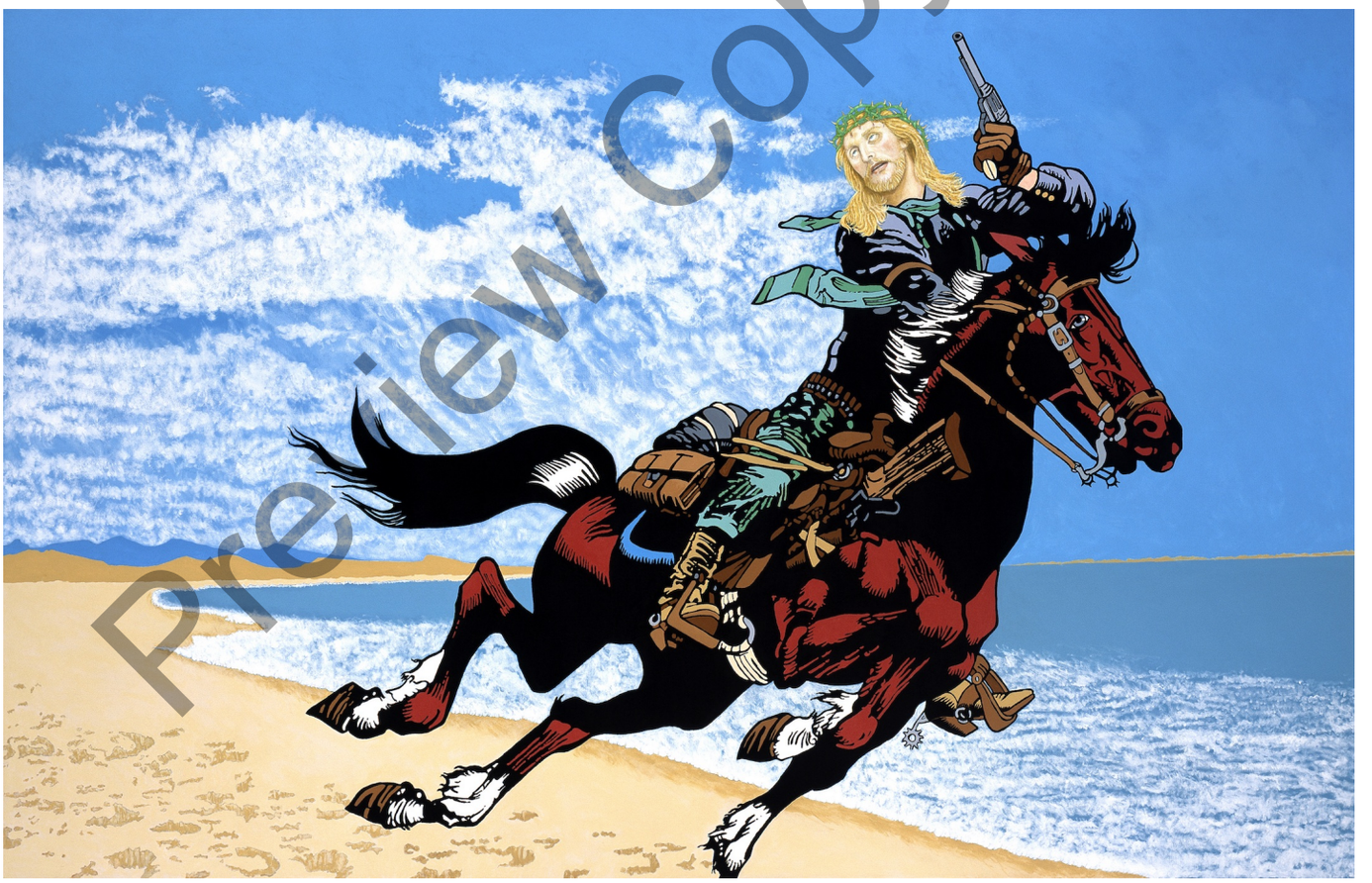
Russell Steinberg

Paleface

Trio
for Violin, Piano, Cello (and Kazoos)

Inspired by artwork by Jerry Kearns



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Paleface

Trio for Violin, Piano, Cello (and Kazoos)
Inspired by artwork by Jerry Kearns
op. 81

I. Wild West
II. Action Hero
III. Into night...

Duration: Approx. 25 minutes

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Trio for Violin, Piano, cello (and kazoos)
by Russell Steinberg

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Front Cover: *Lowland Drifter*, Jerry Kearns
Permission courtesy of the artist

About Paleface

Inspired by the acclaimed paintings of New York "psychological pop" artist **Jerry Kearns**, *Paleface* explores the persistence of the American hero myth, even as it breaks down on every level in our contemporary society. It begins with the Western cowboy mythos—horses, cowboys, folk songs and church hymns (Jesus plays a lurking role in the piece), even a gun fight. Then it jumps to the varied 20th century heroes who struggle and triumph over dark forces—detectives from pulp comics and film noir, the secret agent, and the muscled action hero. *Paleface* concludes with all these icons now as phantoms, struggling in the night to cohere and make sense of a world they no longer can possibly describe. They ultimately all go to church and fade away to a ghost gospel choir.

The musical style of *Paleface* is contemporary classical with an Americana quality influenced by Ives, Copland, and George Crumb. The pianist taps inside the piano to evoke distant galloping horses, all three instruments create a collage of a dozen folksongs and church hymns. There is dissonant chase music, a jazzy "secret agent" tune, frantic blues, and even a comic fanfare with kazoos. A brief summary of the three movements:

I. Wild West—galloping horses, an Ives-ian montage of over a dozen Western/American folk tunes, and a shootout; the piano in this movement uses several extended techniques inside the instrument—tapping the steel bars to imitate horse gallops, melodies and chords with muted strings, and atmospheric strums.

II. Action Hero—a fast scherzo with dissonant "chase" music, jazzy "secret agent" music, "action super hero" music, all getting jumbled together as they lurch towards a comic climax with kazoos tooting out a ridiculous fanfare.

III. Into Night—an *Adagio* that takes all these American icons and thrusts them into the night of today's post 9-11 world. The first part is spooky with high notes depicting the starry night, punctuated with startling tremolos, chords that descend into the depths, and ghostly returns of previous themes. The musical landscape enters "church," with a hymn that morphs into a quasi-gospel pop anthem. The anthem swells and subsides, eventually itself becoming a ghost and fading away.

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Performance Notes

Accompanying Video
Paleface is conceived as a multimedia work in counterpoint with a three part video that corresponds to each of the three musical movements. Each video slowly pans through details of Jerry Kearns' paintings focused on the American hero mythology. The video should be projected on a large screen either behind the piano or on screens surrounding the musicians. *Paleface* may also be effectively performed as a piano trio, without the video.

Kazoos
Each musician plays a kazoo in the *Action Hero* movement. Kazoos take some practice to master pitch and articulation. Written pitches may be adjusted up or down an octave if necessary. The tremolo in M293 involves rapidly tapping the end of the kazoo while blowing. The switching between setting down your instrument to pick up the kazoo and putting it down to then pick up your instrument is a key element of the humor in the movement.The transitions require practice to be dramatic. Ham them up!

Effects Inside the Piano
The first movement, *Wild West,* has several passages performed inside the piano. Switching between standing to play inside the piano and sitting back down to play the keyboard (and vice-versa) requires practice and calculation, especially because the pedal is held down when playing inside the piano. It may even be necessary to have a page turner assist in playing some of the passages.

Opening—"Tap Metal Bars Inside Piano with Palms"— experiment with each piano to discover the metal bars that are most resonant and sound like galloping horses.

M6 "Fast fingernail scrape along low A string"—scrape towards the keyboard with either one fingernailor more with the palm facing down in a ball; experiment half muting with the palm or other fingers to discover the best balance between percussive noise and pitch.

M15 "Tap with curled fingers on the bass strings"—curled fingers create a soft percussive effect. Half mute on attack to give bite and resonance—this takes practice to discover the degree of muting that still provides resonance to the chord.

String pizzicato effects in the Gunfight passage of Wild West
Beginning M182, the snap pizzicatos and the fast gliss. bullet "pings" require dramatic and creative execution to achieve their self-explanatory effects.

M192 Violin R.H.palm tap on fingerboard— left hand forefinger holds down the quadruple stop while right hand palm taps the fingerboard over the instrument body. Experiment to find the spot that allows the most pitch to sound.

At M. 196 Violin R.H.—the flamenco strum is executed by rapidly fanning out the right hand fingers from the ring finger to the index finger.

Cello M.192 pizz R.H. 1212 etc.—this is a guitar effect; alternate the forefinger and middle finger quickly as if playing a guitar.

Audience Participation Possibiity
If desired, an audience may join in the fun playing kazoos in the *Action Hero* movement. I suggest two moments:

1) M137—after the cello cadenza. Have the audience blow 5 times the 2 measure rhythmic motive: 6 eighth notes, one quarter note and 2 beats rest.

2) M293—after the kazoo fanfare. Let the audience improvise loudly on this measure for 10 seconds.

A conductor will need to "teach" these moments to the audience before the performance, then signal the start and stop of both of them.

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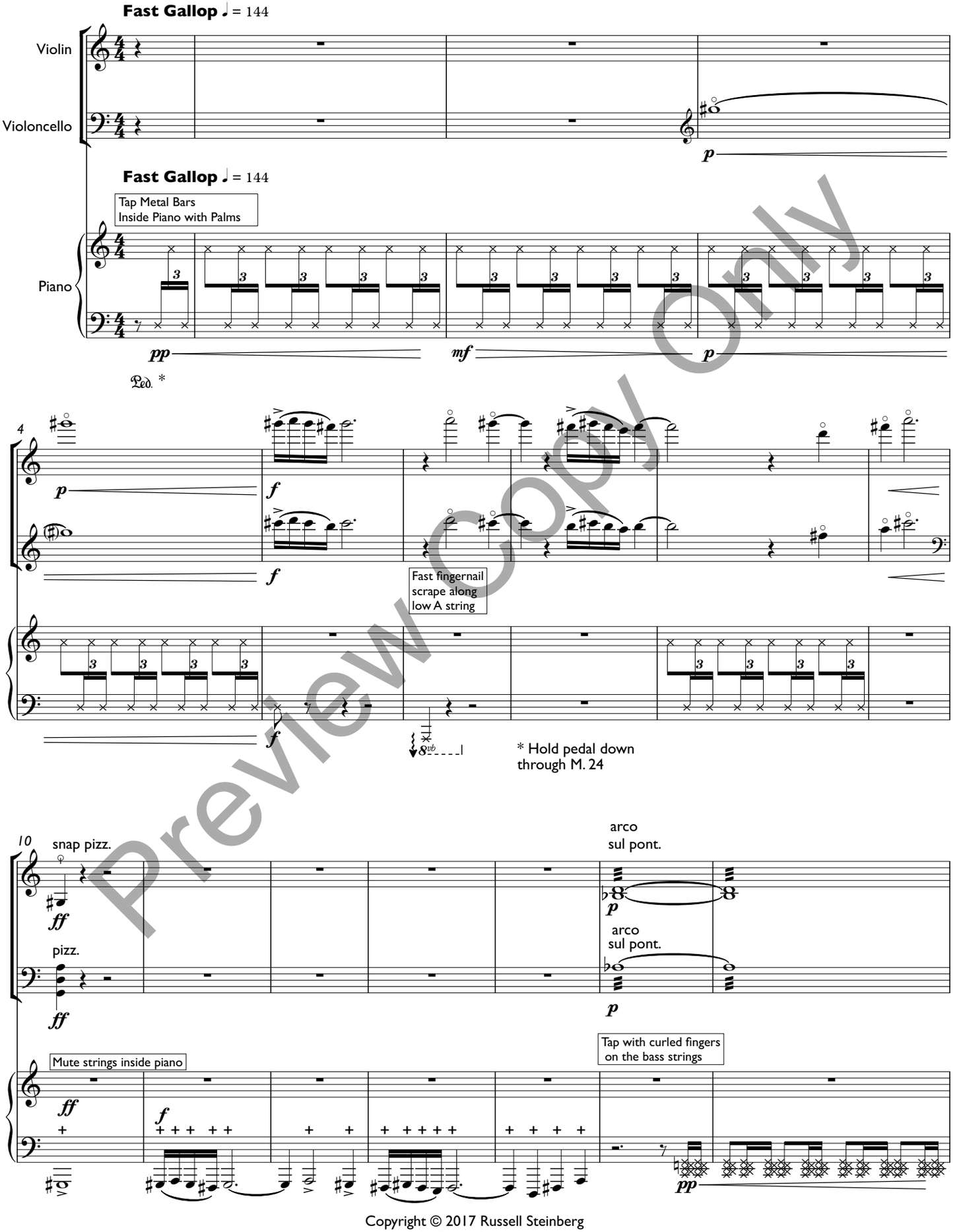
Paleface

I. Wild West

Russell Steinberg



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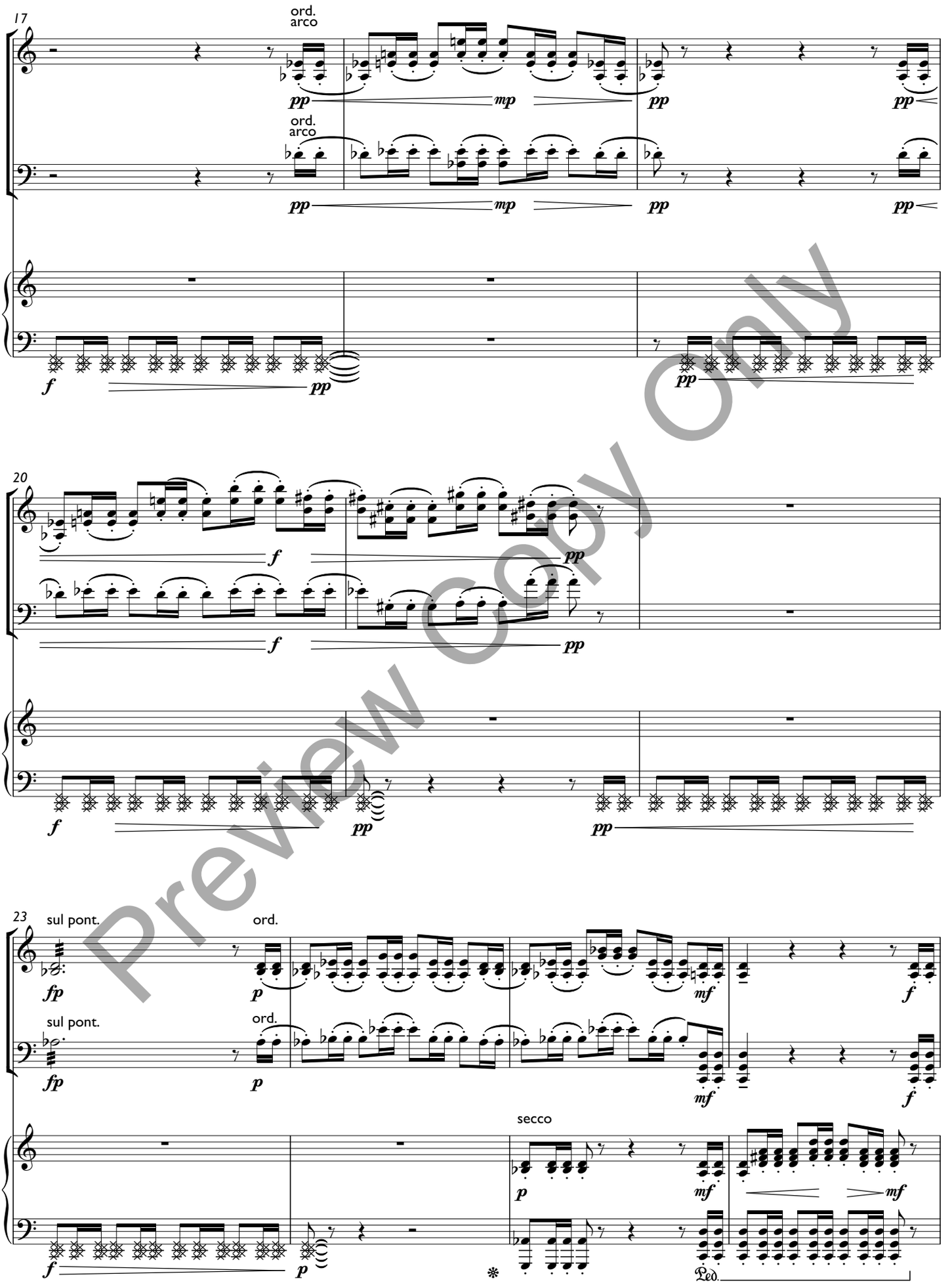

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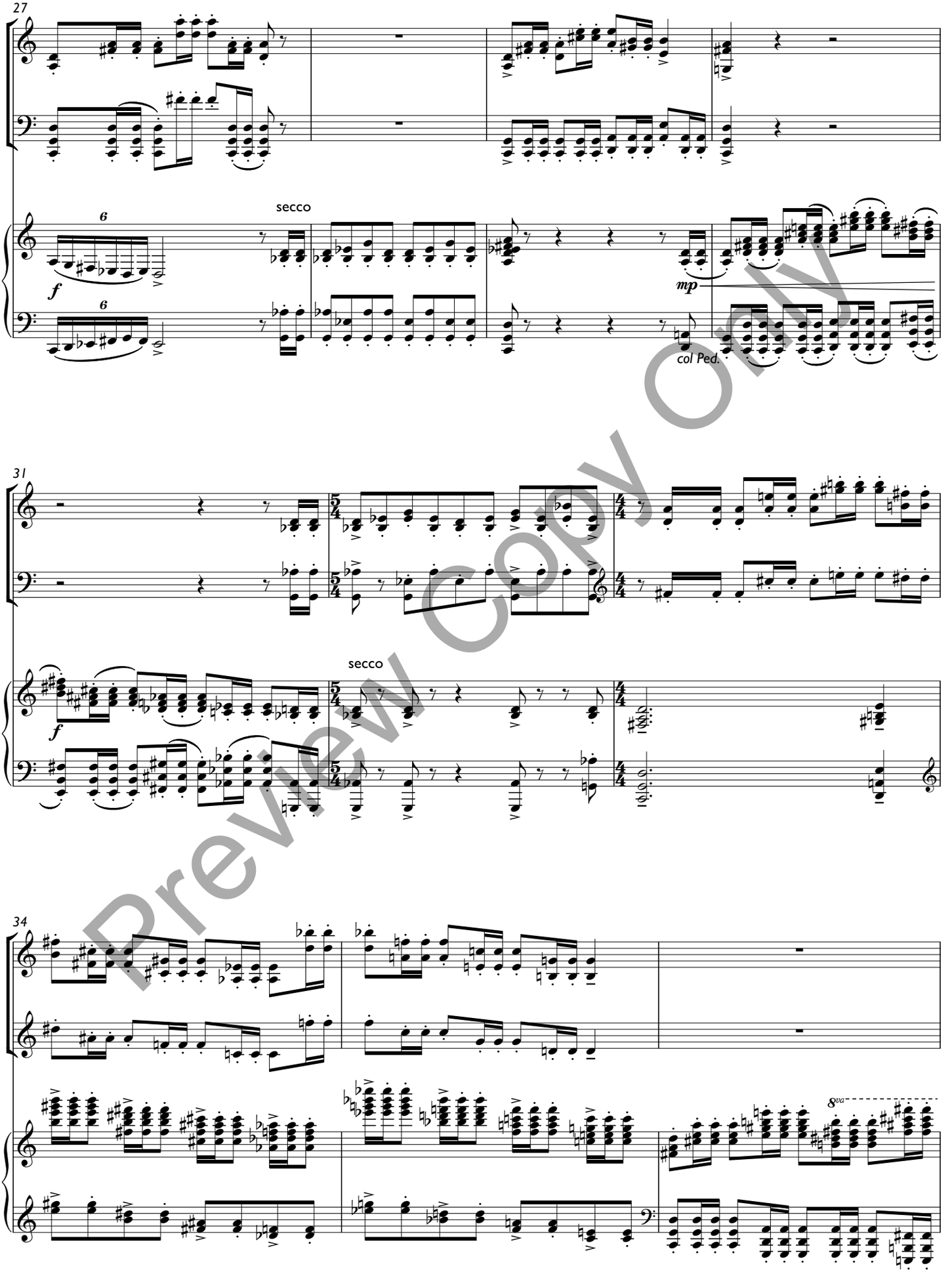

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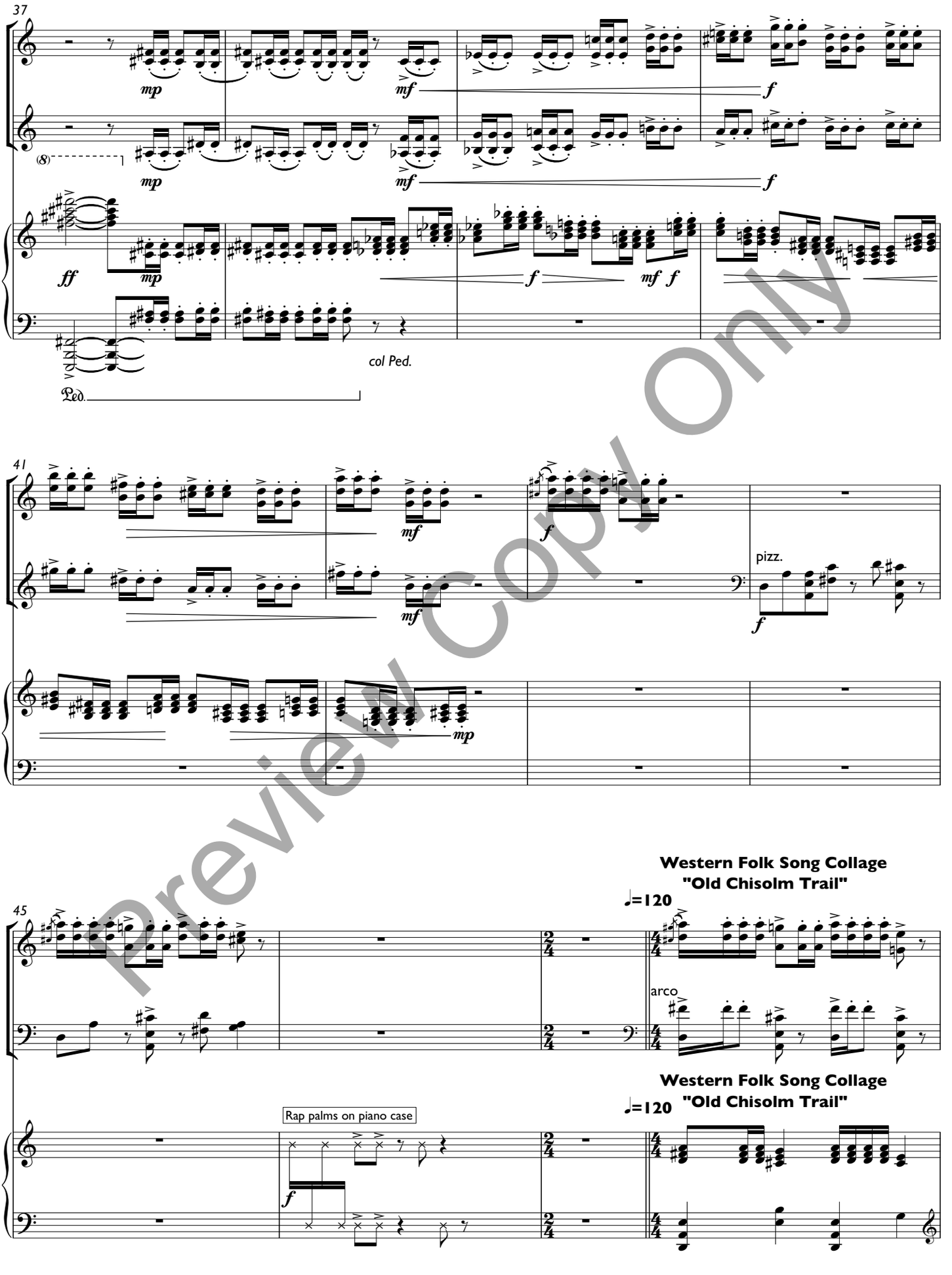

