The Three Graces

for solo oboe, horn, and cello,
with double bass and piano

Kile Smith

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I composed *The Three Graces* over the chord changes to the chorus of "Wait Till You See Her" by Richard Rodgers. After the introduction and statement of the tune, the soloists take turns on the choruses, first playing two choruses each, then trading off in various ways.

This started out to be a concerto grosso, but a timely immersion into the complete recordings of Miles Davis got me to thinking how like a jazz combo the concerto grosso formula can be. So I decided to try to compose a work of straight jazz (not a piece with jazz elements, which I've always found unsatisfying). I grew up listening to my parents' popular jazz albums, so the sounds of random slices from the 1940s and '50s—of the Hi-Lo's (from whom I learned "Wait Till You See Her"); Lambert, Hendricks & Ross; Dave Brubeck; Maynard Ferguson's *A Message from Newport 1958*; Billie Holiday; Stan Getz; and of every solo on the 1947 "Star Dust" by Lionel Hampton with the Just Jazz All Stars (especially bassist Slam Stewart's)—all these sounds inform *The Three Graces*, which is an homage to them all.

It was my intention for the solos to come across as improvisations. The strings (or piano and bass in this chamber version) take the role of a drummer-less rhythm section, playing what I take to be a mix of swing and early be-bop. I hoped to capture the excitement of something that sounded like it was being made up on the spot, although there is also a great tradition of written-out ensemble jazz.

This is especially an homage to our three daughters, each of the soloists taking on the character of one of the girls. Priscilla, the oldest, was just starting to learn the oboe when I wrote this. Nellie, then six, was the soulful horn. At four, Martina was to be the cellist in this fantasy piece, and cuts in with her first (Slam-inspired) solo before her turn. The two younger girls did not play instruments then, but each later decided to play, in real life, exactly the instrument I assigned to the other one.

Chamber version (soloists with double bass and piano) premiered 15 Feb 2008 by soloists Priscilla Smith, Patrick Hines, Rajli Bicolli, with Leon Boykins and Jeremy Gill at Rock Hall, Temple University, Philadelphia. Original version for soloists with string orchestra premiered 2,3 Apr 2001 by Gerard Reuter, oboe, Karl Kramer, horn, Wolfram Kössel, cello, and the Jupiter Symphony in New York City, Jens Nygaard conducting.

Duration, about 11 minutes

for Priscilla

The Three Graces

Kile Smith

Up-tempo swing, driving ♪. = c.156

Oboe

Horn in F

Cello

Double Bass

Piano

mp

7

pizz. sempre

mp

13

mf

mf

mf

cresc.

f

cresc.

