FILM MUSIC

VIVA ZAPATA

MARCH - APRIL 1952

VOLUME XI NUMBER IV

VIVA ZAPATA

Lan Adomian

During most of the second decade of this century Mexico's history was marked by violent events. Revolutions, counter-revolutions, interventions, plots, counterplots, assasinations and revenge. The names that most frequently appear during this period are those of Diaz, Pancho Villa, Madero, Huerta and Emiliano Zapata. These personages represented almost every historical type of leader. There were among them villains and saints, realists and dreamers. There were opportunists and martyrs; some believing that the old order of tyranical rule must stay; others fighting for the liberation of the Mexican peon from all bonds.

The real needs of the down-trodden mass of Mexican peasants cried out for leadership that would most readily bring about the fulfilment of this most ancient of all peasants' dreams:- possession of the soil which they tilled. One of the most outstanding and colorful leaders of these peasant movements was Emiliano Zapata - a native of Ayala. It was in this same Ayala that Zapata's bullet riddled body came to rest. It was here too that a legend started: "Zapata is not dead - when we, the peasants, will need him, he will come."

Many accounts have already been written about Zapata and undoubtedly many more will be written. Mr. Steinbeck's story of Zapata as filmed by Elia Kazan for Twentieth Century-Fox may cause a lot of controversy, or it may be accepted for what it is - one man's view of an exceedingly important era in the history of our neighbors below the Rio Grande. In this reviewer's mind no such controversy can be caused by the musical score of Alex North. A score that lends itself to adverse criticism gives the critic a marvelous opportunity to write a real or imagined post mortem; He can use such a review as a take off point for airing HIS ideas of what should have been done. But as already mentioned Alex North's score is a model of what film music should be. It understates when the exigencies of the story demands it. When the opportunity presents itself, the composer exhibits a fullblown musical talent that is able to cope with symphonic forms.

In a conversation with the composer it became clear that he had no intention of doing an "authentic" Mexican score. The possibility of using either authentic or composed "corridos" (a type of Mexican folk song) did occur to Alex North. However the conception of the film being what it is - a realistic treatment with poetic overtones - it was felt that the "authentic" approach would result in a phony quality. The composer did have one important advantage. He had spent the better part of two years in Mexico not as a tourist but as a resident in close contact with everyday life.

Thanks to the general style of VIVA ZAPATA! the composer did not feel compelled to overparticularize every indivudual emotion, but rather react objectively to the aspirations of the mass of Zapata's peasant followers. Still North's sensitivity to individual drama did not make this another "epic" score. The composer found many opportunities to let the music complete a dramatic situation. Unquestionably this is a score to be studied by those who'd like to see an ideal blending of the individual and epic or objective approaches. The examples that follow should leave no doubt as to the mature stature of Alex North as a composer, and in this instance a very sensitive and wise film composer.

The main title is of rather impressive length; it eventually brings you to the palace of Diaz where a group of peasants are waiting to be received by the dictator. The very opening of the main title is arresting in its use of xylophones and percussion, followed by the rest of the orchestra carrying a treatment of a tune which the composer overheard a woman humming in Zapata's native Ayala.