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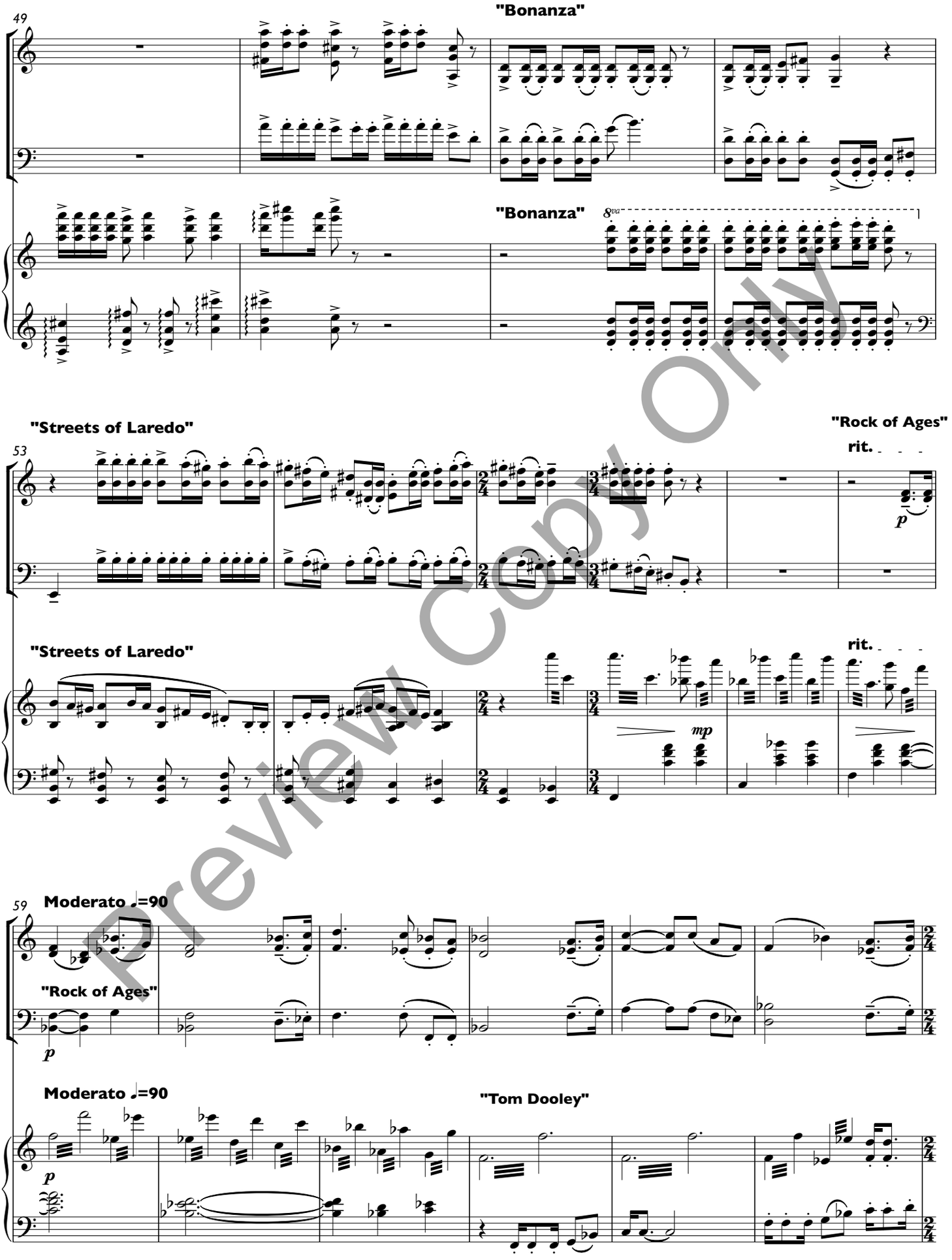

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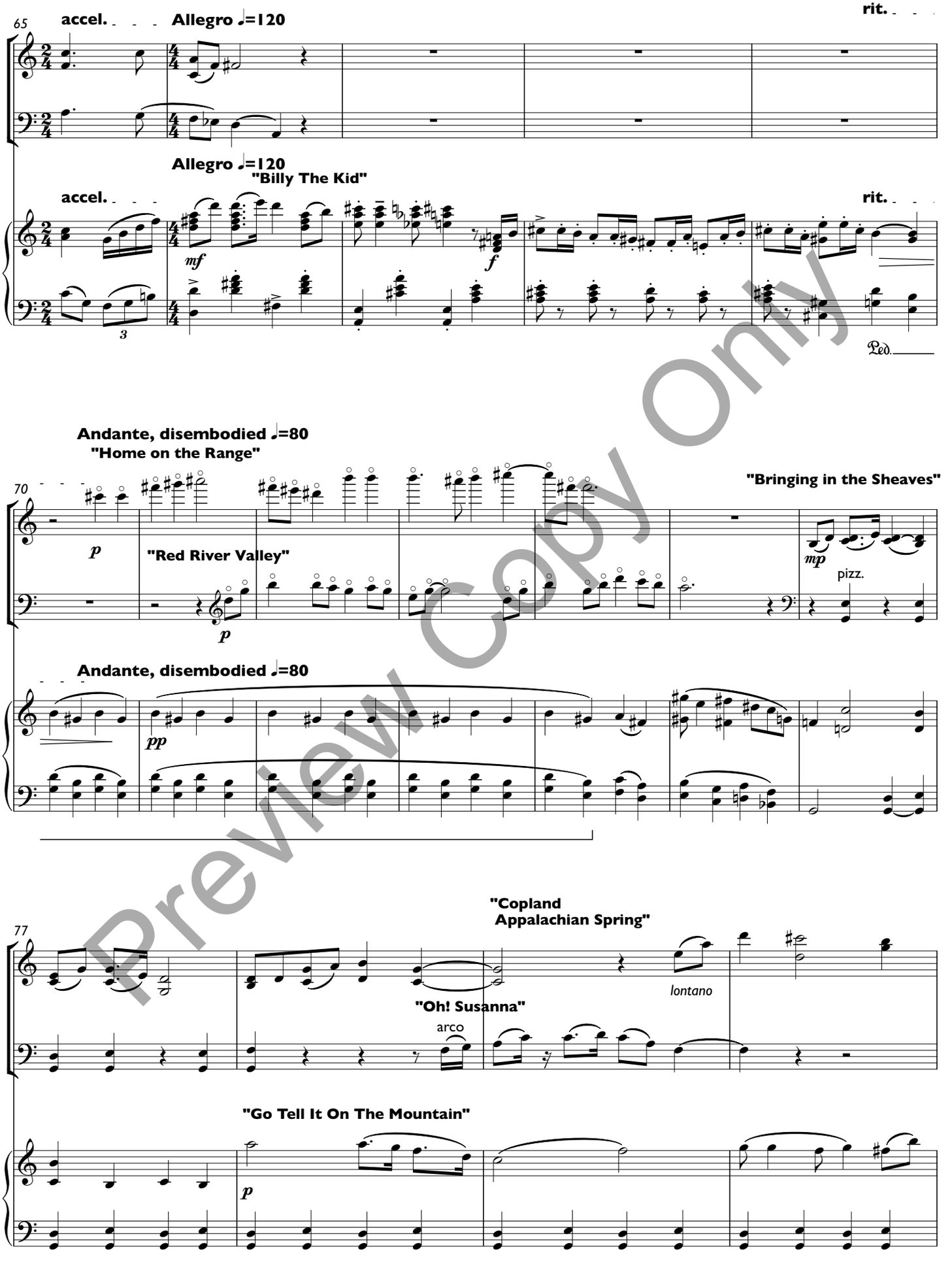

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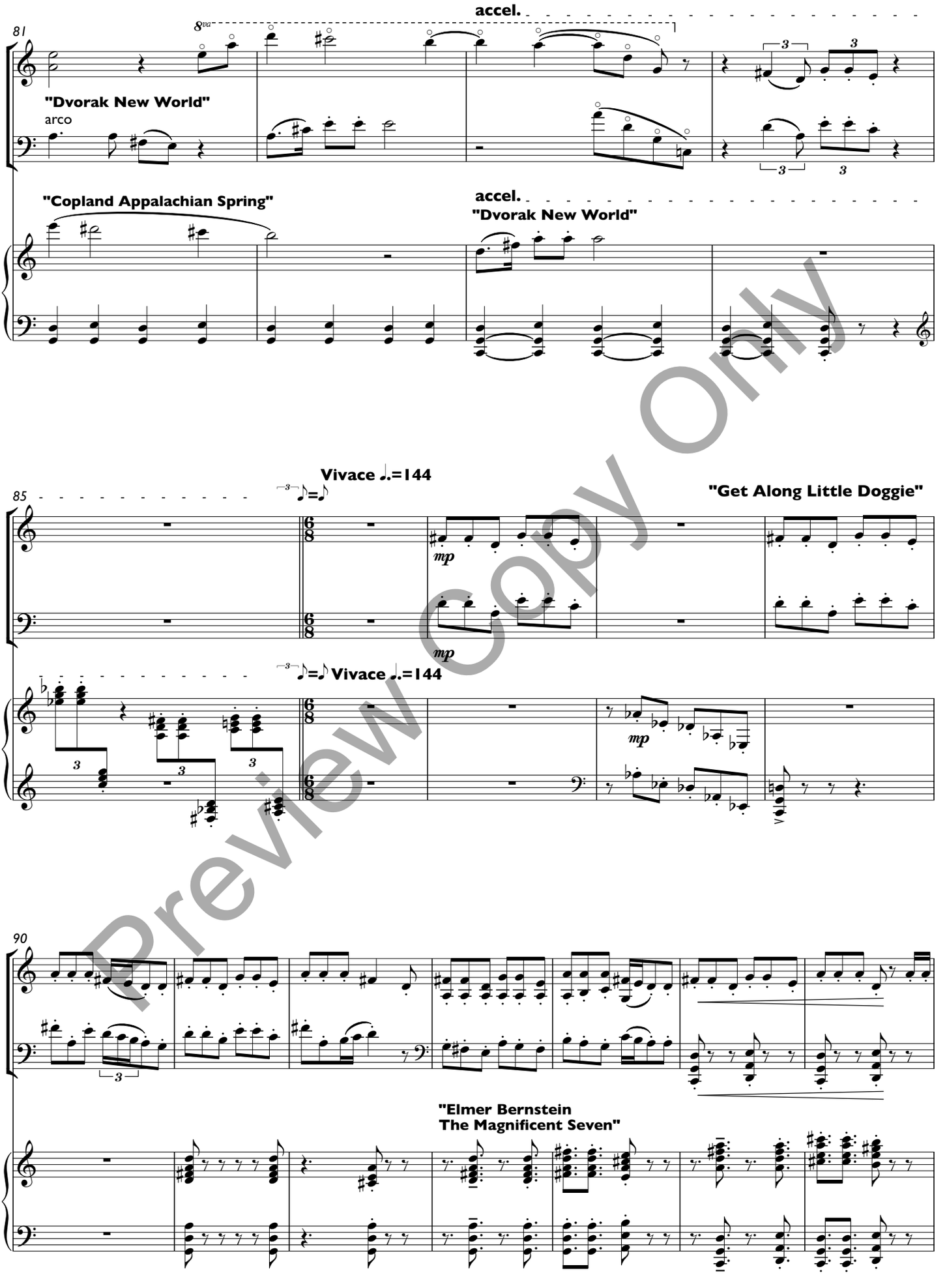

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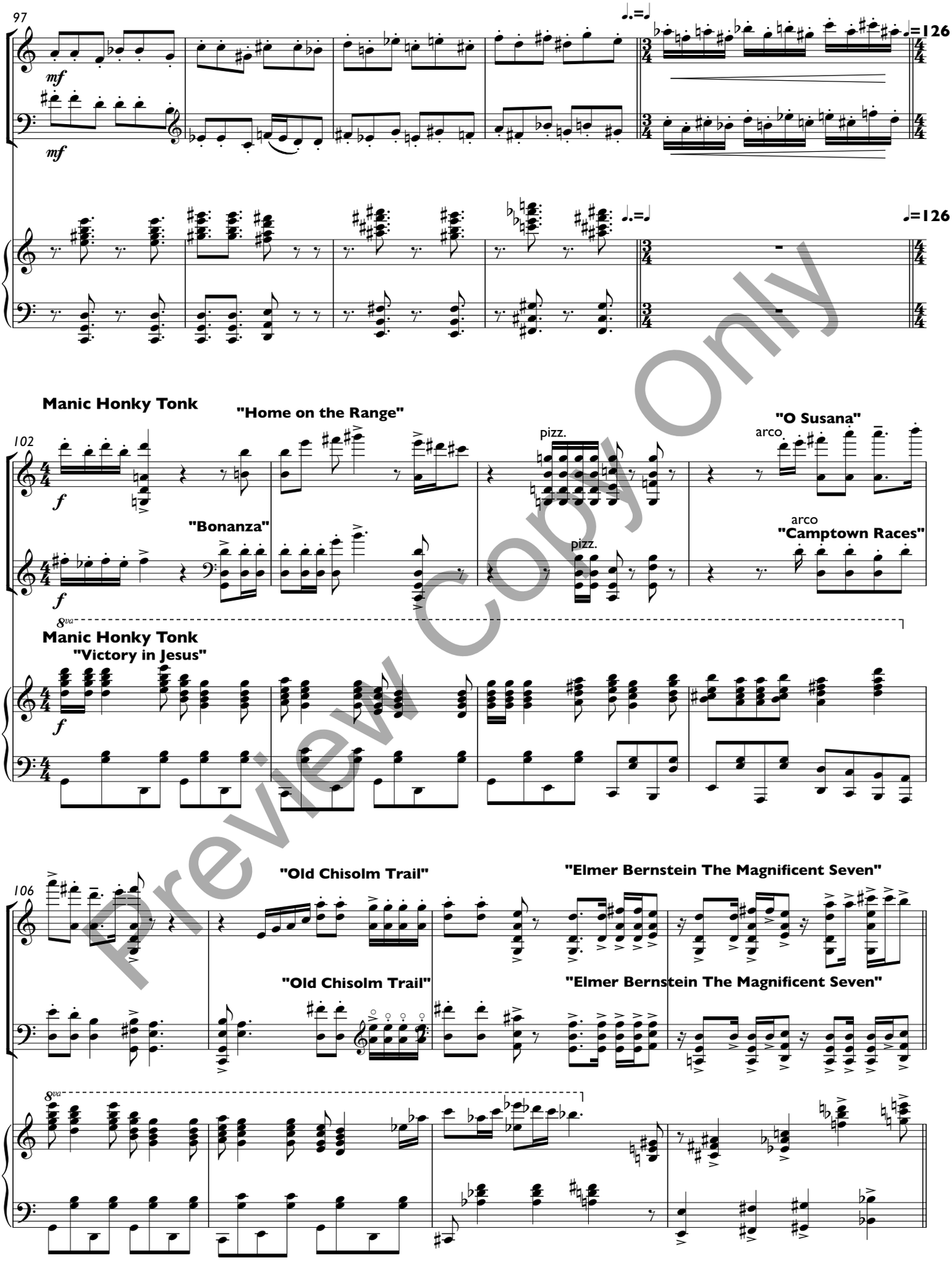

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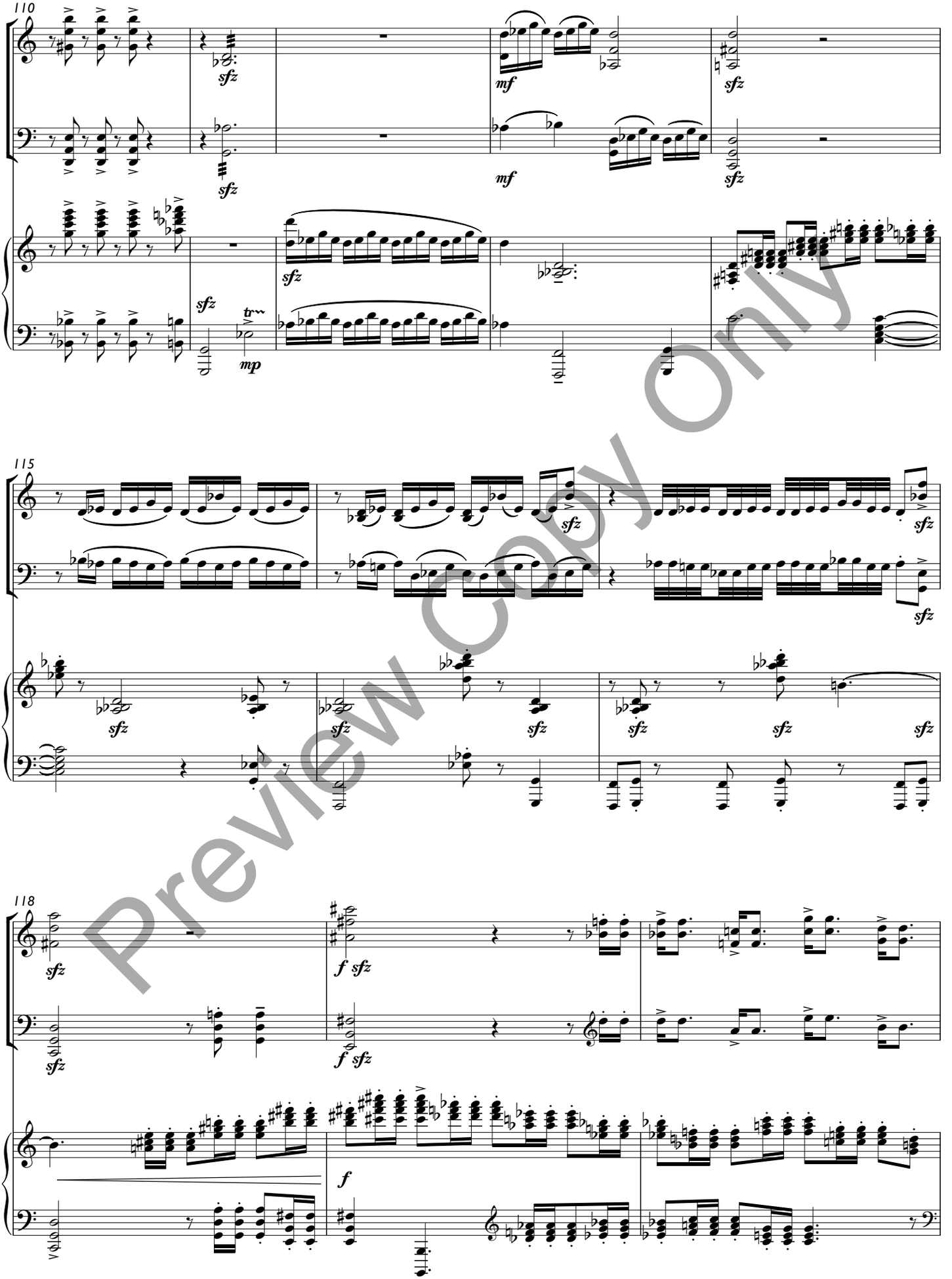

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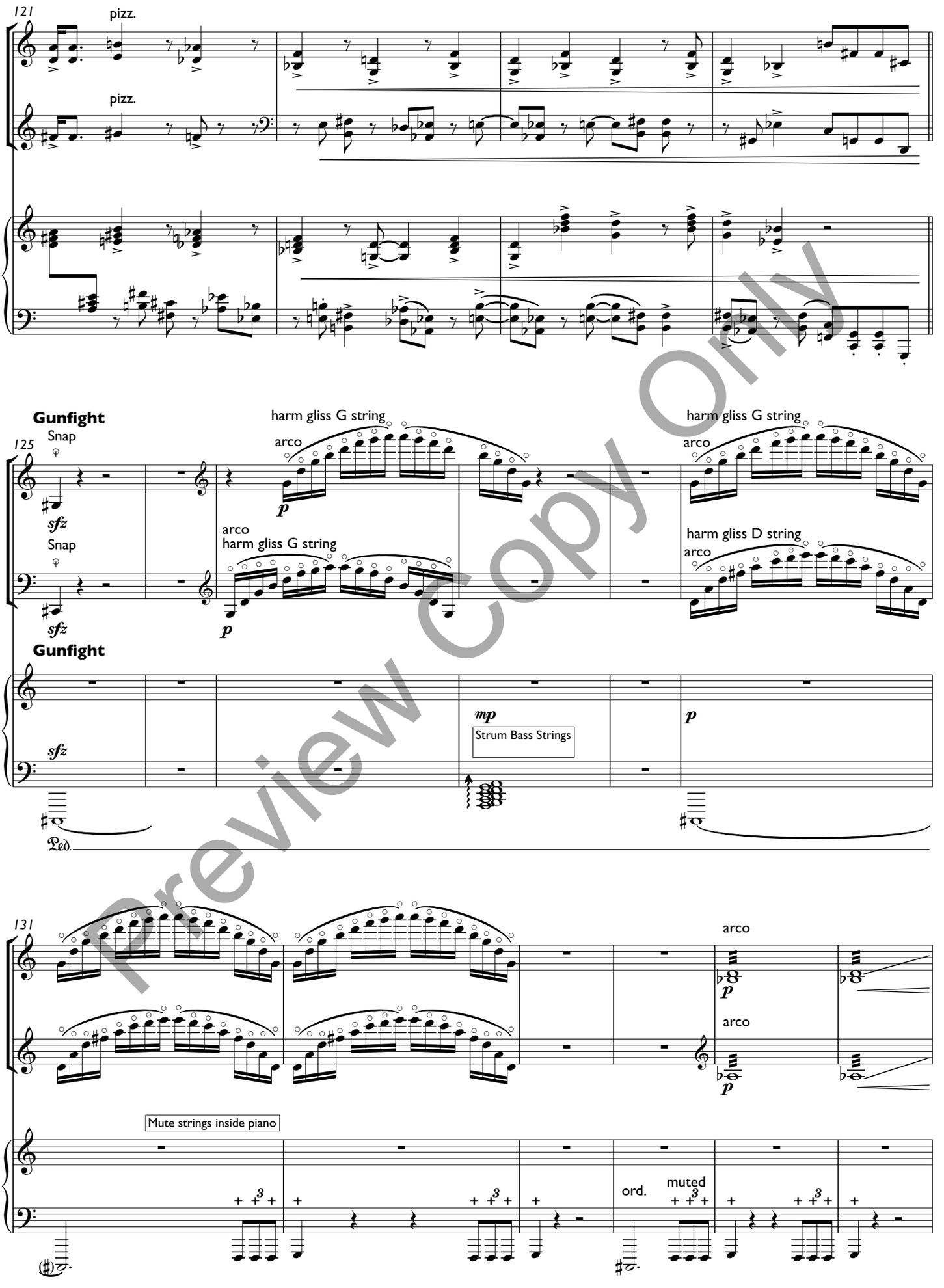

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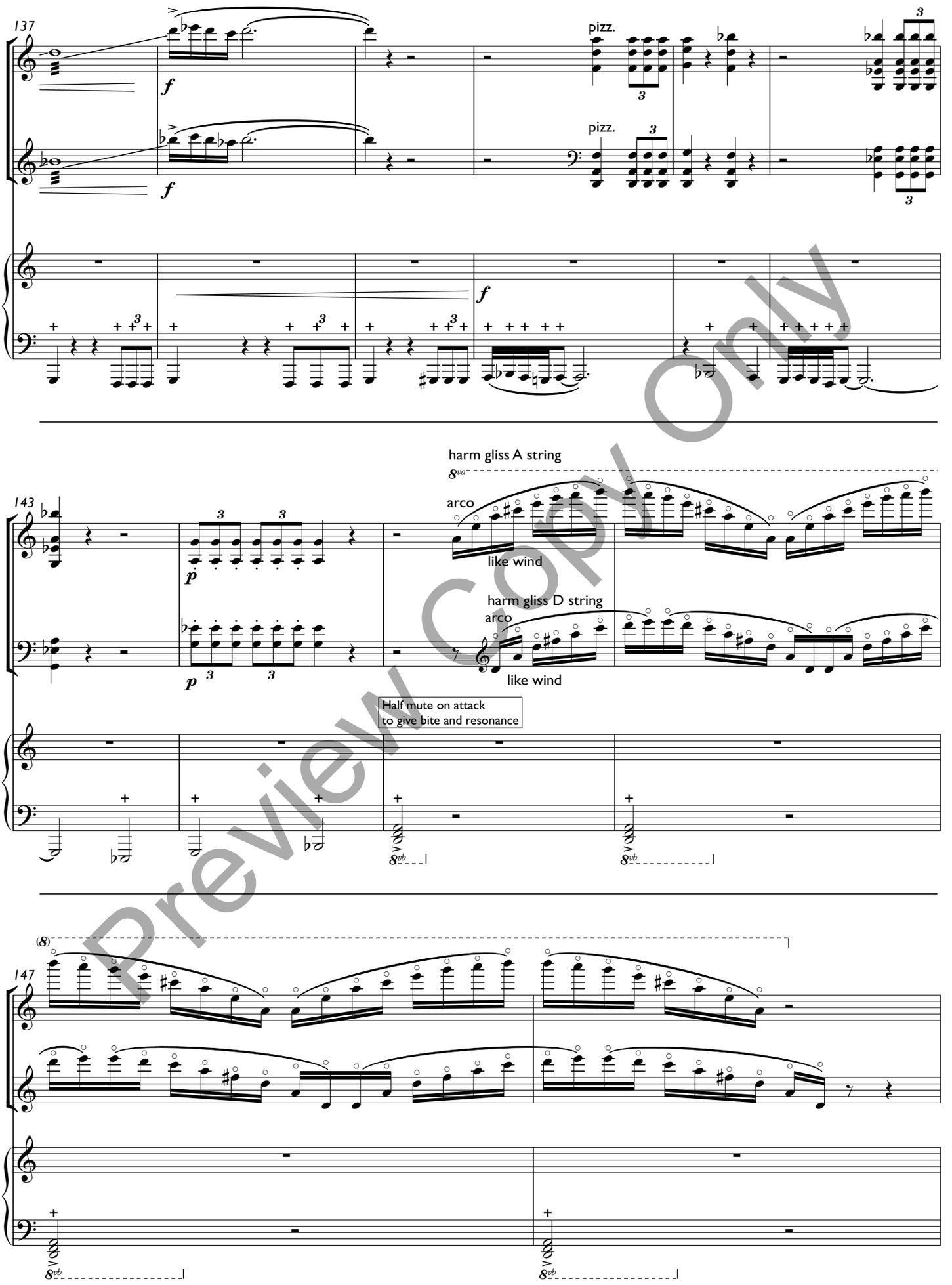

