Interweave

Music theatre for solo harpsichord, toy musical box,
sound diffusion & lighting.

Caroline Wilkins
2011

Duration: ca. 10 – 15 min (variable according to version)

1st performance given by Jane Chapman at Liverpool University on 30th March, 2011.

The composer gratefully acknowledges funds provided by the PRSF and The Bliss Trust.

Programme note:

The harpsichord has always appeared to me like a '*mechanical beast*' set into motion – a glittering extension of the musical box. As the title suggest, this work explores the different acoustic possibilities offered by live and recorded instruments. The process of interlacing their various layers of sound recalls images of textiles on a weaving machine, the web of one material being perceived through that of another. In the same way the specific acoustic placement of live or recorded sound within the listening area allows one to hear a sound surface emerging through another according to the fluctuations of foreground and background and the play of perspective that they engender.

Note on score:

The score is written for three simultaneous parts, all heard at the same time in different parts of the performance space, two pre-recorded, one live.The final section has one pre-recorded part and one live part to be played in synchronisation during the musical box playback. The harpsichord is amplified with two microphones. Each of the two other parts have been pre-recorded and processed in different ways, using echoes and filters to alter the timbre and spectrum of low or high frequencies (for example approaching the metallic 'attack' of the musical box). The prepared toy musical box is placed on a resonating surface of the harpsichord near to one of the microphones.

Version 1. *Concert installation for gallery or public building space.*

Scenography

A work of sound theatre is created by means of installing audio sources in different parallel 'rooms', a labyrinth of spaces through which the public moves. There are subtleties of acoustic 'spill' from one space to another, the audience thereby generating their own personal audio / visual perception of the performance. Some sources, such as loudspeakers, are hidden and the lighting varied; occasionally there may be an almost completely dark space to move through. A mesh curtain (or similar) could half-conceal the live harpsichordist. She/he is never perceived totally, but either in silhouette, in half-darkness or behind a texture. Her/his actions could include stillness, slowed down movement, 'silent playing', activating the mechanical musical box, which could be placed on a separate resonating box in one of the rooms and amplified with a contact microphone. Optional pre-filmed images (of the musical box, harpsichordist, or close-ups of the harpsichord mechanism) can be projected on to the lid of the instrument or on to the surfaces (walls/ ceiling/ floor) of the installation space.

Version 2. *Staged Concert.*

Scenography

The staging area is designed in the form of a semi-circle, with L. & R. speakers placed at an increasingly wider distance from each other towards the downstage area:
Speakers 1& 2 - upstage to L. & R.
Speakers 3 & 4 - centre stage to L. & R.
Speakers 5 & 6 - downstage to L. & R.

Alternatively the 6 speakers can be placed around the auditorium, offering a surround sound.
The harpsichord is placed centre upstage, the toy musical box on its resonant surface.

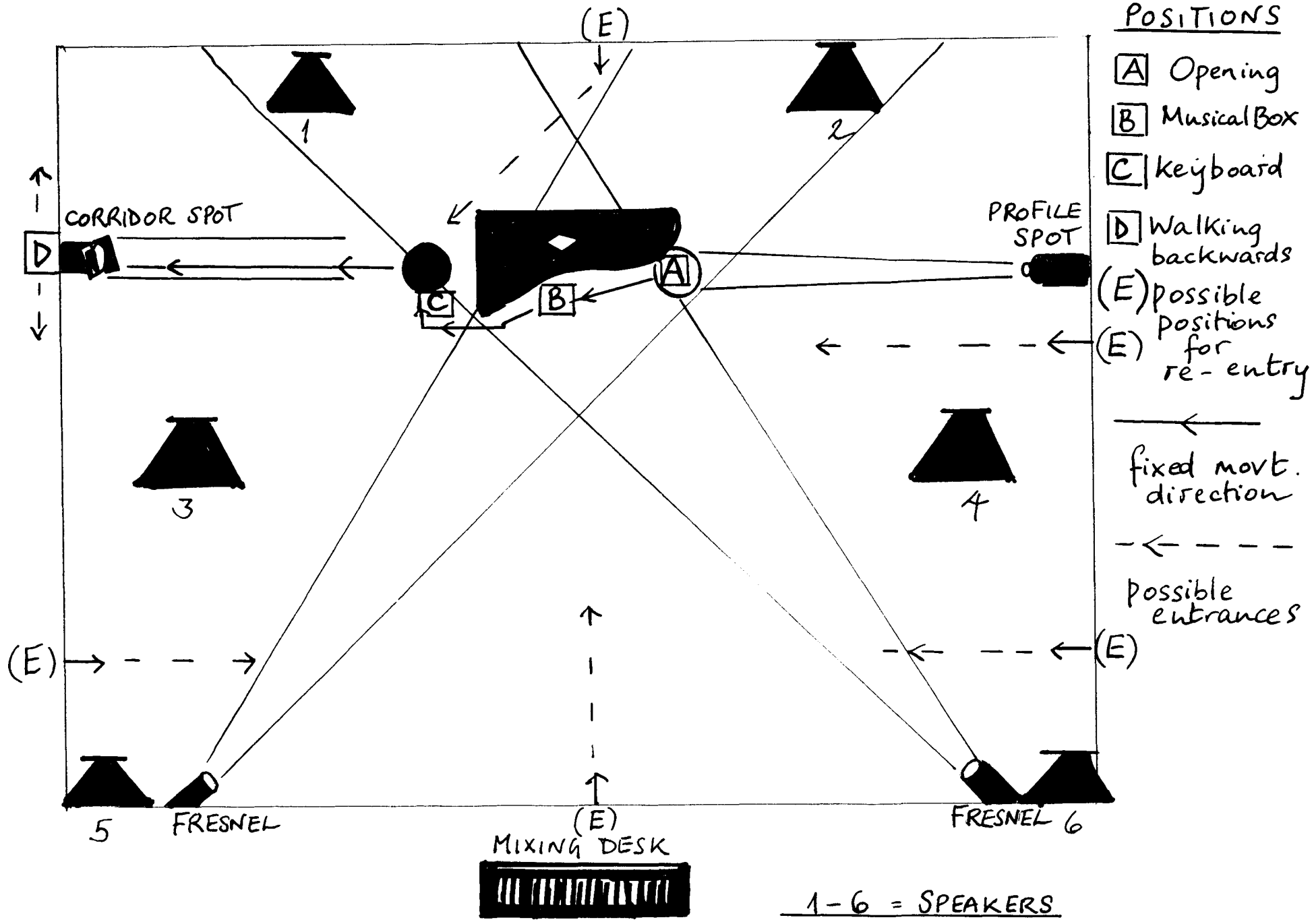
Lighting:

Depending on technical facilities within each performance space, lighting would be carefully considered according to the following parameters:

Version 1 - atmospheric half-light / half dark, important in sharpening both the aural and spatial perceptions of the audience. The choice of lights would be totally dependent on the installation space and is therefore difficult to determine in advance.