f

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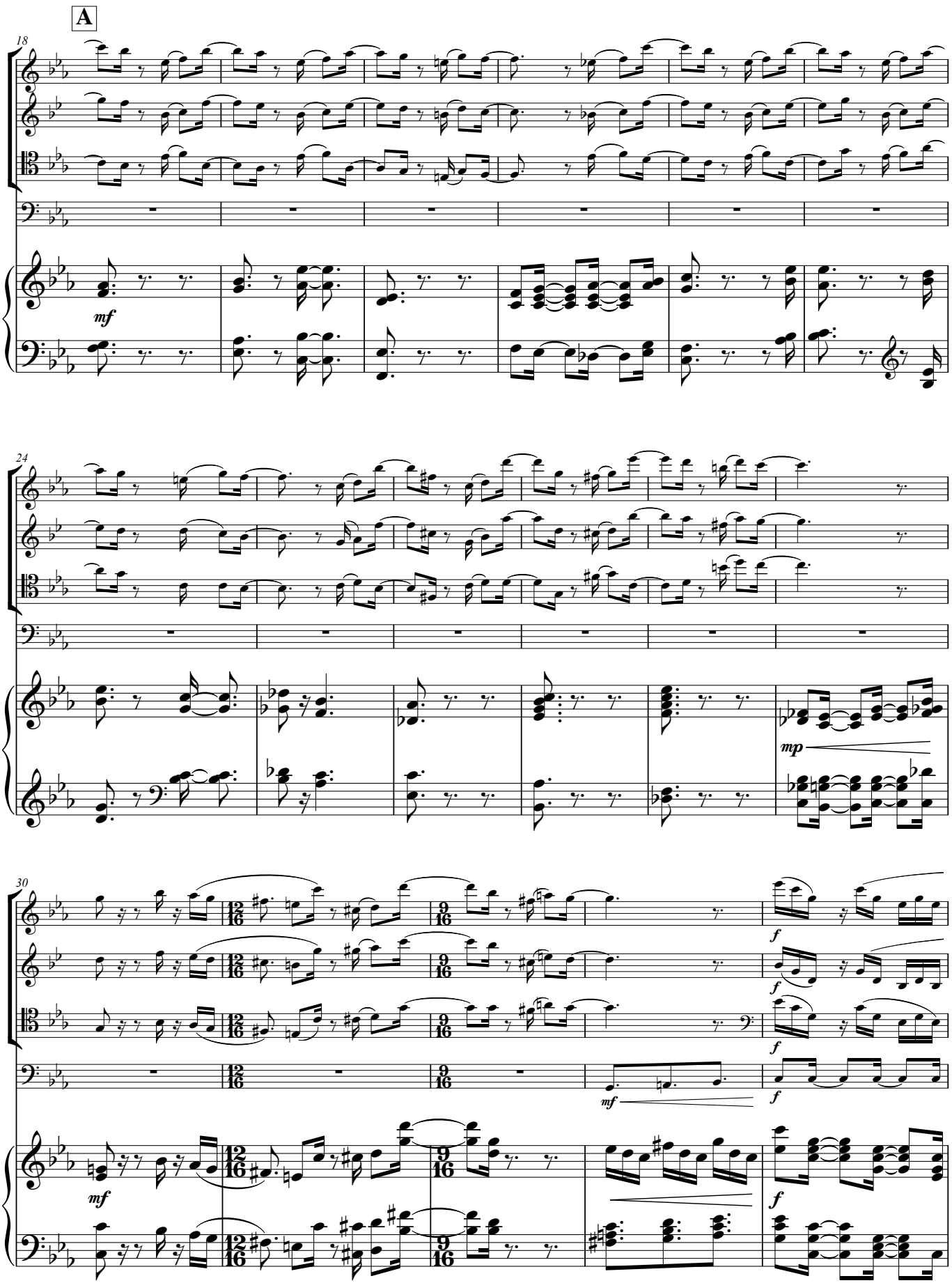
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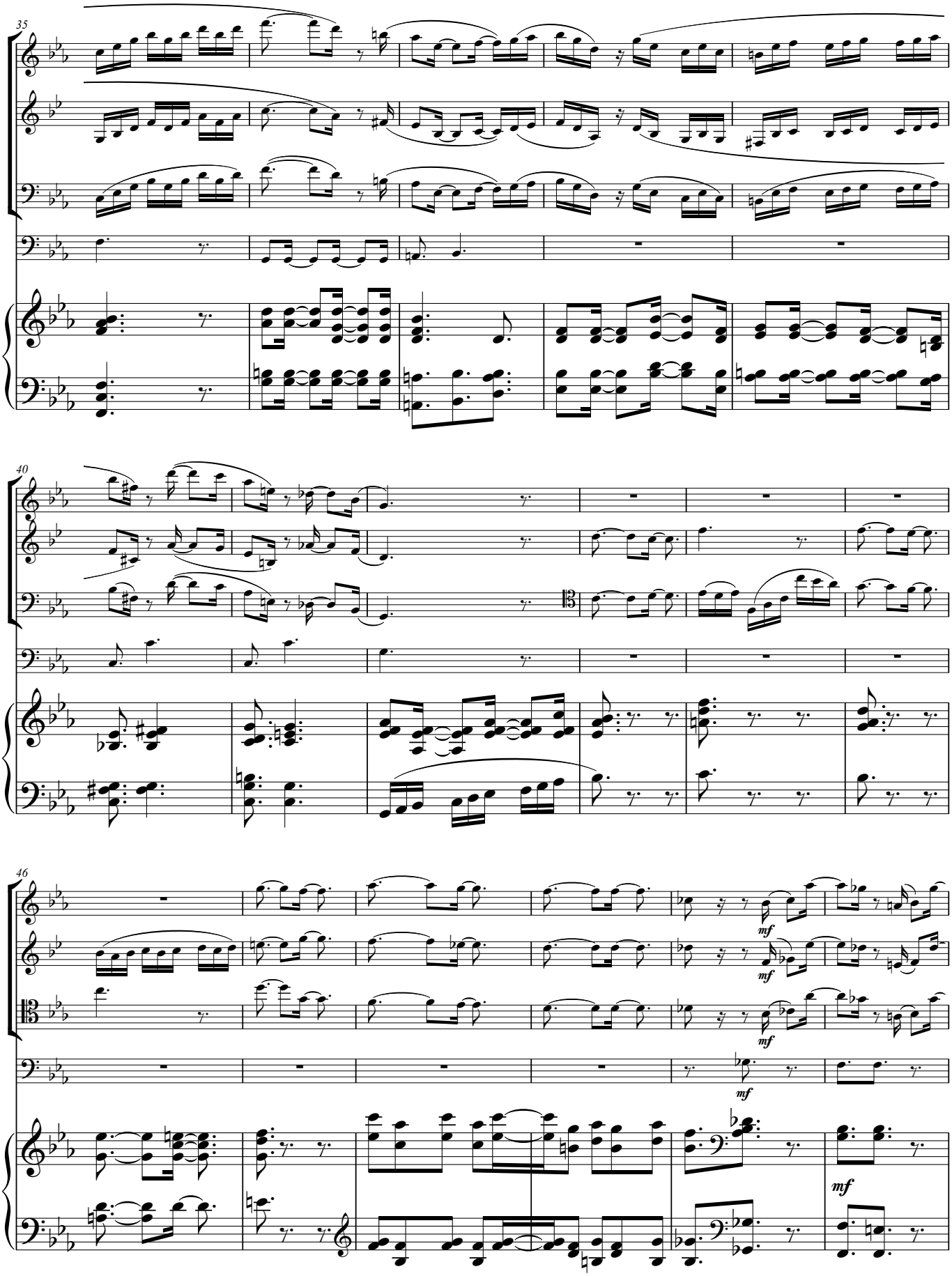
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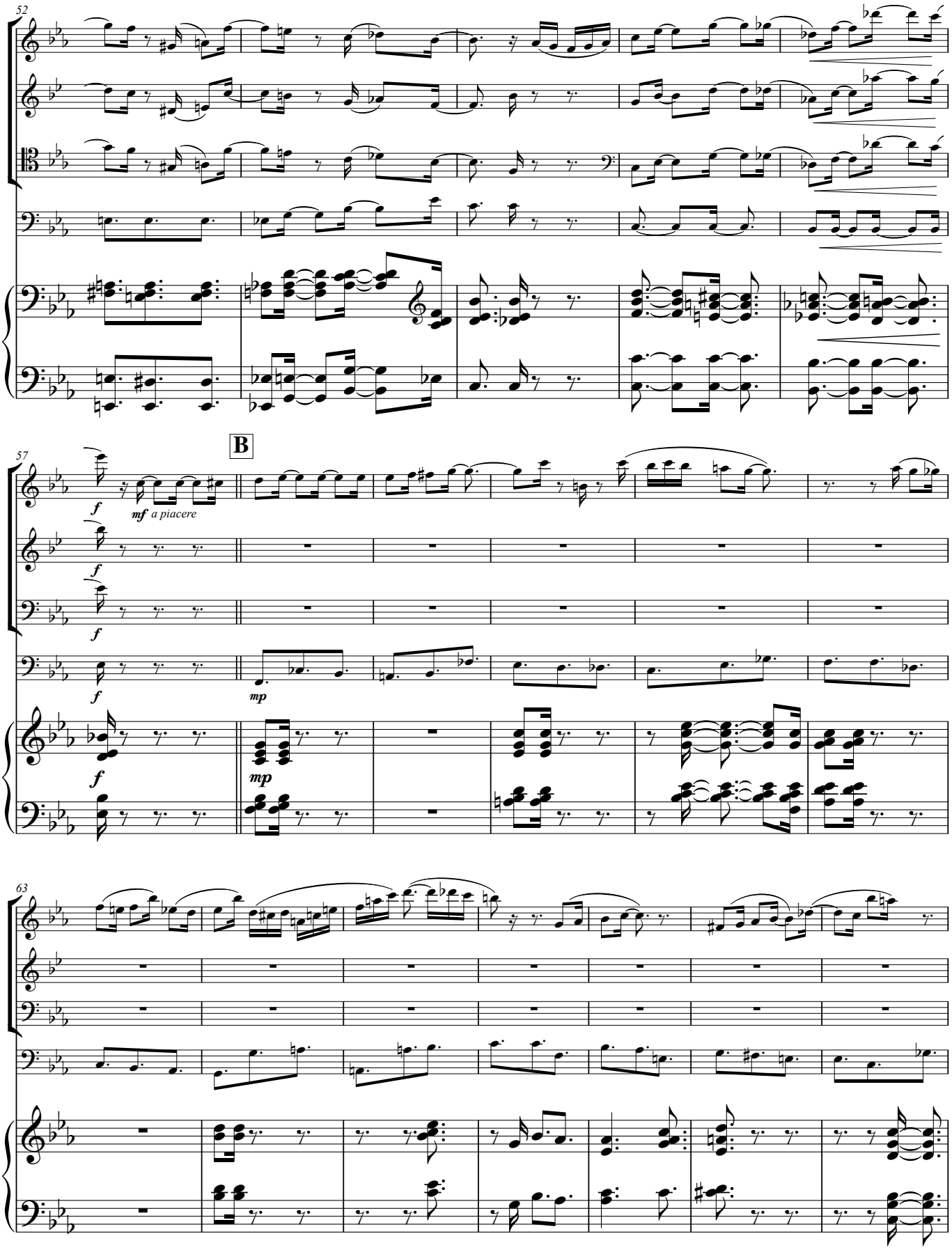
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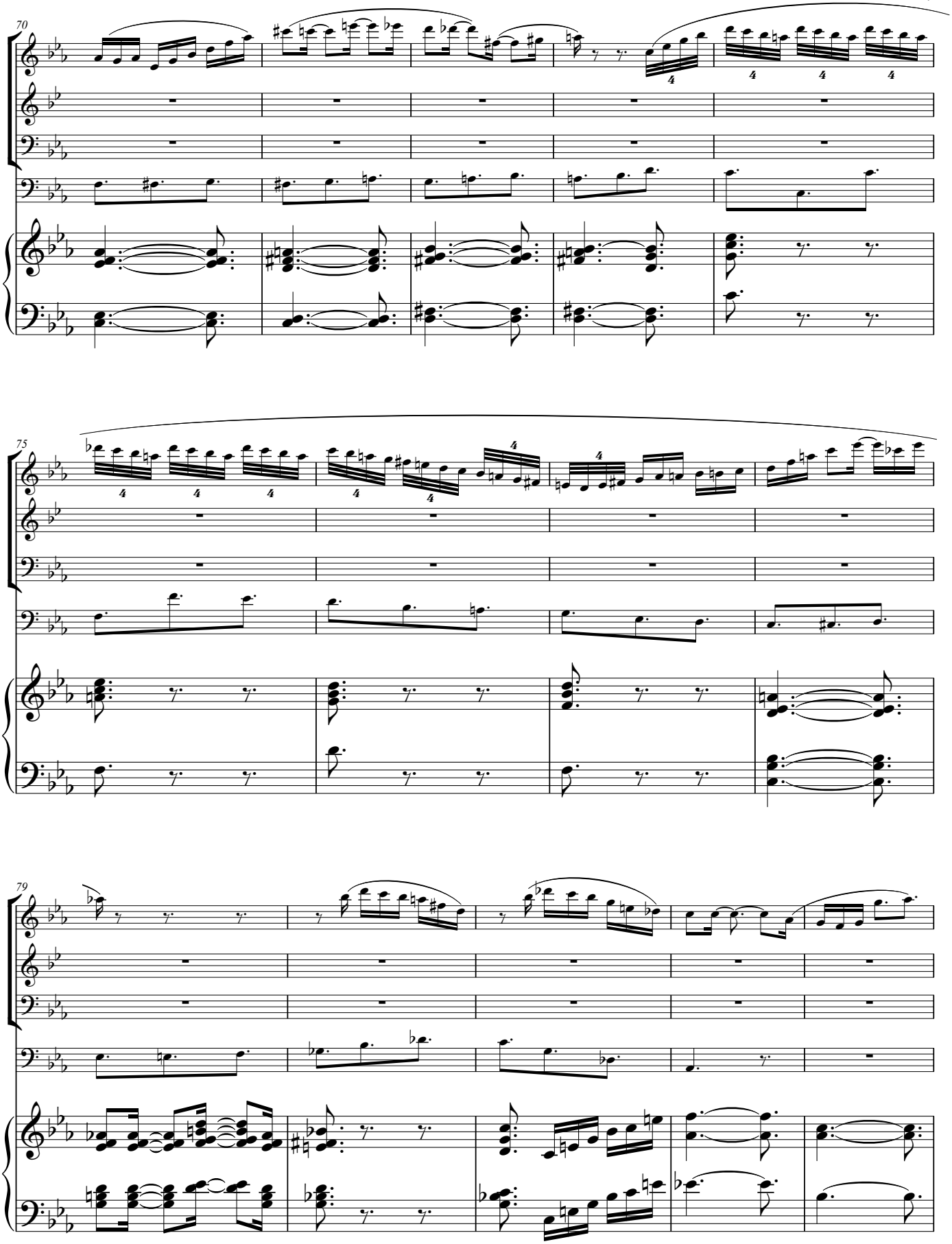
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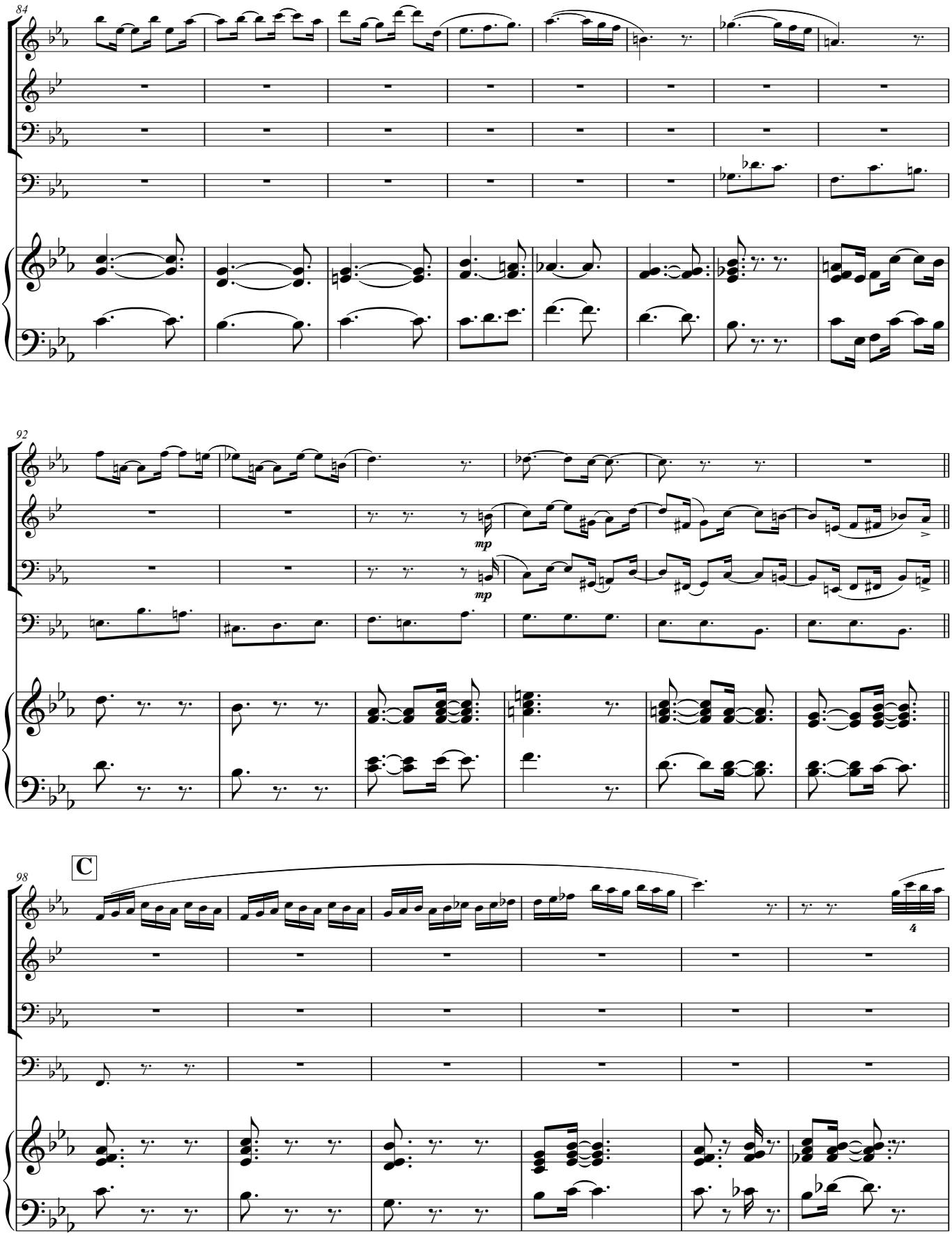
