Steven Snowden

Left of the Dial

Solo percussion and electronics

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Commissioned by
Tom Sherwood
For the 2016 Modern Snare Drum Competition

Program Notes

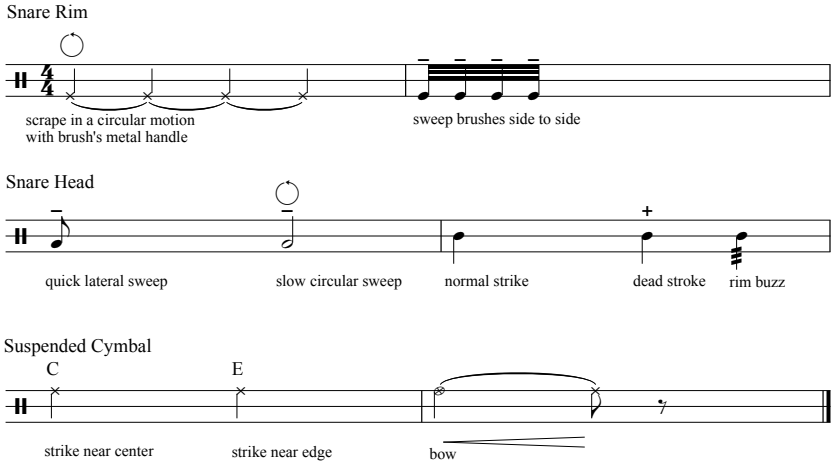
I've always been fascinated by the ubiquity of radio communication. From commercially broadcast FM/AM to shortwave ham radio and the coded messages of mysterious government agencies, it perpetually saturates the very air we breathe. For most, it's simply a way to pass the time between destinations, but for some it is a gateway to another universe. With a little knowledge and a few cheap components, you can explore a seemingly infinite variety of sounds, music, languages, and ideas from around the world.

In this piece, I wanted to encapsulate that experience of haphazard discovery in the electronics, which are all derived from recordings of various radio transmissions. For the live performer, I also chose to embody that same mindset by focusing on the exploration of timbre rather than idiomatic techniques and sounds that we have come to expect from the snare drum.

Gear

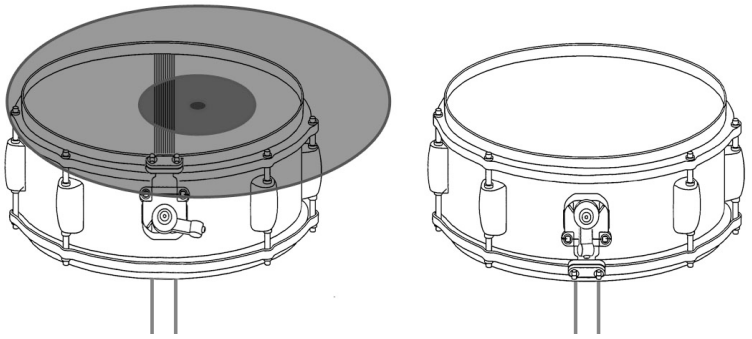
Two Concert Snare Drums
One Heavy Ride Cymbal
One Pair of Retractable Wire Brushes
One Bass Bow

Notation



Setup

Drum 1 (on the right) should be placed in its normal position in a stand with the snares on. Drum 2 (on the left) should be placed in its stand upside-down with the snares off. The ride cymbal should be placed upside down on snare 2 slightly off center so that it isn't touching the snares or the rim. The cymbal will balance on its center at the mounting hole. Though a little bit of wobble is ok, the cymbal shouldn't be allowed to move far from its original position when



struck or bowed. This is to ensure that it stays balanced on the bottom head without touching either the snares or the rim. In order to achieve maximum resonance, you could experiment with using a piece of foam or a rubber band on the snare lever so that the snares of drum 2 barely touch the bottom head. I've found that this increases resonance while maintaining the desired amount of buzzyness.

