ELEGY FOR MISS COVINGTON

poem by Barbara Goldowsky
music by Jeffrey Ryan

for SSAA choir and string orchestra

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Instrumentation:
SSAA choir
String orchestra (min. 33221)

Total performance time ca. 4'50"

Programme note:

From a New York Times article, May 18, 1910:
"Blanche Covington made up her mind that there was no escape from Halley's Comet and that it would kill everyone in Chicago…Dreading the suffering she might have to undergo she locked herself in a room and turned on the gas."

When I first explored Barbara Goldowsky's poetry for my mezzo-soprano cycle *First there was light*, there were many poems that inspired me musically, but didn't fit with that particular project. *Elegy for Miss Covington* is one of those poems that I've been waiting to set. The poem finds a dark humour in Miss Covington's ill-informed and (certainly to the modern observer) ludicrous actions—how could she overreact like that?—and in this setting, there is much gossip as the story spreads. Fortunately, Miss Covington was saved, and after her moment of notoriety was over, her name disappeared into oblivion. The piece turns sweetly poignant when the poem conjectures what the rest of her life, which went unreported, might have been, suggesting that perhaps she lived a full, long life, and her spirit now rides the tail of the comet.

Elegy for Miss Covington was commissioned by Elektra Women's Choir in celebration of its 20th anniversary.

(programme note by Barbara Goldowsky and Jeffrey Ryan)

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ELEGY FORO MISS COVINGTON

Miss Covington had read the dreadful news
about the gas.
The Comet's tail contained — a scientific
fact — cyanogen. Identified by almond
scent, a particle upon the tongue
could kill, the papers said.

Miss Covington could see a future bleak
as outer space; closed door
and window, then turned on
the gas — illuminating —
and took her first breath of eternity.
A neighbor called police.
Miss Covington was saved.

The New York Times does not record
her further life, or death.
Had she a brother in the War
who came back maimed by mustard gas?
A favorite niece in Europe,
deported to a Camp?

Likely she just lived on, to die
of peaceful age, using
her gas range for the family meal,
a wholesome loaf of bread.

Miss Covington, stay well!
Your molecules waft by, mixed into comet dust,
trailing the faint familiar smell
of home-baked almond cookies.

Barbara Goldowsky
From *Ferry to Nirvana and New Poems*
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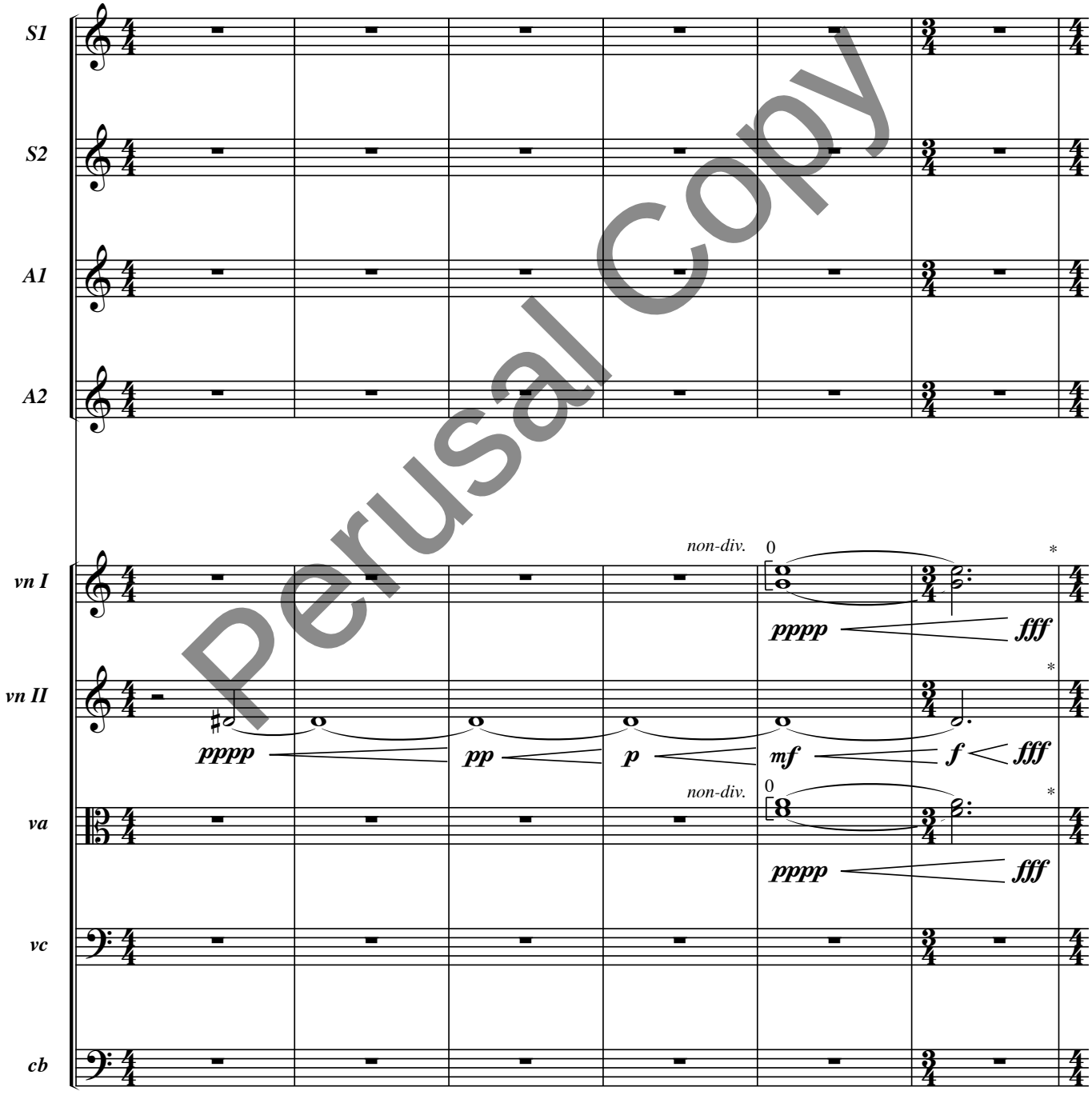
commissioned by Elektra Women's Choir
in celebration of its 20th anniversary

poem by
Barbara Goldowsky

ELEGY FOR MISS COVINGTON

music by
Jeffrey Ryan

♩ = 120 *Tempo di busybody*



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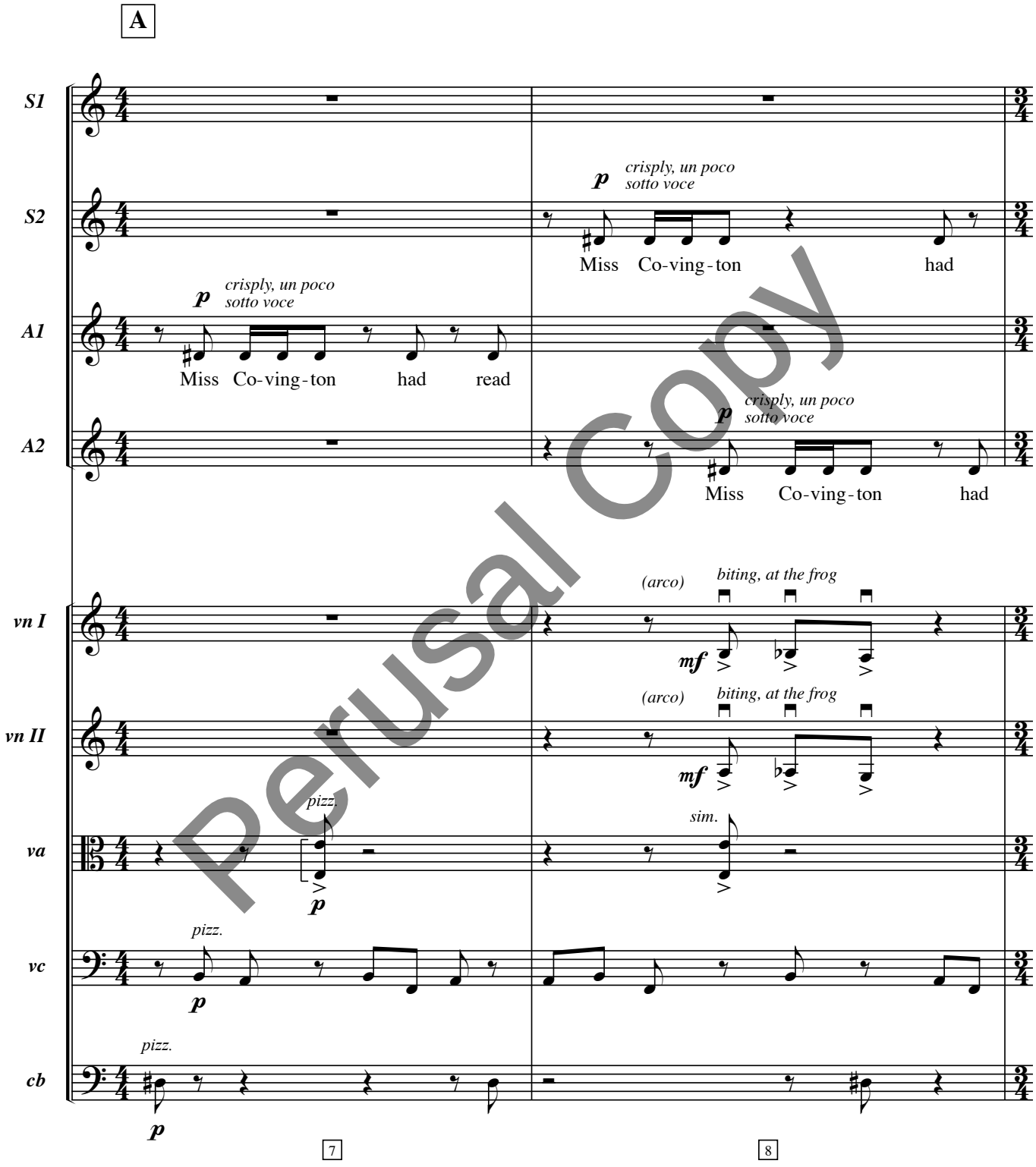
**cutoff with no accent*

text ©1991 Barbara Goldowsky
music © 2007 Jeffrey Ryan



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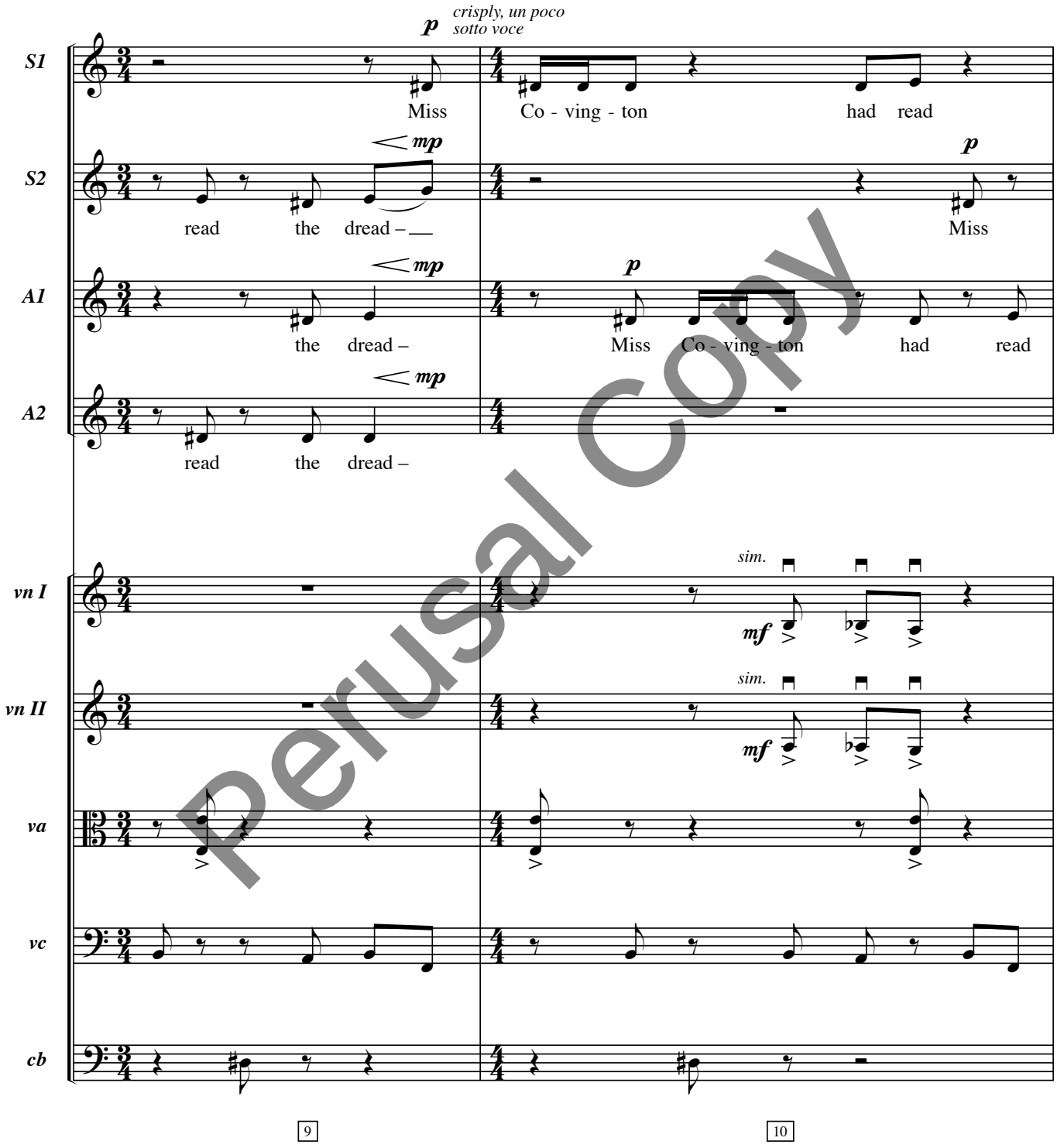

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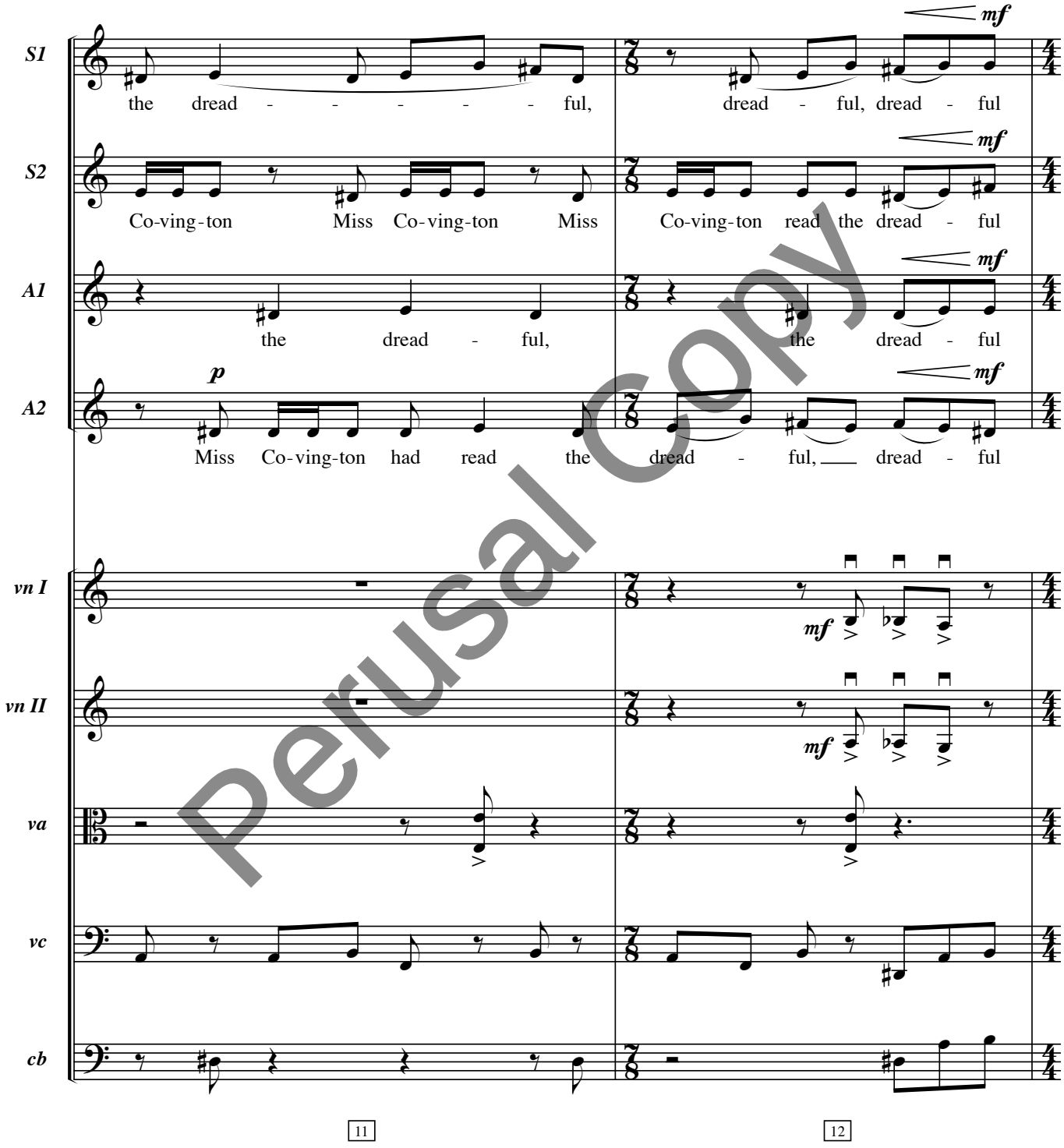

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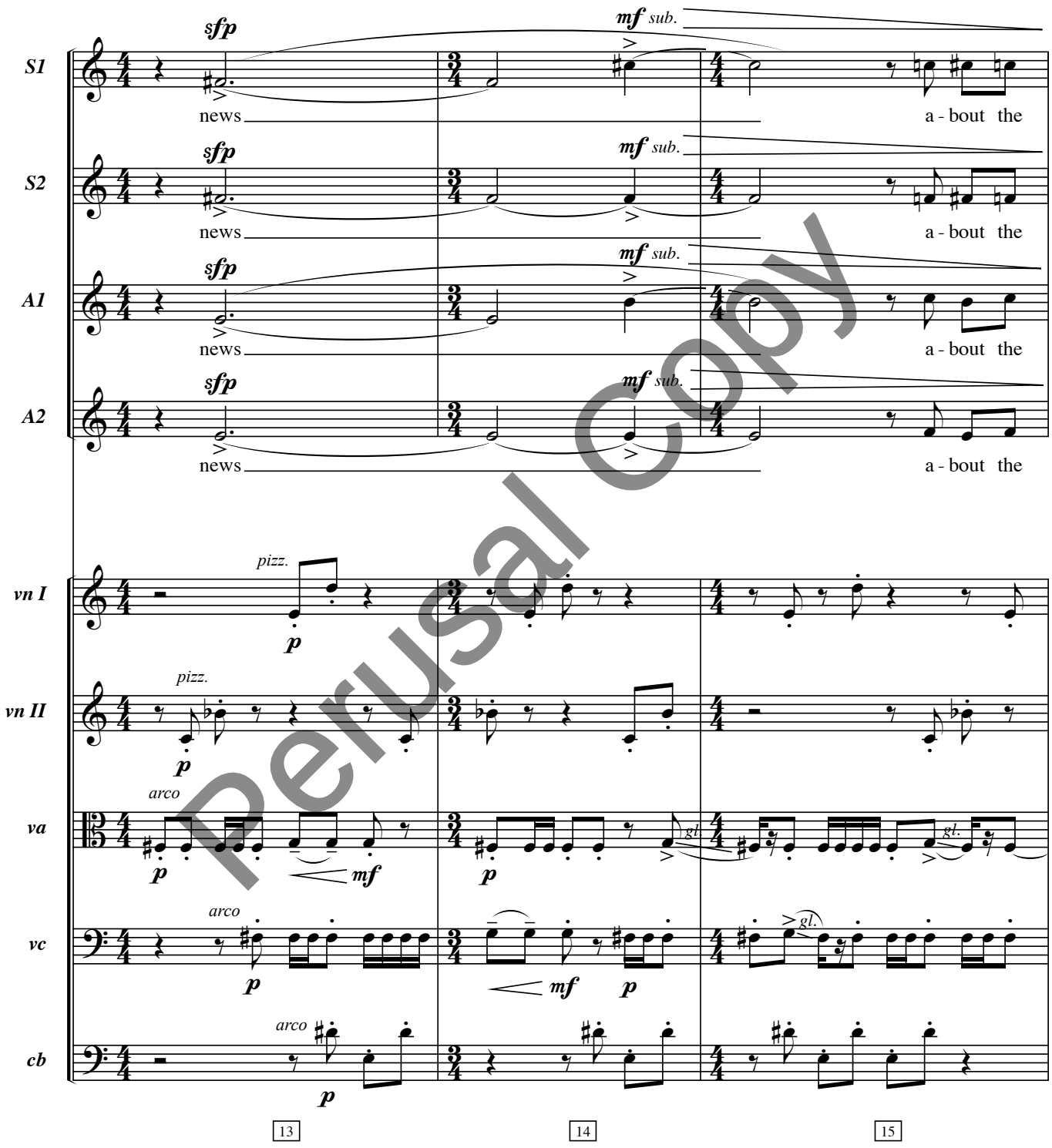

