Kjell Habbestad:

String Quartet

Quattro stazioni
op. 21

Dedicated to Yehezkel Braun

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String Quartet

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I Impetuoso, 5'30"
II Affettuoso, 5'30"
III Misterioso, 4'30"
IV Giocoso, 4'30"

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Total duration: 20 minutes

Comitted by Bergen Kammermusikkforening
supported by Norwegian Cultural Council

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STRING QUARTET op 21
Quattro stazioni

This journey in time and space finds its departure station in the Middle East, and ends up in the Far North, following the route of a 2000 year-old cultural tradition.

1st movement. Impetuoso.

The first "stazione" collects its musical material from a small group of people living in two separate communities, Nablus and Holon in Israel - the Samaritans.

> The Samaritans has preserved itself and its distinctive tradition for over 2000 years. They are essentially a fundamentalistic sect living according to the laws of the Pentateuch but not according to the later prophetic and rabbine writings which have shaped normative Judaism. Now numbering only about 400 people, they are divided almost equally between the biblical city of Sichem, now called Nablus, their religious and political capital, and a neighbourhood in the Israeli city of Holon on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. The group in Nablus claims continous residence since the time of Solomon until today, where the city was taken by Israel during the Six-Day War. The holy place of the Samaritans is the biblical Mount Gerizim, just outside Nablus, where the annual Passover animal sacrifices continue to be carried out.

The song *"Kal tab"* was originally sung on the third Sabbath of each month, after the reading of the portion from the Pentateuch. It is nowadays sung when there is a celebration such as a marriage or a circumcision, or on other happy occasions. The Samaritans themselves classify the song as heavy, and remark on the extensive *qifufim*, or "bendings" which it contains. The musical material is limited, essentially to three notes, the central one of which is heavily vibrated. Unlike the case of "Western" chant where some of the more melismatic forms developed later, the complex *kaved* of Samaritan music probably developed earlier as a progressive series of ornamentations in the simple one-note structure. Thus, in searching in Samaritan music for links to the ancient past, it is likely that the key is to be found in the *kaved* style rather than elsewhere.

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The material itself is so ornamented and possesses such a special character that I wanted it to live its own life, without too much artificing involvment. I also have tried to stress the fact that the music has its basis in one single note; therefore the movement introduces no modulations or foreign tonalities.

2nd movement. Affettuoso.

The starting point for this movement is the Gregorian Chant *"In exitu Israel de Aegypto"*.

> The view which considers ancient Jewish music to be one of the sources of Plainsong is not new. The historical basis of this belief is quite probable: Christianity was born amidst Palestinian Jewry around the time of the destruction of the second temple. The first Christians were mainly simple folk and their liturgy originated in the Synagogue. But as time passed by, certain processes operated towards a progressive blurring of the traces of common origin. It might though be possible to find in Gregorian Chant traces of secondary Jewish influence, from a realtively late date.

The first attempt to attribute a Jewish origin to a Gregorian melody was made by Martin Gerbert in his book "De Cantu et Musica Sacra" (1774). In the first chapter he writes: *"Est vero singularis melodia psalmi CXIII, In exitu Israel de Aegypto, forte e synagoga repetenda."* He refers to the psalmodic tone used, a rather unique one named *"Tonus Peregrinus"*, that is the *foreign* or *alien* tone. This particular tone is quite rare and its use is limited mainly to rendering of Psalm CXIII. This is the only one among the Gregorian psalm-tones which has a "wandering tenor": at the first half of the verse the reciting tone is A and at the second half G. The *"Tonus Peregrinus"* is especially important because similar structures are quite common in the traditions of various Jewish communities. The Hebrew version of the same psalm according to the tradition of the Lithuanian Jews corresponds almost note for note with the Gregorian version. It is quite probable that the *"Tonus Peregrinus"* is of Jewish origin.

After introducing the original material, assigned for 4 instruments, I have gathered the tiny motives (2 or 3 notes each) treated them one by one composed into a musical unity. Unlike the first movement I have continously changed the tonality trying to give the musical progress a suggestion of being in constant motion or wandering (*in exitu*).

3rd movement. Misterioso

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The basis for this movement is another rarity, a two-part hymn from the Orkneys, the St. Magnus Hymn: *"Nobilis, humilis, Magne martyr stabilis."*

This hymn, consisting of 7 stanzas, is the oldest known polyphonic setting in the Nordic countries, dated to 1280. The two parts move in parallel thirds, thus constituting a more natural and sonorous harmony than the more "theoretic" polyphony at the actual period. The third as an interval was moreover not tolerated as a consonant by the theorists, not to speak of the succesion by two major thirds! It is therefore presumed that the harmonizing of the St. Magnus Hymn is a result of folk tradition more than a developing by cloister brothers. The melody has though been used, if not in an official liturgical context, at least in a church connection.

The melody which has a lyrical character is supposed to be of a Norwegian origin. The Orkneys belonged to Norway at the time, and it is likely to believe that the Norwegians brought the two-part song from their home country. We may here have to deal with one example of the polyphonic singing style that the Englishman in the 12-1300 adopted from the Dane and Norse; now classified as the *gymel*, (gemellus = twin, which refers to the parallel voice). The lower part is considered as the "first part",*vox principalis*, the upper voice as *vox organalis*. The mode is hypolydian.

This movement throughout represents the original material (slightly changed) in the two middle voices (viola and 2.-violin) as whistling flageolets with no vibrato, while the two other voices (cello and 1.-violin) constitutes a warm counterpoint (muted and espressivo in both parts), making a contemporary comment upon the original hymn.

4. movement. Giocoso.

The approach to the final movement is *"Vassenda-slåtten"* later named *"Rotnheims-Knut"*. Erik Medås (b. 1769) living at Vassenden in Granvin, Hardanger played this *halling*, which was named after him. (The latter naming stems from the folk dancer Knut Rotnheim, Gol in Hallingdal. This was his *slått* when he *"dansa laus"* ≈ danced "wildly".) The first appearance of this *slått* is nevertheless Christmas Eve 1695; then introduced in a more simple and primitive form, named *"Under ground music"*.

As a form regarded the *slått* is in 1600 already so distinguished that it probably belongs to a very old tradition, which, before it came to the harding fiddle, must have been performed on several primitive instruments. In this *slått* we also find traces from even older ones (*"Fornes-brunen"* dated to 1350, the time of the Black Death,*"Fanitullen"* from Hallingdal and more.)

The fiddle had to be tuned in *trollstilling* (a-e-a-ciss); the oldest known tuning for the harding fiddle (this also explains the A major notation). The harding fiddle music already at this time formed a special kind of rich ornamented polyphony both consonant and dissonant. The construction of*"Vassenda-slåtten"* is a complex two-portion form, each of the portions consisting of smaller ones. The tonality is the *lydian* mode, frequently introducing the lydian fourth (tritonus) which later has become a distinctive feature of the Norwegian Folk Music. The harmony formed by the peasant players was moreover so radical that the contemporary composers hesitated for more than 100 years to make use of it. The *slått* also has a rich counterpoint; from time to time even a double counterpoint.

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In this movement like in the first one, I have kept very close to the original material, in a setting like a canon on the under-fourth. What is originally played by one harding fiddle is divided on 1. and 2. violin, imitated by viola and cello. Since the *slått* contains a great deal of fifths, and also the tritone fourth, these features are frequently quoted. In the repetitive part somewhat before the recapitulation, the Samaritan "Kal tab" is reintroduced to complete the circle.

Kjell Habbestad

Sources:

1. "Samaritan Music", Ruth Katz, Jerusalem, Yuval, vol III, Jerusalem 1974, The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University.
2. "A paper read at the 17. annual conference for Jewish sacred music in Jerusalem, December 1975", Yehezkel Braun.
3. "Hymnus in honorem Sancti Magni comitis Orchadiae". Codex Upsalensis C 233, Nils L. Wallin.
4. "Då ein høyrde "underjordisk musikk" på Kyrkje-Byrkjeland i Fana", Arne Bjørndal, Bergens Museums Årbok, 1945.

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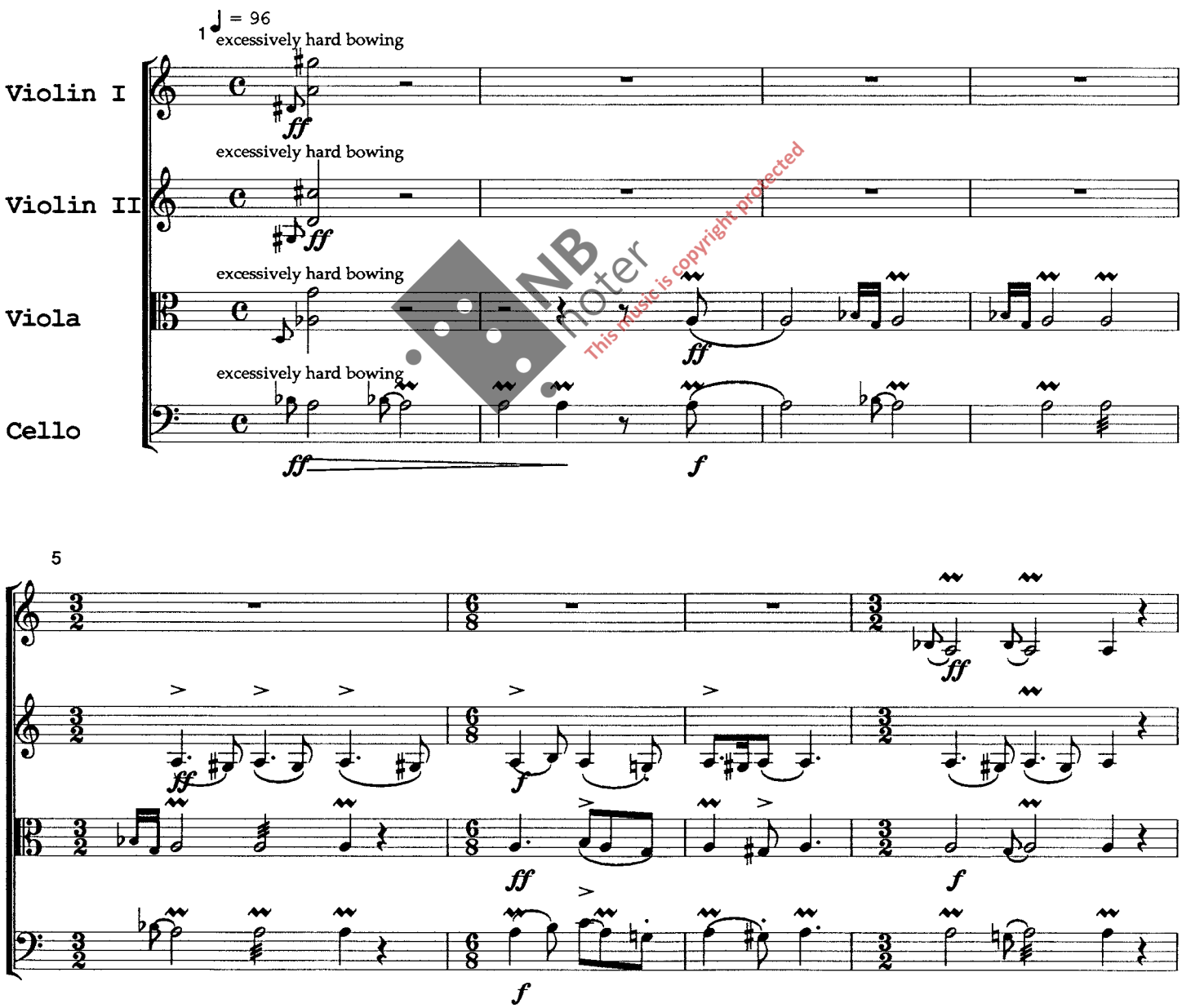
I

Impetuoso



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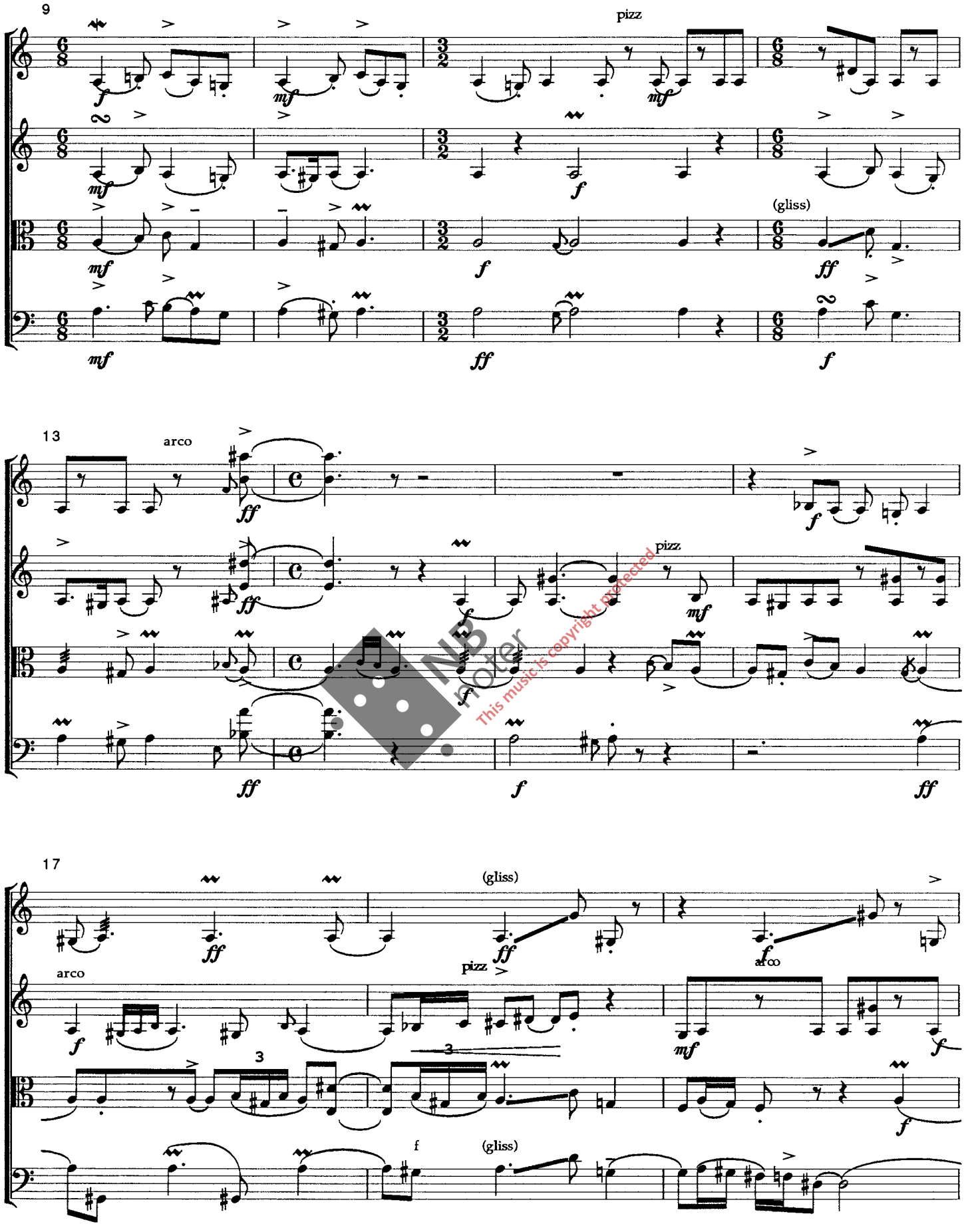

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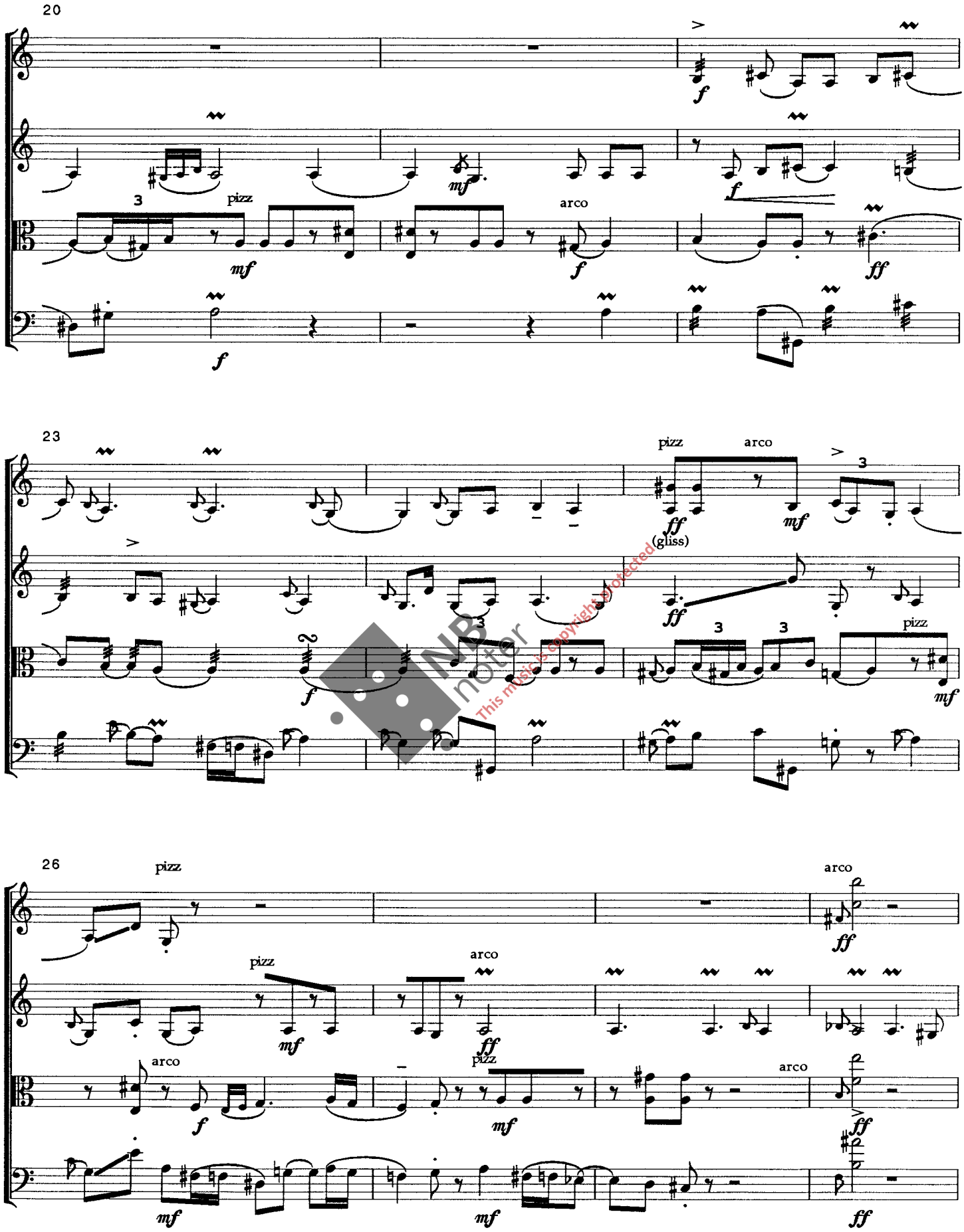

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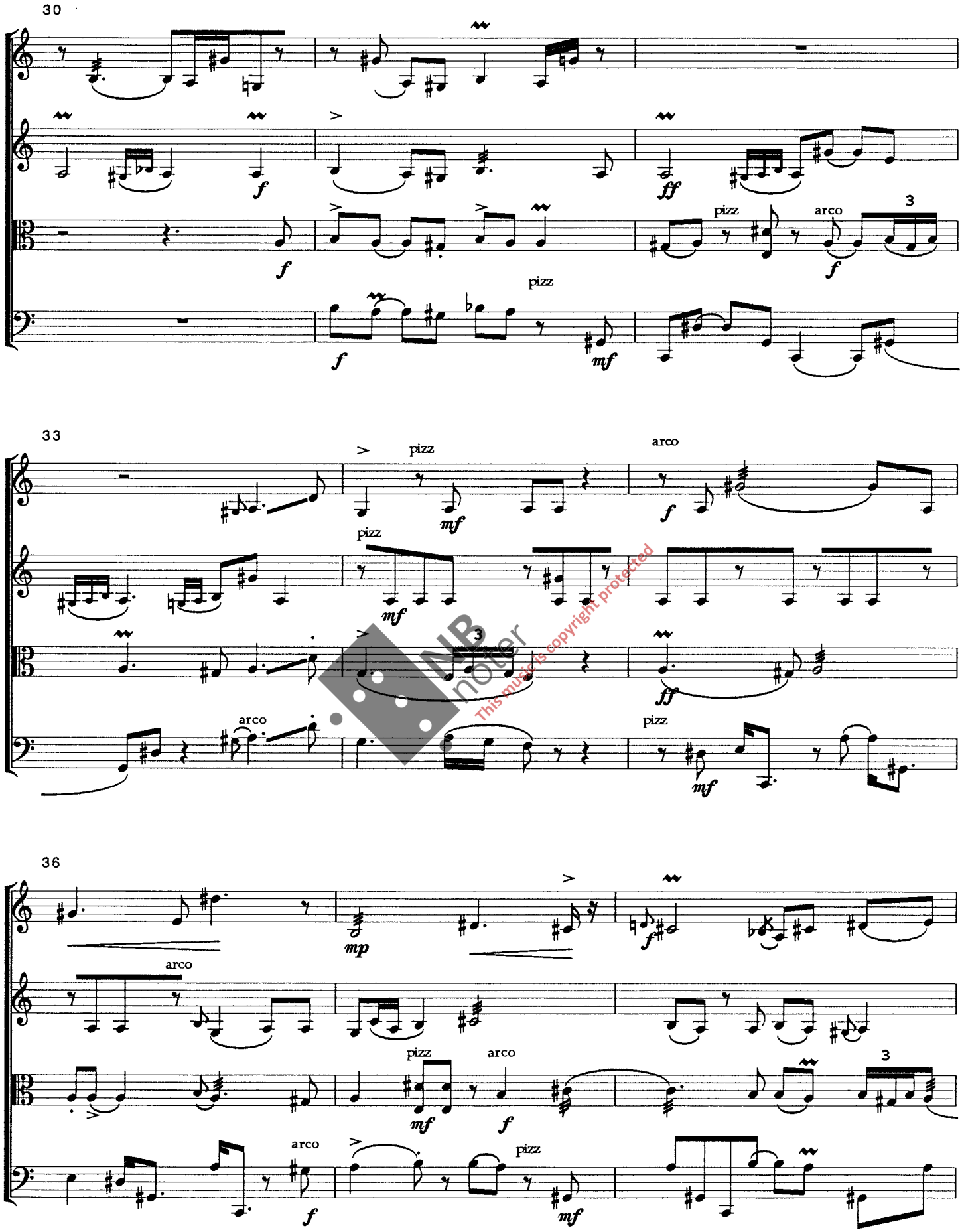

