Preludes and Fugue

Antiphonal work for Three Quartets: Double Reed, Clarinet, and Modified String

Thomas Joseph

Program Notes

Preludes and Fugue is a four-movement antiphonal work-- specifically three preludes and a triple fugue-- written for three contrasting quartets: a double reed ensemble consisting of oboe, english horn, bassoon, and contrabassoon; a clarinet ensemble consisting of soprano clarinet, basset horn, bass clarinet, and B-flat contrabass clarinet; and a modified string quartet consisting of violin, viola, violoncello, and double bass. The first three movements are preludes designed to foreshadow the fugue. Each prelude isolates one of the quartets and explores one of the impending fugue subjects in contrasting atmospheres and styles.

The first prelude explores the initial motive of the third subject, performed by the double reeds. Stylistically, the prelude is of a light and playful character that one normally would identify with the bassoon. This fragment of the third subject is passed around humorously from one instrument to another.

The second prelude of the string quartet explores the first subject of the fugue but with much more subtlety. Specifically, the initial leap of a major 7th in the first subject, as well as its minor 2nd inversion relative, is developed in harmonic fashion rather than melodically. This movement explores darker emotions, spanning a lament to an ill-fated romance.

The third prelude develops the second subject with much more stylistic contrast in comparison with the first two preludes. The clarinet quartet showcases their wide range of possible color combinations. The prelude begins aggressively, then lightens in accompaniment, yet juxtaposes itself with a rustic, penetrating B-flat contrabass clarinet solo. A lyrical section follows, a peculiar section follows later, then the prelude ends with a light-hearted and playful section.

The finale is a triple fugue of the three subjects, involving all three quartets. The fugue begins traditionally but slowly opens up to experimentation with more modern representations of counterpoint. Each subject is introduced separately with its own exposition, played by its respective quartet. However, after all three expositions conclude, the three ensembles unravel and then intertwine as one mass ensemble. At one point, all the bass voices are vertically stacked on top of each other and each act as an individual bass--in an interesting moment, the B-flat contrabass clarinet overtakes the double bass as the bottom voice. Then the other voices interact over each of these basses in their respective harmonic regions, creating tritonality within the confines of the fugal setting.

Instrumentation:

Ensemble 1:
Oboe
English Horn
Bassoon
Contrabassoon

Ensemble 2:
Violin
Viola
Violincello
Double Bass

Ensemble 3:
Soprano Clarinet
Basset Horn
Bass Clarinet
B-flat Contrabass Clarinet

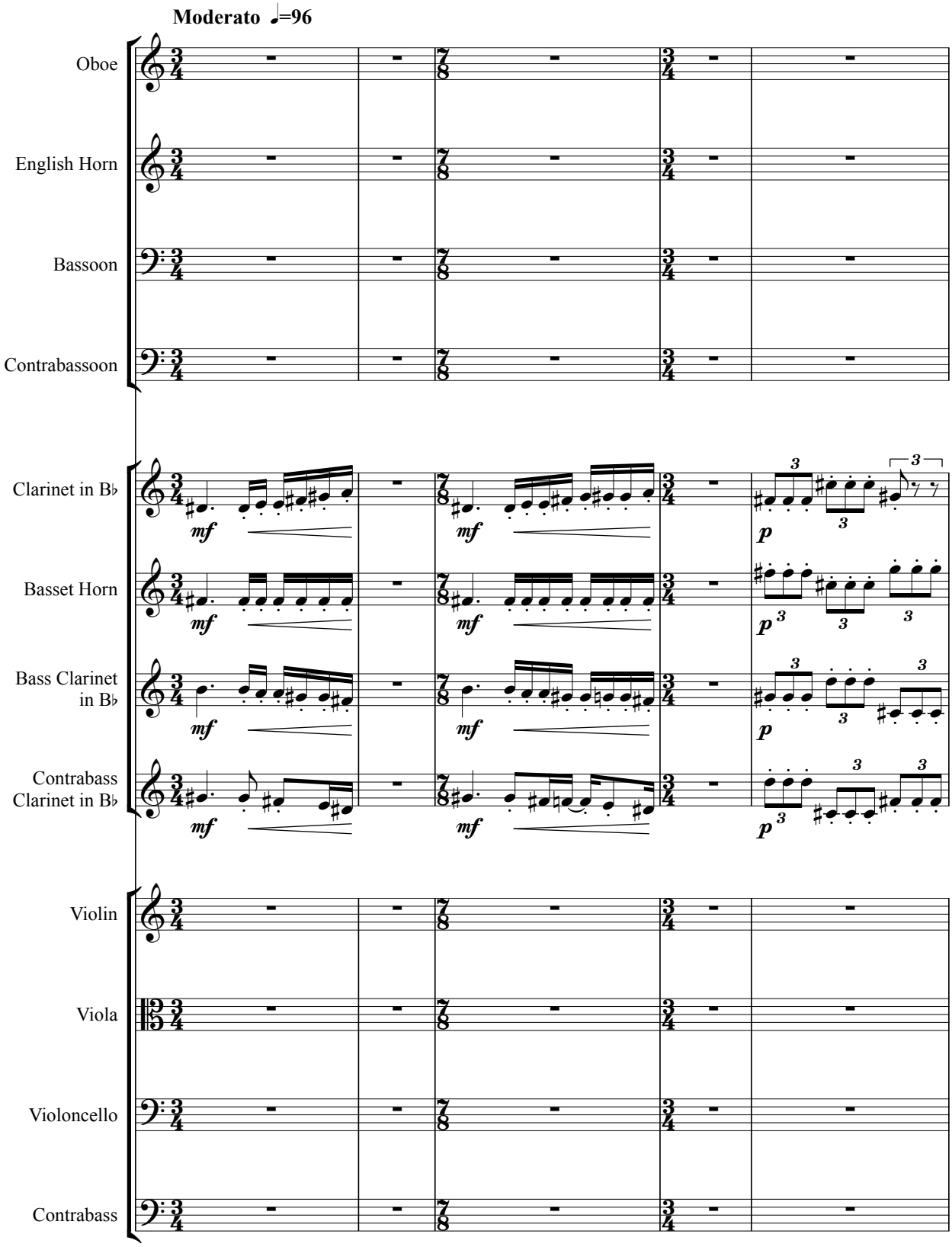
Setup:

Each quartet should be arranged on stage in an easily discernible manner. Preferably, Ensemble 2 should be front and center. Ensemble 1 should be placed in the left back from the audiences view, and Ensemble 3 on the right respectively.

