FILM MUSIC

PICNIC

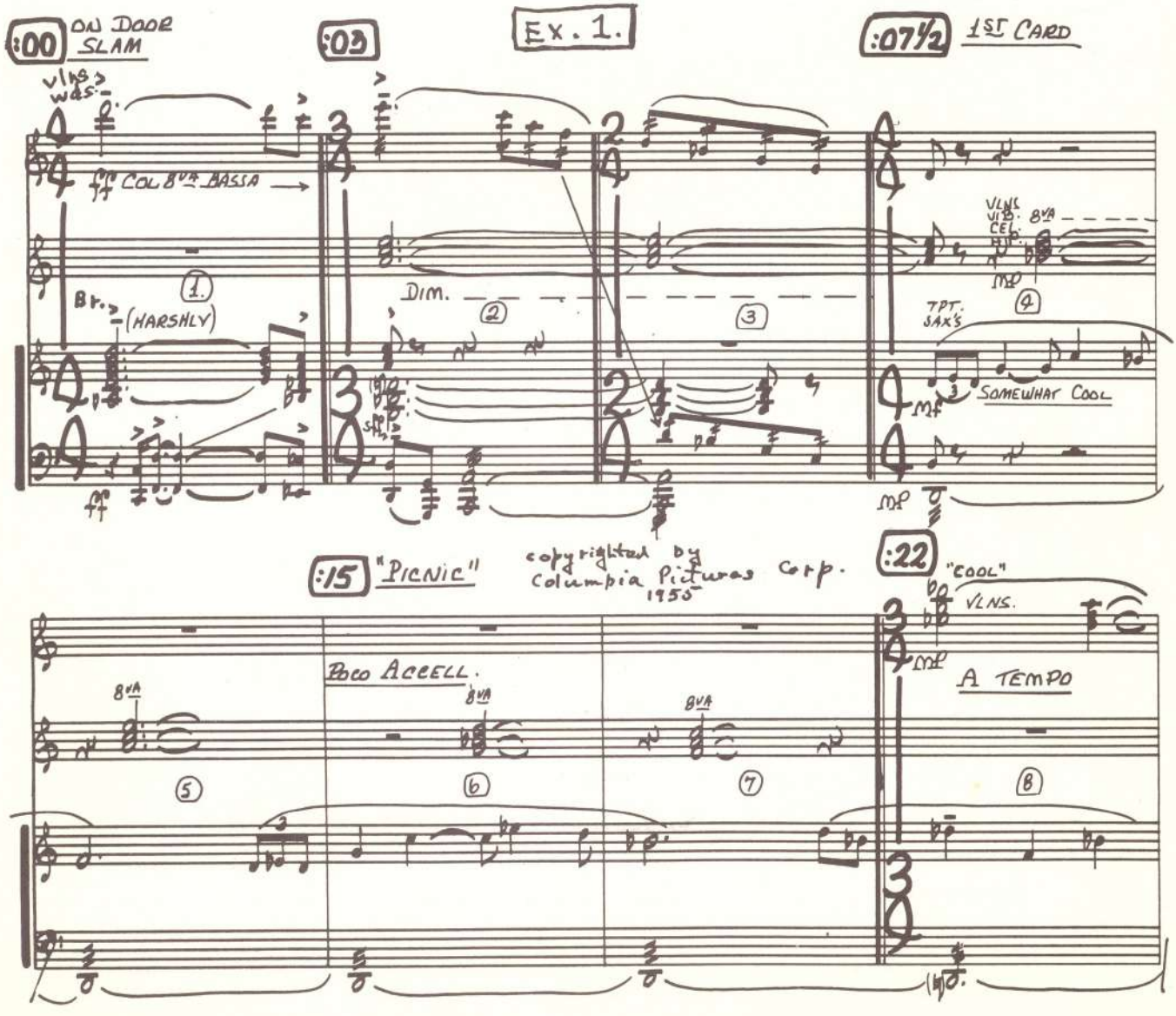
JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1956 VOLUME XV NUMBER 3

