David Bruce

The Lick Quartet

for string quartet

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PROGRAMME NOTE

'The Lick' has been described as 'The most famous jazz cliché ever' – it's a melodic fragment that has been used by countless jazz musicians over the years, and more recently has become something of a joke, an internet 'meme'. As Wikipedia says, "it has become such a cliché, that musicians tend to only see it as an inside joke, so unironic performances are rare." After some fragments in the early sketches for this quartet started to resemble the lick, I decided to take that last statement as a challenge, and see if I could find ways to incorporate the lick unironically into the piece. Although it's not the 'main theme' of any of the movements, I like to think I've treated it a bit like, say, Shostakovich treats his famous 'signature' motive in his 8th String Quartet - something that forms part of the texture and background material for the whole piece. For those so inclined, spotting the various statements and fragments of the melody that fly around throughout the piece may, I hope, add to the pleasure of listening.

The piece is in four movements, each of which has a subtitle referencing a further influence on the music. In the first, *'Tigran's Lick'*, I experimented with a kind of rhythm I'd discovered in the music of pianist and composer Tigran Hamasyan - for those interested in such things, it's a polyrhythm that doesn't complete its cycle, but instead gets cut off and abruptly restarts, causing a jolt in the rhythmic flow as it does. Similarly, the 3rd movement *'Jacob's Lick'* references a trick used by the jazz wunderkind Jacob Collier, where what seems to be a relatively simple 5/4 pattern is actually built from wonky uneven shorter time signatures - again making for a somewhat bumpy ride.

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The 2nd and 4th movements reference two classical composers who have had some influence on this piece. The 2nd movement *'Antonin's Lick'* references Antonin Dvořák. I have long loved the sunny simplicity of Dvořák's American Quartet, far more than some of his more earnest works, and I think some of that same happy outlook can be felt throughout my piece and in this movement in particular. Finally, the 4th movement '*Leos's Lick'* references one of my favourite composers - Leos Janáček. Janáček shares with Dvořák the influence of folk music, but he is also prone to far more quirky extremes of register and texture, sometimes generating excitement from the feeling that the music is on the edge of falling apart. I particularly feel the connection to this part of Janáček's music in the closing pages of my quartet, where the music flies by at a breakneck speed, and everyone - players and audience alike - must hold on to their seats and hope they make it out in one piece.

David Bruce
July 2019

INSTRUMENTATION

Violin 1
Violin 2
Viola
Cello

Commissioned by Dallas Chamber Music Society
&
The Concertgebouw

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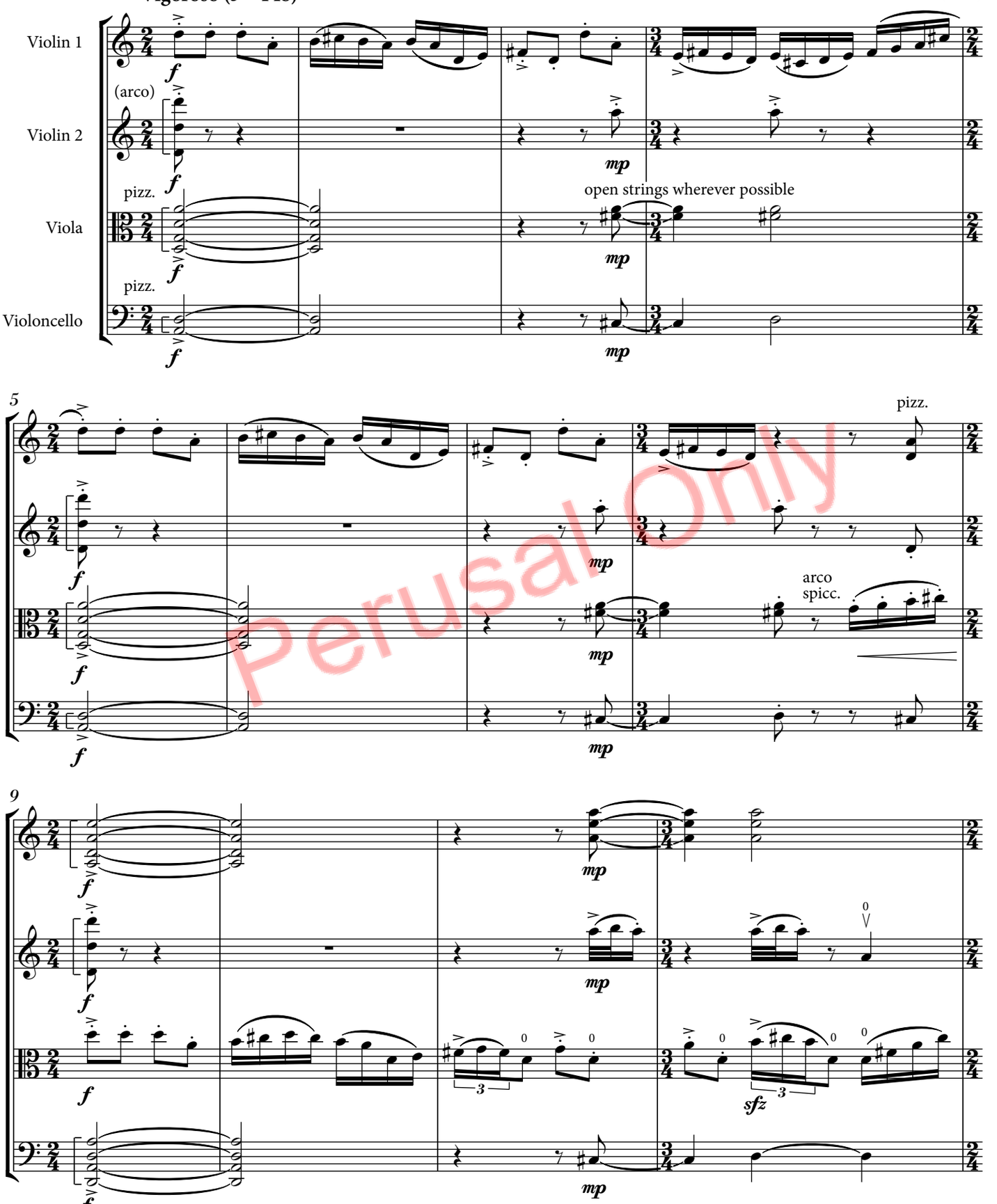
World premiere on 21st Oct 2019 at the Dallas Chamber Music Society,
by the Dover Quartet

The Lick Quartet

1. Tigran's Lick

David Bruce
(2019)

Vigoroso (♩ = 148)



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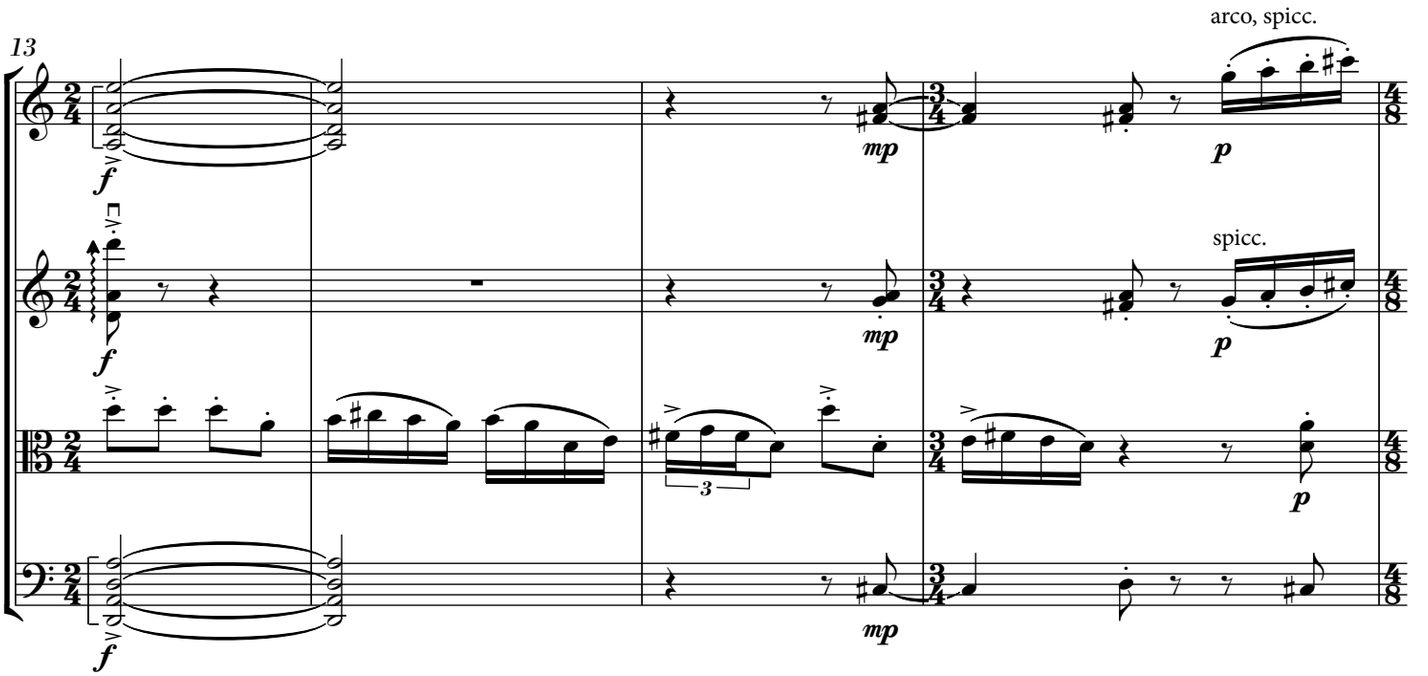

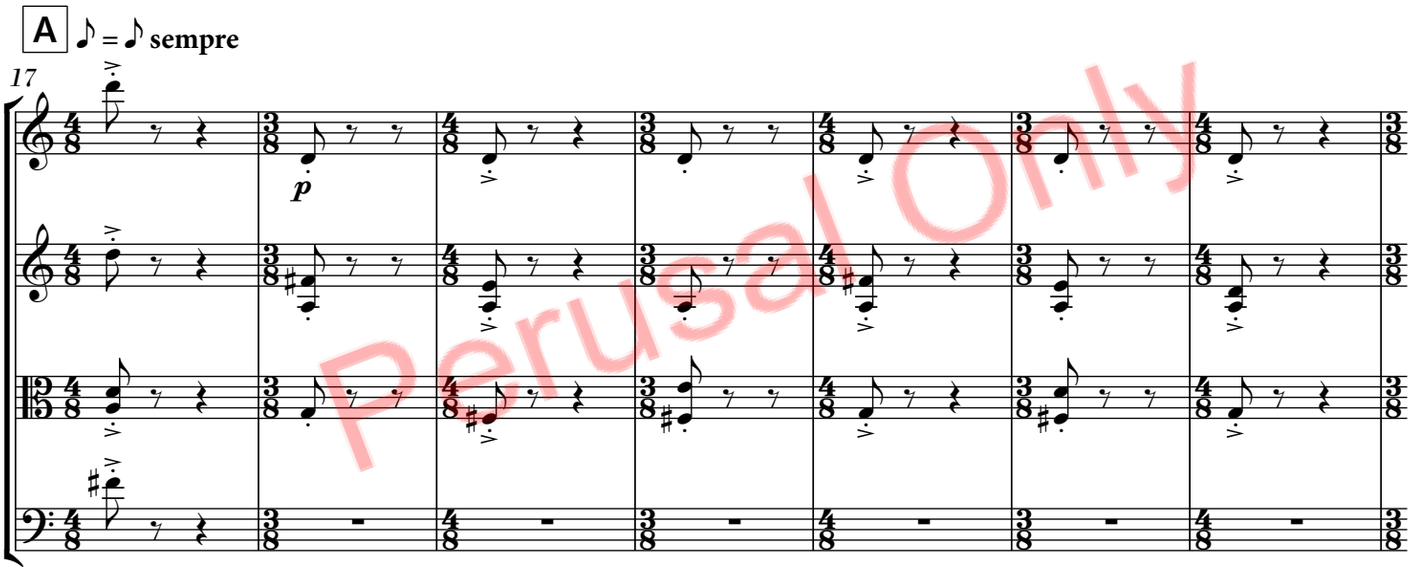

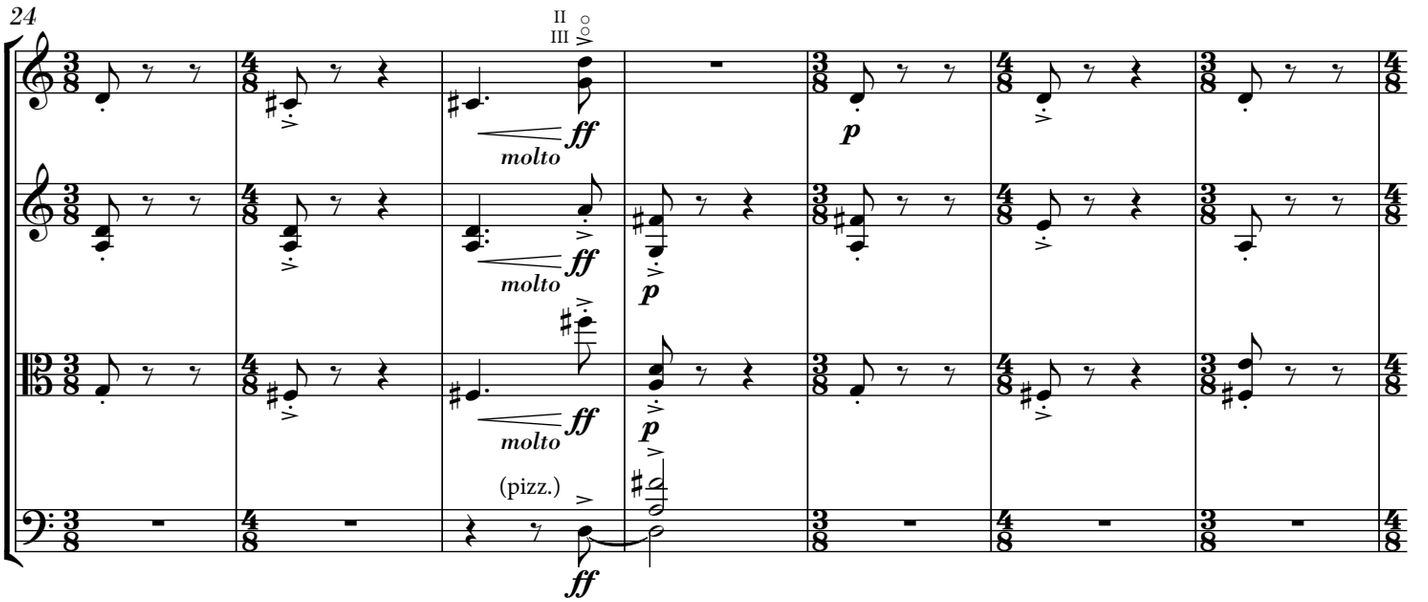

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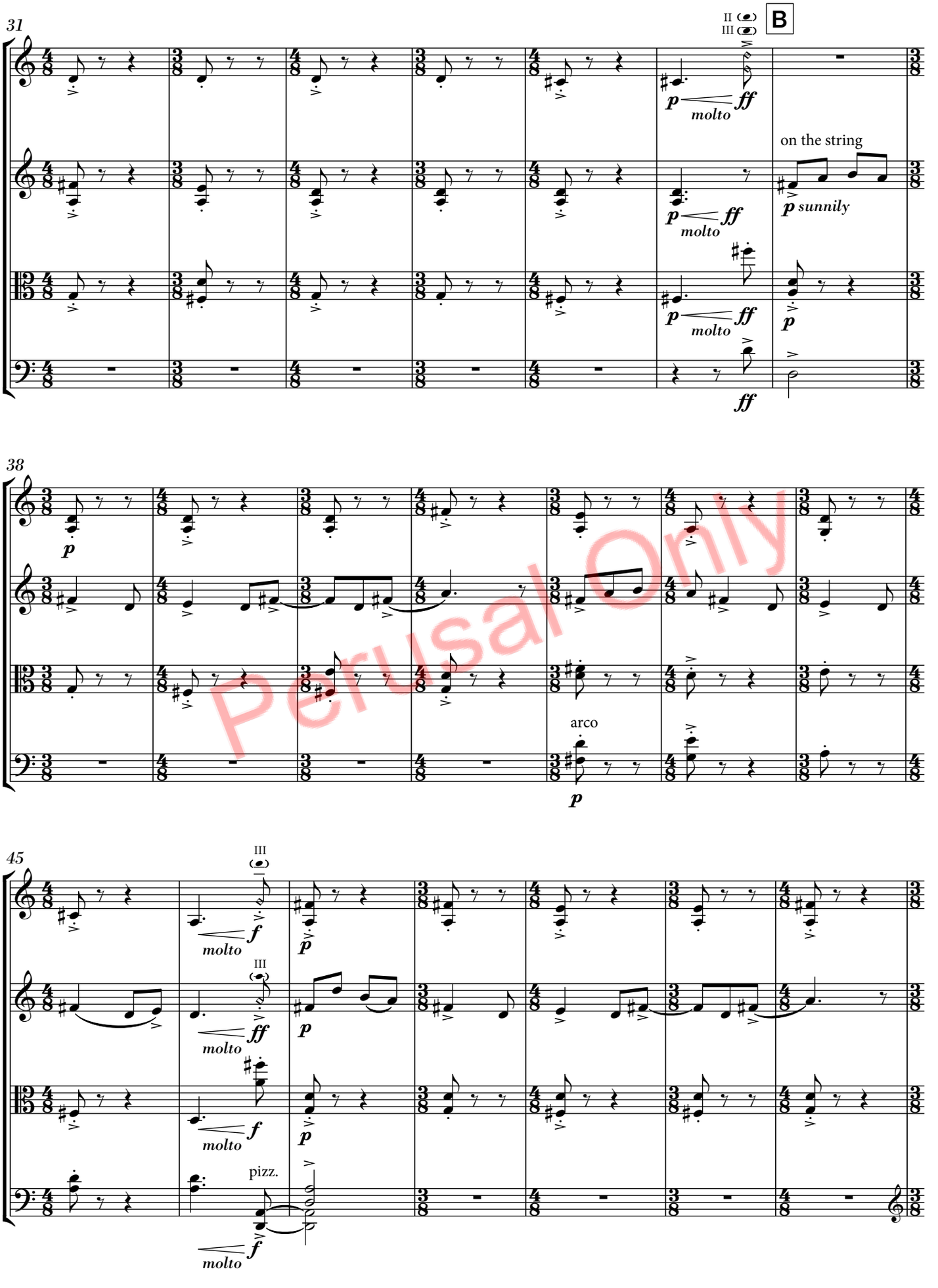

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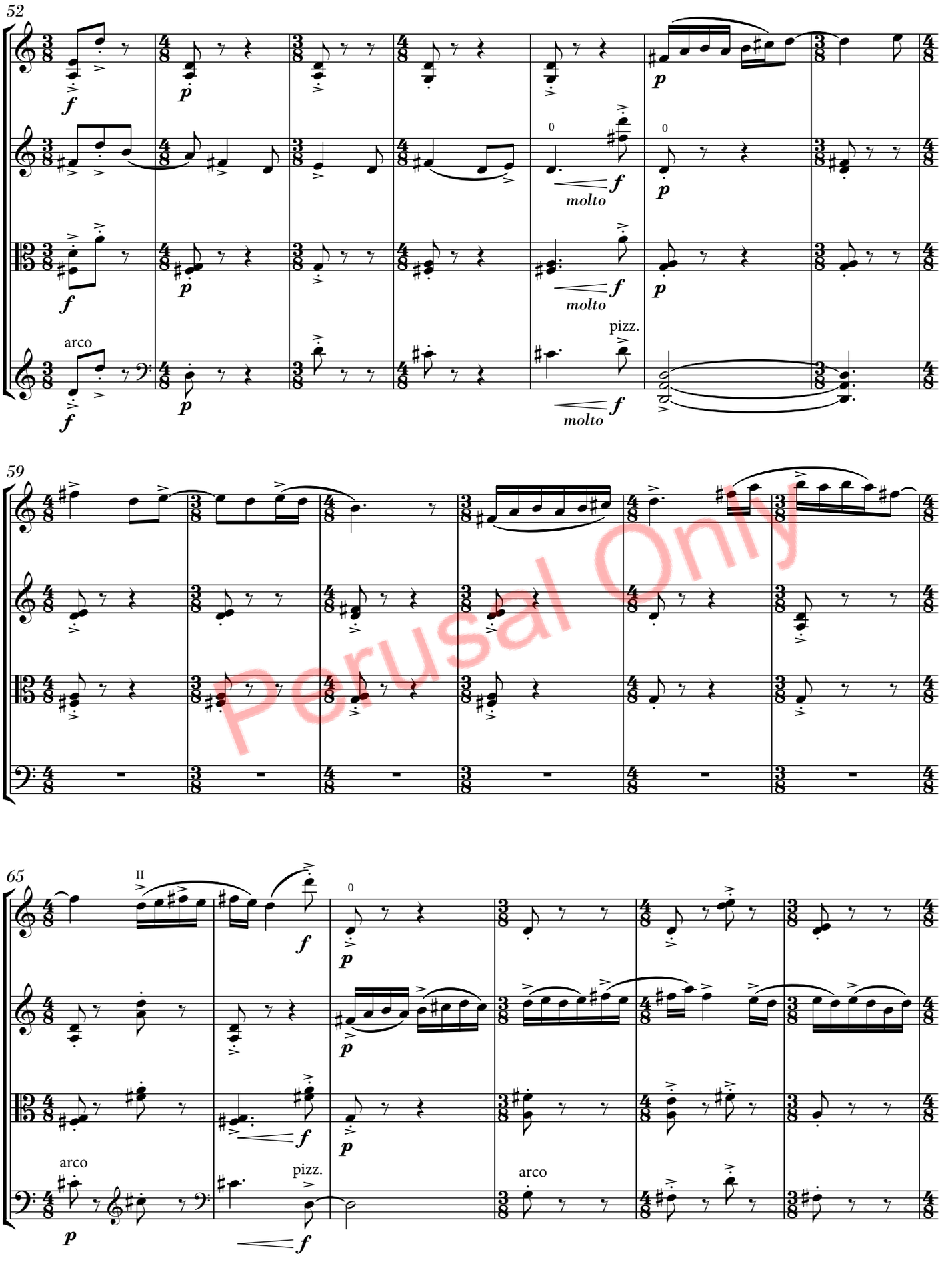

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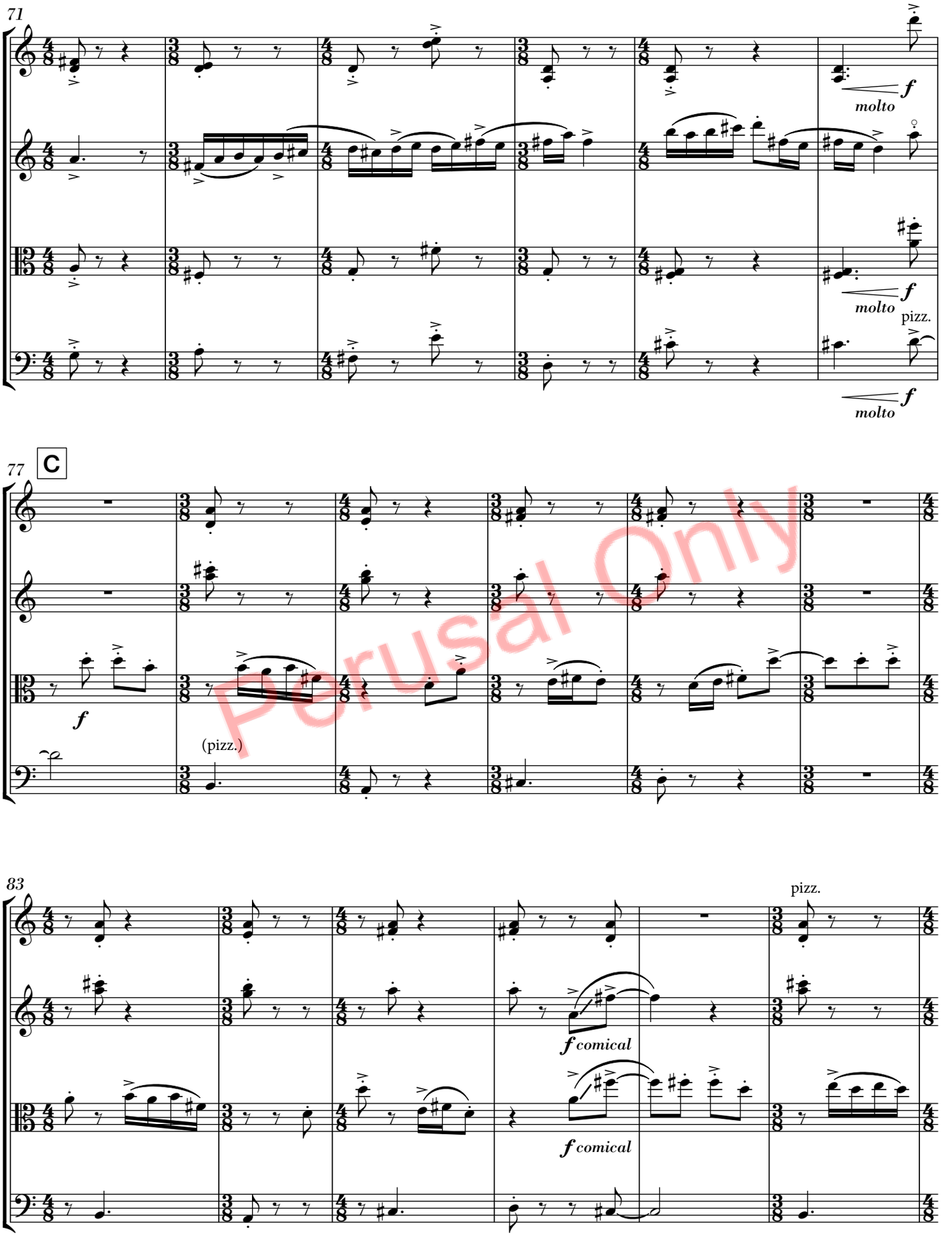

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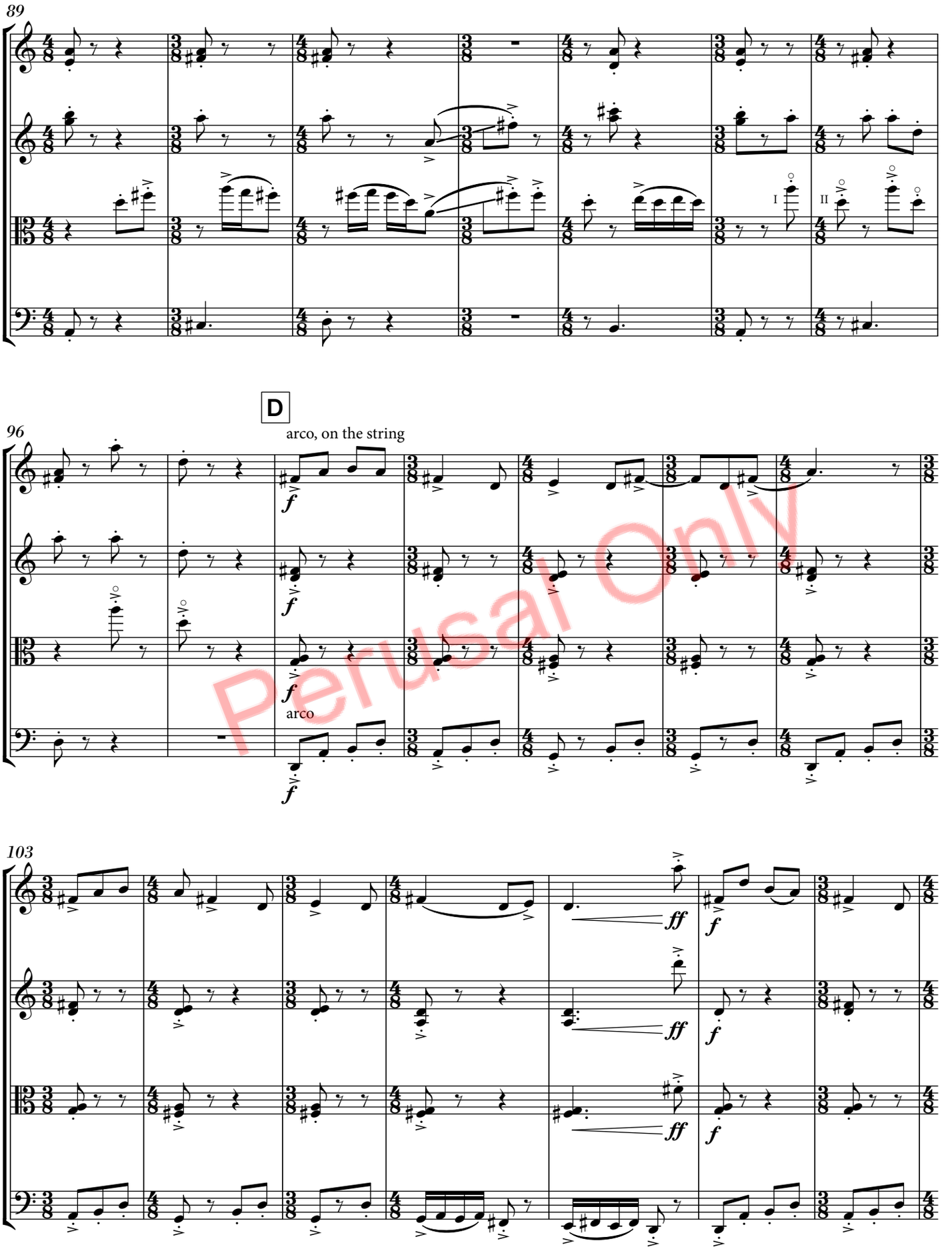

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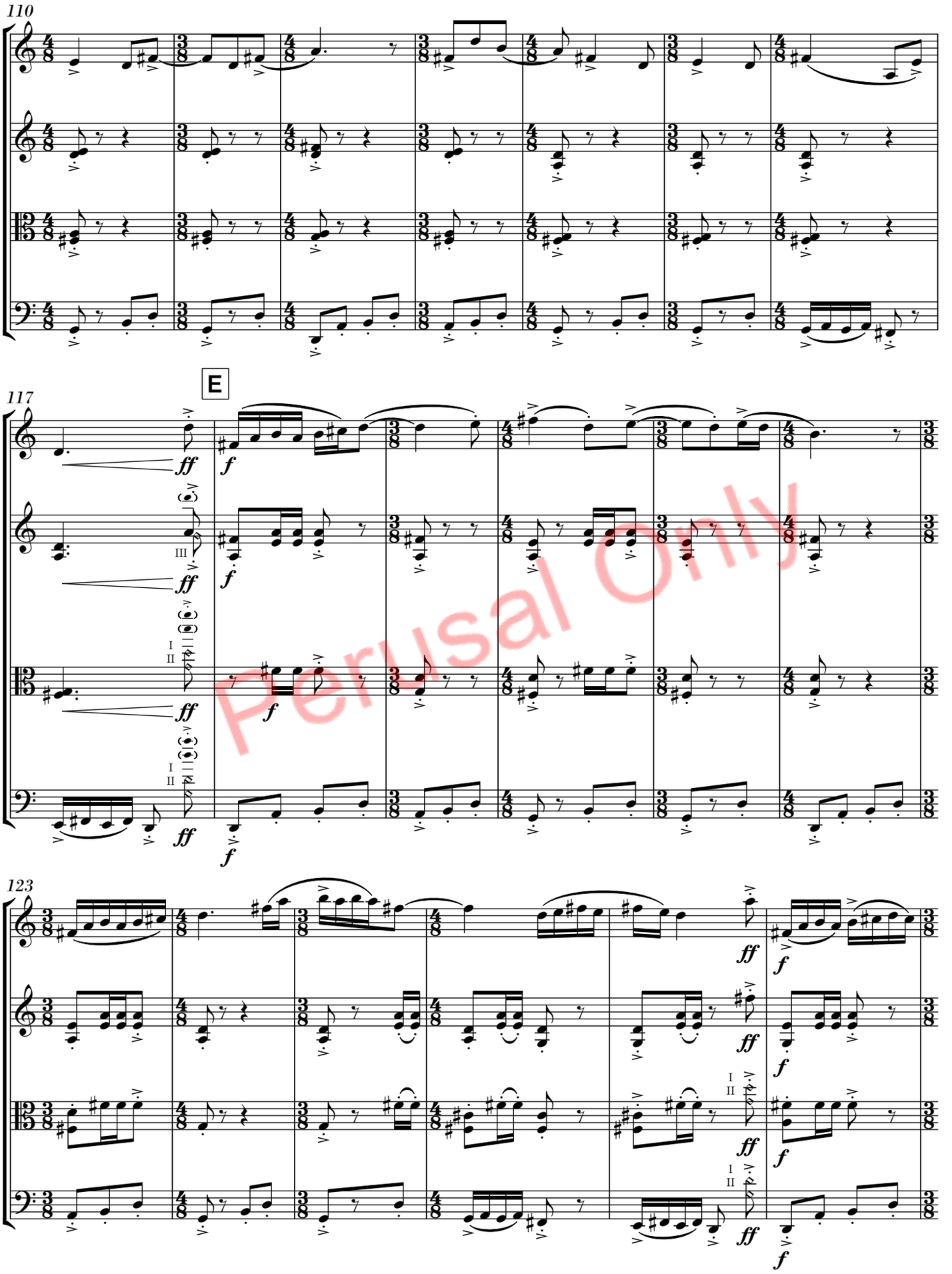
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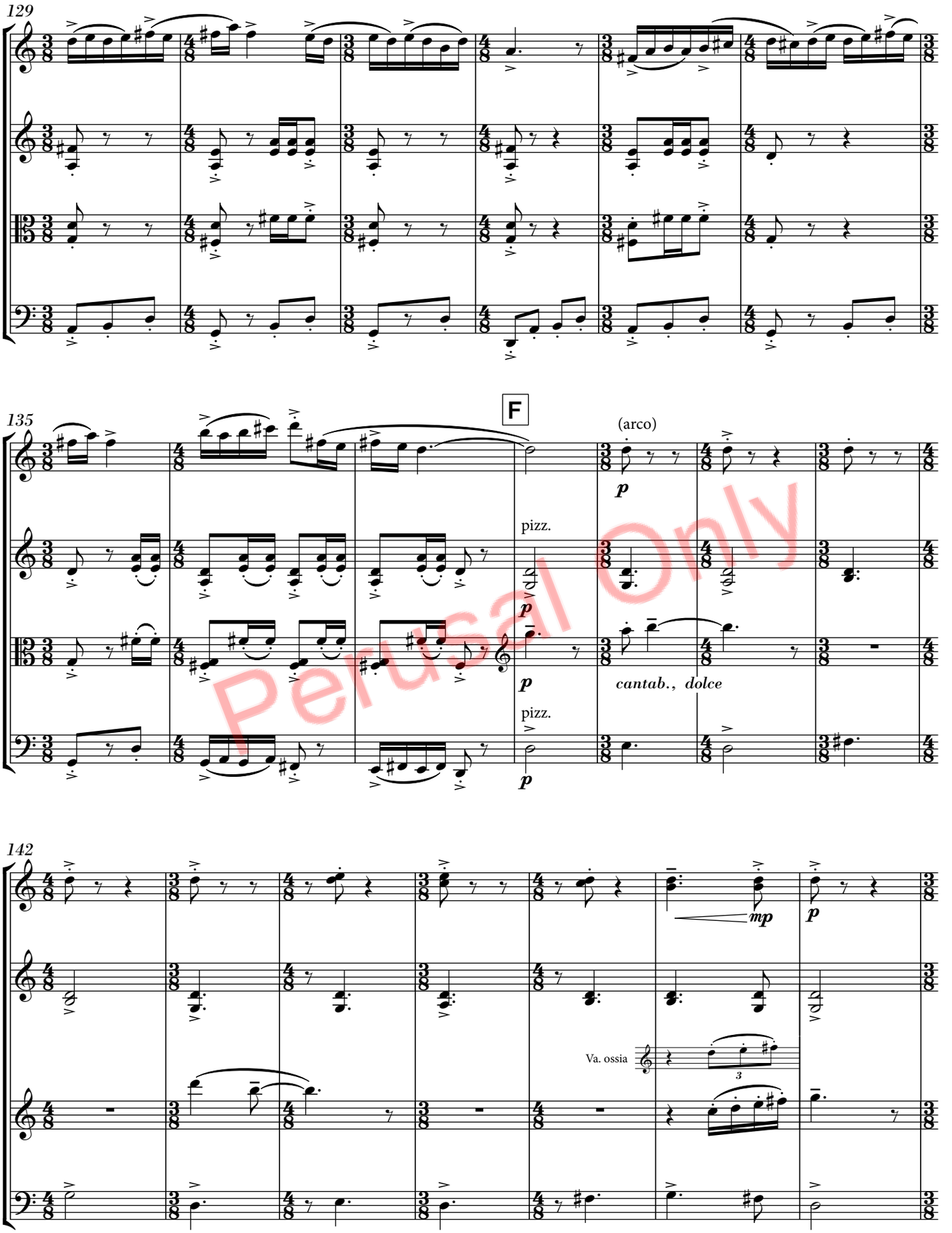

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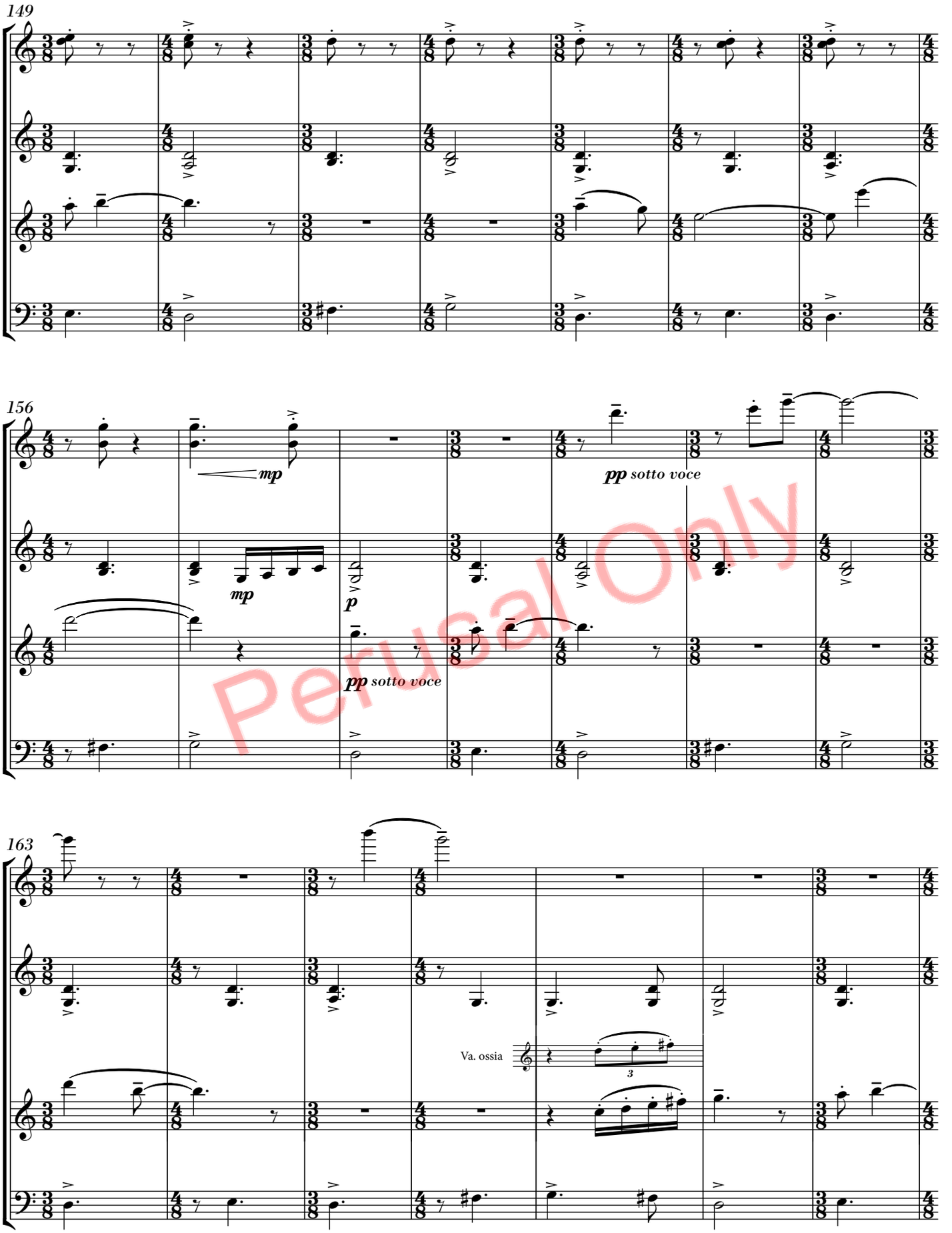

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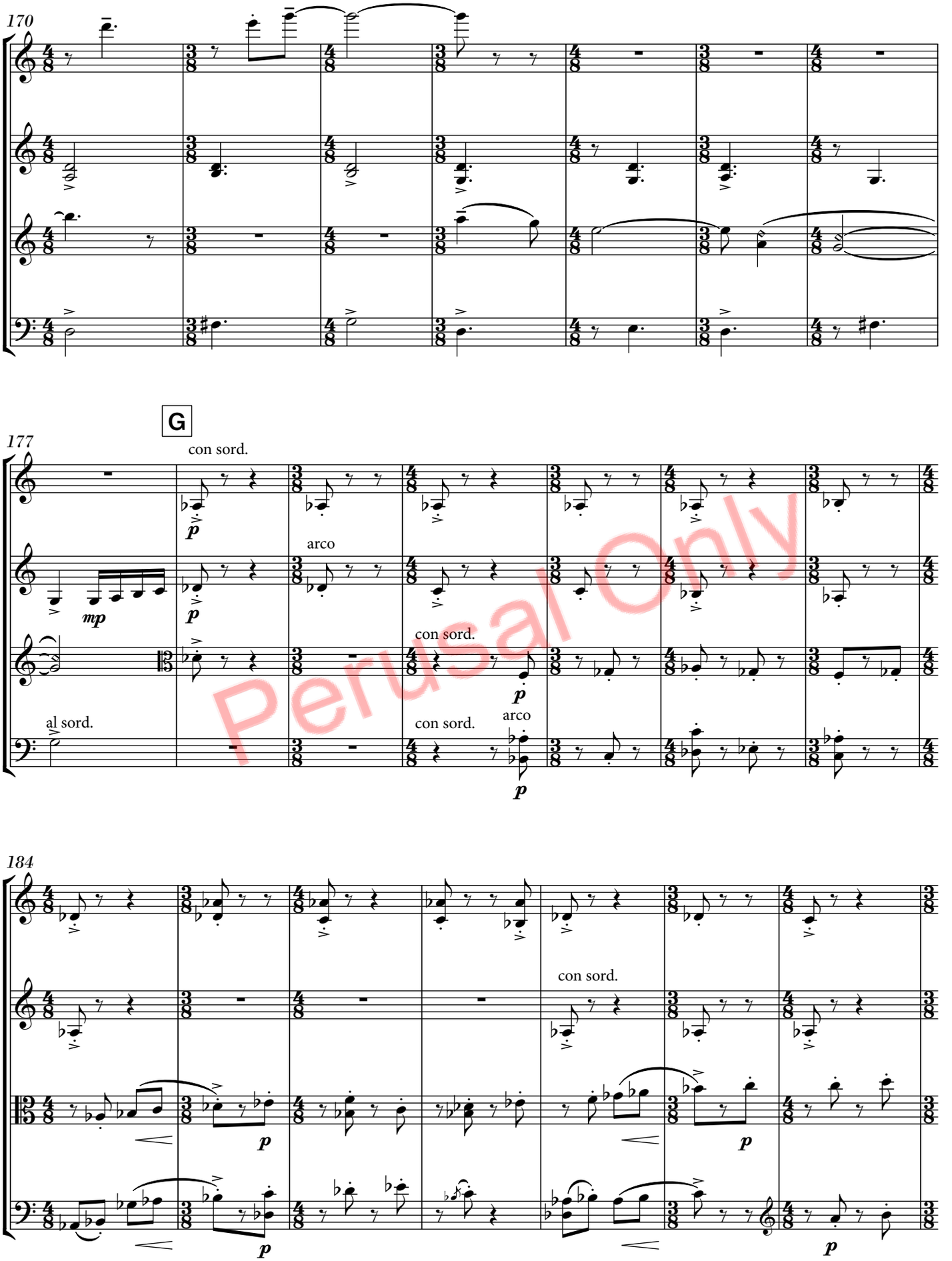

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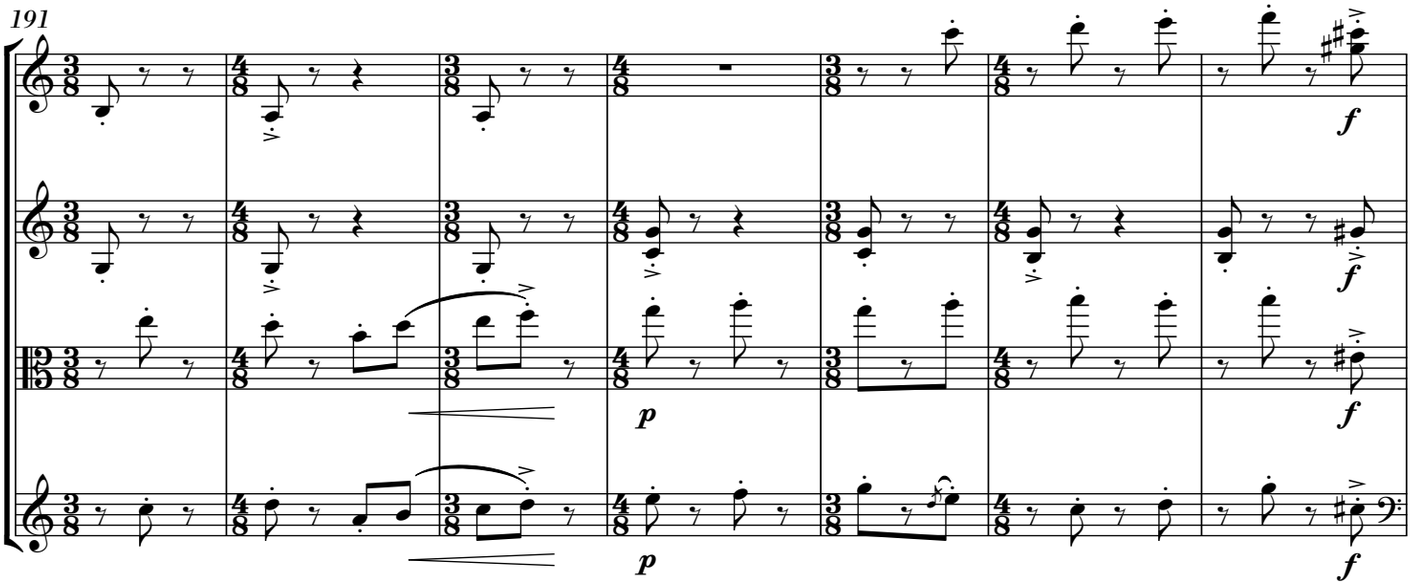