Preludes and Fugue

Prelude 3

Thomas Joseph



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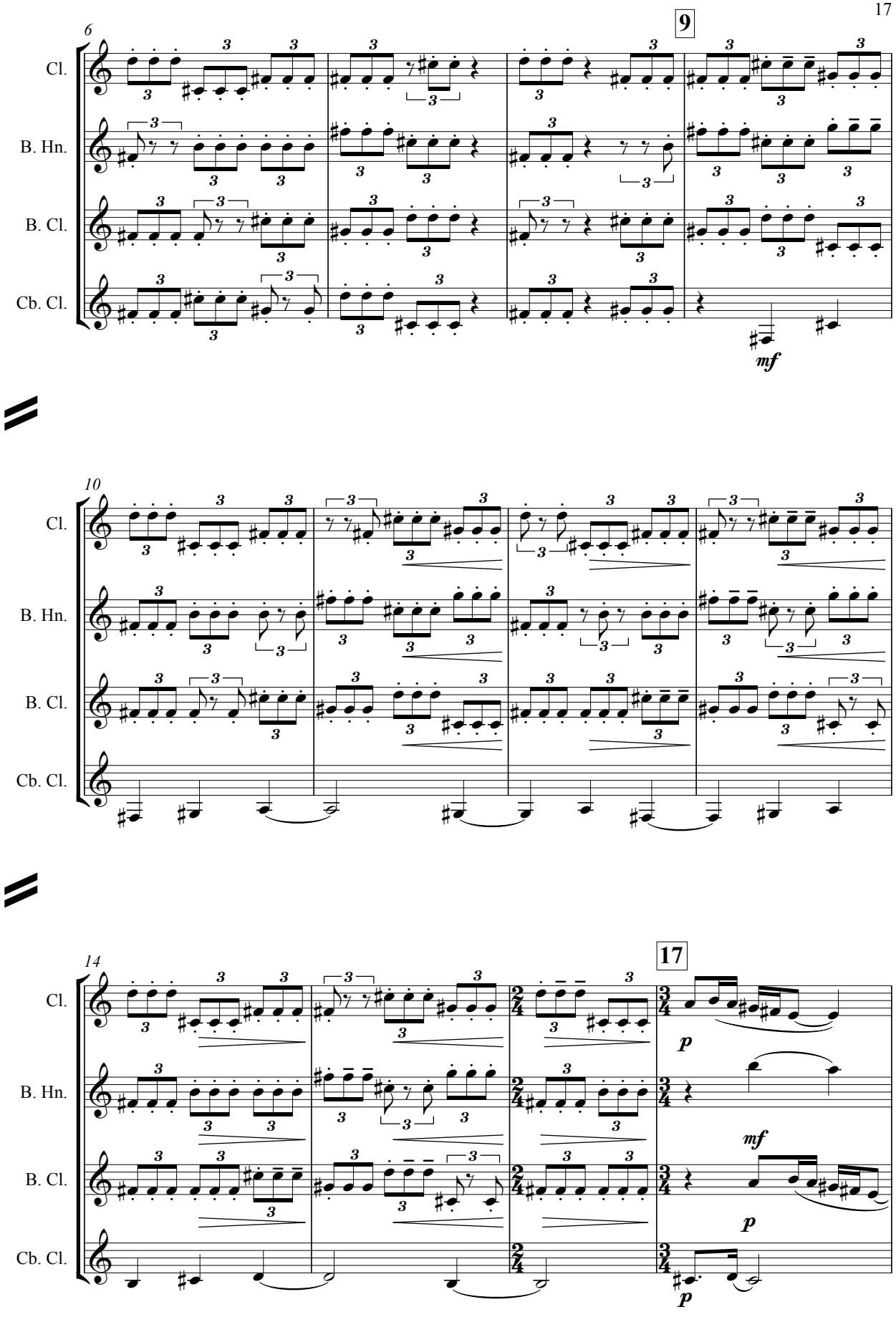
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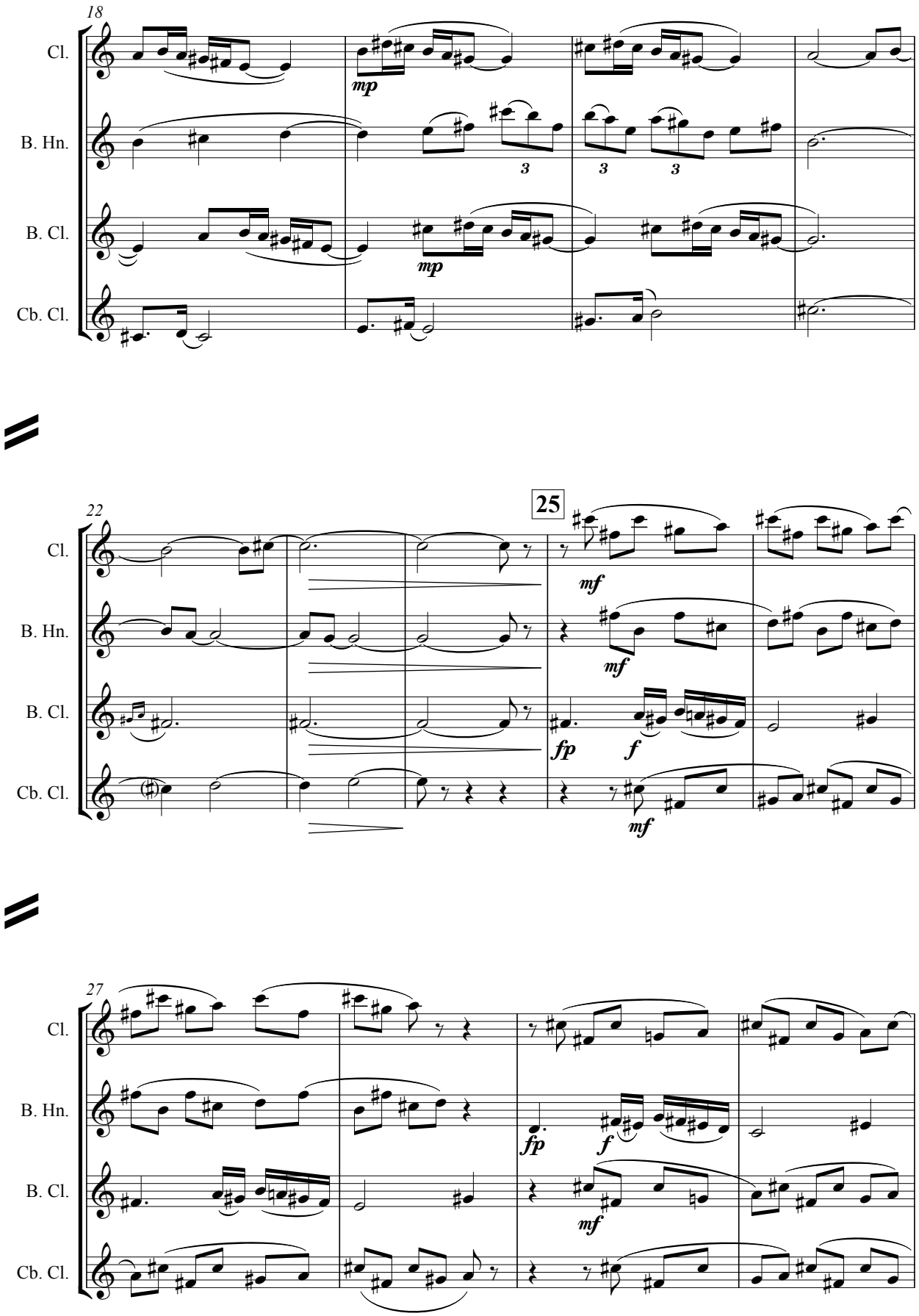
9
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
mf
10
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
14
17
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
p
mf
p
p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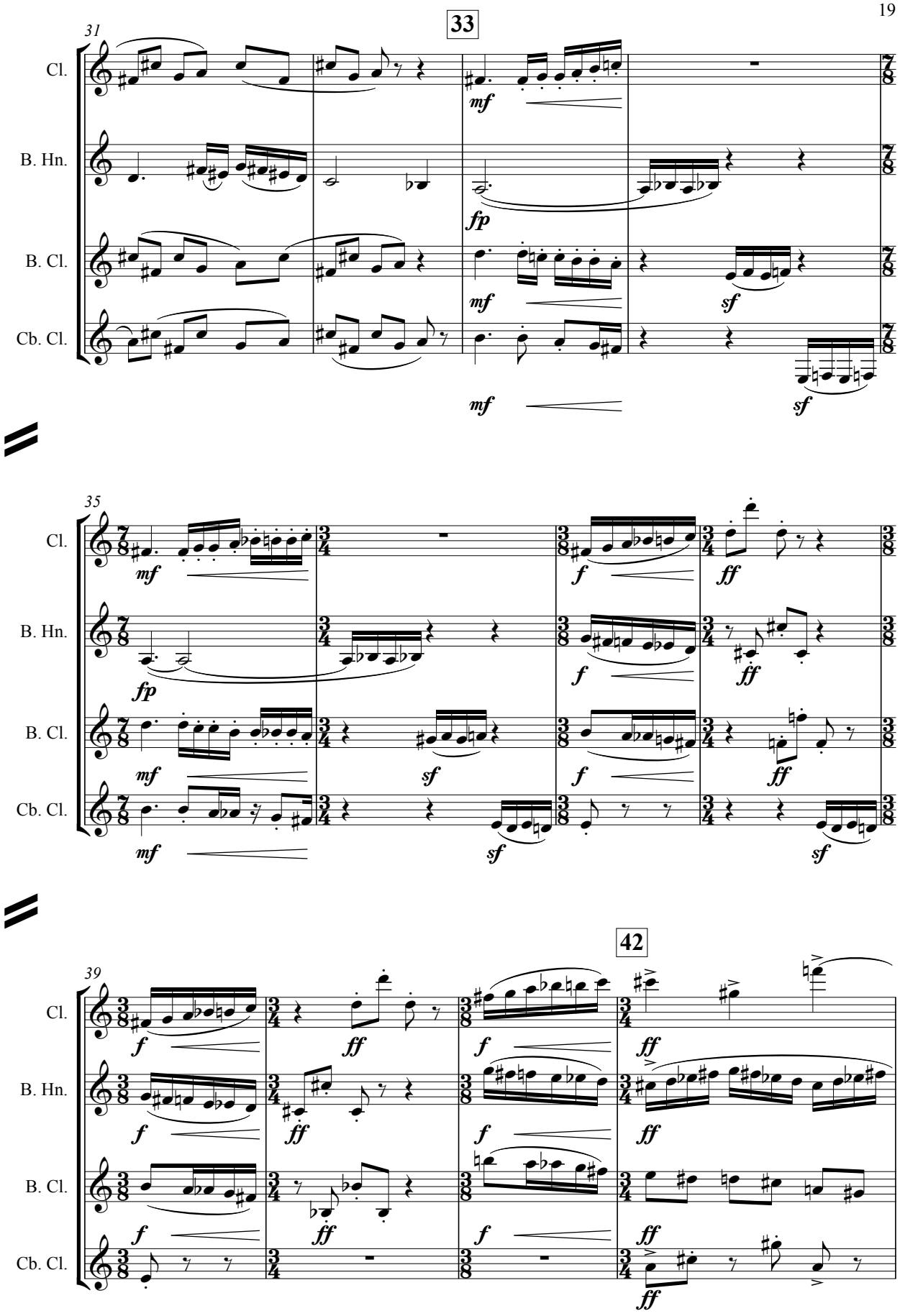
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
mp
mp
3
3
3
22
25
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
mf
mf
fp
f
mf
27
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
fp
f
mf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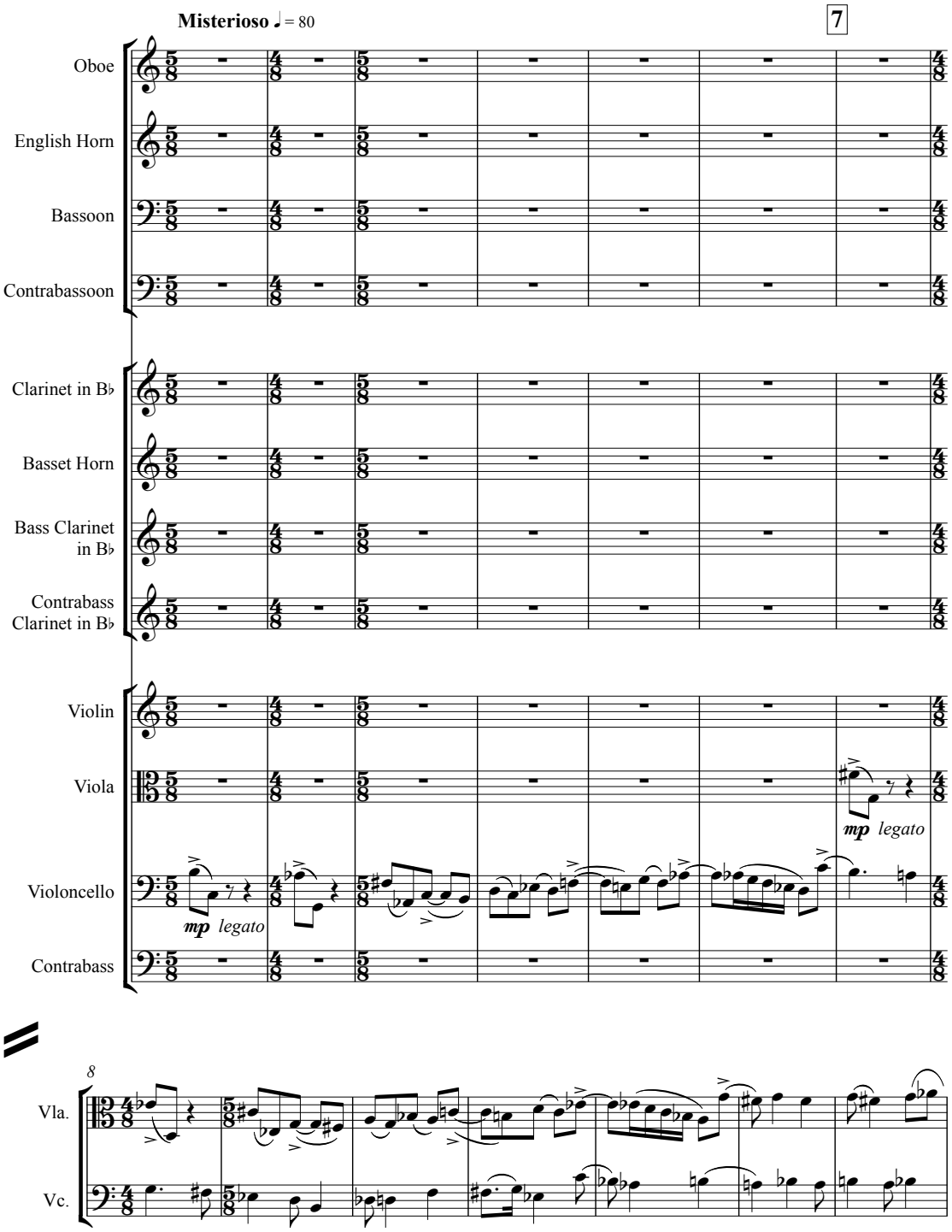
33
Cl.
B. Hn.
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.
mf
fp
sf
35
f
ff
39
42

Preludes and Fugue

Fugue

Thomas Joseph



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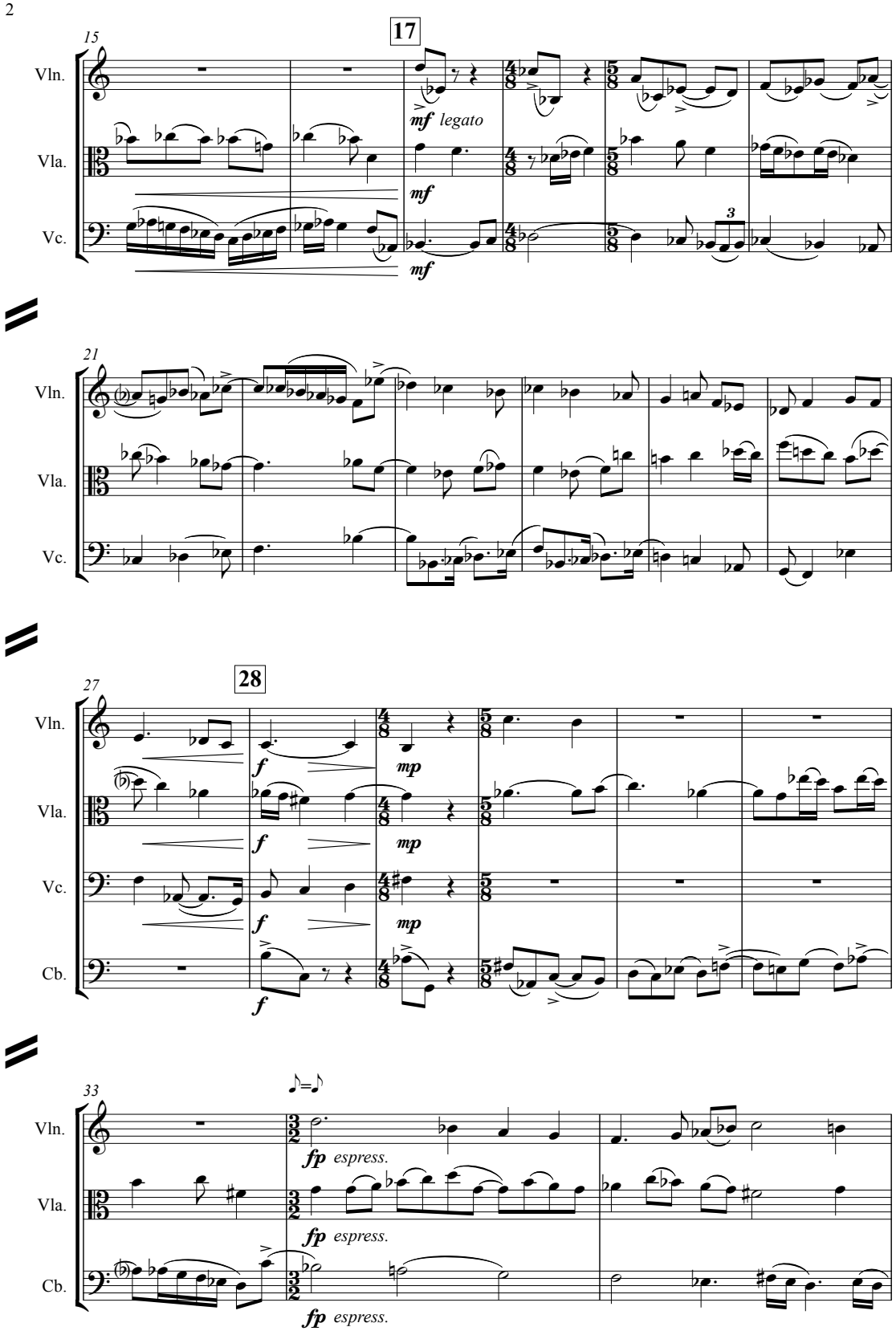
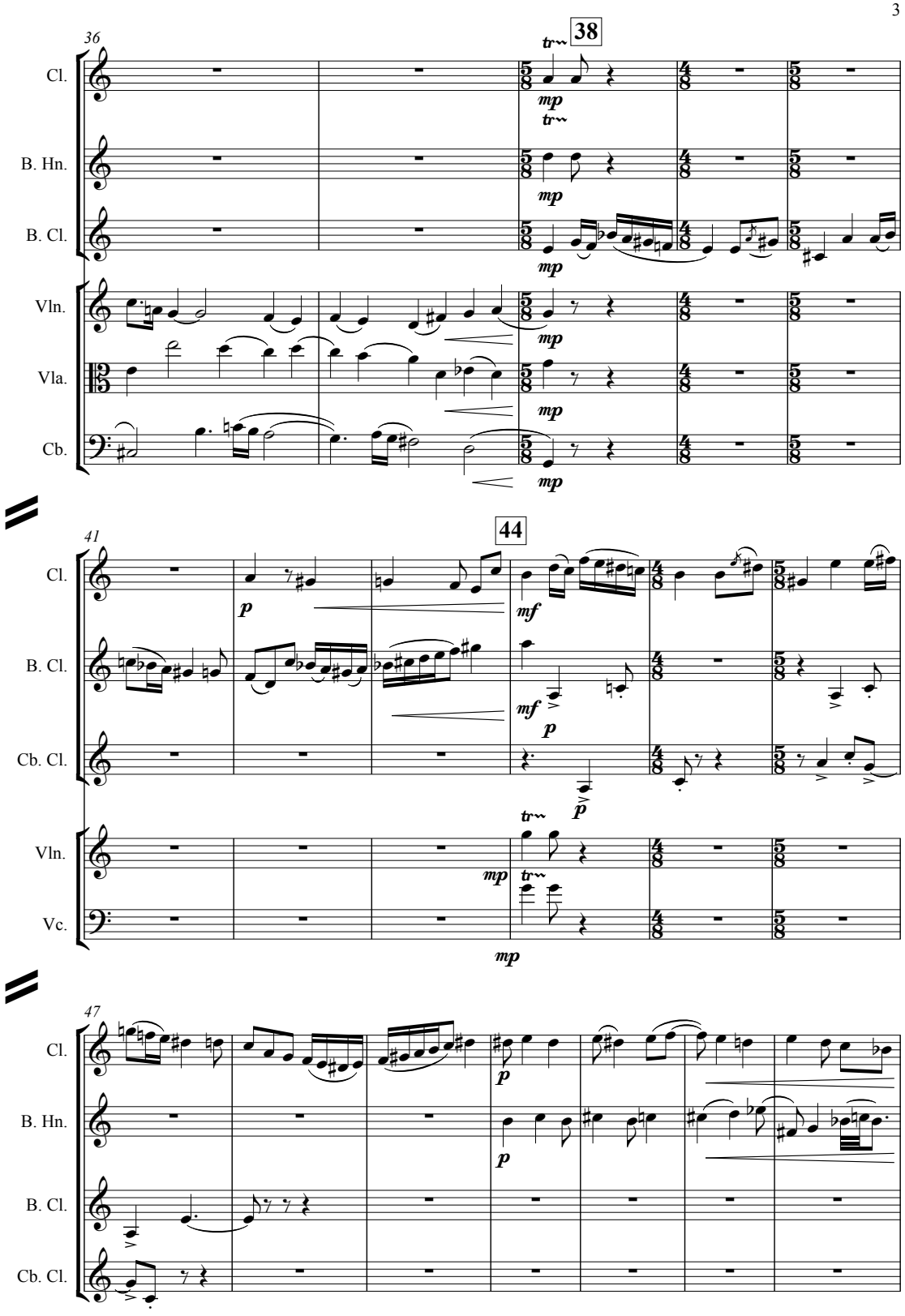

