# Mebasi

**for Flute, Oboe and Prepared Piano**

Kevin H Gray

# FOREWORD

*Mebasi* is partly a tribute to the eminent French ethnomusicologist Pierre Sallée, who made several protracted expeditions to Gabon, among other destinations, to document various tribal customs during the sixties and early seventies. The aspect of his work that pertains to this piece, however, is his time spent among the Bibayak tribe, whose complex, richly textured, and utterly compelling musical traditions were documented by Sallée in several field recordings. So although I certainly feel indebted to his important work in preserving evidence of these vanishing traditions, the true inspiration for this piece is the irrepressible ingenuity and undeniable artistry of the Bibayak people themselves; and in a broader sense, this music is about what society has lost as it has become progressively more technology-dependent.

The title is a Bibayak word given to a musical game, in which participants improvise vocally. The main goal of the game is for all but one of the participants, through a series of discrete communications, to slyly and abruptly stop singing, thereby hopefully catching one unobservant vocalist in an unintended solo. The newly exposed voice must then save face by improvising a cadenza which commands the respect of the other participants, who then gradually acknowledge their approval by rejoining in the singing as the game continues.

This piece is entirely devoid of dynamics markings. This at once introduces an improvisatory element into the *gestalt* of the piece. One of the characteristics of authentic *mebasi* is the tension between moments when all participants strive to blend, and moments when one or another of the players seeks to dominate the texture either through greater volume or through the use of vocal embellishments of particular grandiloquence. Although being true to the spirit of boisterousness that is pervasive in the relevant field recordings indicates to me that the overall presentation needs to remain near *mezzo-forte* or *forte* most of the time, there are certainly opportunities for brief excursions into *mezzo-piano.* But, in any event, this piece is not one that hangs its hat on the rubric of dynamic contrast.

Articulations for all three instruments are notated uniformly, with the three symbols in question carrying the same meaning for all three players.

First, and most simply, accents should not be subtle; and must be easily perceived to stand out from their surroundings by even a casual listener.

Next, the unmitigated staccato dot is intended to represent the shortest possible duration, irrespective of all and sundry considerations which, in the minds of many players of all instruments, often justify the lengthening of notes that bear a staccato dot. I find that when I coach players in performances of my music, the first comment I am likely to make is to request shorter staccatos. Within the locus of my composition, the use of staccato is usually meant to evoke an abruptness bordering on violence, regardless of the volume level.

This brings us to the third and final articulation mark, which is the dash

sometimes referred to as the *tenuto* mark. This symbol's interpretation depends on context. If used in tandem with the staccato dot, it should function to mitigate the severity of the staccato effect, thereby subtly lengthening the duration of the affected note, producing what might be referred to as a slightly "fat" staccato. Whenever the dot and dash are present beneath the same note, the dash's only purpose is the mitigation of the staccato dot, and no additional meaning should be inferred.

In those instances where the dash appears without the dot, its use denotes, for the note in question, an additional heft, weight, or darkening of the tone, perhaps similar to the manner in which most players might respond to the Italian term "*pesante*."

Please exaggerate contrasting articulations.

Preparing the piano for *Mebasi* is a relatively simple task, since all notes that are used are to be prepared in the same fashion. Mute the strings by firmly depressing commercially available silicone putty earplugs (or similar) to each applicable string nut. The amount of putty required to achieve a uniform, muted tone over the specified area of the piano may vary with register, acoustics of the room, and type of piano. Please note that the goal of the preparations is uniformity of *tone*, rather than uniformity of size of the balls of putty. Some experimentation will be necessary. Prudence seems to dictate that neighboring notes at the periphery of the applicable range also be muted in the same manner, so that the effect of a possible wrong note in the heat of performance is not exacerbated by the sudden, unwelcome intrusion of an non-muted note.

It should be noted that, in the composer's opinion, this prescribed method of preparing the piano is completely harmless to the instrument, particularly if latex gloves are worn during the preparation. In the unlikely event that the silicone putty imparts a detectable residue, it may be safely cleaned with cotton swabs lightly dampened with denatured alcohol. Should a reader of these instructions nevertheless in any way damage a piano, please be advised that the composer assumes no responsibility.

