The Use of African Music in Jazz From 1926-1964: An Investigation of the Life, Influences, and Music of Randy Weston

by

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Batchelor of Music, Berklee College of Music, 2003

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master in Ethnomusicology

University of Pittsburgh

2007

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

There have been many jazz musicians who have utilized traditional African music in their music. Randy Weston was not the first musician to do so, however he was chosen for this thesis because his experiences, influences, and music clearly demonstrate the importance traditional African culture has played in his life.

Randy Weston was born during the Harlem Renaissance. His parents, who lived in Brooklyn at that time, were influenced by the political views that predominated African American culture. Weston's father, in particular, felt a strong connection to his African heritage and instilled the concept of pan-Africanism and the writings of Marcus Garvey firmly into Randy Weston's consciousness. While his father was a great influence on his early childhood, Duke Ellington, one of the most important musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, also influenced Weston. Ellington reinforced the importance Weston's father placed on knowing their African roots. At the same time, Ellington, a dominant musical figure of the Harlem Renaissance, became an important musical influence on Weston.

As Weston grew up, he looked up to the musicians of the bebop revolution. Thelonious Monk, one of the most significant contributors to the bebop revolution, befriended Weston and became a mentor to the young man. In Monk, Weston recognized the spirit of an African master.

While Weston learned to interpret music similar to Monk's style, he also developed a keener sense of African aesthetics through his relationship with Monk.

Weston took every opportunity to hear and learn about traditional African music. He went to performances, listened to recordings and interacted with African delegates at the United Nations. Weston's interest and research in traditional African music integrated with the growing cultural interest in Africa among the general African American population during the 1950s. The turbulence during this period of intense civil rights activism encouraged Weston's attempts to merge African music with jazz and he composed *Uhuru Afrika*. All of the above influences helped Randy Weston to be conscious of his heritage. Through his musical output he was able to connect with that heritage in a way that was significant to him.

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INTRODUCTION

In an article written in 1973 for the journal, *Black Perspectives in Music,* J.H. Kwanbena Nketia highlights the important and continual relationship between African and African American music. Nketia states "The relationship between African and Afro-American music is dynamic and unbroken at the conceptual level in spite of the differences in materials to which these concepts are applied."[1] This statement articulates the importance of understanding that African music was vital in the creation of African American music, not only at its inception, but it also continues to be influential in the development of African American music in modern times. This relationship has not always been recognized in past music scholarship. Nketia says, "The importance of the music of Africa in historical studies of Afro-American music has tended to be seen more as providing a point of departure than as something that continues to be relevant to the present."[2] There have been some studies that have attempted to give African music credit for the continual influence it has had on African American music; however, Nketia's words are as relevant today as they were in 1973.

It is my intention to present a study that is sensitive to the claims made by Nketia. The work presented here identifies the continued application of traditional African musical and cultural traits in jazz composition and performance. While this study is primarily focused on the work of pianist Randy Weston, there were many jazz musicians who influenced his work and

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[1] J.H. Kwanbena Nketia, "The Study of African and Afro-American Music" *Black Perspectives in Music* 1:1, (Spring 1973), 9.
[2] *Ibid,* 8.

some of their work is assessed in this paper, as it applies to the use of traditional African materials.

Why is it important to recognize and identify the continued use of traditional African musical traits in African American music? Traditional African cultural traits have played a primary role in the ongoing efforts of African Americans to rectify a culture that was all but taken away during the time of slavery. Recognizing their African roots has also provided African Americans with an avenue by which to travel in their pursuit of equality in a society that has relegated them to second-class citizenship. The importance of recognizing and celebrating African history as an important aspect of African American, and ultimately all, American social structure cannot be underestimated. Without acknowledging and appreciating African history and culture as integral to the shaping of America, African Americans will continue to dwell as second-class citizens; an afterthought in the Anglo dominated development of America. Despite efforts on many fronts to alleviate the problem of inequality, it will exist until African history is placed on the same level as Western history in the shaping of America.

It is to this end that the present project is focused. Music is an important aspect of both African and American culture. Recognizing the continued role traditional African musical traits have played in the shaping of music in America brings us a step closer to acknowledging the important role that African culture as a whole has played in the shaping of American culture.

There have been many jazz musicians who have utilized traditional African music in their music. Randy Weston was not the first musician to do so, however he was chosen for this thesis because his experiences, influences, and music clearly demonstrate the importance traditional African culture has played in his life.

Randy Weston was born during the Harlem Renaissance. His parents, who lived in Brooklyn at that time, were influenced by the political views that predominated African American culture. Weston's father, in particular, felt a strong connection to his African heritage and instilled the concept of pan-Africanism and the writings of Marcus Garvey firmly into Randy Weston's consciousness. While his father was a great influence on his early childhood, Duke Ellington, one of the most important musicians of the Harlem Renaissance, also influenced Weston. Ellington reinforced the importance Weston's father placed on knowing their African roots. At the same time, Ellington, a dominant musical figure of the Harlem Renaissance, became an important musical influence on Weston.

As Weston grew up, he looked up to the musicians of the bebop revolution. Their music was filled with even more African heritage than during the Harlem Renaissance. Thelonious Monk, one of the most significant contributors to the bebop revolution, befriended Weston and became a mentor to the young man. In Monk, Weston recognized the spirit of an African master. While Weston learned to interpret music similar to Monk's style, he also developed a keener sense of African aesthetics through his relationship with Monk.

Weston took every opportunity to hear and learn about traditional African music. He went to performances, listened to recordings and interacted with African delegates at the United Nations. Weston's interest and research in traditional African music integrated with the growing cultural interest in Africa among the general African American population during the 1950s. The turbulence during this period of intense civil rights activism encouraged Weston's attempts to merge African music with jazz and he composed *Uhuru Afrika*. All of the above influences helped Randy Weston to be conscious of his heritage. Through his musical output he was able to connect with that heritage in a way that was significant to him.

The question may be asked, why was Weston so interested in African traditional music? He had already established himself as a prominent jazz pianist before ever recording any African inspired work, so, why did he feel the need to focus so intensely on African music? Weston answers these questions by pointing out, "We are still an African people and to understand ourselves better and understand the world better, Africa being the first civilization, I've got to study and learn about what happened a thousand years ago."[3] In a personal interview, Weston stated, "The history of African people did not begin with slavery but goes back thousands of years."[4] The importance of understanding African history and heritage as it relates to American history and heritage is the first step to improving the lives of African Americans.

Identifying African Material in African American Music

In many of the earliest scholarly work on the music of African Americans, one of the major tasks of scholars was to identify the origins of the musical traits that synthesized to create African American music. Scholars focused their efforts on determining what traits were retained from Africa and what traits were acquired from European influences in the origins of African American music. Often times the general assumption was that the majority of musical techniques used to create African American music were borrowed from Western European culture. This assumption was based on the fact that the culture of African slaves was completely destroyed by the shackles of slavery and as a result, African Americans were forced to survive by adapting to their oppressors' cultural traditions. However, it became clear over time, and with a greater understanding of the material, that African Americans have retained much more of their

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[3] Russ Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, (February 2004) http://www.allaboutjazz.com. (Accessed September 26, 2006).
[4] Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

traditional African culture than was initially thought. The majority of all African American music is the product of the conjunction of African and European music. In his book, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* Melville Herskovists states, "pure African melodies and rhythms may be encountered, but these are exceptions. On the other hand, it is rare to find an [African American] song which, though quite European in melodic line, is not tinged by some African" musical elements.[5]

One problem in investigating African materials in the origins of African American music is determining exactly which materials come directly from Africa and which are from European influences. As a direct result of the transatlantic slave trade, African music has been infused into all aspects of music making throughout the Americas. However, traditional African music material has been retained and utilized to different degrees depending on the environment and situation African slaves were placed into. Herskovits examines the retention of traditional African material in post-slave cultures throughout America and the Caribbean. He suggests that in the Caribbean, influences from many different areas of West Africa are mixed together making it difficult to identify which musical trait came from where. However, in the United States it becomes even more difficult to assign the origins of musical traits. Herskovits states, "not only must the inner combinations of West African types of music be taken into account, but a more far-reaching influence of various European styles as well."[6]

Much of the initial research on African American music focused on early African American folk music. As research began to focus on popular forms of African American music, the line that distinguished African traits from European traits became much harder to draw. "In

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[5] Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, (Boston; Beacon Press 1958), 267.
[6] Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 268.

some instances the general patterns [of African and European traits] approach each other, which complicates the problem where certain similarities of this nature in the two traditions have coalesced and reinforced one another in the New World's" music.[7] This can easily be seen in jazz, where one must struggle at times to decide whether a musical trait is of African decent or of European decent, or perhaps both.

The complete synthesis of African and European musical traits in jazz can, at times make is difficult to distinguish African traits from European traits in the origins of jazz. The present research, however, will not focus on general factors that have aided in the origins of jazz, but rather the role that traditional African music has played as a source of ongoing inspiration and material for the continual development of jazz. The main challenge inherent in this study is to identify which African elements are being employed intentionally in jazz and distinguish those traits from the ones that are responsible for the inception of jazz. In doing so, we shall see that the implementation of traditional African elements in jazz is often an attempt of the jazz artist to identify himself with Africa beyond the capabilities that jazz is able to provide. Therefore, the problem becomes not whether the musical trait is of European or African origin, but is this musical material or technique drawn from the traditions of jazz, or introduced anew from the traditions of Africa. To accomplish the task of identifying newly introduced African elements into jazz I will utilize the concept of African pianism introduced to me by Dr. Akin Euba through his work in Intercultural Musicology. These concepts will be examined and explained in part two of this work.

This thesis is divided into two sections. Part One will focus on the influences that aided in Weston's development. A comprehensive understanding of the influences that were

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[7] Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* 267.

instrumental in shaping Weston's philosophical view of life and his musical output is vital to understanding not only what kind of music Weston produced, but equally important, why he chose to produce jazz infused with African music. To this end the investigation of Weston's influences is admittedly extensive, however, at no point is Weston, the prime subject of this work, lost or forgotten in the investigation of his web of influences. Part One begins with an examination of Weston's earliest influence, Harlem Renaissance. The first half of this thesis culminates with the Civil Rights Movement, at which time Weston was creating an African infused jazz of his own.

Part Two of this thesis is an examination of the use of African music in the compositions and performance of Weston during the early part of his professional career. In this section, Weston's music is analyzed using techniques designed to flush out the intentional use of African musical traits in both large ensemble composition and piano performance.

Once again, it should be noted that Weston was not the only musician to merge traditional African music with jazz between 1926 and 1964, nor was he the first musician to do so. He was chosen as the focus of this thesis because his music provides many accessible examples of jazz merged with African music.

PART I:

MUSICIAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES

CHAPTER 1

Jazz pianist/composer Randy Weston was born in Brooklyn, New York, on April 06, 1926. He is best known in the jazz community for his use of traditional African material in both written compositions and improvisation. Weston was not born or raised in Africa, but in Brooklyn; therefore, he had to study and research traditional African music in order to become familiar with it enough to compose using African elements.

From an early age Weston sought out a diverse musical education. "I used to get early Folkways recordings- prison songs, field hollers, the old blues- so I was already searching."[8] His parent's had a love of music and African American heritage encouraged Weston's search. "I grew up listening to Negro spirituals on my mother's side, I listened to a lot of West Indian calypso on Pop's side. So when I went over there, [to Africa] I heard both in their raw form. I heard the basic rhythms that I recognized from the calypso music, and I heard some of the singing and hand clapping that I heard in the church on my mom's side."[9]

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[8] Russ Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, (February 2004) http://www.allaboutjazz.com. (Accessed September 26, 2006)
[9] I. Gitler "Randy Weston," *Down Beat* issue 31.6 1964 p 36.

Weston's father influenced him greatly by introducing him to the music and concepts popular during the Harlem Renaissance. "My father took me to see Duke [Ellington] and Andy Kirk at the Sonia Ballroom and Brooklyn Palace. We'd hear [calypso bands] Duke of Iron and Macbeth in Harlem… we listened to [my mothers] spirituals. I grew up in a rich culture, a rich period."[10] The rich period Weston talks about, the Harlem Renaissance period, most certainly had a profound influence on Weston's childhood development.

In addition to listening to diverse styles of music, Weston also searched out books to read. "As a boy I was always going to libraries, and my father would have at home books to learn more about my history, my heritage, because I certainly wasn't getting it in the schools."[11] Weston's father always tried to instill the importance of Weston's African heritage; he would say, "Africa is the past, the present, and the future."[12] Weston's father was a Panamanian born Jamaican and was very interested in the cultural writings of Marcus Garvey.[13] We will see shortly that the writings of Marcus Garvey had a profound effect on Randy Weston. Garvey's writing was also paramount in shaping the Harlem Renaissance. Therefore the Harlem Renaissance must be examined, as it had a profound effect on Weston's childhood. Concepts brought to light during the movement influenced his parents. These were the first influences on Weston as a child.

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[10] Fred Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival" *Downbeat*, November 1990, p.20
[11] Musto, "African Rhythms," February 2004
[12] Ted Panken "African Soul" *Down Beat*, October 1, 1998, p.20
[13] Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival," p.20

Harlem At The Turn of The Century

African American communities in the North were small and scattered before World War I. Even in large cities like New York, African American communal enclaves were restricted to only a few blocks and were surrounded by white communities. One example is the well-known community of Harlem. Originally Harlem was primarily an upper class white neighborhood and African Americans were restricted to a very small section of the neighborhood.[14] However, just before the turn of the century the African American population began to increase and Harlem soon became very influential in the history of African American culture.

The development of northern African American communities began around 1880 when African Americans started to move away from southern rural areas into northern urban areas. This transition became known as the Great Migration. The Great Migration began slowly, around 1880, and turned into a flood that lasted until after World War I.[15] During this time, it is estimated that about five million rural southern African Americans migrated to urban areas and northward to escape the racial humiliation and persecution they faced on a daily basis "on the streets of every southern town."[16]

As African Americans began to migrate north, they also began to gravitate toward major cities. Despite the close quarters of urban living, southern African Americans felt a sense of freedom there, because they were able to escape much of the racial discrimination they had experienced in the rural South. The greatest numbers of African Americans fled from

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[14] Jim Haskins, *The Cotton Club*, (New York; Hippocrene Books, 1977.)

[15] Robert Darden, *People Get Ready: A New History of Black Gospel Music*, (New York: Continuum, 2004), 131.

Bernice Johnson Reagon, *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition.* (Lincoln; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001) 13

[16] Darden, *People Get Ready,* 131.

Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. They traveled primarily toward the flourishing industrial cities of Chicago, Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and New York, where new jobs were most abundant.[17]

Newly transplanted African Americans faced new hardships as they moved northward. In many places, long established northern African Americans had assimilated the customs of northern Anglo Americans, particularly their religious customs. Southern African Americans faced a new challenge with these peer groups and were not easily accepted into these pre-established African American communities. Oftentimes as a result, migrating African Americans were forced to form their own communities and establish their own cultural centers.

In the 1890's the first wave of African Americans from the "Great Migration" hit New York City. At the same time, eager real estate investors began building in Harlem at a very aggressive pace. The influx of new African American residents combined with the overdevelopment of Harlem caused African Americans to gravitate to Harlem and settle there. At the time, Harlem was full of new construction; it was a nice, clean and new neighborhood. Not only were African Americans moving there, African American institutions also began moving their businesses to Harlem from downtown.[18]

With the commencement of World War I in 1914, many European immigrants who had settled in New York City went back to their homelands to fight for their respective countries. This caused an abrupt halt to immigration of Europeans during the war. As a result, New York City was left with a labor shortage in industrial and munitions jobs. Fortunately, many of the African Americans who had relocated to the pristine new buildings of Harlem filled these jobs.

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[17] Darden, *People Get Ready*, 131.
[18] Haskins, *The Cotton Club*, 1977

Thus, migrating African Americans were fortunate to fall upon an ideal set of circumstances; a city with an abundance of jobs and affordable, desirable housing. As a result, Harlem residents were subsequently able to sustain an affluent living and a culturally rich, high quality of life.

The prosperous war times for African Americans living in New York created a unique situation in Harlem. Harlem was unique because it was the only black community to form in an exclusive residential area, and it was the largest community of African Americans in the North. However, like many neighborhoods in New York City at the time, Harlem did have its seedy side. The mob controlled many of the entertainment establishments and as a result, gambling, prostitution, and drugs soon found their way into the neighborhood. However, for the most part, Harlem in the early twentieth century was prosperous and the community attracted many of America's most talented black artists. These artists found Harlem to be welcoming. They were able to perform in front of America's largest African American audiences. They were embraced by a group of their peers in a way that they had never experienced in predominantly white communities. The large gathering of artistic personalities, political writers and activists, and the variety of opportunities for self-expression created what is now referred to as the Harlem Renaissance.

Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance began in the 1920s. While the Great Migration and development of Harlem were important factors that helped to bring about the Harlem Renaissance, this movement ultimately grew out of political activities of African Americans who were working hard to promote African American civil rights and cultural heritage. One of the most important concepts of the time was that of the Pan-African movement. According to

Samuel A. Floyd Jr., in his book, *The Power of Black Music*, Pan-Africanism is the "belief that black people all over the world share an origin and a heritage, that the welfare of black people everywhere is inexorably linked, and that the cultural products of blacks everywhere should express their particular fundamental beliefs."[19] Floyd continues by stating, "Pan-African thought seeks to glorify the African past, inculcate pride in African values, and promote unity among all people of African descent. Pan-African thinking was set off in part by the transatlantic slave trade and was intensified by the Haitian Revolution on 1804 and the onset of nineteenth century colonialism in Africa."[20] Harlem's influential political leaders believed in the ideologies established by the concept of Pan-Africanism. Furthermore, they had great respect for one of Pan-Africanism's most vocal advocates Marcus Garvey.

Marcus Garvey

The concept of Pan-Africanism Floyd identifies, is often associated with the writing of Marcus Garvey. His concepts were very important to the development of the Harlem Renaissance. As Jim Haskins suggests, the Harlem community became a large captive audience for writers such as Marcus Garvey and his back to Africa movement.[21] Garvey is credited with instilling a sense of African nationalistic pride and unity throughout the diaspora. Garvey was born in Jamaica in 1887, he moved to England in 1912, at that time he created the Universal Negro Improvement Foundation; the U.N.I.F. He had a particularly strong impact in New York where he spent time in 1916.

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[19] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1995), 100.
[20] *Ibid,* 100.
[21] Haskins, *The Cotton Club*, 1977.

John D. Baskerville also recognizes Marcus Garvey's contributions to the Harlem Renaissance. He states, "Garvey brought to the United States in 1916 a movement designed to redeem Africans in the diaspora."[22] In explaining the importance of Garvey's writings on African Americans at the time of the Harlem Renaissance, Baskerville states, "To promote unity throughout the diaspora, Garvey espoused race consciousness through a concept called 'African fundamentalism'. It was a concept that signified a psychological return to Africa, along with the glorification of African cultural values and history and the rejection of outside influences."[23]

Garvey's work, and the impact he had on African Americans during the Harlem Renaissance is recognized by many scholars. L.W. Levine wrote, "Garvey utilized the idea of Africa to touch deeply many of the yearnings and needs of his people. He was preaching more than the redemption of Africa, he was preaching the redemption of the entire Negro people, the revitalization of the entire black race."[24] These views of Marcus Garvey highlight the important role his writings played in shaping the activities of the multitude of artists in Harlem during this Renaissance period.

Garvey's work is also important in understanding the nature of the artistic products produced during the Harlem Renaissance. As Floyd states, "African Americans were inspired by a growing awareness of the African civilizations that had once flourished along the Nile, Tigris, and Euphrates rivers. They longed to restore African culture to a position of respect, and they used what they knew of African and African-American folk art and literature of times past and

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[22] John D. Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz Music of the 1960s and 1970s*, (Lampter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2003), 67.
[23] *Ibid,* 68.
[24] L. W. Levine, "Marcus Garvey and the politics of revitalization," In *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, John Hope Franklin and August Meier, (Eds.) (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982,) 129.

current in an attempt to create new cultural forms."[25] The Harlem Renaissance was not so much concerned with emulating a romanticized foreign culture. It was a rebirth of African American heritage. African American's wished to embrace and express that part of themselves that they had been forced to repress for so long. However, these valuable cultural traits of Africa were at the time considered inferior to the European cultural traits that dominated America.

The Perception of Africa in America during the Harlem Renaissance

The American perception of Africa and African cultural traits at the time of the Harlem Renaissance was of central importance to the artistic products created during this time period. At this time in America and throughout the Western world, Africa was portrayed as a primitive and savage land. A land filled with savage tribal people who were stuck in the ancient past. In the eyes of the West, Africa was a link to the primitive past and existed much lower on the evolutionary scale than Western Civilization.

The view of Africa as a land filled with primitive and savage people was one fabricated by Western scholars as they sought to understand their own beginnings. Scholars saw modern foraging societies in Africa as a depiction of primitive life in Europe. They viewed these societies as devoid of history and having remained stagnant for centuries. The perception of a primitive and savage Africa was strong and it permeated throughout America during the Harlem Renaissance.

It is evident by the scholarship of the time that there was substantial ignorance of African cultural activities. In many cases, scholars misinterpreted traditional African musical techniques. They deemed many axiomatic African musical techniques as having European origins, and by

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[25] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music, 106.*

doing so, they show a Eurocentric persuasion in their research. In his work, *The Myth of the Negro Past,* Melville Herskovits gives examples of scholars who attempted to find traditional African material in African American folk music. Herskovits presents a study done by Erich M. Von Hornbostel, in which Hornbostel states that "the outstanding aspects of the [African American] spirituals are European, such characteristics as the pentatonic scale, 'Scotch Snap,' and a tendency to harmonize in thirds all being well known traits of white folk music. "[26] In fact, Hornbostel identifies only one feature of African derivation, that being call and response. This type of thought typifies the lack of insight about traditional African musical materials in use in the United States. For although the musical techniques mentioned in Honbostel's research may have been found in Europe, they were also present in traditional African music well before Europeans had contact with West Africa. It was the collective opinion of the West that African music consisted of tribal drums and jungle noises and of little else. However, many of the musical techniques assumed by Honbostel, and other scholars to be of European origin would eventually be recognized as African and would come to play an important role in the music of the Harlem Renaissance.

Music of the Harlem Renaissance

At the outset, the Renaissance movement began "primarily as a literary movement," music contributed only marginally.[27] However, as the movement progressed music soon became its defining factor. According to Floyd, the initial attempts of musicians during the Harlem

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[26] Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 263.
[27] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Music in the Harlem Renaissance: An Overview," in *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: a collection of Essays.* Ed. Floyd, Jr. (New York; London: Greenwood Press, 1990,) 3.

Renaissance were to produce works of art that white Americans would respect for their excellence. It was the hope of Renaissance leaders to mold African Americans into people "who would attend concerts and operas."[28] Composers began producing music in the mold of western art music with the hope that this would raise the status of African Americans in the eyes of Anglo Americans by demonstrating intellectual parity of African Americans through the production of musical works, along with other forms of art and literature.[29] From these efforts came works in extended musical forms such as symphonies and operas. At the same time, these works began using raw materials from African American folk heritage such as spirituals, in an attempt to foster a sense of pride in African American folk material. It seems as though the perception of African musical material as being inferior to that of Western European music was part of the reason for the attempt to emulate the Western style.

Initially, entertainment music, such as blues and jazz were ignored in favor of concert music. Perhaps this was because jazz and the blues represented an aspect of African American culture that would not allow it to acclimate to Anglo American cultural aesthetics. In the end however, it was jazz and the blues that proved to be the most successful styles of music, and they flourished during the Harlem Renaissance. The incorporation of jazz and dance band music began to draw white audiences into the uptown Harlem clubs.

Before World War I, downtown white communities had relatively ignored Harlem cultural activities. However, after the war, downtown white Americans began to take an interest in African American theater, music, and dance. In fact, white American interest and funding greatly aided the Harlem Renaissance. White audiences comprised the majority of audiences in

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[28] Floyd, Jr., "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 4.
[29] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 106.

the clubs of Harlem. As previously mentioned, the mob controlled Harlem clubs and catered to their white clientele, creating an atmosphere that appealed to them. White audiences came to Harlem to observe the 'exotic entertainment' that African Americans partook in every night. They wanted to hear jungle music. According to Floyd, "Jazz and show entertainers were being viewed by whites as symbols of primitive indulgence… This stereotype was reinforced by the discovery of primitive African sculpture and the ascendancy of jazz in the Renaissance years."[30] This desire to hear and experience exotic entertainment can again be attributed to the perception that Africa and Africans were exotic and savage people who partook in primal celebration that were nothing like the dignified and repressed white culture. Thus, a monetary incentive to produce renditions of African, jungle, inspired music was created.

As a result, the view of a primitive African culture was incorporated and encouraged in the artistic works of musicians during the Harlem Renaissance. Primitive traits such as horn cries and jungle drums played central roles in club music performances for white Americans. Not only was the music exotic but the clubs also featured beautiful African American dancers dressed provocatively as exotic jungle dancers. For white American audiences, this primitive jungle sound symbolized exotic and forbidden activities. However, the perception of a foreign and unfamiliar Africa signified something different for African American artists and audiences who participated in the Harlem Renaissance. For African Americans, the idea of associating with a primitive Africa represented a separation from the expected social behaviors of white Americans. It gave them a different identity to relate to; one that did not brand them as inferior because of their race. For too long African Americans had been subverted into the lower social caste and were unable to elevate themselves in white America's social system. By rejecting

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[30] Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 4.

white American cultural traits for their own traditional African cultural roots, they hoped to gain equality. Though it may have been considered primitive and savage, in the eyes of white America, it was their own identity and it set them apart and imparted them with pride and individuality.

This growing awareness of Africa by African Americans had an important effect on the development of music during the Harlem Renaissance. African American composers and musicians began to consciously use rhythm, percussion instruments, and unique timbre to evoke the sounds of Africa in their music. One of the most popular musicians of the Harlem Renaissance period who exemplified this was Duke Ellington.

Ellington and his band was the house band for the Cotton Club, one of the most famous clubs in Harlem during the Renaissance period. The Cotton Club was renowned for its exotic jungle shows and Ellington's band was the headliner. Ellington's band became known as 'the jungle band' and many of his compositions used the word 'jungle' in the title, however these titles did not reflect Ellington's writings as much as it reflected the desire of white audiences to experience primal African music.[31] Ellington was, however, conscious of the use of timbre in his music and its link with African aesthetics. In regards to catering to expectations of white audiences Ellington stated, "As a student of Negro history I had, in any case, a natural inclination in this direction."[32]

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[31] Haskins, *The Cotton Club*, 1977.
[32] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

DUKE ELLINGTON

Edward Kennedy Ellington, born in 1899, grew up in urban Washington D.C. Ellington was raised in a middle-class D.C. neighborhood, and his comfortable social background afforded him the opportunity to experience a wide variety of African American music. He attended traveling vaudeville acts that performed regularly at the local Howard Theater. Ellington was also able to see performances by well-known African American pianists such as Eubie Blake, Lucky Roberts, and James P. Johnson as all three traveled to Washington D.C. to perform often.[33] The wide variety of musical performances Ellington was able to experience proved to be valuable to him as he matured into a professional musician. As he began composing for his own group he was able to draw upon his early childhood musical experiences and they added to his very personal style.

One of Ellington's biggest critiques is that he was not a talented pianist.[34] Regardless of the critic's opinion of his technical skills, one cannot refute his prowess as a bandleader and composer. In fact, Ellington considered himself to be first and foremost a composer; it was his group as a whole, more than himself as an individual pianist that identified him. Ellington is of particular interest to this study because he played a major role in the development of jazz during the Renaissance Movement, and he was an important influence on Randy Weston and his use of African musical material.

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[33] Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, (New York; London: Continuum, 2001), 261.
[34] According to Dr. Nathan Davis this is a popular, but inaccurate critique of Ellington's playing ability, personal communication fall 2005.

Ellington the Composer

Ellington relocated from Washington D.C. to New York City in 1923. After a short stint at the Kentucky Club, his band became the house band at the Cotton Club. At the Cotton Club, Ellington's music was broadcast and showcased a variety of styles, from the 'sweet' dance music that was popular at the time, to the 'dirty and rough' syncopated numbers that white audiences stereotypically associated with 'primitive' African Americans.[35] The Cotton Club demanded a variety of musical styles to satisfy different crowds. This required Ellington to become a versatile composer and performer. As Alyn Shipton points out, "Ellington began to personify an image of jazz that combined his own considerable sophistication with the primitive rhythms and growling horns of the 'jungle'."[36] Ellington became a musical chameleon in order to create an appeal for his varying audiences. To succeed at the Cotton Club he needed to be perceived as exotic and mysterious; however, to appeal to his broadcast audiences he needed to have a certain amount of sophistication. Shipton states:

> Ellington's compositions were being performed for white audiences in the center of an African American district of New York. At the same time as Ellington's work was being packaged for that audience as 'jungle' music, helped along by Bubber Miley and Joe Nanton's growling brass and [Sonny] Greer's 'African' drumming, [his manager, Irving] Mills was presenting him to a wider public as a sophisticated composer…[37]

Ellington's use of timbre and rhythm was unique because they were a direct result of his band, which consisted of musicians who all had individual styles. He chose his sidemen for their unique voices and individual styles and he composed with their individual strengths in mind. Their ability to produce interesting tonal inflections was key to Ellington's African inspired compositions. Floyd has commented on the effect of Ellington's use of interesting timbre

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[35] Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, 266.
[36] *Ibid,* 267.
[37] *Ibid,* 267.

combinations. He states, "The key to the power of the Ellington effect lies in its embodied sound, the visceral expressive effect that, in Ellington's amalgams, exudes and evokes, by way of the prodigious semantic value of their sound, the callers, criers, and 'story tellers' of the African and African American past."[38]

Some critics have called Ellington's interpretation of African music stereotypical and cliché. However, it must be remembered that Ellington had not visited Africa at the time of the Harlem Renaissance. His compositions may not have been accurate depictions of modern African music, but his works represented Africa to him and his listeners, most of whom had also never been to Africa. A passage from Floyd's essay, "Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance" describes the use of traditional African musical techniques and the paradox that it caused because of the negative perception Americans had of Africa at the time. He states:

> By 1920 it was certainly clear that polymeter, multimeter, call-and–response patterns, certain pitch collections and inflections, and all of the sound devices and techniques of Afro-American music performance practices were common traits, to some degree, of all the music that had emanated from black culture in the United States, and that these traits defined this body of music as Afro-American… The elements that defined the music of the black folk communicated the very stereotypes and values that Renaissance leaders wanted to eradicate. In spite of such contradictions, Renaissance thinkers believed that the building of a culture required a foundation on which to build the new ideas and institutions. For this foundation, black thinkers and artists reached back to the artistic forms of the "old Negro" and his forbears in Africa.[39]

It can be seen from this extended passage that Renaissance leaders, the same leaders who wished to cultivate African American operagoers, tried to dispel the primitive perceptions of traditional Africa. However, at the same time it was these unique traditional African materials that gave African Americans an identity during the Renaissance movement and propelled the

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[38] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 170.
[39] Floyd, Jr., "Music in the Harlem Renaissance," 6.

movement forward. Thus, the Harlem Renaissance existed as a paradox of itself, one side attempting to forge new paths the other embracing and exploiting its so-called 'primitive' roots.