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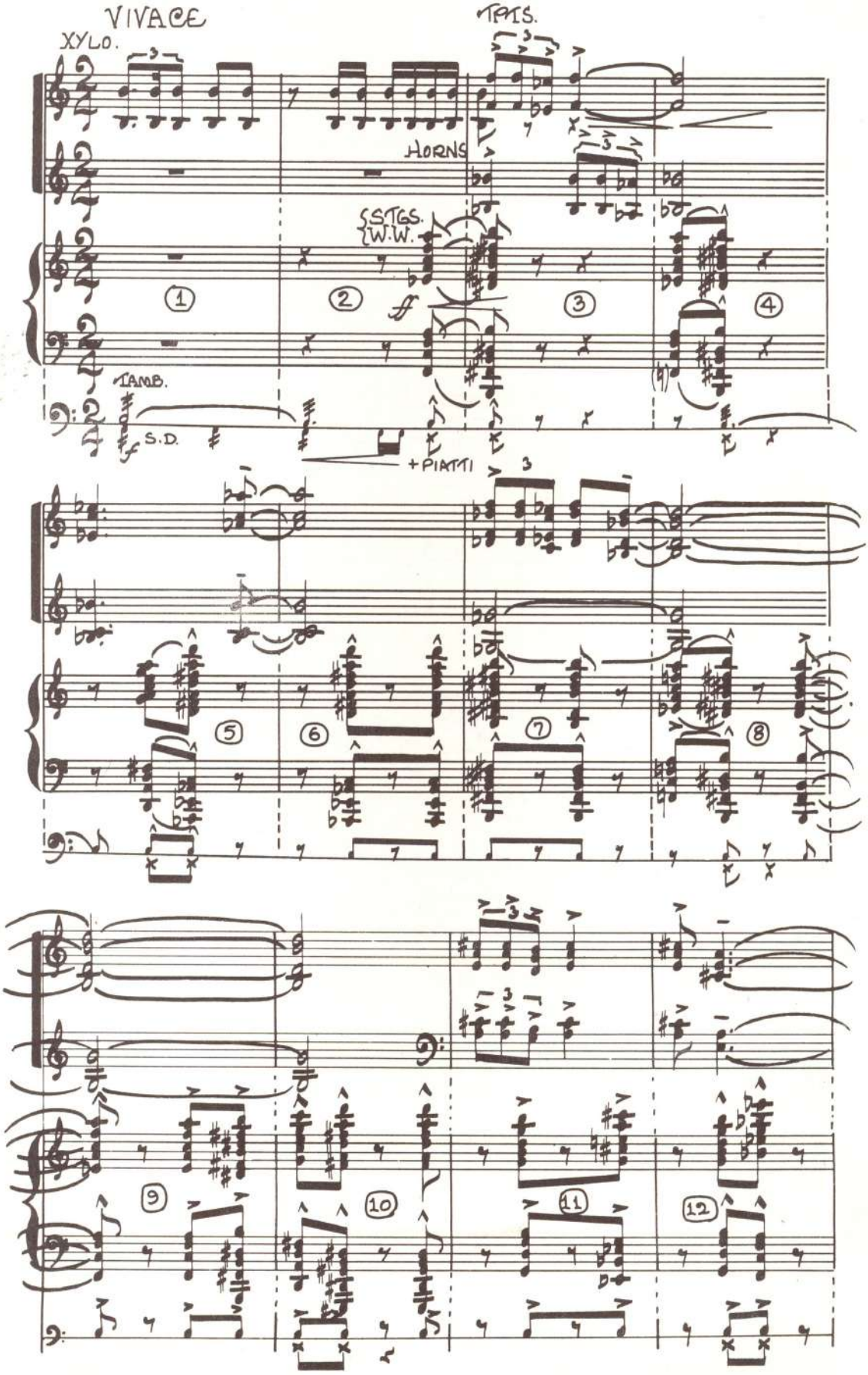