Performance Notes

Scraping the rim of the drum with the metal part of the brush's handle

Fully retract the bristles into the handle to expose the entire length of the long metal pull. Scrape the shaft of the pull against the rim of the drum in a circular motion at a rate equivalent to the notated rhythm. This will produce the steady scraping sound of metal against metal as well as a subtle phasing or whooshing effect.

Sweeping the brush on the rim of the drum

With the bristles fully fanned out, sweep the shafts (not the tips) of the bristles laterally on the rim of the drum. Generally, the point of contact between the brush and the rim should be roughly halfway between the tips of the bristles and where the bristles meet the handle. Starting in measure 57, the part indicates occasionally sweeping on both the rim and the head. To do this, angle the tips of the bristles downward until they touch the head and back up to resume sweeping only the rim. To add some variety to your timbre, you can gradually move the point of contact forward and back a couple of inches. This will emphasize higher and lower overtones. Just be careful not to pull too far back. You run the risk of jamming the tips of the outer bristles into the outside of the drum rim.

Sweeping the brush off the drum

Sweep from the center to the edge of the drum and push past the rim so that the brush comes fully off.

Rim Buzz

Strike the rim with the handle of the brush. The angle of the brush should be roughly parallel with the head of the drum as the rim is struck. This will produce a rapid fluttering effect as the bristles spring back and forth against the head.

Striking and sweeping the ride cymbal

In almost all cases, you should sweep and strike the cymbal near the mounting hole. Otherwise, you run the risk of causing it to wobble so much that it scoots across the head of the drum or bumps against the rim. The only exception is measures 41-42, when you should gradually move from the center "C" to the edge "E".

Bowing the ride cymbal

The cymbal is bowed in measures 24 and 35. In measure 24, "anchor" the cymbal against the rim of the drum before bowing. This will allow you to put a lot of pressure on the bow and really dig in. (a small piece of moleskin could be used reduce the potential of hearing the cymbal touch the rim before you bow) This should result in a rich sound with lots of lower overtones. In measure 35, the cymbal should not be touching any part of the rim while you bow it. This should result in a bright sound with lots of higher overtones and you may find that you'll have to use less pressure with a faster bow. In both cases, you will need to press down near the mounting hole of the cymbal in order to keep it in place while bowing. Take care not to allow it to wobble back and forth so much that it strikes the rim of the drum or the snares after bowing.

Last 16 measures of the piece

Play in time with the jazz band in the recording. However, the specific pattern is up to you. The style should be relaxed and not too complicated in order to emphasize contrast with the previous section. Play until the recording (abruptly) ends.

You can take a look at short videos demonstrating many of these extended techniques here:
http://www.stevensnowden.com/video/LotD_tut_videos/

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Get technical info about running the electronics for this piece at
http://www.stevensnowden.com/tech/

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Spastic, but tightly controlled ♩ = 70

Percussion

rim buzz

ff *f* *ff*

7

mp *ff*

10

f *ff* *f*

12

ff *f* *ff*

15

f *ff* *f* *mf* *ff*

20 Alien and a little sinister

Grab bass bow and retract bristles on one brush

17

fff

24

Bow Cymbal (anchored)

