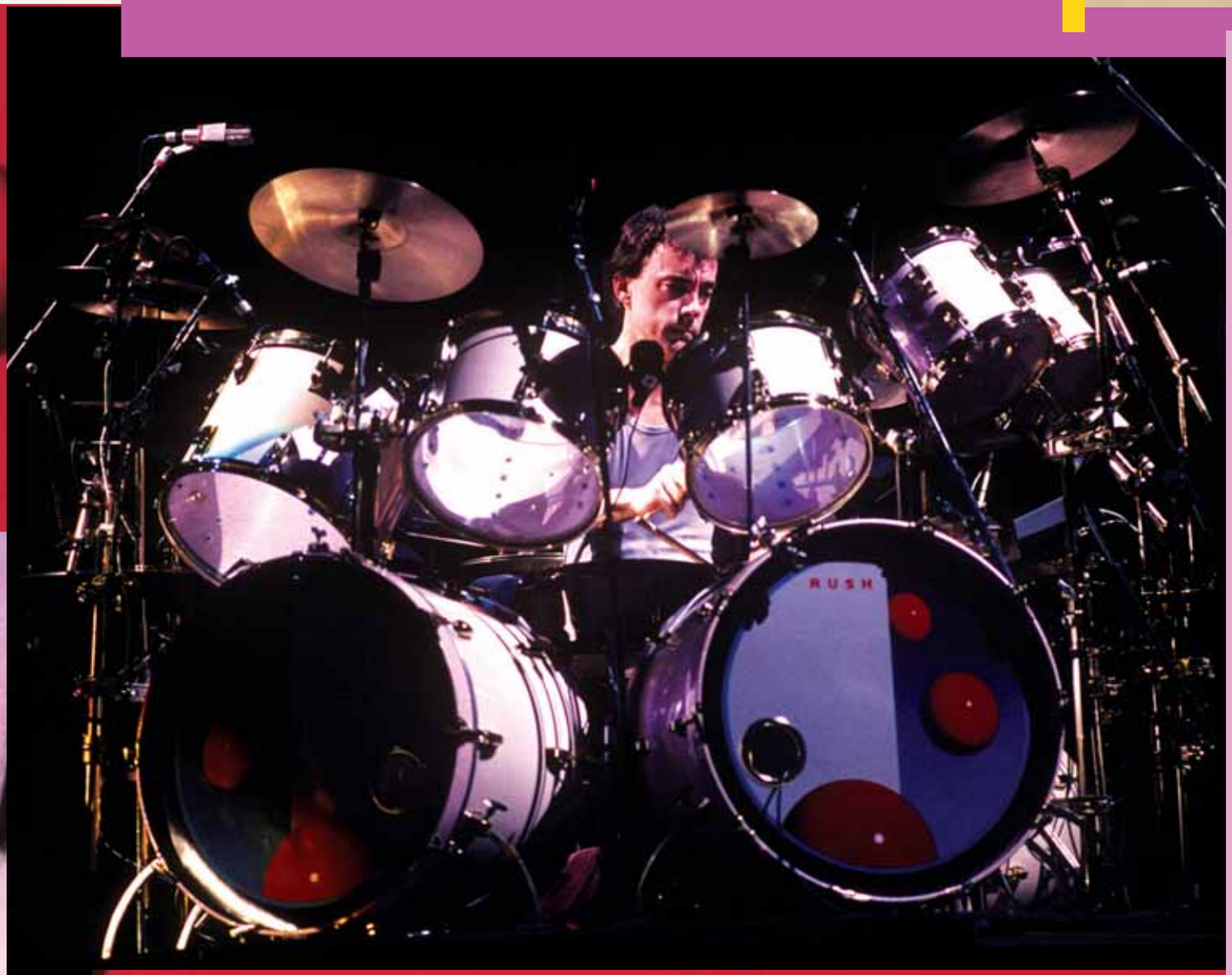
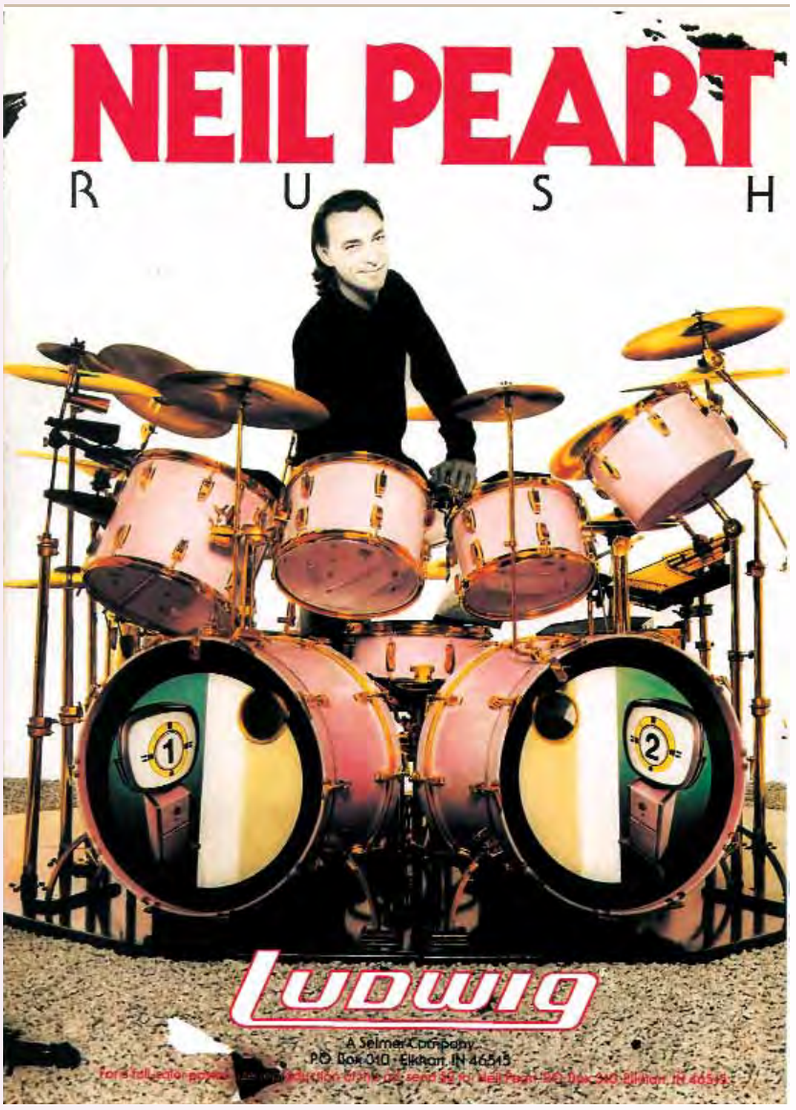
CHAPTER 8