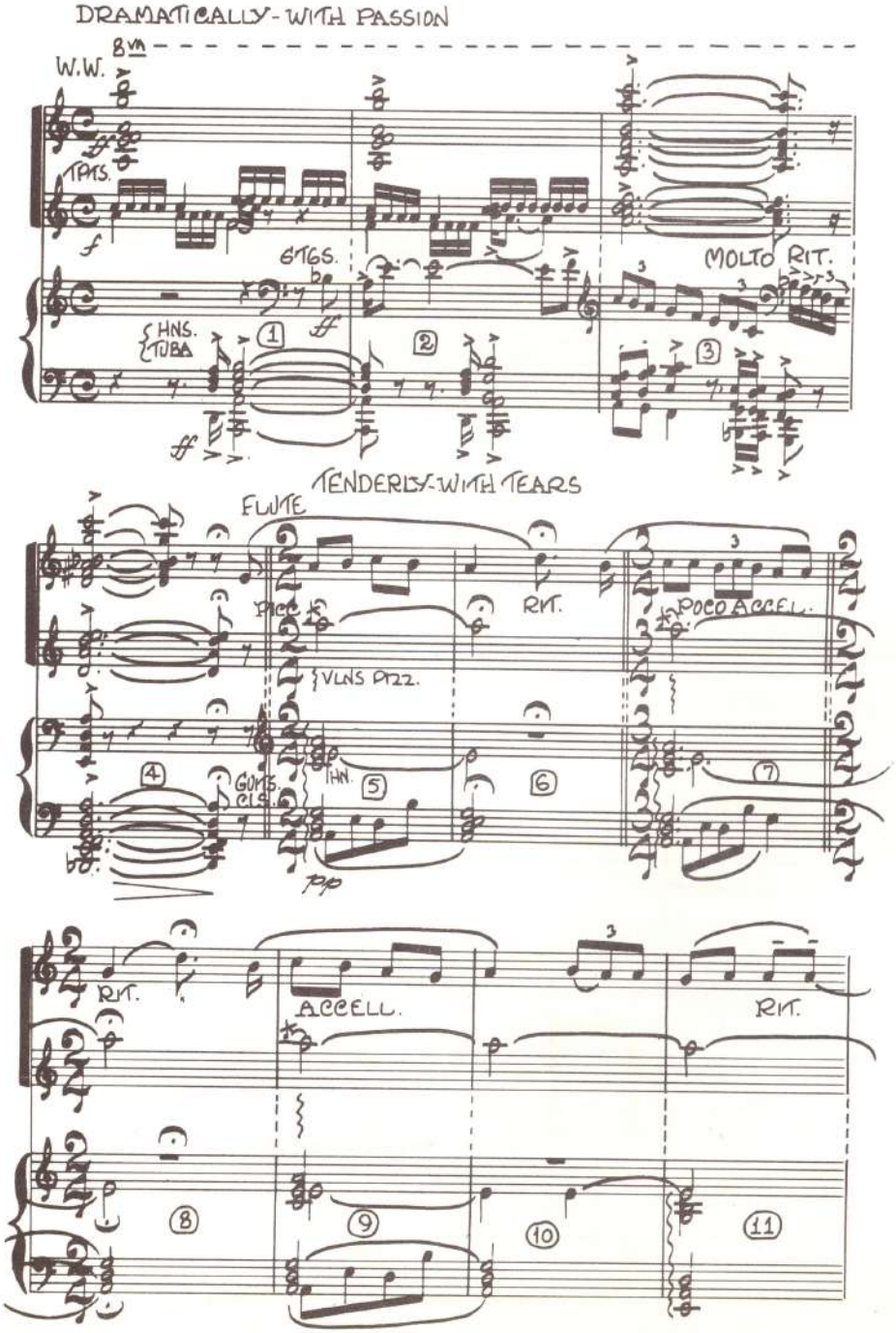
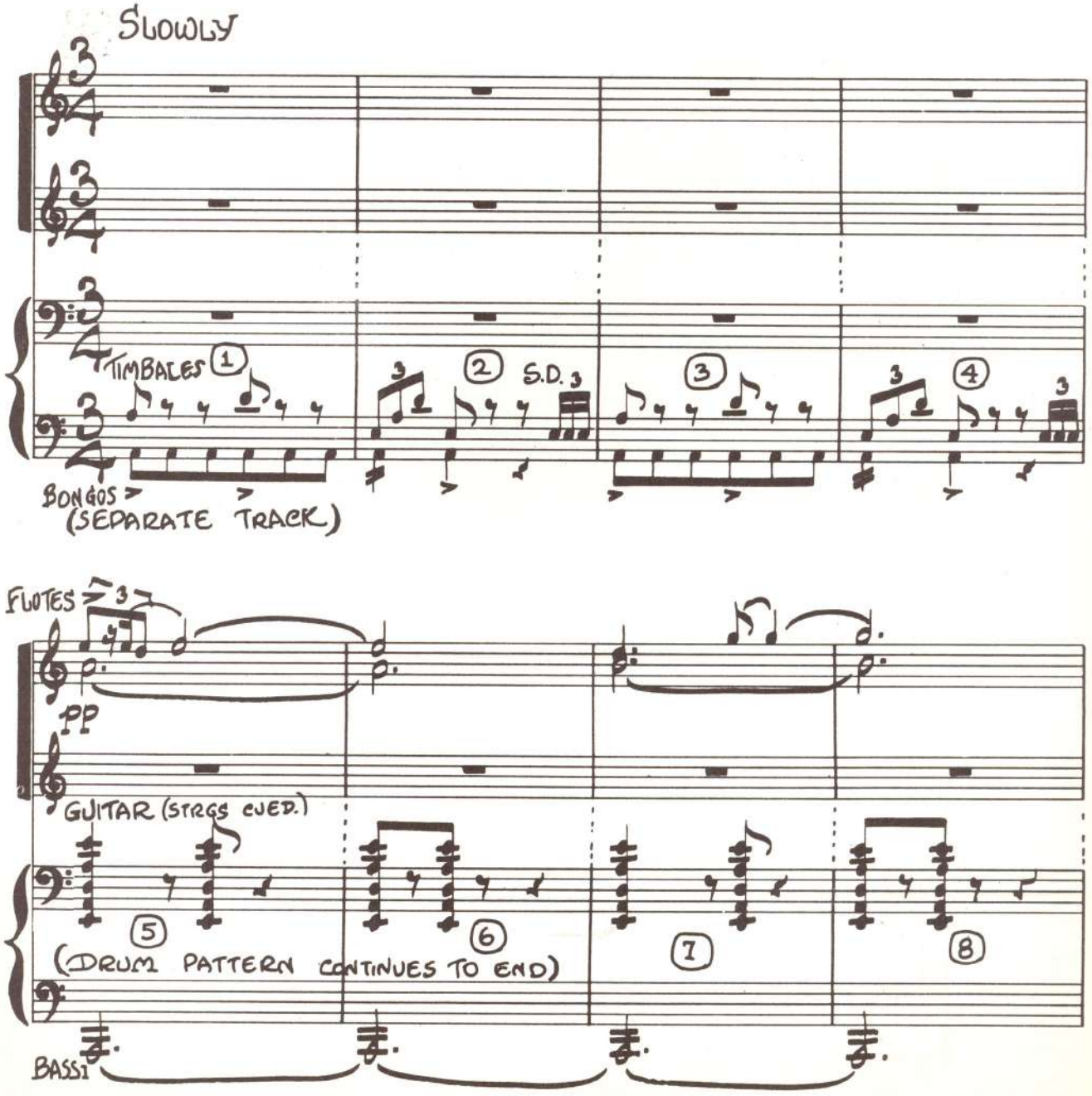
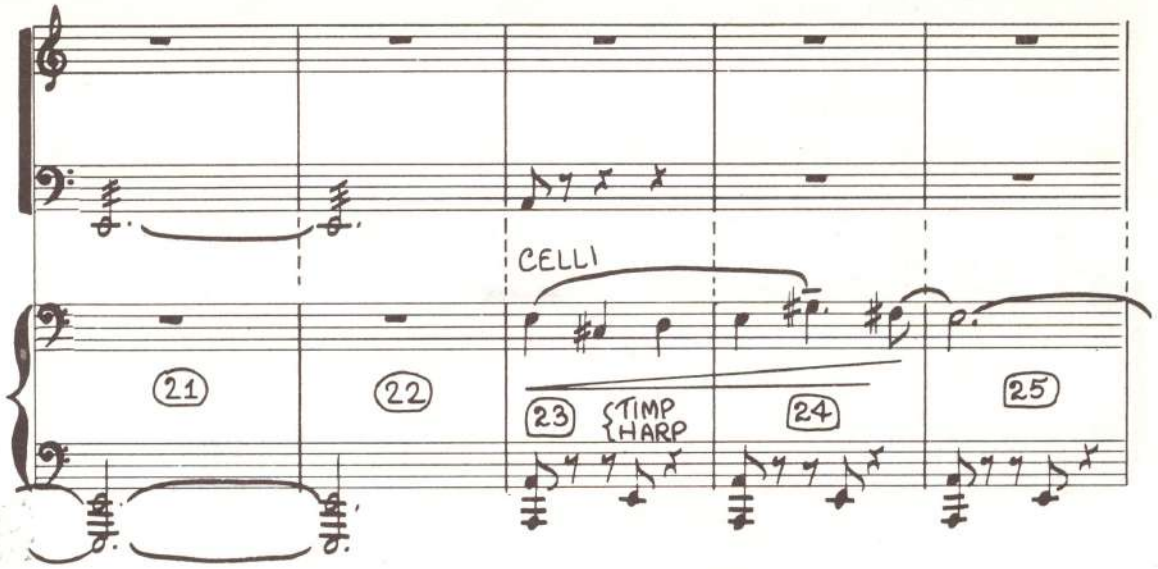