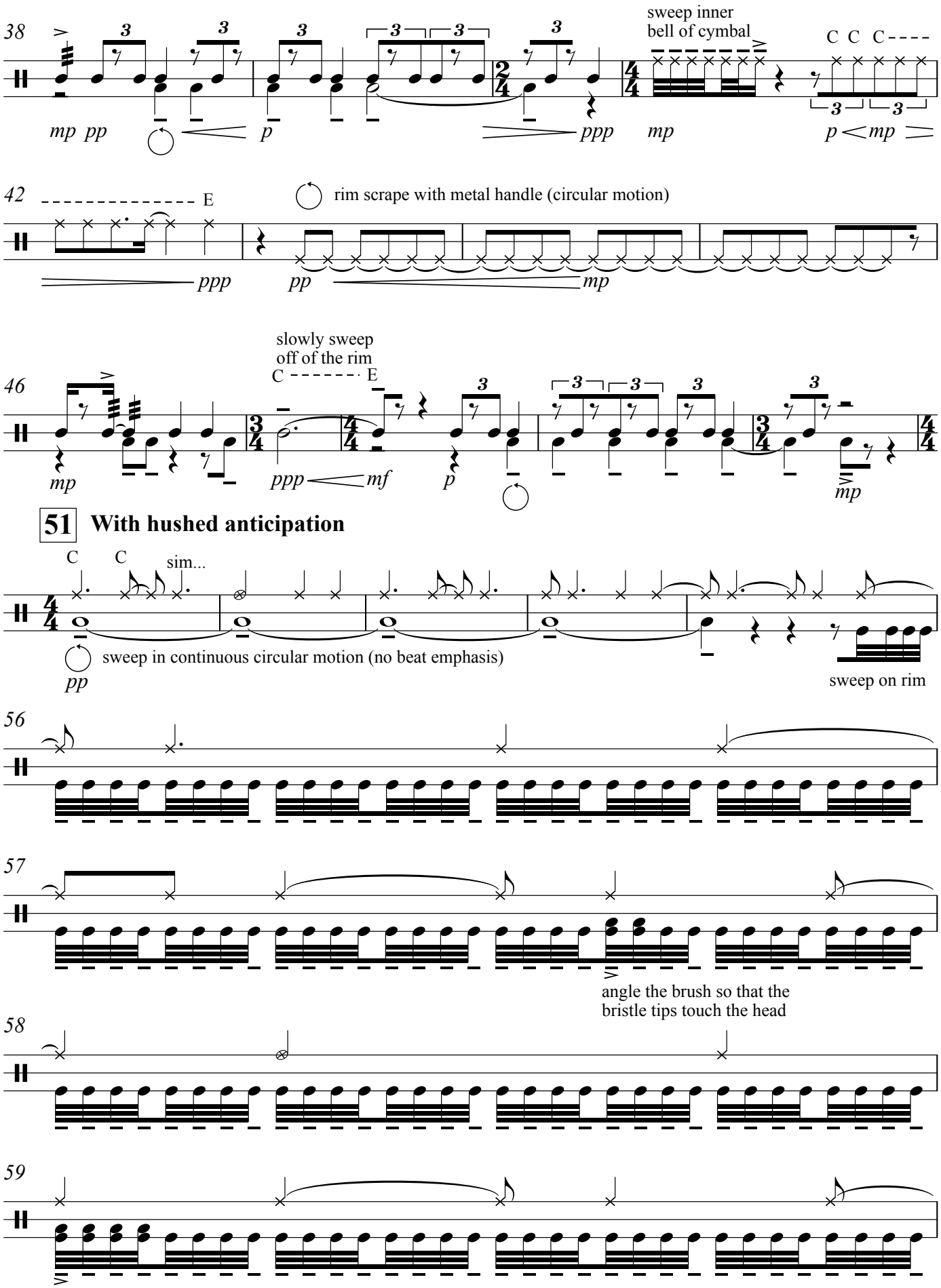
rim scrape with metal handle (circular motion)