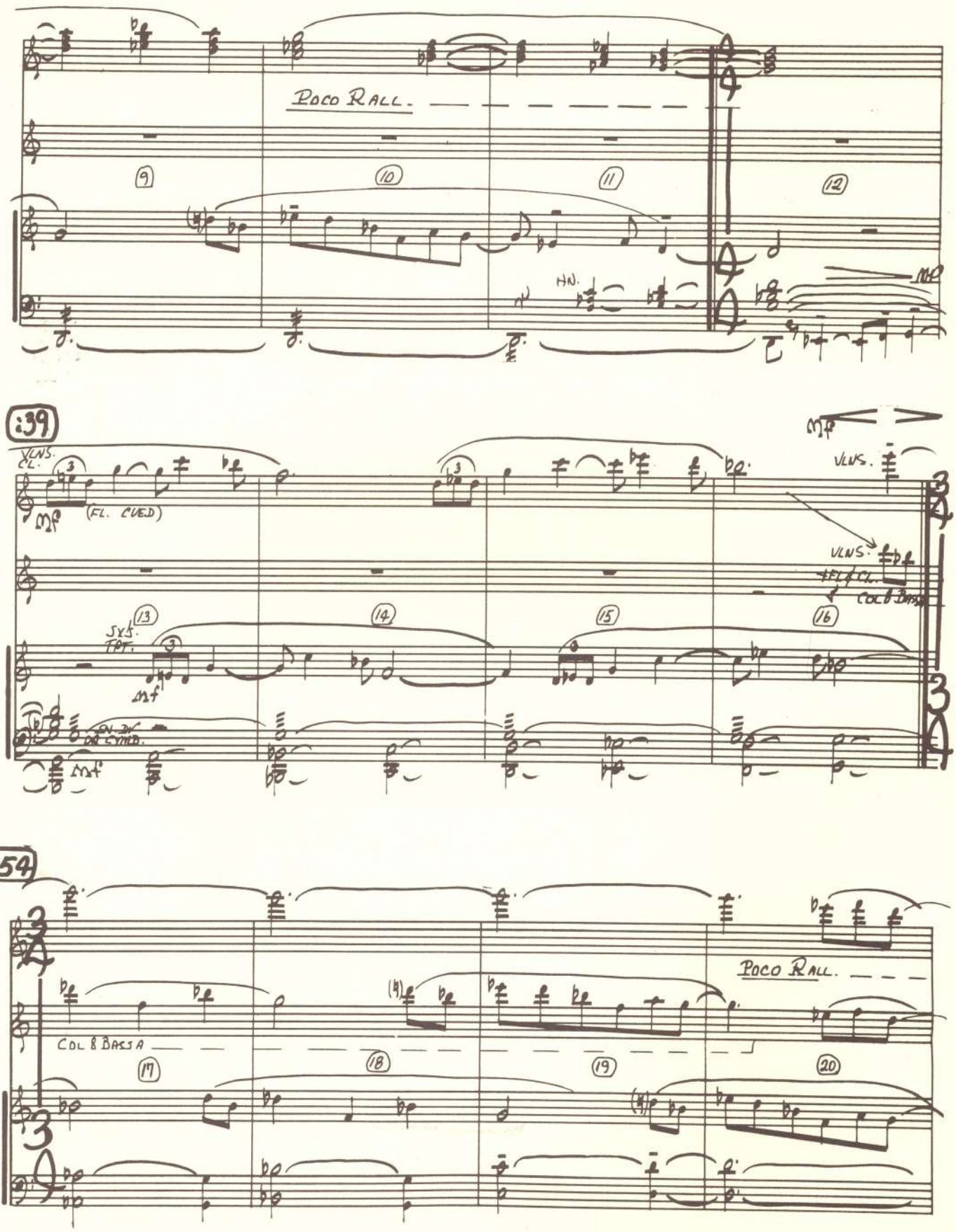
PICNIC

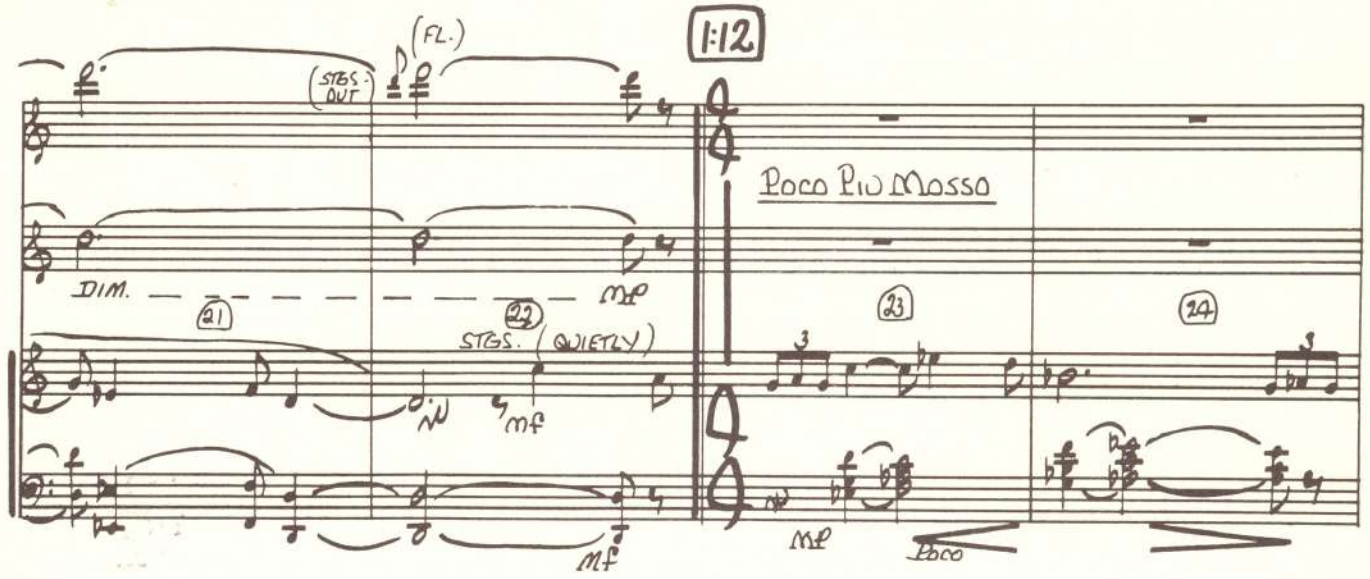
George Duning

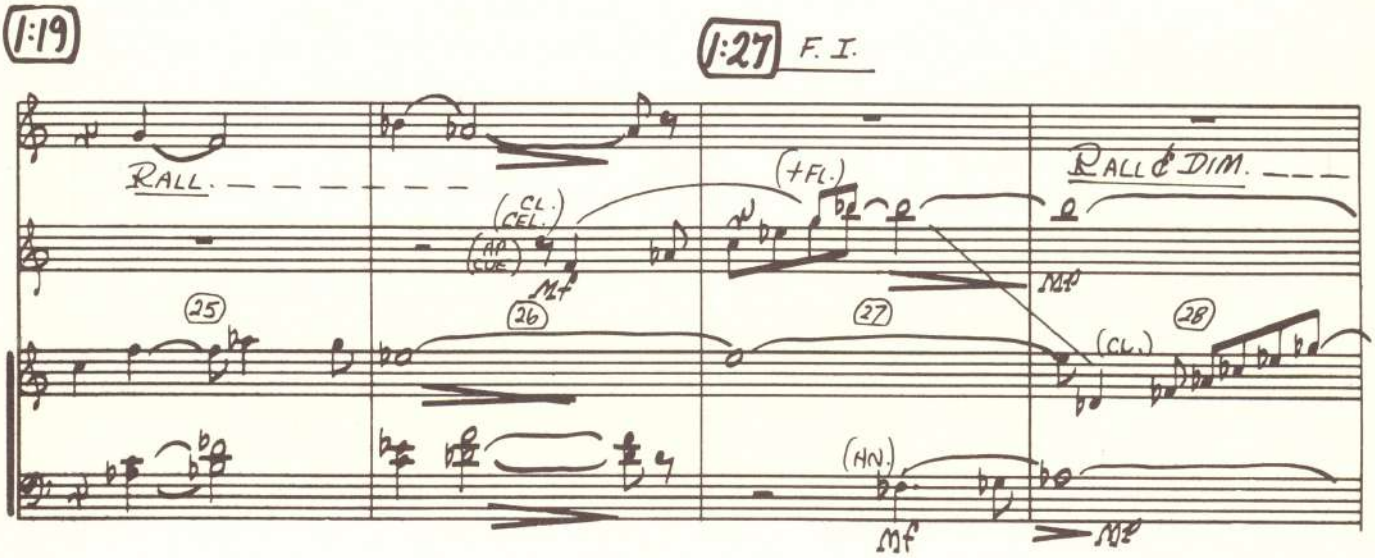
Composing the background score to PICNIC was a challenging and grateful experience. First of all, having come from the middle West, I believed the story and characters. Under the sensitive direction of Joshua Logan, the principals really come to life.

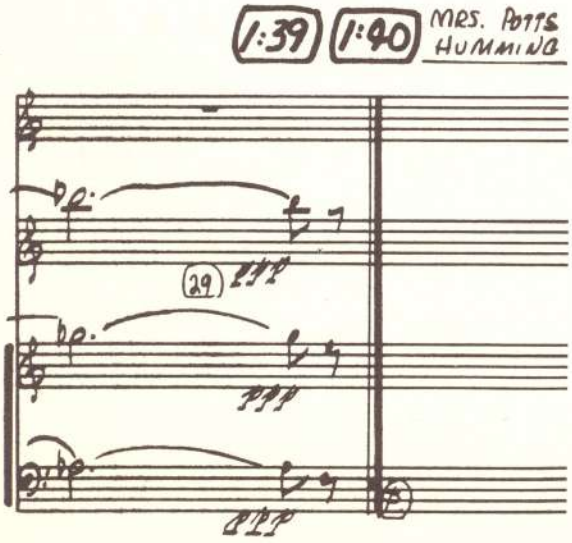
For Hal Carter, the restless and wayward ex-college football hero, I used a somewhat tense and irregular theme, with a touch of the blues (Example 1, bars 8, 9, & 10) first heard over the Main Title cards, in a unison of trumpet, alto and tenor sax. At bar 13 (Example 1), Hal's theme is repeated in the violins and woods with the trumpet and saxes imitating in common form a half bar later. Contrary to usual practice, the Main Title starts without music — just the sound effects of a diesel engine freight train arriving in the railroad yards of a small Kansas wheat town. Hal gets out of a freight car, and after a facetious remark from the train man he violently slams the freight-car door shut. At this point the opening music is heard, a harsh fragmentary motif (Example 1, bars 1 and 2). Near the end of this opening cue a motif of ascending thirds is heard (Example 1, bars 27 to the end). This motif is the basis of the love theme (Example 2, bars 3 to 5).



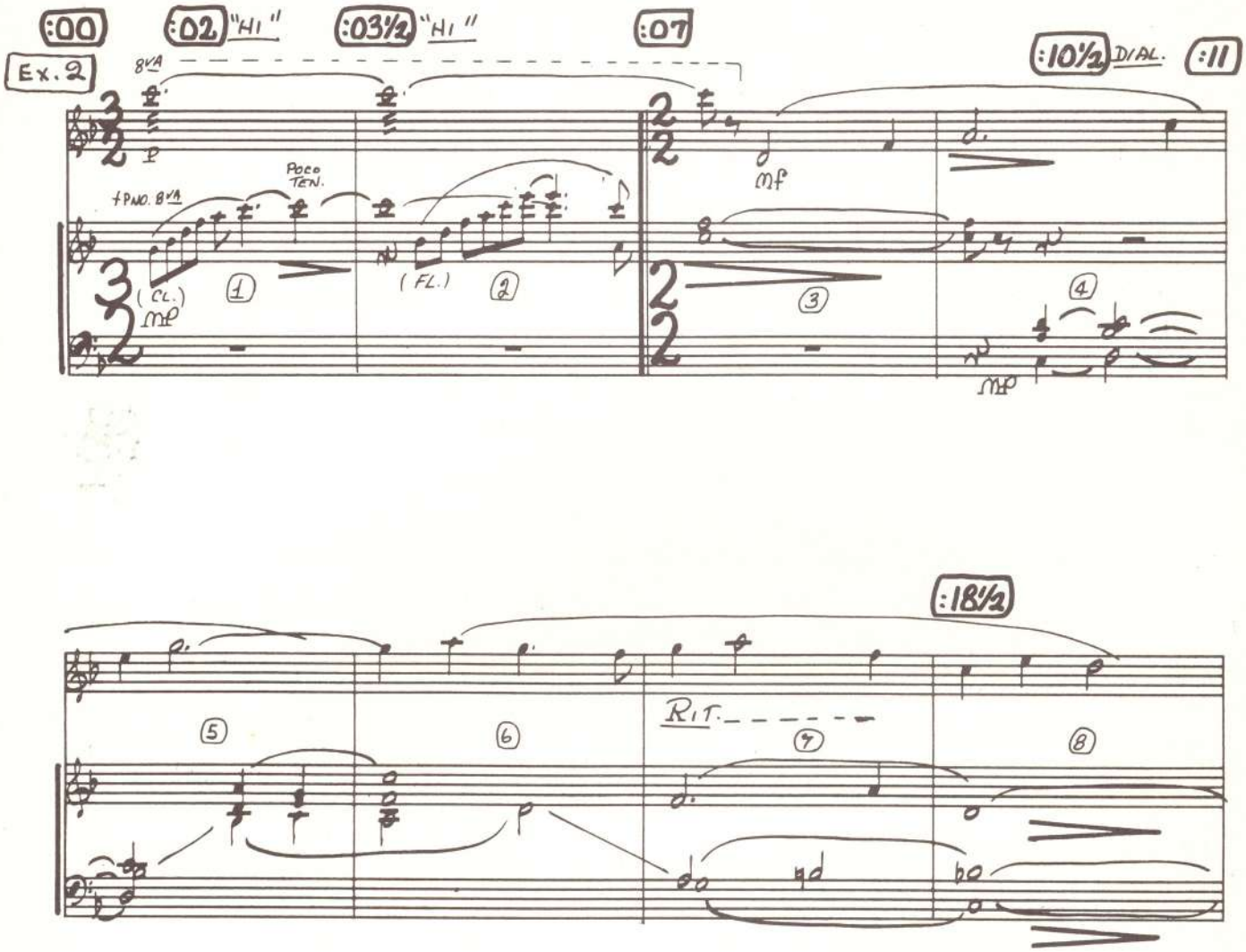

POCO RALL.
HN.
:39
VLNS.
CL.
(FL. CUED)
VLNS.
VLNS.
COL 8 BASSA
SXS.
TPT.
:54
POCO RALL.
COL 8 BASSA







An interesting unbalanced orchestral effect will be found in **Example** 2, bars 10 to 14. In several scenes the mother, Flo, makes bitter references to her ex-husband, and in other scenes feels the similarity between Hal and her ex-husband. The four-bar passage in **Example** 2, bars 10 to 14 is the musical reference to the ex-husband and was set in two flutes and two horns with piano and vibraphone accents. Arthur Morton, my orchestrator, and I debated re-enforcing the two flutes and tried adding two clarinets on the recording stage, but this seemed to destroy the somewhat tense and cold effect of two flutes and two horns alone.



