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# Padmavati "She Possesses the Lotus" A Western Perspective on Indian Classical Music

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# *Padmaravati*

"She Possesses The Lotus"

A Western Perspective on Indian Classical Music

By: Melanie Watman

Advisor: Hilary Tann



For Completion of the Music Major

Union College

Spring 2012

## Asian Studies and Music Senior Project Presentations



### **Soun Sheen '13**

Modification vs. Modernization:  
Korean Gayageum in the 20th Century  
Asian Studies Senior Project

### **Melanie A. Watman '12**

“Padmavati (She Possesses The Lotus)”  
Original Composition – A Western  
Perspective on Indian Classical Music  
Music Senior Project



**Thursday, May 31, 2012**

**7:00 to 8:00 p.m.**

*Reception follows in foyer*

**Emerson Auditorium**  
**in Taylor Music Center**

**Guest Musicians: Musicians of Ma'alwyck**

Music Senior Project Presentation  
Melanie Watman '12

# *Padmavati*

"She Possesses The Lotus"  
A Western Perspective on Indian Classical Music



*Padmavati* is an original composition inspired by what I have learned about Indian Classical Music as a whole. It is by no means Indian music, but it contains fundamental elements of Indian music. The piece is written for flute and viola, which have been instructed to play as if they were Indian instruments, as well as the dombek, a Middle Eastern hand drum that has been instructed to imitate the sound of a tabla, the traditional North-Indian hand drum.

This past fall I did an Independent Study where I read about the different elements of Indian Classical music, including the significance of the different regions, the instruments, and the core concepts. Some of these concepts most notably heard in the piece are Raga and Tala. While these concepts are not easily understood to someone with a Western musical upbringing, Raga is what gives a piece its 'color,' comparable to a scale in Western notation. Tala is responsible for the pulse of the piece, and all Classical Indian pieces have defined Raga and Tala.

The piece was written from January – May 2012 for completion of my Music Major with the goal to learn about music beyond the familiar Western world. It demonstrates the struggles I had to overcome, specifically the idea of no harmony, no key changes, bending of notes, and the fact that Western instrumentation will *not* sound like Indian instruments, no matter how hard I try. With that, I hope you enjoy what you hear today and get an understanding of what Indian Music is perceived as from a Westerner's ears.

I'd like to thank Professors Jennifer Matsue and Hilary Tann for guiding me through this project as well as my enriched musical experience during my time at Union. I'd also like to thank my parents who have always encouraged my love for music and culture, and specifically for sending me to India this past winter.

Hello everyone, and thank you for coming to the presentation of my senior music project.

I'm going to give a brief summary of what I've done for my Senior Project over the last year so you can better understand what went into my composition that you will be hearing today. The piece is being played twice so that you get a first impression, and then when you hear it a second time through, you can hopefully pinpoint the elements that I put into the piece and my intentions that I'm about to discuss.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm a Music and Neuroscience Double Major, but I've always had a love for culture that I didn't get to truly dive into during my first three years of college. At one point I hoped to be an Anthropology minor, or somehow combine my Music major to do something with music and culture, but it never worked out how I had hoped. So when the time came last year to figure out what I wanted to do for my project, I wanted to finally take the opportunity to mix my love for music and culture into one project so I'd finally get the experience I always hoped for.

I sat down with Professors Tann and Matsue to discuss my project this time last year. All I knew was that I wanted to write an original composition, but have an element of culture that would truly allow me to explore something outside of the Western world of music, which was the main focus of my music studies at Union. We collectively decided I would explore the world of Indian classical music because it was something I was absolutely unfamiliar with, and because I had plans to visit India on the Mini-Term later in the year. We decided it would be a great Senior Project experience where I would be able to hear the source of the music in its native country, bring it back to America, and put my own spin on it in some way.

Before I could start this project, I needed to develop some fundamental understanding of how Indian Classical music functions. To do this, I did an independent study at the start of this academic year with Prof. Matsue where I read hundreds of pages on what makes Indian classical music what it is, from the perspective of Western musicologists. This was in preparation for my composition, which I worked on during the winter and spring terms with Prof. Tann. At this time, I started to acquire a sense of the major elements that go into Classical Indian Music.

The following are the elements I decided to focus on most within my composition.

