The Qoshnay Speaks; With Sadness Awake

for bassoon and harpsichord

Kevin H Gray

FOREWORD

“*The Qoshnay Speaks; With Sadness Awake*” is one of two compositions involving bassoon written during the summer of 2009 that reflect my fascination with Uzbek music, literature, and culture. (The other one is “*Seven Worlds*,” a piece for bassoon and bass clarinet whose title is an homage to the immense accomplishments of Uzbek poet Alisher Navoi.) The present piece is inspired by a poignant Uzbek tradition wherein a community learns of a death in the vicinity by being awakened at dawn by the sound of music played on the *qoshnay,* a double-reed instrument once common among Uzbeks and Tajiks. My thoughts, already trending towards the funereal due to the complicated palette of emotions engendered by the terminal illness of my mother, embraced the idea of the qoshnay’s complex role as herald, counsel, cathartic, and finally comforter.

THE SCORES

Two scores are provided. The first is the harpsichord score, which contains a cue-sized bassoon part. Following that is the bassoon score, which contains a cue-sized harpsichord part that has been edited, when loss of pertinent information is not a contraindication, to fit on a single stave.

DYNAMICS AND BALANCE

The harpsichordist should employ the buff stop throughout the entire composition, and a harpsichord not equipped with a buff stop should not be used to perform this piece. Consequently, the bassoon (with most harpsichords and in most rooms) should have no trouble easily surpassing the harpsichord in perceived volume, even given the persistently high tessitura of the bassoon part. Therefore, the terms *forte*, *piano*, and their variants, are used a bit differently in this composition. *Mezzo-piano* will be understood to denote an equality of perceived volume between the two instruments, while *mezzo-forte* will denote a slight perceived dominance for the bassoon. The use of *piano* denotes a state wherein the bassoon’s playing is just quiet enough to create the impression that the harpsichord is the dominant instrument in the passage in question. Indeed, when both instruments are playing, the bassoon’s dynamic palette should be rather confined, creating just enough contrast to subtly depict, by turns, states of either relative parity with the harpsichord, or close inequality. The bassoonist’s dynamic palette may be much wider, however, when the harpsichord is not playing, though this freedom should primarily manifest itself as freedom to be quieter, not louder. “*The Qoshnay Speaks; With Sadness Awake*” should come across as a primarily intimate composition, regions of agitation notwithstanding.

ARTICULATION

Articulations for bassoon and harpsichord are notated more or less uniformly. First, the unmitigated staccato dot (for both instruments) 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.

This brings us to the other pertinent articulation mark, which is the dash sometimes referred to as the *tenuto* mark. This symbol has two possible interpretations, depending on the context. If used in tandem with the staccato dot, for either instrument, 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. (For many players, this will likely be a "normal" 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 places where the dash appears (in the bassoon part) 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*."

RHYTHM

The beaming scheme employed throughout this piece is different for the two instruments. In the harpsichord's part, the relatively high incidence of beaming that could be considered dismissive of any concern for meter, reflects my wish that the harpsichordist's view of the music be driven by articulation and phrasing, and not by attempting to project the clearly delineated pattern of pulse demanded by an archaic view of the nature of meter. However, the bassoon part is usually characterized by beaming that is as traditional as the sometimes irregular rhythms allow. The implication of this dichotomy is that the bassoonist should strive to audibly depict the pulse of the meter, even though the harpsichordist will not. The purpose here is to simulate a state of affairs sometimes heard in Uzbek ensemble playing, in which the various instrumentalists may be heard to happily disagree on exactly what accent structure a particular passage should have, thereby enlivening and enriching the composition. Slight to moderate rubato may be seen as appropriate in many places during this piece.

VIBRATO AND OTHER EXPRESSIVE TECHNIQUES

The bassoonist's vibrato, throughout this composition, should be generally in proportion to the duration of any given note. Shorter notes should have little or even no vibrato, while notes with longer durations should have more. Very long notes (half notes, or better) may start and finish with no vibrato, but have near the mid-point of their durations a brief moment of extreme vibrato.

Normally, one manner in which an astute bassoonist strives to create variety within the confines of a particular musical texture is by applying artistic and subtle variance of dynamics. However, this expedient for creating additional interest and color has been largely denied the bassoonist in this composition, due to the fact that, for the most part, the bassoon's volume, usually fairly tightly controlled in the score, should either match or only marginally deviate from that of the harpsichord. Therefore, the bassoonist is encouraged to experiment with expressive devices that include, but are not necessarily limited to, alternating phonations, breathiness, and nasality. By not specifying which techniques should be utilized where, a condition similar to that which has customarily existed in Uzbek traditional classical music is created, whereby the

performer enriches the framework of the composition by the tasteful application of expressive techniques, to a much greater degree than is the norm in most Western composition. It should be noted, however, that these expressive devices should not be applied in a haphazard fashion, but rather should adhere to a thoughtful design whose purpose is to elucidate the composition's inherent architecture.

Although developing a familiarity with Uzbek music is encouraged, it should be noted that simply imitating the sound of Uzbek double-reed instruments with a bassoon is probably both aesthetically undesirable, and an exercise in futility besides. Rather, the bassoon part should be played in a manner that is informed and influenced by the cultural and expressive milieu that inspired this composition, but in a way that respects (yet respectfully expands) the unique capabilities of the bassoon, without resorting to base mimicry.

Kevin H Gray

for Jennifer Rhodes

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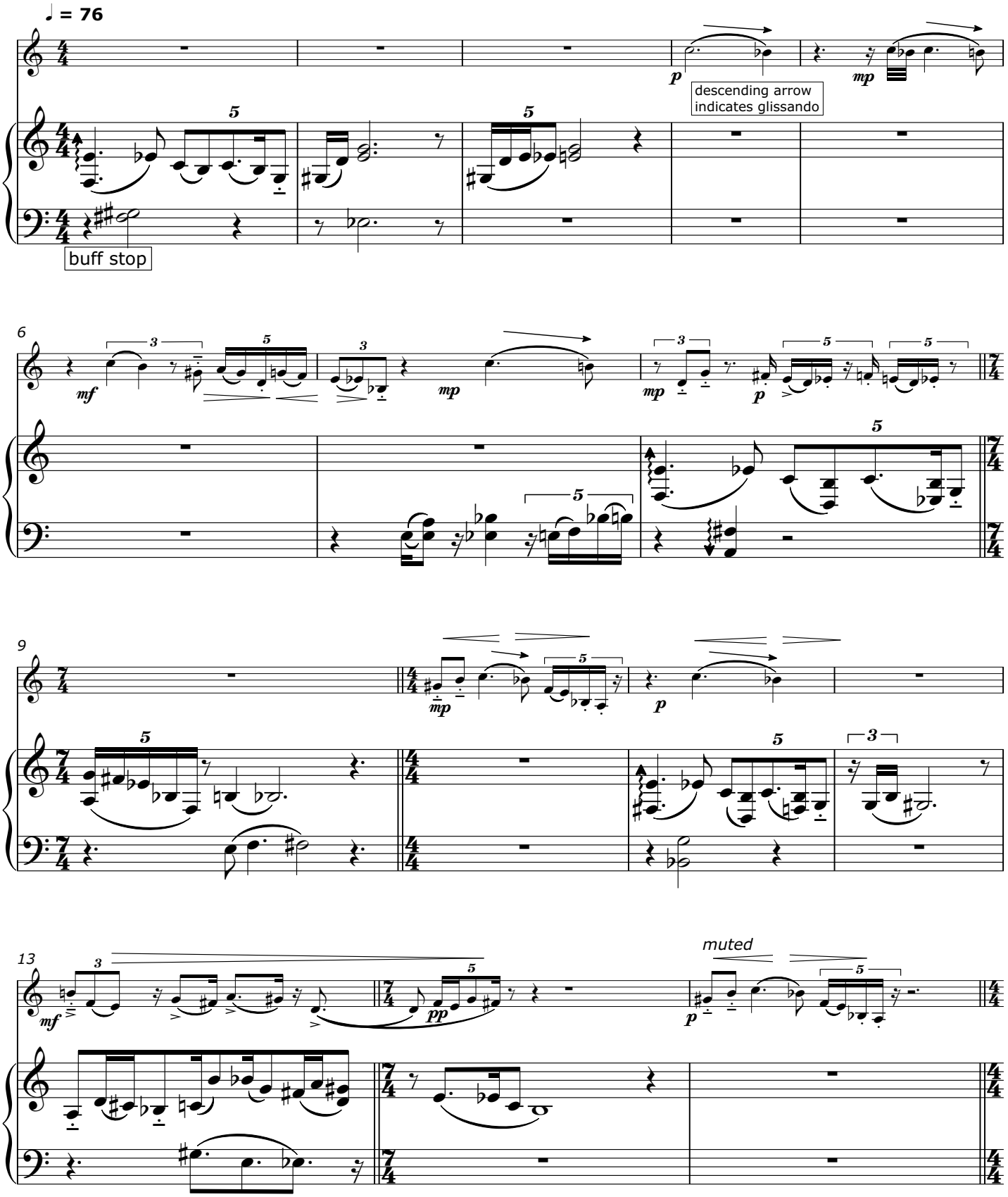

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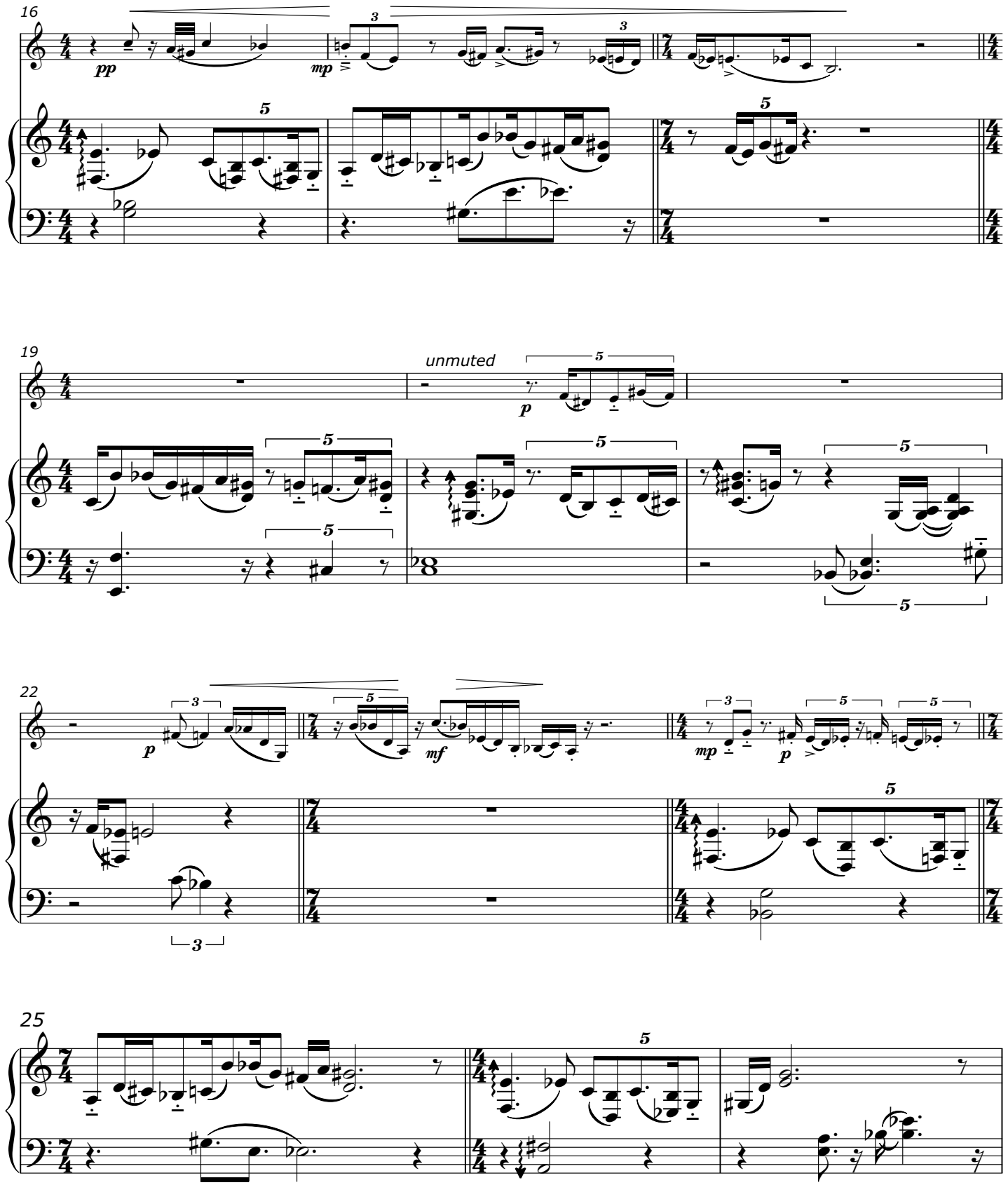

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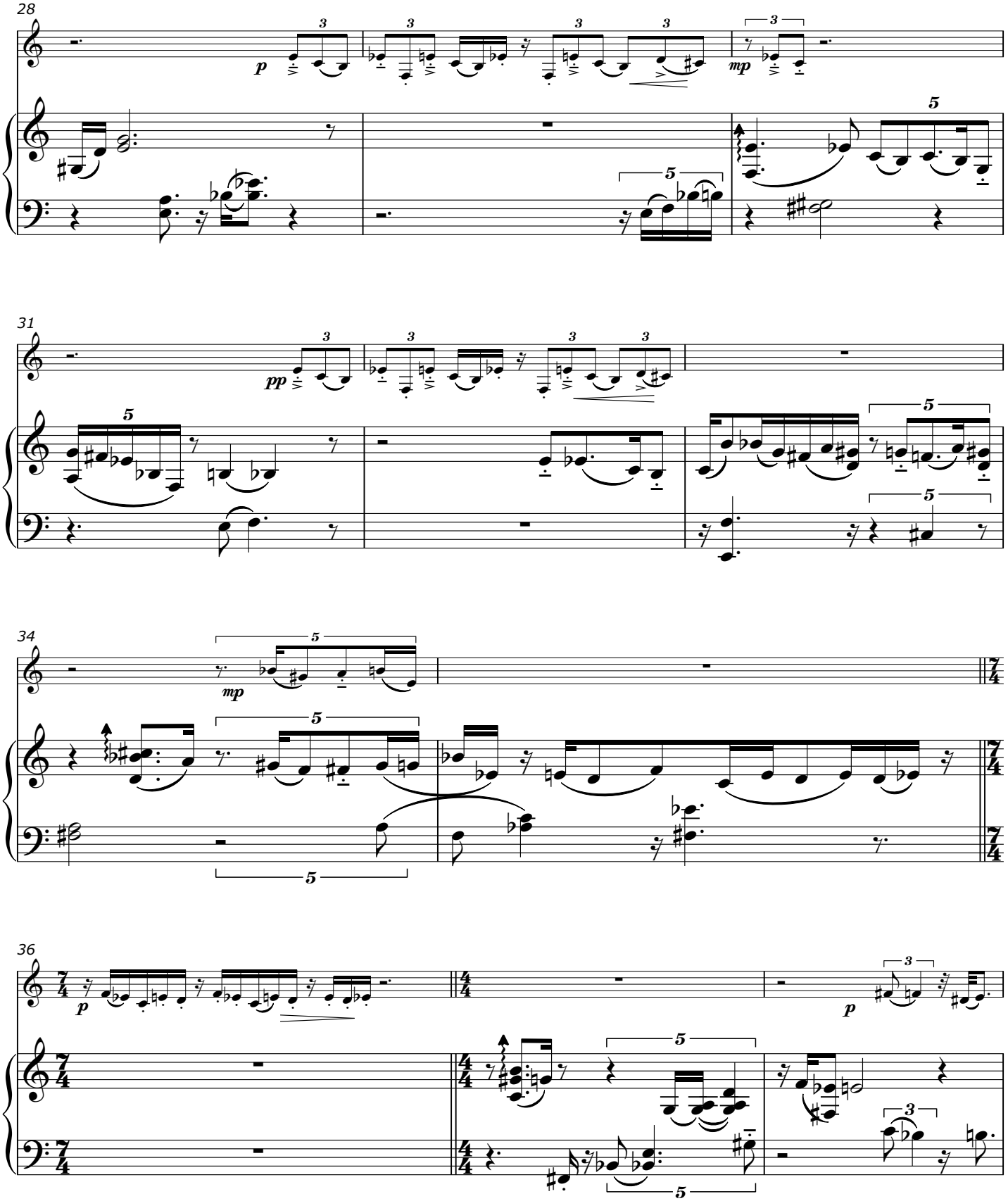