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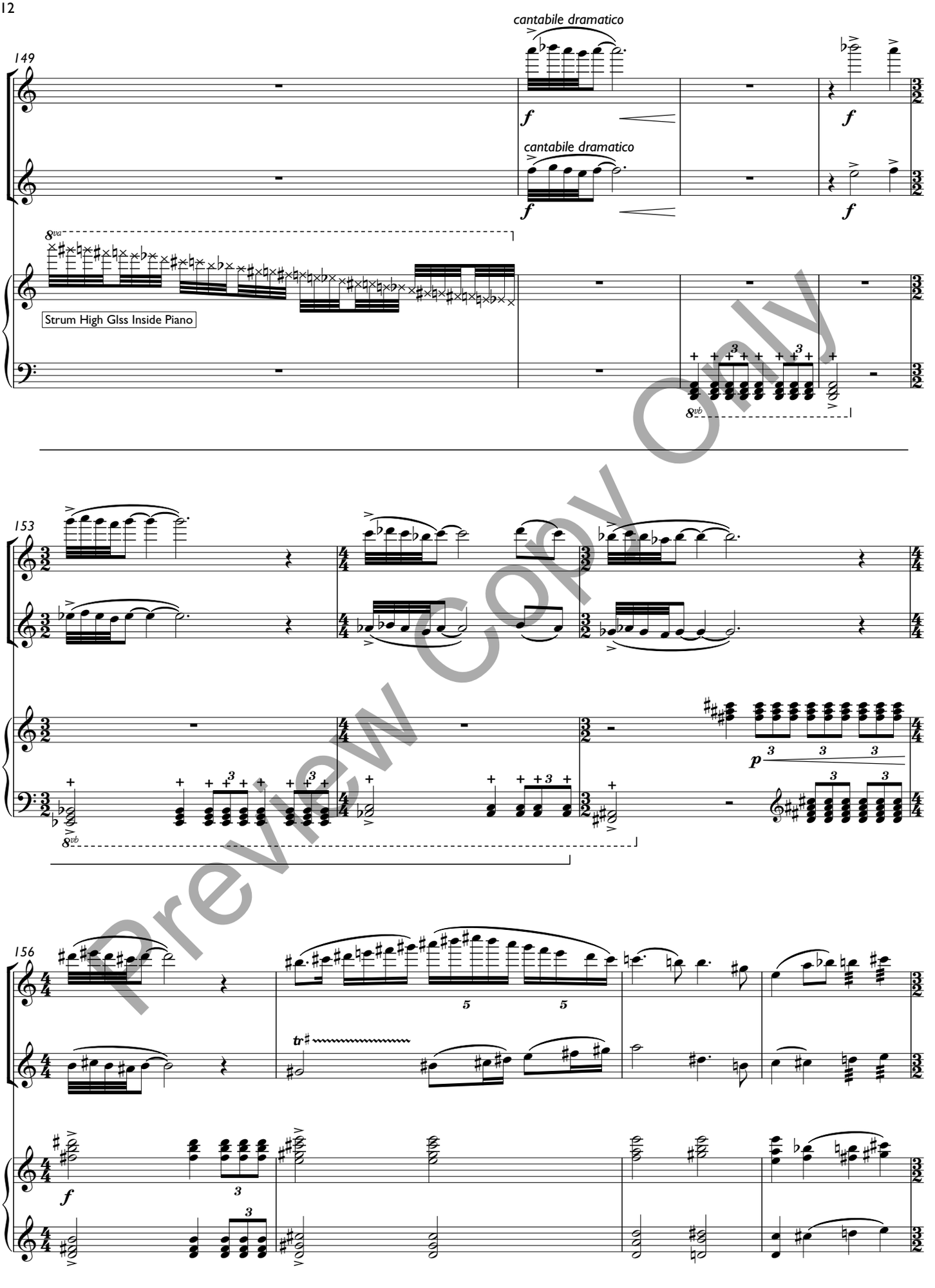

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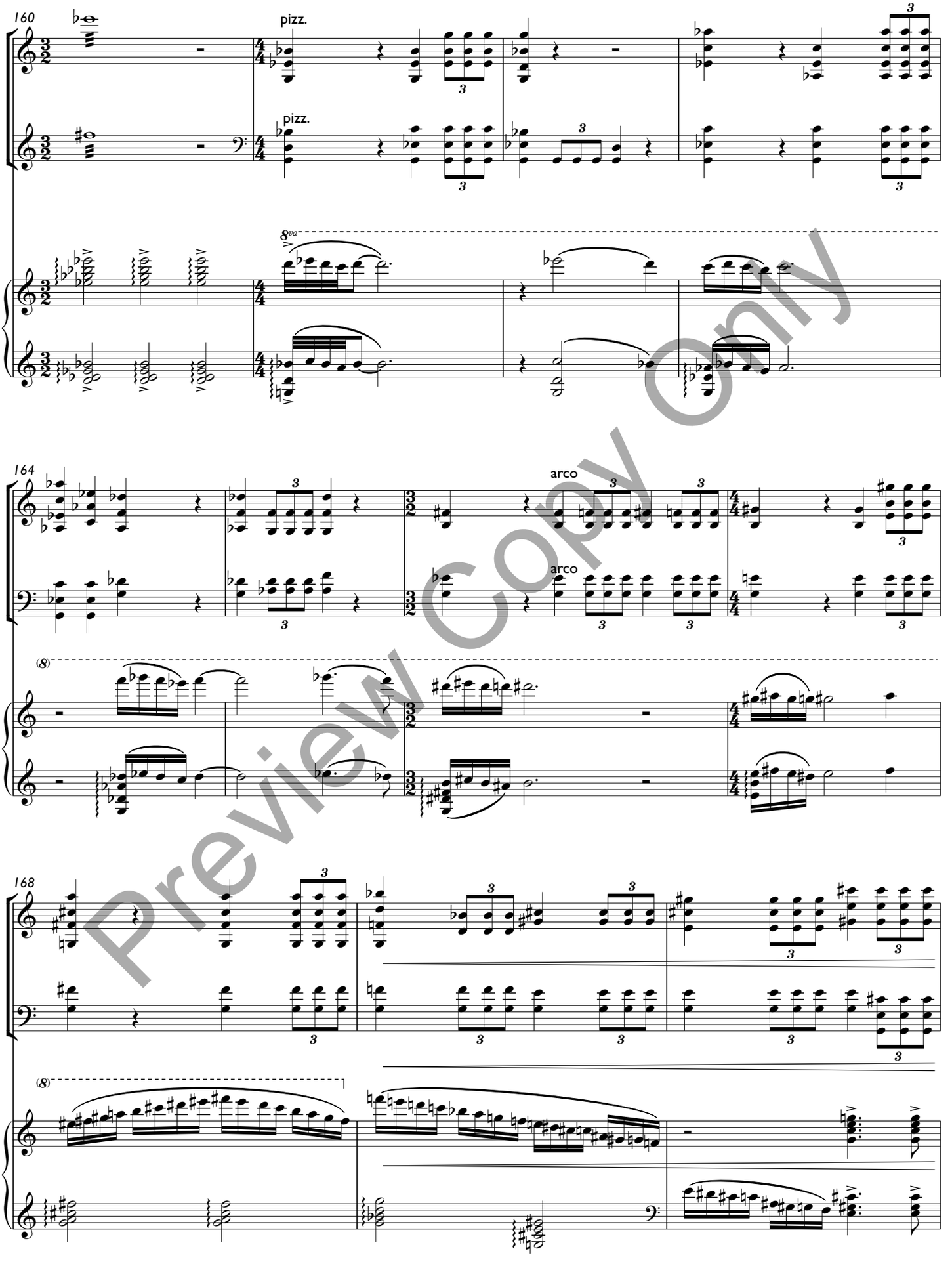

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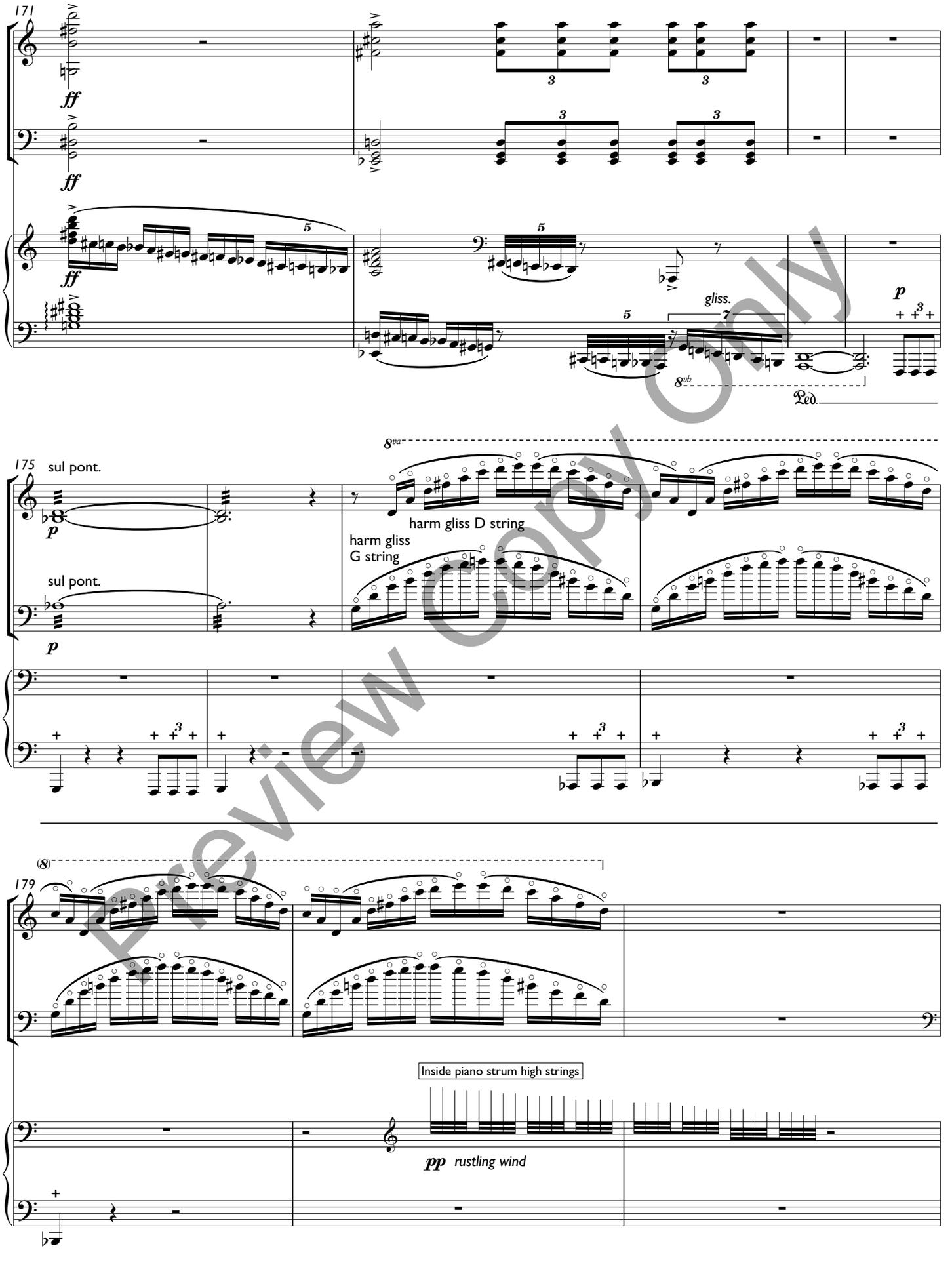

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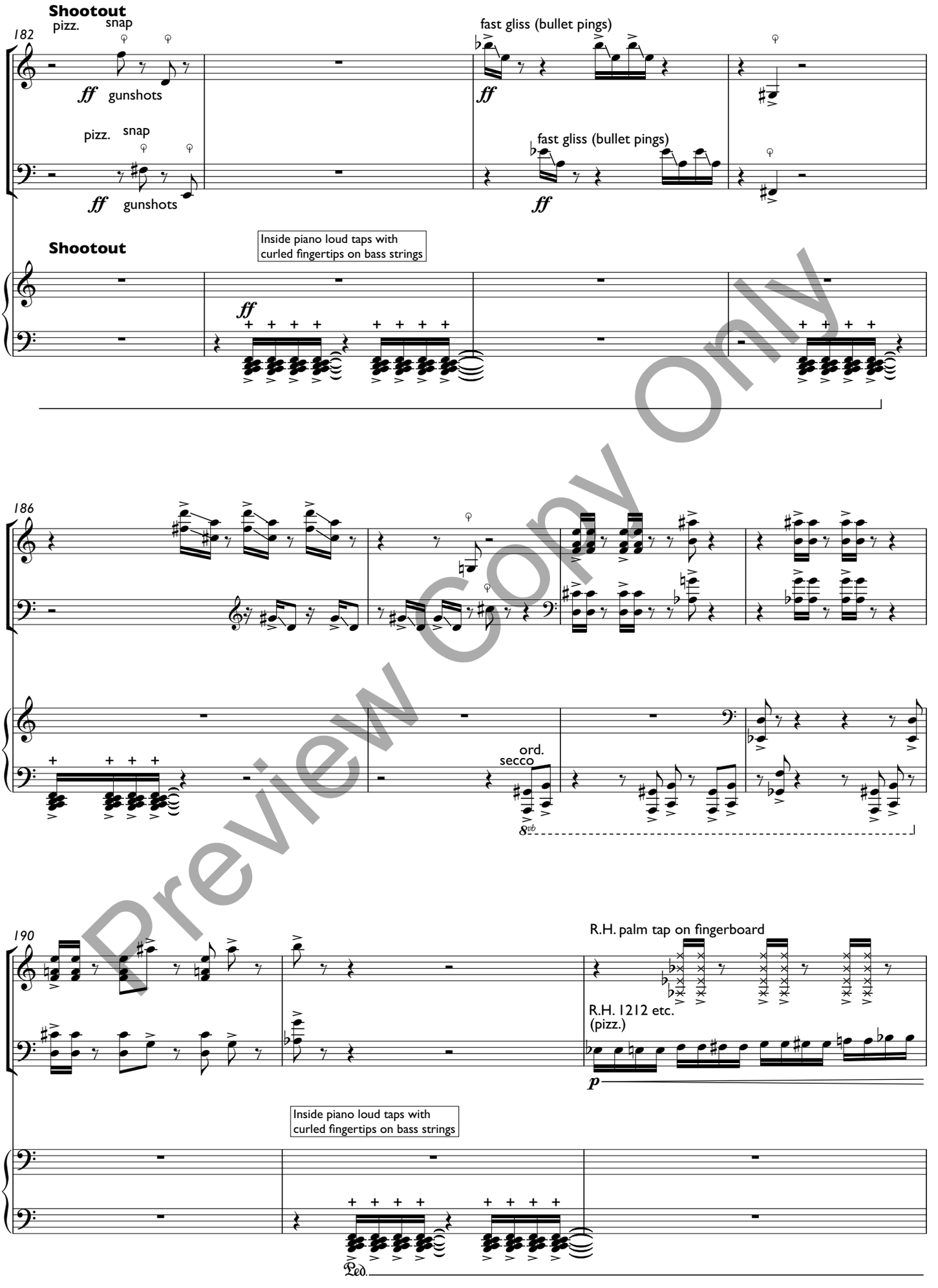

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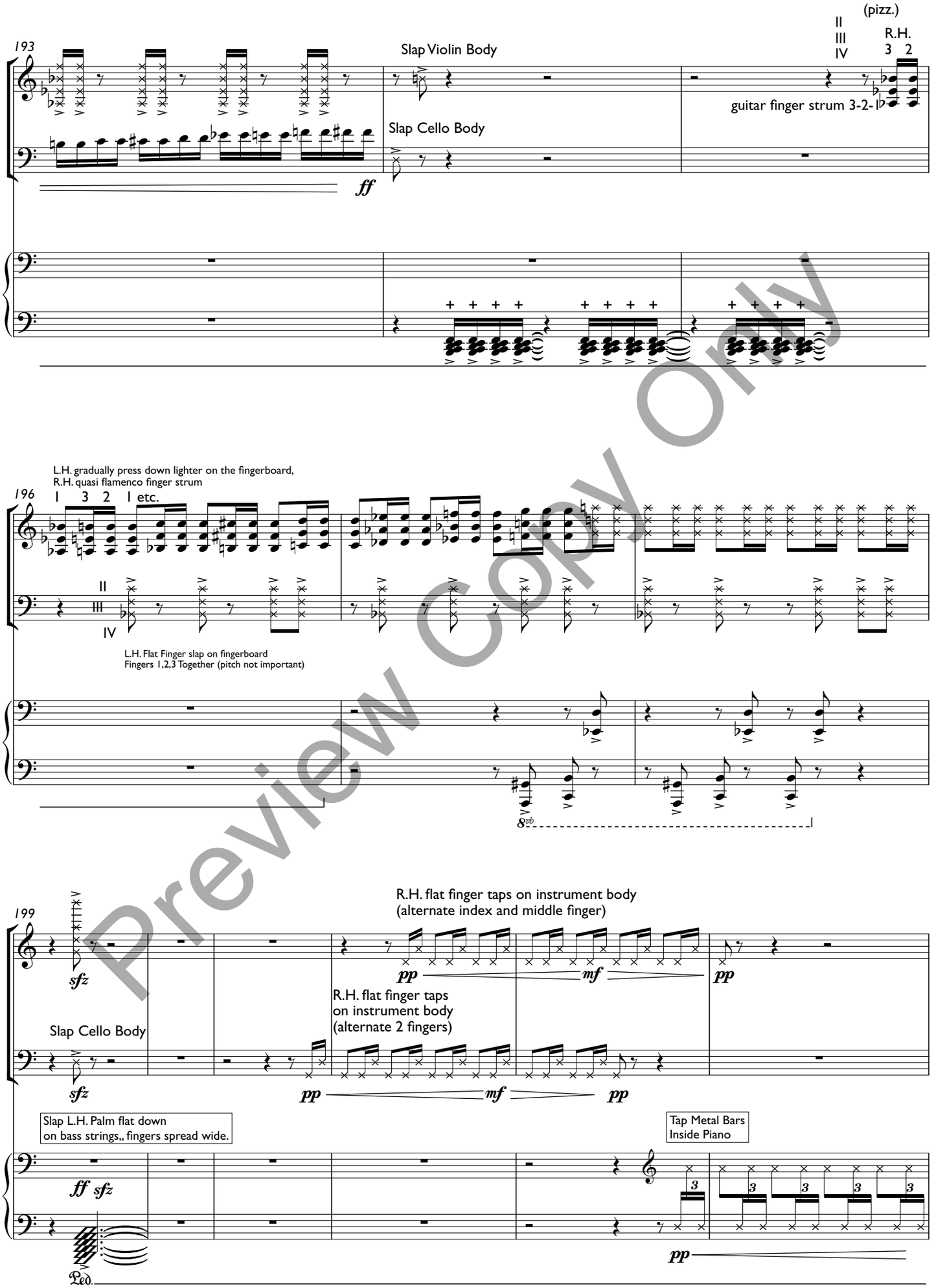

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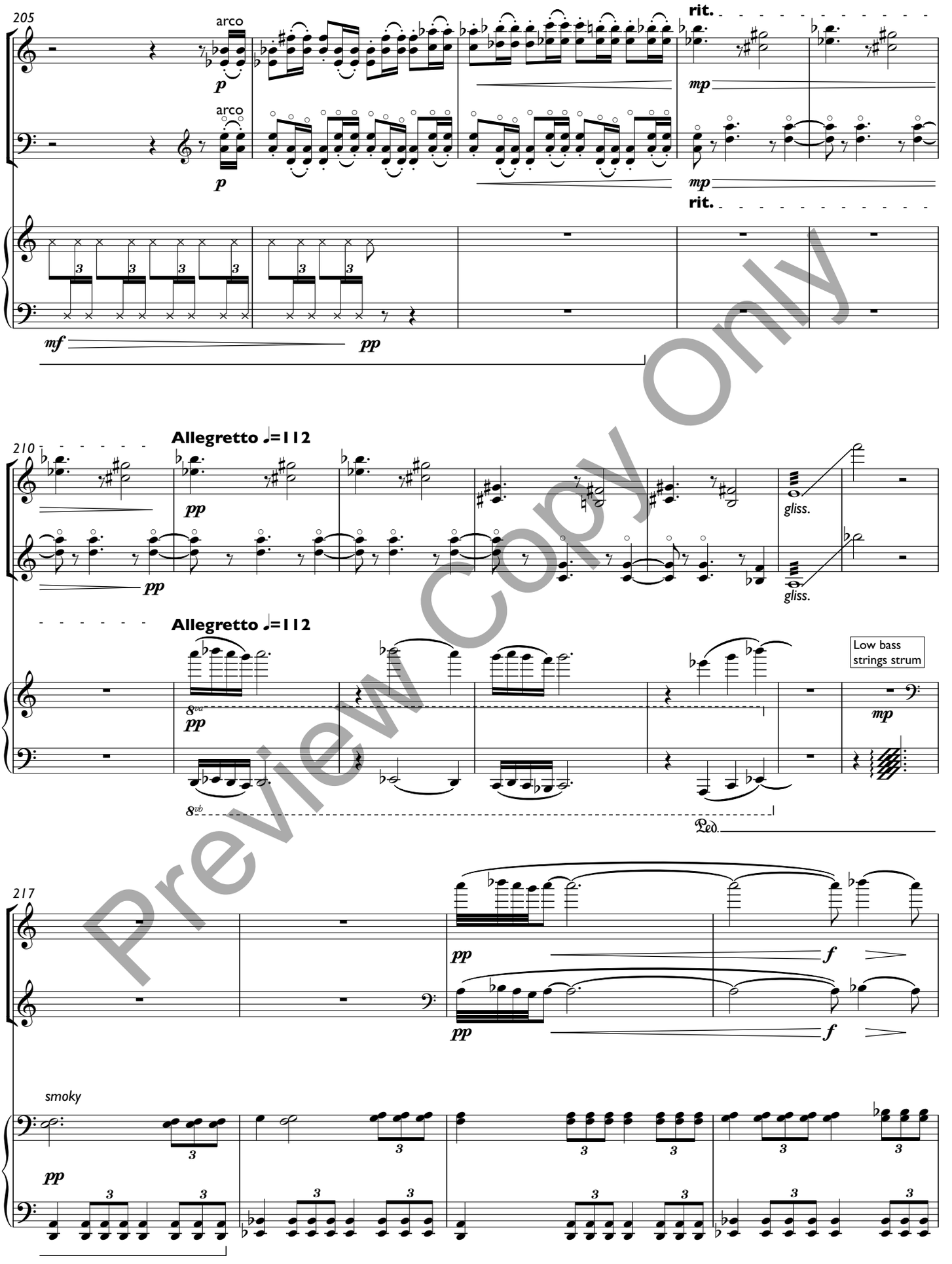