One of the most important concepts to understand about Indian Classical music is that it is an oral tradition. Every practice has its own oral notation, and most melodic instruments strive to sound like a voice, believed to be the purest of sounds. With this idea in mind, I decided I would have to write for instruments that I believed could produce similar sounds.

The first major element that I learned about is called *Raga*, which literally means 'color.' Raga is often a difficult concept to understand in western music, but it is most similar in our world to a scale, yet it is believed to portray the emotion and mood of the piece. There are hundreds of ragas in the Indian music world,

and they all have their own specific characteristics. For example, certain ragas are traditionally played at specific times of the day, seasons, and for specific occasions and rituals. Similarly to the scale, raga has 7 main scale degrees, where *Sa* is the tonic, or first pitch in the scale, and *Pa* is the perfect fifth above the *Sa*, or the fifth pitch in the scale. The *Sa* and *Pa* pitches are those typically heard as the drone, which is very characteristic of many Indian works. What makes a raga very unique from a scale, however, is that Indian instruments are designed to bend between the major pitches. There are no strict intervals between pitches either, which explains why there are so many more ragas than scales. This was one of the first major boundaries I had to overcome while composing for Western instruments; they don't naturally bend between pitches the way that Indian instruments do, so that was something I had to keep in mind.

The second major element is called Tala, which means 'clap.' The tala is the main rhythmic composition throughout a piece of Indian music and its main role is to keep time. This is usually the role of the drummer of the ensemble. Similarly to raga, there are hundreds of tala cycles carried out for different traditions, and are mixed with the different ragas to create major works. This is where I discovered another boundary I'd have to overcome; the rhythm is extremely crucial in Indian music, but it is nearly impossible to notate the intricacies that are typically heard on Indian drums. I was going to have to figure out a creative way to keep the rhythm interesting throughout the piece, while still keeping time.

Different traditions exist throughout India. The biggest divide between musical traditions is Hindustani music, which is represented in North India, and Karnatak music in the south. Both groups have their own ragas, talas, ways of using ornamentation, improvisation, and major forms for the whole piece.

I focused on learning about these elements during my independent study and used them throughout my composition.

When it came time to compose, I was very careful to pick the instruments I would write for. After much deliberation, I decided to write for Flute, Viola, and Doumbek. The flute seemed to be an obvious choice because it is a very popular solo instrument in Indian Music and has the ability to do some of the characteristic bends and ornamentations that I hoped to achieve. The viola was selected because the open strings on the instrument worked best with the *Sa* and *Pa* pitches of the raga I chose to work with to create a drone throughout the piece. Finally, the Doumbek was the trickiest choice. As I mentioned, the drummer plays an important role in the Indian ensemble, and typically traditional Indian drums have very distinct sounds. I chose the doumbek because it was the best option of the drums available to me for striving to sound like a tabla, the traditional drum of the Hindustani tradition. Keep in mind all of these instruments are not native to the classical Indian world, but these were the instruments I was able to best come up with that I could write western notation for. You must keep in mind that classical Indian music isn't notated, so just the idea of writing Indian style music causes major difficulties.

So...some of the specifics of my piece.

The raga I chose to work with is called Natia Raga, which is typically characterized by happiness. By working with a particular raga this means that my entire piece only has 7 different pitches, and the notes bent in between. Harmony doesn't exist in Indian music, so it is necessary to provide bending, ornamentation, rhythm, and tempo to keep the piece interesting. The Tala I chose to work in is called Jhaptal Tala, which is a beat cycle of 5 total beats, consisting of 2+3, which means the major beats are on the first and third beat in each 5 beat phrase. So if you hear the rhythm throughout the piece, I will always be playing around with the idea of 5, and 2+3.

The major form of my piece is also based on one of the most popular forms in Indian Music, which is the Kriti. My piece begins with an alap, which is a section that has an improvised feeling without any rhythm, then it goes into the structured bulk of it, consisting of 3 major sections, and finally the ending is referred to as the mudra, which traditionally is the composers signature. Throughout the piece, the drum is constantly pushing the tempo to speed up. Additionally there is always going to be some sense of a drone laying down the underlying main pitches of the raga.

