Simon Emmerson

PIANO PIECE IV

1965

for piano and tape

Preview File Only

for Philip Mead

SIMON EMMERSON

PIANO PIECE IV

(Amplified piano and tape)

Circuit

The piano must be very carefully amplified (with at least three microphones) to maximise the projection of the sympathetic resonances of those strings held undamped (qv.). The tape consists largely of electronically re-created and sustained resonances and is to be projected at a relatively low level, integrated (though not necessarily mixed into the same loudspeakers) with the live amplified piano sounds. Ideally the tape and live resonances should match, although in practice the tape usually dominates.

The piano part

At any give moment, six strings are held undamped. This is achieved either by the use of the third pedal or by the use of piano tuning wedges pushed between the key and the piano superstructure (the keyboard lid) to keep the key depressed. (Such pitches are, of course, omitted from the piano part.)

(In fact, the tuning wedges commercially available should be cut in half lengthways to make them narrower than the width of a black key. In addition a small section of the 'sharp' end should be cut off for more effective and stable insertion.)

The notes to be undamped by either method are indicated in boxes either as chords (for the third pedal - to be depressed totally silently! - marked '3P') or as wedge changes (the arrow giving the change from the previous to the next key to be wedged - marked 'We') - except at the opening where the initial hexachord is given.

The score is notated in space-time notation. The duration of notes is indicated in two ways. The 'extension' added to a note head is within the space-time frame given: it indicates key depression time, the actual duration being determined as much by the pedal indication. In addition grace note groups are to be interpreted 'as fast as possible given clear articulation'. As to their position in time, two criteria hold. Firstly, attached to a non-grace-note with extension, it is this last which must be correct in time, the grace-note group acting acting outside the space-time notation as 'upbeat'. Secondly, if unattached and isolated, the grace-note group is played with its first attack correctly positioned in time.

The exact coordination of tape and live performance is not usually critical, but sometimes the tape acts as upbeat to the live. This is indicated in the score and may override the inevitable slight discrepency between stopwatch and tape.

The tape part is notated very simply. The pitches are accurate at onset but subsequent 'retuning' is not indicated. A pitch with an arrow attached means simply that it is sustained until subsequently indicated. At the start of every line an indication of the pitches sustained at that moment is given bounded by a square bracket. If an event occurs at the start of the line this is given just to the right. Fades of pitches *al niente* are indicated.

PROGRAMME NOTE

Piano Piece IV continues a series of works which seeks to explore the relation of resonance - as found in real instruments - to the development of harmony and harmonic motion.

A specific hexachord is transposed in turn onto the harmonic series of four fundamentals. The notes of the hexachord are held undamped (using a third pedal or tuning wedges) to allow continuous sympathetic resonance from an increasingly animated series of attack gestures, themselves based on the hexachord or its complement - a sort of 'overtone row'.

The tape part has a dual function, 'freezing' certain resonances to act as a harmonic backdrop to the work, and to 'retune' some of the pitches of the hexachord to true harmonic series values.

The work is an eight section 'cadence' on roots B flat, C, F, E flat, B flat.

The work was commissioned by Philip Mead with funds made available by Northern Arts. It was composed between March and May 1985 and the tape realised in the Electroacoustic Music Studio at City University, London.

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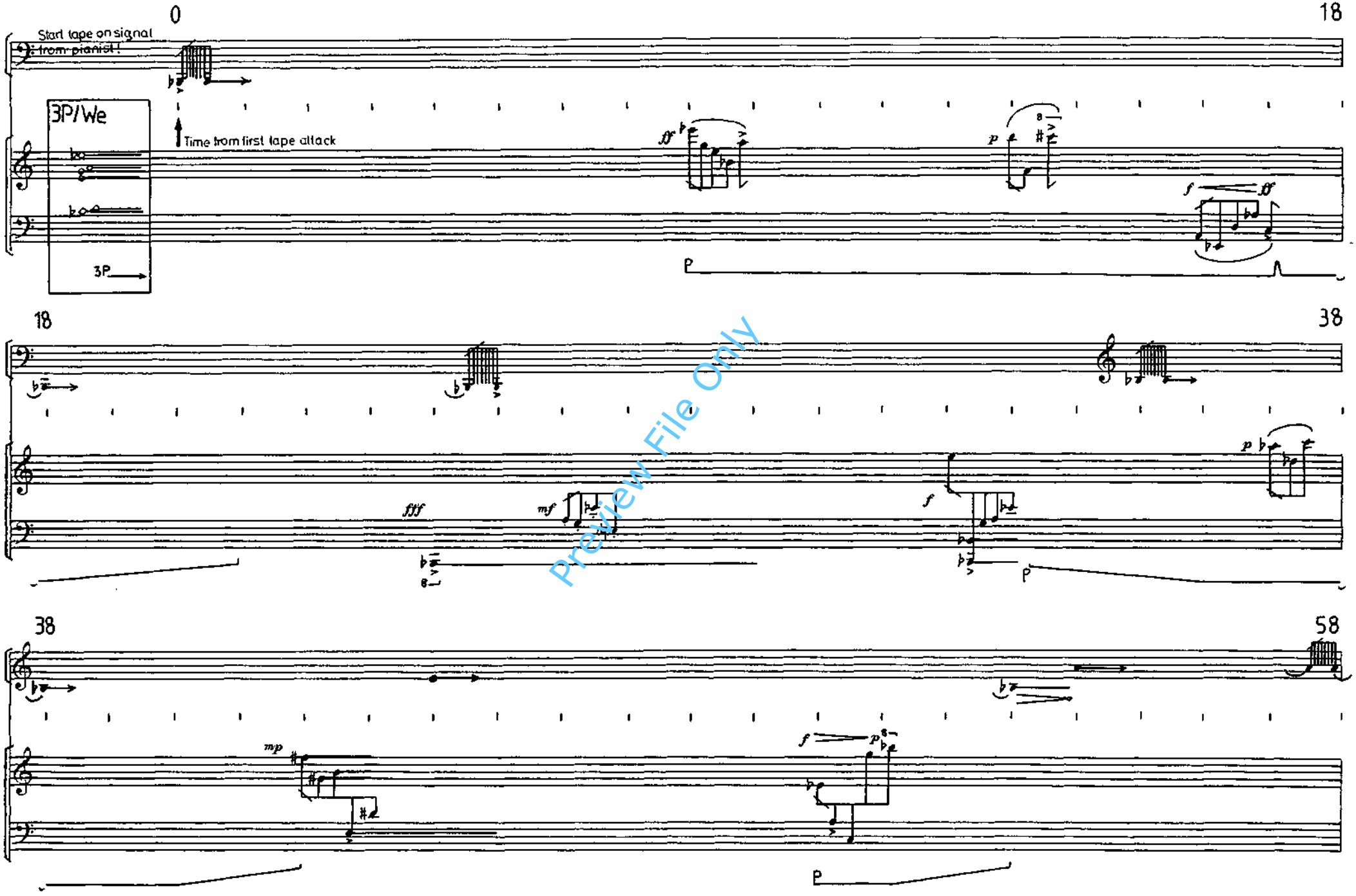

