Venancio Mbande talking with the trees

A concerto for quartertone marimba (and various wooden instruments)
and fifteen instruments

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James Wood

Instrumentation

Flute (doubling alto flute and piccolo)
Oboe (doubling cor anglais)
Clarinet in Bb (doubling clarinet in A)
Bass clarinet (down to low Bb)
Trumpet
Trombone

Percussion (1 player)
Keyboard (88-note) triggering 2 TX16Ws and 2 TX802s
Cimbalom
Harp

Solo quartertone marimba* (and various wooden instruments)

Violin
2 violas
Cello
Contrabass (down to C)

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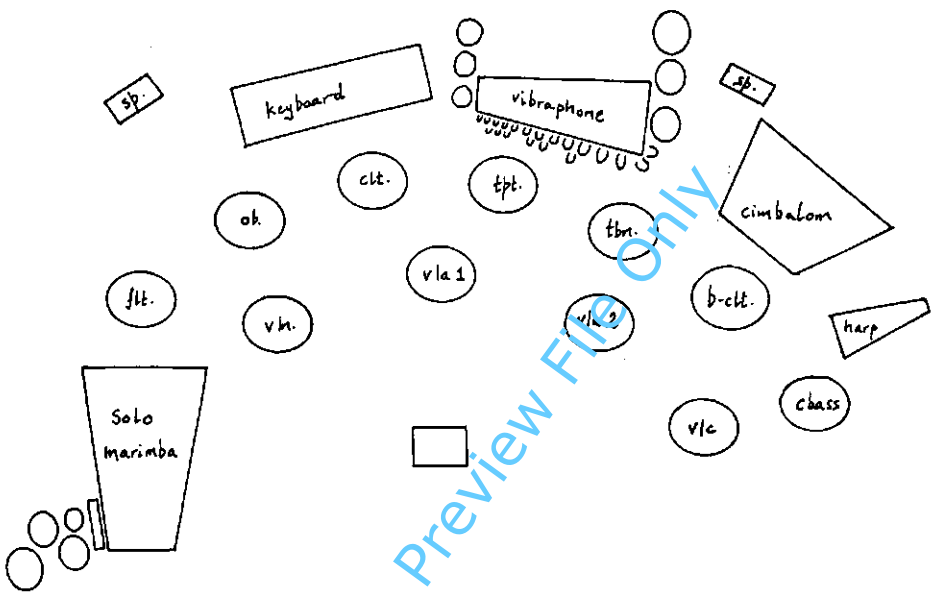
Score in C
Keyboard part appears in the score as sounding, but in the part is transposed as necessary.

Duration: 18 minutes approx.

* The quartertone marimba consists of a normal 5-octave marimba plus a quartertone extension over some of its range. This extension can be obtained from Adams in Holland.

Suggested layout of performers



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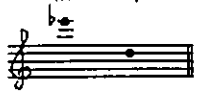
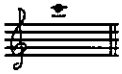
Instruments for the soloist

5-octave marimba

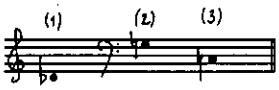
Quartertone marimba extension:

2 woodblocks - sounding: 

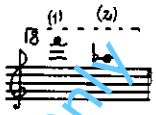
1 large piece of bamboo - sounding: 

1 simantra - sounding:

1 small tambourine, with nut (kernel) or wood rattles

3 wooden-headed tomtoms - sounding: 

1 very long wooden guiro

2 sets of wood-chimes - sounding: 

Notation

The marimba is notated in the treble clef throughout, but sounding an octave lower.

The notation of the other instruments corresponds with their layout around the marimba, which can be seen opposite. Note that the woodblocks and bamboo are laid (on foam rubber) on the upper end of the marimba (natural and sharp/flat rows) from F# and G upwards, and therefore are notated on the marimba staff as F#, G and A. Whilst obviously no marimba notes on the natural and sharp/flat rows are used above F, the quartertone row is occasionally used in this upper register, and can be reached over the top of the woodblocks and bamboo.

The guiro should be played with the shaft of the mallets (ratan sounds better than wood). Long notes can be played by alternating (contrary motion and overlapping) sweeping movements of both hands. Glissando effects can also be brought about by varying the length of the mallet shaft.

= dead-note

= played at the nodal point (sounding 2 octaves higher)

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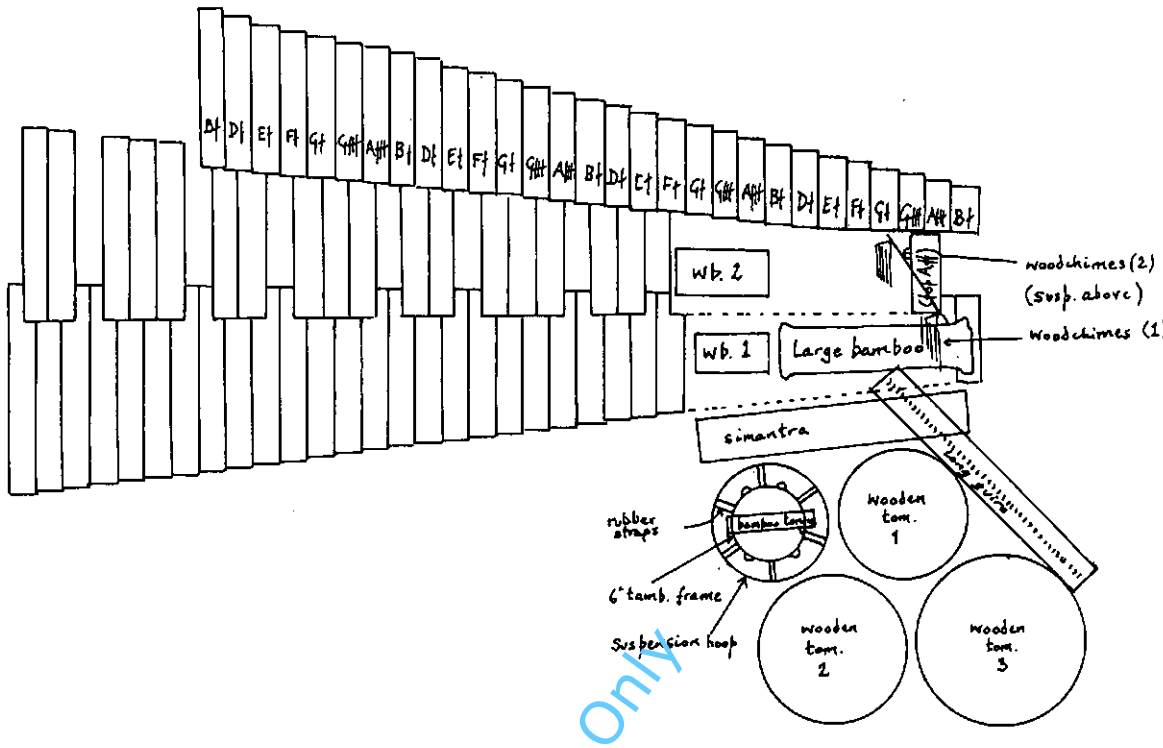
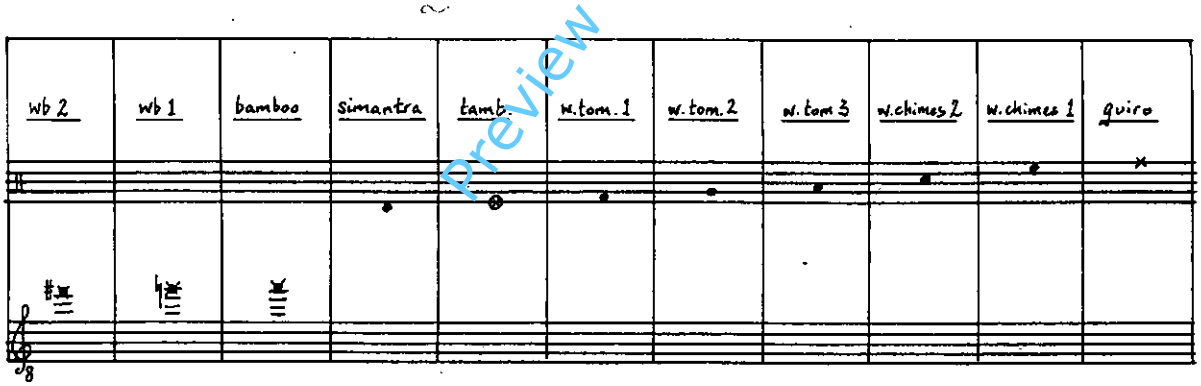
Layout of the soloist's instruments



Notation



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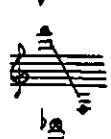
Percussion (Ensemble percussionist only)

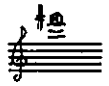
Notated: | Instruments used



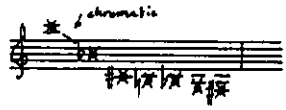
Vibraphone (motor off always)

Small tambourine (6") with bamboo tongue strapped tightly to head (mounted with rubber strings inside (tomtom) shell)

Shekere with bamboo tongue strapped across open hole (mounted with rubber strings inside (tomtom) shell)

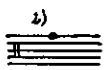


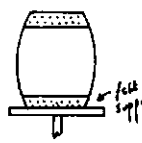
Piccolo chinese tom-tom, sounding c. Note shape: (Drum 1)
(resting on felt support)



Cowbells: sounding 1 octave higher than notated

N.B. In general, use hard (plastic or rubber glock-) mallet for upper (chromatic) register, and medium-hard yarn mallet for the lower bells (usually dead-stroke).

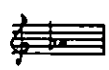


Medium chinese tom-tom, sounding c. Note shape:  (Drum 2)
(resting on felt support)
(N.B. This is not the 'normal' kind of chinese drum - this shape produces a rather focussed, 'secco' sound).

LP Junior Conga, sounding c. (Drum 3)

Djembé, sounding c.
(mounted)

5 temple blocks

3 sets wood-chimes: (s.e. 1 octave lower than soloist's)
(N.B. Not bamboo!)
1 + 2 sounding:
3 (bass woodchimes) sounding:  (built from min. 1¼" softwood dowel)

Low bell (preferably Oberton bronze bell) sounding:

Sand-paper: long strip, played with sand-block.
(lay the strip on rubber or felt pad.)

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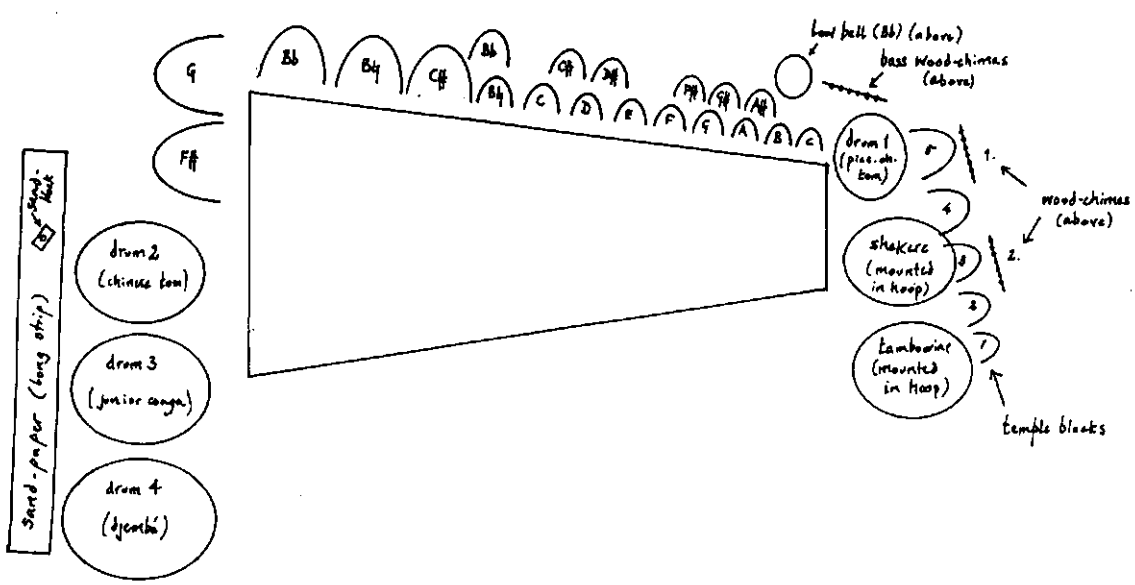
Layout of instruments



Electronics for the keyboard part

Equipment required

2 TX802 Synthesizers
2 TX16W Samplers
(one of these (Sampler 1) needs to be fitted with all three possible EMM15 Expansion Memory Modules, the other of which (Sampler 2) needs no EMM15).
1 KX88, or similar 88-note Master Keyboard, with a minimum of 12 Programme Change buttons, and a sustain pedal.

Small mixing desk (4 inputs to 2 (L-R) outputs)
Amplifier
2 Speakers

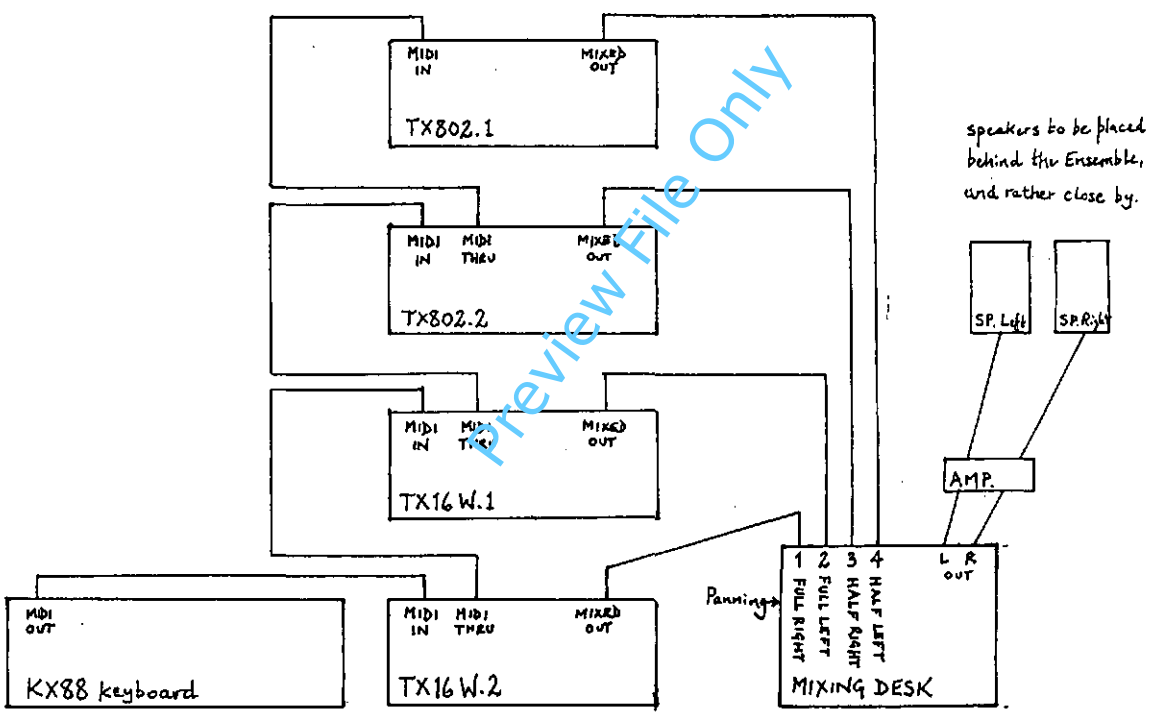
Overall level is controlled at the mixing desk in the Hall, more detailed level adjustments are made by the player's touch (not by a volume pedal).

Diskettes and Cartridges

Each TX802 needs a separate RAM4 Cartridge
(Cartridge 1 for TX802.1 and Cartridge 2 for TX802.2)
TX16W 1 needs 3 diskettes, plus Typhoon-System (Version 1.0) Programme
TX16W 2 needs 2 diskettes, plus Typhoon-System (Version 1.0) Programme

All the Diskettes and Cartridges are available on hire from the composer, together with the performing material. (Fax no. Nat: 0869 278392
(Internat. +44 869 278392)
Loading instruction for the TX16Ws are given in the keyboard part.

Set-up diagram



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Note that the following settings for the TX802s cannot be included on the Cartridges, and therefore must be set up manually onto the actual synthesizers to be used in the performance. These settings (under Menu SYSTEM SETUP) are given in the keyboard part:

SYSTEM SETUP 3: Settings for Programme Changes
SYSTEM SETUP 6: MICROTUNINGS (Internal 1 and 2)

Notation symbols

Strings

ric. = ricochet (jeté)
(sometimes 'col leg')

Percussion

\+ = dead-stroke

Wind

= key-slap (embouchure hole closed) (flute)
(sounds major seventh lower)

= multiphonic (free, but with given fundamental)

Specific multiphonics for flute - see Robert Dick 'The Other Flute'

Specific mutiphonics for bass clarinet -
see Henri Bok/Eugen Wendel 'New Techniques for the Bass Clarinet'
eg: II^{12} = type II multiphonics, no. 12
I = type I multiphonic

= aeolian (breath) sound
(if possible unpitched, otherwise fairly high)

= very breathy (flute)

= slap-tongue (with definite pitch) (bass clarinet)

Wind and contrabass

= 'quasi ricochet' (see section beginning bar 262)
4 or 5 repeated notes (staccato) - like 'rebounds'.
Make sure to fill out the whole of the given note value - this means that the higher notes in the chord will contain faster 'rebounds', and the lower notes in the chord slightly slower ones. Varied and irregular rhythms, but generally starting fast and then ritardando. Always diminuendo from the given dynamic dynamic. When two notes given, incorporate both into the ricochet, varying the order of the two notes: (eg. 1.2.2.1. or 2.2.1.1.1 etc).

Harp

= let finger(s) strike the sound board (as loudly as possible) immediately after plucking the string. (Obviously the string should be plucked near the sound-board). In the case of two-note chords, use one finger from each hand, and let both fingers strike the sound-board)

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Microtones (ensemble)[1]

𝄲 𝄰 𝄳 = raised by a maximum of a quartertone*

𝄲 𝄰 𝄳 = lowered by a maximum of a quartertone*

* according to available fingerings, and taste.

𝄲 = very slightly flat (equivalent to the natural 7th)
𝄳 This is usually used with reference to the bass clarinet type I
multiphonic, whose 2nd overtone is a very pronounced natural 7th.
𝄰 The asterisks in the score indicate the corresponding overtone in
the bass clarinet. (NB during this section the bass clarinet sounds
an ocatve lower than written).

Harp

N.B. All E and F strings should be tuned a quartertone flat

[1]Note that the quartertone notation for the ensemble is different from that in the solo marimba, on account of the subjectivity involved in the wind and strings intonation. There being no subjectivity involved in the case of the quartertone marimba, this part is notated with the following quartertone symbols:

𝄲 = quartertone sharp

𝄳 = quartertone flat

𝄰 = threequartertone sharp

Programme note

It was during the 1992 Hague Percussion Festival that I had the pleasure to meet the Mozambican musician and timbila player, **Venancio Mbande**, and to see him play together with the Hague Percussion Group. The sheer amount of sound and vibration generated by the magnificent group of ten 'buzzing' timbilas set me wondering, as so often before, at the magic of producing sound from simple pieces of wood.

And yet in today's environmentally-conscious world we have become more aware than ever before of the Earth's rapidly vanishing forests, and the morality of felling trees (particularly those precious hardwoods which are so indispensable to the building of musical instruments) is seriously being called into question.

Venancio Mbande's name is used here merely to symbolise 'the musician' who makes music from wood, whose medium for spiritual communication, with all its sophistication and perfection, is, nonetheless, dependent upon the felling of trees. He offers up his music to the trees in the hope to justify himself by the sheer beauty of the sounds and the excellence of his craft - as he enters into musical dialogue with them it is as though the music itself has become the medium through which the trees can communicate with their own 'tree-spirits'.

In **'Venancio Mbande talking with the trees'** the solo part (representing Venancio and his timbila) is performed on many different species of wooden instrument - quartertone marimba, woodblocks, bamboo, simantra, wooden-headed tomtoms, wood-chimes, wooden guiro and a special tambourine with nut rattles. In contrast to this, the ensemble (representing 'the trees') is characterised predominantly by metal, skin, wind and stringed instruments.

The starting-point of the dialogue between 'Venancio' and 'the trees' is a series of seven distinct emotional 'characters' -brittle/energetic, angry, florid, austere/ritualistic, sad/melancholic, sombre/mysterious and dancing - these are presented in their simplest form in seven **'character-sketches'** of varying length and instrumentation, which occur at irregular intervals throughout the piece. Between these comparatively static episodes come six **'scenes'** in which these characters develop into a continuously evolving dramatic dialogue.

Venancio Mbande... was written between June 1993 and March 1994 for Robert Van Sice, and co-commissioned by him and L'Itinéraire.

James Wood.April 1994

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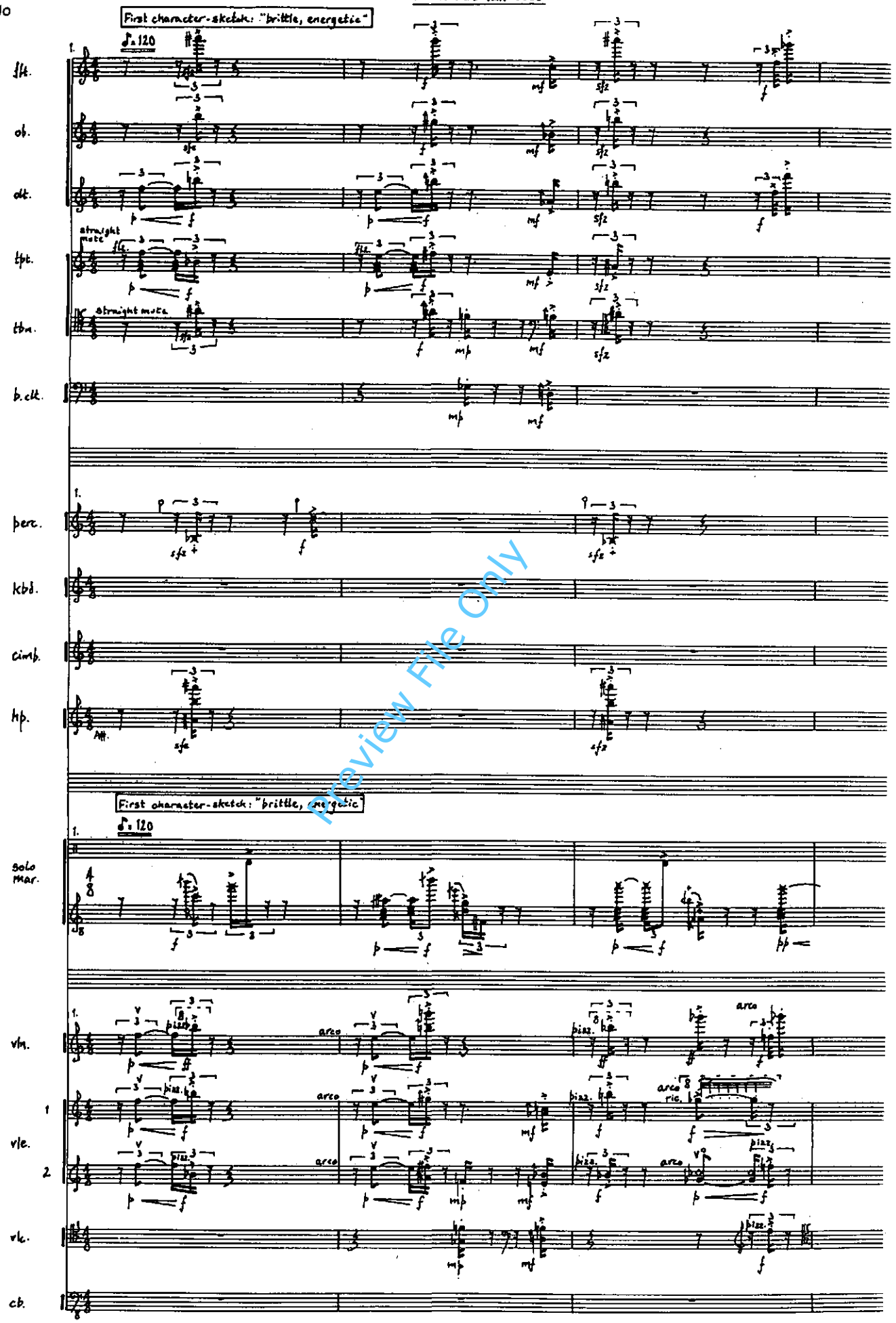
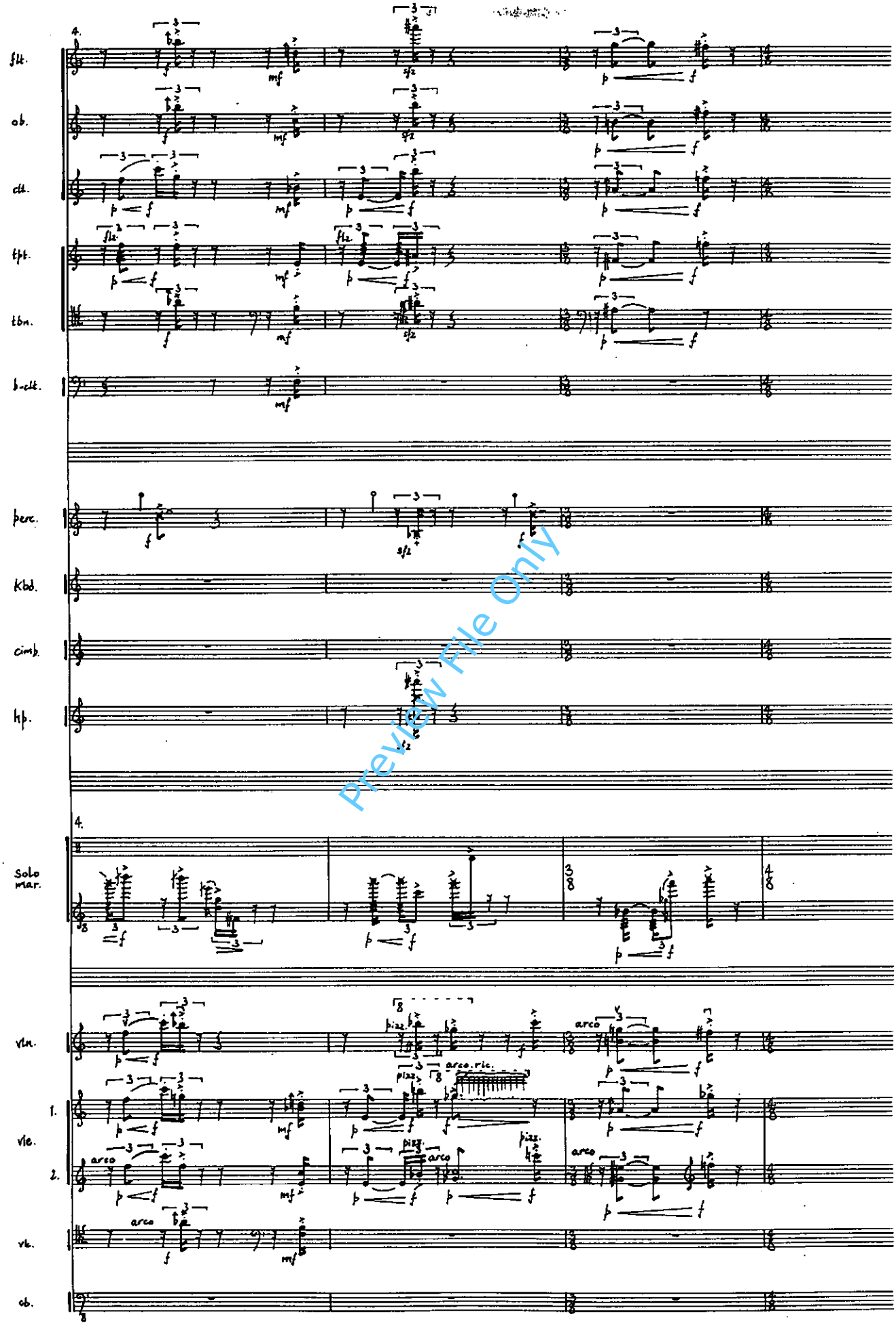
For Robert Van Sice


