flesh brittle as i can think it

for two electric guitars
and electronics.

length: c. 15-20’.

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Performance Notes

Equipment

Electric guitar I

Much of the material pertaining to electric guitar I depends on the guitar's ability to speak two simultaneous glissandi running in opposite directions to the point of actuation (one from the stopped fret and the other from the bridge). In order for this to work properly, guitar I must have **at least two pickups**: one close to the bridge and the other close to the neck. If there are more than two pickups, the guitar should be set to use the bridge pickup and neck pickups only.

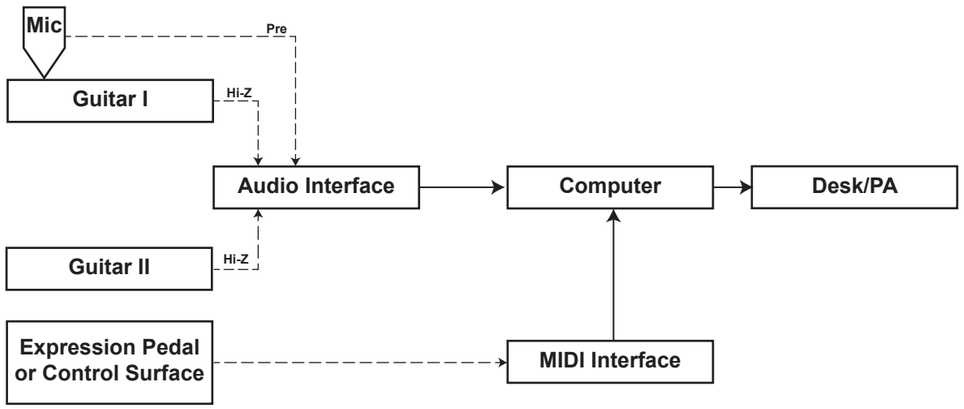
The strings for guitar I are to be actuated by a **uni-directional dynamic mic** with something that can 'catch' the strings and pluck them inelegantly along the sides (for example, ribs on the diaphragm), and a grill on the top that will 'scrape' the string sufficiently to actuate it with low enough downforce that glissandi are produced simultaneously as it moves along the string. For my own experiments, I used an Audio-technica Pro 6.

Max Patch and Audio Interface

The electronics part is integral to the piece, and will work on any modern computer capable of running Cycling74's Max 7. The Max patch is available directly from the composer. An audio interface with at least two Hi-Z inputs and one mic pre (or the necessary additional devices) will be required for the patch to function properly.

The Max-patch features an on-screen fader, which may either be operated by a player by means of a MIDI expression pedal, or by an assistant using the mouse or an external control surface.

Setup Diagram



N.B. The electronics part often applies its own envolopes to the guitars, often undermining dynamics and accents. Performers may wish to use direct in-ear monitoring so that they can hear what they and their fellow performer are actually playing.

Rhythm, proportions, durations and cues

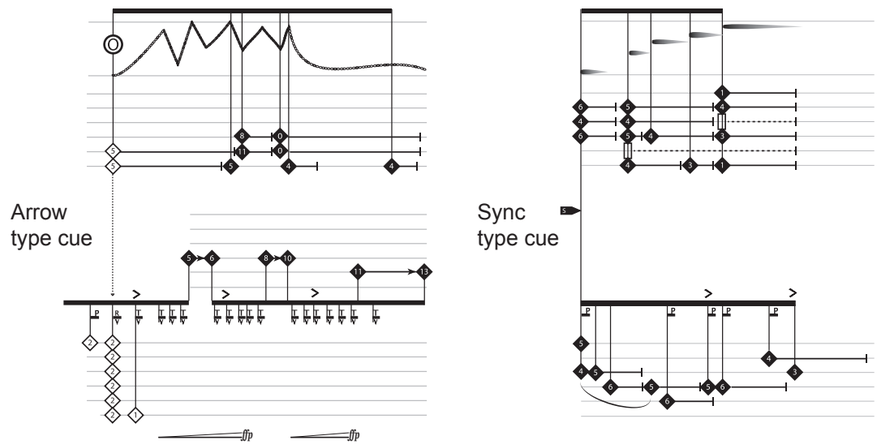
Although the rhythms, proportions and durations are specified relative to the space they occupy, I have elected not to impose a global time-space schema, and this explains the absence of tick-marks or other grid-like superstructures dictating a referent pulse. As such, there should be no attempt on the part of performers to maintain a global-level consistency of pulse. The distribution of beamed rhythmic groups across the page serves as an indicator of local proportions and is intended to give an impression of the density, impetus and shape of local phrases and mid-level gestures as they relate to their immediate surroundings, including those pertaining to the other part.

I have provided very loose guideline durations above the opening group(s) of the first guitar part for each section. These can serve as a starting point or as centres of gravity to aim for and/or pull away from. They may also be freely ignored, as long as the music is not so slow that the sense of rhythmic grouping is lost, or so fast as to 'blur' proportional differentiation.

There are two different types of cue in the piece. While both are equally significant, they carry different levels of demand for precision.

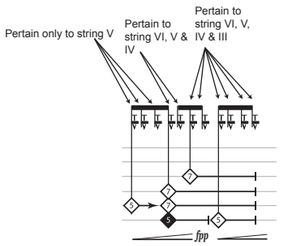
Arrow type cue - Consider these cues to be temporal points of meeting and departure. Performers should aim to arrive at these points simultaneously (even where necessary at the expense of accuracy), but can progress through the material between such cues more or less independently. To this end, I suggest that performers negotiate arrow-type cues 'on the fly,' dynamically speeding up and slowing down to arrive at meeting points together, whilst taking care that neither part is consistently ahead of the other. Performers should make contingency plans for 'finding' each other in the event that the degree of confusion such negotiation will likely lead to causes players to get lost (for example, by agreeing on 'landmarks' one or the other player should repeat until the confusion is resolved).

Sync type cue - Sync cues appear on stems that interconnect beams across parts. For these groups, the chronology of events between parts should be much more strongly adhered to, and performers may wish to agree on an overall pace per synced beam prior to performance.



Fretting hand staves

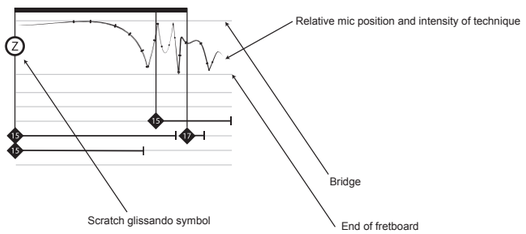
The ‘fretting hand’ staves work the same way in both parts, and are based on ordinary guitar tablature. Fret numbers inside white diamonds represent fretting-hand muting at the indicated point along the indicated string. While no deliberate attempt should be made to induce natural harmonics in the course of actuating muted strings, the incidental sounding of harmonics is inevitable and unproblematic.



Actions in the fretting hand also dictate the active string for the picking hand, as shown to the right.

Picking hand guitar I

The picking hand staff for Guitar I represents an area from the bridge (at the top) to the end of the fingerboard (at the bottom). All actuations of the string take place between these bounds. The technique symbols apply to the stem to which they attached and every following stem until the next symbol.