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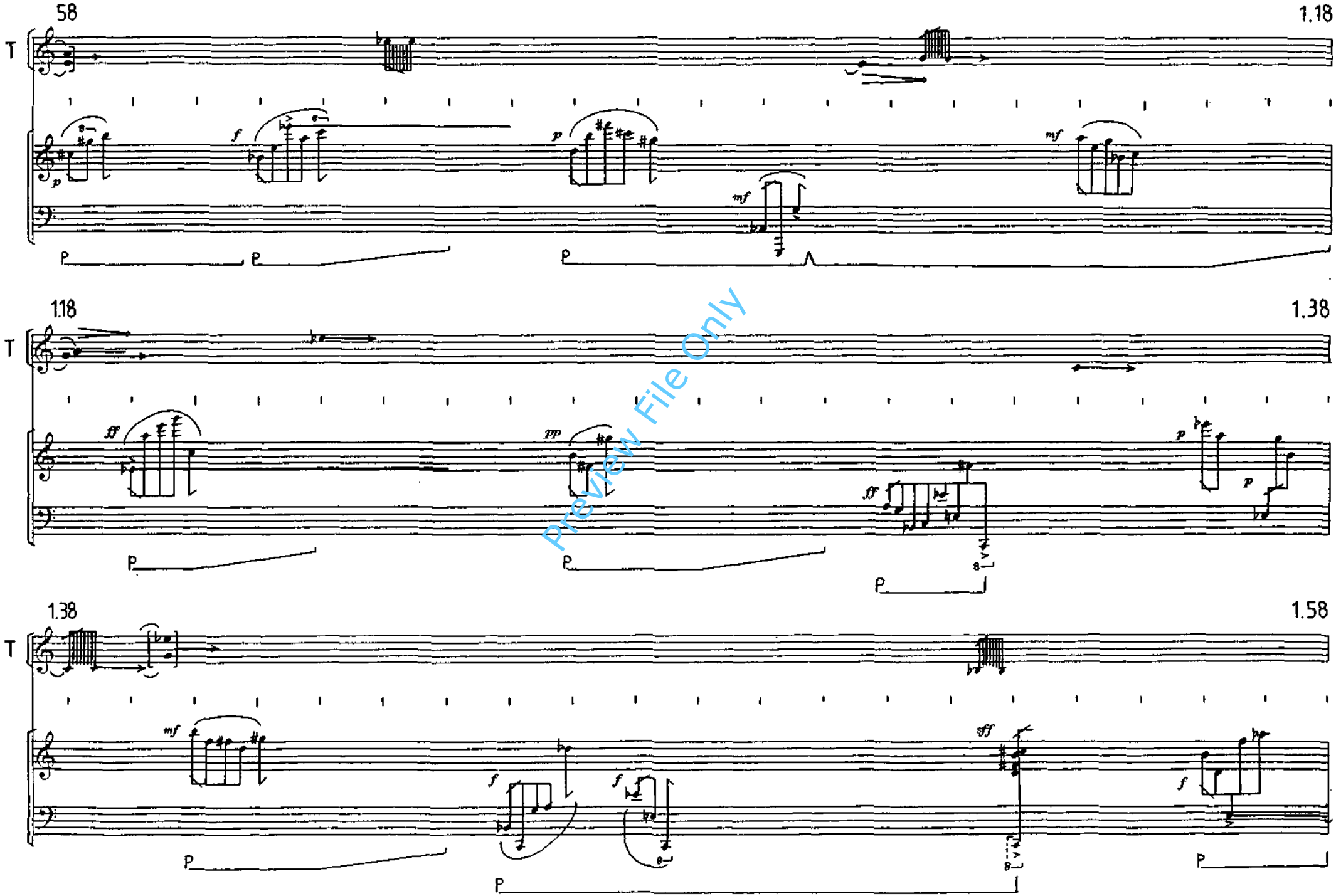
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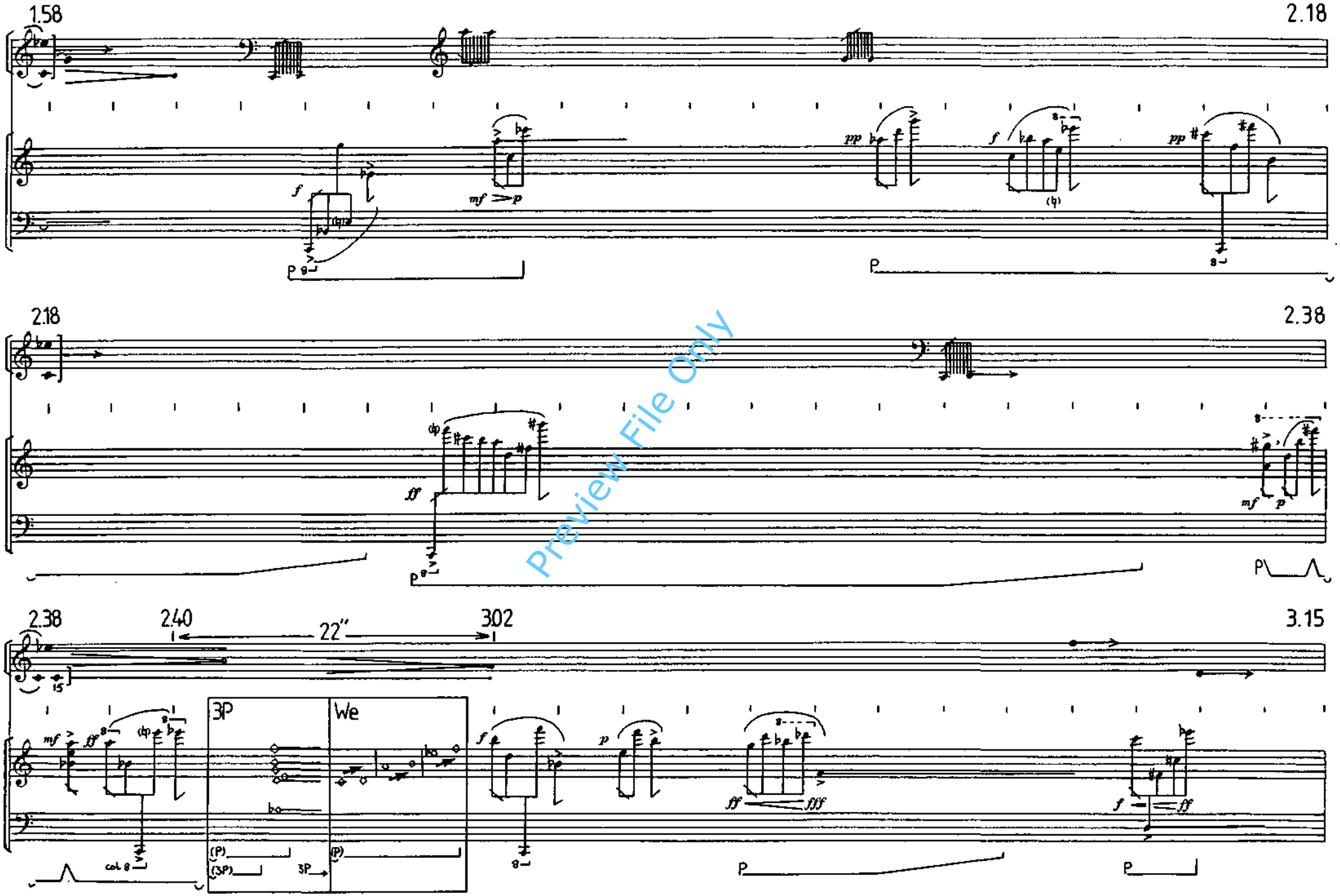

