Horseplay
by Errollyn Wallen

The Composer

The music of composer Errollyn Wallen spans numerous styles from classical avant-garde to jazz and songwriting. Born in Belize City, Belize, she gave up her training at the Dance Theater of Harlem, New York, to study composition at the universities of London and Cambridge. She now resides in London where she founded Ensemble X whose motto is, "We don't break down barriers in music … we don't see any." Described by The Observer as “the renaissance woman of contemporary British music”, she is a leading figure in today’s musical world, as respected as a singer/songwriter as she is a composer of contemporary music.

Errollyn Wallen’s prolific output includes more than twenty operas and two large scale works for the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games for London 2012 broadcast to a billion people around the world. Symphonic works include a Concerto for Percussion and Orchestra, a saxophone concerto for jazz virtuoso Courtney Pine and the Hallé Orchestra, or Mercury, for brass band and steel drums.

Errollyn was awarded the MBE in 2007 and was made a CBE in the New Year Honours List. In 2015 she became an Honorary Fellow of Mansfield College, Oxford and in 2019 an Honorary Fellow of Goldsmiths, London. She has received an Ivor Novello Award for Classical Music, a British Composer Award and a FIPA D’Or for Best Music for a Television Series. These honours come with further garnishes: an Honorary Doctorate from York St. John’s University, one of BBC’s 100 Women 2018 and one of London University’s 150 Leading Women; and her latest orchestral album, with Orchestra X, Photography, was voted into the Top Ten Classical Albums by USA’s National Public Radio.

Horseplay

Commissioned in 1998 by Tom Sapsford for The Royal Ballet, and dedicated to Judy Theophanous, Horseplay is a ballet for four male dancers. Wallen used the idea of the horse as an archetype to be the driving inspiration for the work. *Horseplay* was premiered on February 23rd, 1998 by The Royal Ballet, choreographed by Tom Sapsford, at the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield.

In the words of Tom Sapsford, “Each movement has its own colour and word or image associated with horses: the first is ‘dark’ and brooding, the second is ‘swift’ and is a winged

horse cutting brightly through the sky. The word for the third movement is ‘rocking’ which sways beautifully but uneasily, and the fourth, ‘race’, gallops on to the climactic finishing post.” *The Gramophone* in its review of the recording of the work characterized the four movements of the piece as “vivacious studies in motion.”

The work has a duration of roughly 22 minutes and is orchestrated for a mixed ensemble: Flute/Piccolo, Clarinet, Bass Clarinet, Soprano Saxophone, Horn, Percussion (2 players), Piano/Celesta, 2 Violins, Viola, Cello, Double Bass.

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Horseplay is published through Peters Edition (EP 7683) and has been released in a recording on *Avie Records*, in 2002, in the album entitled *The girl in my alphabet* (Avie AV 0006).

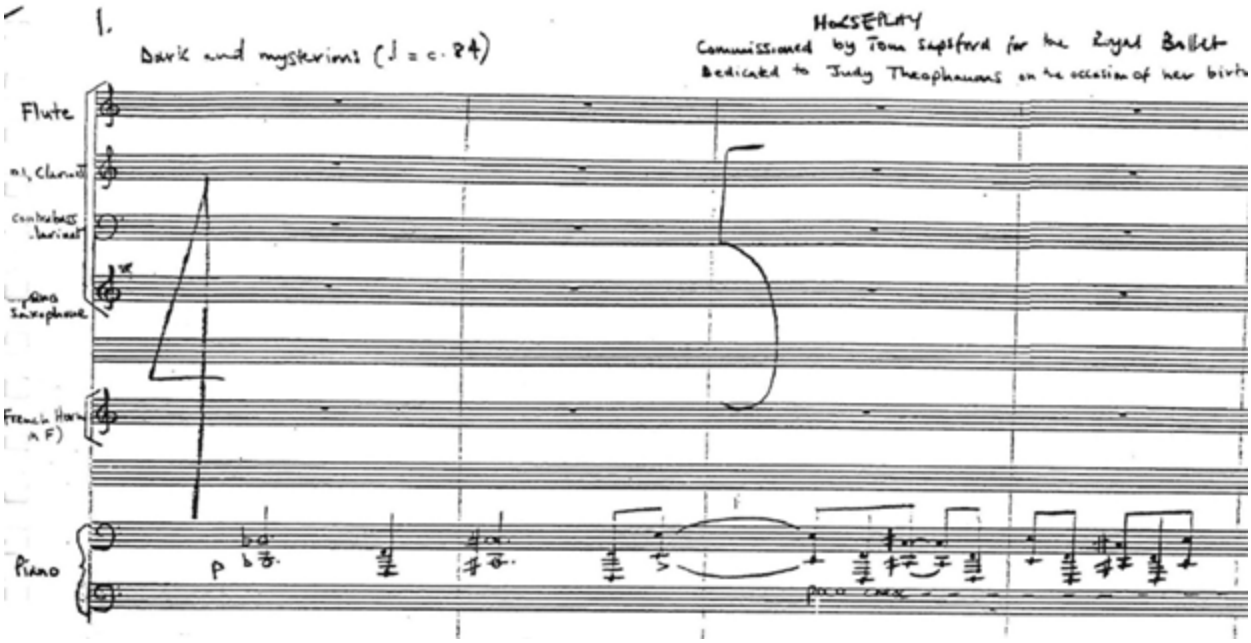
Analysis

Movement 1 – “Dark and Mysterious”

Table 1 - summarized formal structure of Movement 1

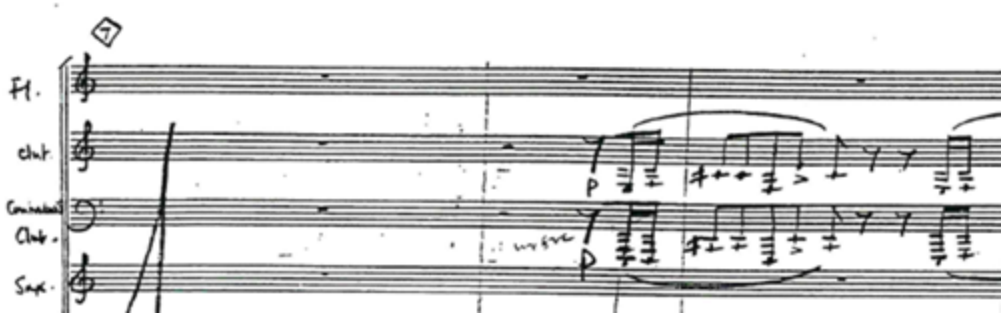
Section	Subsection	Measures
A		1-17
B	***b1*** (18-29), ***b2*** (30-39)	18-39
C	***c1*** (40-46), ***c2*** (47-52), ***c3*** (53-58)	40-58
C’	***c'1*** (59-63), ***c’2*** (64-73)	59-73
D		74-94
E		95-106
F - CODA		107 - end

Section ***A*** begins with the presentation of the theme played by the piano and is built upon augmented 5th and major 7th intervals played by the low register of the piano (until measure 8).



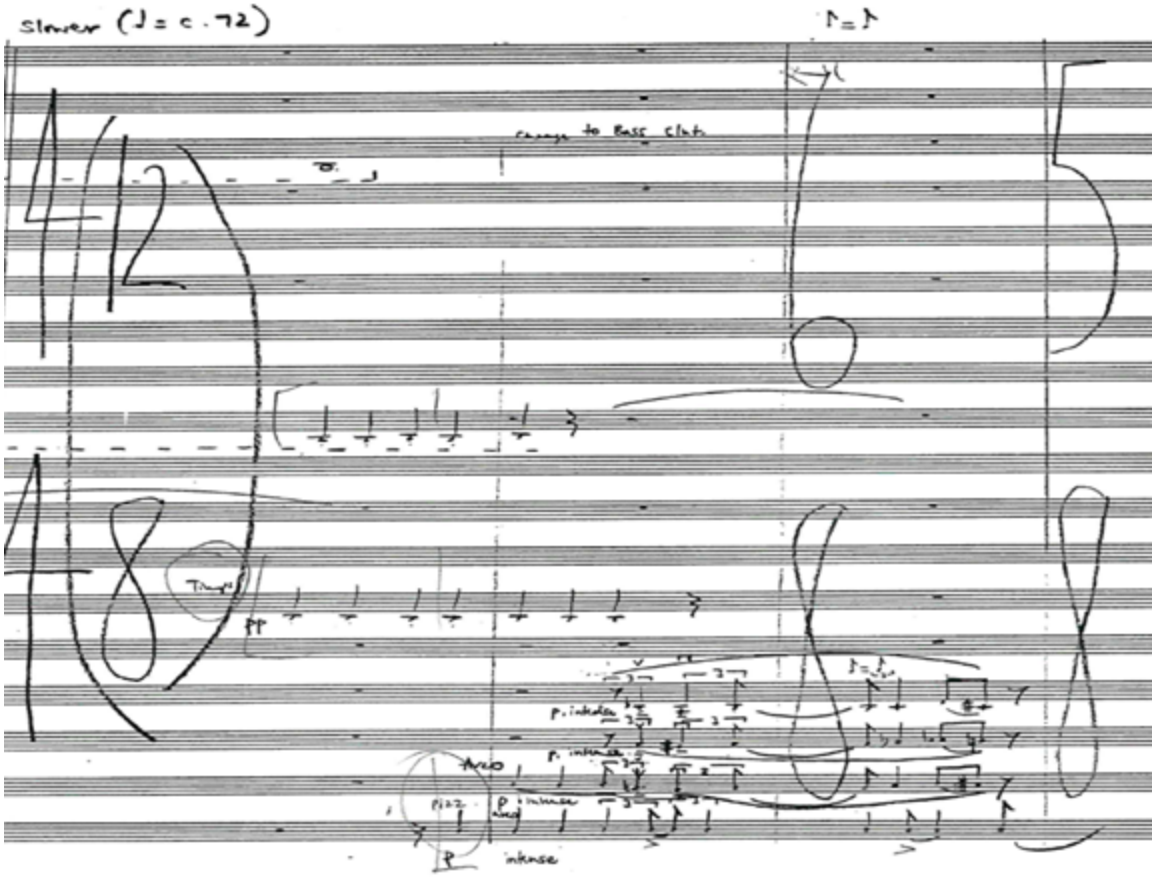
*Example 1 - piano theme from Section **A** of Movement 1.*

A melodic fragment from this theme is presented in the upbeat between measures 9 and 15, in a rhythmically variated manner, by the clarinet and bass clarinet.



*Example 2 - melodic fragment based on the main theme of Section **A** rhythmically varied by the Clarinets.*

Measures 16 and 17 are a transition to section ***B***. This transition to ***B*** is constructed over short and rhythmically fast motifs presented in an imitative fashion. When examining the harmony, we find that the major 2nd features prominently. The first subdivision of ***B***, ***b1***, is characterized by a static atmosphere generated by the pedal D in the double basses, piano and low percussion instruments which supports a lyrical chorale in the strings that develops in small 2 or 3 measure phrases.

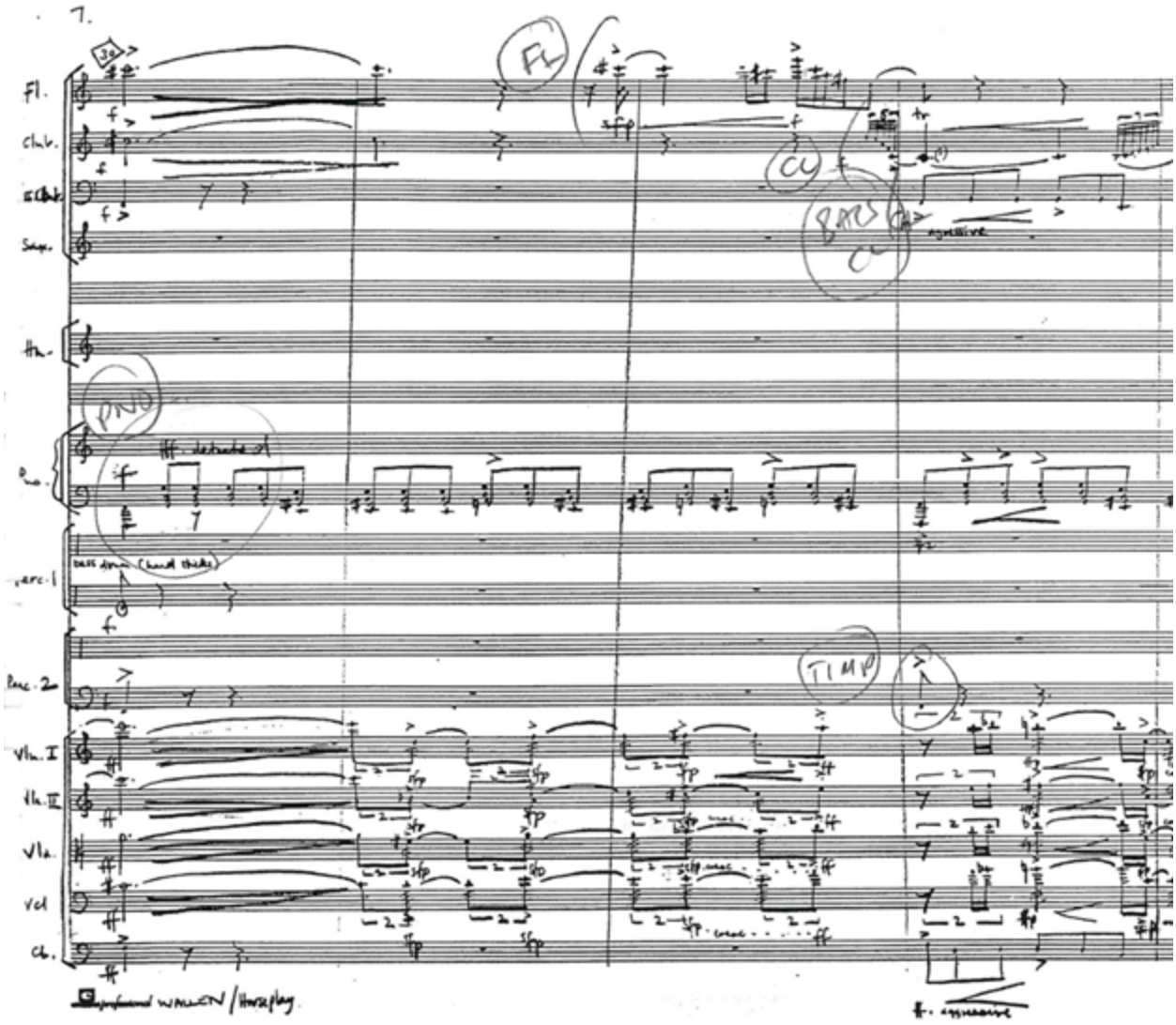


*Example 3 - first measures of Subsection **b1**. Notice the pedal tone D and the chorale construction of the strings.*

This chorale has an ascending, wave-like movement that leads to a climax in measure 29. Harmonically this subsection is based in G-minor, with chromatic chords at the end of the phrases, with the climax presenting a C-sharp harmonic and melodic structure.