First character-sketch: "brittle, energetic"
♪ = 120
straight mute
straight mute
First character-sketch: "brittle, energetic"
♪ = 120
arco
arco
arco



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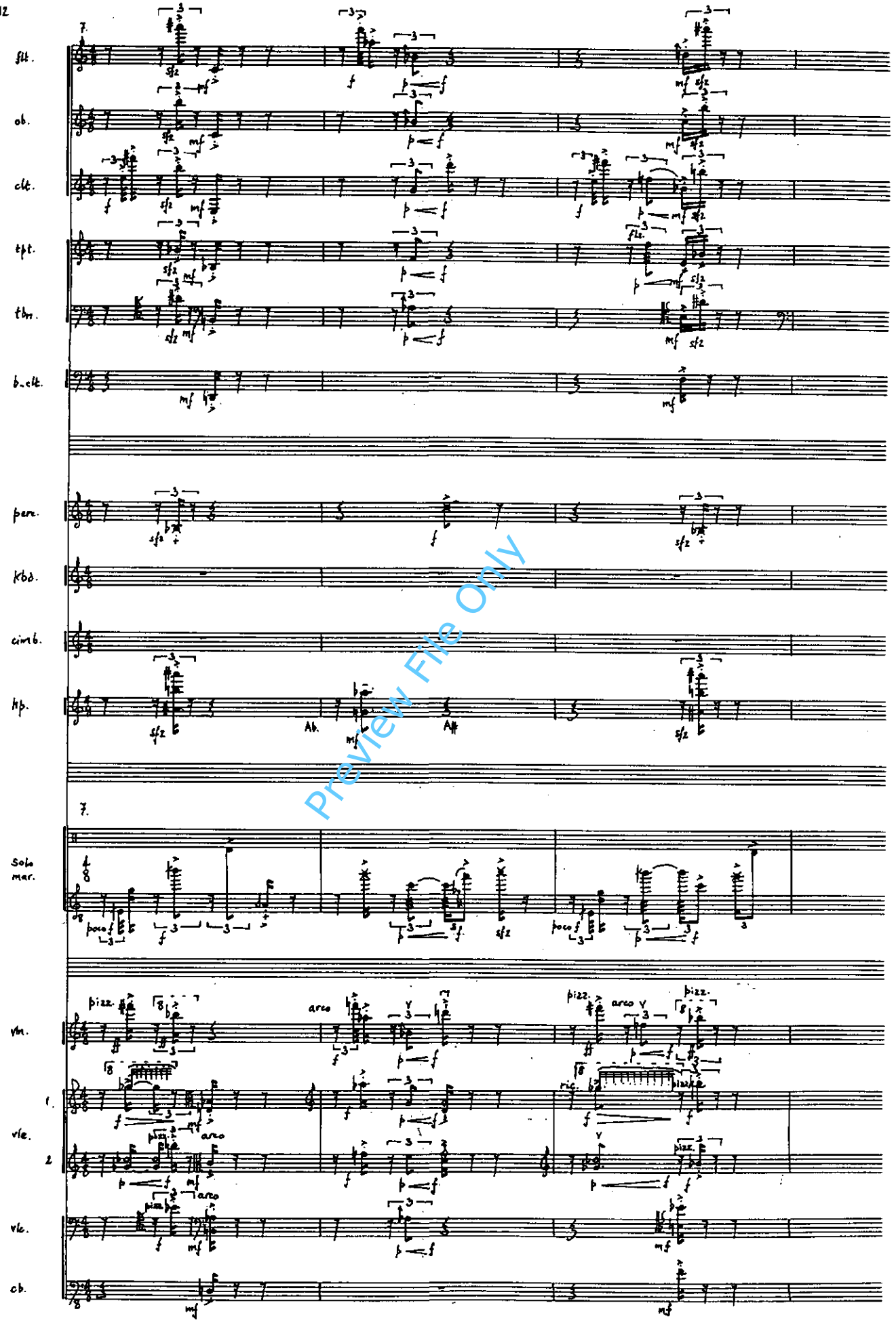

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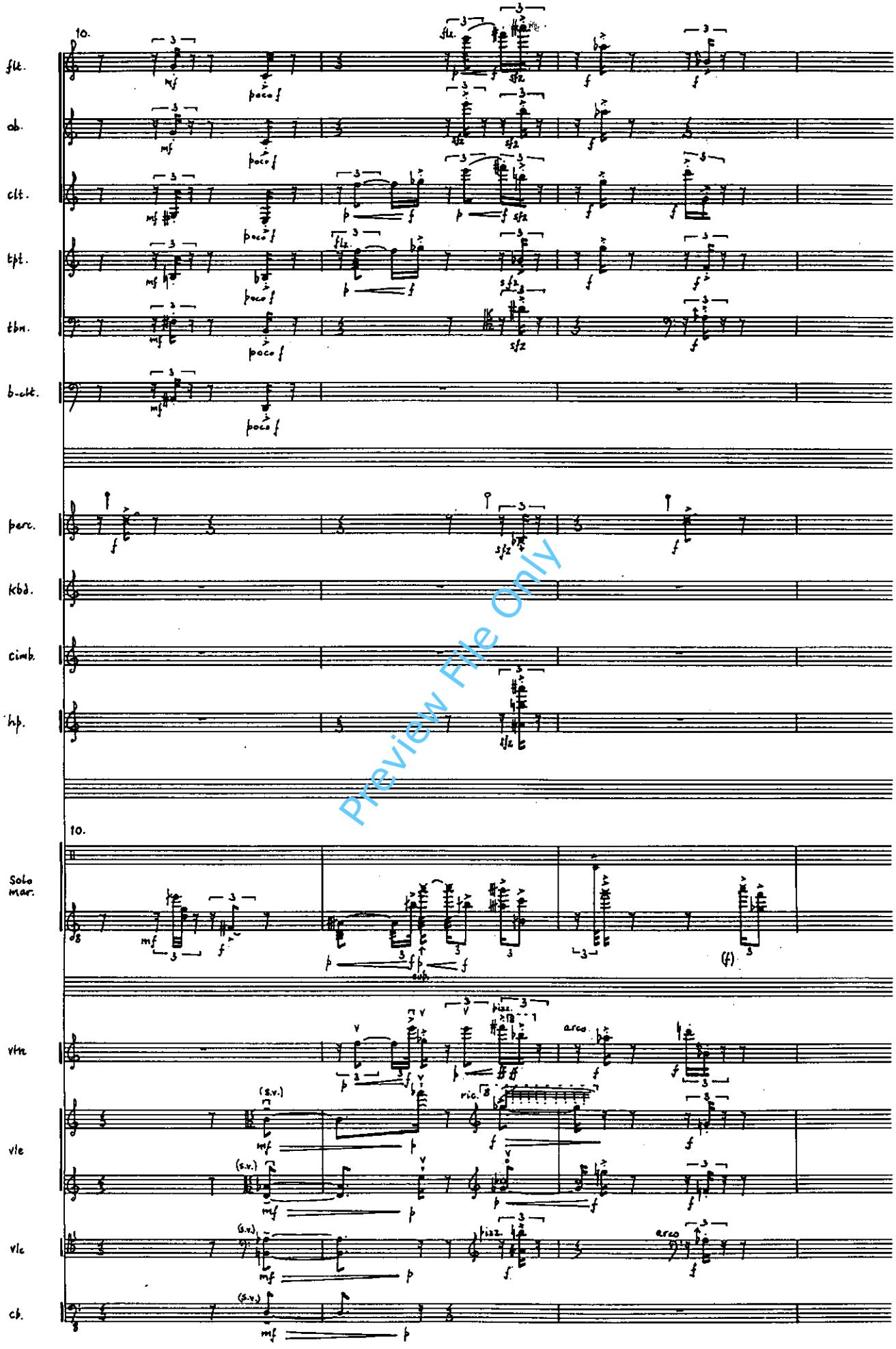
flt.
ob.
clt.
tpt.
tbn.
b-clt.
perc.
kbd.
cimb.
hp.
Solo mar.
vln
vle
vlc
cb.
10.
poco f
sfz
arco
ric.
(s.v.)
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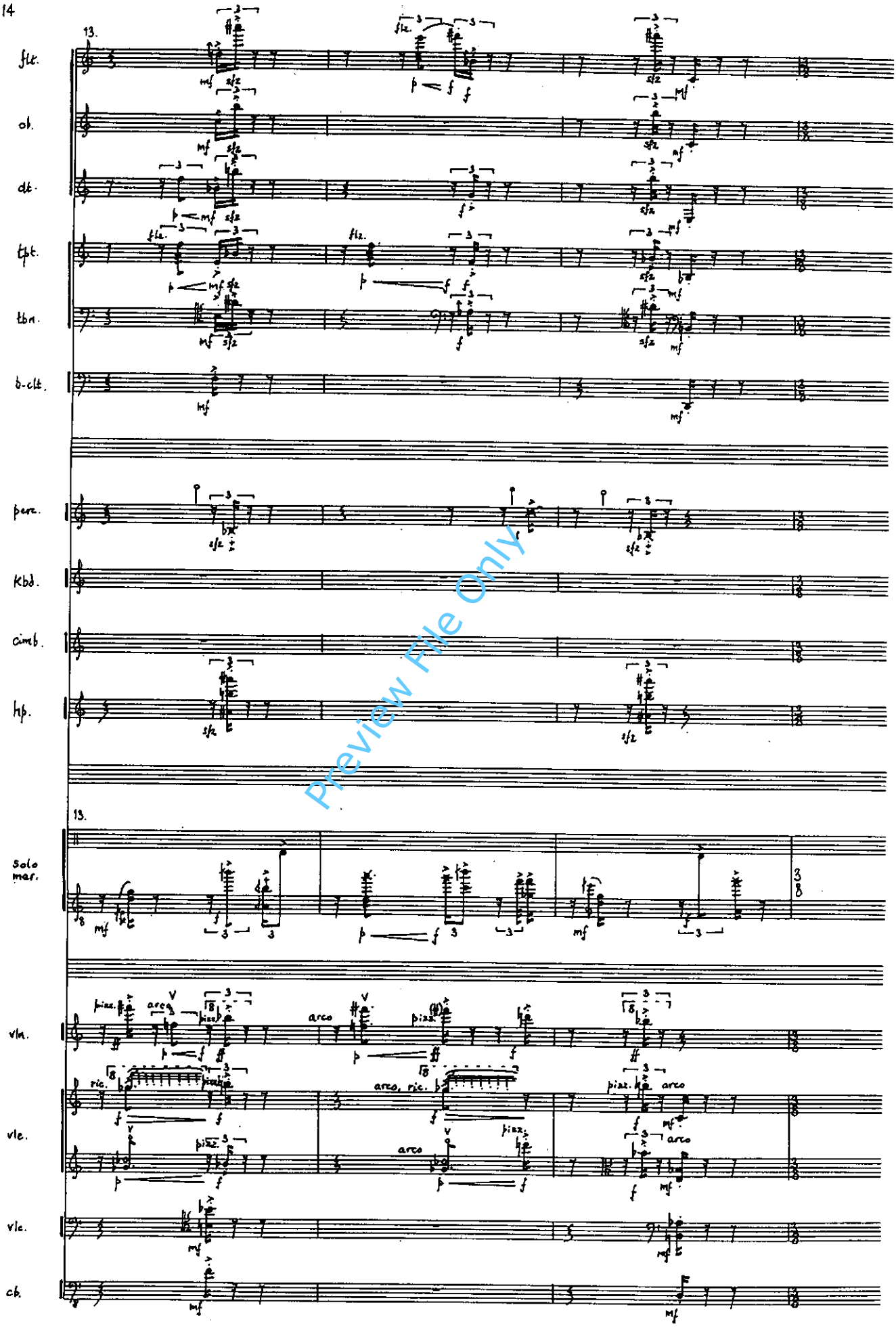
13.
flt.
ob.
clt.
tpt.
tbn.
b-clt.
perc.
Kbd.
cimb.
hp.
13.
solo mar.
vln.
vla.
vlc.
cb.
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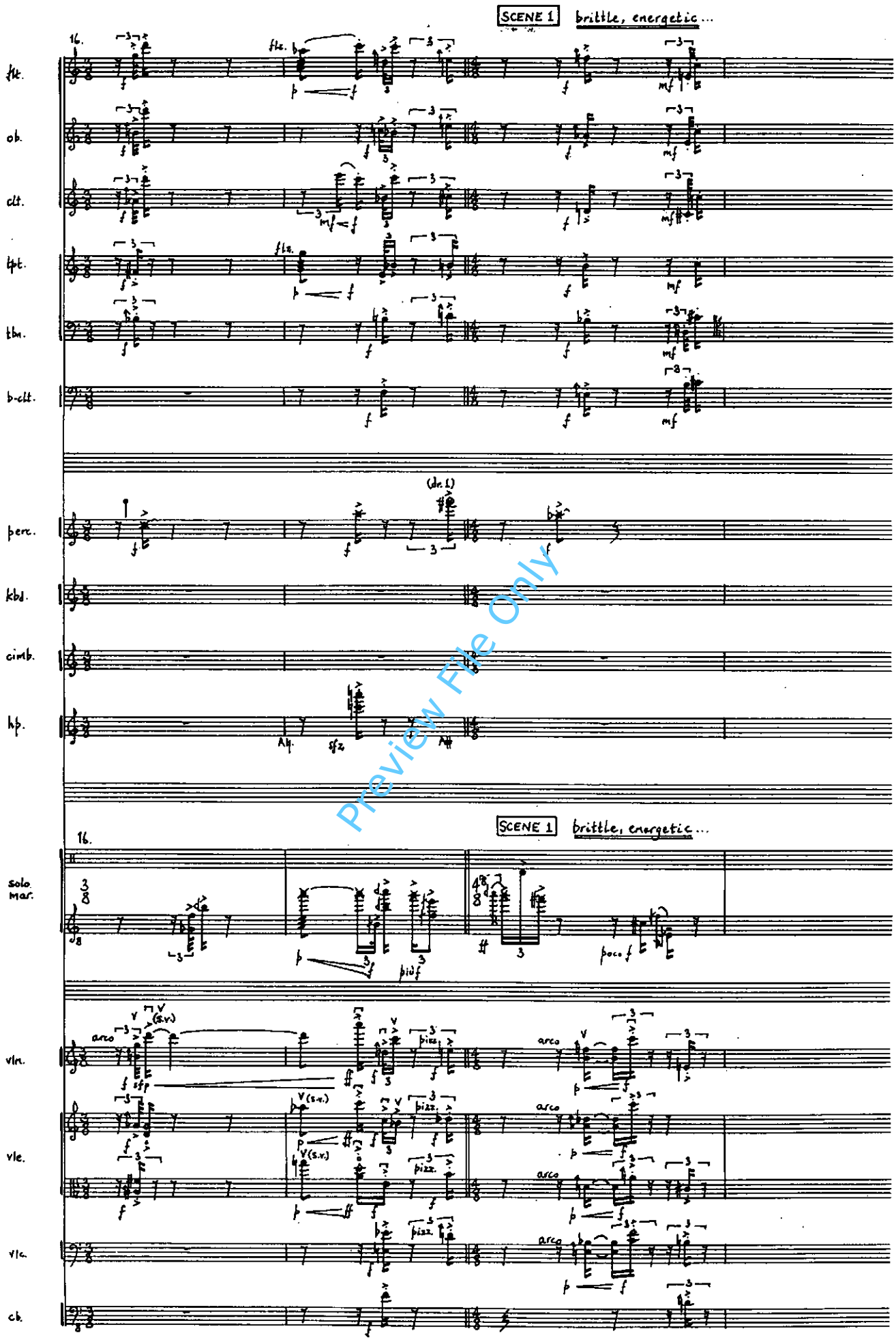

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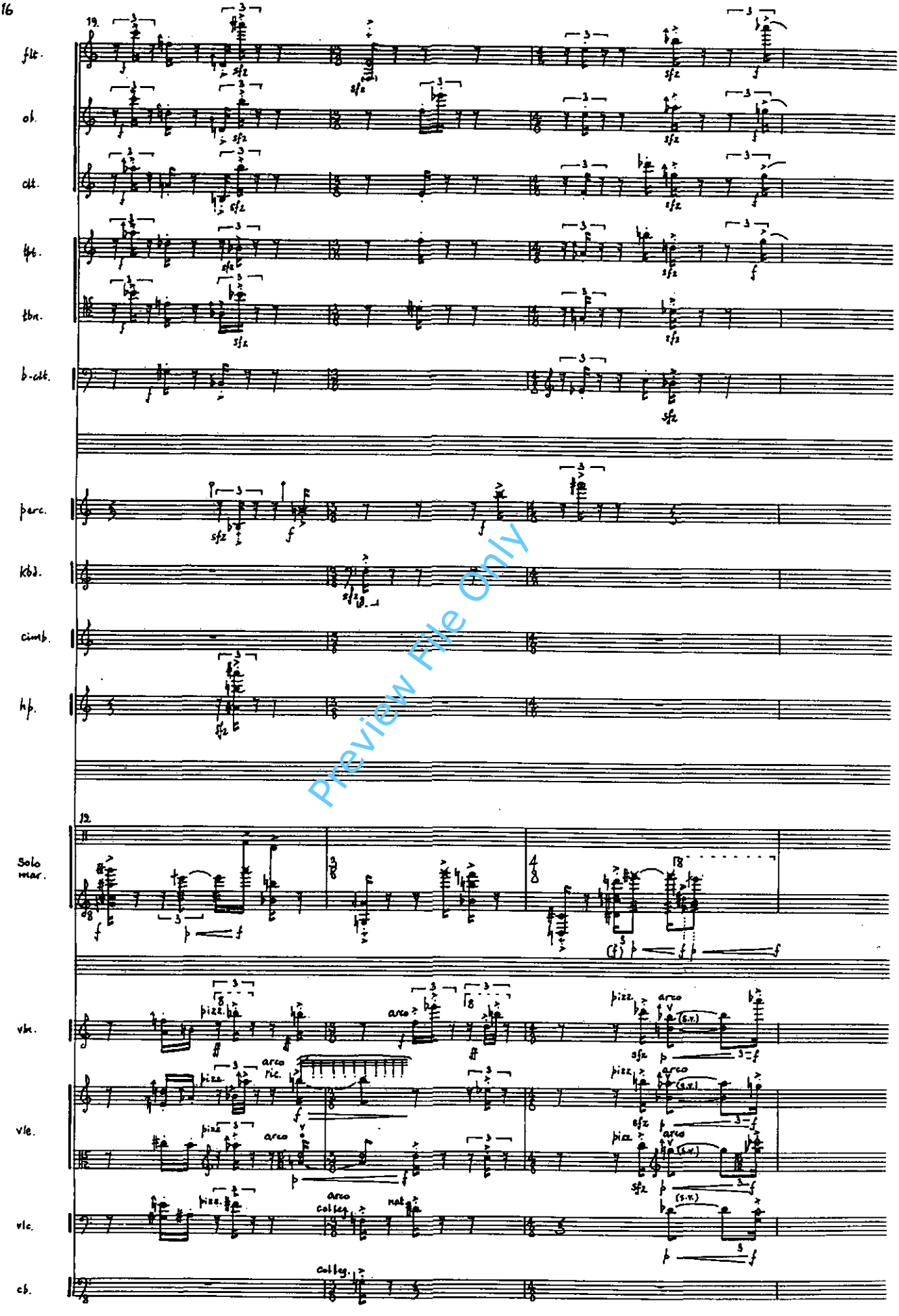

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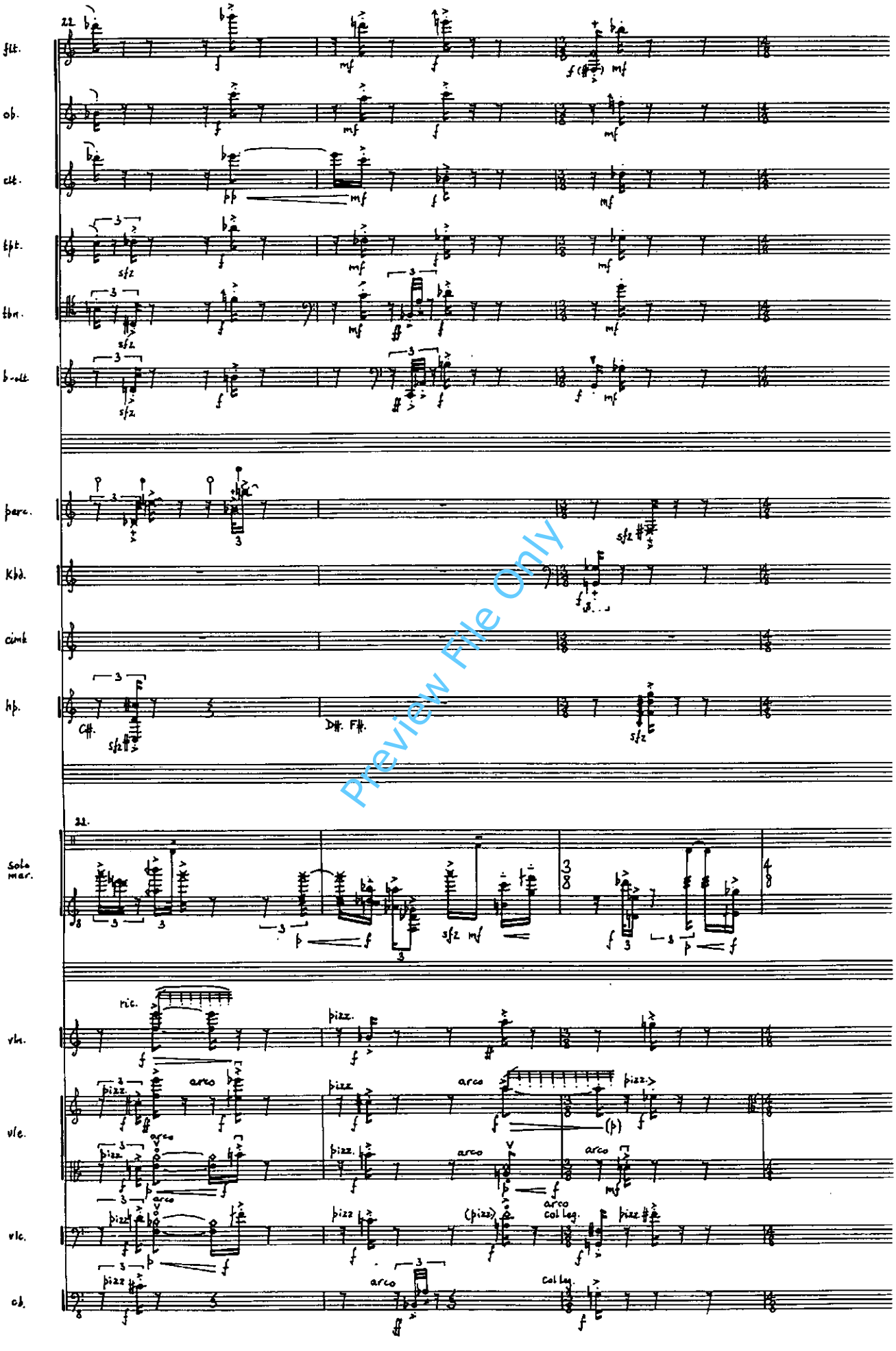

