Of Being

for string quartet

JESSICA MEYER

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for string quartet

22'

PROGRAM NOTES

Milan Kundera's novel "The Unbearable Lightness of Being" has been a book I have been wanting to read for quite some time, specifically because of the philosophical paradox it poses. Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of eternal return (or eternal recurrence) puts forth that everything in life happens an infinite number of times, causing the "heaviest of burdens". Conversely, a personal life in which everything happens only once loses its "weight" and significance—hence the "the unbearable lightness of being." Kundera encourages the reader to consider this duality through the actions of his characters and the comparisons between love and sex, loyalty and betrayal, self and community, lightness and weight, then ulitmately...fate and chance. Kundera also continuously refers to a motive Beethoven uses in his final string quartet as a sonic allegory for eternal recurrence ("Es muss sein" or "It Must Be"), and posits that musical motives in a composition can come and go like certain people in one's life.

In September of 2021, I was fortunate to have a month-long residency at the Ellis-Beauregard Foundation in Maine in order to conceive and write this piece. It gave me a lot of time to ponder these dualities, how they relate to each other, and explore how they are present in my own life. While reading the novel, five quotes stood out to me and each movement is inspired by a different one. Also like the novel, themes are interwoven throughout in a way that encourages us to question our own patterns and experiences.

As concert seasons are getting back to their usual robustness, it is clear what we have been missing during Covid time: the communal sharing of sounds and emotions, the energy that passes between the performers and the audience, and the affirmation of why we devote our lives to our craft. The work ends with everyone in the room making music together, reminding us how our selves exist in relation to those around us, while also allowing moments of fate and chance to unfurl in real time.

Many thanks to Chamber Music America, the Argus Quartet, the Ellis-Beauregard Foundation, and to my family - both chosen and related.

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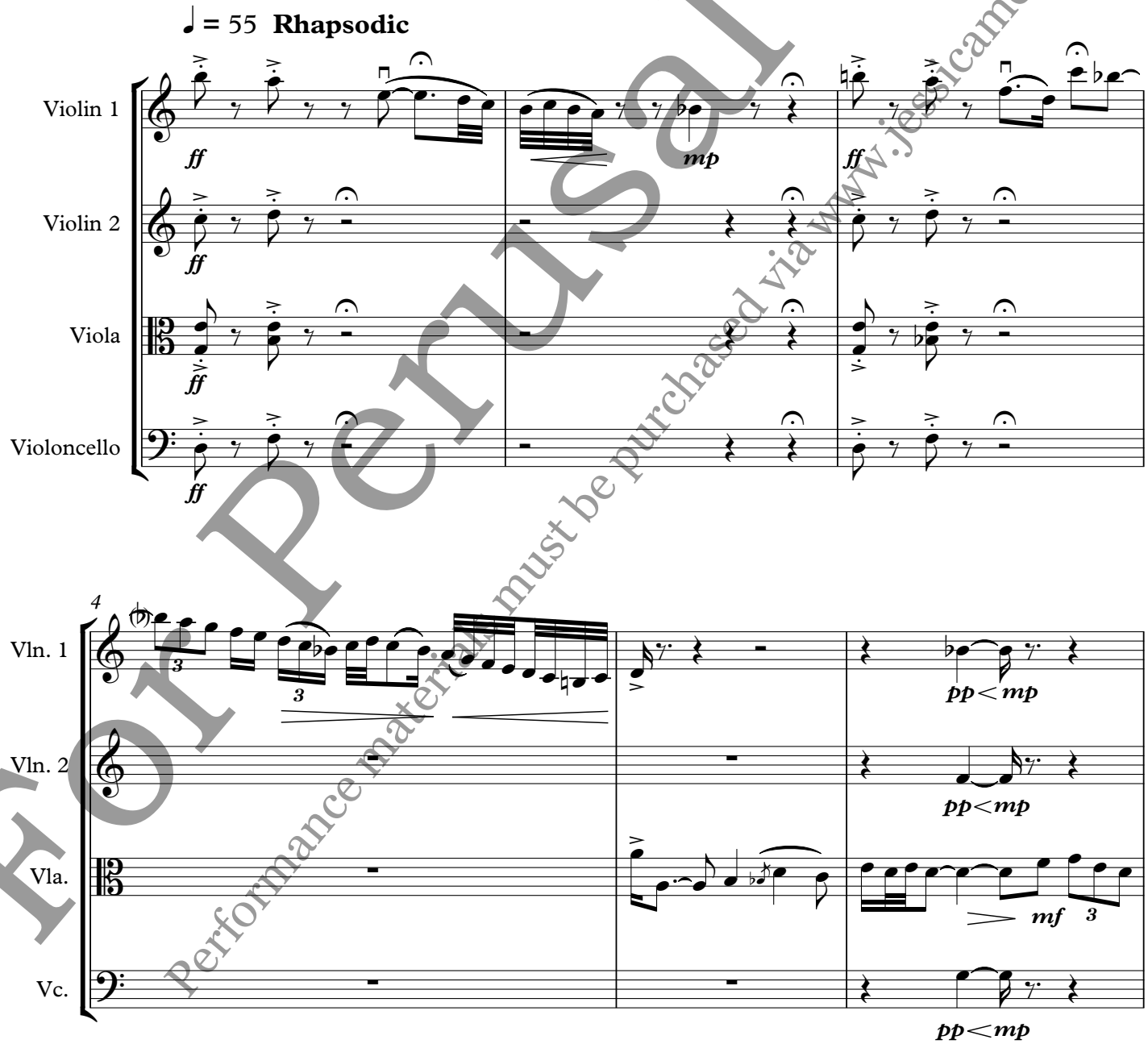
This commission for the Argus Quartet has been made possible by the Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program, with generous funding provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

JESSICA MEYER

I. Inertia

"Sometimes you make up your mind about something without knowing why, and your decision persists by the power of inertia. Every year it gets harder to change."



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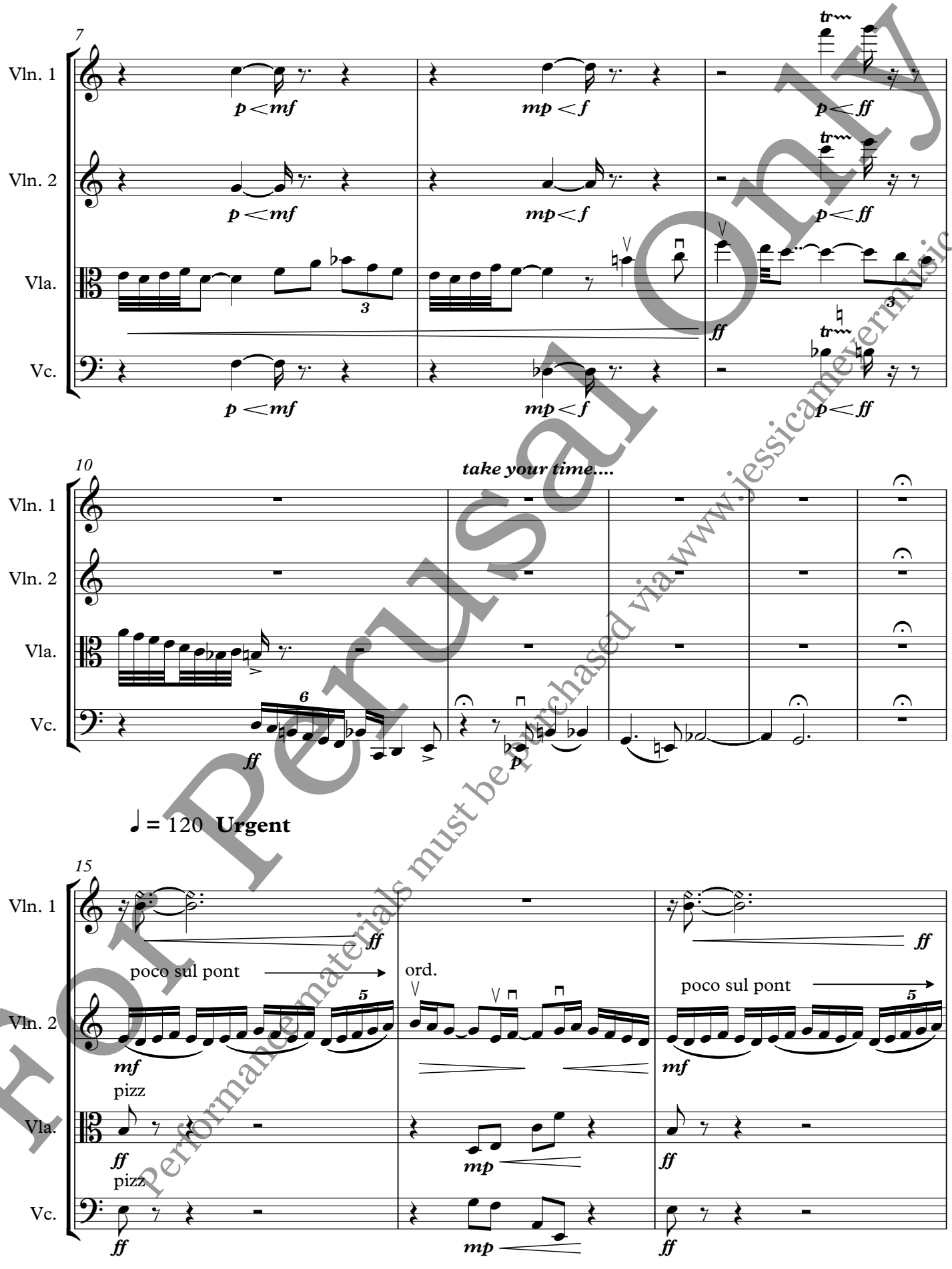

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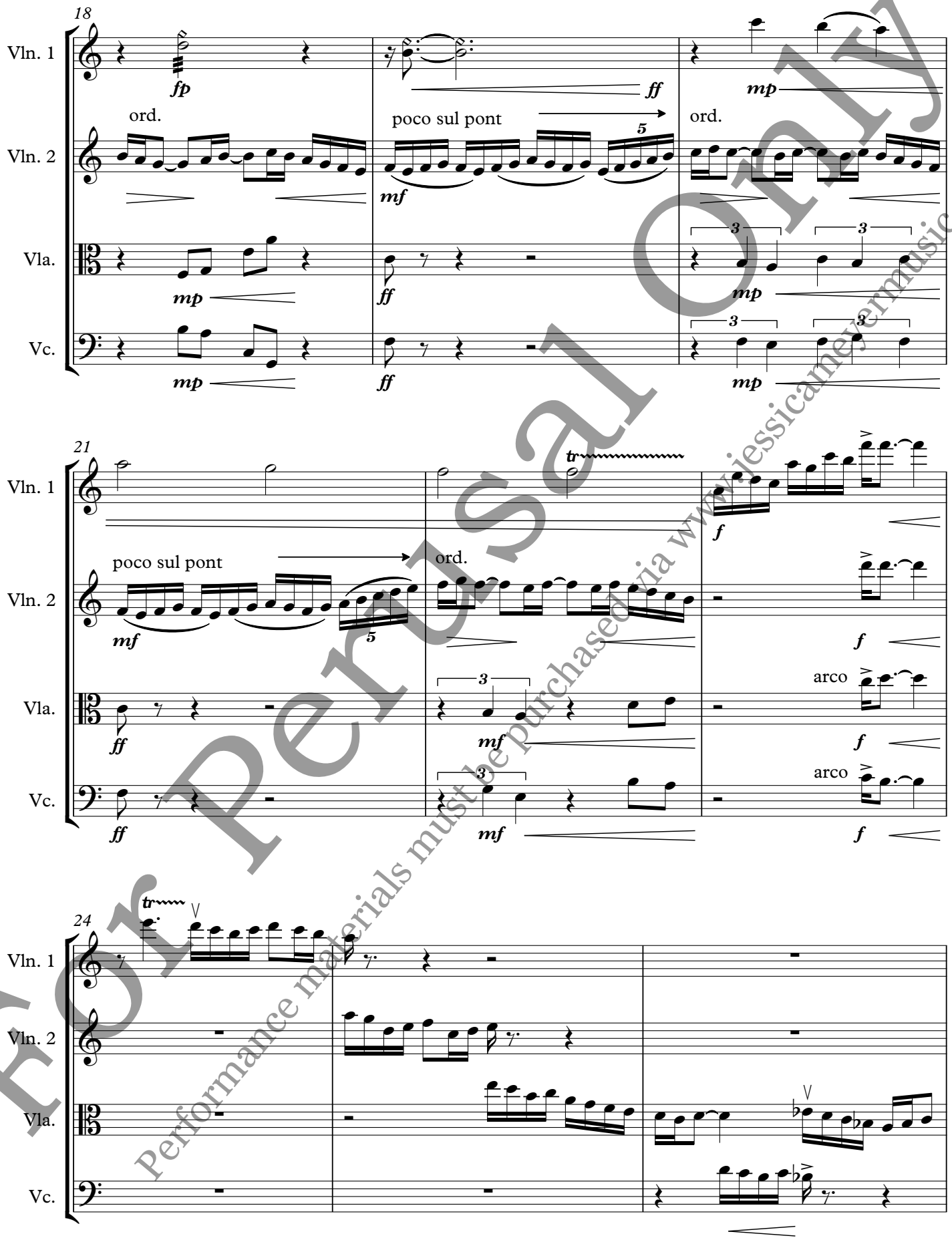

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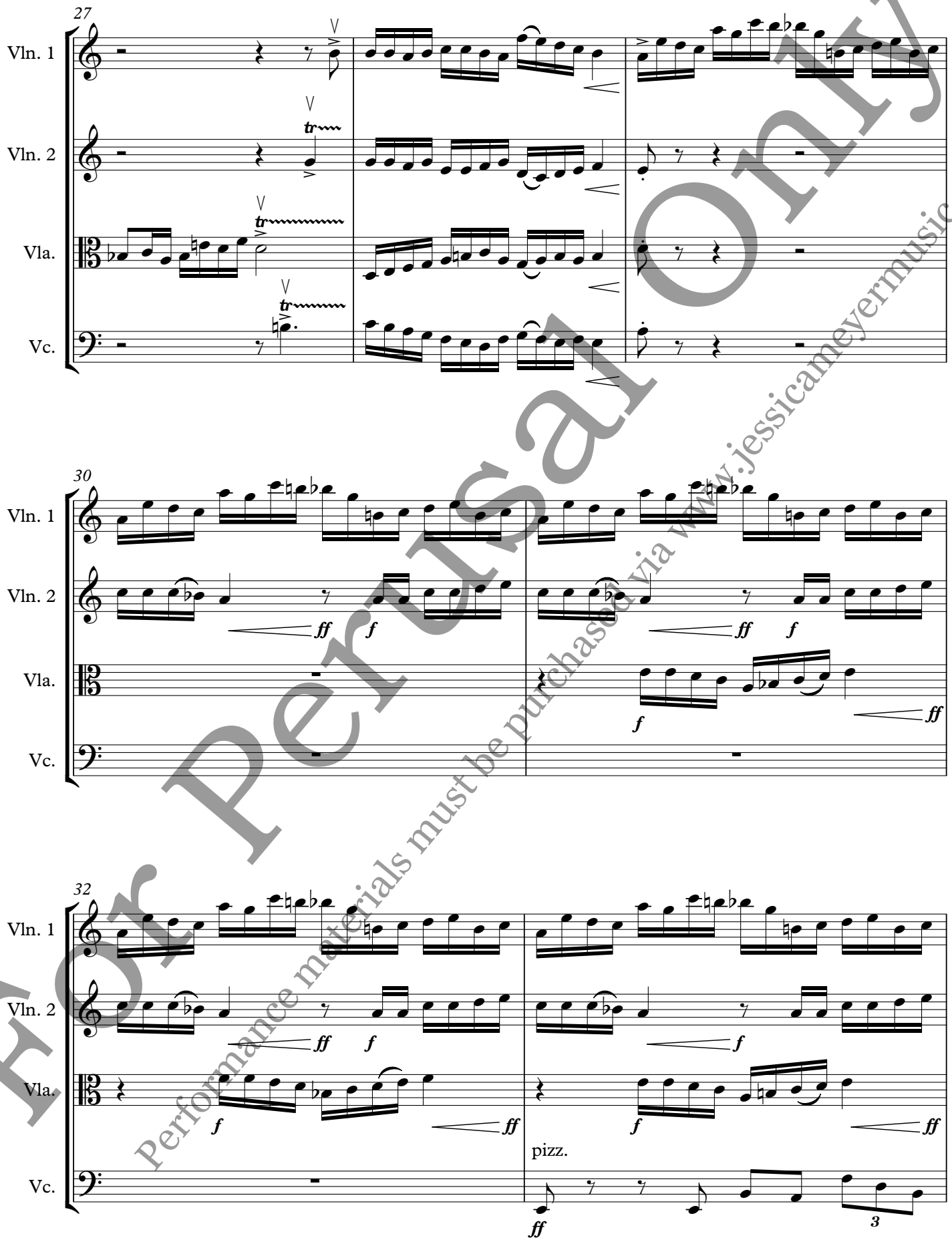

