Eidolon

A Chamber Opera

featuring the poetry of
H.D.

Sid Richardson
(2024)

Eidolon

Dramatis Personae

Helen ..... Soprano
Eidolon..... Mezzo-soprano
Achilles..... Countertenor

Instrumentation

Clarinet in Bb
Percussion - Frame Drum, Ocean Drum, Resonant Metal, Seed-pod Shaker, Vibraphone (with bass bows)
Harp

Duration

25 minutes

Performance Notes

All of the ensemble members are called upon to vocalize in the manner of a Greek chorus. Whispered sections should be projected as much as possible without vibrating the vocal cords.

The fixed media sound design cues should be played back in stereo through the house PA system. Adjust the levels to the performance space.

= A long pause of indefinite length

Clarinet

Slap tongue is indicated with an X through the stem of the note to which it applies.

Harp

X noteheads indicate to tap on the soundboard with fingertips.

Scrapes on wire strings are indicated with a direction and relative speed. These may be executed with fingernails or a plectrum of some kind, such as a guitar pick or metal spoon.

Pedal buzz effects are indicated with a Z through the stem of the note to which it applies. Hold the given pedal in between positions to create a harsh buzzing as the plate makes contact with the vibrating string.

The indication "thunder effect" calls for the harpist to execute a strong slide with the rubber tuning key that causes the wire strings to strike against each other.

Texts

All texts from *Helen in Egypt* (1961) by Hilda Doolittle, used with permission New Directions Publishing Corp.

PROGRAM NOTES

Eidolon, for soprano, mezzo-soprano, actor (countertenor), and mixed chamber ensemble, sets to music poetry from *Helen in Egypt* (1961) by Hilda Doolittle (aka H.D.), a semi-dramatic lyric narrative that revisits and rewrites the myth of Helen of Troy. I am drawn to H.D.'s late poem because of its relation to themes that interest me in my own work, namely multiple identity, mysticism, memory, dream states, and Greek drama. According to H.D. and Euripides in his play *Helen*, the Helen that went to Troy was an *eidolon*, a phantom or specter "conjured out of air" by the gods. H.D. takes this idea and runs with it in her own epic poem, which takes the form of a series of three-line choral stanzas interspersed with prose.

My new work deemphasizes traditional narrative in favor of new dramaturgies rooted in the psyche of the heroine, Helen. The structure of *Eidolon* springs out of the form of H.D.'s poem. It begins with Helen's own "defense" or "pallinode"—a song to counter the negative portrayals of Helen in traditional texts. She is aware of how negatively she has been defined by the masculine world, which H.D. associates with death, war, chaos—Sigmund Freud's "death drive." The journey of Helen over the course of the work is one in which she ultimately transcends male definitions of womanhood by negating them through a commitment to life and love. At the end of the full chamber opera, she merges with the poem's mother Goddess, Thetis, in an ecstatic final aria. This version of the chamber opera comprises the first two scenes, which may be performed as a standalone piece.

The other characters consist of Helen's foil, the eidolon or "fake" Helen (of Troy), who represents woman as body/spectacle/desired object. Musically she is both pitted against the real Helen (of Egypt), and at times combined with her to reflect the dualities in H.D.'s complex poem. In the H.D., Achilles has been returned to Egypt over Lethe, the river of forgetfulness in the underworld, after his death at Troy. His memory of the Trojan War has been wiped, but vestiges of that trauma remain in his interactions with his new mate, Helen. For example, this two-scene version of the work ends with Achilles assaulting Helen after he has been triggered by her mention of his mother. He is portrayed by an actor because for the majority of the work he has forgotten how to sing, the masculine "death-cult" of the Greek army at Troy has separated him from his feminine side. As he gradually remembers his love for his mother, the sea goddess Thetis, he moves away from the masculine world of war, and, over the course of the work, is reborn as the "new Mortal." In the end of the full opera, he rediscovers his singing voice. The ensemble of three instrumentalists, clarinet, harp, and percussion, function as a Greek chorus. They augment their instrumental parts with vocalizations that comment on the drama and they interact with the onstage Helen.

This work was developed under the aegis of the Longy School of Music of Bard College, and was premiered there in Edward M. Pickman Hall on March 2, 2024.

Eidolon

I. The Amen-Temple

Setting: inside a huge Egyptian temple by the sea.

II. The Beach

Setting: outside the Amen-Temple on the beachhead.

Transposed Score

Eidolon

Hilda Doolittle
(1886-1961)

I. The Amen-Temple

Sid Richardson
(b. 1987)

Senza Misura, Introduction

[*Egypt: In the sanctuary of the Amen-Temple, sand falls from the ceiling in half-light; musicians enter and take their places.*]

Helen (soprano)

Eidolon (mezzo-soprano)

Achilles (actor)

Clarinet in B♭

Ocean Drum swirling *ad lib.* to evoke waves; continue for circa 3-4' until harp enters then slowly fade out

Percussion

pp ***mf*** ***pp*** ***mf*** ***pp*** *sim.*

Sound design cue 1: *Sand*
continues from house opening...

Sound design cue 2: *Voiceover 1*

"We all know the story of Helen of Troy..."

Sound Design

Harp

A ♩ = 66 Floating, Misterioso

[*Helen, crouching on the floor, draws designs in the sand that she attempts to interpret.*]

Cl.

Hp.

p ***mf*** ***p***

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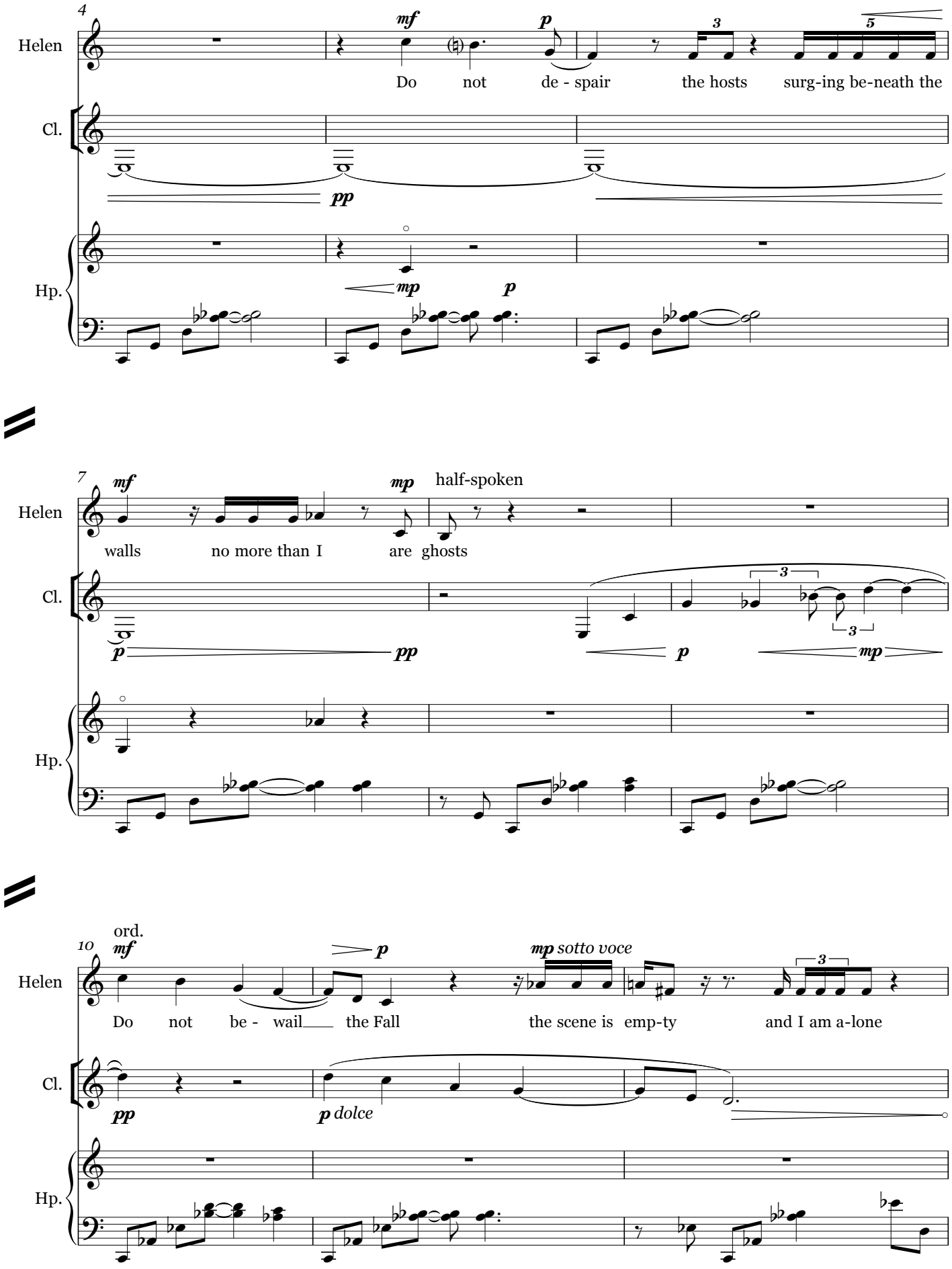
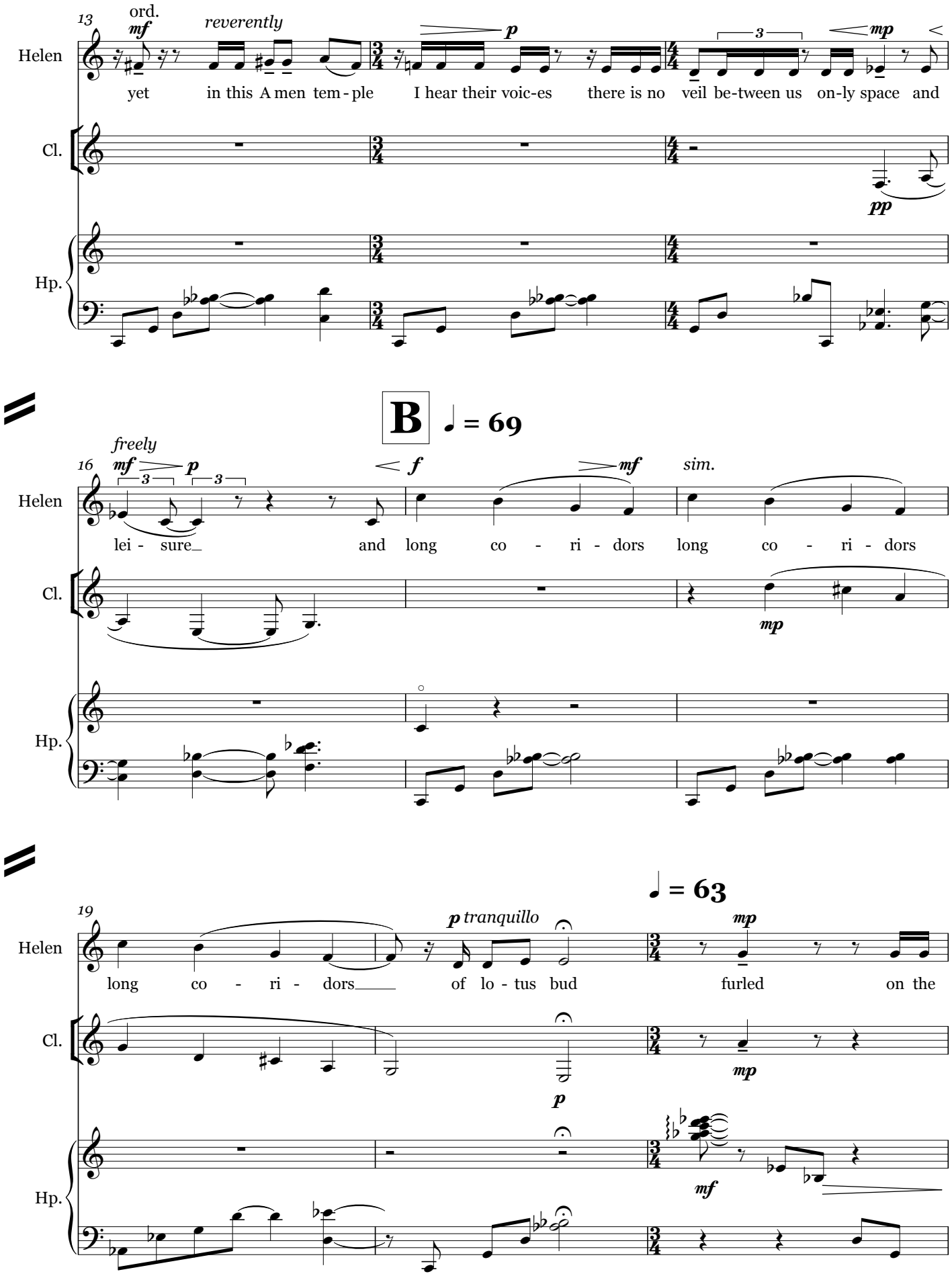
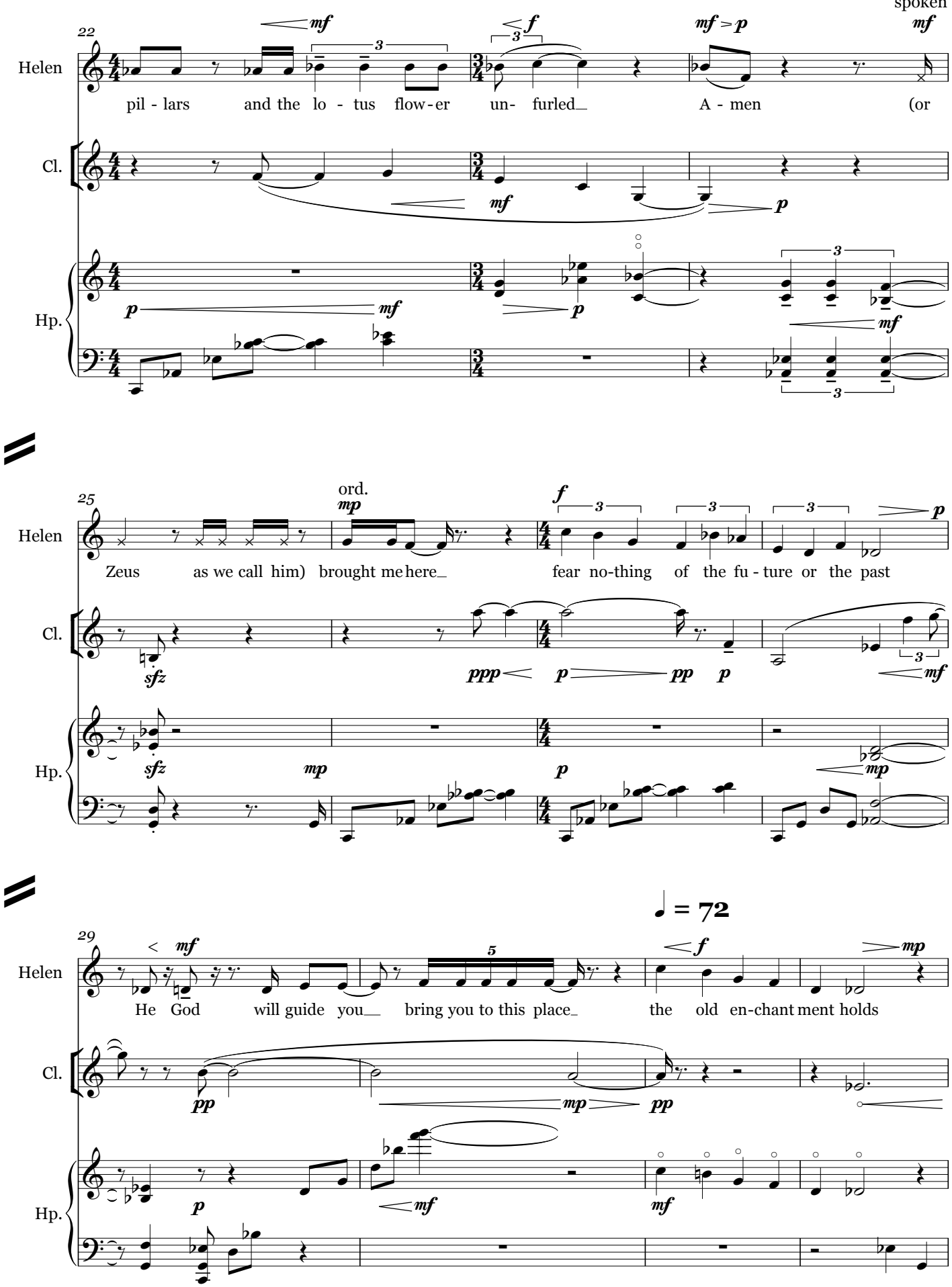
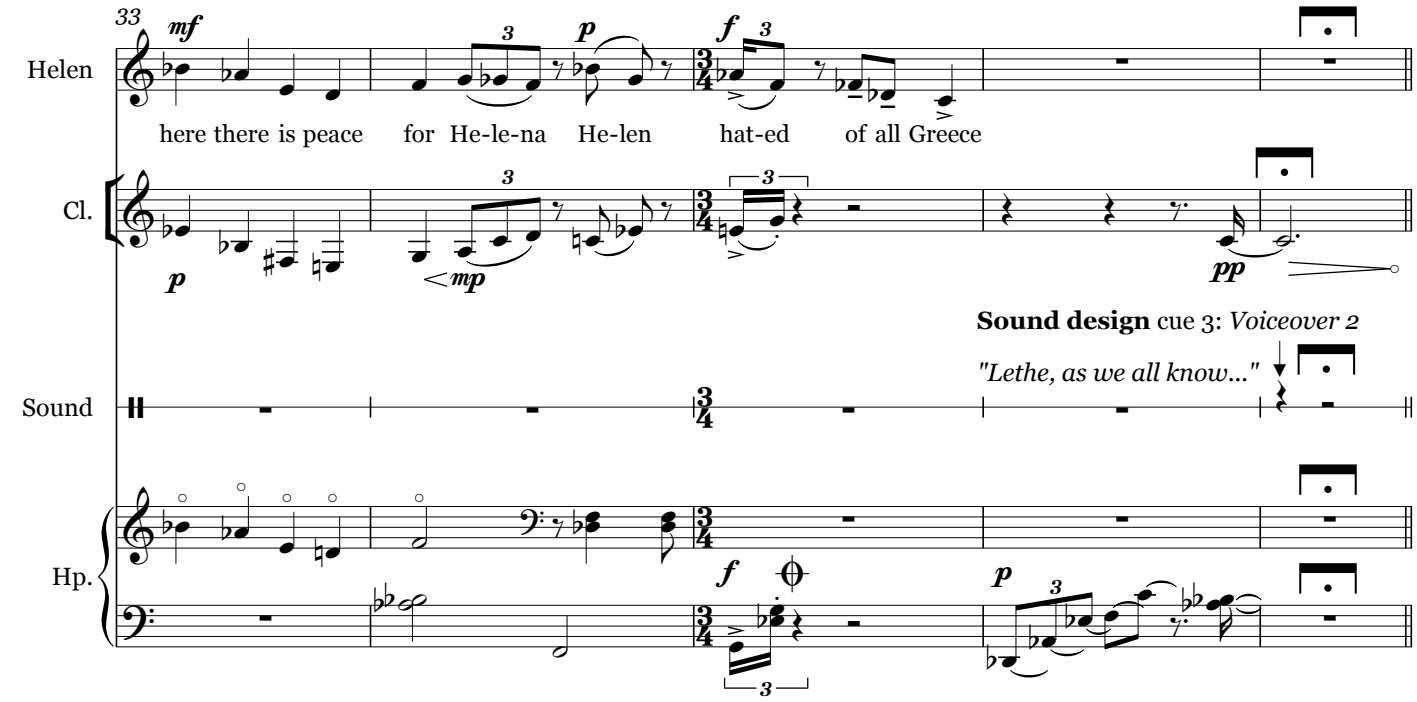