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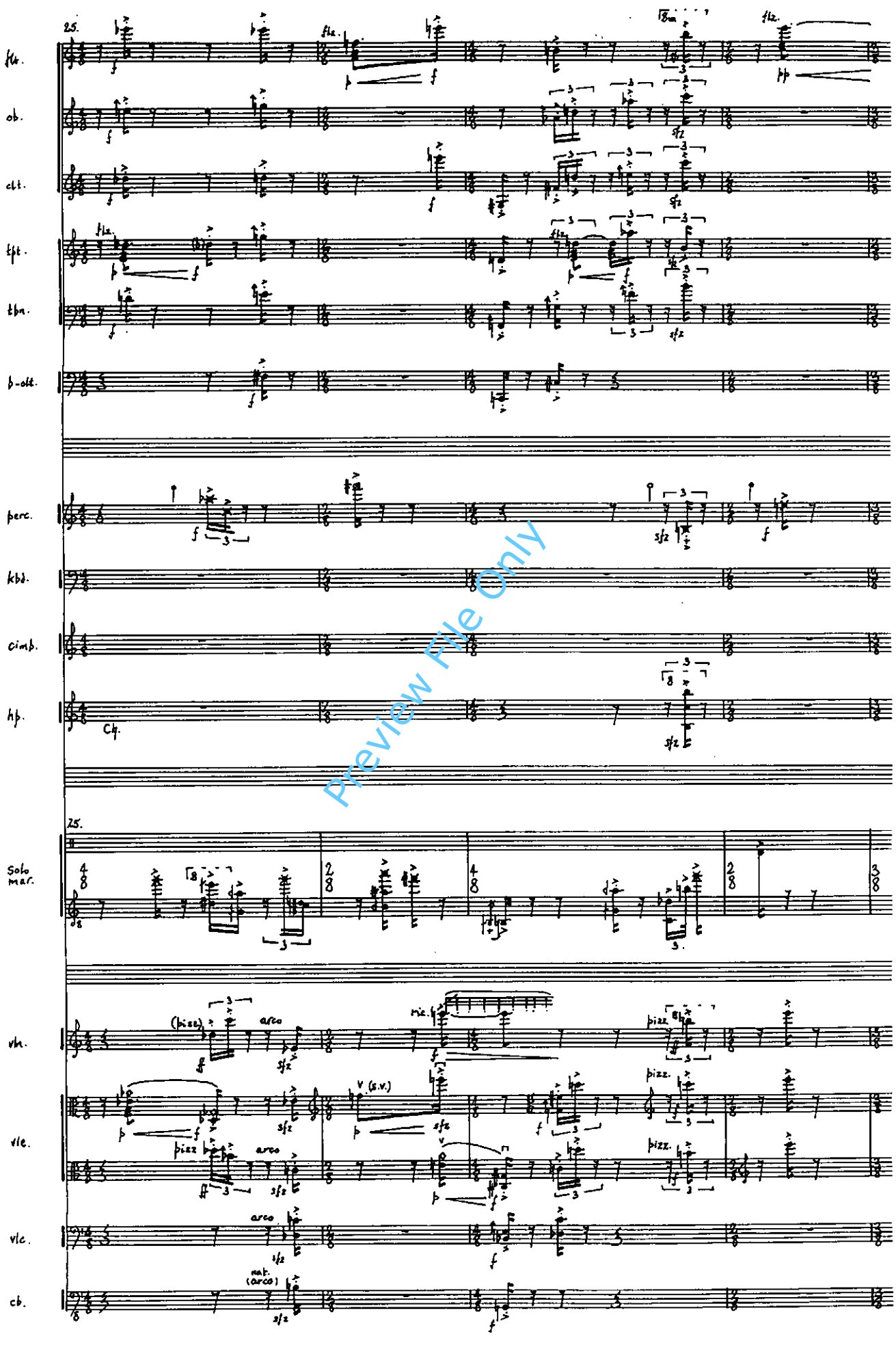

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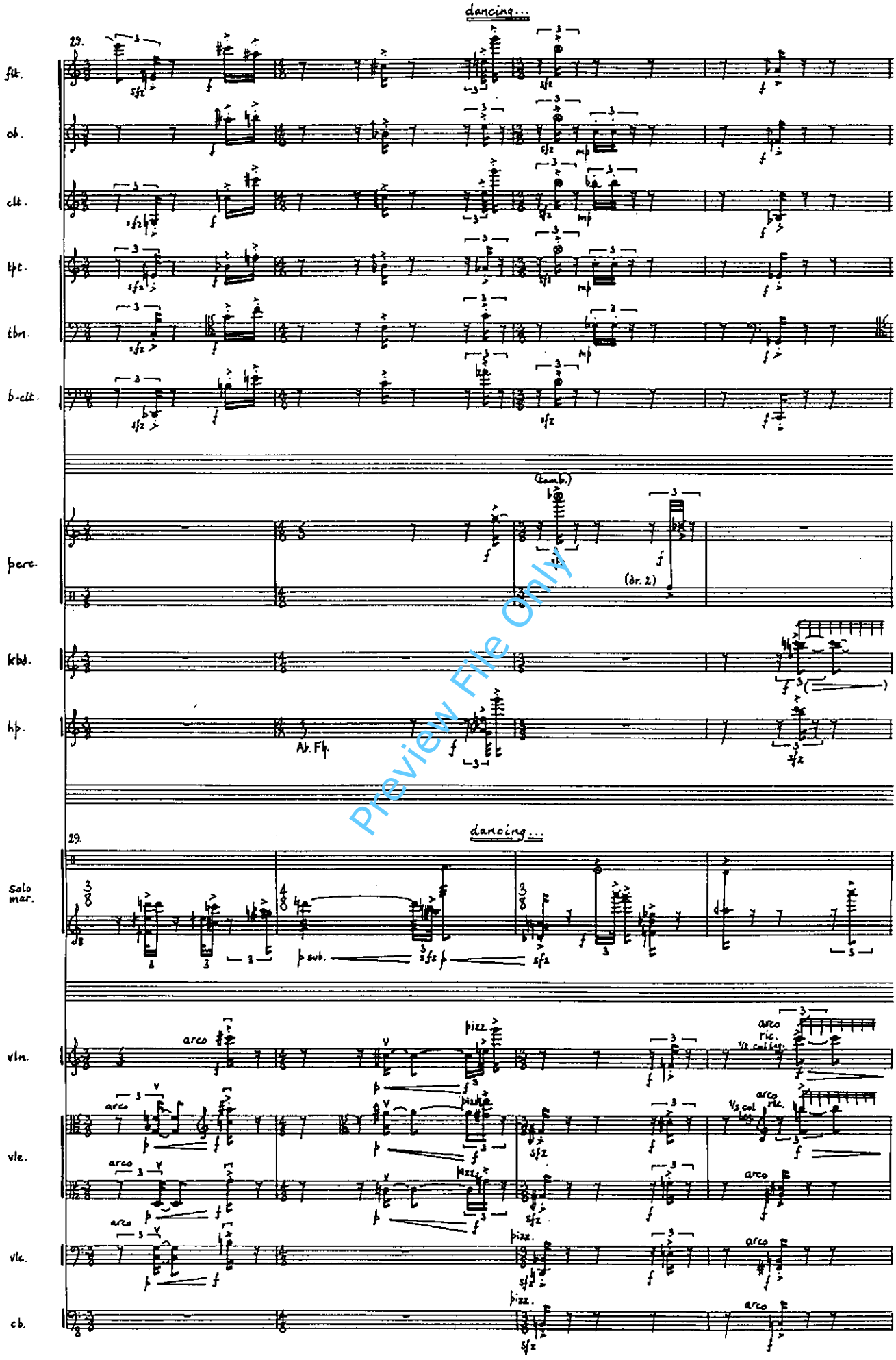

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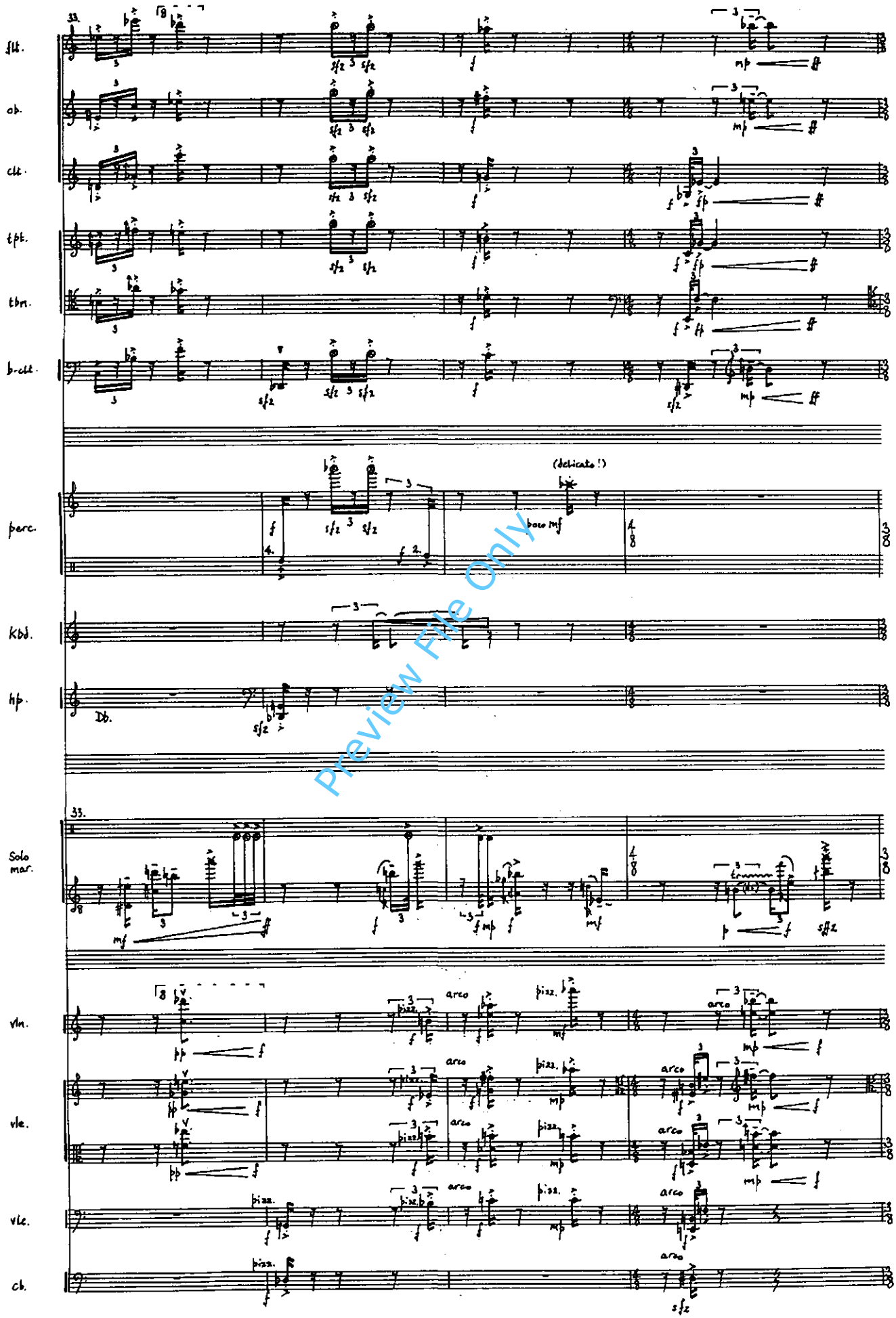

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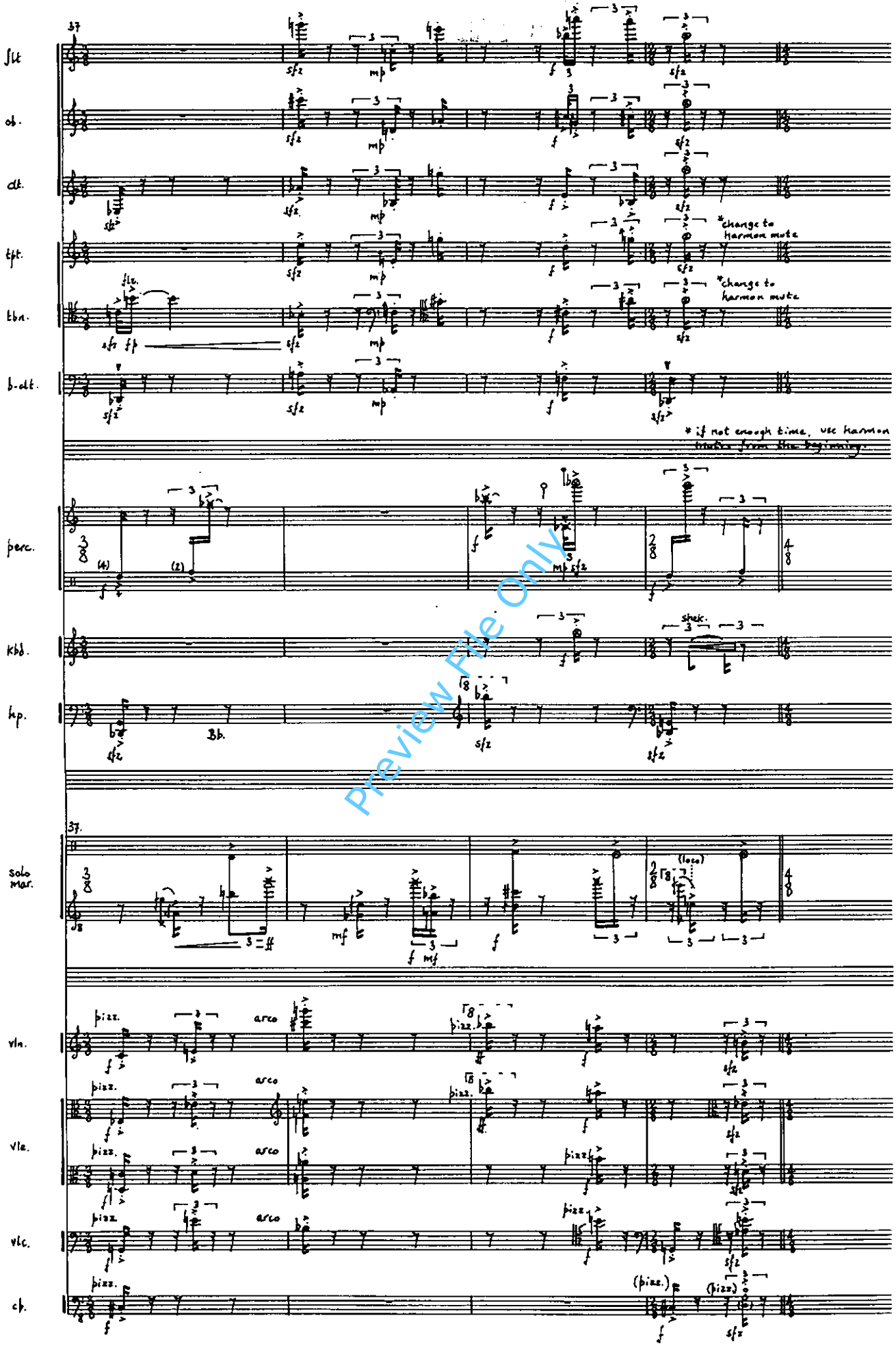

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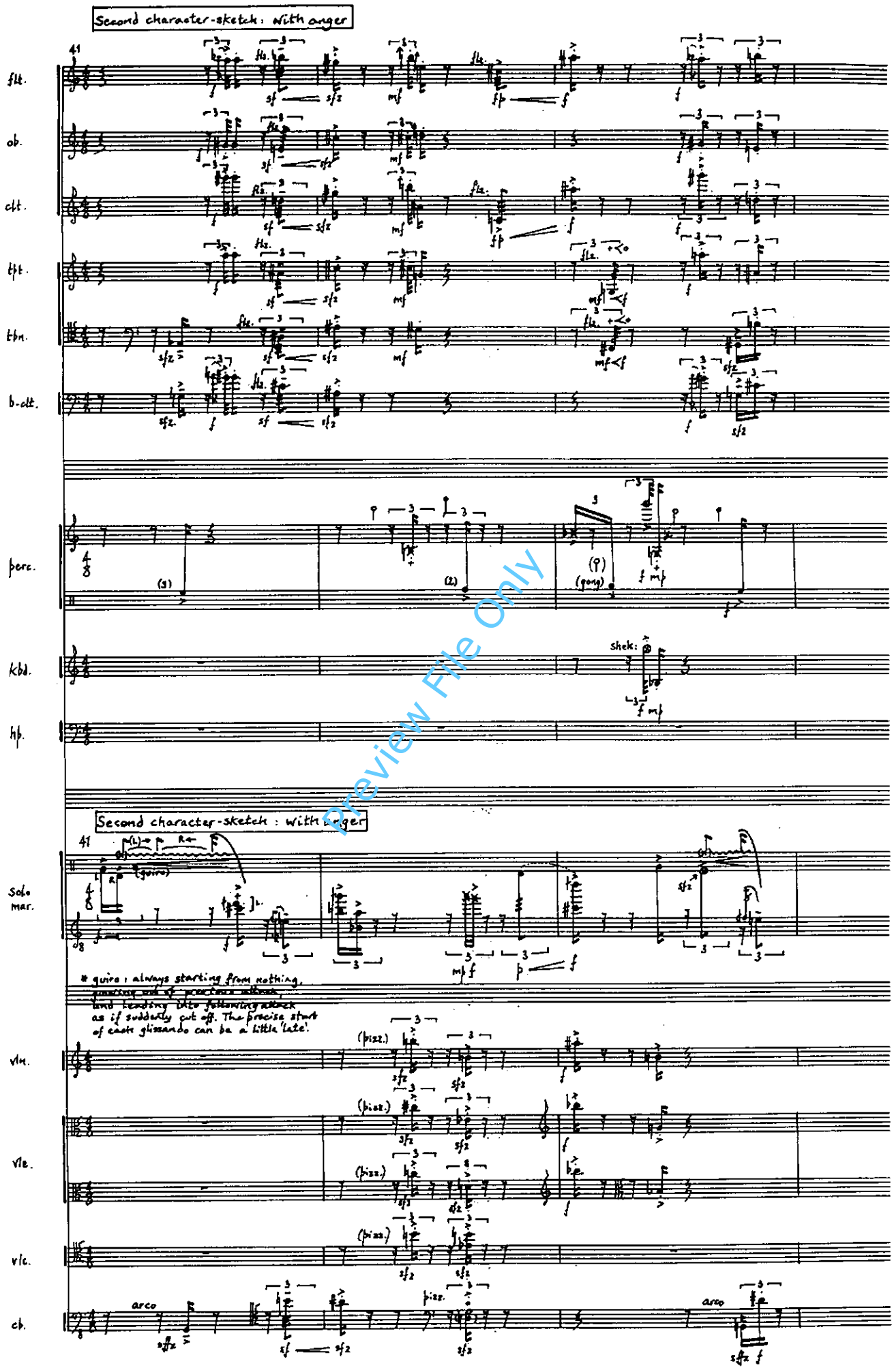

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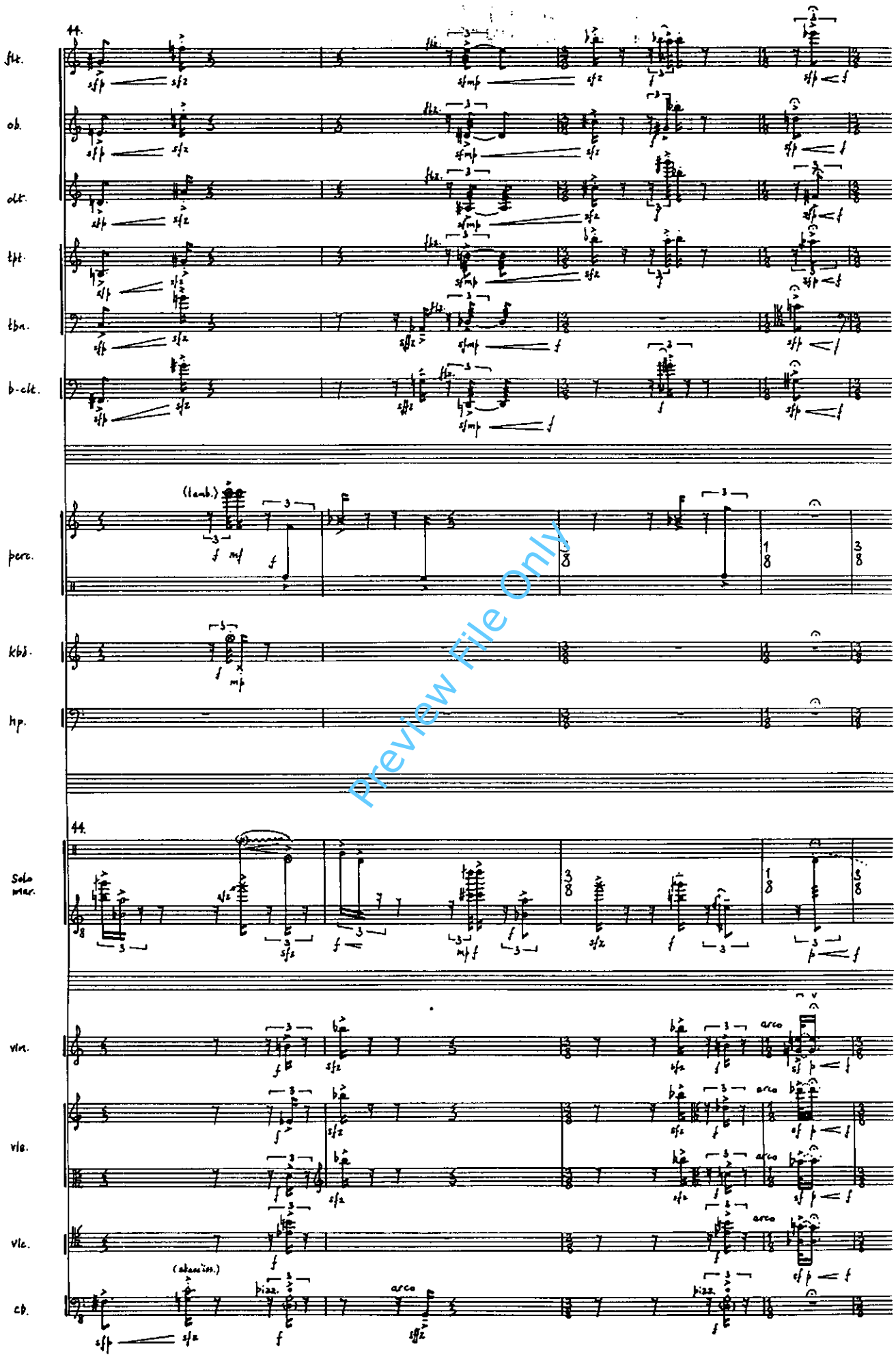

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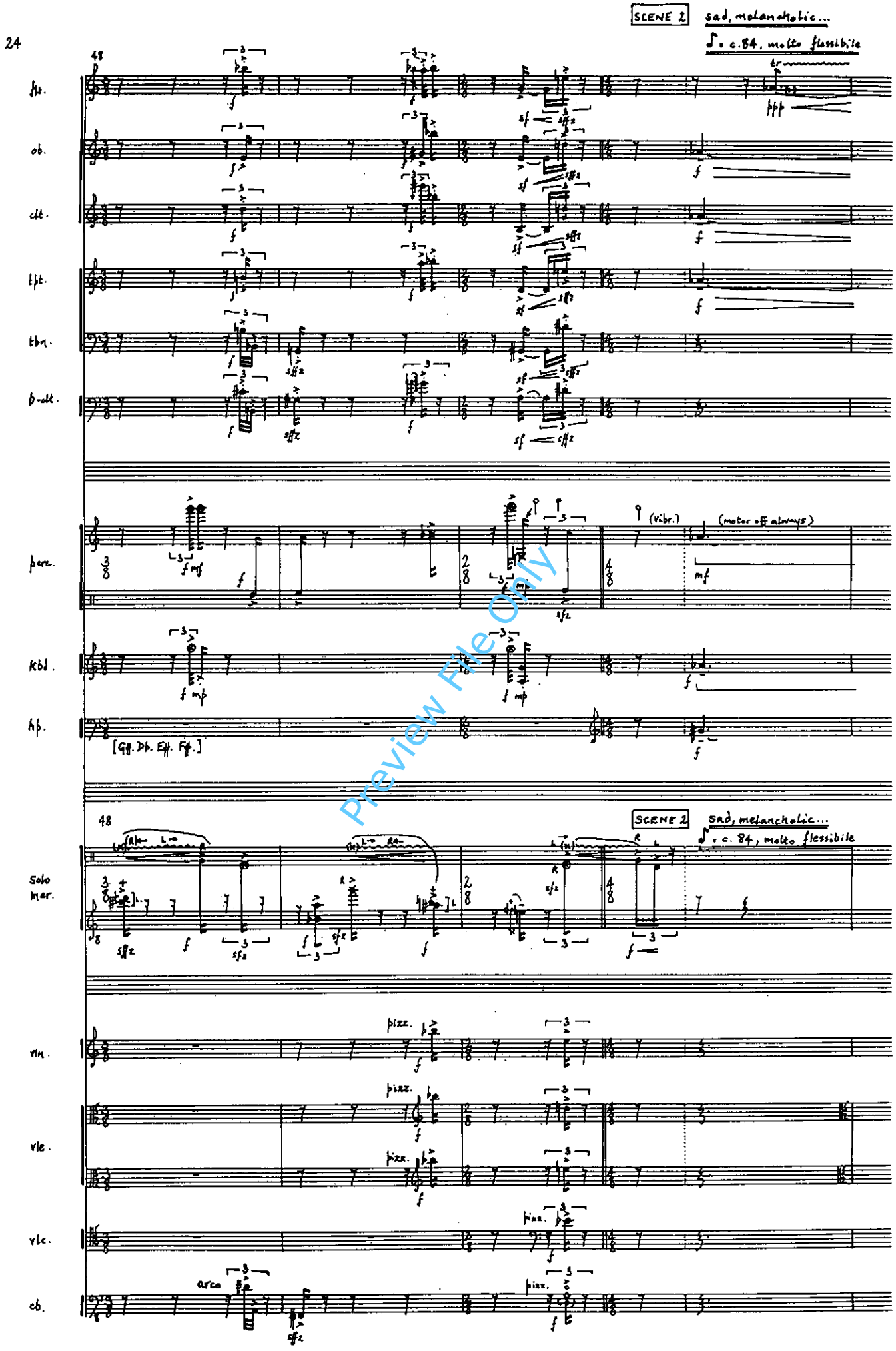