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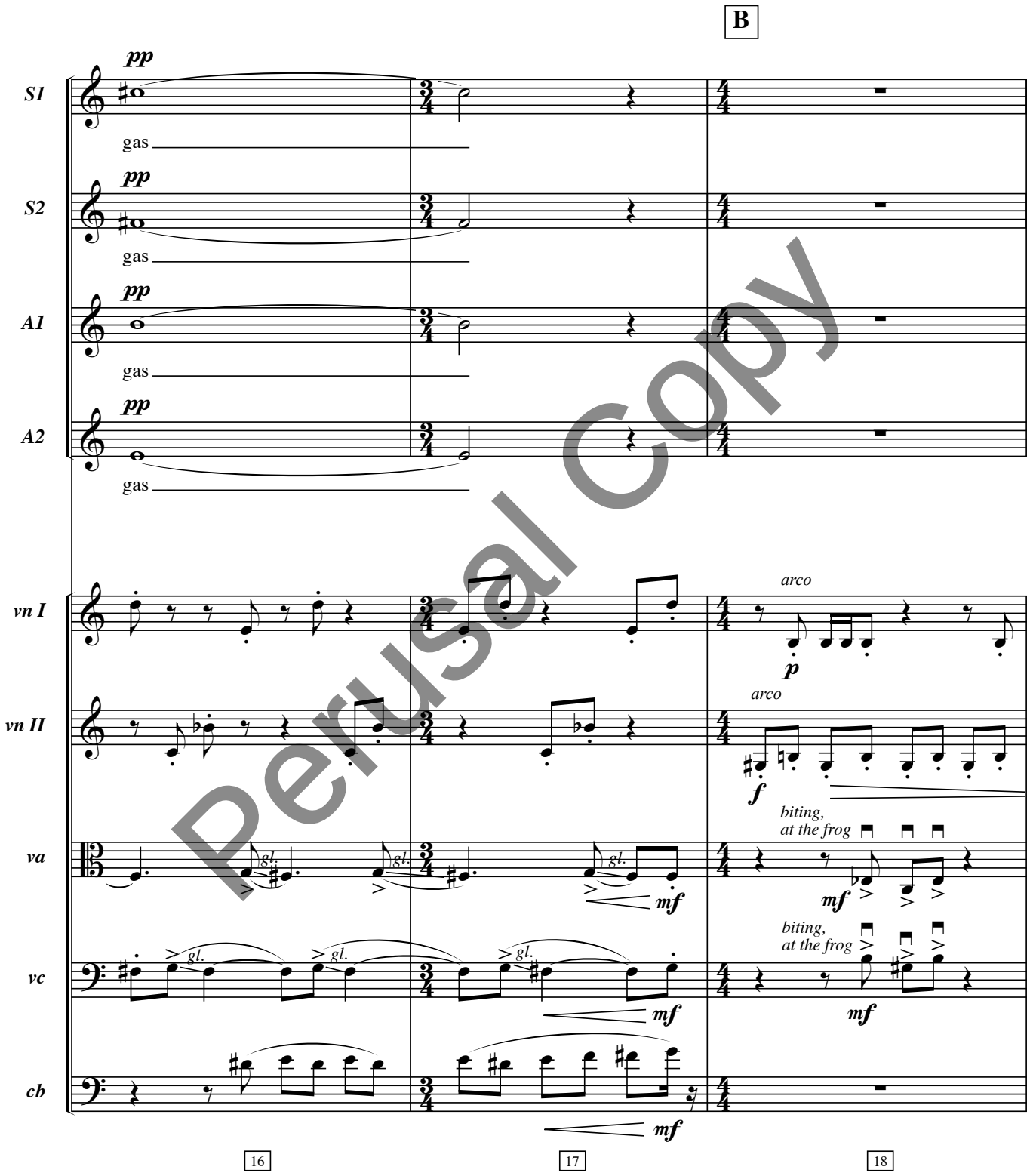

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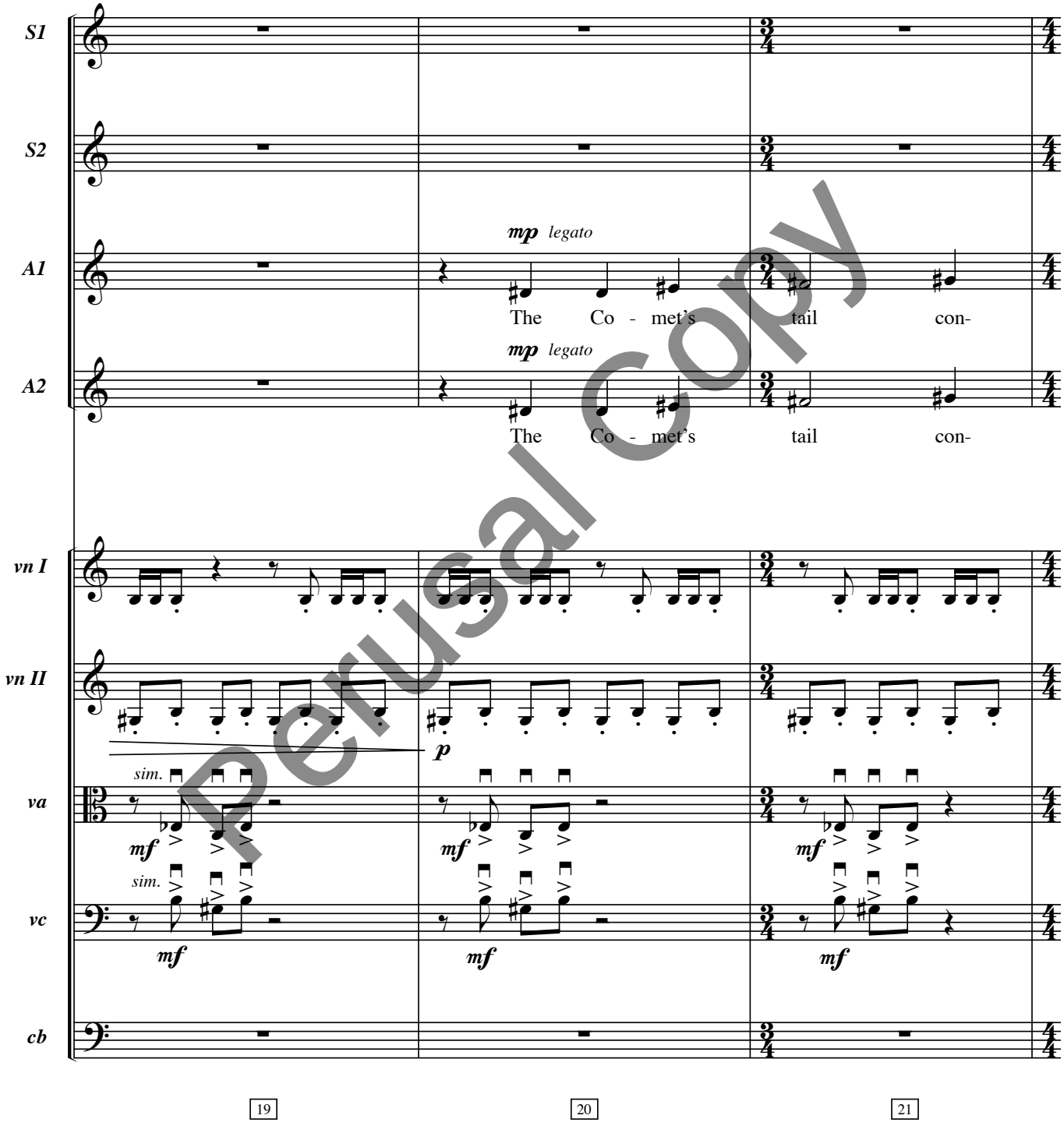

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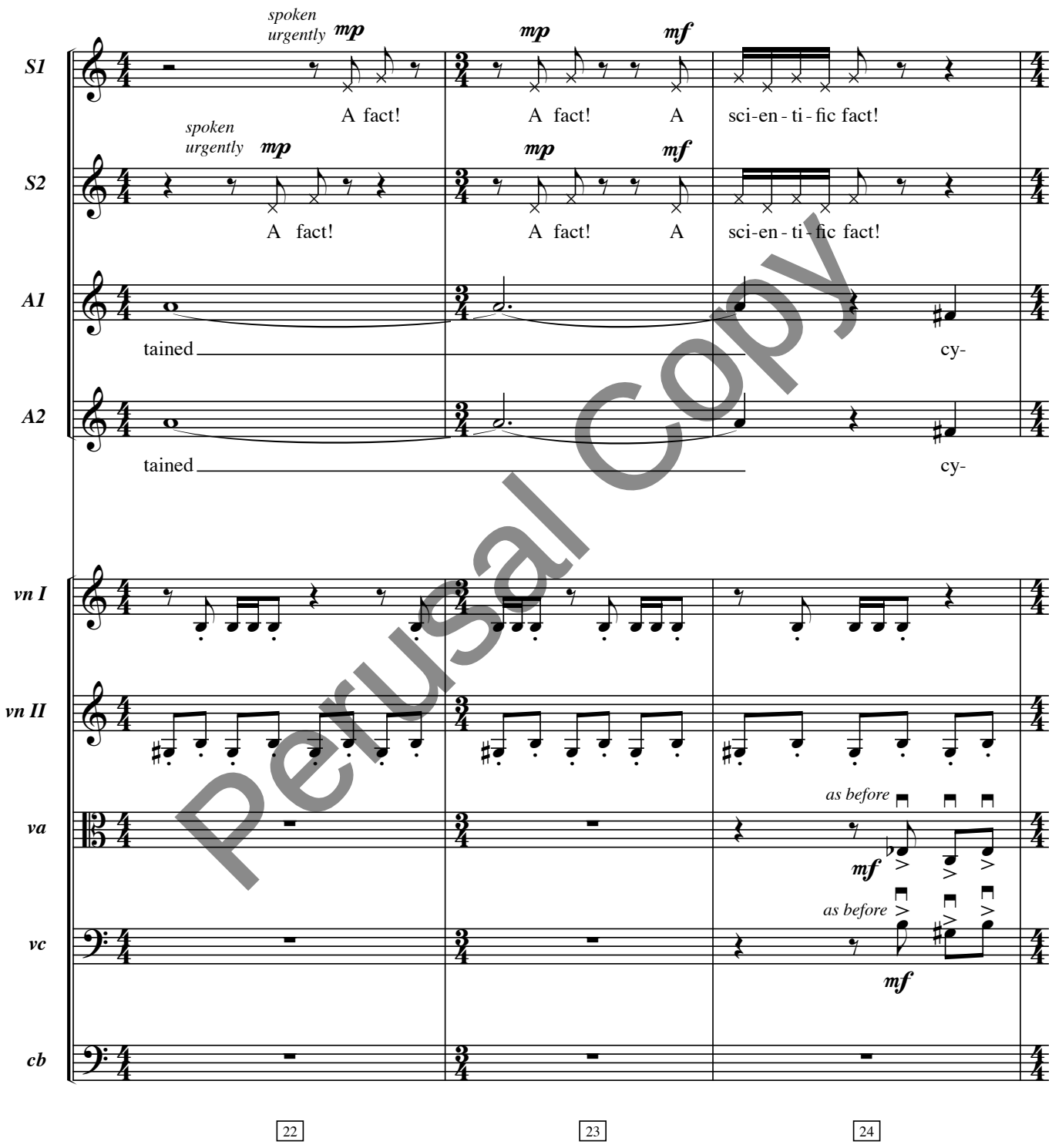

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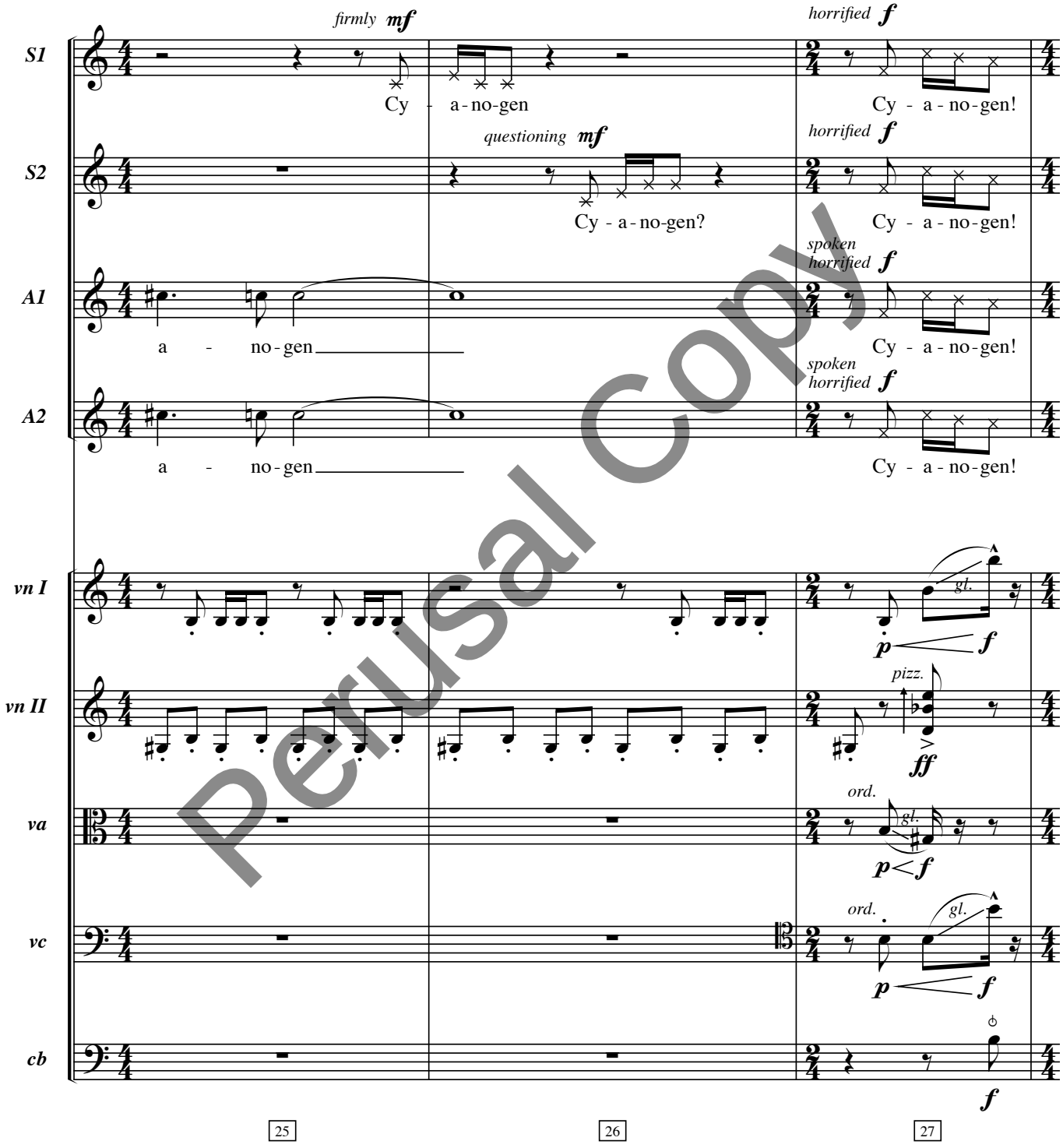

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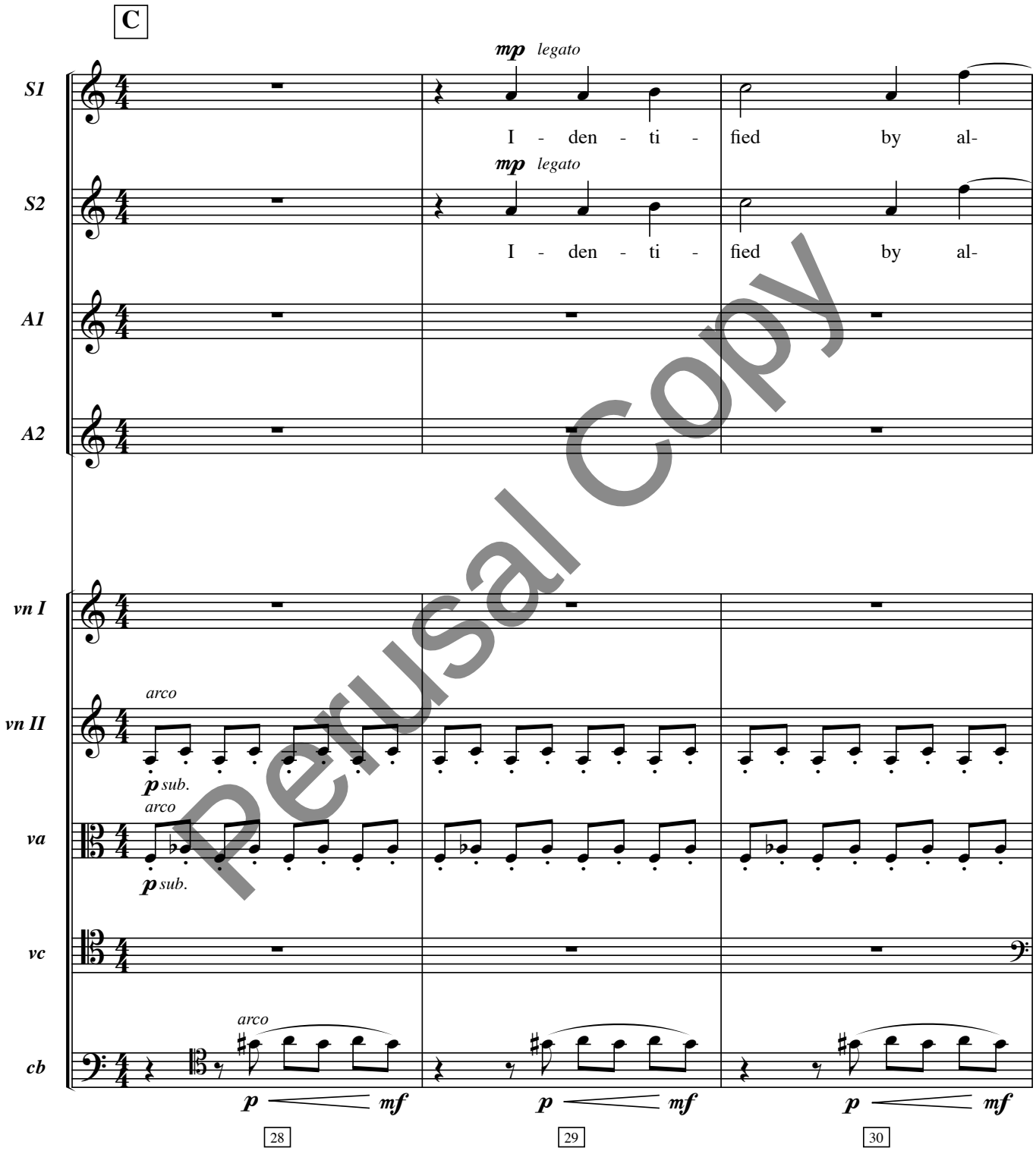

