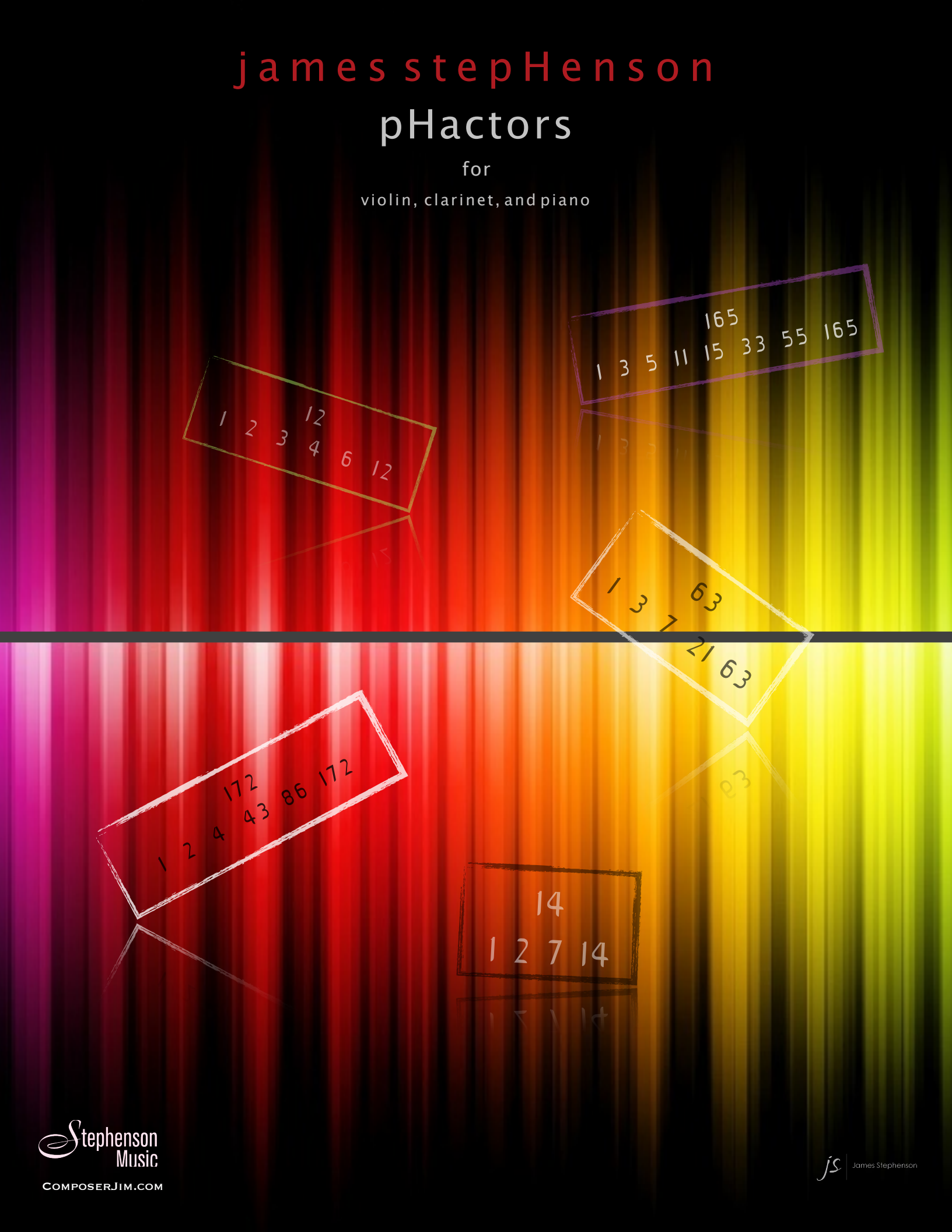
james stepHenson

pHactors

for

violin, clarinet, and piano



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js | James Stephenson

pHactors

Trio for violin, clarinet, and piano

james m. stepHenson

Commissioned by Osmo Vänskä and Erin Keefe

duration: approx. 16'

program notes – by the composer

In June of 2018, I had a most enjoyable experience premiering my low brass concerto – PILLARS – with the Minnesota Orchestra and Music Director Osmo Vänskä as conductor.