15
17
Vln.
Vla.
Vc.
mf legato
mf
mf
21
28
27
f
mp
Cb.
33
♪=♪
fp espress.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Cb.
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mf
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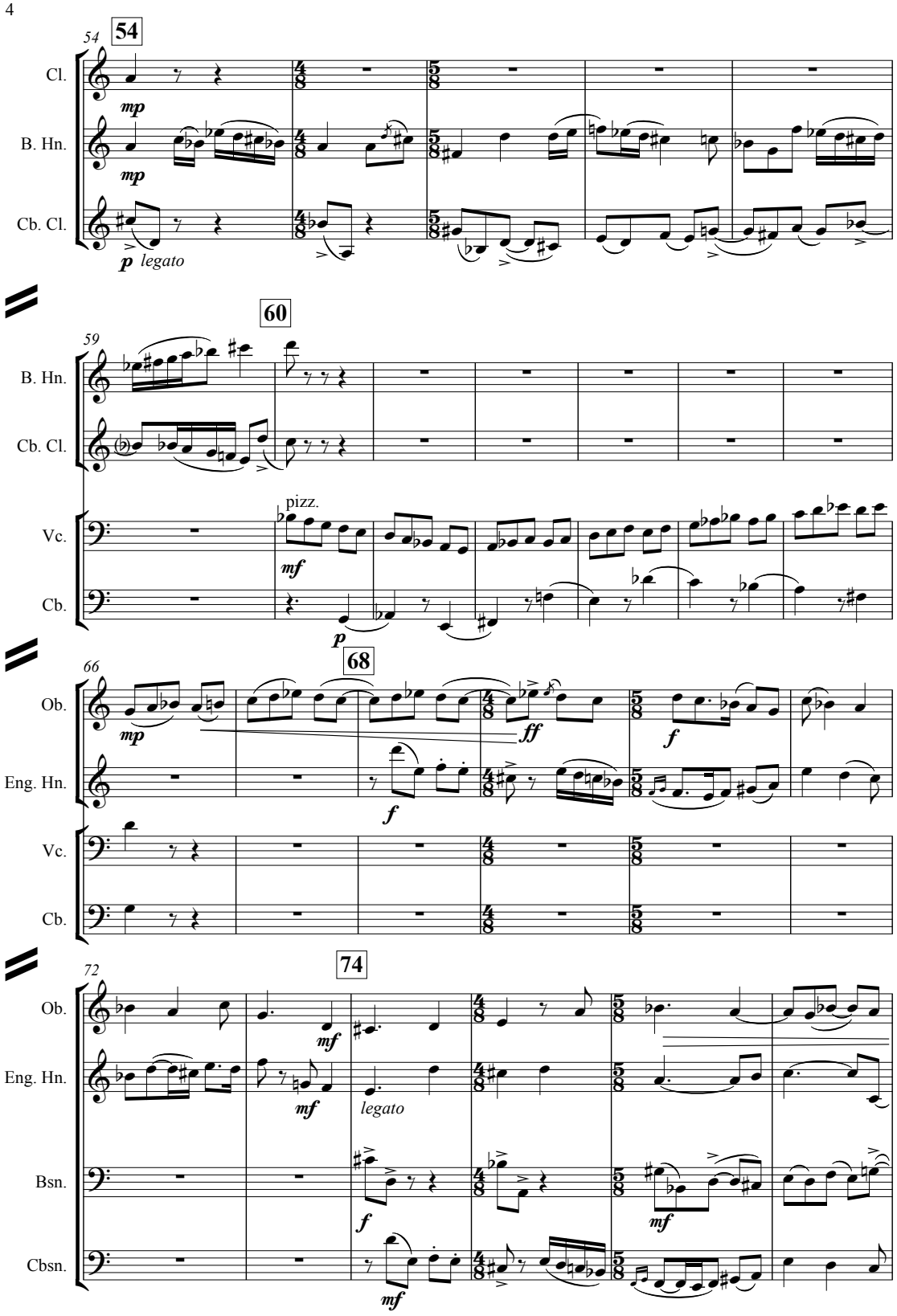
B. Cl.
Cb. Cl.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Cl.
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B. Hn.
mp
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p legato
60
59
B. Hn.
Cb. Cl.
Vc.
pizz.
mf
Cb.
p
66
68
Ob.
mp
ff
f
Eng. Hn.
f
Vc.
Cb.
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Bsn.