Version 2 – dimensional lighting from a series of angles.
2 cross-beams from stage front (Fresnels) to light the instrument centre upstage.
1 profile spotlight from Stage L. to focus on the performer in opening position.
1 spotlight (Fresnel with barndoors) Stage R. to provide a corridor from the harpsichord stool to the wings. The performer walks backwards, exiting out of the corridor of light and disappears from view until her re-entry. She/he does not always have to be in a lit path on re-entering the space

Concert Staging Plan, 'Interweave' 2011, CW. ©



Technical list:

Sound - 6 Genelec speakers, 2 monitor speakers, 2 microphones, mixing desk, amplifier, laptop.

Video projector & DVD player (for installation version)

Lights - Profile spotlight, 3 fresnel spotlights, one with barndoors (either free-standing or hung from ceiling). Small reading light on instrument pult if necessary.

Materials:

Toy musical box – prepared by loosening the metal comb, resulting in a jangling, metallic timbre.
Mesh curtain (for installation version)

Choreography:

BLACKOUT. Performer enters and sits motionless at the end of the harpsichord on the floor, her/his back resting against the tail leg. SPOTLIGHT. They hold this position for ca. 30 sec. before rising slowly to turn towards the musical box placed on the instrument with their back to the audience. Slowly performer turns the miniature handle of the mechanical instrument to elicit sounds for ca. 1 minute.

Bars 1-10: (ca. 26 sec) The pre-recorded harpsichords begin on Speakers 1/2 and 3/4. Slowly the performer turns to their left in profile to the audience, pauses, and moves slowly to sit on the stool.

During passages of playing she/he should maintain a high intensity of movement and tension, this in contrast to the choreographed, slow movement sections.

Bars 14-23: (ca.26 sec) Performer remains absolutely still, as if 'frozen', at keyboard.

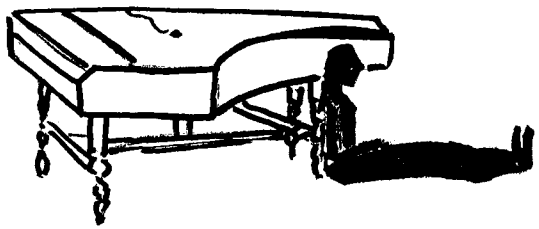
Bars 27-45: (ca.43 sec) Performer rises slowly from the stool and walk backwards to the edge of the performance space. Exits. She/he re-appears from another point of the stage area (depending on space). Pauses. Walks slowly forward to stool.

Bars 80 -93: (ca. 30 sec) Performer stands and leans over instrument to turn endlessly the pages of the score. Plays short passages in bars 94-108 in standing position.

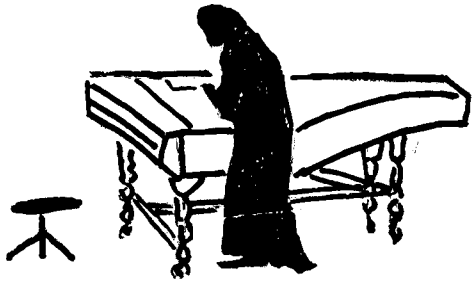
Bars 109-117: (ca.30 sec) Performer sits on stool. Slow motion movement at keyboard in exaggerated mimed gestures of crossing hands / register changing.

End: Performer remains very still until BLACKOUT.

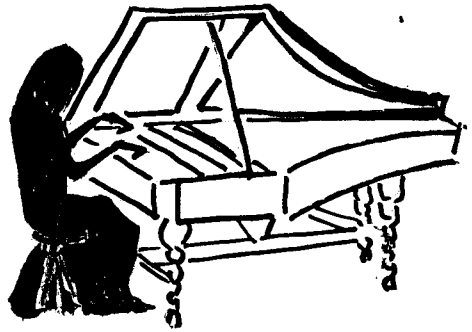
'Interweave' Scenario sketches, Caroline Wilkins, 2011