After the performances, I was most delighted when Osmo mentioned he might like to have a new work for himself – this time as clarinetist – along with MNOrch concertmaster Erin Keefe on violin, and with piano. "pHactors" is the result of this collaboration.

My last name is always a source of frustration for me – not because of any heritage, but because I almost always have to spell it for anyone who asks. (Believe me, all things considered, I know that there are last names much more difficult to spell than mine).
However, I've always been amused – ever since biology class – that my last name has the "pH factor" (as opposed to a ""v"). I started thinking of other factors that might exist, such as a "fear factor", or a "fun factor" – used as measuring qualities when judging a thing or event. Given that they start with the "f", I simply changed the spellings to "pHear" and "pHun", and added a ".k" on the latter, because musically I wanted to add something funk-inspired to the last movement as well. Ergo: "pHun.k".
Lastly, I simply entitled the middle movement "balance" – as in pH balance – to offset and neutralize the energetic and frenetic (dare I say "acidic"?) outer two movements.

Musically, the first movement does present a certain anxiety to it. Though somewhat jazz-inspired, harmonically, there is always a sense of trepidation to it, a fear of what is to come next.
The second movement has a two-part role in its "balance". First, as mentioned earlier, it provides respite to the outer movements – but also plays with the balance of twelve-tone music and tonality. The opening measure does indeed use all twelve notes, and other sections follow that use that device as well. It is all encased, however, in a tonal realm of F major, and at times, some bold simplicity. The third movement initially presents the three instruments gleefully bouncing off one another in pure light-hearted fun. Eventually this ends, and the funk(y) music begins, re-castng some of the twelve-tone ideas, while gradually propelling forward toward an inevitable exciting conclusion.

My sincere thanks to Osmo and Erin for the inspiration to create music for musicians of such high caliber. This has been a 'pHantastic' delight to create!

jim stepHenson; July 13, 2019

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Commissioned by Osmo Vänskä and Erin Keefe