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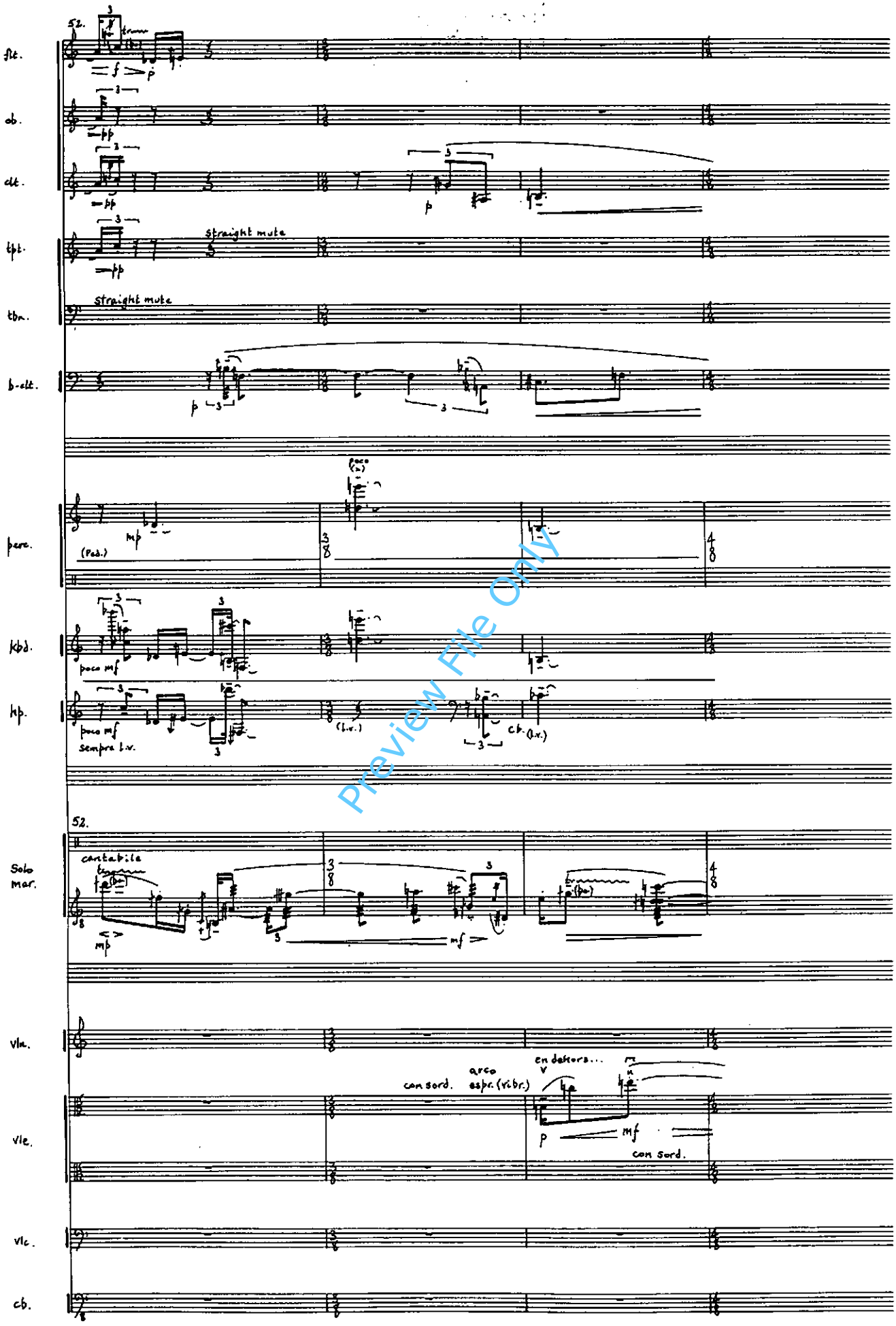

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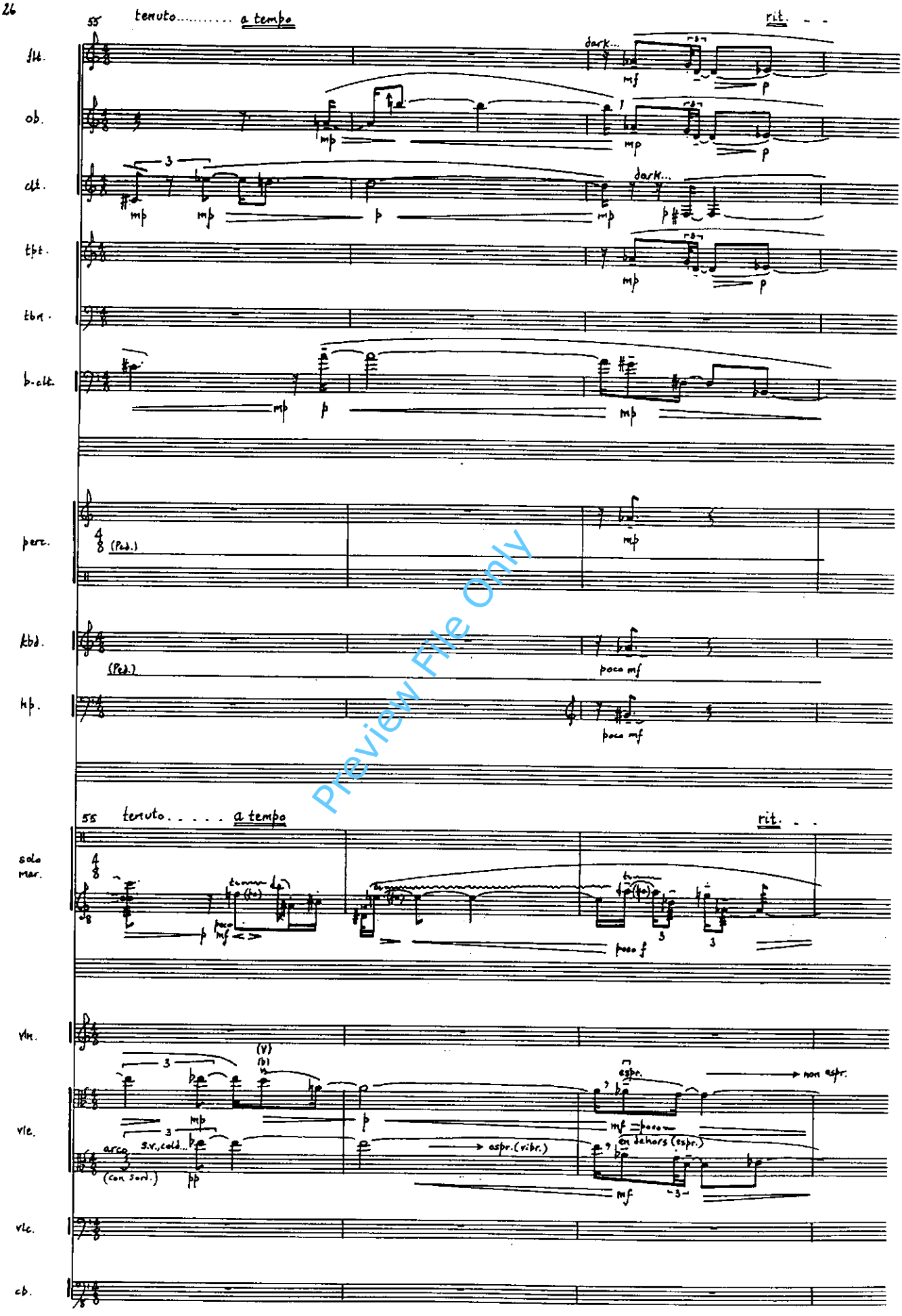

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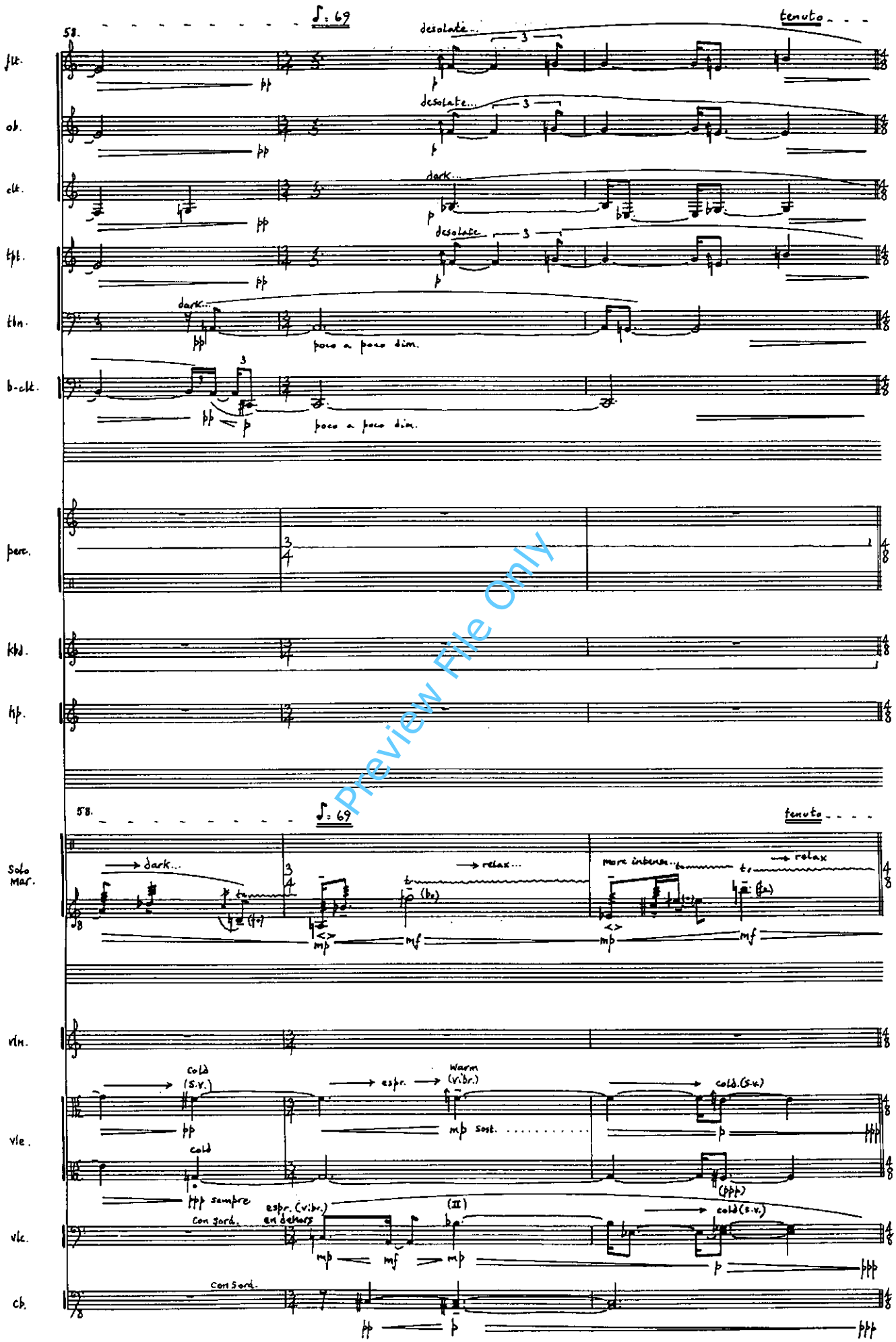

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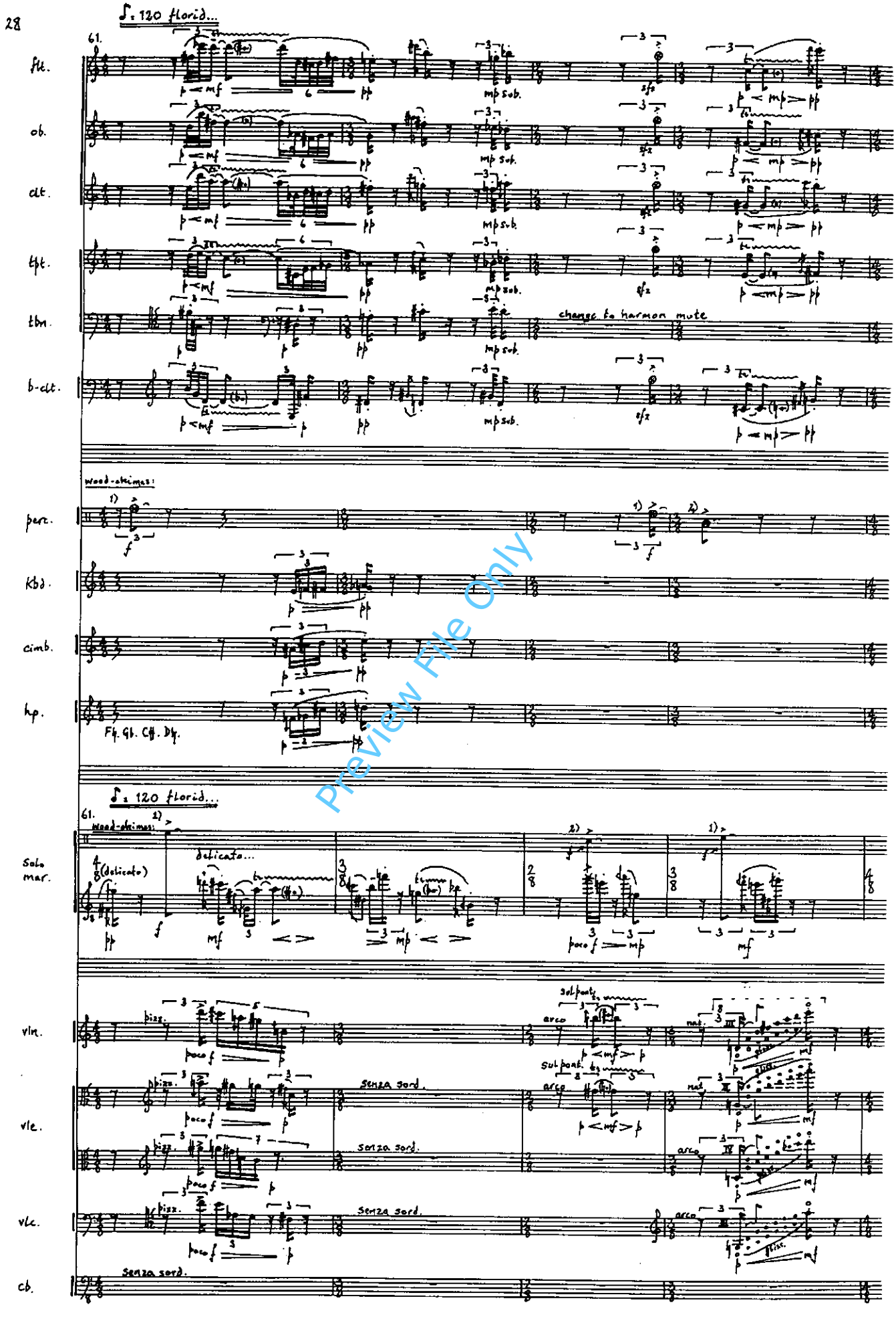

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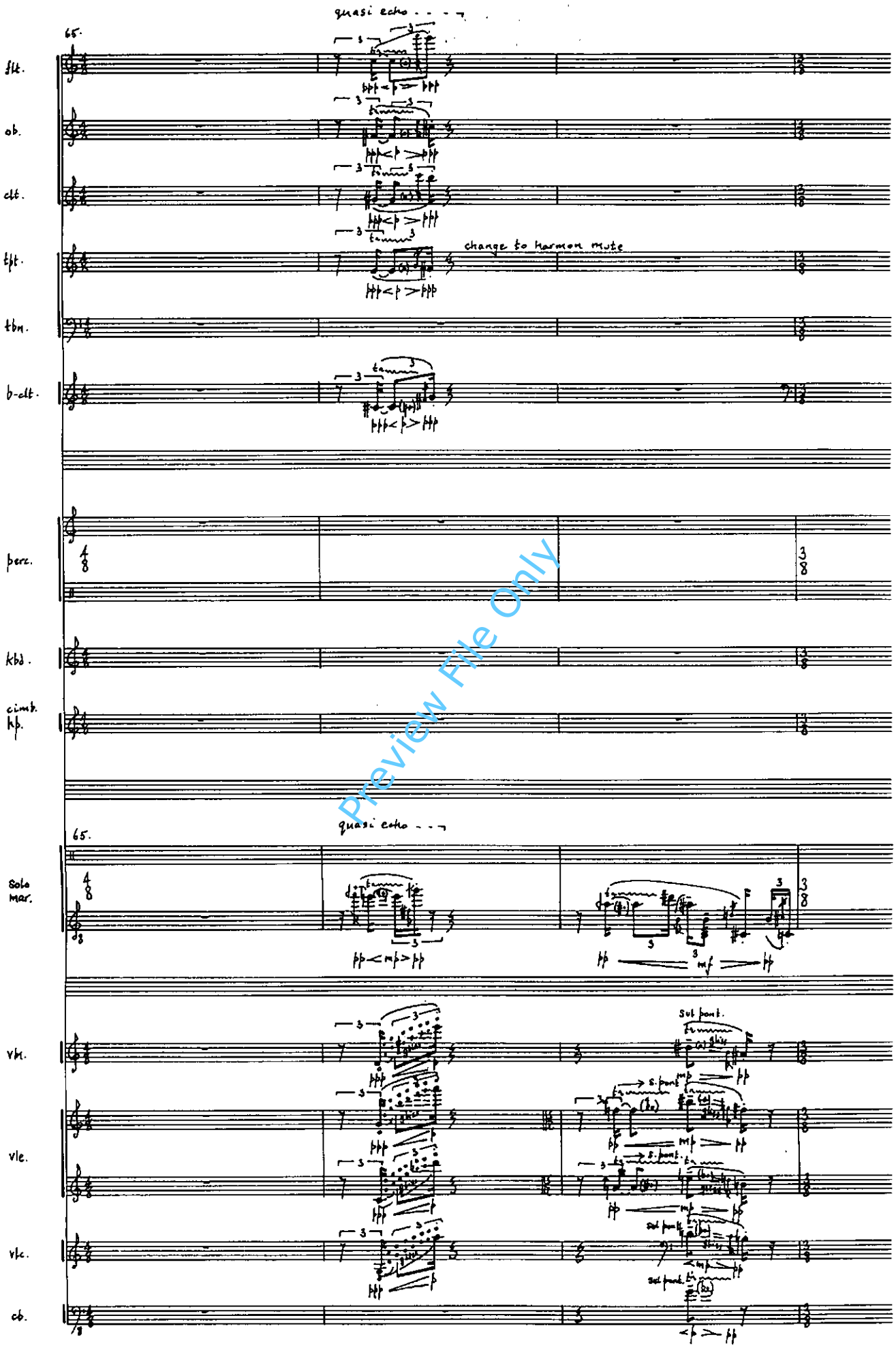

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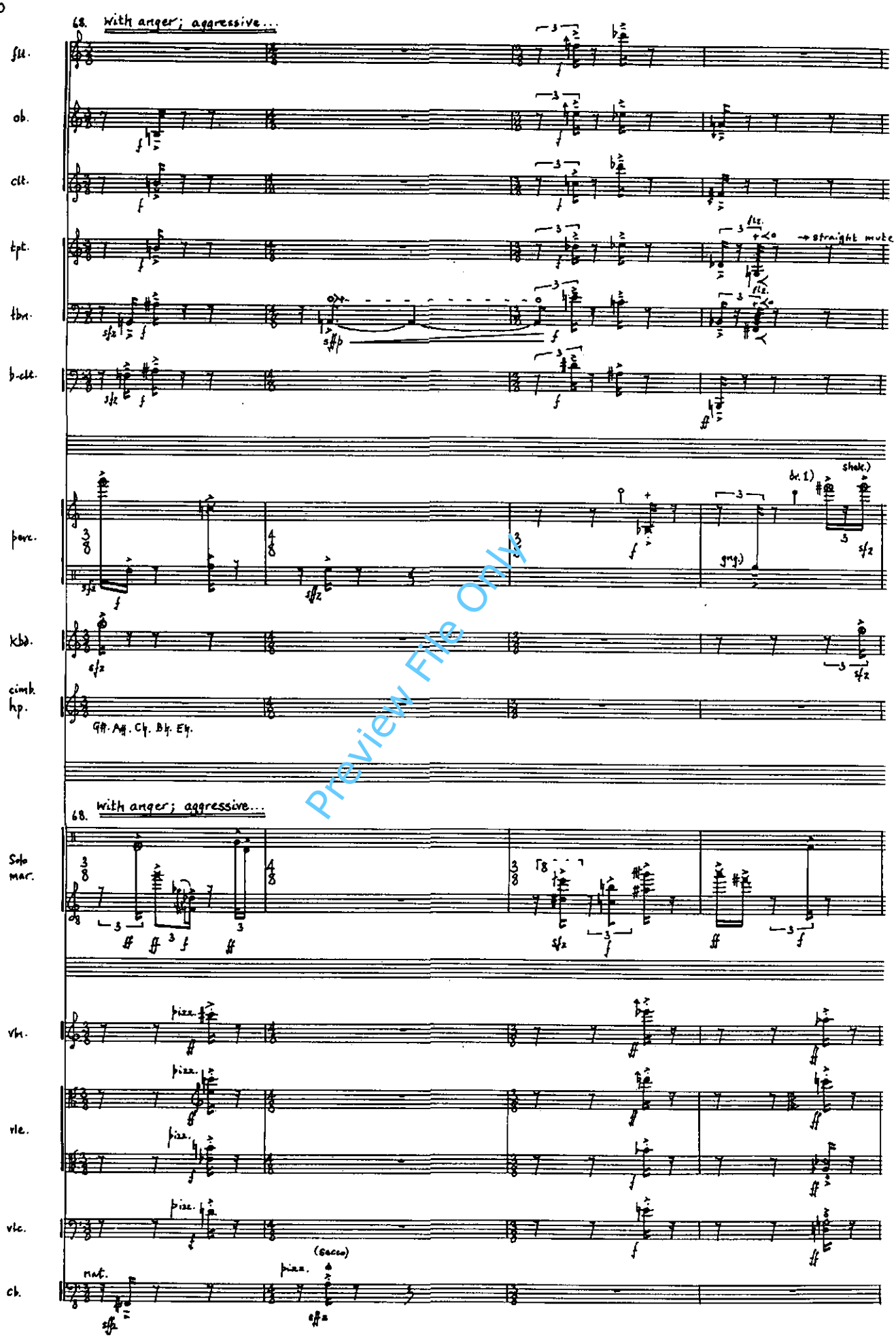

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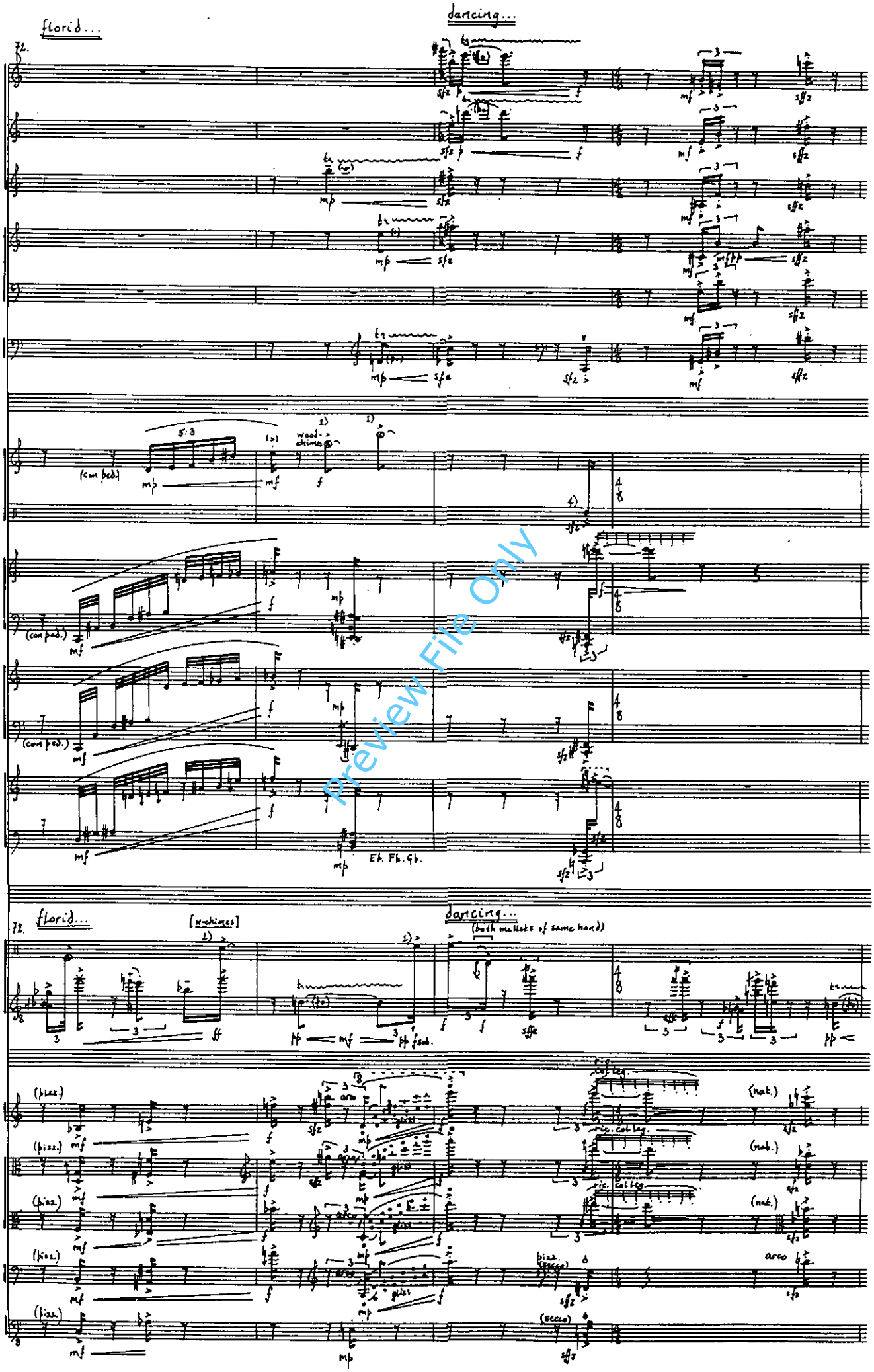