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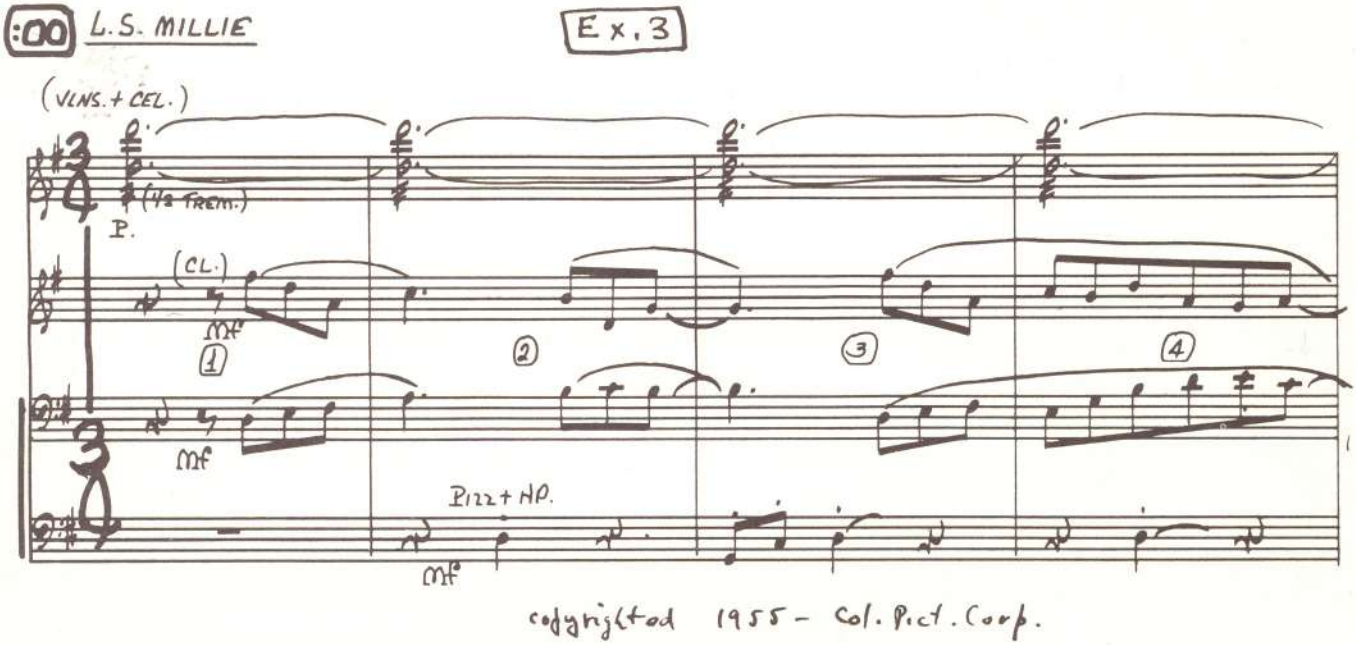
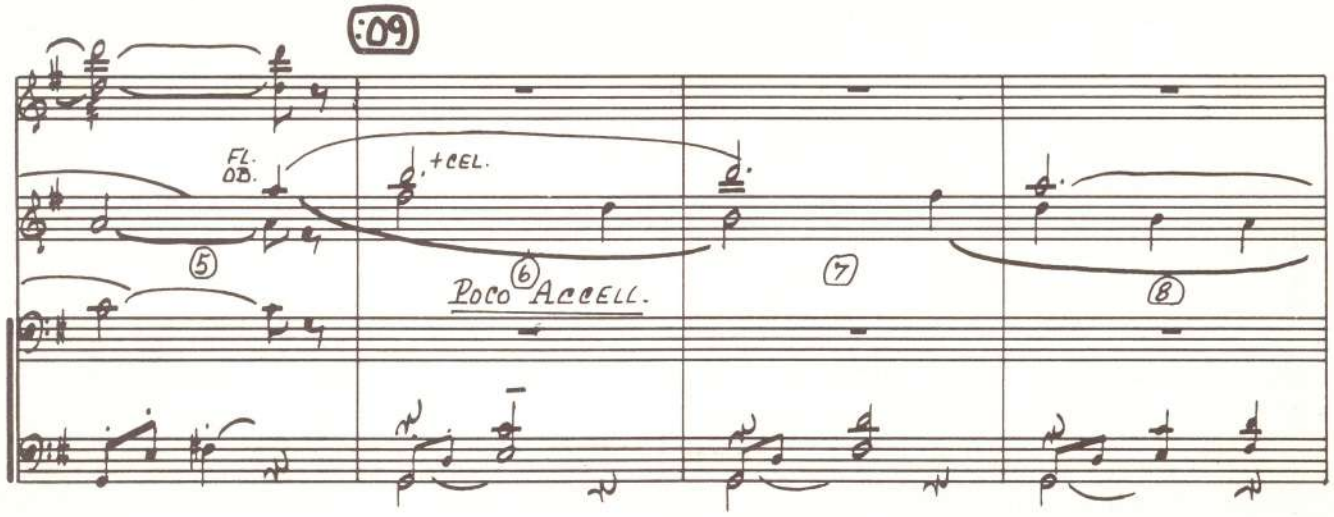
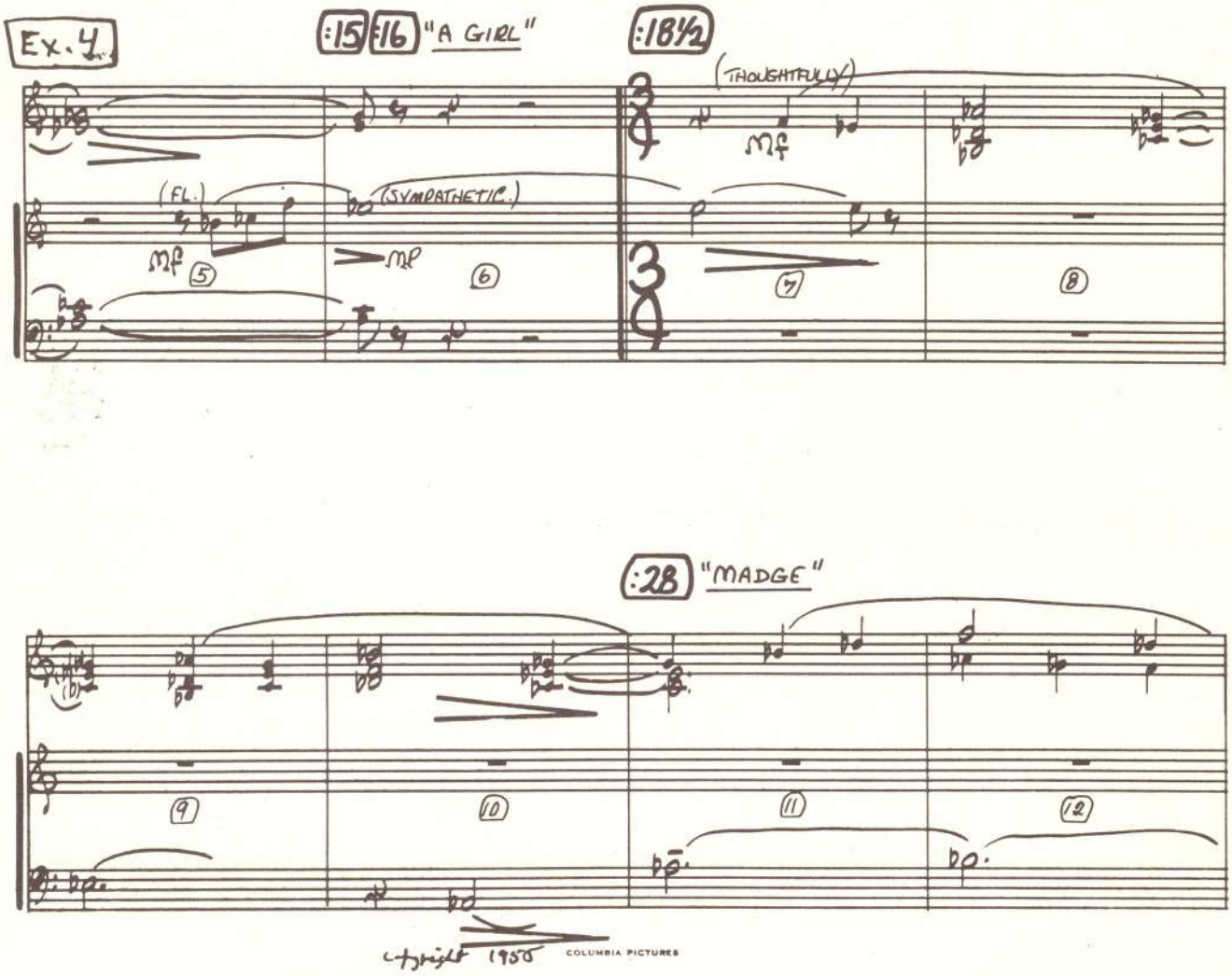
For the Owens family, consisting of the older daughter, Madge, (Kim Novak), the younger sister (Susan Strasberg) and the anxious and somewhat bitter mother, Flo, (Betty Fields), there is a sort of village theme, usually heard in woodwind colors (Example 3). The mother is chiefly concerned with having Madge "marry the right man." In some of the dialogue sequences between Madge and her mother, there is a waltz-like tune heard in the strings, with a simple harp accompaniment (Example 4, bars 7 to 15). Notice the use of the inversion of the ascending thirds from the love theme (Example 4, bars 12 to 14). Example 5, bars 50 to 58, is a distorted tense version of the mother theme.