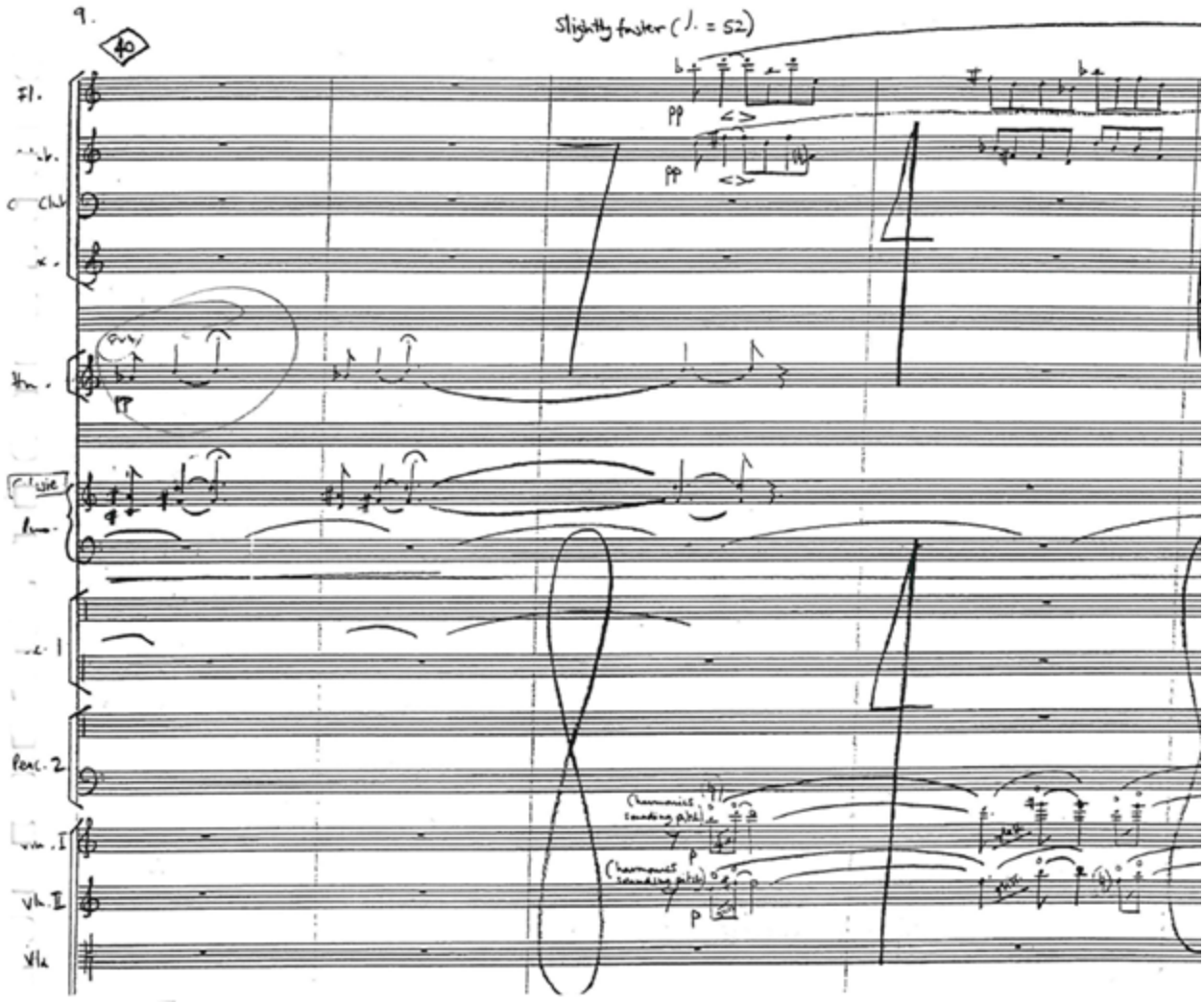
The **b2** subsection is characterized by an energetic ostinato pattern present in the piano. This ostinato is generated by major chords of G and E Major, spaced by a minor third interval of the fundamental, and finishes with a fragmentation of the ostinato, again with major chords but this

time distanced by a tritone. Other relevant melodic material of this section is presented by the dialogue between the flute and the clarinet. In the flute, the melodic material derives from descending melodic motifs based on disjunct intervals (predominantly major thirds) and the clarinet melodic material is based mainly in an ascending melodic scalar movement. The strings continue their homorhythmic syncopated structure varying on the material they presented in **b1**, now in ff and tremolo.



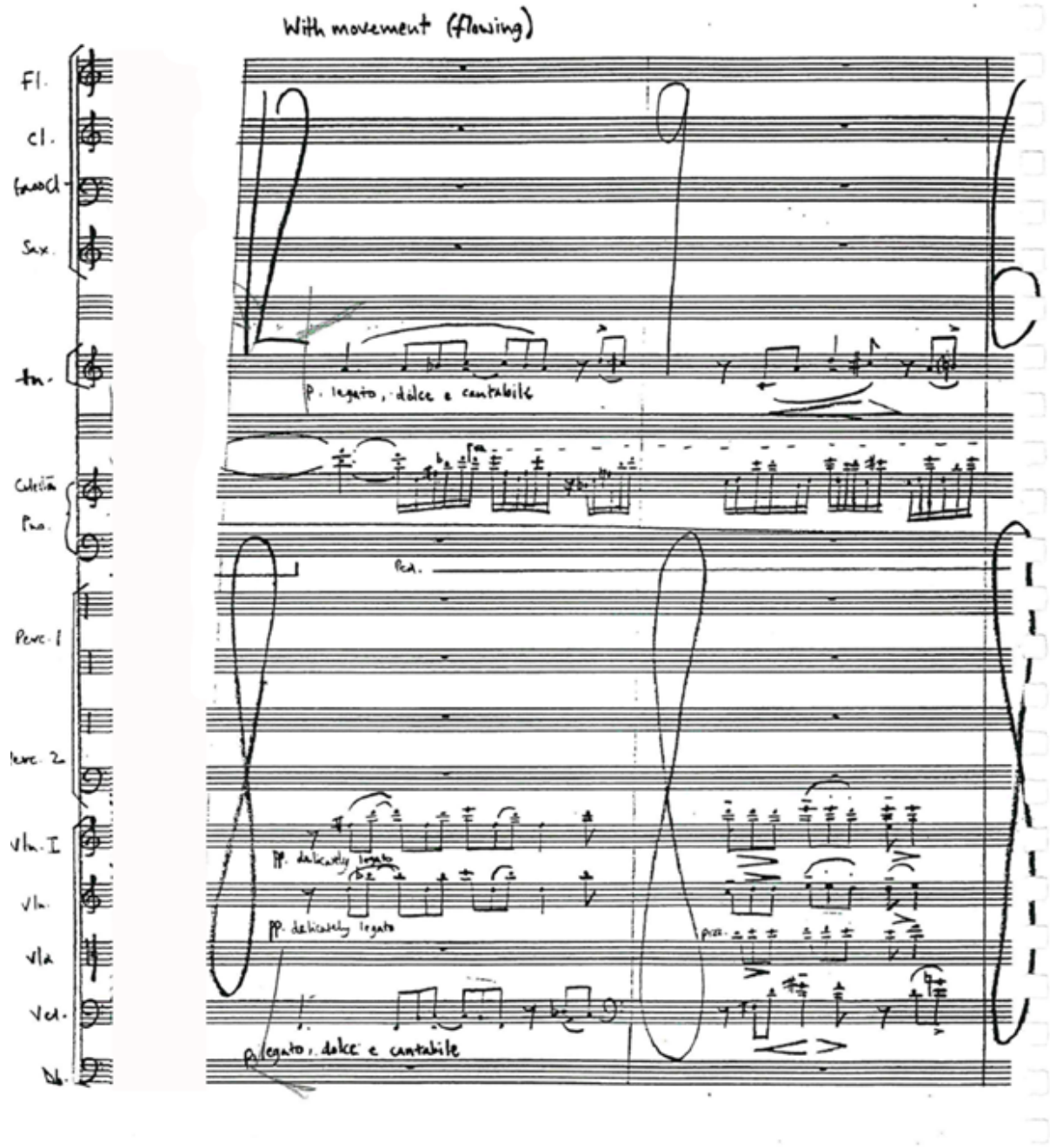
*Example 4 - first measures of Subsection **b2.***

C begins with an introduction split into two phrases: the first one lasts for two measures and is a simple call motif present in the horn and celesta, an ascending major third interval. The second phrase, which starts in measure 42, is a contrasting lyrical movement phrase presented by the clarinet and flute with a predominant harmonic structure based on an augmented chord. This lyrical line is supported by the violins playing harmonics in glissando.



*Example 5 - first measures of subsection **c1**.*

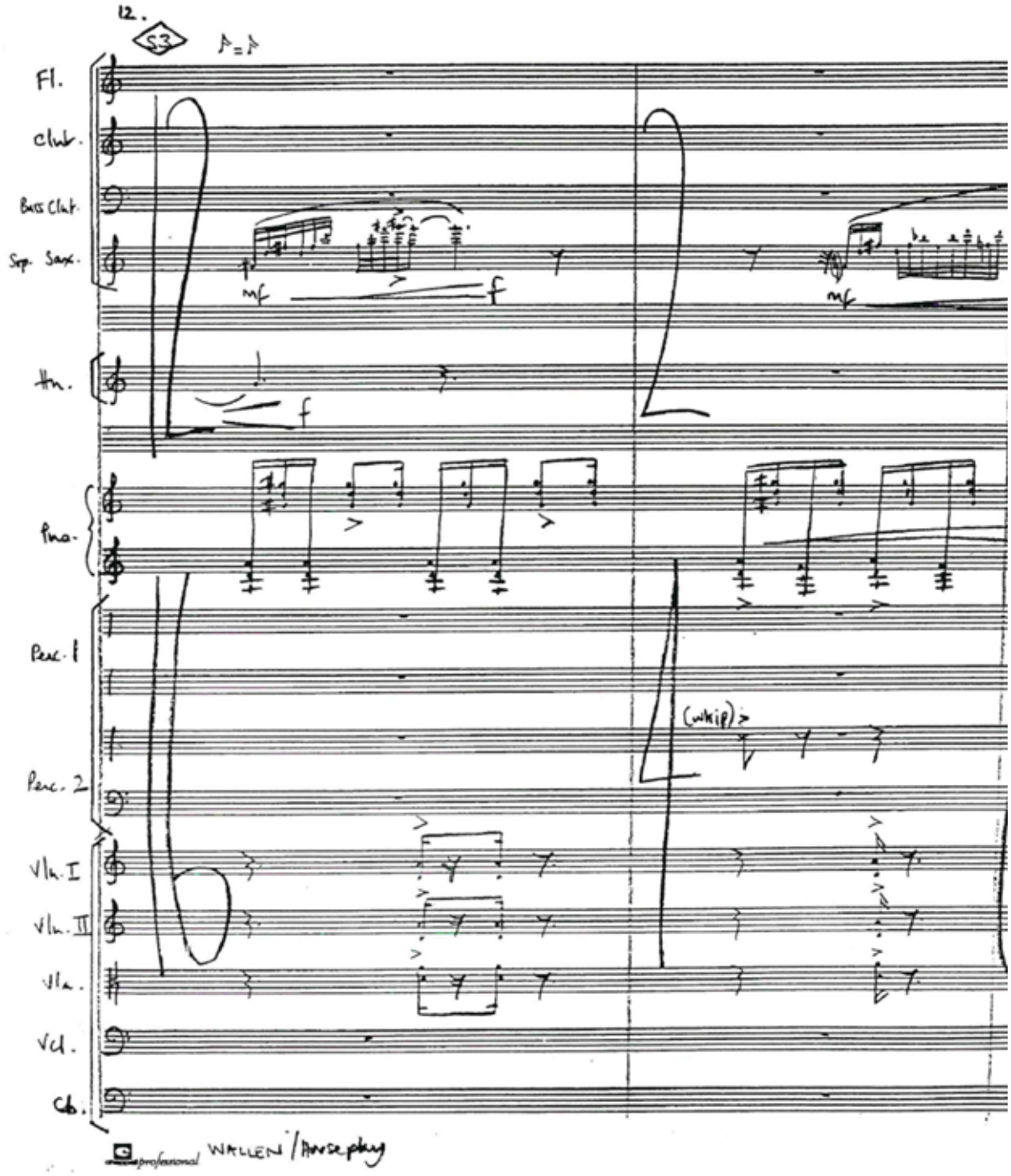
The ***c2*** subsection develops from measure 47 until measure 52. The main melodic material of this subsection is carried by the horn that presents a 4-measure phrase based on the 2nd violin motif of the ***b1*** section. Harmonically this theme is in G-minor with some chromatic alterations. The melodic lines, presented concomitantly by the strings and celesta, are based on whole tone scales.



*Example 6 - first measures of Subsection **c2**.*

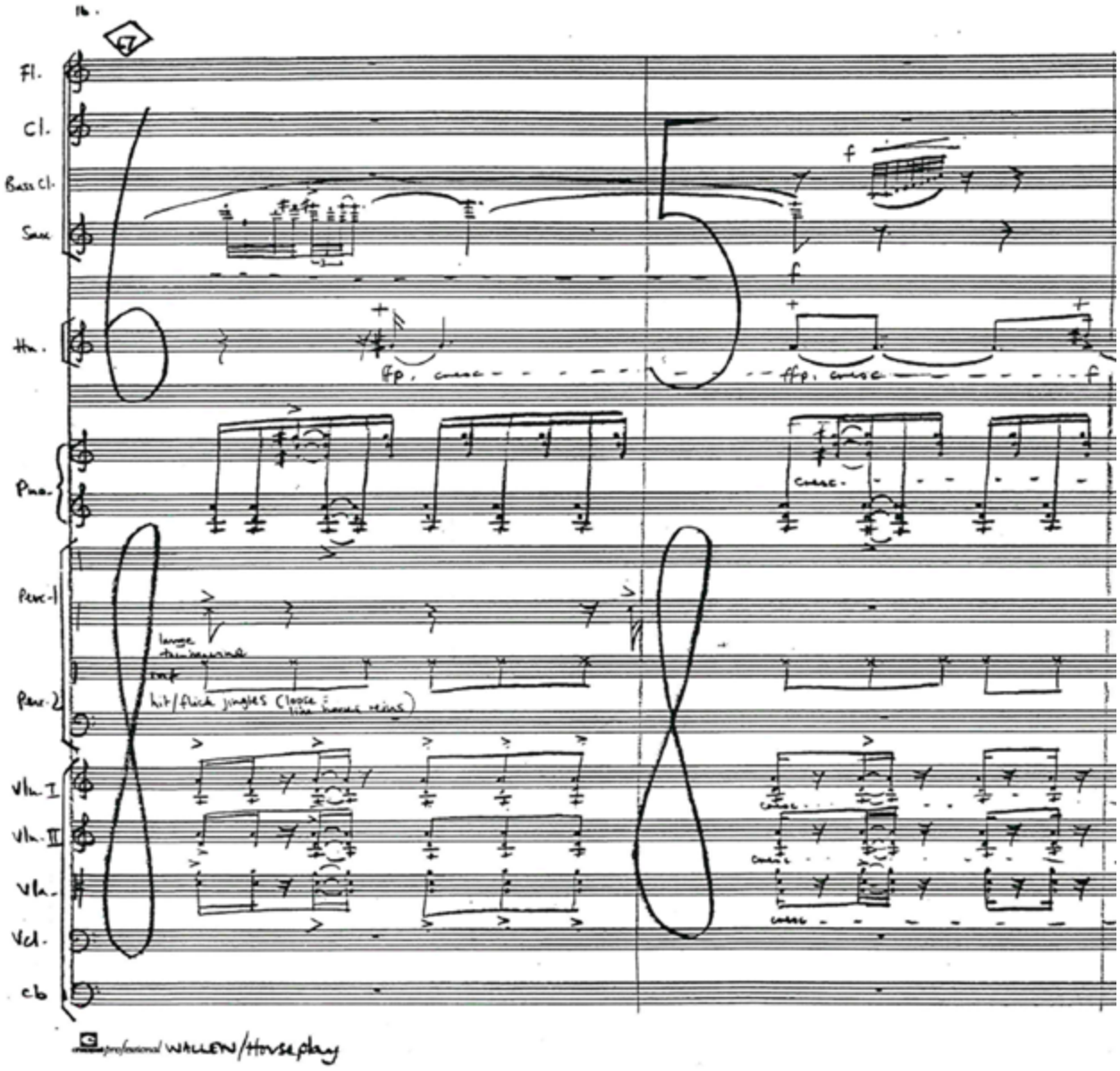
The ***c3*** subsection character contrasts greatly with the previous section. The primary material of this section is presented by the melodic line of the soprano saxophone, in short and quick paced

phrases, supported by the ostinato played by the piano. Harmonically the saxophone material is predominantly based on a whole tone scale and, in the piano ostinato, there is a predominance of major 7th and minor 2nds supported by chords of juxtaposed fifths, A and D, that are accented by the strings.



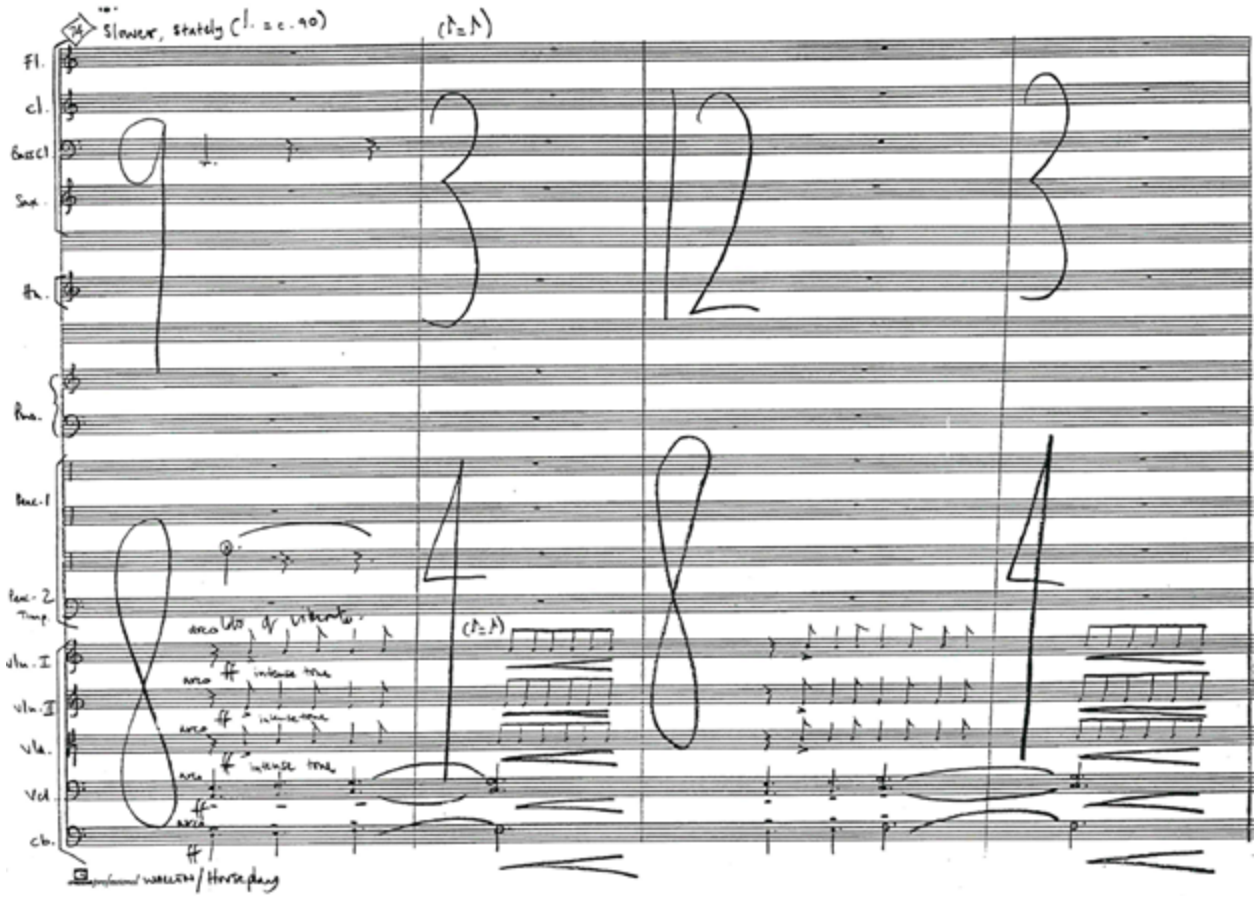
*Example 7 - fragment of Subsection **c3**.*

The next section, ***C'*** is a series of variations on the material of the previous ***C*** section. ***c'1*** is based on ***c2*** but the composer introduces many more contrapuntal elements. The subsection ***c'2*** is based on the previous ***c3*** but with an extension of three measures. The composer develops variations on the soprano saxophone voice, and also adds more instrumental lines, namely clarinet contrapuntal elements and percussion.