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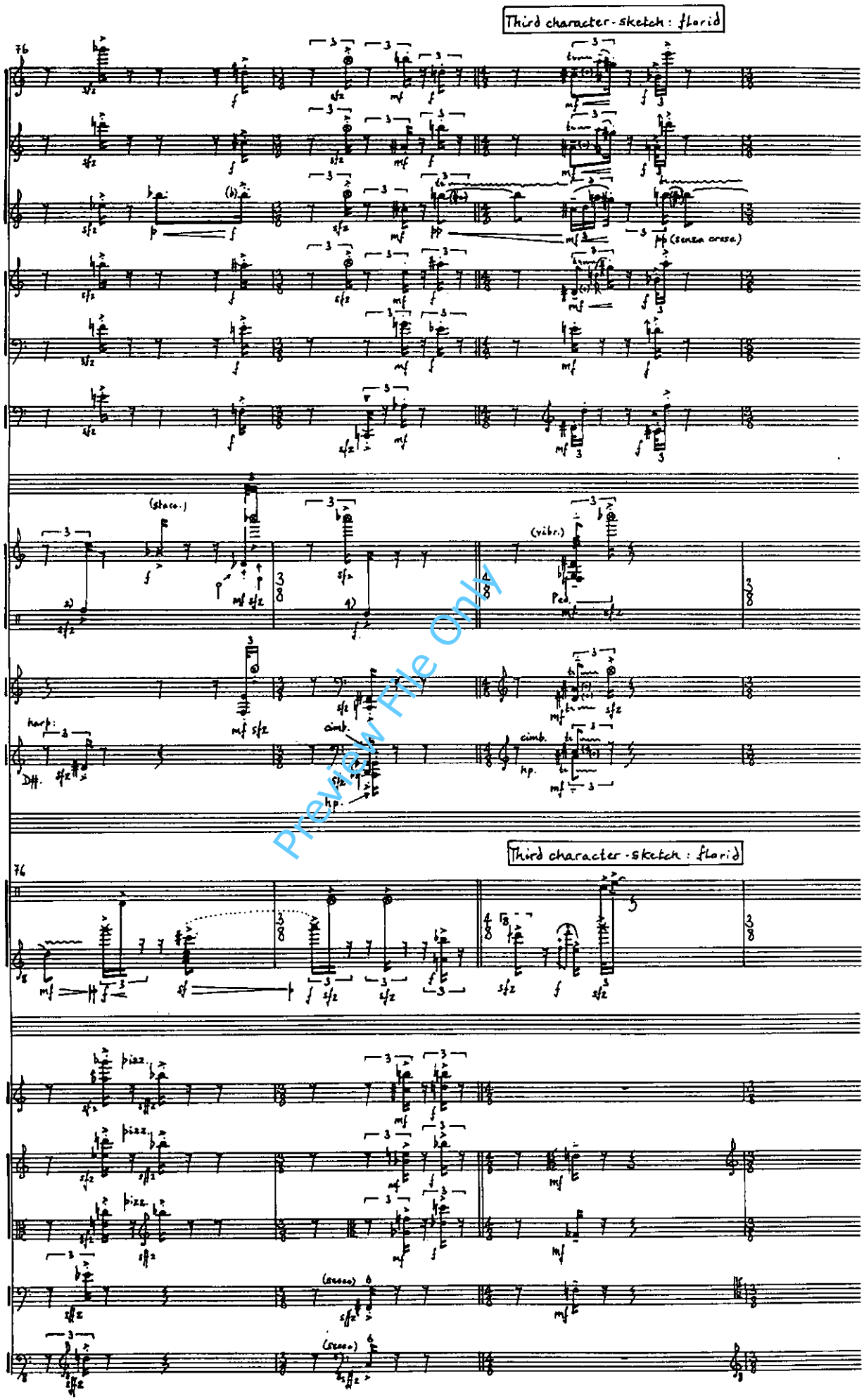

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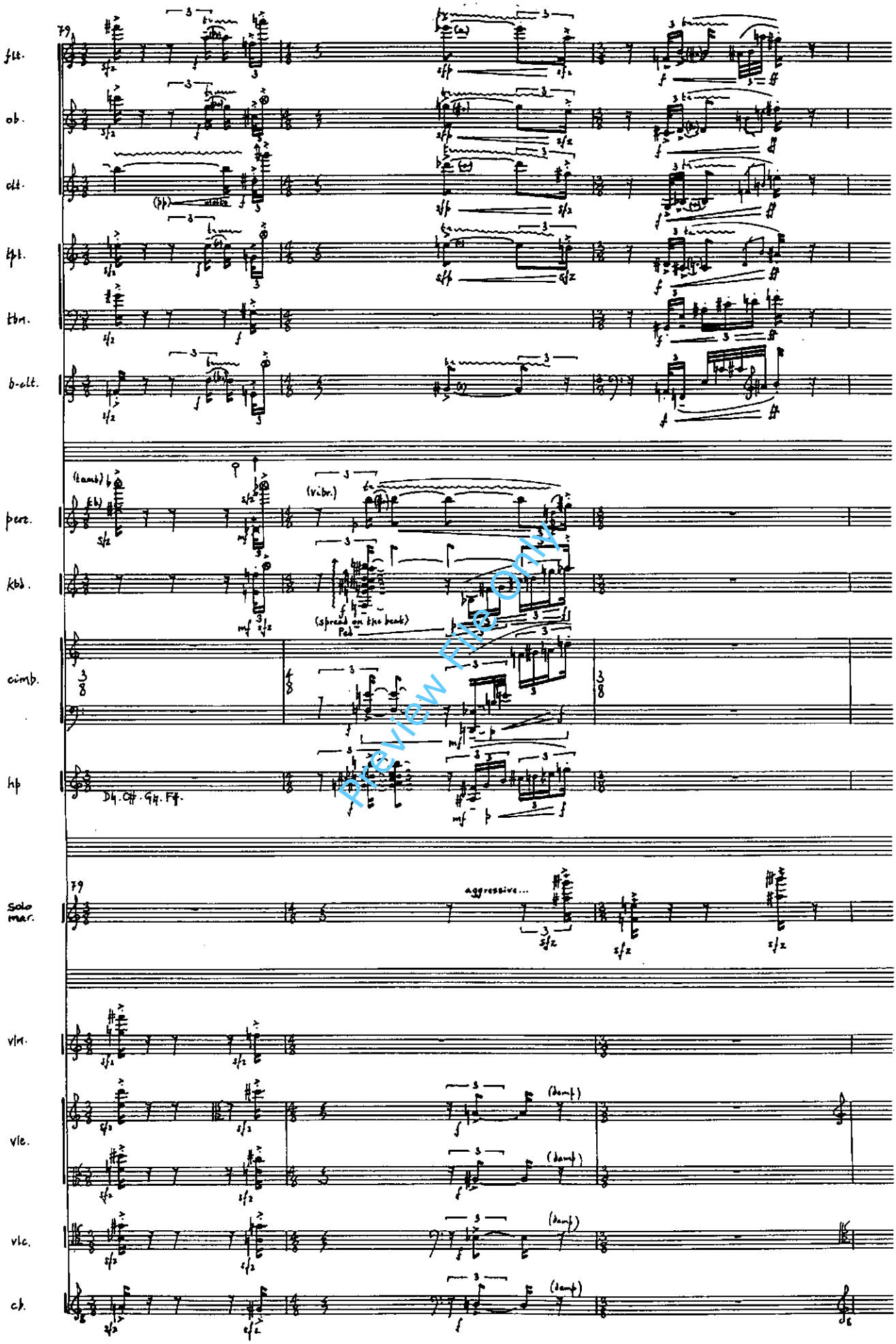

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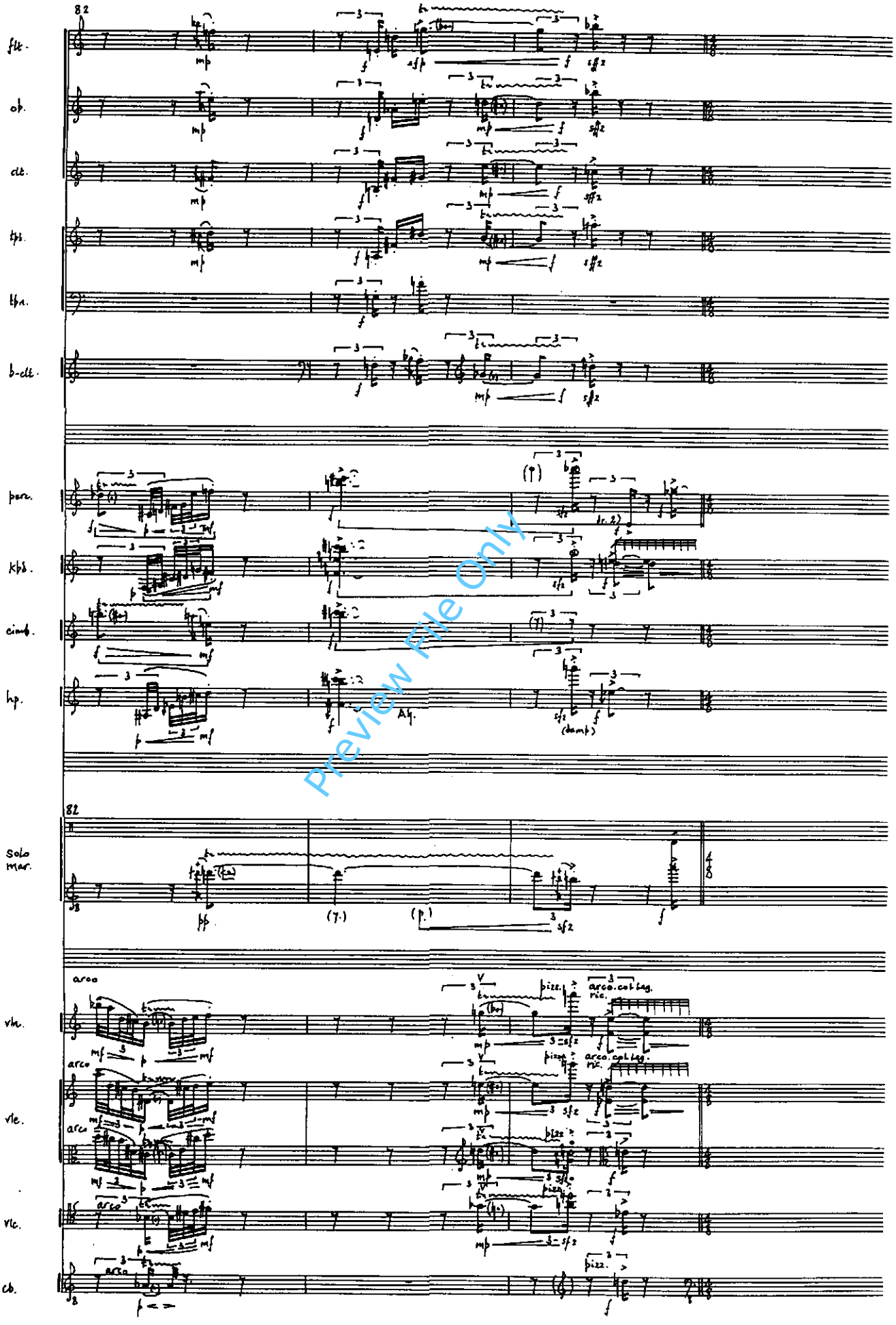

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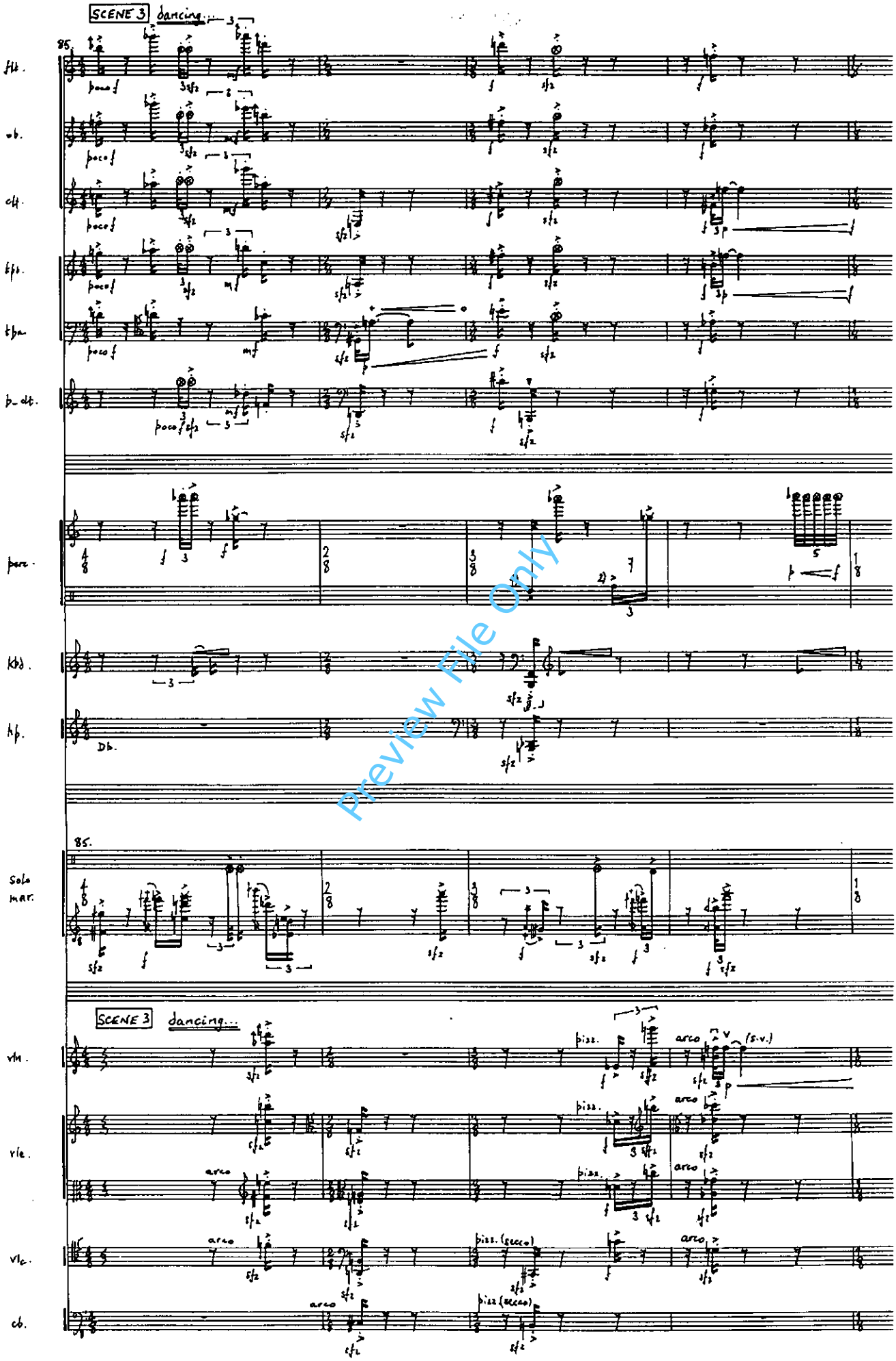

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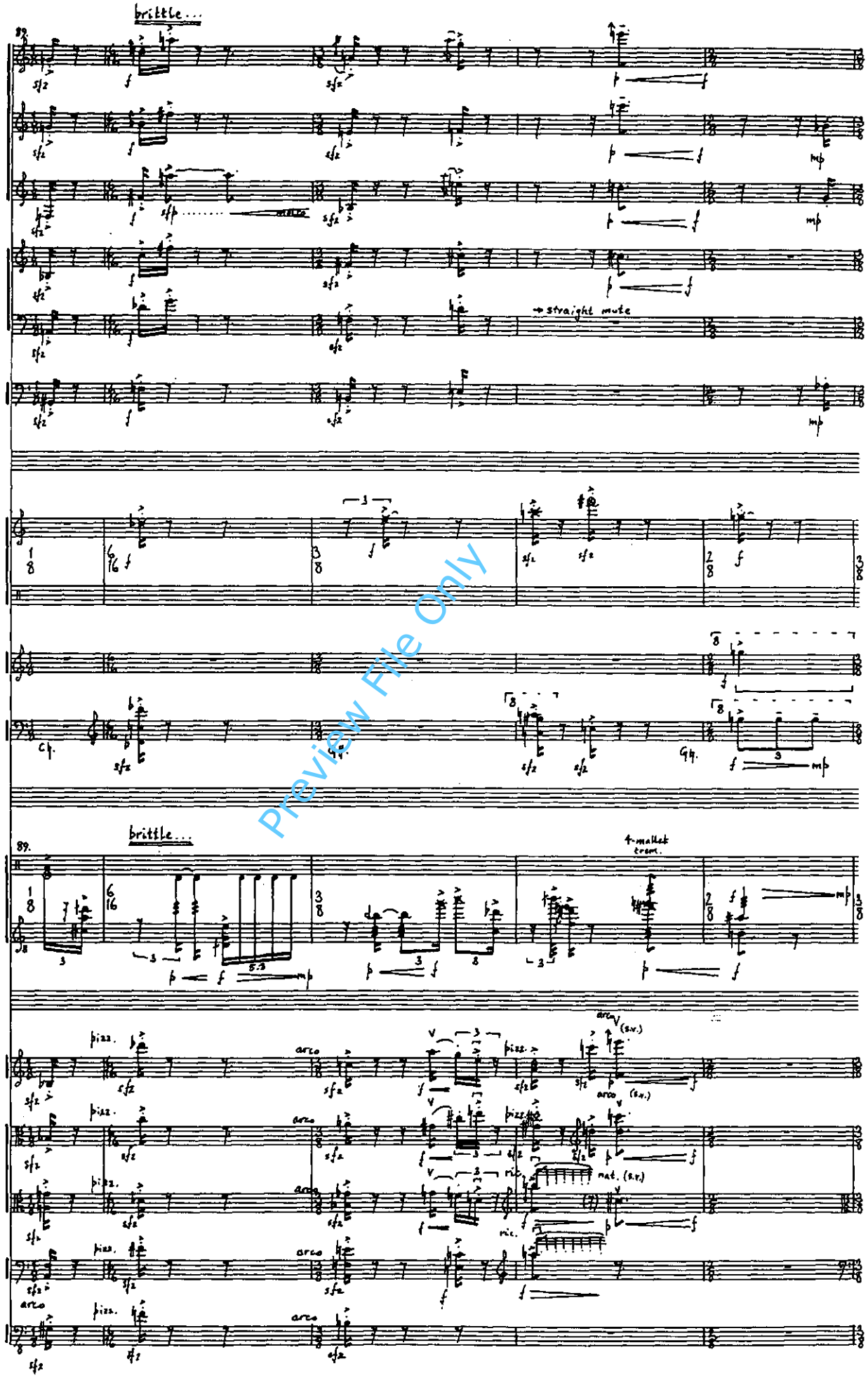

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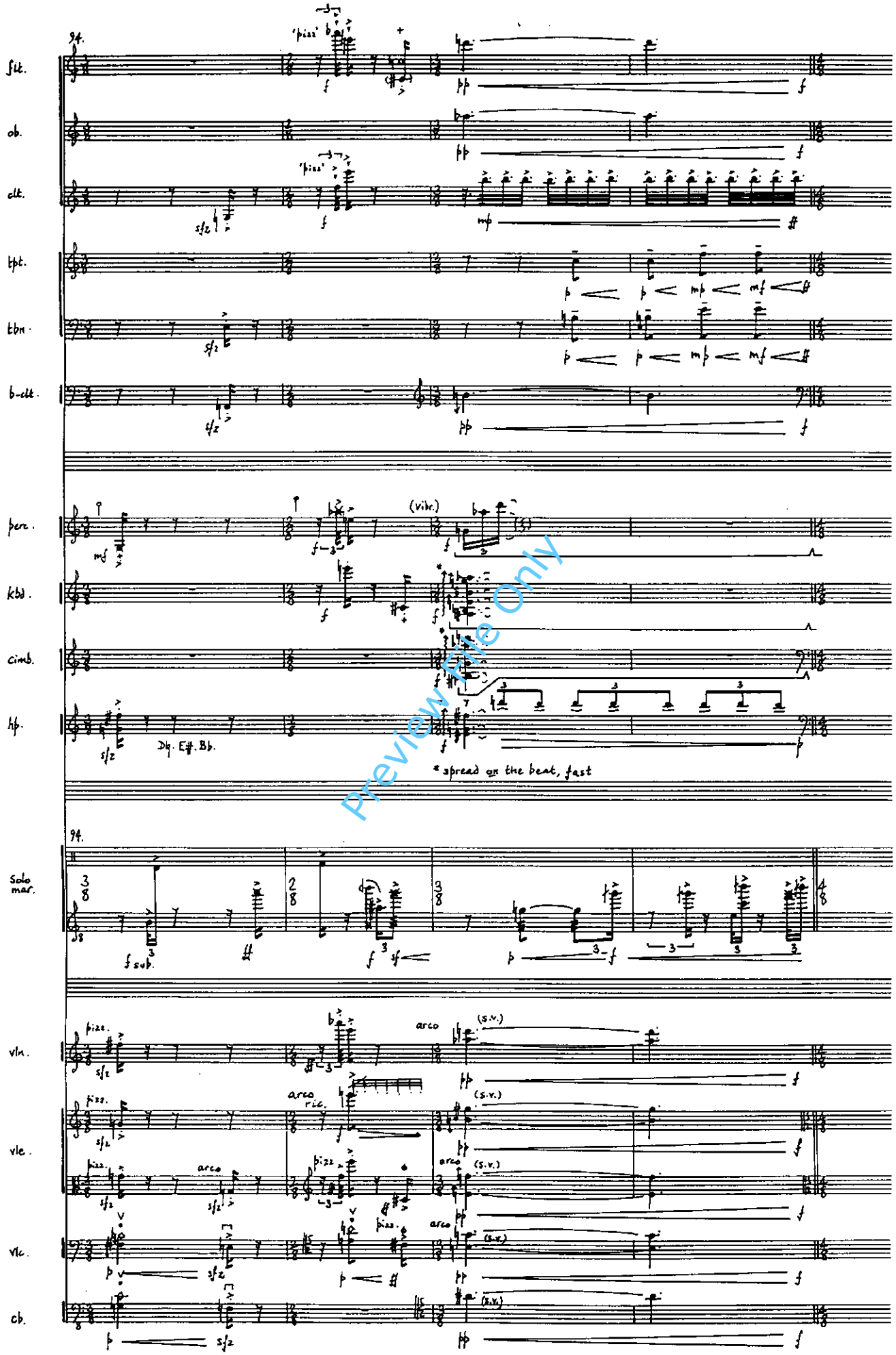

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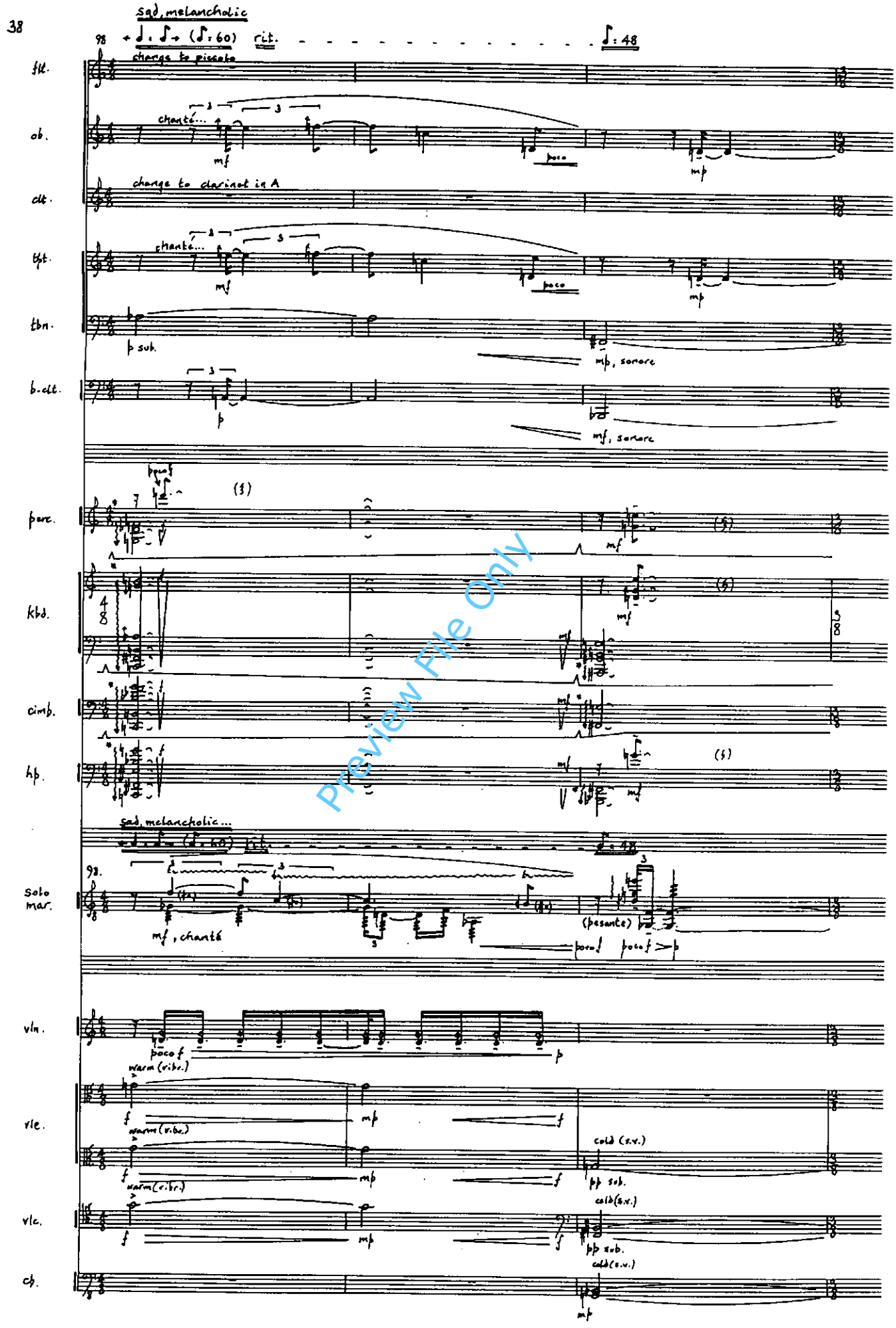

