H

String Quartet No.3

Andrew Downes

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Andrew Downes - Quartet No. 3

This single movement work, lasting about twenty-five minutes, was composed at the request of the Almira String Quartet during 1993 and 1994. It is dedicated to the composer John Mayer.

The Quartet contains three strongly contrasting musical ideas, each of which evolves and develops organically throughout the work. It is this organic growth whereby ideas, however contrasting, evolve from each other, which allows such a long movement to remain whole and logical in structure, whilst at the same time giving full vent to the development of passion and feeling.

The first of the three main ideas out of which the Quartet grows is slow, melancholic and plainsong-like. This is later accompanied by a thematically linked harmonised arpeggio figuration which evolves into an important thematic idea in its own right.

The second main idea is violent, rhythmically and harmonically ragged, contrasting radically with the even flow of the first idea, despite the fact that it can be heard to derive from it. The violence of this section develops into triumph, but is then replaced by a reflective transformation more suggestive of the opening idea.

The final main idea in the work, again organically derived from the others, is obviously and strongly influenced by Indian Classical Music, and was conceived immediately after the composer visited Bengal in February 1994. The drone of the tampura is suggested by the lower instruments, and the sitar-like flourish of the opening of the raga is played by the violins. Later, the pizzicato viola suggests tabla rhythms. The section concludes with a passage of furious, multi-tempo music, suggestive of the final improvisatory section of the Indian Rag. This material is transformed into a triumphant coda at the end of the work.

As always, this composer finds it impossible to convey through words the heartfelt passion, tragedy and joy which can only be experienced through the sound of the music, but he fervently hopes that these few words, inadequate though they may be, help his audience to enjoy this new work.

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This work was first performed by the Almira Quartet at the Birmingham and Midland Institute on 16th March 1995. The Almira Quartet have since performed the work at numerous venues throughout the UK.

Duration of the quartet: 25 minutes

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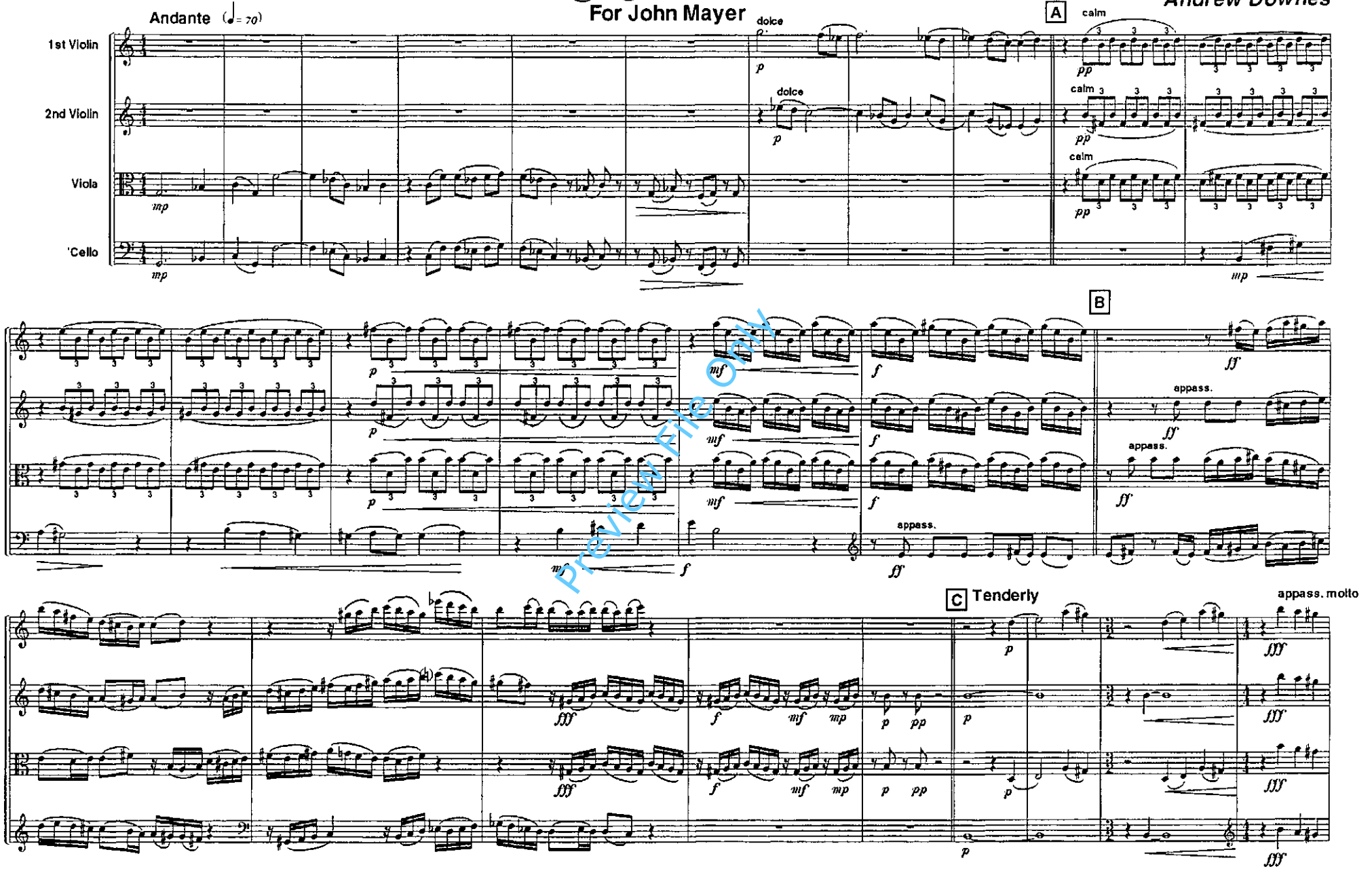
For John Mayer

Andrew Downes



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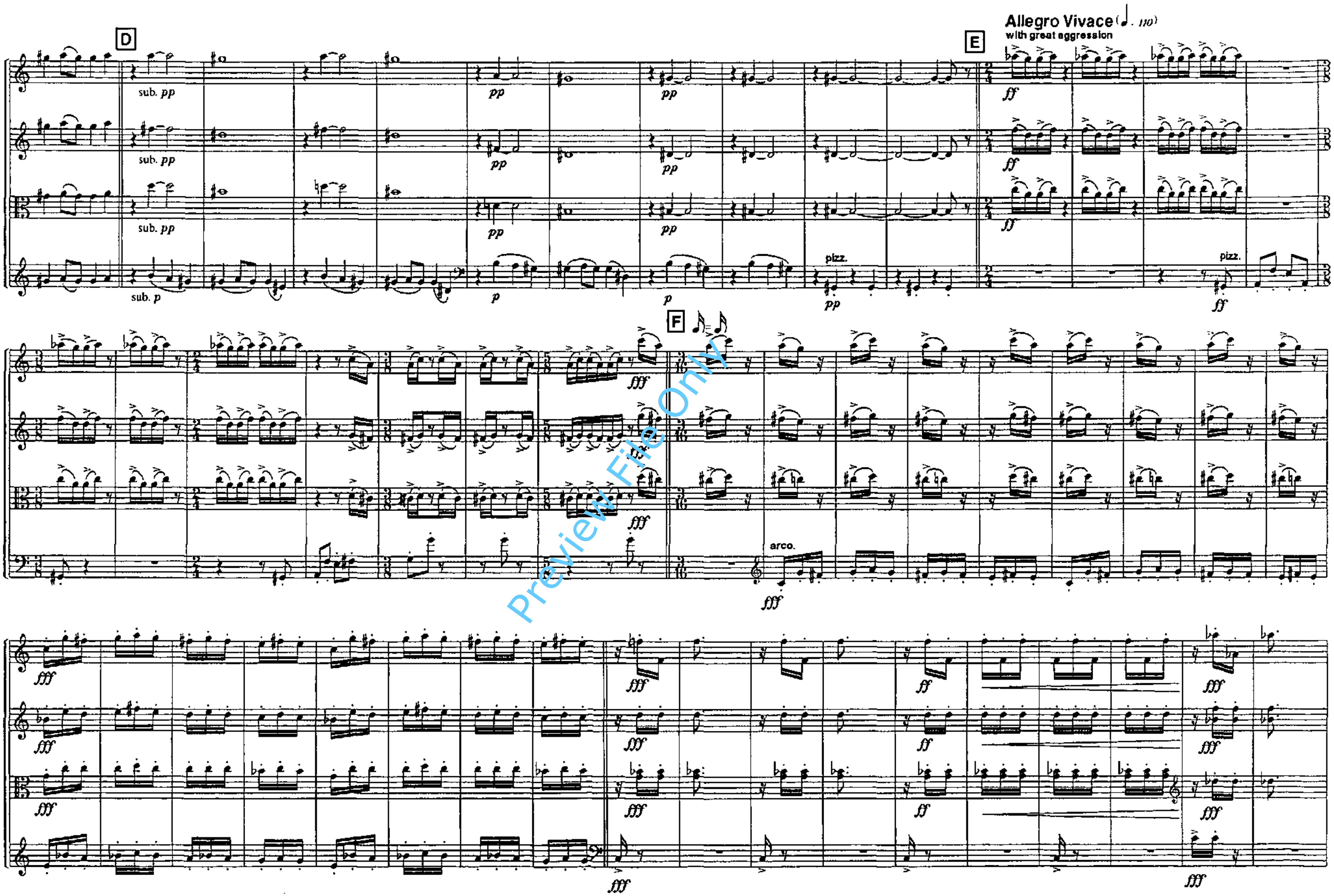