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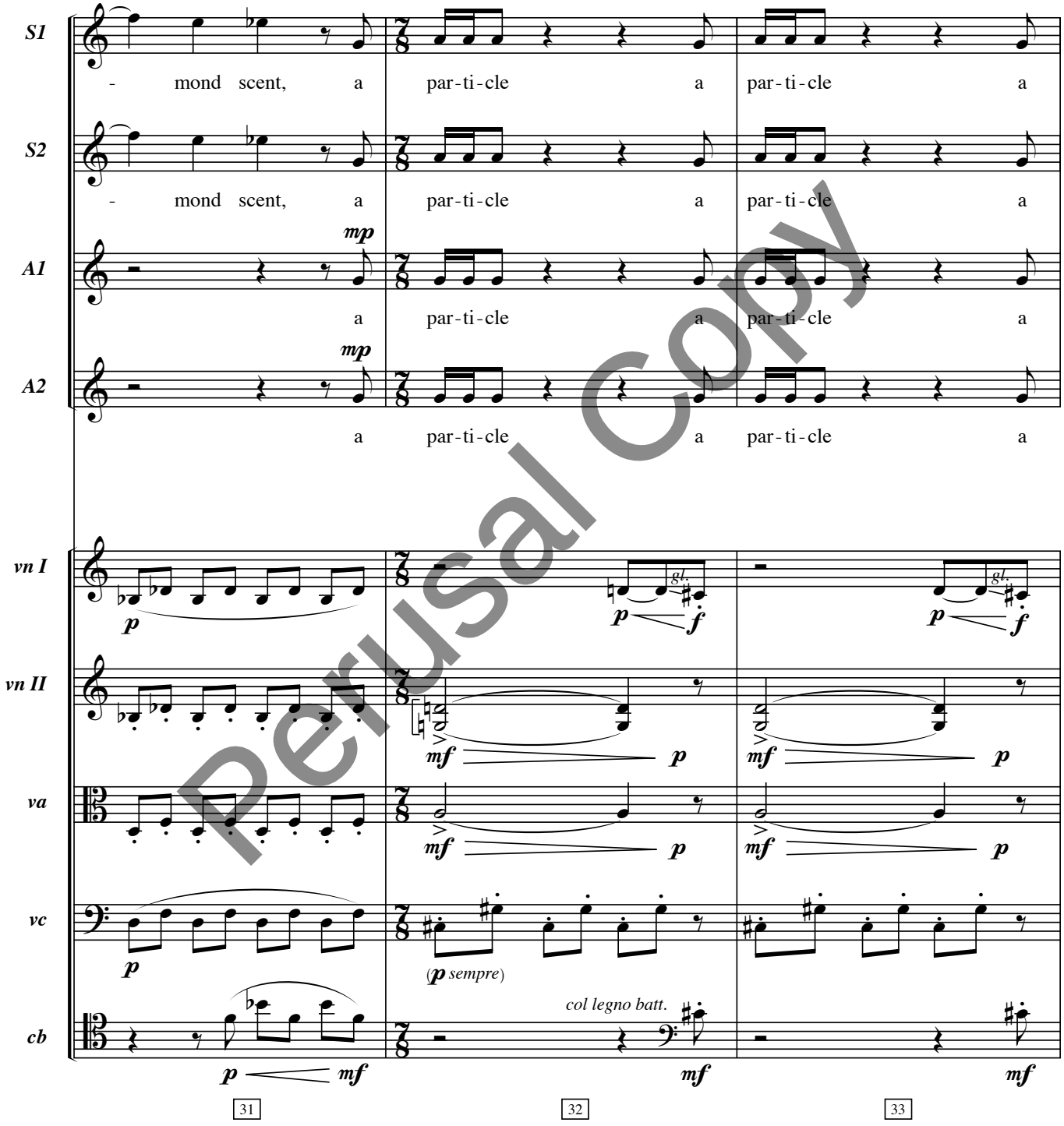

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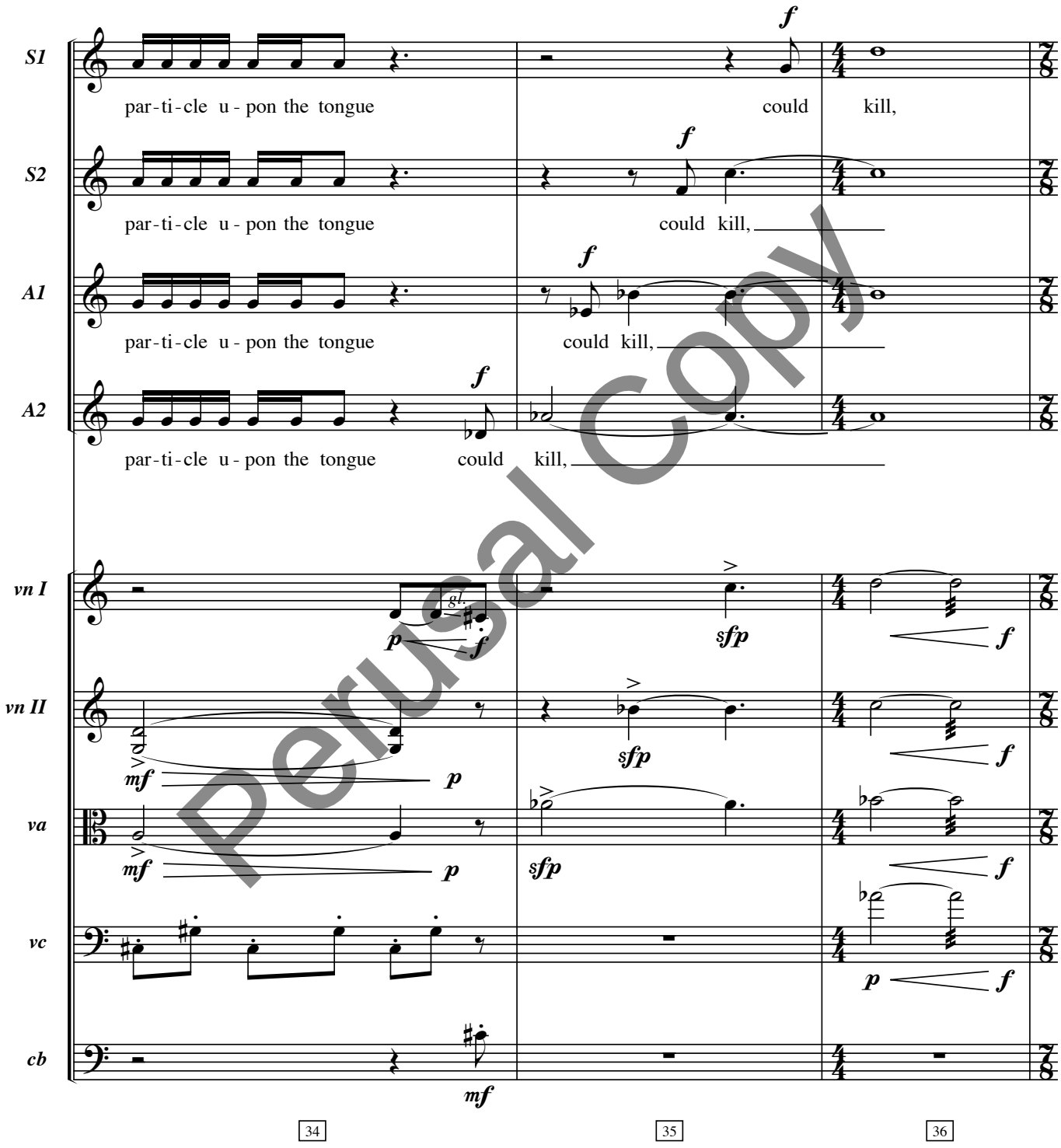

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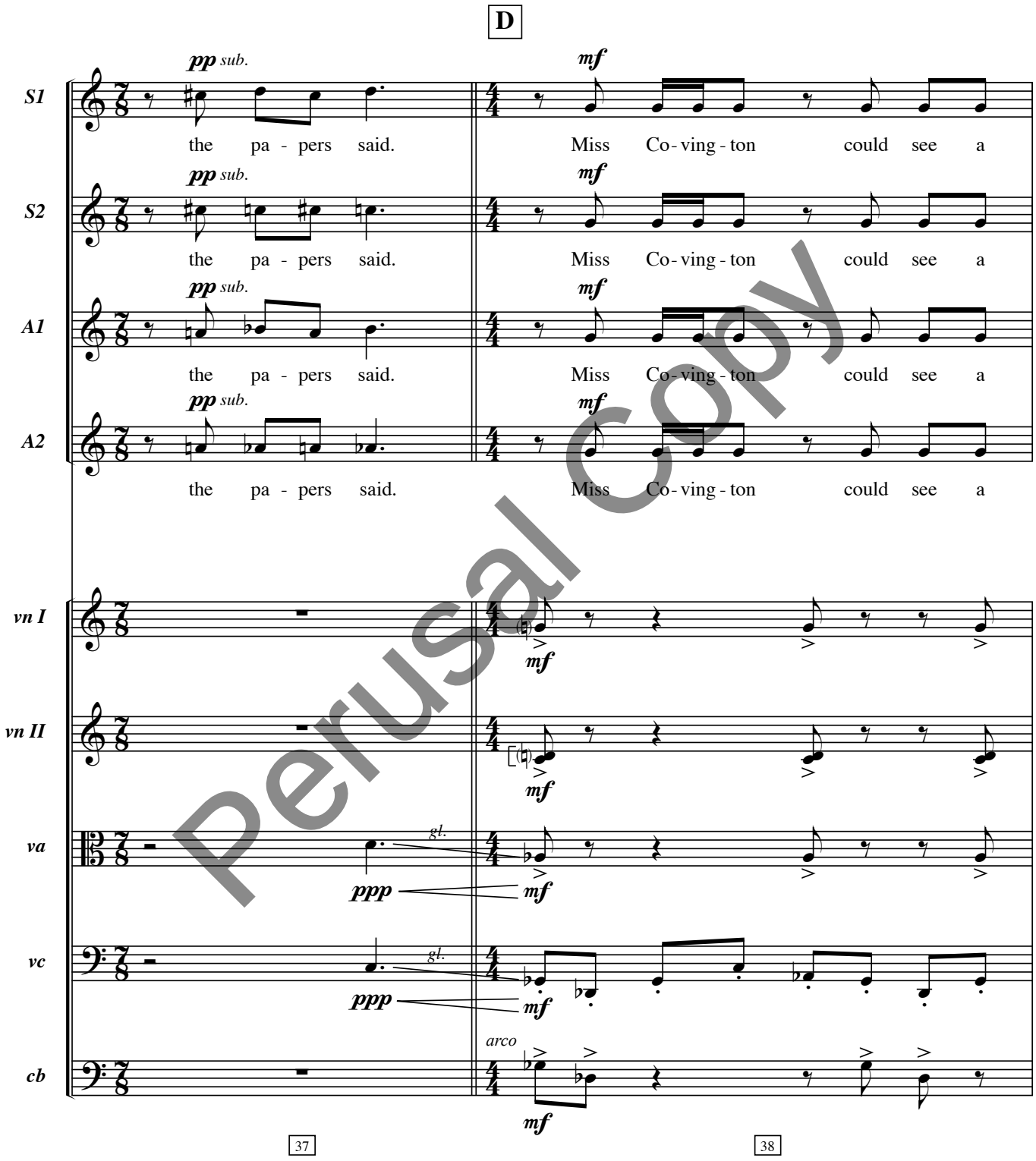

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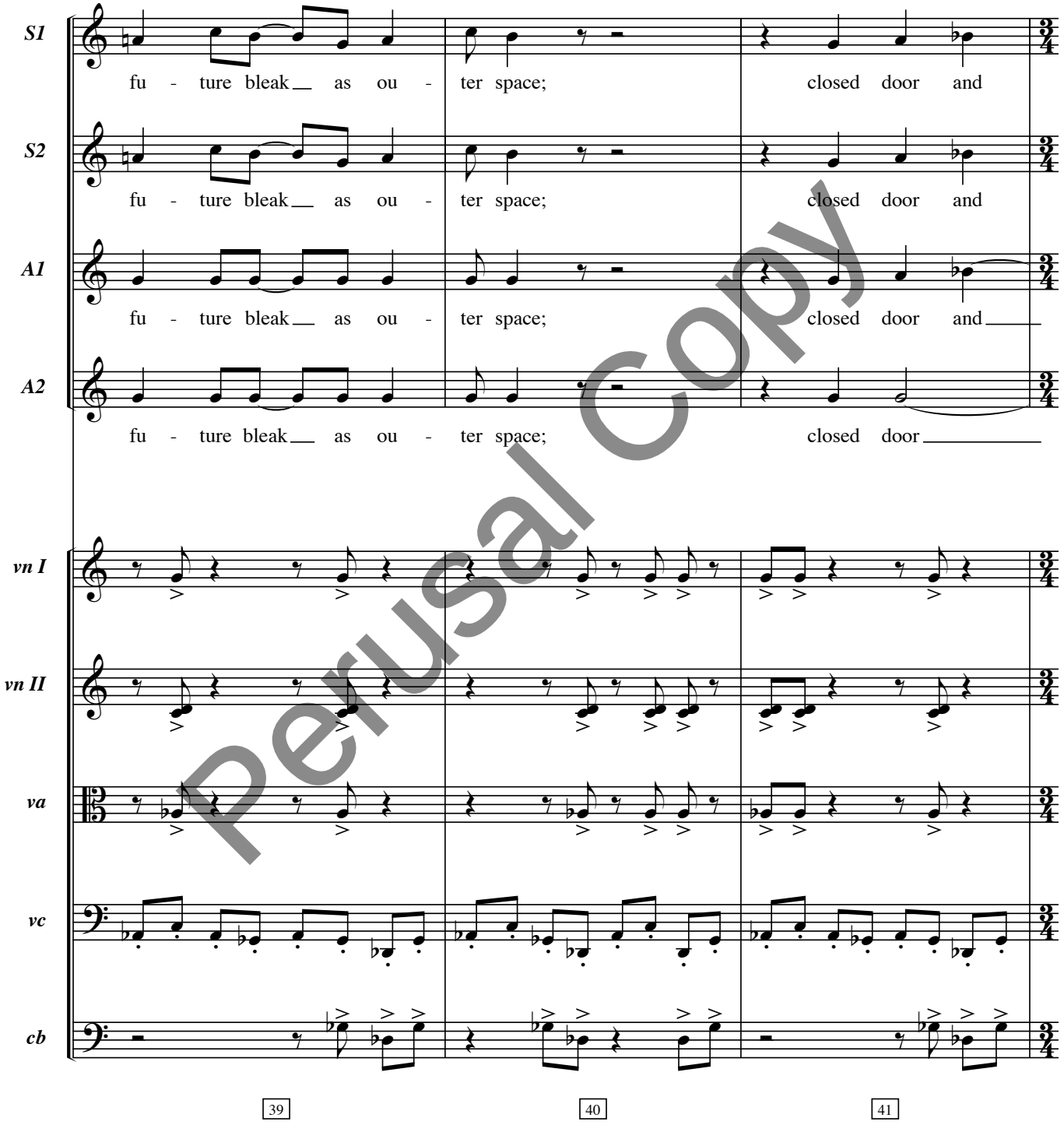

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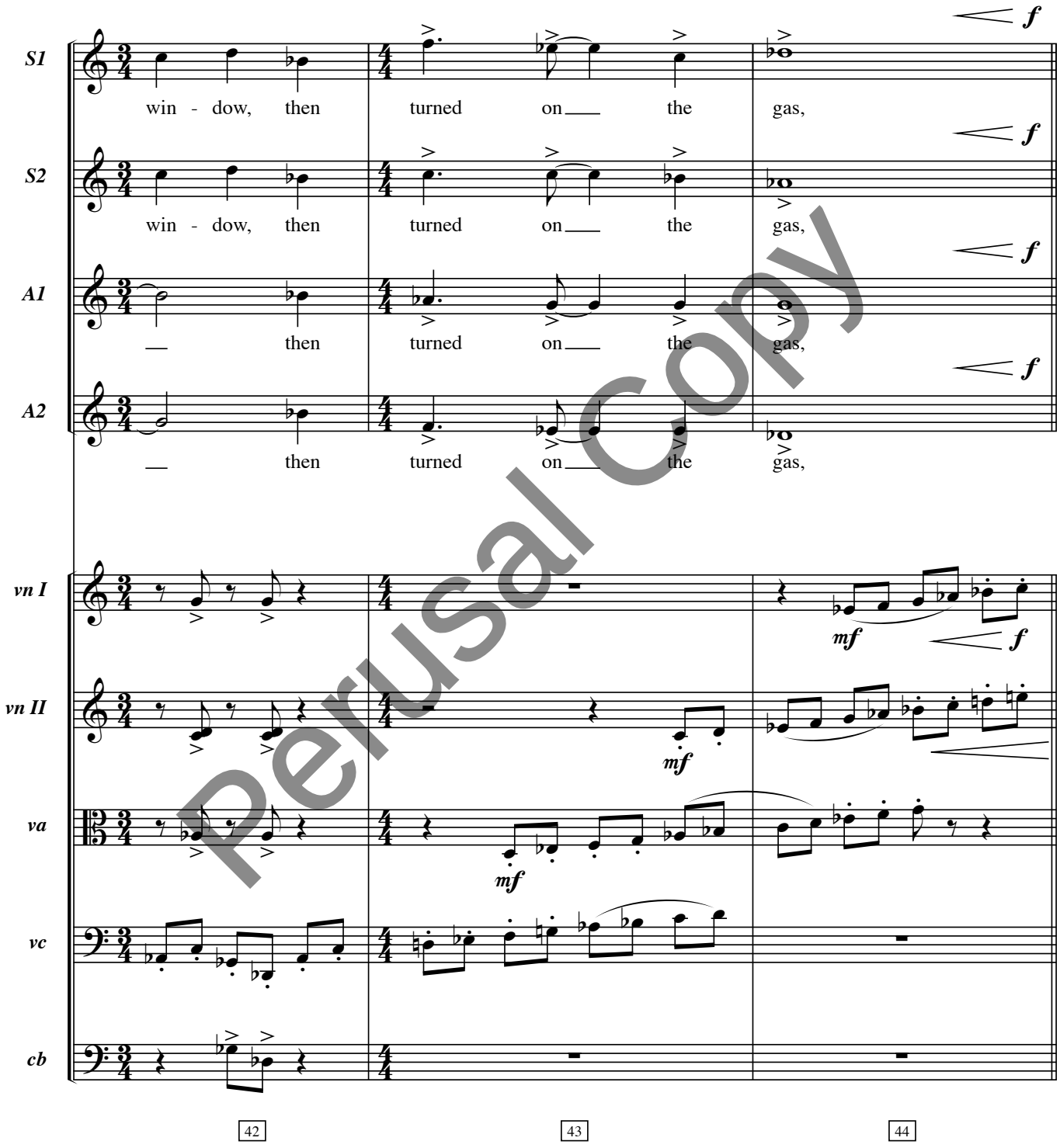