4
Helen
Cl.
Hp.
mf
p
pp
mp
p
Do not de - spair the hosts surg-ing be-neath the
7
mf
mp
half-spoken
walls no more than I are ghosts
p
pp
p
mp
10
ord.
mf
p
mp sotto voce
Do not be - wail the Fall the scene is emp-ty and I am a-lone
pp
p dolce


13
ord.
mf
reverently
p
3
mp
Helen
yet in this A men tem - ple I hear their voic-es there is no veil be-tween us on-ly space and
Cl.
pp
Hp.
B
♩ = 69
16
freely
mf
3
p
3
f
mf
sim.
Helen
lei - sure and long co - ri - dors long co - ri - dors
Cl.
mp
Hp.
♩ = 63
19
p tranquillo
mp
Helen
long co - ri - dors of lo - tus bud furled on the
Cl.
p
mp
Hp.
mf

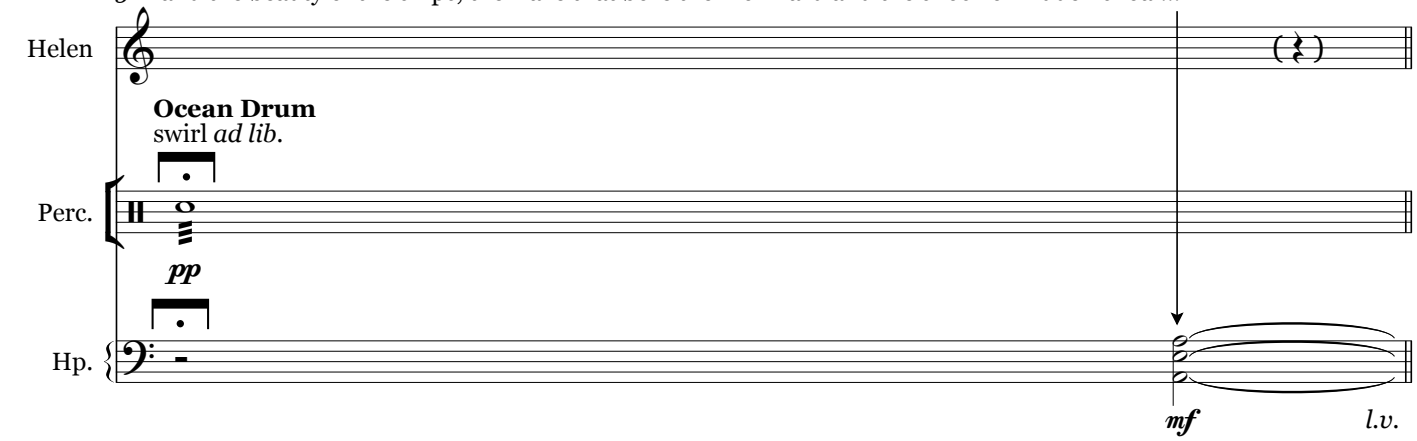

spoken
22
Helen
pil - lars and the lo - tus flow-er un- furled A - men (or
Cl.
Hp.
25
ord.
Zeus as we call him) brought me here fear no-thing of the fu - ture or the past
29
He God will guide you bring you to this place the old en-chant ment holds
♩ = 72



C ♩ = 60 Freely

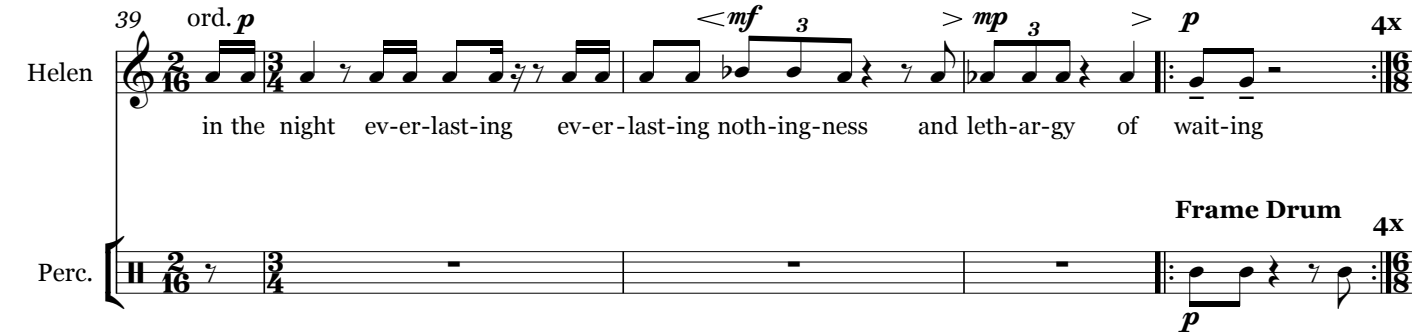
[*Helen, fed up with trying to read the Amen-script in the sand, violently swipes it aside with her hand.*]

spoken *in a sing-songy manner*
The potion is not poison, it is not Lethe and forgetfulness but everlasting memory, the glory and the beauty of the ships, the wave that bore them onward and the shock of hidden shoal...



♩ = 76 Sostenuto misterioso

[*Helen goes back to reading the picture-writing.*]

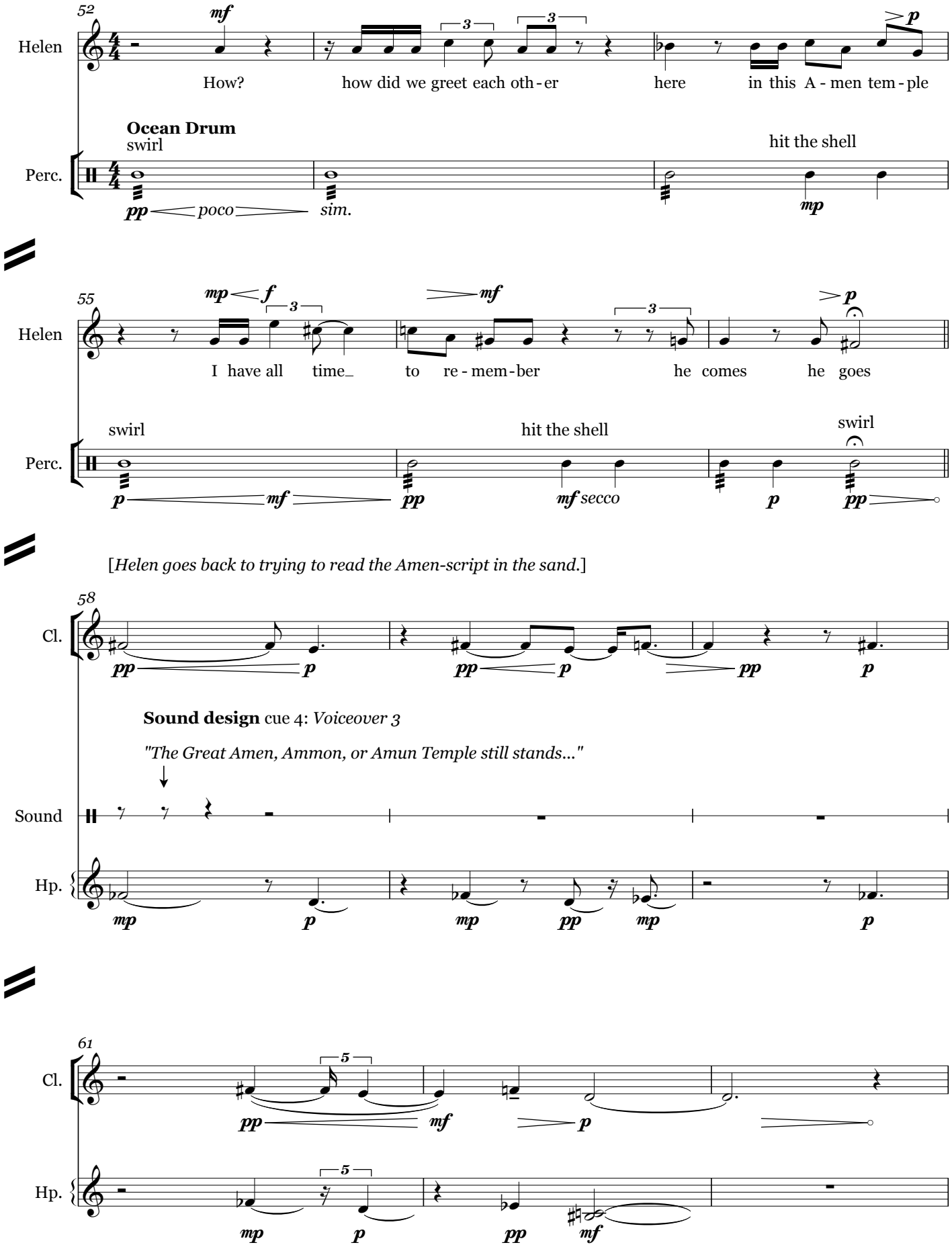


D
♩. = 42 Largo misterioso
44
Voice (Cl.)
Cl.
Voice (Perc.)
Perc.
Voice (Hp.)
Hp.
poco f
whisper (stacc.)
Let me for - get
Frame Drum with fingertips
circular scraping with fingernails
ord.
sim.
scrape up with fingernail
poco sfz

48
Voice (Cl.)
Cl.
Voice (Perc.)
Perc.
Voice (Hp.)
Hp.
whisper (stacc.)
let me be lost
ord.
sim.
ord.

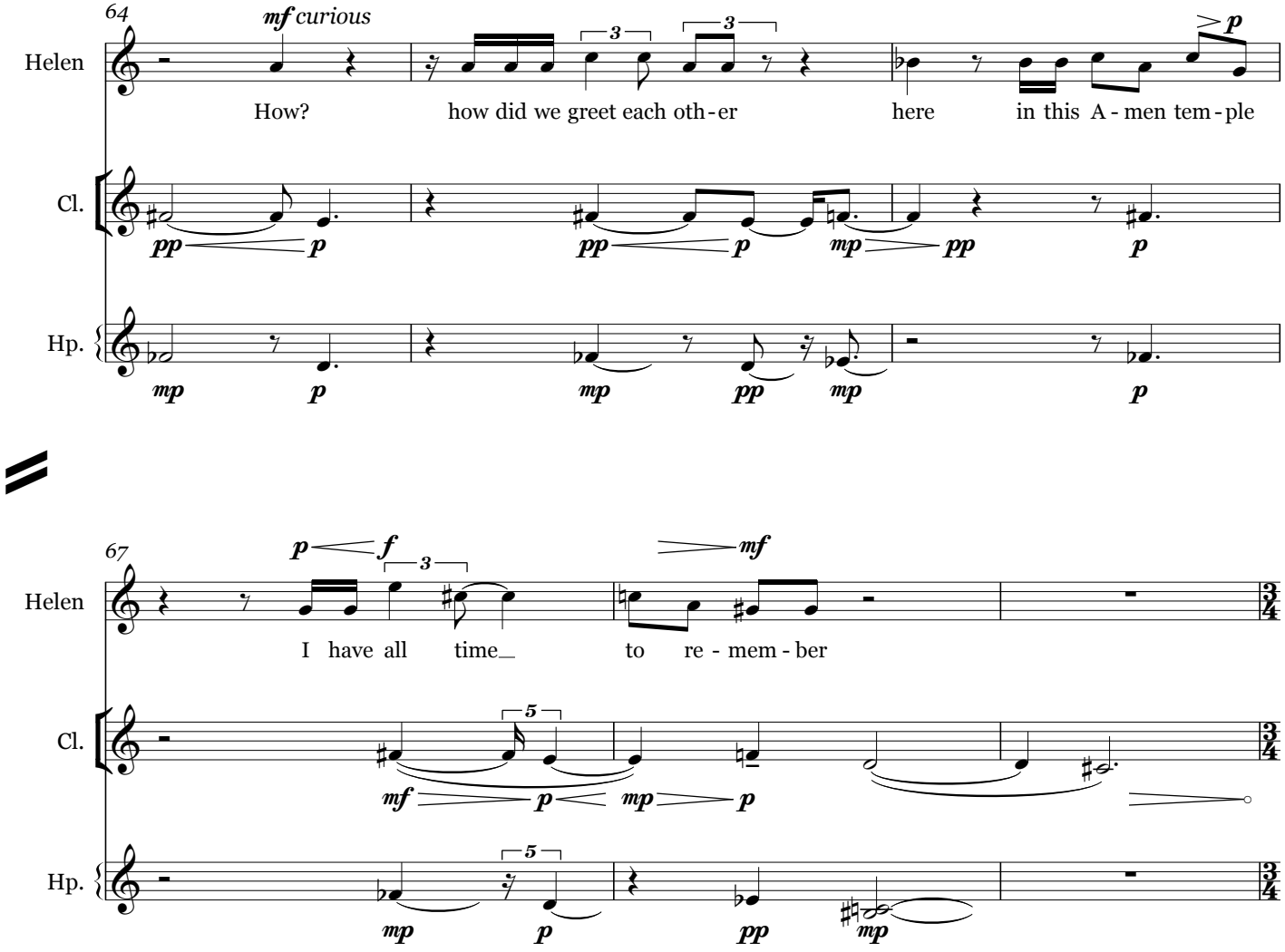
E ♪ = ♪ (♩ = 63)

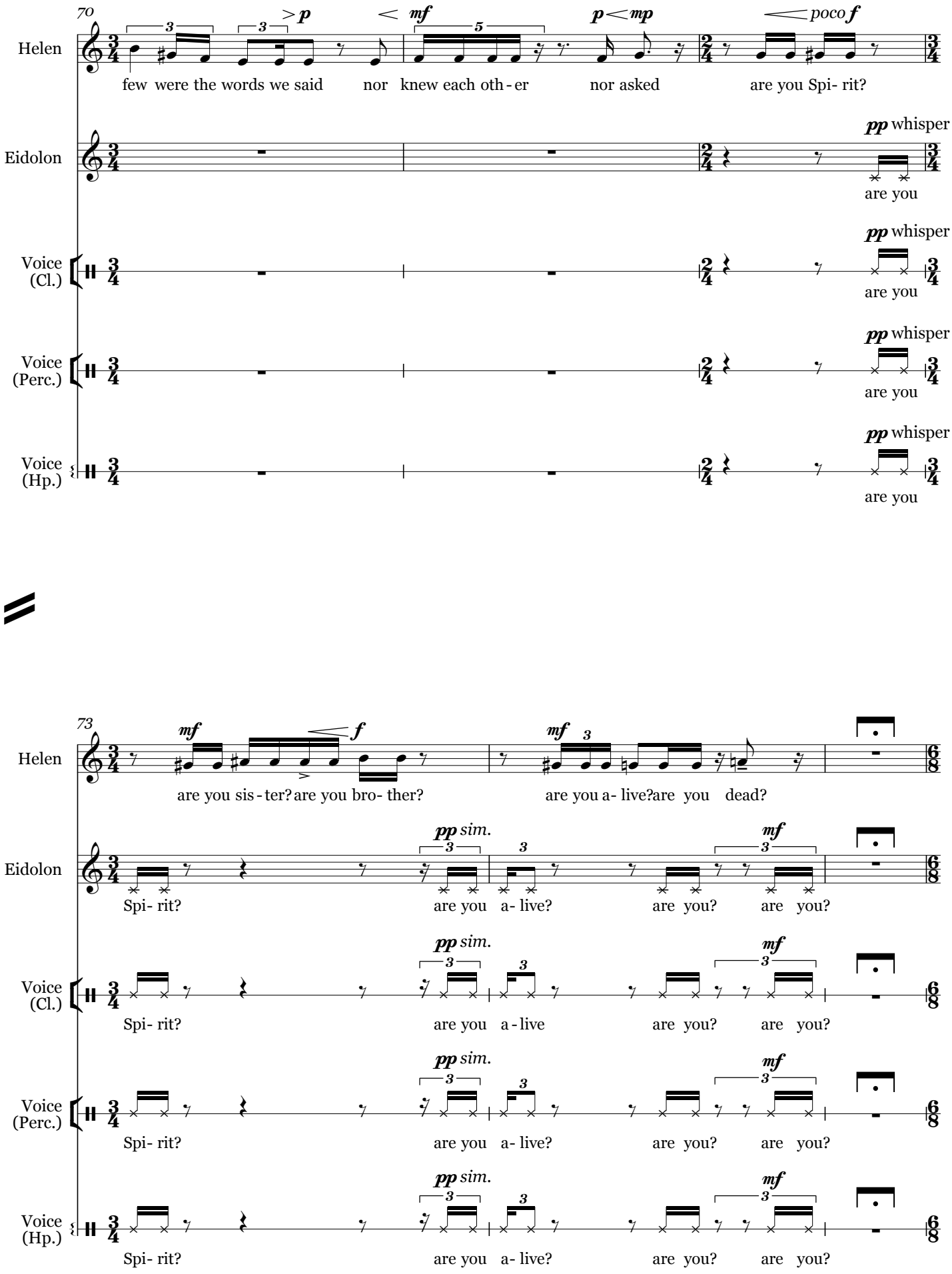
[*Helen perceives the shadow of Achilles behind the scrim and stands up to face it.*]



[*Helen goes back to trying to read the Amen-script in the sand.*]

