GROOVING HARD OR HARDLY GROOVING?

A Portfolio of Transcriptions Exploring the Difference Between Adding Energy to Music and Overplaying.

Michael Cooper

This portfolio was an exciting opportunity to explore a variety of playing styles and the elements that make music groove. I decided on this topic because it is something I struggle with in my own playing and this often leads to a stagnant performance from myself as I try to support others without getting in their way and therefore don't take risks. This portfolio spans almost six decades and I have looked at a wide range of ensembles and styles. Where possible I have transcribed the live version of the tunes because I felt that was more relevant to my focus. I find that in a live situation it is easy to get carried away and play inappropriately. I have mostly focused on intros, heads and playing under solos.

Mercy, Mercy, Mercy (Live) 1968
Buddy Rich

This drum part is one of my favourite examples of a successful groove. From the very first hit on the snare, Buddy Rich is playing with energy and delivers an exciting performance. Throughout this piece, he doesn't stick to the snare playing the backbeat. This is something that is typical within my own groove playing, though I often find that it can disrupt the groove when I try it. However, in this transcription I feel that it only adds to the energy. This is largely due to the hi-hat maintaining a solid backbeat and the conviction with which the pushes on the and of four are played which launches the music in to the next bar. During the drum intro, Buddy sets up the groove in bars 2 - 3 followed by a passage of semiquaver triplets grouped in 8, 6 and then 4 followed by a strong downbeat crotchet, followed by a snare and cymbal crash on beat two of bar five. This is a really creative use of space as there is a very busy and intricate fill followed by a short silence and then immediately the strong backbeat returns.
I often worry that I improvise too much around a groove instead of sticking to an ostinato. Throughout this piece, Buddy Rich plays something different in every bar and I feel it is very successful in not disrupting the groove but adds a lot of energy to the music. Similarly, throughout the guitar solo he certainly doesn't hold back. He is improvising just as much here as he was in the head and the result is an incredibly groovy and exciting solo. A large part of what makes Buddy's groove in this tune so successful is the dynamic control he has over the drum kit. Although it is a busy part, the combination of ghost notes, accents and tonal variation of drums and cymbals allow his playing to

not disrupt the rest of the band but to continue driving and adding excitement.

Spectrum, 1973
Billy Cobham

I chose this tune because I believed it to be an example of a drummer playing too many notes and disrupting the groove. I have since come to realise that I was mistaken. This tune is completely driven by the drums and it was only when transcribing and analysing the playing did I come to appreciate this. The relentless use of ghost notes are really effective in driving the music forward and I believe what makes these ghost notes so successful is the dynamic range in which they are used. In my own playing, I typically have a set pattern of ghost notes and until transcribing this tune I would use these without much thought but Billy's placement of ghost notes is entirely deliberate and effective.

There is a creative use of dynamics during the sax solo. The first two bars of the solo are played forte and then it drops down to mezzo forte. This gives and initial burst of energy for the soloist to use. During bars 60 - 63 there is a brief lull where he stops using ghost notes and lowers the dynamic of his playing. This is a very effective use of space as it comes after and intense section of playing and the energy is then built back up for the climax of the solo.
Something else that stood out to me was the use of rhythmic variation on the cymbals. This is particularly evident during bars 24 - 29 and then again during the sax solo in 71 - 82 where Billy moves on to a trashy cymbal and is varying the rhythmic patterns played. Until this portfolio, I didn't put much consideration in to what my right hand was doing on the cymbals in groove playing. I would focus more on my bass drum, snare and my left foot but I have come to realise how effective the use of varying patterns on a cymbal can be. The combination of the sound of the cymbal and the rhythms used really stand out, as if another musician has just joined in at that point and this is really effective in adding energy to the music.

Coisa Feita 1982

I chose this tune because I felt it was a great example of simple playing that is really effective and groovy. I decided to transcribe both the drum part and the bongo part as the rhythms used by these two players compliment each other perfectly without getting in one another's way. I've done extensive research but unfortunately couldn't find the name's of the players on this track.
Most of the rhythmic information in this tune is coming from João Bosco so I thought it would be a good chance to explore how to support a busy rhythmical player. The drums are largely playing the same pattern throughout with occasional variation of accents on the snare. Again, what makes this drum part so successful are the dynamics. Even though there are constant semiquavers on the snare drum, these are played with brushes and are very subtle. I decided against notating these as ghost notes because although they are quiet, they are still very powerful and help to drive the music along. This is therefore an excellent reflection of the control the drummer has over his instrument. I find it very difficult to add energy to music when playing quietly and through transcribing and practicing this drum part I have made progress in this area. The accents on the snare are hinting at the partido alto without fully playing it, which allows space for guitar and percussion to fill.

The bongo part is a great example of simple groove playing while still leaving space for others. This part is heavily rooted in the partido alto rhythm but, again, doesn't play the full pattern and only highlights certain accents to drive the music along. The semiquaver phrase on beat four of bar two is repeated often and is an excellent example of this. By playing the higher bongo on the first and fourth semiquaver, they are highlighting the partido alto, but by playing the lower bongo on the second and the third, they are launching in to that push on the last semiquaver. Transcribing this piece has helped me develop my Brazilian rhythmic language.

Soul Vaccination (Live) 1999
David Garibaldi

Here is another tune I thought was an example of a drummer over-complicating the drum part and disrupting the groove and where again I was mistaken. It became evident very quickly of the tight relationship

between the drums and the other instruments, especially the bass. During the intro and the instrumental section at 1.28, the main accents on the snare and bass drum are mimicking the rhythms in the bass part. This changes slightly during the verse and chorus where the bass drum is accenting the rhythms of the bass guitar, and the snare drum is highlighting the rhythms of the guitar. The effect of this is a call and response between the bass drum and the snare drum which adds interest and energy to the music.
This tune is another great example of varying the patterns played with the right hand and has helped me develop and understand the importance of this skill. The intro involves a cascara bell pattern, followed by an ostinato pattern on the hi-hat in the verse and chorus. This pattern is the basis for the cowbell part during the sax solo but David improvises around this. This adds an entirely new texture to the music and allows David to provide interesting rhythmic information to the soloist but still leave a lot of space due to the dry sound of the cowbell. The rhythm section breakdown is an excellent example of improvising around a groove pattern in a fairly minimalistic way. This section has a lot of energy and this is mainly due to the rhythmic language of the right hand and the variation of ghost notes and accents the drums. Typically, in a situation like this I would tend to play a lot more notes in an attempt to fill the space. However, through transcribing this I have realised the importance of just holding down a steady groove and how effective it can be to then add one or two extra notes as these then stand out.

Brooklyn (Live) 2005
David Henzie-Skogen
Tom Reschke

Here is another effective example of two percussionists working together to create a strong groove. I decided to transcribe this tune because it involves the core elements of a drum kit split up and played by two separate drummers (David is playing snare drum and crash cymbal and Tom is playing bass drum and a smaller cymbal.) I felt this would be an excellent opportunity to explore the effect of listening and leaving space but still adding a high amount of energy to the music.
Nothing that either drummer plays is particularly complicated and it is the simplicity that makes this drum part so successful in creating an exciting groove.

The accents on the cymbals used by David are an essential element to this groove. During A to E, there is a strong accent on the off beats. This is either played on the bell of the cymbal or with more of an accent on the crash. This gives the groove a funkier feel compared to the more driving feel which is achieved at F when the accent is placed on the beat. The effective use of dynamics throughout this tune create variety and excitement in the music.
This tune has helped me understand the sonic value of each drum and to view each part of my drum kit as it's own instrument. As there are two drummers, each drum truly has it's own voice throughout this piece. This is especially notable in the drum / sousaphone break from bar fifty seven. It is particularly the bass drum part that stands out to me here. Although David gets to deliver a flashier solo on the snare drum, Tom is maintaining a solid groove while improvising in a creative rhythmical way. The spacial awareness here is very effective as Tom manages to provide exciting rhythmic phrases of his own while also supporting and leaving space for the snare drum and sousaphone. All three parts combine to deliver an exciting solo break.
Transcribing this tune was very beneficial for me. Until this point I had worked on the whole drum kit one bar at a time, but by just focusing on the bass drum part separately and then the snare and then the cymbals I was able to achieve much more accuracy. I have now adopted this approach to all transcriptions.

<u>What About Me? (Live) 2014</u>
Larnell Lewis

The tune begins with a burst of energy from Larnell and a rhythmically complex six bar phrase were the beat is often displaced with various accents. The final two bars of the intro are much simpler, creating a stark contrast.
The band then launch in to the head with Larnell playing a semi-linear groove with strong accents on beat two and the fourth semiquavers of beats three and four. His playing is very dense throughout with creative rhythmical language, relying predominantly on semiquaver subdivisions and tonal playing involving many different cymbals and two snare drums. Even though it is a very busy part, it still has a strong groove, again due to dynamic control.
He plays a lot more sparsely during the drum / guitar solo from bar twenty six. This is a creative use of space similar to that mentioned in

Soul Vaccination with an equal success in maintaining a solid groove. Considering it is just Larnell accompanying the guitar solo, it would be easy here to over-compensate and fill all the space with notes. The fact that this section is fairly sparse again only adds to the excitement of each note. As the solo progresses, the drum part becomes busier and builds up to a strong hi-hat part from bar sixty six. Here, Larnell is providing much more energy for the guitarist and helps drive the music forward to the next section where the rest of the rhythm section join in. Something I find difficult in my own playing is accompanying a soloist, especially a bass player when there are often just the two of us playing. This is a great example of being confident and playing sparsely but with lots of energy.

You'll notice the lack of the word 'overplaying' in this commentary and that is because I no longer believe that word to be relevant. It is more a case of appropriate playing, whether this is rhythmically, dynamically or tonally. The contrast between leaving space and filling gaps leads to a much more exciting performance. By viewing each drum as its own instrument and with it's own dynamic and tonal quality, my approach to the drum kit has changed and I aim to continue to apply and develop this awareness and skill to my playing.

Technical Notes

Mercy, Mercy, Mercy

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8WAvTmJuKk

Due to the quality of the recording, it was difficult at times to distinguish exactly what was happening with the left foot. I am assuming he is playing quavers but for the purposes of this transcription I have only included the notes I felt to to be essential to what makes this groove so successful.

Spectrum

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhFgQTSOkeY

Coisa Feita

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Xck5zagbOE

It is likely that the bongo player is playing constant semiquavers throughout this piece but I have decided to only include to rhythms that are audible to show how these add to the heavy groove.

Soul Vaccination

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nFjHL-E0NTQ

Due to this being a live version, it was very difficult to distinguish the exact ghost notes being played so I had to approximate these. I looked up an interview where he plays this groove and took the ghost notes from that as I believe they are largely the same.

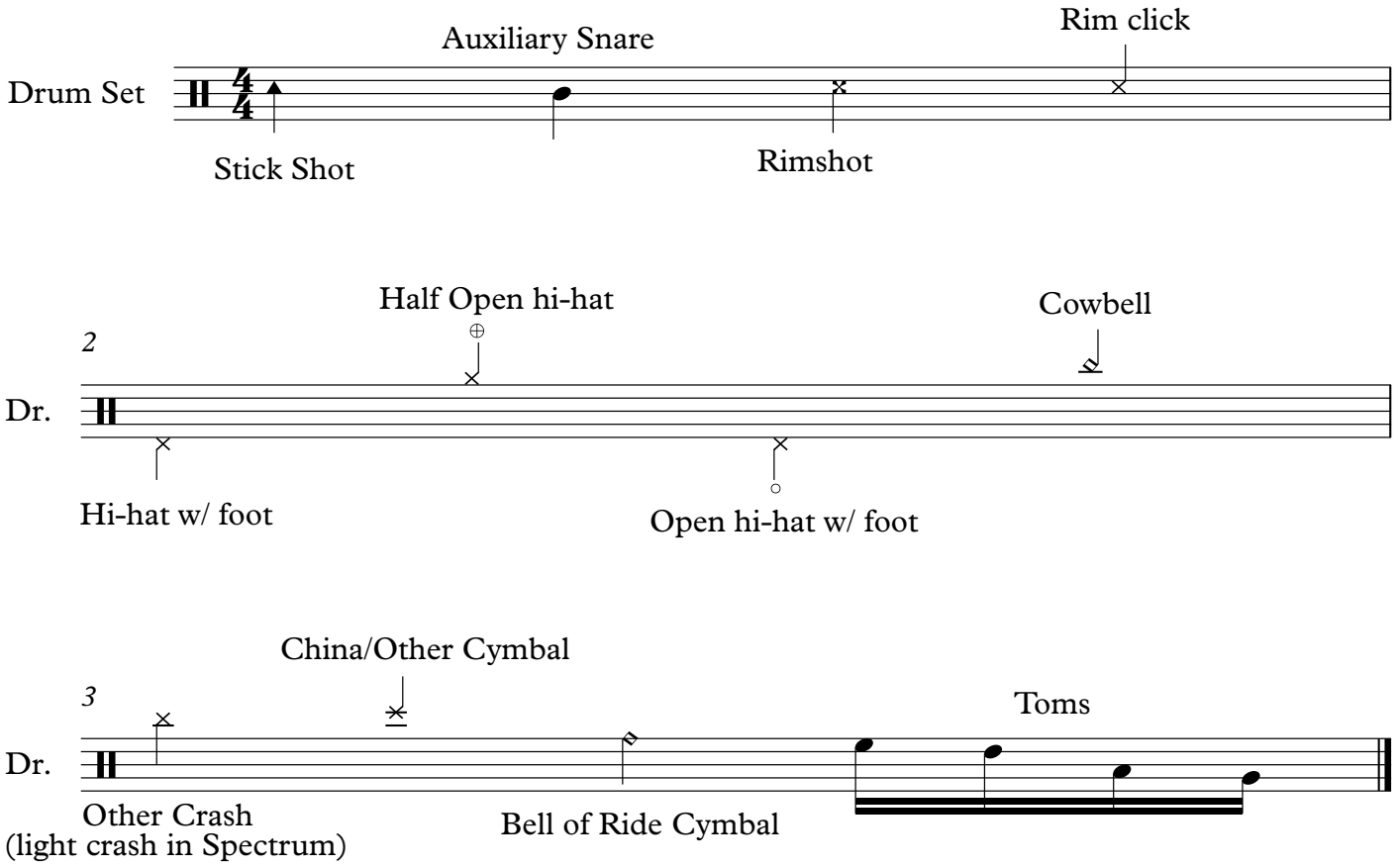
Brooklyn

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwGMOHJ5hbY

What About Me?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fuhHU_BZXSk

Drum Legend


Drum Set
Auxiliary Snare
Rim click
Stick Shot
Rimshot
2
Dr.
Half Open hi-hat
Cowbell
Hi-hat w/ foot
Open hi-hat w/ foot
3
Dr.
China/Other Cymbal
Toms
Other Crash
(light crash in Spectrum)
Bell of Ride Cymbal

