FOR FLUTE, VIBRAPHONE, CELESTA, PIANO

An Camchéachta

Nicholas Gish

NG MUSIC

An Camchéachta

Instrumentation

Flute

Vibraphone

Celesta

Piano

Duration

4'40"

Program Notes

This piece is entitled (in Irish) "An Camchéachta," which translates to "The (bent) Plough." This is the Irish name for the constellation called the "Big Dipper" (Ursa Major). The work is essentially a musical portrait of the constellation but also takes into account the Irish and Welsh mythology around the first person to yoke an oxen. The political significance of the plough symbol is also taken up.

The image carries a deep mythological inheritance. In a strand of Celtic tradition preserved most clearly in Welsh sources, the constellations themselves trace the figure of the first ploughman. Boötes the herdsman – identified with Hu Gadarn, the first man to yoke oxen to the plough – moves westward across the sky, drawing through Ursa Major and on toward Taurus, the oxen at the head of the yoke. The first ploughing is not merely an event remembered but an event continually re-enacted, wheeling silently around Polaris each night. The plough that broke the first furrow is the same plough turning, even now, above the field.

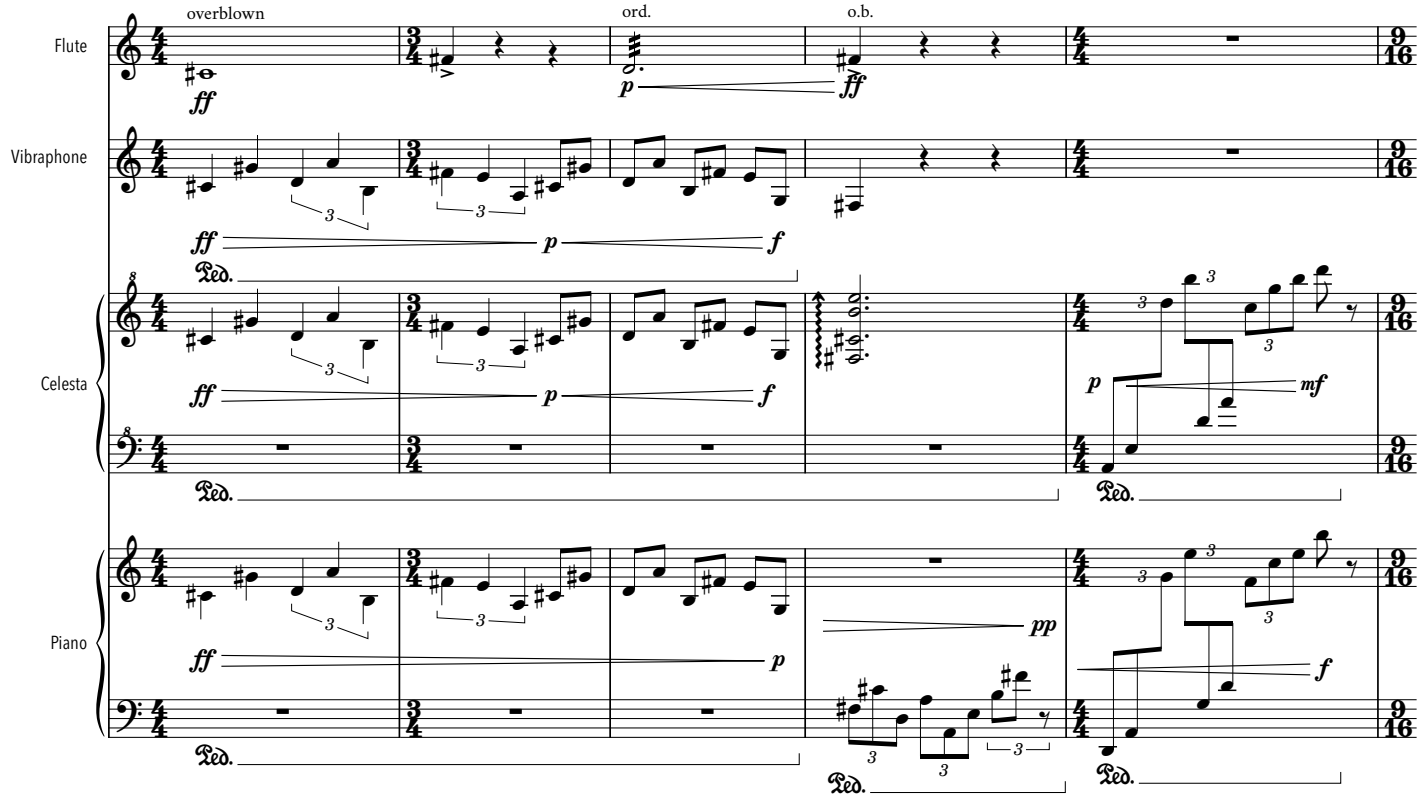
This is also a calendrical figure. Across the agricultural year *An Camchéachta* rises and falls and rotates around the pole, its handle pointing now here, now there – a slow celestial clock that bound the rhythm of work in the fields to the rhythm of the heavens above them. To name a constellation a plough is to insist that the practice of breaking and turning the earth has its origin, and its measure, in the sky.

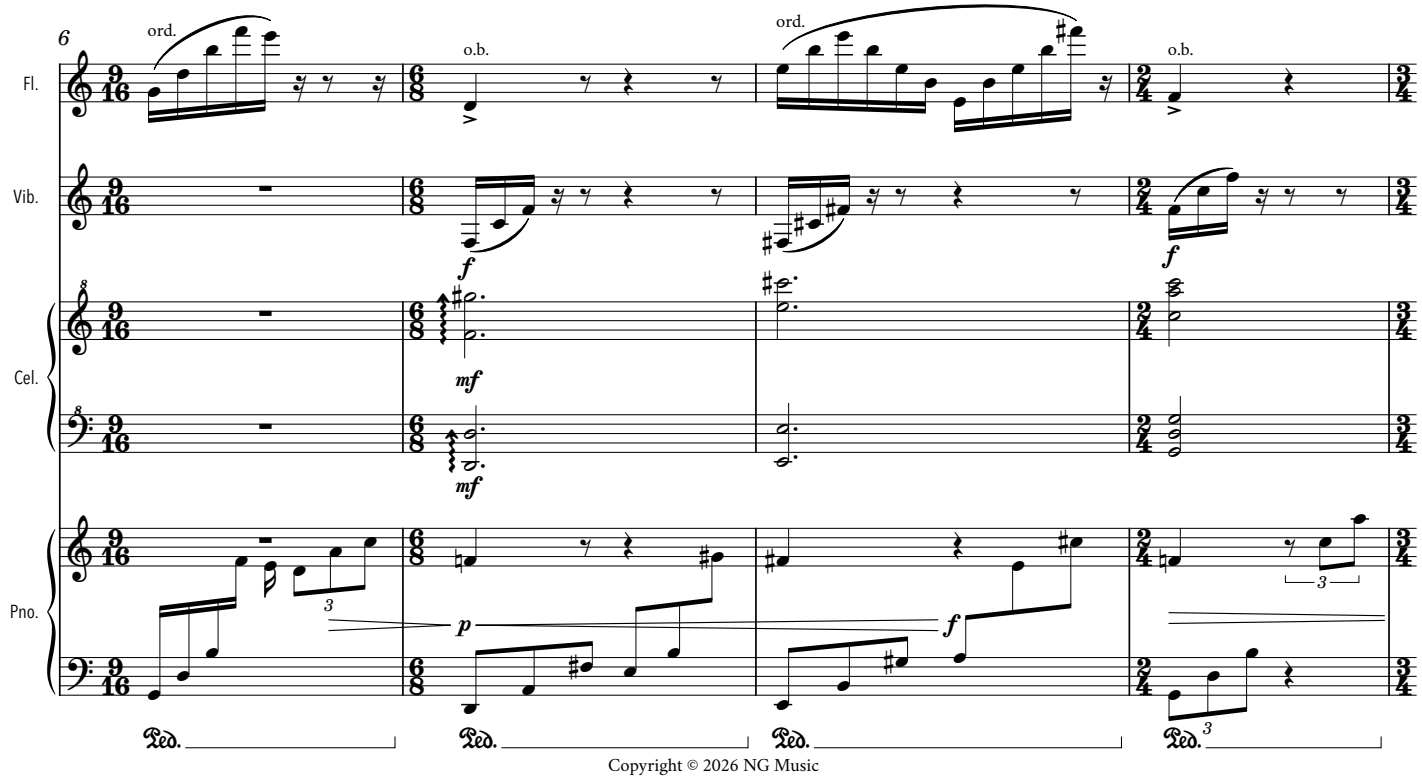
The image is also politically charged. In 1914 the constellation gave its name to the Starry Plough – *An Camchéachta* – the banner of James Connolly's Irish Citizen Army, flown over the Imperial Hotel during the 1916 Rising. Connolly's gloss on the flag turned the plough's vertical reach into a manifesto: a free Ireland, he said, would own everything from the plough to the stars. The same image that joins blade to constellation, field to firmament, here joins labour to sovereignty. To invoke *An Camchéachta* in Ireland is, unavoidably, to invoke this lineage – the cosmic plough as the people's plough, and the night sky as a territory of legitimate claim.

