

Andrea La Rose

advertising changed my life

an opera scene

2001

advertising changed my life
(2001)

music and libretto by the composer.

characters:

businesswoman — soprano

friend of businesswoman — mezzo-soprano

train conductor/homeless man — baritone

passengers — speaking part, one or more people

orchestra:

clarinet

viola

percussion

piano I

piano II

The scene takes place on the R train from Union Street in Brooklyn to Union Square in Manhattan, where businesswomen discuss the joy of finding discarded items and the weird behavior of strangers, a homeless man begs for money, and everyone waxes poetic about the ads that shine down from above.



I wrote this opera scene for the new music ensemble, conTempo, at Brooklyn College, who gave it a workshop performance shortly after it was finished. The ensemble consists of whomever signs up for the class, which is why the “orchestra” for this work is the rather atypical scoring of clarinet, viola, percussion, and two pianos. It was eventually premiered by the Graduate Center Contemporary Ensemble.

I had been living in New York City for about six months, and between travelling and busking, I had already spent a lot of time in the subway. Since this was such a large part of my New York experience, it seemed like a natural choice for the subject matter. Musically, I wanted to portray several aspects of being on the subway: the motor rhythms, squeals and bells of the train; the way the conductors talk at one moment like an irate mother and at other moments like a smarmy salesman; and the craziness of people busking or trying to sell things on the train. I also wanted to capture something of the way people normally talk, while still having something melodically appealing, so I combined “chant notation” (just noteheads to indicate pitch but nothing to indicate rhythm) with blues scales. Basically, the scene is an eight-minute recitative, without quite sounding like one.

In real life, nothing actually happens on the subway that is plot-worthy, so I decided to keep it that way in my piece. For about two weeks, whenever I rode on the subway, I took a small notebook and jotted down ads, everything the conductor said, conversations I had with a friend of mine, things homeless people said as they asked for money. At one point I fell onto someone as the train jerked forward; he commented angrily, and that became fodder for the libretto, too. After surveying what I had collected, I found the juxtaposition of the ad texts — promoting the wholesome goodness of an education at the New School, proper behavior in the subway, and everyone’s favorite omnipresent dermatologist, Dr. Zizmor — and the typical sad speech of a homeless person has its own dramatic propulsion. Subway riders, from investment bankers to hipsters, to the homeless, are bombarded by these ads daily, and yet, how much do they affect our lives?

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The musical score consists of five staves on the left and a piano section on the right.

Left Side:

- clarinet:** Treble clef. Measure 5 starts at tempo = 72, dynamic (echo) flatten. Measure 6 starts at tempo = 84-96, dynamic occasionally squeak (short and long) until you hear triplets in the piano...
- percussion:** Bass clef. Measure 4 starts at dynamic ff, dynamic occasionally bow large cymbal & high vibraphone pitches until you hear triplets in the piano...
- baritone:** Bass clef. Includes a box with lyrics: And if you're late for work, you can thank the gentleman in the first car for holding the doors!
- piano I:** Treble and bass staves. Measure 5 starts at dynamic fff, dynamic cluster from middle C up (use arms).
- piano II:** Treble and bass staves. Measure 5 starts at dynamic fff, dynamic cluster from middle C down (use arms).

Right Side:

Measure 6 starts at tempo = 84-96. The piano section is divided into two parts: 2x and 3x. The 2x part consists of two measures of eighth-note clusters. The 3x part consists of three measures of eighth-note clusters.

Text:

occasionally squeak (short and long) until you hear triplets in the piano...

occasionally bow large cymbal & high vibraphone pitches until you hear triplets in the piano...

pianos: start first measure together; it's okay if you're not in synch afterwards

time signatures for piano I; piano II is independent.