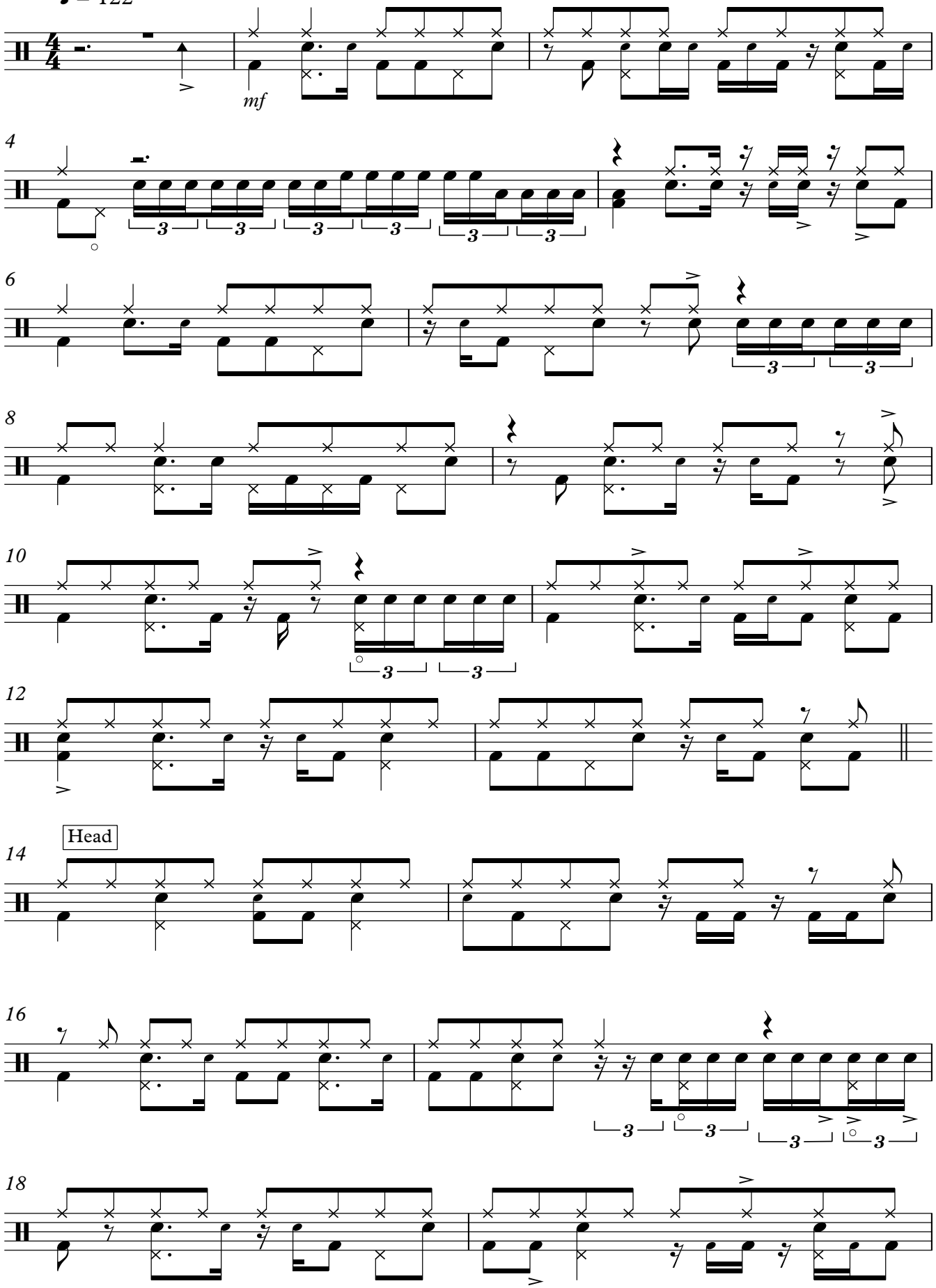
Mercy, Mercy, Mercy (Live)

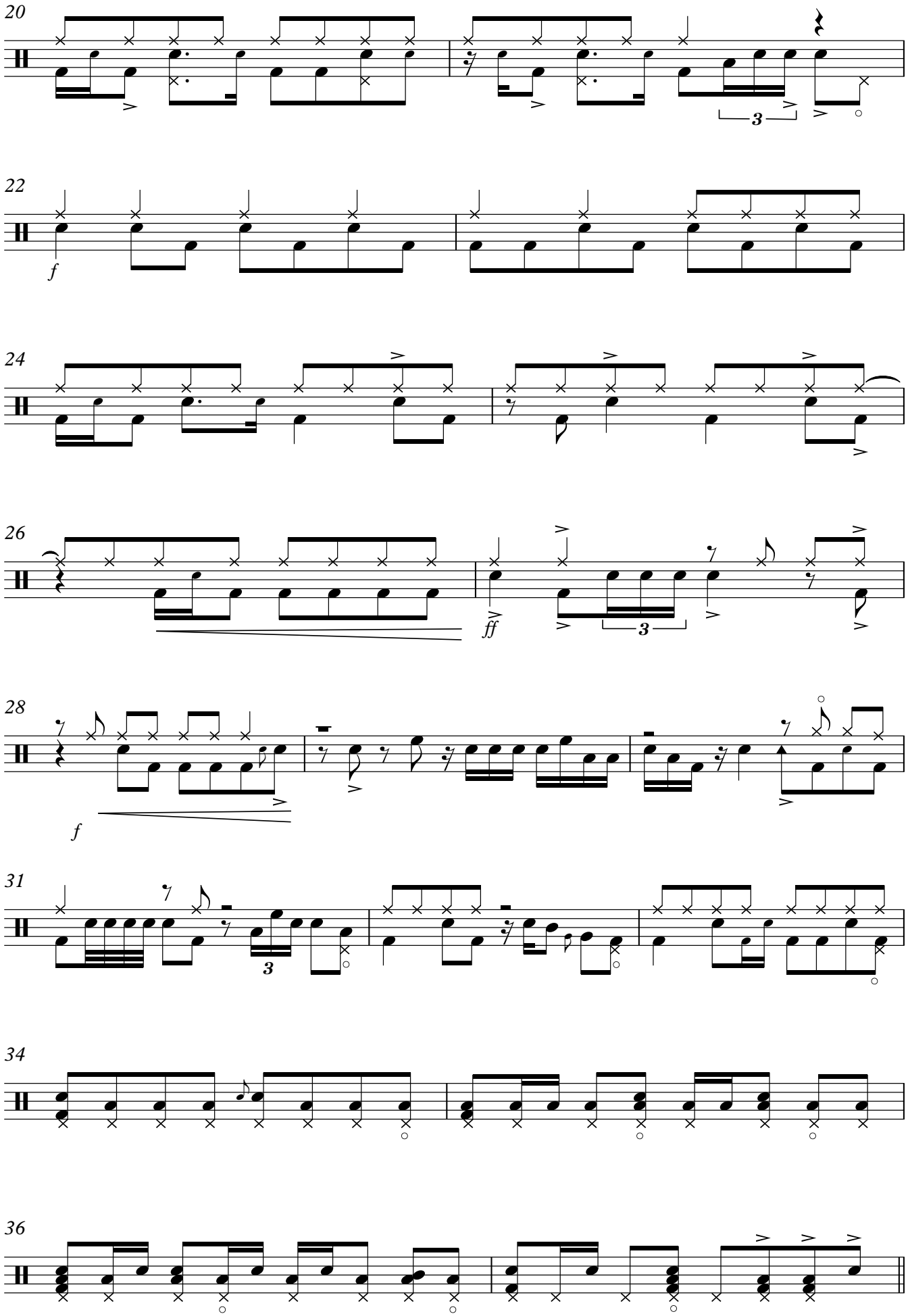
Drum Set

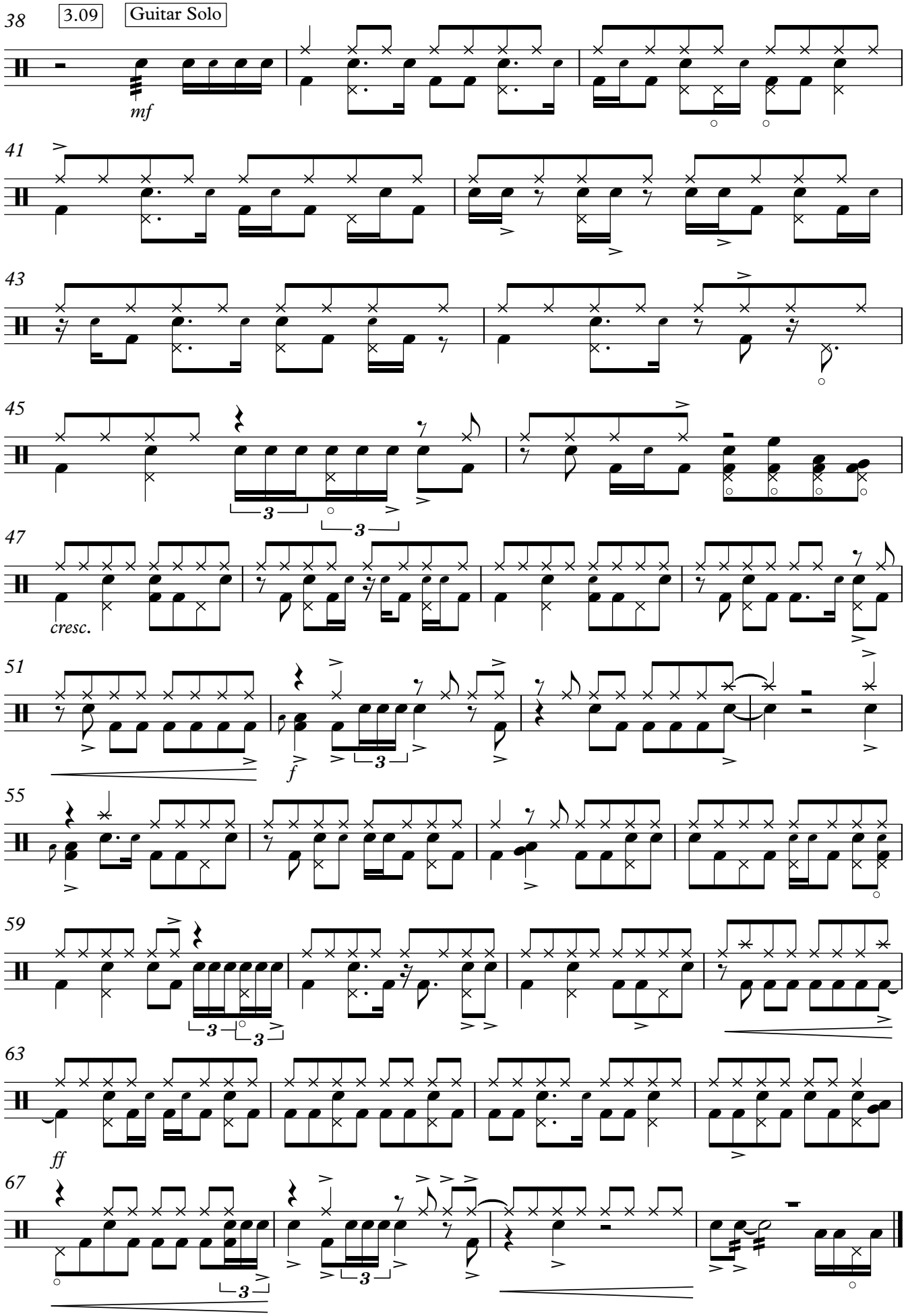
1968
Mercy, Mercy
Buddy Rich Big Band
Buddy Rich