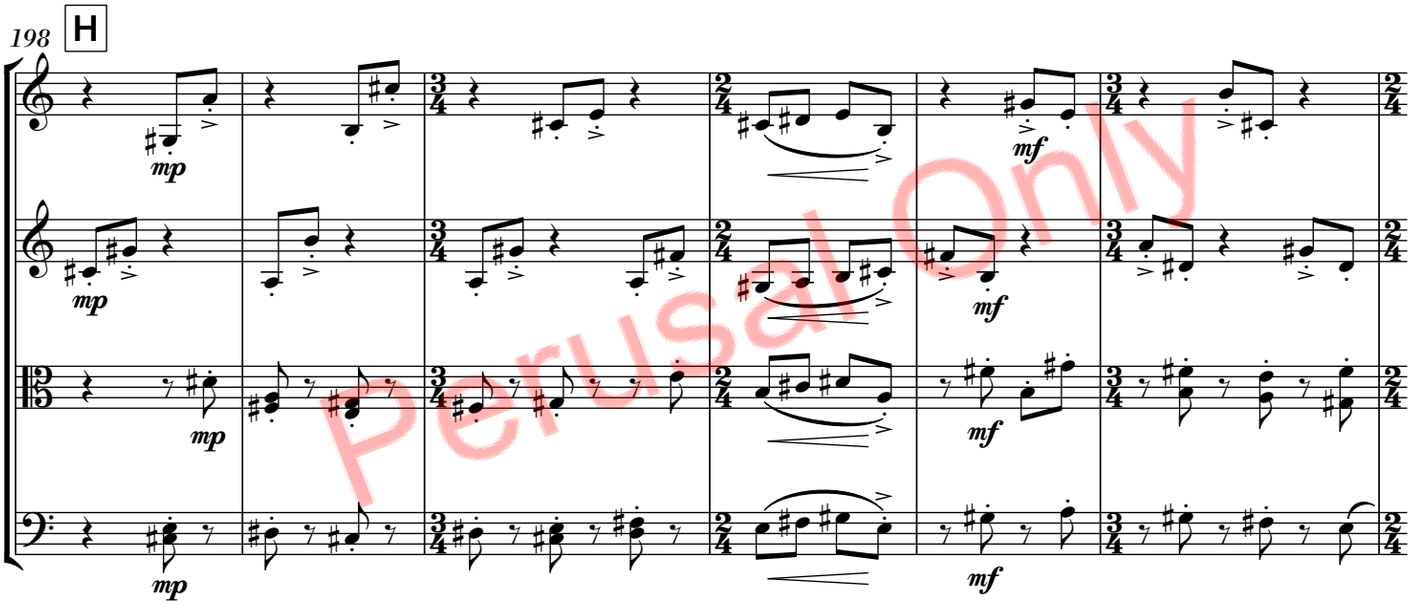

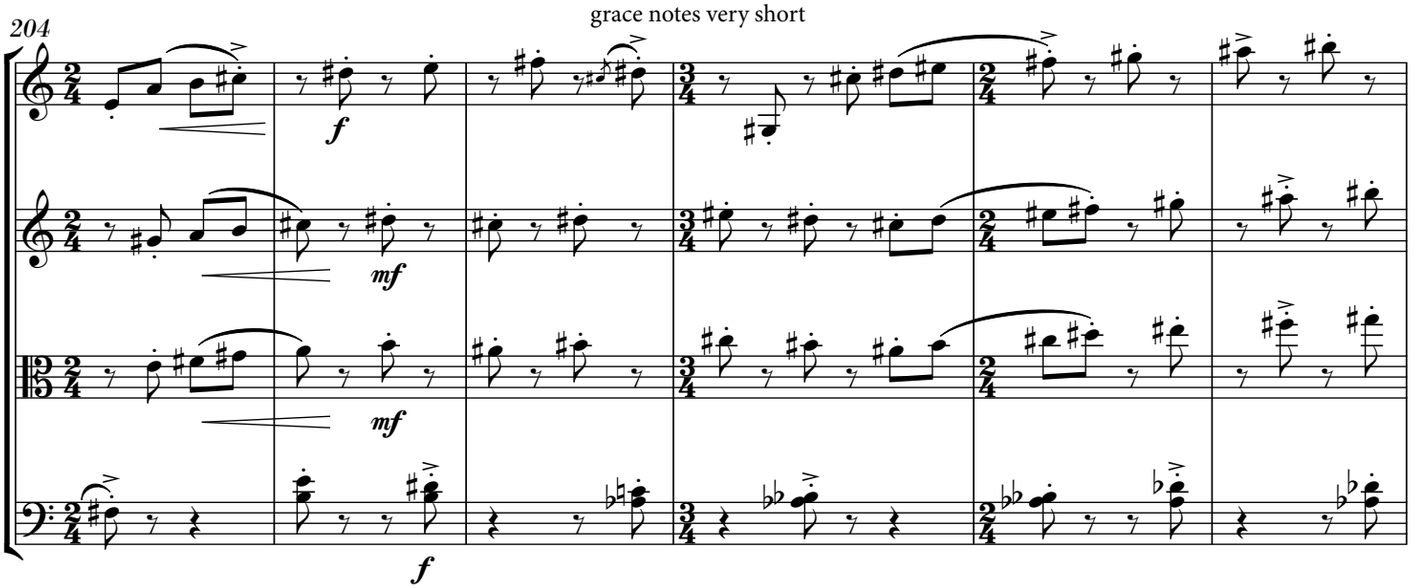

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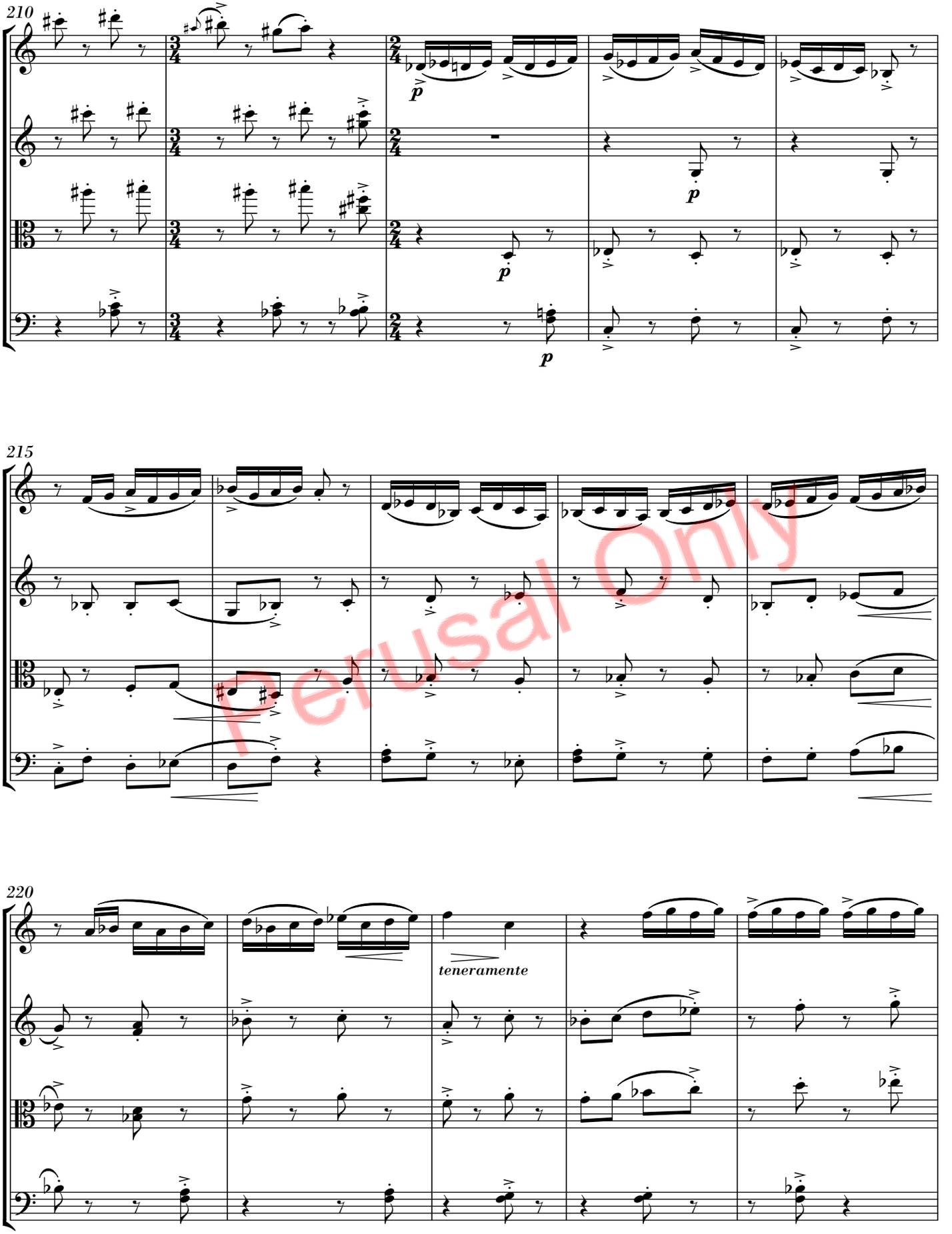

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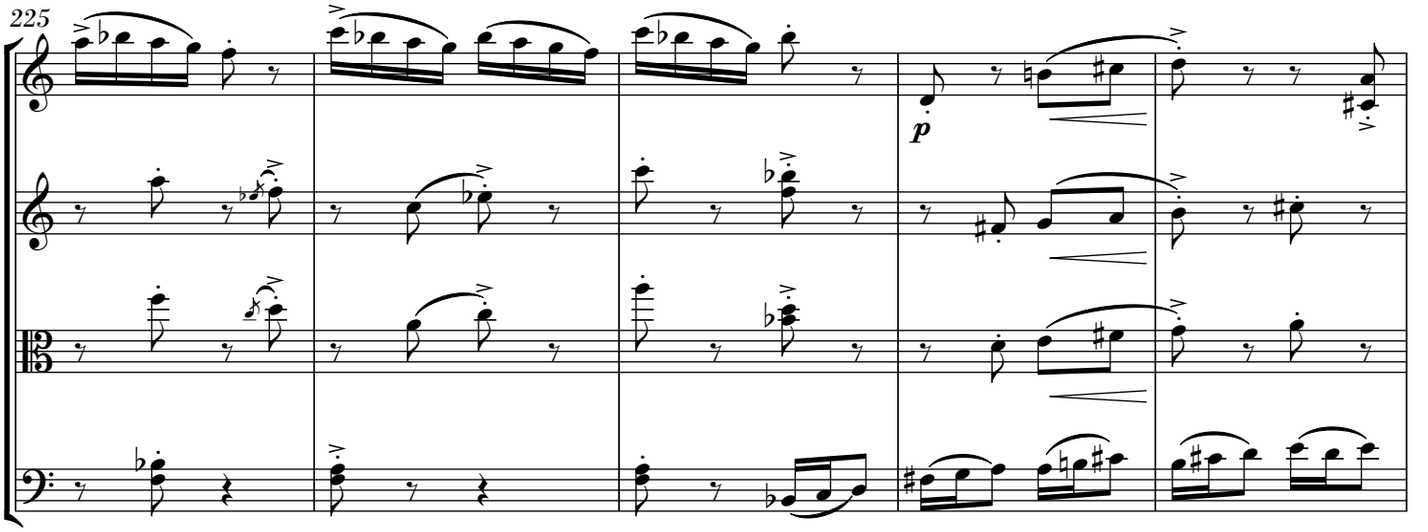

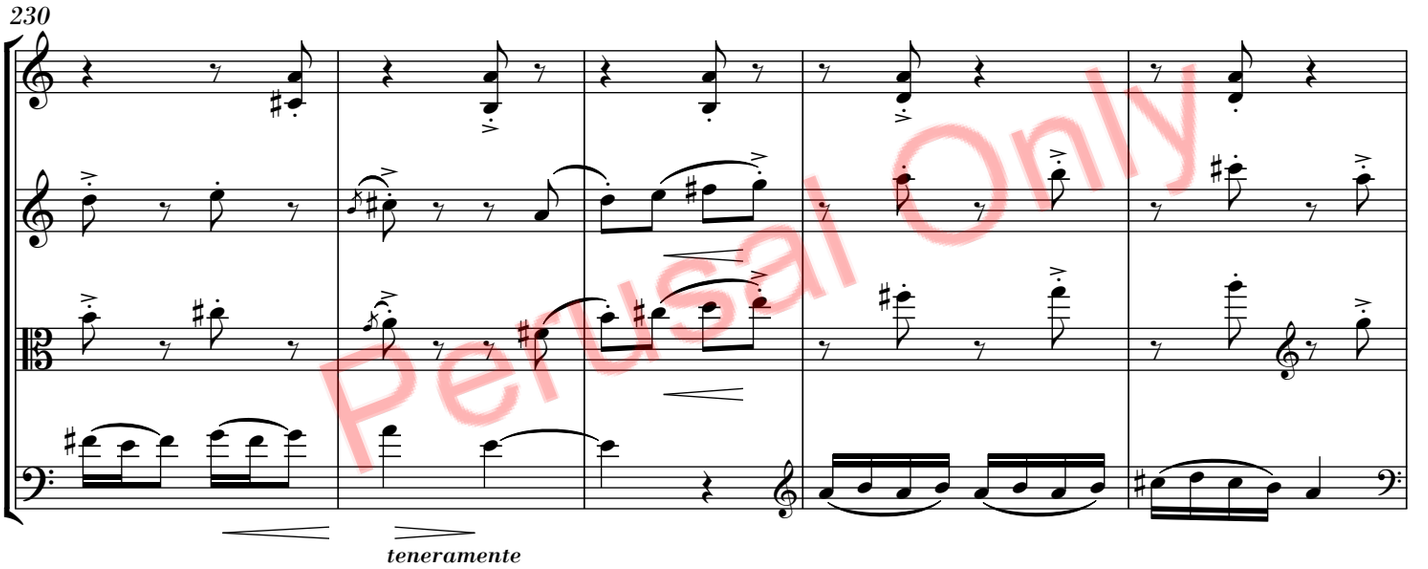

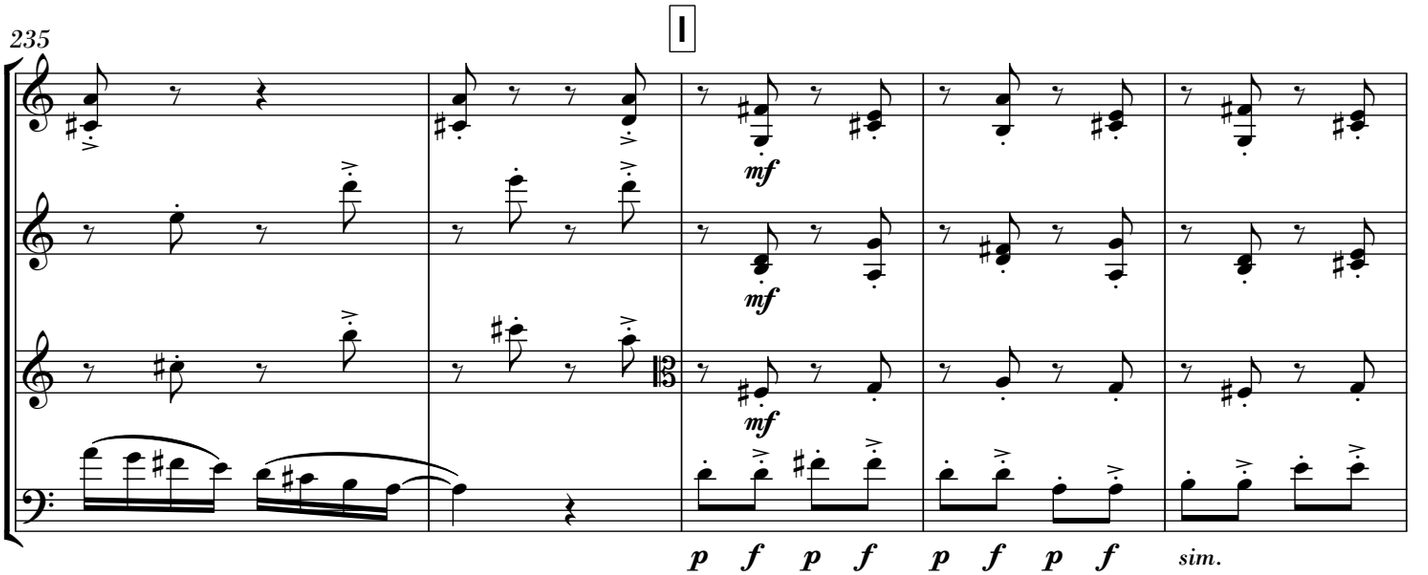

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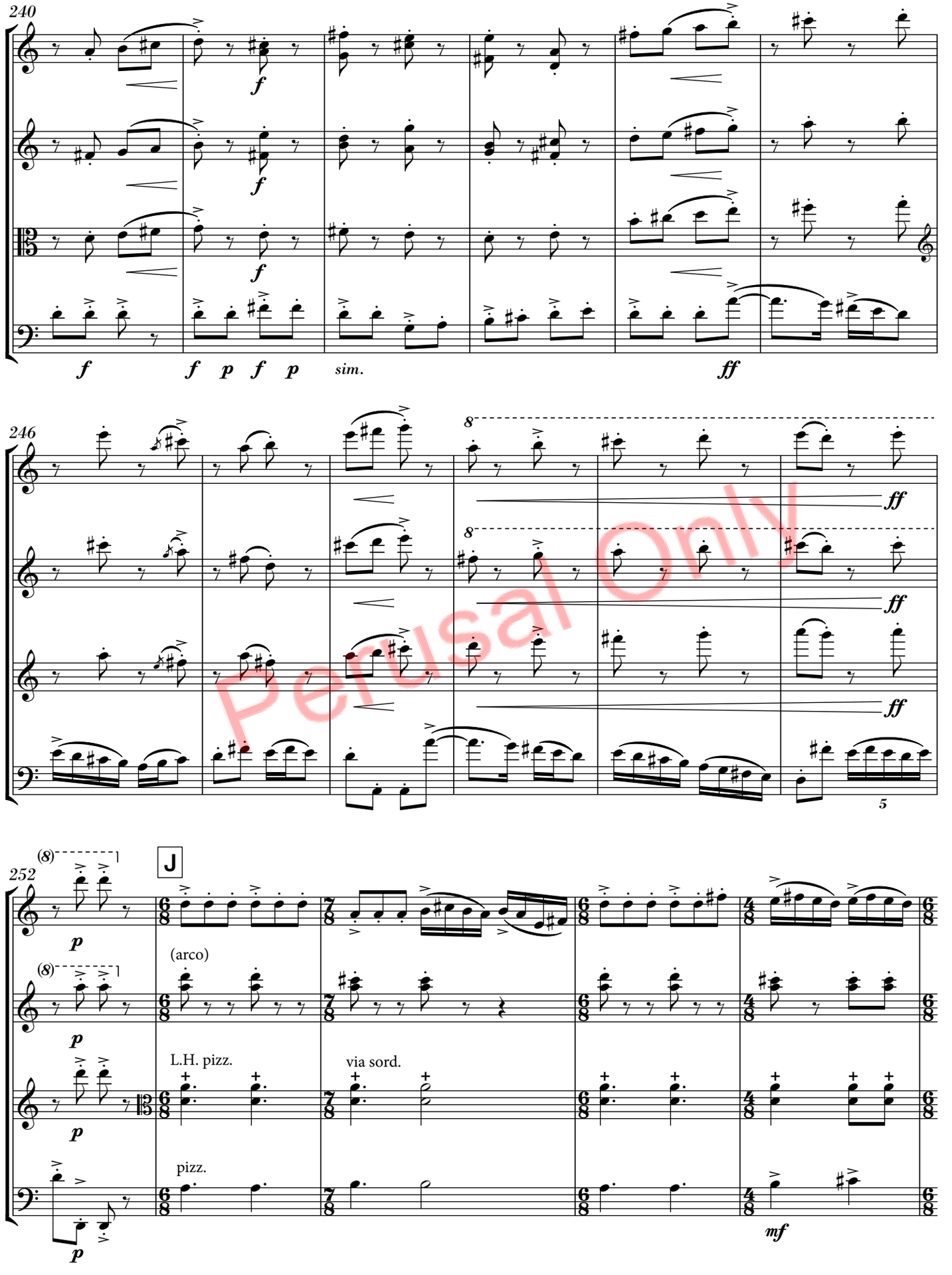

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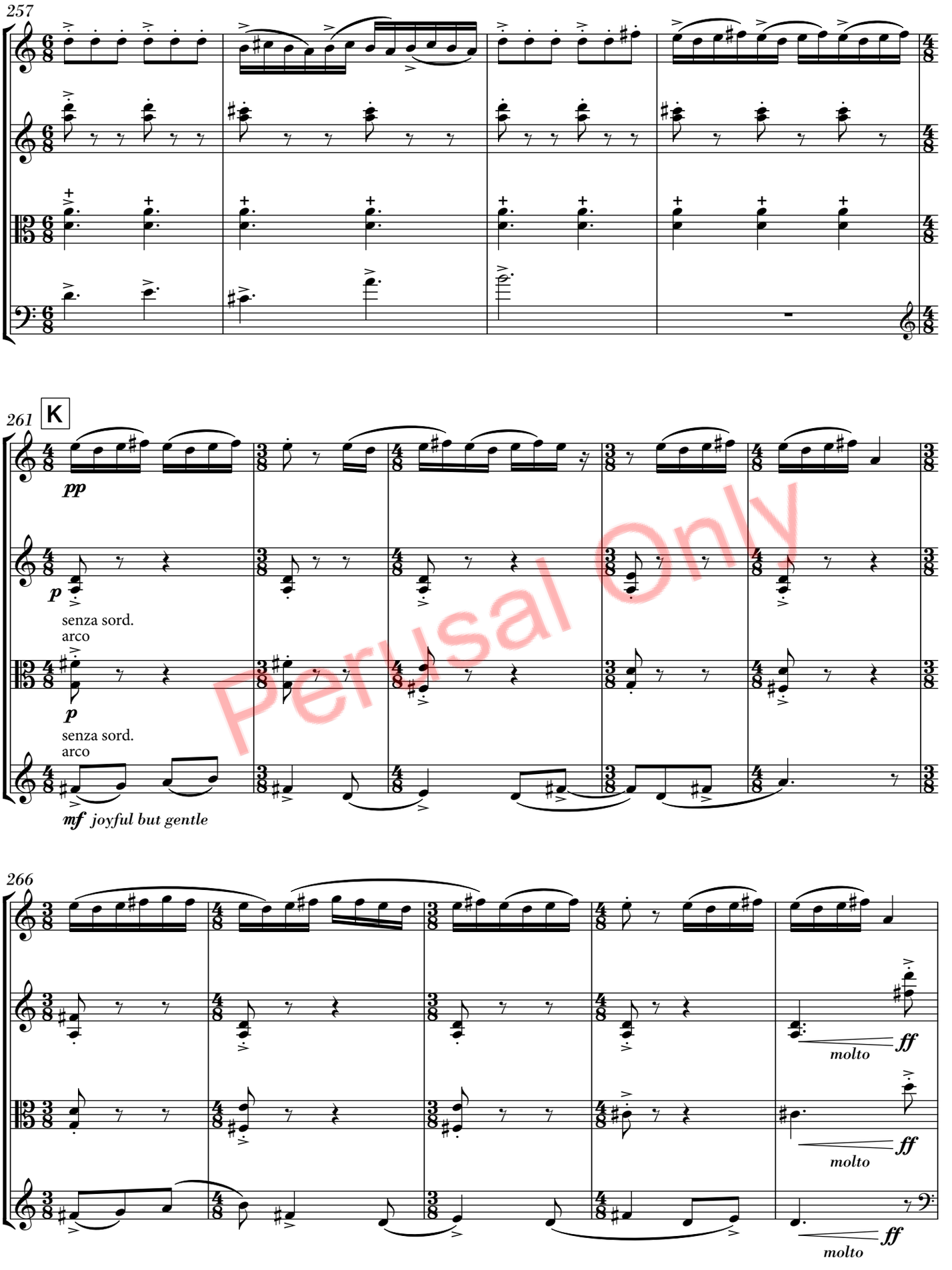

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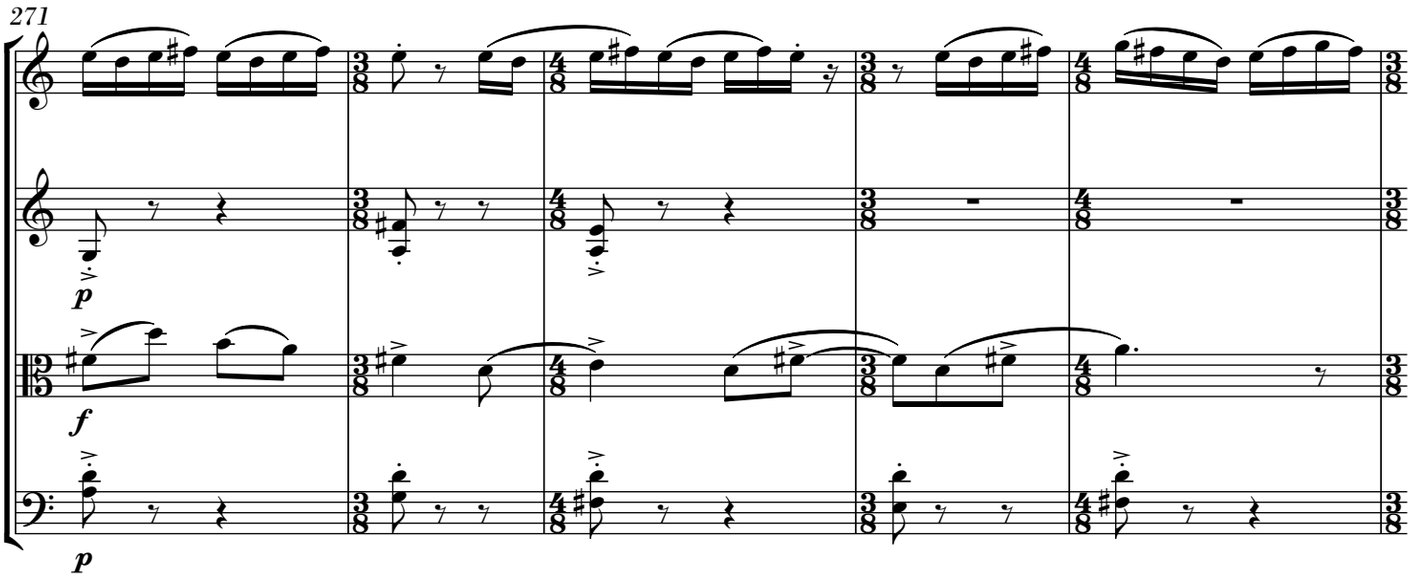

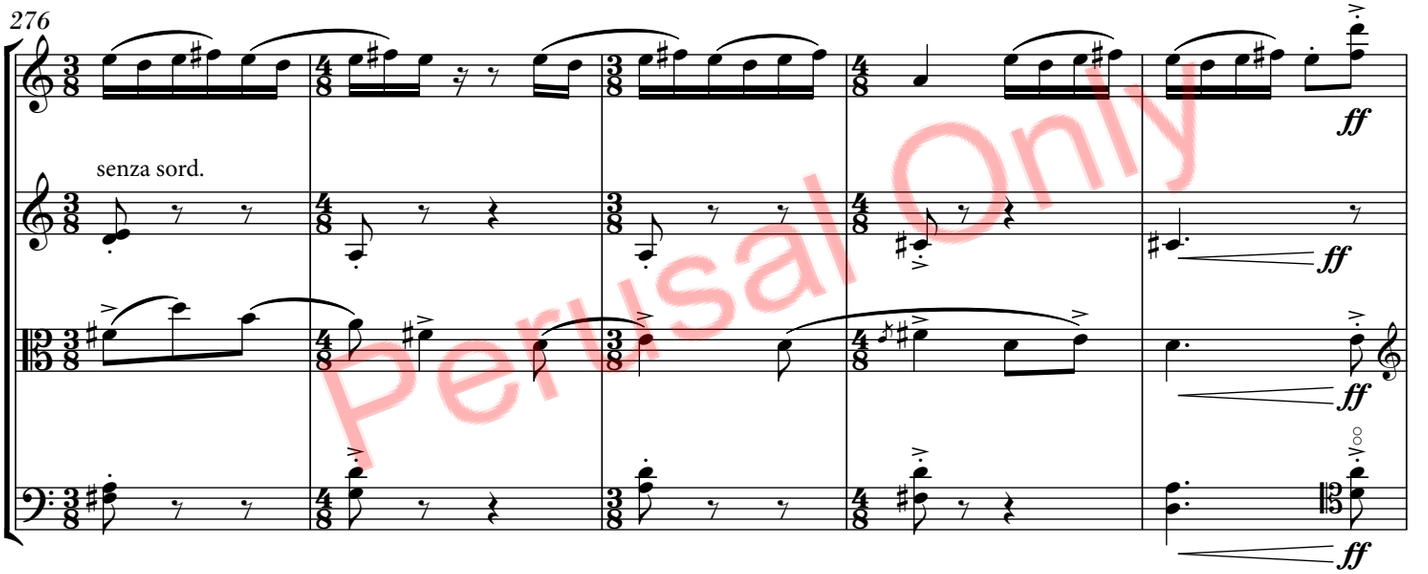

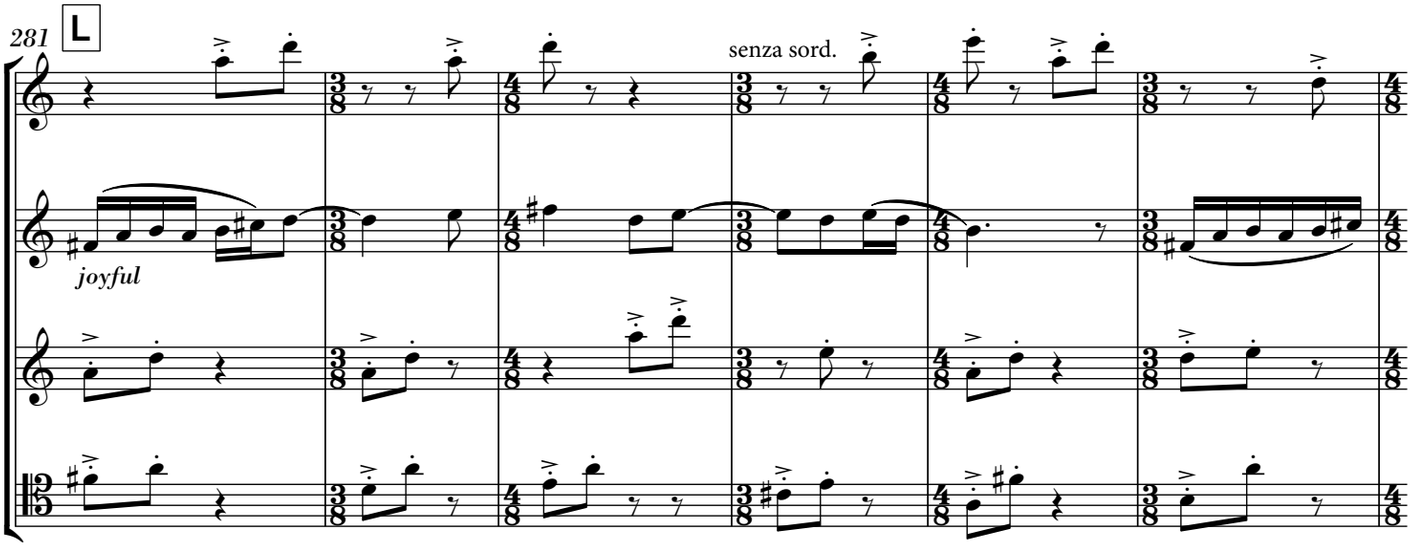

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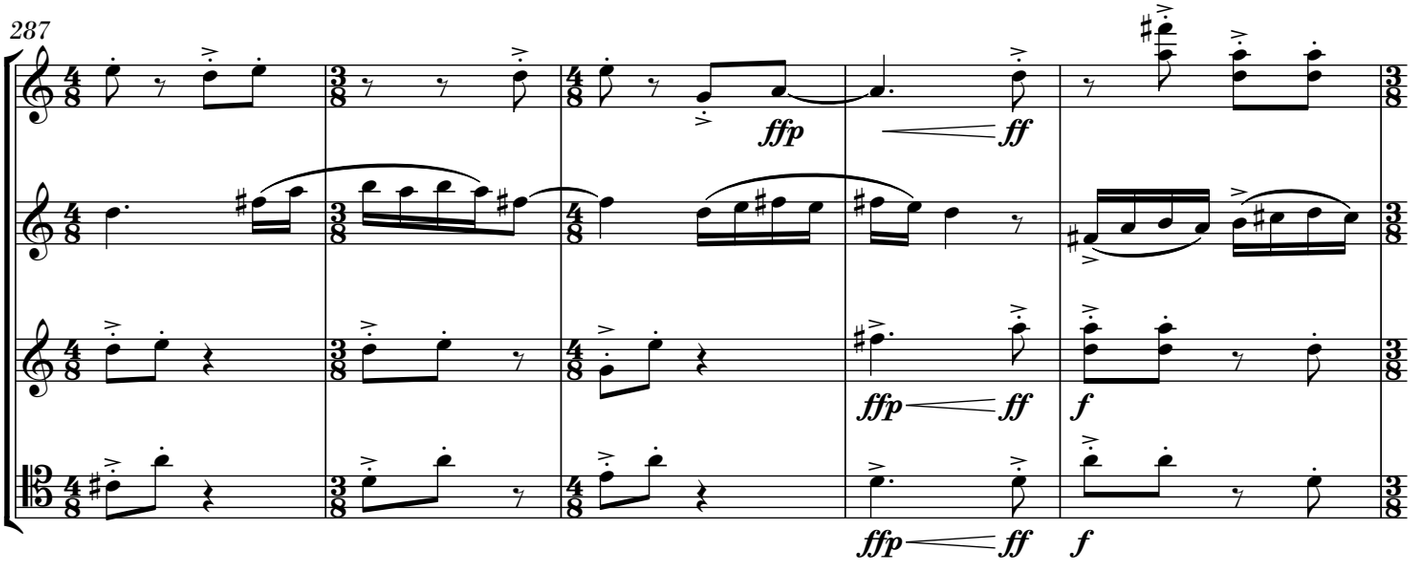

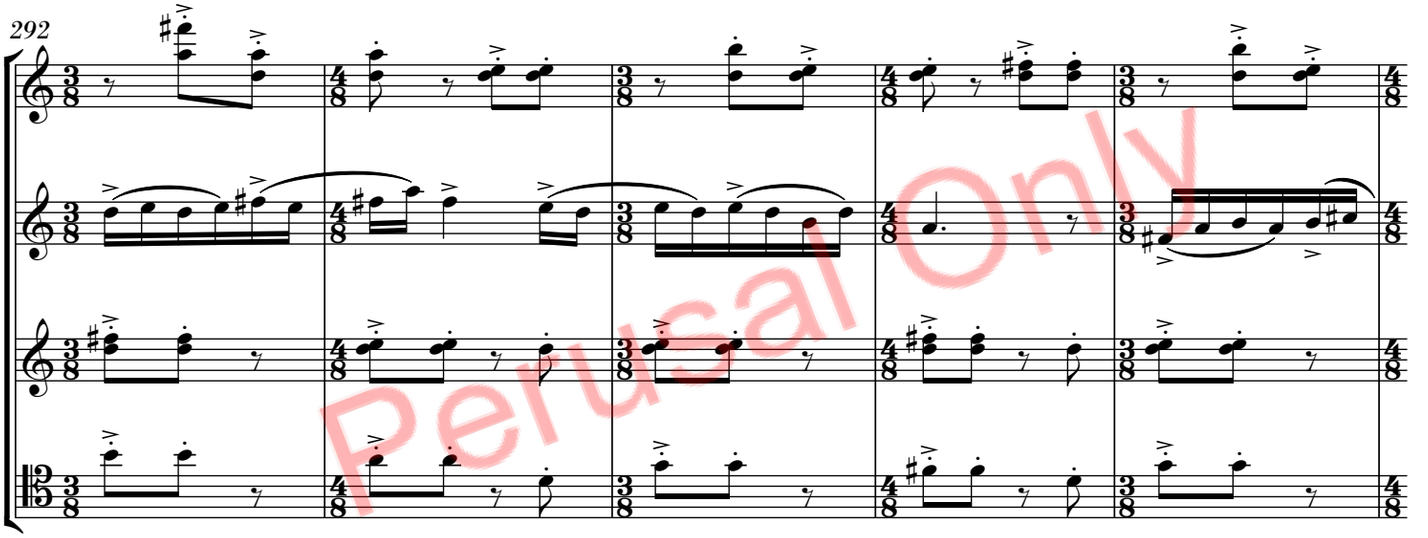

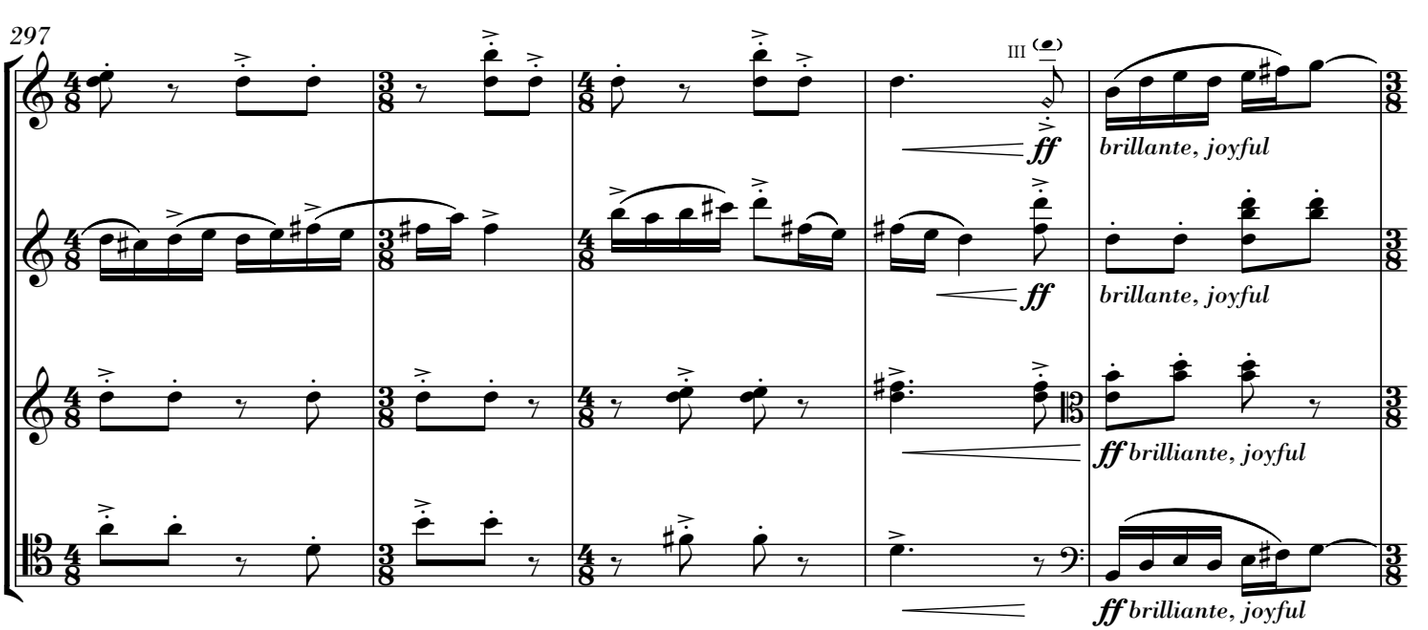

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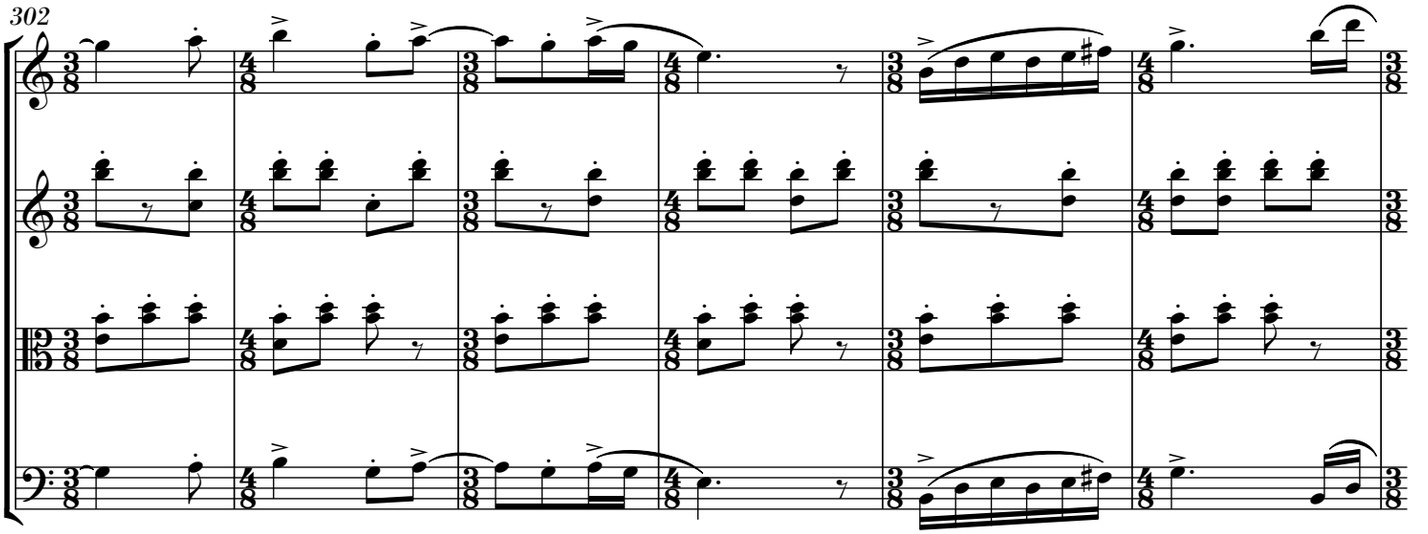

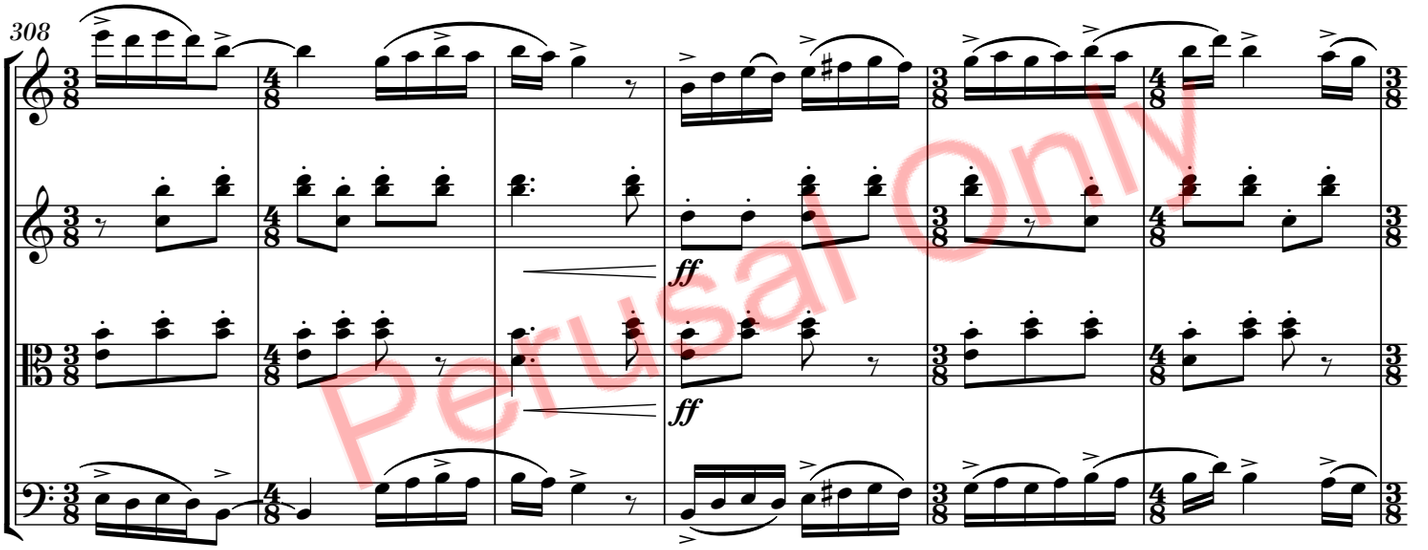

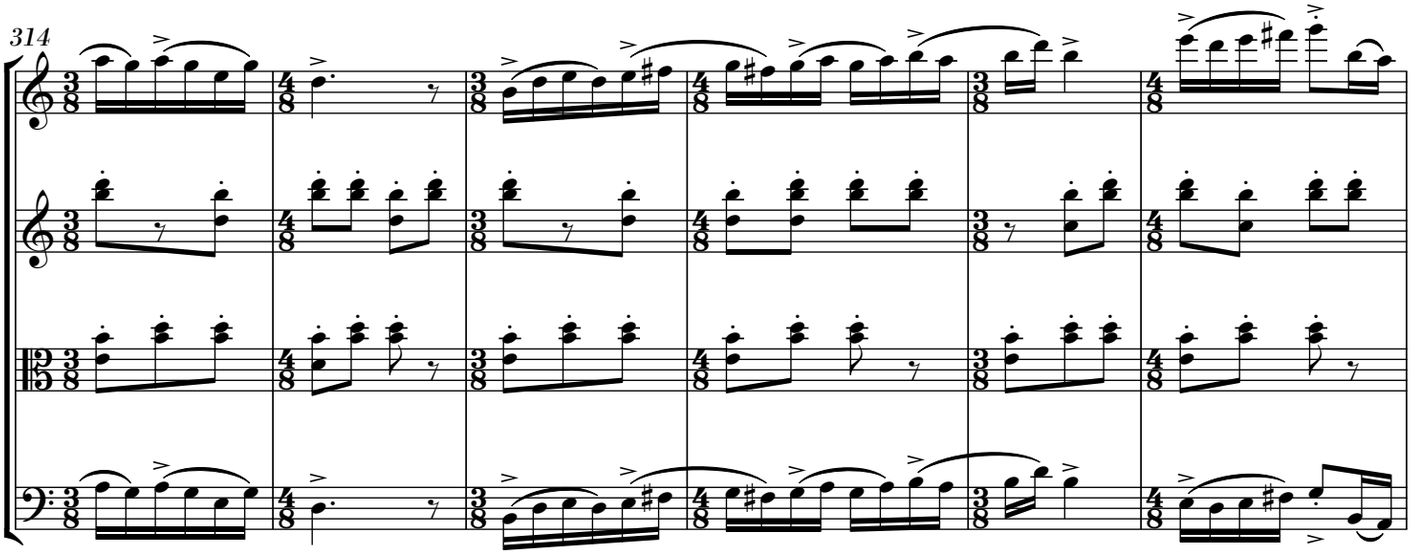

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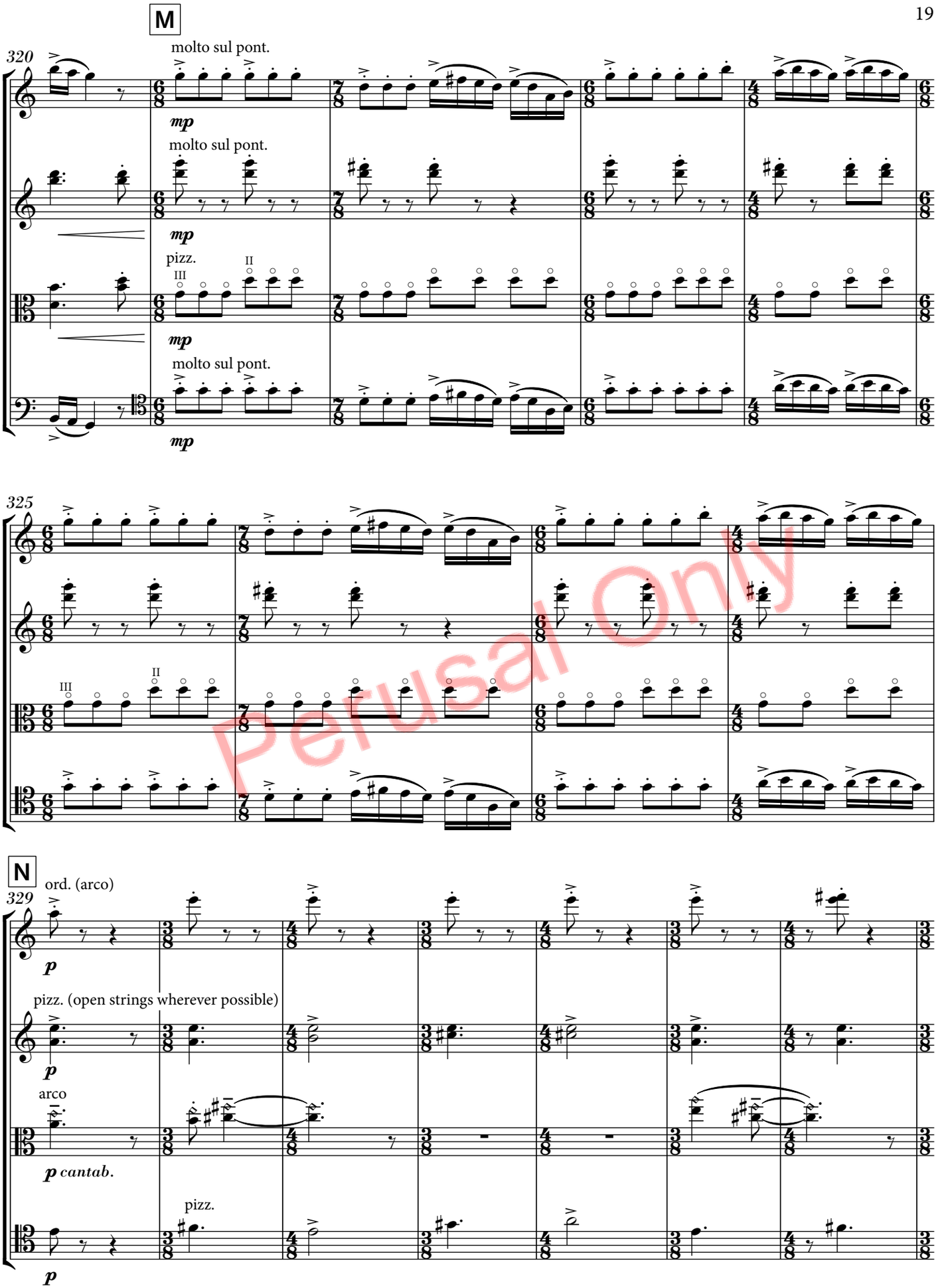

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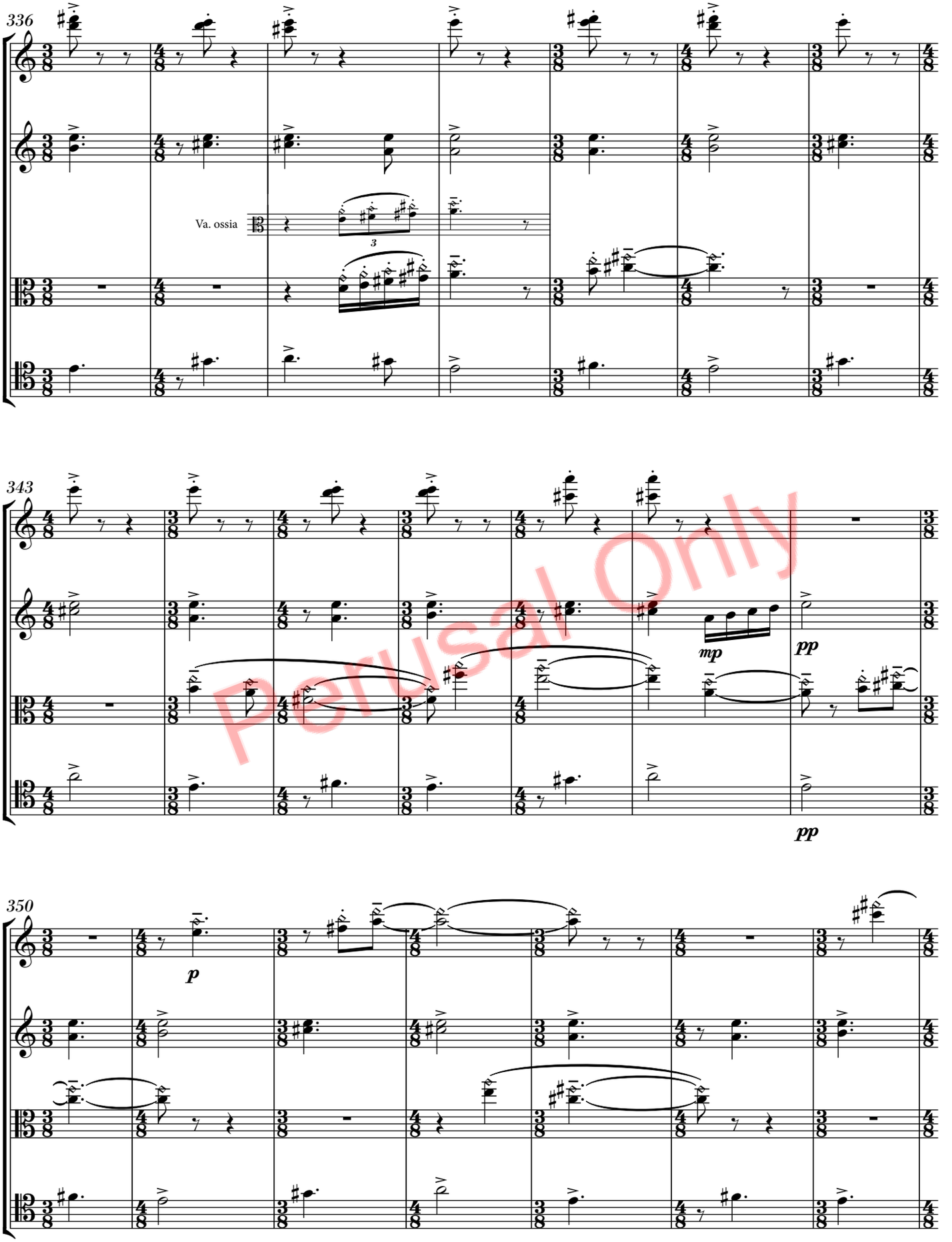