When it finally came time to naming my piece, I searched for something that would encapsulate my experience with this project and give the piece some character. I decided to name the piece *Padmavati*, which literally means "possessing lotuses" and is a common name for girls in India. Instead of saying my piece is "possessing lotuses," I wanted to give it a soul and more purpose. I therefore changed it to mean "she possesses the lotus" because I decided that I wanted it to refer to the hindu goddess that possesses the lotus herself, that being the goddess *Lakshmi*. Lakshmi is in the picture you see on your program, and she is a symbol of good luck, beauty, fortune, wealth, and prosperity. As I reflected on all this project meant to me and all the hard work I put into it, the piece made me realize that I'm ready to tackle the world outside of Union College and I hope for all the things that Lakshmi represents.

I want to thank the musicians of Ma'alwick, my family, and the entire Union College Music Department for guiding me through this project.

I hope you all enjoy what you hear.

## Score

## Padmavati

"she possesses the lotus"  
Natia Raga, Jhaptal Tala

Melanie Watman  
Advisor: H. Tann

Adagio ♩ = 76

Flute

*p espress.*

Viola

Doumbek



2

## Padmavati

B

Fl. *mp* 16

Vla. 16

Dmbk. 16

Fl. 21 *p* *mf* 21

Vla. 21

Dmbk. 21

Fl. 26 *p* *mf* *p sub.* *mp* 26

Vla. 26

Dmbk. 26

31

Fl.

*pp* *mf*

31

Vla.

31

Dmbk.

36

Fl.

*f*

C

36

Vla.

*ppp*

36

Dmbk.

41

Fl.

*mp* *mf* *accel.*

41

Vla.

*p* *mp*

41

Dmbk.

## Più mosso

46

Fl.

46

Vla.

46

Dmbk.

50

Fl.

50

Vla.

50

Dmbk.

**D** Kriti (♩ = c. 92)  
Pallavi

55

Fl.

55

Vla.

55

Dmbk.

59

Fl. *f* *p*

Vla. *mp*

Dmbk. *mp*

63

Fl. *mf*

Vla. *mf* *mp*

Dmbk. *mf* *mp*

67

Fl. *p* *f*

Vla. *mf*

Dmbk. *p* *f*

E

Fl. 71

Vla. 71

Dmbk. 71

*mp* *mf* *p* *f*

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Flute (Fl.), Viola (Vla.), and Double Bass (Dmbk.). The Flute part starts with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat (B-flat). It features a melodic line with various intervals, including a tritone (F# and C), and dynamic markings of *p* (piano) and *f* (forte). The Viola part uses a bass clef and features a melodic line with a tritone (F# and C) and dynamic markings of *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte). The Double Bass part uses a bass clef and features a rhythmic line with eighth notes and dynamic markings of *mp* and *mf*. The score is numbered 71 at the beginning of each staff.

Fl. 75 **F** *mf* *f*

Vla. 75 *p*

Dmbk. 75 *mf* *p*

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

G Anapallavi

83

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*p*

*f*

*p*

87

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*mf*

*p*

*mf*

93

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*p*

*mp*

*pp*

99 Fl. *mf* *f*

99 Vla.

99 Dmbk. *f*

105 Fl. *mf*

105 Vla. *mf*

105 Dmbk. *mf*

H 110 Fl. *mp* *mf*

110 Vla. *f*

110 Dmbk. *mp*





10

## Padmavati

Fl. 130 *mf*

Vla. 130 *mf*

Dmbk. 130 *mf* *mp*

Measures 130-133. Flute (Fl.) and Viola (Vla.) parts feature melodic lines with slurs and ties. The Drum Kit (Dmbk.) part consists of a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplets, marked with accents and a crescendo from *mf* to *mp*.

## J Viola Feature

Fl. 134

Vla. 134 *f*

Dmbk. 134 *mf*

Measures 134-139. The Viola (Vla.) part has a melodic feature starting at measure 134, marked with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Flute (Fl.) part has rests. The Drum Kit (Dmbk.) part continues with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplets, marked with accents and a crescendo from *mf* to *mp*.

141

141

141

Fl. 141 *p*

Vla. 141 *mf*

Dmbk. 141 *p*

Measures 141-144. The Flute (Fl.) part has a melodic line starting at measure 141, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The Viola (Vla.) part has a melodic line starting at measure 141, marked with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The Drum Kit (Dmbk.) part has a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with triplets, marked with accents and a crescendo from *p* to *mp*.