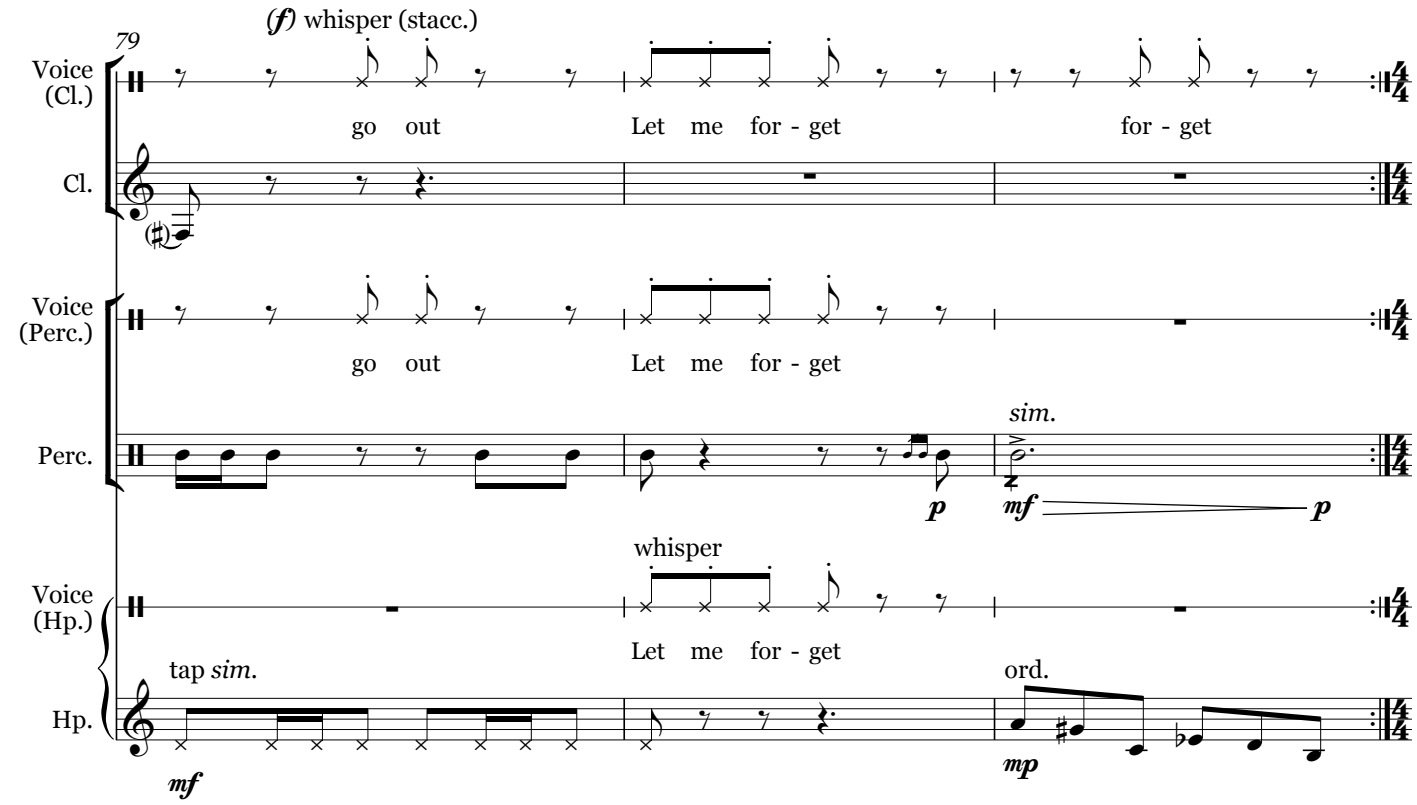
[*Helen again perceives the shadow of Achilles behind the scrim and moves quickly to face it.*]




70
Helen
few were the words we said
nor
knew each oth - er
nor asked
are you Spi- rit?
Eidolon
are you
Voice (Cl.)
are you
Voice (Perc.)
are you
Voice (Hp.)
are you
73
Helen
are you sis - ter? are you bro- ther?
are you a- live? are you dead?
Eidolon
Spi- rit?
are you
a- live?
are you?
are you?
Voice (Cl.)
Spi- rit?
are you
a - live
are you?
are you?
Voice (Perc.)
Spi- rit?
are you
a- live?
are you?
are you?
Voice (Hp.)
Spi- rit?
are you
a- live?
are you?
are you?

F ♪ = ♪ (♩. = 42) Largo Misterioso

[*The shadow of Achilles fades and Helen turns away dejectedly. She goes back to the picture-writing.*]



♪ = ♪ (♩ = 63)

[*Helen perceives the shadow of Achilles behind the scrim and jumps up to face it.*]

82

Helen *mf*

How? how did we greet each oth - er here in this

Ocean Drum
circular scraping

Perc. *poco*

G ♩ = 72 - 76 Brittle

[*Helen breaks off as if she were snapping out of a trance. She addresses an unseem army of Greek soldiers.*]

85

Helen *ff feroce* > *f*

A-las my broth-ers He-len did not walk up-on the ram-parts

Cl. *sfpp*

Resonant Metal

Seedpod Shaker

swirl

Perc. *sfz* *mp sempre* *sfz* *(mp)* *sfz*

Hp. *ffff sempre molto secco*

sim.

[*Eidolon appears across the stage.*]

88

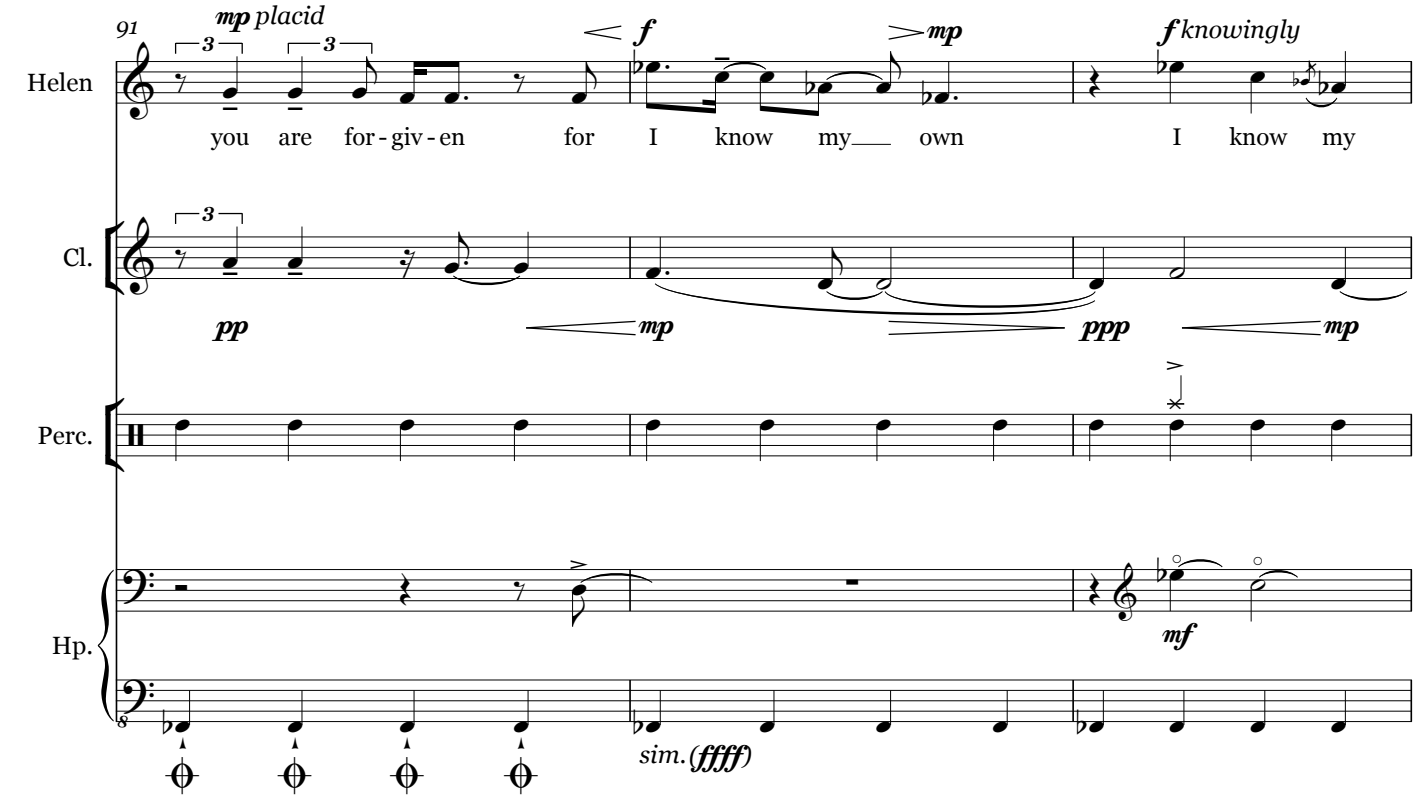
Helen *ff* *f* > *mf*

she whom you cursed was but the phan-tom and the shad-ow thrown of a re-flec-tion

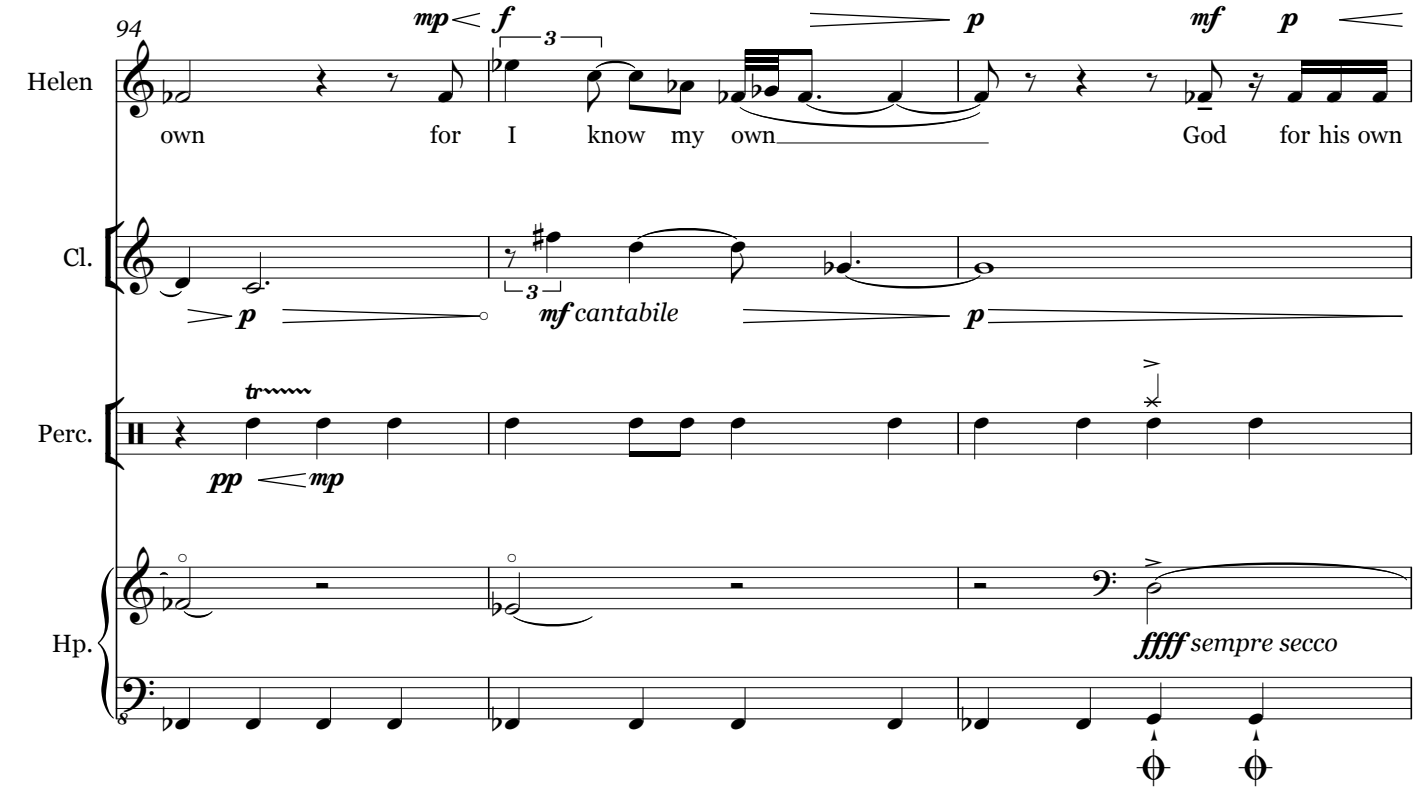
Cl. *p* *mp* *mf* *p*

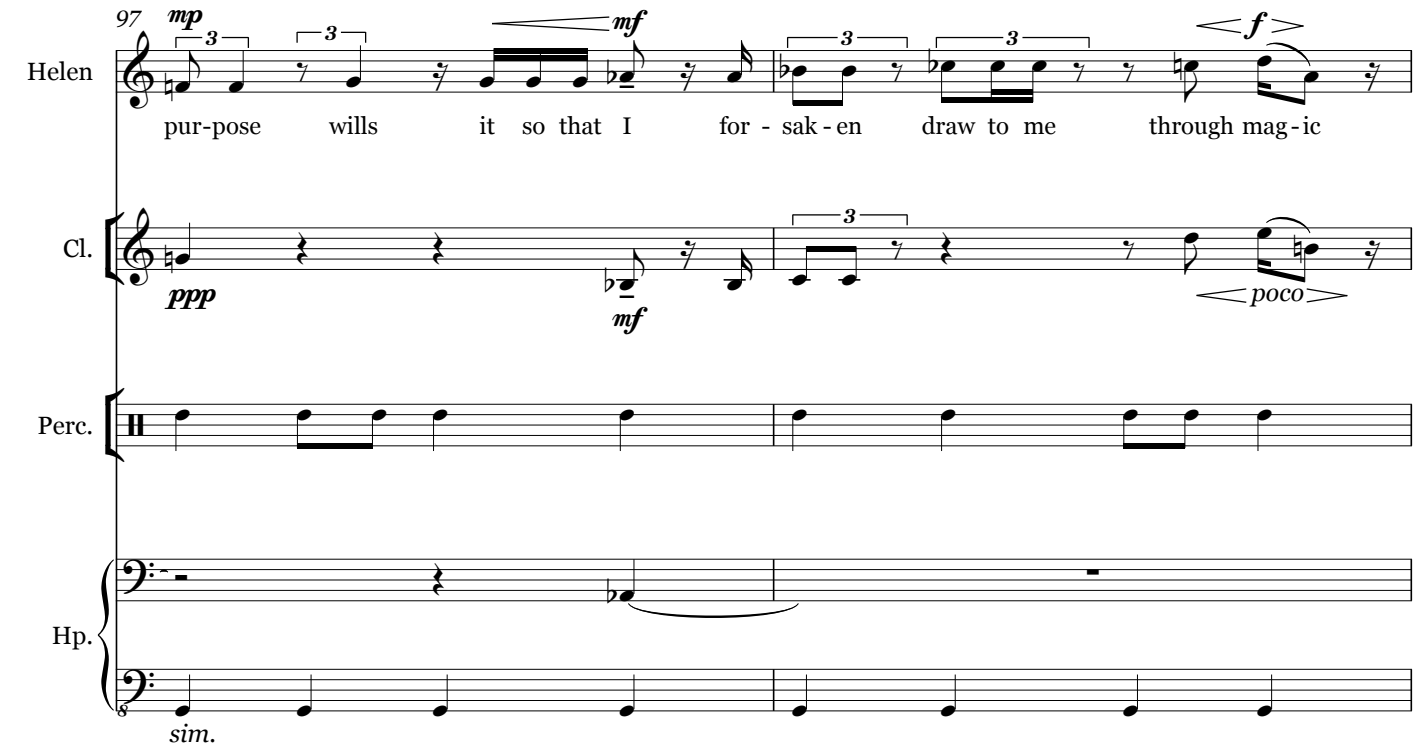
Perc. *sim.*

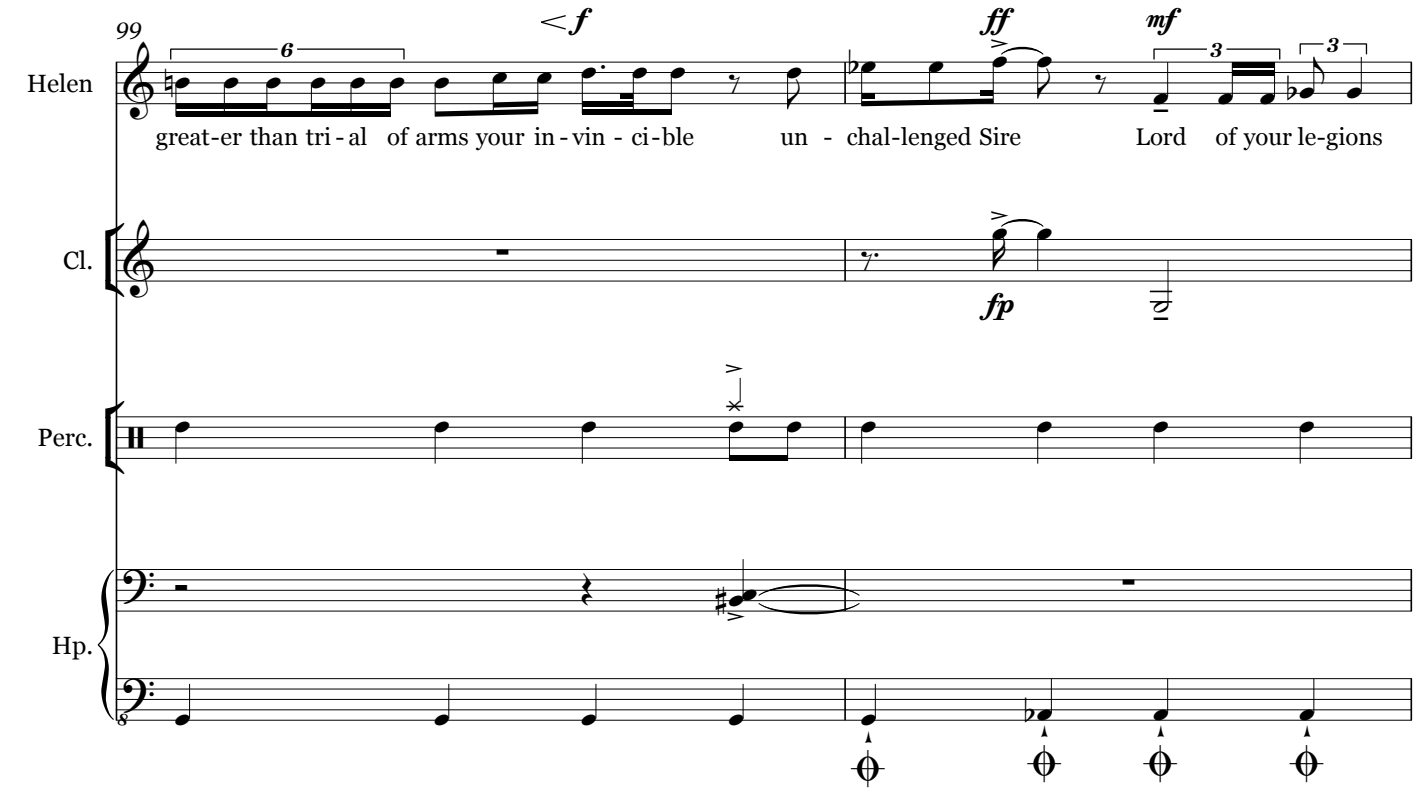
Hp.

