Patrick Harrex

Rhythm of Black Lines

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Composer's note

The title of this short work is borrowed from the painter Piet Mondrian. His painting *Rhythm of Black Lines* (1935-42) follows the familiar grid structure which dominates his later works. There are four horizontal and seven vertical lines which stretch across the whole canvas. The vertical lines are unevenly spaced, giving a strong sense of movement. The picture is predominantly black and white, with small areas of blue, yellow and red.

My work was not originally intended as any form of musical interpretation of Mondrian's painting, but in looking for a title there appeared to me to be several common areas. Notated music is, generally, a series of black lines. There are four parts, or horizontal lines, in my work. The basic material is relatively simple but, by layering the parts, more complex patterns emerge, although there are moments of inactivity/ silence. The tam-tam at the beginning and end of the work creates a different colour from the 'monochrome' of the brake drums or, if you like, a frame for the sounds that they weave together.

The structure of my *Rhythm of Black Lines* is quite simple: the four players, who have two brake drums each (the 8 brake drums must each be of a different pitch), perform the same material five times, but because they start one after the other and there are spaces of varying duration between repeats, they set up constantly changing melodic and harmonic patterns within what becomes a fairly constant rhythmic pattern. Only for the fifth and final time do all the players come together, playing in rhythmic unison. The overall effect may be likened to that of a (very small) gamelan in that each of the four players is responsible for only part of the whole body of sound.

The allocation of the brake drums between the players is up to them, giving them some choice in the sounds that are created. The choice of sticks is also left to the performers. Any tempo within the range crotchet = 54 to 72 may be selected. The result of these variables, particularly of tempo and sticks, is that it is possible to give each performance of the work a different characteristic; for example a very bright effect will be achieved if played at the faster tempo with very hard mallets whereas the adoption of a slow tempo with the use of softer mallets will produce a more sombre result. Indeed, I encourage performers to experiment with the different effects which may be achieved from this limited material.

PH

If brake drums are not available, they may be replaced by instruments with similar properties, such as steel drums (1 per player), cow bells, woodblocks, biscuit/coffee tins.

Duration: 4 to 6 minutes

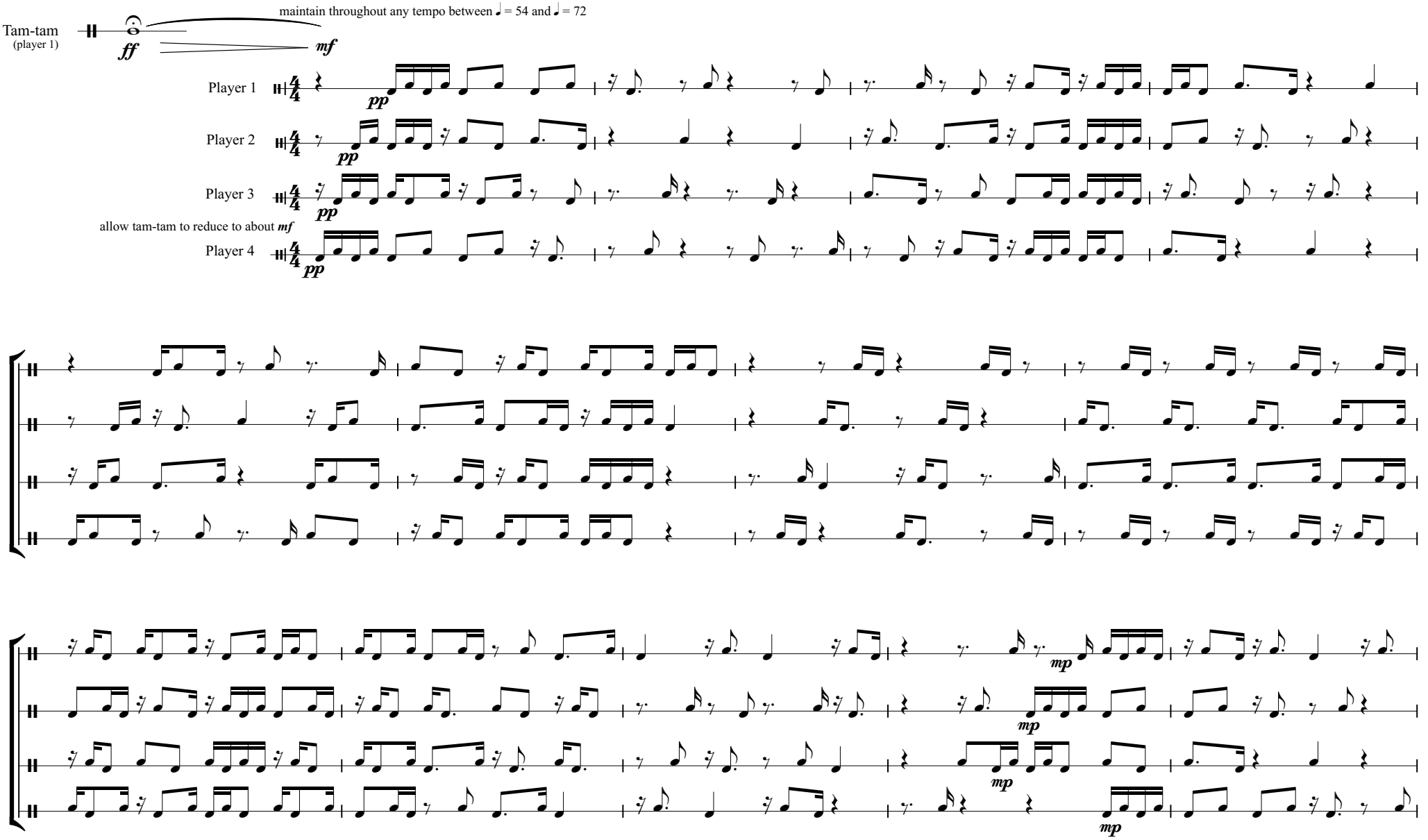
Rhythm of Black Lines *received its first performance on 12th May 2005 by Brake Drum Assembly (Paul Burnell, Karen Hunt, Oli Mayne and Billy Strachan) at the Sussex Arts Club, Brighton*