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff, labeled 'cl' (clarinet), has a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff, labeled 'perc' (percussion), has a 3/4 time signature. Both staves begin with a long horizontal bar. The piano I section (staves 2-5) features six measures of complex rhythms. Measure 1: '4x' (four groups of eighth-note pairs). Measure 2: '2x' (two groups of eighth-note pairs). Measure 3: '3x' (three groups of eighth-note pairs). Measure 4: '5x' (five groups of eighth-note pairs). Measure 5: '4x' (four groups of eighth-note pairs). Measure 6: '3x' (three groups of eighth-note pairs). The piano II section (staves 6-9) includes dynamics like *f*, *p*, *mf*, *mp*, and *v*. Measures 1-3 show eighth-note patterns with various rests. Measures 4-6 show quarter-note patterns with rests. Measures 7-9 show eighth-note patterns with rests. The score concludes with a large black arrow pointing right at the end of measure 6.

squeal more frequently and increasingly higher with various durations and dynamics

slow down

cl

4
4

bow more frequently and increasingly higher with various durations and dynamics

perc

A musical score page featuring a treble clef staff. The first measure starts with a dynamic instruction 'p' with a 'K' underneath it, followed by a dynamic 'mf'. The second measure contains a sequence of eighth notes: the first note has a '3' over it, the second note has a '3' over it, the third note has a '3' over it, and the fourth note has a '3' over it.

A musical score for a six-string guitar. The first two measures show eighth-note patterns on the first and second strings. The third measure begins with a sixteenth note on the third string, followed by a grace note on the fourth string.

to timpani

3x

The musical score consists of two staves. The top staff shows a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. It contains six notes: a quarter note, a eighth note, a quarter note, a eighth note, a quarter note, and a eighth note. Above the staff is a bracket labeled "3x" and a tempo marking "7:4". The bottom staff shows a bass clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. It contains five notes: a quarter note, a eighth note, a quarter note, a eighth note, and a quarter note. Below the staff is a dynamic marking "f".

freely

vla

perc

bar.

train conductor

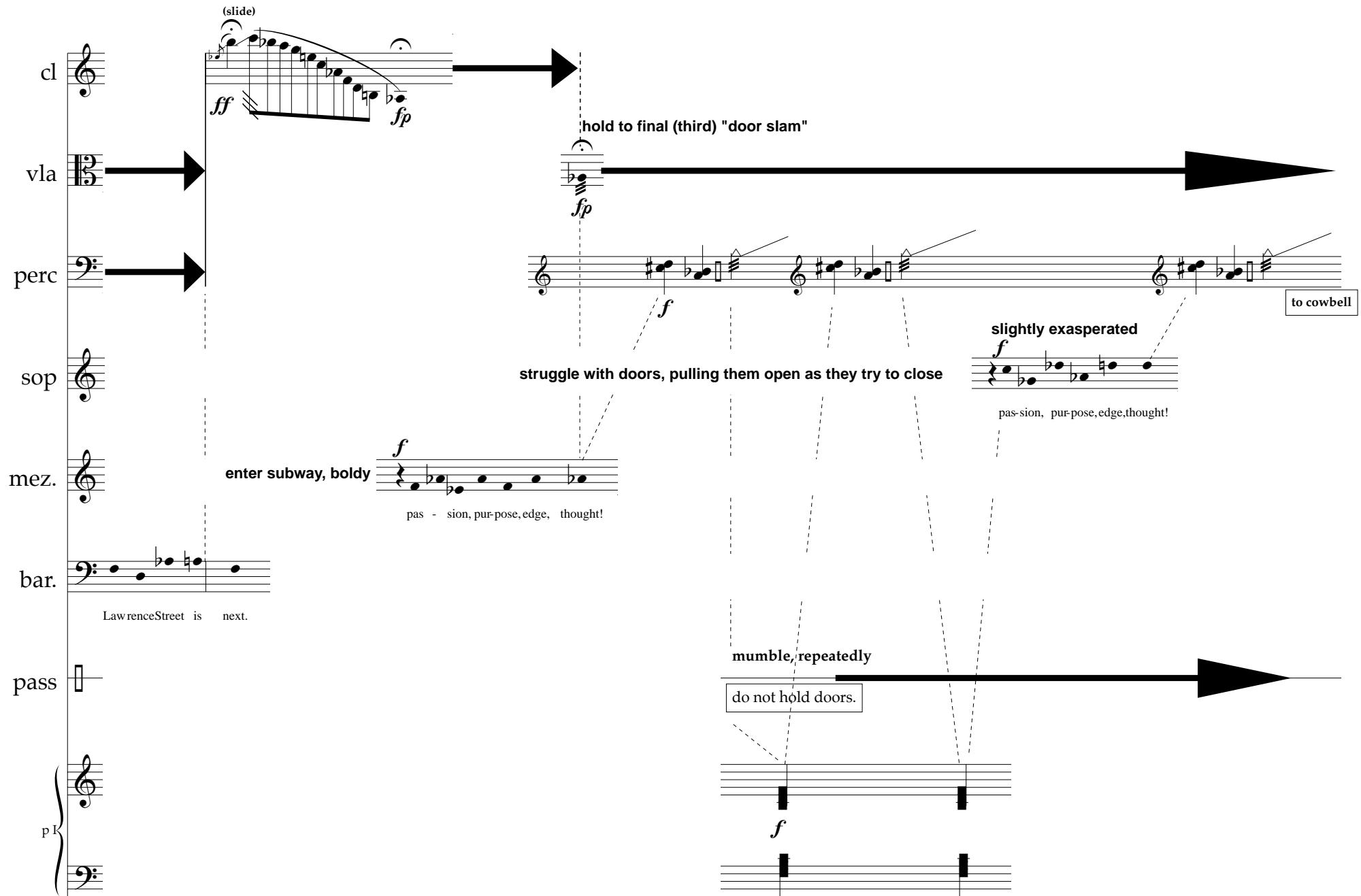
De-kalb A - ve - nue. Q train a - cross the plat-form. Step in, la - dies and gen - tle - men! Stand clear of the clo - sing doors. Man - hat - tan bound R.