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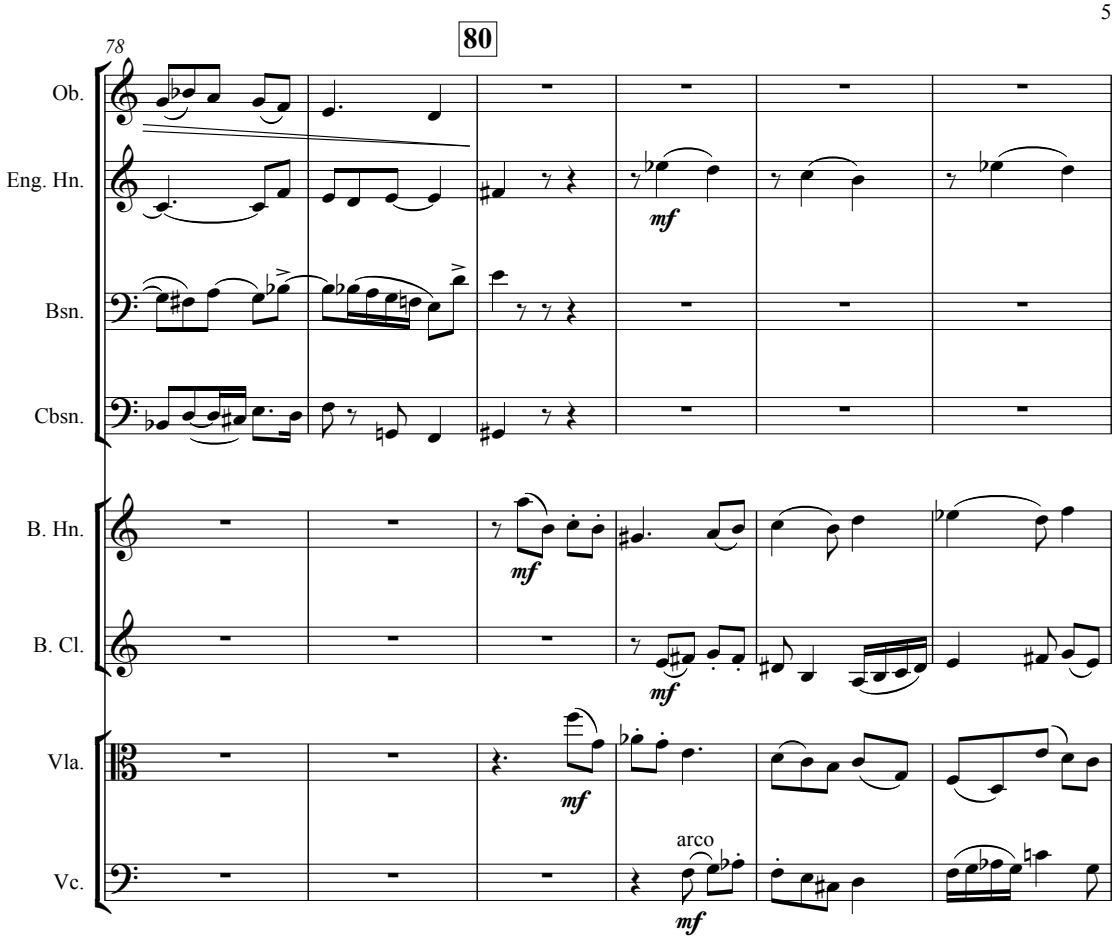
Cbsn.
mf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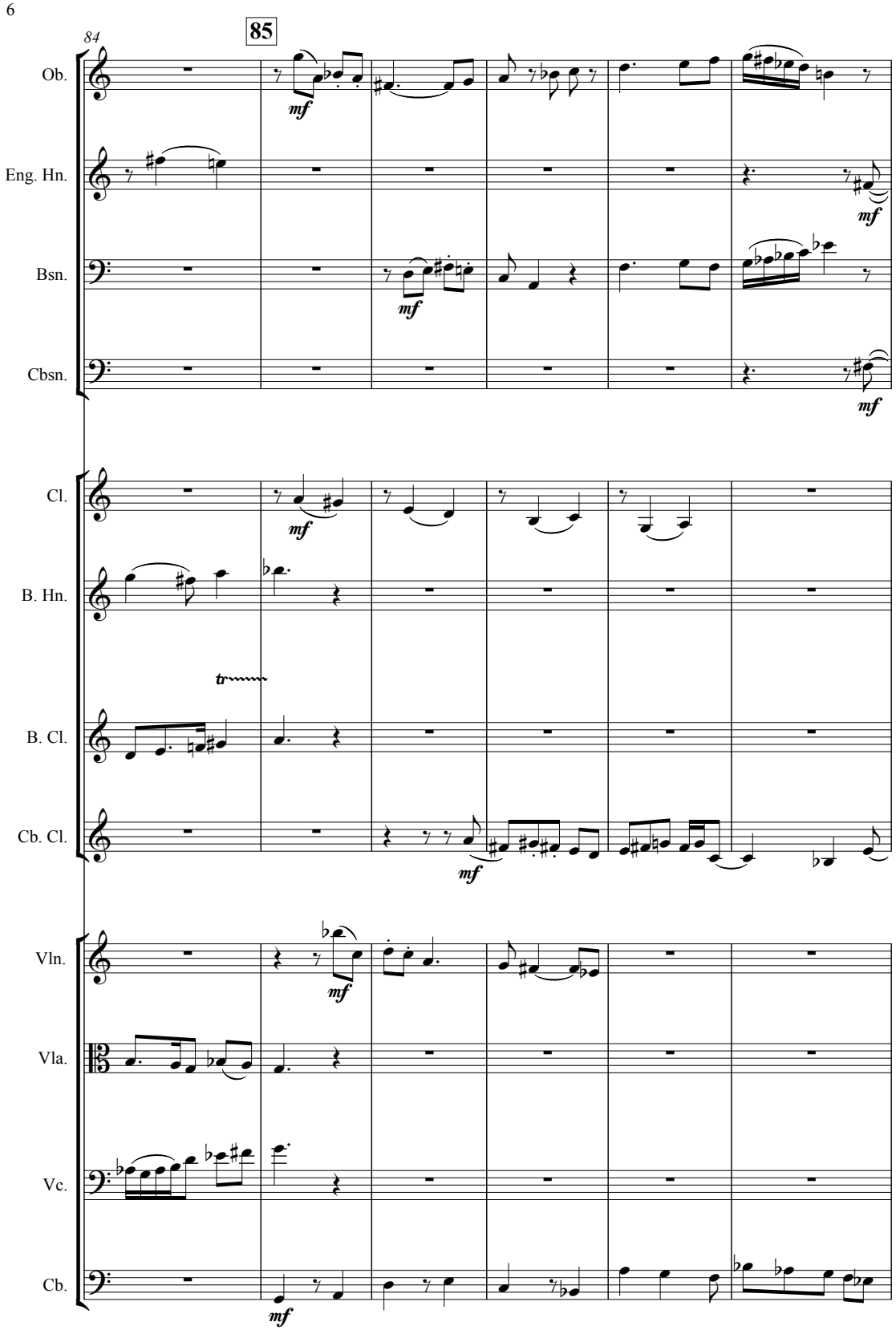
Vc.
mf
arco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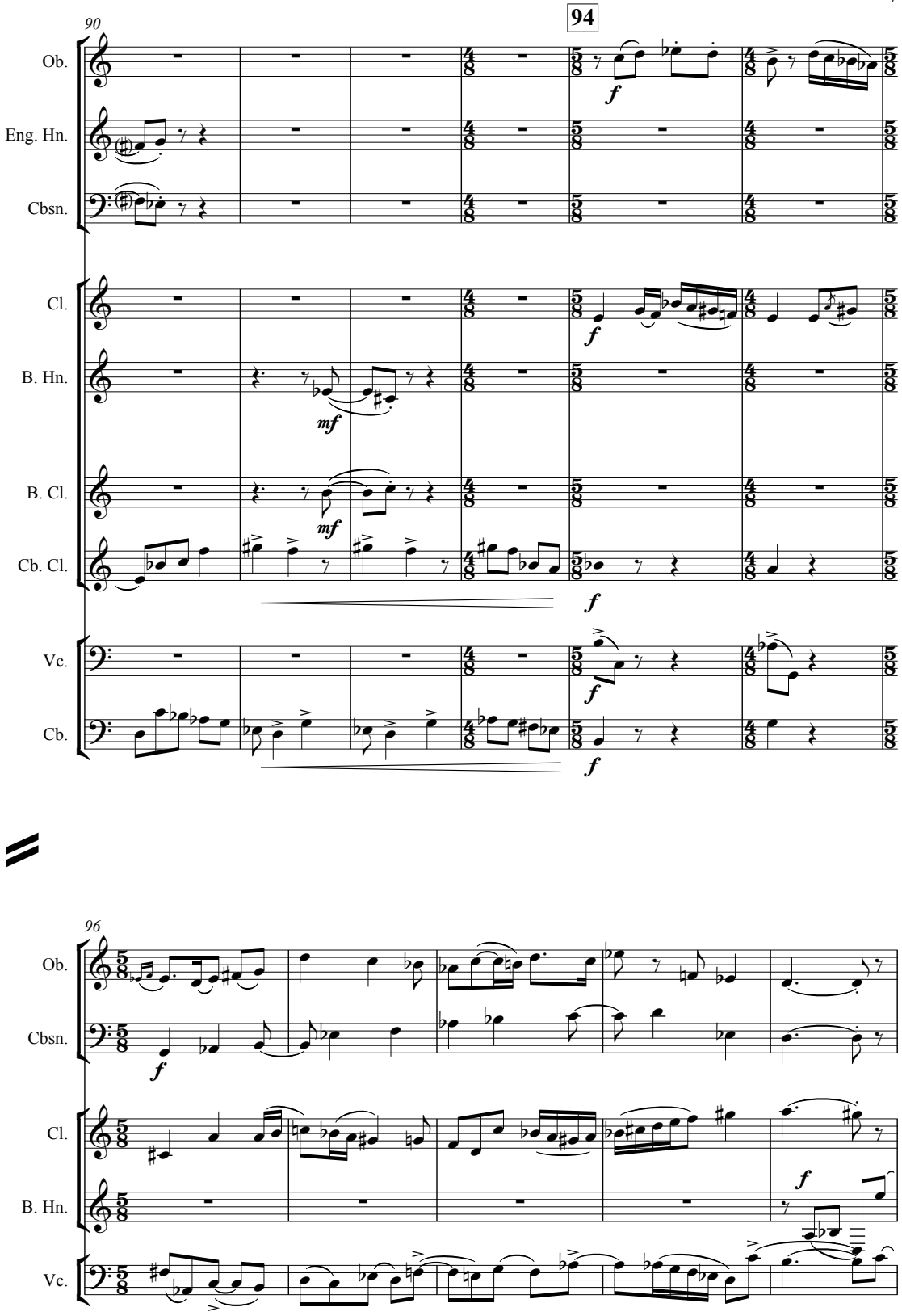
Cb.
mf
tr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f
mf
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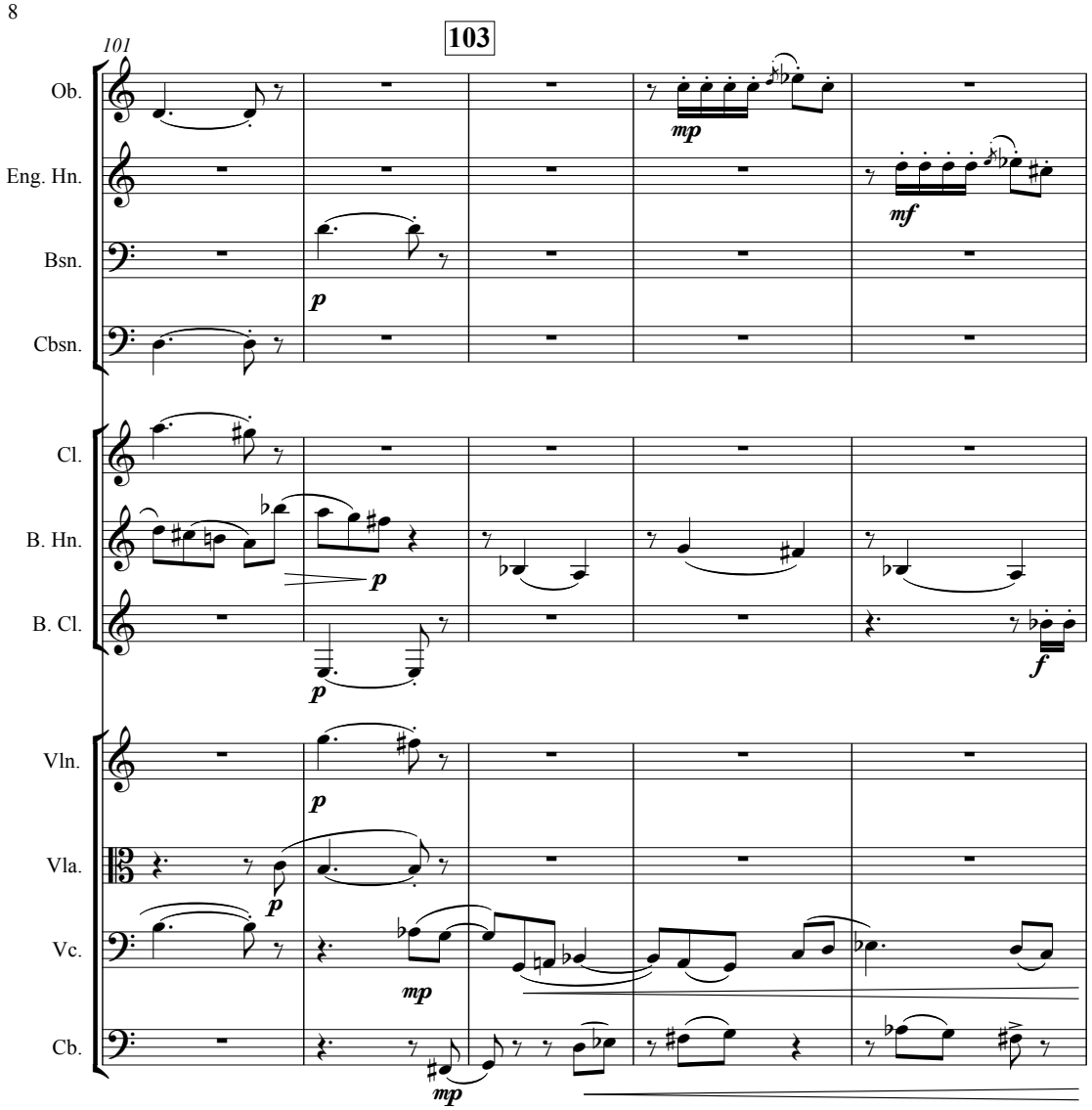
Cl.
B. Hn.
Vc.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mp
mf
p
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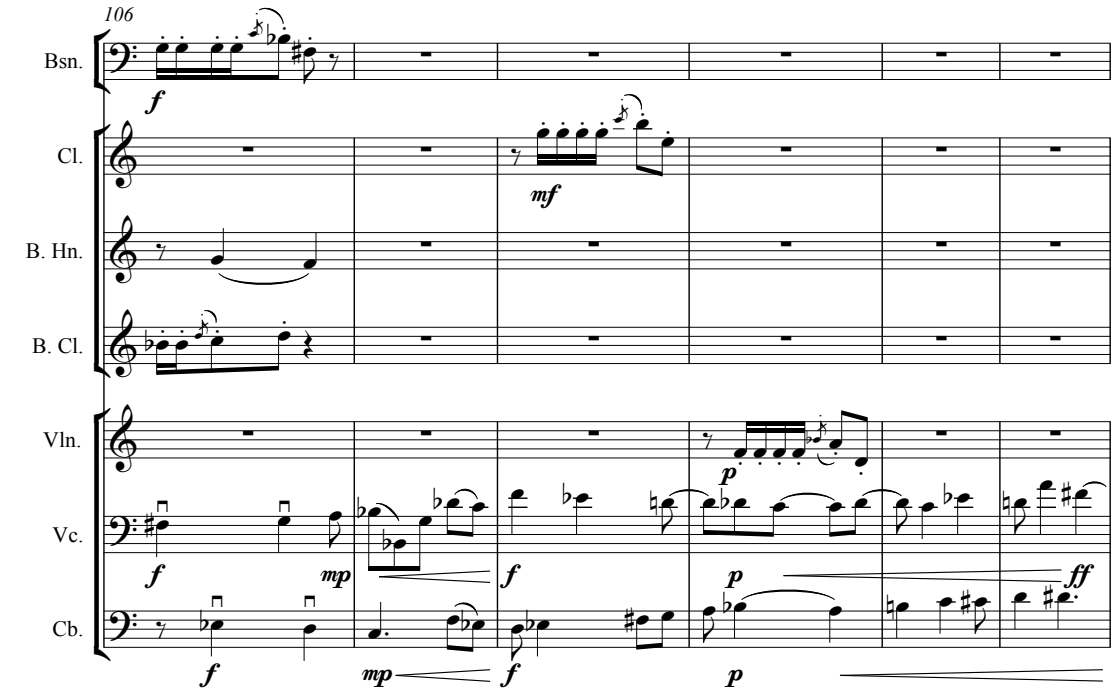