*Example 8 - fragment of **c'2** with material drawn from subsection **c3** with added instrumental lines in the clarinet and percussion.*

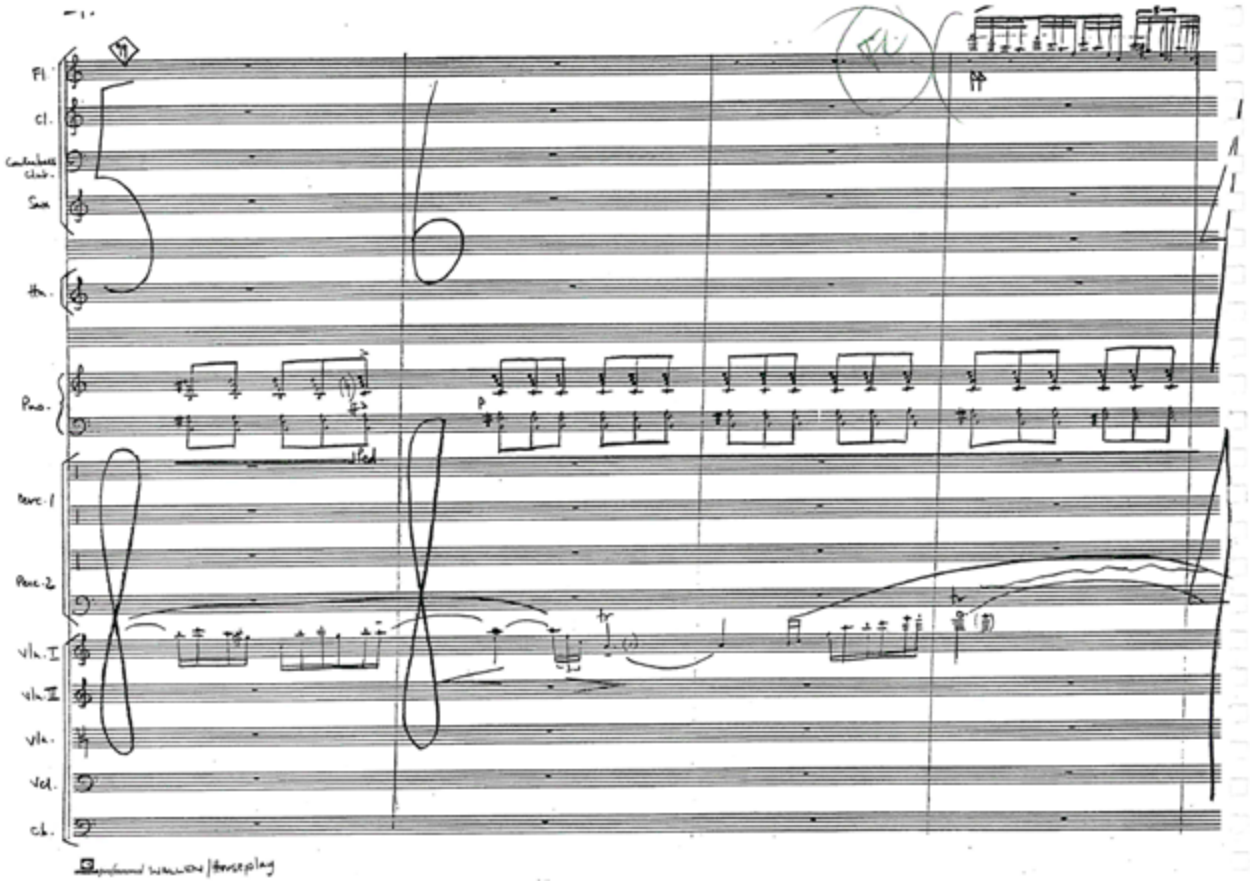
Section **D** is divided in two subsections: **d1** from measure 74 to 86 and **d2** from measure 87 to 94. Subsection **d1** is characterized by the juxtaposition of two distinctive harmonic elements creating a polyostinato. The first element is present in the violins and viola and is based on a major 7^{th} chord; the second is in the violoncellos and double basses, created by juxtaposing 5ths. This aggregation of the elements creates a Doric D scale.



*Example 9 - beginning of subsection **d1.***

The subsection ***d2*** is a development of the motifs used in ***d1***, both in terms of the orchestration of said motifs as well as in terms of the register (octave).

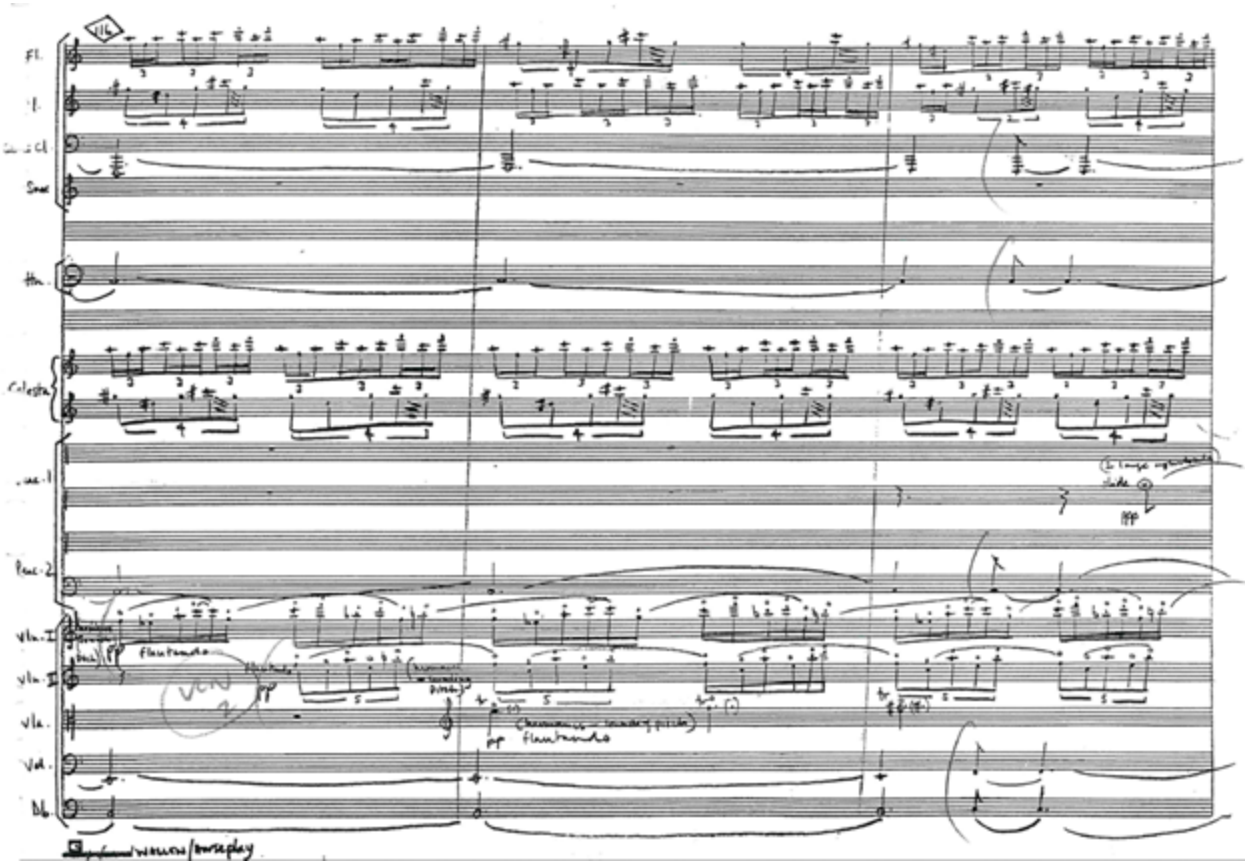
Section ***E*** can be considered a lyrical episode. The composer creates a lyrical melody in A minor on top of a harmonic ostinato in the piano. The violin theme, conjugating long notes with ornamental elements, gives special emphasis to the 6th degree chord. The harmonic ostinato of the piano has a polytonal character by the juxtaposition of two chords from the base pentachord of the E major scale. On measure 102 the flute starts a dialogue with the violin.



*Example 10 - fragment (measures 99-102) of section **E.***

The final section of this movement, section ***F***, beginning on measure 107, is a *coda*. It can be further subdivided in 3 distinct short phrases of different characters. The first, lasting for three measures, is a quote of the *Dies Irae* orchestrated in the low register in the contrabass clarinet, double bass and horn. These three voices move together in harmonic aggregates. The second phrase is a dialogue between the clarinet, horn and flute which presents, in a melodic way, the harmonic material used in the last four measures of the lyrical episode, section ***E***. Finally, the

last phrase takes four measures and is an ostinato created by the melodic lines of the flute, clarinet, and piano, over the pedal notes of the lower instruments.



Example 11 - fragment of the closing measures of Movement 1.

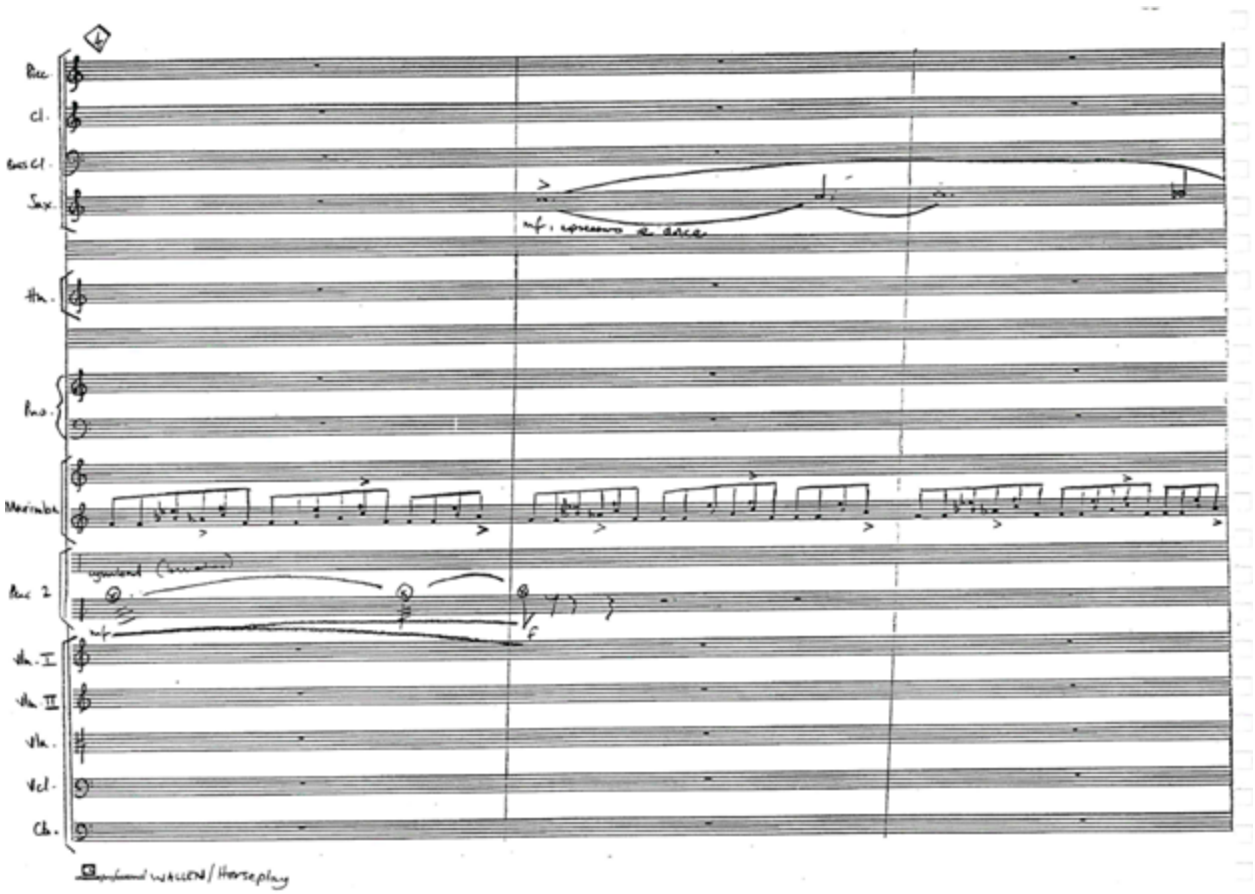
Movement 2 – "Lively"

Table 2 - summarized formal structure of Movement 2

Section	Subsection	Measures
A	***a1*** (1-16), ***a2*** (17-36)	1-36
B	***b1*** (37-52), ***b2*** (53-69)	37-69
C - CODA		70-93

Section ***A*** is subdivided in two subsections. The subsection ***a1*** spans from the beginning until measure 16 and starts off with a vigorous ostinato. Played by the marimba, this pattern is pentatonic in nature and contains variable accents that appear at different points along the phrase. This is then joined by the soprano saxophone (measure 5) which plays a three-measure

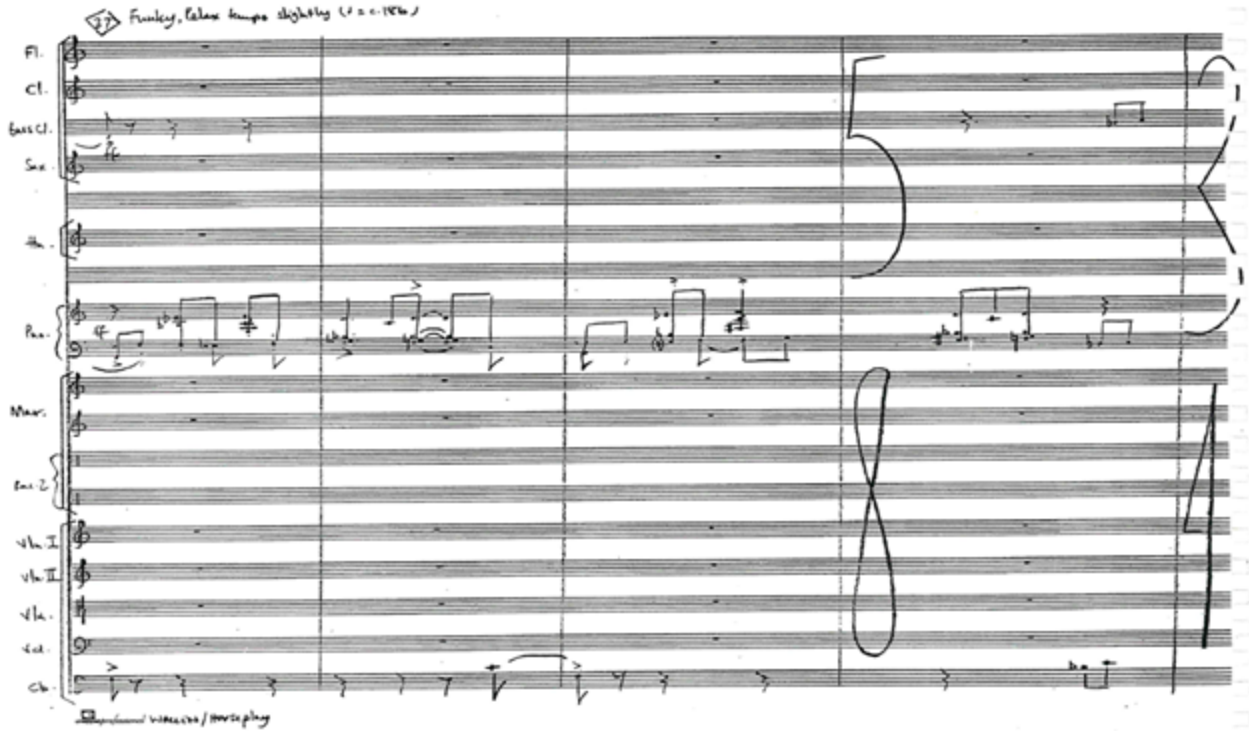
phrase seated in the key of F minor. This is presented twice. At measure 13 the vibraphone joins in, alternating the ostinato with the marimba which breaks the regularity of the accents. Harmonically this alternating ostinato is more complex than that of the original because the pentatonic is now presented in a series of perfect fourths.