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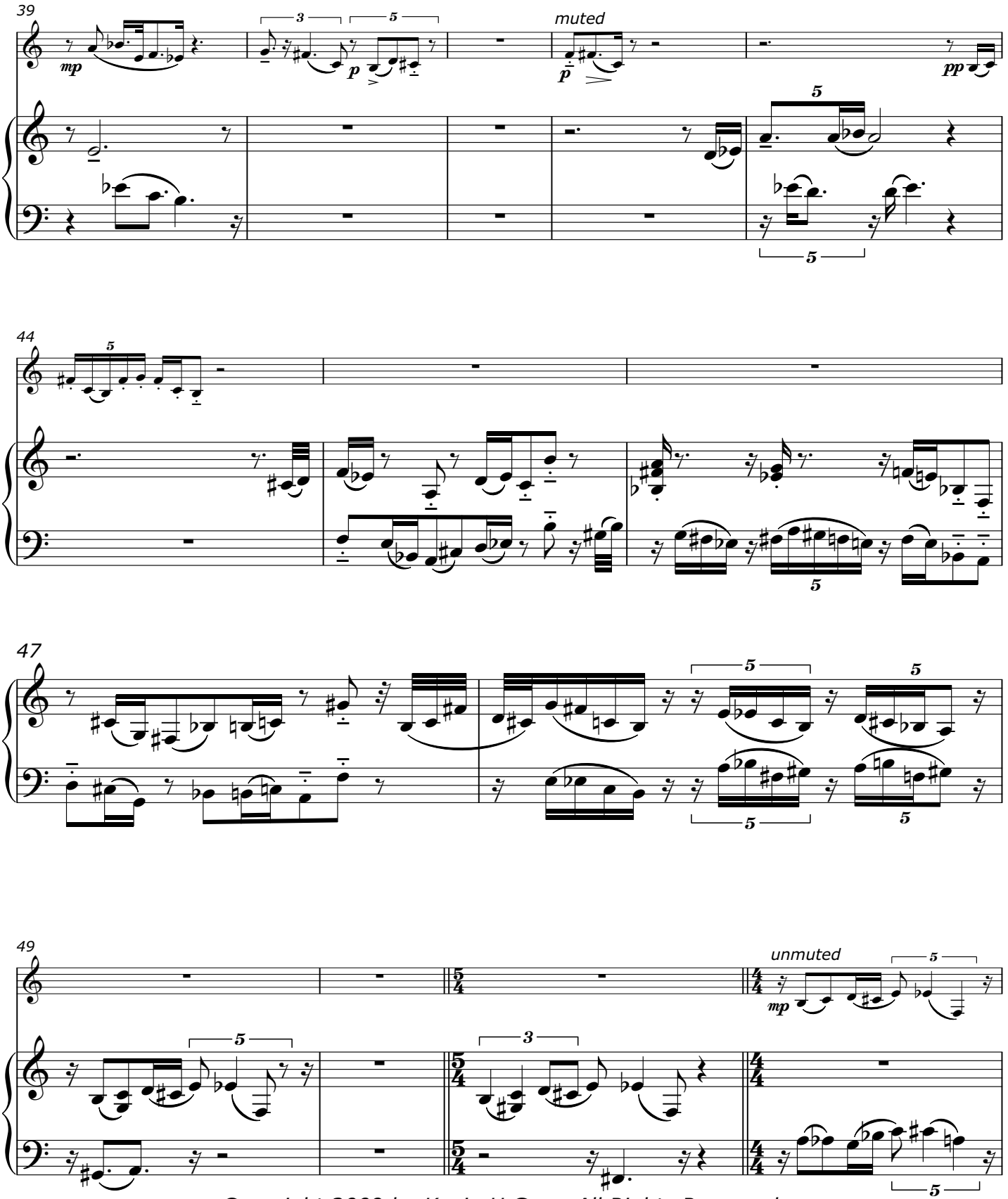

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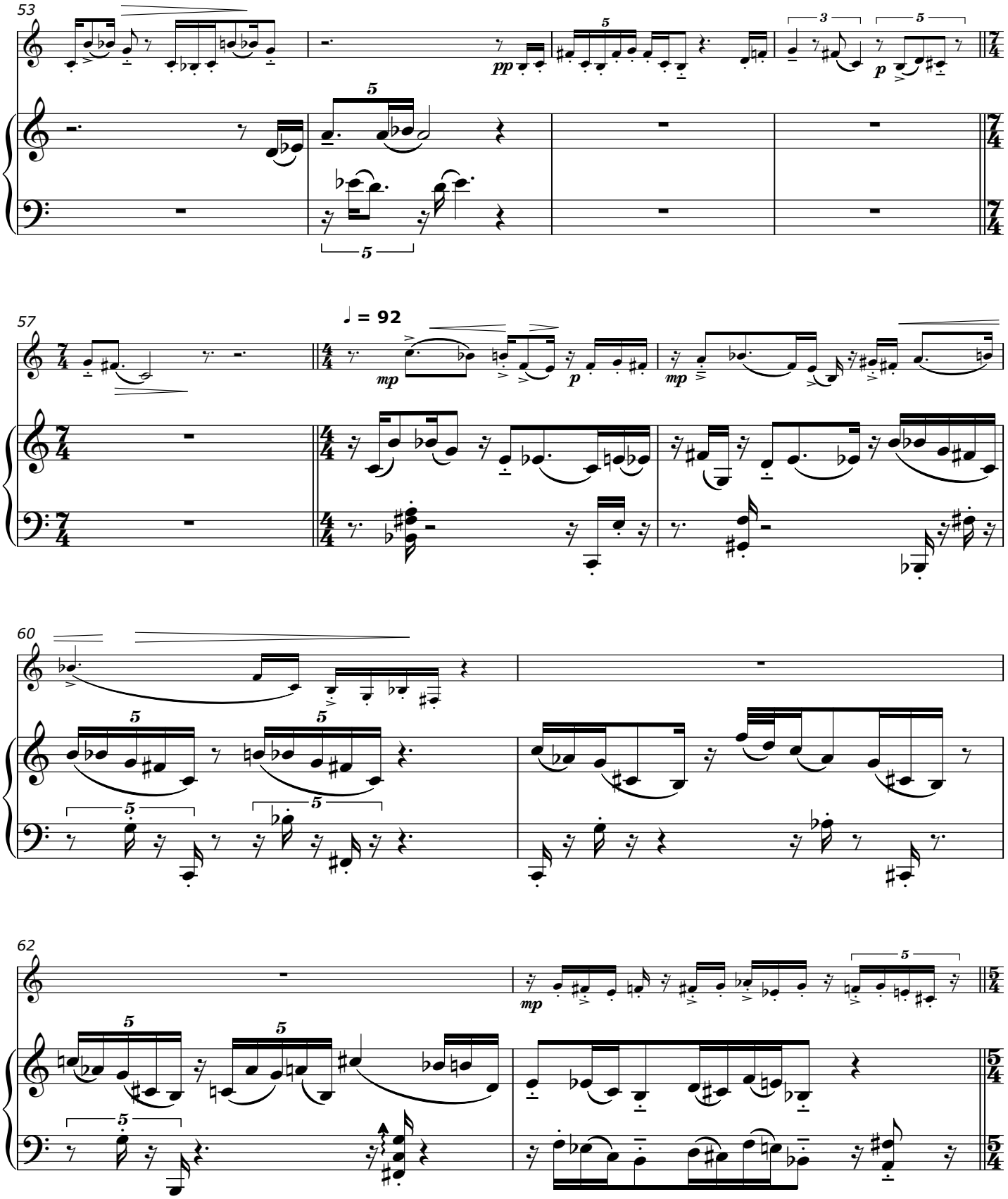

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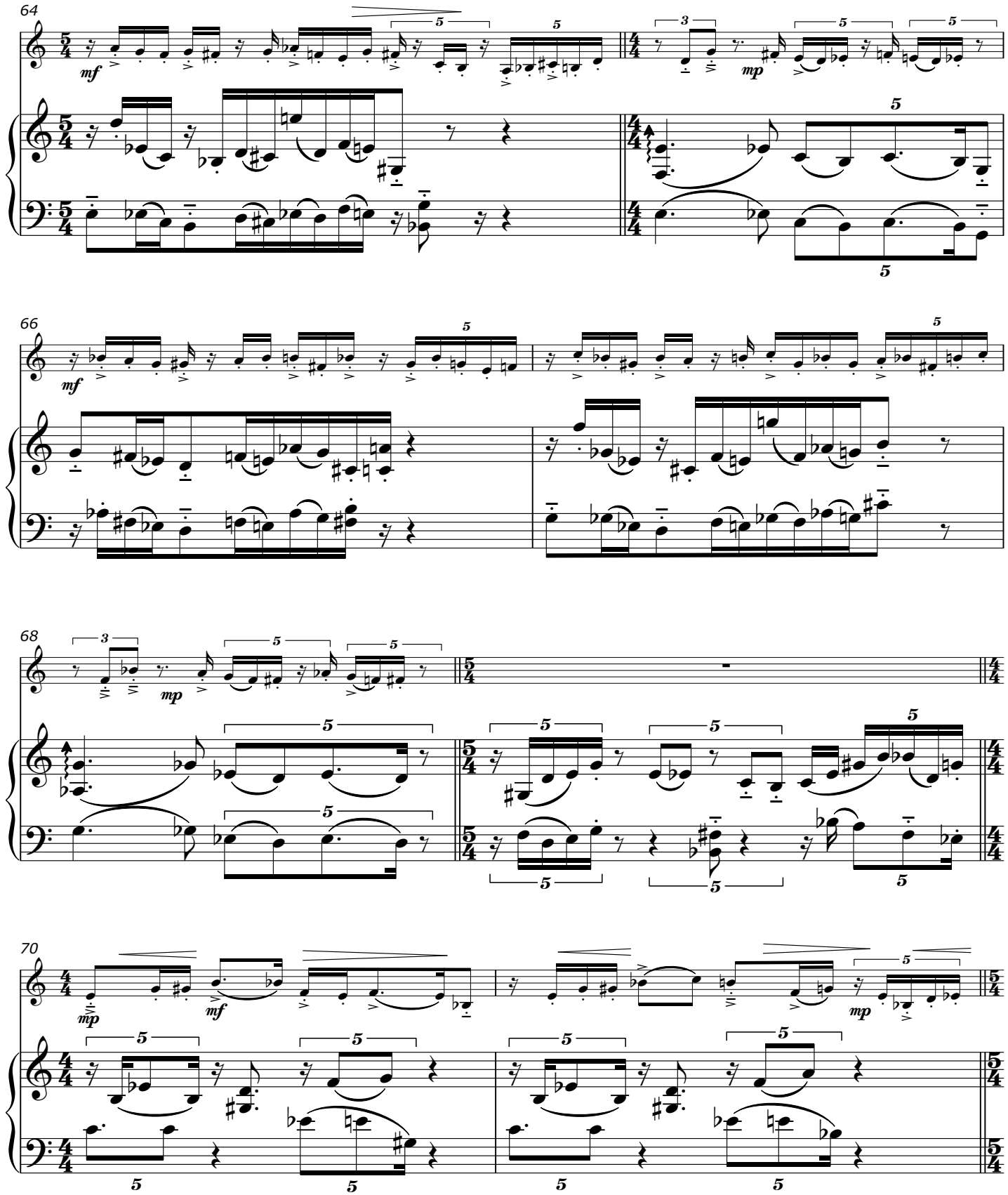

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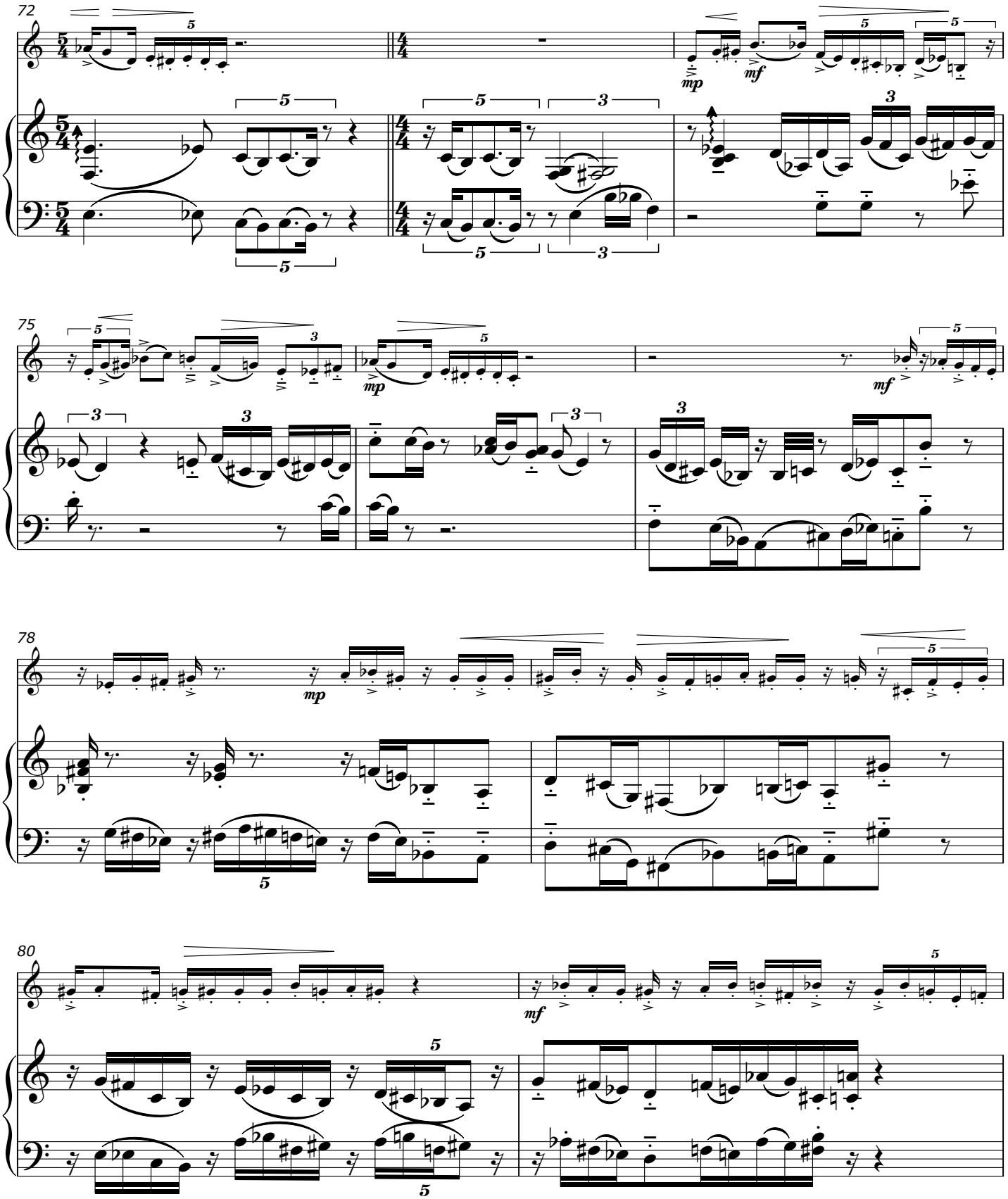