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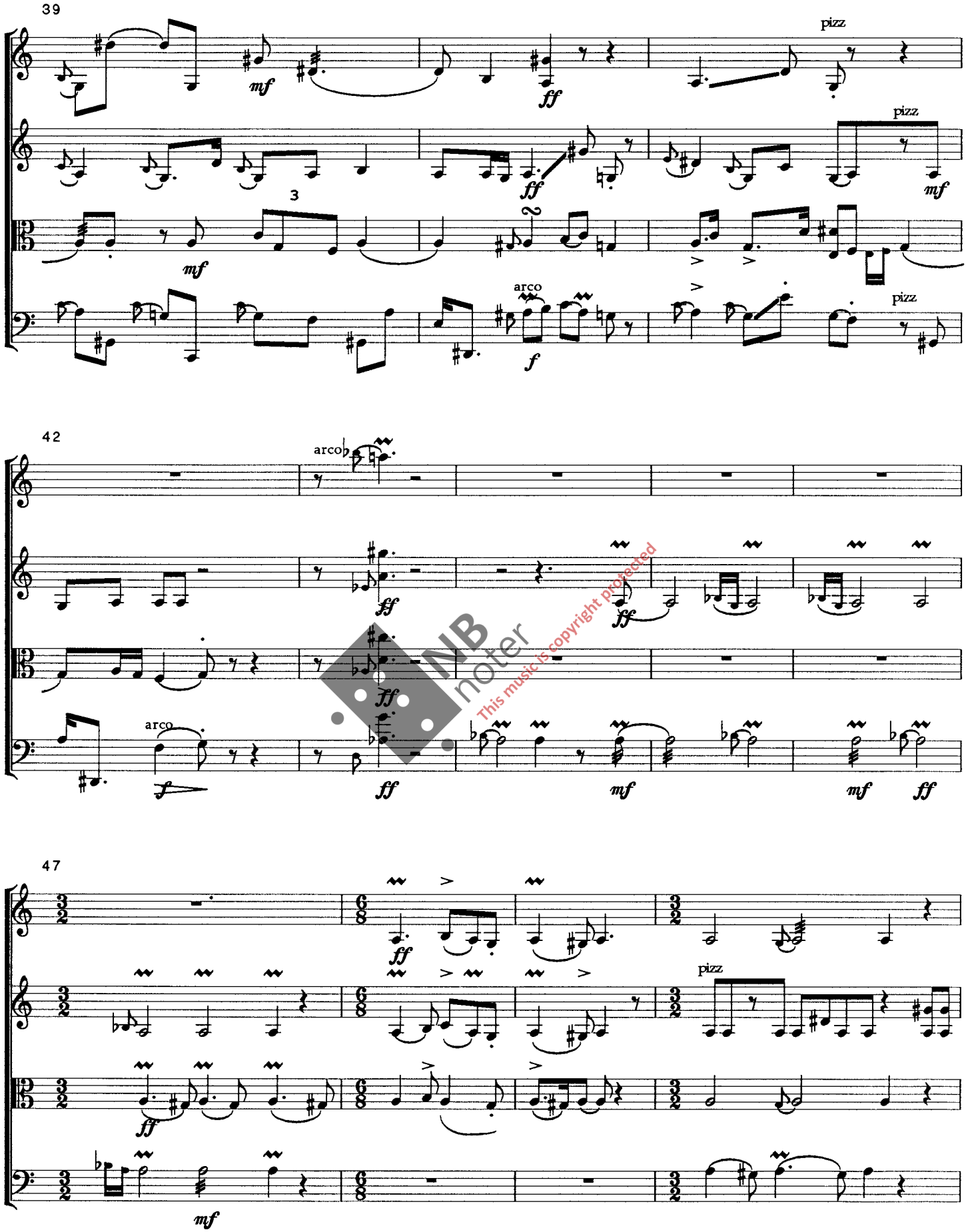

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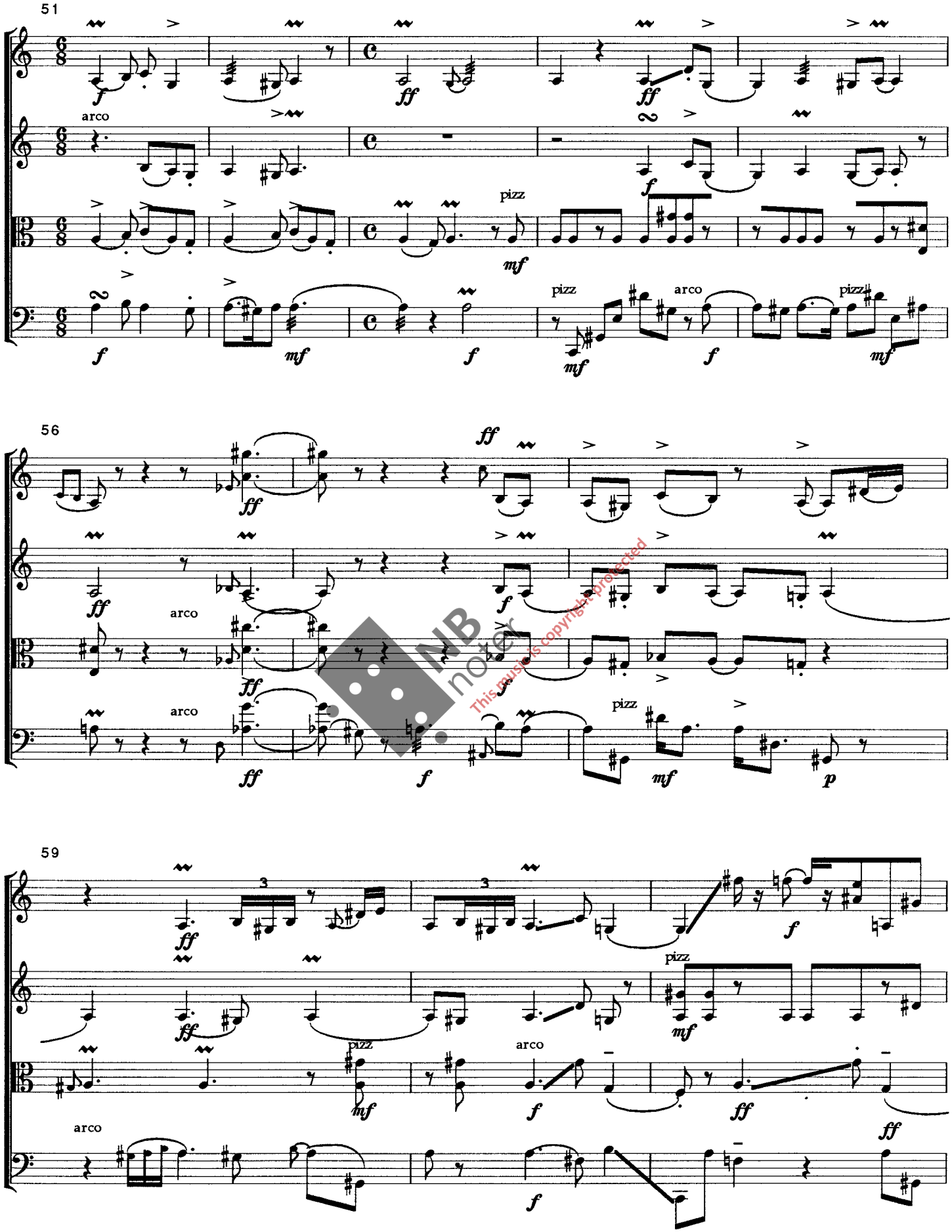

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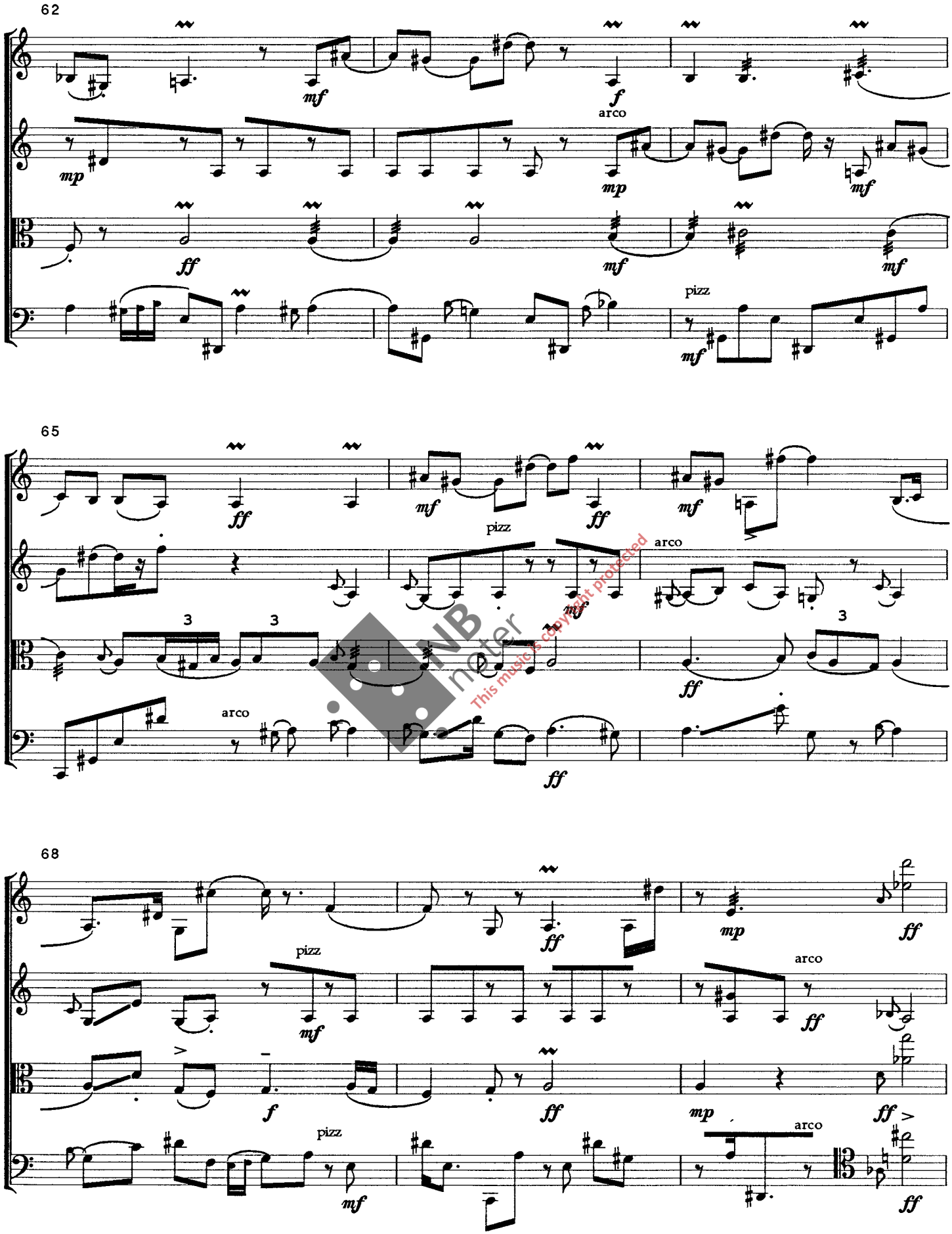

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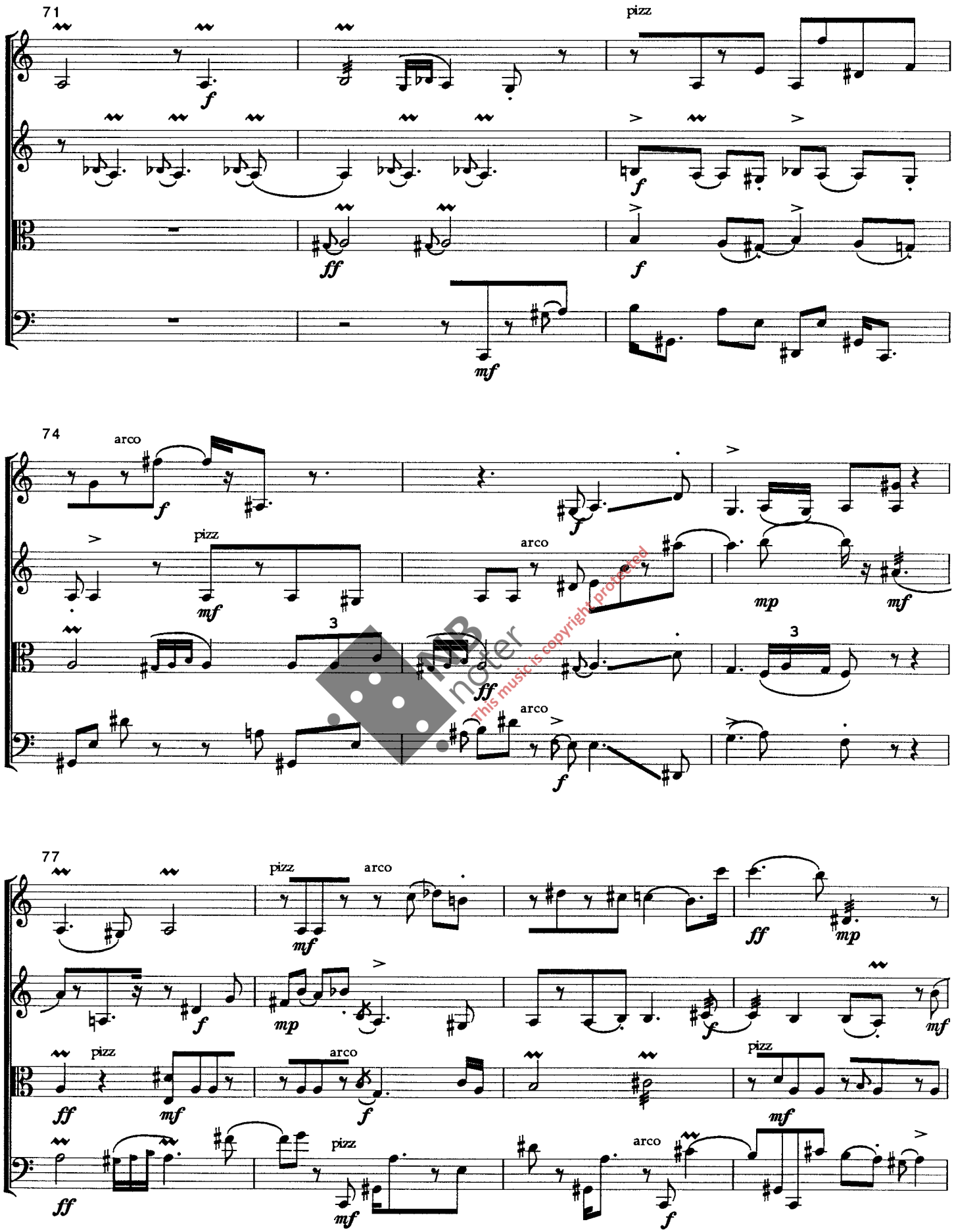

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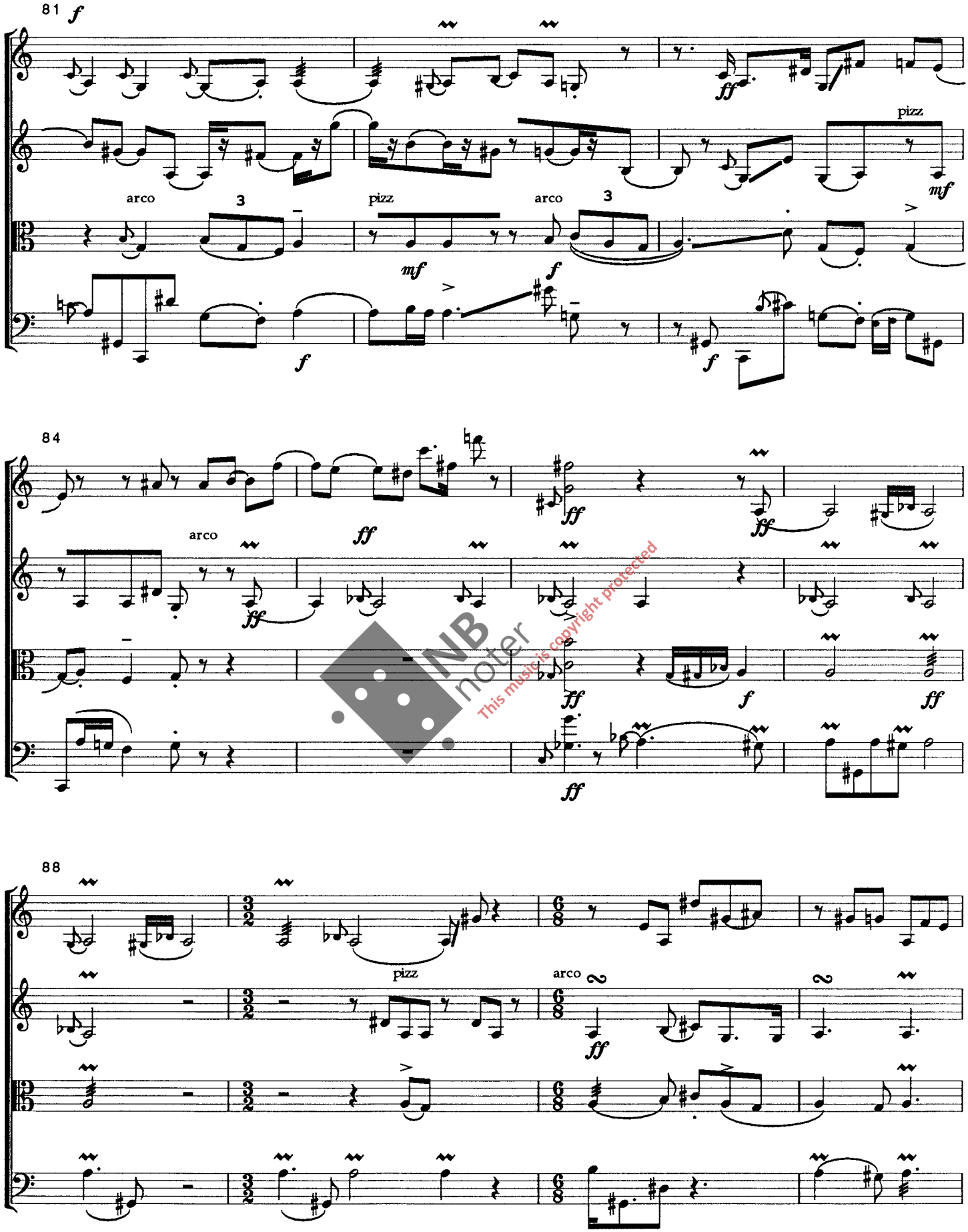