Swing Feel

♩ = 122




20
22
f
24
26
ff
28
f
31
34
36


38
3.09
Guitar Solo
mf
41
43
45
47
cresc.
51
f
55
59
63
ff
67

Spectrum

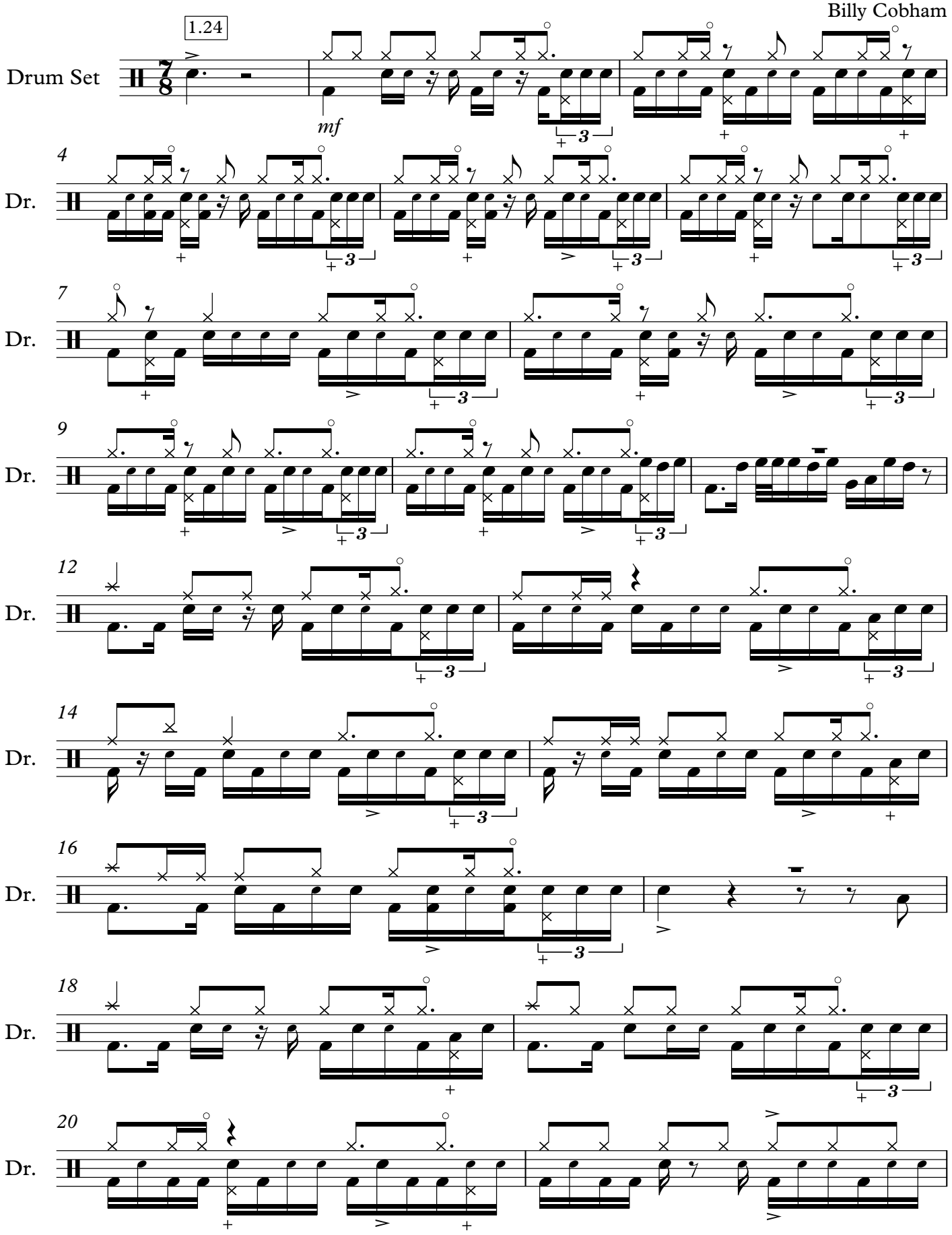
1973
Spectrum
Billy Cobham

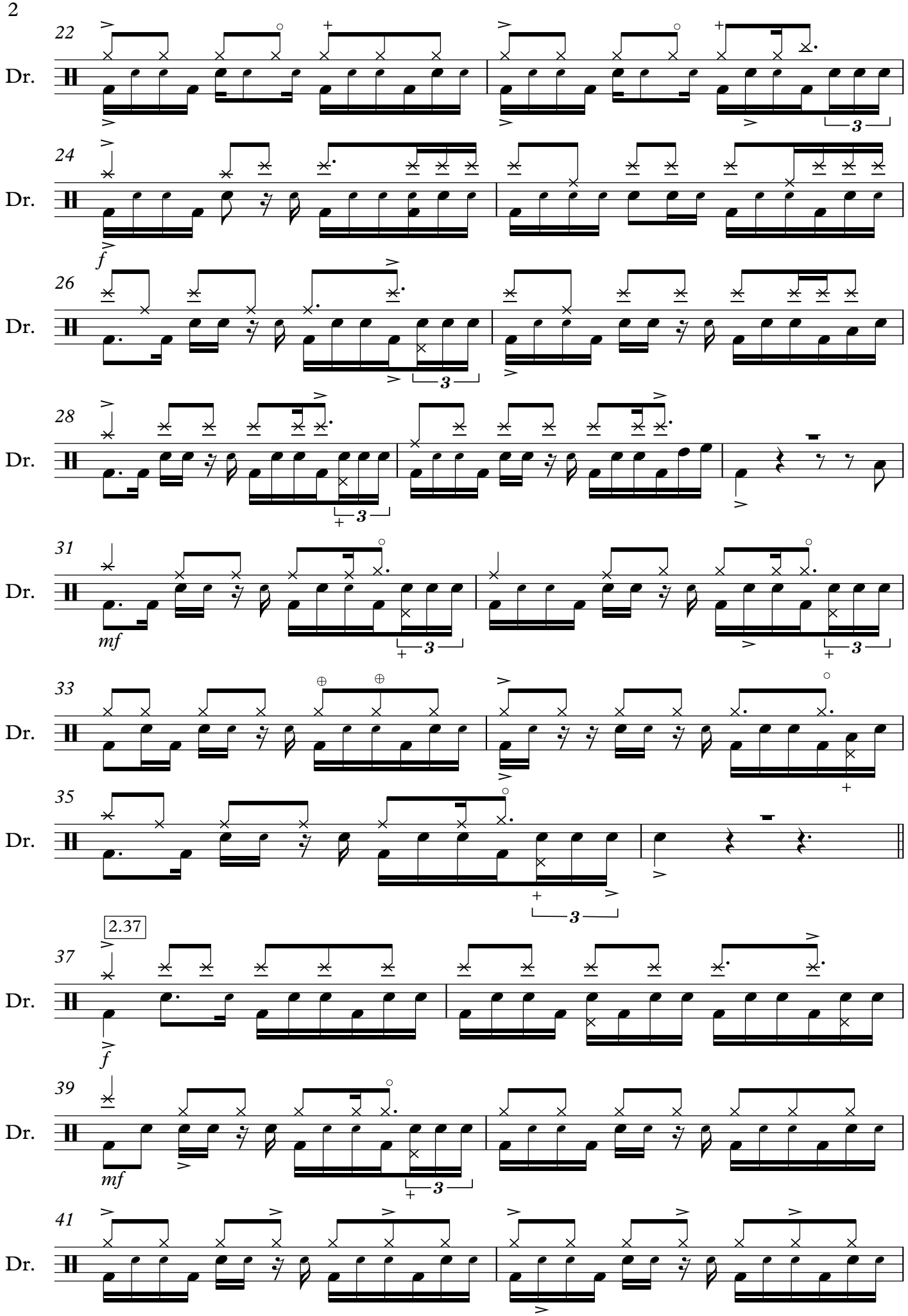
♩ = 130

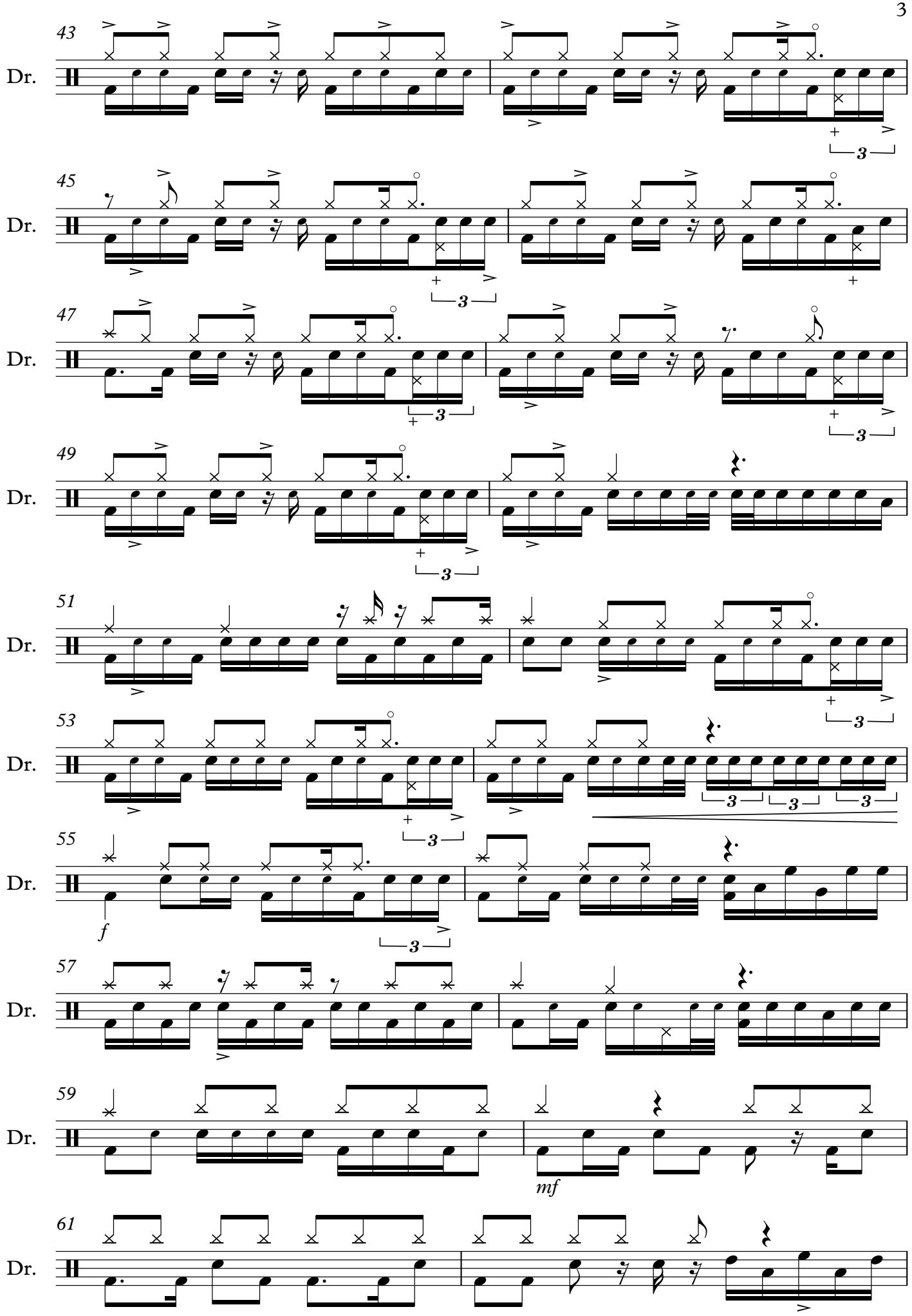
1.24

Drum Set

mf




22
Dr.
24
Dr.
f
26
Dr.
28
Dr.
31
Dr.
mf
33
Dr.
35
Dr.
2.37
37
Dr.
f
39
Dr.
mf
41
Dr.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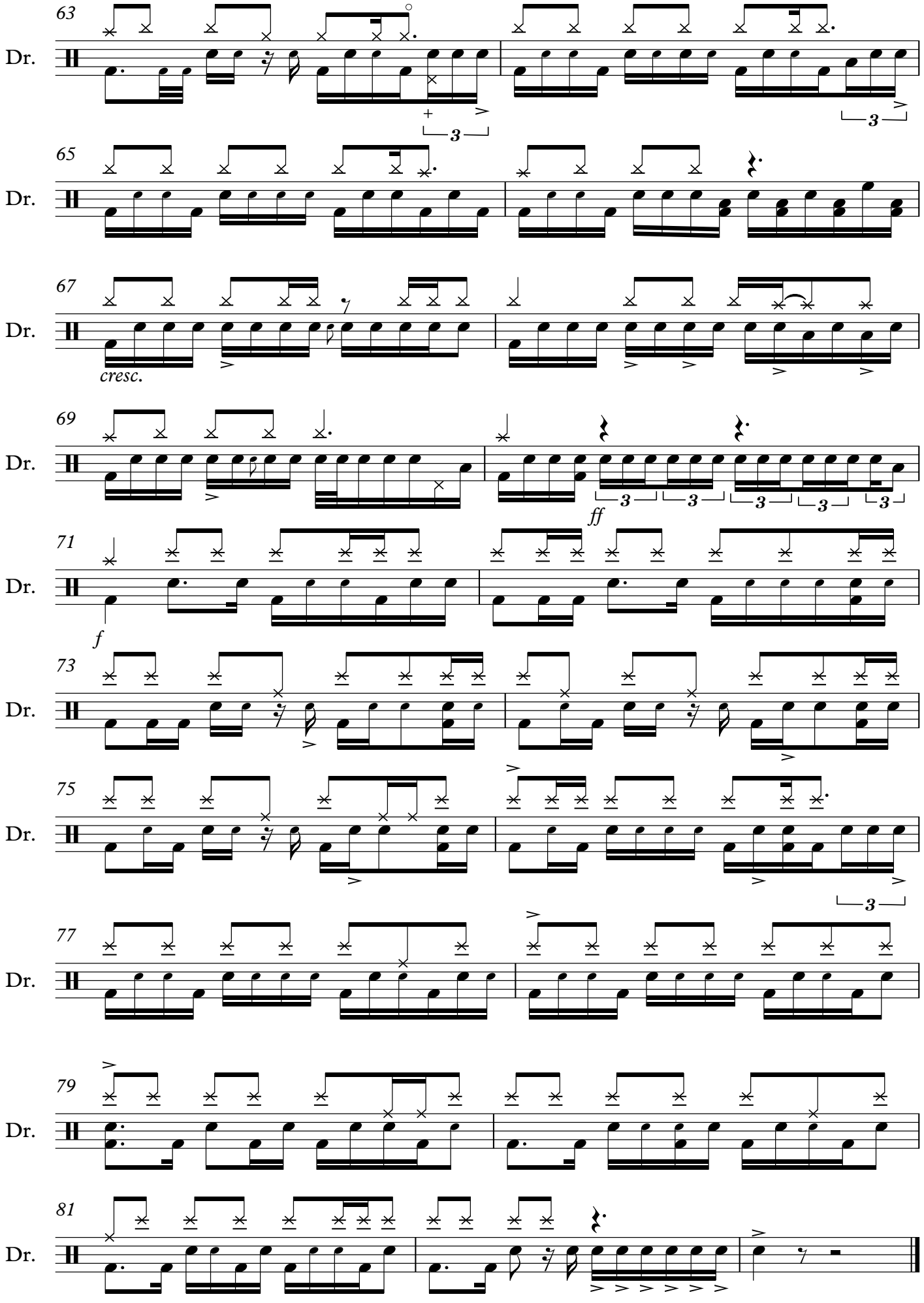
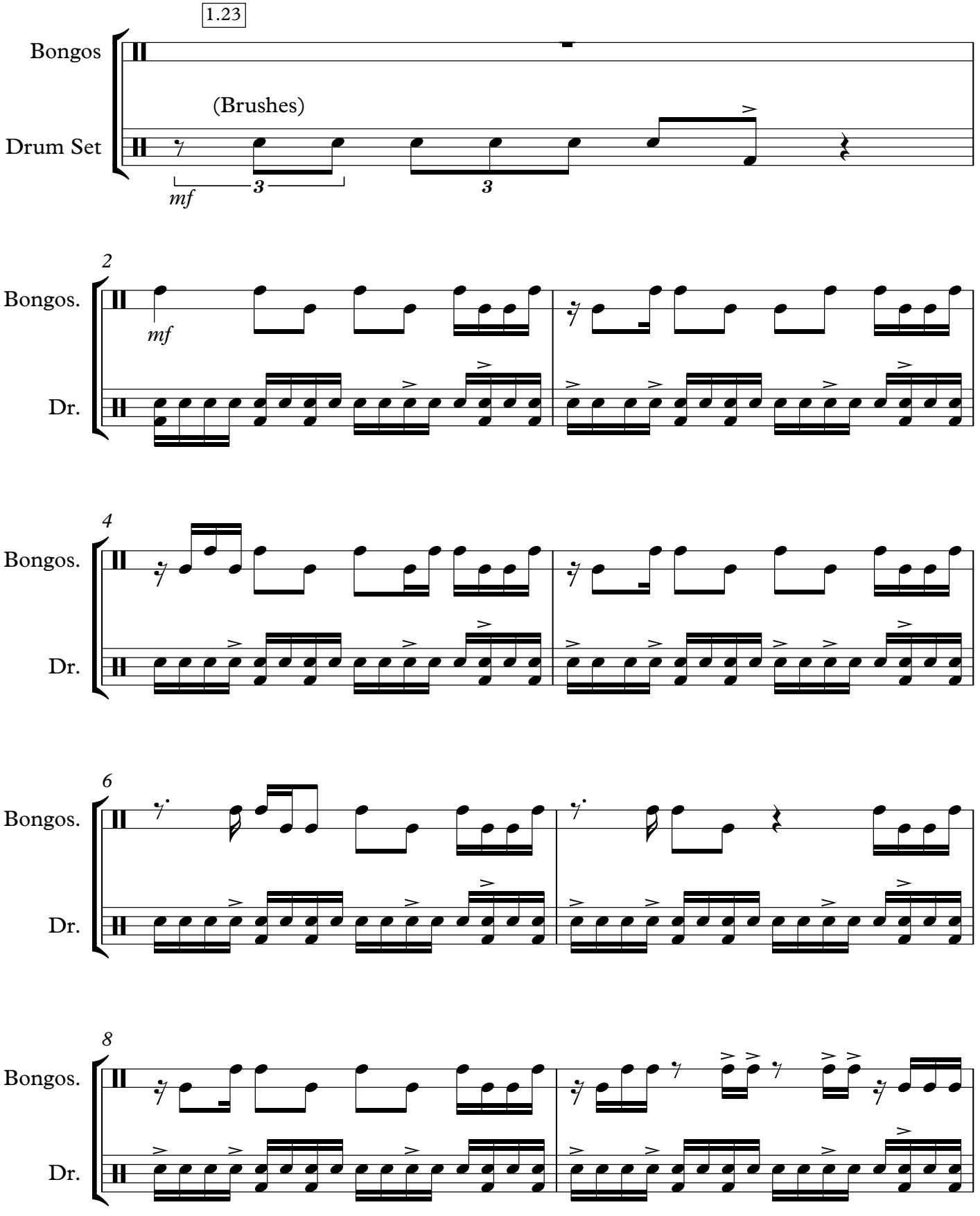
Dr.
45
Dr.
47
Dr.
49
Dr.
51
Dr.
53
Dr.
55
Dr.
f
57
Dr.
59
Dr.
mf
61
Dr.