The string actuating techniques are represented by various symbols, as shown below:

Ⓩ Scratch glissando - Represented by a ‘barbed wire’ type line, and accompanied by the symbol to the left. The player moves the tip of the mic along the indicated strings horizontally, following the line, whilst simultaneously exciting the string by inducing very fast, but minuscule vertical movements that constantly re-actuate the string, generating a finicky texture-timbre. The thickness of the line represents the desired level of intensity, which is a combination of down force, the degree of string contact with the grill of the mic, and the speed of vertical movements. When the line is at its thickest, the scratch should sound bold, confident and forceful. When the line is at its thinnest, the scratch should sound like a tenuous imposition on the surface of the concurrent sound-world.

Ⓞ Circle glissando - Represented by a ‘chain-link’ type line. The mic should move in ellipses across the indicated strings, down them and back round again, using the movement of the line as a guide to the horizontal size. The vertical size is implied by the number of active strings.

Ⓖ Glissando - Simply run the mic along the string as though it is a bottleneck slide.

(continued)

Ⓟ Side arpeggios - From the highest string to the lowest, use the ribs on the side of the mic to pull at and pluck the indicated strings. The location of the articulation makes little difference and so is not given, but I would suggest at the midpoint between the two active pickups. Downforce should be sufficient that the strings are effectively ‘spring loaded’ before they are released.

Hit - Presented as grace note in the course of glissandi. Hit the string(s) in the spot indicated by the position of circle, with just enough downforce that both a percussive and pitch element speak.

Ⓘ Strike - Use the circumference of the top of the mic to strike the strings downward vertically, with a little horizontal motion so as to cause a short glissandi to be present in the attack. The size of the shape attached to stems of this kind of articulation represents intensity, and in this case refers to the velocity of the strike and the degree of string contact with the surface area of the mic. The position of the shape, as one would expect, is an indicator of the horizontal position of the mic along the strings at the time of articulation.

Picking hand guitar II

Actions pertaining to the picking hand for Guitar II are represented by icons above the fretting hand staff. When those actions pertain to the fretboard, a secondary staff is also present.

The icons represent different techniques for actuating the string, as discussed below:

Thumb up - Strike with the nail of the thumb from the bottom of the string upward.

Thumb down - Strike with the flesh of the thumb from the top of the string downward.

Downward strum - Strum downward with the index finger and thumb joined to form a point.

Pluck - Pluck the strings with any available fingers. For chords, use ‘classical style’ claw plucking.

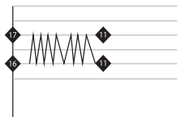
Roll - Rasgueado-style upward strums with each digit and downward on the thumb for the lowest string. Need not be ‘rhythmically precise’. The roll should ideally last until the next articulation or a rest.

Mute - Hit the strings in a staccato fashion with the palm of the hand, such that any strings vibrating are muted. If conjoined with fret indicators on a secondary staff, these pertain to the position that the muting should take place. Where they indicate depressed frets, the mute should itself fret and therefore actuate those strings. Because fretting with the palm is imprecise, these numbers serve as a rough guide.

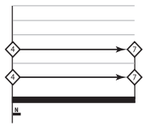
Aside from normal articulation markings, there is also an ‘anti-accent’ indicator (left). Notes with an anti-accent mark should be significantly quieter than the dynamic level of the surrounding passage.

Guitar II secondary staff symbols

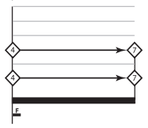
The secondary staff pertains to picking-hand actions on the fretboard.



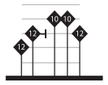
Finger walk - Use the picking hand to ‘walk' down the fretboard along the indicated strings, starting roughly with the frets indicated at the beginning, and ending roughly with those indicated at the end. You should depress each string as you go, and allow them to ring out as far as possible when they are released. Use the zigzag lines as a rough indicator of speed and movement across strings.



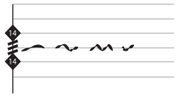
Nail slide - Slide the nail along the indicated string(s) from the indicated position, using minuscule horizontal movements to continuously actuate the string, generating a texture-timbre.



Finger slide - Use the flesh of the finger to slide along the indicated string(s). Do not depress the strings.



Hammer - Simply use the picking hand to fret strings at the indicated points with sufficient velocity that they sound.



Tremolo - Alternately hammer the given frets in a rapid motion, using the given ‘trill’ line as an indicator of how the pulse should change across time.

Pull off - Hammer the fret, and then actuate the string as you release, such that the string sounds according to the position of the fretting hand.

15 Guide fret - In transitions between picking-hand actions on the fingerboard and normal articulations, a fret over which the first normal articulation might take place is given in a square box. These are suggestions for reference only, and need not be adhered to precisely or at all.

MIDI Fader

The midi fader cross-fades between 4 different routing possibilities.

A MIDI number to be arrived at per section is presented beneath the opening system for each section. (A, B, C, and D).

Between these numbers, the manner of movement from one to the next is an open decision, as long as the fader does not reach or surpass the number pertaining to the following section before that section is actually reached. Generally, I have found it more effective to keep the fader still for at least half of each section before beginning to move to the correct position for the next.

A note on form

The piece is divided into 4 sections, A-D. Each of these sections has a different character, as defined by the materials, the relationship between the parts and the electronics. The latter part of section D (except for the last system) is further subdivided into 6 miniatures (labelled i-vi). These miniatures are intended to have a fundamentally different character to the surrounding material and are almost song-like in nature. Any number of these miniatures may be extracted from the wider piece and played independently, as long as the order in which they appear is maintained.

1

A

Confined, but with wide expanses just out of reach. Like scratching at the walls of a well.

Electric Guitar I

Picking Hand.

I

Fretting Hand.

VI

Electric Guitar II

Picking Hand.

I

Fretting Hand.

VI

Compulsive, chaotic attacks, but constrained, claustrophobic and oscillating between dread and panic.

4 - 8"

Spiky, aggressive and choppy, but with moments of marked insecurity in keeping with the softer dynamics and anti-accents.

f *ff* *mp* *ff* *p* *f* *mp* *ff* *f* *s.pp* *mp* *s.pp* *mp sfz* *s.pp* *ff* *p* *f* *s.p* *f* *s.pp* *ff* *p f* *p*

Elec. G I

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

Elec. G II

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

2

Wrestles, highly volatile and reactive. The spiky, choppy nature of the previous passage gives way to a series of rapidly changing states, each with a self-contained character.