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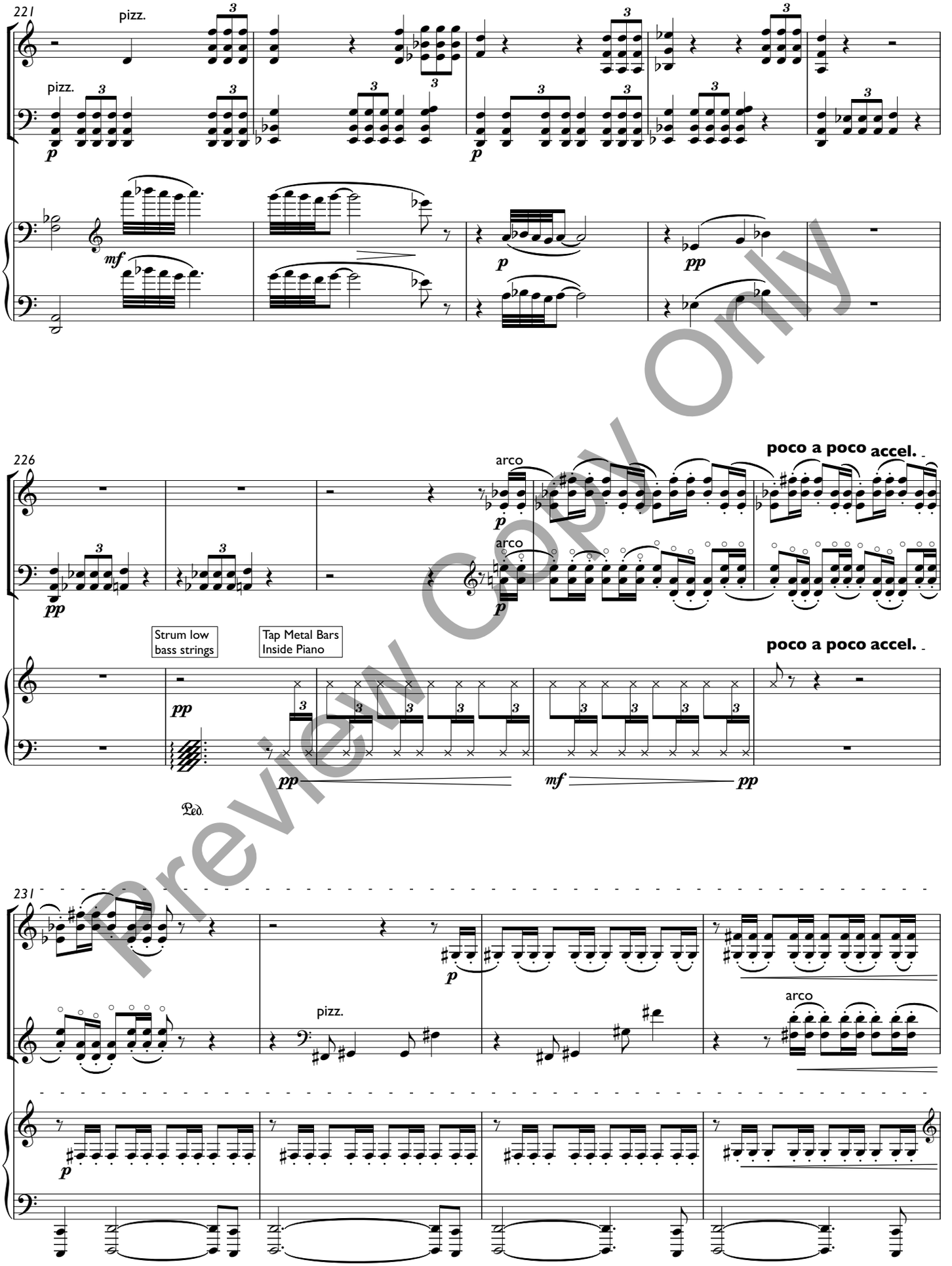

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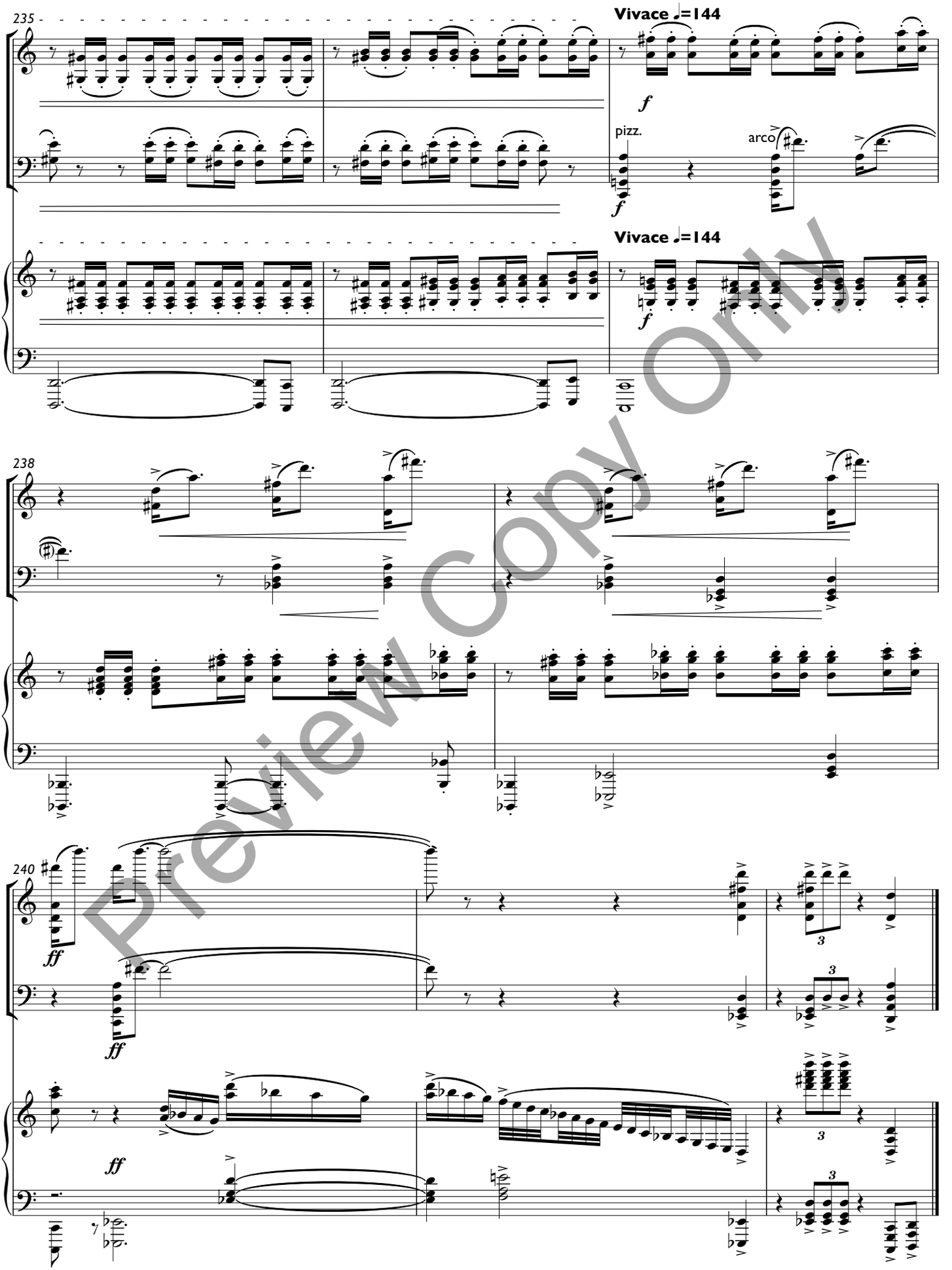

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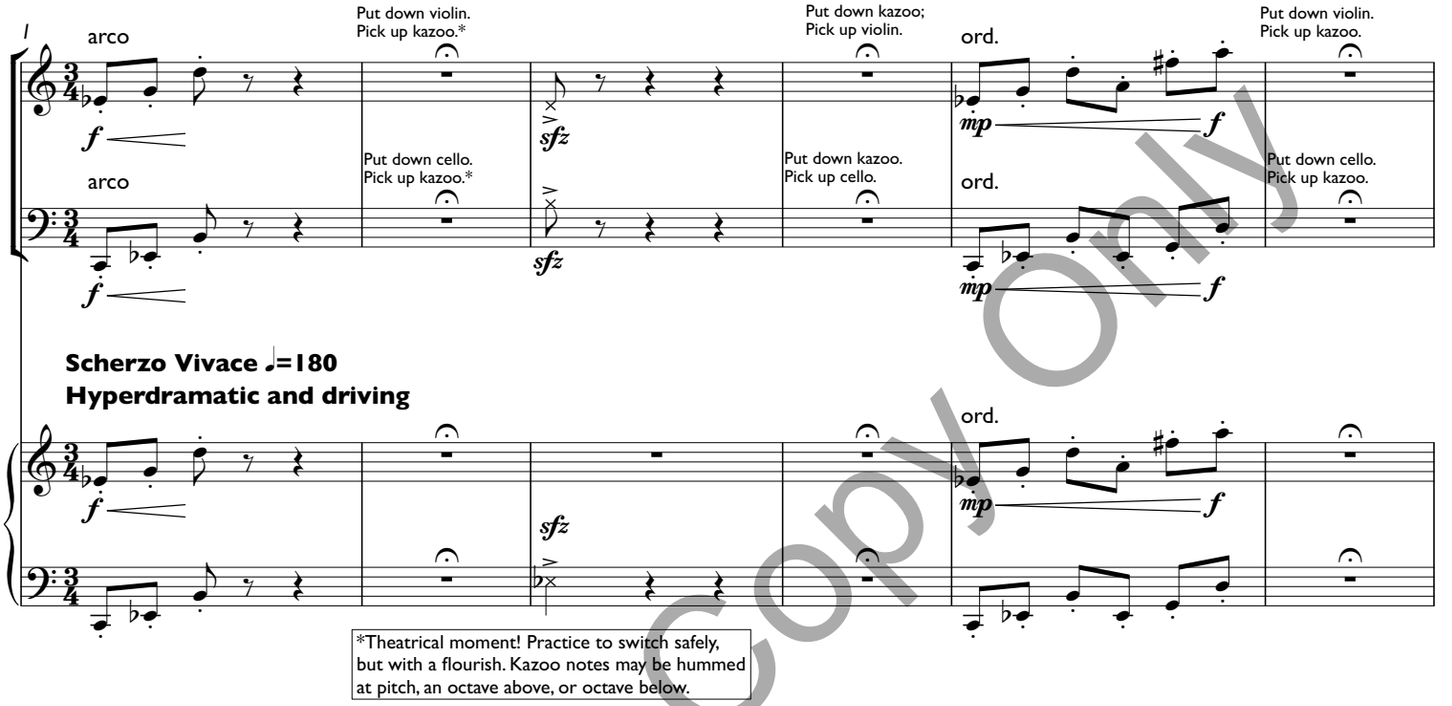
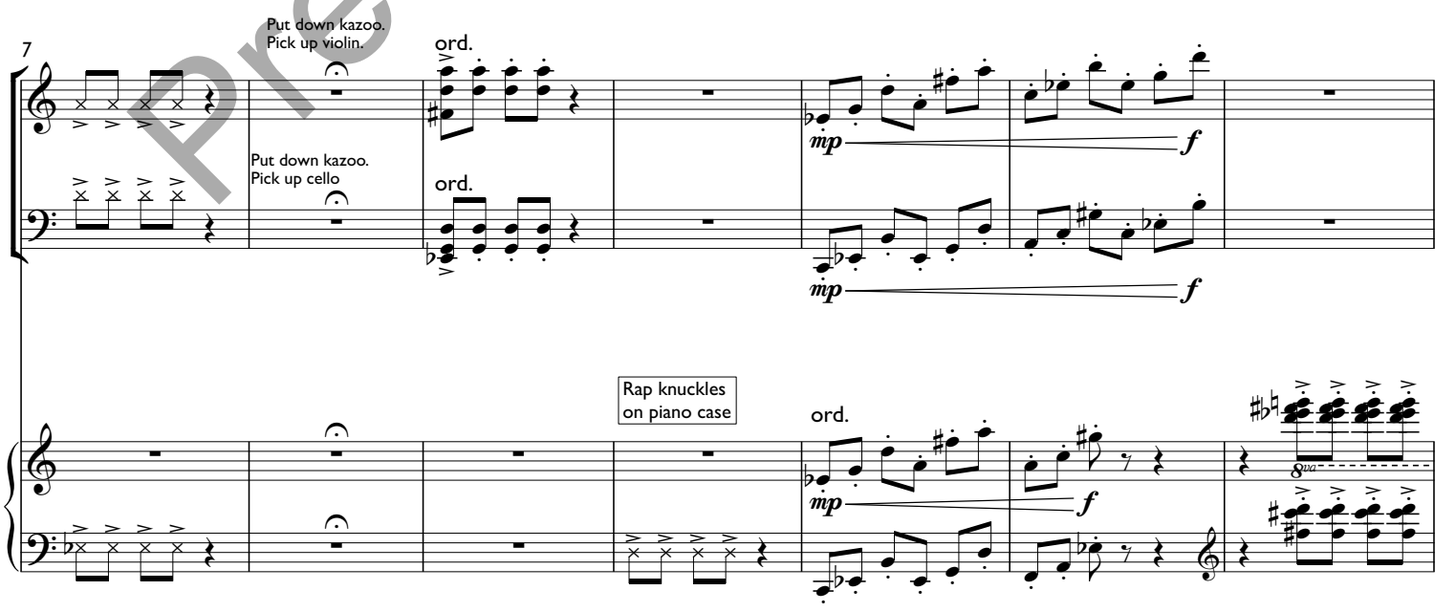
II. Action Hero

Scherzo Vivace ♩=180
Hyperdramatic and driving



*Theatrical moment! Practice to switch safely, but with a flourish. Kazoo notes may be hummed at pitch, an octave above, or octave below.



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"Frenetic Blues"

percussive

14

mf *f*

mf *f*

(8)

"Frenetic Blues"

percussive

22

29

p *f*

p *f*

p *f*

mp *f*

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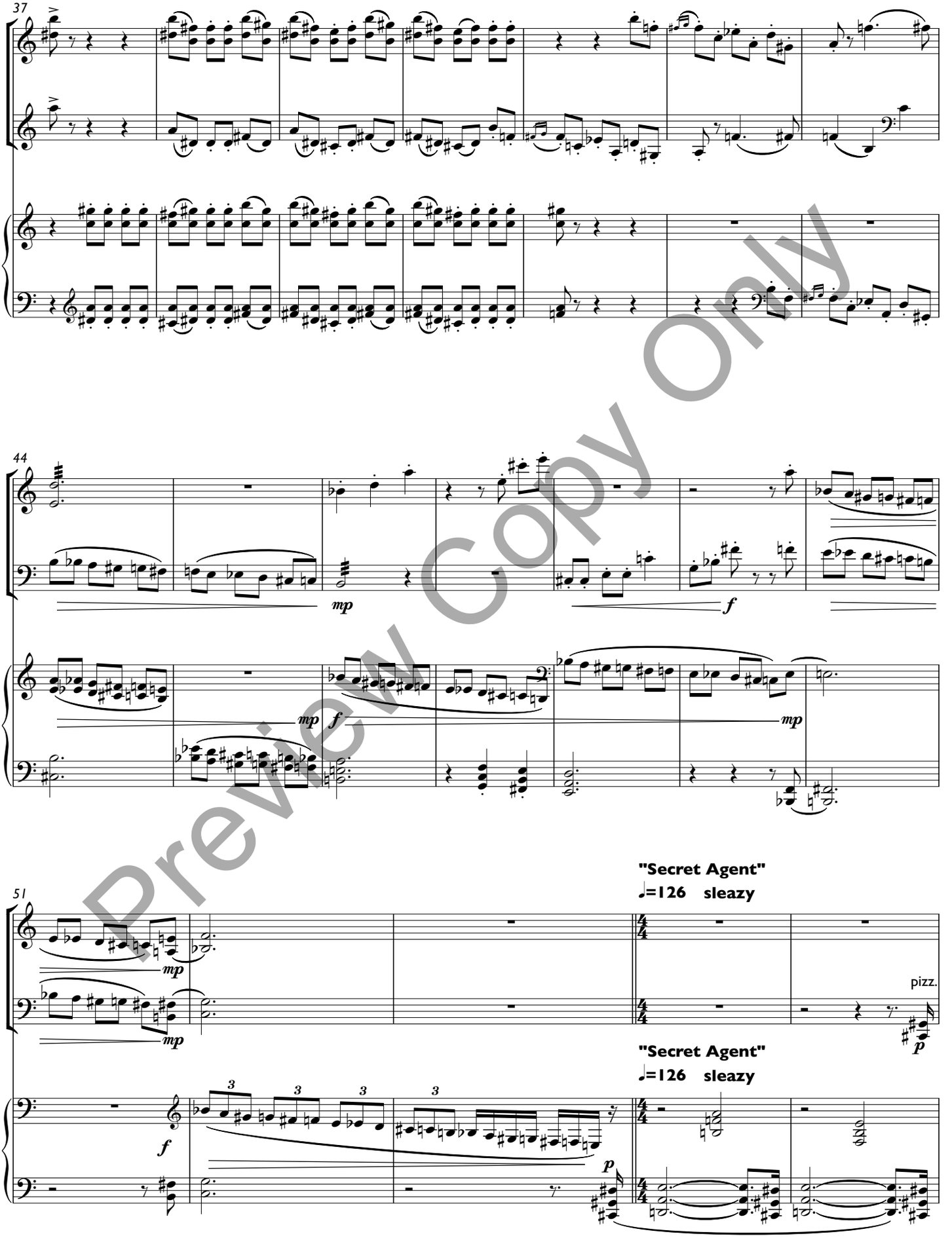

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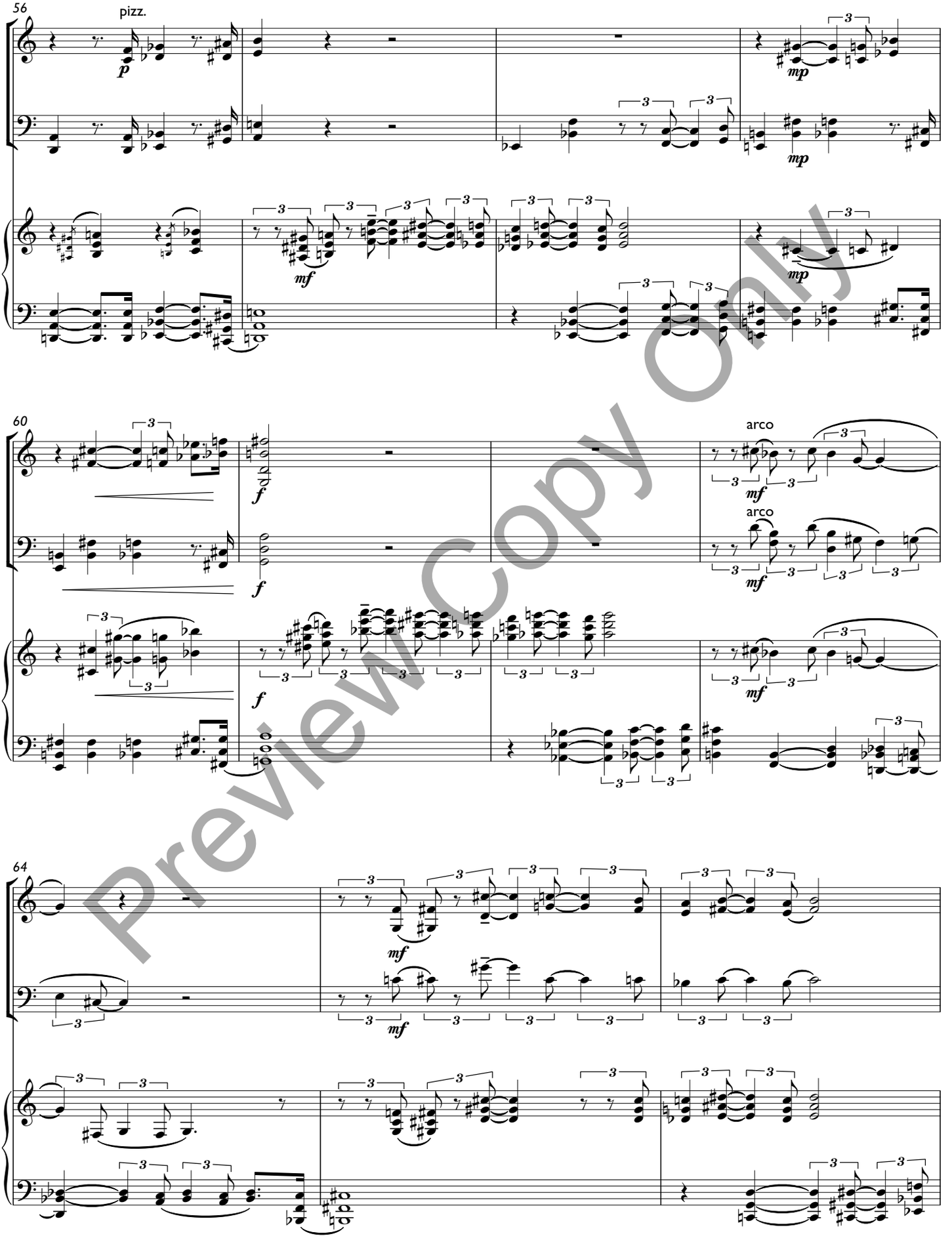

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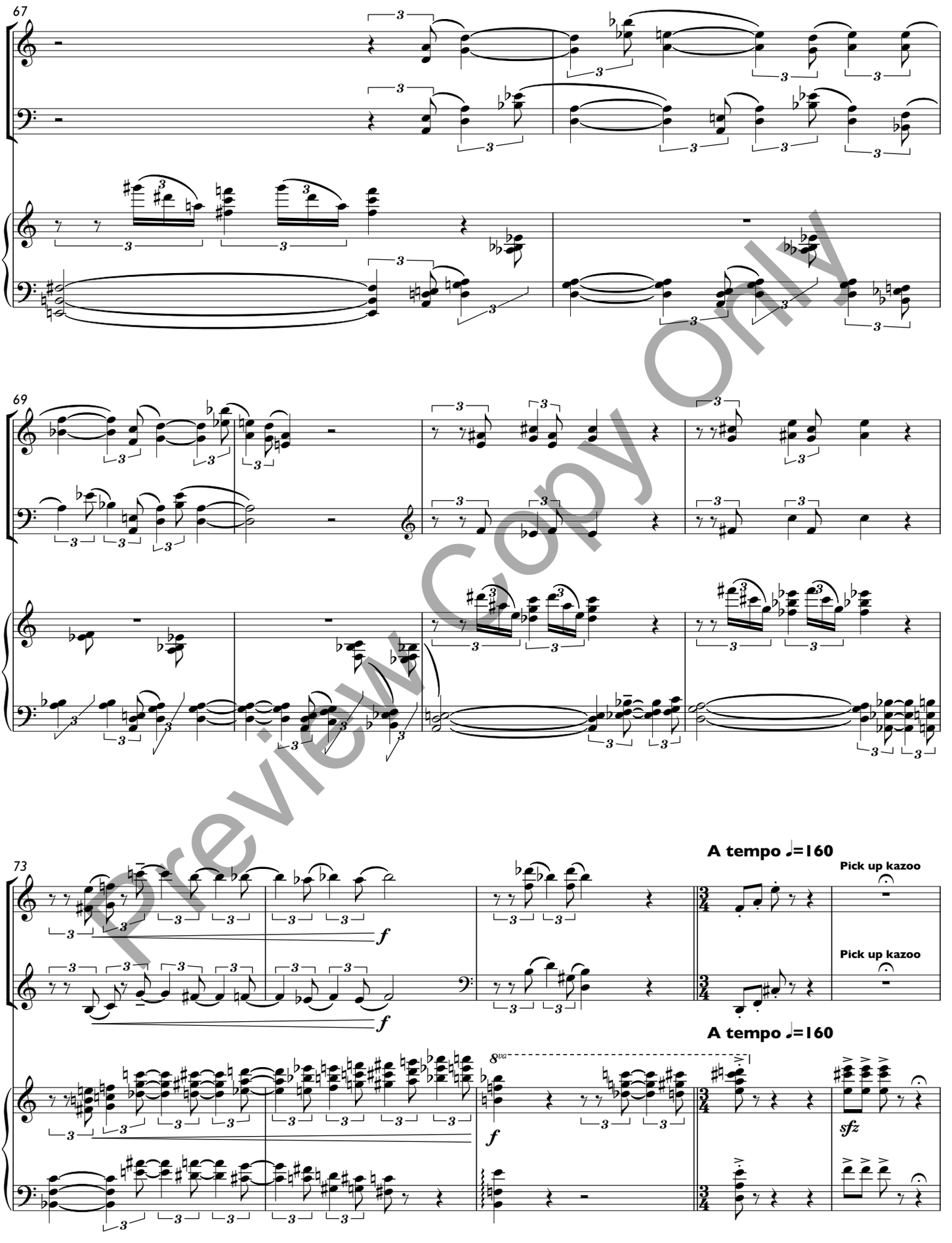