*Example 12 - fragment of subsection **a1.***

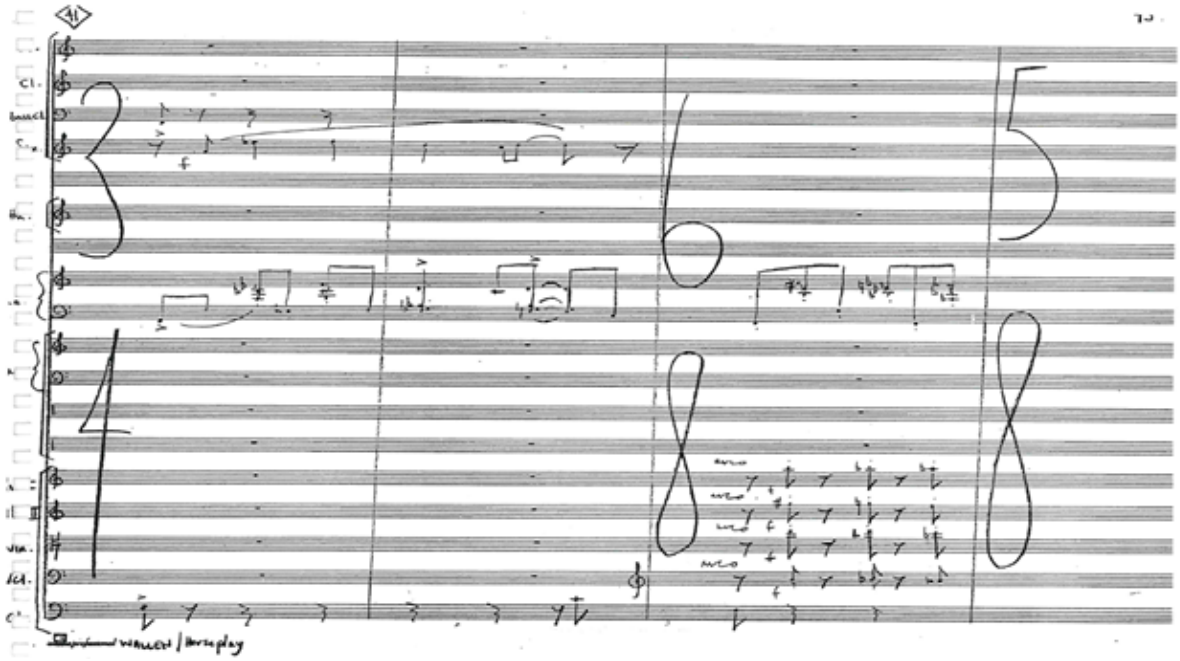
Subdivision ***a2*** begins on the upbeat to measure 17 and is played by the soprano saxophone. This subsection functions as a development of ***a1*** and the melodic material of the saxophone is presented four times. In the first two, the theme is varied rhythmically, by diminution, and melodically, by the addition of a C-flat. The last two presentations of the theme are varied by the addition of the horn. The percussion ostinato is varied by the alternation of the initial ostinato with the one from measure 13. The last seven measures have a transitional character, based on the percussion ostinato, harmonically enriched, and by the addition of short, pointillistic elements of the flute, clarinets, saxophone and strings.

The ***B*** section is also subdivided in two subsections. The ***b1*** subsection goes from measure 37 to 52. This subsection maintains the ostinato character of the writing but shifts it to the piano. The ostinato is based on the original marimba ostinato but, as indicated by the composer, this time with a funky character which is emphasised both rhythmically and harmonically.



*Example 13 - beginning of Subsection **b1**.*

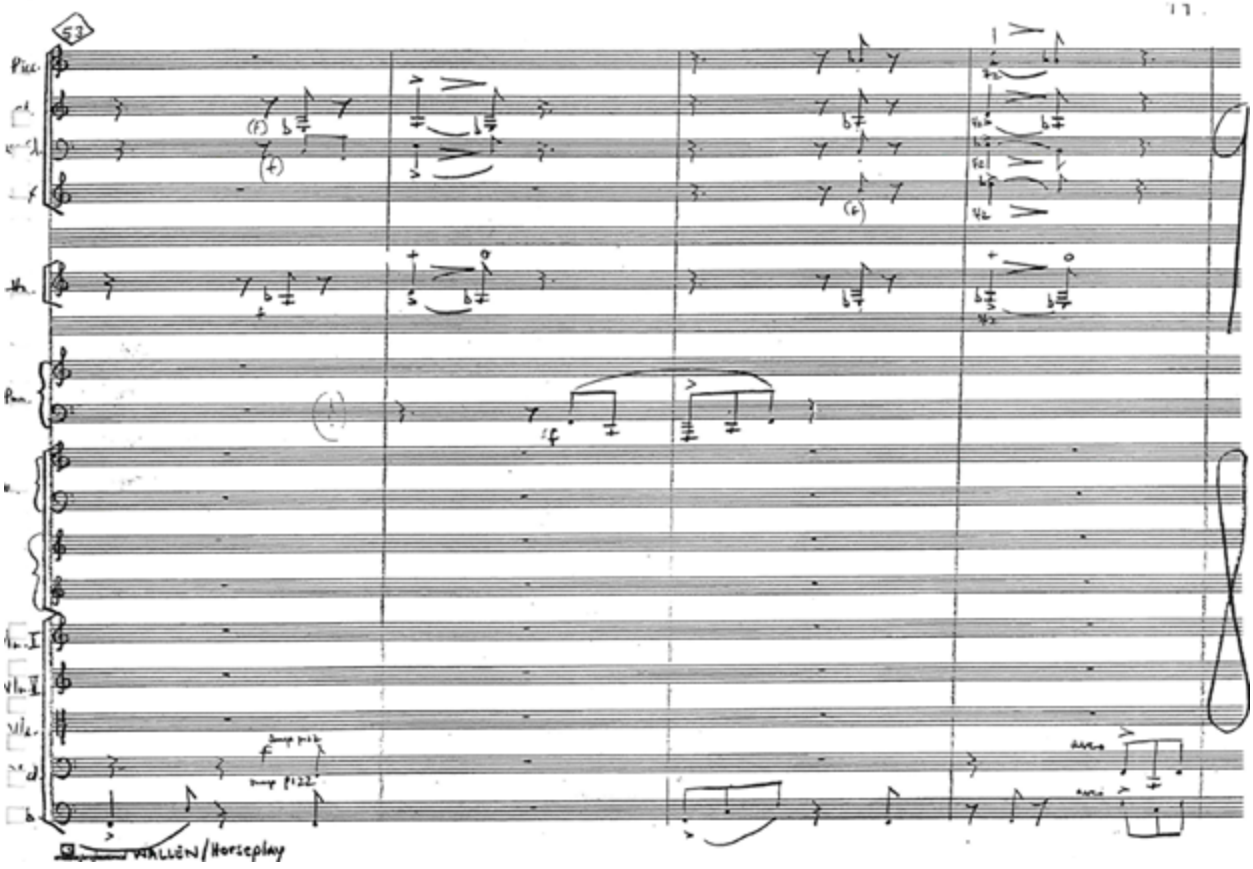
Continuing to use the ostinato as a base, Wallen introduces melodic motifs, beginning at measure 41, alternating between the woodwinds. The strings are used to emphasize melodic and harmonic elements of the piano ostinato.



*Example 14 - fragment of Subsection **b1** - measures 41 to 44.*

Starting on measure 48, an eighth-note motif appears, based on the closing elements of the saxophone theme of the ***a2*** subsection. In this subsection the composer also uses harmonic textural material inherited from the previous section.

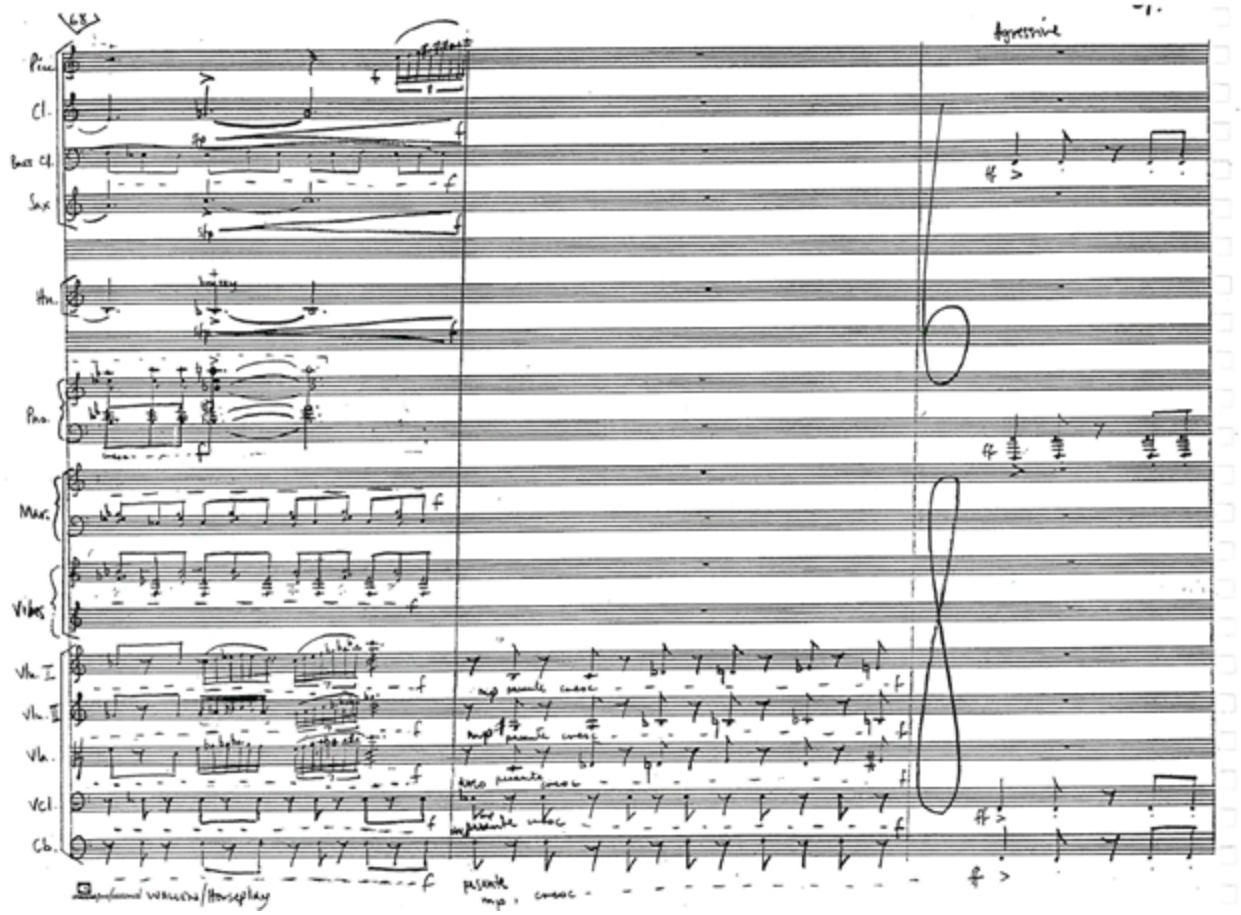
Subsection ***b2*** can be further subdivided in two phrases: the first phrase one goes from measure 53 to 63 and the second from 64 to 69. The first phrase consists of short alternating melodic motifs. These are presented by two groups: clarinets and horn alternating with piano and double bass and with piccolo, clarinets and horn. This alternation moves into a piano ostinato, punctuated by the strings and the woodwinds, which is a development deriving from the piano ostinato of the previous section.



Example 15 - alternating melodic motifs from the beginning of Subsection ***b2.***

Measure 63 is a transitional element that introduces a new ostinato, with the marimba taking over the constant eighth notes and carrying the music over to the second phrase. This new phrase is structured in five measures leading up to a climax on measure 68 and one transition measure leading up to the *coda*. These five measures are the densest in terms of texture of the entire ***B*** section and are constructed on polyostinatos. This phrase's harmonic construction is

based on the scale of E-minor. The most prominent ostinato is present in the marimba and vibraphone with the other ostinatos being present in the melodic elements of flute, bass clarinet, the long notes of clarinet, soprano sax and horn, energetic motifs of chordal juxtapositions in the piano, and repeated, alternating notes in the strings which emphasize the percussion ostinato.



*Example 16 - fragment illustrating measure 68, the climax of Section **B**, the transitional measure 69 and the ostinato at the beginning of Section **C**.*

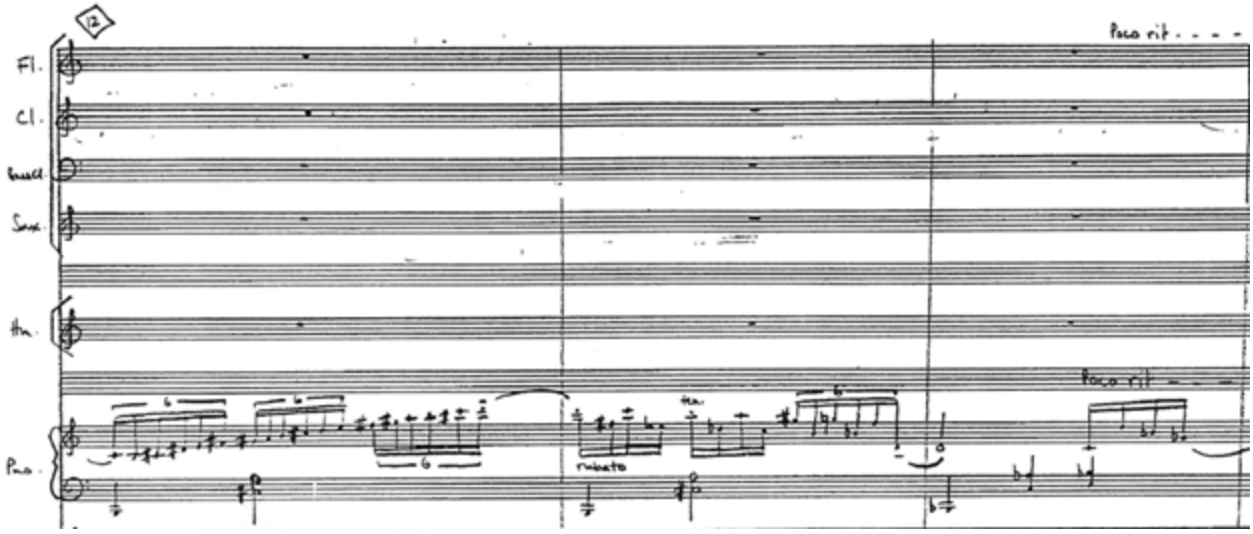
Measure 69 is thus a transition created by mainly ascending chromatic off-beat eight notes on violins and viola over pedal notes in cello and double bass. Coda, section ***C***, starts off with an ostinato, in *ff*, with an aggressive character, orchestrated in the low register in double bass, cello, piano, and bass clarinet. The tritone harmonic nature of this ostinato stresses the aggressive character. Starting on measure 81, the marimba switches the ostinato to a pentatonic scale-based motif. This new ostinato will be carried alternatively and successively by clarinet and saxophone; piano, marimba and viola; marimba and vibraphone; clarinet, marimba and vibraphone and finally vibraphone, violin and viola. In the last four measures this pentatonic based ostinato is changed by diminution and presented in juxtaposition of sixteenth notes and quintuplet of sixteenth notes. The movement finishes with a B-flat major chord.

