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Transcribing for the Trombone Ensemble

Joshua Robinson Walker
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

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UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Josh Walker

College: Arts & Sciences Department: Music

Faculty Mentor: Don H. Hough

PROJECT TITLE: Transcribing for the Trombone Ensemble

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: _____, Faculty Mentor

Date: 11 May 1998

Comments (Optional):

Transcribing for the Trombone Ensemble

by

Josh Walker

Transcribing for the Trombone Ensemble

The lack of literature for the trombone and the trombone ensemble has long been a concern of trombonists everywhere, myself included. Despite the fact that the trombone is the oldest fully chromatic brass instrument (it could play all twelve notes of Western harmony long before the trumpets and French horns achieved this through use of the valve), it fell out of frequent use towards the end of the Renaissance and did not return until the latter part of the nineteenth century. While there are few exceptions, the trombone was mostly overlooked by the great composers of the Baroque, Classical, and early Romantic periods. It made its way into the modern orchestra in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, but solo and chamber works were virtually nonexistent until the Twentieth Century. The reasons why composers overlooked this oldest and most versatile of brass instruments is a mystery to all of us.

This problem is the reason that I chose this project. I wanted to transcribe for trombone ensemble different types of pieces from different time periods. I selected the following pieces: Giovanni Perluigi da Palestrina's *Stabat Mater*, the second movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, Johannes Brahms' *Intermezzo*, and Henry Fillmore's *Rolling Thunder.* These pieces offer four contrasting styles ranging from the tranquil religious work to the blazing showpiece.

Palestrina's *Stabat Mater* was written for large chorus in two antiphonal choirs, each choir divided into four parts. It was composed during the Renaissance, towards the end of the Sixteenth Century. I arranged the trombone ensemble in the same way. There are two antiphonal choirs, each consisting of three tenor trombones and one bass trombone. Due to the difference in sound of the different voice parts, the first part in each choir could be played on alto trombone for a more authentic sound, but I scored it for tenor because alto trombone is not that widely played. I lowered the piece

a major sixth from its original key of C to the key of Eb to keep the upper parts from being too taxing. The lower parts are not a problem because the bass trombone is capable of playing much lower than the human voice can sing. Because this was originally written for two antiphonal choirs, I could use the dynamic and phrase marks that the composer provided. This type of music is especially effective if the two choirs can be on opposite sides of a large church and play back and forth with the audience in between. This is the way that sacred works, both choral and instrumental, were performed in the Renaissance and early Baroque.

Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7* was written for a full sized Classical orchestra in the early part of the Nineteenth Century. It is one of Beethoven's symphonies that helped to develop the new writing style of the Romantic Period. The second movement is a funeral march. In the first part of this movement, which is what I arranged, the strings play a hauntingly beautiful theme that is later joined by an rhythmical accompaniment in the woodwinds, trumpets, horns, and timpani. I arranged this for two choirs, each consisting of four tenor trombones and one bass trombone, representing the strings and the accompaniment. I raised this piece a major fourth from its original key of A minor to D minor. This was to enable the bass trombones to play the low parts with as much finesse as possible. I also had to lower the upper string parts one or two octaves in places to accommodate the range of the trombone. I stopped at the middle section of this movement because the expanse of the music becomes too great for one family of instruments to play all of it. The middle section would require a full brass ensemble with higher and lower voices to work with. This is probably the most accessible of the four arrangements.

Johannes Brahms' *Intermezzo* was written for piano in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. This is a very Romantic composition with soaring melodies and use of almost the entire keyboard. This piece was the most difficult to arrange. I had to

constantly be careful not to exceed the range of the trombone in either direction while retaining the emotion that must be present in this music. I also had to keep in mind that a piano can sustain arpeggiated chords with the pedal so it sometimes does not complete a chord until two or three beats have passed. I had to determine which chords could start at the beginning of the measure and which ones should form gradually for the effect. I arranged this for a trombone sextet consisting of two alto, tenor, and bass trombones. This is to cover the extreme range of the piano and to create a sound that gets smaller as it gets higher, just like the strings of a piano do. I lowered this piece a major fifth from its original key of A major to D major, and still it pushes the range limits on the top and the bottom. I used some of the original phrase marks, but some were not practical and had to be changed. I had to use my own ideas for dynamics so that the melody is not covered by the other trombones. This is my favorite of the four arrangements; the one I would like to most see performed in a formal setting.

The forth and final arrangement is a band piece, Fillmore's circus march *Rolling Thunder.* This was written in the early Twentieth Century to be exciting music for high-flying acts in the circus. The only word to describe circus marches is fast. The trombone part in the band arrangement is hard enough, and adding the rest of the band parts makes it extremely difficult. I arranged this for a trombone quintet consisting of a bass trombone, two tenor trombones, and two alto trombones. The bass and tenor trombones represent the tuba and trombone parts, and the alto trombones are the upper woodwind and trumpet parts. I retained the original key of F minor because the slide choreography is the best in this key. I also kept most of the high parts in the original octave, making them very taxing. There are two altos in order to trade off the high parts so the piece is not impossible. I was able to keep all the original phrasing, dynamics, and articulations because this piece was composed

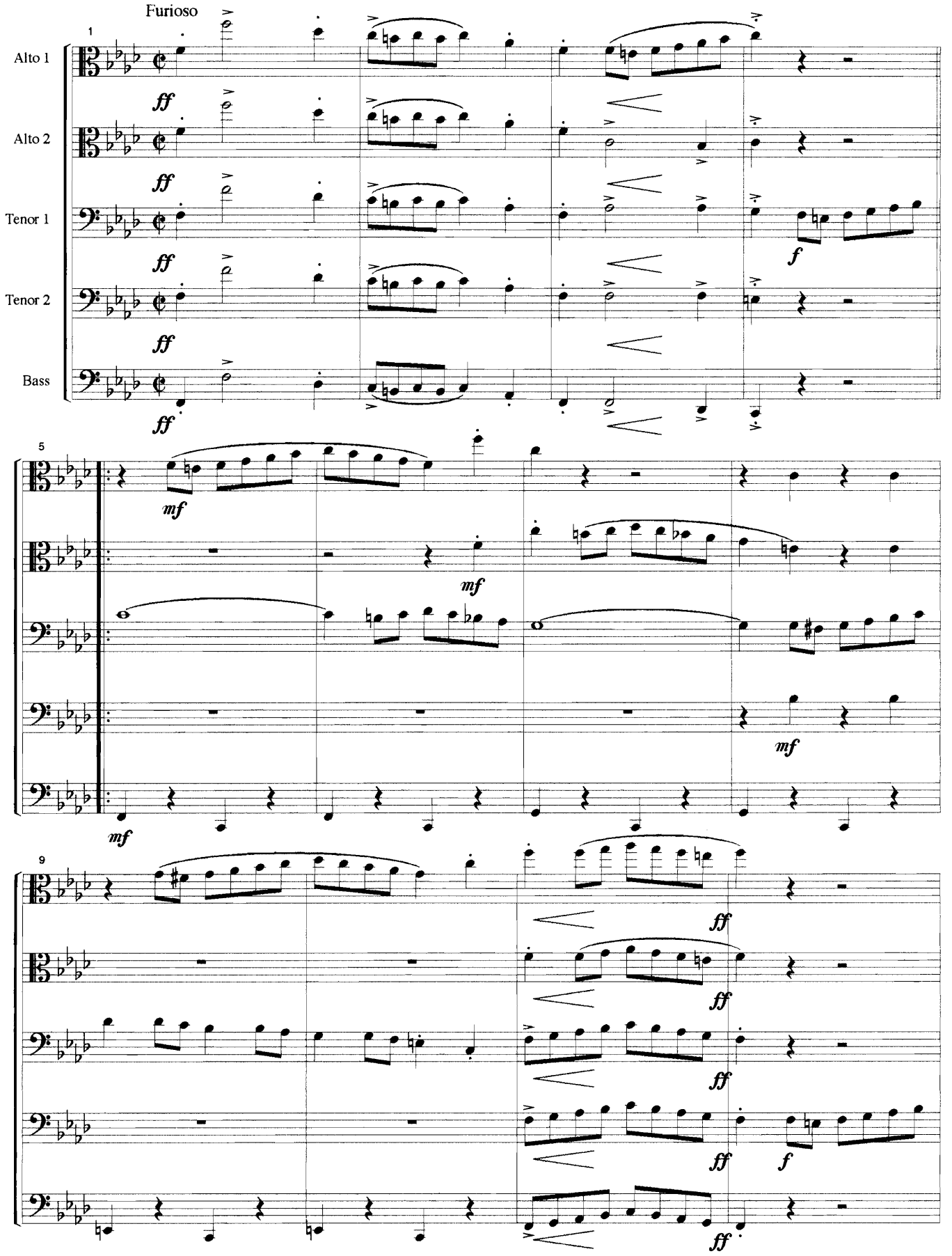
solely for wind and brass instruments. Although extremely difficult, it is playable and would be an unbelievable encore for a trombone ensemble.

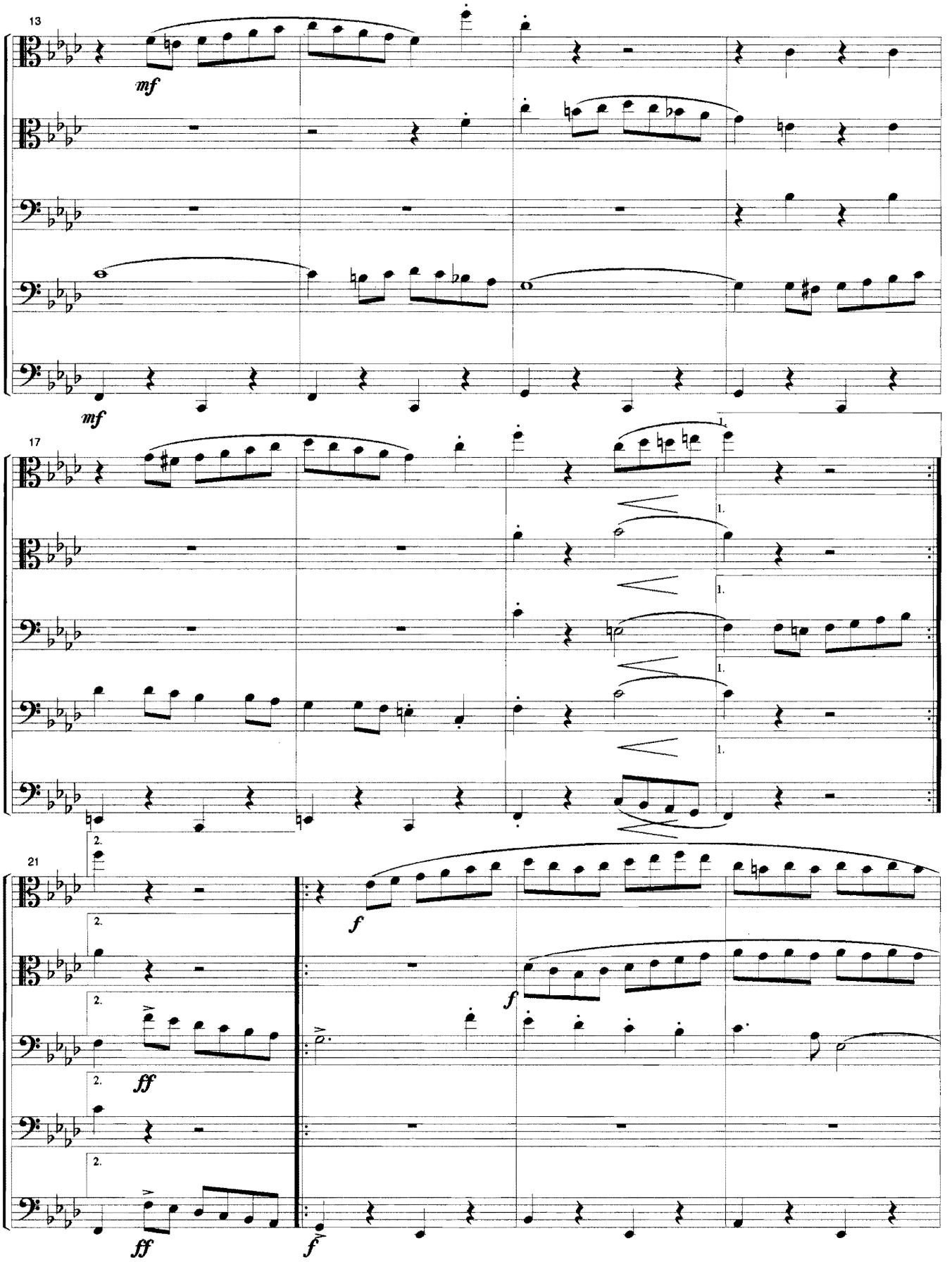
In arranging these four pieces, I was hoping to produce a variety of new music for the trombone ensemble that is fun for both the performers and the audience. Since this was my first major arranging attempt, I got the added benefit of learning a lot about what works and what does not work. I also learned that transcribing music is a lot like translating a language. Just as I would translate the meaning of a sentence in Italian, I had to translate the composer's meaning for a certain sound instead copying the score note for note. I have enjoyed the arranging process and have especially enjoyed the few sessions where a few of us read through the arrangements to see whether or not they would work. I certainly hope that some other people can get the some enjoyment from playing this music.

Rolling Thunder

for Trombone Quintet

Henry Fillmore
arr. Walker

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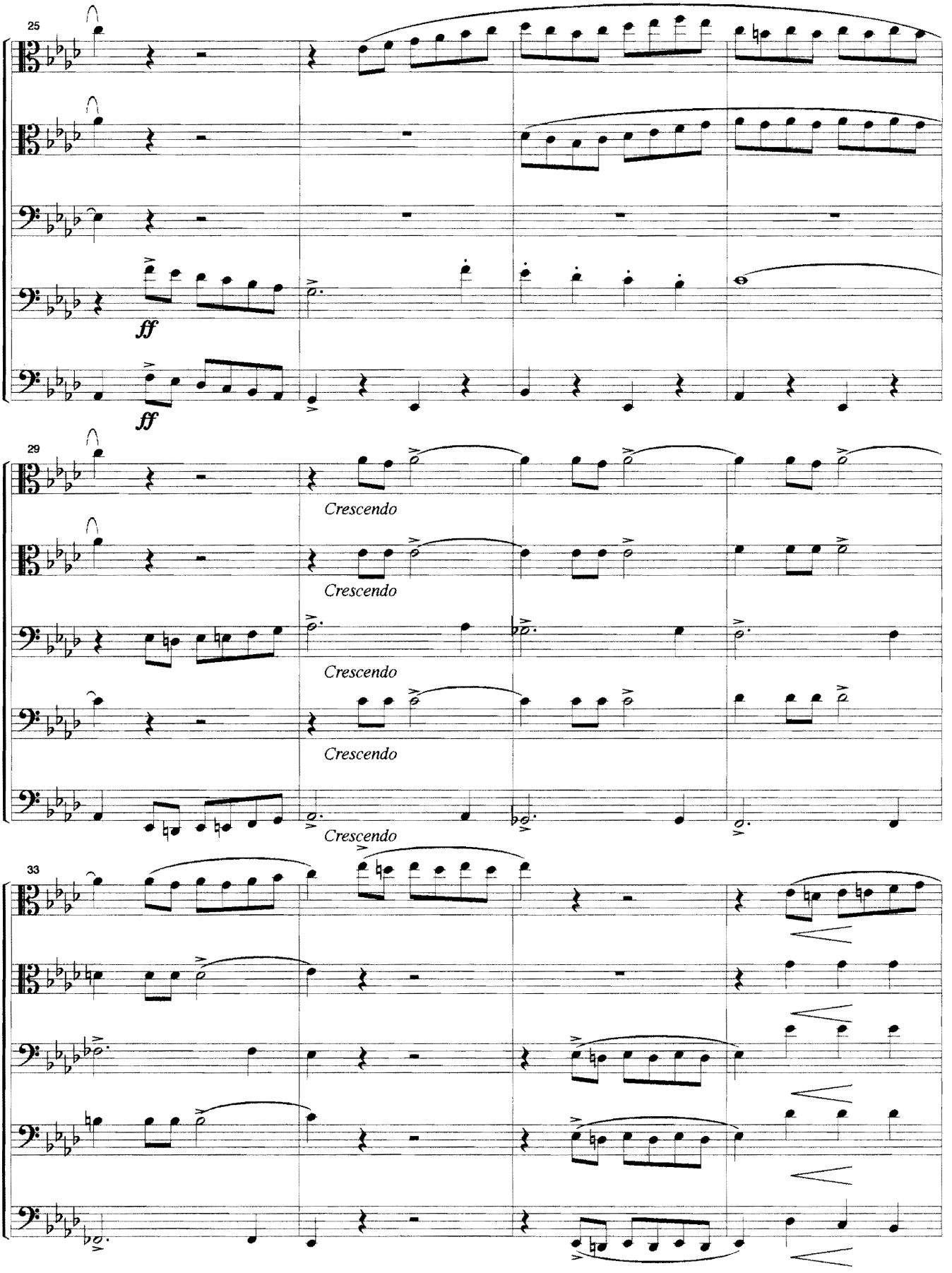
mf
mf
17
1.
21
2.
f
ff
ff
f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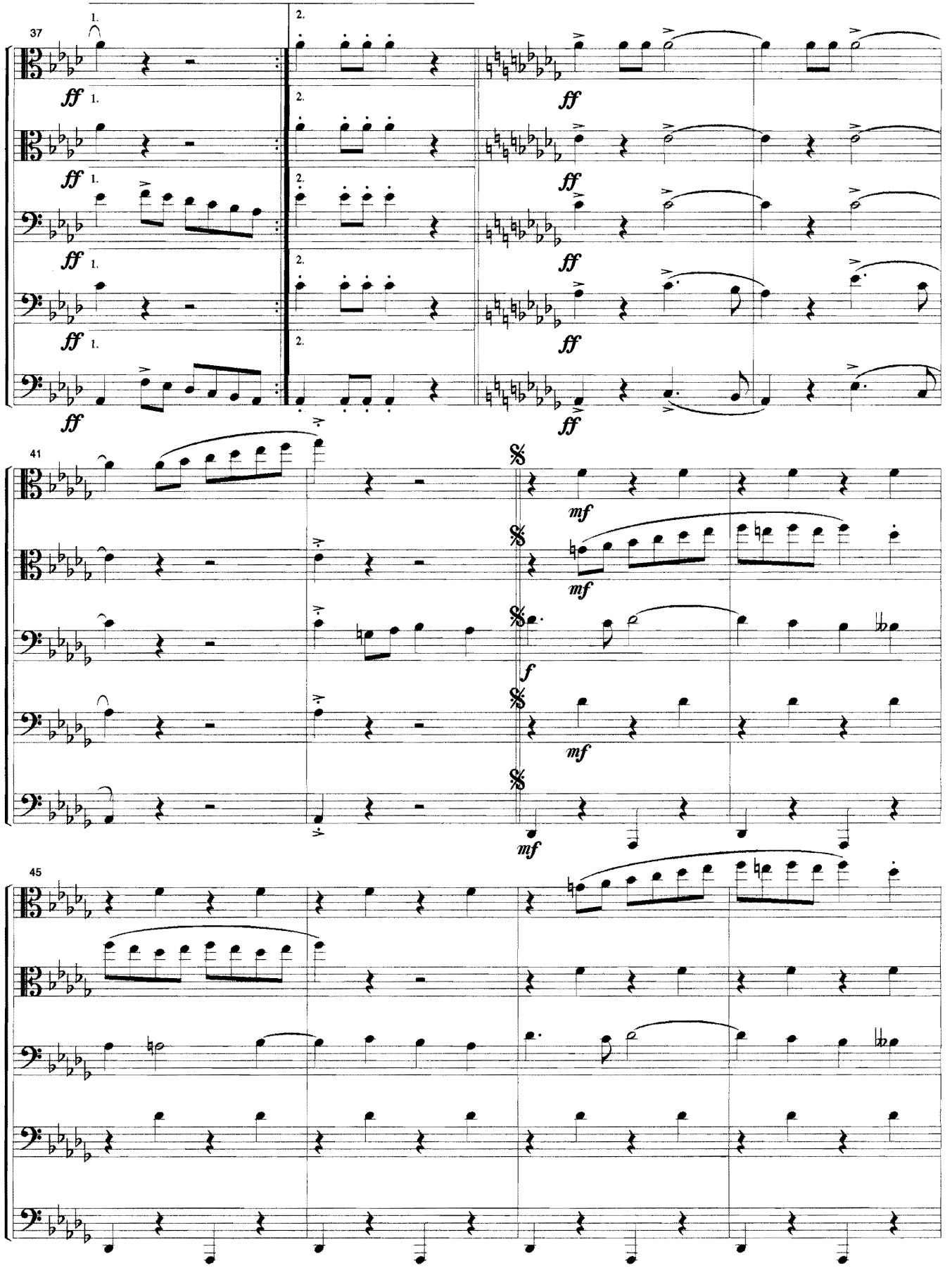
ff
ff
29
Crescendo
Crescendo
Crescendo
Crescendo
Crescendo
33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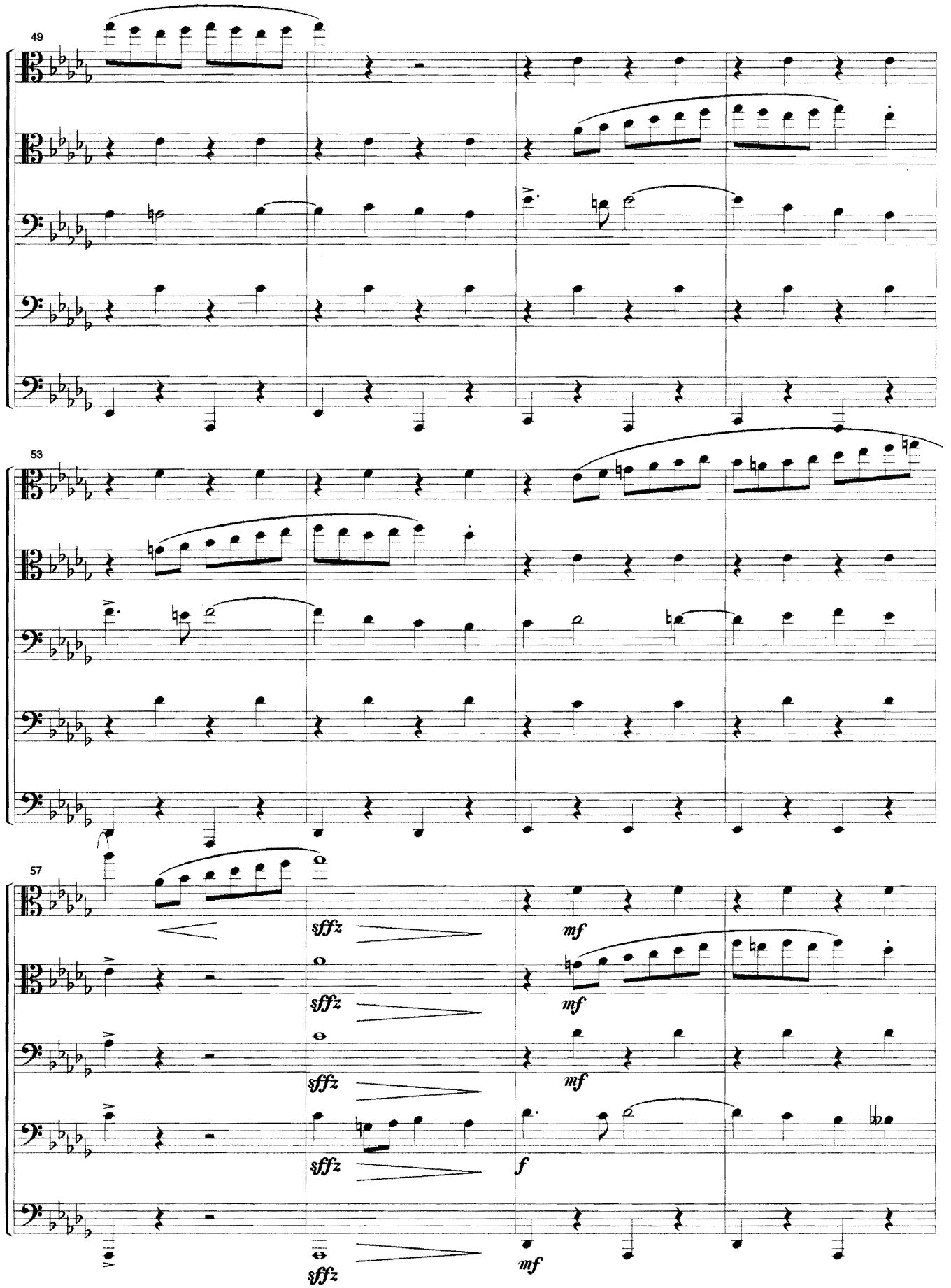
1.
2.
ff
41
mf
f
45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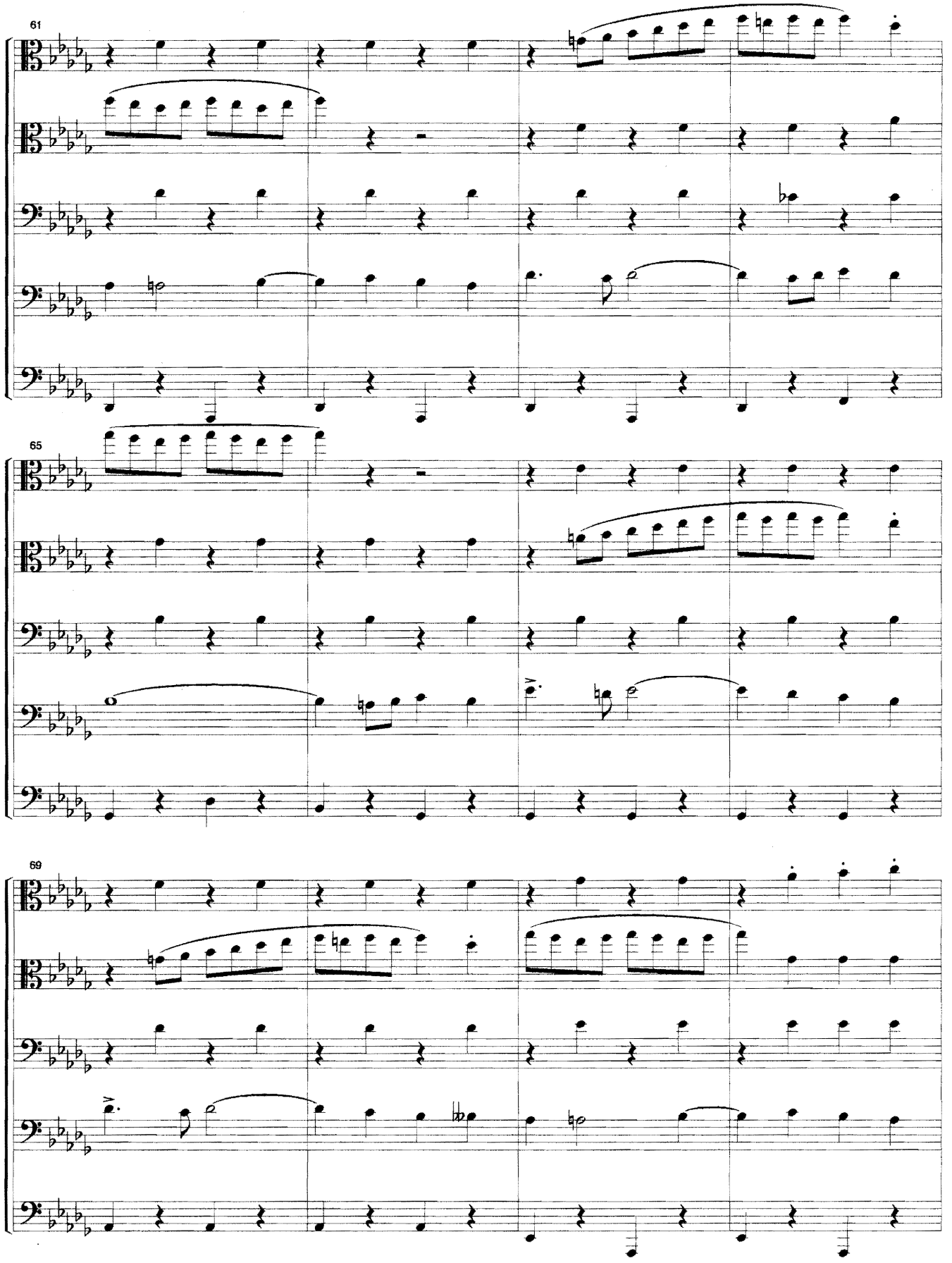
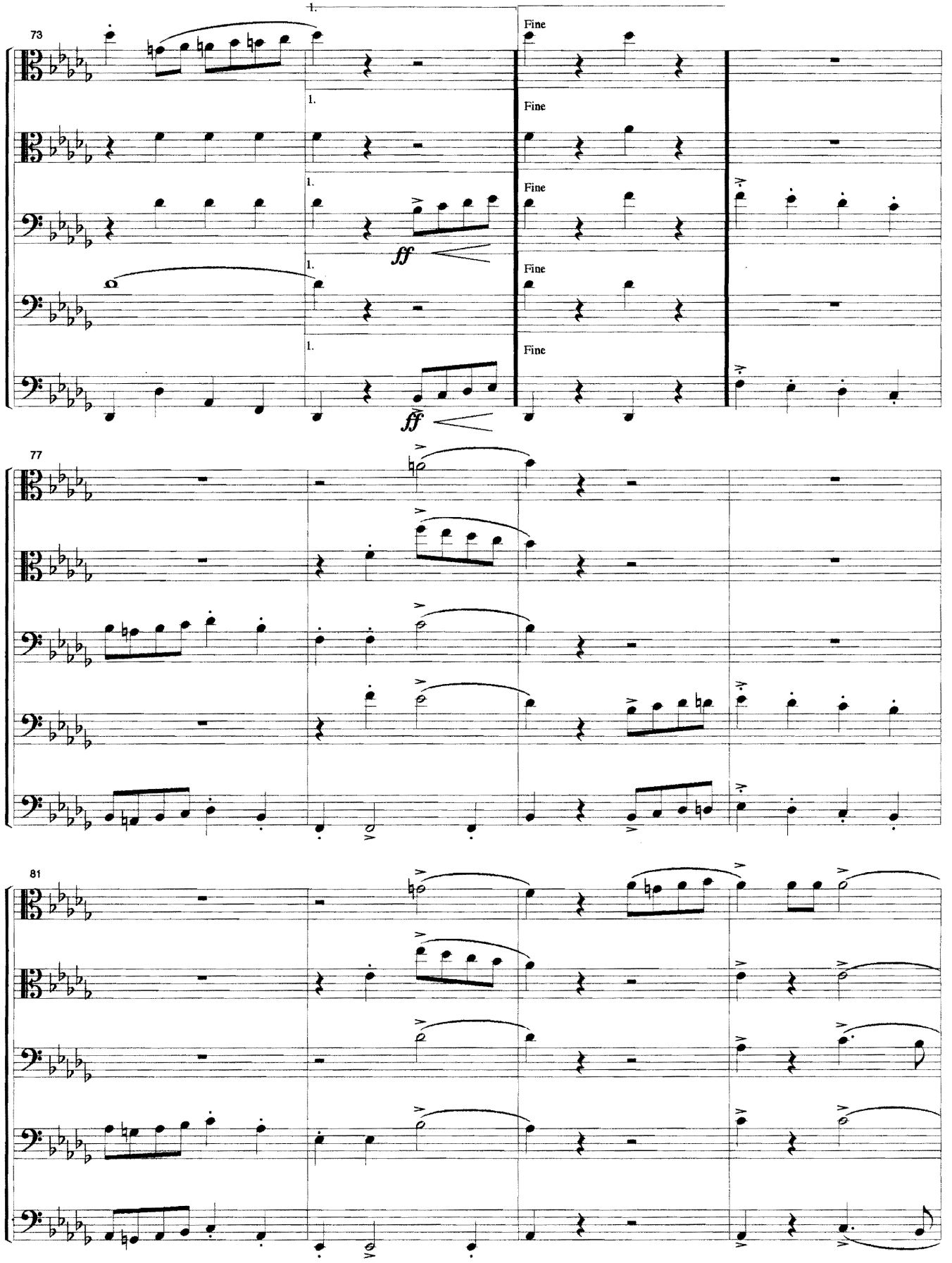
53
57
sffz
sffz
sffz
sffz
mf
mf
mf
f
mf


61
65
69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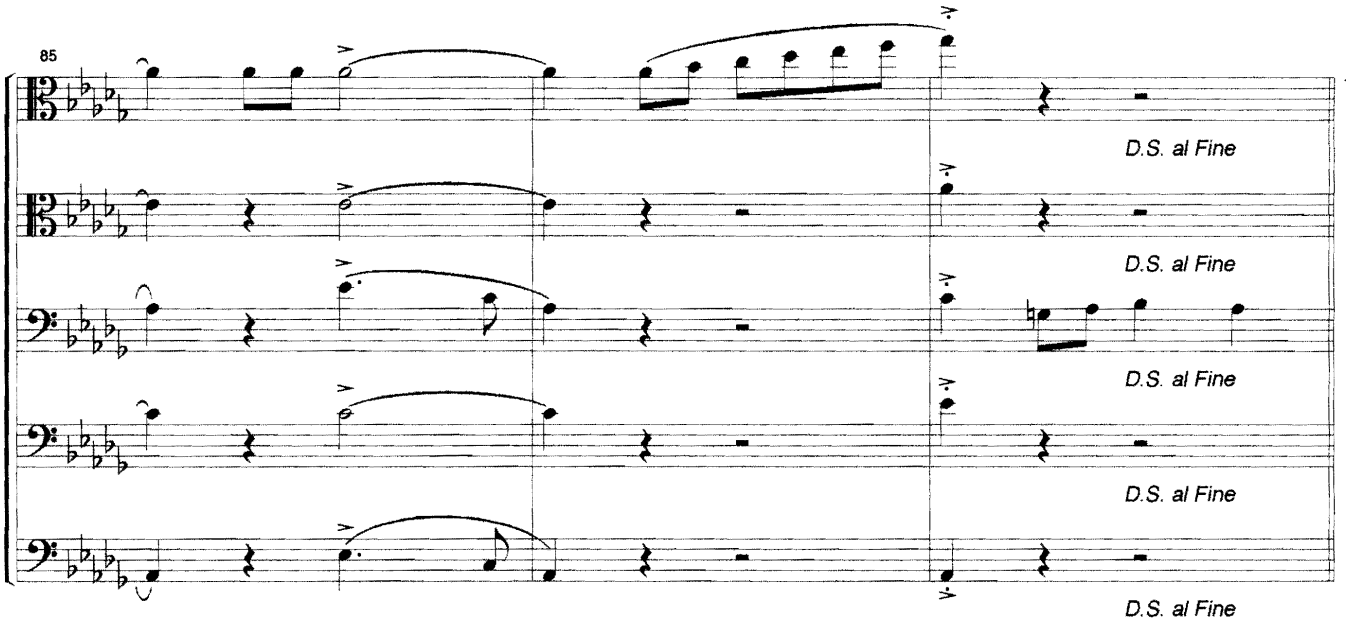
1.
Fine
ff
77
81