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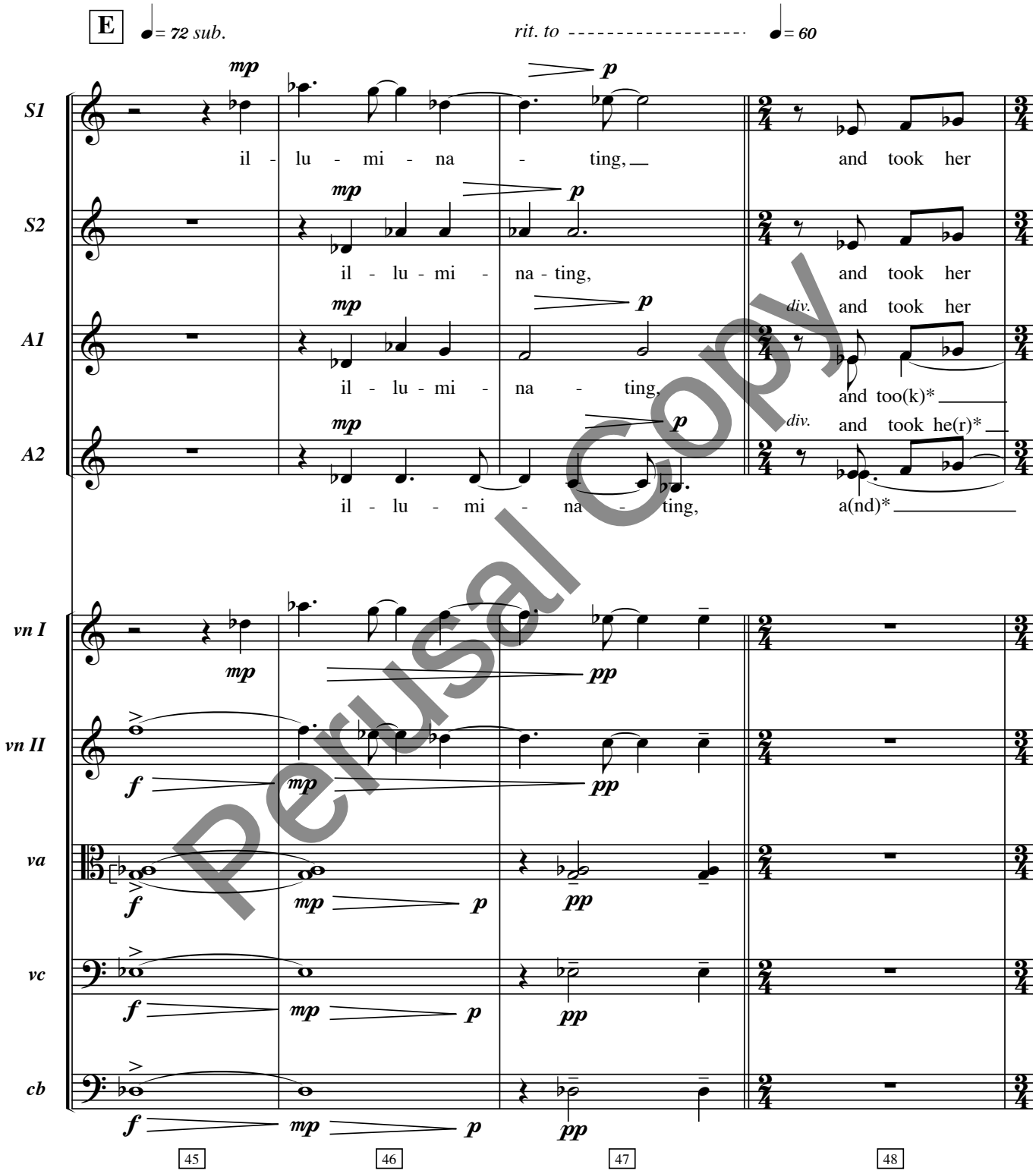

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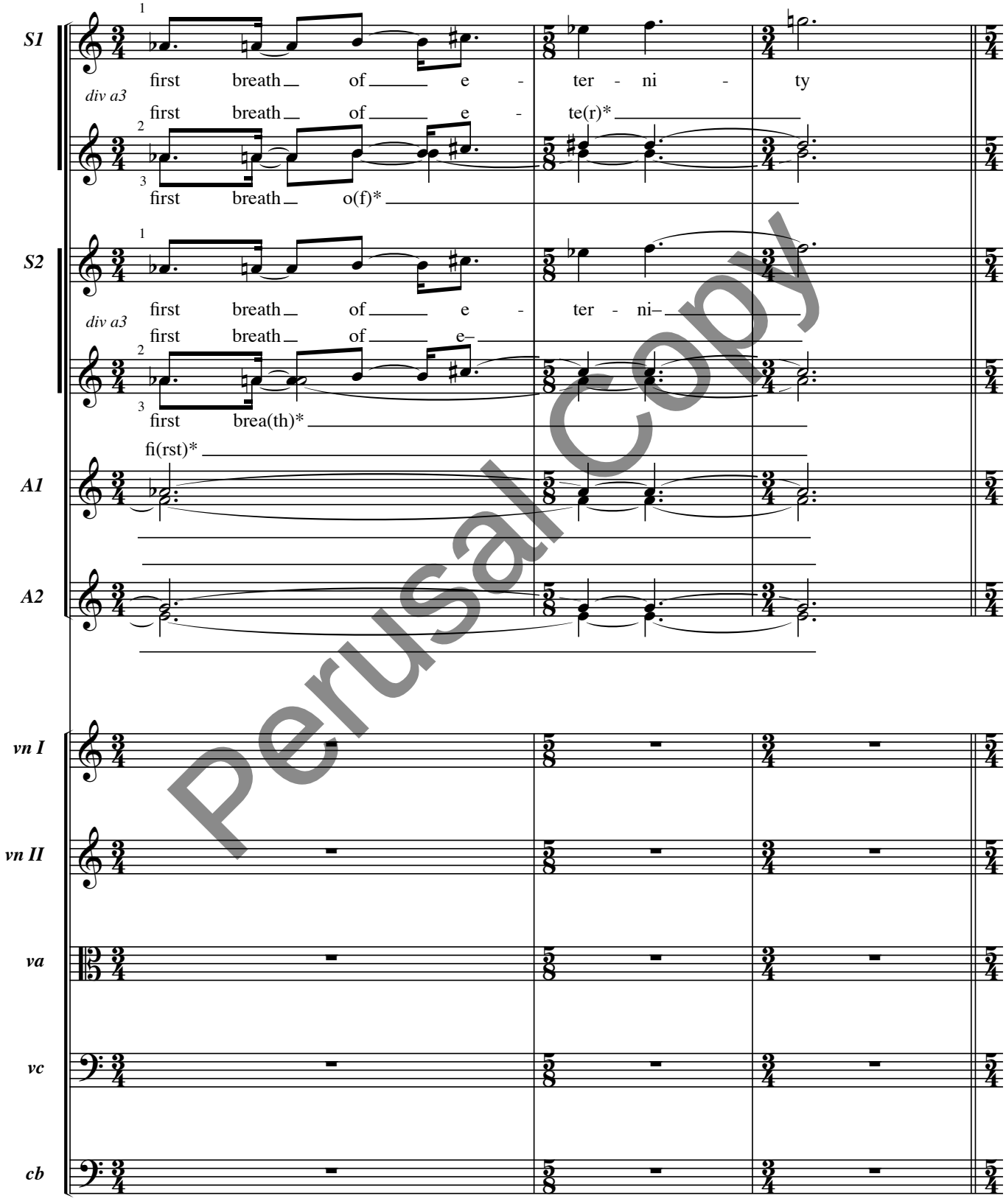
*omit final consonant(s)
to end with open vowel



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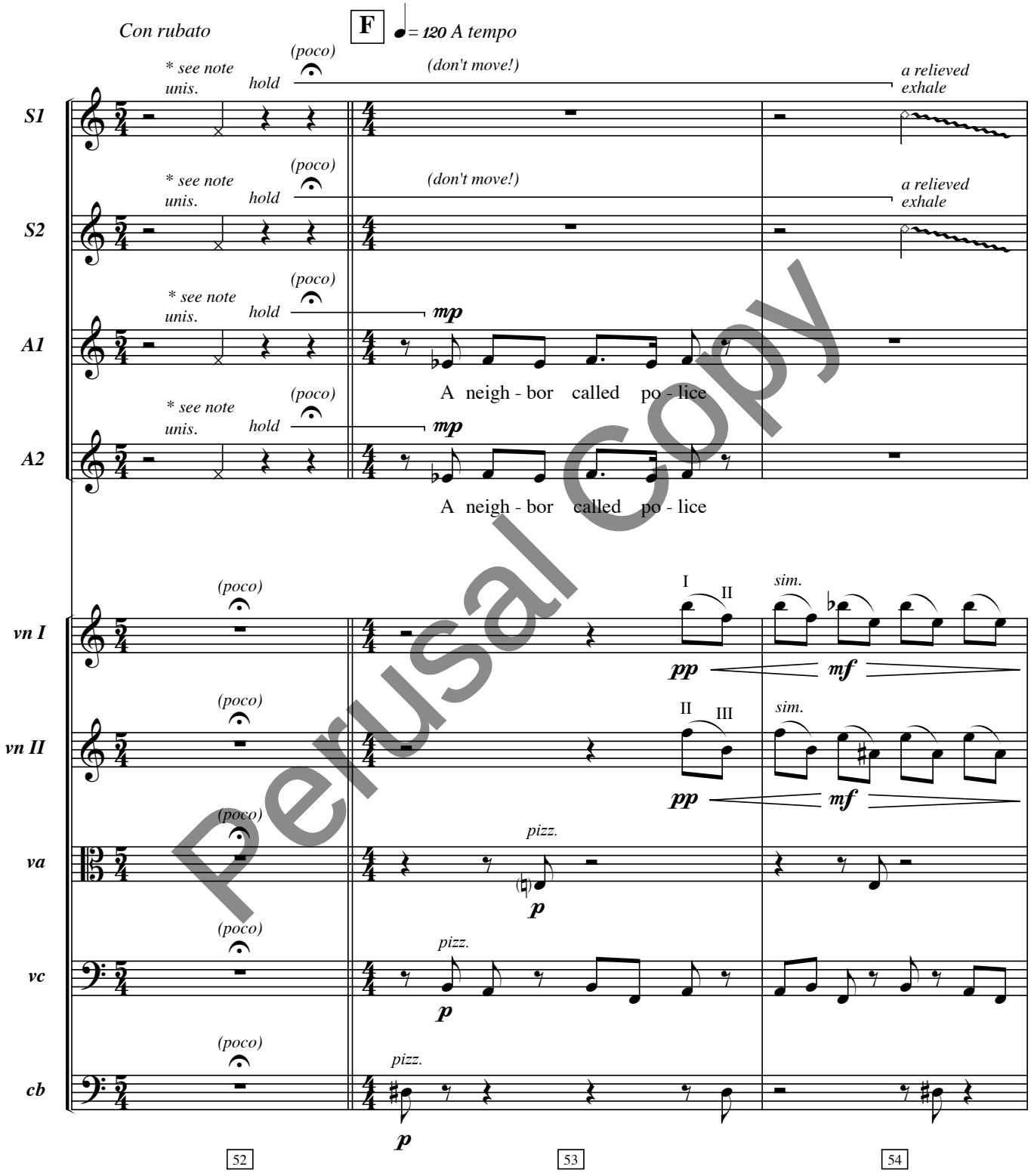

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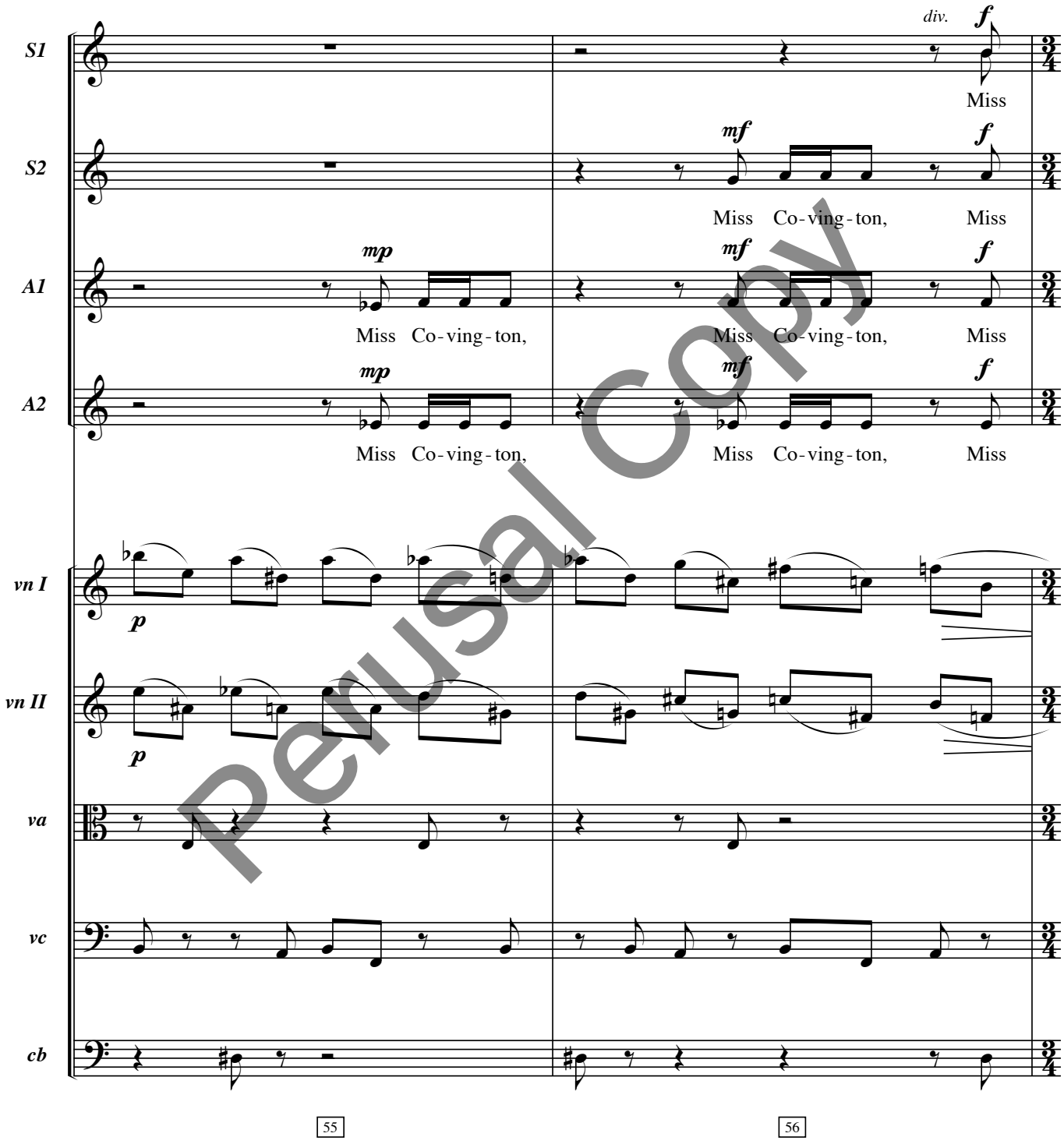
*in unison, a dramatic, audible inhale, through the mouth; hold breath and do not move until indicated



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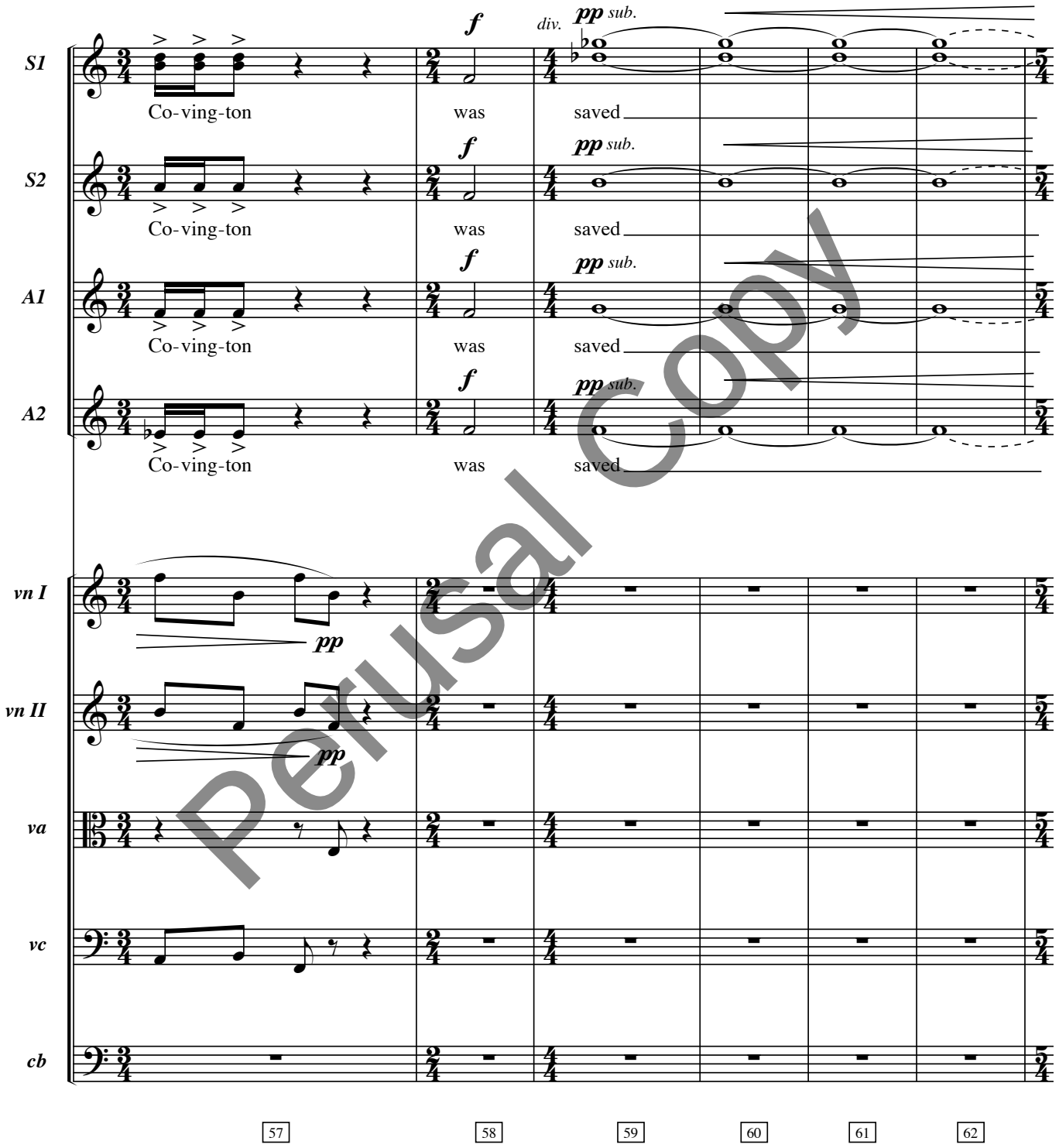

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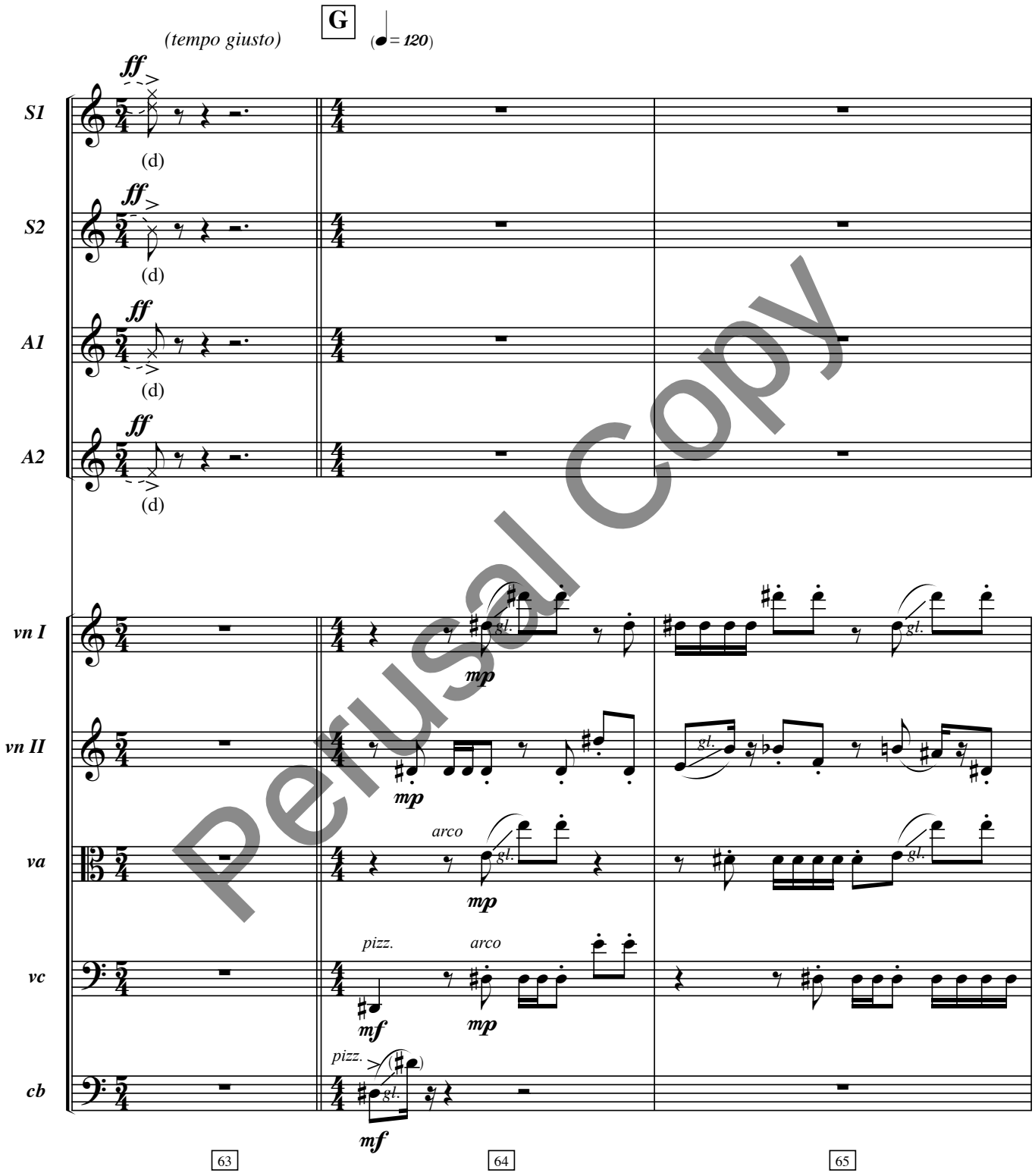