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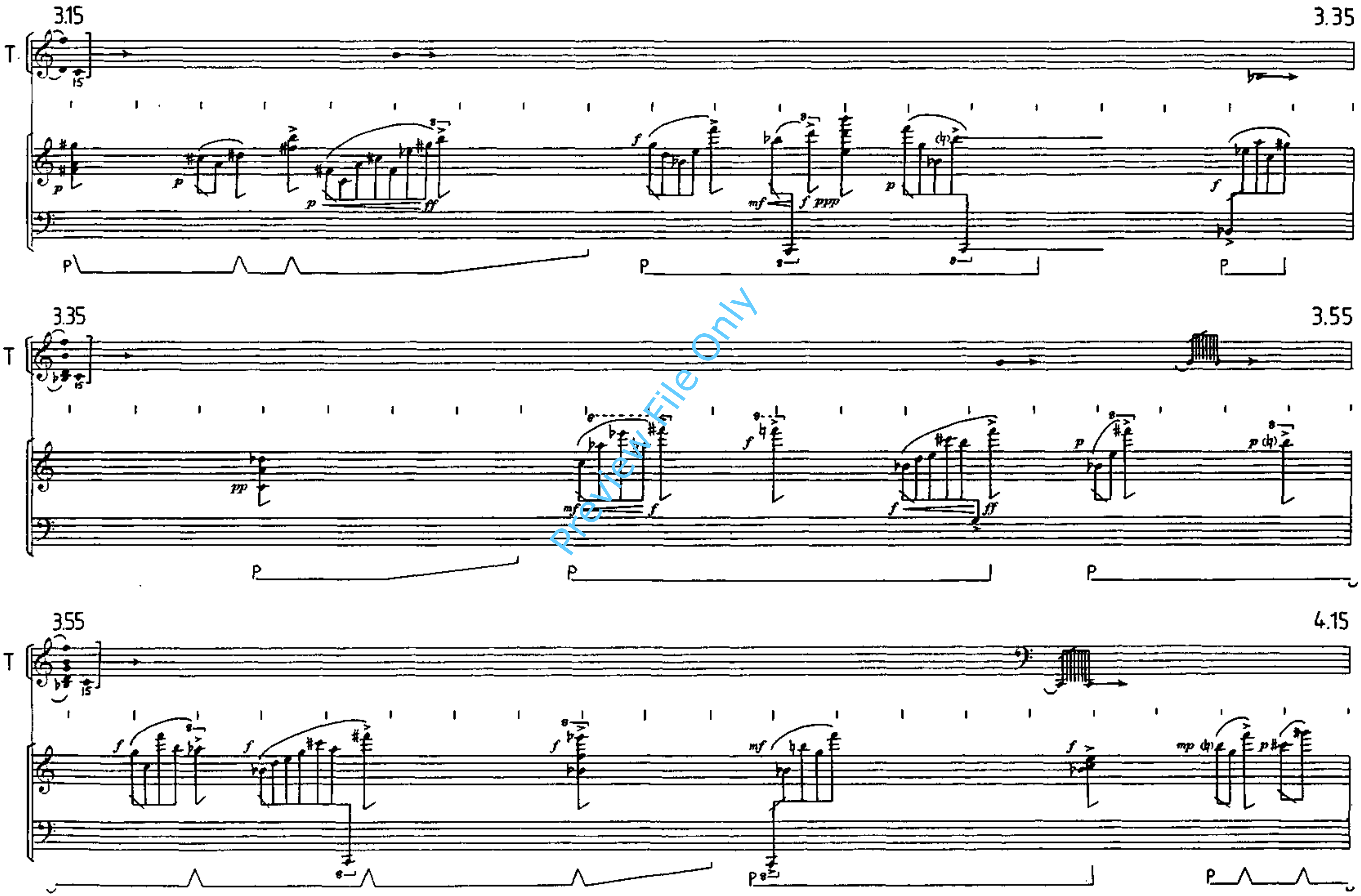
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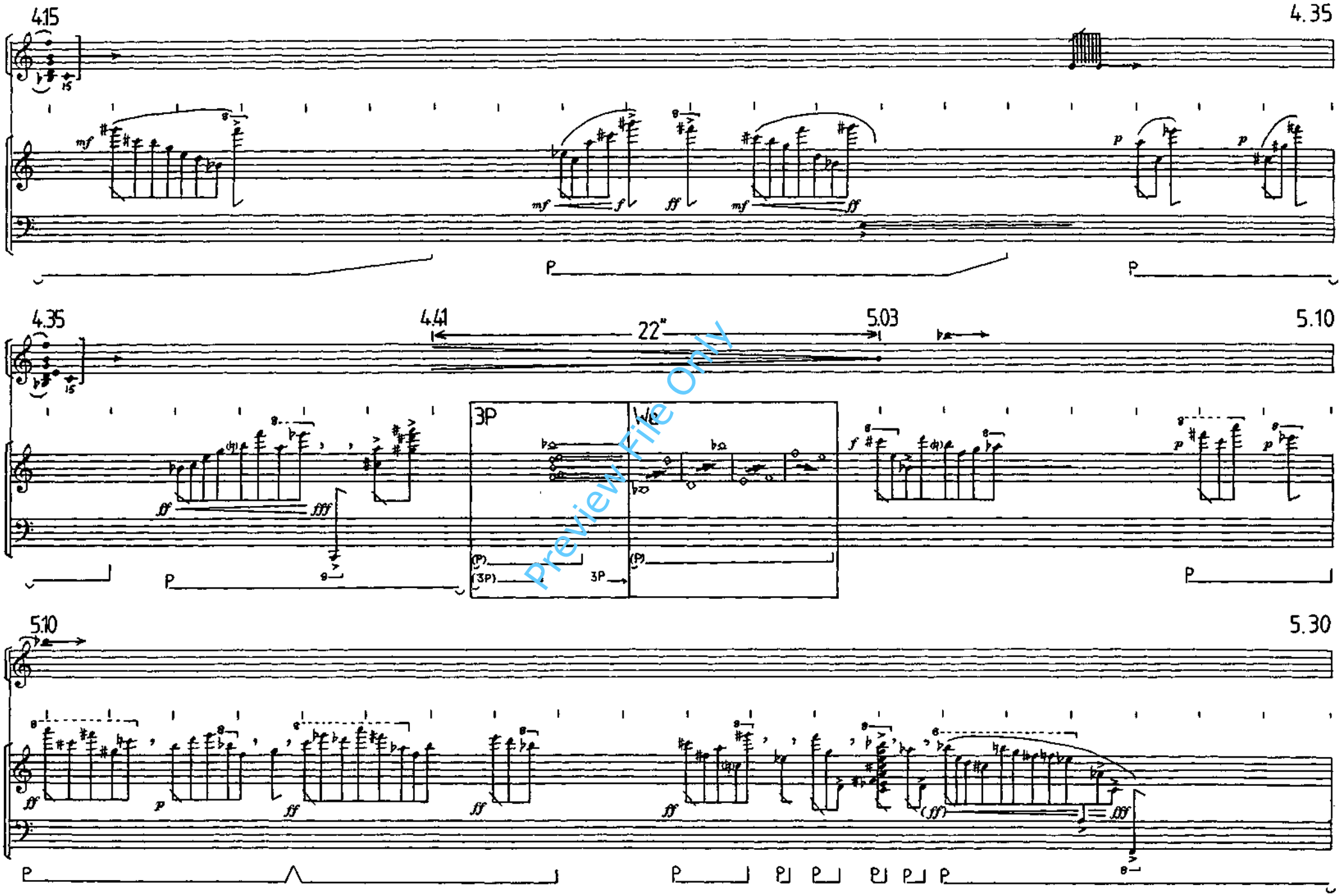