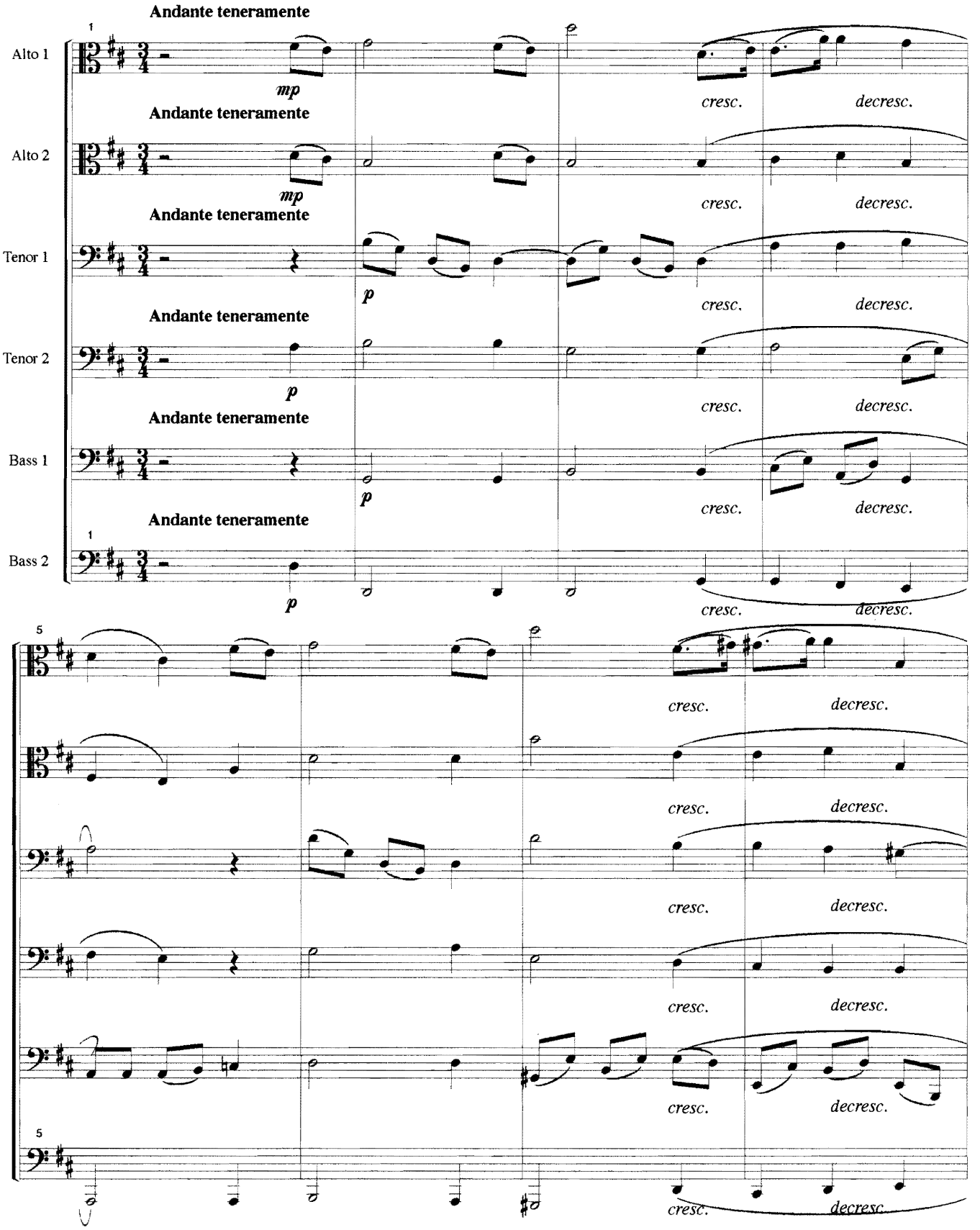

85
D.S. al Fine
D.S. al Fine
D.S. al Fine
D.S. al Fine
D.S. al Fine

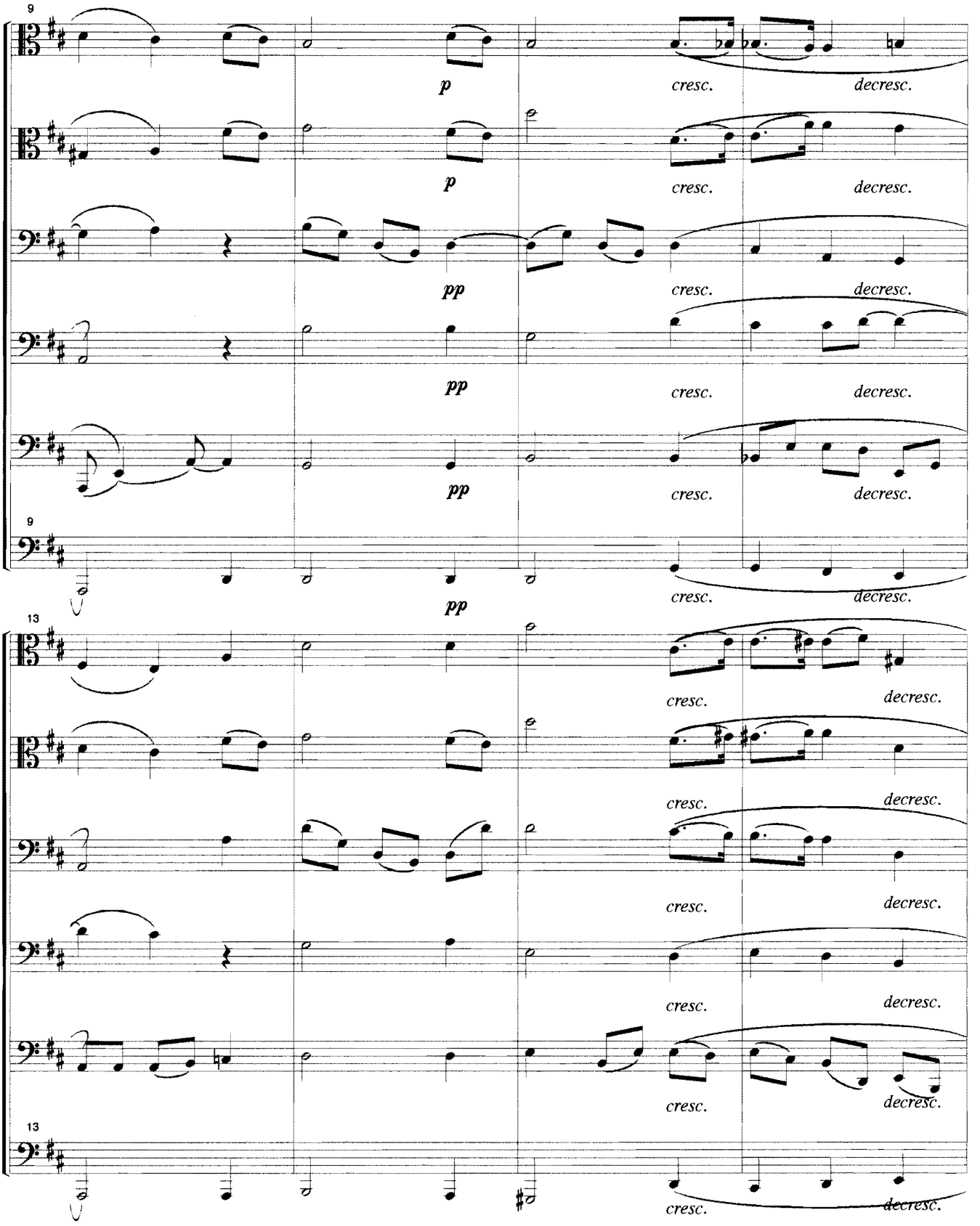
Intermezzo

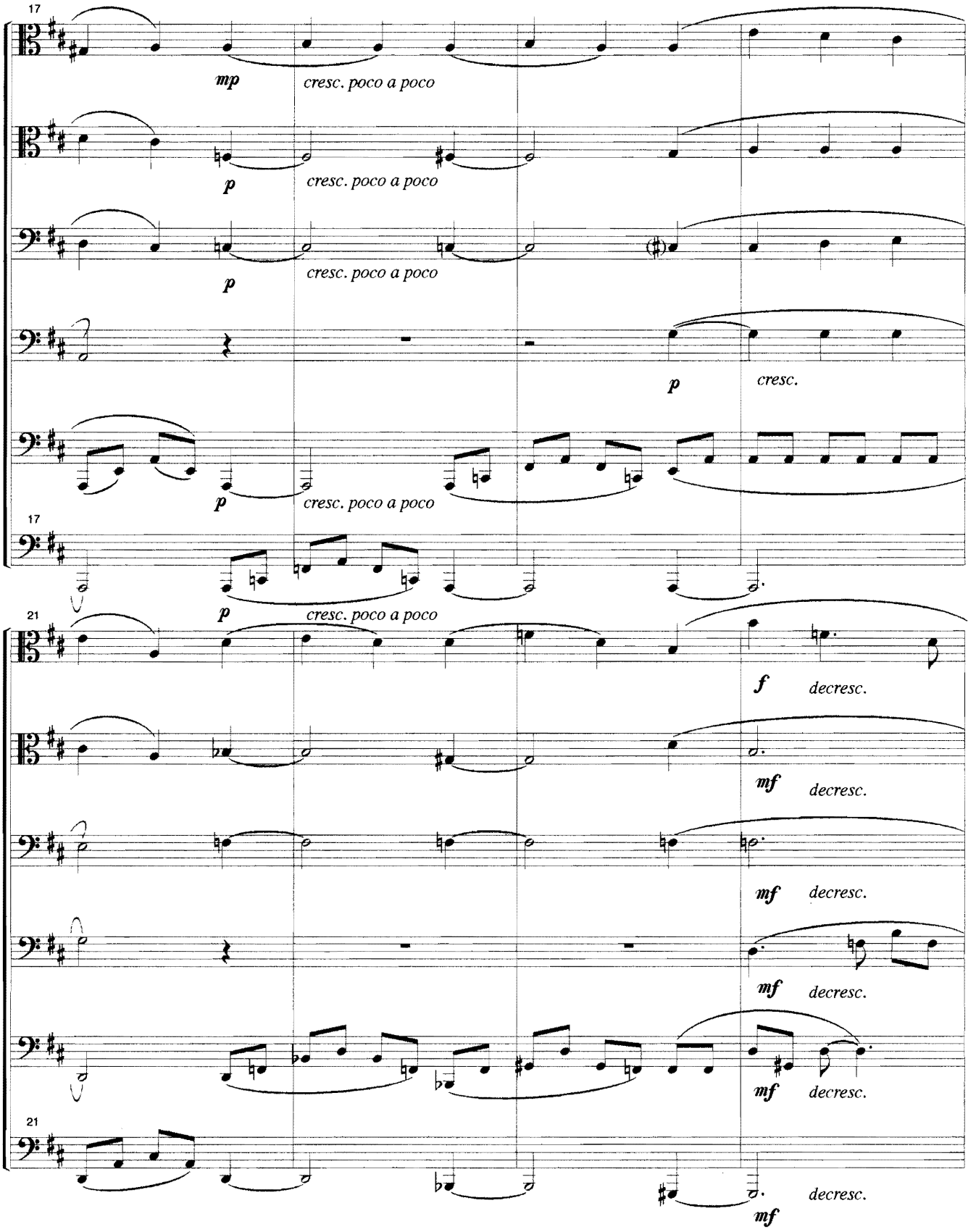
Op. 118, No. 2

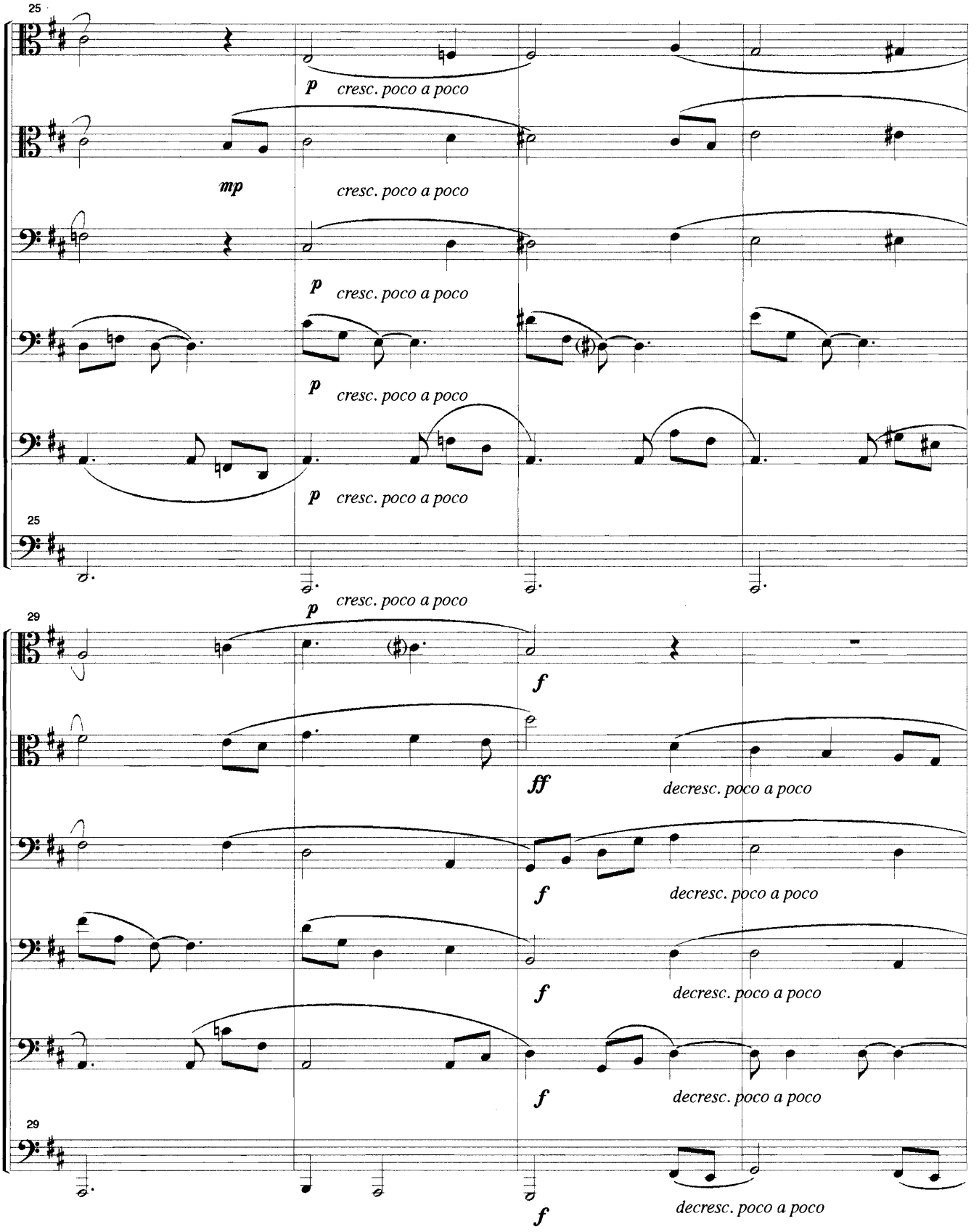
for Trombone Sextet

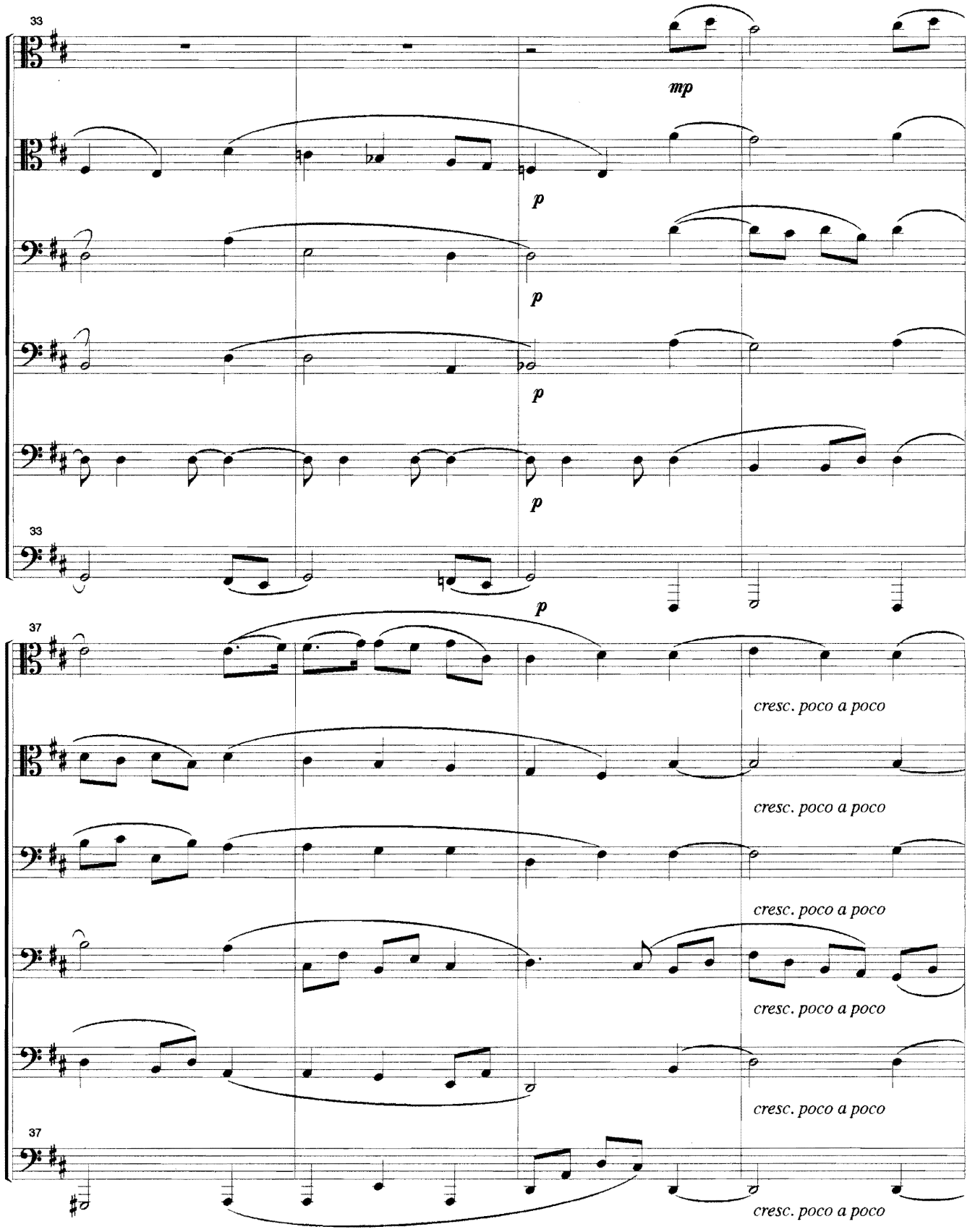
Johannes Brahms
arr. Walker

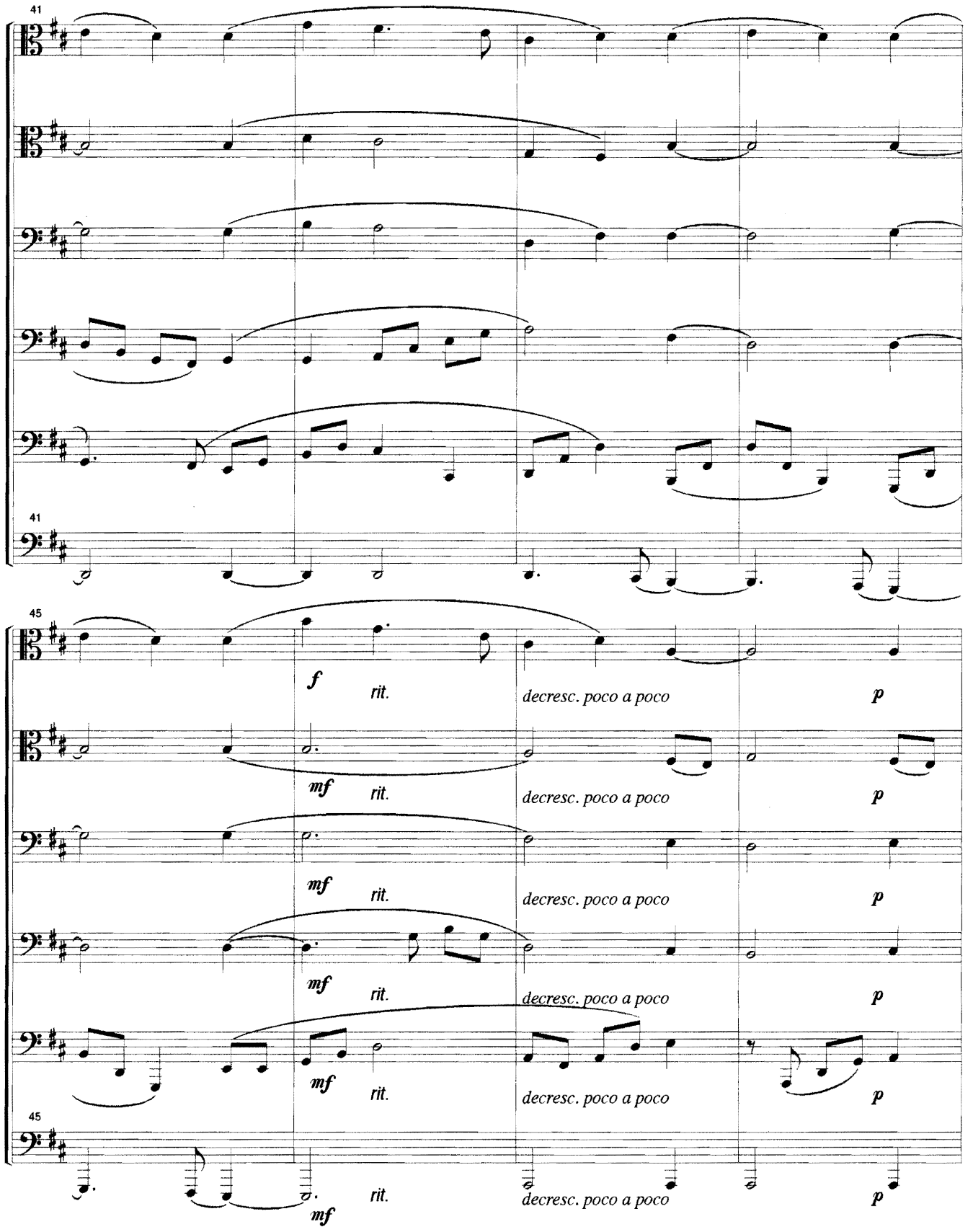



9
p
cresc.
decresc.
p
cresc.
decresc.
pp
cresc.
decresc.
pp
cresc.
decresc.
pp
cresc.
decresc.
9
13
cresc.
decresc.
cresc.
decresc.
cresc.
decresc.
cresc.
decresc.
cresc.
decresc.
13


17
mp
cresc. poco a poco
p
cresc. poco a poco
p
cresc. poco a poco
p
cresc.
p
cresc. poco a poco
17
p
cresc. poco a poco
21
f
decresc.
mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
21
mf


25
p cresc. poco a poco
mp cresc. poco a poco
p cresc. poco a poco
p cresc. poco a poco
p cresc. poco a poco
25
p cresc. poco a poco
29
f
ff decresc. poco a poco
f decresc. poco a poco
f decresc. poco a poco
f decresc. poco a poco
29
f decresc. poco a poco


33
mp
p
p
p
p
33
37
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
37
cresc. poco a poco


41
41
45
45
f
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
p
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
p
mf
rit.
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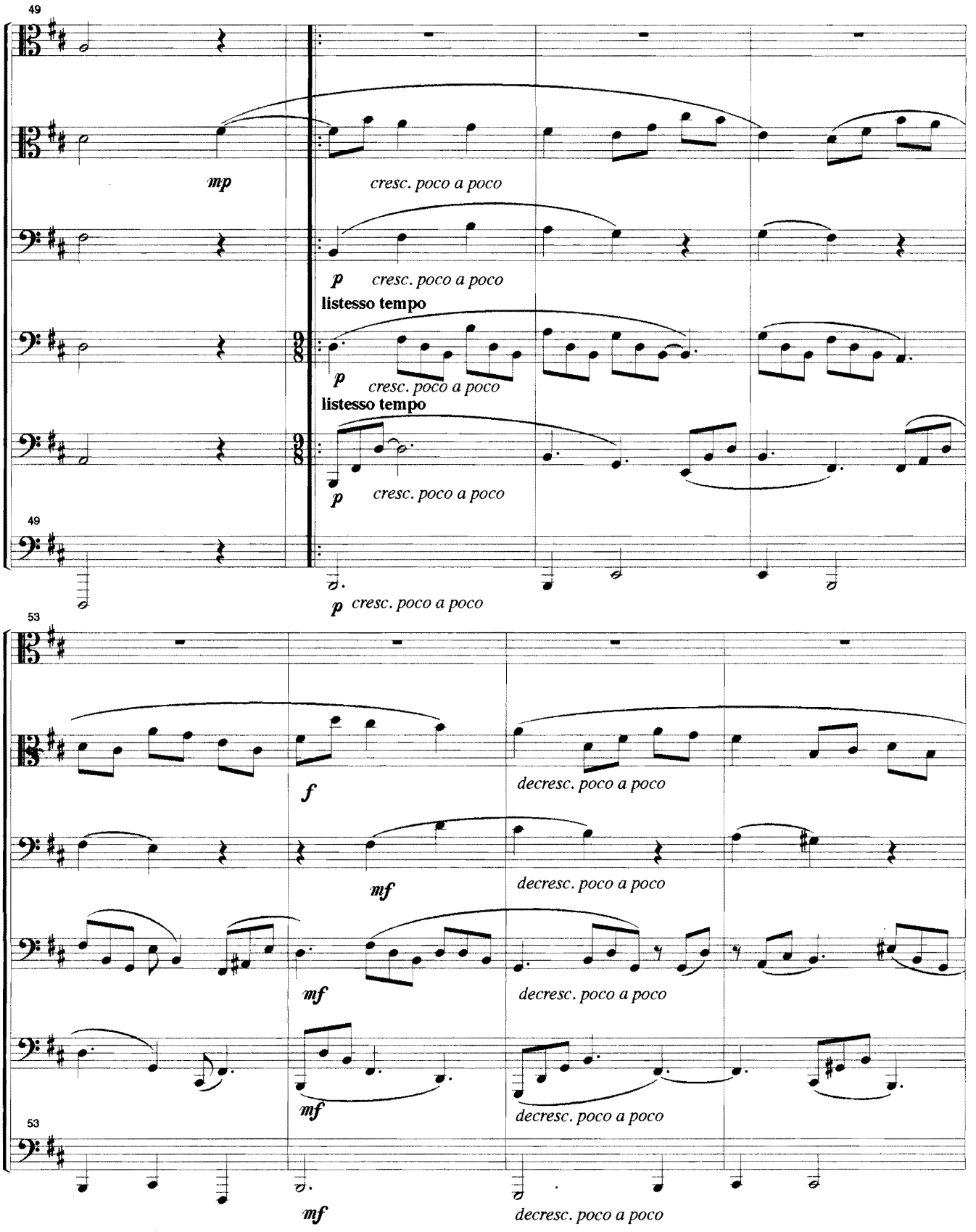
p
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
p
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
p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p
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listesso tempo
p
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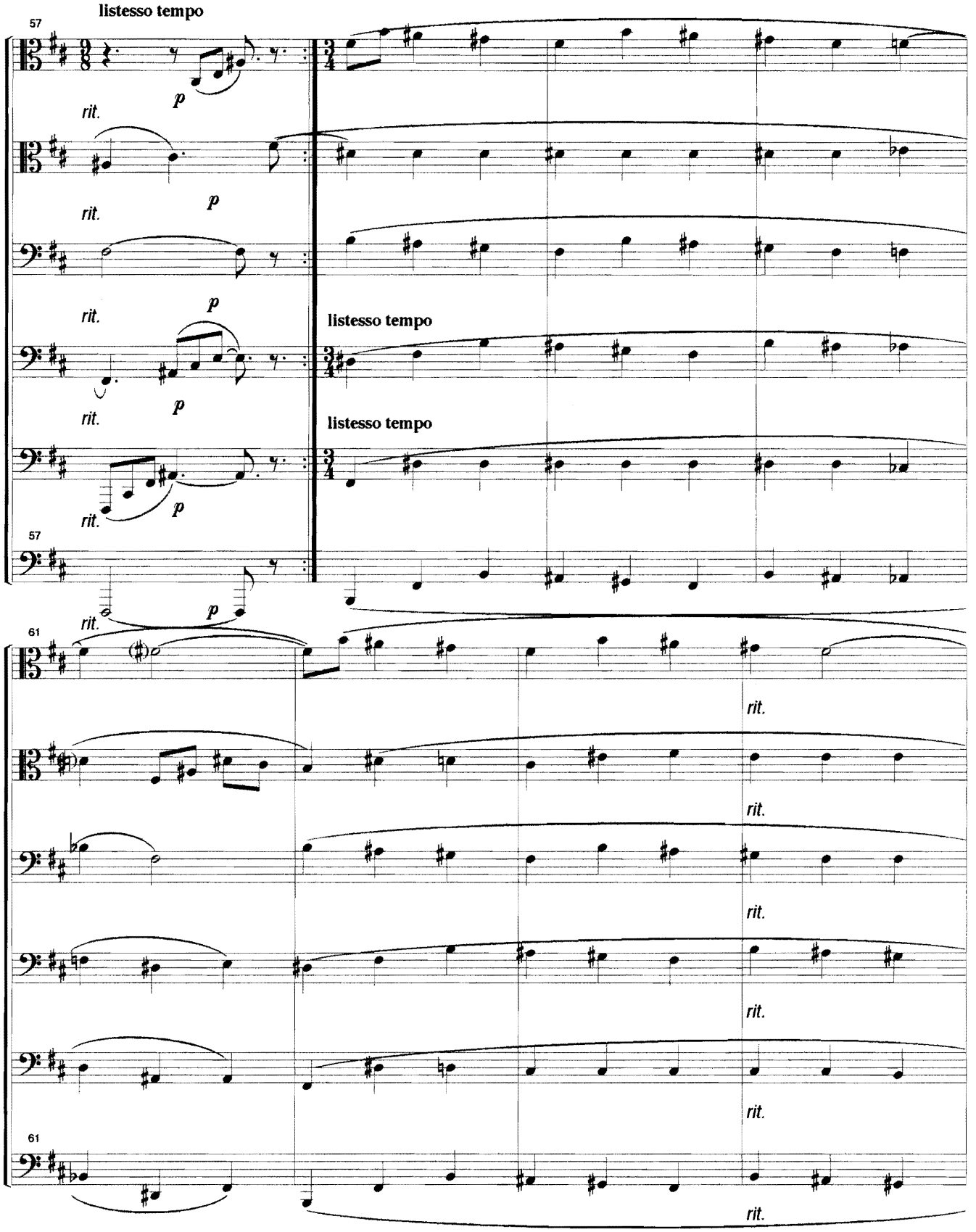
listesso tempo
p
cresc. poco a poco
49
p
cresc. poco a poco
53
f
decresc. poco a poco
mf
decresc. poco a poco
mf
decresc. poco a poco
mf
decresc. poco a poco
53
mf
decresc. poco a poco