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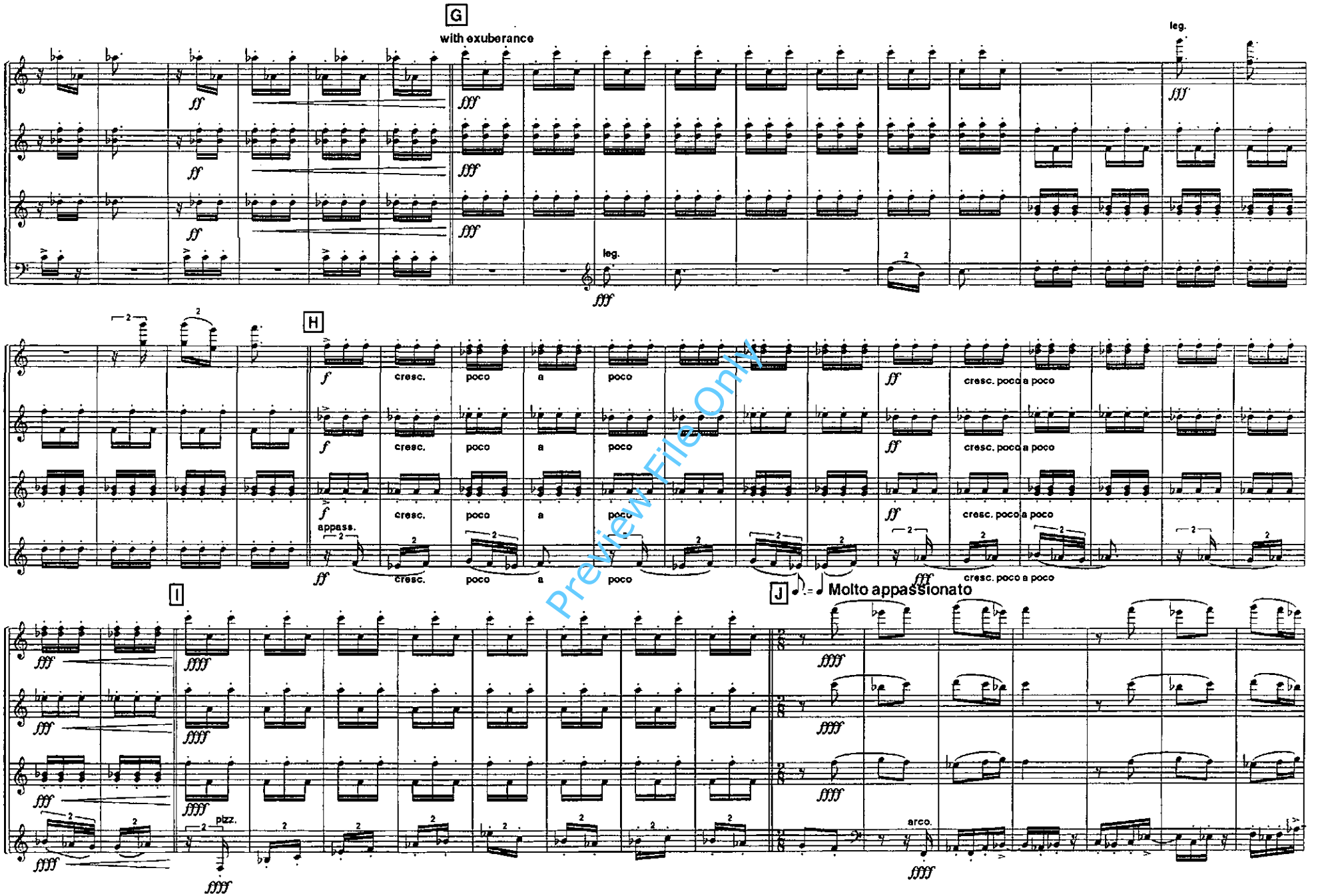

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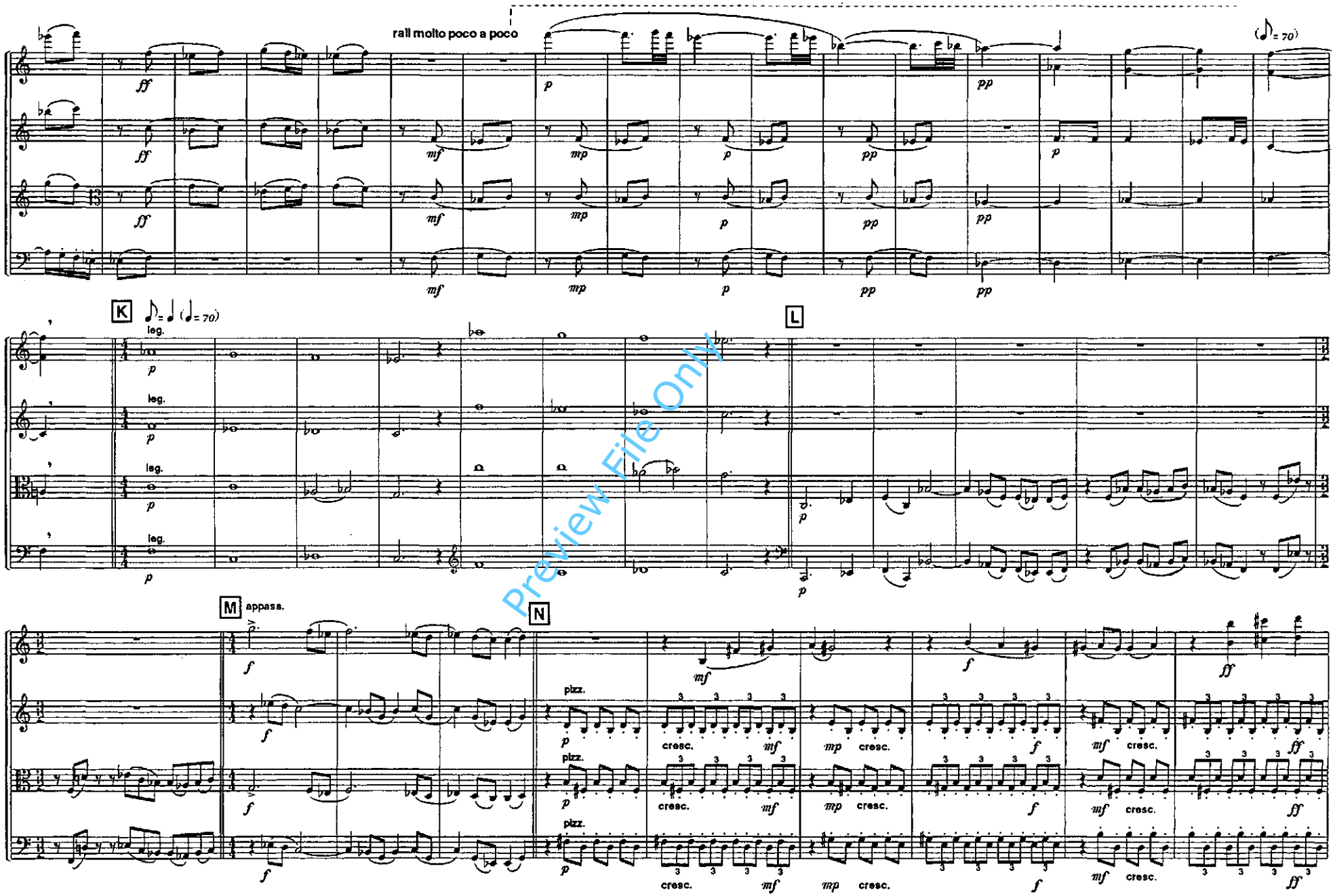

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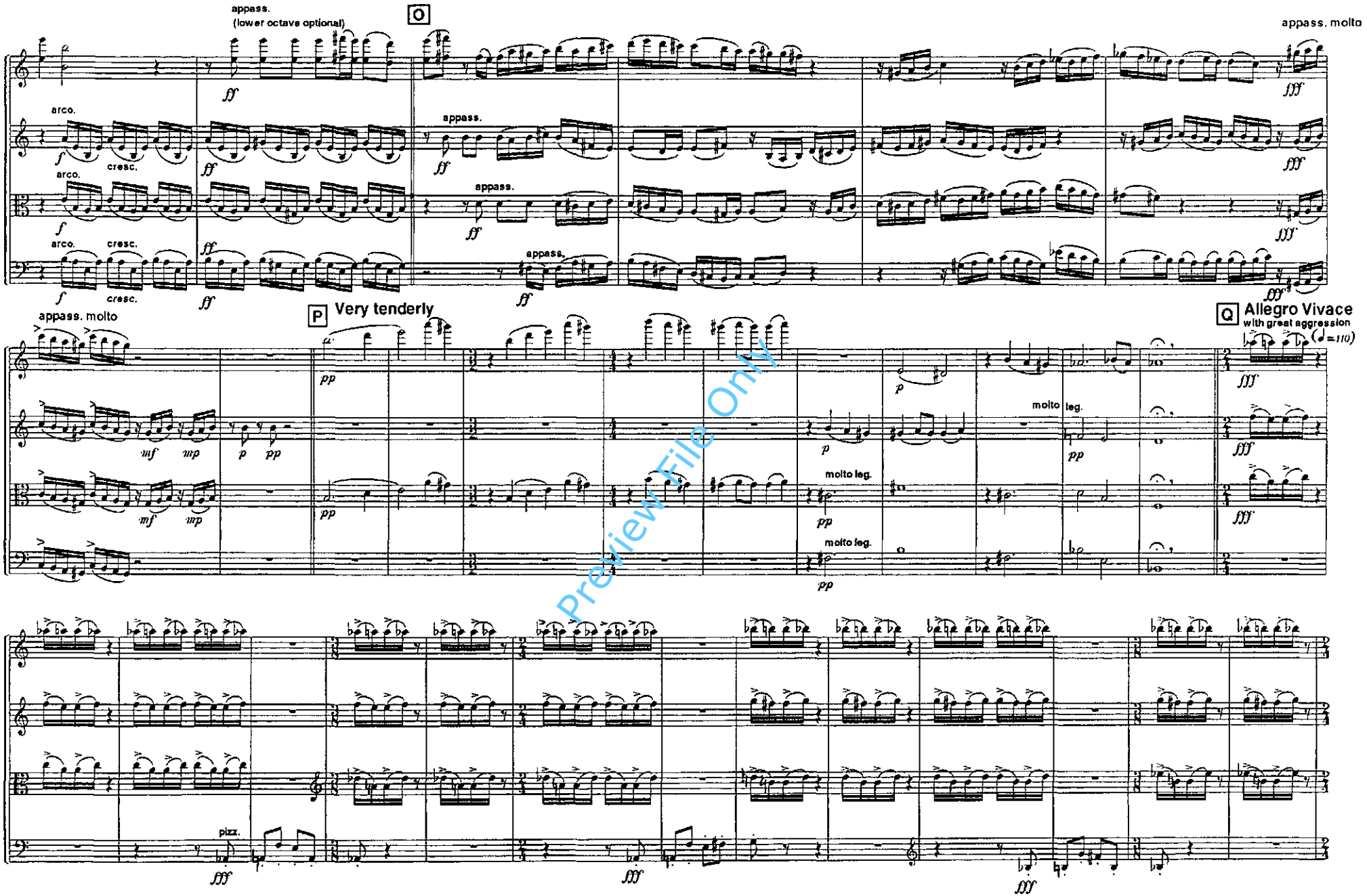