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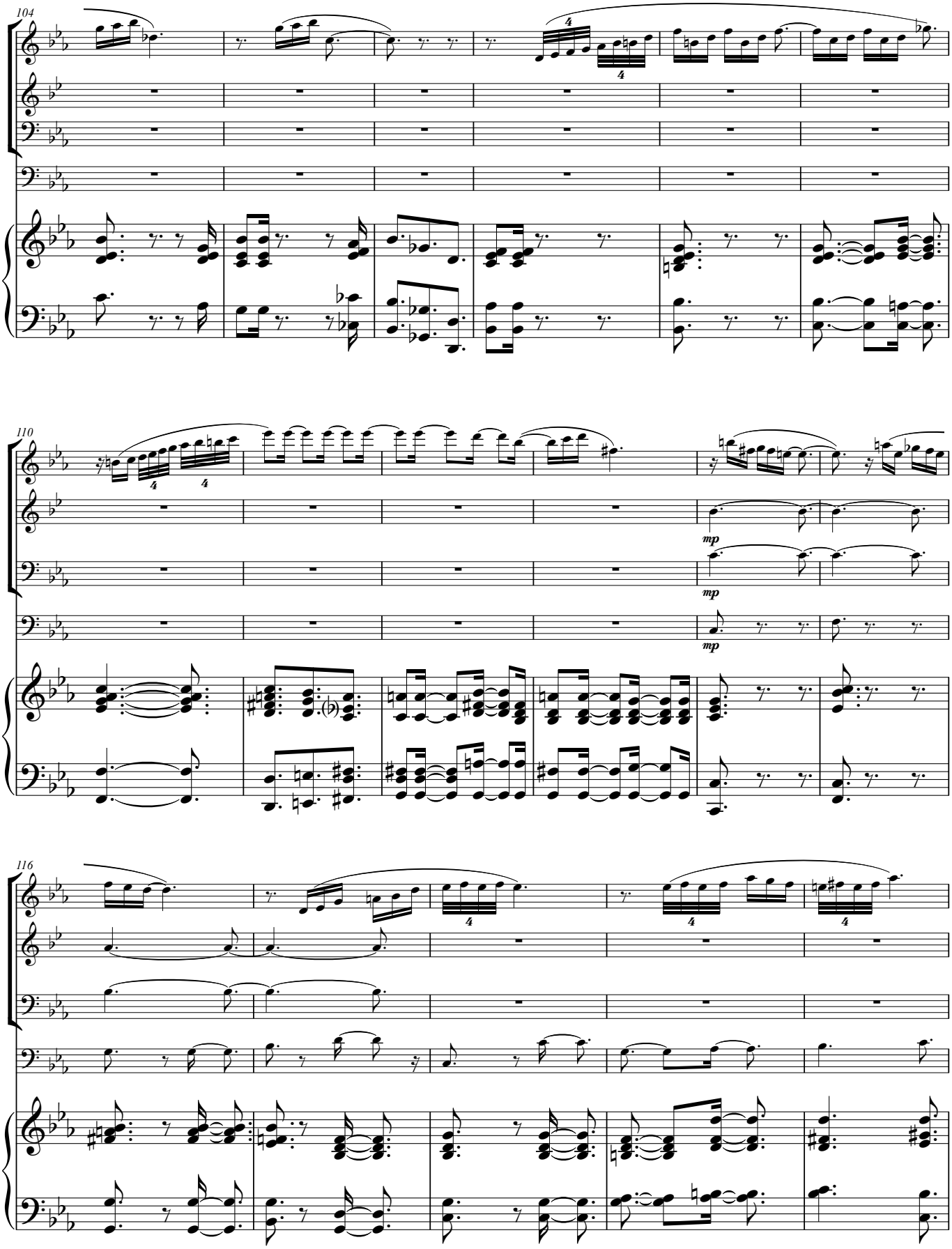
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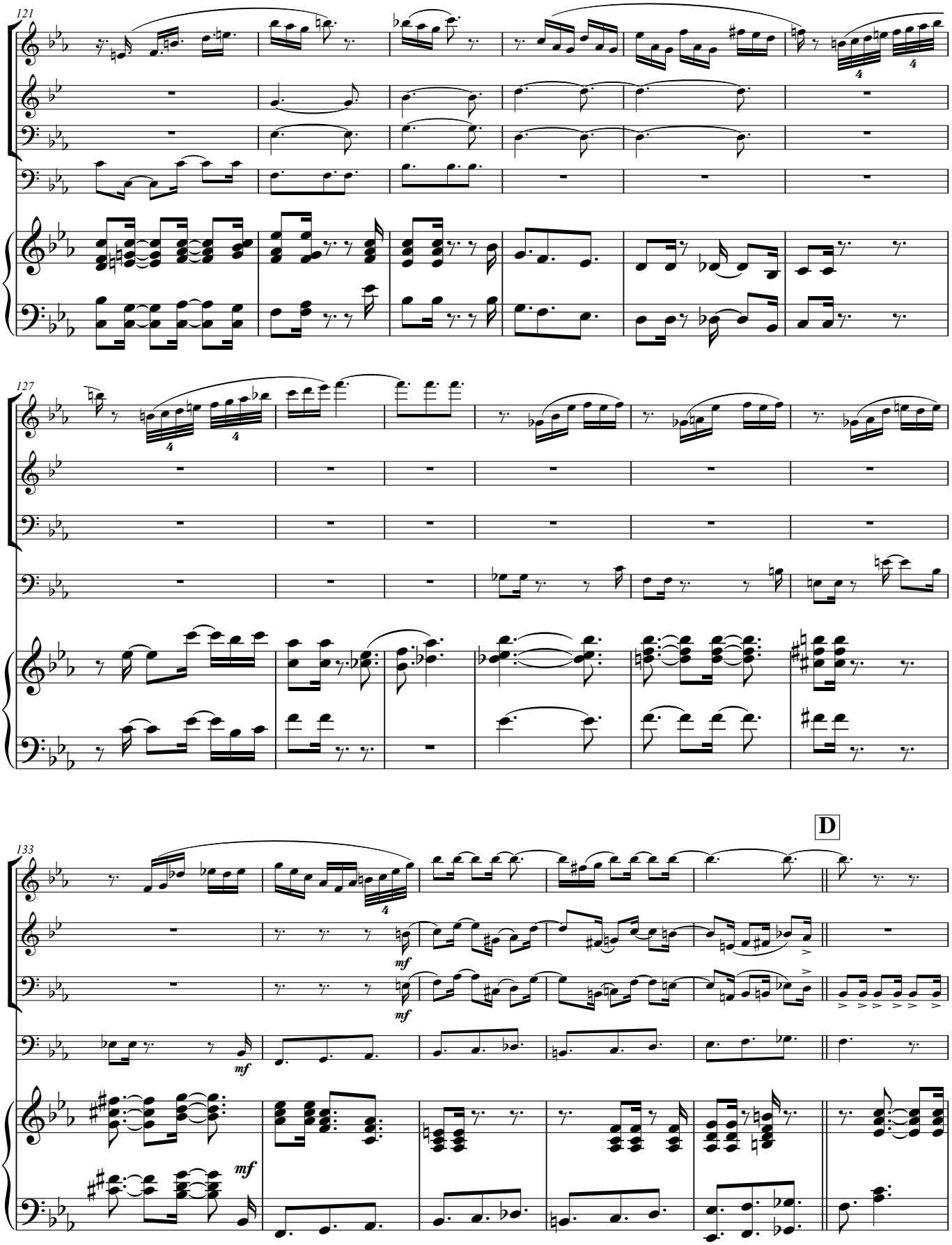
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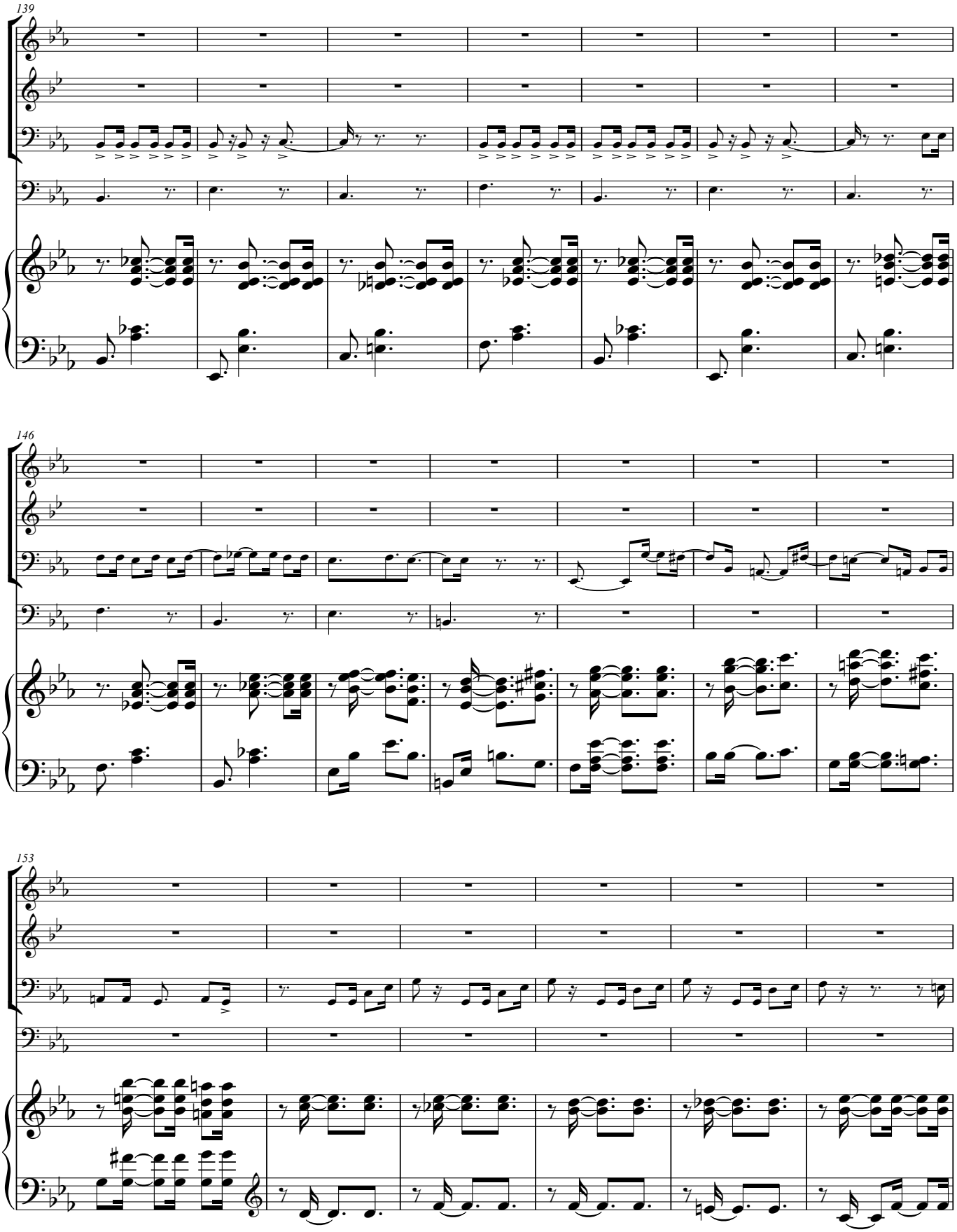
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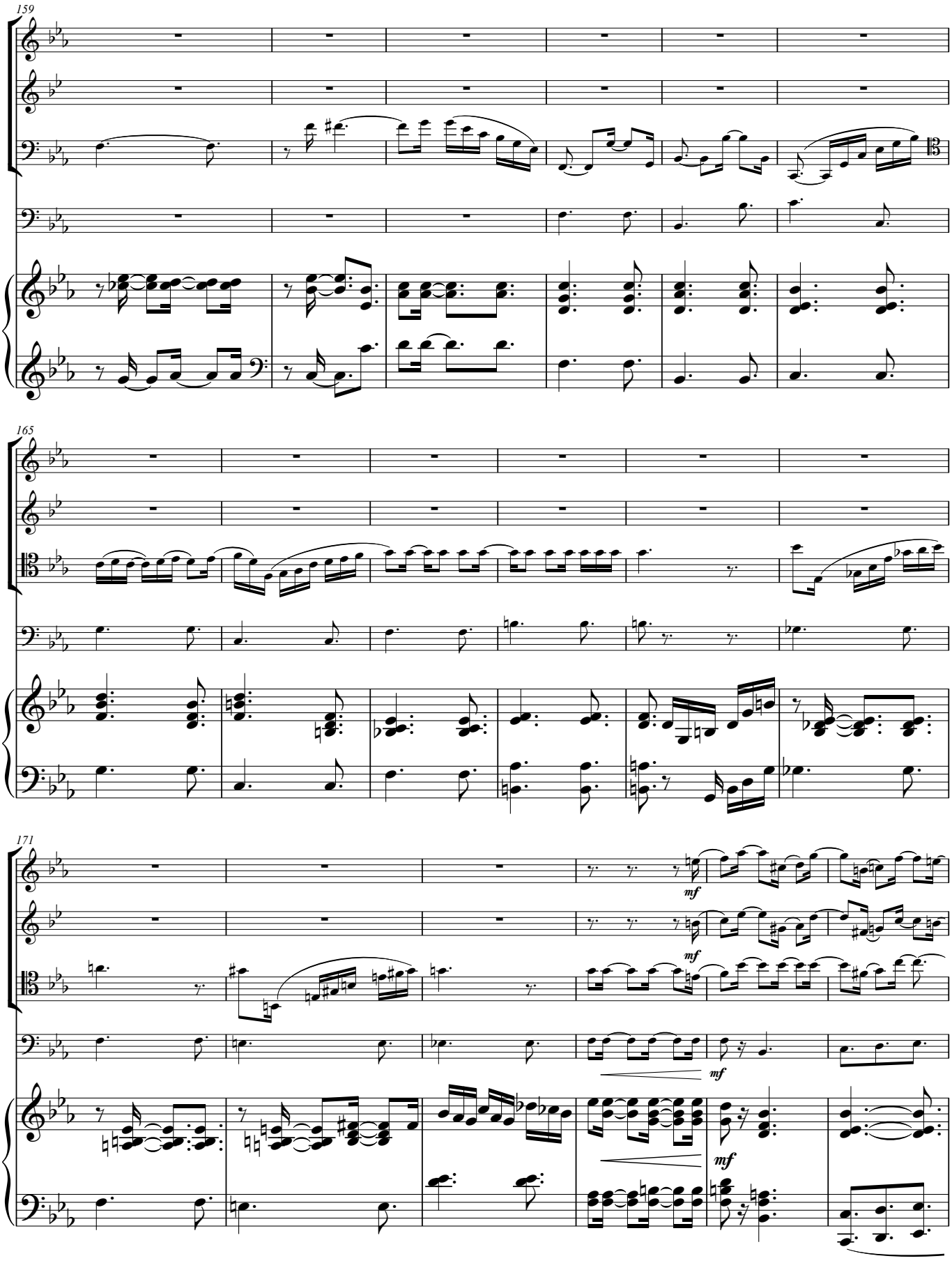