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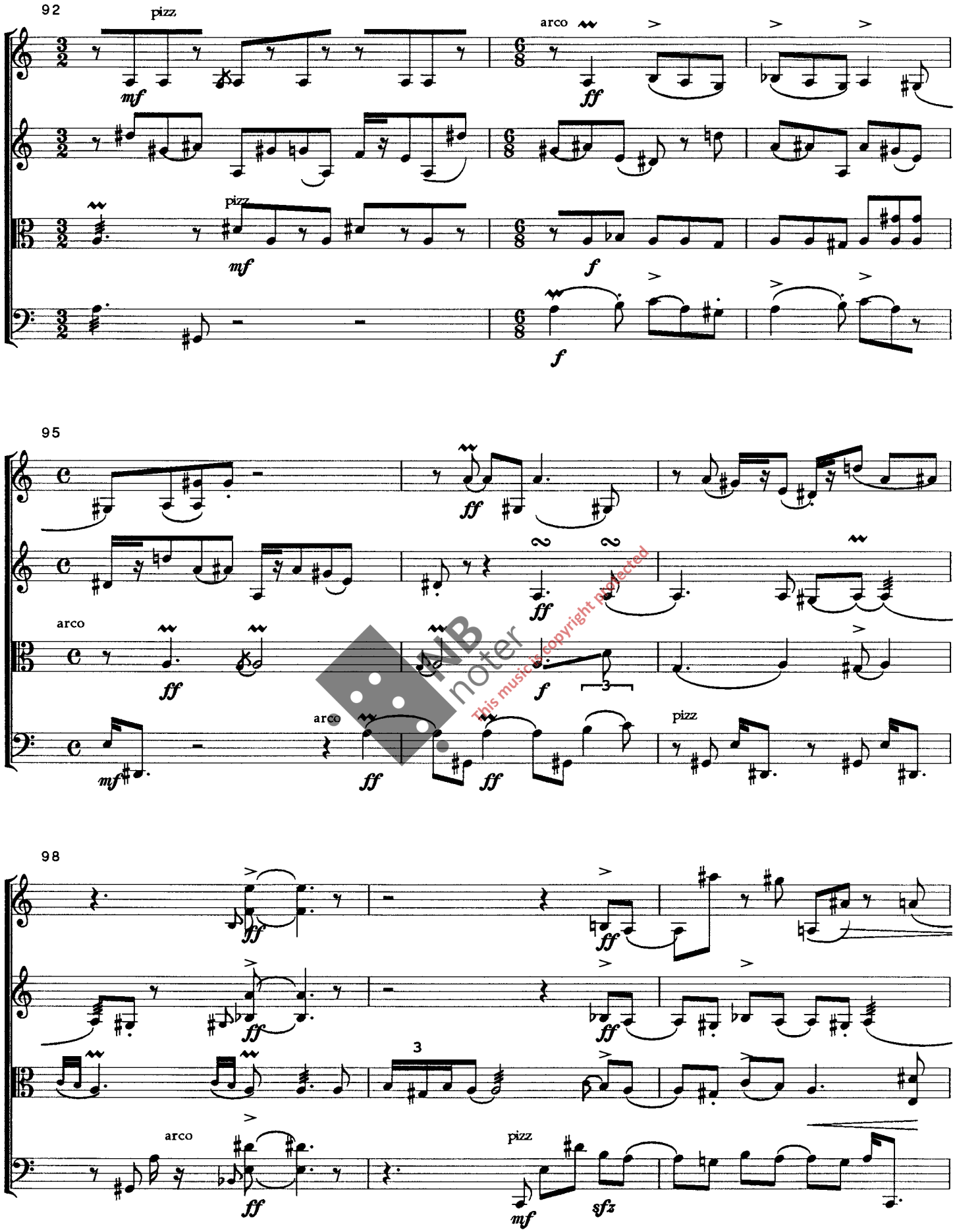

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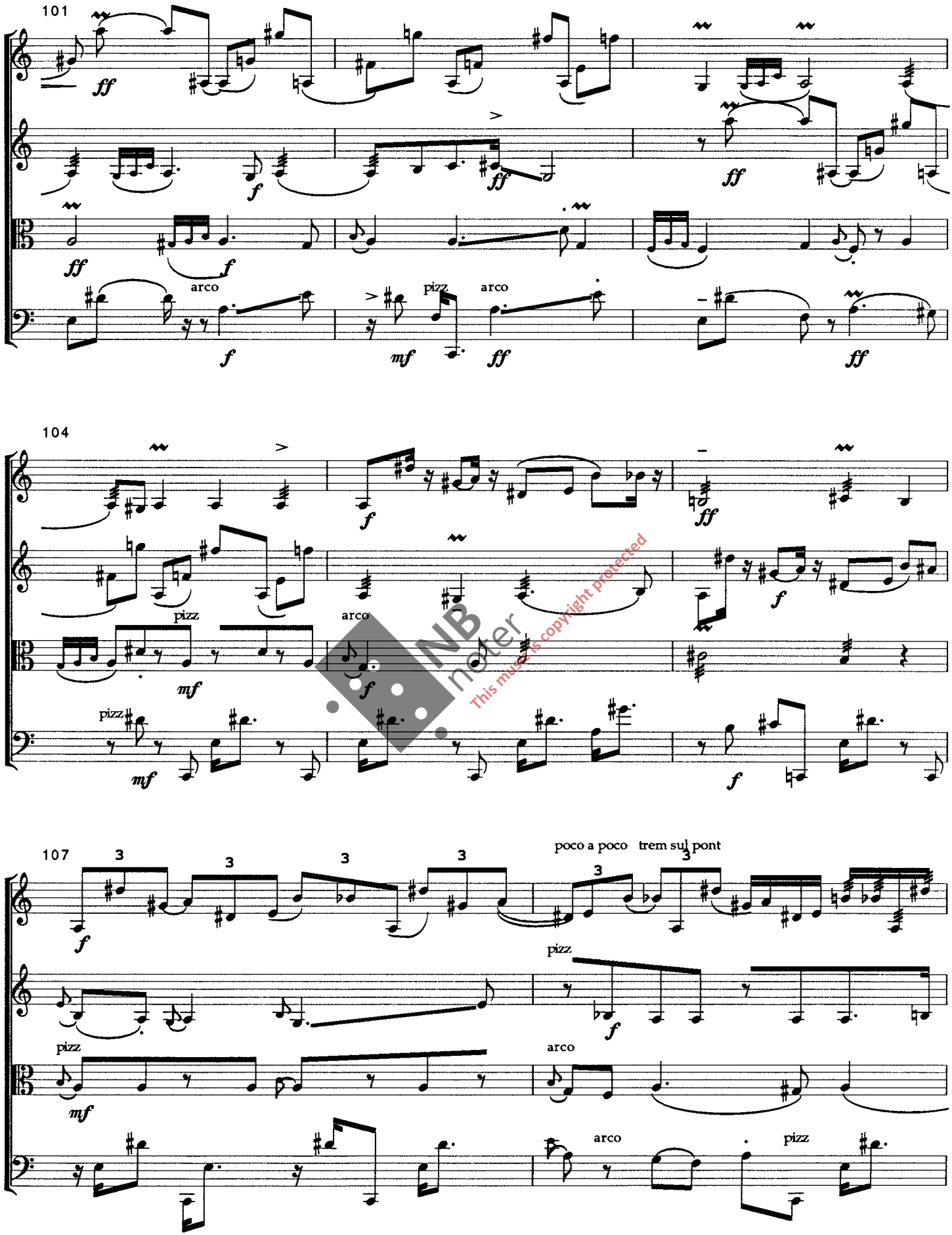

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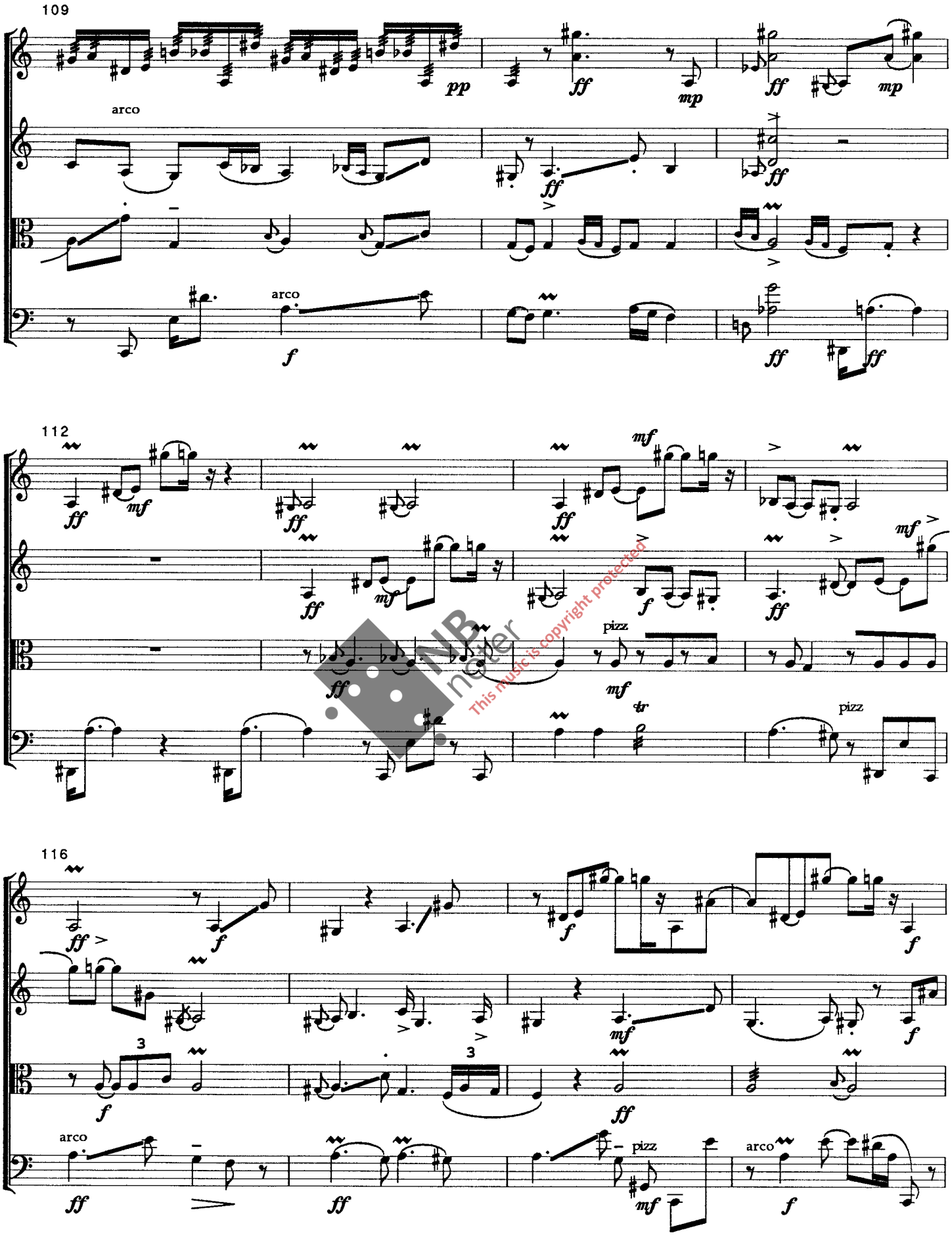

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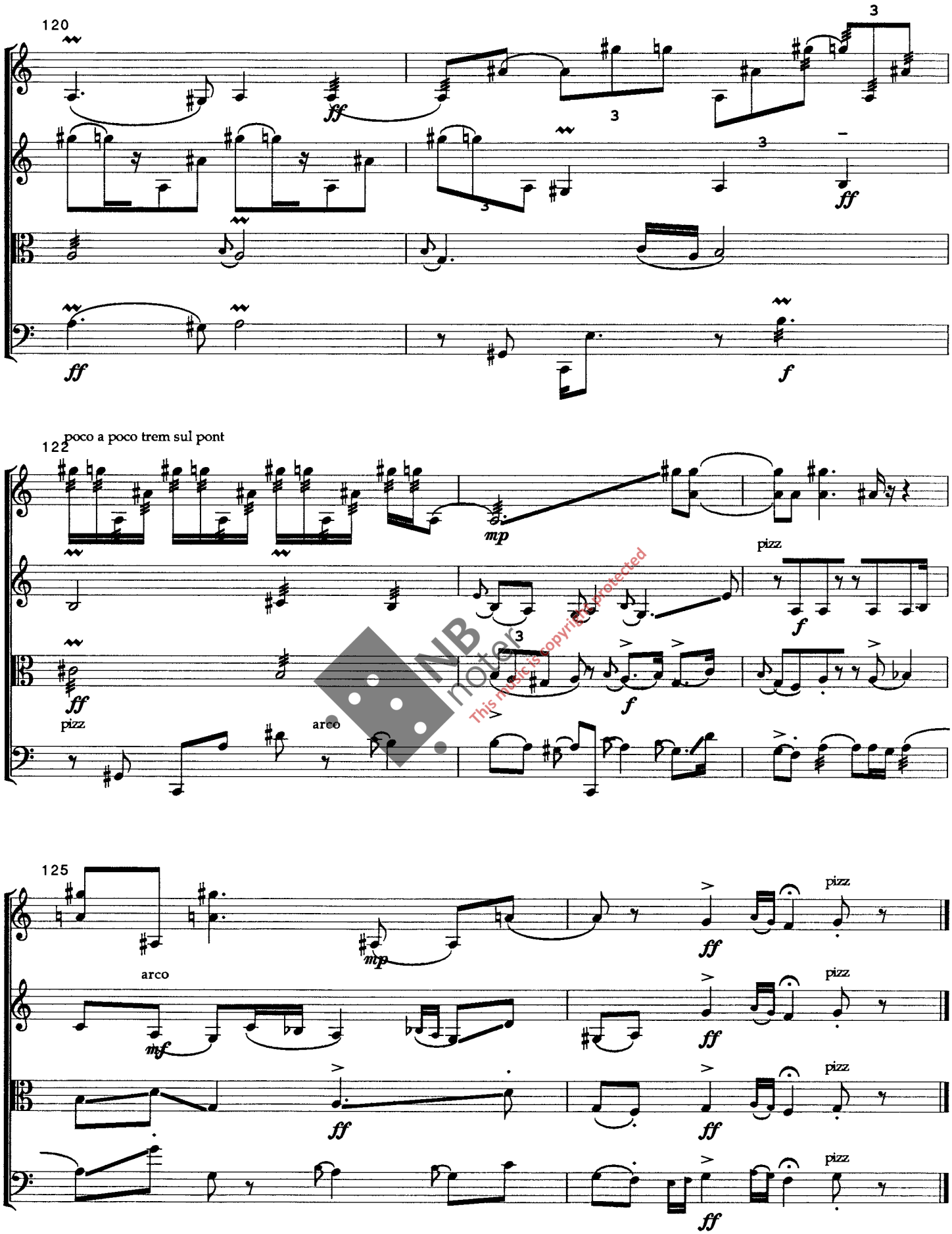

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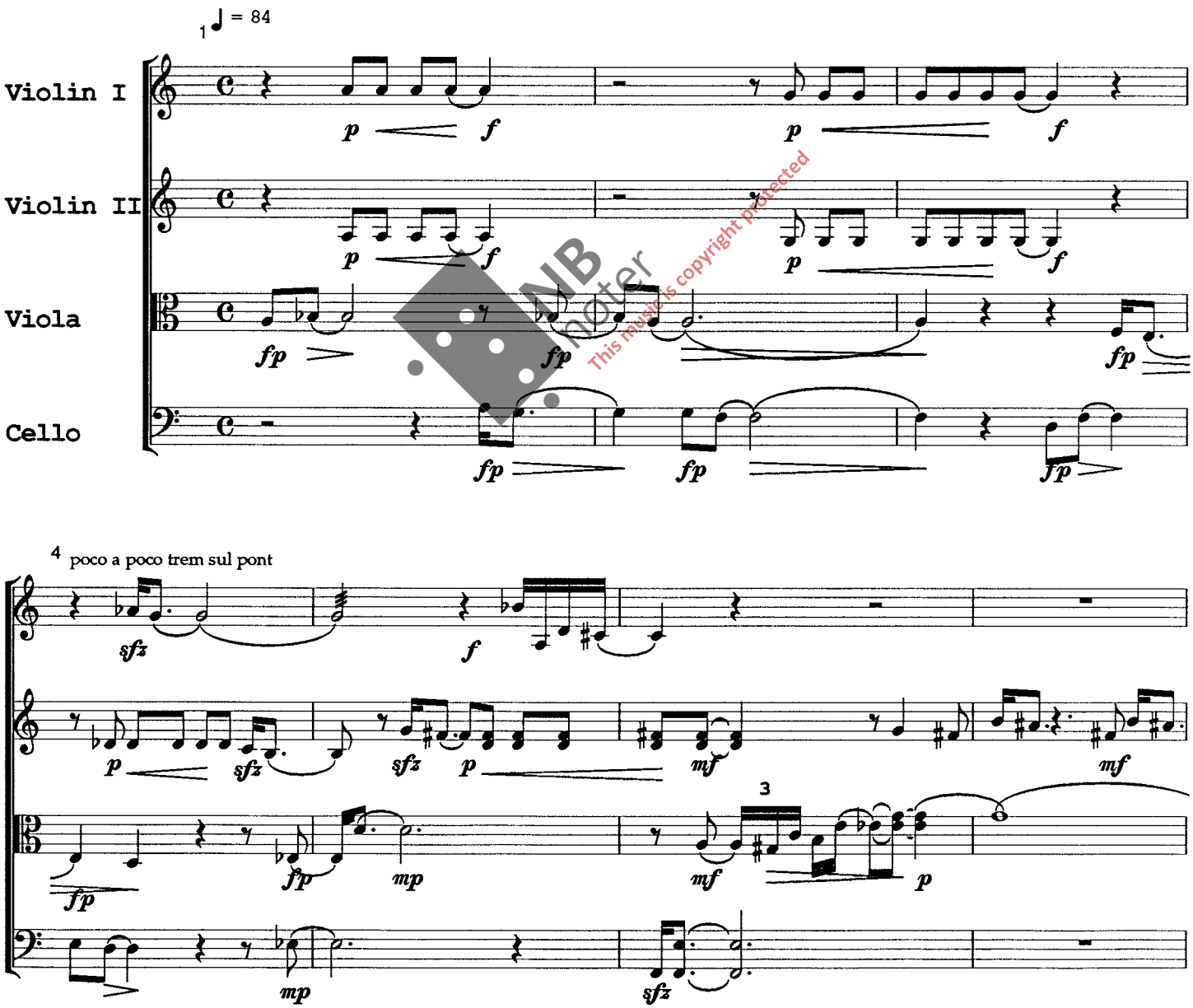
Affettuoso



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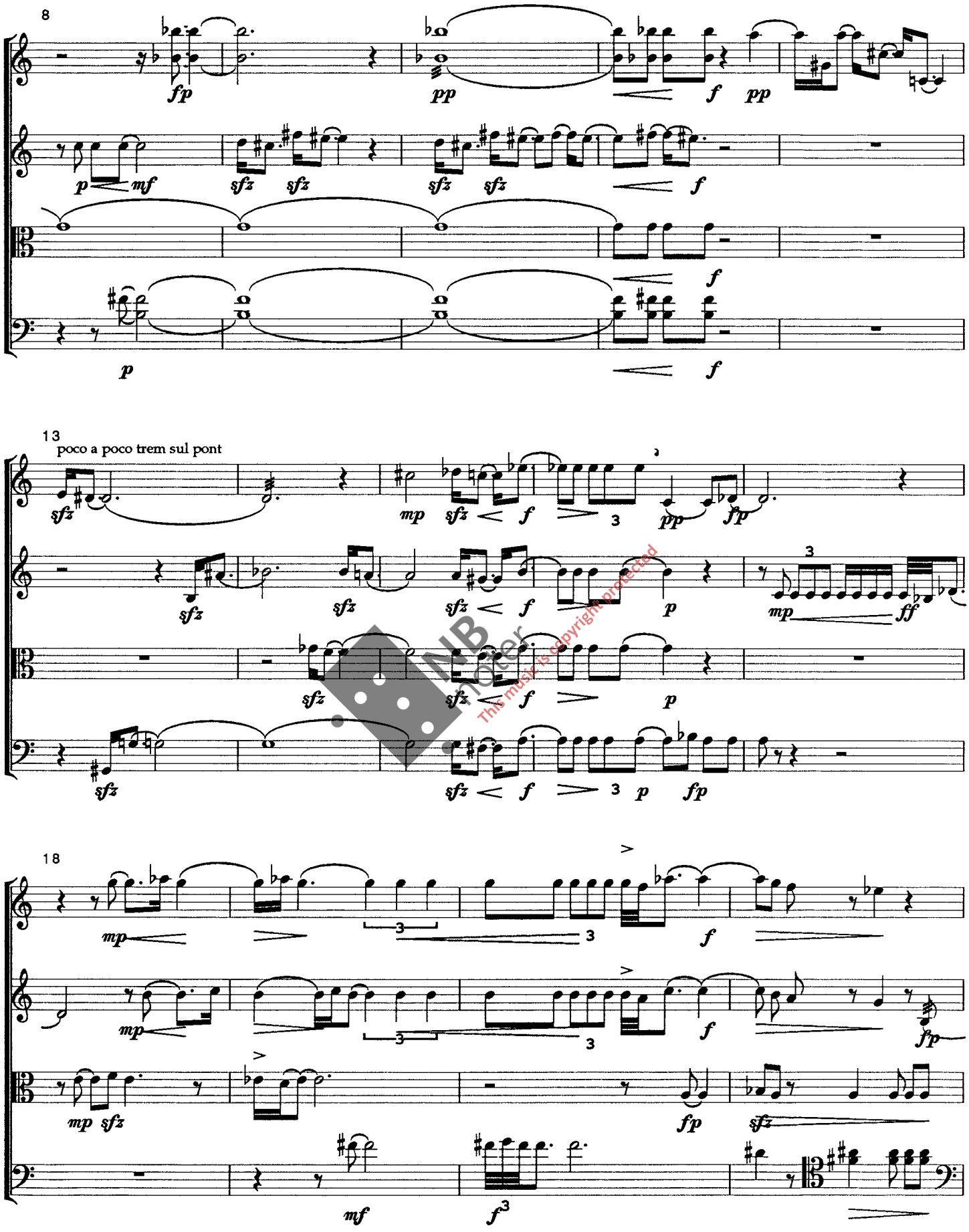