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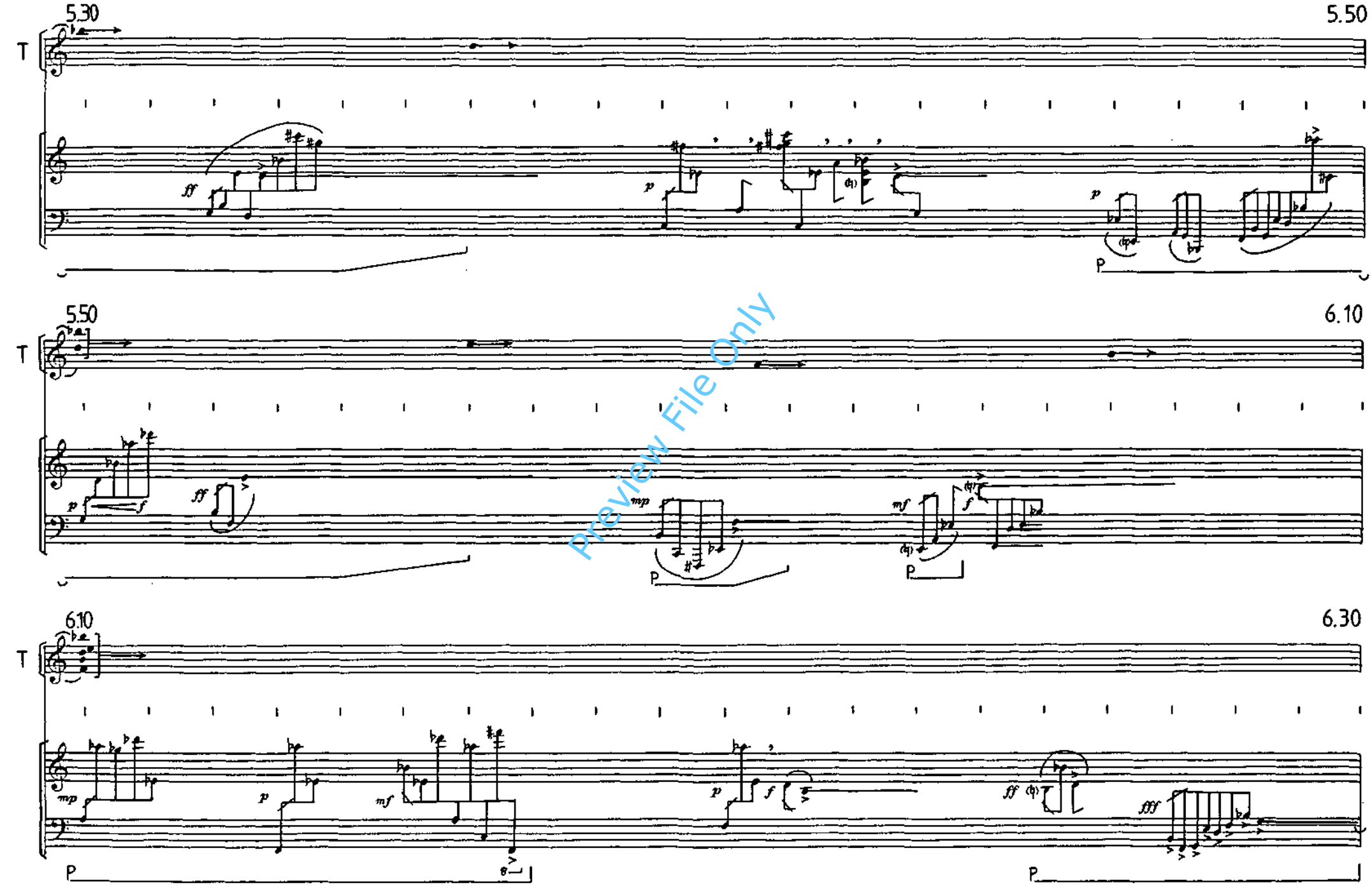