It must be remembered that Ellington, and other artists of the Harlem Renaissance, also worked with the primitive and savage perception that the rest of America had of Africa. These artists were attempting to achieve dual tasks. They were required to present a show that was exotic and entertaining for white audiences. Yet, they were also trying to forge a new African American identity. To Ellington and his African American audiences, his pieces function more as symbols of Africa and its cultural heritage, than they were accurate depictions of modern African music.

Norman C. Weinstein has suggested that Ellington's use of 'jungle sounds' in his music is "the product of musicians reflecting Caribbean and African musical values."[40] Though sometimes thought of as comical or caricaturizing, Ellington's use of tonal effects does reflect a sense of timbre manipulation taking precedence over complex harmony; something perhaps influenced by traditional African music. During the Renaissance movement, many people were under the impression that African music consisted only of drums. Yet, Ellington delved deep and used the manipulation of timbres to signify a connection with Africa.

Drums however, were not altogether unimportant in the music of Ellington. In fact, he favored the drums very much and knew how important they were to his music. Weinstein elaborates by saying, "Ellington knew how to match that horn section's jungleistic glossolalic polyphony with polyrhythms galore…Duke's love of drums was manifested not only in his drum section, but also through his percussive piano attack. He played piano with a drummer's feel for

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[40] Norman C. Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia*, (Metuchen NJ; London: The Scarecrow Press, 1992,) 42.

the percussive possibilities of the keyboard."[41] Ellington's percussive use of the piano is a characteristic that has been noticed by a number of scholars, as Ken Rattenbury, among others, has also indicated "Ellington's touch is resoundingly percussive."[42]

Ellington's Sidemen

As previously mentioned, Ellington's sidemen were vital to both the development of his composition style and also to the sound and identity of the band as a whole. His most important sidemen were highly individual performers, and also integral to the overall unity of the ensemble. In fact, during the Harlem Renaissance, Ellington's most recognizable sidemen played an important role in developing the young leader's compositional techniques. Shipton has very perceptively pointed out, "The majority of pieces he wrote, arranged, and recorded between 1929 and 1931 depend on his use of 'personalized' settings for his major players, Bubber Miley, Joe Nanton, Barney Bigard, and so on, in which their own solo voices are subsumed within the compositional framework, while simultaneously being essential to it."[43] Trumpeter Bubber Miley was an integral part of the Ellington band identity.

Bubber Miley

Bubber Miley, known for the growling vocal noises he made with his trumpet, joined Ellington's band in 1924. Miley was a major influence on Ellinton's composition style and in

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[41] Weinstein "Madame Zzaj Testifies Why a Drum is a Woman," 42.
[42] Ken Rattenbury, *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer*, (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990) 220.
[43] Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, 268.

fact, co-wrote some of Ellington's earliest pieces.[44] While discussing the use of unique timbers in the Ellington band, Gunther Schuller states, "Bubber Miley was largely responsible for the initial steps through his introduction of a rougher sound into the band." Schuller continues by stating that "it was Miley and Nanton who developed the band's famous "jungle" effects through their use of the growl and plunger mute."[45] Miley's contribution to the band, while important in supplying the stereotyped sounds of Africa, also echoed back to traditional African music in a larger sense. His individual voice integrated with the rest of the band; together the many individuals formed a singular collective group in much the same way as that found in traditional African musical practices.

In many instances, distinct vocal and instrumental timbres are highly appreciated in traditional African musical performances. Drums, xylophones and horns are often affixed with rattles, mirliton, shakers, bells, vibrating cords, and other extraneous noise-making materials with the intention of giving the primary instrument a distinctive voice when played. In fact, it is said that a xylophone is not ready to be played until it is fastened with the proper extraneous vibrating material. It is only then that the instrument is able to sound its true tone.[46] In this sense, the Ellington band incorporated the traditional African concept of sound. The individual musicians were encouraged to play with interesting and individual tones, and the musicians who possessed the most unique sounds became the most famous soloists of the band. At the same time, these musicians were the most invaluable to the sound of the band as a whole.

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[44] Rattenbury, *Duke Ellington: Jazz Composer*, 1990.

[45] Gunther Schuller, *Early Jazz: Its Roots and Musical Development.* (New York: Oxford Univesity Press. 1968,) 326.

[46] Personal communication with Akin Euba, and Steve Kofi Gbolonyo, fall 2006

Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton

Ellington's sidemen were more than just musical contributors to the band, they were important contributors to the development of African American conceptual ideas and their impact on Ellington most certainly spread to other artists as well. Another influential musician in Ellington's band during the Renaissance movement was Joe Nanton. Nanton was West Indian, and his African influences came via the African diaspora in the Caribbean. Ellington was very aware of the Caribbean influence on jazz in the early 1920s. In his autobiography, Ellington elaborates more on the impact of Nanton, "What he was actually doing was playing a very highly personalized form of his West Indian heritage. When a guy comes here form the West Indies and is asked to play some jazz, he plays what *he* thinks it is, or what comes from his applying himself to the idiom."[47] In another statement Ellington continues, "Tricky and his people were deep in the West Indian legacy and the Marcus Garvey movement. A whole strain of West Indian musicians came up who made contributions to the so-called jazz scene, and they were all virtually descended from the true African Scene."[48] Garvey was as important to Ellington and his musicians as he was to the larger artistic movement of the Harlem Renaissance.

Influence on Weston

As stated earlier, Ellington was a particularly important influence on Weston, both musically and philosophically. Musically, Ellington's creative use of timbre, in his piano voicings and his band orchestration were observed by Weston. Weston also credits Ellington for directly influencing his use of African music. "Duke Ellington…did a lot of composition about

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[47] Edward Kennedy Ellington, *Music is My Mistress,* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976,) 108-109.
[48] Ellington, *Music is My Mistress,* 109.

Africa. [He] knew the connection; so it's not something brand new, it was just something that got cut off. Without the influence of those before me, there wouldn't have been any Randy Weston."[49] Ellington's recording "The Drum is a Woman," among others, was certainly influential to Weston's own compositional techniques as will be examined later.

Weston was greatly influenced by Ellington's music but they also share many philosophical beliefs. Both musicians were greatly influenced by Marcus Garvey. In fact, Ellington went so far as to suggest that many musicians were influenced by Garvey's work. In his autobiography Ellington states, "Bop…is the Marcus Garvey extension."[50] Weston's similarities to Ellington can also be seen in the fact that Weston, like Ellington, understood the concept of Pan-Africanism and that much of African America's African heritage came via the Caribbean. The importance of this fact in regards to Weston will be examined in greater detail later on. However, it is clear that both Ellington and Weston shared a clear understanding of Pan-Africanism, which was based in the Harlem Renaissance movement and the writings of Marcus Garvey.

Finally, in the liner notes to his tribute to Duke Ellington recording, Weston explains the debt and gratitude he owes to Ellington. He states:

> I was trying to play funny things in between notes, trying to get sounds on the piano, but I hadn't heard anybody do that yet until I heard Monk. Ellington had been doing it all the while—before Monk, before me, before any of us. Duke in the 20s was already doing this but he had his full orchestra and he was so creative that it was hard to catch up to Ellington. Duke wrote many songs about Africa and about African people. But, he also wrote about calypso, about the Caribbean. The worth of the Duke, his music, and his most valuable appendage, his orchestra, to black or African musicians like myself, cannot be underestimated.[51]

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[49] Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*, February 2004
[50] Ellington, *Music is My Mistress,* 109.
[51] Randy Weston's Website, http://www.randyweston.info/randy-weston-welcome.html, accessed 02/22/07.

As Weston matured he began studying the piano seriously during the 1940s, at the height of what is considered the Bebop era. He grew up in Brooklyn and lived next to Max Roach. Roach, a drummer and significant contributor to Bebop, encouraged Weston to continue playing. While Weston hung out with Roach and other bebop musicians, it was Thelonious Monk who had the greatest impact on Weston during this exciting time in jazz history.

CHAPTER 3

BEBOP

As a teenager Weston built upon his childhood influences. He had childhood friends who took him to hear African music being performed in Brooklyn. This exposure led him to the music of Thelonious Monk. Monk became a mentor to Weston. Although Monk did not consciously use African material in his music, Weston felt that Monk had an unconscious spiritual connection to Africa. Thelonious Monk was a significant participant in the development of bebop.

The start of the bebop era[52], which began around 1940, was indeed a continuation of the Harlem Renaissance movement. In the spirit of the Renaissance movement, African American artists and musicians continued to develop identifiable cultural traits that were rooted in Africa, and were distinctly African American in nature. However the 1940's marked a change in the attitude of many of the young jazz musicians who were breaking onto the scene in New York. In the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* James Lincoln Collier writes:

> A new militant spirit began to be felt by African-Americans, particularly jazz musicians, who by 1940 were hearing from critics that they were artists worthy of respect; they also realized that white players in big bands usually commanded higher salaries than they could, for playing what African-Americans were beginning to conceive of as their music. Furthermore, African-American musicians constantly suffered the indignity of having their families and friends refused entry into white clubs and dance halls where they were playing. Many became bitter as well as militant.
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> These attitudes had two effects on African-American jazz musicians. The first was the development of a strong distaste for the show-business antics of Fats Waller, Cab Calloway, and Armstrong, whose routines suggested the stereotype of the grinning,

[52] Bebop is also referred to as modern jazz.

> carefree African-American with a natural gift for song and dance: Armstrong in particular was castigated on this account. The second was their turning away from the seemingly impenetrable white culture in favor of African-American culture, which was at least their own, and would welcome them; musically, this meant a turning away from the swing style of the big bands, whose very popularity among whites made it suspect.[53]

This extended passage is important in understanding the attitudes of younger musicians and subsequently the direction modern jazz was taking. It was no longer a priority for the musicians to present themselves and their music in parody for white audiences. As a result, the musicians' focus changed from presenting accessible entertaining music, to developing a style of music less accessible and more challenging for both audiences and musicians alike. In fact, the development of bebop also marked a change in the perception of traditional African cultural traits as well. It is at this point that many African American artists no longer accepted the notion of a primitive and savage Africa. It will be seen below that this new perception had a great effect on the musicians of the following generations including, Randy Weston.

The major figures credited with the development of modern jazz are, of course, Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Both are recognized as individuals who single handedly sculpted modern jazz, and their collaborative work shows that they were two of the most progressive musicians of their day. Although these musicians did have a great impact on the modern jazz style, the development of the music was the work of many musicians some better known than others. One of the most creative innovators of the bebop era was Thelonious Monk.

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[53] James Lincoln Collier, "Bop: The Climate for Change," *New Grove Online,* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 17, February 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

Thelonious Monk

Thelonious Monk was born in Rocky Mount, North Carolina on October 10 1917, and moved with his family to the African American community of San Juan Hill in New York City when he was a young boy. It is clear by listening to Monk's solo performances that he was greatly influenced by many of the famous stride pianists of his childhood. Consequently, it is no surprise that many of these pianists lived and worked close to where Monk grew up. In his late teens, as he became more competent at the piano, Monk went on the road with a traveling evangelist. This experience was vital to his distinctly individual style and specifically to the development of his concept of rhythm. Monk's rhythmic concept developed from his use of a steady rhythmic foundation created for the traveling evangelist. "Monk frequently told journalists, he valued the experience of playing for the evangelist," states Leslie Gourse. "Undoubtedly the benefit lay, in large part, in the steadiness of the rhythms and the groove, the way the rhythms connected."[54] The steady rhythmic concept that Monk developed in these formative years gave him a freedom to develop other musical traits, including unique chord voicings and a comping style that were equally distinct. Furthermore, his strong sense of rhythm made him a favorite pianist of bebop drummer Kenny Clarke; together Clarke and Monk propelled the development of bebop ever forward.

According to Thomas Owens, "Although bop was solidly grounded in earlier jazz styles (New Orleans jazz and swing), it represented a marked increase in complexity, and was considered revolutionary at the time of its development. Perhaps its most significant characteristic was the highly diversified texture created by the rhythm section—a considerable

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[54] Leslie Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser: the Life and Genius of Thelonious Monk*, (New York; Schirmer Books, 1997), 10.

contrast to the insistent four-beat approach that was taken by swing musicians."[55] Monk's performance techniques exemplified this development of diversified texture on the piano. His work with Kenny Clarke at Minton's Playhouse was vital to the development of jazz at the time. Monk became the house pianist at Minton's Playhouse in 1941. It was during the many nights of playing accompaniment for young bop soloists that Monk "developed a very unusual…melodic style…with surprising harmonies, angular, pointed chords, and twists and turns, stops and starts, and unusual rhythmic play and elasticity" states Gourse. [56]

Though Monk was influential in the development of the bebop tradition, not everyone appreciated his distinctive piano style. In fact, before he began playing regularly at a jazz club called the Half Note, he had very few supporters. In an article for the New Grove, Ran Blake and Barry Kernfeld identify some of the reasons he was not appreciated by many of his fellow musicians; "He did not always exhibit the customary right-hand dexterity of most jazz pianists and, more importantly, his fellow jazz musicians quite often disagreed with his choice of notes. But his style, based on the Harlem stride tradition, had many strengths: a highly distinctive timbre, a capacity to provide uncanny rhythmic surprises, and a wide variety of articulation."[57]

These aspects of Monk's playing are very similar to Ellington's playing and composition style. Monk's music is also saturated with blues influence like Ellington.[58] Monk and Duke

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[55] Thomas Owens, "Bop" *New Grove Online,* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 12, March 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
[56] Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser*, 20.
[57] Ran Blake and Barry Kernfeld, "Thelonious Monk," *New Grove Online,* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 12, March 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
[58] Nathan T. Davis, *African American Music: A philosophical look at African American Music in Society*, (Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing, 1996,) 70.

share a kinship in their music. [59] According to Dr. Nathan Davis, both Ellington and Monk were incorrectly thought to have poor or limited technique on the piano.[60] Finally, "a close examination of Ellington's music reveals…a direct link to the piano style of Thelonious Monk."[61]

While Ellington was socially conscious, composing music to reflect his feelings about African and African American issues, in general, it appears that Monk was not concerned with things of that nature. "I'm not in power," states Monk. "I'm not worrying about politics…Let the statesmen do that—that's their job."[62] By his comments made in interviews, Monk also appears to be unconcerned with racial issues. "I hardly know anything about it," he says, speaking of racial problems. "I never was interested in those Muslims. If you want to know, you should ask Art Blakey. I don't have to change my name—it's always been weird enough! I haven't done one of those 'freedom' suites, and I don't intend to. I mean, I don't see the point. I'm not thinking that race thing now, it's not on my mind."[63] From Monk's statements it seems that he was completely absorbed in his music and had no regard for the cultural Aspects of the time. However, according to people who knew Monk personally, the pianist did not always voice what he was thinking. Dr. Davis has suggested that at times Monk my even tell you the opposite of what he was thinking, 'just to mess with you.'[64] It may be the case in the statements above, that Monk not expressing his true feelings on the topics of politics and race.

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[59] Davis, *African American Music,* 74.
[60] *Ibid,* 25.
[61] *Ibid,* 26.
[62] Valerie Wilmer, *Jazz People*, (New York; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, inc. 1970,) 48.
[63] *Ibid,* 48-49.
[64] Personal Communication with Dr. Nathan Davis, spring 2007.

Though he may not have voiced his concerns with politics, racial issues or civil rights, Monk's music displayed a kind of unconscious link to African aesthetics. His choice of chord voicings produced unique timbres, and he performed in a natural polyrhythm relationship with the other accompanying instruments. His overall piano playing is percussive and is akin to the way African musicians utilize their instruments. It is these musical attributes that sparked Weston's interest in Monk as a pianist.

Randy Weston first heard Monk play in Coleman Hawkins's band. Monk and Hawkins may seem like a strange fit, however, though the older tenor man played in a traditional swing-era style that was no longer in vogue, he prided himself in hiring young, modern musicians. "Monk was one of [Hawkins's] favorite young players" and he often defended Monk against his detractors, of which there were many.[65] Weston introduced himself to Monk and arranged to visit him at his apartment. During one visit to Monk's apartment, Weston states, "He played piano for almost three hours for me. Then I spent the next three years with Monk." Though Monk hardly spoke during their get-togethers, Weston sill learned a great deal from the man. He continues, "Later I found out that Sufi mystics didn't speak through words. Ancient, wise people knew how to speak without words."[66] Monk was a big influence on the development of Weston as a person and a musician. This is because Weston was an impressionable teenager when he met Monk and the revered jazz musician made himself available to Weston. Weston looked up to Monk. In an art form where originality is placed at a premium, Weston considered Monk the most original pianist he had ever heard.

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[65] Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser,* 35.
[66] *Ibid,* 77.

Like many listeners, when Weston first heard Monk play with Hawkin's group, Monk's unique style struck Weston as abrasive and unpolished. However, Weston's opinion changed after hearing him again. "The next time I heard him, I knew that was the direction I wanted to go in. That happened because Ahmed Abdul Malik played with Monk, and he would take me to Atlantic Avenue."[67] Weston states that "Monk was from another dimension…but most pianists in the 1940s didn't like Monk. They said he couldn't play. But I knew he was the most original pianist I ever heard."[68]

Malik was a childhood friend who would take Weston to hear African music being performed in Brooklyn. This was one of Weston's earliest exposures to traditional African music. Weston states, "I grew up in Brooklyn with the great bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik, whose father was Sudanese. He also played the oud, and when we were kids he'd take me to Atlantic Avenue in downtown Brooklyn to hear musicians play the instruments of North Africa and the Middle East."[69]

Weston heard these musicians play quartertones and notes in-between the Western half steps. He absorbed the music he heard at the time and attempted to apply it to the piano. "I would try to play like that on the piano, but Monk was already doing it."[70] He continues, "[Monk] was the most original I ever heard; he played like they must have played in Egypt 5,000 years ago. For me it was pure African piano."[71] Not only does this statement show Weston's interpretation of Monk's music, it also shows an underlying Pan-African theme of Weston's thoughts that Africa consisted of the whole continent and not just West Africa. In the following

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[67] Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser*, 77.
[68] *Ibid,* 79.
[69] Ted Panken "African Soul" *Down Beat*, (October 1, 1998,) 20.
[70] *Ibid,* 20.
[71] Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival," 21.

chapters it will become clear that Weston's concept of Pan-Africanism, like that of Ellington's during the Harlem Renaissance had a significant influence on Weston's work as a composer and musician.

So what attracted Weston to Monk and his music? It was Monk's rhythmic and timbre approach that drew Weston in. In Monk's playing Weston heard a natural unconscious African element. Weston was aware of the similarities between the piano styles of Ellington and Monk and their similarities further strengthened his appreciation of the two of them. Though Monk did not openly display an interest in Africa or traditional African music, it is clear that the spirit of Africa was strong in Monk and Weston could sense this. In an interview with Gourse, Weston states:

> I loved Monk personally because he was a master, but not in the Western sense. In the West, to be a master, all you have to do is play well, that's it. From my years with traditional Africans I learned that in the East, you have to be respected in your community. And in Monk's neighborhood, when we walked together, people acknowledged him. To be a master, you have to be clean of mind and spirit. And he was clean of mind and spirit. He did not speak it, didn't waste words; he lived it. In our tradition, our people didn't talk a lot. Monk was from that tradition… When he said something, it was powerful. It was different.[72]

According to Leslie Gourse, "when Randy went to Egypt and studied African history and music, he came to realize that Monk, was "like the reincarnation of the ancient spirit of Africa. Randy didn't hear any of Europe in Monk's music. He heard the way an African hears. He heard spiritualism and mysticism."[73] Monk's influence on Weston became greater as Weston began to study traditional African music and culture leading into the 1960s. "After years in

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[72] Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser,* 80.
[73] *Ibid,* 79.

Africa I came to believe that God sent prophets to bring us beauty in life," says Weston. "Monk was that for me. He shared music with me…we shared and became inseparable."[74]

[74] Leslie Gourse, *Straight, No Chaser: the Life and Genius of Thelonious Monk*. (New York; Schirmer Books, 1997), 78

CHAPER 4

CIVIL RIGHTS

During the fifties and sixties Weston joined the professional world as a young adult. It was at the height of the Civil Rights Movement and pride in traditional African culture was very high. All of Weston's previous influences fit well with the political climate. The appreciation Weston had developed for traditional African culture blossomed during this time and he capitalized on the renewed public interest in African culture to learn as much as he could about African music.

In the 1950's Weston spent eight summers in Lenox, Massachusetts, where he met Marshall Sterns and participated in his Jazz history classes, demonstrating modern jazz on the piano. Sterns reinforced Weston's concept of jazz as having originated in Africa and not just in New Orleans.[75] Weston also met other inspirational colleagues during his summers in Lenox. "I spent time in the Berkshires with African choreographer Osadali Duforum. He inspired me to collect African traditional music; it was a natural process of listening, but not necessarily listening with your ears, almost like listening with your spirit."[76] While back in New York during the fall, winter, and spring, Weston began to pursue interests in Africa by interacting with people from the United Nations. He would frequently ask them for traditional music from their respective countries. He met with visiting officials from different countries. "I'd always ask about the music. They might give me a tape or a book, and I slowly started to learn."[77]

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[75] Gitler "Randy Weston," p17.
[76] Willard Jenkins, "Freeing His Roots" *Down Beat* (February 2005)
[77] Panken "African Soul," p.20

Weston's musical development and research culminated in an extended composition that fused together traditional African musical material with jazz, the composition was called *Uhuru Afrika*.

The time between 1950 and 1965 in United States history had a great effect on solidifying the direction in which Randy Weston would take his professional career as a pianist. The 1950s and 60s were the beginning of a new era in the history of Civil Rights struggle in the United States. In fact, the fight for equality began about one hundred years earlier. However, Louis Porter states, "There was little debate among African Americans about the need for civil rights, increasingly a concern of [African Americans] since World War II."[78] The 1950s mark an increase in intensity and organization in the fight for African American equality. The 1950s brought the peaceful organization of Martin Luther King Jr. and the sometimes-violent one of Malcolm X. Jazz musicians became involved in all aspects of the fight for Civil Rights and played a major role in the battle.

As stated above, there was no distinct split between the period of time known as the Civil Rights Movement and the decades leading up to that time. In fact the period of time between the 1950s and 60s is similar to the previously mentioned Harlem Renaissance in many interesting ways. Guy Booker, in an article titled, "Colored Historians Too Lazy to Write Own History of Jazz; Let Whites Do It," for the *Philadelphia Tribune*, indicates that there was a push for African Americans to assimilate into white culture, in the same manner that initiators of the Harlem Renaissance did at the beginning of that movement. He states, "So anxious are they to show how much [African American's] 'are just like white folks' that they shun the sordid, wretched,

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[78] Louis Porter, "Race Politics and Jazz in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Jazz: A Century of Change*, (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997.)

often vile background of jazz."[79] While this is only one short article in a local magazine, it indicates two important aspects of the beginning of the Civil Rights movement. First it shows that there was some sentiment, at least in Philadelphia, that African Americans were once again shunning their own cultural heritage in an effort to obtain equality. Furthermore, it shows that many people interpreted this attempt at acculturation incredulously, again if only in the Philadelphia area.

In his book, *the Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz Music of the 1960s and 1970s,* John Baskerville suggests that African Americans have been treated as an inferior class since the time of slavery. They have responded to this inferior status in a number of ways. He states, "some attempt to distance themselves from this negative image of 'blackness' through assimilation. Often, an African American individual attempts to identify with the so-called dominant group to demonstrate his/her high-level of acculturation and adoption of the dominant cultural paradigm, indicating a suitability for full participation within the mainstream."[80] This assimilation was observed at the onset of the Harlem Renaissance and again at the beginning of Civil Rights movement.

Collectively, African Americans have sought to become integrated into American society. This desire to become an equal participant in the society has produced an ebb and flow in the political, social, and economic status of African Americans over the decades. Baskerville points out, "During brief moments of inclusiveness, African Americans generally strongly emphasized the 'American' and de-emphasized the 'African' to demonstrate their similarity to other Americans. But, in those moments of fallen expectations, some reject the American side of

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[79] Guy Booker, "Colored Historians Too Lazy to Write Own History of Jazz; Let Whites Do It," *Philadelphia Tribune*, weekly magazine section, August 13 1955.
[80] Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American,* 5.

their existence and attempt to embrace the 'African' side.[81] It seems that the moments of fallen expectations that Baskerville mentions, propelled cultural change in both the Harlem Renaissance and during the Civil Rights movement. At both times, African Americans embraced the African side of their cultural heritage and intensified efforts to bring awareness to the importance of African cultural roots in America.

Many of the musicians who had been involved in the Harlem Renaissance also saw the connection the earlier period had with the Civil Rights movement. In his autobiography, Ellington commented on the Civil Rights movement, "It is the same now with the Muslim movement, and a lot of West Indian people are involved in it. There are many resemblances to the Marcus Garvey schemes."[82] Again, in this statement we can see the many ways that this period in American history was similar to that of the Harlem Renaissance movement. In many ways one could say that the Civil Rights movement is an intensified period of the same fight that African American have been struggling with since their emancipation.

The development of a nationalist ideology

In the United States during the 1960s, many African Americans began to reiterate the belief that the black population in America constituted a distinct nationality; a "black nation," with a cultural consciousness distinct from the larger society.[83] This is a central concept in Baskerville's work. He states:

> Cultural nationalists believed that members of the African Diaspora possessed a distinct cultural heritage that originated on the African continent. Although variations emerged over the years due to the dispersion of Africans globally through the transatlantic slave

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[81] Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz,* 6.
[82] Ellington, *Music is My Mistress,* 108-109
[83] Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz,* 22.

> trade, much of the primordial culture remained intact. Cultural nationalists contended that before global black liberation could be attained people of African descent—particularly those living in the United States, the Caribbean, and Europe—had to reassert and embrace their cultural heritage and eliminate all alien cultural influences.[84]

Baskerville's passage here, supports the idea that the Civil Rights movement in the United States, again like the Harlem Renaissance movement, marked an attempt to 'reassert and embrace' African cultural heritage. This was done through the work of artists and musicians at the time and this resurgence of African cultural heritage led to another cultural arts movement.

The Black Arts Movement

During this time of political unrest and struggle for civil rights, African Americans again developed a renewed interest in their historical roots and traditional African culture, and another renaissance began to bloom. Floyd states that this cultural movement was "known collectively as the Black Arts Movement, and [it was] a nationalistic, Pan-African cultural awakening that was 'nurtured by a belief in the positive value of blackness'. It signaled a return to myth: it became acceptable, respectable, even expected, for African Americans to seek out, believe in, and display their mythological roots."[85] Jazz musicians and their music became an important element of the Black Arts movement. Through their music they began to connect with traditional African cultural roots.

One of the most important roles jazz musicians of the Black Arts movement played was in helping to change the perspective of traditional African music. The perception that Africa was a savage and primal place still lingered in America at the time. However, great strides to appreciate and understand traditional Africa were made during the Black Arts movement, in

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[84] Baskerville, *The Impact of Black Nationalist Ideology on American Jazz,* 37.
[85] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 185.

large part due to the work of jazz musicians. In his book *A Night in Tunisia: Imaginings of Africa in Jazz,* N.C. Weinstein describes a process by which the 'savage' perception of Africa was first discarded before the use of traditional African musical elements were effective in the work of African American musician. He states, "African American artists in search of their African connections must initially deconstruct the fixed body of distorted African imagery that racists have historically disseminated in multitudinous forms. After these images are deconstructed, various elements can be recombined so that new perspectives can be gained."[86] The deconstruction Weinstein identifies became more active during the Black Arts movement because musicians began to interact with African musicians both in Africa and in the United States.

It is in the use of specific traditional African musical techniques that the Black Arts movement can be differentiated from the Harlem Renaissance movement. The Harlem Renaissance attempted to capture the spirit of what people thought was traditional Africa. It was very important symbolically, regardless of how accurately Africa was depicted. During the Black Arts movement there were more accurate depictions of traditional African musical material because jazz musicians were traveling to Africa, interacting with African musicians in the United States, and recorded materials were becoming more and more available in the United States.

In the 1950s, jazz musicians began to travel to Africa to perform. Louis Armstrong was one of the first jazz musicians to make a trip to Ghana and he was received by a great procession of African highlife musicians. Jazz drummers Max Roach and Art Blakey both traveled to Africa in the late 1950s and their experiences most certainly influenced the multitude of

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[86] Weinstein, *A Night in Tunisia,* 12.

musicians that they performed with. At the same time that African American jazz musicians were traveling to Africa to perform, African musicians were also coming to the United States and performing with jazz musicians. For example Guy Warren, also know as Ghanaba, came to the United States in the summer of 1950 and played with many jazz musicians in and around Chicago. Likewise, Nigerian drummer, Babatunde Olatunji came to the United States in 1954 and settled in New York City.[87] He collaborated with many well-known jazz artists at the time including John Coltrane, Sonny Rollins, Yusef Lateef, and Clark Terry, and had a huge influence on Randy Weston.[88]

The Music of The Black Arts Movement

Jazz was an important aspect of the Black Arts movement. Along with interaction between African musicians and jazz musicians, recordings of traditional African music were more available in the United States by the 1950s. As a result, musicians began taking advantage of the accessibility of African music to use concepts of the music in their own compositions and improvised solos. In much of the music of this period, harmonic progressions that had traditionally been used in jazz compositions were often "replaced by a more static harmonic environment in which pedal points establish key centers and modal scales, together with this relative harmonic stasis, gave improvisers more melodic and structural freedom,"[89] states Floyd. Wendell Logan also emphasizes the increase in the freedom of the music due to slower harmonic motion in his article "The Ostinato Idea in Black Improvised Music". He states "The tonal

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[87] Gregory F. Bartz, "Olatunji, Babatunde," *New Grove Online.* ed. L. Macy (Accessed 17, March 2007), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
[88] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 188n.
[89] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 186.

centers in this music usually have long duration…therefore, it is possible to craft ostinatos with a high degree of rhythmic and melodic interest, unencumbered by frequent modulations."[90] The use of ostinato techniques in jazz during the Black Arts movement is important because it provides a direct link to traditional African material. The ostinato is a harmonic/rhythmic device that is functionally related to the time-line bell pattern found in traditional West African music. Along with the repetition of ostinatos, pianists began using quartal harmonies, using the intervals of fourths and fifths to create sounds that are associated with the vocal music of West Africa.