listesso tempo
57
p
rit.
p
rit.
p
rit.
p
listesso tempo
rit.
p
listesso tempo
rit.
p
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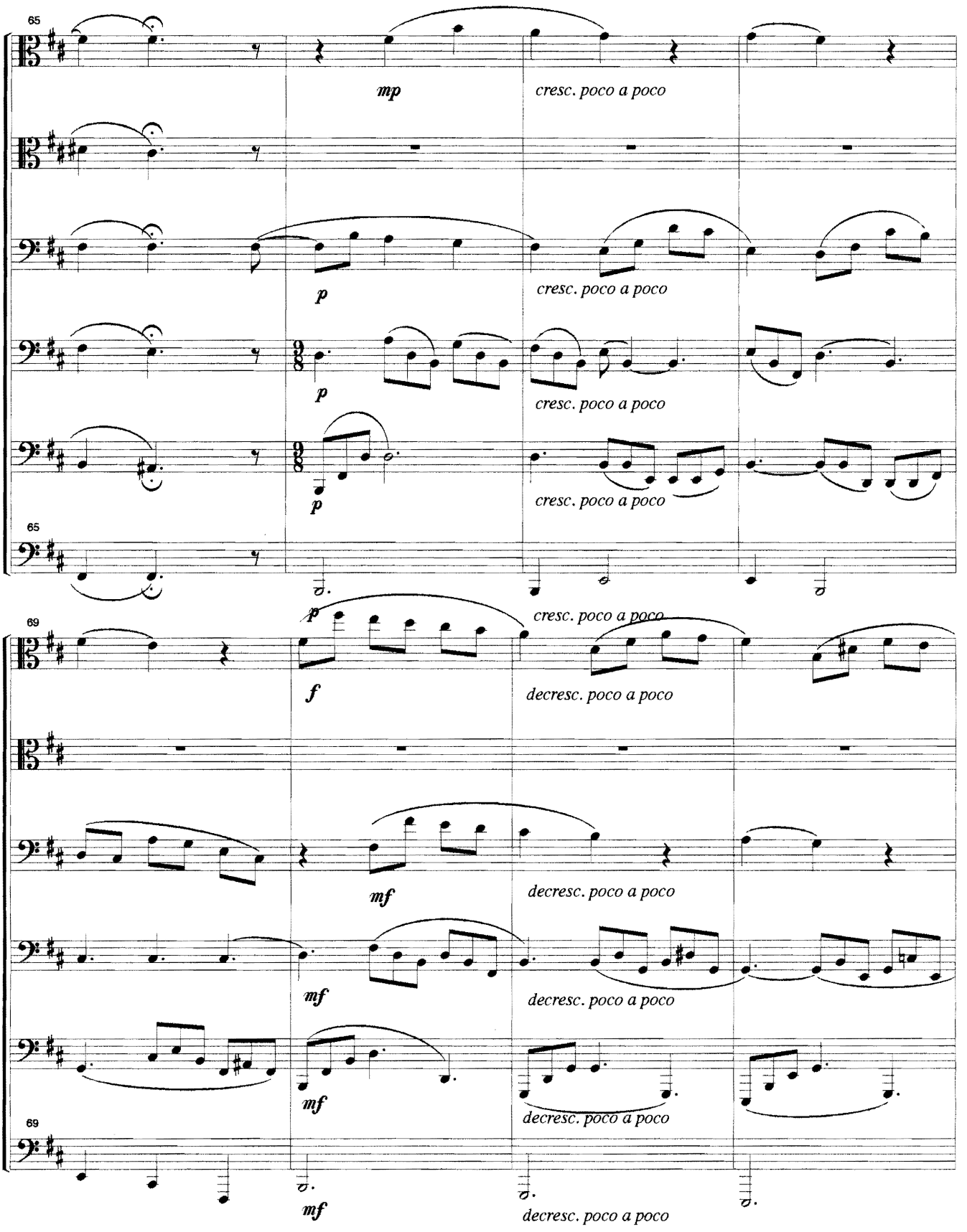
rit.
p
61
rit.
rit.
rit.
rit.
rit.
61
rit.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p
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p
cresc. poco a poco
69
f
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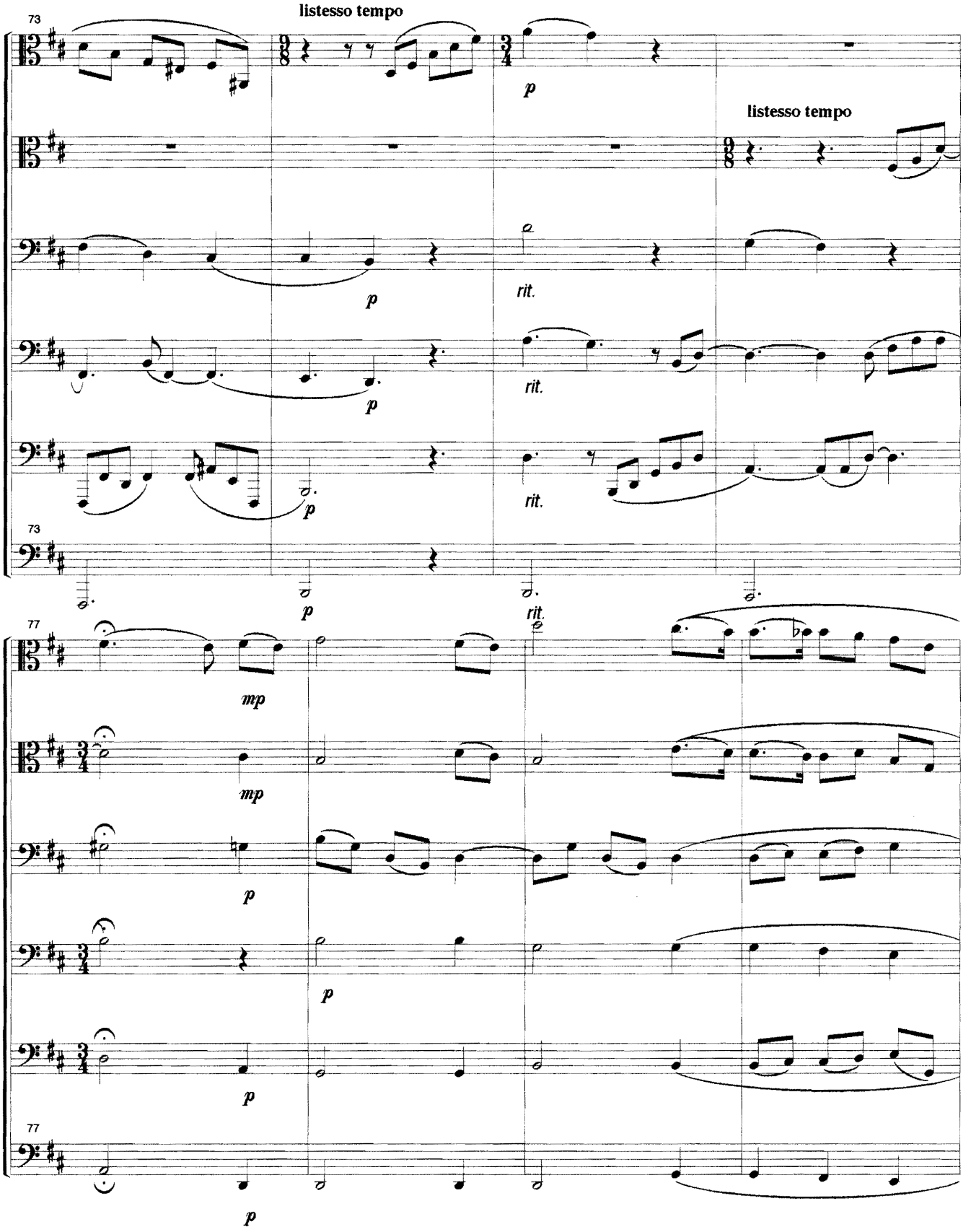
decresc. poco a poco
69
mf
decresc. poco a poco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p
listesso tempo
rit.
rit.
rit.
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rit.
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mp
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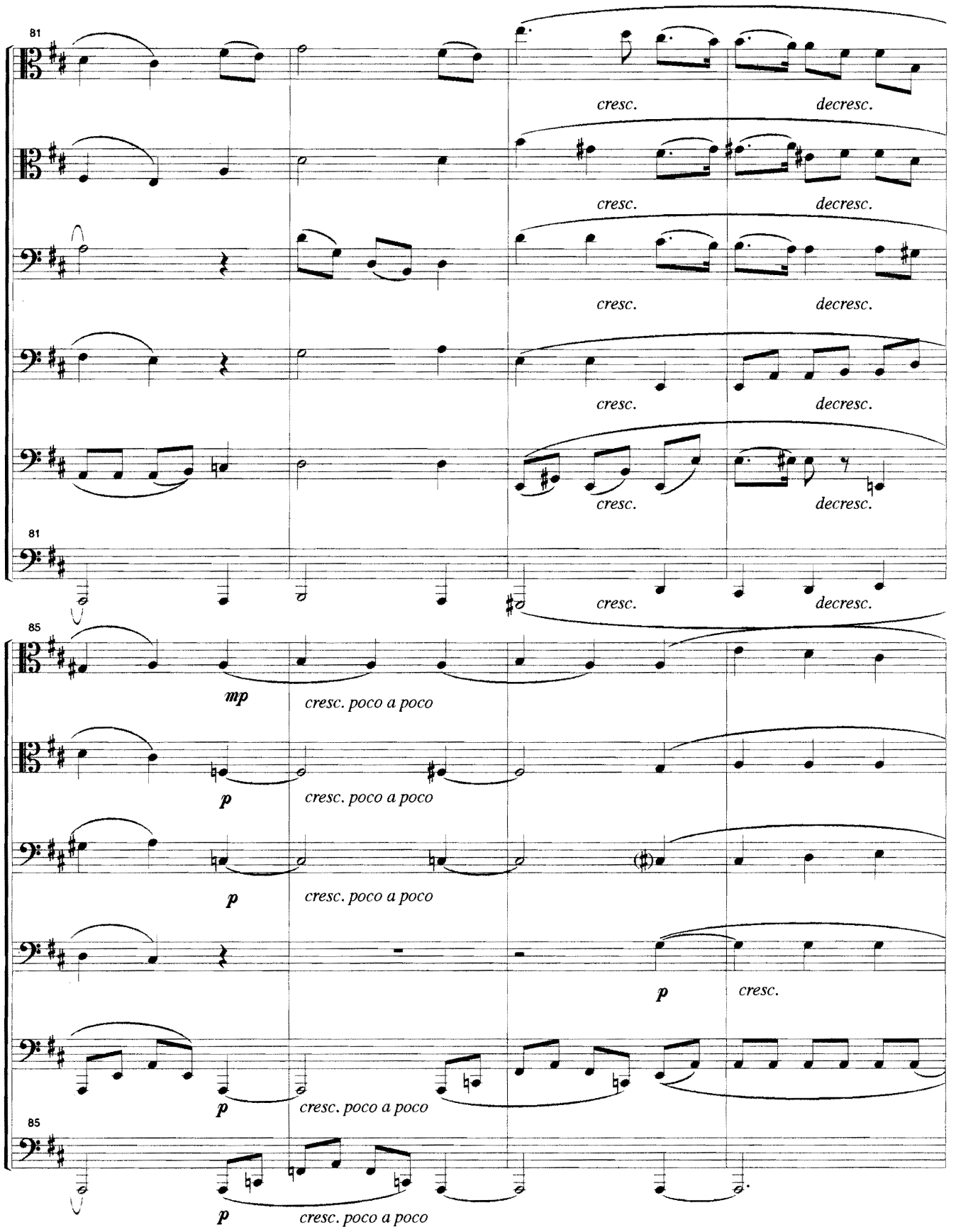
p
77
p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cresc.
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cresc.
decresc.
cresc.
decresc.
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decresc.
85
mp
cresc. poco a poco
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cresc.
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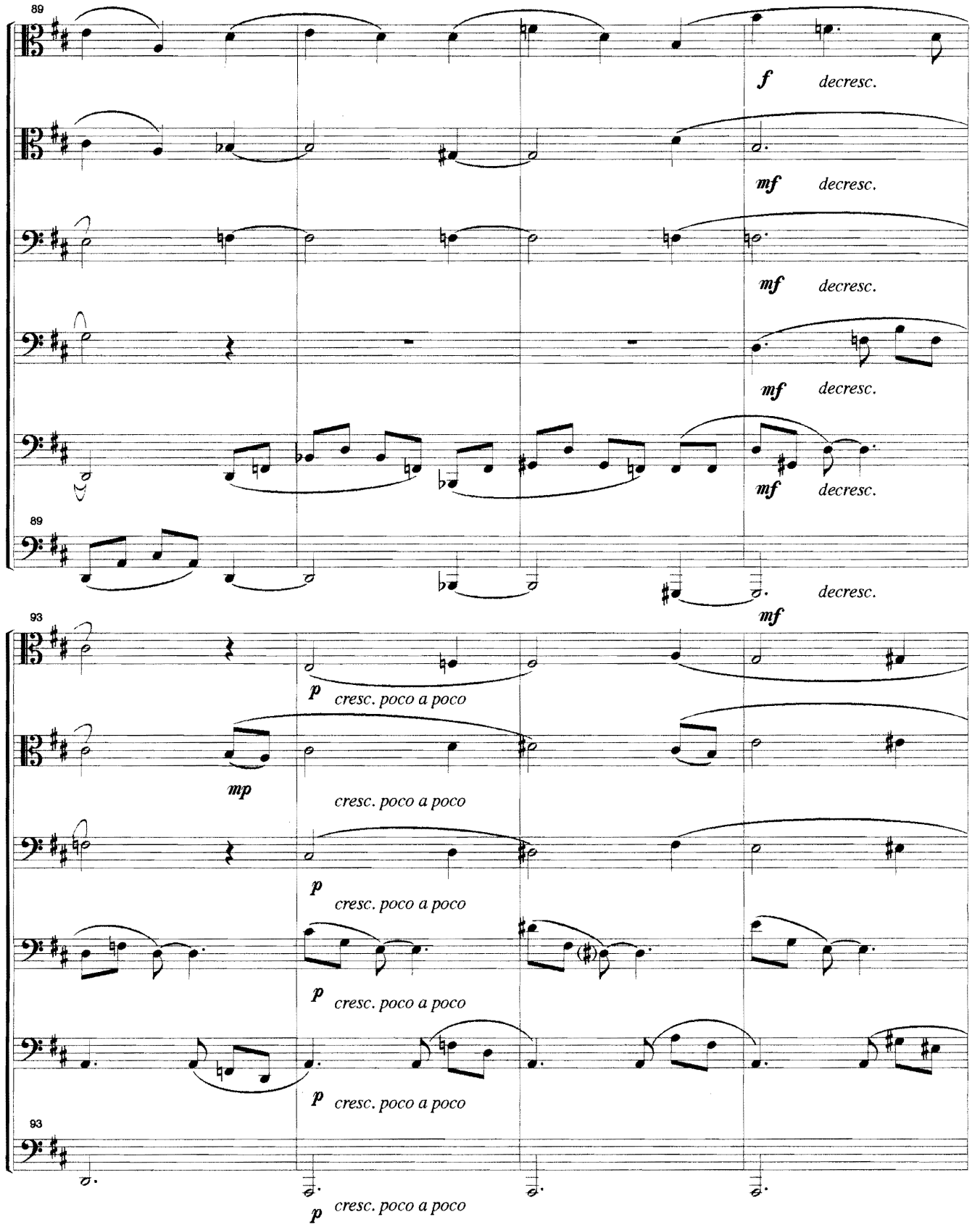
cresc. poco a poco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mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
mf
decresc.
89
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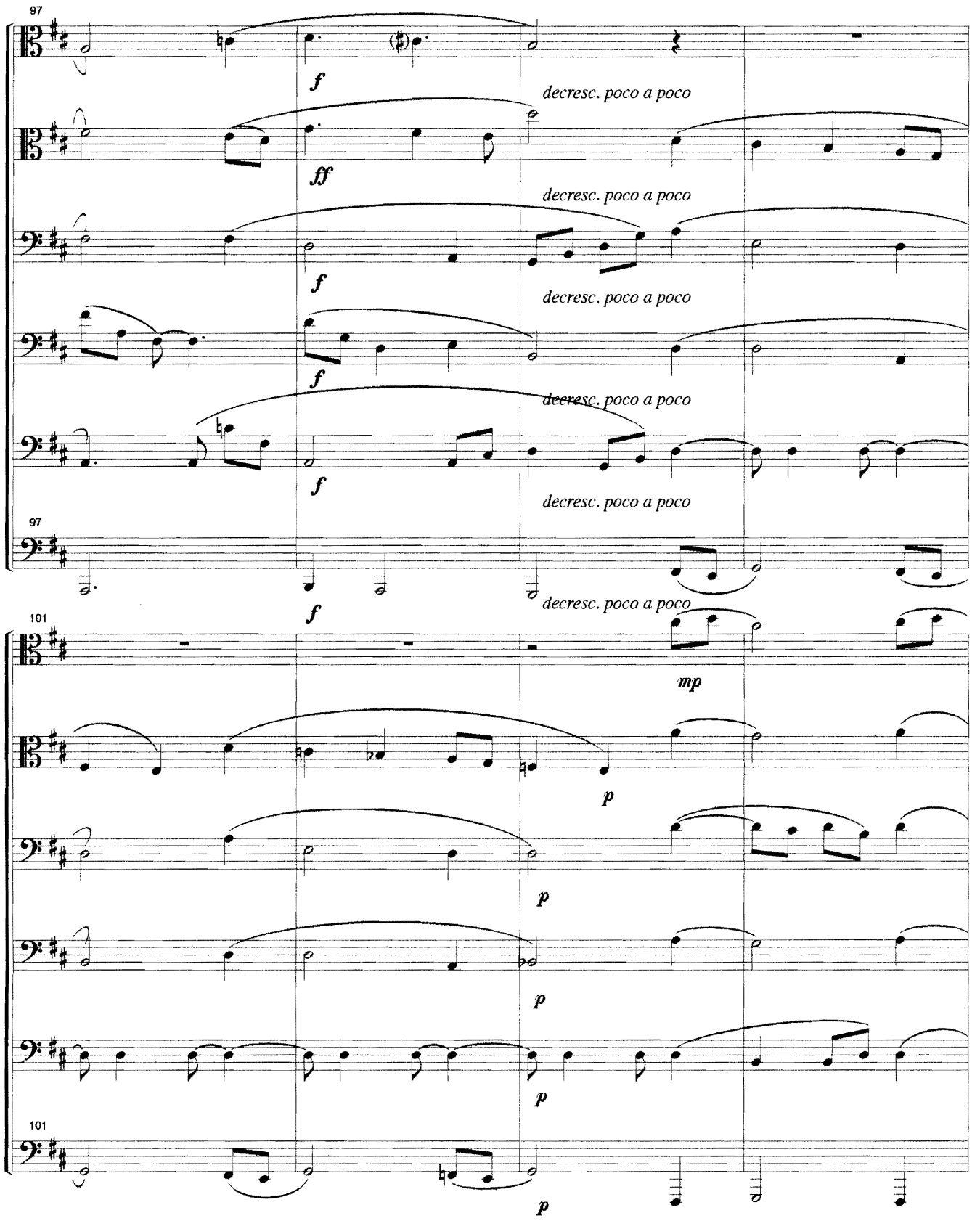
cresc. poco a poco
93
p
cresc. poco a poco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ff
decresc. poco a poco
f
decresc. poco a poco
f
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decresc. poco a poco
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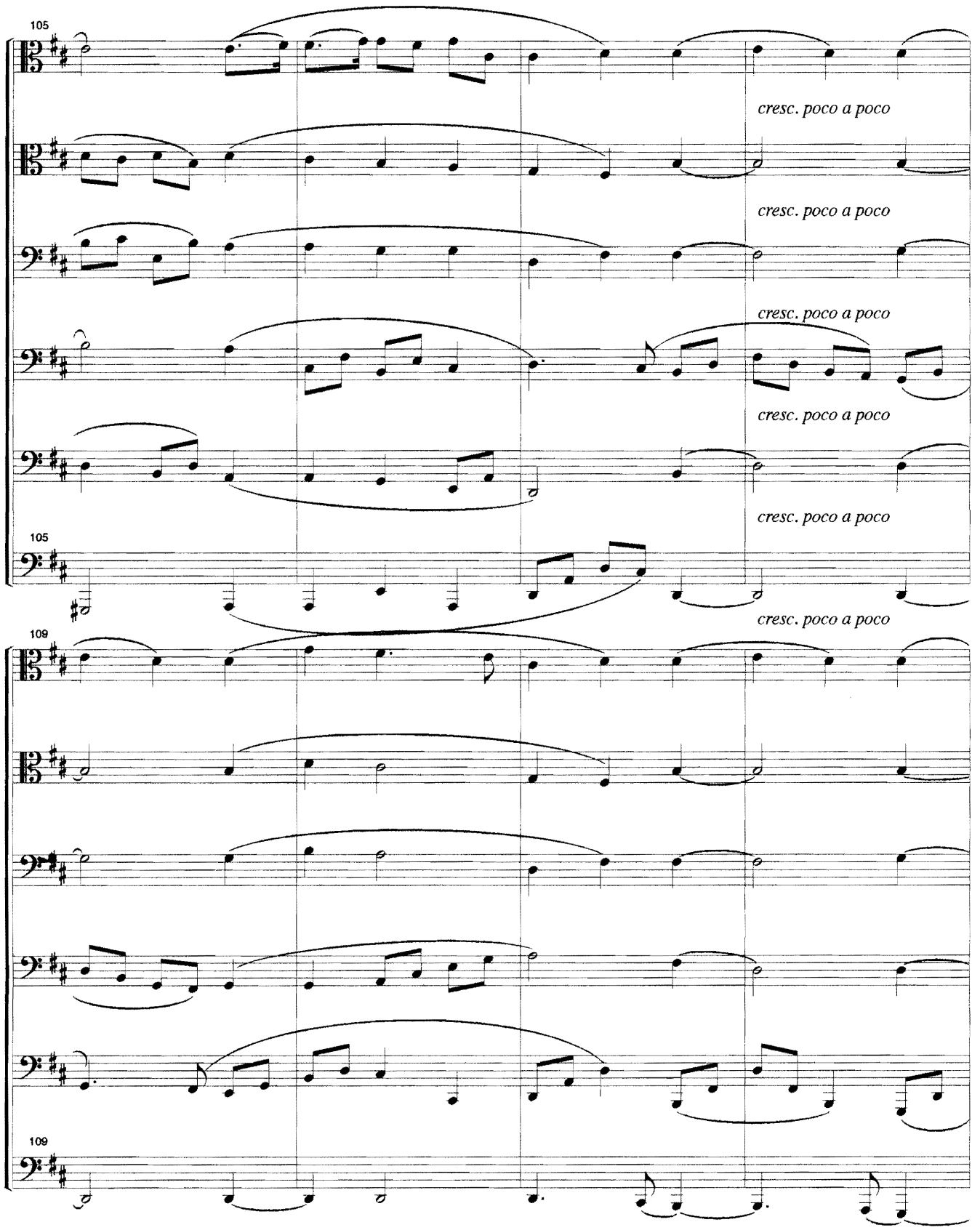
f
decresc. poco a poco
101
mp
p
p
p
p
101
p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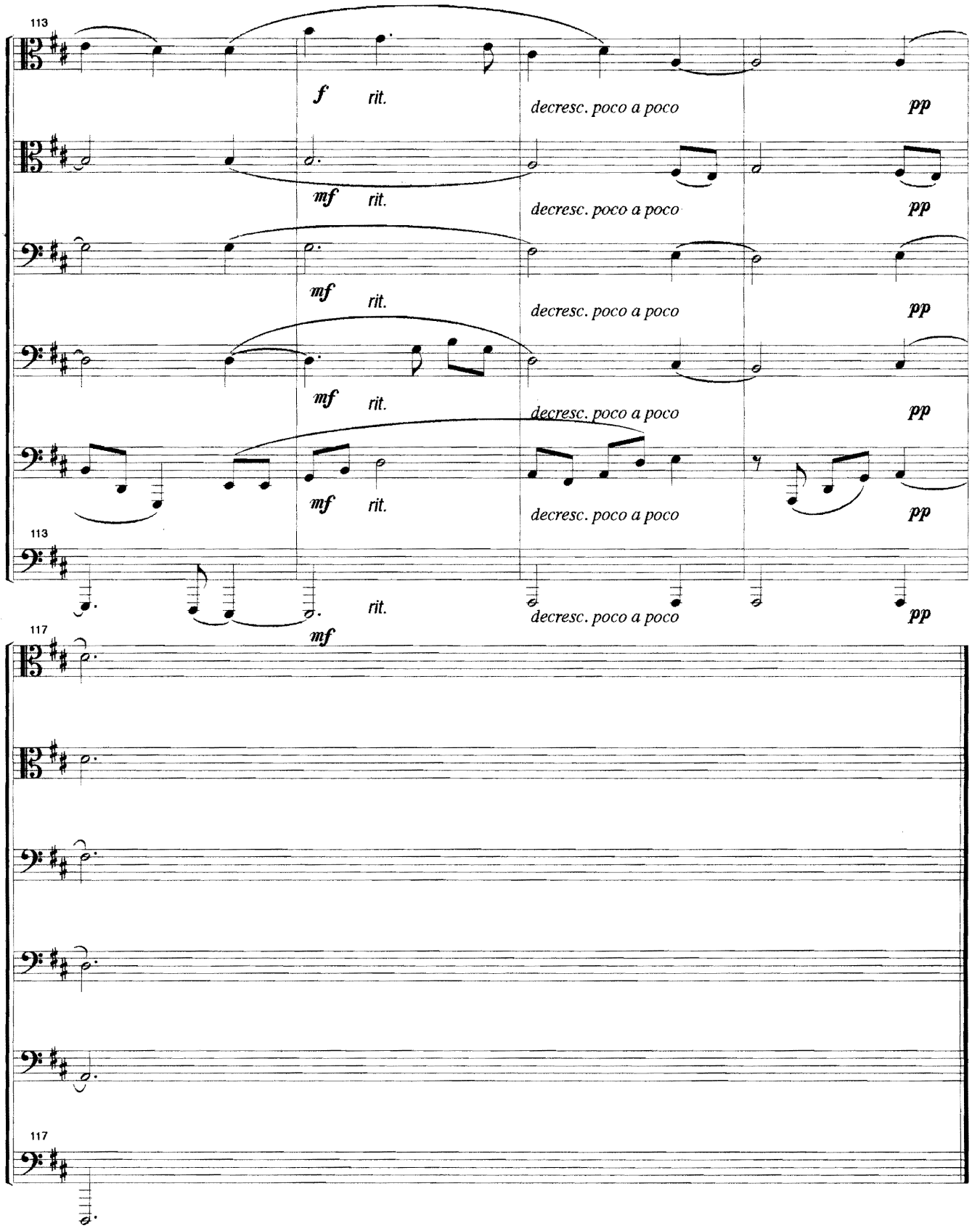
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
cresc. poco a poco
105
cresc. poco a poco
109
109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f
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
pp
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
pp
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
pp
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
pp
113
mf
rit.
decresc. poco a poco
pp
117
117

Allegretto

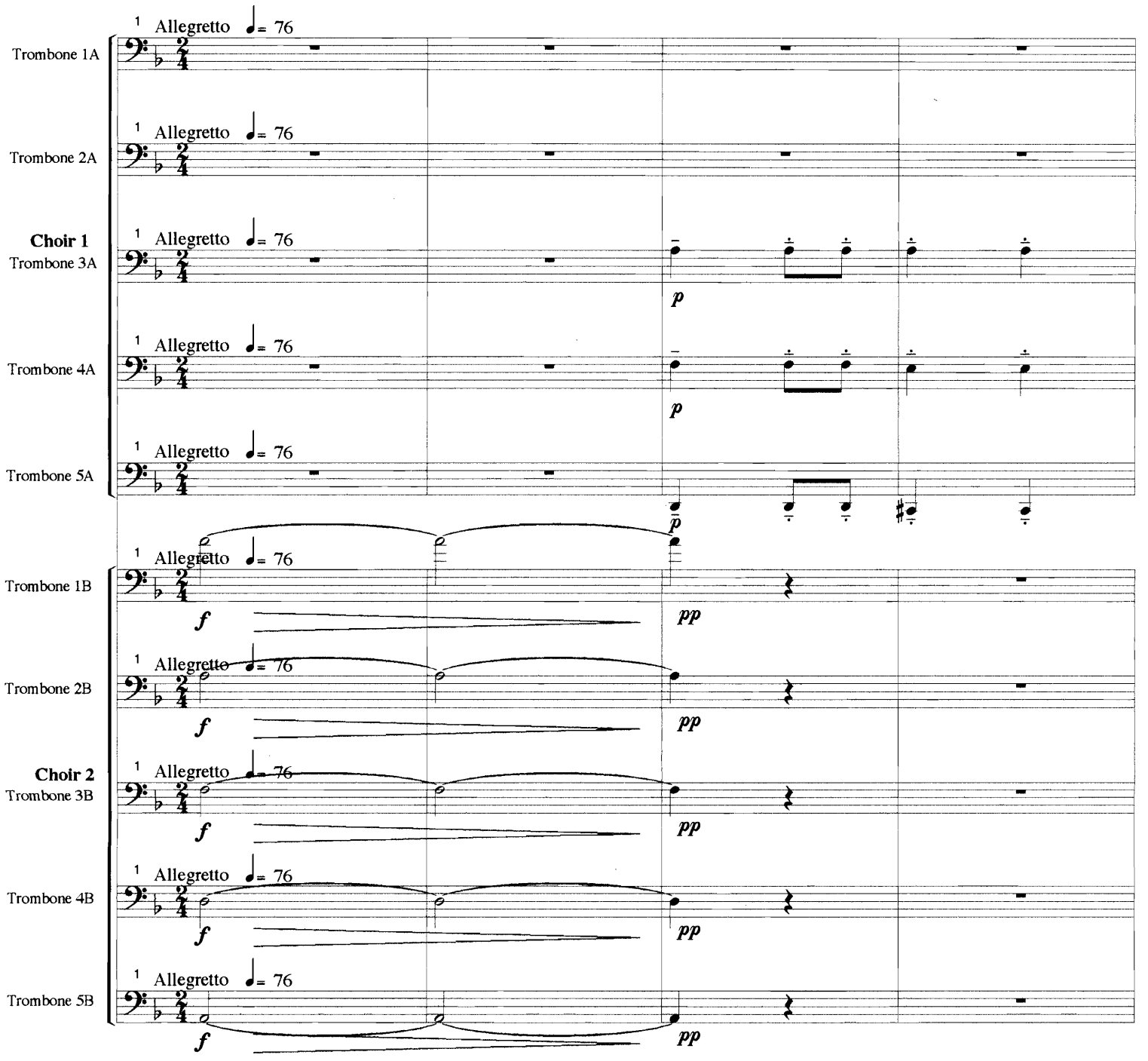
from

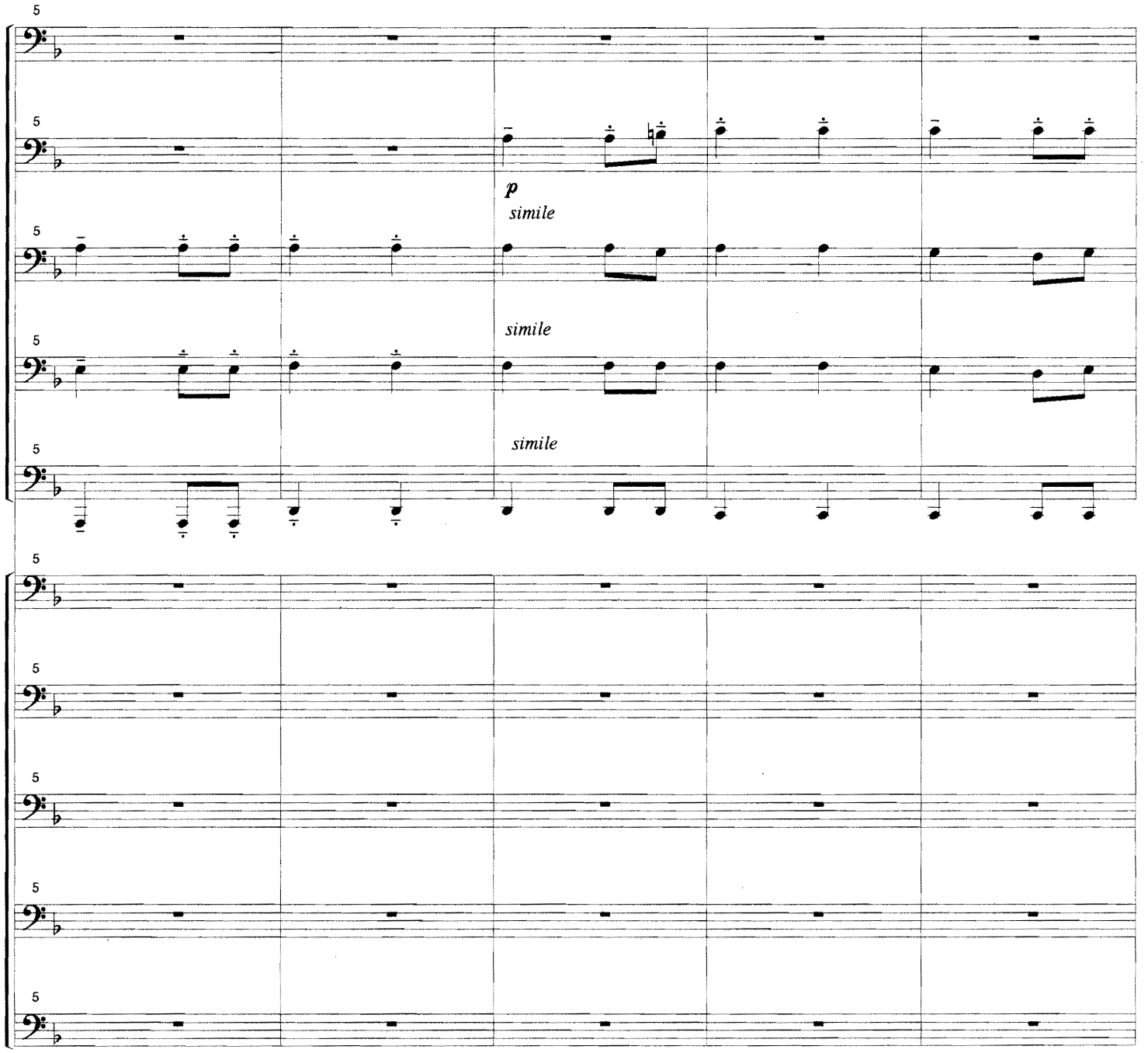
Beethoven's Symphony No. 7

Op. 92

L. van Beethoven

arr. Walker

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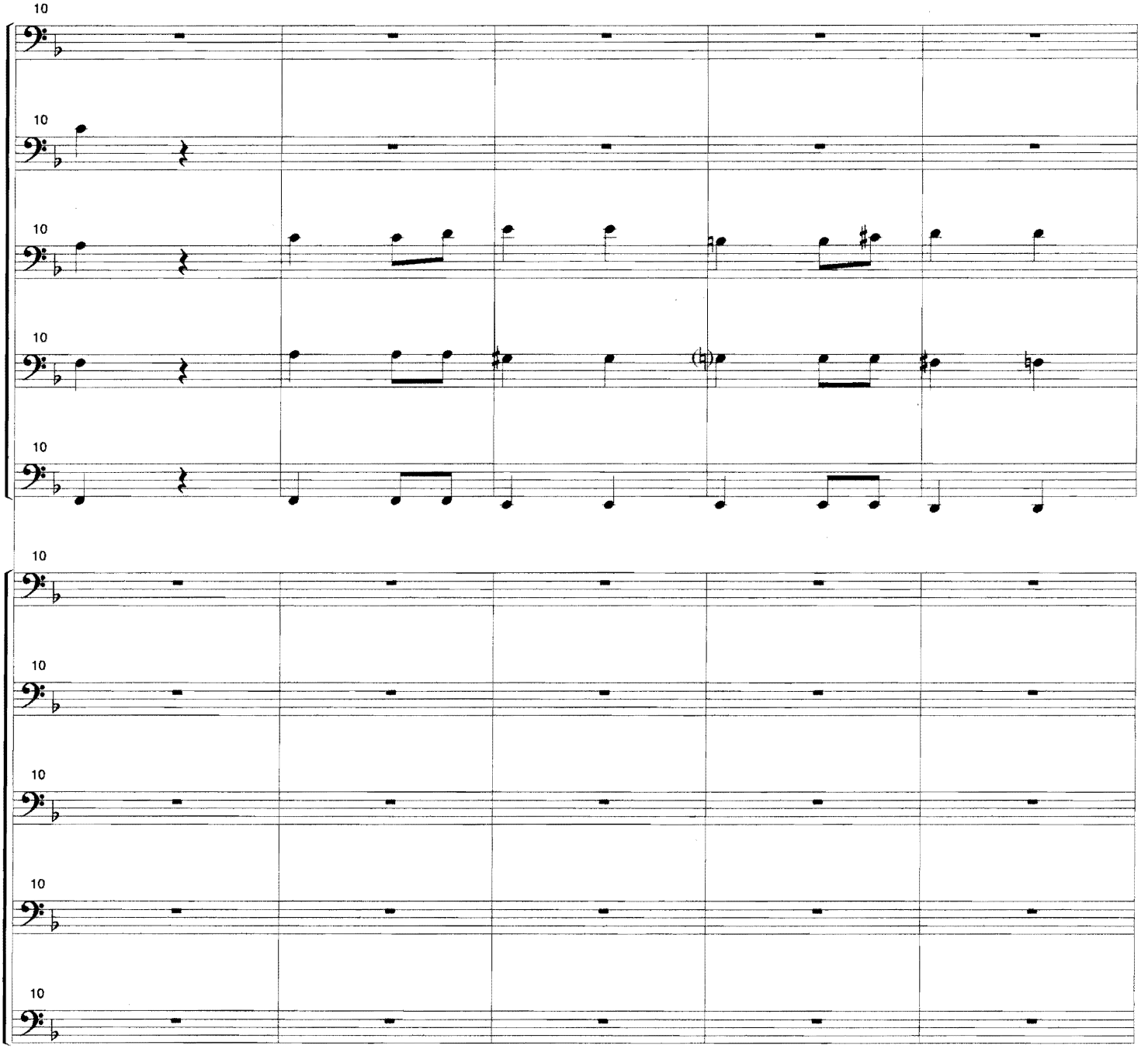
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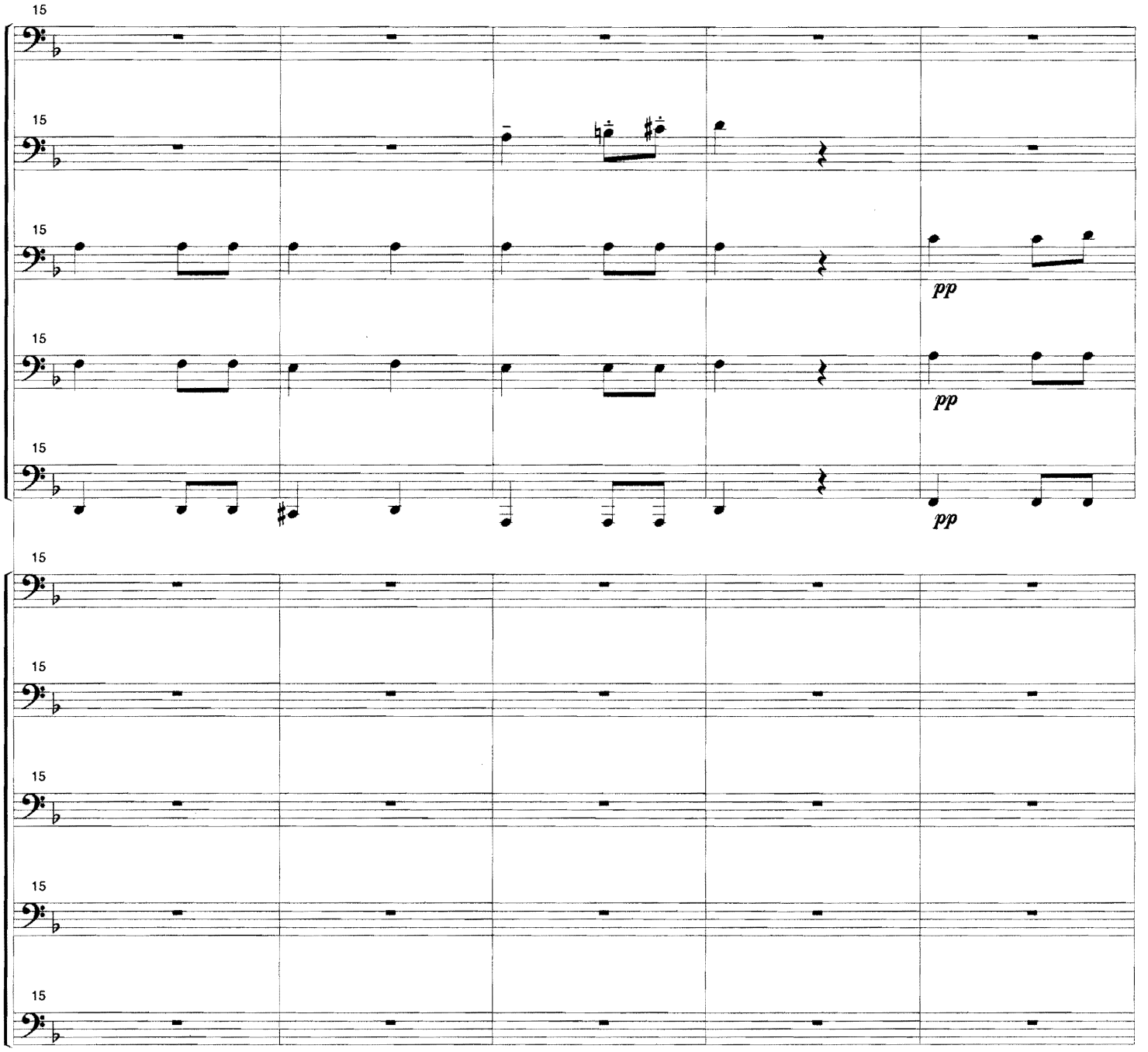
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pp
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pp
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pp