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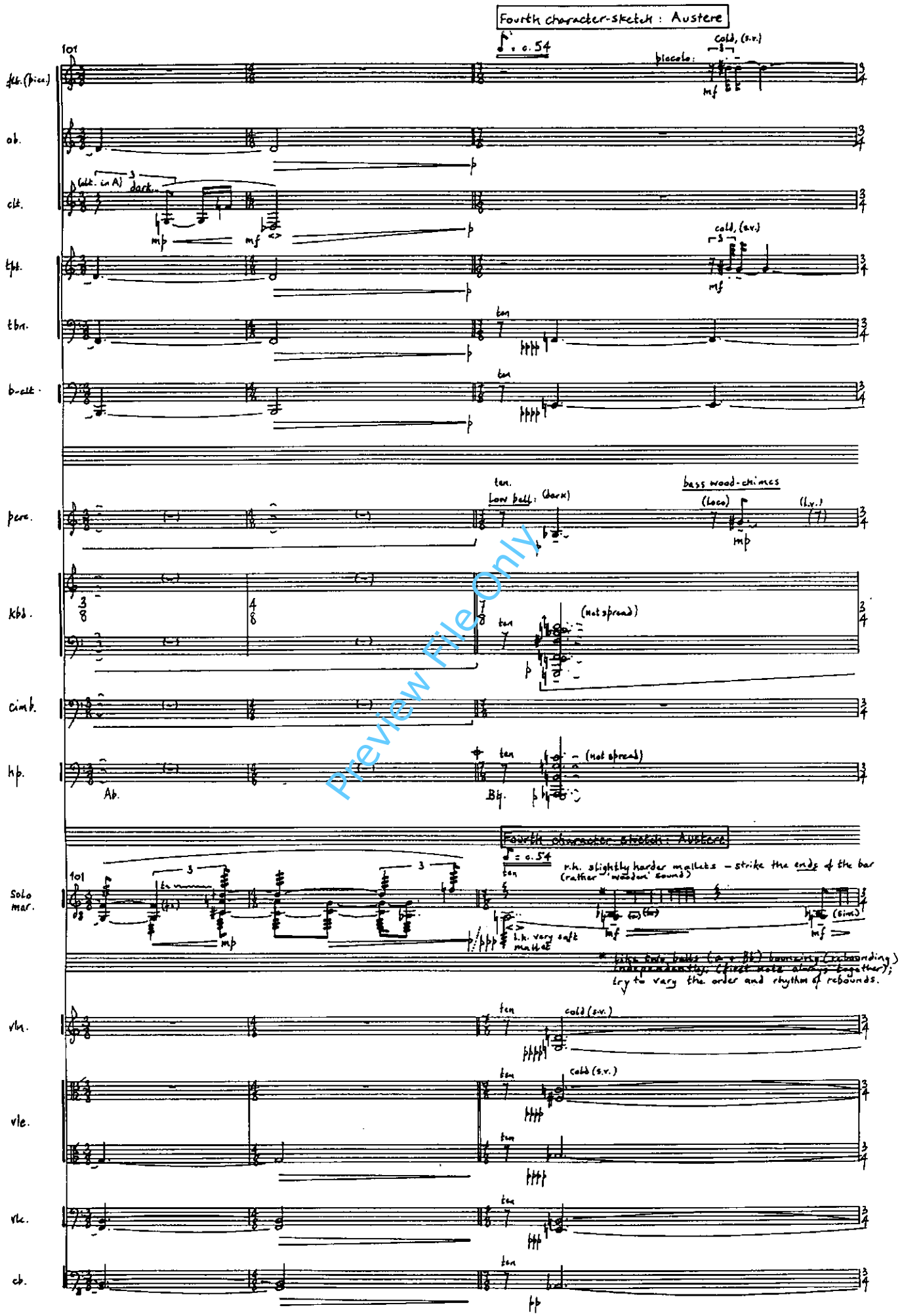

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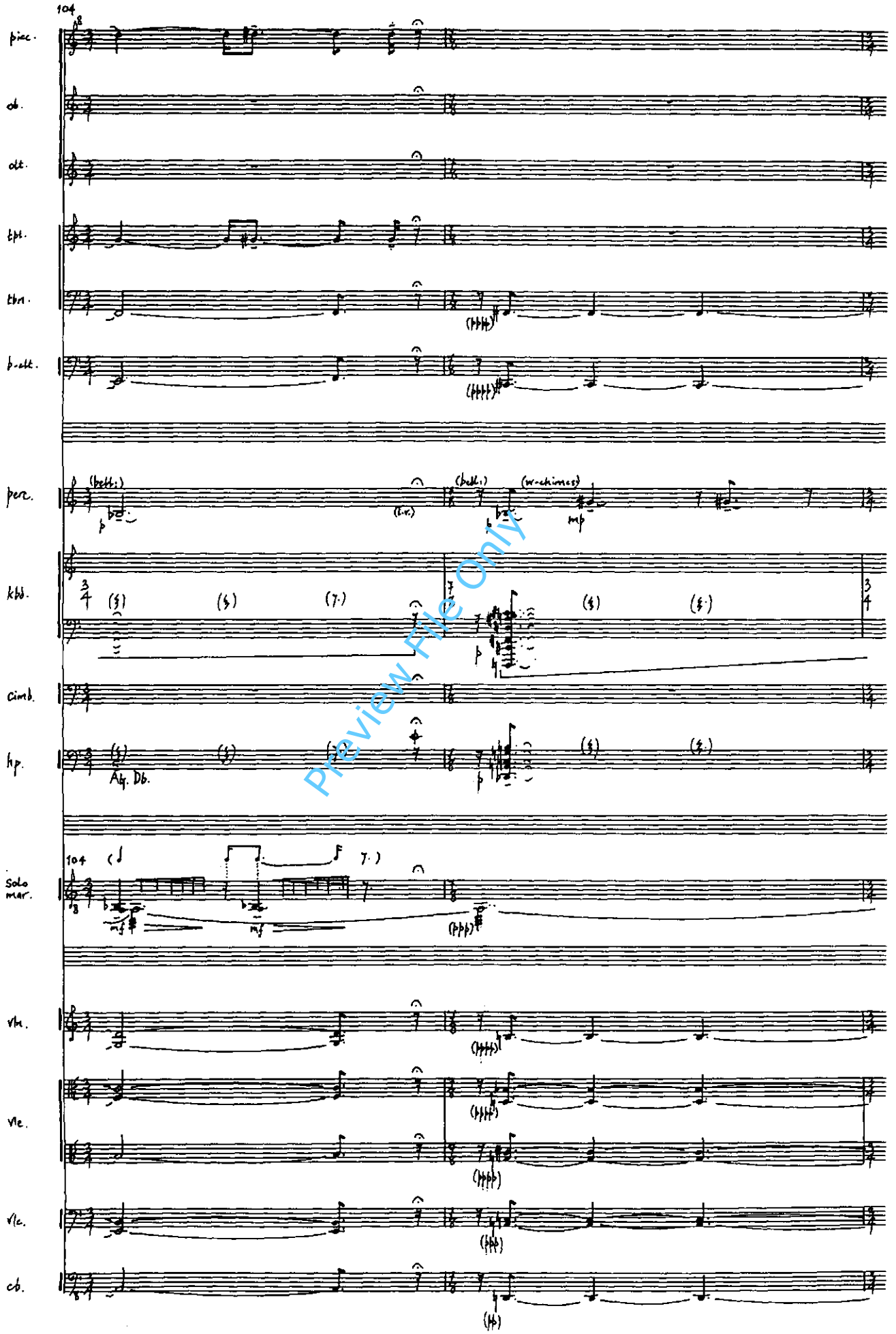

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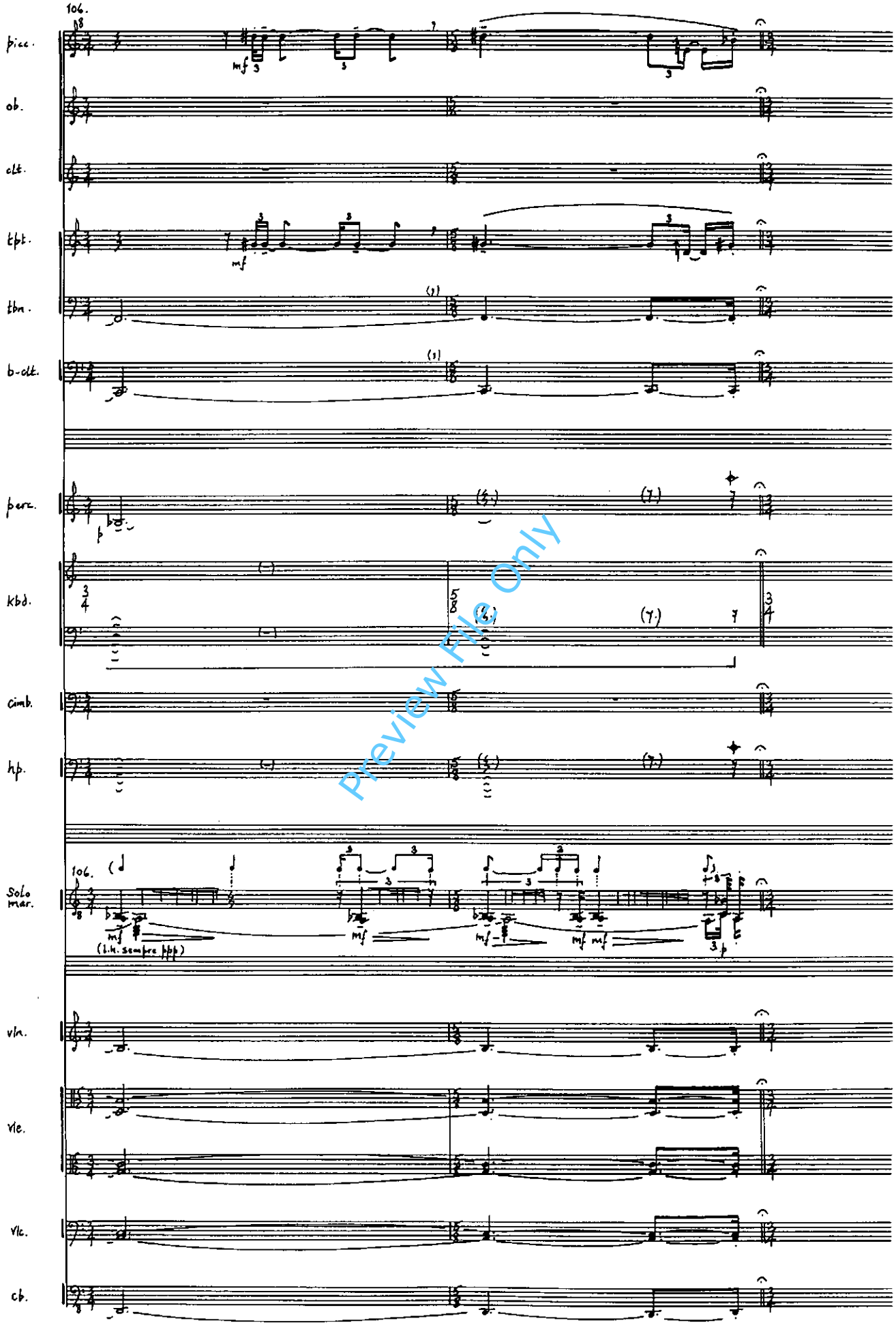

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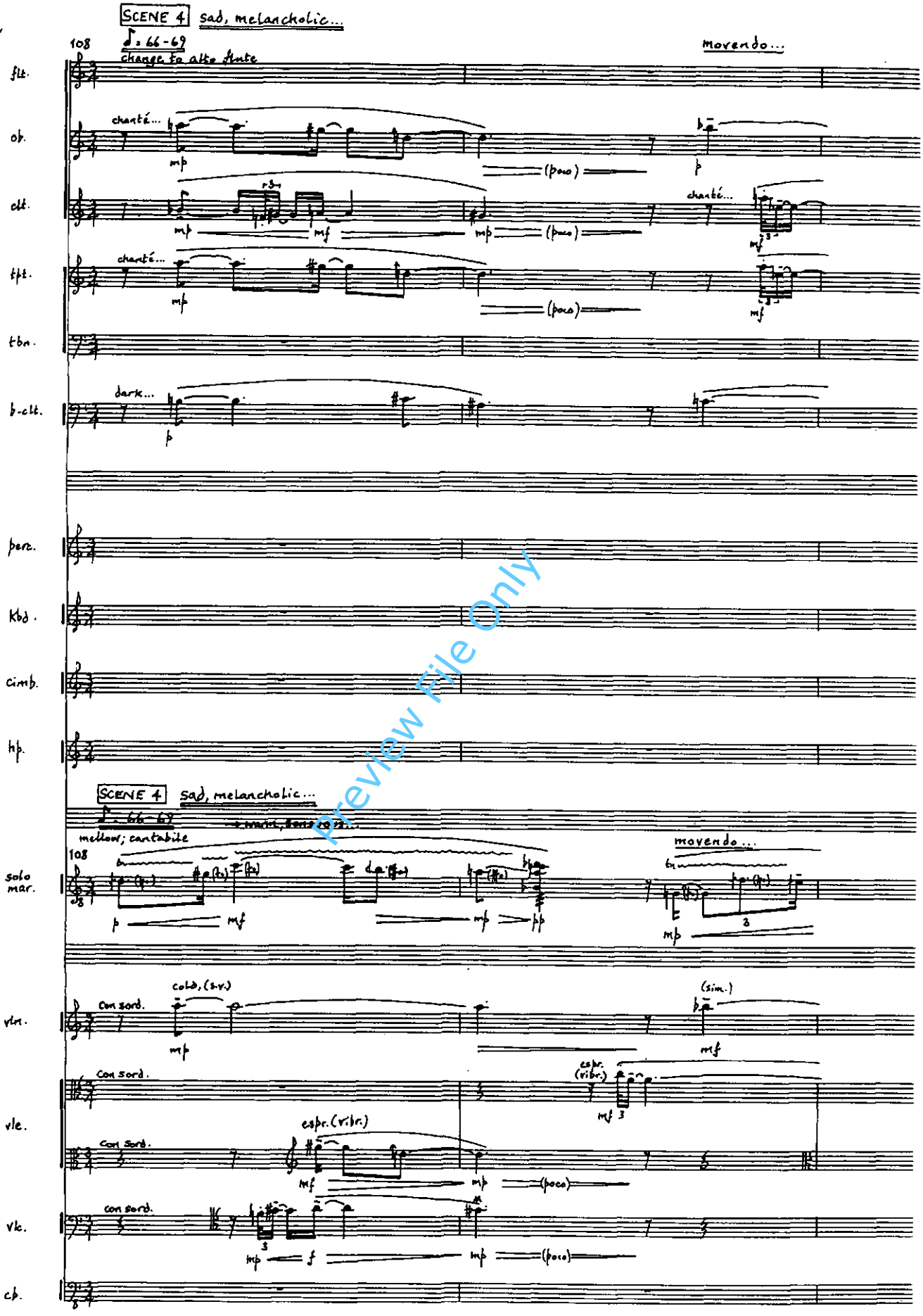

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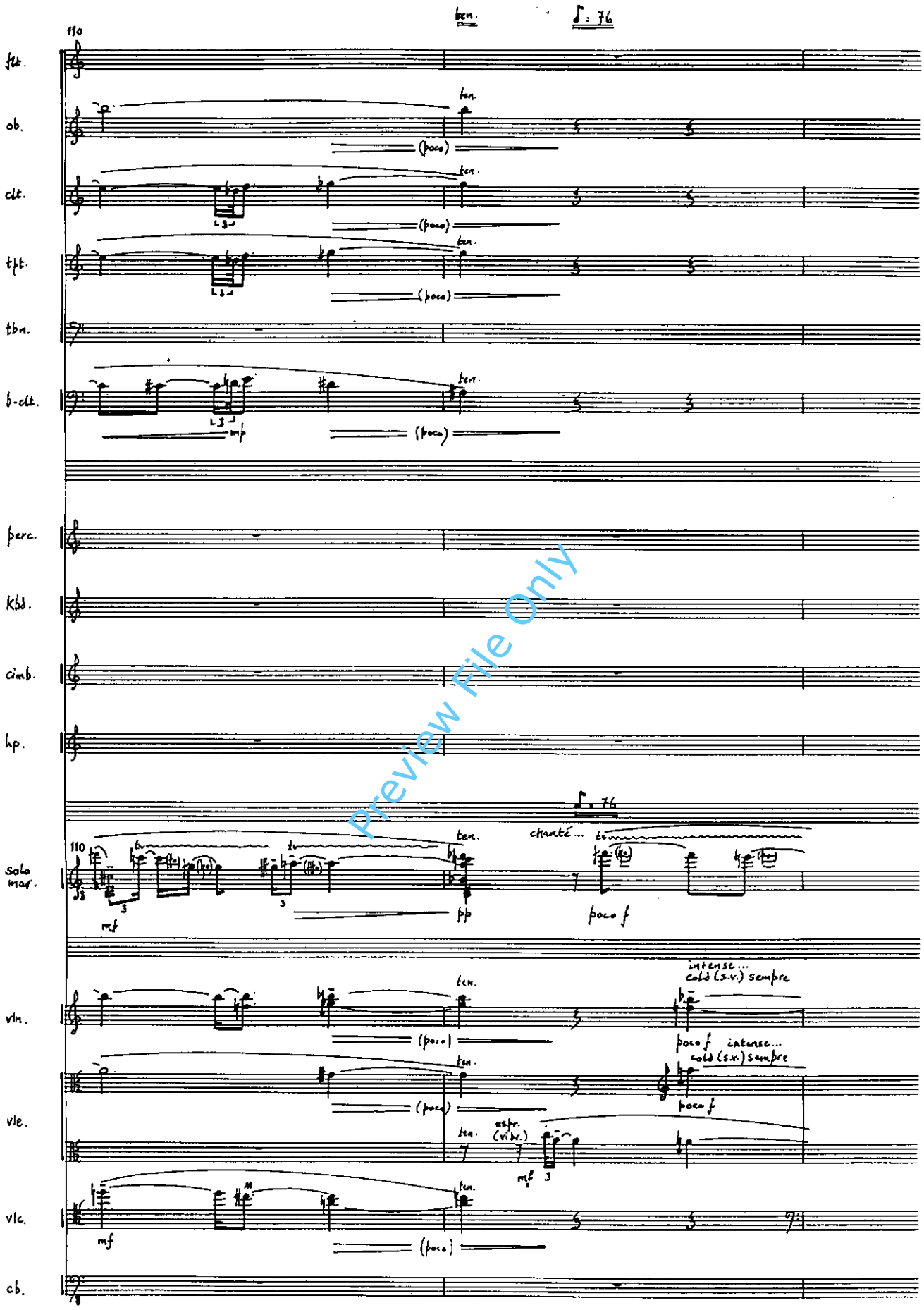

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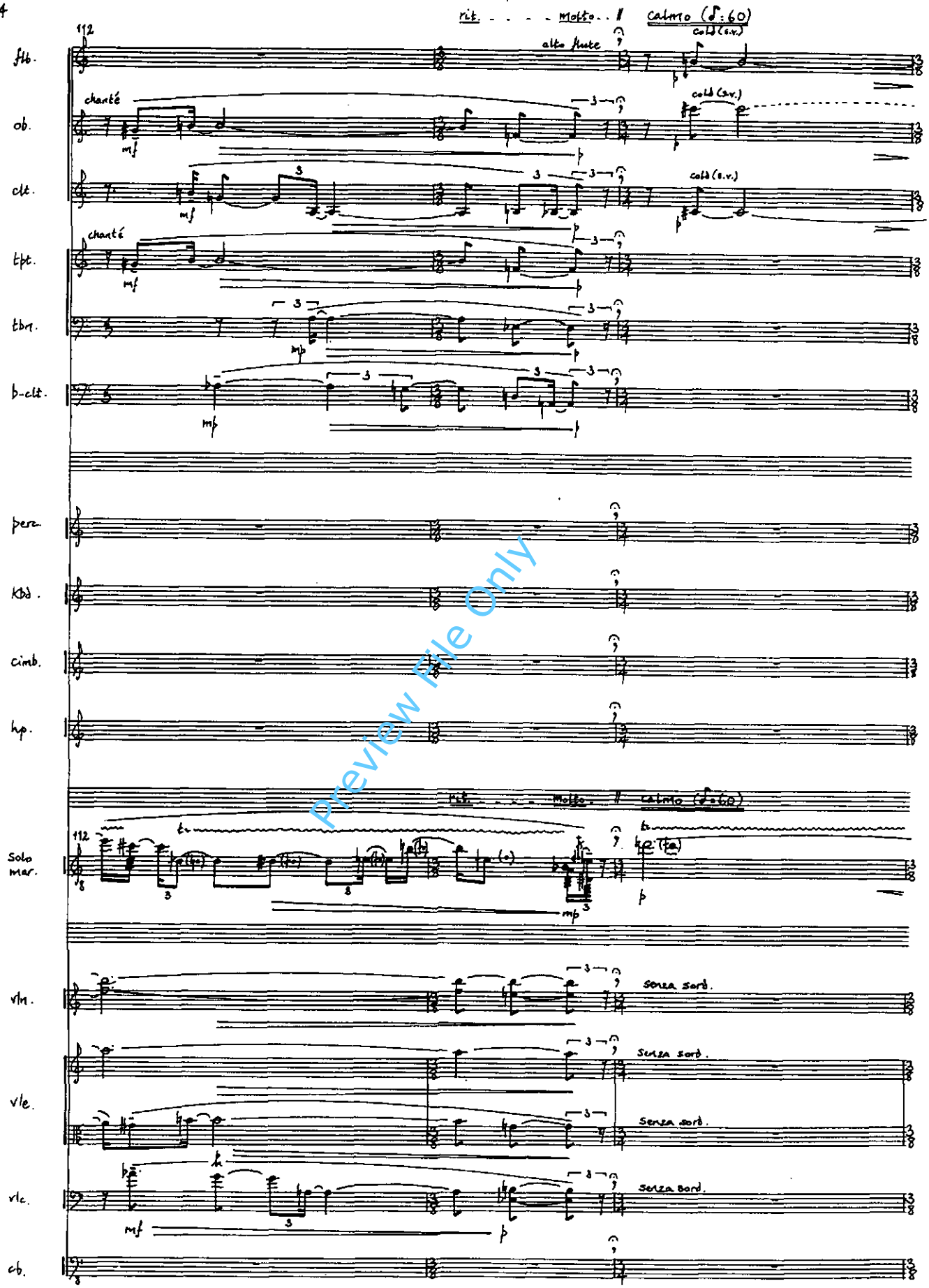