The incident that eventually brings about the emergence of Zapata as a revolutionary leader occurs when mounted "rurales" drag a lassoed peasant along the dusty country road. Many another composer might have accompanied this brutal scene with some kind of "symphony music". Not so Alex North. He waits till the moment when Zapata's machete cuts the lasso that has almost strangled its victim, and at this point the music breaks in violently for a brief moment. As soon as the camera cuts to the dying peasant being comforted in the nearby cornfield a flute, very tenderly, intones a treatment of a Yaqui death chant.



Zapata is captured by the reenforced rurales. He, like the old peasant whose lasso was cut by Zapata, is now walking the dusty road, his neck in a lasso. Here occurs one of the outstanding moments in the film. The camera picks up peasants in the plaza, in the fields, on the streets. Their faces are impassive, but their hands are making clicking sounds by knocking little stones against each other. This is a sort of primitive telegraph - apparently spreading the news of Zapata's capture. As the clicking rises in volume you hear a measured beat of bongos and tuned timbales. The orchestra has started a kind of Mexico Bolero. We hear next flutes, guitars, plucked strings. All this is without dialogue. The camera picks up figures of peasants seemingly emerging from nowhere, but all gravitating toward the bound Zapata and his captors. The music rises in volume expressing the unspoken demand of the peasants for the liberation of THEIR Zapata. The "rurales" thus surrounded are compelled to free Zapata who joins his people.