An Camchéachta

Nicholas Gish

♩ = 130





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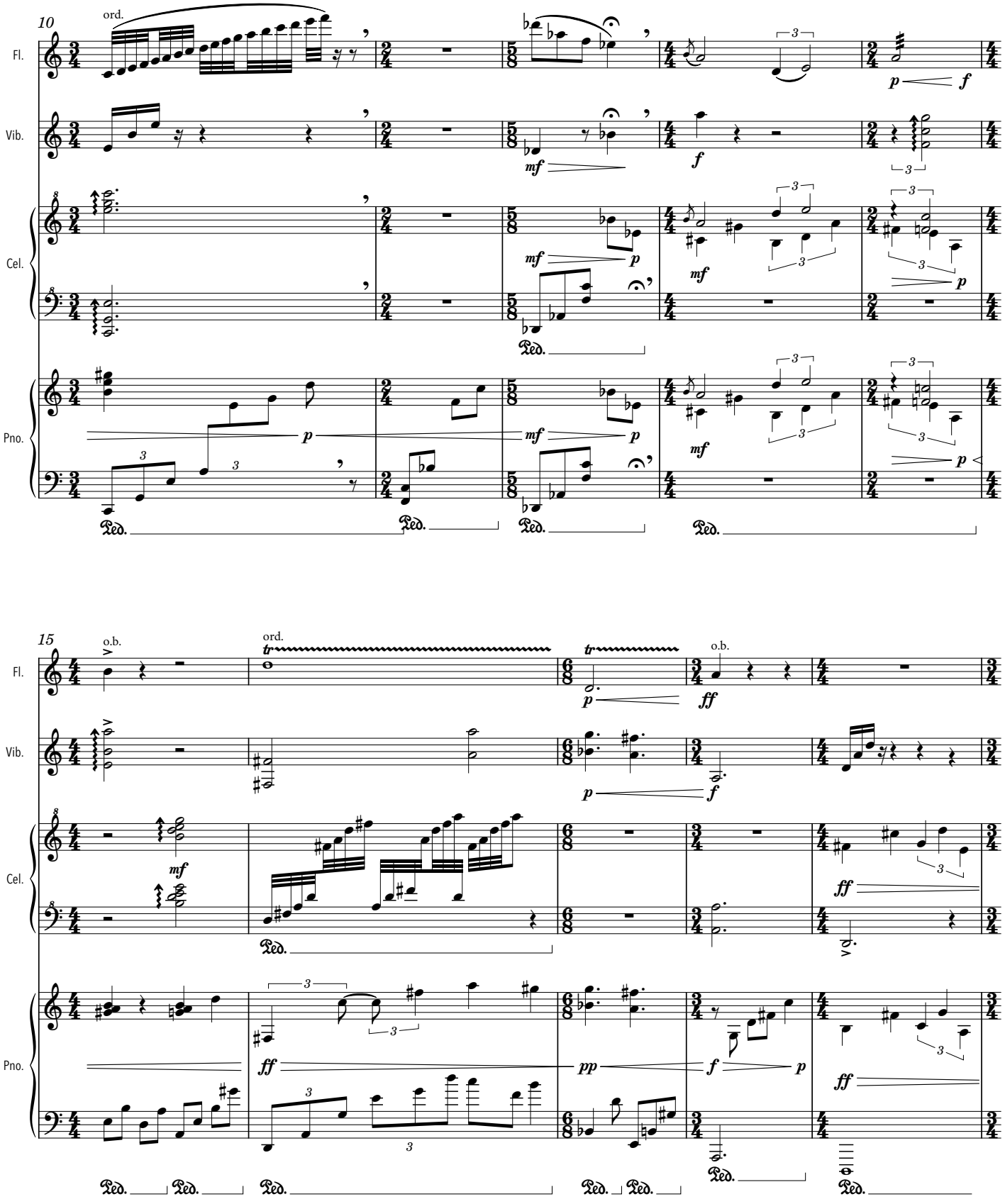
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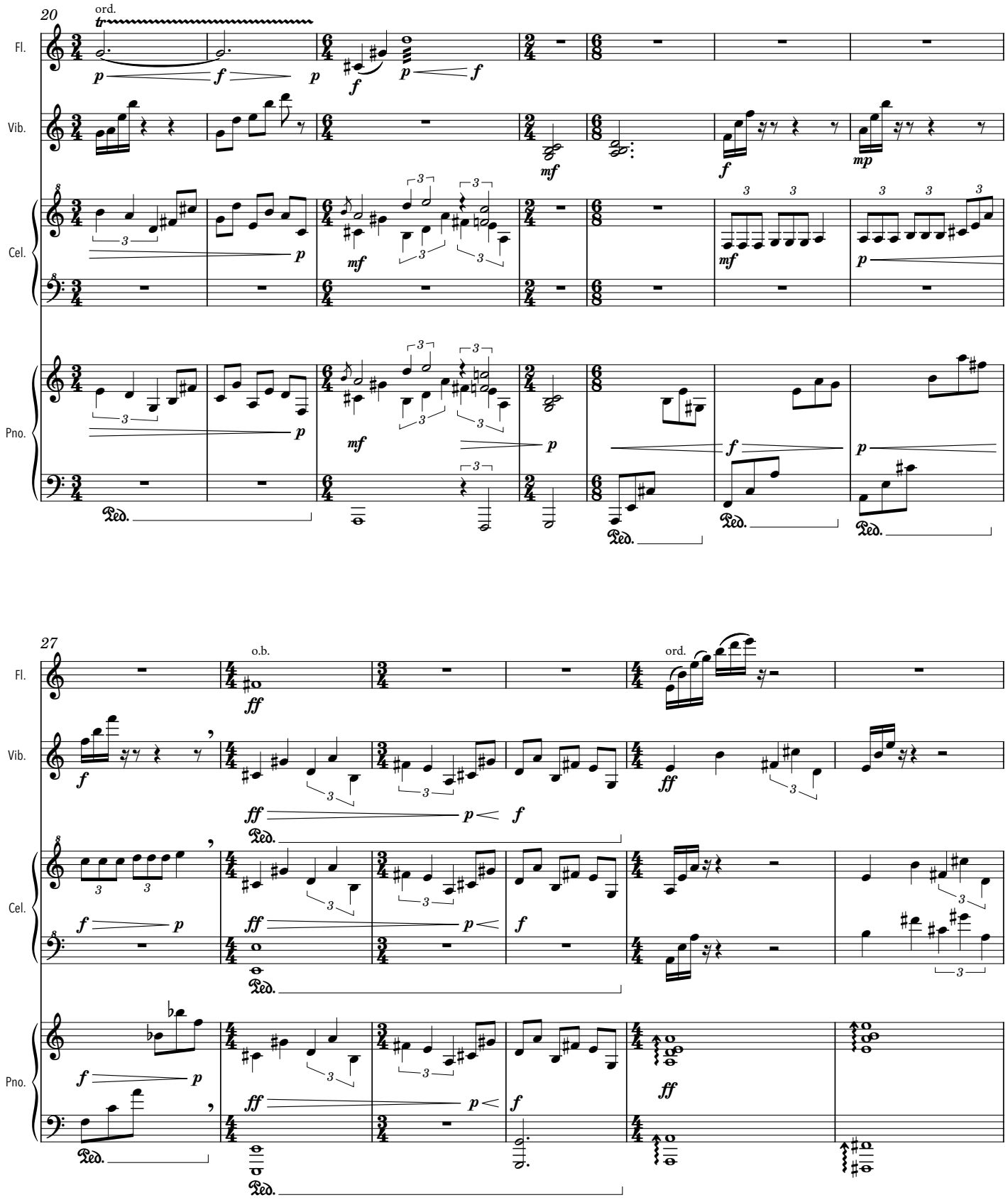