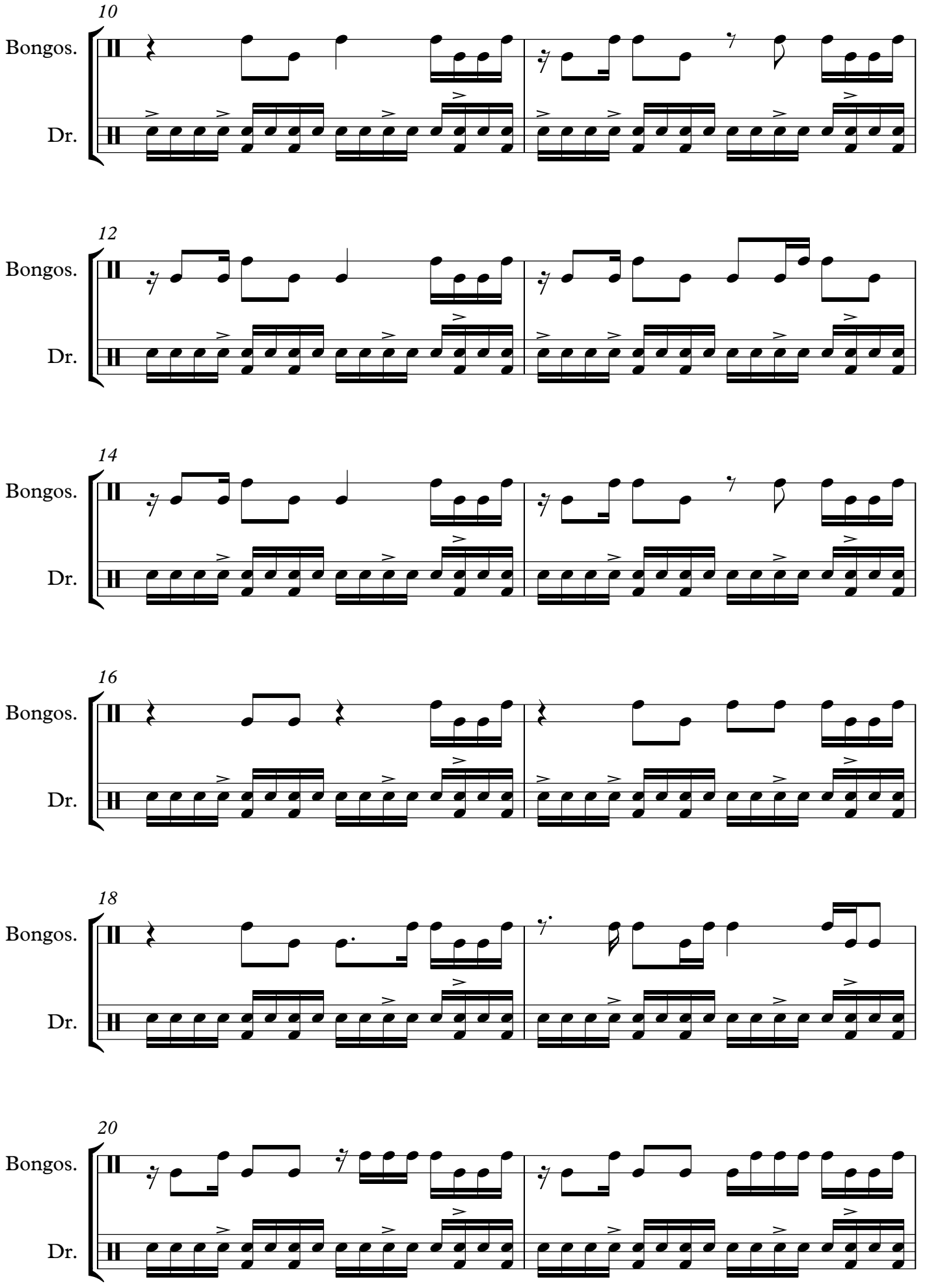

63
Dr.
3
65
Dr.
67
Dr.
cresc.
69
Dr.
ff
3
71
Dr.
f
73
Dr.
75
Dr.
3
77
Dr.
79
Dr.
81
Dr.

Coisa Feita

1982
Comissão de Frente
João Bosco

♩ = 125

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Bongos.
Dr.
12
Bongos.
Dr.
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Bongos.
Dr.
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Bongos.
Dr.
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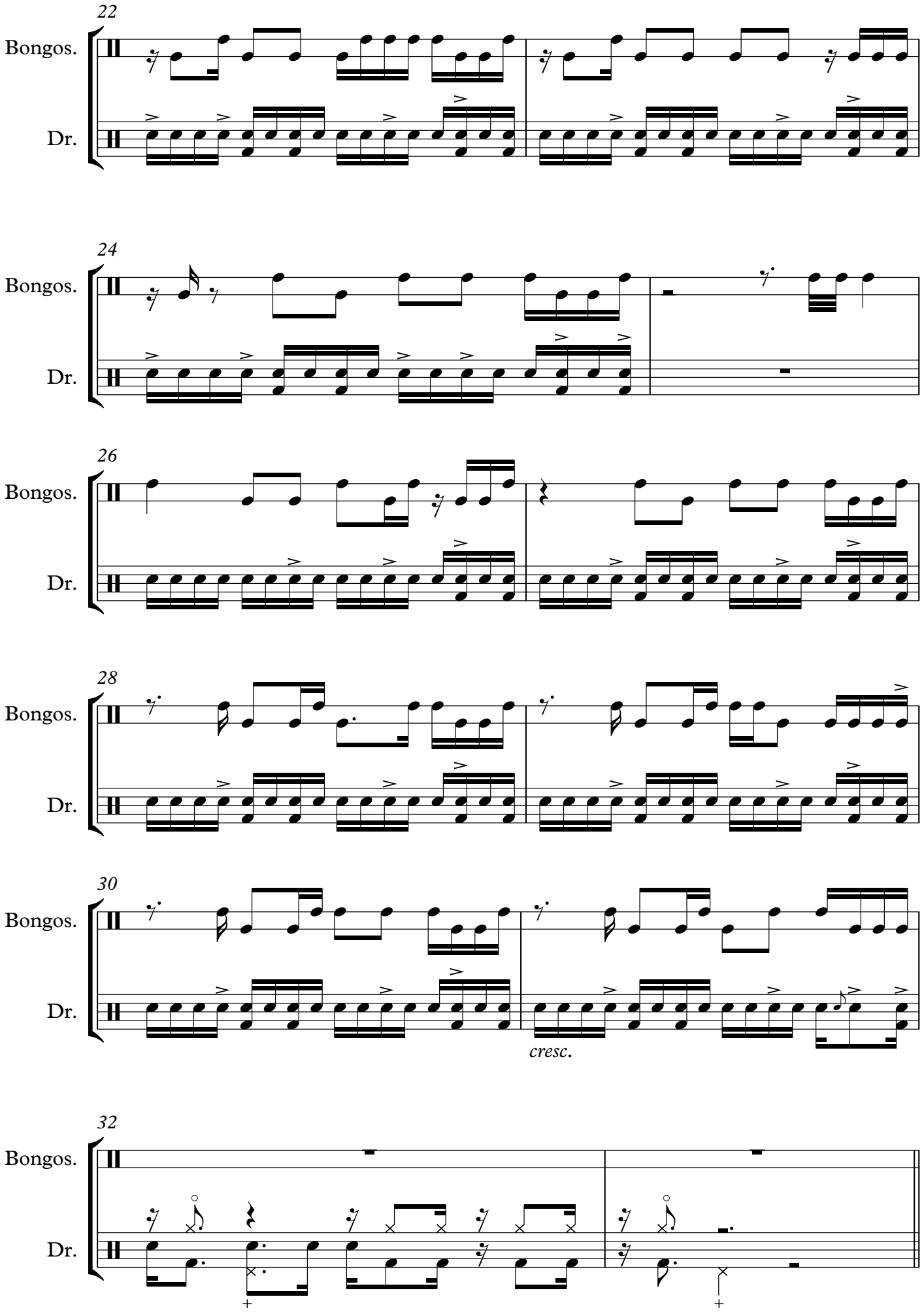
Bongos.
Dr.
20
Bongos.
Dr.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Bongos.
Dr.
24
Bongos.
Dr.
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Dr.
28
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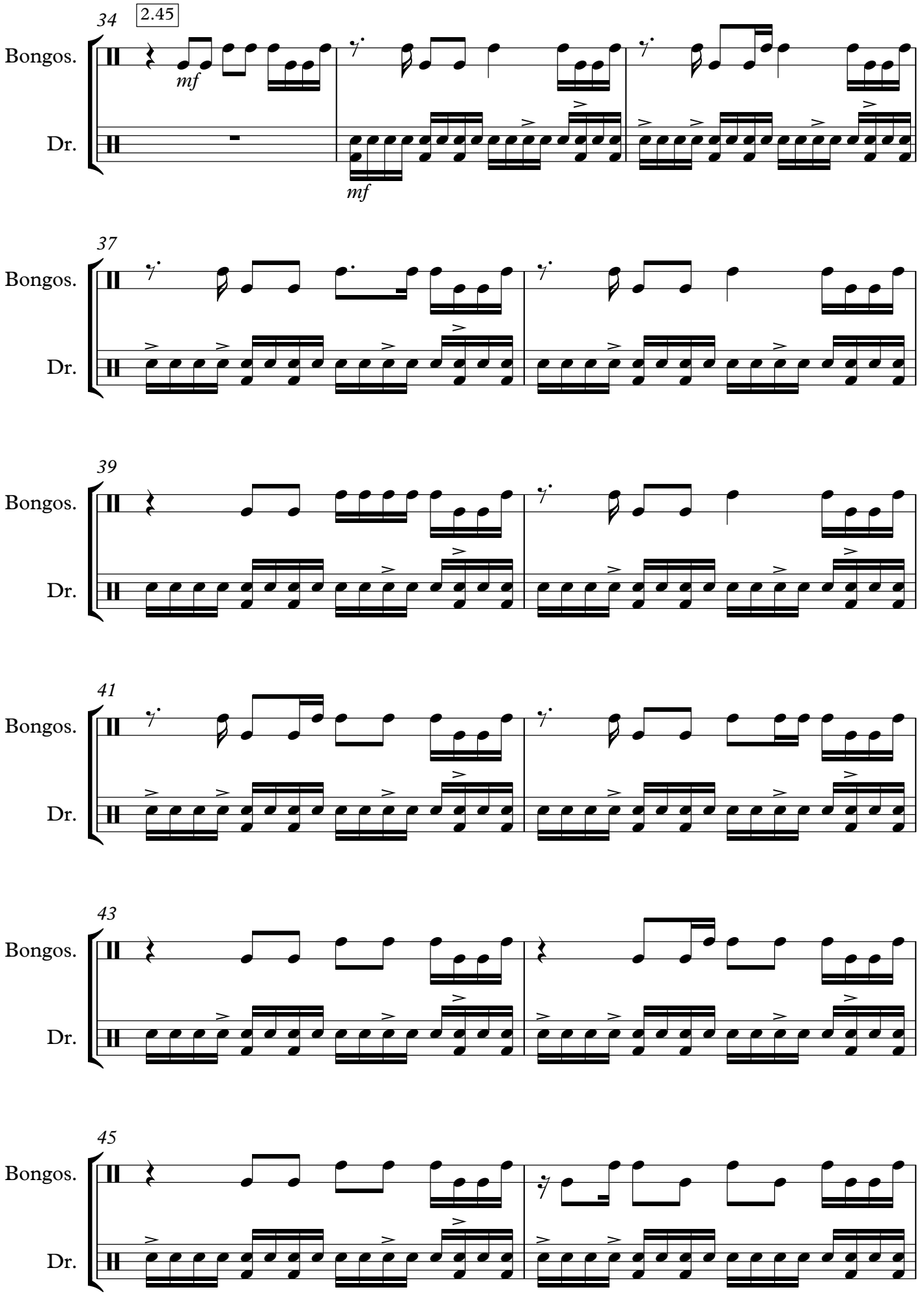
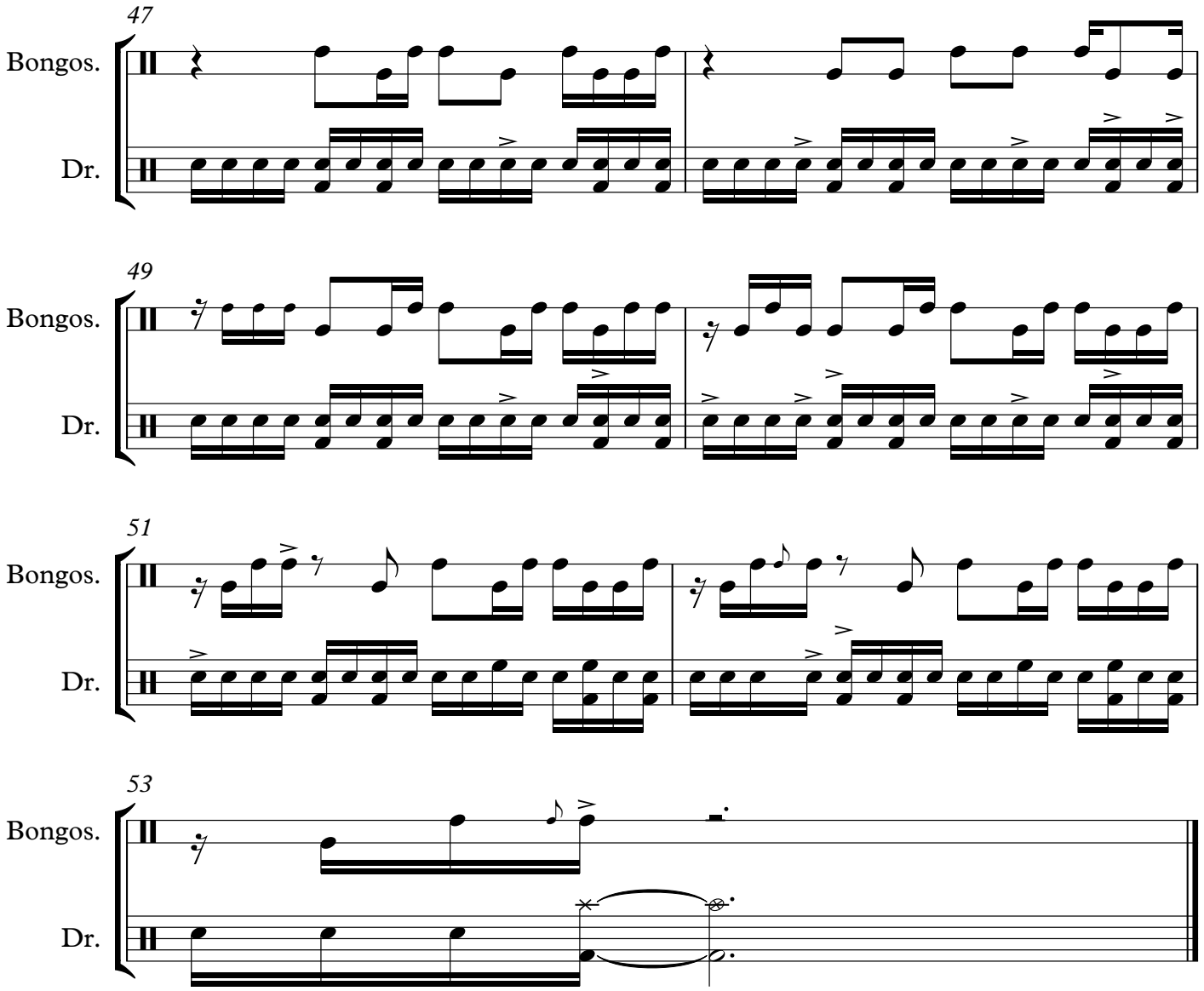
Dr.
30
Bongos.
Dr.
cresc.
32
Bongos.
Dr.

