and thought.

Jim: Yep! It takes a lot of pacing and I know Bob used to do that himself in some of his earlier recordings. If he had a solo, he’d make notes to himself in areas like: push here, lay back here. Just in terms of the whole energy of the solo, so the pacing is really important.

Eliana: Yeah, yeah. So we also wanted to ask about the unusual 7 part color combination at the very opening of the chart. You have soprano, clarinet, tenor, harmon & cup trumpets and valve bone and cup bone. I guess soprano is kind of the main sound, but can you talk a little bit about choosing those colors and what you were going for?

Jim: Yeah, there is the core sound and the colors. So the soprano is the core sound of the top line. And then is the valve trombone playing those mirrored figures?

Eliana: Yeah, the valve bone is the bottom voice mirror

Jim: Right, so he'd be the core sound on the bottom line. And then you know the cup mute colors it. The combination of tenor and valve bone would be the core sound. The clarinet would also be a coloration of the top line. So basically the stronger instruments are the core sound, and the muted and less strong instruments are shading the colors.

Eliana: Got it, so moving onto our next focus concept. It's a broad subject, just about tension in release. This seems really integral to the piece in general. We have a bunch of examples but I won't go through all of them. So a couple are how the whole opening of the piece is full of 6 or 10 bar phrases, which is a kind of tension in it of itself and then it resets with this melodic 8 bar theme at 229, which is a release.

Additionally you have the harmonic structures at 160 for example. The first structure is so dissonant and with each of the chords is gets more open and "consonant." There were more examples like about how density builds on pedal point with added instruments etc, but we wanted to ask how you maybe think about tension and release in the piece, if you did?

Jim: Nothing particular comes to mind, but yeah, those dissonant to consonant things. I remember that in particular being conscious. Also the next example you have with the expanding minor chords at 47, starting on a unison and unfolding into a great big blossom thing.

Eliana: Right, and the whole ending starting at 342, it feels so tense and the big release is that big hit at the end.

Jim: Yeah right, it finally kind of explodes. It's almost a physical gesture like *makes explosion sound* kind of like the time I slipped on a slippery floor…and then *makes explosion sound*.

Yeah it's definitely building to that big point, I was thinking of a whirling dervish. It's really different but like the finale of the *Rite of Spring*, where it builds to a frenzy and then supposedly the young dancer collapses. That kind of thing was generally on my mind.

Eliana: Right, so that example at 47 with the expanding minor chords. We wanted to ask if this was intentional. You have concept A, which is perfectly mirrored voices (measure 1-38). Then you have concept B, which is expanding minor chords (starting measure 38).

At 47, you have the expanding minor chords that actually land on a dissonant chord structure that is a perfectly mirrored vertical chord if you start from the outer notes and go inwards to the E. Was this an intentional combination of the two compositional concepts?

Jim: It might have just been a happy accident! If that accident with lead to that, I'd say, *well cool it's a mirrored symmetrical chord*. It probably just ended up that way and I thought it works nicely.

**skipped a question but put this in context here* A lot tertiary structures, as opposed to more lumpy or angular structures.

Eliana: Yeah, with the thirds, even on the very dissonant structures it has a lot of clarity in the sound.

Jim: Right, yeah, because of the space between all of the voices.

Eliana: Great, so anything else you want to say about the piece, or perhaps something we missed in our analysis?

Jim: Not really, if I think of anything I'll let you know. I guess one thing, this is the case with most of the pieces in that whole suite. I wanted to get away from standard song form, something I've been working on for a long time, so nothing really new there. But I really wanted things to start in one place and end somewhere else and really keep the momentum going. With *Bob's Here*, it really ends up in a different place than where it started and that's completely intentional.

“Big Red Thing”

Jim McNeely — Macro-Formal Graph (RB)

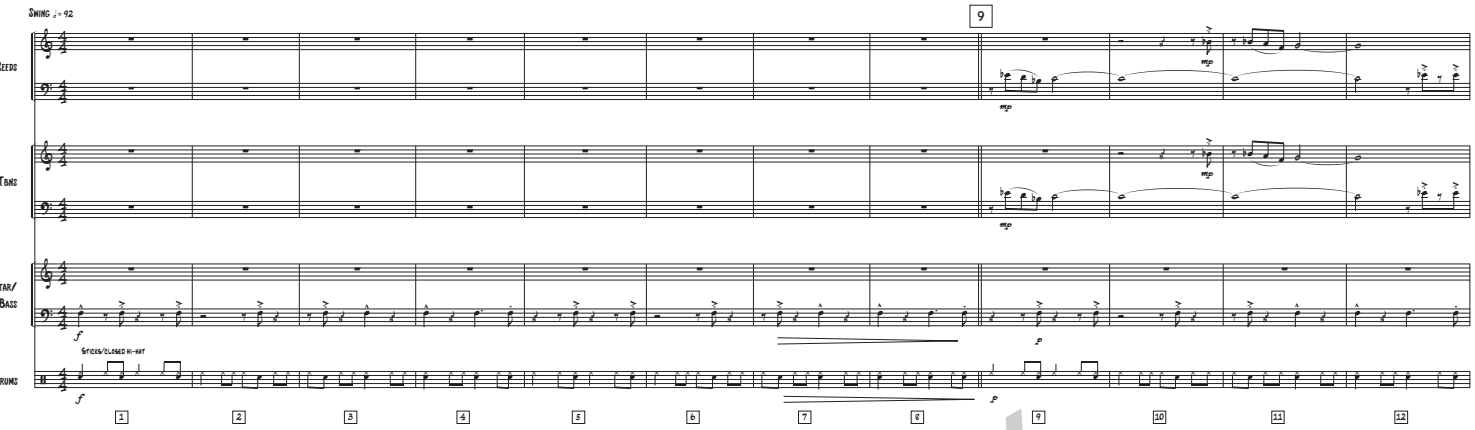
Intro	A	A’	B	C	Trans. (Intro)	D1	D1’	B’2x	C’2x	Trans.	SOLO D2’	D2’	Trans.	SOLO B’	C’
8	16	16	16	16	8	16	16	8	8	8	16	16	8	16	16
8	8 8	8 8	8 8	4* 4* 4 4	8	4* 4 4* 4	4* 4 4* 4	4 4	4 4	4 4	4 4 4 4	8 8	8	8 8	8 8
in[1]	a1	a1’	th1	a1 th1’	in[2]	d1[1]	d1[2]	tr2	tr3	in[3]	d2[1]	d2[2]	tr4	*open*	*open/pads*
F pedal	F pedal	F pedal	F pedal* Gb pedal	Cycle Cycle (x2)	F# pedal	F7sus4 pedal	F7sus4 pedal	F Gb	Cycle (x2)	B pedal	F7sus4 pedal	F7sus4 pedal	Bass fig.	F7sus4 Cycle	Cycle Cycle (x2)
1–8	*9–24*	*25–40*	*41–56*	*57–72*	*73–80*	*81–96*	*97–112*	*113–128*		*129–136[7]*	*138–153*	*154–169*	*170–177*	*178–193*	*194–209*

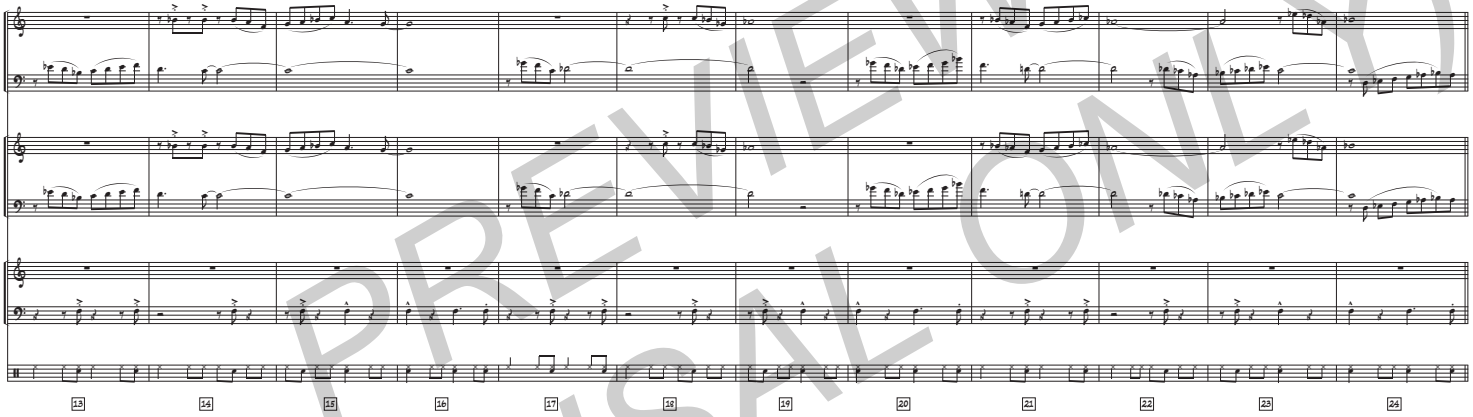
SOLO Trans.	Trans.	D3	Trans.	D1”	Trans.	Trans. (?)	Trans.	D1”’	D1””	Intro
8	8	16	8	16	8	16	16	16	16	4
8	8	4* 4 4* 4	4 4	4* 4 4* 4	4 4	8 8	8 8	4* 4 4* 4	4* 4 4* 4	4
tr4’	tr5	a2 a2’ a2 a2’	tr6 a1”	d1[1] d1[2]	tr6	soli	in[4]	d1[1] d1[2]	d1[1] d1[2]	in[5]
F pedal	*Loose*	F7sus4	F# C#	F7sus4	Break	Cycle Cycle (x2)	B pedal	F7sus4 pedal	F7sus4 pedal*	F
210–217[8]	*219–226*	*227–242*	*243–250*	*251–266*	*267–274*	*275–290*	*291–306*	*307–322*	*323–338*	*339–342*