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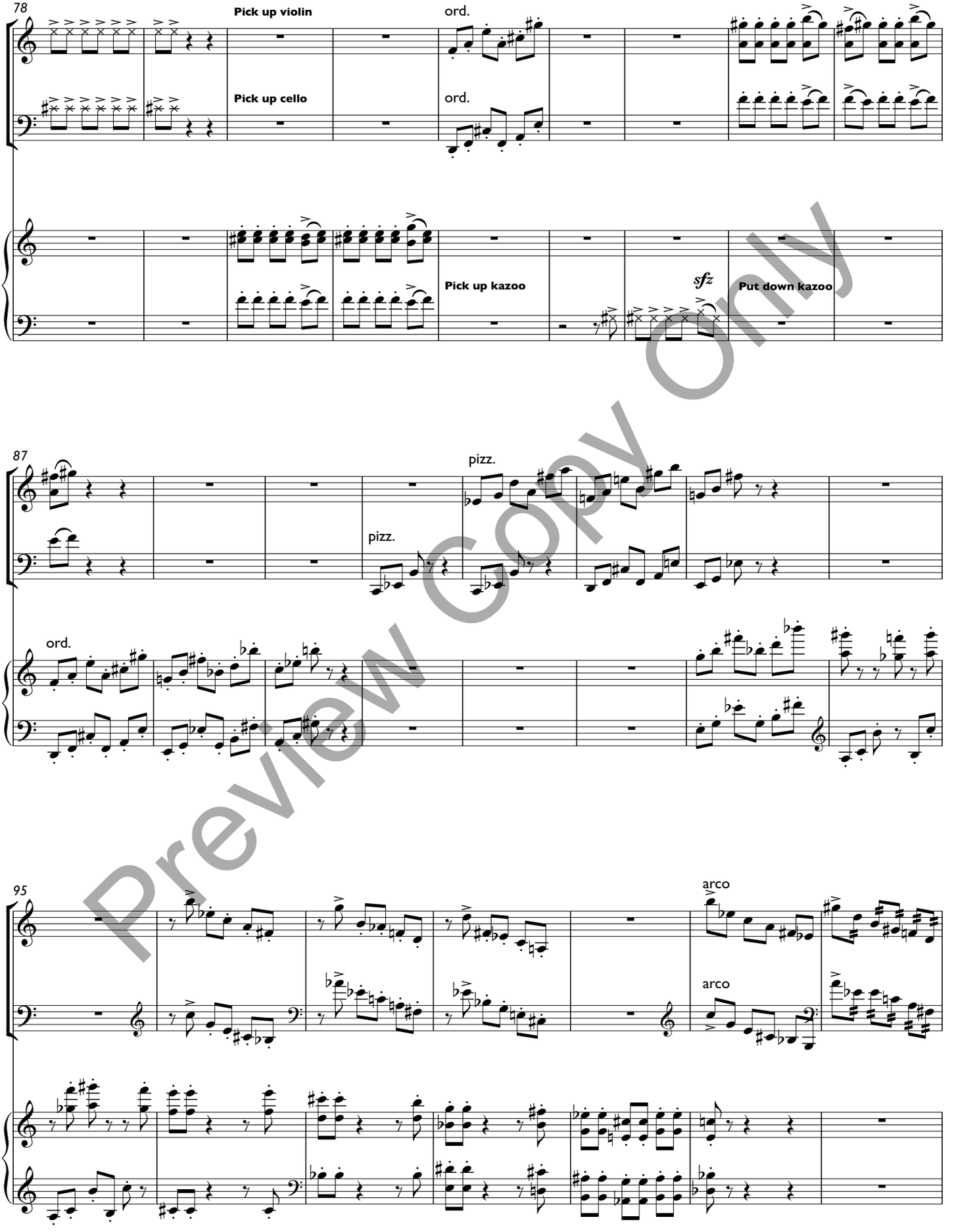

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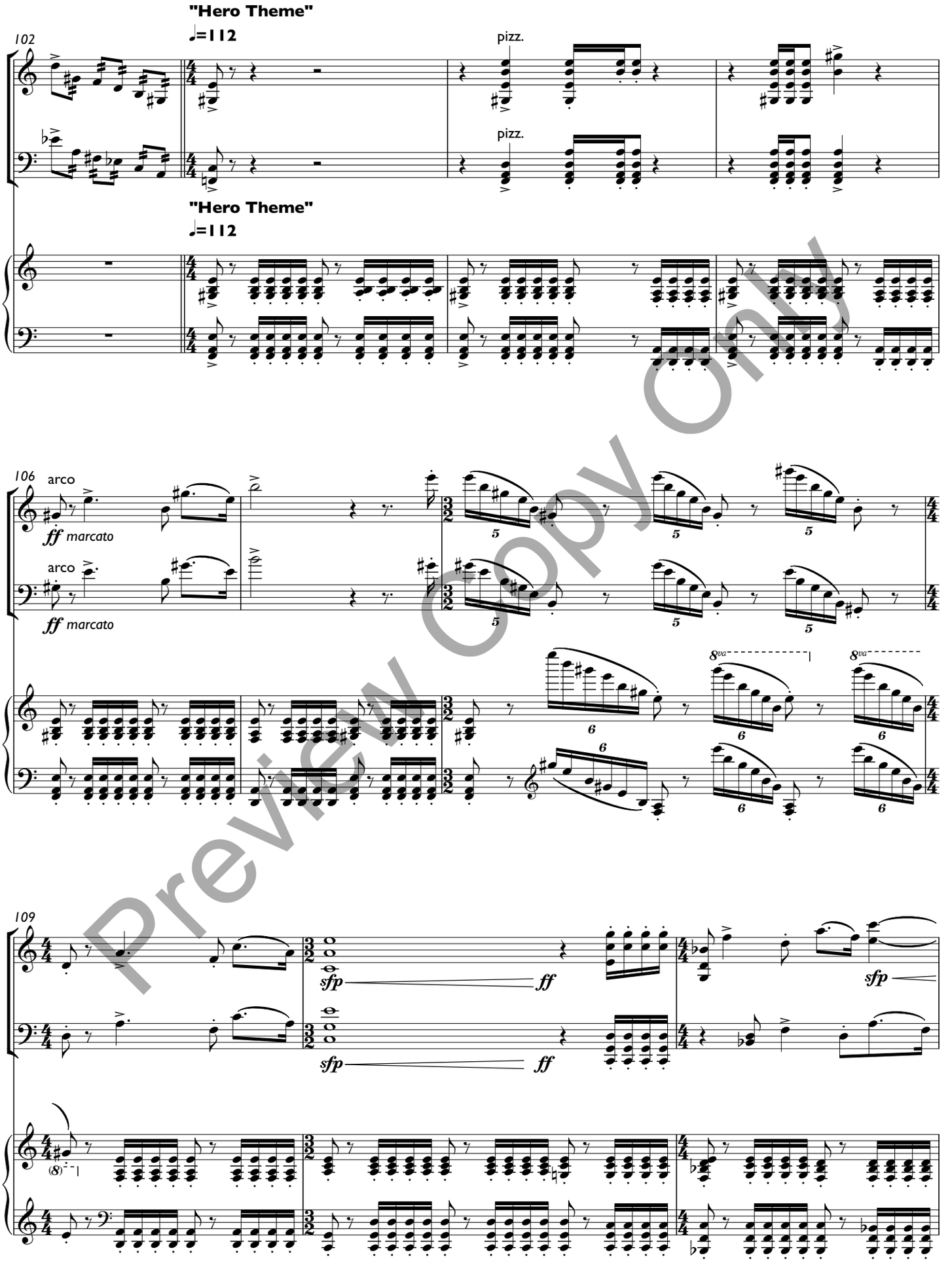

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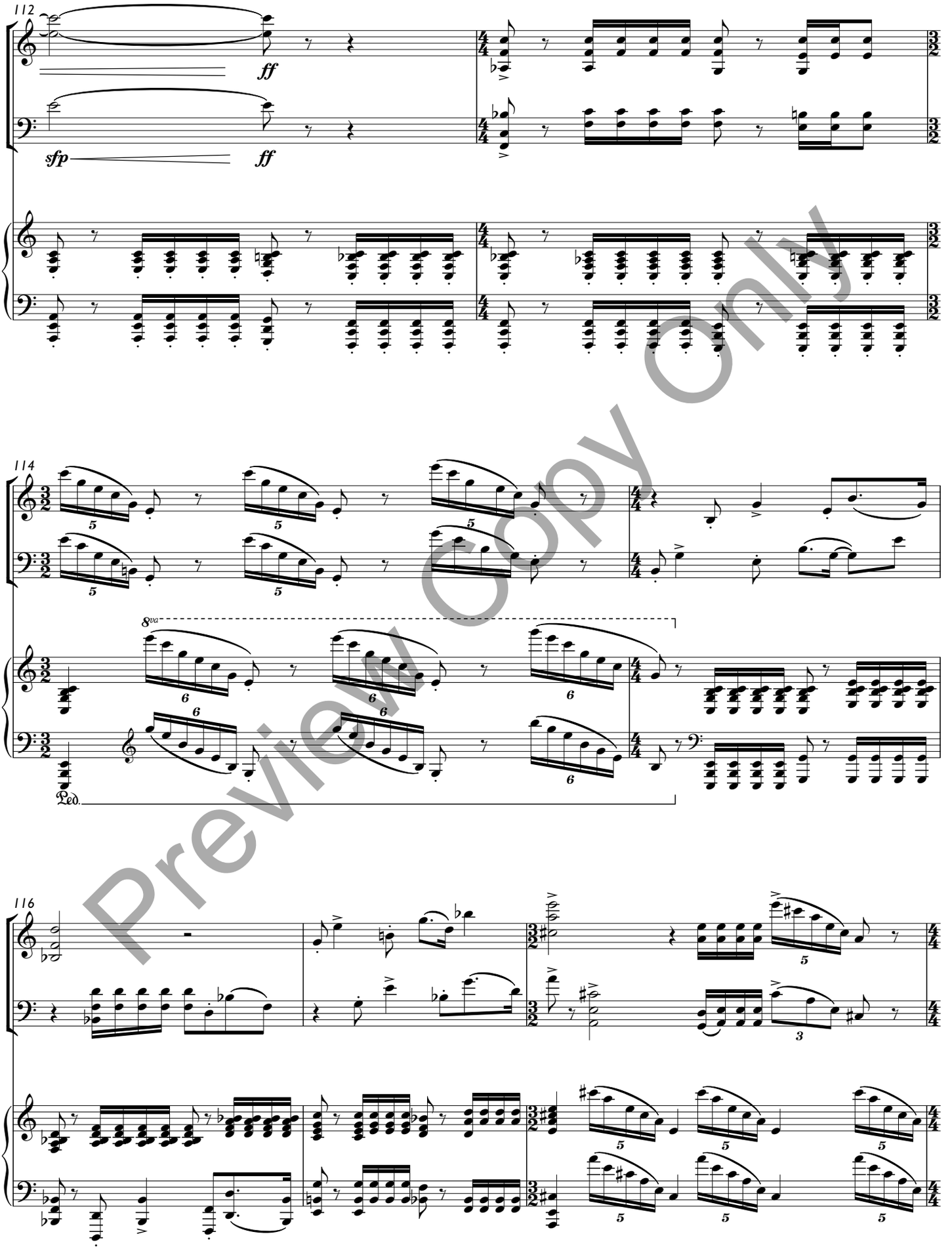

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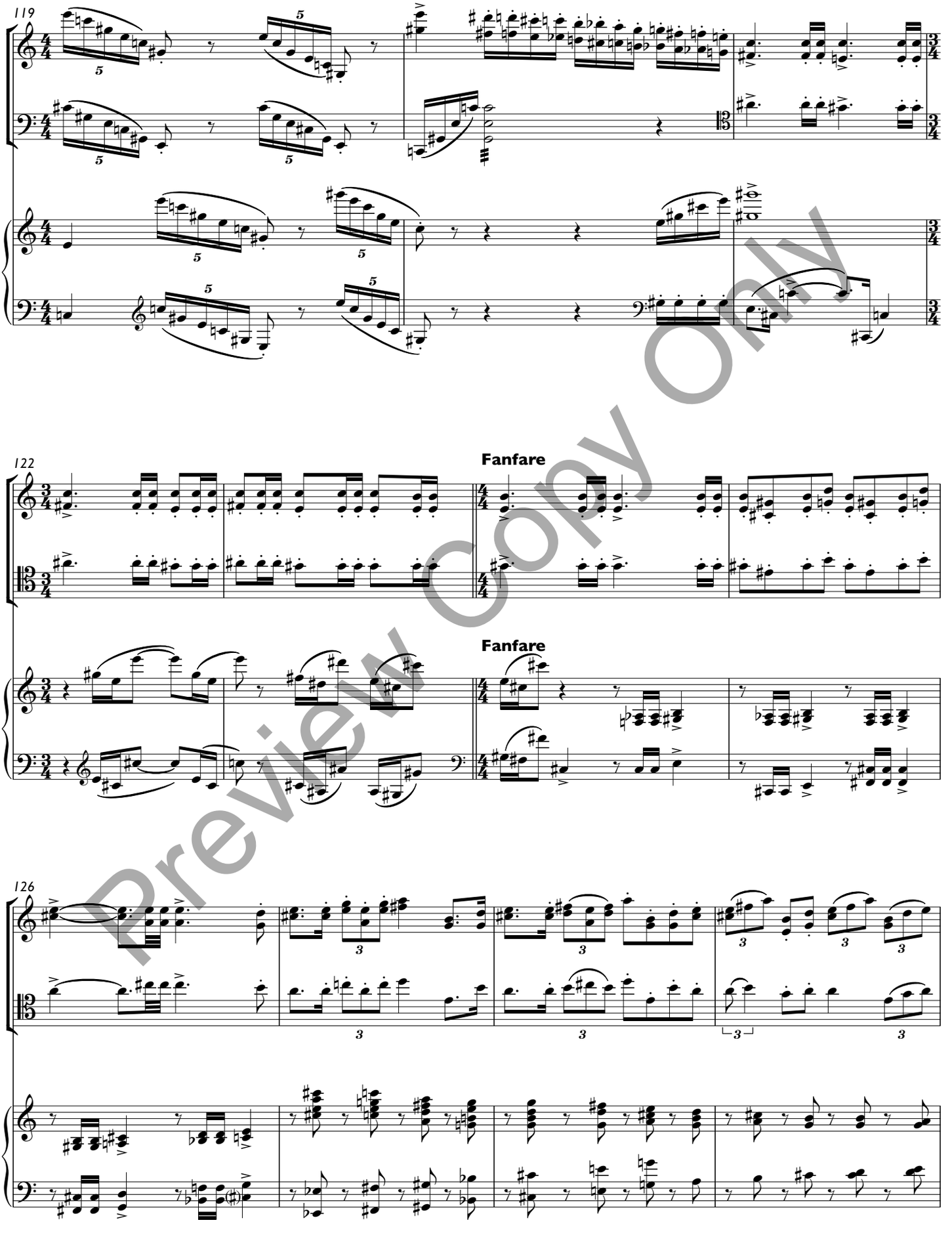

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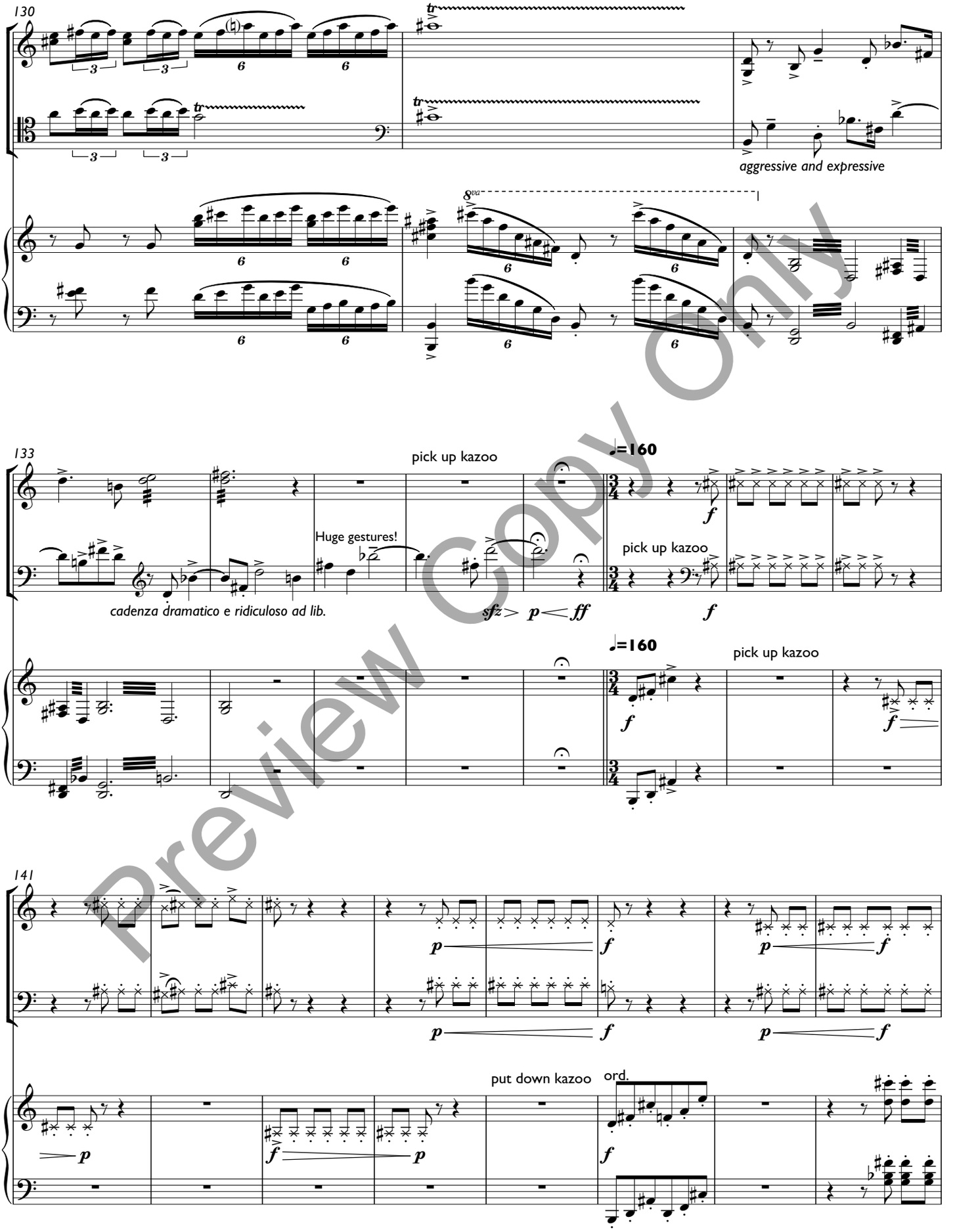

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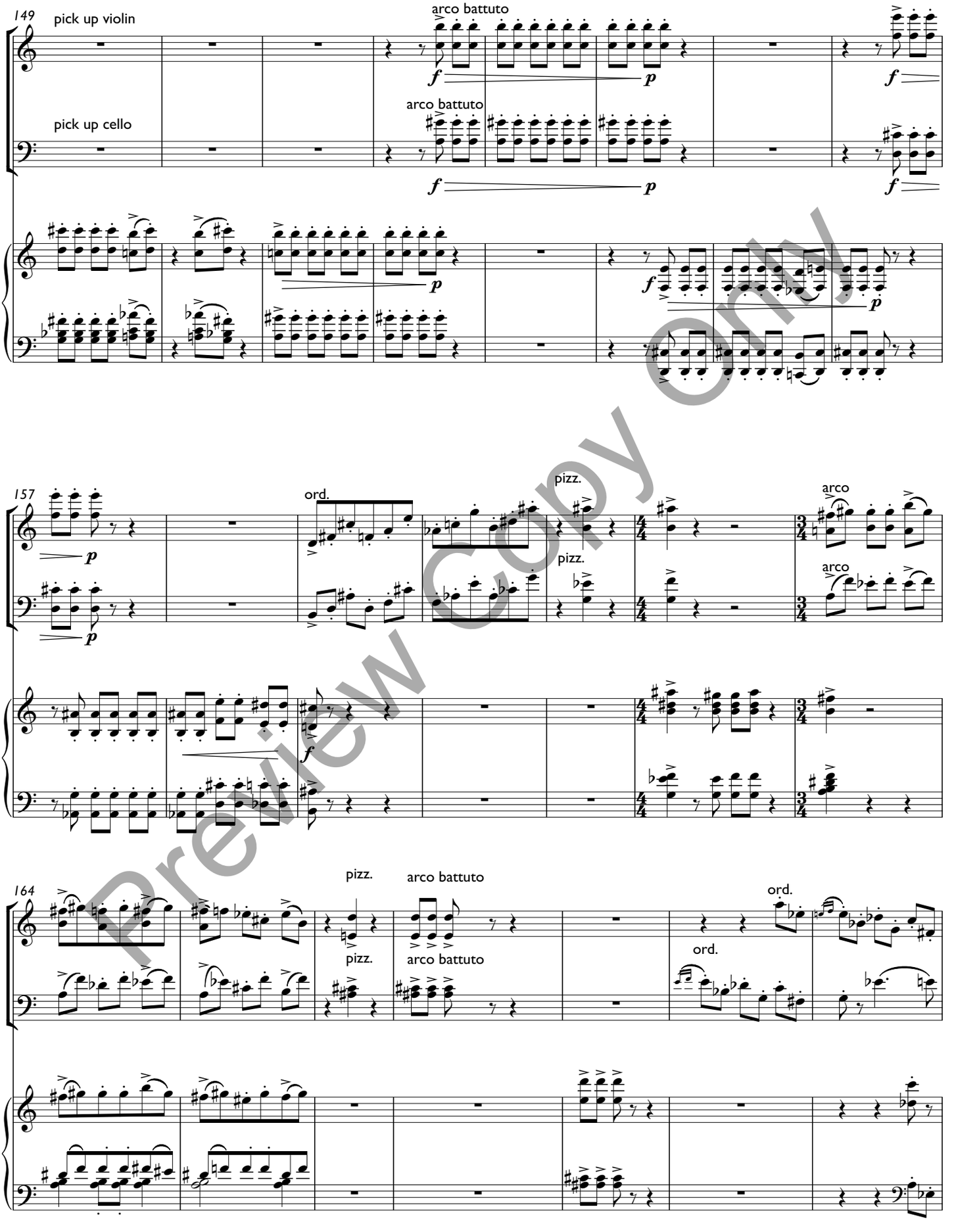