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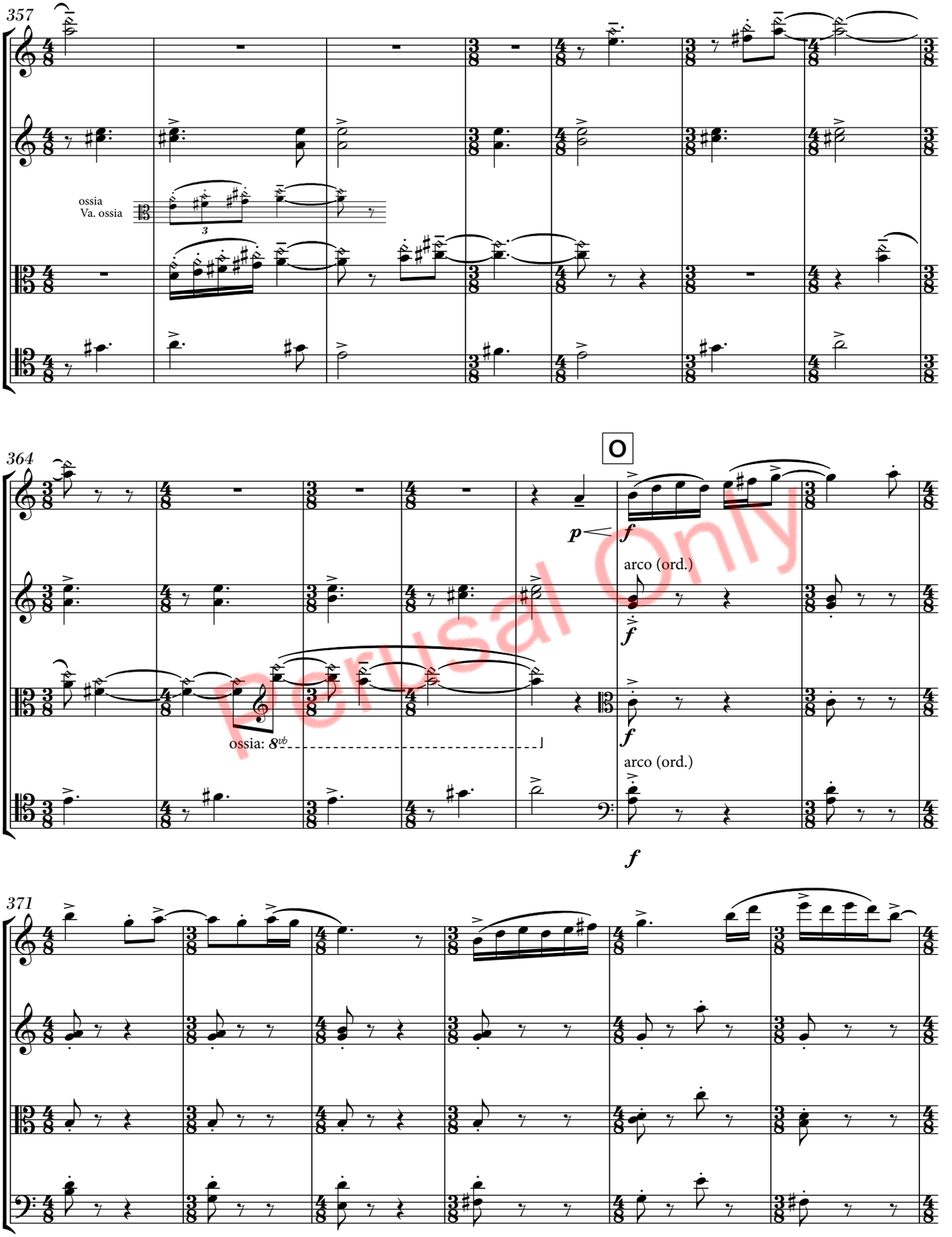

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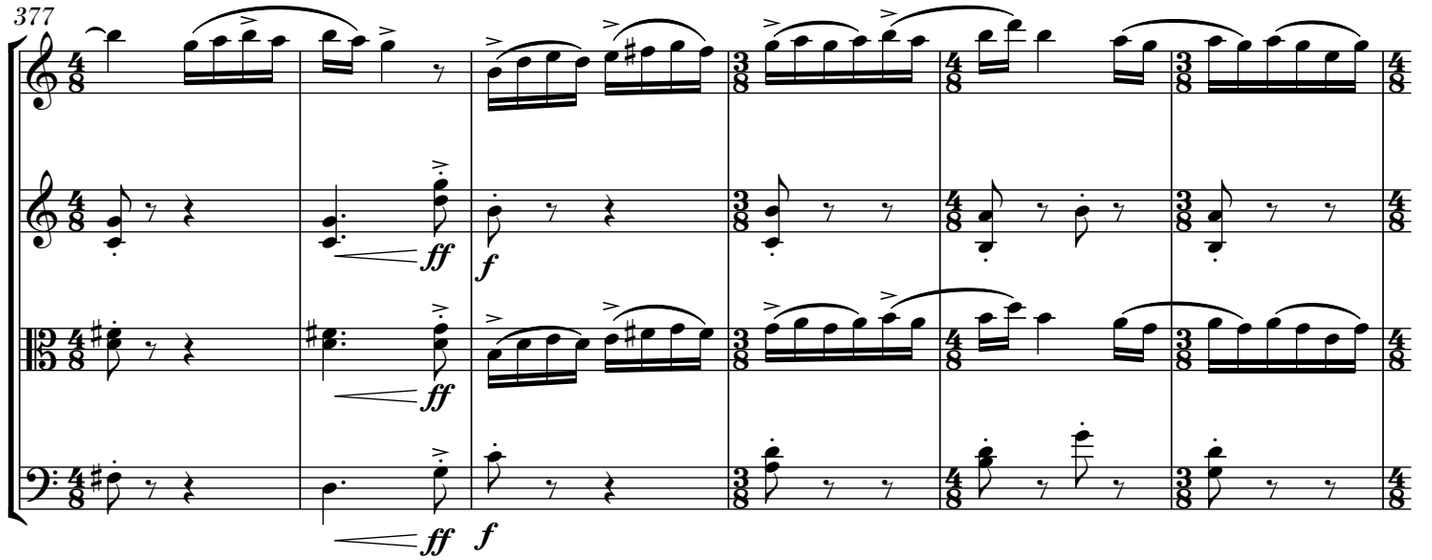

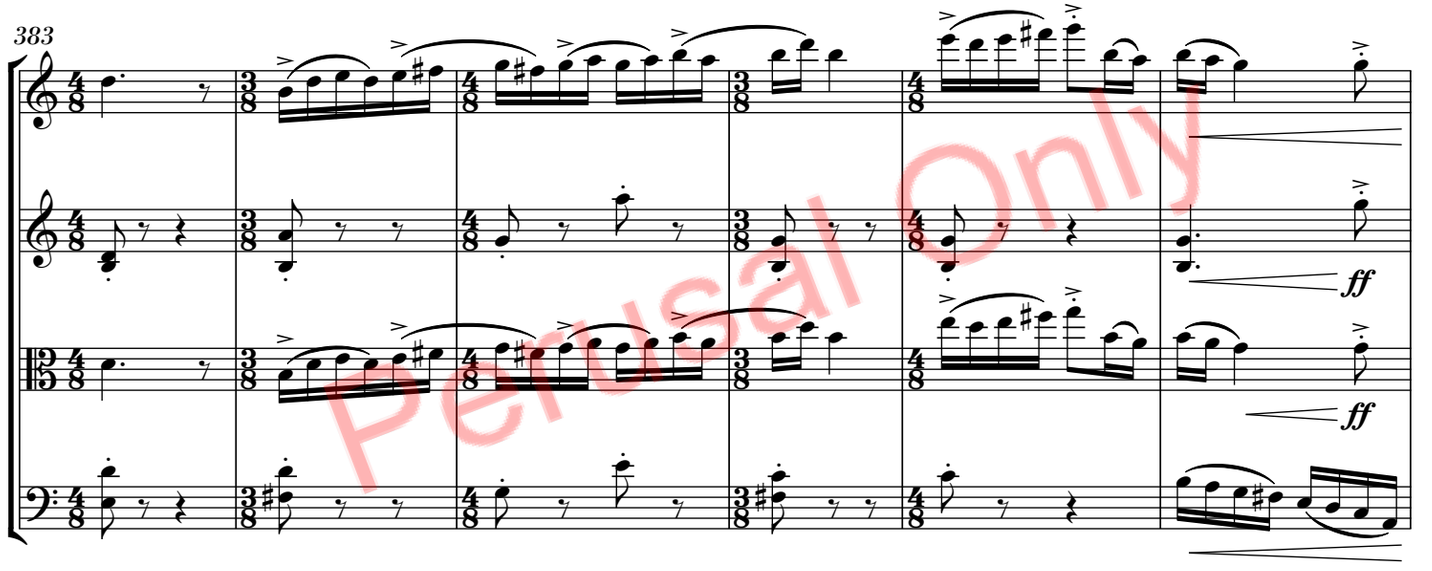

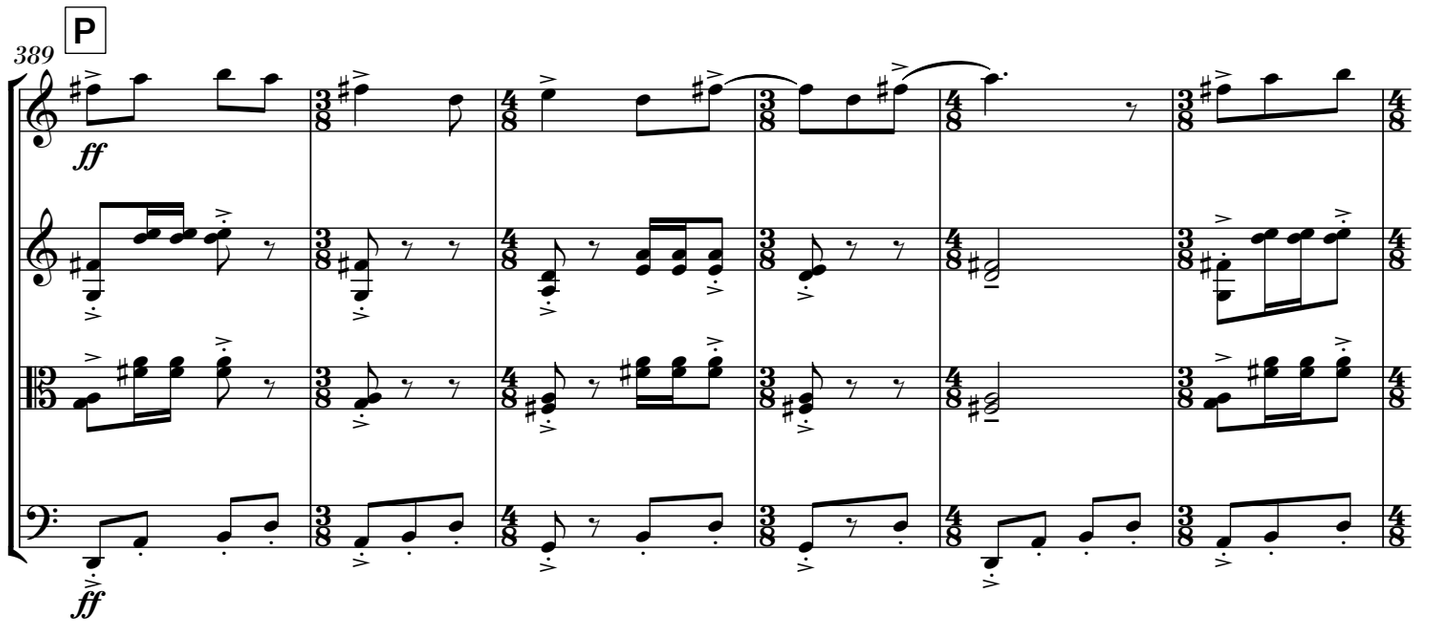

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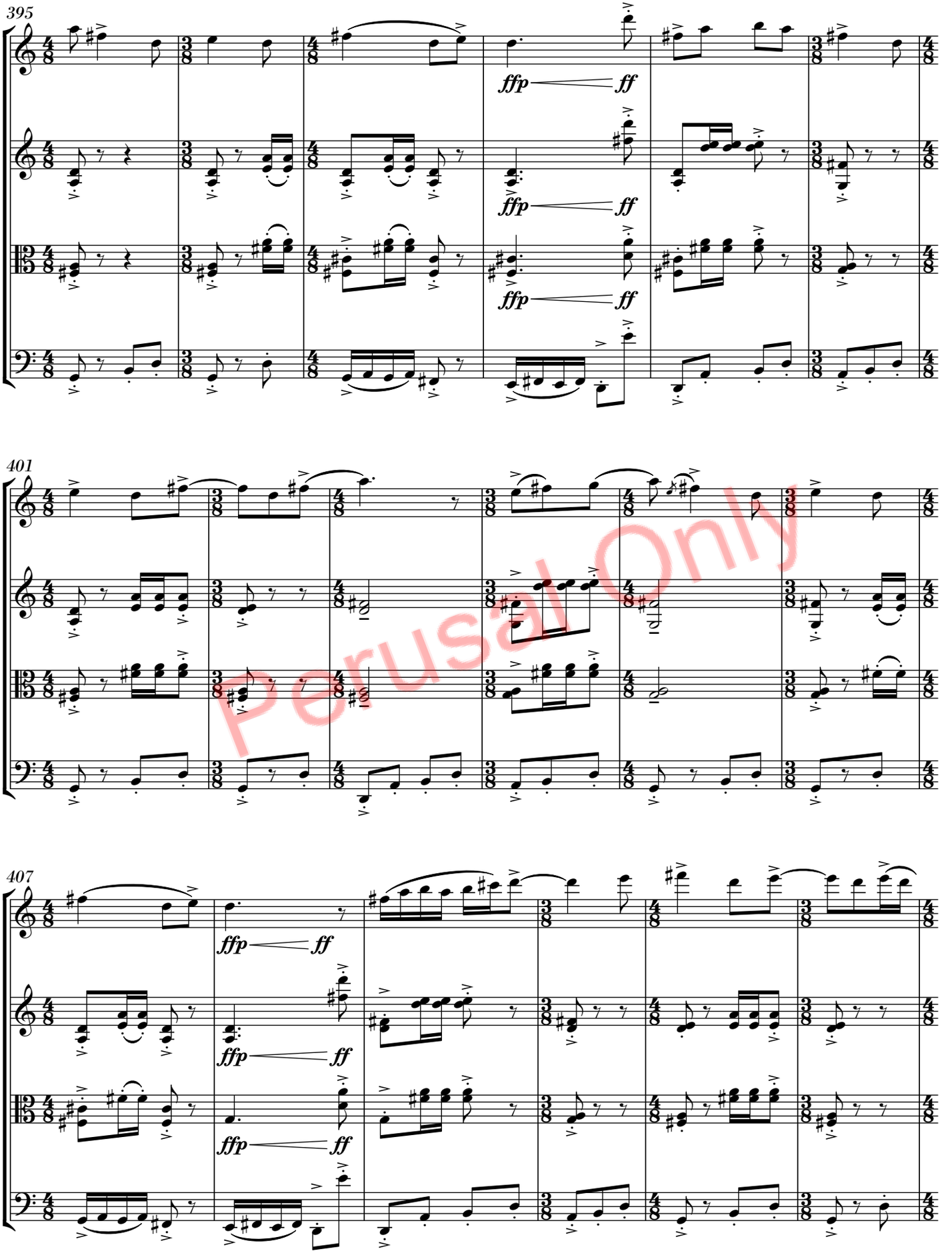

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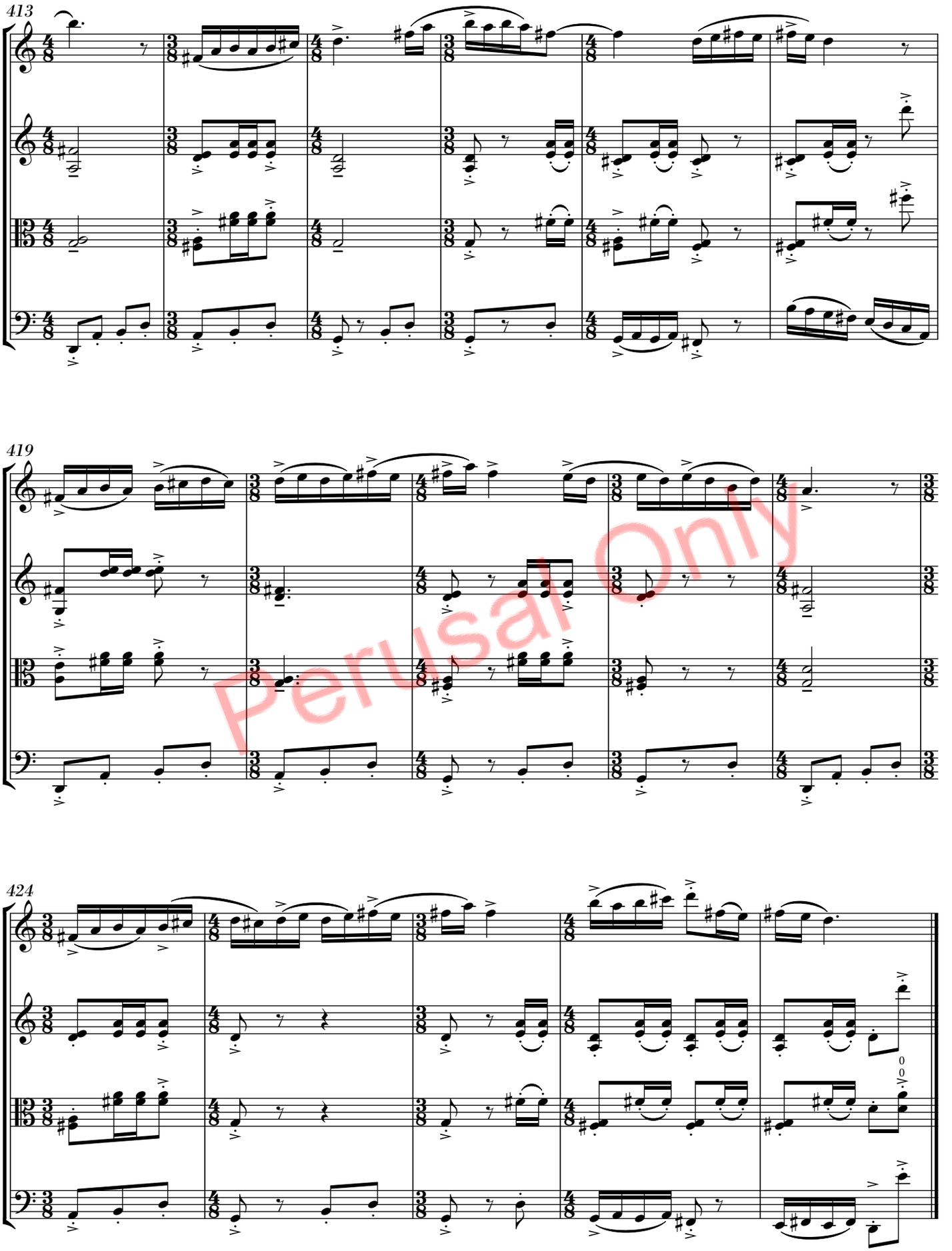

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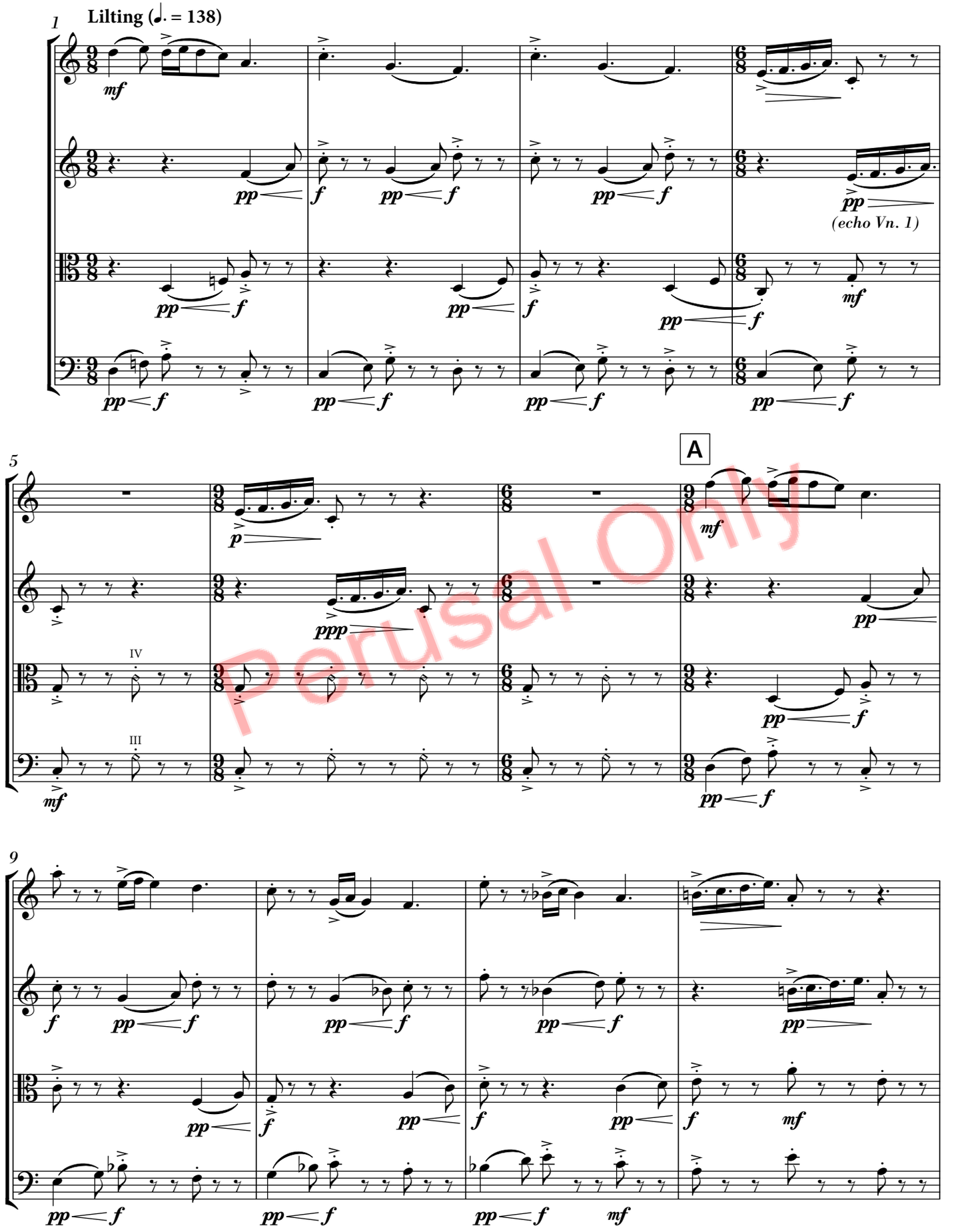
II. Antonin's Lick



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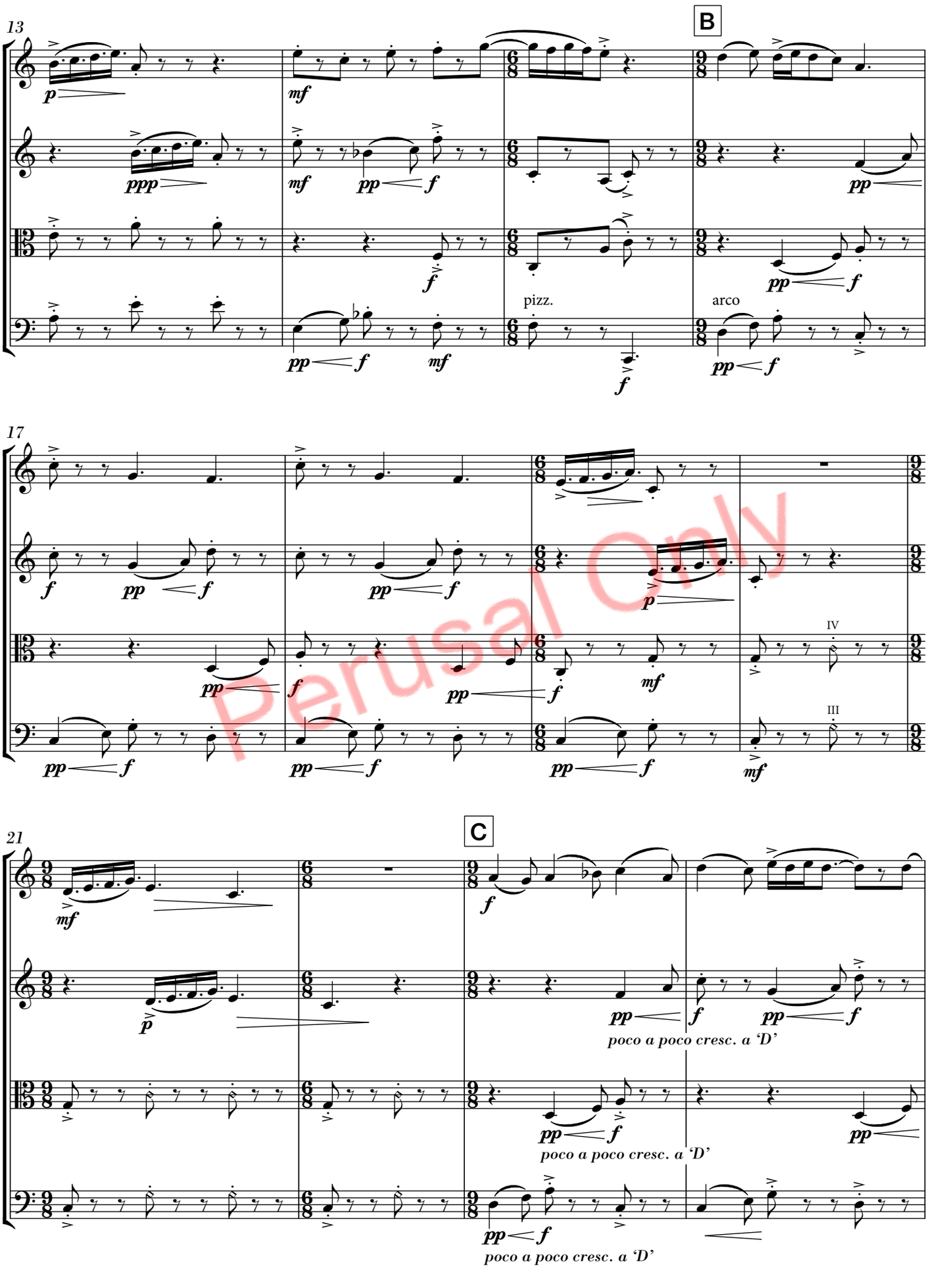

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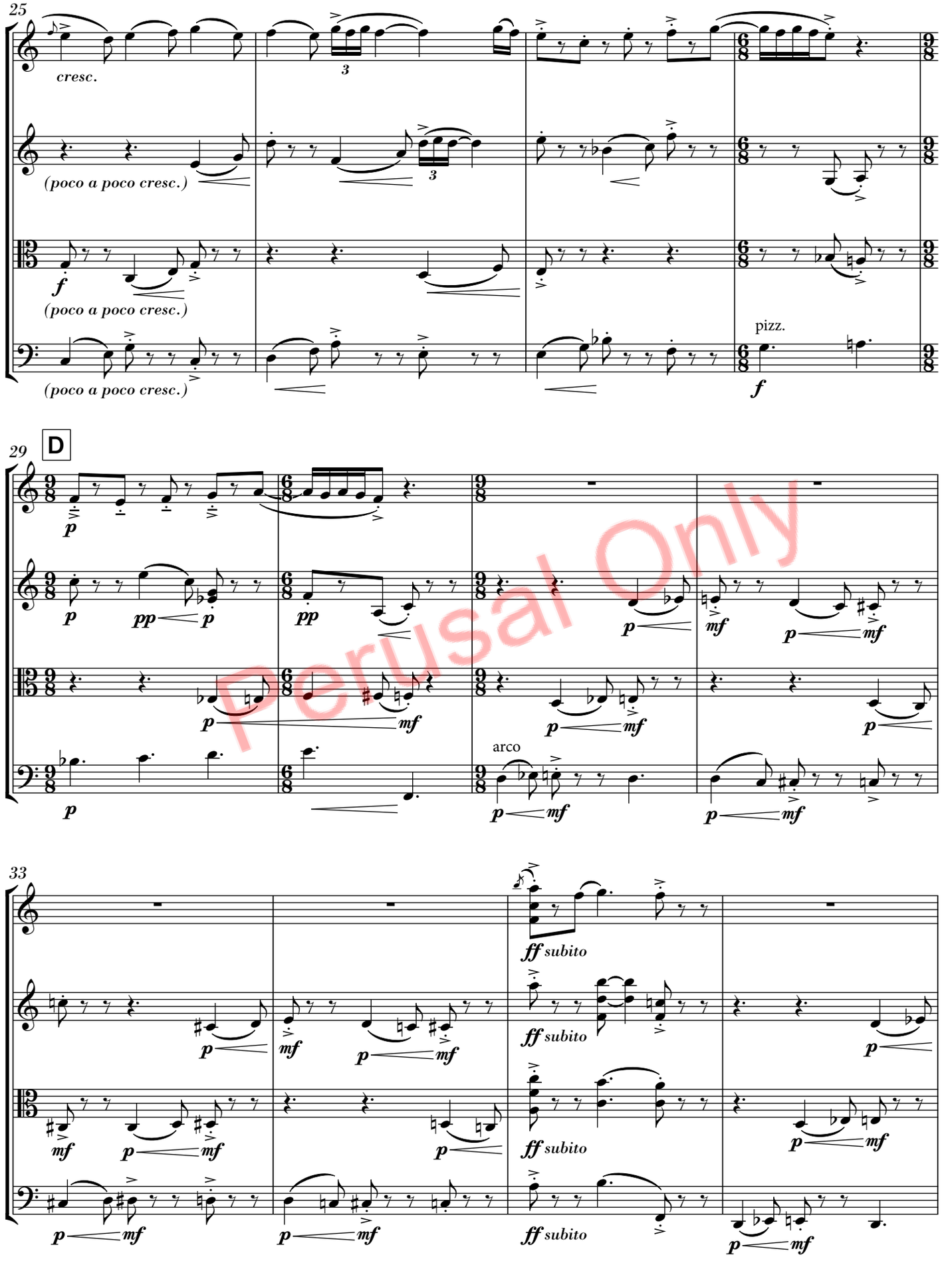

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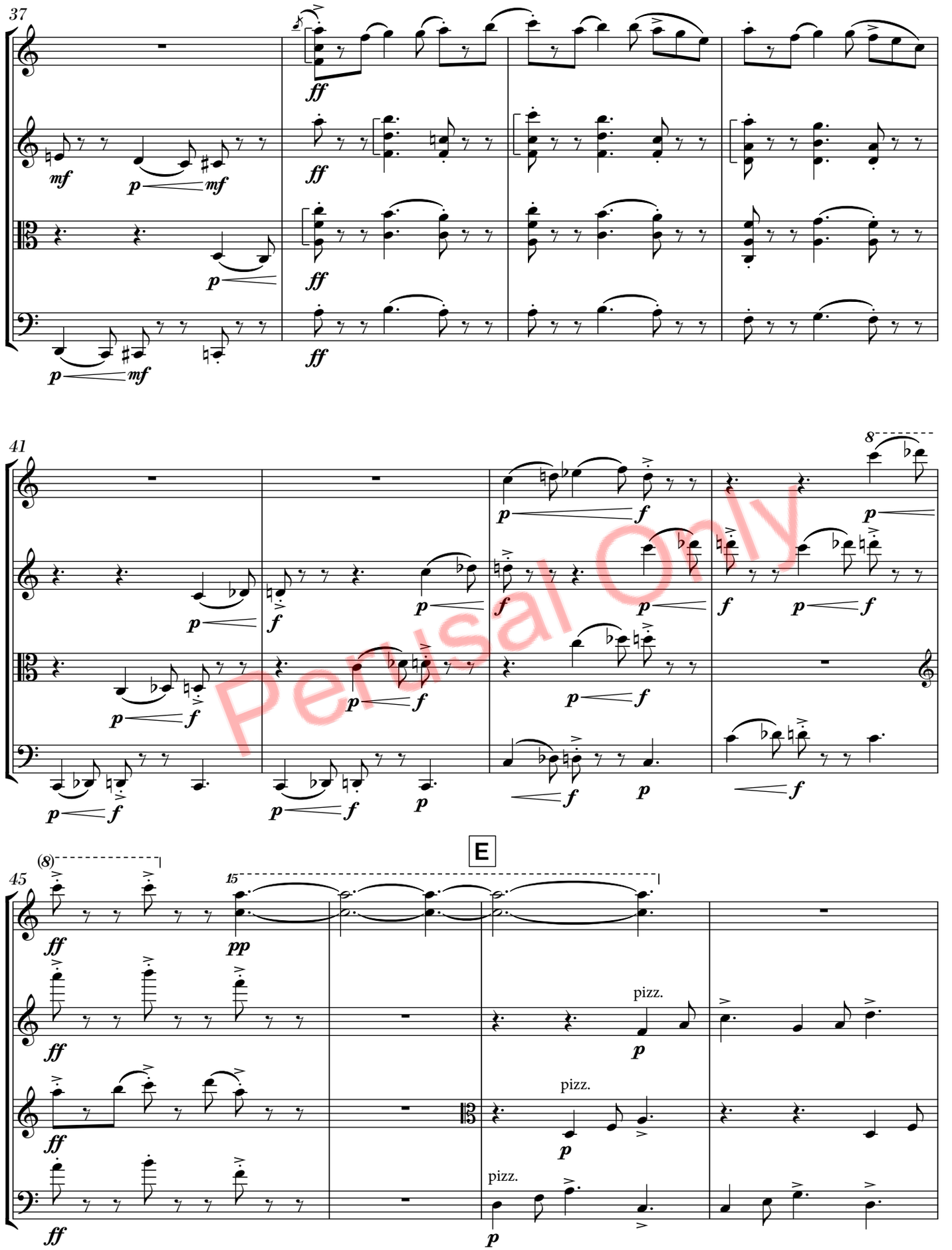

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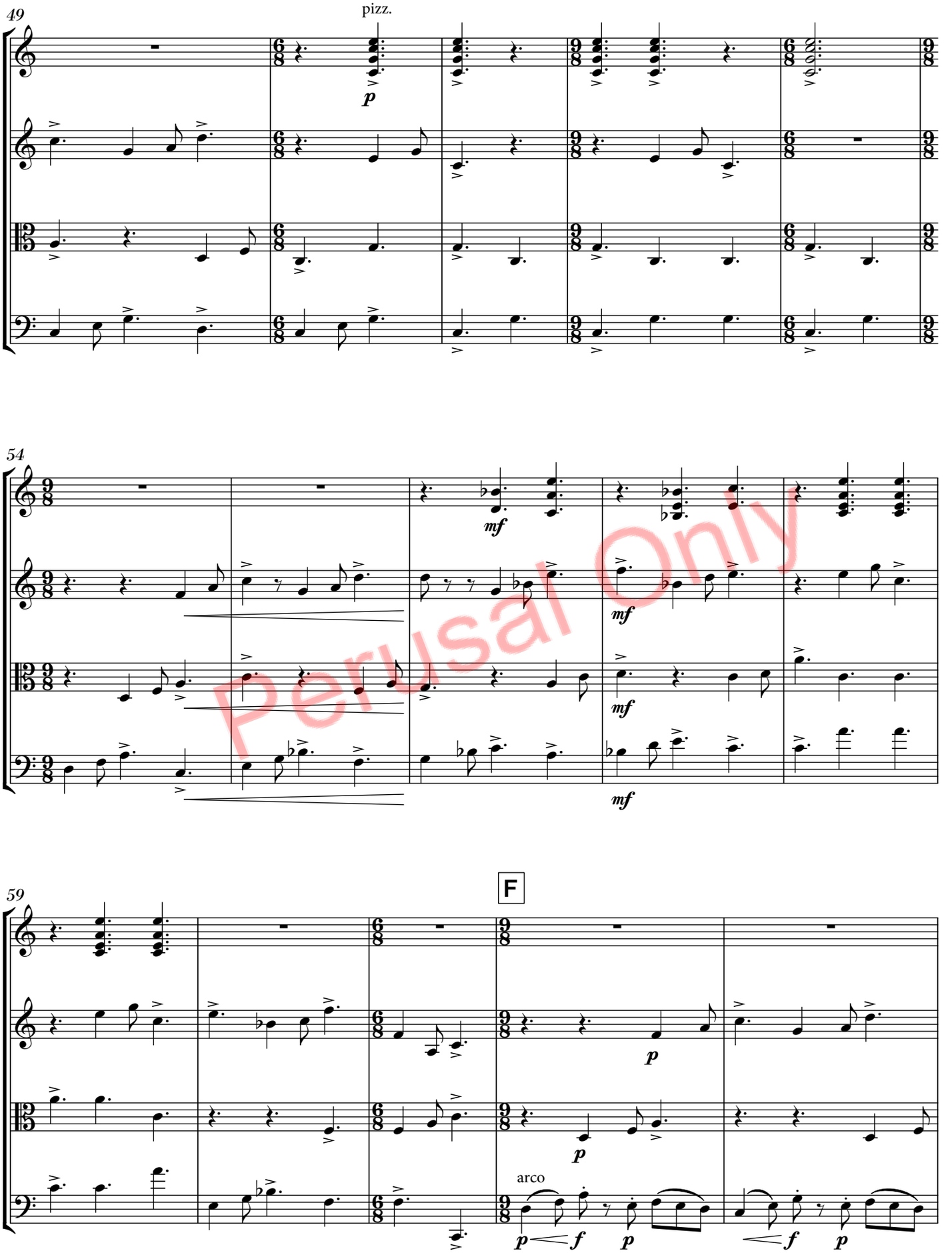

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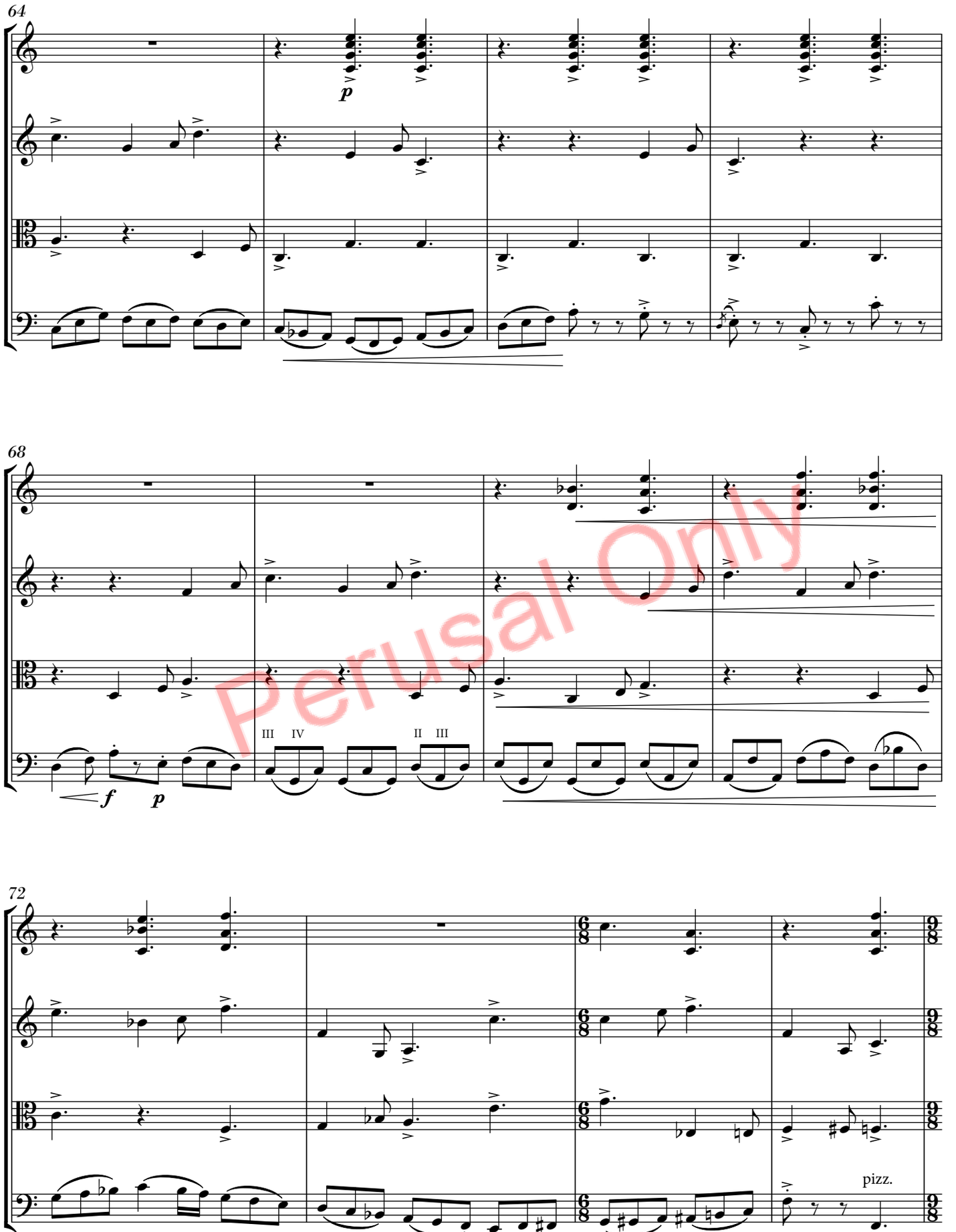

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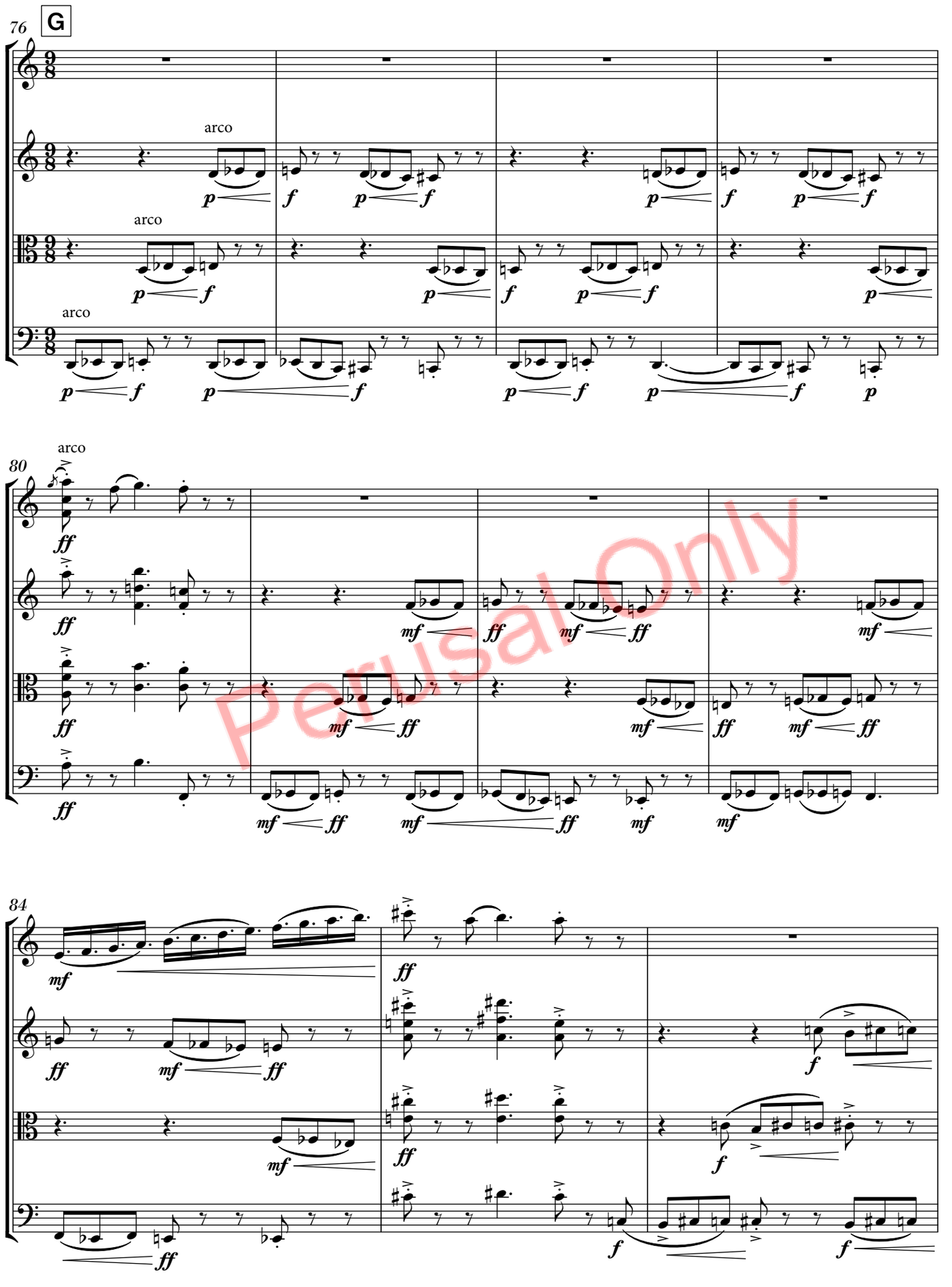

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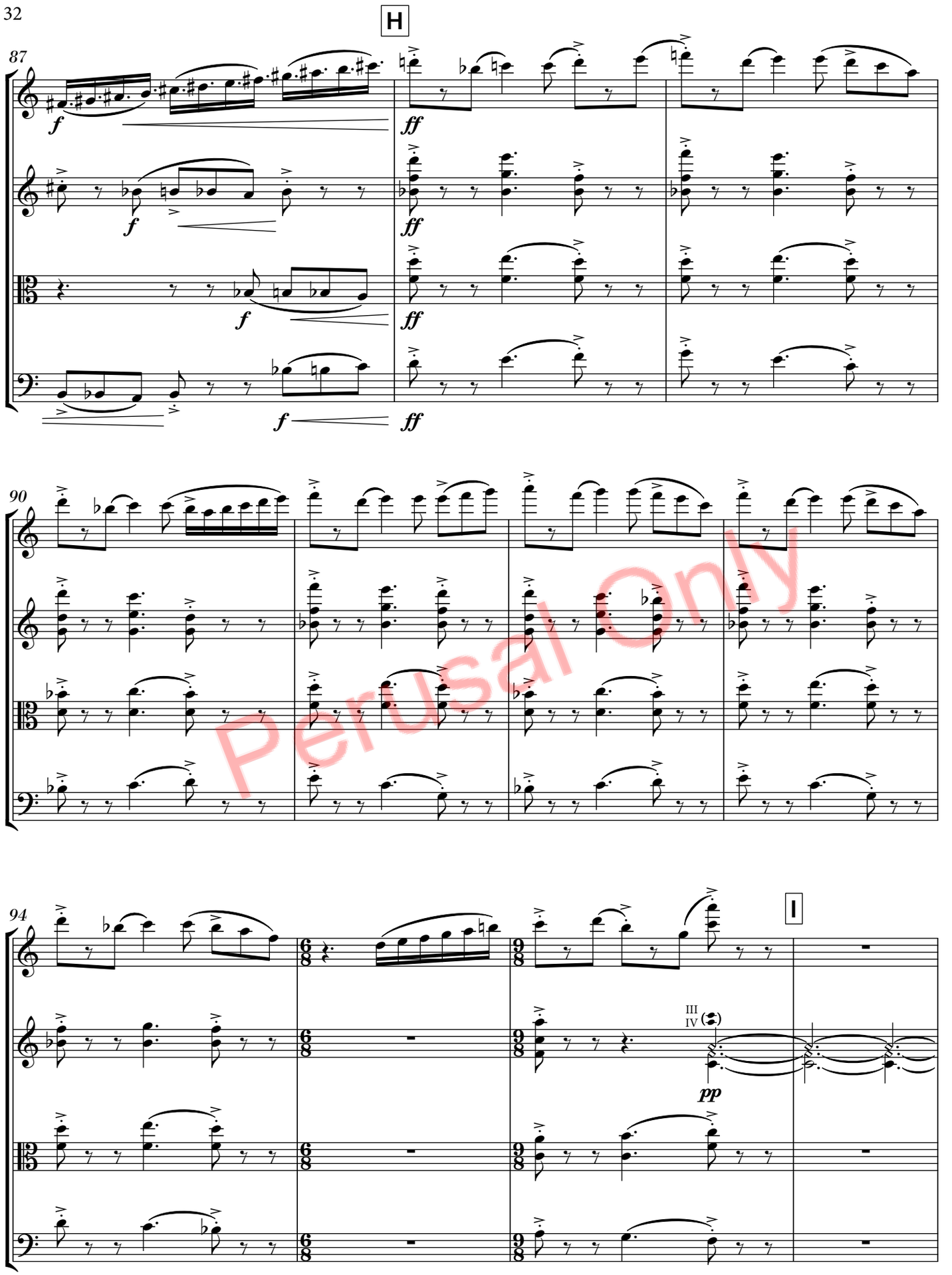