Movement 3 – "With grace, very expressive and tender"

Table 3 - summarized formal structure of Movement 3

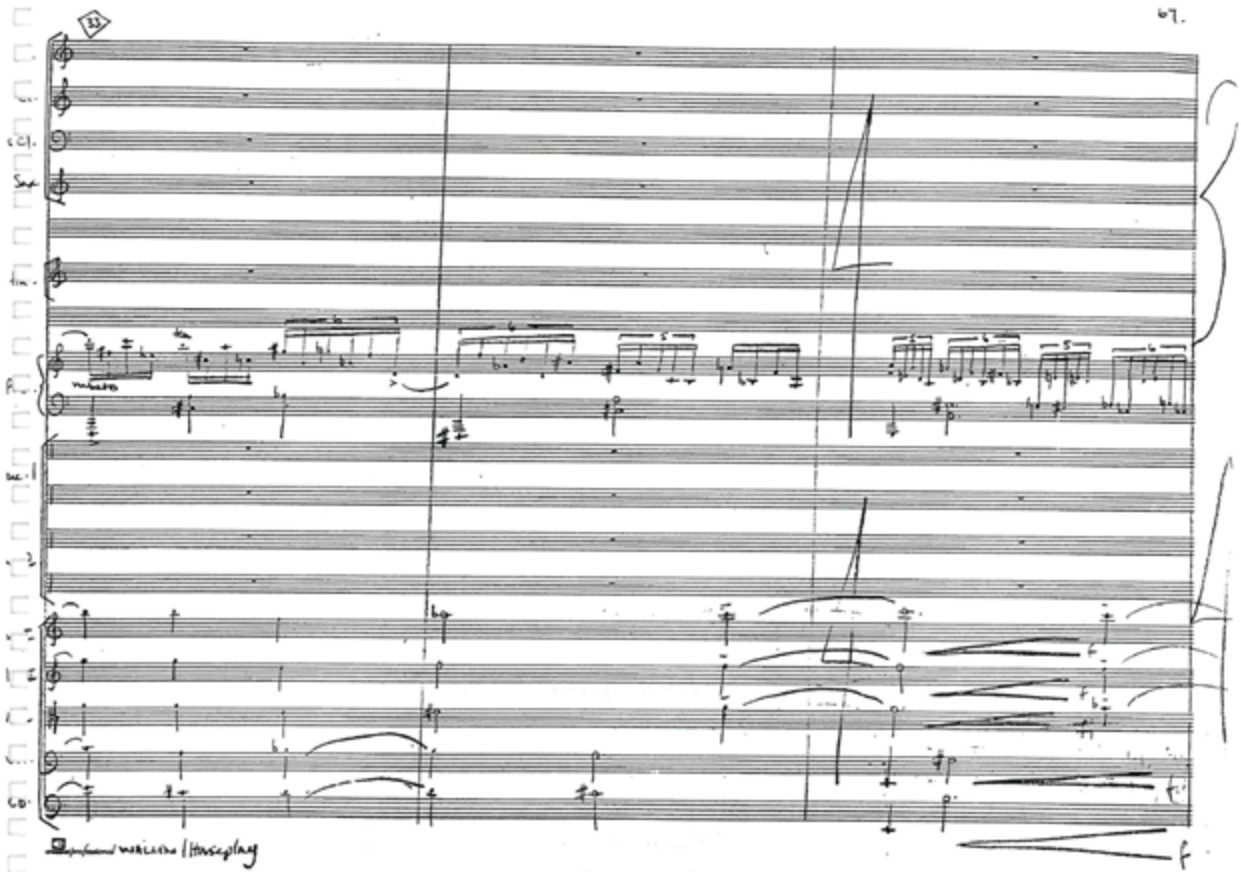
Section	Subsection	Measures
A	***a1*** (1-23), ***a2*** (24-41)	1-41
B		42-61
C	***c1*** (62-67), ***c2*** (68-79)	62-79
D - CODA		80-92

Section ***A***, which can be subdivided in two subsections, starts with a horn call that leads to the entrance of the piano, at measure 3. This figure is a waltz with a melancholic character, which is constructed using D-flat Mixolydian. In measures 8 to 10 the composer introduces several chromatic elements and a more improvisatory character starting on measure 11. This improvised character is stressed by the movement in 16th notes, quintuplets and sextuplets, that serve as ornaments to the waltz.



*Example 17 - fragment from Subsection **a1.***

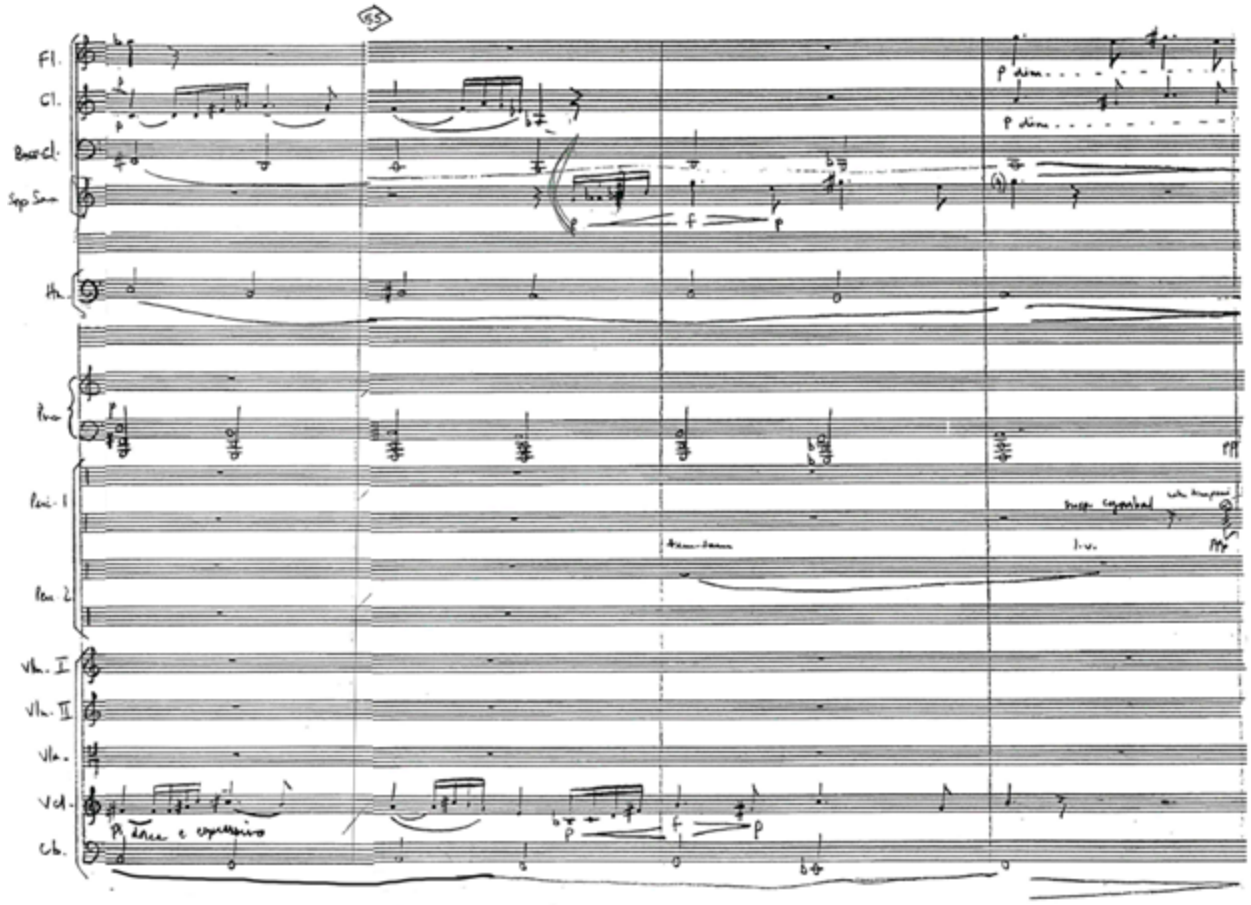
In measures 15 to 16 and 16 to 17, Wallen introduces two harmonic cadential moments. The harmonic expressive element of this subsection is the uncertainty created by the shift between B and Bb which is finally resolved on measure 21 with a cadence in B, with the presence of both the major and minor chords. The last measure works as a transition to ***a2*** which starts at measure 24 and goes up to 41. In this subsection the waltzing movement is carried by the piano, with the strings doubling the harmony of the piano. After measure 31, while the piano assumes a more improvised character, the strings convey a more melodic character, in clear contrast to the piano.



*Example 18 - fragment from Subsection **a2**, measures 33 to 35.*

Comparing it to section **a1**, the improvisatory character of the piano is enlarged to five measures, from 31 until 35. In these measures the composer uses ornamental and scalar elements, similar to the ones used in the previous subsection. In measures 36 and 37 we see a reuse of material from measures 14 to 19, with some melodic variation. As in the previous subsection, the composer presents the same two cadential elements, this time on measures 37 to 38 and 38 to 39, and the same resolution to B on measure 41 with the major chord on the piano and B minor on the strings.

Section **B** is a Passacaglia that uses as main theme a monody akin to the Gregorian Dies Irae, orchestrated in double bass, horn, and bass clarinet. Harmonically the melody is harmonized with a sequence of six chords that repeats throughout the subsection: B minor – G major – A major – F major – G major – E-flat major.

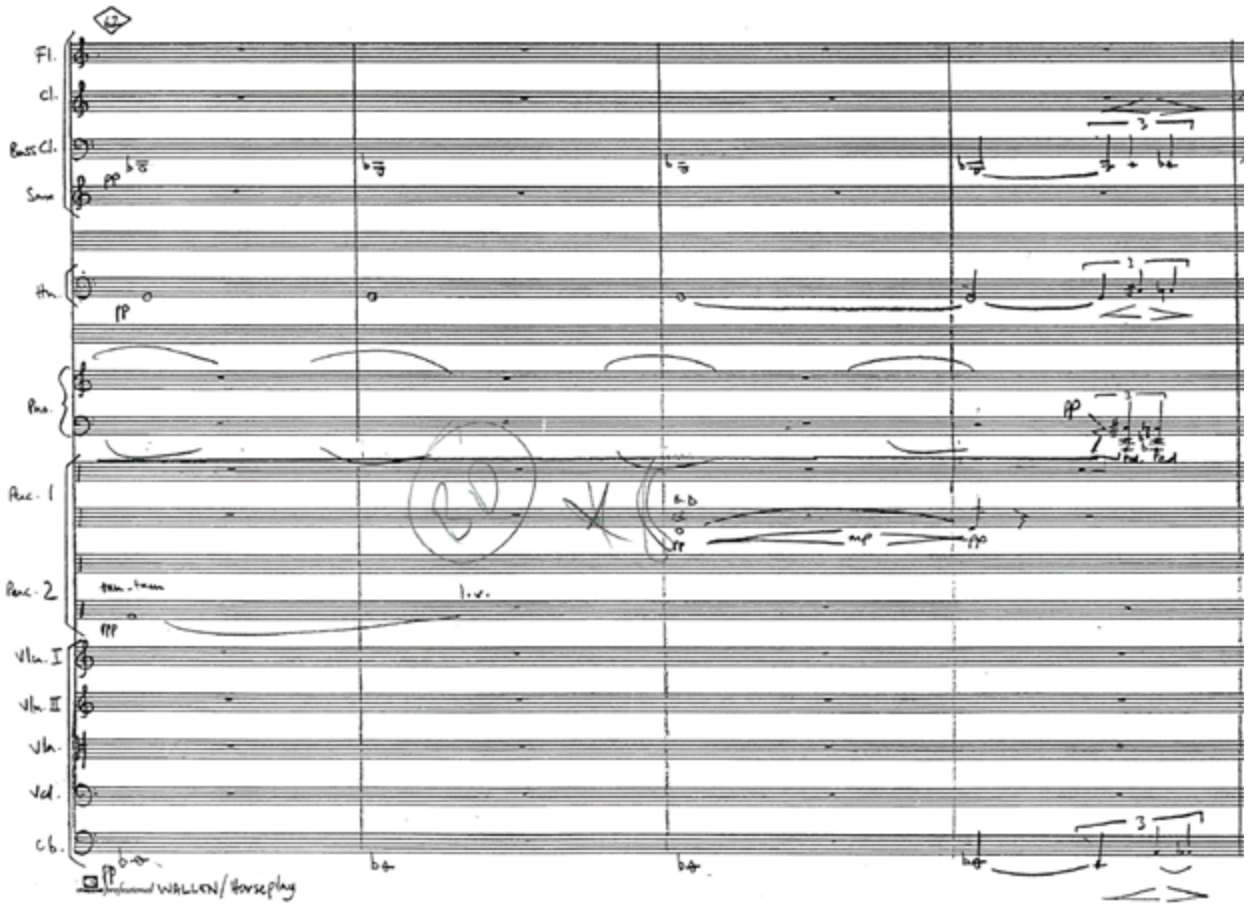


*Example 19 - fragment of Subsection **b2** illustrating the monody of the double bass and the harmony progression on the piano, horn and bass clarinet.*

This section builds up on the ***F*** section of the first movement and the theme is presented four times with variations. On the second instance, from measure 50 to 53, the composer introduces a counterpoint created by melodic descending lines in the flute and clarinet. From 54 to 57, second variation, short melodic motifs, introduced by the cello, clarinet and saxophone enlarge and intensify the texture and the descending melodic line of the flute transitions to other instruments. The last presentation is the climax both in terms of texture, due to the great variety of melodic lines present, as well as different harmonic blocks presented simultaneously. Another important aspect of this variation is the presence of the “call” motif from section ***C*** of the first movement, measures 40 and 41, which is now carried by violins and viola on measures 57. This last presentation of the *Passacaglia* theme is incomplete with the section finishing on measure 61.

Section ***C*** can be further subdivided in two subsections with ***c1*** going from measures 62 to 67 and ***c2*** from 68 to 79. The main characteristic of ***c1*** is an alternation of long, repeated notes, in the double bass, horn and bass clarinet and the “call motif” that was presented in the final

measures of the previous section. The repeated notes create an E-flat major chord, a rather contrasting atmosphere from the previous section.

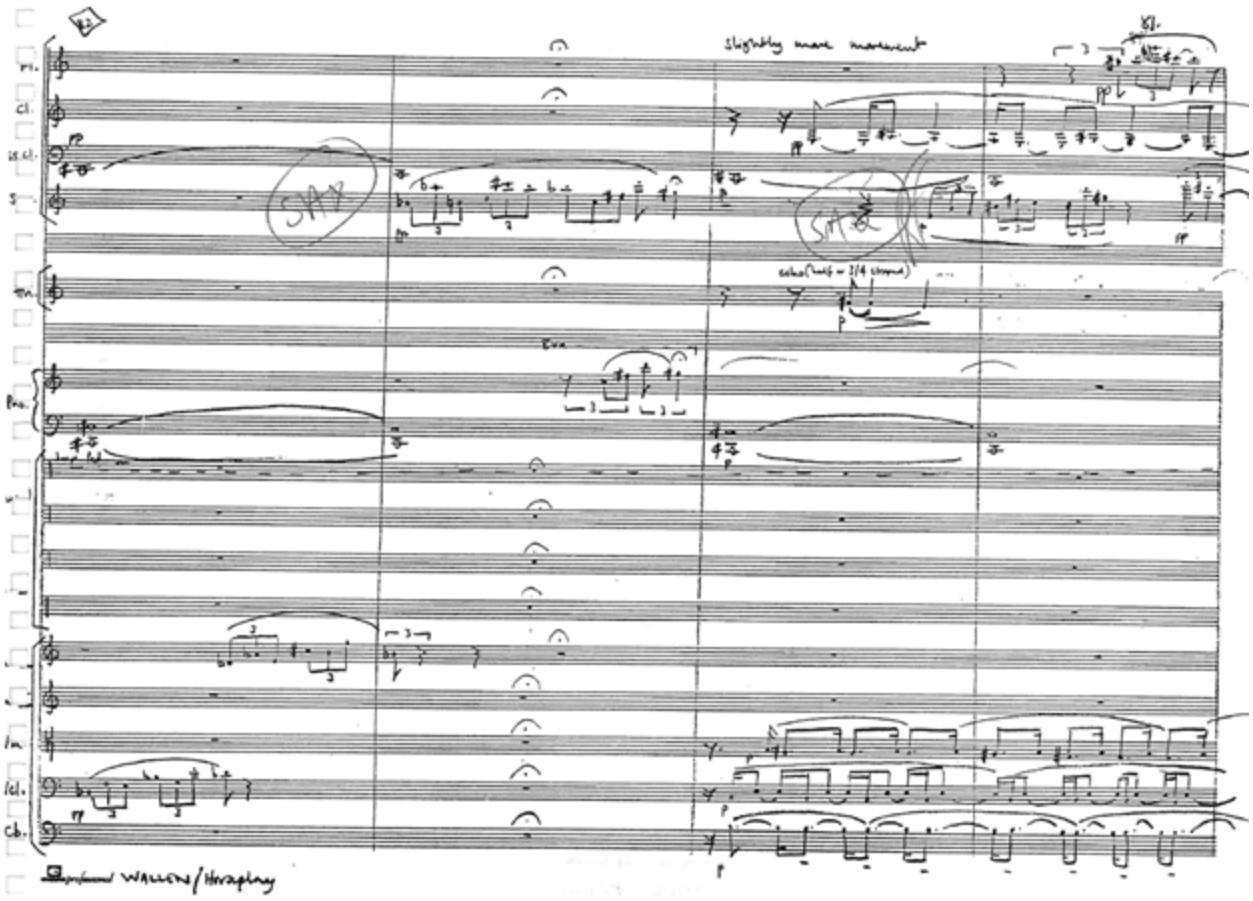


*Example 20 - fragment from Subsection **c1.***

The whole-tone scale is the main material of ***c2*** as it dominates both the horizontal and vertical spaces, except for measure 70 where A-flat is added in the piano and double bass.