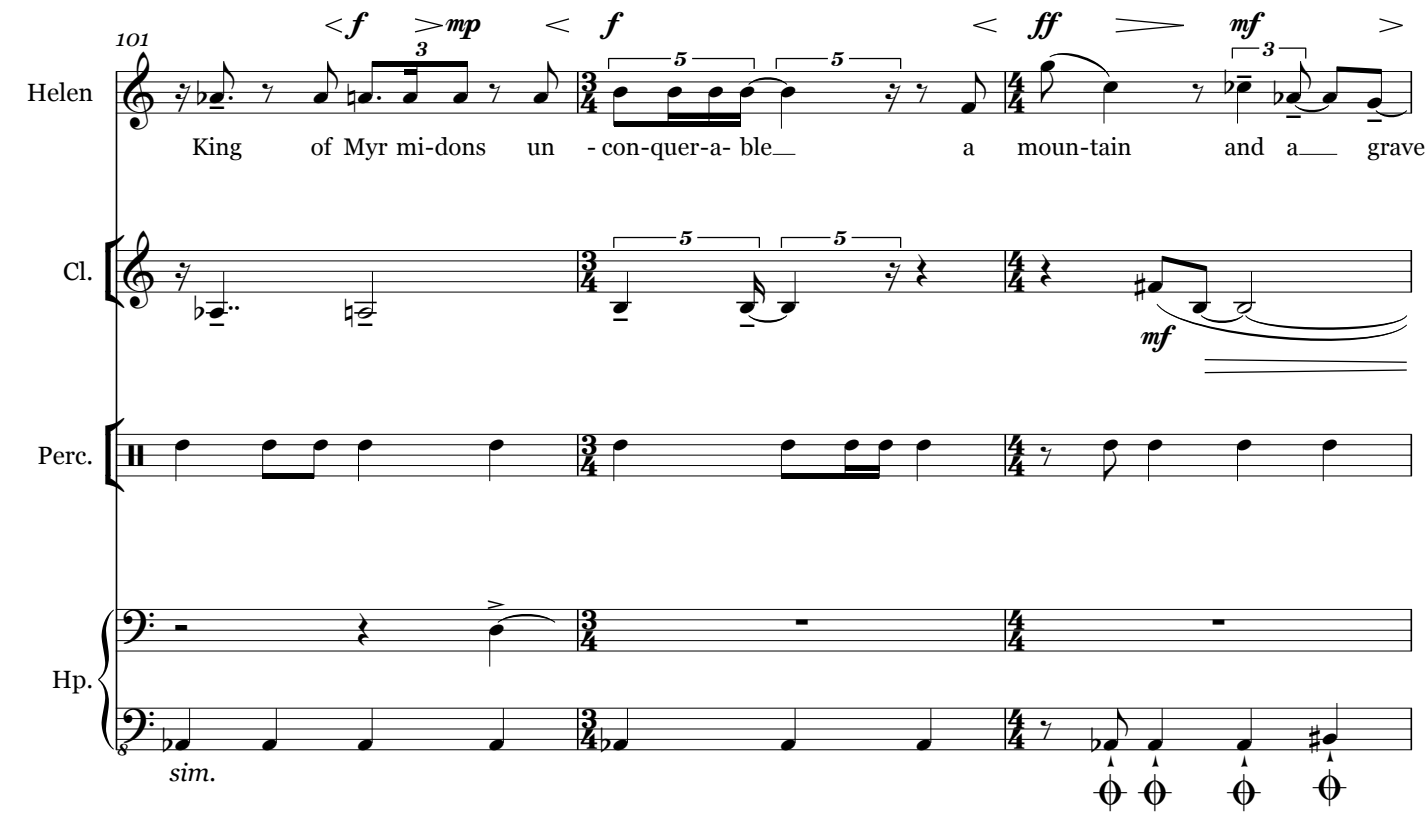


[*Eidolon disappears off stage.*]

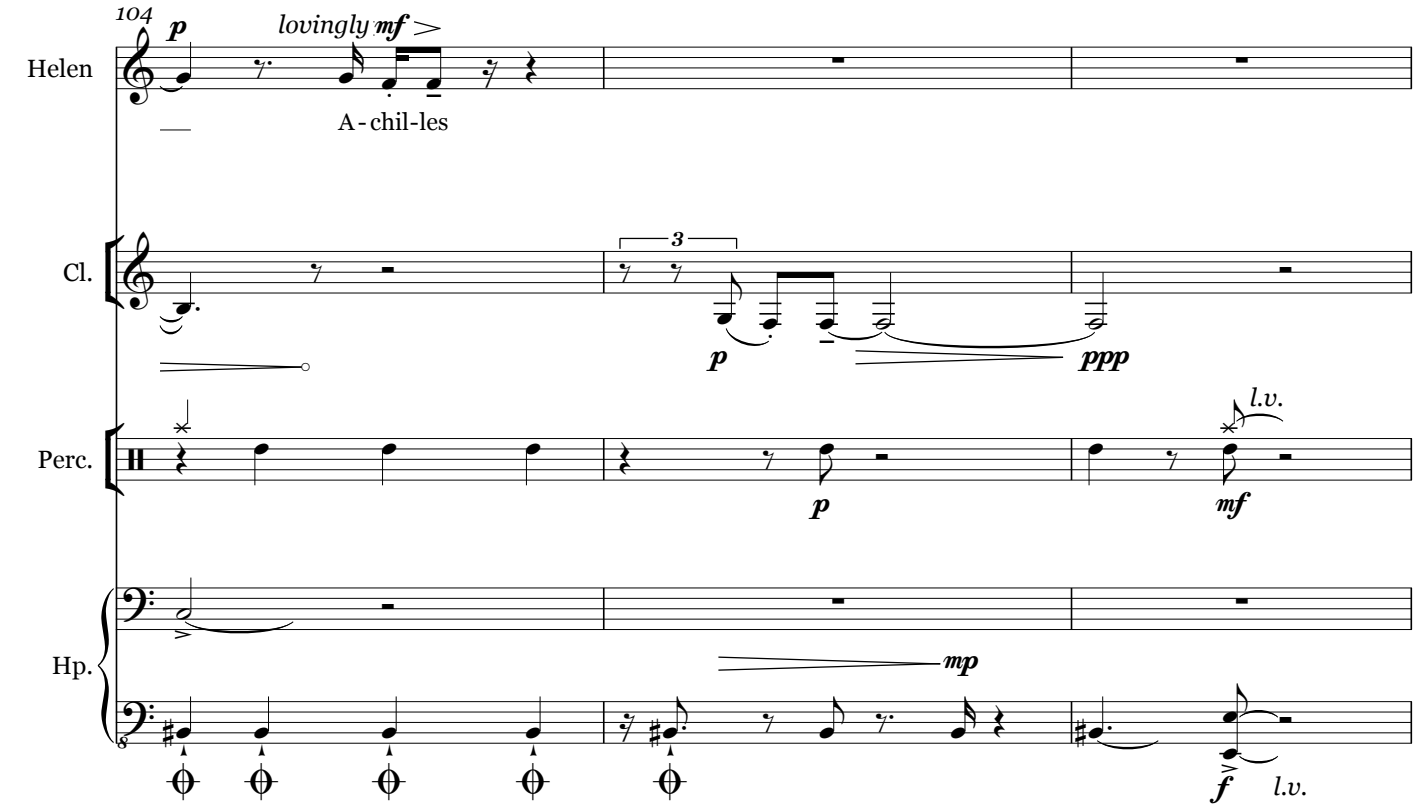


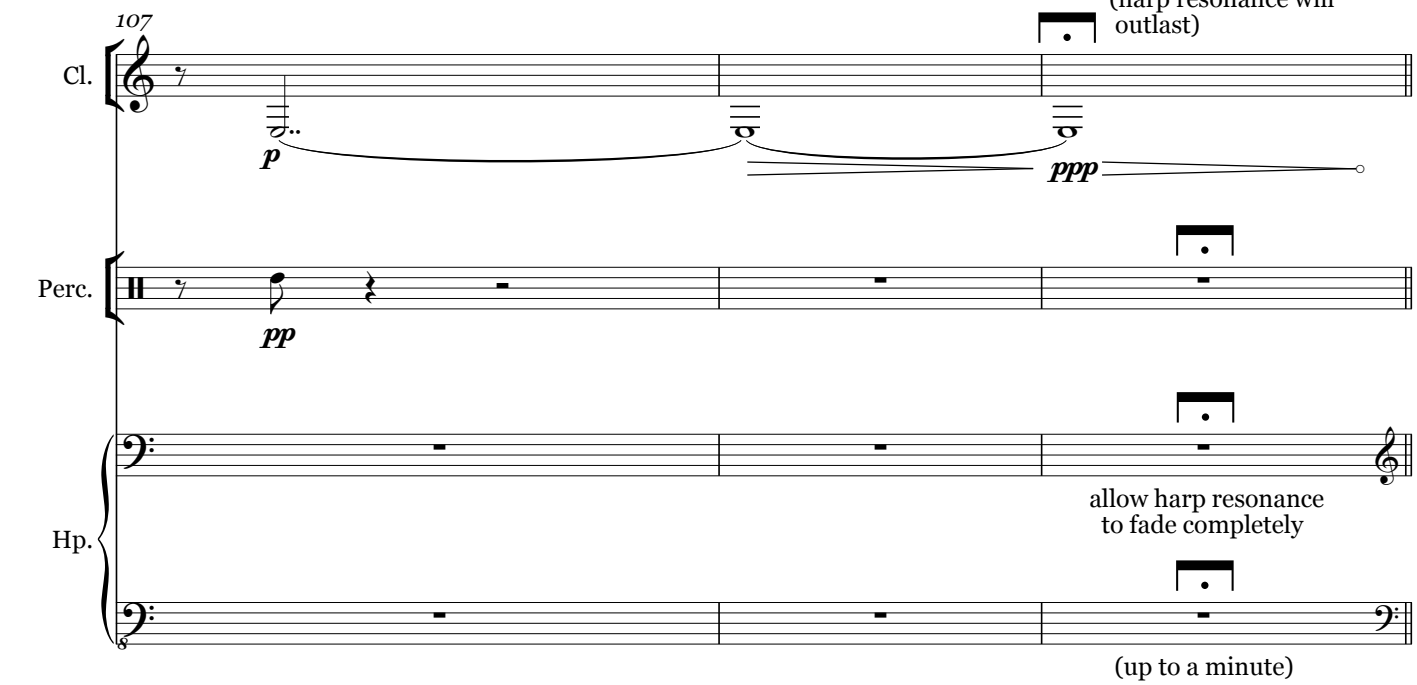

97
mp
mf
f
Helen
pur-pose wills it so that I for - sak - en draw to me through mag - ic
Cl.
ppp
mf
poco
Perc.
Hp.
sim.

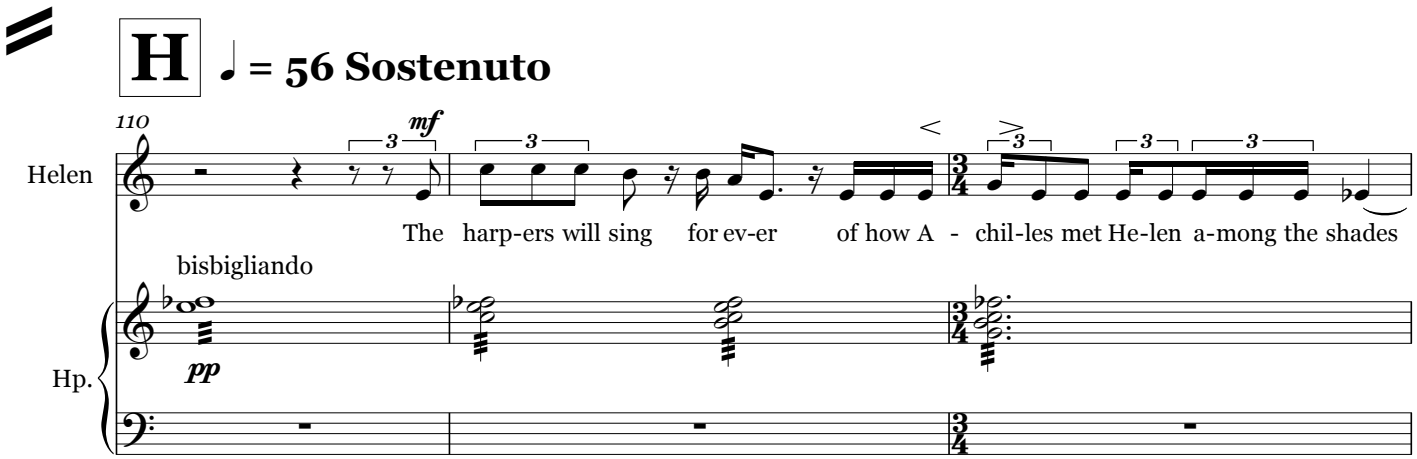

99
f
ff
mf
Helen
great-er than tri - al of arms your in - vin - ci - ble un - chal-lenged Sire Lord of your le-gions
Cl.
fp
Perc.
Hp.

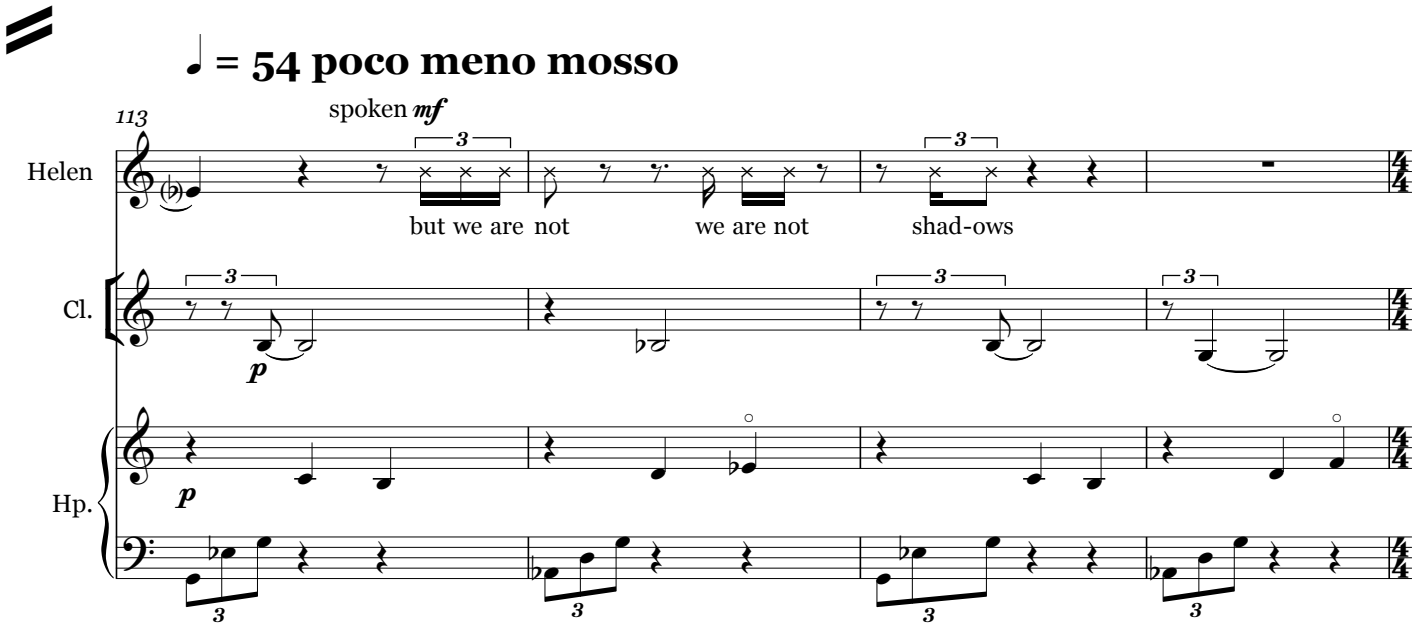


[*Helen extends her arms to Achilles who emerges, limping.*
He avoids eye contact with Helen and proceeds to slowly begin gathering imaginary sticks from off the floor.]




hold as long as possible without reattacking (harp resonance will outlast)
107
Cl.
p
ppp
Perc.
pp
Hp.
allow harp resonance to fade completely
(up to a minute)


H
♩ = 56 Sostenuto
110
Helen
mf
The harp-ers will sing for ev-er of how A - chil-les met He-len a-mong the shades
bisbigliando
pp
Hp.


♩ = 54 poco meno mosso
113
spoken mf
Helen
but we are not we are not shad-ows
Cl.
p
Hp.
p

♩ = 60 Floating

117

Helen

we are not shad- ows we are not shad-ows

Cl.

Hp.

(C)

120

Helen

we_ are not shad ows as we walk heel_ and sole_ leave our san dal prints in the

Cl.

Hp.

