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THE USE OF PERCUSSION LANGUAGE FROM BEIJING OPERA IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

WENXIANG FENG

93 Pages

The purpose of this paper is to explore the aesthetic value of the gong and drum language, a style of percussion in traditional Chinese opera, and its use in modern composition. I will compose a symphony to demonstrate how the gong and drum sutra is practiced in modern composition. Finally, I will describe how racism can be countered through the construction of aesthetics.

KEYWORDS: Beijing opera, chamber symphony, percussion language, music composition, counterpoint, drum sutra

THE USE OF PERCUSSION LANGUAGE FROM BEIJING OPERA IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

WENXIANG FENG

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

School of Music

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2022

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THE USE OF PERCUSSION LANGUAGE FROM BEIJING OPERA IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

WENXIANG FENG

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Carl Schimmel, Chair

Roger Zare

Roy Magnuson

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EXAMPLE 1

Marimba
Wood Block
Taiko Drum

Duration (appr.): 2'

EXAMPLE 2

1 Flute
1 Oboe
1 Clarinet in B♭
1 Bassoon

1 Horn in F
1 Trumpet in B♭
1 Trombone
1 Tuba

Wood Block
Taiko Drum

Strings (4, 4, 2, 2, 1)

Duration (appr.): 15'

Example1: The percussion trio "Dance of Zhong Lu"

The percussion trio "Dance of Zhong Lu" is played by marimba, taiko and woodblock composed by me. This two-minute piece is one of the products of my combination of gong sutra and modern composition.

The Dance of Zhong Lu describes the scene in which Zhong Lu, the princess of Qin, is asked by the king to dance for the visiting guests at a banquet. This is one of the background music I composed for the play.

The form is ABCBA., tempo 120.

A:1-5, B:6-13, C:14-27, B:28-43, A:44-52. Coda:53-60

The initial inspiration came from a piece of music describing a dance at the beginning of Stravinsky 's "The Rite of Spring". This piece of music demonstrates how changes in accent placement can make for interesting rhythms. I tried to create a compound rhythm. For example, the four accents of the first bar taiko combine with the accents of the marimba to form a compound rhythm. The accent in the second bar returns to downbeat in the marimba, while the accent in the taiko remains largely unchanged. In the third bar, the accent of the marimba shifts again and I give rest in the taiko. The purpose of all this is to make the music flow and not get boring. As Stravinsky said, the constant change of accent can bring excitement

The motive in bar 6 is the easiest to remember throughout the piece because it is in the key of pentatonic. The rhythm of the fifth bar is also very common in Chinese folk music, so I focused on expanding it at the end to make the listener feel that it is a Chinese story.

The first appearance of woodblock at bar 10 is accompanied by the end of the b section. This is the first cli max of the piece. The music then moves into a reprise of the woodblock and taiko（c section） . c is a crescen do and reaches its maximum volume at the end of c(bar27). The function of the 25-bar-like material is to give a r est after a large compound rhythm. this rest keeps the listener from getting too fatigued and prepares for the crescendo that follows. Bar 28 begins with a marimba solo, and bar 36 begins with a unison section and a second climax. In terms of narrative, this is exactly the scene when Zhong Lu starts the dance. It begins with a solo dance, moves into a group dance in 36 bars, and then returns to a solo at the end. The musical material used in woodblock here actually comes from the opening motive 1 (measures 1-5) However, it was not easy to detect the connection aurally because I had split the musical material. The music returns to the A section (higher octave) at bar 44 and develops the 52-bar motive into an 8-bar coda.