147

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*mp*

*f*

*mp*

153

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*

159

Fl.

Vla.

Dmbk.

*mf*

*mf*

*mf*



181

Fl. *f*

Vla. *mf*

Dmbk. *ff*<sup>3</sup>

185

Fl. *mf* M

Vla. *mp*

Dmbk. *f*<sup>3</sup>

189

Fl. *f* *mf*

Vla. *f*

Dmbk. *f*<sup>3</sup>

193

Fl.



193

Vla.



193

Dmbk.



197

Fl.

197 *f*

Vla.



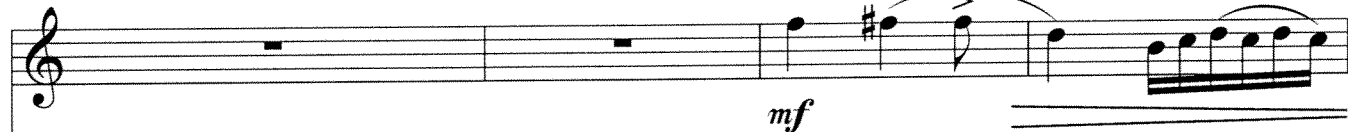
197

Dmbk.



201

Fl.



201

Vla.

201 *f*

Dmbk.



205

Fl. *mp*

205

Vla.

205

Dmbk. *mf*

209

Fl. *f* *ff*

209

Vla. *f* *ff*

209

Dmbk. *f* *ff*

214

Fl.

214

Vla.

214

Dmbk. *f*

16

Padmavati

O Doumbek Feature

218

Fl.



Vla.



Dmbk.



223

Fl.



223

Vla.



223

Dmbk.



228

Fl.



228

Vla.



228

Dmbk.



234

Fl. *f*

234

Vla.

234 *tr* *tr* *f* *>* 3 3 *tr* ~

240

Fl.

240

Vla. *f*

240

Dmbk. 3

244

P Mudra

Fl. *ff*

244

Vla. *ff*

244

Dmbk. *tr* *ff*



249

Fl. *mf* *f* *p* *f*

Vla. *mf* *f* *p*

Dmbk. *mf* *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr*

253

Fl. *ff* *mf*

Vla. *f* *ff*

Dmbk. *tr* *tr* *tr* *tr* *f*

257

Fl. *f*

Vla. *f*

Dmbk. *tr* 3

Q

*smorz.*

261

Fl. *mf*

261

Vla. *mf*

261

Dmbk. *mf*

266

Fl.

266

Vla. *f*

266

Dmbk. *f*

271

Fl. *f*

271

Vla. *mf*

271

Dmbk. *mf*



Flute

# Padmavati

"she possesses the lotus"  
Natia Raga, Jhaptal Tala

Melanie Watman  
Advisor: H. Tann

Adagio ♩ = 76

*p* *espress.*

**A**

*f* *mf*

*mp* *p*

**B**

*mp*

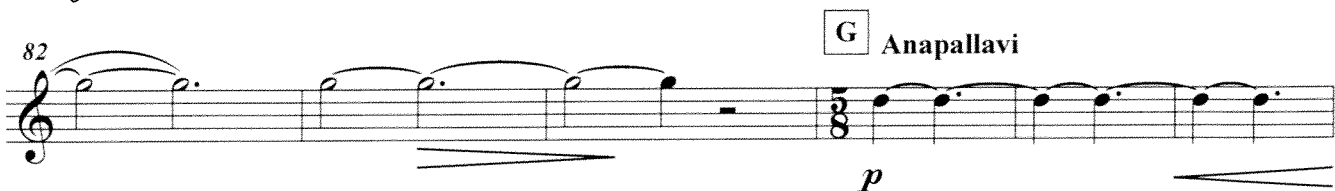
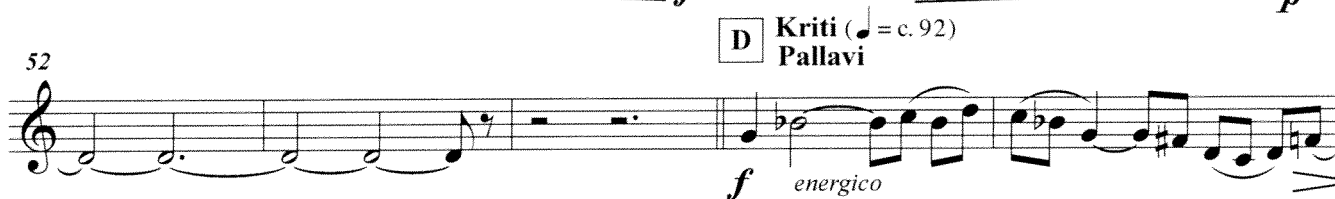
*p* *mf*