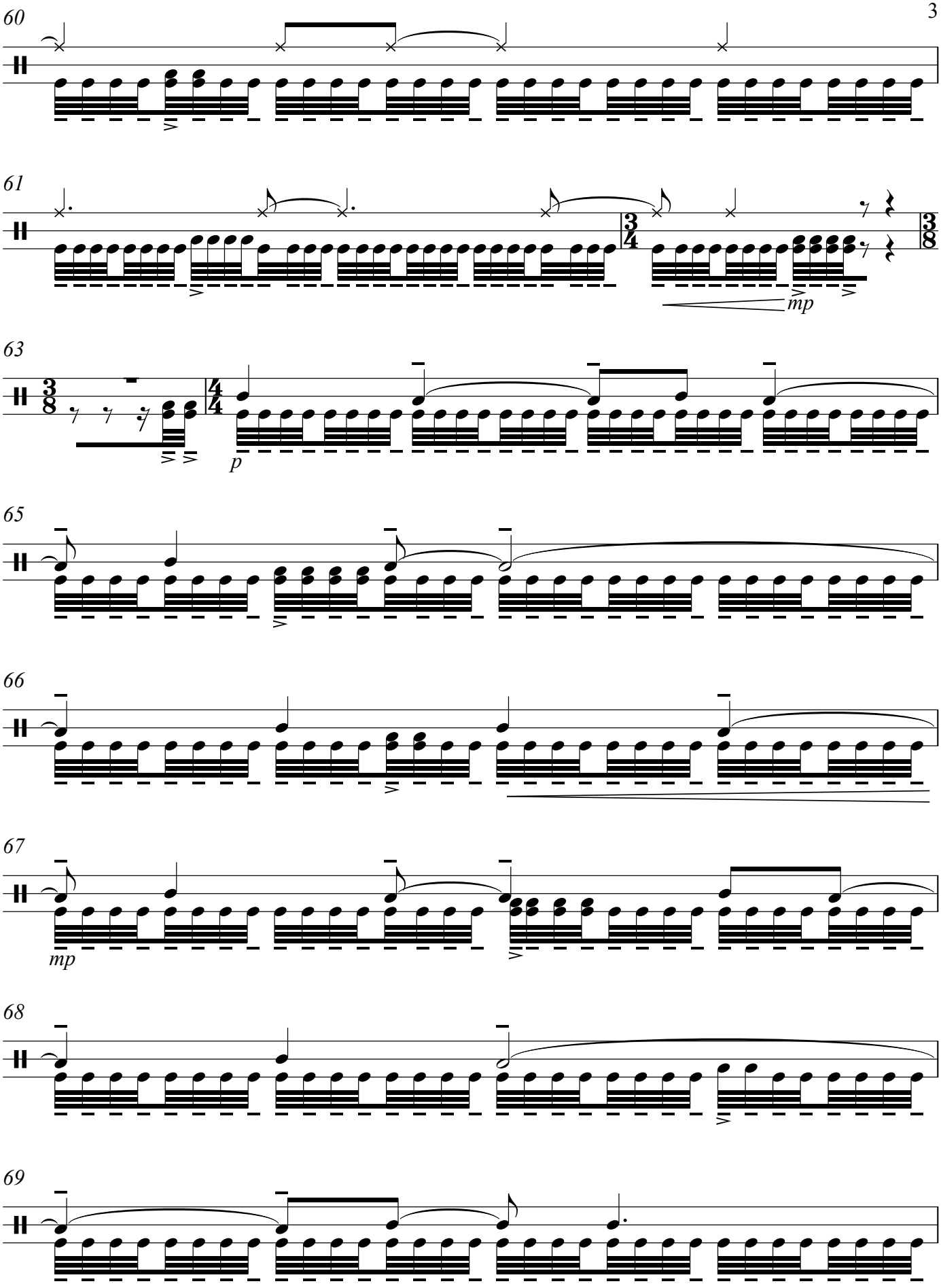
p < f *ppp* *p*

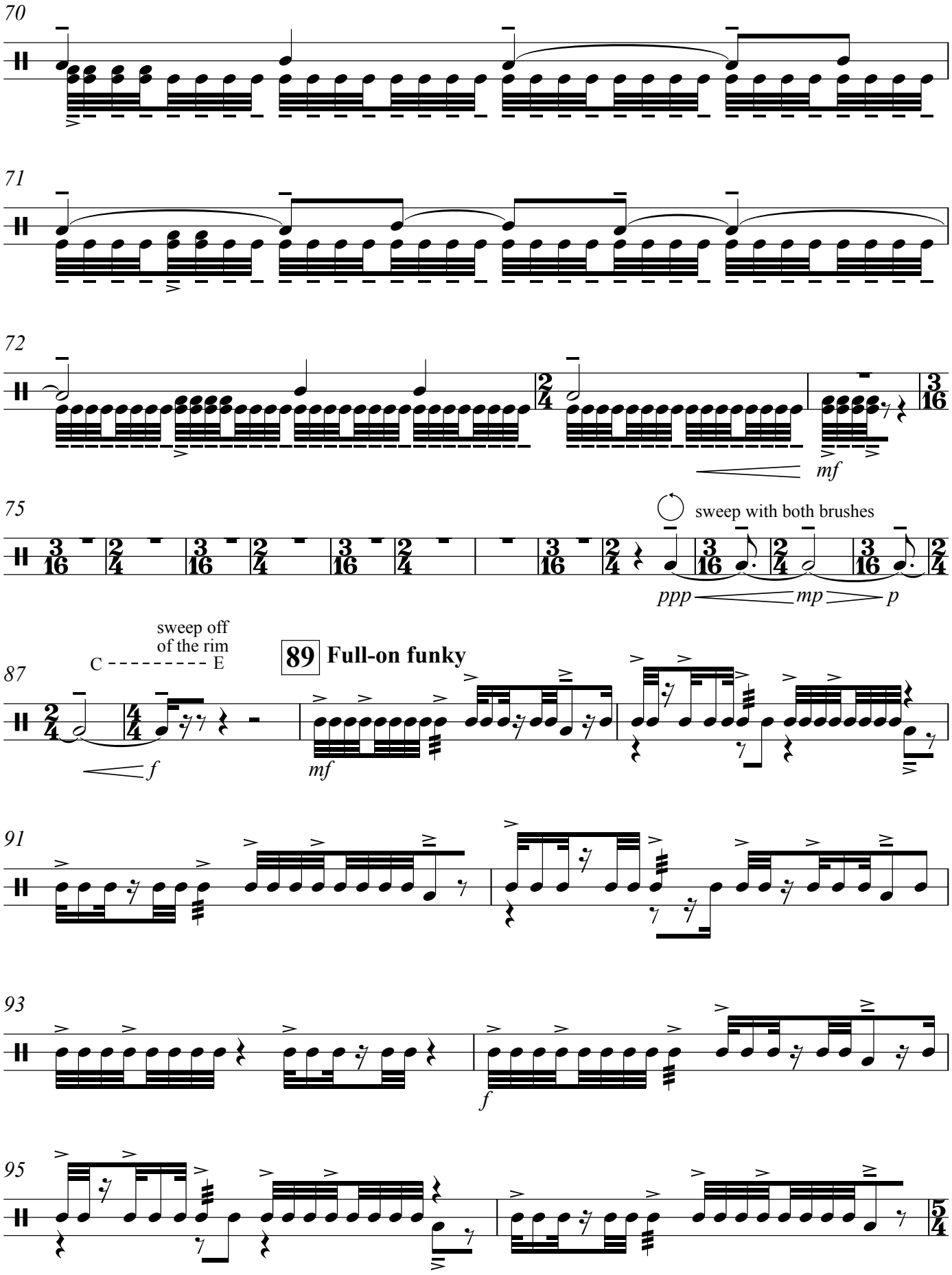
32

Bow Cymbal (free floating)

mp *p < f* *mf*

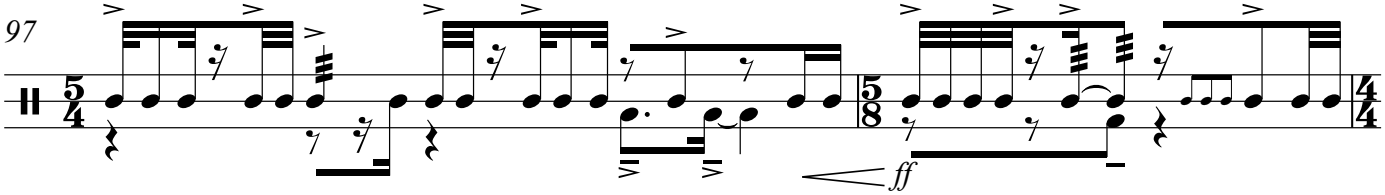

38
sweep inner
bell of cymbal
C C C
mp pp
p
ppp
mp
p < mp
42
E
rim scrape with metal handle (circular motion)
ppp
pp
mp
46
slowly sweep
off of the rim
C
E
mp
ppp
mf
p
mp
51 With hushed anticipation
C
C
sim...
sweep in continuous circular motion (no beat emphasis)
pp
sweep on rim
56
57
angle the brush so that the
bristle tips touch the head
58
59