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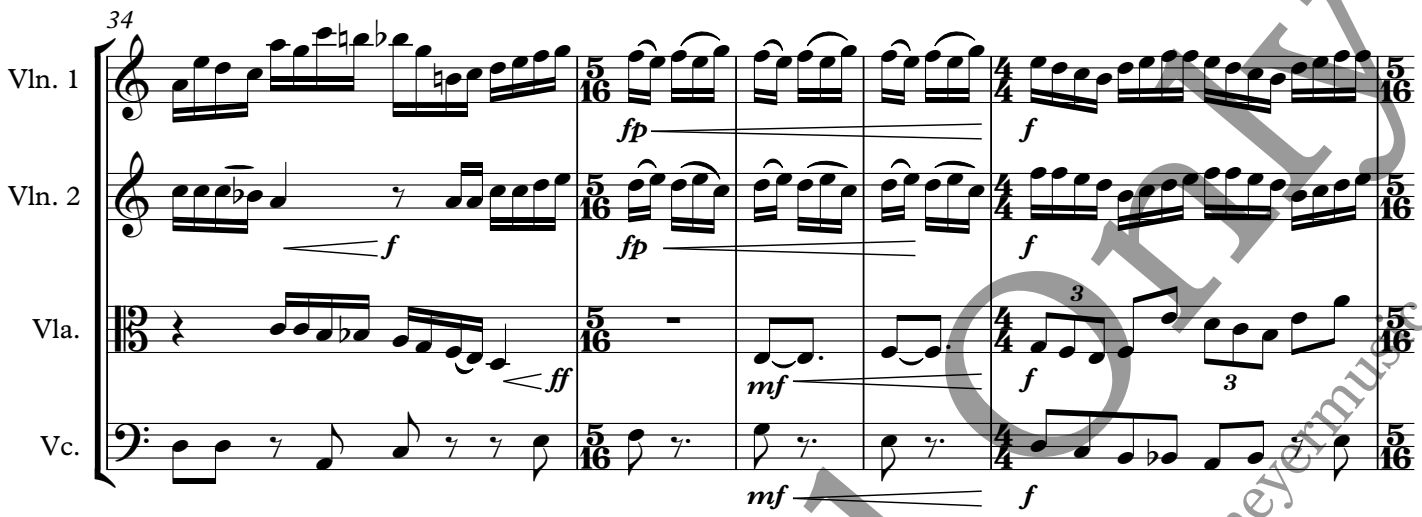
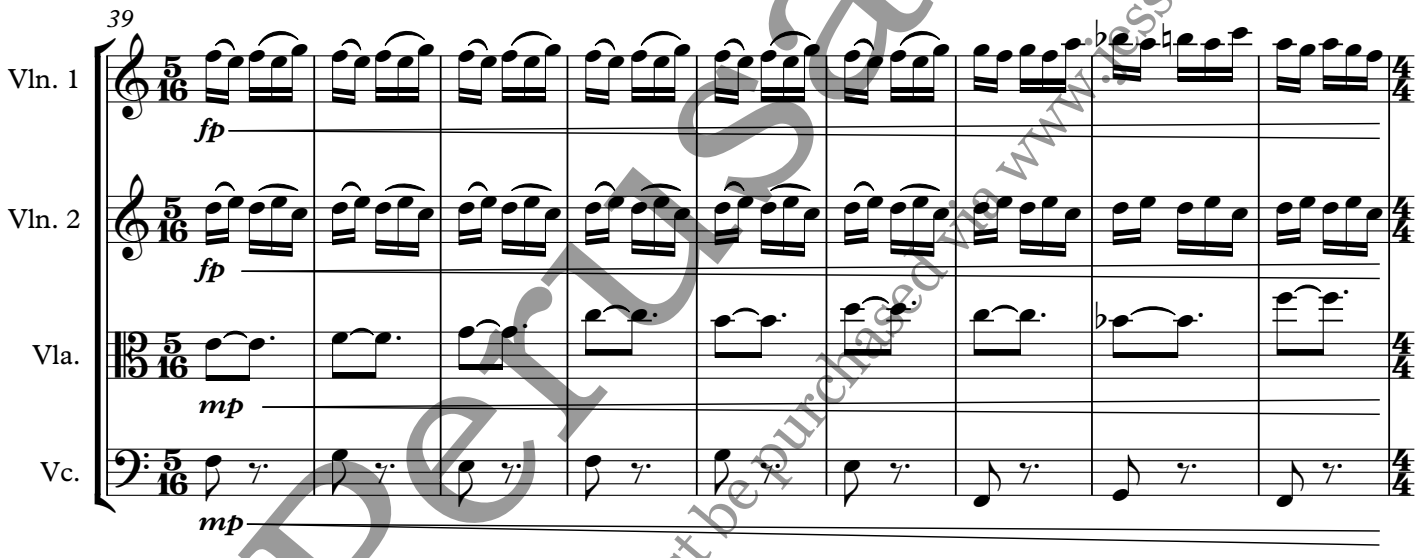
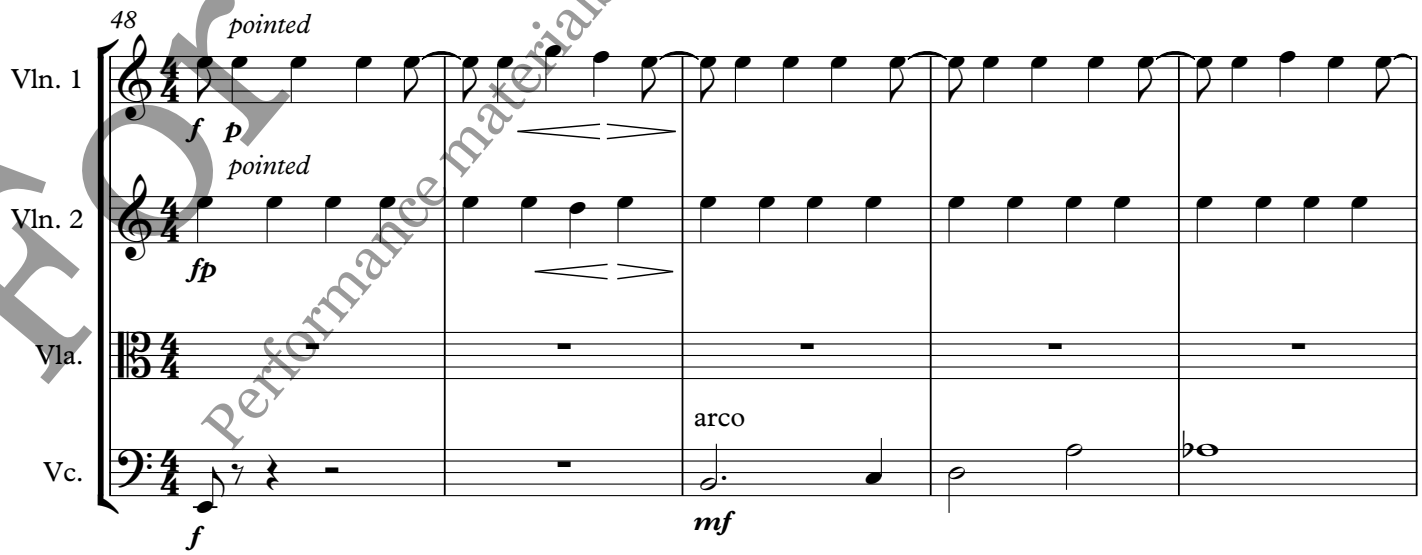




Foreboding



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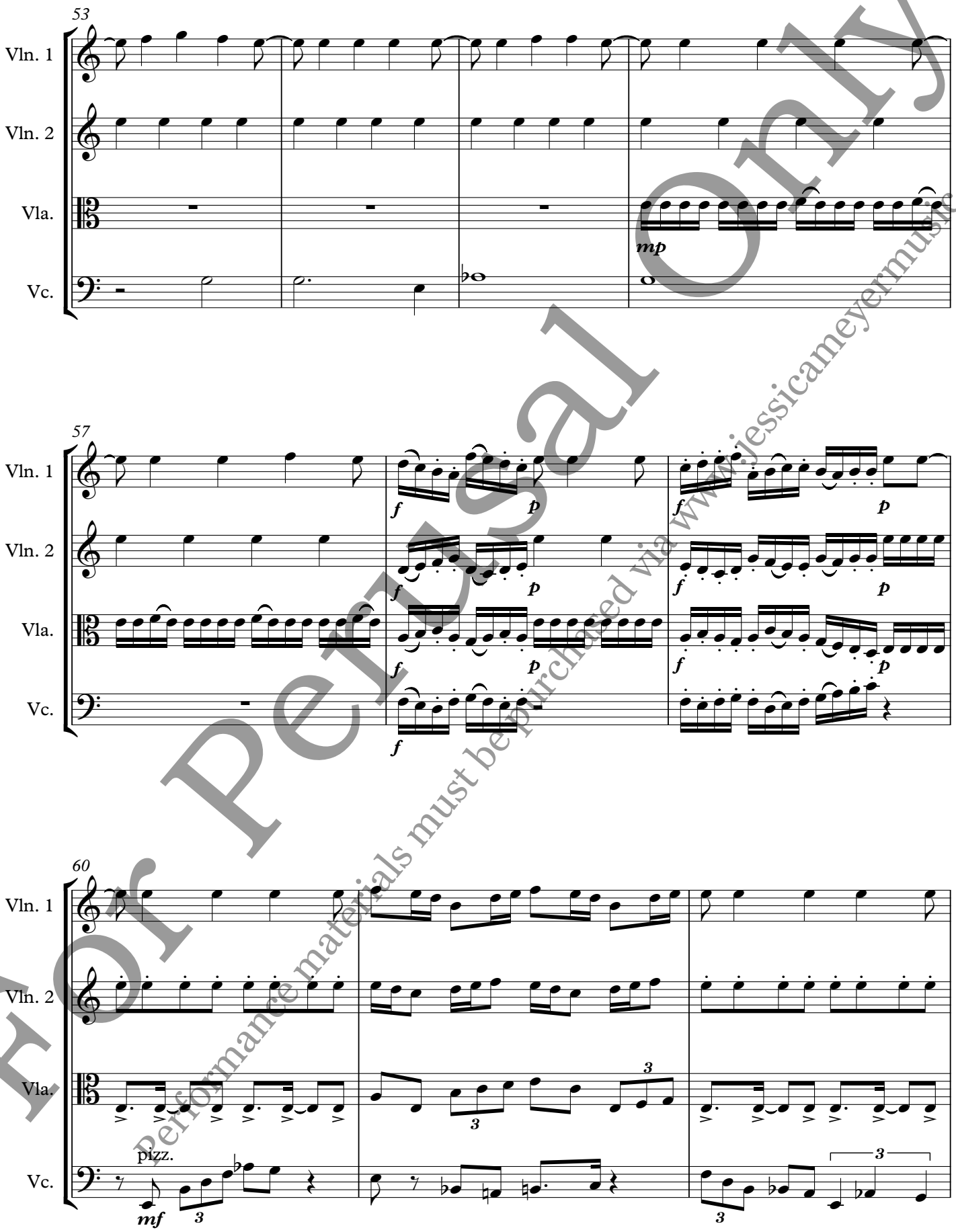

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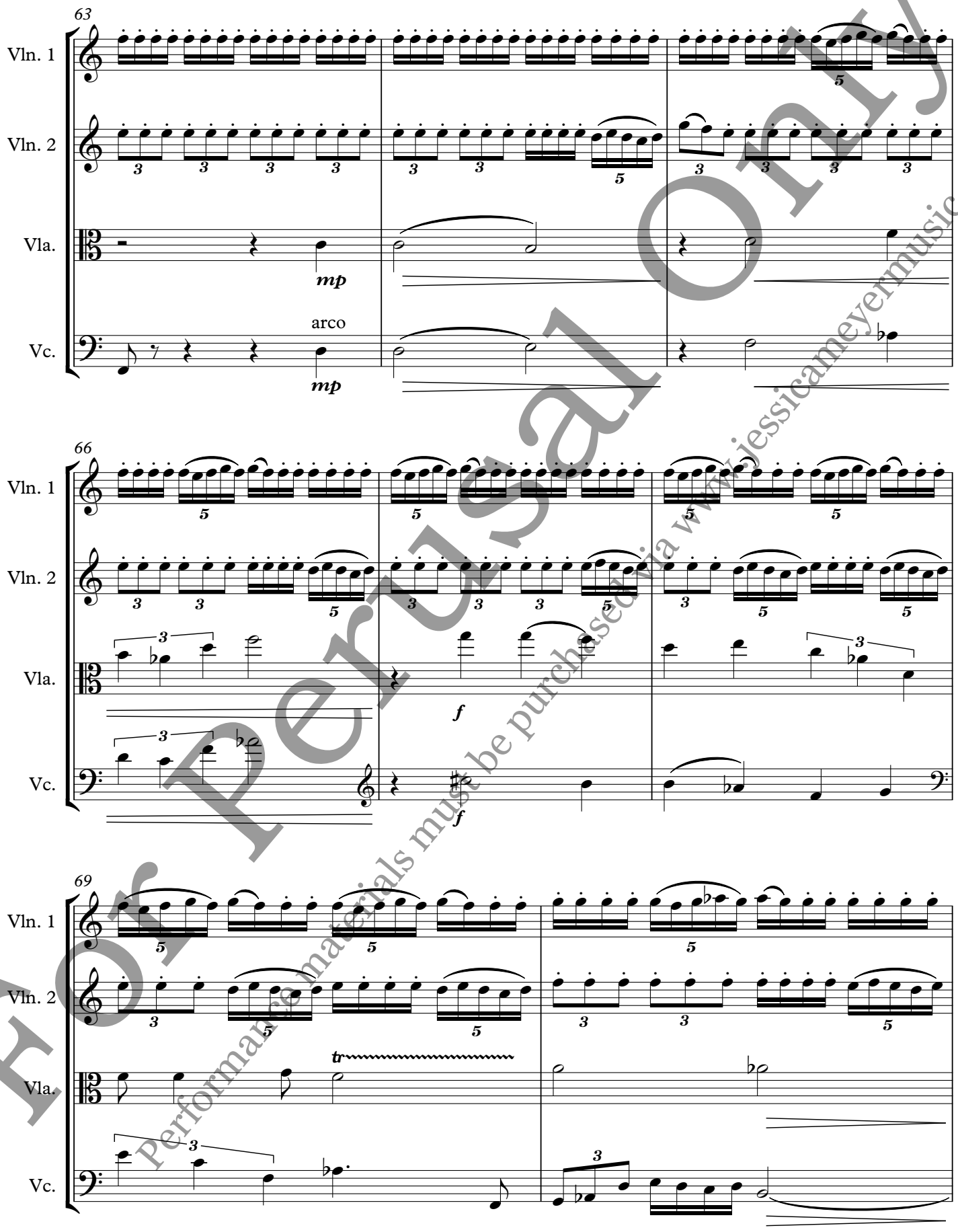

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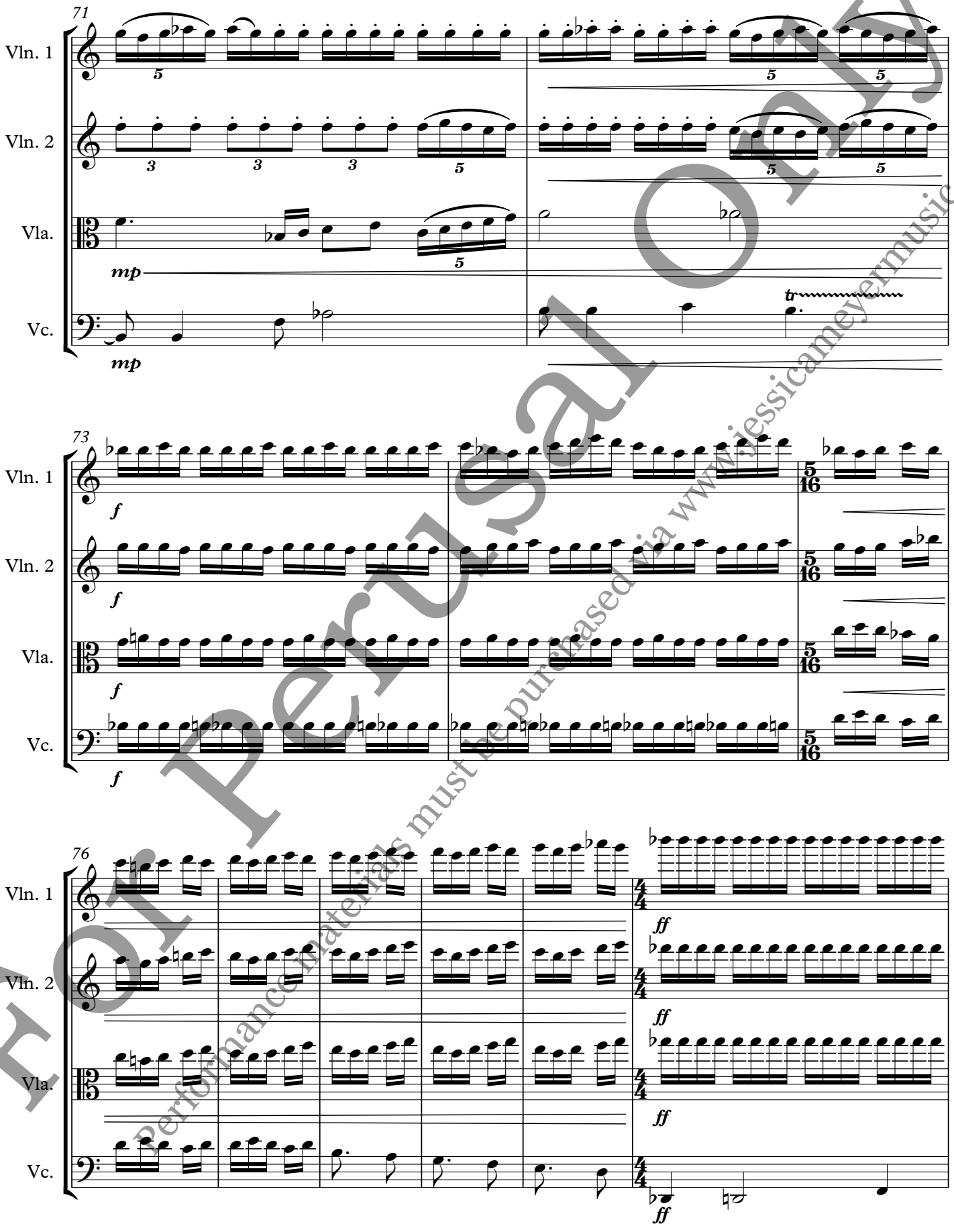

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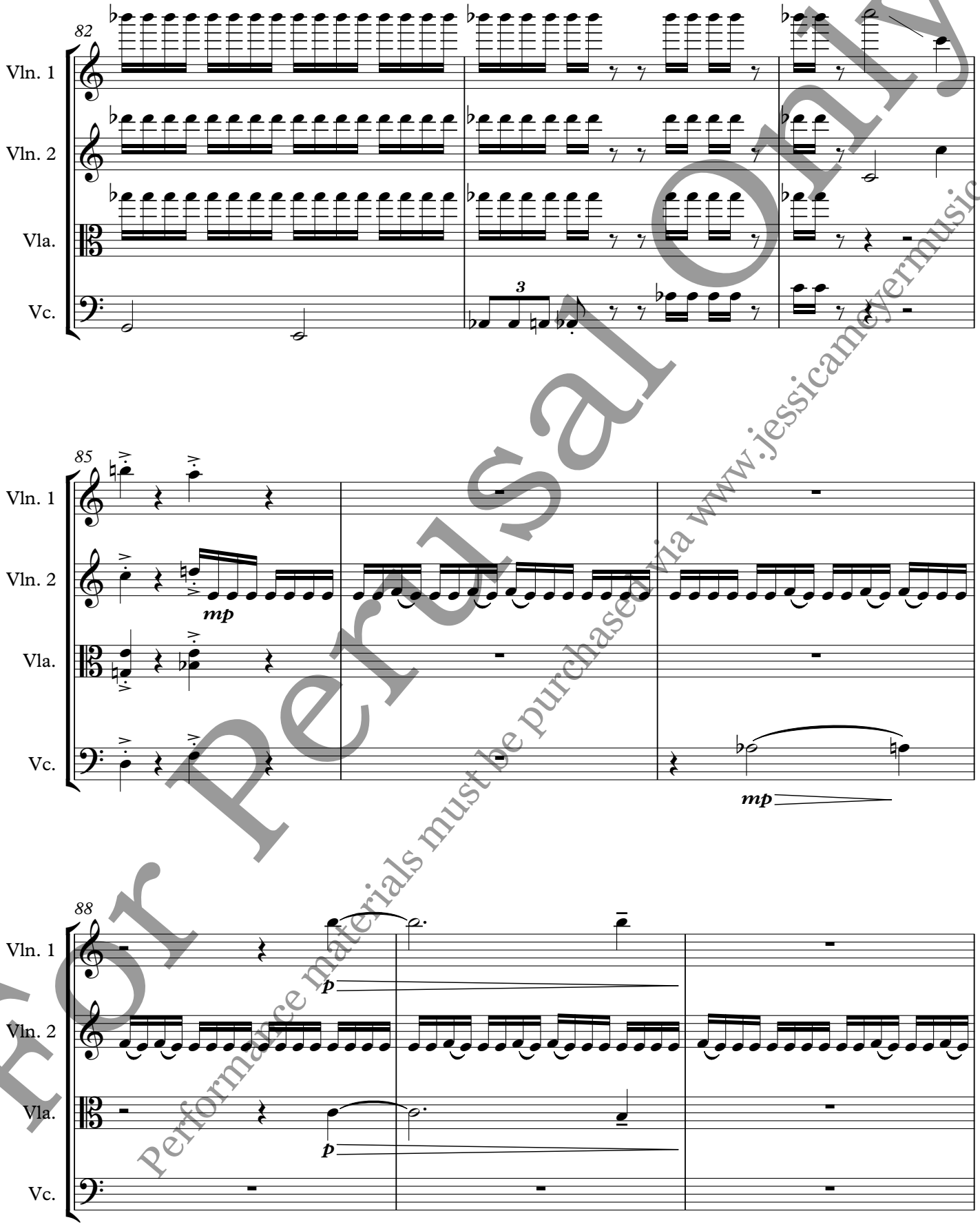