Grinding and forceful

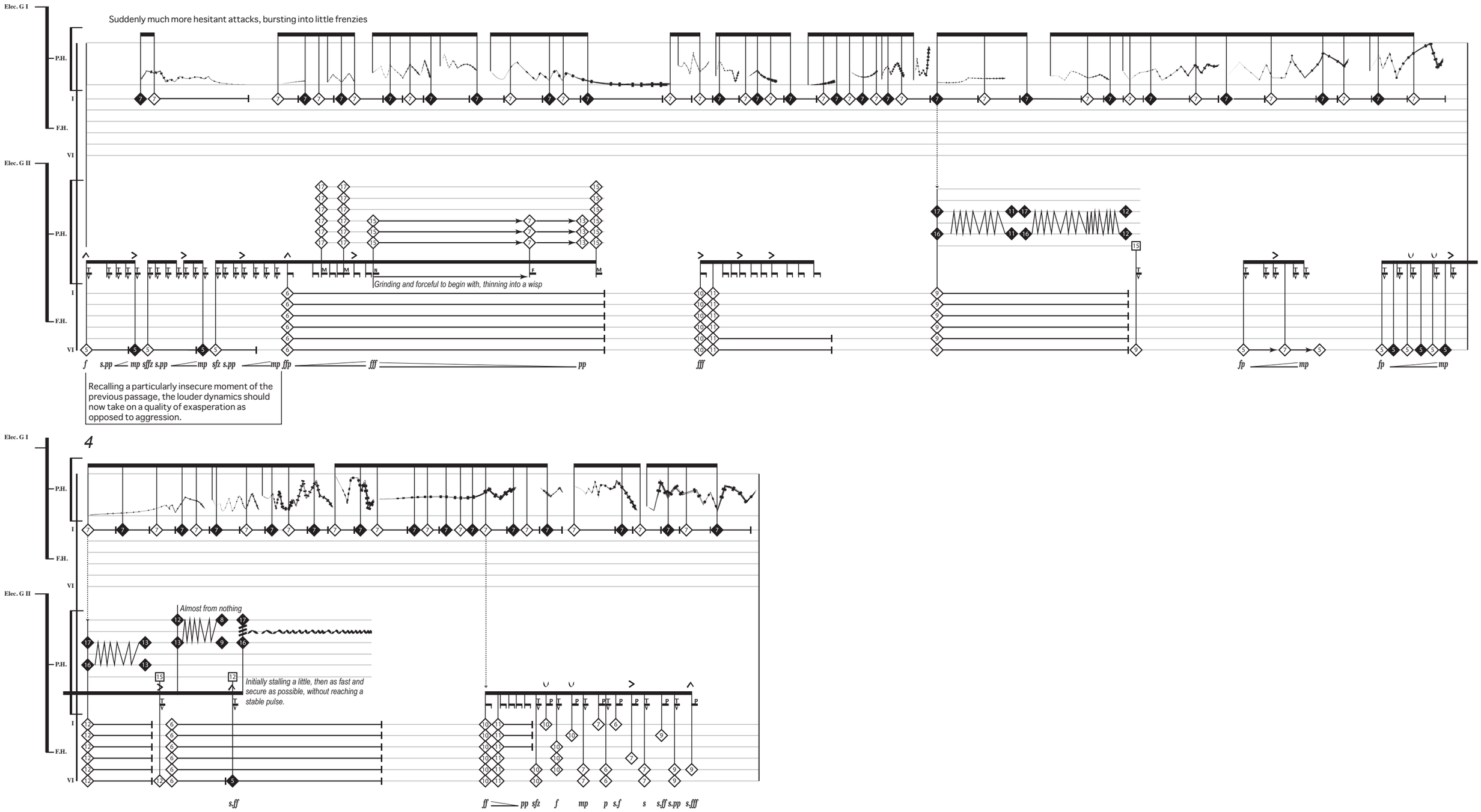
Start slowly and quicken, but always halting; inelegant, graceless