Ex. 4
:15 :16 "A GIRL"
:18½
(THOUGHTFULLY)
(FL.)
(SYMPATHETIC.)
mf
mp
mf
5
6
7
8

:28 "MADGE"
9
10
11
12
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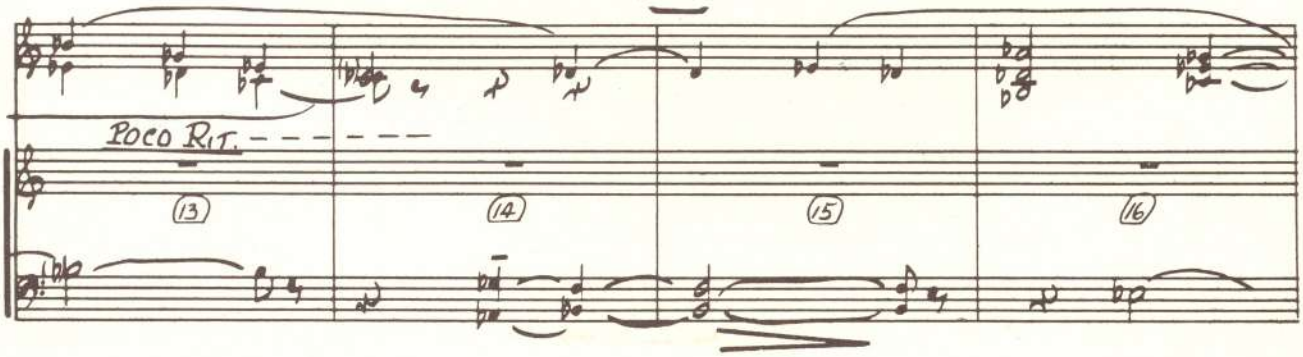
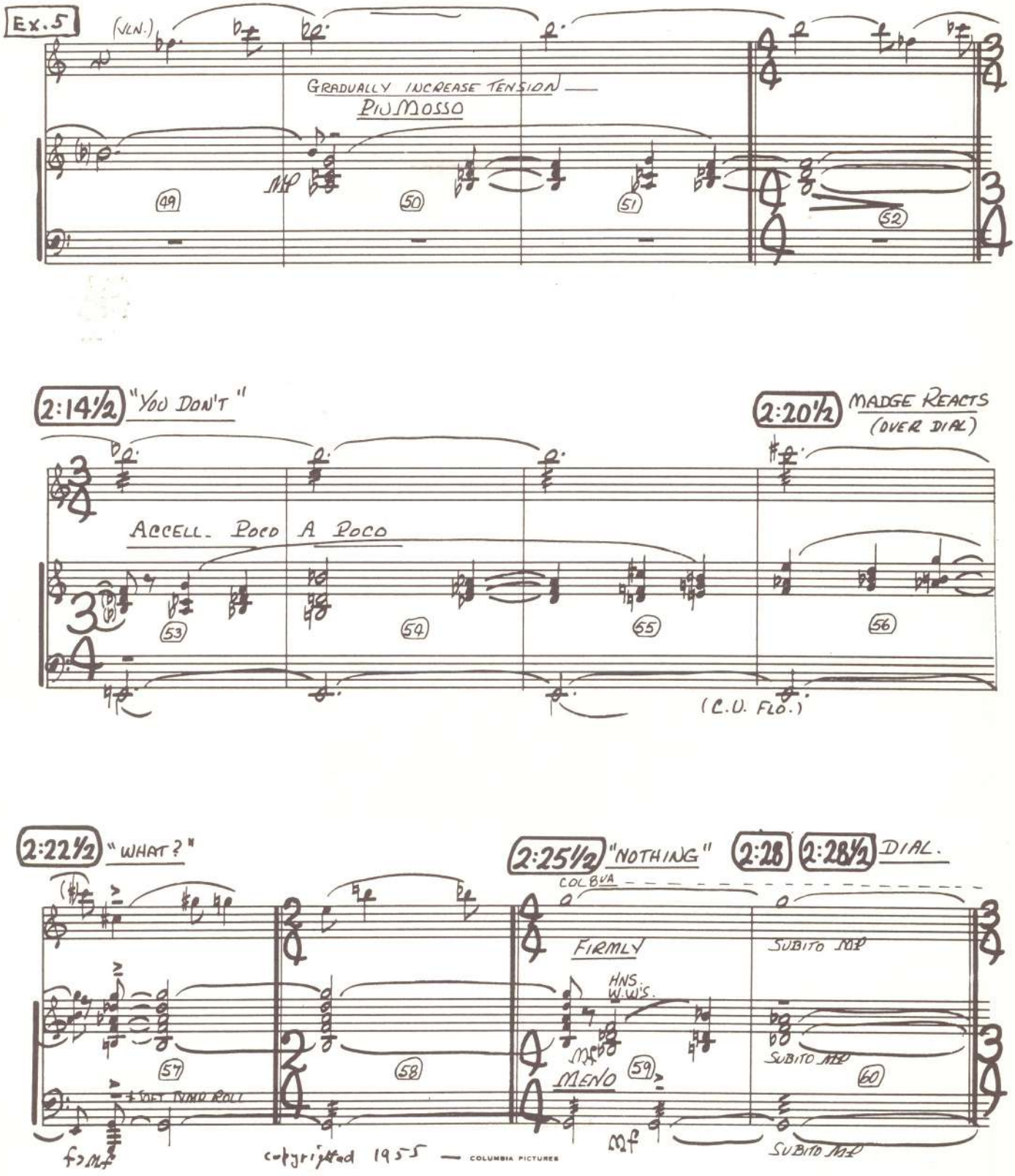