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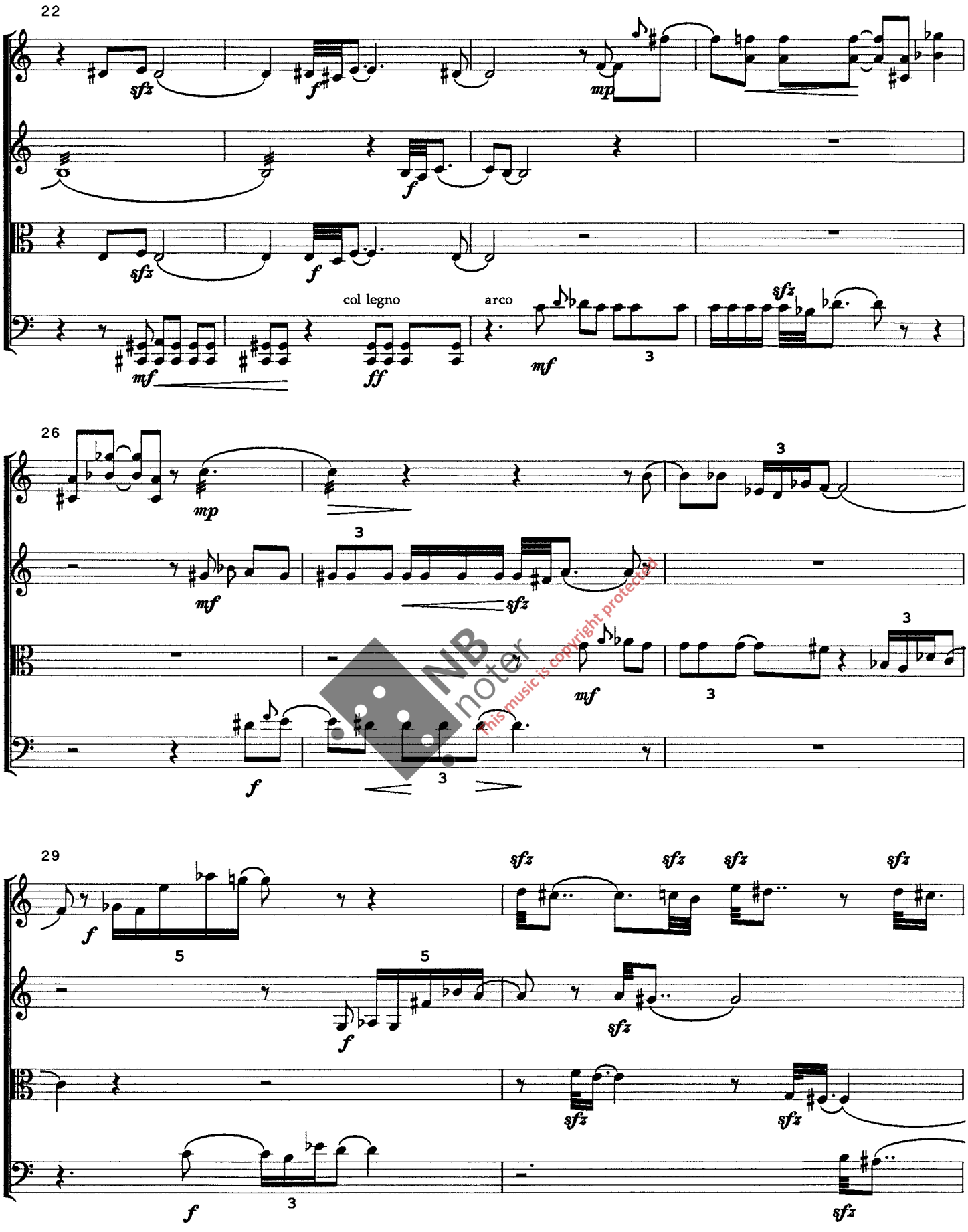

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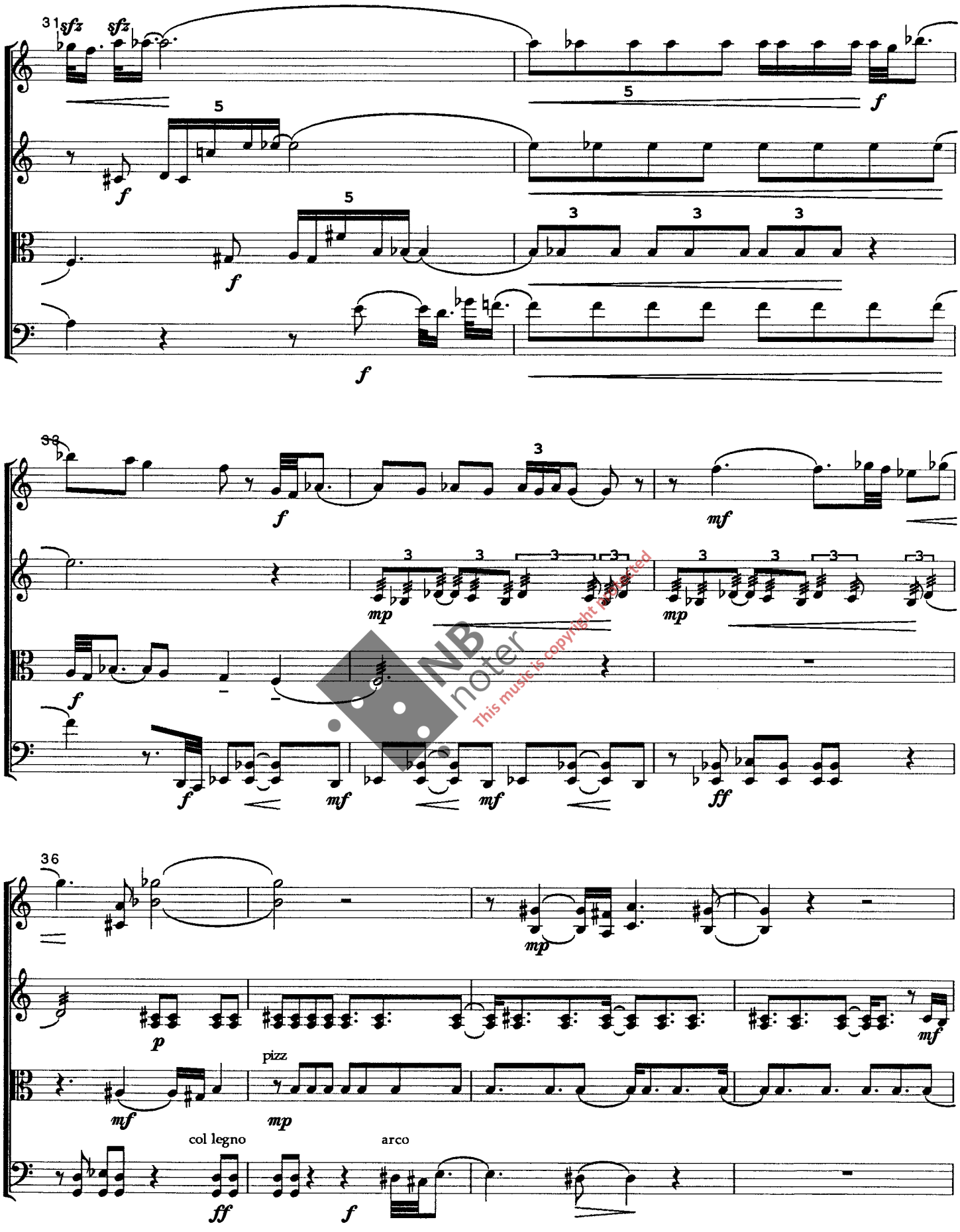

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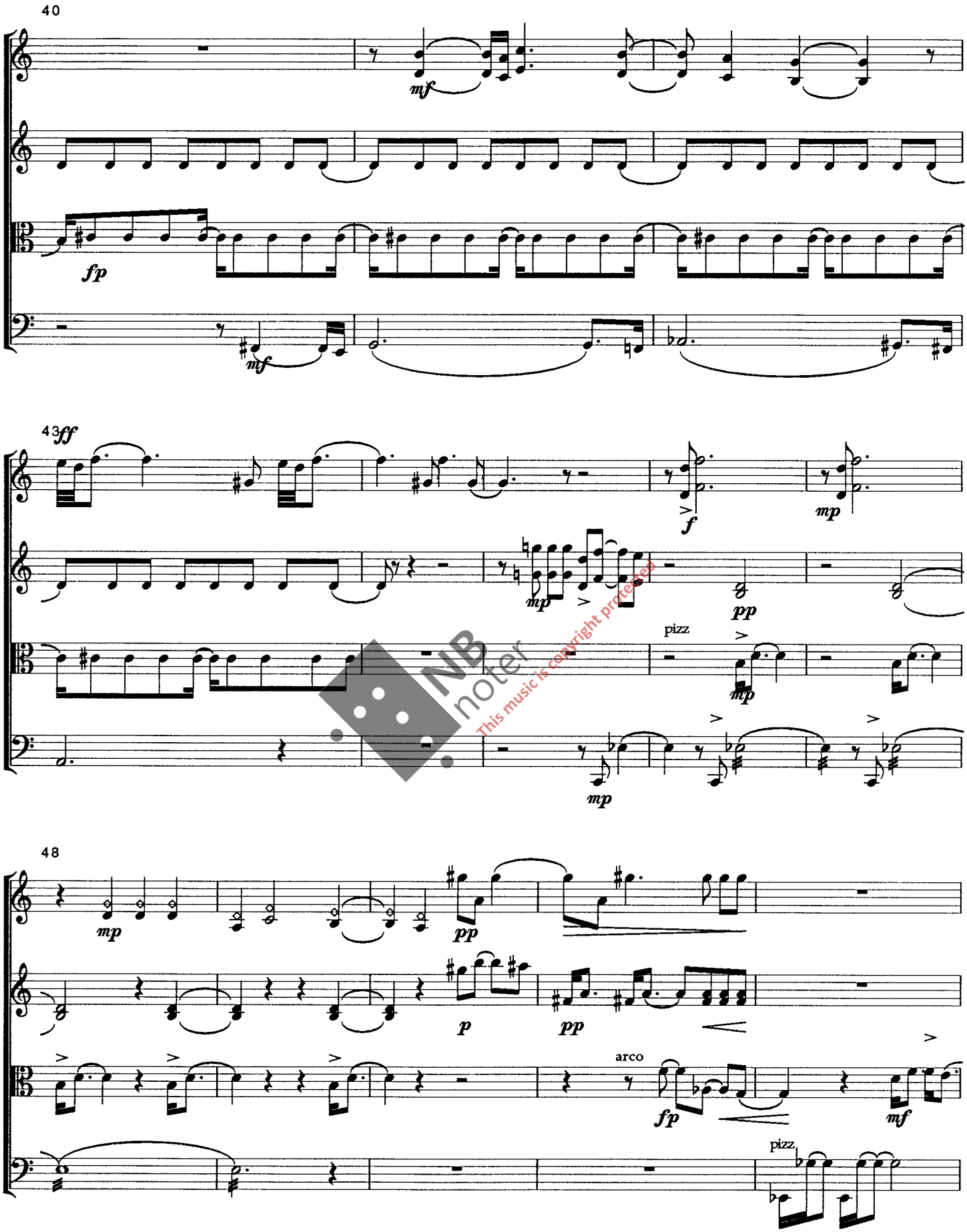

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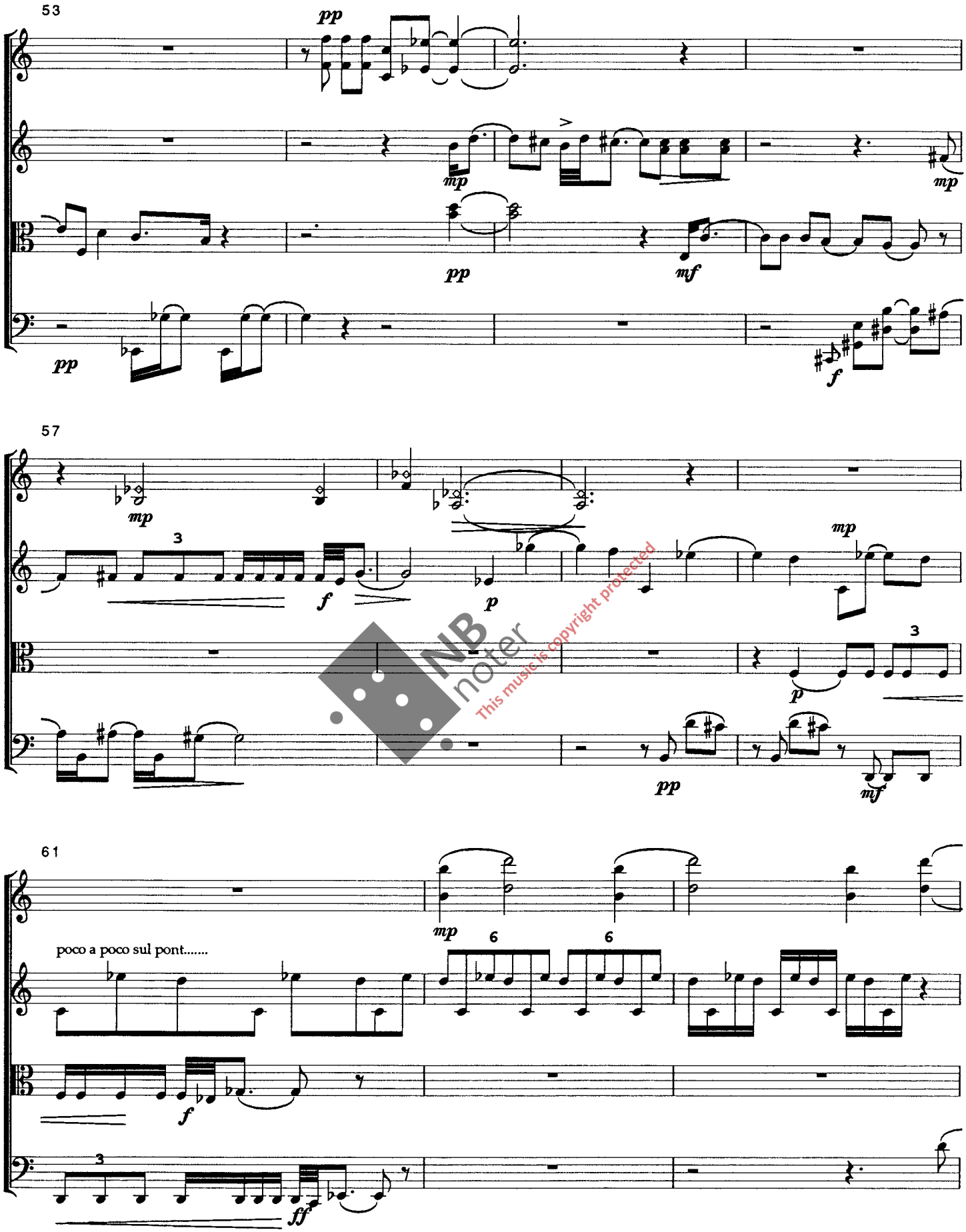

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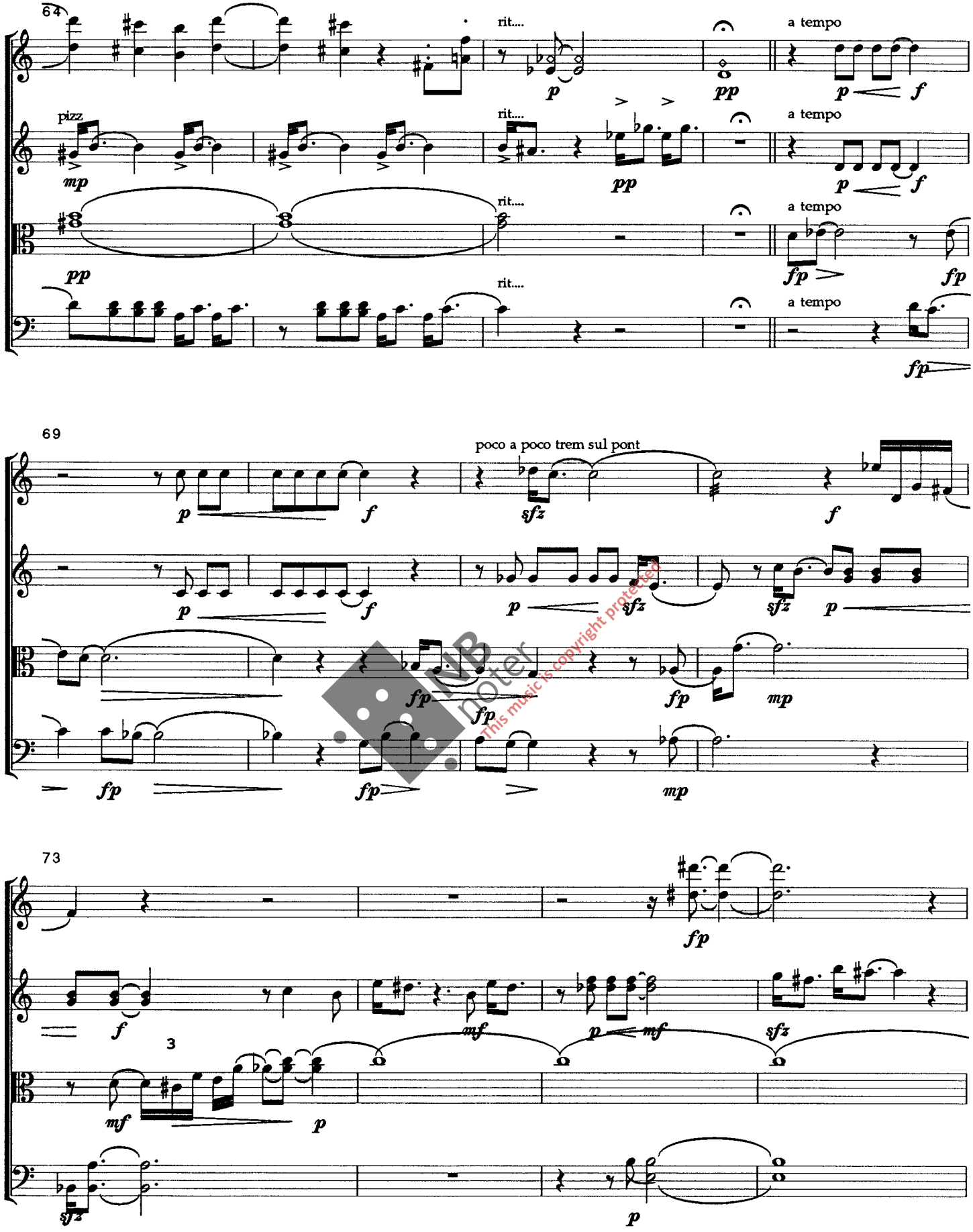

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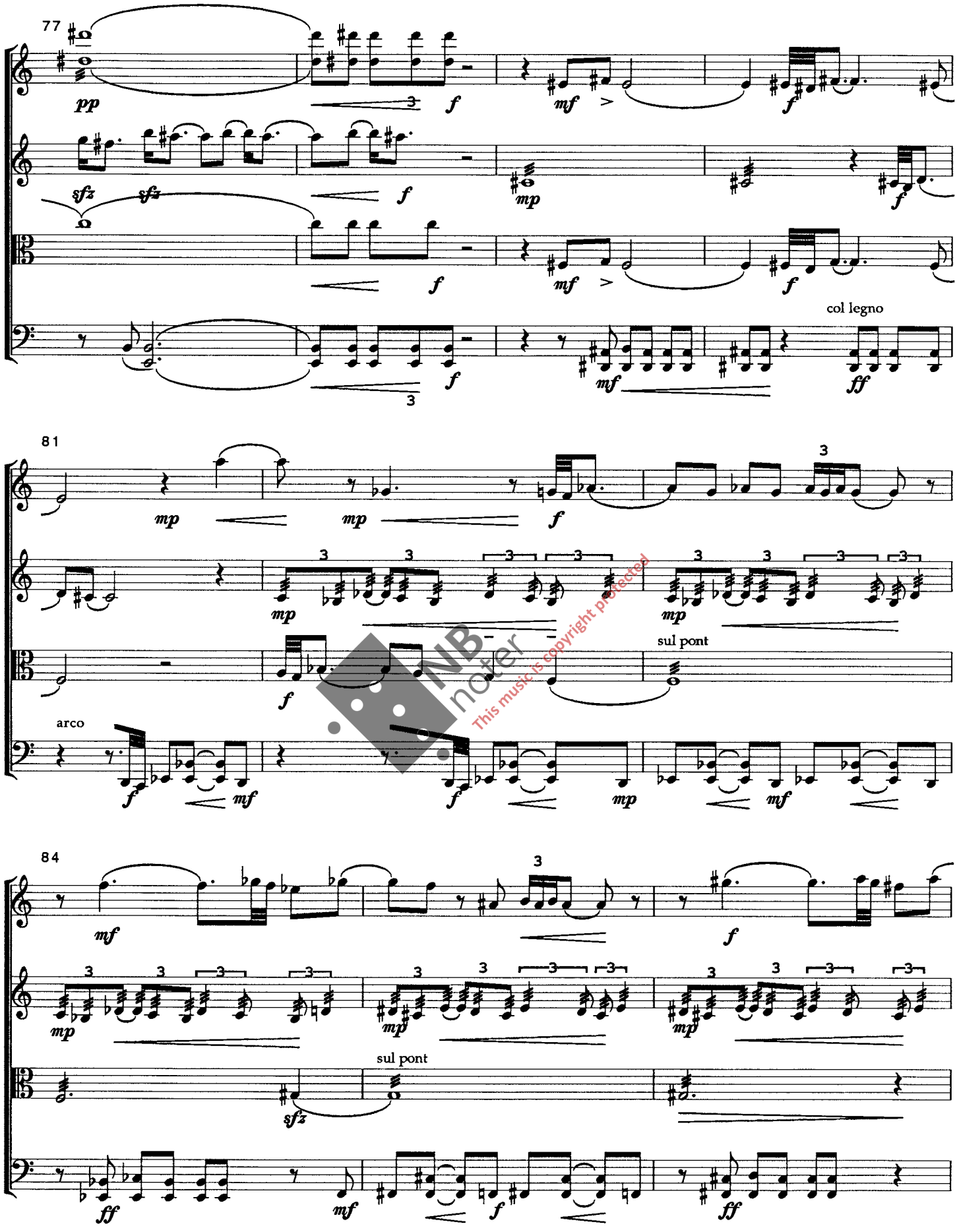