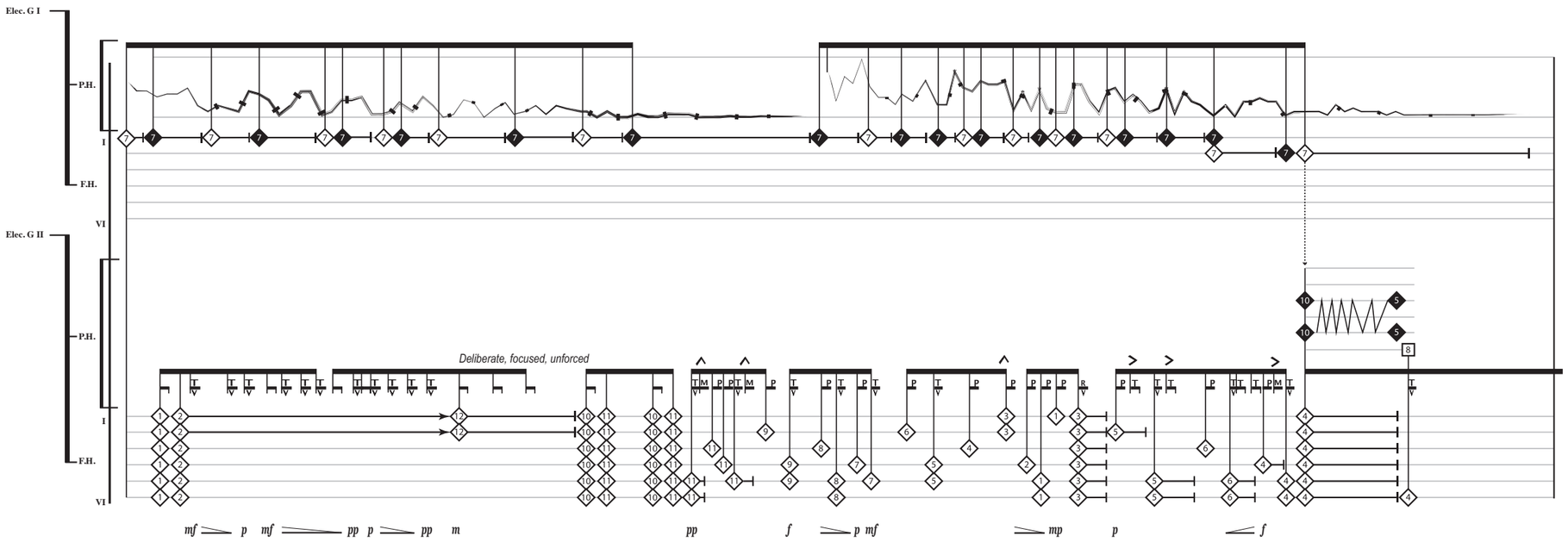
ff *pppp* *fffp* *fff* *f* *fff* *ff*

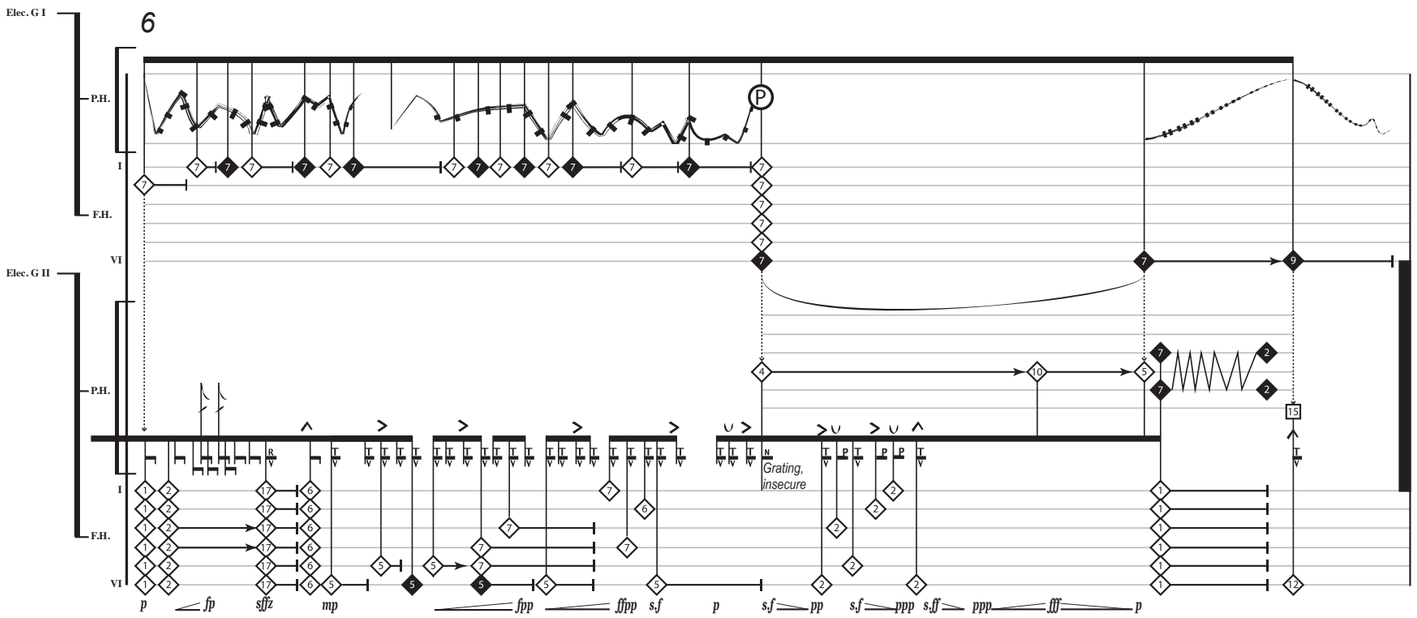
Very fragile and at the edge of perceptibility; like expulsions of breath at the end of a sentence.

Explode into the space left by guitar I and expand beyond it, as though an ionizing gas.

Spluttering, stilted with an increasing sense of urgency; drunkenly searching for house keys.


Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Suddenly much more hesitant attacks, bursting into little frenzies
Grinding and forceful to begin with, thinning into a wisp
f s.pp mp sffz s.pp mp sfz s.pp mp ffp fff pp
fff
fp mp
fp mp
Recalling a particularly insecure moment of the previous passage, the louder dynamics should now take on a quality of exasperation as opposed to aggression.
4
Almost from nothing
Initially stalling a little, then as fast and secure as possible, without reaching a stable pulse.
s.ff
ff pp sfz f mp p s.f s s.ff s.pp s.fff