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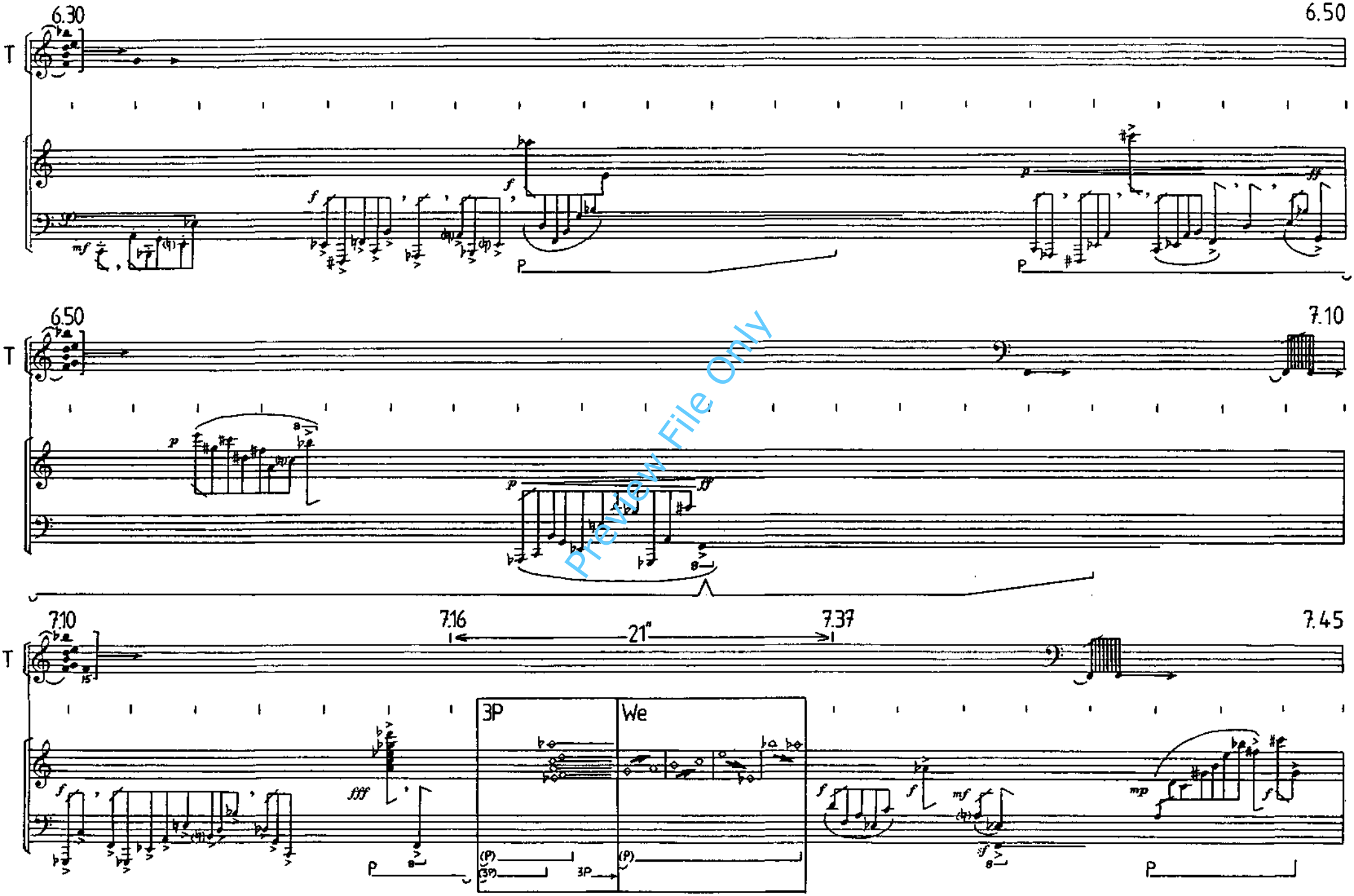