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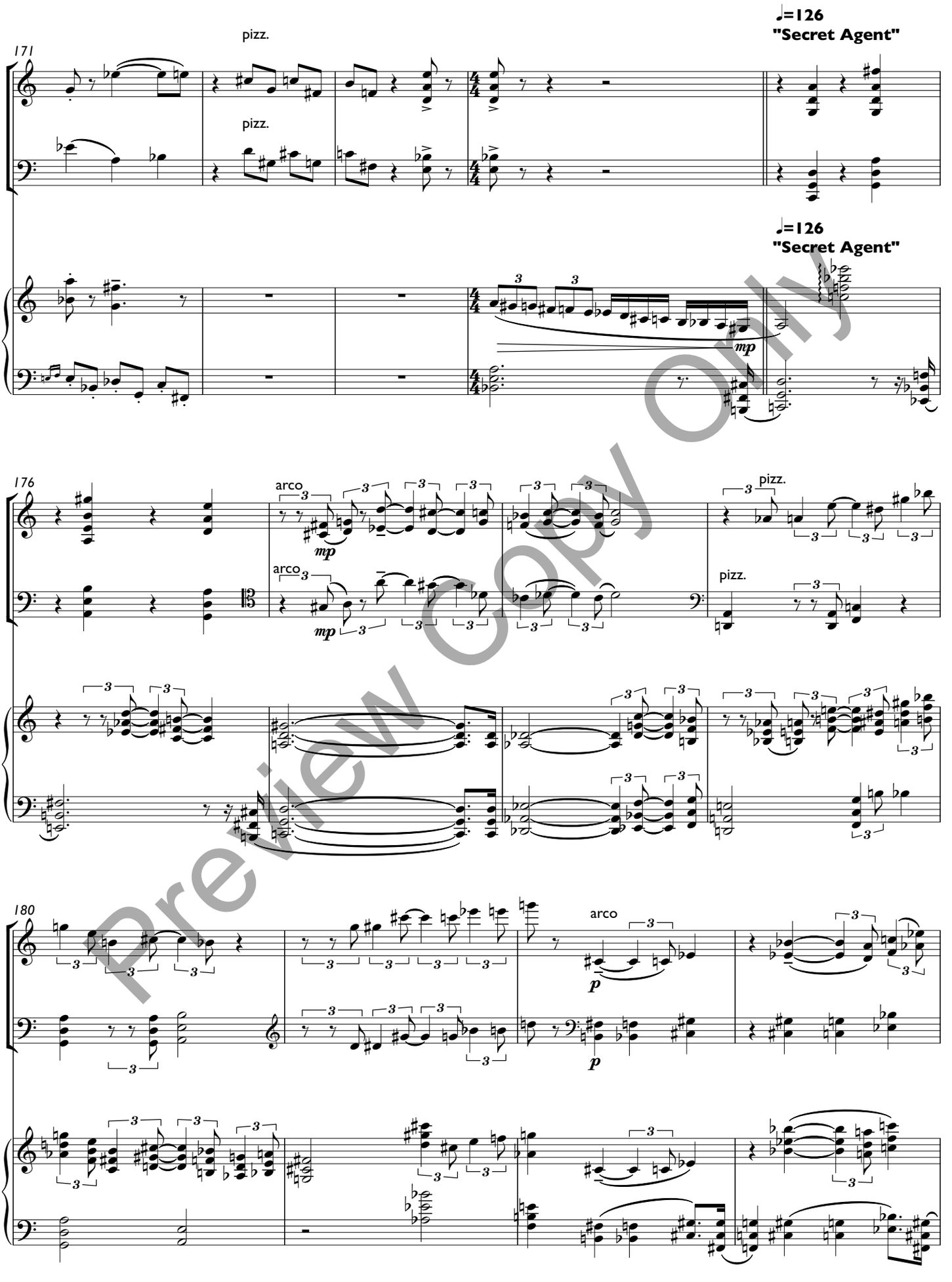

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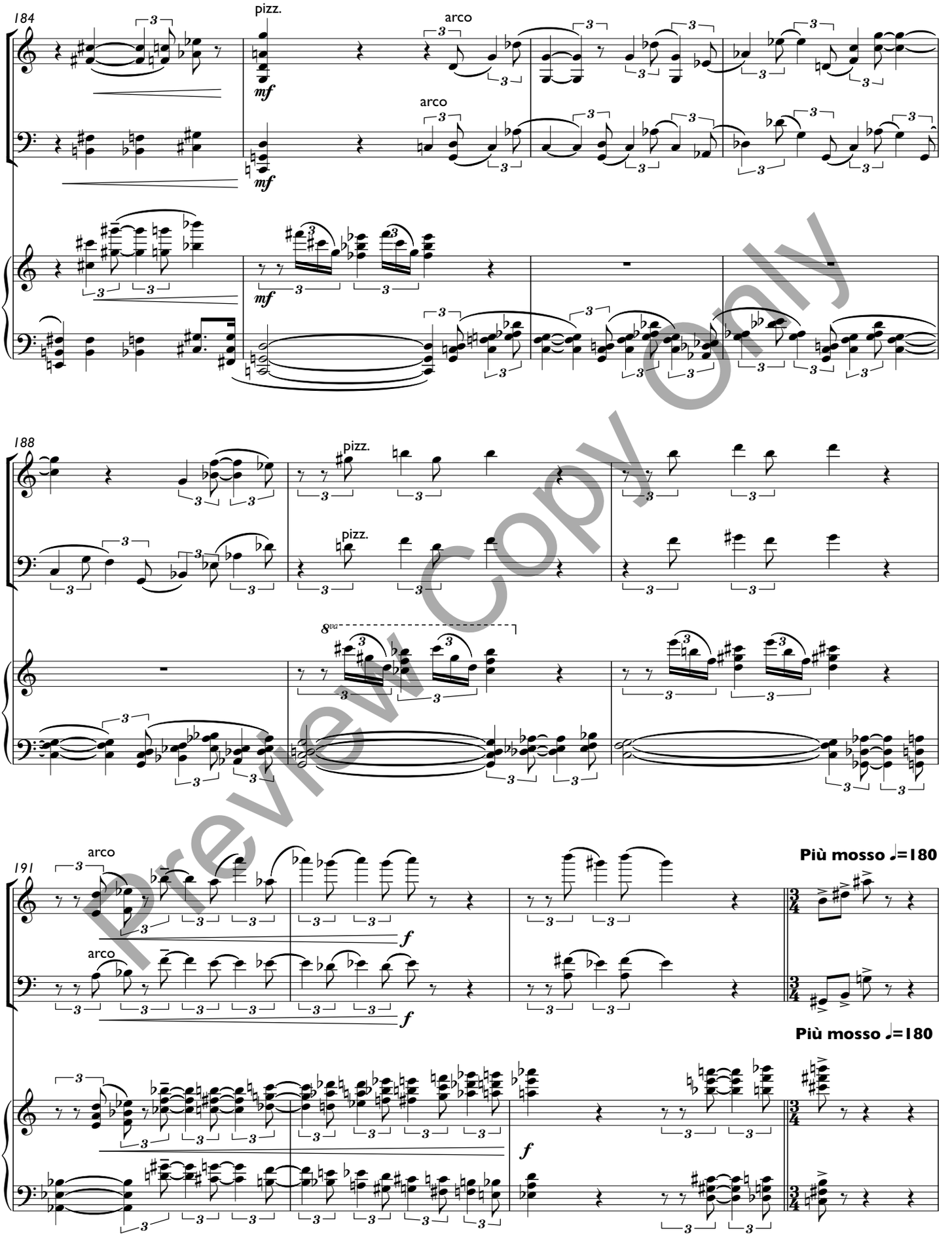

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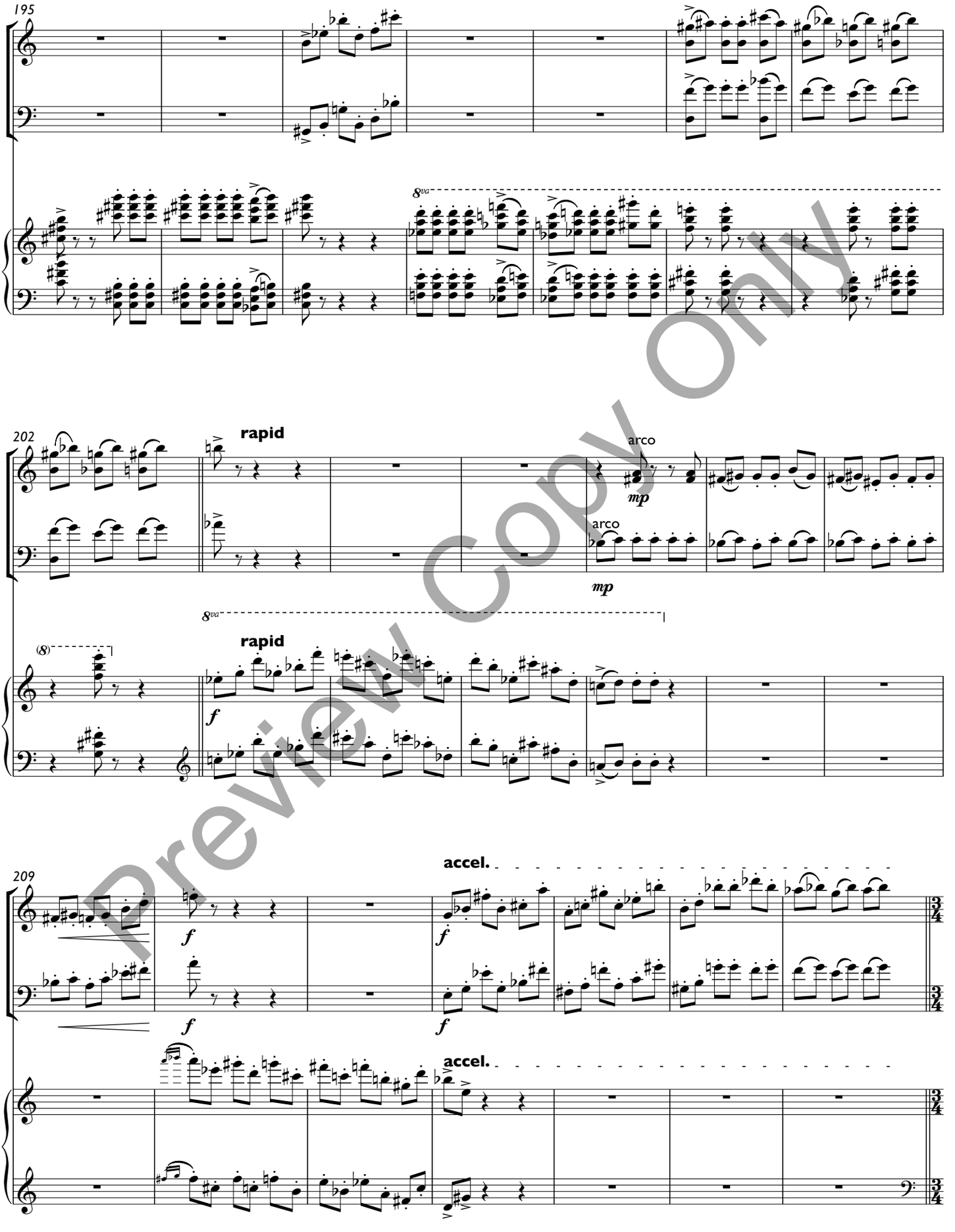

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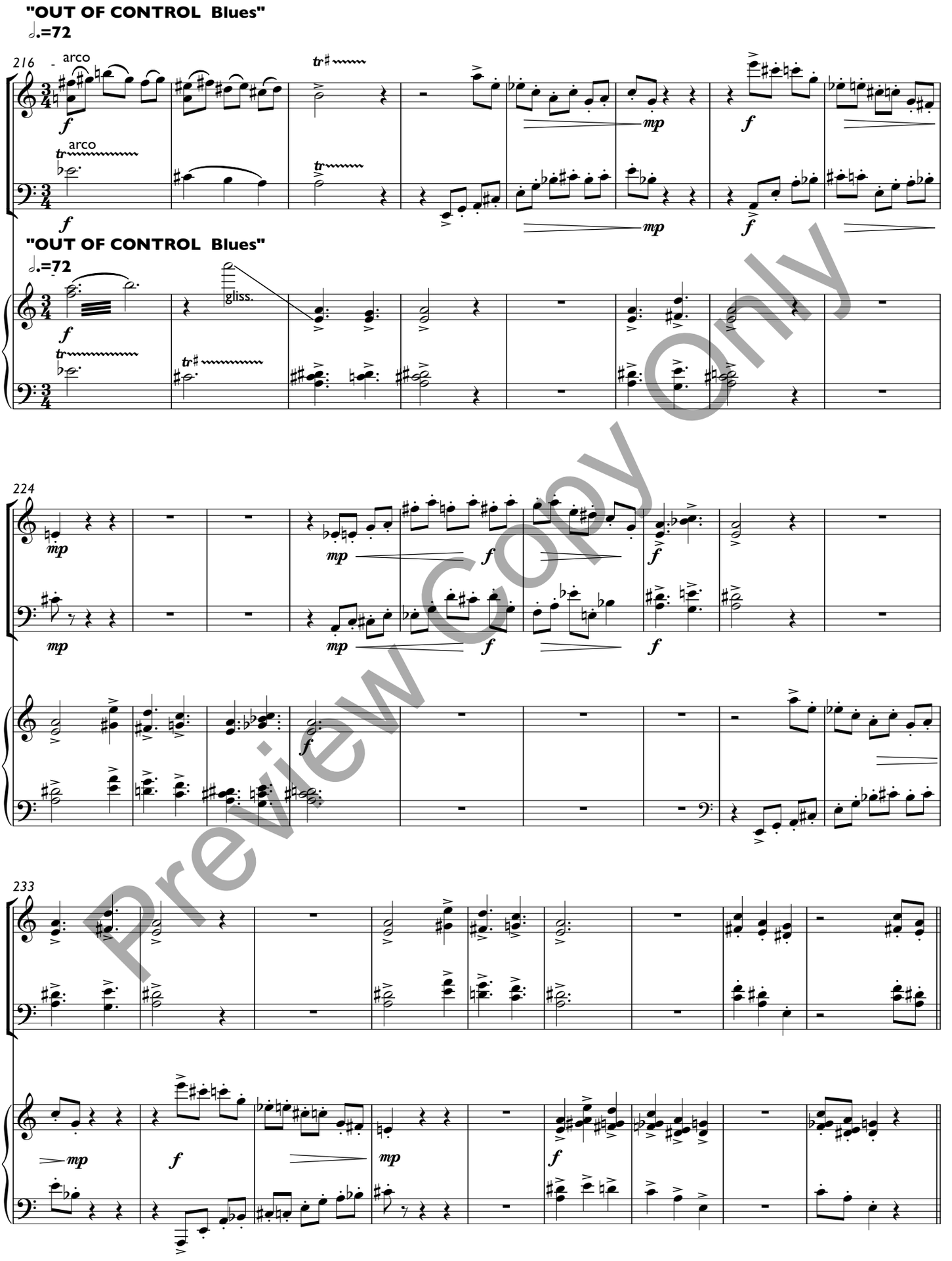

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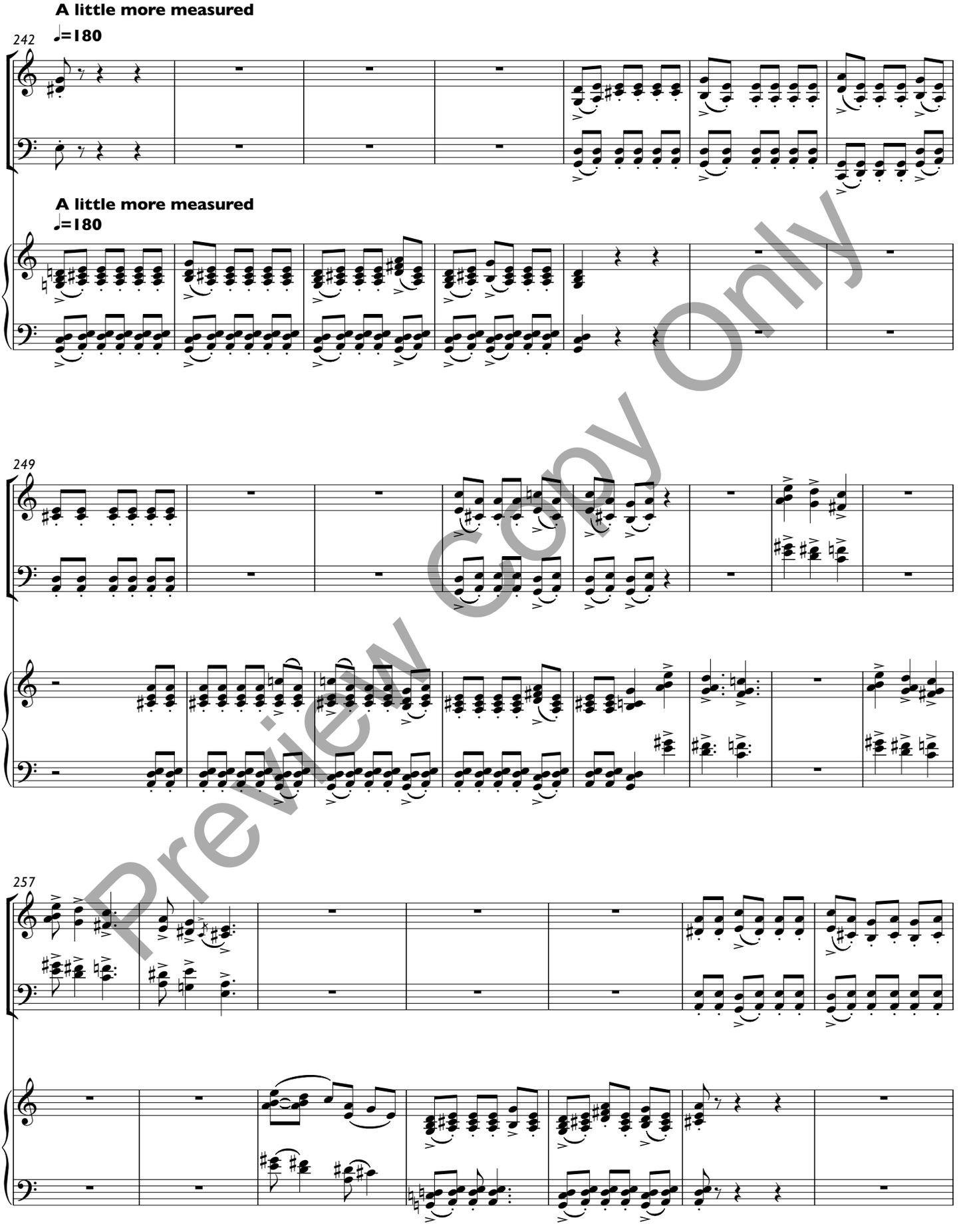

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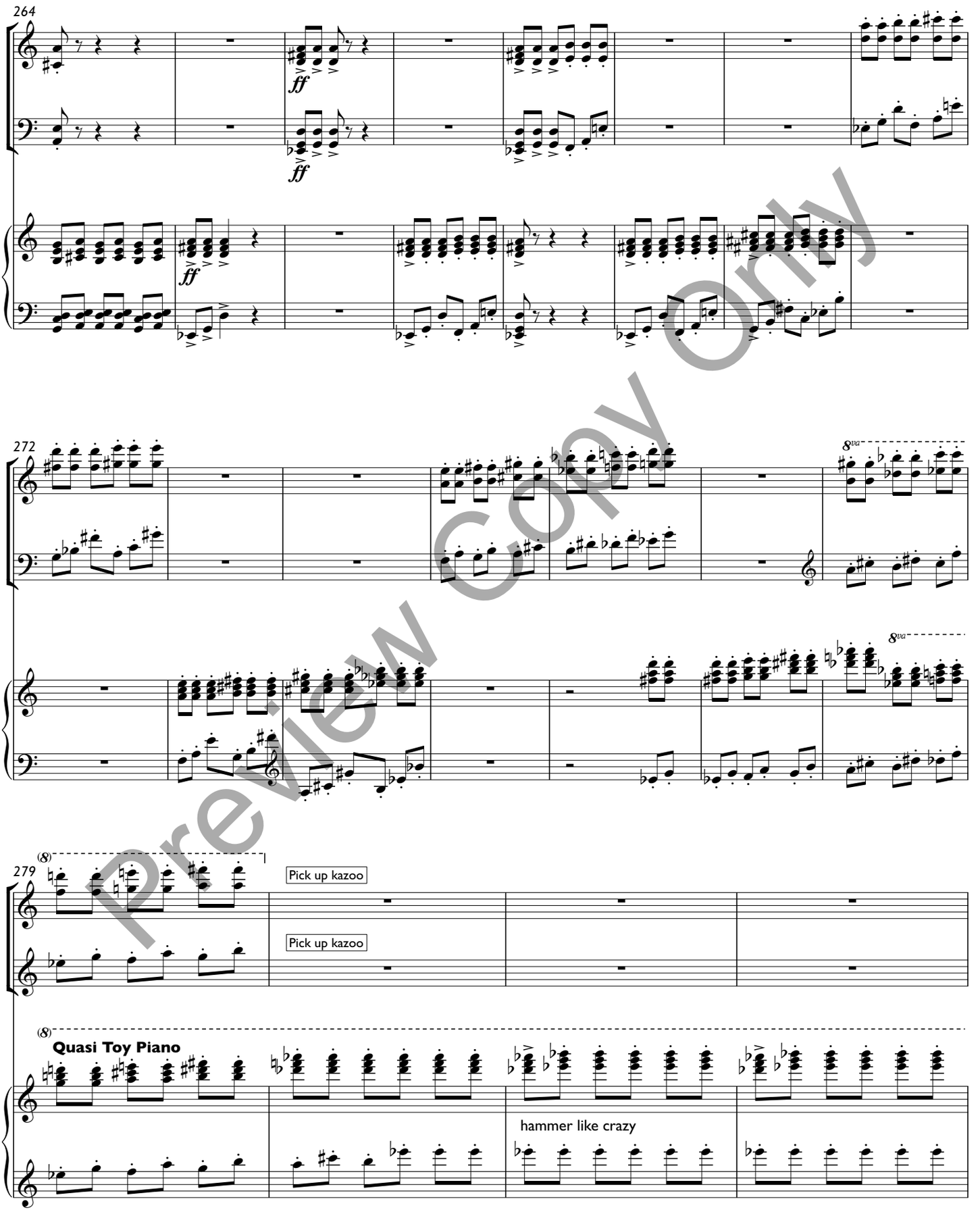

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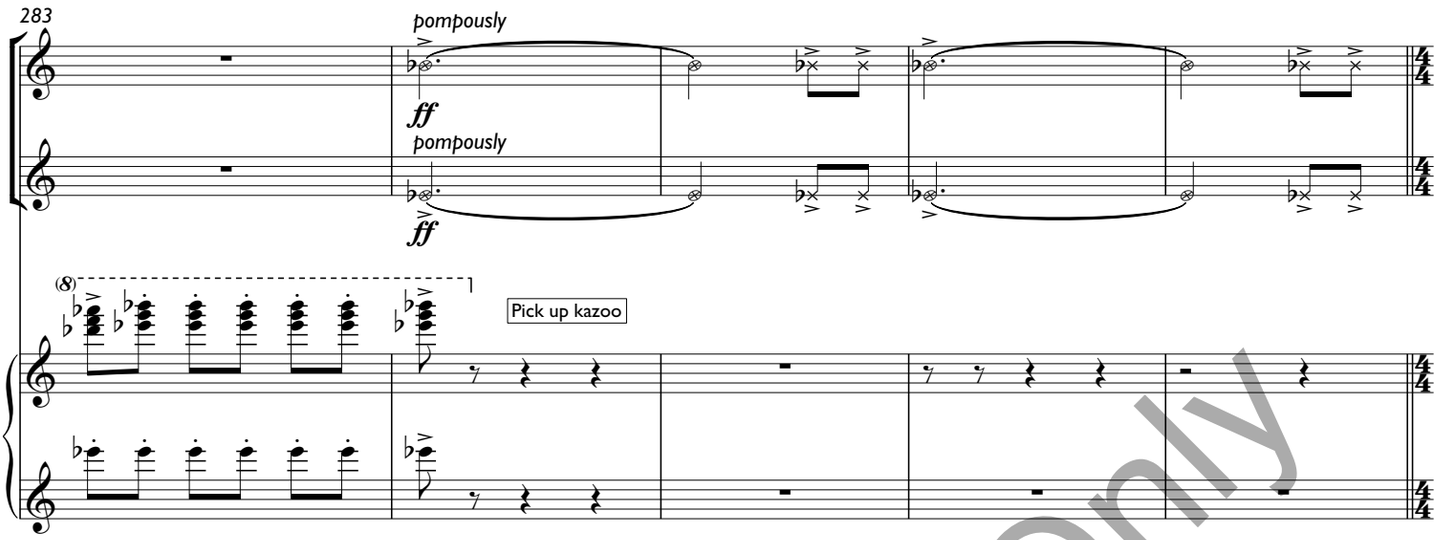
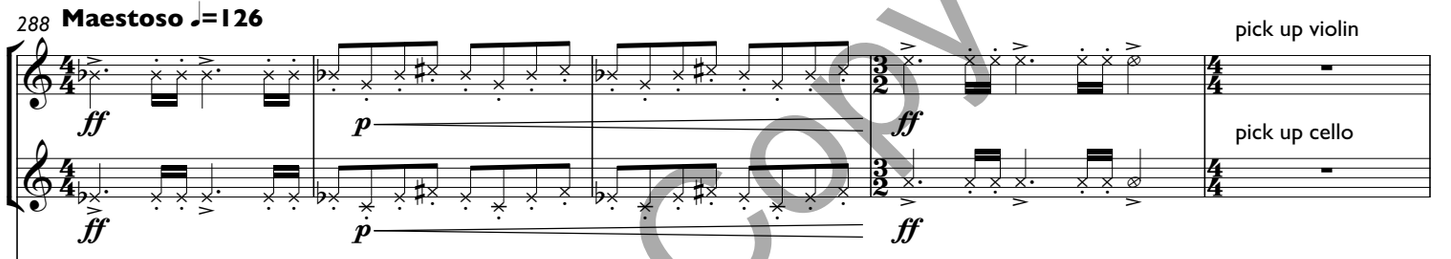