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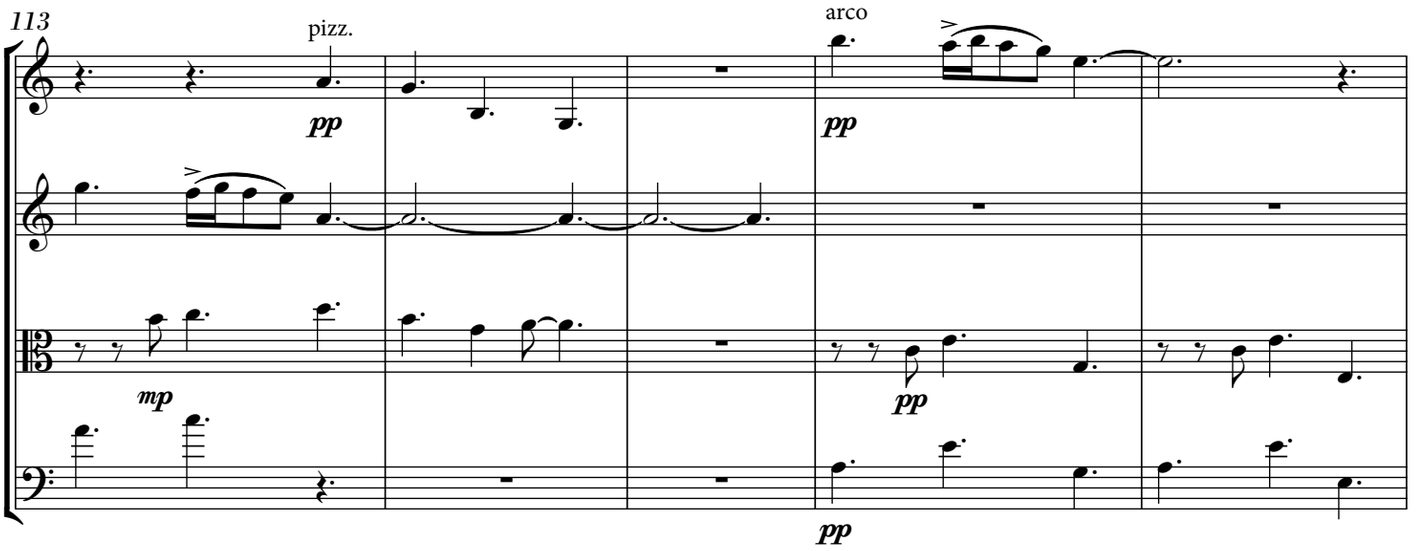

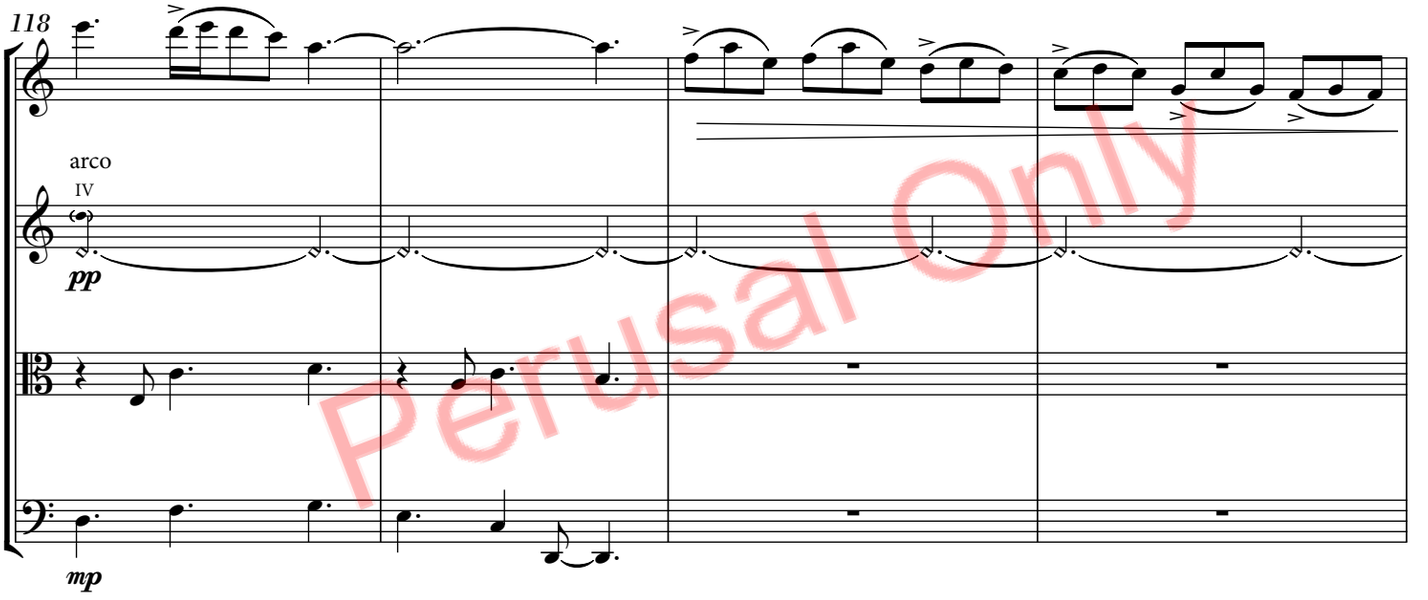

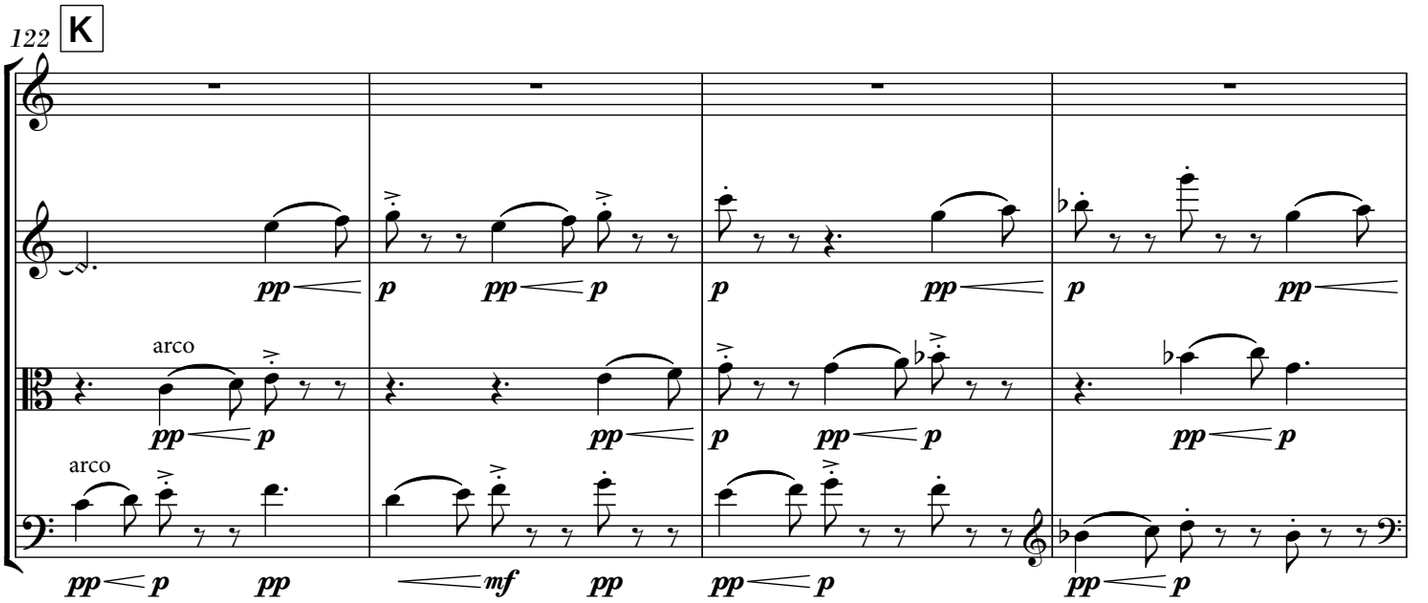

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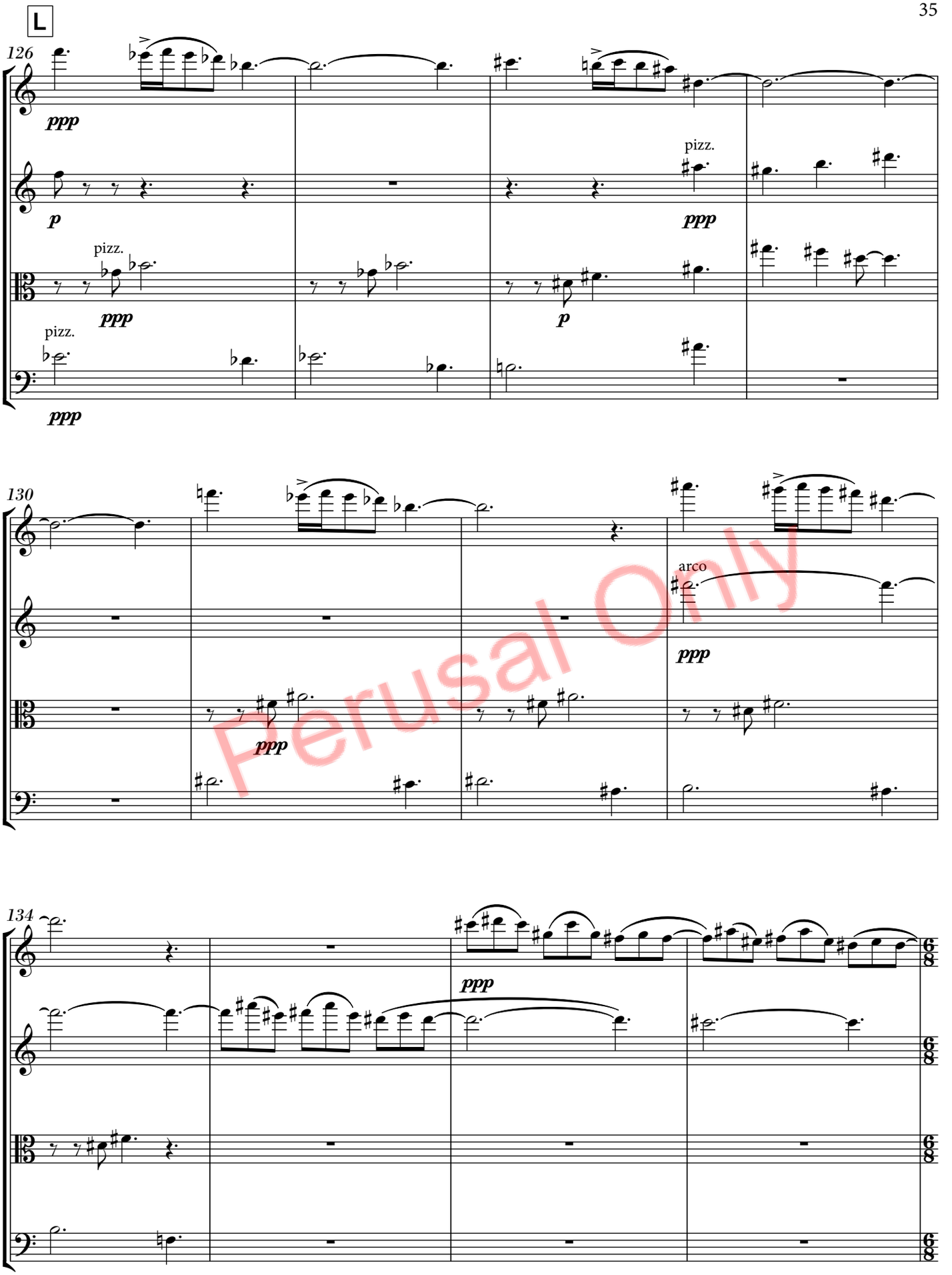

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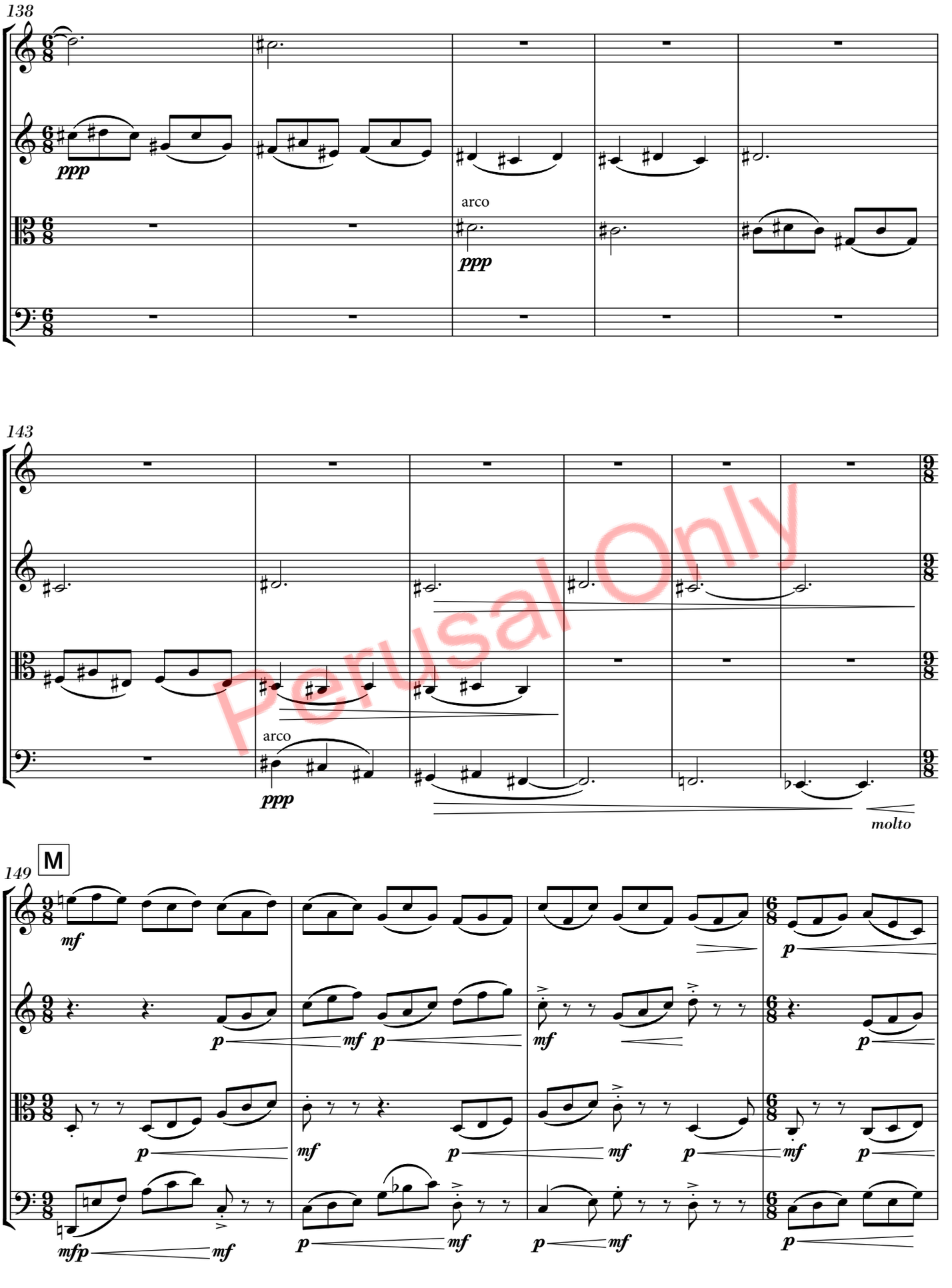

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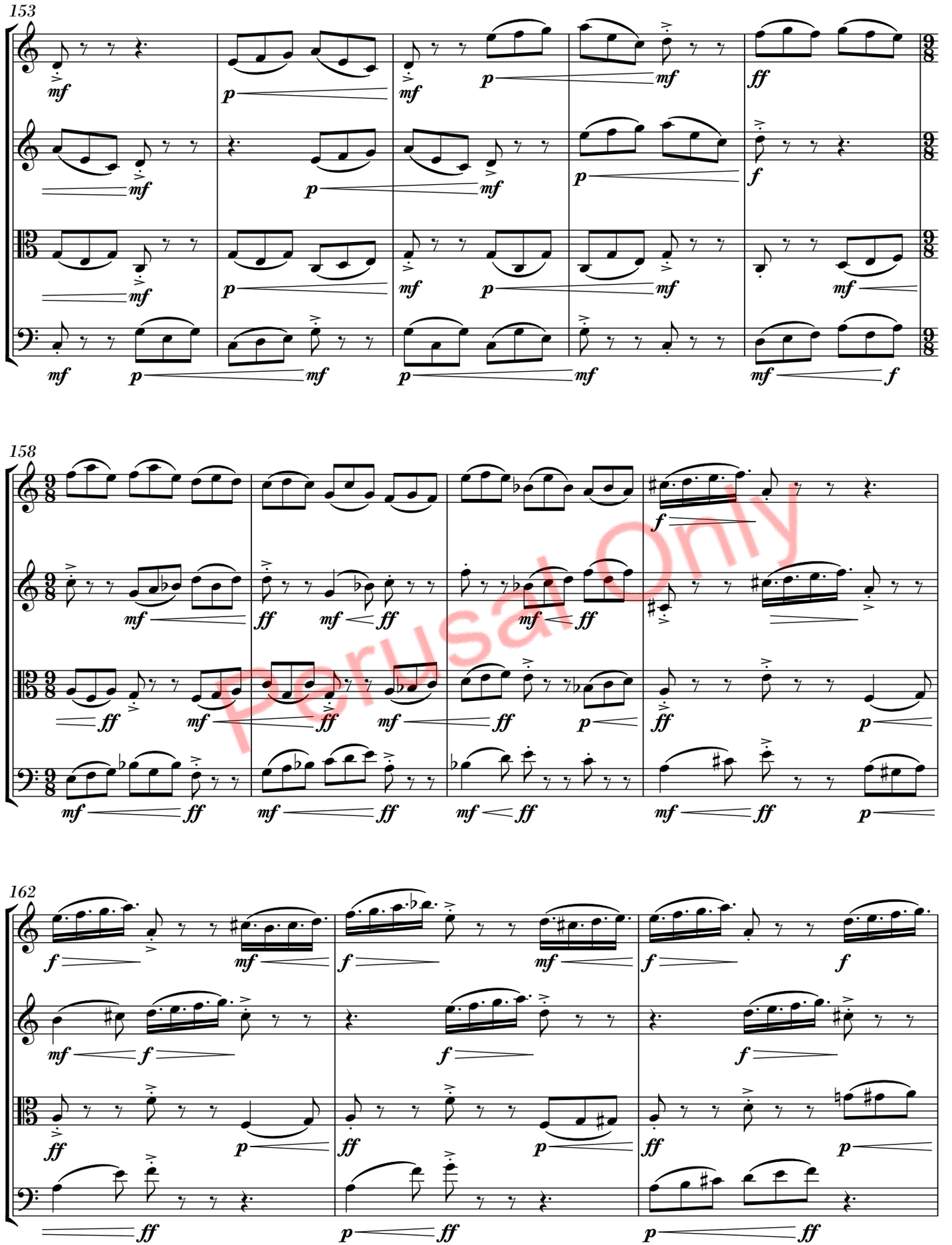

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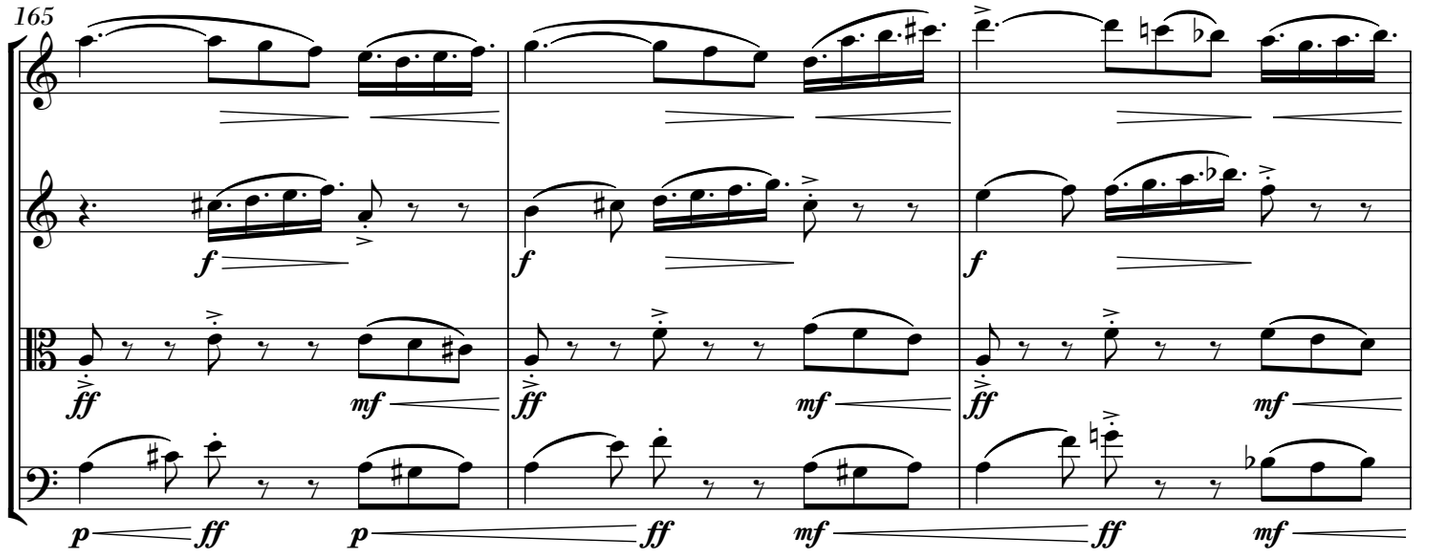

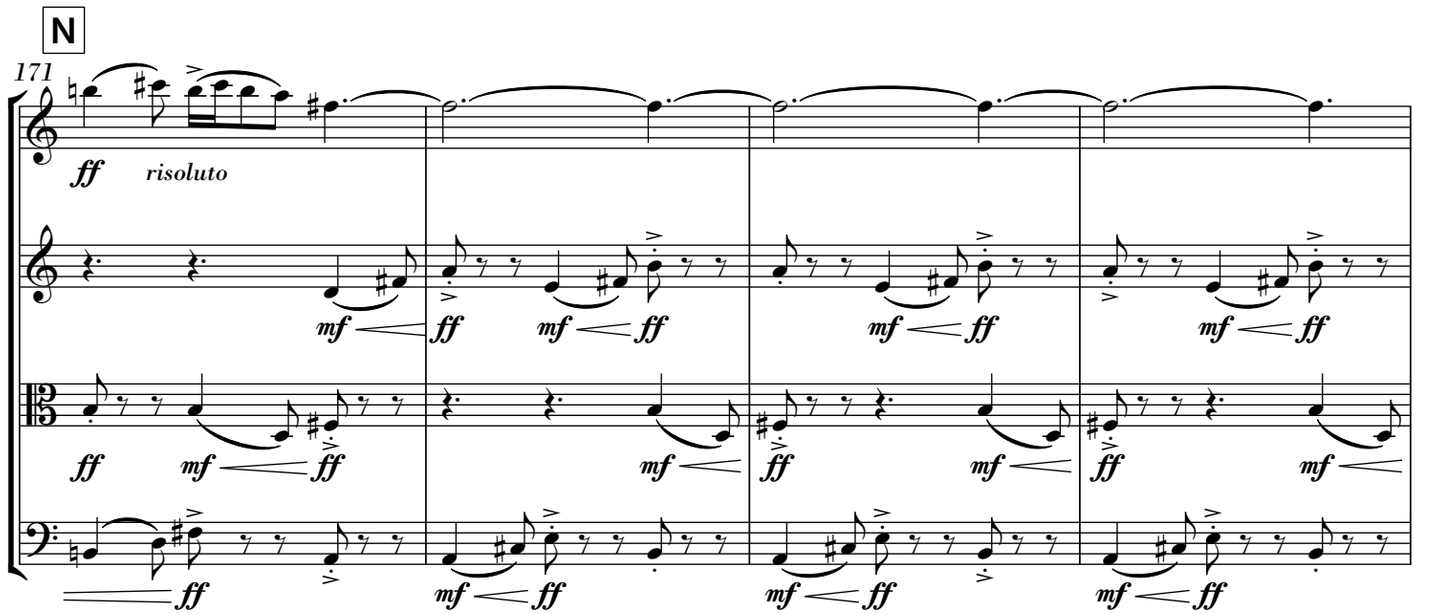

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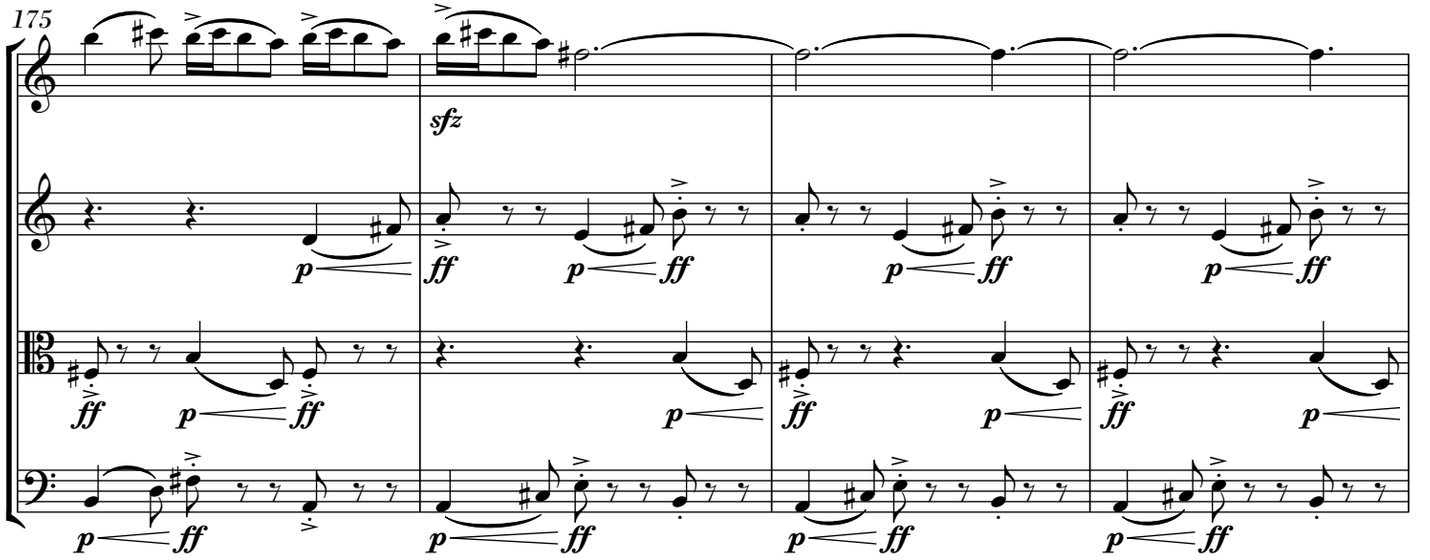

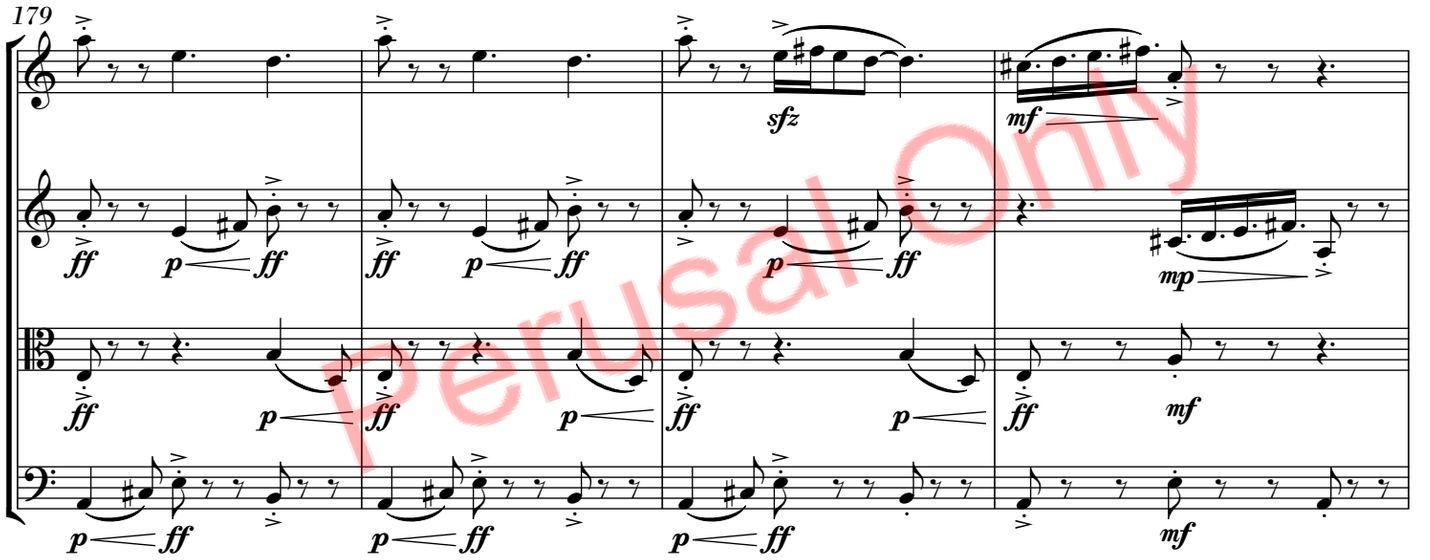

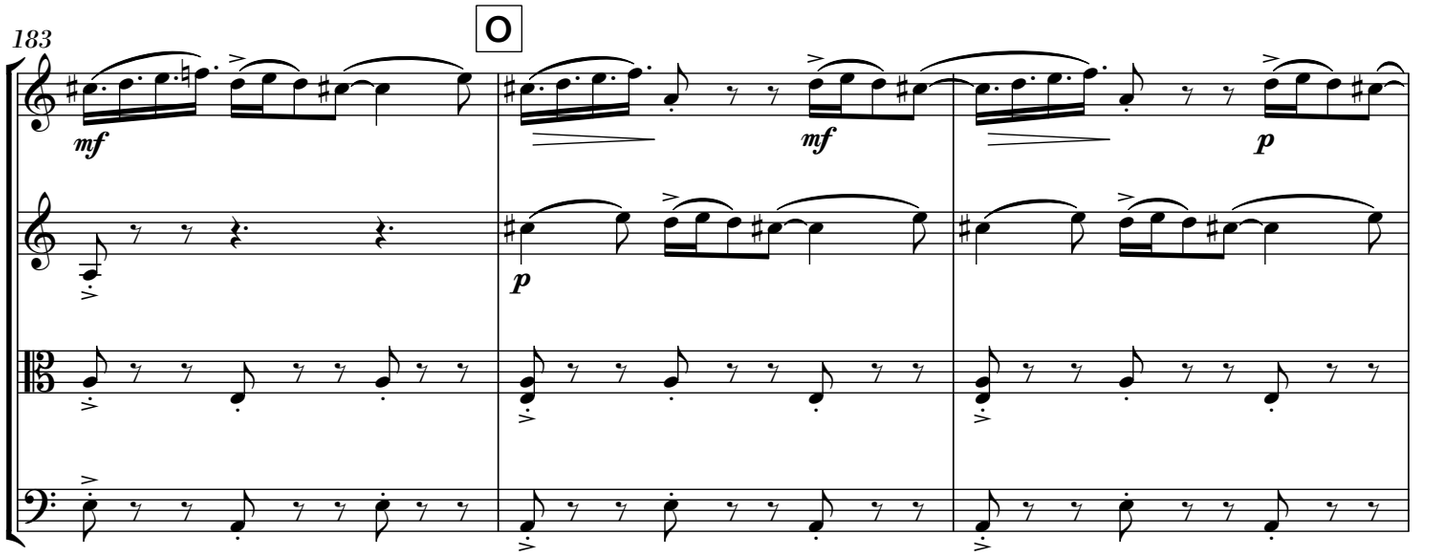

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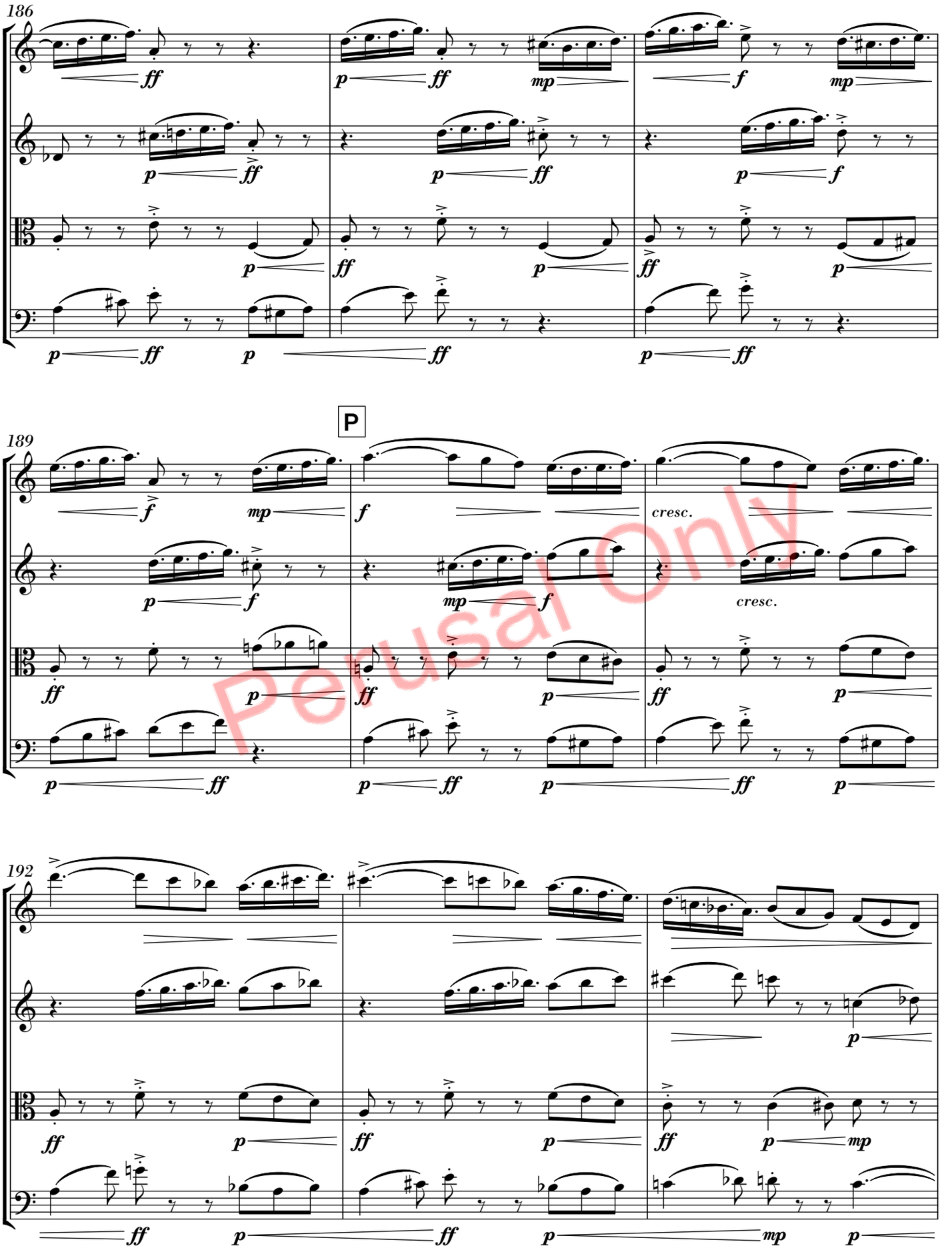

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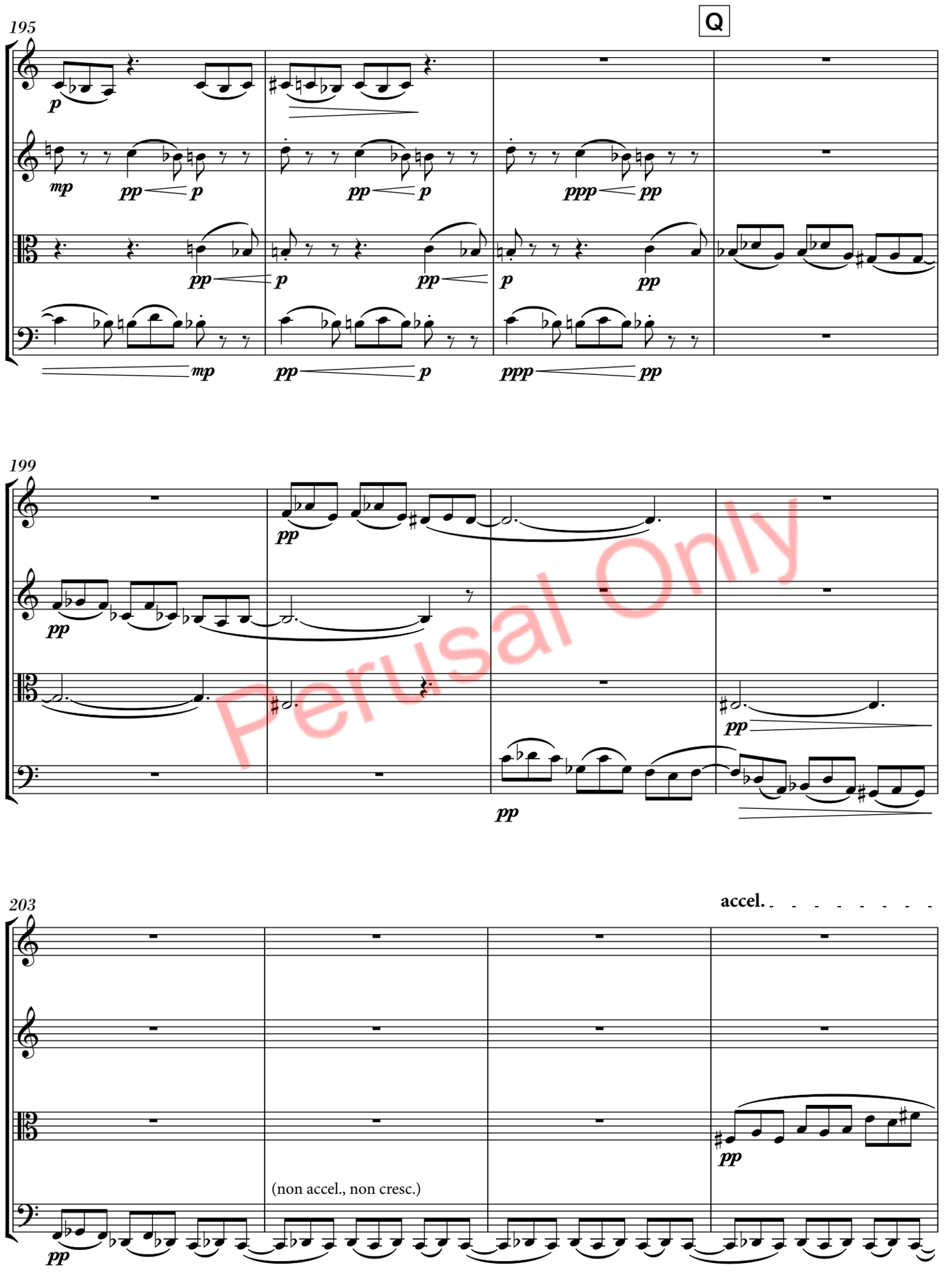
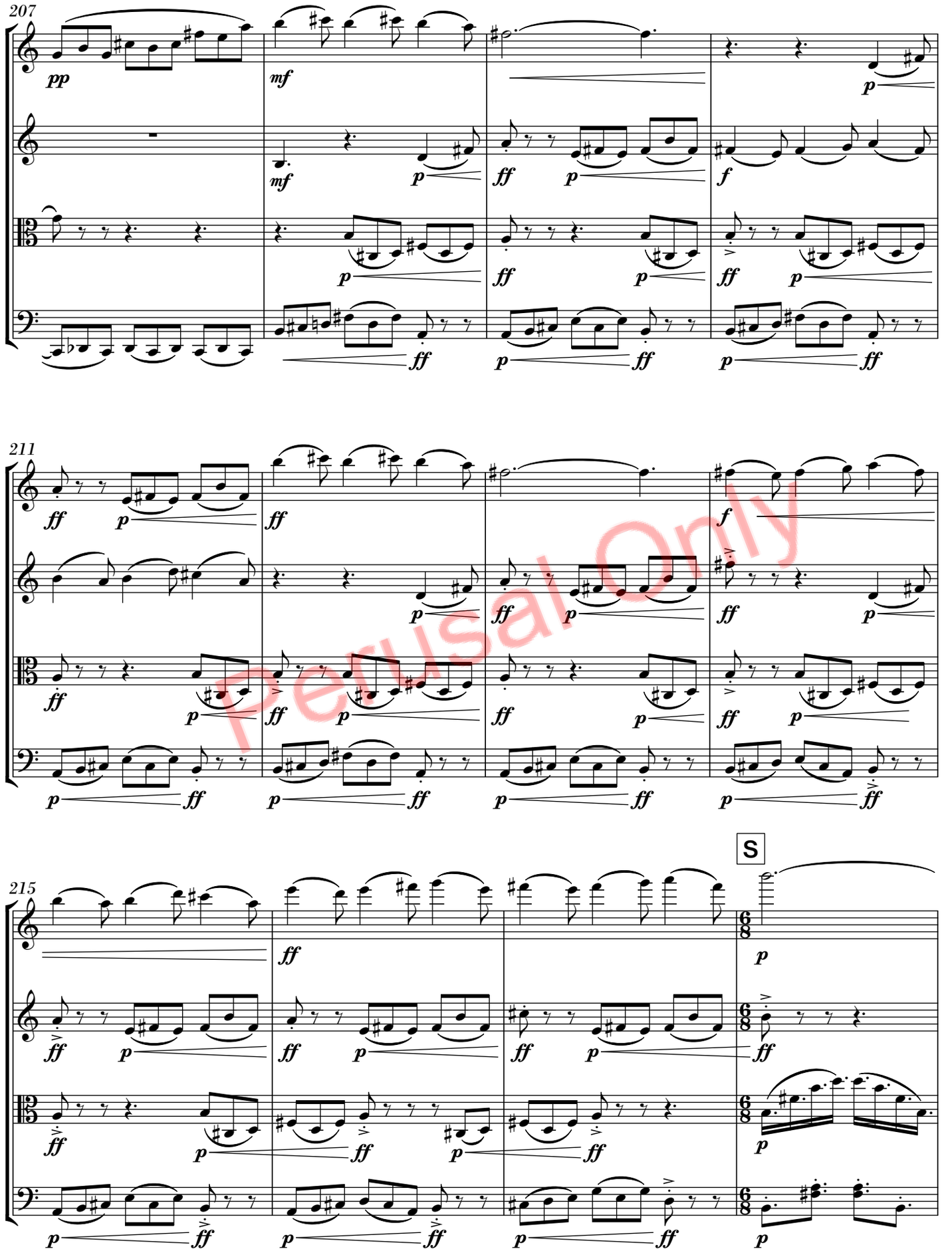


Perusal Only

(accel.) - - - - - - R Stretto (♩. = c. 168)



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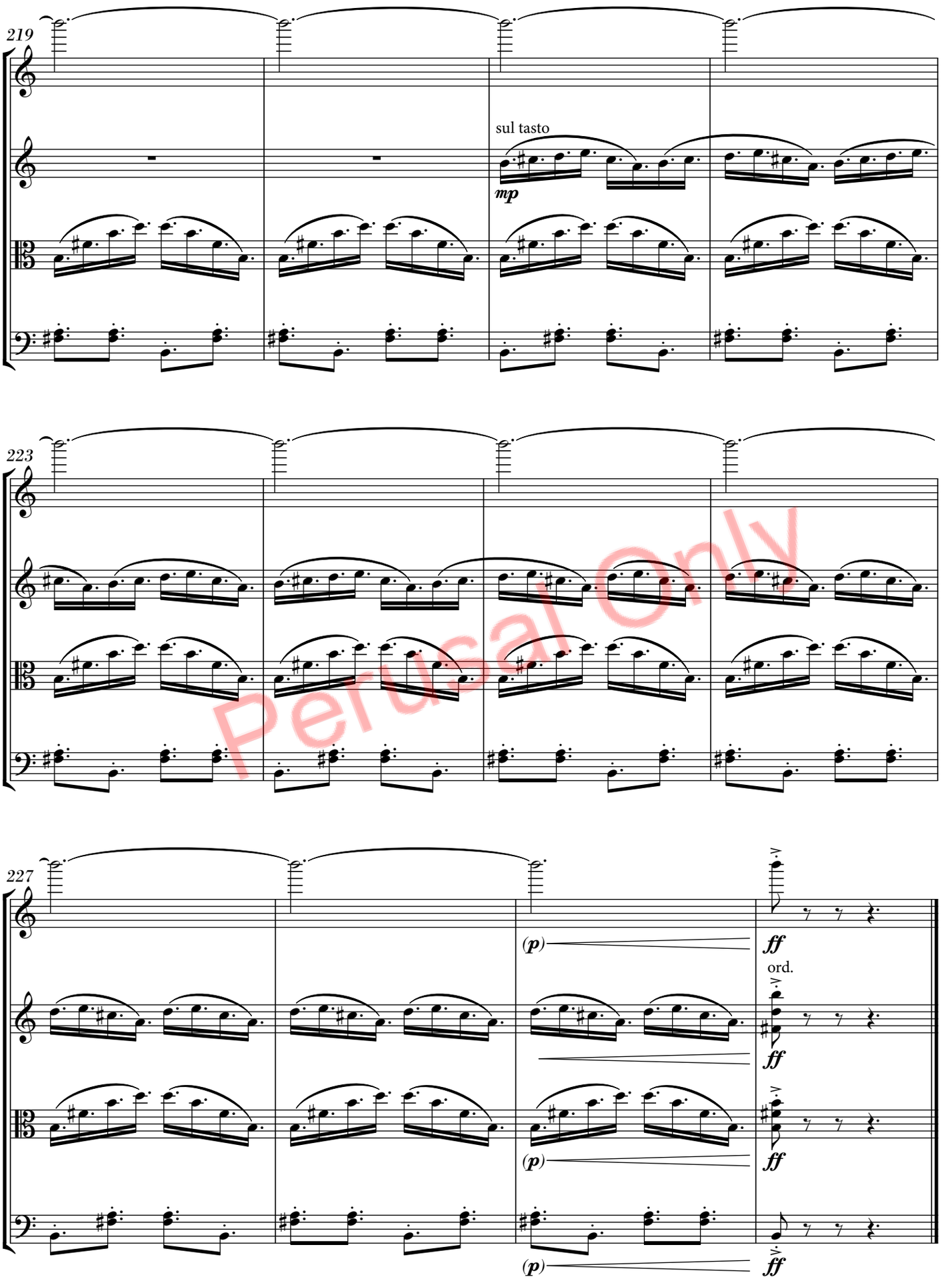
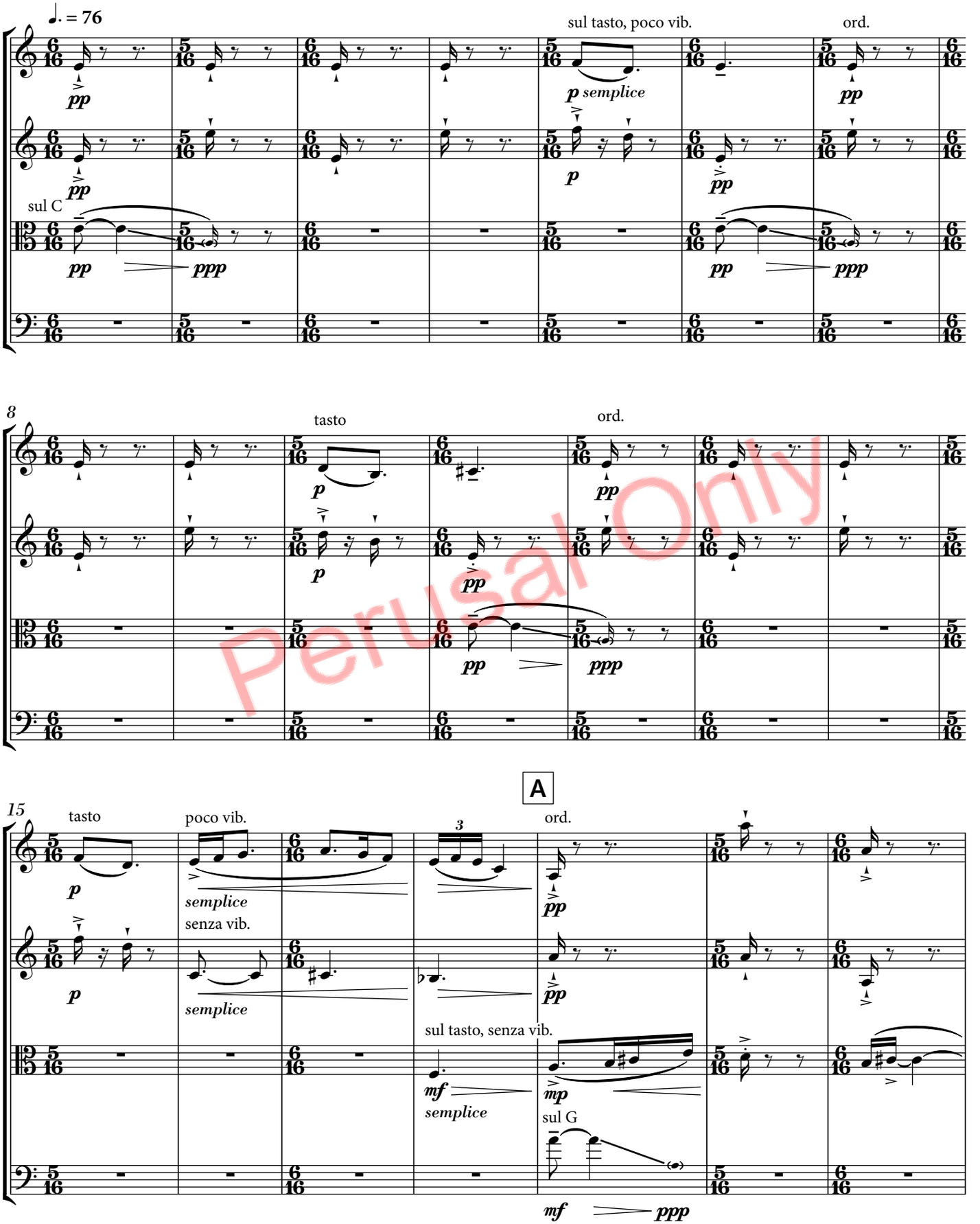