Traditional African musical techniques were not just applied to jazz randomly. Using the resources available to them, jazz artists were also able to capture the essence of traditional African music. According to Floyd, jazz musicians began to "bring about a more primeval ensemble sound, which, in its emotional character, recalls African ensemble music." He continues by stating, "The drums no longer merely 'play time,' but compliment, color, and texture the lines and the instrumental combination." [91] Though it is evident from Floyd's statements that some perception of a 'primeval' Africa persists, it is just as important to understand his statement as it relates to the functional aspects that occurred because of the use of traditional musical techniques. Jazz during the Black Arts movement exchanged some of its predominant European influences—the most dominant being traditional Western harmony—and replaced them with African techniques, including an increase in polyrhythm, more diverse tonal textures and a greater sense of group collectivity. Floyd characterizes the music of this time

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[90] Wendell Logan, "The Ostinato Idea in Black Improvised Music: A Preliminary Investigation," *Black Perspective in Music,* 1984 12 no. 2:193-215.
[91] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 186.

stating, "The whole musical environment was repetitive, hypnotic, funky, and exciting, insinuating the entire black musical tradition, including its African manifestations."[92]

Music and Politics

Many jazz musicians in the late fifties and early sixties recorded music and voiced their opinions about political and civil rights issues. Compositions such as Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit," Sonny Rollins' "Freedom Suite," and Charles Mingus' "Fables of Faubus" are all songs with obvious political and civil rights undertones, which African Americans could relate to. During this time John Coltrane recorded his famous suite, *A Love Supreme*. At a radio interview, jazz drummer Max Roach said "I heard many things in what Trane was doing. I heard the cry and wail of the pain this society imposes on people and especially black folks."[93] *A Love Supreme* is an excellent example of the music being created during the Black Arts movement that had a great influence over everyone at the time of its release.

A Love Supreme

Coltrane dominated the jazz scene for nearly a decade, from 1957-67, and *A Love Supreme* in particular, received the greatest reception. Coltrane's music was very popular on college campuses in the early 1960s and he gained recognition because of it. The popular music magazine *Billboard* made note of the effect that Coltrane was having on young people across the

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[92] Floyd, Jr., *The Power of Black Music,* 186
[93] Quoted in Lucas Aaron Henry, "Freedom Now! Four Hard Bop and Avant-garde Jazz Musicians' Musical Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement, 1958-1964," MA thesis, (East Tennessee University, 2004,) 85.

country.[94] Coltrane's ability to captivate an audience and *A Love Supreme*'s warm reception was due to the decade he dominated, the 1960s. "Arriving at the midpoint of the sixties, *A Love Supreme* distilled the decade's theme of universal love and spiritual consciousness."[95] In his biographical work on Coltrane, Nesenson identifies the importance and timeliness of the release of the recording: "It is significant, and once again indicative of Coltrane's uncanny inner gauge to the temper of the time, that *A Love Supreme* was recorded at the end of 1964. That the album is, among so many other things, something of a retrospective of those first few years of the sixties, a unique time of hope, of the New Frontier and the Great Society and Martin Luther King's Dream."[96] Although Coltrane was contributing to the social climate of the 1960's, this influence was also reciprocal. He was equally affected by the political and cultural environment, which helped develop an experimental and searching mentality for Coltrane. Nisenson continues, "Coltrane was as inextricably a part of that decade as any of the other major cultural manifestations. Coltrane in so many ways reflected the contradictions of those times; its feelings of constant apocalypse, the search for inner peace, the riots, as well as the love-ins, the great creativity, and the equally great self-indulgence."[97]

Many people sensed an unease with his playing that reflected the dissatisfaction that the majority of African Americans felt during this politically charged time of the Civil Rights movement. Due to a strong spiritual rebirth, and his devotion to religion in general and not

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[94] Henry, "Freedom Now!" 94.
[95] Ashley Kahn, *Love Supreme: The Story of John Coltrane*. (New York: Viking, 2002,) xvi.
[96] Eric Nisenson, *Ascension: John Coltrane and his quest*. 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993,) 154.
[97] Nisenson, *Ascension*, 76.

specifically to Christianity, Coltrane had a "belief in the wholeness of humanity, which was one of the values at the heart of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's and 1960's."[98]

Uhuru Afrika

As mentioned previously, Randy Weston began composing and performing professionally during the Black Arts movement. His childhood influences up to that point had prepared him for the political climate, and his interests in traditional African music and culture flourished. Like Coltrane and many other jazz artists, Weston also composed and recorded an extended composition advocating civil rights and celebrating strides that had been made at the time. He called his political suite *Uhuru Afrika*. Unlike many of the other political jazz suites, Weston's composition was not restricted to commentary on the political struggles in America. Weston chose to dedicate his composition to the struggles and strides made by Africans throughout the diaspora. This does not come as a surprise, given the degree to which Weston was influenced by Marcus Garvey and his concept of Pan-Africanism. In fact, the main focus of Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* was the emerging independence of the new African nations, freed from the claws of colonialism.

By 1960, seventeen African nations had gained independence. This was a source of joy and inspiration for Weston. He considered the nations that had emerged to be a source of inspiration for nations that were still struggling under oppression. He also saw the independence of Africa as inspiration for the struggle for equality in the United States.

Although Weston had not yet been to Africa, his idea of a connected African people, despite their location throughout the diaspora, most certainly influenced his extended work.

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[98] Henry, "Freedom Now", 90.

Uhuru Afrika was one of Weston's first conscious efforts to employ African music in a composition; it displays a mixture of traditional African material and elements of the diaspora. Record producer Michael Cuscuna has reissued *Uhuru Afrika* twice. He shows his appreciation of Weston's *Uhuru Afrika* by stating, "So much music in the '60s used Africa superficially as window dressing, but this was the real deal—an honest, well-written, well researched fusion of jazz and African music."[99]

On November 16, 1960 Weston began recording *Uhuru Afrika* and his choice of musicians for this recording was very specific. Weston states, "I wanted to use a big band, and I wanted to use artists from Africa and artists of African decent. Jazz musicians, cats from the Broadway shows, a classical singer, a guy from East Africa, a guy from West Africa."[100] He continues, "We wanted a rhythm section that showed how all drums come form the African drum."[101] The rhythm section included Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji, Caribbean drummer Candido, and Cuban percussionist Armando Peraza. It is clear from Weston's statements and his choice of musicians that he attempted to incorporate many different types of African music into his composition.

As a result of Weston's work on *Uhuru Afrika,* he was able to bring together African, Caribbean, and African American musicians from very different cultures and used their common African roots to create a synthesis of Pan-African music. The use of African musicians from throughout the diaspora makes *Uhuru Afrika* an important composition during the Black Arts movement. *Uhuru Afrika* had an even stronger impact in Africa than it did in the United States.

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[99] Willard Jenkins, "Freeing His Roots."
[100] Laurent Goddet, "Interview With Randy Weston," *Coda,* Issue 159 (Feburay1978), 9.
[101] Jenkins, "Freeing His Roots."

In 1964, the South African government banned Weston's recording of *Uhuru Afrika* because of its encouragement of colonial freedom.[102]

Weston's entry into the professional world of music in the late 1950s and his composition *Uhuru Afrika* marked the beginning of Weston's use of African musical material in both composition and performance. It is at this point that I will depart from the influences that helped to shape Weston's ideas and work, and I will turn to his own musical output.

[102] "South Africa Bans Recordings by Lena Horne, Randy Weston," *Downbeat,* September 24, 1964, p. 4. Posted on Weston, Randy. Website. http://www.randyweston.info/randy-westonwelcome.html, accessed 02/22/07

Part II

THE MUSIC OF RANDY WESTON

CHAPTER 5

African Pianism

Before I begin with an examination of the use of traditional African musical techniques in the music of Randy Weston, a brief explanation of the methodology behind this analysis is necessary. The concept of borrowing from one music culture to enhance another is not a new concept. Composer and ethnomusicologist, Dr. Akin Euba has established a systematic approach to the study of intercultural relationships in a field he calls Intercultural Musicology.[103] Many of the concepts espoused in Intercultural Musicology have been developed as a result of interaction between Africans and Europeans during the time of colonization in Africa. Therefore, a brief examination of the colonial influence on Africa is important in order to understand the full magnitude of the integration of Western and African musical techniques in this study.

Colonialism

In the early 1400s, European explorers began setting up trade routes along the West African coast in order to trade European goods for West African gold and slaves. The Portuguese were the first to arrive on the banks of the Guinea coast and were also the first to set up a slave trade route across the Atlantic.[104] However, before long the British, Dutch, Belgians, Germans,

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[103] Personal Communication with Dr. Akin Euba Fall 2006.
[104] Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 36.

and French had all established imperial control along the western coast of Africa.[105] Although official colonization did not begin until 1885 and lasted roughly seventy-three years, Kofi Agawu states, "formal partitioning was preceded by several centuries of European contact with initially coastal then later inland Africa, resulting in influences on religion, culture, and education."[106] Therefore, it is necessary in this study to take into account the full duration of time European imperialists occupied Africa and not just the official dates of political colonization.

Alongside colonial imperialistic governments came missionary workers whose job was to convert Africans from their traditional religions to Christianity. Musical activity was common in Christianity and played a large role in the missionary's work. Music allowed missionaries to pass along the concepts of Christianity in a way that African converts could relate to; through singing and music making.[107] For this process missionaries introduced religious hymns and choral music with traditional European harmony. The importance of religious music is emphasized by Agawu who says, "We should not underestimate the potency of the hymn in the African reception of European music."[108]

Along with the introduction of religious choral music and European harmony, the missionaries also introduced religious keyboard instruments such as the organ and the piano. "Western keyboard instruments first gained popularity in Africa as an almost indispensable

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[105] Charles Johnson and Patricia Smith, *African in America: America's Journey through slavery*, (New York; London: Hardcourt, Inc., 1998), 6.
[106] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music: Postcolonial notes, Queries, Positions*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2003), 3.
[107] Personal Communication Sister Marie Agatha Ozah, October 16, 2006.
[108] Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music*, 13.

aspect of church worship."[109] It is particularly important to understand the lasting effect that religion has had on colonial Africa. "There are many Africans today whose affective investment in [Christian inspirational proverbs] is far greater—deeper and more sincere—than anything that might be awakened by a traditional funeral dirge or hunter's chant," states Agawu. [110] This statement is significant because is indicates the extent to which Christianity, had been integrated into African society at the expense of traditional religions.

The acculturation of European cultural concepts and activities was encouraged and in some places expected, of the indigenous people by the ruling mother country. African converts were encouraged to learn vocal material and piano accompaniments of common Christian songs. Before long, Christianity, Western European religious music, and a keyboard instrument could be found in many urban centers of colonial Africa.

Education also played an important role in the acculturation of European cultural traits. A European curriculum was instituted into many areas, particularly urban areas. In missionary schools, "hymns were sung to the accompaniment of keyboard instruments."[111] Even today, one of the premier music institutions in West Africa, Achimota School in Ghana, first known as the Prince of Wales College, has a logo that consists of a segment of a piano keyboard whose black and white keys symbolize harmony between Africans and Europeans. The school contains twelve practice rooms with upright pianos and a seven-foot grand piano in a small concert hall. Students learn Western classical performance and composition but also have the opportunity to explore popular and traditional musical avenues. During the time Agawu attended this school,

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[109] Akin Euba, "Towards an African Pianism" *Intercultural Musicology* 1 (Oct. 1999), 9.
[110] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music,* 13.
[111] Akin Euba, "Towards an African Pianism," 10.

he noticed that African students made no distinction between the performance of traditional African music and Western classical music. He states:

> The self-consciousness with which these African students performed African traditions was no different from the self-awareness with which they played Bach on the violin or sang Vivaldi's 'Gloria'. The very ground of their cultural being did not correspond to some pristine, uncontaminated African essence, one that might be said to be innocent of 'outside' influences. No, their origins were irreducibly mixed, hybrid, syncretic, in-between, impure. And this is one of the enduring effects of colonialism.[112]

This account of the educational experience of university students in Ghana shows that students in 1970 had been brought up in a community that was a synthesis of both traditional African culture and European hegemonic culture, in much the same way African Americans fused African and American culture.

Intercultural Activity

In his extensive work on the subject of intercultural musicology, Dr. Akin Euba identifies two kinds of intercultural creative activity. One occurs when composers, or improvisers integrate elements of two or more cultures into compositions. The second occurs through performance, where the "music and the performer originate from different cultures." [113] Both forms of this intercultural activity took place during colonial times and continued after West Africa gained its independence.

The majority of West African colonies gained their independence by the beginning of 1970. However, the colonization of West Africa had a permanent effect on the indigenous people. Alongside movements towards preserving and retaining traditional practices of religion

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[112] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music,* 13-14.
[113] Akin Euba, "Intercultural expressions in Neo-African Art Music" *Essays on African Music 2: Intercultural Perspectives*, (Bayreuth: Eckhard Breitinger, 1989), 117.

and the arts, West Africans continued to practice Christianity and the Western European musical activities they learned along with it. As a result, although colonization had ended, African musicians, primarily those who grew up in urban areas, and were most affected by colonial powers, continued to interact with their European mother countries well after the end of colonization. Promising musicians attended European music schools and received training in Western European classical music.

Some of these musicians began to gain recognition for their compositions in Western art music. Some of the most well known African composers of Western classical music are Fela Sowande (1905-1987), T.K. Ekundayo Philips (1884-1969), Akin Euba (b. 1935), Ayo Bankole (1935-1976), and Joshua Uzoigwe (b.1946). [114] All of these composers are Nigerian. Nigeria was a colony of Great Britain and because of this, all of these composers at one point in their career received formal training in the United Kingdom. They learned and honed their skills in the techniques of Western European music, and began to compose in a Western classical music style. However, as Pedro Aponte points out, "From the point of view of postcolonial theory, what composers intend to do with [the language of Western classical music,] is to use colonial elements, in this case piano, to produce a traditional musical discourse that will allow Africa to confront the West former colonizer, on its own terms."[115]

African Pianism

Harmony is the most influential of all European musical elements in Africa. Agawu states, "Of all the musical influences spawned by the colonial encounter, that of tonal functional

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[114] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music, xv*.
[115] Pedro R. Aponte, "Confronting Otherness: African Pianism as a Postcolonial Discourse" *Intercultural Musicology* 2/1-2 (October 2000), 16.

harmony has been the most pervasive, the most far reaching."[116] Taking this into consideration, it is not surprising that the piano has become one of the most influential European instruments in Africa. African Pianism, a term coined by scholar and composer Akin Euba, is the concept that musicians integrate elements of African music with the piano. This integration could involve an African musician who plays classical music; but it could also be used to describe a non-African musician who employs African musical elements in a composition that he performs on the piano.

There has been much criticism over the use of the piano, a European instrument, in the composition of music identified as African. However, it must be understood that the piano is simply a tool that the musician uses to express himself. In the hands of the composer it makes little difference whether it is of European origin. It is an available means to express a musical end. In fact, there have been many instruments that were not indigenous to Africa and yet have become part of its tradition. These include the hourglass tension drum and fiddles that originated from Middle East and the guitar that originated from Portugal and Spain. In addition, A.M. Jones has suggested that the popular one string fiddle, the Goje, probably came from the Middle East, and the xylophone may have come from Indonesia. "The goje and xylophone are today regarded as African, evidence that the assimilation and adoption of "foreign" musical instruments have long been a facet of African culture."[117] The Portuguese were responsible for introducing the Spanish guitar to Africa in the sixteenth century. It is thought to have arrived with sailors on merchant ships who traded along the African coast.[118]

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[116] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music*, 8.
[117] Kofi Agawu *Representing African Music*, 6.
[118] Ronnie Graham, *The Da Capo Guide to Contemporary African Music*. (London: Da Capo Press, 1988), 15.

The piano is but another instrument, a tool that the African musician may use as part of a rich percussive melodic tradition. In fact, because the piano is a percussion instrument and yet has the ability to produce many different pitches, it seems like the ideal instrument for African music. As Akin Euba has pointed out, "At a point of cultural contact, musical instruments presumably maintain a close relationship to their prototypes, but begin to diverge and assume new structural features, functions, idioms, and so forth when adapted to local conditions…this occurs only after several millennia."[119] The use of the piano, however, is still too "close to the point of cultural contact" for any substantial developmental features to be identifiable.[120]

The concept of African Pianism, introduced above, has primarily been identified in the genre of Western classical music.[121] It is found in solo piano music, in chamber groups, and in compositions for large orchestras. The majority of compositions, and for that reason literature, on African Pianism has been in the Western classical music vein. However, African pianism can exist in other forms of music; particularly forms that have the ability to incorporate elements of African music with distinctly different styles. For instance, there is the potential for an African Pianism that synthesizes African and Chinese music, or African and Indian music. Perhaps there has been an African Pianism composition that has merged African music with Gamelan techniques composed for piano. The possibilities are really endless.

African Pianism is not just the product of African fusion with Western classical music, but has also developed through interaction between Africa and America. At the same time that colonial and post-colonial Africans interacted with Western European musicians, African

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[119] Akin Euba, "Towards an African Pianism" *Intercultural Musicology* 1 (Oct. 1999), 10.
[120] *Ibid,* 10.
[121] The actual process of identifying and naming classical music is at times problematic. Other terms include, Art music, serious music, and intellectual music.

American musicians, particularly jazz musicians, became increasingly aware of their African roots. This cultural awareness was continuous from the beginning of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, however it increased in intensity during the Harlem Renaissance and again during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s. Particularly during the Civil Rights movement, jazz musicians began using African musical elements in their compositions and improvised solos. Improvisation is one musical element present in both African music and jazz, that brings the two traditions closer and allows for an easier transition for musicians to integrate the two music traditions into an African Pianism, through jazz performance.

This merger between jazz and African music is similar to the integration of contemporary African music with traditional African music, because many people feel that jazz is a form of African music. However, I believe that jazz is enough of a synthesis of Western and African musical traditions to justify the identification of the use of intentional African musical elements as something unique and separate.

The primary musicians involved in intercultural relations between Africa and America have been African musicians and African American musicians. Euba has pointed out that, "From a certain perspective all known types of contemporary music existing in the world may be said to be intercultural."[122] However, what is most interesting about the intercultural relationship between Africans and African Americans is that African Americans have specifically sought to connect with their African roots. The fact that Africans and African Americans are closely culturally related allows for the possibility of a tightly interwoven relationship, however the closer the relationship is between two interacting cultures, the more complicated it becomes to distinguish between individual traits of the two cultures.

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[122] Akin Euba, "Intercultural expressions in Neo-African Art Music," 115.

While all jazz pianism can be considered a type of African Pianism, I believe that it is important to differentiate jazz that intentionally attempts to incorporate African musical elements and jazz that does not. There is no argument that jazz contains unmistakable African musical elements and was developed by descendants of Africans. However it has been acculturated into American culture to the extent that it must be seen as distinctly separate from African music. In this way, musicians who consciously incorporate African elements into their music to enhance it, make the incorporation of African material distinctly identifiable. It should also be understood that under Euba's definition, African Pianism might also include African pianists who play jazz; presumably because they would unconsciously incorporate identifiable African musical elements, into traditional jazz repertoire.

It is with Euba's theoretical concept of the integration between traditional African musical elements and Western musical elements that I shall progress to the investigation of the music of Randy Weston.

CHAPTER 6

The Music of Randy Weston

Randy Weston is an appropriate example of a musician who effectively employs African pianism techniques. He is an African American who uses musical elements to re-establish his roots in Africa. He integrates African musical elements into his own playing, which is primarily in a jazz style. He also utilizes African musicians and instruments in combination with Western instruments to create a synthesis of African music and jazz; he has abandoned the term jazz, opting to describe his music as African Rhythms.

To understand Weston's African Rhythms, we must first understand Weston's concept of Africanism in full detail. Indeed, his idea of Africa is not restricted to sub-Saharan Africa. It includes Africans and their music throughout the diaspora. Thus, Weston's use of African musical techniques is not restricted to traditional African material. He infuses his music with traditional West African folk songs and dance rhythms, but he uses material from Latin America, the Caribbean, North Africa and Sub-Saharan African popular music equally. In discussing African elements in the music of Randy Weston, all music of the diaspora is included in many of its traditional and synthetic forms. If it is necessary, we may then label Weston's activity as Pan-African Pianism.

Pan-African Pianism

Randy Weston was not the first musician to use African material in his jazz compositions or improvisations. In fact, the use of African material can be traced back to Jelly Roll Morton's

use of the "Latin Tinge" in his solo piano works.[123] Aside from the influence that Duke Ellington and Thelonious Monk had on Weston, one of Weston's first discoveries of African influenced jazz was the Cuban infused music of Chano Pozo in Dizzy Gillespie's big band. Weston describes his first opportunity to hear Pozo with Gillespie, "Hearing Chano Pozo with Dizzy Gillespie's Orchestra in 1947 turned me around, and I've been working with hand drums ever since. Chano was Cuban, but you could hear pure Africa in his drum sound. It was a marriage, a complete circle."[124] Weston also realized that African music was present throughout the diaspora; "When you look at world history and you see the African retention in what we do here, in what we do in Jamaica and Brazil, you hear it in the music. You hear the rhythm, you hear the call and response, and you hear the humor."[125]

Weston stressed that despite being in "different parts of the world and speaking different languages,"[126] it was important for decedents of Africa to identify with the African continent. "Africa is like a huge tree, with branches to Brazil, to Cuba, and America. The approach to music is identical: rhythm, polyrhythm, call and response."[127] Weston's opinion of the importance of African music does not end with Latin America, the Caribbean, and African America. He states, "Most of the music of the Western Hemisphere comes out of African traditional music."[128] Certainly many recent popular music scholars have tended to agree with Weston's opinion.[129] However, the question may be asked, why does Weston place such

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[123] Shipton, *New History of Jazz, 831.*
[124] Panken "African Soul," 20.
[125] Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*.
[126] Musto, "African Rhythms" *All About Jazz*.
[127] Bouchard, "Randy Weston's Pan-African Revival," 20.
[128] Ted Panken "African Soul," 20.
[129] Charles Kiel and Steven Feld, *Music Grooves*, (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

importance on the influence of traditional African music? He says it is because, "There's always the emphasis on the differences in us. But I'm looking for the similar."[130]

Keeping Weston's philosophical concepts in mind, we move to his musical work in order to investigate his use of African music in composition and performance. Looking at both Weston's use of the piano and at his ensemble compositions, we can see elements of all of Euba's African Pianism techniques. Dr. Euba, responsible for coining the term African Pianism puts forth five characteristics that facilitate identifying the use of African musical traits in other styles of music:

1. Direct borrowing of thematic material from traditional African sources
2. Thematic repetition
3. The use of rhythmical or tonal motifs based on traditional sources
4. Percussive treatment of the piano
5. Making the piano behave like an African instrument

An examination of Weston's artistic output will show that he has utilized all of these techniques.

1. Direct borrowings of thematic material from traditional African sources

Weston's most obvious use of thematic material borrowed directly from traditional African sources is his song, "Congolese Children." This song appears on a few of his recordings from the 1960s and 70s, however it was first released on the album *Highlife: Music from the New African Nations* recorded in 1963. "Congolese Children" is Weston's adaptation of a traditional Bashai Pygmy song that he heard schoolboys from the Bashai tribe singing during his trip to Congo. The melody is based on a diatonic scale, F major, and he sets the melody in a

[130] Panken "African Soul," 20.

straightforward 4/4 meter. Weston has recorded this piece in multiple settings. On the original recording, the composition is arranged for six horns and a rhythm section. Weston has also performed the piece on solo piano. In both situations the melody is of prime importance and is repeated numerous times. With each repetition of the melody, Weston alters the instrumentation and harmonic organization of the accompaniment. One of Weston's favorite arranging techniques is to have the full ensemble state the melody the first time through and on the repeat, play the melody on the piano with no accompaniment from the horns.[131] The number of times the melody is repeated is unusual for a jazz arrangement compared to the norm of the time. This indicates that a high level of importance is placed on the melody, as it would be if it were sung over and over again by children.

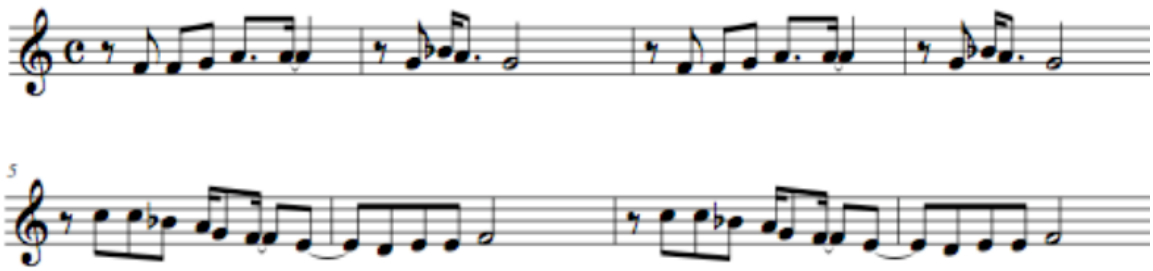


Figure 1 "Congolese Children" melody

On his *Highlife* album Weston also arranged and performed two compositions by modern African composers, "Niger Mambo," by Bobby Benson and "Mystery of Love," by Guy Warren. These musicians compose in a contemporary music style. However, Weston's use of their works is relevant under this first technique of African Pianism. These composers unquestionably utilize traditional rhythmic and melodic elements in their compositions. Both Benson and Warren

[131] Weston uses this arranging technique on a number of different compositions and its importance is discussed below.

employ traditional African percussion and rhythm patterns in their respective pieces, merging these traditional musical traits with the use of Western horns. Weston's interpretation of their compositions demonstrates his understanding of the unwritten characteristics of the music that must be performed in order for the composition to be identified as containing African elements. Weston could have interpreted these compositions with a more traditional jazz performance; yet, he chose to emphasize the African material in each. He did this by preserving the African rhythmic patterns and instruments prescribed by the composers.

"Niger Mambo," composed by famous highlife musician Bobby Benson, is essentially a highlife song. The drumbeat that Weston's rhythm section plays is consistent with that of other highlife songs of the time. The use of a highlife rhythm pattern rather than a jazz swing pattern indicates that Weston understood the importance of preserving the African rhythmic element in Benson's composition. The highlife rhythm used here is indicated in example 2.

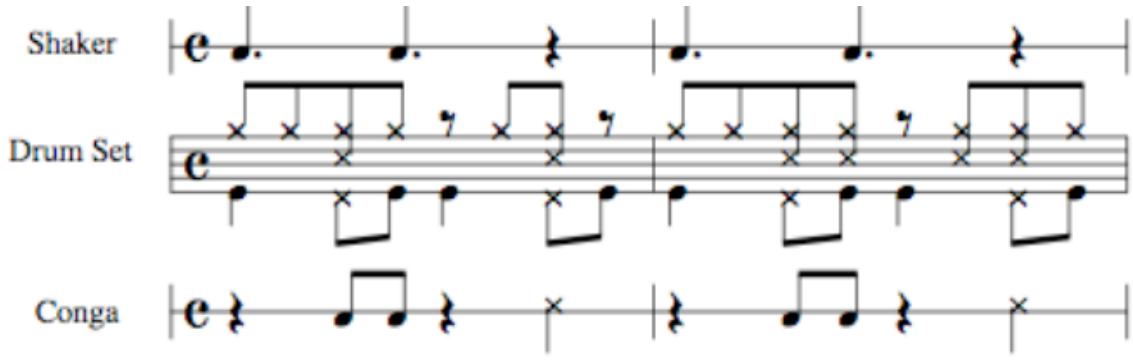


Figure 2 The highlife rhythmic pattern used in "Niger Mambo."

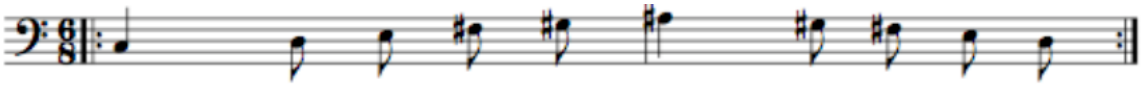
The second work by an African composer recorded by Weston on *Highlife* album is "Mystery of Love." As stated above, this song was composed by Ghanaian born Guy Warren. Weston was so fond of the song that it became the theme song for his African Rhythms

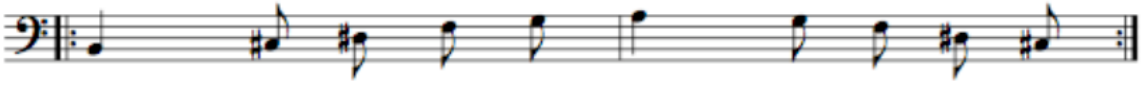
ensemble. The work features a more traditional rhythmic organization than Benson's tune; in fact, the rhythmic pattern used in this composition is a well-known timeline common in traditional music of West Africa. This piece is discussed further below.

2. Thematic repetition

Thematic repetition is a technique used quite often by Weston, and it can be heard in conjunction with many of the other African Pianistic techniques. The use of repetition in Weston's music can be found in left hand ostinatos in compositions such as the first movement of *Uhuru Afrika*, and piece titled "Lagos" written in 1963. These are excellent examples of the important use of ostinato, a traditional African technique identified in chapter five. In both examples, the repetition of the ostinato creates a steady, rhythmically oriented accompaniment in which the establishment of a groove takes precedence over harmonic movement.

Movement I. *Uhuru Afrika*





"Lagos"

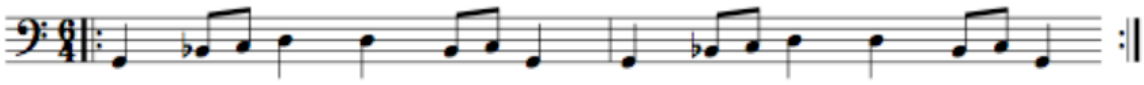


Figure 3Thematic Repetition.

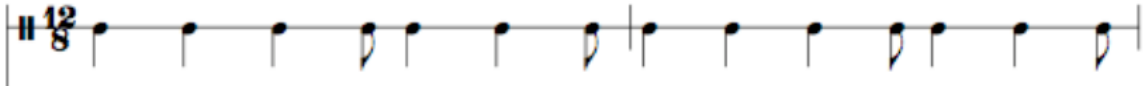
The repetition of the melody in "Congolese Children," (Figure 1.), is yet another example of the use of repetition in Weston's music. As stated above, the repetition of the melody in variation dominates every performances of this composition. In fact, even when musicians take turns performing improvised solos on the original recording, the melody is consistently performed in the back ground, underneath the solos. During Weston's own improvised solo he never fully ceases playing the melody, he constantly refers to it throughout his entire solo.

Likewise, in a solo performance of "Kasbah Kids" recorded on the Album *Blues to Africa,* Weston's melody consists of two recurring melodic phrases that alternate and are developed extensively throughout the performance; becoming evermore intricate with polyrhythm. (See Figure 7.) The melodic phrases in this song are very short, particularly the second phrase, which is three notes, repeated continuously. "Kasbah Kids" is an interesting example of thematic repetition because the repeated melodic phrases are found in the highest voice. In contrast, the majority of thematic repetition in Weston's work appears in the low voice. For this reason, "Kasbah Kids" functions as a sort of upside down ostinato. This is not however uncommon in African music, in fact, it is quite common for the higher pitched drums, rattles and bells to perform a repeating ostinato while a low pitched master drum improvises rhythmic patterns that coincide with the accompaniment.