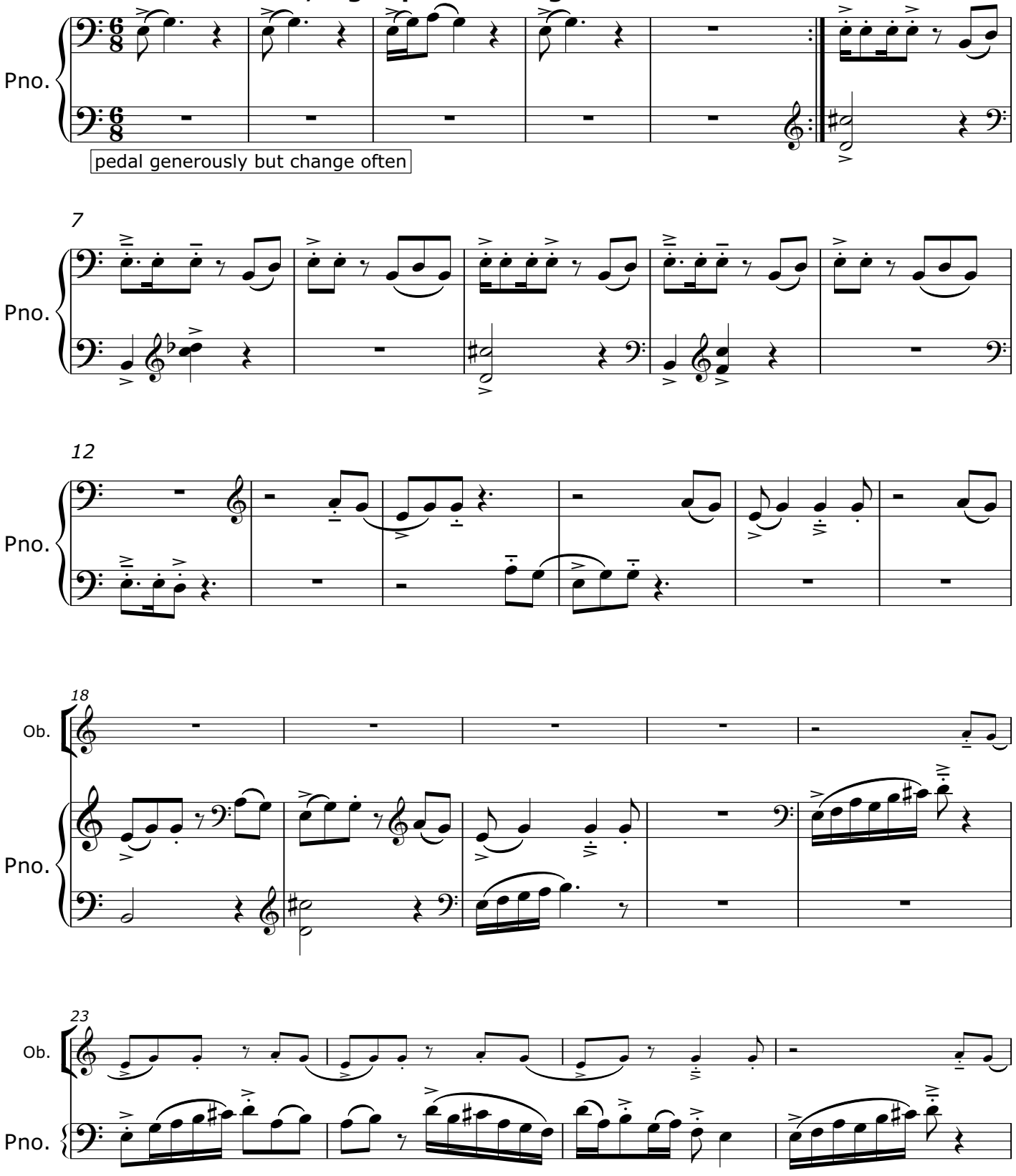
Kevin H Gray

# Mebasi

Kevin H Gray

♩. = 84

**With boisterous, high spirits throughout**

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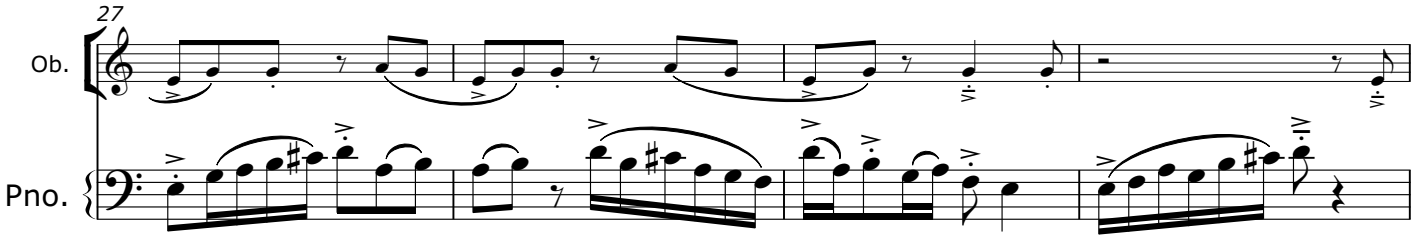