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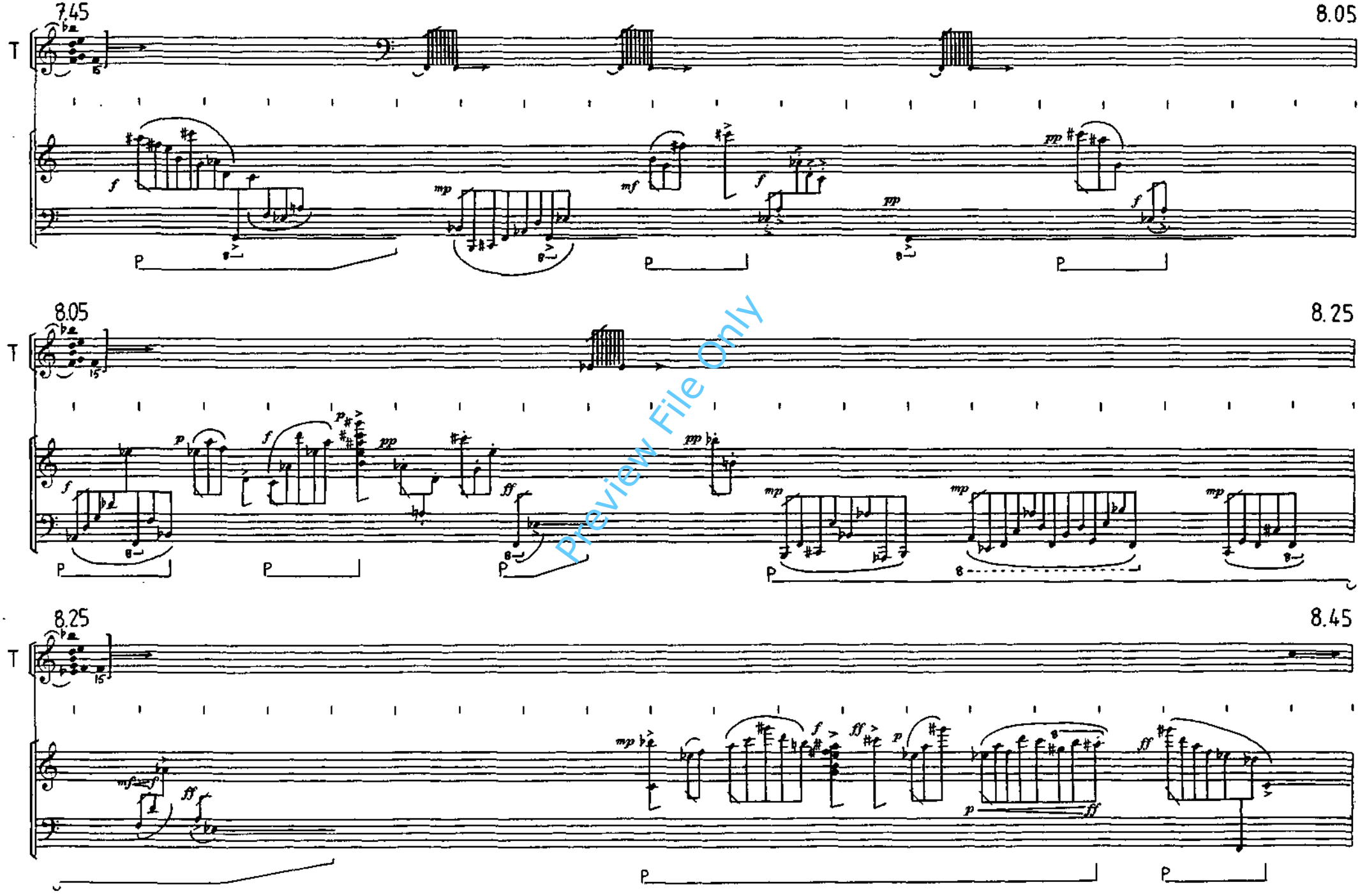
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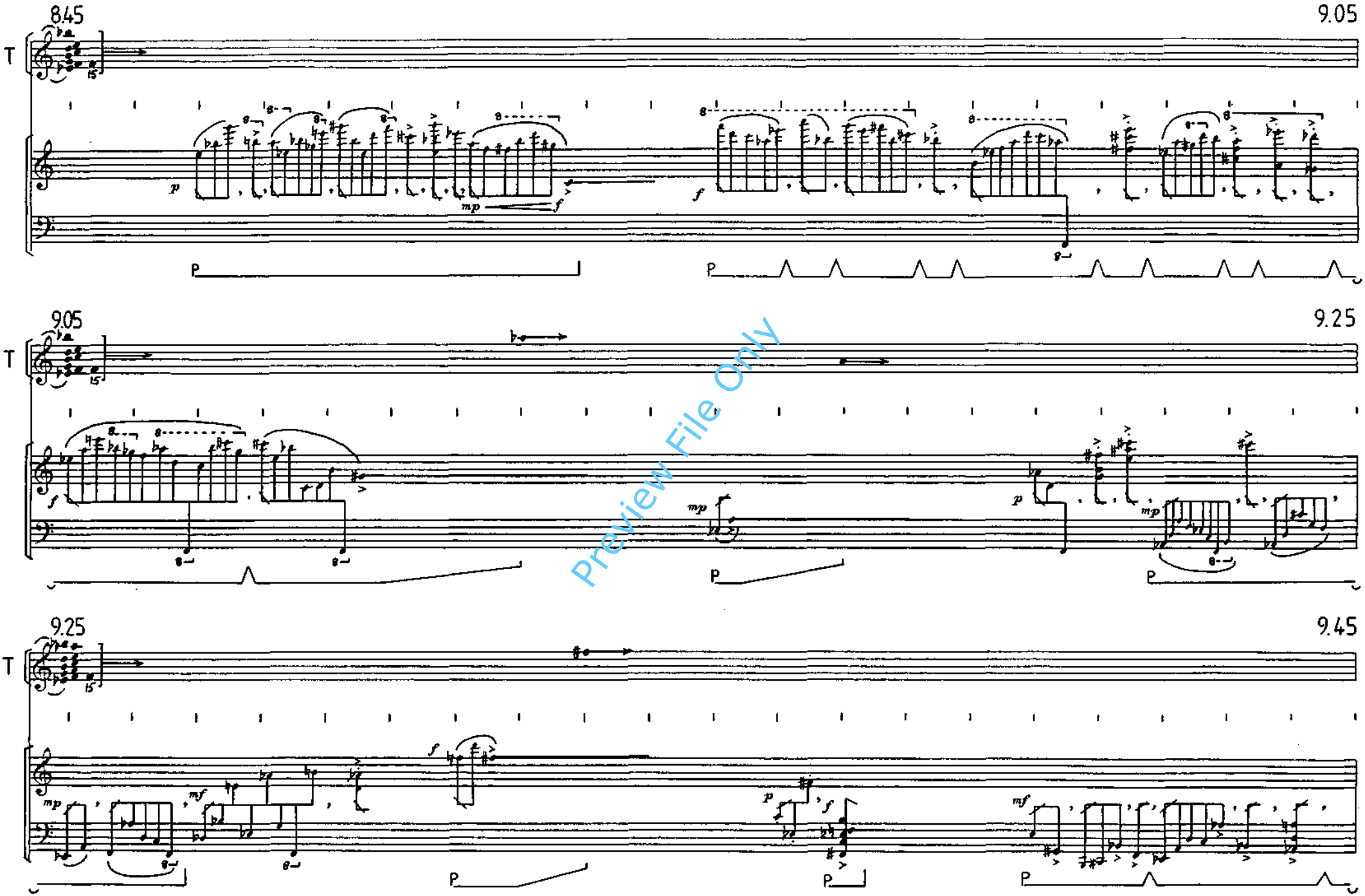
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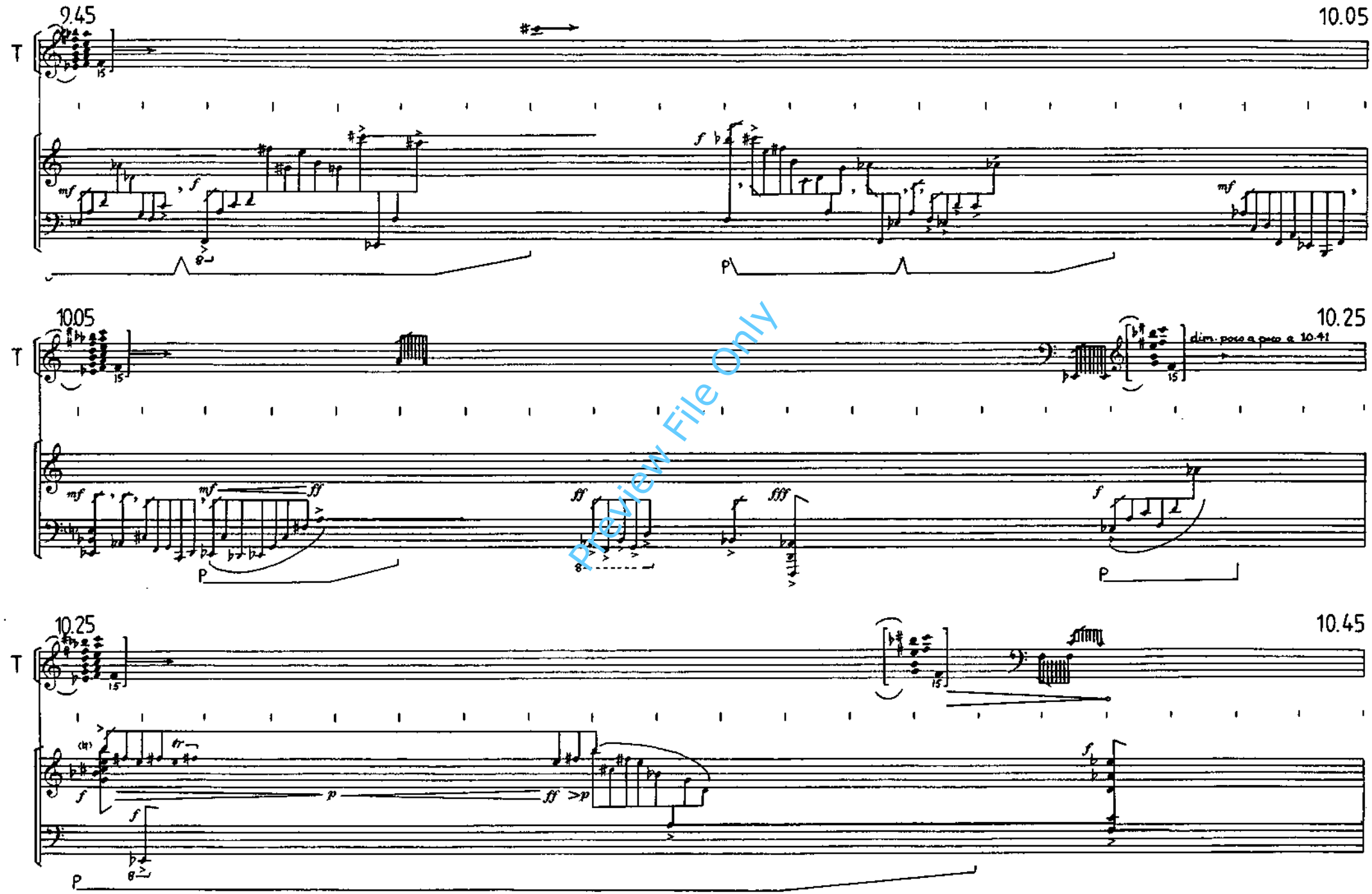