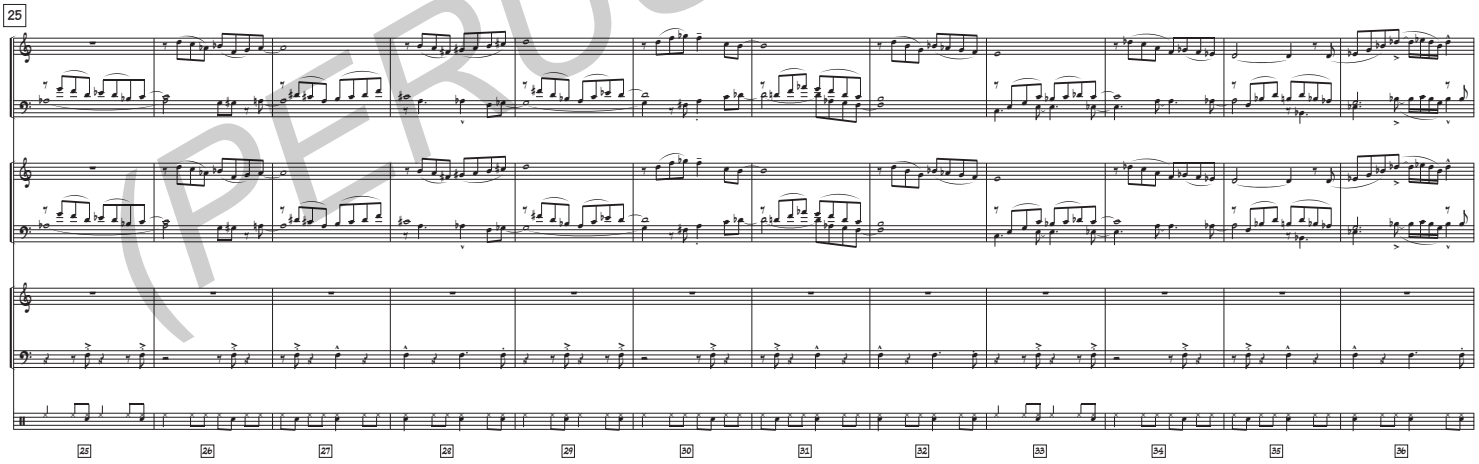
SCORE REDUCTION - (EF)