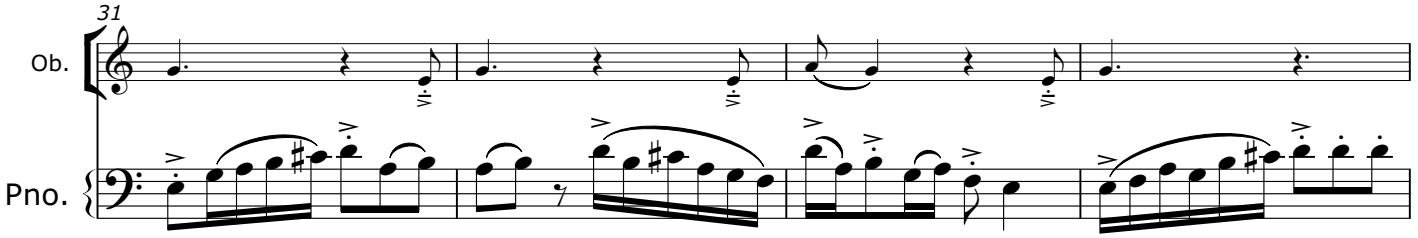


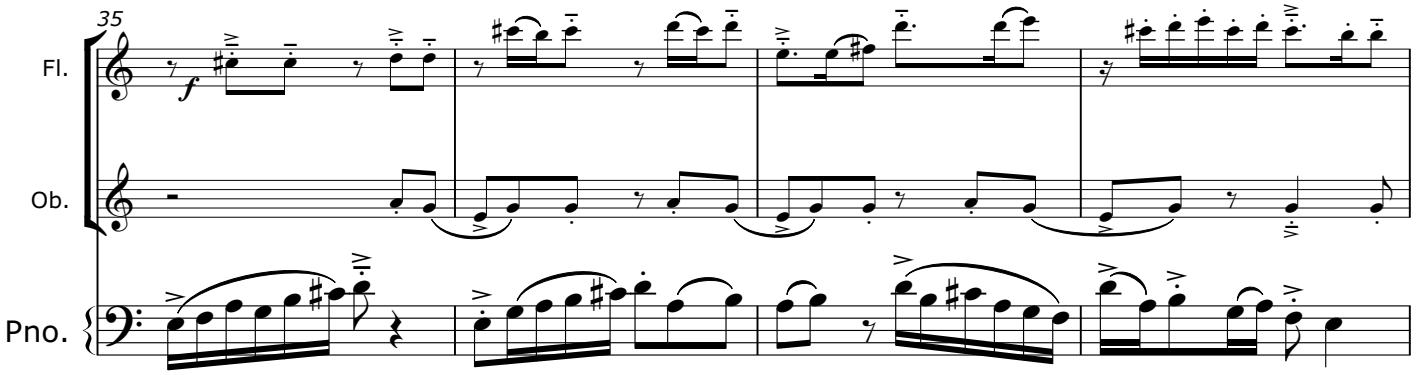


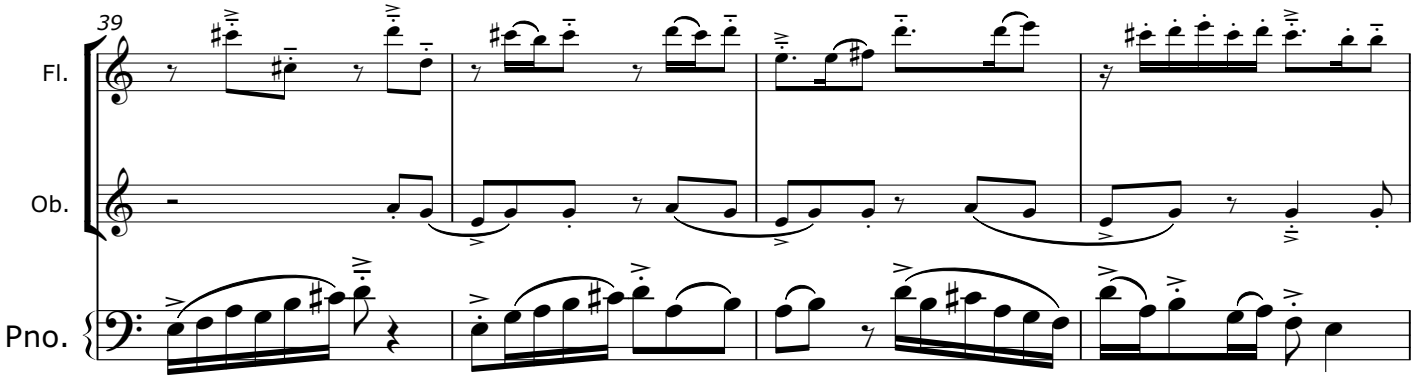


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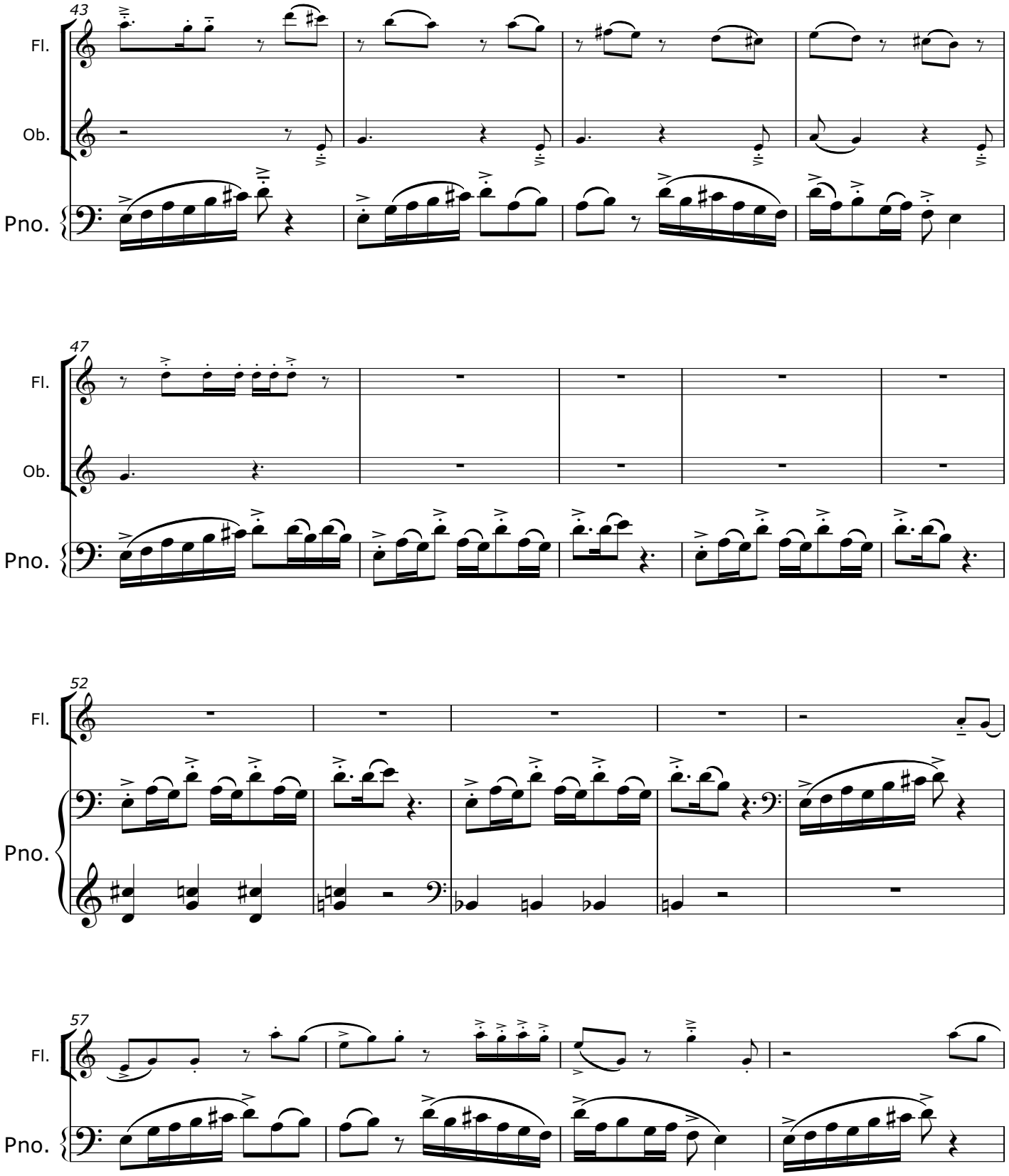


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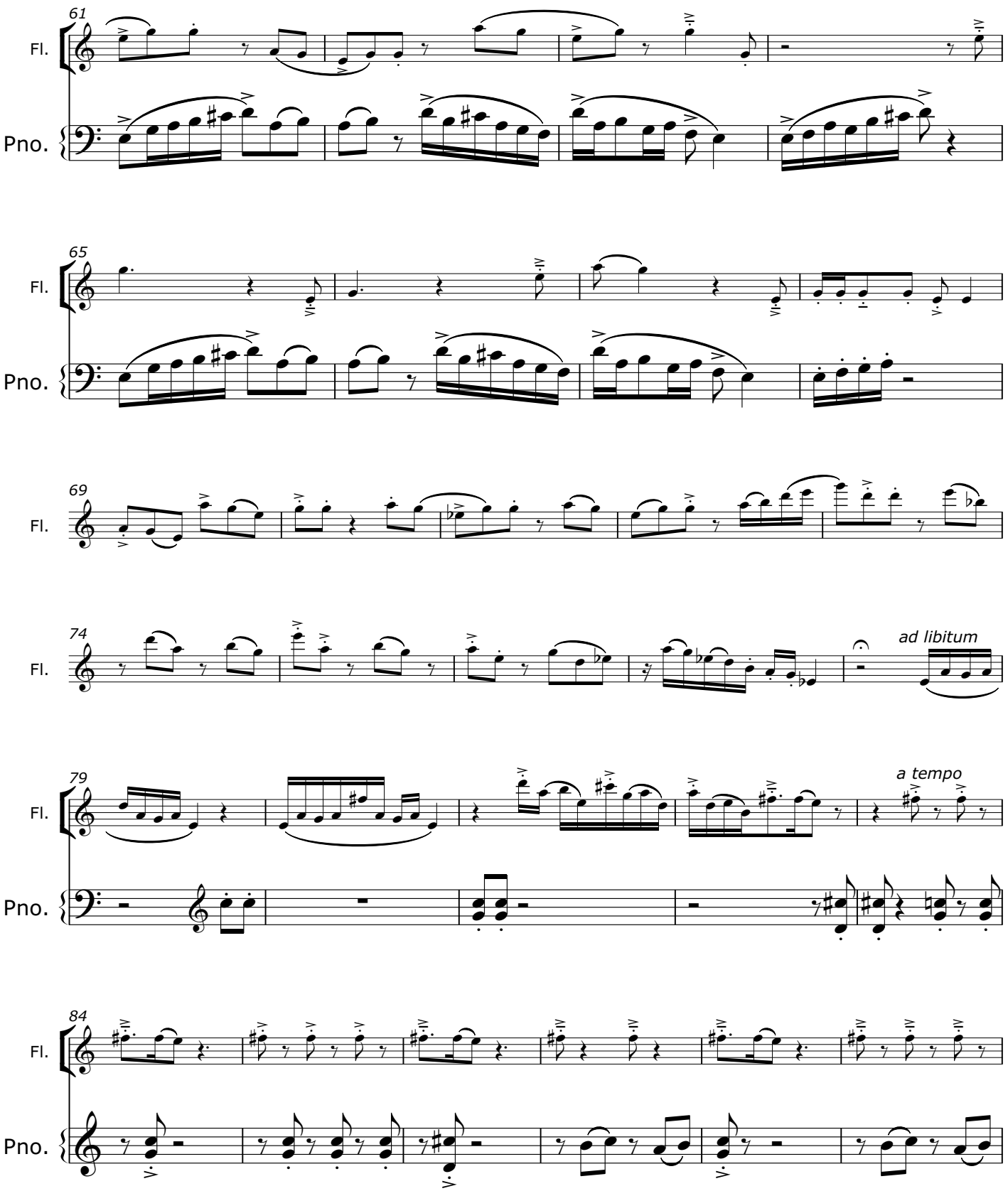


