# BEACON ARTS
## COLLECTIVE

2026 Front Ensemble Packet

# KEYBOARDS

**Posture:** Our feet will be shoulder width apart with our knees slightly bent, to enable us to move behind our instruments. Feet should be slightly angled outward to facilitate our shifts around the instrument. For most instances, the torso and shoulders will stay parallel with the keyboard. Each keyboard should be at an appropriate playing height. Keep your shoulders square and your head up. No Slouching!

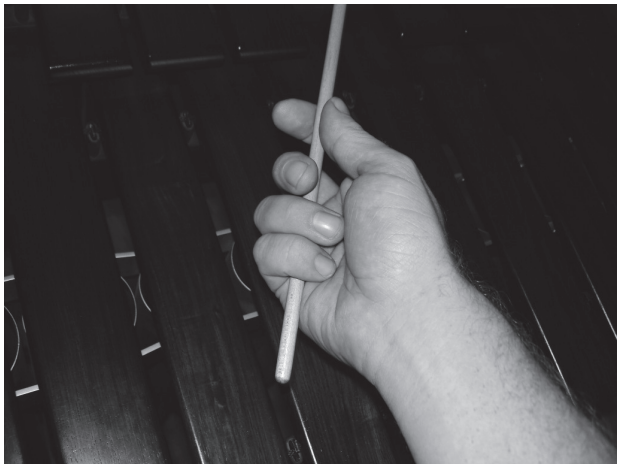
> *Vibraphones*: Your right **toes** only will be on the pedal. This is to ensure that your right foot/heel will be providing balance for you as you move behind your keyboard with your left foot.

**Set Postion** - Mallet heads are aligned equally at full wrist extension above the keyboard, which is also the top of the Piston Stroke. Distance between mallet heads will change depending on the interval to be played. Mallet heads should angle in and create an "A" shaped frame that we will maintain as we move around the keyboard. Keep the wrists low and do not use your arm to raise the mallets.

Stay relaxed at all times.

## 2 Mallet Technique – Middle Fulcrum

Divide the mallet shaft into thirds with your eyes. You will place the bottom third in the palm of your hand griping the mallet with your pinky and ring fingers. Your index finger and thumb should line up directly on the third division of the mallet leaving approx. 2" of the mallet sticking out of the back of your hand. The thumb and index finger should connect with the mallet at your first knuckle. A natural space should occur between the first and second and the thumb and index fingers.



At most tempos we will encounter (for the exception of very brisk tempos) the front and back of your grip should be relatively relaxed. The back should be a tad more stable to create a solid foundation, but the front between the thumb and index finger should be relaxed until very fast tempos. The purpose of middle fulcrum is to do away with having to make a switch in your hands once the tempo is no longer slow enough to effectively use back fulcrum. The middle fulcrum makes use of the weight of your arm just like back fulcrum, with the added benefit of more dexterity and more moderate to brisk tempos as in front fulcrum.

Ninety-five percent of the stroke should come from the wrist so it is important that the technique in the hand is solid. The back fingers should remain closed into the palm and the index finger can be slightly relaxed (but not pointed). The other five percent should come from the arm as an extension of a full wrist stroke. There will be exceptions at times but this will be the standard. A marimba or vibraphone played with mallets does not have rebound so this approach allows us to create our own rebound for the Piston Stroke. The mallets should feel heavy in your hands. Be sure that most of the weight that you feel is in the middle of your grip. Not the front or back.

**Piston Stroke** - The starting and stopping point of the stroke are the same (with the exception of horizontal motion across the keyboard creating a Shift). No wasted motion is created by a piston stroke. You go straight down to play and straight up to return back to the original playing position. **The stroke is relaxed yet precise**, and it does not connect to the next stroke.

**Legato Stroke –** This is our general stroke and will be used the most often within the mallet ensemble. Without overcomplicating things, it's just a relaxed, smooth, and connected stroke. When playing exercises like Single and Scales, the wrist creates a constant full range of motion to general a very natural looking/sounding stroke.

When playing longer rhythms that can't be comfortably connected with one smooth wrist turn (whole notes, half notes, etc), we utilize an exaggerated slow legato upstroke. Let's call it the "float" for now.

In the "float", the initial down stroke is the same but the recovery is slower on the upstroke, creating a "slow-mo" movement upwards from the note. The movement is lead by the mallet head (not the wrist!) and should feel like you are slowly pulling every bit of sound possible out of the bar. The arm is used at times to create a more fluid look and to generate more sound from the bars in louder passages. Most "floats" will have either a defined ending beat or continue the motion until the next note. Common mistakes include pushing forward with the mallets, using too much arm, and generally overdoing it. This technique will be used most often in the Vibraphones, but will be utilized throughout the ensemble.

**Shift** - When going from one note to another, we will use the upstroke of a piston stoke to travel to your next destination. We will refer to it as a "checkmark" type of motion. This is very helpful when moving through tricky 4 mallet chords, or when making large leaps around the instrument. The main function of the stroke is to get you where you need to be sooner, which then allows you to play more accurately and with a better sound.

Stay relaxed at all times!

# 4 Mallet Technique - Stevens

**The following process is the same for both hands.**

First, grip a mallet with your pinky and ring finger. The pinky is our "anchor" and must wrap all the way around the mallet providing the foundation for the grip. There should be minimal excess mallet protruding from the bottom of your pinky. I probably have just a little too much mallet poking out the bottom in this pic. The outer mallet should go up at about a 45 degree angle in relationship to the forearm. This will ensure the mallets will hang evenly when the inner mallet is added to the grip. There is a delicate balance between gripping too tightly with the pinky and letting your outside mallet droop down.

Second, place the other mallet in the center palm of your hand just under your thumb muscle. Everyone's hands are a little different so you may need to do experiment somewhat with the exact spot that "sticks" for you. Your middle finger is wrapped around the mallet, holding it into your palm/thumb muscle with the fingertip. Your index finger now acts as a shelf for the inside mallet, and the mallet should be able to rest without any pressure in your hand. We will call this the "bridge". Just like any real bridge, it must never falter or bend. The index finger must always stay out and NEVER curl into your hand at any time. This is probably the biggest foundation of your entire 4-mallet technique. The mallets should naturally set at the interval of a fifth. Stay relaxed at all times.

Finally, place your thumb on the inside mallet directly over the first knuckle of your index finger. The thumb rests on top of the mallet and applies only the minimal amount of pressure to keep it in place. The thumb contacts the mallet with the fleshy part of the thumb, not the tip of the thumb (as seen below). **NO BENT THUMBS!** This will allow you to freely change intervals as well as maintain a relaxed grip. Avoid the "white thumbnail syndrome".

## 4 Mallet Stroke Types

There are four basic stroke types that we will use with the Stevens technique:

1. Double Vertical strokes
2. Single Independent strokes
3. Single Alternating strokes
4. Double Lateral strokes – 2 versions

**1. Double Vertical strokes:**

This stroke should be played primarily with the wrist. The thumbs will remain on top of the grip the entire time. Never turn the hand flat as in our 2 -mallet grip regardless of difficult intervals (major seconds, etc). Both mallets must remain parallel to the keyboard at all times to eliminate flamming of the mallets. Gradually, we will learn to incorporate the arm into the stroke. The addition of using arm should be a by-product of a relaxed stroke with correct technique. Do not misinterpret this for using arm to execute the stroke. The mallets should travel straight up and down without any side-to-side motion. Make sure to keep your fingers relaxed and the speed of the stroke fluid and consistent.