Opening

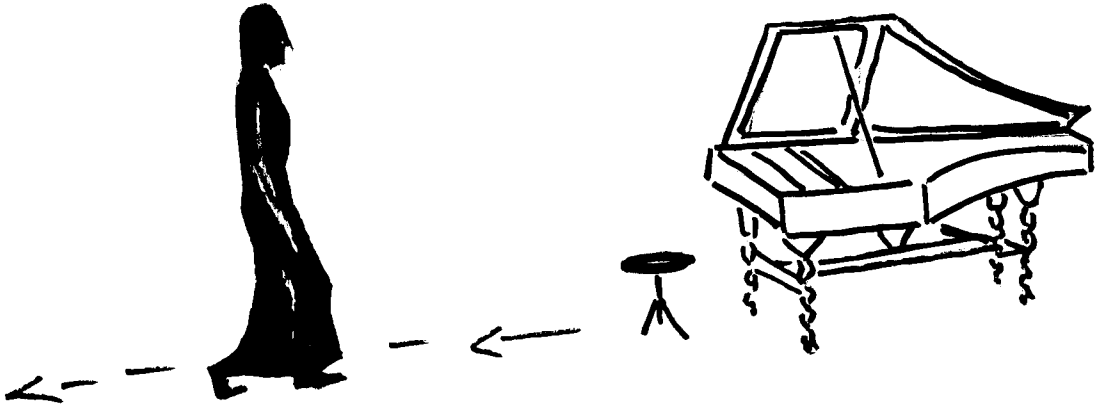


Musical Box

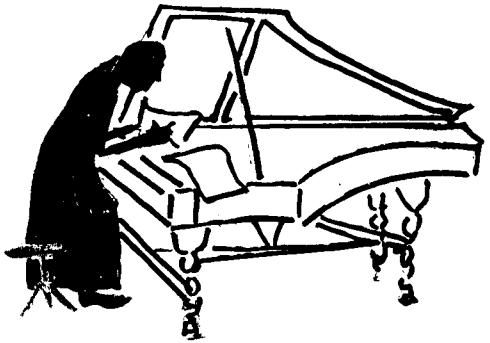


'Frozen' posture

Exiting backwards

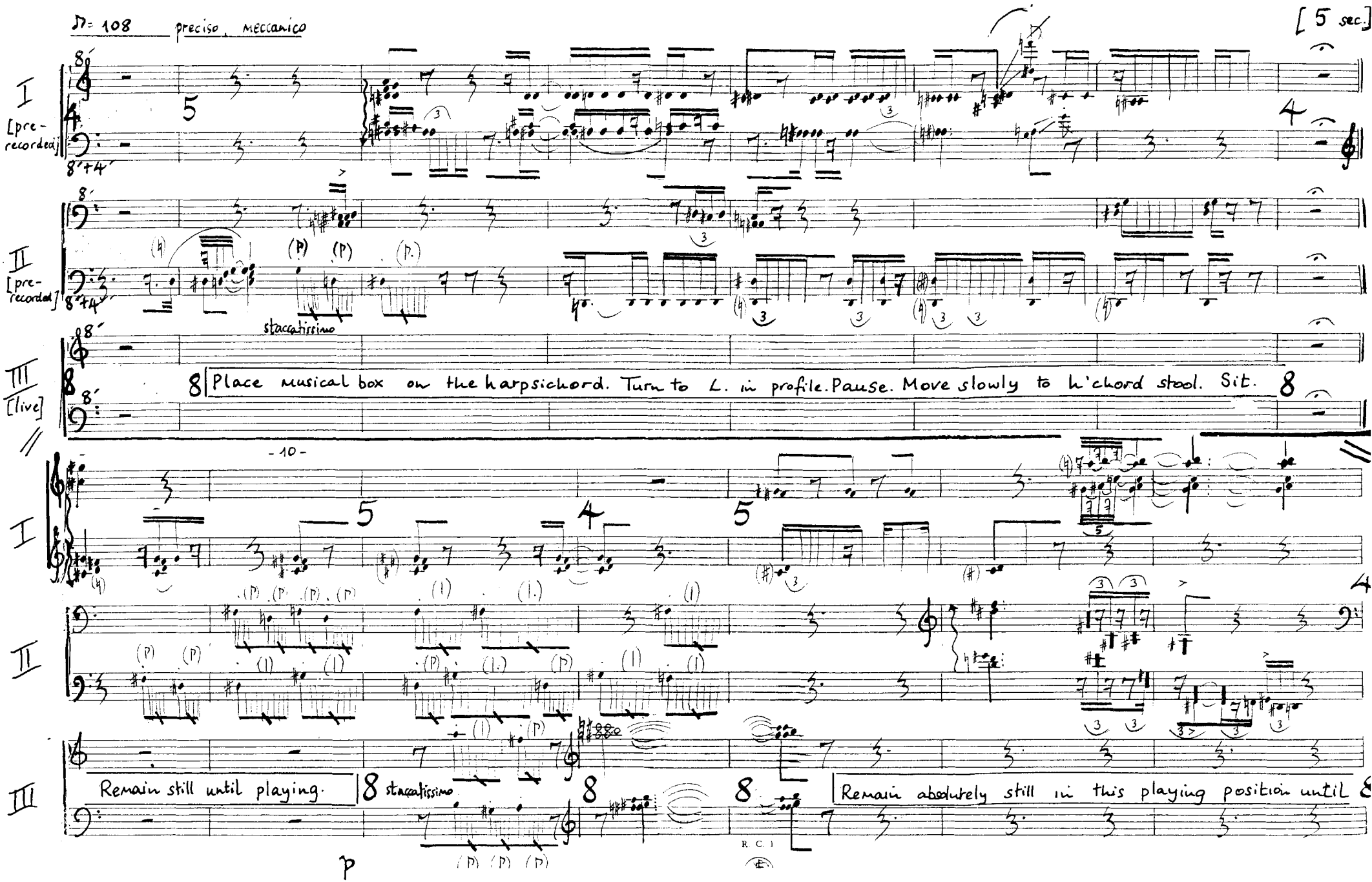


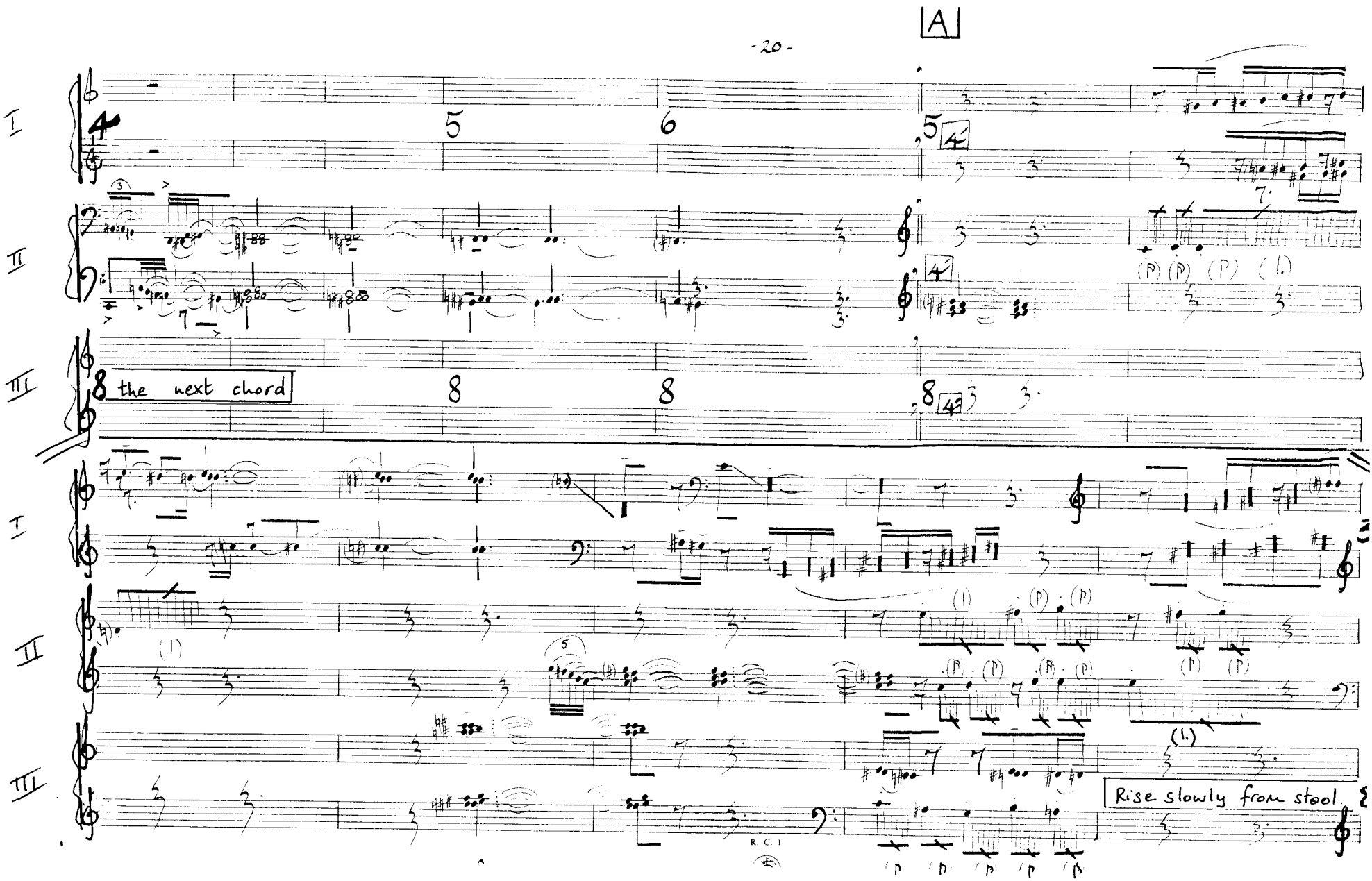
Turning endless pages

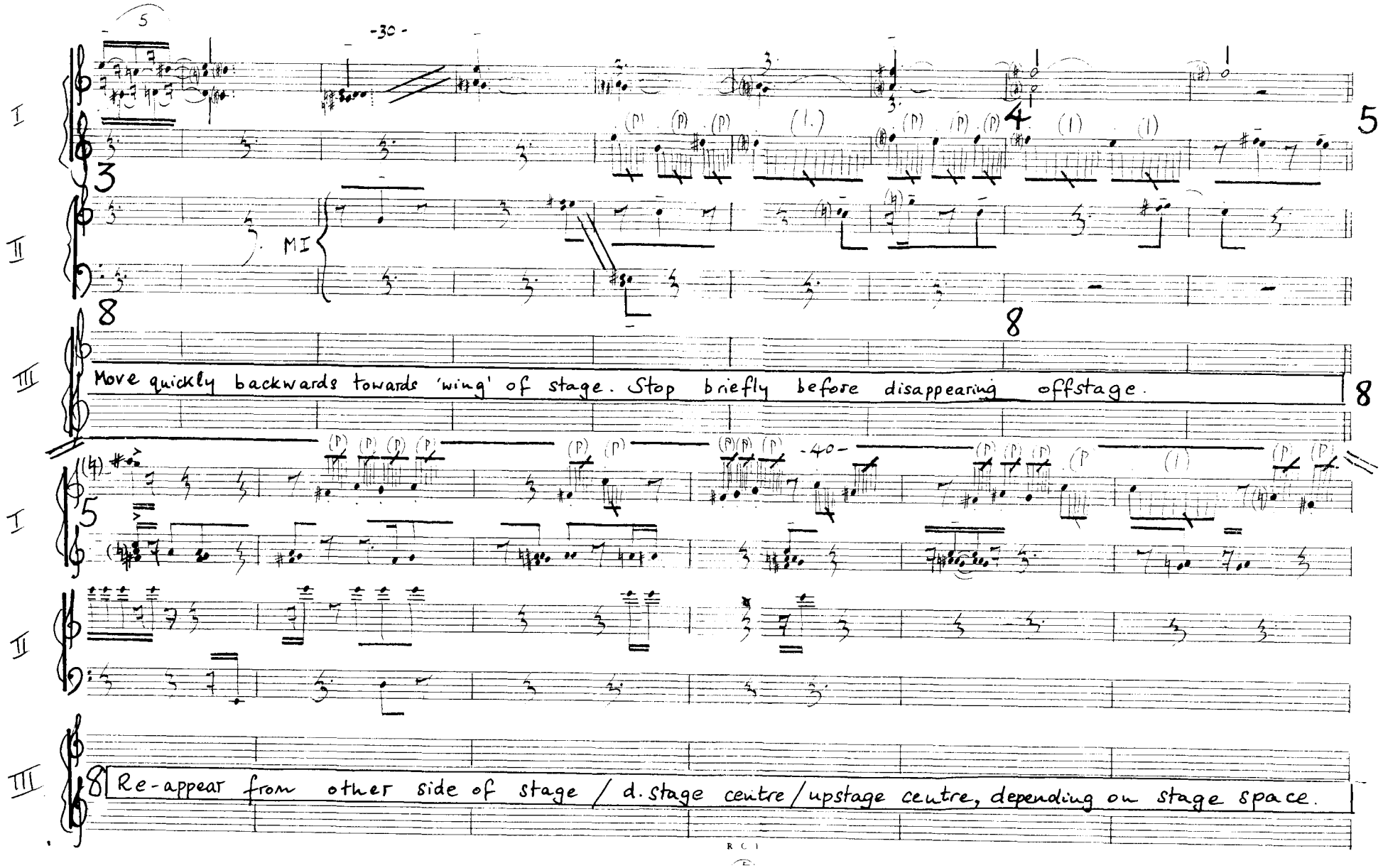