cl (slide) 
 ff fp
 vla 
 perc 
 sop
 mez. f
 bar.
 Lawrence Street is next.
 pass
 p K

hold to final (third) "door slam"
 fp
 f
 struggle with doors, pulling them open as they try to close
 slightly exasperated
 pas - sion, pur-pose, edge, thought!
 to cowbell

enter subway, boldy
 pas - sion, pur-pose, edge, thought!

mumble, repeatedly
 do not hold doors.
 f



This page lasts about 20-25 seconds, then go to the next page.

Musical score for orchestra and choir. The score includes parts for cl (clarinet), vla (viola), sop (soprano), and mez. (mezzo-soprano). The soprano and mezzo-soprano sing lyrics in parentheses. The score consists of four staves. The first two staves have a dynamic of *f* and *mp*. The soprano and mezzo-soprano staves have lyrics: "in own time *f* driven, proud", "pas - sion!", "pur - pose!", "edge! thought!", "in- for-ma - tion!", "goal!", "di - a-logue?", "repeat until cowbell". The mezzo-soprano staff has lyrics: "pas - sion, pur - pose, edge, thought...", "in - for - ma - tion!", "goal!", "di - a -logue. -". The score concludes with a large black arrow pointing right.

cl
repeat until cowbell

vla
repeat until cowbell

sop
in own time *f* driven, proud
pas - sion!
pur - pose!
edge! thought!
in- for-ma - tion!
goal!
di - a-logue?
repeat until cowbell

mez.
f slowly, romantic
pas - sion,
pur - pose,
edge,
thought...
in - for - ma - tion!
goal!
di - a -logue. -
repeat until cowbell

in own time

Musical score for orchestra and choir, page 6. The score includes parts for p I (piano I) and p II (piano II). The piano parts play eighth-note patterns. The score begins with dynamics *ff* and *p*, followed by *mp*. The piano I part has a dynamic of *ff*. The piano II part has a dynamic of *mp*. The score concludes with a large black arrow pointing right.

4
4
• = 80

p I
ff

p II
ff

mp

p

ff

mp

repeat until communi-CA-tion in soprano

repeat until cowbell

cl
cowbell
swing sixteenths

perc
ff
to splash cymbal

sop

mez.

bar.

pass
f swing sixteenths
 the new school! the new school!

p I
 when you hear cowbell, finish previous music, then continue
 (straight sixteenths)

p II
mf
 repeat until communi-CA-tion in soprano

freely *p* *f* 5 *tr* *pp*

like a conversation
mp
 begin- ning ca - reer me - di - a

mp
 i - de - a on - line so - cial

indifferently
mf
 Law-rence Street.

sop

mez.

pass

p I

p II

swing sixteenths *f*

the new school!