3. The use of rhythmical or tonal motifs based on traditional sources

In regards to his compositional techniques, Weston states, "I've been going through a period of heavy concentration on rhythm… using a lot of traditional rhythms and also playing the blues, so people can recognize that there is actually no difference in the musics. It's like I'm

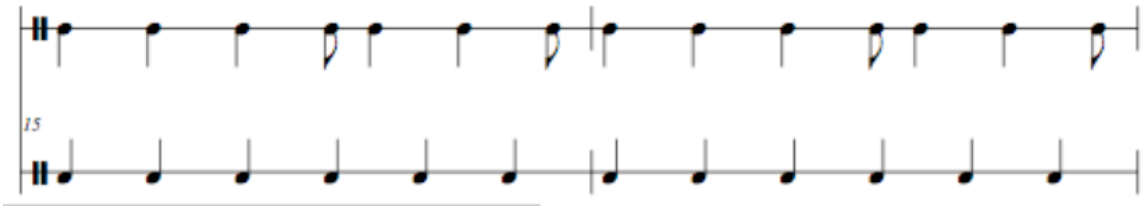
developing the language of the African-talking drums on piano."[132] One example of Weston's use of a rhythmic motif based on a traditional source comes from his performance of Guy Warren's composition "Mystery of Love". Weston has recorded this song many different times. When Weston performs "Mystery of Love" with a rhythm section as he does on the recording, *Highlife,* the percussion section accompanies the melody with a common West African timeline. This timeline pattern is very common in traditional West African music and is often referred to as the 'standard time pattern.'[133] On Weston's recording, this pattern is accompanied by a high drum part that plays in polyrhythm with the standard time pattern. The same kind of interaction between the high drum part and standard time pattern can be found in the traditional Ewe funeral dance rhythm, Adowa. In Adowa there is a secondary bell pattern that is identical to the high drum part performed in "Mystery of Love". As can be seen from these examples, the interaction between the two parts is very similar. During solo piano performances "Mystery of Love", Weston plays the common African timeline in the upper range of the keyboard, imitating the African bell that usually plays the rhythm.



Standard time pattern with high drum secondary part in "Mystery of Love"

[132] Robert Palmer, "The Musical Roots of Randy Weston," *Rolling Stone*, 30 (October 1980), 25.
[133] Kofi Agawu, "Structural Analysis or Cultural Analysis? Competing Perspectives on the 'Standard Time Pattern' of West African Rhythm", *Journal of American Musicological Society,* 59:1 (2006).

Standard Time pattern



High Drum Pattern

Primary Adowa bell pattern with secondary bell pattern

Figure 4 Standard time pattern

Weston is also fond of using African tonal motifs when improvising solos. For example, on the recording of "Mystery of Love" recorded in 1963, he improvises using an organization of melodic tones that is consistent with Anlo Ewe tonal organization.[134] While the remainder of the ensemble states the melody and provides a stable accompaniment, Weston improvises a solo line that complements the melody. He limits his note choices to six tones over the span of three octaves. These pitches are C#, D#, E, F#, G#, and B. Using these tones in stepwise motion creates the sense of C# minor, or a C# dorian mode without the A#, the sixth degree. However, upon a closer look at the way Weston utilizes these tones, it seems that he uses them in a way that is closer to that of Anlo Ewe traditional melodic construction.

[134] The Anlo Ewe are an ethnic group that occupy a region of West Africa near the Eastern border of Ghana and into Togo.

It is widely accepted that traditional African vocal music may employ scales from four to seven steps.[135] However, in his dissertation, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes of Ewe Traditional Vocal Music*, George Dor states that "Anlo Ewe use pentatonic tonal resources in constructing their melodies." [136] One of Dor's most significant assertions is that Ewe songs may contain up to seven tones; however, two of these tones function as added tones and are only used in specific circumstances. In addition, it is not uncommon for Ewe composers and performers to utilize two closely related pentatonic scales, which creates a sense that the tonal construction is hexatonic when it is really pentatonic. Dor states:

> Hexatonic modes are mostly realized in songs that introduce a sixth tone only at certain structural points of a melody that is originally pentatonic…What I call 'temporary tones' within Anlo hexatonic tonal resources can be explained under the following rubrics: (1) sparing use under which…neighbor tones can be subsumed; (2) juxtaposition of two pentatonic modes…[137]

Weston's implementation of the six tones in his solo corresponds closely to that of Anlo Ewe vocalists.[138] The primary nature of the solo is pentatonic. The first pentatonic, C# E F#, G# and B is outlined clearly in the descending line moving from measure one to measure two. (See example 5.) The D# makes its first appearance in the second phrase. At this point the D# seems to take precedence over the E, thereby relegating the E to an upper neighbor tone in measure three and in the descending cadential figure of the second phrase. In Western music, including jazz the minor pentatonic represented in Weston's solo C# E F# G# and B is quite common; in

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[135] J.H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, (New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974.
[136] George Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes of Ewe Traditional Vocal Music*, (PHD Dissertation University of Pittsburgh, 2001), 111.
[137] Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes,* 126.
[138] I am not implying that Ewe vocalists would sing in the same manner that Weston is playing. I simply intend to show that Weston is organizing his pitch selection in a way that it functions similarly to that of Ewe vocalists.

fact, it could be said that the majority of pentatonic improvisation focuses on this form of the anhemitonic pentatonic scale. Why then, does Weston choose to emphasis the D# over the E? The simple answer may be that the D# features prominently in Warrens original Melody. However, there may be a closer connection to the tonal organization of Anlo Ewe music, if only subconsciously.

It is thus significant to note the emphasis Weston places on the D#, which creates the pentatonic C# D# F# G# and B. This configuration of a pentatonic scale, at first seems to be uncommon in Western music. However, it can be reordered as the third mode of a G# minor pentatonic. If looked at from this perspective, Weston is juxtaposing two minor pentatonic scales with the same construction, simply by utilizing both the D# and E in his improvisation. This same exact juxtaposition can be found in Anlo Ewe vocal music.[139] In his dissertation, Dor presents a juxtaposition of two pentatonic scales with the same relationship as the ones used by Weston. In Dor's work he gives an example of an Ewe song that utilized the tones D E F G A and C, each tone is a half step higher than its corresponding pitch in Weston's solo. Dor indicates that while a reduction of the tone set would indicate a hexatonic tonal organization, the specific use of tones indicates a pentatonic function.

There are admittedly times when Weston's juxtaposition of the two pentatonic scales breaks some of the 'rules' established by Dor, however the overall impression of the solo is one of a pentatonic nature.

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[139] Dor, *Tonal Resources and Compositional Processes*, 126-129.

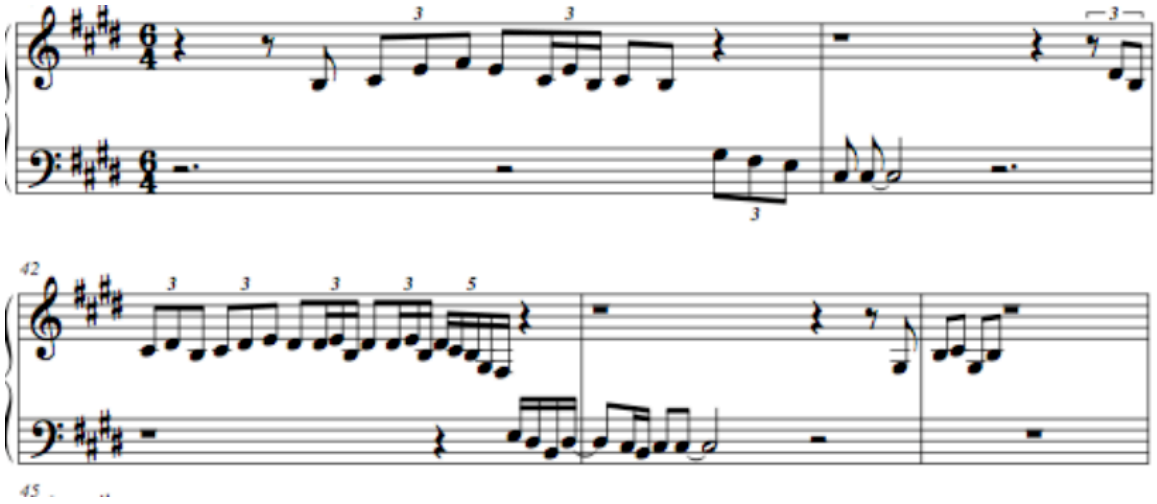

Figure 5 First phrases of Weston's improvised solo on "Mystery of Love"

4. Percussive treatment of the piano

Weston has a fondness for turning the piano into a percussion instrument where rhythmic articulation and timbre play a much larger role than specific note choices. Robert L. Doerschuk points out that "At times [Weston moves] to the bottom of the 96-key Bosendorfer Imperial Grand. The rumble of these lowest notes doubtless appeals to Weston's fascination with blurring the line between percussive effects and tonality."[140] An example of this can be heard on a solo performance of Weston's composition "Lagos." Here Weston uses the lowest notes of his piano to represent a repeating rhythmic drone of unspecified pitch. He also uses this technique to represent his impression of the rhythm of an airplane.[141]

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[140] Robert L. Doerschuk. "Randy Weston: Back to the Fountain" *88:The Greats of Jazz Piano*, (San Francisco: Backbeat Books, 2001).

[141] Weston composed "Lagos" in celebration of his trip to Nigeria in 1963. The composition was written on an airplane as Weston was traveling to Nigeria, in an interview he states that the opening rhythms are intended to imitate the rhythm of the airplane engine.

Another example of the percussive treatment of the piano can be heard in the introduction of Weston's solo performance of "Blues to Africa", from the Album of the same name. In this example, Weston contrasts low rumbling chords with a one-note rhythm played with drum-like percussive sound on the piano. This piece can also be heard on the recording *Highlife*. On the *Highlife* version, the low rumbling note clusters are given to the horns, and the trombone in particular plays with a tone that sounds reminiscent of the Kakaki, the long royal trumpet of the Hausa of northern Nigeria. However, Weston keeps the one note percussive line in the piano and plays in polyrhythm with the drum set.

5. Make the Piano Behave like an African Instrument.

During the introduction of many of his compositions, Weston will often improvise in the low end of his piano while the rest of the musicians provide accompaniment. When this is done, Weston's role as soloist is analogous to that of a master drum in an African drum ensemble in the sense that both are improvising authoritatively using low resonating pitches. At the same time, his band functions in the same role as the accompanying instruments of the African drum ensemble. The accompanying instruments provide repeating ostinato rhythms, and Weston solos on top of this accompaniment in the same way master drummer would fit his part into a drum ensemble.

Weston also seems to be fond of imitating other African instruments such as the xylophone and the Mbira. In his compositions "Congolese Children" and "Kasbah Kids" he employs a technique that imitates what at first sounds like a toy piano. However, upon further listening is seems that Weston is imitating a small xylophone or Mbira. In both situations he plays a single line in each hand in a sort of polyrhythmic counterpoint. Furthermore, in each case

one of the hands plays a repeated ostinato that provides an accompaniment to the melody, which can be found in the other hand.

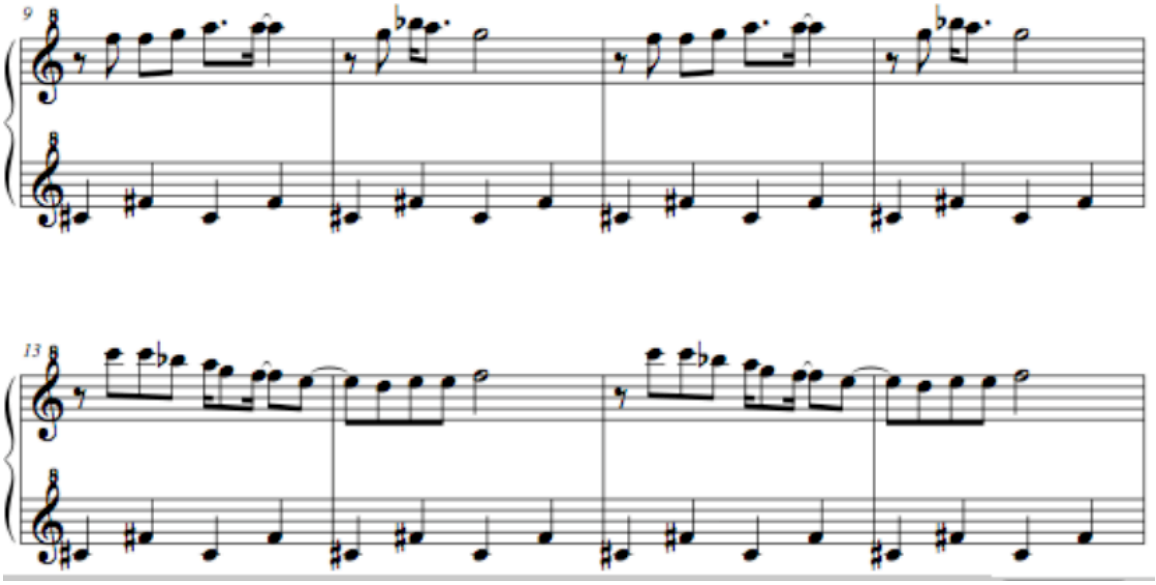

Figure 6 "Congolese Children" mbira impression

In the performance of "Congolese Children" this technique is used for only one eight-bar section of the melody. In the example of "Kasbah Kids," the entire song is played in the upper range of the piano making it reminiscent of a small xylophone or Mbira. In this composition, Weston plays repeating melodic motifs in his right hand while in his left hand he plays an accompanying melody which creates a polyphonic song that Weston says is his interpretation of kids playing and singing in the streets of Kasbah Morocco.

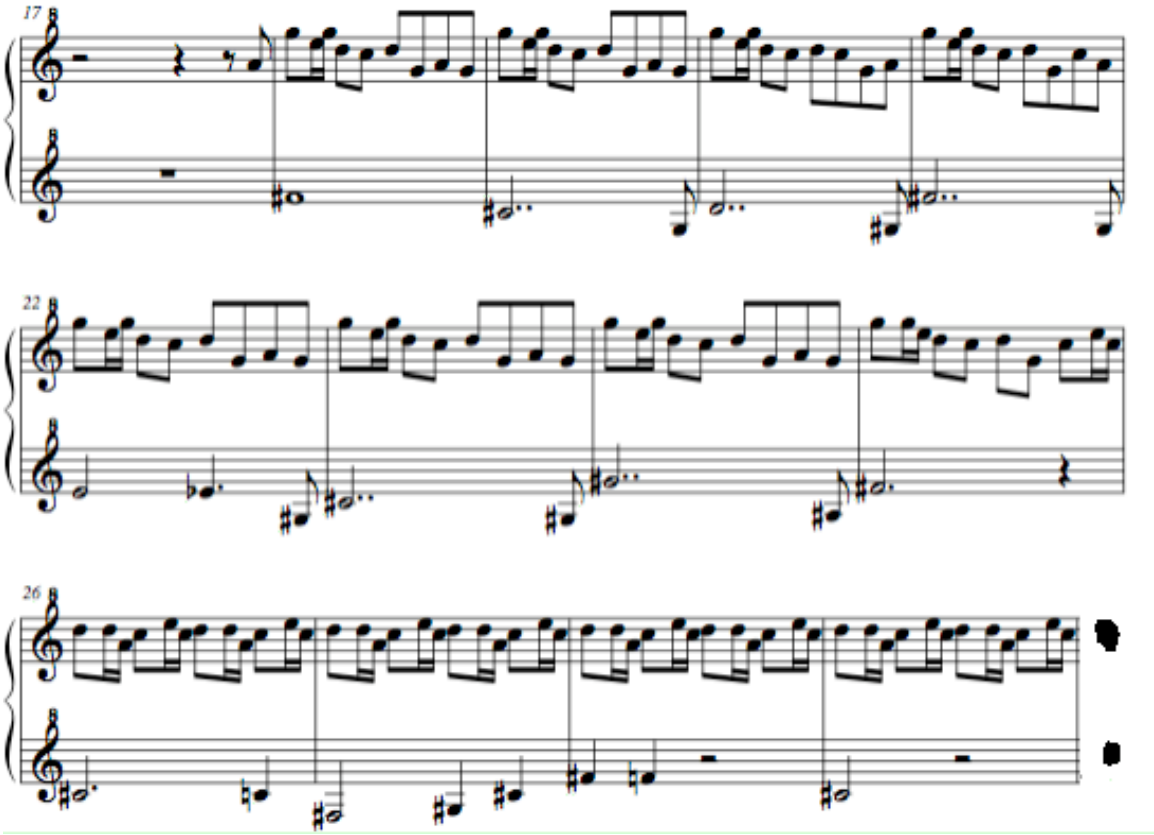

Figure 7 "Kasbah Kids" impression of mbira

Weston's use of African material is not limited to these musical examples but abounds in all of his ensemble and solo performances. He has effectively assimilated African material into his playing to the extent that his use of the term African Rhythms for his music, rather than jazz, is justified.

The following section is an analysis and comparison of two of Weston's compositions. The first is the first movement of Weston's *Uhuru Afrika*. This work is compared to a composition of Weston's called "Caban Bamboo Highlife".

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS OF "UHURU KWANZA,"

For much of his life Weston had listened to and studied traditional African music. He took every opportunity he had to listen to the music of Africa in live performances and on recordings, often given to him by United Nation's delegates. In a sense, his research culminated in the composition and recording of *Uhuru Afrika,* recorded in 1959. Aside from the political statement Weston made with this composition, he also incorporated within it many aspects of traditional African music. In fact, *Uhuru Afrika* is quite possibly his most complete synthesis of traditional African music with jazz.

Uhuru Afrika is divided up into five sections, an introduction, followed by movements one through four. Although the introduction is relatively brief, it is significant as it is marked by a collaboration of Weston with Langston Hughes, who supplied text for the introduction in the form of a freedom poem. Langston Hughes' participation in this project is significant because he was an instrumental contributor to both the Harlem Renaissance and the Black Arts Movement. Hughes's text was performed in a combination of English and Swahili by Tuntemeke Sanga, a friend of Weston's and a United Nations Delegate from Tanzania. Weston chose to use Swahili because he felt that it represented a unified Africa. This is yet another example of his philosophy of inclusion, of a united African people, a philosophy developed by the influences mentioned in part one of this thesis.

For this composition, Weston employed different combinations of horns and percussion along with a jazz rhythm section. In its fullest sections Weston used four trumpets, three trombones, and five saxophonists—who double at times on piccolo, flute, and clarinet—guitar,

bass, drums, piano, hand percussion, bongos and congas. The full ensemble is only heard in short sections in movement II and III. For the remainder of the composition he used the horns in smaller groups, mixing up the combinations in order to acquire specific tonal textures.

At this point I would like to look specifically at movement I "Uhuru Kwanza". I chose to analyze this movement for a few reasons. First, I did not have access to a score of the composition, only a sound recording. When listening to the first movement, I realized that the traditional African musical elements it contained were fairly accessible. Second, the instrumentation was such that I was able to transcribe the entire ensemble, to the extent that a clear visual picture was obtained sufficiently enough to facilitate an analysis of the work.[142]

"Uhuru Kwanza" begins with drums and percussion. African hand drums and percussion instruments dominate the rhythm section, while the drum set plays a lesser role as an accompanying instrument. Throughout the song there is a polyrhythmic feel that varies between 6/8 and 3/4. I chose to notate the score in 6/8 because is seemed to coincide with the timeline played in the hand percussion. The traditional timeline used is a derivative of the well-known 'standard African time pattern." (See Example 4, p. 67.) The rhythms of "Uhuru Kwanza" are not necessarily from any specific traditional group, instead Weston's rhythm section creates a syntheses of African rhythms, drawn on from their own individual cultures to create a traditional sounding rhythmic feel.

Further traditional African music traits can be seen in the function of the percussion section. The percussion section functions like an African drum ensemble for the entire movement. In the opening forty-eight measures, bongos, a shaker, jawbones, and a drum set, function as the accompaniment. The drum set, though not normally part of a traditional drum

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[142] For all music examples of "Uhuru Kwanza" please see Appendix 1.

ensemble, performs a function similar to the African hourglass tension drum. This is accomplished by using the high tom as the high tone of the hourglass drum and the low tom as the low tone of the hourglass drum. Known by many different names, the hourglass tension drum is one of the most popular traditional drums of Africa and plays an important role in many different ensembles as both leader and accompanying instrument. The accompanying instruments play continuously repeating rhythms while a low pitched drum, acting as a master drum or leader, plays a changing rhythm in an improvised soloistic fashion. This ensemble structure and the roles played by each instrument are consistent with the roles of instruments in the drum ensembles of the Ewe people in Ghana and Togo, and of the Dundun drum ensembles of the Yoruba in Nigeria. In both traditions, a large low-pitched drum functions as the master drum, playing an improvised solo part while the remaining drums and idiophones provide a relatively stable accompaniment.[143] It is thus evident that the percussion section of Weston's piece functions in the same way as a traditional West African drum ensemble; specifically those of Ewe and Yoruba tradition.

The bass and piano enter in measure forty-nine and they present a repeating theme based on a scale played in stepwise motion. This repeating melodic theme creates an ostinato played in polyrhythm and metric hemiola with the rhythmic groove that is set-up by the rhythm section. The hemiola occurs because the rhythm section is phrasing its eighth notes in groups of three while the bass and piano are phrasing eighth notes in groups of two. This interaction creates the feeling of the meters 6/8 and 3/4 being phrased simultaneously. While this is a melodic theme, it interacts rhythmically with the rhythm section. The polyrhythmic interaction

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[143] The information given on African Drum ensembles comes from my own personal performance experience, personal communications with Dr. Akin Euba, Anicet Mundundu and Steve Gbolonyo.

of melodic material plays an important role in traditional African music and Weston presented his interpretation of that technique here.

The melodic theme represented by a whole tone scale is repeated six times and then transposed down a half step and repeated four more times, thus all twelve pitches are utilized in the repeated ostinato. As stated in the previous chapter, the repeated whole tone pattern utilized here as an ostinato is significant because it was a rhythmic technique prevalent in jazz composition at the time and it created a release from the constraints of Western harmony allowing the composer and performers to focus on the groove and other rhythmic aspects of the composition.

It should also be noted that the melodic theme has a two-measure repetition. This is significant because while most jazz compositions of the time focused on four measure phrases creating eight or twelve measure sections, Weston uses shorter two measure phases. The shorter phrases allow him to create more varied sections of six and ten measures. Furthermore, a shorter two-measure phrase is akin to the repeated ostinatos commonly found in African traditional music. Using a two-measure repeated theme also allows for more polyrhythmic interaction between instruments in a traditional African music setting. This is explained by the fact that when you combine many different simple two-measure phrases one on top of another there is the opportunity for accurate, and complex polyrhythm.

In Section A, the whole tone theme is presented linearly, in stepwise motion. In section B, Weston takes the whole tone thematic material, and restructures it so that it is utilized with more rhythmic variation. He also utilizes it harmonically, first in the bass and piano that accompany the melody of section B1 and then in the horns when B2 is stated. Sections C1 and C2 are a further development of the whole tone material first stated in section A.

Weston's use of the whole tone scale is significant for two reasons. First, the whole tone scale was a particular favorite of Thelonious Monk, there is no doubt that Weston is drawing on Monk's influence by using the whole tone material.[144] Second, it is a six note symmetric scale, meaning that all of the notes are equally spaced apart. This is significant because symmetric scales are often found in traditional African music. Nketia identifies four, five, six, and seven-tone "equidistant" scales in both instrumental and vocal music throughout Africa.[145] The six-note equidistant scales used in traditional African music are also whole tone scale and it is more than likely that Weston is drawing upon the information he has gathered to compose using an equidistant scale with this in mind.

In sections C1 and C2 the trombones provide a harsh non-conventional timbre in the horn section that references back to the influence of Ellington. The use of the trombones in these sections is similar to the way Ellington utilized his brass players to symbolize the primitive and savage aspects of Africa through music. Weston may have also been trying to produce the sound of African horns such as the Kakaki, a royal trumpet used by the Hausa of Nigeria. Furthermore, listening to an array of recorded examples of solo and ensemble horns, it is evident that unique and individualized timbre production is important in West African horn tonal production. As indicated in chapter 3, what is thought of as a 'clear' and 'pure' tone in terms of Western aesthetics is considered incomplete in many African societies. Weston listened to many recordings of traditional African music at the time, and these examples, coupled with the influence of Ellington's group were most certainly an influence on "Uhuru Kwanza."

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[144] In a personal interview with Weston, he states that his use of the whole tone scale in *Uhuru Afrika* comes from his study of Thelonious Monk's music. Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.
[145] Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 116-119.

Weston's Musical Transition

When listening to "Uhuru Kwanza", recorded in 1959, there is no question that it is Weston's interpretation of traditional African music. However, soon after releasing the album Weston took two trips to Nigeria as part of a U.S. cultural delegation. The first trip was in 1961 and the second was in 1963. An interesting transformation occurred in Weston's music due to his trips to Africa. Upon his return to America after his second visit to Nigeria, Weston recorded and released the Album *Highlife: Music from the New African Nations.*

This album presents a decidedly more popular style of African music. I suggest that the change in musical style is due to the fact that *Uhuru Afrika* was recorded before Weston went to Nigeria. His musical sources were from America; his influential parents, African musicians in America, and tapes from UN delegates. These were most likely more traditional sources because African musicians in America were expected to showcase the 'exotic' side of African traditional music to their American audiences. Like wise, UN officials, when asked for musical examples, may have also felt obligated to showcase the more traditional musics of their countries in order to feel that they were representing their nations respectfully. However, when Weston went to Nigeria and visited with musicians in Lagos, he was able to hear the popular music of urban West Africans. This popular music would have been much closer in spirit to the American jazz that was happening at the same time. In fact, in personal interview, Weston states that his trips to Africa provided him with the first opportunity to hear African highlife, and to interact with highlife musicians.[146]

[146] Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

During his two trips, Weston interacted with local musicians. He played with popular musicians such as Fela Kuti in Lagos.[147] Furthermore, in the introduction to a solo performance at the 2005 Symposium of Composition in Africa and the Diaspora, Weston states that he hung out with Bobby Benson, a famous highlife musician, at his club the Caban Bamboo. Upon his return to the US, after his second trip, he recorded and released *Highlife*. This recording shows the influence of the Nigerian popular music that Weston was exposed to on his trip. The album contains seven songs, five by Weston and the previously mentioned works by Bobby Benson and Guy Warren. The entire album features a decidedly highlife inspired rhythmic groove, with the exception of Warren's "Mystery of Love" which features a more traditional rhythmic pattern. The first track on the recording, "Caban Bamboo Highlife" represents the album's highlife inspired theme well. A transcription of the first statement of the melody is presented in Appendix 2, in order to facilitate a comparison to "Uhuru Kwanza," the first movement of *Uhuru Afrika*.

"Caban Bamboo Highlife"[148]

While "Uhuru Kwanza" represented Weston's attempt to merge traditional African music with jazz, "Caban Bamboo Highlife" is unmistakably influenced by the West African popular music called highlife. The melody is written in the popular song form AABA, which is a form that is common in standard jazz repertoire, but is also common in highlife. Speaking on the subject of typical highlife melodic forms Agawu states, "At its most basic, it borrows from the

[147] Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.
[148] For all music examples of "Caban Bamboo please see Appendix 2.

outline of a popular melody or hymn tune."[149] This is certainly the case for Weston's "Caban Bamboo." The melody of Weston's piece is a simple diatonic theme in the key of F. The simplicity of the melody is also characteristic of highlife tunes, which are often short diatonic phrases.[150]

The first A section is played in thirds by the horns. Upon its restatement, the piano performs it in thirds. Finally the last A section is a combination of the first and second, with the piano playing the melody for the first four bars and the horns finishing it off. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a technique that Weston employs often.[151] Varying the instrumental texture on the melody provides an interesting contrast of timbre for the repeat of a melody that, in standard jazz settings is often repeated without change each time it is performed.

The performance of the A sections in thirds is significant to Weston's interpretation of highlife music. It is a further indication that Weston understands the significance of traditional African tonal organization in the popular highlife music. In highlife, the presentation of a melody in thirds is a reference to the singing technique used in traditional Akan singing.[152] Although Weston learned his interpretation of highlife in Nigeria, and the Akan are located in Ghana, the fact that Weston discovered the technique of performing highlife melodies in thirds is an indication of the importance of that technique. Furthermore, it shows an important connectedness that African popular music has throughout West Africa.

The Bridge, or B section of Weston's "Caban Bamboo," features a repeated two-measure call and response figure by the horns, while the piano and bass perform a four measure

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[149] Agawu, *Representing African Music,* 130.
[150] Agawu, *Representing African Music,* 130.
[151] See the example of "Congolese Children"
[152] Agawu *Representing African Music,* 131.

repeated harmonic figure with a common root movement in fourths. The call and response in the horns can be identified as retention of traditional call and response techniques common in African music. The harmonic movement is more typical of popular music and derives its origins from Western classical music, in this case most likely acquired through Weston's education in jazz. However, the merger of traditional African call and response with Western harmony is again an important identifying factor in highlife, as much as it is an identifying factor in jazz.

In the 1963 recording of "Caban Bamboo," Weston used a highlife rhythmic pattern in the percussion section rather that a traditional rhythmic pattern. The difference between the rhythmic pattern used in "Caban Bamboo" and the one present in "Uhuru Kwanza" is that the drum set in "Caban Bamboo" fulfills a dominant role in the rhythm section, rather than the hand drum and percussion dominated rhythm section found in "Uhuru Kwanza". Furthermore, while "Caban Bamboo" still features some aspects of traditional African rhythm, including an underlying standard time pattern, it is equally accompanied by the steady bass drum beat found in the drum set, and the repeated eighth notes in the shaker. In "Caban Bamboo" the standard time pattern is played on a medium range drum, which possesses neither the bell's ability to be heard over the percussion section, nor the authority of a low sounding master drum. In a traditional setting, the standard time pattern would take precedence. It may be initiated by the master drummer, and sustained by a highly audible bell. Therefore, in the example of "Caban Bamboo" Weston demonstrates his understanding of the role of traditional African rhythm in popular music, and the fact that it continues to be sounded, but plays a more subdominant or integrated role in the overall structure of the music.

Weston's understanding of African popular music is further displayed by the fact that "Caban Bamboo" is performed in a simple 4/4 meter with not as much polyrhythm. The

result is a rhythm section that functions closer to that of the jazz rhythm section. This is in contrast to "Uhuru Kwanza" where there was a high degree of polyrhythm in both the percussion section and the band.

Finally, in "Uhuru Kwanza", the horns function significantly as added timbre providing an Ellingtonian-like image of African jungle horns, while the piano performed the main melodic role. However, for "Caban Bamboo" the horns function more like a highlife band horn section. The soprano saxophone and trumpet carry the majority of the melody while the low brass and reeds supply harmonic interjections.

The question may be asked, why did Weston choose to incorporate popular African music along with traditional African music in his recordings after visiting Nigeria? The answer can be found in the significance of this comparison. Before Weston was able to visit Africa for himself he was forced to rely on second hand information about the place he considered his homeland. The information he was able to acquire left him with a fairly accurate perception of traditional African music. However, once Weston was able to experience Africa for himself, his view of the complex nature of African society became much more accurate. Furthermore, he was able to depict the complex cultural aspects in his music. It was clear to Weston that traditional African music and culture still existed. For example, he was able to experience performances of traditional music at cultural centers on his trip, and he took short excursions to rural villages to hear traditional music performances.[153] However, Weston also spent significant time in Lagos, one of the most populated cities in Africa. He went to nightclubs every night and interacted with highlife musicians. There is a similarity between jazz musicians and highlife

[153] Information supplied from introductions to compositions, at the 2005 Symposium of Composition in Africa and the Diaspora, organized by Akin Euba.

musicians. It is only natural that Weston would find a much closer relationship to highlife musicians and their music than he would with traditional African musicians.