Vib.
Cel.
Pno.
15
o.b.
ord.
o.b.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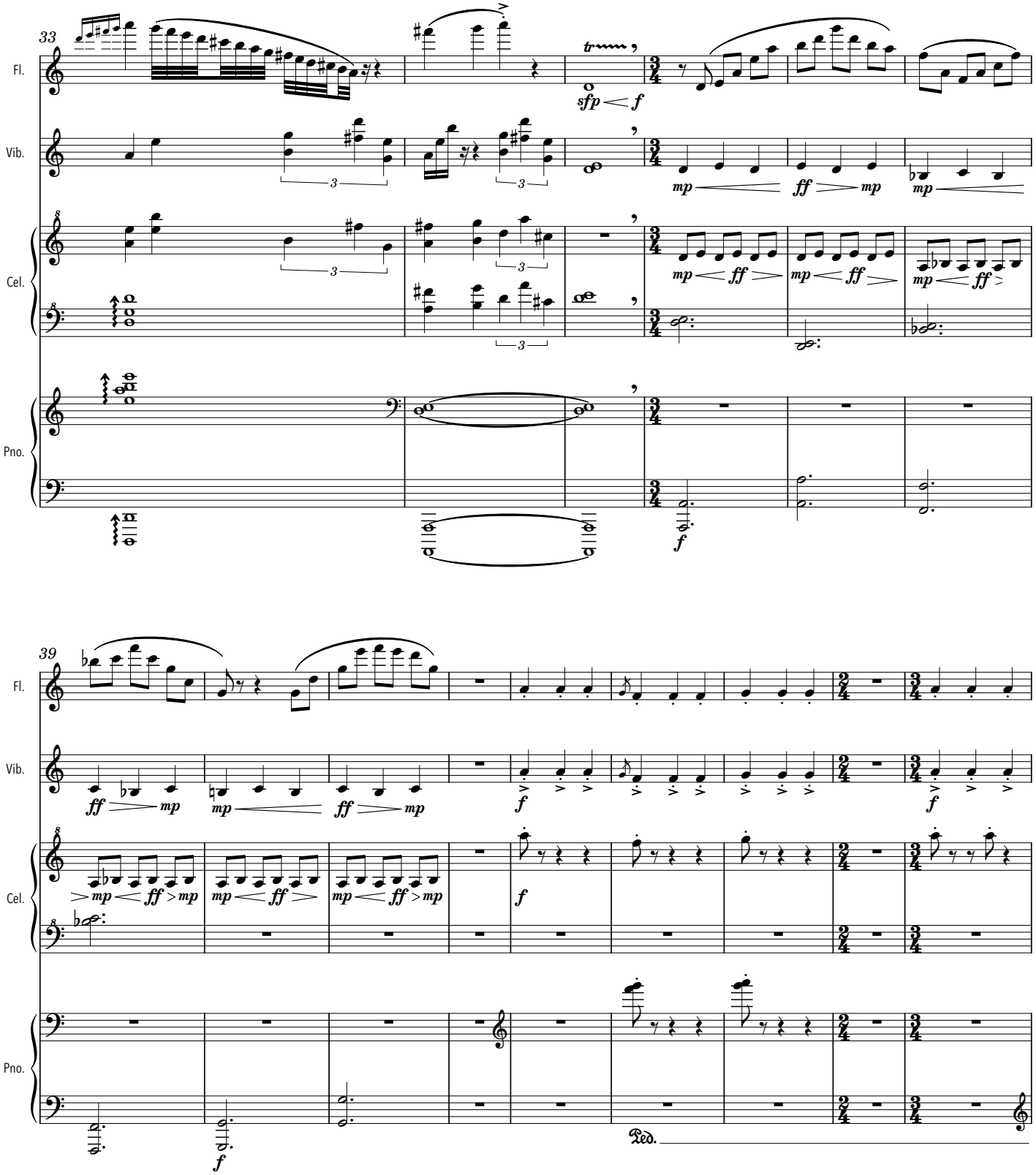
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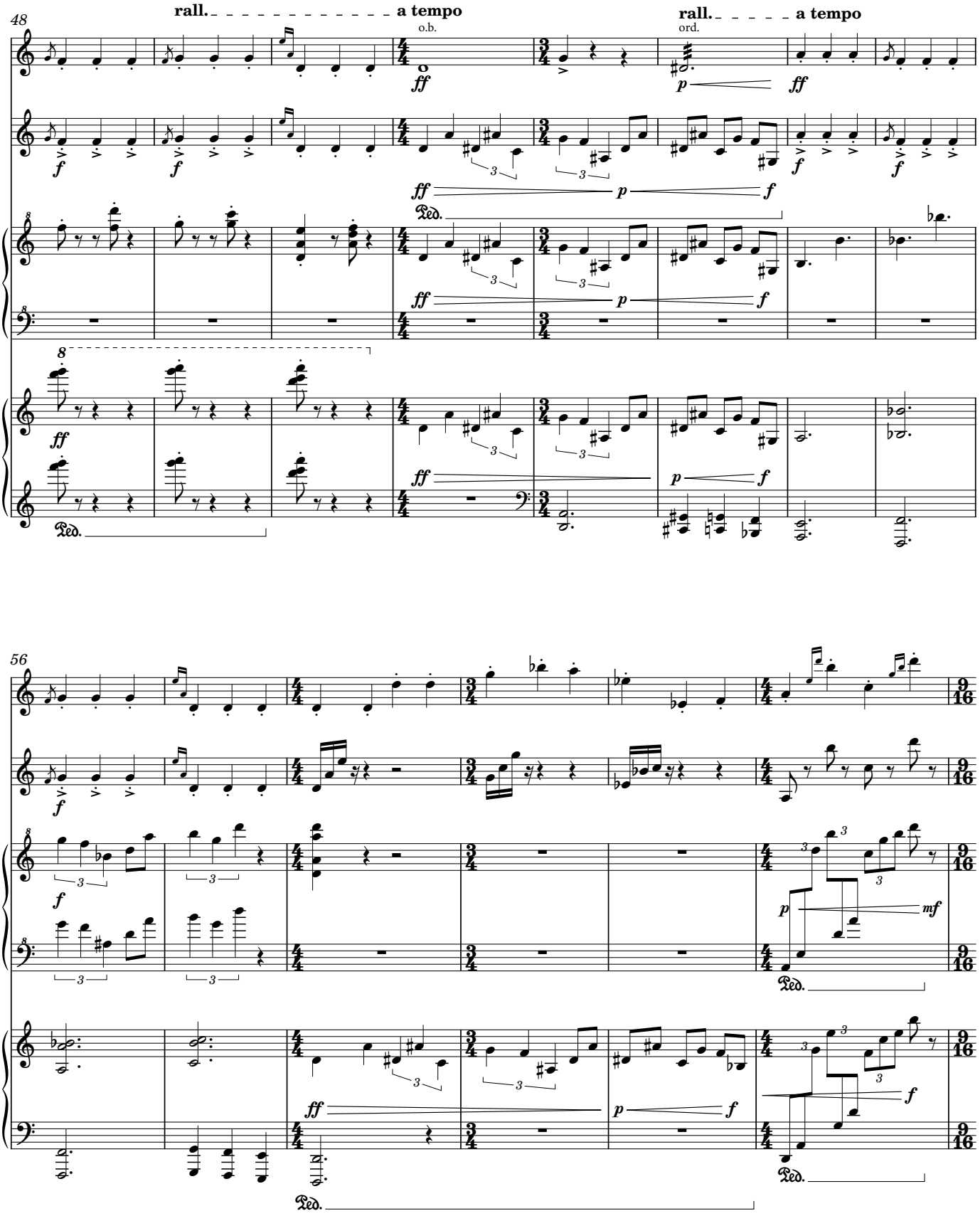
Pno.
Ped.