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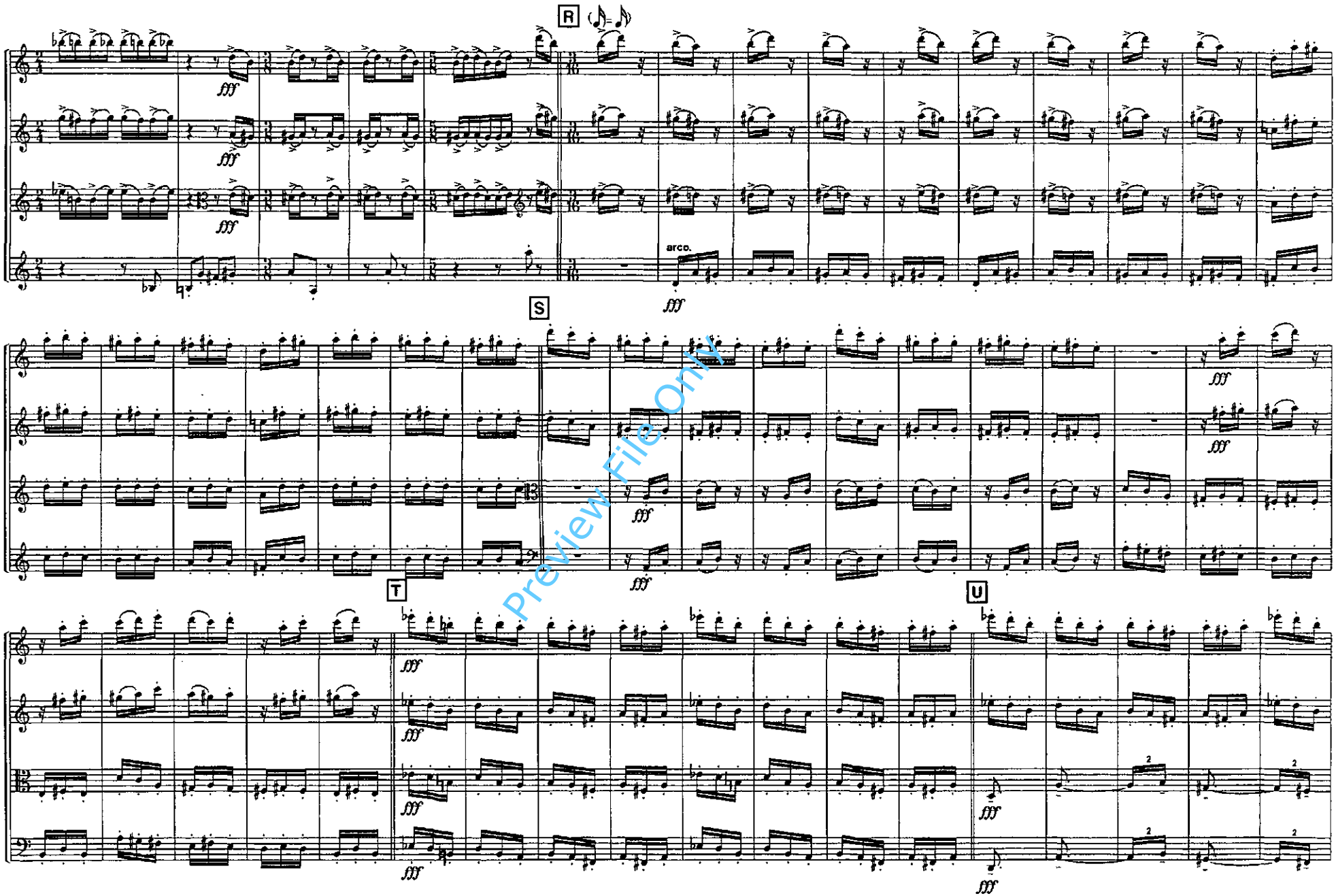

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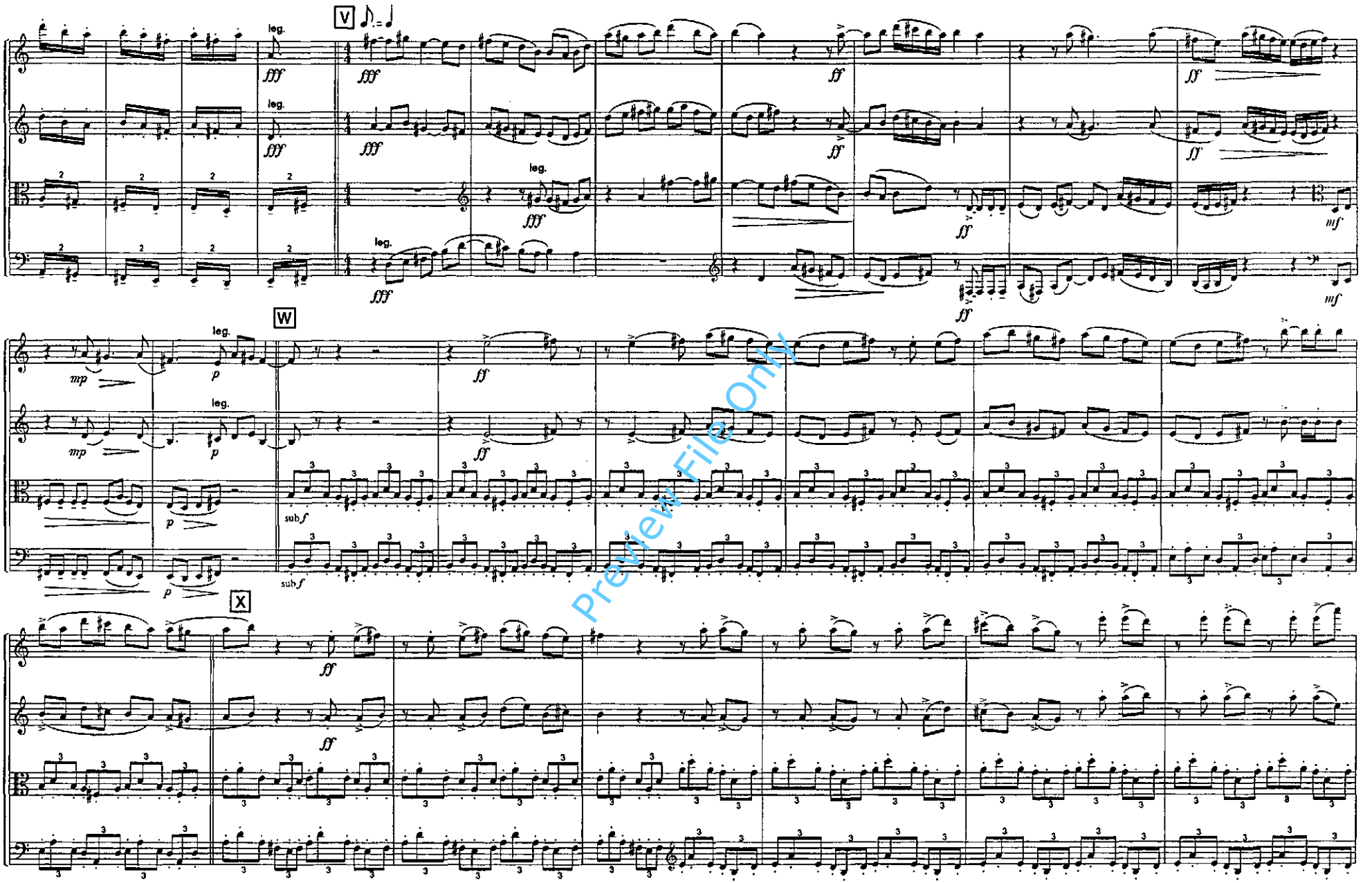

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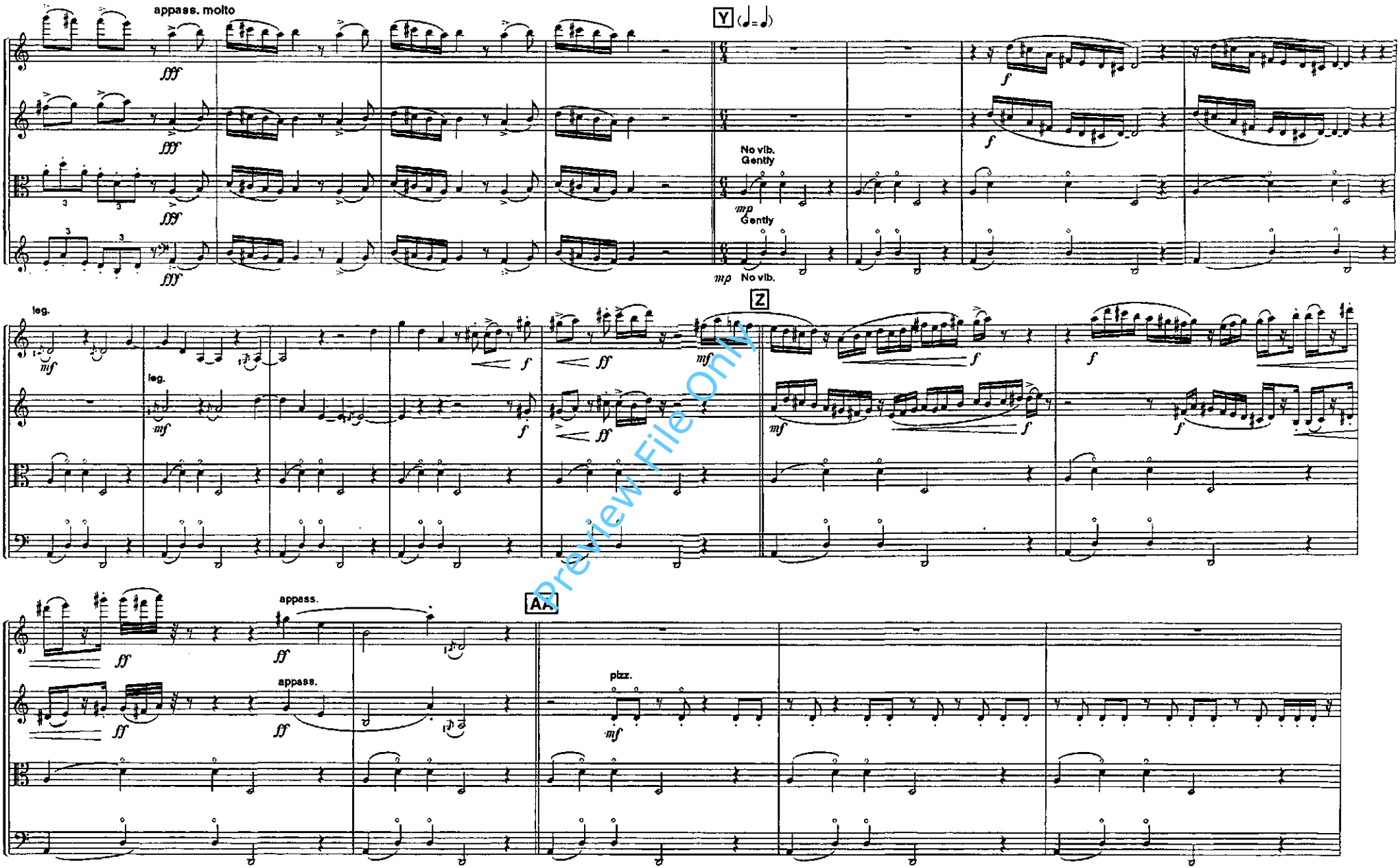