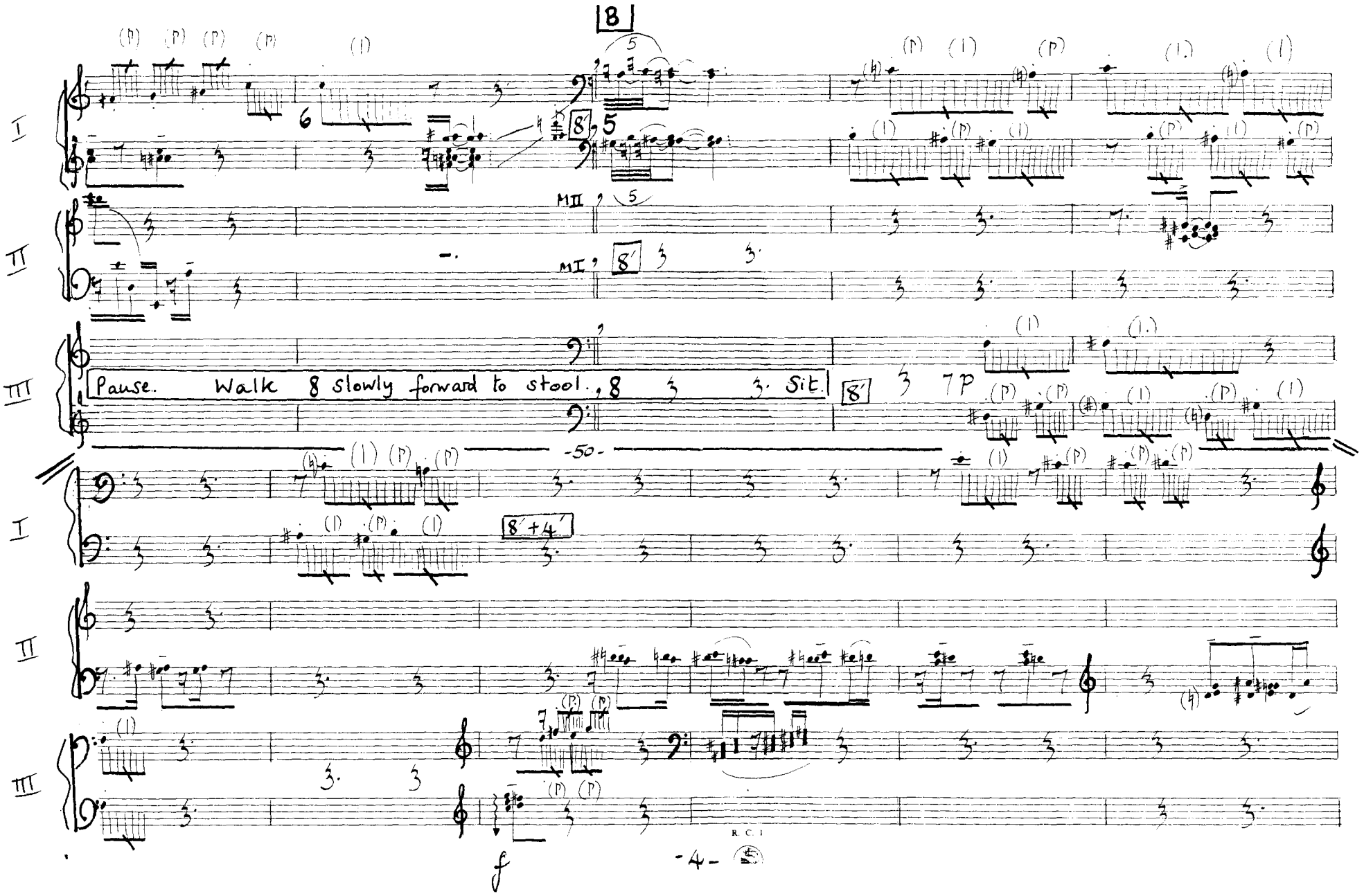
Prologue

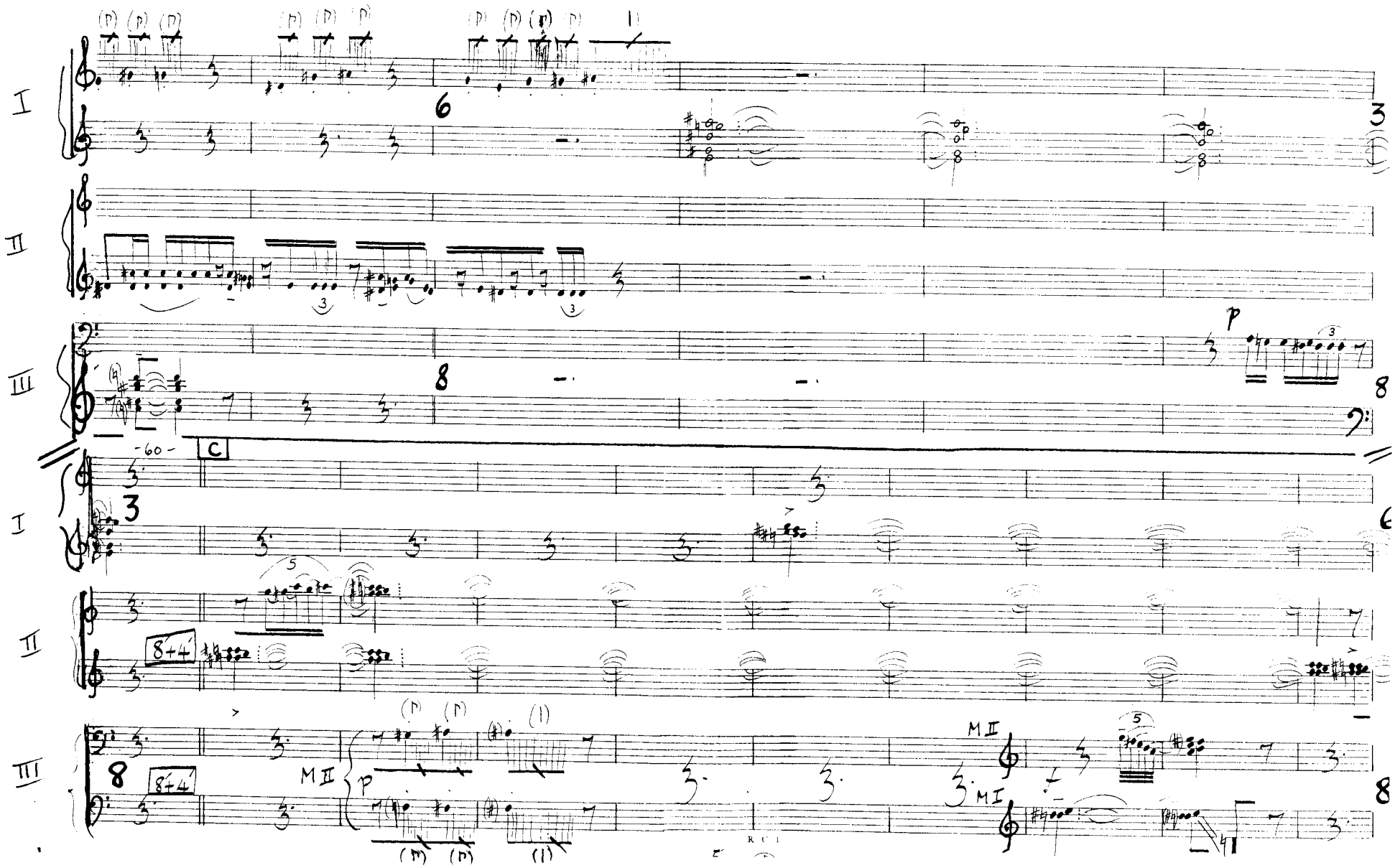
BLACKOUT. Performer enters and sits motionless at the end of the harpsichord on the floor, her/his back resting against the tail leg. SPOTLIGHT. They hold this position for ca. 30 sec. before rising slowly to turn towards the musical box placed on the instrument, with their back to the audience. Slowly the performer turns the miniature handle of the mechanical instrument to elicit individual sounds for ca. 1 minute until the pre-recorded music begins.