*p* *mf* *p sub.* *mp*

*pp* *mf*

**C**

*f* *mp*

*accel.*

88 *mf* *p* *mp*

96 *mf* *f*

105 *mf* *mp* **H**

113 *mf* *mp*

120 *mf* *f* **I**

128 *mf* *f*

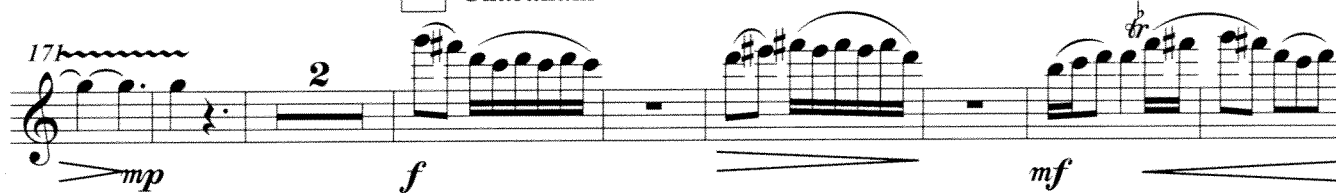
**J** Viola Feature

149 *mp* 5 4

K



L Charanam



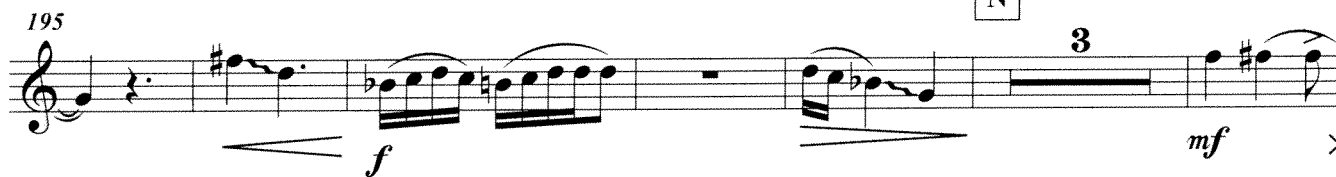
181



M



N



204



209



O Doumbek Feature



230 *accel.*

*mp* *f*

240

P Mudra

*ff*

247

*mf* *f* *p*

252

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

258

*mf*

263

Q smorz.