Hold Your Fire Tour
(1987-88)

As Neil mentions in the tour book, 1987 was a big year indeed for those interested in his equipment preferences. The candy apple red Tama set had endured three albums and long tours, and was feeling a little road-weary, so Neil set about looking for a new kit. His side-by-side "taste test" of different brands of drums was conducted at The Percussion Center in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and included the following makes: Tama, Yamaha, Ludwig, Sonor, Premier, and Tempus (a Canadian company that makes fiberglass drums). After careful tuning, playing, and comparison, it came down to a neck-and-neck finish between Tama and Ludwig, and in the end Neil felt that the Ludwig drums were just a tad more exciting. The new kit, diagrammed here, was a 1987 Ludwig Super Classic with four-ply maple/poplar shells. Once again it was completely customized by Neal Graham, including the white opalescent finish.



The electronic setup for this tour was much expanded. In a 1987 *Modern Drummer* interview, Neil says: "We were to start working on new material in the fall, and I really wanted to update my electronic outfit as well. I had been watching the progress of digital sampling units for a couple of years, and felt that the time was right to explore that. I spoke with the band's 'technological mentor,' Jim Burgess, told him what I was after, and he recommended the Akai unit, with a Yamaha MIDI controller. I decided to stay with the latest Simmons pads, as I like the feel of them. The sounds are digitally stored on those little 3-1/2" computer disks, and once you put them into the Akai's RAM memory, you can edit and change them at will without affecting the original sample. Assigning them to different pads is a simple affair, and you can copy from the RAM to a new disk to create new setups and safety copies. With the Yamaha MIDI controller, you can create 'chains,' which allow you to change programs with the flick of a footswitch. For example, in one of the new songs on which we're working as I write, I play an African drum setup for the verses, and then click to a setup of my acoustic Tama drums, sampled from 'Grand Designs,' for the choruses." It was clear that Neil was sold on the benefits of electronic drums and MIDI technology.

The number of Simmons pads on this setup expanded to six, and with the continued advancement of technology, the orchestra bells (aka glockenspiel) and temple blocks were retired. However, between all of the Simmons pads and the addition of a MalletKAT MIDI controller, Neil had exact samples of all of these retired percussion instruments to choose from. Other interesting changes at this time included a switch from concert toms in the higher register to all closed toms (which gave Neil a more uniform sound), and a temporary reduction in the number of China cymbals on the kit to two.

From the Hold Your Fire tour book, Neil writes:

Well, lots of Big News in the equipment department this year, for those of you who are interested in such things. When I decided last year that I wanted to get a new set of drums, I went about it in a very methodical way. This time I wanted to be absolutely sure that I was using the best-sounding drums there were. So I went down to The Percussion Center in Fort Wayne, and we tried out six different makes of drums, side by side and with the same heads and tuning. The result was a new set of Ludwig drums—the ones which sounded the most lively and exciting. A similar "A-B" comparison confirmed the effectiveness of the vibra-fibing treatment, and that process of a thin layer of fiberglass has been applied to the inside of the shells.

When Geddy saw the color I had chosen for them, he asked: "What ever possessed you?" Well, I'm not sure about that, but it's another "hot rod" finish like the red ones, this time a combination of white opalescent, with a few "flip-flop" sparkles, and a little hint of pink.

Just different, that's all.