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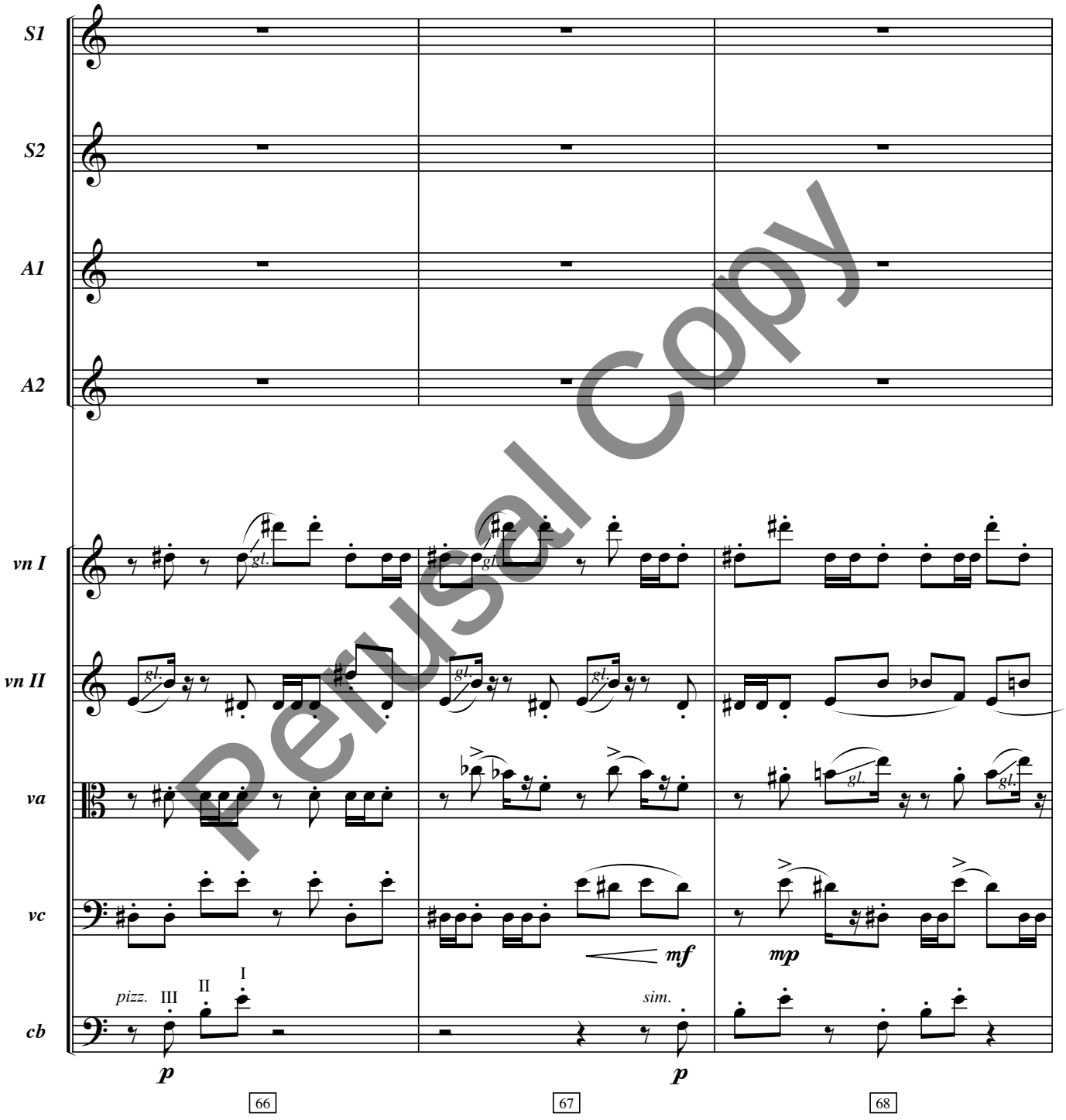

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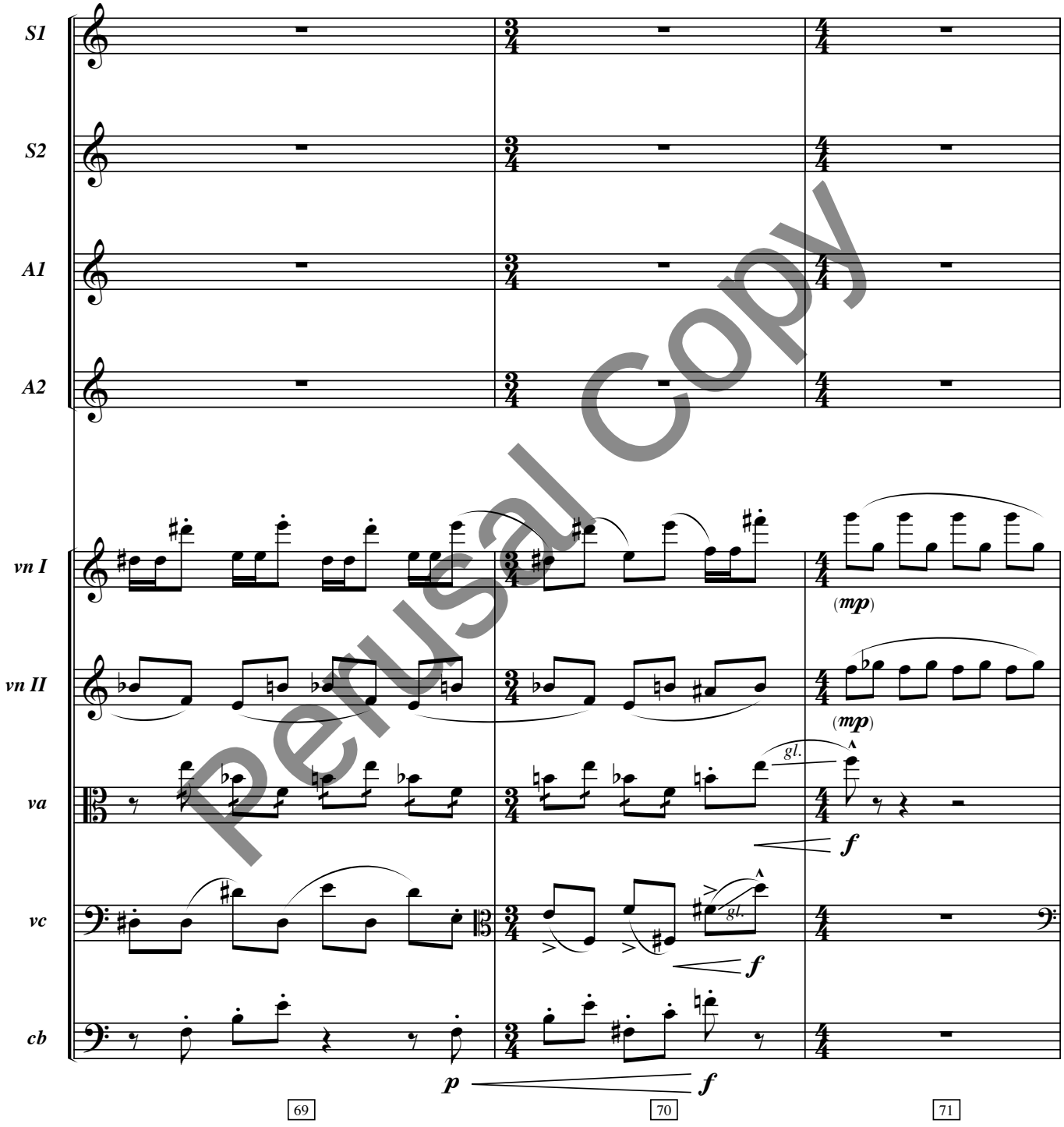

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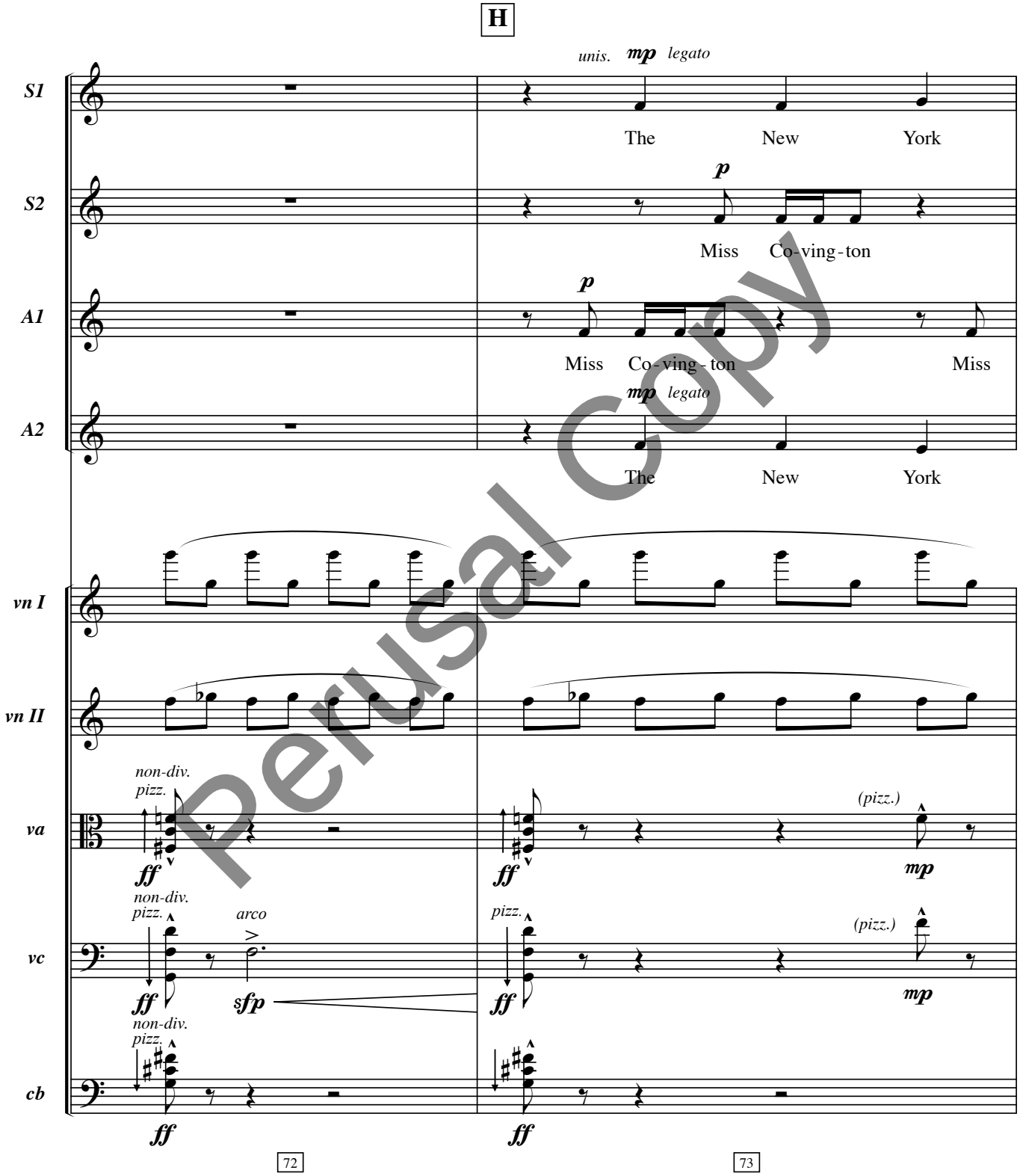

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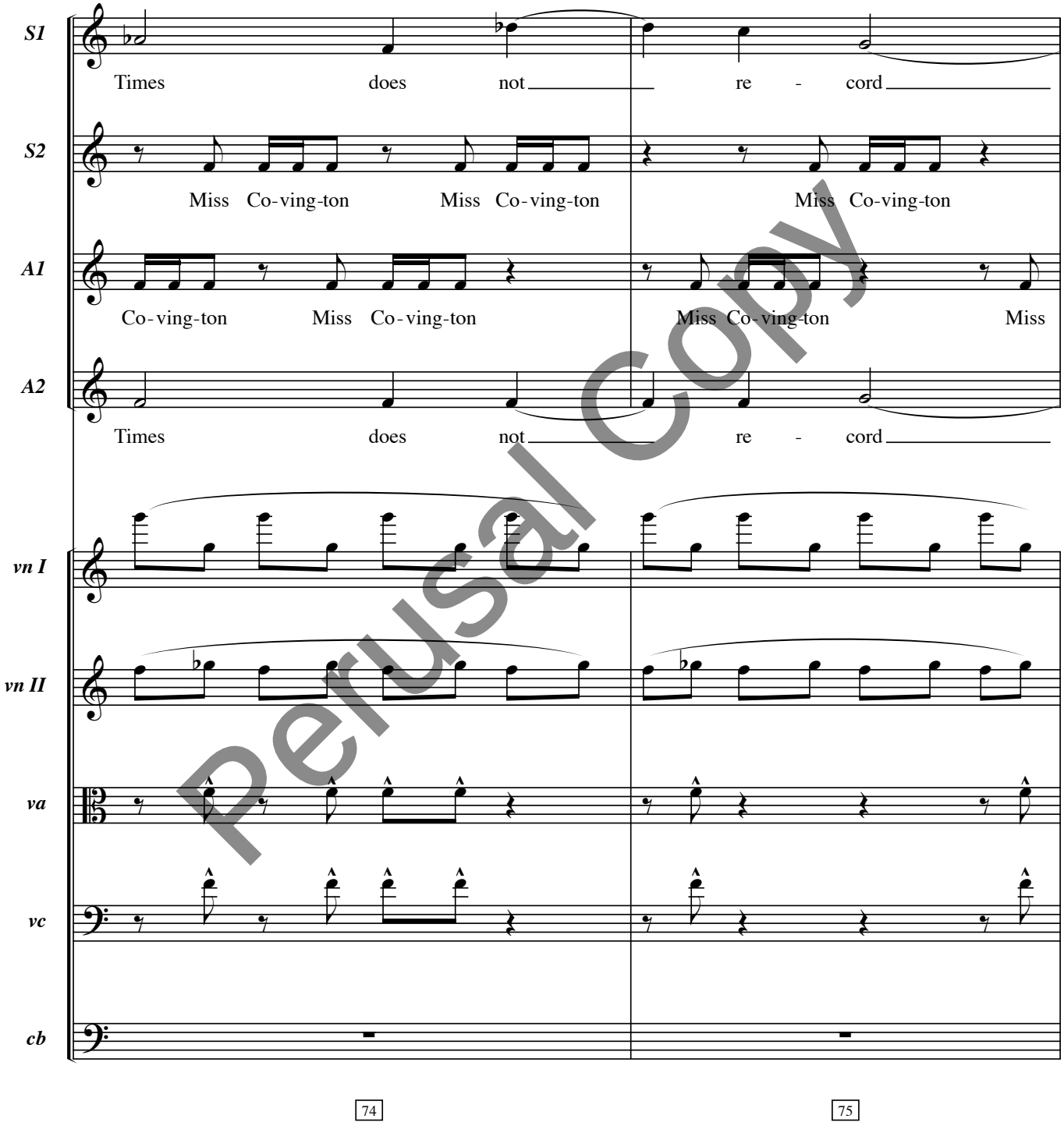

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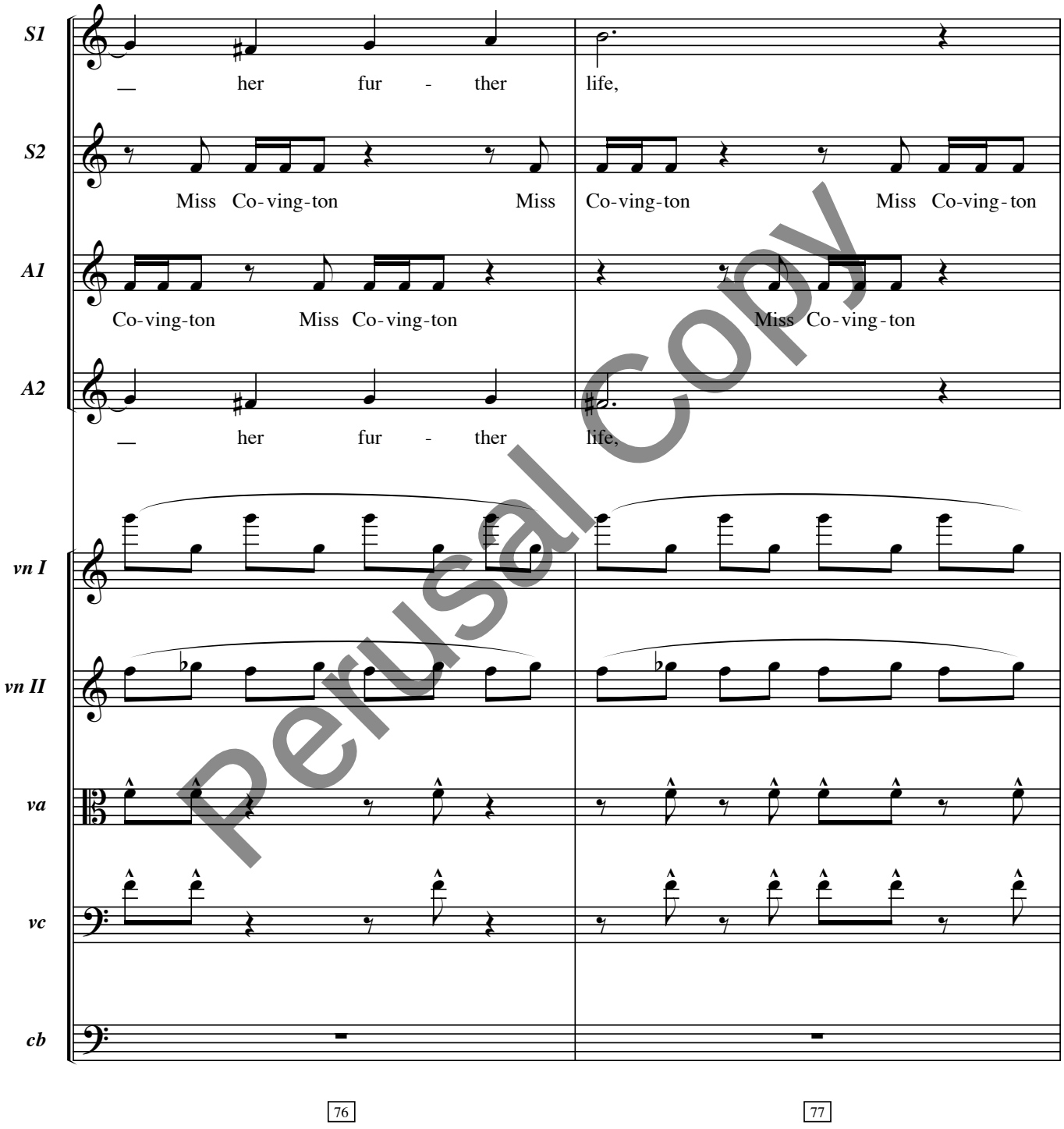