Score

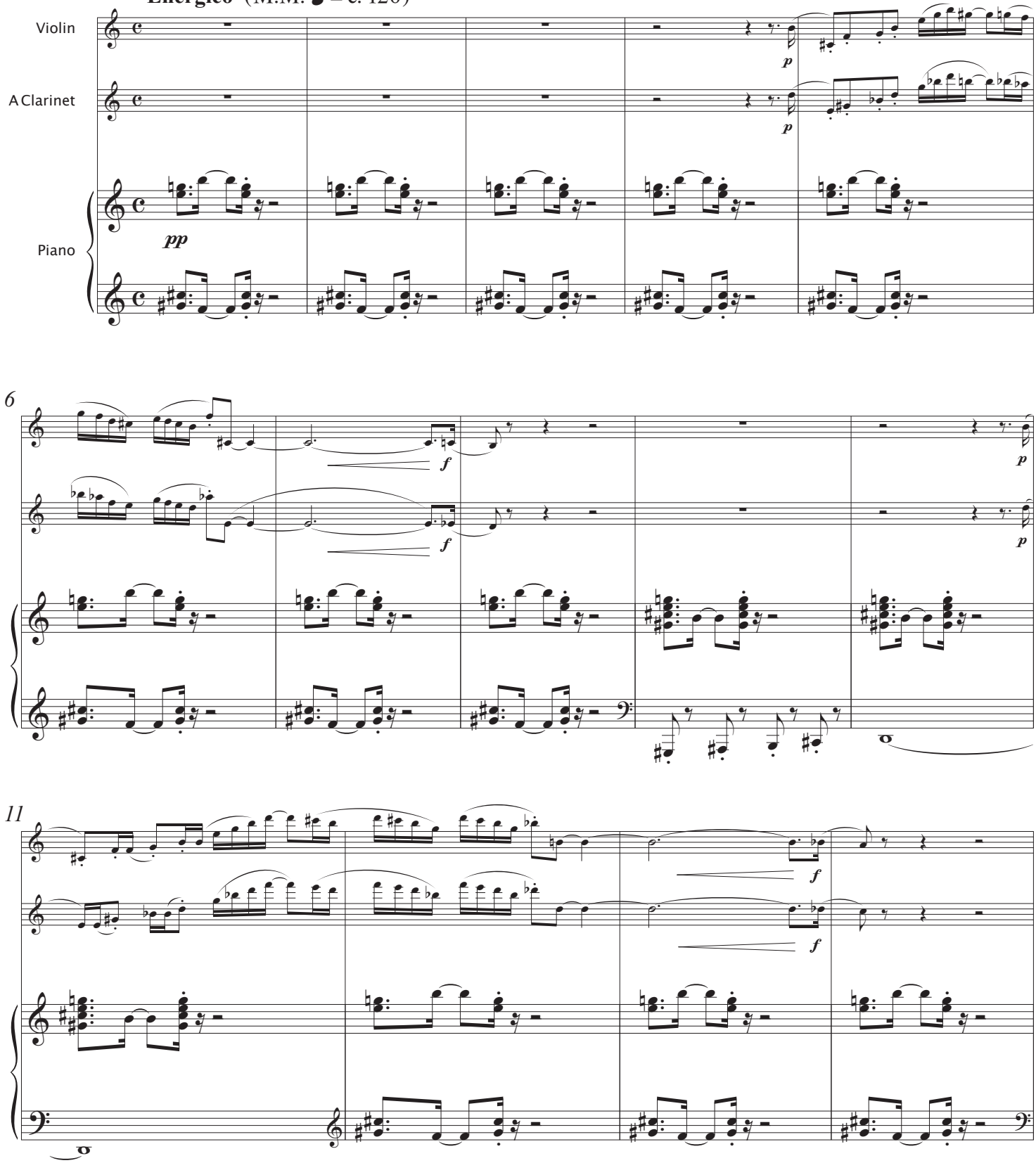
pHactors

Trio for violin, clarinet, and piano

james m. stepHenson

I. pHear

Energico (M.M. ♩ = c. 120)