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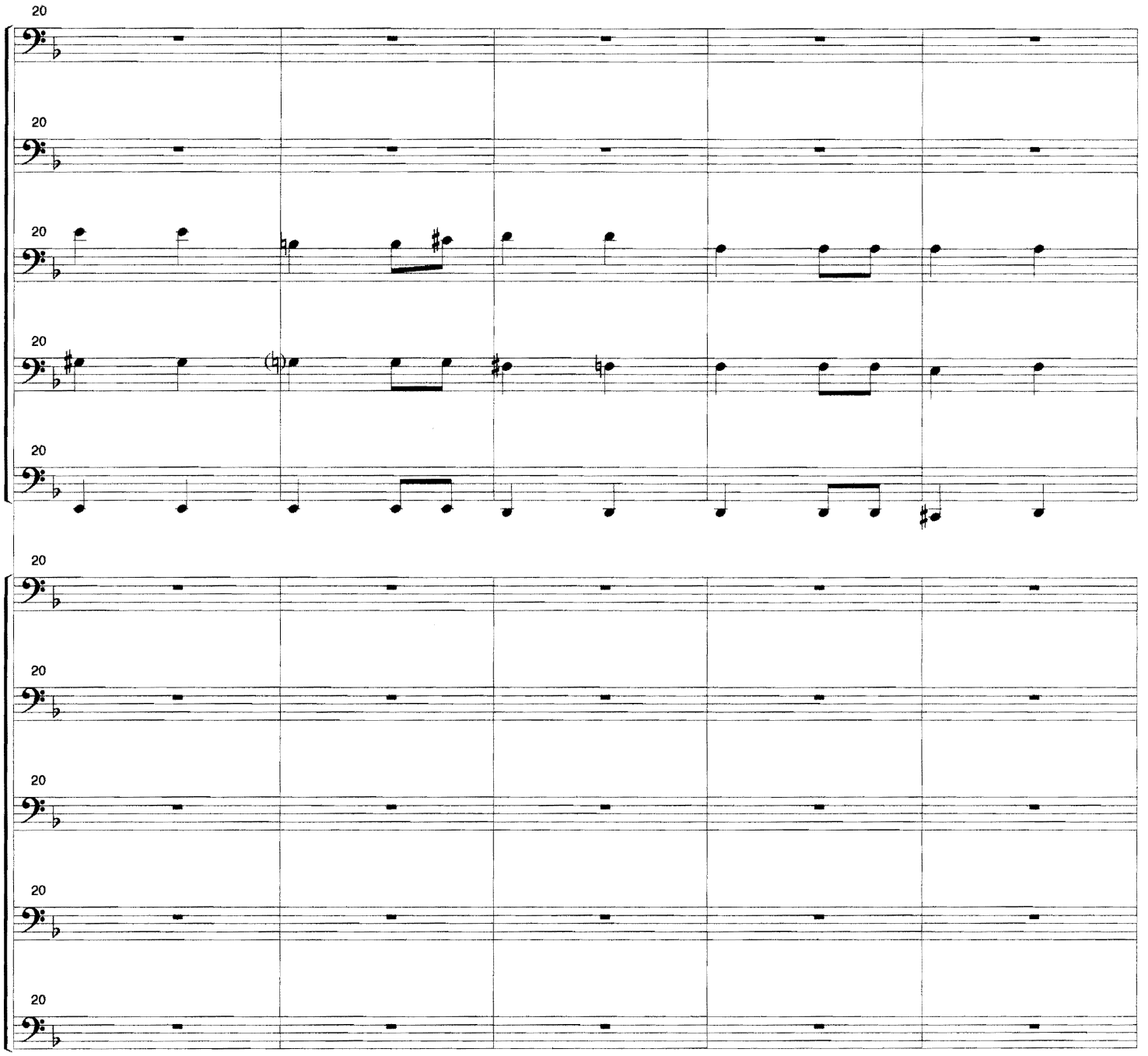
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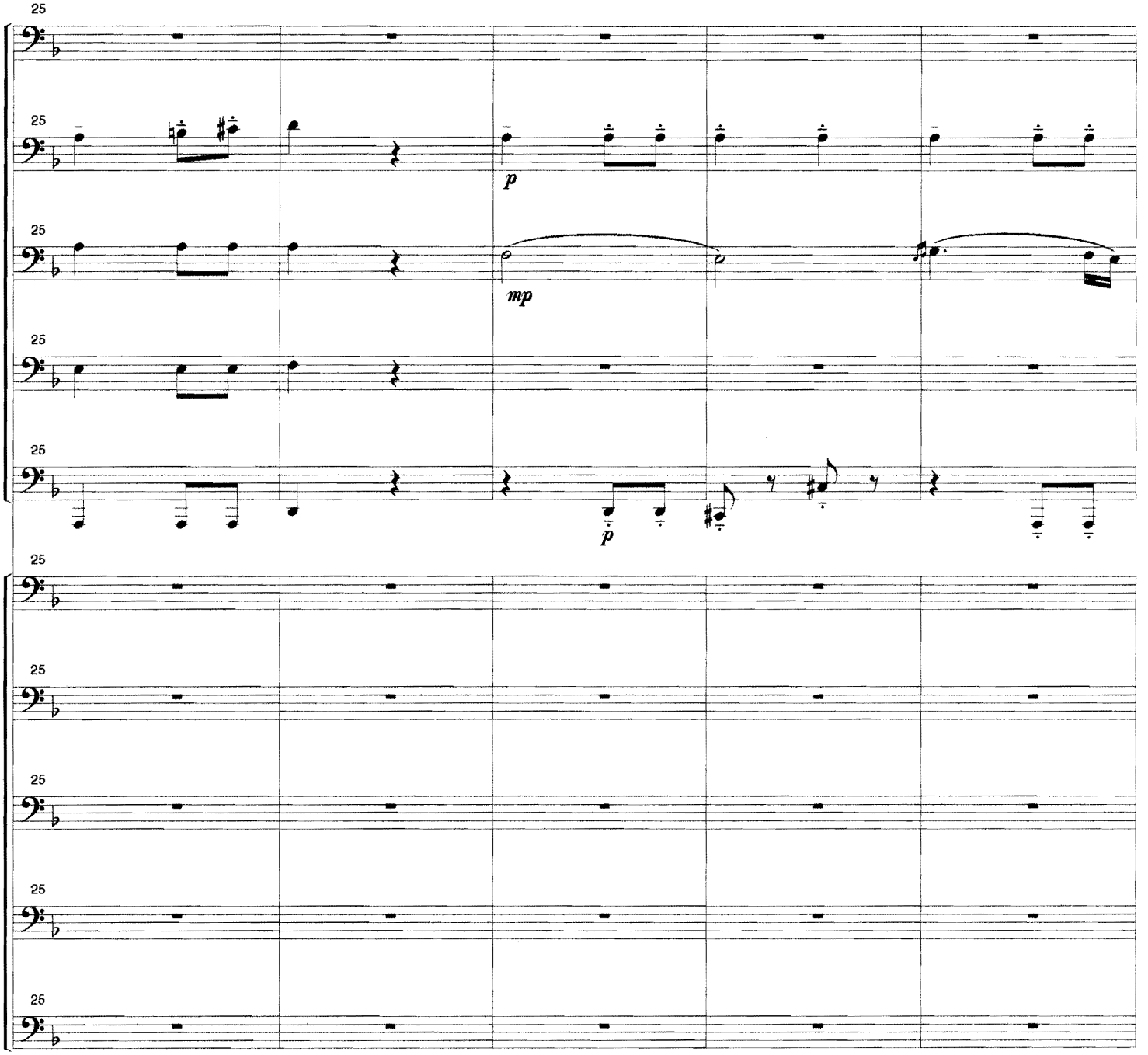
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25
p
25
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25
p
25
25
25
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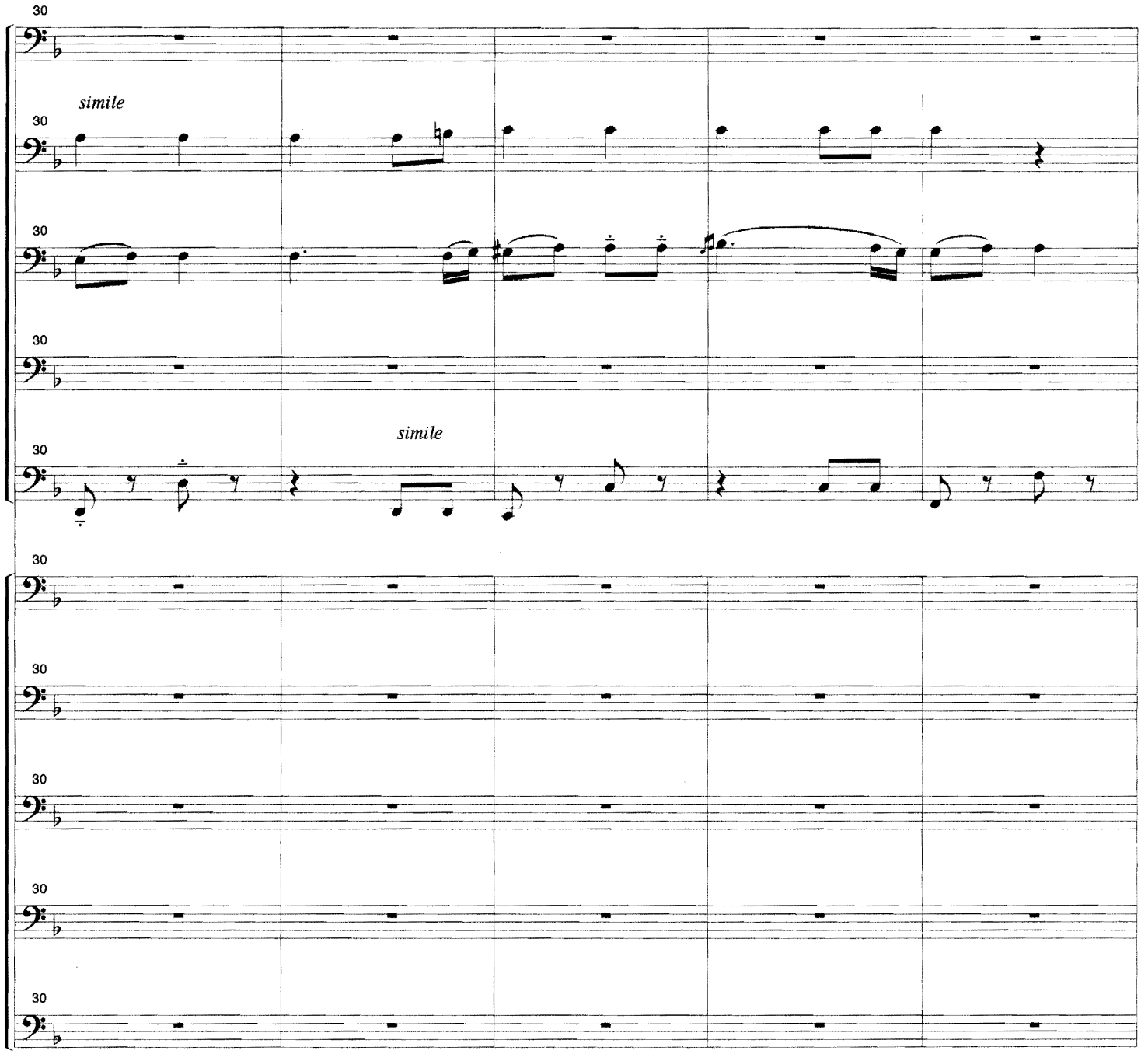
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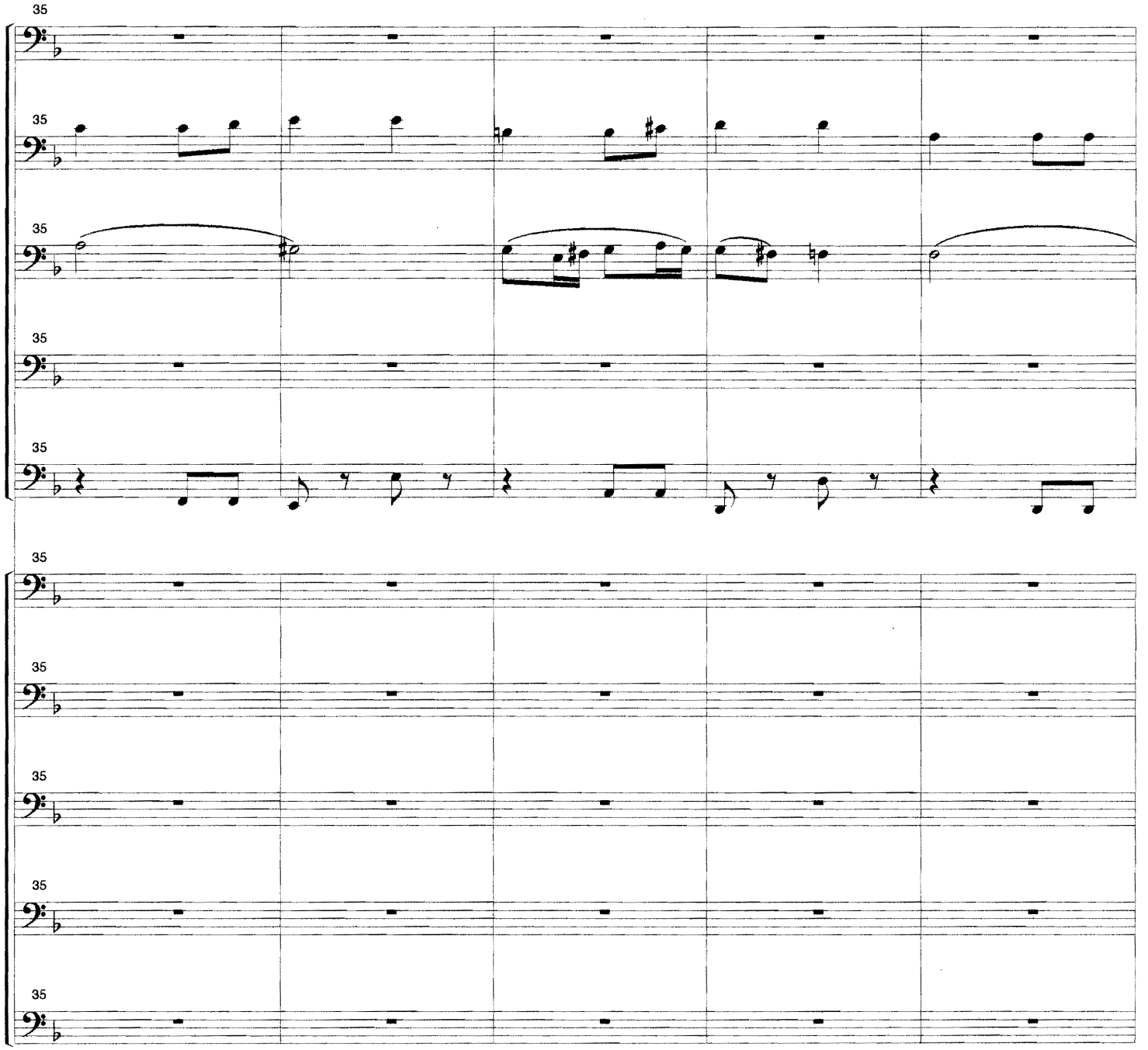
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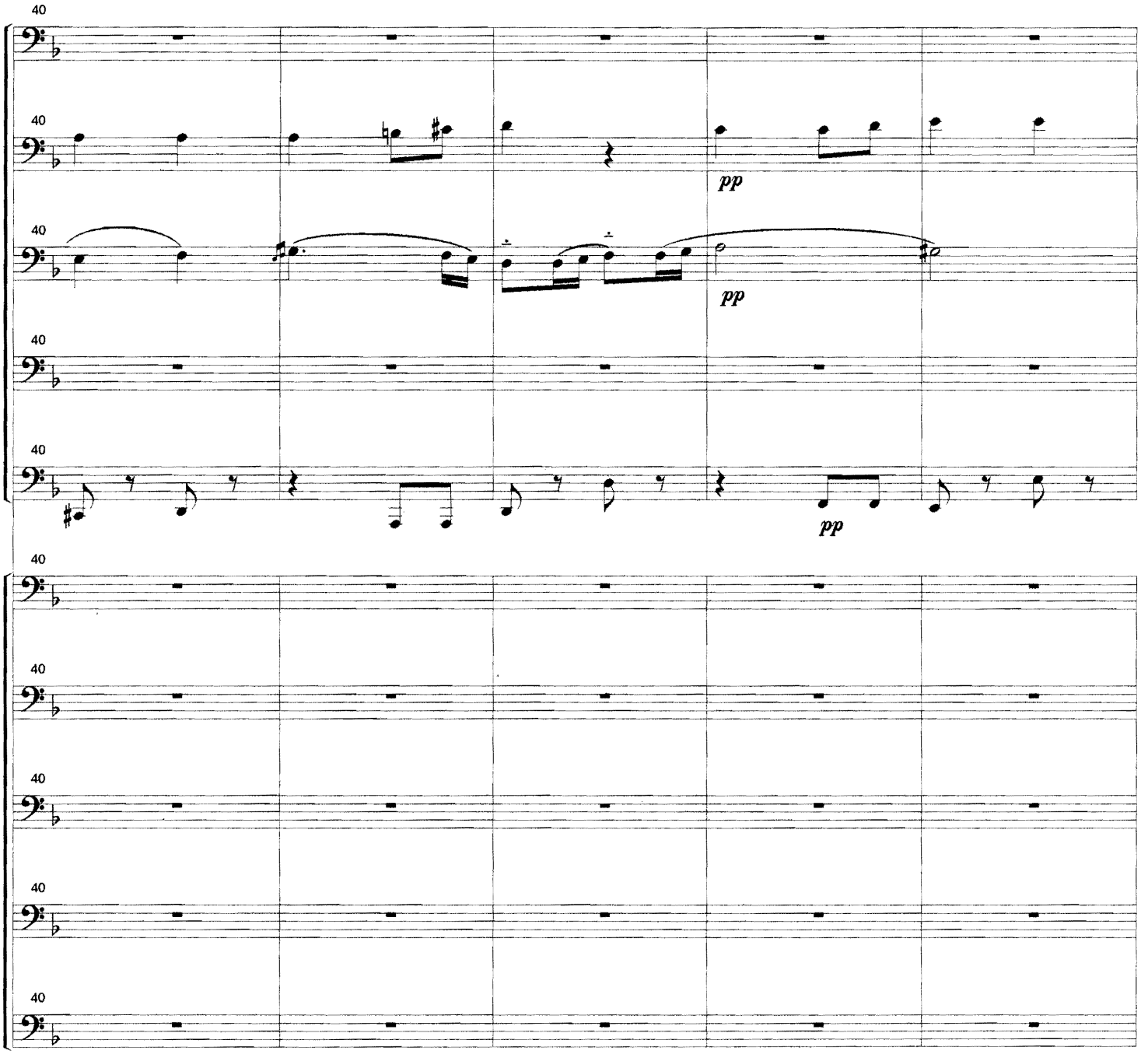
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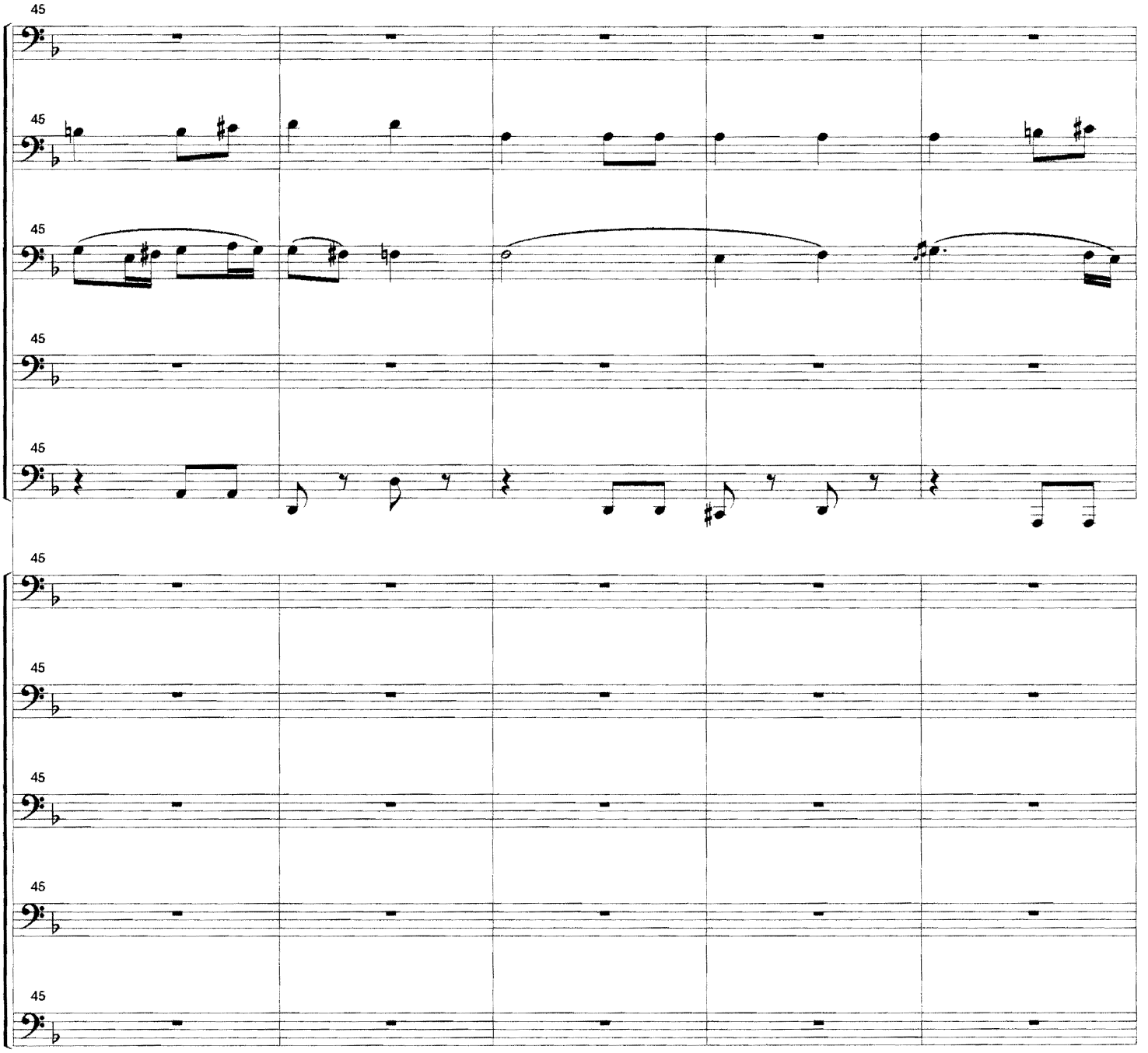
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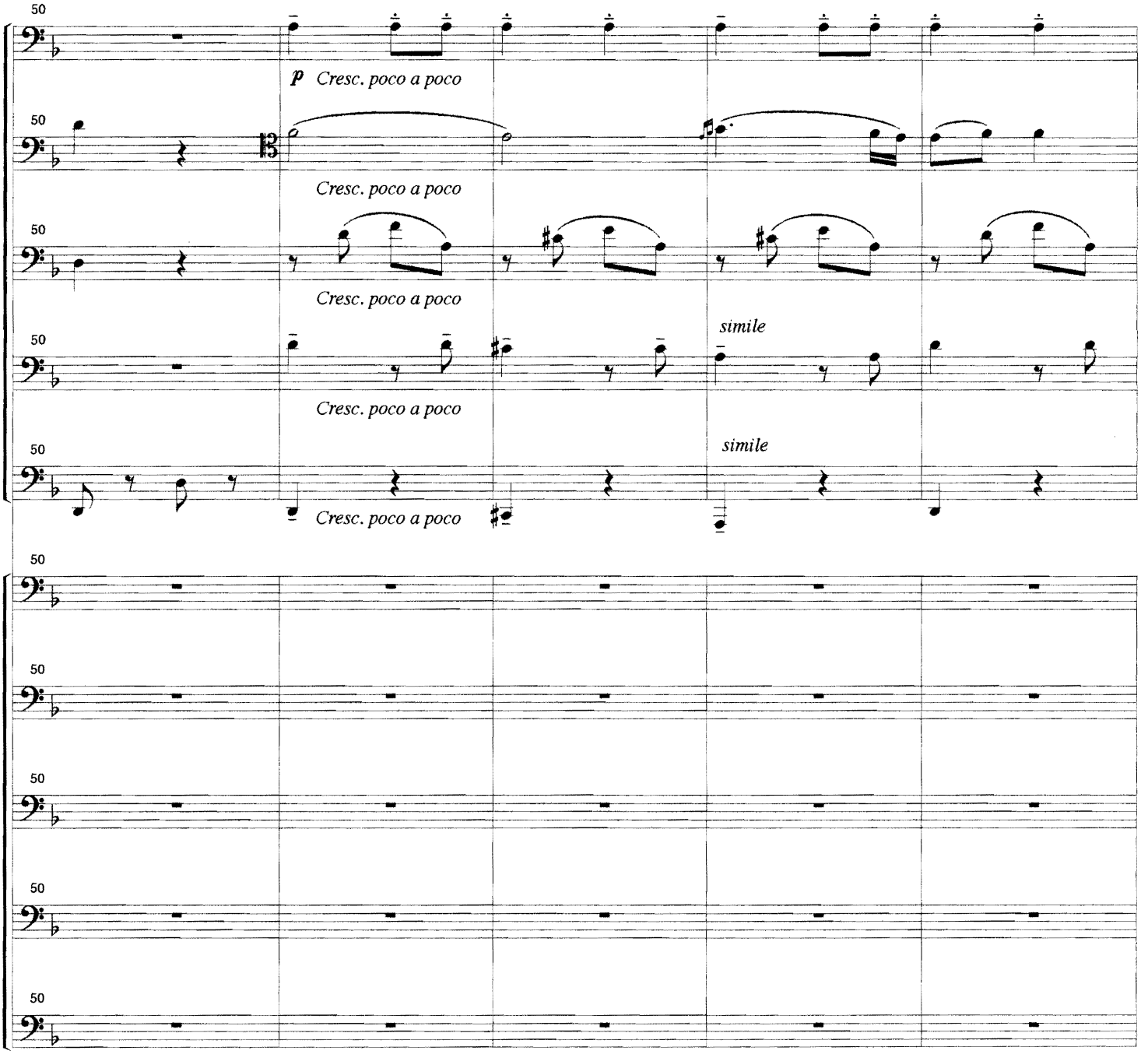
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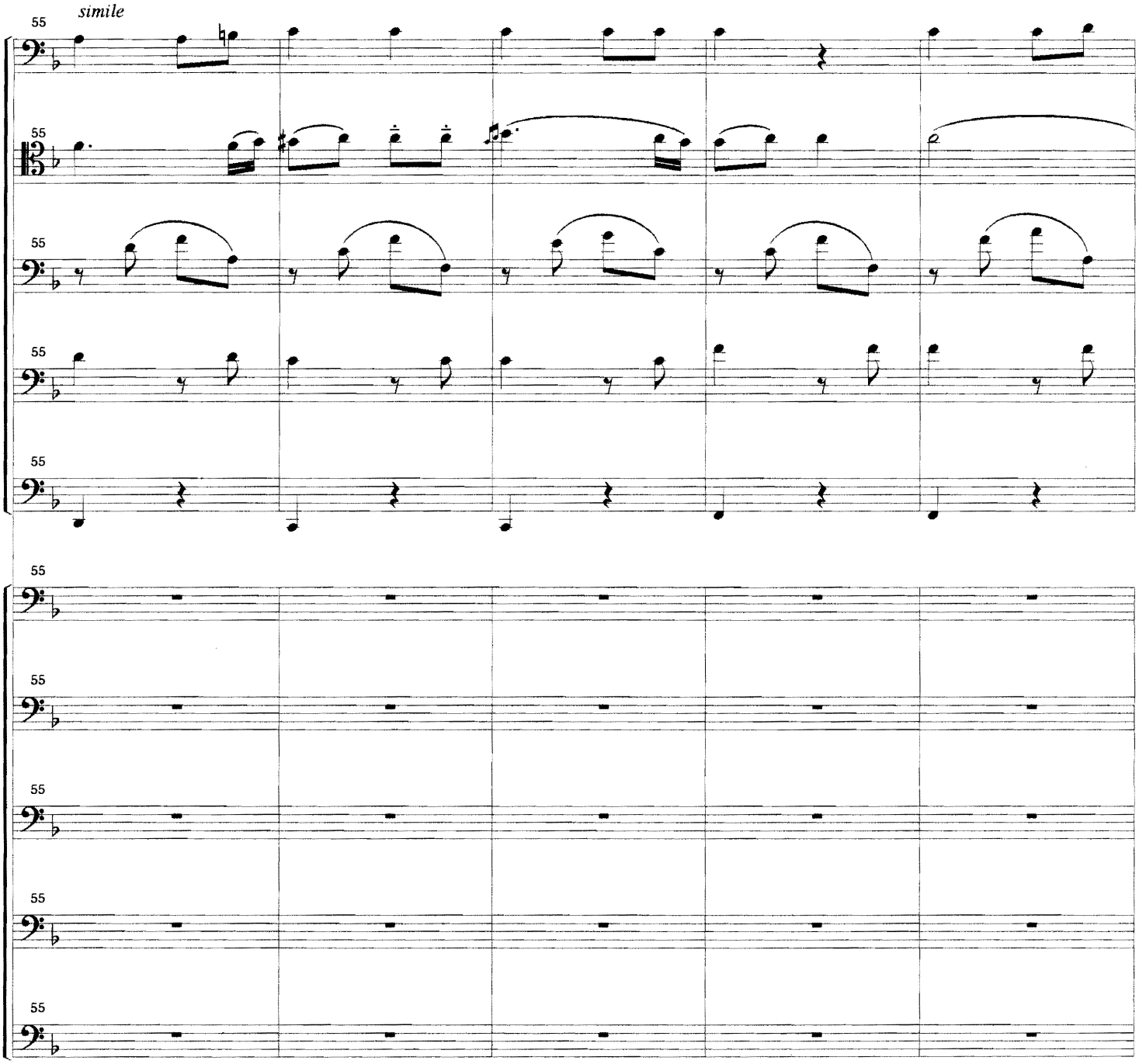