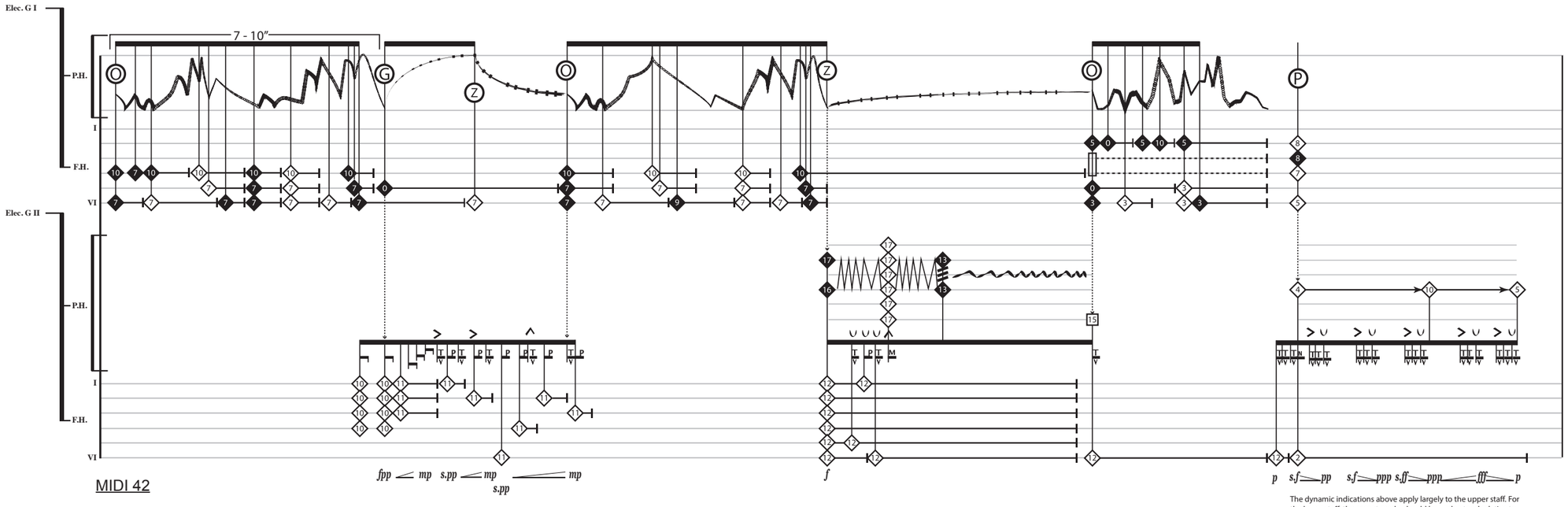


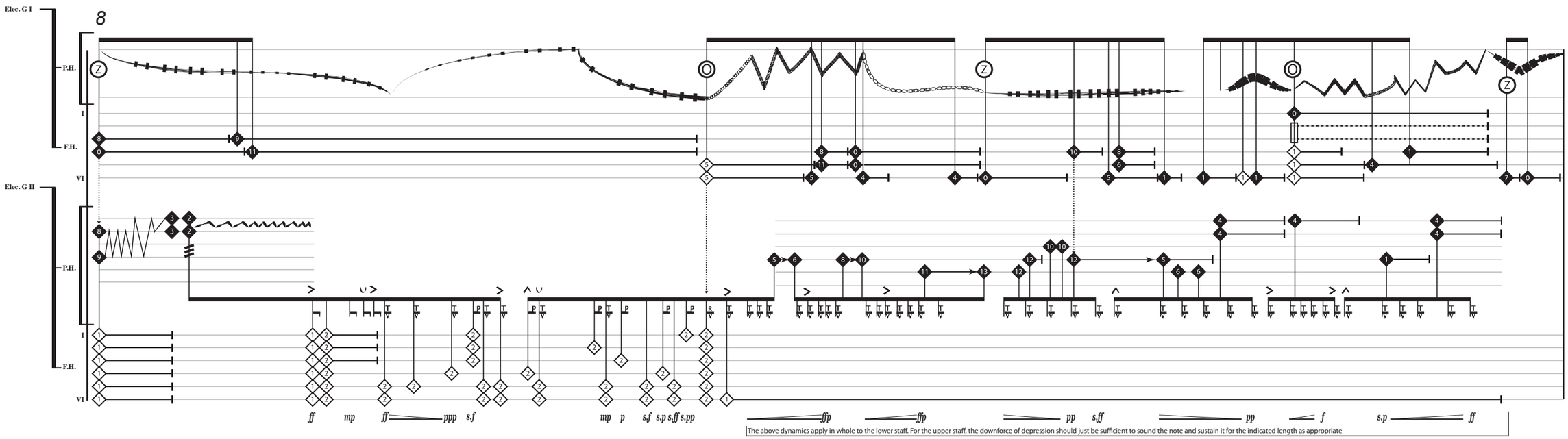


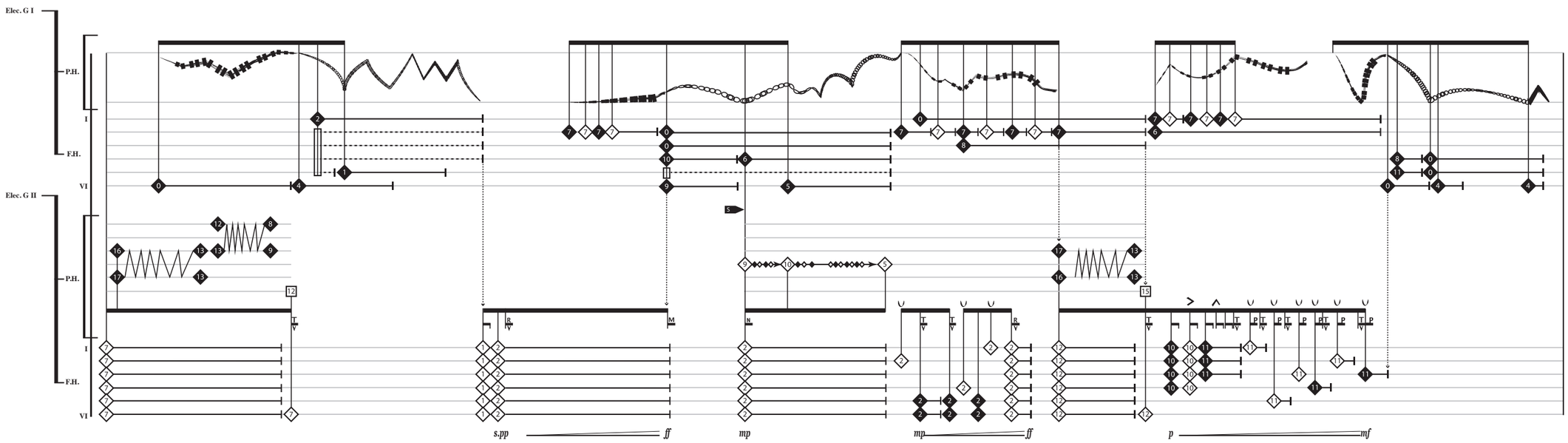
The dynamic indications above apply largely to the upper staff. For the lower staff, the accent marks should be understood relative to the volume of the noise made by action in the upper staff

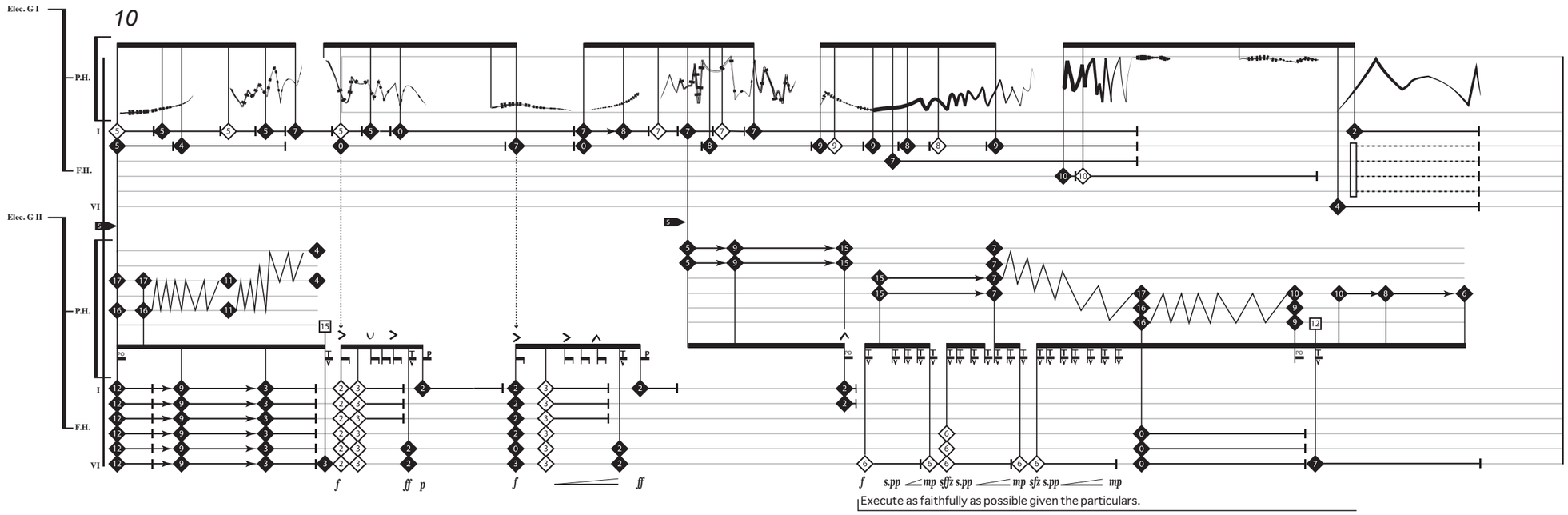
B

Alternating between wild gesticulations and fragile sighs of exhaustion.









Execute as faithfully as possible given the particulars.

Elec. G I

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

Elec. G II

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

molto sul pont.

ord.

f *mf* *sfffz* *sffz sffz* *sfz* *p*

Let the open strings gently ring out, while fretted strings pierce the texture like shrapnel, muted immediately by lifting the fretted finger

Allow fretted notes to fall into the harmony, forming dense aggregates.

Elec. G I

12

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

Elec. G II

P.H.

I

F.H.

VI

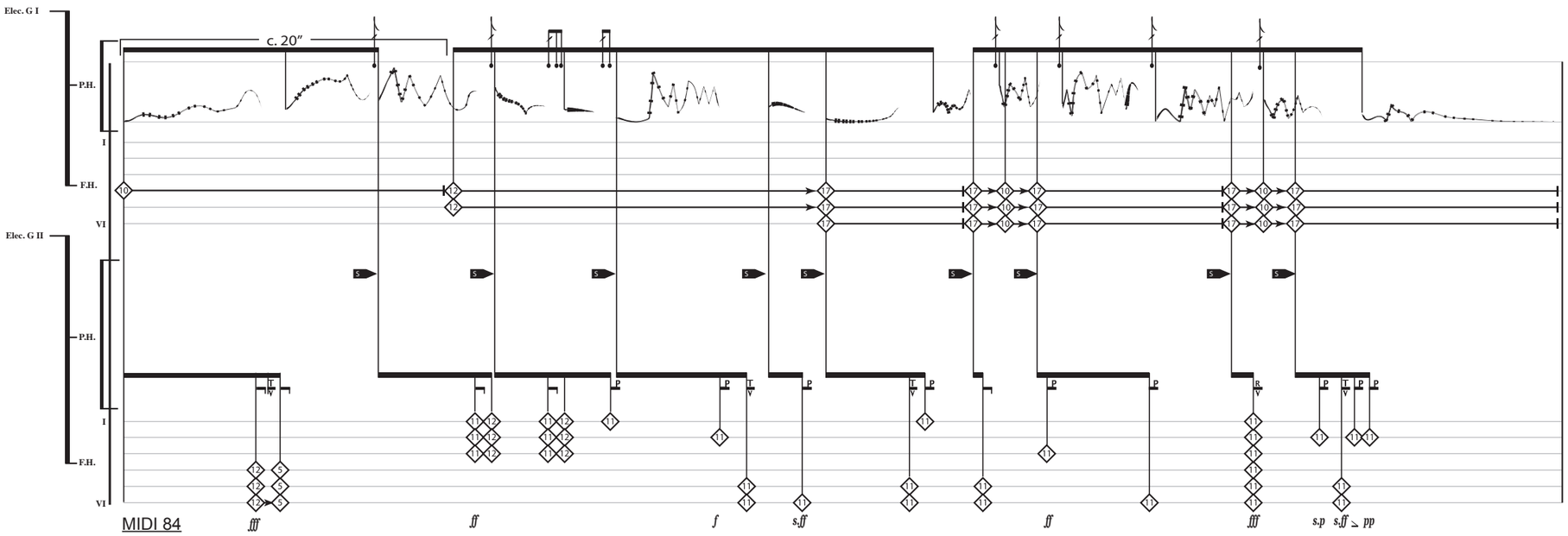
f *ff* *p* *f* *ff* *p* *pp* *pp* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *sfffz* *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *ppp*