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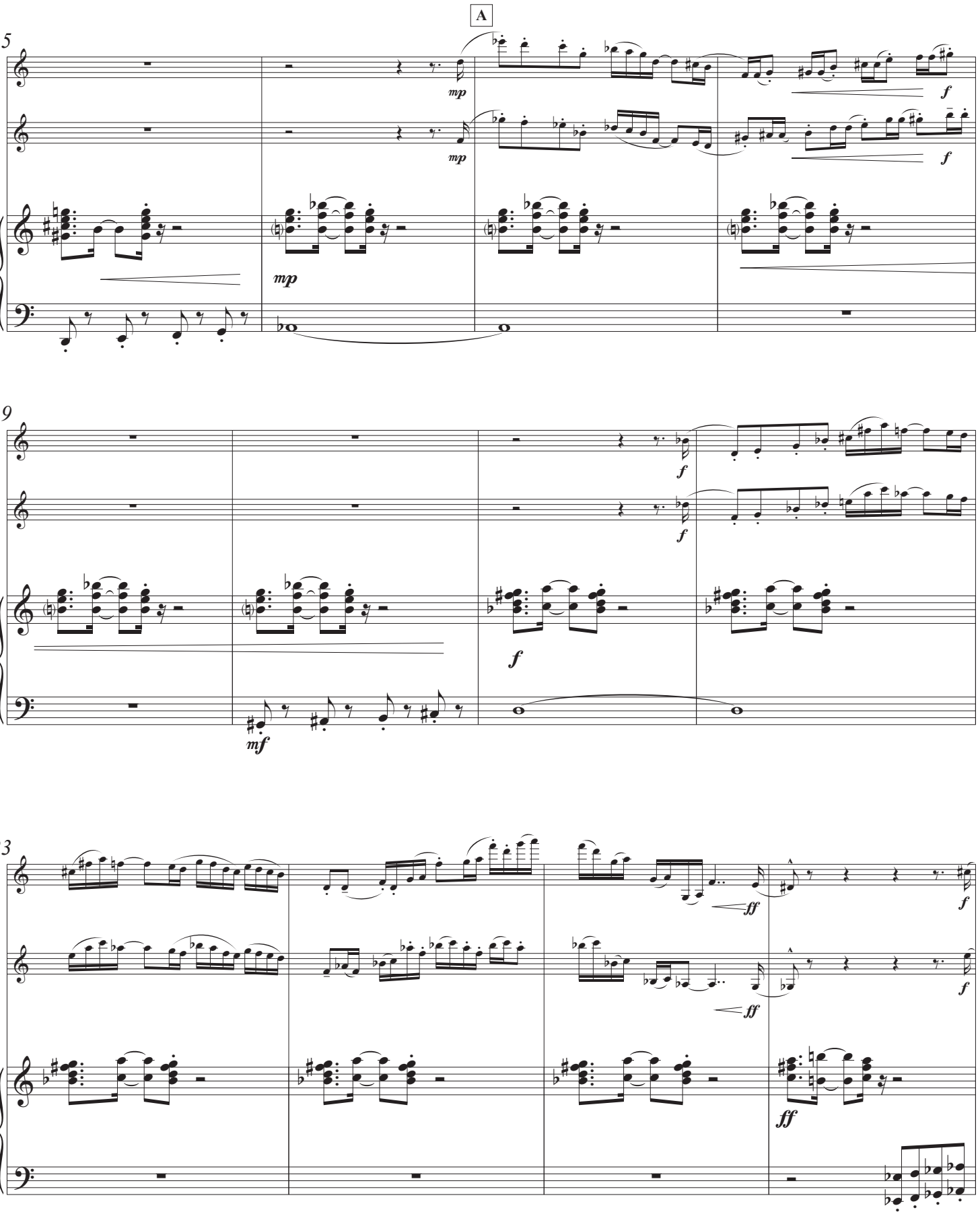
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