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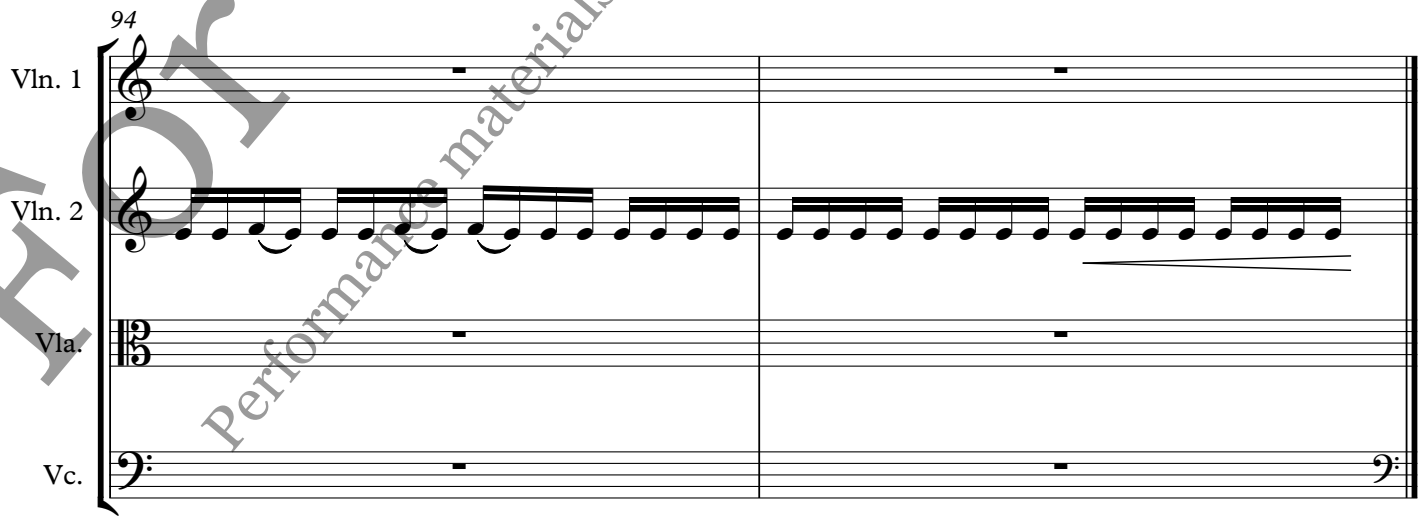

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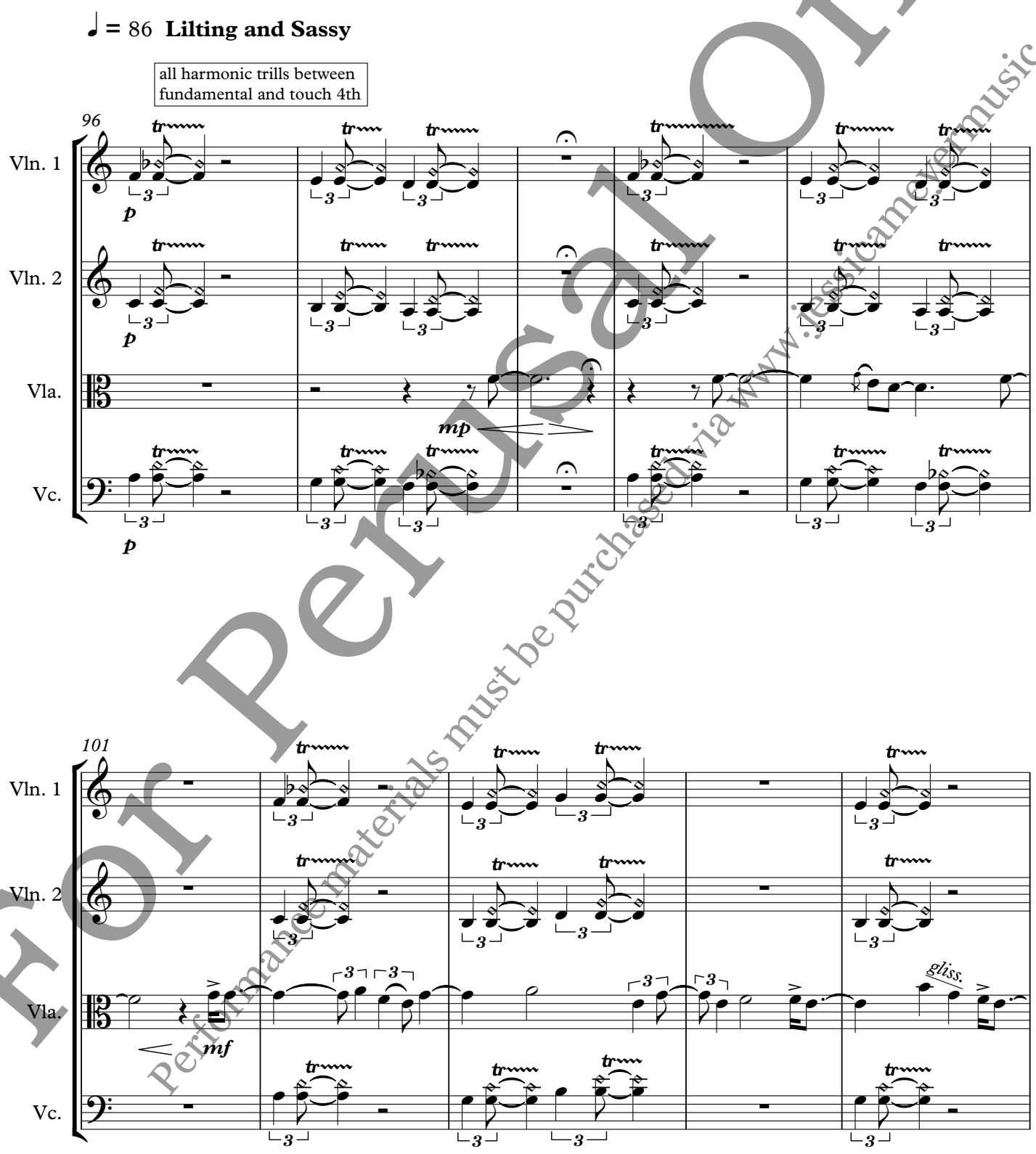
II. Unbearable Lightness

"Her drama was a drama not of heaviness but of lightness.
What fell to her lot was not the burden, but the unbearable lightness of being."



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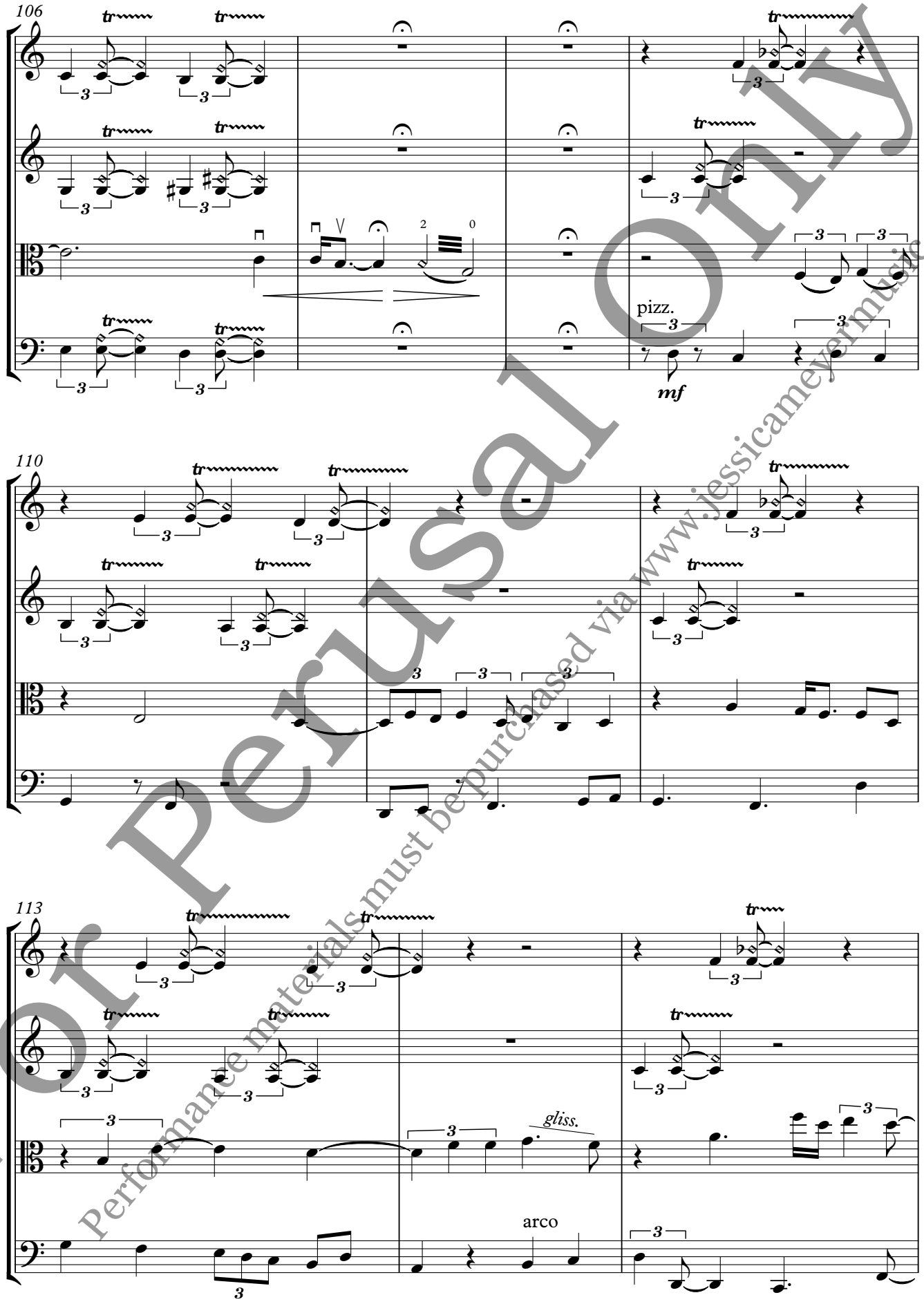

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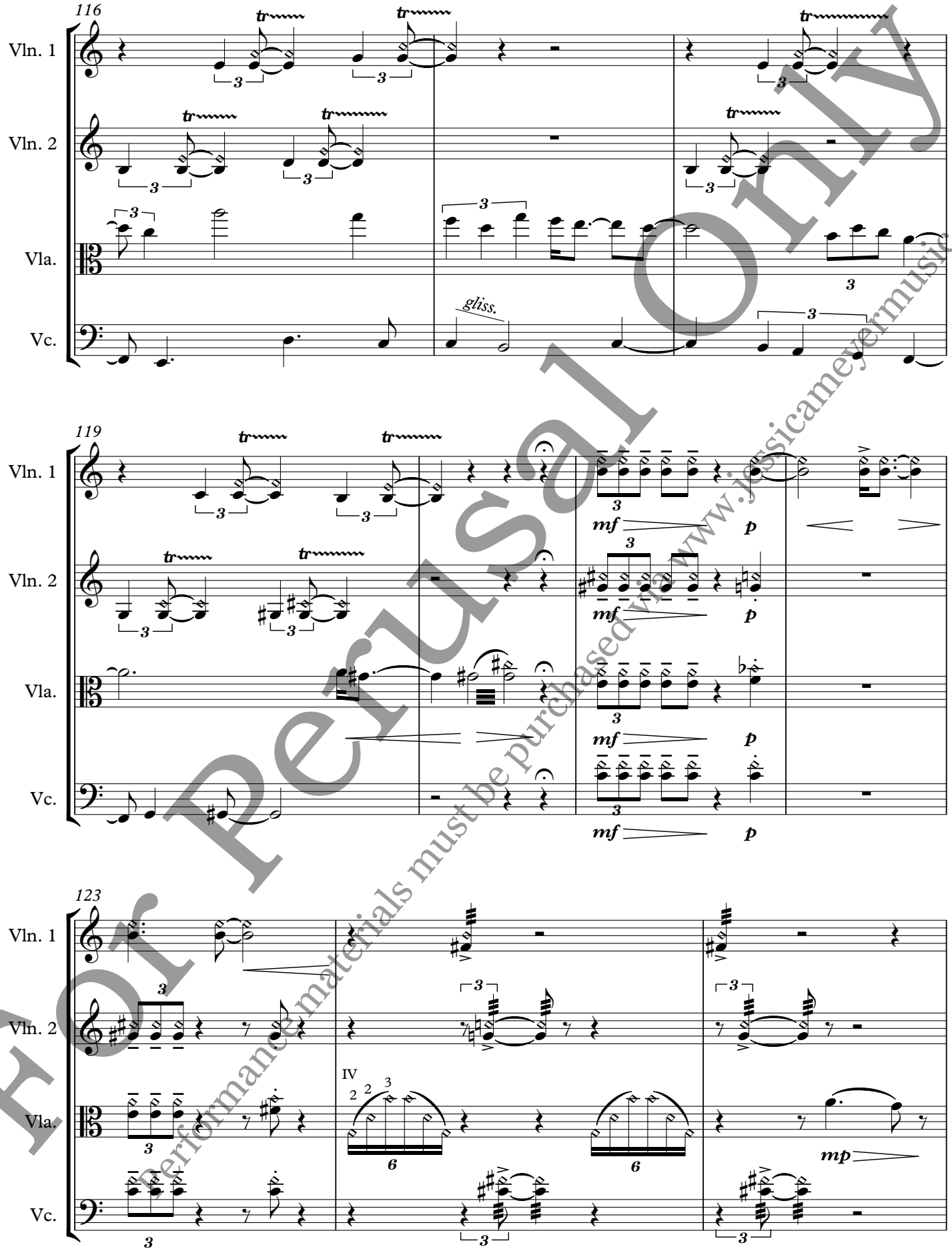

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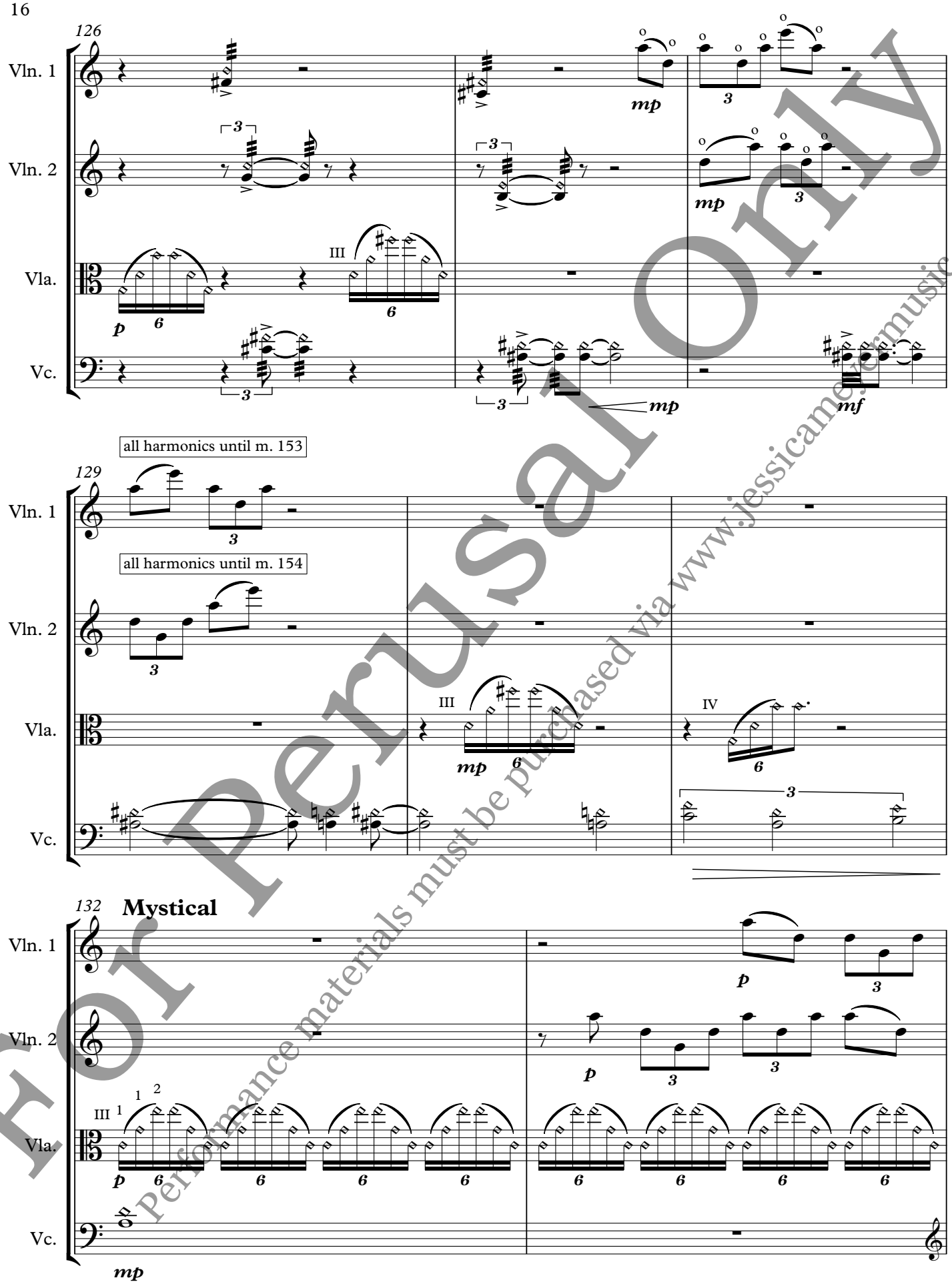

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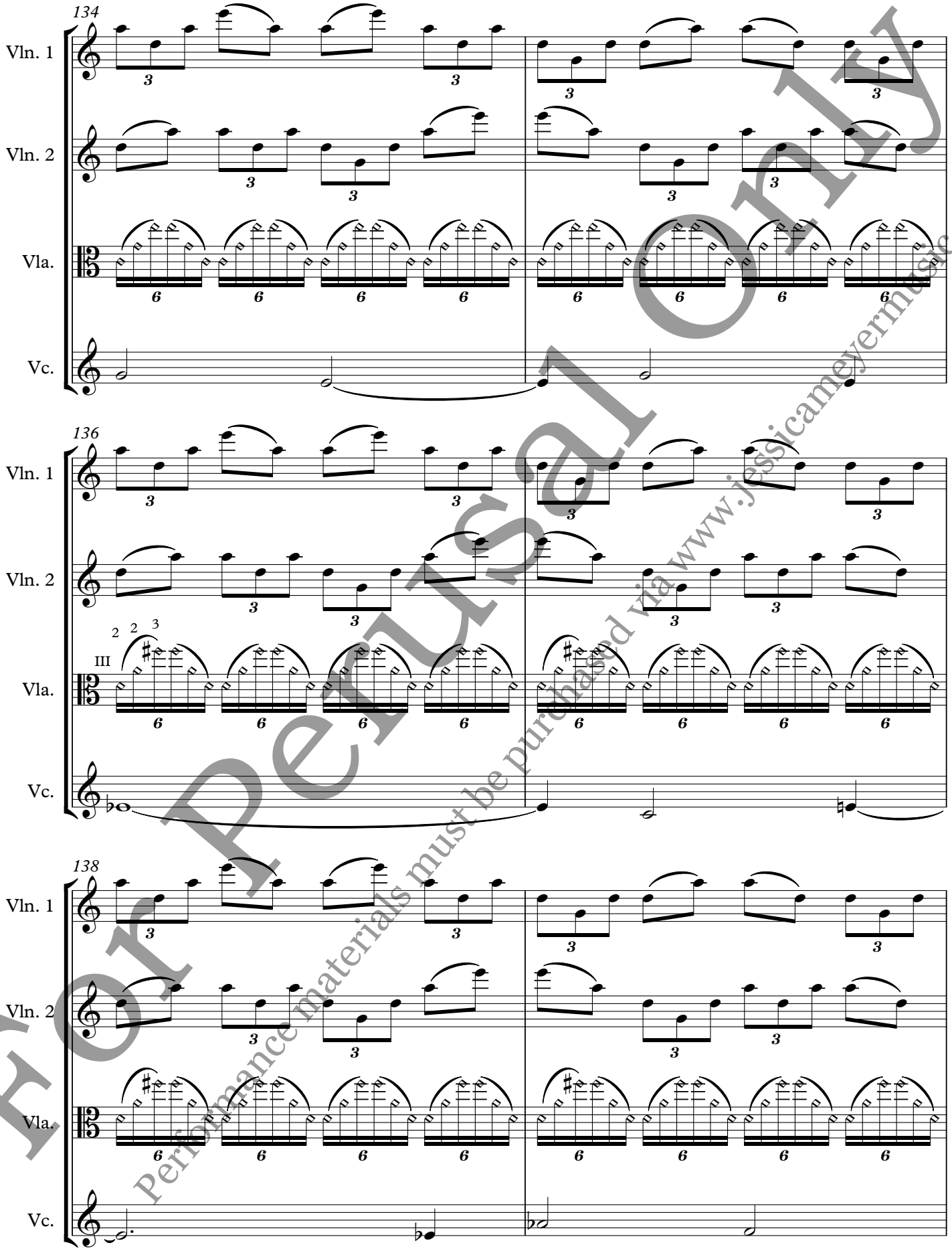