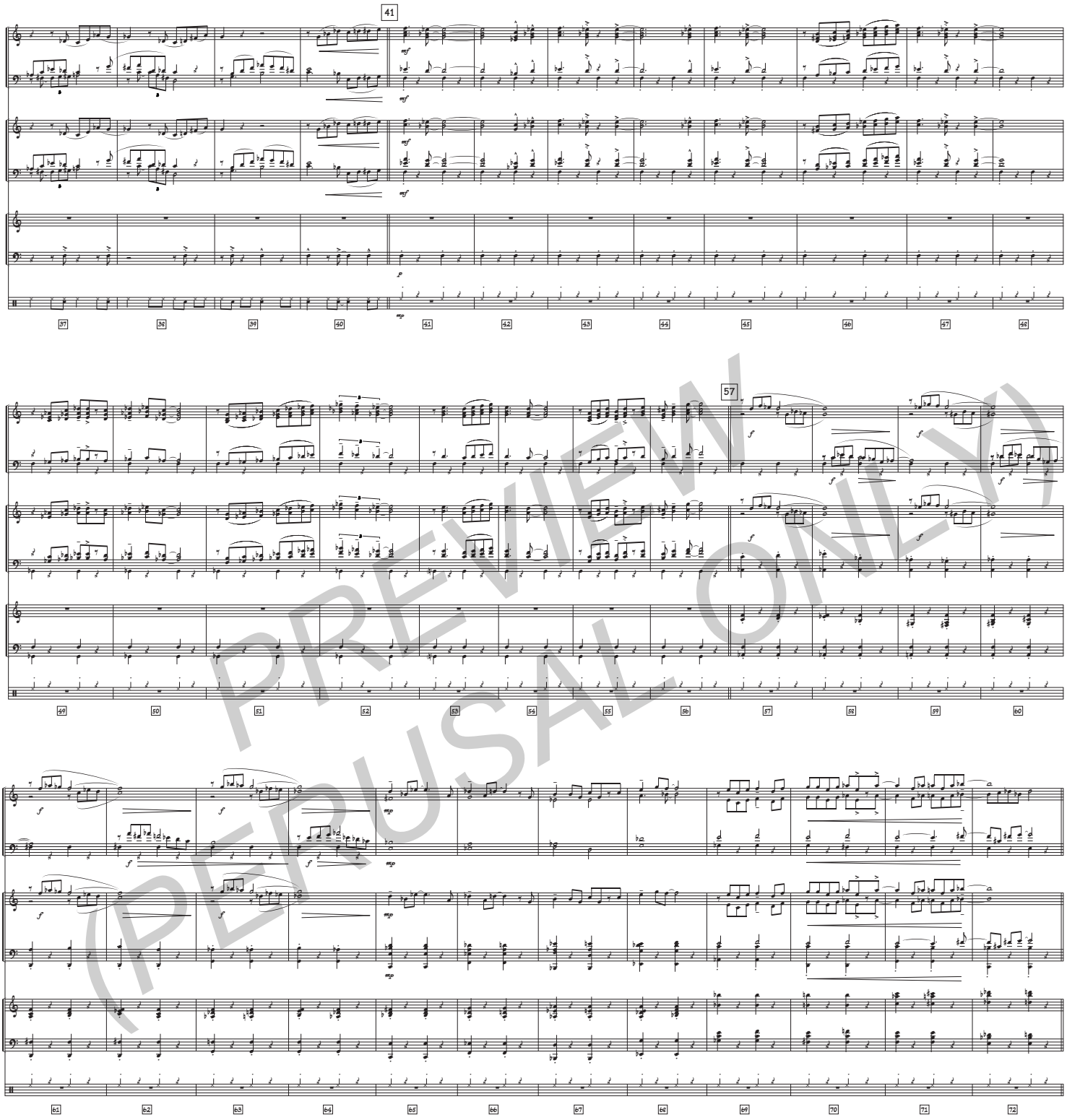
Big Red Thing

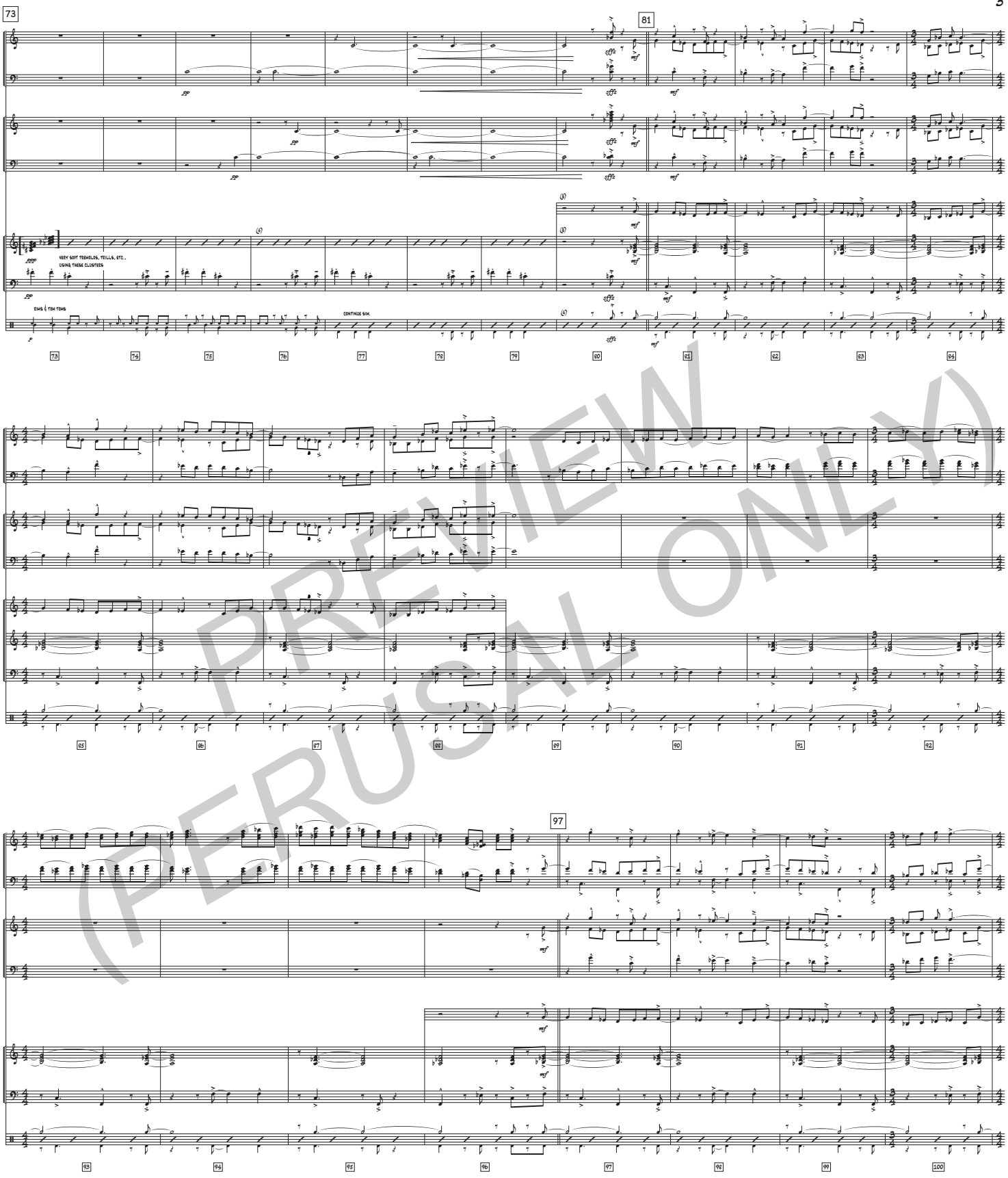
Composed by Jim McNeely

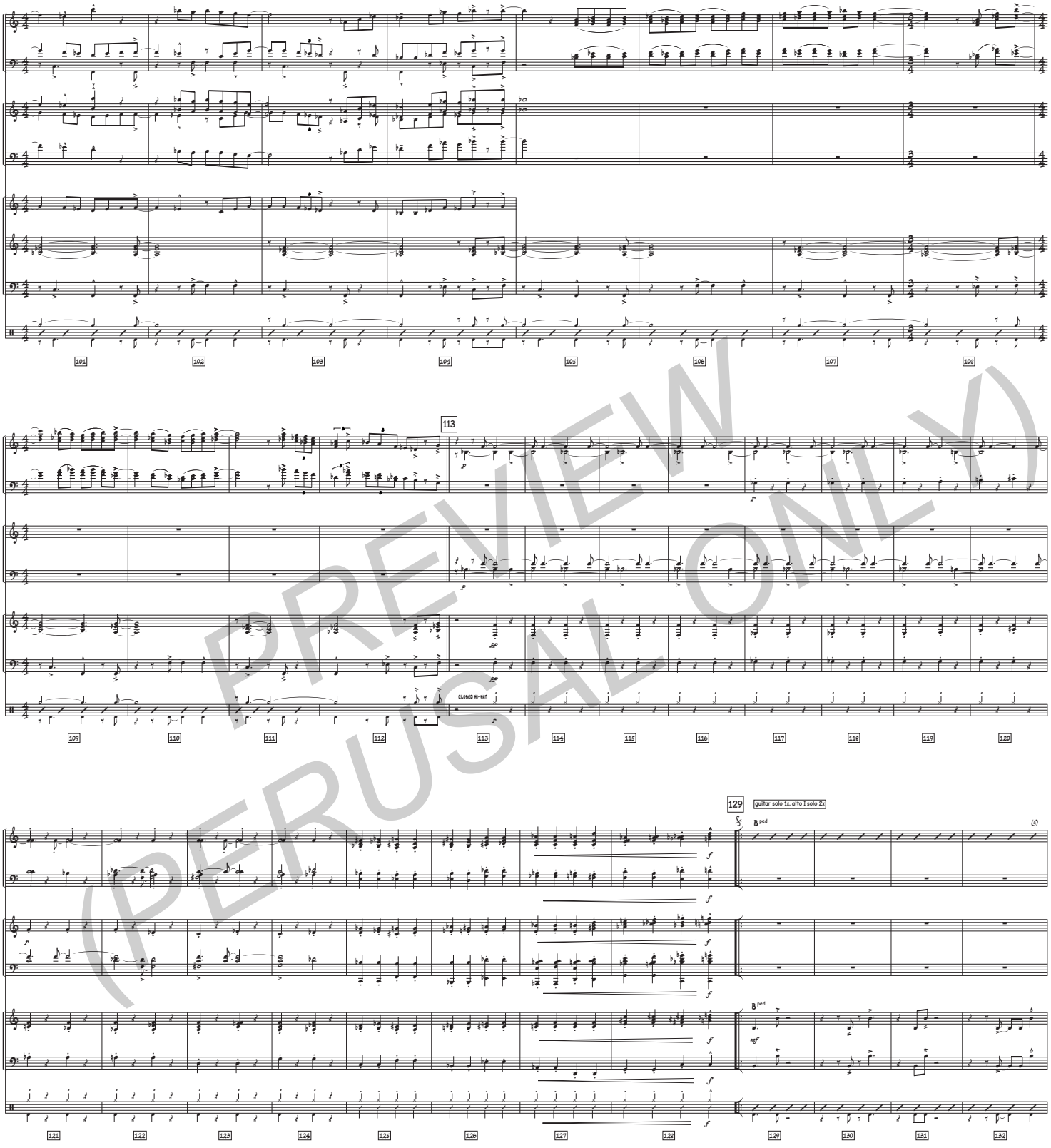


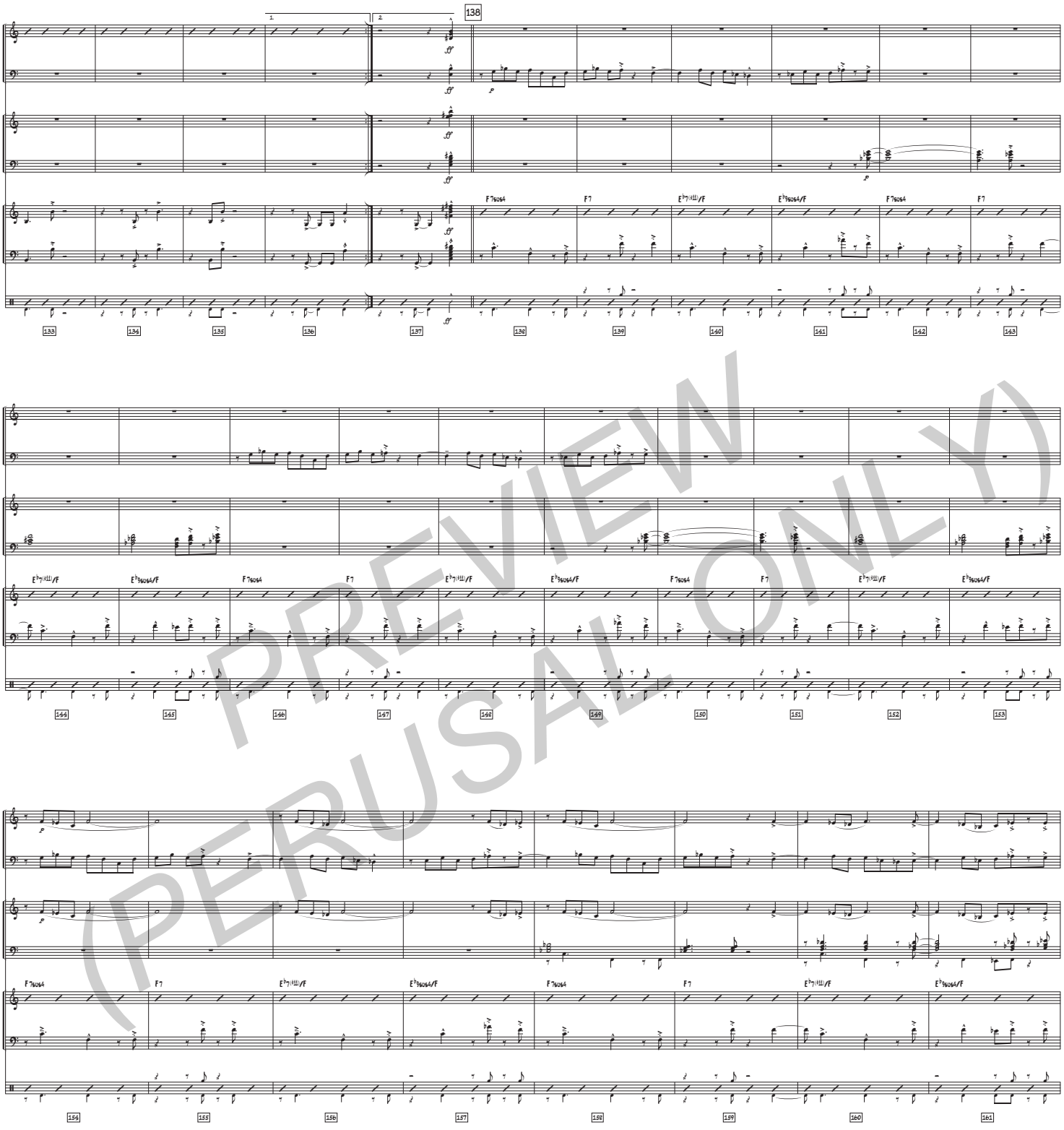


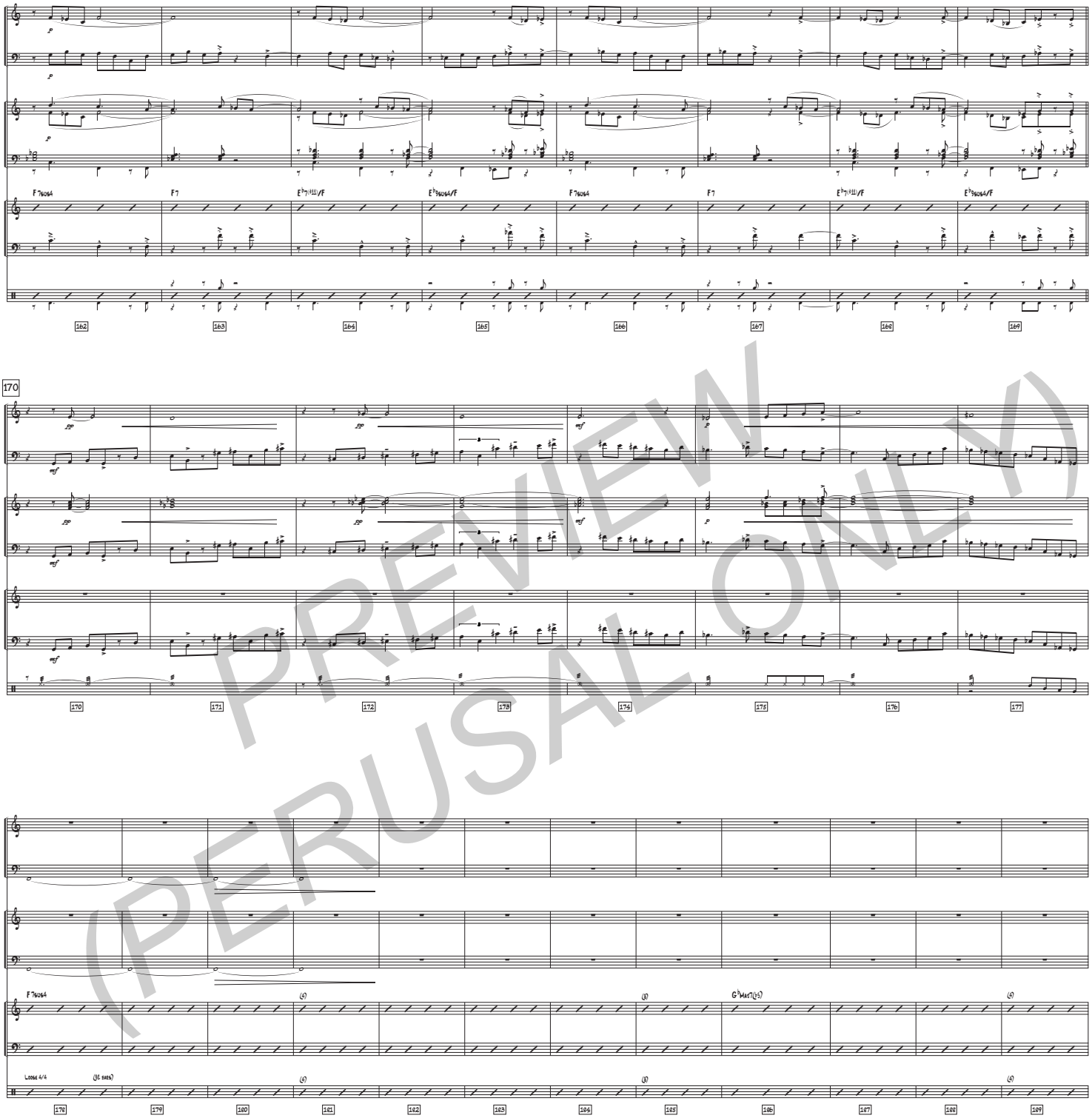


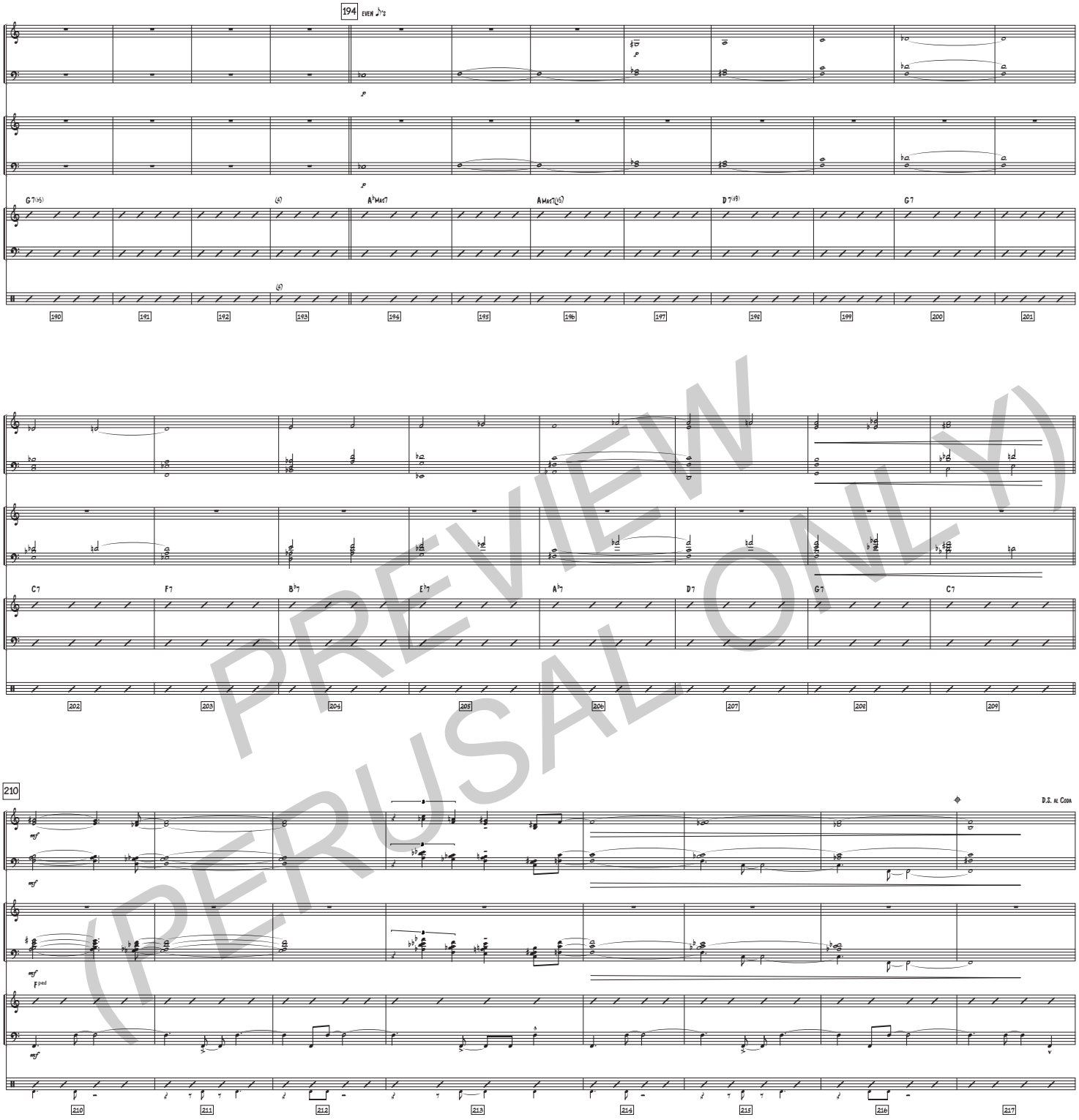




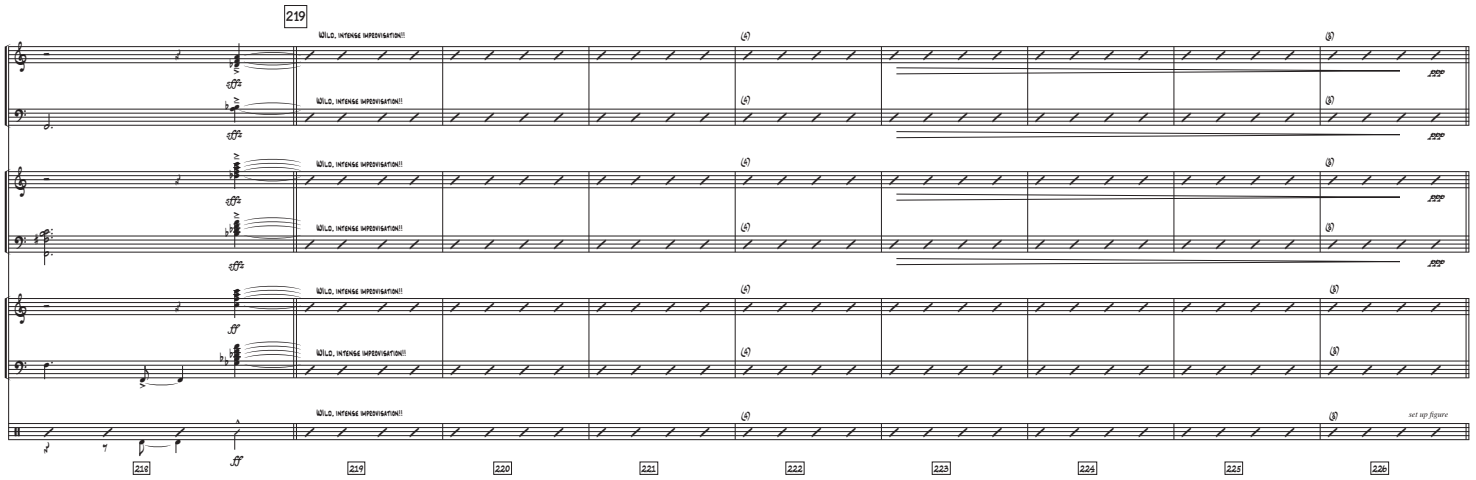


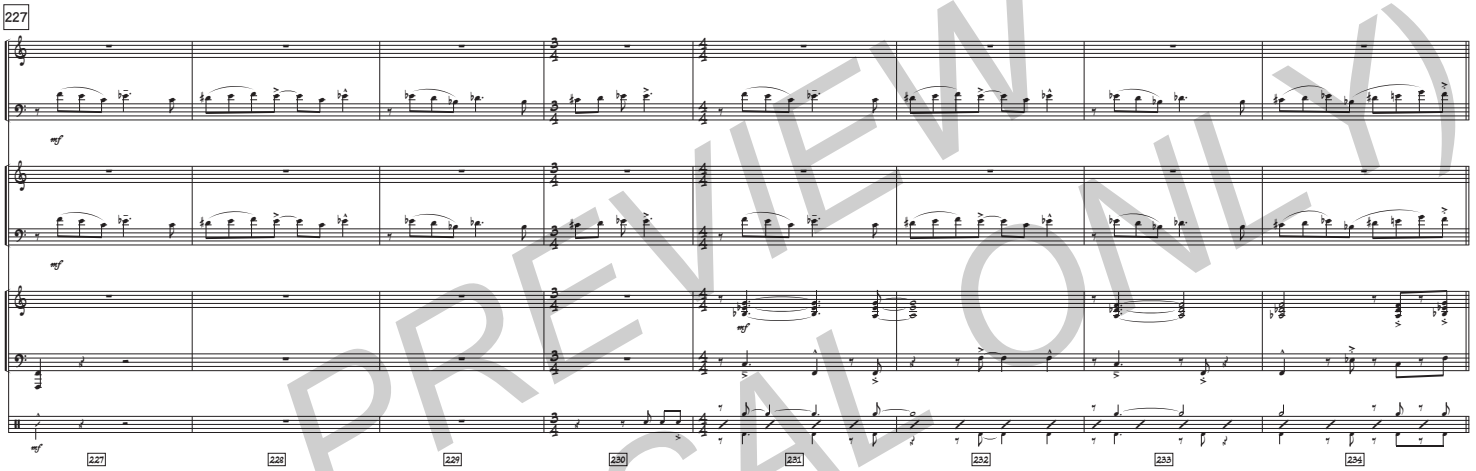


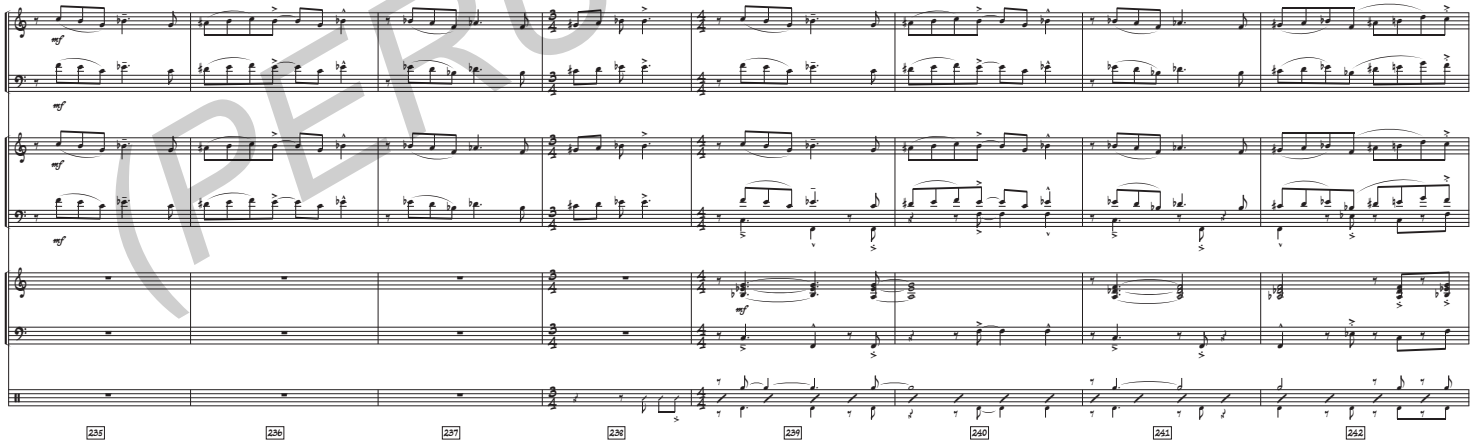


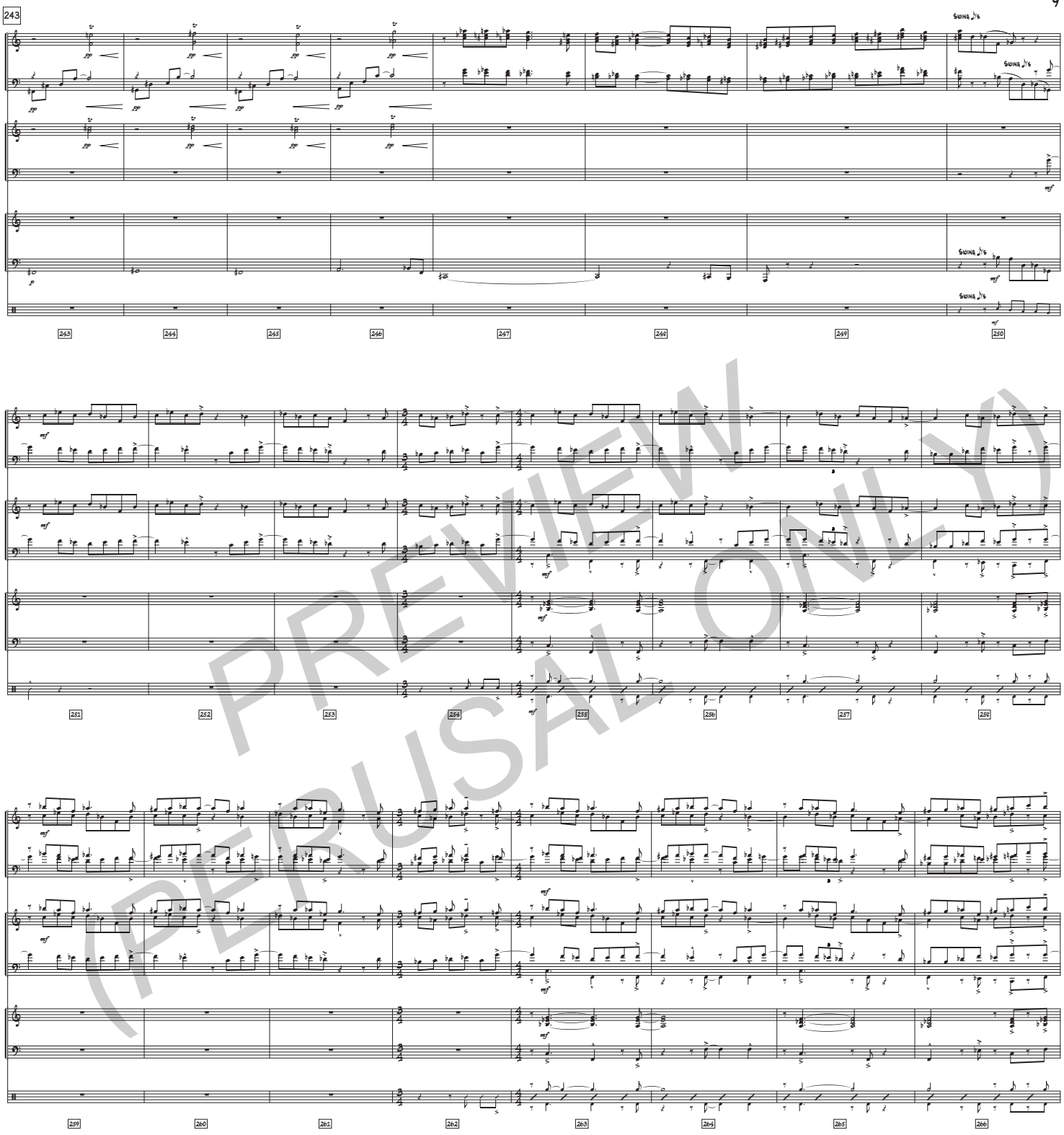


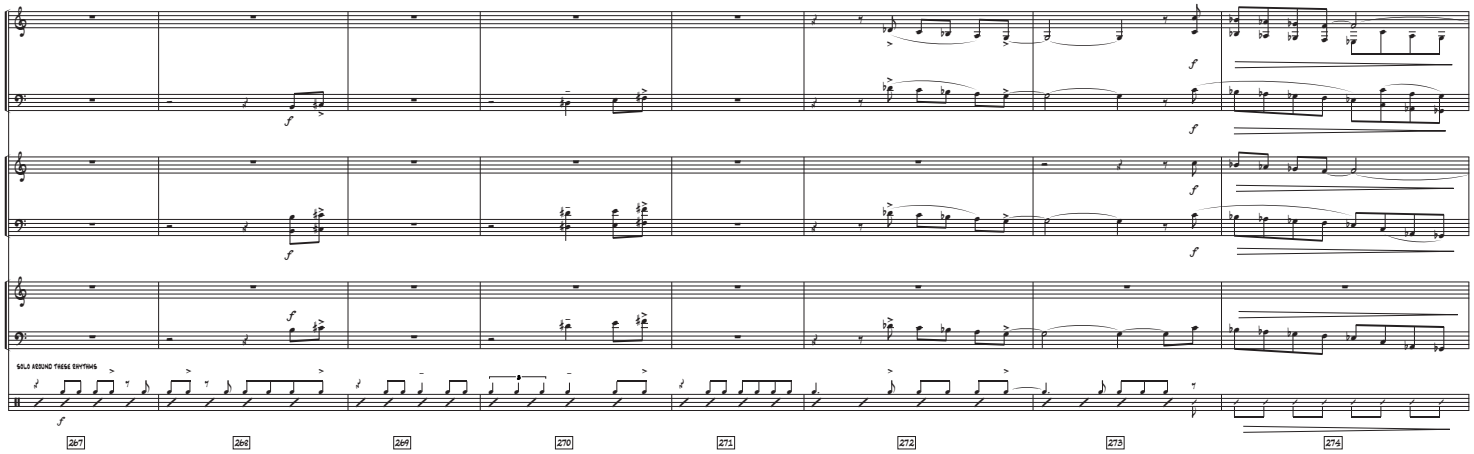
Big Red Thing

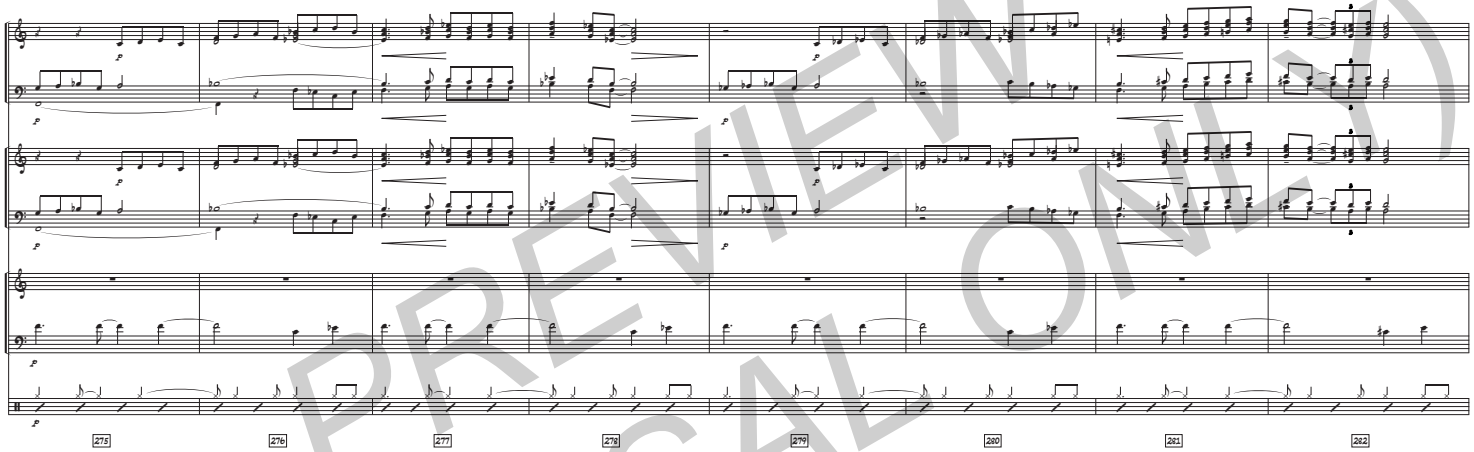


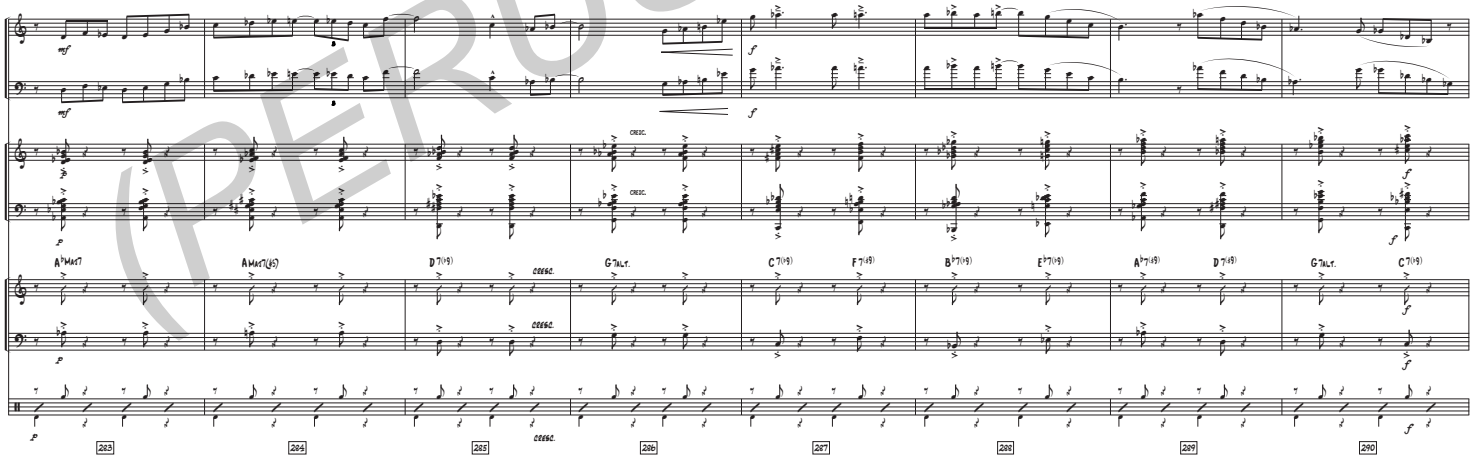


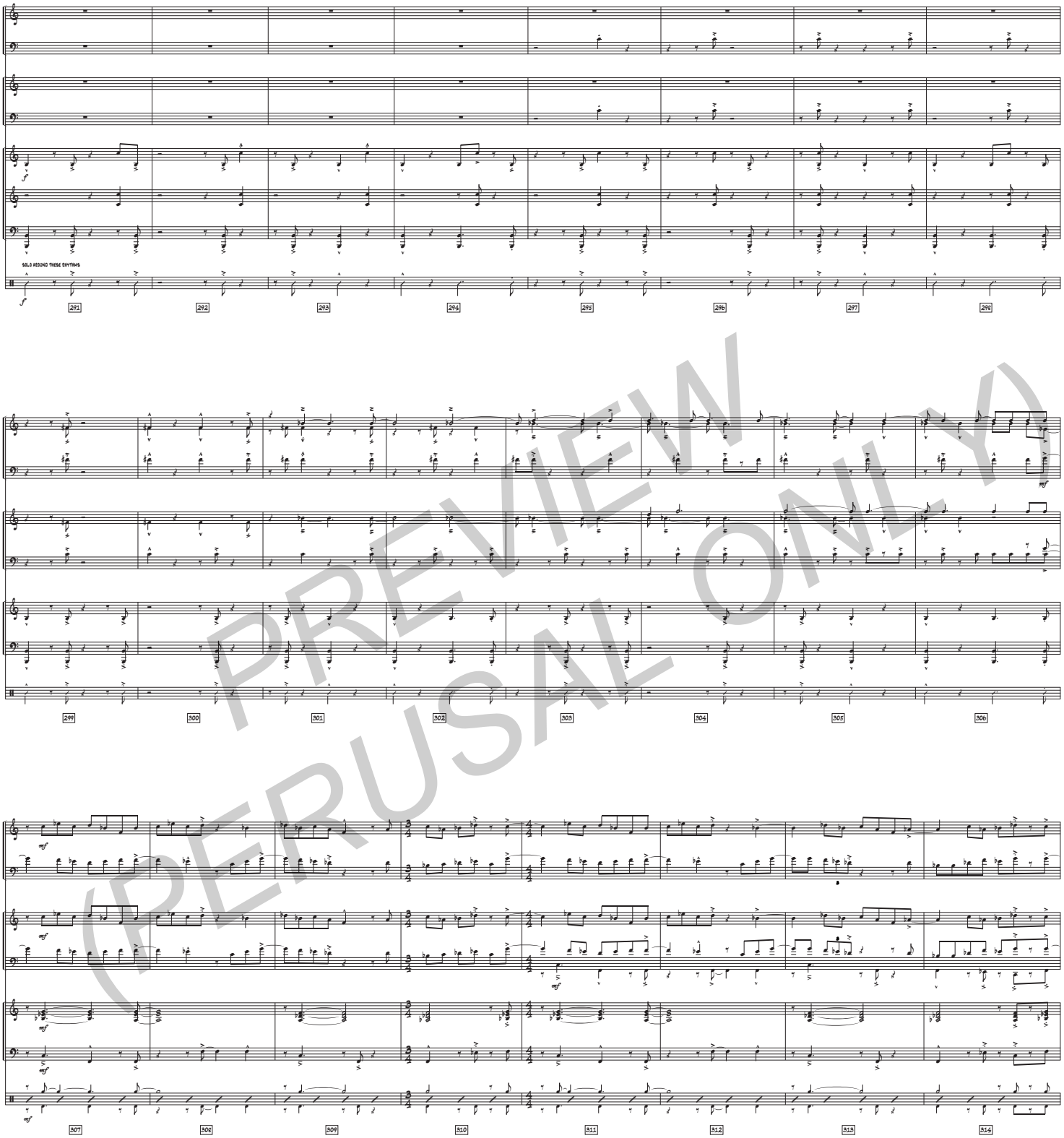


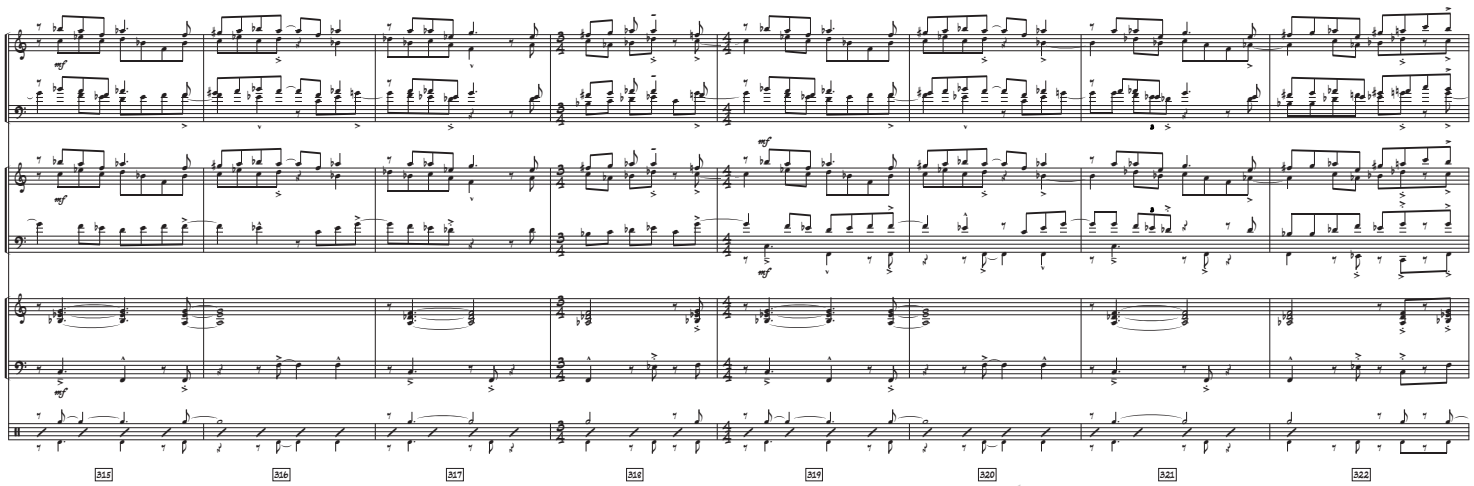


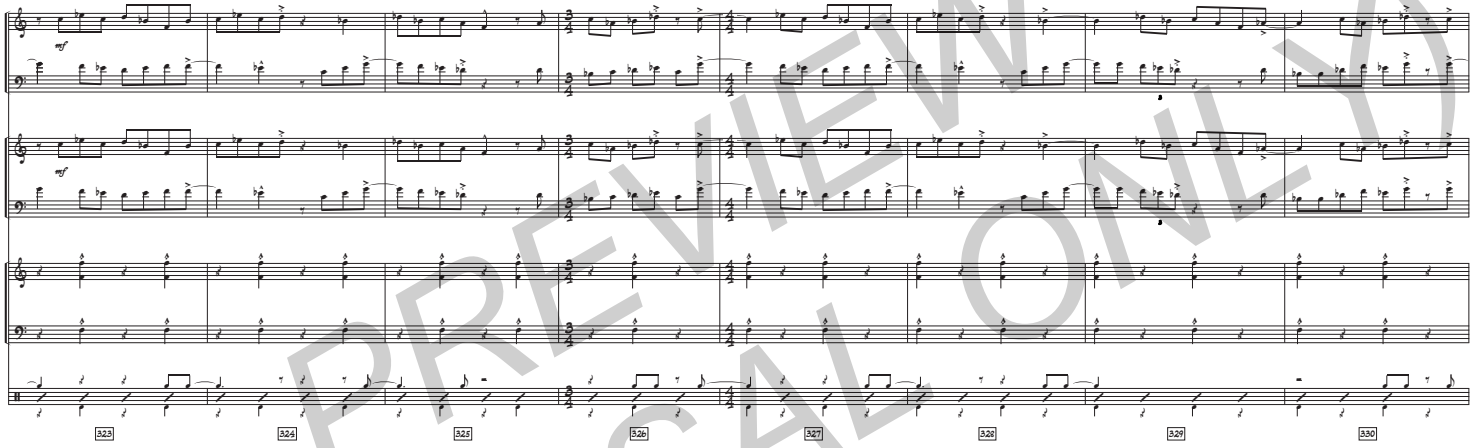


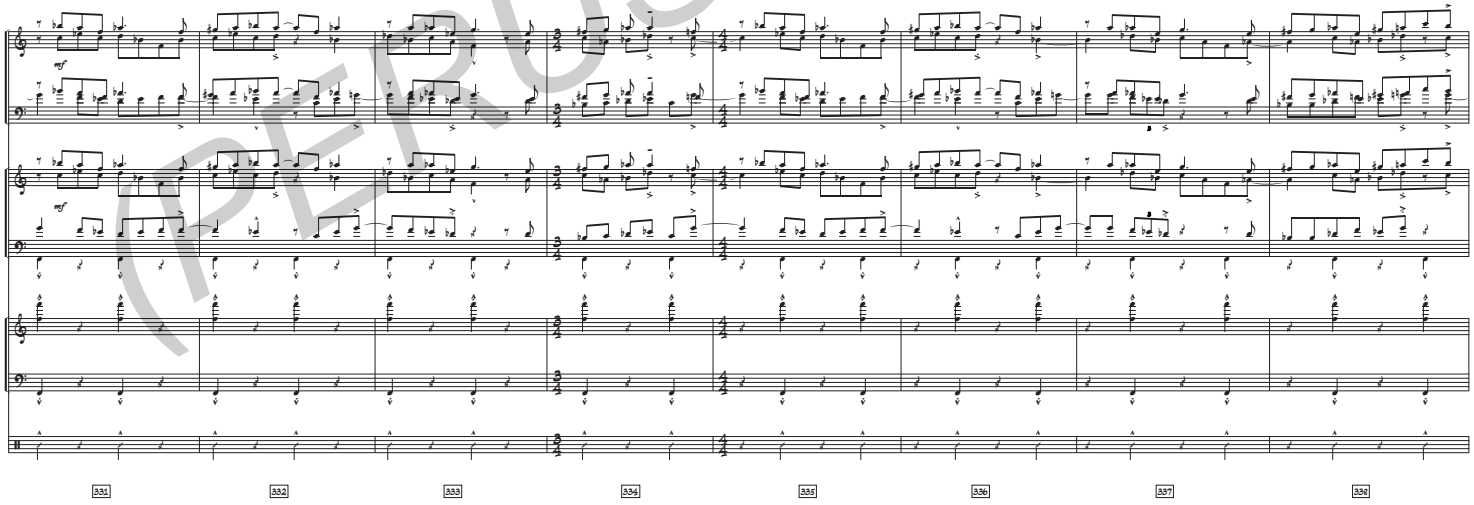


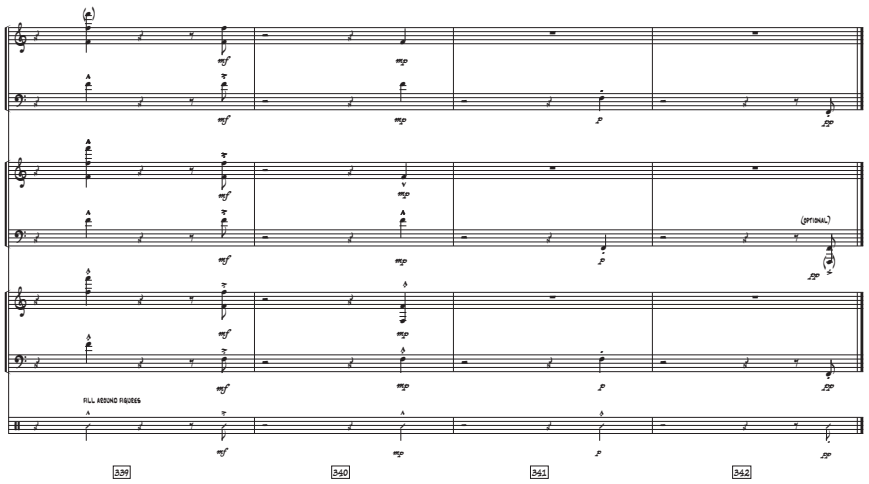












TRANSCRIPT OF *BIG RED THING* INTERVIEW:

** these interviews have been condensed & some order of things have been re-arranged for clarity and cohesion. This interview would be best understood in conjunction with the score **

Rob: So, *Big Red Thing* originated as the orchestral version from *Primal Colors*, right?