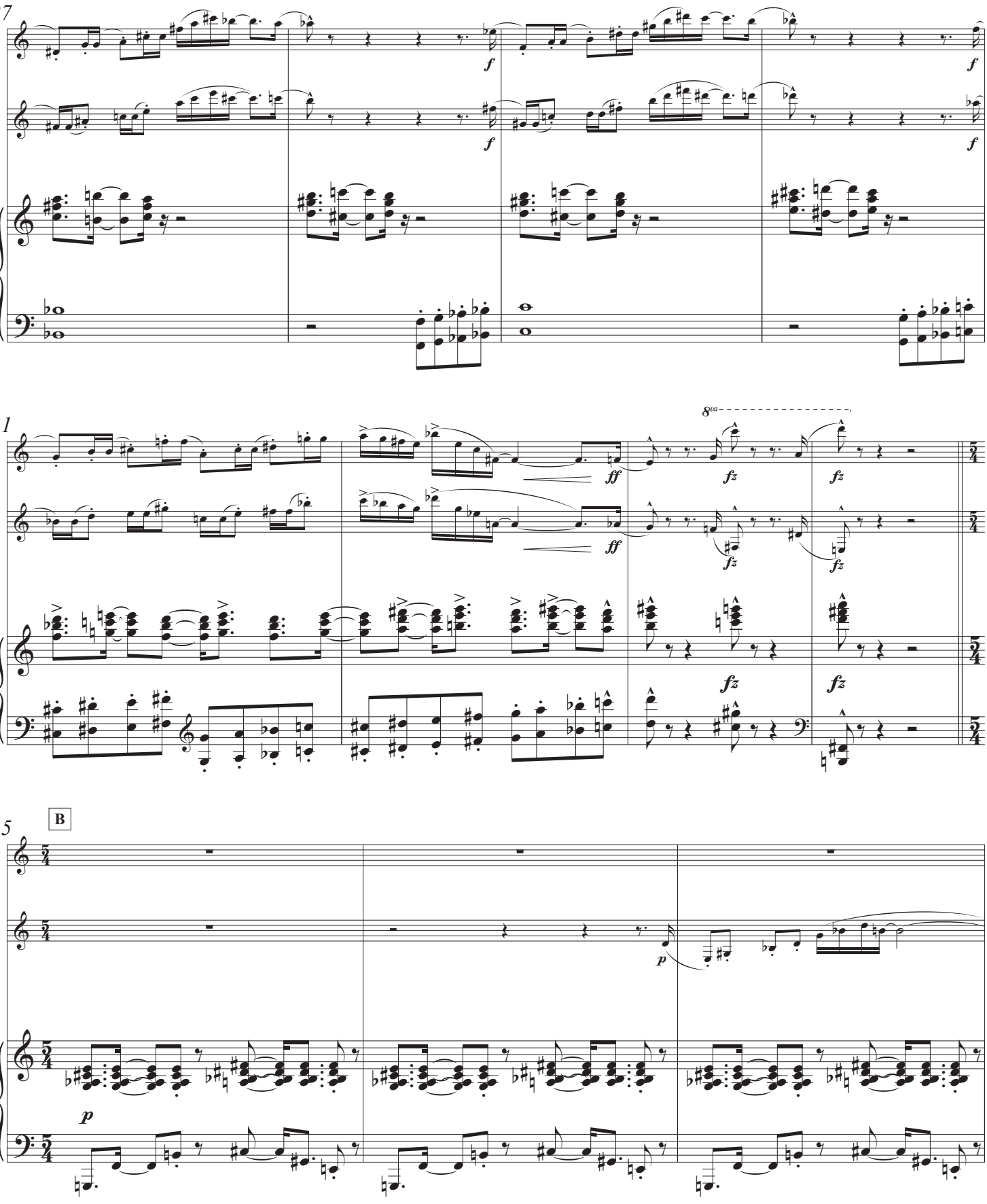
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35
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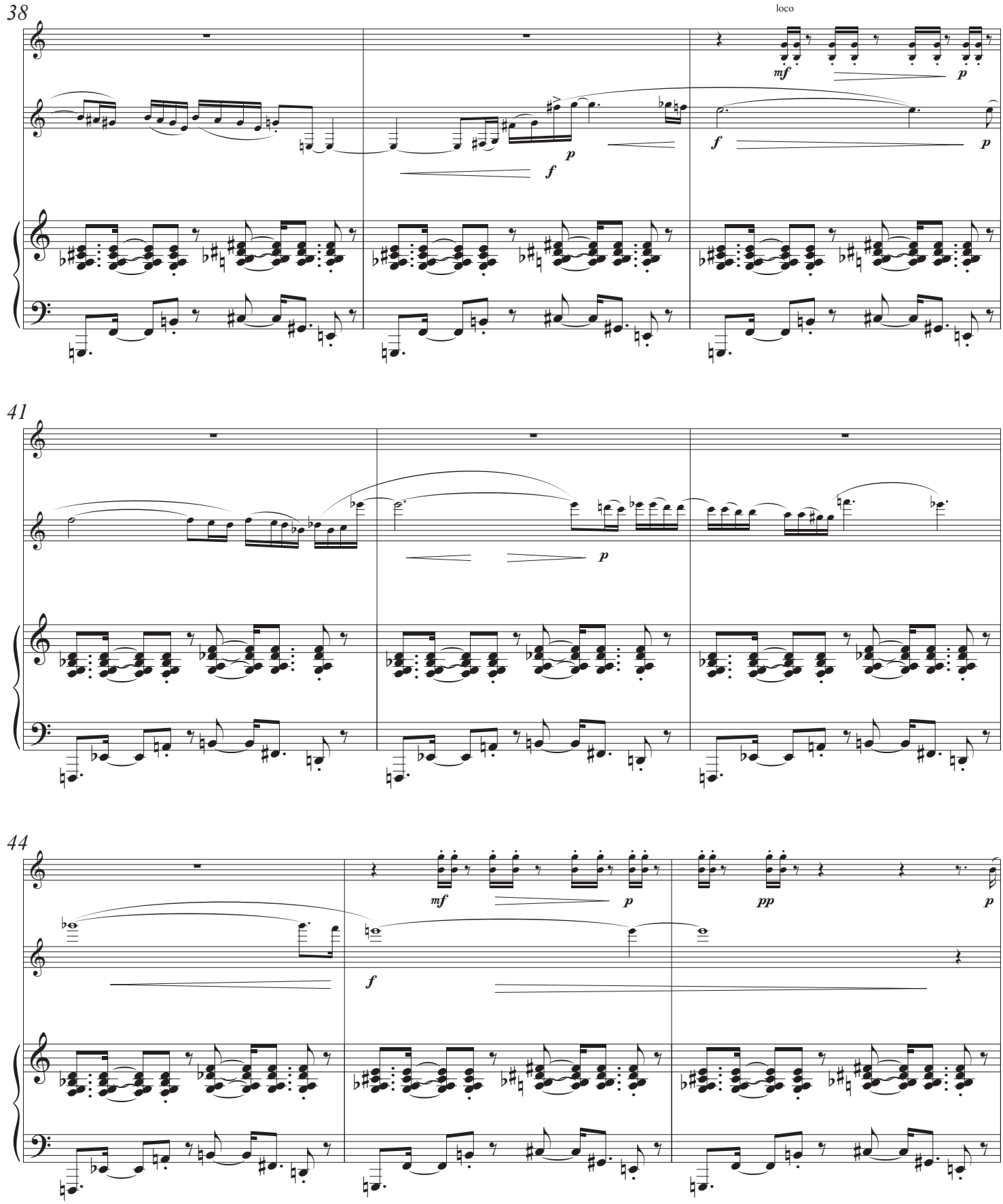