48
rall.
a tempo
o.b.
rall.
ord.
a tempo
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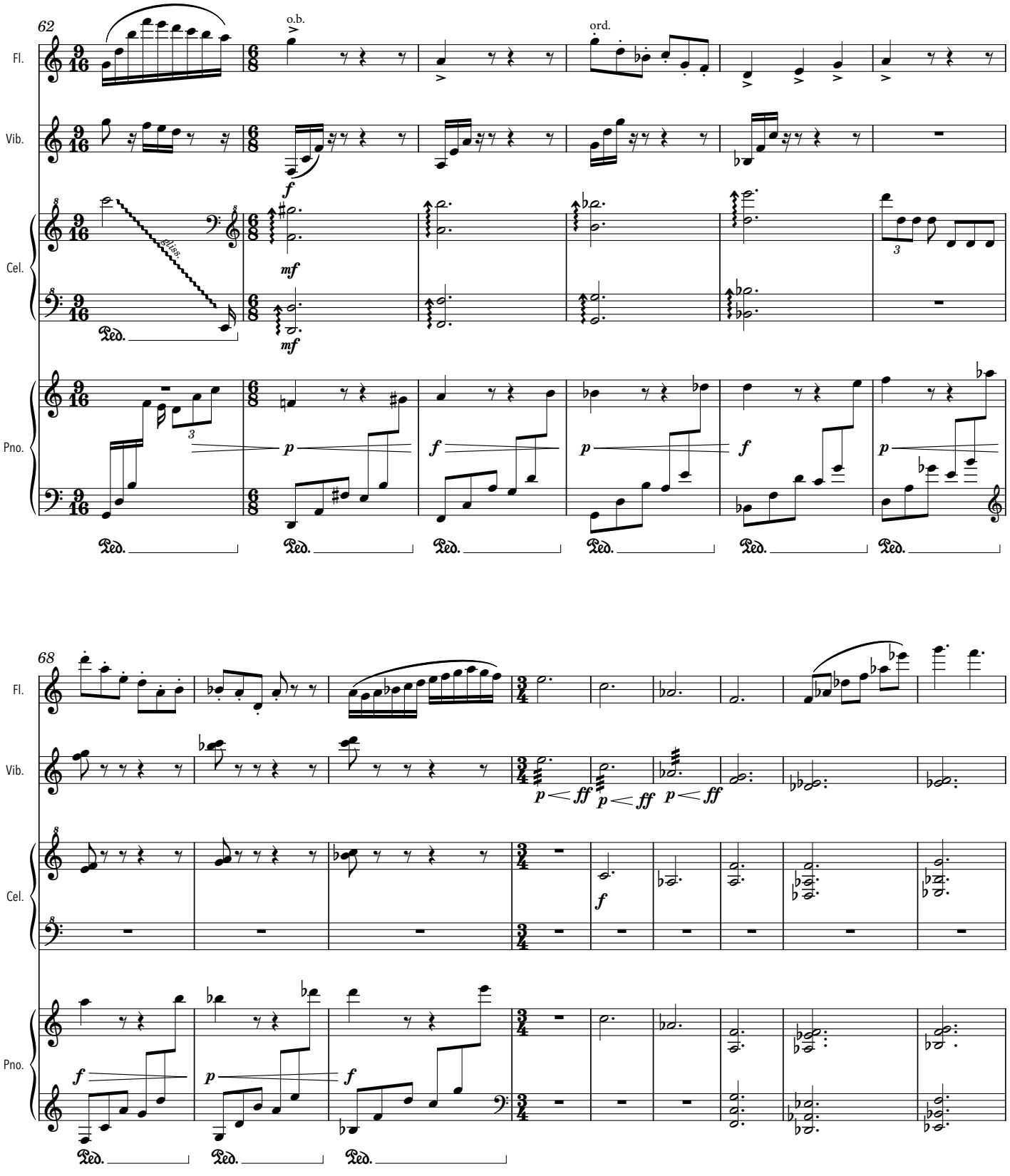
Pno.
ff
p
f
mf
Ped.
56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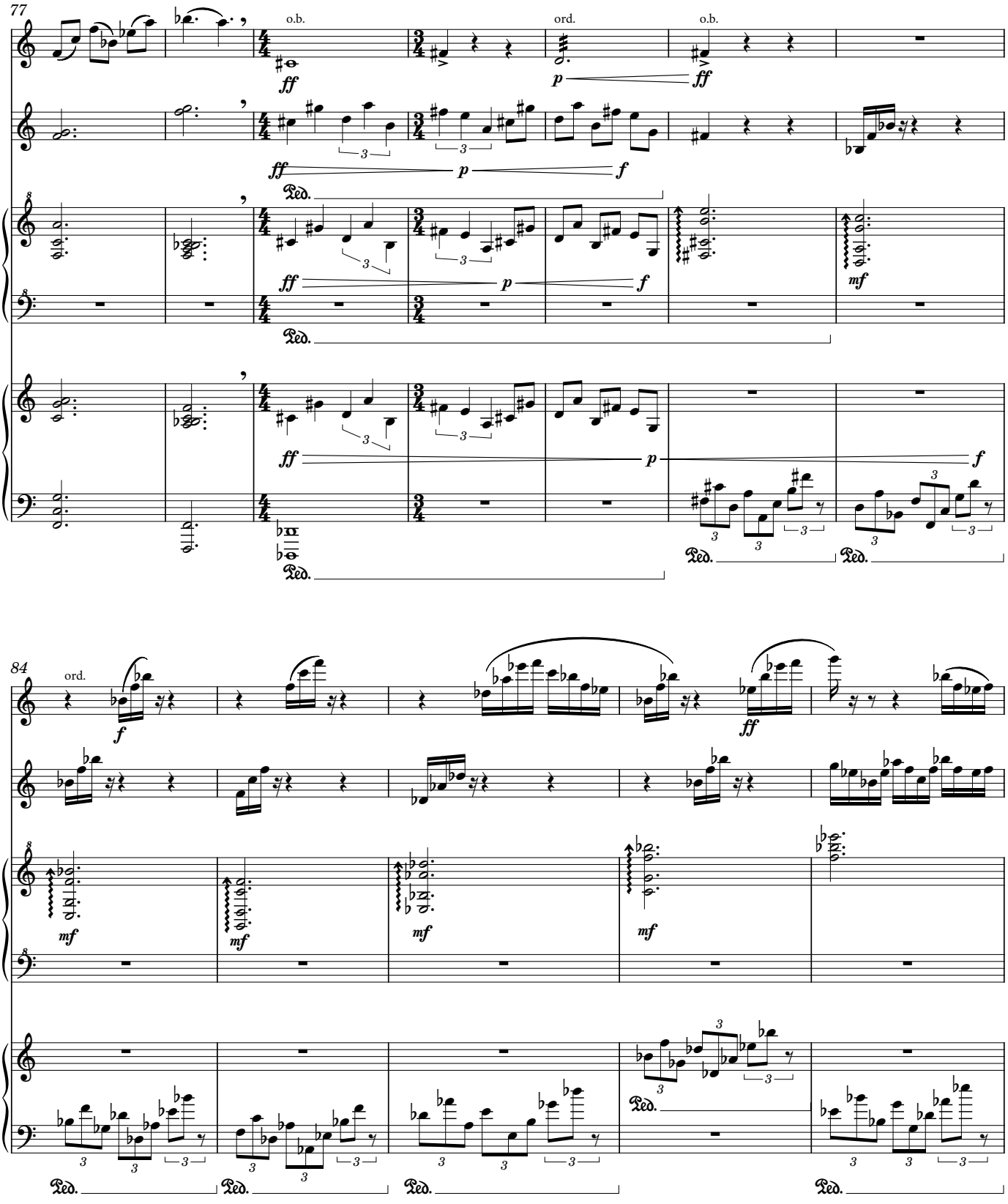
Ped.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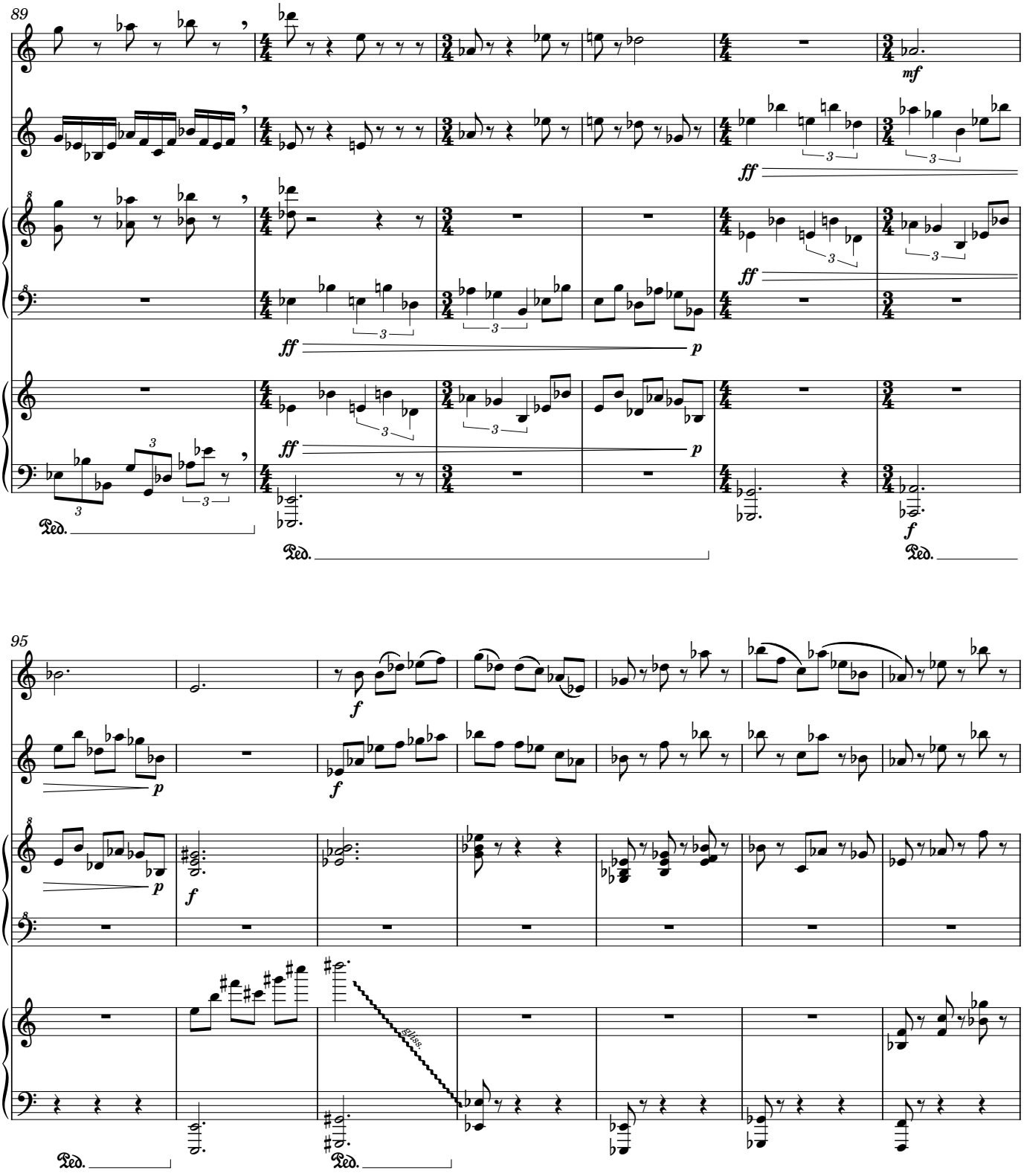