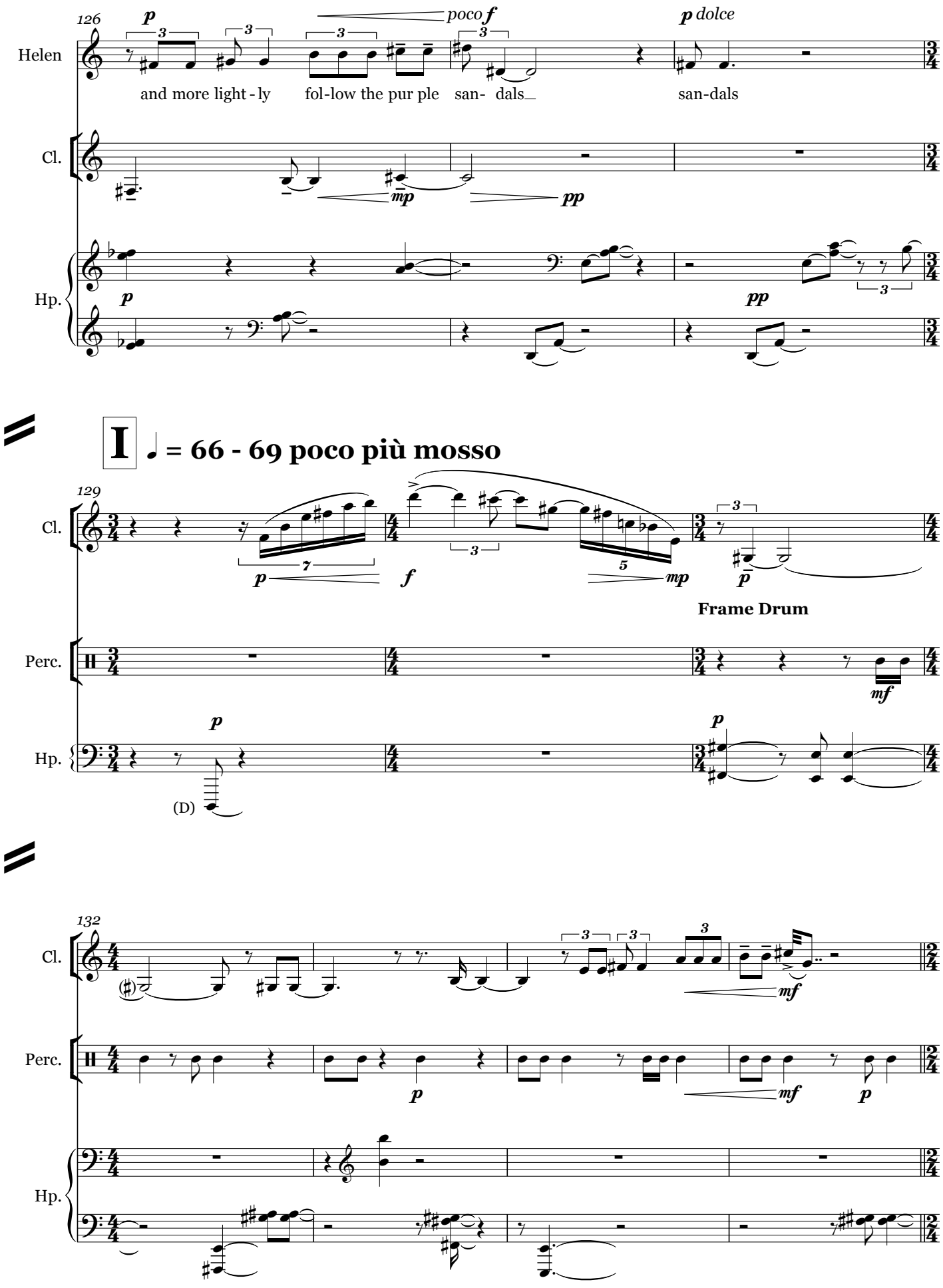
123

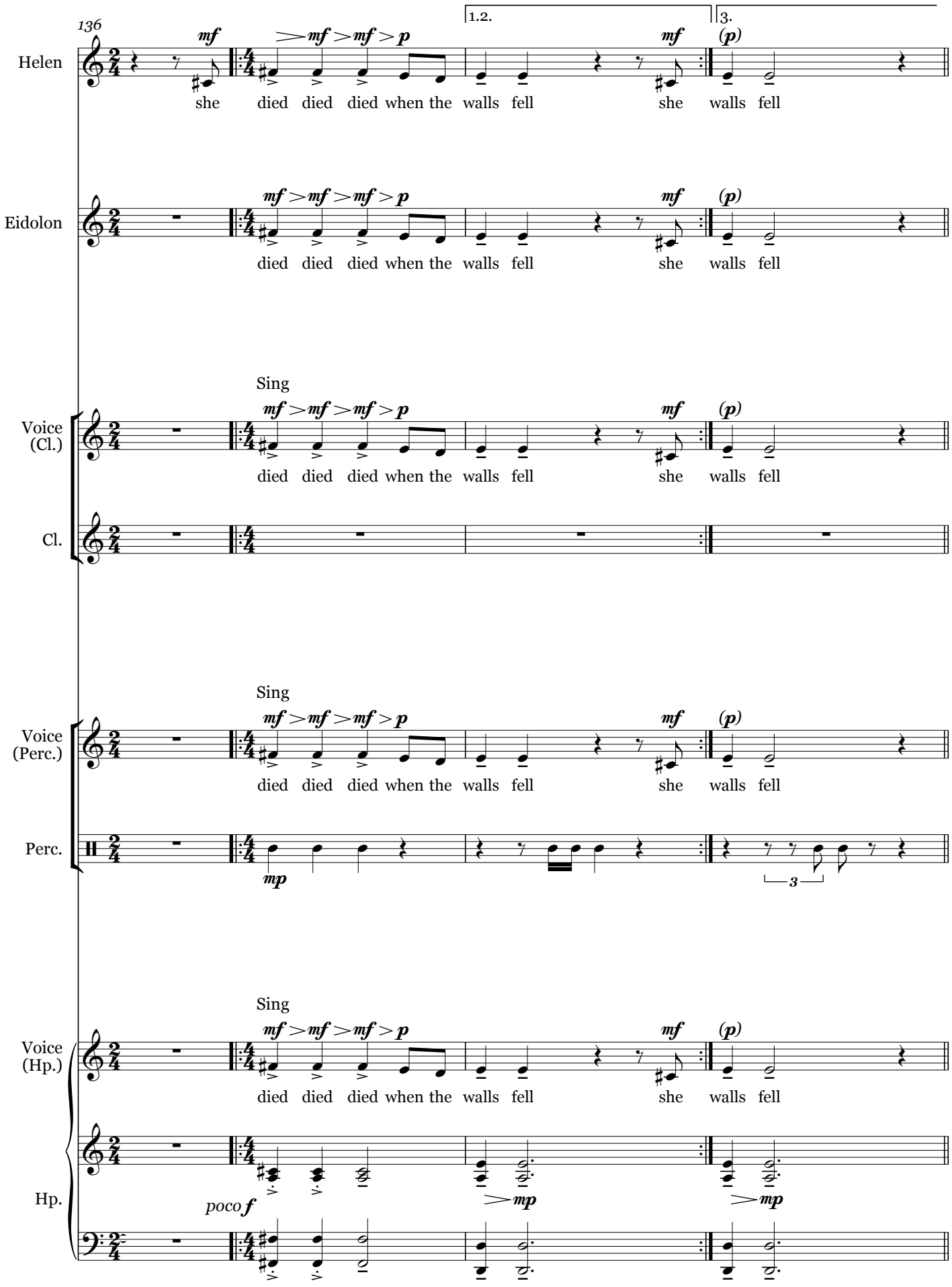
Helen

sand_ though the wound-ed heel treads light-ly light-ly

Cl.

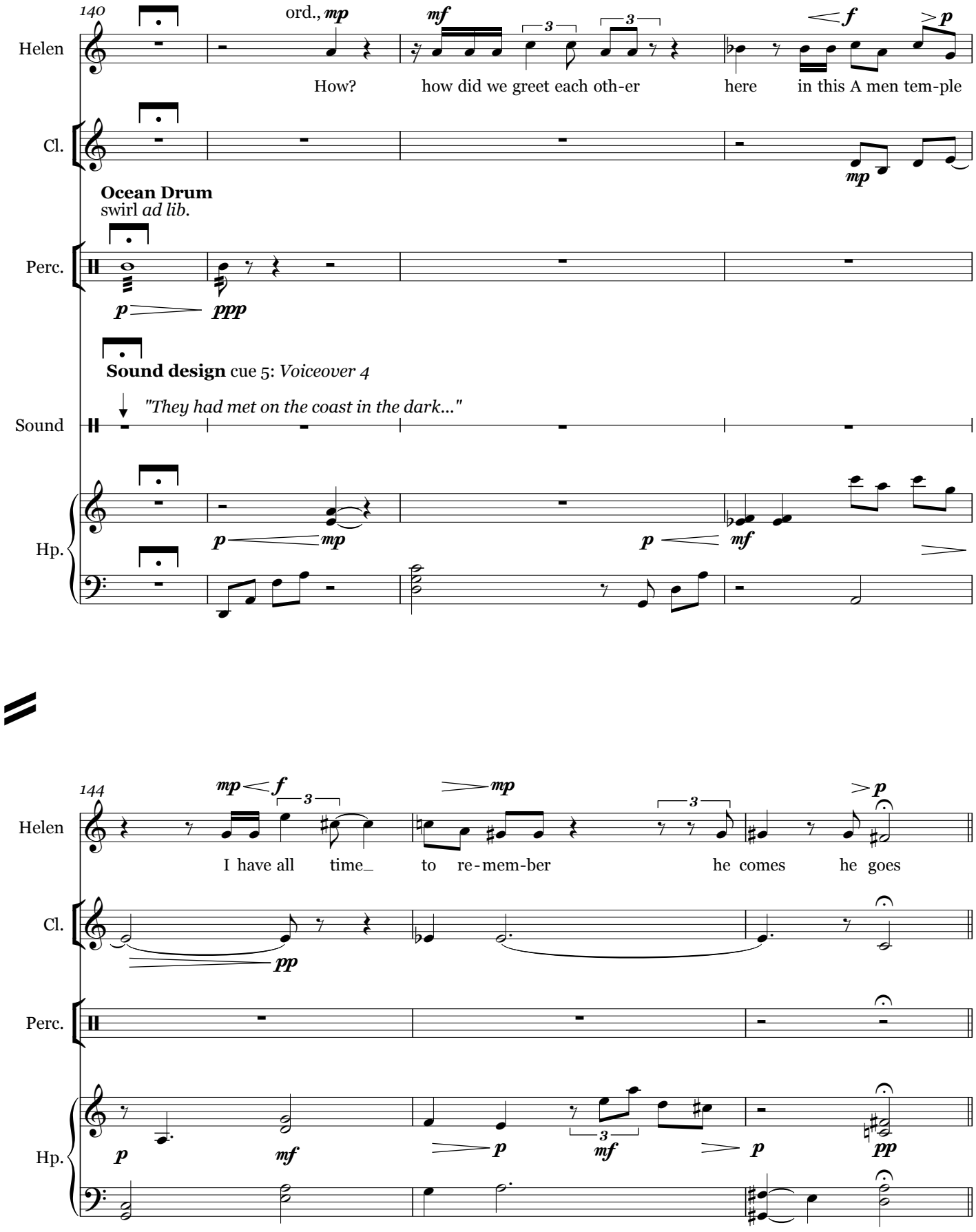
Hp.

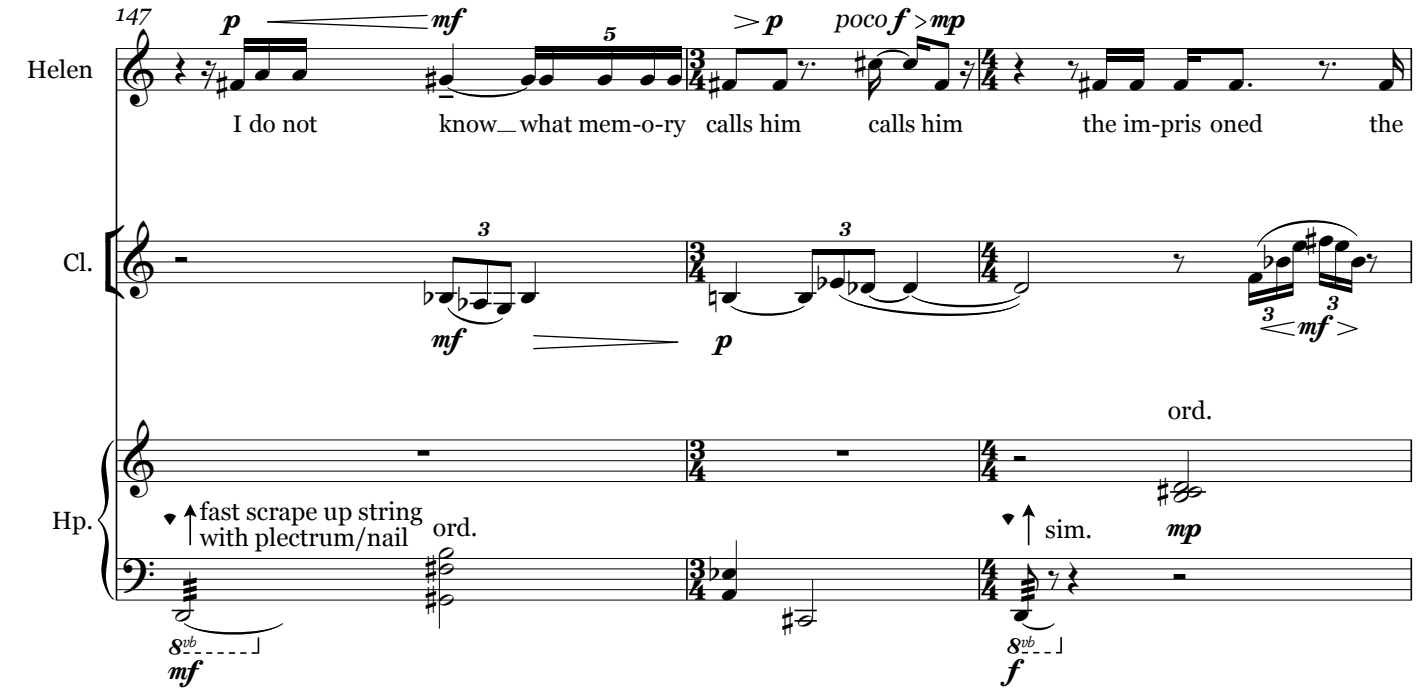

126
Helen
Cl.
Hp.
p
poco f
p dolce
and more light - ly
fol-low the pur ple
san- dals
san-dals
mp
pp
I
♩ = 66 - 69 poco più mosso
129
f
mp
Frame Drum
Perc.
mf
(D)
132
mf

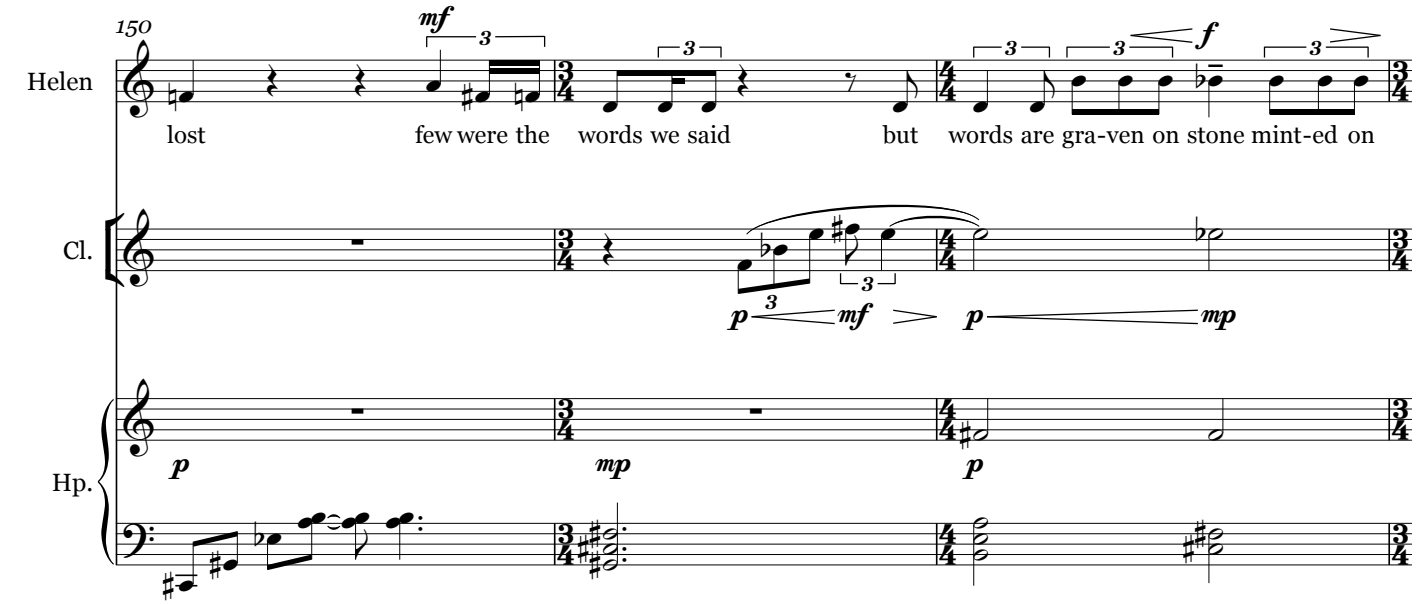

136
1.2.
3.
Helen
mf
>mf >mf >p
she died died died when the walls fell she walls fell
(p)
Eidolon
mf >mf >mf >p
died died died when the walls fell she walls fell
Sing
Voice (Cl.)
Cl.
Voice (Perc.)
Perc.
mp
3
Voice (Hp.)
Hp.
poco f
>mp

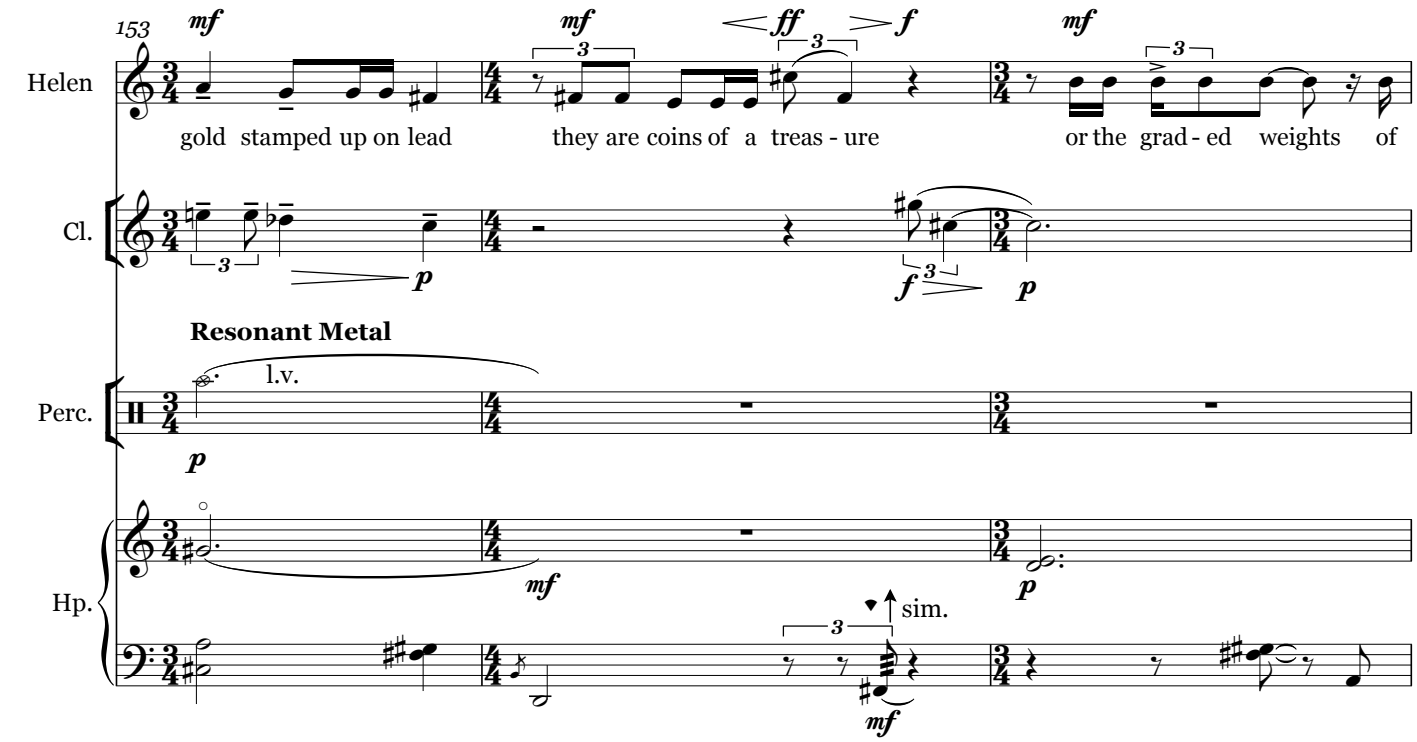
J ♩ = 63 Adagio

[*Achilles begins to assemble the sticks into a campfire structure in the middle of the stage.*]