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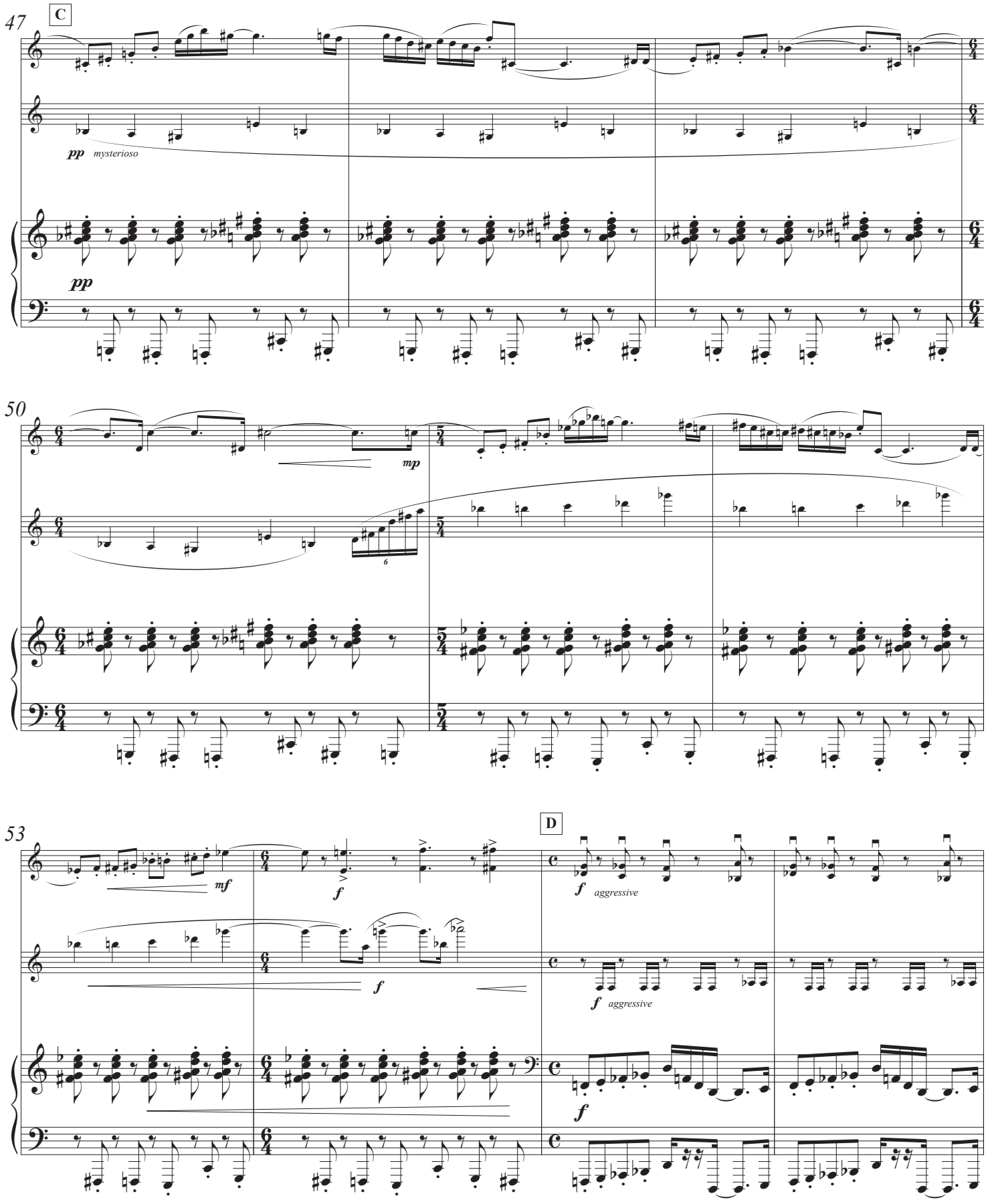
47
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