**2. Single Independent strokes:**

We will primarily be using this stroke type for mallets 2 and 3 (the inside mallets). The playing position will be achieved by rotating the "active" around the unused mallet (i.e.: mallet 3 will rotated around mallet 4). In order to develop independence, in this case, with the inside mallets, it is important to keep the outer mallets as still as possible. The outer will be defined as being half the height of the playing position. In order to achieve this DON'T USE ANY TENSION!! Relaxed fingers act as shook absorbers-tension will cause the outer mallets to twitch vertically and/or horizontally. Make sure that you keep your index finger and thumb firm, but relaxed. This will help to keep control of the inside mallets. When at set position, the outer mallets should be slightly angled up, not parallel with the keyboard. This should happen naturally.

**3. Single Alternating strokes:**

This stroke type is closely related with the Single Independent stroke, but without concern for motion in the other mallet. The set position and playing position are the same as in the Double Vertical stroke. As one mallet strikes the bar, the other mallet will raise in response much like a pendulum transferring its momentum. Be sure to not simply rotate the wrist: instead, think of the pivot point as bouncing from one mallet to the next. This will allow us to control the articulation, rhythm and dynamic of each mallet. It is important to note that TEMPO is a major determining factor for when a Single Alternating stroke TURNS INTO a one-handed roll

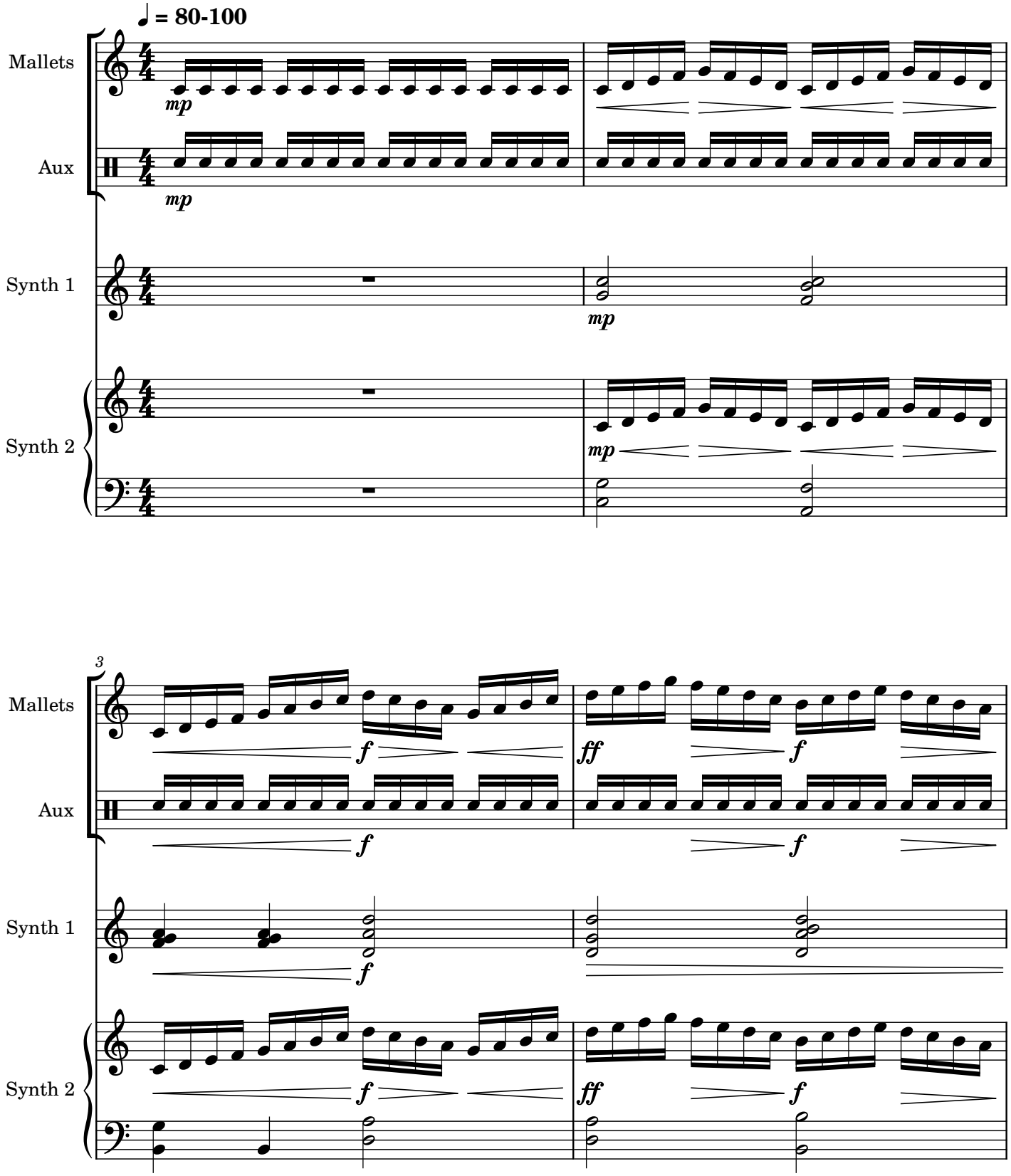
motion. As the tempo increases, the ability to control each mallet will decrease, until the motion is solely a rotation of the wrist.