f
ff
mf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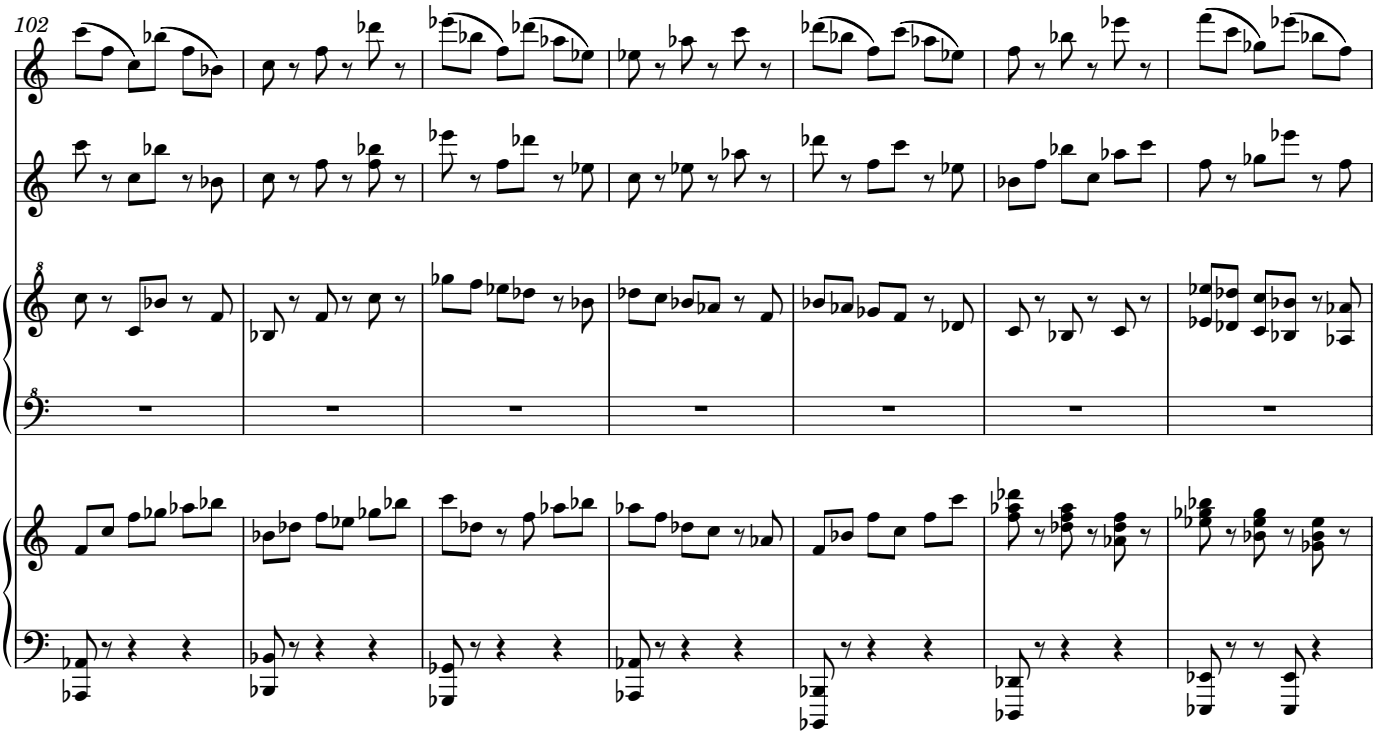
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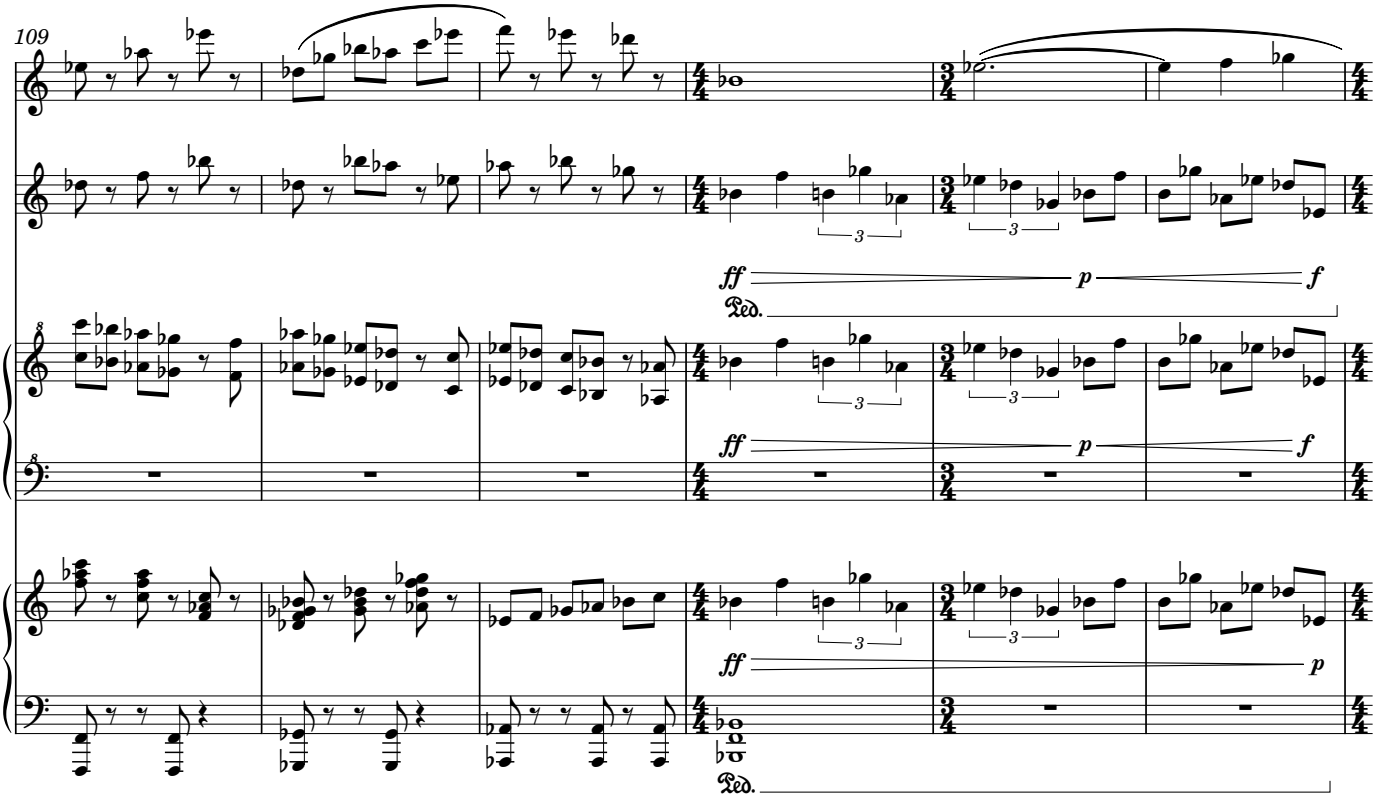
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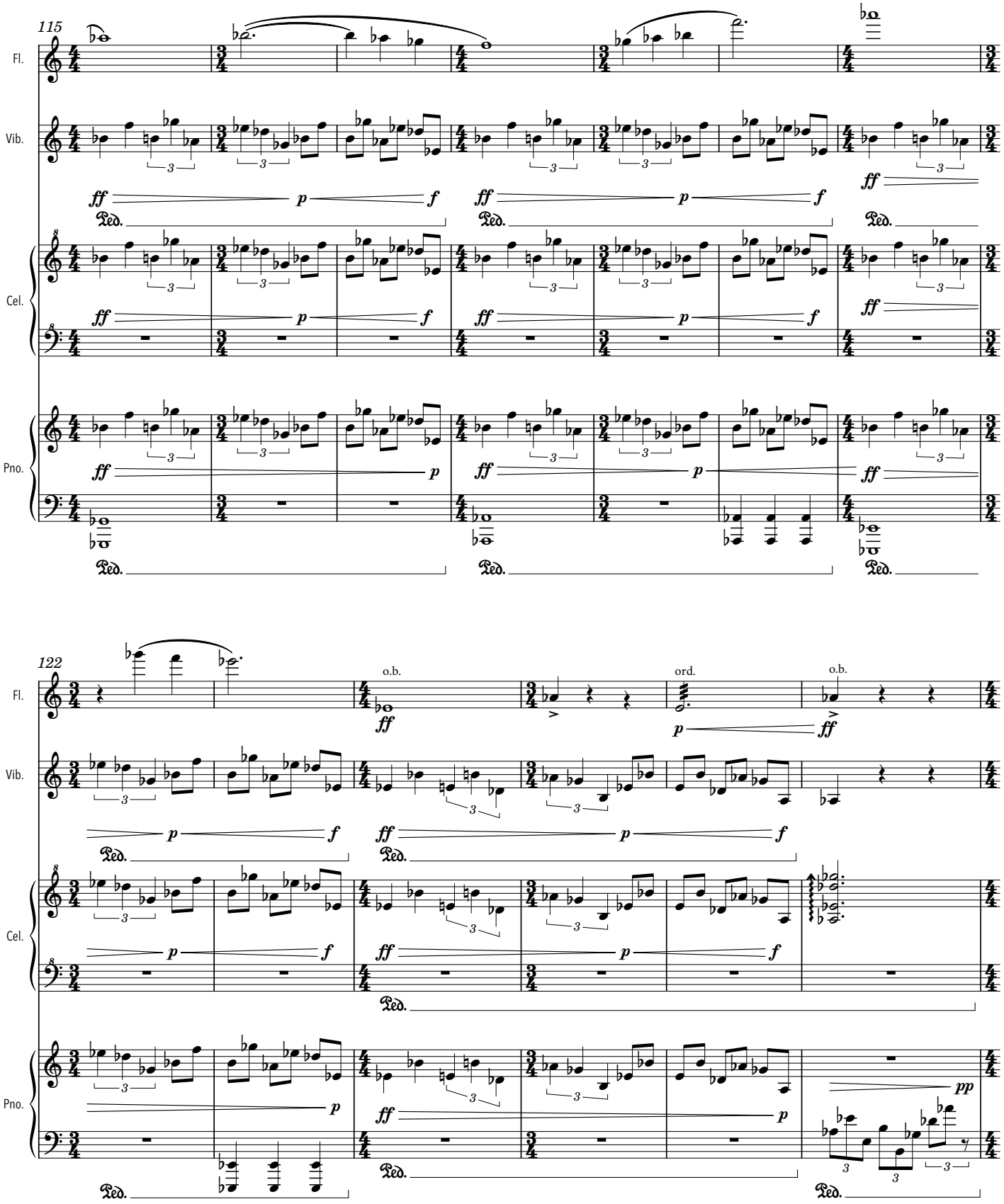