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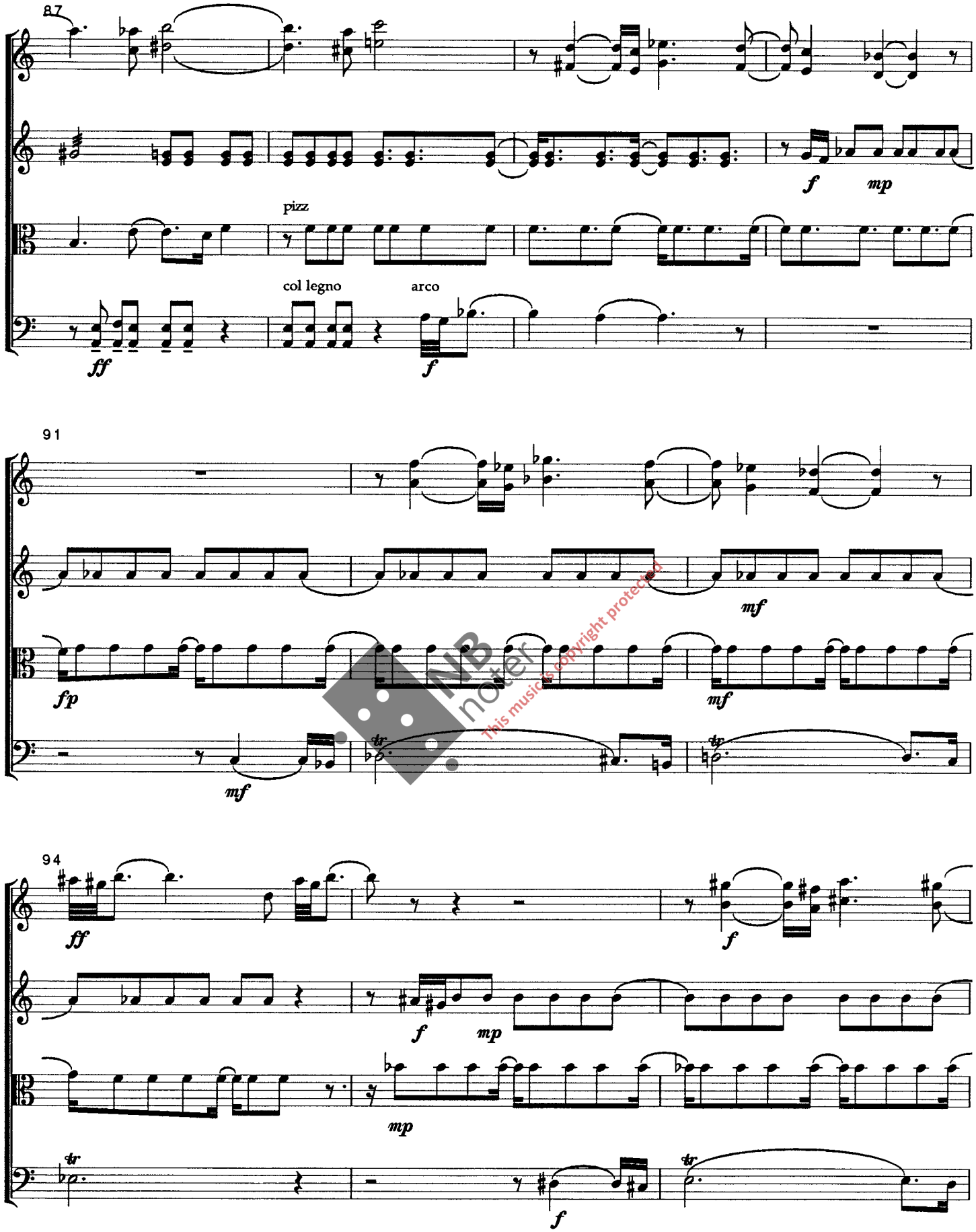

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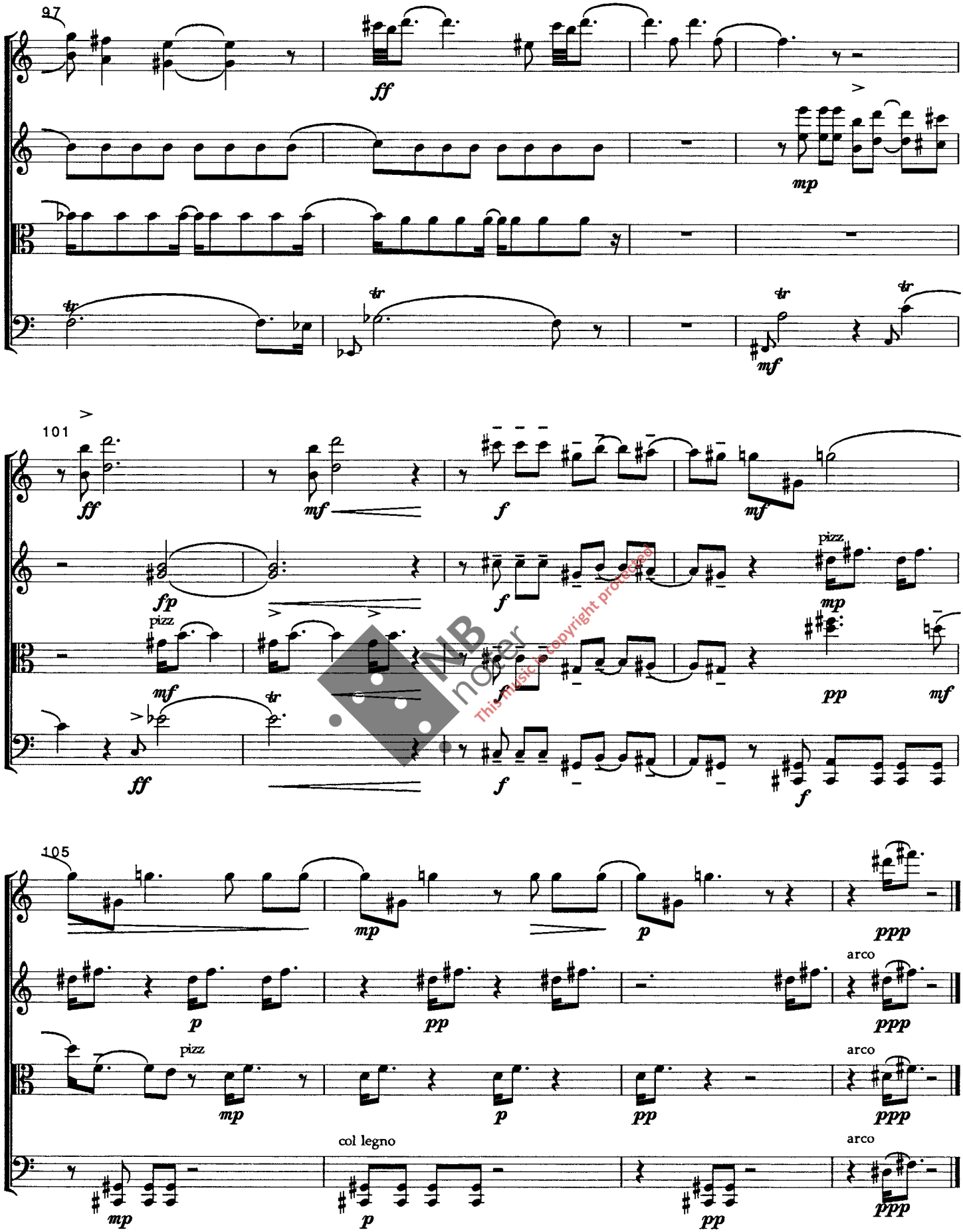

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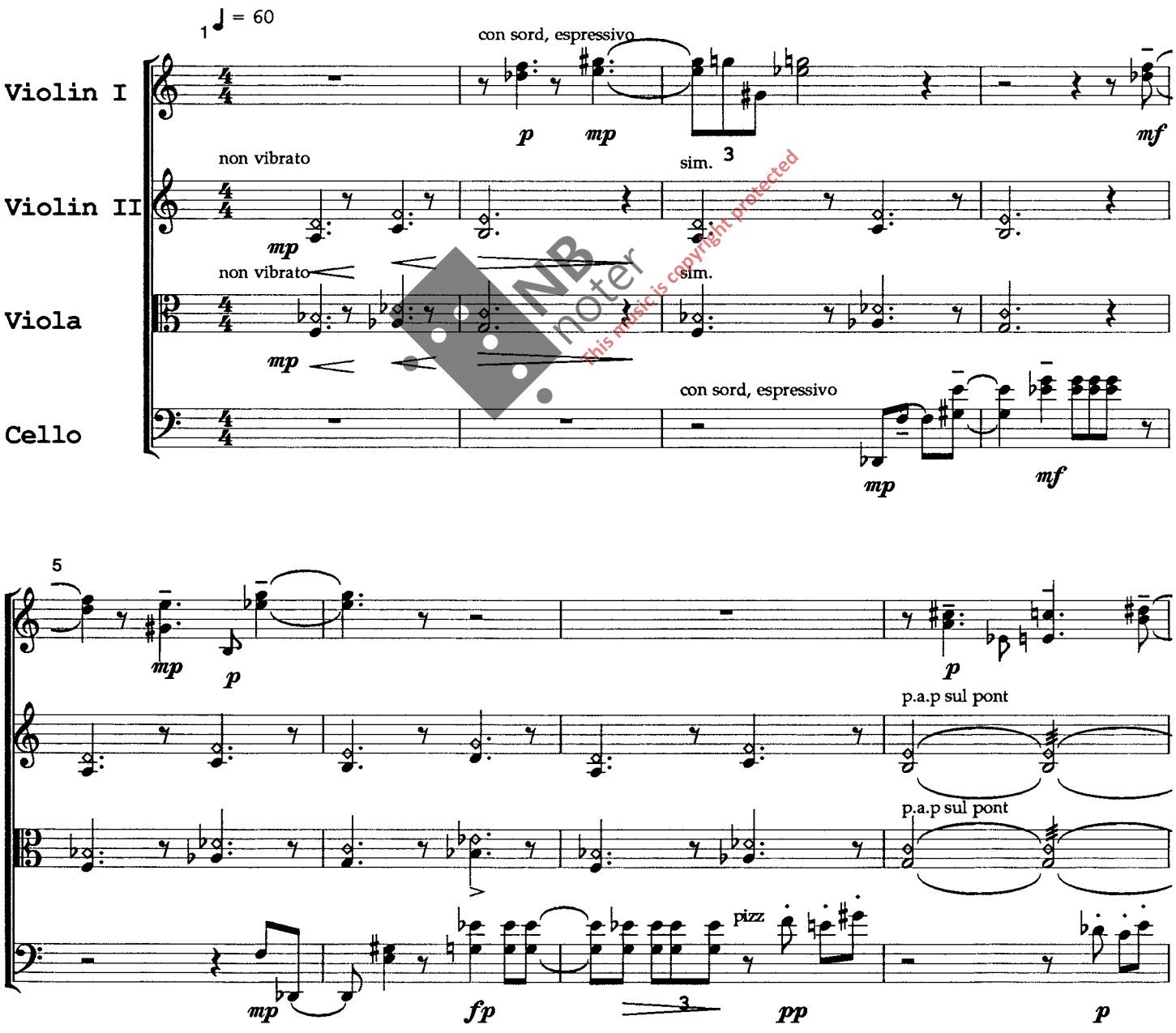
III

Misterioso



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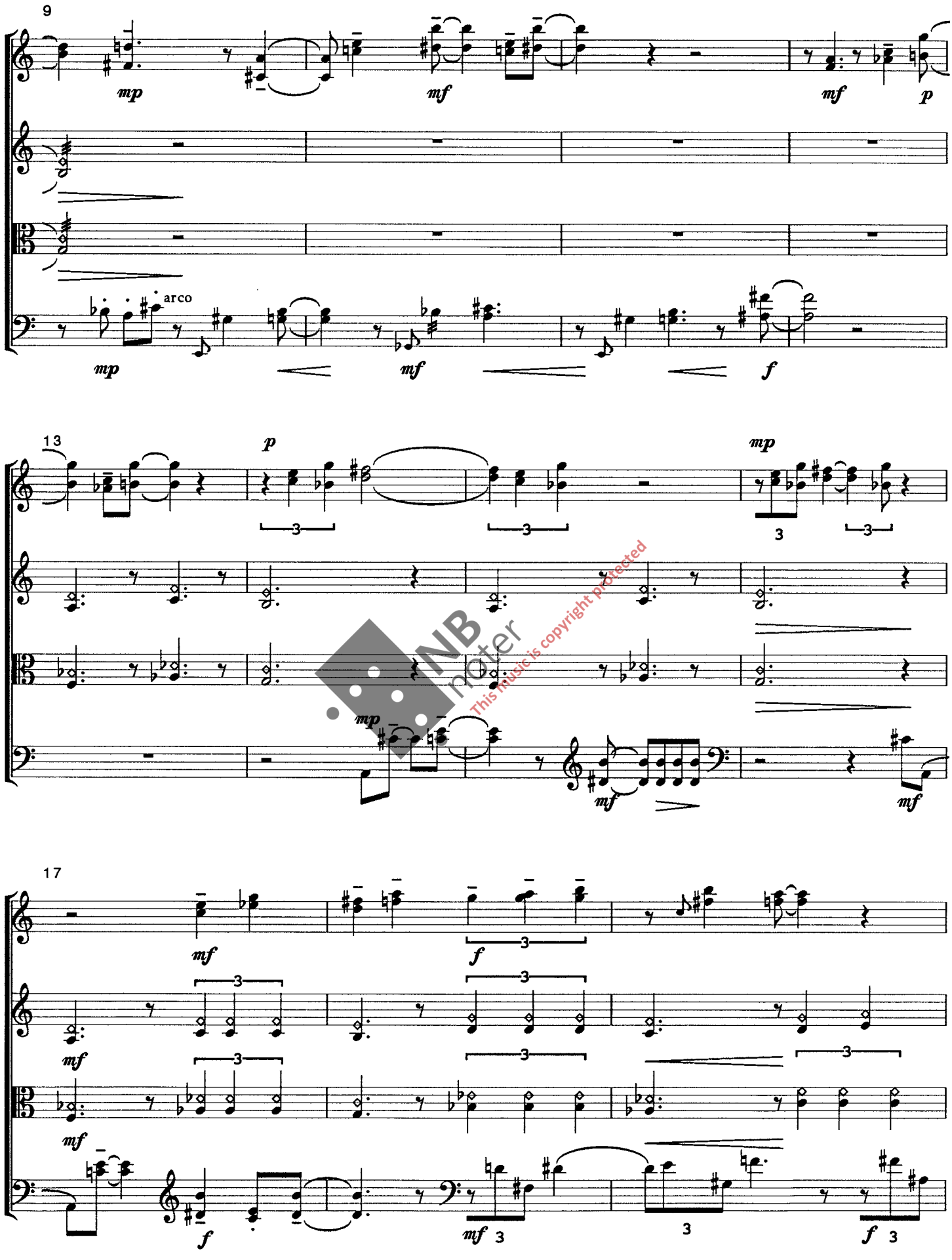

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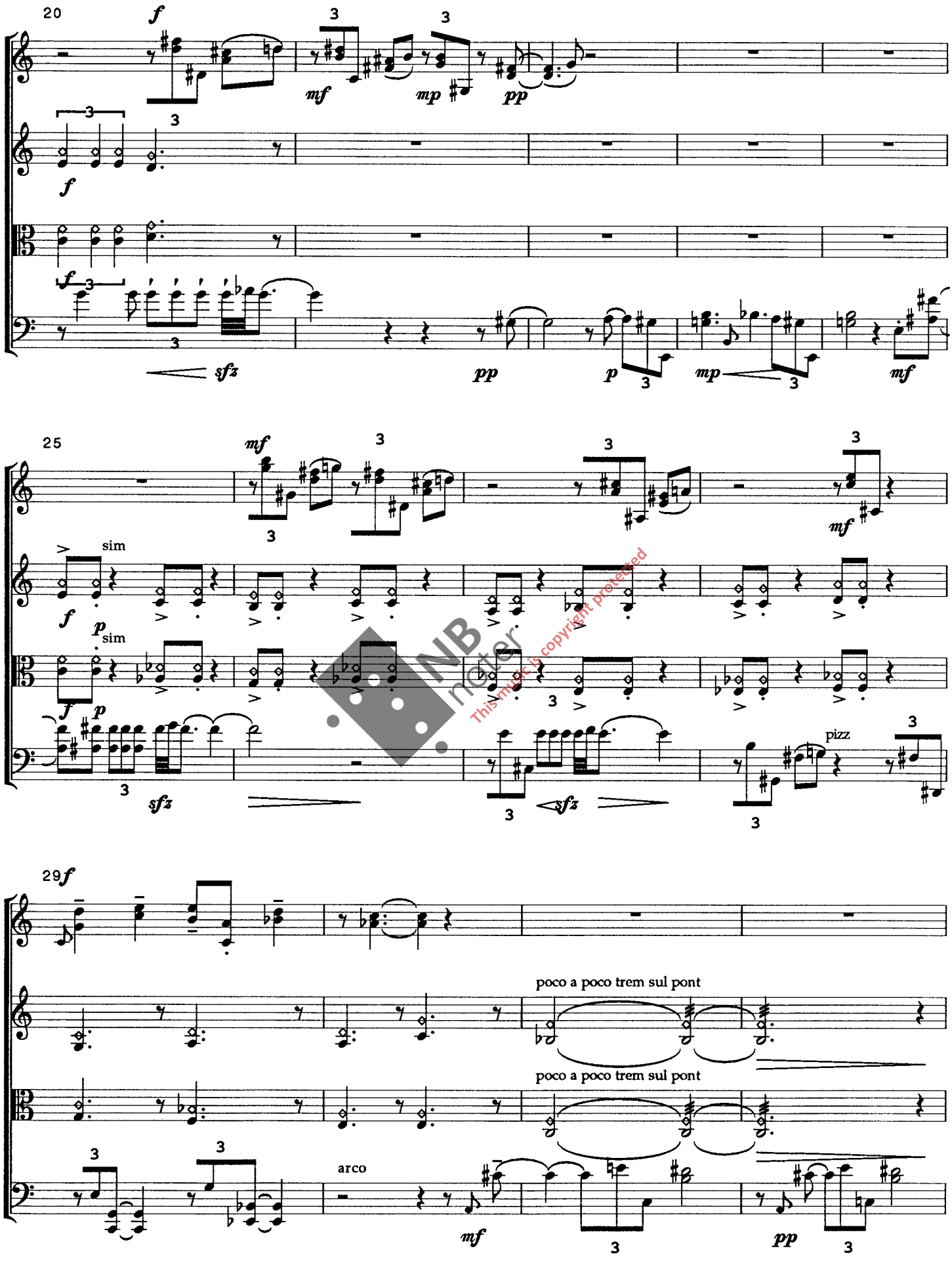