It is because of his trips to Africa that Weston was able to experience for himself the true nature of his spiritual homeland. This experience did not dissuade his use of traditional African material; it reinforced it. However, his trip also provided him with the knowledge that there were many different kinds of music being performed in Africa, and he took advantage of his newfound knowledge by incorporating both traditional and popular African music into his work throughout the 1960s.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

This examination of the influences and the music of Randy Weston depicts a complicated interaction of many different elements of African and African American culture that came together in a very specific way to shape his life and music. No other person has been influenced in exactly the same way that Weston has. However, his influences, experiences, and political and musical philosophies are similar to those of other jazz musicians who lived at the same time.

The cultural environment in America from the time of the Harlem Renaissance through the Civil Rights movement was such that African Americans sought to connect with their African roots. Weston was greatly influenced by this period of time. Due in large part to his fathers consistent concerns to instill the importance of recognizing his African heritage, Weston gravitated towards the use of traditional African music in jazz, as did other musicians of his era.

Weston's experience however, was significantly different than that of other jazz musicians for one very important reason. While Weston grew up and worked in New York City like many of his contemporaries, he had the uncommon fortune and opportunity to travel to Africa. That opportunity was one that only a few other jazz musicians were given. Furthermore, he took his trips during an exciting time in African history, when many nations were gaining their independence, and cultural activities flourished. Finally, his journeys occurred at an optimum time in his life, a time when he was most prepared musically and intellectually to absorb the complex social systems and cultural activity in Africa that was a direct result of the merger of traditional and modern cultures of the time.

Randy Weston's journey—a journey that began with his parents' cultural awareness and ended in Africa—transformed him into the mature man and musician he eventually became. The journey began with other peoples' perceptions of Africa and African music, but it culminated with Weston's own experiences of Africa and his subsequent readjustment of his impression of African culture and music. As a result, he was able to gain a unique understanding of the music of his forefathers, and he has continued to spread the ideas and images of the complex nature of African society and culture through his music.

The decision to integrate African music with jazz has not been an easy process for Weston; in fact he has had to endure many hardships along the way. In a personal interview Weston discusses some of the struggles he has had to endure. "Africa was a place to be ashamed of. [Africa was misrepresented] in the Hollywood movies, and in the educational system," so playing an integrated music of jazz and African music left Weston in a lonely position for many years. "People considered Europe to be the highpoint of civilization." His choice to integrate the two musics placed him in an "unpopular position at times," states Weston, "but you have to do what you have to do."[154] Although it has been a very long process for Weston, he understands that it is important to understand African history and heritage as it relates to American history and heritage. This understanding is the first step to improving the lives of African Americans.

Understanding the life and music of Randy Weston is equally important because it provides further awareness of the importance of the African heritage to Americans. Recognition of the existence of an African history and the vital part it has played and continues to play in the shaping of American culture is the next step to true equality in America.

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[154] Weston, personal interview with Jason Squinobal, 03/26/2007.

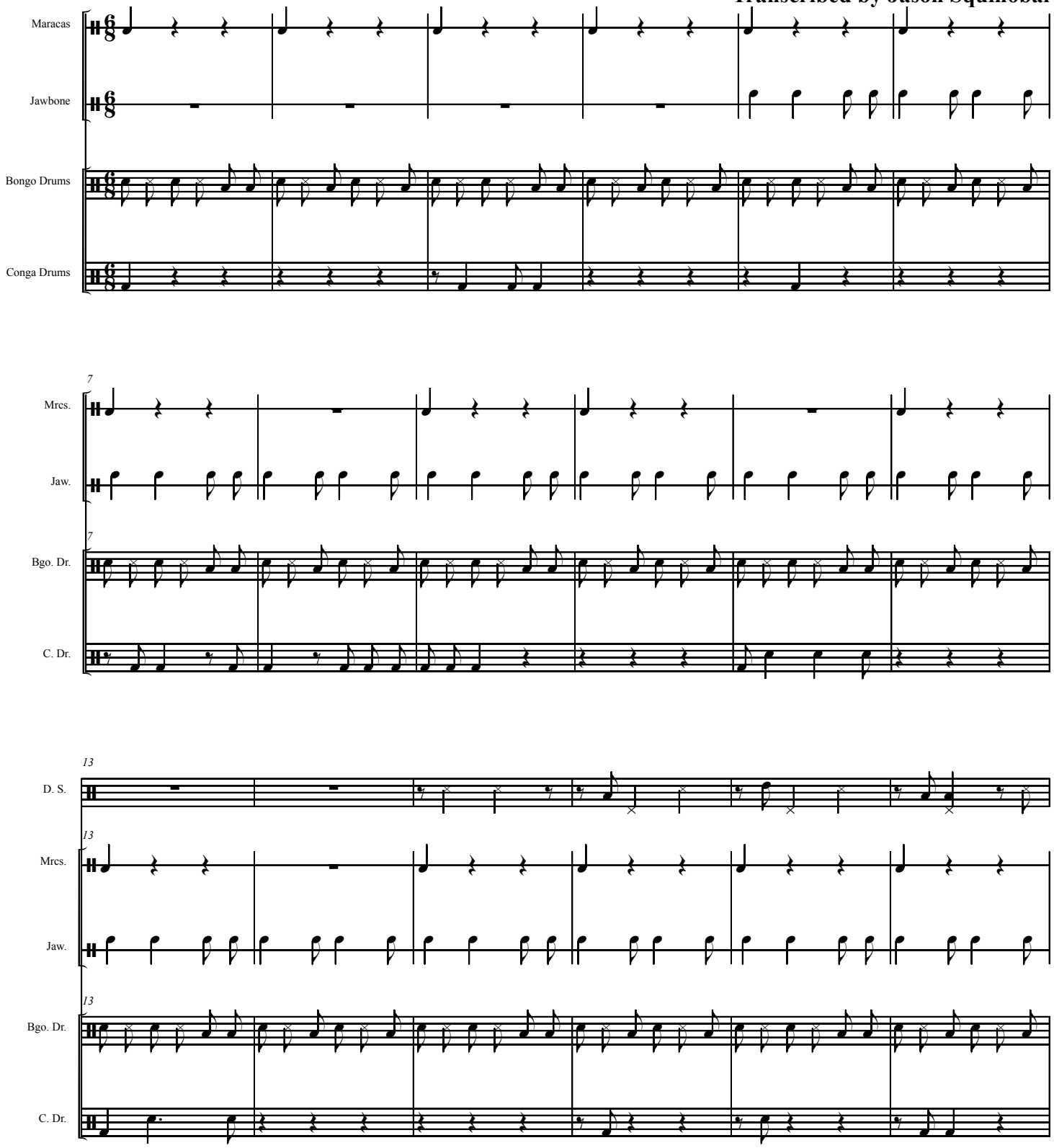
APPENDIX 1

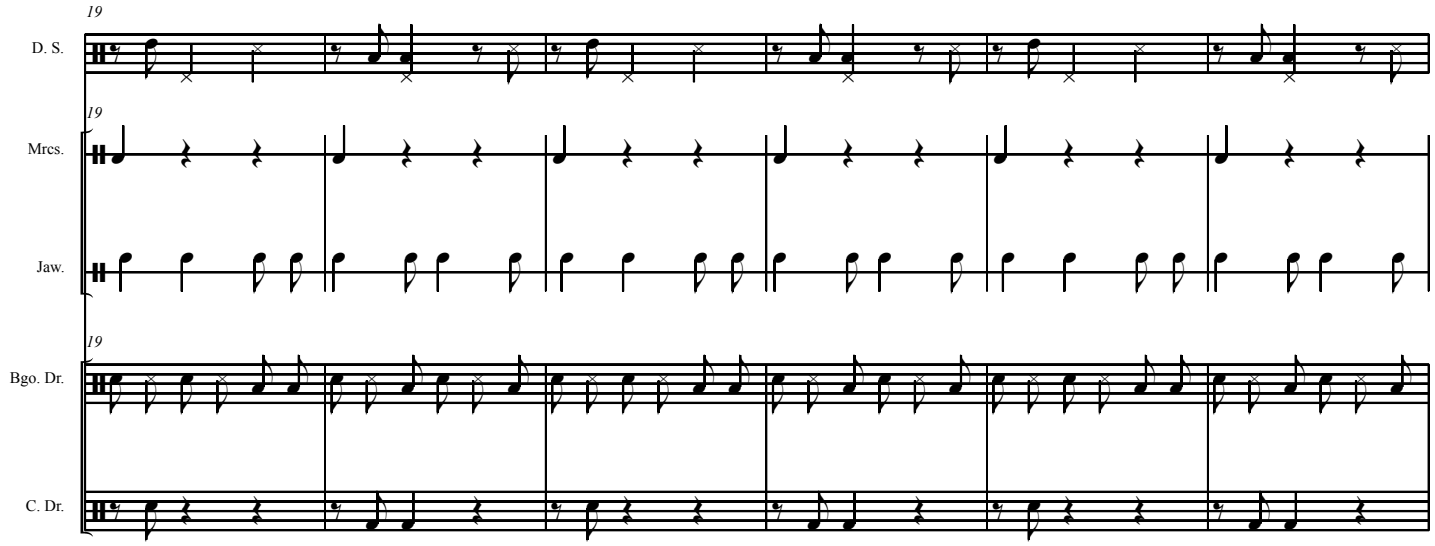
TRANSCRIPTION: “Uhuru Kwanza”