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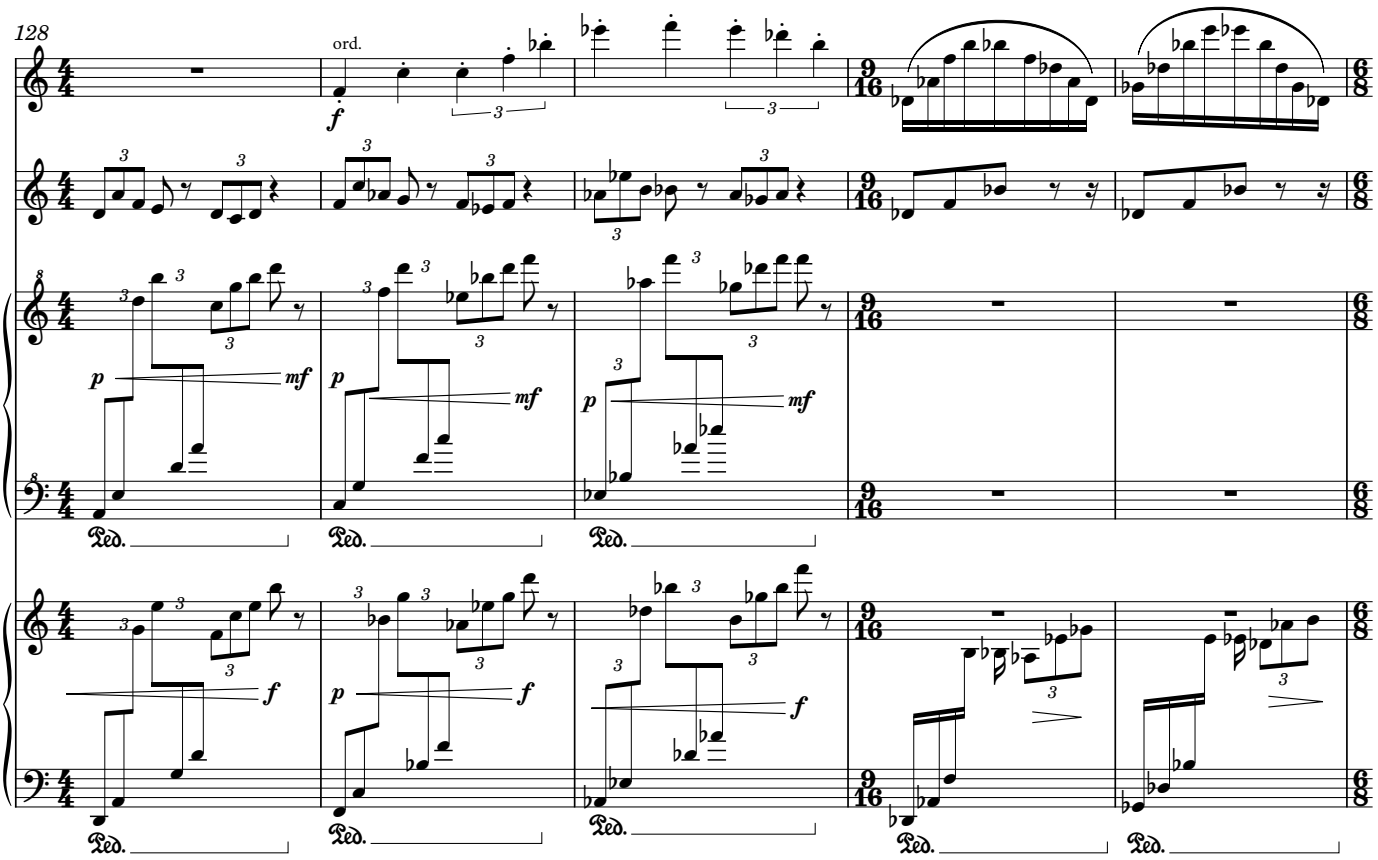
o.b.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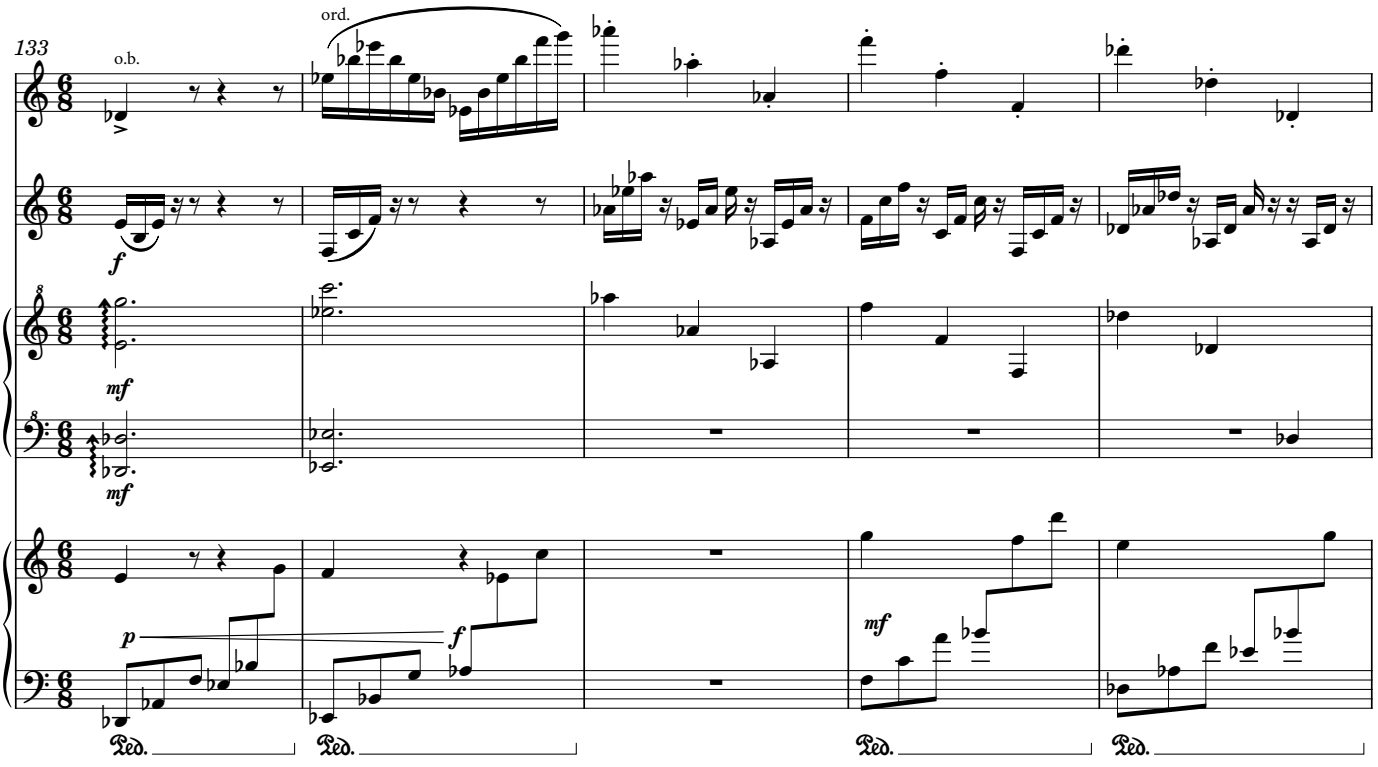
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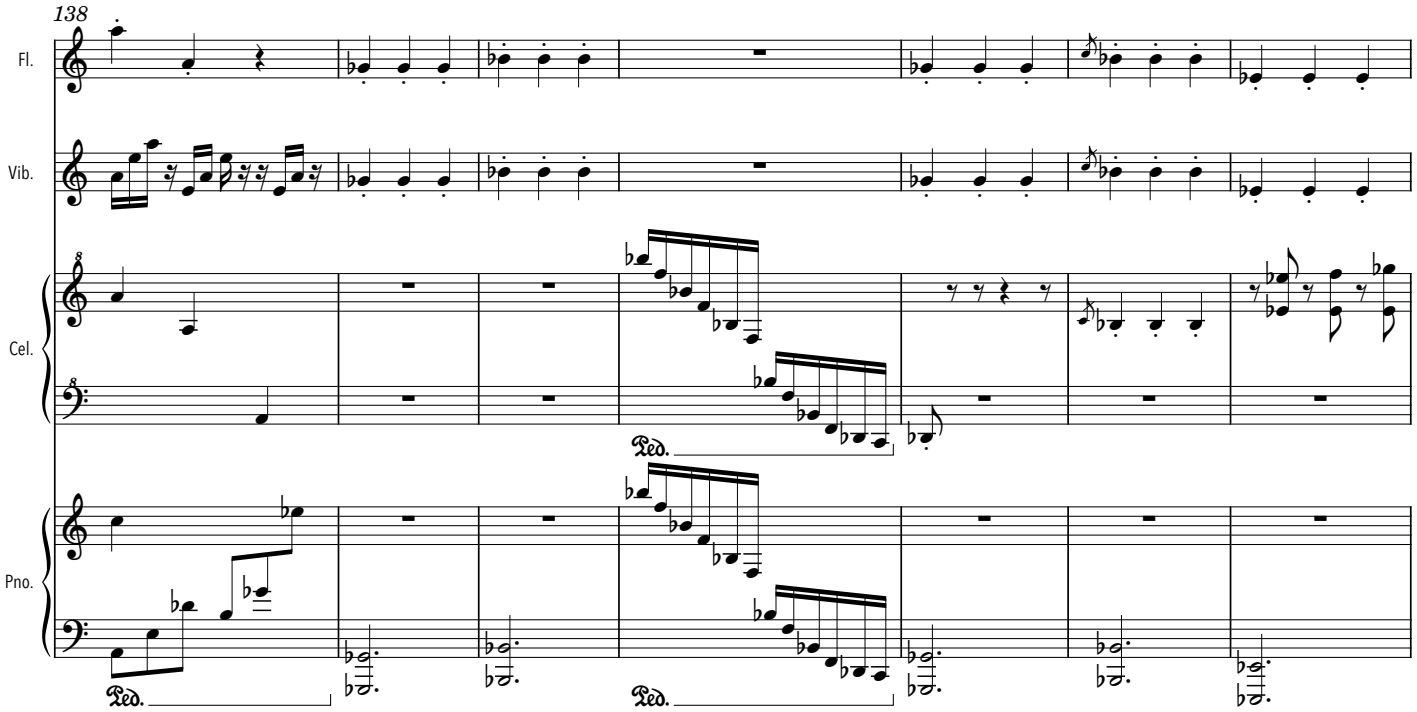