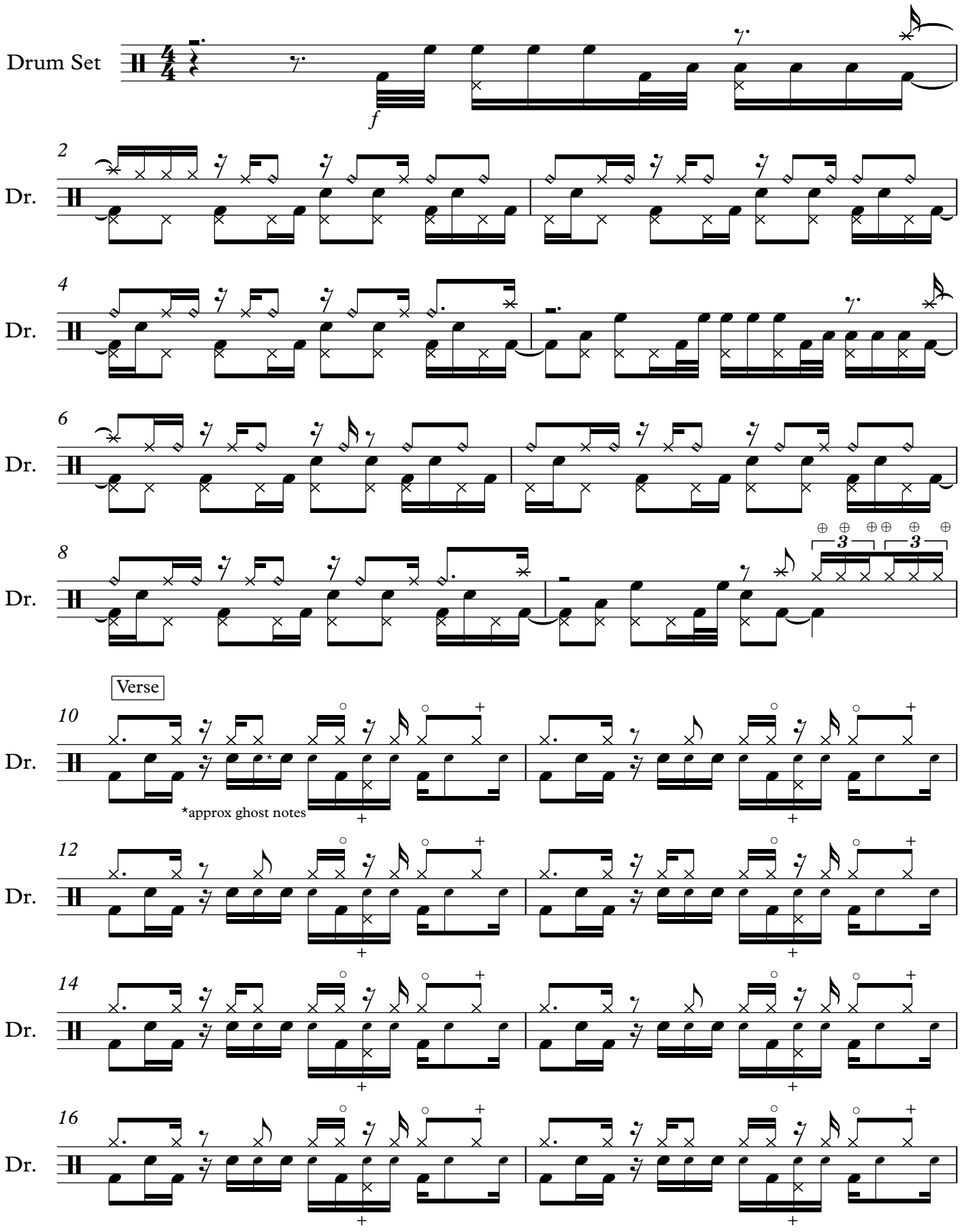

34
2.45
Bongos.
Dr.
mf
mf
37
Bongos.
Dr.
39
Bongos.
Dr.
41
Bongos.
Dr.
43
Bongos.
Dr.
45
Bongos.
Dr.

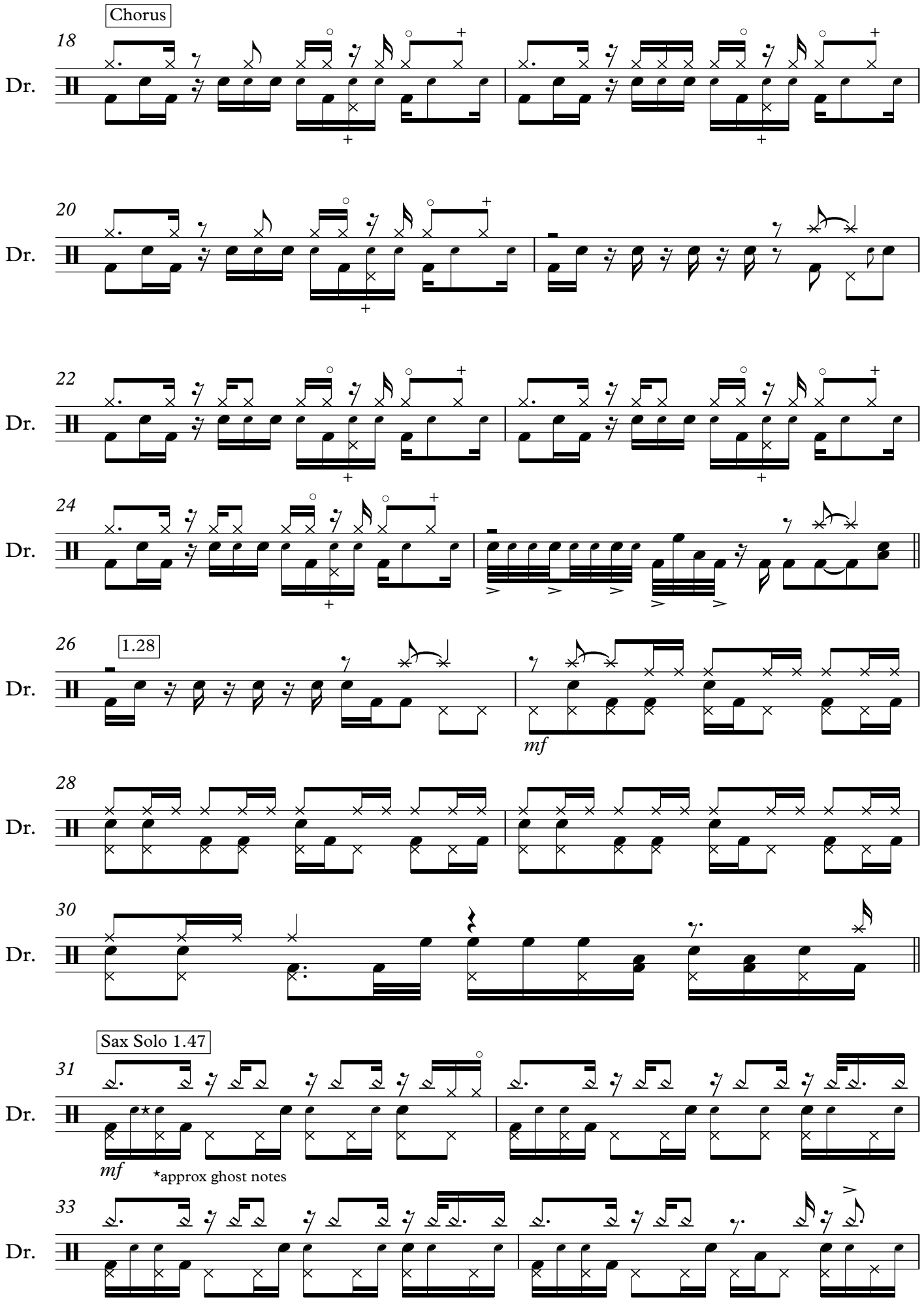

47
Bongos.
Dr.
49
Bongos.
Dr.
51
Bongos.
Dr.
53
Bongos.
Dr.

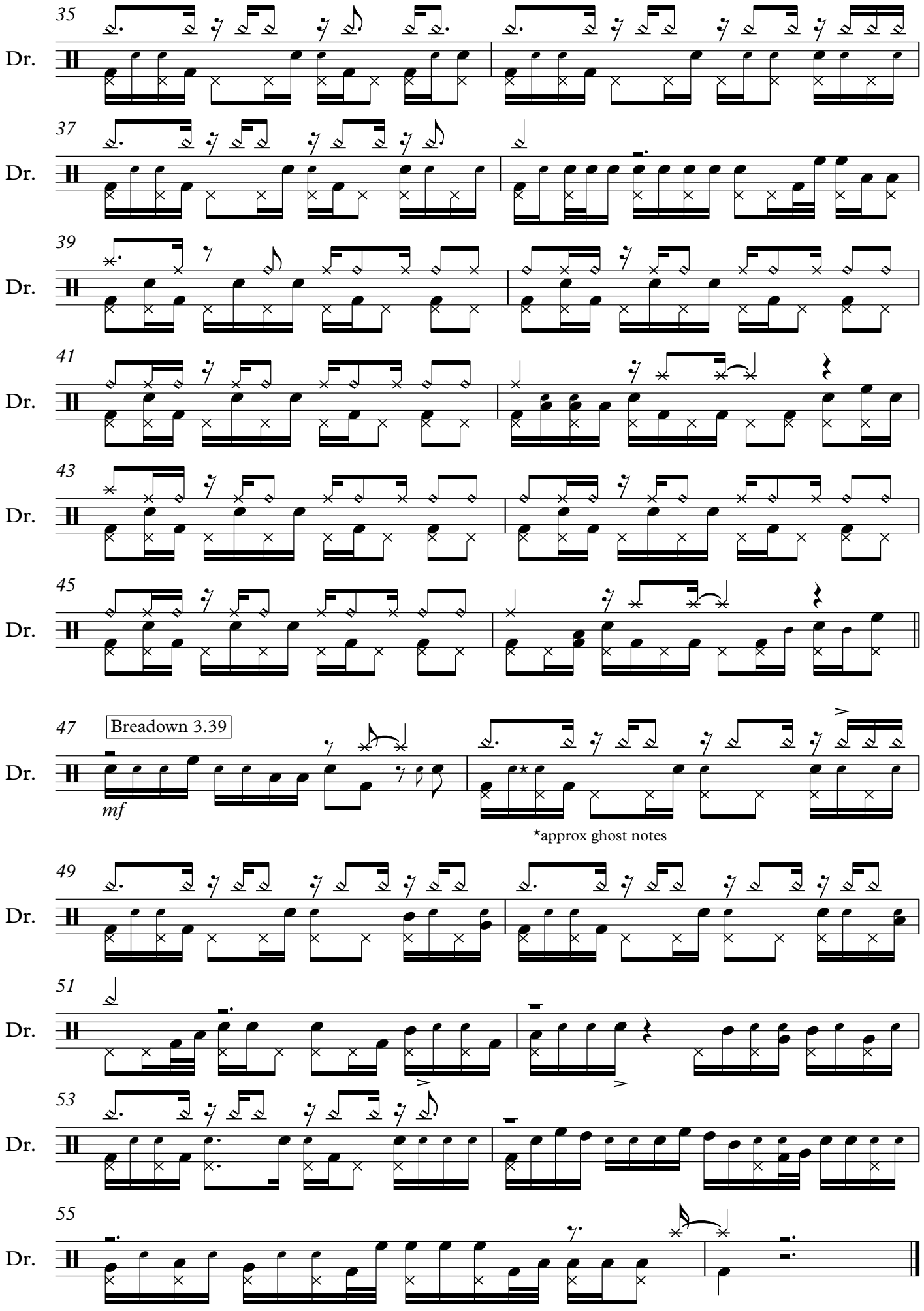
Soul Vaccination (Live)