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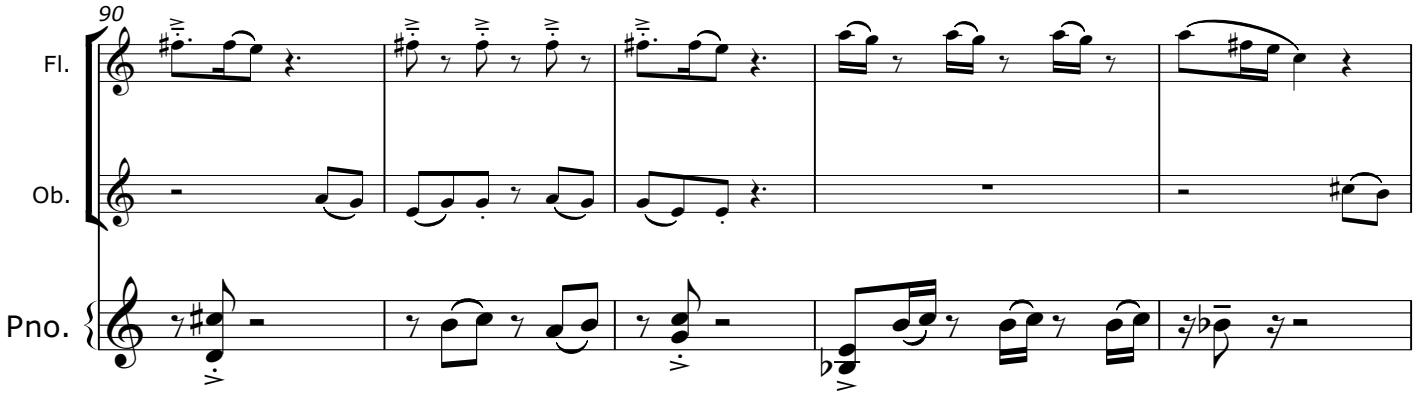