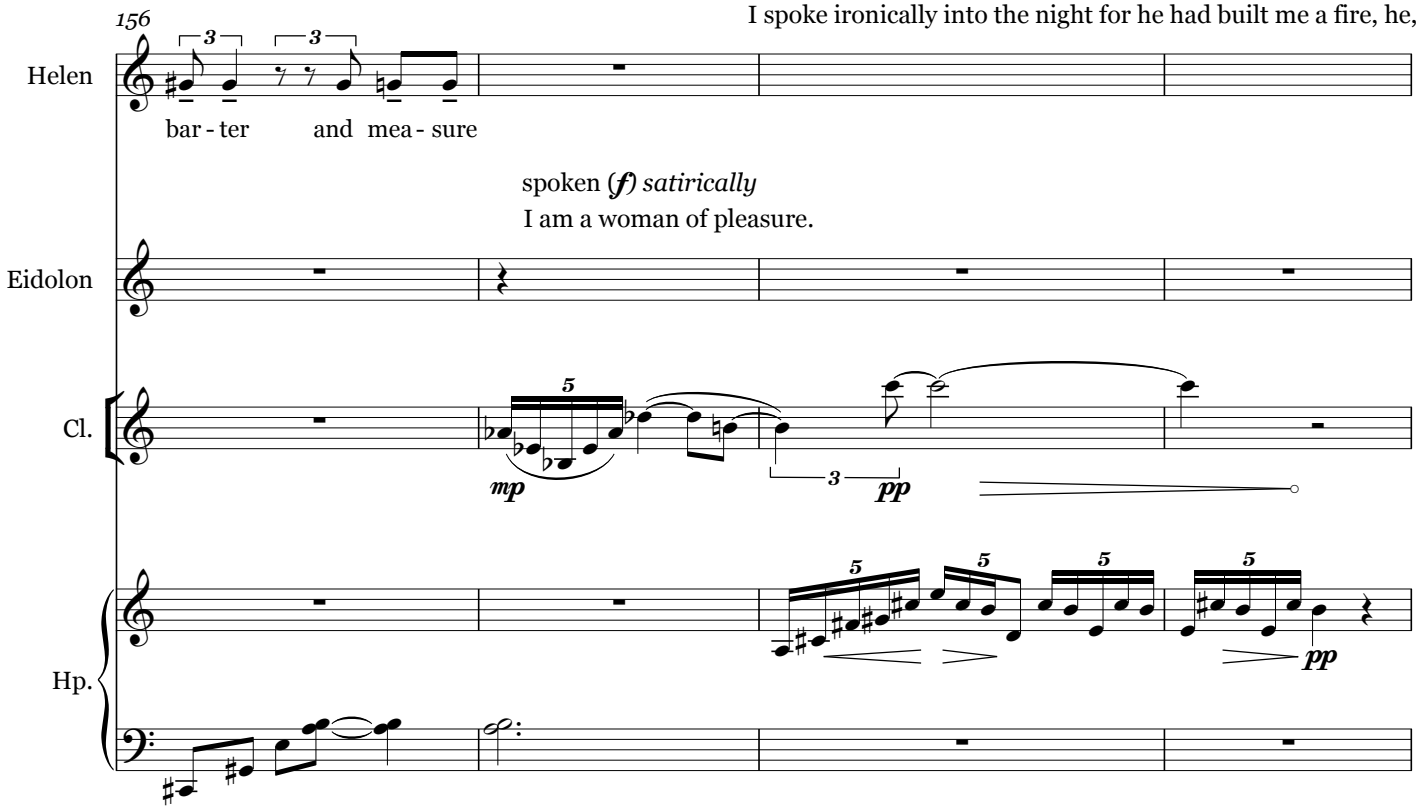


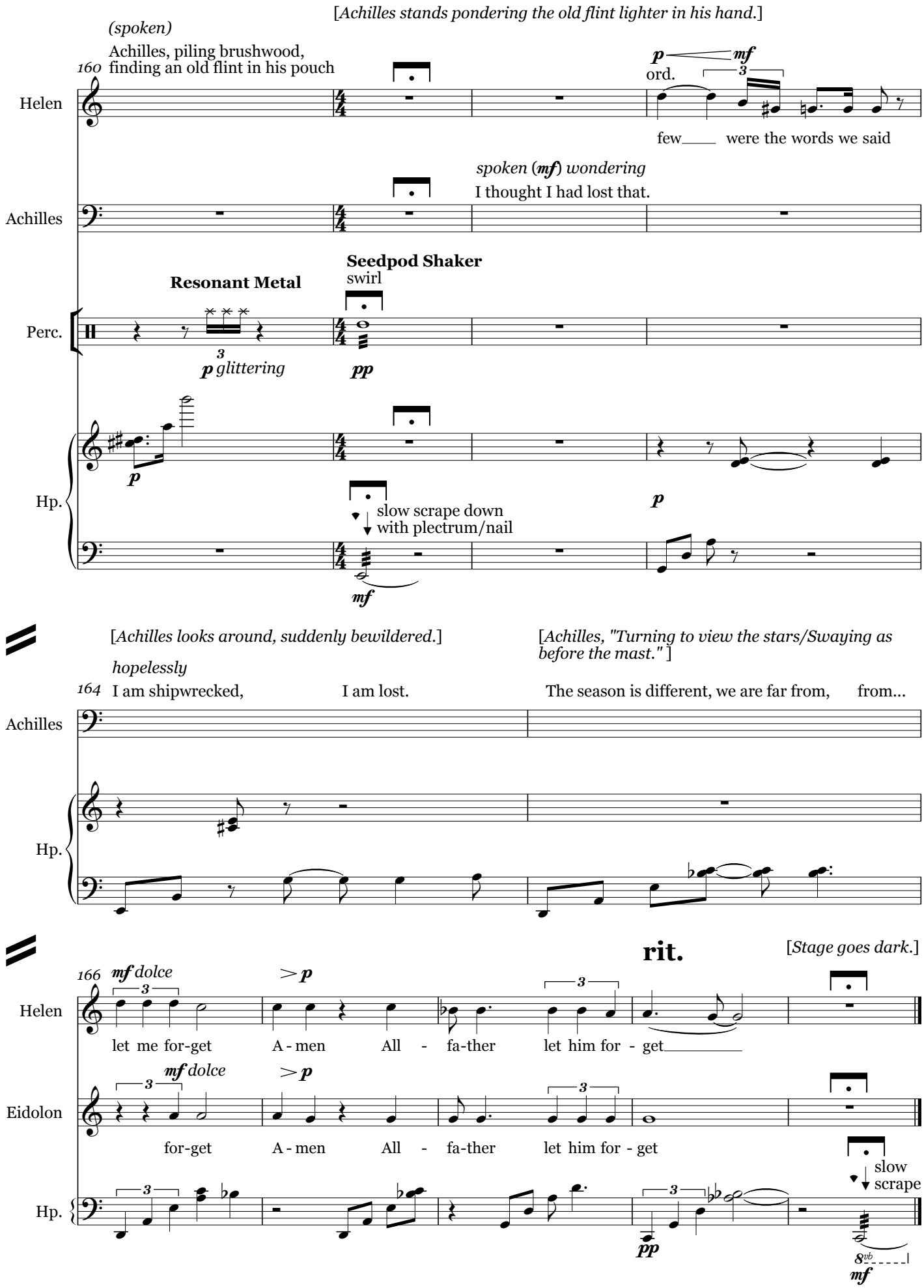

147
Helen
I do not know what mem-o-ry calls him calls him the im-pris oned the
Cl.
Hp.
fast scrape up string with plectrum/nail
ord.
sim.
ord.


150
Helen
lost few were the words we said but words are gra-ven on stone mint-ed on
Cl.
Hp.



[*Eidolon struts on stage.*]




[Achilles stands pondering the old flint lighter in his hand.]
(spoken)
Achilles, piling brushwood,
finding an old flint in his pouch

ord.
few were the words we said
spoken (mf) wondering
I thought I had lost that.

Resonant Metal
Seedpod Shaker
swirl

p glittering

slow scrape down
with plectrum/nail

[Achilles looks around, suddenly bewildered.]
[Achilles, "Turning to view the stars/Swaying as before the mast."]
hopelessly

I am shipwrecked, I am lost.
The season is different, we are far from, from...

rit.
[Stage goes dark.]

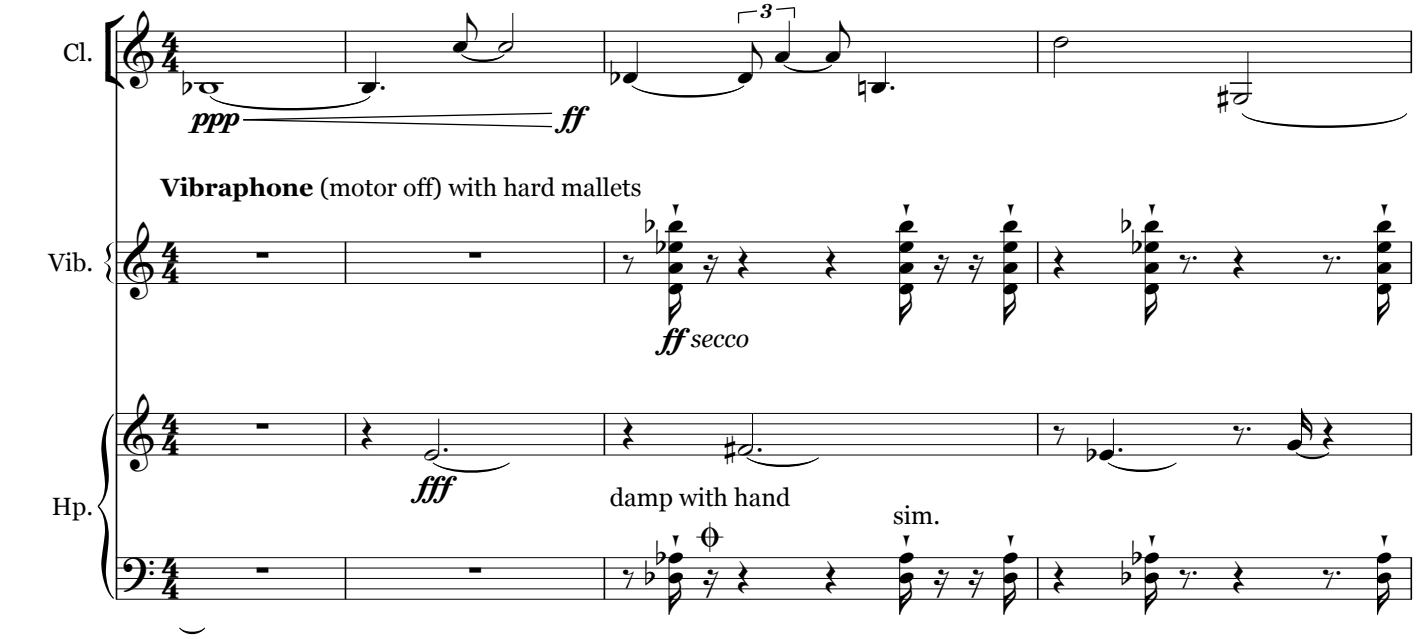
let me for-get A - men All - fa-ther let him for - get

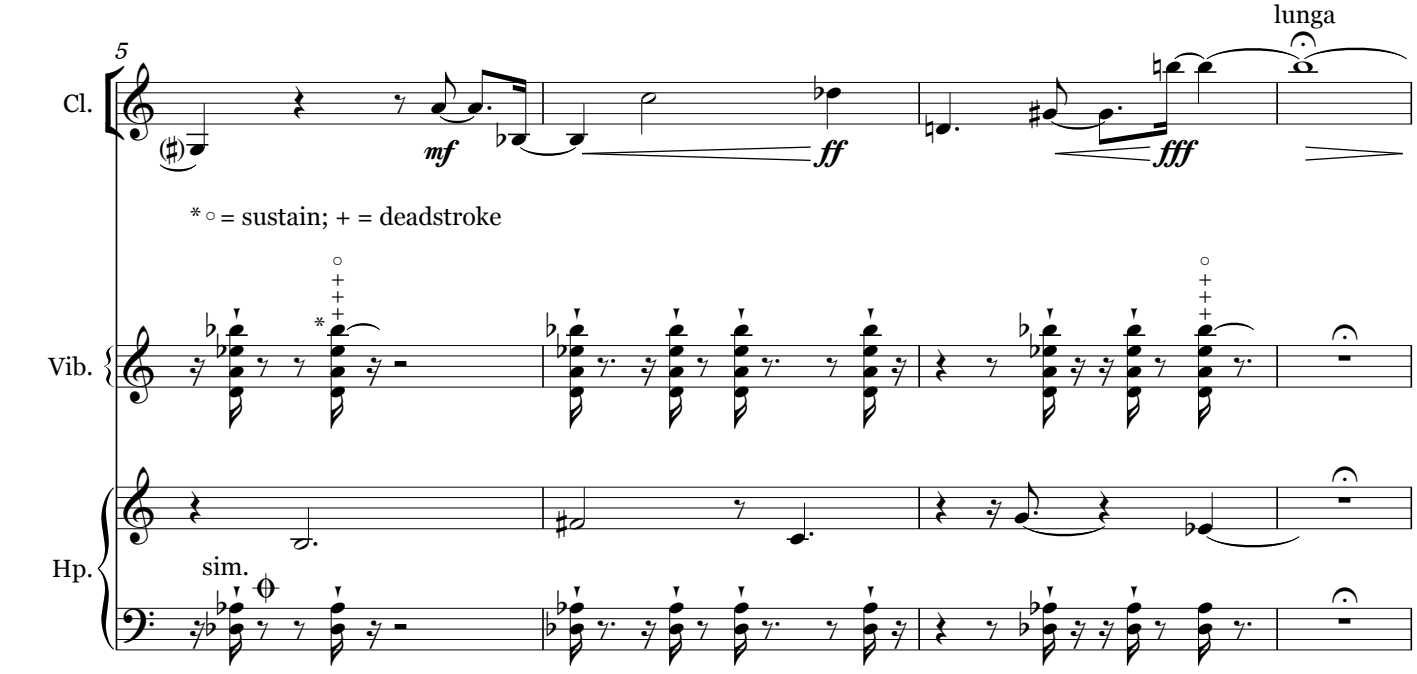
for-get A - men All - fa-ther let him for - get
slow
scrape