Jim: Yes.

Rob: Right, so why did you choose this one in particular to make a big band version of?

Jim: Really, the reason was that of all of the 5 big pieces of the suite, *Red,* was the one that had the most big band sound to it. The orchestra was just kind of dressing around the big band in that movement. When we were playing the thing with the orchestra, I thought it would be nice to extract this just for the big band. It seemed to lend itself to a big band treatment much more so than any of the other movements.

The fourth movement is completely strings. The fifth movement is about this battle between the band and the orchestra, so it wouldn't make any sense to take out the orchestra, or it would just be the battle of the band. Even the first and second movement, there is back and forth between the two ensembles. In *Red,* there wasn't really that interaction. There were little orchestral interludes, but I thought those could be taken care of by the big band.

Rob: Could you talk about the context of *Primal Colors?* How it originated I mean. I remember you introduced *Blue* to us in studio orchestra class, which I was a big fan of. But it was a last minute edition to the suite right?

Jim: Yeah, I think it was the last thing I wrote. Well, I wrote the little interludes last, there are 5 movements and 4 little interludes, I wrote those last. But I think *Blue* I wrote last from the big suite piece. The story about this suite..well, actually Brookmeyer was originally asked to write a piece for Frankfurt radio symphony with the big band, but his health was starting to go down. He finally notified them that he won't be able to do it, and I think he recommended me. I already knew the band, I worked with them 3 different times at that point, so they asked me if I wanted to do it. I said *sure I'd love to do it.*