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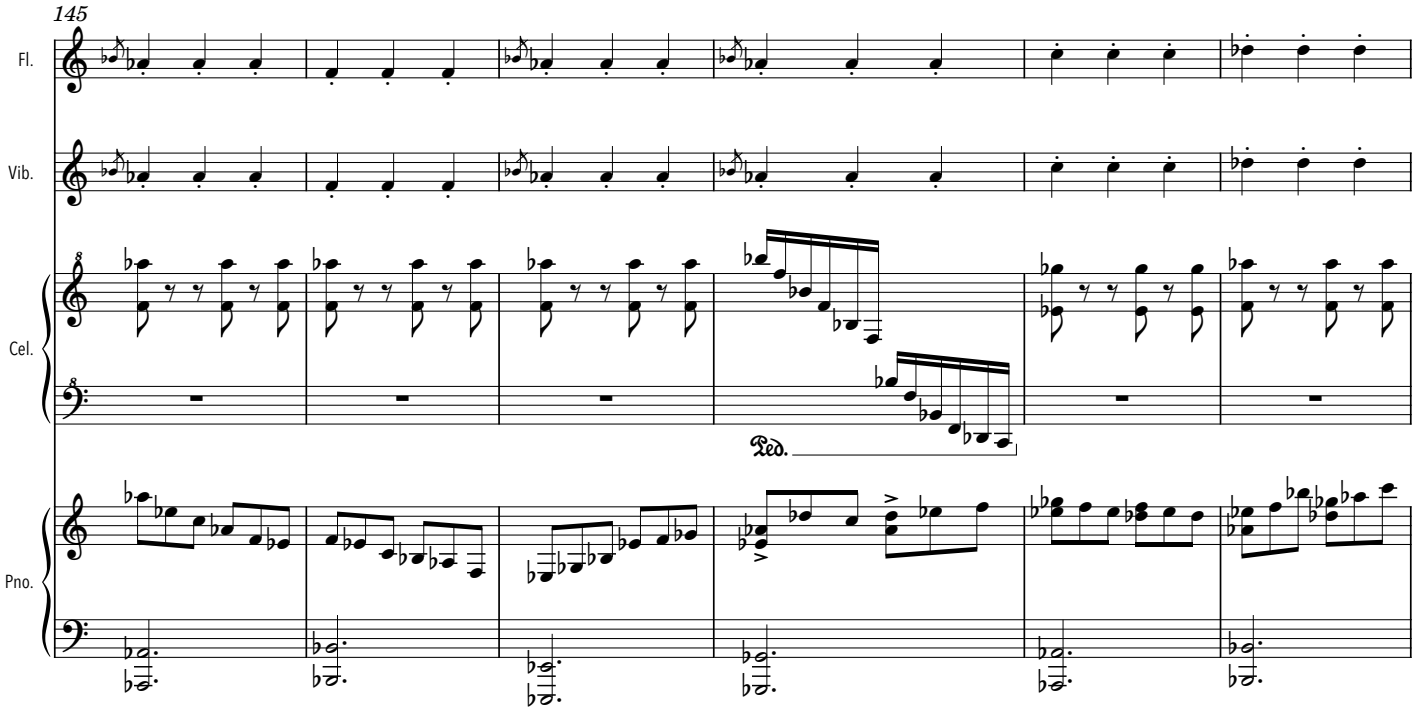
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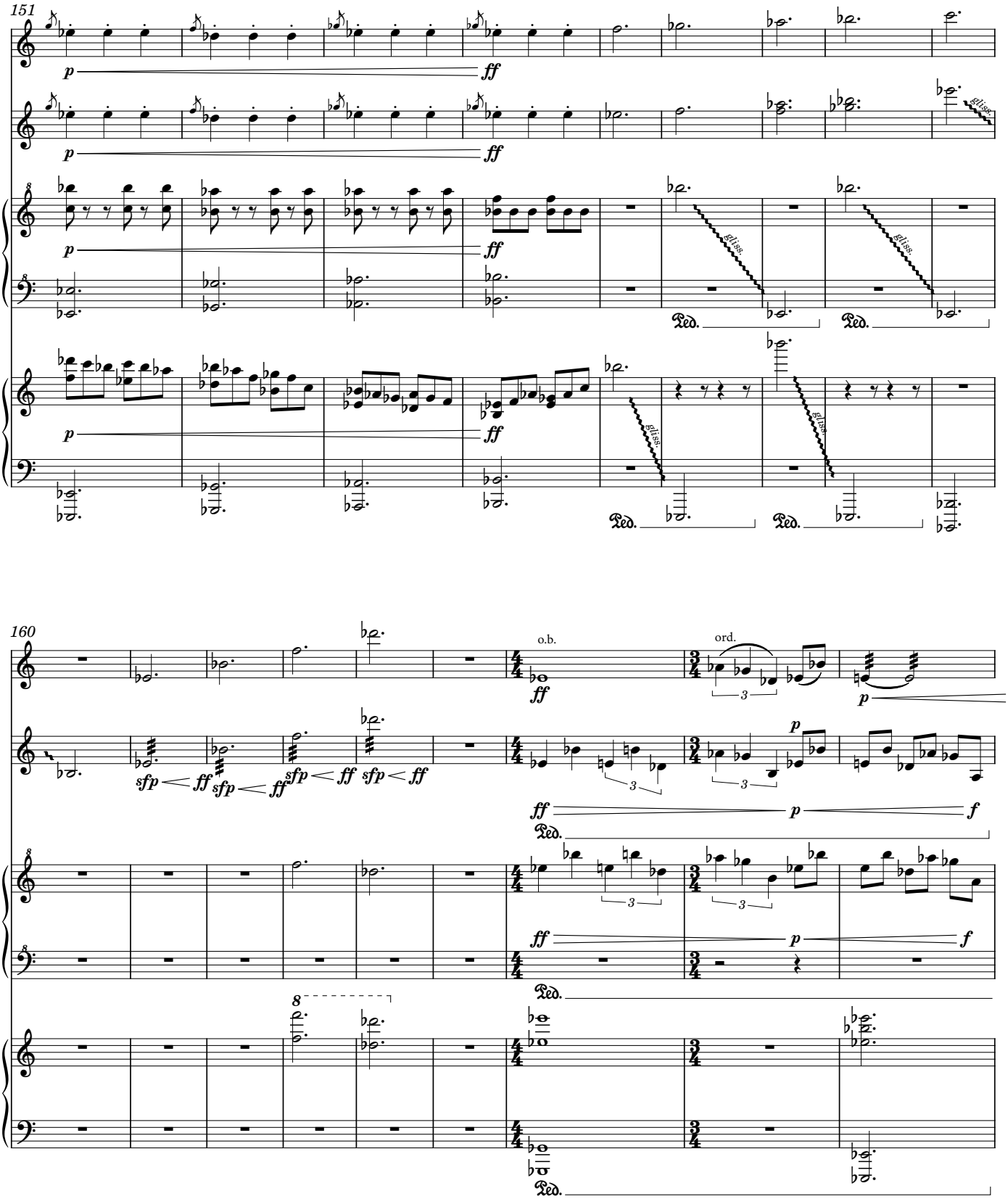
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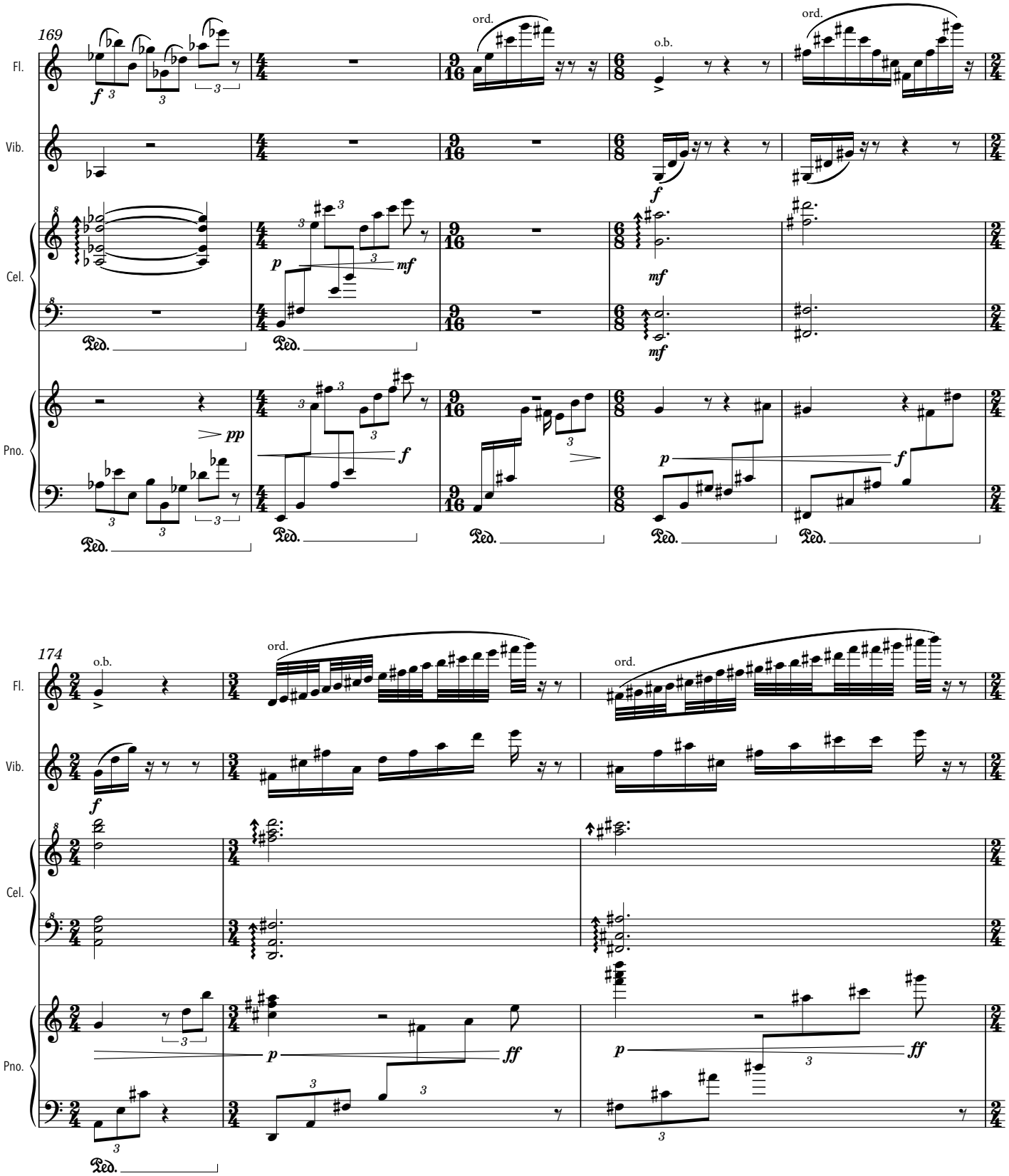