Perusal Only

3. Jacob's Lick



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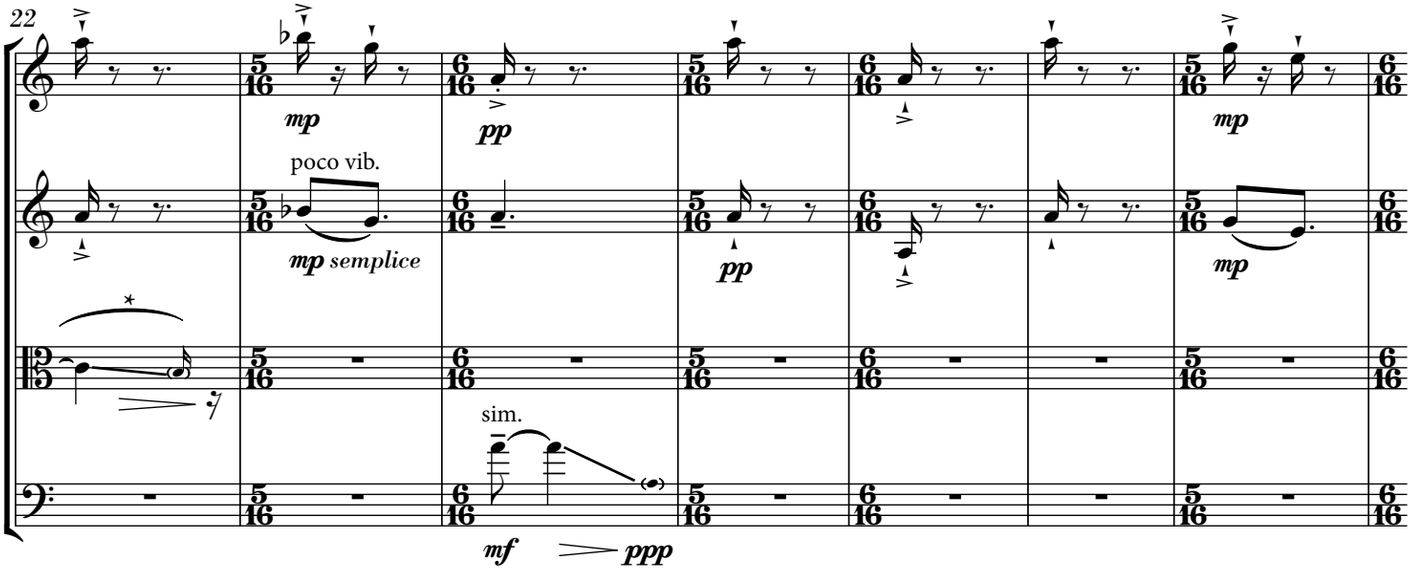
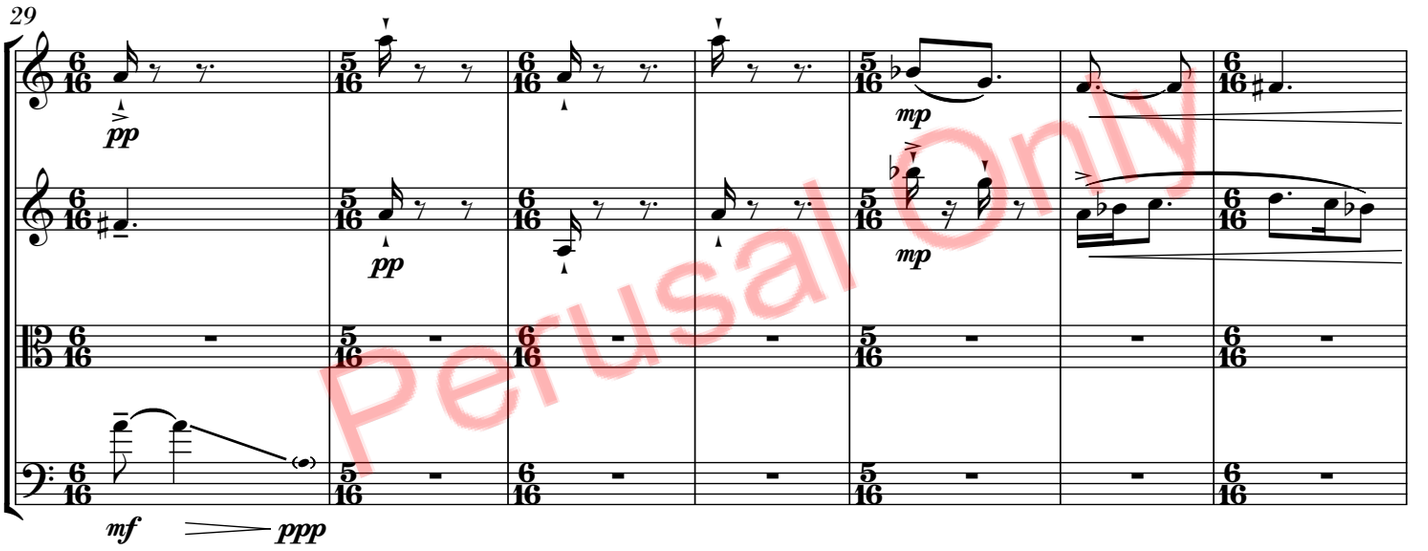
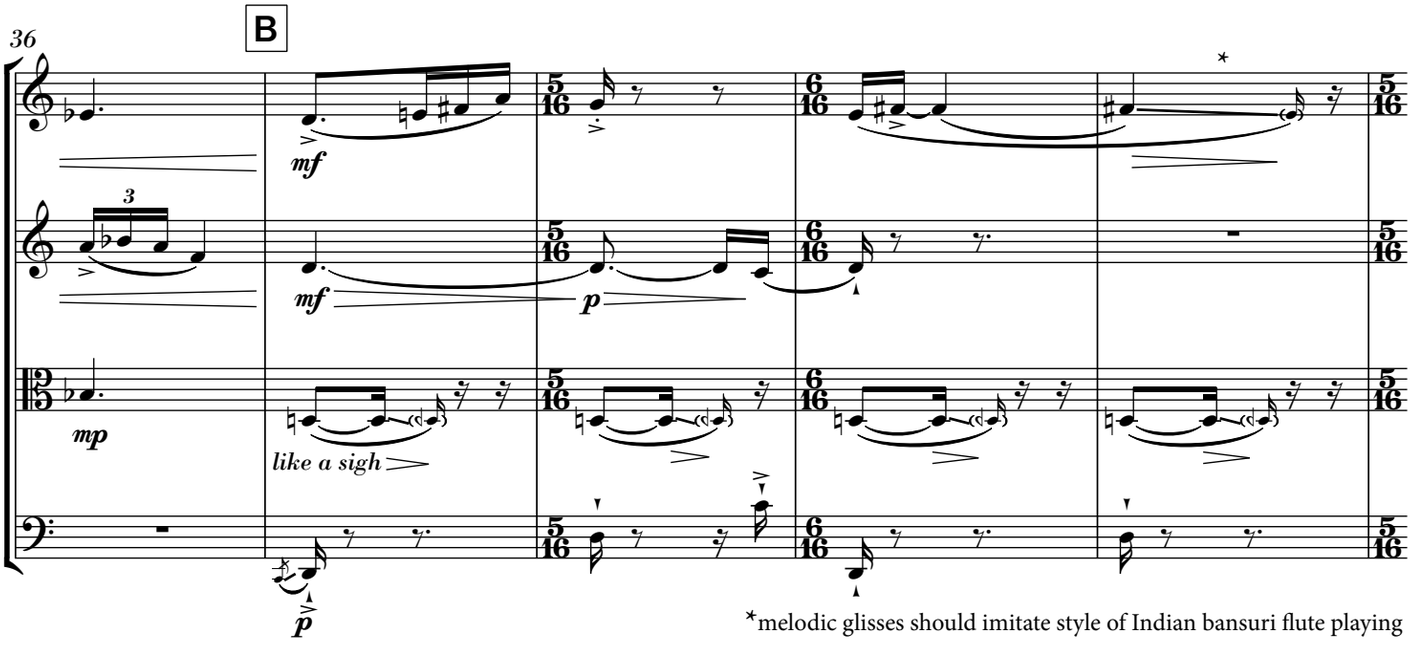
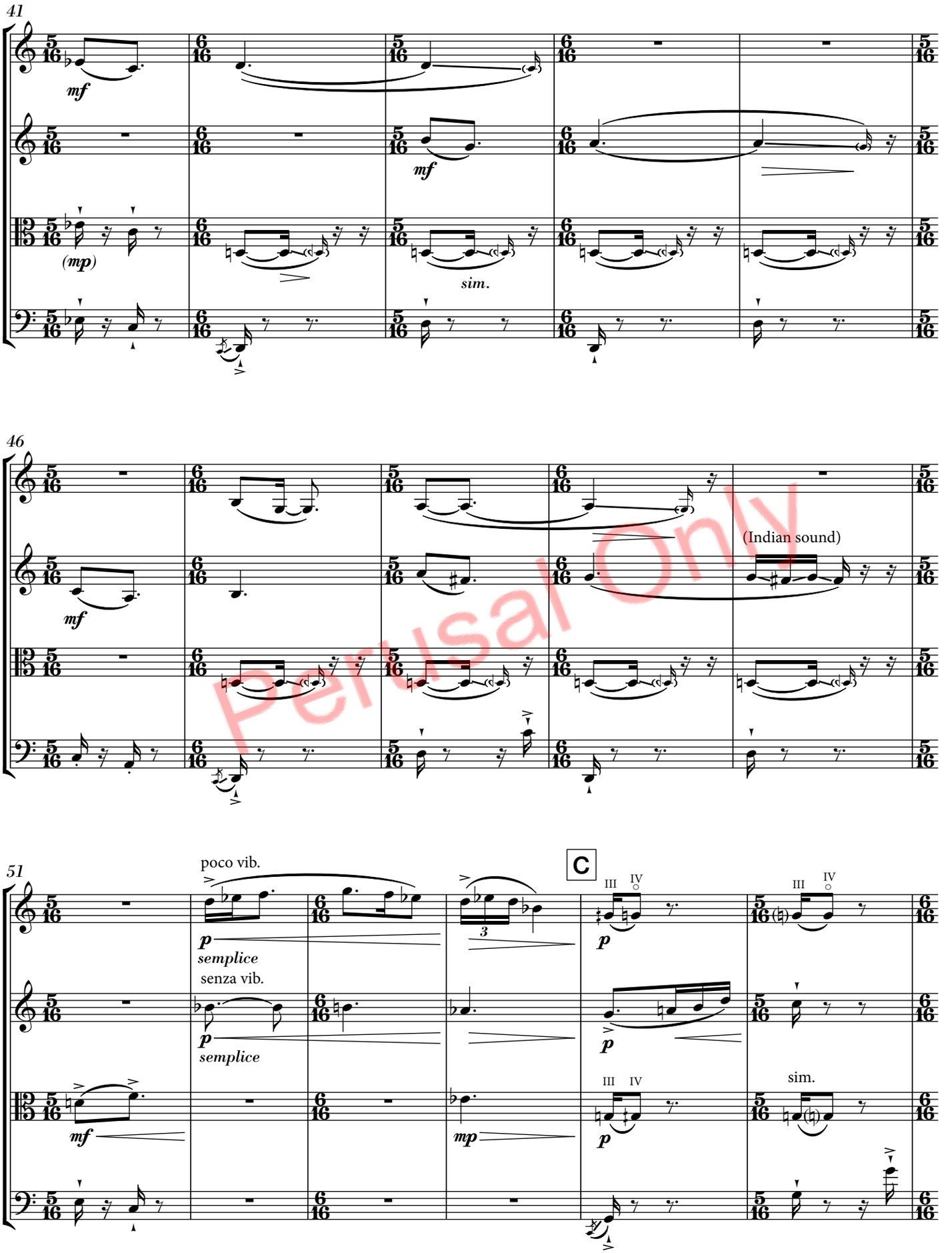






*melodic glisses should imitate style of Indian bansuri flute playing

Perusal Only



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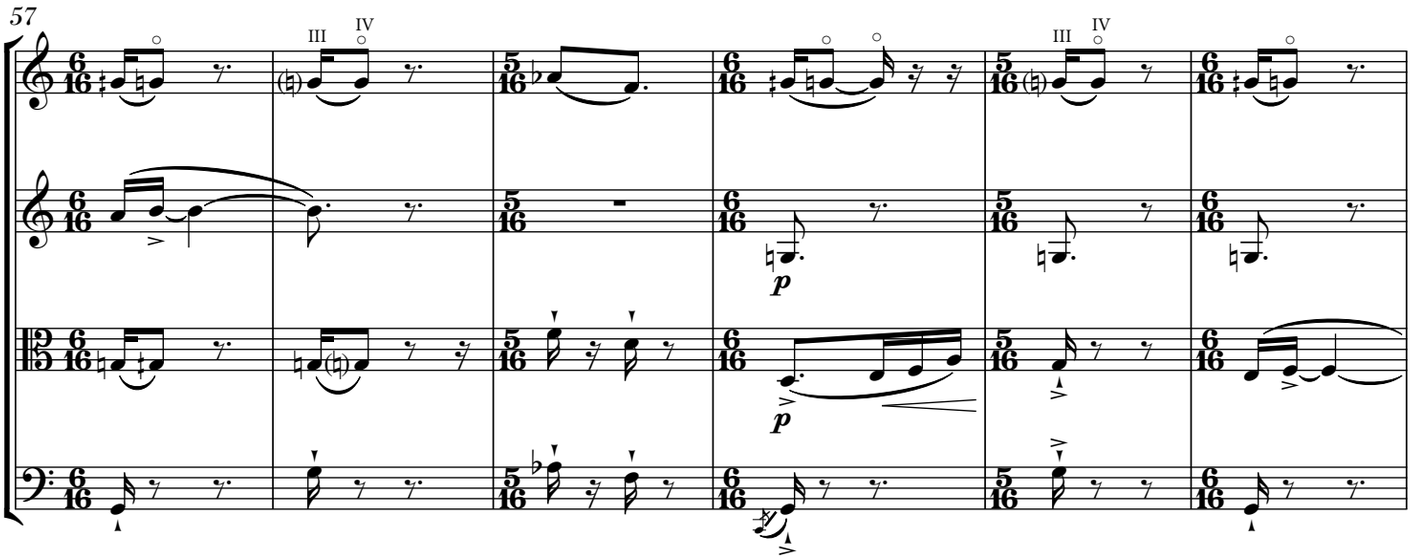

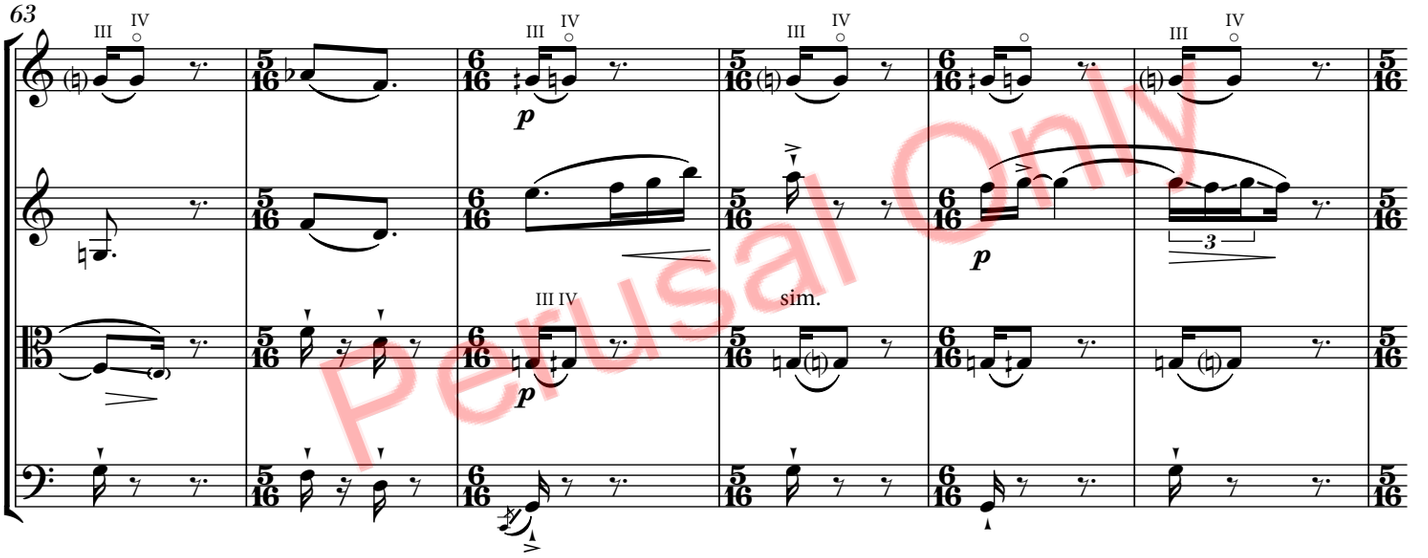

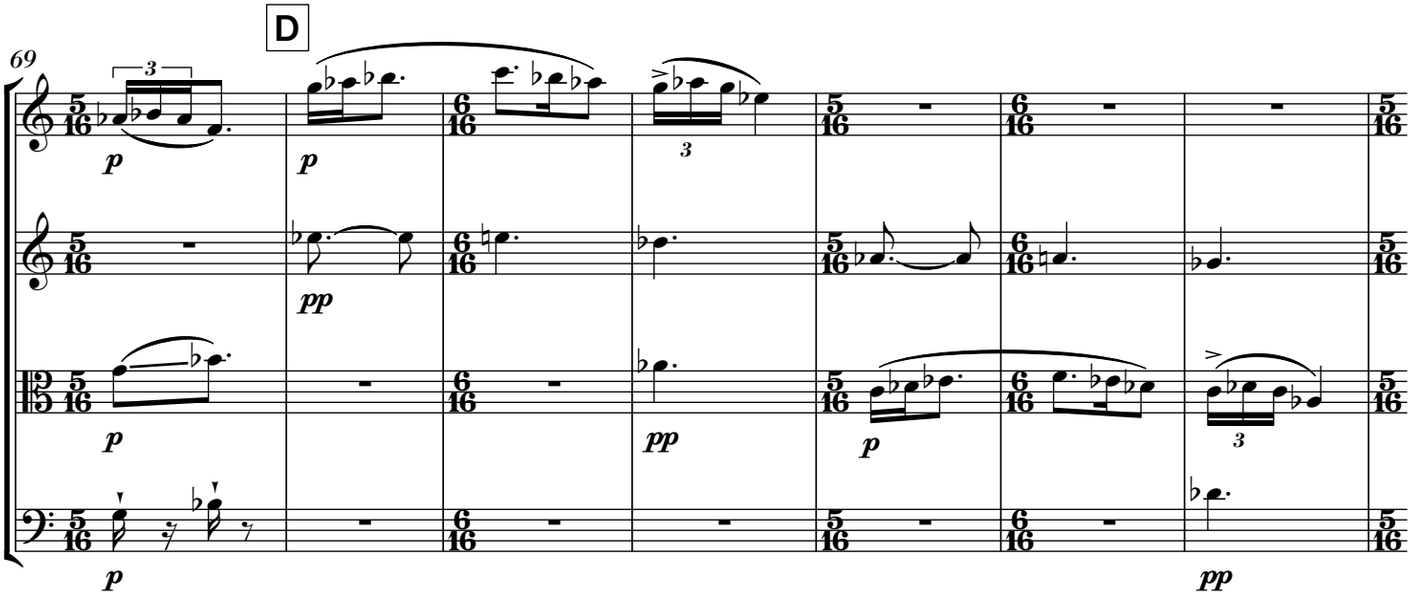

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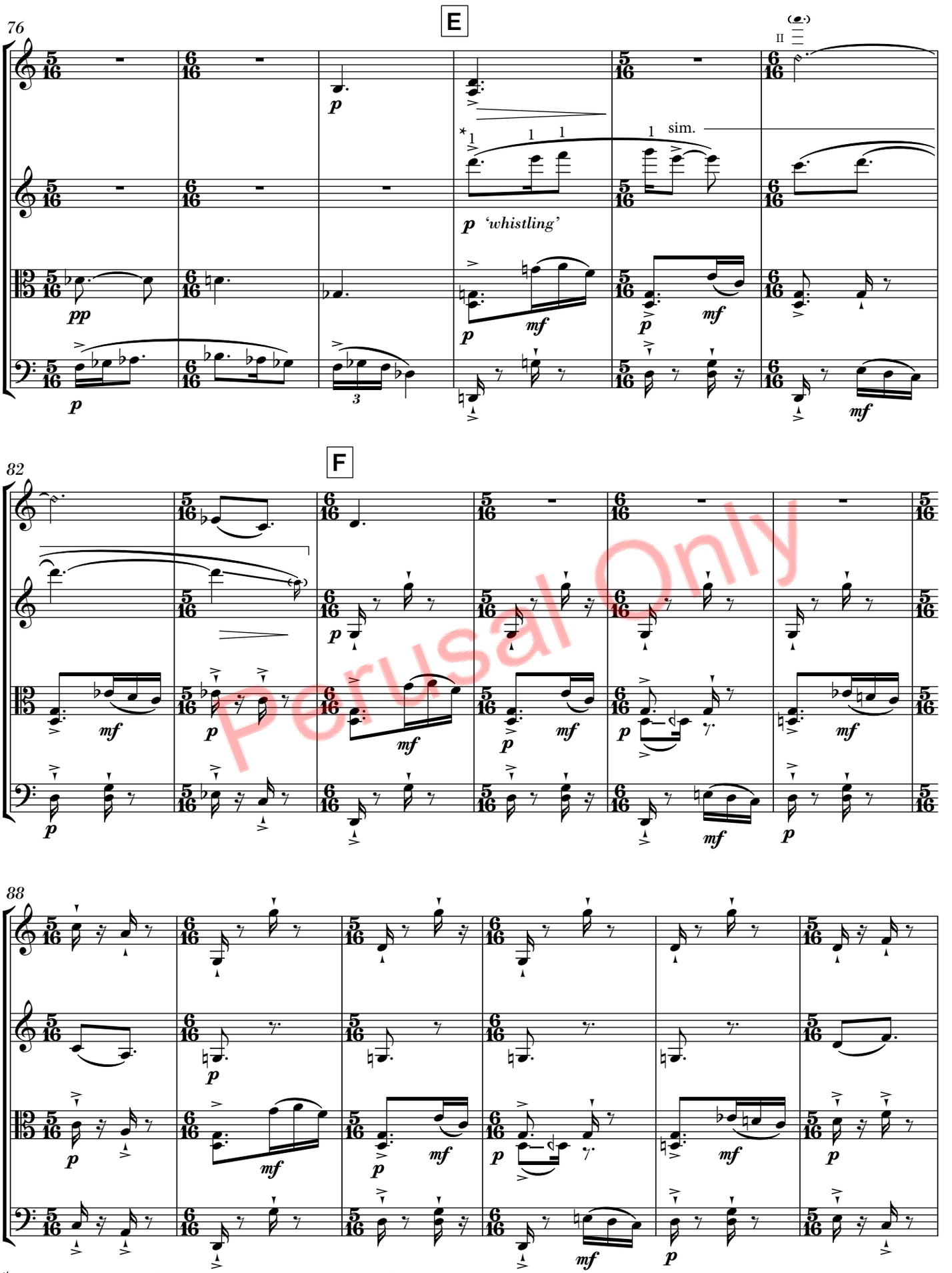
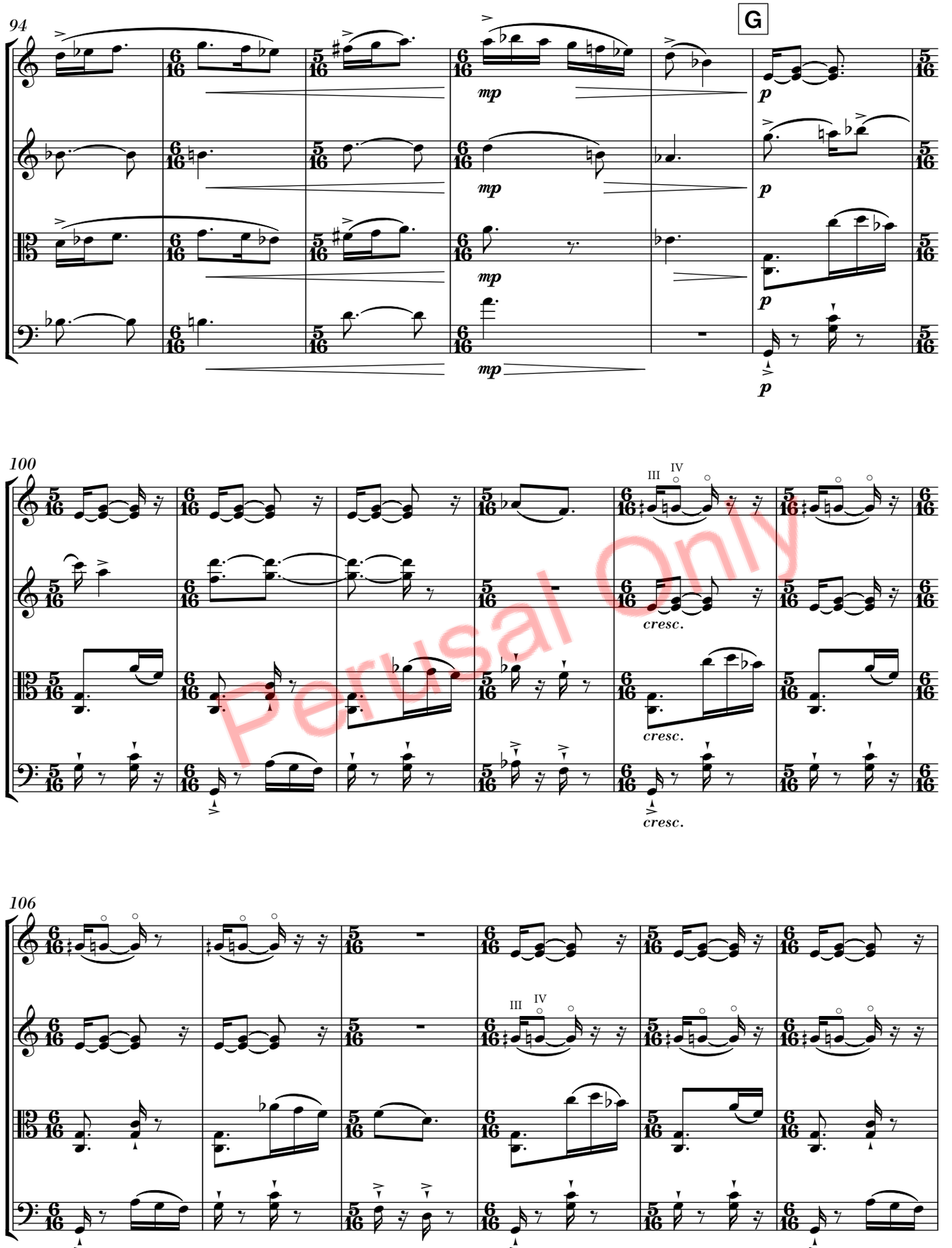


Perusal Only

*use single finger on left hand to create a quasi-whistling effect



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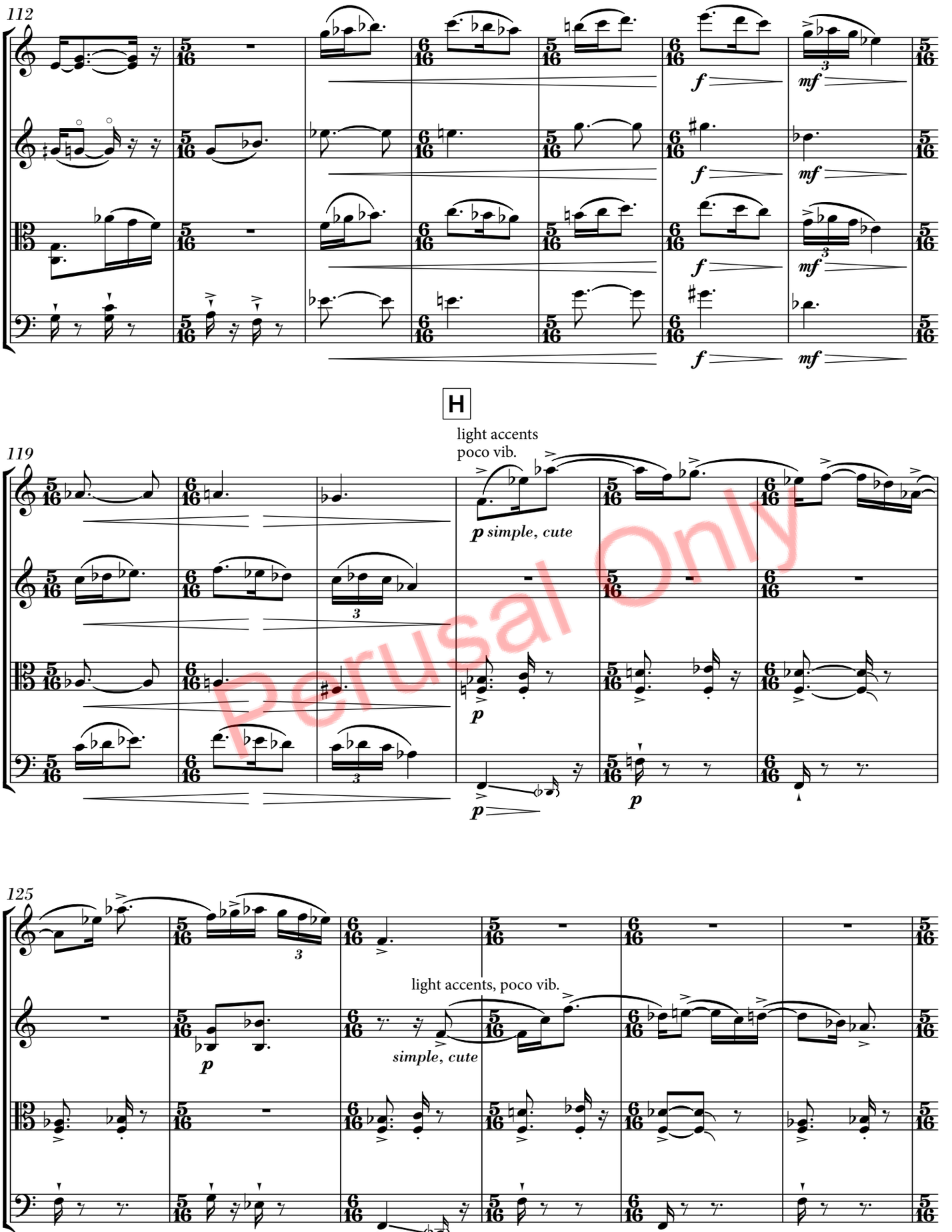

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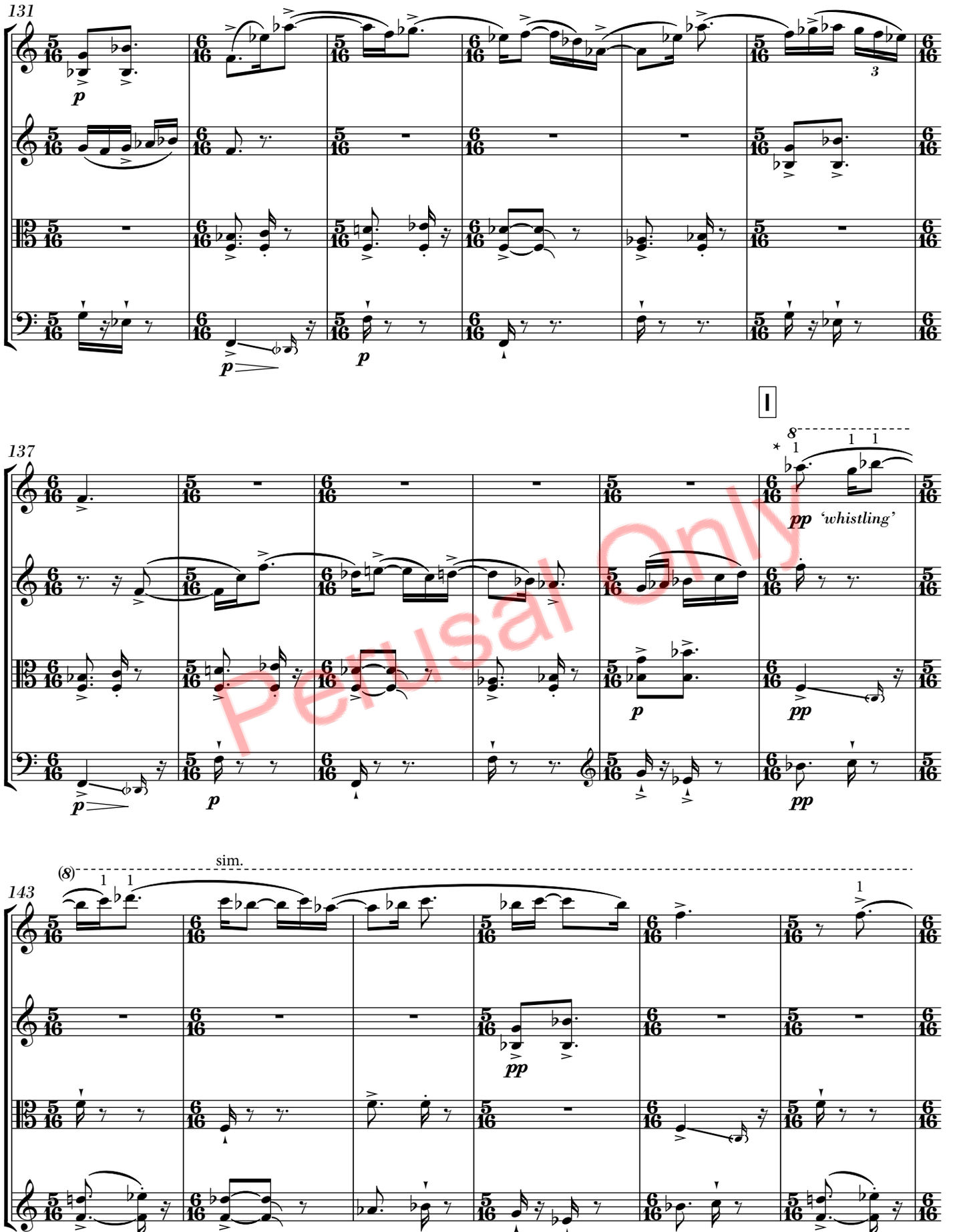
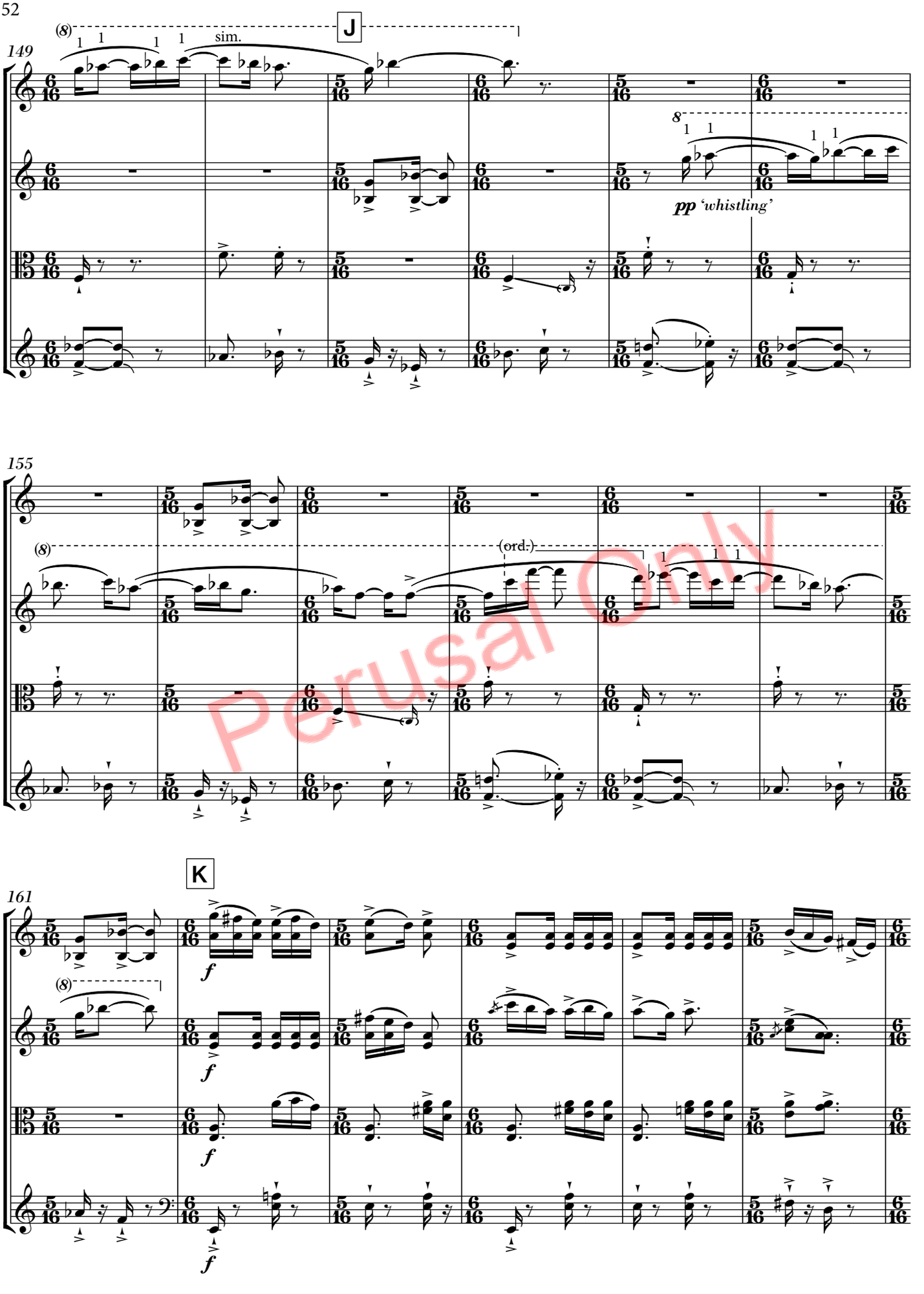


*use single finger on left hand to create a quasi-whistling effect

Perusal Only



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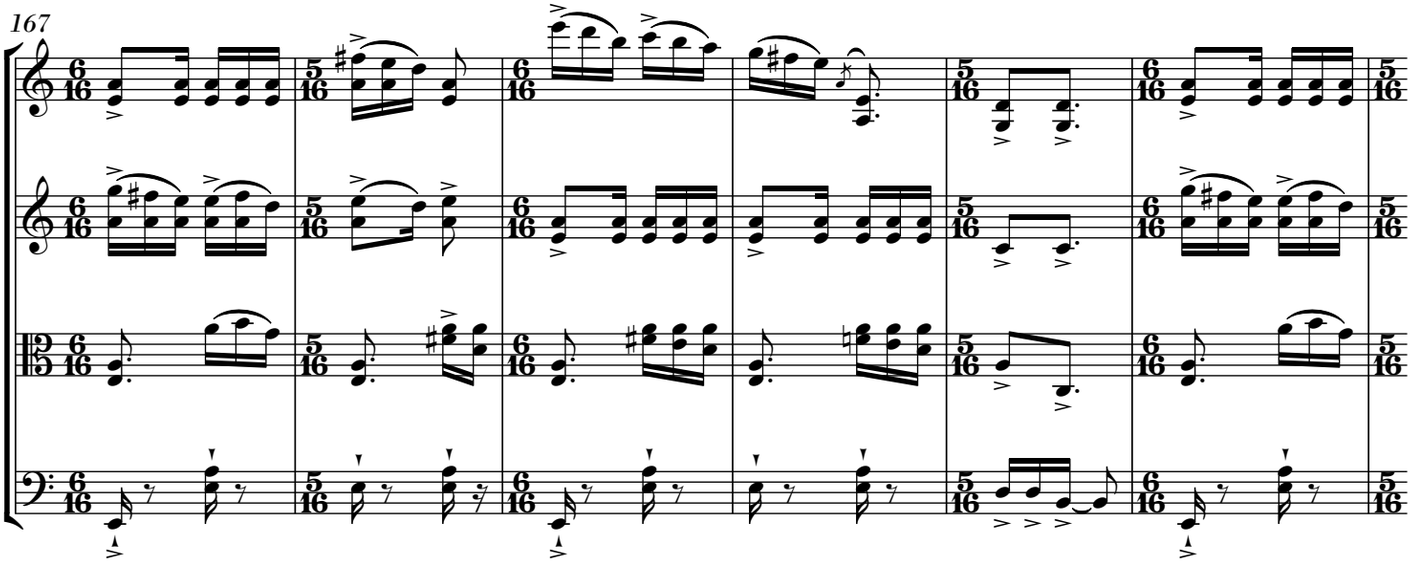

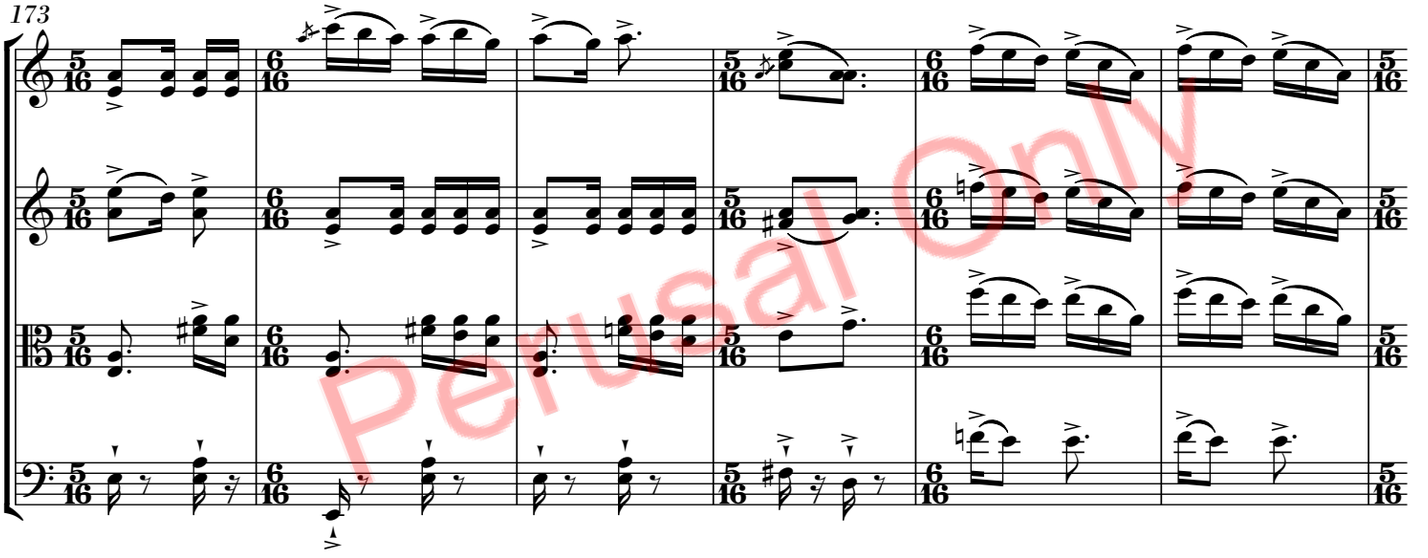

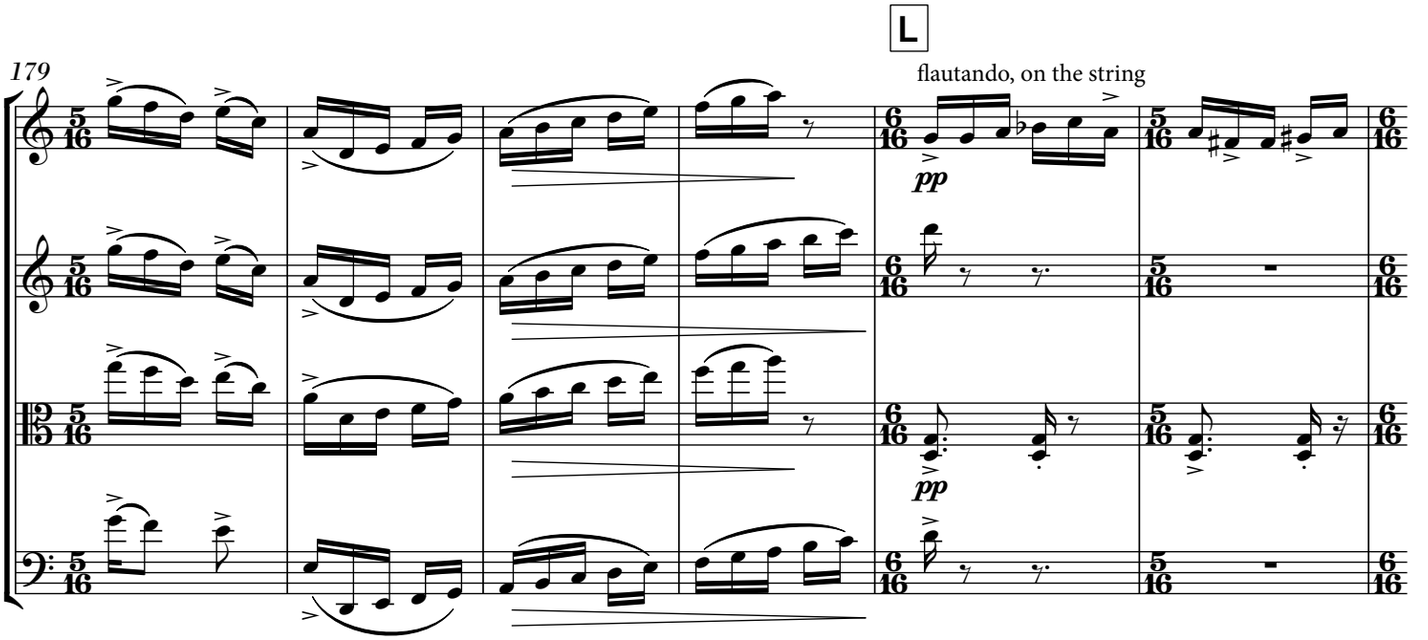

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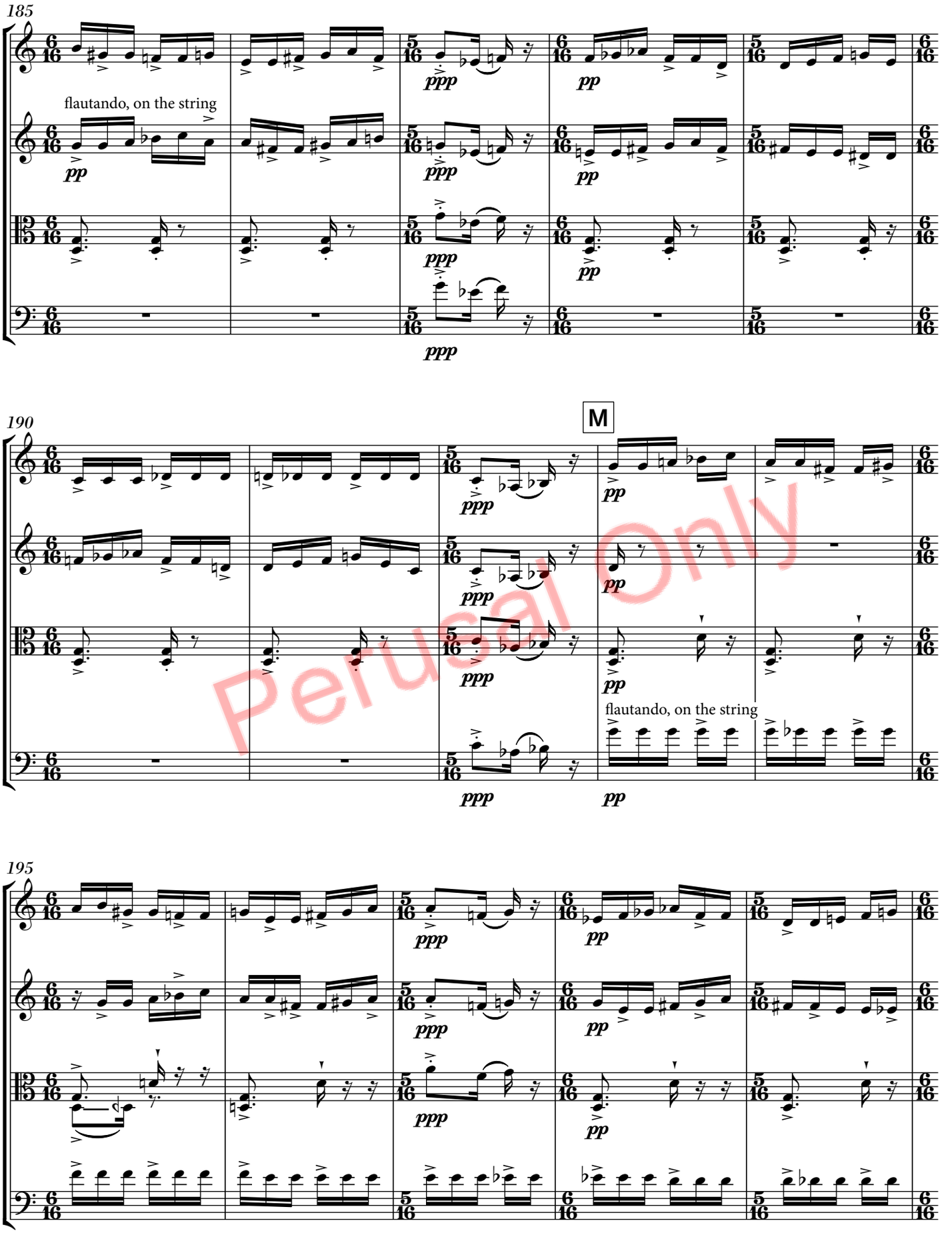