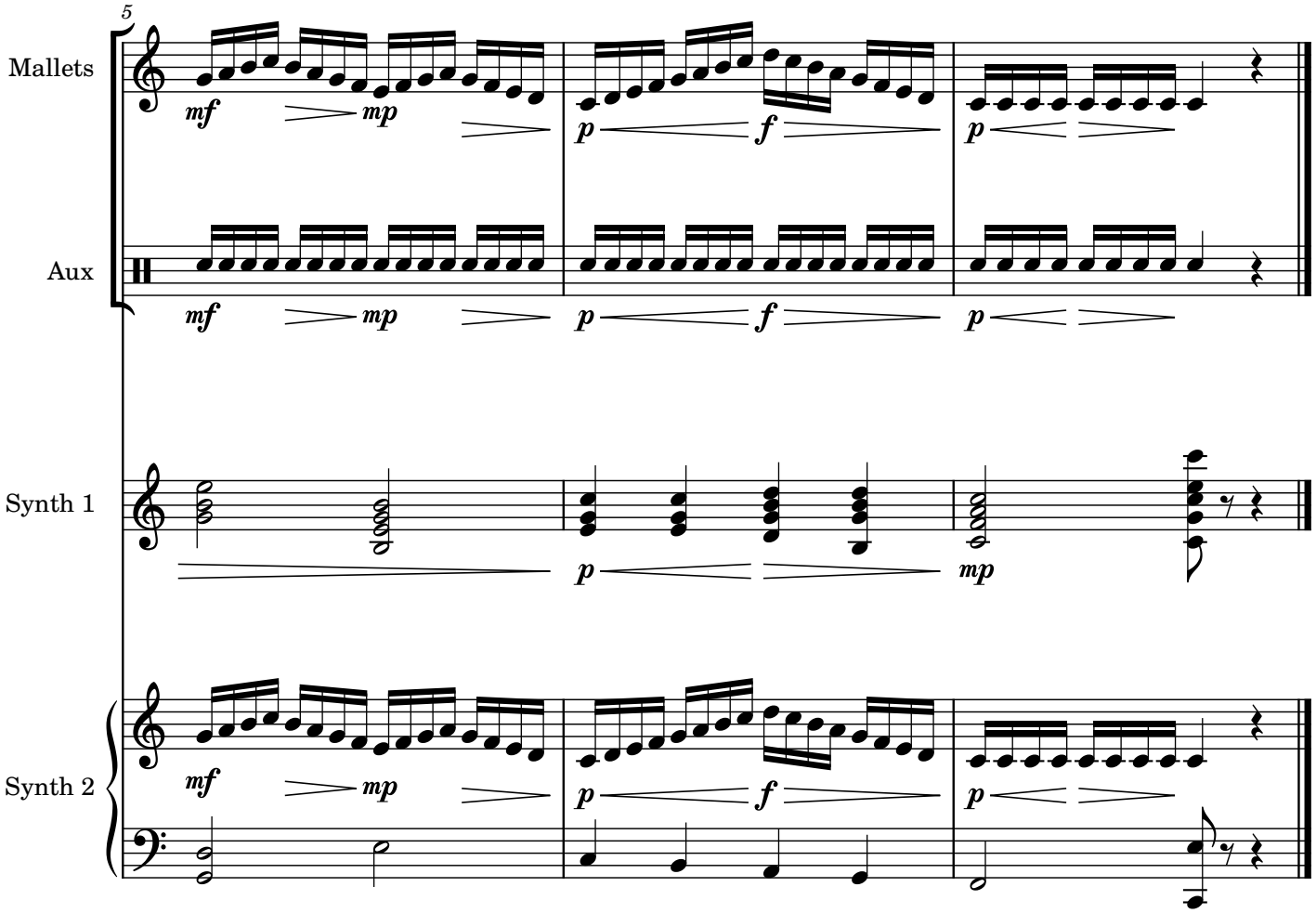
**4. Double Lateral strokes:**

The standard Double Lateral stroke is most commonly used for the "ripple roll" or "lateral roll" technique. It should not operate like the other 3 stroke types. The goal here is to produce TWO strokes through ONE hand motion. Again, the set position and playing position are the same as a Double Vertical stroke. In the case of the outside Double Lateral stroke, play as if you were going to perform a Single Independent stroke (the outside mallet will strike the bar first) and then rotate your wrist counter-clockwise to strike the bar with your inside mallet. This motion is almost impossible to put into words, so please ask questions in person regarding - this stroke. The main thing is to stay completely loose and relaxed in the hands and practice A LOT!

I have found the need to separate a distinctly different version of the double lateral that I will refer to as the "controlled" double lateral stroke. You will find an exercise for this in the packet. The goal here is training us how to "muscle" the doubles. Not dissimilar to a drummer playing double stroke rolls on a pillow to create wrist strength. We want to create an articulate and powerful double lateral stroke that can be used with precise rhythmic accuracy. More on this when we are together in person!