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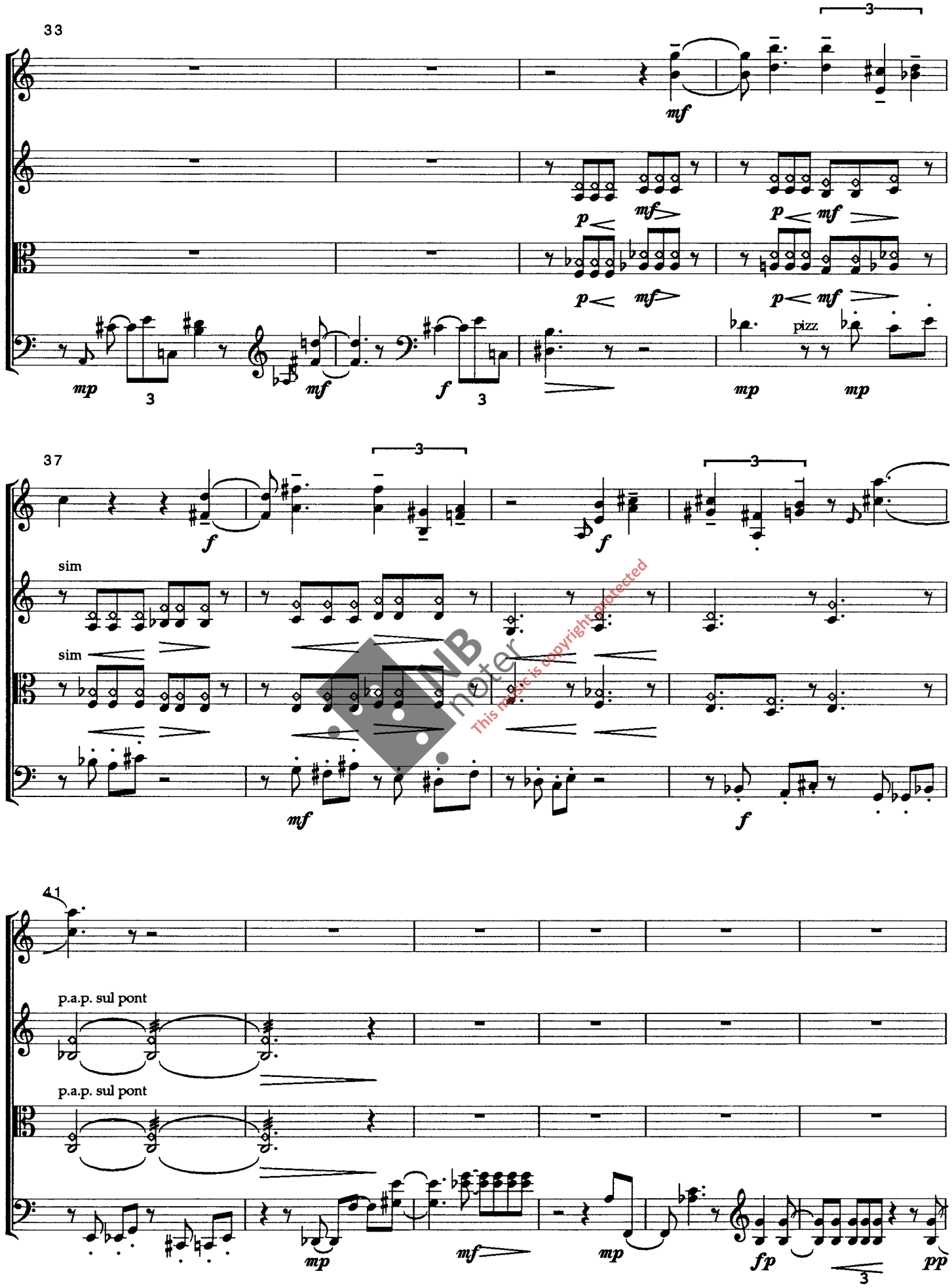

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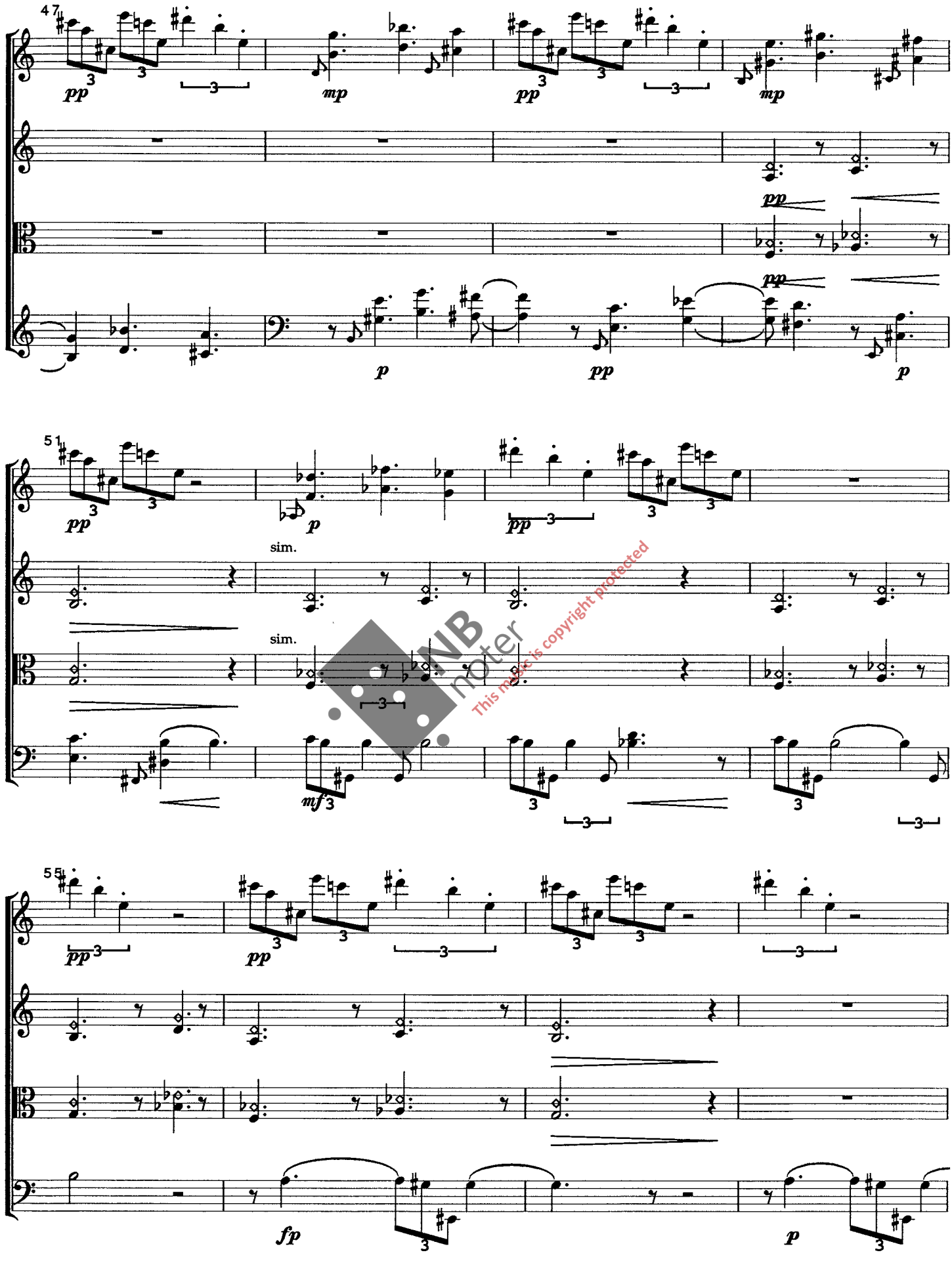

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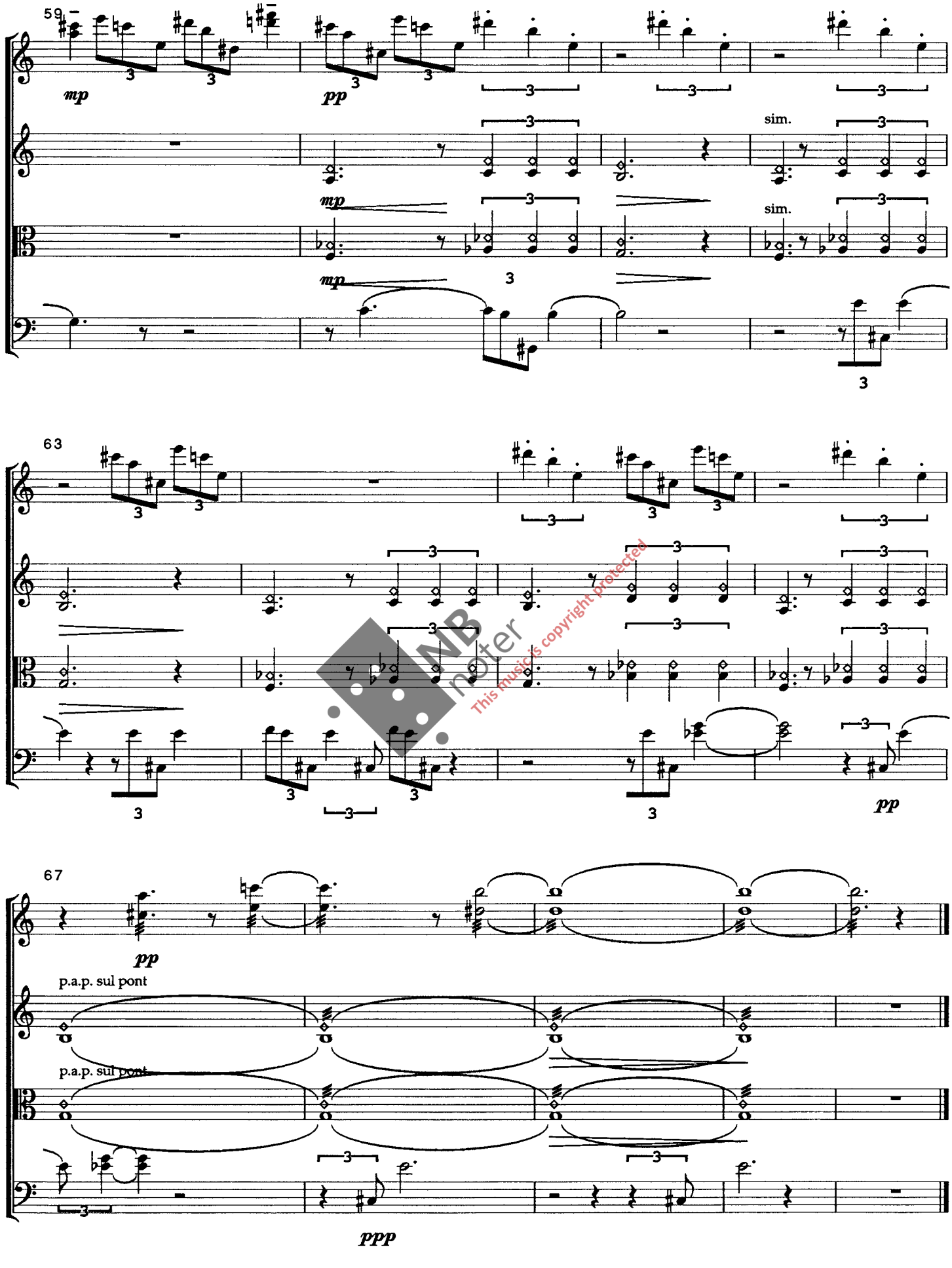

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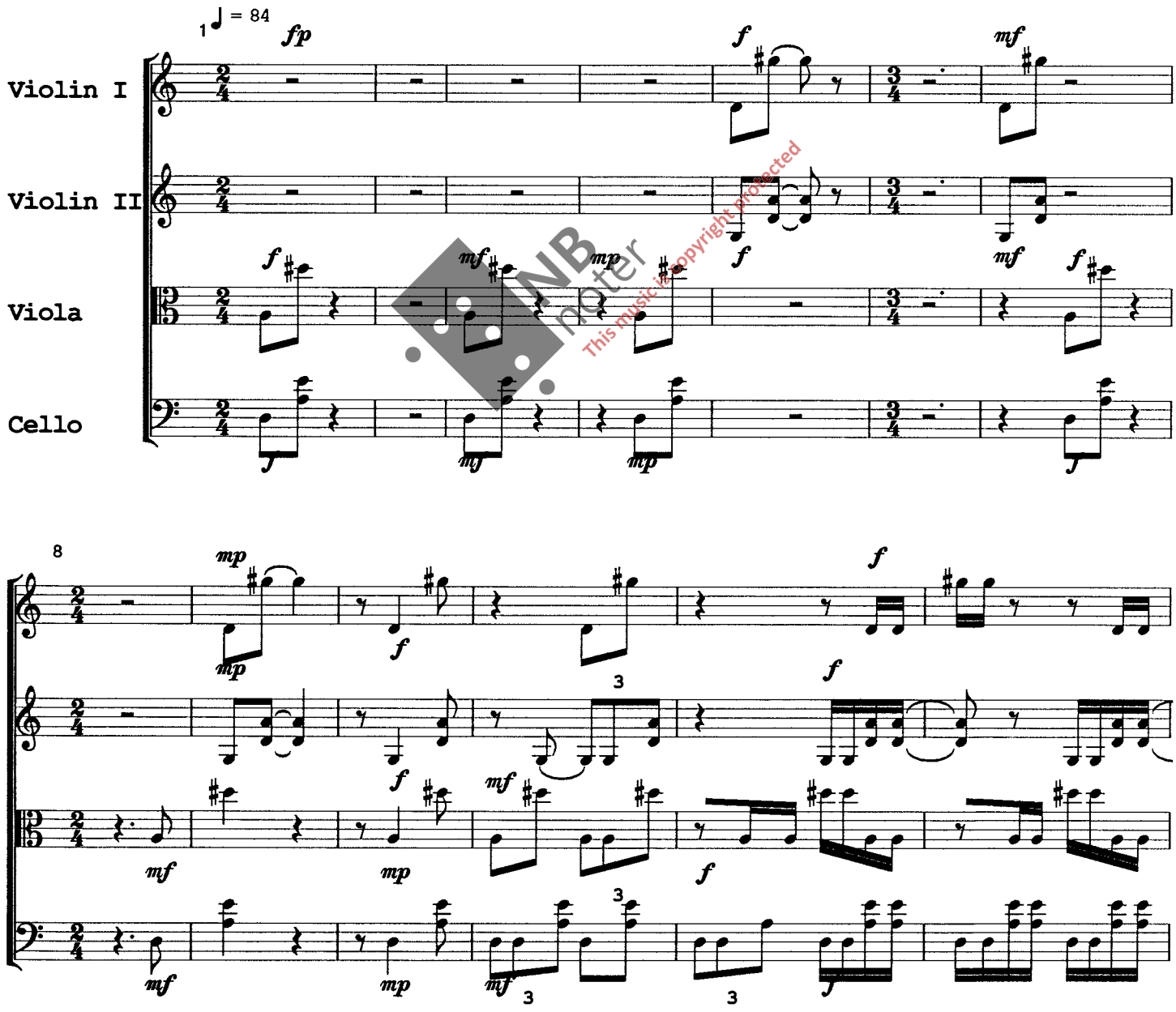
I V

Giocoso



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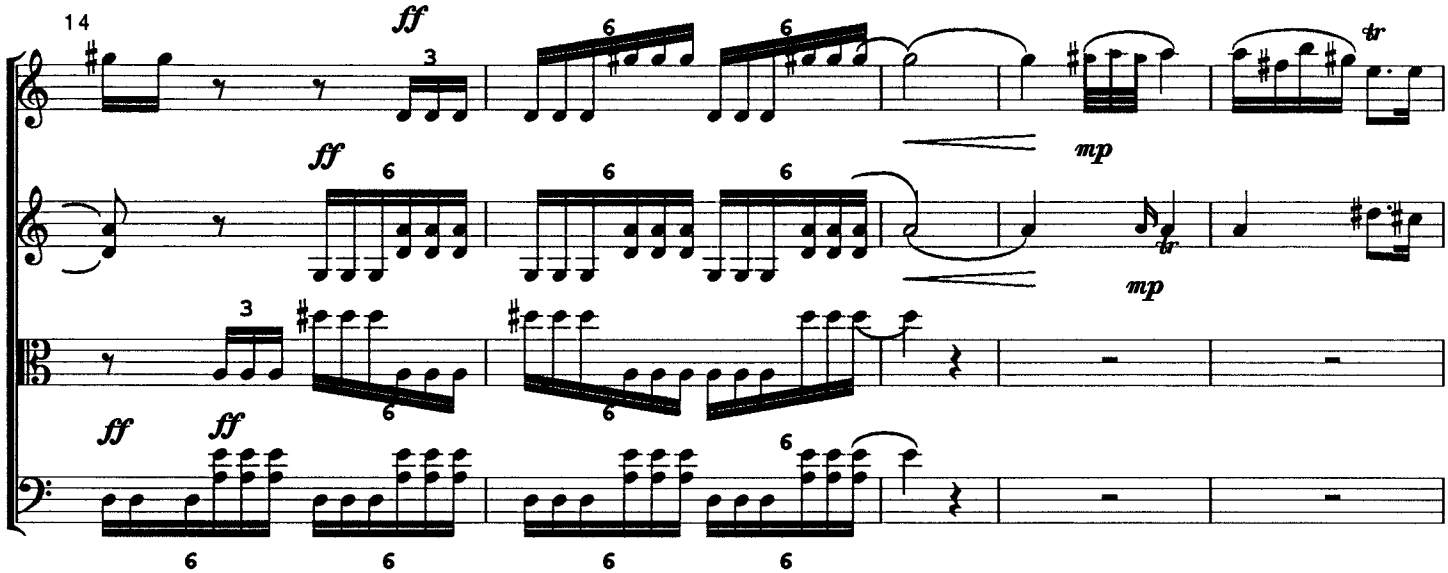