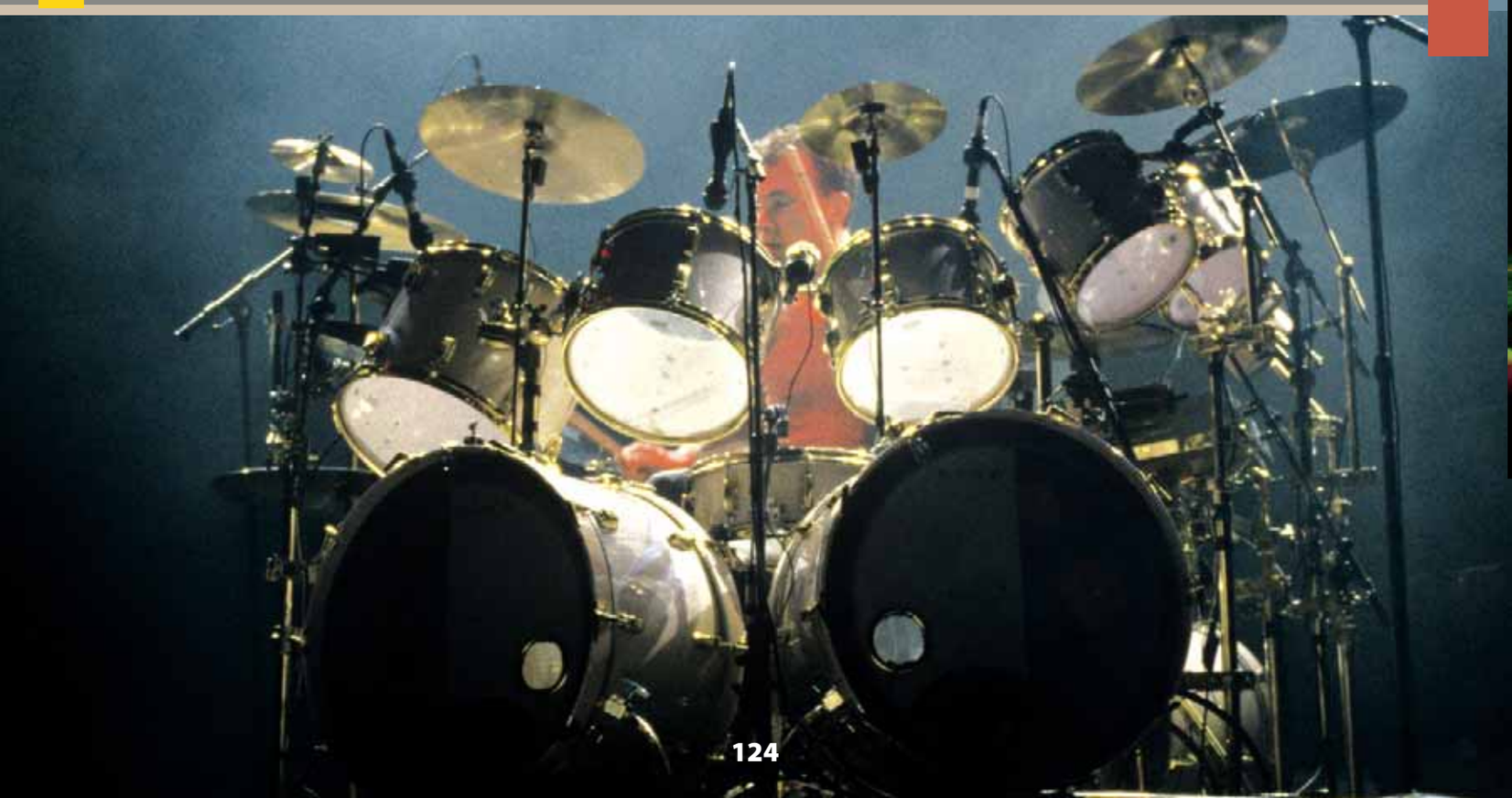
The hardware, which has been brass-plated, is a combination of Premier, Tama, and Pearl fittings, while the cymbals are by Avedis Zildjian, with the exception of the Chinese ones which come from Wuhan province in China. The venerable Slingerland "Artist" snare drums remain, as do the Pro-Mark 747 drumsticks.

Big News in the electronics department as well—the Simmons pads now trigger an Akai digital sampler through a Yamaha MIDI controller. This has expanded my range of available percussion sounds enormously, allowing me to have absolutely any sound available at the flick of a stick or the kick of a switch. Nice. I've also added a KAT keyboard percussion unit, which again gives me all of the keyboard percussion sounds in a neat little package.

In the "traditional" percussion domain, there are temple blocks, timbale, crotales, a Tama gong bass drum, cowbells, and wind chimes.

What else was I going to say?
I forget.
Oh well.

Author's note: As the photos and diagram demonstrate, although Neil mentions using temple blocks, crotales, and chimes, ultimately he did not take these instruments on the tour, and used electronic samples of their sounds instead.



DRUM SETUP

Drums:

Ludwig Super Classic in custom white-with-pink-sparkle finish, with the inside of shells vibra-fibed

1. 14x24 bass drum
2. 5.5x14 "Old Faithful" Slingerland Artist snare drum
3. 5.5x6 concert tom
4. 9x6 tom
5. 9x8 tom
6. 9x10 tom
7. 8x12 tom
8. 9x13 tom
9. 12x15 tom
10. 16x18 floor tom
11. 14x22 Tama gong bass drum
12. 5x14 Slingerland Artist snare drum
13. 6.5x13 Tama brass timbale
14. 14x18 bass drum

Cymbals:

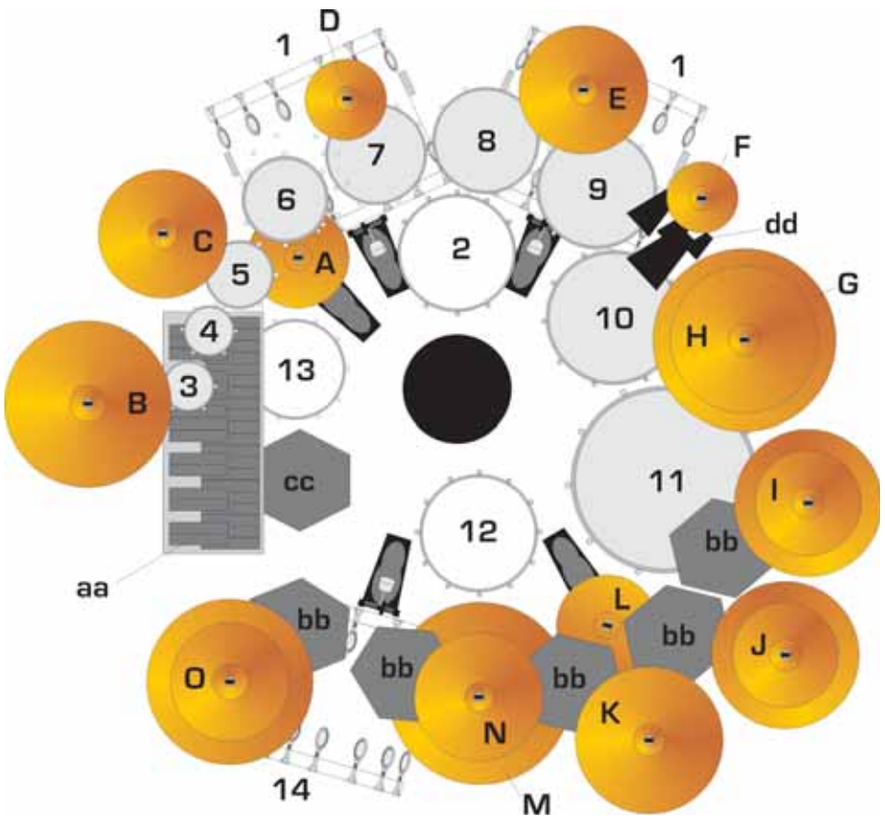
Zildjian (except Wuhan)

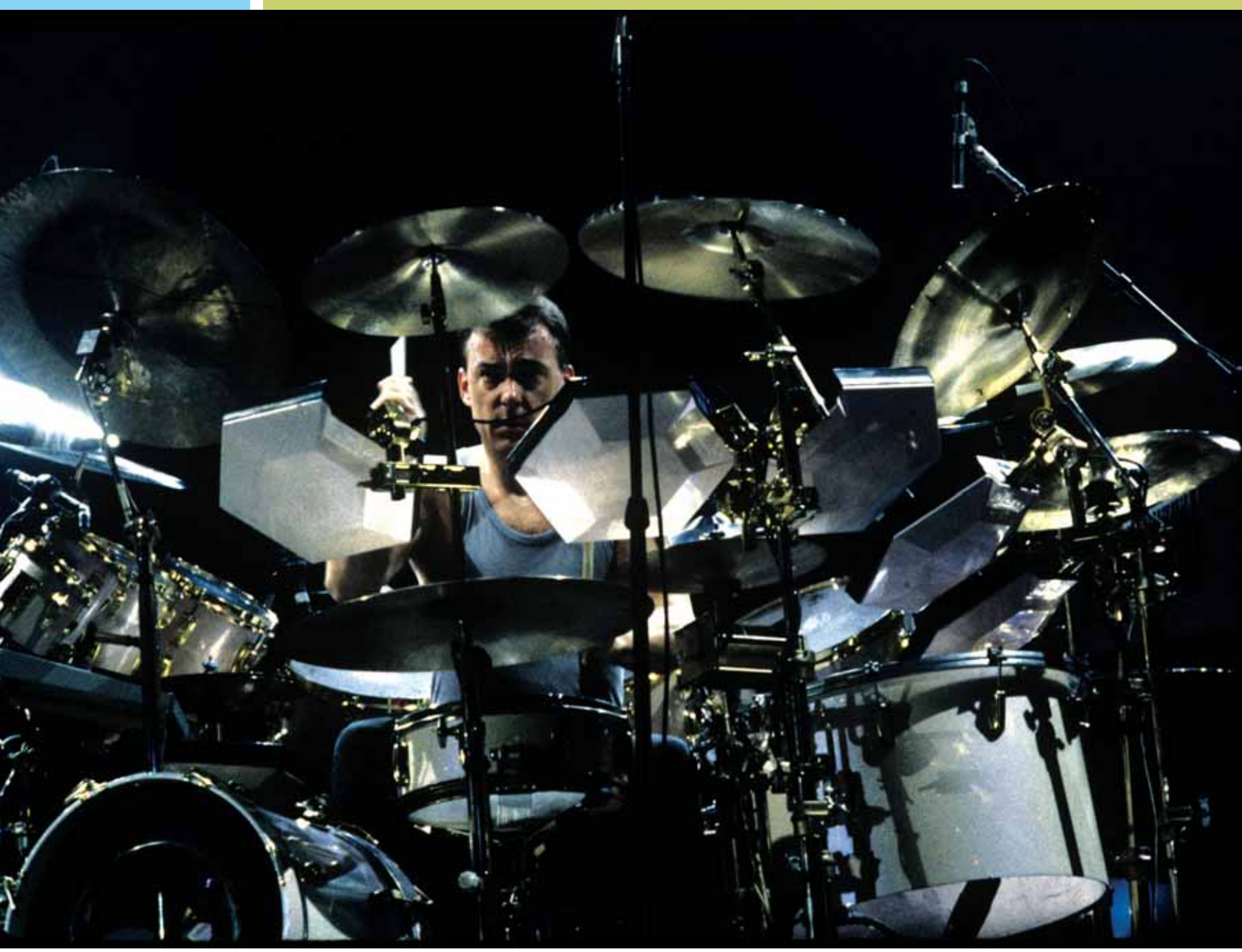
A. 13" New Beat Hi-Hats
B. 20" Medium Thin Crash
C. 16" Medium Thin Crash
D. 10" Splash
E. 16" Medium Thin Crash
F. 8" Splash
G. 22" Ping Ride
H. 18" Medium Thin Crash
I. 18" Wuhan Chinese
J. 18" Pang
K. 18" Medium Thin Crash
L. 13" New Beat Hi-Hats
M. 22" Ping Ride
N. 16" Medium Thin Crash
O. 20" Wuhan Chinese