for Brake Drum Assembly

Rhythm of Black Lines

for 8 brake drums - 4 players + tam-tam

Patrick Harrex



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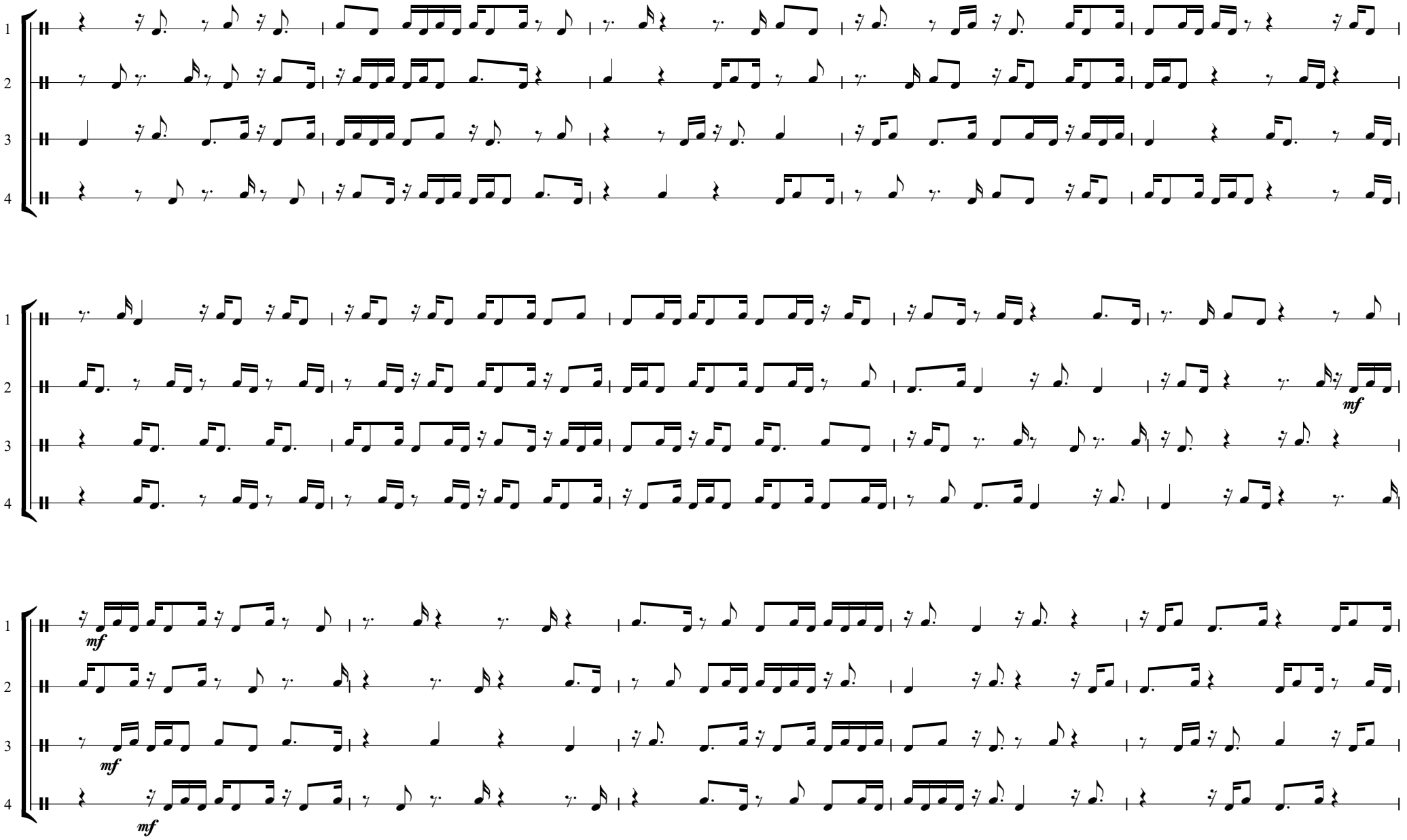