POCO RIT.
13
14
15
16


Ex. 5
(VLN.)
GRADUALLY INCREASE TENSION
PIU MOSSO
MP
49
50
51
52
2:14½ "YOU DON'T"
2:20½ MADGE REACTS (OVER DIAL)
ACCELL. POCO A POCO
53
54
55
56
(C.U. FLO.)
2:22½ "WHAT?"
2:25½ "NOTHING"
2:28
2:28½ DIAL.
COL 8VA
FIRMLY
SUBITO MP
HNS. W.W'S.
MF
MENO
59
60
57
58
SOFT TYMP ROLL
f>MF
MF
SUBITO MP
SUBITO MP
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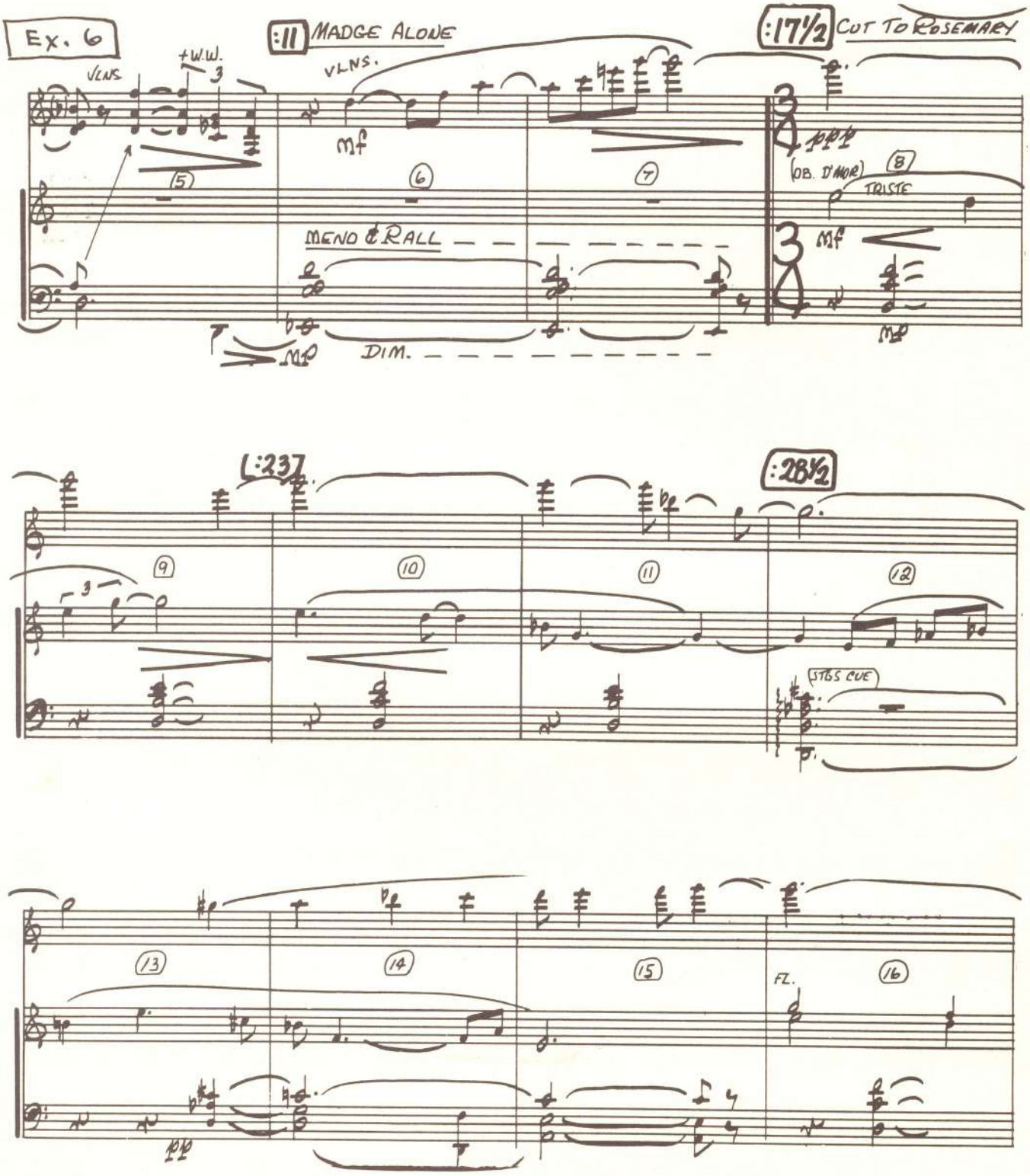
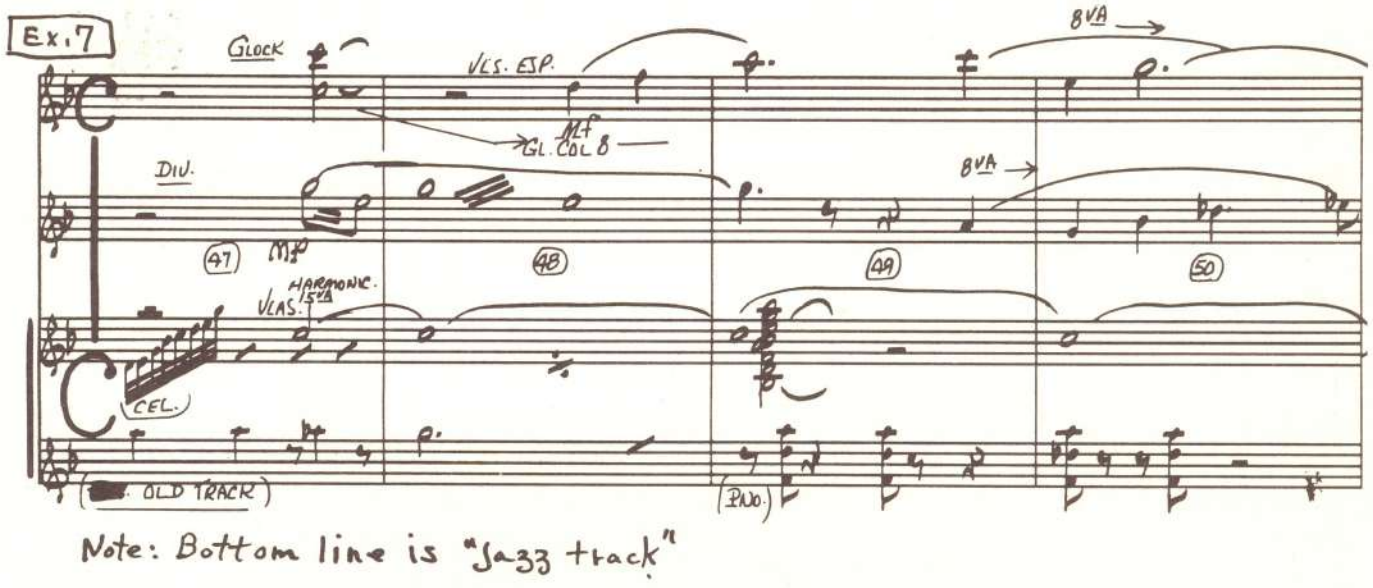
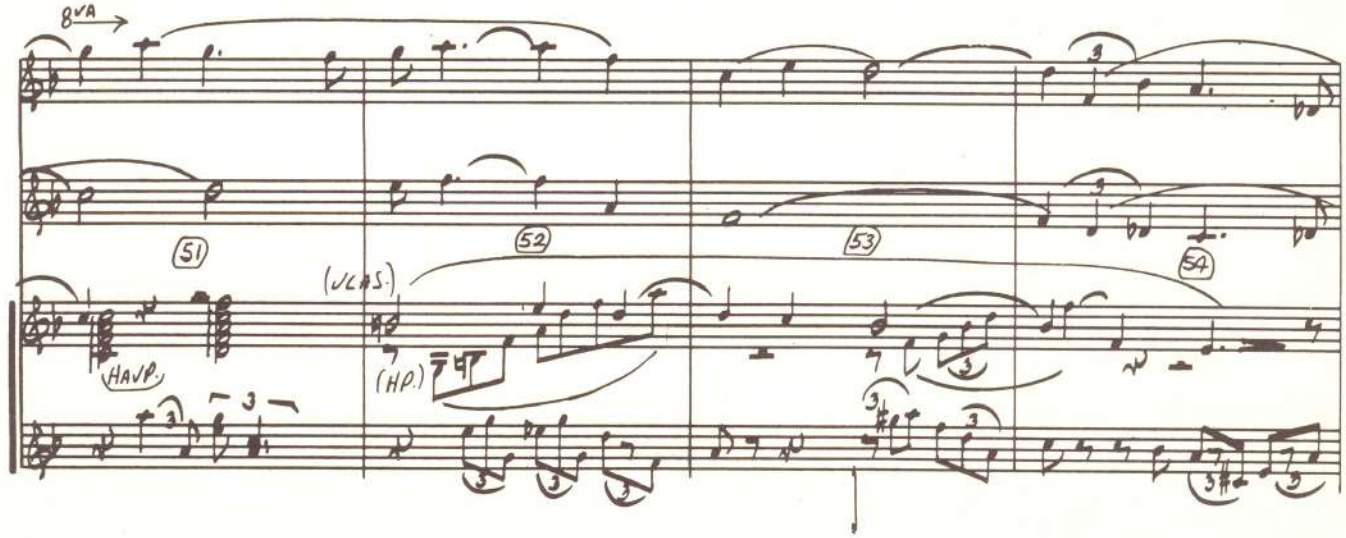
Boarding with the Owens family is a lovely frustrated school teacher, Rosemary (Rosalind Russell). In spite of her brash, devil-may-care personality, her main desire in life is to get married to a local bachelor, Howard, (Arthur O'Connell). Here the theme is lovely and plaintive, usually heard on the oboe d'amore (Example 6, bars 8 to 15). Most of the source music in the wonderful picnic sequence was picked up on location in Kansas. The brass band, quartets and soloists were all local talent.



An interesting cue at the picnic is the scene where Hal and Madge are dancing to a rhythm group. They are oblivious of their surroundings and at a certain point they move closer together and we can feel the inevitable attraction between boy and girl. At this point I was able to superimpose a three-part string treatment of the love theme playing against the rhythm group (Example 7, bars 47 to 58). This scoring was recorded separately against the rhythm track and then "reverbed".