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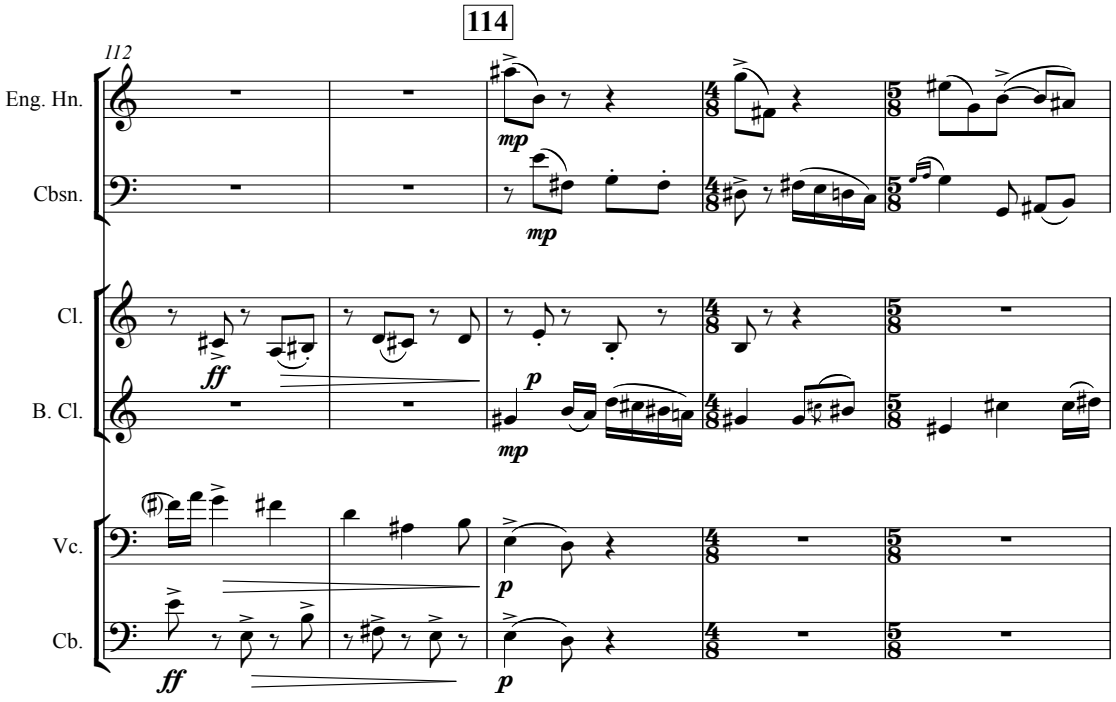
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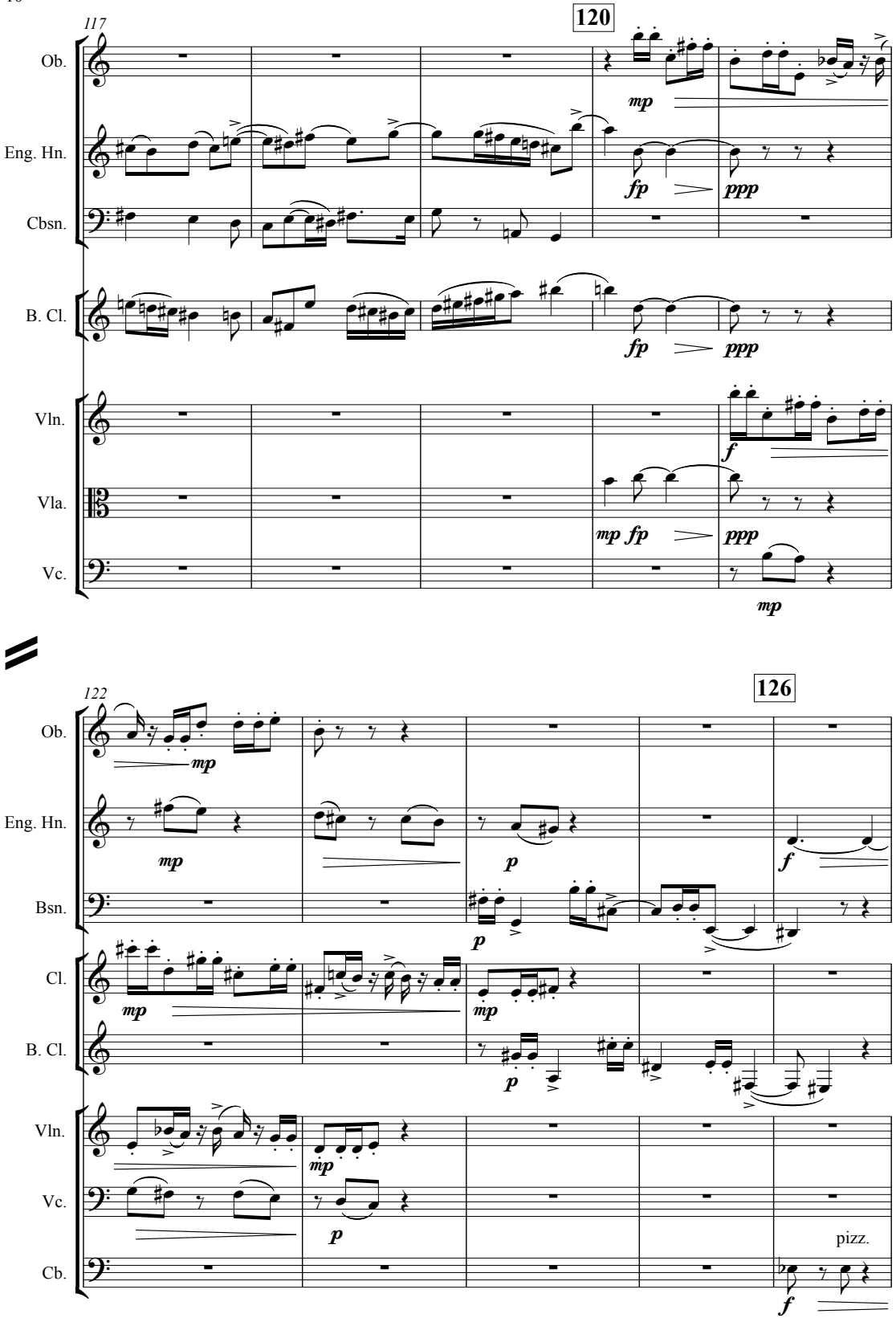
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mp fp
ppp
mp
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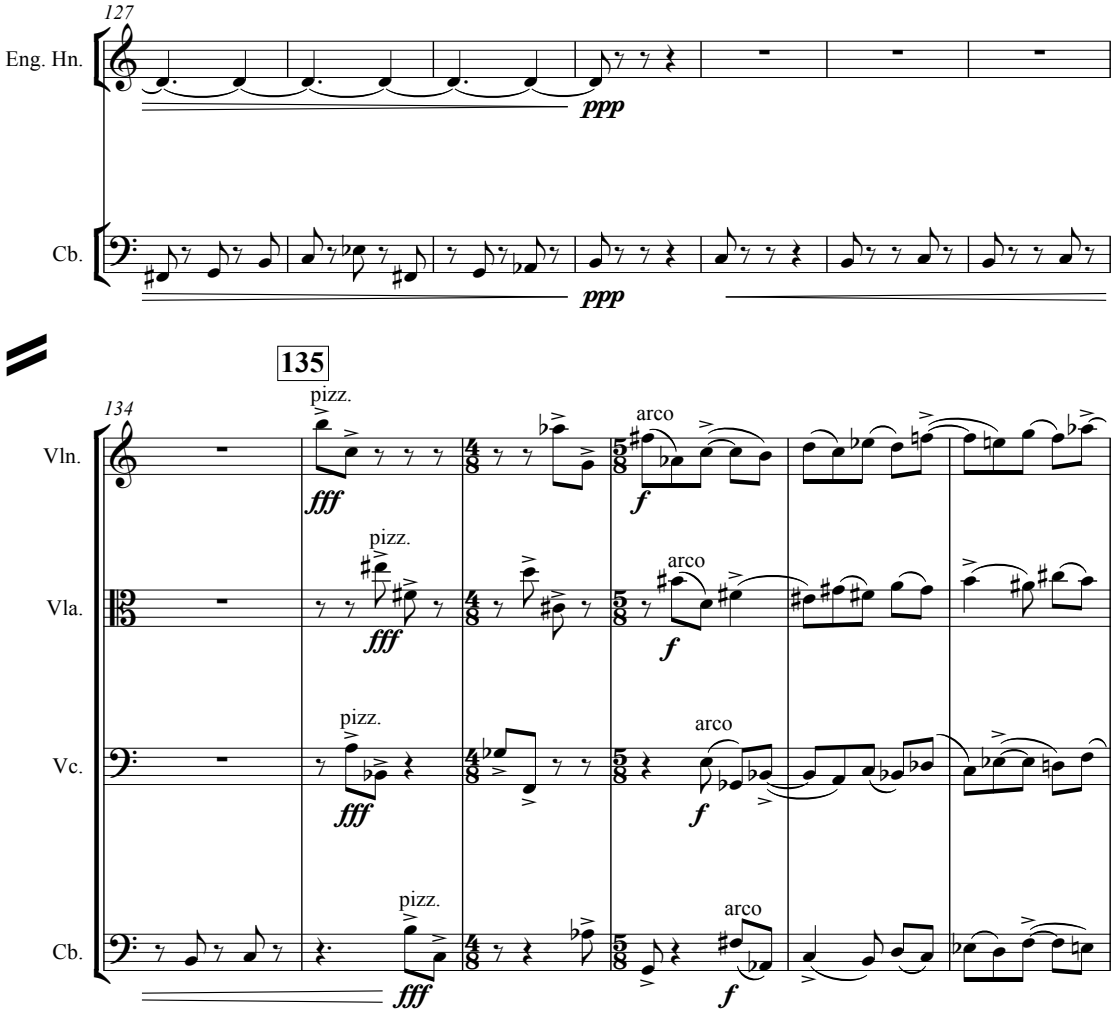
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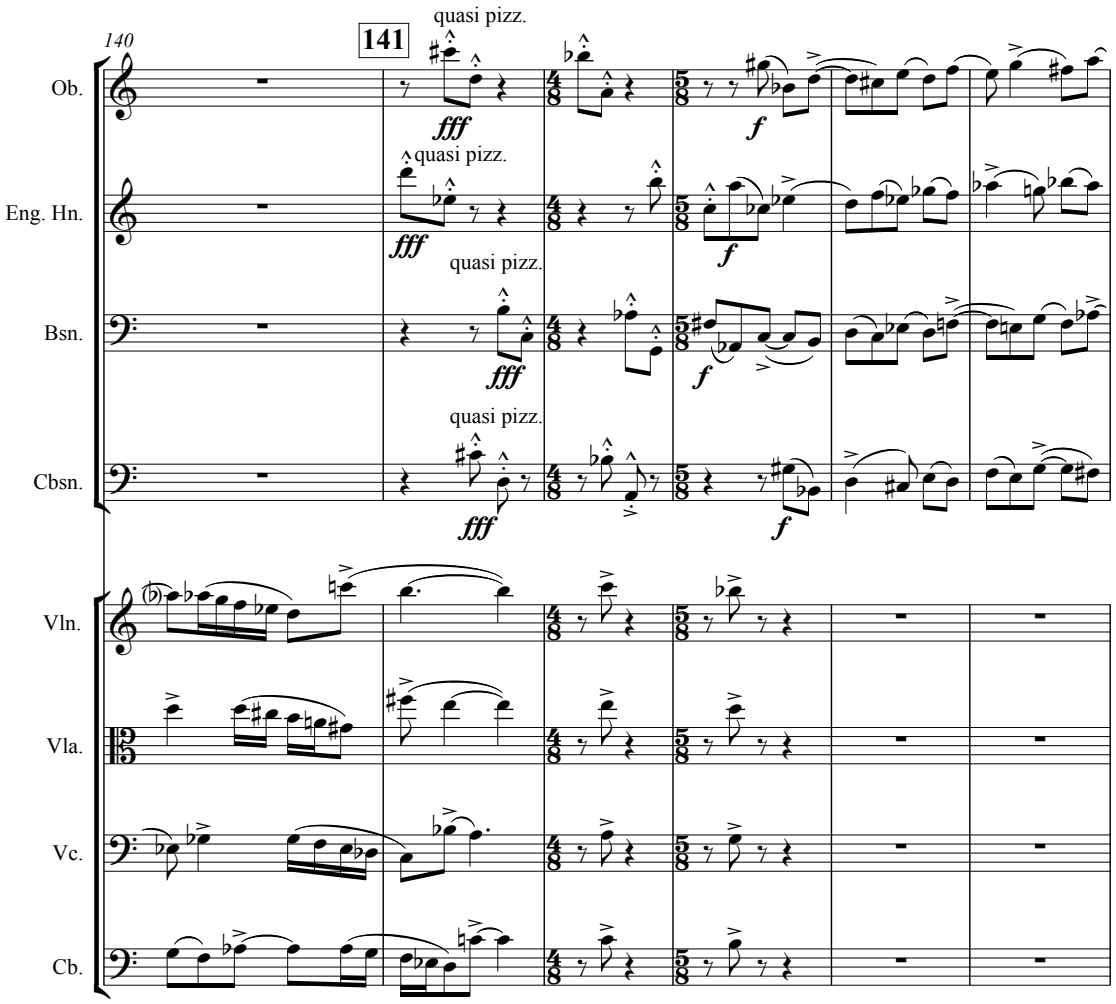
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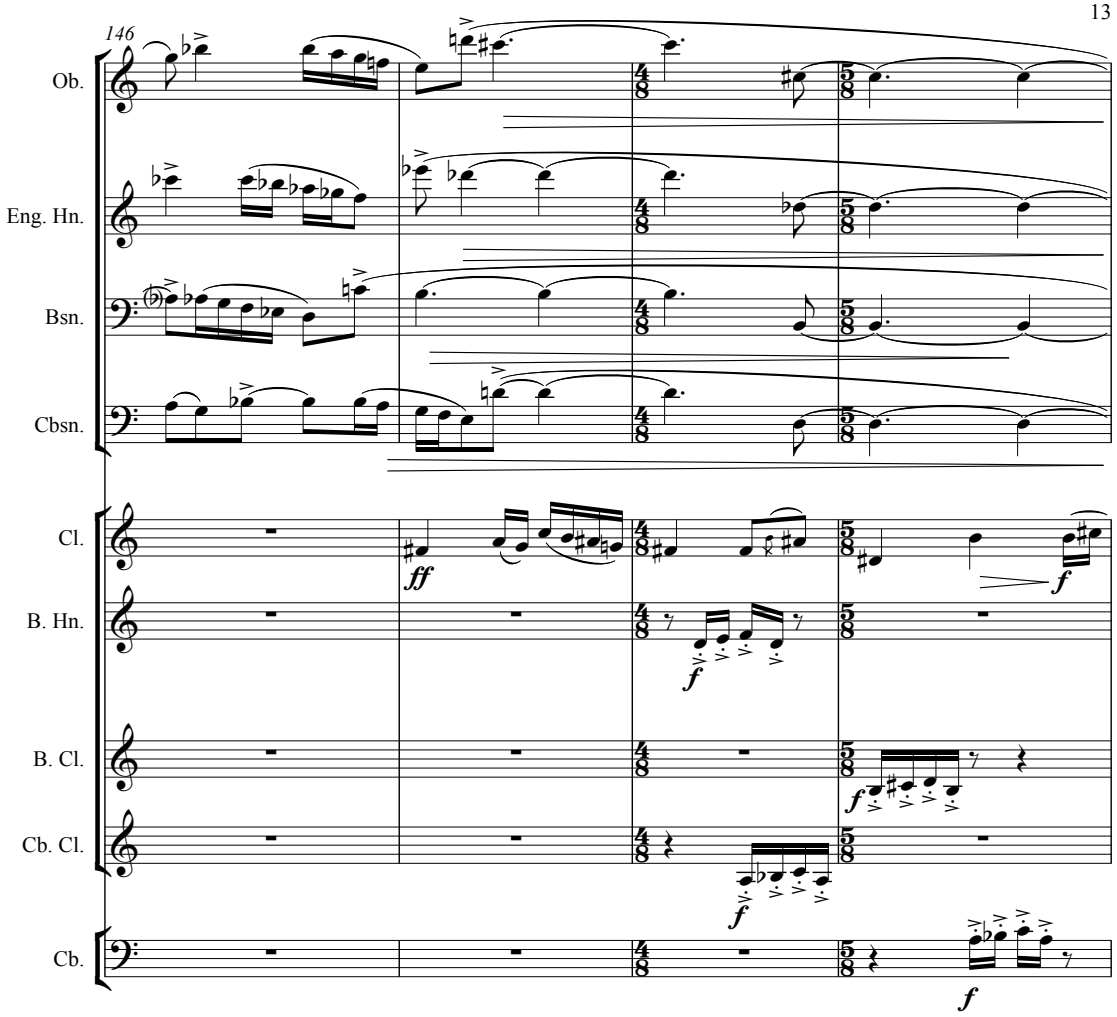
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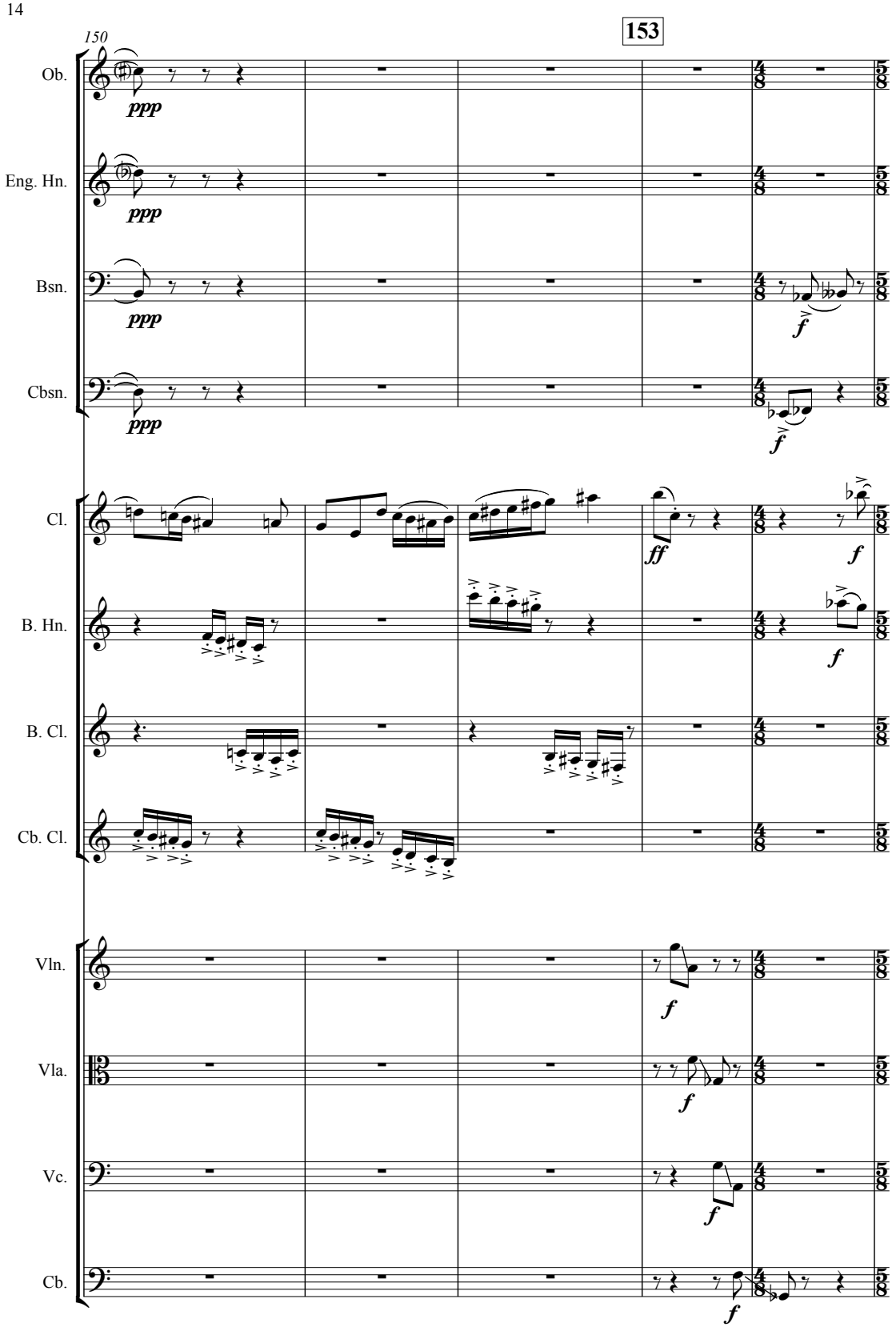