Percussion & Electronics:

aa. MalletKAT electronic percussion controller
bb. Simmons SDS-5 tom module
cc. Simmons SDS-5 snare module
dd. cowbells

Additional Electronics:
Yamaha KX-76 MIDI controller
Akai 900 samplers
Shark pedals
(trigger for electronics)





Time Stand Still

Taken from the *Hold Your Fire* album (1987), "Time Stand Still" is a detailed drum part that perfectly displays the high level of Neil's arrangement and orchestration skills. Each groove and fill is carefully thought out and fits so well with the song that it becomes an integral part of the composition.

In the 1980s keyboards and synthesizers became a prinicipal element of the band's sound. The albums *Signals* (1982), *Grace Under Pressure* (1984), *Power Windows* (1985), *Hold Your Fire* (1987), and (to a lesser degree) *Presto* (1989) all feature synthesized sounds in a central role. In order to perform this material, all three members of the band began triggering different samples to reproduce the parts live. Since that time, Rush has always been known as a band on the forefront of music technology.

The use of new musical technology meant one major thing to Neil: electronic drums! Starting with the *Grace Under Pressure* tour in 1984, and on every tour since, Neil has used an electronic drumset facing the opposite direction from his main kit, installed on a rotating riser so that he always faces the audience. While the rotating riser and second kit add a very cool visual element to the show, the reason for their introduction was so that Neil could reproduce the electronic sounds on the albums. His electronic setup has evolved from early Simmons drums in the '80s to state-of-the-art Roland V-Drums today, with enough pads reachable on his main drumset that he only used the rear kit for his drum solo on the Time Machine tour.

In live performance, although Rush uses time-sensitive samples, they are all triggered in real time, and the band does not play to a click. This presents one of the biggest challenges for Neil in live performance (which was discussed on the DVD): maintaining the correct tempo so that when these samples enter, the band does not have to speed up or slow down to accommodate the tempo of the sample. This requires strict attention to and control of the tempo.

In "Time Stand Still," Neil plays a creative groove during the chorus where he uses two "clock tick" sounds that match the lyrical theme. One of these sounds is on a pad reachable by his left hand, while the other is played by his left foot on the electronic pedal to the left of his hi-hat pedal. Other sounds that Neil triggers in this song include a gated reverb effect on the snare drum, castanets, and sound effects.

ANALYSIS:

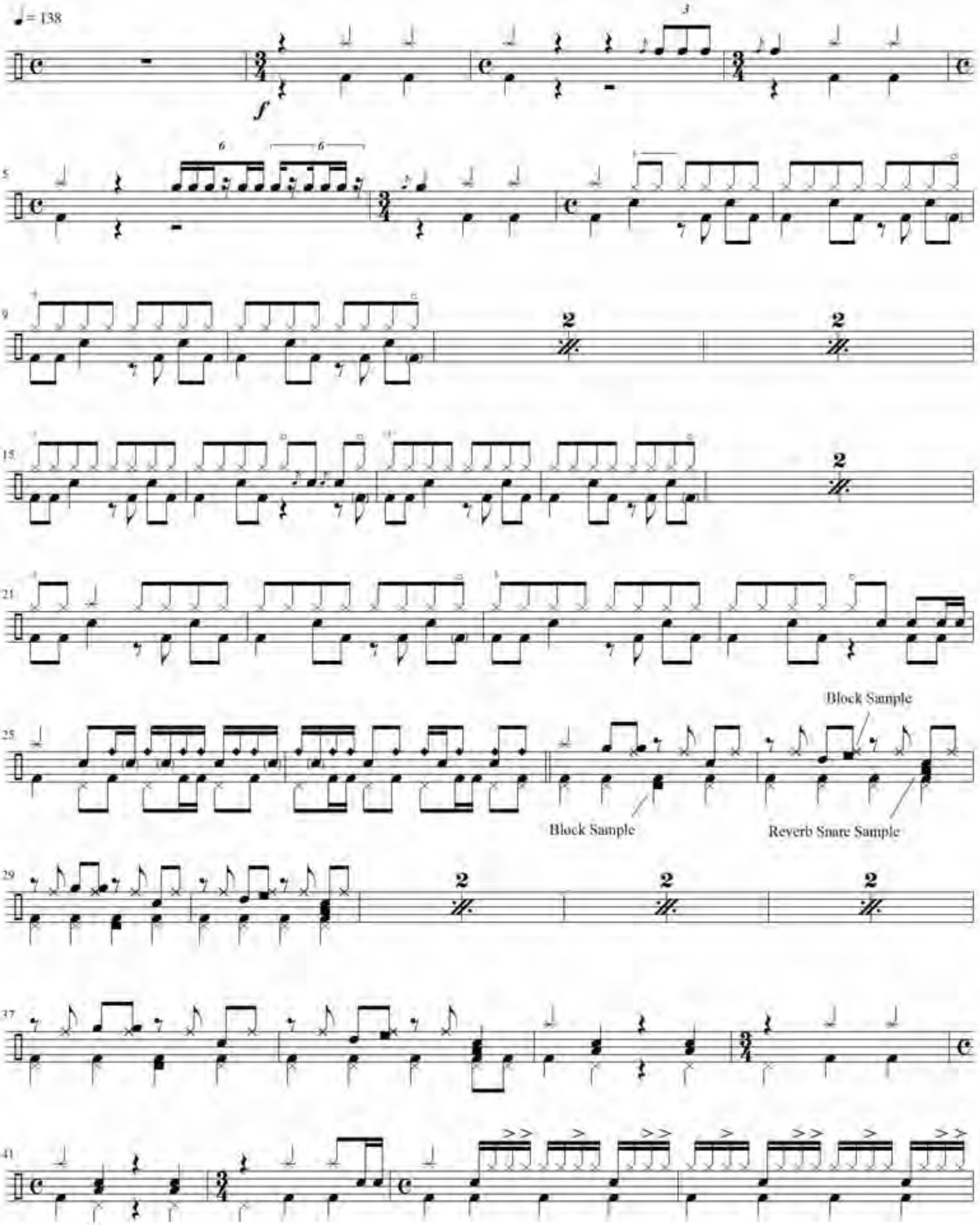
The introductory guitar theme of the song has seven beats, written out here as a bar of 4/4 and a bar of 3/4. There are some interesting fills in bars 3-6 which were played on timbales on the album, but which Neil has transposed to his highest toms. The second of these fills was inspired by Phil Collins. Interestingly, Neil tells the story that he spent hours trying to learn this particular lick up to tempo, finally mastering it with much admiration of Collins' chops, only to discover years later that Phil had recorded this rhythm with the tape slowed down!

Measures 9-24 are the first verse, and the groove is a straight rock beat, but with carefully placed hi-hat openings and slight snare fills (often with flams) that punctuate the lyrics. Neil also utilizes his signature ride pattern to generate lift going into the choruses (see, for instance, bars 25-26).

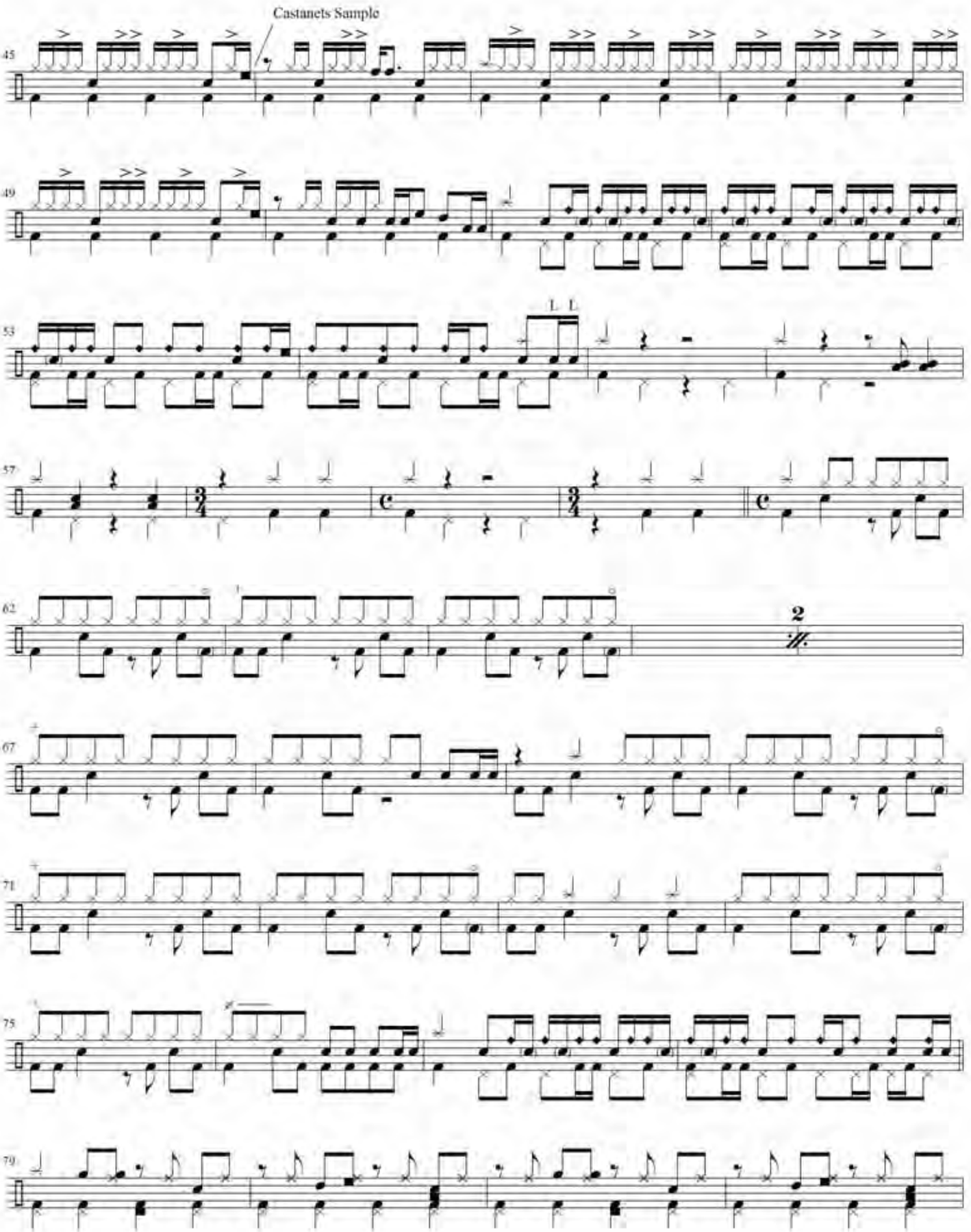
The chorus groove is a real point of drumming interest in this song. Here's how it breaks down: The beat is a two-bar phrase in which Neil's right hand plays upbeats on the ride cymbal, while his feet play the downbeats (1, 2, 3, 4) on bass drum and foot hi-hat. However, on beat 3 of the first bar of every two, his left foot moves from the hi-hat to the electronic pedal on the left to trigger one of the "clock tick" sounds, and then moves right back. This can take awhile to master. The left hand then moves around the kit, playing the rest of the accents, as well as the second "clock tick." The only time the right hand leaves the ride cymbal is to play a pad to trigger the reverb sound on beat 4 of every second bar. A truly masterful and creative groove! (Note: It is possible to play this groove without electronics by setting up two wood blocks or LP Jam Blocks to your left, and playing the note Neil plays with his left foot as a left-hand accent.)