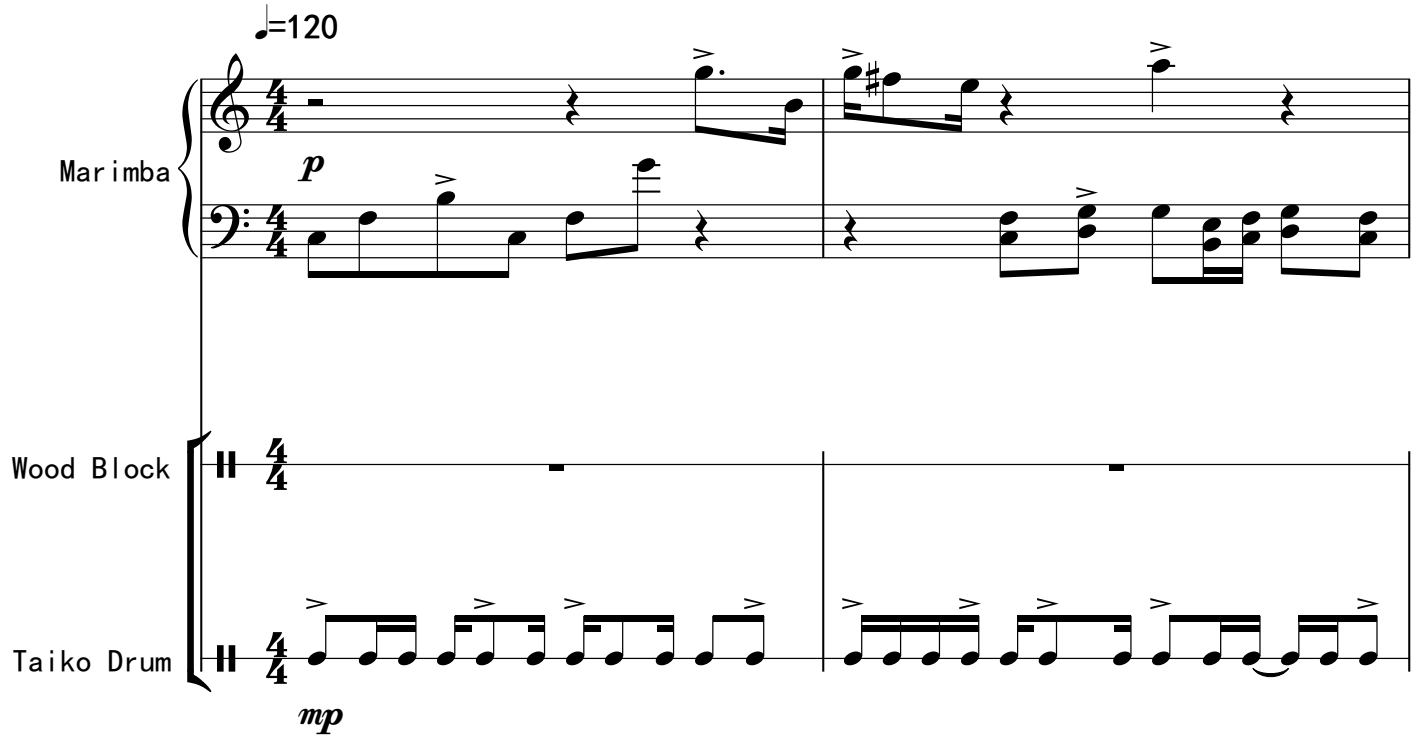
The B section occupies the most bars in the whole piece because it describes the figure of Zhong Lu. The first appearance of the B section is hidden in the percussion, suggesting that the figure is hidden in the noisy party. The second B section is the dance of Zhong lu, and the A section describes the lively scene of the banquet and reappears at the end. The C section is the preparation of Zhong Lu's dance, more like the men talking at the banquet.