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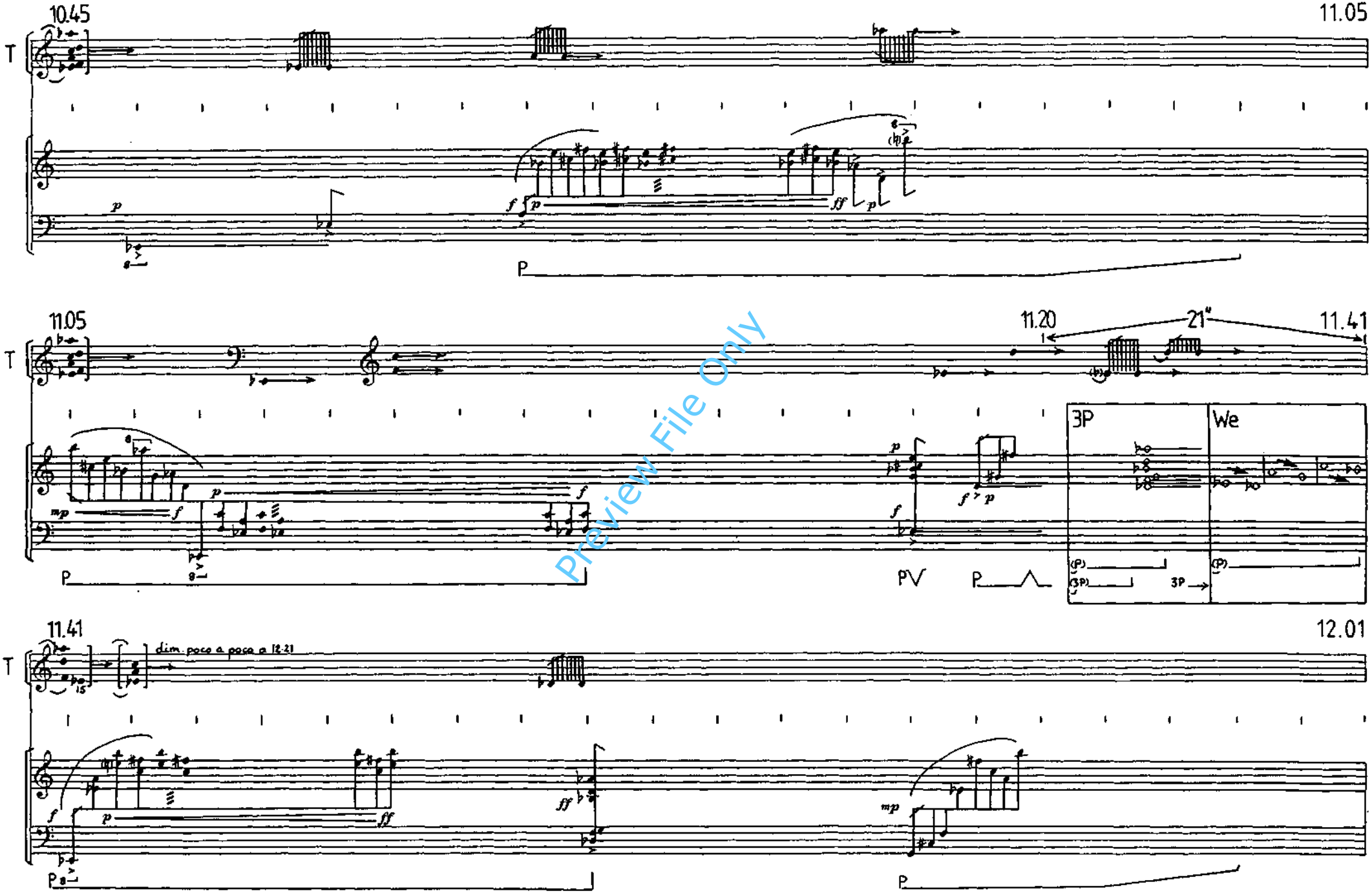