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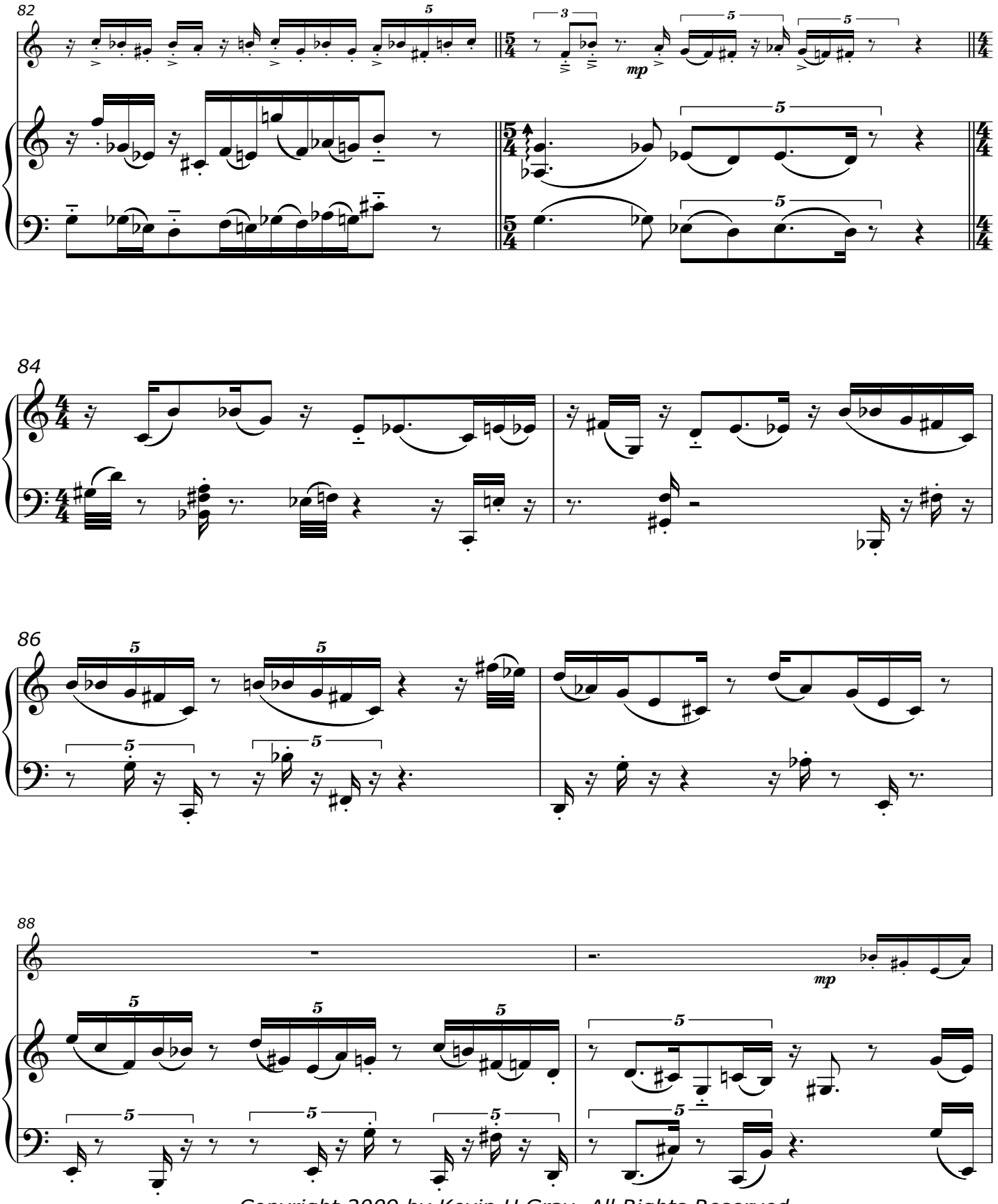

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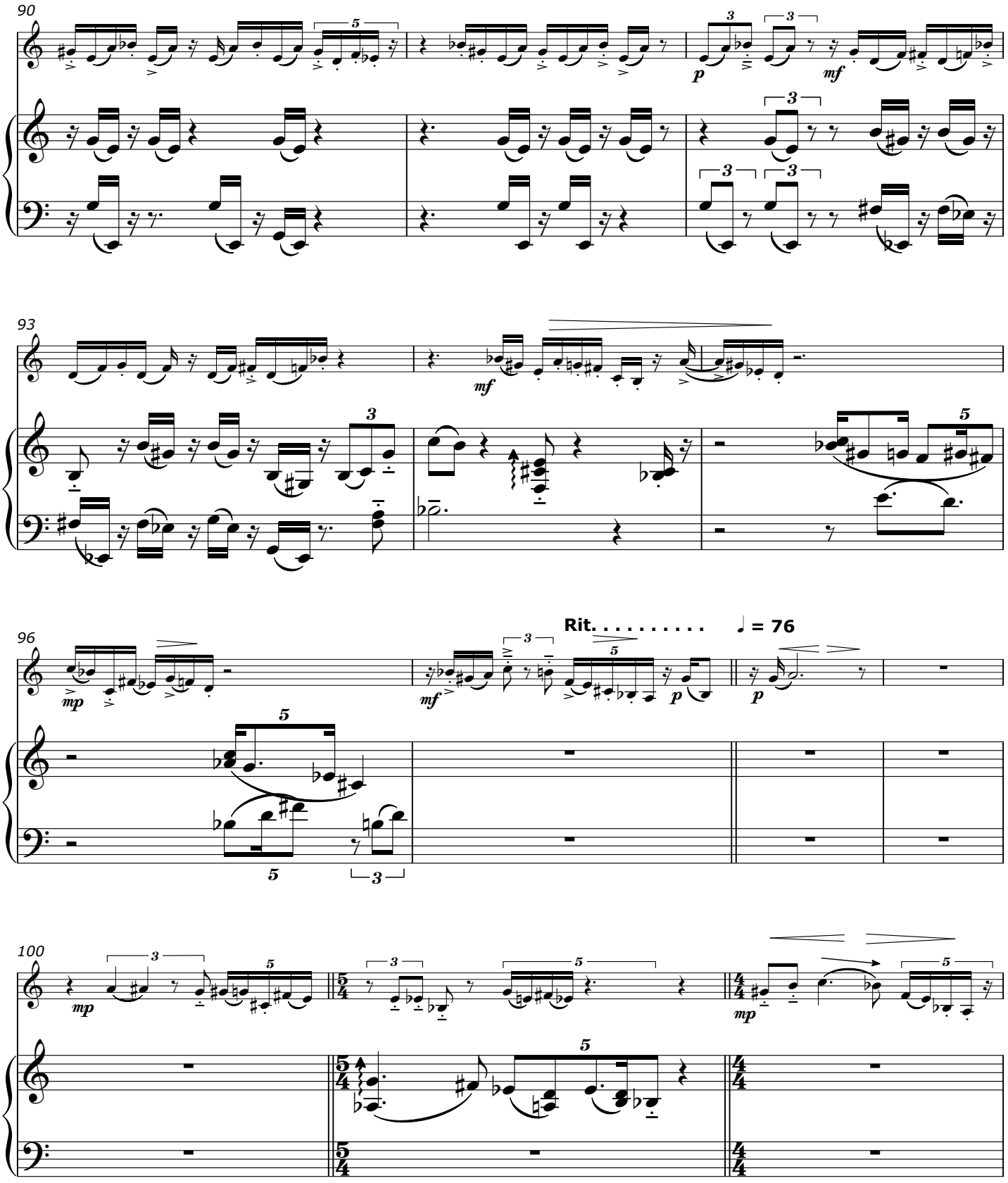

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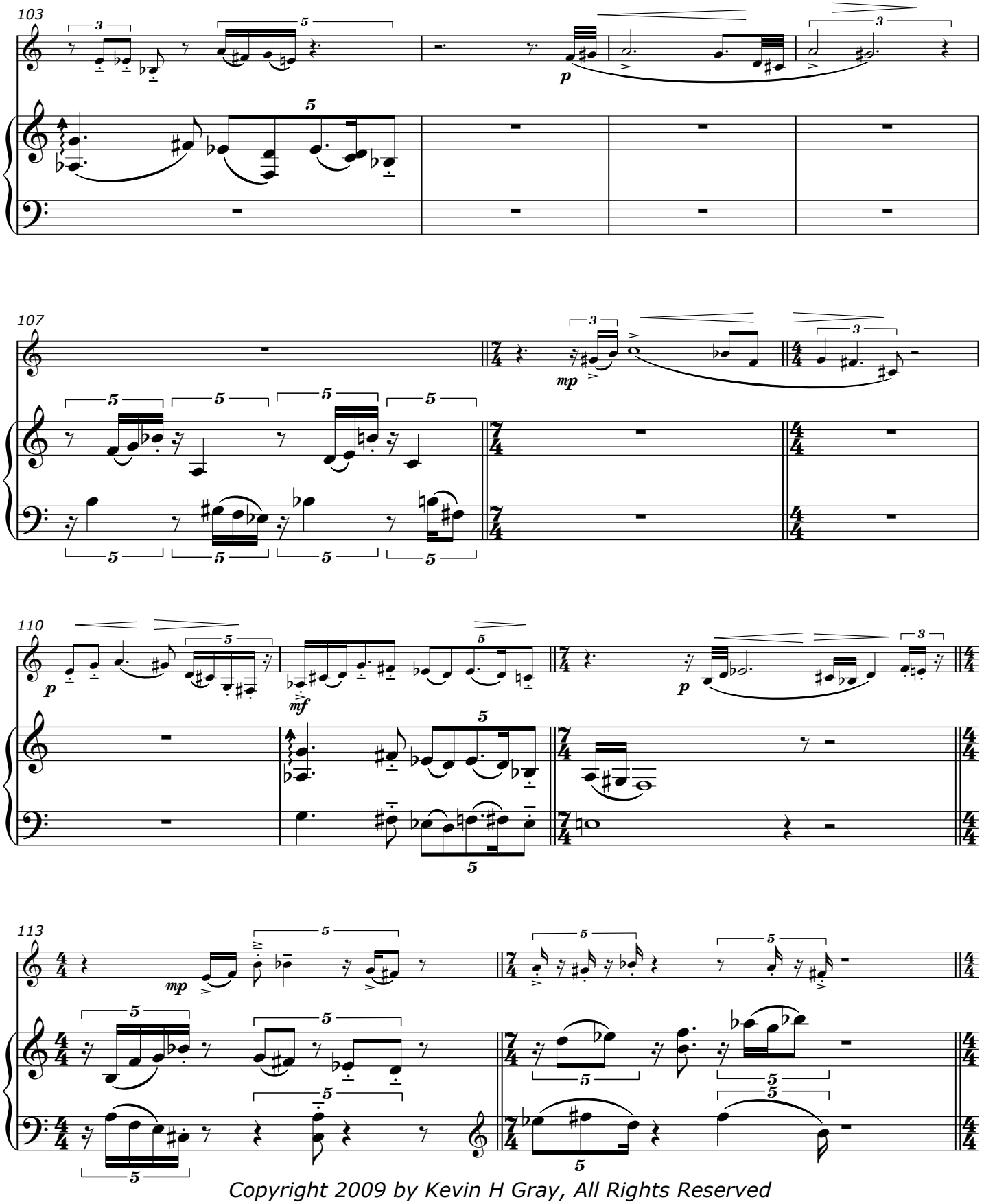

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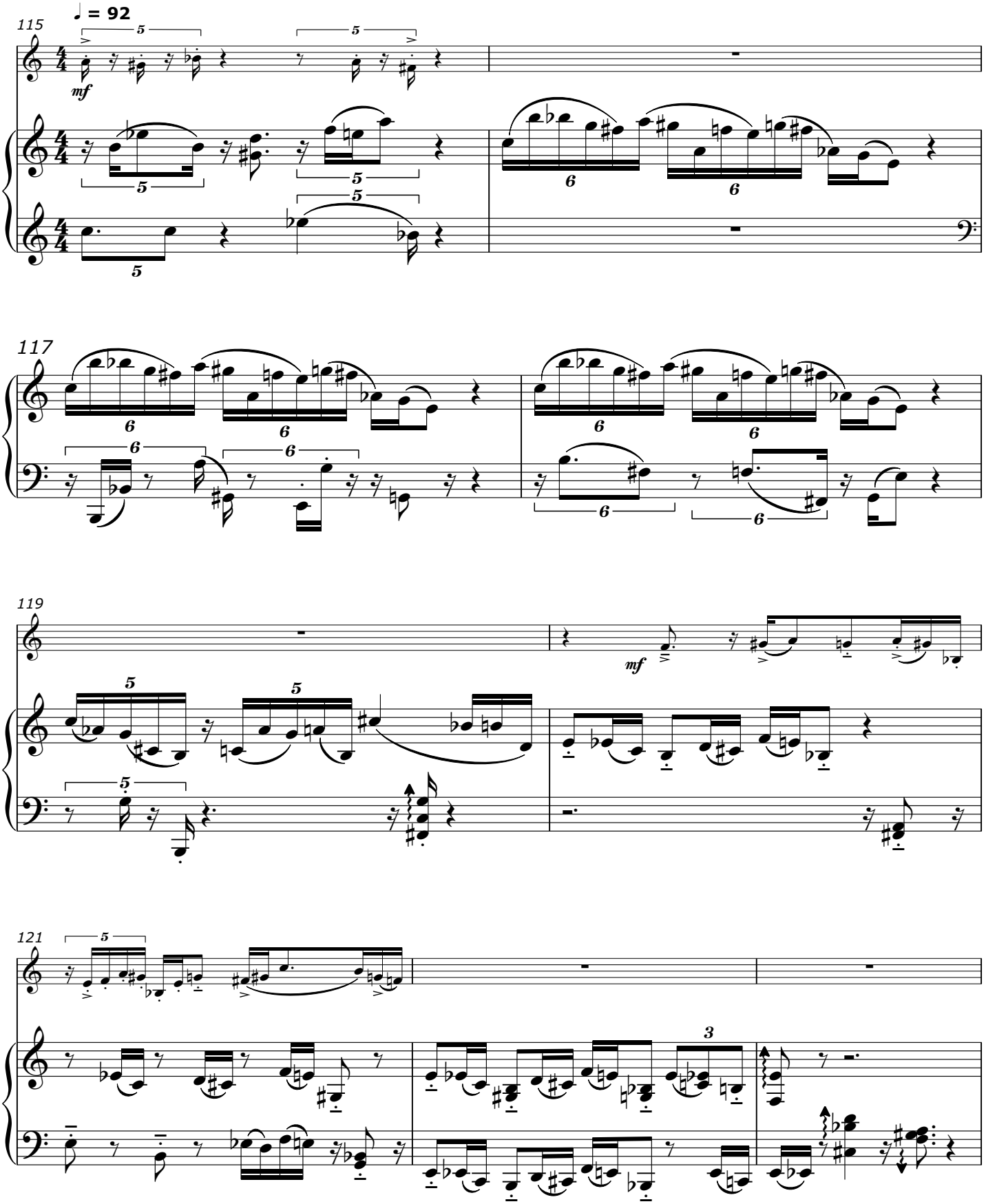