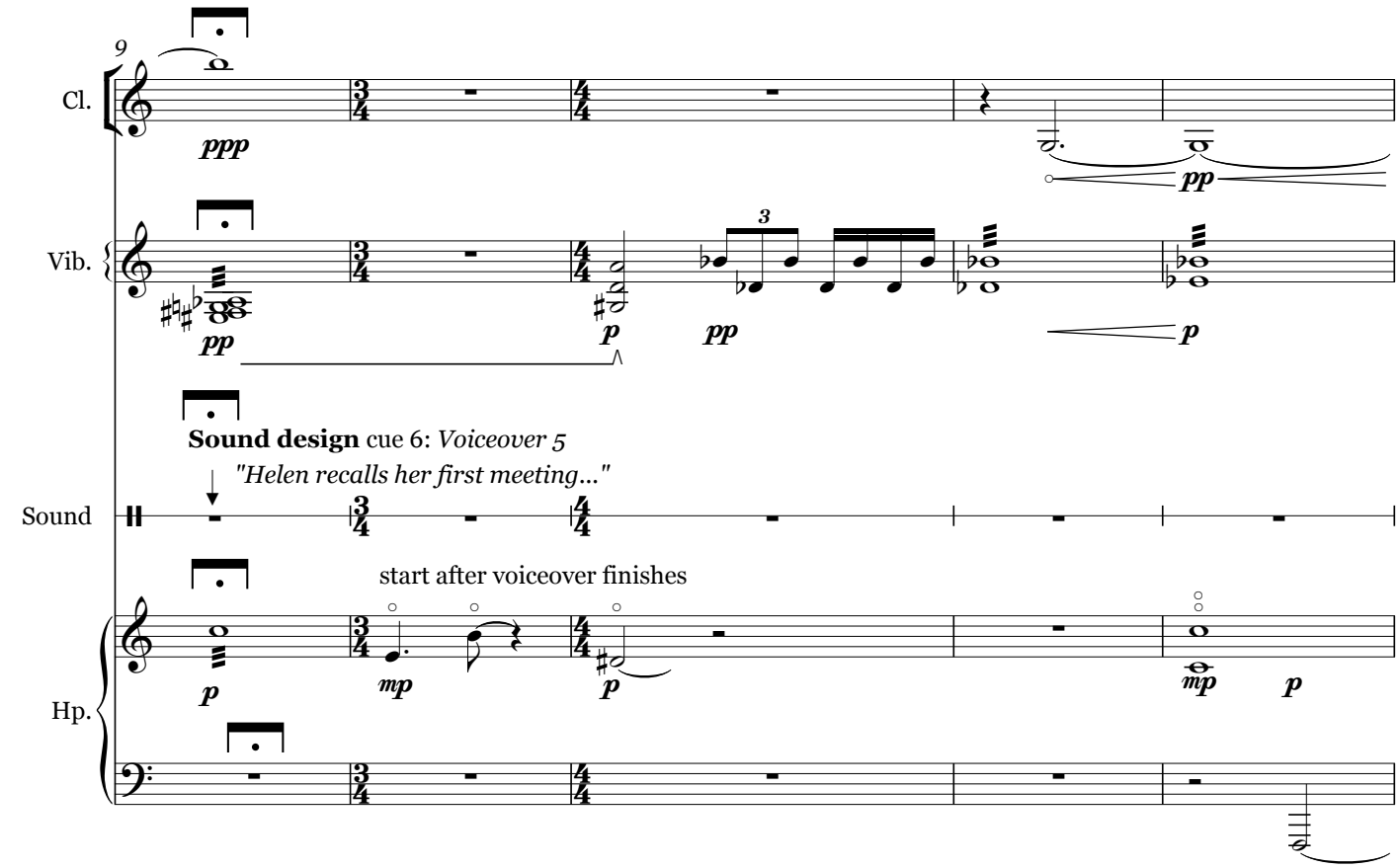
II. The Beach

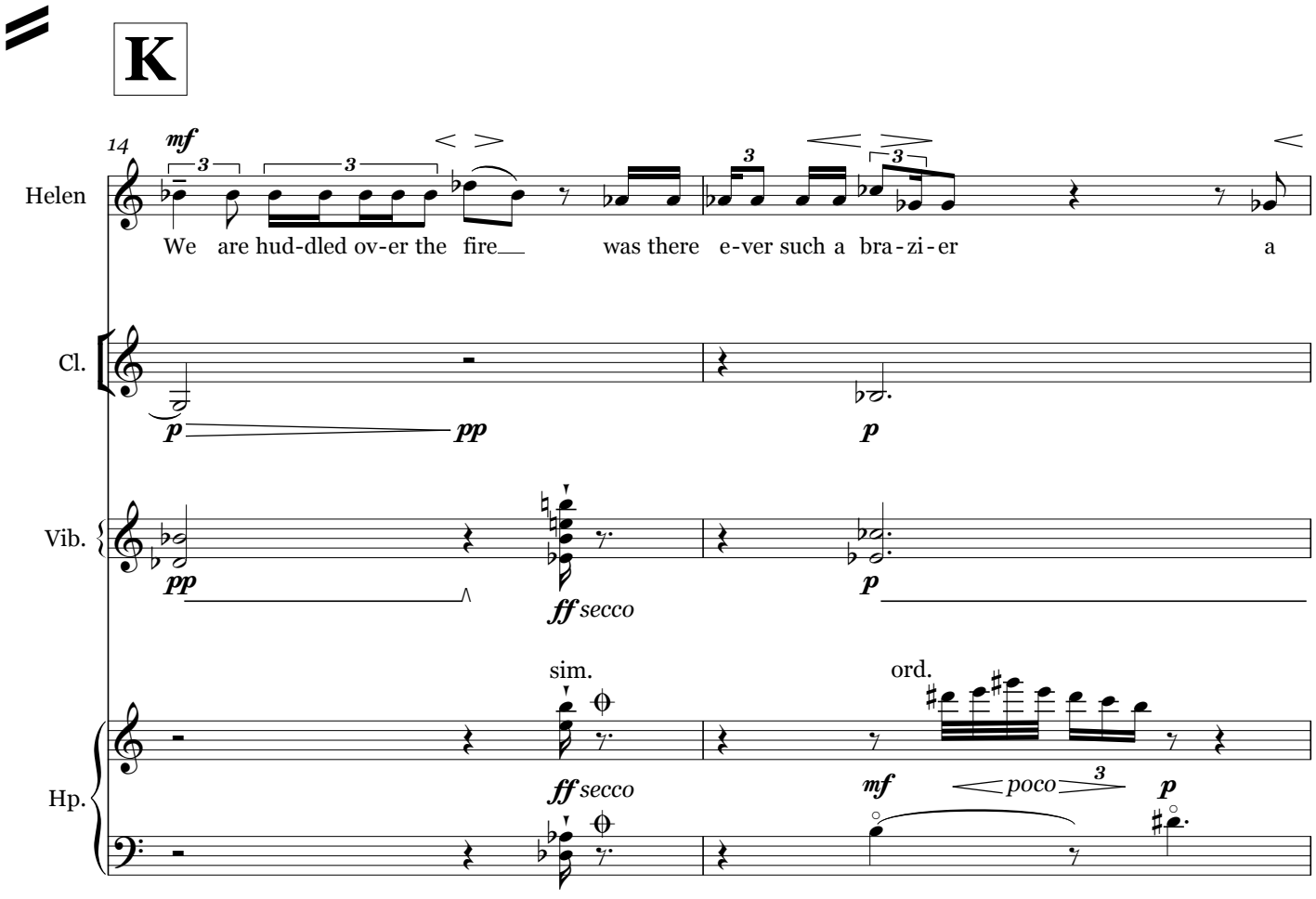
[*Dim flickering light. Helen and Achilles huddle around a fire.*]

♩ = 60 Aggressive

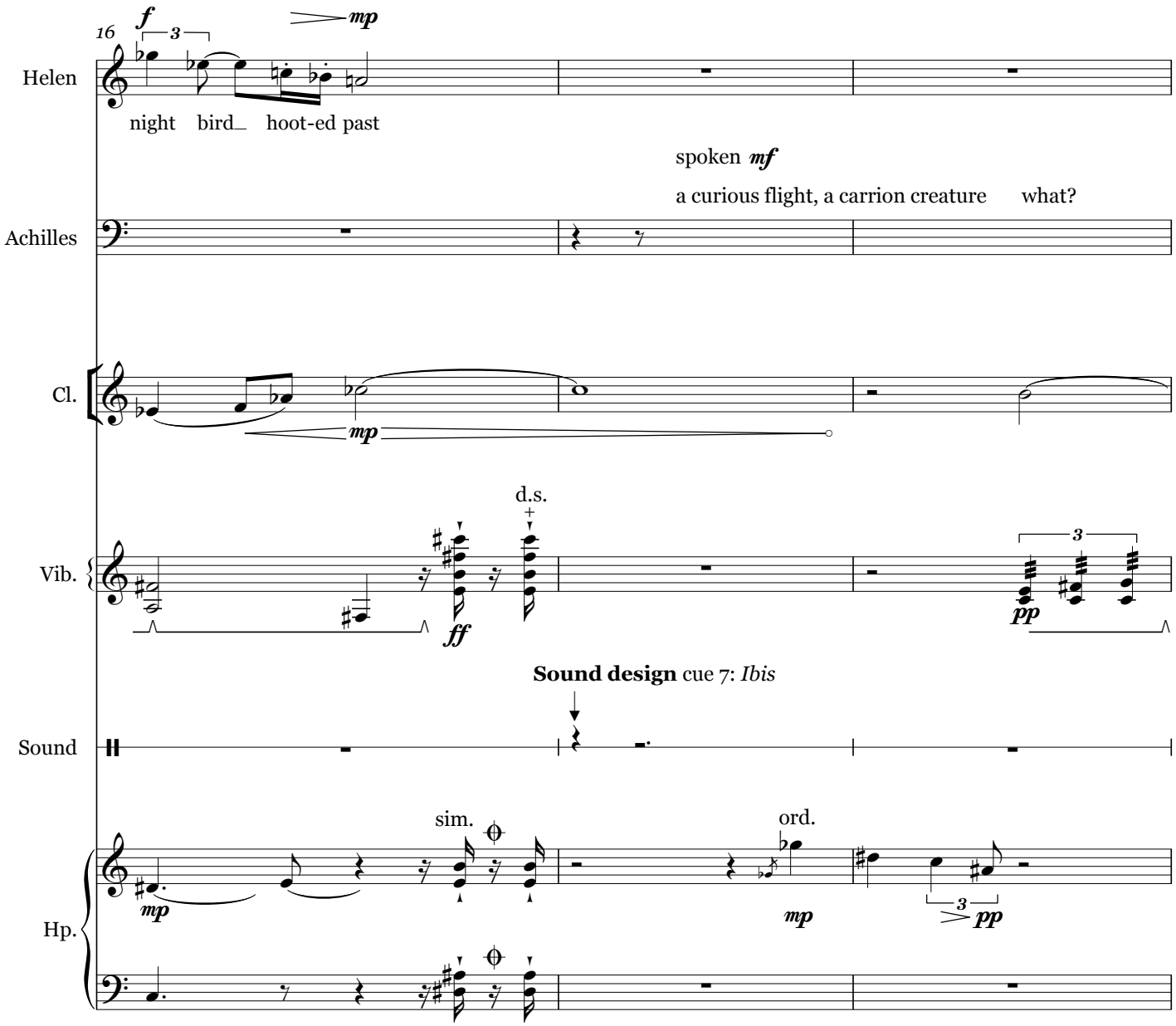


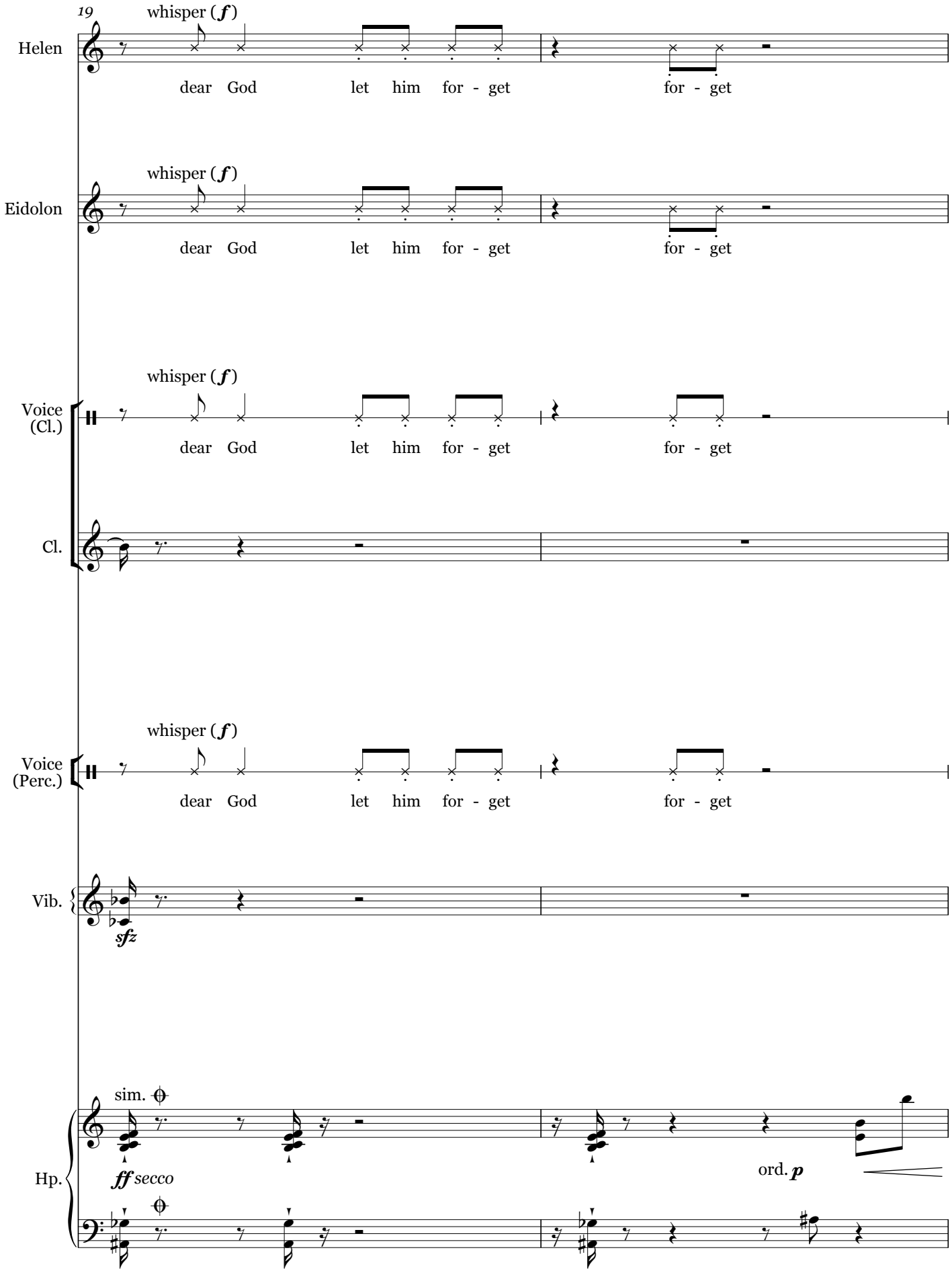


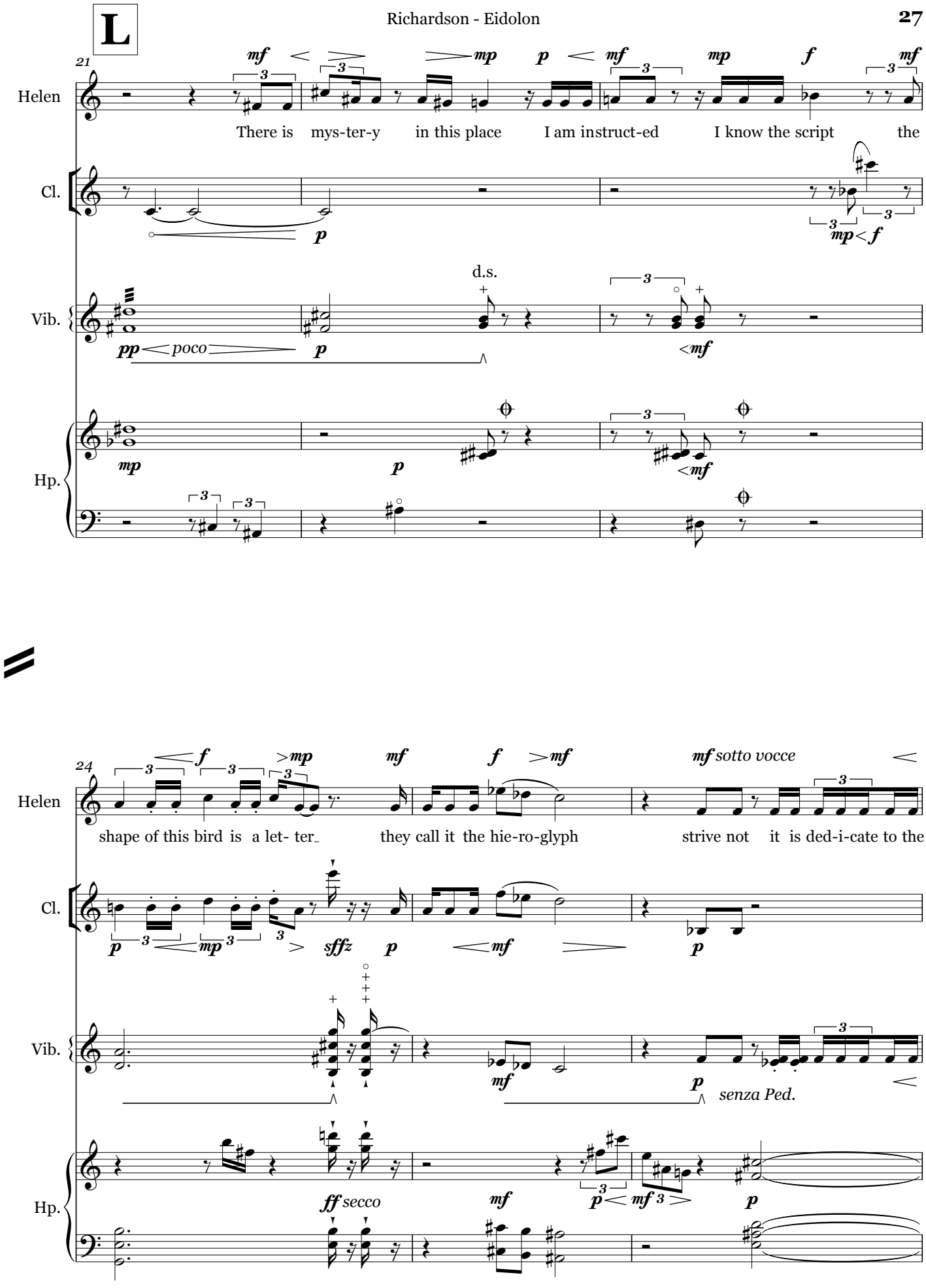

9
Cl.
ppp
pp
Vib.
pp
p
pp
p
Sound design cue 6: Voiceover 5
"Helen recalls her first meeting..."
Sound
start after voiceover finishes
Hp.
p
mp
p
mp
p

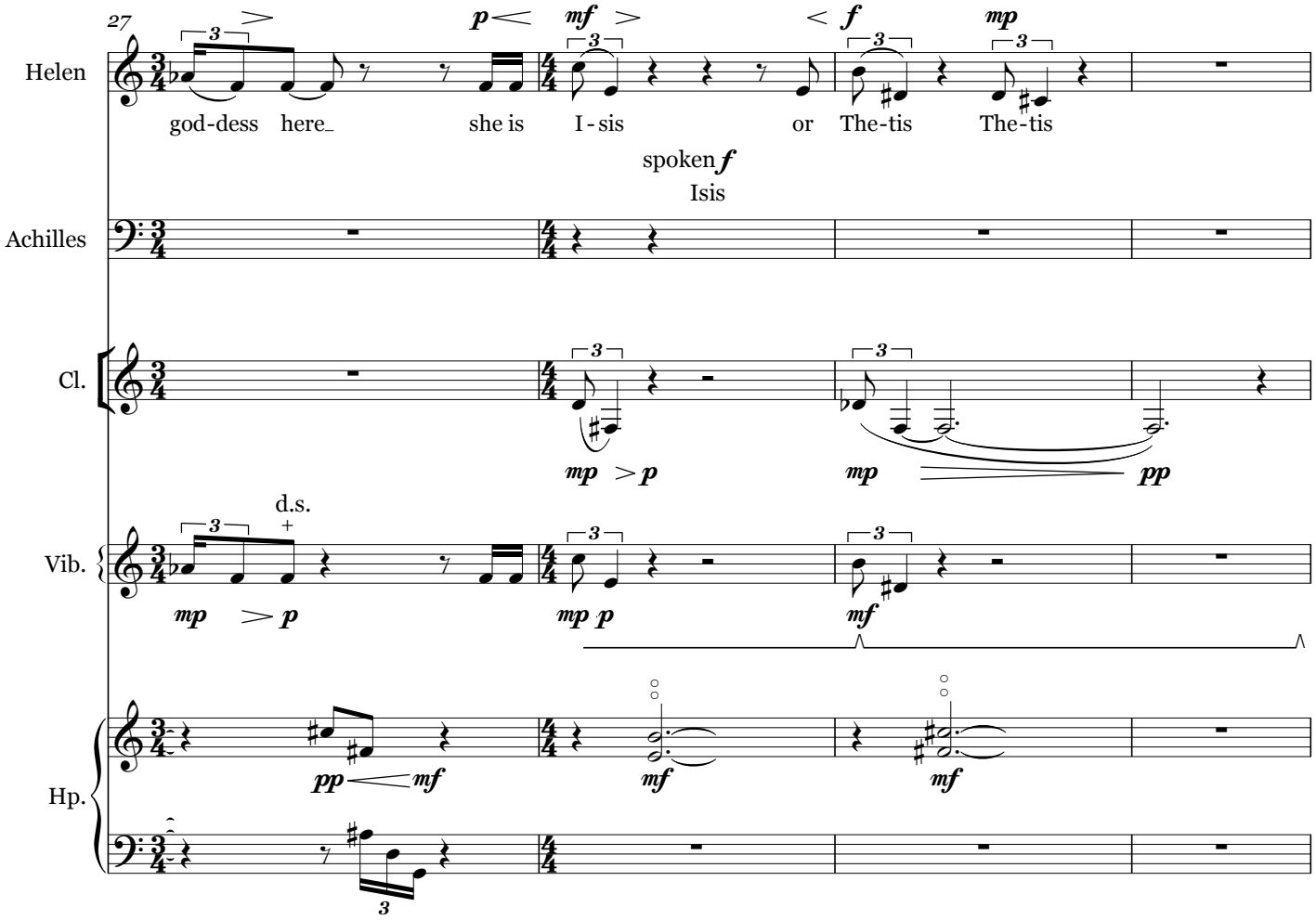

K
14
mf
Helen
We are hud-dled ov-er the fire was there e-ver such a bra-zi-er a
Cl.
p
pp
p
Vib.
pp
ff secco
p
sim.
ord.
Hp.
ff secco
mf
poco
p