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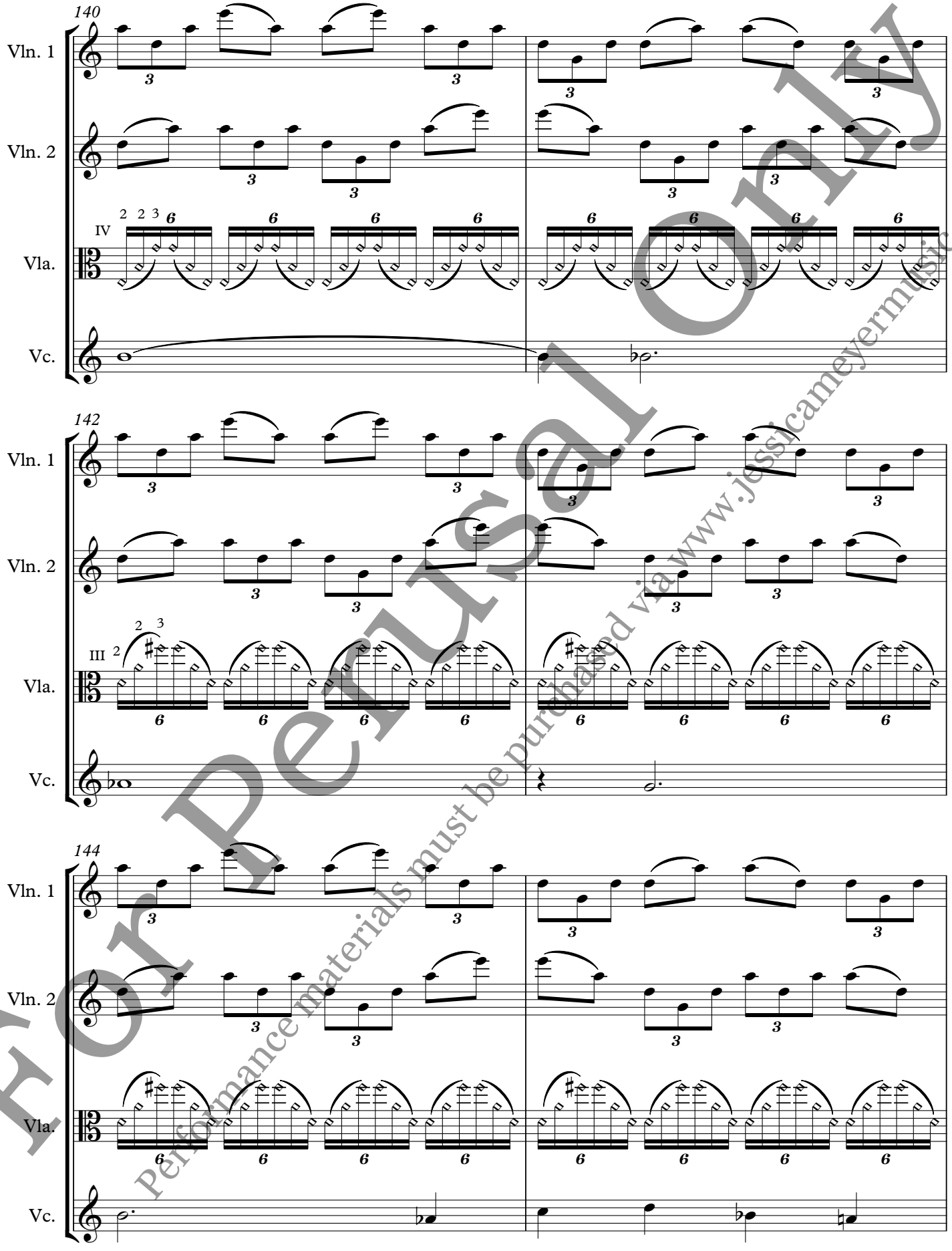

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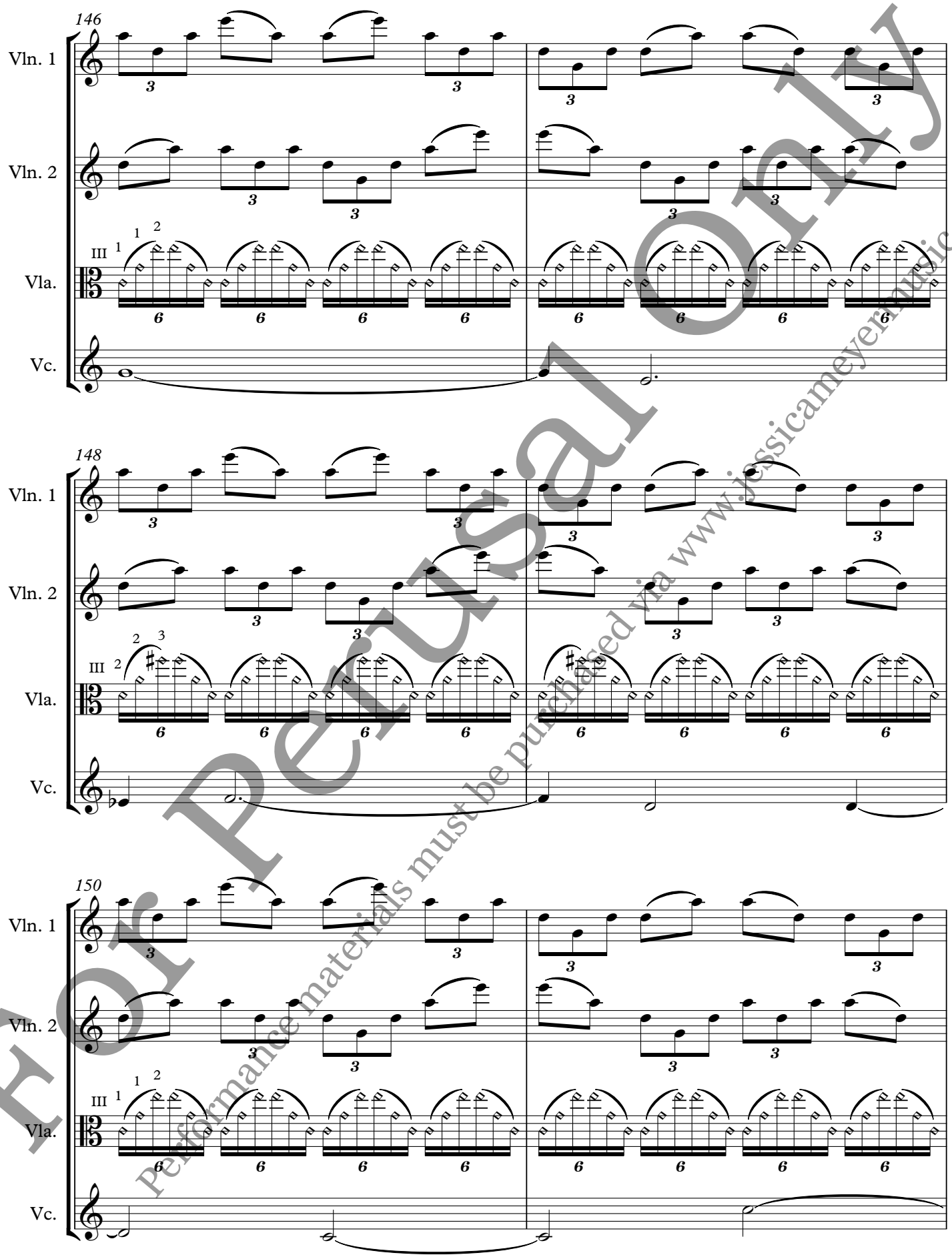

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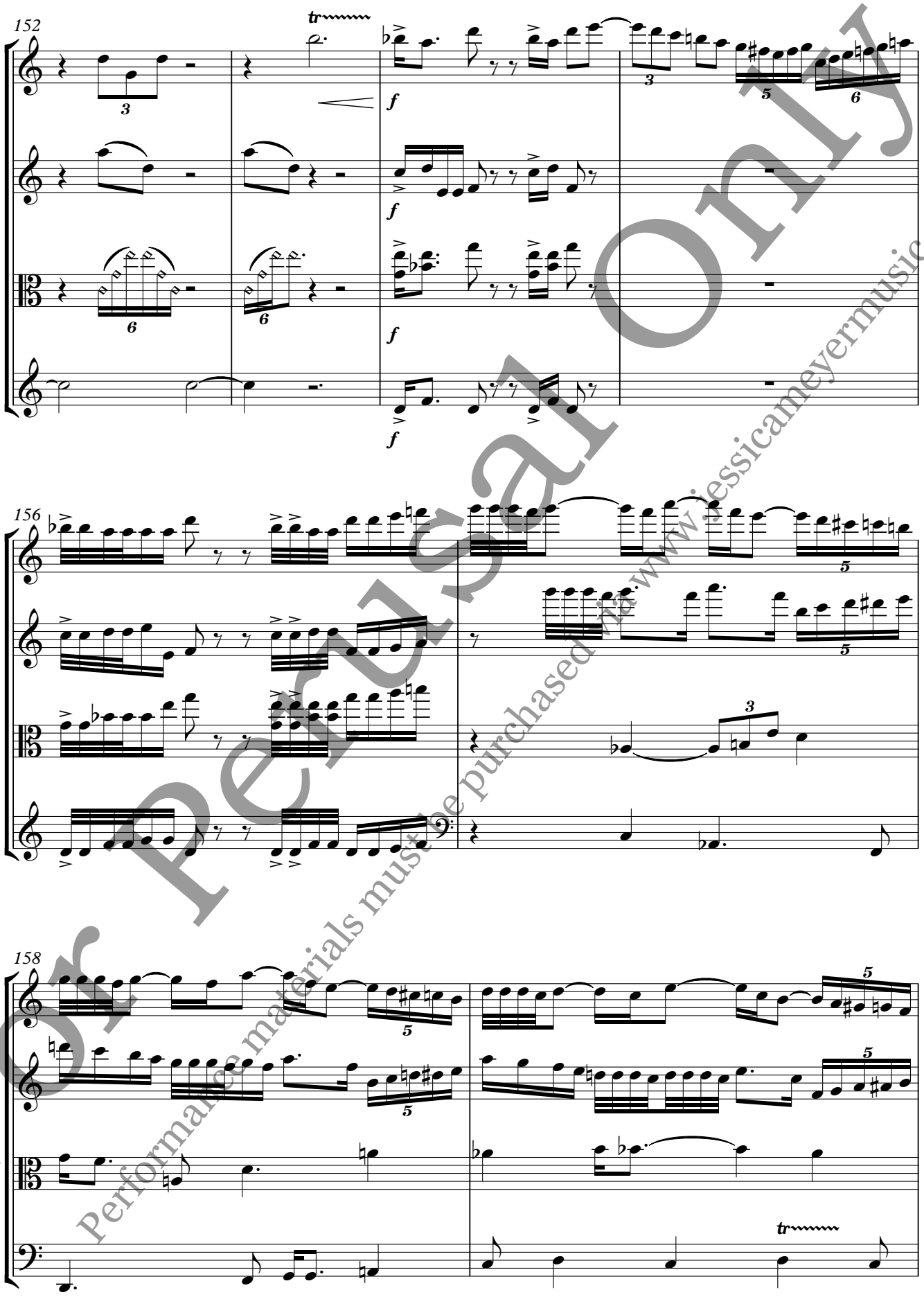

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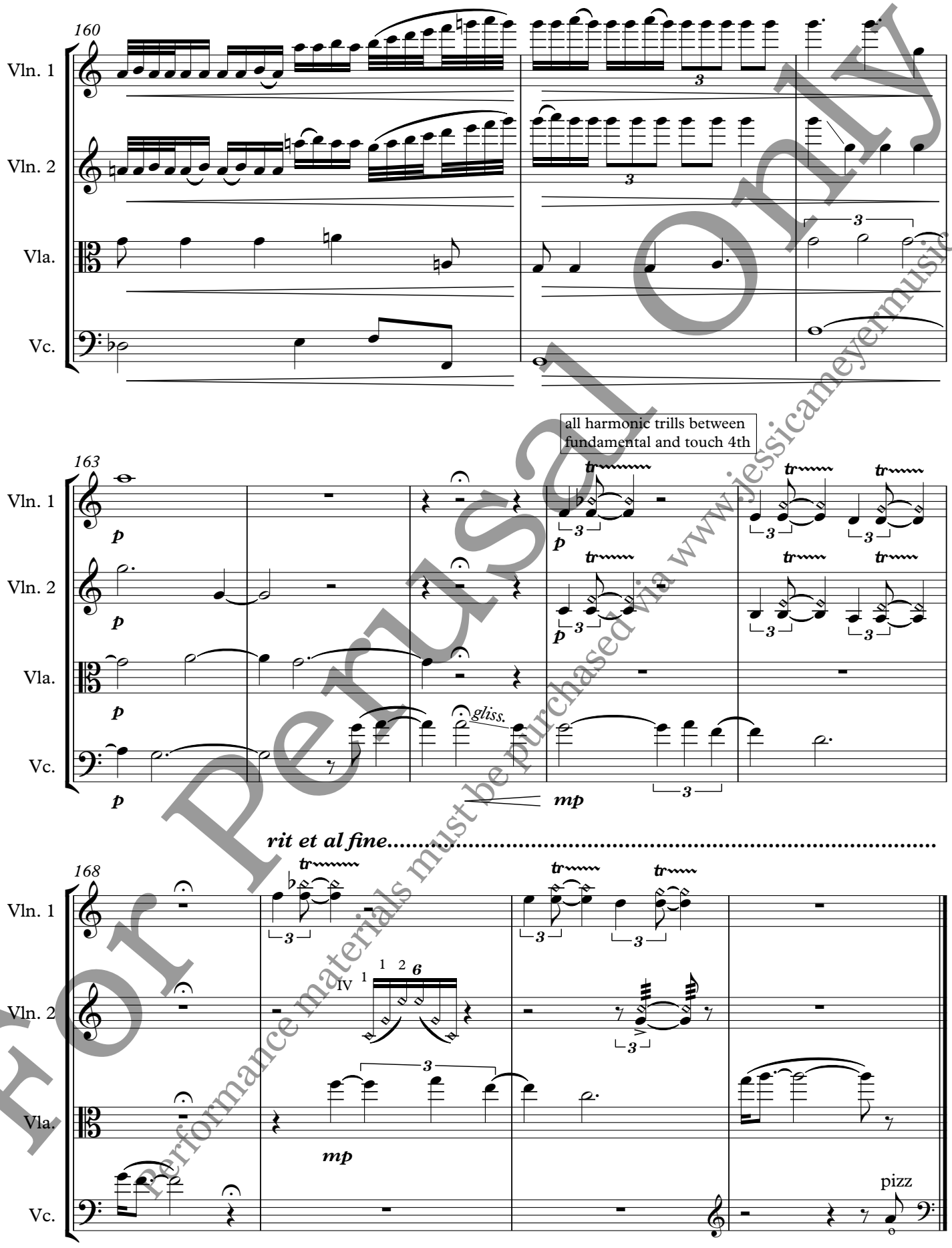

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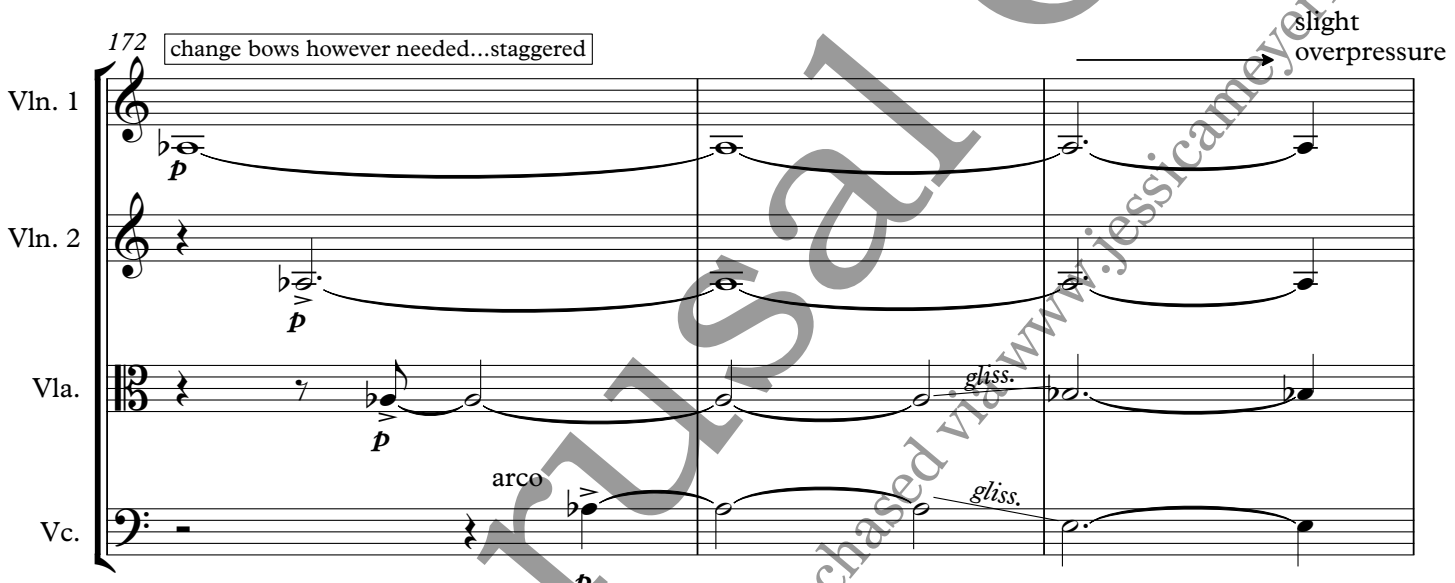
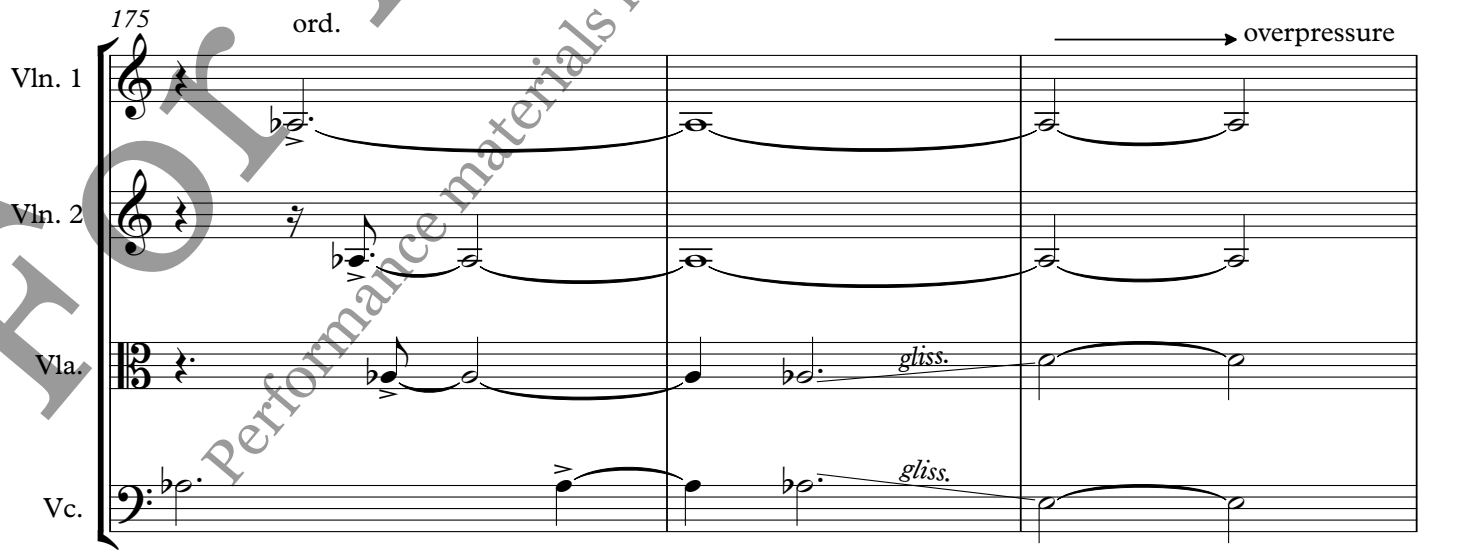
III. Compassion

Origins of the word "compassion":
Middle English: via Old French from ecclesiastical Latin *compassio(n-*), from *compati* 'suffer with'.