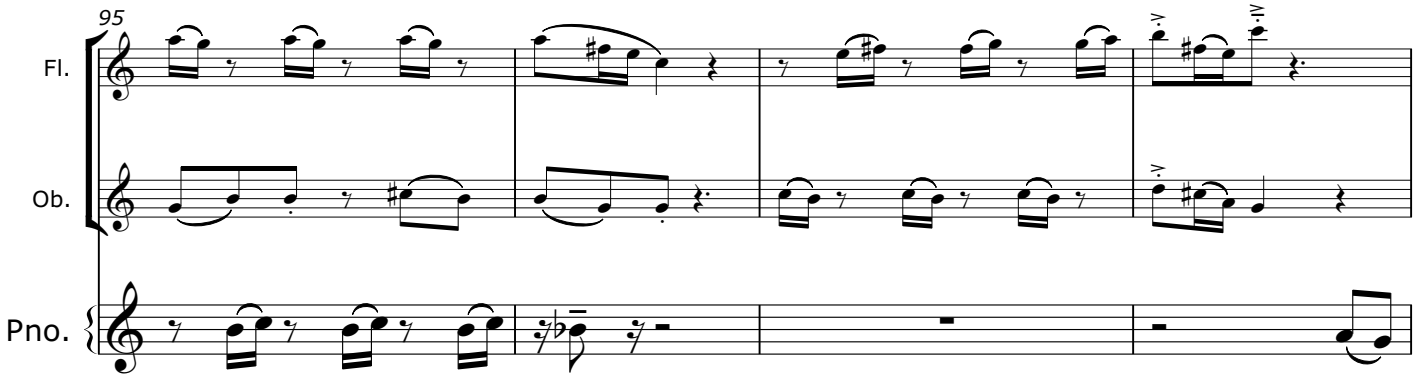


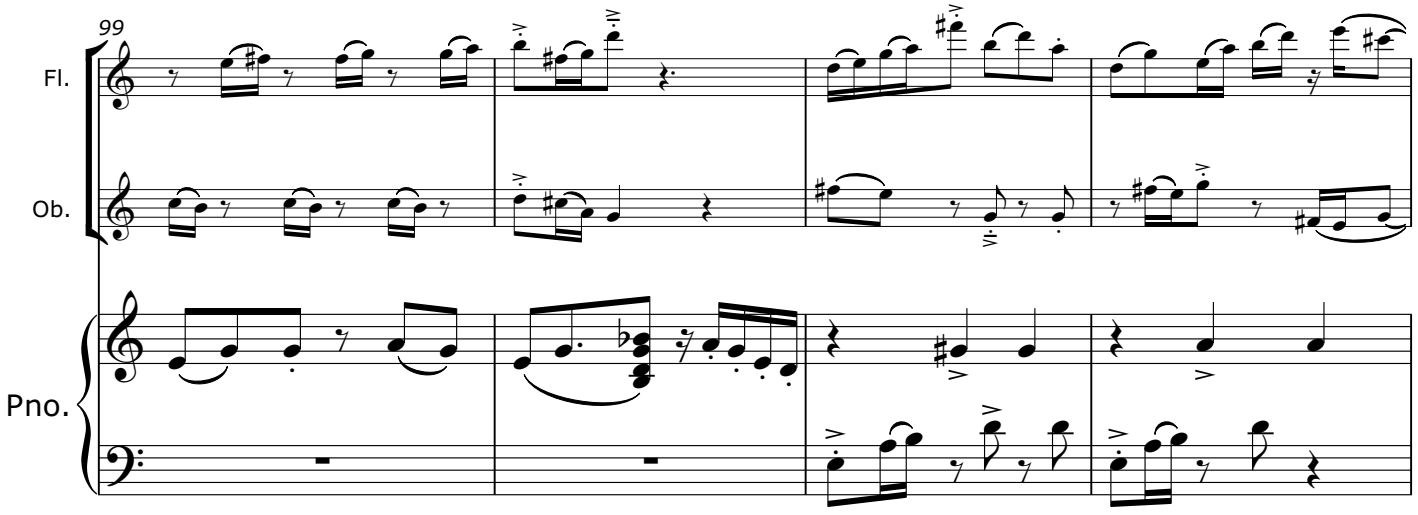


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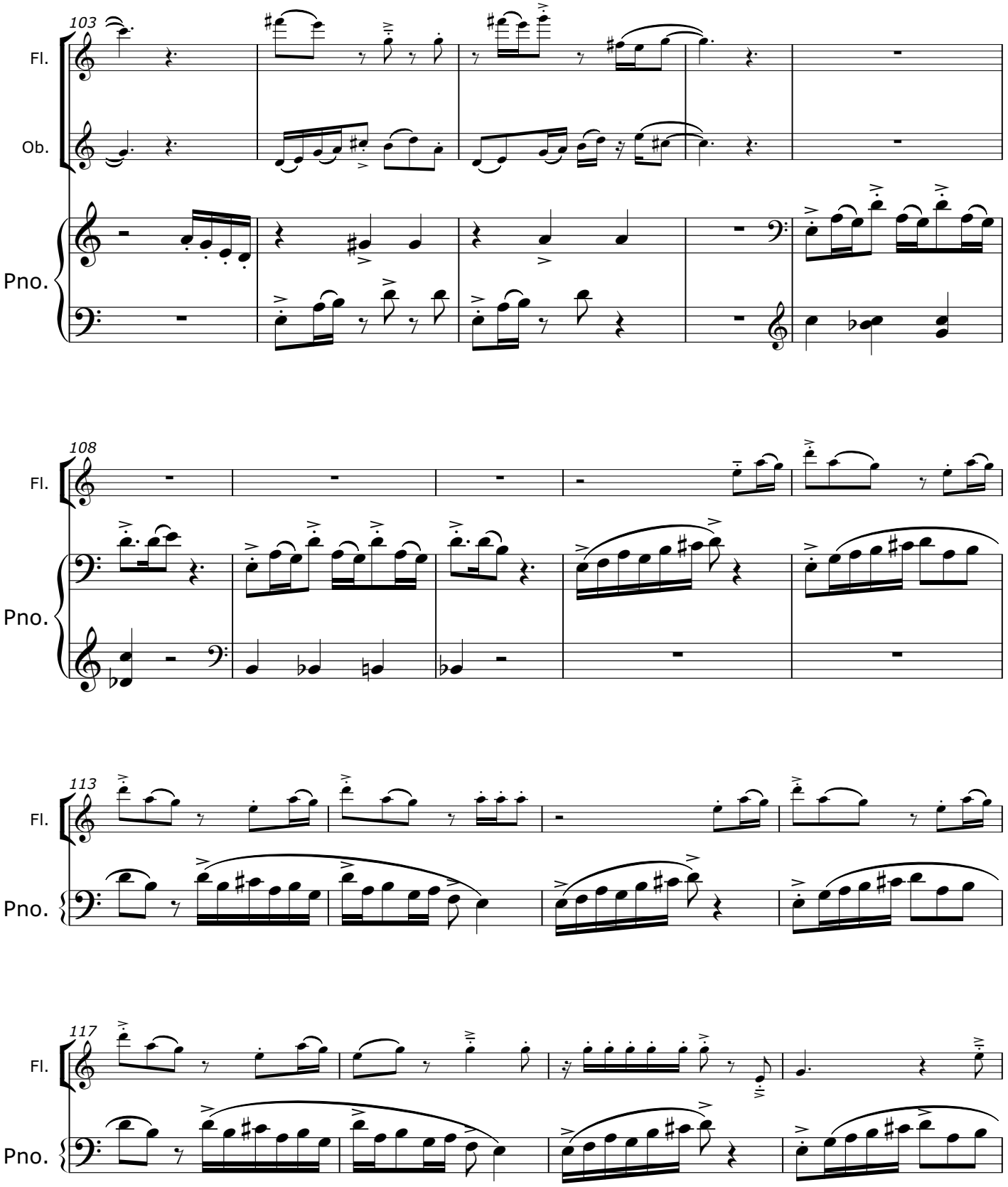


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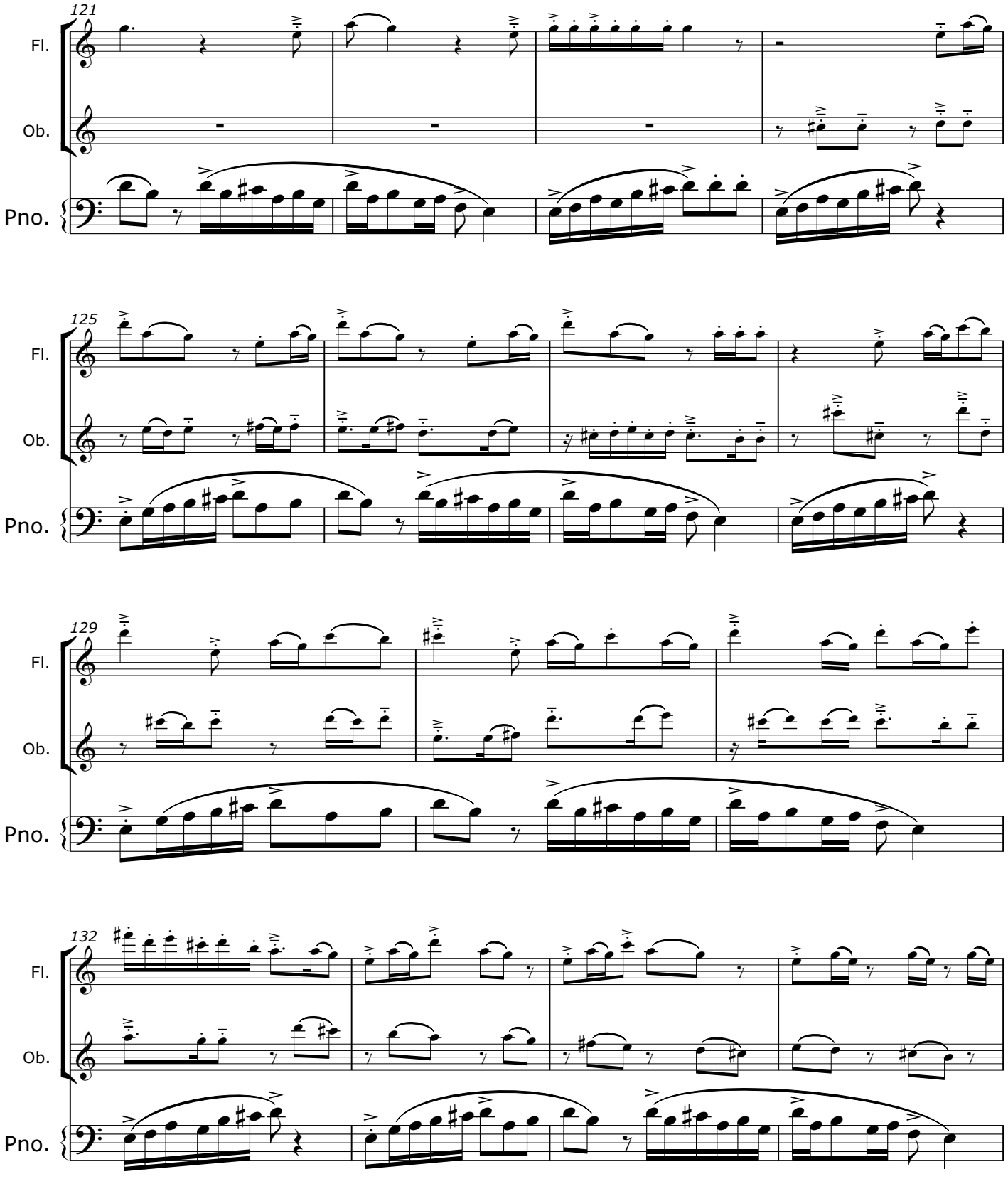