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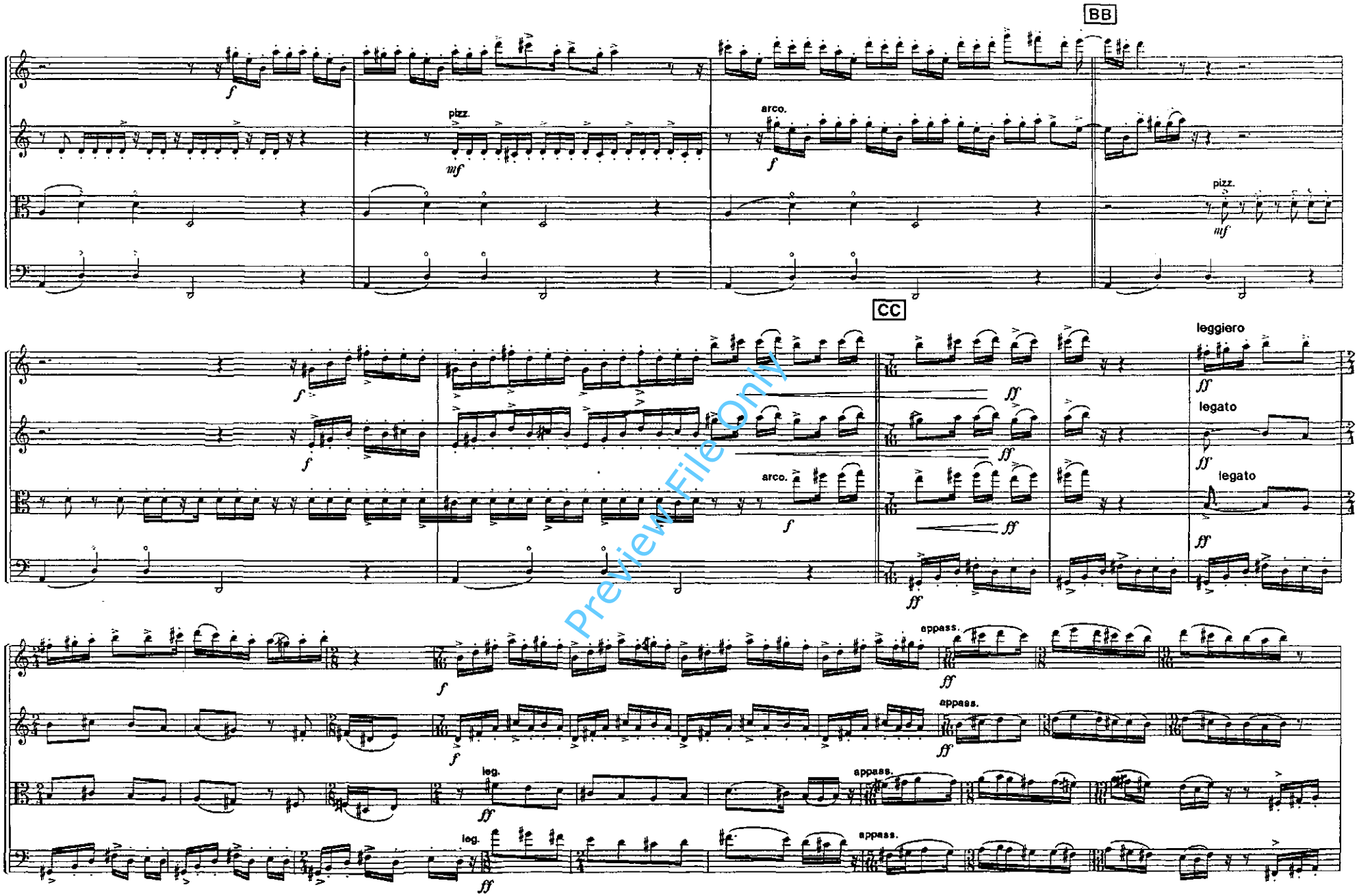

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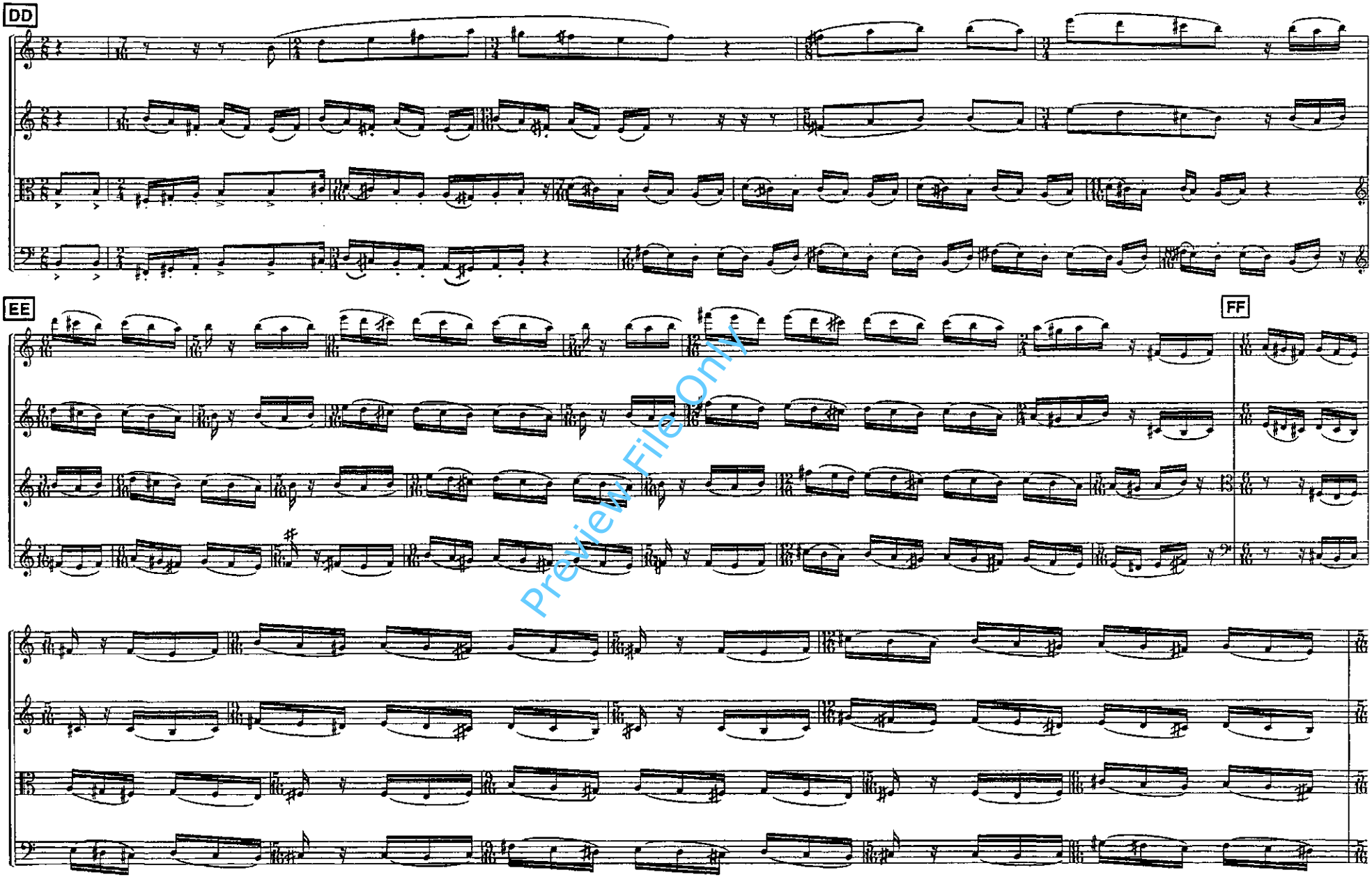

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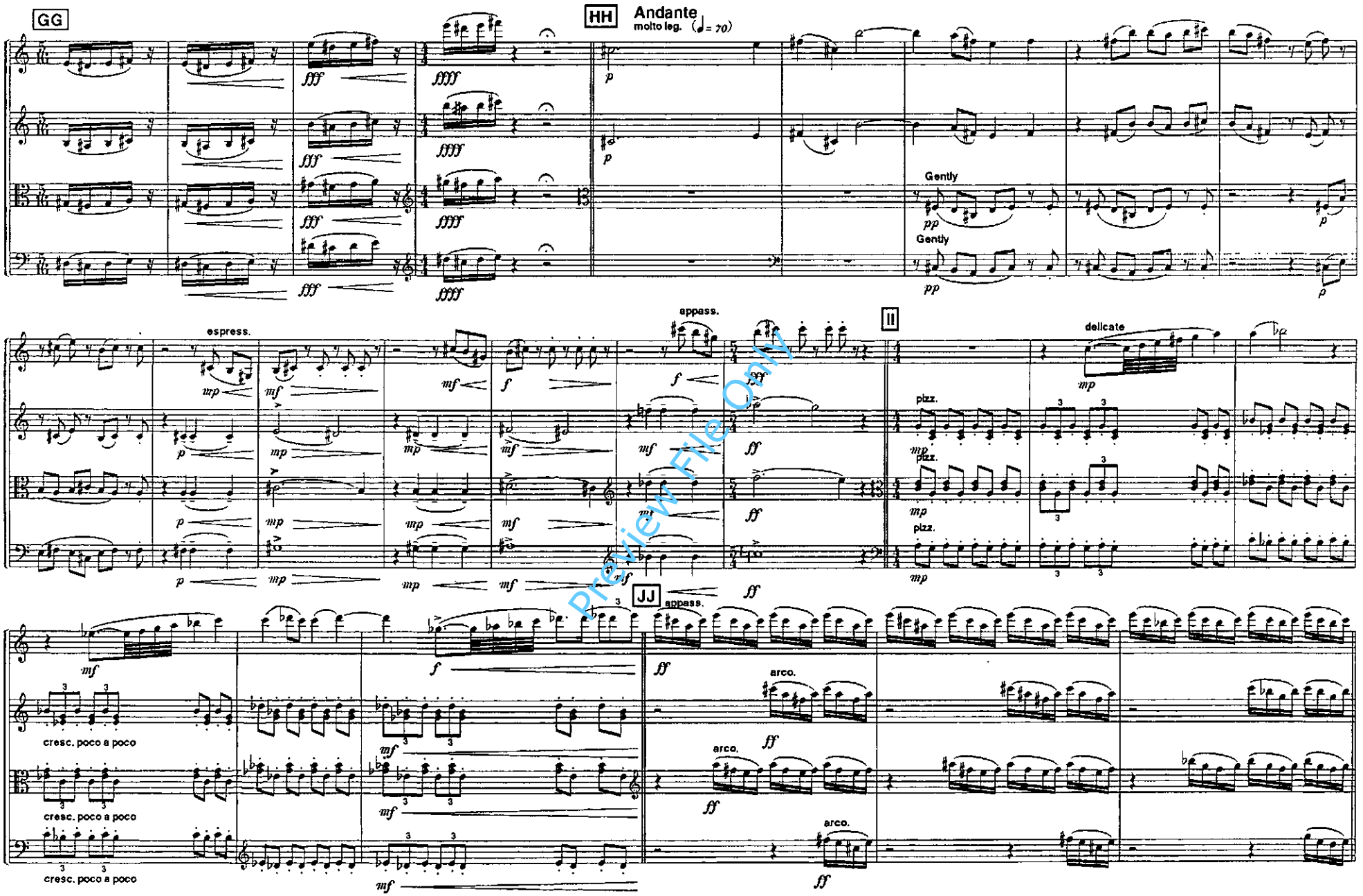