*smorz.*

270

2

*f*

275

*mf* *pp*



Viola

Melanie Watman  
Advisor: H. Tann

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E

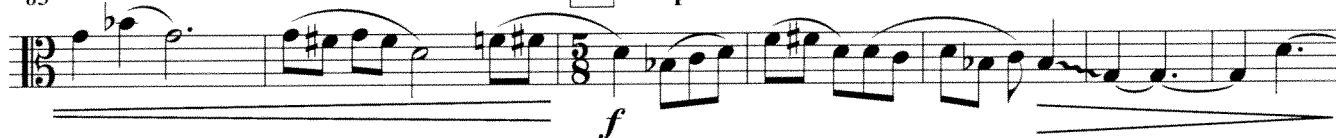


F



83

G Anapallavi



90



98



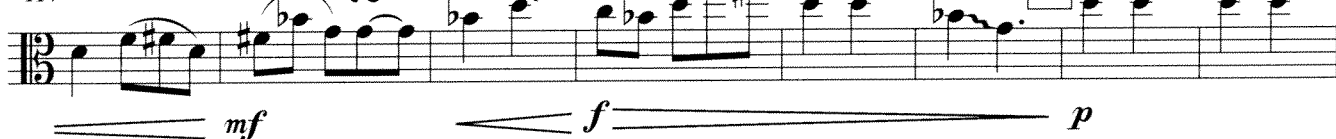
108

H



117

I



125



134

J Viola Feature



143 *mf* *f*

150 *mf*

[K] *mf*

166 *f*

173 *L Charanam* *mp* *f*

179 *mf* *mp*

187 [M] *f* *mf*

194 *f*

[N] *mf* *f* *mf*

4  
207

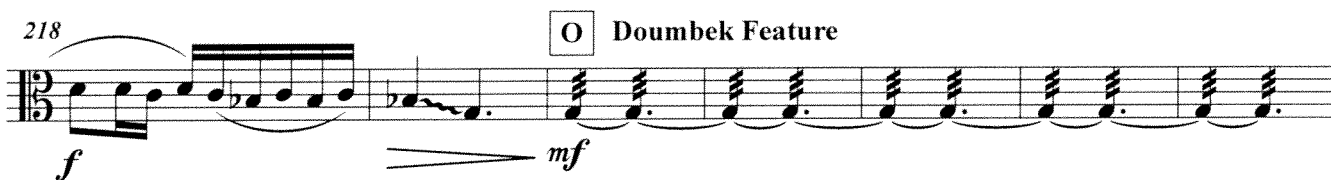
## Padmavati



213



218



225



241



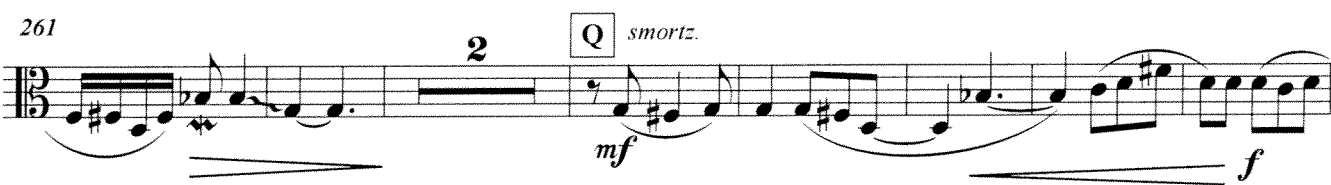
249



255



261



270



Doumbek

# Padmavati

"she possesses the lotus"  
Natia Raga, Jhaptal Tala

Melanie Watman  
Advisor: H. Tann