5

vla

perc

sop

mez.

p

p I

p II

splash cymbal

ff
gradually faster, more interruptive

com - mu - ni - ca - tion!
art!
ca - reer!
sci - ence!

mus - ic!
busi - ness!
wri - ting!
ma - the - ma - tics!

com - pu - ter!
dance! cu - li - na - ry!

ff

96

8va

repeat until "call" in the mezzo-soprano

repeat until "call" in the mezzo-soprano

mez. *evangelize*

Call for your free **fall on passenger**

bar. *Court Street*

pass

improvise up to some "unreachable" note — make it sound bad

sheepishly

(ehem) course bul - le - tin.

one passenger, annoyed

Would you mind holding on to something?

cl

leave "pit" and go onstage to be a busker

vla

perc

like a telephone operator

sop

Eight hun - dred three one nine four three two one ex - ten - sion eight sev - en five!

pass

p I

p II



vibraslap

to timpani

f

**2
4**

$\text{♩} = 84$

f

dou - ble u dou - ble u dou - ble u dot n s u

vla

perc to vibraphone

f

bar.

White - hall South Fer - ry. Stand clear of the clo - sing doors. Let 'em out! Let 'em out first, please. Step all the way in! - This is a Queens-bound R. Stand clear of the clo - sing

tr *tr*

p I

fp *tr*

tr

tr *tr*

fp tremolo until doorbell (vibes)

p II

fp *tr*

tr

tr *tr*

fp tremolo until doorbell (vibes)

memorize this passage!

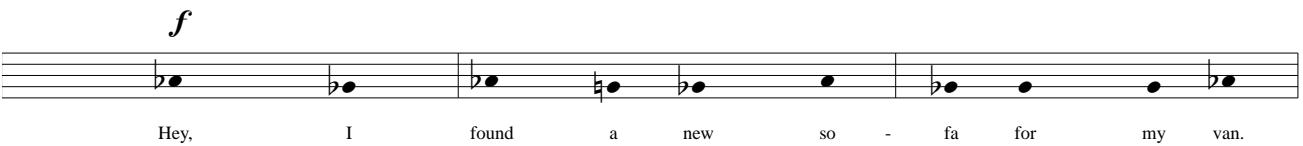


clarinetist enters w/ other passengers, makes way to one end of car and plays when ready, after the vamp measure has been played at least twice.

vibraphone



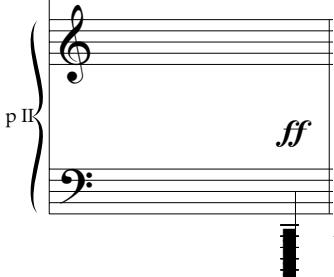
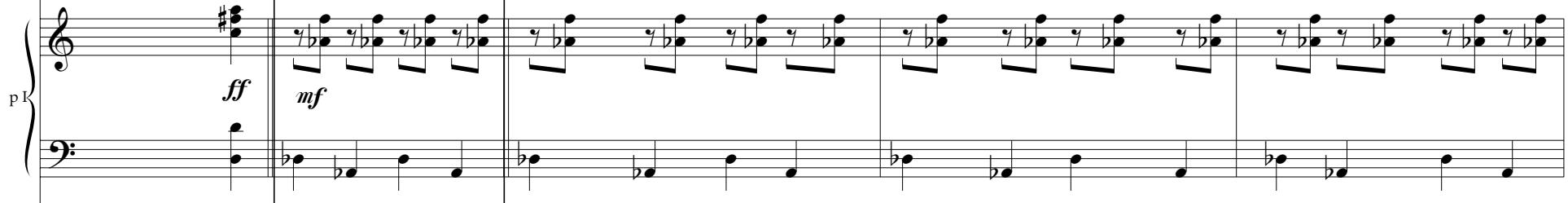
soprano puts on make-up while mezzo engages her in conversation.