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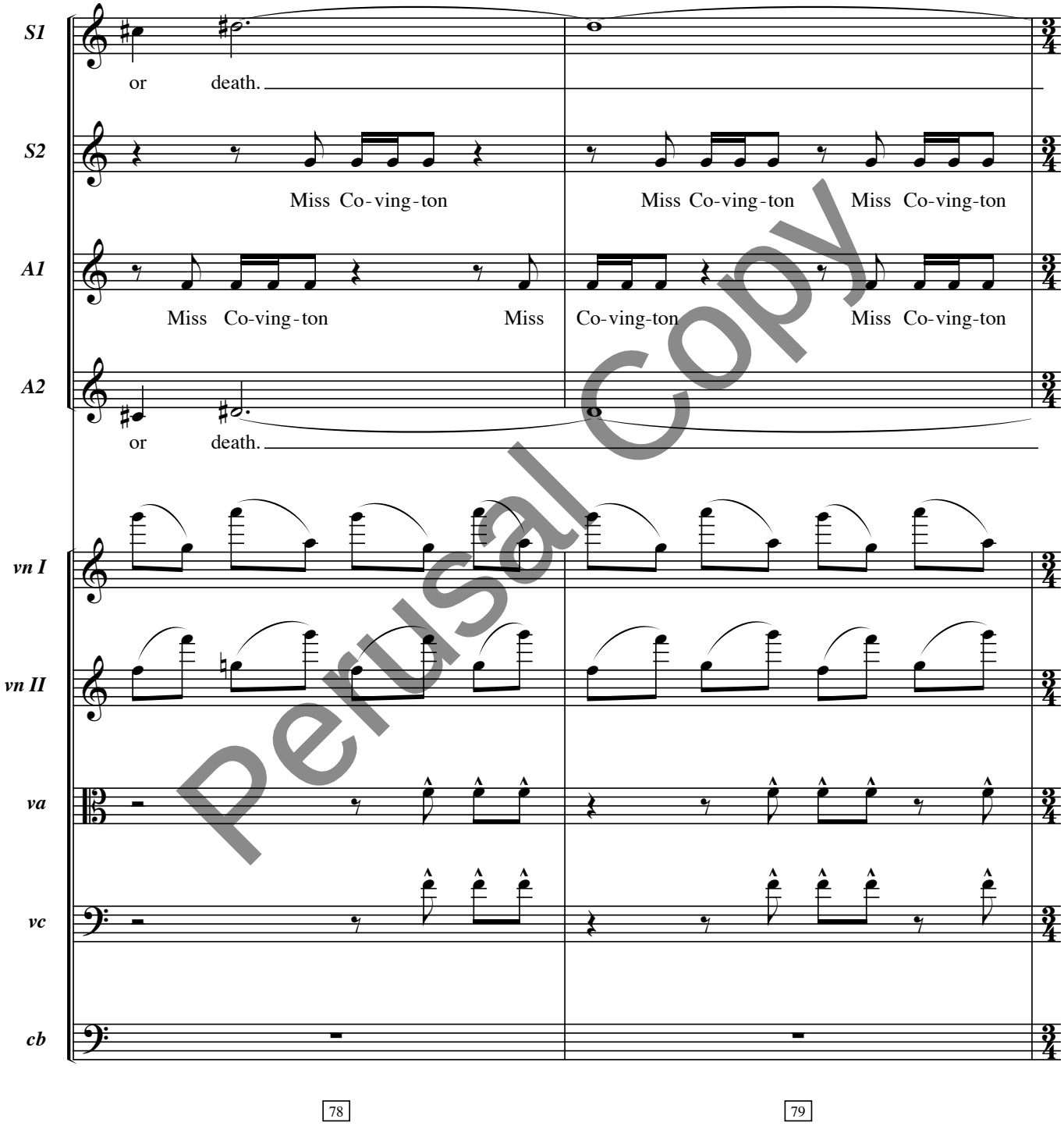

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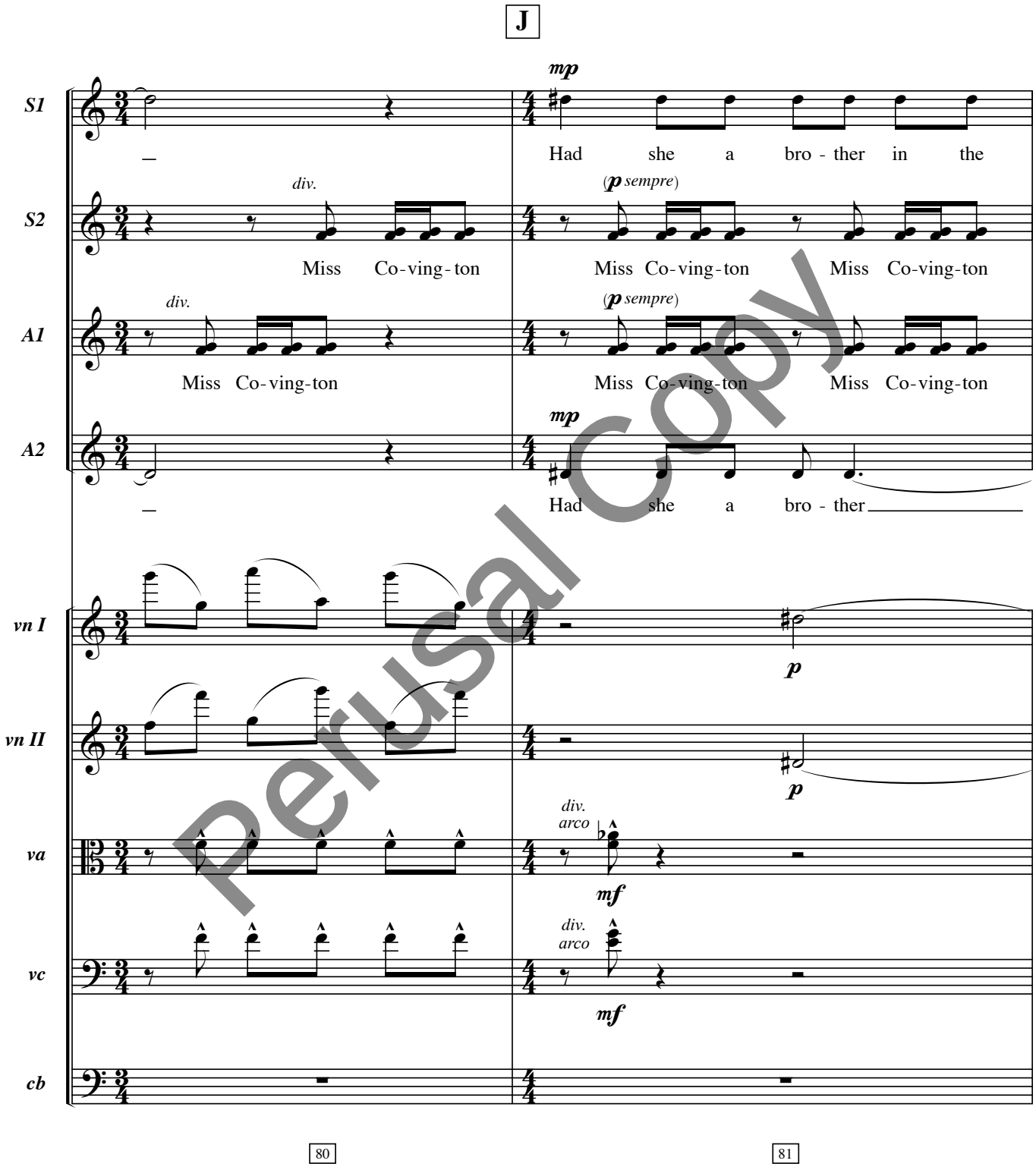

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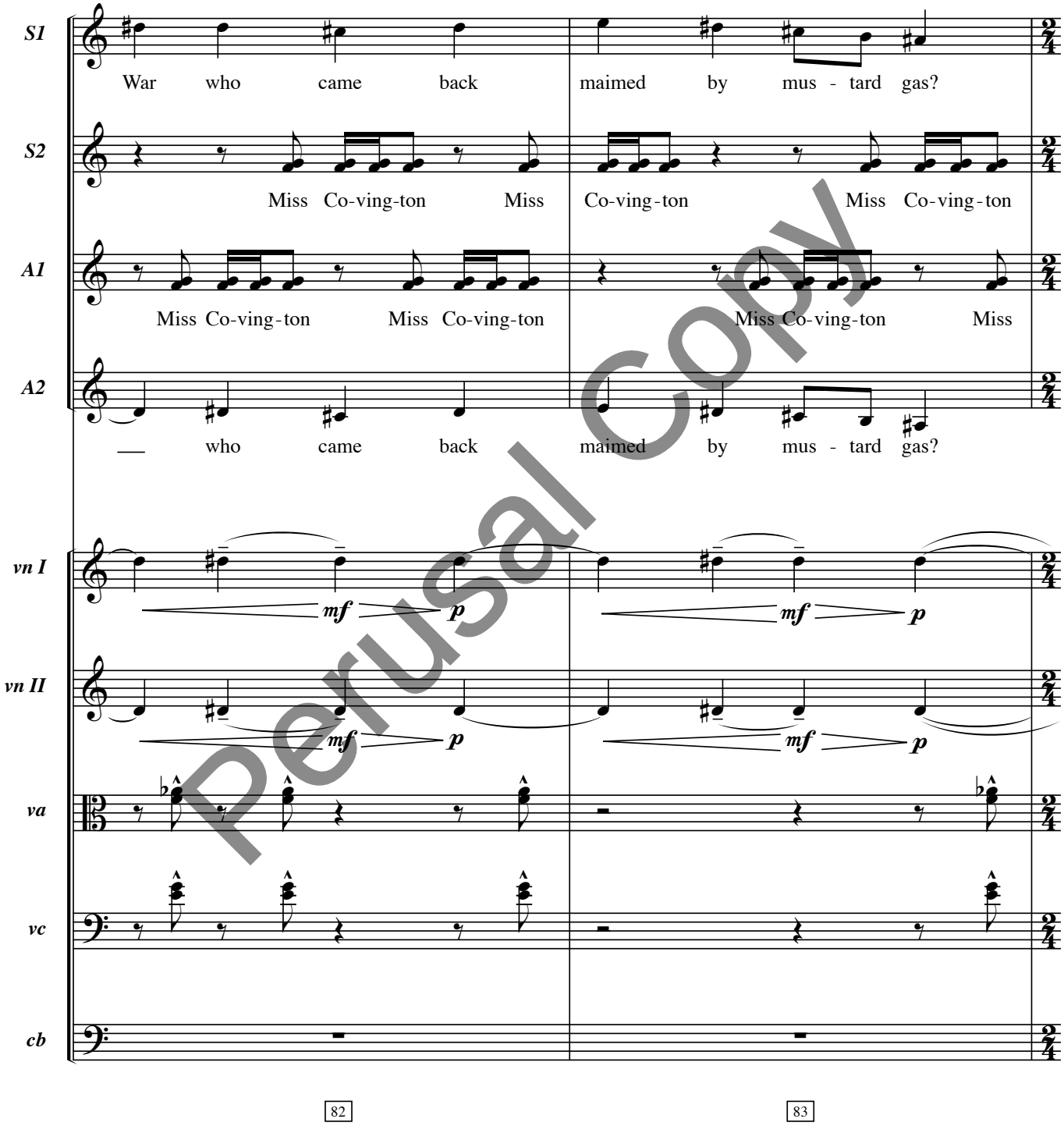

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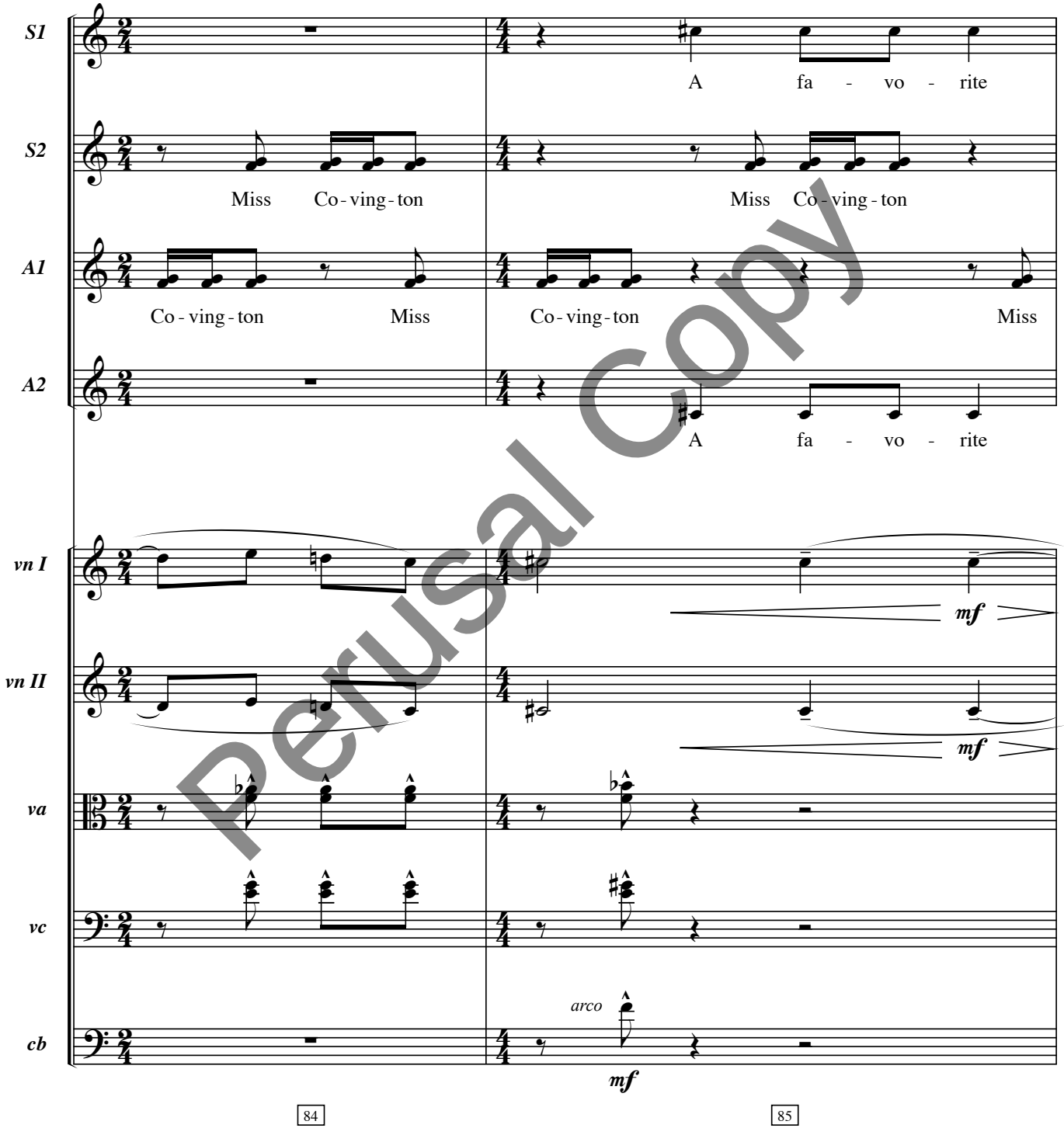

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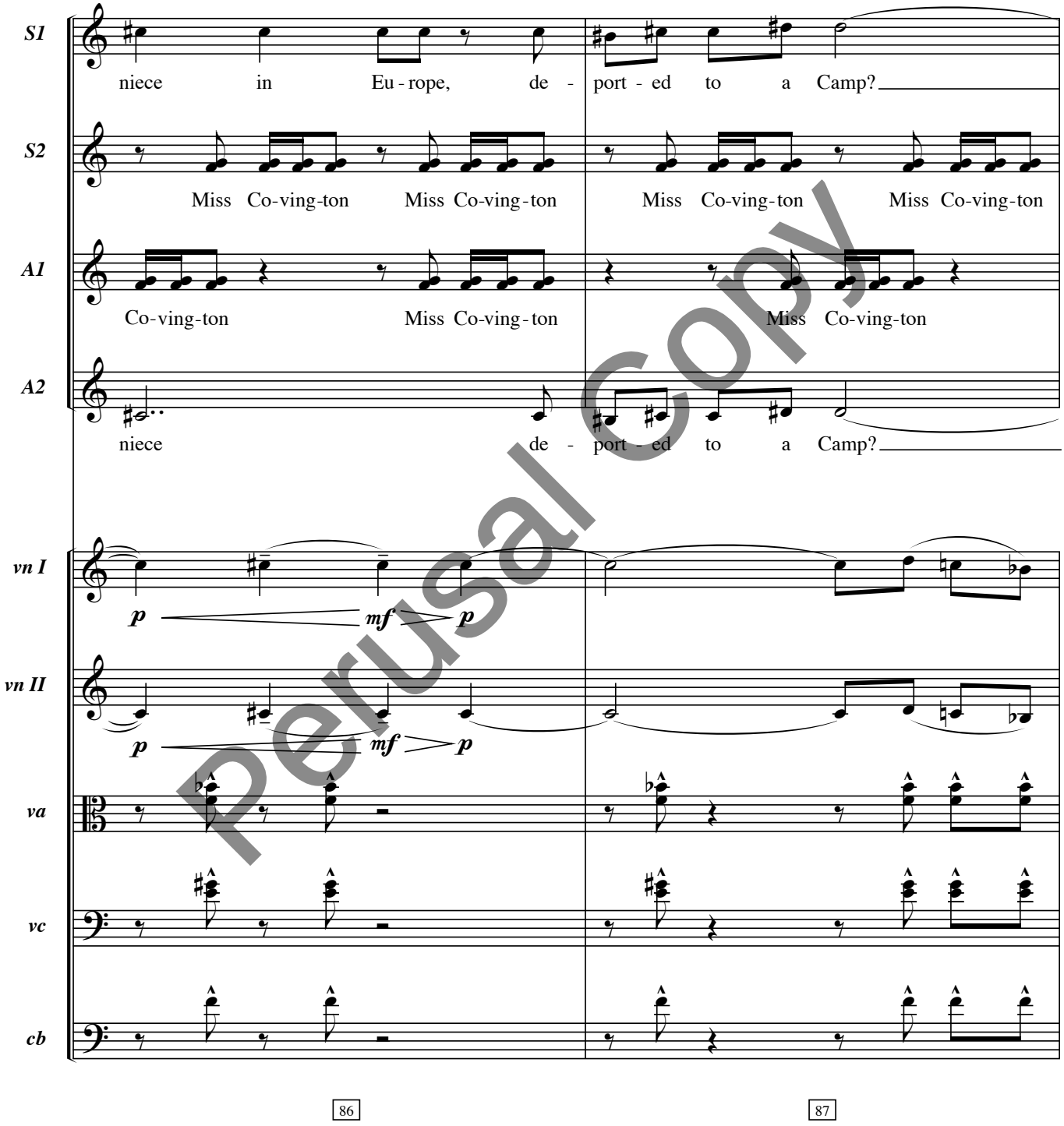