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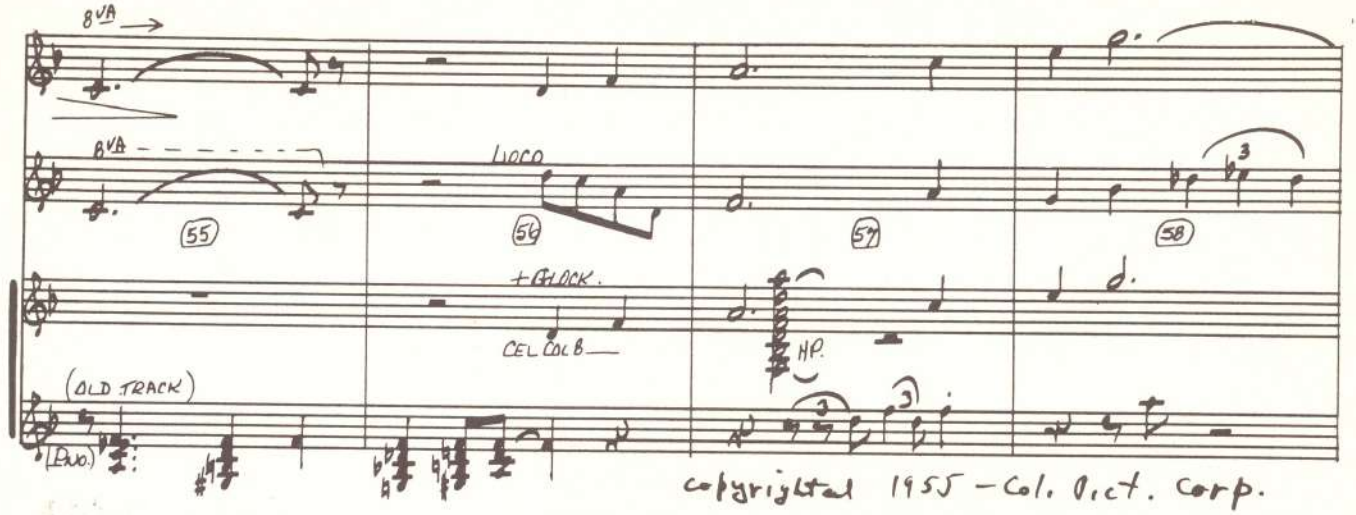

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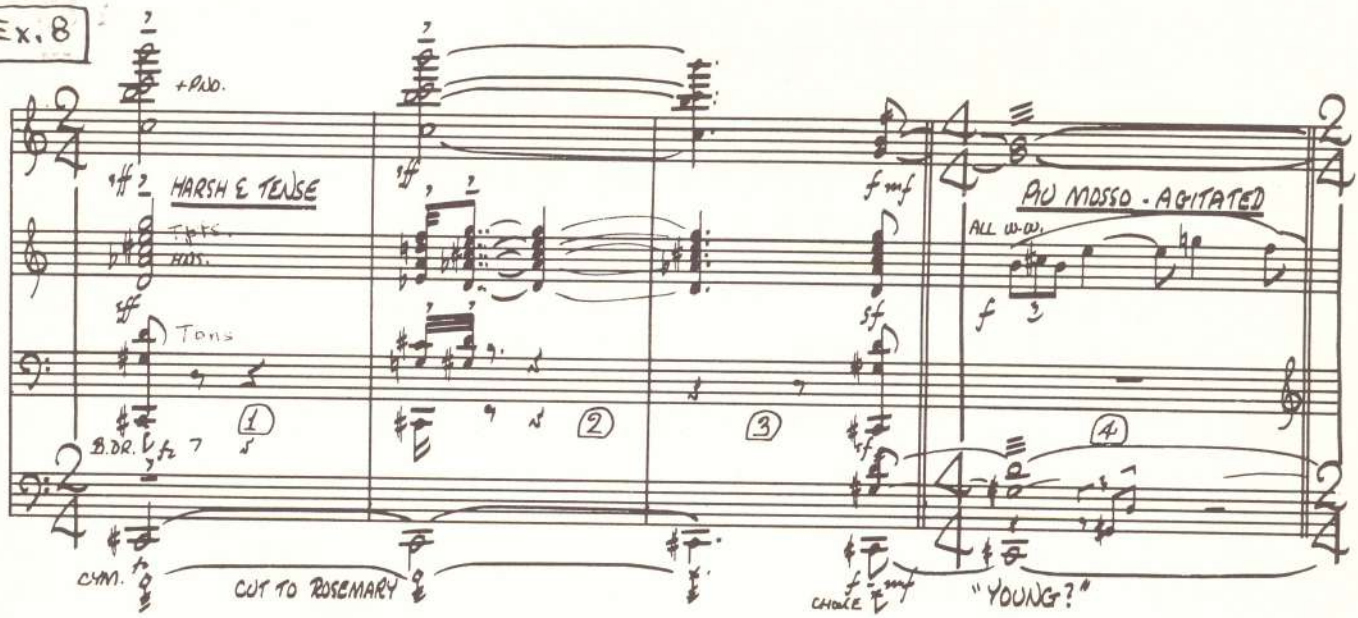
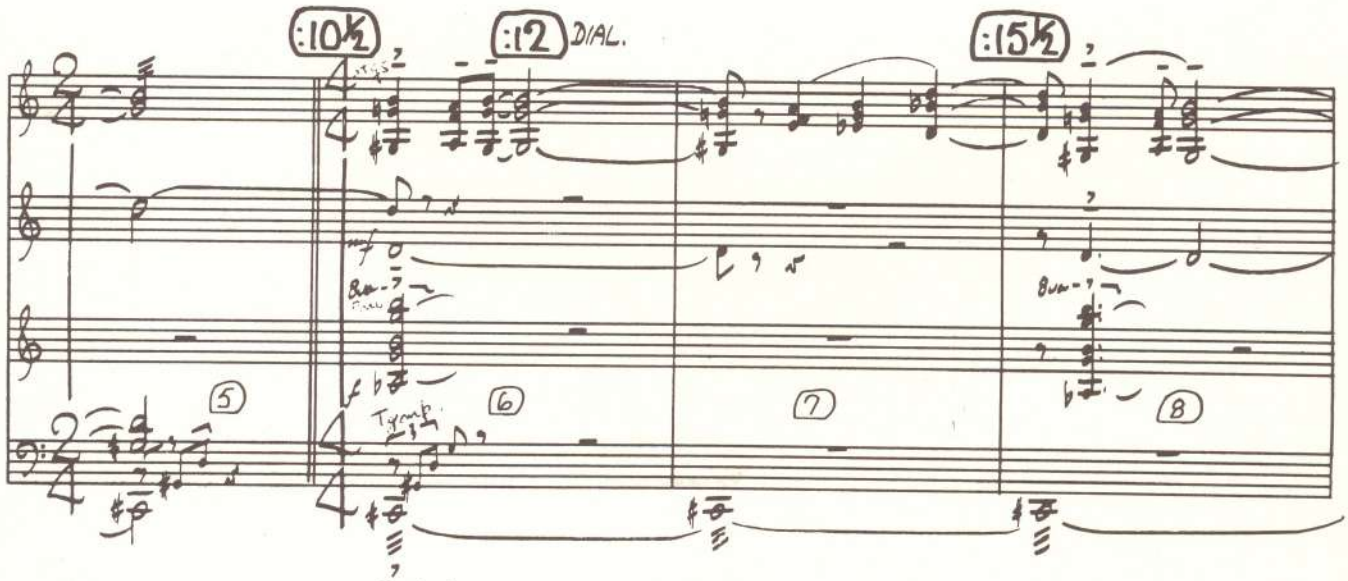
Ex. 8