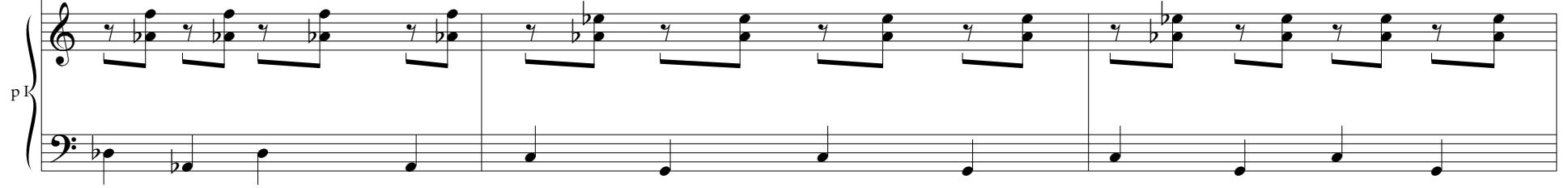
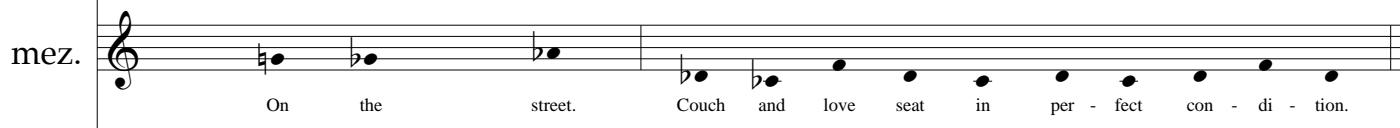


doors, please.

4
4
vamp until clarinet enters

pull out newspapers. mumble quietly. randomly shout out headlines until splash cymbal.





cl
 vla clarinet continues in the same tempo, everyone else:
 vla $\text{♩} = 80$
 perc motor on medium speed always roll from low to high
 sop
 mez. No. Just the love seat. The couch was too big.
 bar. Rec - tor Street.
 pass
 p K

read newspaper, nod occasionally,
 hum along with clarinet (does not
 have to be exact). continue to hum,
 even after clarinet has stopped, until
 "still SHA-ving" in the soprano.

f
 One time, I got on the train, and this dude was sha - ving

cl
 vla *repeat until "still SHA-ving" in soprano*
 perc
 sop
 mez.
 pass

vocal lyrics:
 with an e - lec - tric ra - zor. I thought, o - kay, so this guy is sha - ving, what - e - ver... then, I no - ticed a- bout three or four stops la - ter he was still

large cymbal

stop previous section abruptly

vla



splash cymbal

perc

ff

ff

sop



sha - ving!

mez.



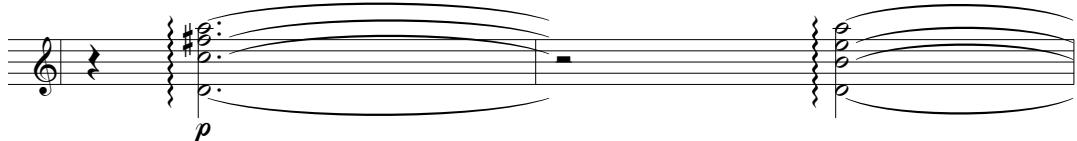
bar.



perplexed
mf

Was there an - y - thing left to shave?

Cort - landt Street.



No. New peo - ple would get on and then af - ter a few stops

<p

repeat for ca. 20"

vla

perc

sop

they would start to stare at him.

mez.

bar.

pass

p k

p II

flexitone

ff

ff

f

A - mor! Nine - ty three point one F M

Mu - si - ca va - ri - a - da ro - man - ti - ca y mo - der - na!

Ci - ty Hall.

passengers bob heads to music

battery seller: Four double A batteries, one dollar!

$\text{♩} = 152$

ff

ff

ff

ff

19

Musical score page 10 featuring vocal parts (Clarinet, Mezzo-soprano, Bassoon) and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts sing lyrics in a conversational style. The piano part includes dynamic markings like *p*, *ff*, *p*, *f*, and *mf*. Measure numbers 3 and 4 are indicated with large numerals.

cl
mez.
bar.