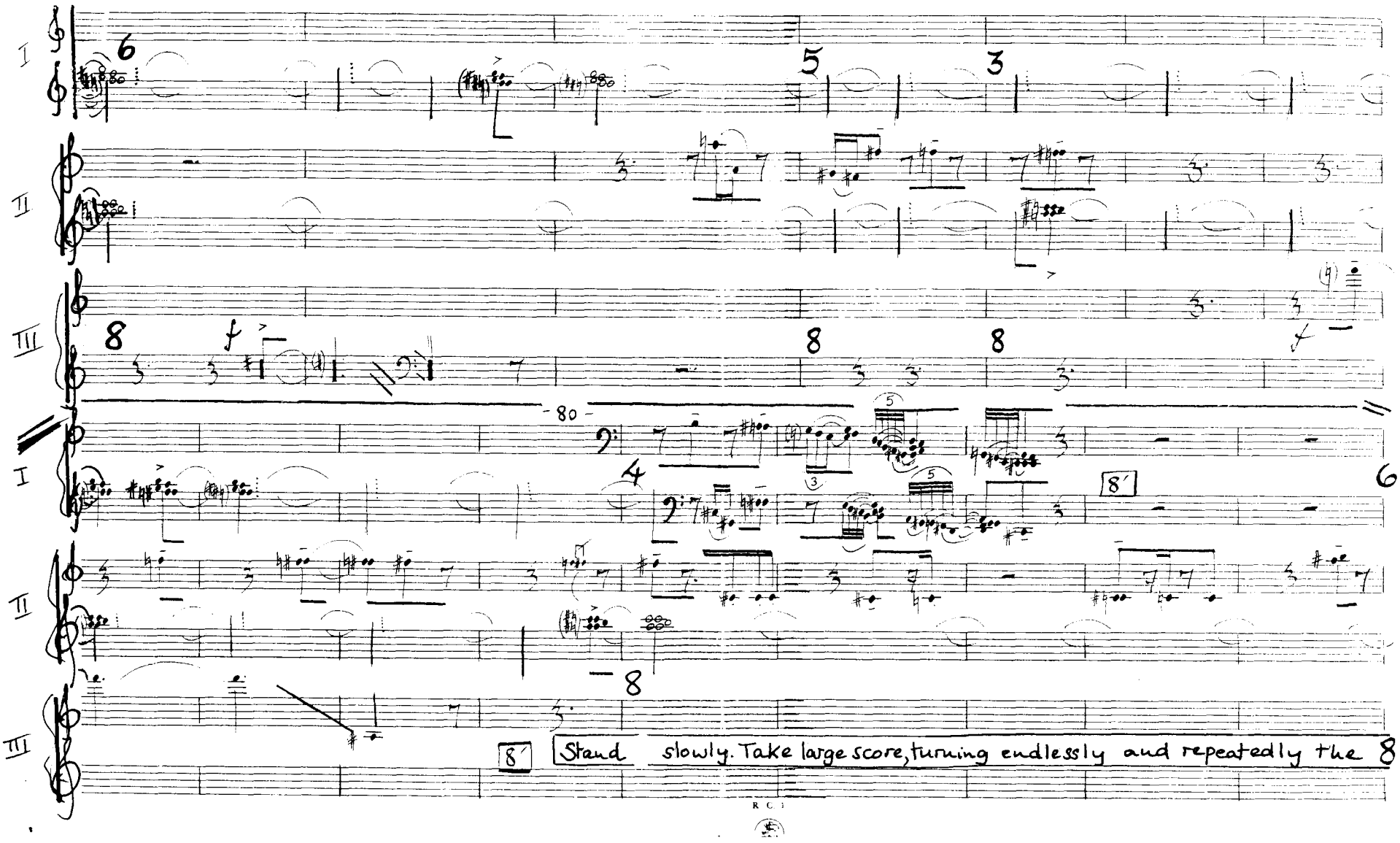

♪= 108 preciso, meccanico
[5 sec.]
I [pre-recorded]
II [pre-recorded]
III [live]
staccatissimo
Place musical box on the harpsichord. Turn to L. in profile. Pause. Move slowly to h'chord stool. Sit.
- 10 -
Remain still until playing.
staccatissimo
Remain absolutely still in this playing position until
R. C. I


A
I
II
III
the next chord
Rise slowly from stool.


-30-
I
II
III
MI
Move quickly backwards towards 'wing' of stage. Stop briefly before disappearing offstage.
-40-
Re-appear from other side of stage / d. stage centre / upstage centre, depending on stage space.