"...for there is nothing heavier than compassion.
Not even one's own pain weighs so heavy as the pain one feels with someone,
for someone, a pain intensified by the imagination and prolonged by a hundred echoes."

♩ = 50 **Heavy, Haunted**





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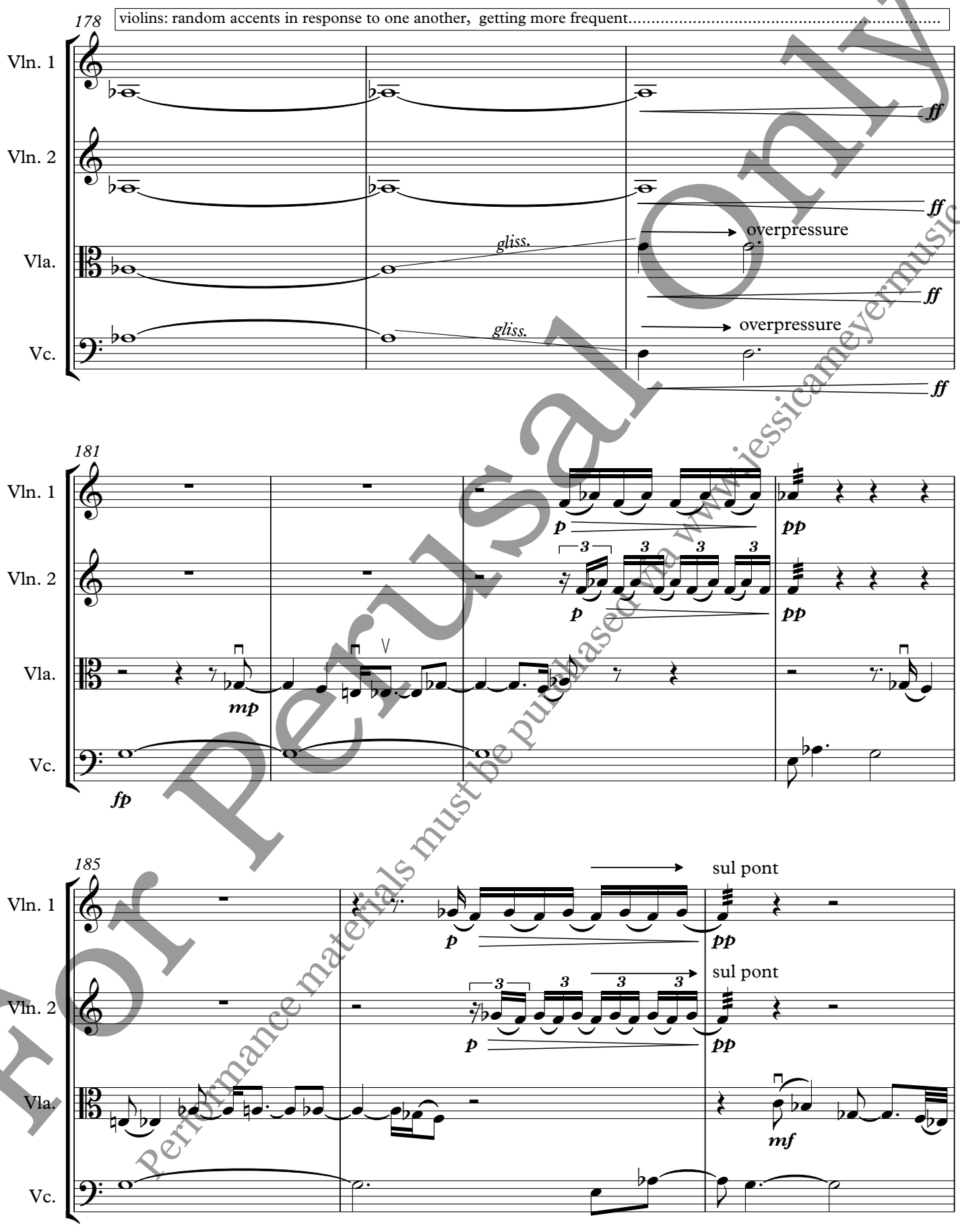

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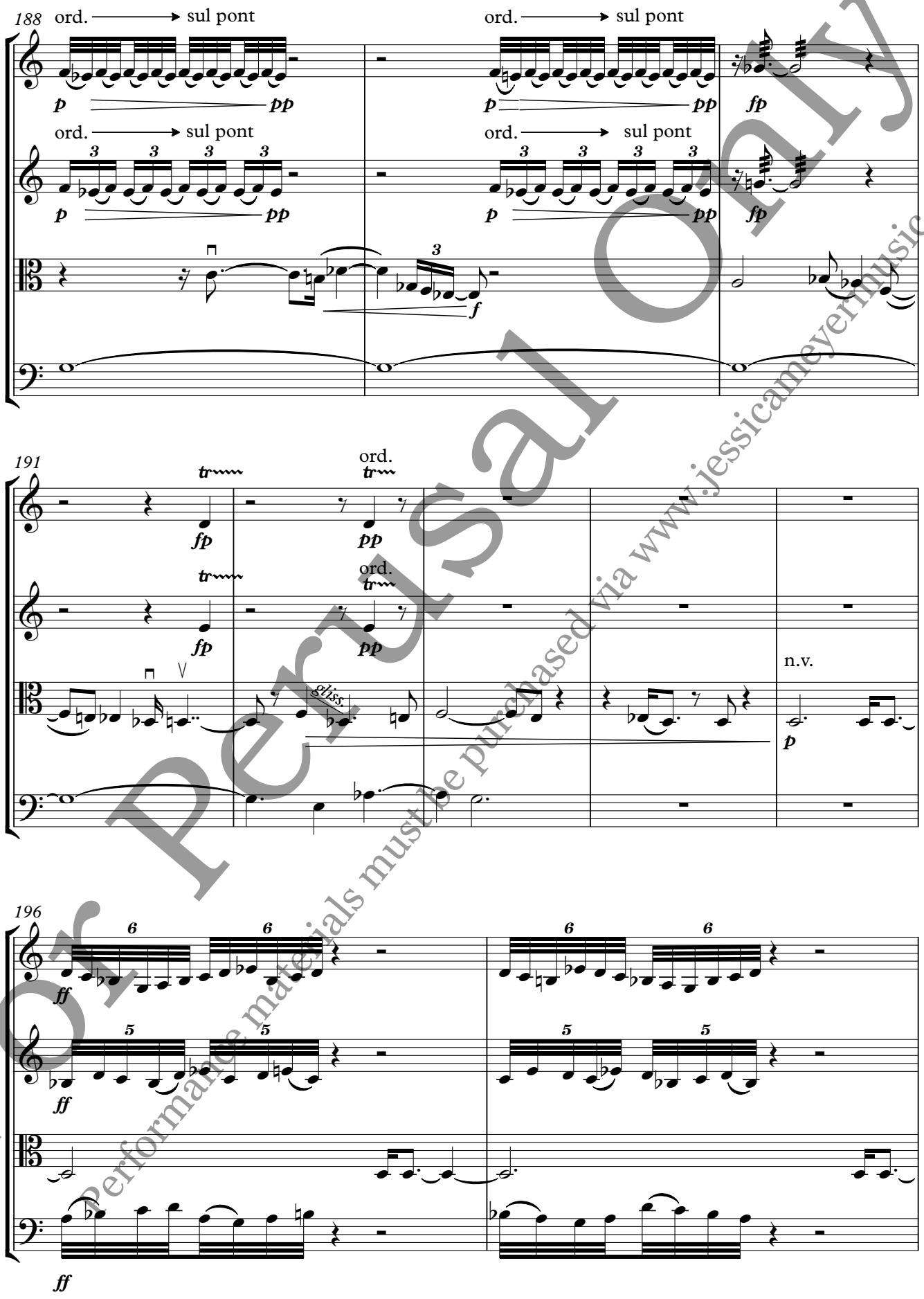

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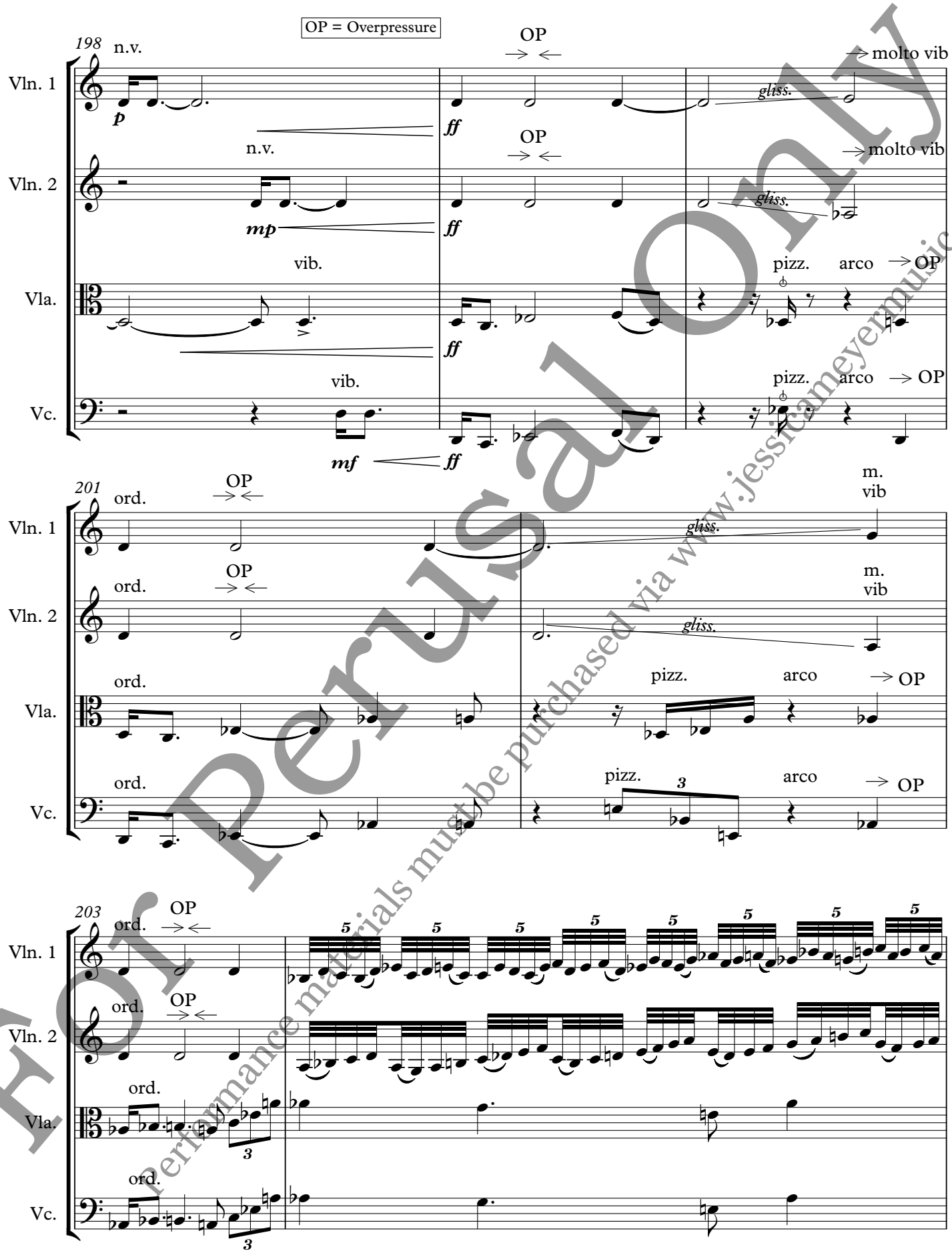

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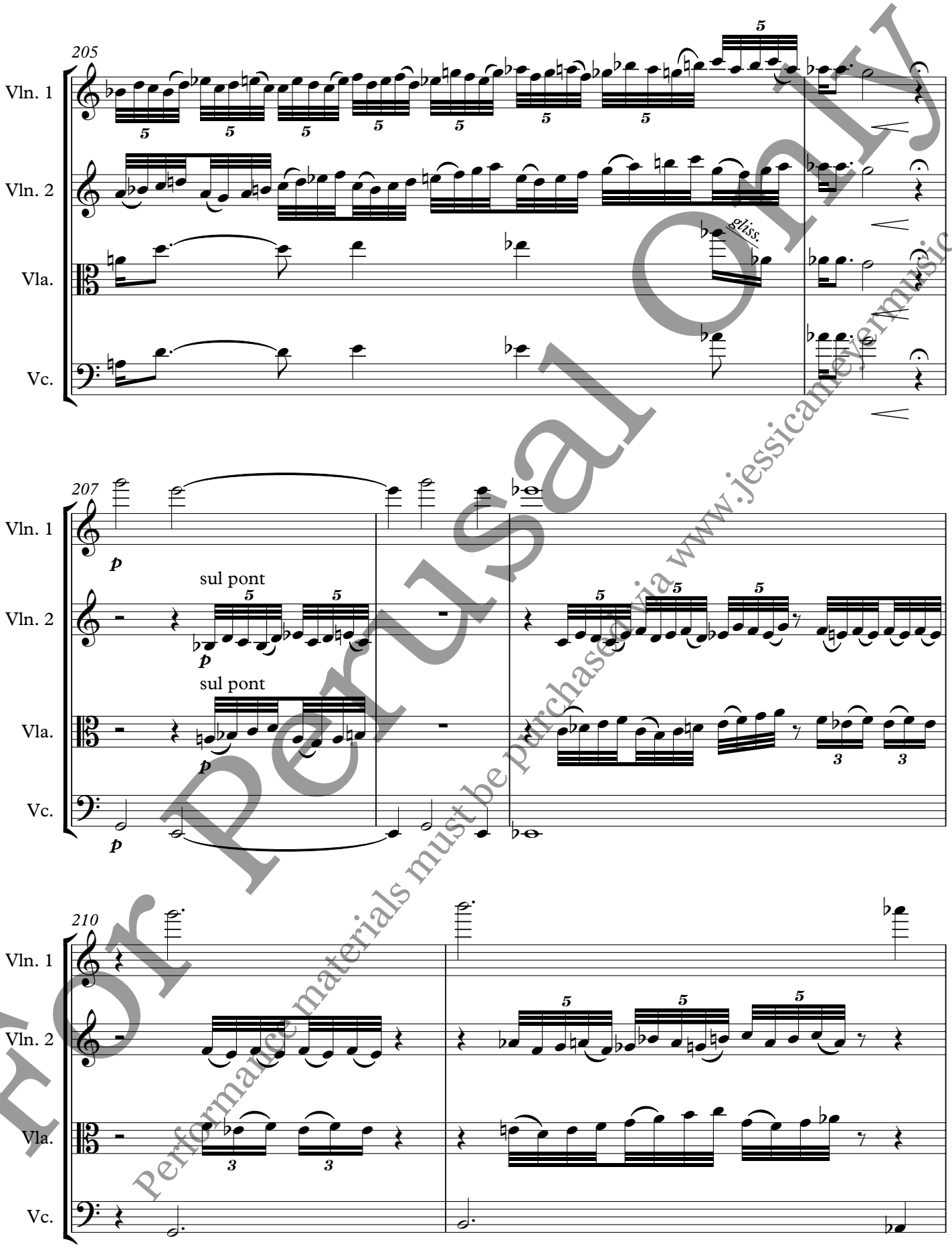

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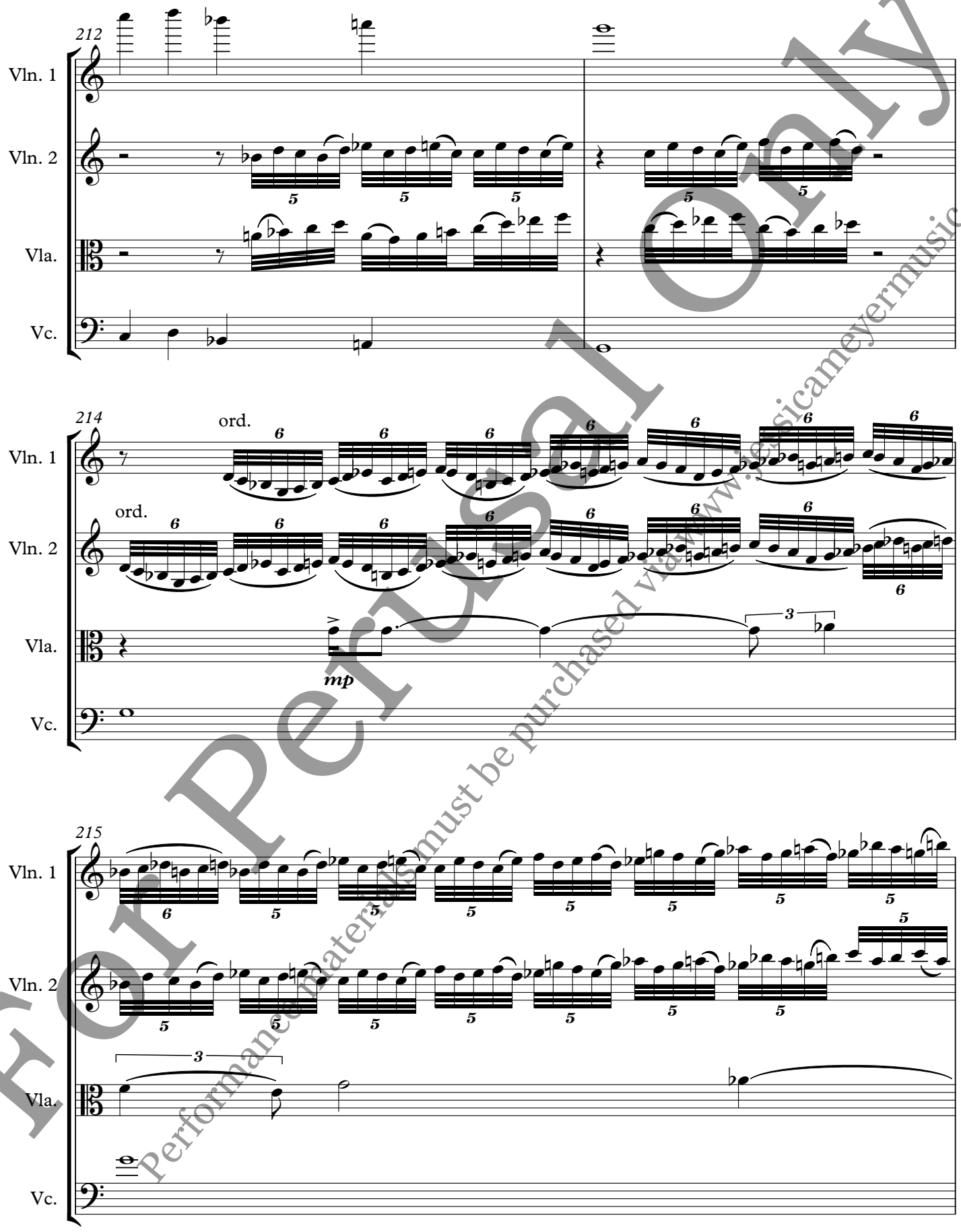