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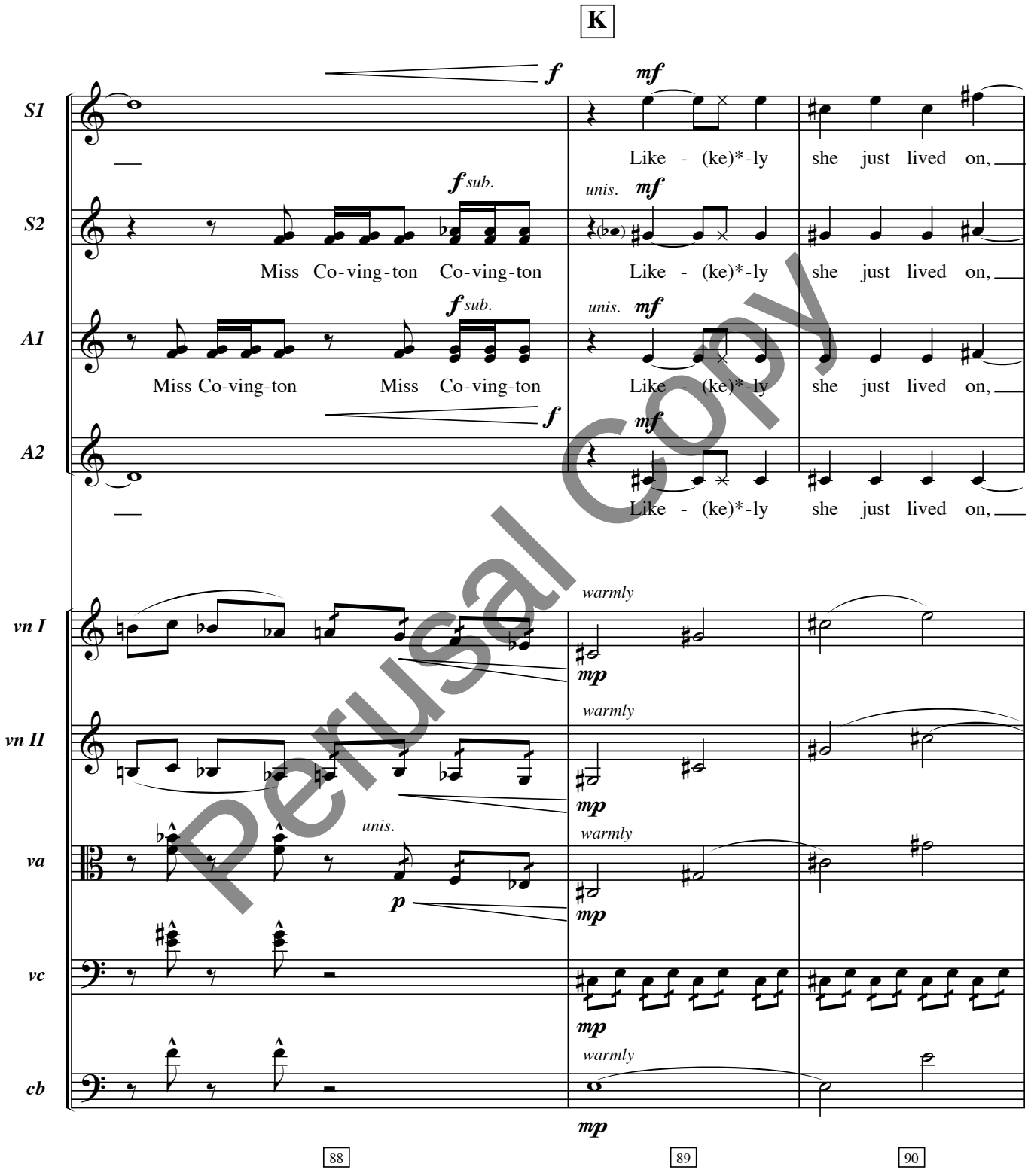

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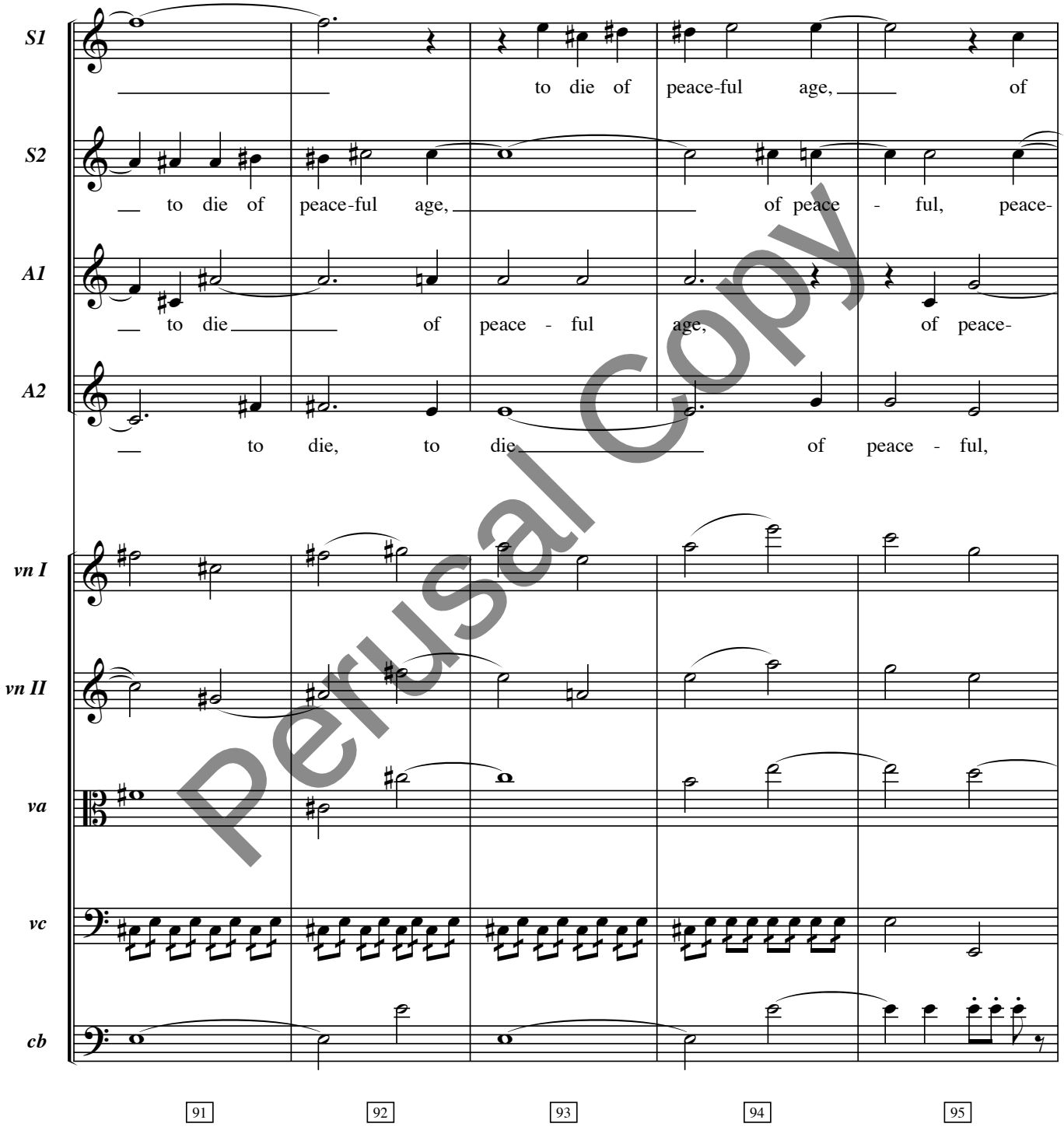
*articulate the "k" metrically as indicated



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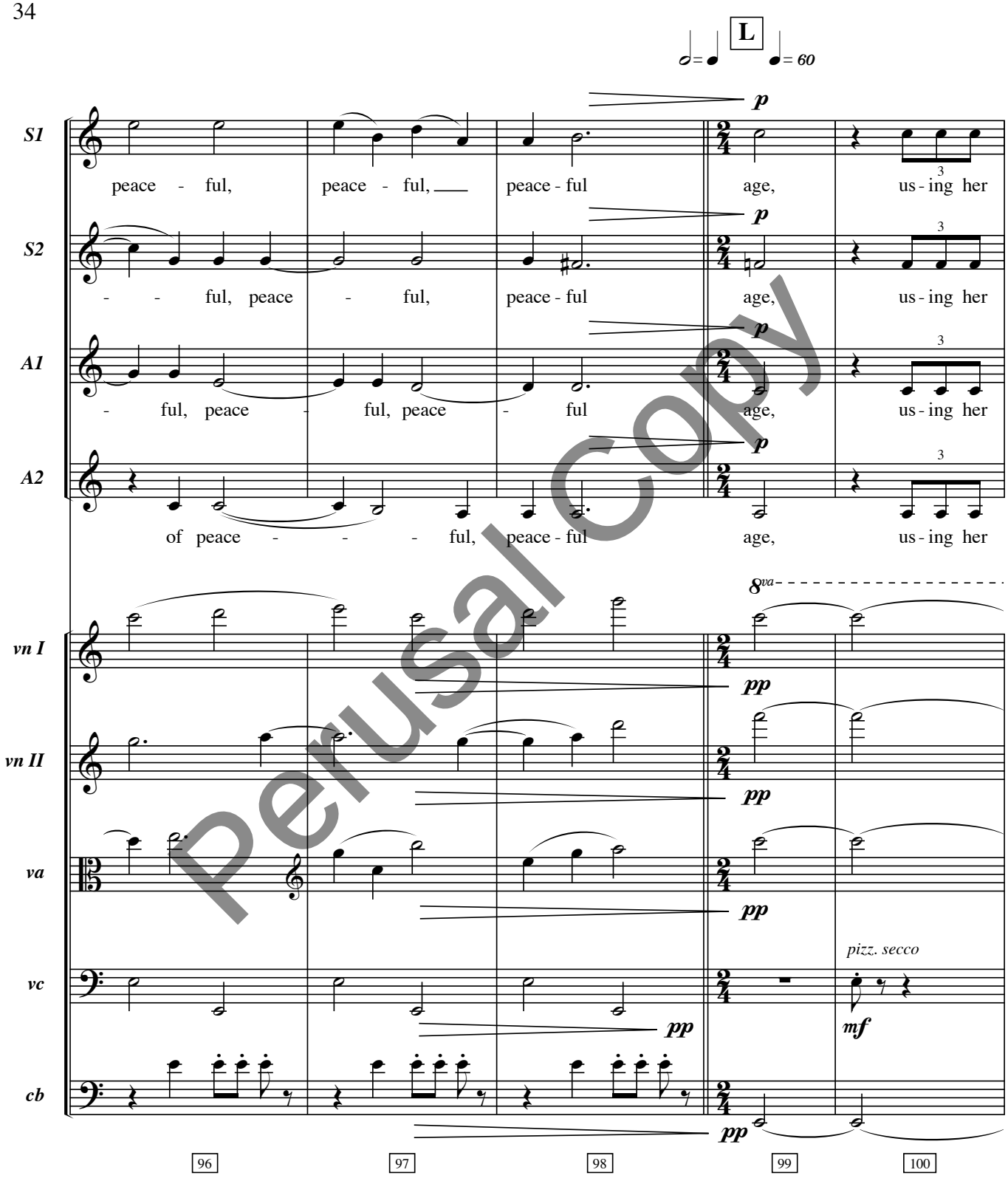

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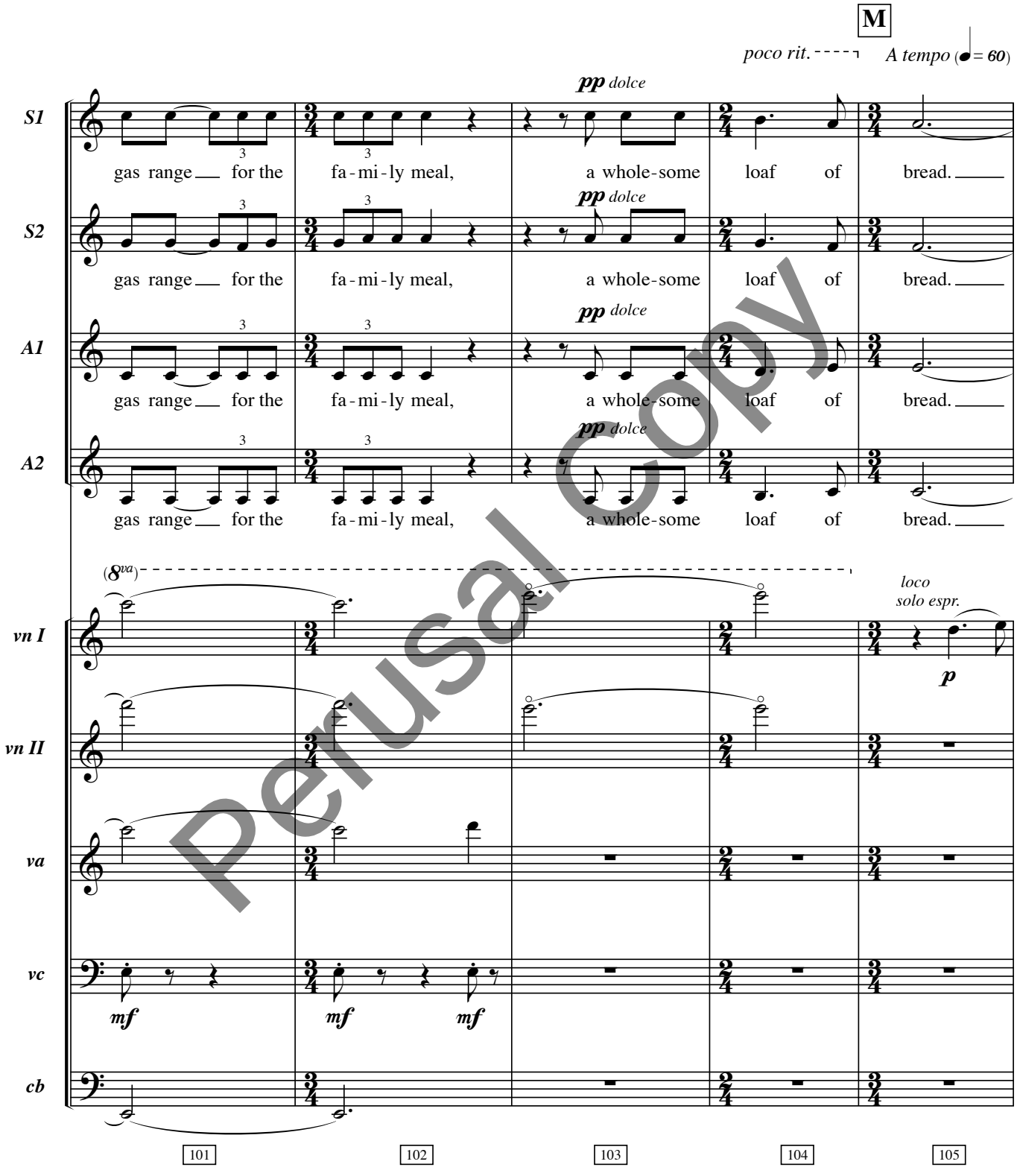

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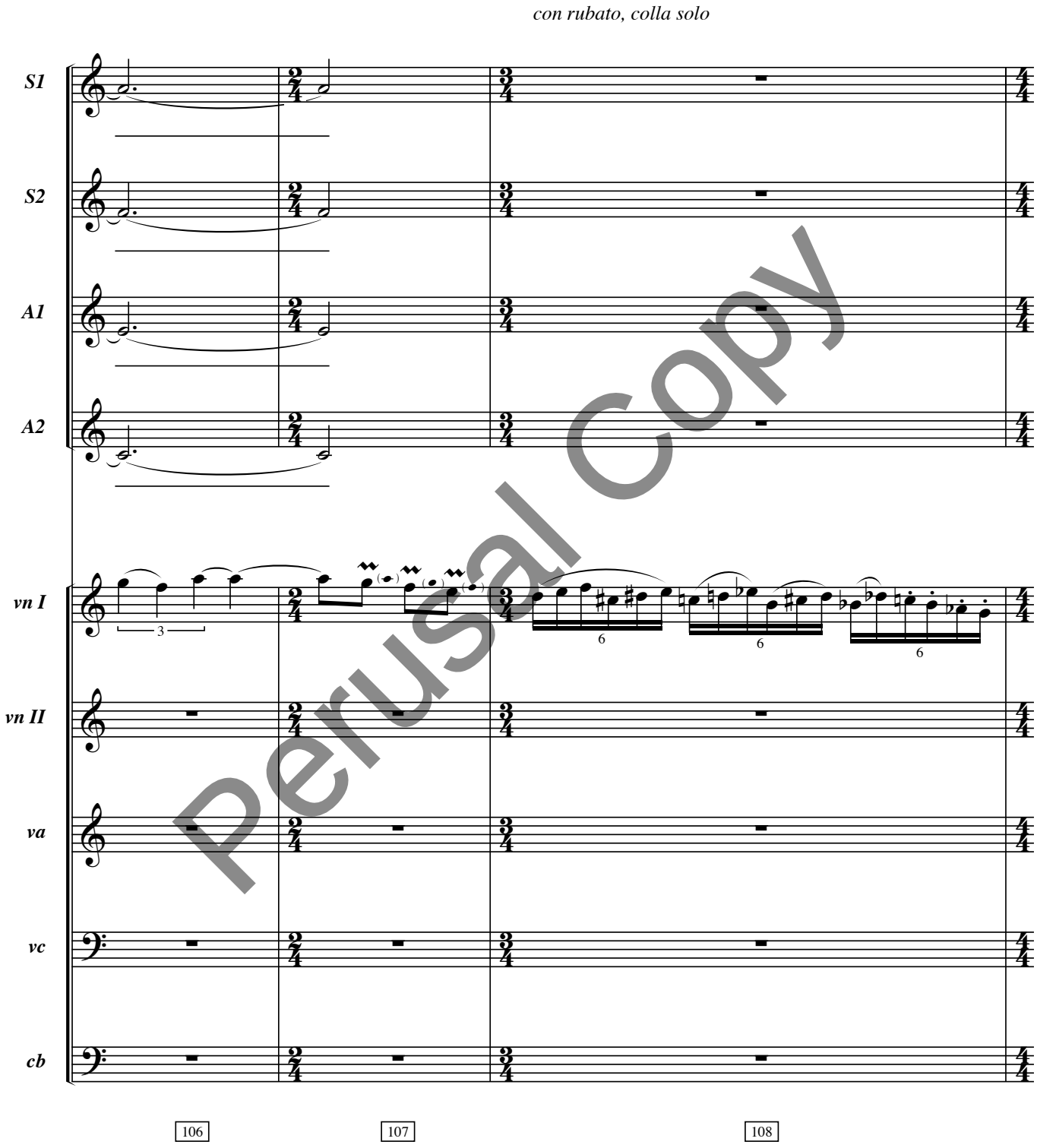

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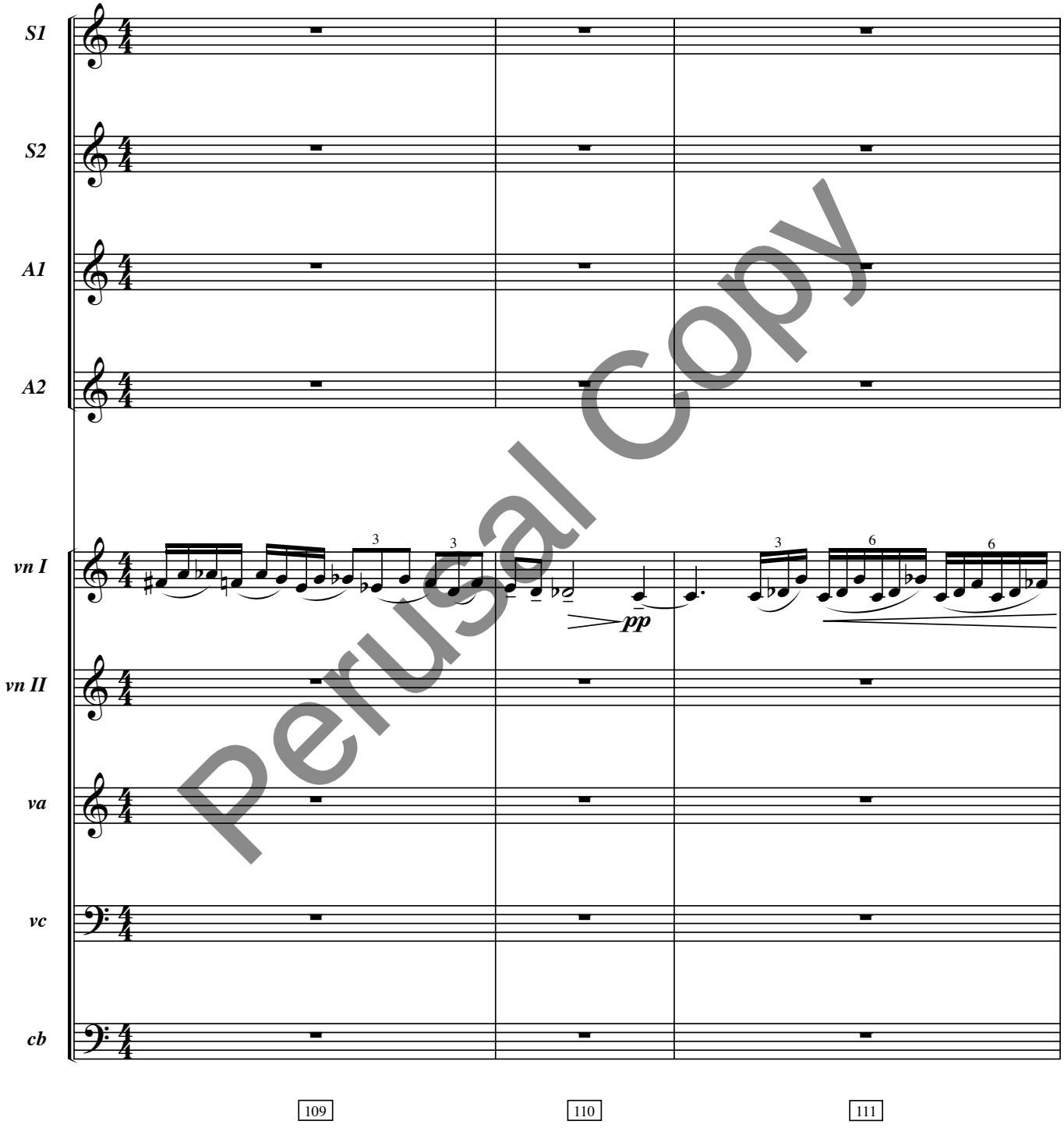