CELLI
21
22
23
TIMP
HARP
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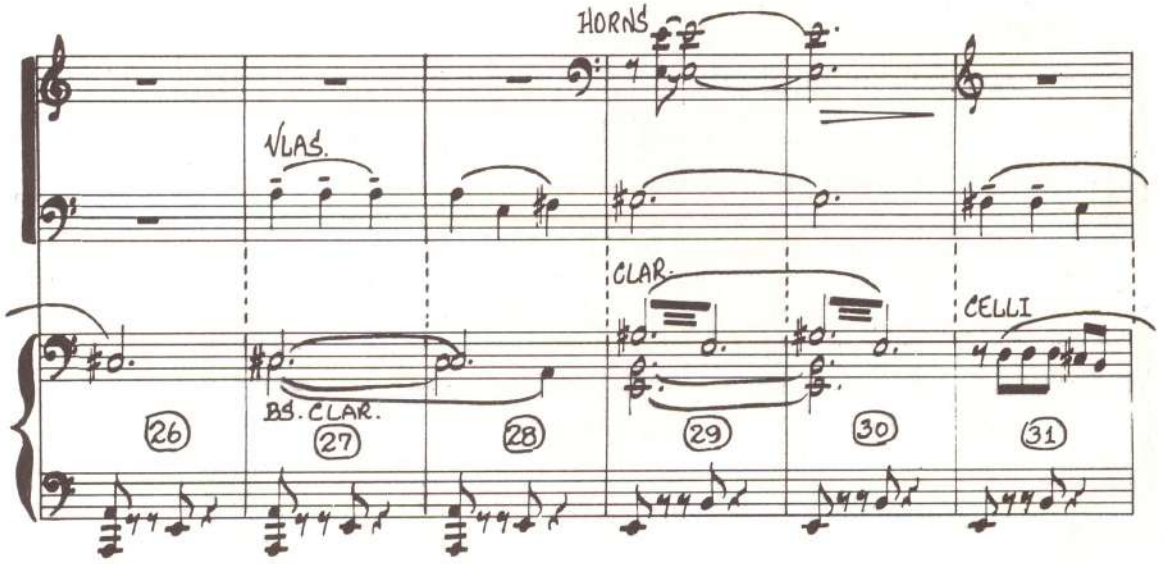
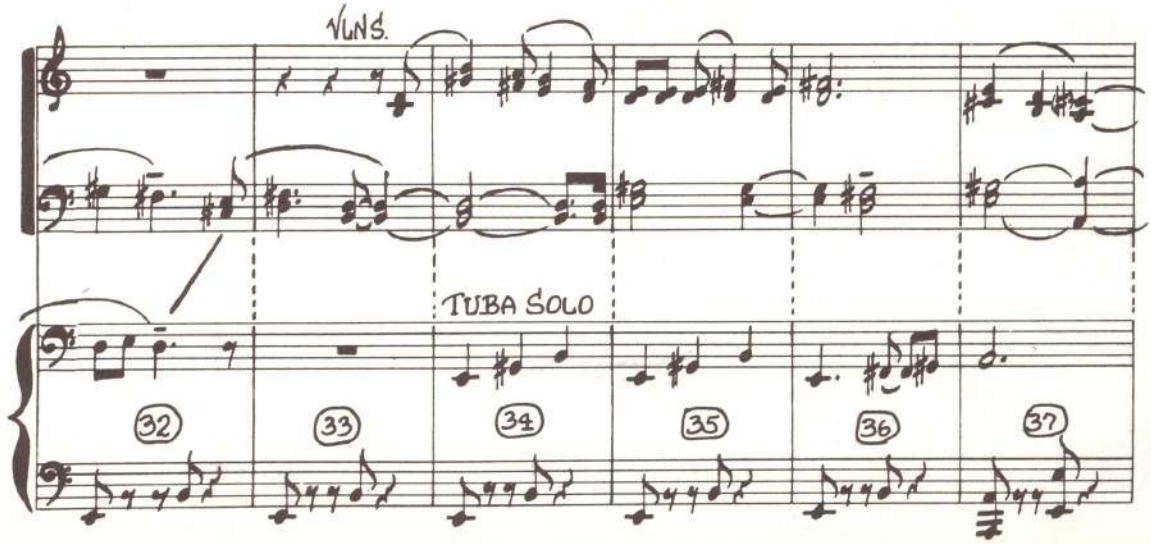
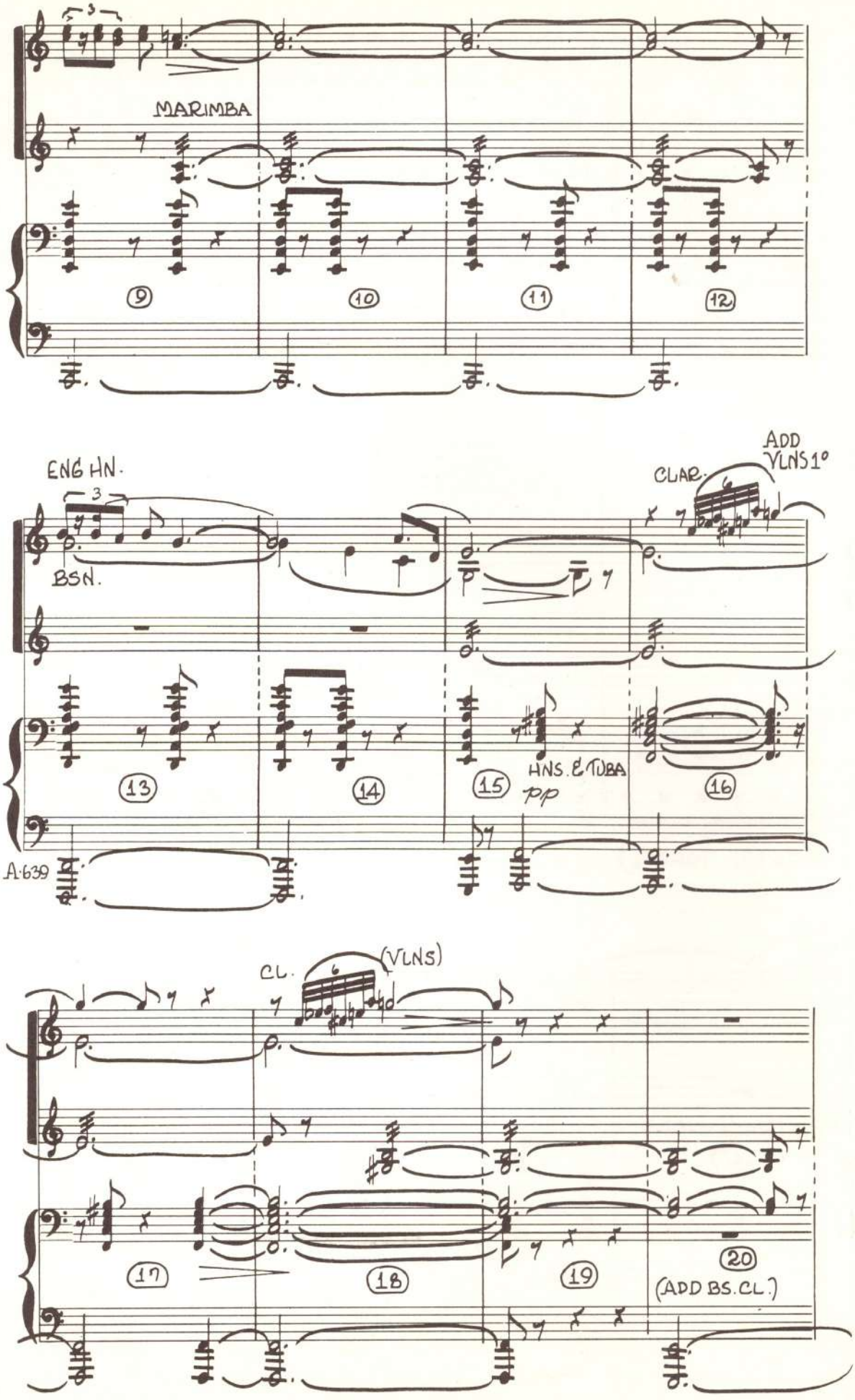
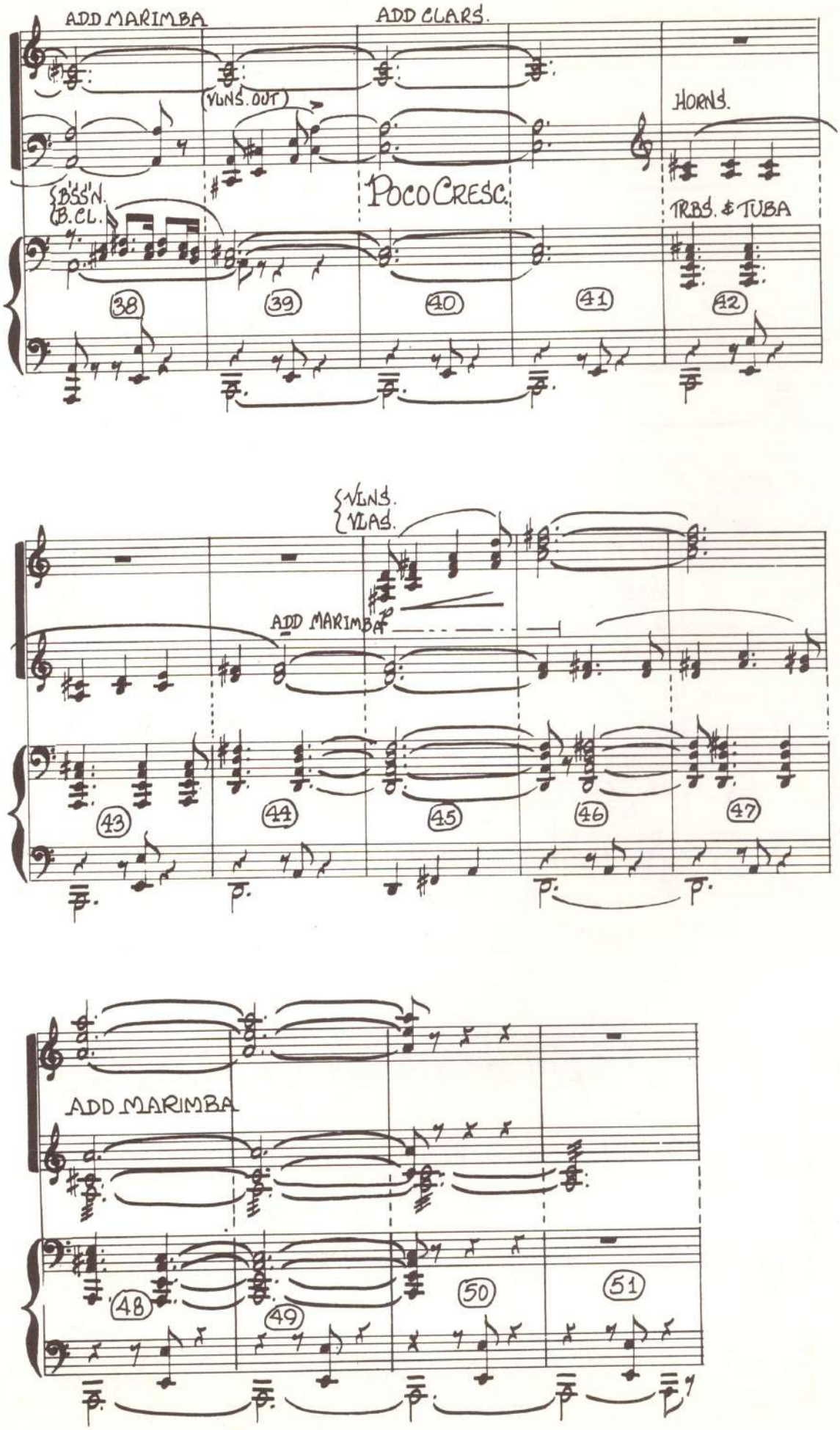
25