60
61
mp
63
p
65
66
67
mp
68
69


70
71
72
mf
75
sweep with both brushes
ppp
mp
p
sweep off
of the rim
C ---------- E
87
89 Full-on funky
f
mf
91
93
f
95

98 **Aggresive, hostile**

97



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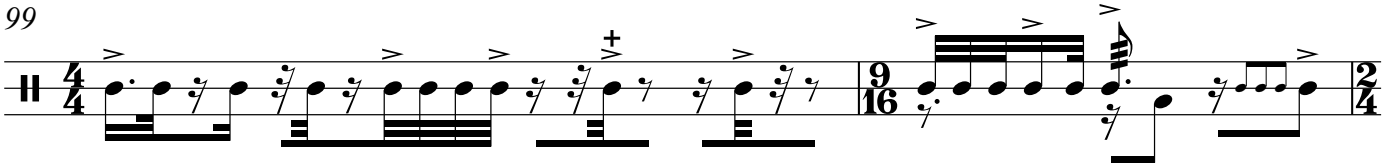

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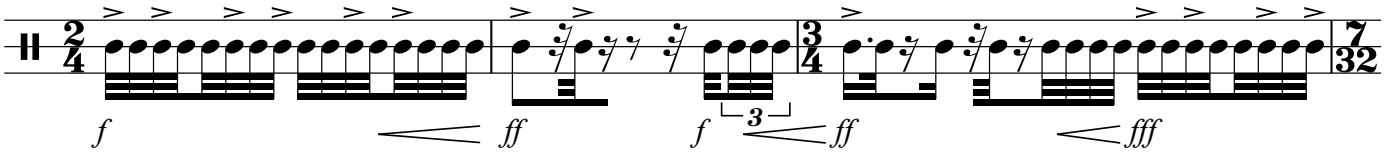

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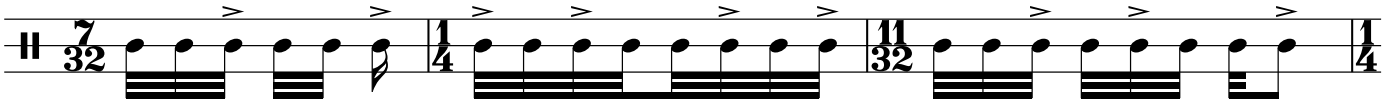

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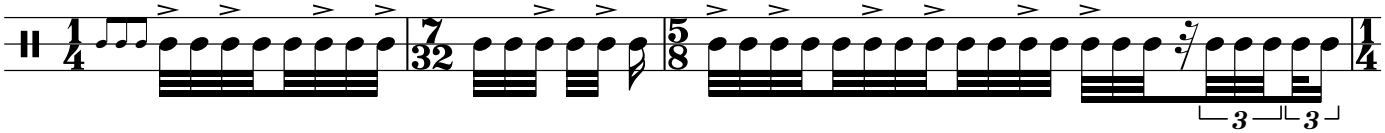

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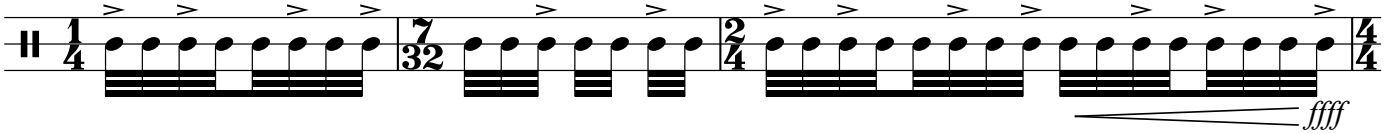
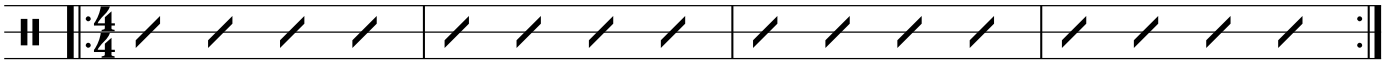
113 play a relaxed pattern with the recording until it ends (16 measures total)