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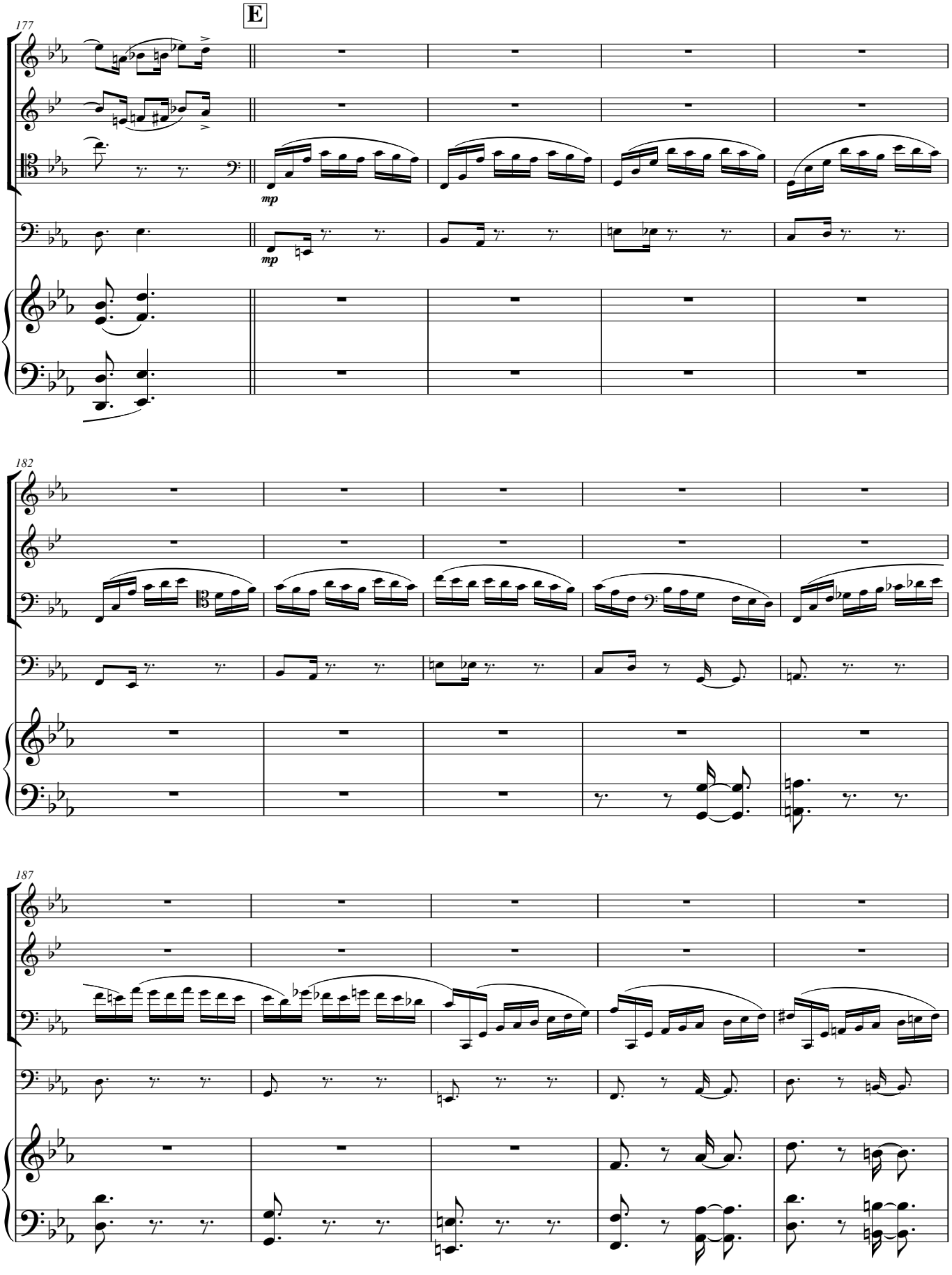
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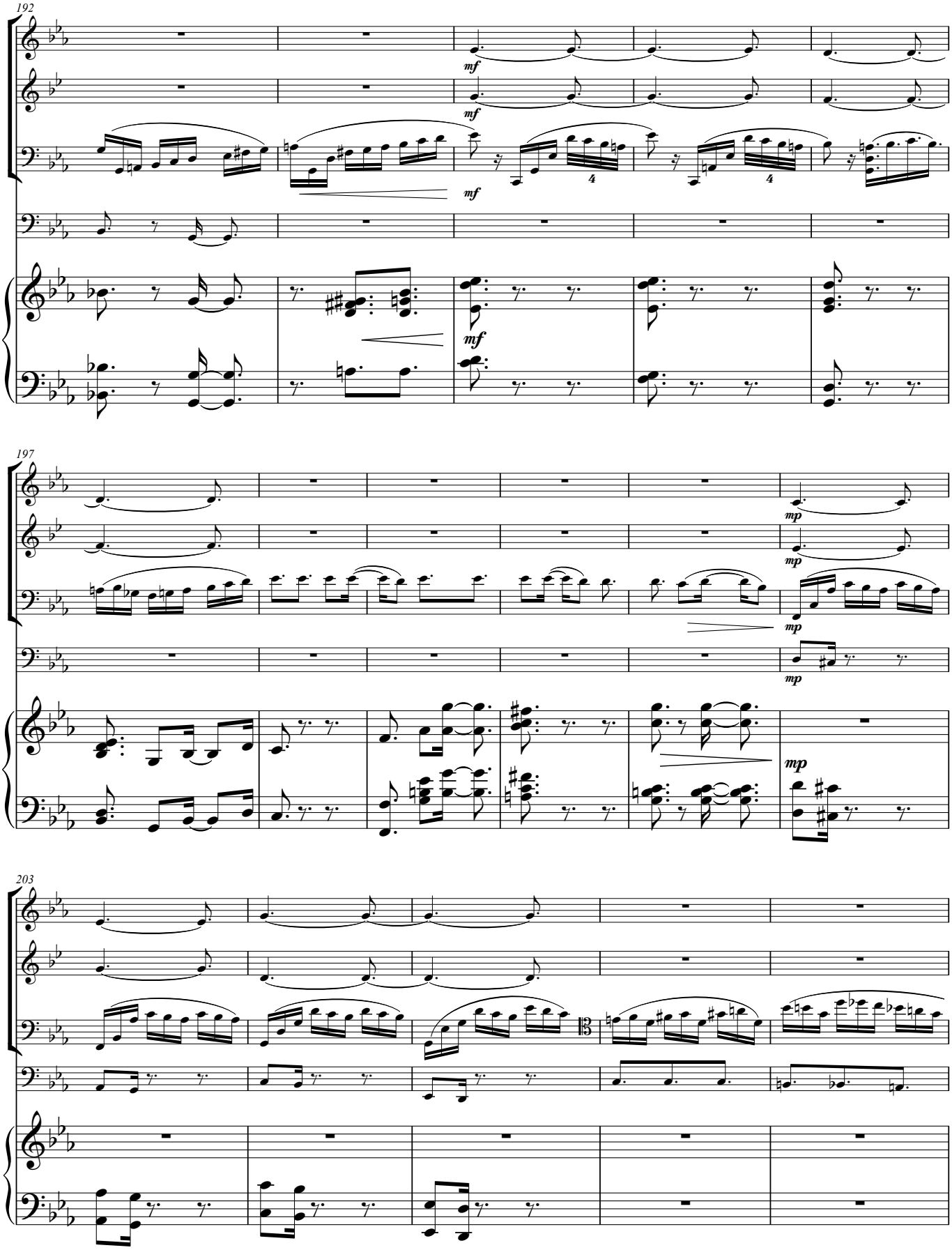
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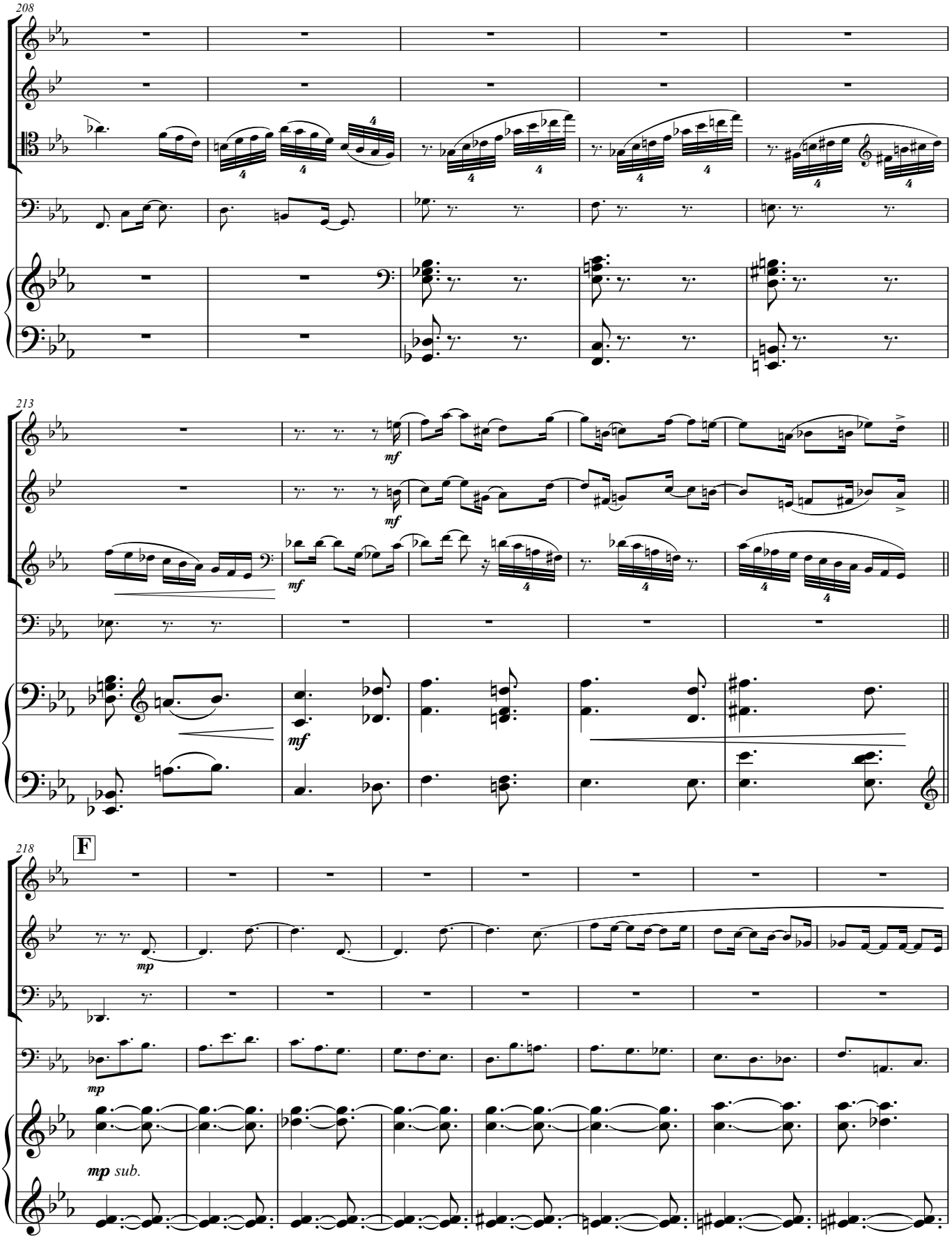
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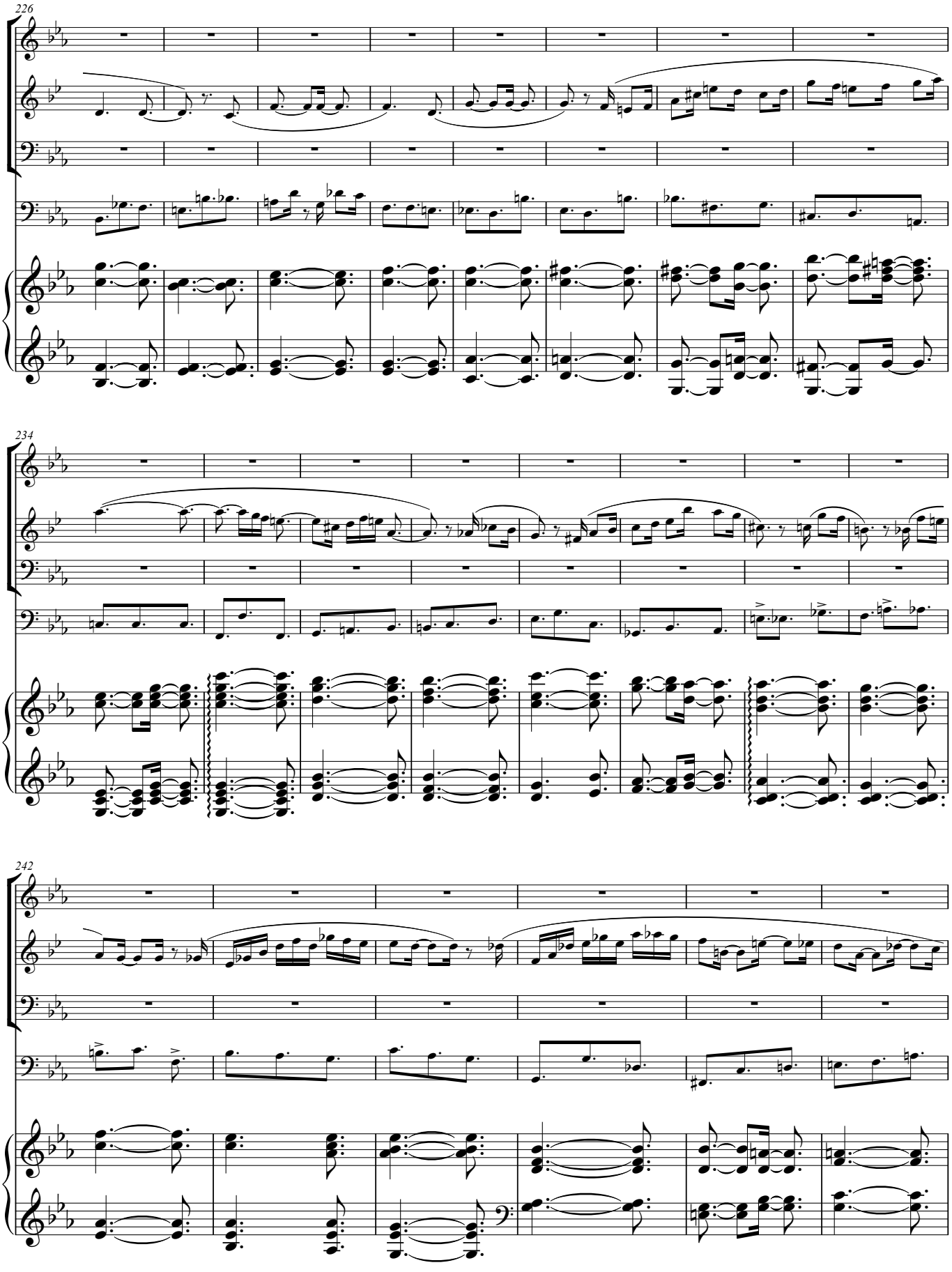
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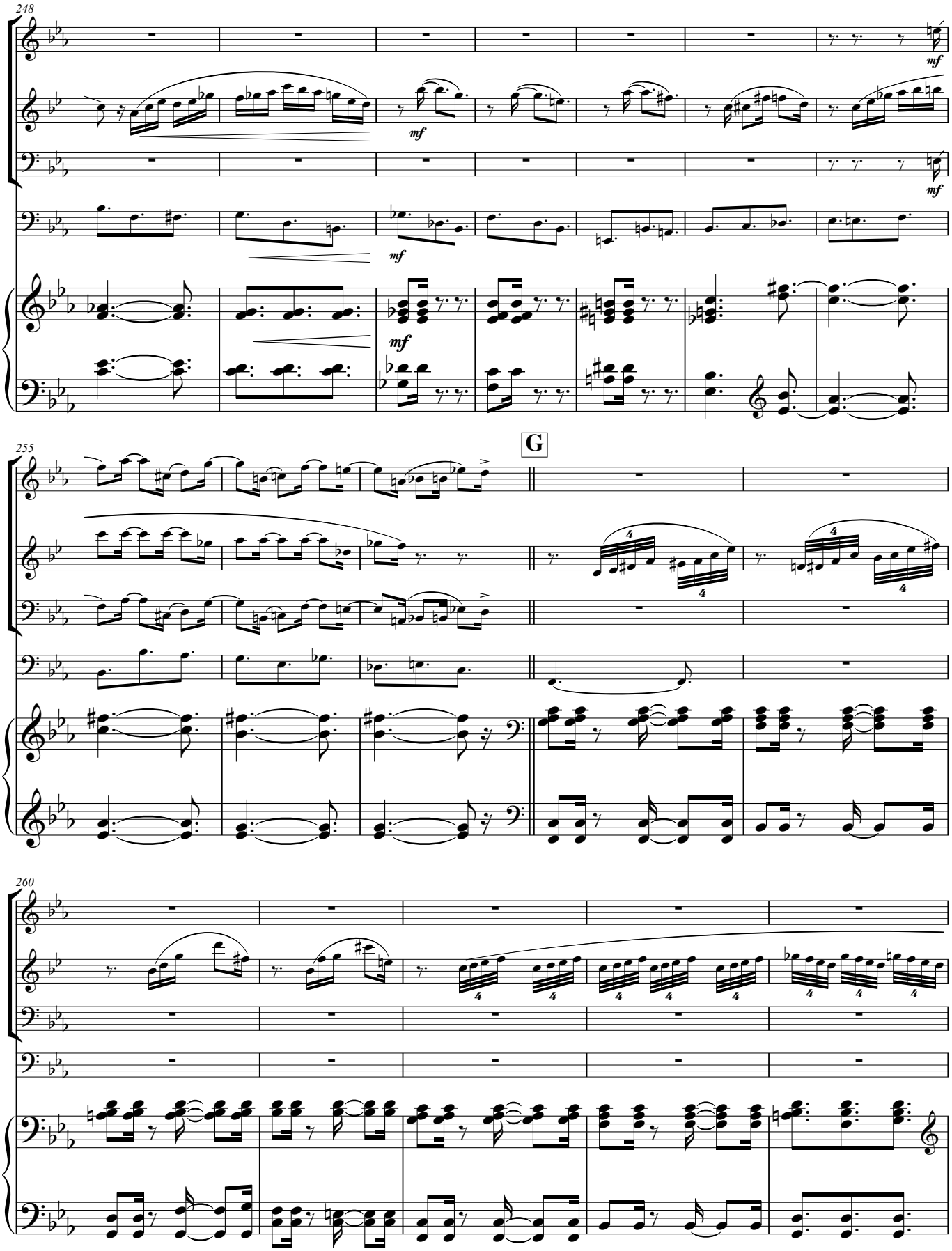