Uhuru Kwanza

♩. = 130

Transcribed by Jason Squinobal

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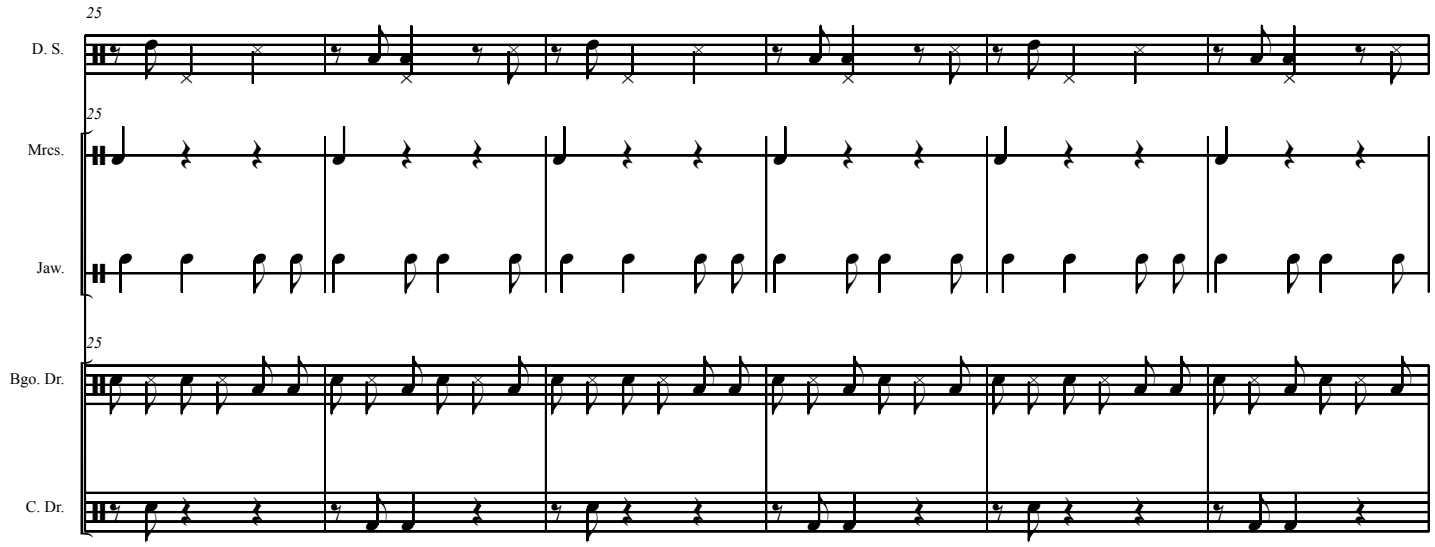
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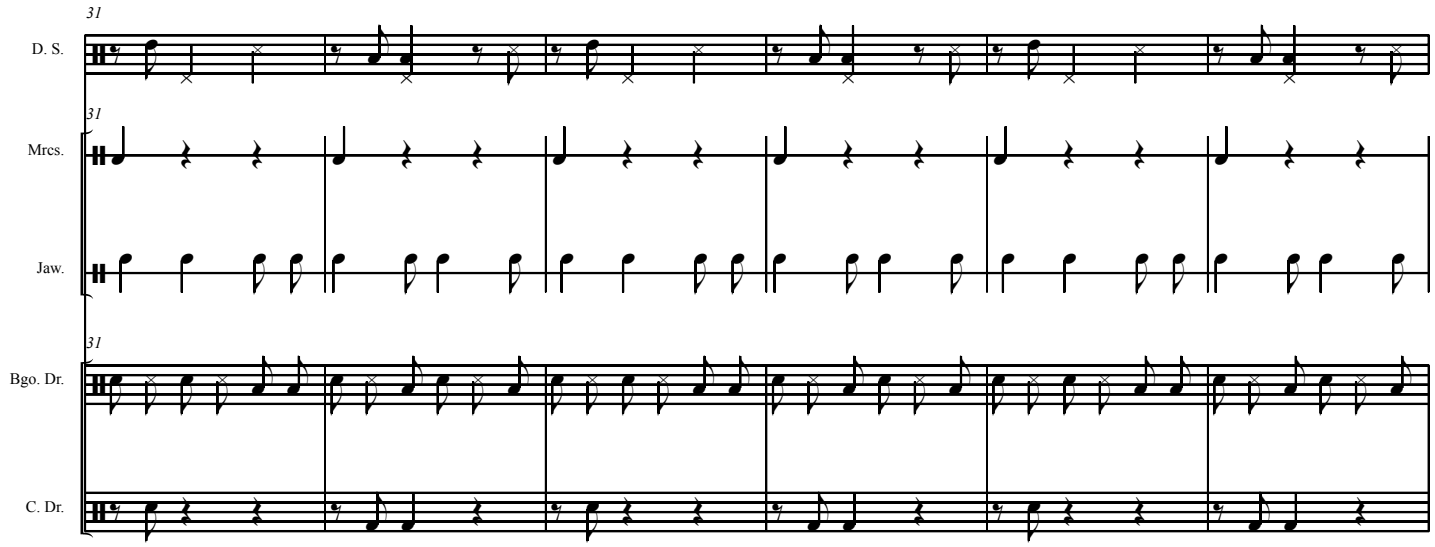
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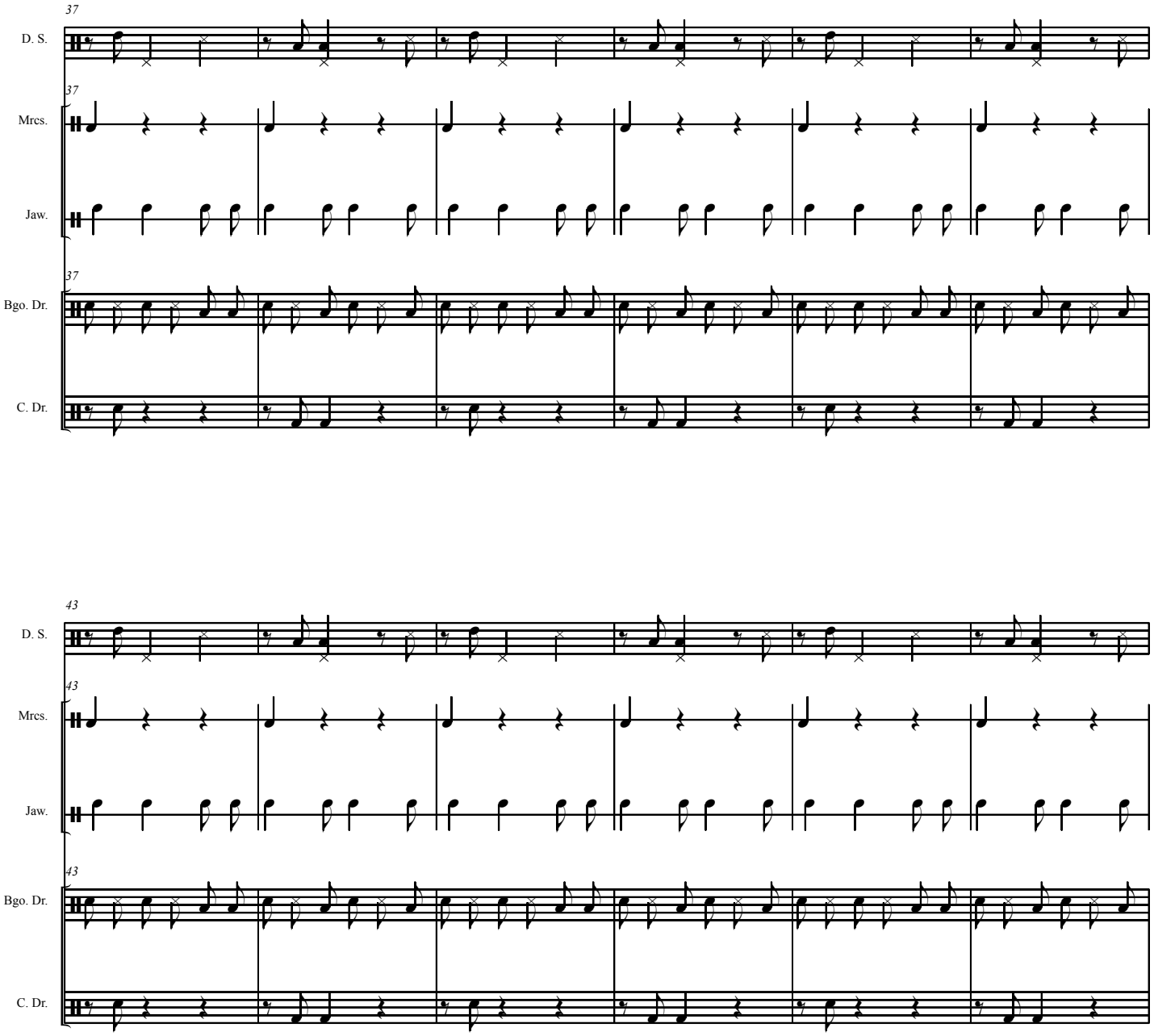
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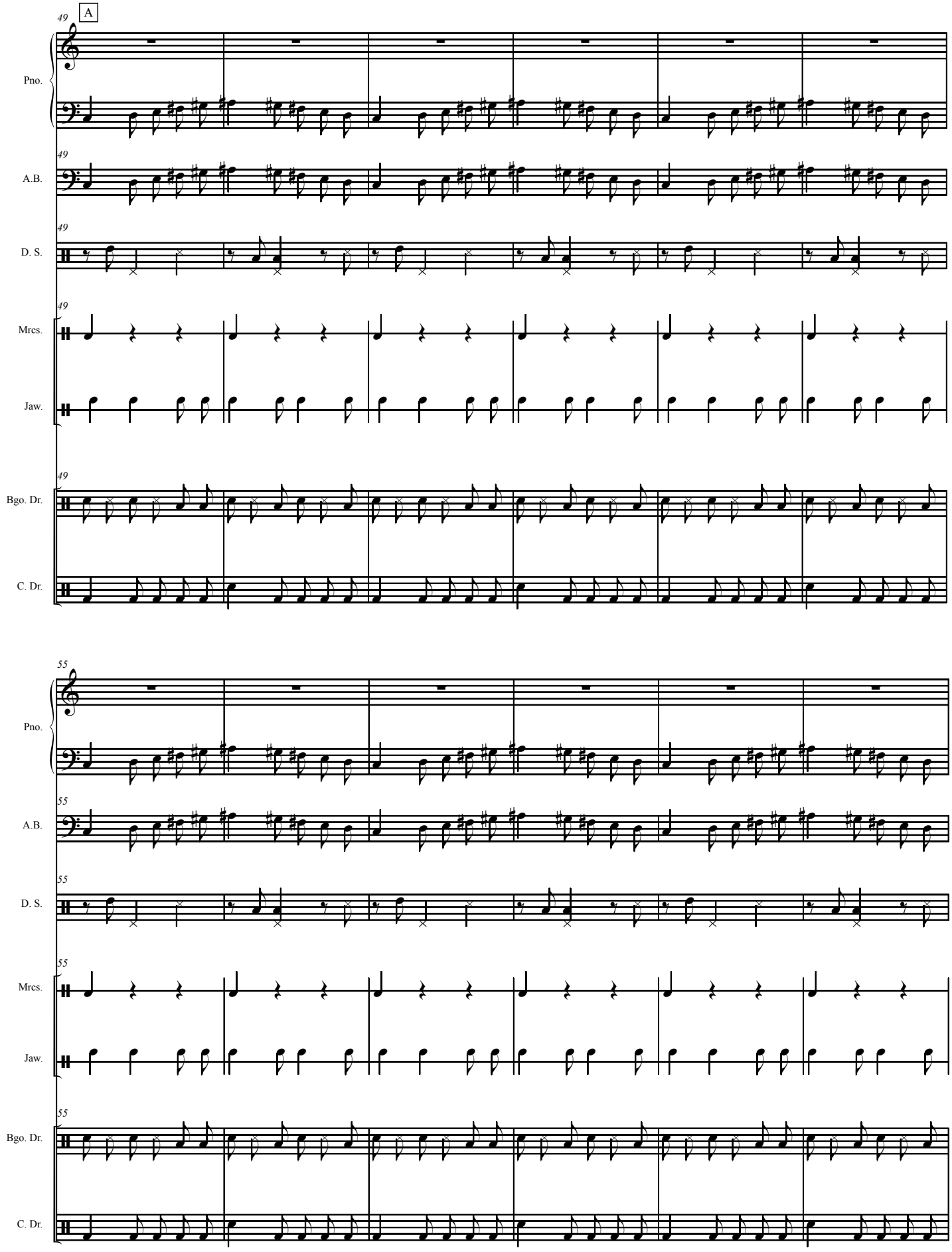
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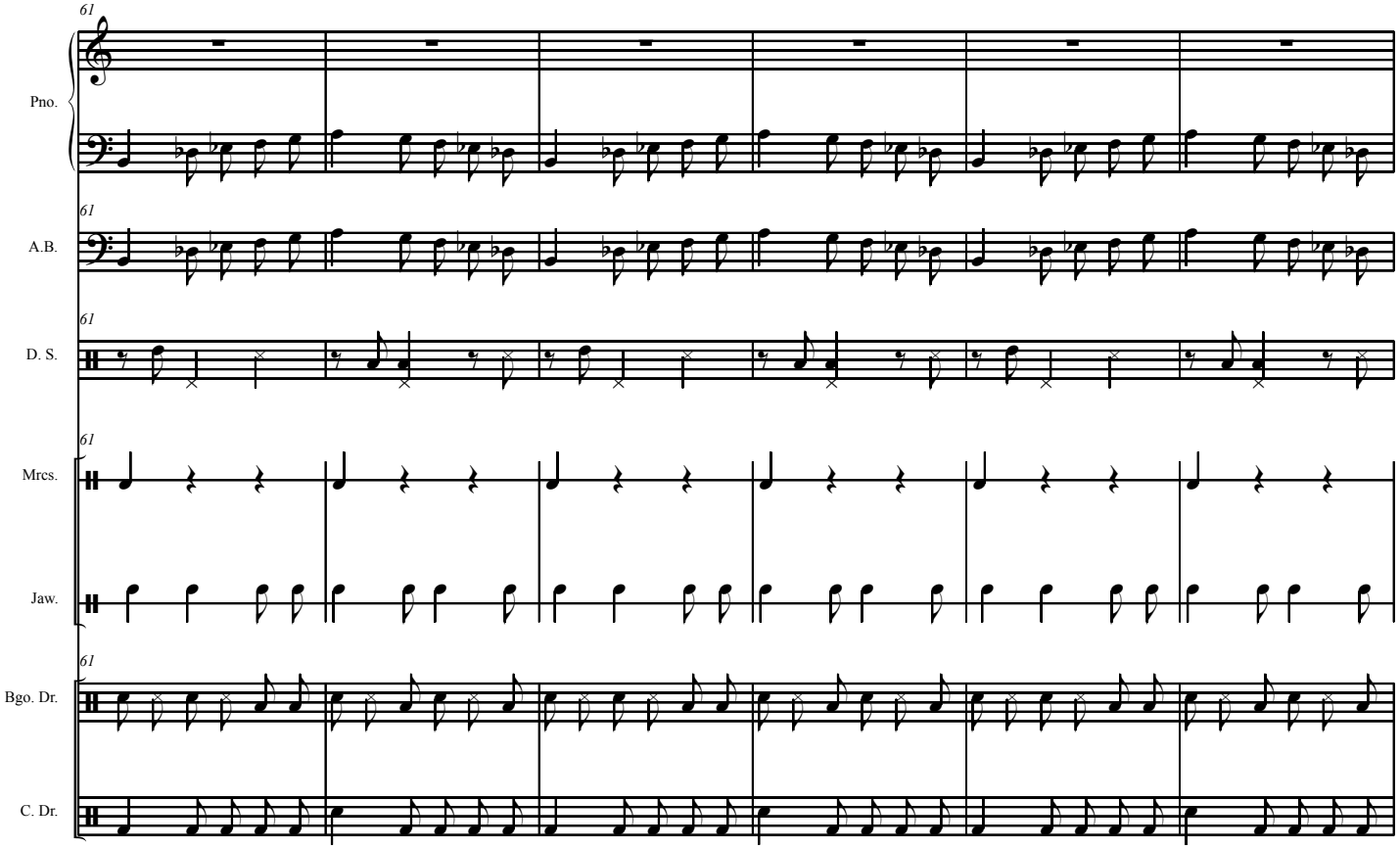
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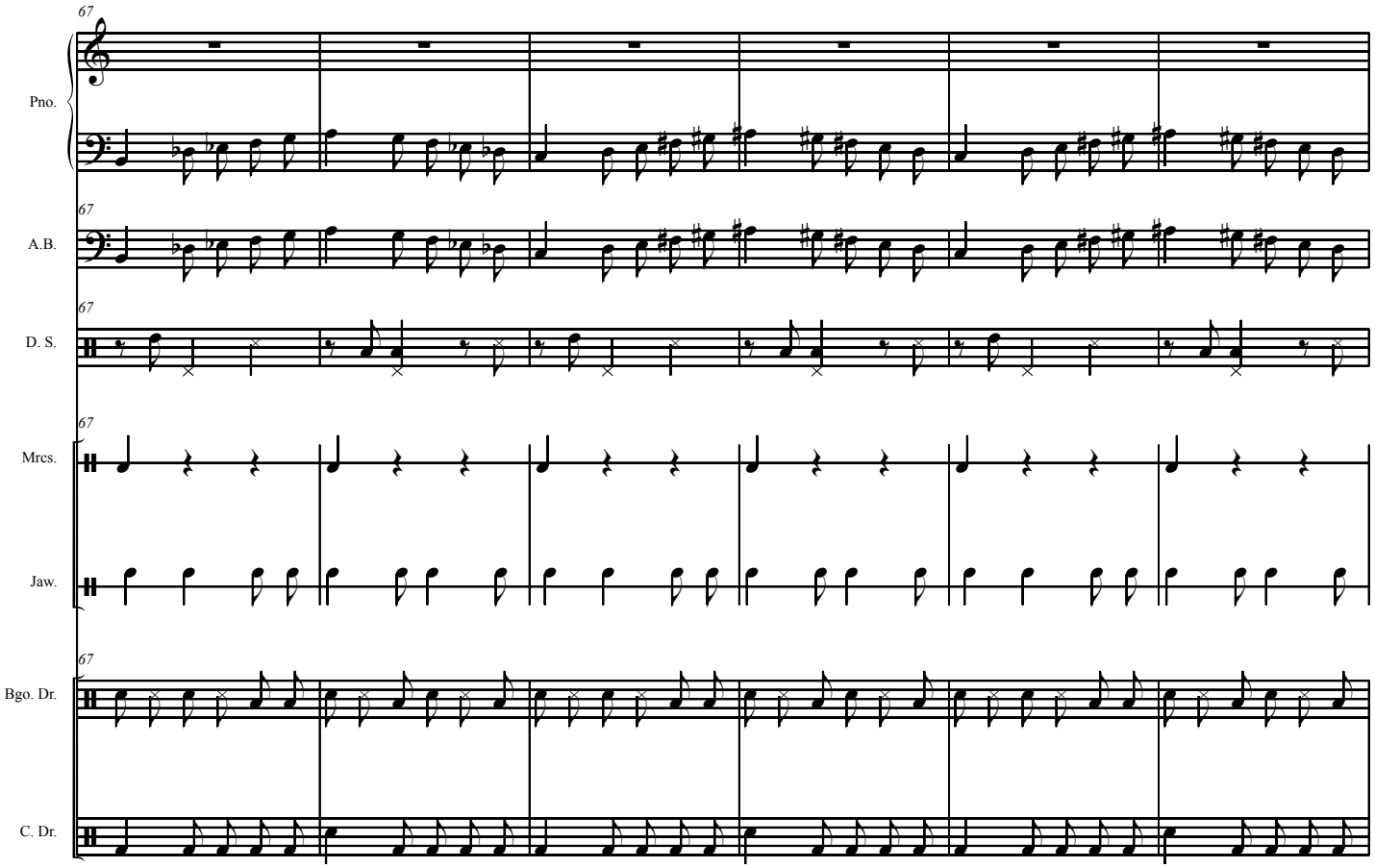
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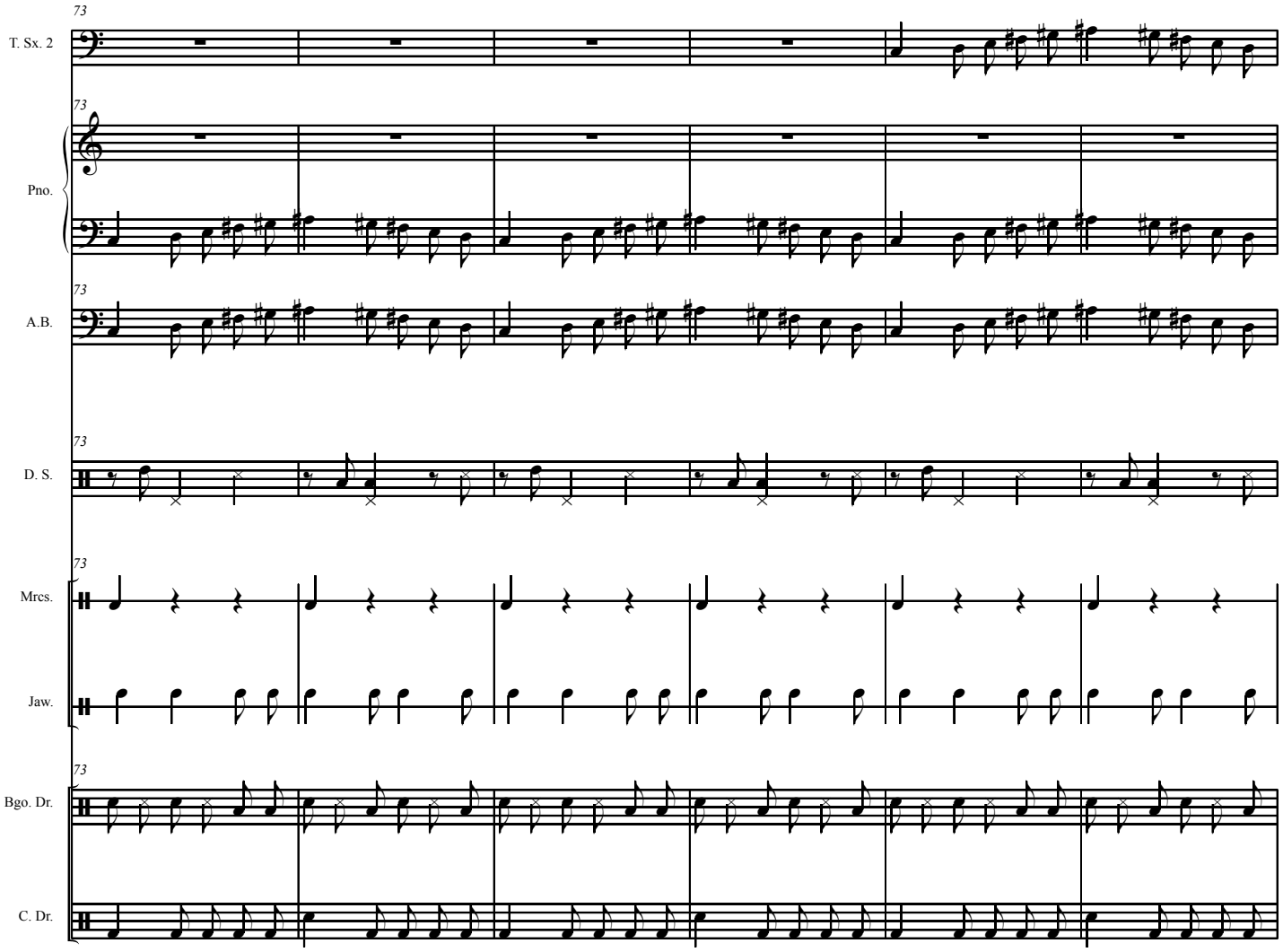
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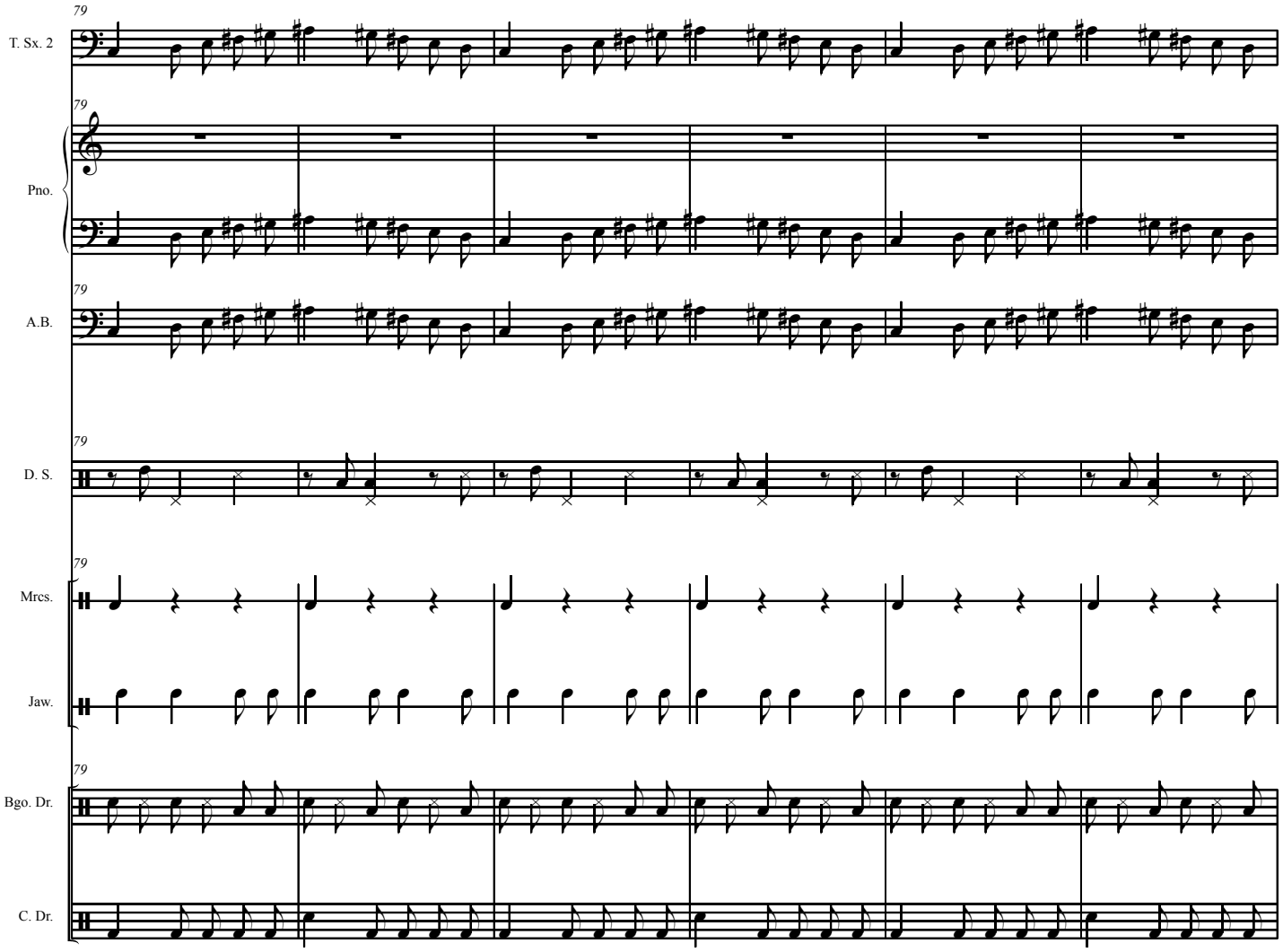
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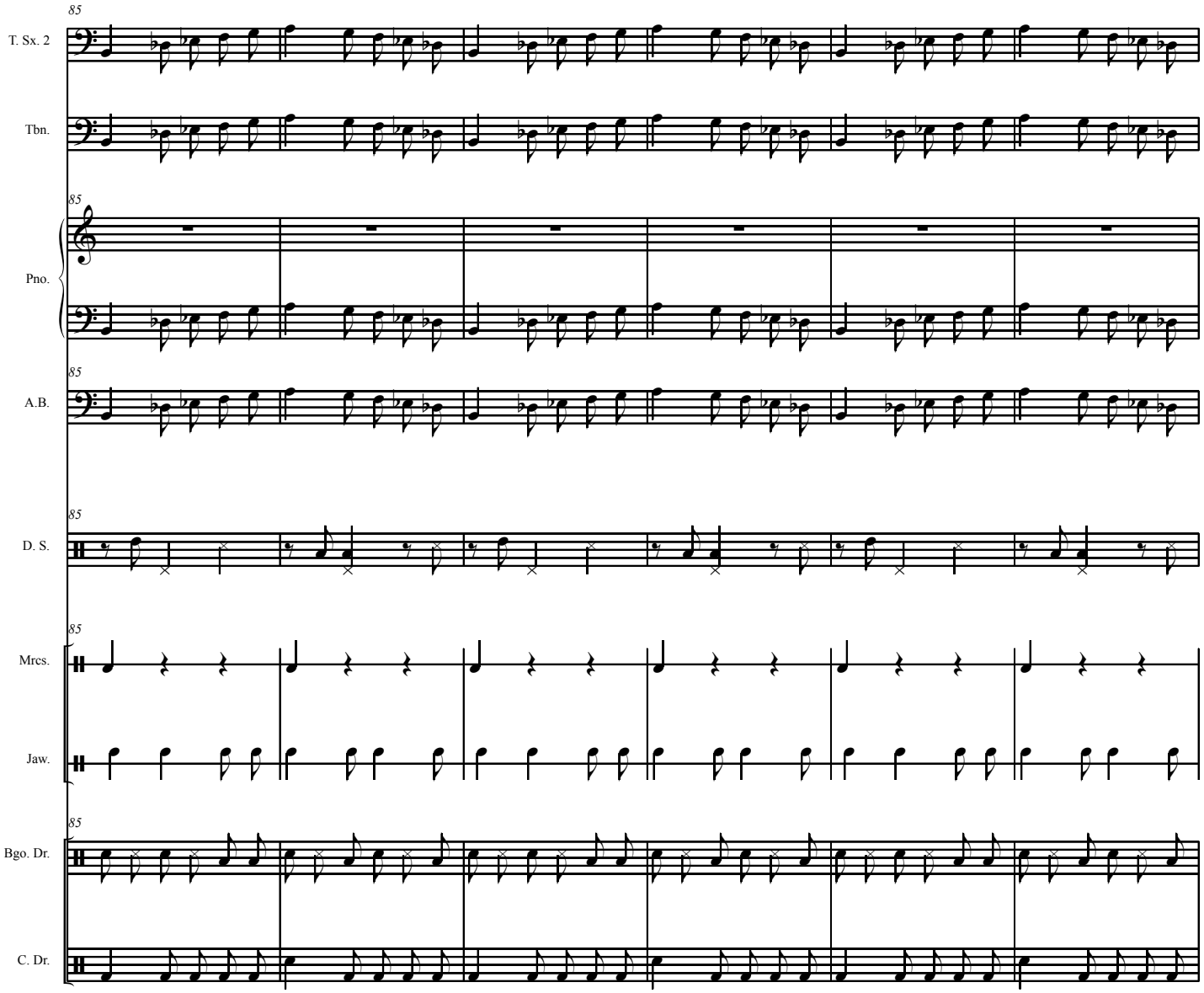
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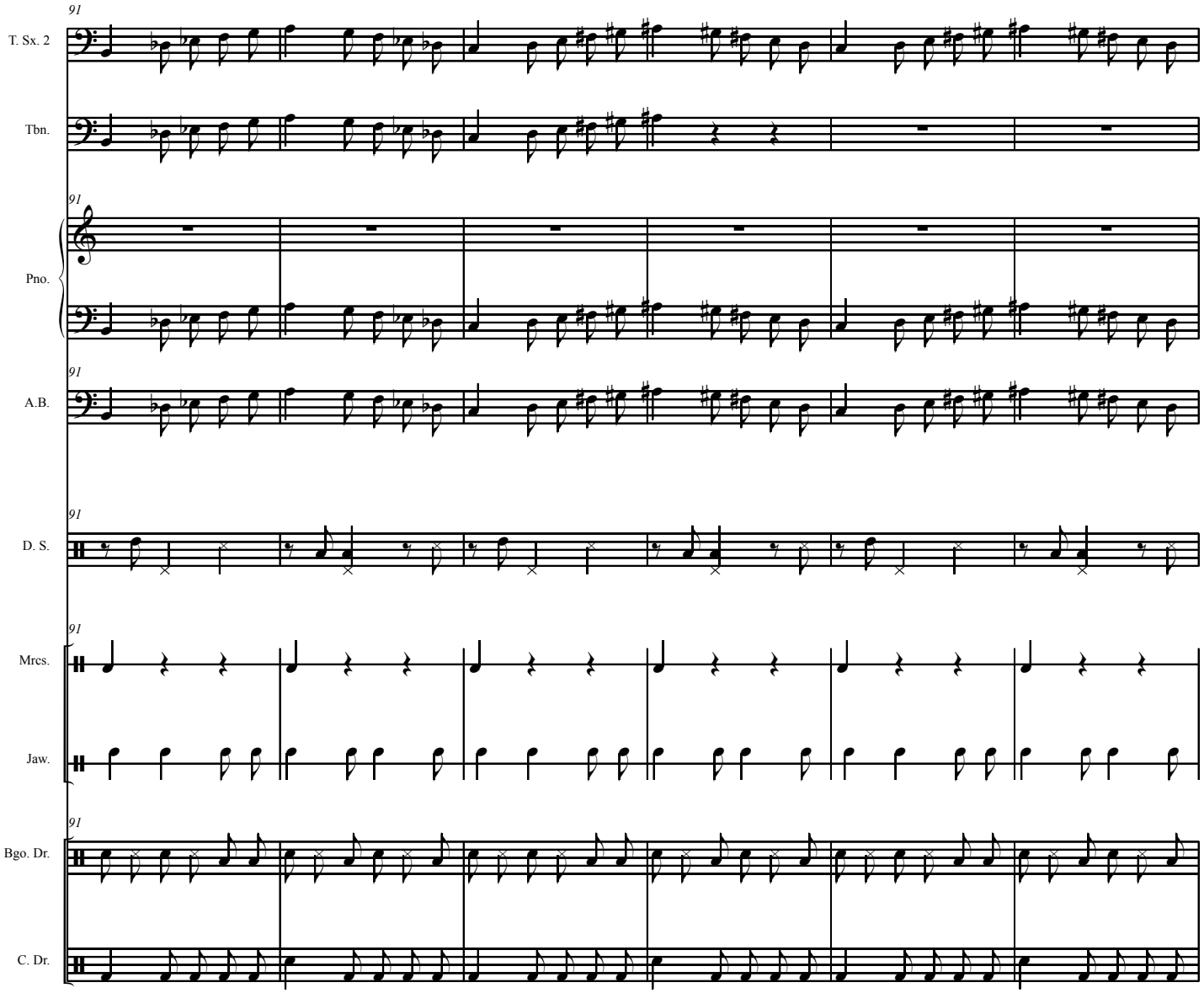
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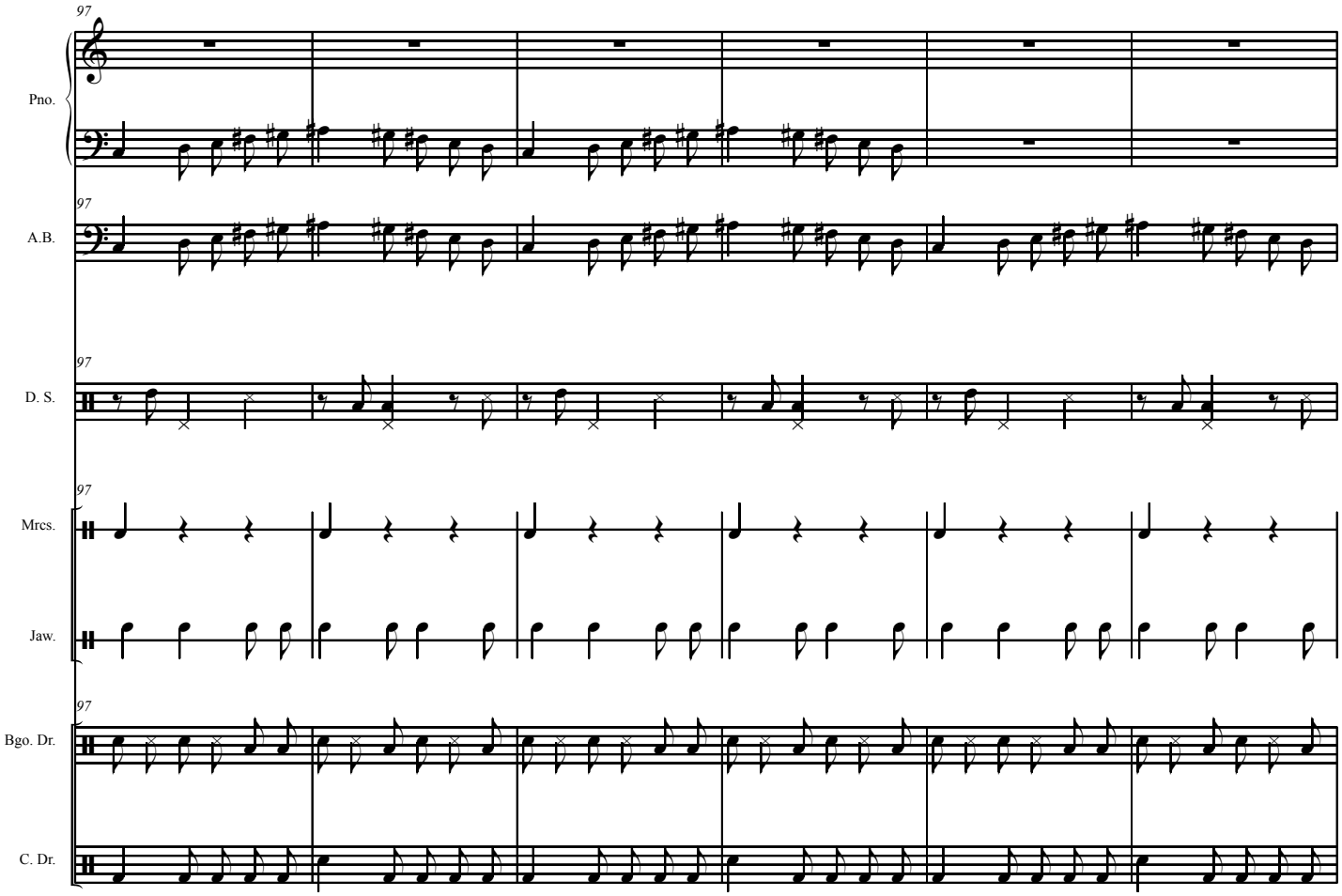
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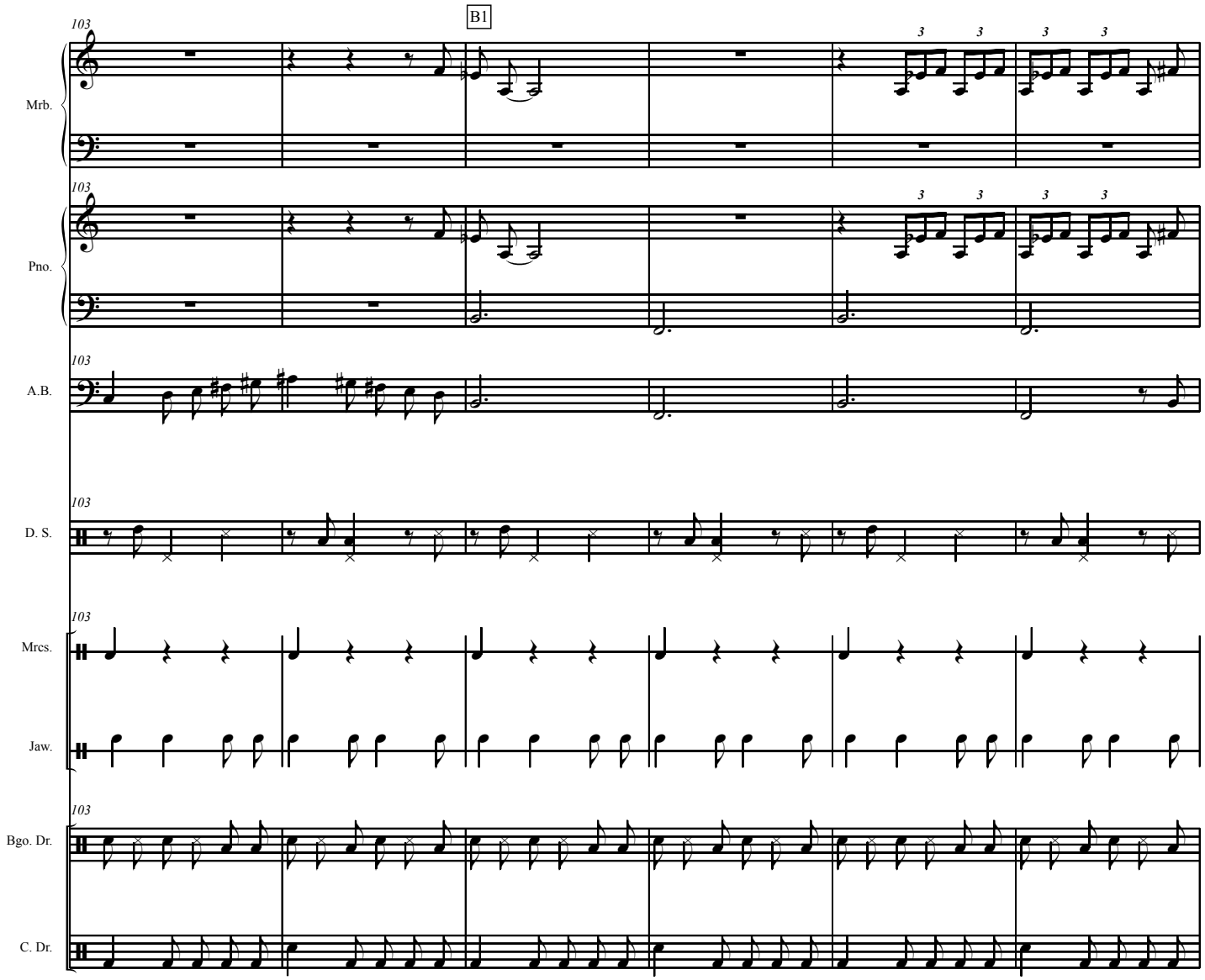
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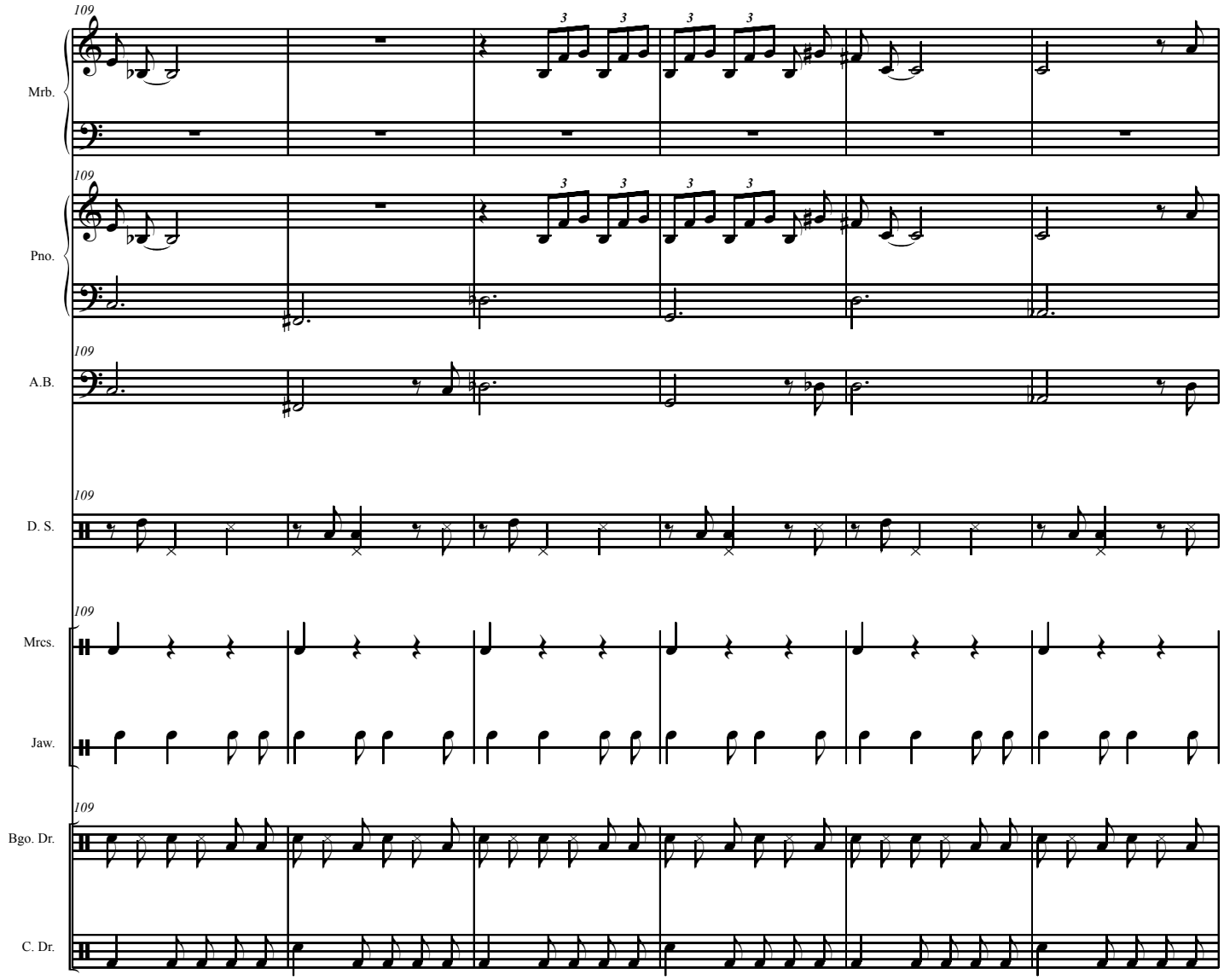
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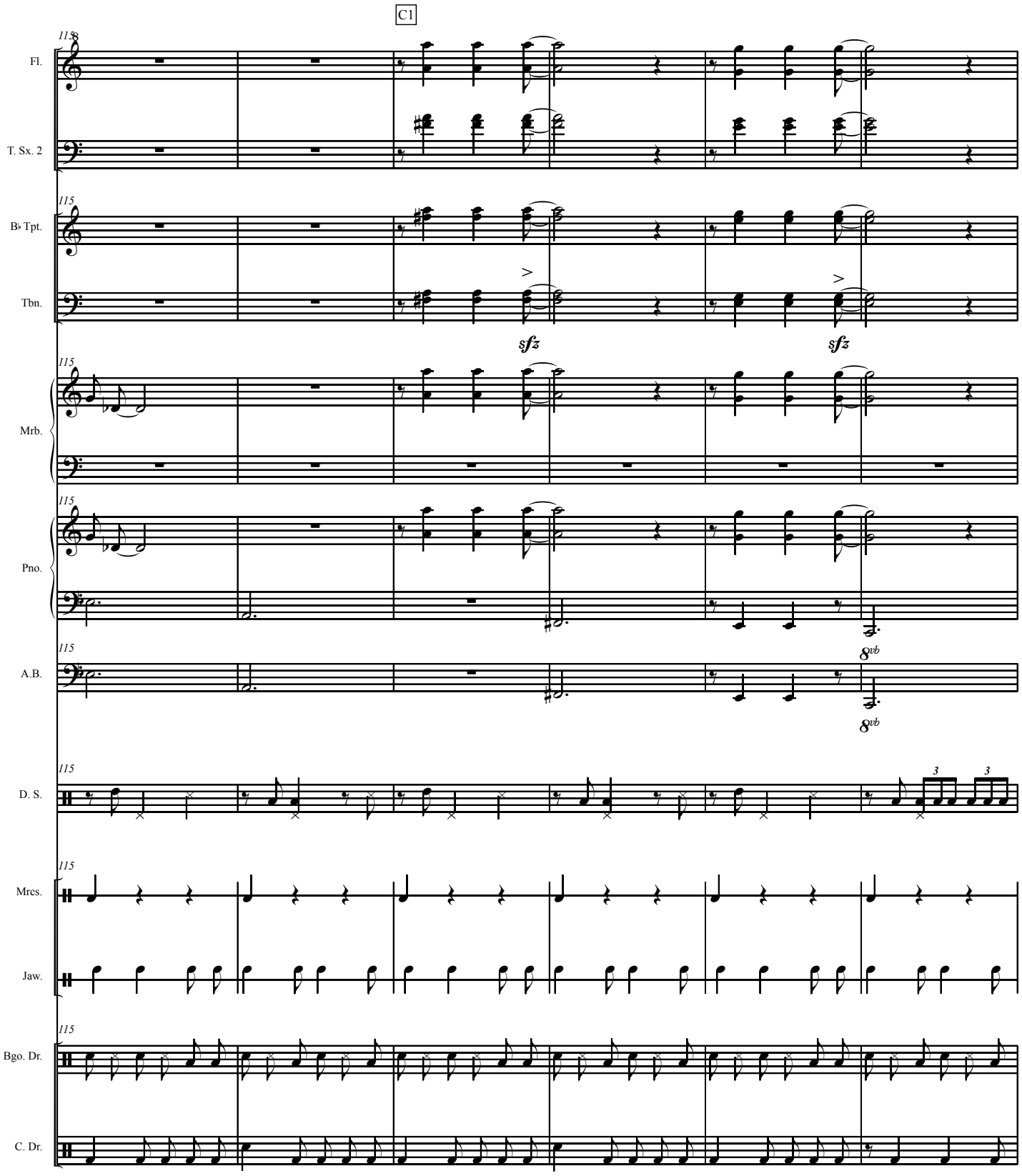
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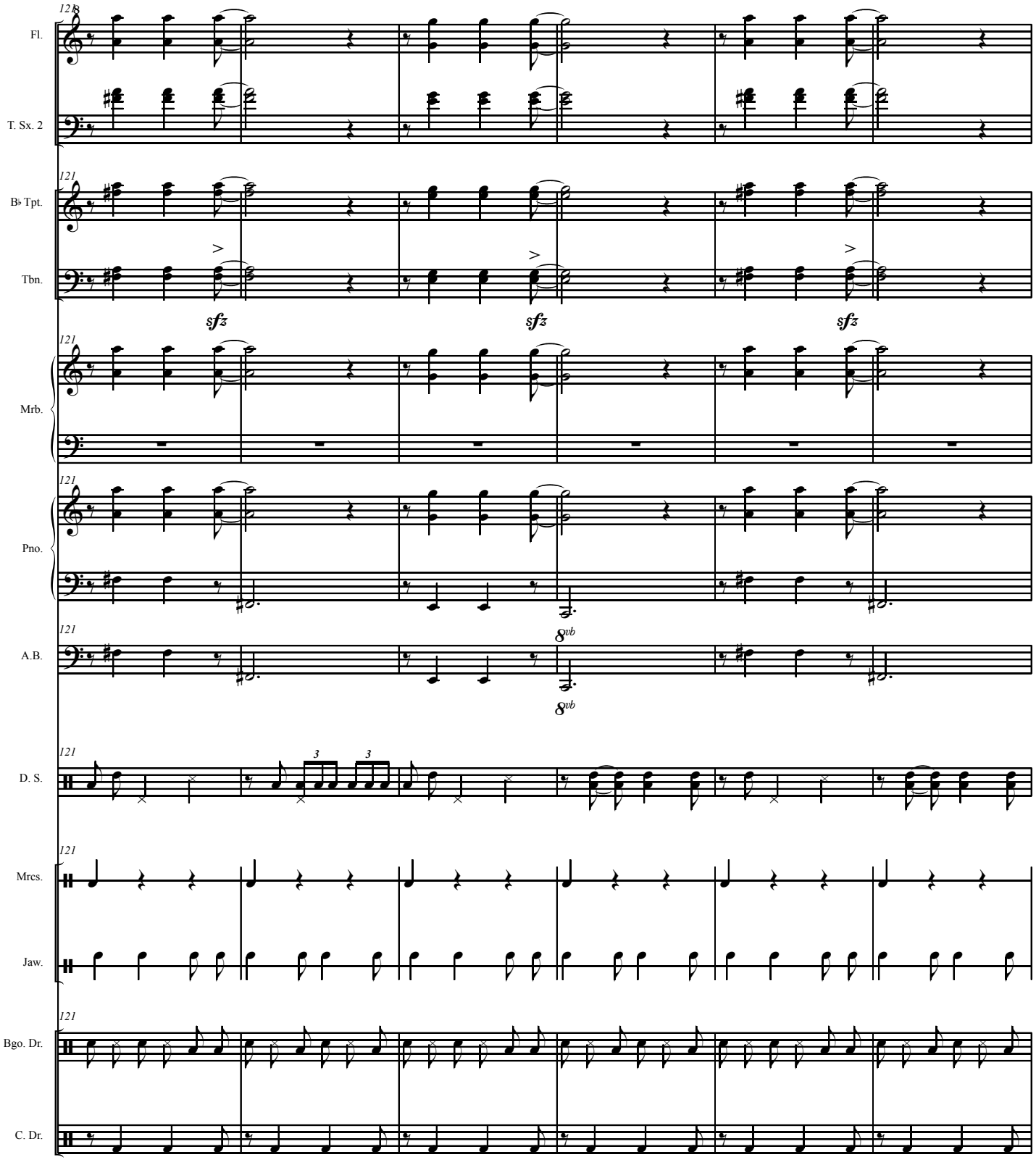
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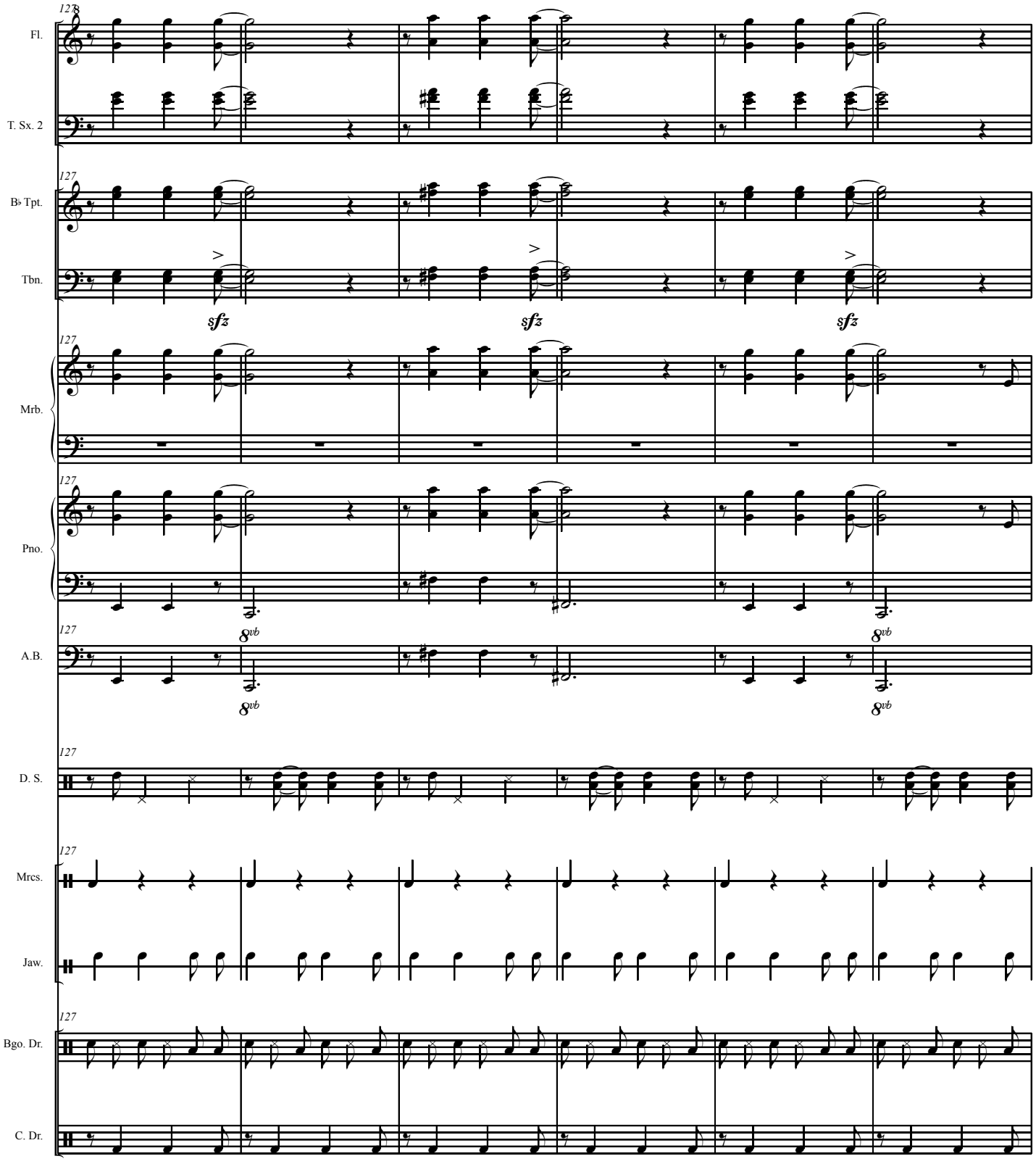
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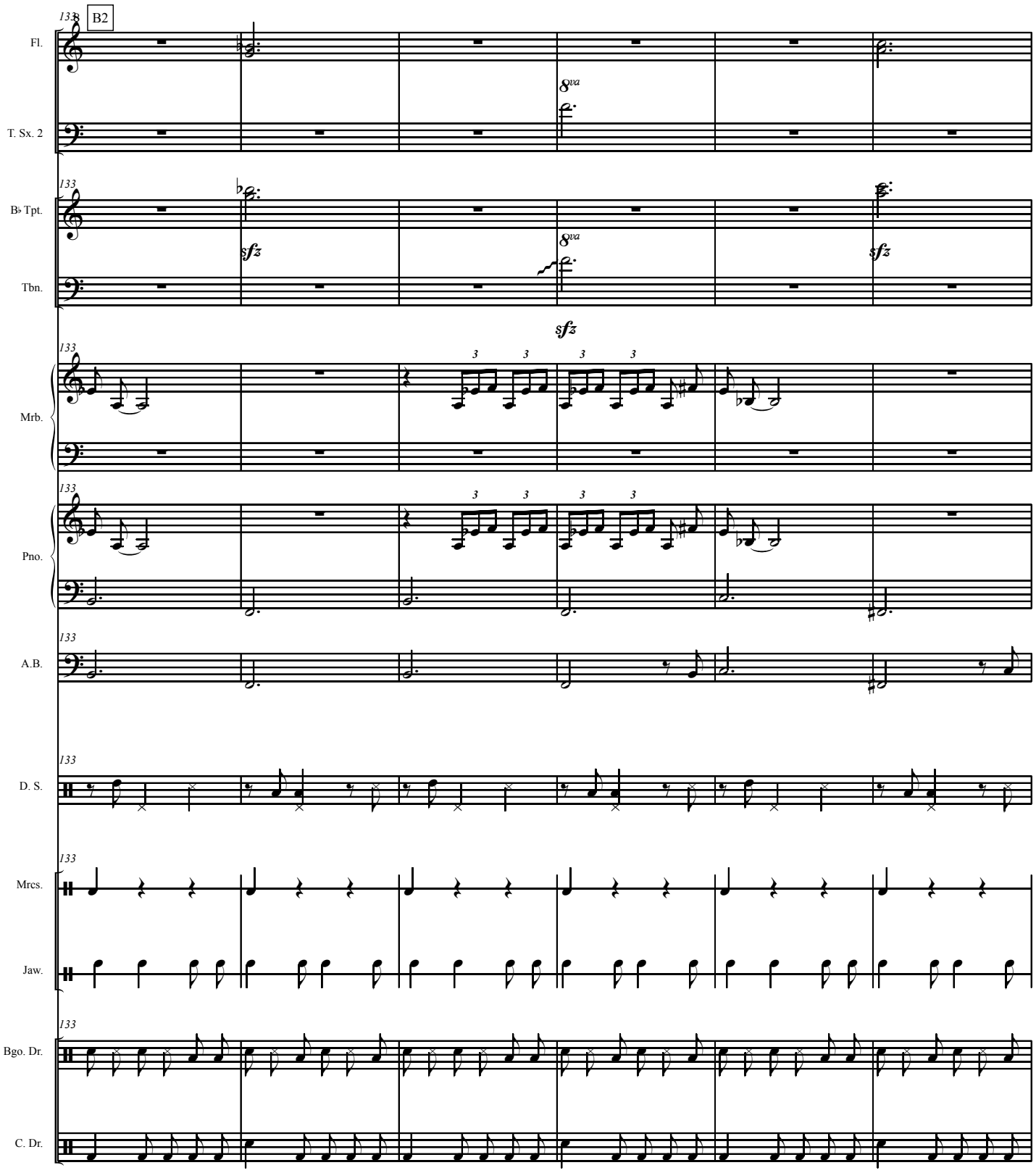
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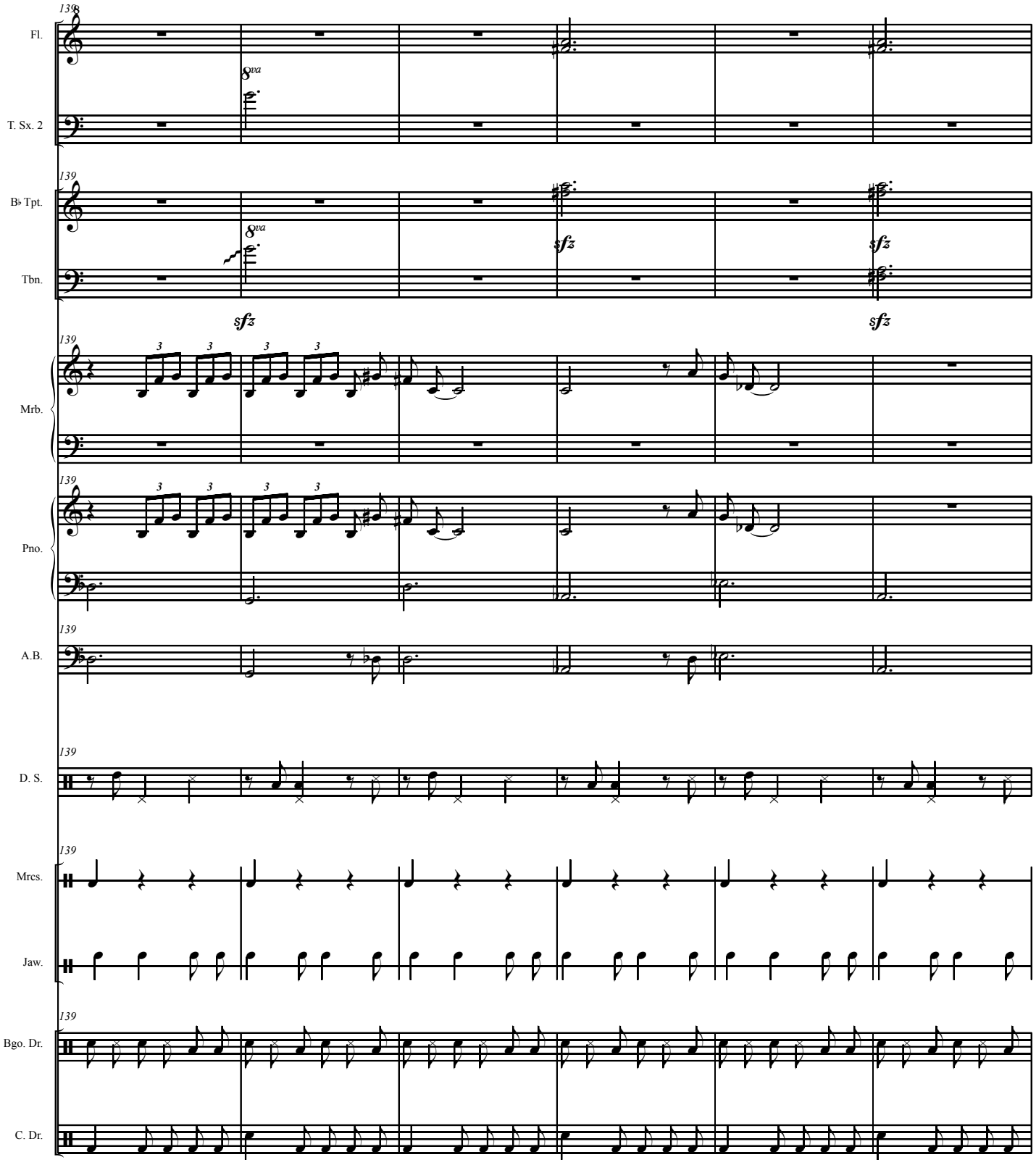
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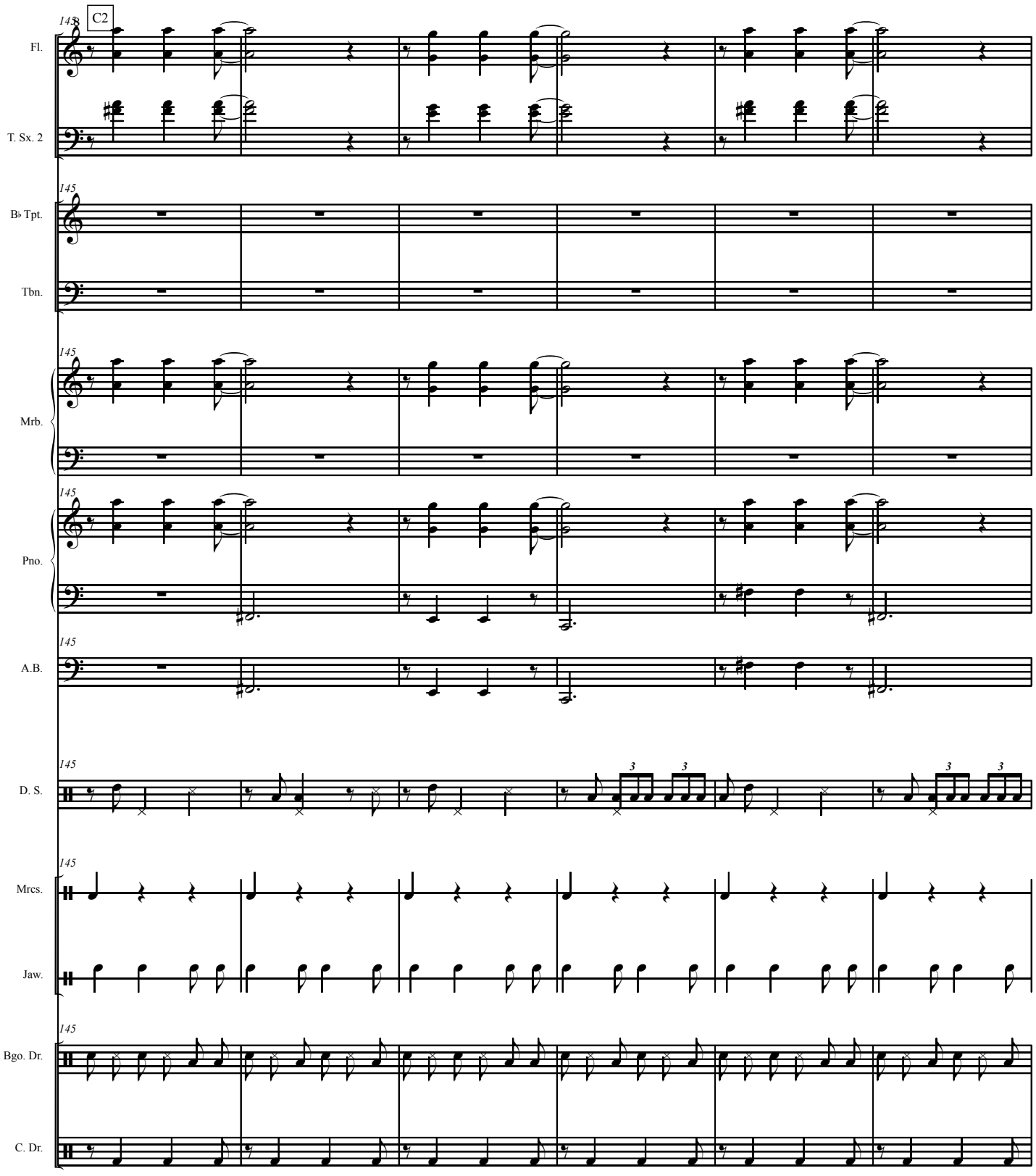
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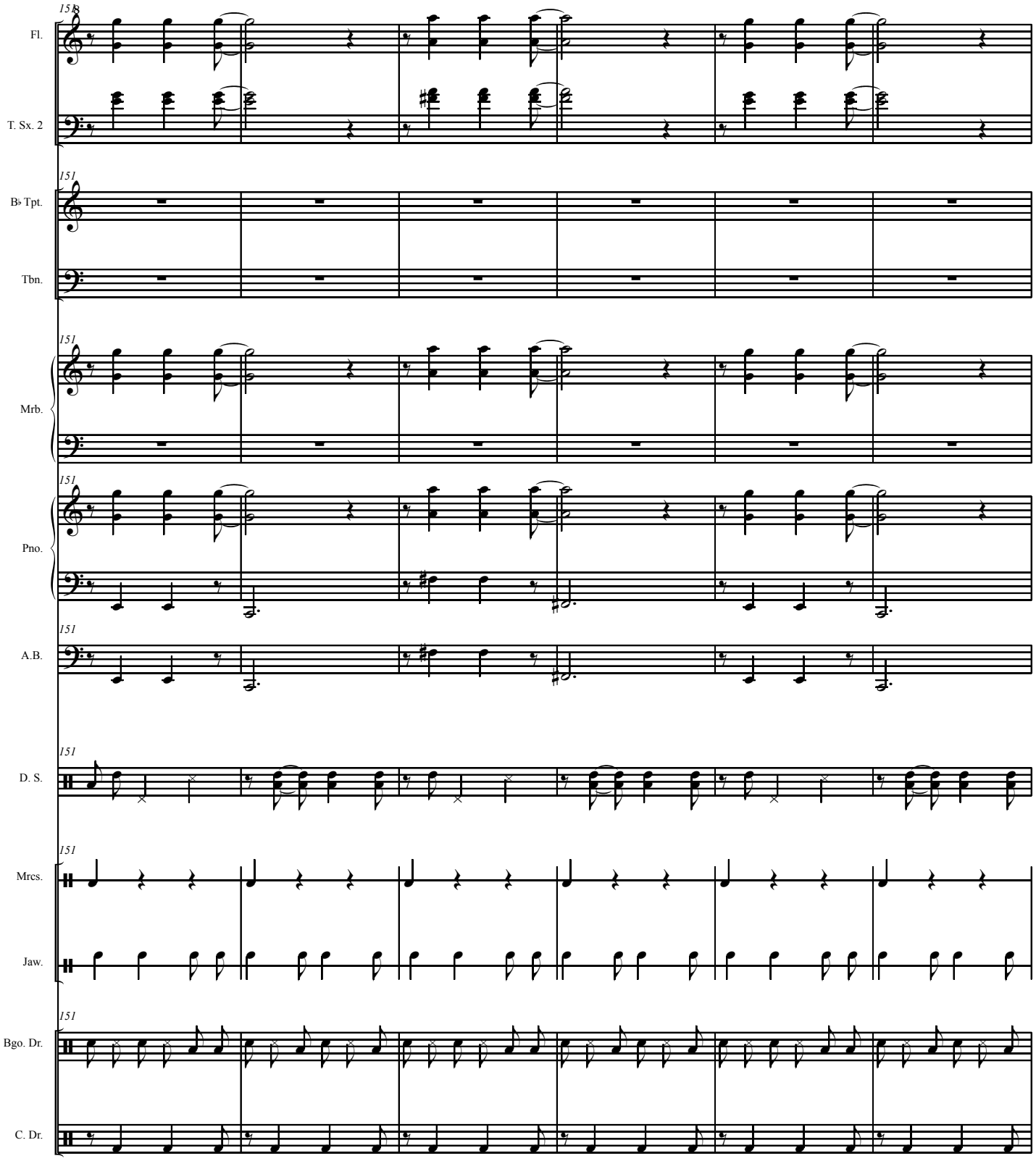
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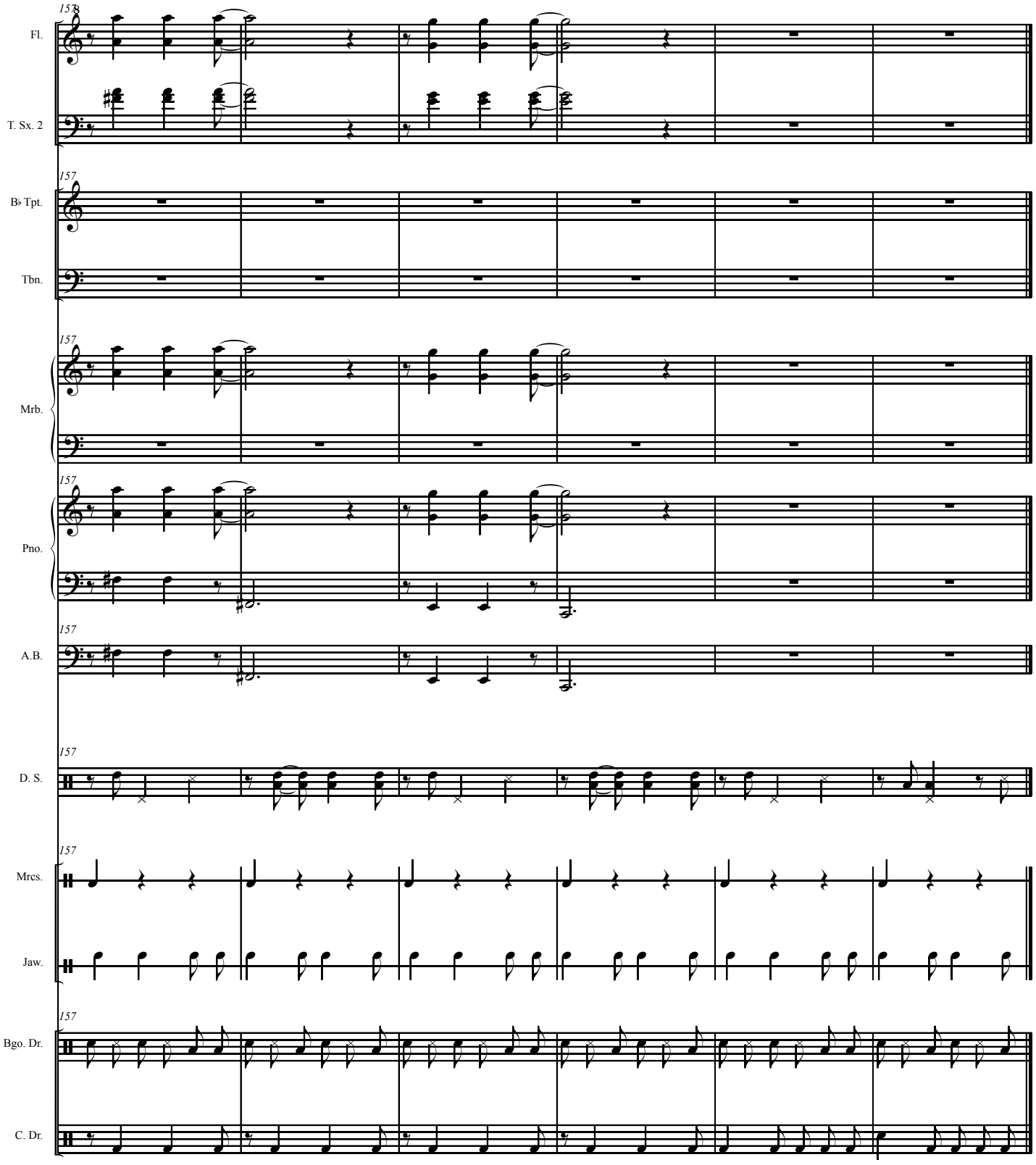
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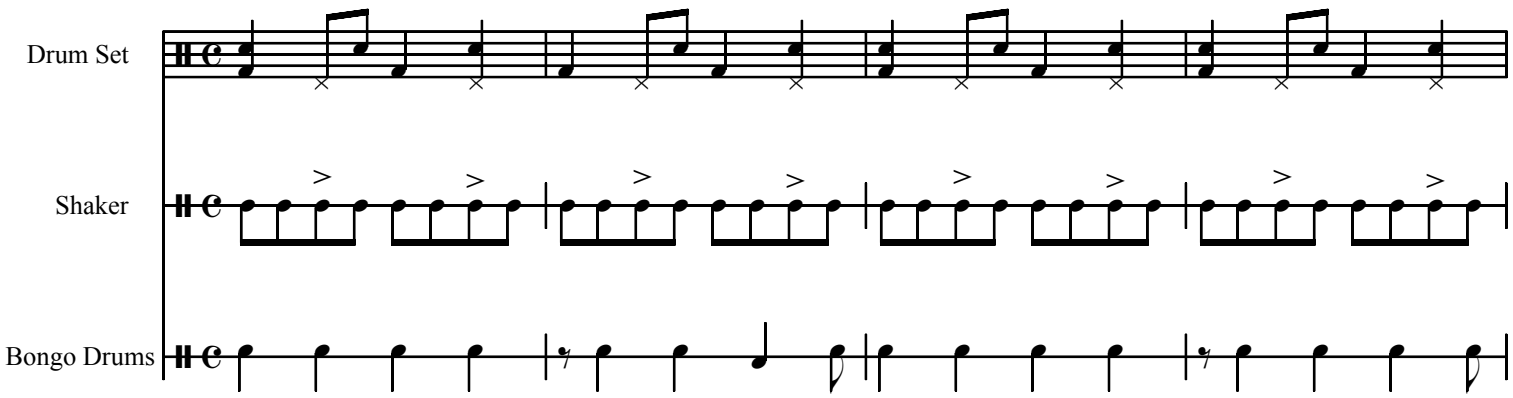
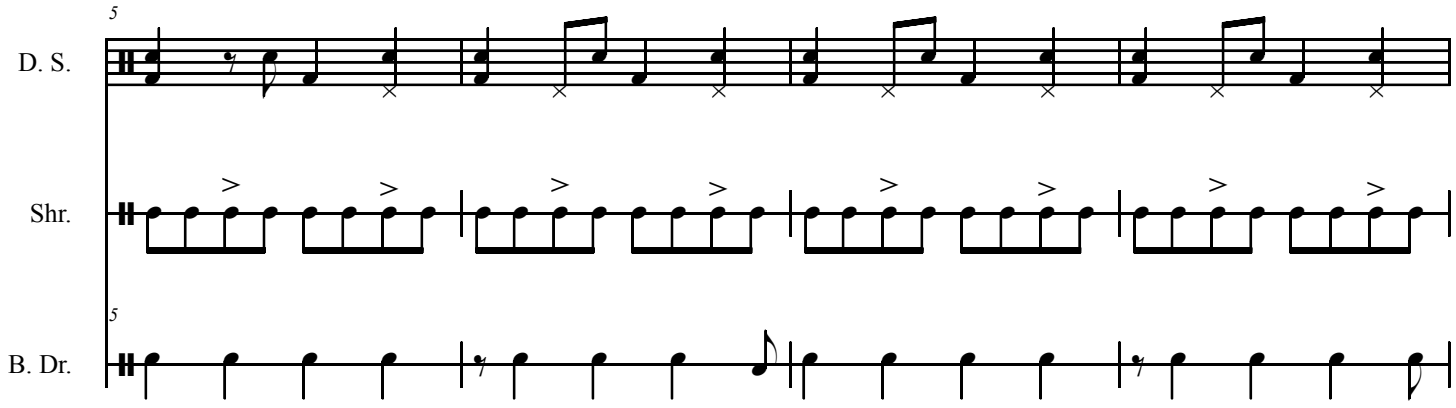
APPENDIX 2