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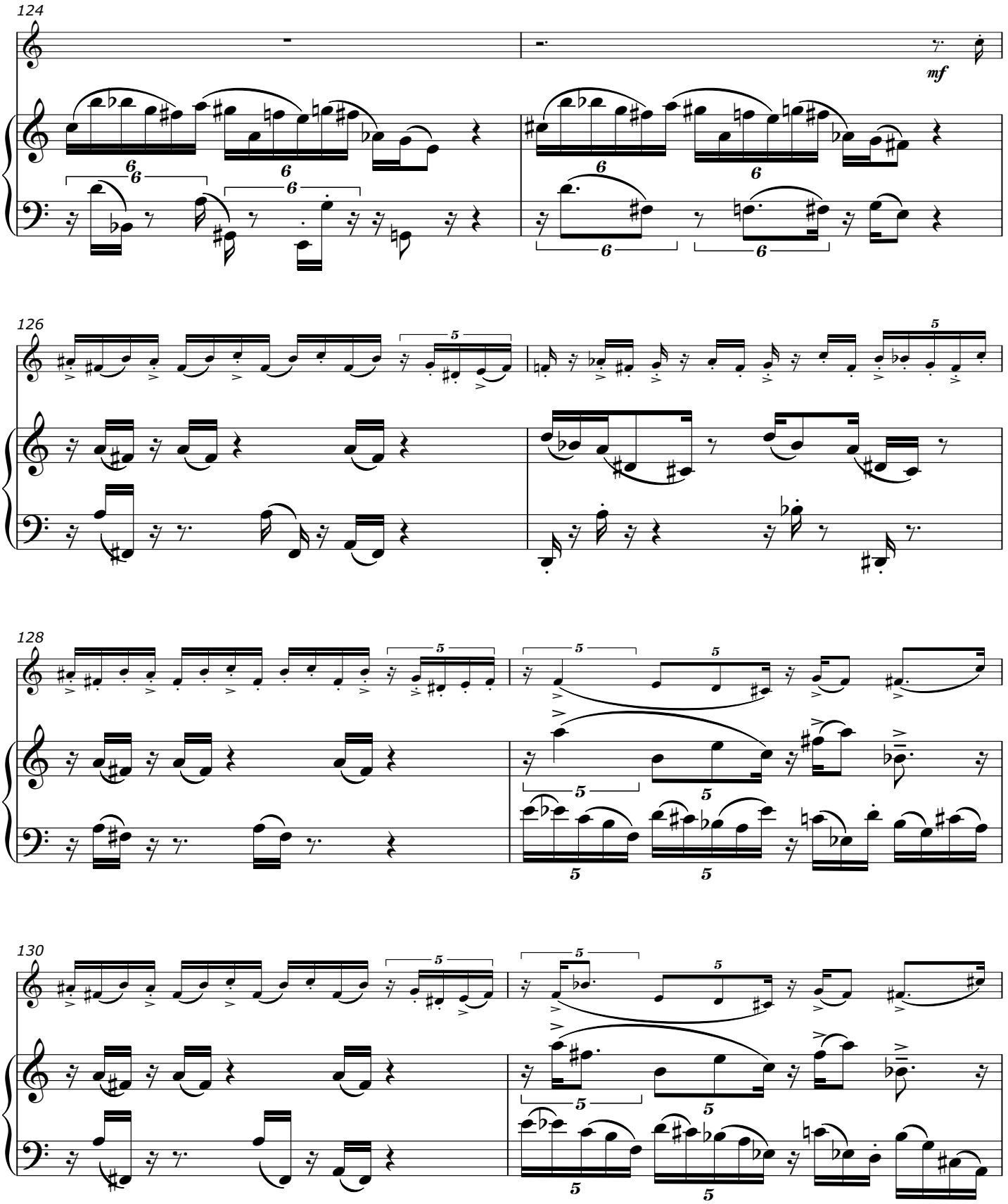

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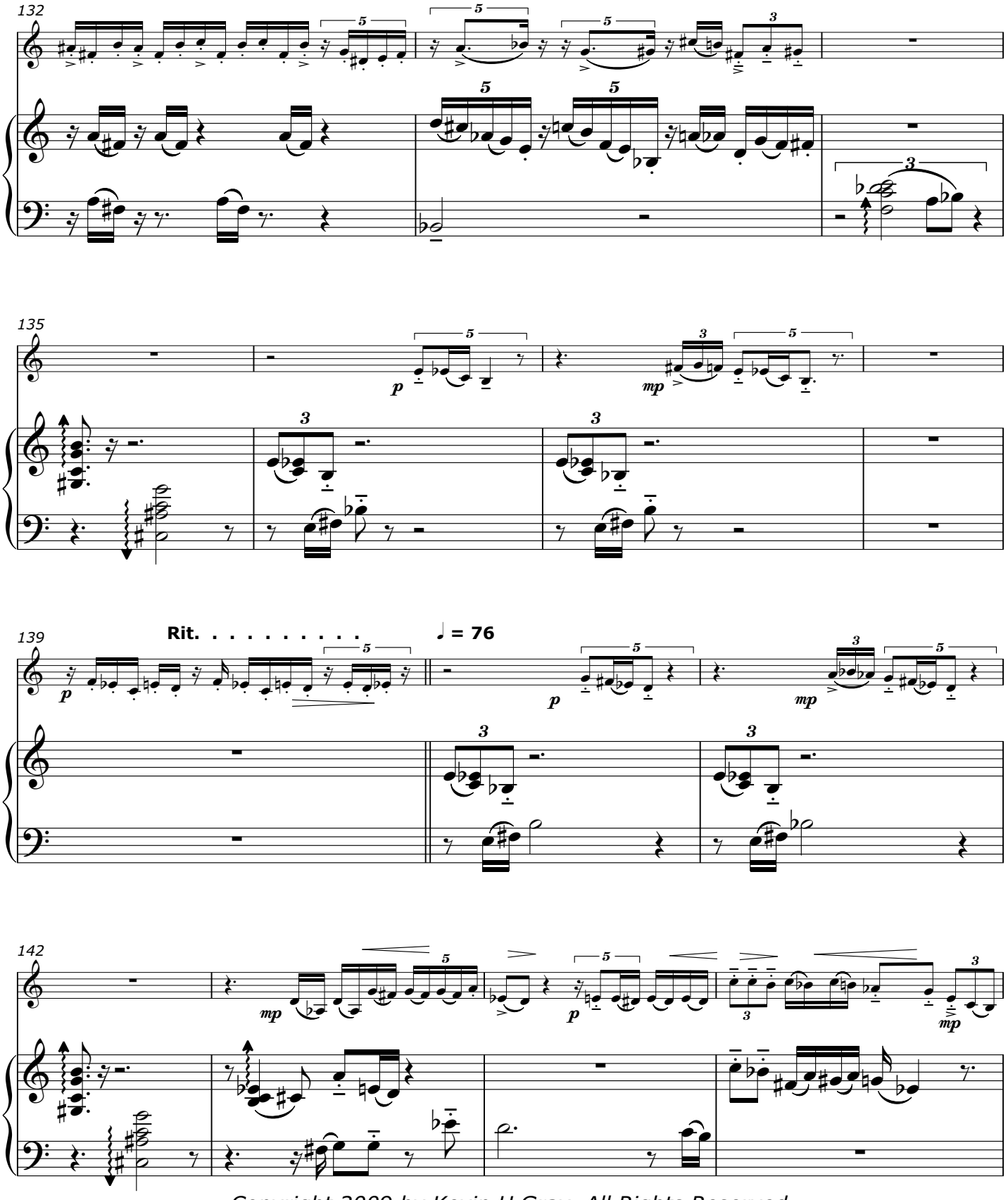

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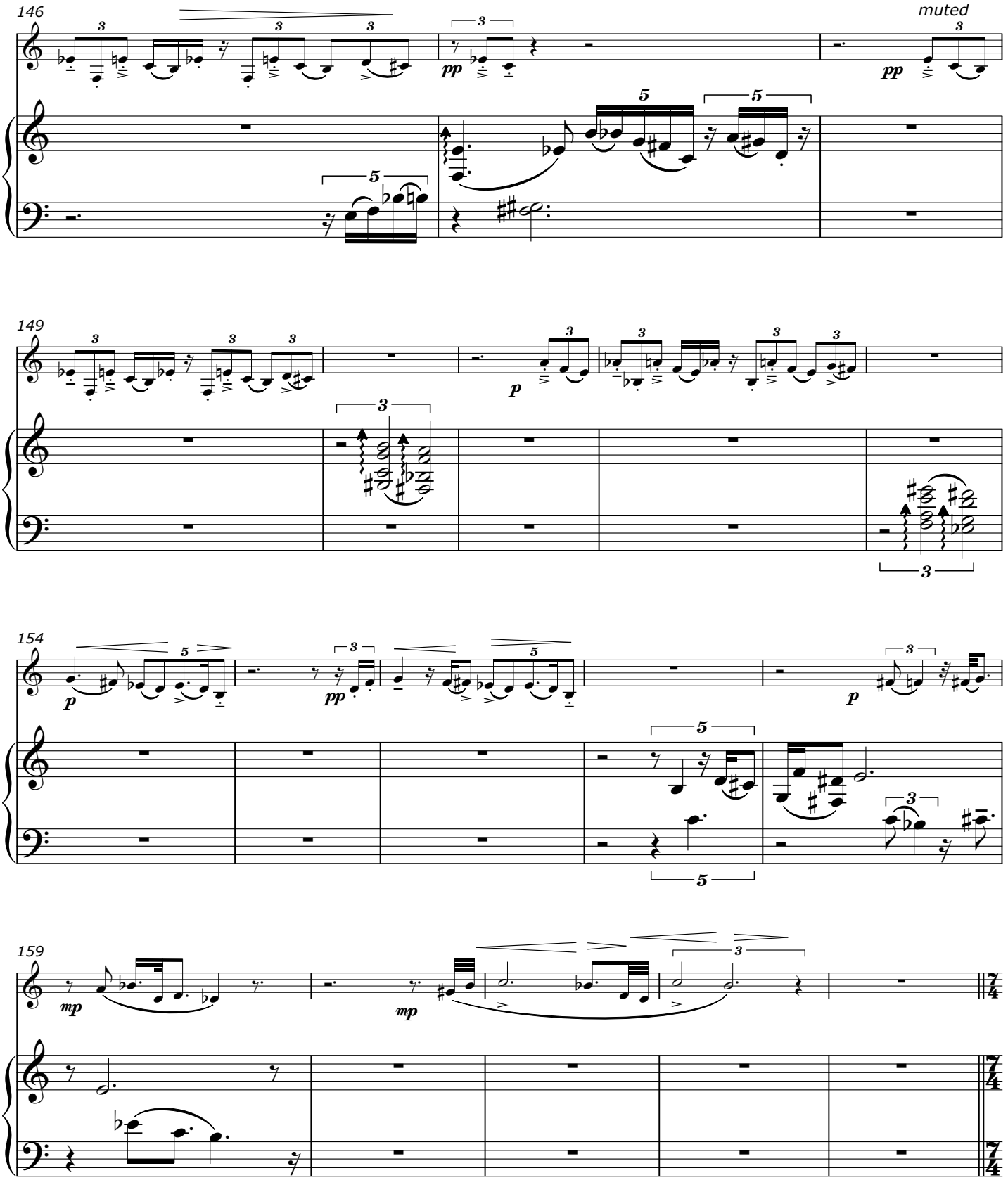

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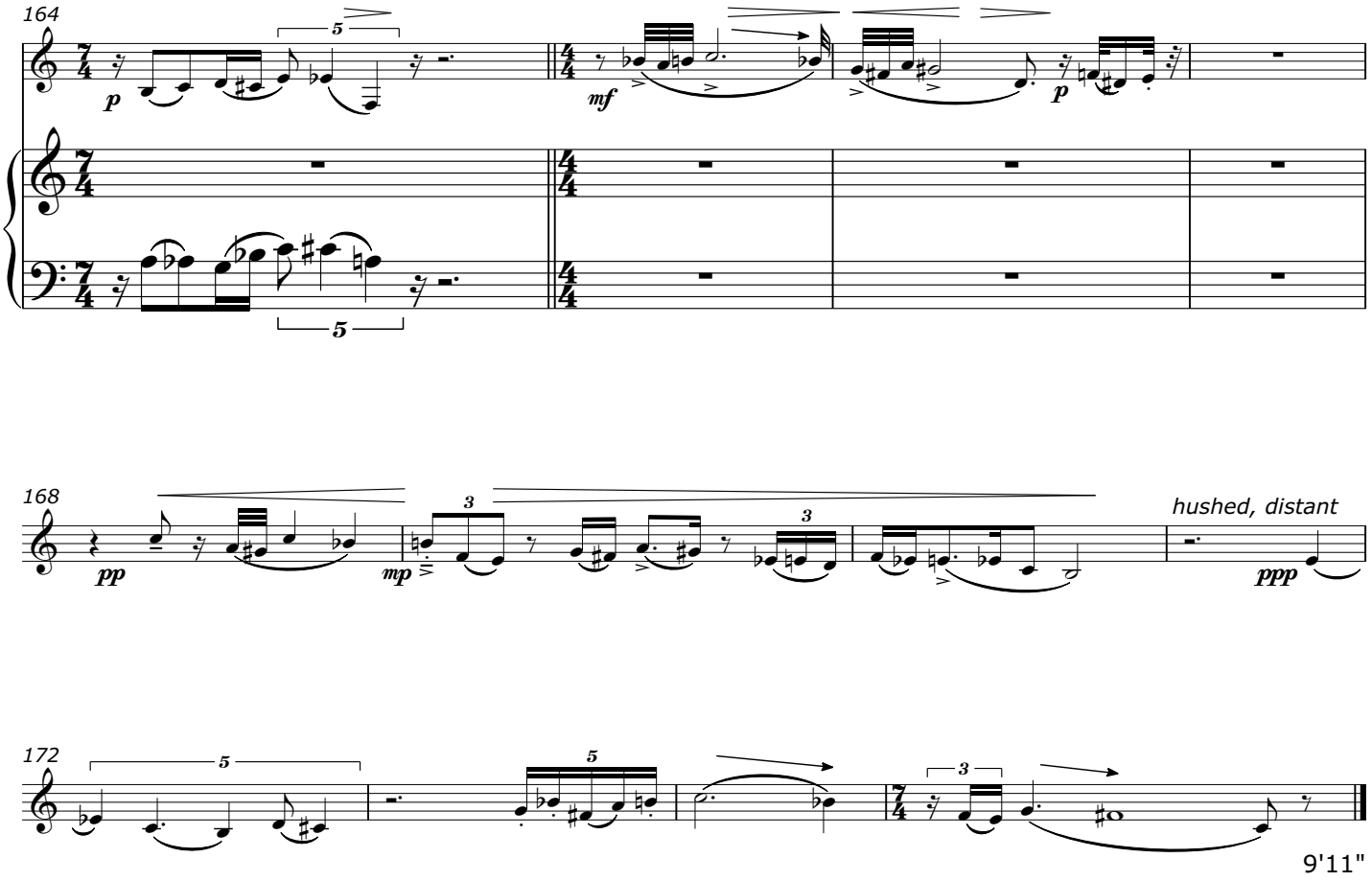

for Jennifer Rhodes

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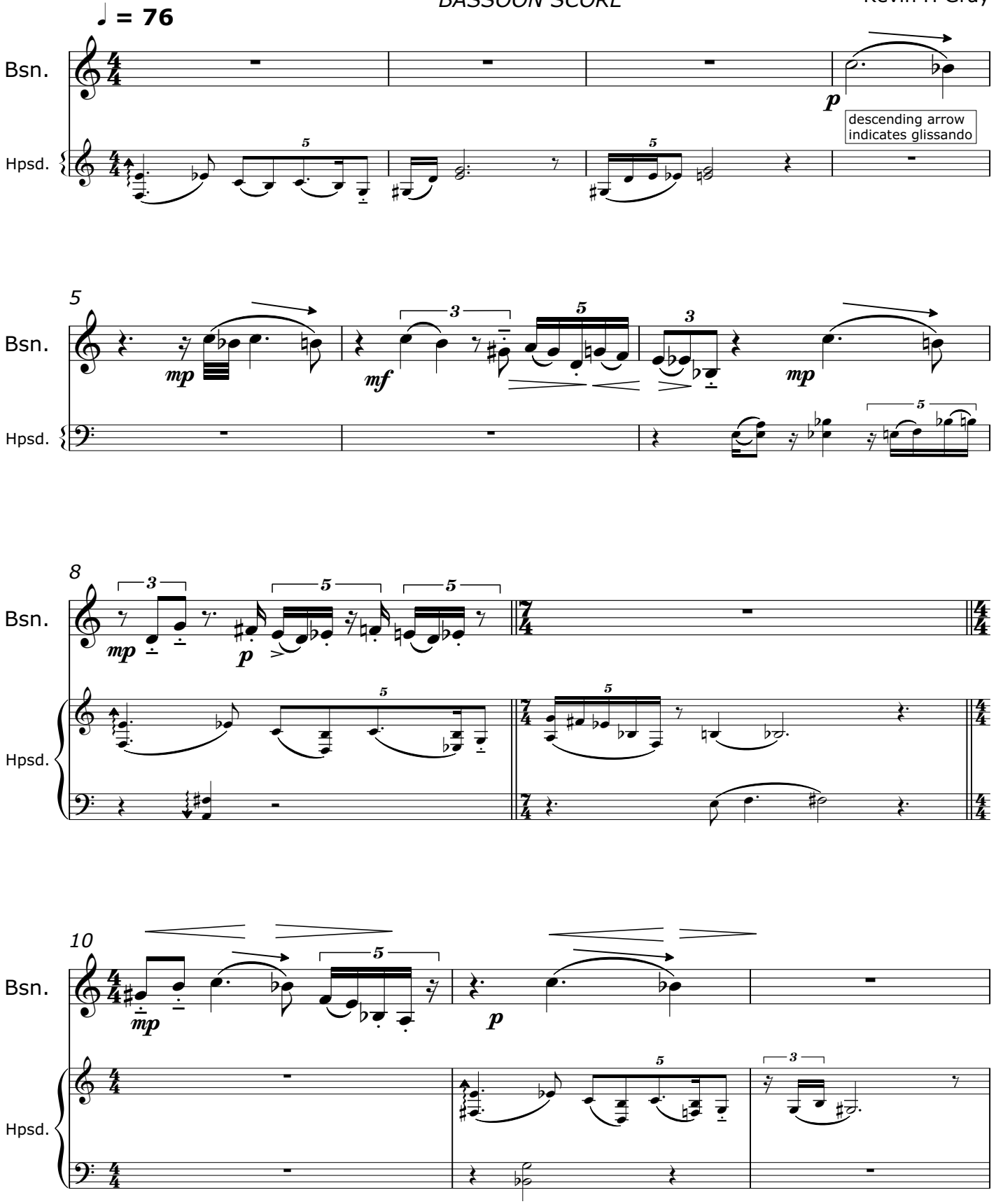
for bassoon and harpsichord