8
I
II
III
MII
MI
8'
Pause. Walk 8 slowly forward to stool., 8 Sit.
-50-
8'+4'
R. C. I
-4-
f


I
II
III
-60-
C
8+4'
MII
MI

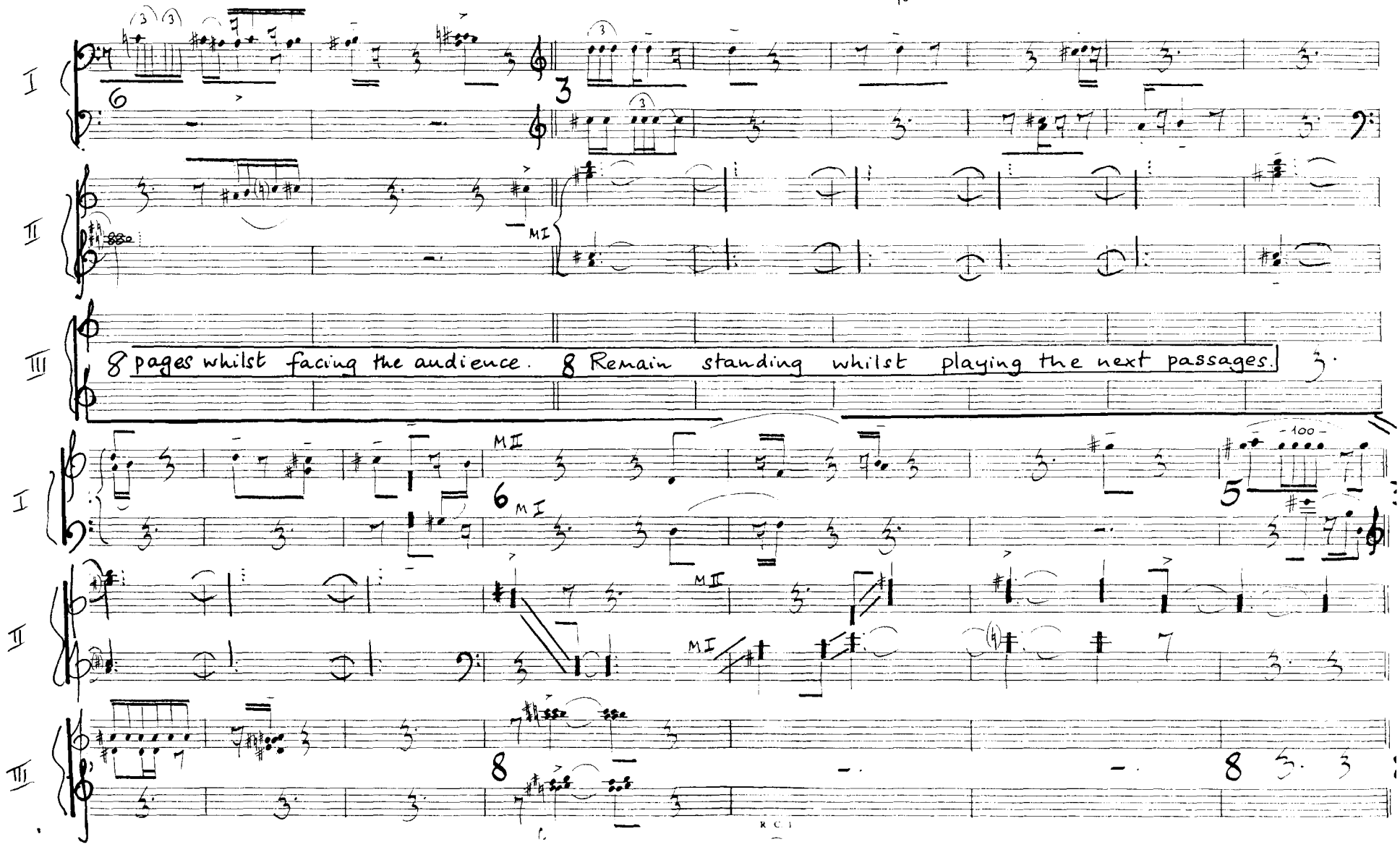

I
II
III
6
5
3
8
f
8
8
f
-80-
I
4
8'
6
II
-8
III
8'
Stand slowly. Take large score, turning endlessly and repeatedly the 8

I

II

III

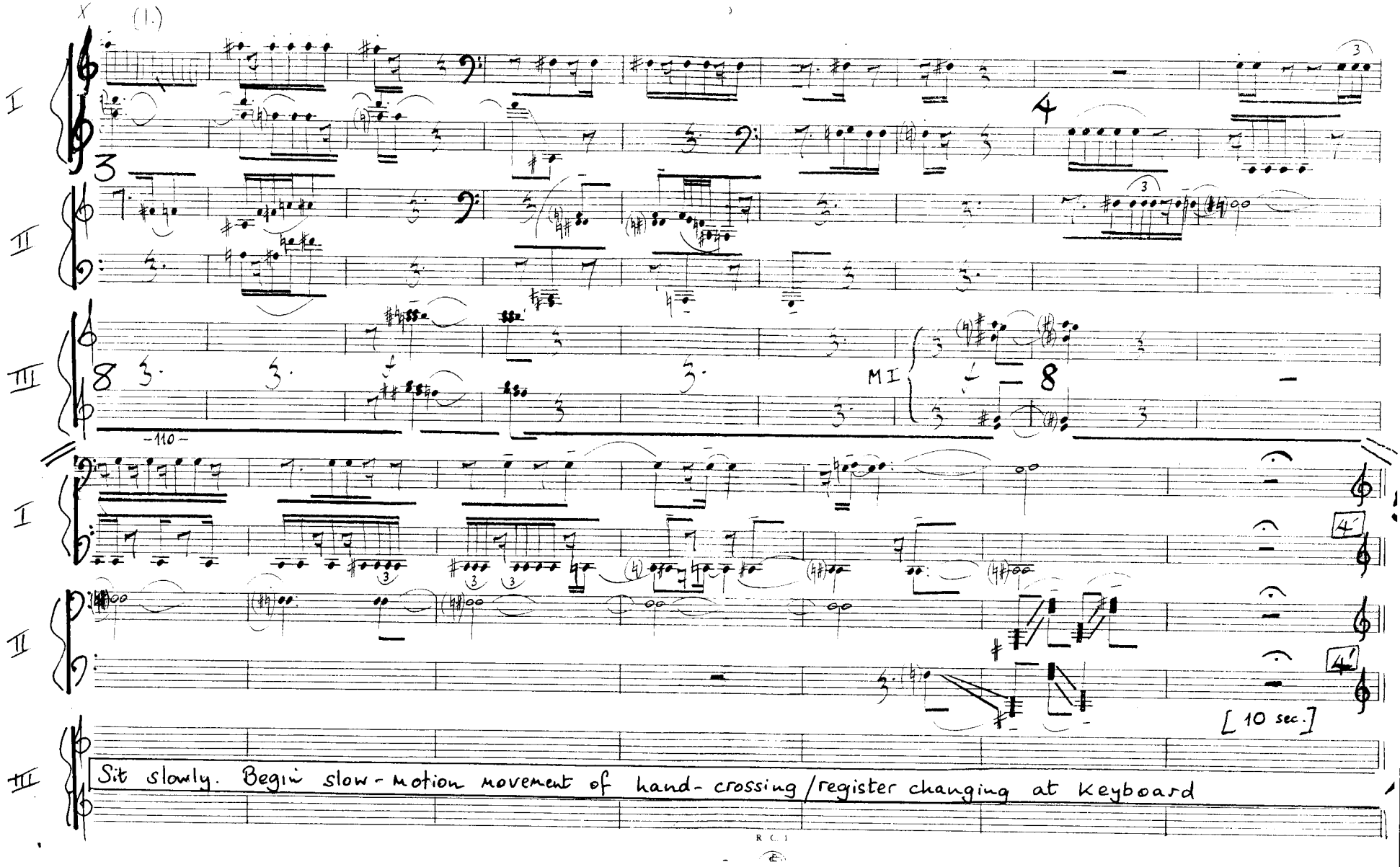
8 pages whilst facing the audience. 8 Remain standing whilst playing the next passages.