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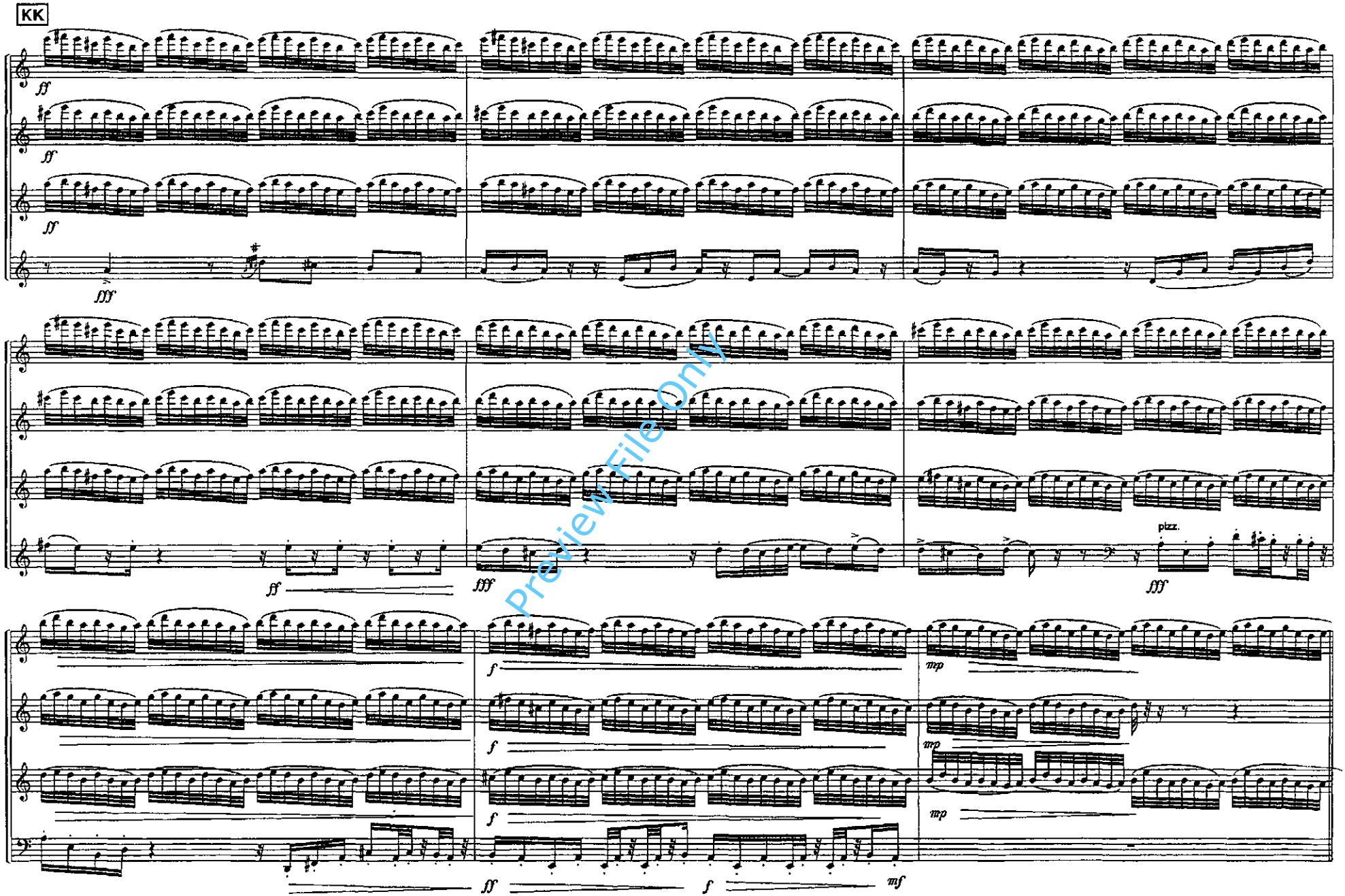

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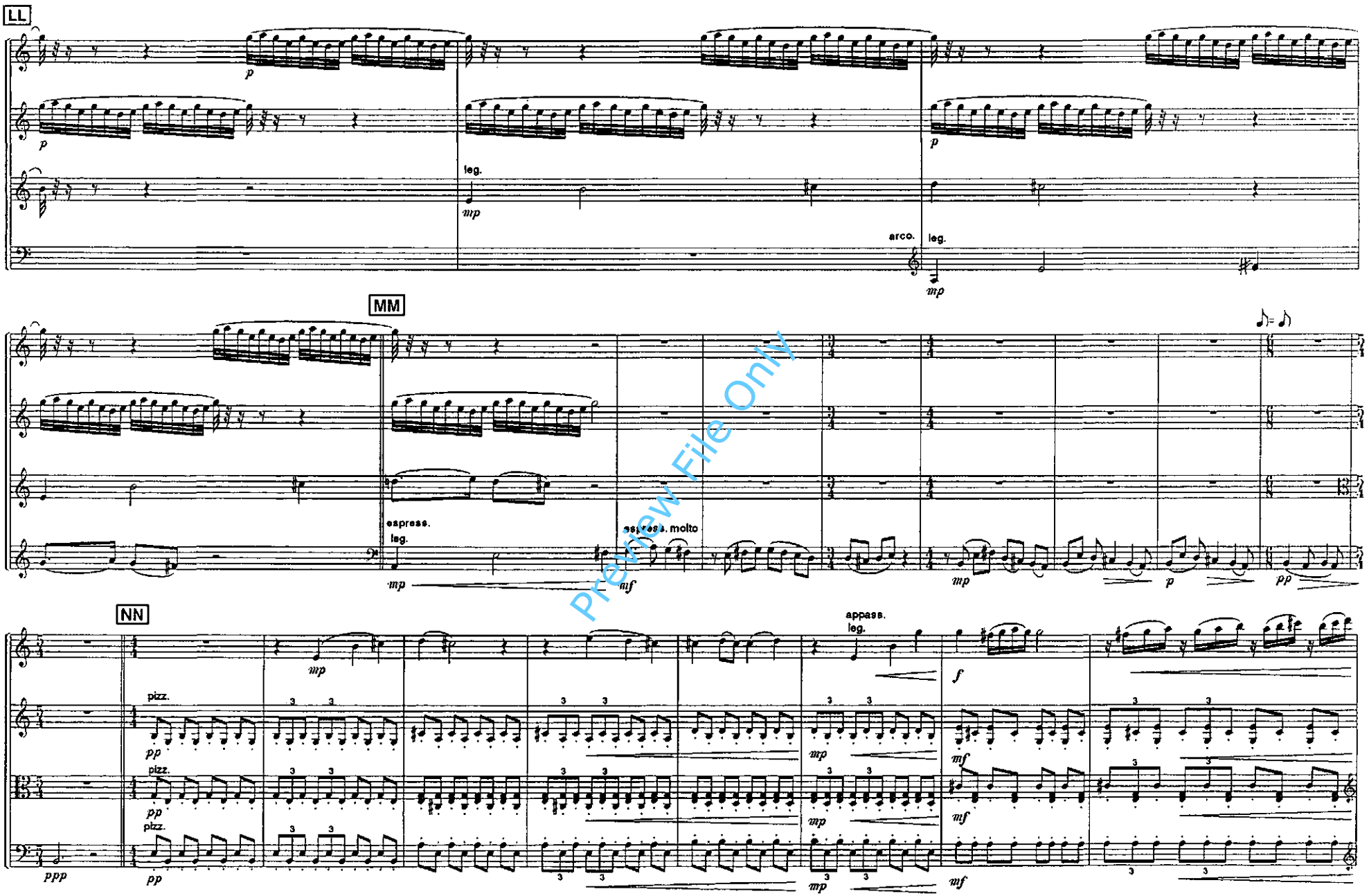

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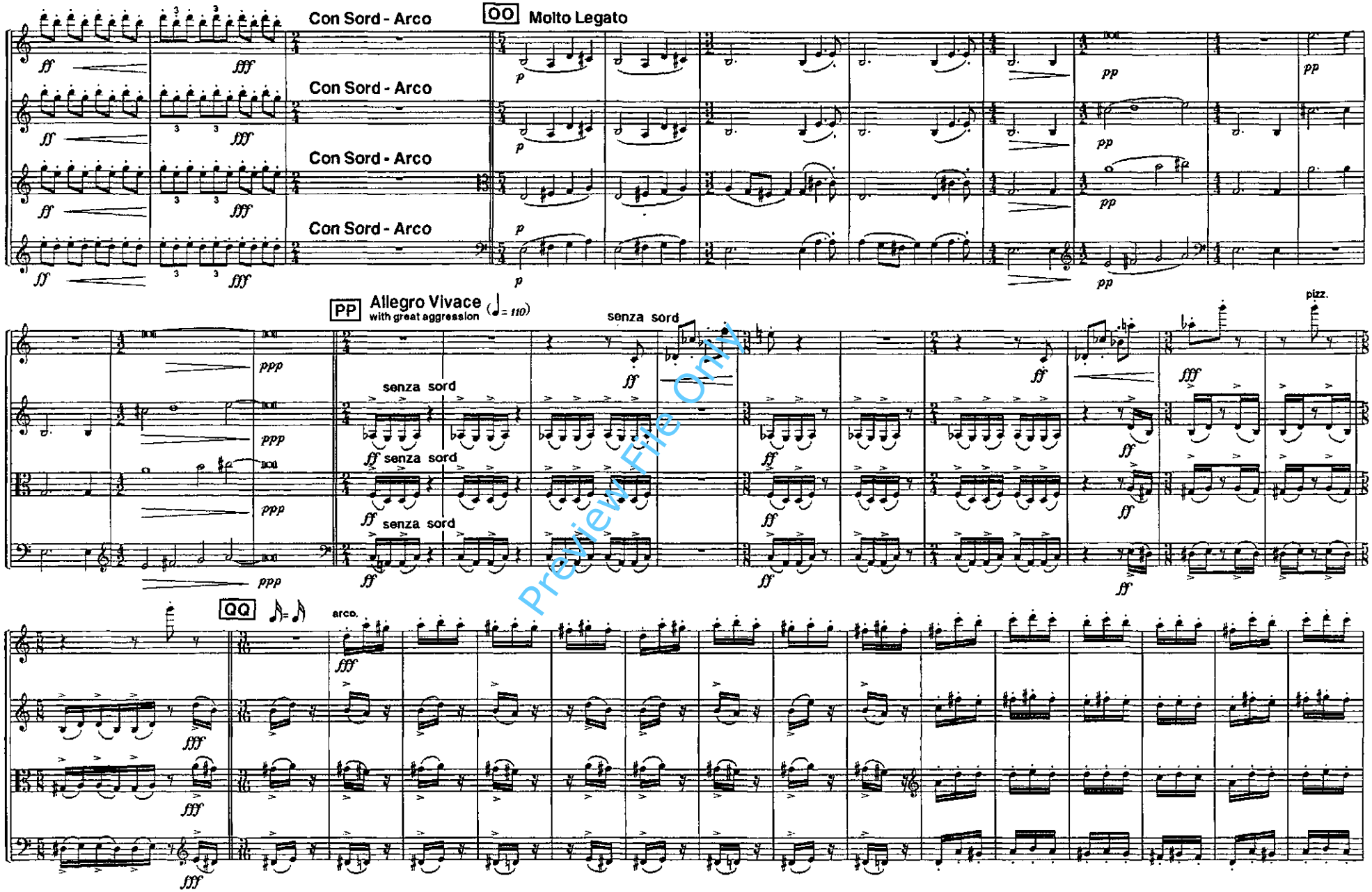