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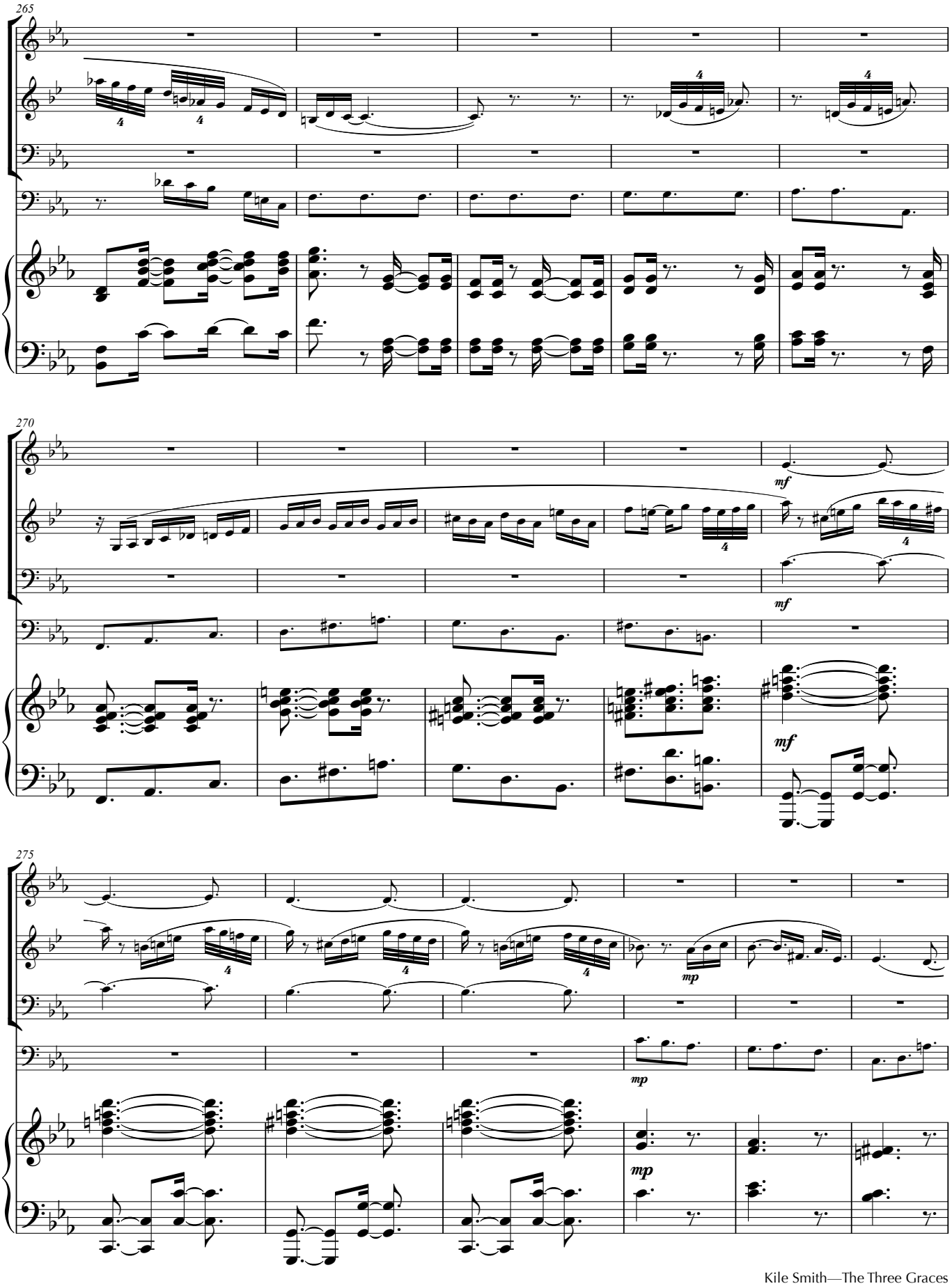
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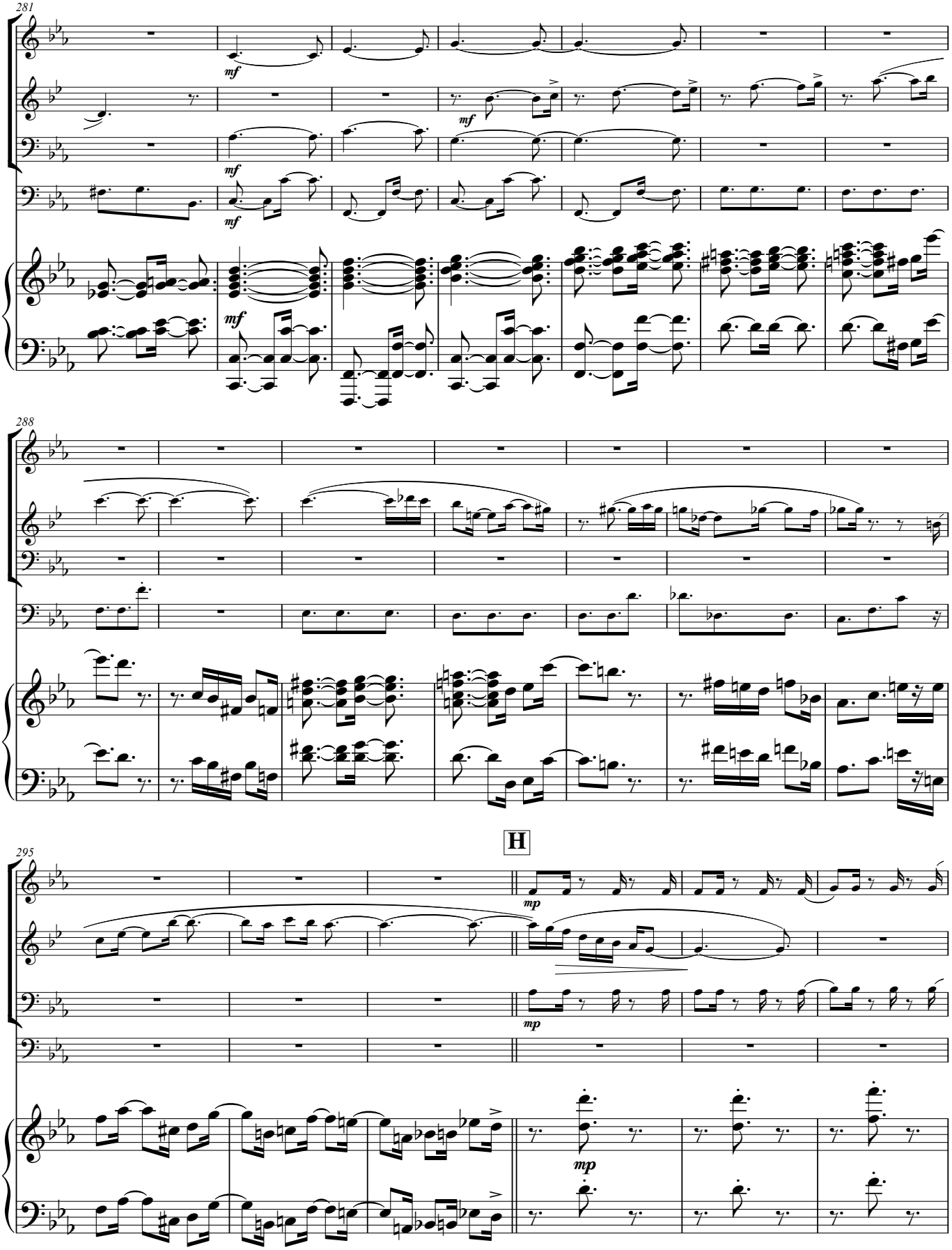
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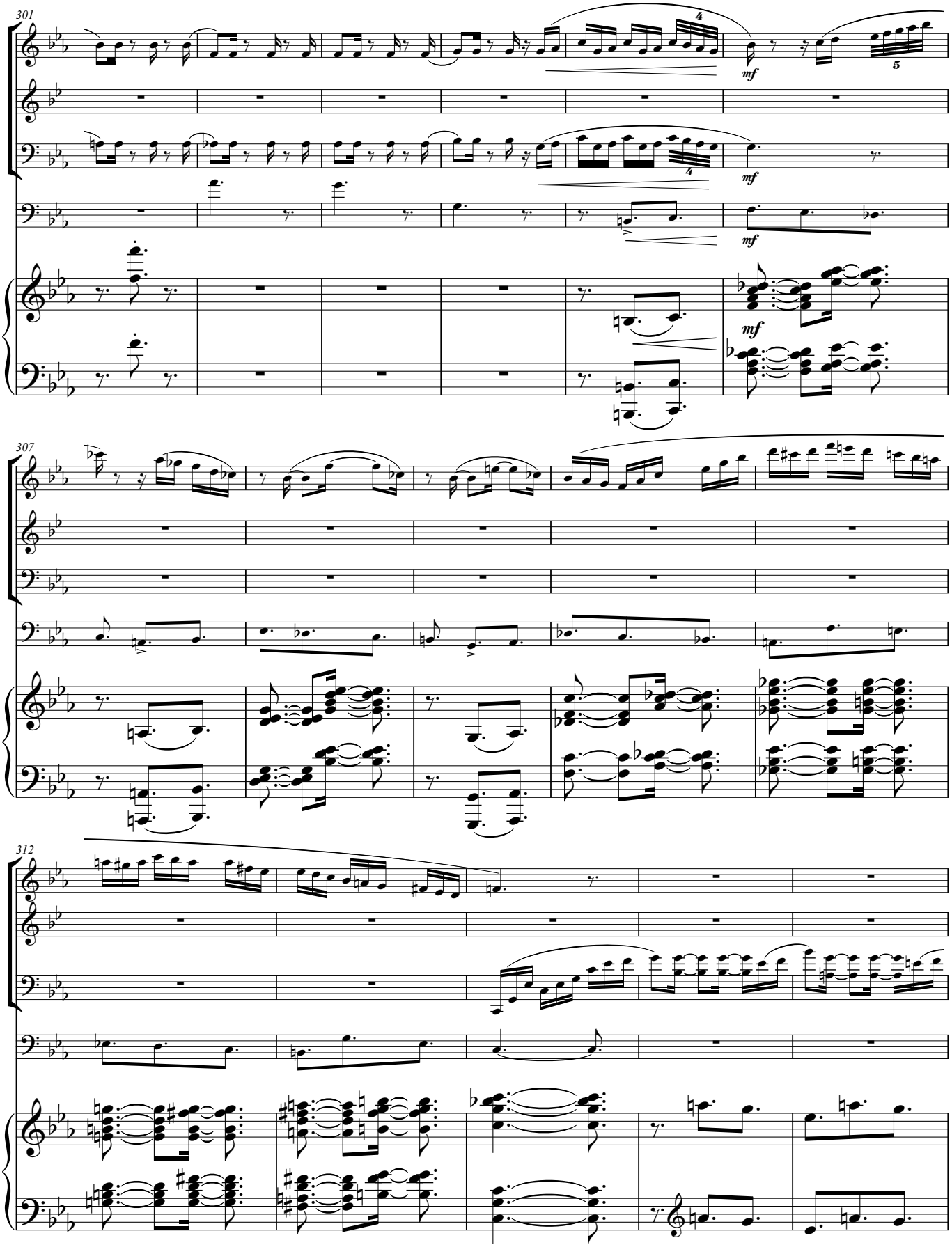
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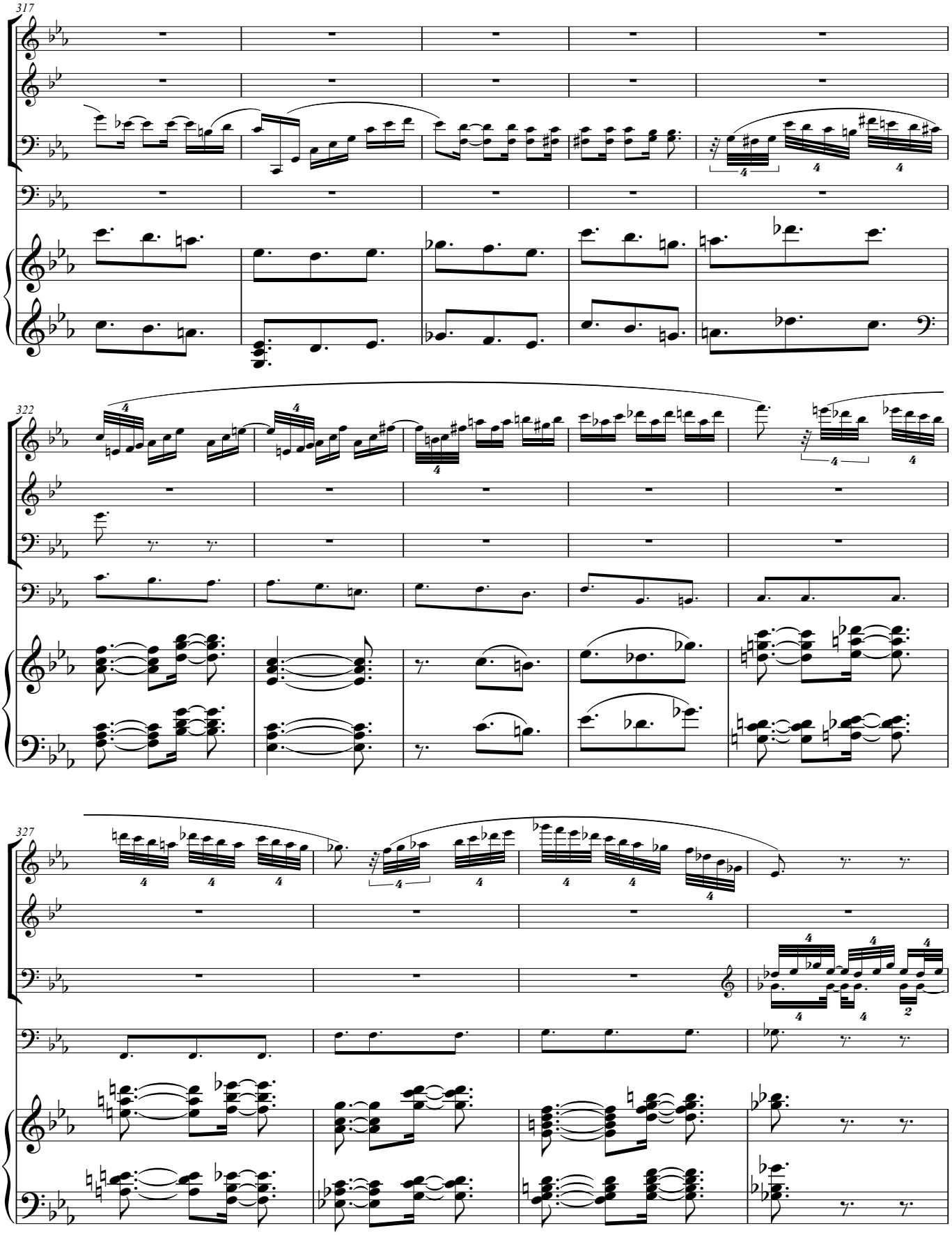
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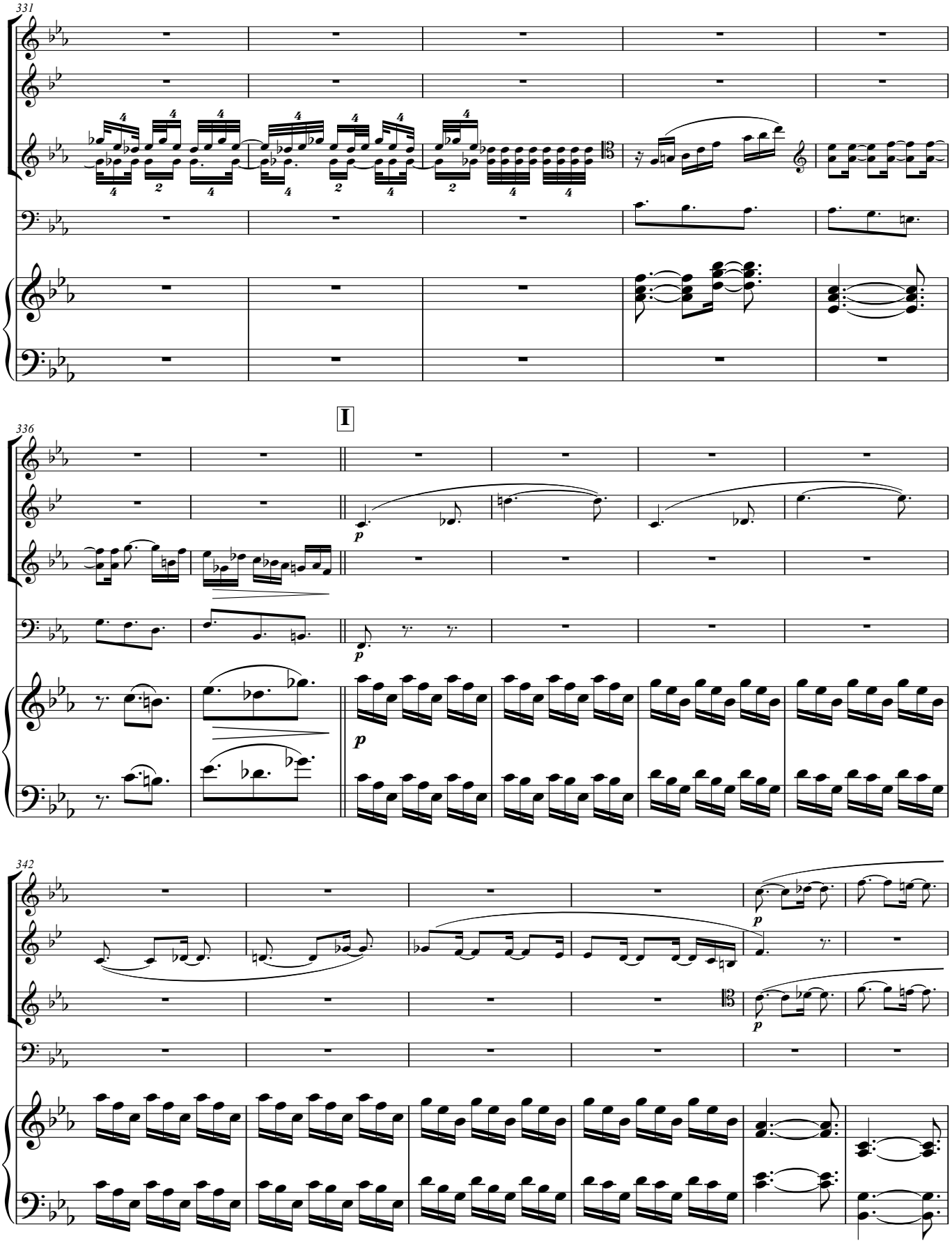