1999
Soul Vaccination - Tower Of Power Live
Tower Of Power
David Garibaldi

♩ = 110



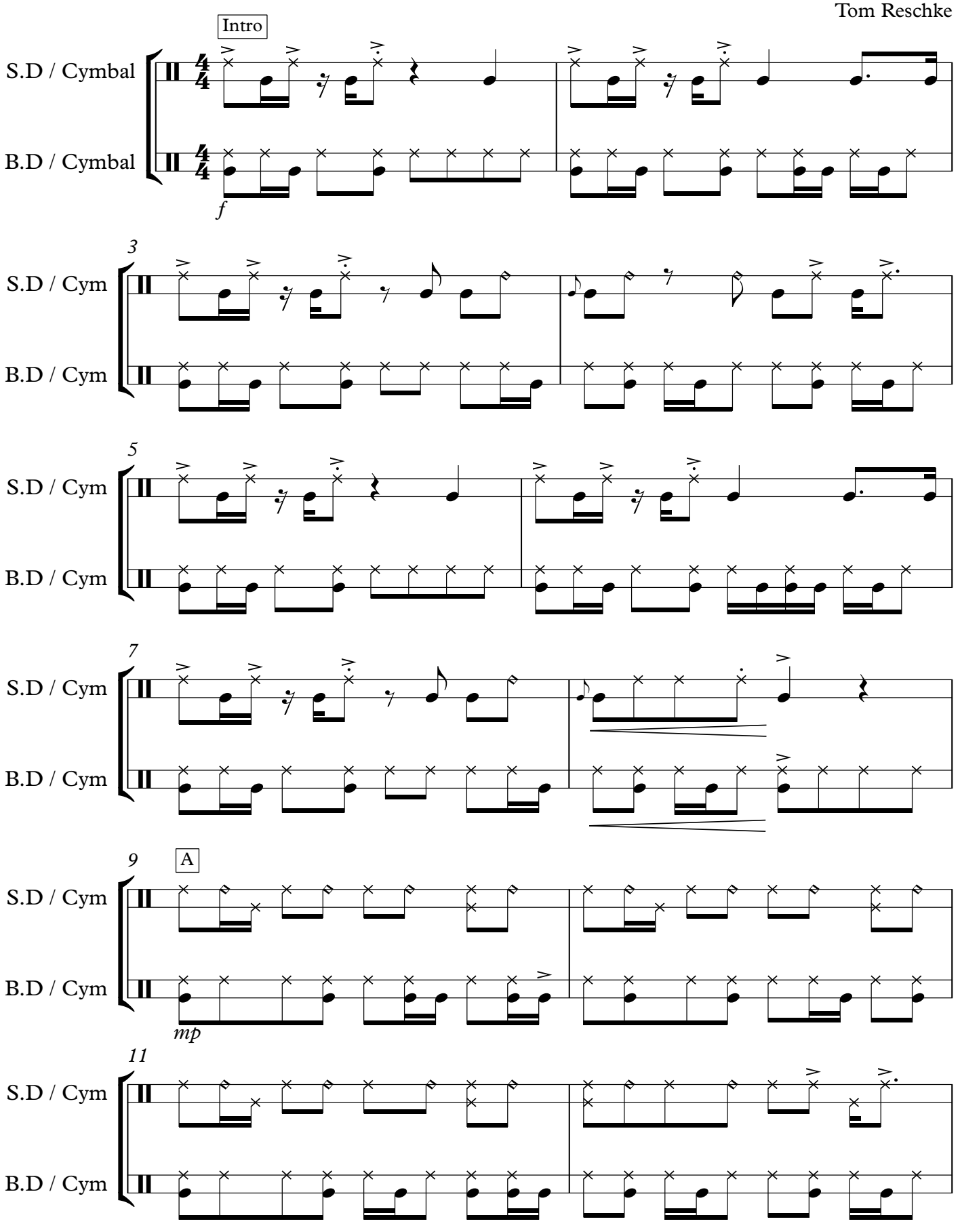

Chorus
18
Dr.
20
Dr.
22
Dr.
24
Dr.
26
1.28
Dr.
mf
28
Dr.
30
Dr.
Sax Solo 1.47
31
Dr.
mf
*approx ghost notes
33
Dr.

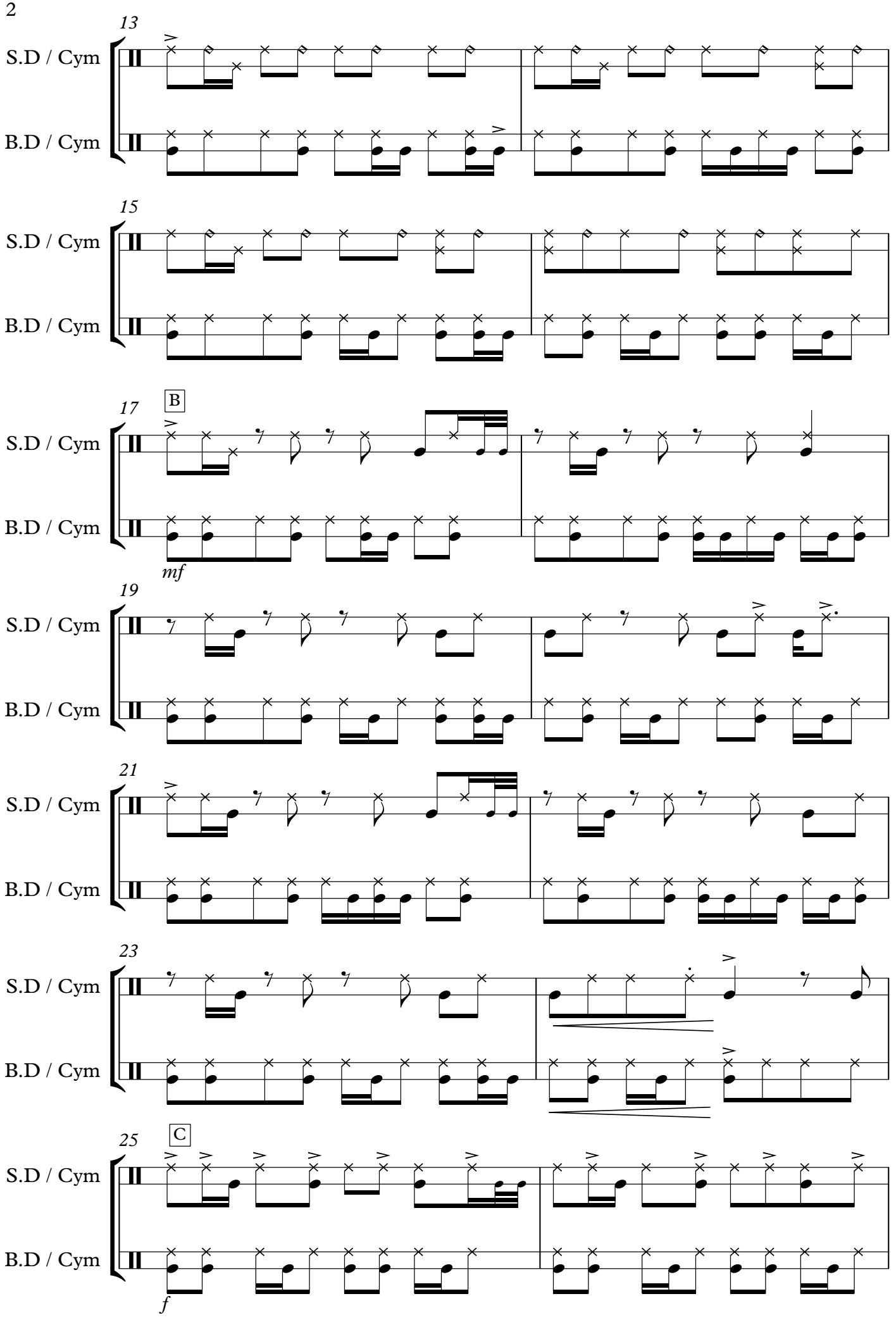

35
Dr.
37
Dr.
39
Dr.
41
Dr.
43
Dr.
45
Dr.
47
Breadown 3.39
Dr.
mf
*approx ghost notes
49
Dr.
51
Dr.
53
Dr.
55
Dr.

Brooklyn (Live)