Section ***D*** is a *coda* where the composer organizes the melodic and textural material in a structure of 4+9 measures. In the first four measures, we see a dialogue between clarinet, piano, cello, violin, and soprano sax, with a melodic line based on the *"Dreamy"* melodic material used in measures 110 and 111 of the first movement. This dialogue is supported by a low C-sharp sustained in the left hand of the piano. After a suspension on measure 83, the last nine measures are characterized by a very complex texture, in contrast to the first four which are very transparent. This complexity is generated by the presence of various sound blocks, melodic lines, polyostinatos and polytonality. We can reference the presence of some elements: the melodic line of the previous phrase is carried over by the saxophone in dialogue with the flute; a polyostinato in the lower strings in measures 84 to 86; polytonality in the celesta created by the juxtaposition of F-sharp Major and C Major from measures 87 to 89; and a counterpoint

of the melodic lines, based on the whole-tone scale, on the 1st and 2nd violins in measures 87 to 89.



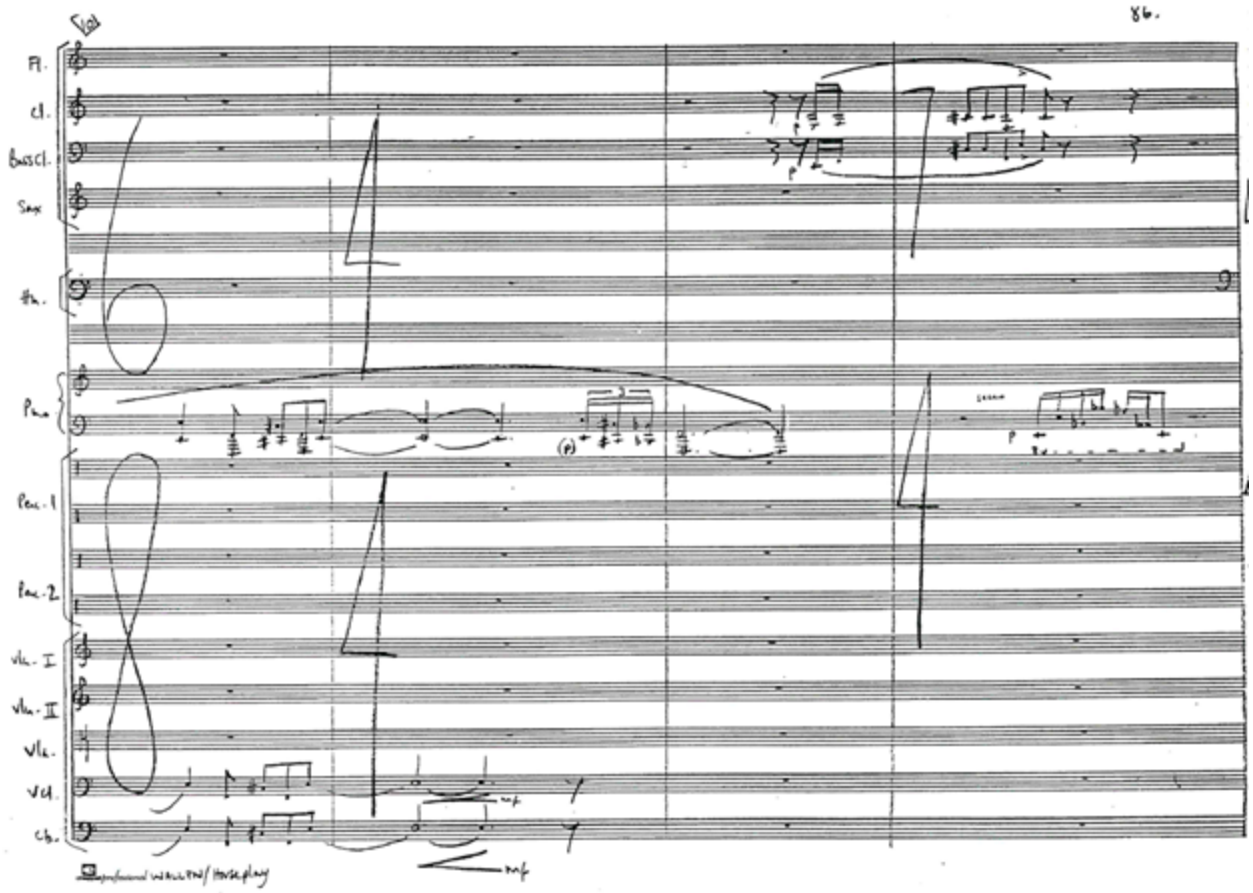
*Example 21 - fragment from Section **D** (measures 82 to 85) illustrating the transition between the two phrases that comprise it.*

Movement 4

Table 4 - summarized formal structure of Movement 4

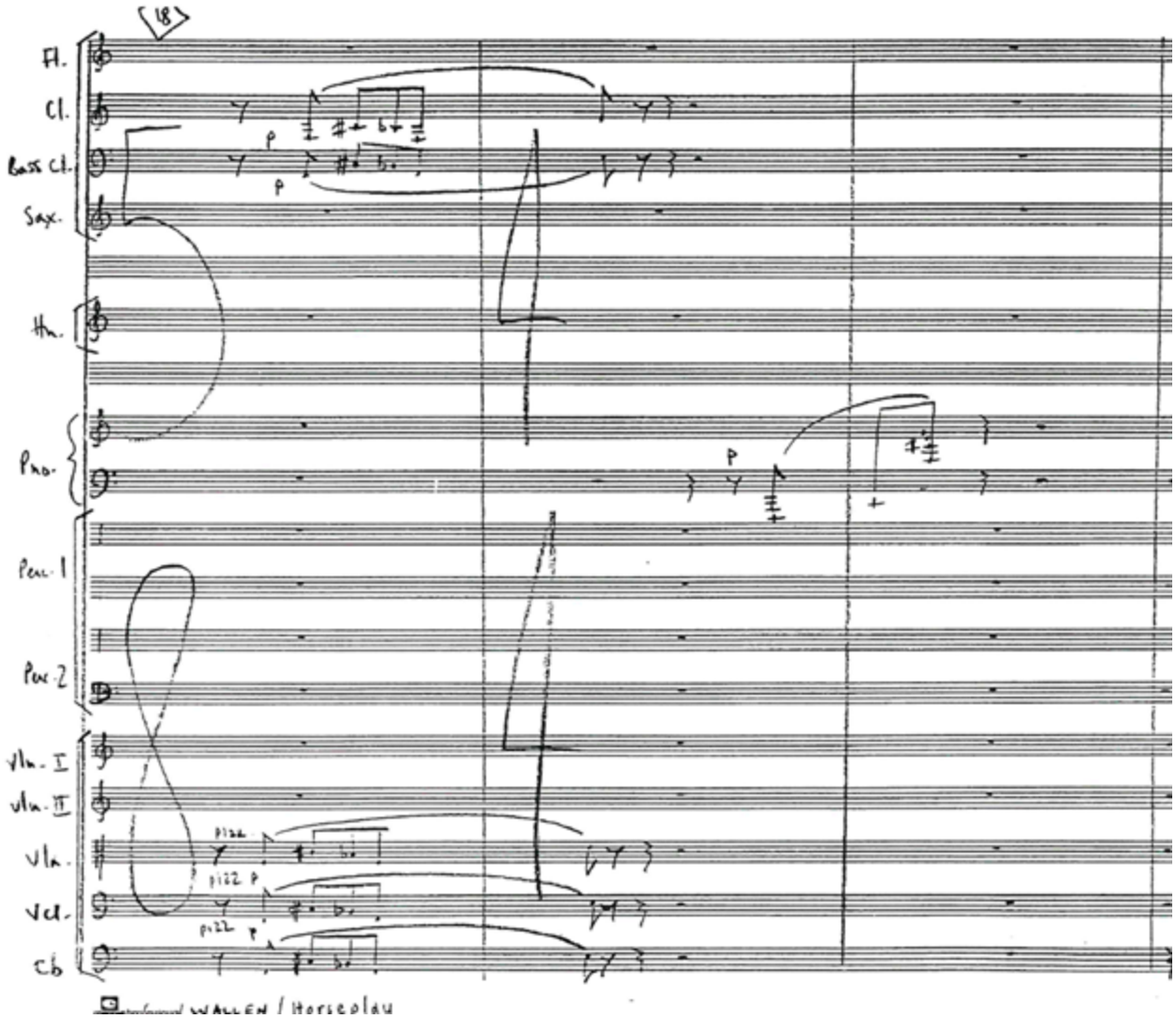
Section	Subsection	Measures
A	***a1*** (1-13), ***a2*** (14-25), ***a3*** (26-32), ***a4*** (33-39), ***a5*** (40-55)	1-55
B	***b1*** (56-71), ***b2*** (72-85), ***b3*** (86-100)	56-100
C	***c1*** (101-116), ***c2*** (117-131), ***c3*** (132-144)	101-144
D - CODA		145-end

Subsection ***a1*** progresses from measure 1 till 13 in which the first seven measures are a re-exposition of the piano theme from the beginning of the piece. The melodic line of the piano is supported by the cello and double bass on measures 10 and 11. In the last measure of this subsection, the composer repeats a melodic fragment, in whole-tone, from measures 15 and 16 of the first movement.



*Example 22 - fragment from Subsection **a1**, measures 10 to 13.*

Subsection ***a2*** starts in measure 14 and goes to 25. This subsection can be analysed as a development of the material of ***a1***. The composer uses small motifs of the theme in an imitative manner in a dialogue opposing winds and strings to the piano.

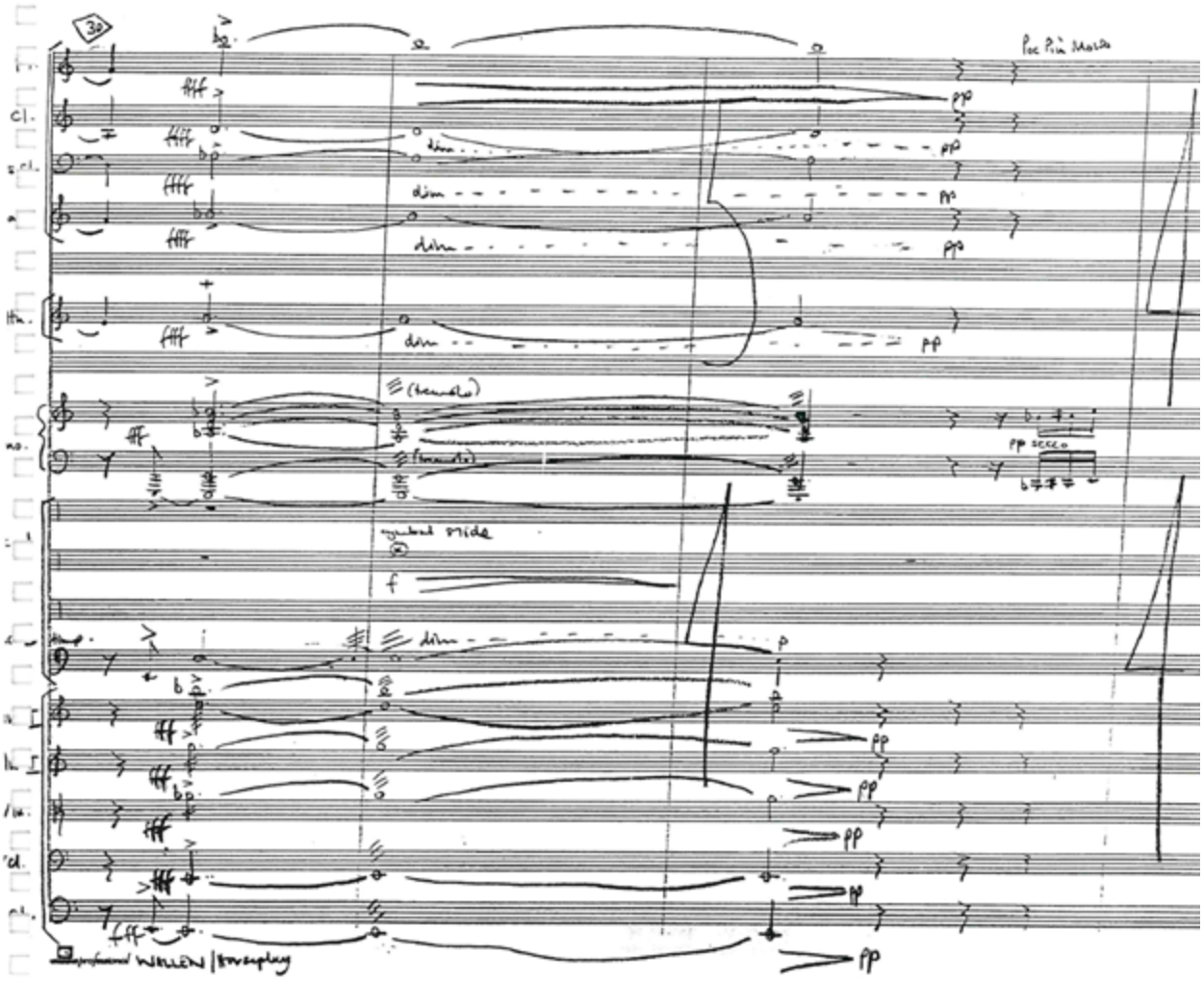


*Example 23 - fragment from Subsection **a2**, illustrating the dialogue between the winds and stings and the piano.*

Subsections ***a3*** and ***a4*** are very short that use both new melodic and harmonic elements as well as material carried over from ***a1***.

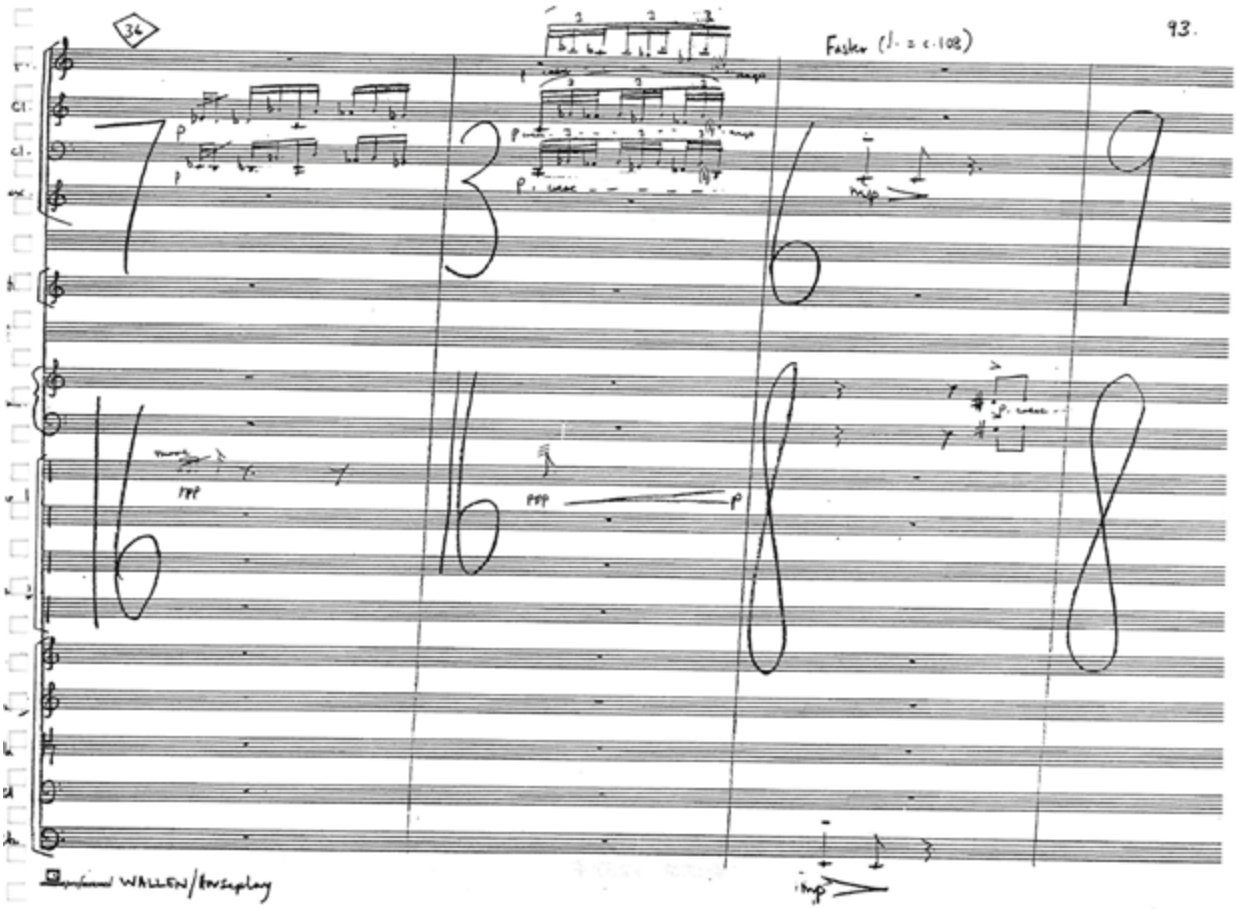
Progressing from measure 26 until 32, subsection ***a3*** presents the juxtaposition of two blocks: the first block, comprising double bass, cello and piano, uses a short motif from the initial theme and the second block, containing horn, saxophone, and clarinets is based by a sequence of descending perfect major chords in a chromatic sequence with the bass clarinet creating an harmonic dissonance with this block. This subsection comes to an end with a polychord orchestrated in the full ensemble, starting in *ffff* that diminishes into *pp* from measures 30 to 32.