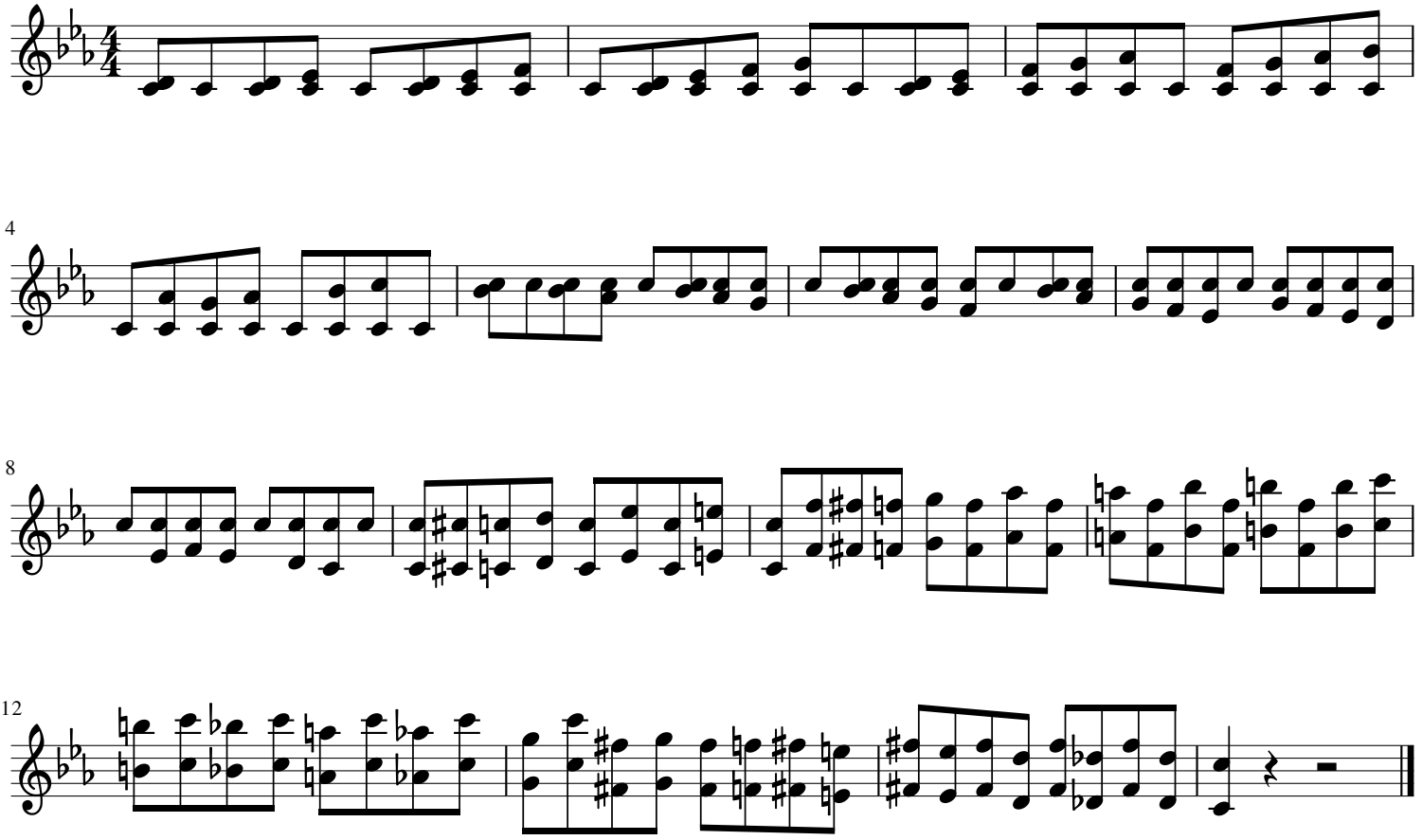
# Green Scales 2.0



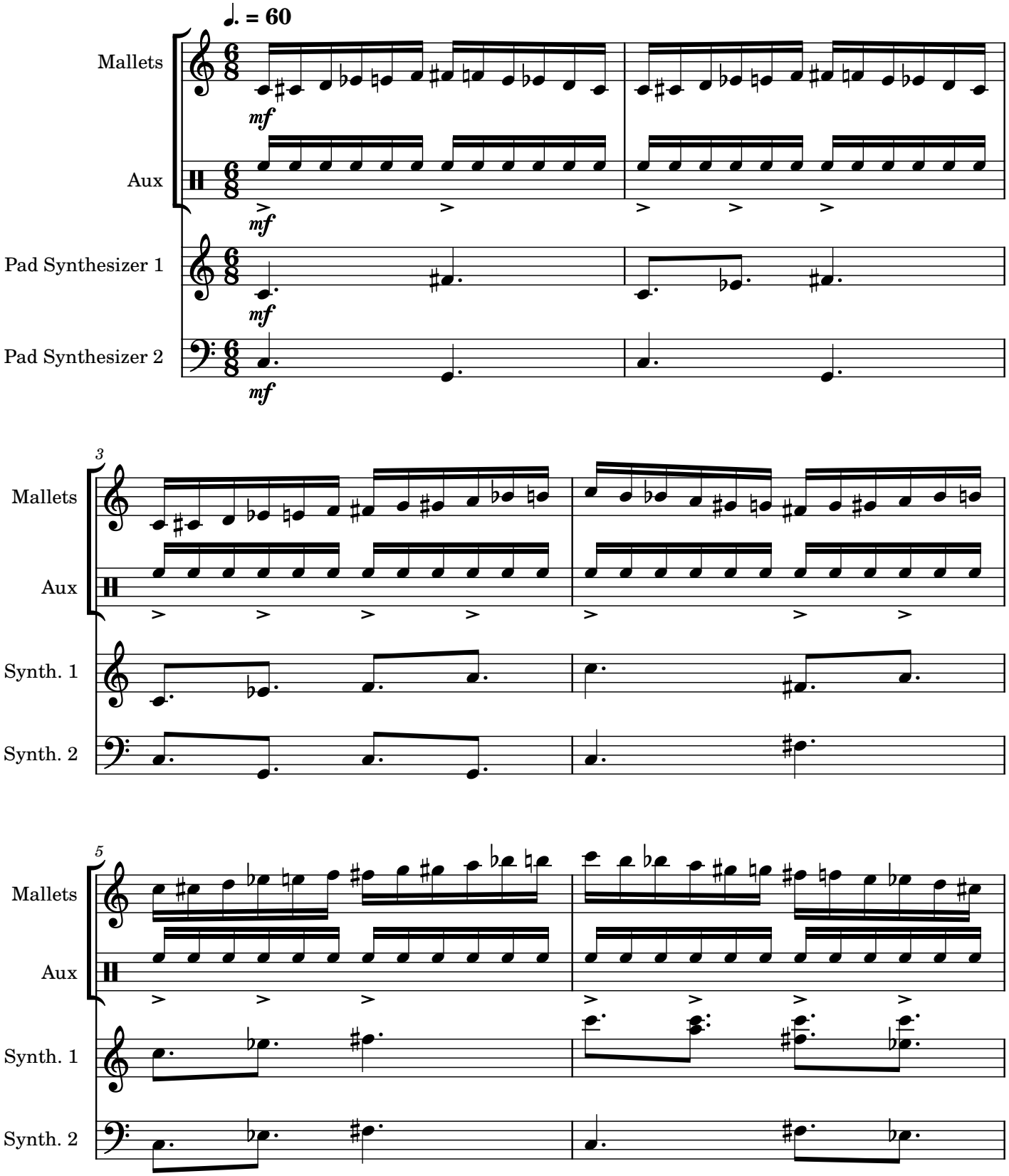

5
Mallets
Aux
Synth 1
Synth 2
mf
mp
p
f
p
mf
mp
p
f
p
p
mp
mf
mp
p
f