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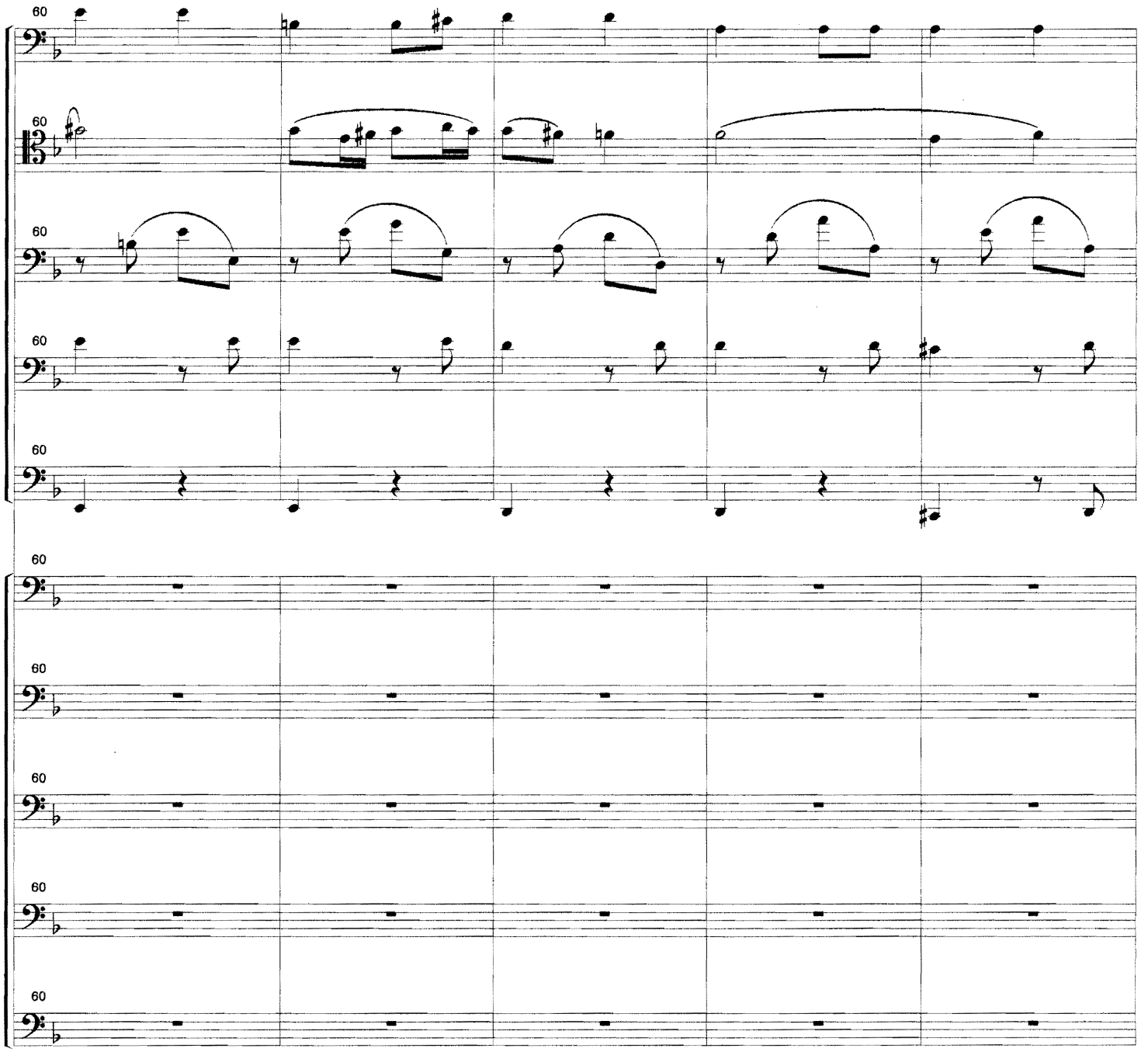
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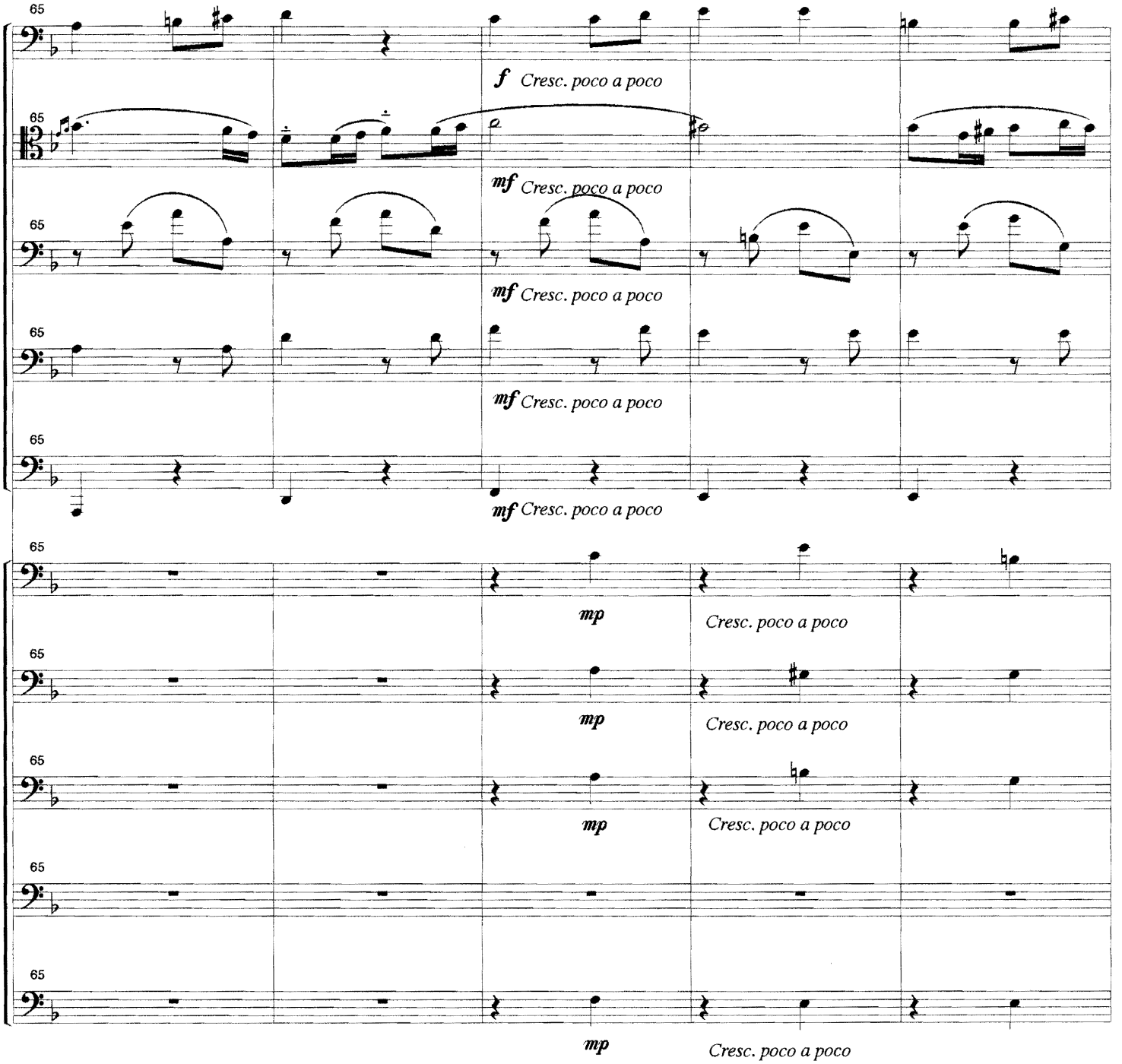
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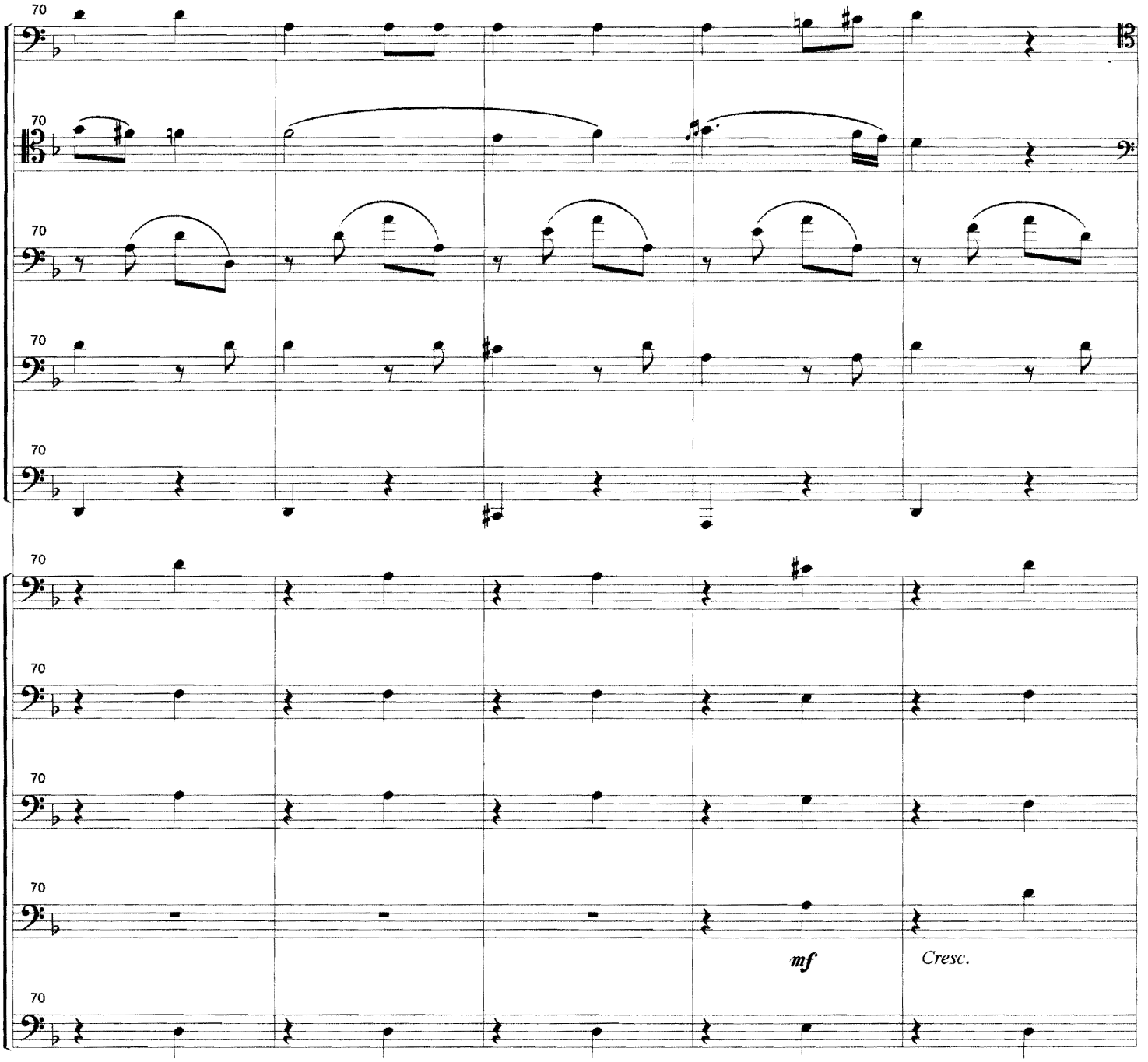
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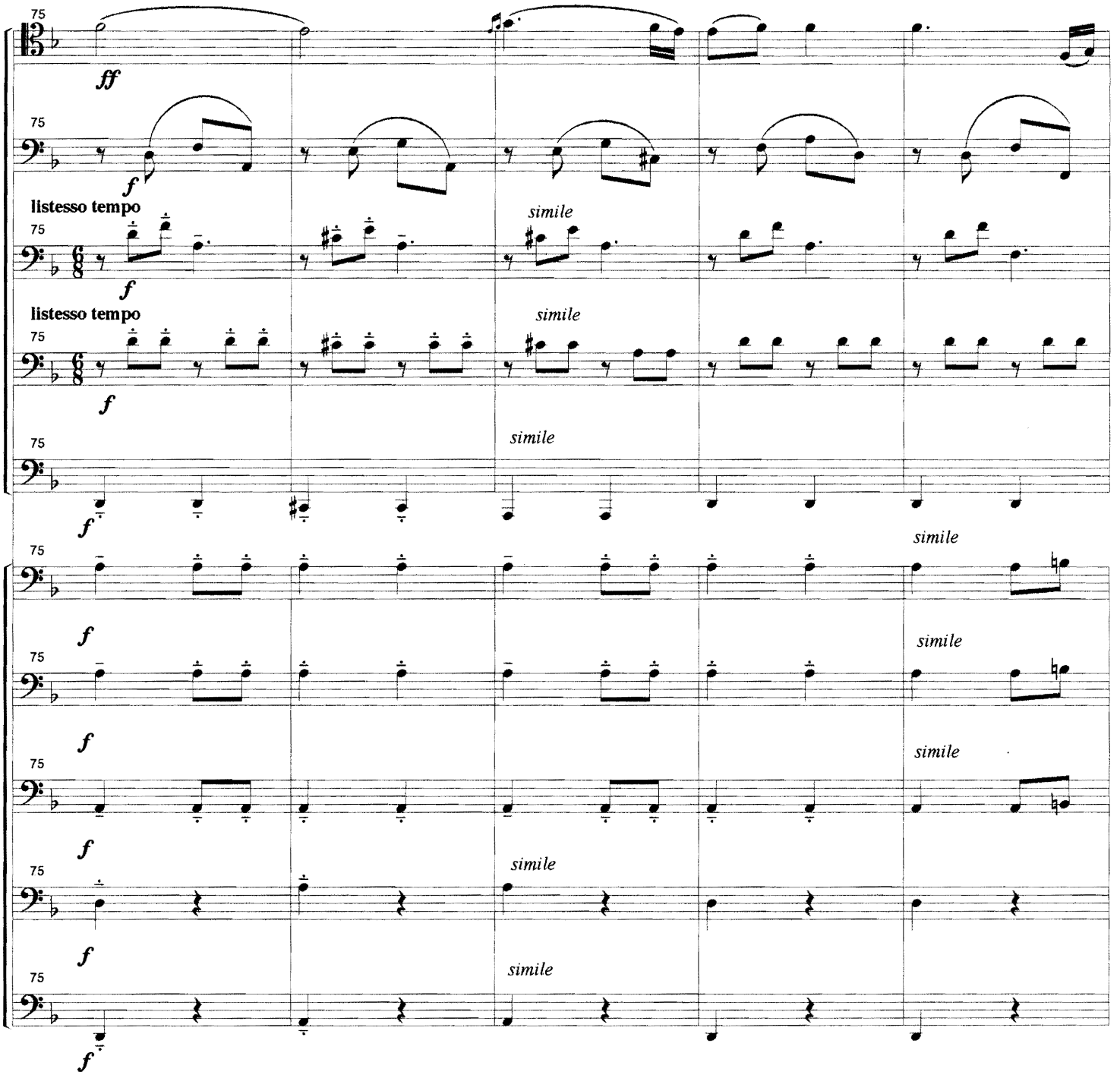
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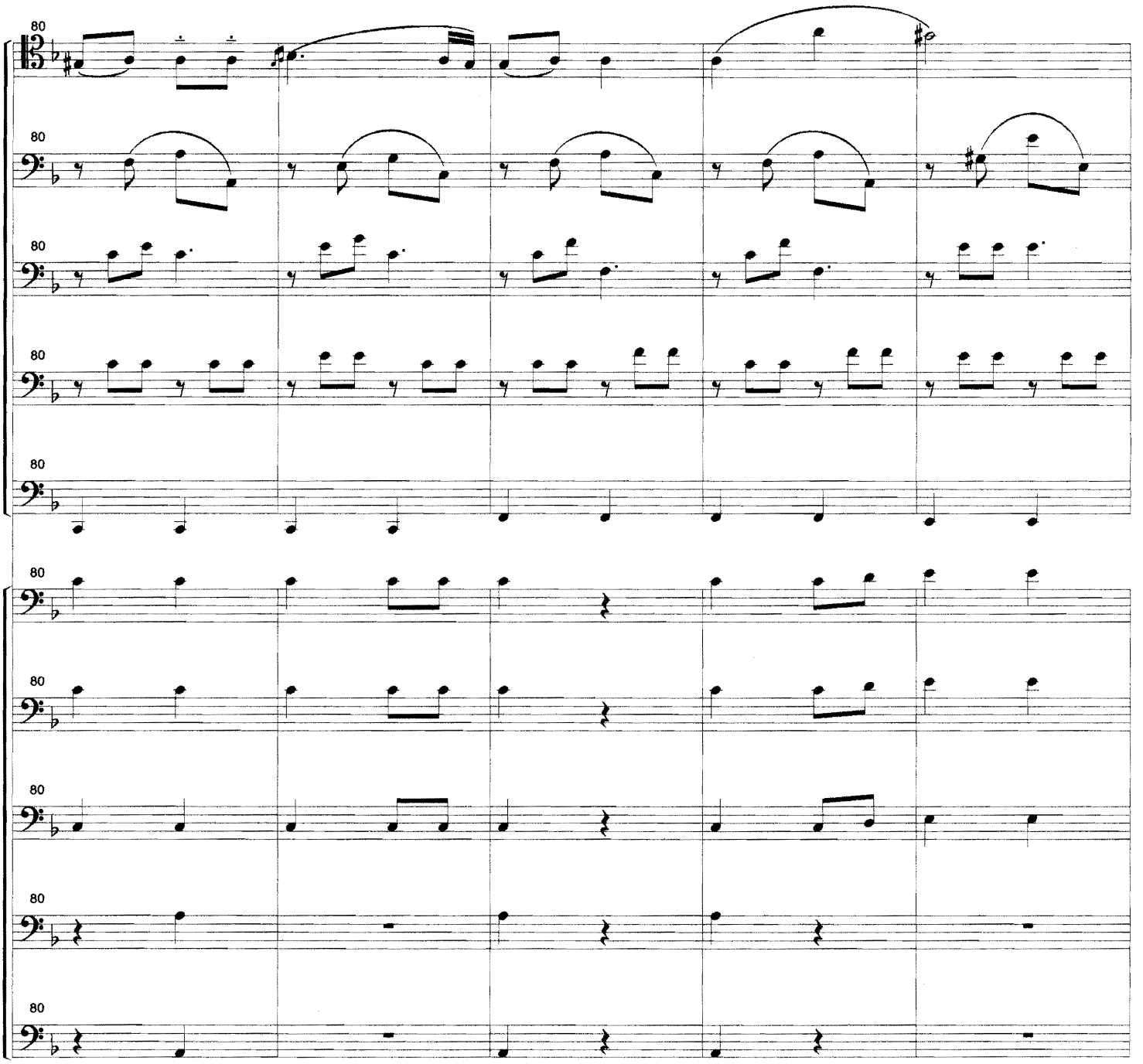
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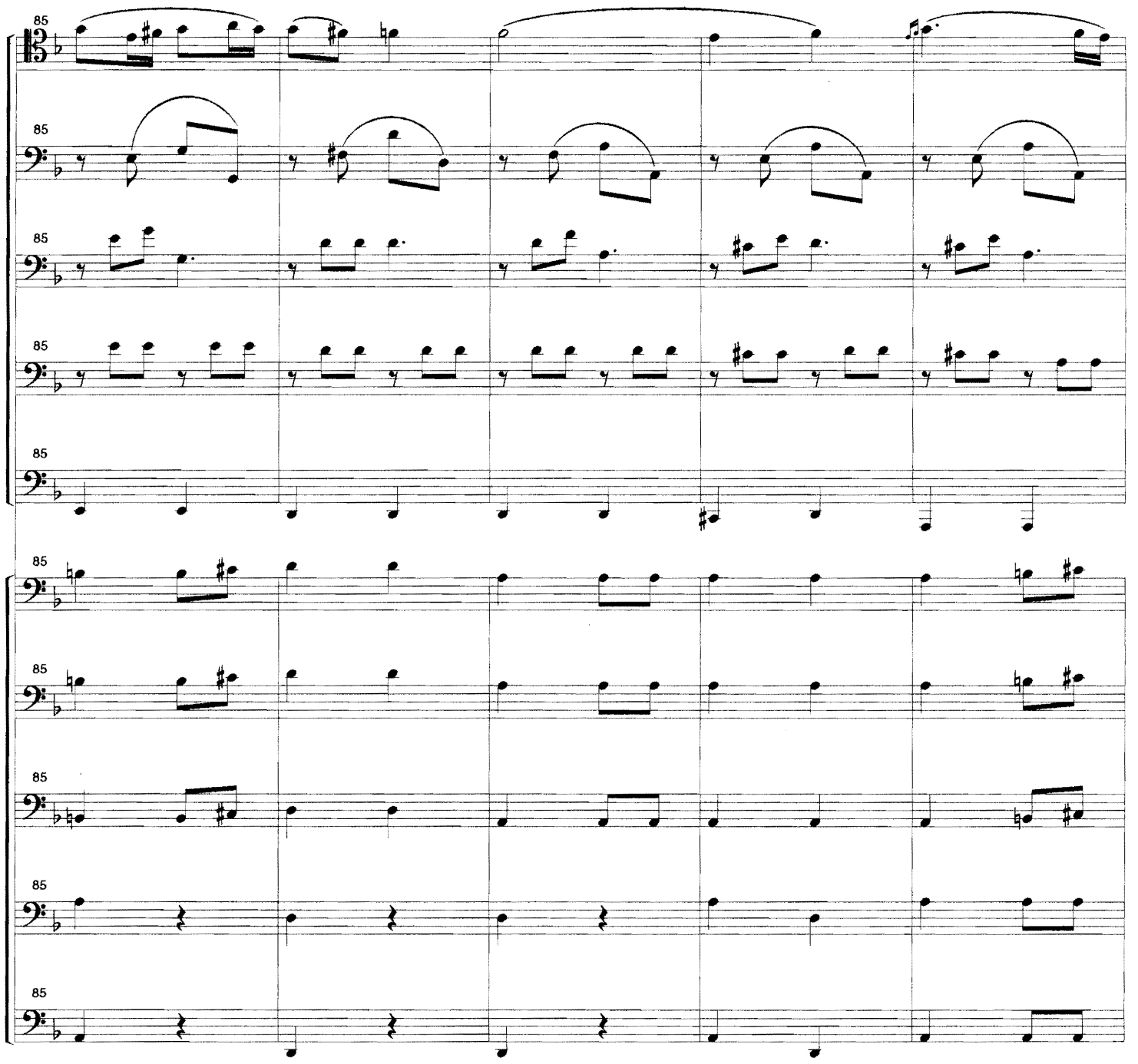
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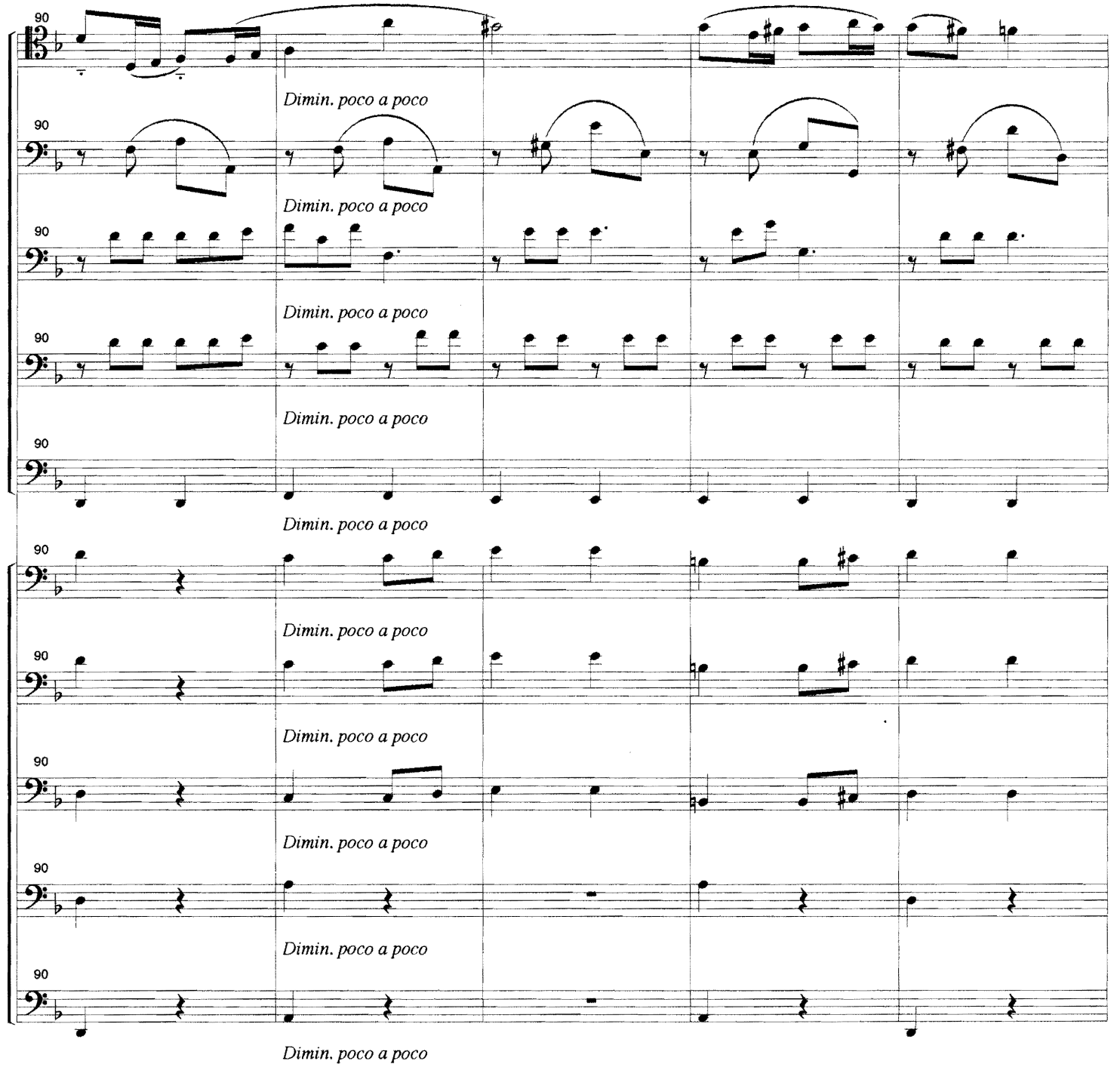
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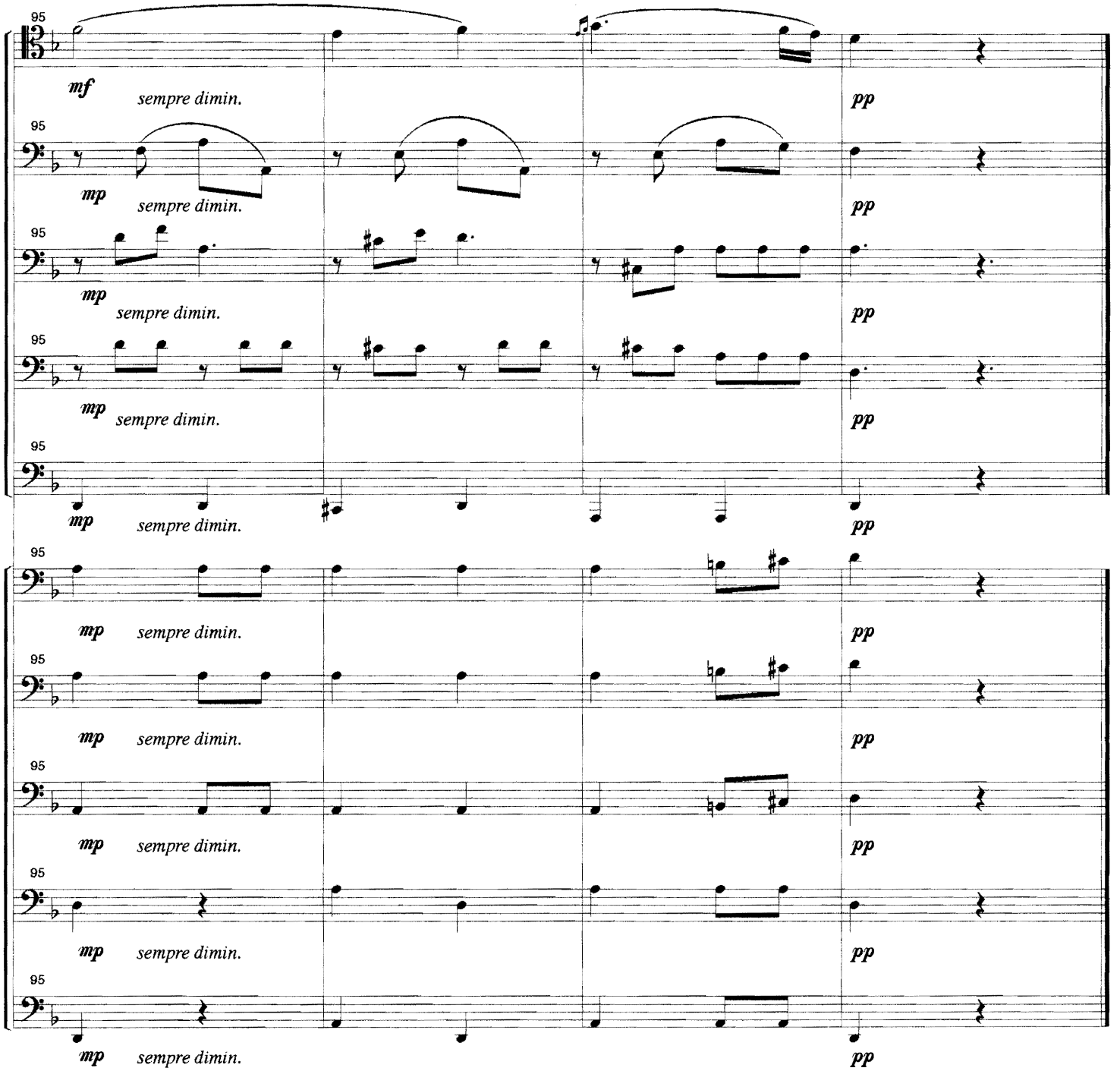
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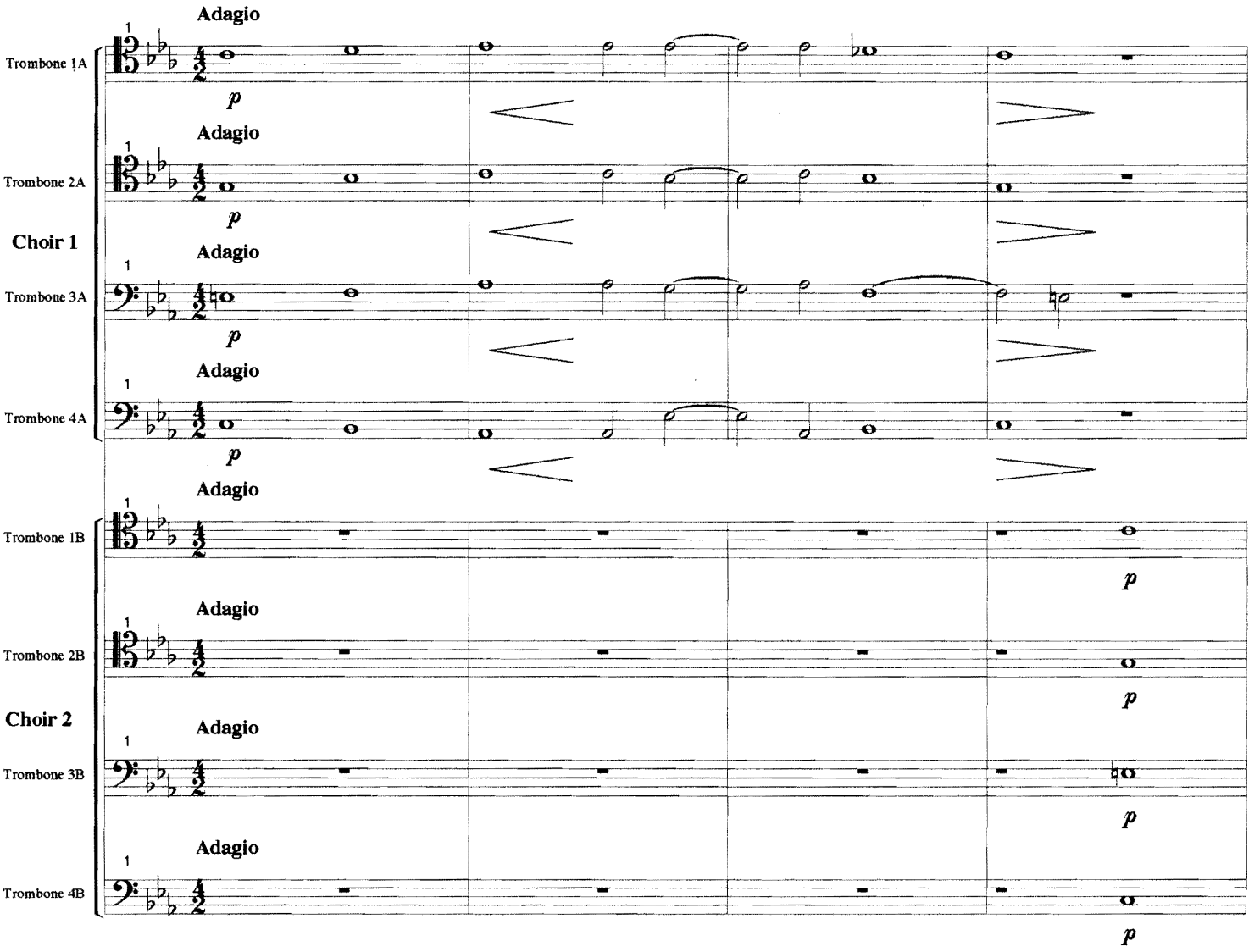