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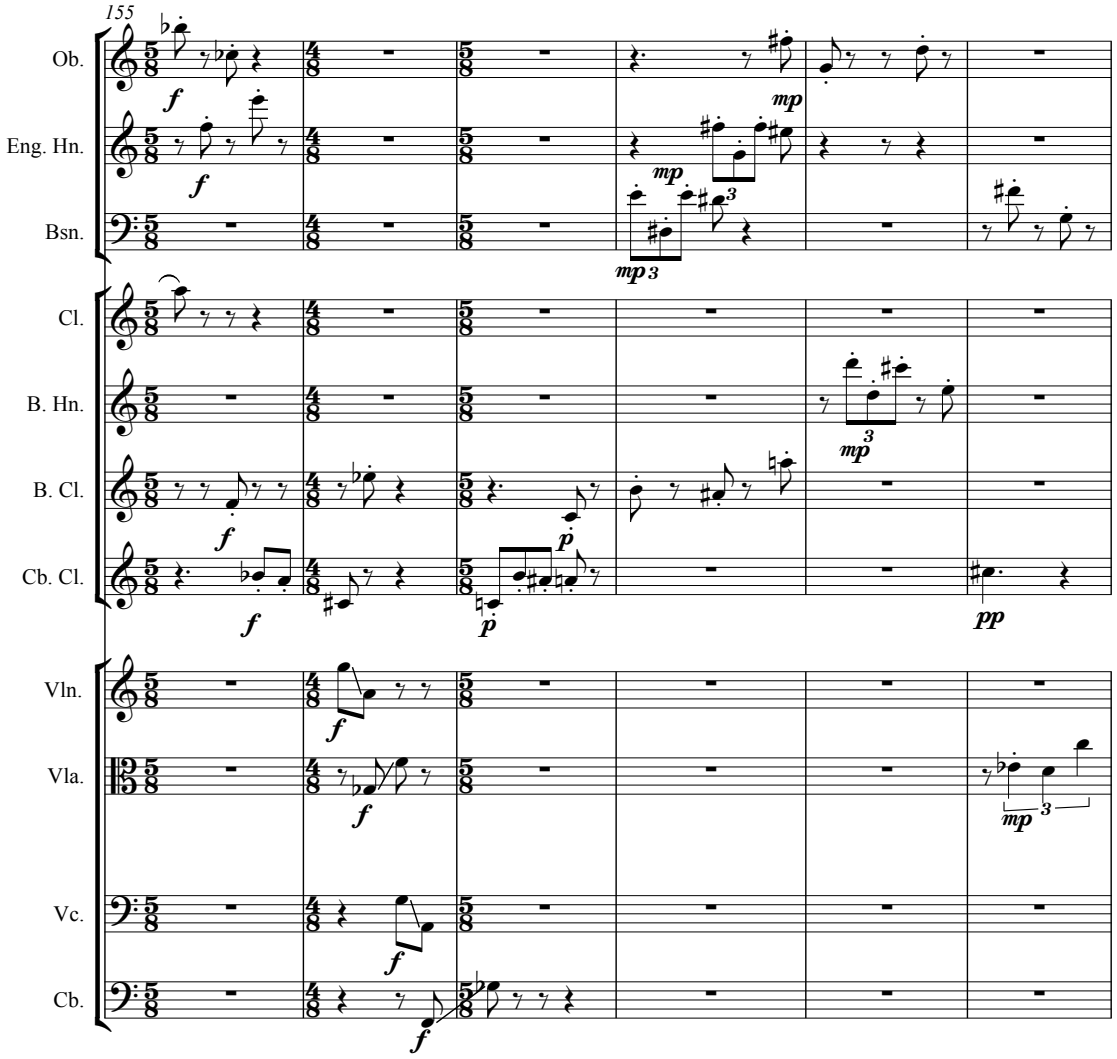
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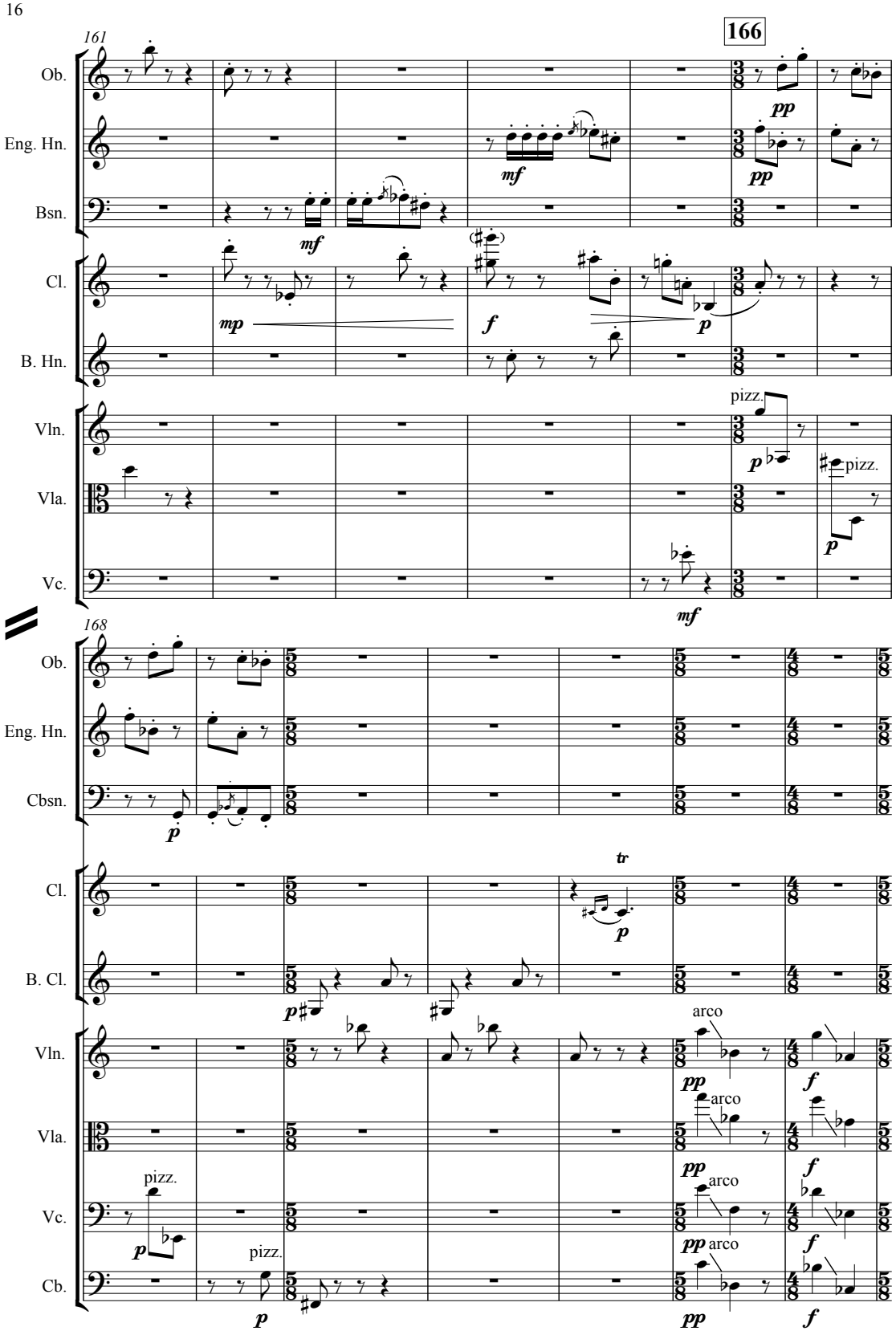
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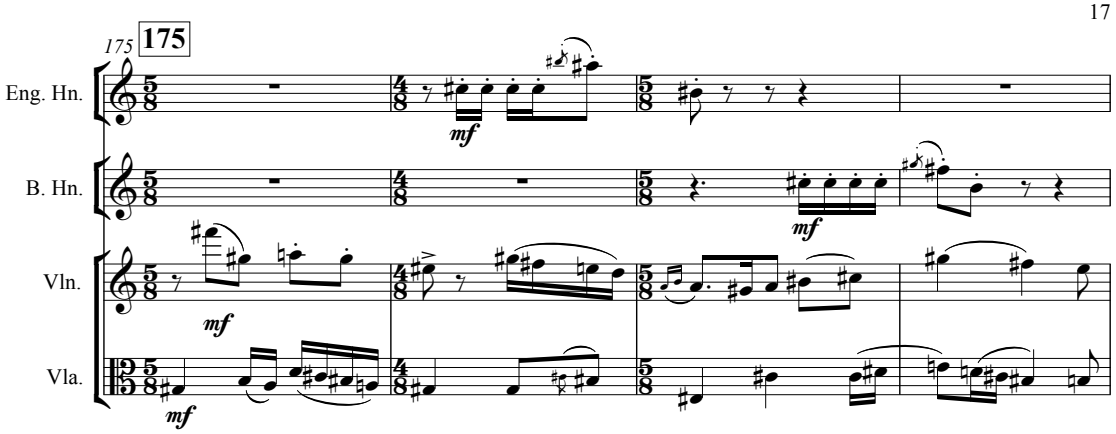
Cb.
arco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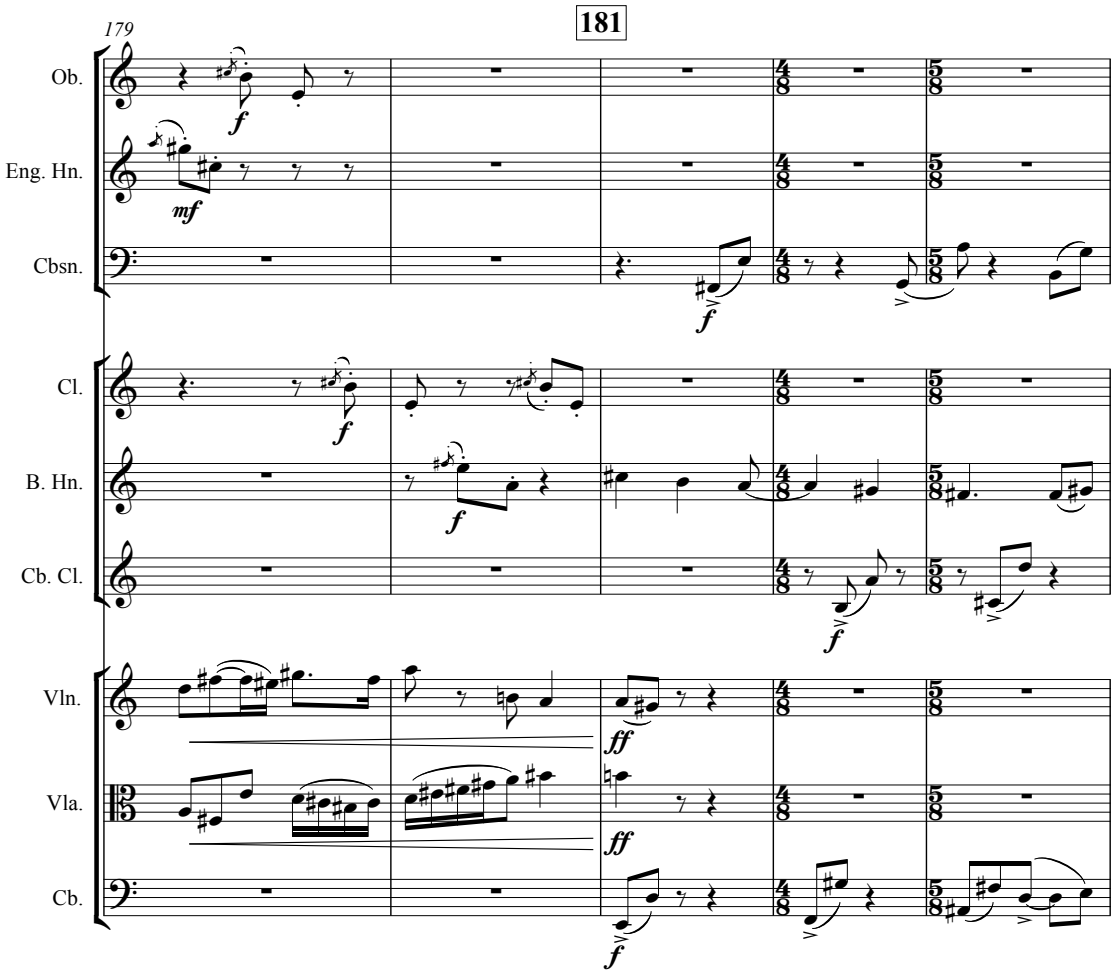
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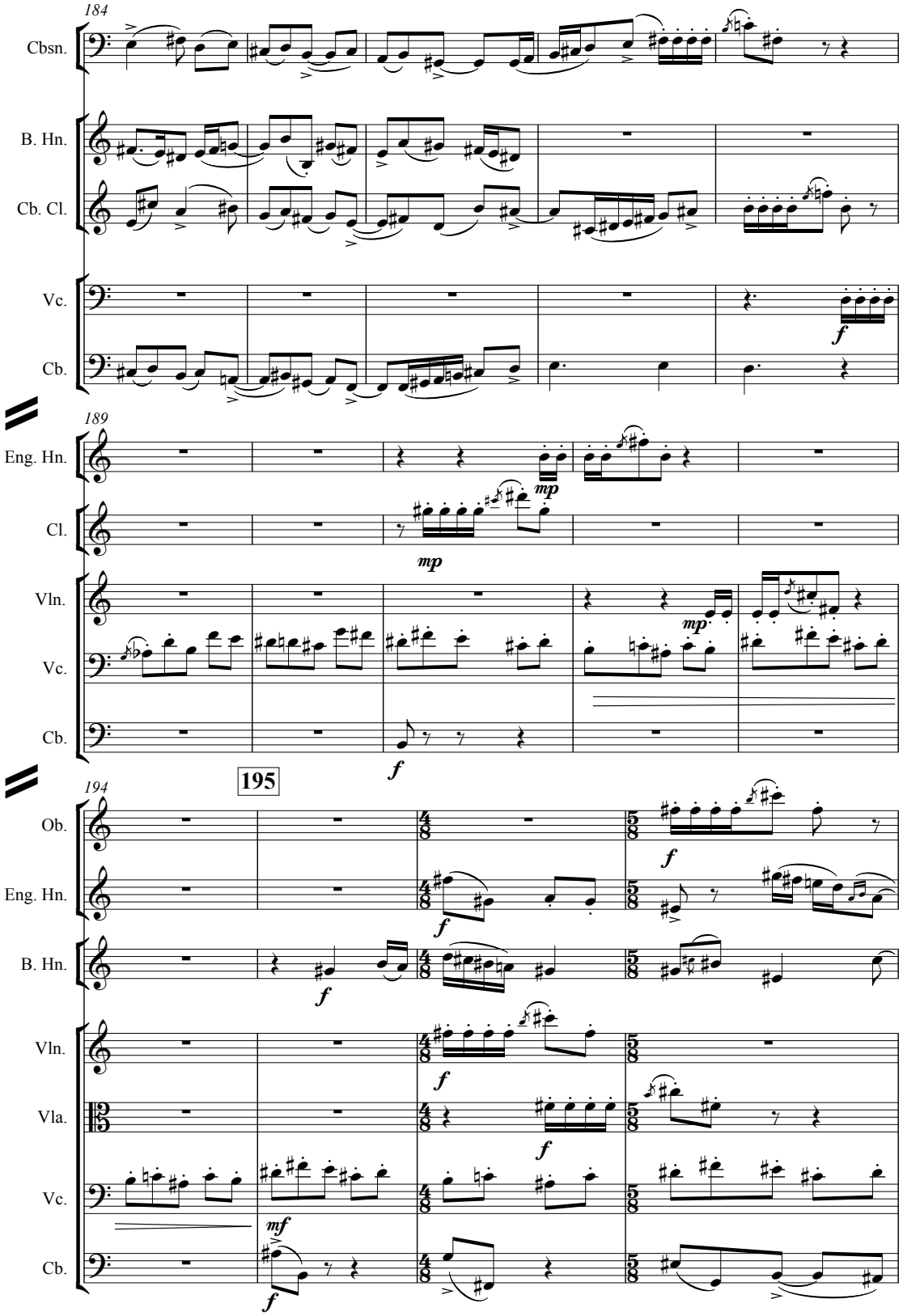
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mp
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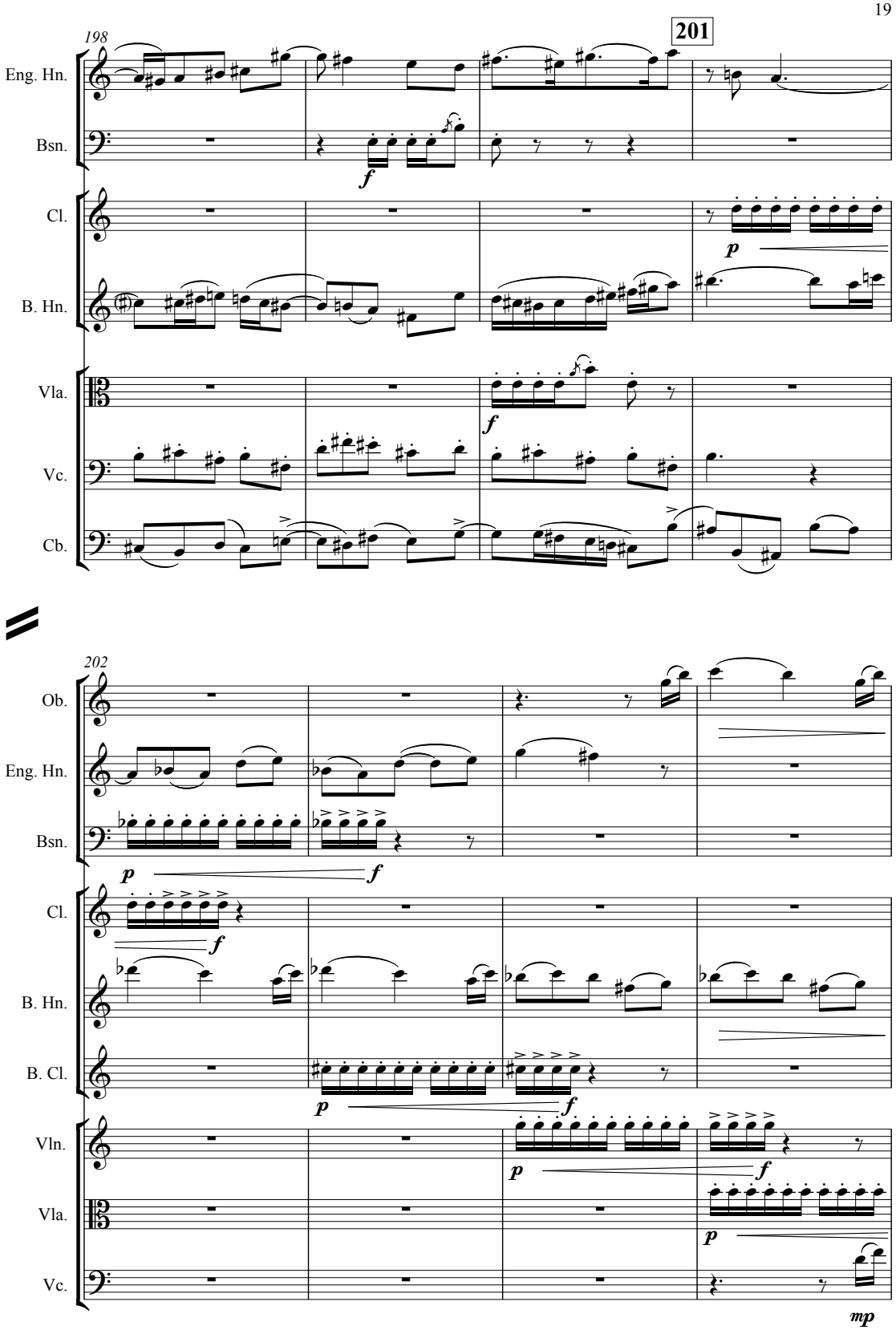