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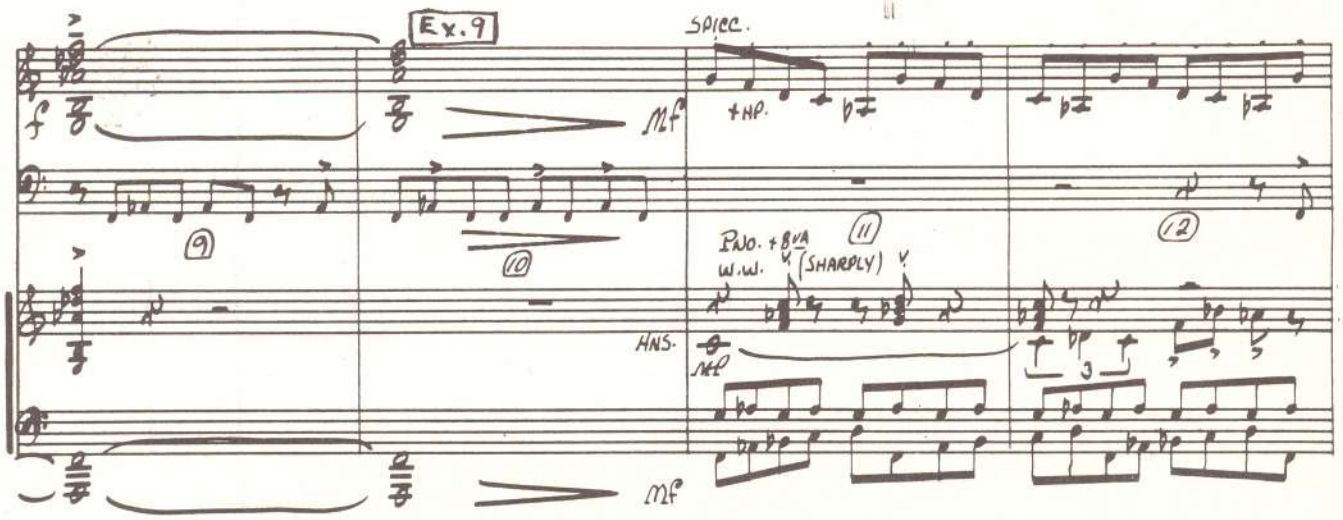
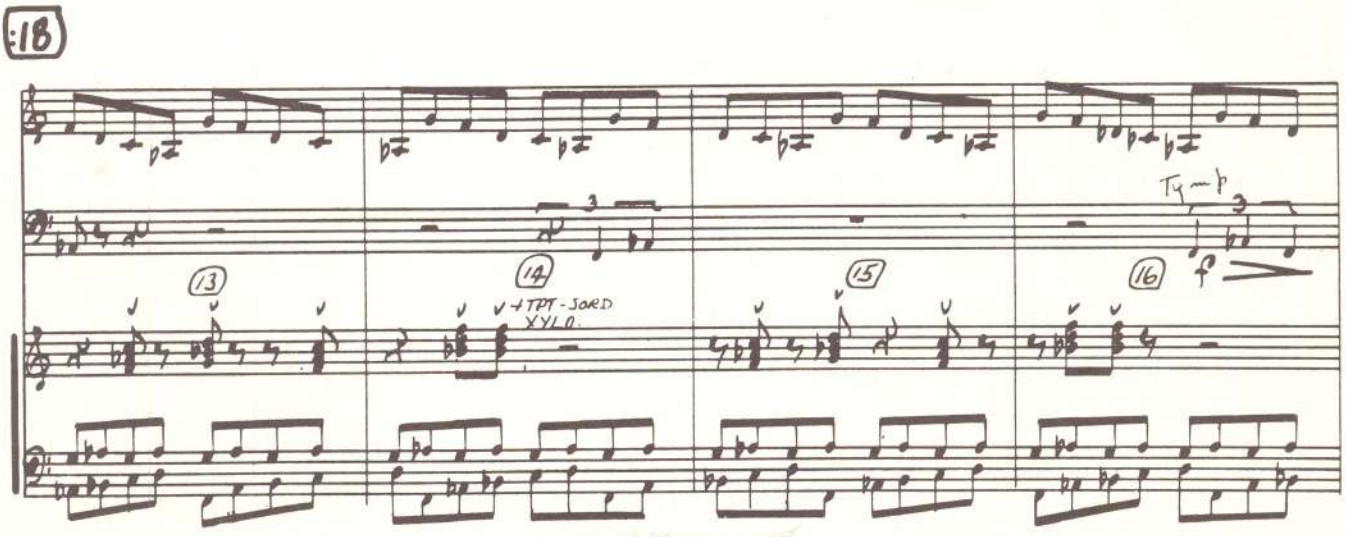
Following this scene where Rosemary (the teacher) is dancing with Hal, she suddenly rips the sleeve of his shirt, at which point the underscoring crashes in with a shocking chord, wiping out the source music (dance band). (Example 8, bars 1 to 8). The effect is one of suddenly shocking the audience out of the reality of the picnic sequence and pointing up the frustrations and inner turmoil that has grown within the principal characters.

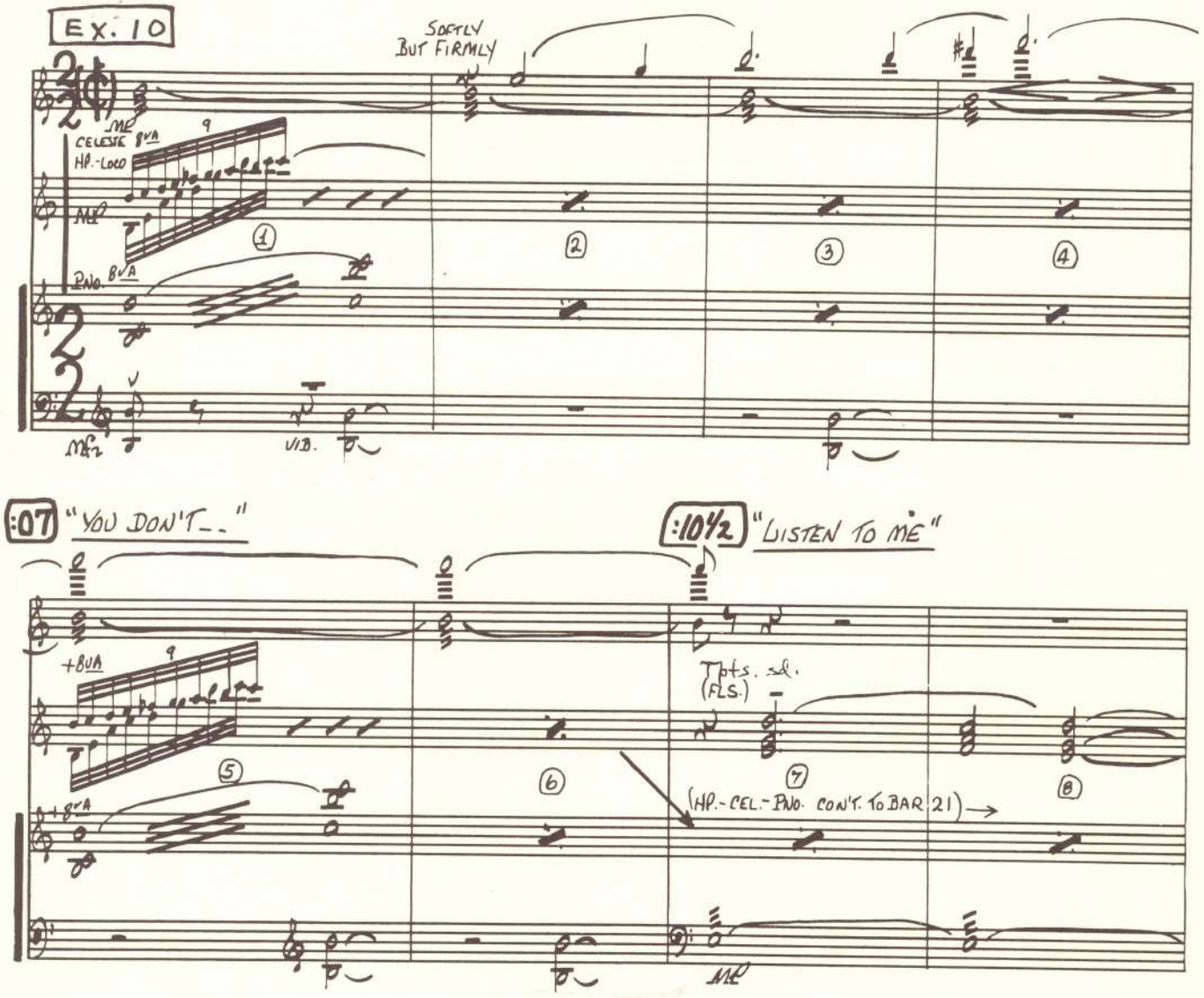




In reel 12, Hal is fleeing to the freight yards, pursued by the police. Example 9, bars 11 to 16, are from this cue. The horns state Hal's theme (Example 9, bars 11 and 12) over a jazzed accompaniment of woods, piano and trumpets and an eighth-note patter in the strings and harp which set up the basic tonality.

In the last reel, Madge has decided to follow Hal and her mother pleads with her to stay and marry the "nice, rich boy." The agitation and tension were set up in a long harp, piano and celeste mixture (Example 10, bar 1). The ascending thirds of the love theme are heard in the violins. The mother motif enters in flute and trumpet (Example 10, bar 7). At the point where Madge tears her hands loose from her mother, a sharp accent occurs, followed by complete silence (Example 11). This was what Joshua Logan called "The cutting of the umbilical cord"! ! (Example 11, bar 46).

At the end of the picture there is a high helicopter shot showing the bus carrying Madge and the freight train on which Hal has "hitched a ride." Here both Hal's theme and the boy-girl theme are heard simultaneously (Example 12, bars 82 to end).