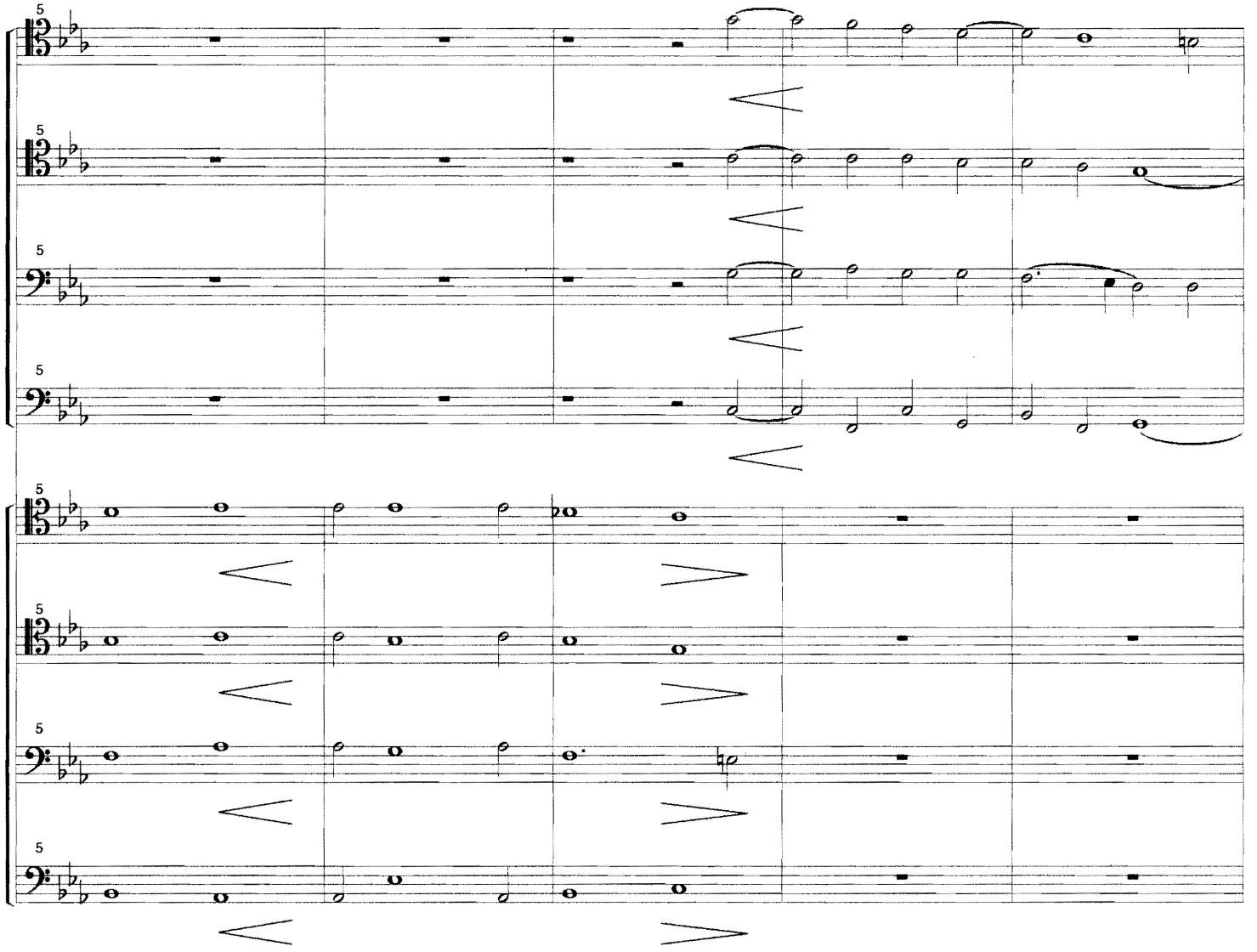

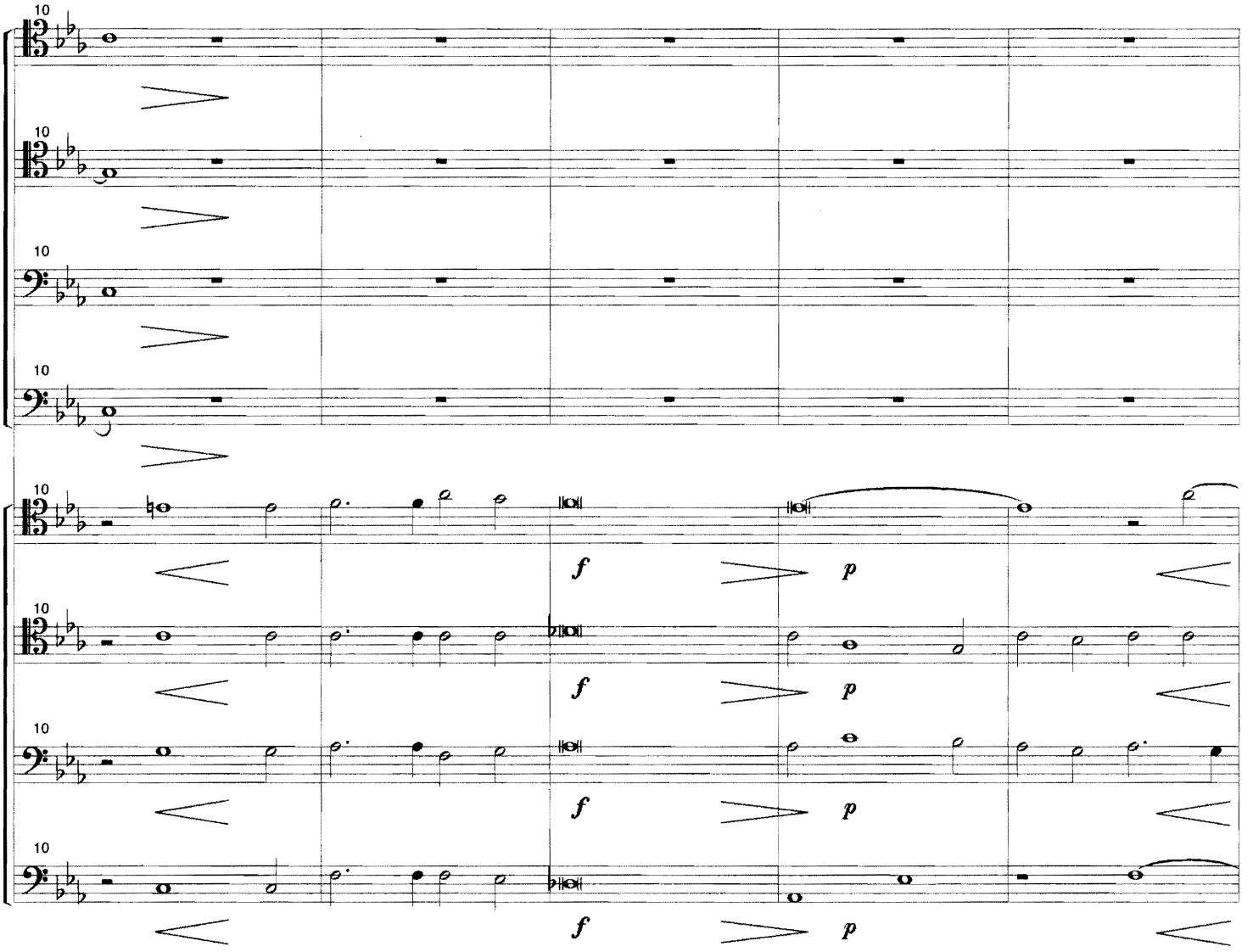
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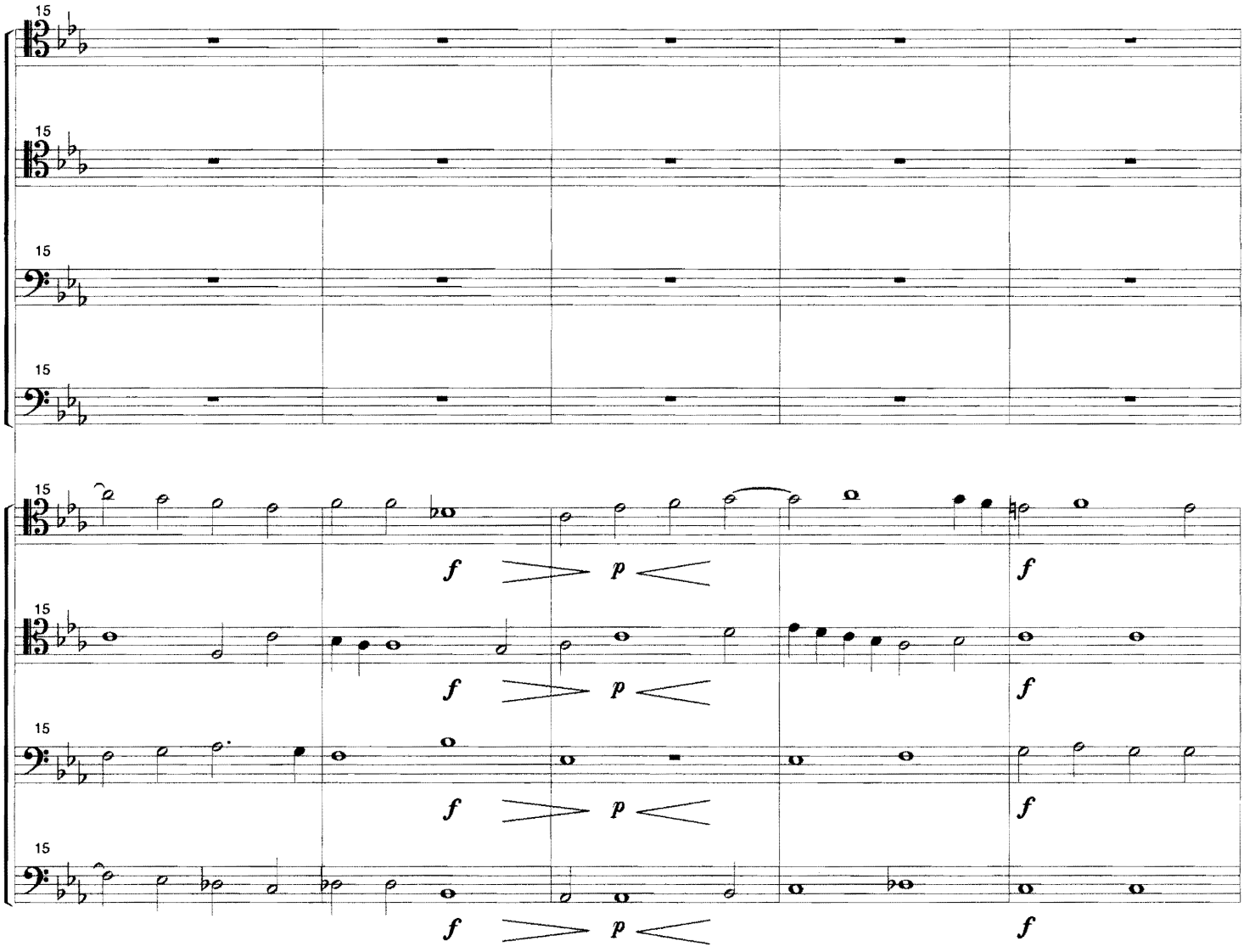
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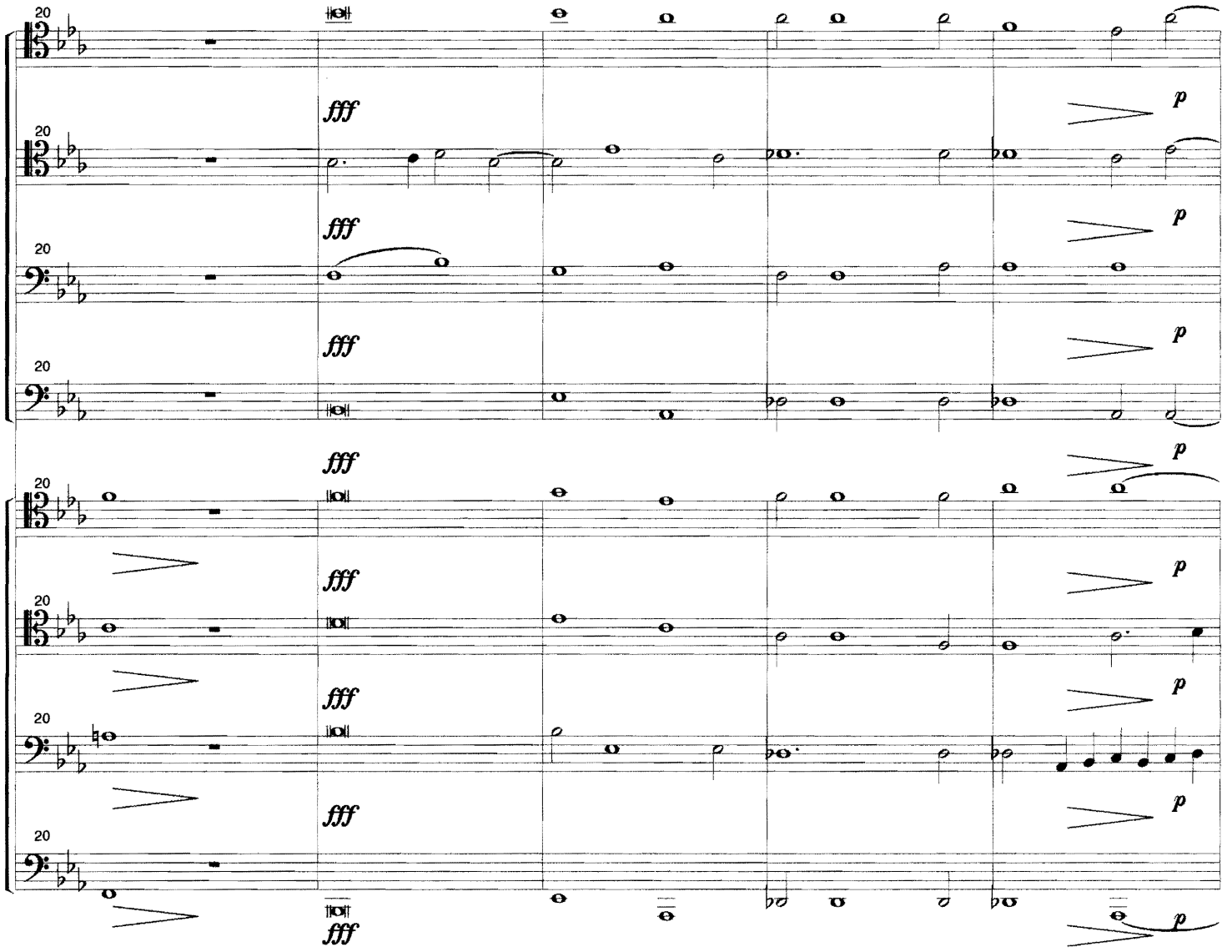
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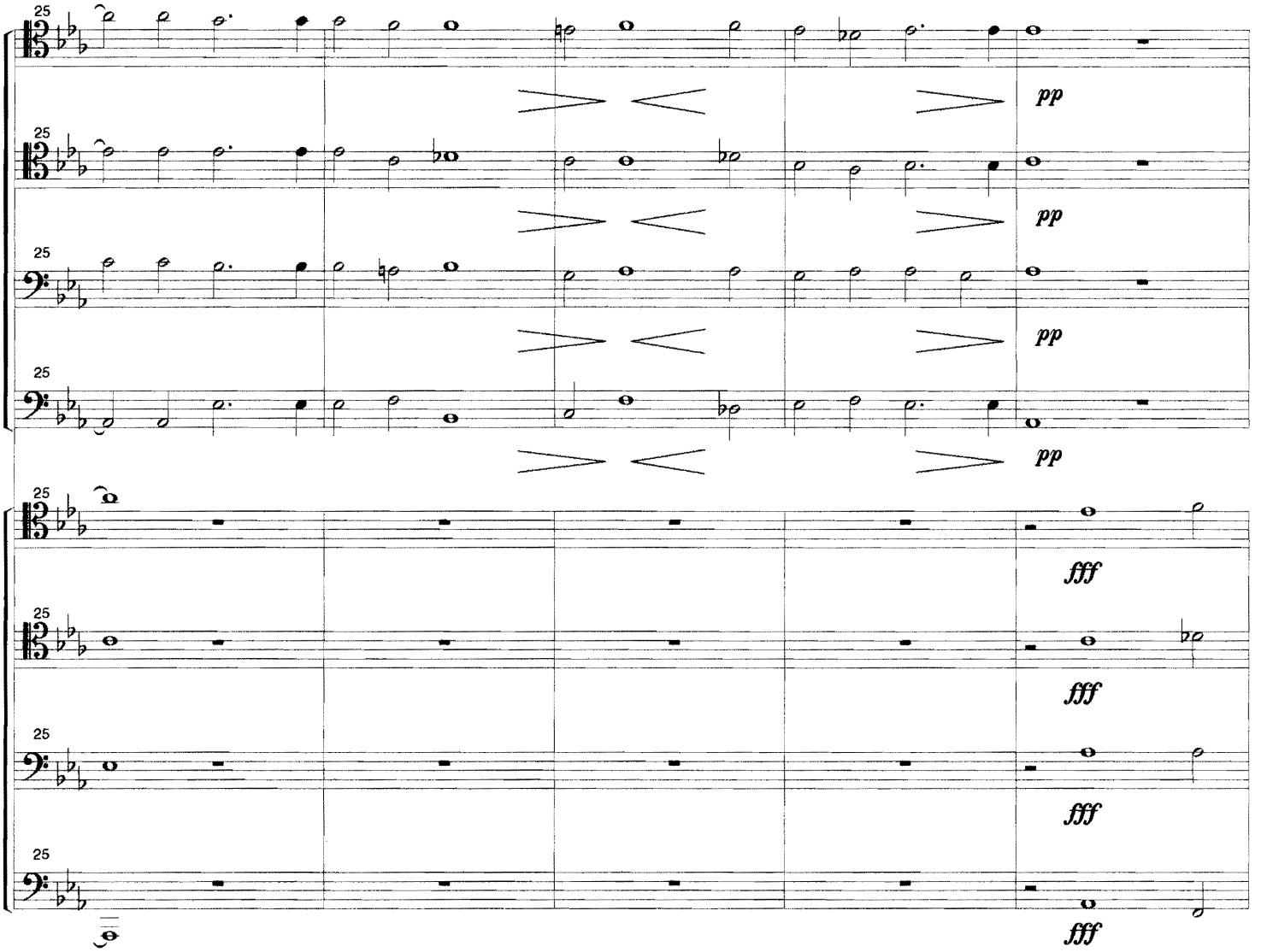
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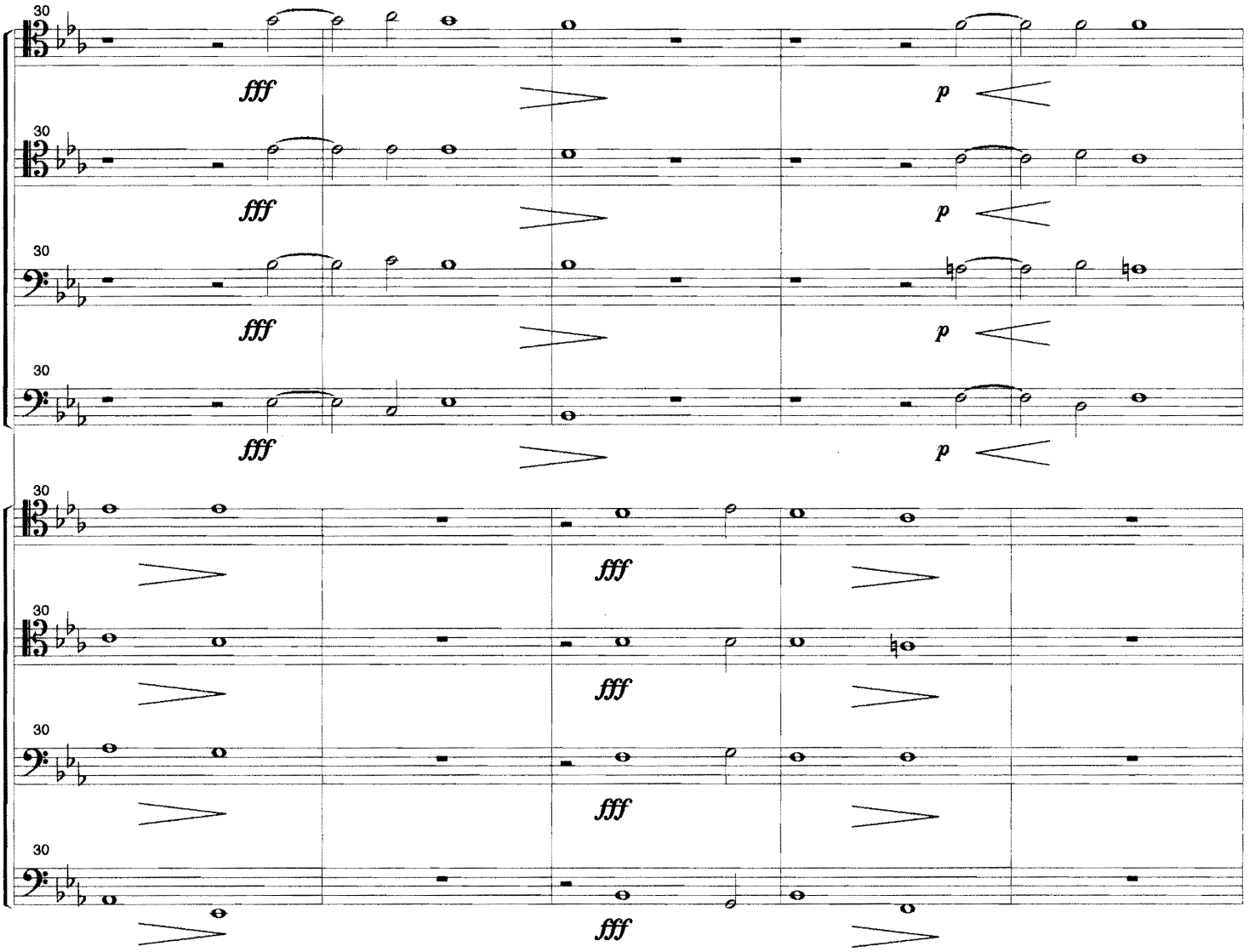
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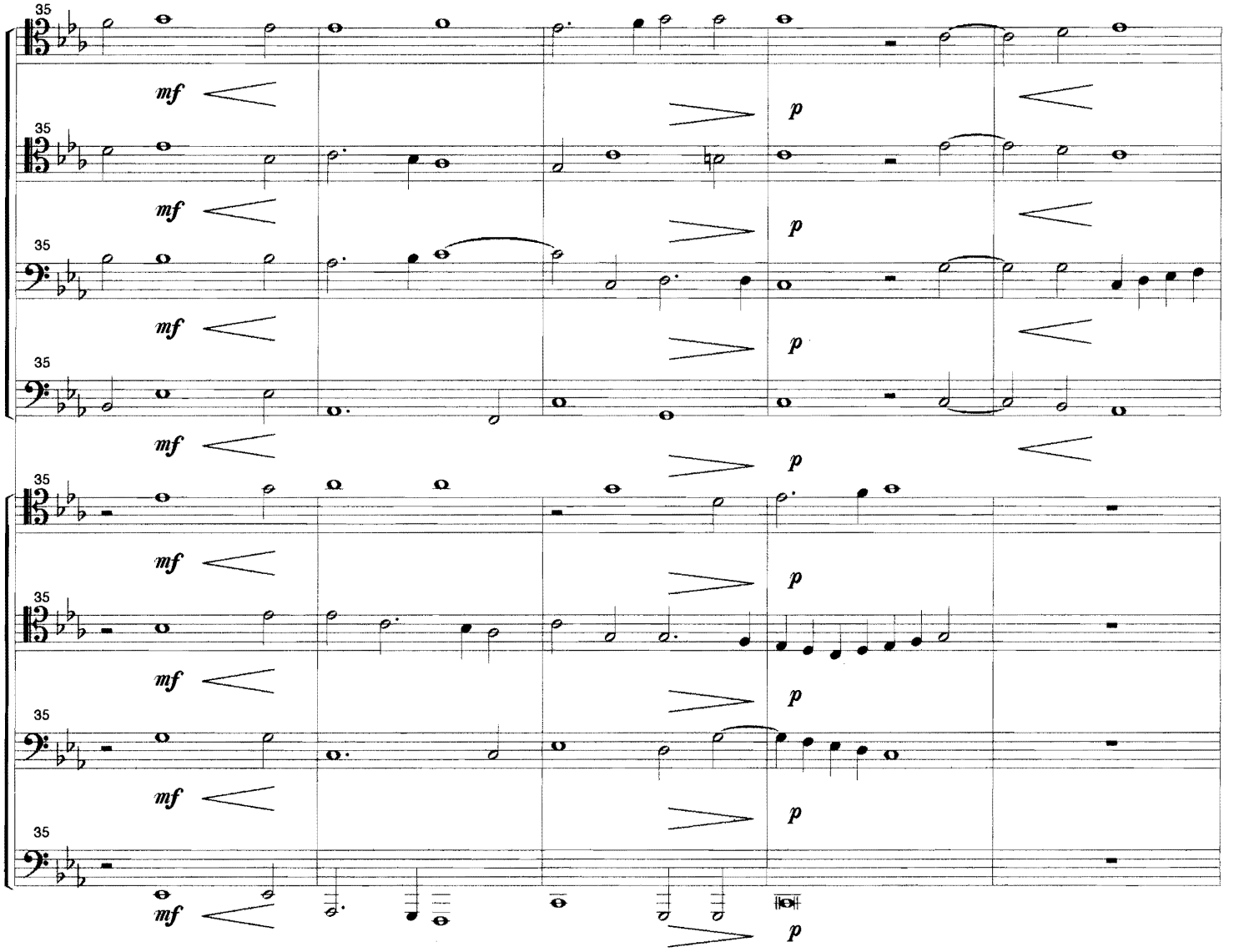
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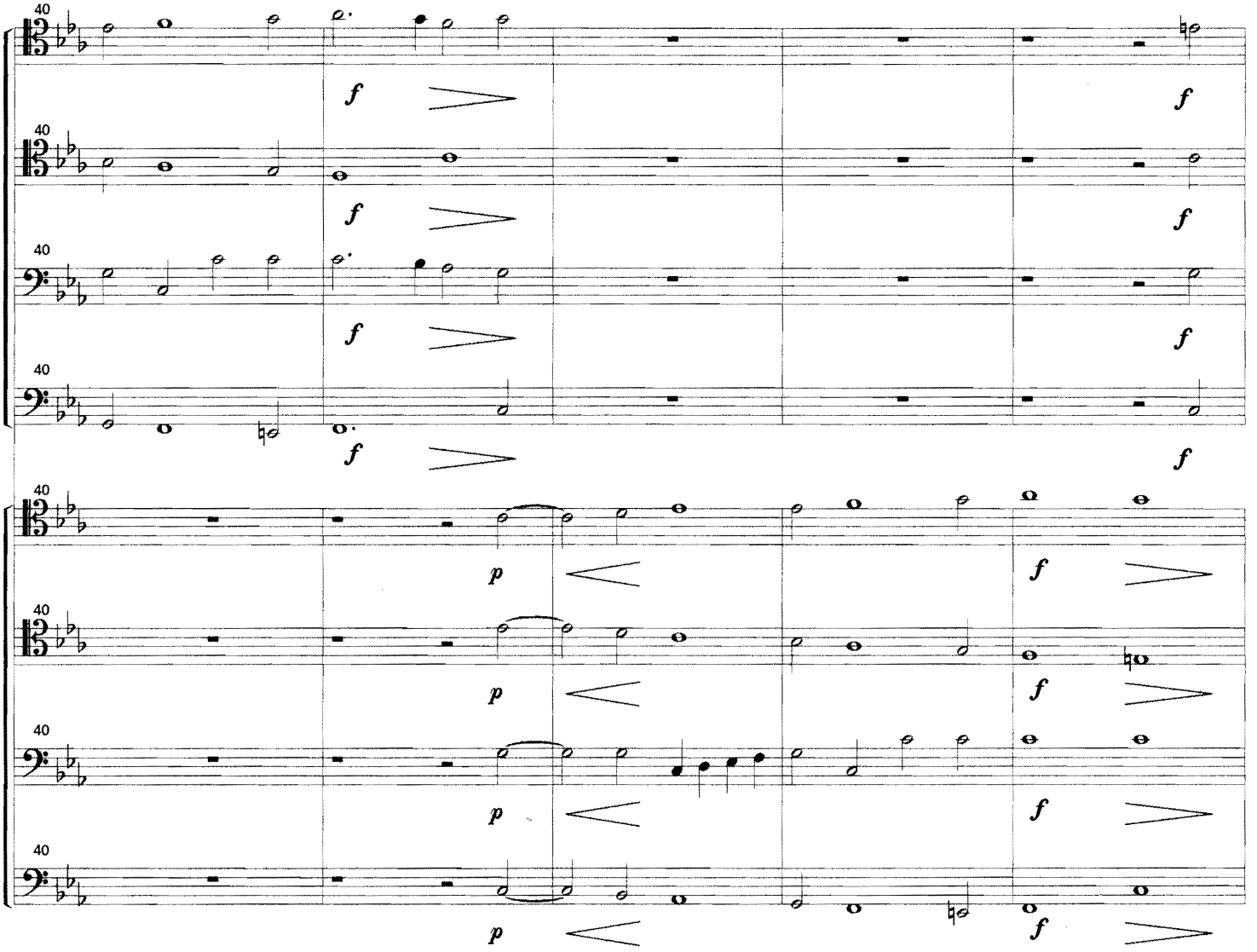
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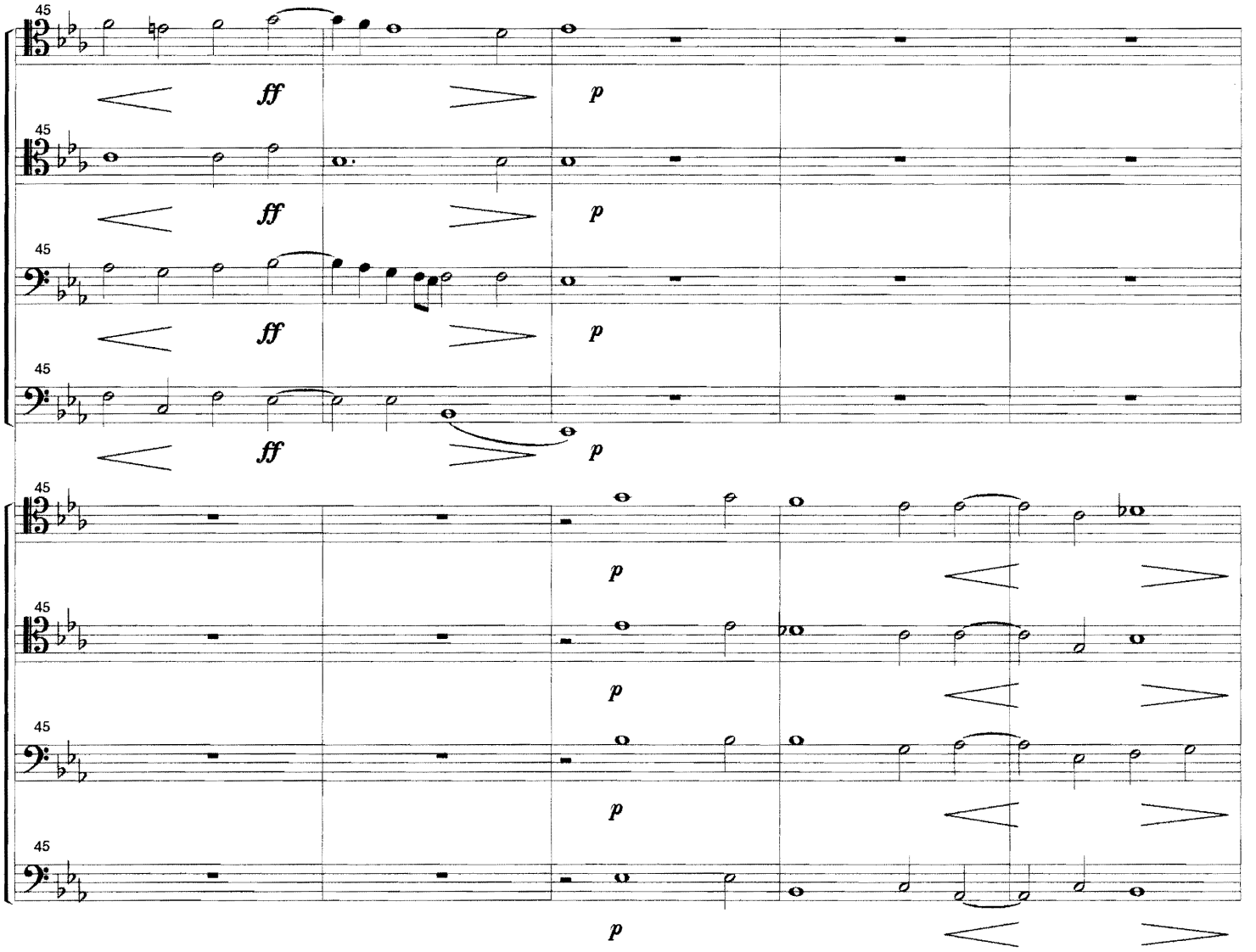
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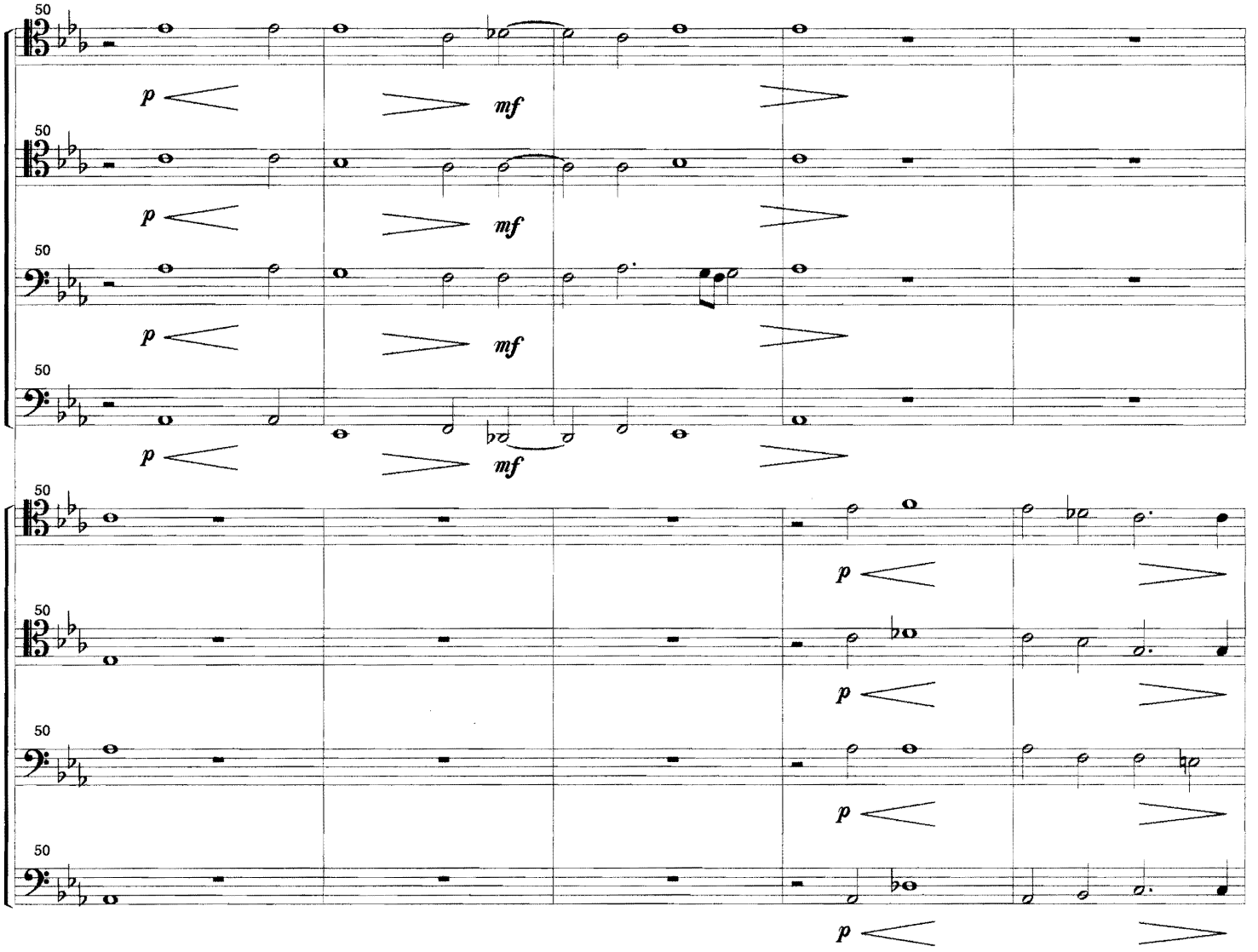
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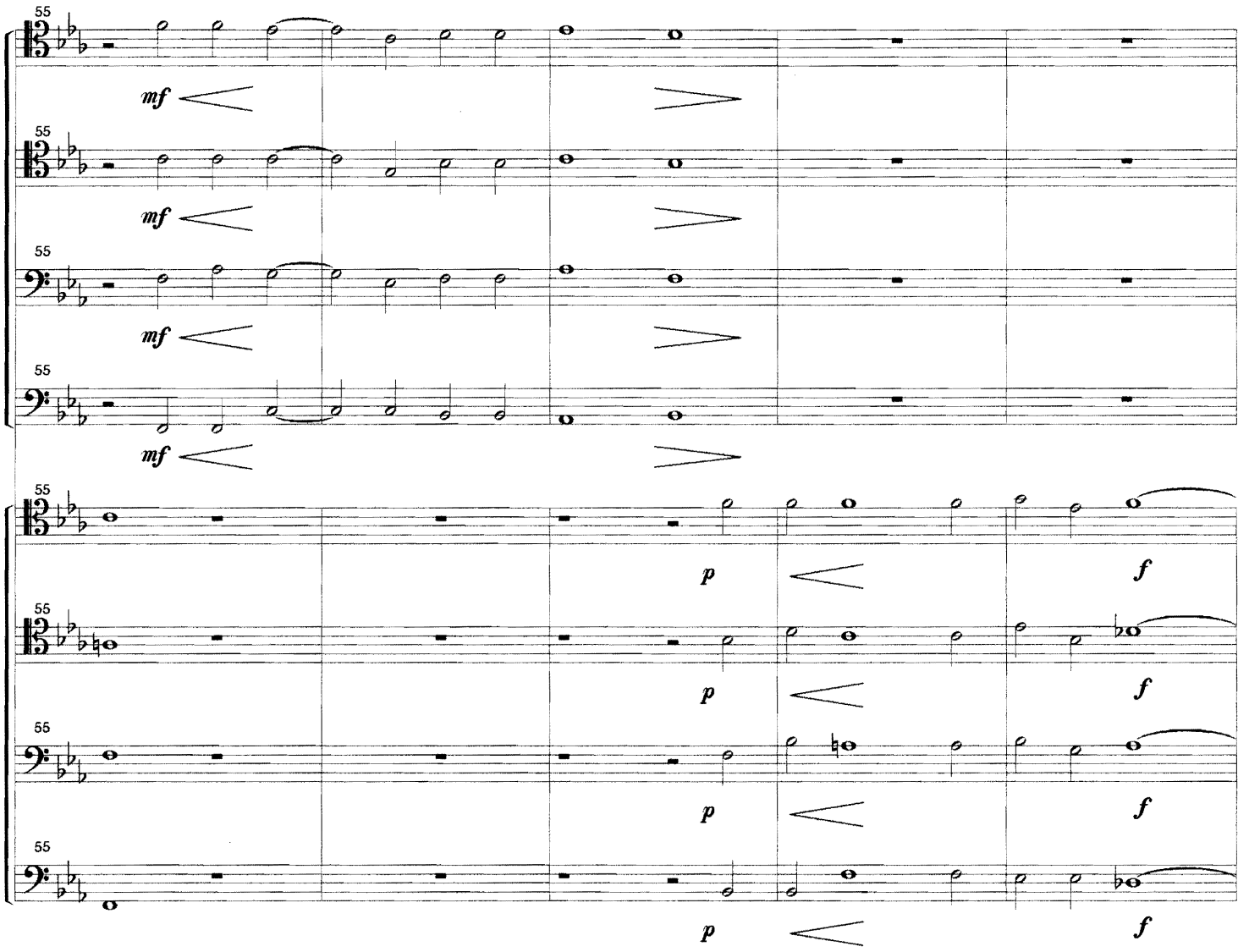
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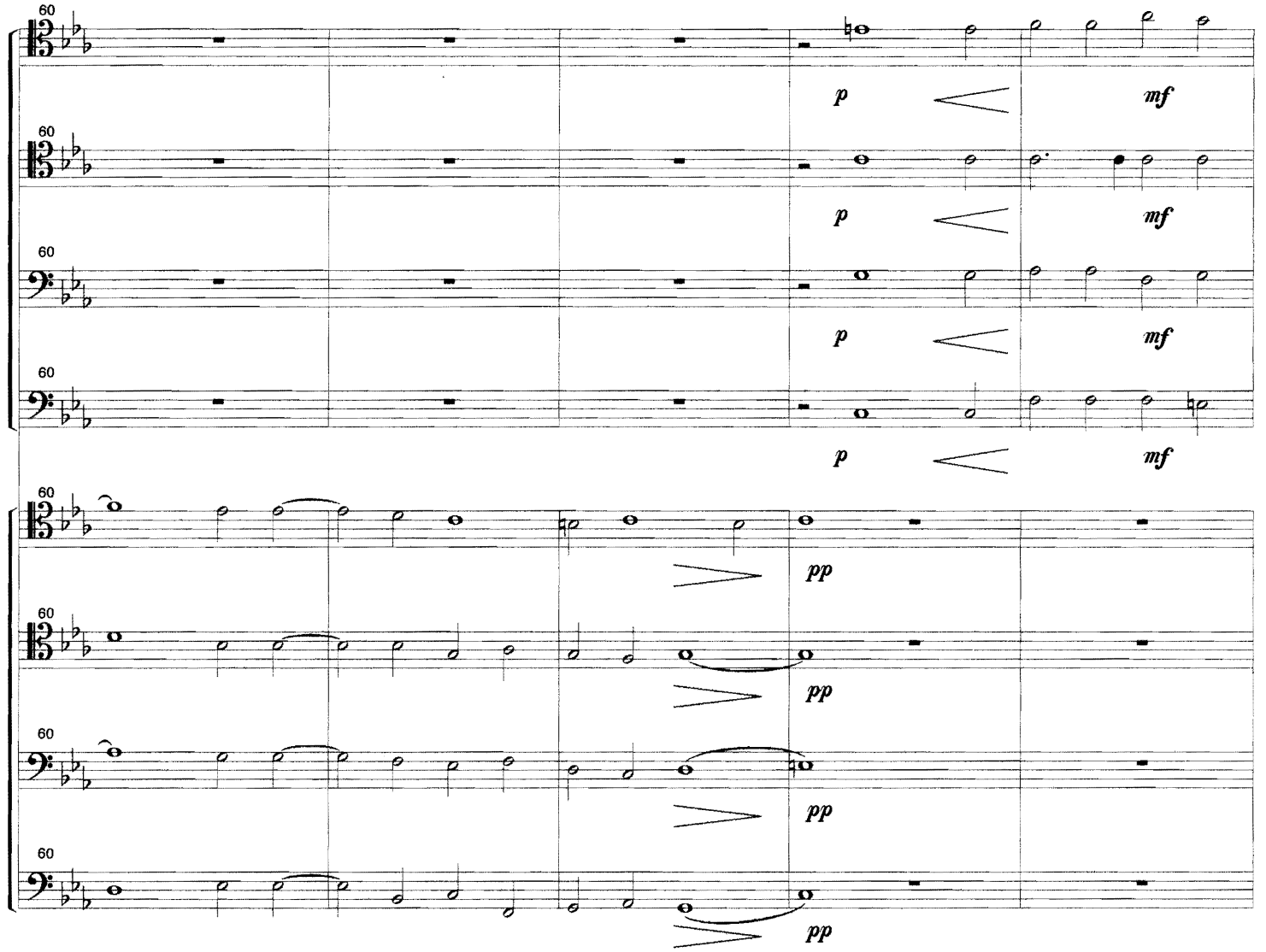
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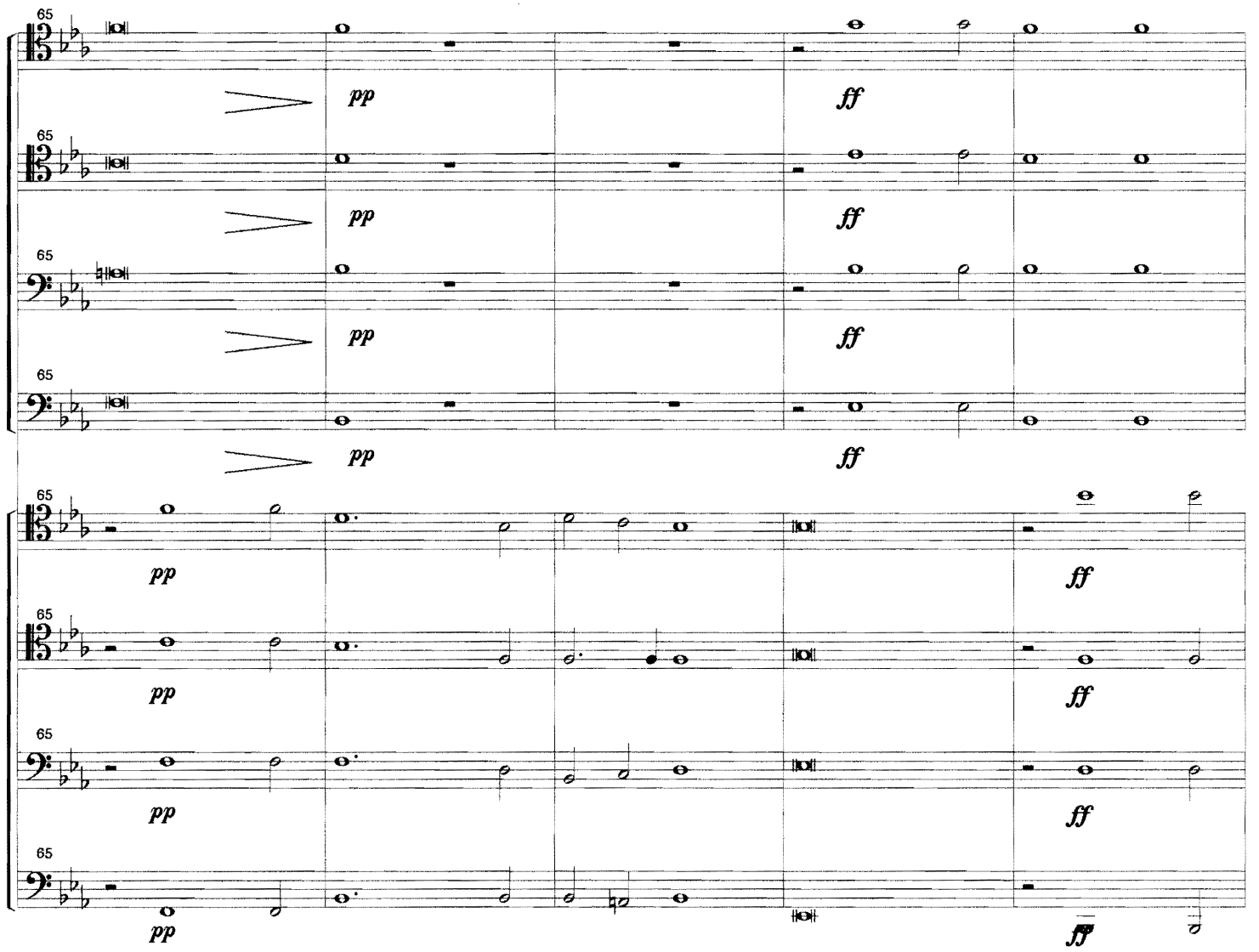
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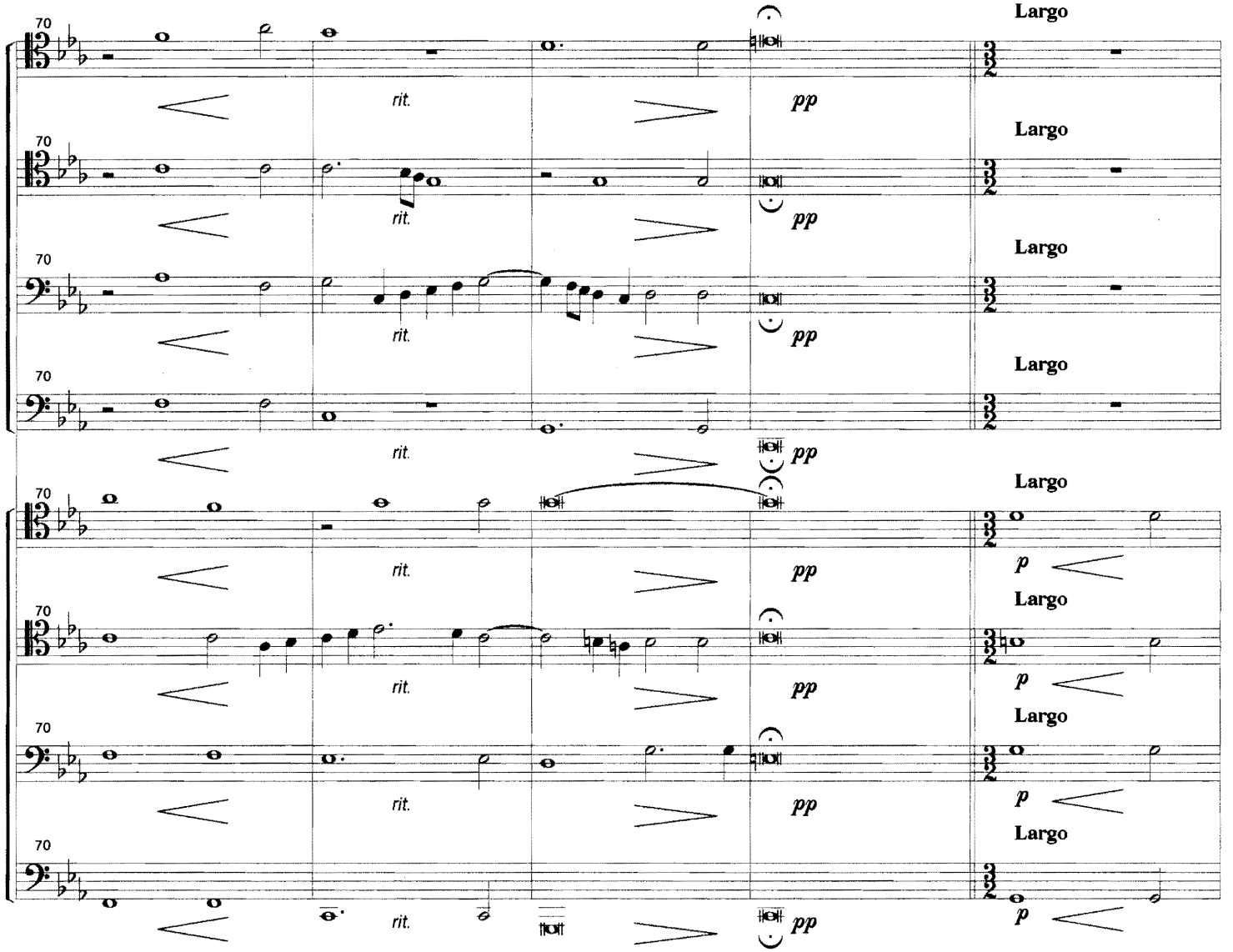