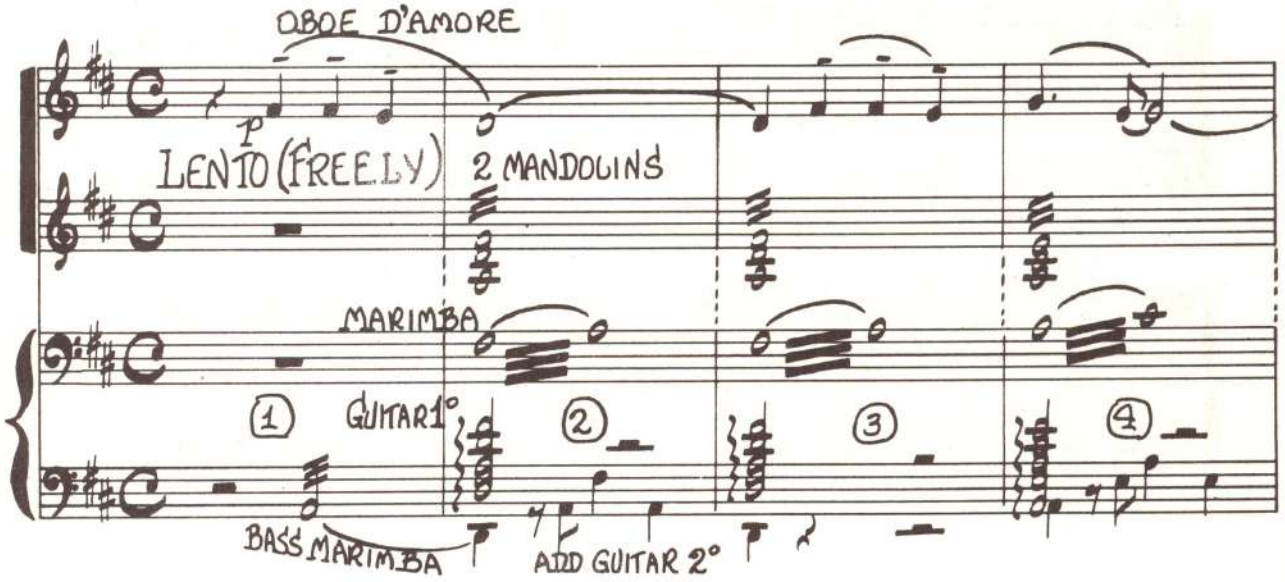

HORNS
VLAS.
CLAR.
CELLI
BS. CLAR.
26
27
28
29
30
31

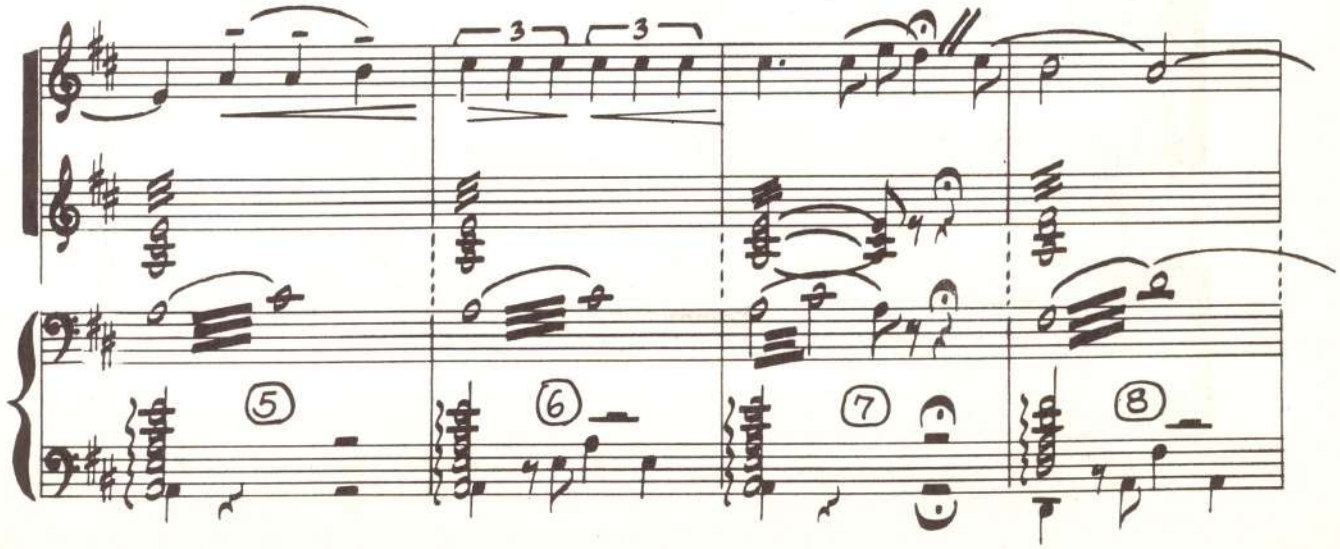

VLNS.
TUBA SOLO
32
33
34
35
36
37

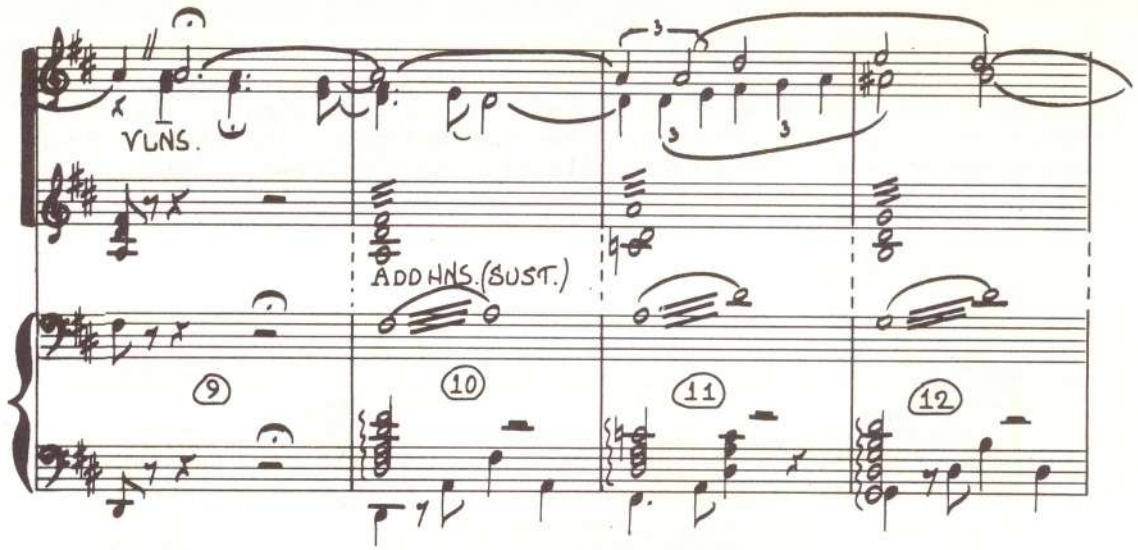

MARIMBA
9
10
11
12
ENG HN.
3
BSN.
CLAR.
ADD VLNS 1°
13
14
15
HNS. & TUBA
pp
16
A·639
CL.
(VLNS)
17
18
19
20
(ADD BS. CL.)

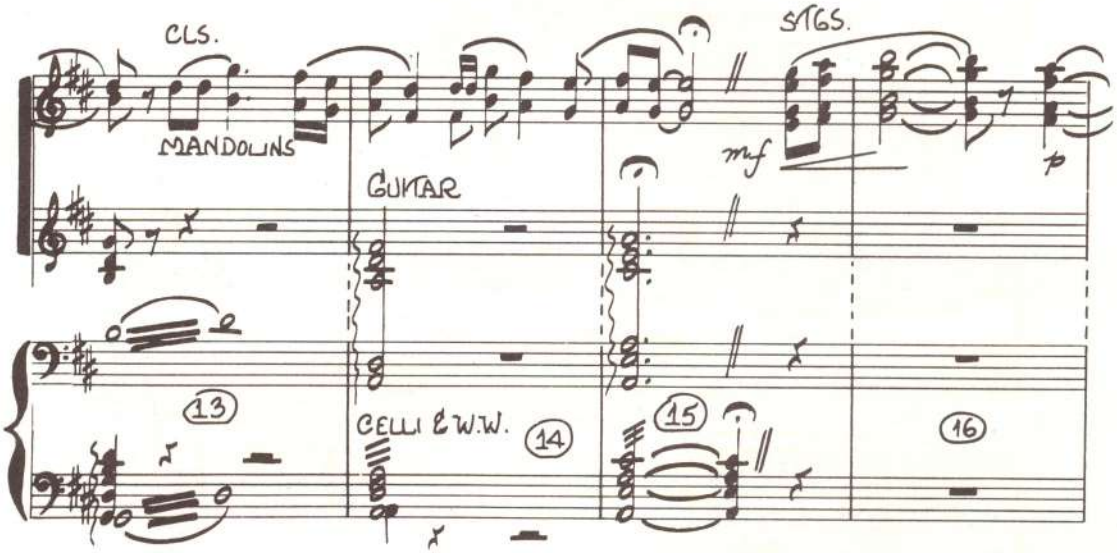

ADD MARIMBA
ADD CLARS.
(VLNS. OUT)
HORNS.
B'SS'N.
B.CL.
POCO CRESC.
TRBS. & TUBA
38
39
40
41
42
VLNS.
VLAS.
ADD MARIMBA
43
44
45
46
47
ADD MARIMBA
48
49
50
51