KAZOO FANFARE— AT PITCH OR OCTAVE LOWER



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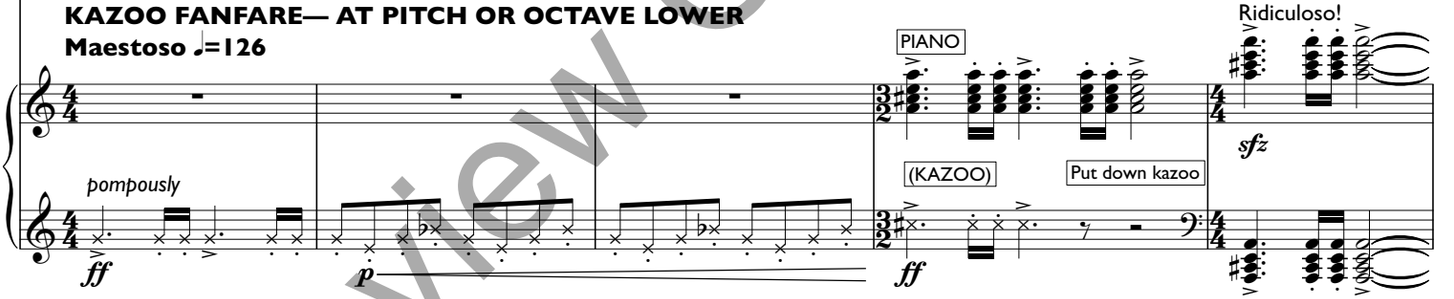

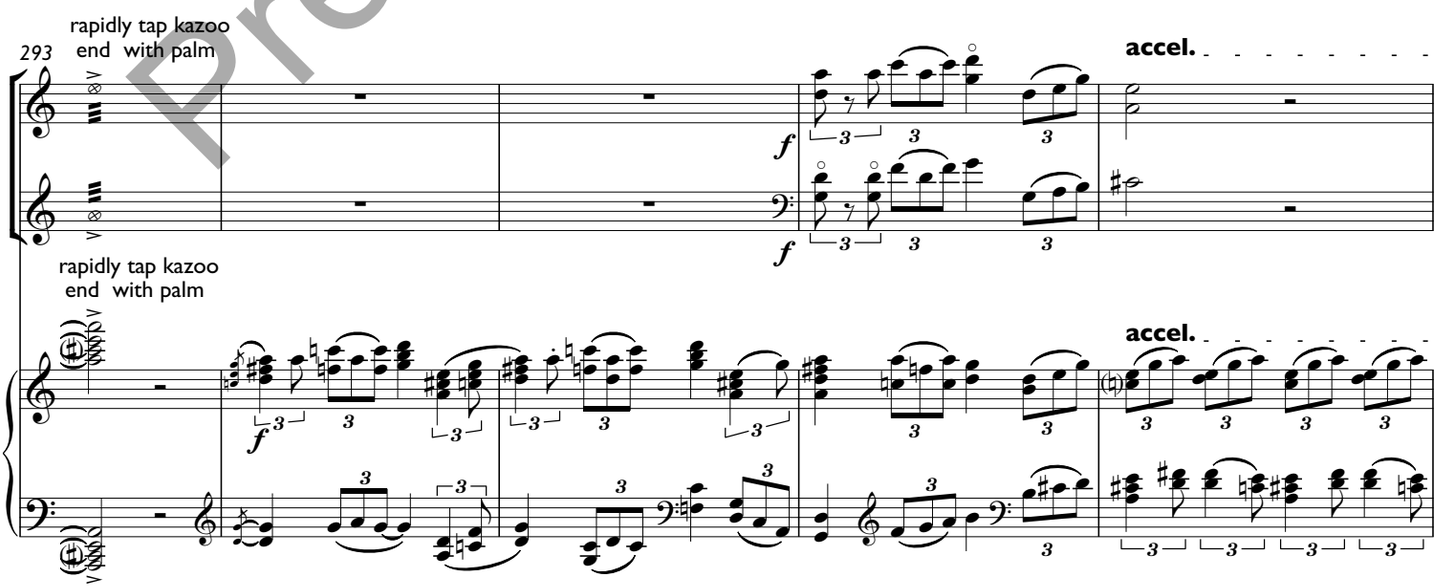

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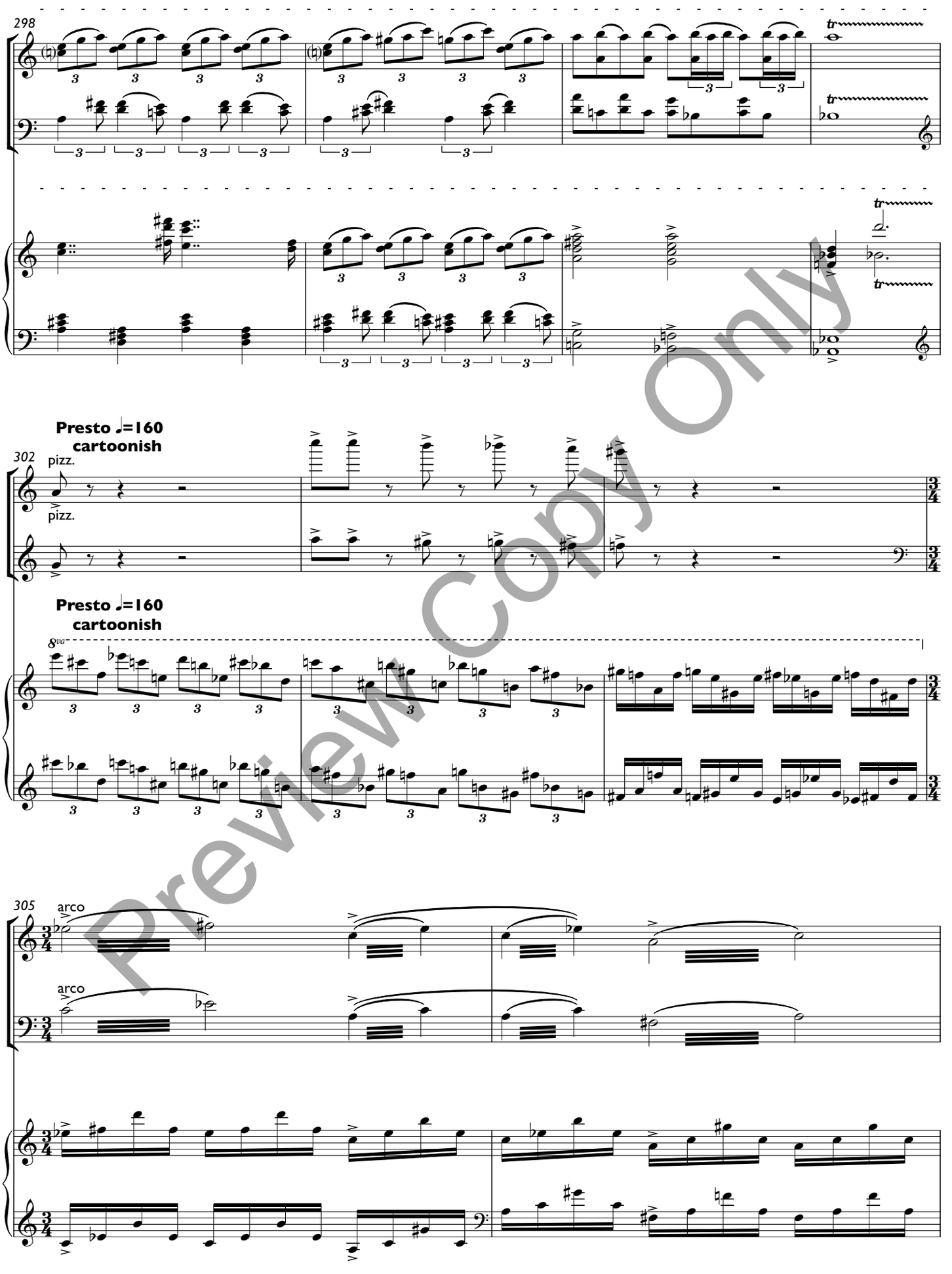

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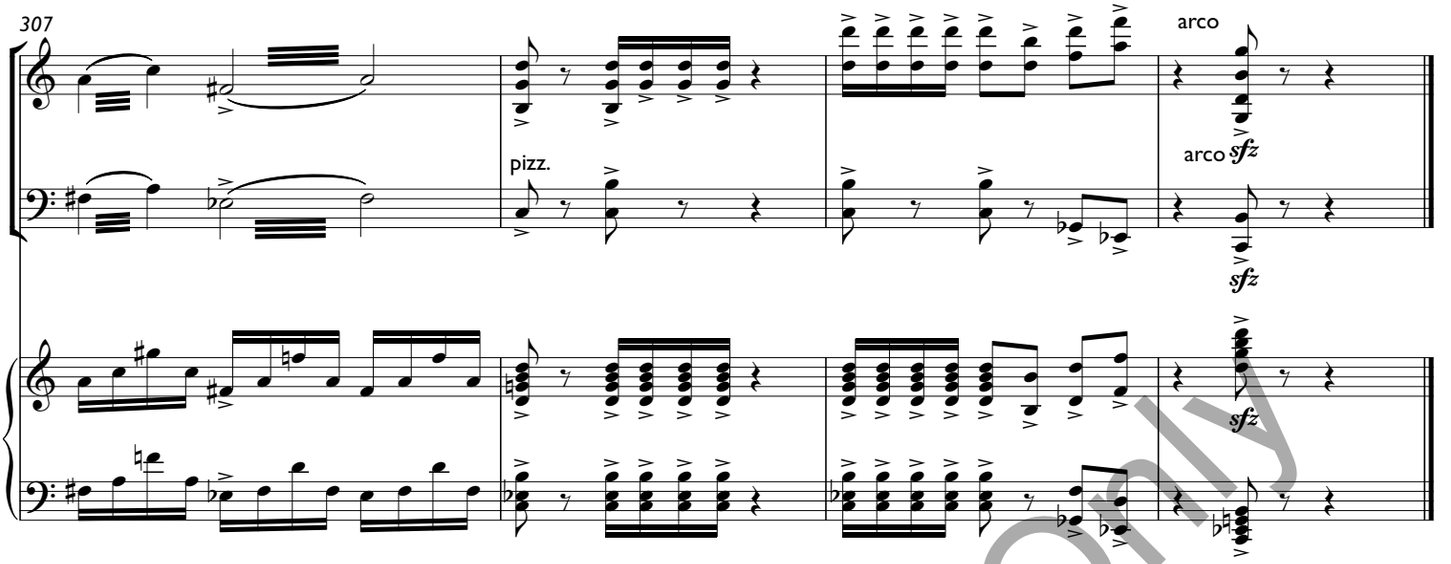

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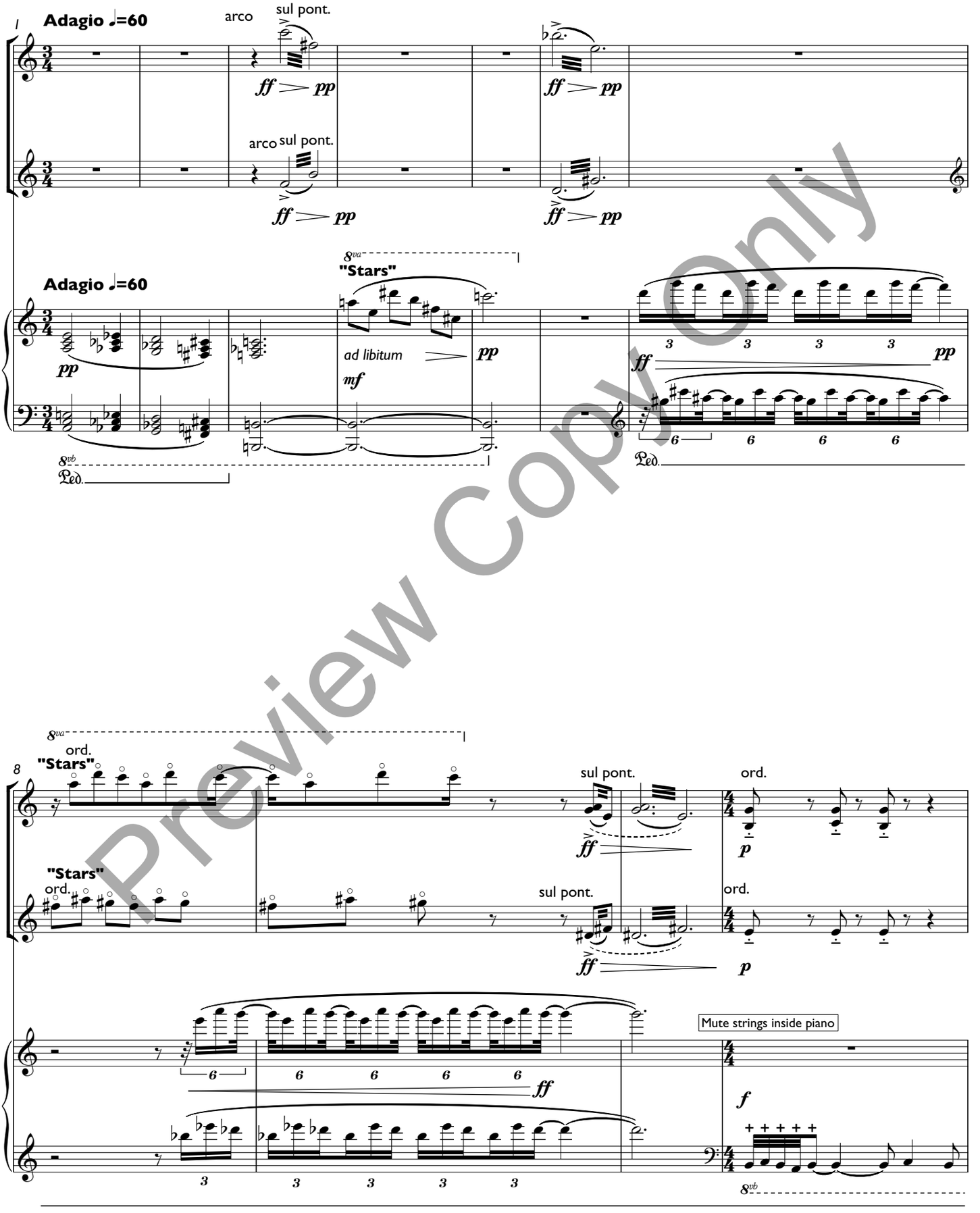
III. Into night...



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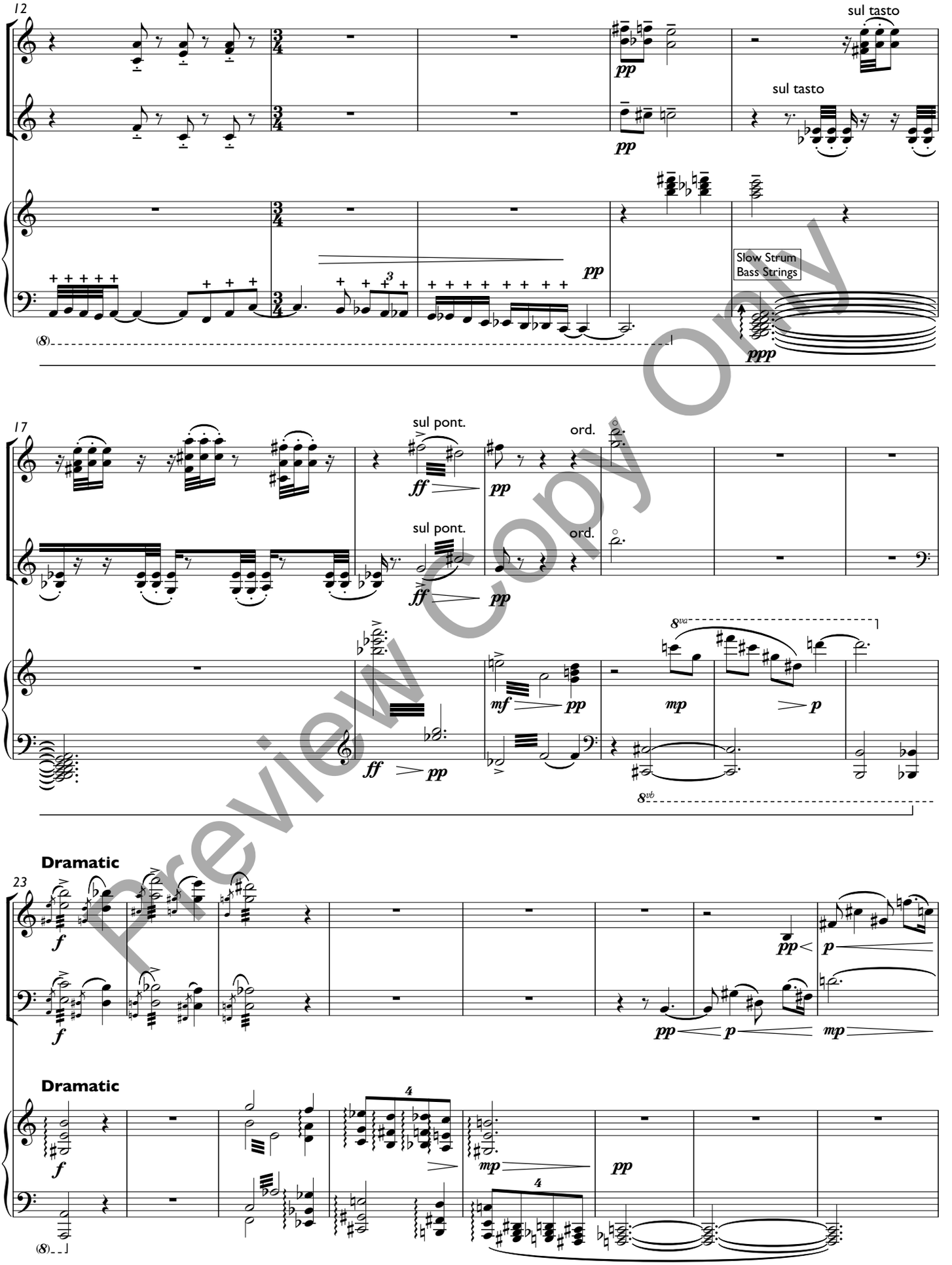

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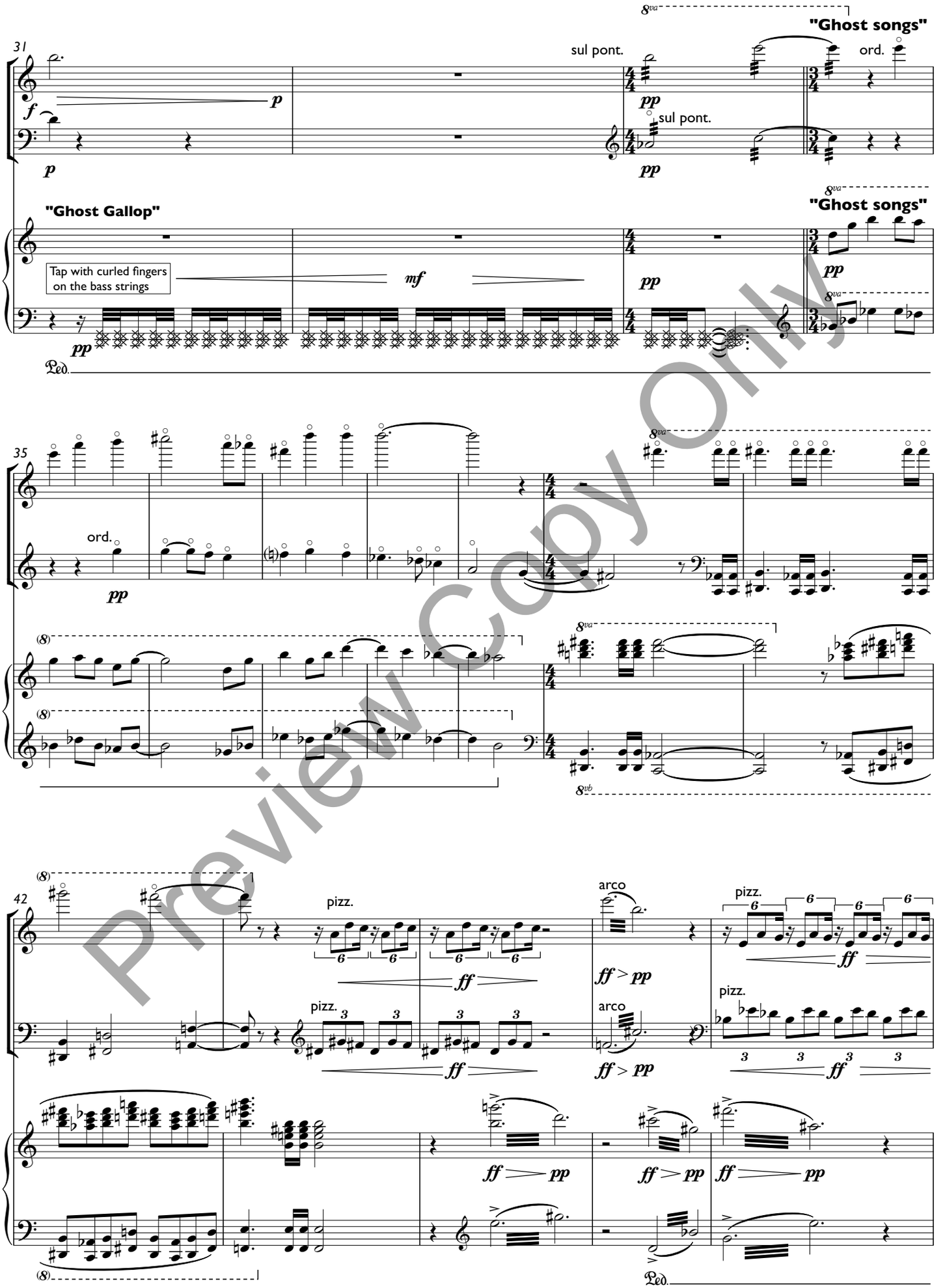

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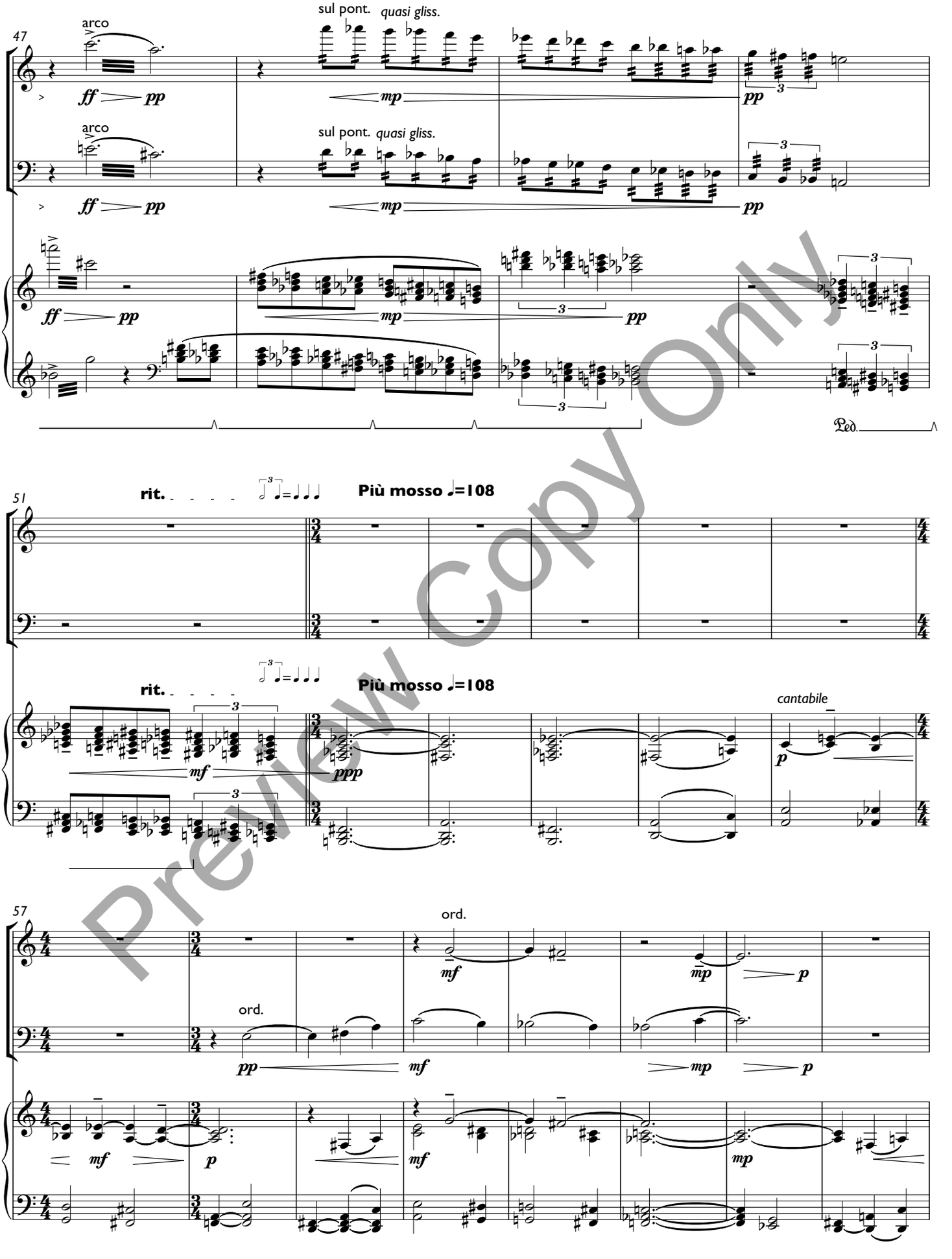