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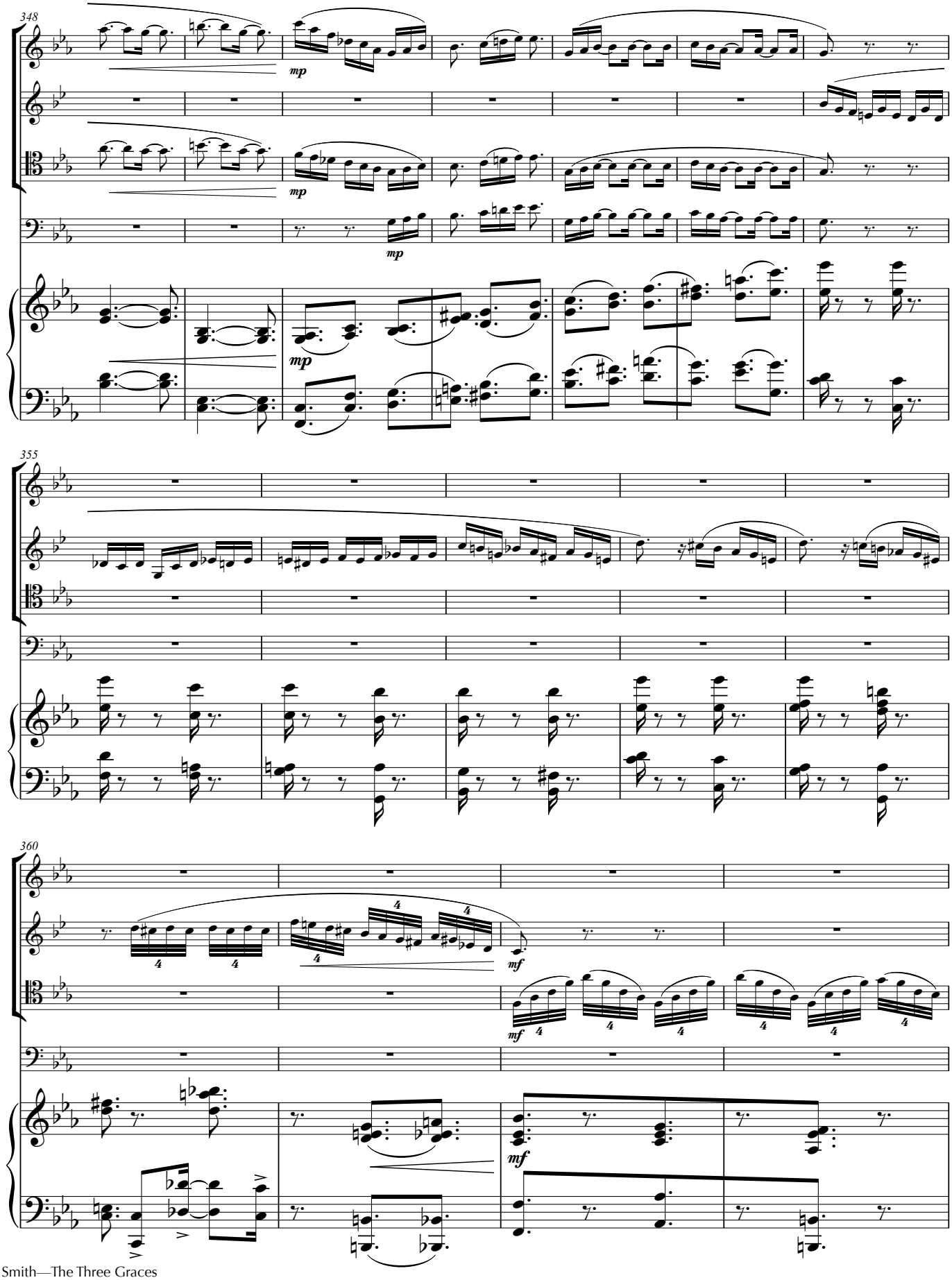
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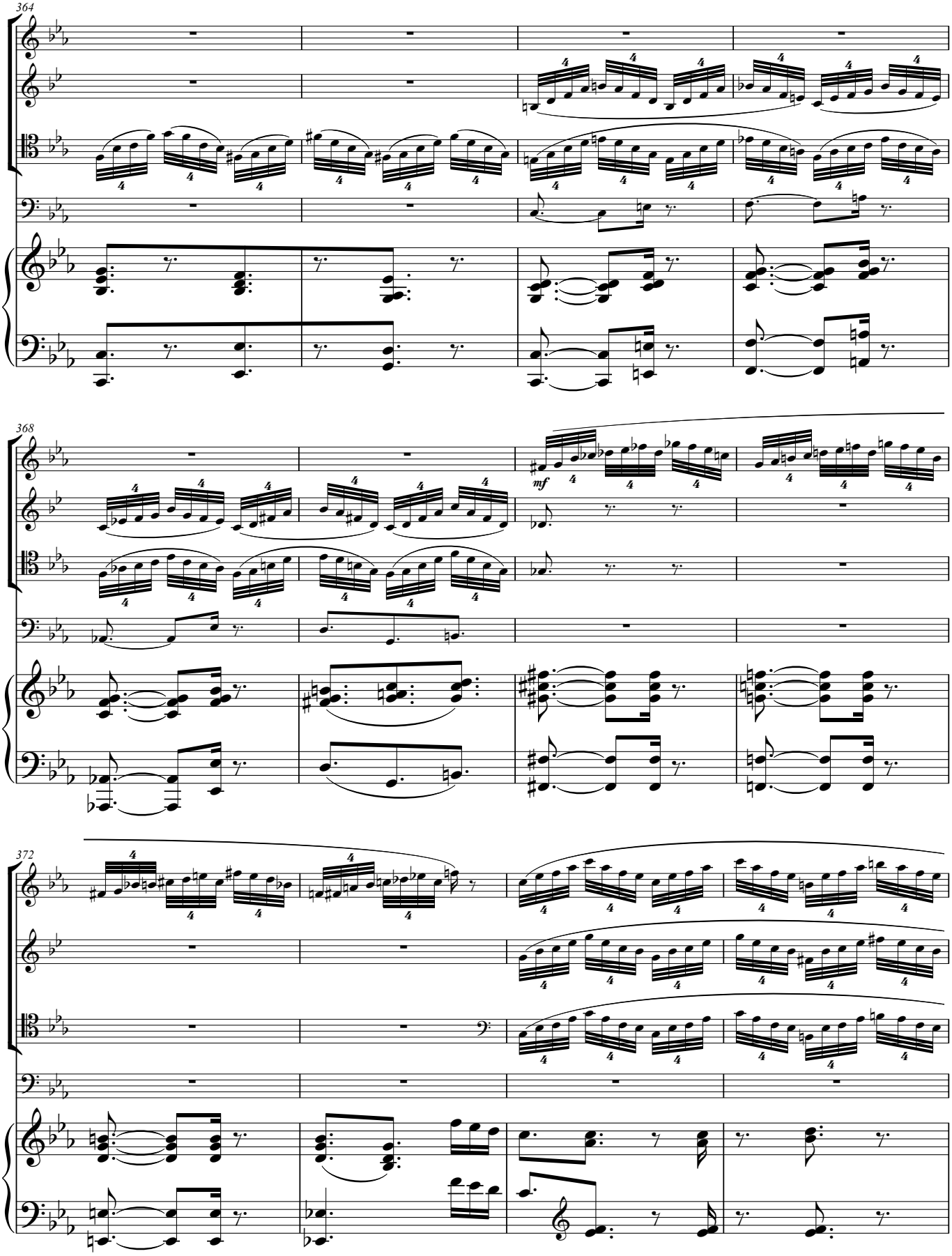
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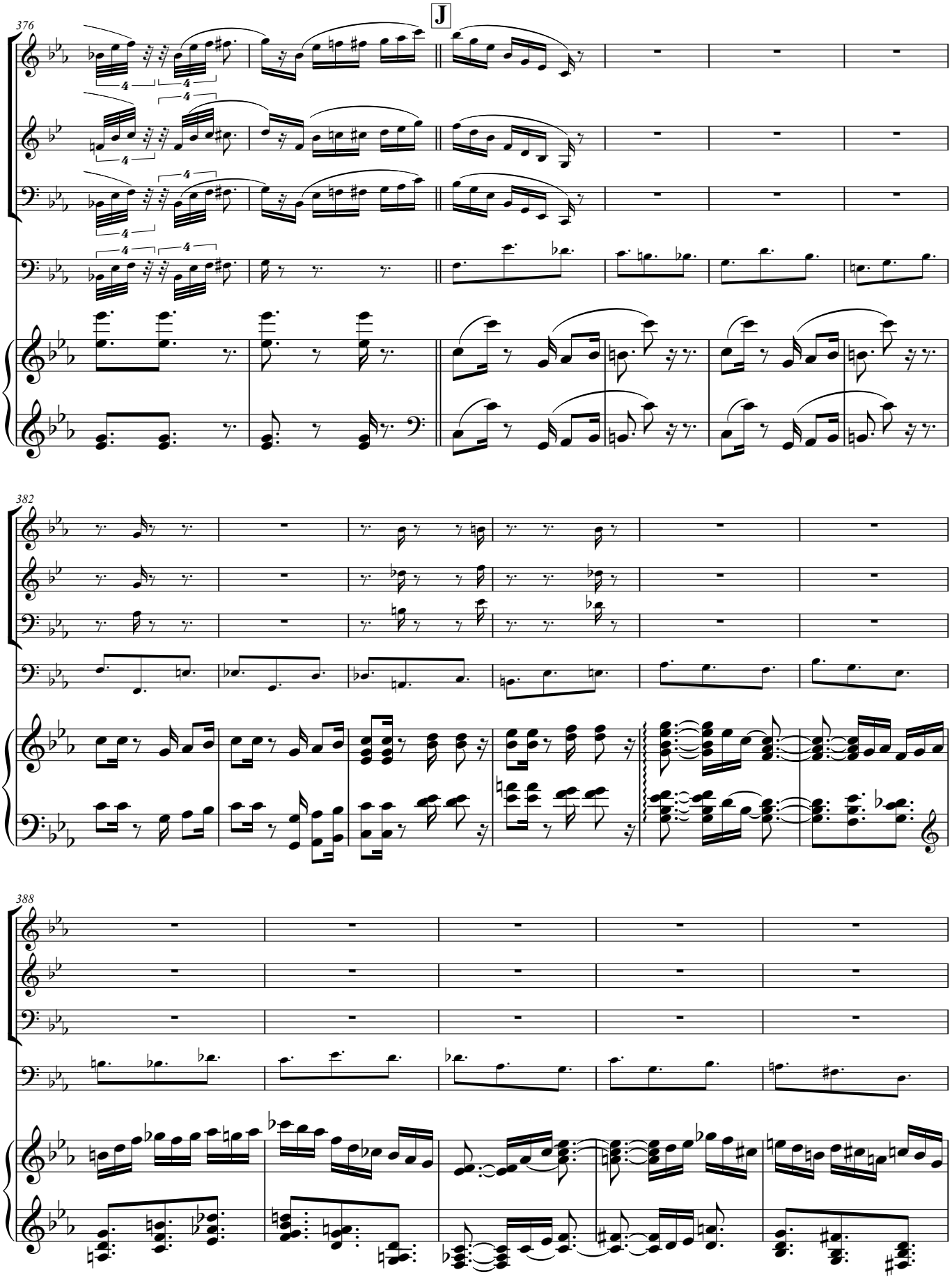
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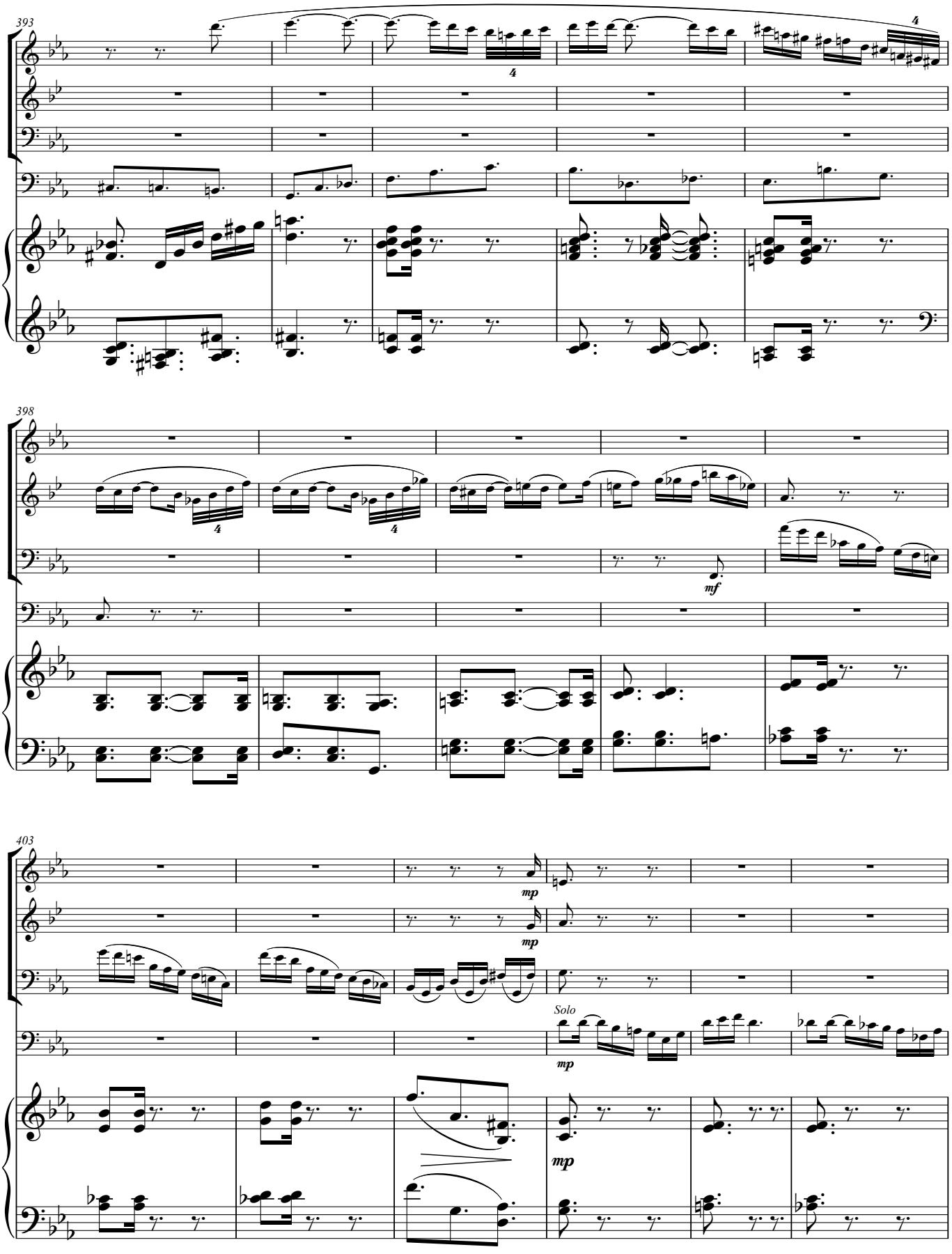