p

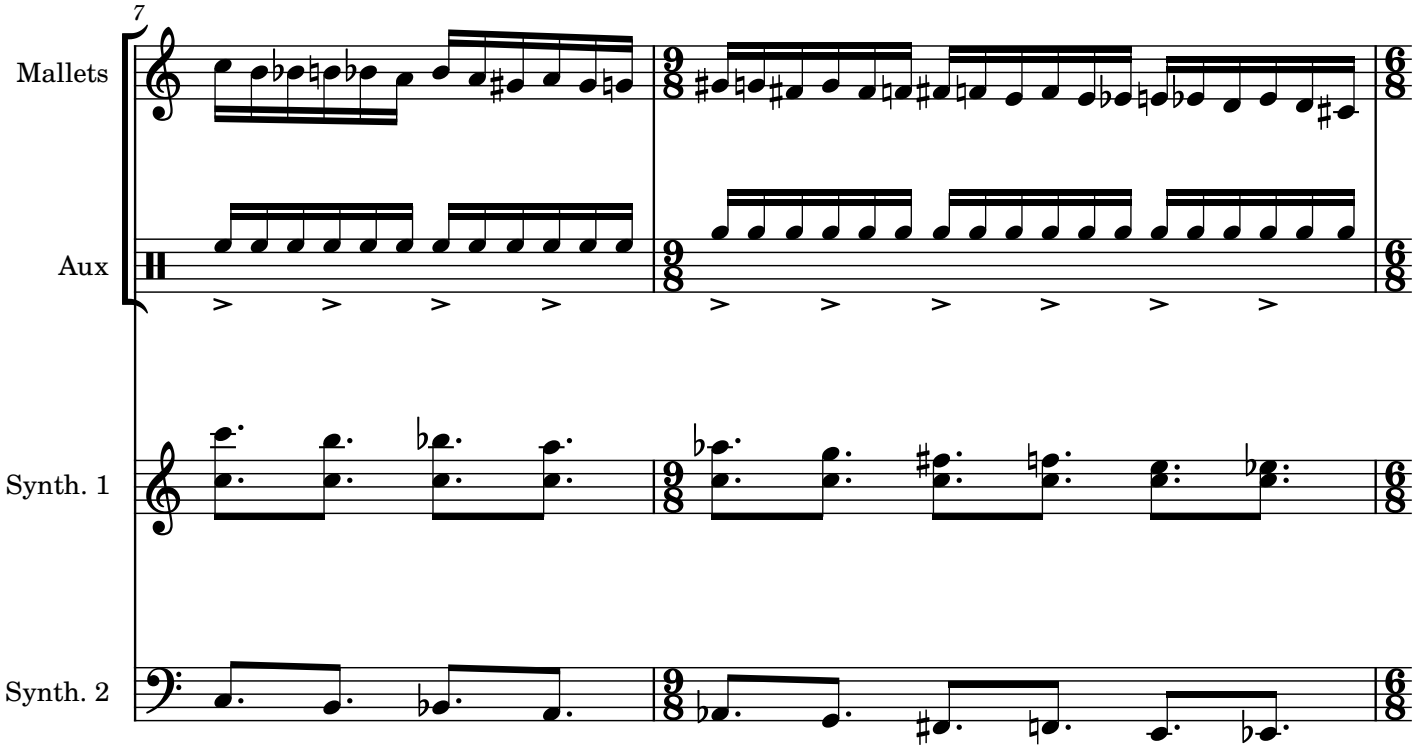
# Recycled

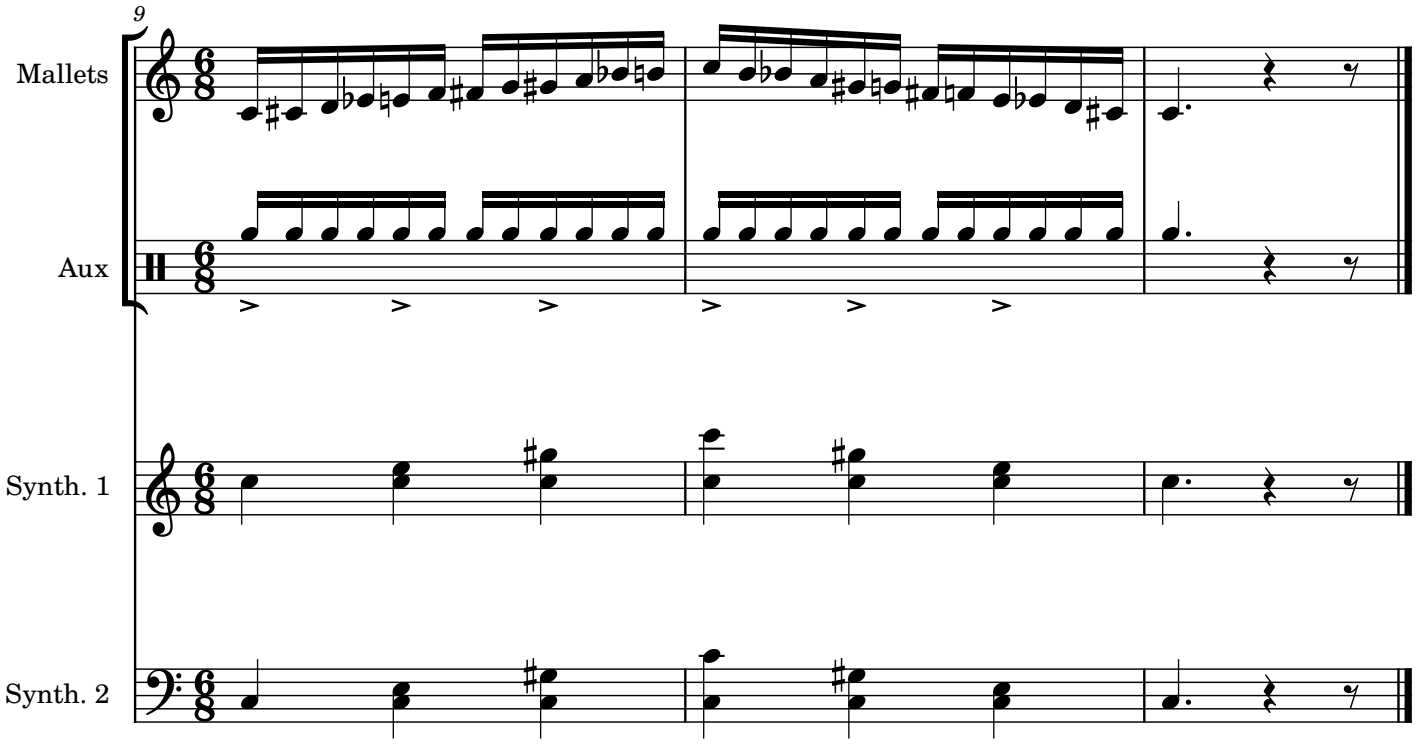
♩ = 130



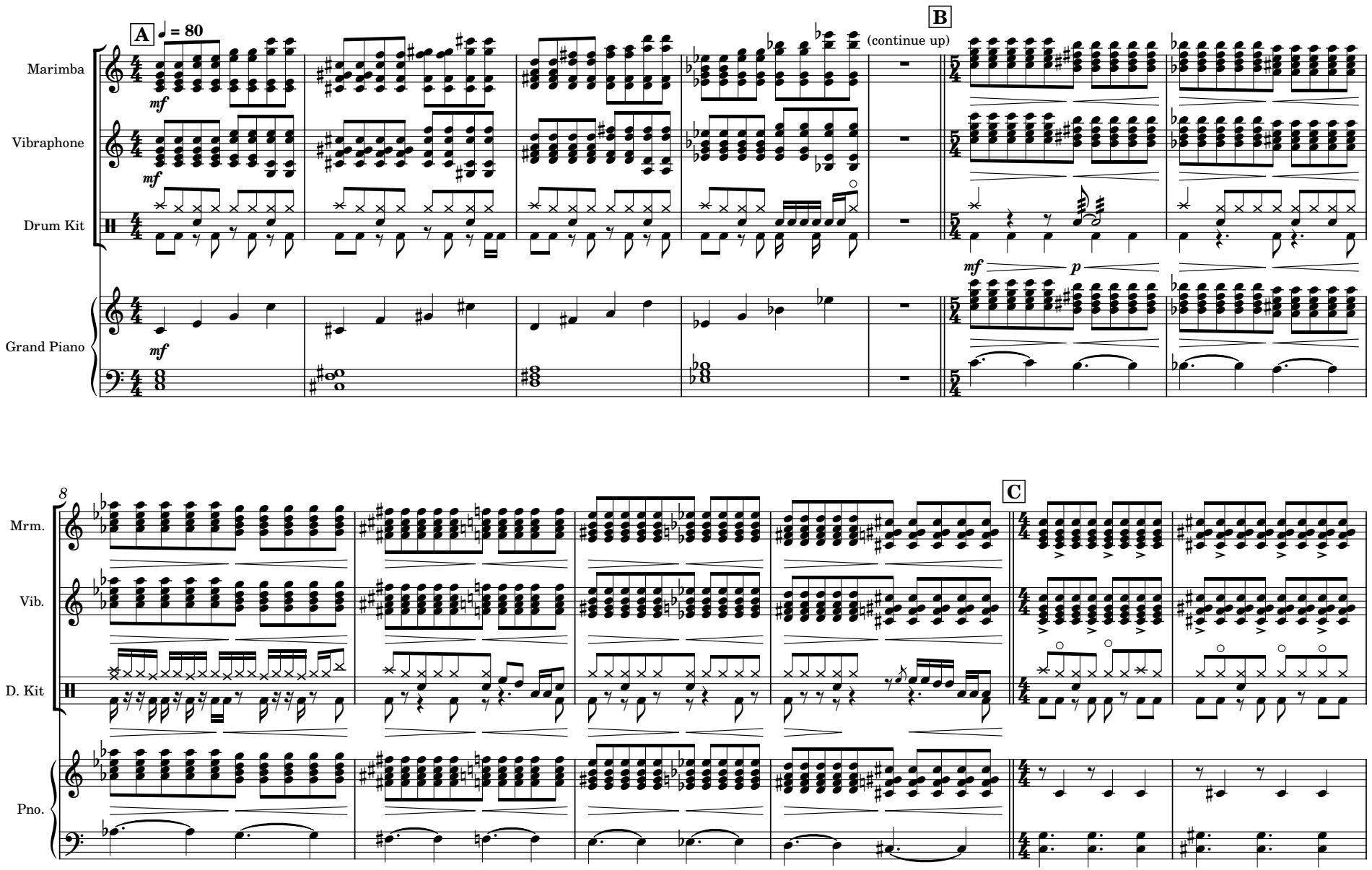