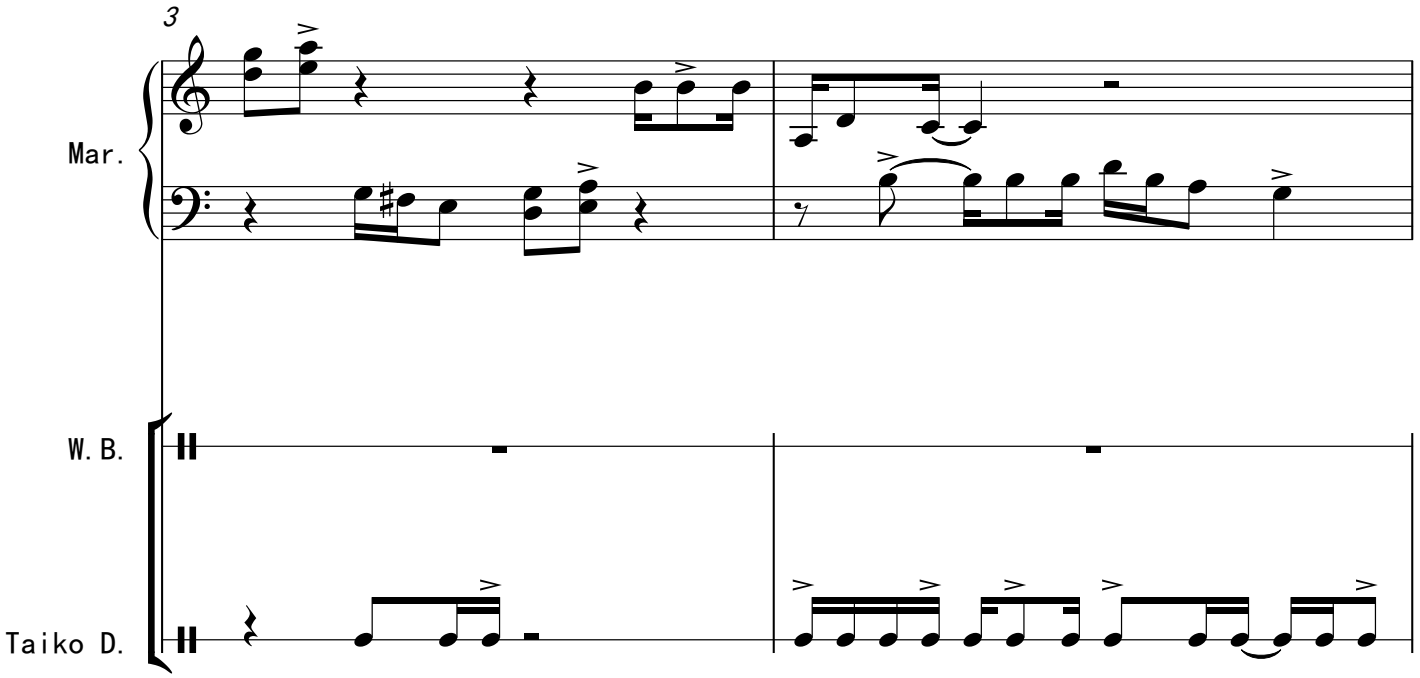
Example 2：Symphony SWORD

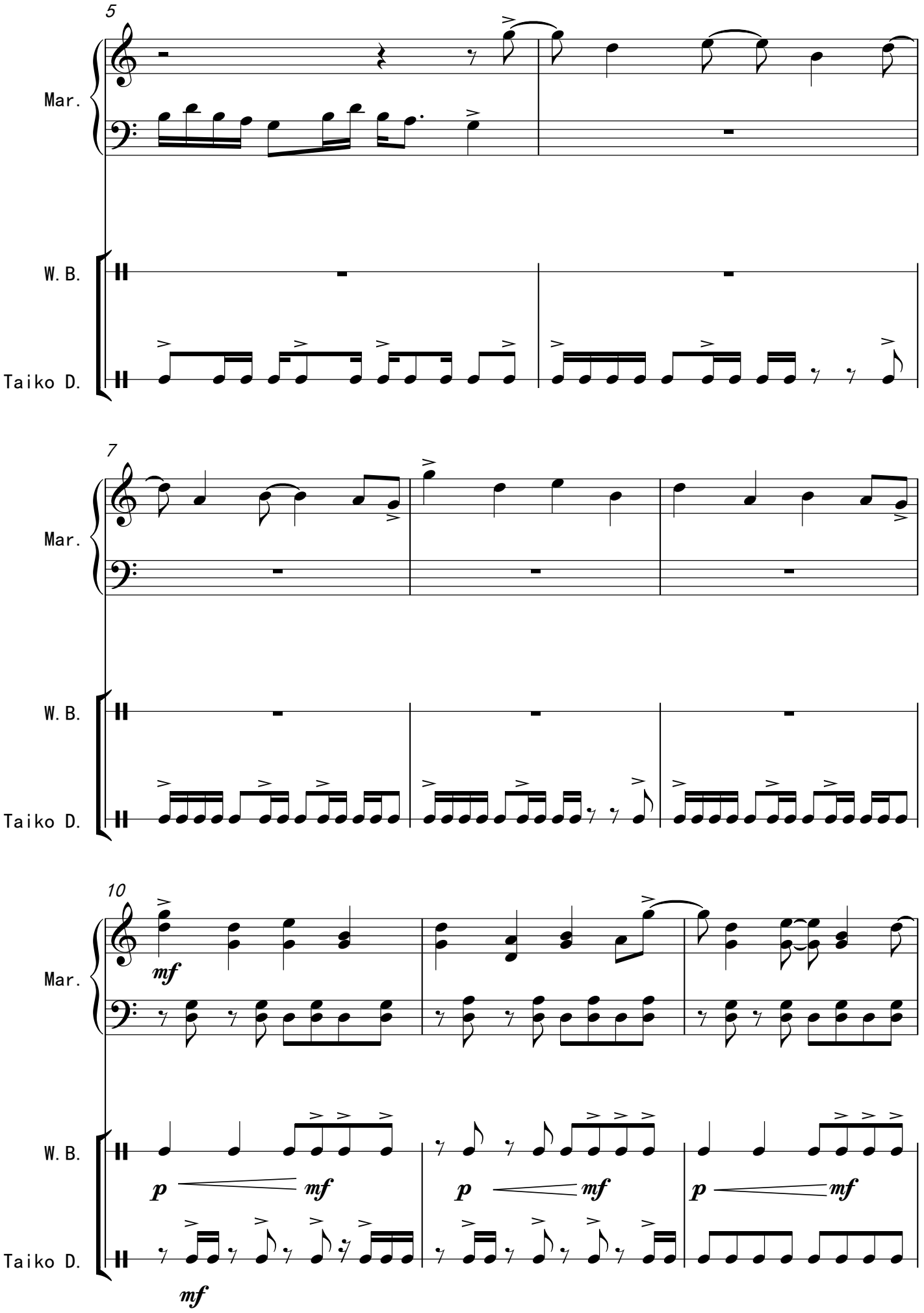
This fifteen-minute symphony is the focus of my presentation for this exposition. The form is A(ab)B(ac)A(ab) . Like what was said above, I combined counterpoint with the symbolic meaning of the gong sutra. I try to find a state of equilibrium in the musical languages of East and West, finding a meaning that both sides can understand.