BASSOON SCORE

Kevin H Gray



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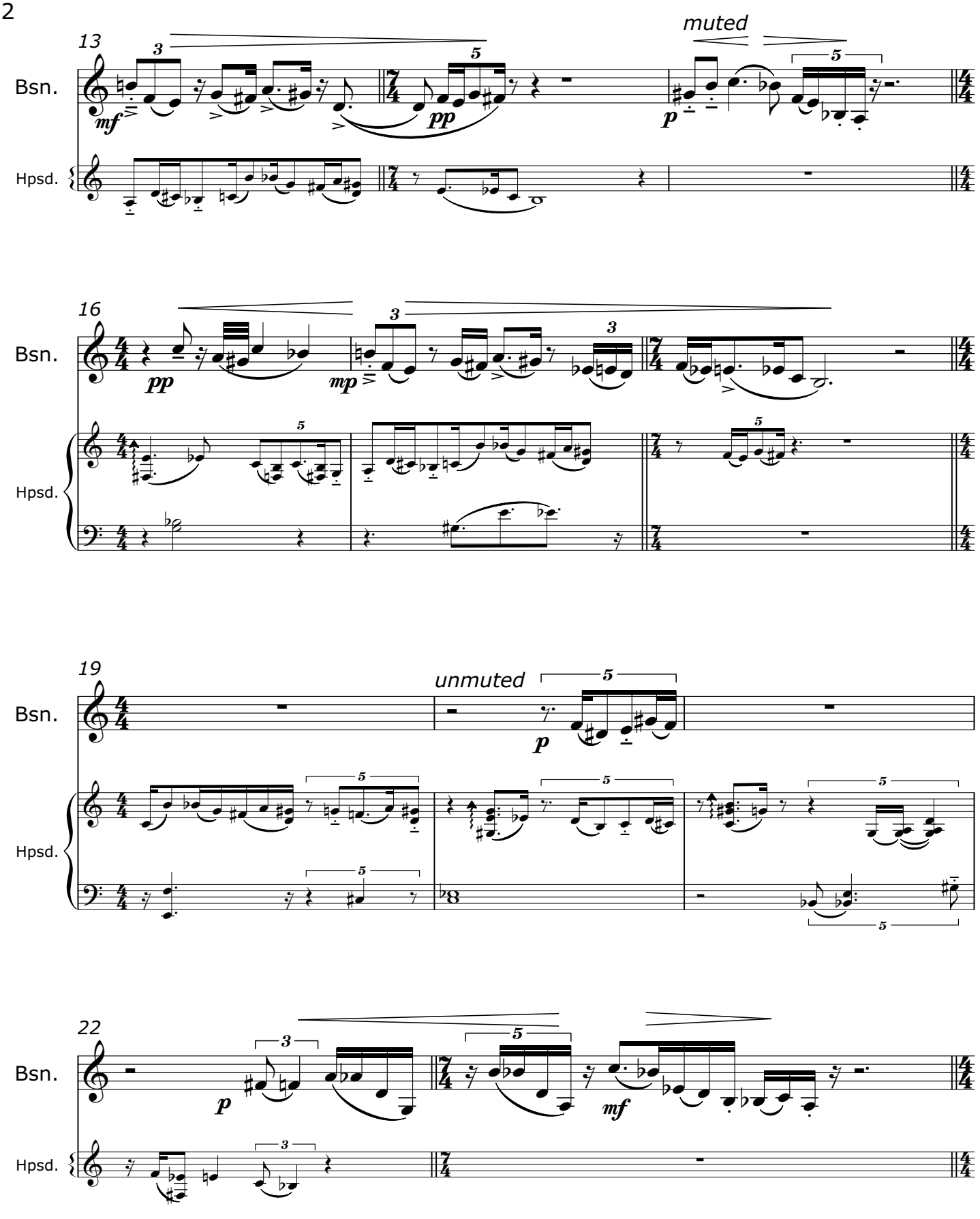
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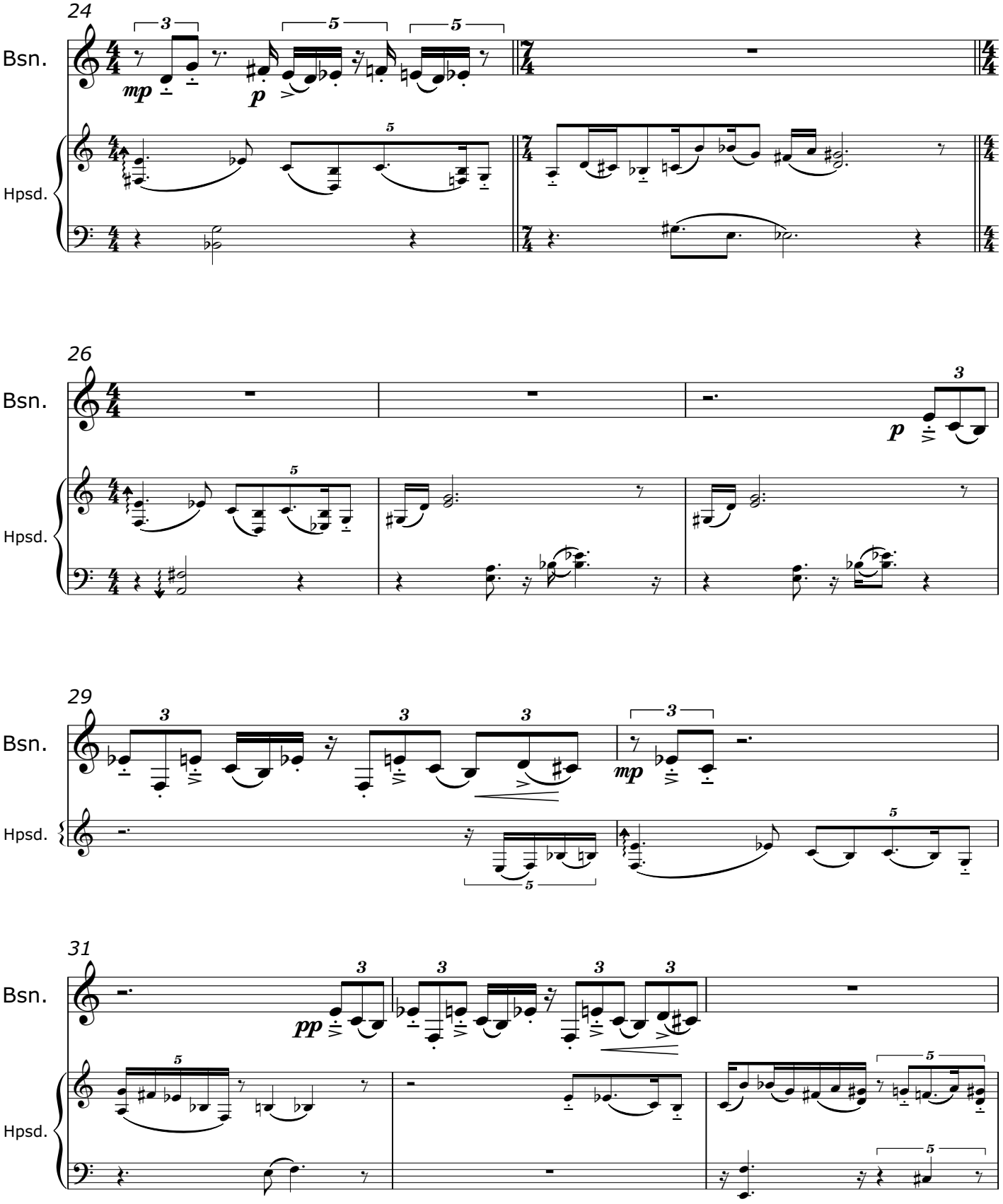
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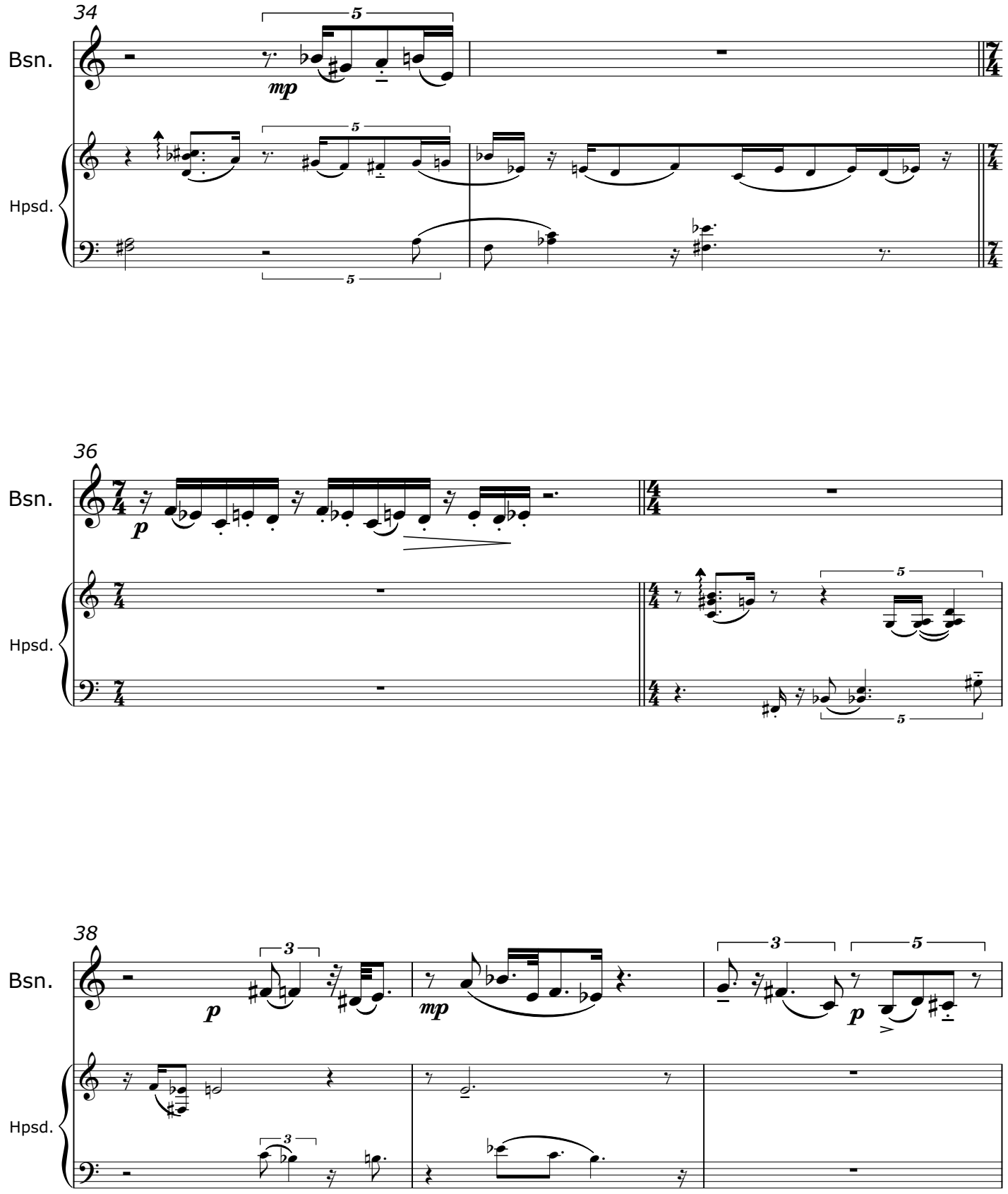
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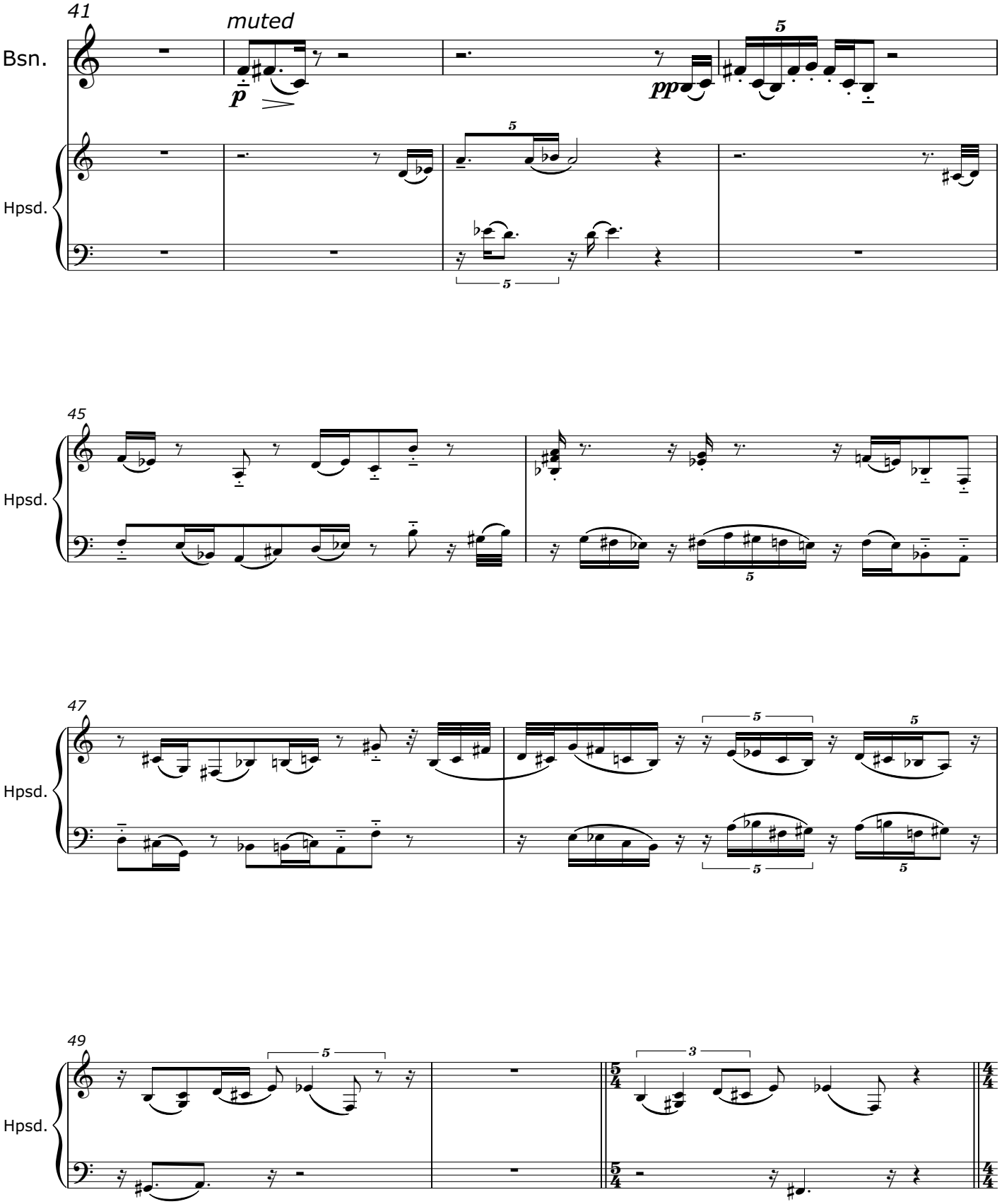