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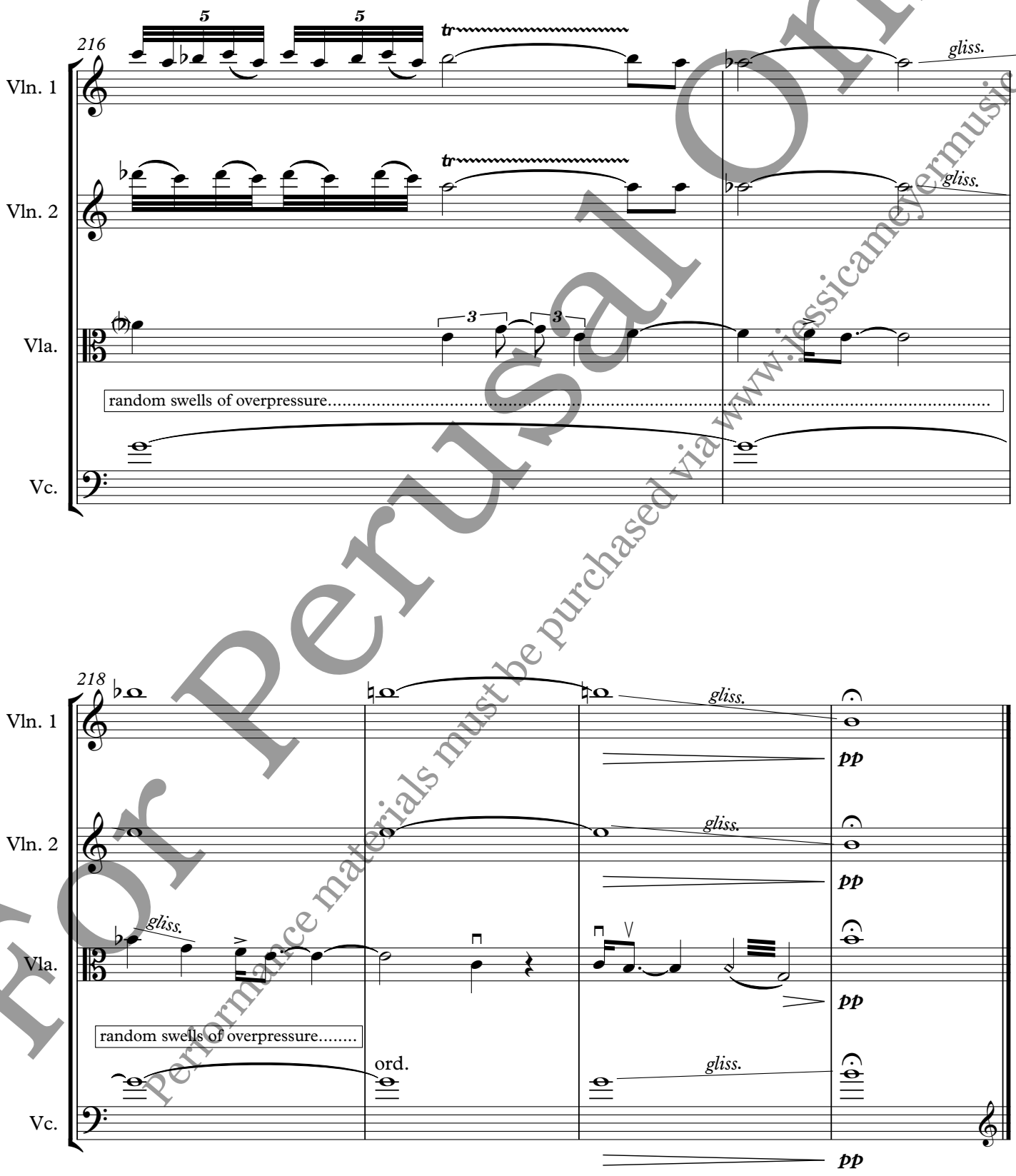

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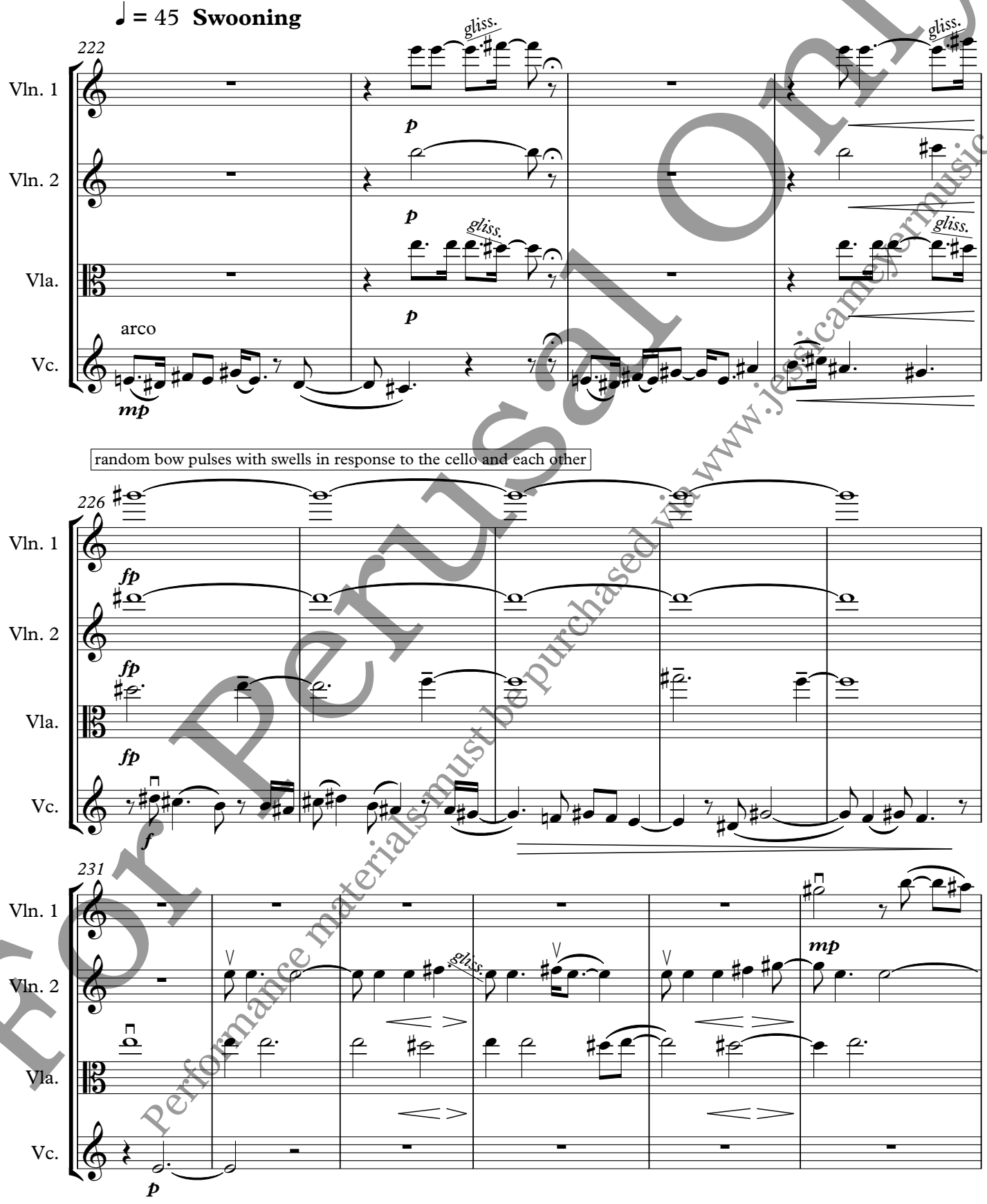
IV. Heart/Mind

"When the heart speaks,
the mind finds it indecent to interject."



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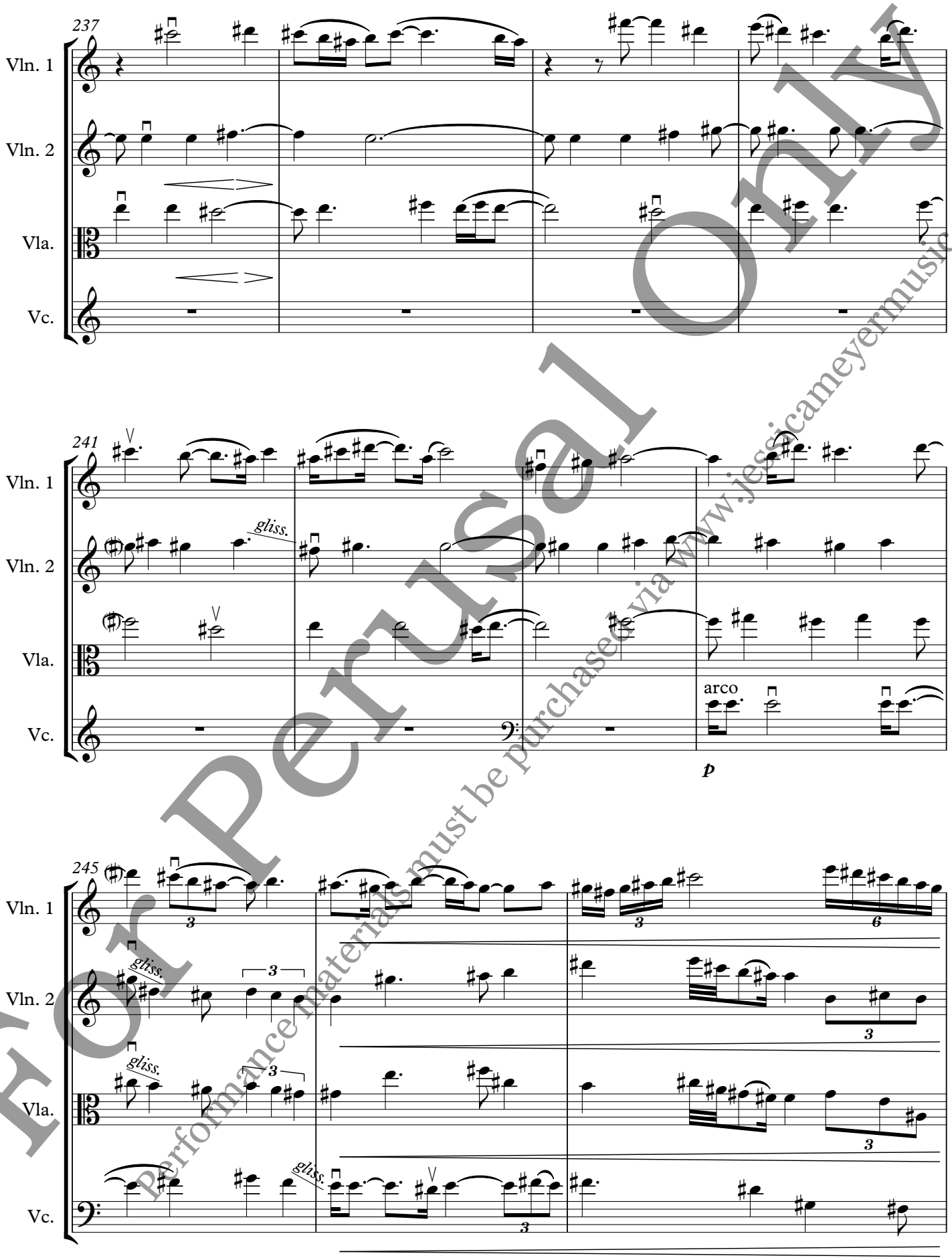

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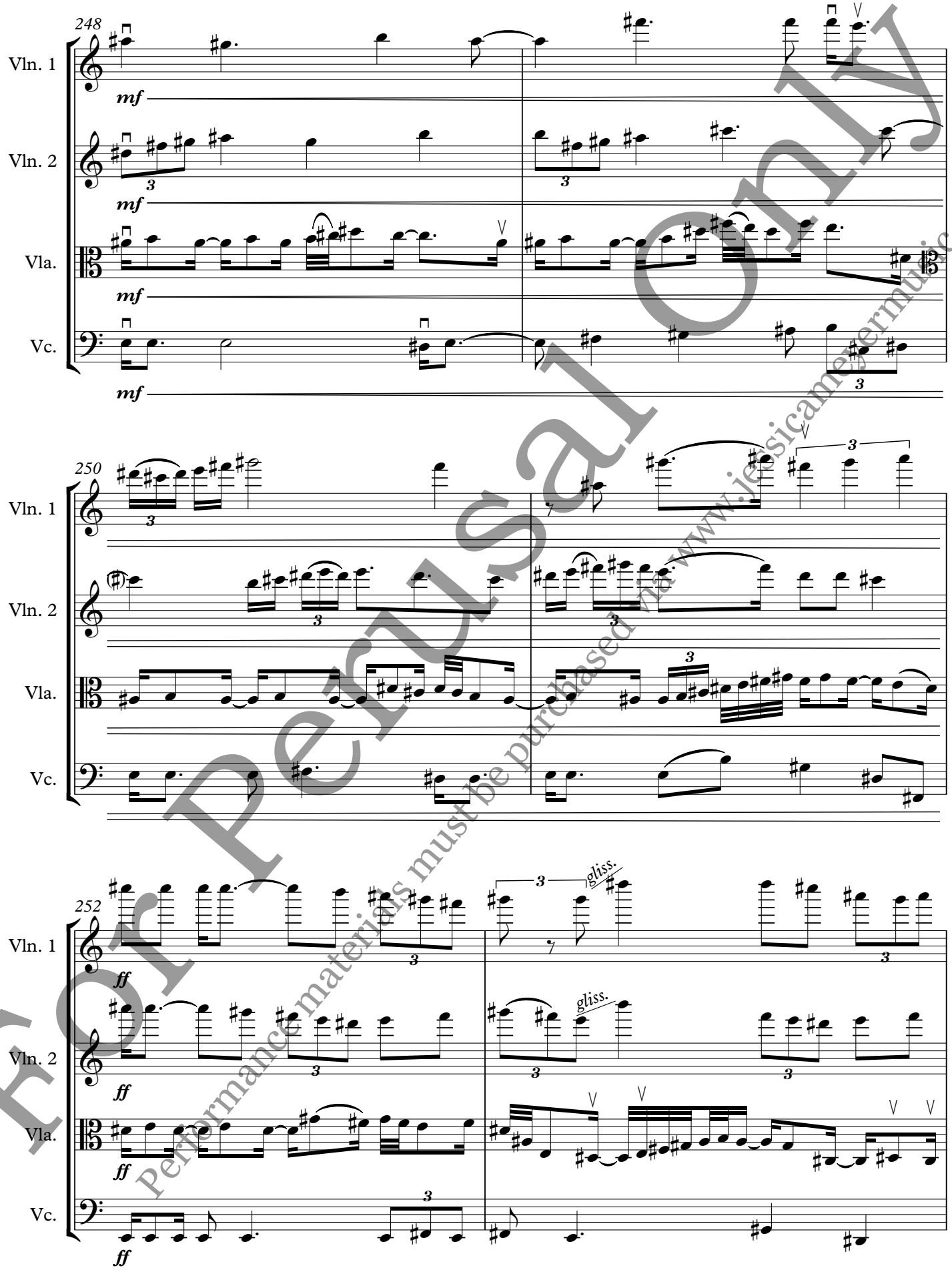

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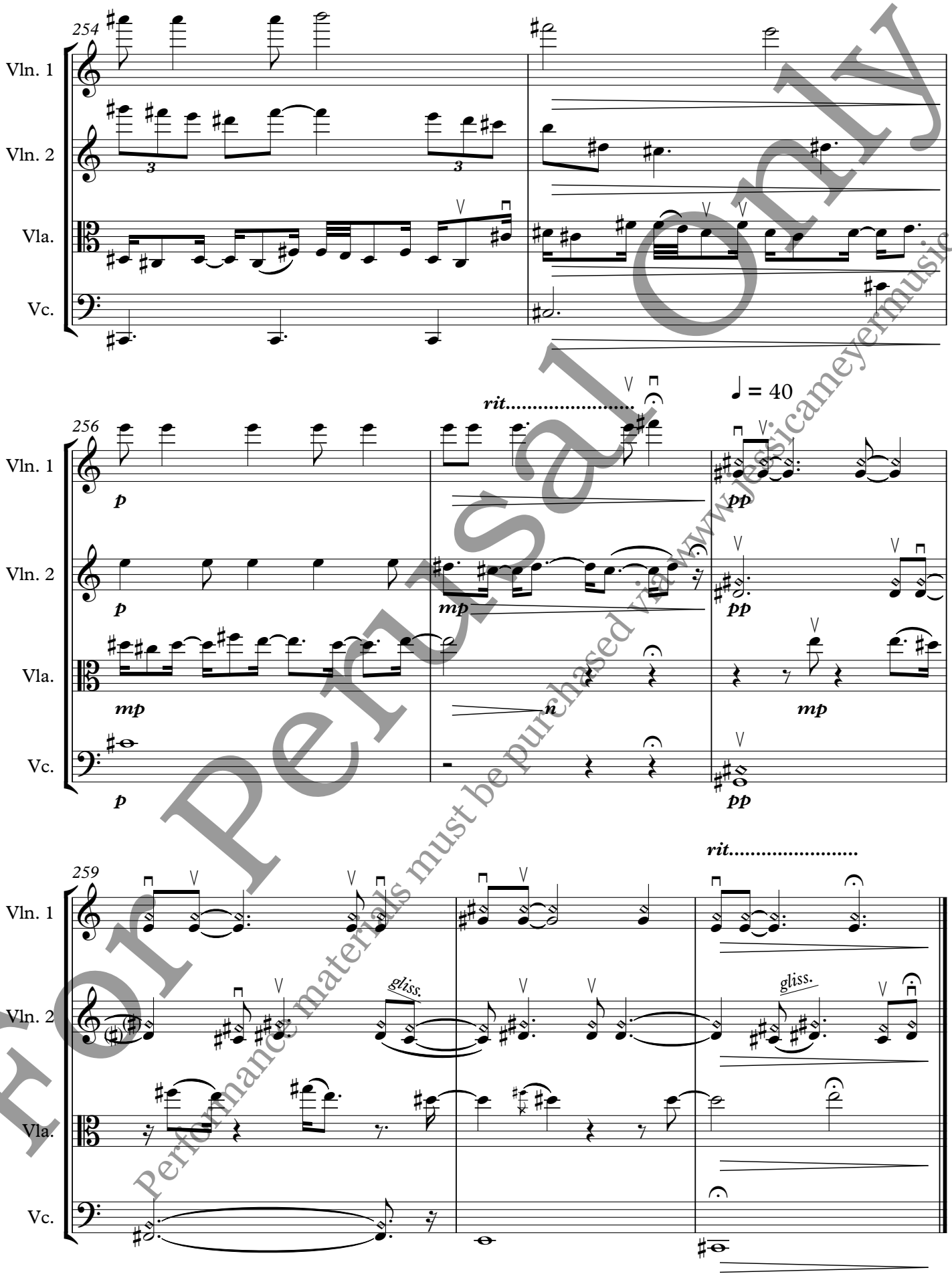

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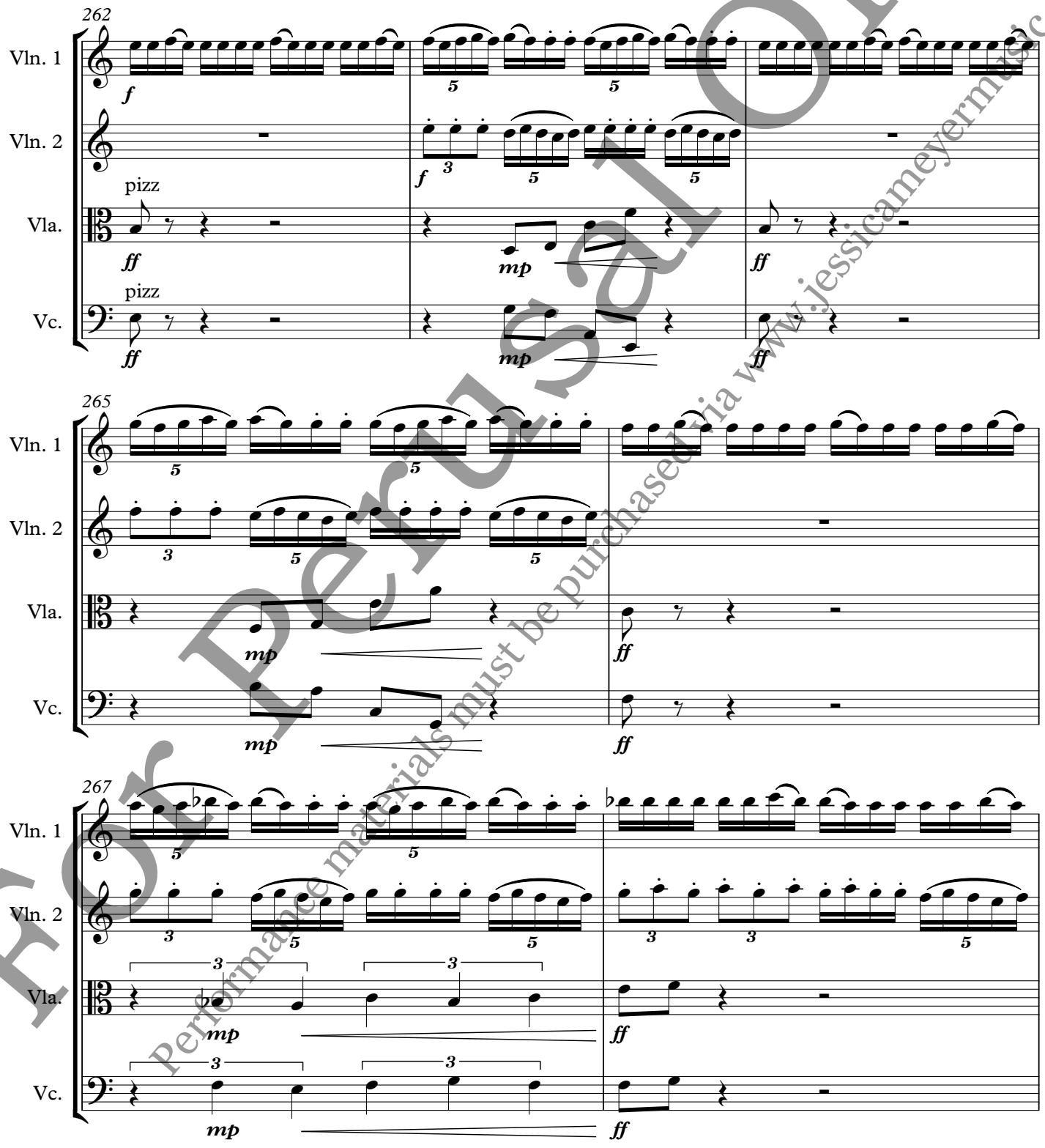
V. Es muss Sein (It Must Be)

"The sadness meant: We are at the last station.
The happiness meant: We are together.
The sadness was form, the happiness content.
Happiness filled the space of sadness."