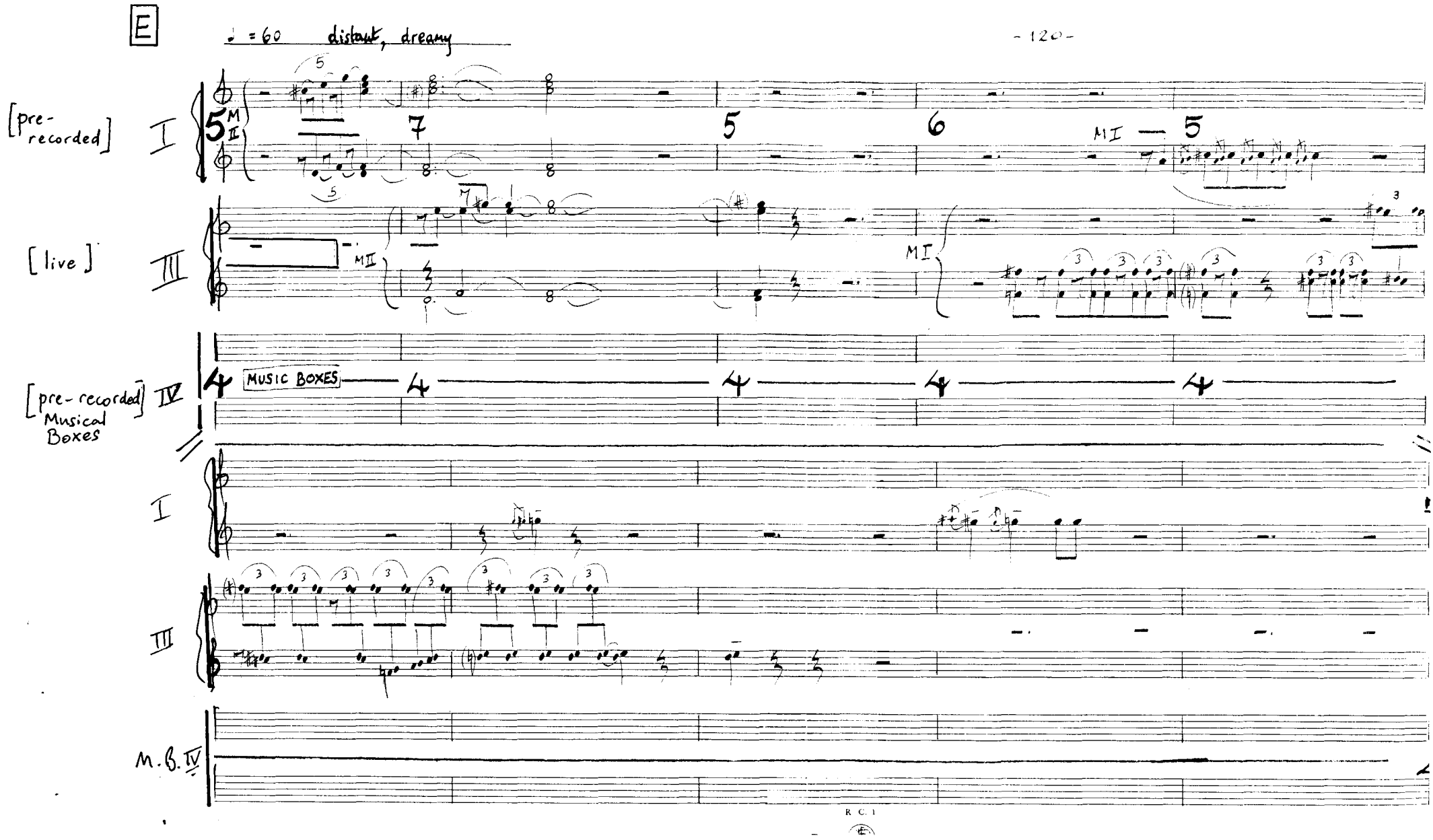


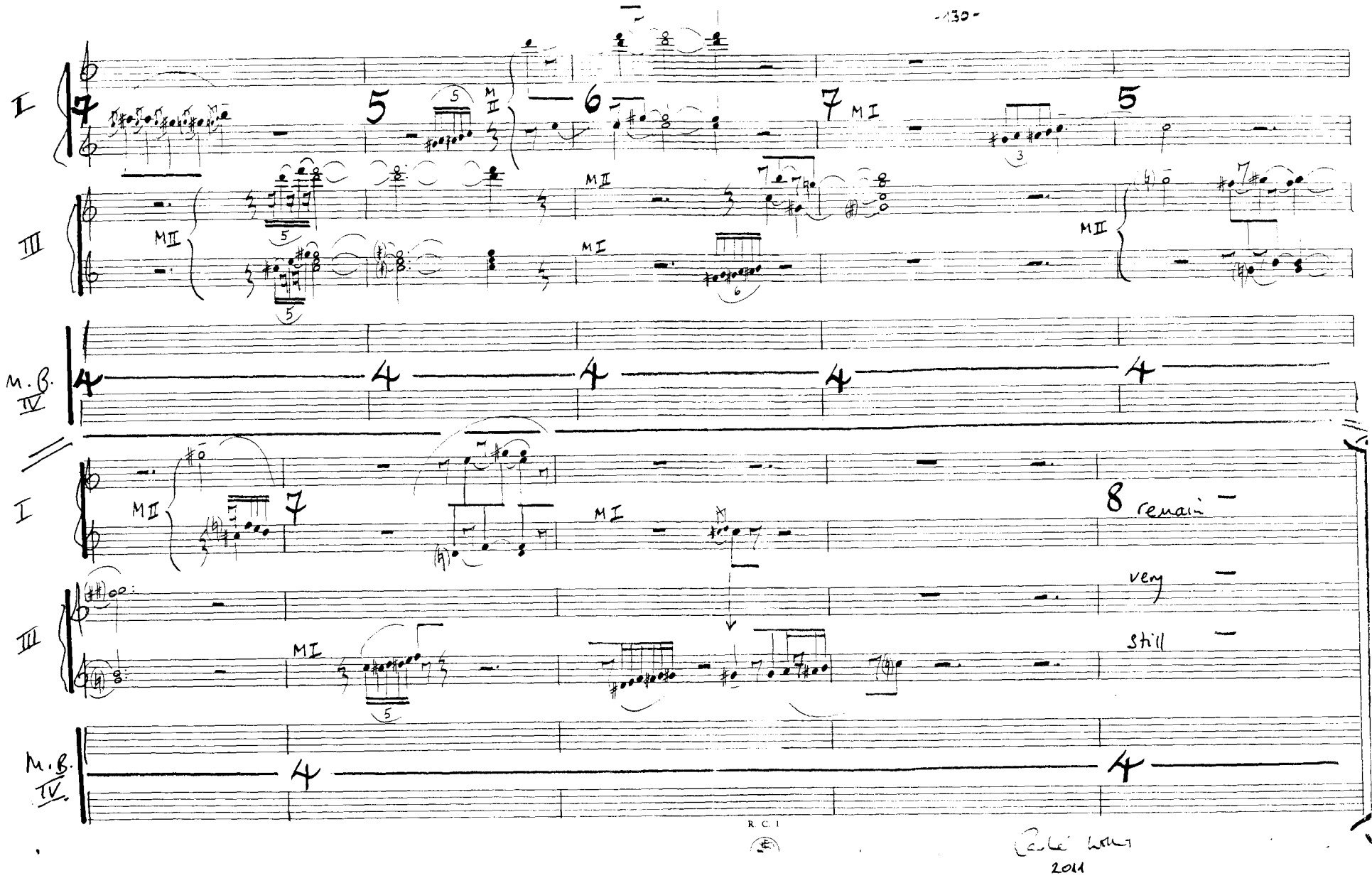
I

II

III


(1.)
MI
[10 sec.]
Sit slowly. Begin slow-motion movement of hand-crossing/register changing at keyboard


E
♩ = 60 distant, dreamy
[pre-recorded]
I
[live]
III
[pre-recorded] Musical Boxes
IV
MUSIC BOXES
M.B. IV
MI
MII
R C 1



R.C.I

2011