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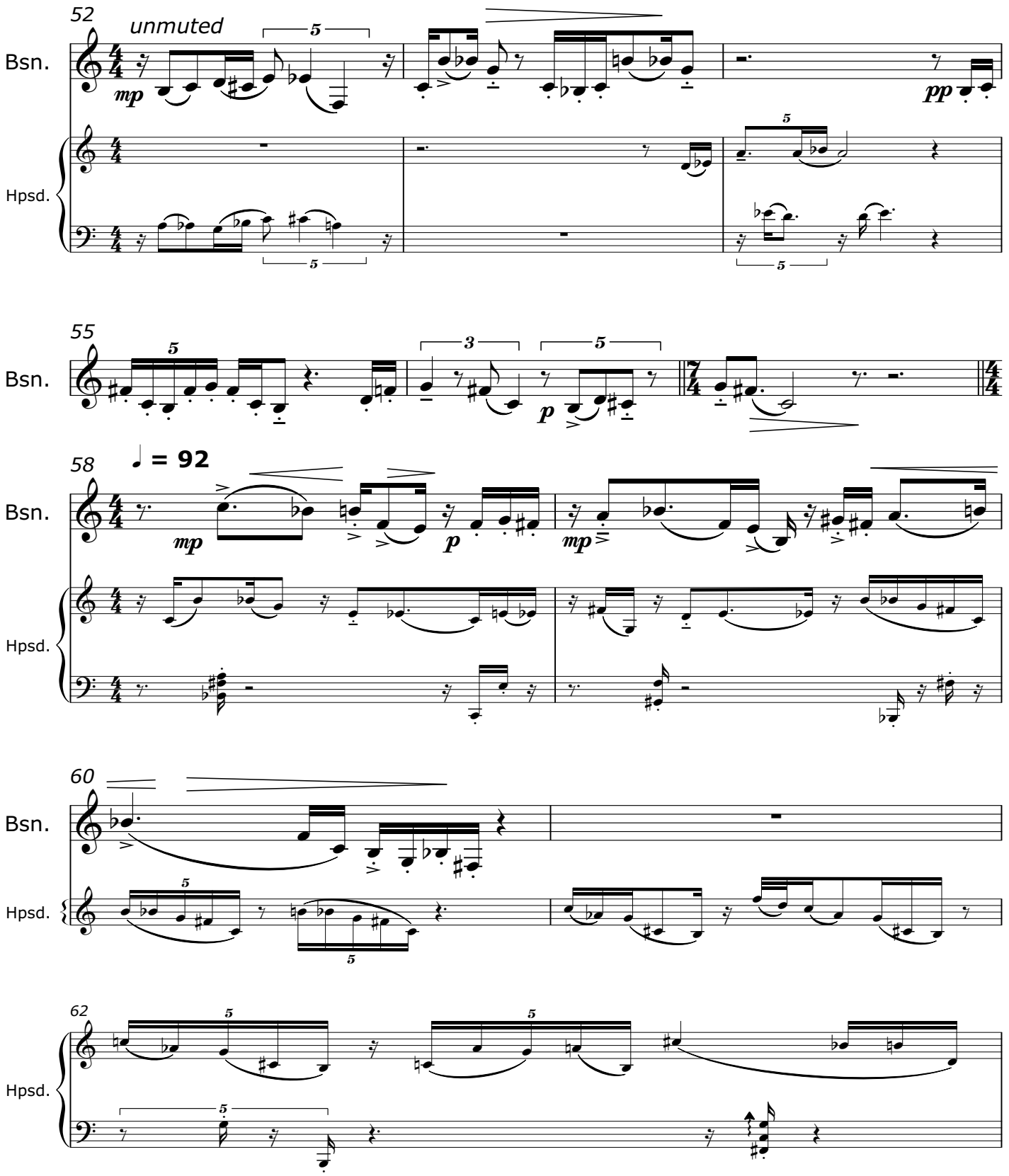
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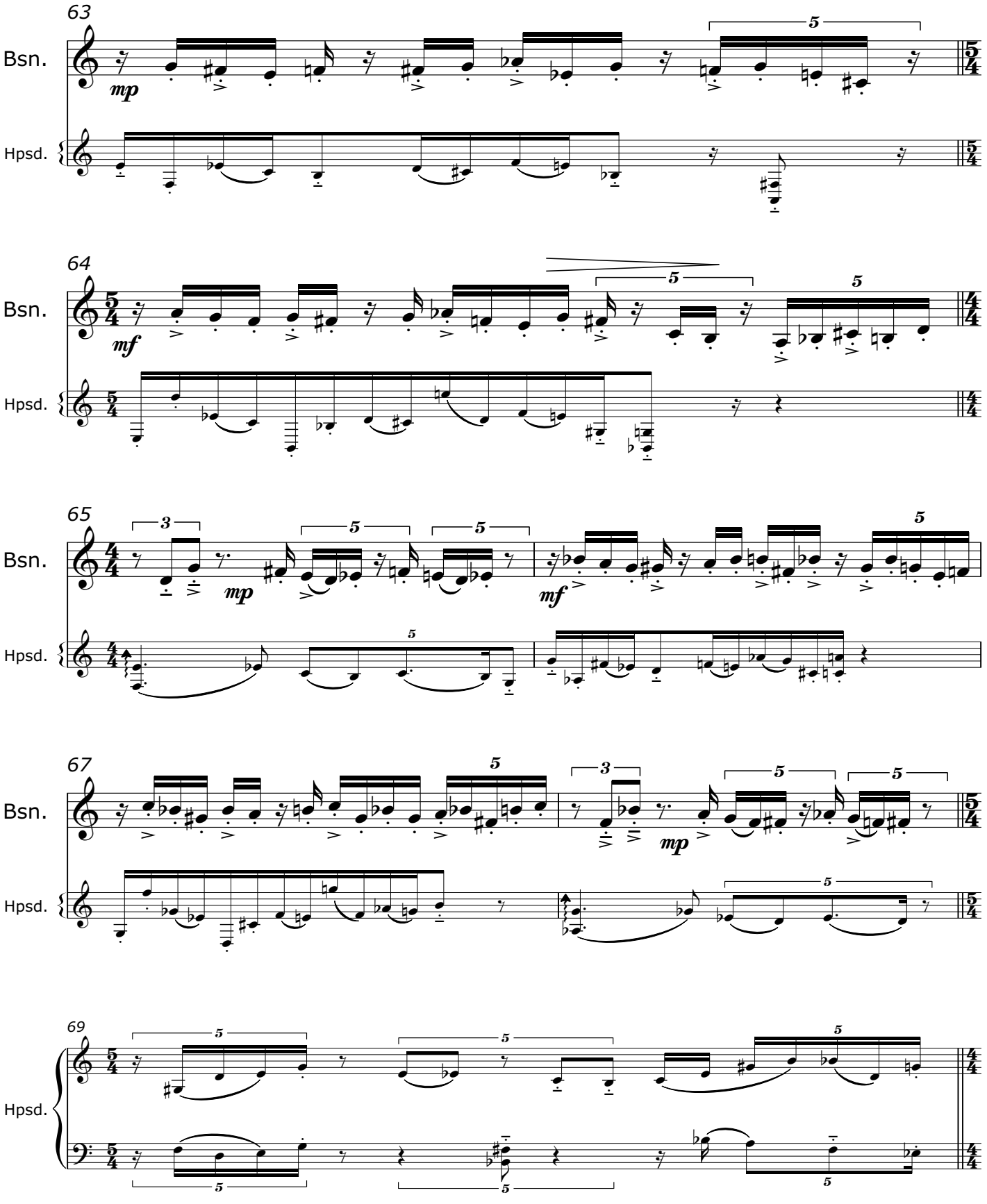
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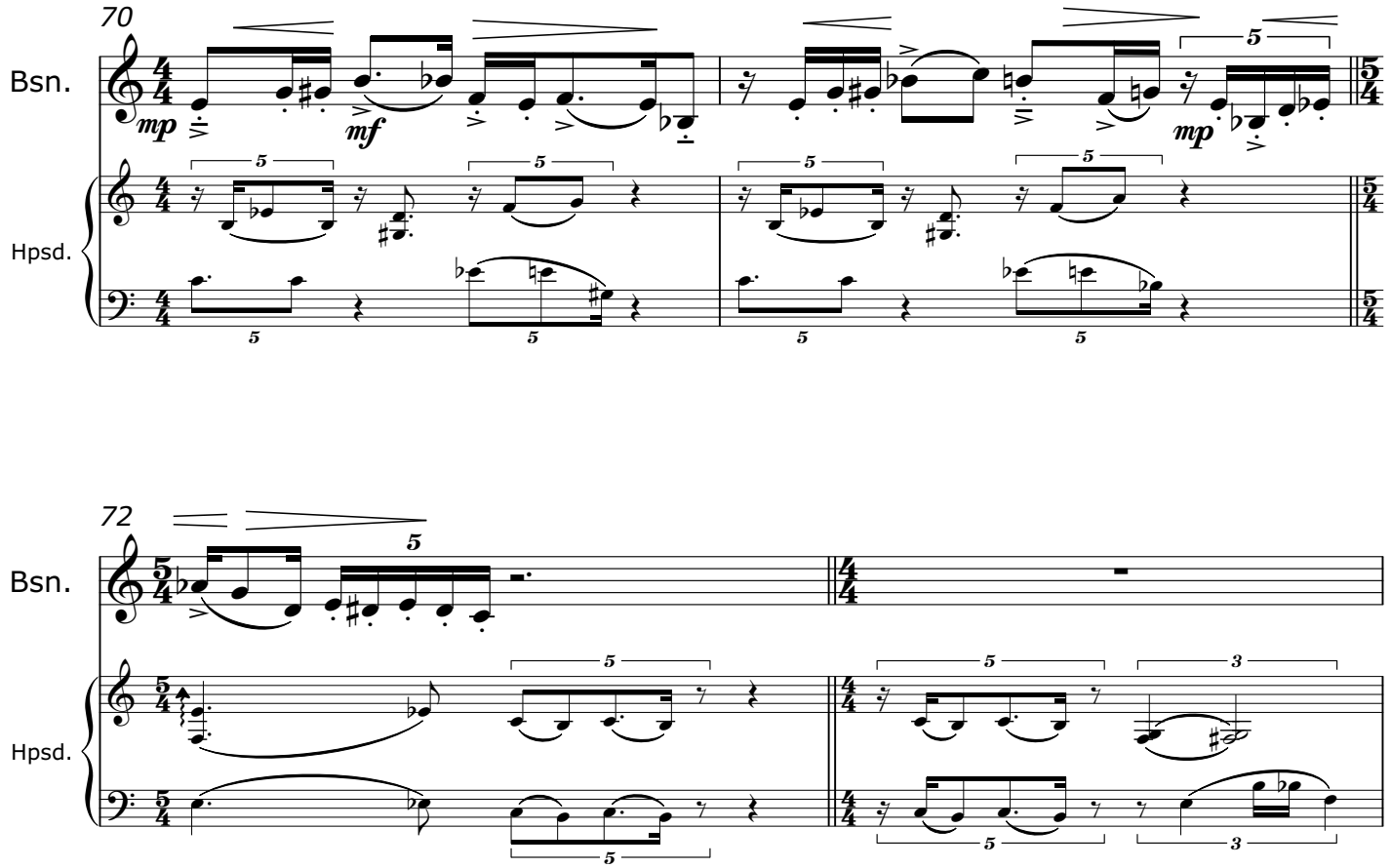
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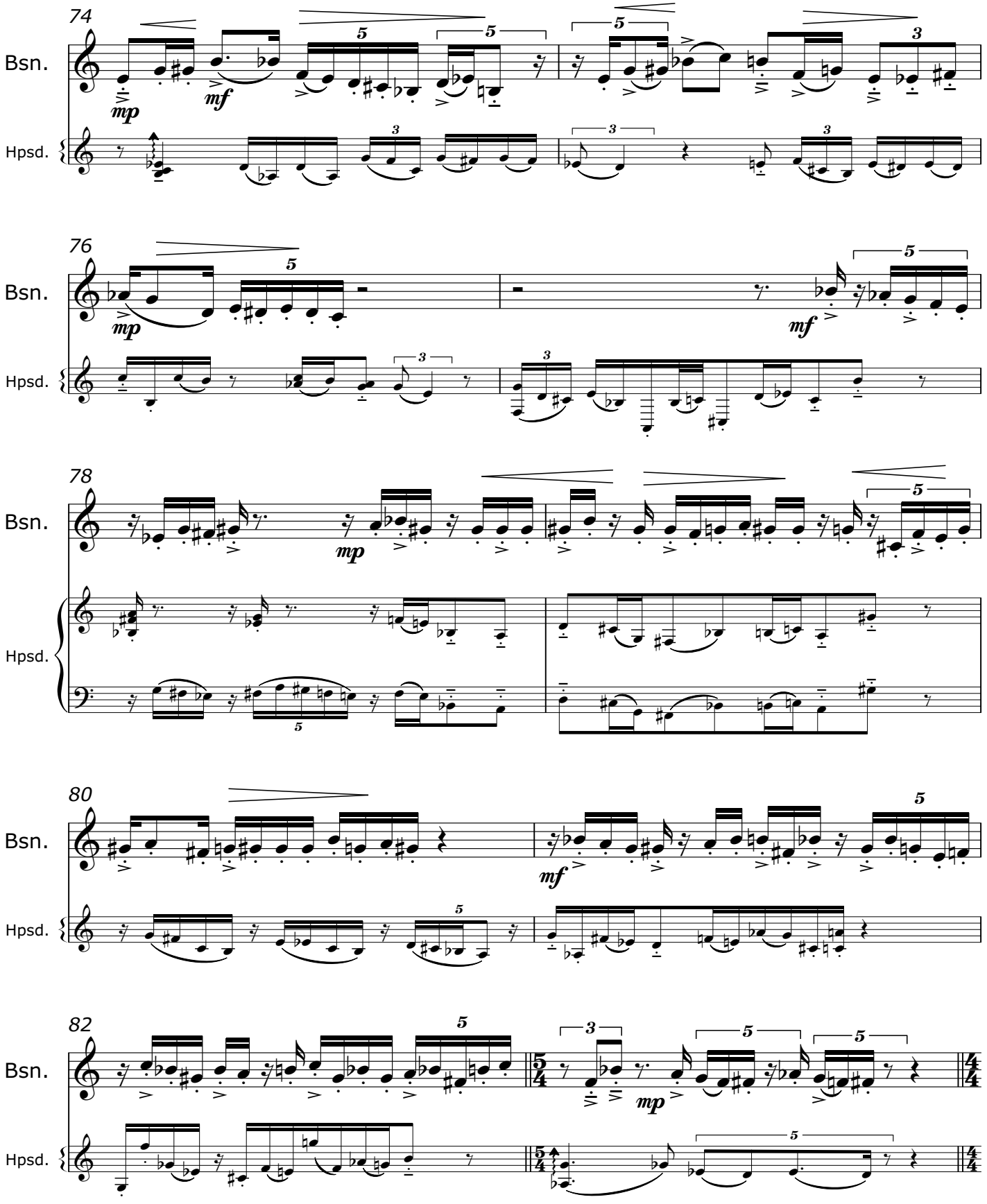
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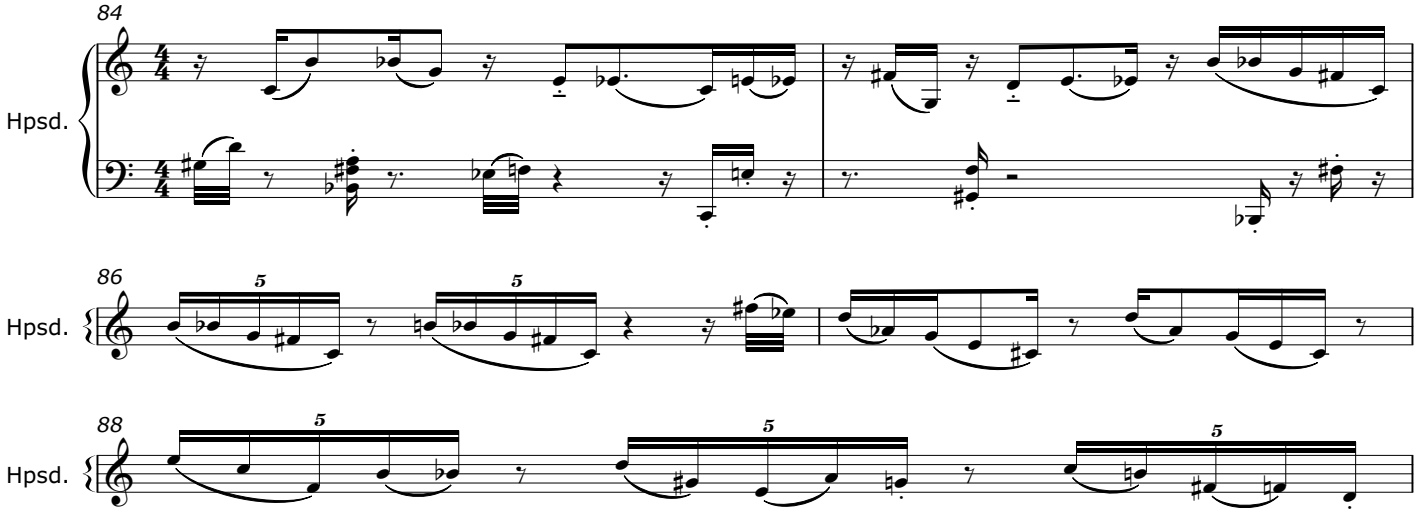