Ca - nal Street. Trans - fer to J, M, Z, down - town six... La - dies and gen - tle - men, this is your con - duct - tor speak - ing. Due to track work,

p I
p II

3
4

swing eighths

100

p

mf

Pas - sion, pur - pose, edge, thought!

sop Prince, Eighth, Twen - ty Third, Twen - ty Eighth!
 mez. Thir - ty Fourth
 bar. Four - tenth Street
 For - ty Sec - ond
 we will be by - pass - ing Prince, Eighth, Twen - ty Third, and Twen - ty Eighth. and will be stop - ping at Four - tenth Street, Thir - ty Fourth,

p *interruptive, increasingly excited*
 p II

cl - *f ppp* 

 vla - *f ppp* 

 perc

 sop

 mez.

 bar. to the Brook - lyn side for your lo - cal by - passed stops. Next stop, Four-teenth, Un - ion Square. Stand clear.

vibrphone **timpani**
(motor off) *f*

Un - ion Square
 Un - ion Square

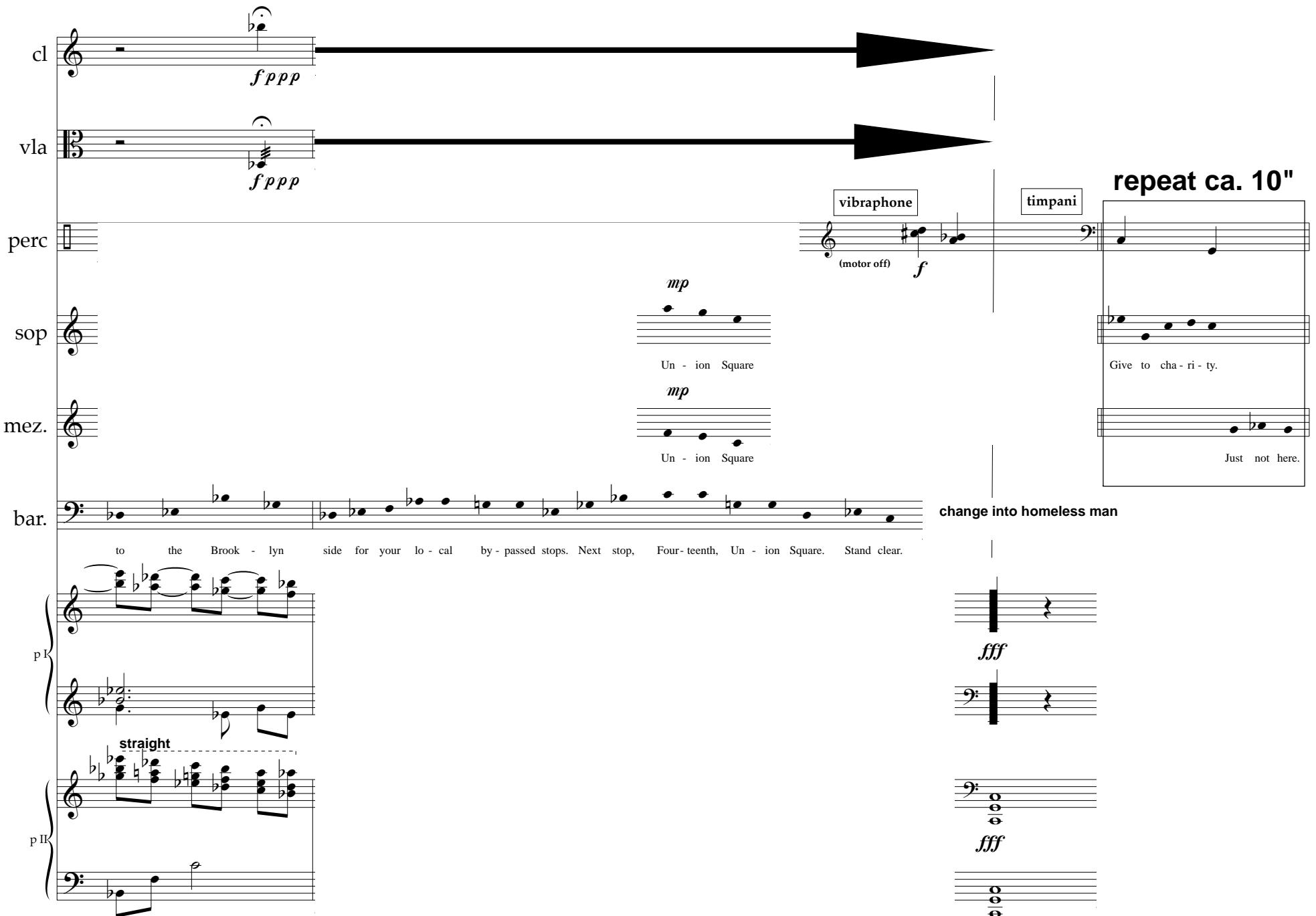
repeat ca. 10"