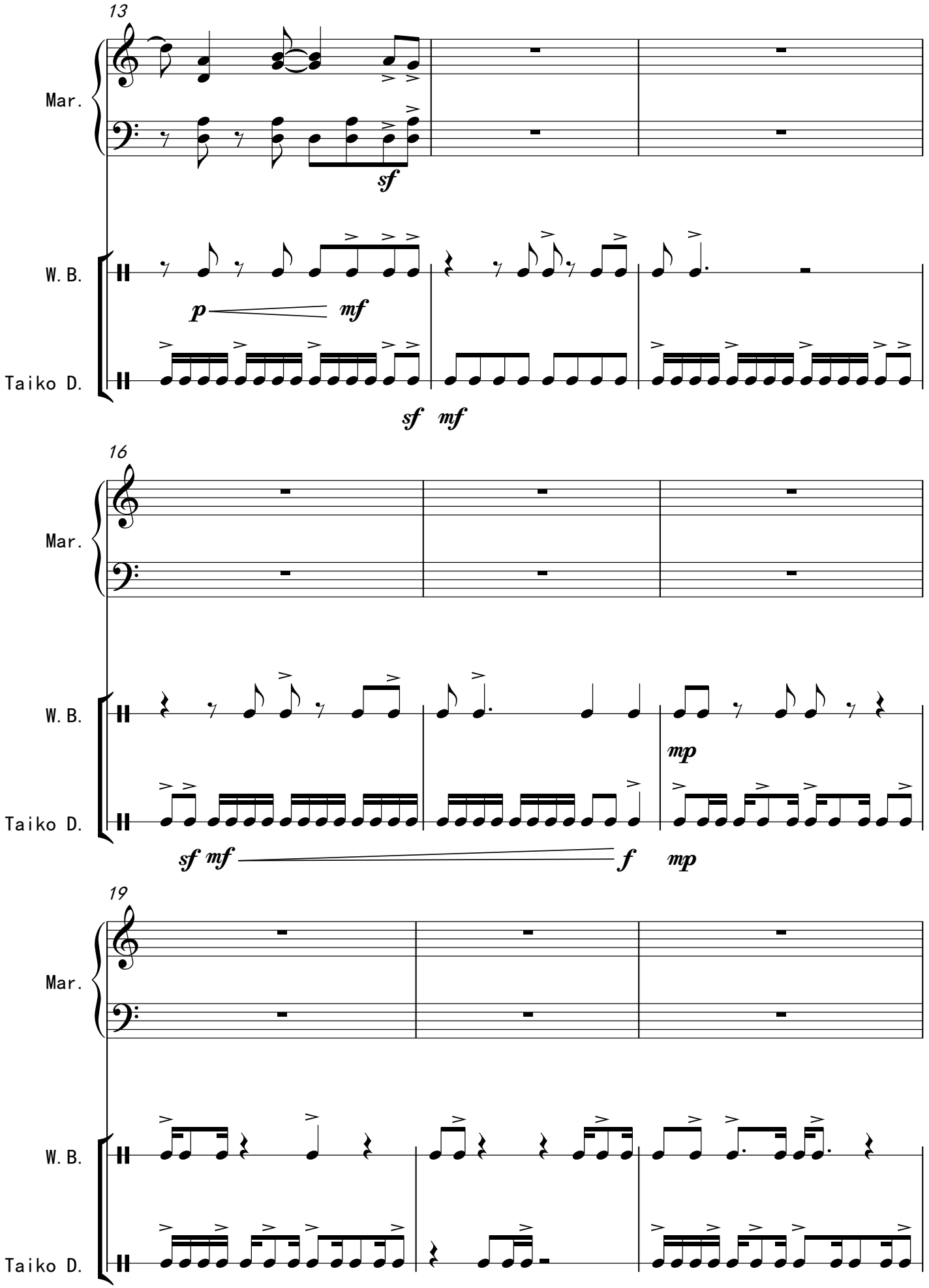
The Dance of Zhonglv

Wenxiang Feng






5
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
7
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