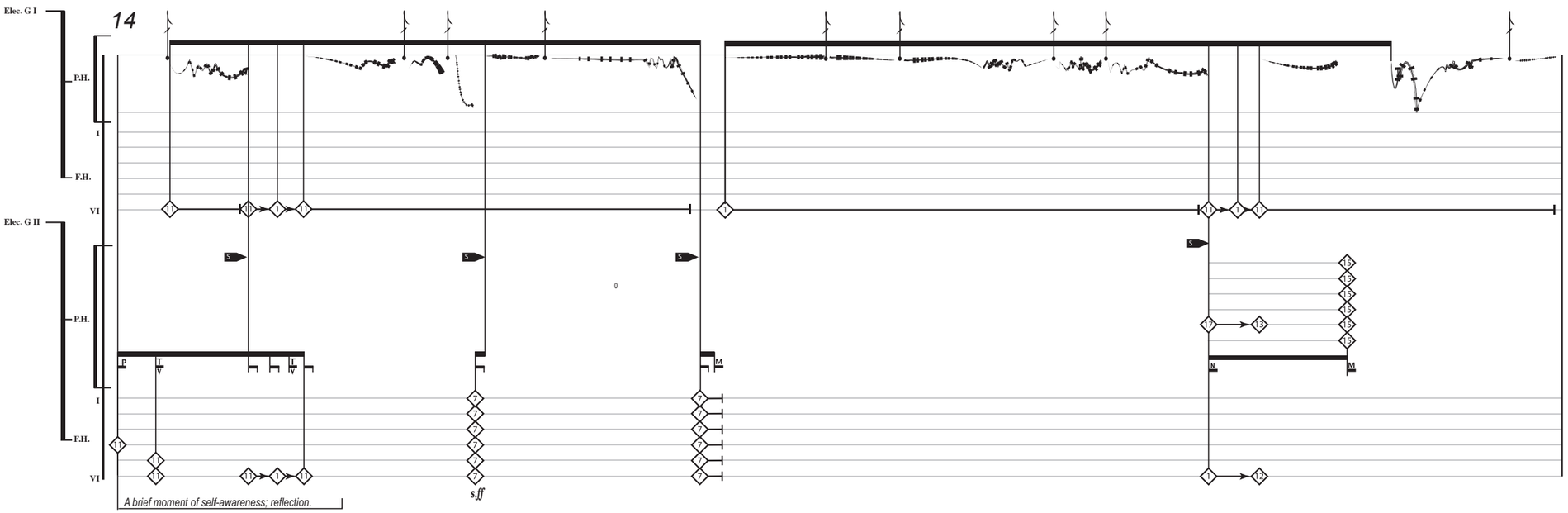
Very tentative at first, not quite emerging against guitar I - the plucked low E should feel like an explosion of latent potential.

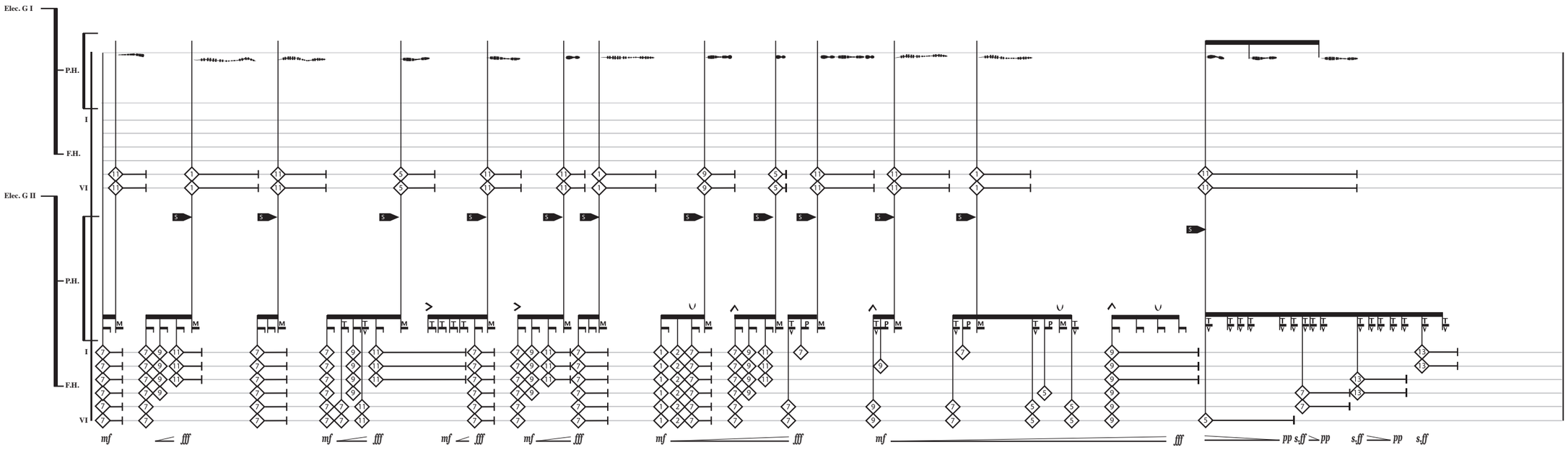
The above dynamics are a rough guide. The aim is to keep the dynamic contour as synchronized with guitar I as physically possible.