2005
Live. Places.
Youngblood Brass Band
David Henzie-Skogen
Tom Reschke

♩ = 96




13
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
15
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
17
B
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
mf
19
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
21
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
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C
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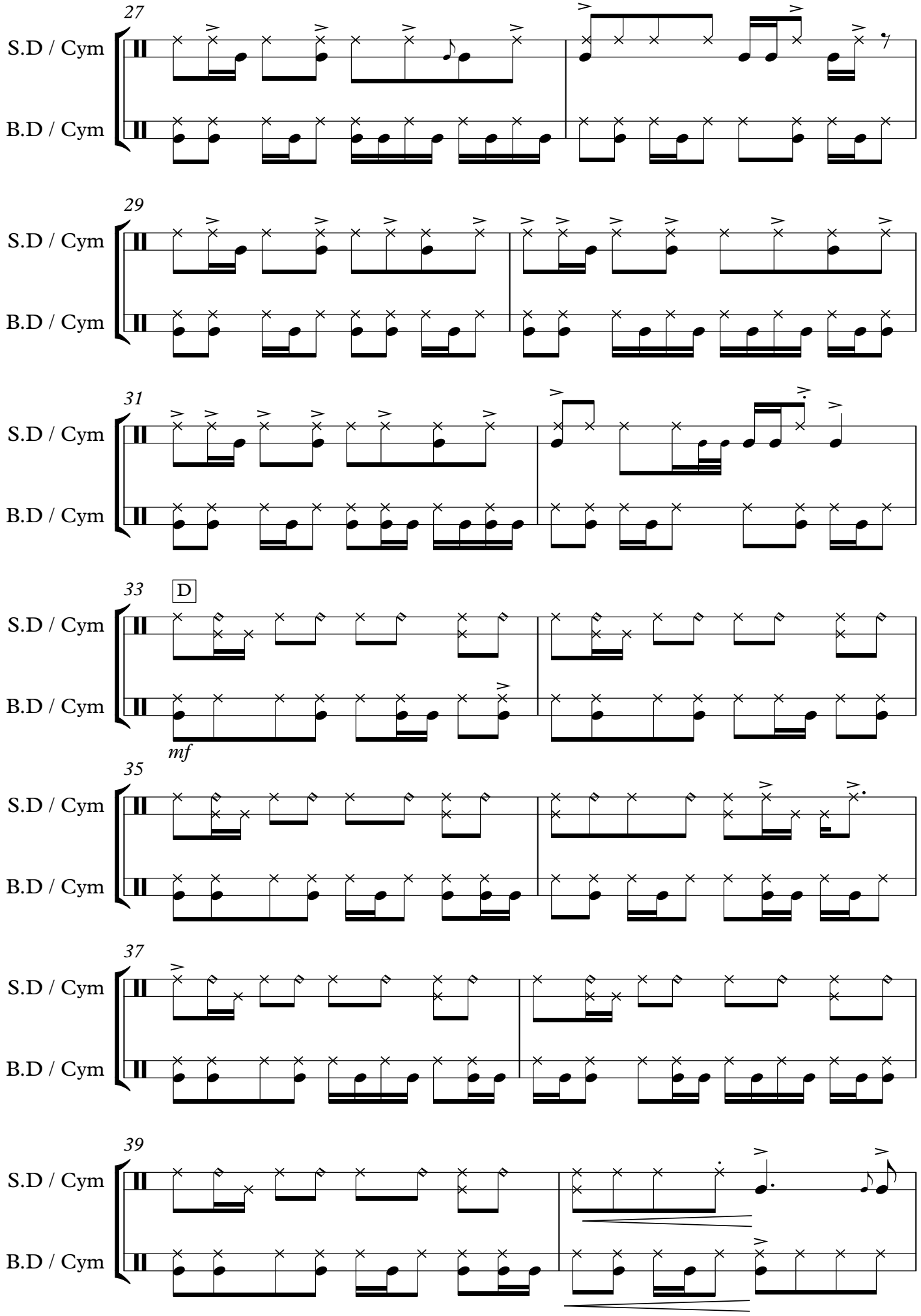
B.D / Cym
f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S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
29
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
31
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
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D
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
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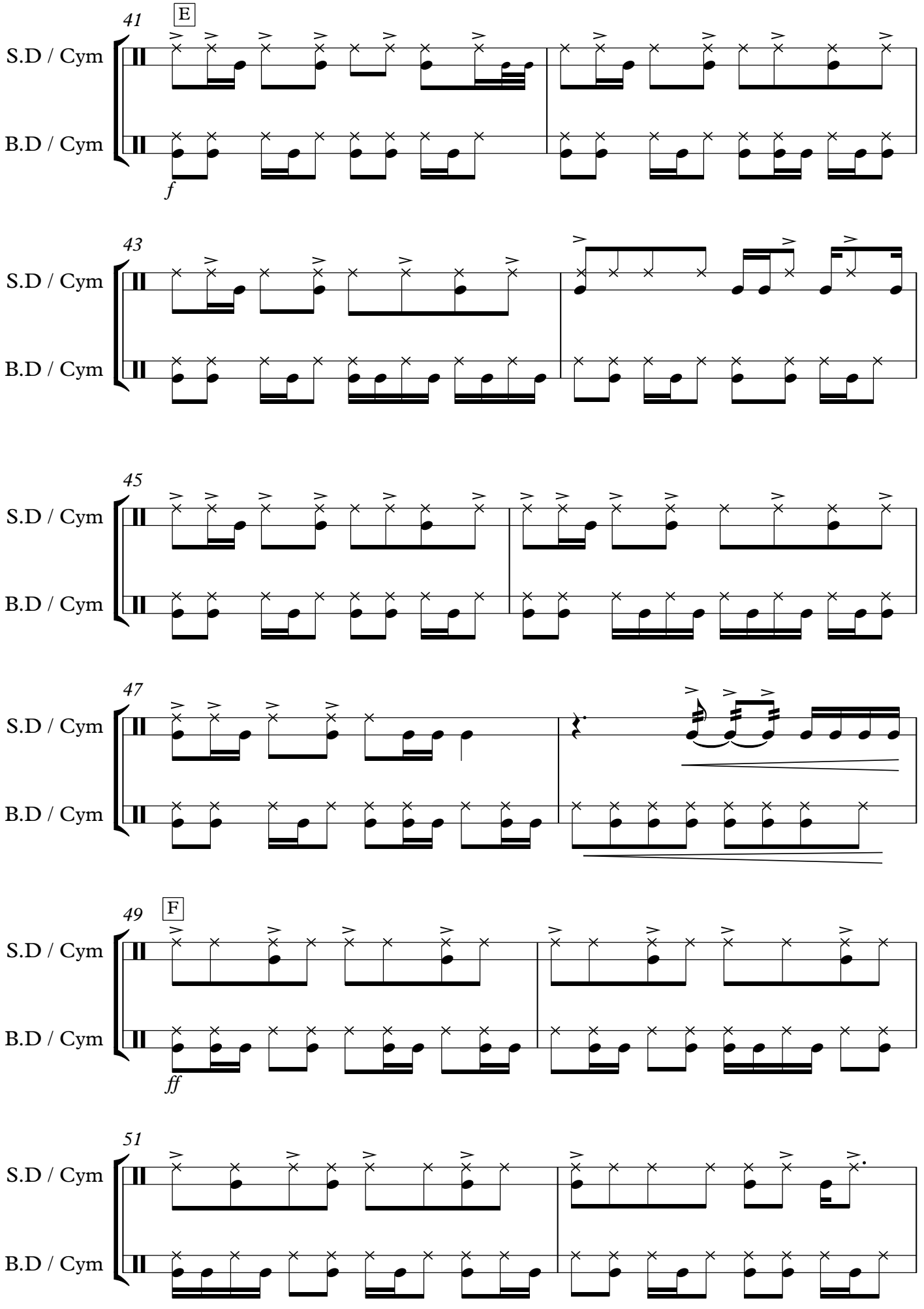
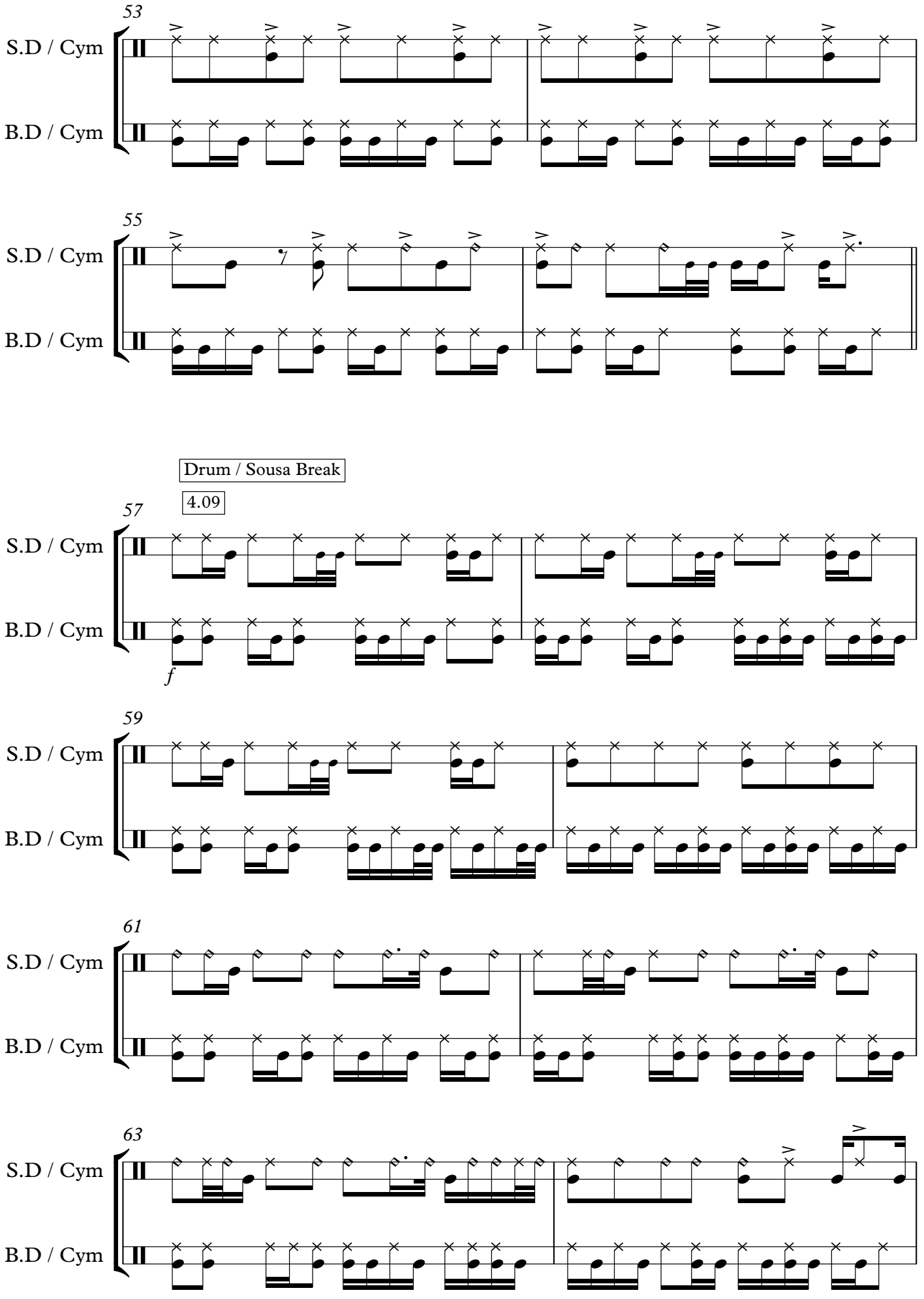
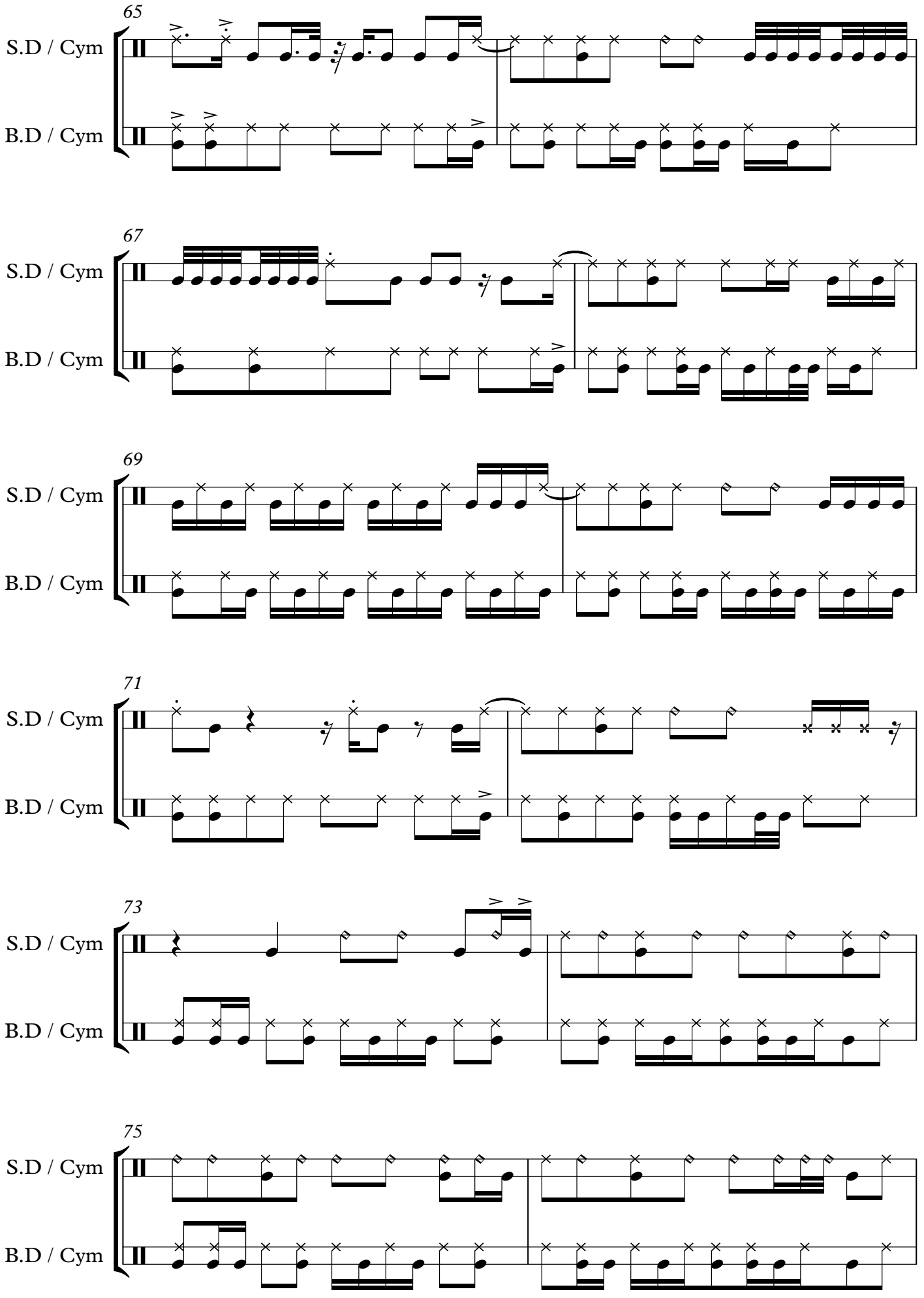
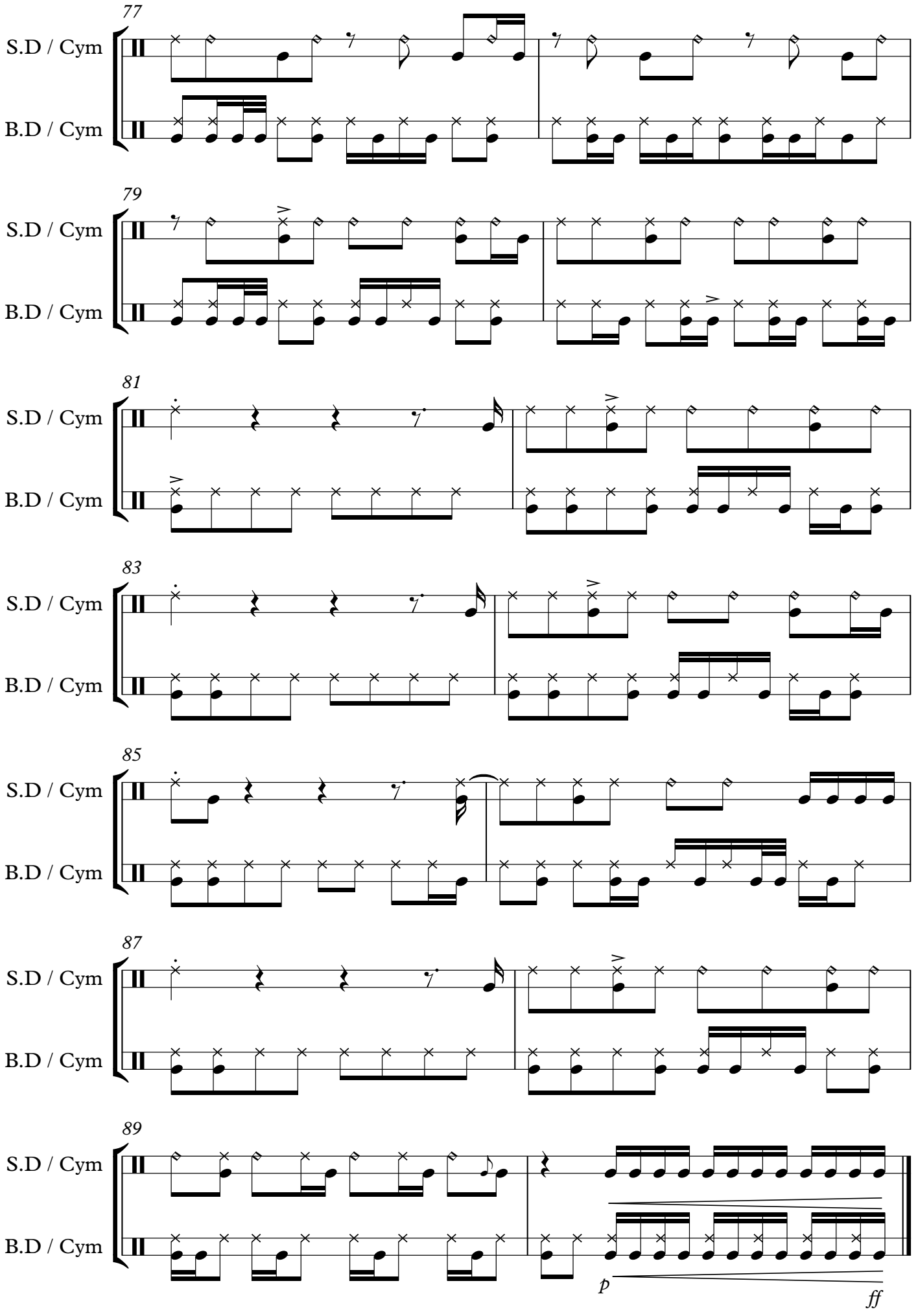
B.D / Cym
39
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym


41
E
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
f
43
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
45
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
47
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
49
F
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
ff
51
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym


53
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
55
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
Drum / Sousa Break
4.09
57
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
f
59
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
61
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
63
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym