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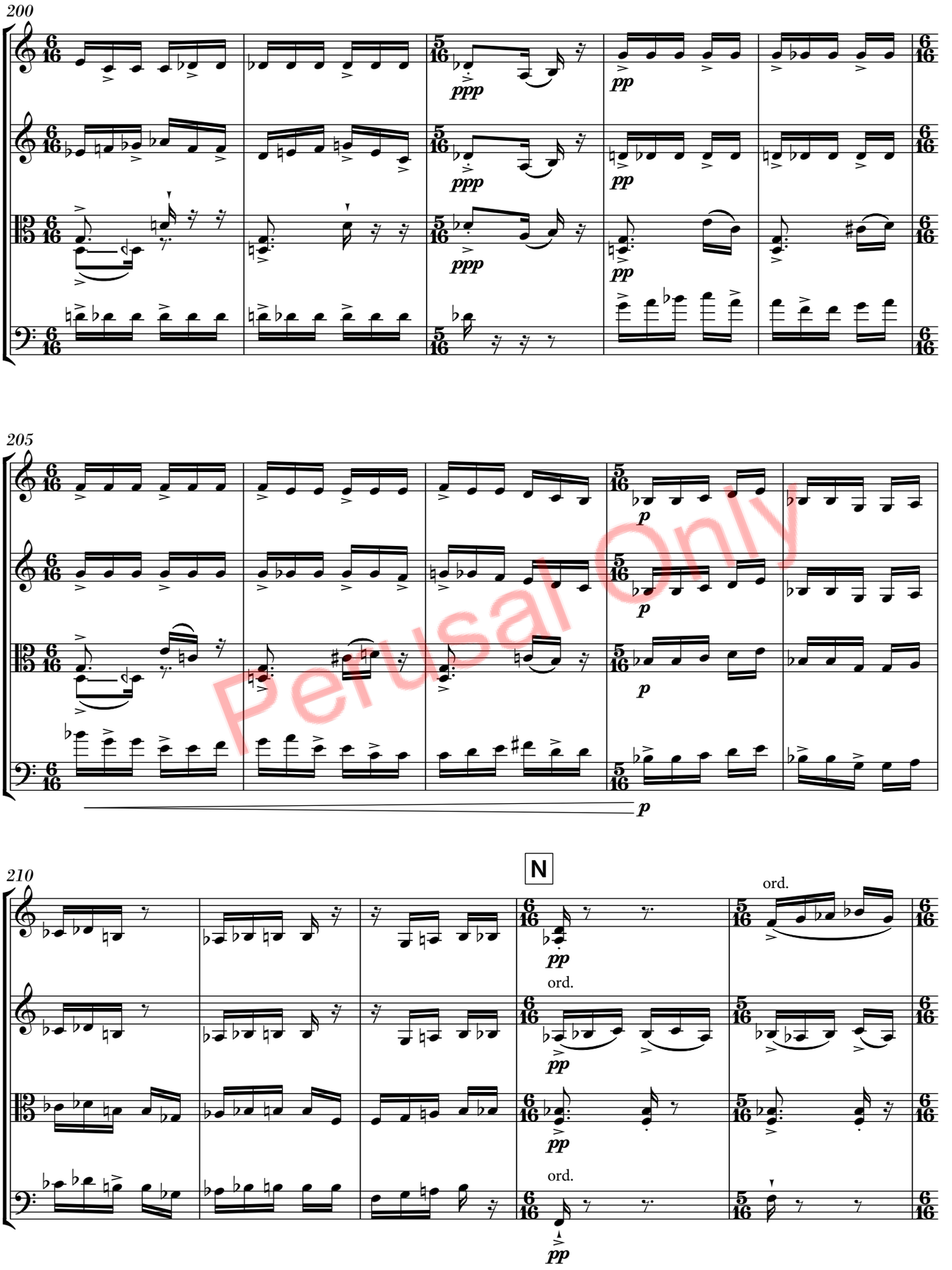

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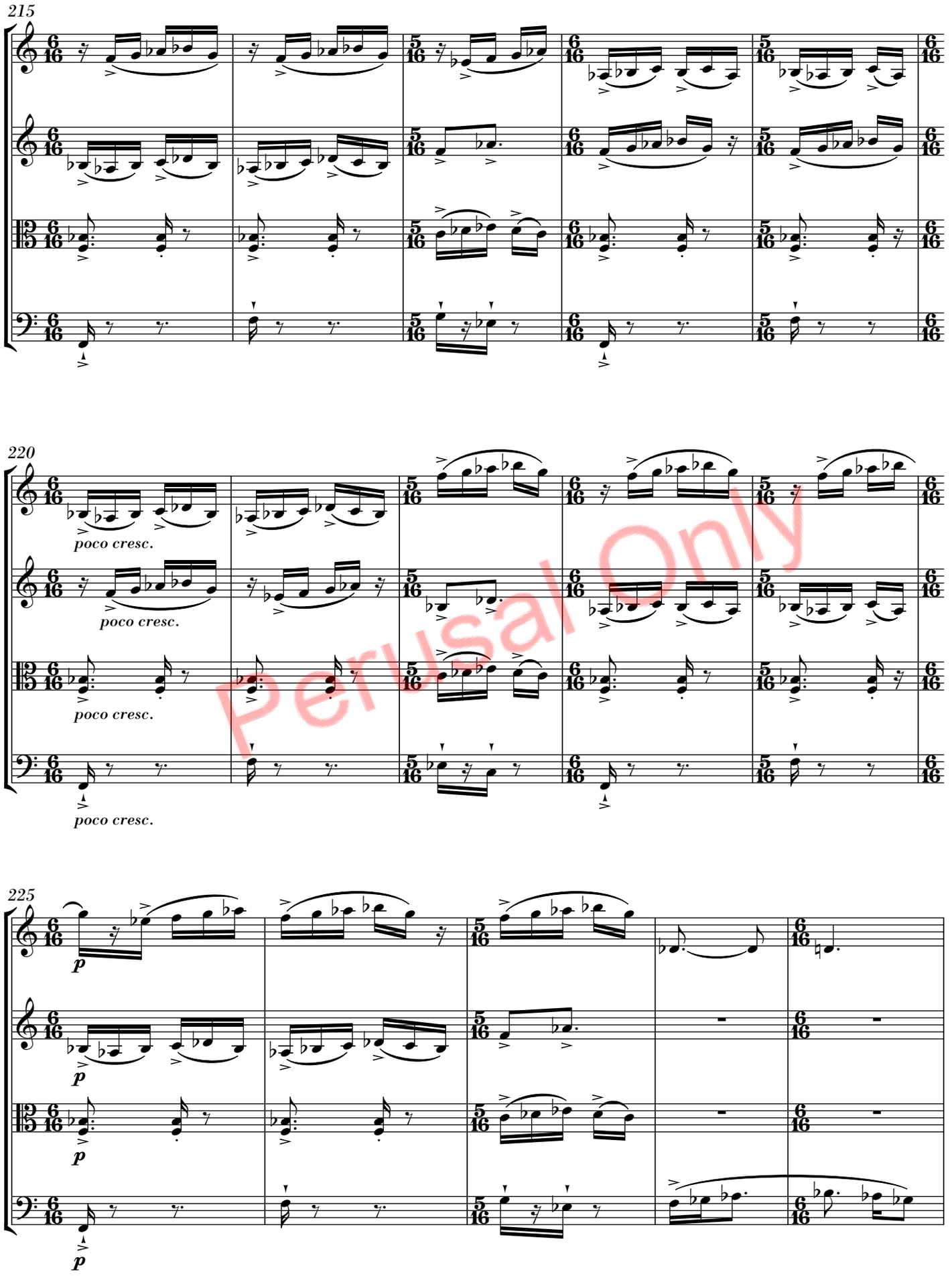

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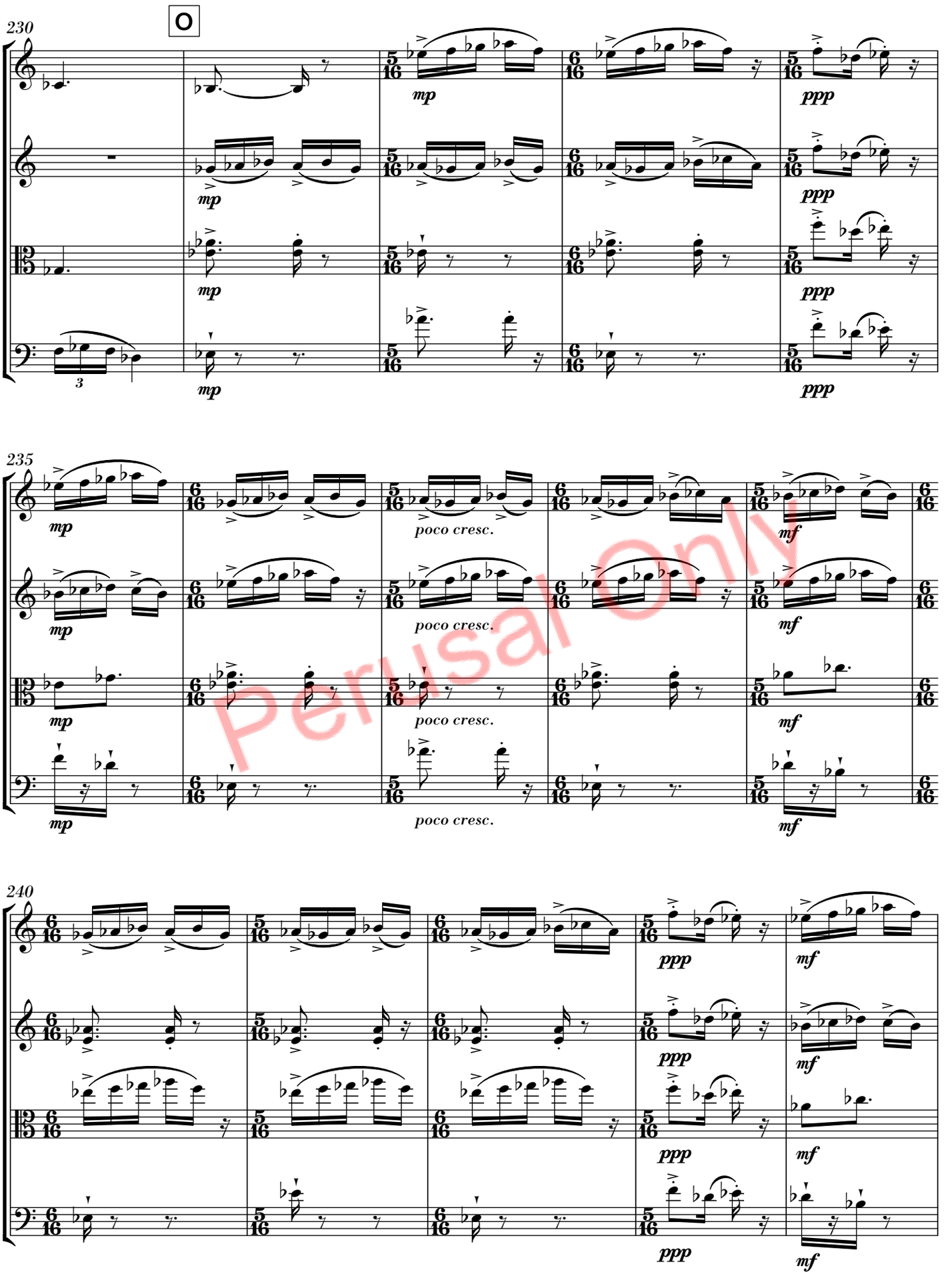

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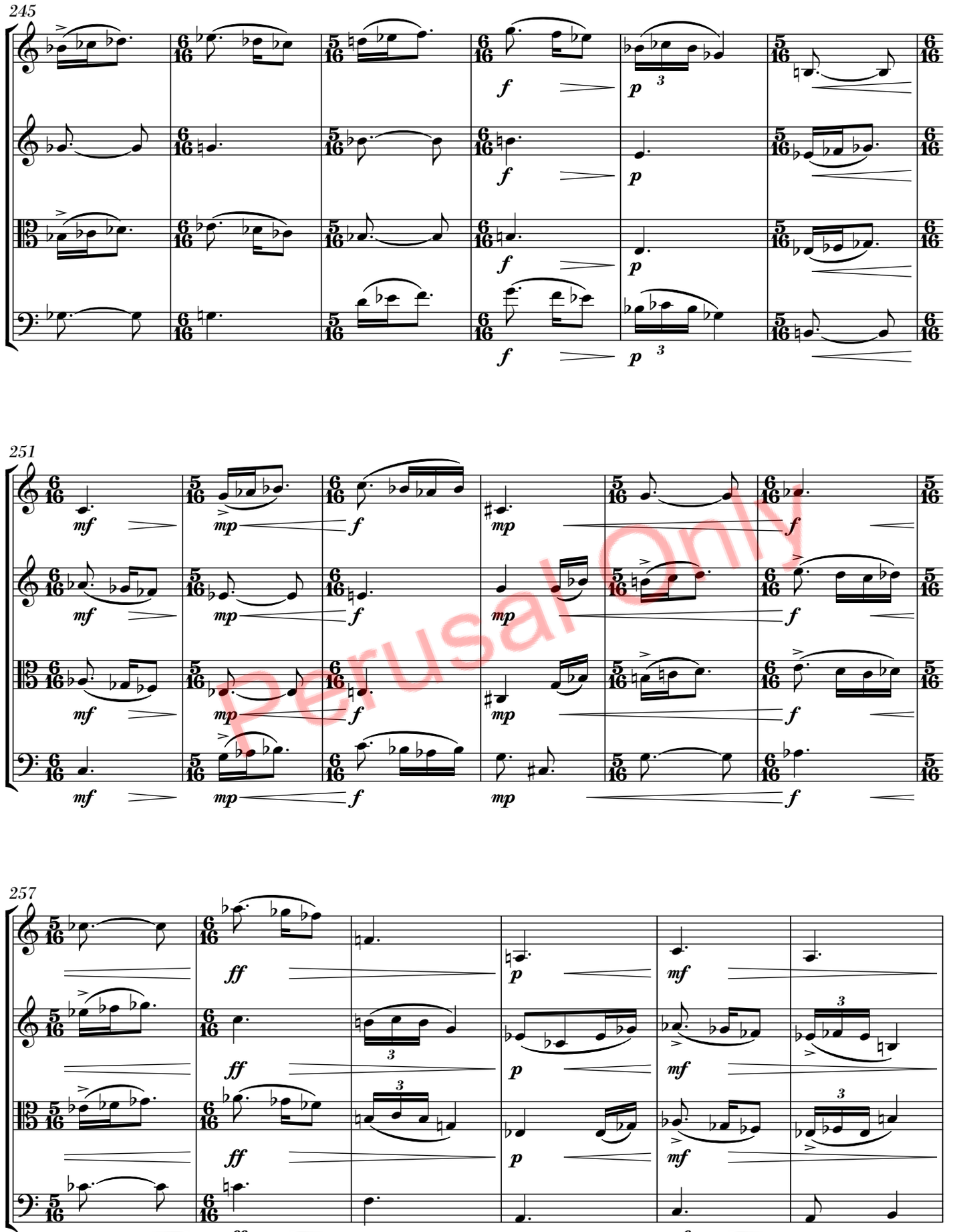
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257
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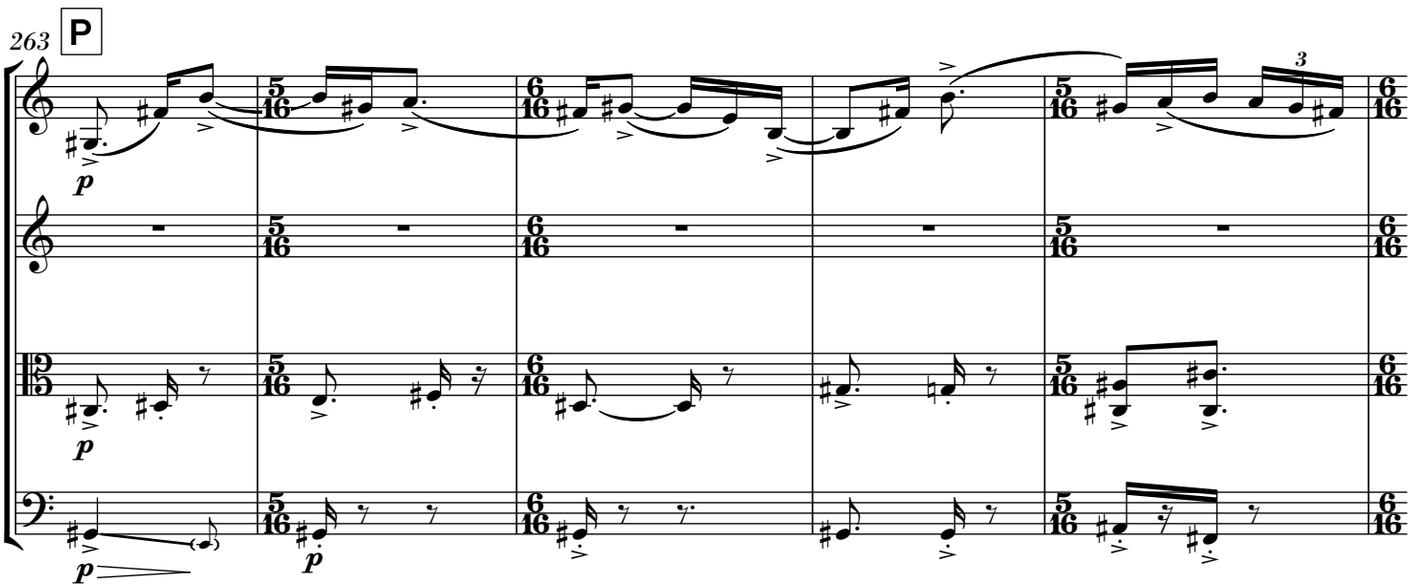

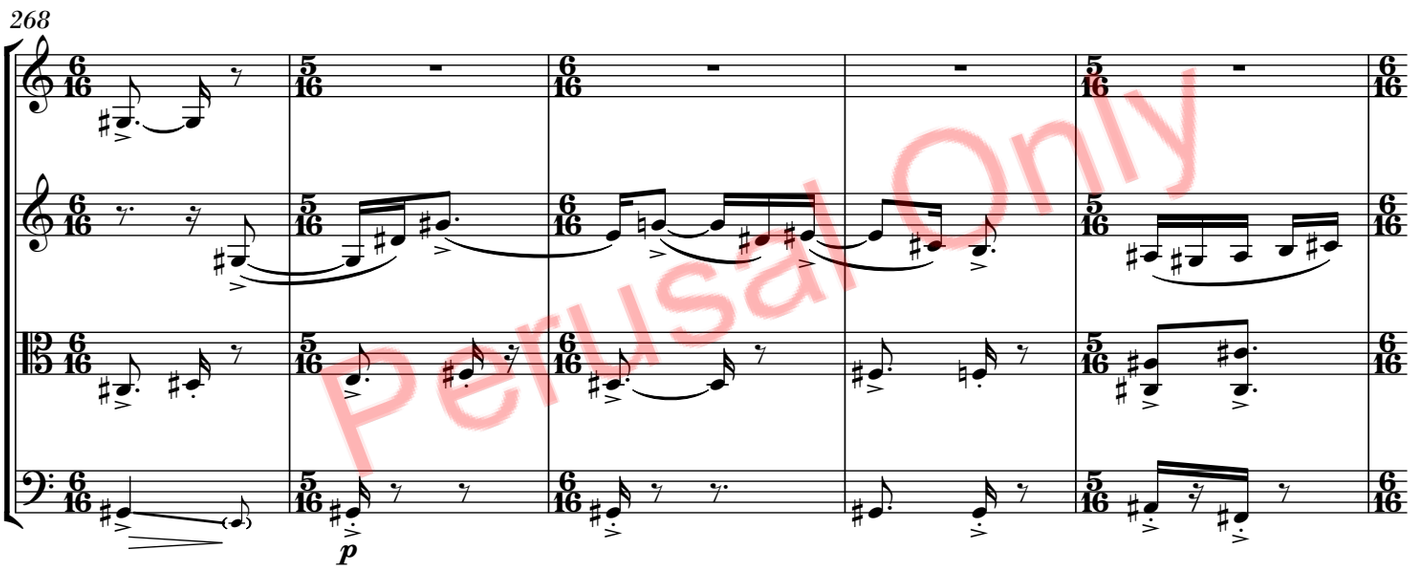

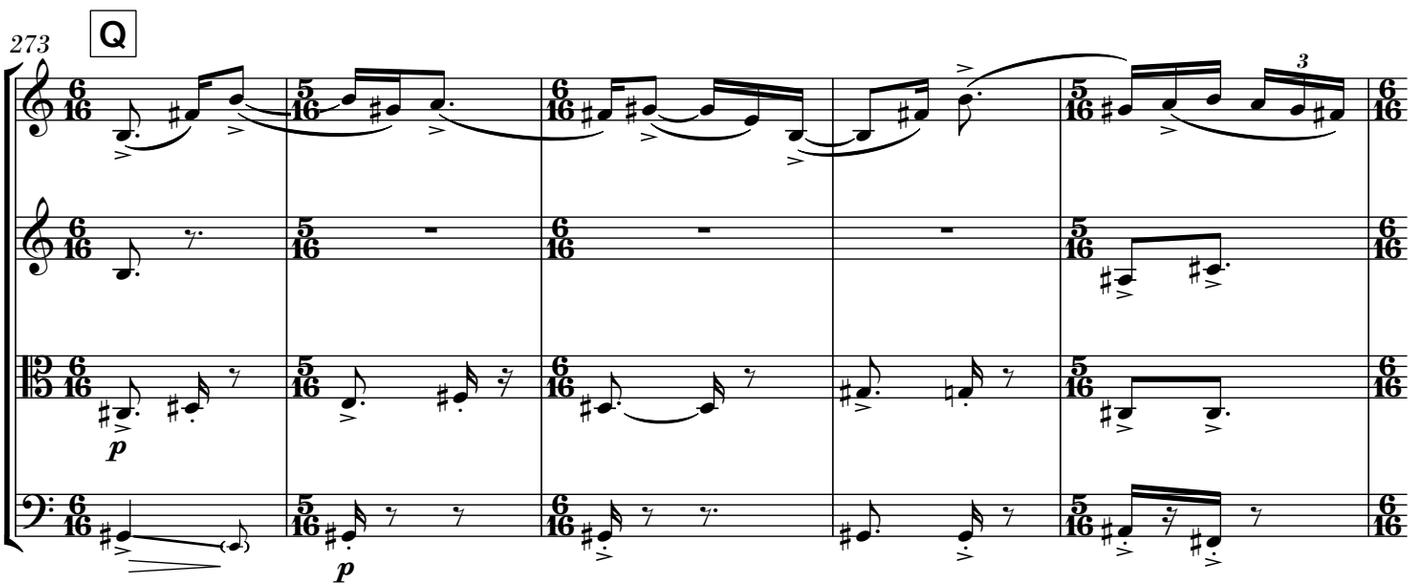

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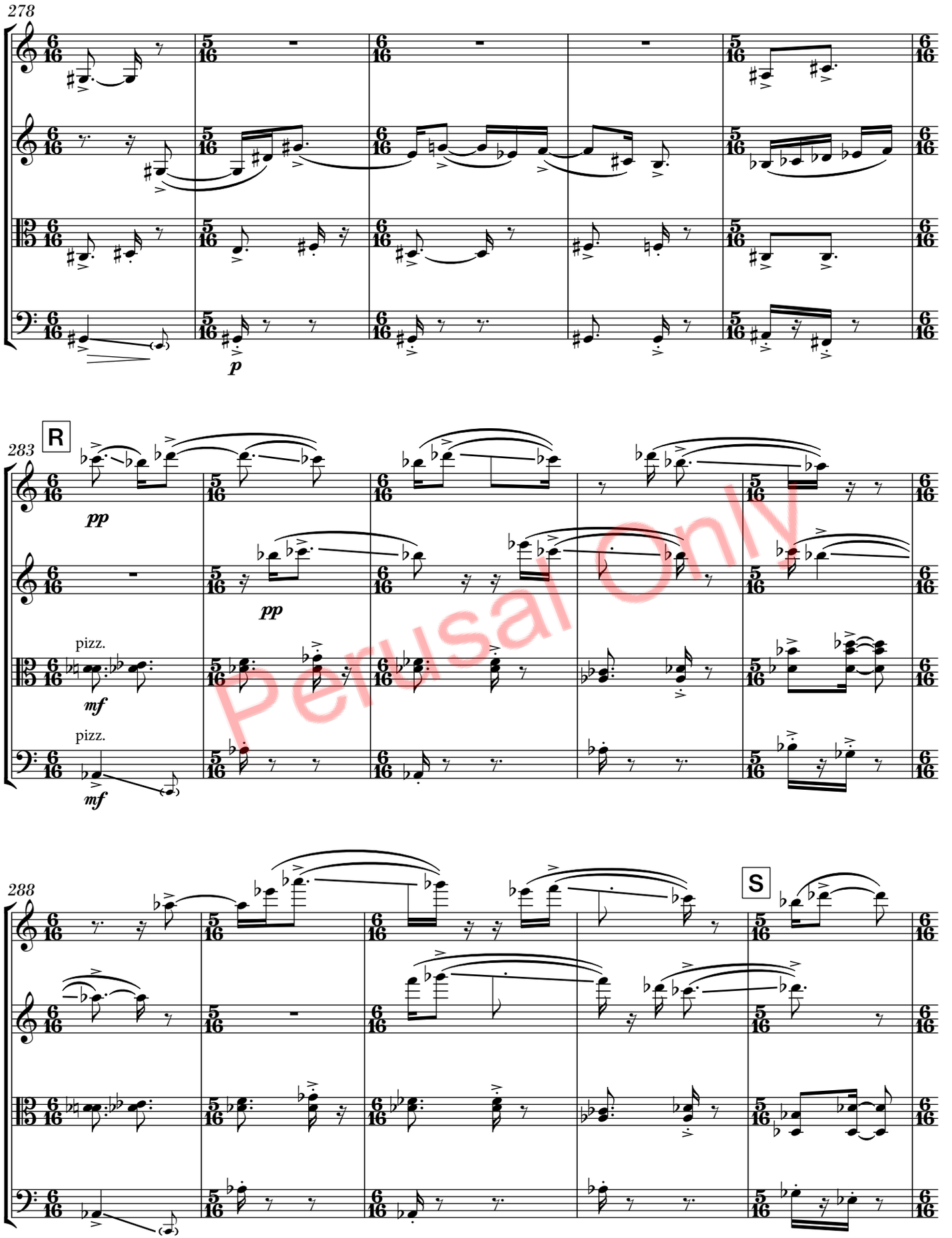

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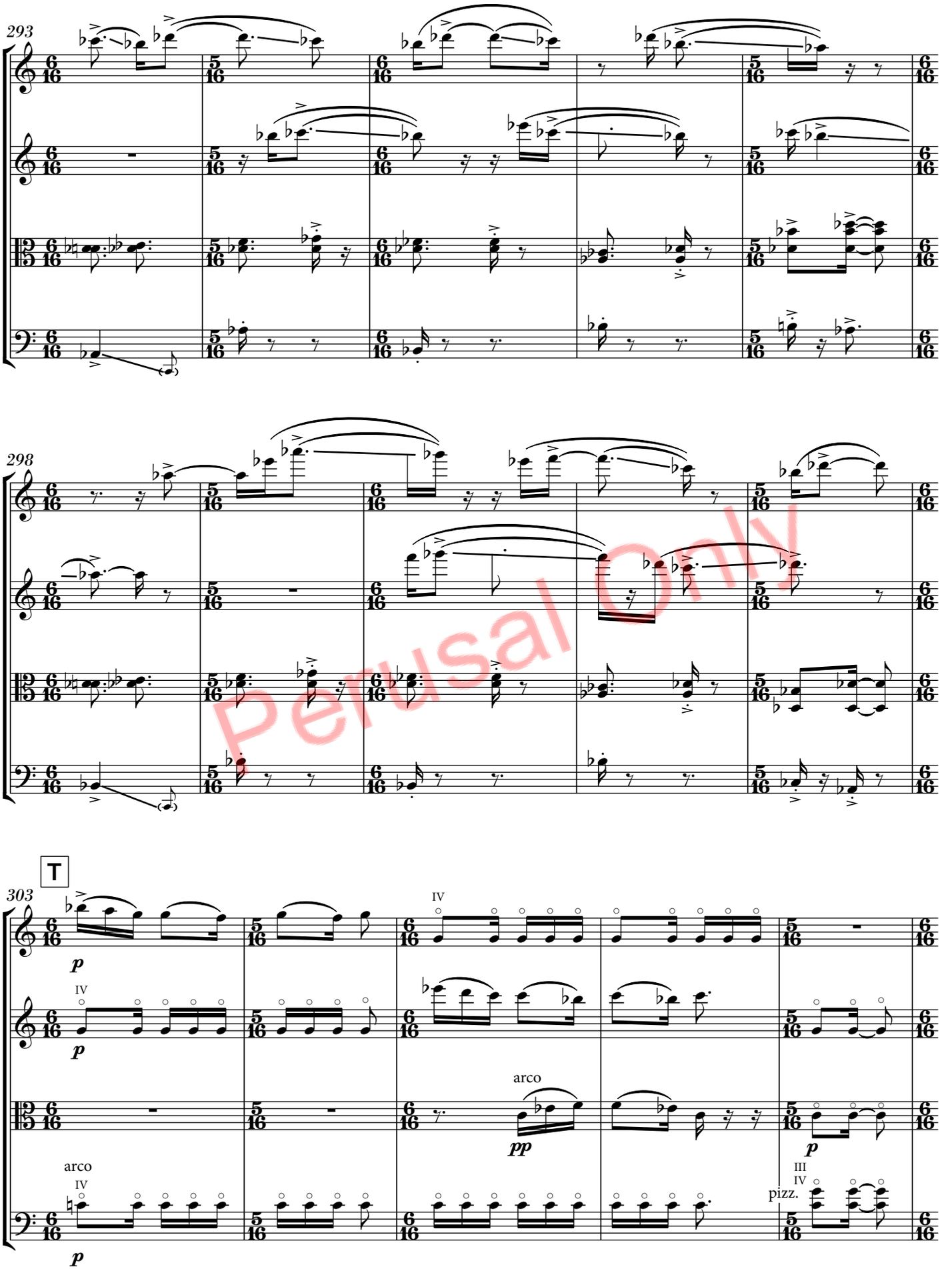

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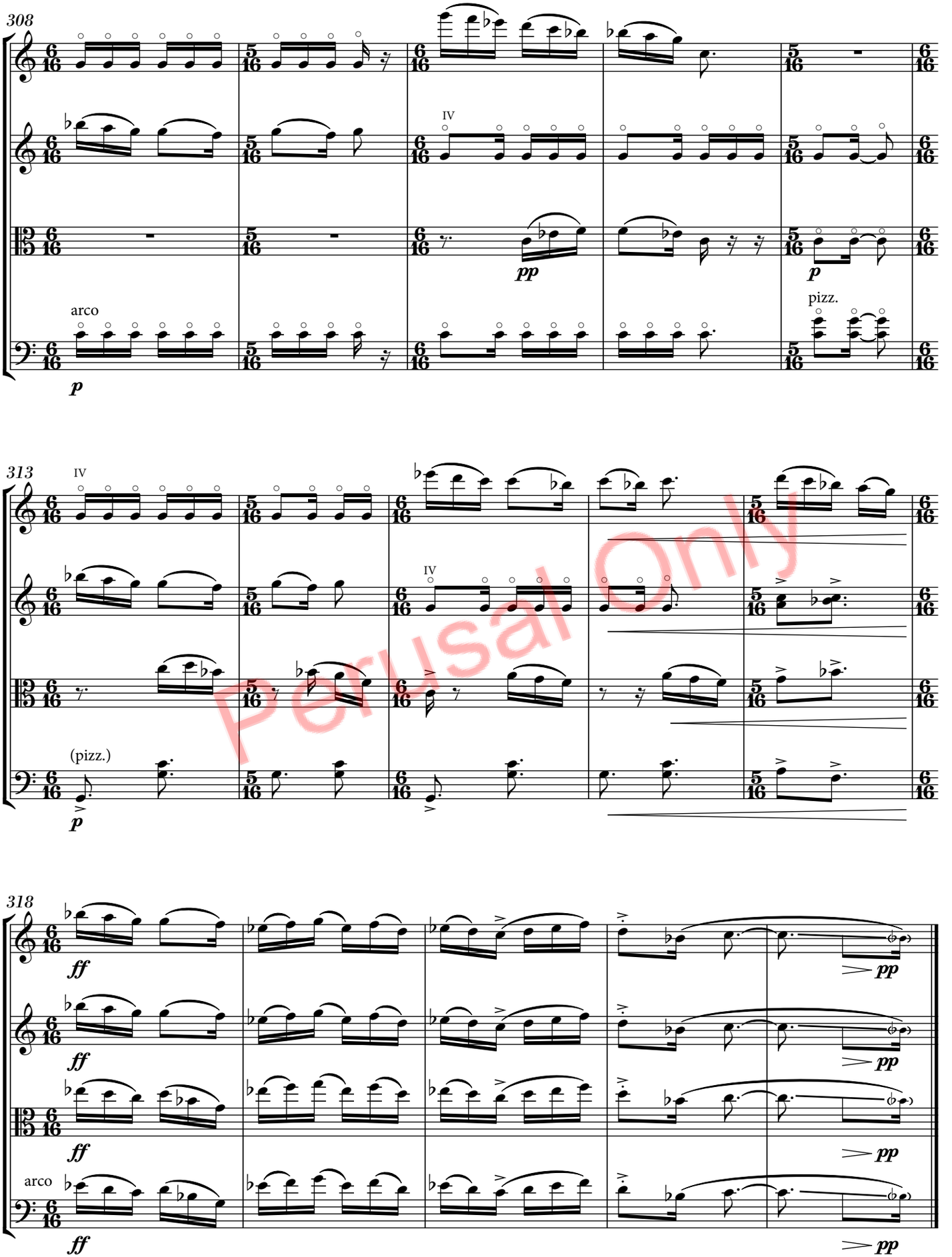
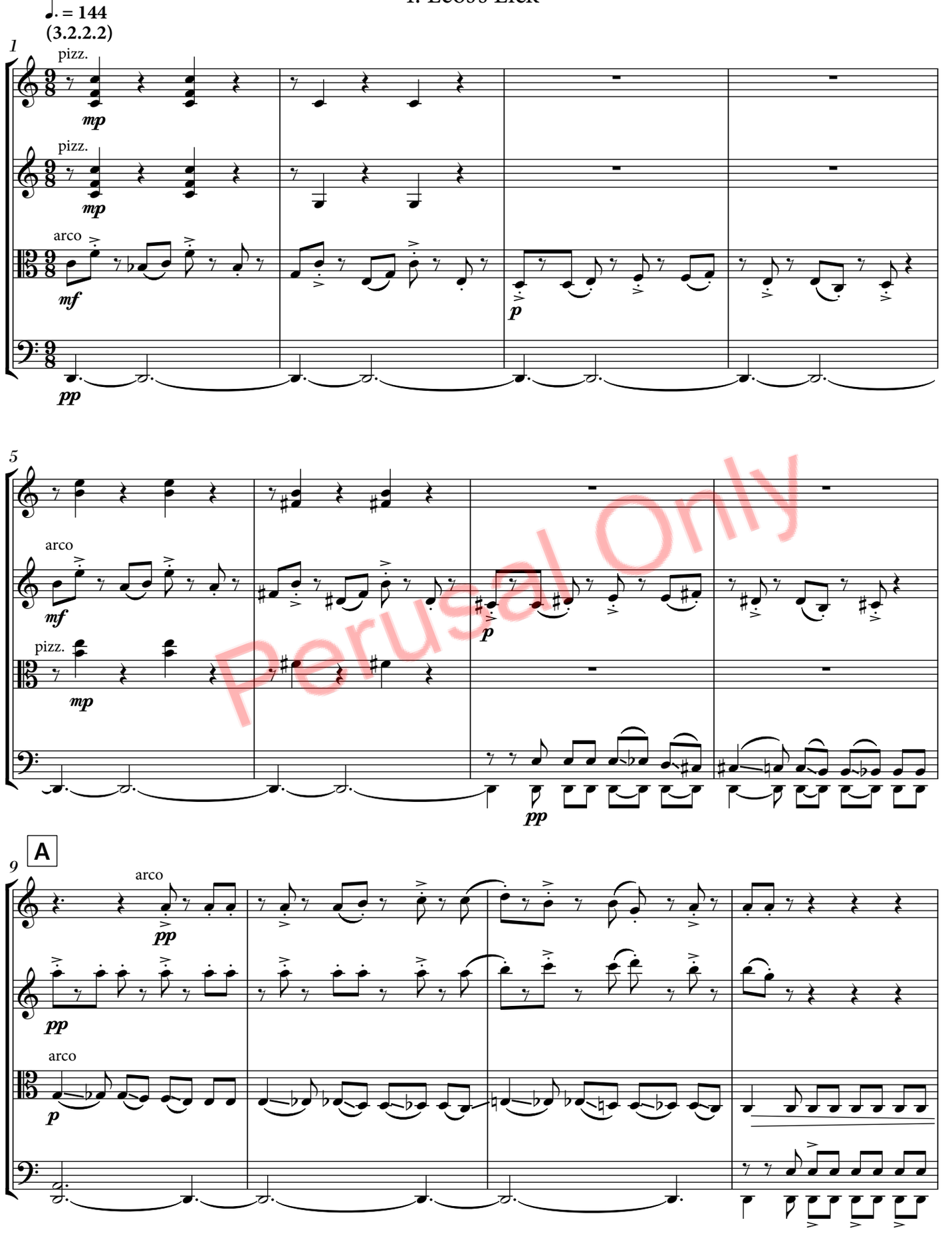


Perusal Only

4. Leoš's Lick



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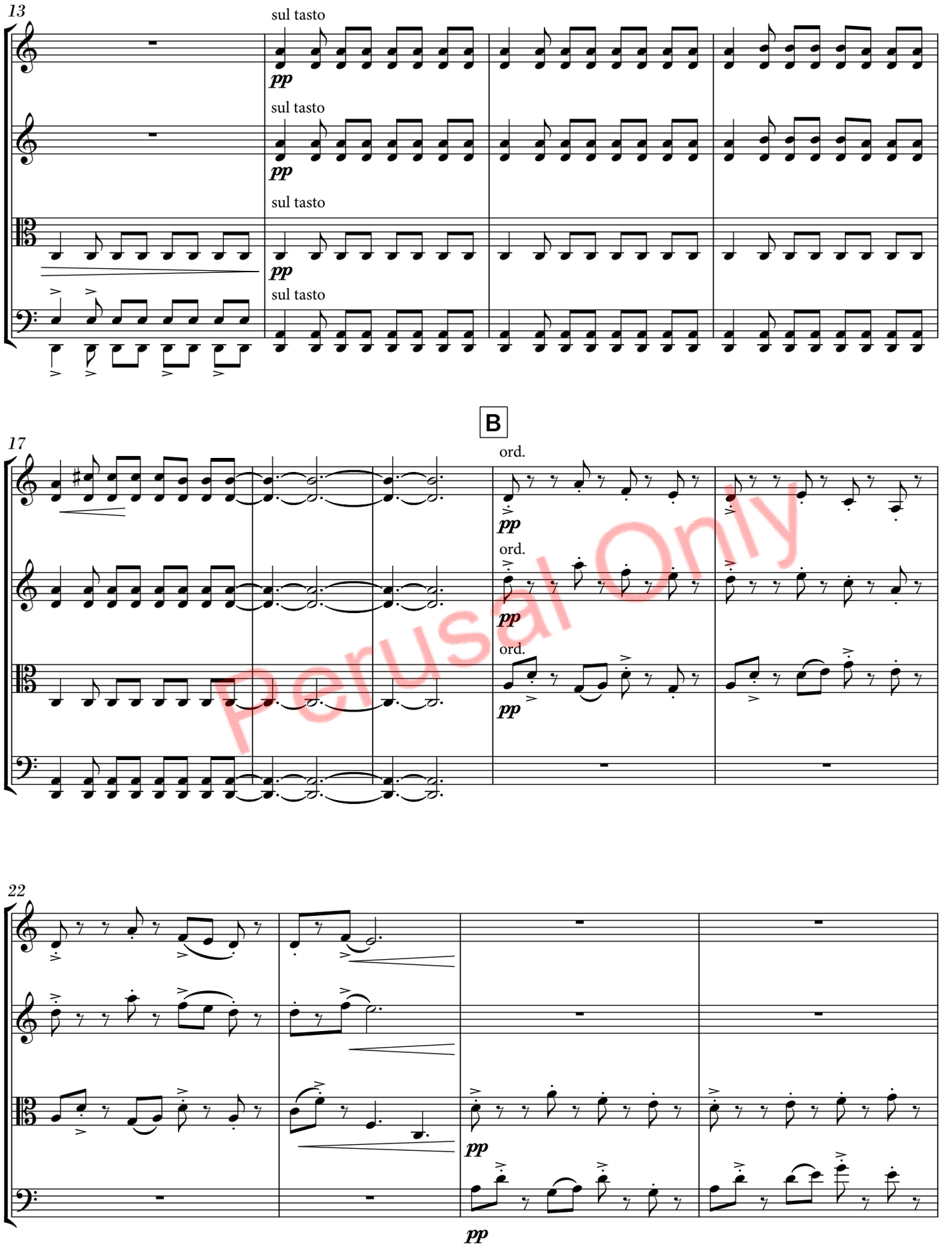

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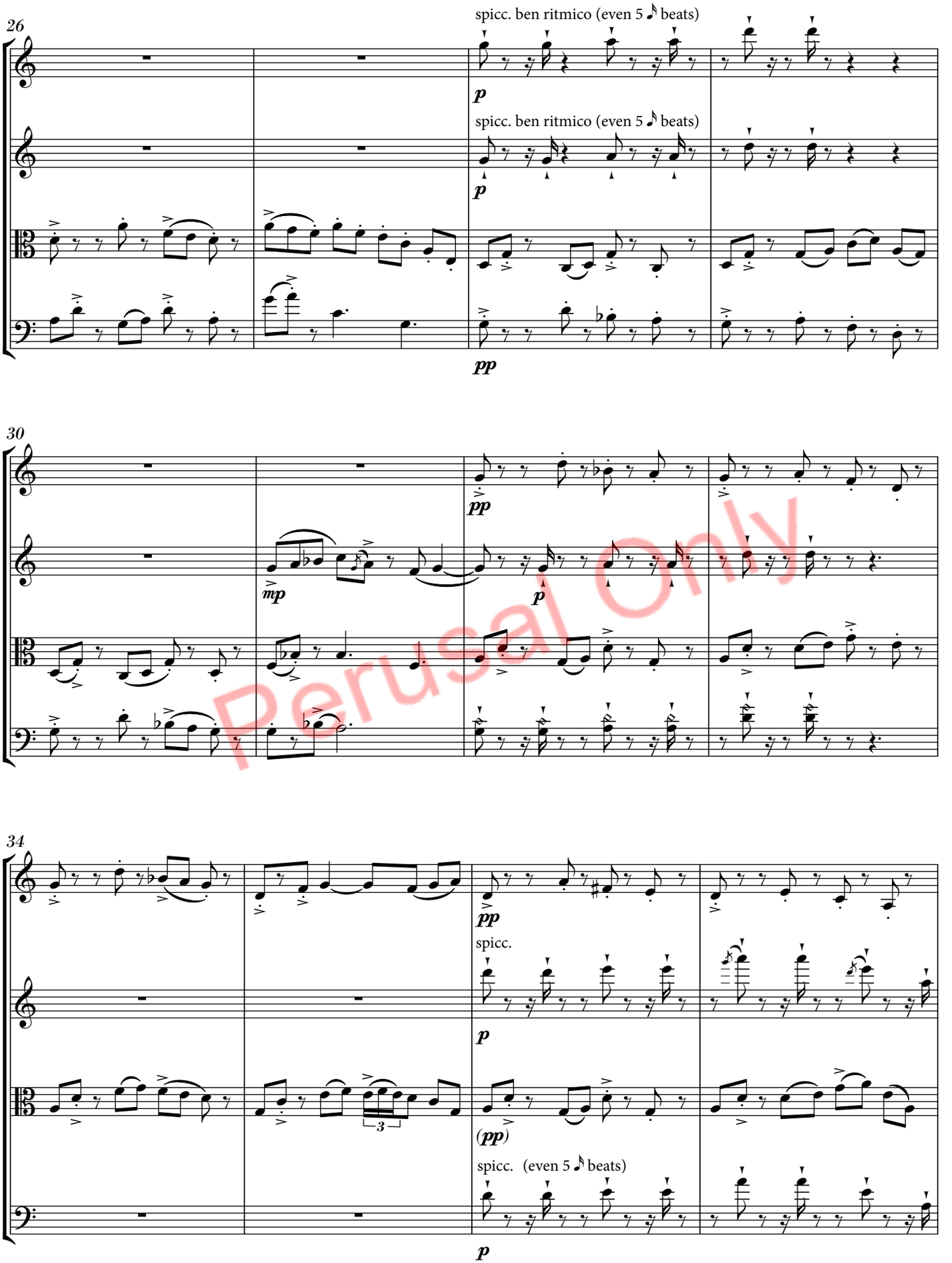

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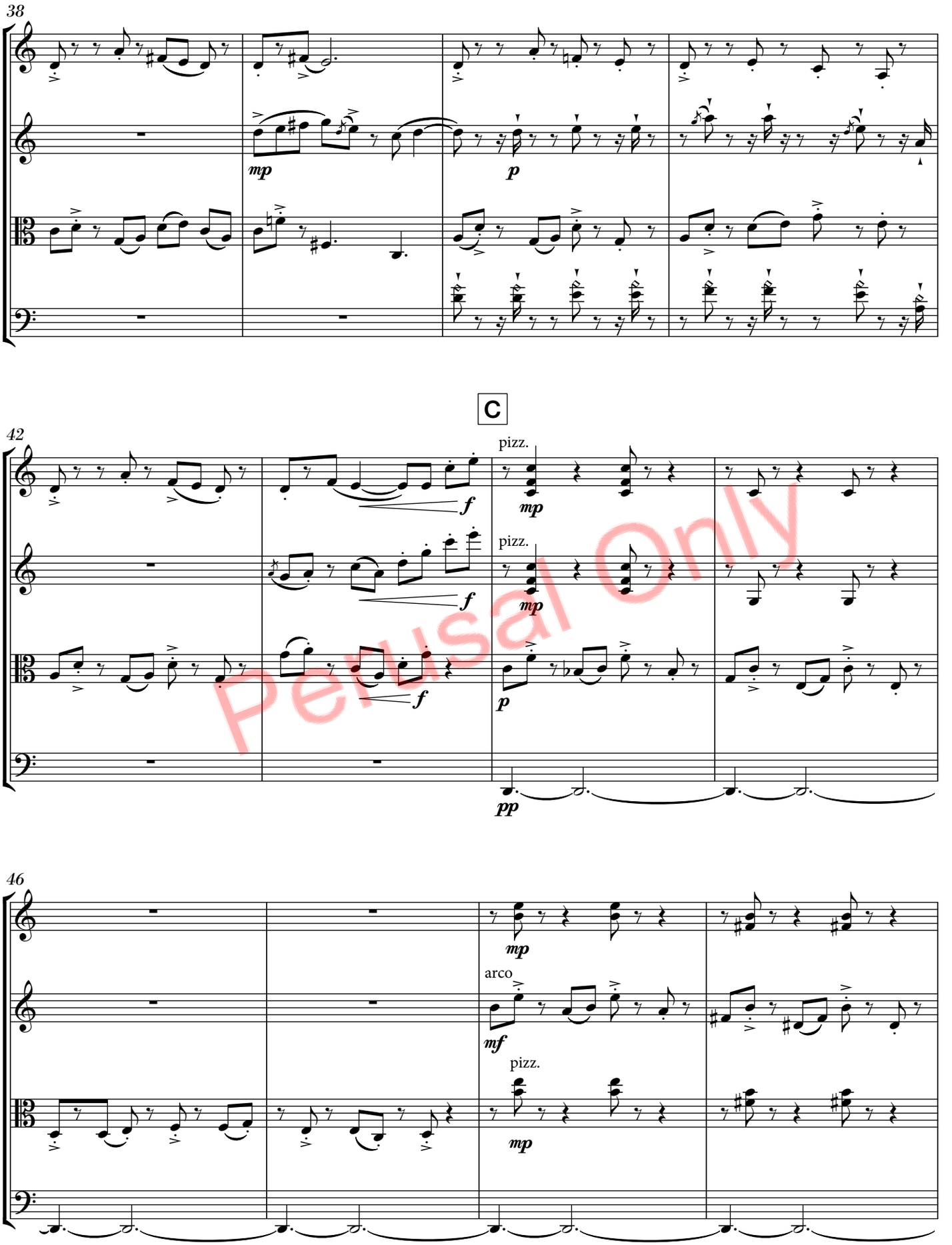