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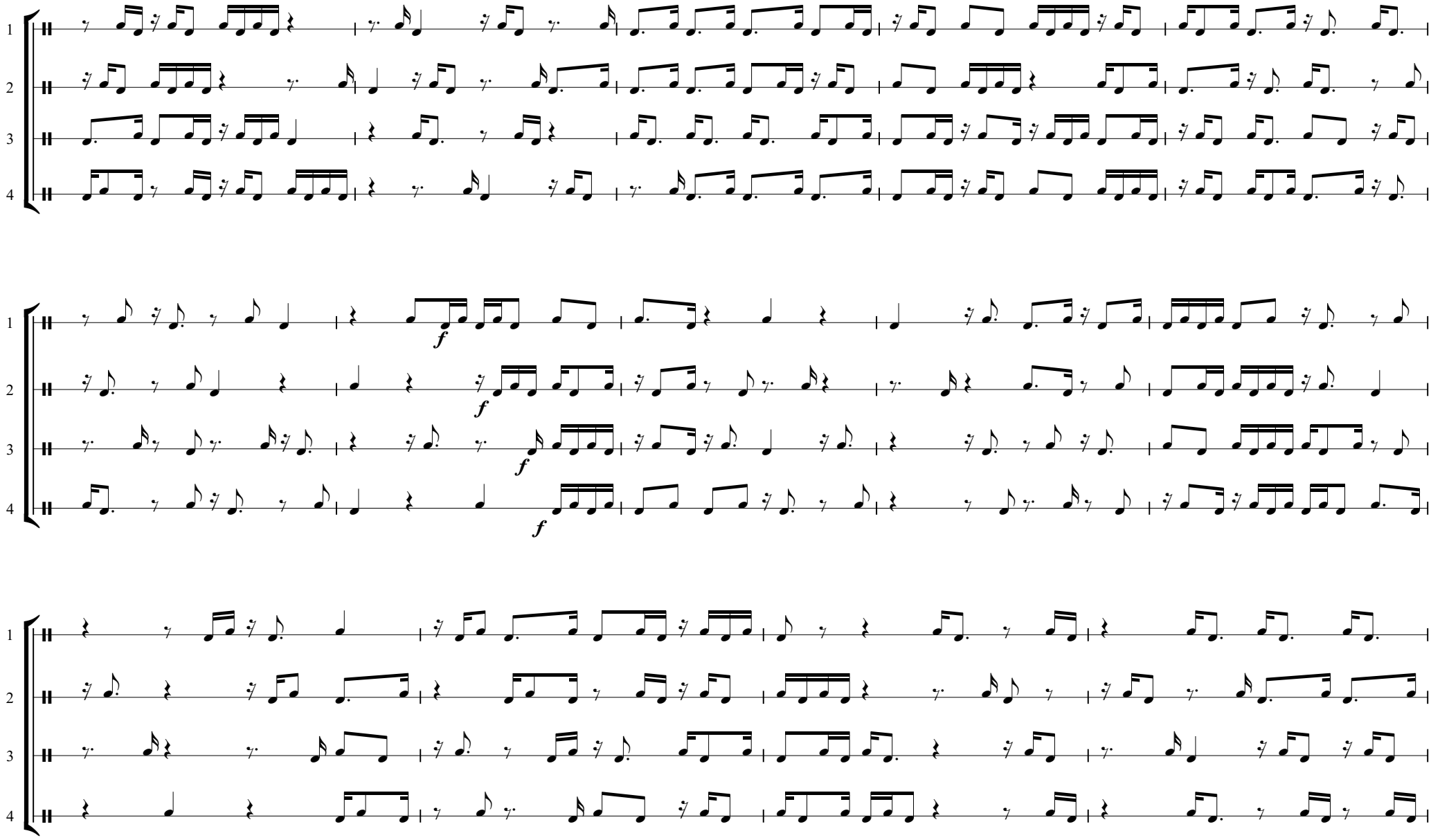
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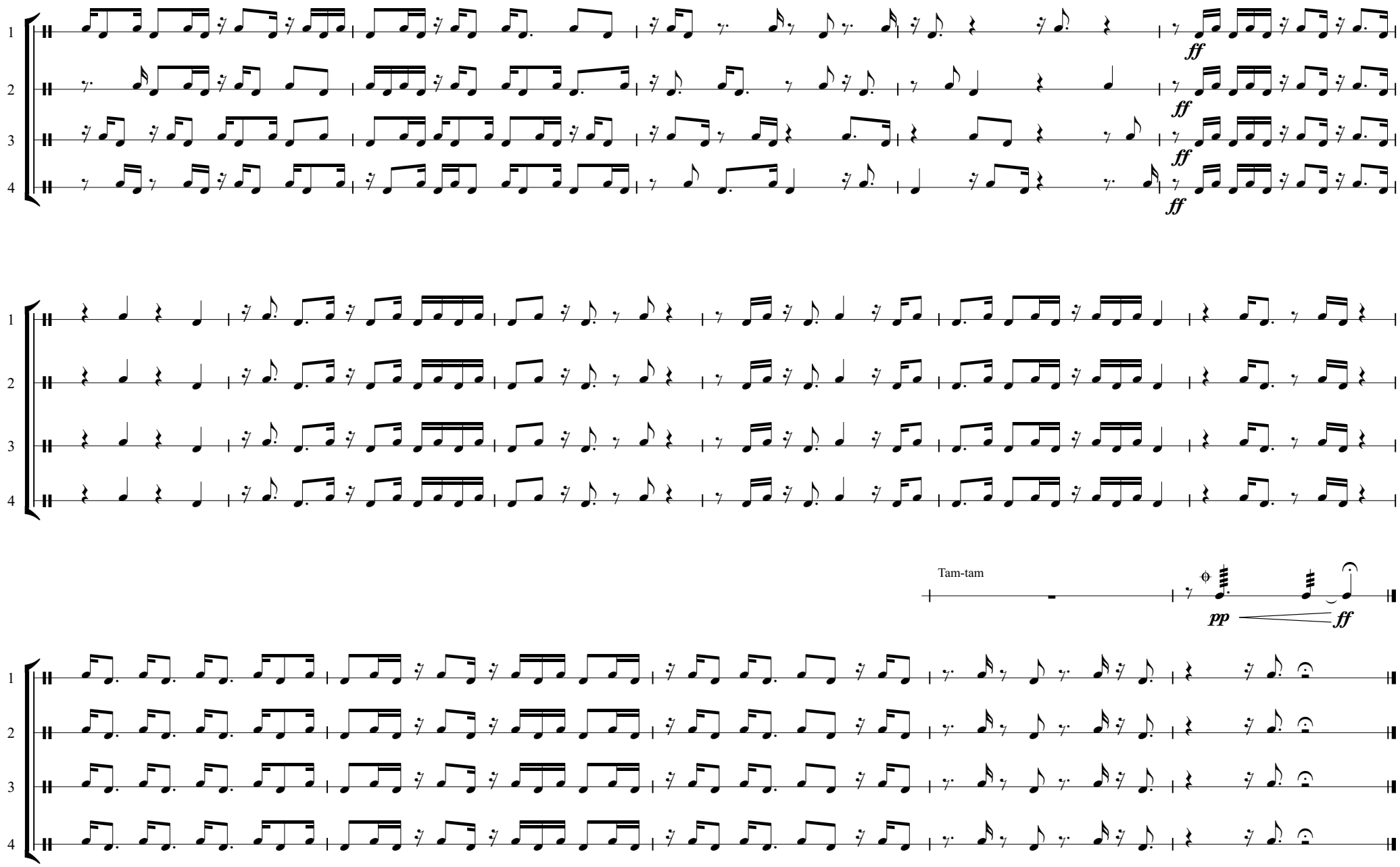

ϕ one player to strike two drums while another plays tam-tam (tam-tam player may need to switch before last bar), or use 5th player on tam-tam

Duration: between approx. 4 and 6 minutes