# Chromatic 2.0

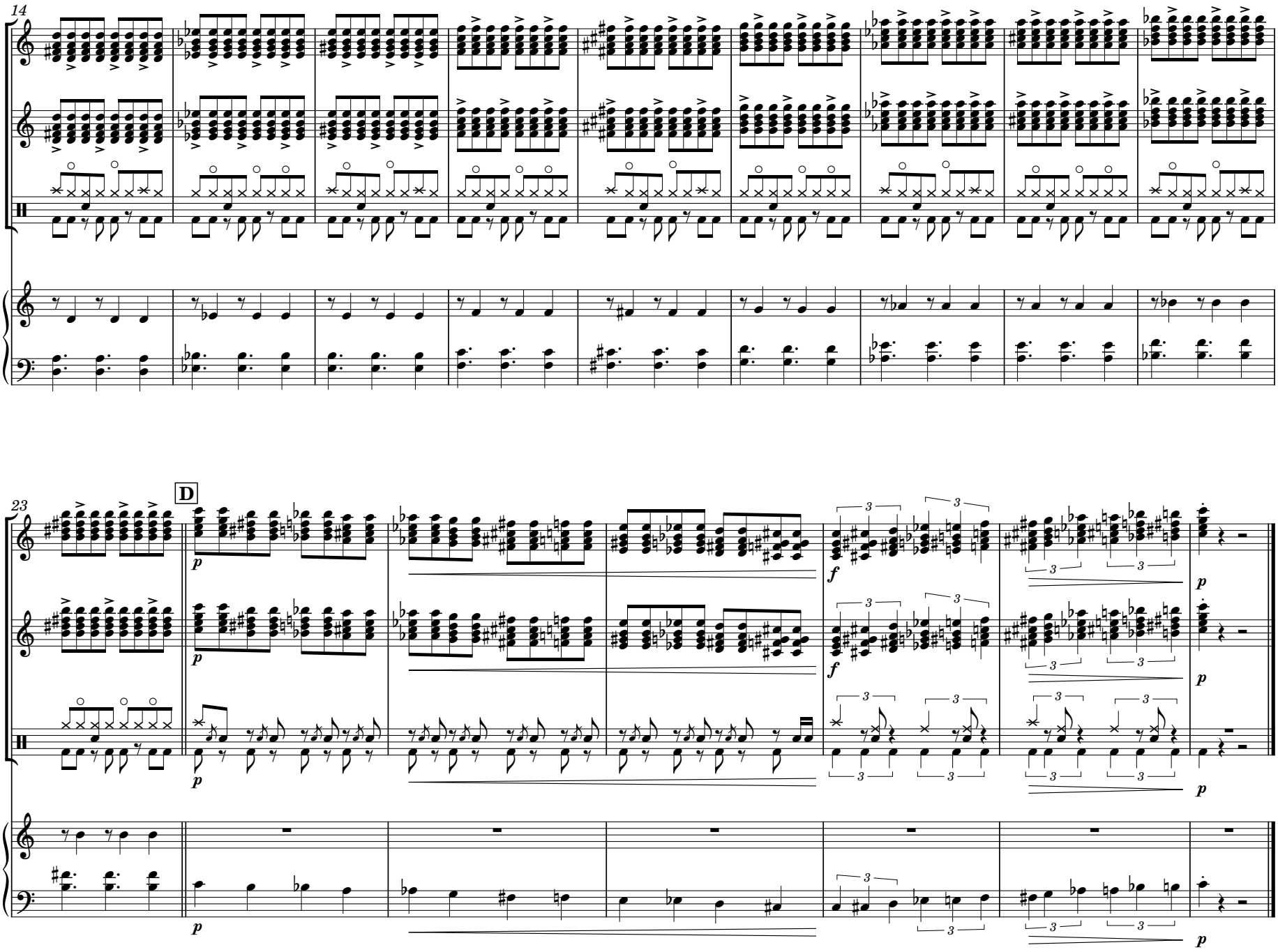



7
Mallets
Aux
Synth. 1
Synth. 2

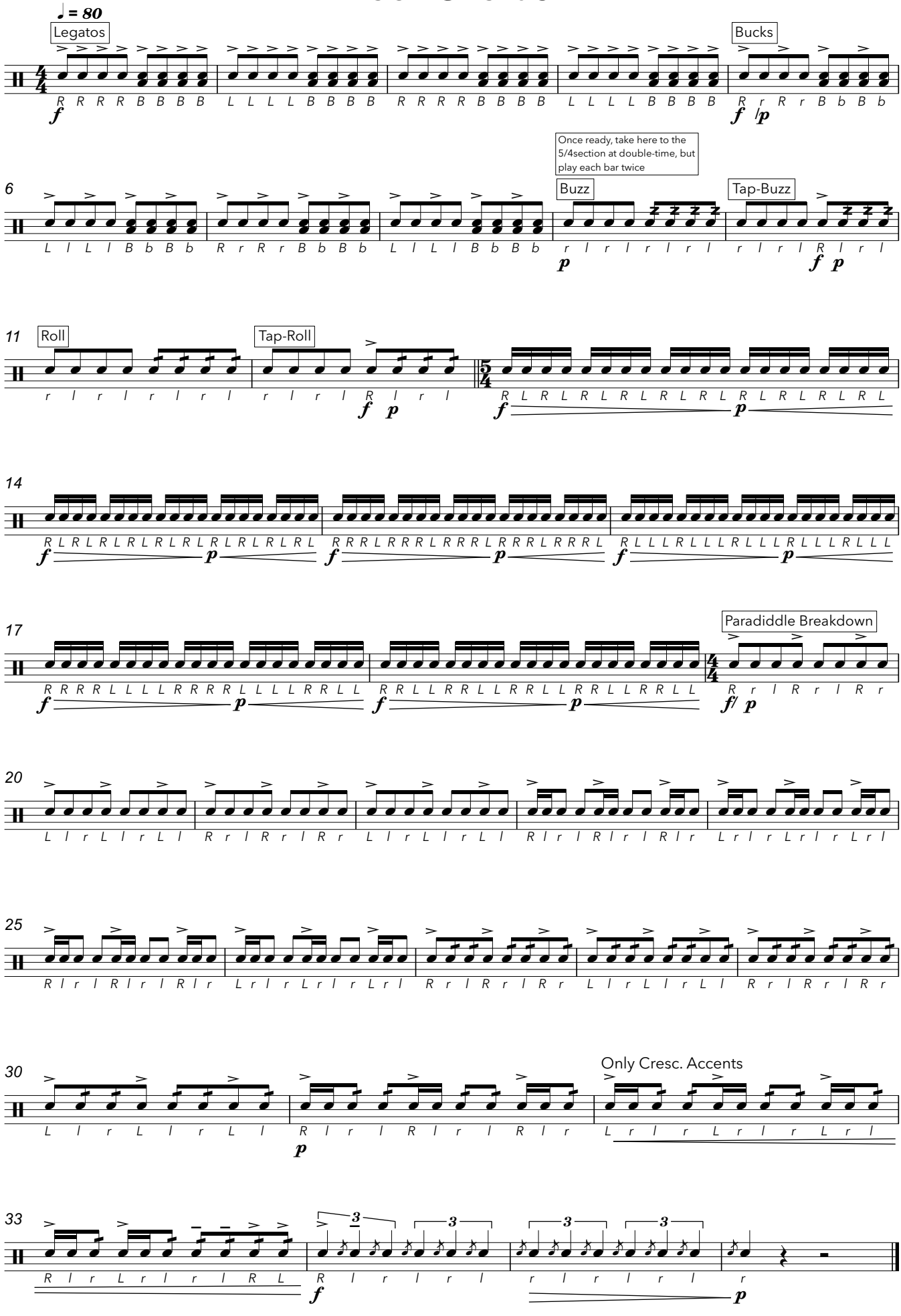

9
Mallets
Aux
Synth. 1
Synth. 2

# Block Chords 2.0