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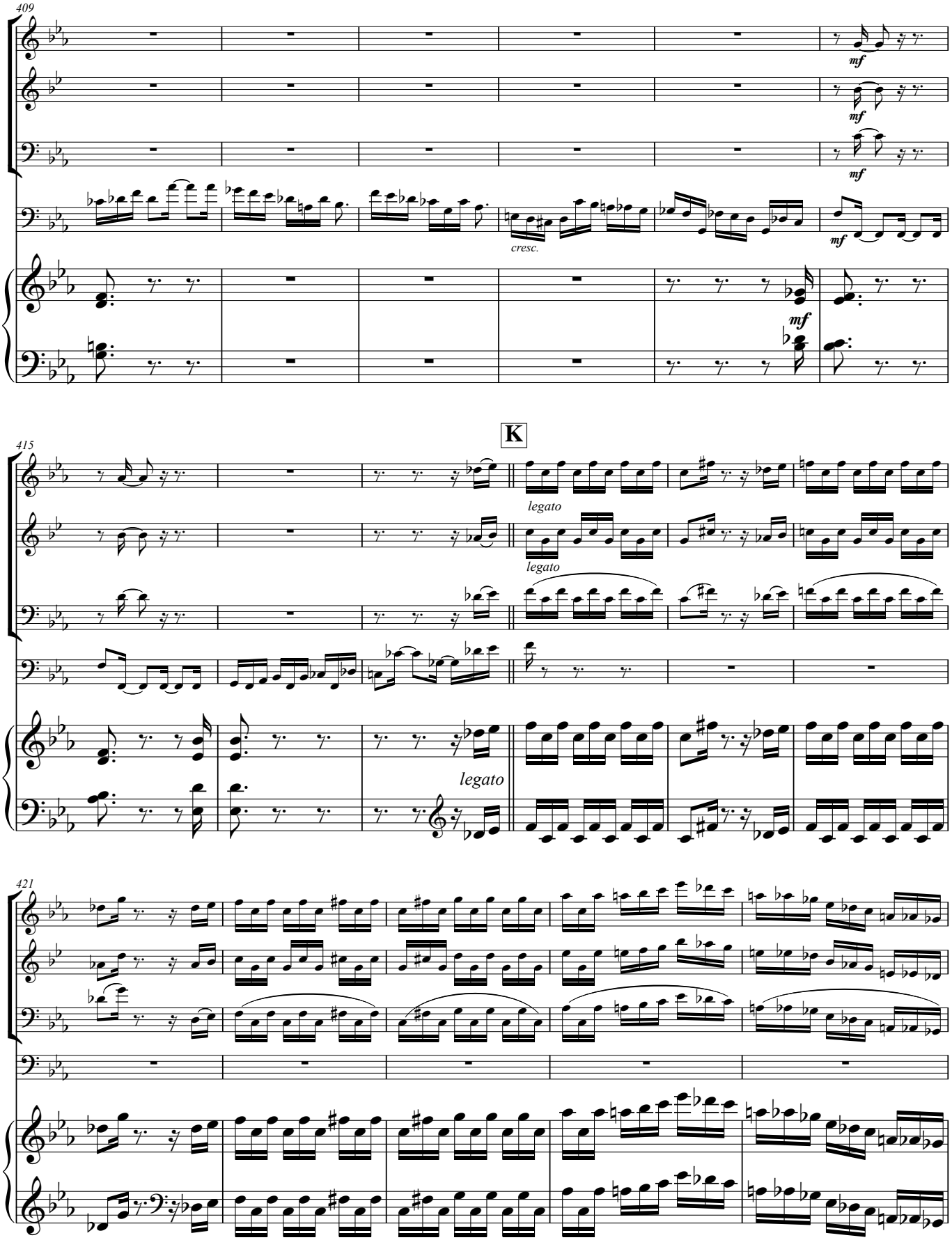
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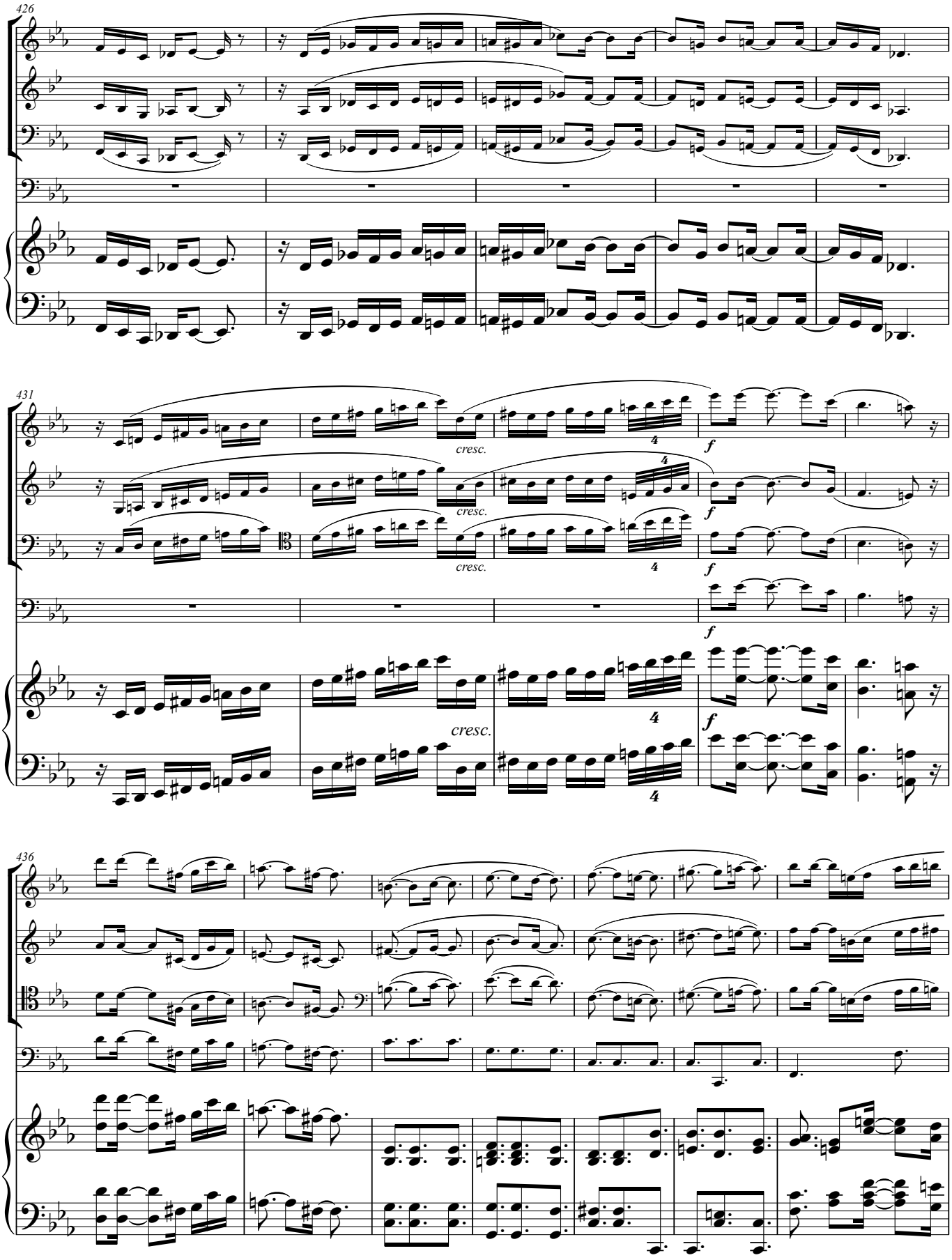
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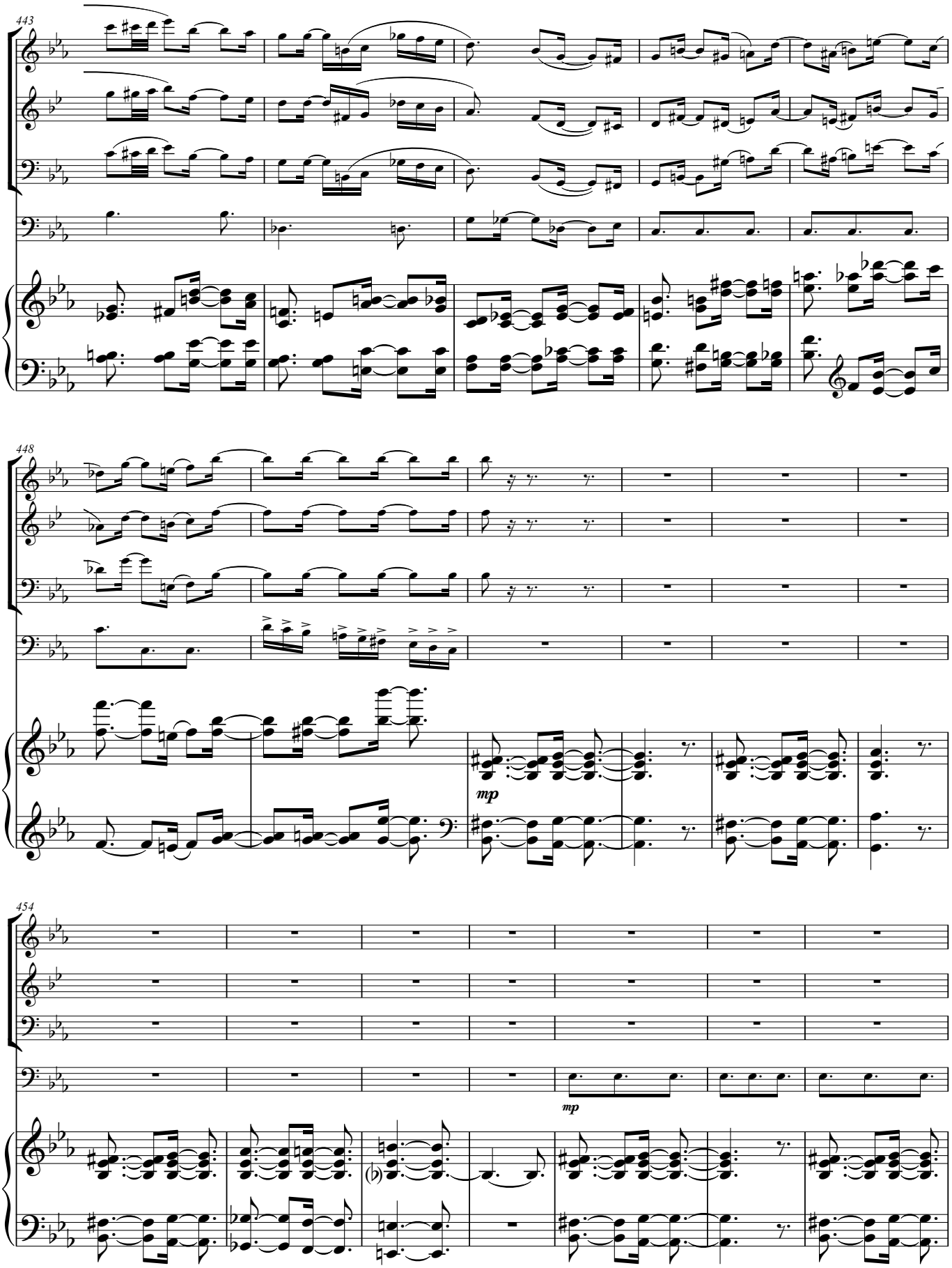
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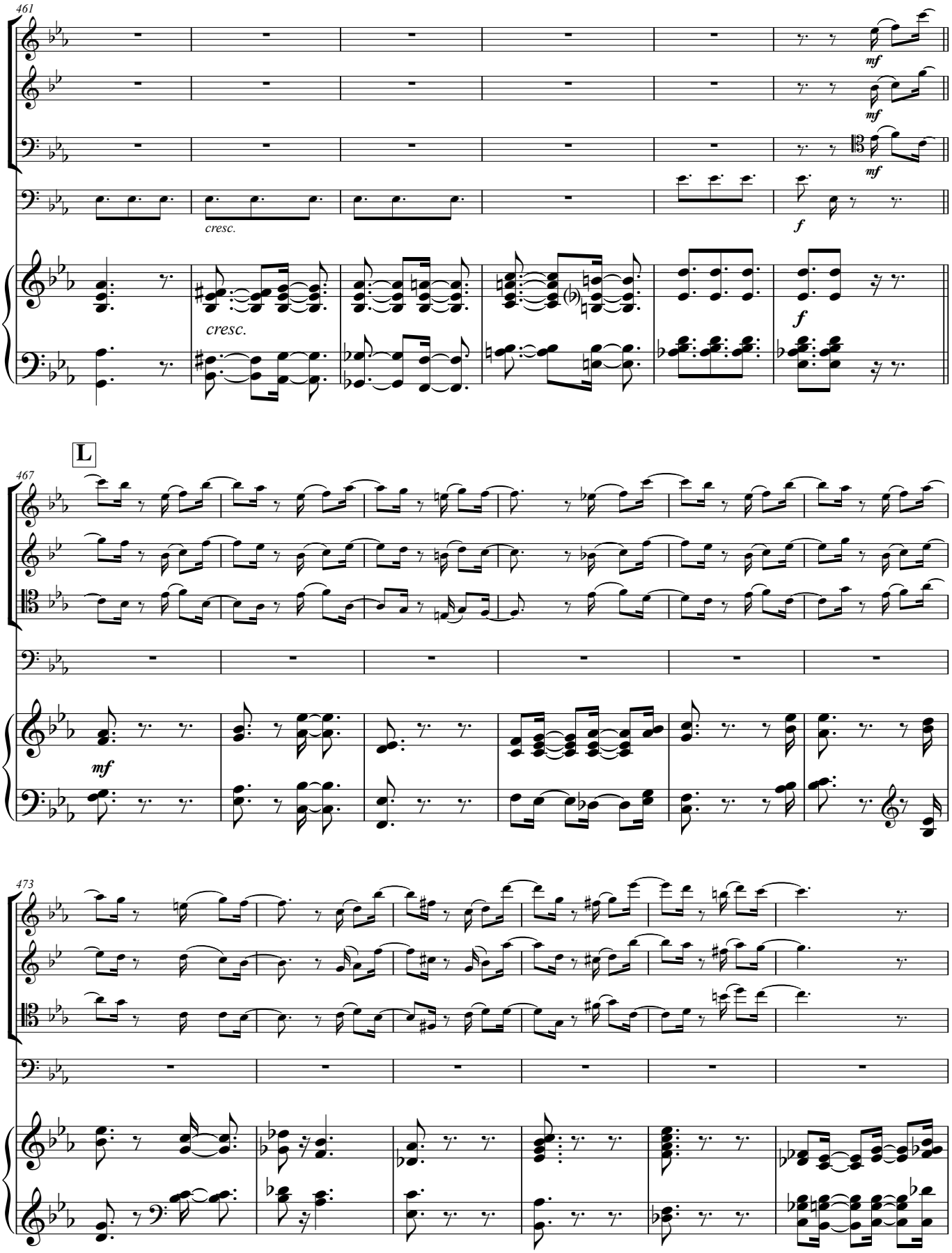
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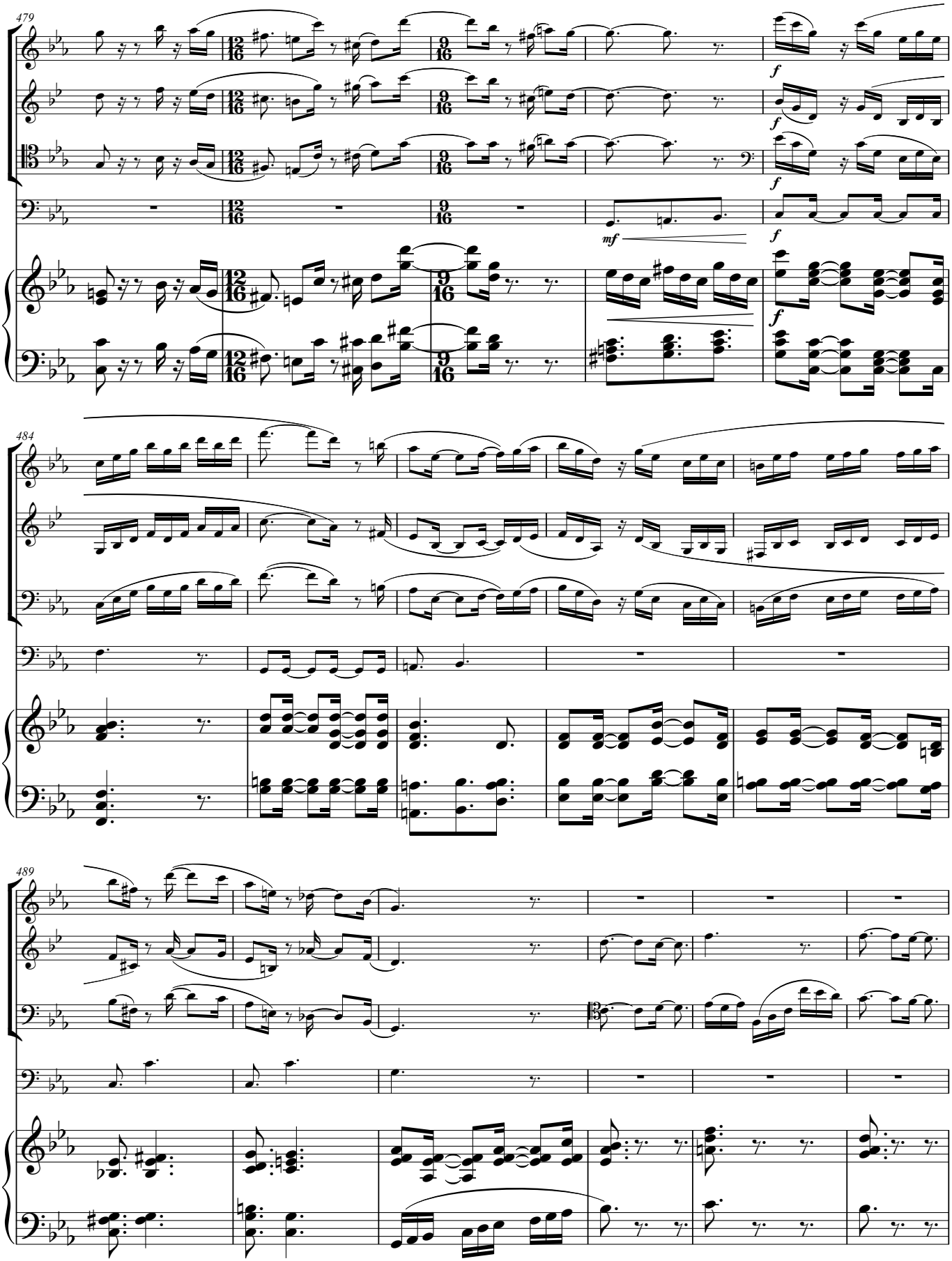