10
Mar.
mf
W. B.
p
mf
p
mf
p
mf
Taiko D.
mf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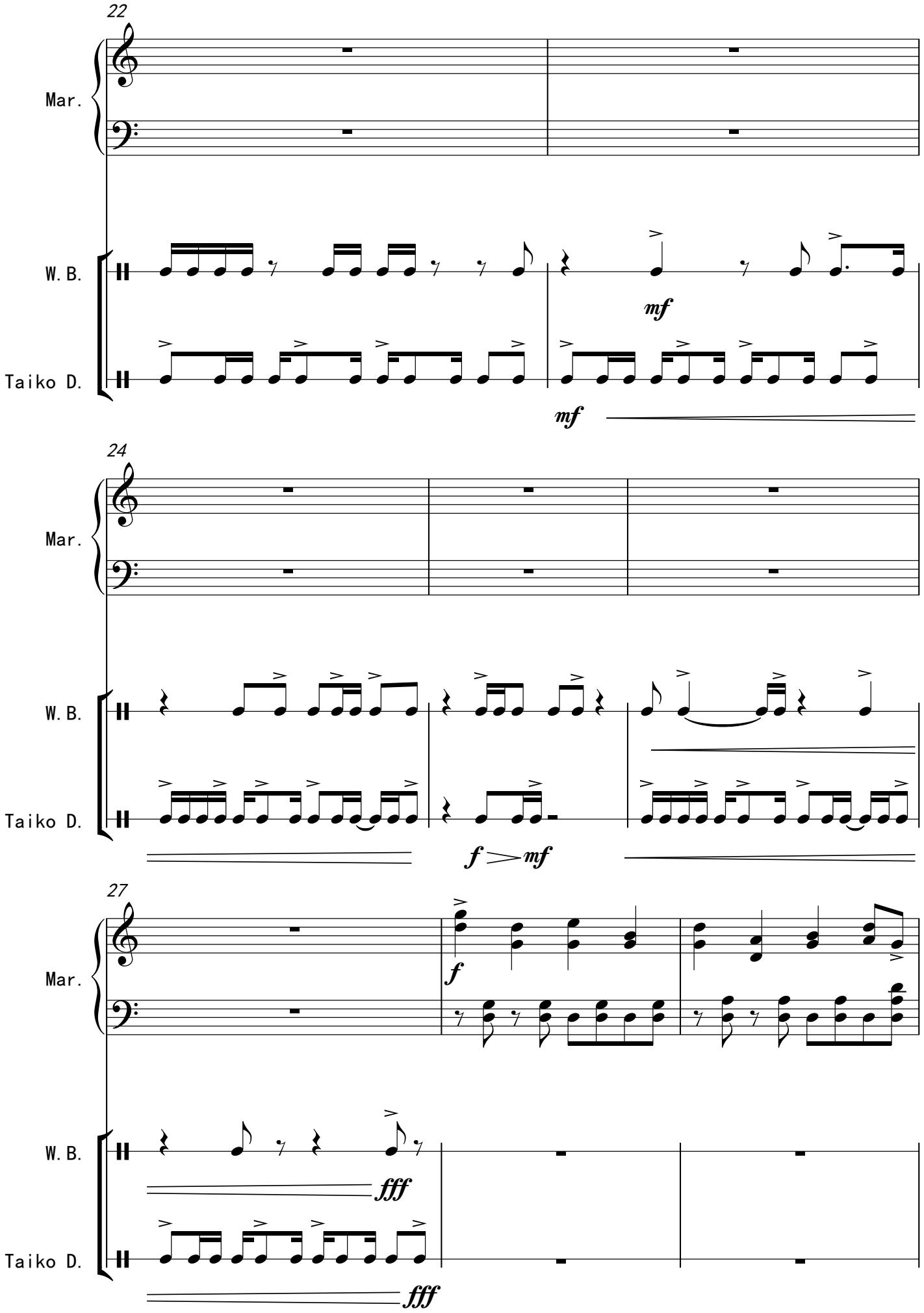
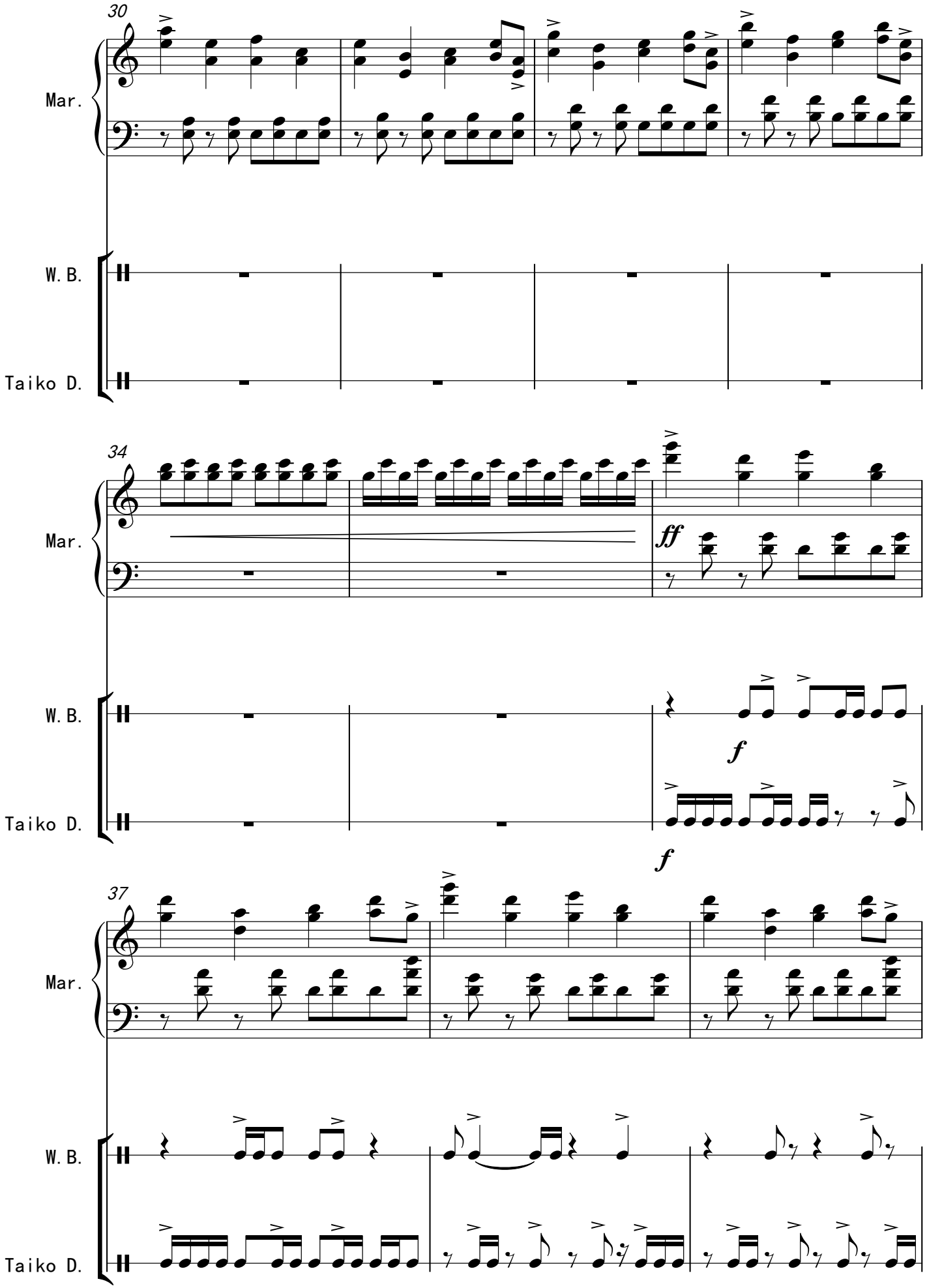
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
p
mf
sf
sf mf
16
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
mp
sf mf
f
mp
19
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.