This polychord can be perceived, enharmonically, as a dominant 7th E chord together with a G minor chord.



*Example 24 - fragment illustrating the climatic point of Subsection **a3.***

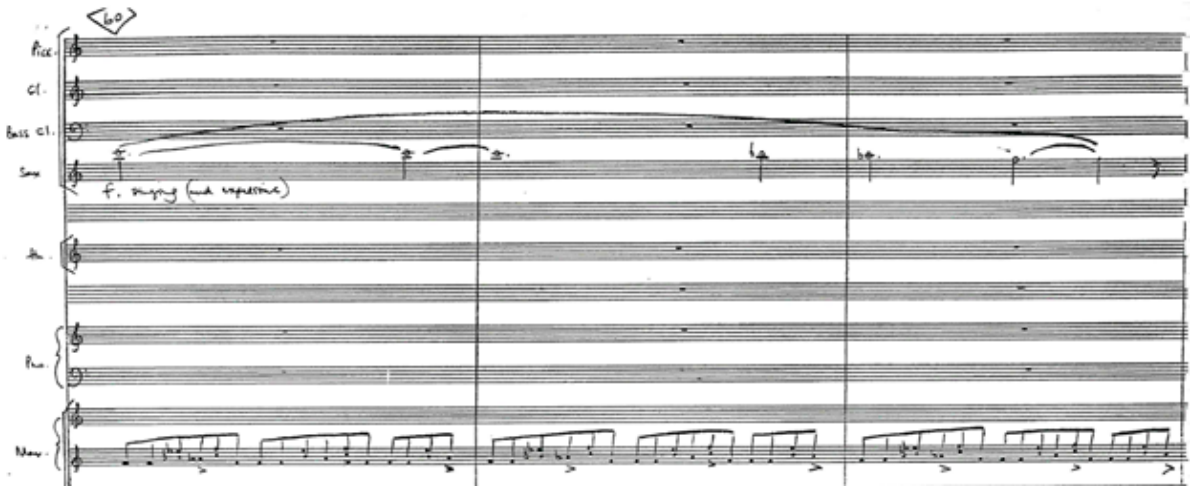
Subsection ***a4*** is a development of the motif of the initial theme. This short, rapid paced development is carried by the Piano, Clarinets and Flute. The theme is progressively transposed, and chromatic variations are introduced after measure 34. The two last measures of this subsection are a transition where the Double Bass and Bass clarinet introduce the note E which will be one of the main characteristics of subsection ***a5***, while piano and the strings reply with melodic elements from the initial theme.



*Example 25 - fragment, measures 36 to 38, illustrating the transitional musical elements connecting Subsection **a4** to **a5.***

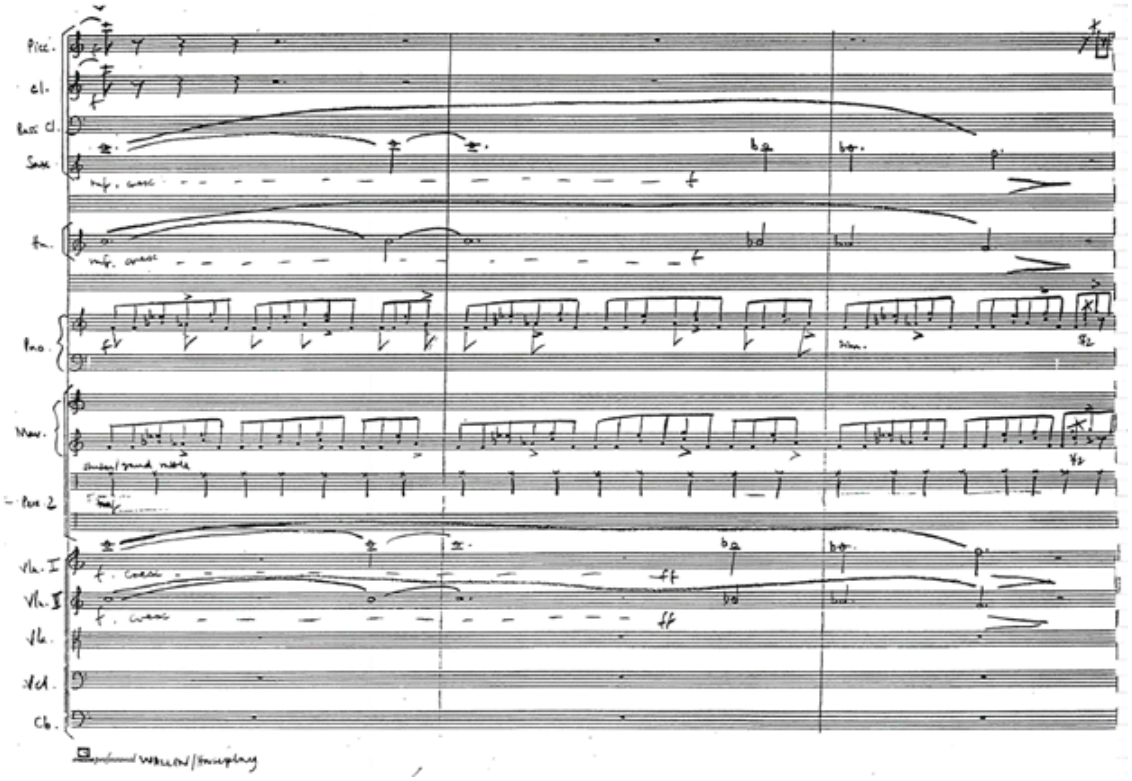
Conclusive in character, subsection a5 is based on the section C – coda of the second movement (measures 70-93) but it is transposed to E in this instance. The harmonic base of this subsection is a pentatonic scale that appears in several forms, both vertically in Violins, Violas, horn, Saxophone and Clarinets, and melodically in rapid motifs in the strings after measure 44. The last two measures of this subsection change harmonically. The harmonic structure becomes characterised by the use of the augmented D chord, over a pedal in E, that is present in ascending and descending gestures in the violins, flute, clarinets and horn.

Subsection b1 borrows the main material from subsection a1 of the second movement. The soprano sax theme appears now transposed an octave higher, and percussion elements are added to the Marimba ostinato in measures 58, 59, 63 and 64.



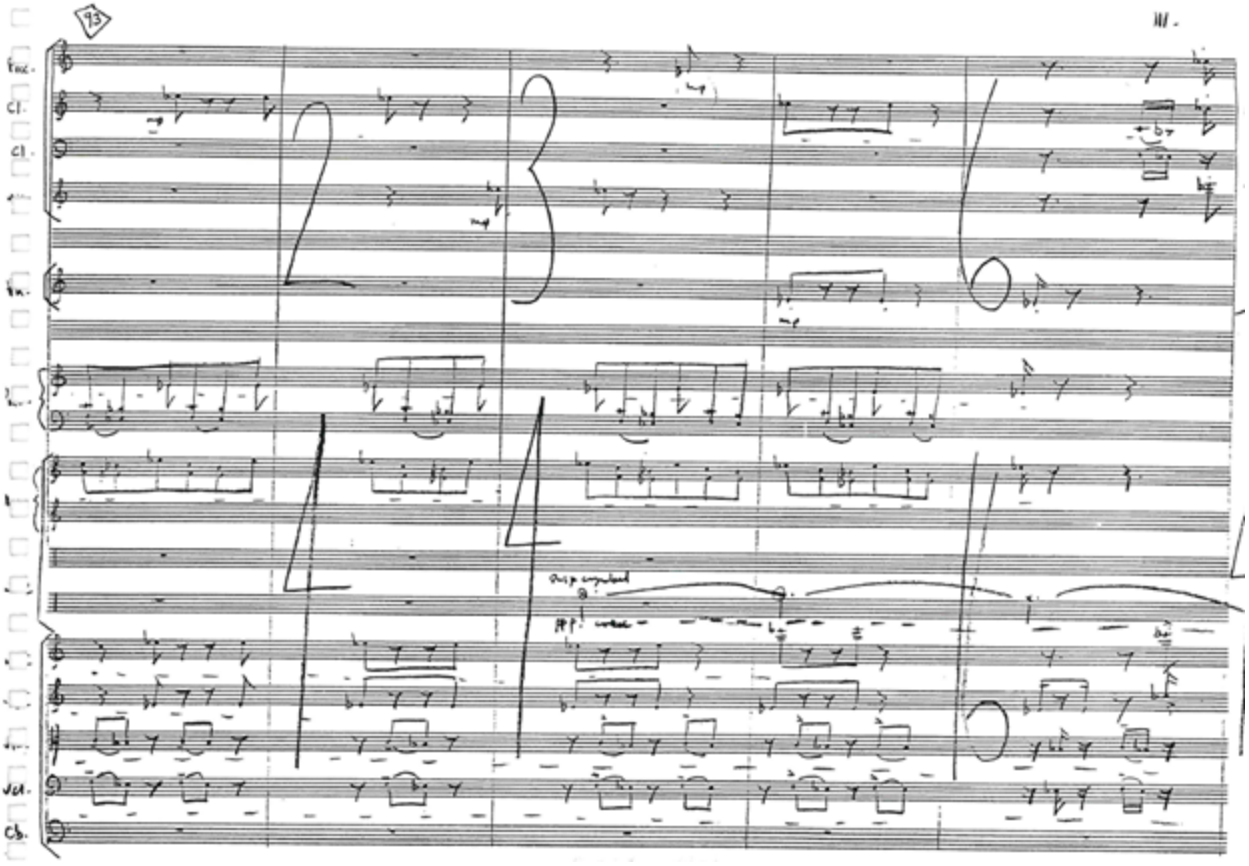
*Example 26 - fragment, measures 60 to 62, from Subsection **b1.***

The second subsection, b2, is based on the material of a2 of the second movement. The borrowed immaterial s now reinforced: the melodic theme of the soprano sax and horn is doubled by the Violins (measures 74 to 79) and by Violins, Violas and Cellos, after measure 81; the Marimba ostinato is here doubled by the Piano.



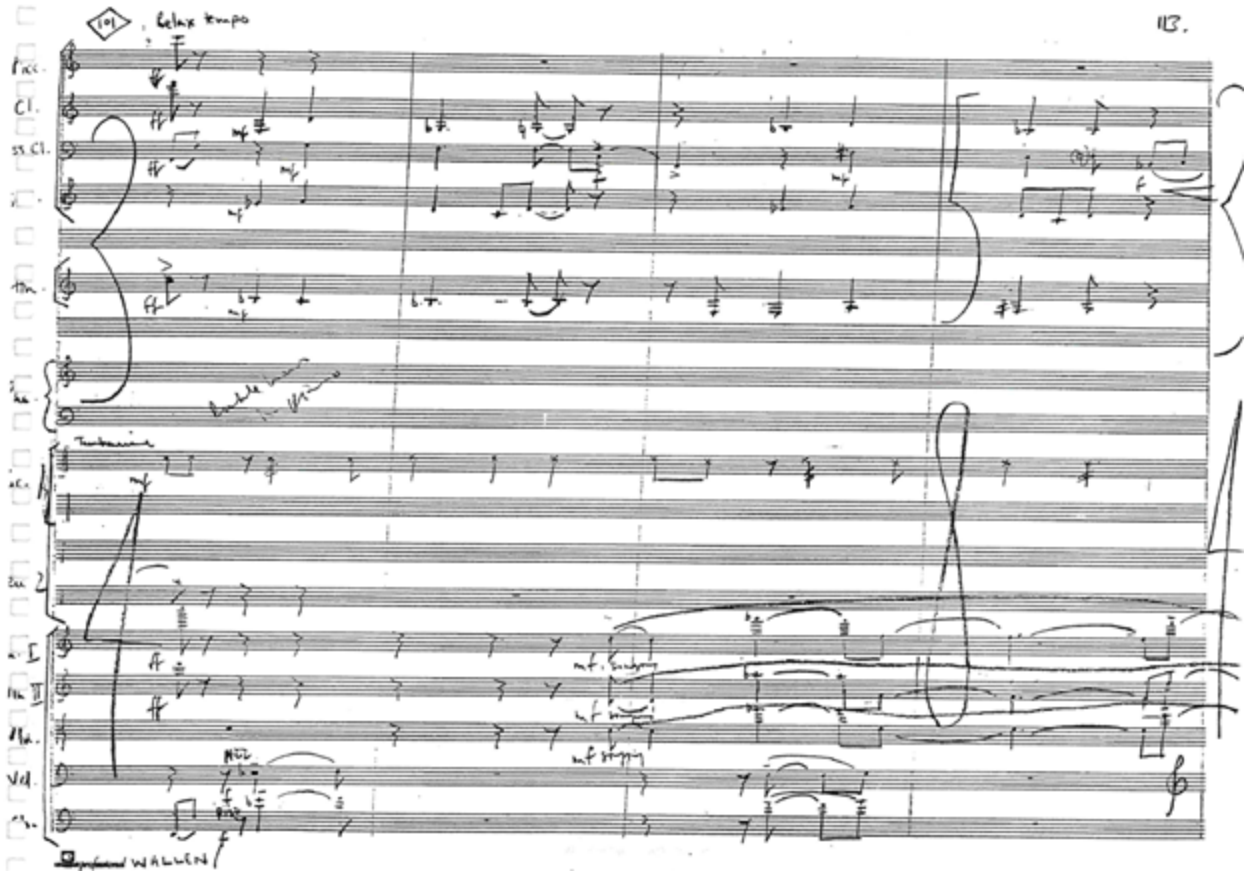
*Example 27 - fragment, measure 74 to 79, illustrating Subsection **b2.***

Subsection b3 has a conclusive character and is based on the material from measures 30 to 36, last measures of subsection a2 of the second movement. The material is now enriched in terms of its orchestration and presents denser textures in the strings.



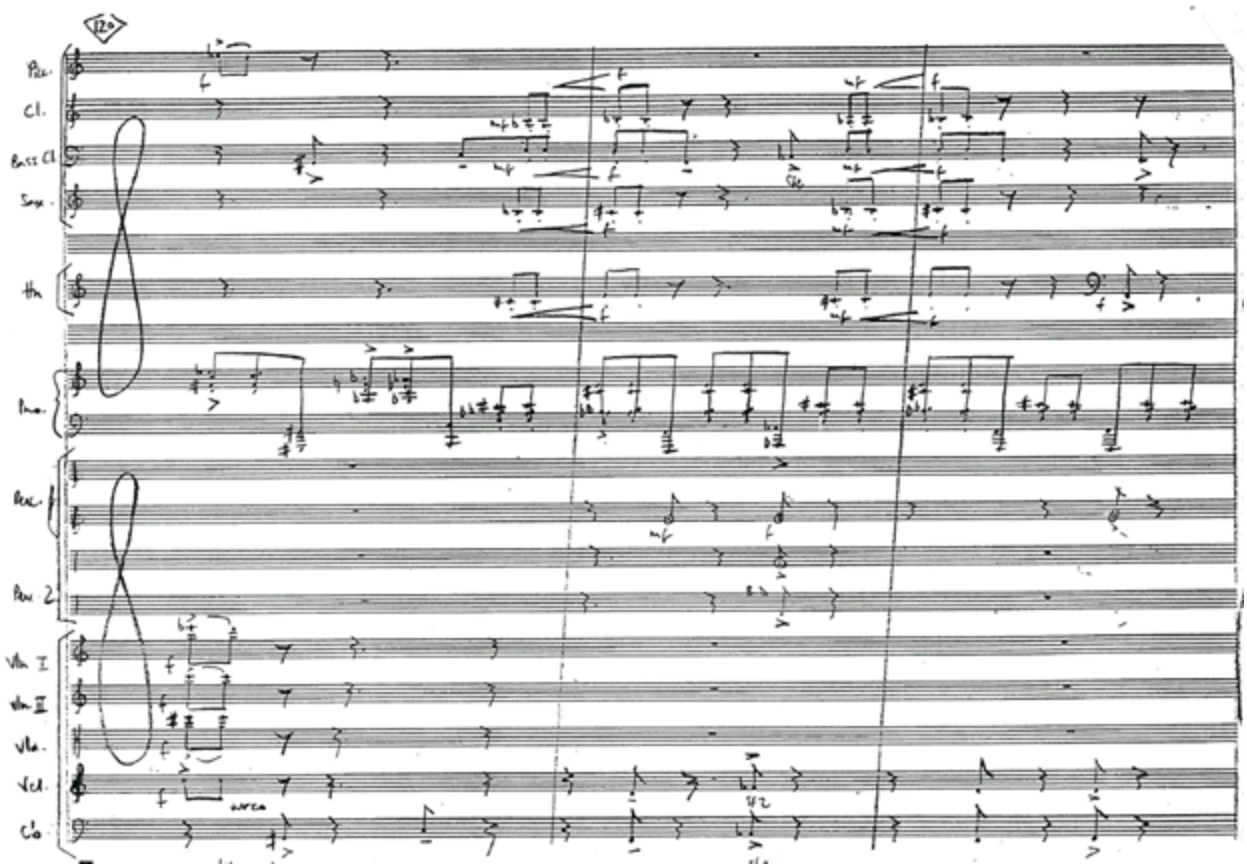
*Example 28 - fragment, measures 9 3to 97, illustrating Subsection **b3.***

Starting in measure 101, subsection ***c1*** is based on the theme present in the saxophone in measures 41 and 42 of the second movement. This theme is now reorchestrated, and contrapuntal lines, notably on the Violins and Violas, are superimposed to it.