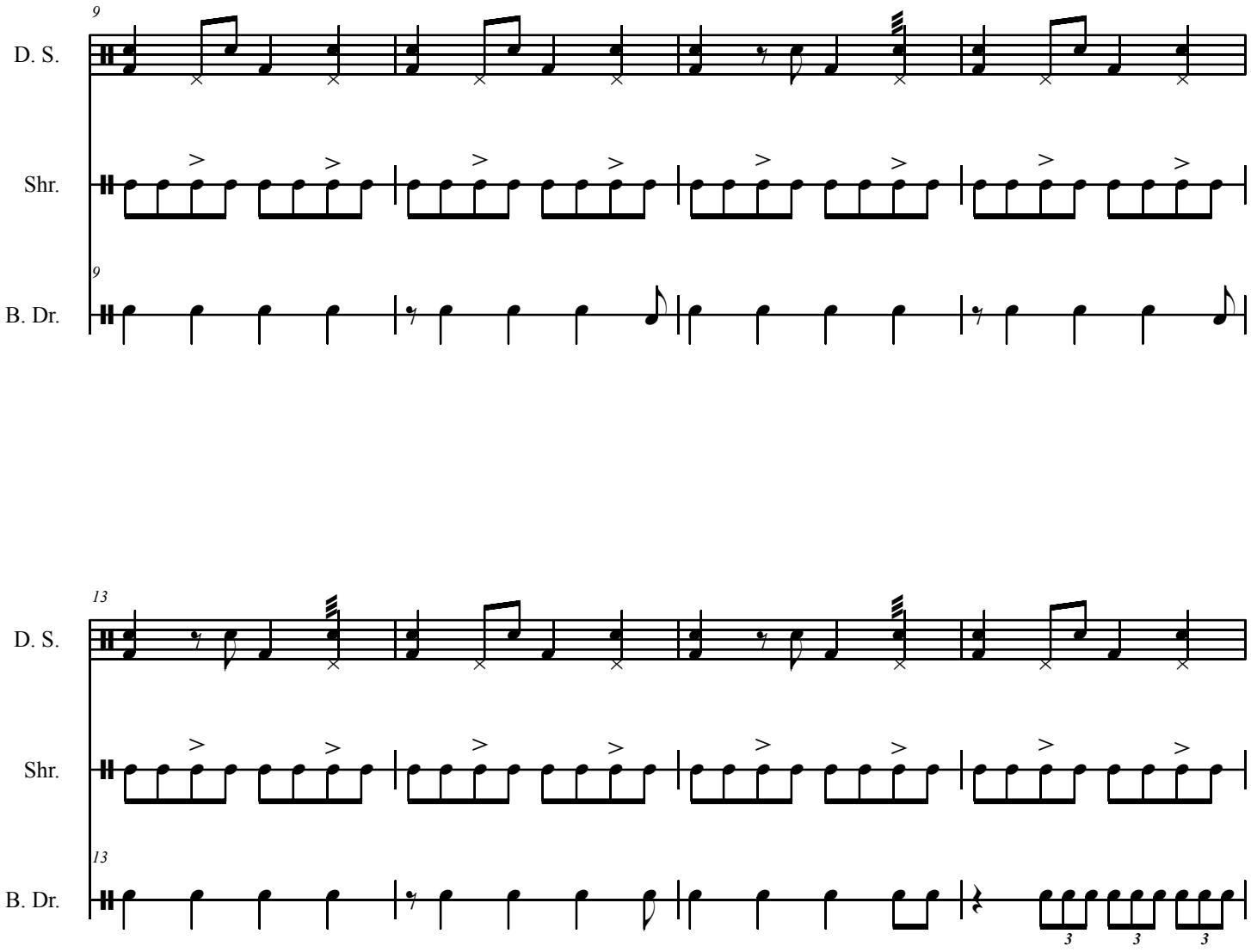
TRANSCRIPTION: “Caban Bamboo Highlife”