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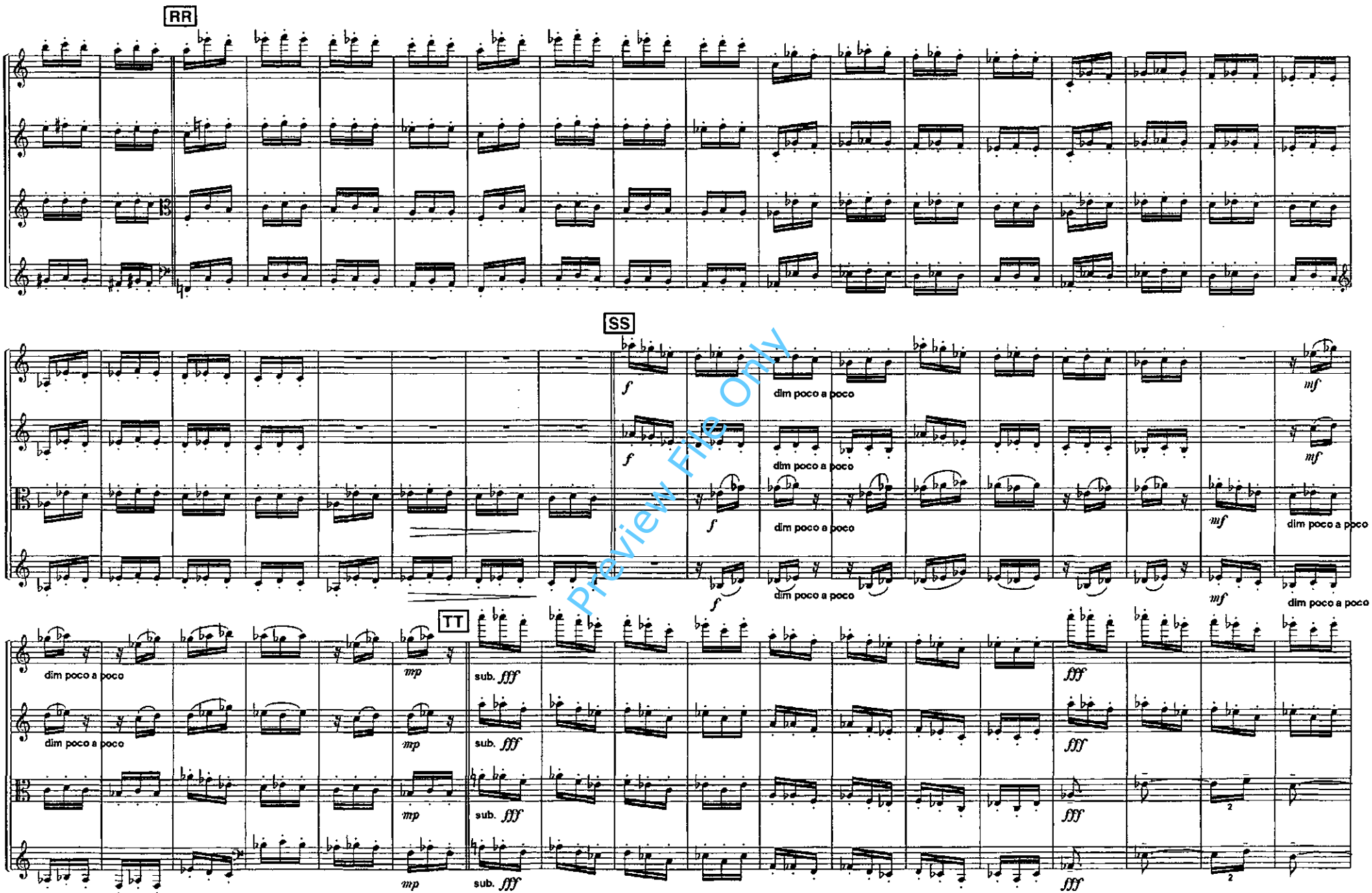

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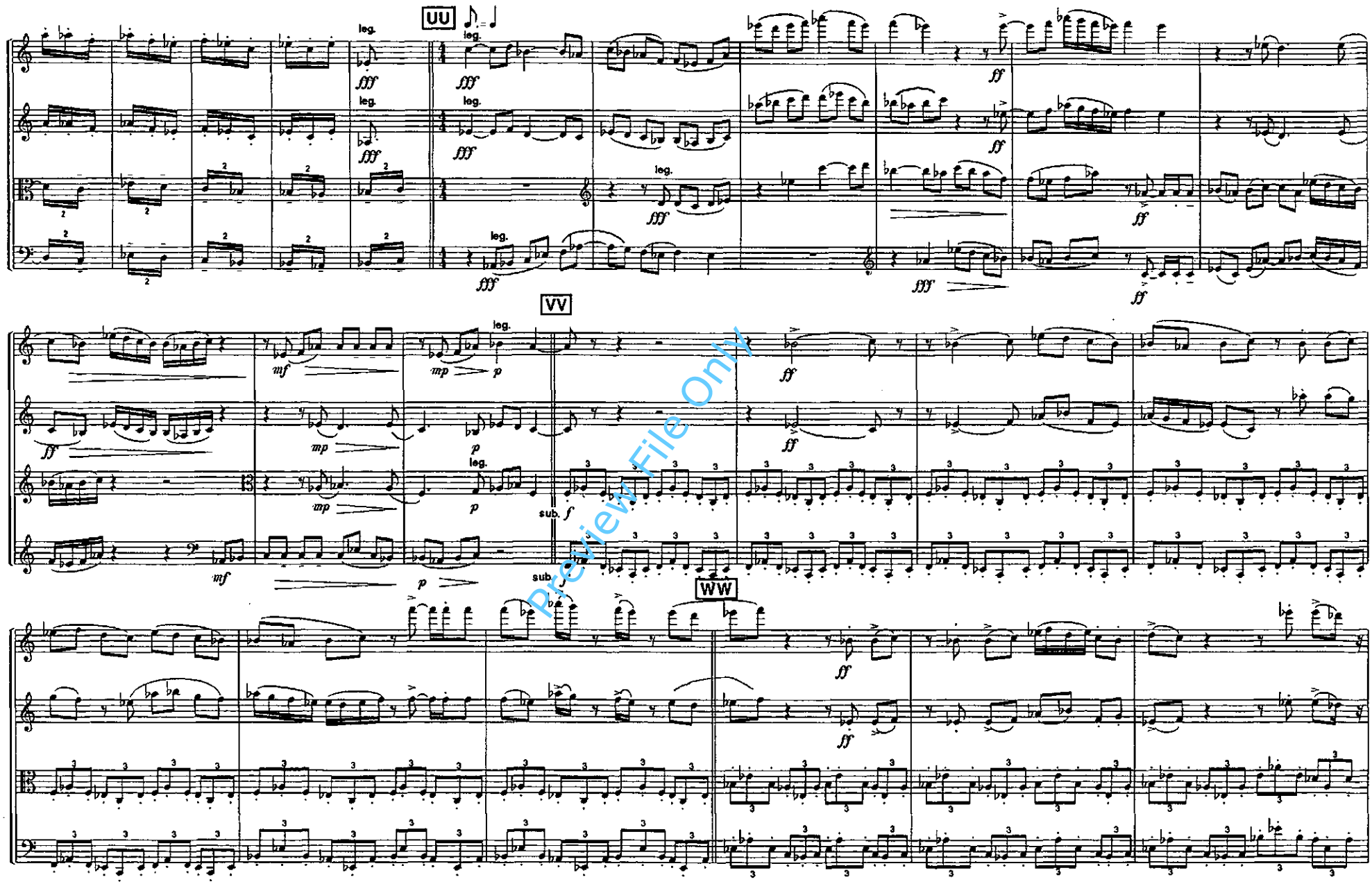

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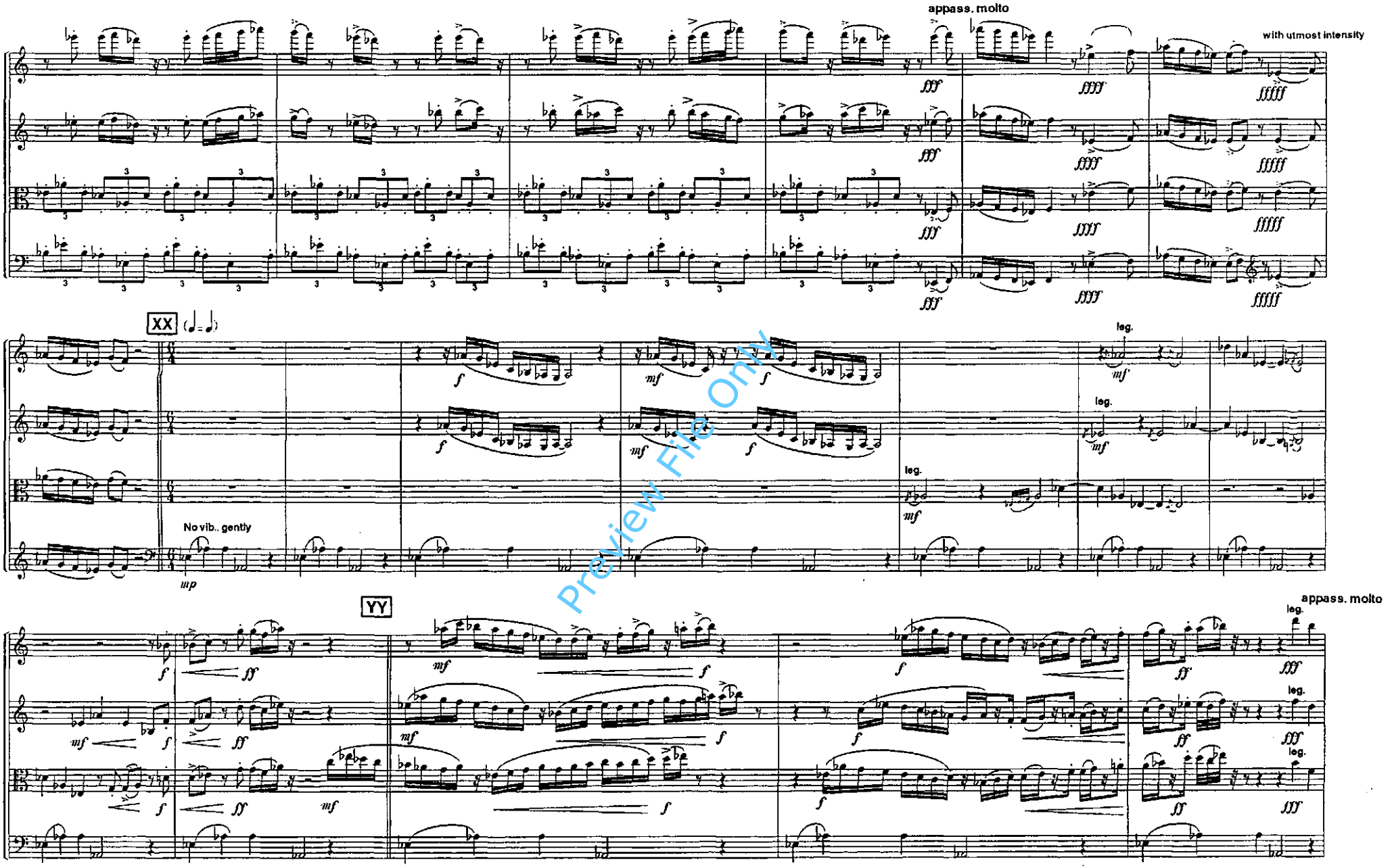