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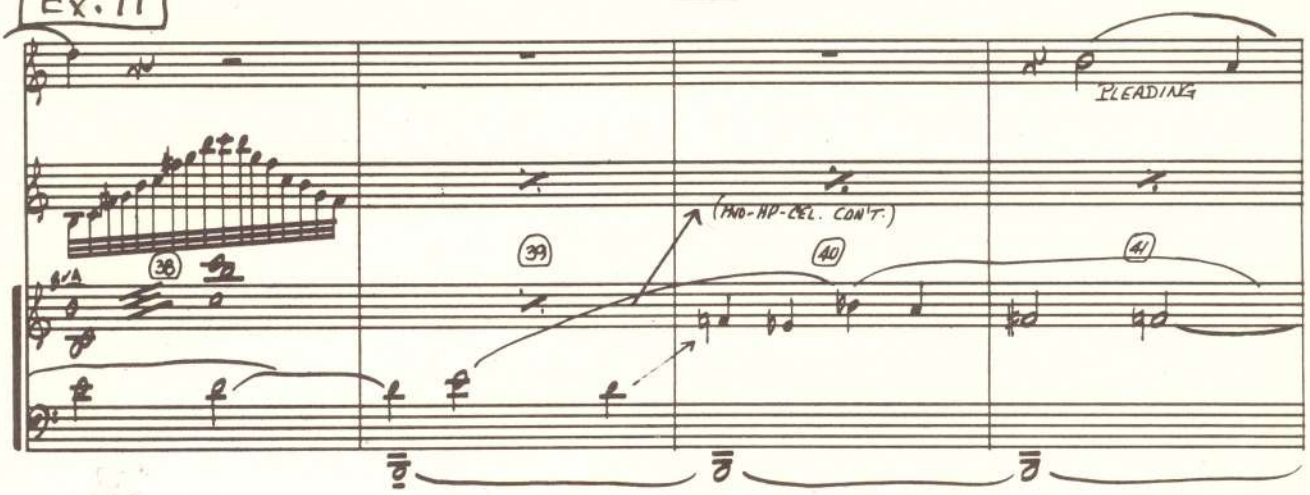
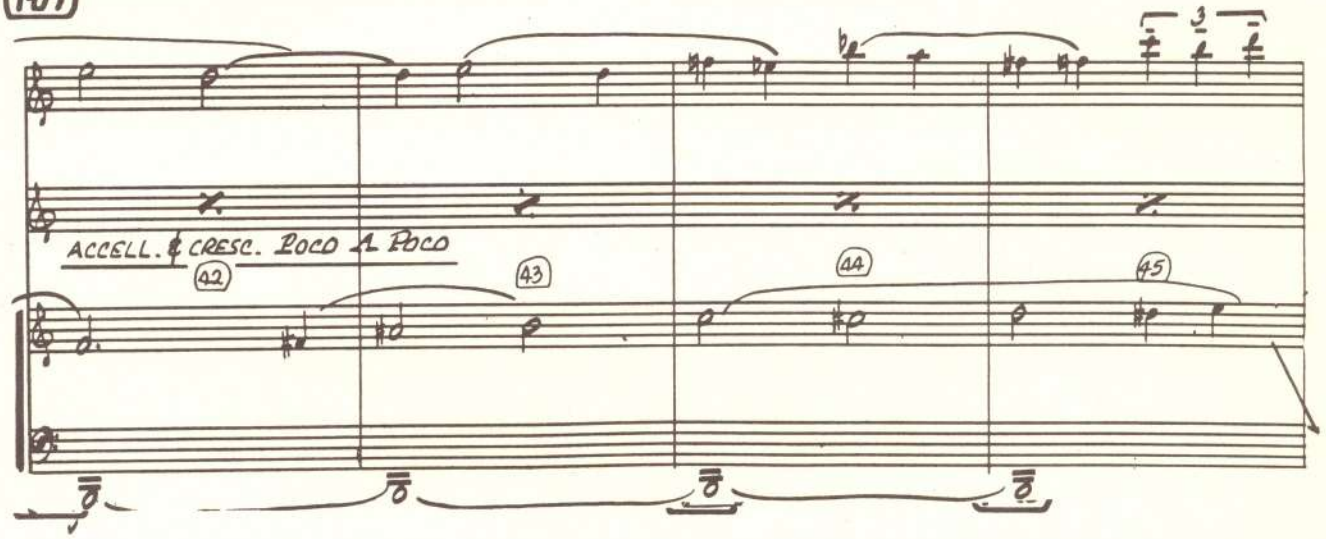
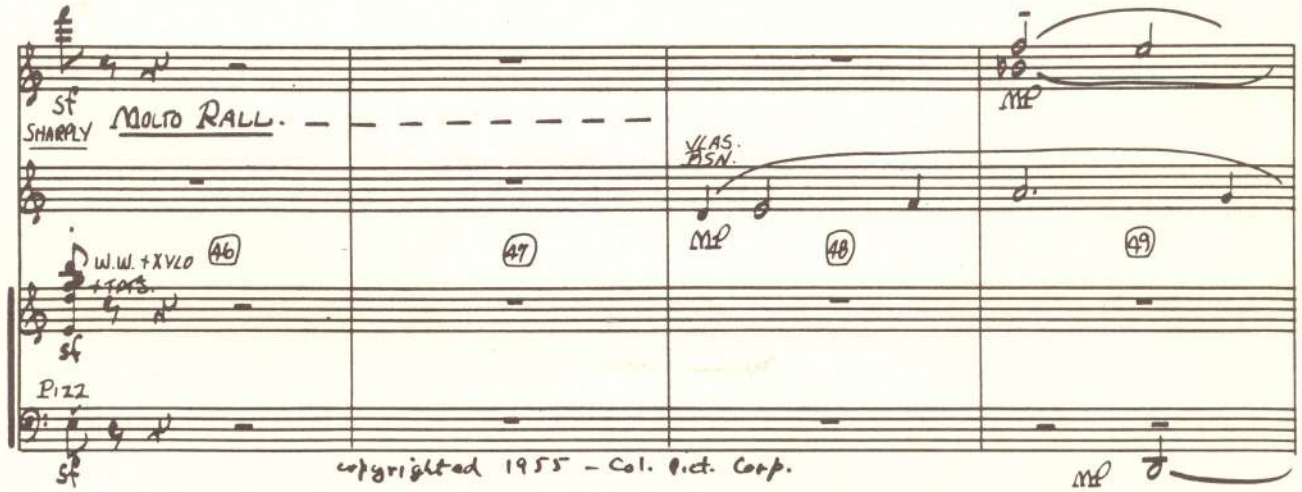
Ex. 11

(1:06) "OH MADGE"



1:09





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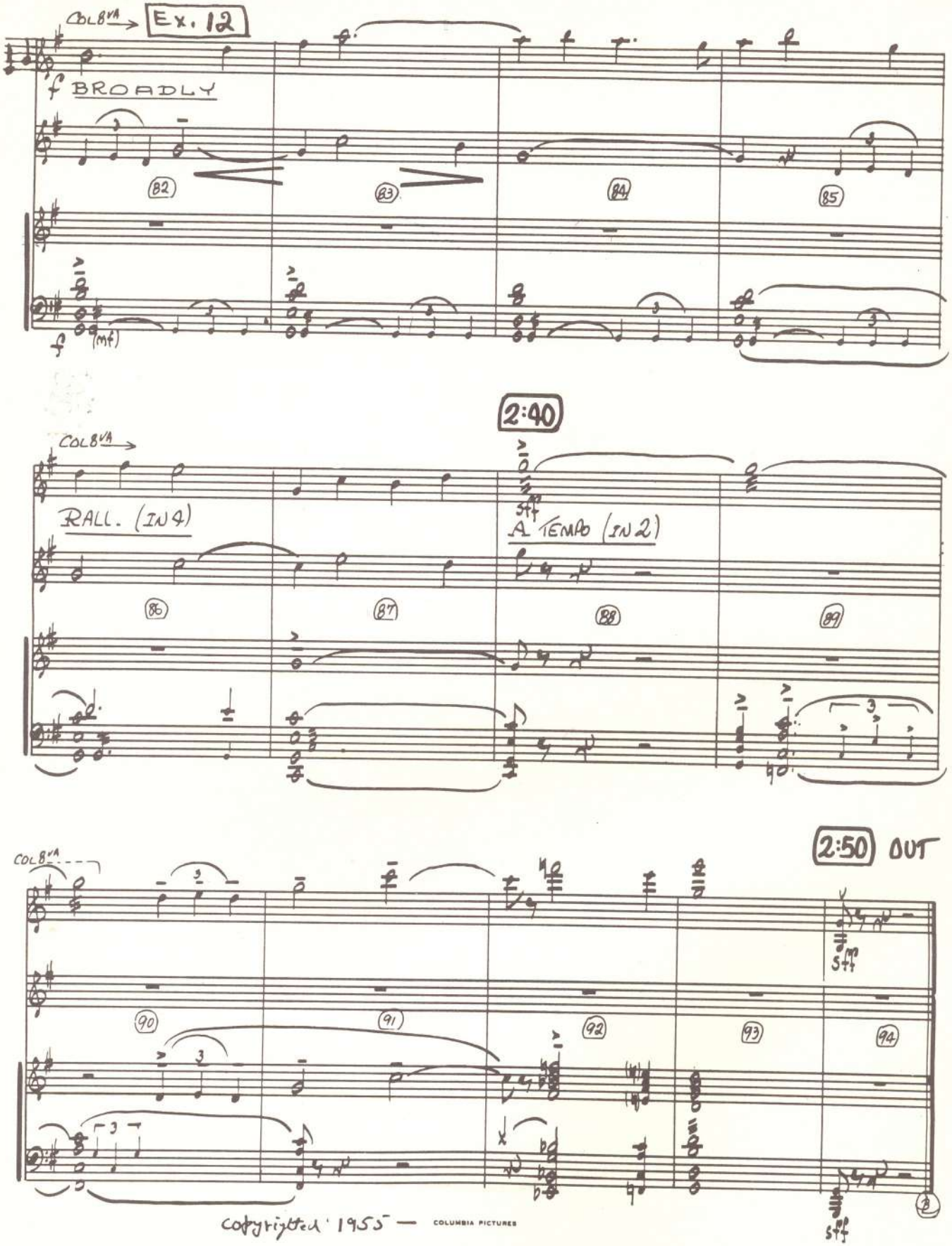

PICNIC . . . Columbia. William Holden, Kim Novak. Director, Joshua Logan. Music, George Duning. Orchestrator, Arthur Morton. Music conducted by Morris Stoloff. Music copyrighted 1955 by Columbia Pictures Corp. Technicolor.