Other points of interest include the flowing two-hand 16th-note groove Neil plays in the post-chorus (measures 43-50). During this groove, his left hand moves from the hi-hat to the MalletKAT to trigger the castanet sound. There are also two bridge-type sections in 7/4 (starting at bars 115 and 136, respectively) which can be tricky to understand unless you count through them the first few times. Finally, check out the wonderfully phrased, melodic tom fills in measures 104, 147, 155 and 163.

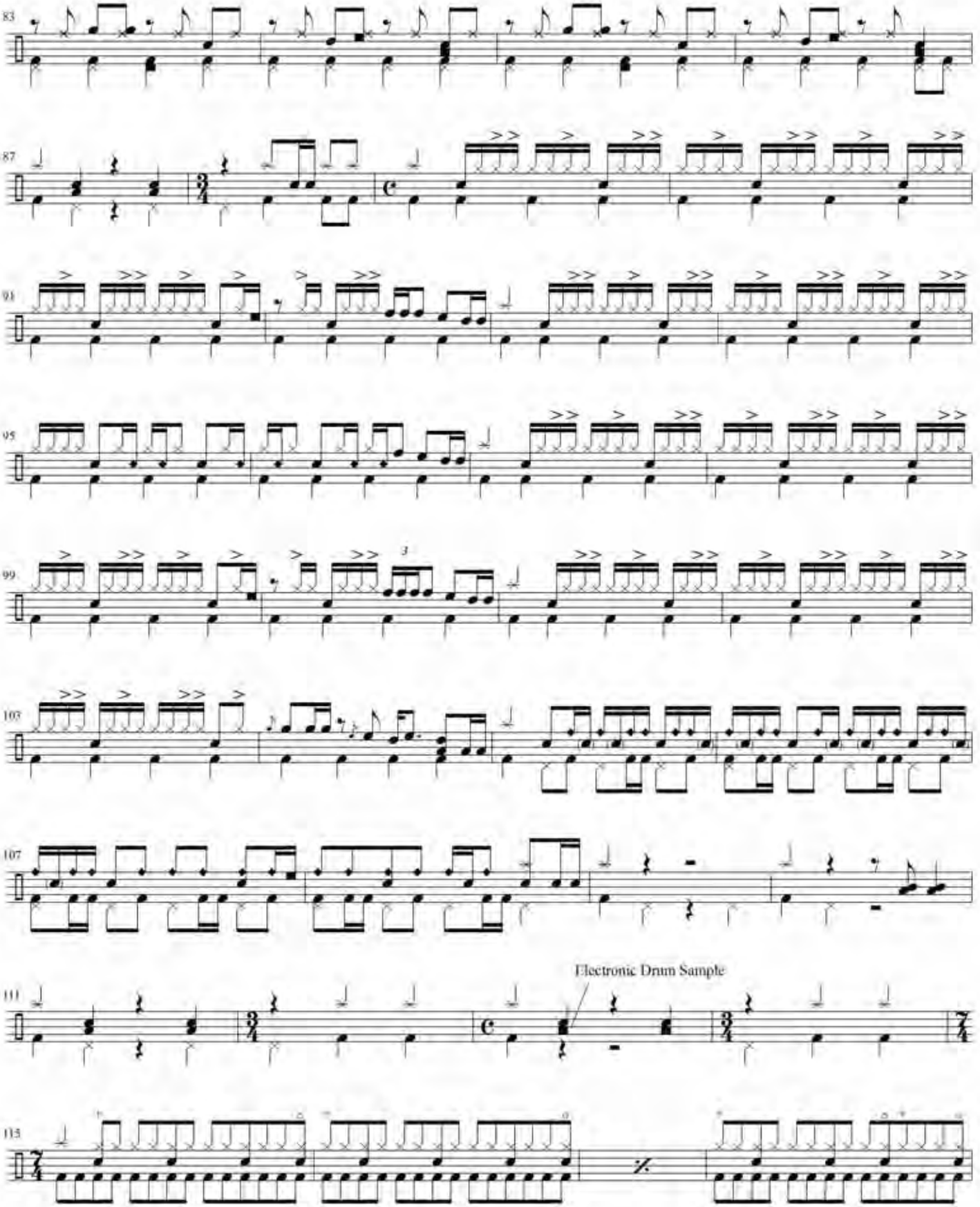
TIME STAND STILL



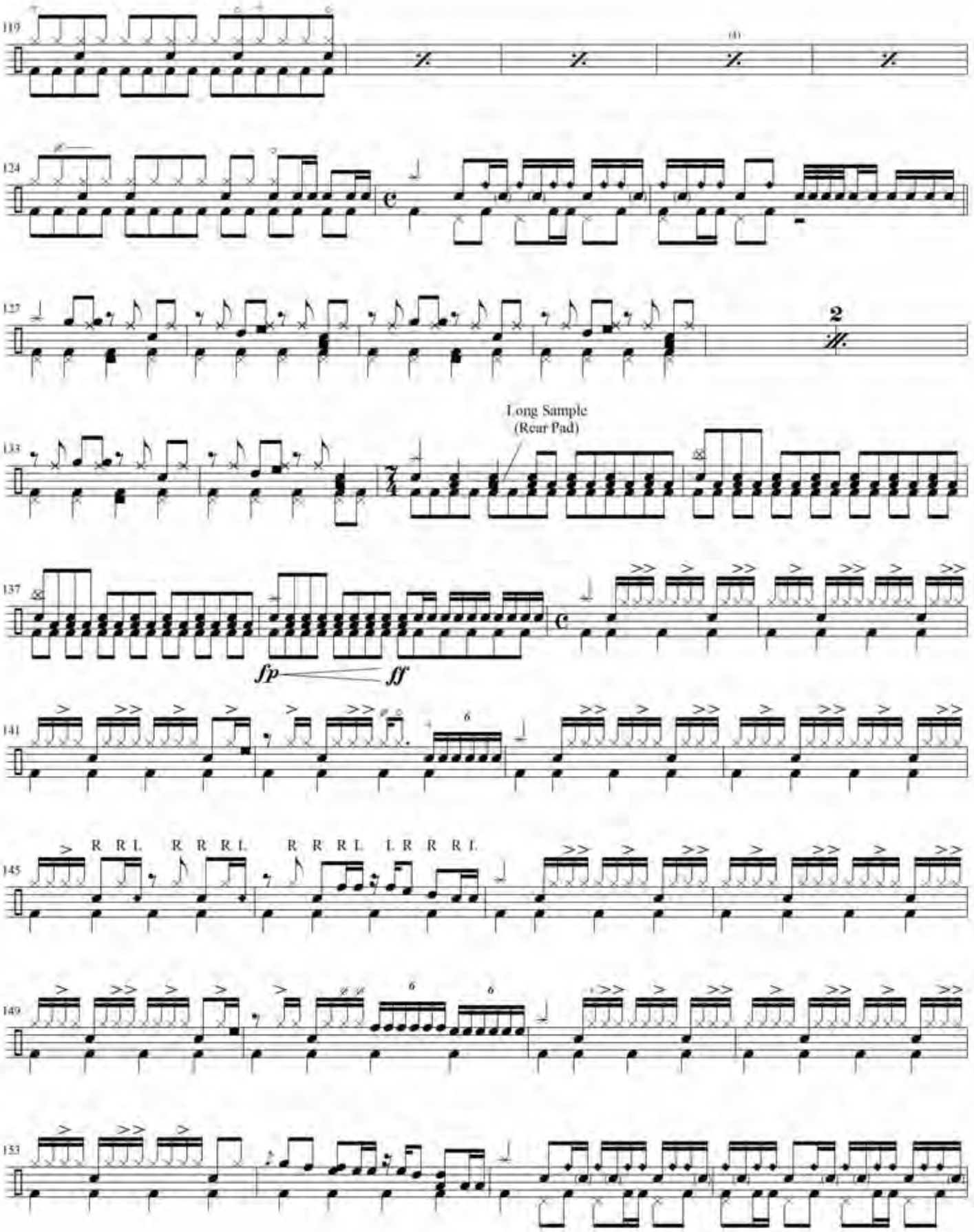
TIME STAND STILL



TIME STAND STILL



TIME STAND STILL



TIME STAND STILL