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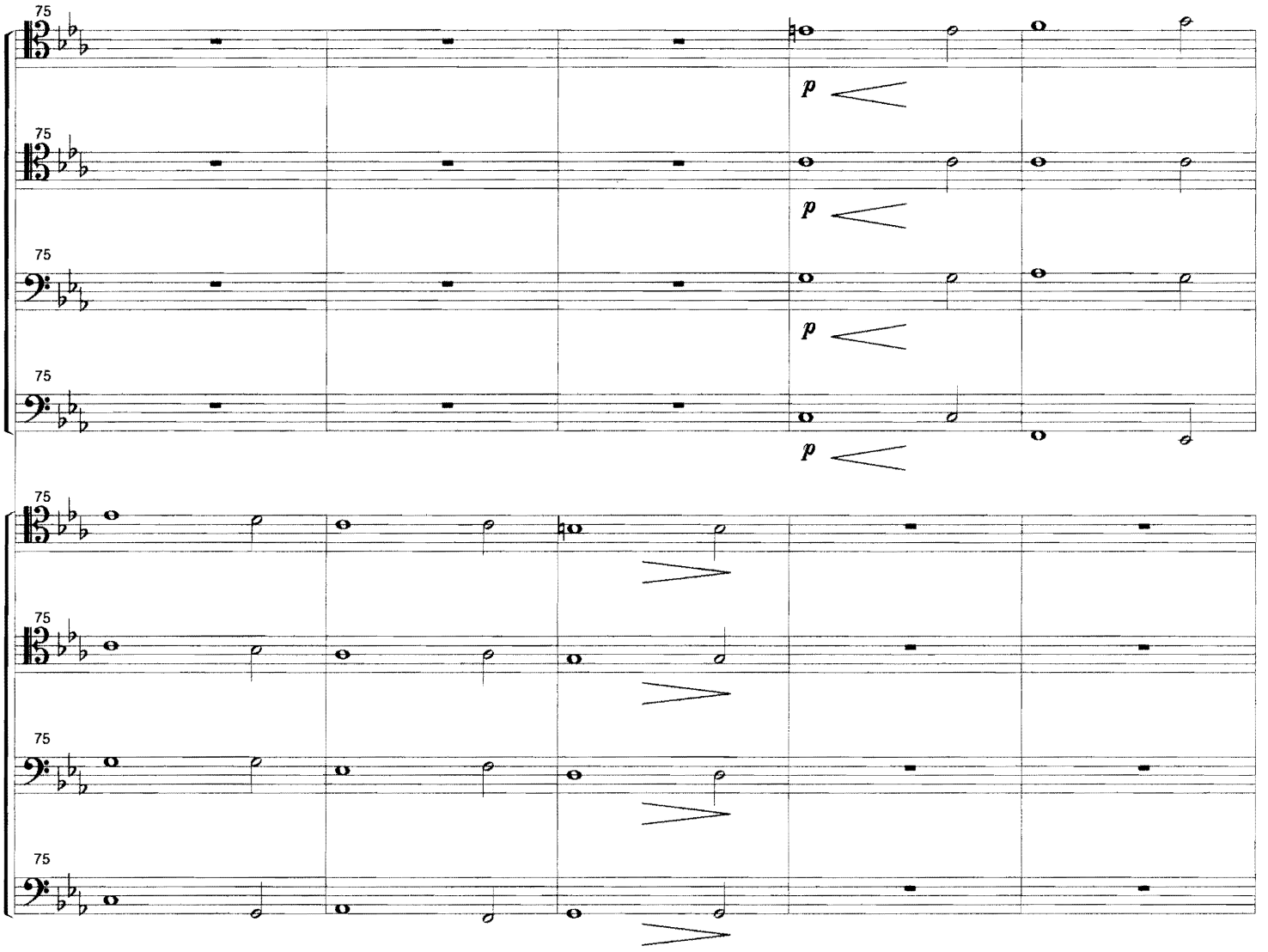
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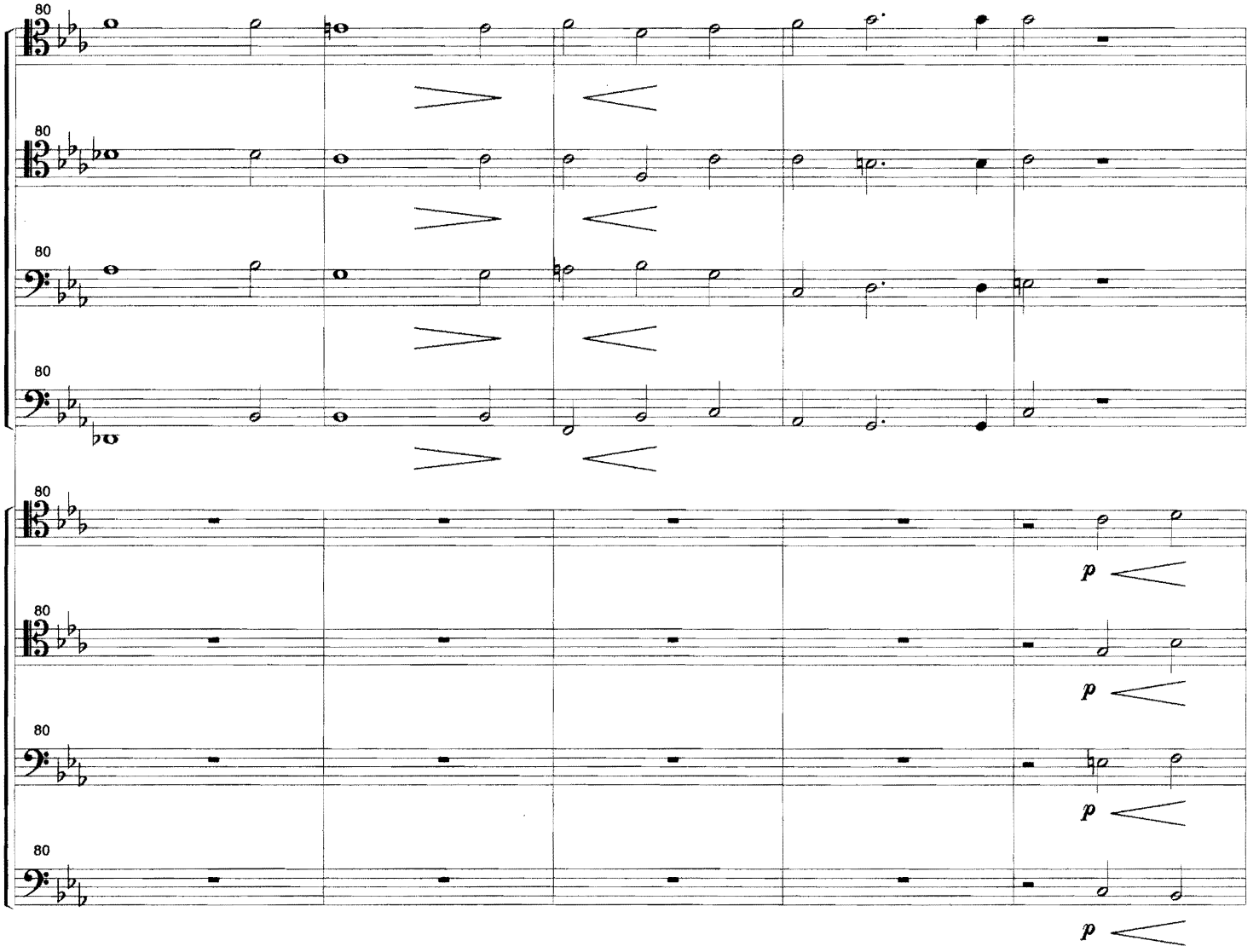
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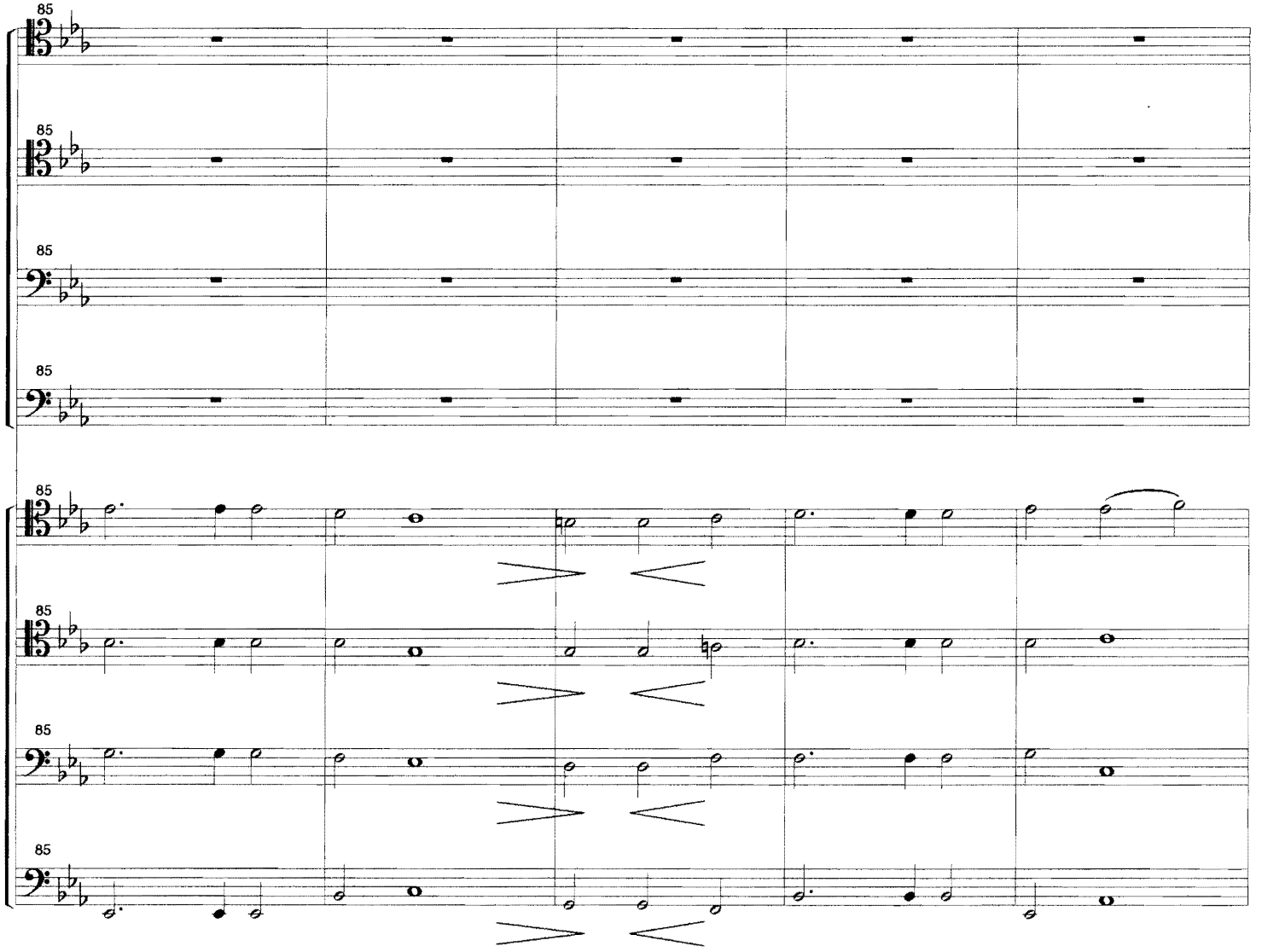
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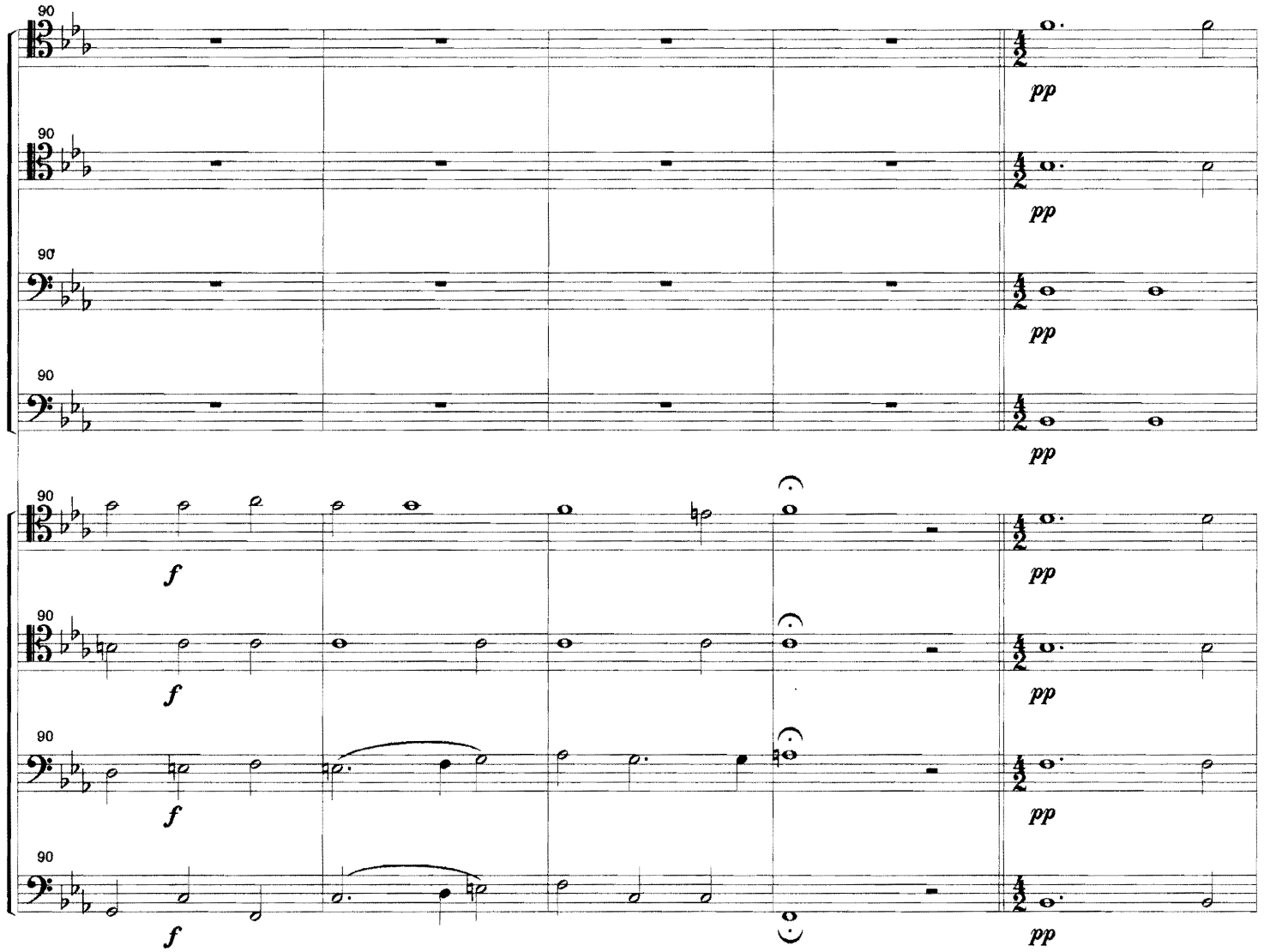
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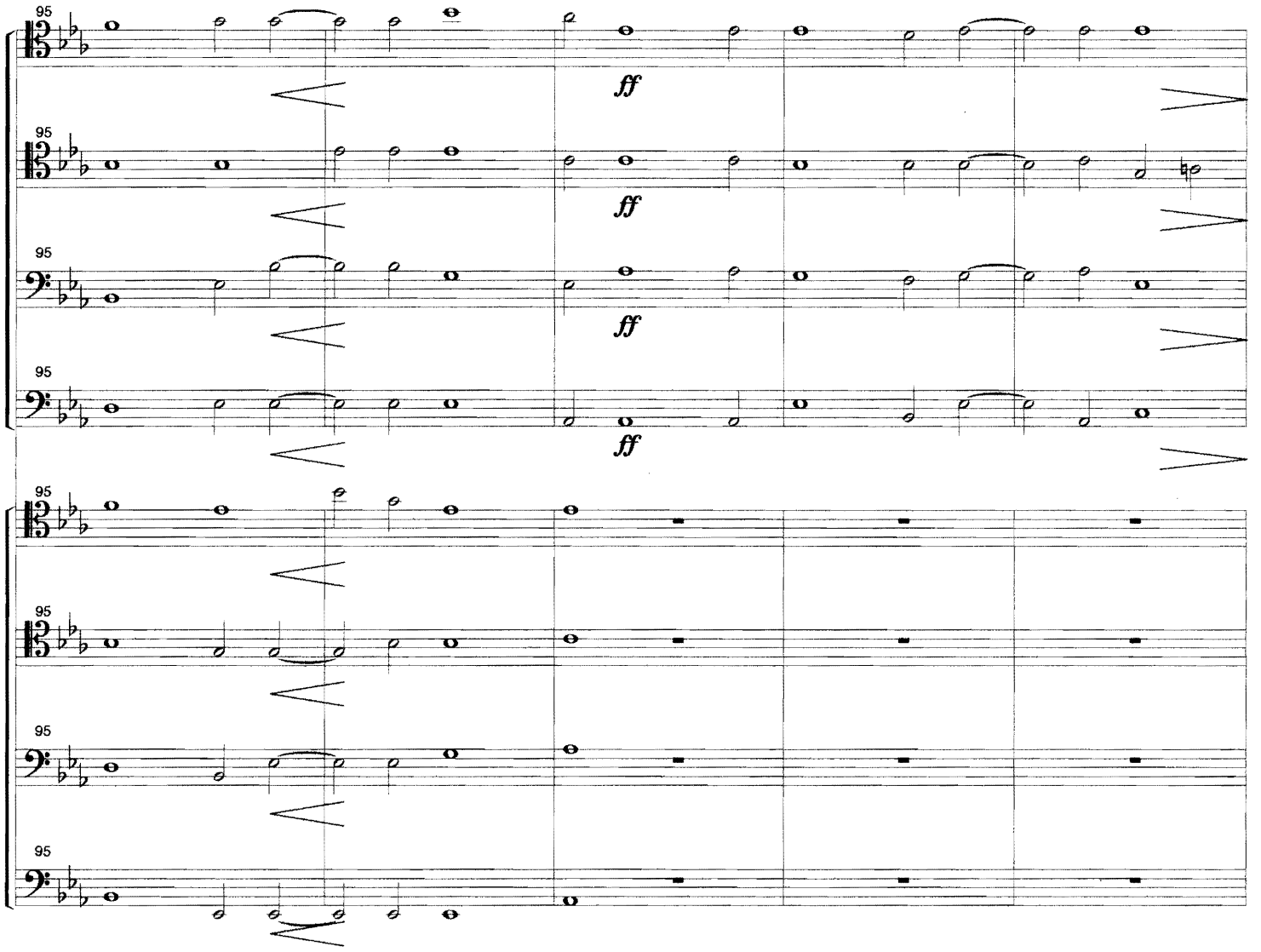
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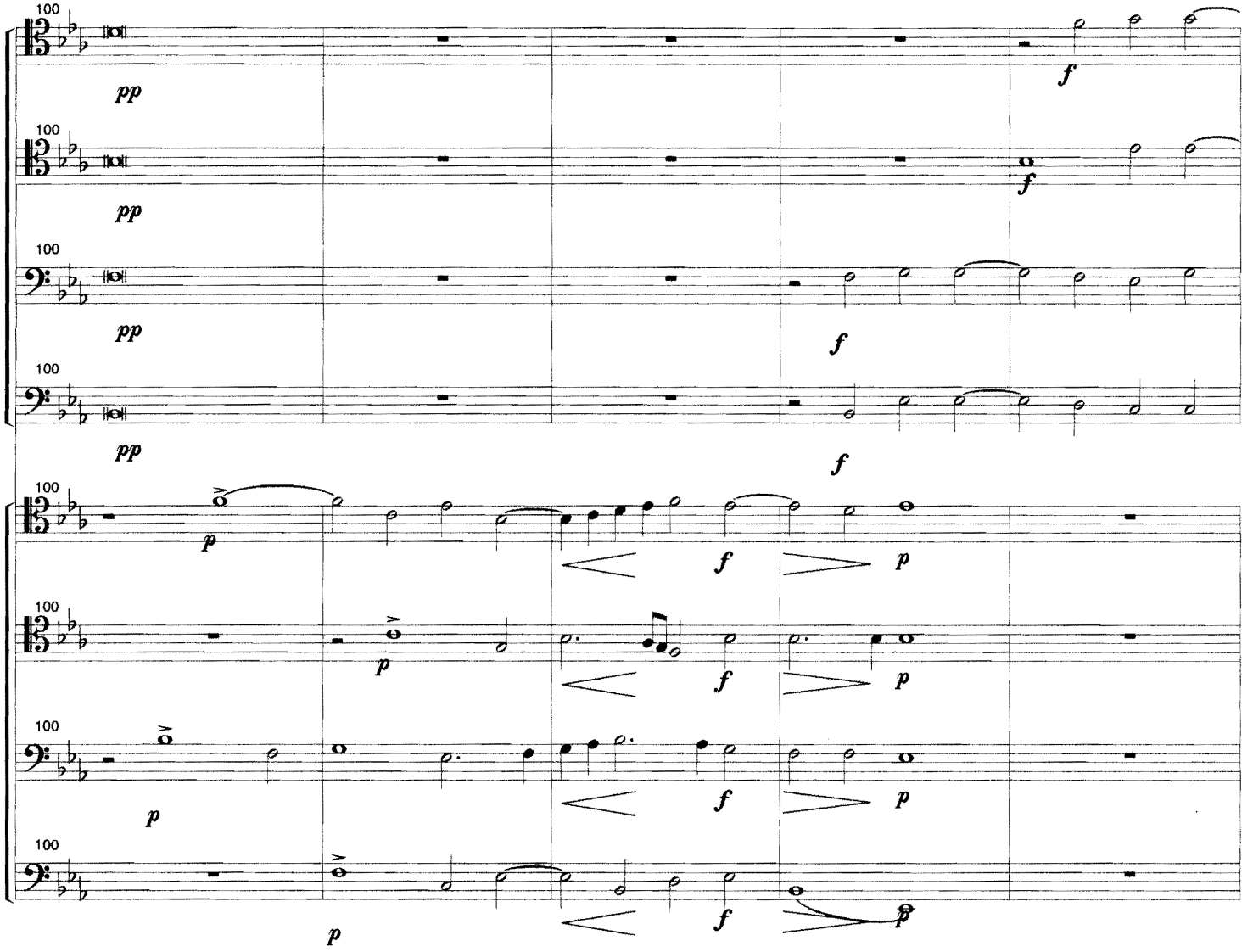
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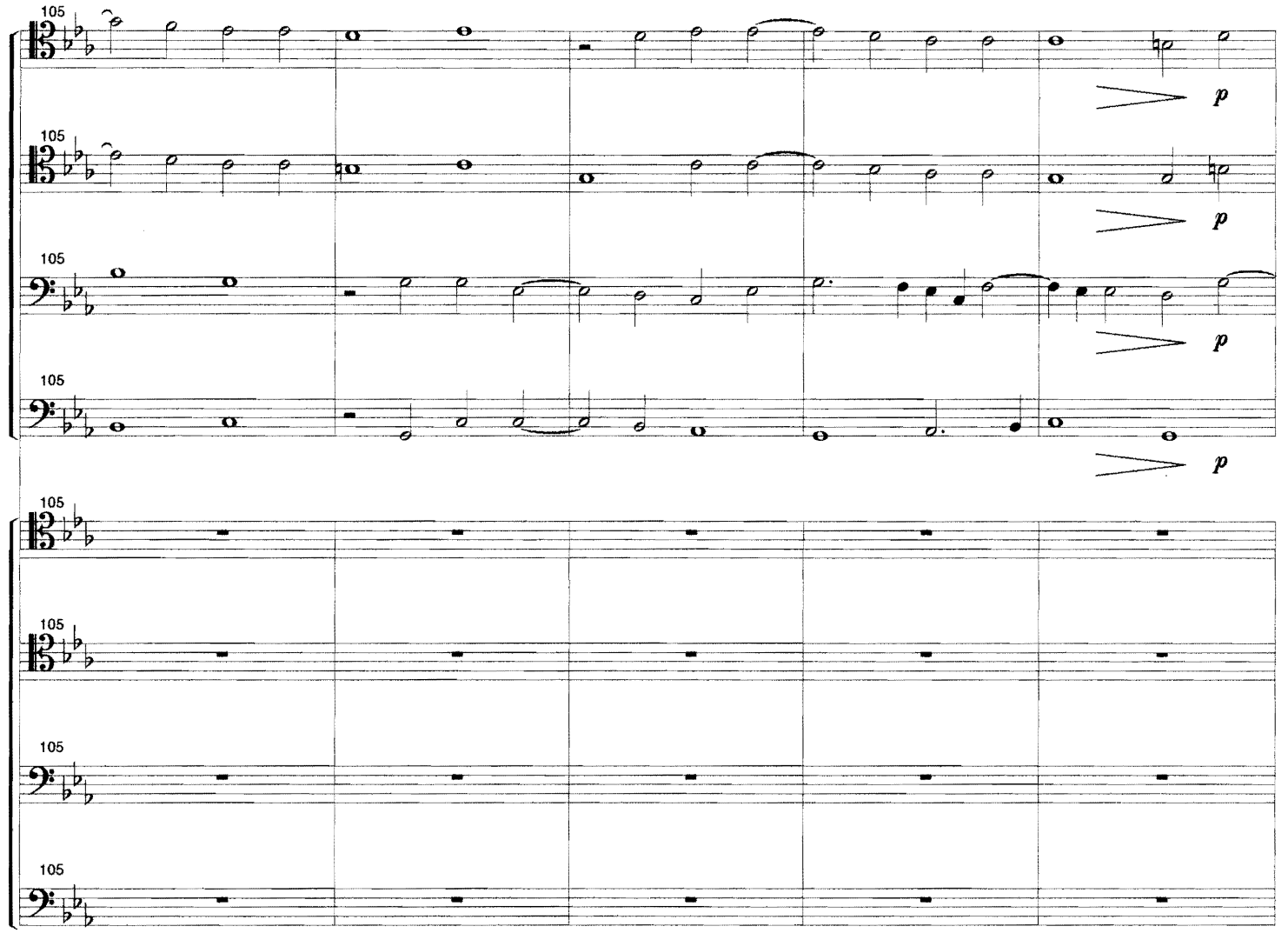
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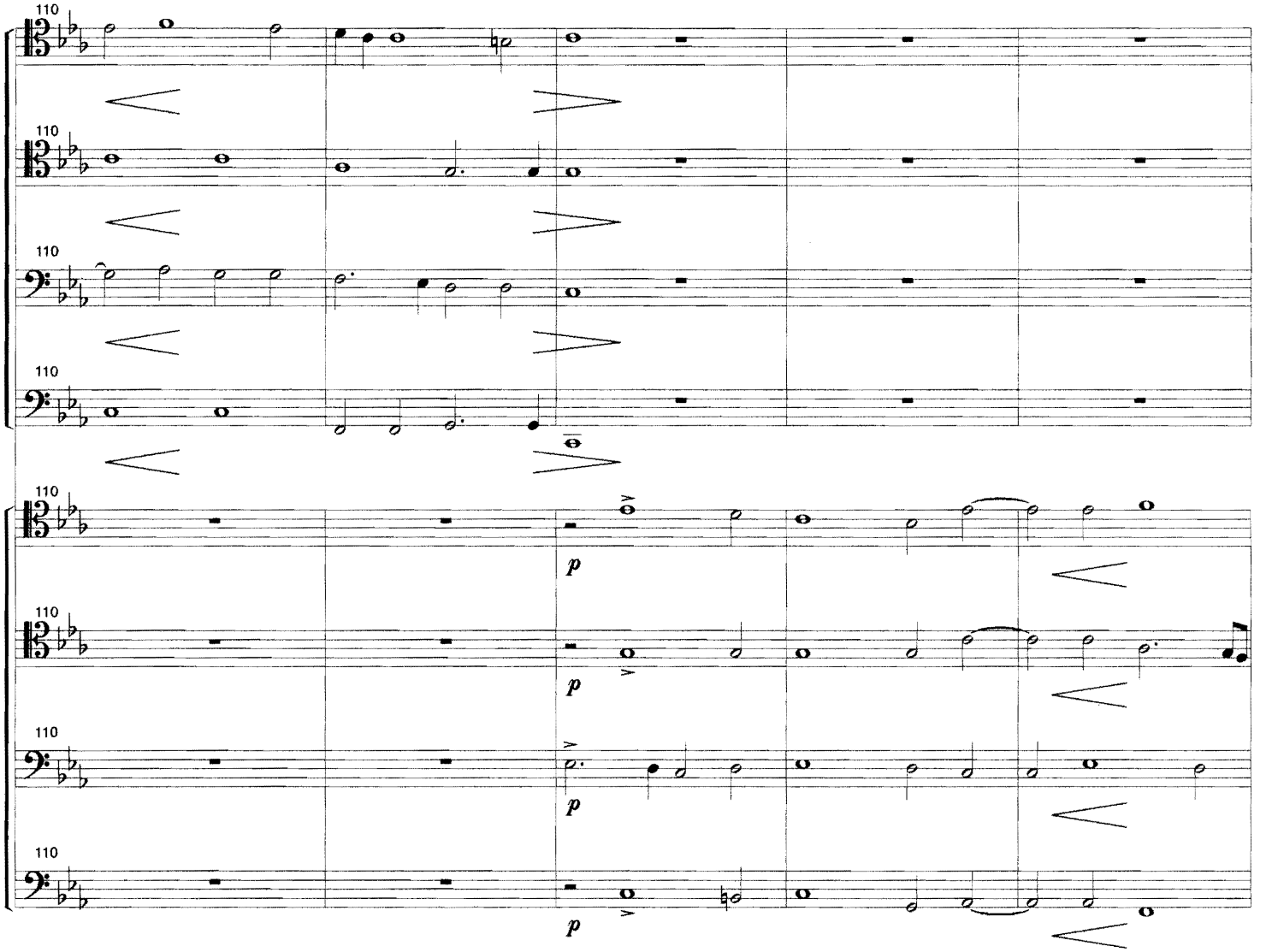
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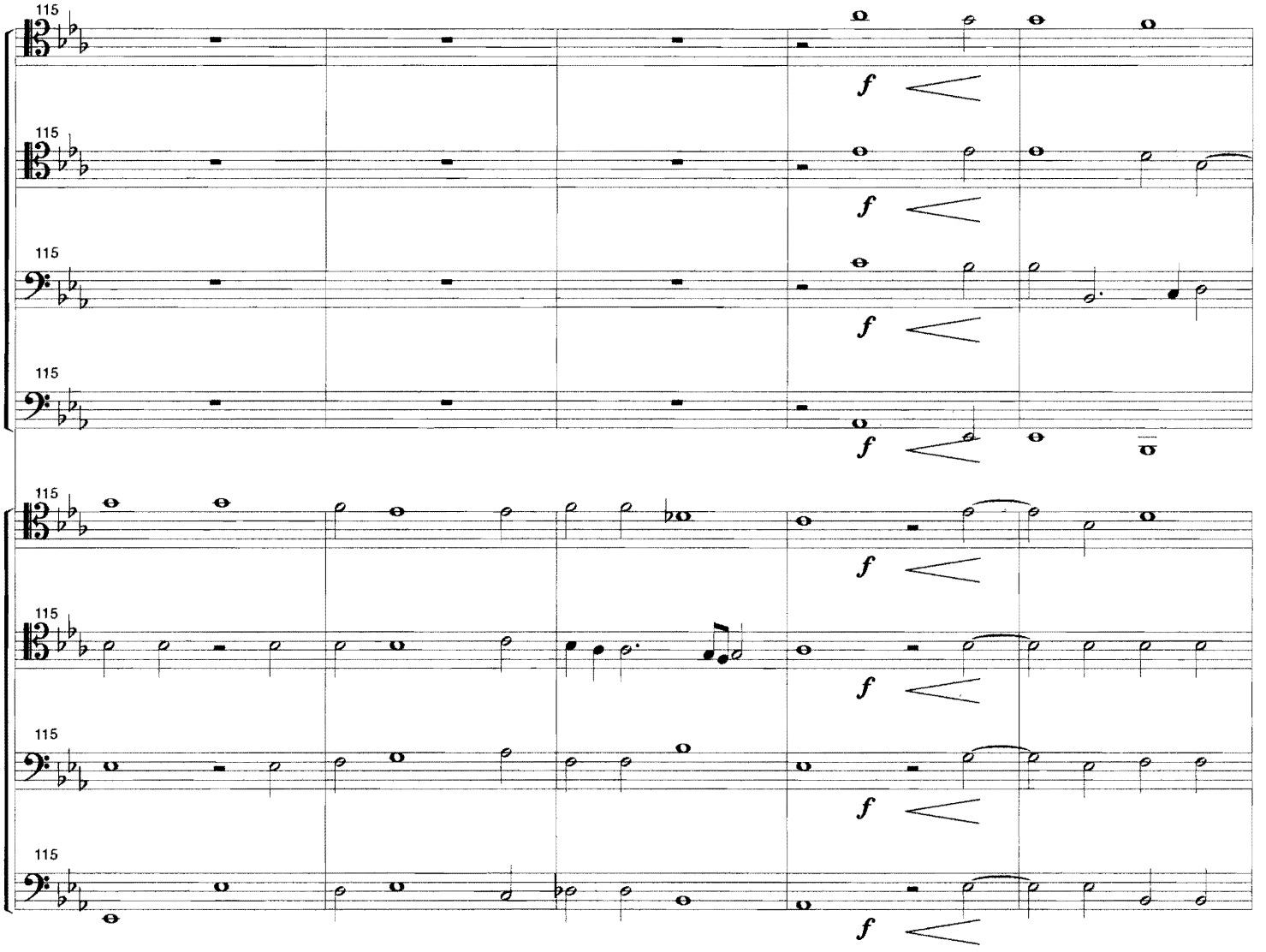
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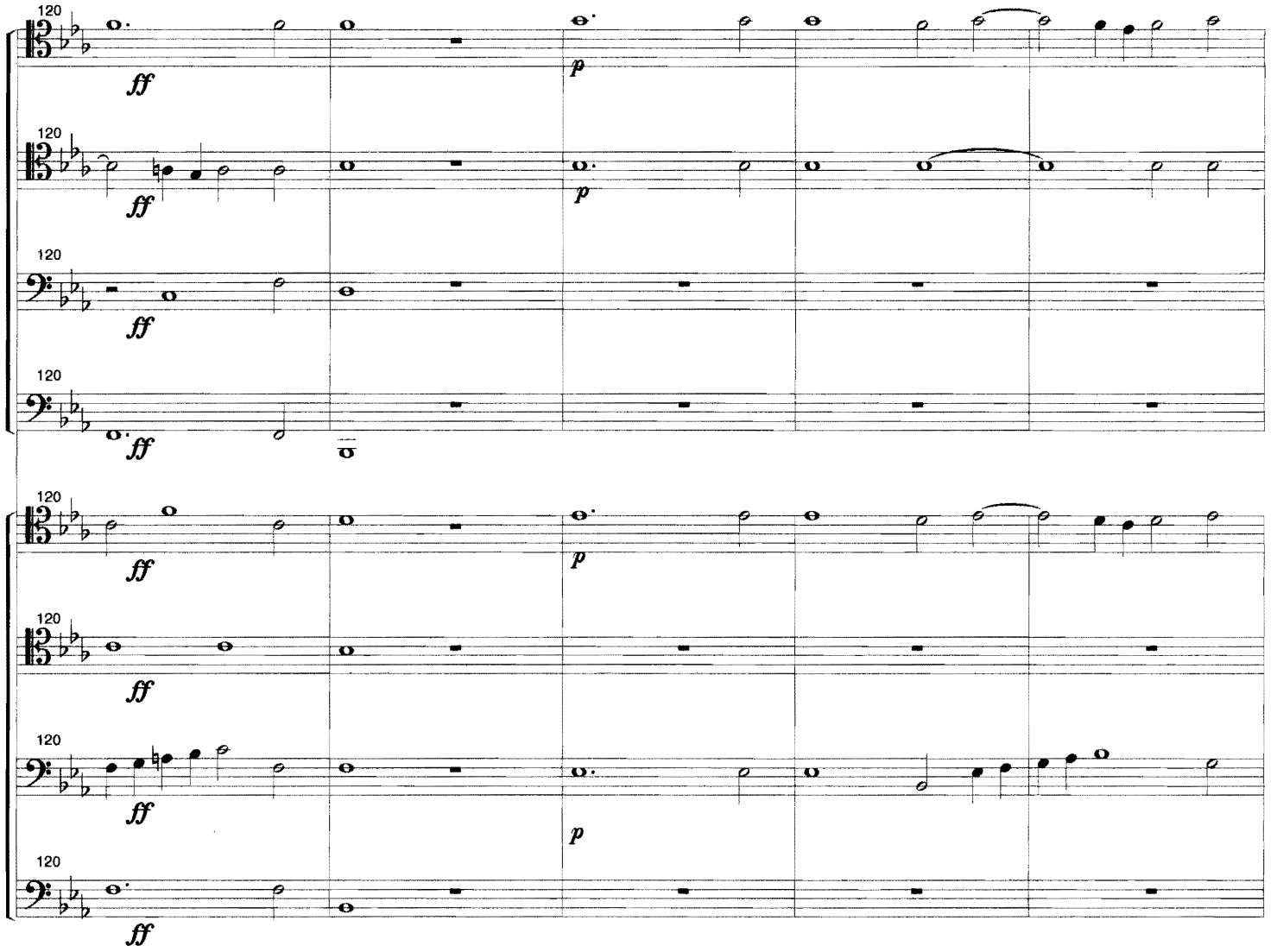
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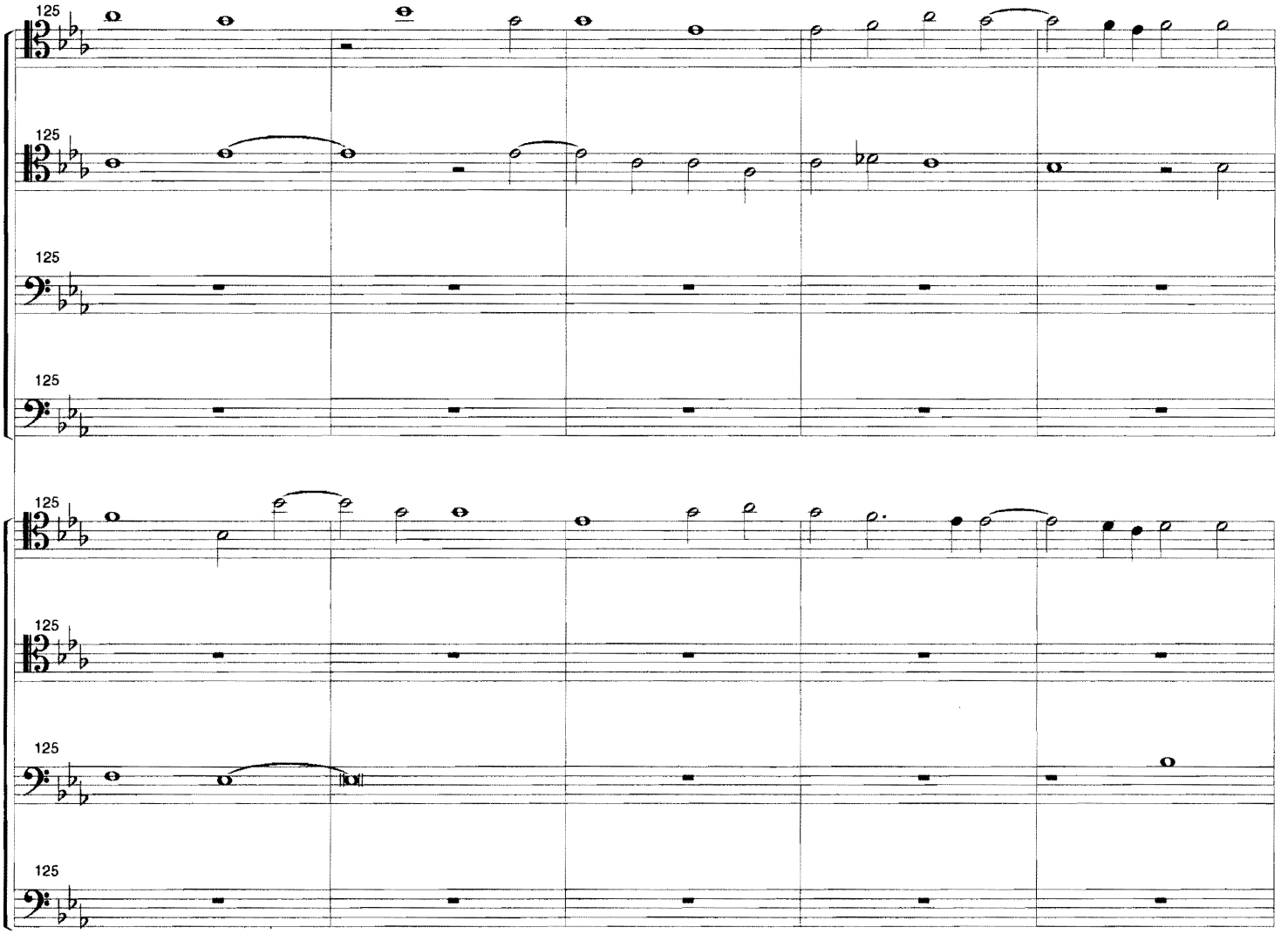
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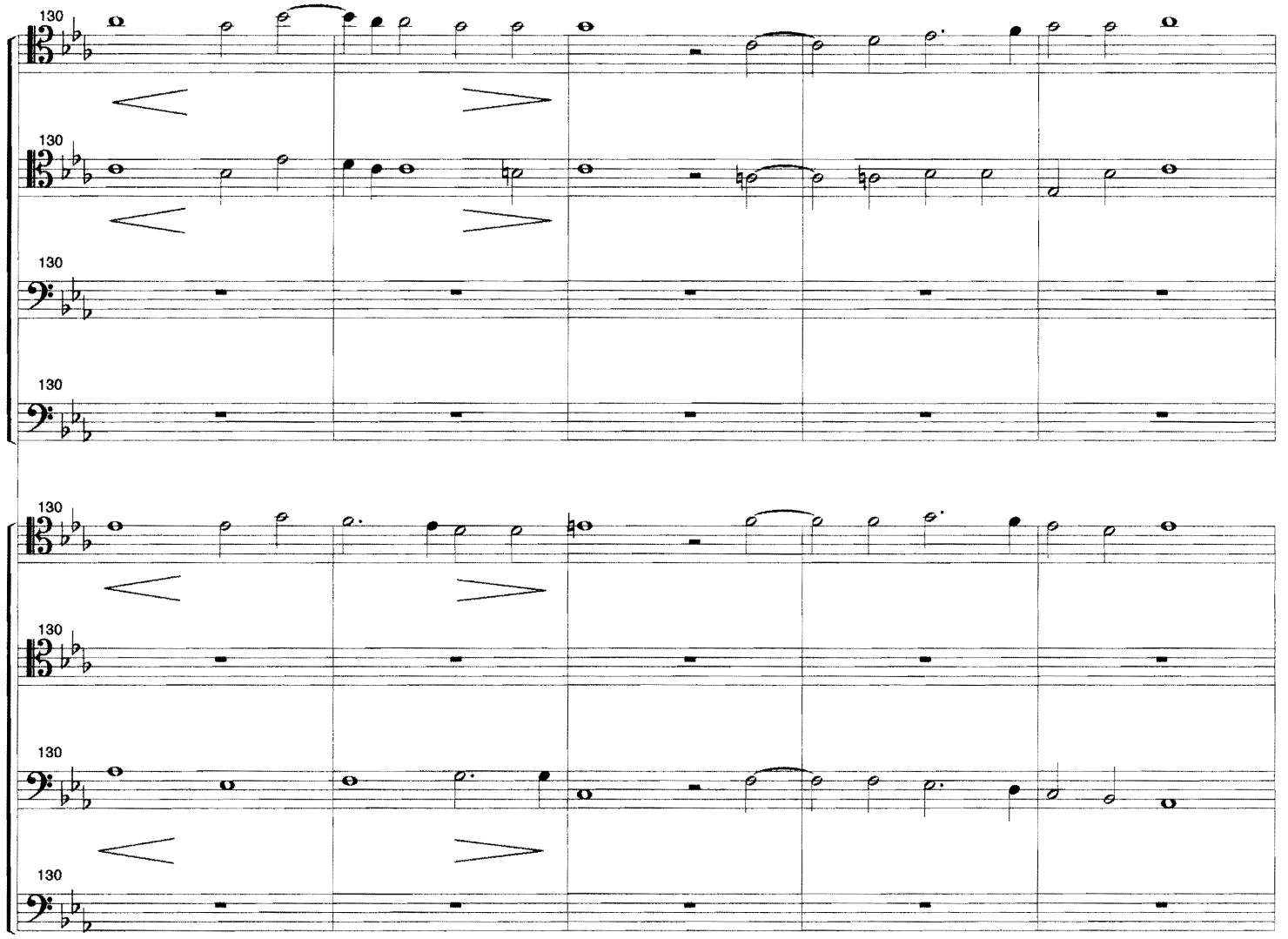