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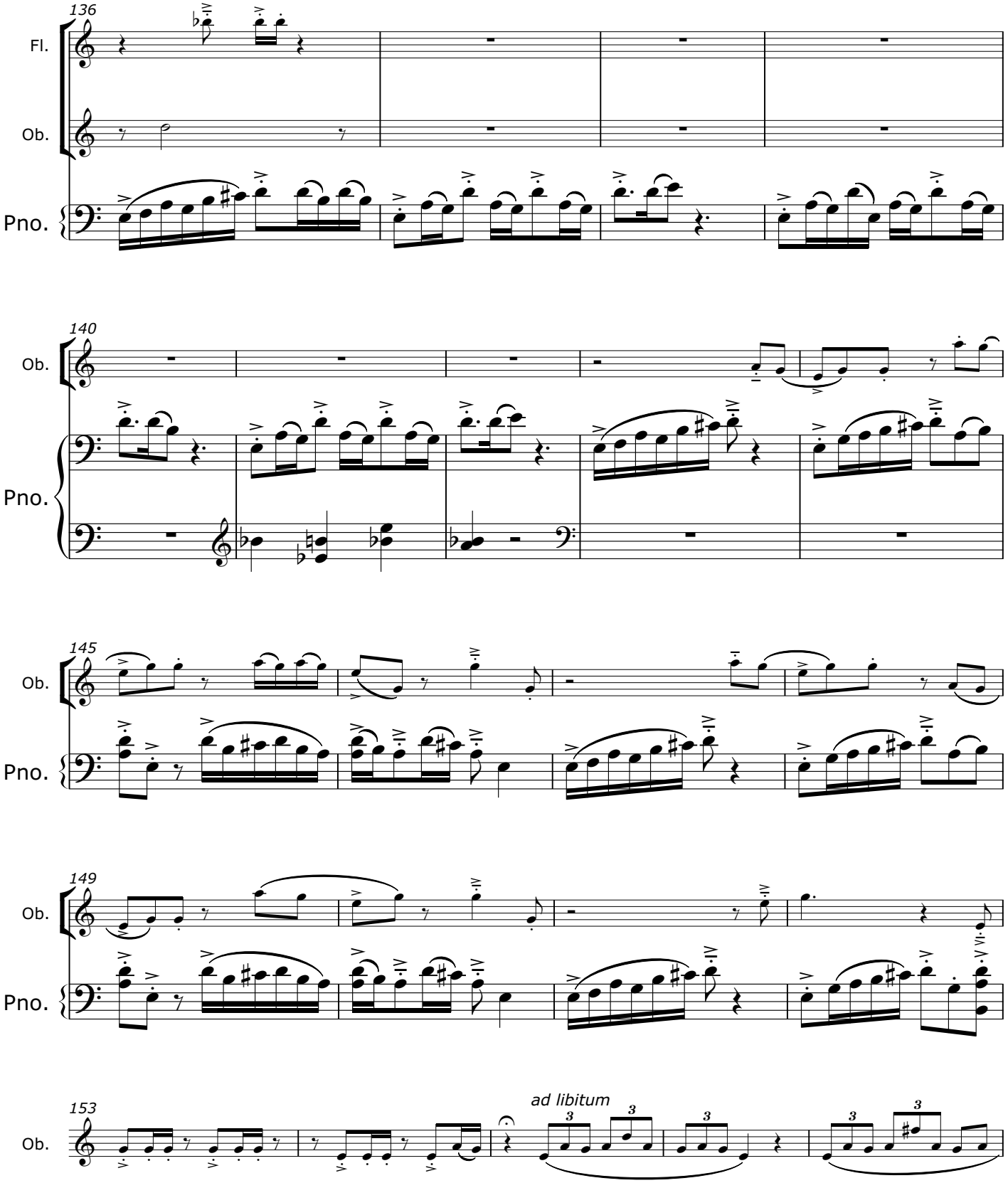


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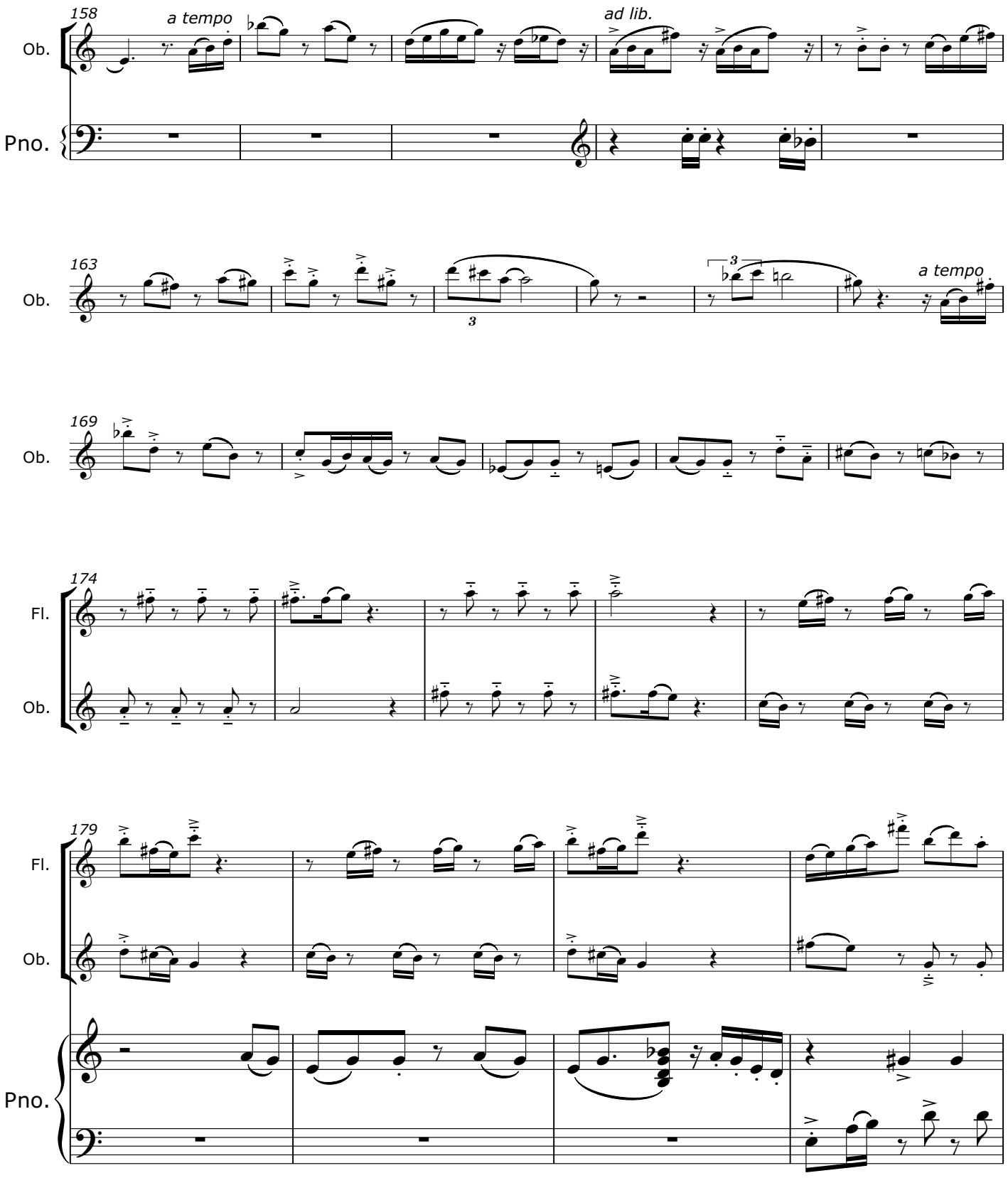