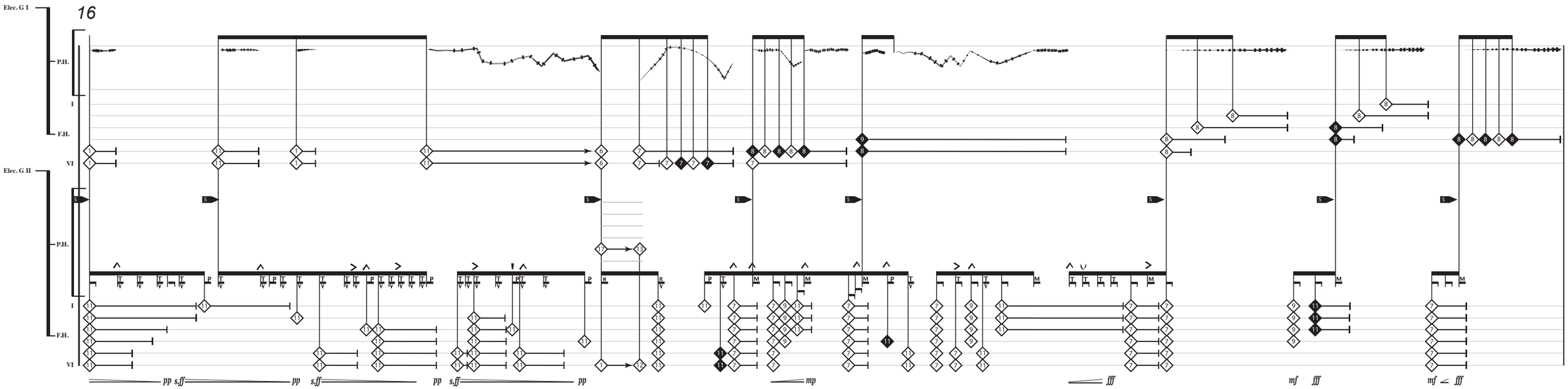
C

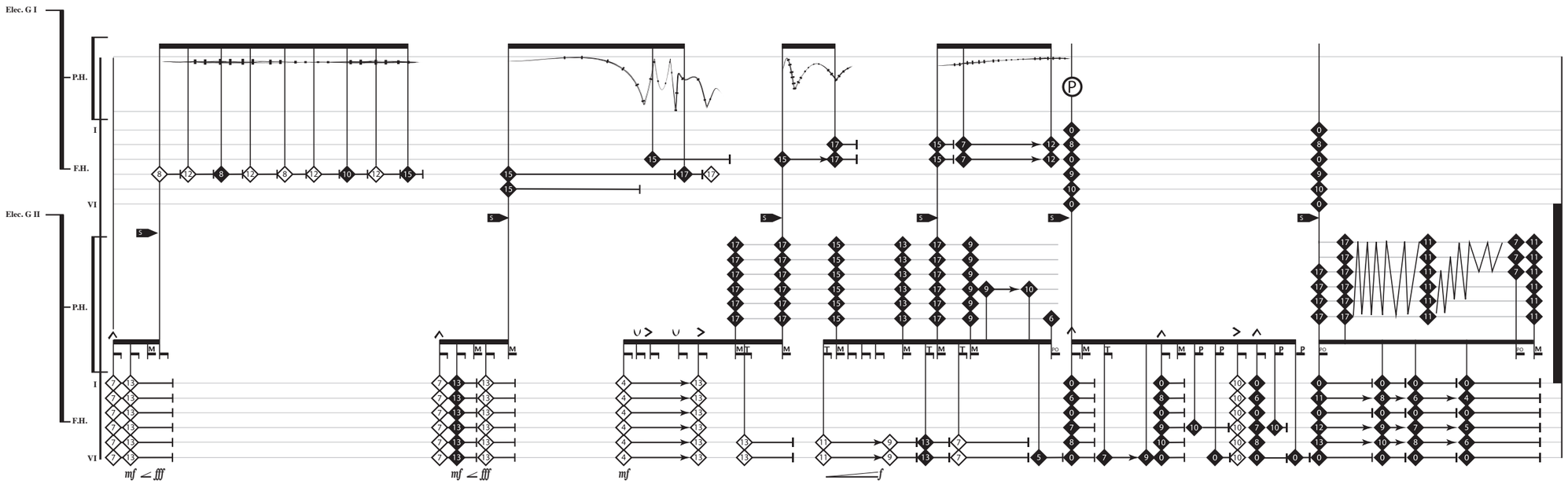
Sparse, percussive and discursive. Give the electronics room to breath (and/or scream)



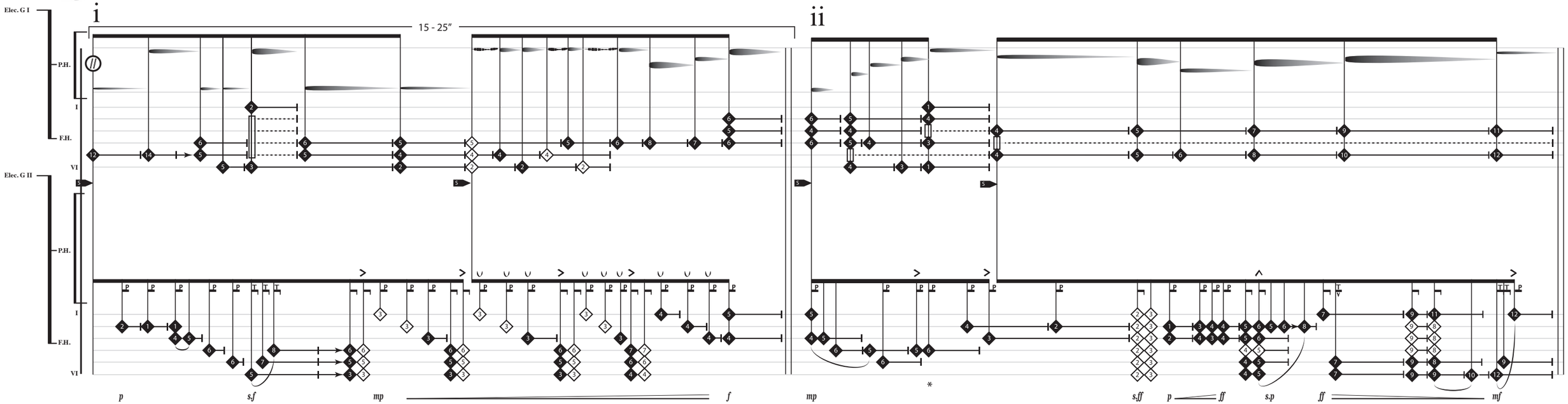



Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
mf fff
mf fff
mf fff
mf fff
mf fff
mf fff
pp s.ff pp
s.ff pp
s.ff


16
Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
pp s.ff pp
s.ff pp
s.ff pp
mp
fff
mf fff
mf fff



While each miniature has its own qualities, they are generally reflective and almost song-like in nature.