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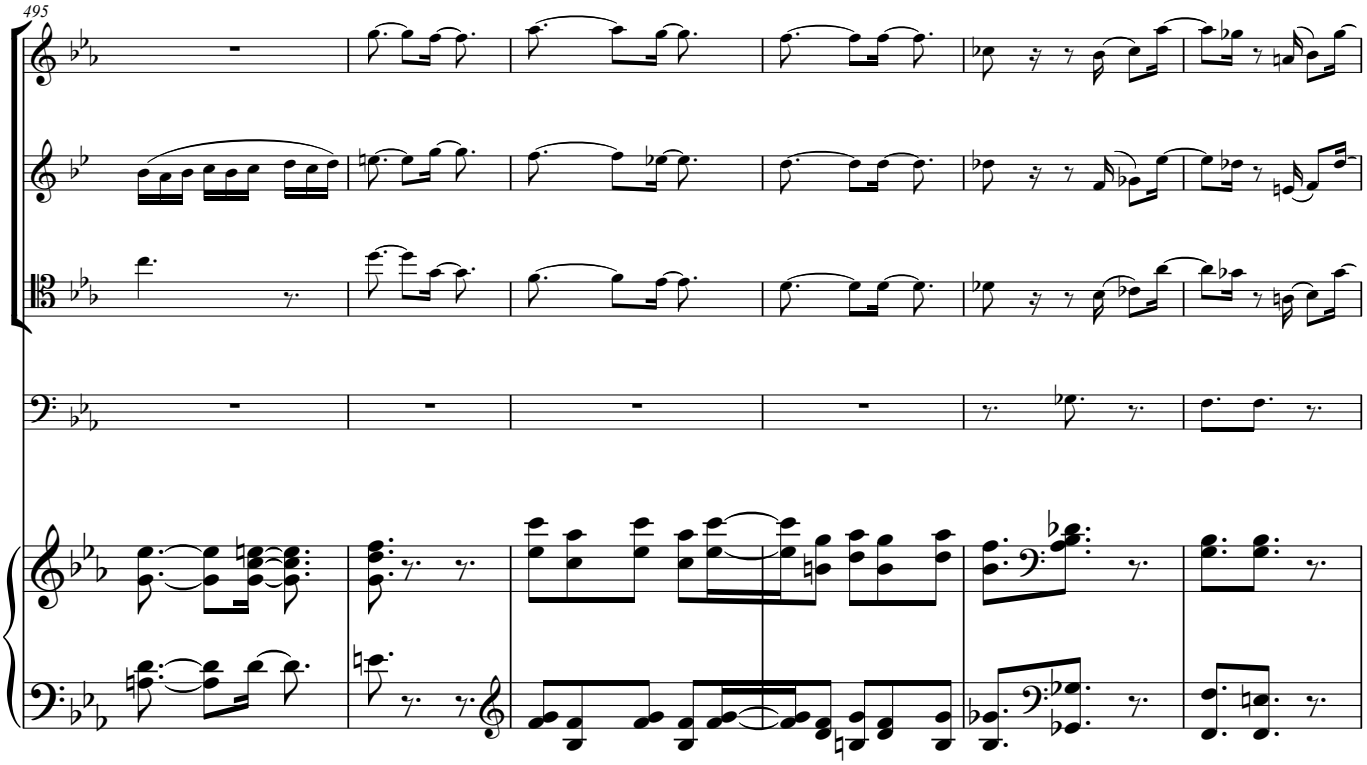
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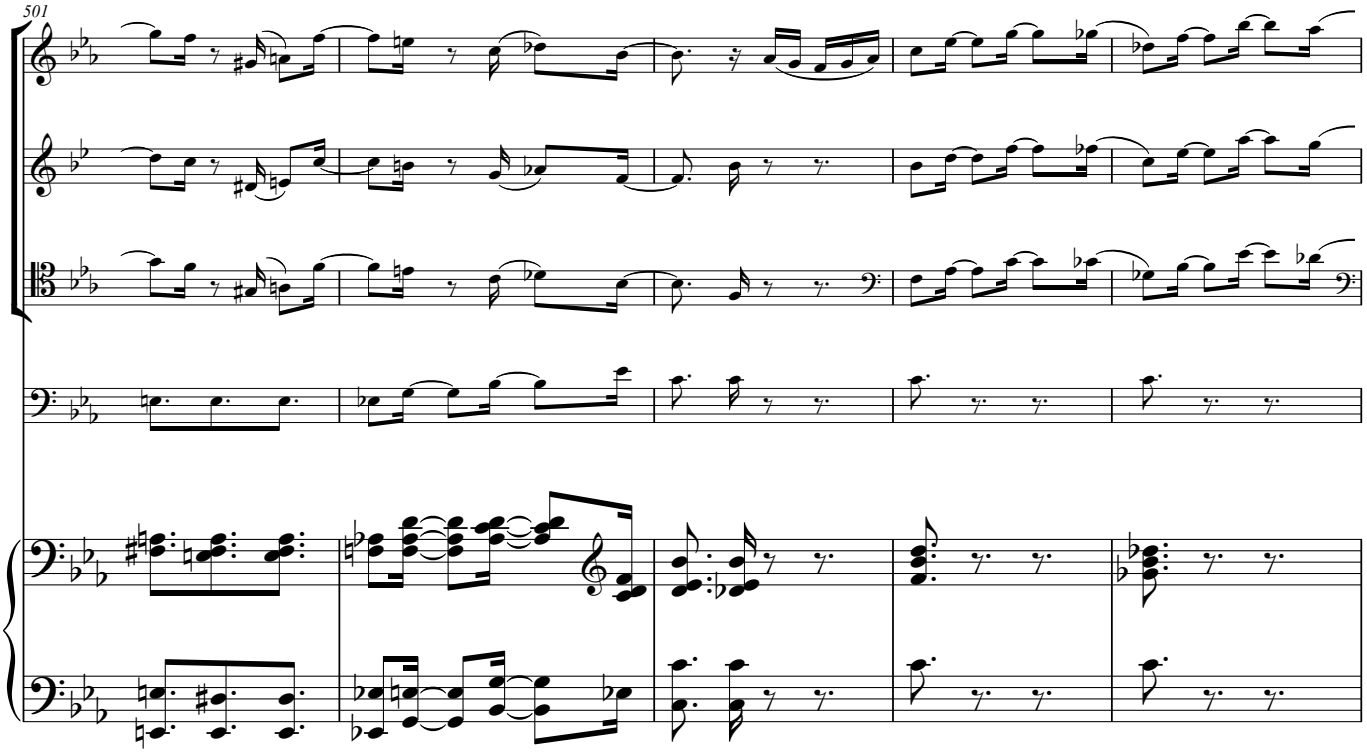
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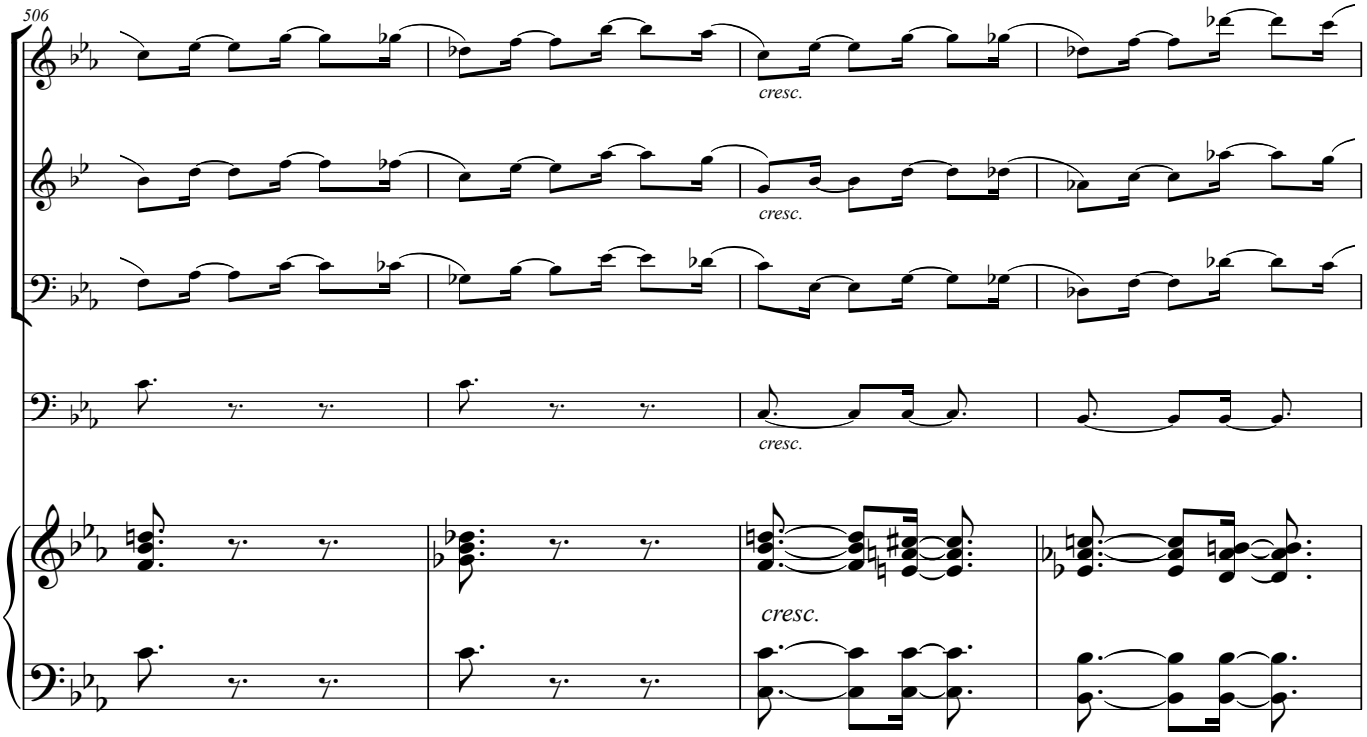
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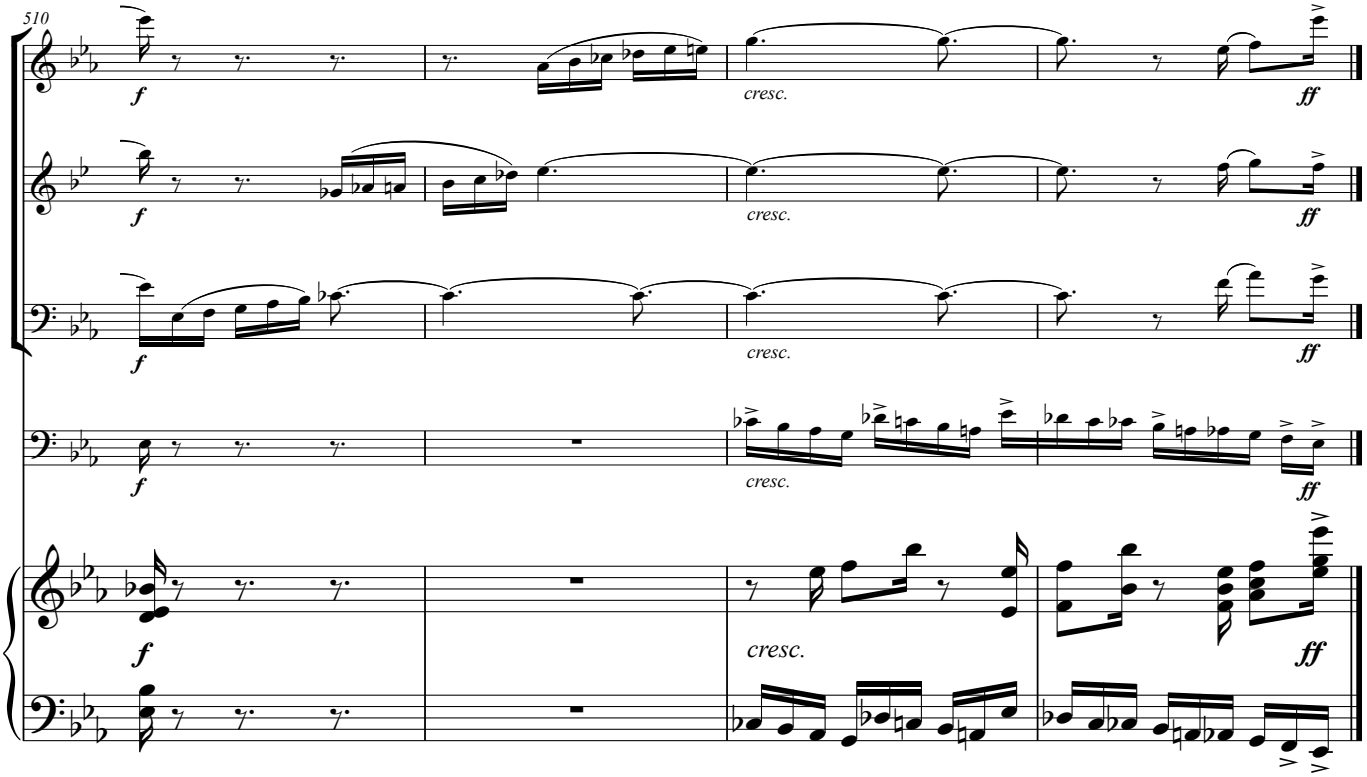
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