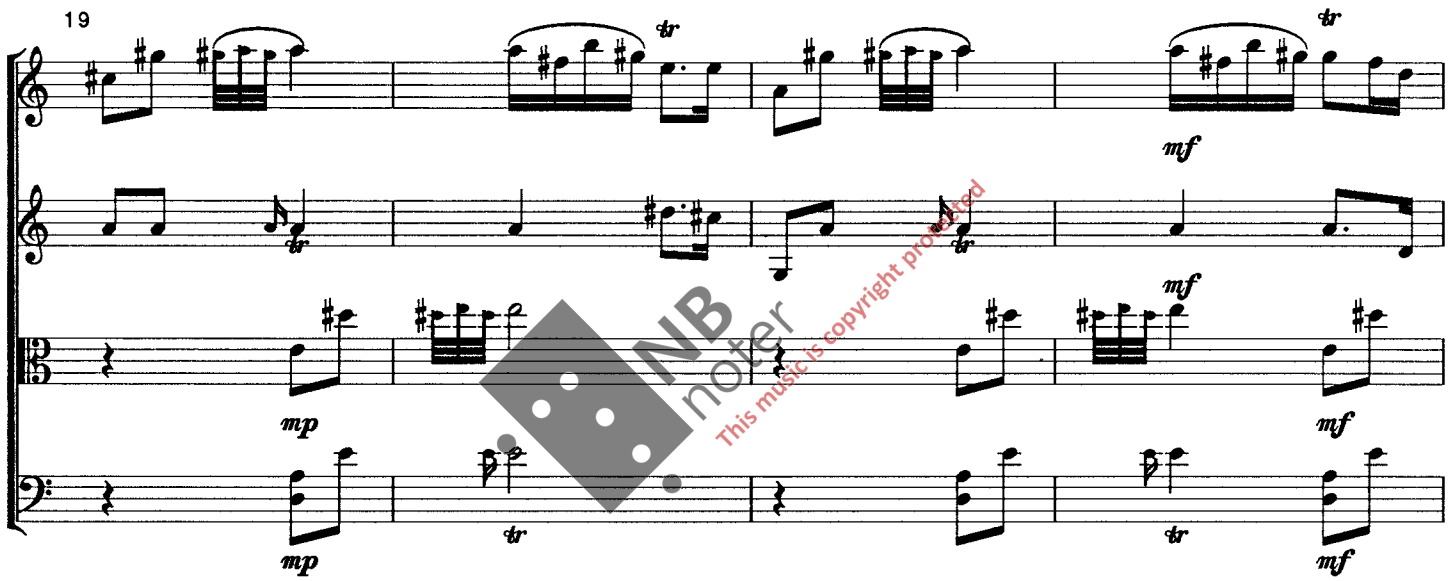

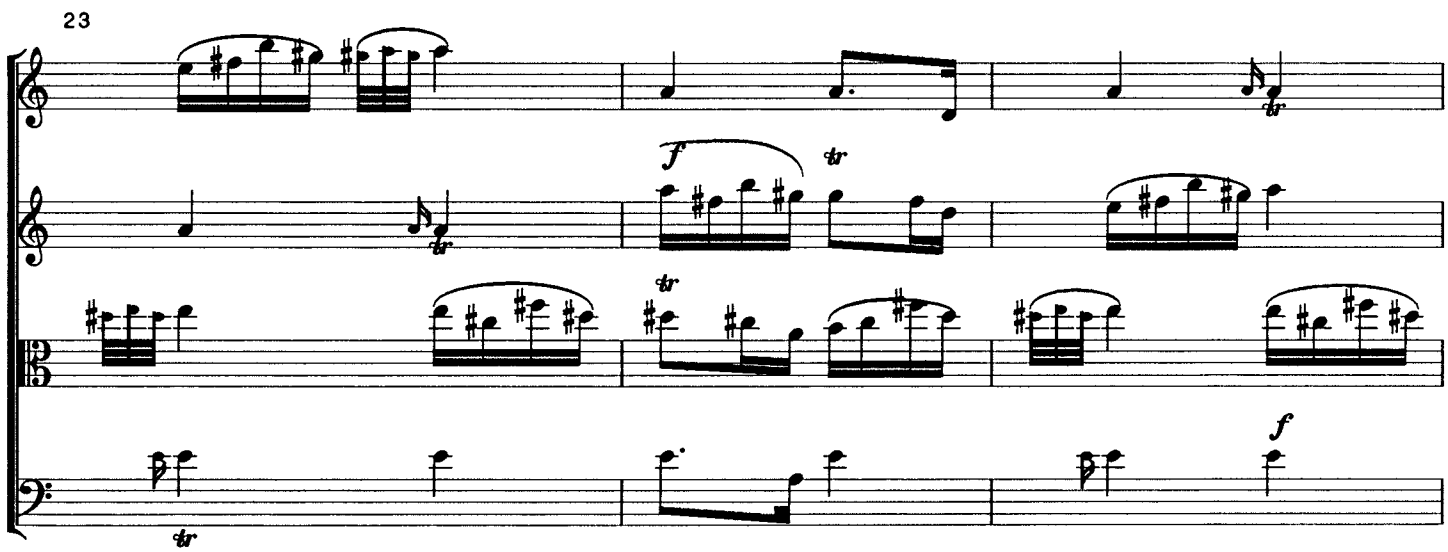

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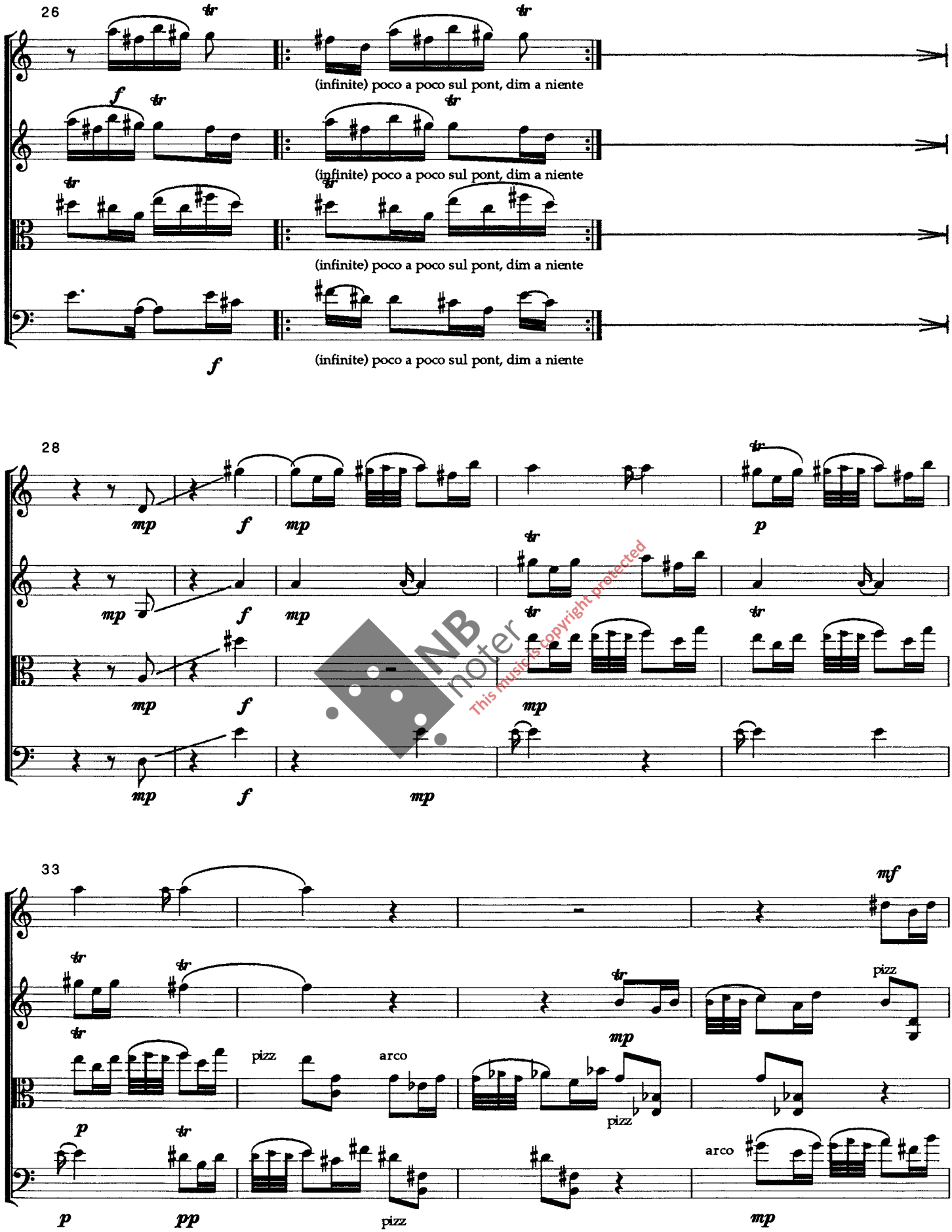

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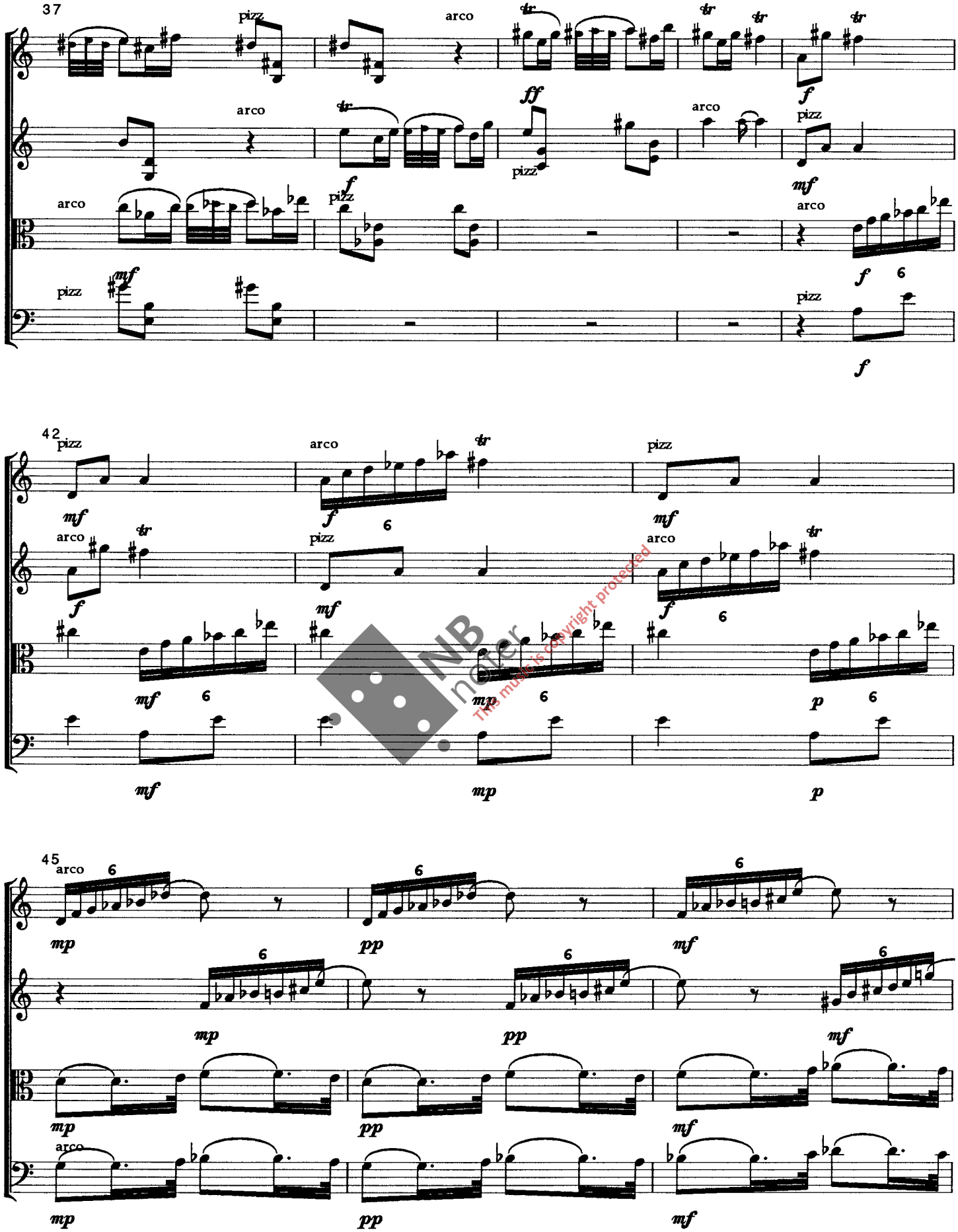
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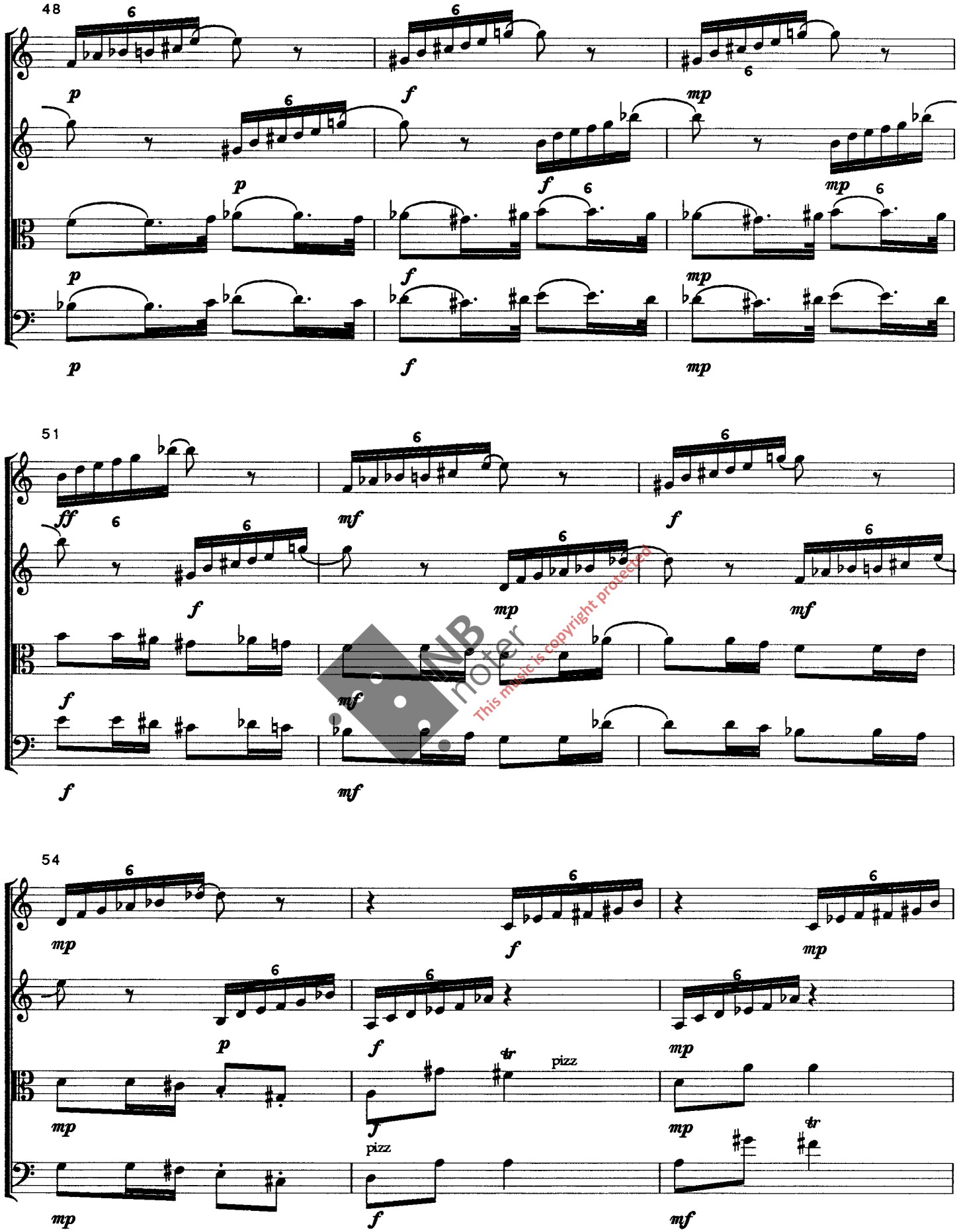

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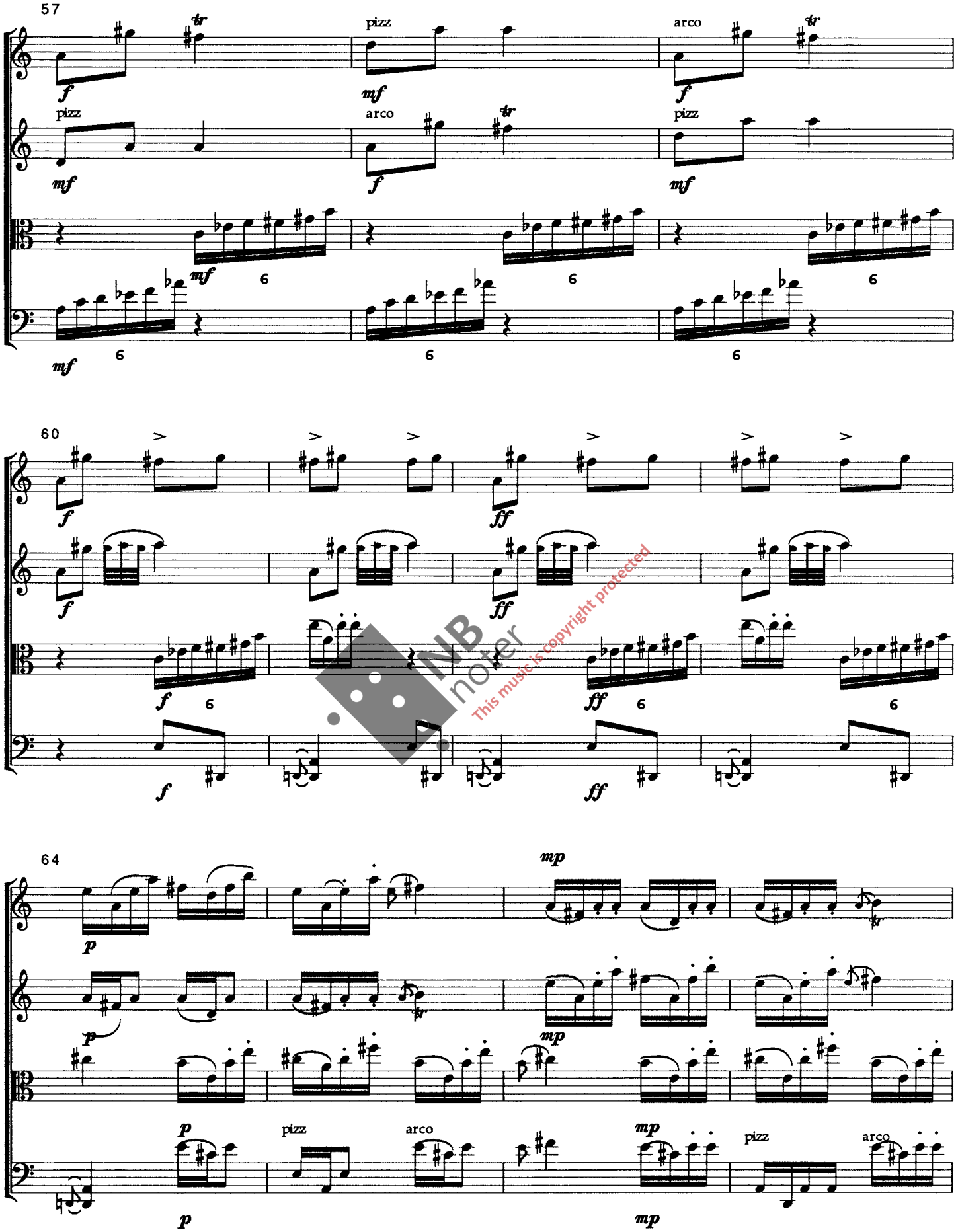

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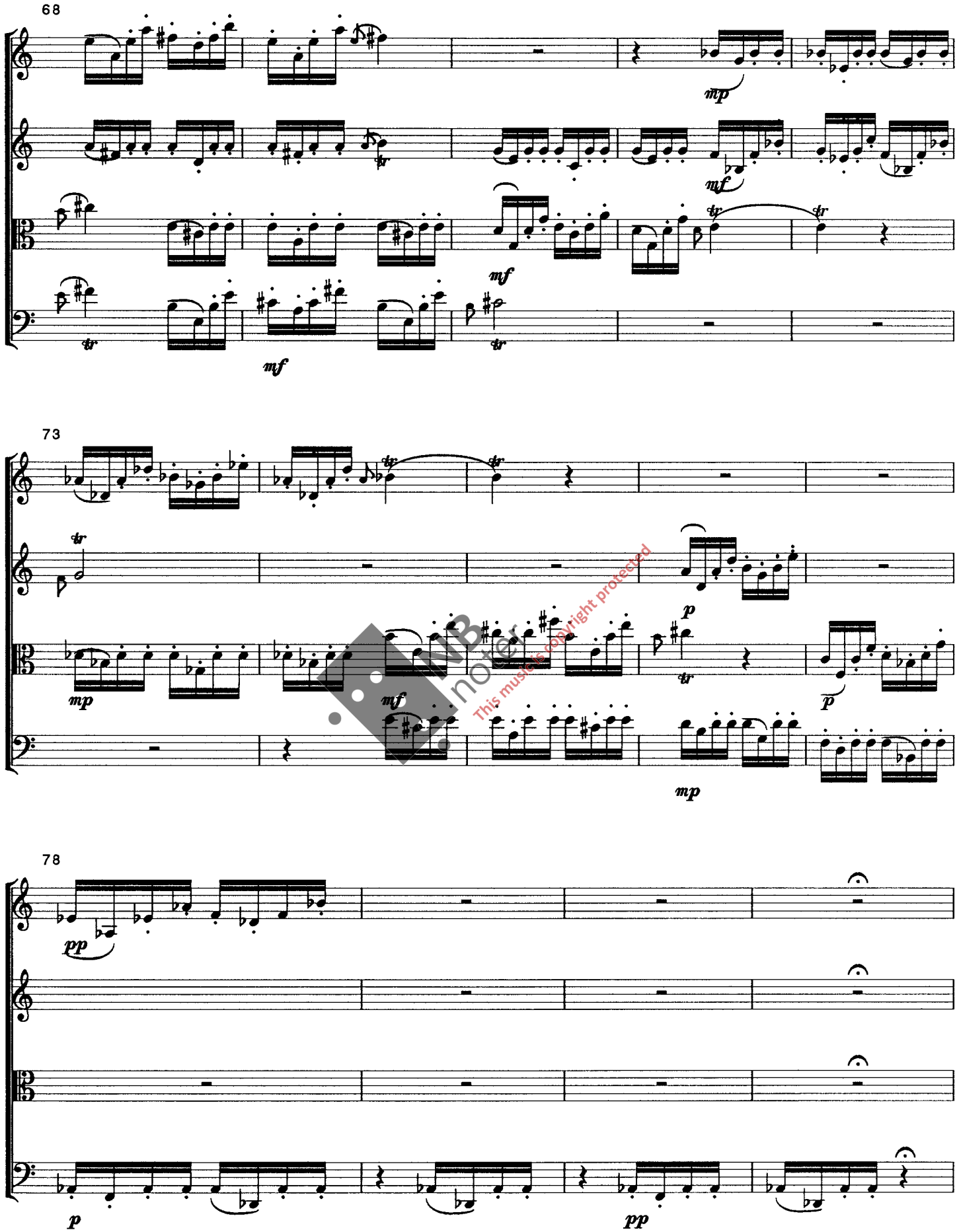