[*Achilles starts, seeing the shadow of Eidolon move behind the scrim.*]

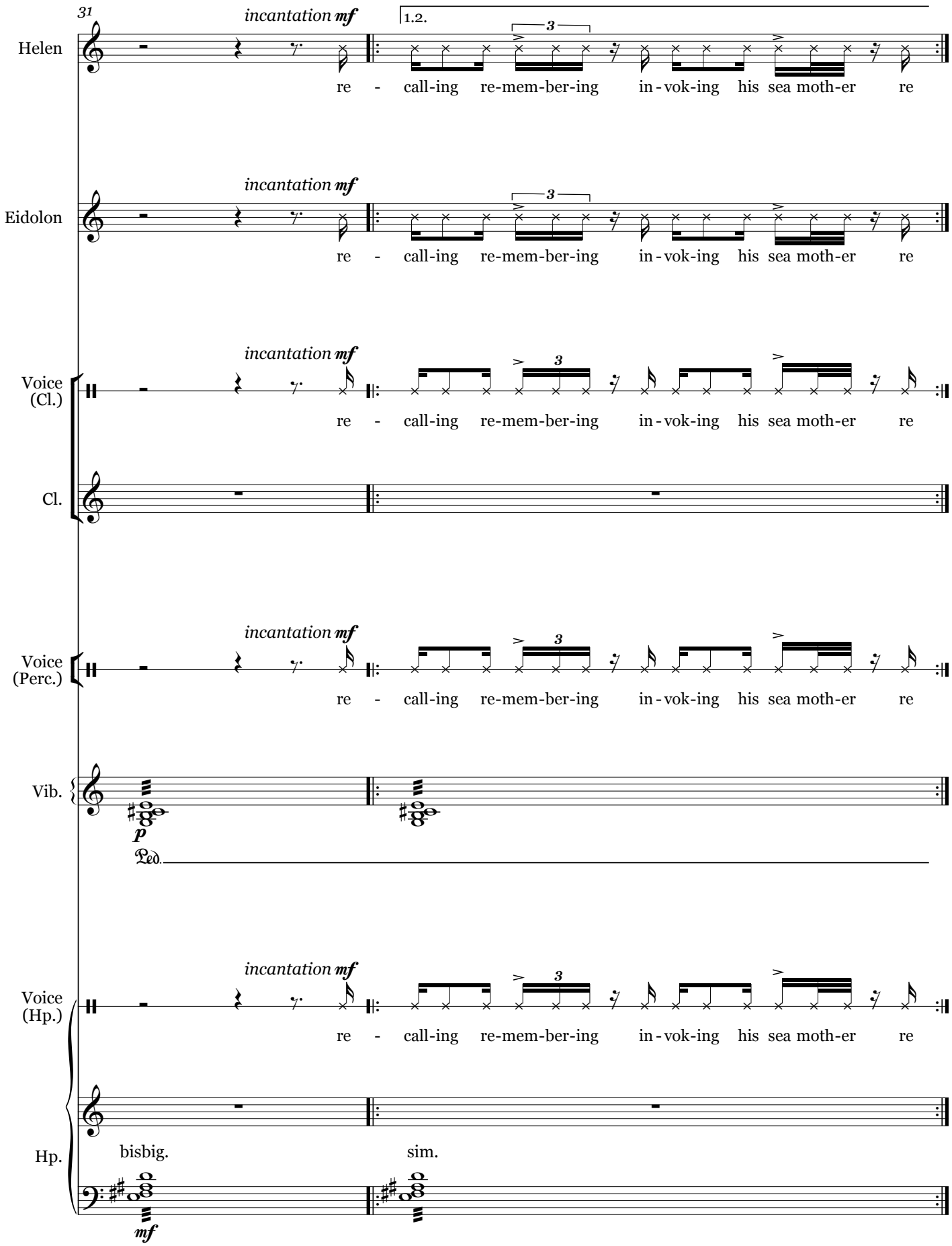


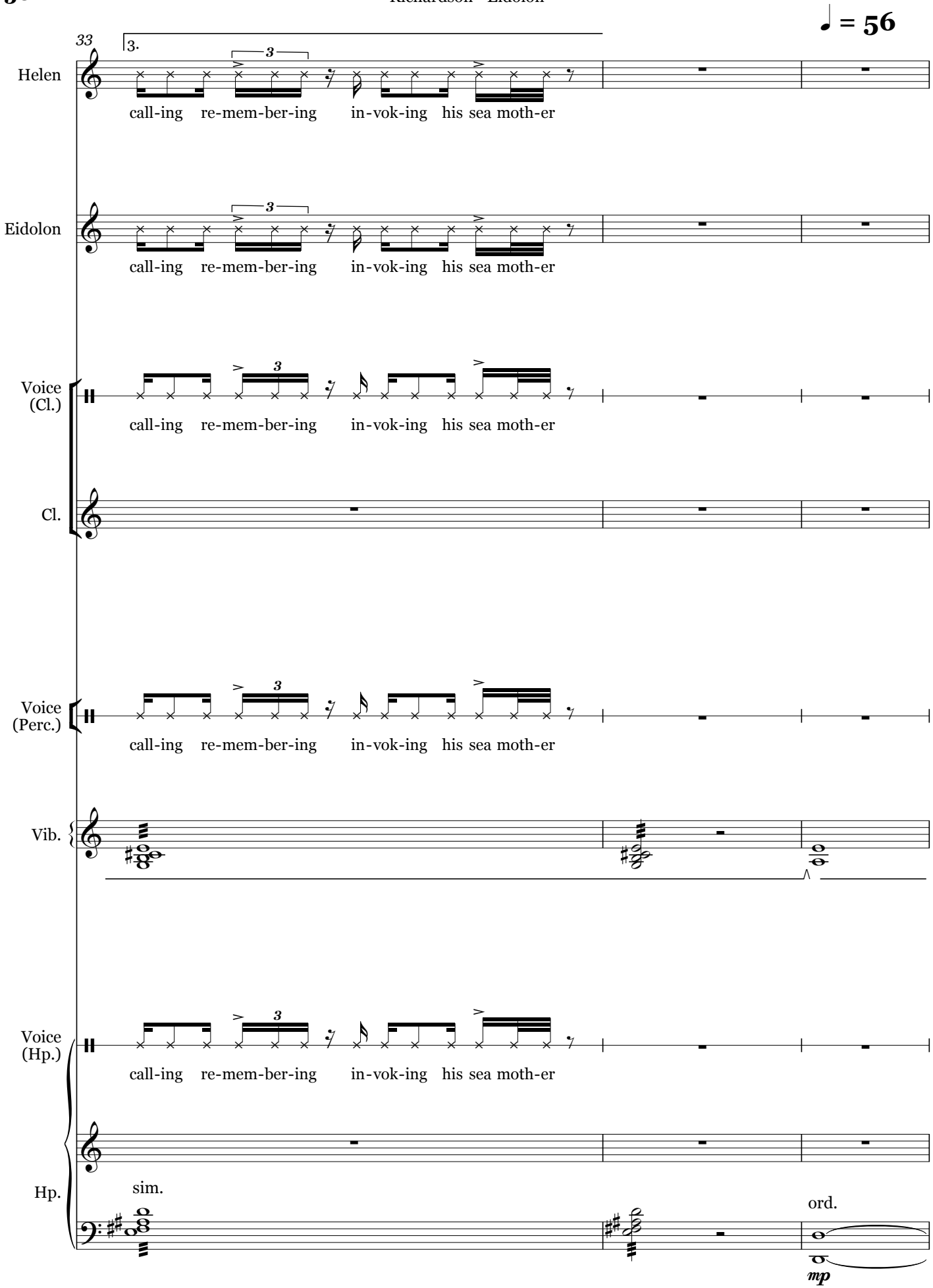
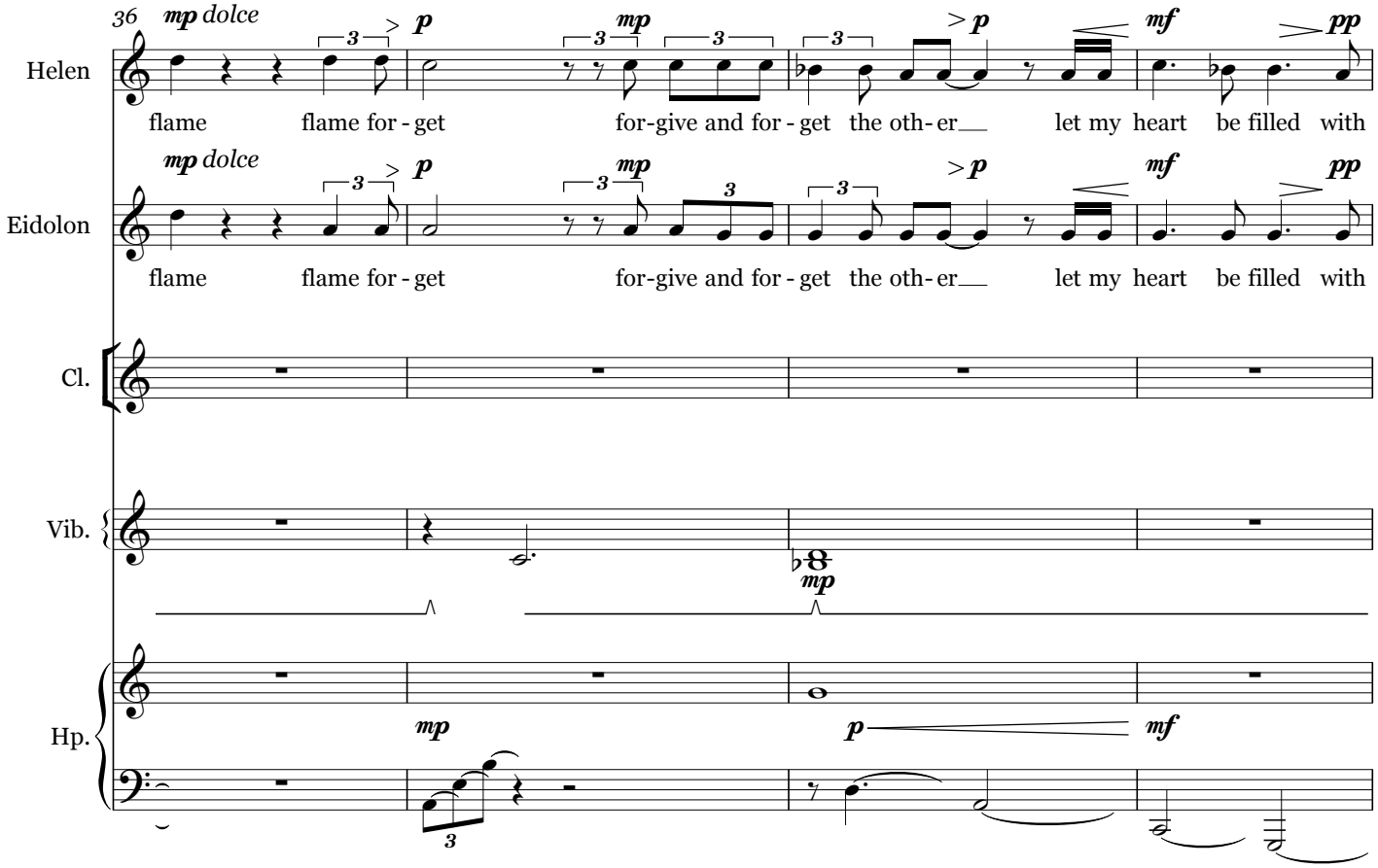
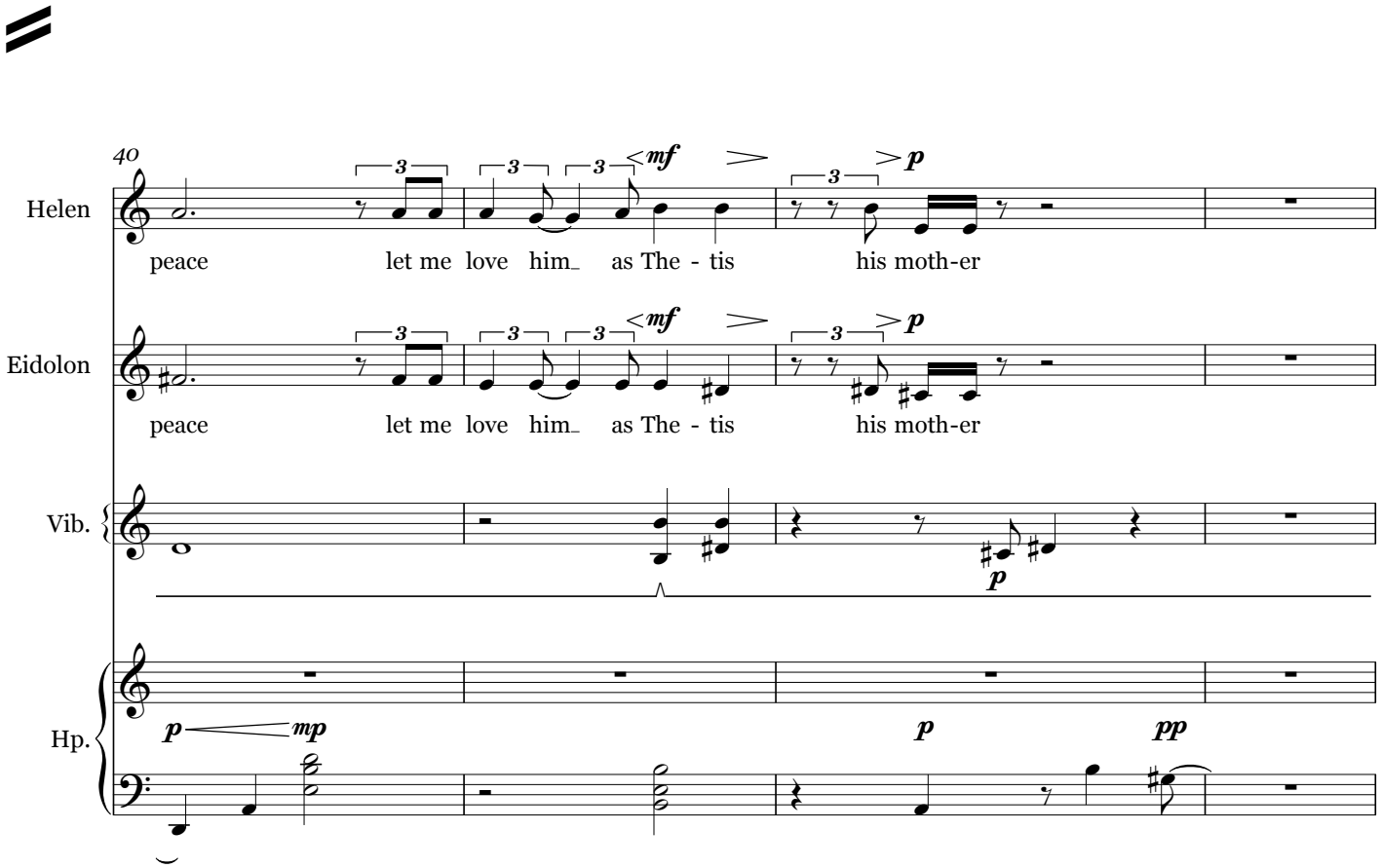

19
Helen
whisper (f)
dear God let him for - get for - get
Eidolon
whisper (f)
dear God let him for - get for - get
Voice (Cl.)
whisper (f)
dear God let him for - get for - get
Cl.
Voice (Perc.)
whisper (f)
dear God let him for - get for - get
Vib.
sfz
Hp.
sim.
ff secco
ord. p


L
21
Helen
There is mys-ter-y in this place I am instruct-ed I know the script the
Cl.
Vib.
d.s.
Hp.
24
Helen
shape of this bird is a let- ter they call it the hie-ro-glyph strive not it is ded-i-cate to the
Cl.
Vib.
senza Ped.
Hp.


27
Helen
god-dess here she is I-sis or The-tis The-tis
spoken
Isis
Achilles
Cl.
Vib.
d.s.
Hp.

M ♩ = 46 Slower, increasing in volume with each iteration




♩ = 56
33
3.
Helen
call-ing re-mem-ber-ing in-vok-ing his sea moth-er
Eidolon
call-ing re-mem-ber-ing in-vok-ing his sea moth-er
Voice (Cl.)
call-ing re-mem-ber-ing in-vok-ing his sea moth-er
Cl.
Voice (Perc.)
call-ing re-mem-ber-ing in-vok-ing his sea moth-er
Vib.
Voice (Hp.)
call-ing re-mem-ber-ing in-vok-ing his sea moth-er
Hp.
sim.
ord.
mp

[*Helen reaches out to the Eidolon seen in silhouette behind the scrim. Eidolon mimics the gesture in a mirror image. They pray in unison.*]