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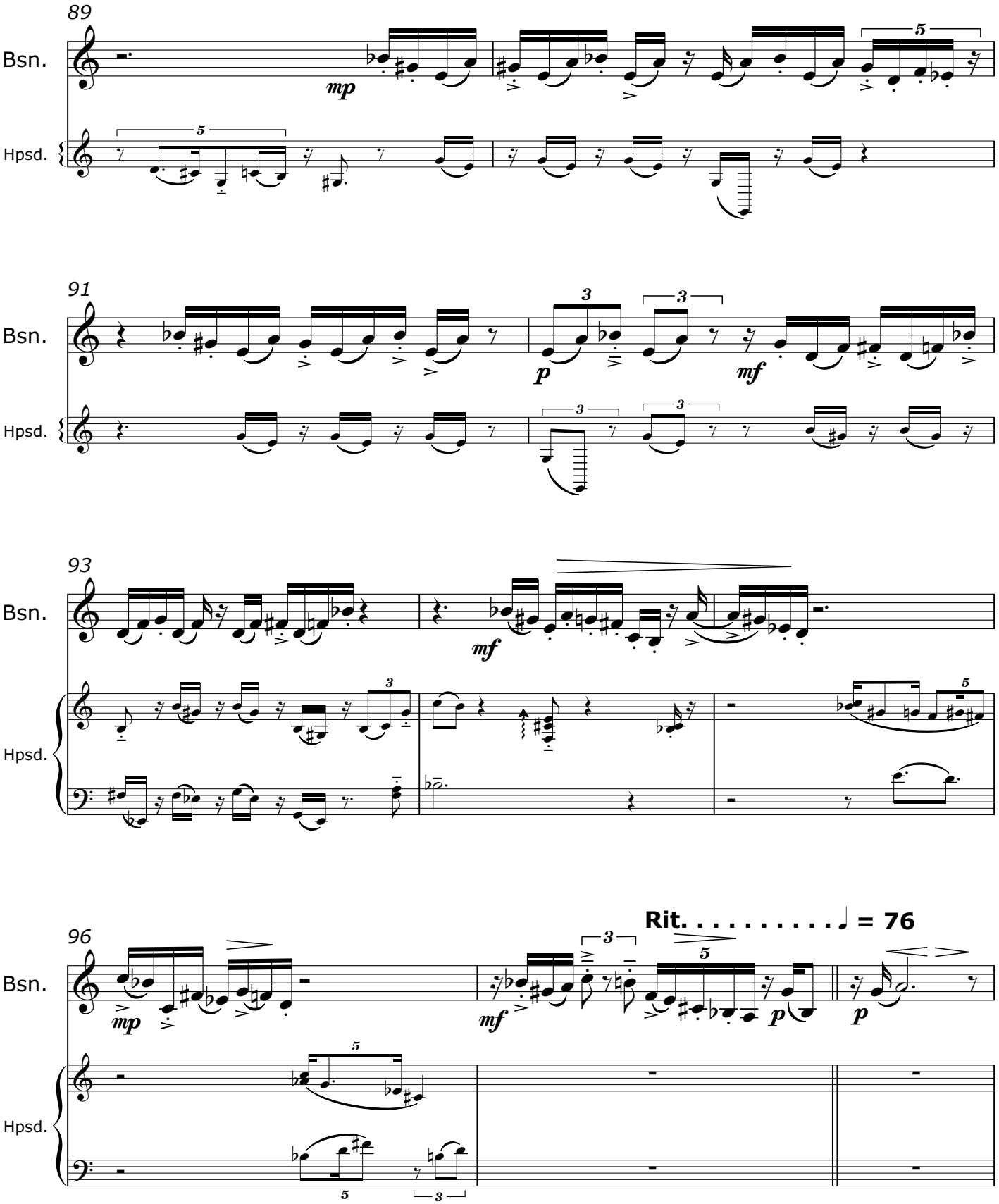
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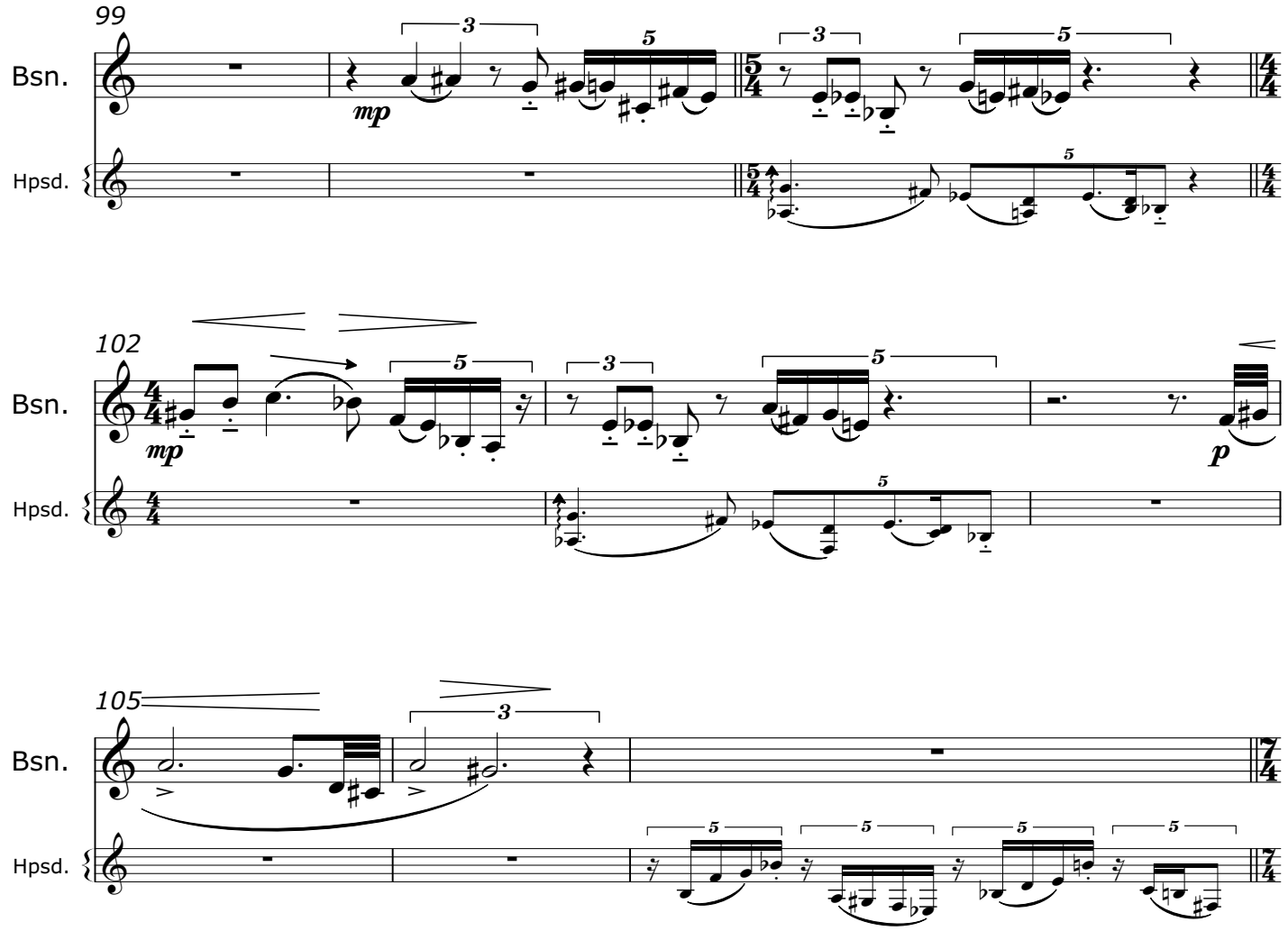
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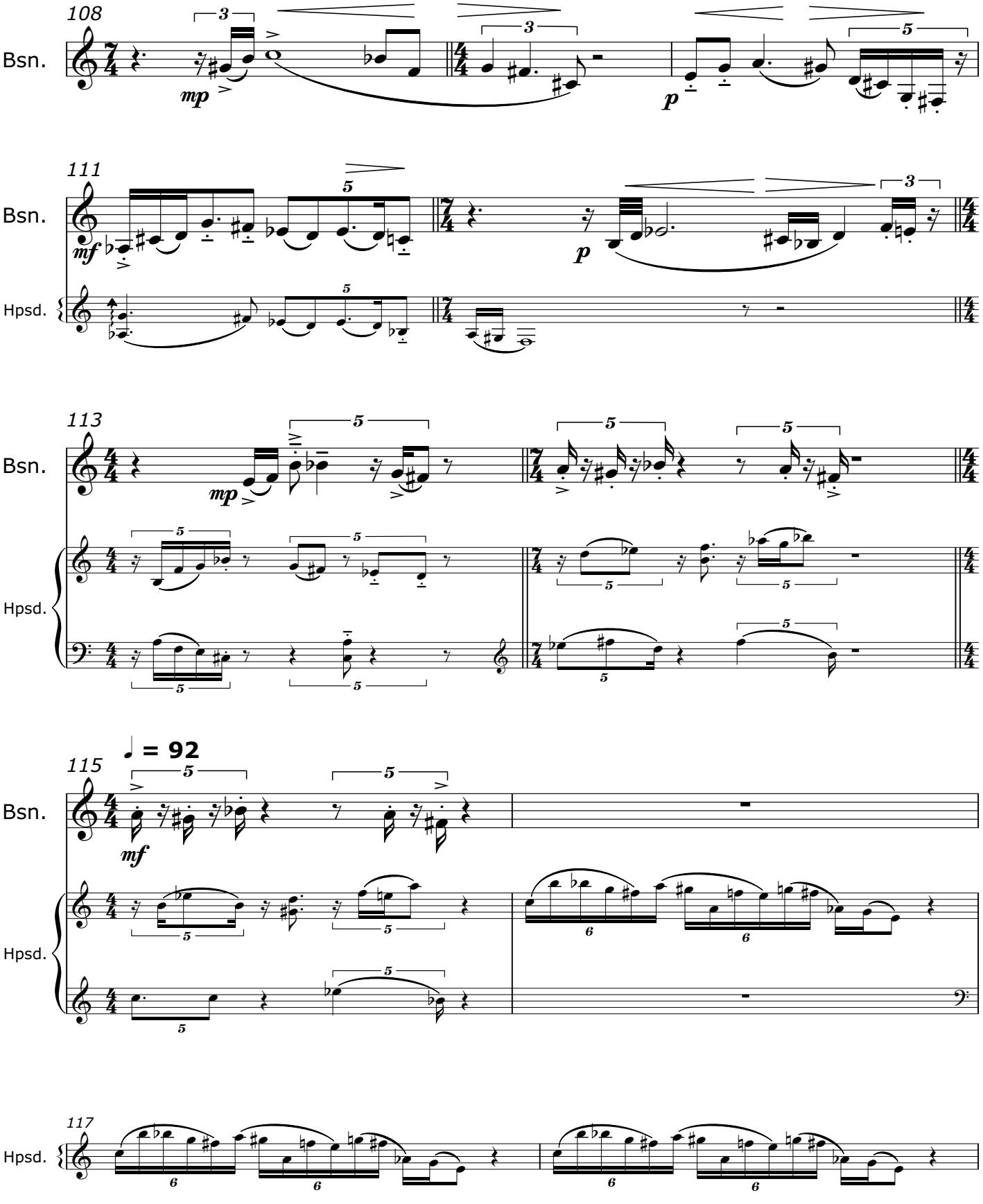
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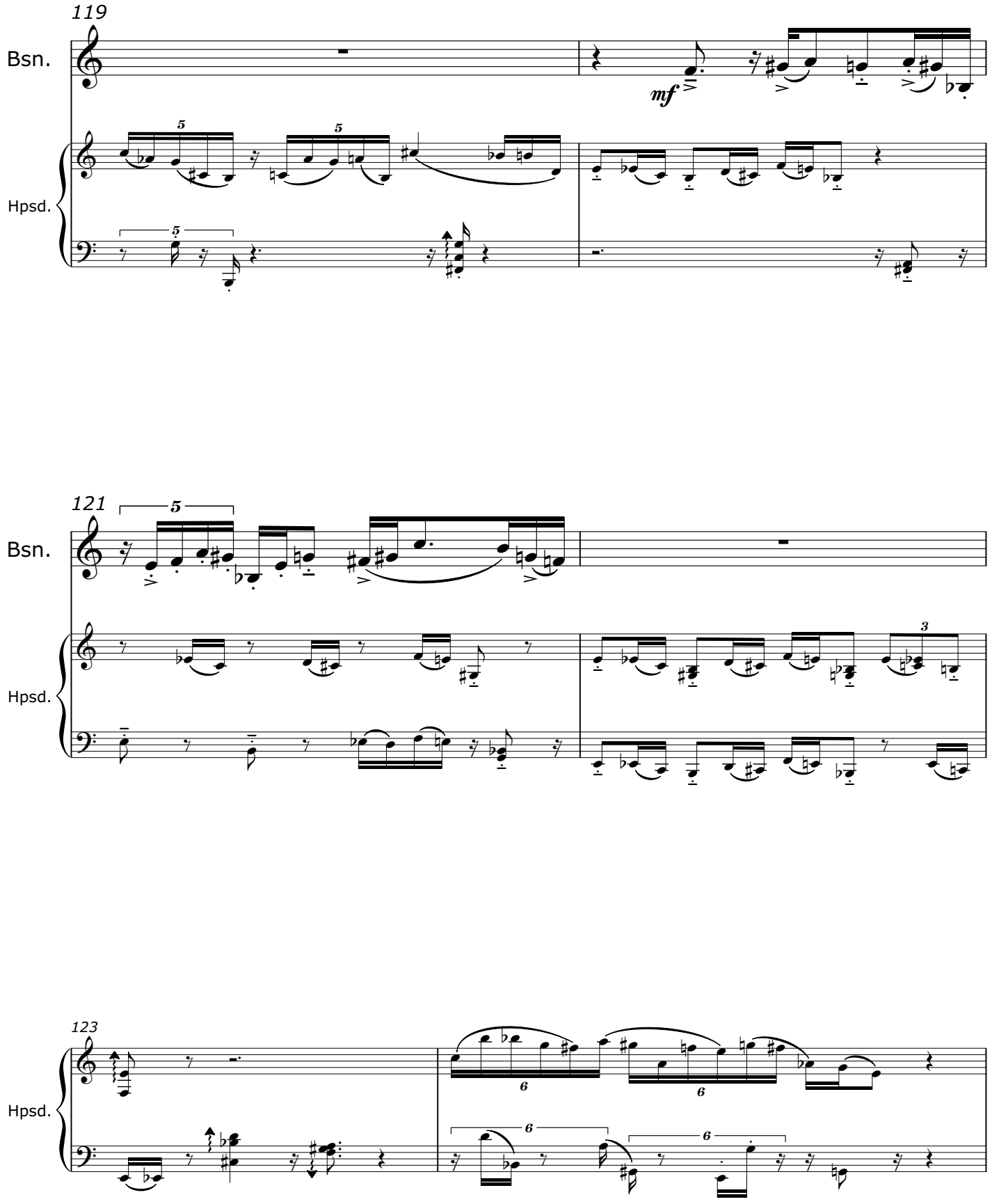