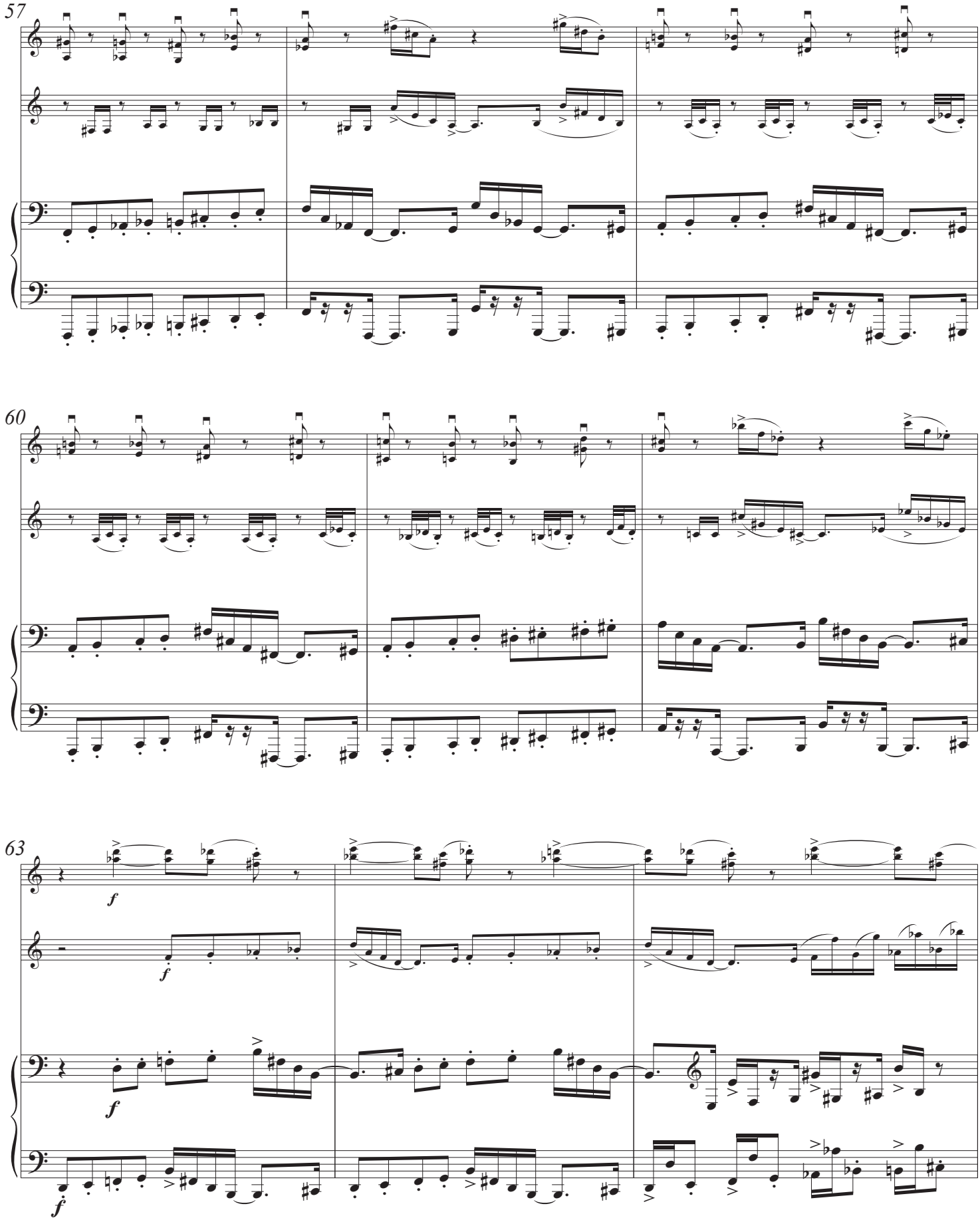
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60
63
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