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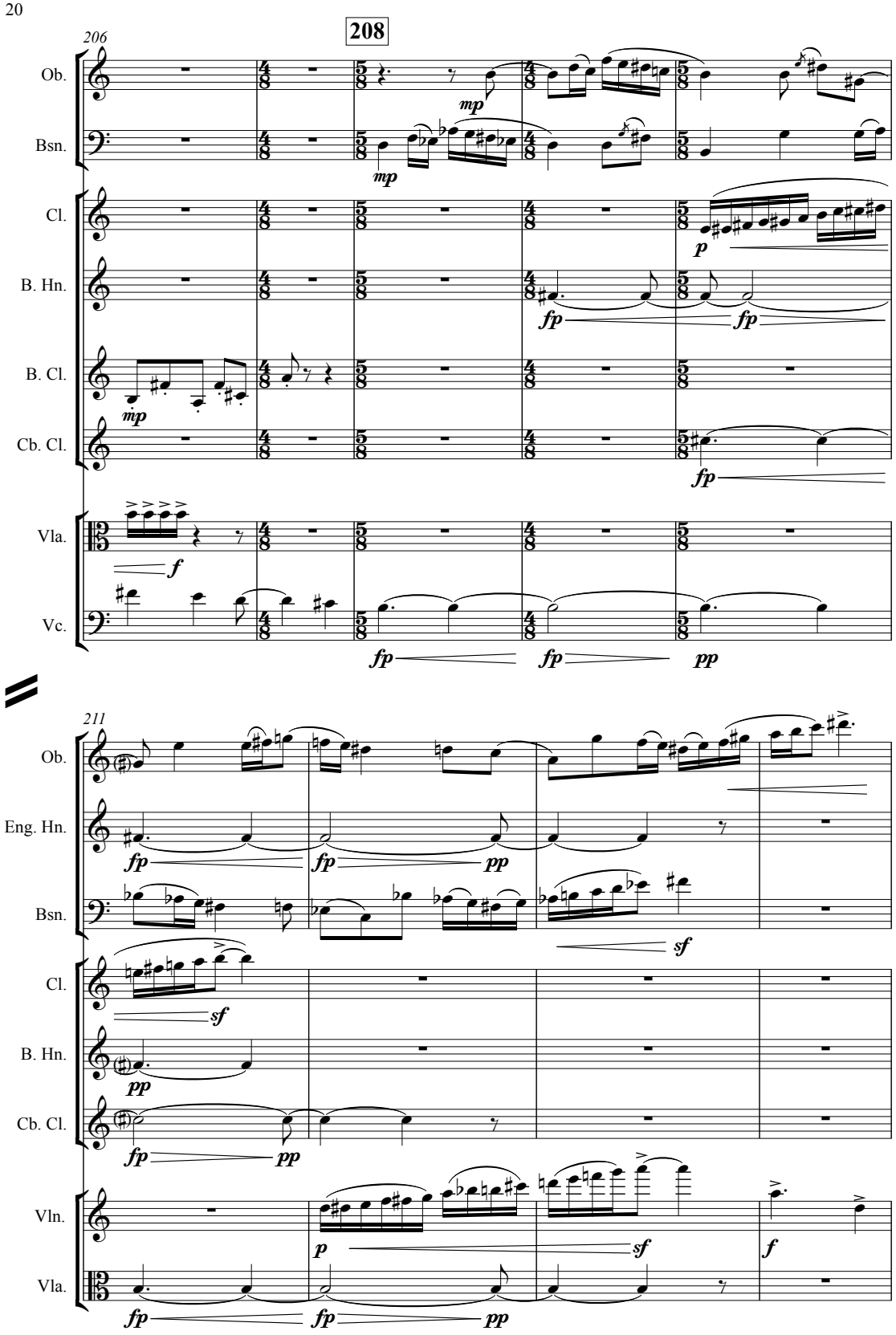
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fp
fp
pp
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Eng. Hn.
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B. Hn.
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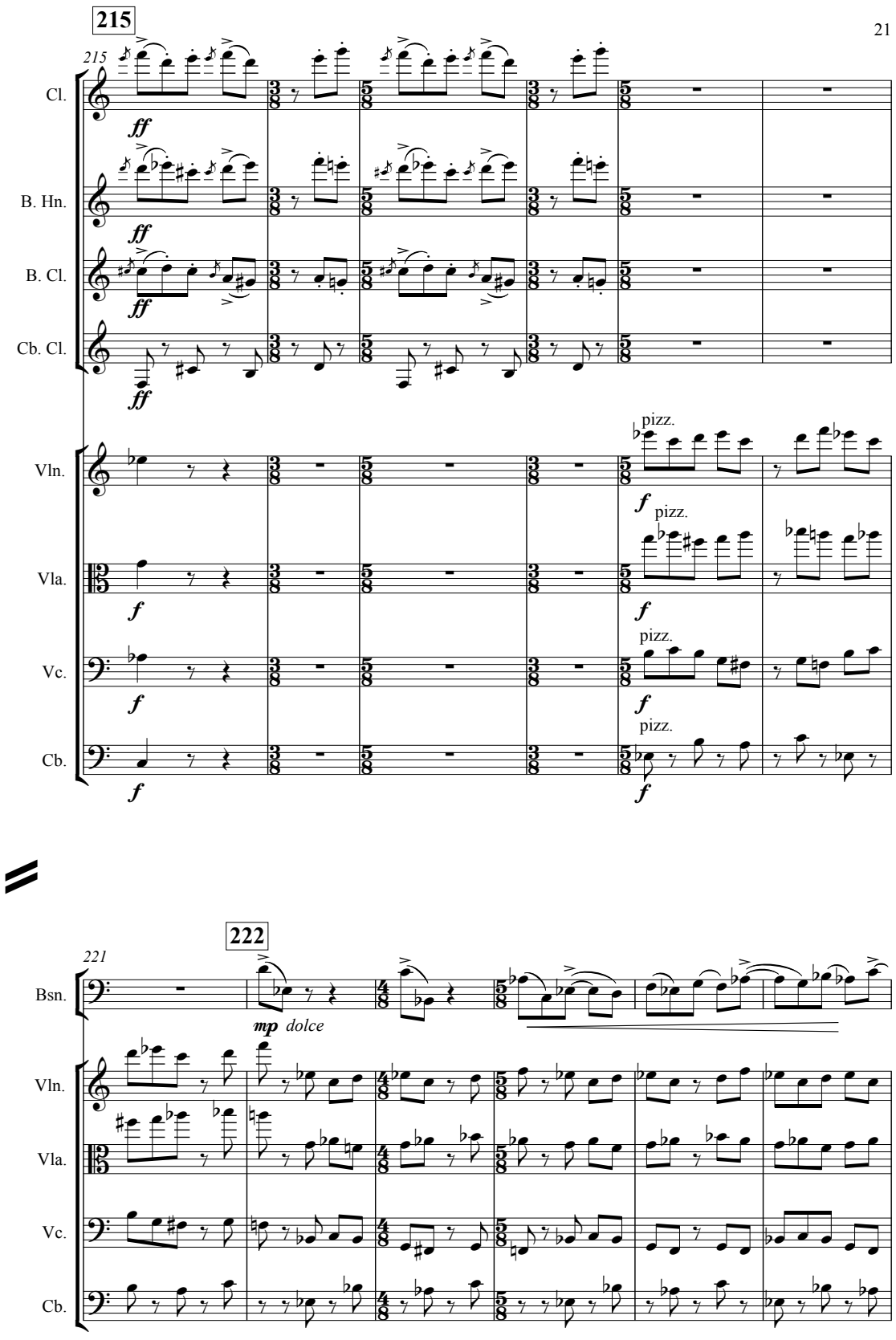
215
215
Cl.
B. Hn.
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Cb.
pizz.
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222
221
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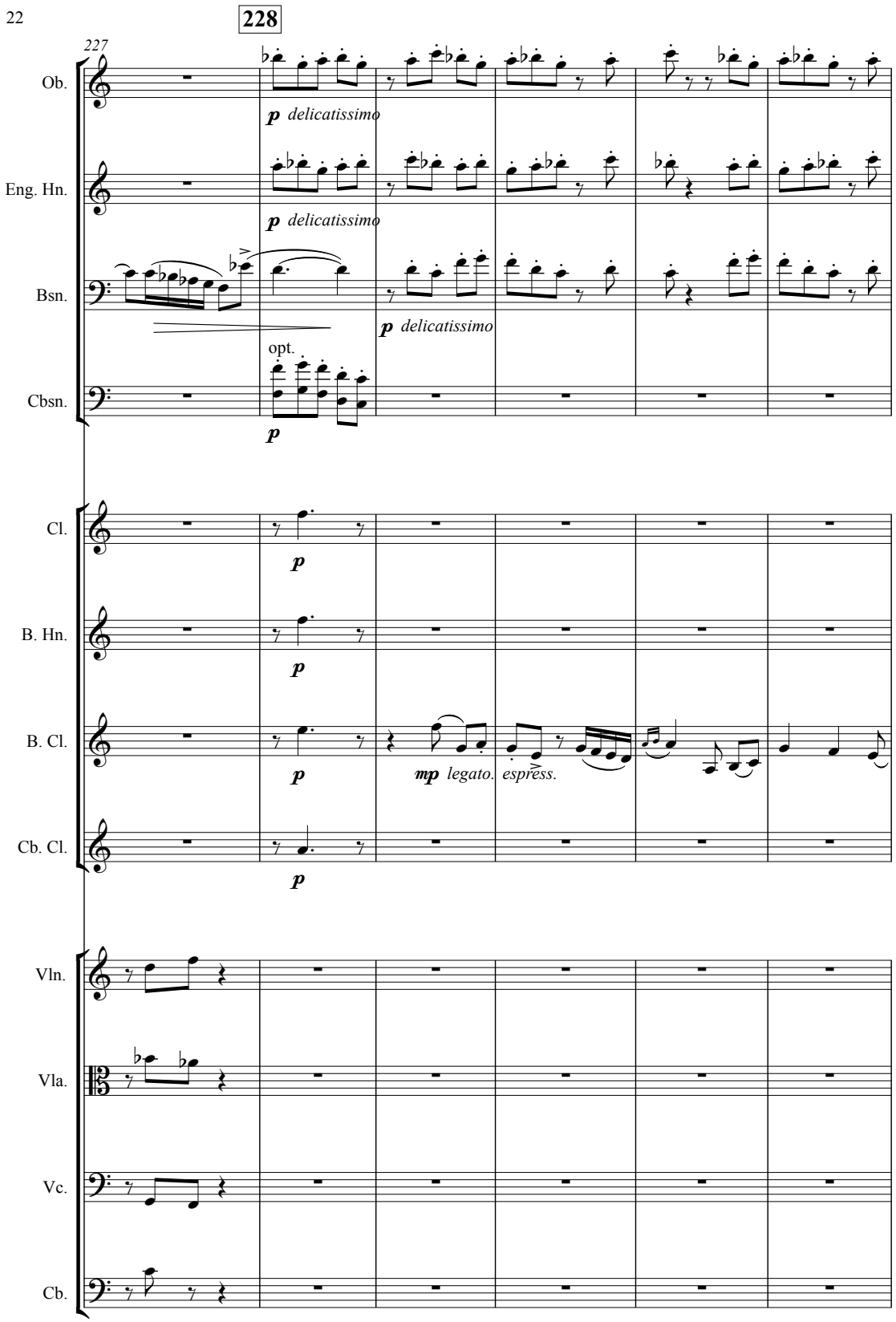
mp dolce