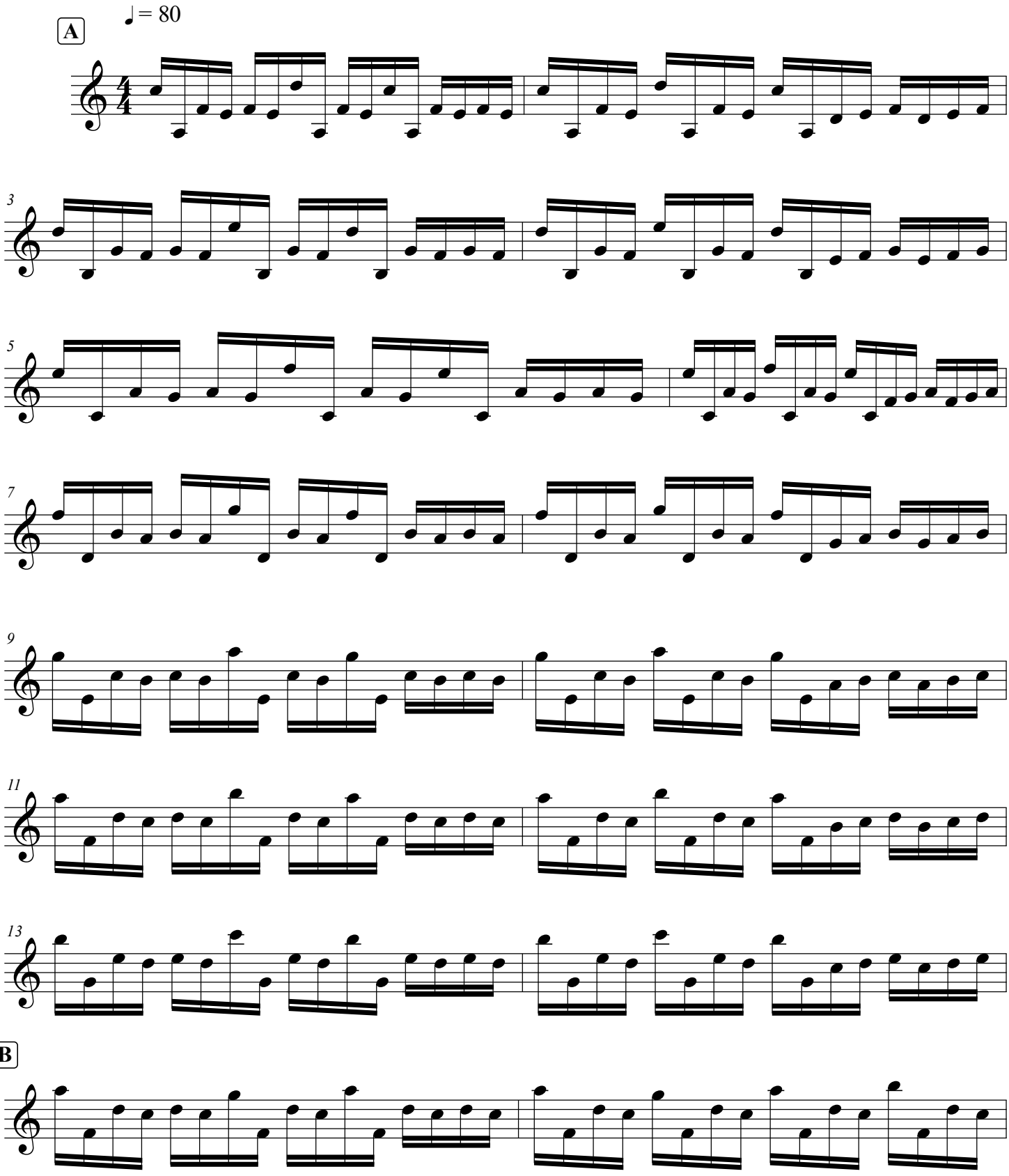

14
Mrm.
Vib.
D. Kit
Pno.
23
D
Mrm.
Vib.
D. Kit
Pno.

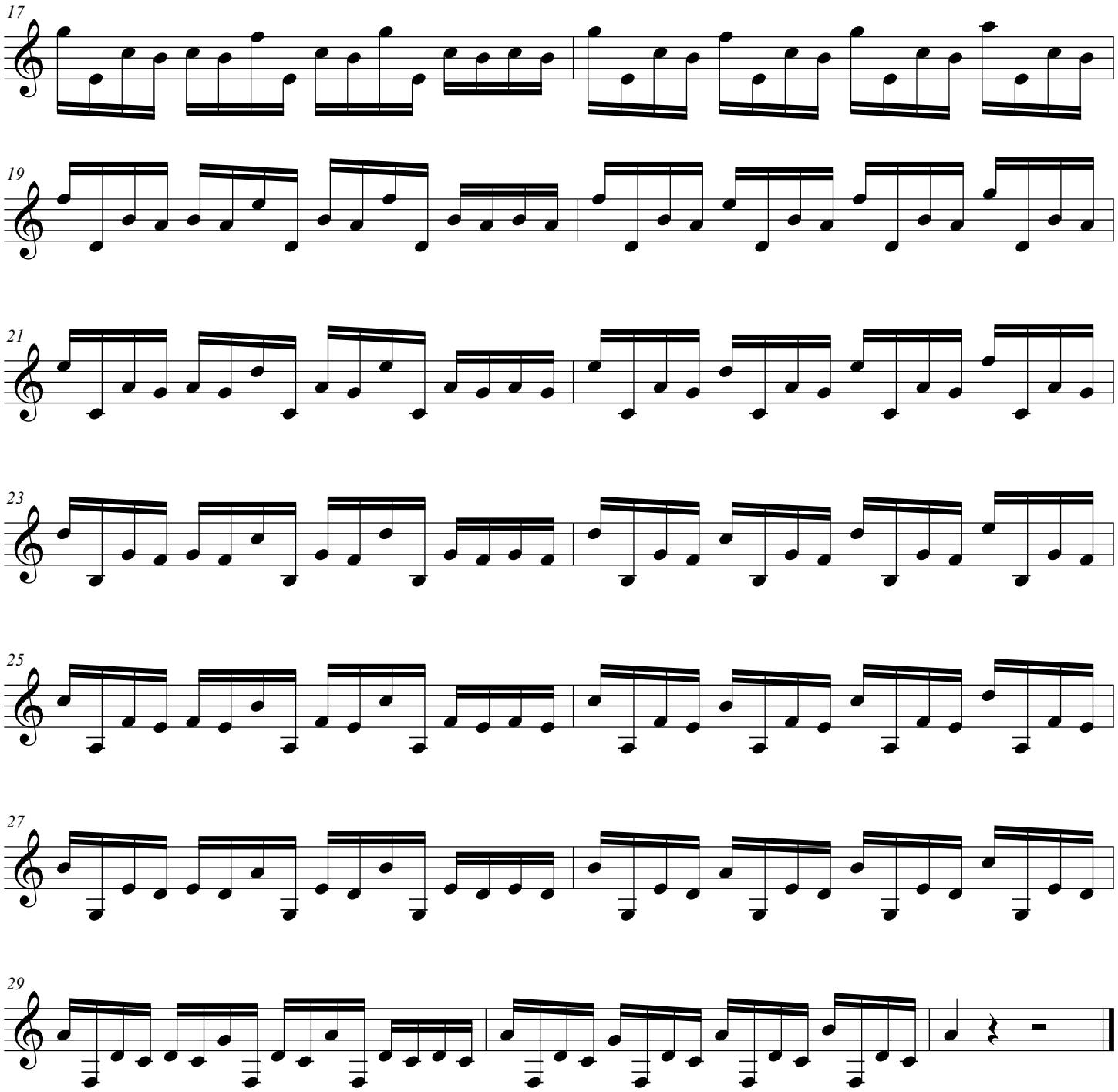
# Block Chords



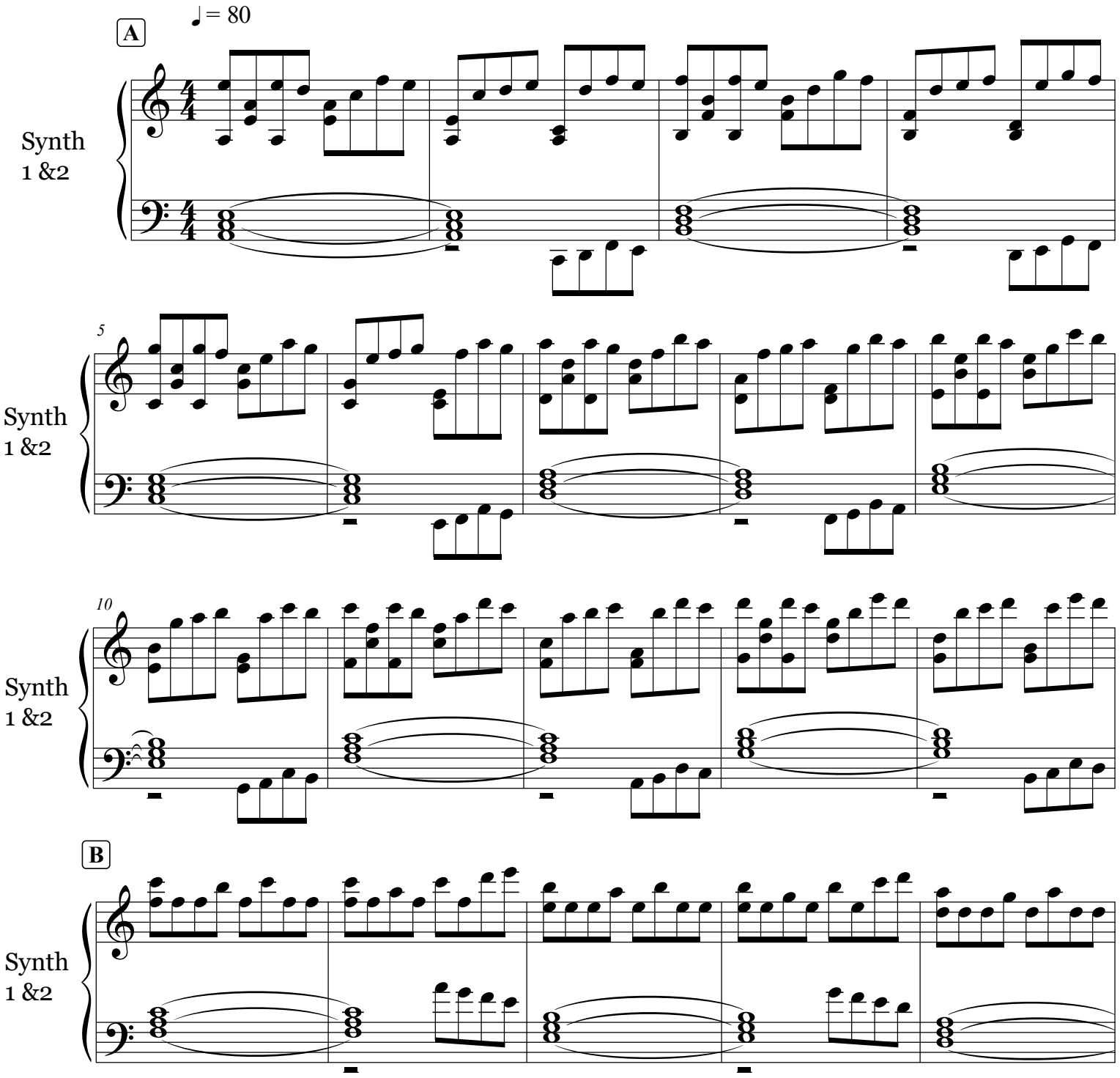