Caban Bamboo Highlife

Transcribed By Jason Squinobal



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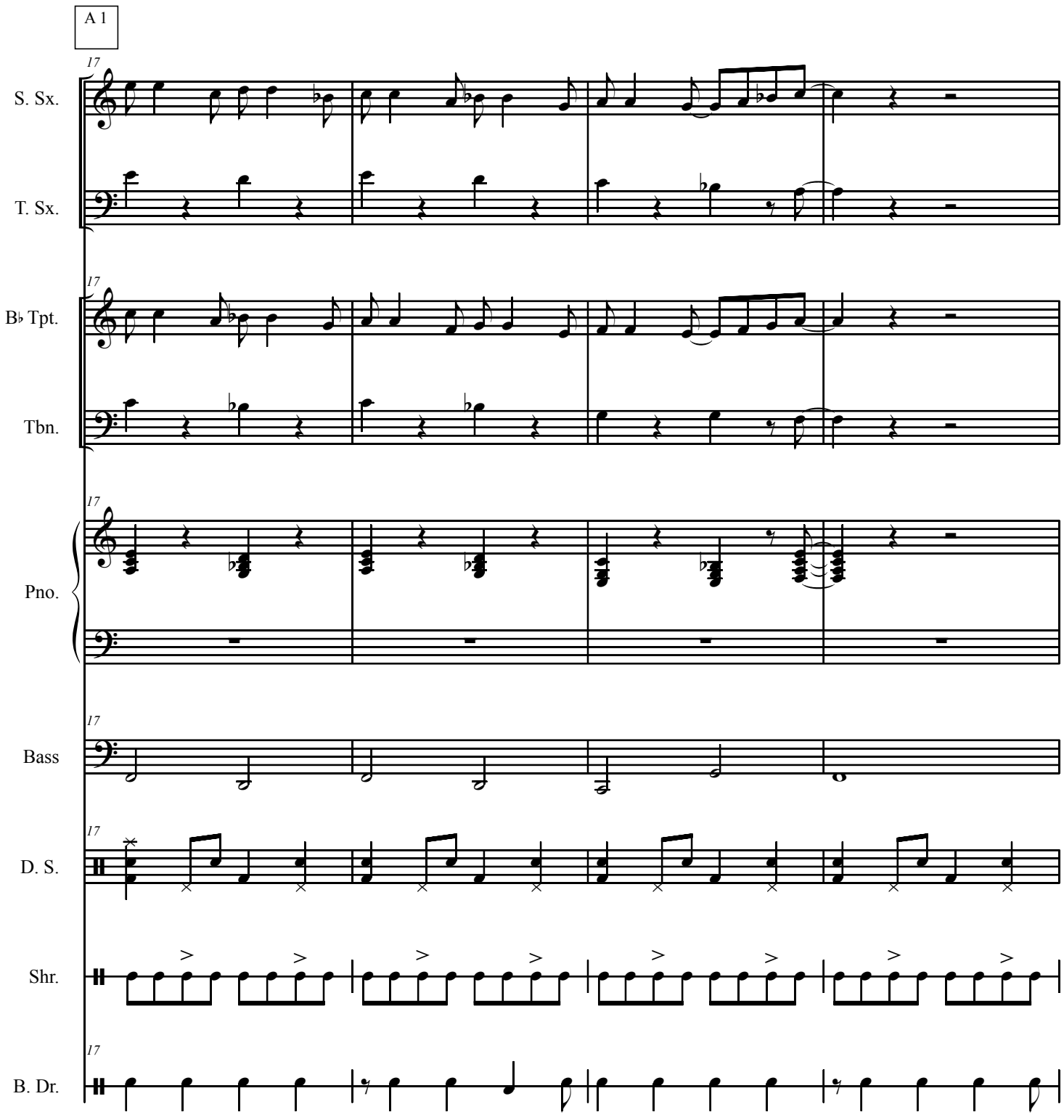
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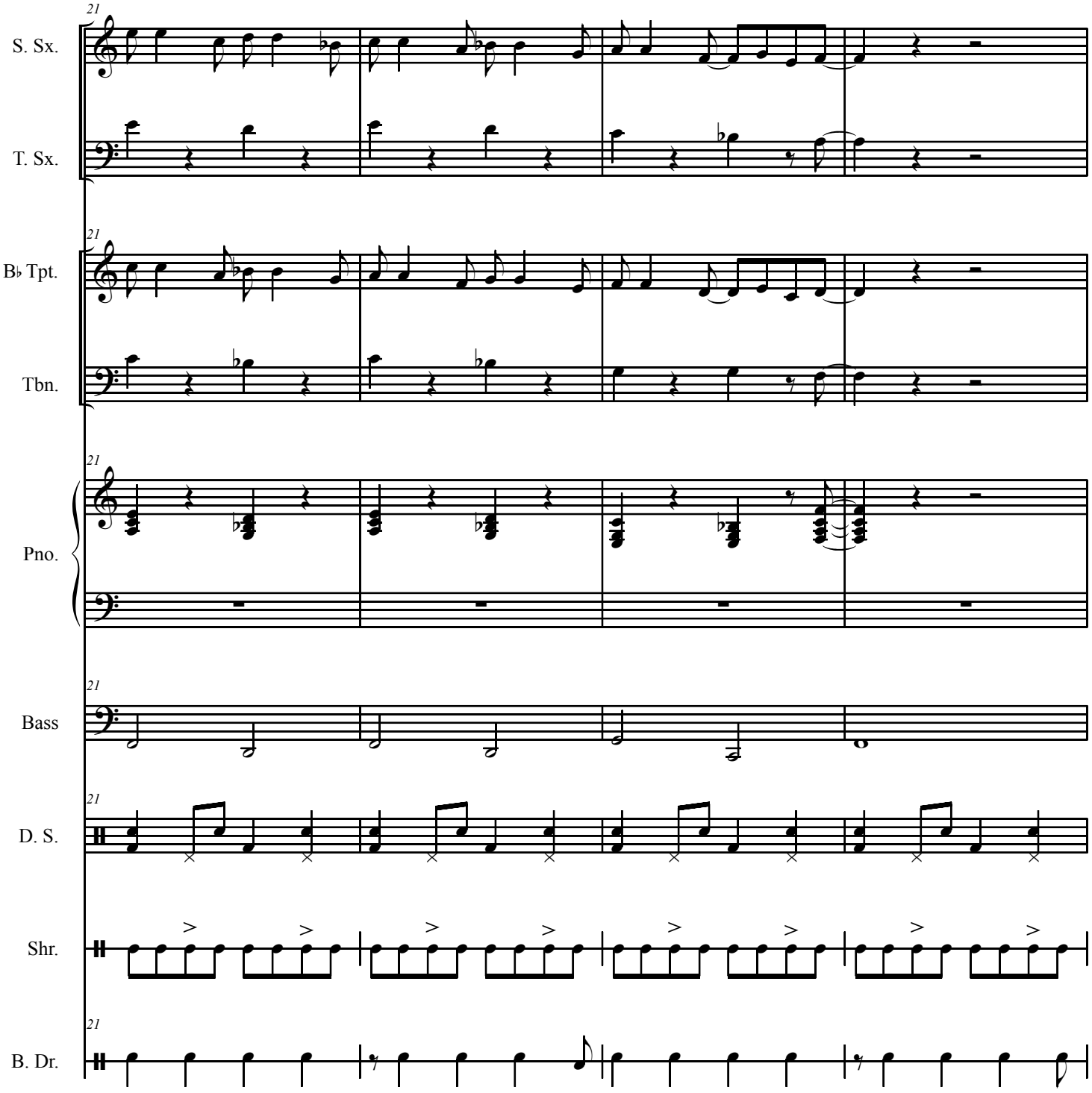
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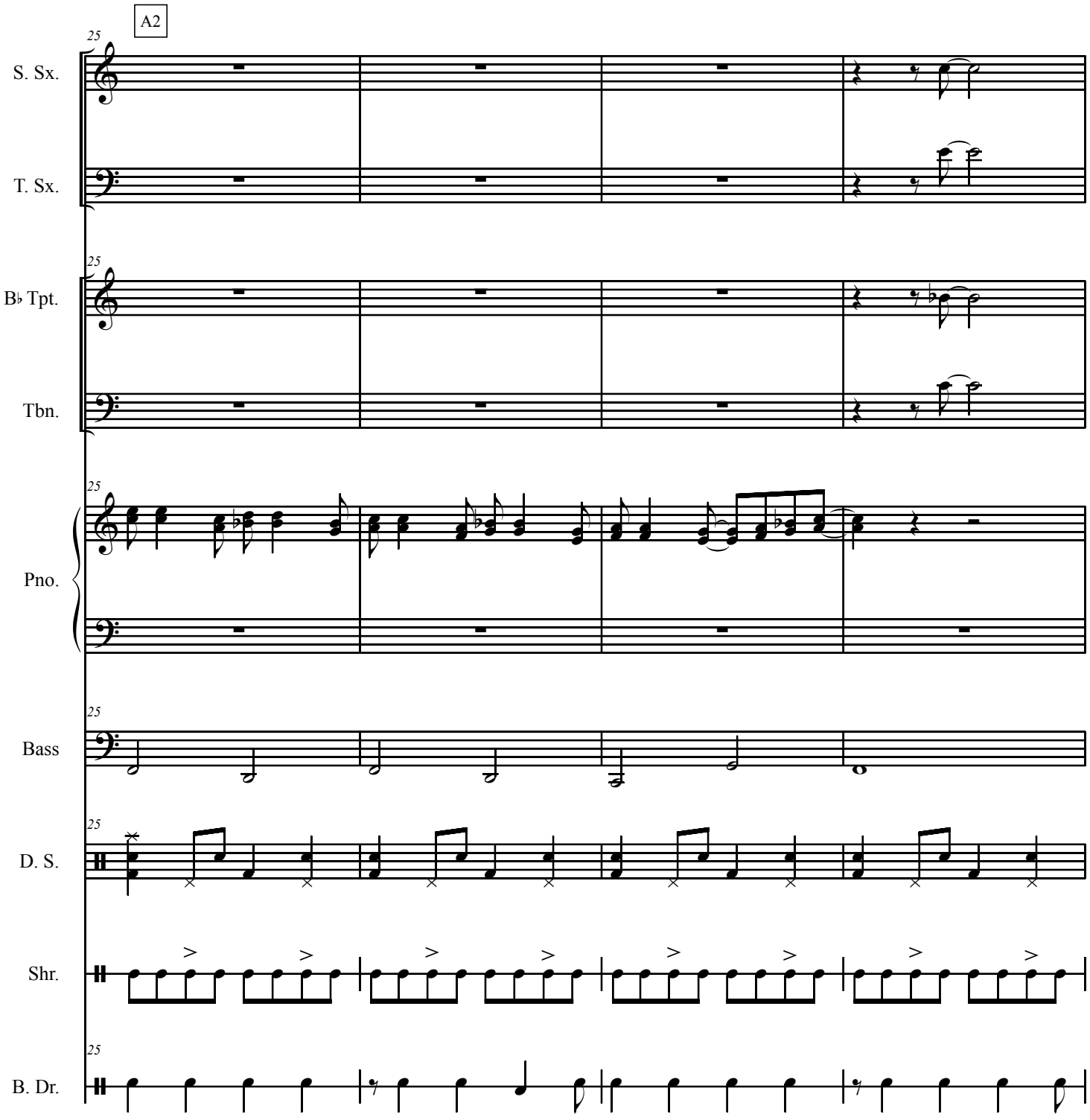
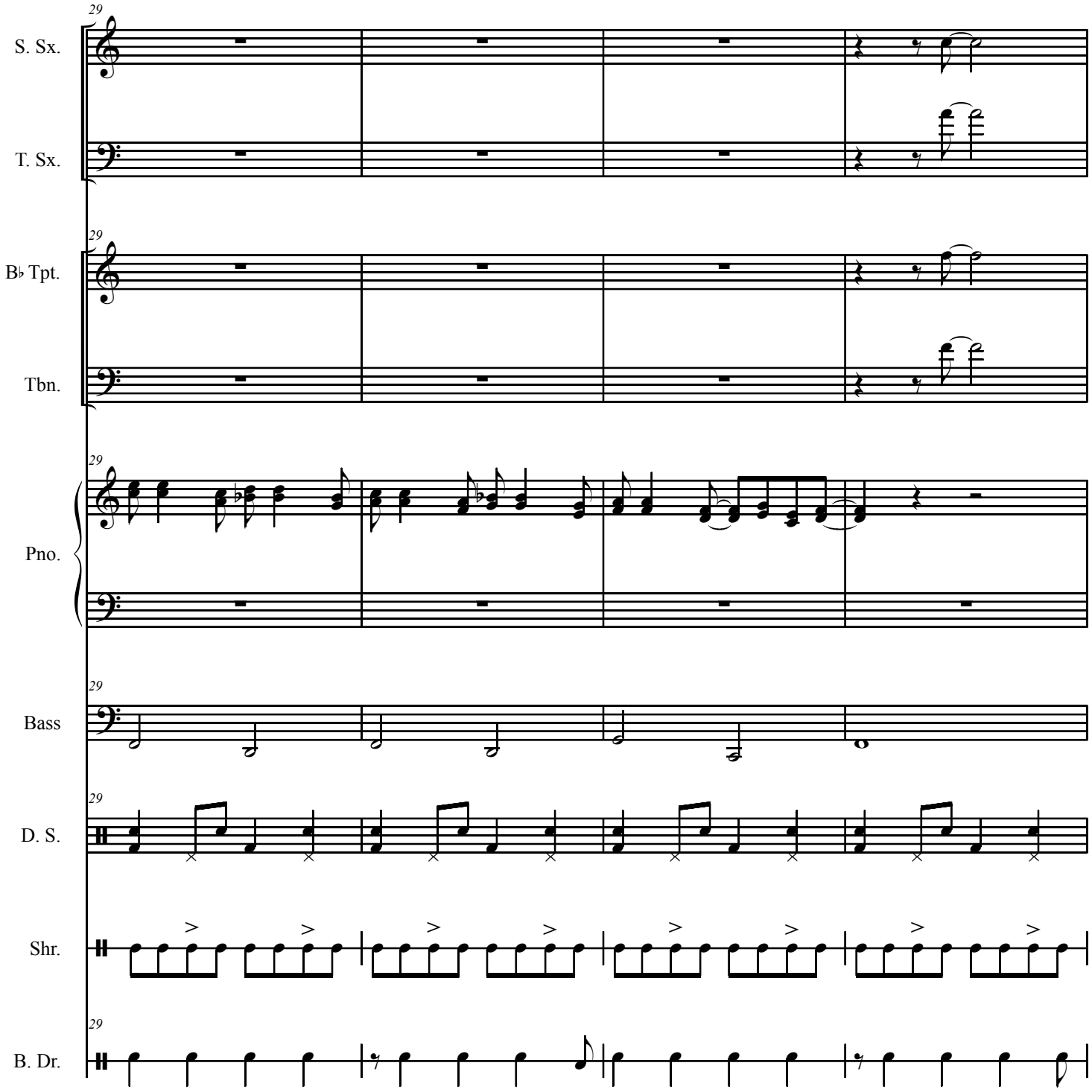
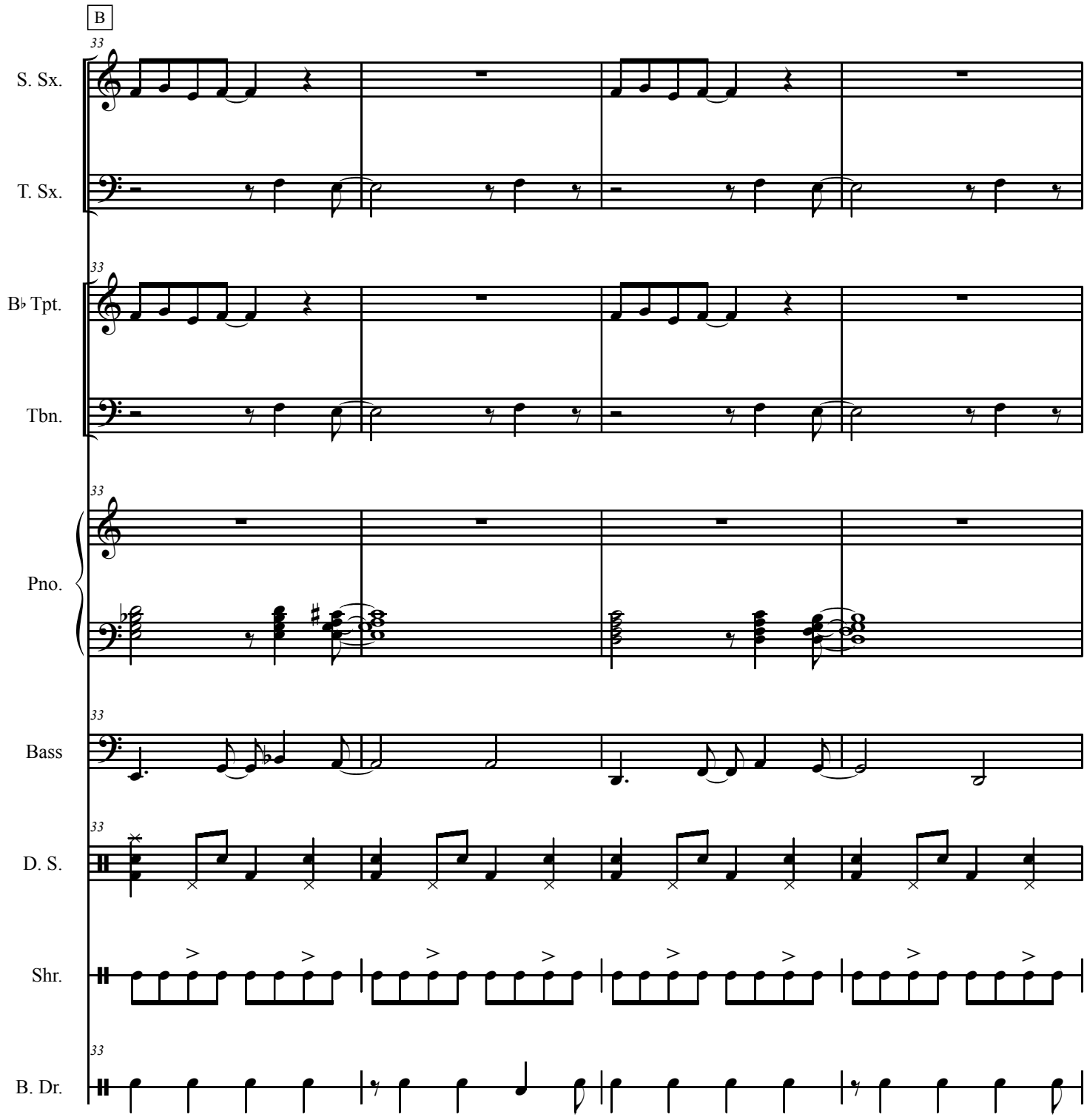
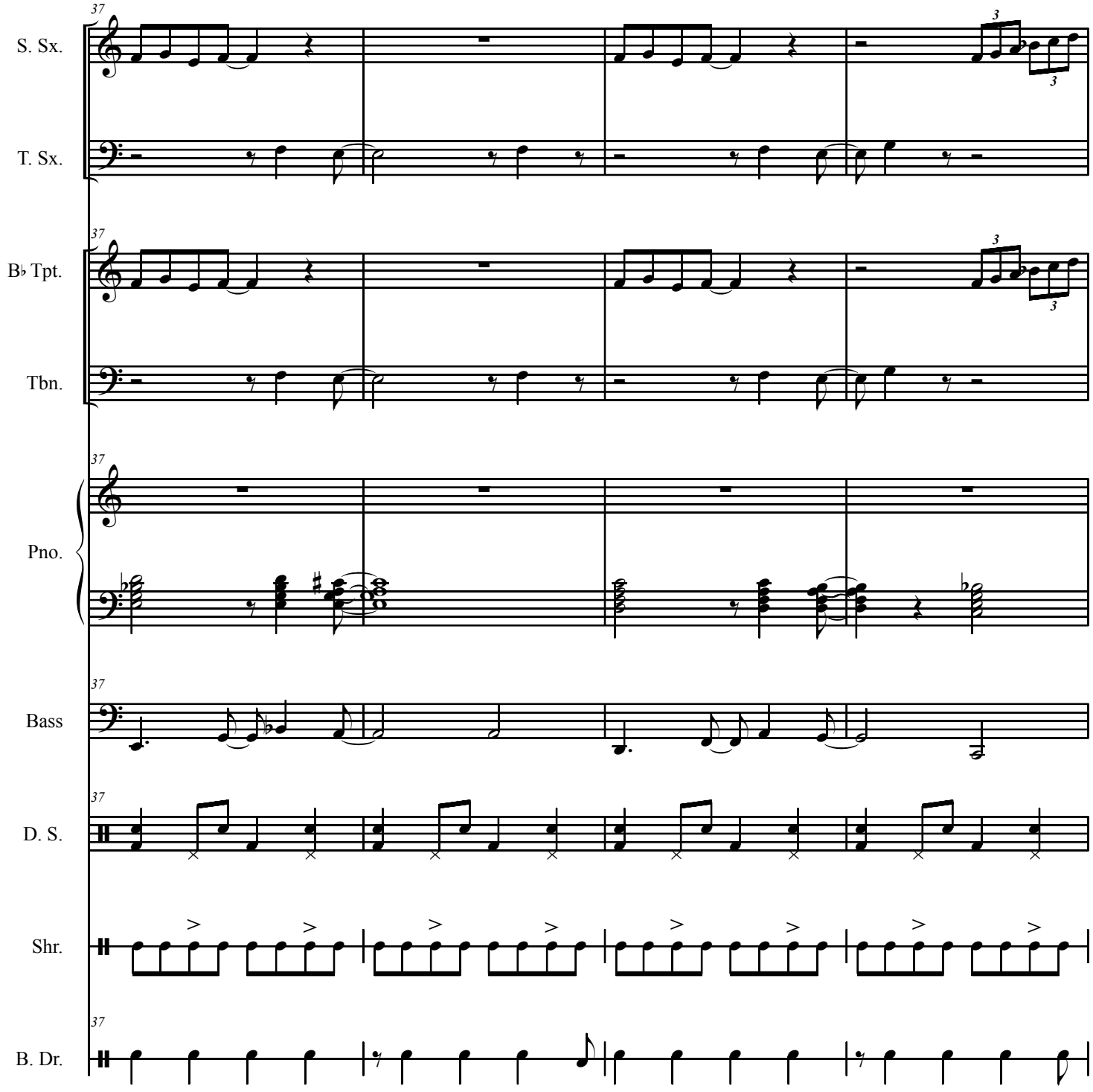
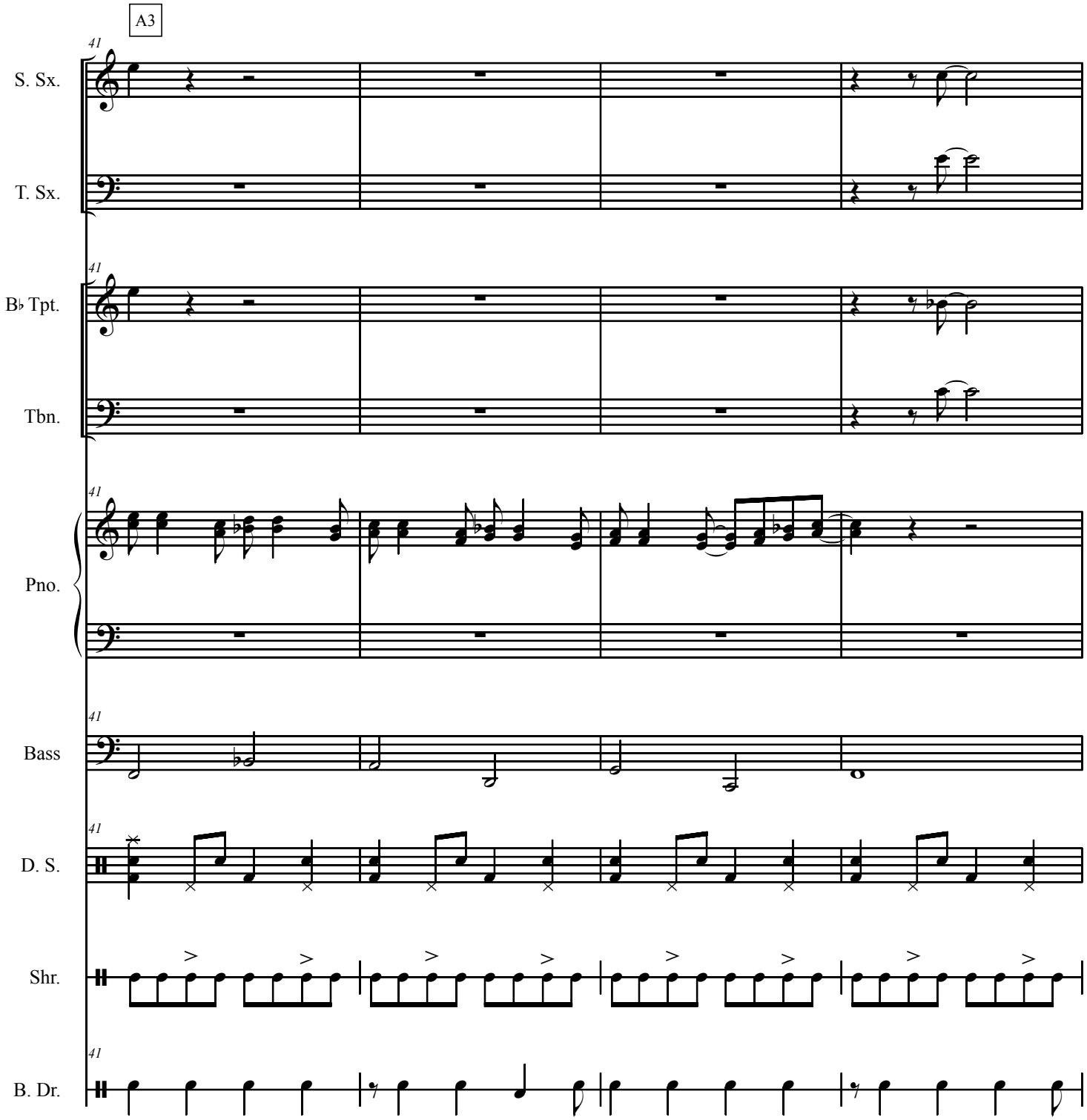
Shr.
B. Dr.

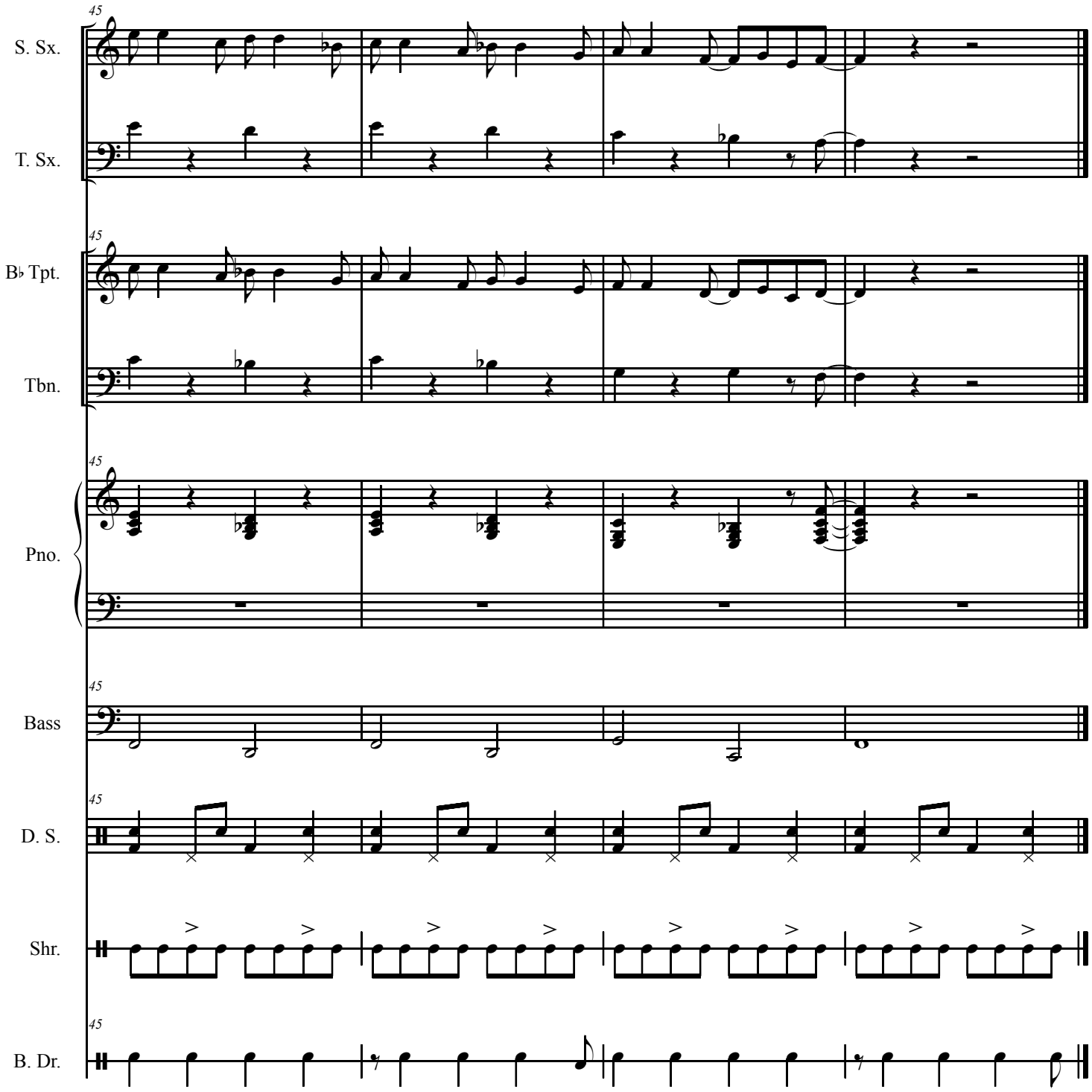

A2
25
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.


29
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.


B
33
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.


37
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.


A3
41
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.


45
S. Sx.
T. Sx.
B♭ Tpt.
Tbn.
Pno.
Bass
D. S.
Shr.
B. Dr.

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