Adagio  $\text{♩} = 76$

A 9 B 6 C 24 10

Viola entry

53 D Kriti ( $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 92$ )  
Pallavi

59 *mp* *mf*

64 *mp* *p*

69 E *f*

74 F *mf* *p*

78

81 *mf*

84 G Anapallavi *tr* *p*



99



106



112



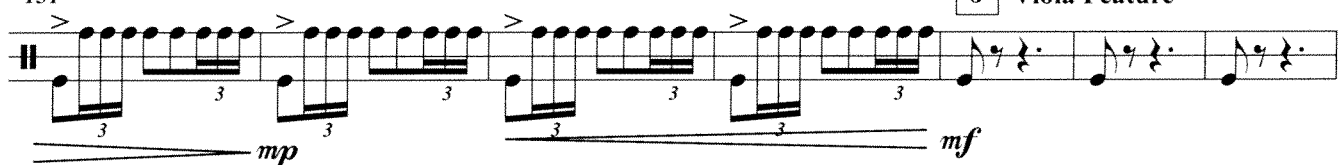
119



126



131



138

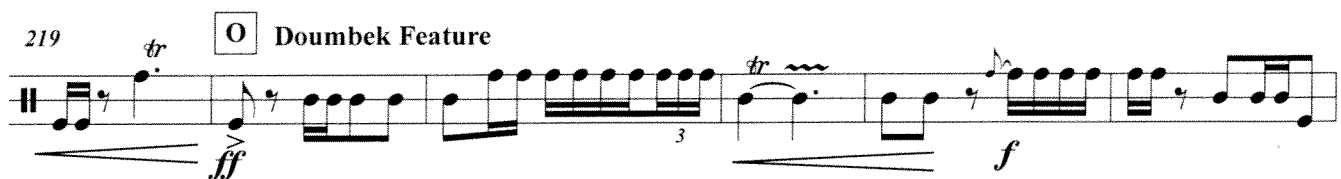
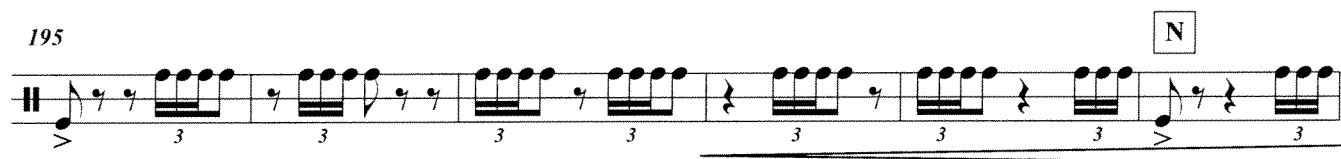
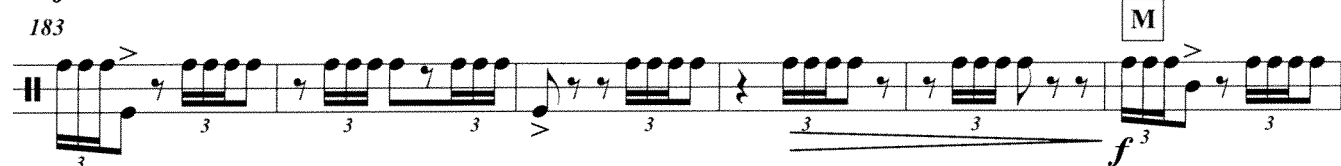
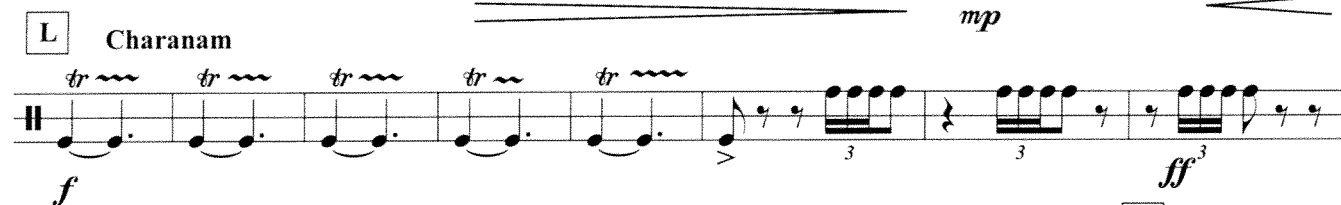
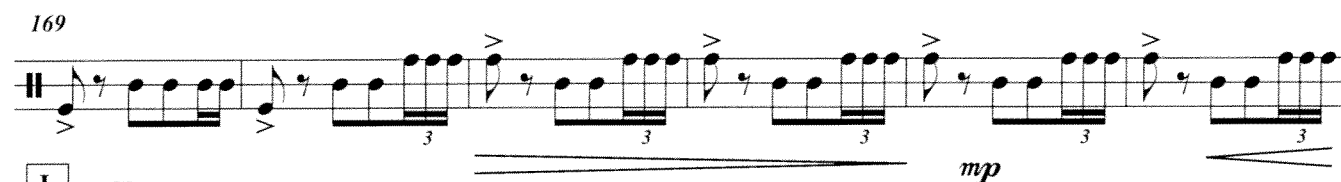
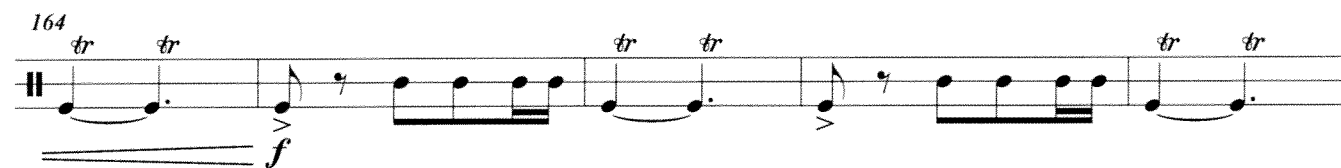


146



155





225 *accel.*

231 *ff* *f*

237

243 **P** Mudra *ff*

249 *mf*

255 *f*

260 **Q** *smortz.* *mf*

266 *f*

271 *mf*

275 *pp*