It wasn't until I had written a lot of it, when the producer told me *oh by the way, in this concert we're doing Clare Fischer's orchestration of Pictures at an Exhibition for big band*. *We're also doing a suite of short pieces written by this guy with a classical alto saxophone soloist based on painting by Edvard Munch. So the concert is about art and music, so if you can come up with something.*

This was not long after the Paul Klee project, so I thought I could think of something. I thought I would take each primary colors: red, blue and yellow. Then black and white, the absence of colors. So I called the suite Primal Colors. In the program notes, I explained how each color in English has other connotation outsides of just being a color. So that's how that came about, I wasn't really thinking of colors when I was writing it though.

Although, I think by the time I was writing the 5th movement, I was thinking of these photos I'd seen of deep space where galaxies are colliding, which must be an awesome thing to be in the middle of..haha. There are places where the orchestra and big band collide together and are a tritone apart, so that's the idea. The blending of all of the chromatic scale, was kind of white noise. So by then, I started to think about the color thing. The earlier movements, I wasn't thinking about color association until later.

Rob: So that actually answers a lot about the source material questions we had. But, just to clarify, was there a big band that asked you write *Big Red Thing* for them? What spawned *Red* to be released as it's own big band thing. It's not on any record, which is why we're asking about that.

Jim: Oh yeah, it hasn't been recorded. I was thinking about having the dutch band record it, but I've already written enough big noisy things for them. So, it's gonna get out somewhere, somehow…someone will play it.

Rob: Miho featured I think at a concert in Washington square park? I remember googling it, and seeing that some bands featured it around the world. I think it was played in New York like 5 years ago.