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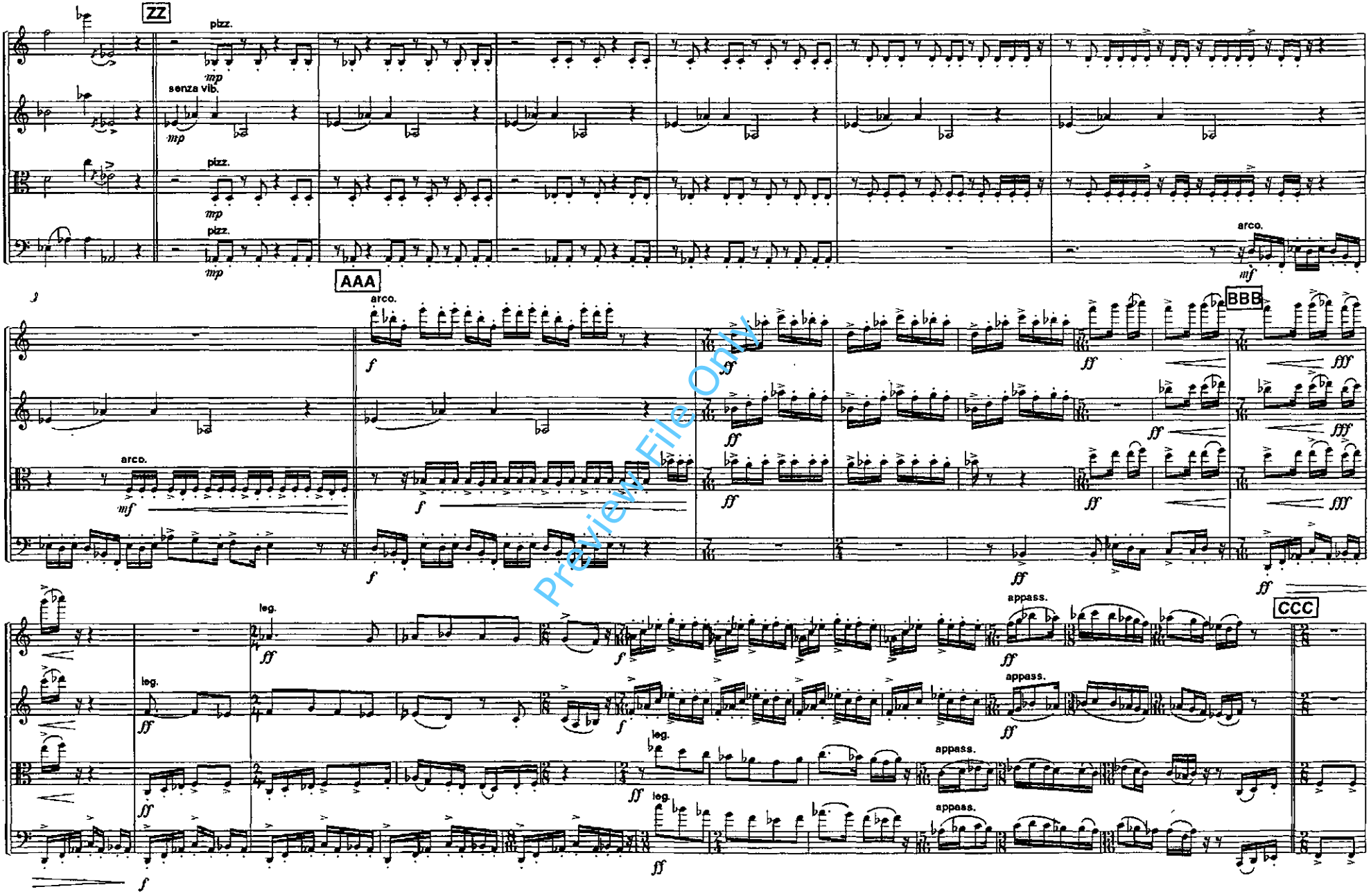

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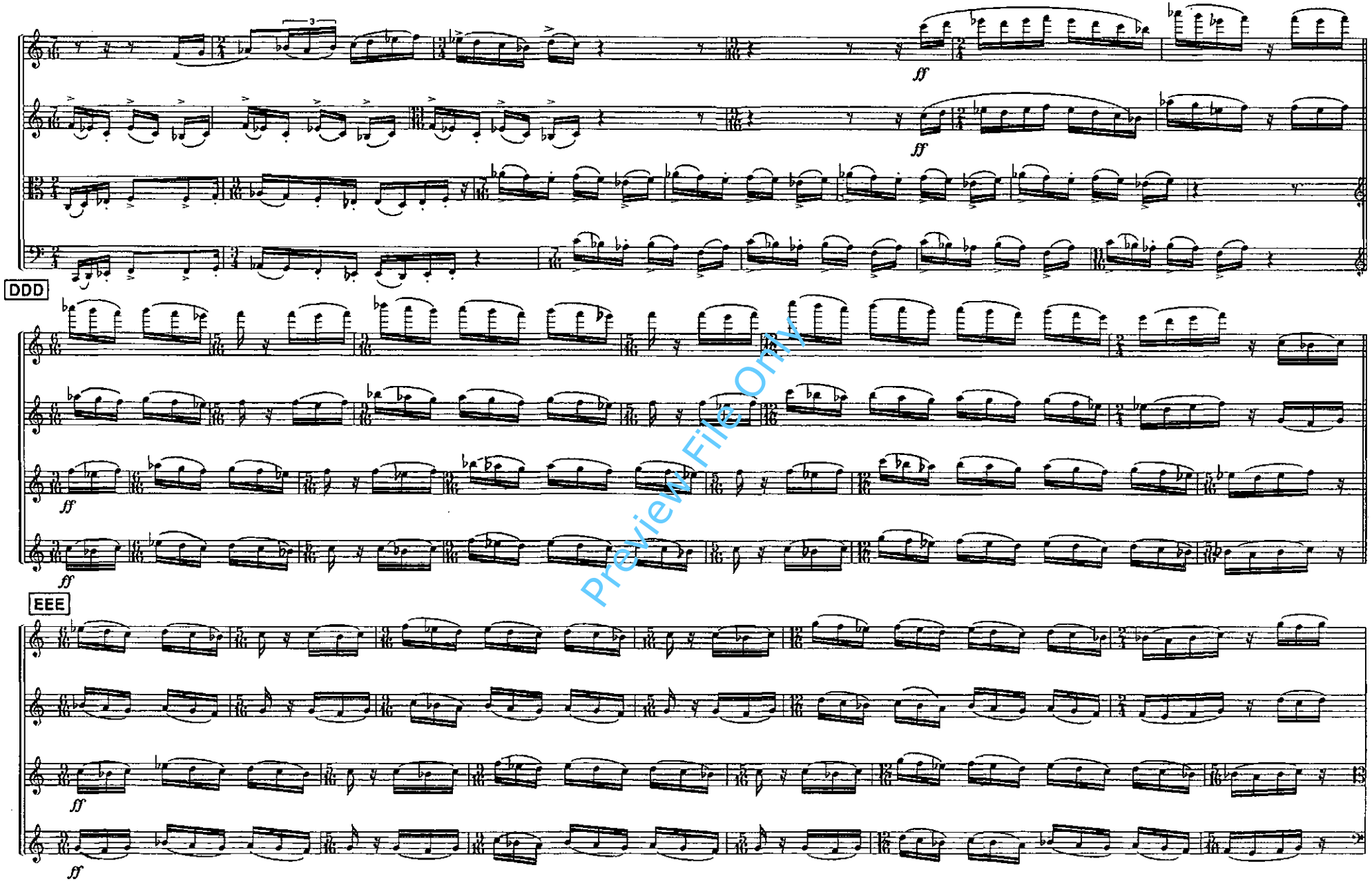
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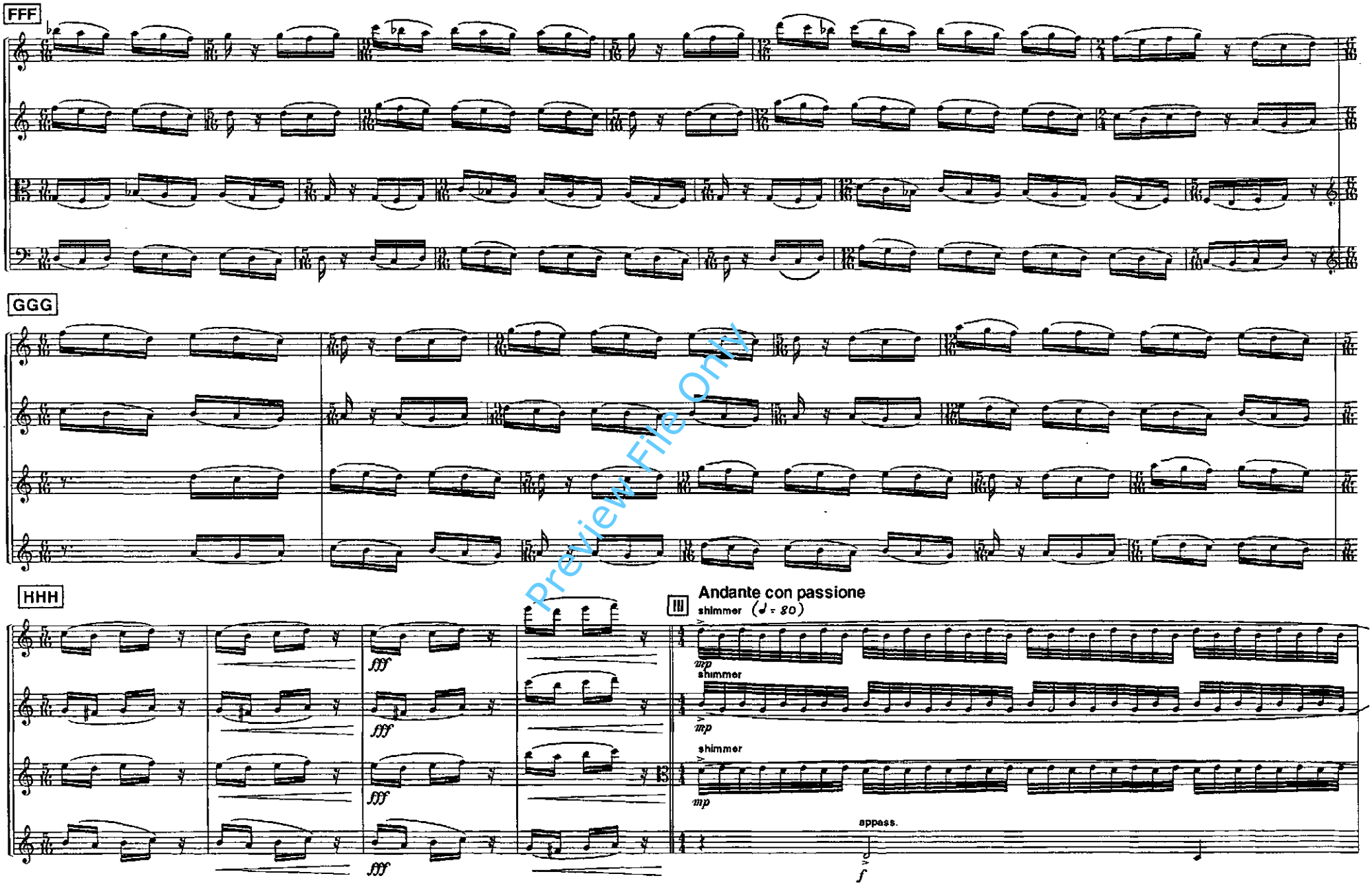