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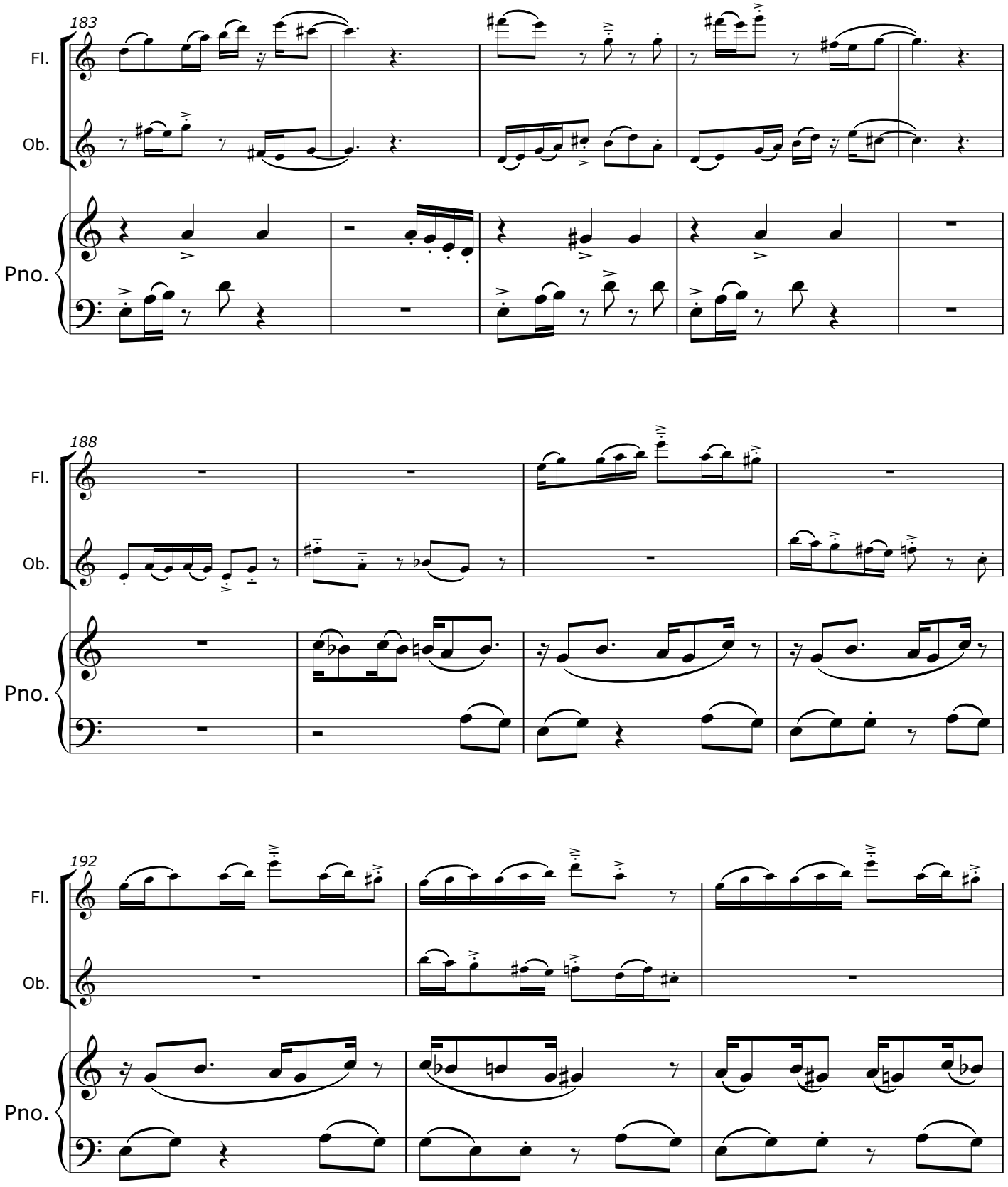


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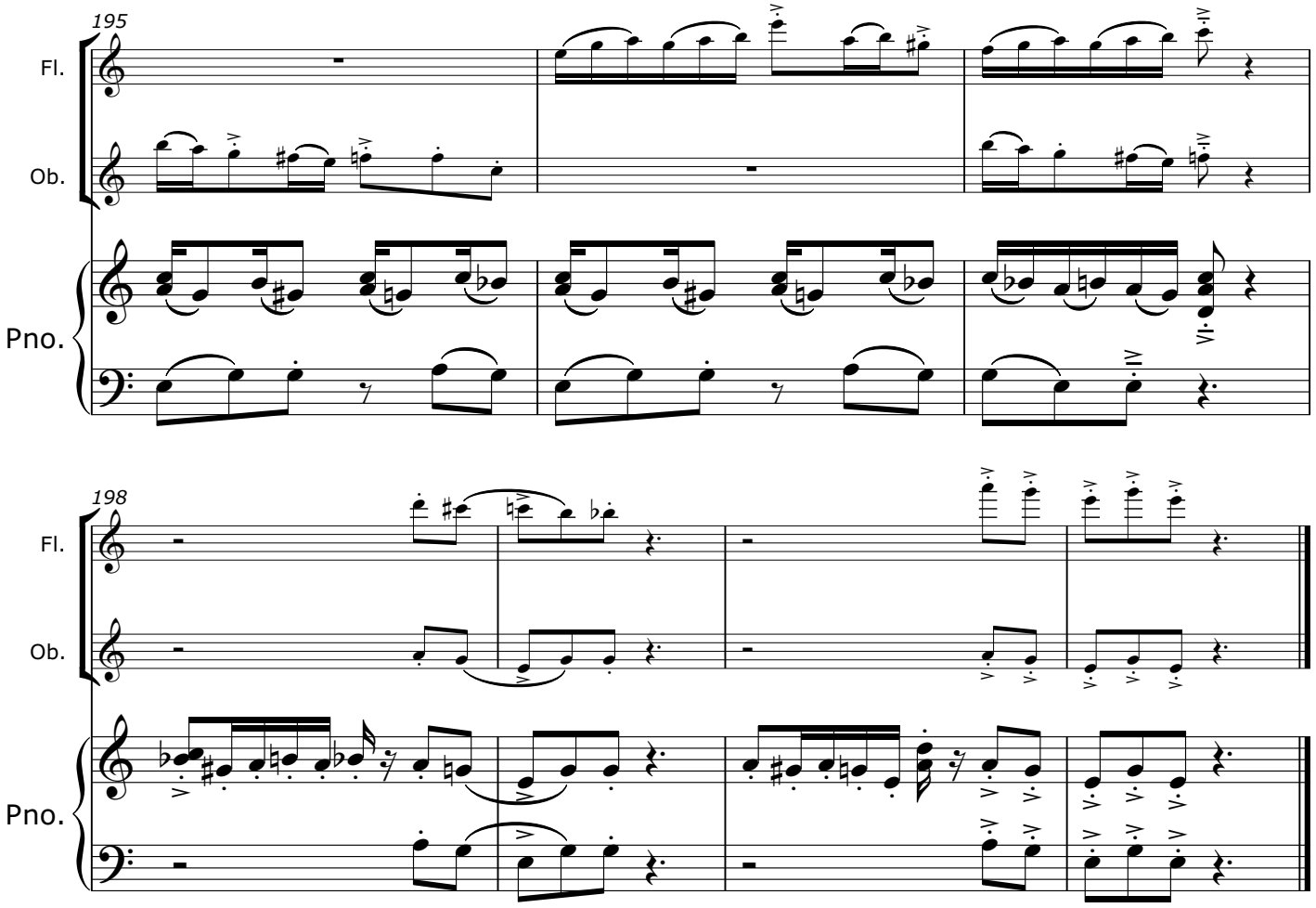


4'54"