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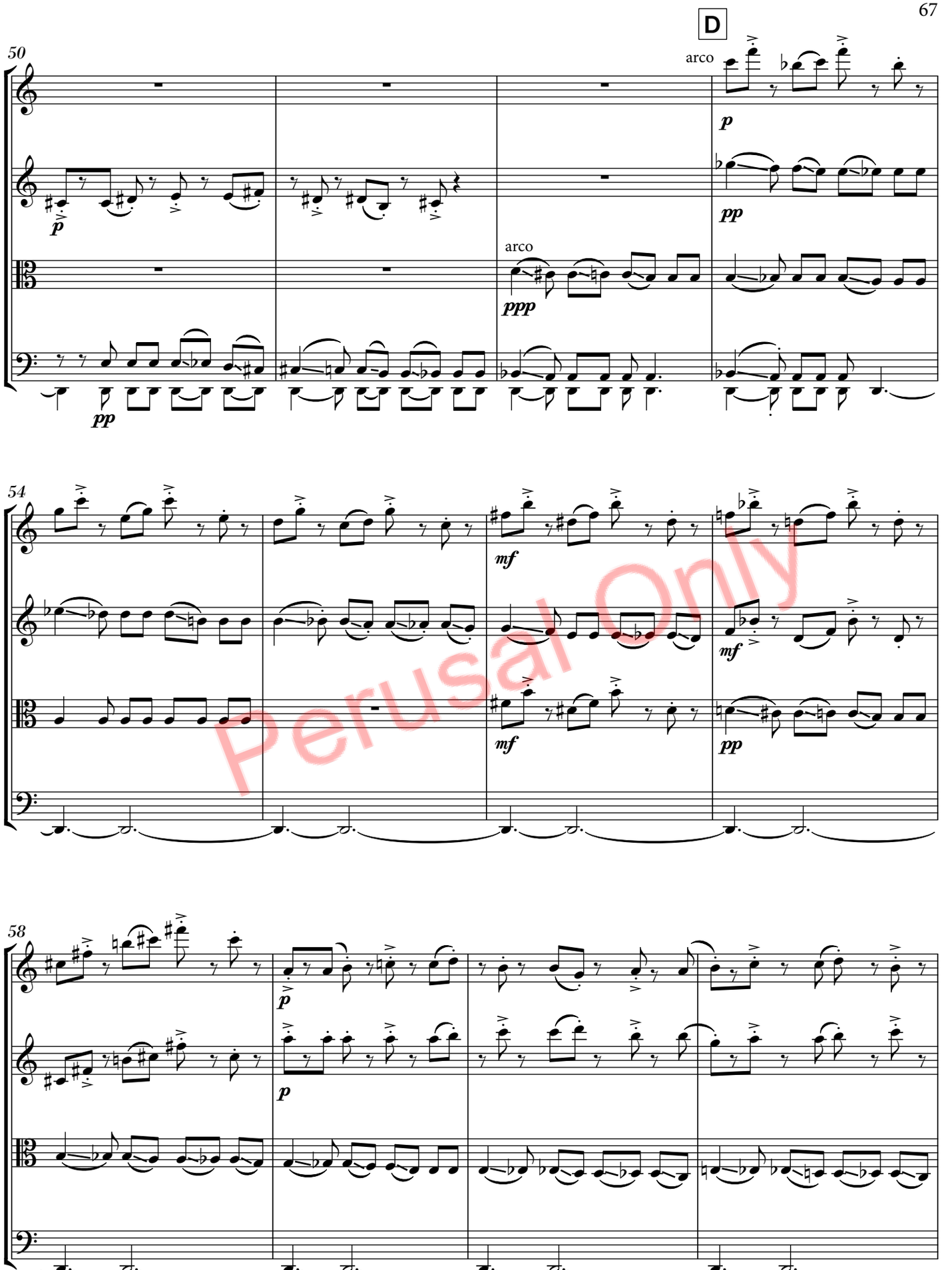

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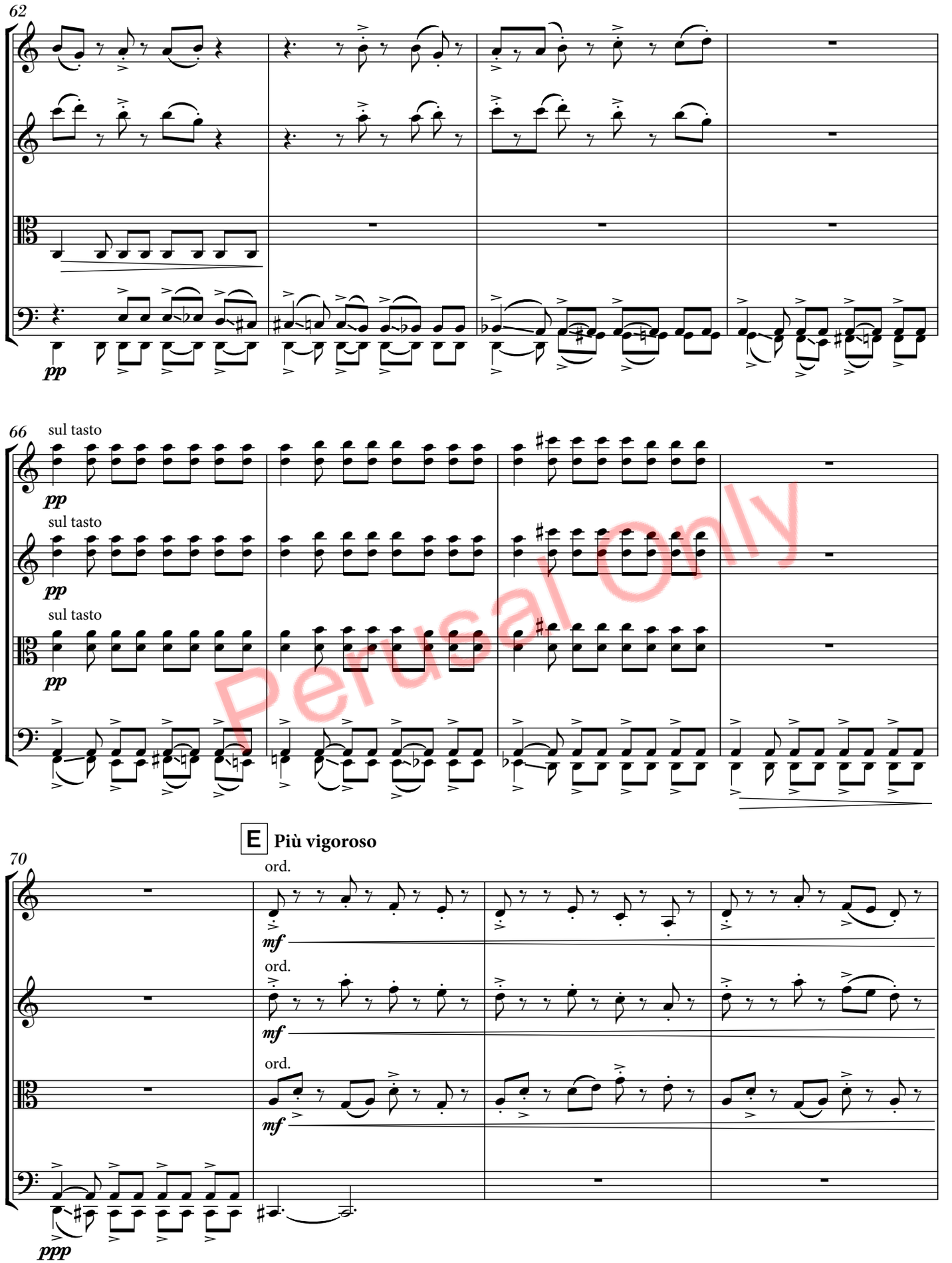

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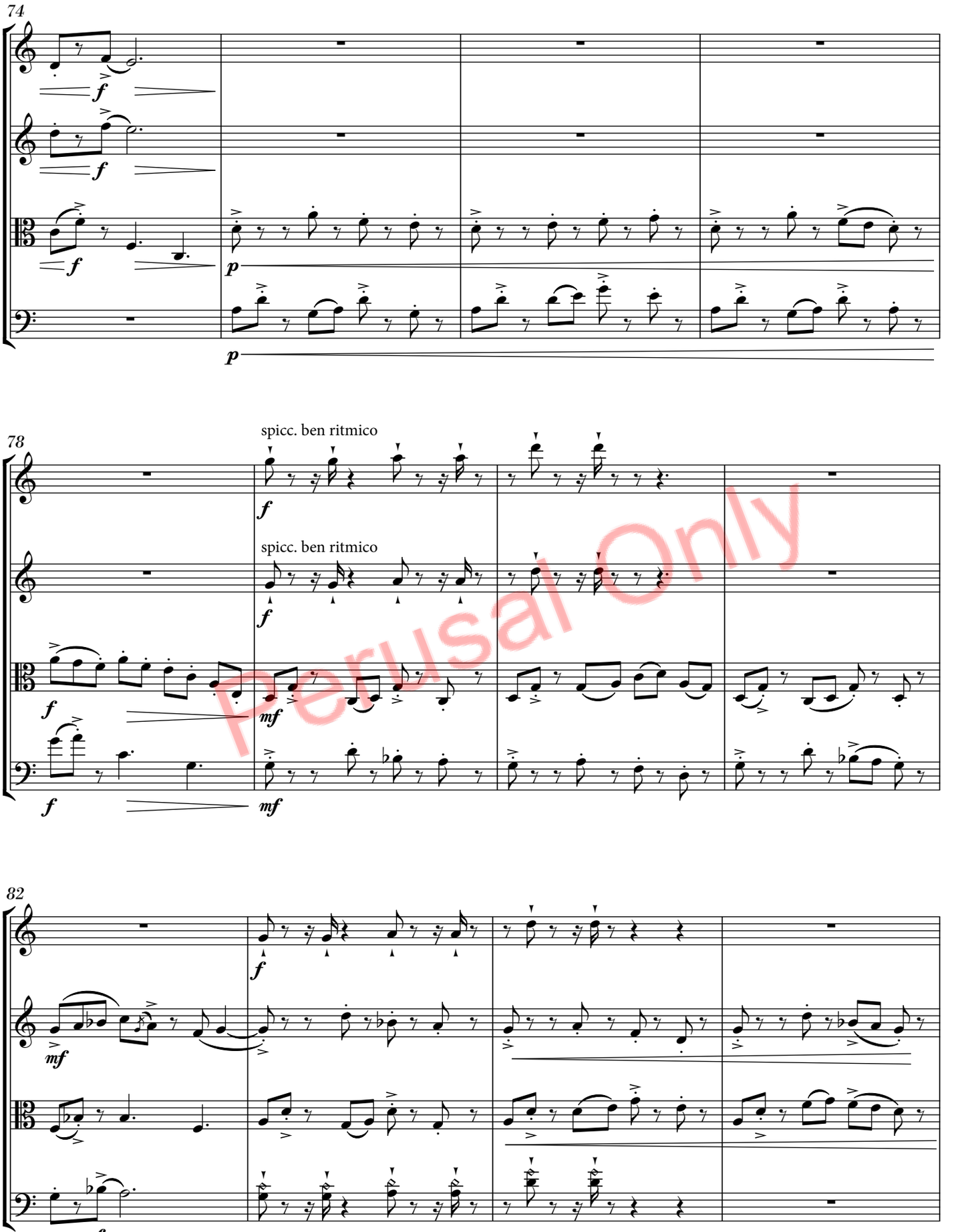

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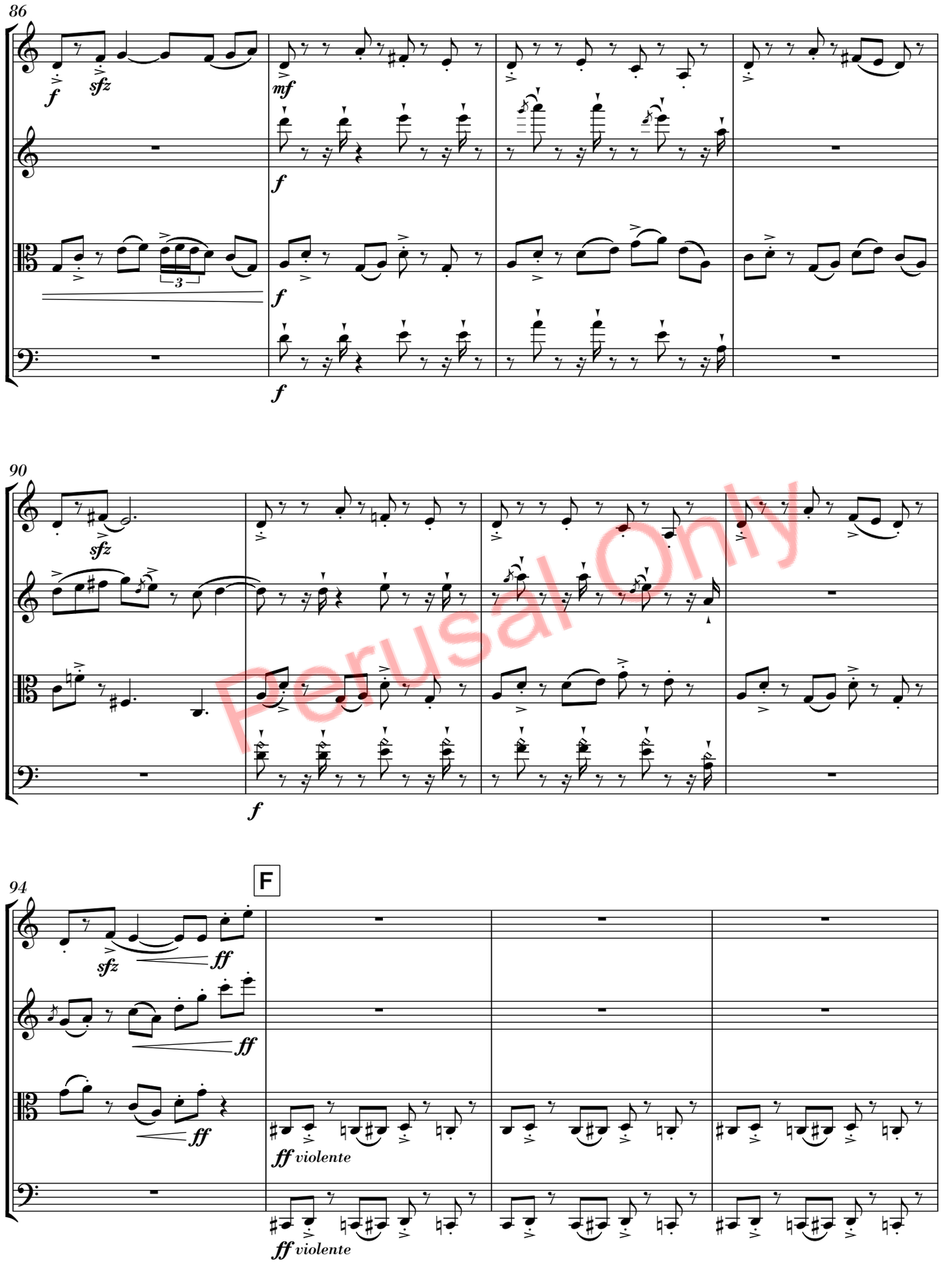

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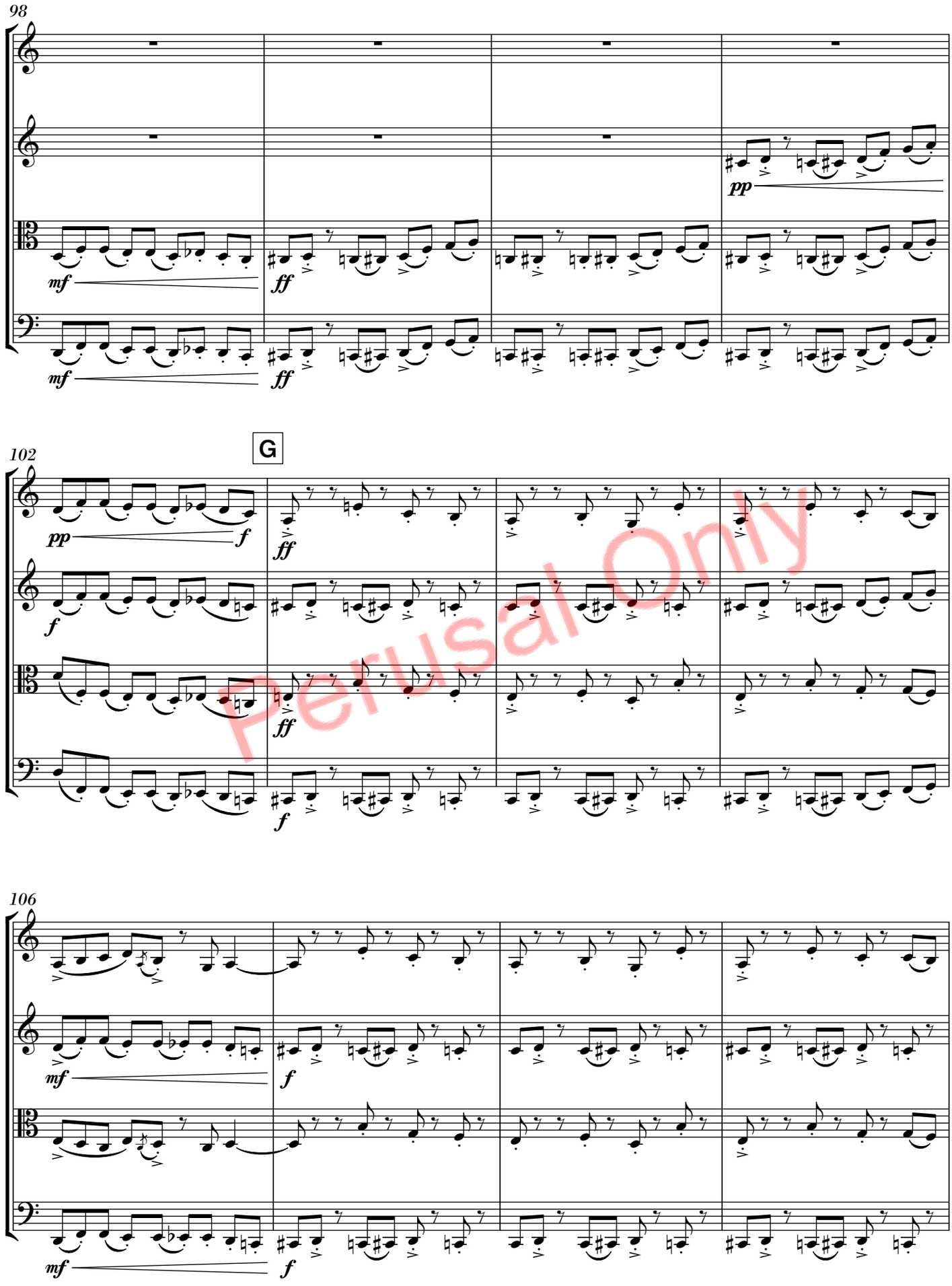

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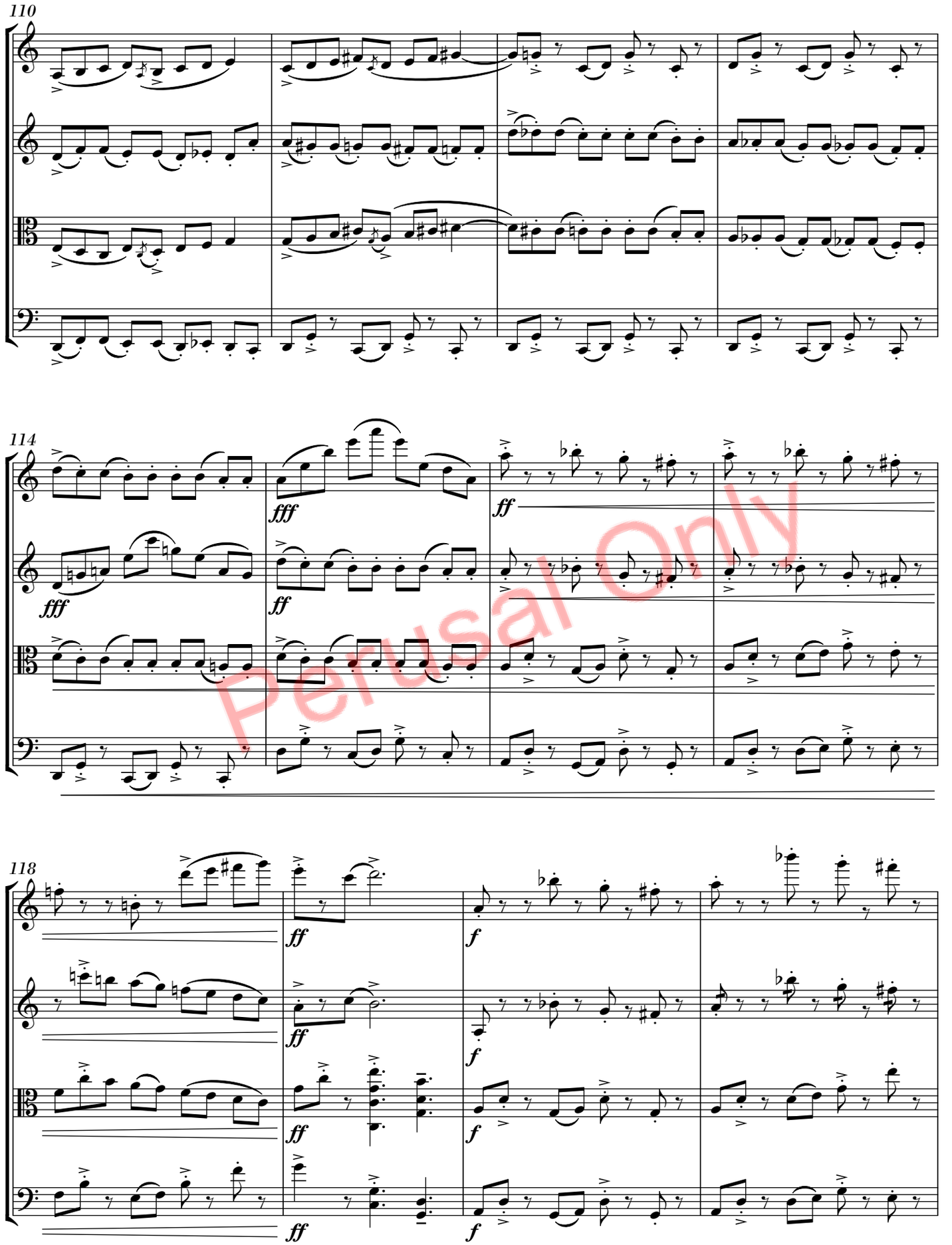

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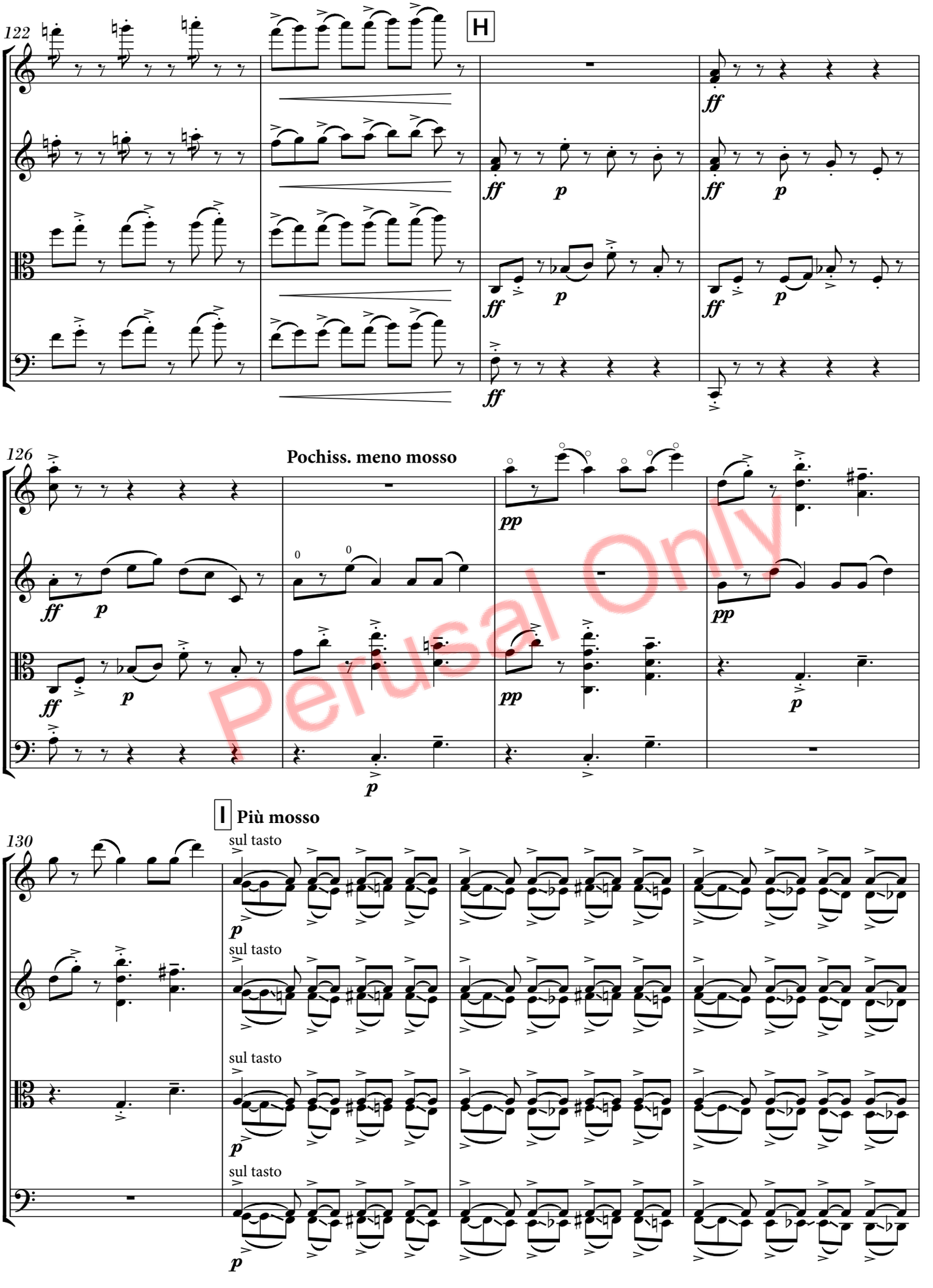

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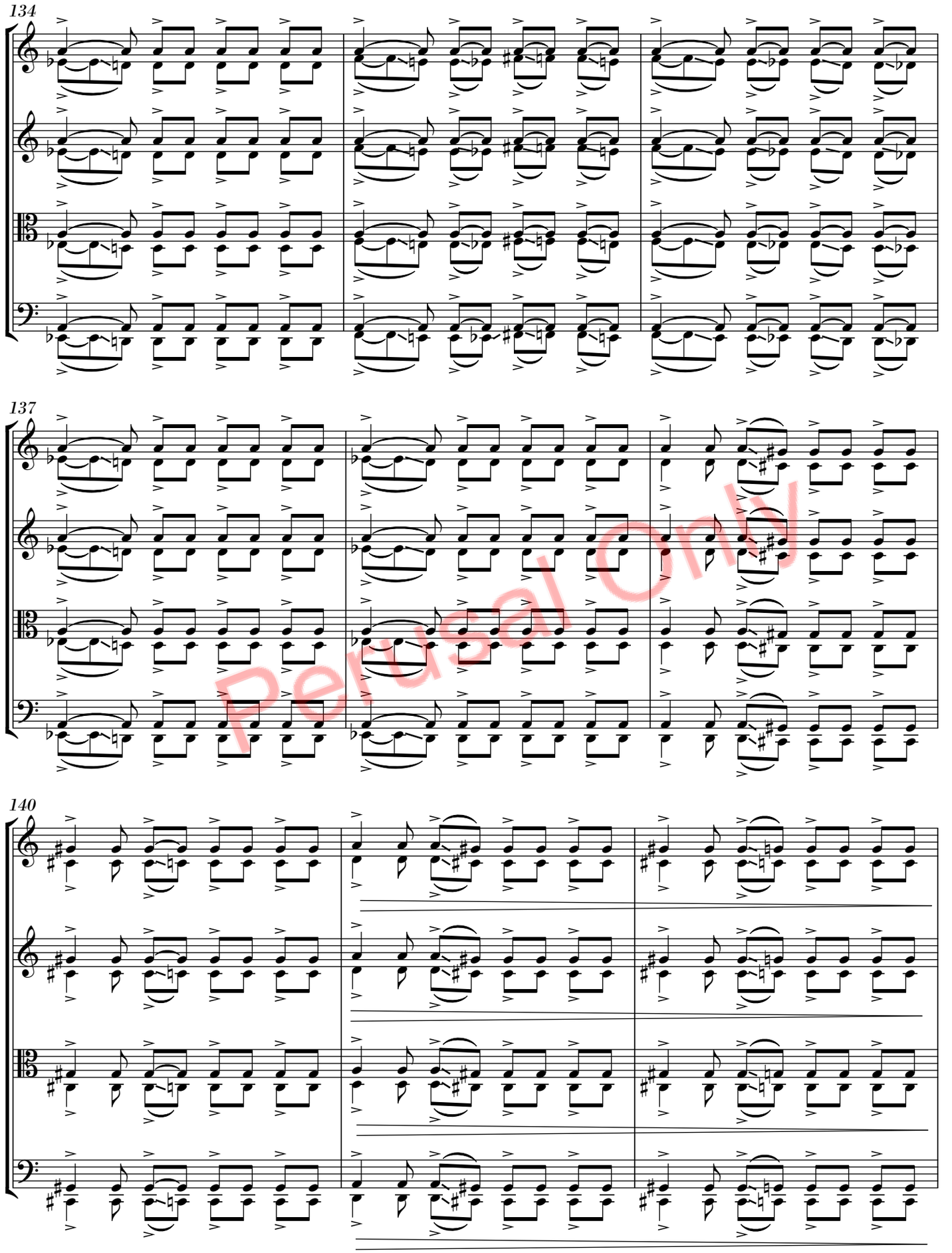

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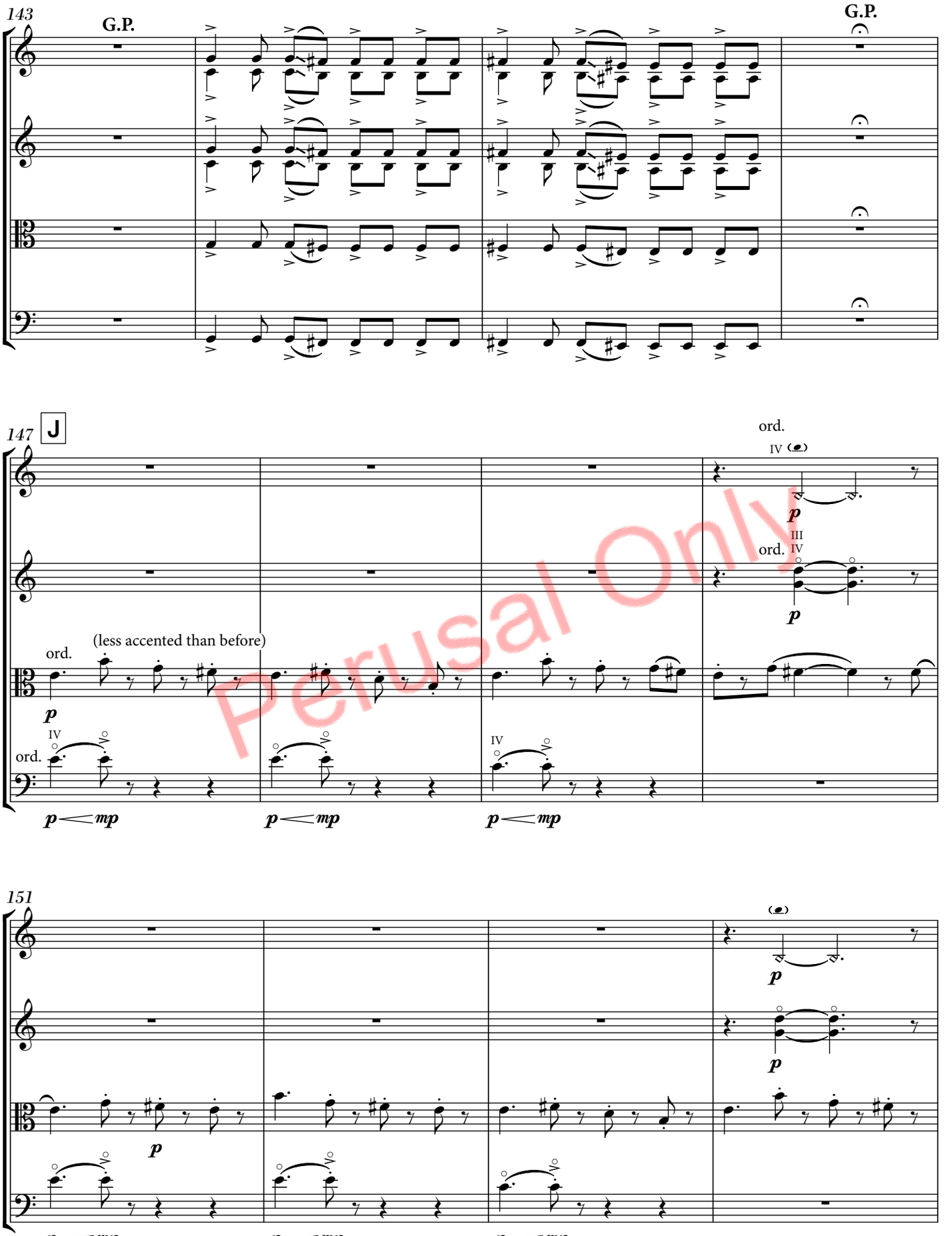

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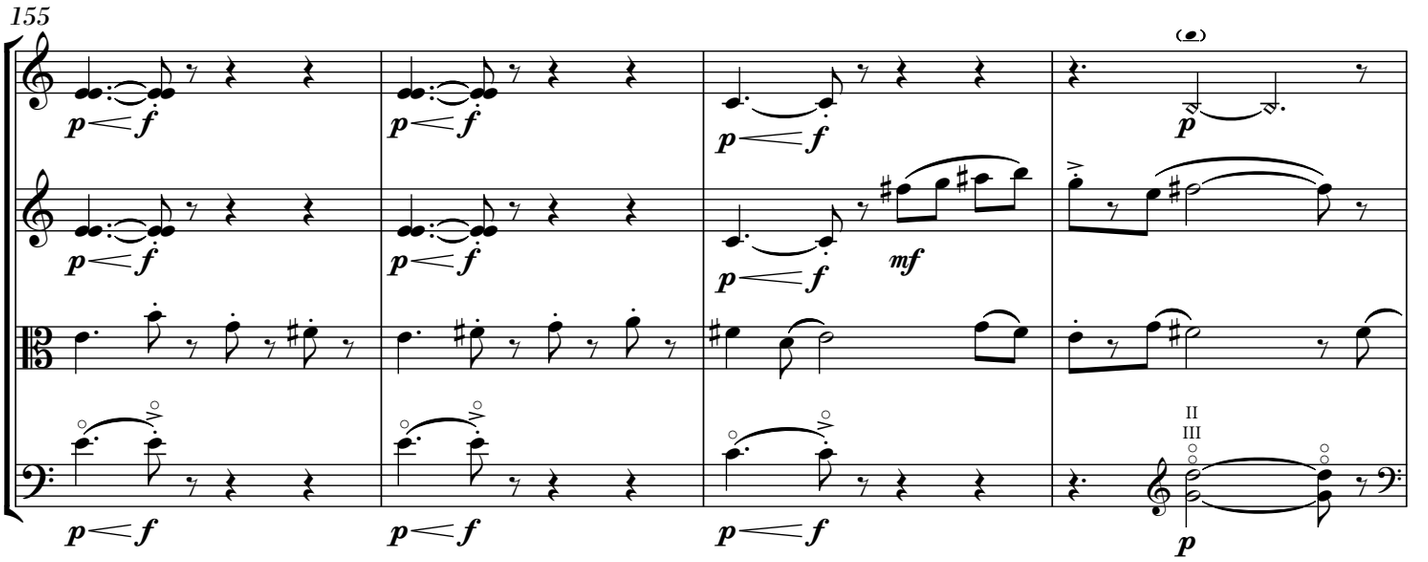

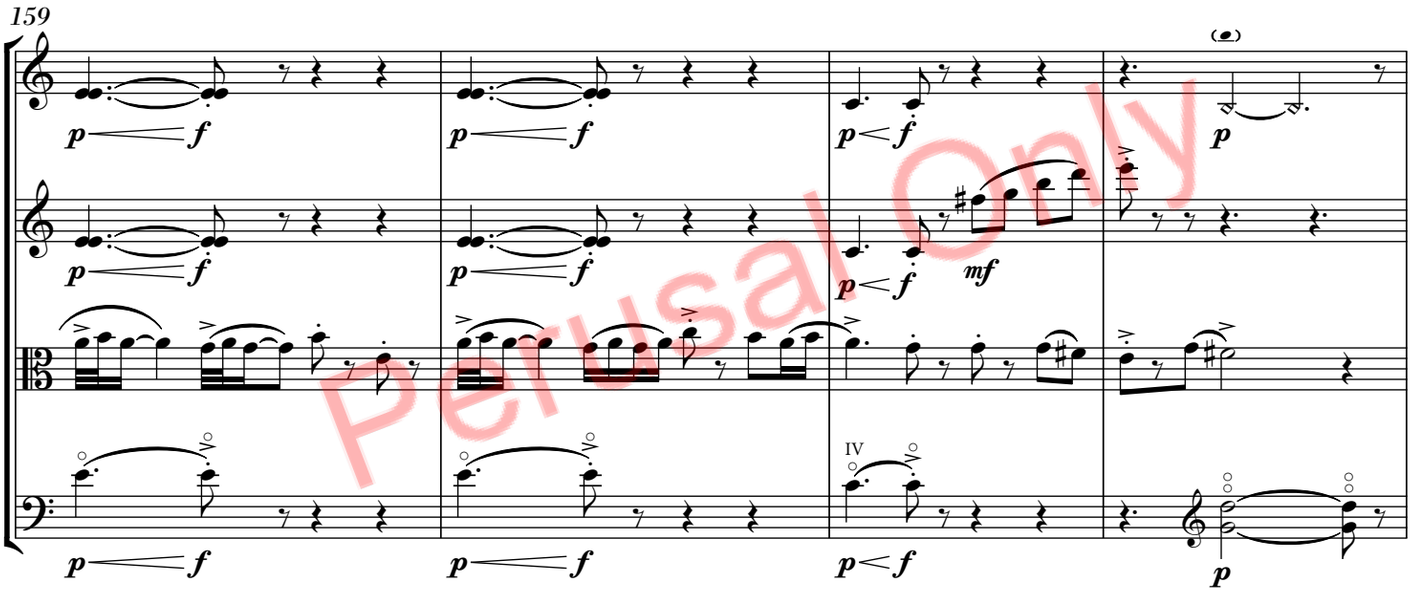

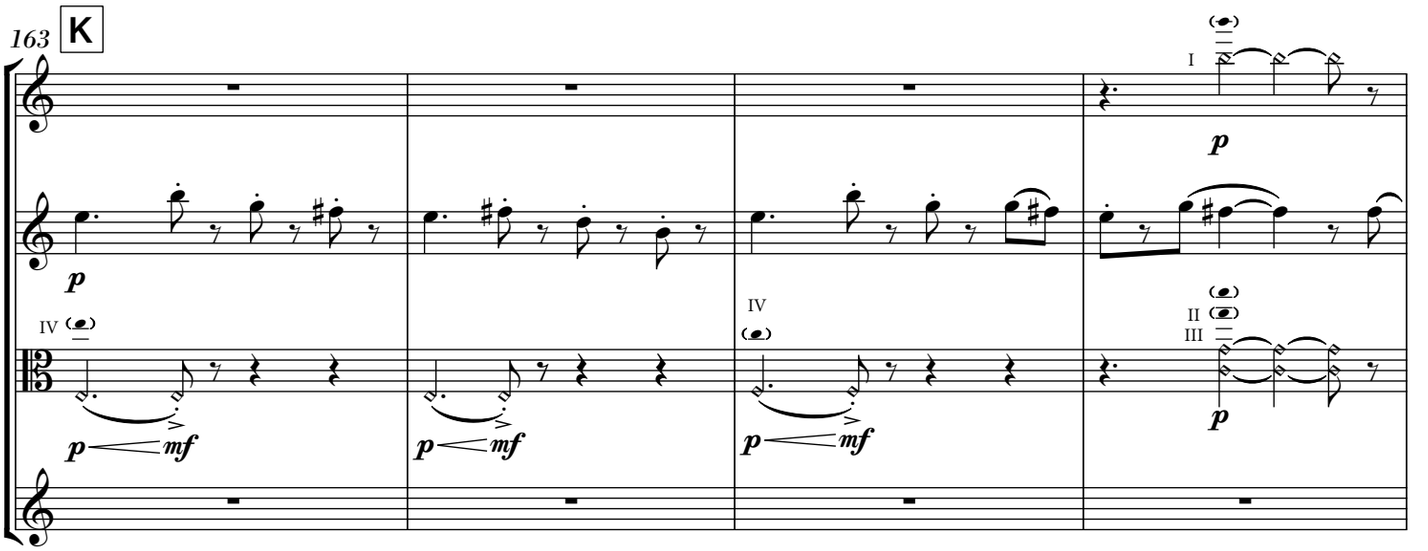

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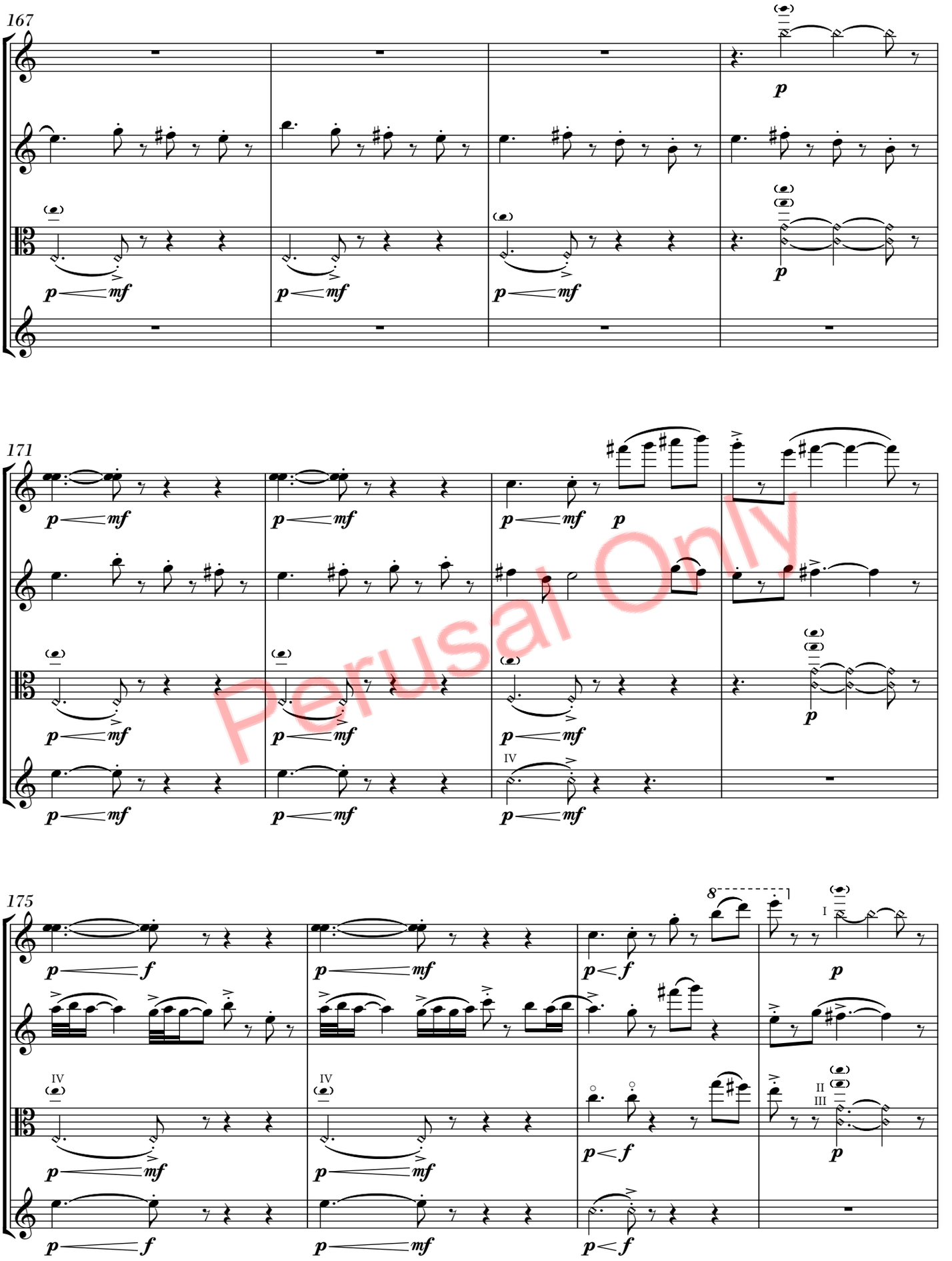
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8
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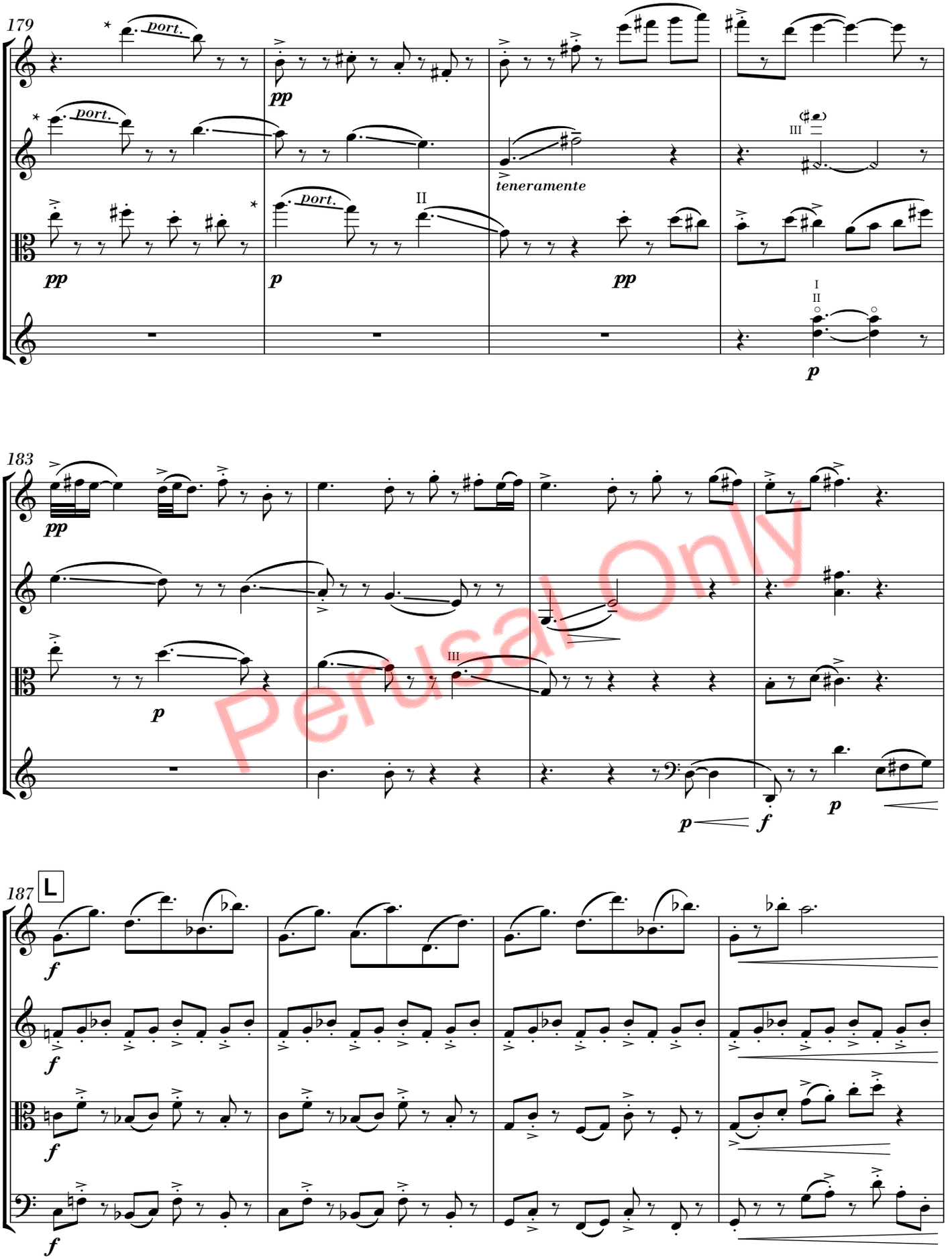

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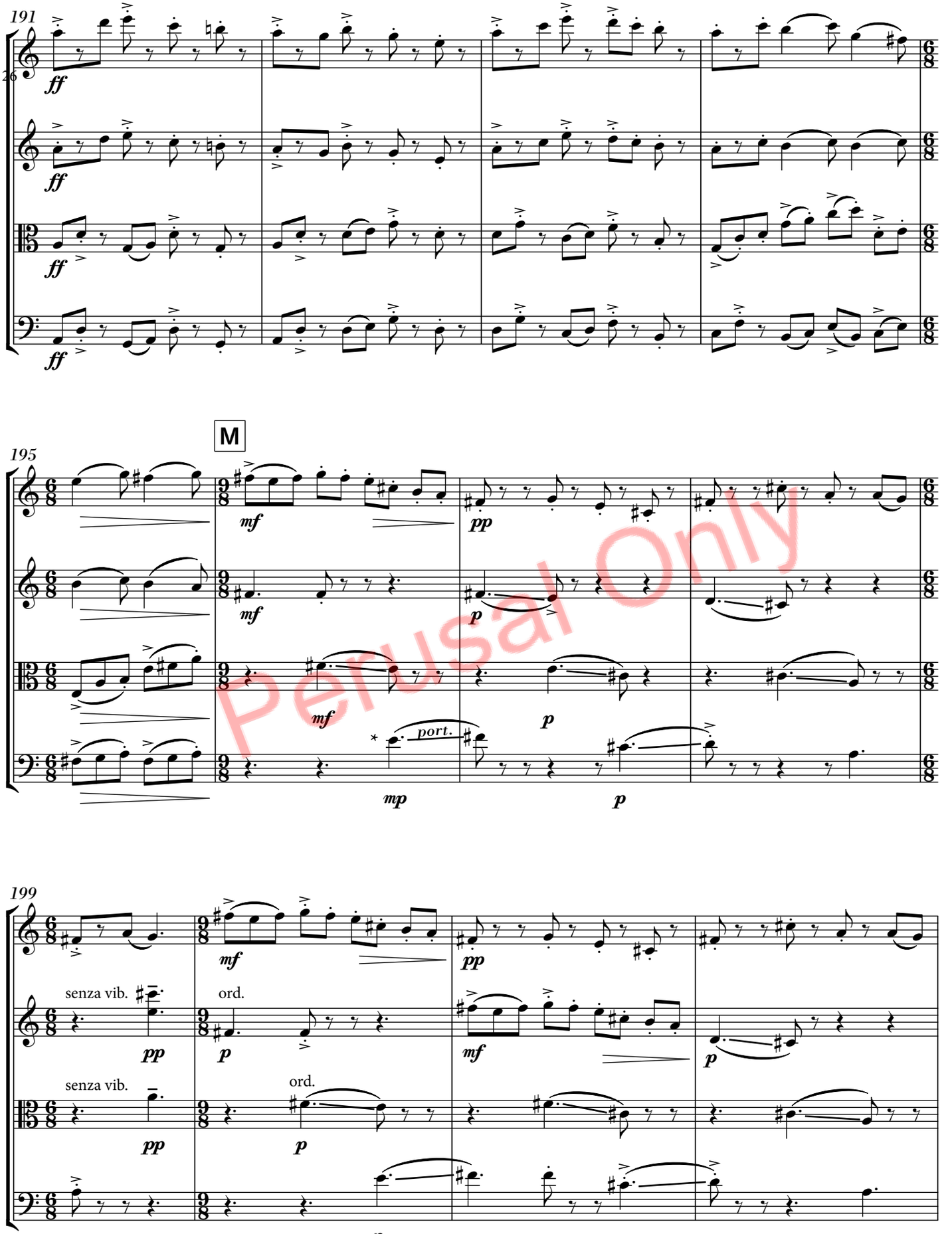
*all portamenti are subtle and expressive rather than 'comic effects'. If in doubt, use less!