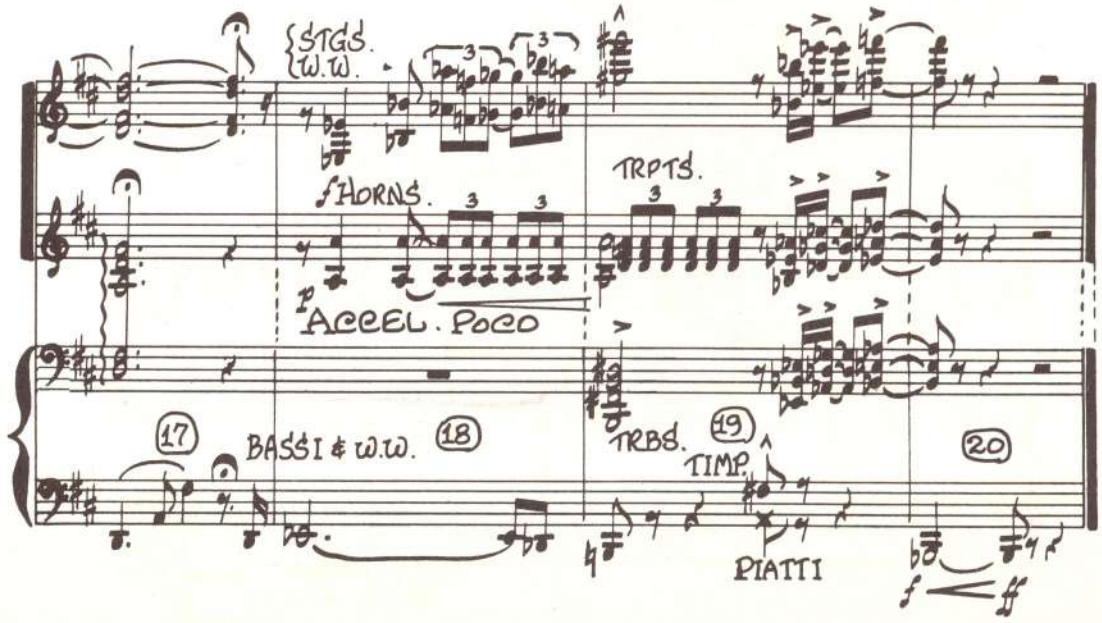
In a mountain hideout the now hunted Zapata is with his wife and closest collaborators. The preceding few years have seen much violence. The peasants almost achieved what they set out to do... get the land which they tilled for the landlords. There were joys and sorrows. The years were noted for the profusion of heroism and cowardice, nobility and treachery. A president had been assasinated. Zapata's enemies were determined to destroy him. But this was no simple matter. Zapata had too many friends. Treachery was the only way to render Zapata's movement harmless. As bait, he was offered an opportunity to meet with a military group that was ostensibly in favor of his ideas. On the night before Zapata was to go down into the valley to meet them, but his wife implored him not to go. She sensed that this was a trap. He rode away. Arriving at the appointed place, he enters a wide gate. In the sunbaked yard we see three women clad in black. Zapata is embraced by an officer and is about to talk with him. The officer jumps away and Zapata is shot full of lead by soldiers who are concealed on the roofs of the barracks. In the following example we hear the music accompanying the scene between Zapata and his wife (oboe d'amore, mandolins, guitar, marimba, bass marimba); the music grows ominous, the orchestra fuller: It cuts for a moment to the three women, and then to the gates ... a brief crescendo and the scene of Zapata's doom is set.