# New Alternating

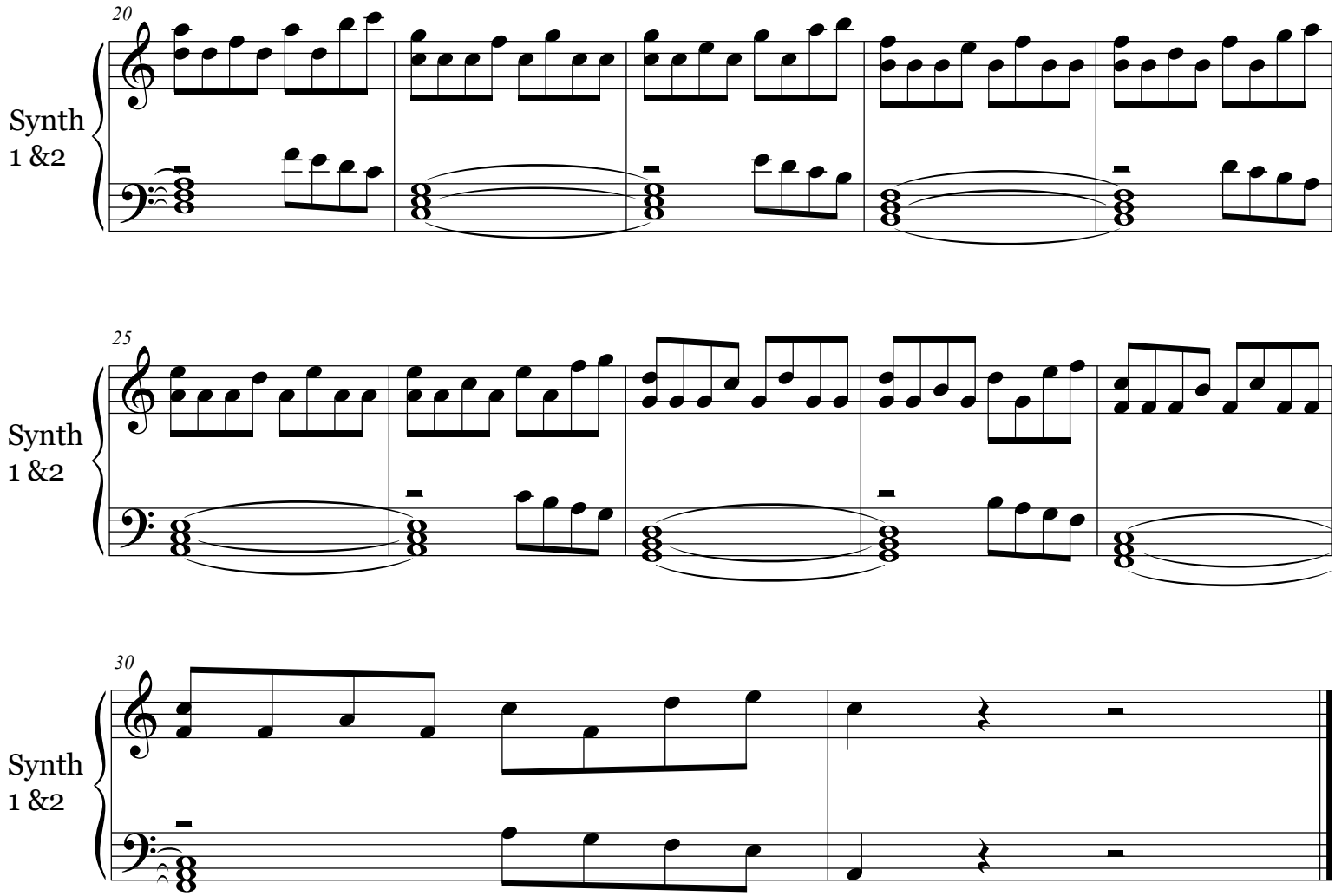
Mallets




17
19
21
23
25
27
29

# New Alternating




20
Synth
1 &2
25
Synth
1 &2
30
Synth
1 &2