22
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
mf
mf
24
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
f > mf
27
Mar.
f
W. B.
fff
Taiko D.
fff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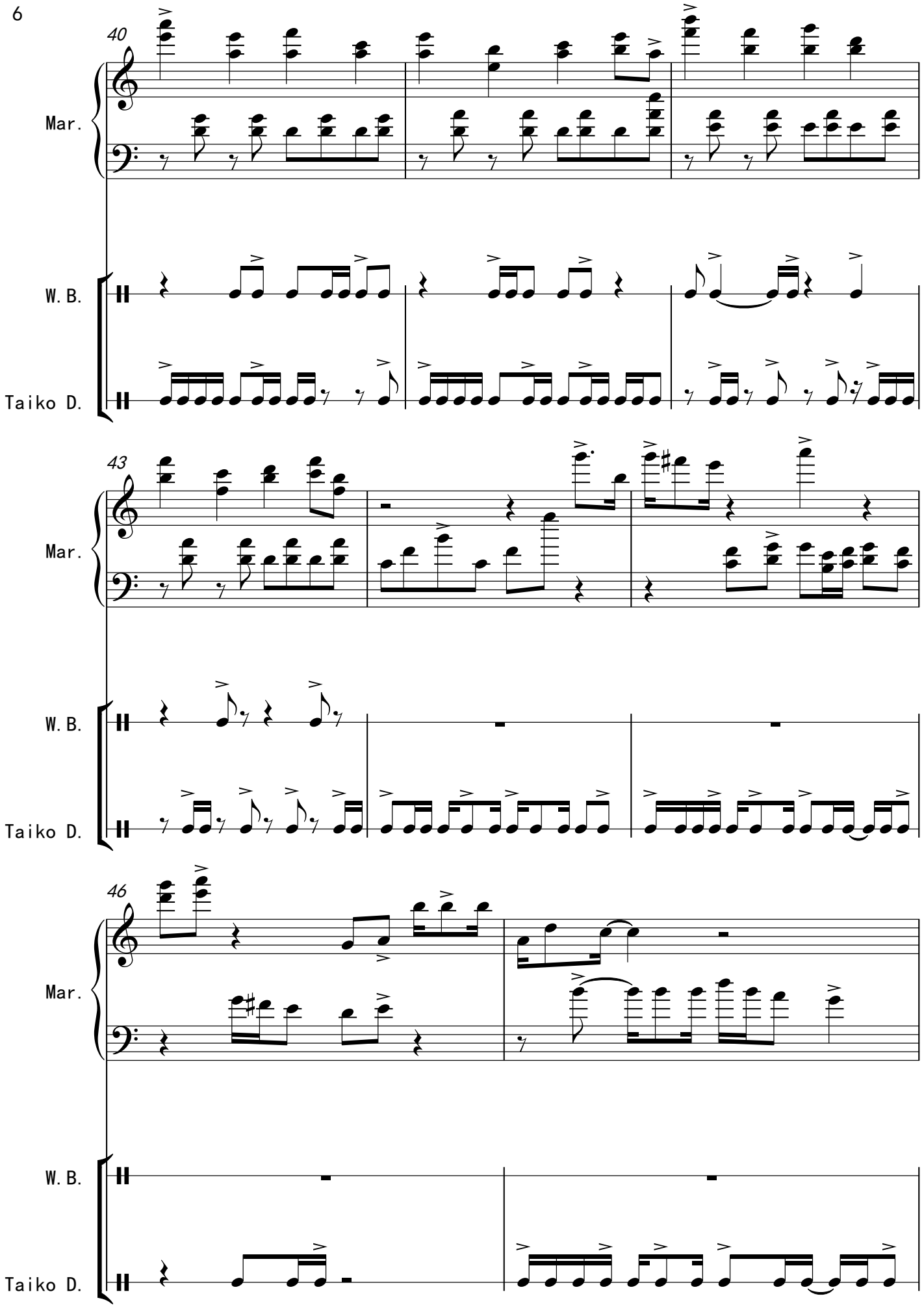
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.