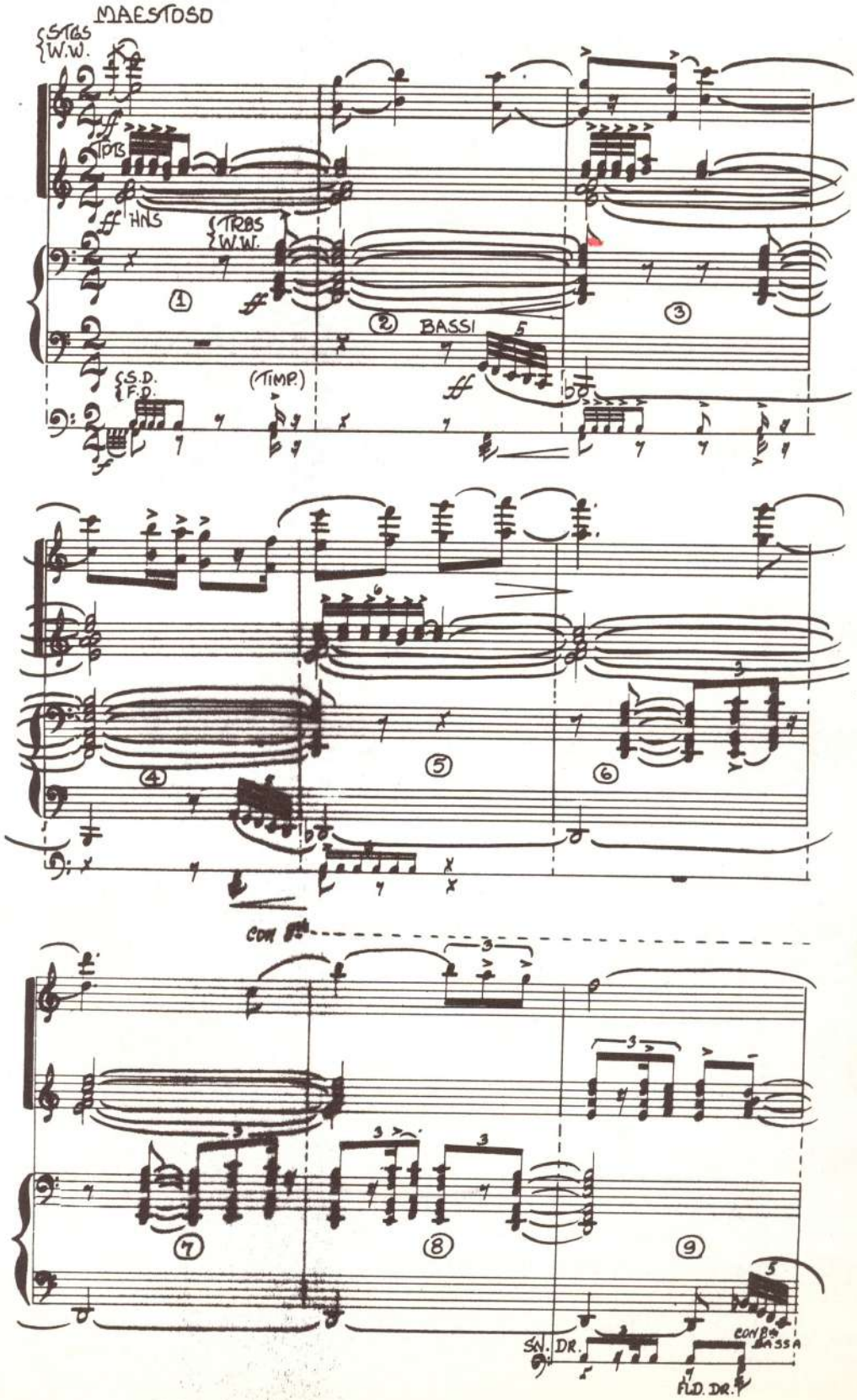


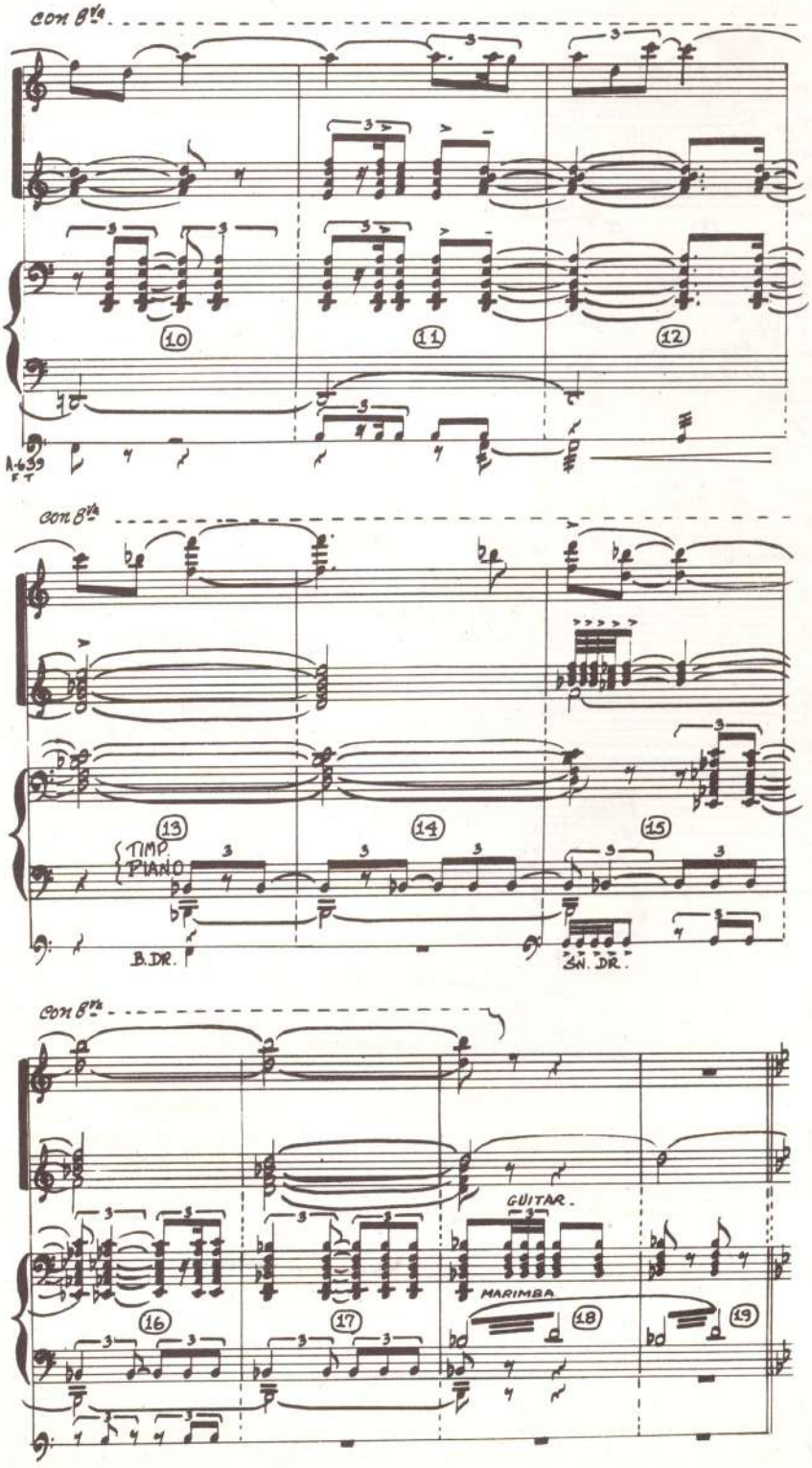

VLNS.
ADD HNS. (SUST.)
9
10
11
12


CLS.
MANDOLINS
GUITAR
STGS.
mf
p
13
CELLI & W.W.
14
15
16


STGS.
W.W.
f HORNS.
TRPTS.
p ACCEL. POCO
17
BASSI & W.W.
18
TRBS.
19
TIMP.
PIATTI
20
f
ff

The assassins dump the body of Emiliano Zapata in the plaza of Ayala. Women and peasants come to vererate their dead hero. But the peasants say: "can you capture a river?" "Can you kill the wind?" ..... The legend has wings - it soars over the countryside - its message that Zapata isn't dead. The people believe that when needed Zapata will return.



The music is singularly poignant. High strings and woodwinds, muted high trumpets, a tone cluster in the horns. The composer gives full and rich expression to the grief, pride and hope of the followers of Zapata. It is a very telling film score sensitively directed by Alfred Newman. Here indeed is fine music waiting to be presented in concert form.

VIVA ZAPATA.. 20th Century-Fox. Marlon Brando, Jean Peters. Director, Elia Kazan. Music, Alex North. Musical Director, Alfred Newman and Alex North. Music Copyright by 20th Century-Fox.