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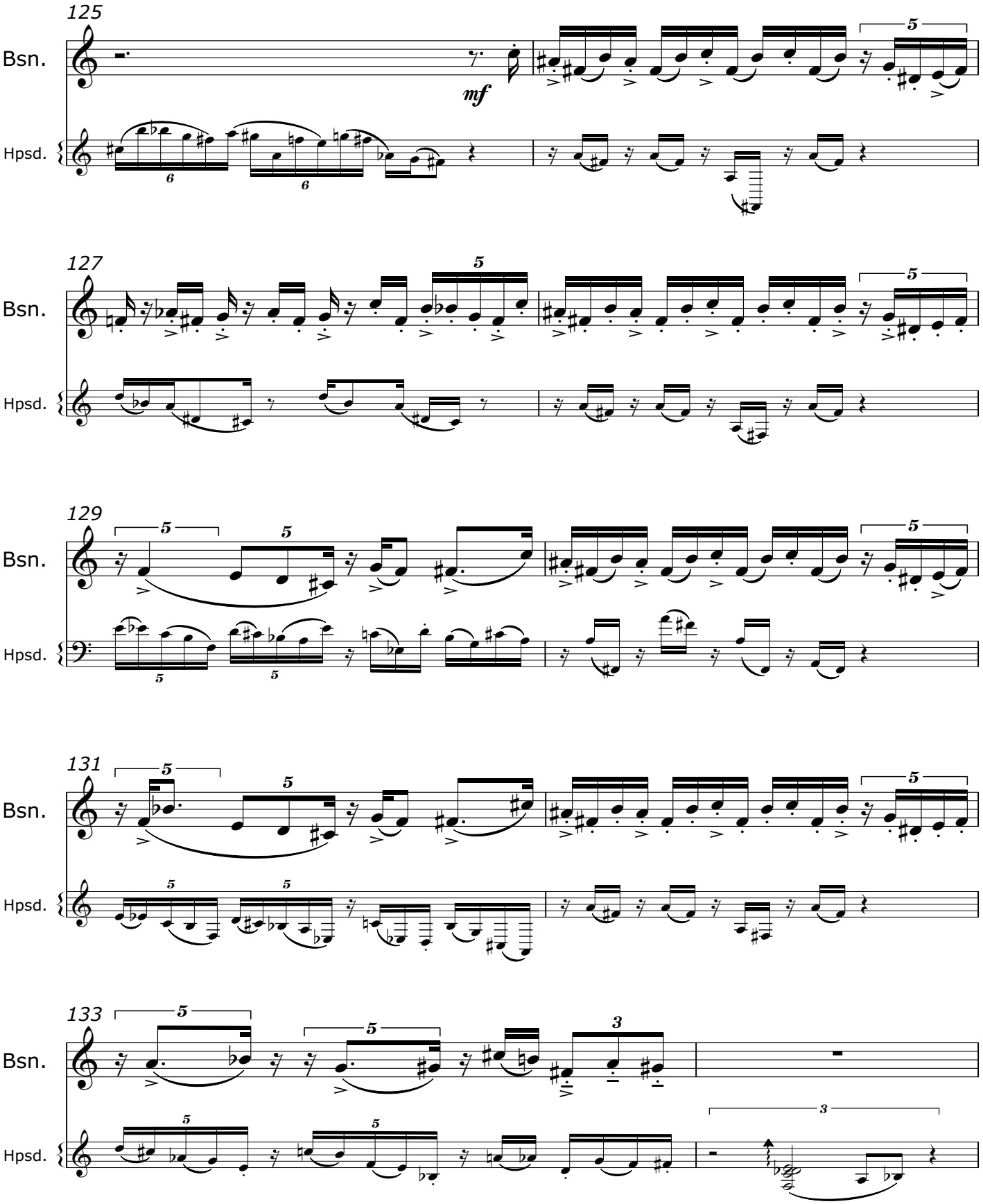
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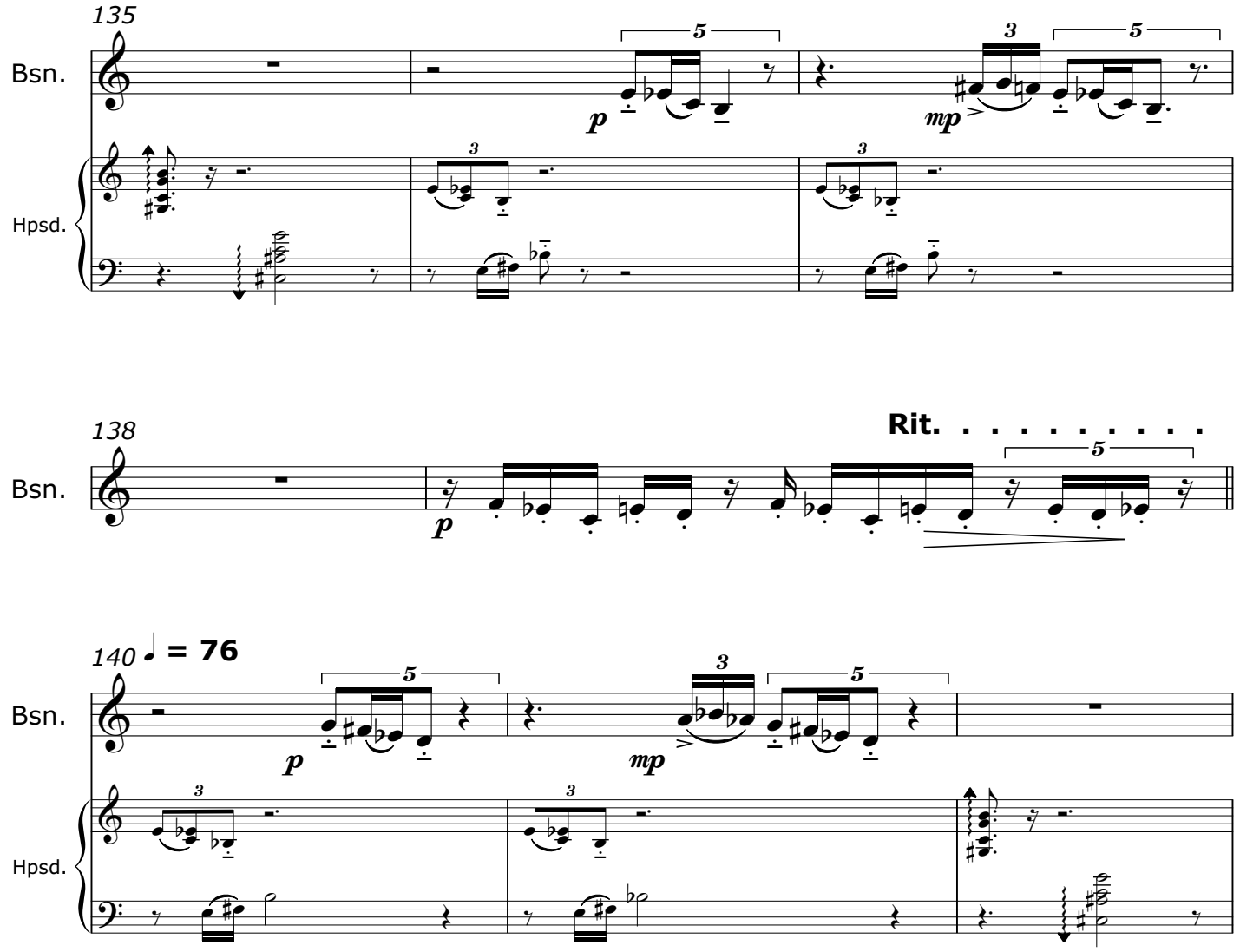
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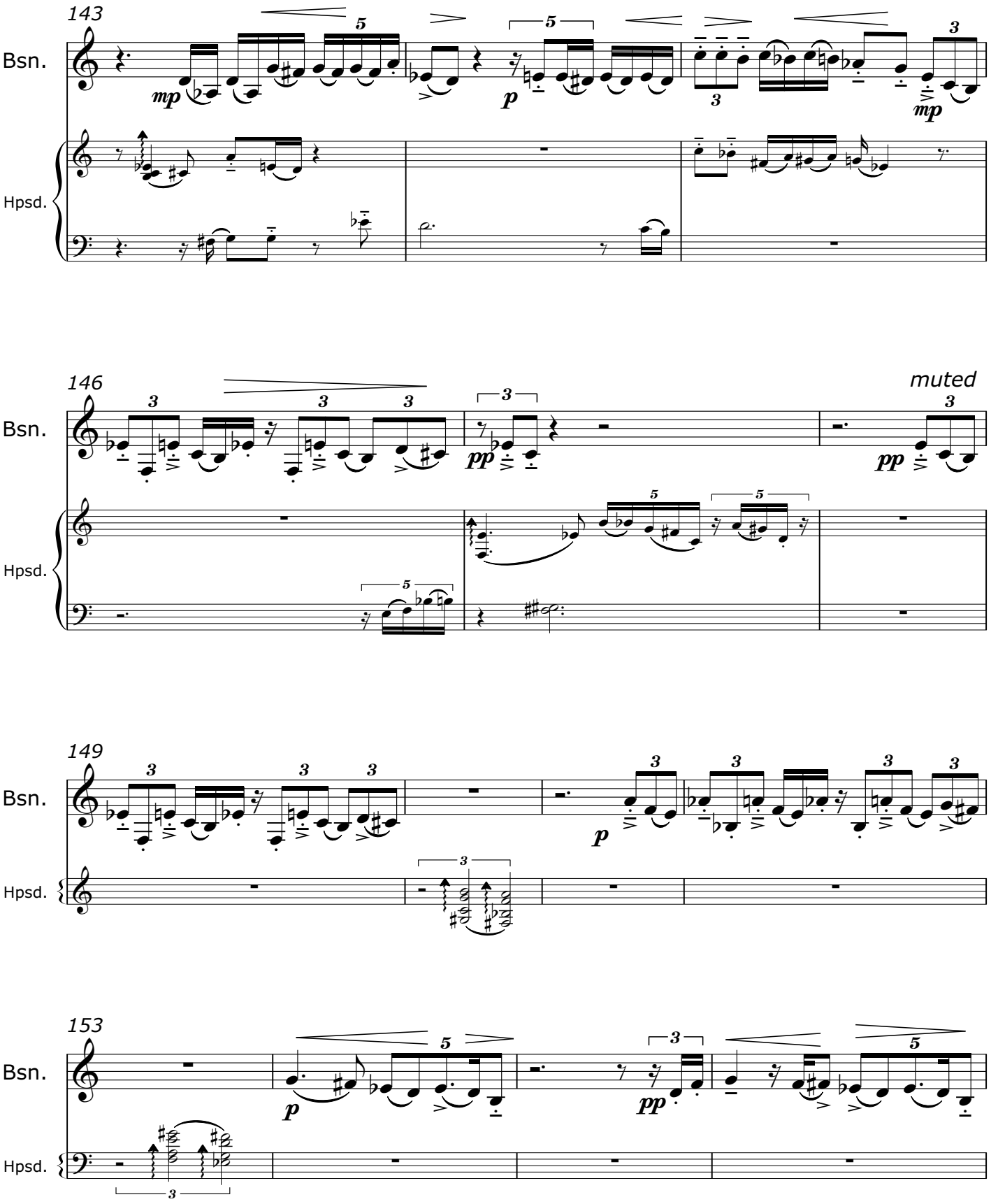
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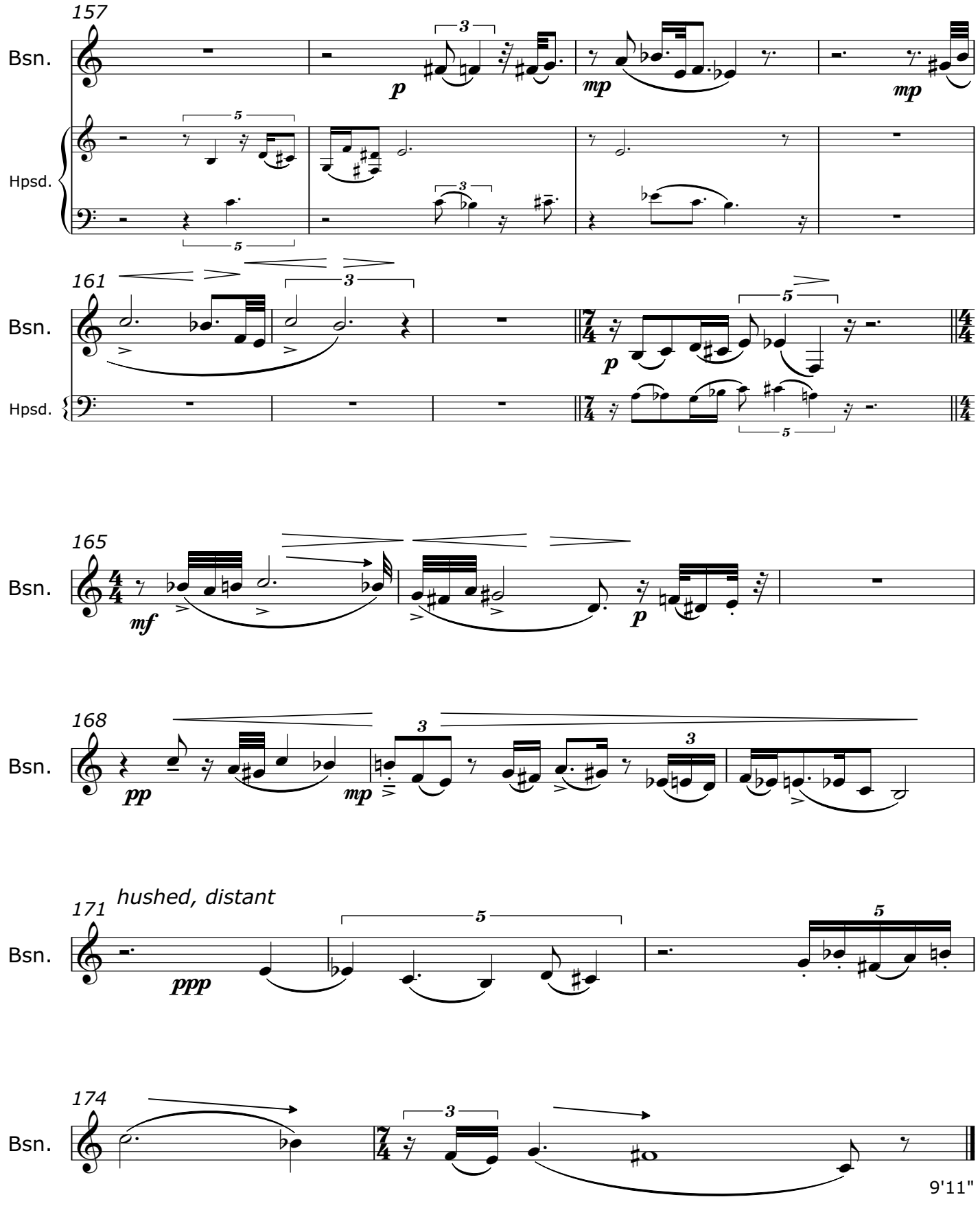
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