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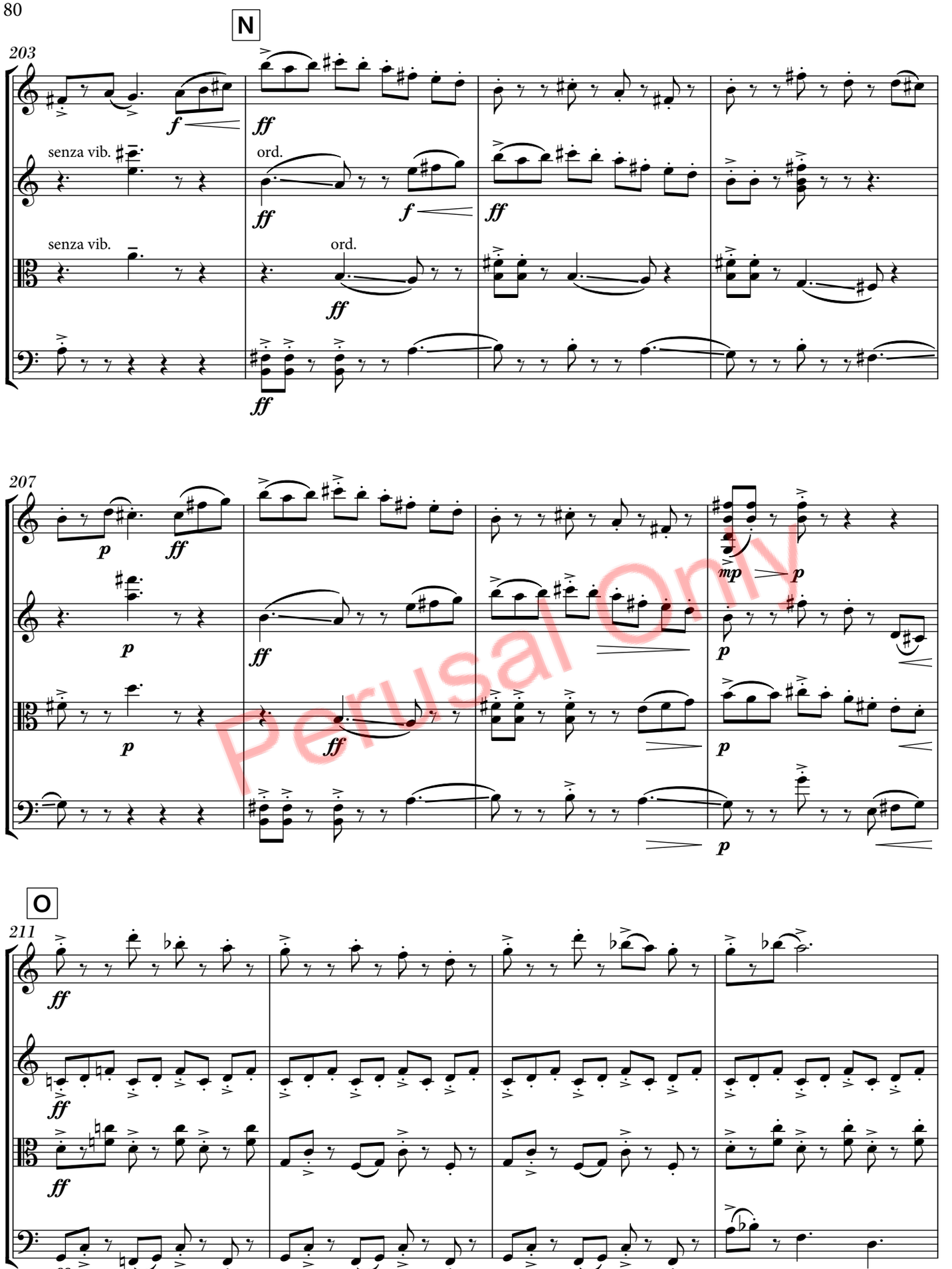

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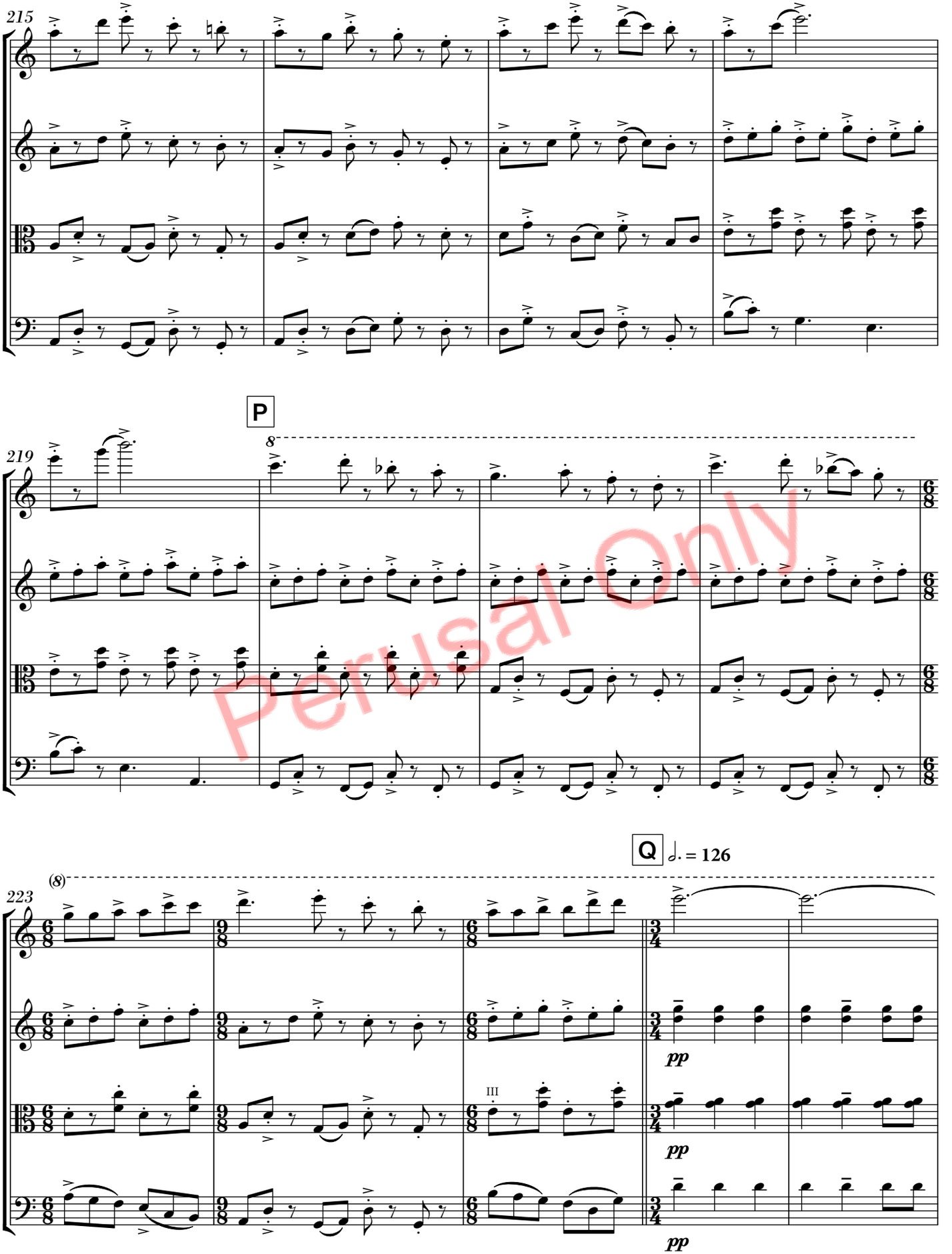

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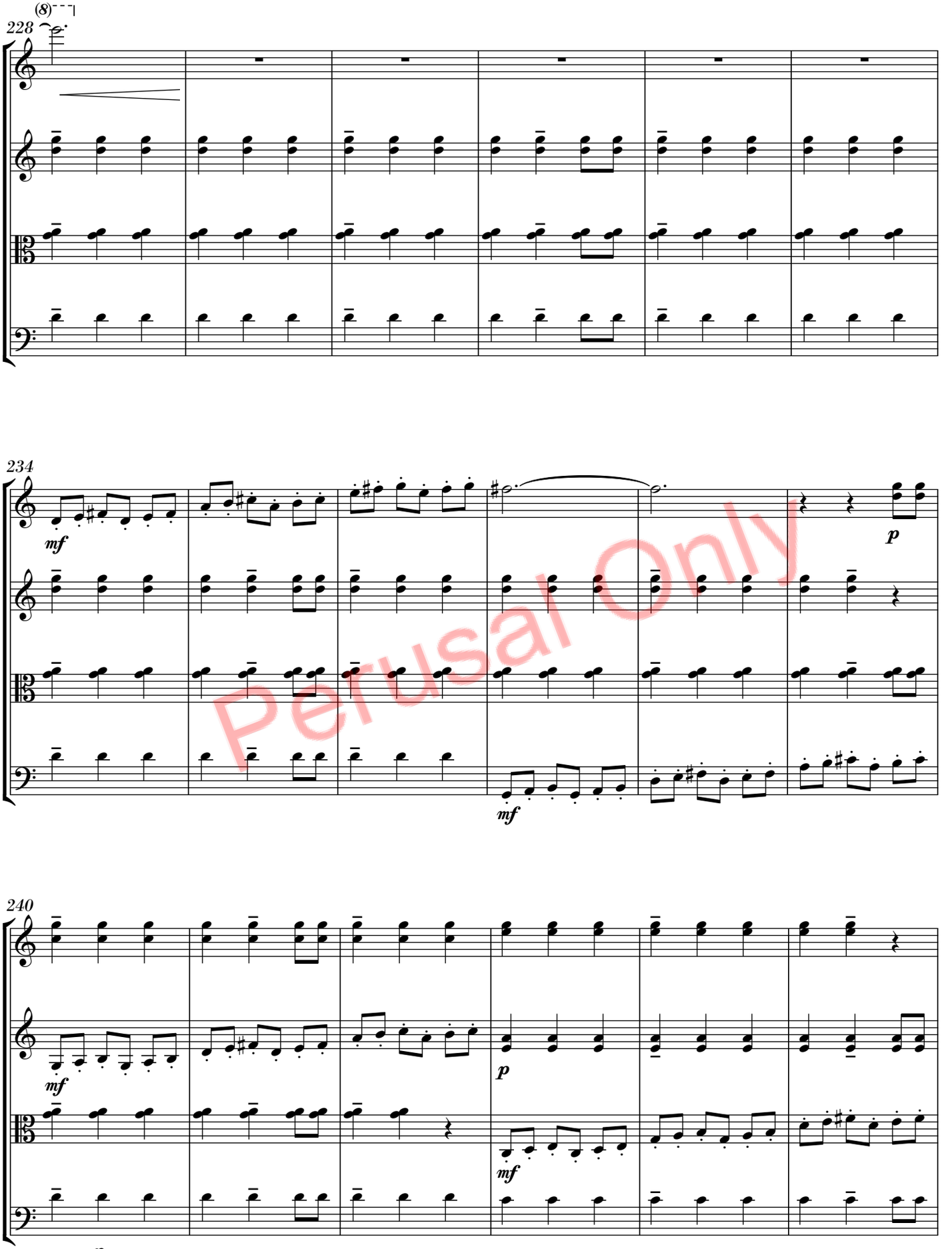

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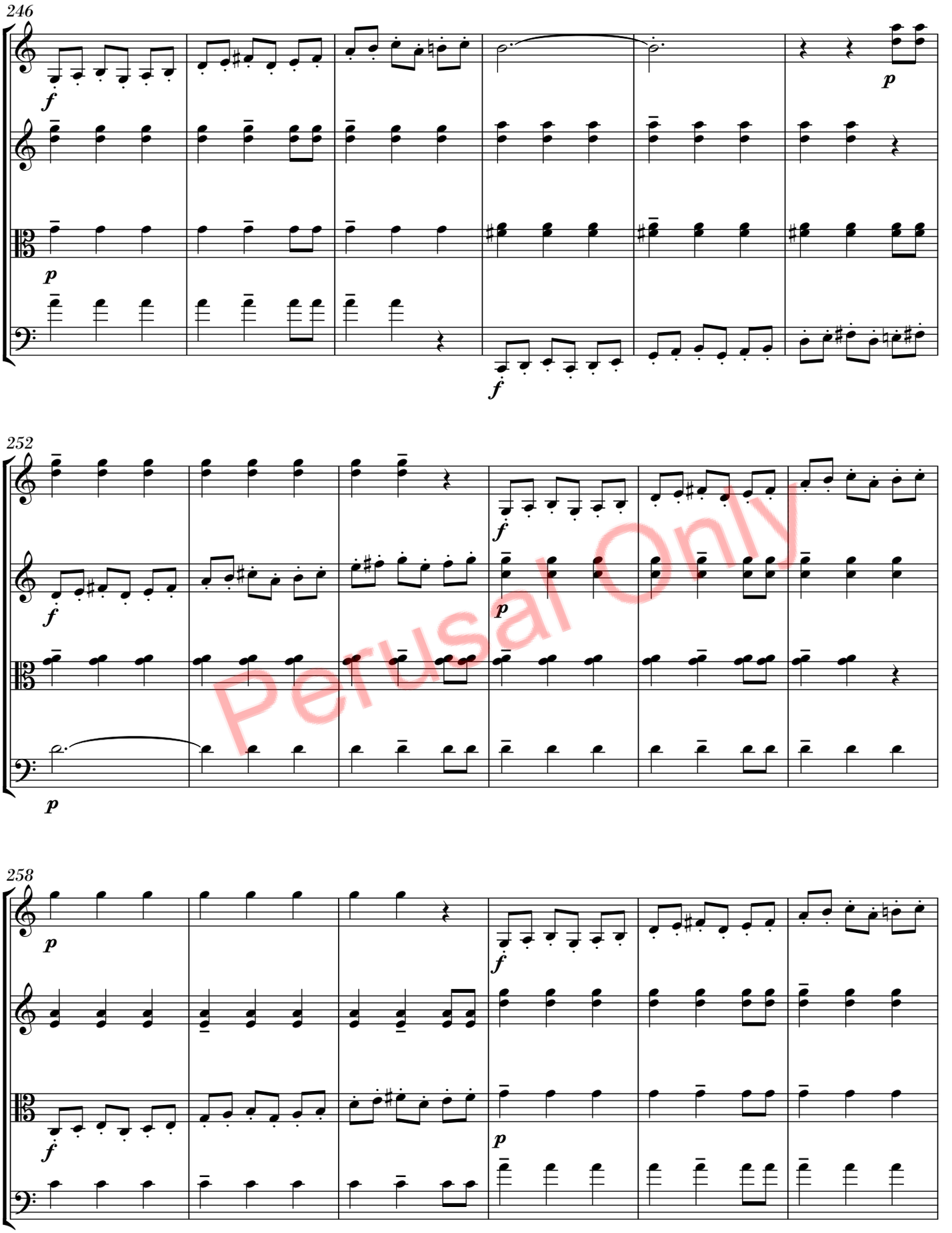

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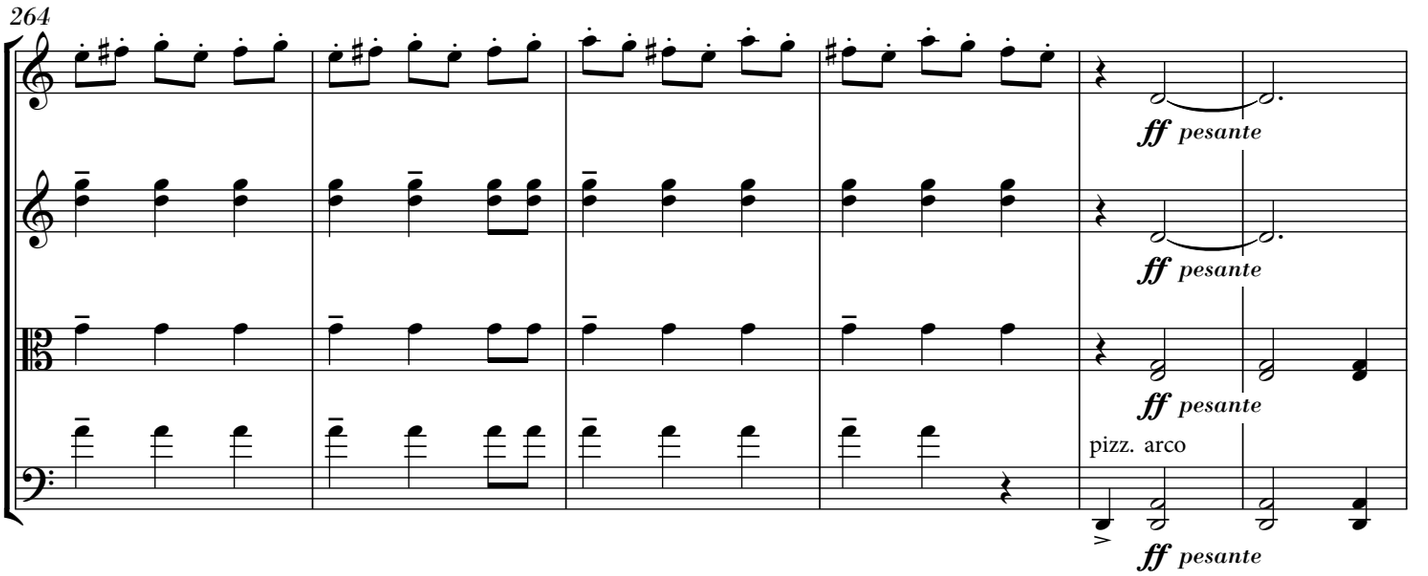

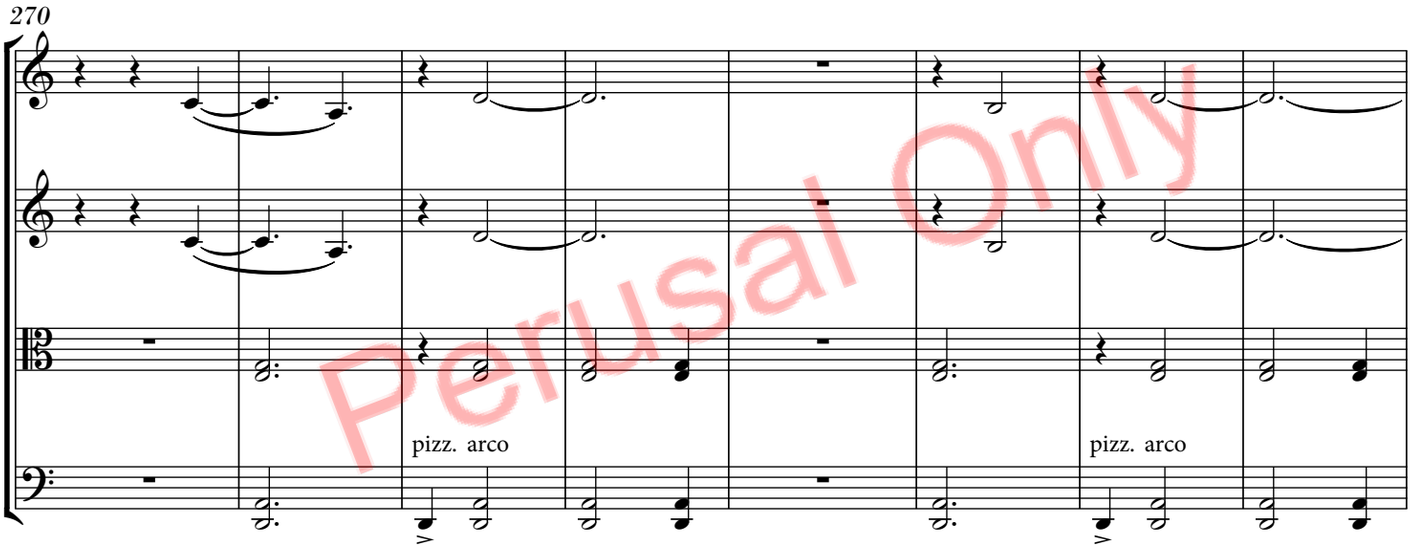

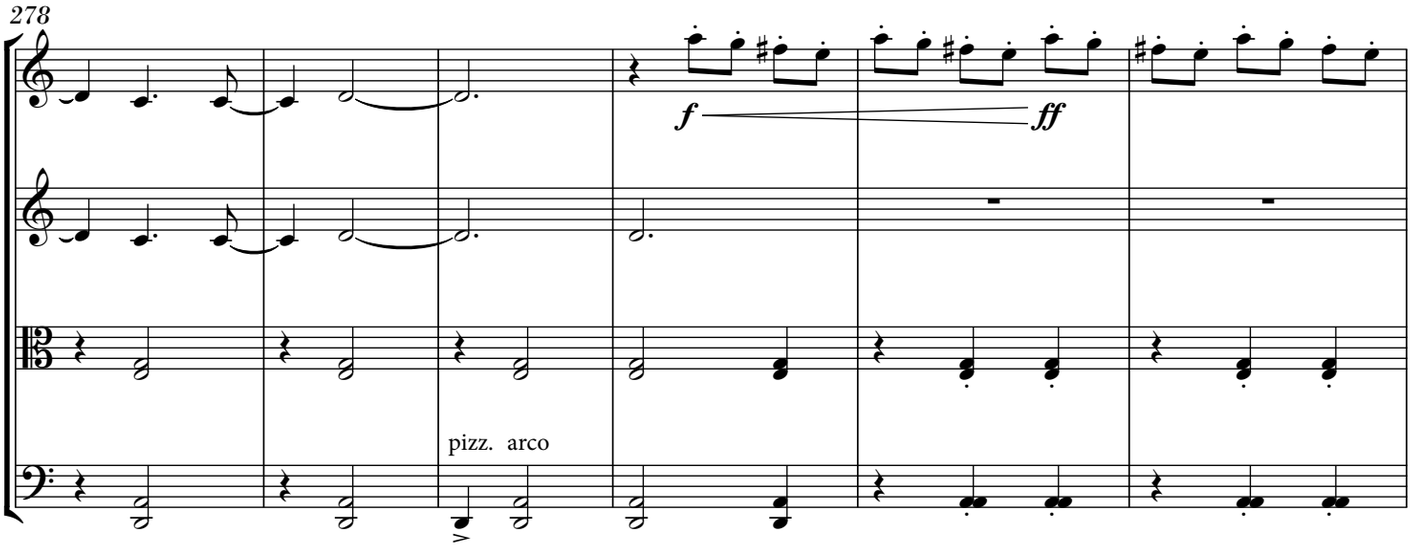

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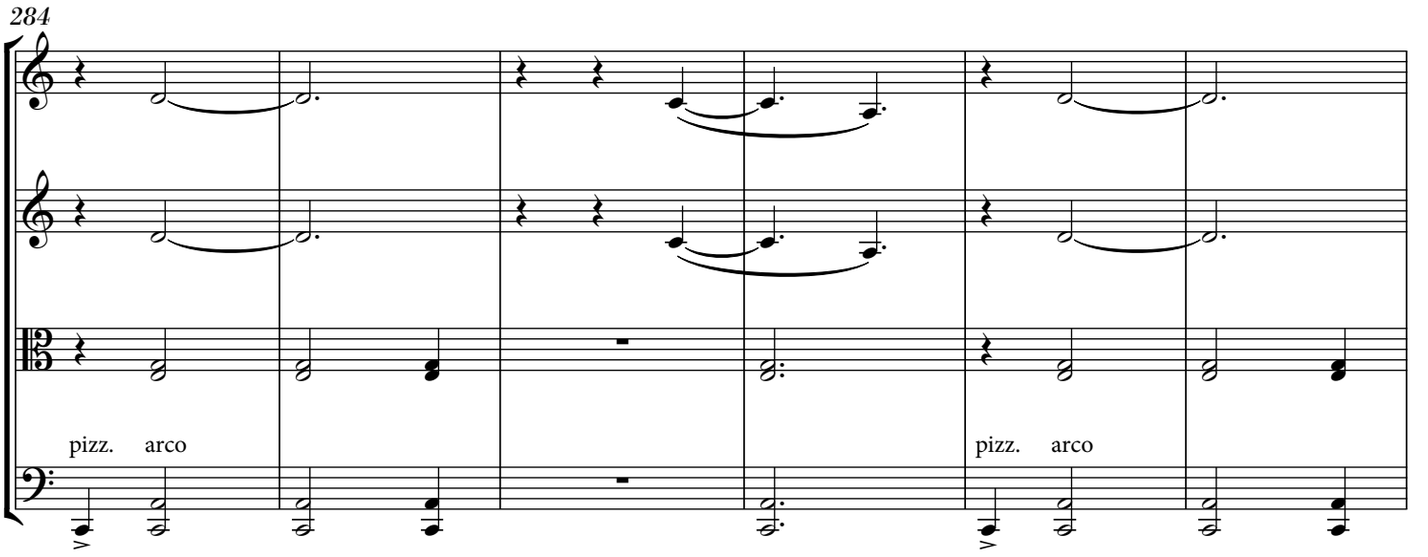

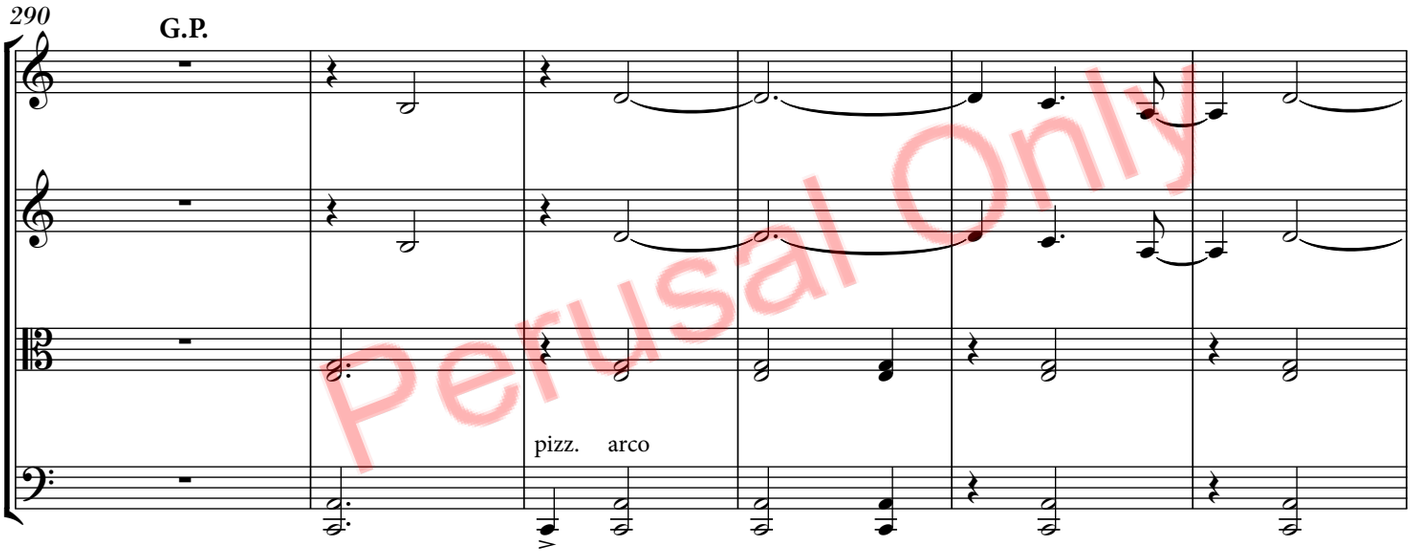

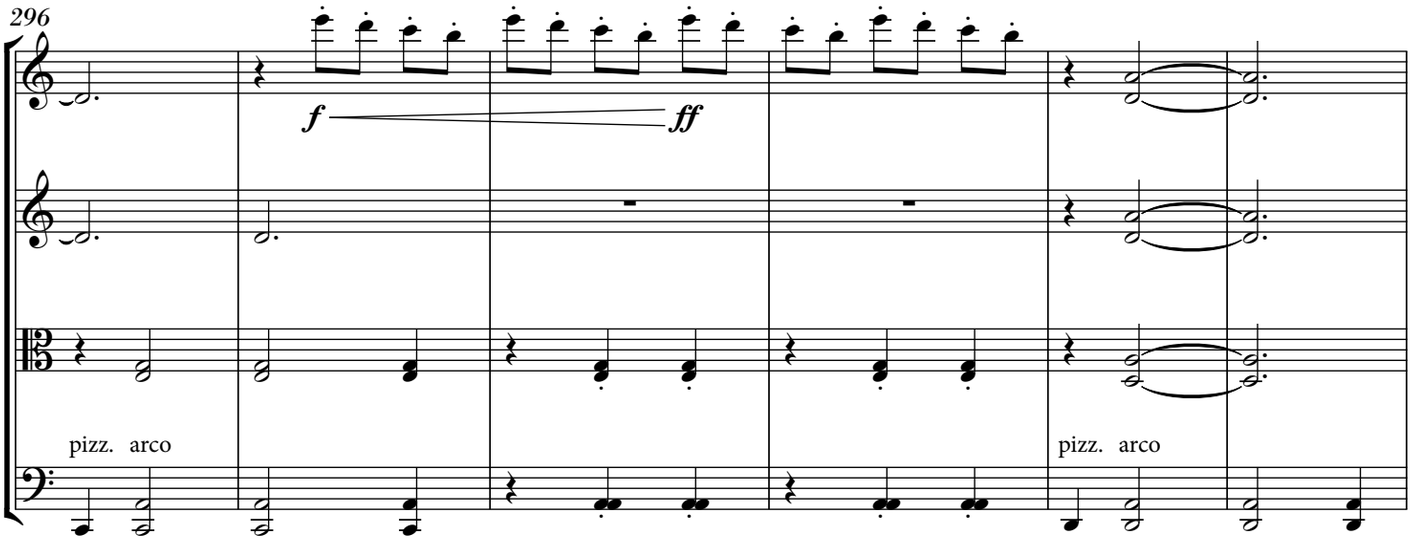

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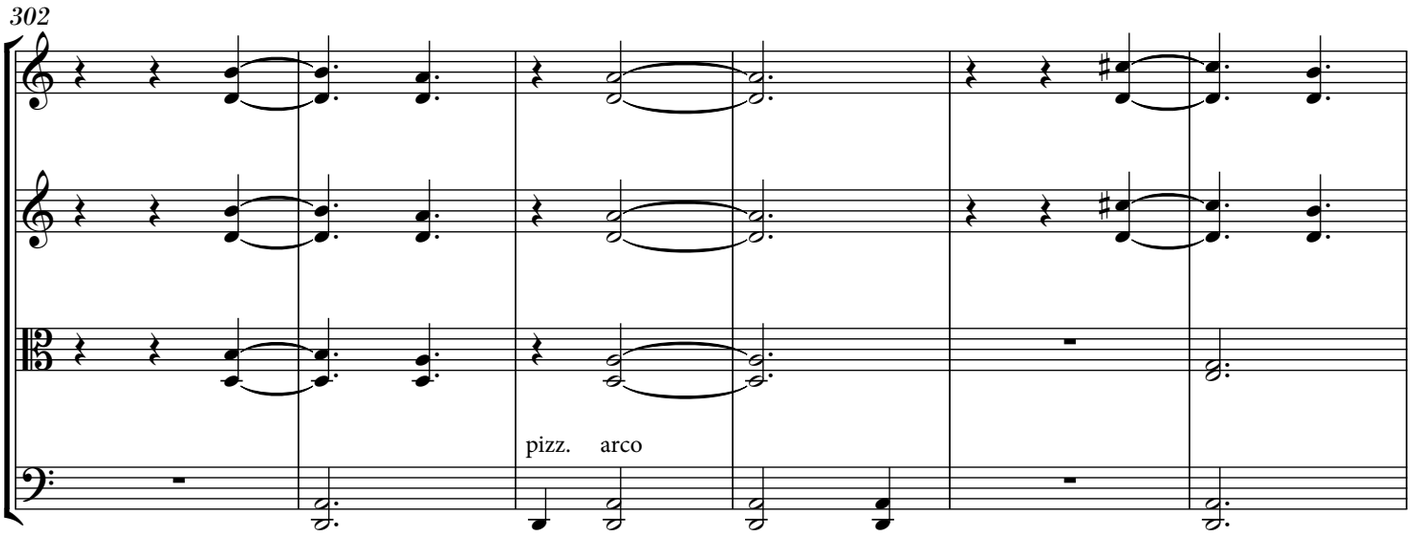

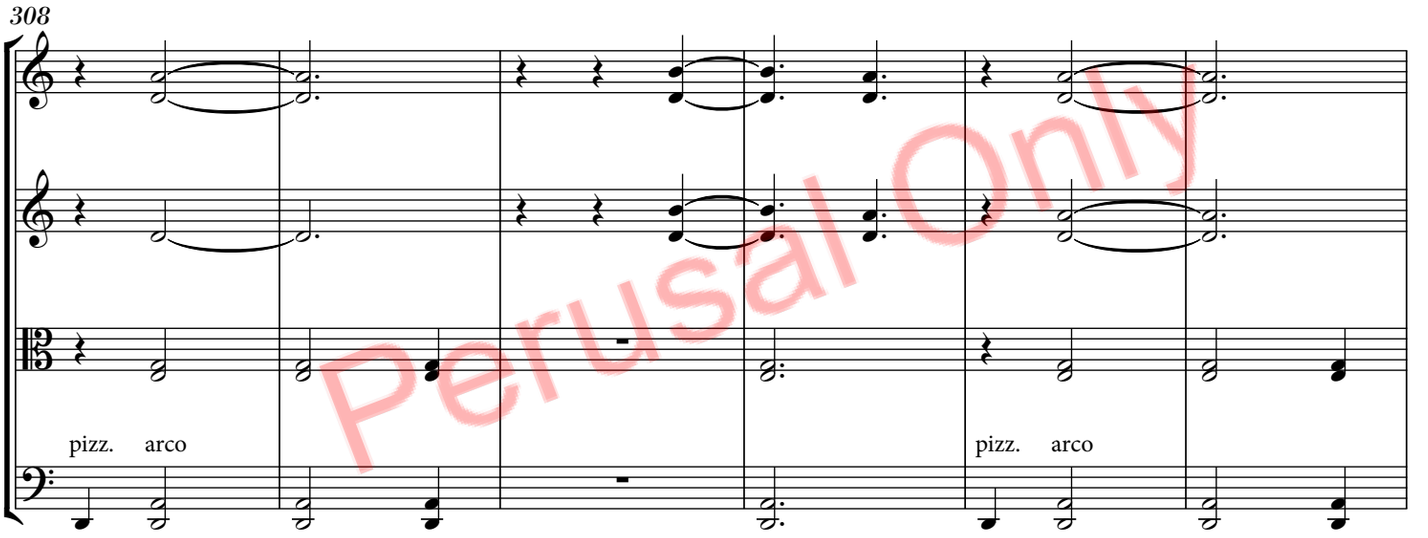

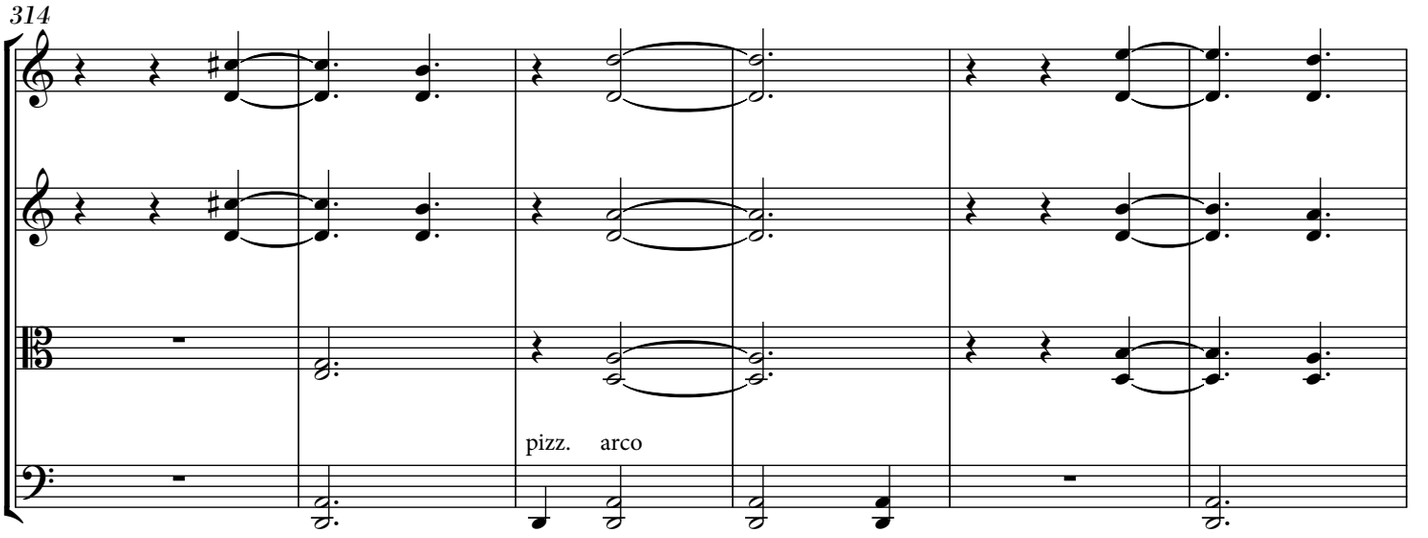

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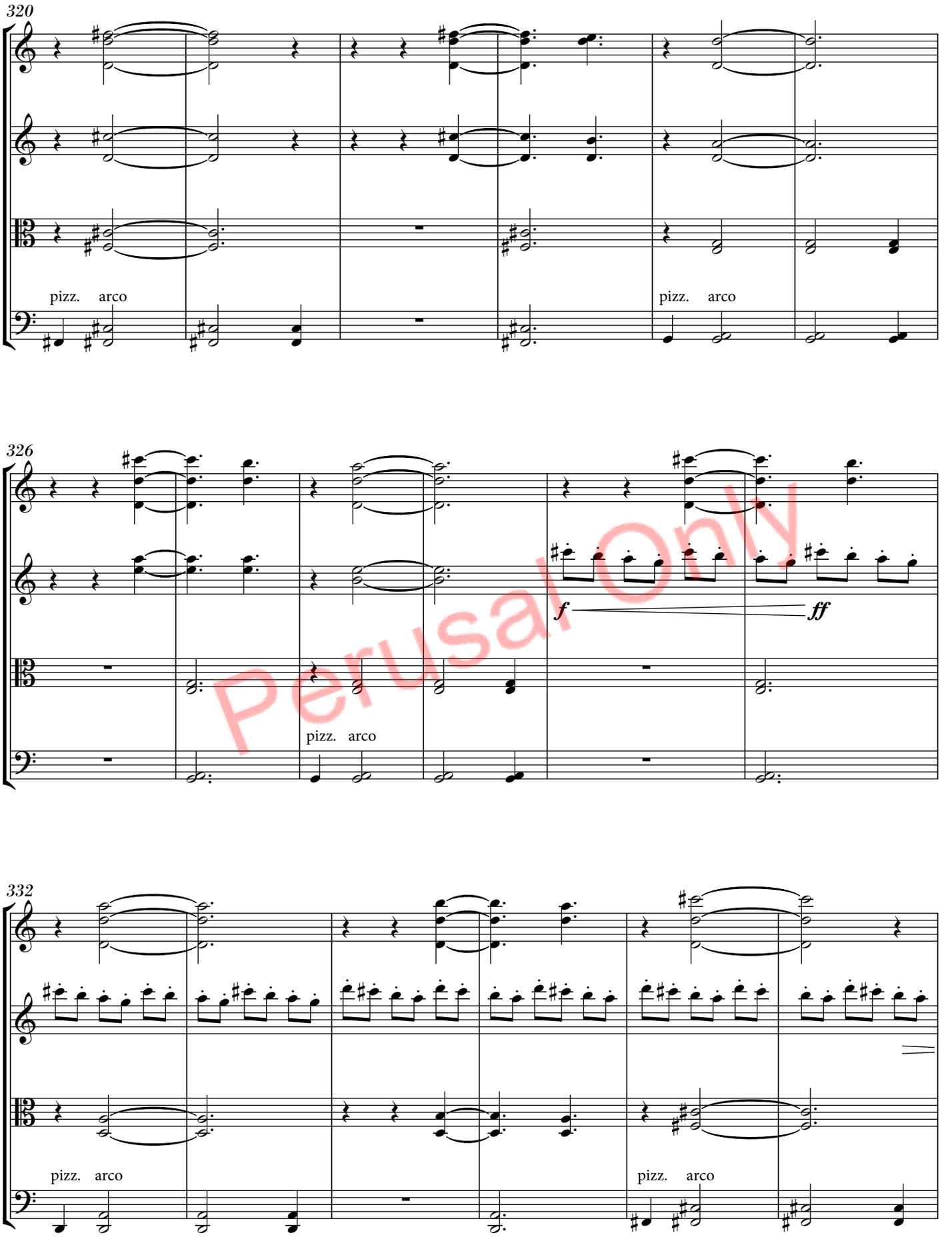

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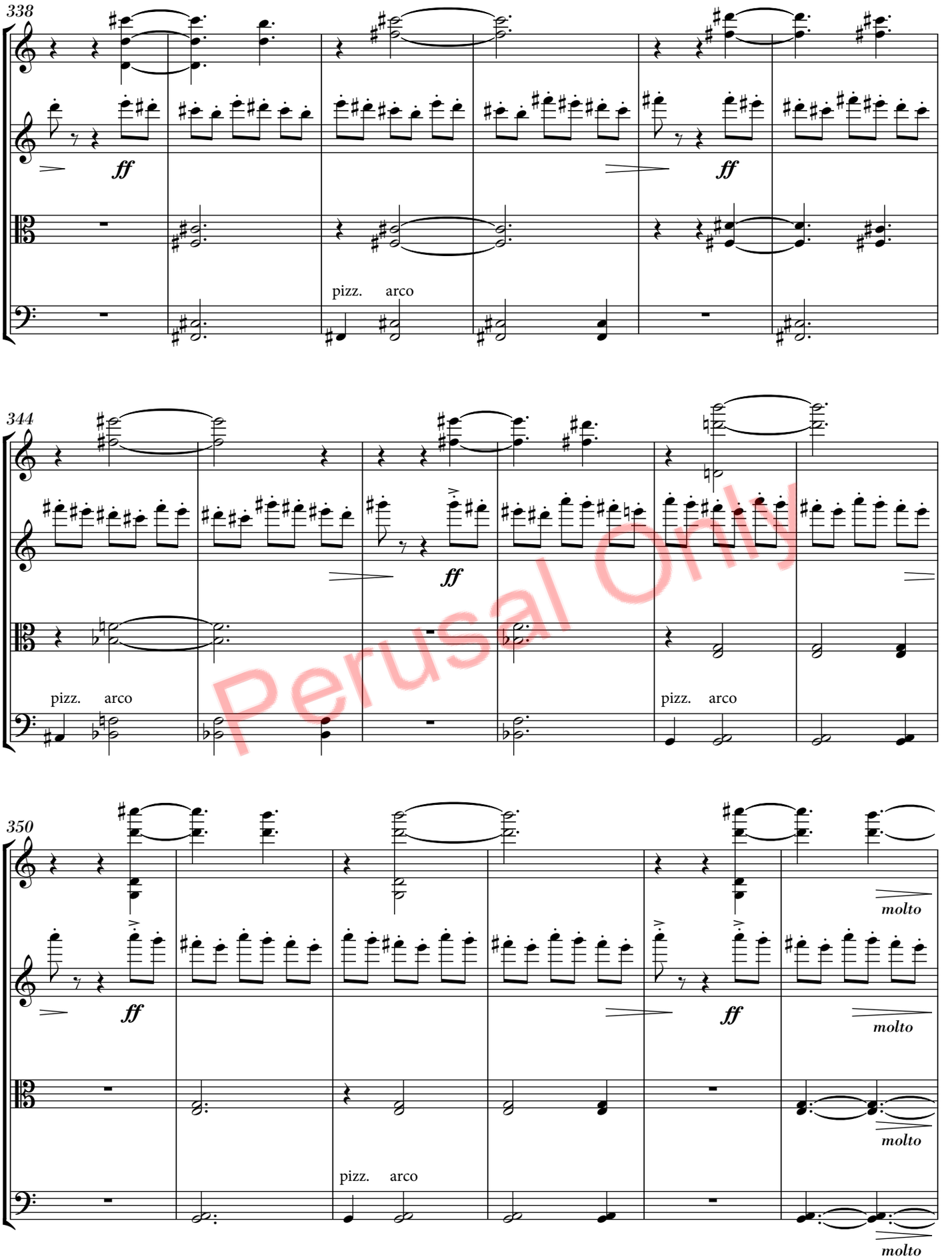

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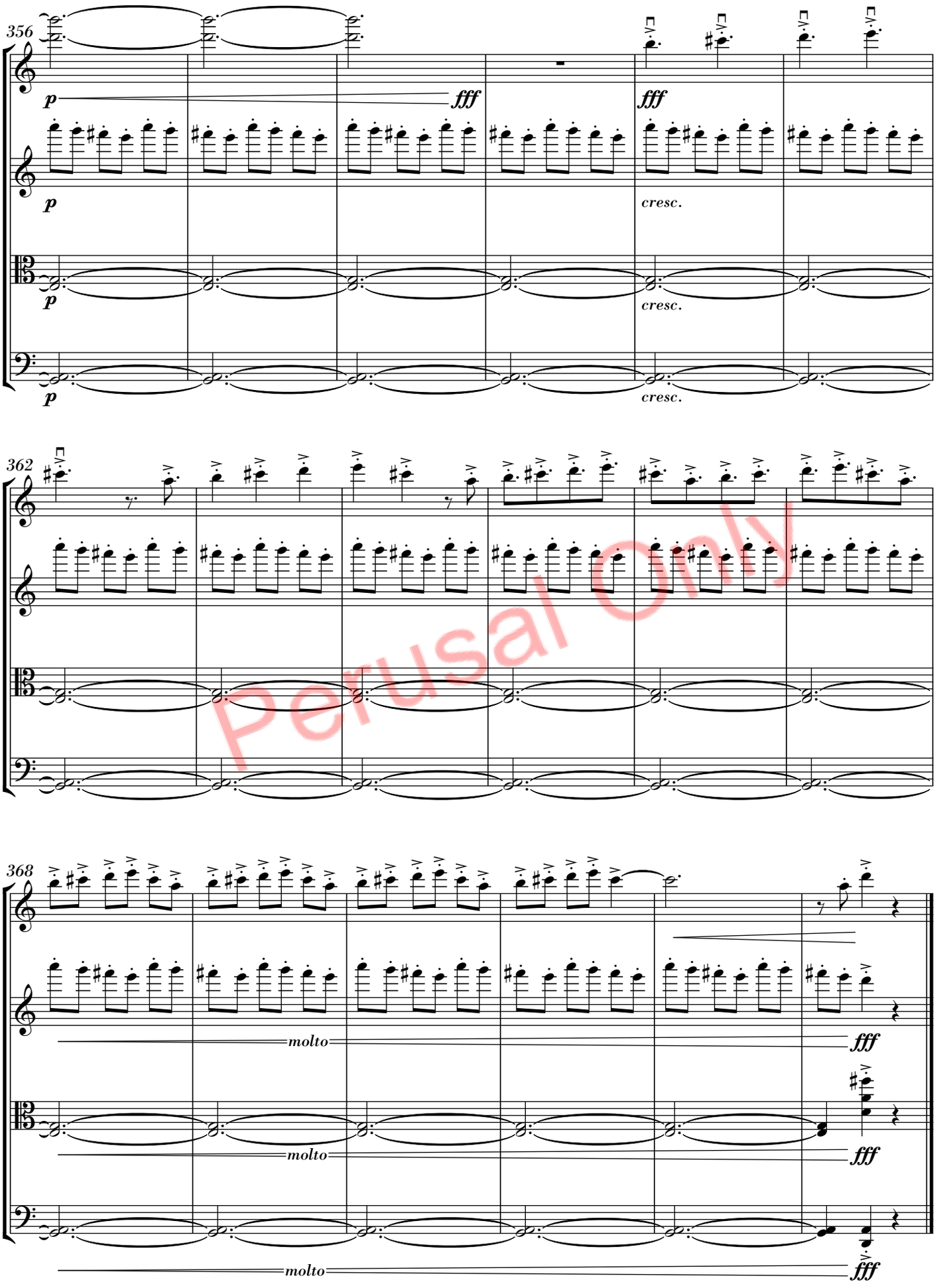

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