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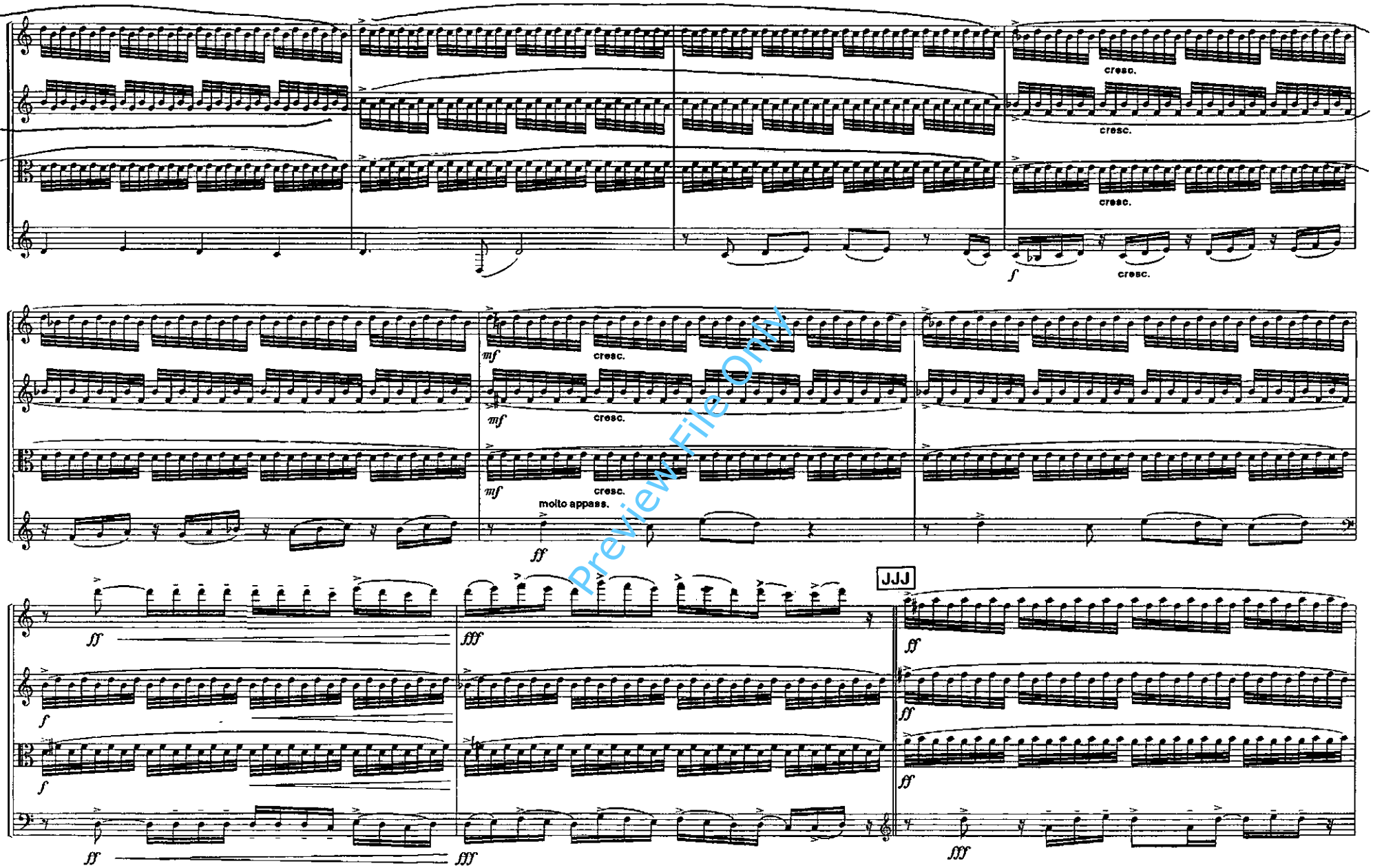

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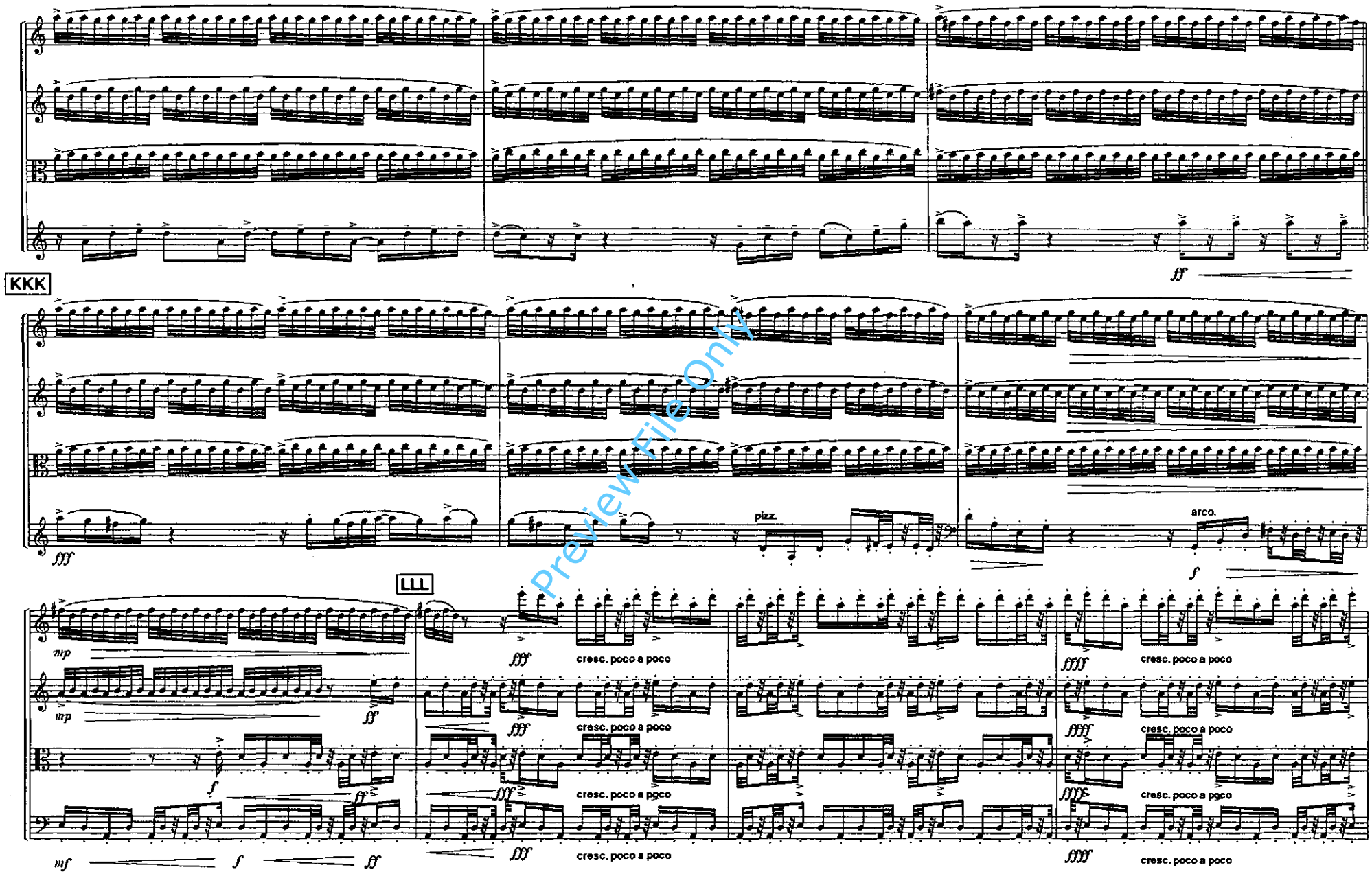

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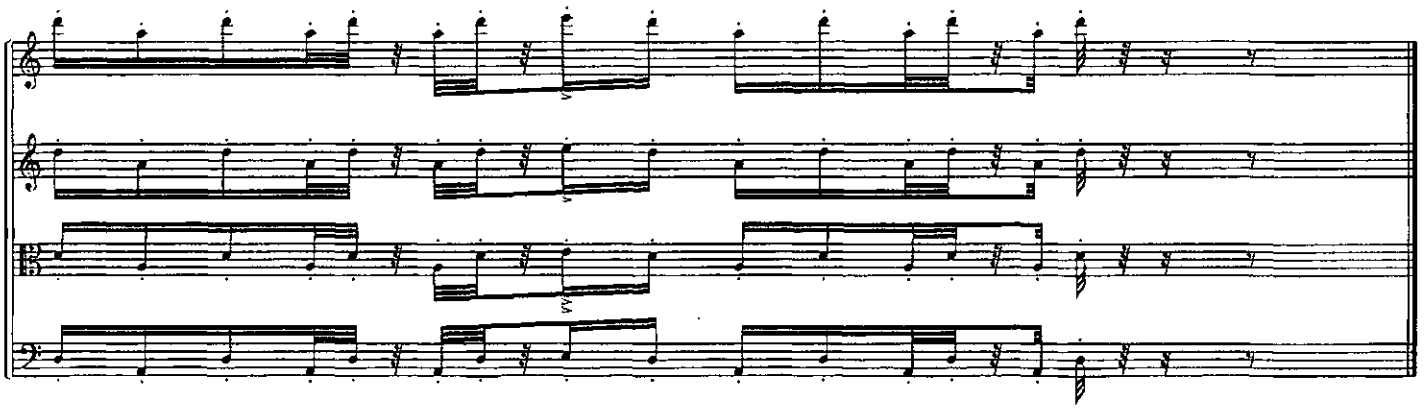

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