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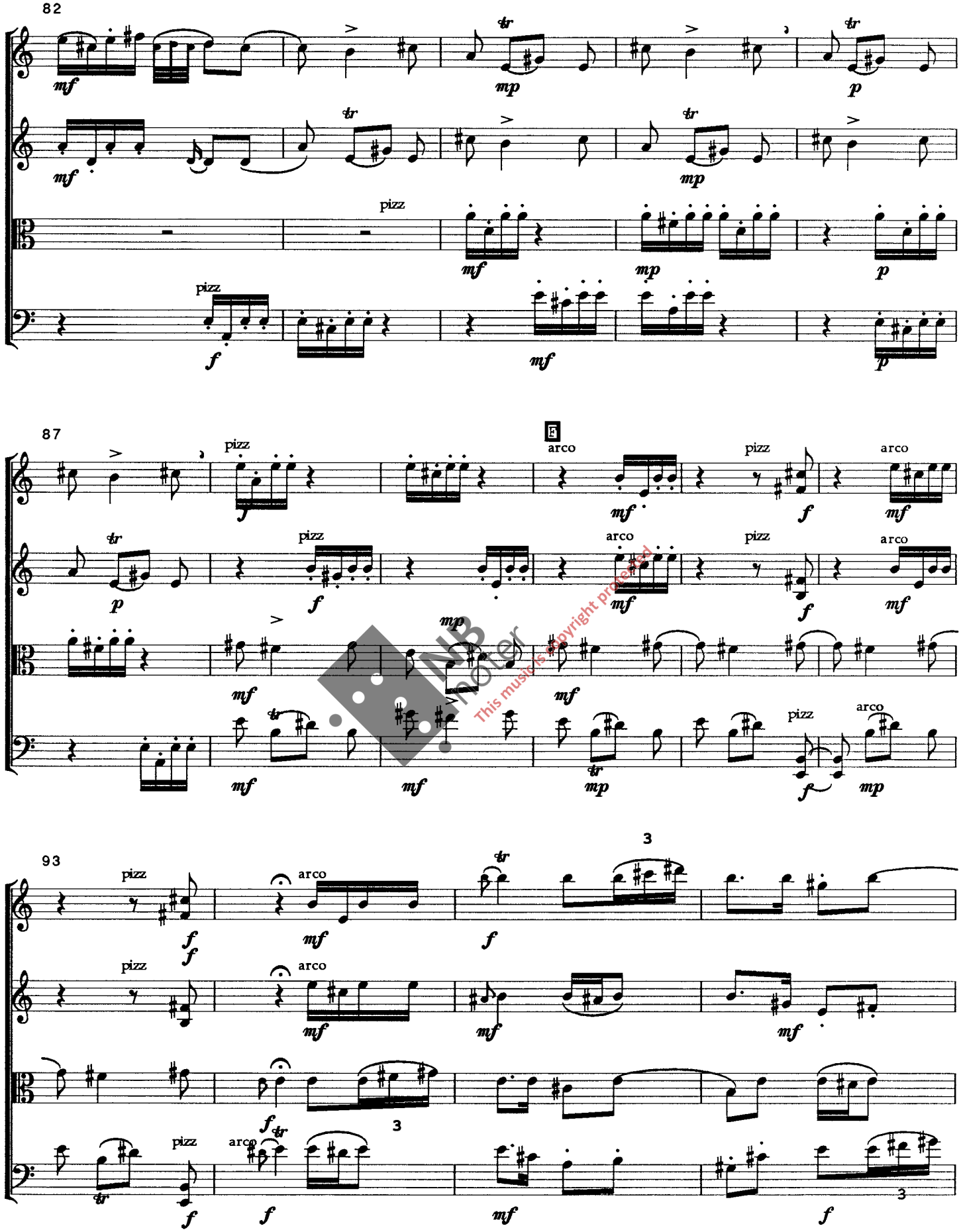

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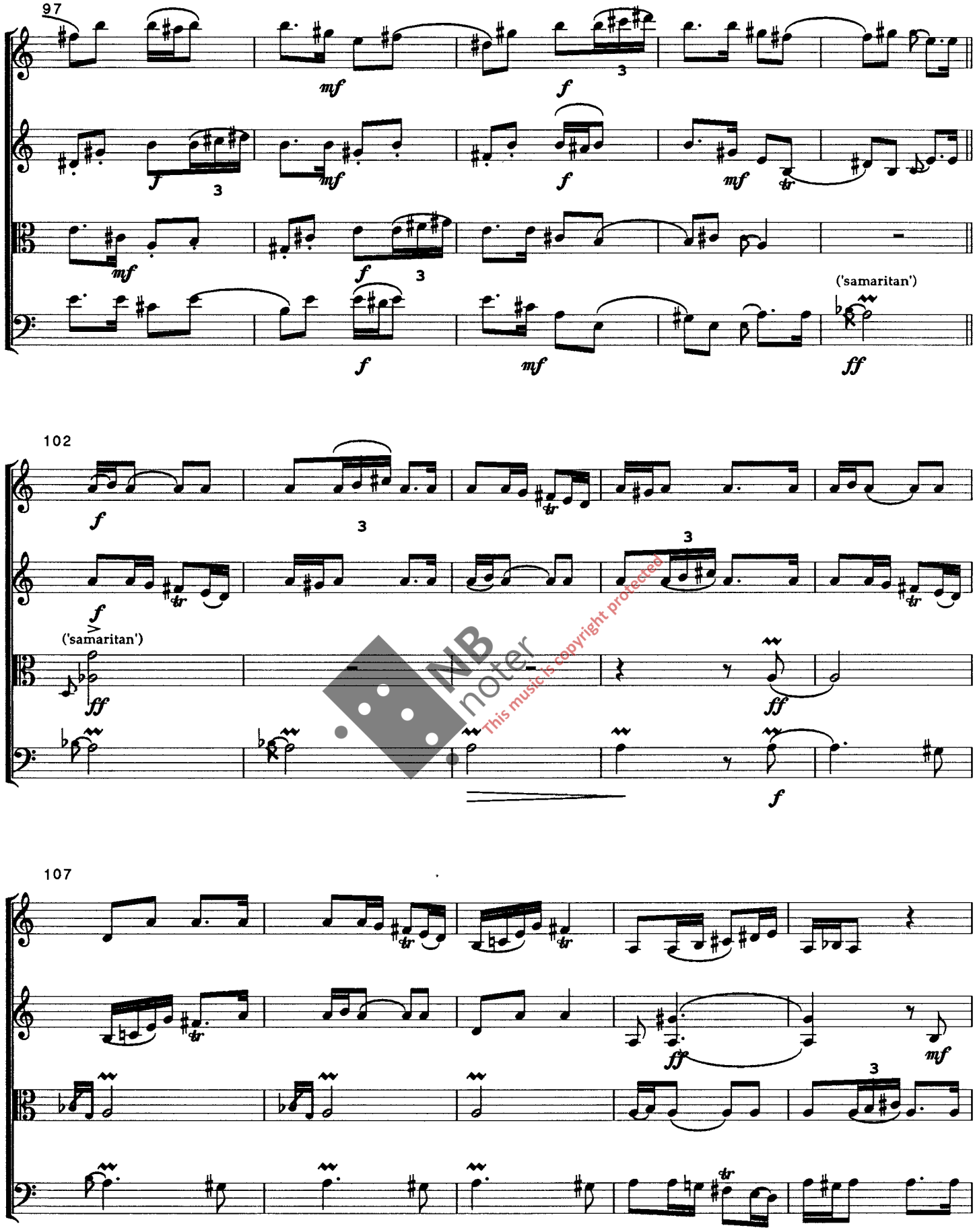

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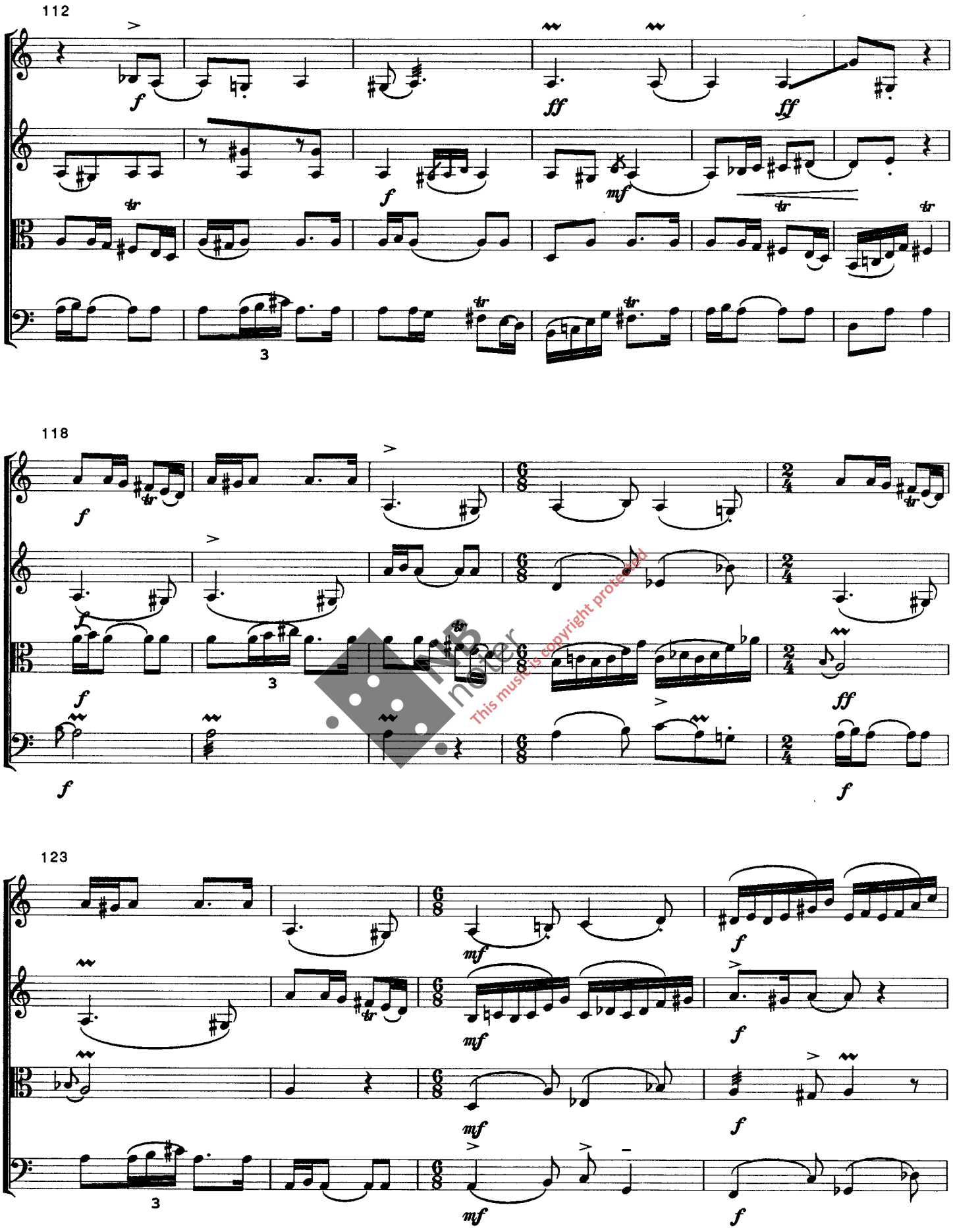

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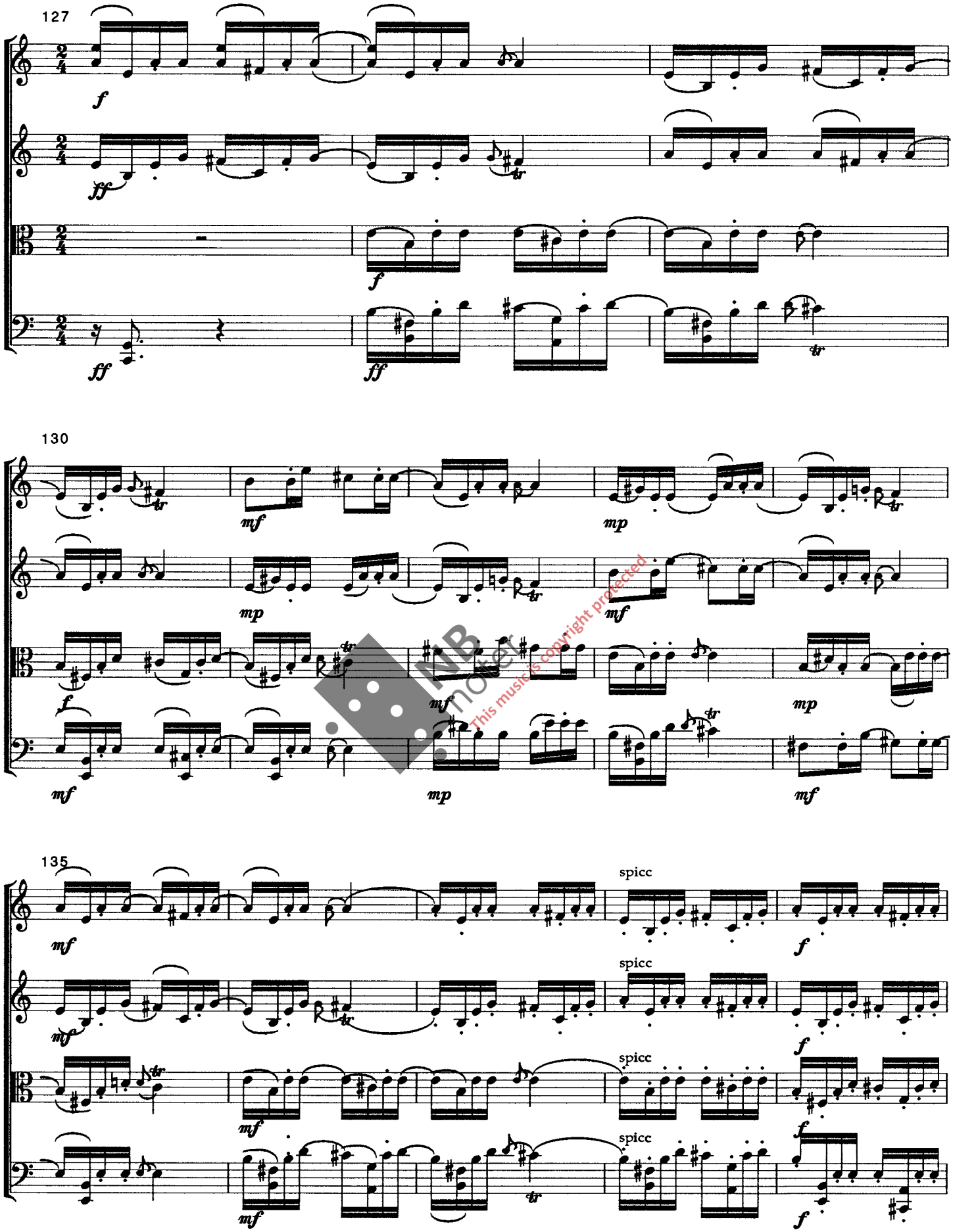

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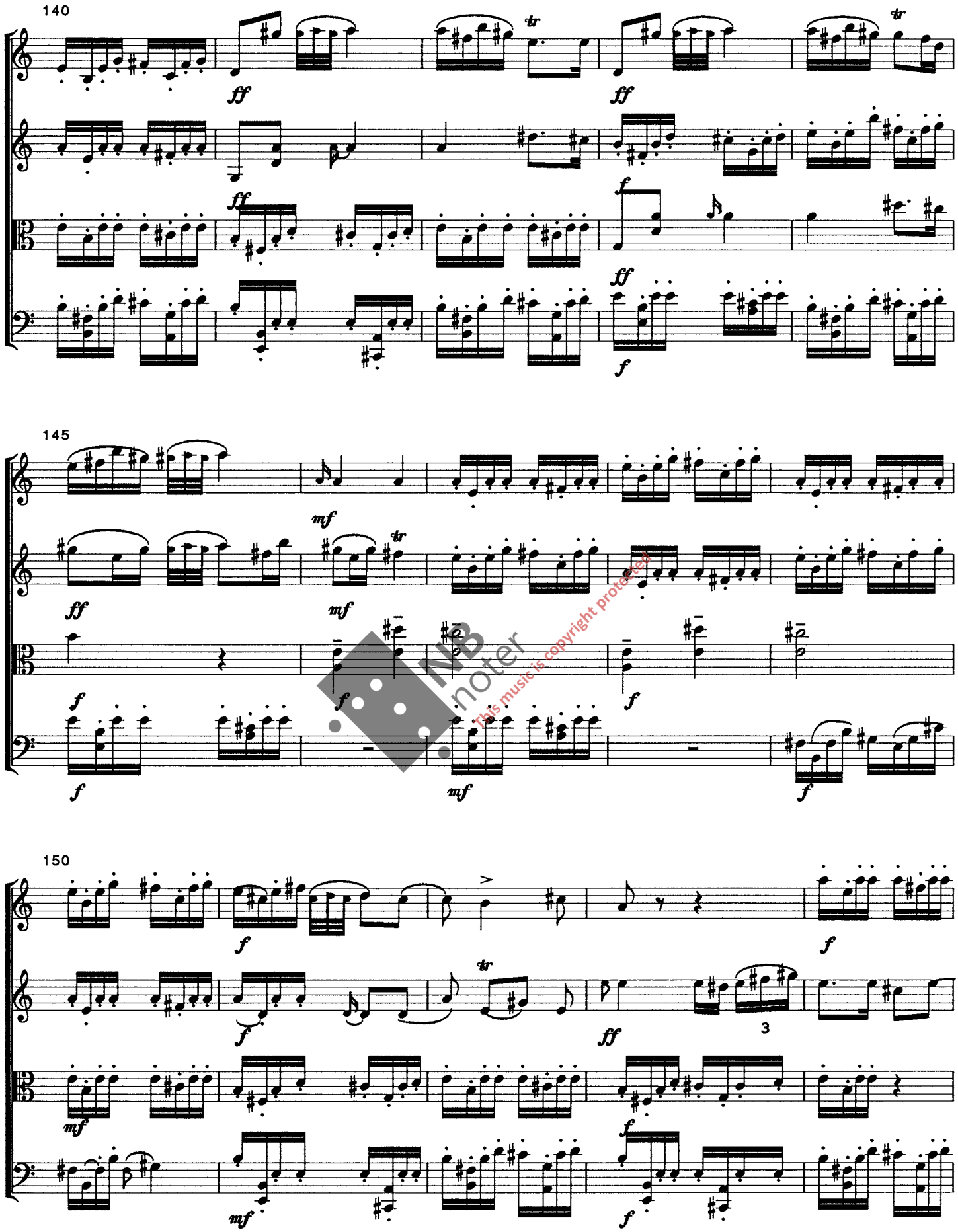

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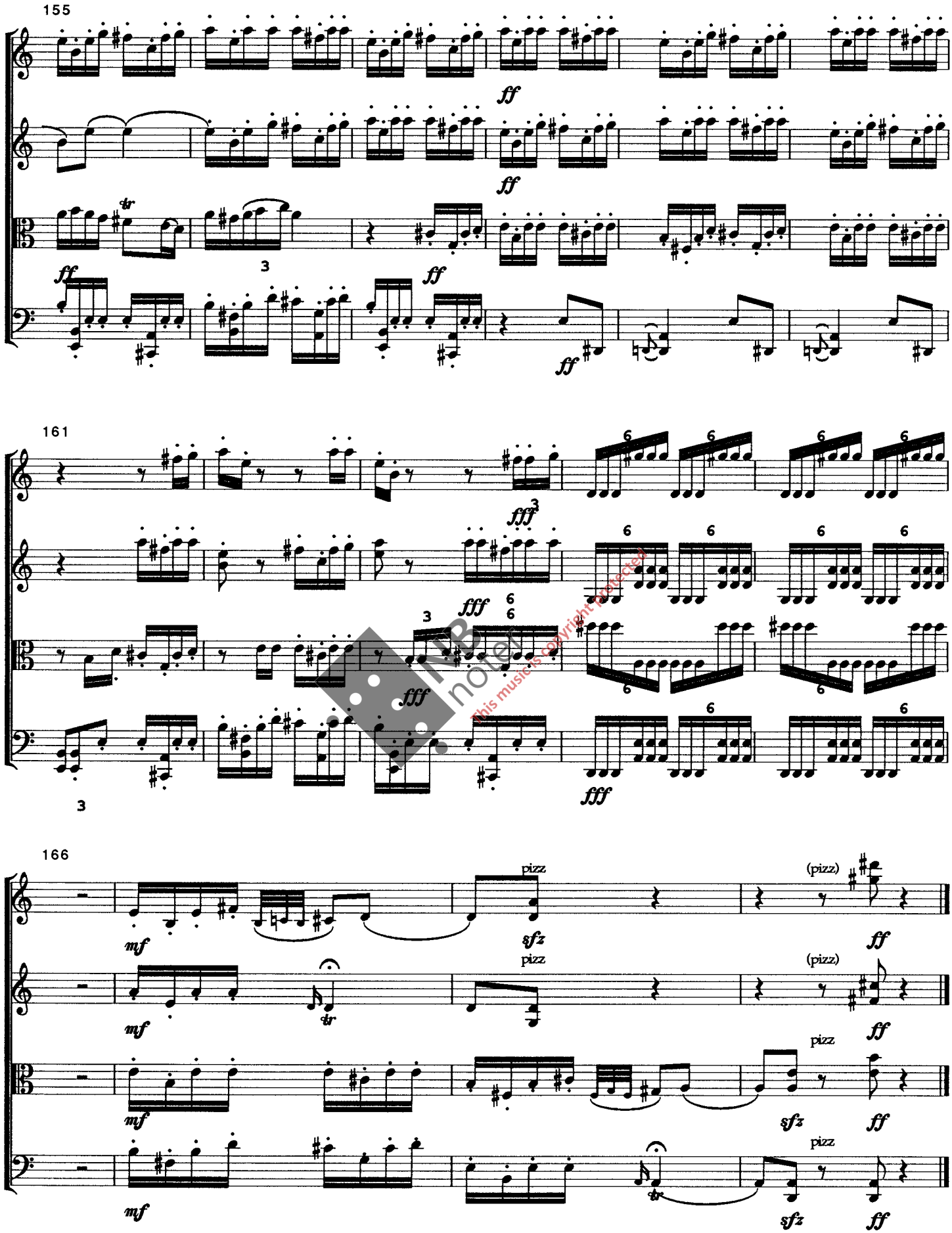

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