228
227
Ob.
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Eng. Hn.
p delicatissimo
Bsn.
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opt.
Cbsn.
p
Cl.
p
B. Hn.
p
B. Cl.
p
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espress.
Cb. Cl.
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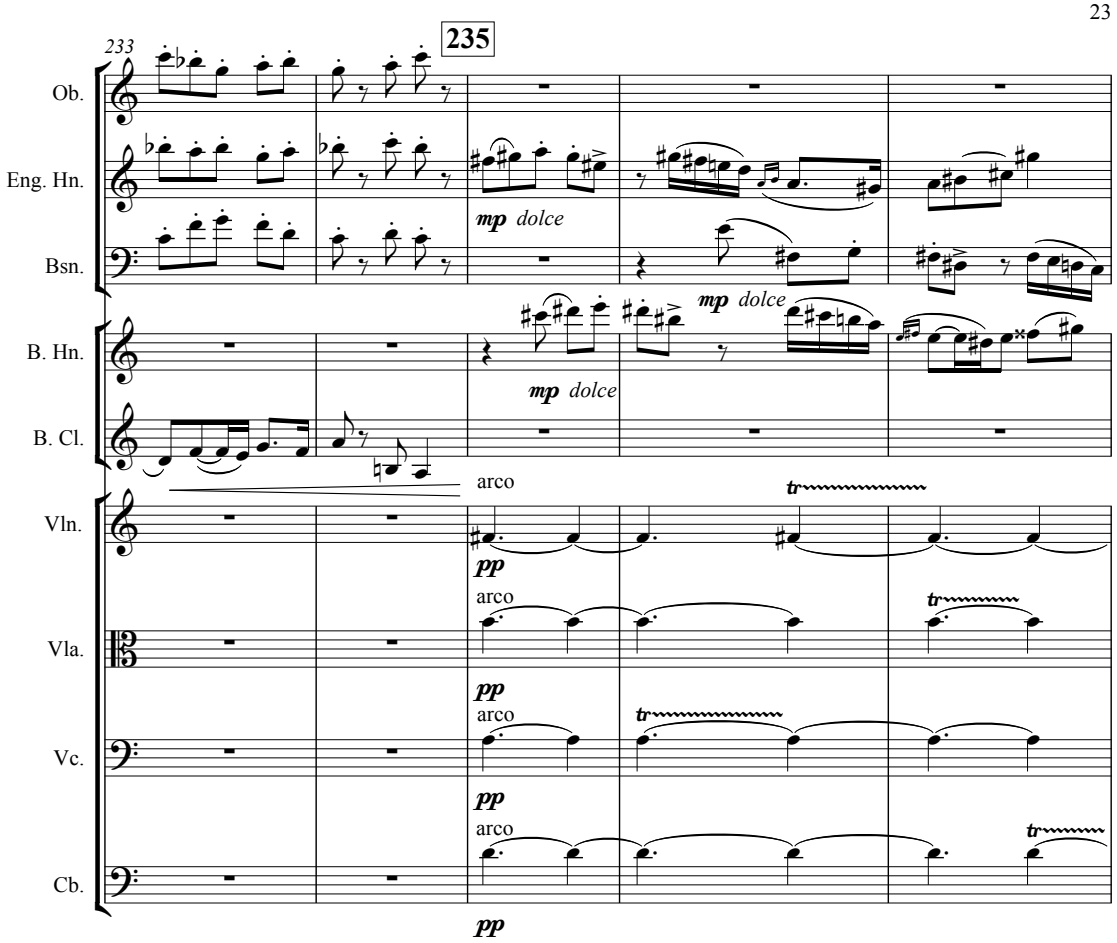
Vc.
Cb.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Vc.
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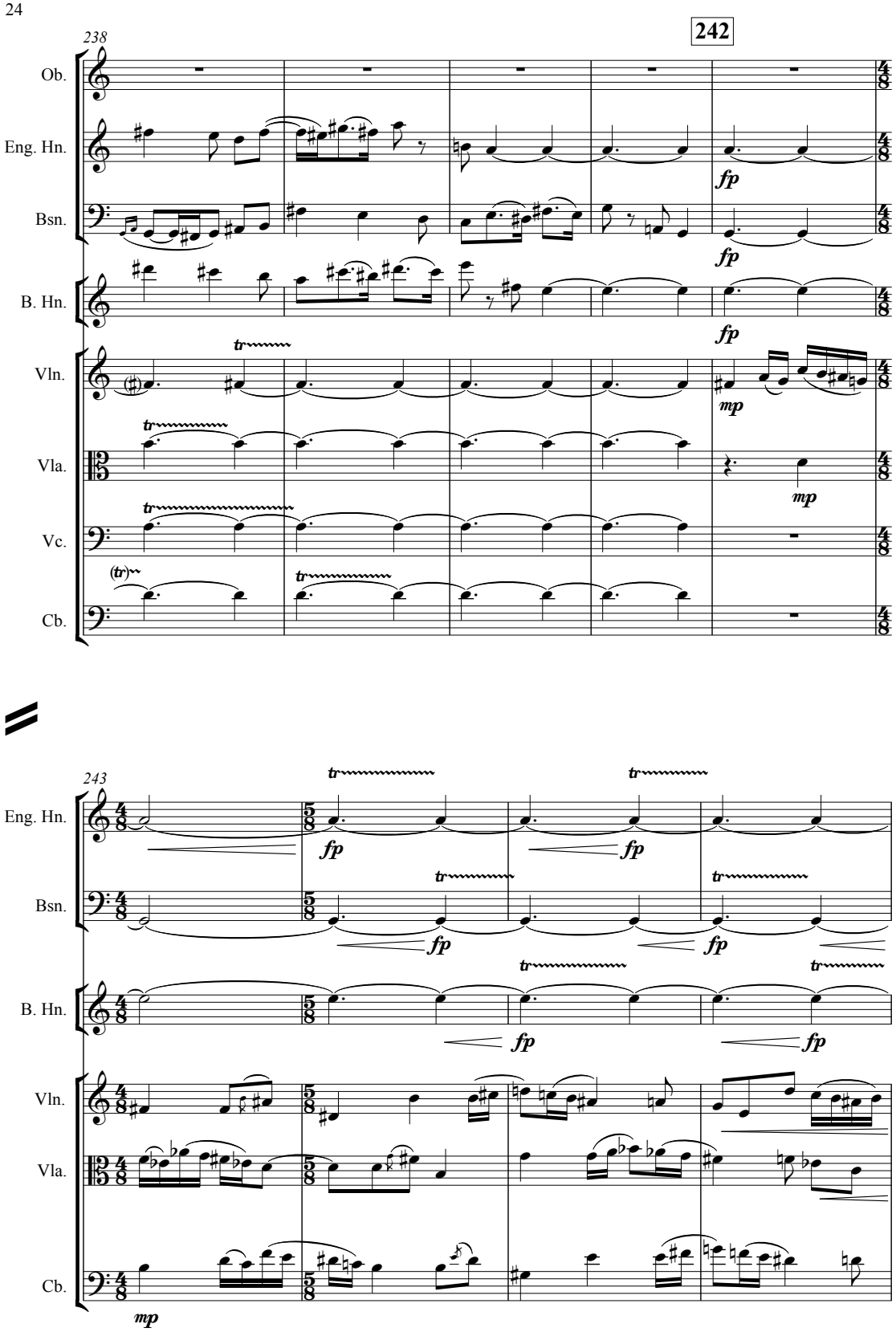
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B. Hn.
Vln.
Vla.
Cb.
fp
mp
tr