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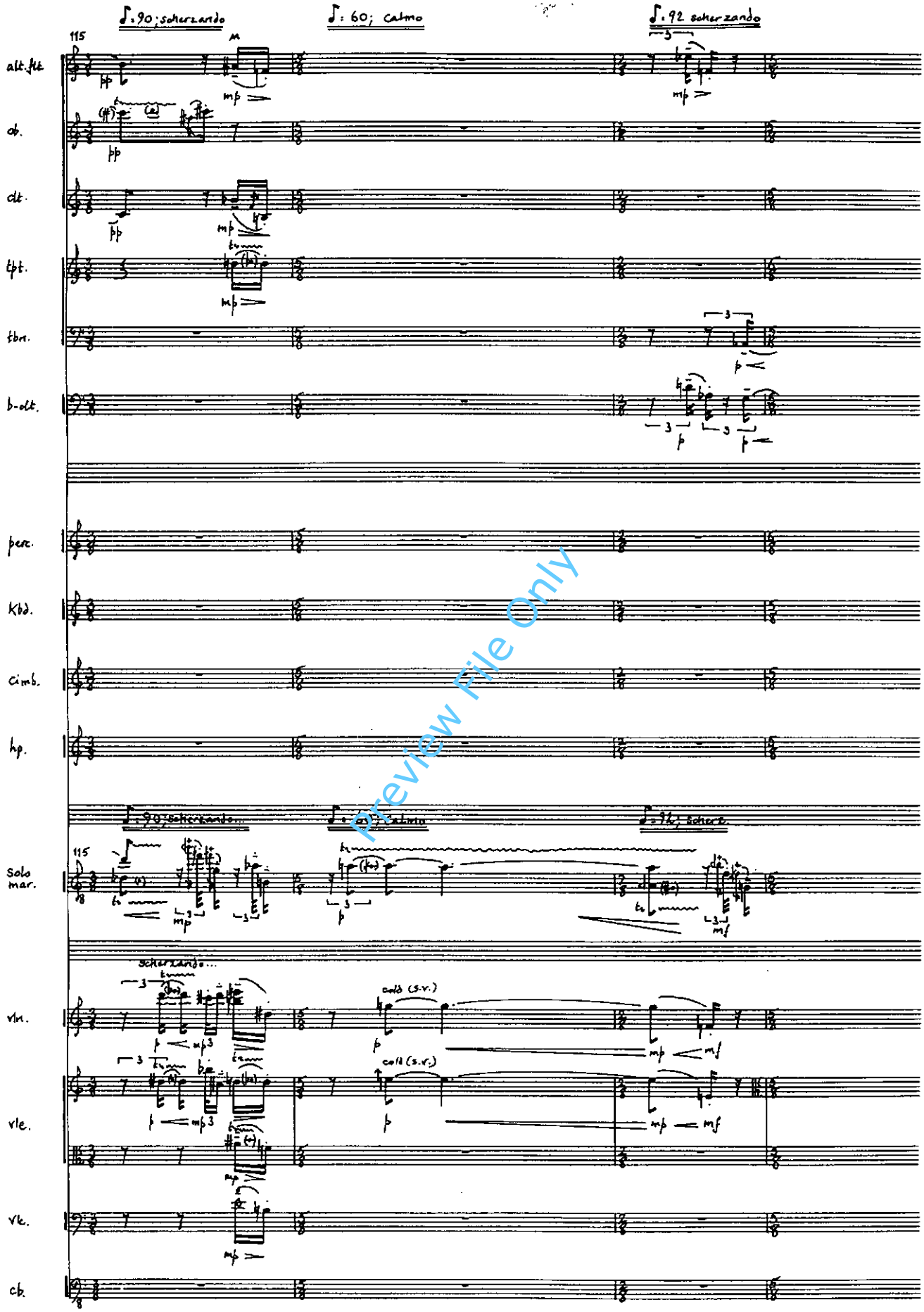
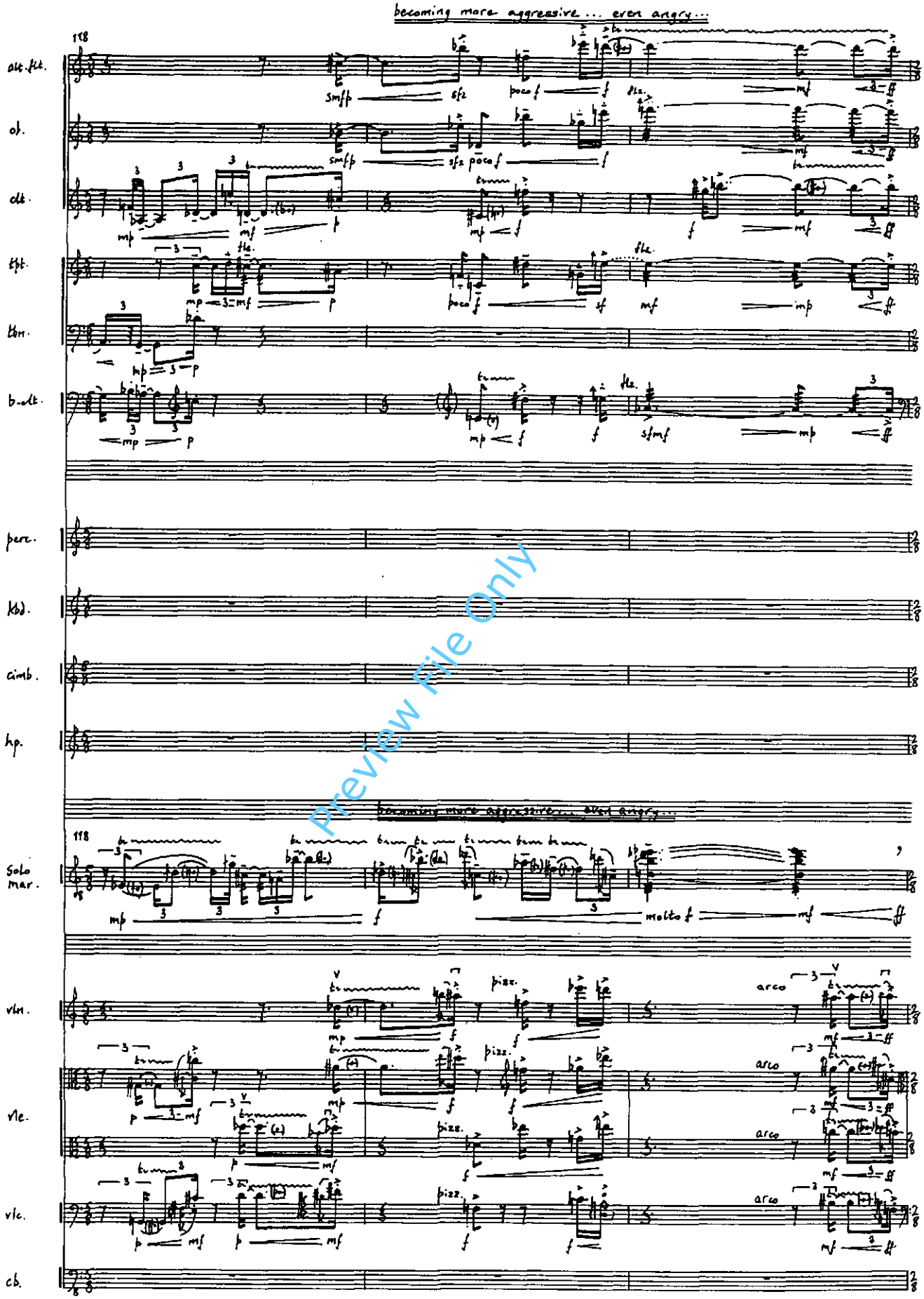

♩.90; scherzando
♩: 60; calmo
♩.92 scherzando
115
M
alt.flt.
ob.
clt.
tpt.
tbn.
b-clt.
perc.
Kbd.
cimb.
hp.
Solo mar.
scherzando...
vln.
vle.
vlc.
cb.
preview File Only



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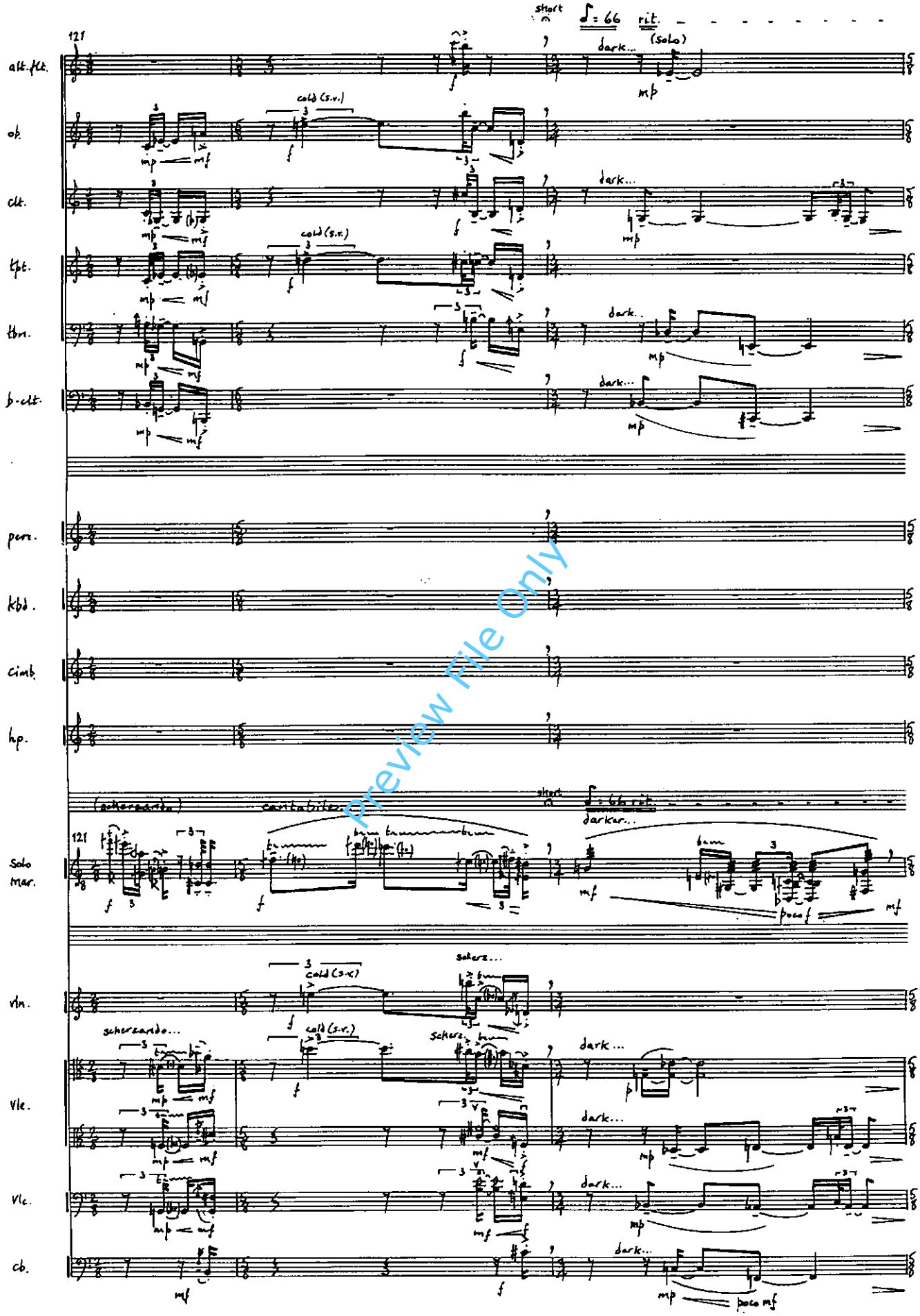

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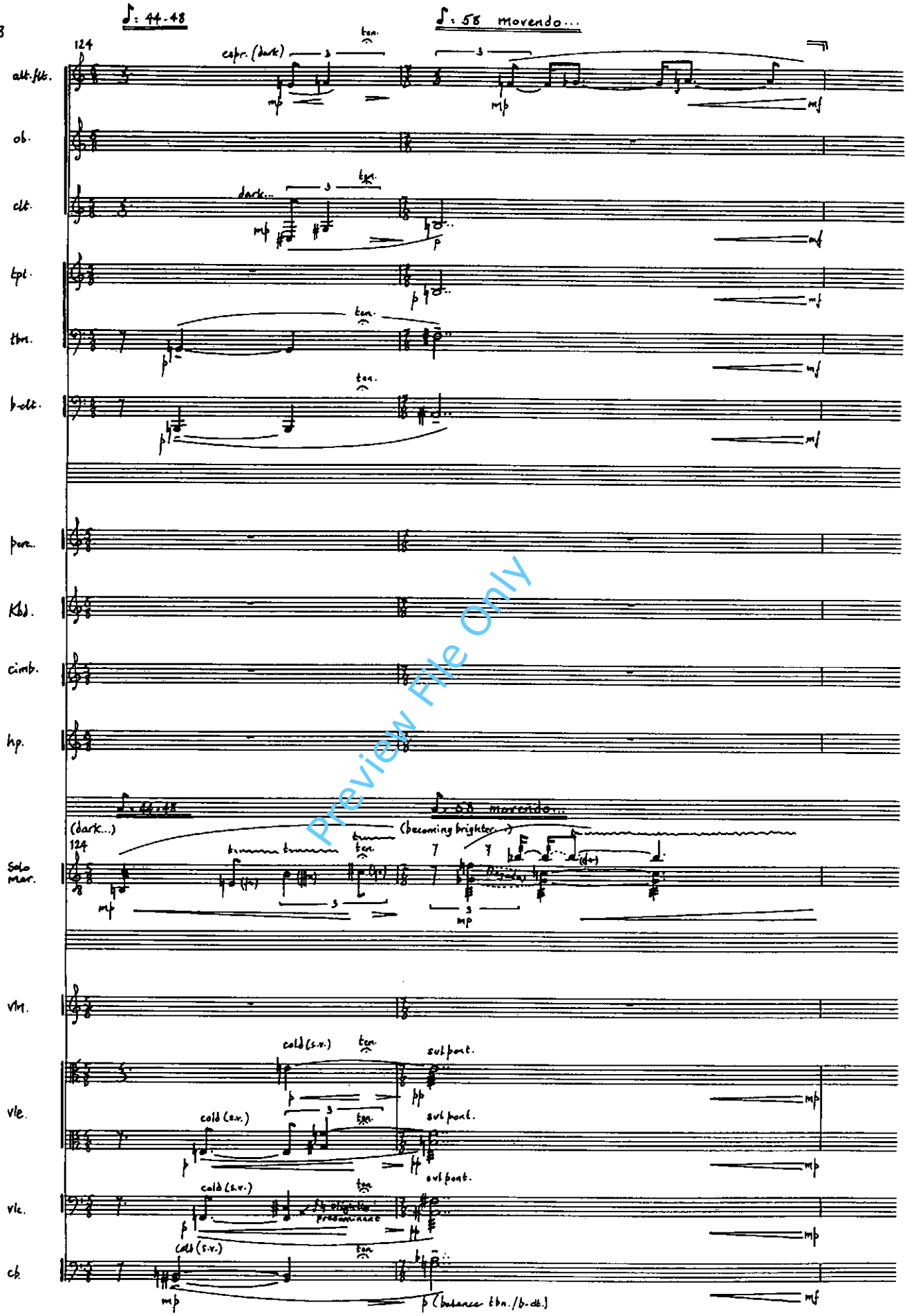

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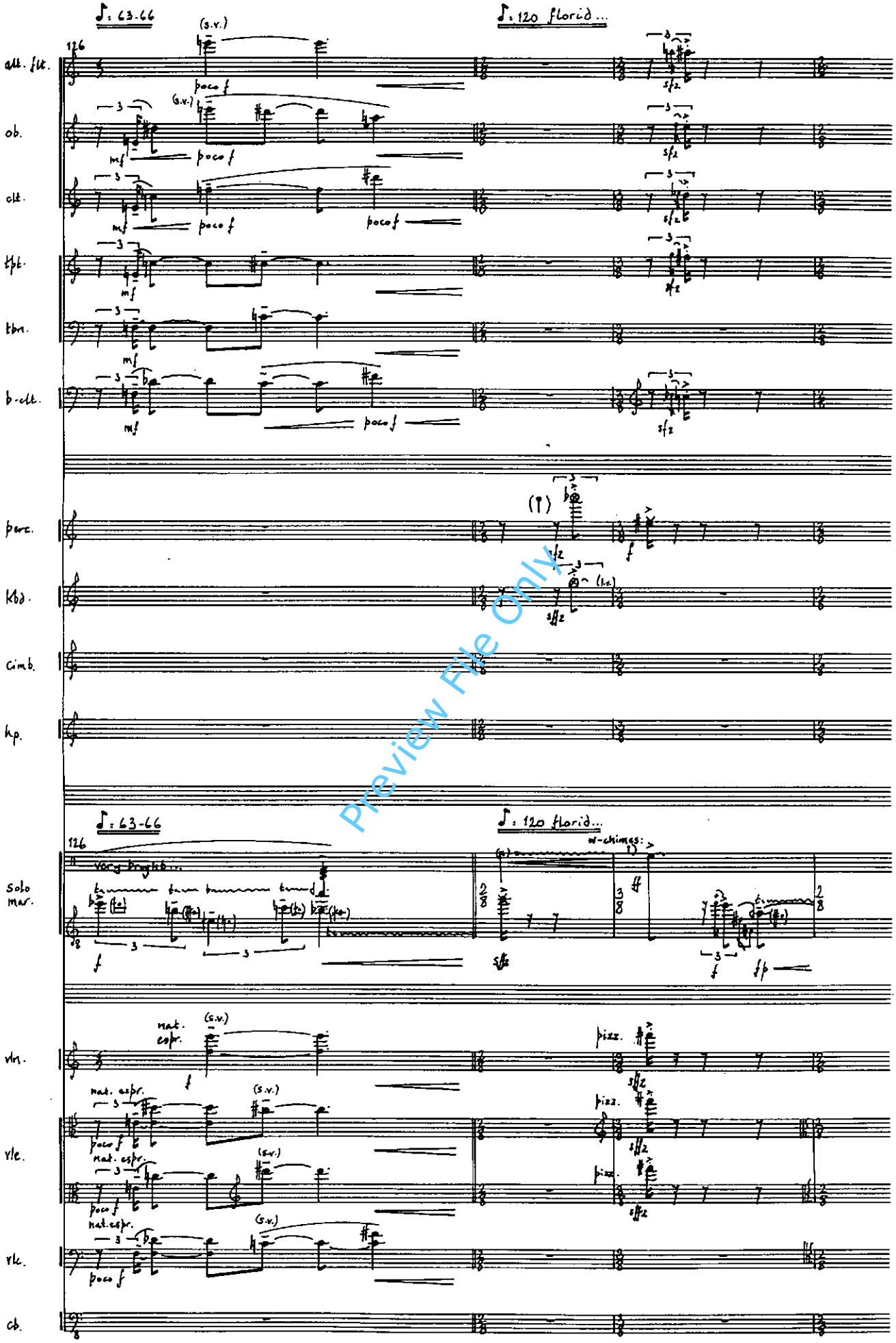

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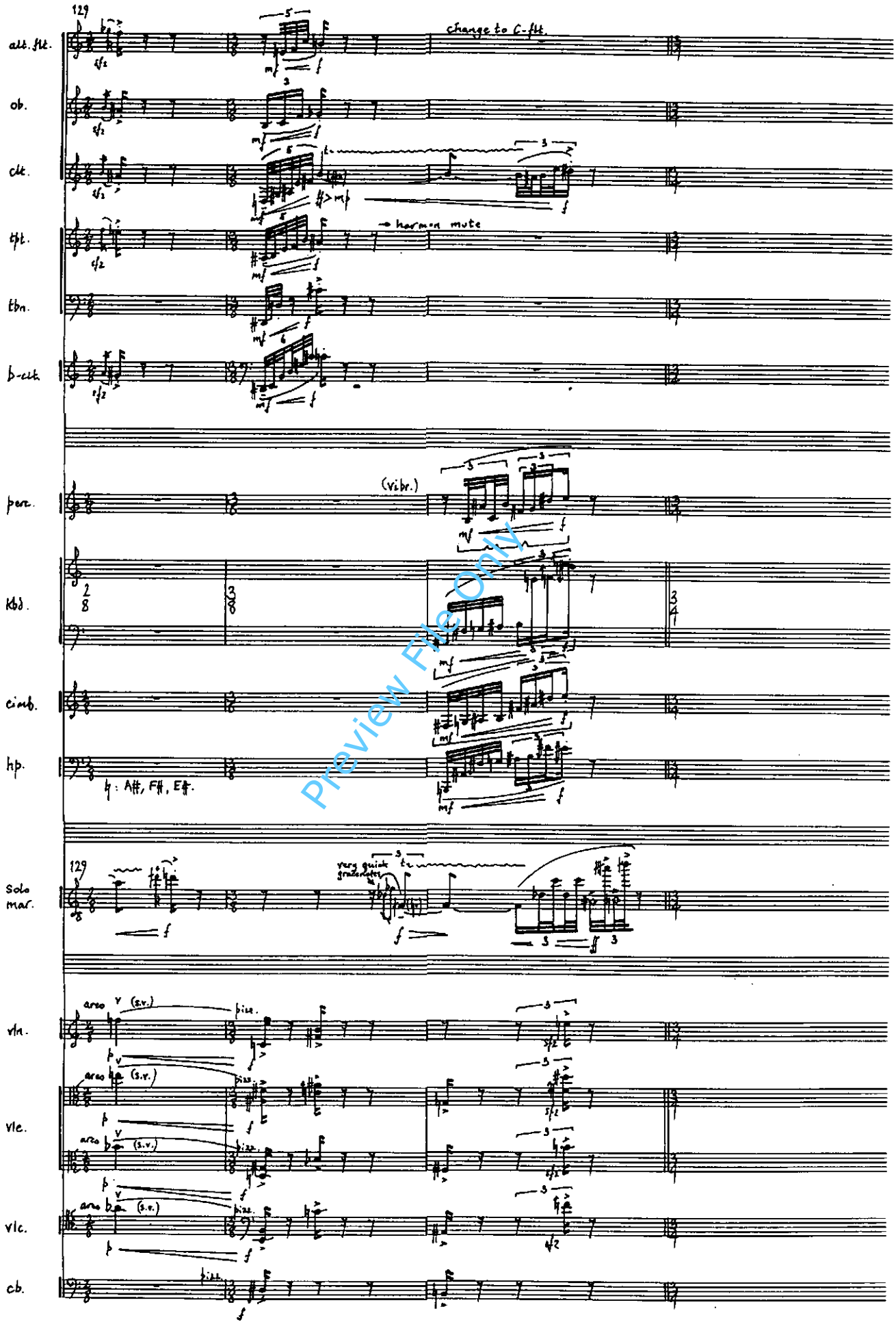

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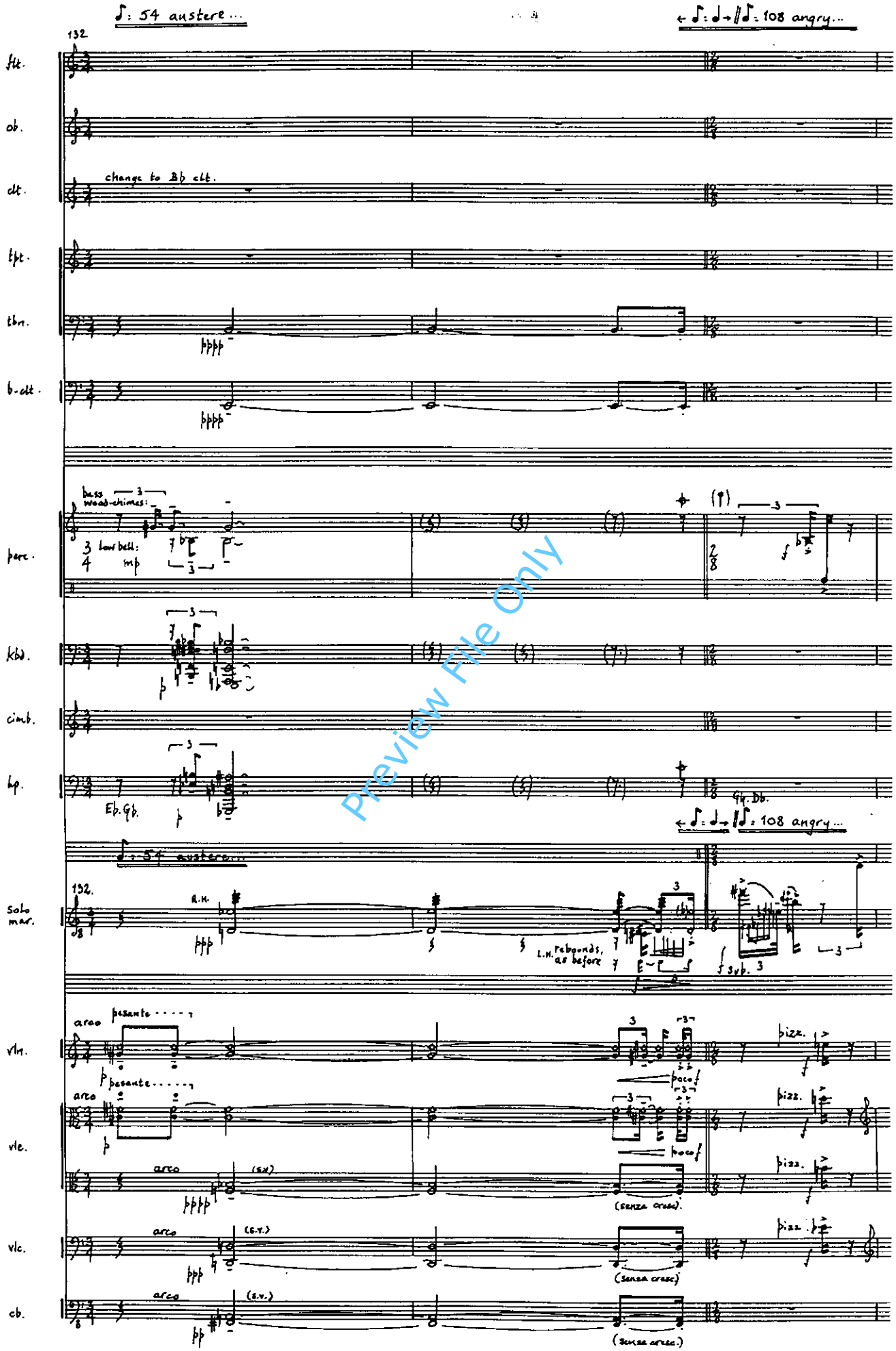