MIDI 126

* You may need to switch fingers over the sustain of the Bb in order to change position for the Db while keeping the sustains as indicated

iii

Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI

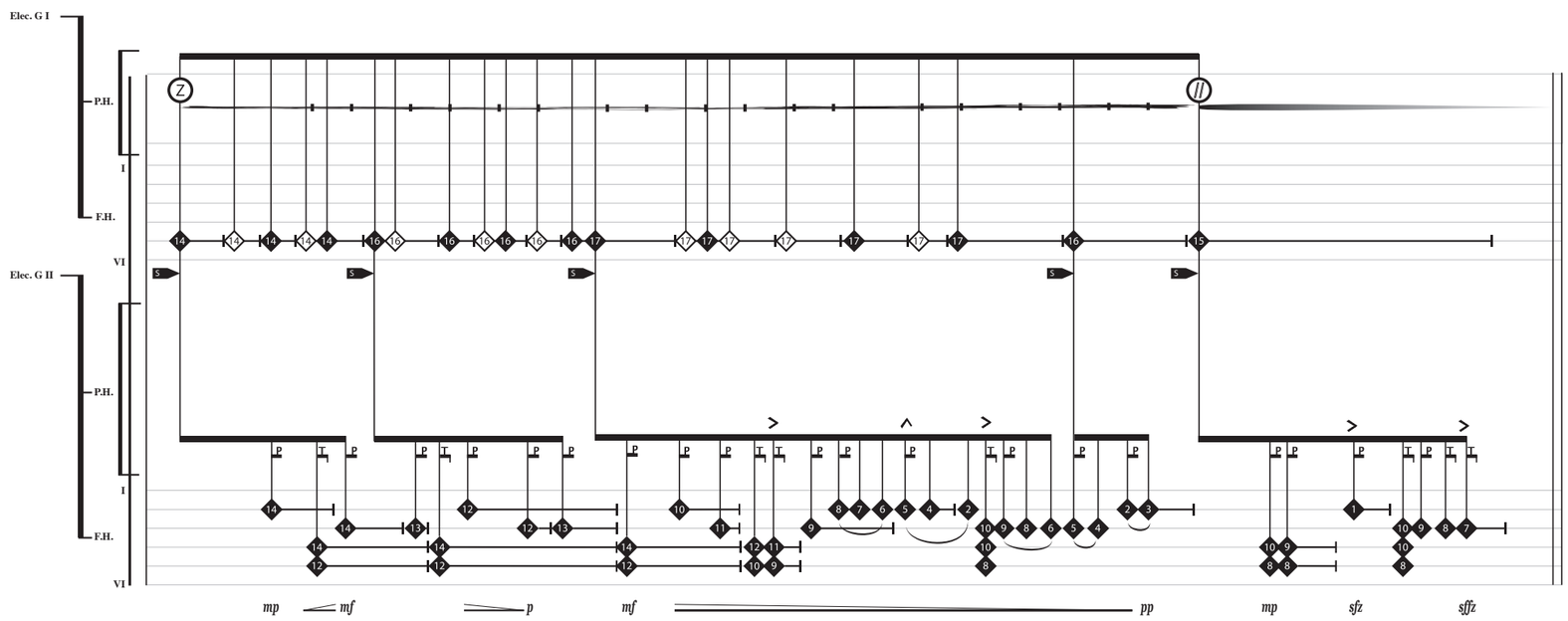
s.f pp s.f mp

iv

20

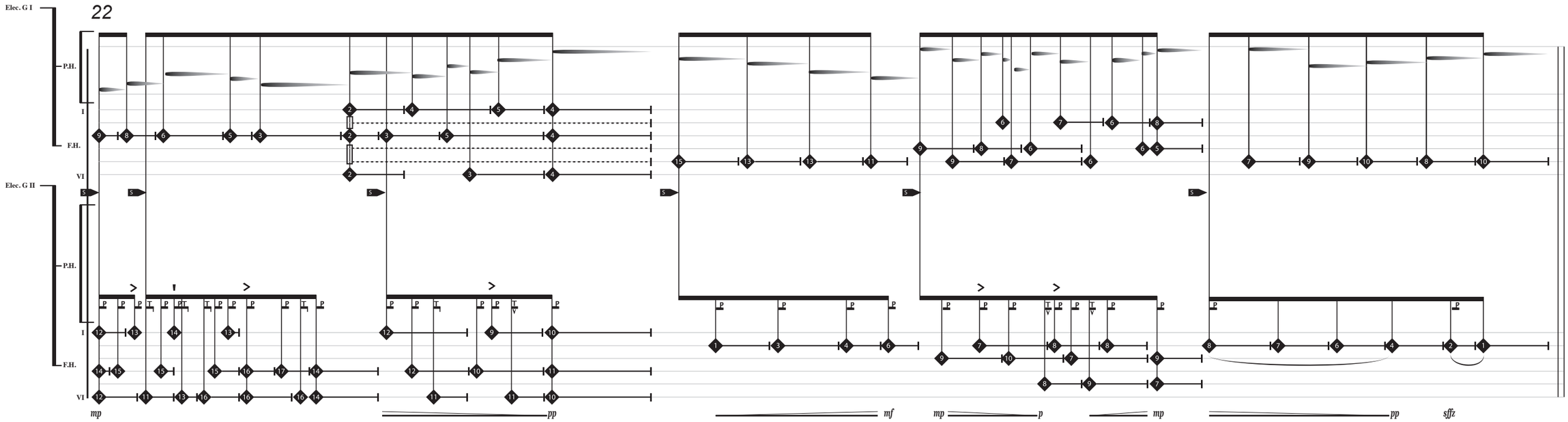
Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI

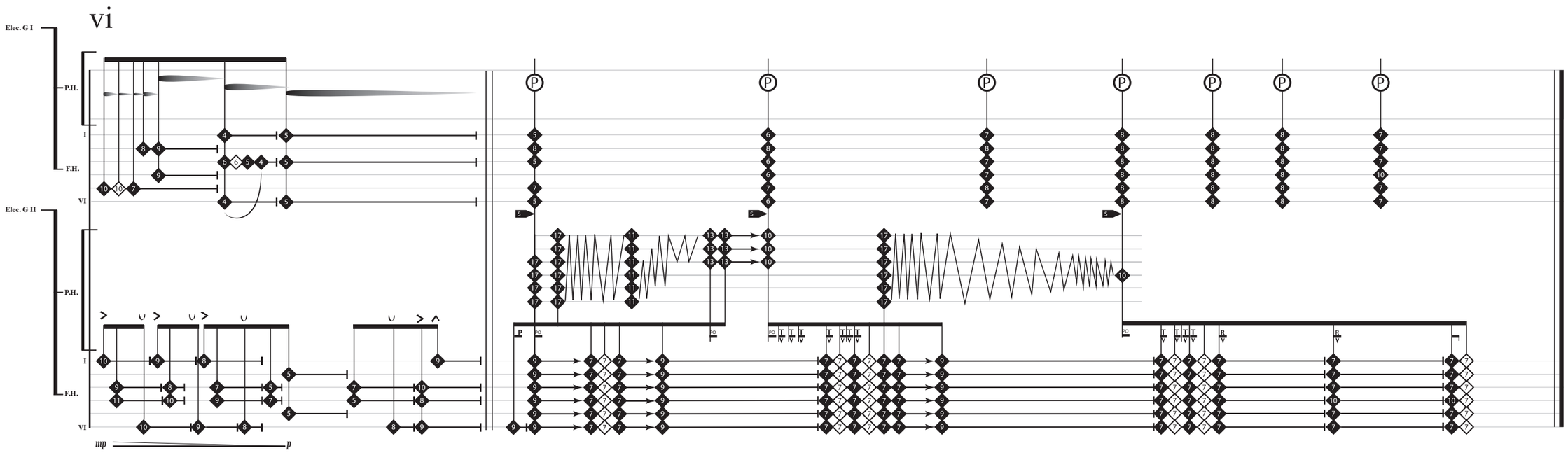
f mf


Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
mp
mf
p
mf
pp
mp
sfz
sffz

V

22


Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
mp
pp
mf
mp
p
mp
pp
sffz


vi
Elec. G I
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
Elec. G II
P.H.
I
F.H.
VI
mp
p