Give to cha - ri - ty.
 Just not here.

change into homeless man

p I
 straight
 p II

fff
fff



perc

ca. 7"

repeat until viola entrance, then to splash cymbal

sop

mez.

bar.

slow and somber

La-dies and gen-tle-men, I am sor-ry to dis-turb you this mor-ning. I am a home-less man.

I do not use drugs or al-co-hol.

Pan-hand-ling in the sub-way is il-le-gal.

In stead give to the cha-ri-ty of your choice.

A musical score page featuring five staves. The top four staves are labeled 'perc', 'sop', 'mez.', and 'bar.' from top to bottom. Each of these staves has a thick horizontal line extending across the page, ending in a large black triangle pointing right. The 'bar.' staff includes a musical notation line below it with several sharp symbols. Below the 'bar.' staff is a line of lyrics: 'If you could find it in your hearts to give me a lit - tle change or some food, I would be ve - ry grate - ful. Please help me out.' To the left of the 'pass' staff, there is a small square icon containing a stylized letter 'P'. Below the 'pass' staff, there is a block of text describing a performance note: 'some hide behind newspapers, some put on headphones and make drum noises. random shouts of "what if you are the sick passenger?" until homeless man leaves car...'.

**3 + 3
4 16**

clarinet & viola: ♩ = 80

cl

vla
sop
mez

Homeless man shuffles to other end of car, collecting money. Sop., Mezz., and passengers continue until the homeless man leaves the car, ca. 10-15". Before leaving the car, a passenger approaches the homeless man from behind, giving him a bag of food.

pass Mezz., and passengers continue until the homeless man leaves the car, ca. 10-15'. Before leaving the car, a passenger approaches the homeless man from behind, giving him a bag of food.

pi

p II

The image displays six staves of musical notation arranged in two rows of three. Each staff begins with a dynamic marking 'mf' and a tempo instruction '2x'. The notation consists of two voices, indicated by two sets of stems per staff. The first four staves feature various rhythmic patterns and performance techniques such as slurs and grace notes, with some notes having curved lines above them. The last two staves continue the melodic line, showing a progression of notes and rests.

4
4

A musical staff with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp, and a common time signature. The staff contains two measures of eighth-note patterns. Measure 1 consists of a sixteenth note followed by a eighth note, then a sixteenth note followed by a eighth note. Measure 2 consists of a sixteenth note followed by a eighth note, then a sixteenth note followed by a eighth note. Measures 3 and 4 show eighth-note patterns starting with a sixteenth note followed by a eighth note.

3
4

2x

depress pedal for remainder of piece!

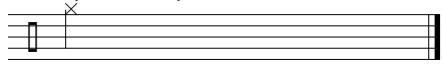
26

**3 + 3
4 + 16**

2x

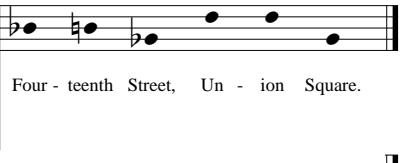
cl 

vla  **f**

perc  **f**

sop **once homeless man has left...**
distant **p**
Dear Doc - tor Ziz - mor, thank you for im - prov - ing my face. Thank you for im - prov - ing my life!

mez. **distant** **p**
Dear Doc - tor Ziz - mor, thank you for im - prov - ing my face. Thank you for im - prov - ing my life!

bar.  **f**
Four - tenth Street, Un - ion Square.

p I 

p II 