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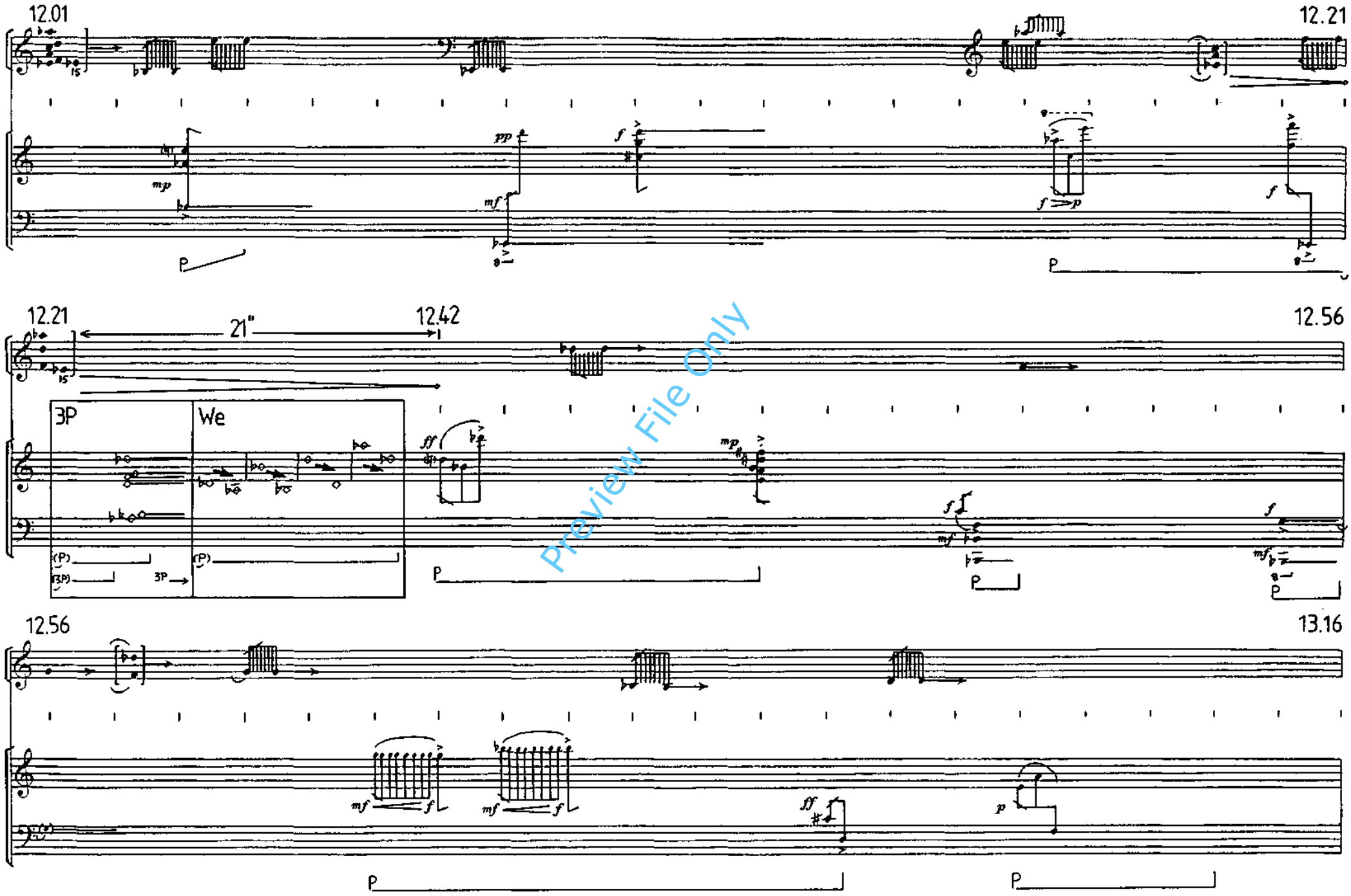

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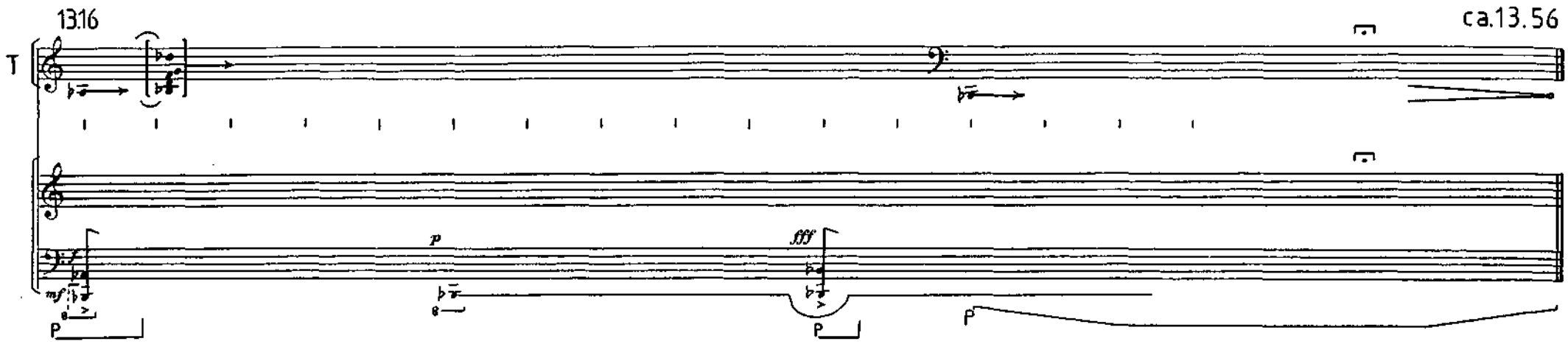

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