♩ = 120 **Renewed Urgency**



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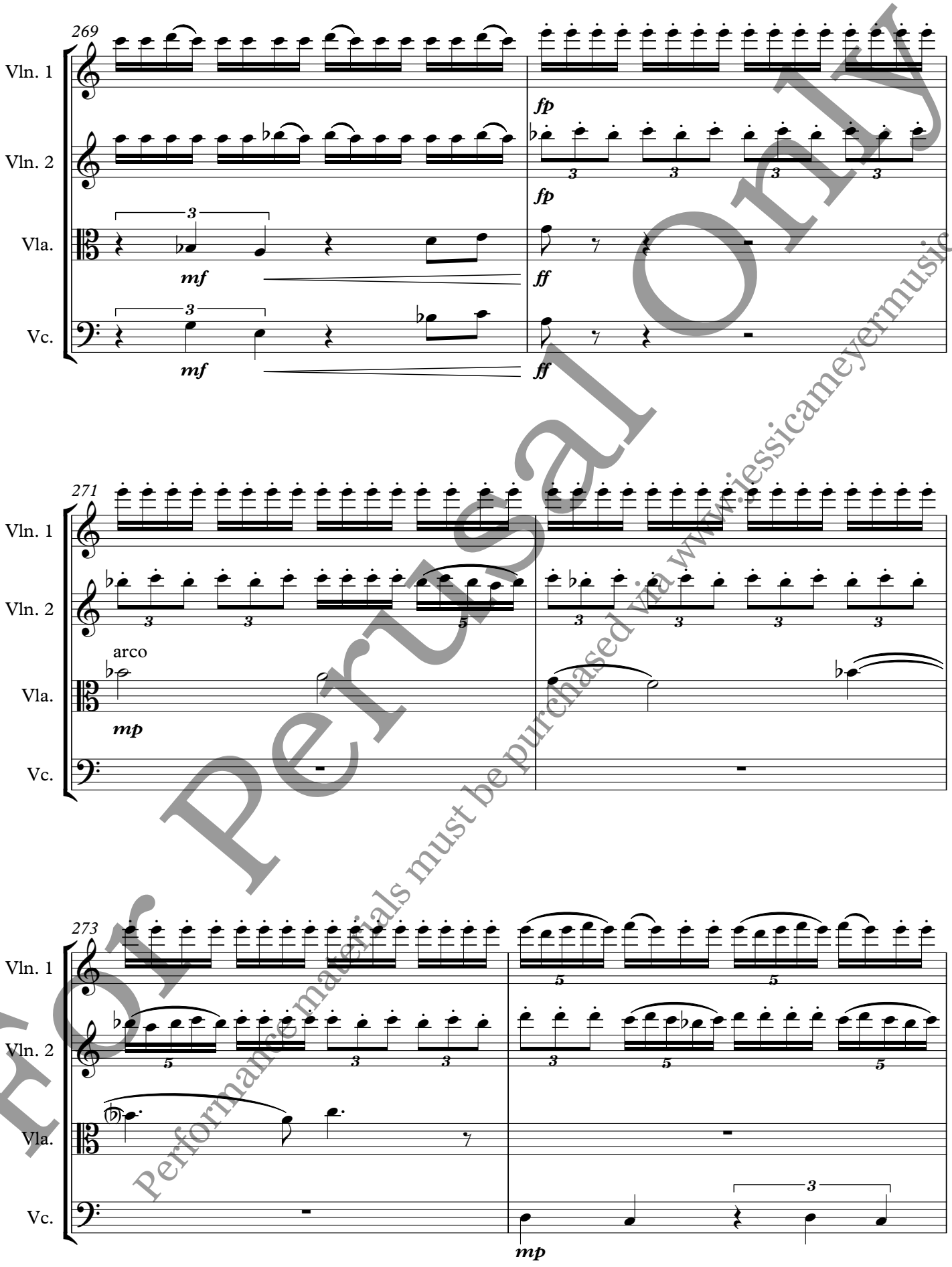

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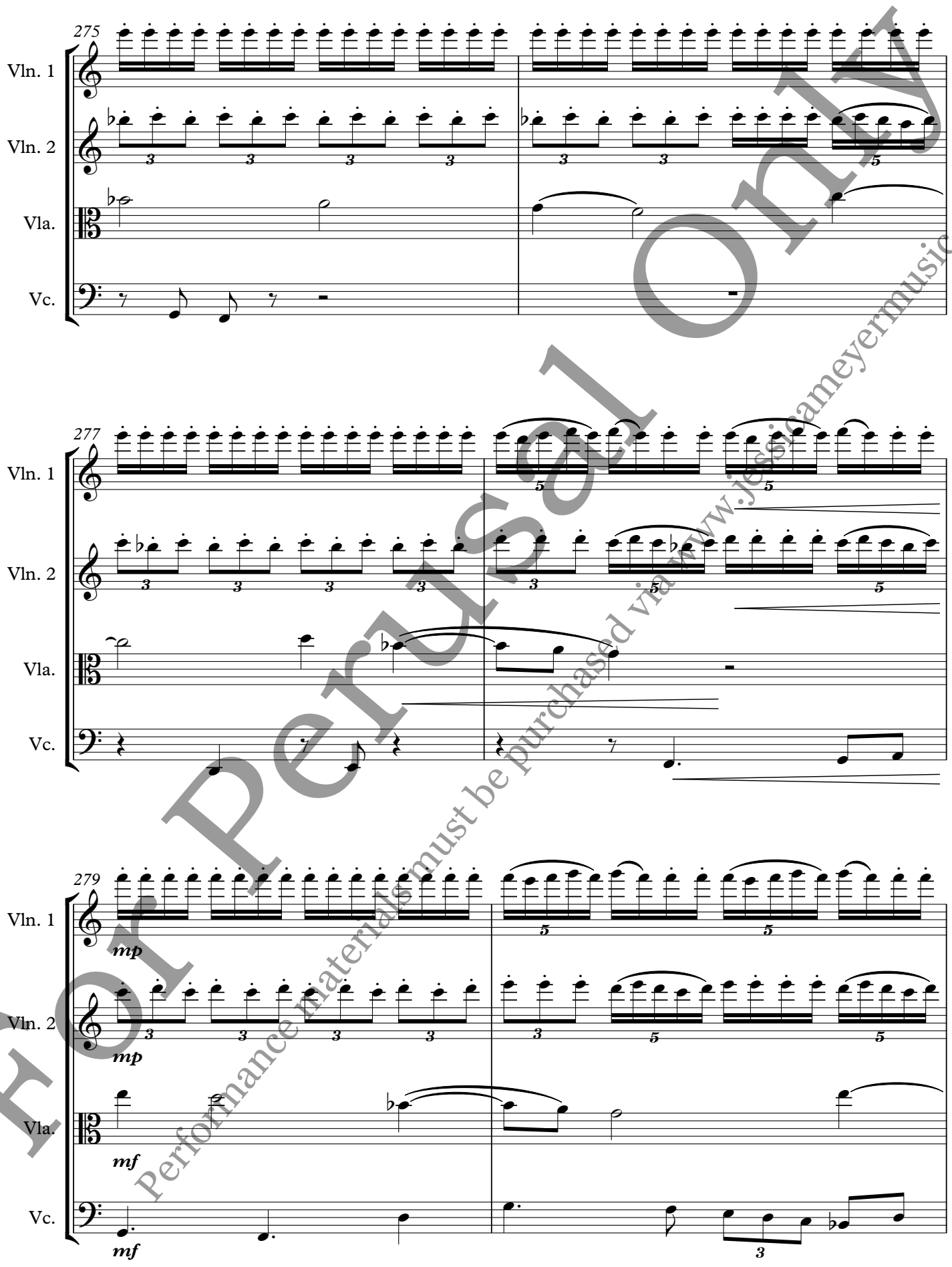

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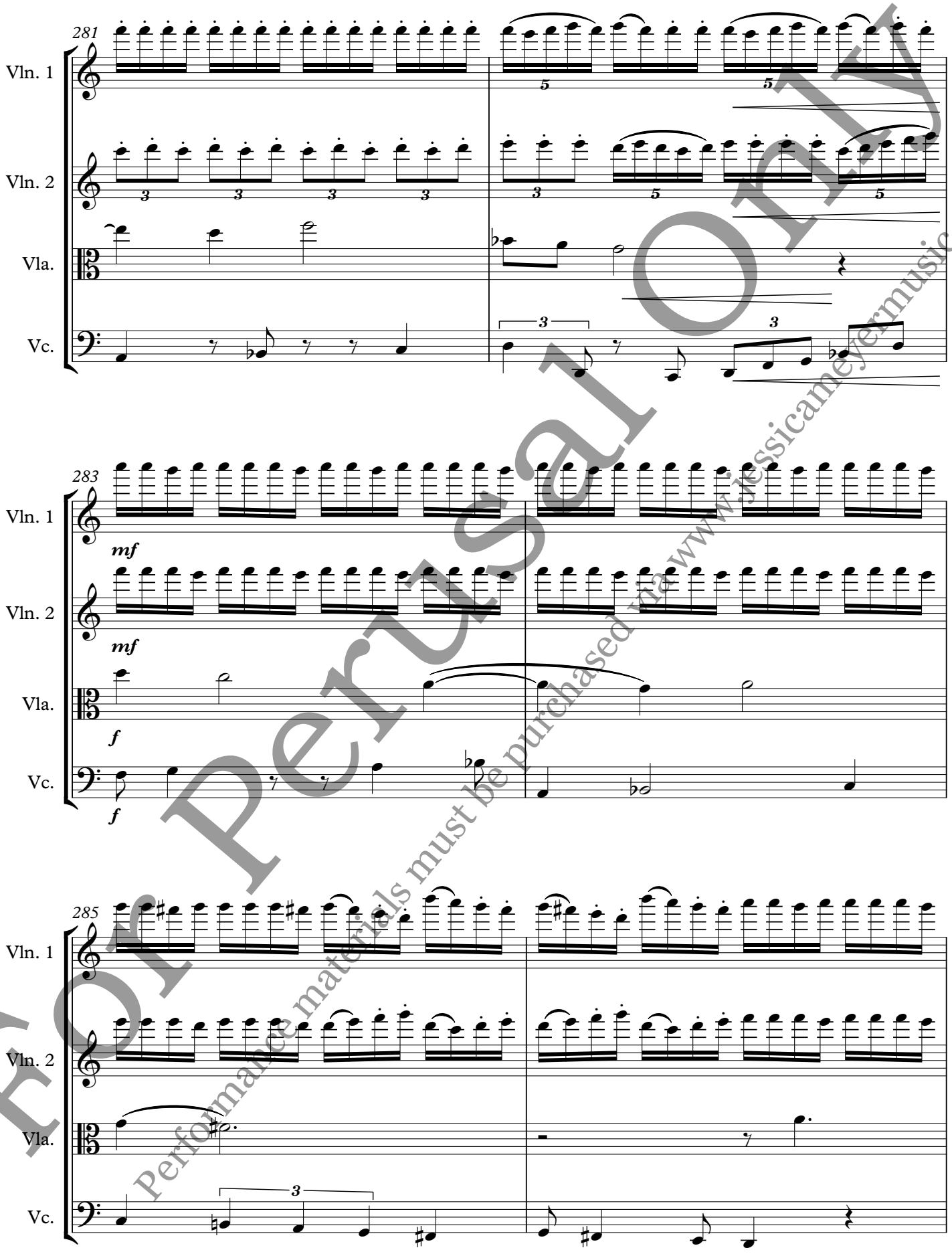

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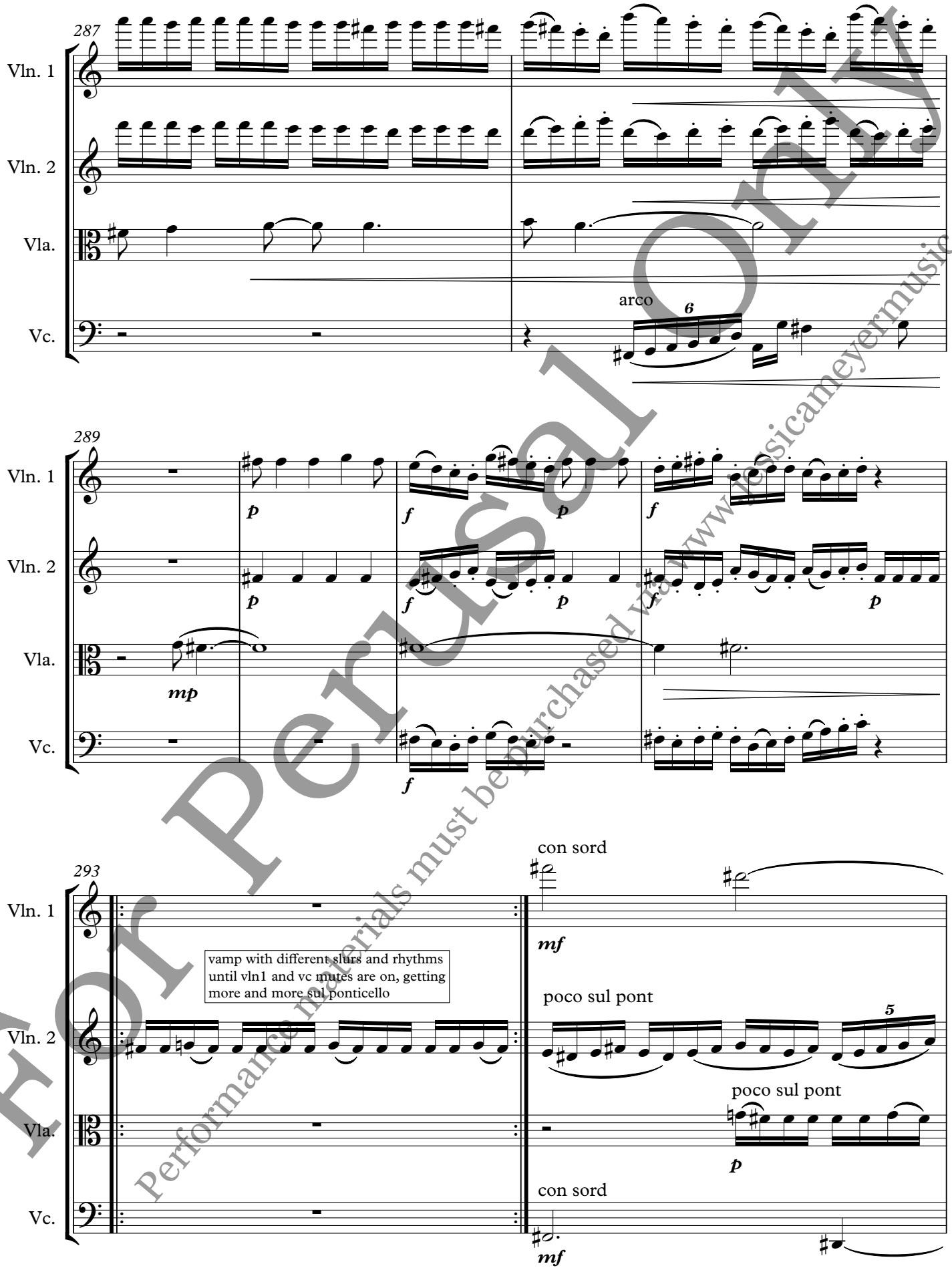

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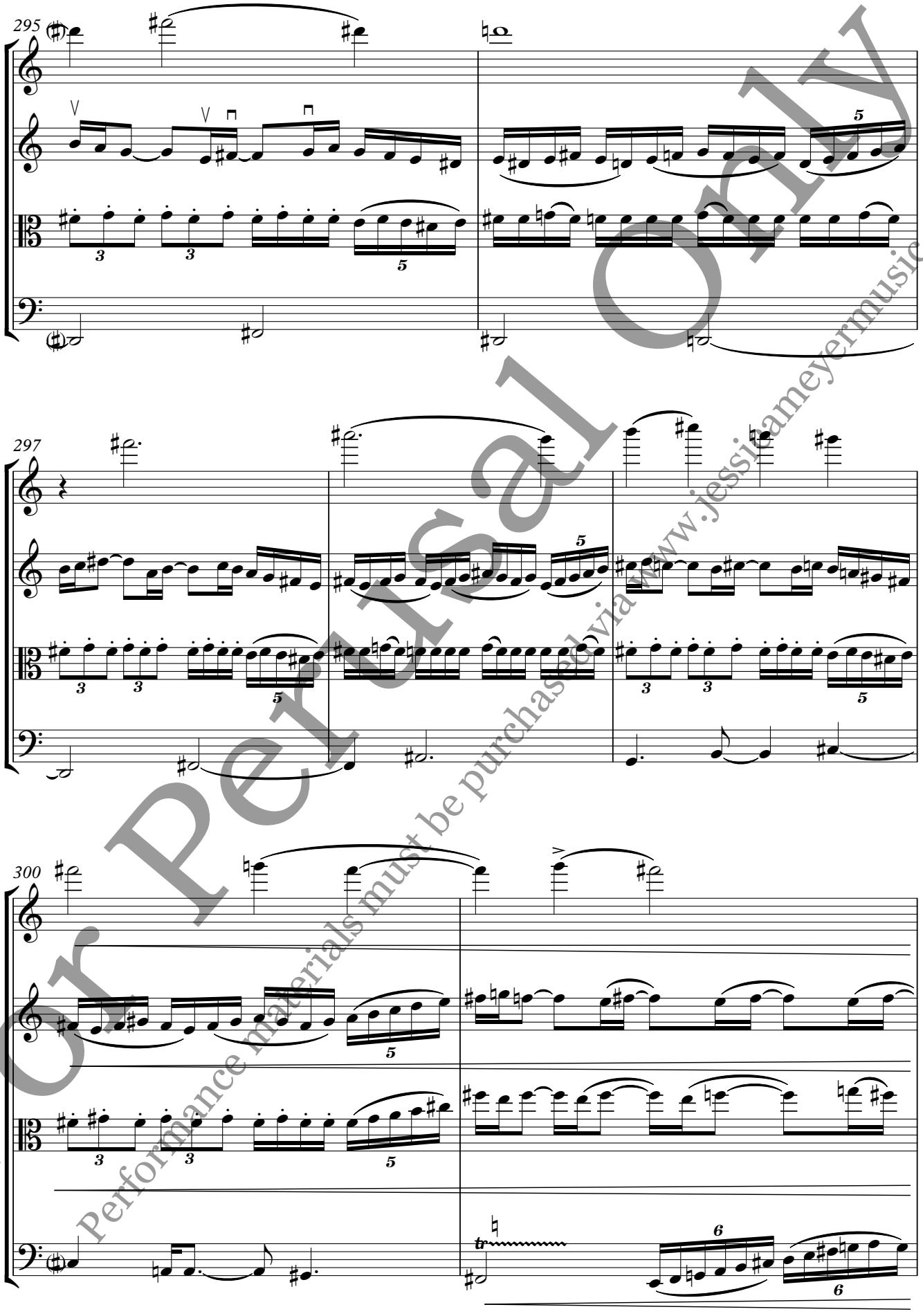