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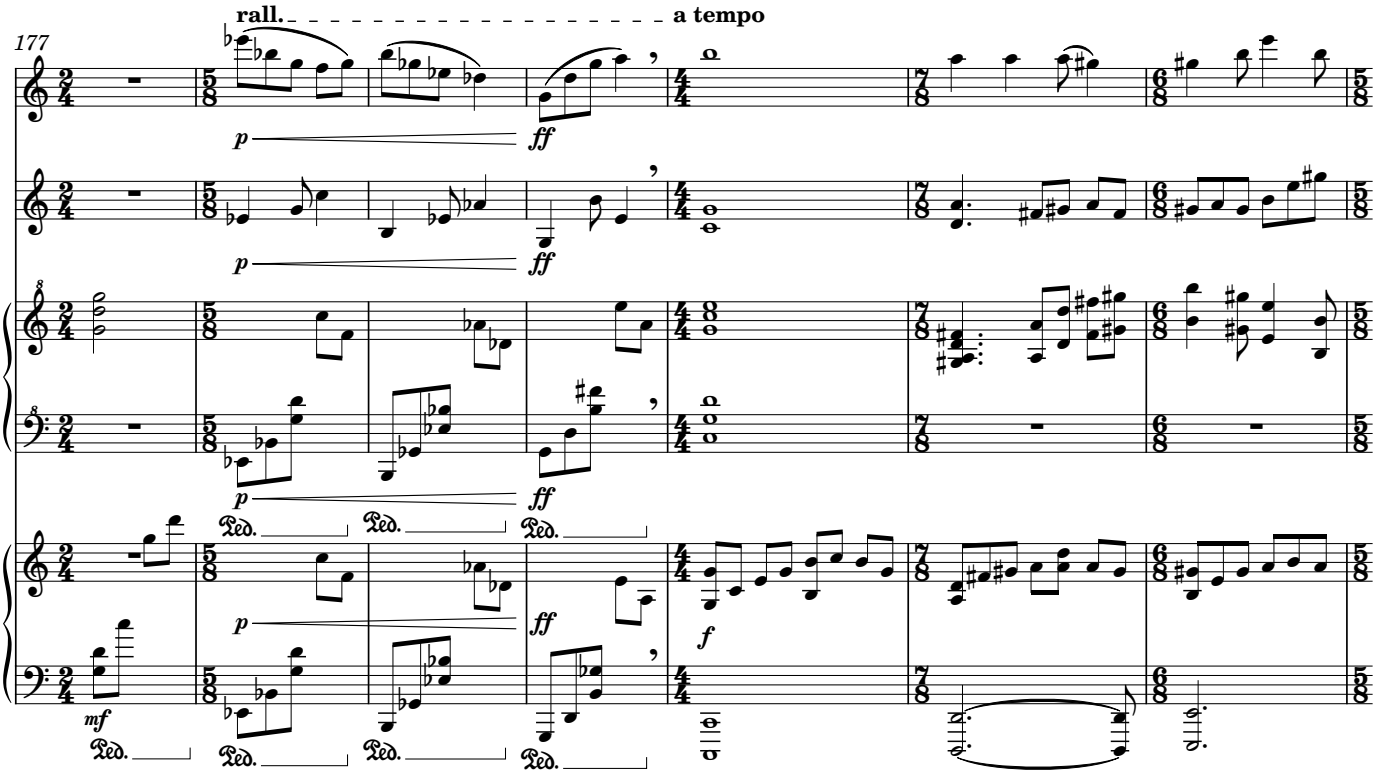
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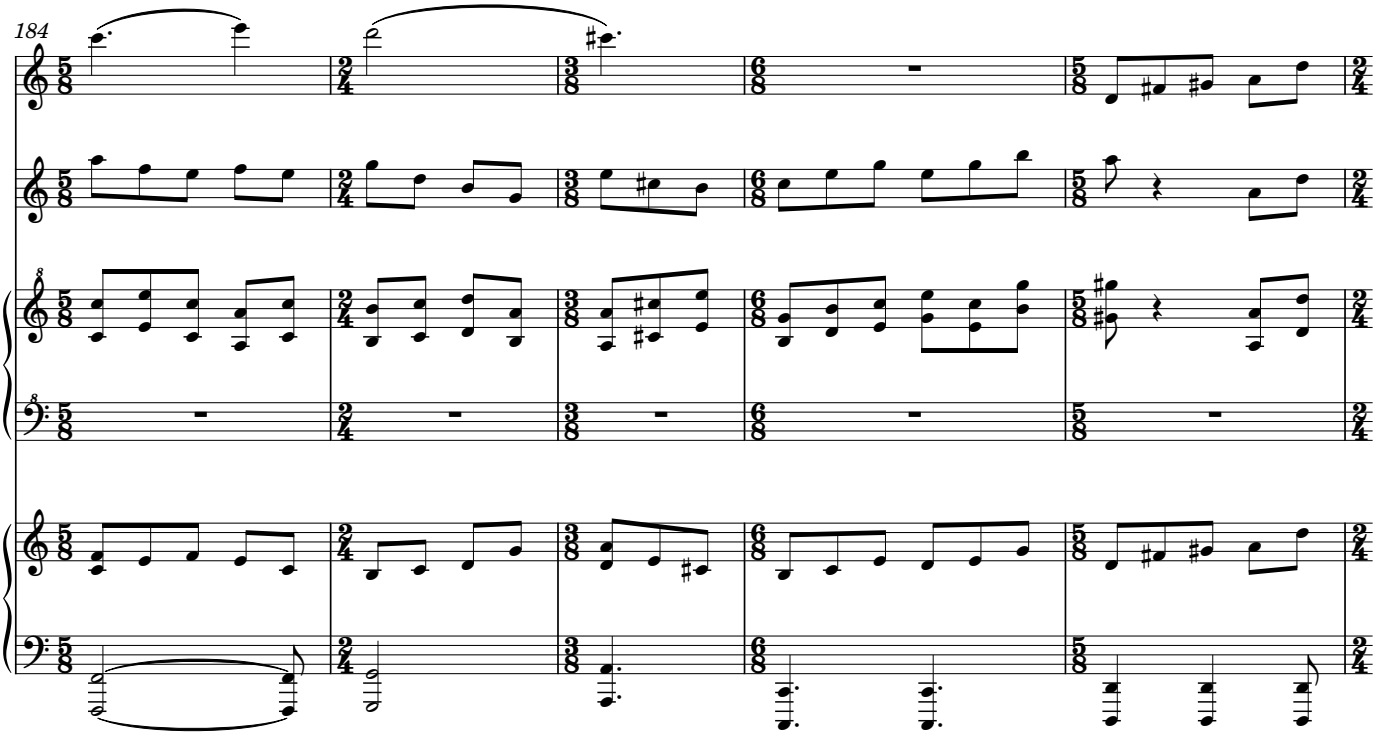
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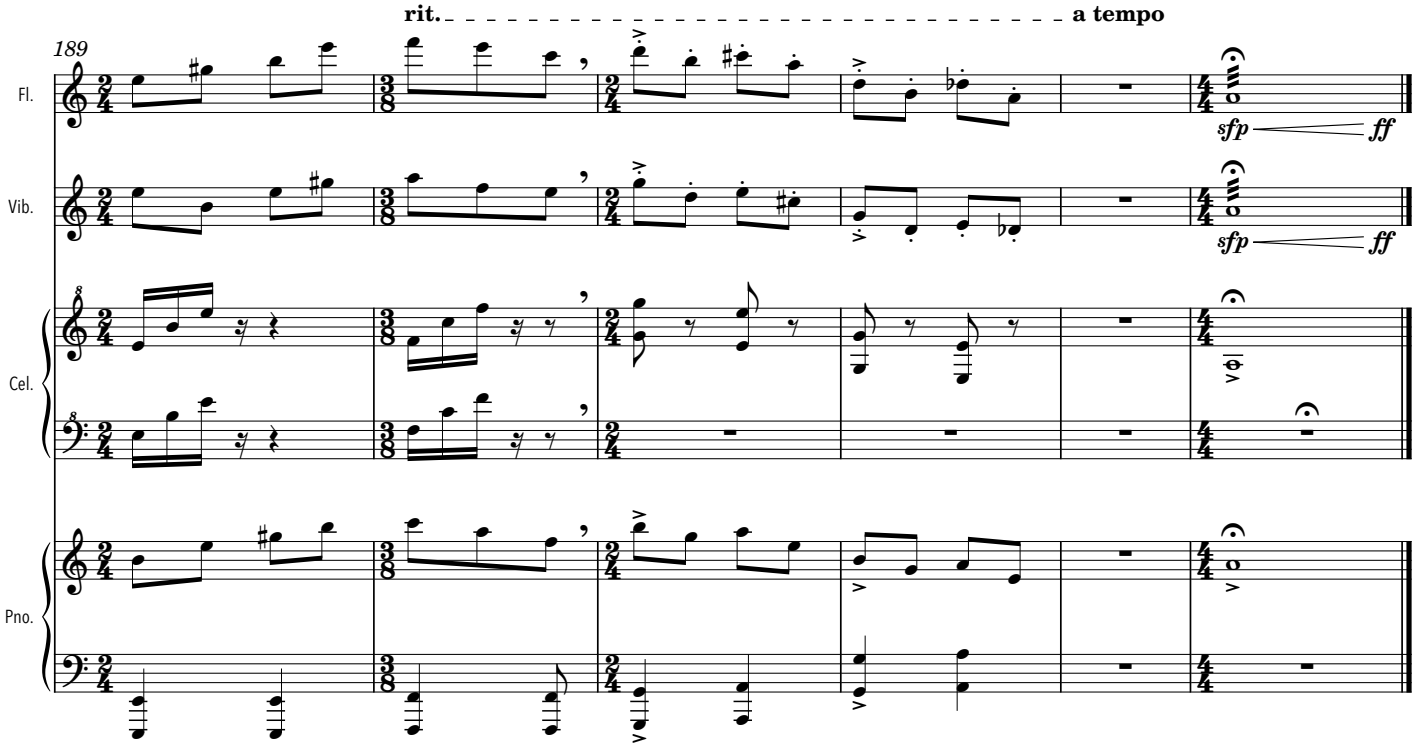
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