Jim: Yeah…could be. I think what happened was that I was going to do a concert with the other HR big band, in Zagreb. The HR big band is a band that existed over there, I think it's still around. I think they asked me to bring some music, and I didn't want *Red* to just sit around gathering dust. So I thought I'd rearrange it for this big band.

Then I did another version for the Frankfurt band. I have about 3 different versions of it, depending on who the soloist are. One has piano and alto, one has trumpet and alto. I forget the one I sent you guys.

Rob: We have guitar and alto on the recording you sent us.

Jim: Right, ok, you know that might have been for somebody else, I'm not sure. I know a few bands have played it, maybe Paris Conservatory. It's kinda tough because of the dropped beat every once in a while in this thing. That makes it a little tough for some bands. Oh, the only difference in the orchestra version is that there is only one solo, the guitar solo.

Rob: Right, you added 8 bars in the big band version, which we assume was because of the D.S.?

Jim: Yeah, definitely. And then the other thing is in the orchestra version, there are these interruptions. I first thought about calling it *Swingus Interuptus.* Because it kept getting interrupted by these interludes, but I didn't think that would go over so well, so I ended up on *Big Red Thing.* Yeah, so I did add a solo for some reason to the big band version.

Rob: Very cool, so being on the topic of formal interruptions. One of our main over-arching questions is about the construction of the piece, it's really intriguing. We have questions about what's informing the angular formal components of this piece. There is a lot of changing momentum, a lot transitions and interludes with unrelated material.

Jim: Let me pull up the score here..

Rob: **pulls up reduction** Right so quick more transparent question. The bass ostinato at the very beginning, where do you feel the beginning of the pattern, is it four bars? Is it directly parallel to the form outline, or does the bass run displaced?

Jim: Right, I was thinking it's a four bar pattern but the second repetition starts differently *sings through rhythm*. So in a way, the and of 4 on the fourth bar, is an anticipation of the old downbeat. So I suppose I could have started it that way, but I decided for some reason to start it on the downbeat. Right, it's a four bar pattern throughout.

Rob: Right, cool — thank you for clarifying that. And what was the feeling you wanted, or what informed starting off with that bass figure vibe?

Jim: I just wanted this static, sparse, punchy, rhythm happening. It's in the higher octave, so I wanted this feeling of it being suspended above the ground. The theme that comes in at 9, **plays through some of the melodic figures** the harmonies those lines imply, there is a progression at work there. Whatever changes are being implied by the two melodic lines there, are all over the F pedal and help inform the solo changes — so the pedal helps give everything this static feeling I wanted.

all spend some time looking through solo changes

Rob: Right, so talking about those opening motifs outside of the harmony they imply, can you talk about them and their development in your composition process?

Jim: I think I was just going for a call response thing, like a tenor voice and a soprano voice. Give it rhythmic interaction and some motion. Then the third voice comes in and then it crystalizes into the that tutti at 41.

Rob: Definitely, and was that at all inspired by the color red as source material?

Jim: No, I just assigned red to this, because red is kind of warm, it's got a feeling of hotness to it. This is the swing thing in the suite which made sense.

Rob: It's still pretty amazing how a composer sometimes might not have any specific thing in mind, but it might still fall in line with that thing. Like to me, this *sounds* like the color red. You're still evoking red somehow, even just by nature of its title. The real test would be a double blind study on this.

Jim: Haha..yeah. That would be interesting. I did a thing recently at a McGill, it was about the Paul Klee suite. This guy said that is wife had read about the Paul Klee thing and seen the paintings. He had played one of the tunes for her and she guessed correctly what painting it was associated with.

Rob: Very well deserved compliment.

Jim: Yeah it is. Well do a double blind test here and see what people come up with..ha. The second movement actually, sometimes I mistakenly refer to it as green. To me, it's more green than yellow, but green isn't a primary color so it's gotta be yellow.

Rob: Well maybe in the future, you can super-impose two movements on top of each other and create secondary colors.

Jim: Hahah, yeah, right. So actually the interludes are named after different things colored by the combination of the piece before and after. So like black going into yellow, I named it monarch butterfly. Yellow going into red, had something to do with orange — red going into blue had something to do with purple. And blue going into white, was Regal, which is a great white giant star in Orion.

Rob: Awesome. So we talked about the actual motives, we'd like to talk a little bit about middle level stuff. There is a lot of 4/4 + 3/4 irregular bar phrases, like at 227 and plenty of other places in the piece. Can you tell us if you had the bar structure set ahead of time or was it from singing the motif and it felt right that way?

Jim: Yeah, I just sang it I think **sings through the phrases**. It could have been **sings it with 4/4 bar phrases** but then I just thought what if I just cut off a beat, and kind of create a sense of urgency here.

And at the end, starting at 323, you have that rhythm section thing. All of the sudden there, the chops instead of being on the off beats are now on the down beats. It's essentially a 15 bar phrase, that gave me the flexibility to keep the chop constant, but turn the beat around. I was looking to just break up the 4/4 thing there a little bit.

In the orchestra rendering of it, you can hear the strings, I mean they hung in there well, but it was tricky for them to feel that.

Rob: Right, as I mentioned before one of our main over-arching questions from the beginning more about the construction of the piece. A lot of stuff is newly introduced thematic material throughout the piece, like the tenor line at 138, which I love.

There are also a lot of abrupt changes in mood and texture. There are even unthematic transitions or interludes that feel like they're from a different piece, for example measure 243, or 170 and similar areas.

Jim: Oh yeah, at 170 **sings through it**. On the orchestra version, there was this tuba player, who was just great, played the heck out of that thing.

Anyway, all these are meant to be completely unrelated, like you said. These things are *really* interruptions, they come out of nowhere. They try to knock the soloist off balance, but then the F pedal comes back in and saves the day.

Right and at 243. So, in general through out the piece you have this more modal stuff and then at 243, this sludge comes in, this chromatic thing. It breaks the mode there — then you get that F7sus theme coming back in. So it's really these chromatic interruptions.

Rob: Right so they are directly contrasting with the thematic material. You have this open sus sound and then suddenly these big chromatic figures come in.

Jim: Yeah, yep. Out of the blue, really contrasting, like somebody walking into the wrong room, *whoops sorry* and then F pedal. And then again, giant tuba comes in, and then *oops sorry, wrong wrong.* And the F pedal comes back.

Rob: Haha!

Jim: It was actually probably better expressed in the orchestra version. Because like I said, the orchestra doesn't do much in the piece, but they do give life to those interruptions. You hear a totally different color, and different feel since those players don't swing.

Even in the big band version, I want a very even interpretation of those areas. When a big band plays this, I always tell them to play it like a classical quartet, a lot of moving the shoulder haha. So I think it was reinforced better in the orchestra version because it's a totally new color, and people with a completely different time feel.

Rob: Right, it's definitely very stark in the orchestral version. So now continuing comparing the orchestral version to the big band one. At 219, in the orchestral version, you had the wild improv fully written out, while in the big band version it's just slashes with instructions for *wild, intense improvisation.*

Jim: Yeah, it's the orchestra going nuts. I wrote it out things for them to do, but I might have told them to do whatever they want if they felt comfortable. In case, I gave material there. I see, I gave the French horns some rips and all that. You can tell from the percussion writing that the idea was just to have some controlled chaos. Again, it's the effect of these 8 bars of **explosion sound** and then *whoop, never mind.* In the big band version, you put slashes there and they'll do something, they'll go for it. So it's about writing for two different kinds of musicians. The main thing, is the decrescendo.

Rob: Right, so how would you lead a rehearsal on this piece? A more experienced composer would know how, but we like to ask a little bit about rehearsal process in this analysis project, because we want to point out that differently constructed pieces will merit different rehearsal processes.

Jim: Yeah, so for example, I'd take 9-24. And just rehearse low saxes, trombones with the rhythm section. Then high saxes and trumpets together with rhythm section. The biggest challenge really, is not the notes, but to learn to listen for who else you are playing with. It's a matter of forging a feeling of unity with whatever saxes and trombones are playing a line together and same with saxes and trumpets.

At 25, it breaks into 3 groups, so I would take each of those groups and work with them. Especially, depending on the experience of the musicians, but even professional bands. It's good to have each group know who they are playing with.

Rob: Anything about creating a solo arc between two soloists since in the big band version it repeats?

Jim: You know, it starts pretty sparsely. The main thing is don't play all your stuff in 138, because there is a long way to go. You have to think about when those interruptions occur, how will you respond to that.

There are two levels to those interruptions. They are part of the composition of the piece, but they are also there to challenge the soloist. The idea is to have the soloist respond to that, or you know, maybe the soloist will choose to ignore it and to act like nothing happened at all. But, if a big surprise jumps out at you, I would expect the soloist to respond in some way, shape, or form to those interludes.

The other thing to rehearse, is that last section with the 4/4 + 3/4 bar. I rehearse rhythm section alone first, just to get the thing to flow.

Rob: Cool, yeah thank you so much! Is there anything else that you'd like to point out?

Jim: No, but you know the other thing, the way this piece functioned in the whole suite. Movements 1 and 5, black and white, were kind of the big ones — with extreme back and forth between the two ensembles. Yellow was more lyrical, it's this faster 3 that oscillates with a slow 3, with a flugelhorn solo. And movement 4, was this pensive, very emotional movement. The guy who played it, Julian Argüelles, he's a great player.

So movement 3, *Red*, was meant to be the kind of happy-go-lucky, just swing piece. I really was thinking of it as a jazz piece, I wanted it to have a light nature to it. Especially to contrast some of the heaviness of movements 1 and 5. That was generally the vibe of the whole piece before I even thought of Red, or any specific motivic material here, it was just supposed to be the light middle piece.