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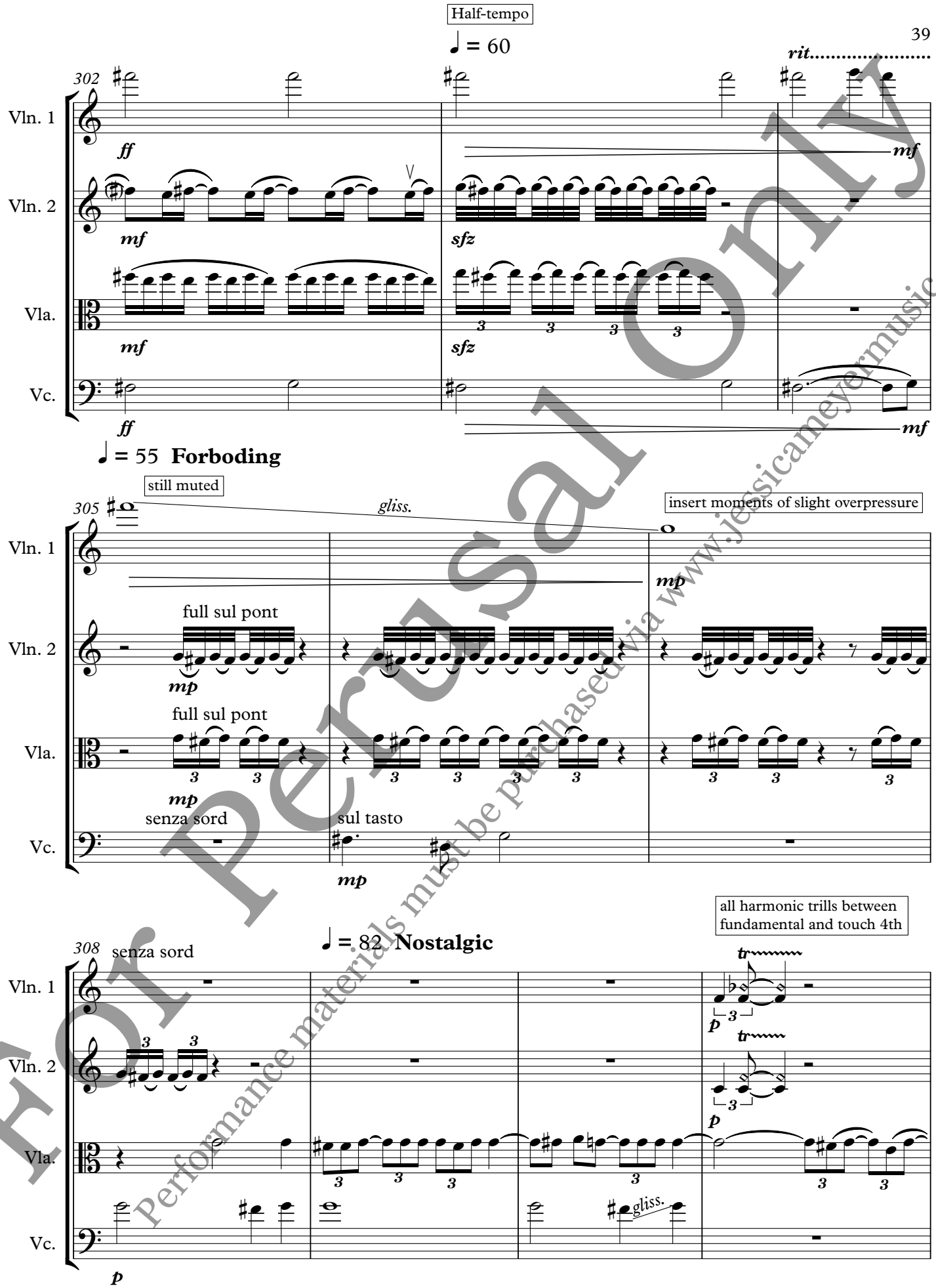

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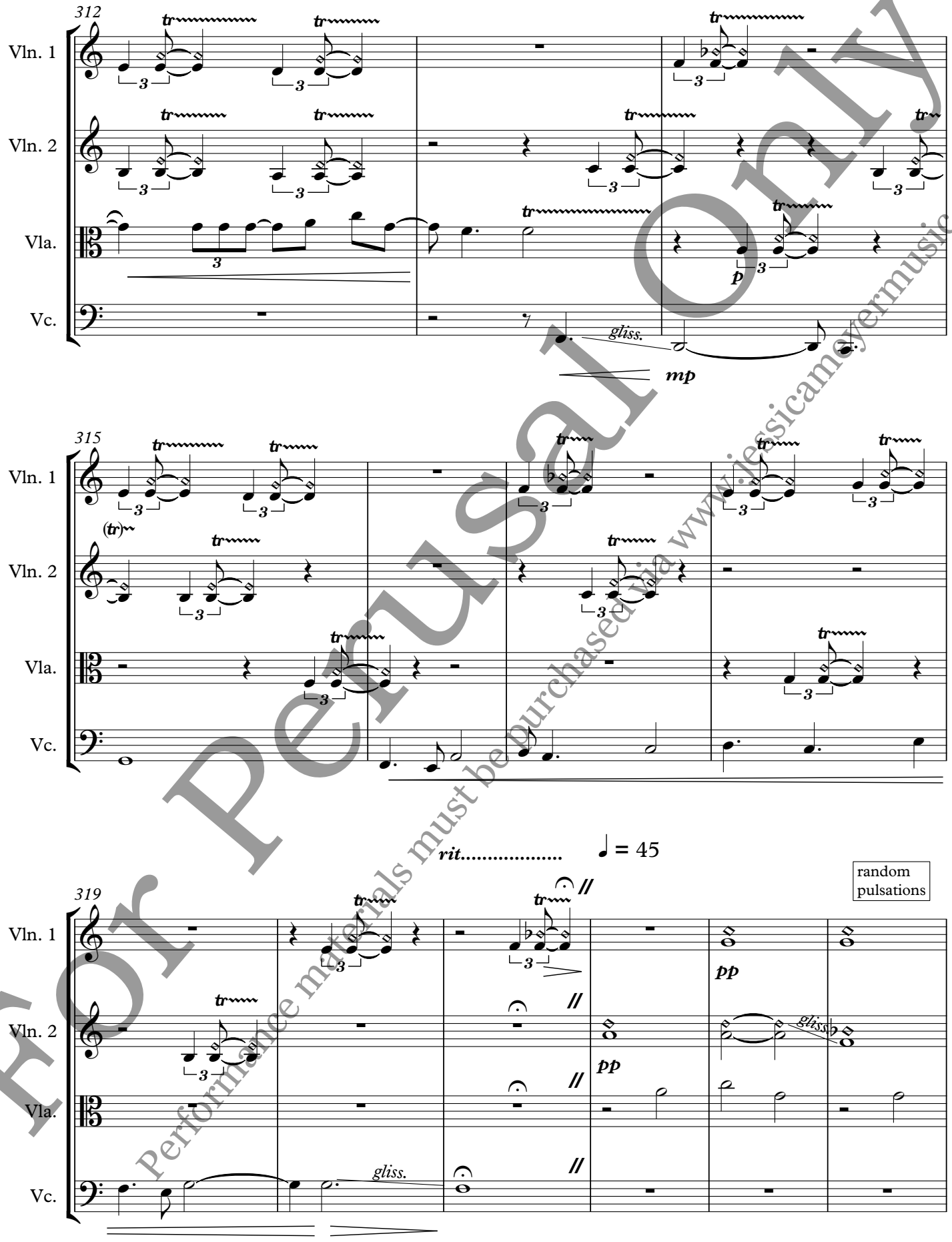

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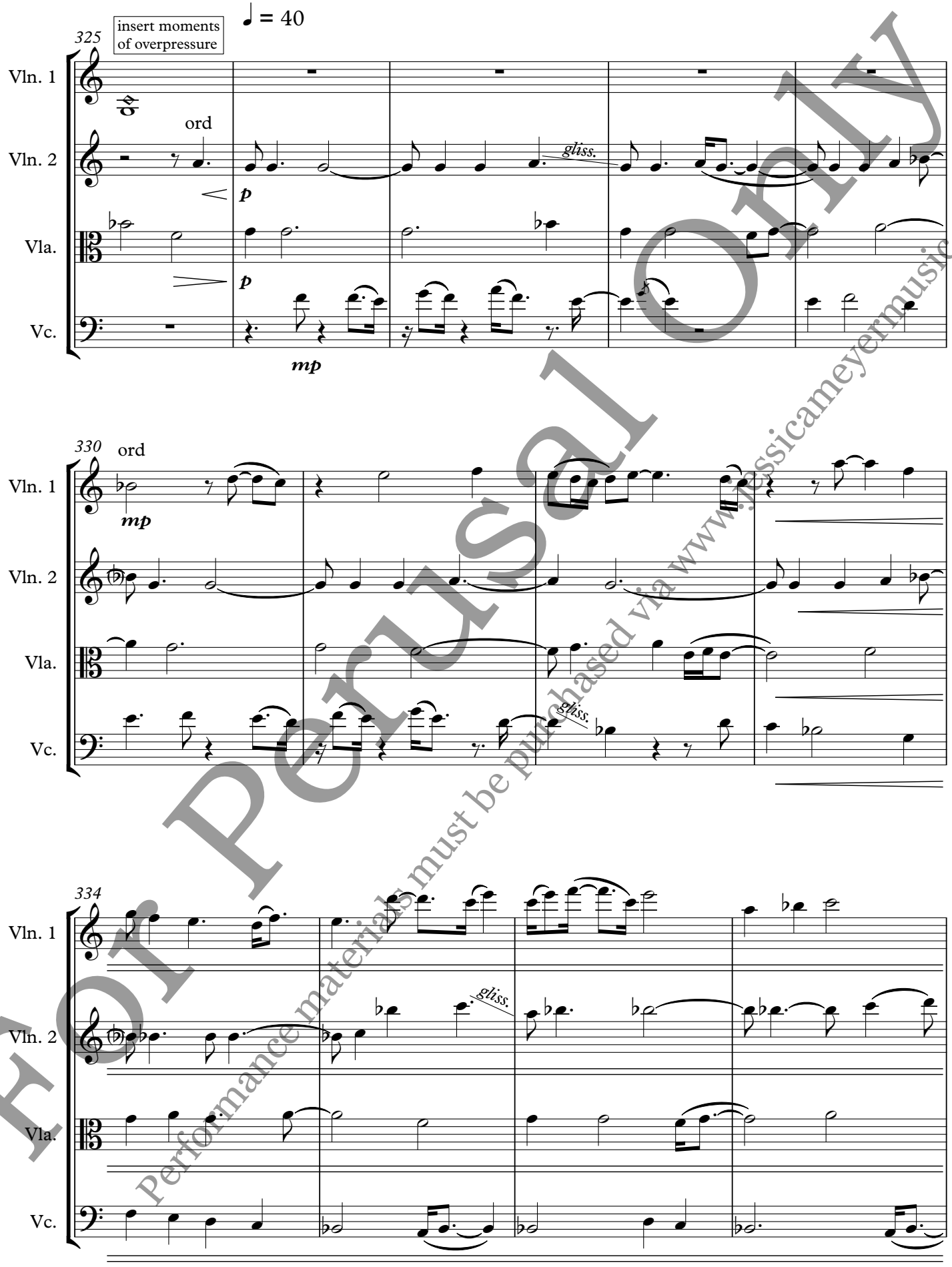

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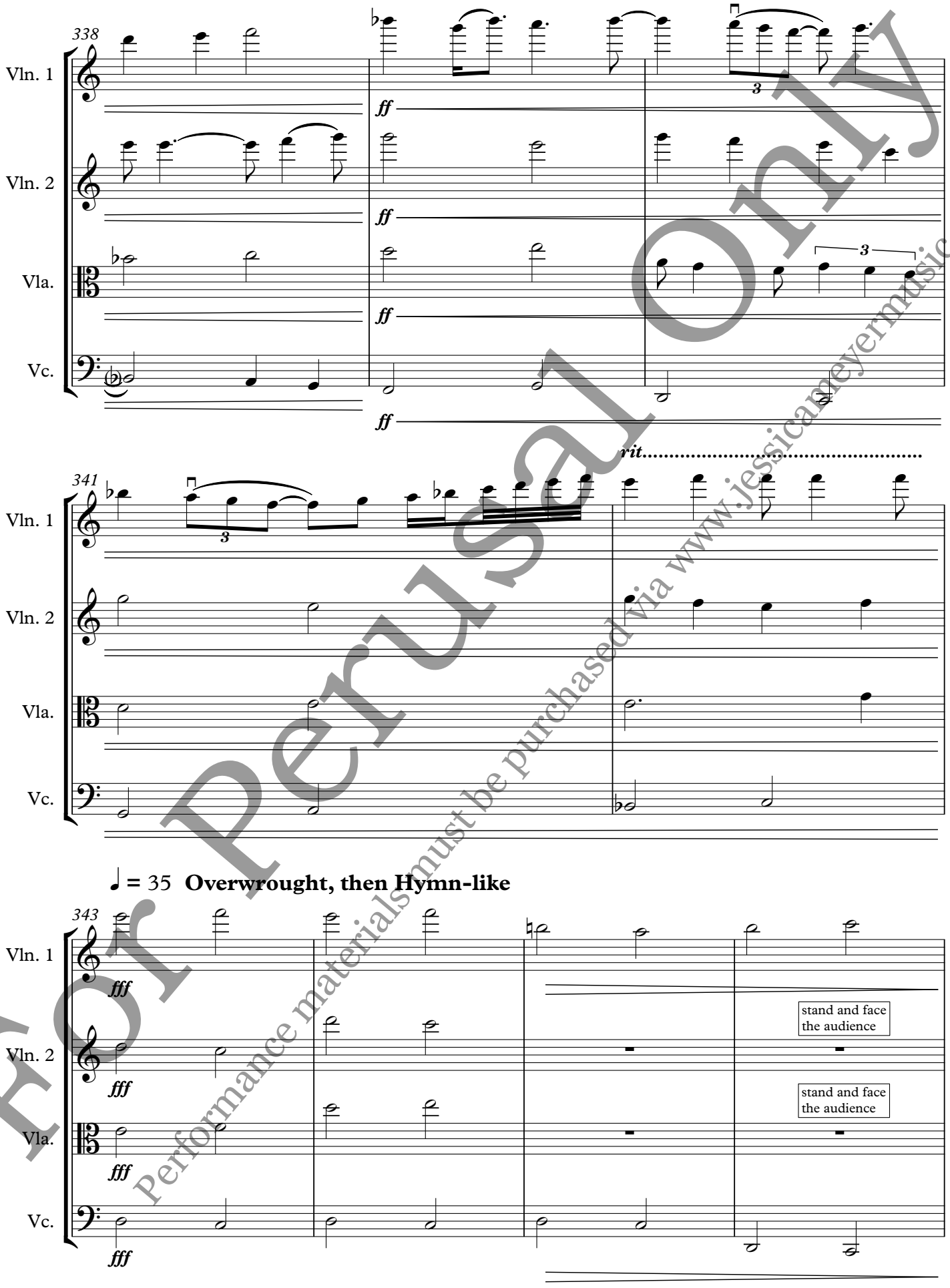

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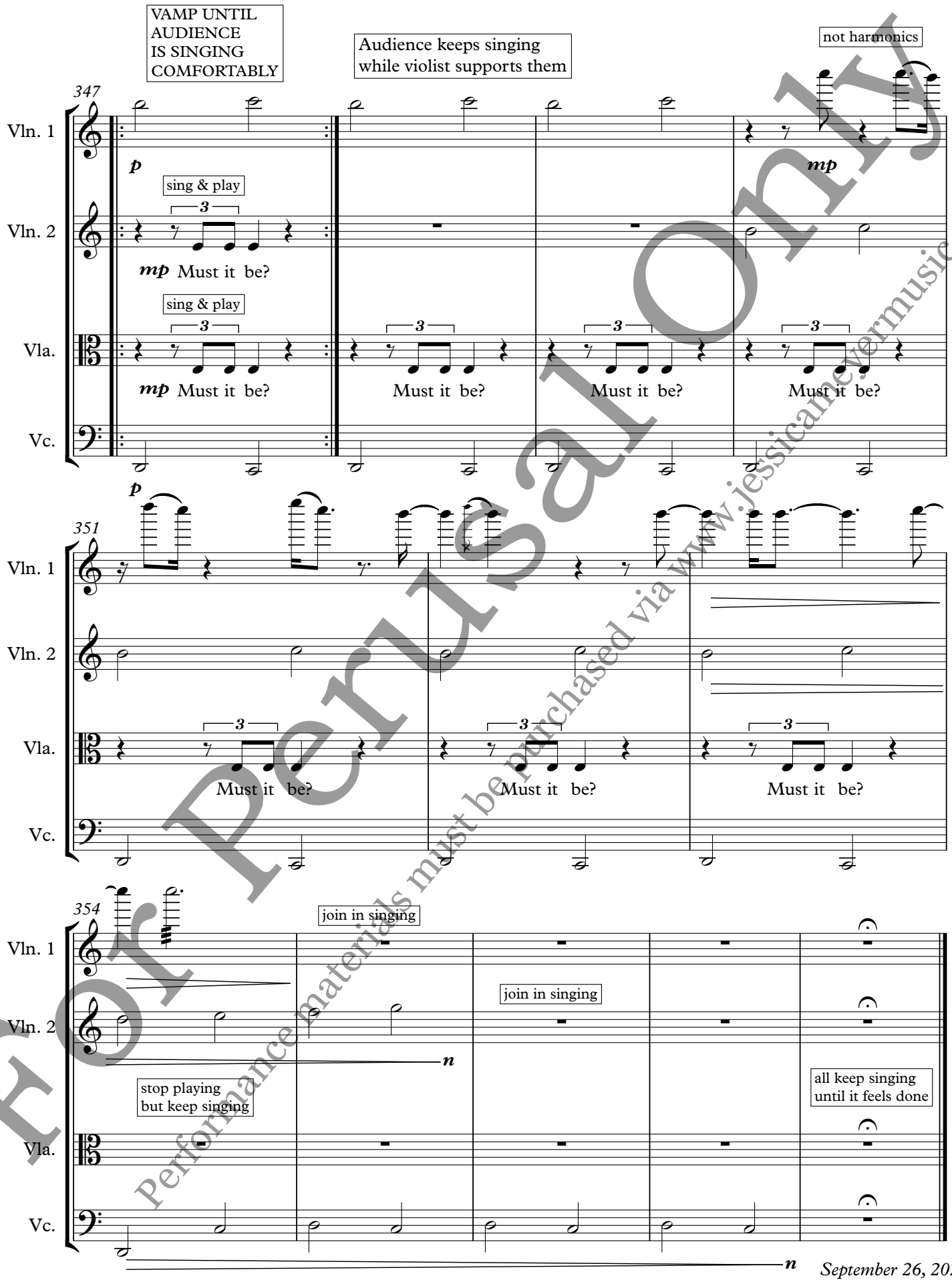
******Teach the audience the repeated section before playing this piece****



September 26, 2021
Rockland , ME

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