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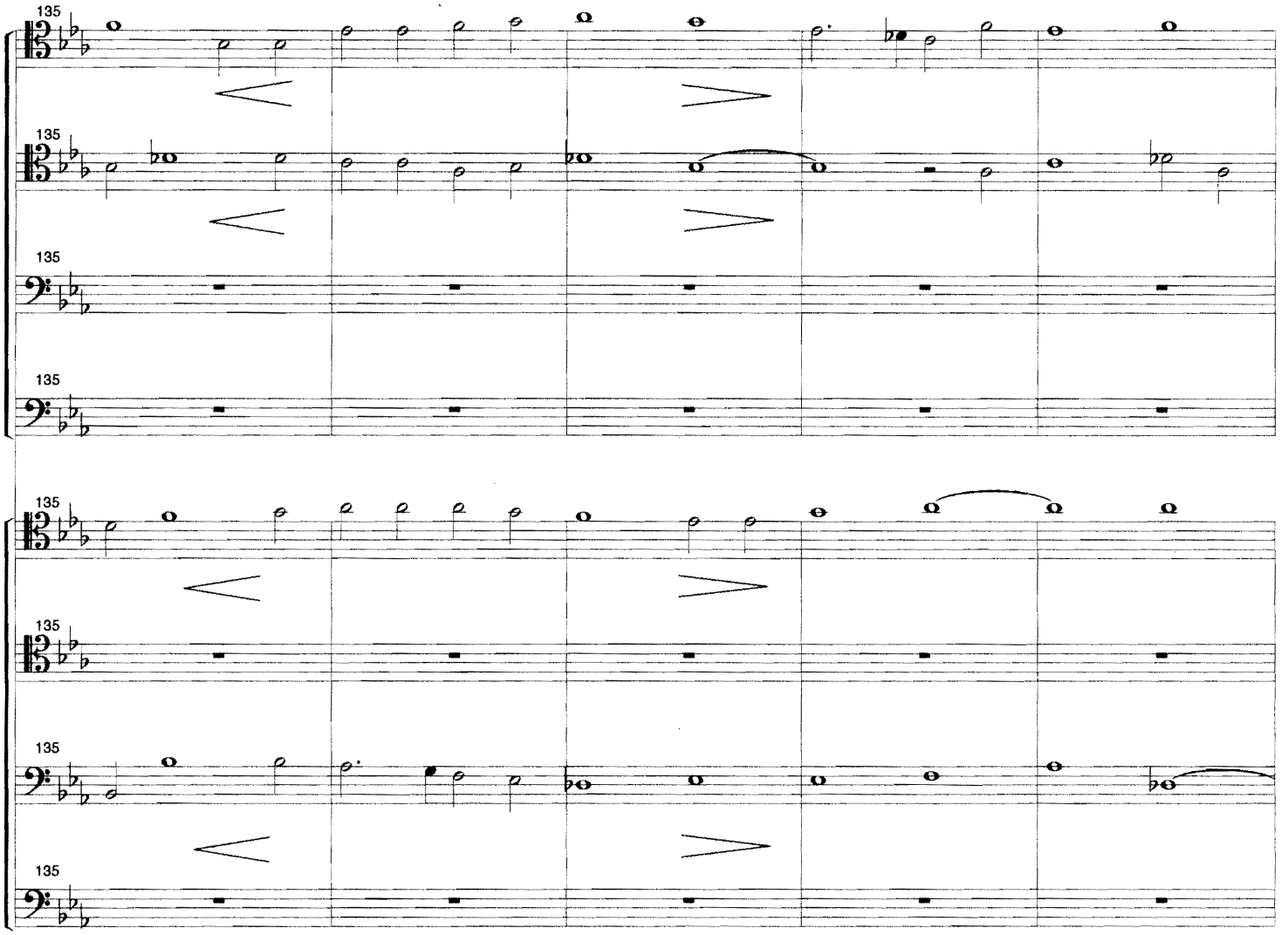
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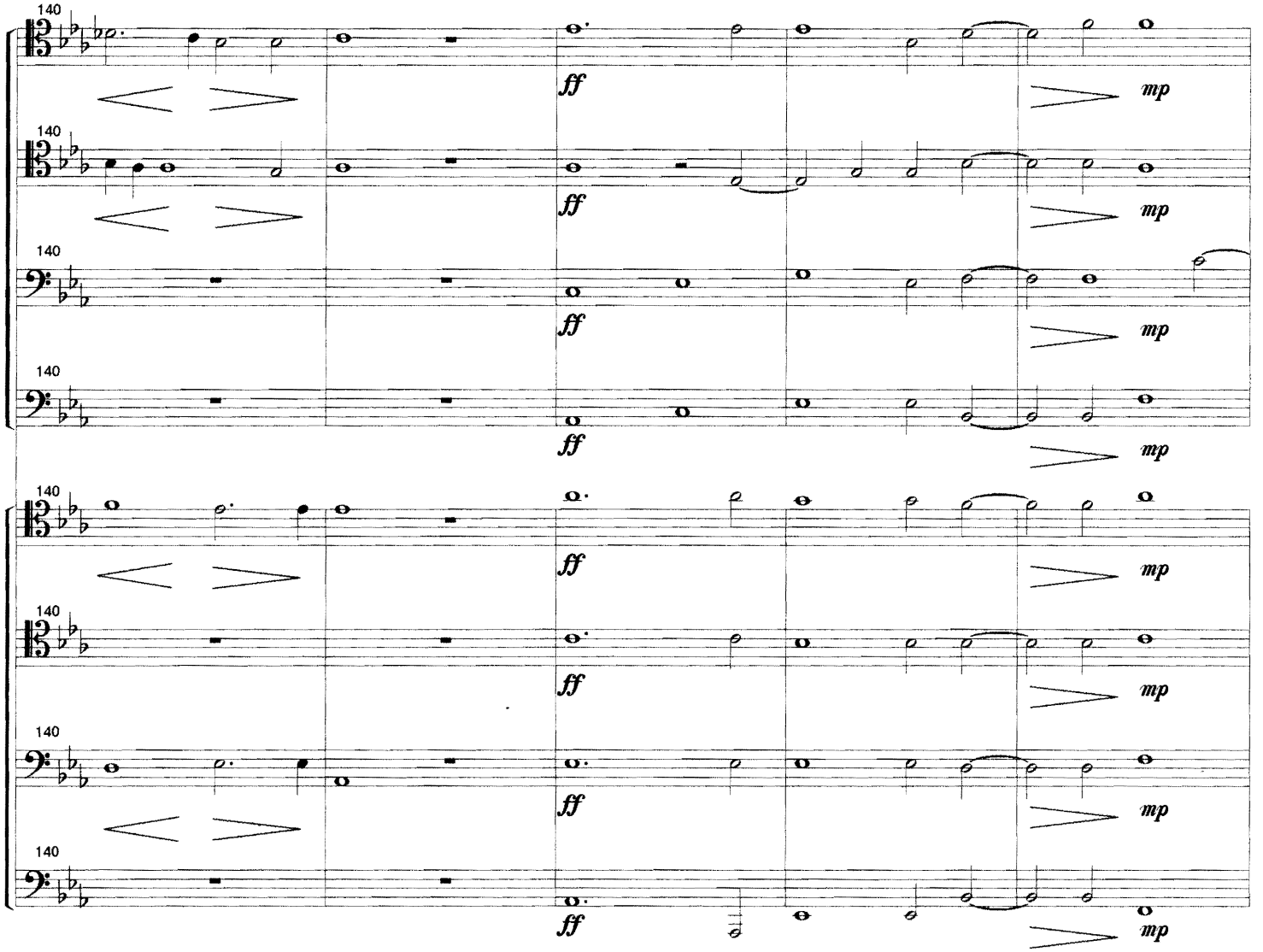
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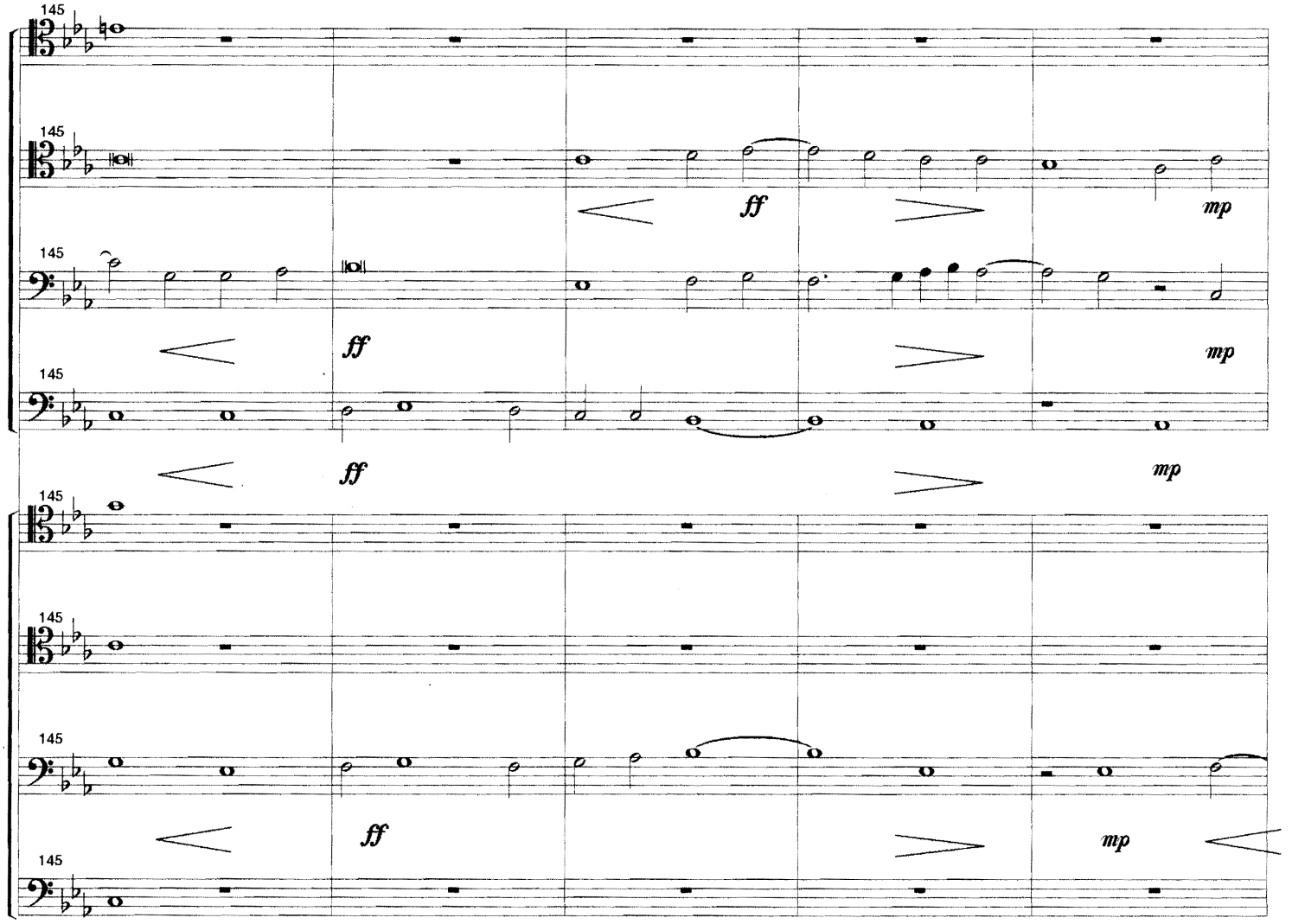
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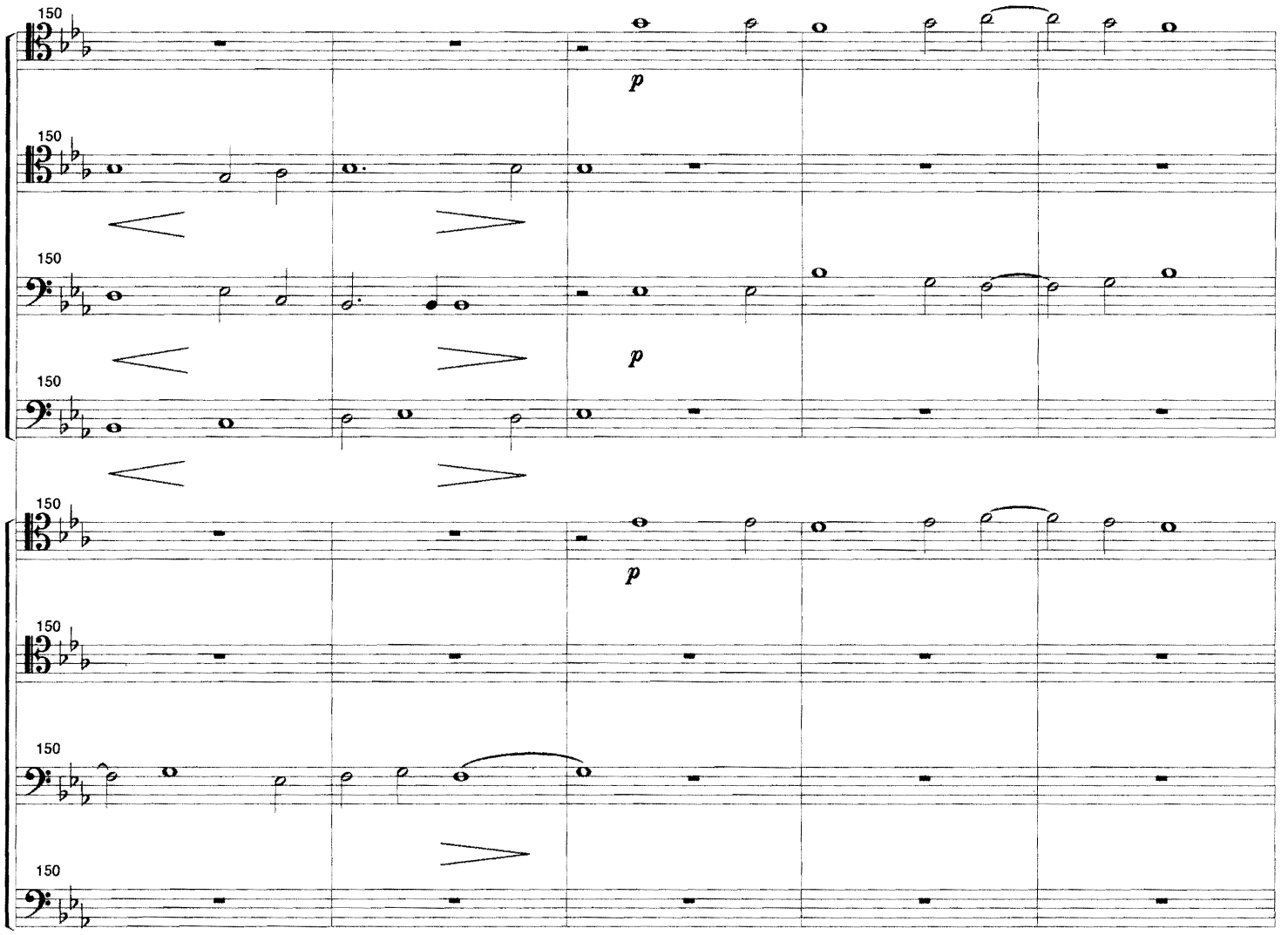
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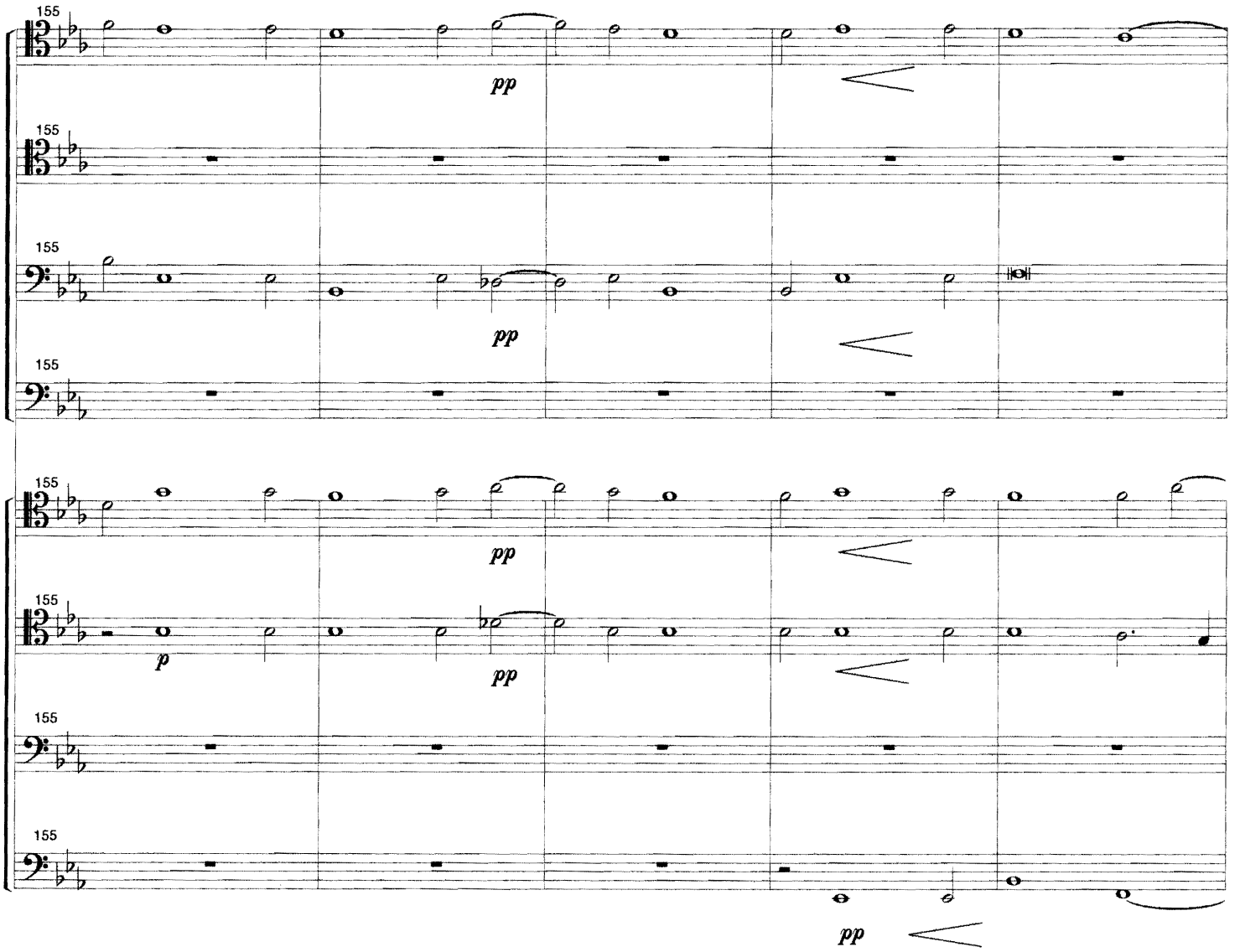
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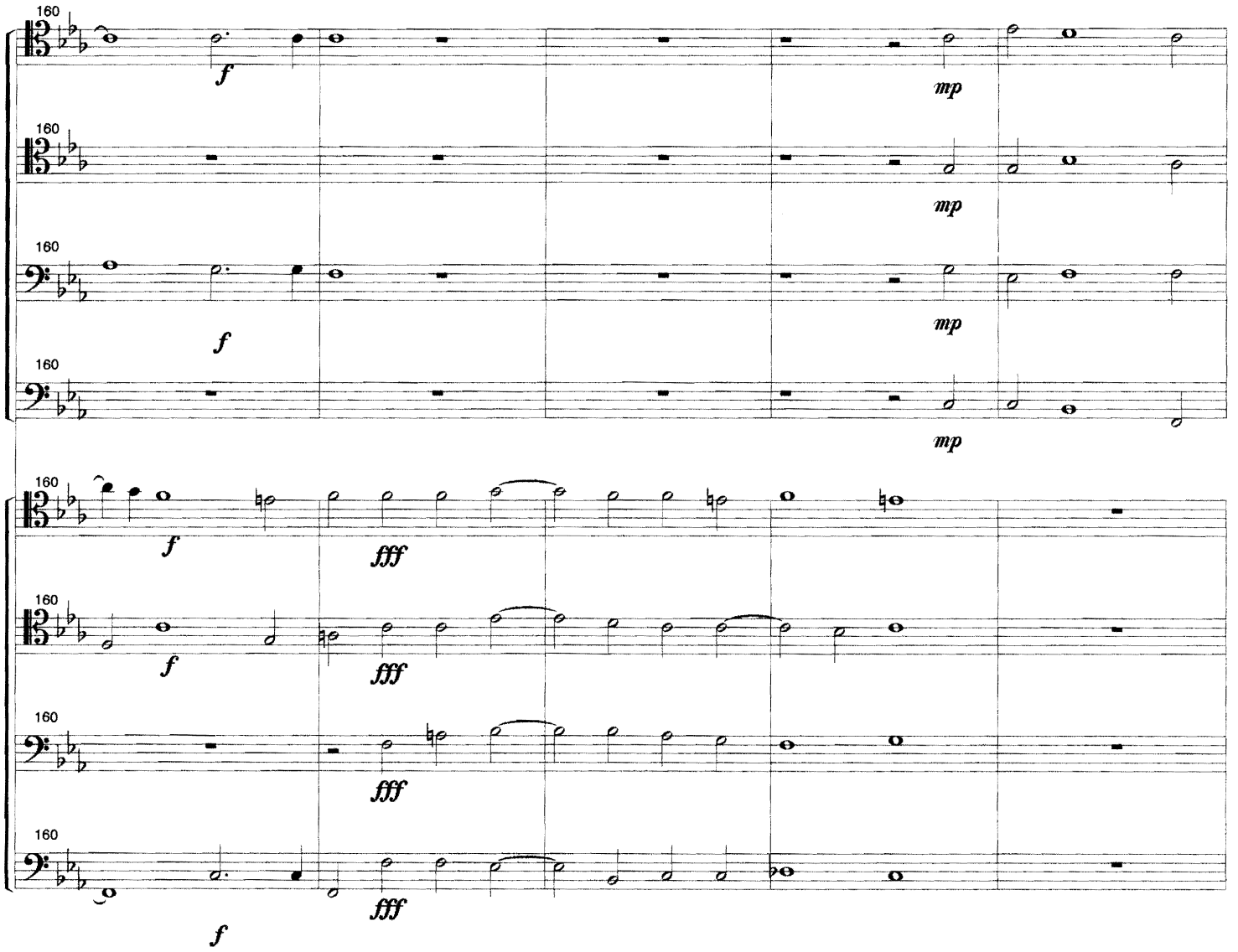
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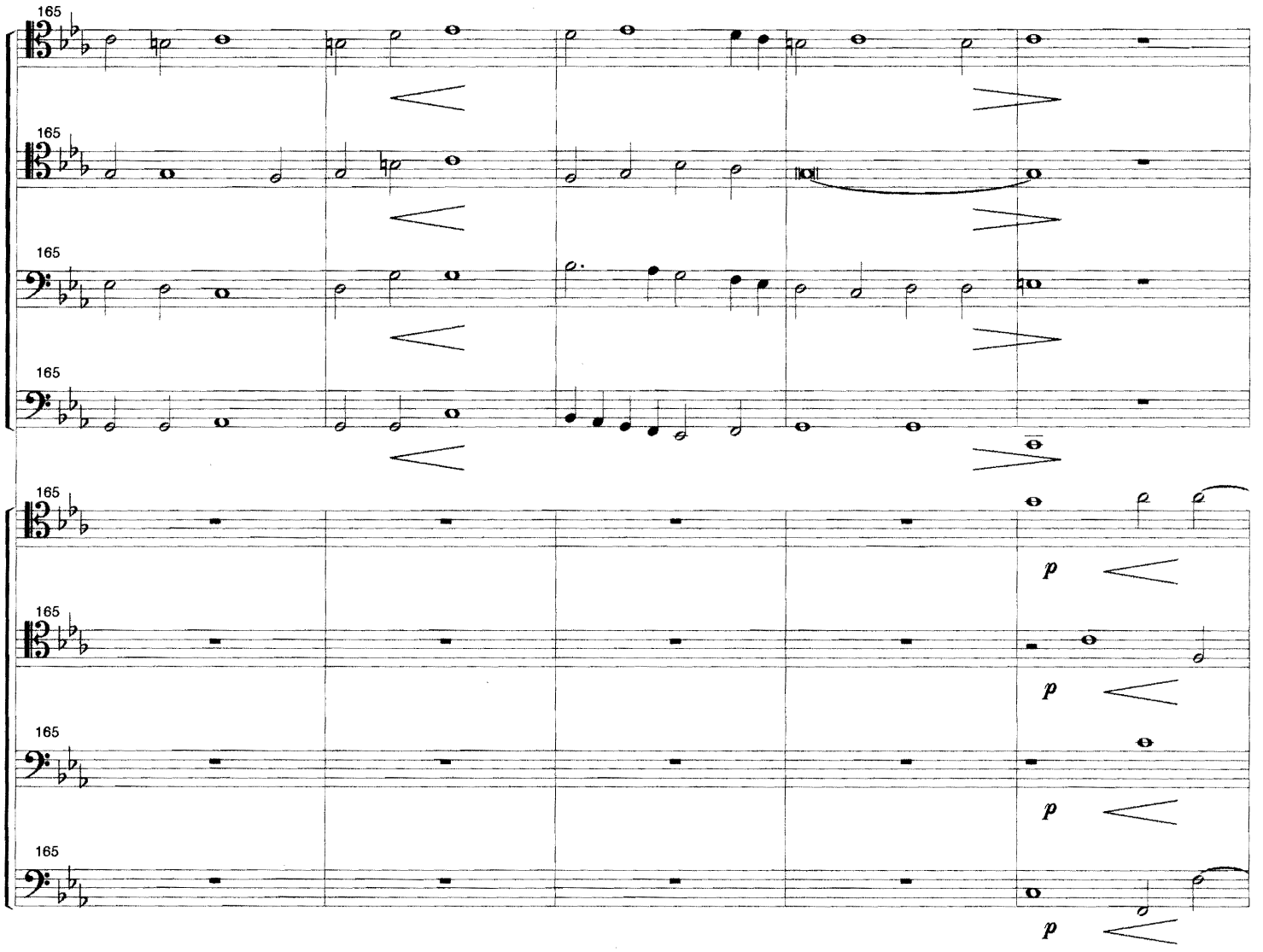
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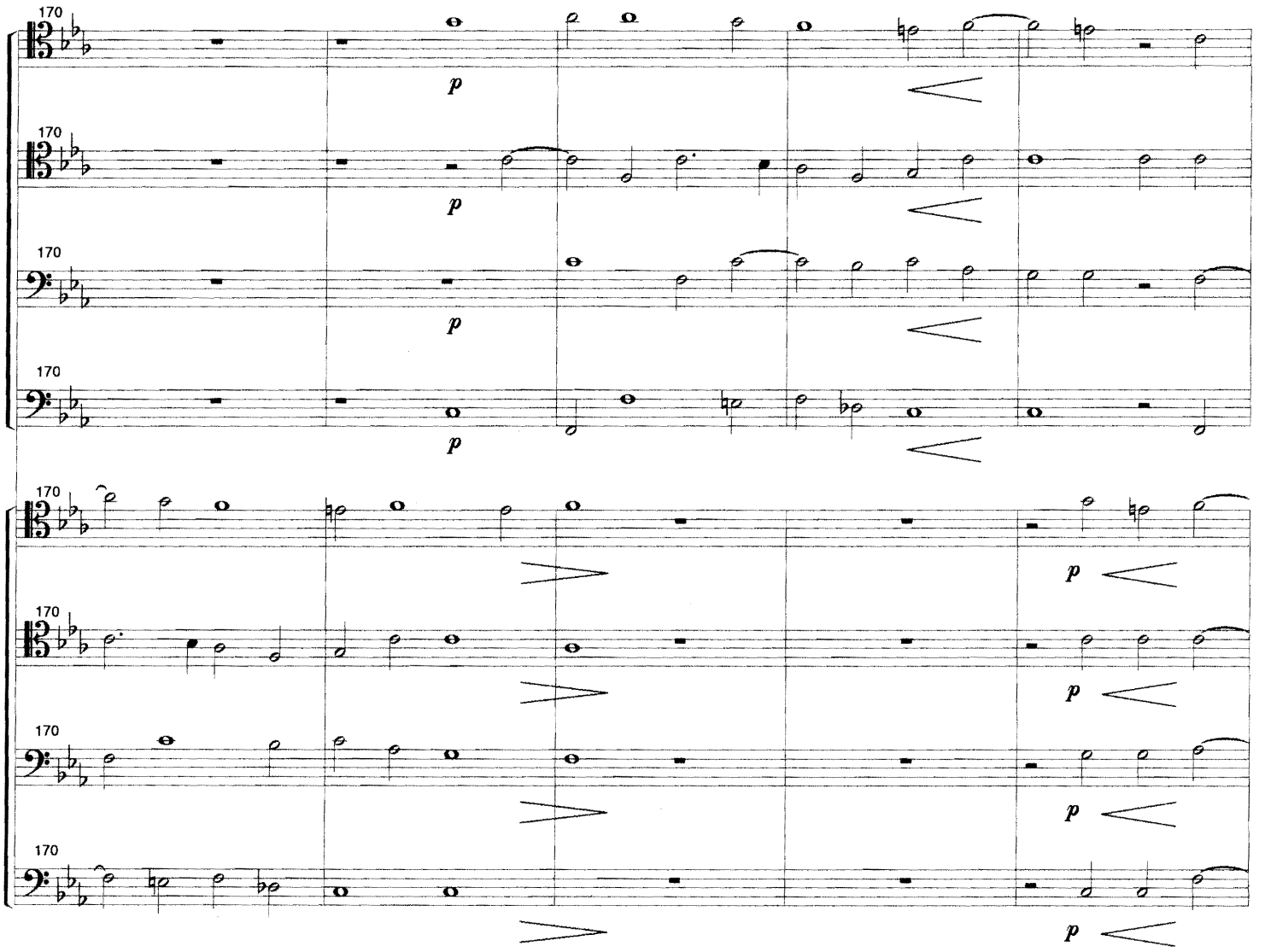
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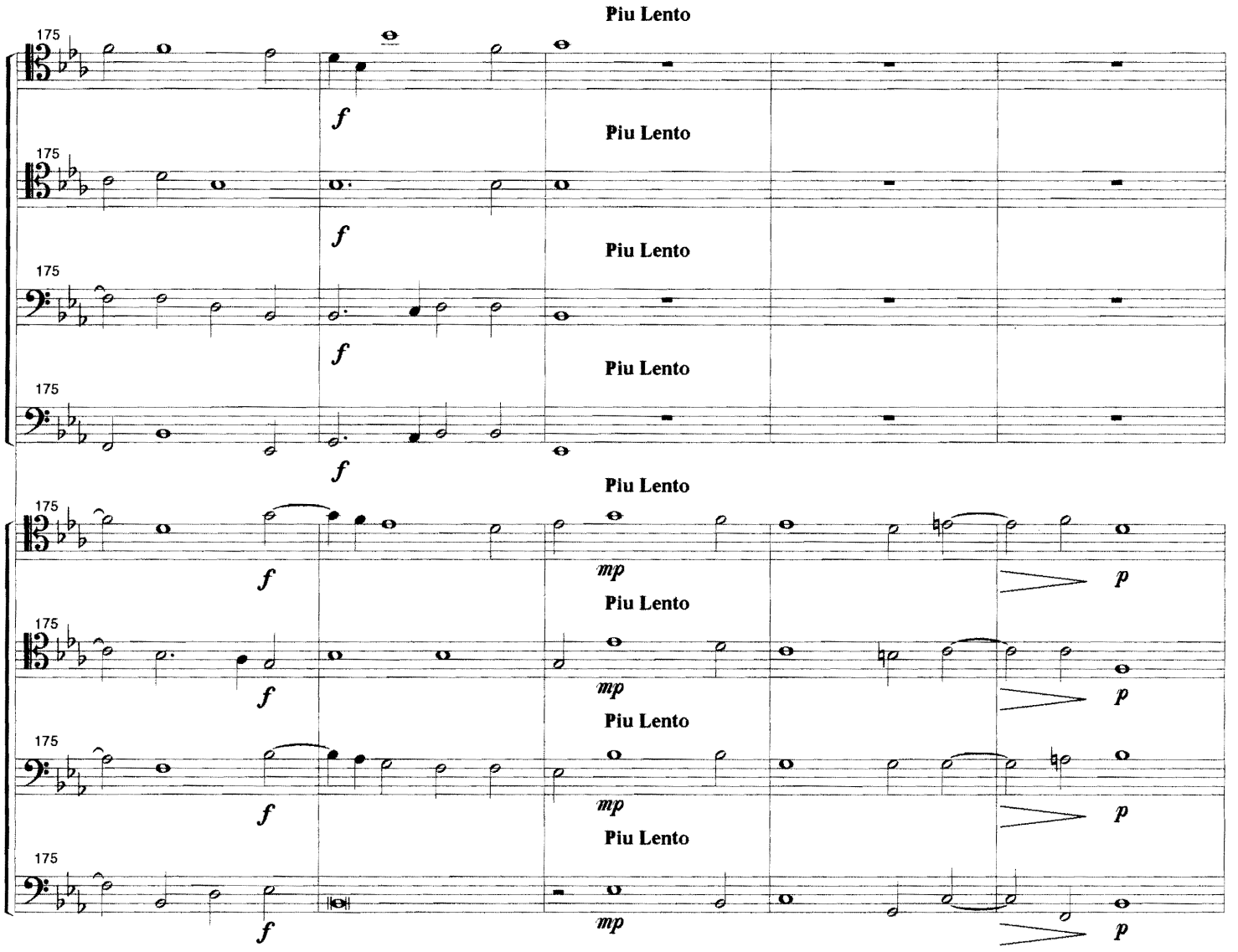
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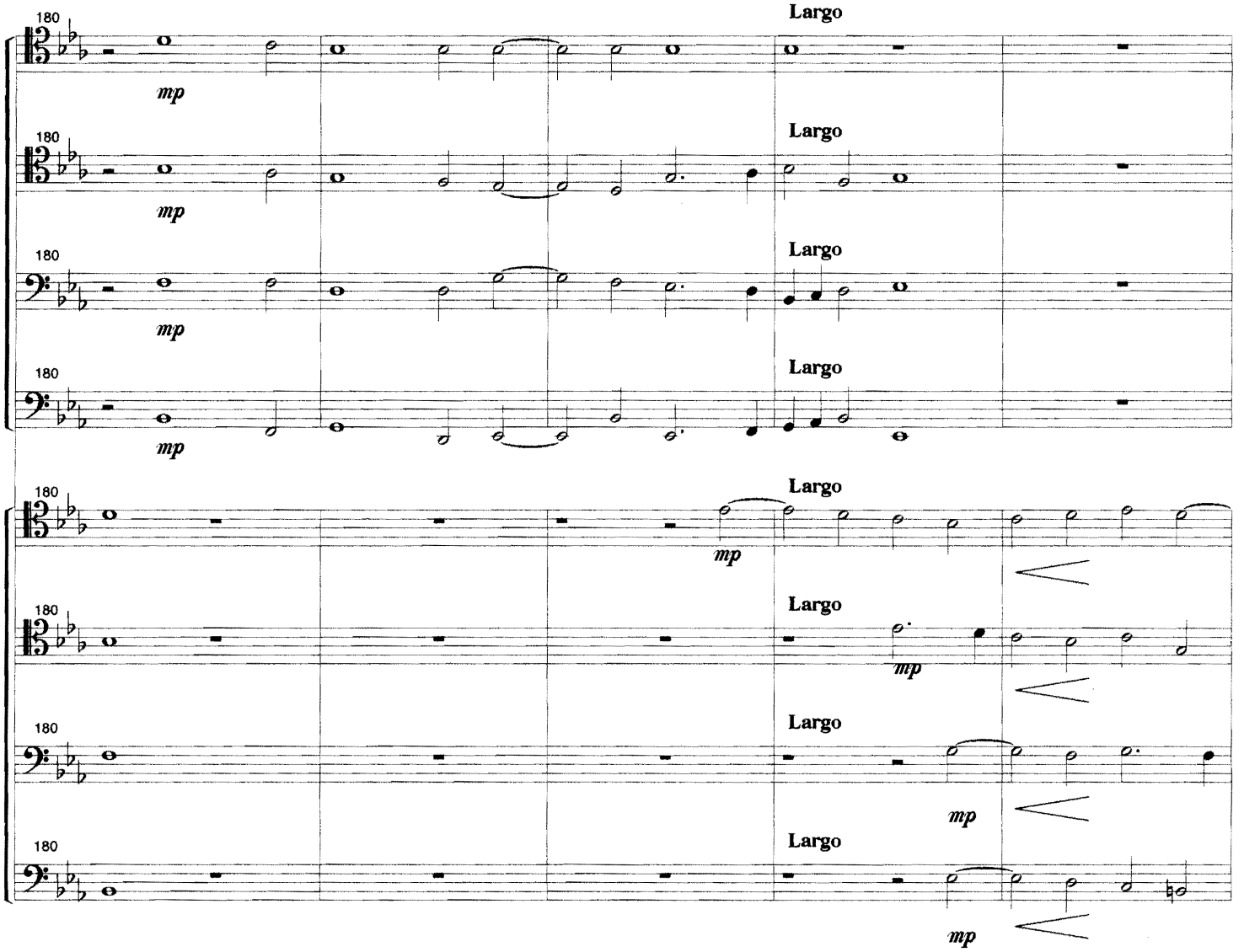
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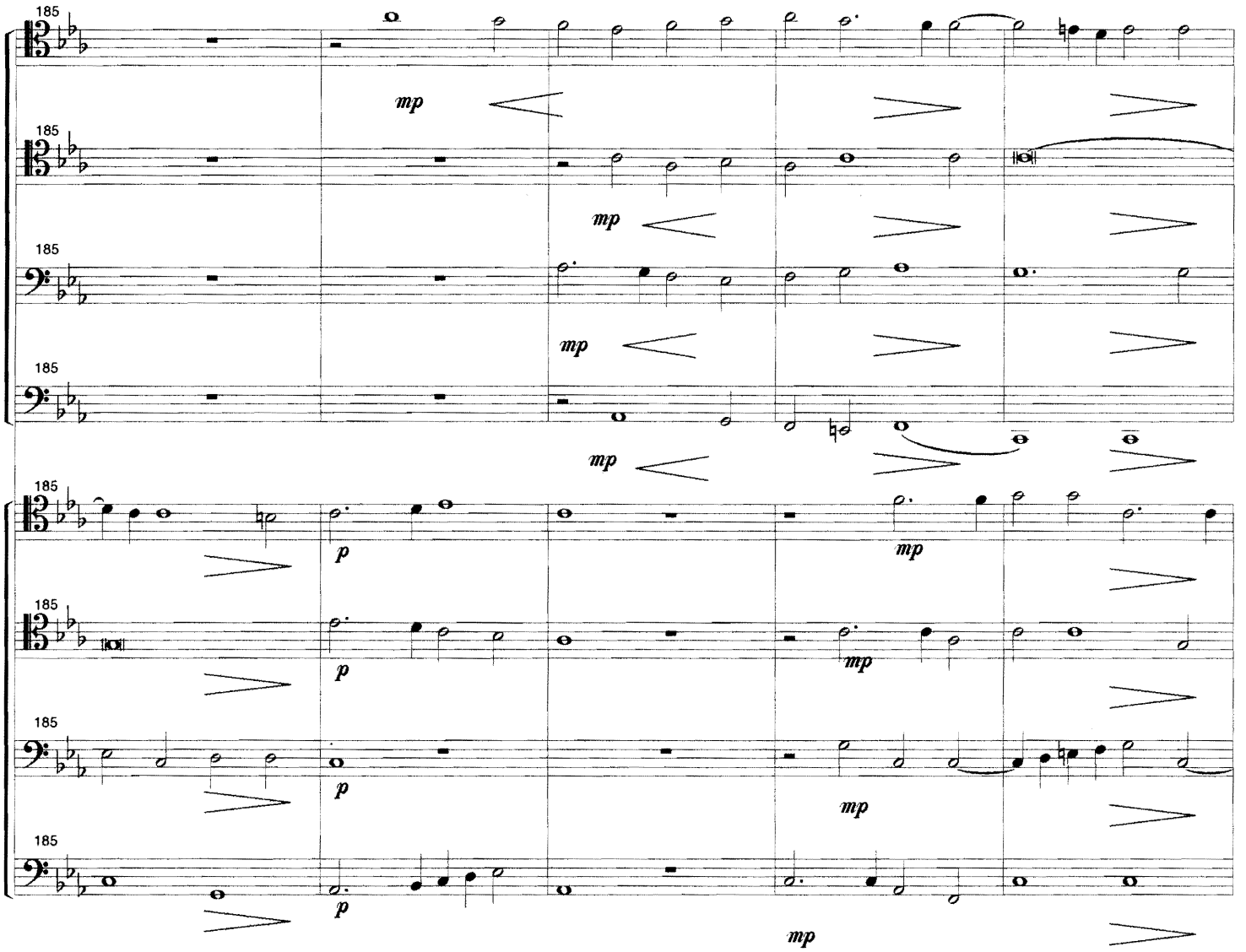
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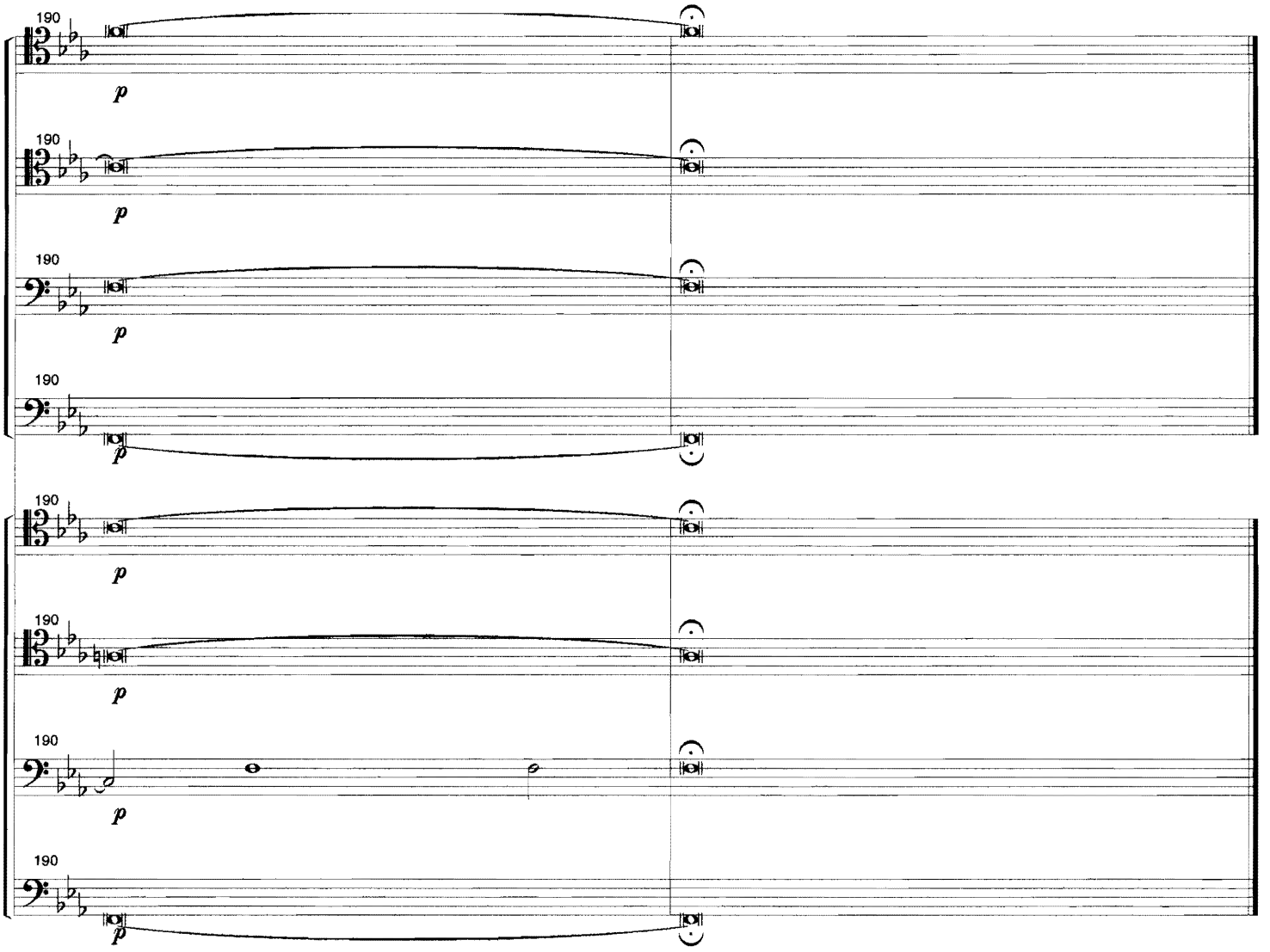
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