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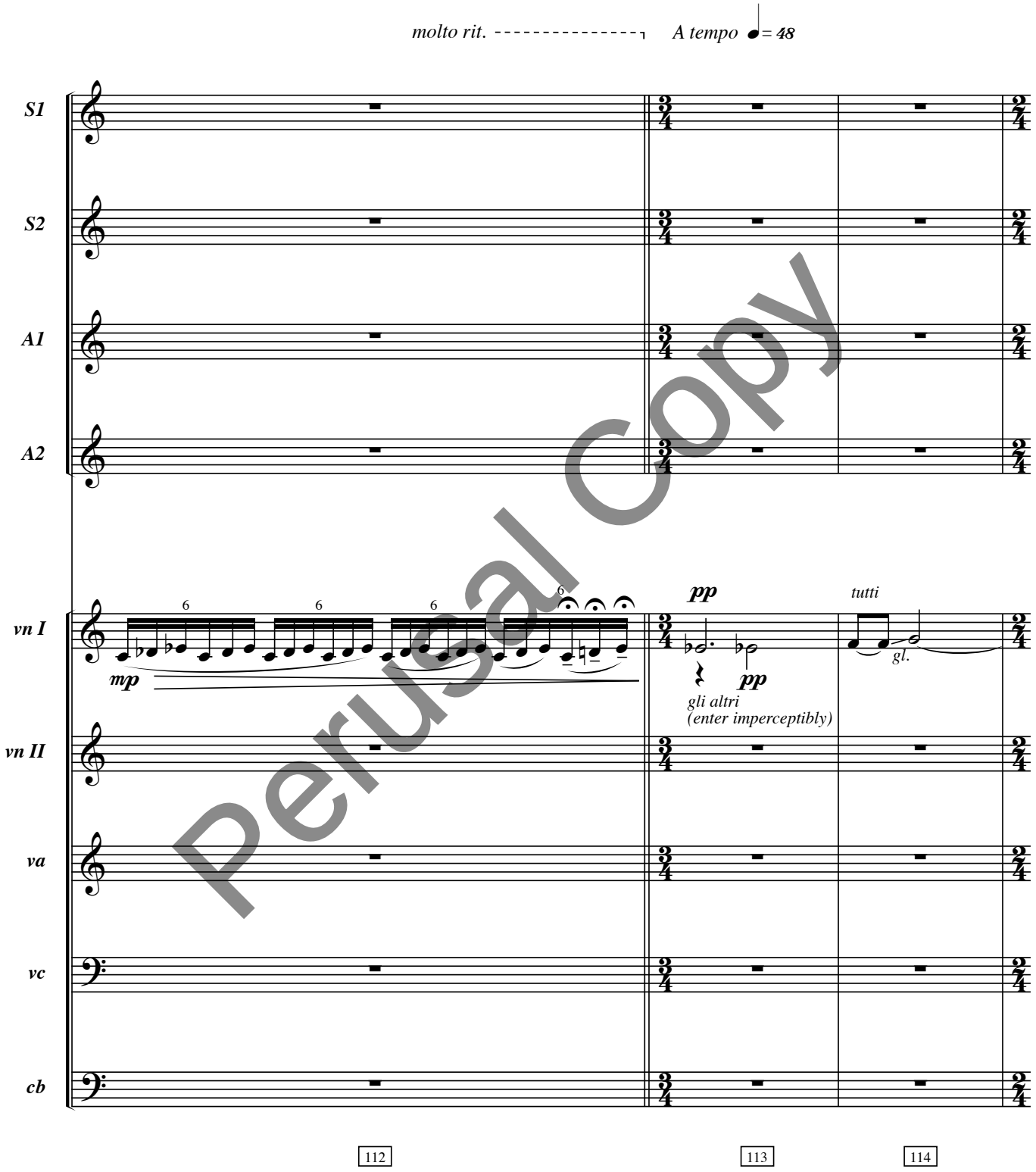

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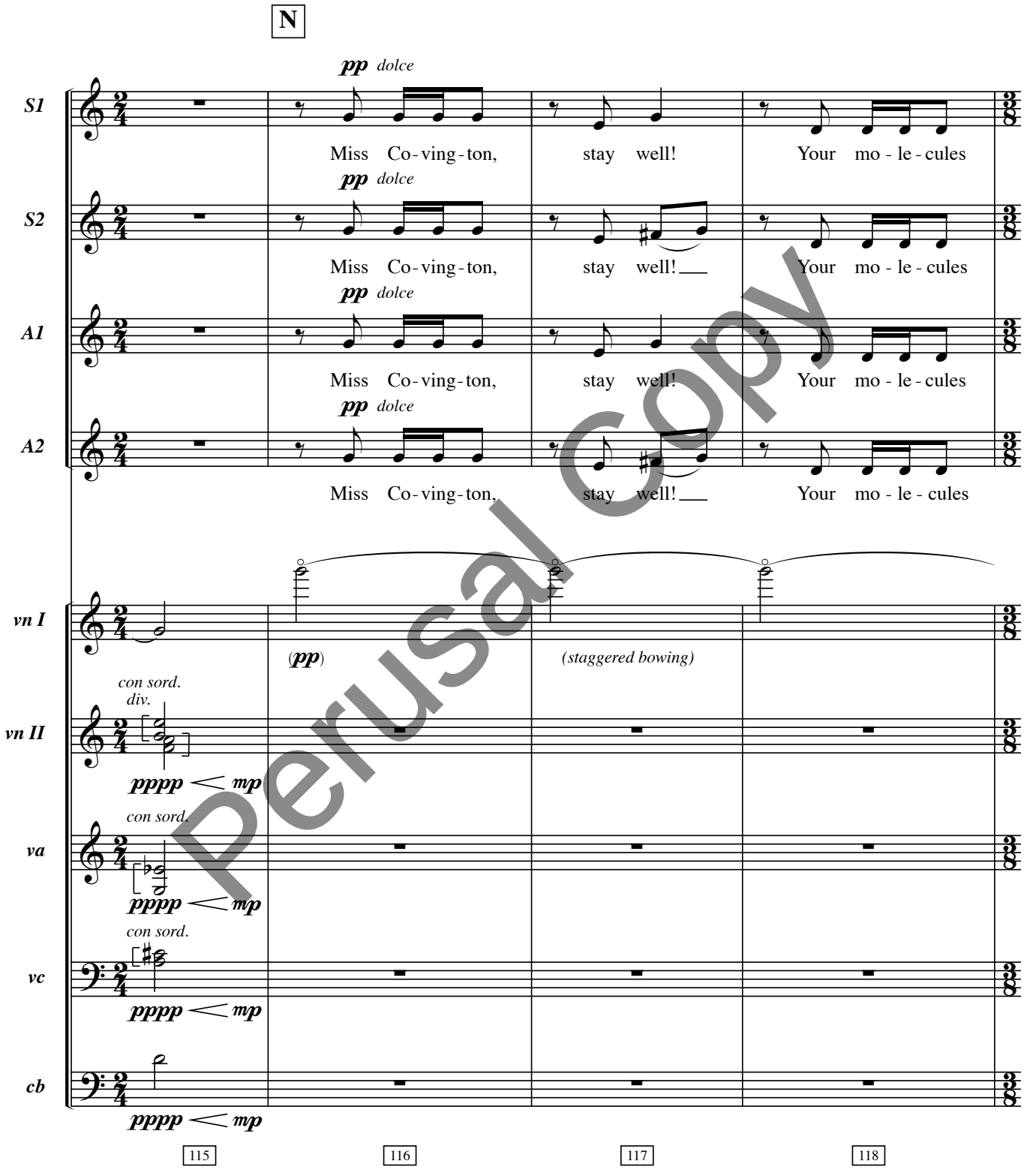

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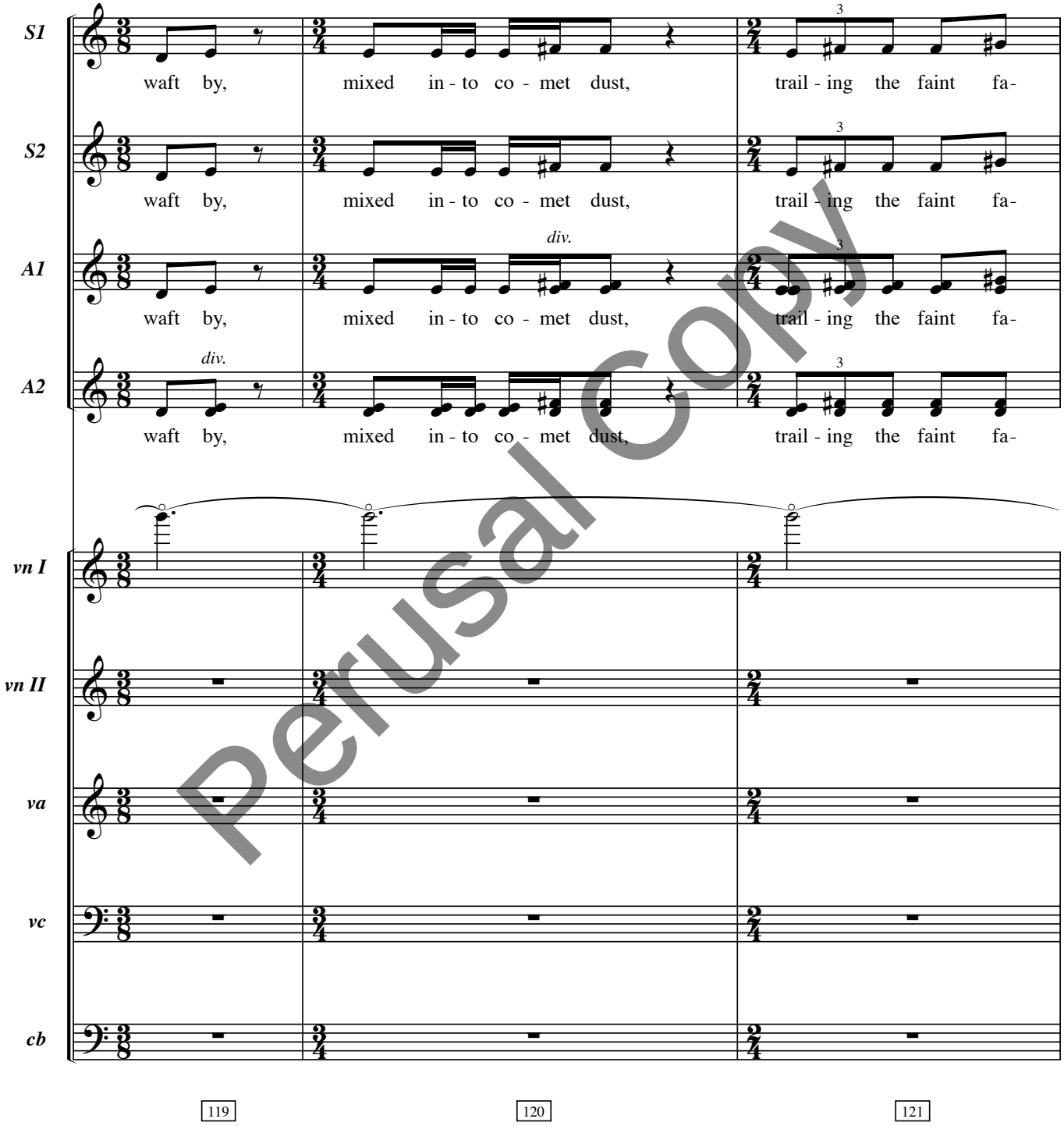

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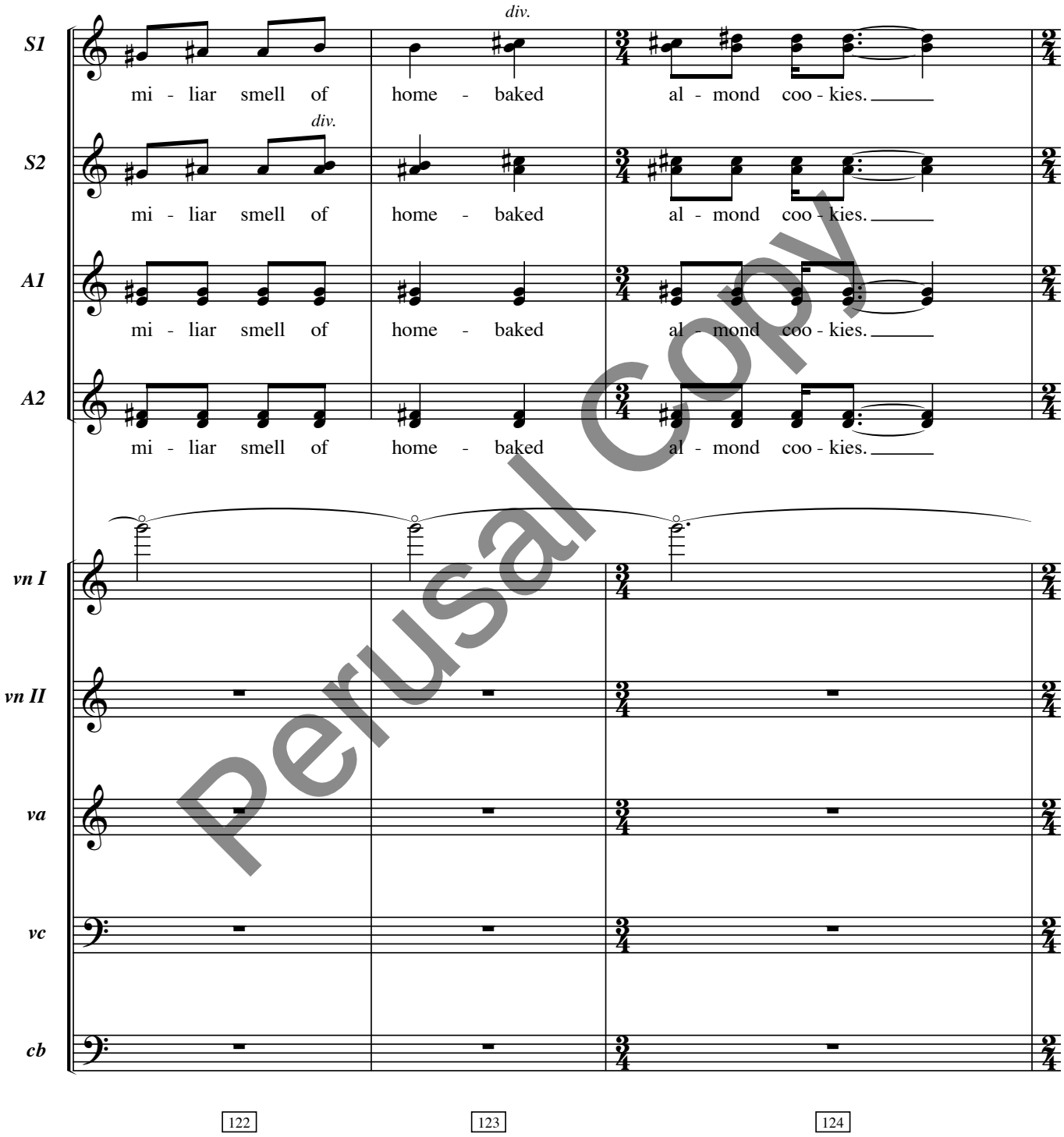

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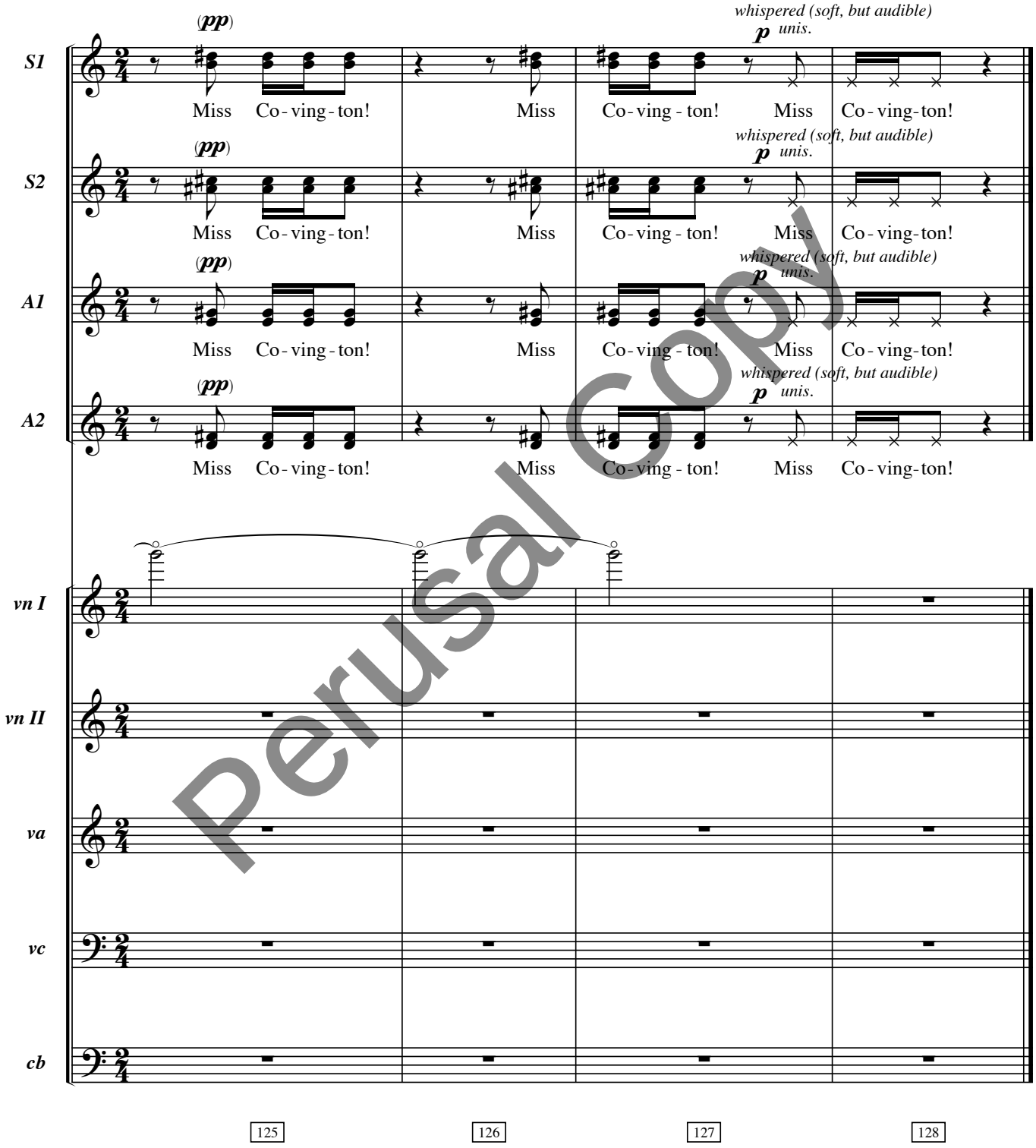

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