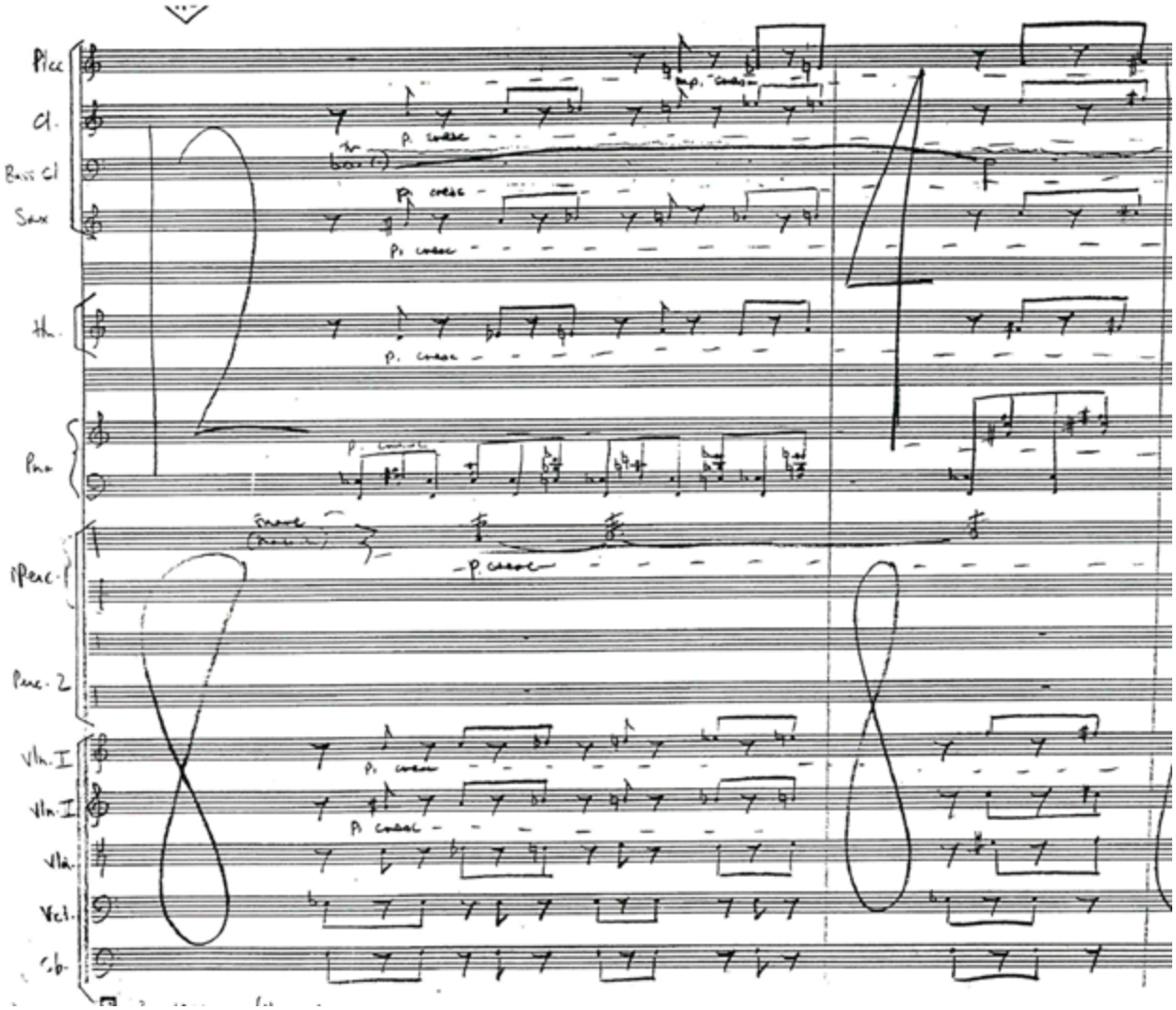
*Example 29 - fragment from the beginning of Subsection **c1.***

Subsection ***c2***, starting on measure 117, presents an ostinato evolving over the note F in the low instruments, reminiscent of the bass line of the first part of subsection ***b2*** of the second movement, while the piano develops harmonically the ostinato line, reinforced by the by the timbres of the winds, and the strings. In measure 125 an E dominant 7^{th} chord with added 6^{th} is presented by the winds and sustained until measure 129. In the last two measures of this subsection, 130 and 131, Wallen introduces whole-tone structures in rapid passages in the strings and piano.



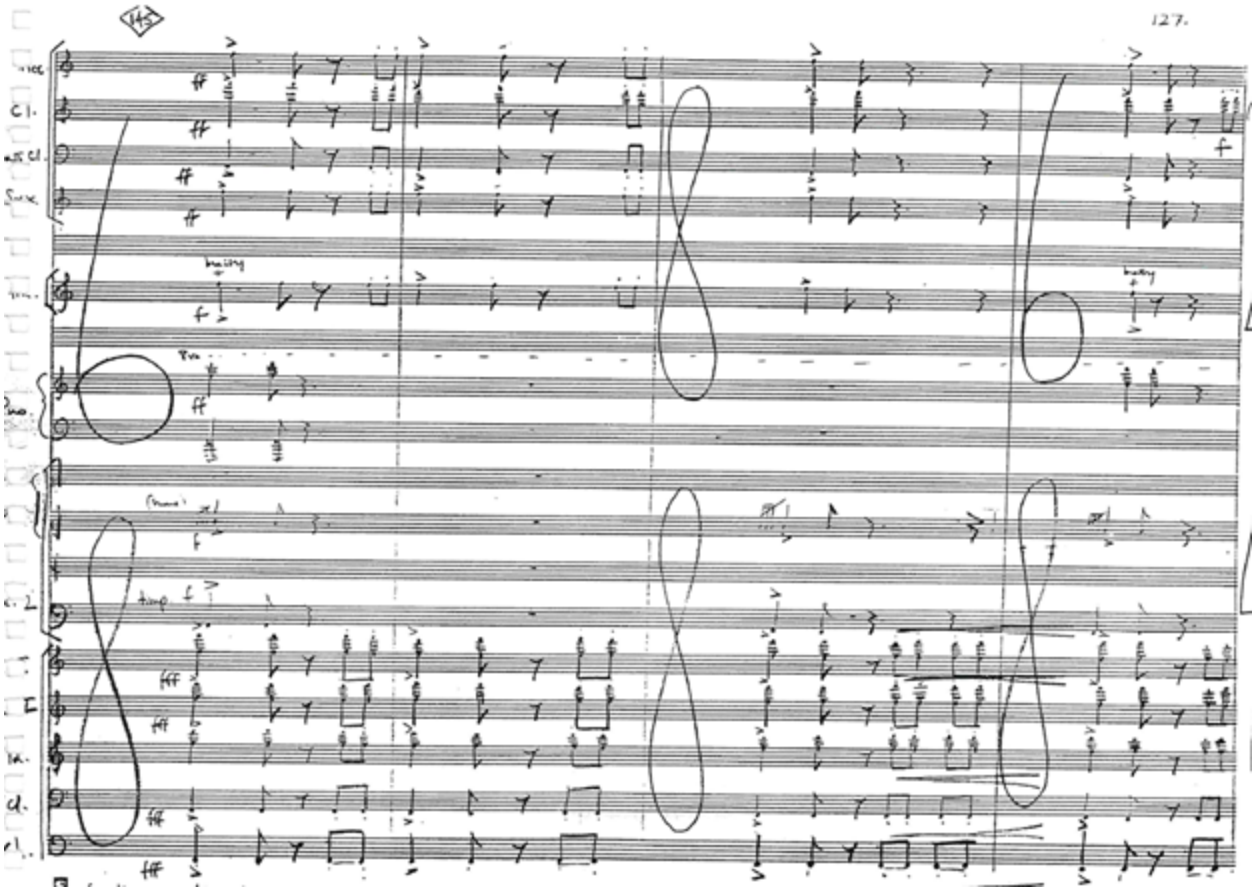
*Example 30 - fragment, measures 120 to 122, illustrating Subsection **c2.***

The last subsection of ***C*** has conclusive character and reproduces of some fragments from the second movement. In the first measures of ***c3*** we find material from measures 63 to 65 of the second movement. After measure 135 we find material from measures 67 and 68 of the second movement. Starting on measure 138, Wallen repeats and develops, in the violins and violas, the chromatic ascending line from measure 69 of the second movement and in this way creates a transition to the last section of the piece. To this ascending line Wallen adds a piano line, after measure 141, supporting an increasing textural density.



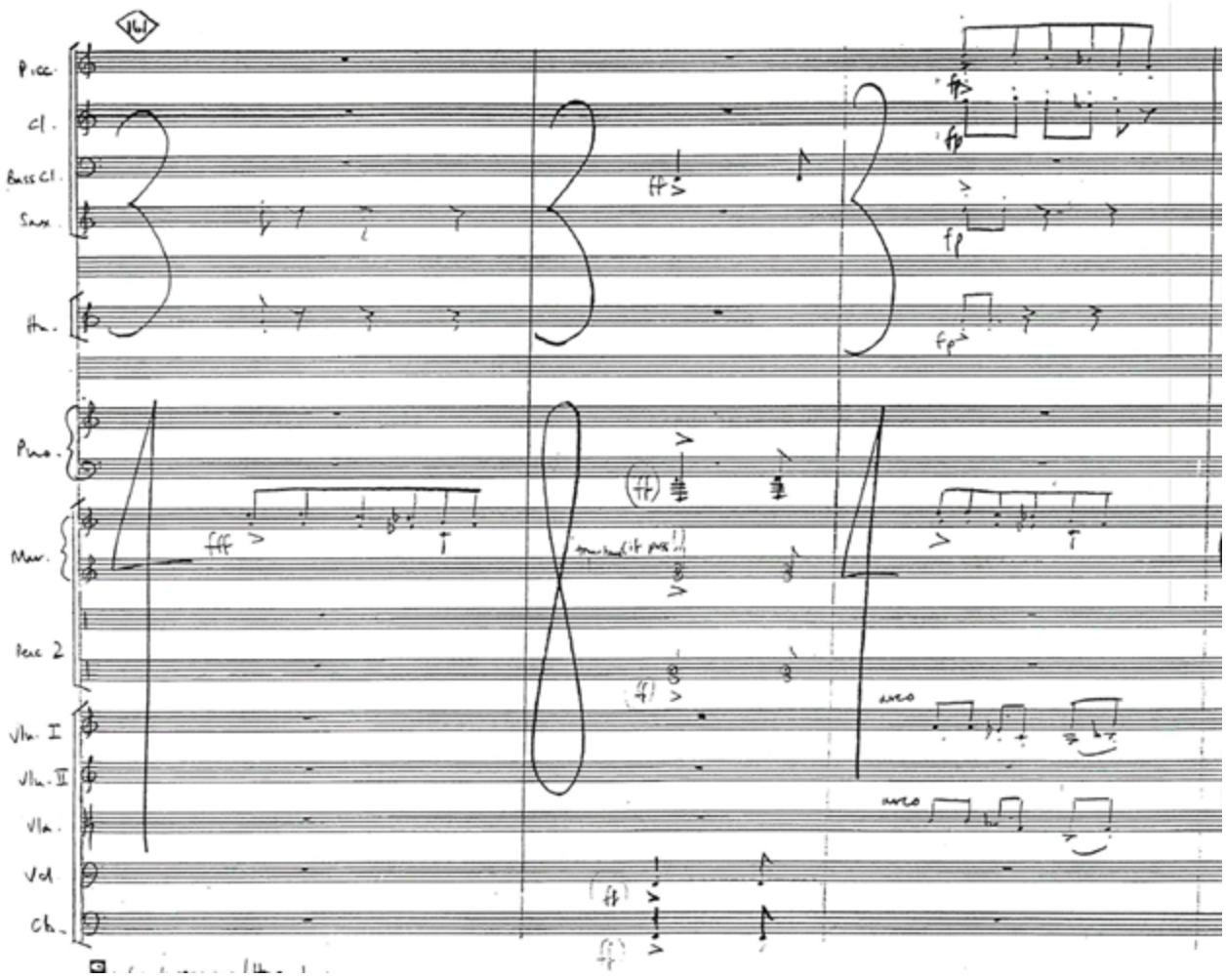
Example 31 - fragment, measures 143 and 144, illustrating the last measures of Subsection ***c3.***

The last section, ***D***, is a re-exposition of the ***C (coda)*** section of the second movement. The ostinato that was then present in Double Bass, Cello, Piano and Bass Clarinet is now reinforced by Violins, Violas, Flute, Clarinet, Soprano Sax and Horn.



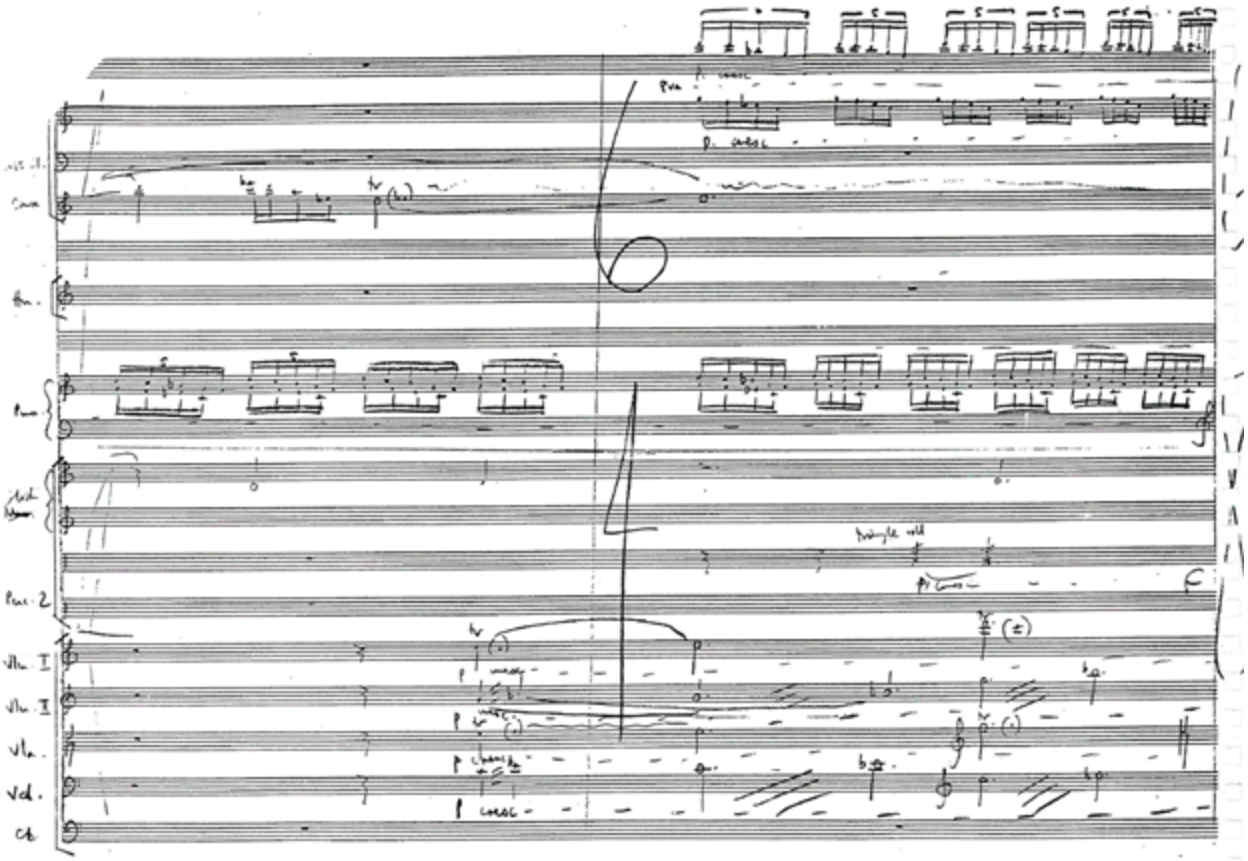
*Example 32 - beginning of Section **D.***

After measure 158 Wallen re-exposes and develops, timbrically and texturally, the pentatonic motif of measure 81 of the section ***C*** of the second movement. This pentatonic motif appears alternating with short ostinato elements over the note F.



*Example 33 - fragment, measures 161 to 163, of section **D.***

The last four measures re-expose a textural ostinato structure created based on pentatonic motifs drawn from the last four measures of the second movement. Over this ostinato texture, the Soprano Saxophone presents a melodic gesture that is elaborated from the motif which is present in the aforementioned measures from the second movement.



*Example 34 - fragment, measures 172 and 173, of Section **D.***

ConductIT