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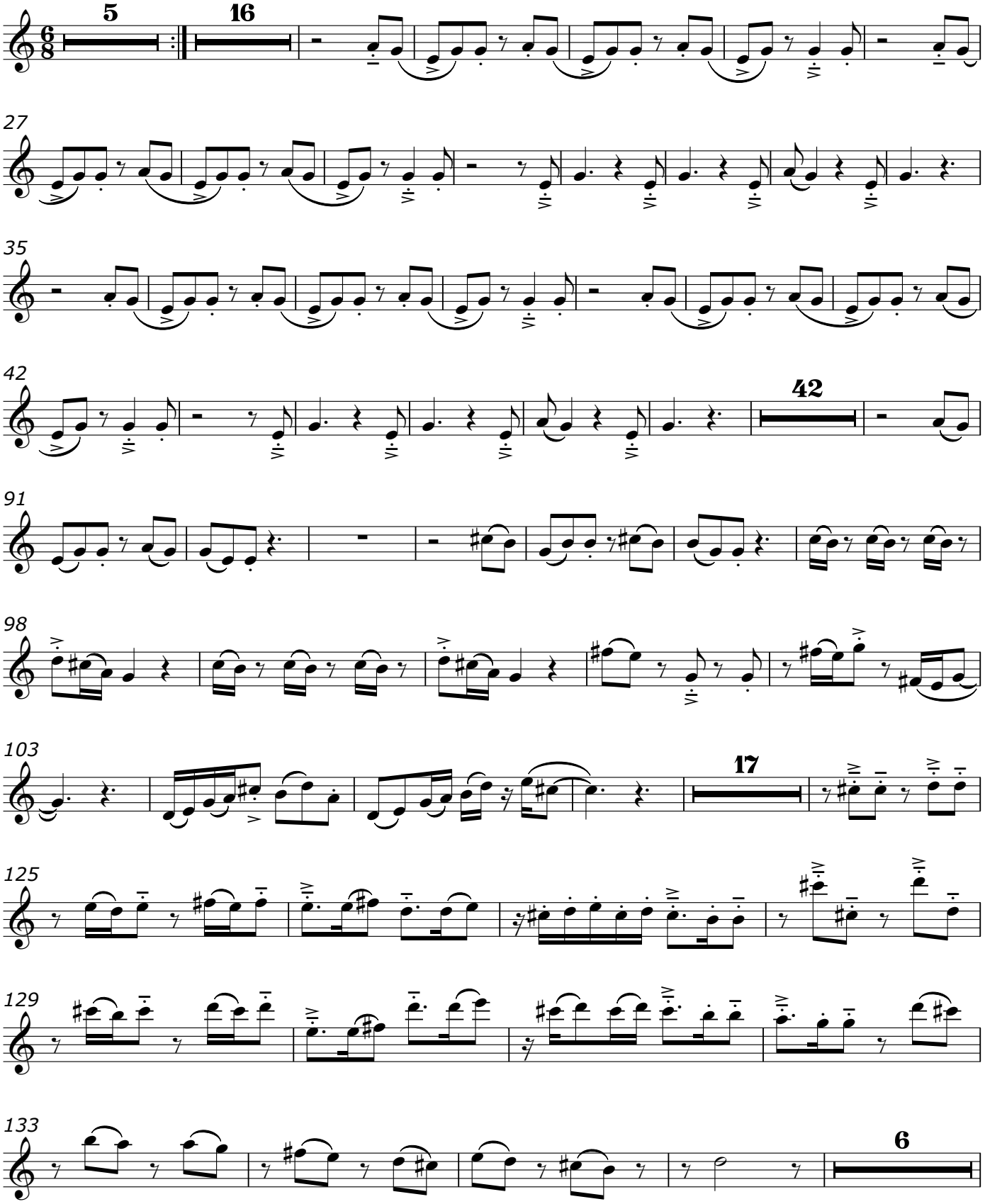
Oboe

# Mebasi

Kevin H Gray

♩. = 84

**With boisterous, high spirits throughout**

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Oboe
2

143

150

ad libitum

157

a tempo

ad lib.

162

168

a tempo

174

180

186

192

197

4'54"

Flute

# Mebasi

Kevin H Gray

♩. = 84

**With boisterous, high spirits throughout**

5

29

39

44

8

58

65

72

78

*ad libitum*

*a tempo*

84

91

97

102

4

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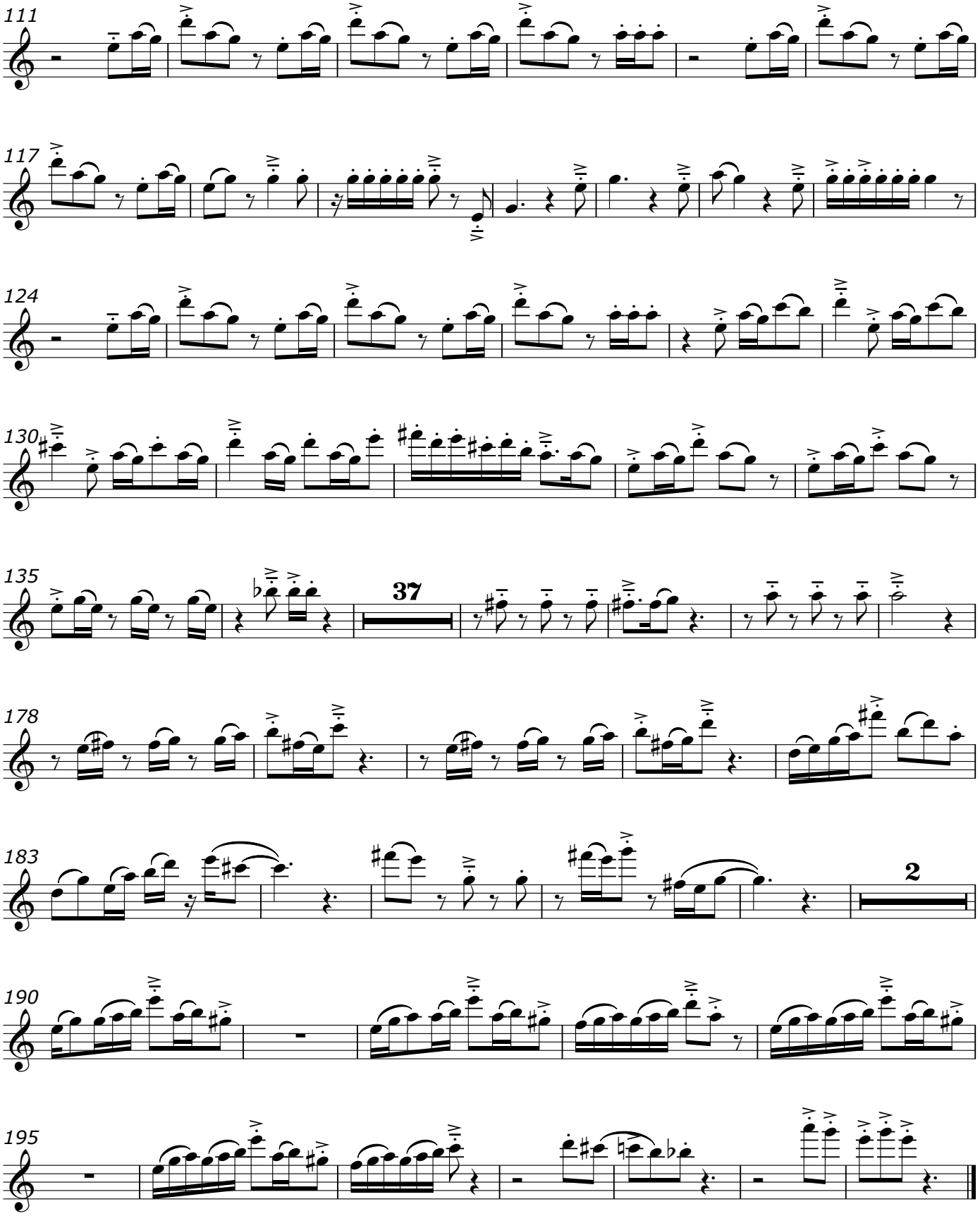
Flute
2

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