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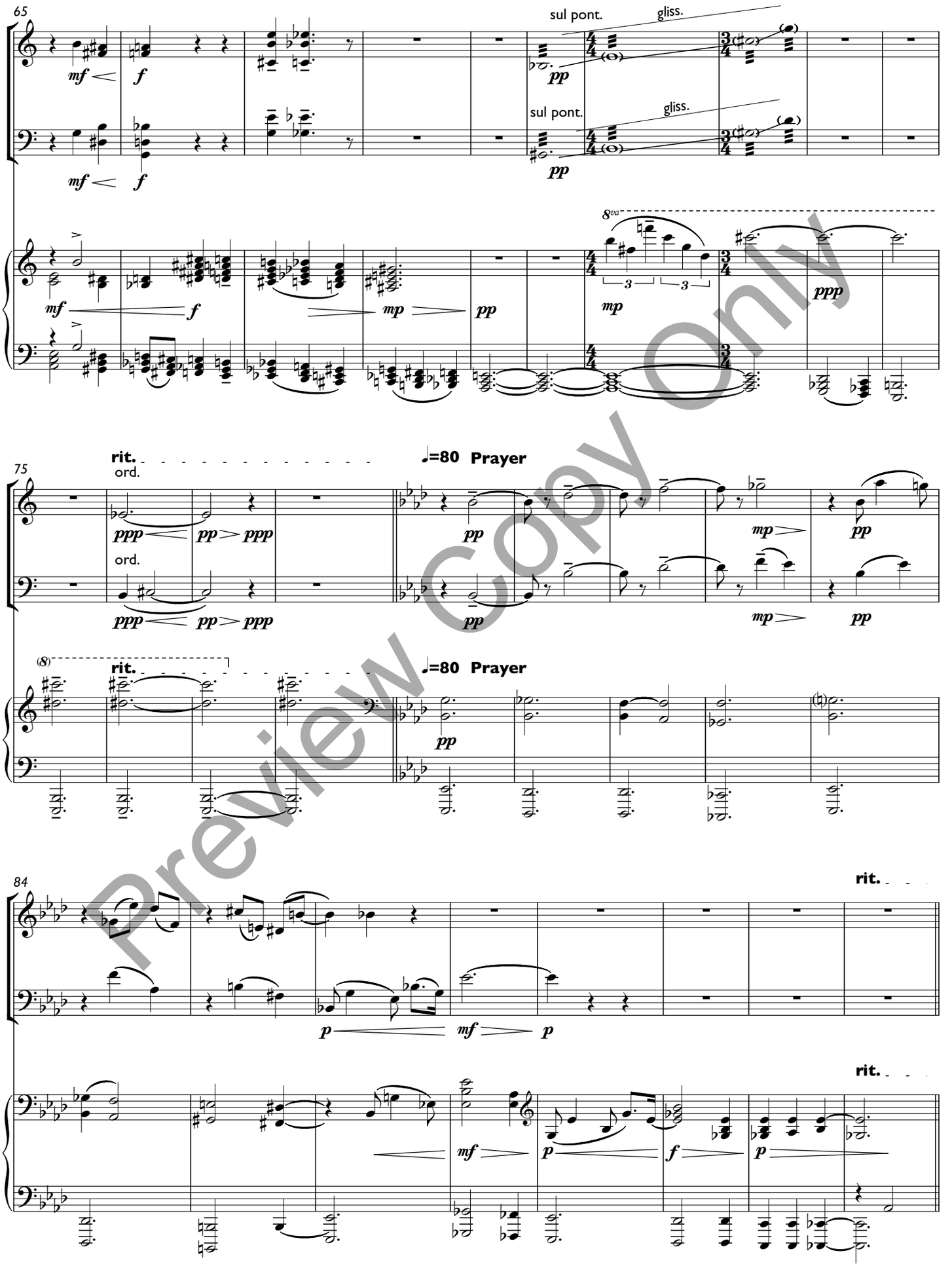

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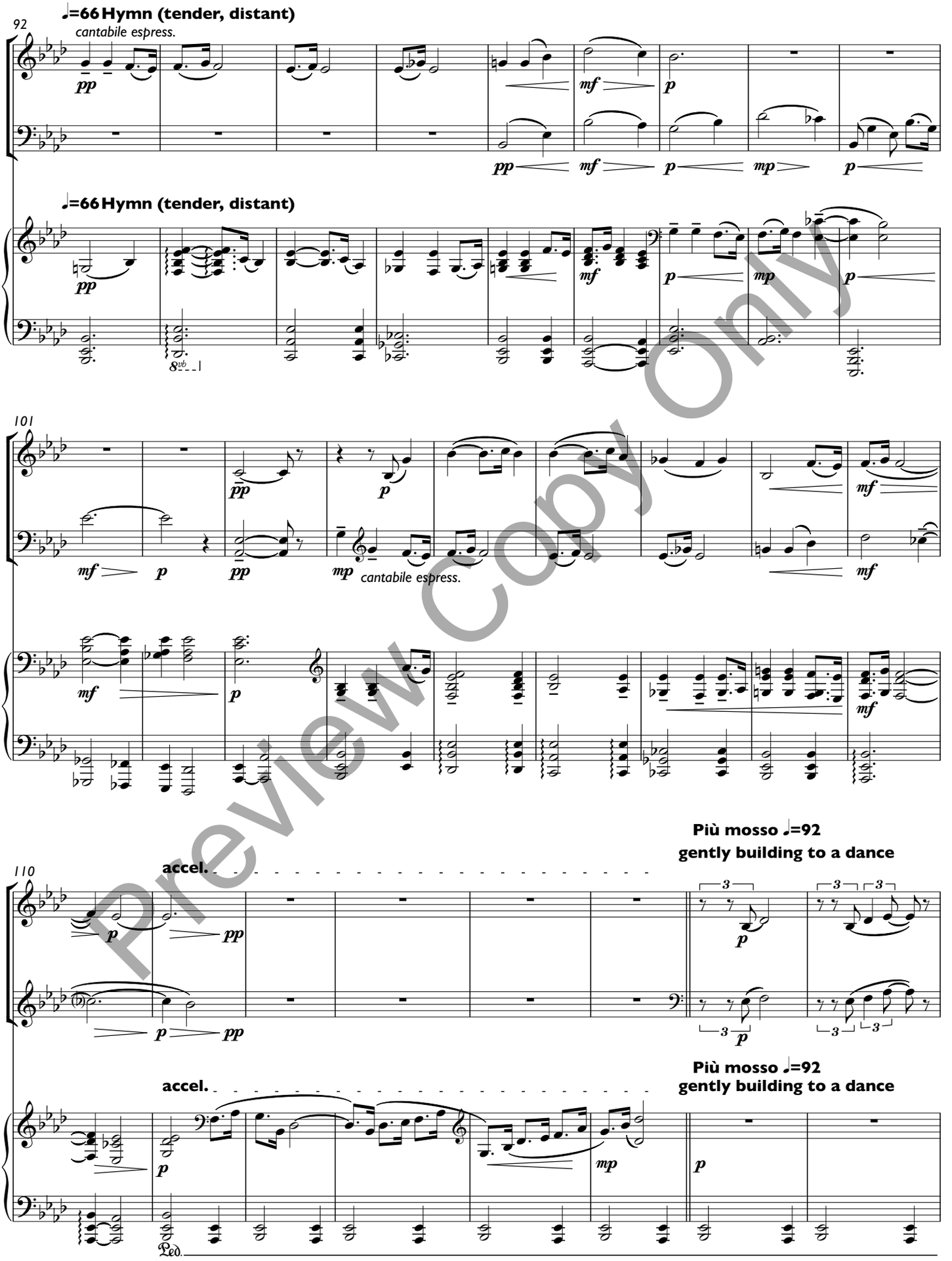

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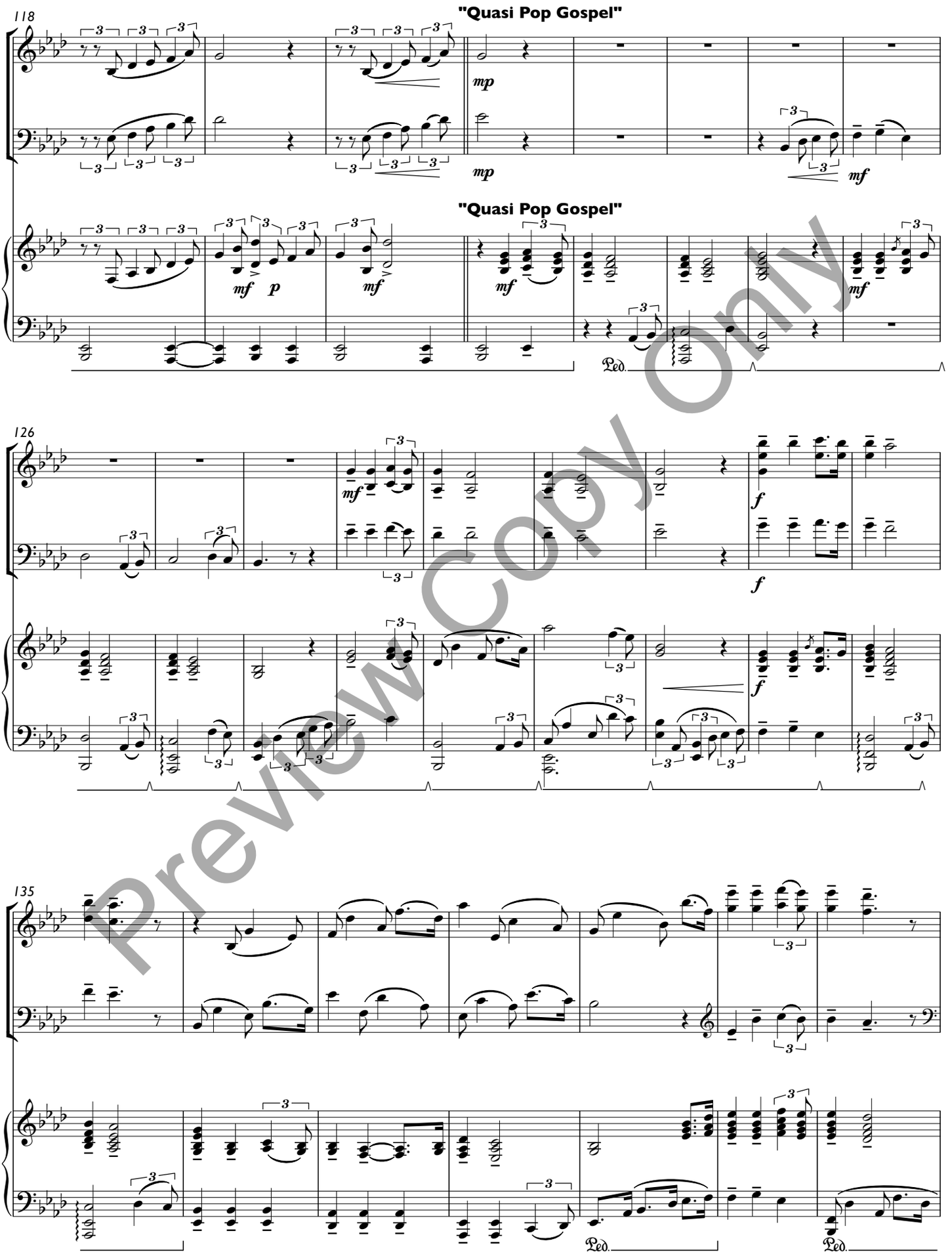

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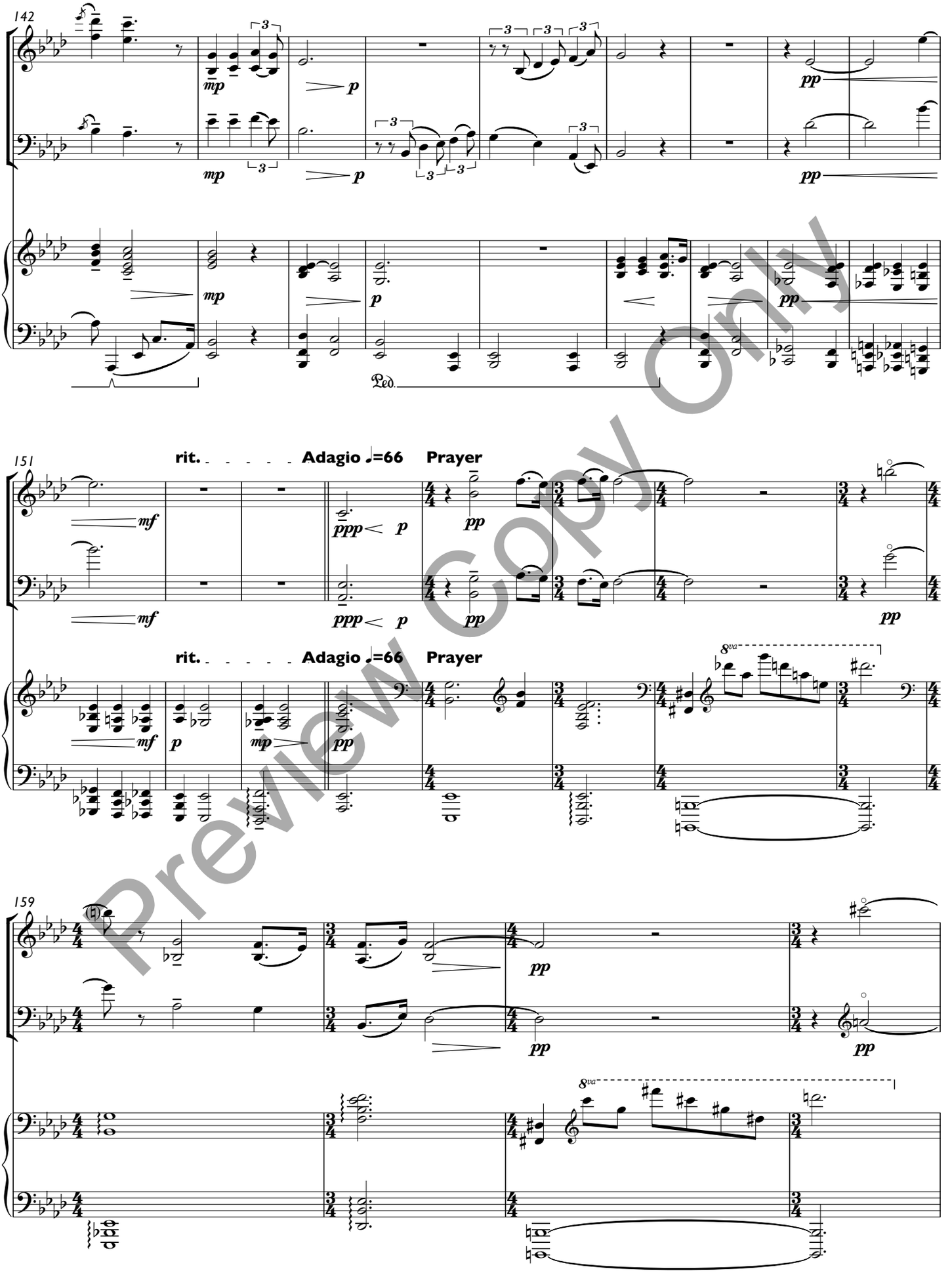

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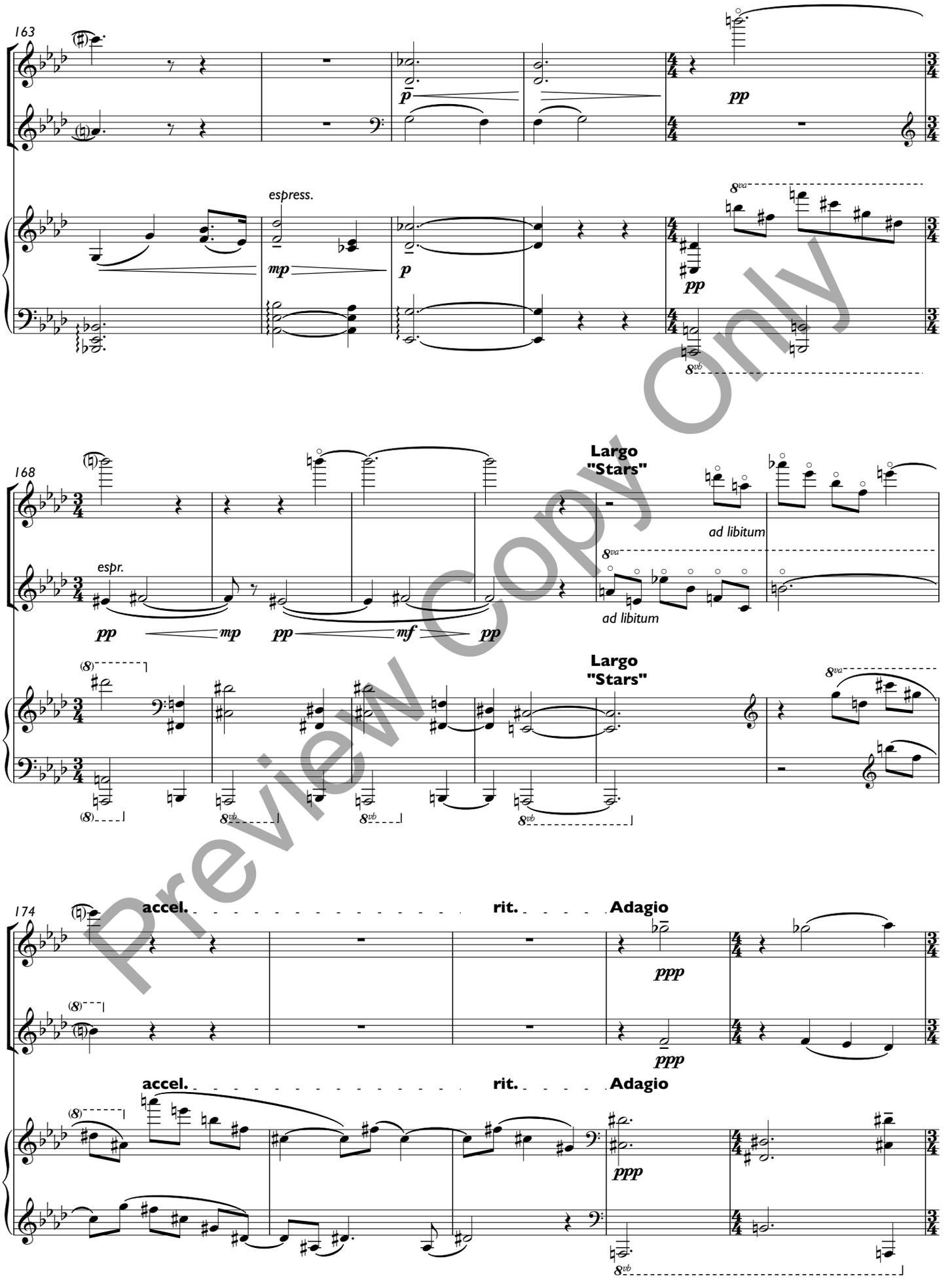

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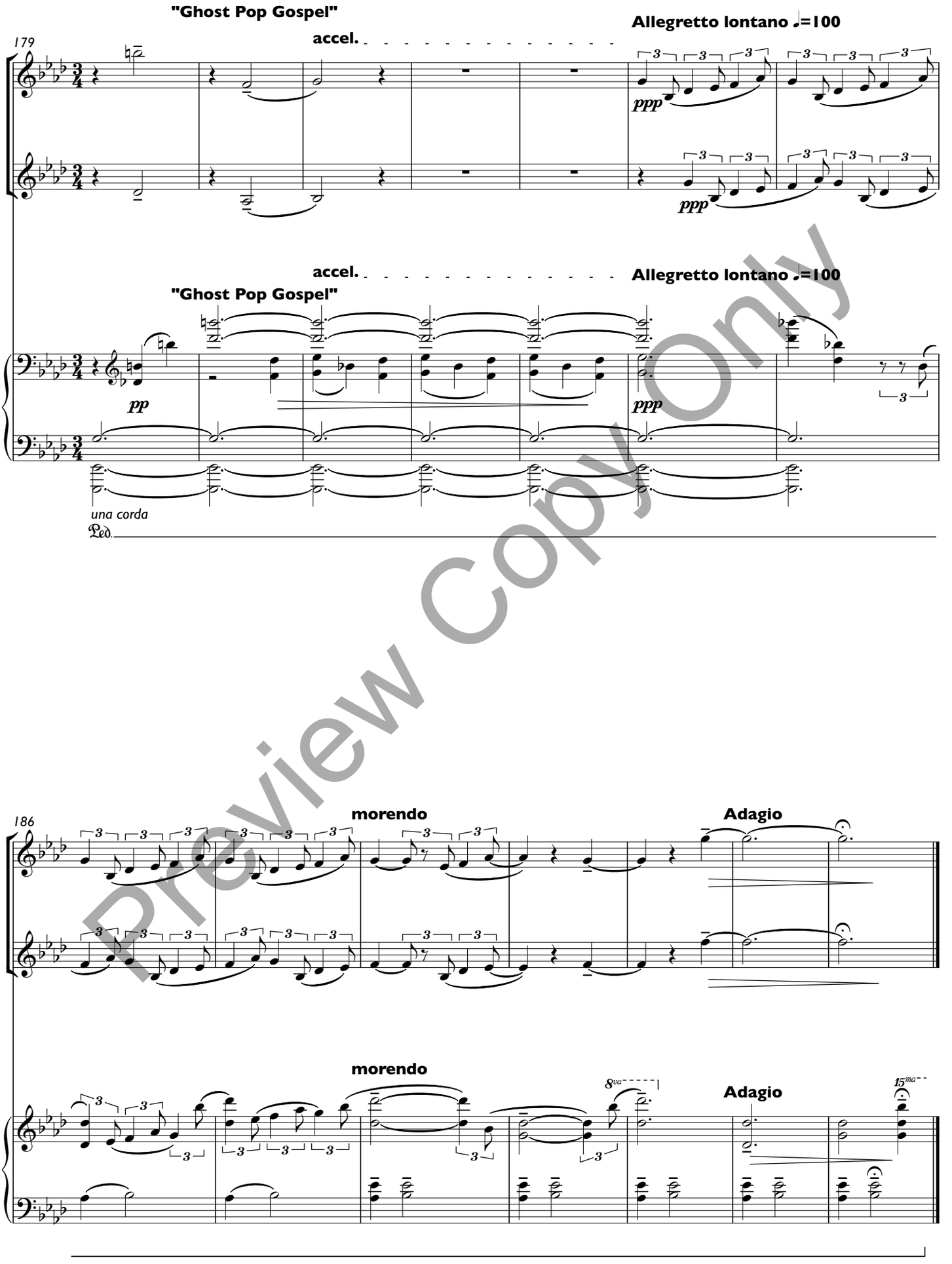

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