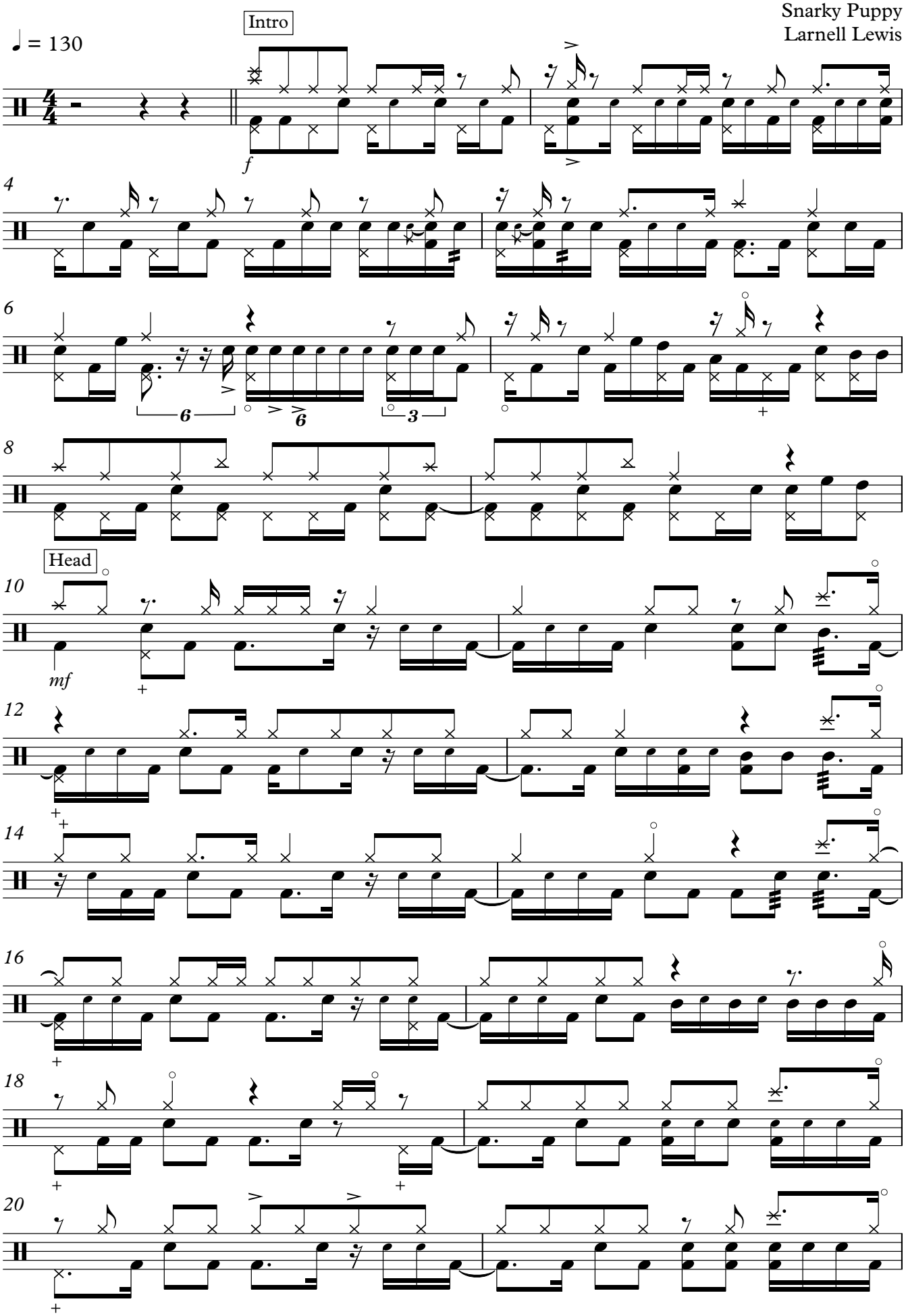

65
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
67
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
69
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
71
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
73
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
75
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym

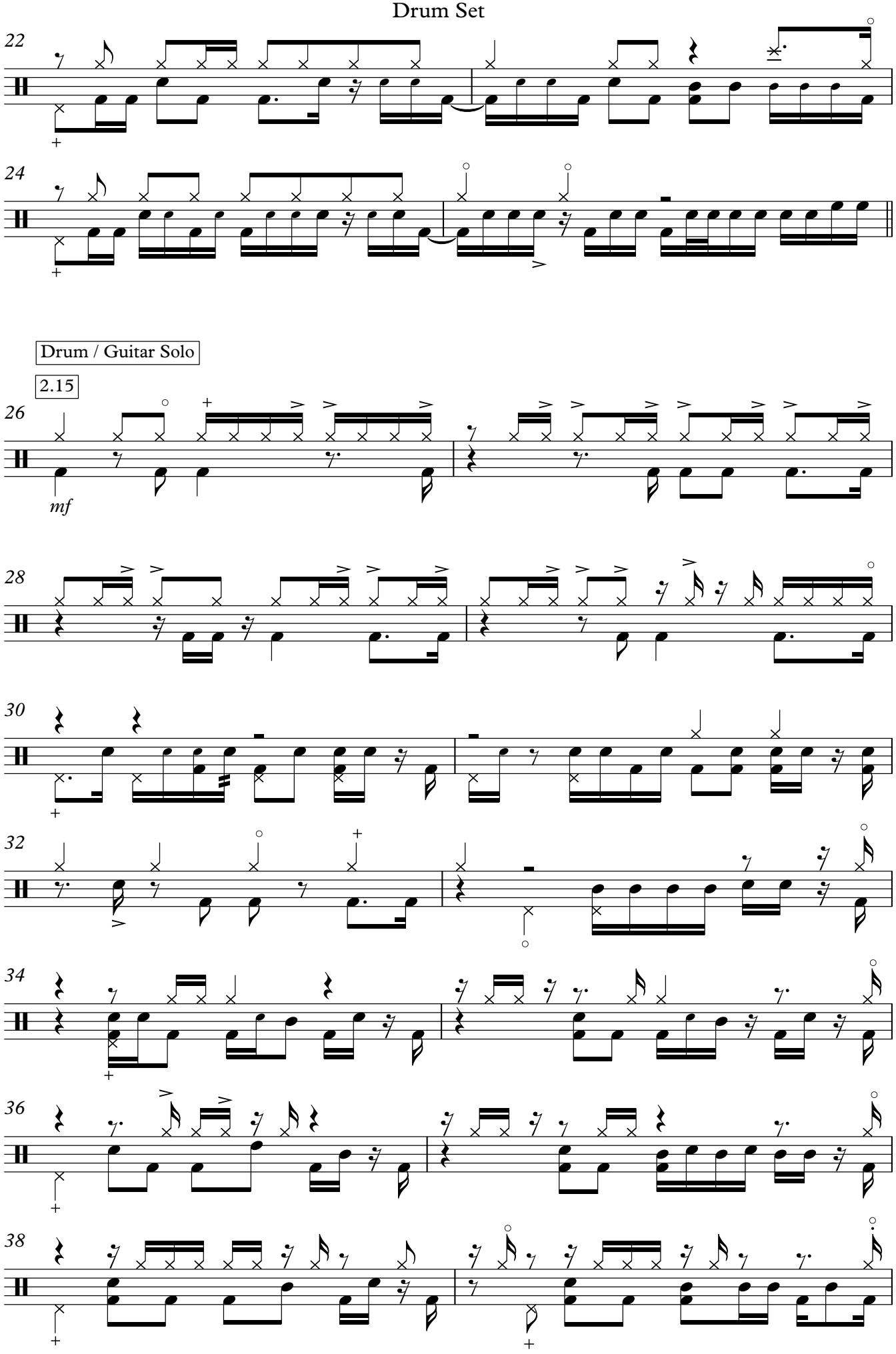

77
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
79
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
81
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
83
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
85
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
87
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
89
S.D / Cym
B.D / Cym
p
ff

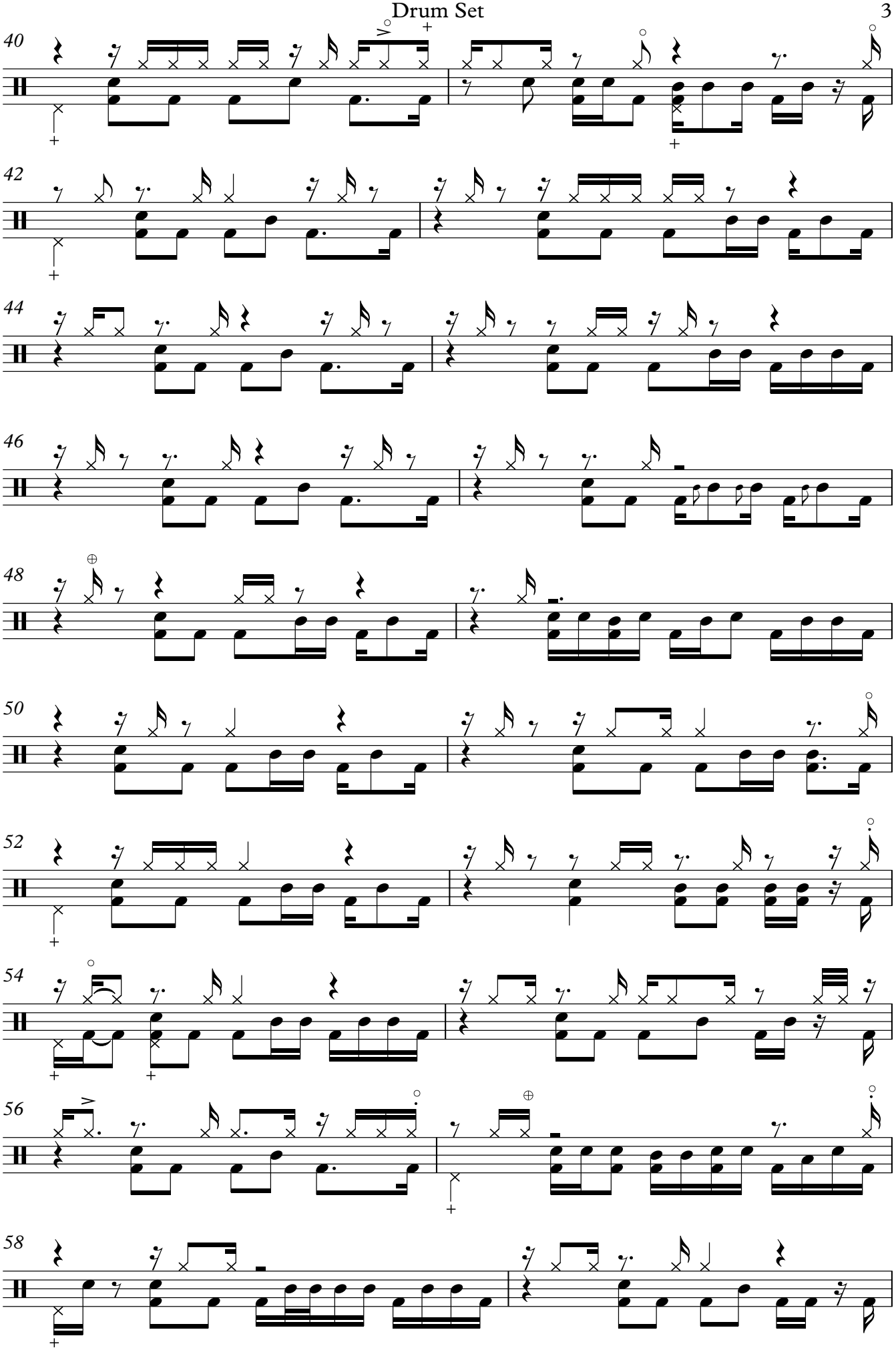
What About Me? (Live)

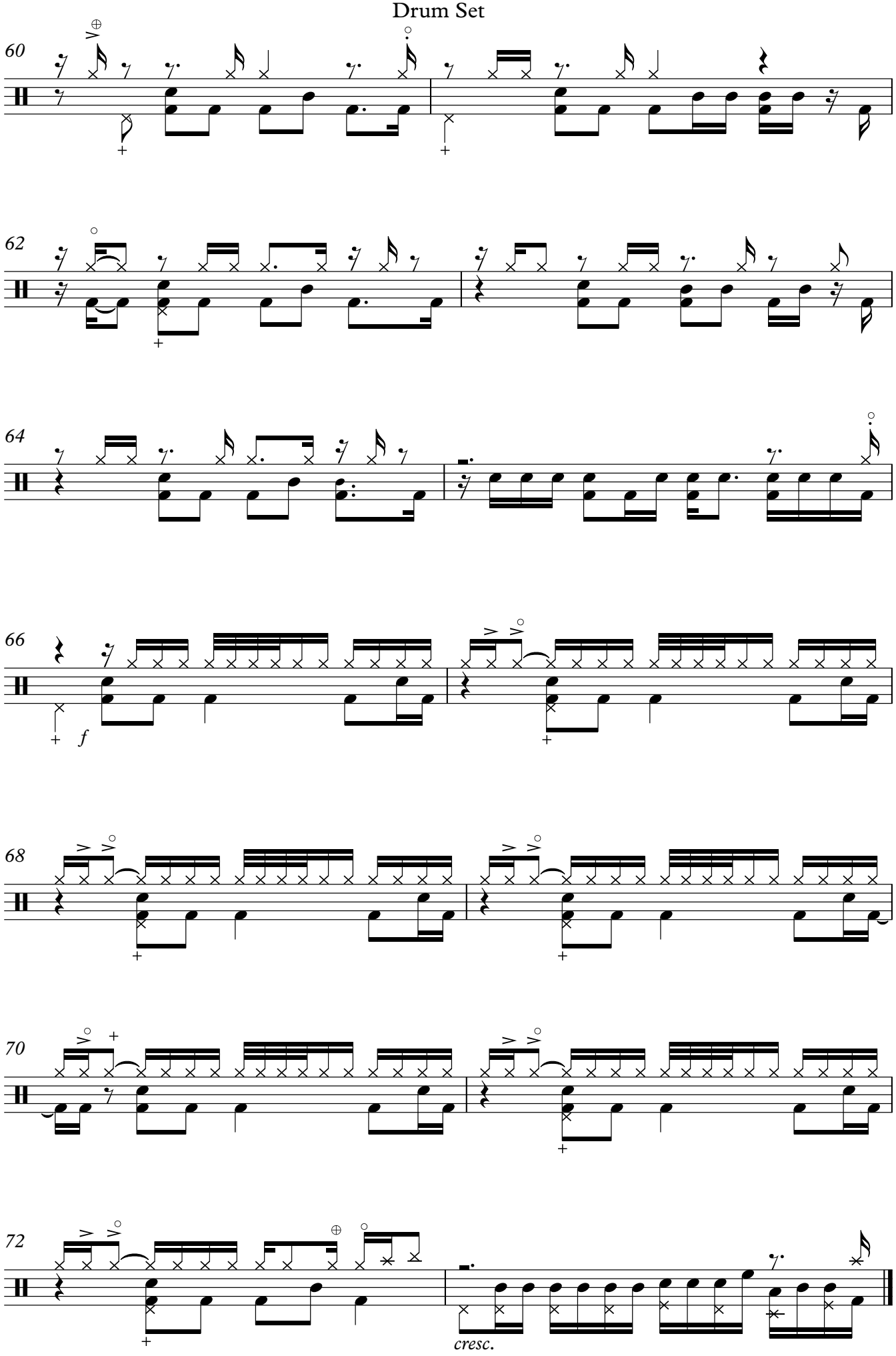
Drum Set

2014
We Like It Here
Snarky Puppy
Larnell Lewis




22
24
Drum / Guitar Solo
2.15
26
mf
28
30
32
34
36
38


40
42
44
46
48
50
52
54
56
58


60
62
64
66
f
68
70
72
cresc.