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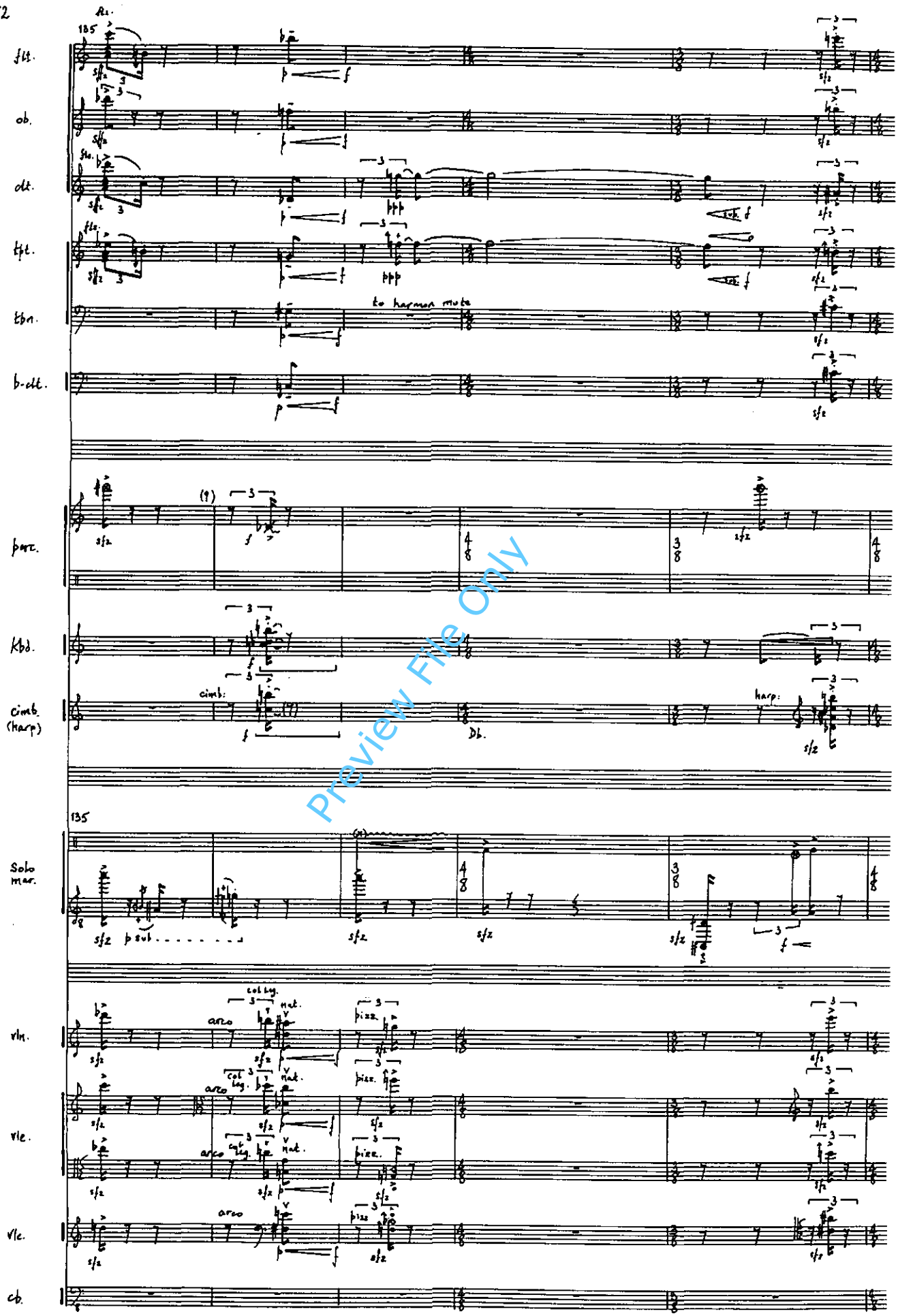

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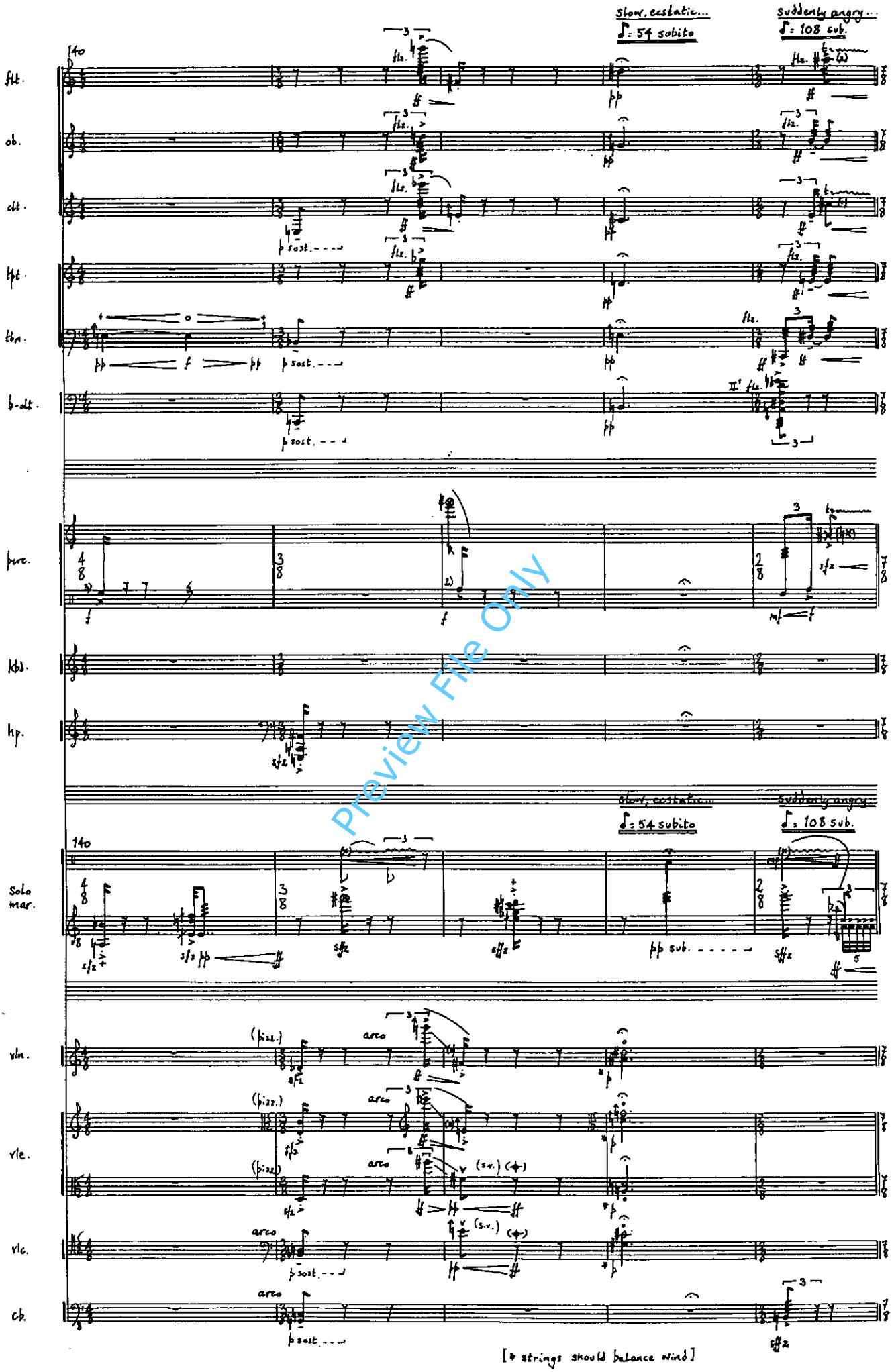

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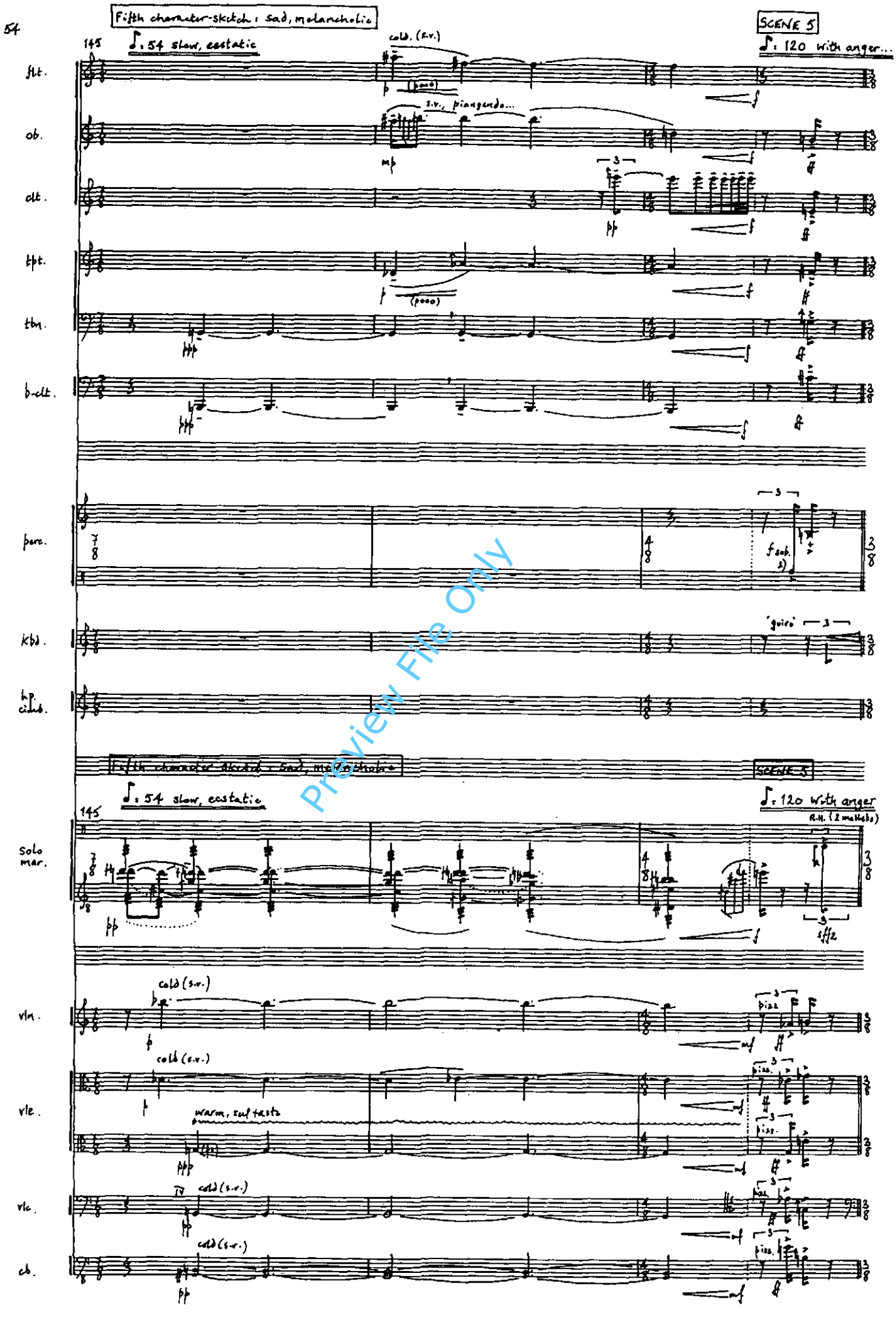

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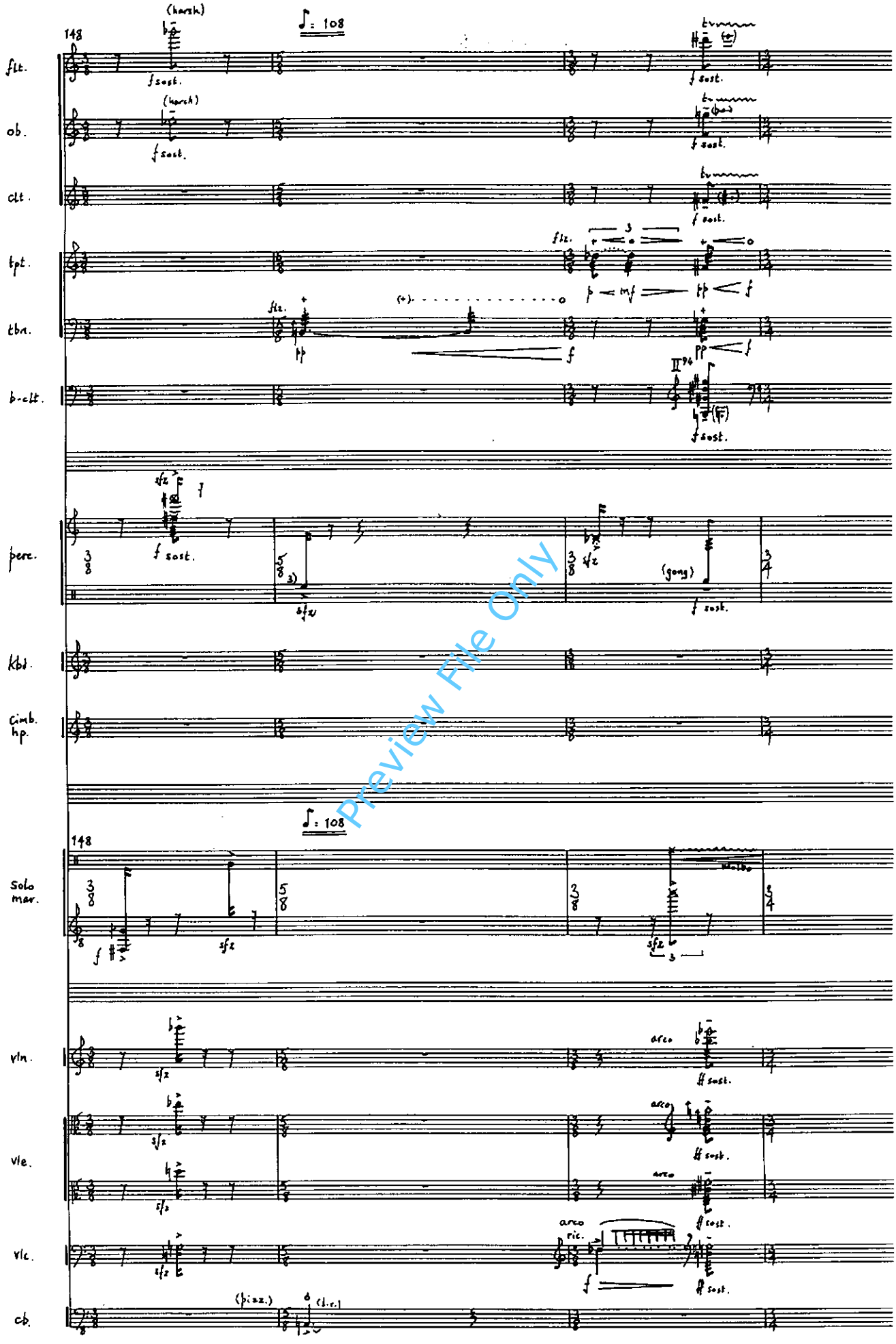

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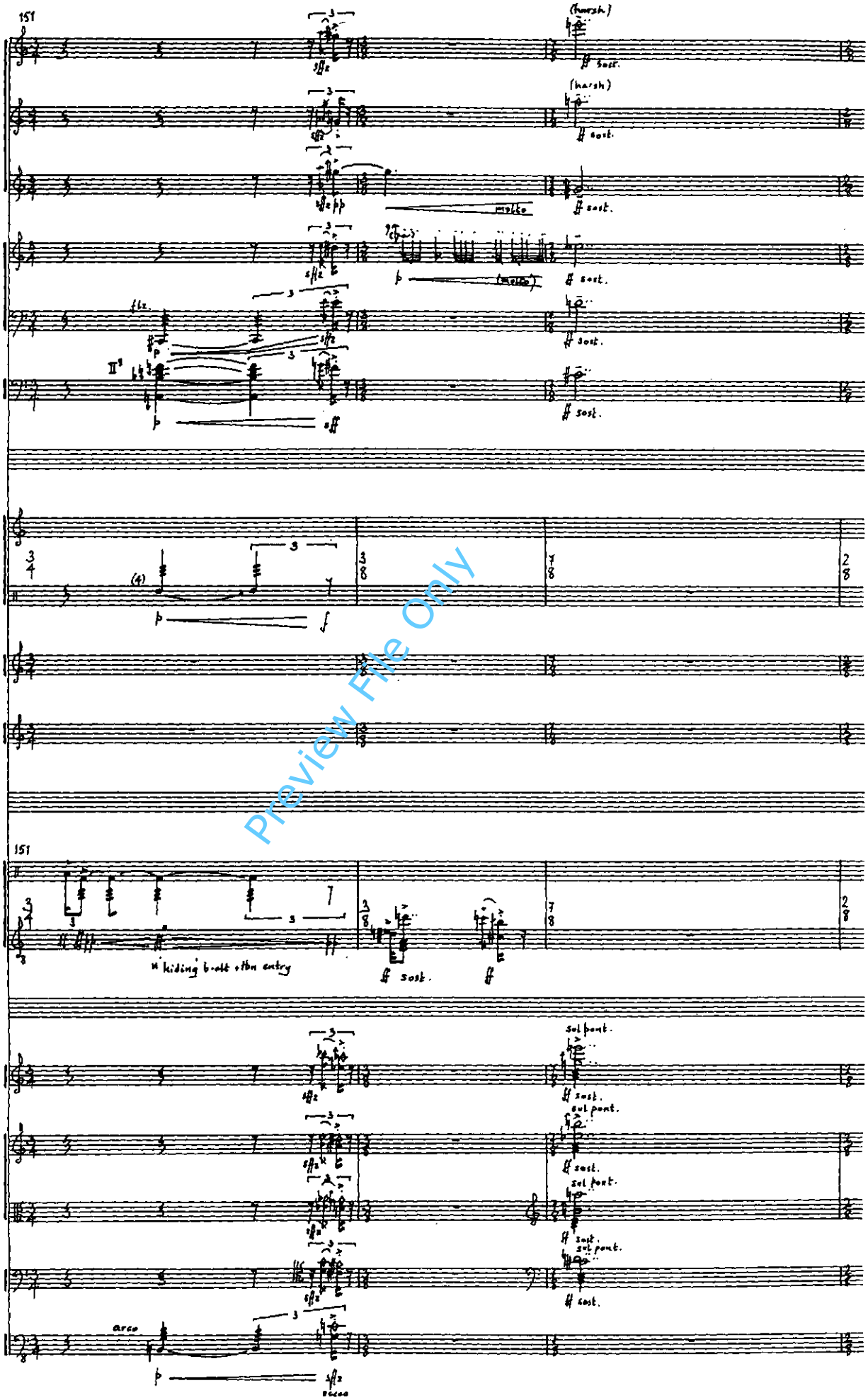

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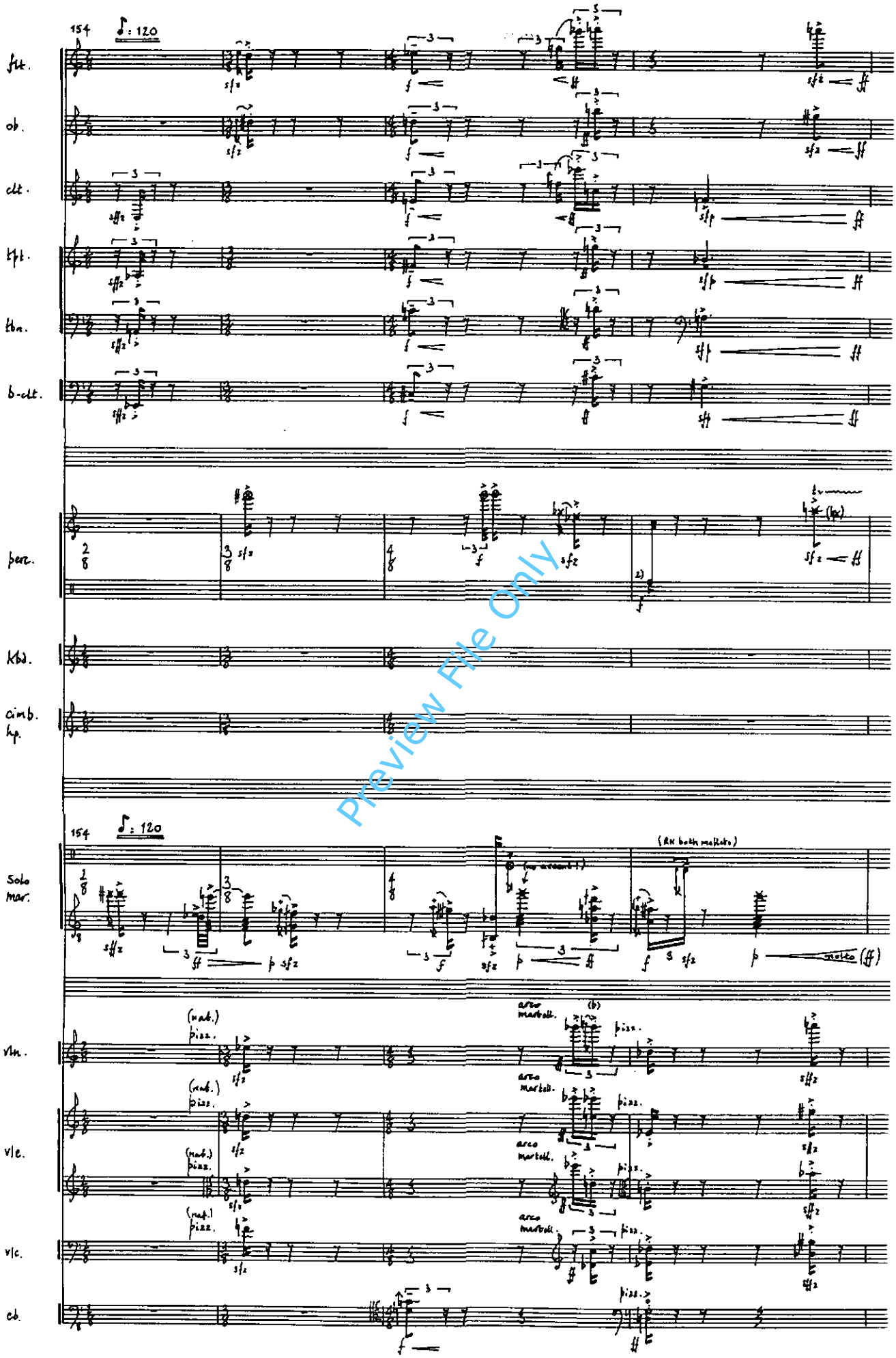

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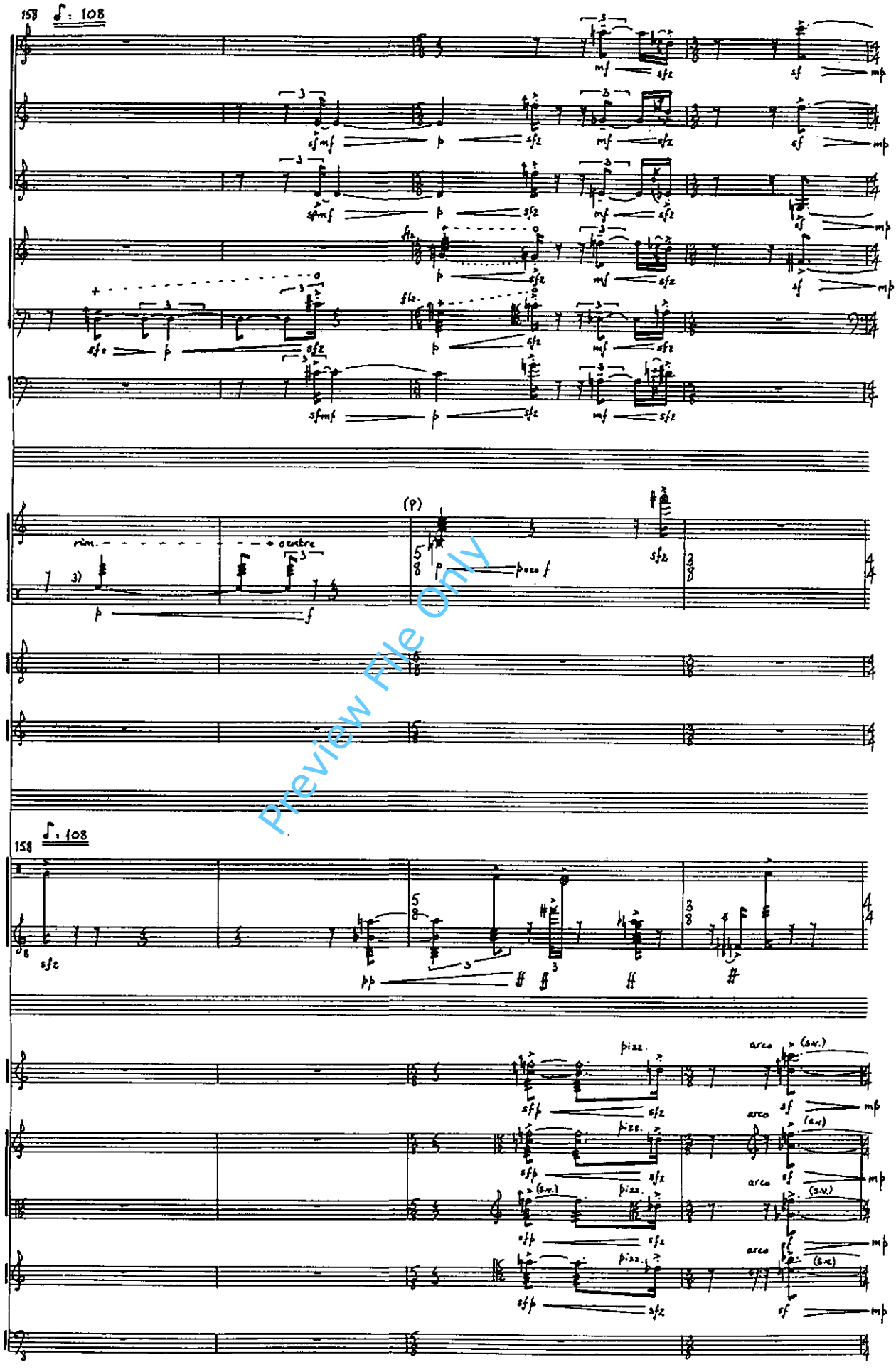

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