34
Mar.
ff
W. B.
f
Taiko D.
f
37
Mar.
W. B.
Taiko D.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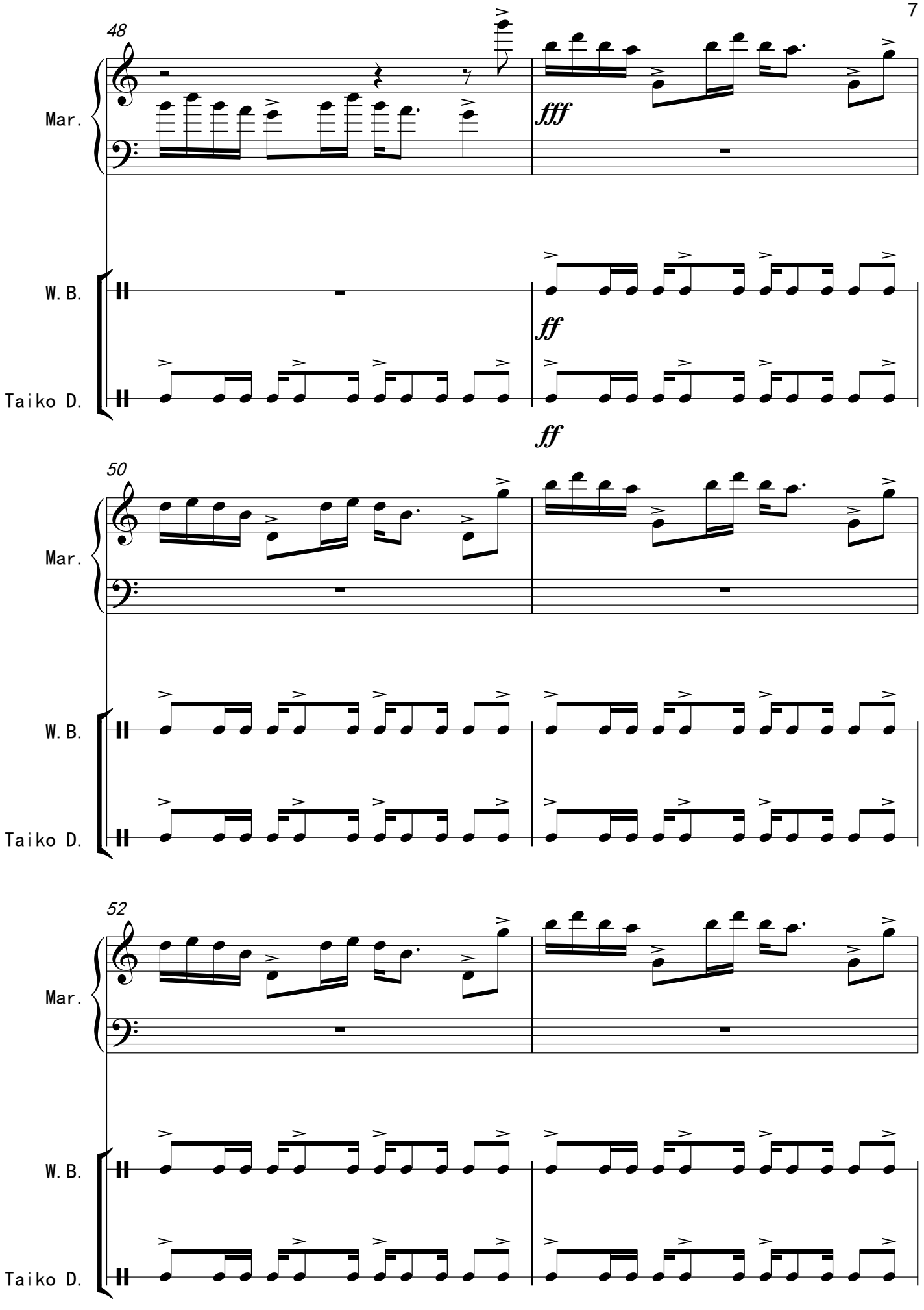
Mar.
W.B.
Taiko D.
43
Mar.
W.B.
Taiko D.
46
Mar.
W.B.
Taiko D.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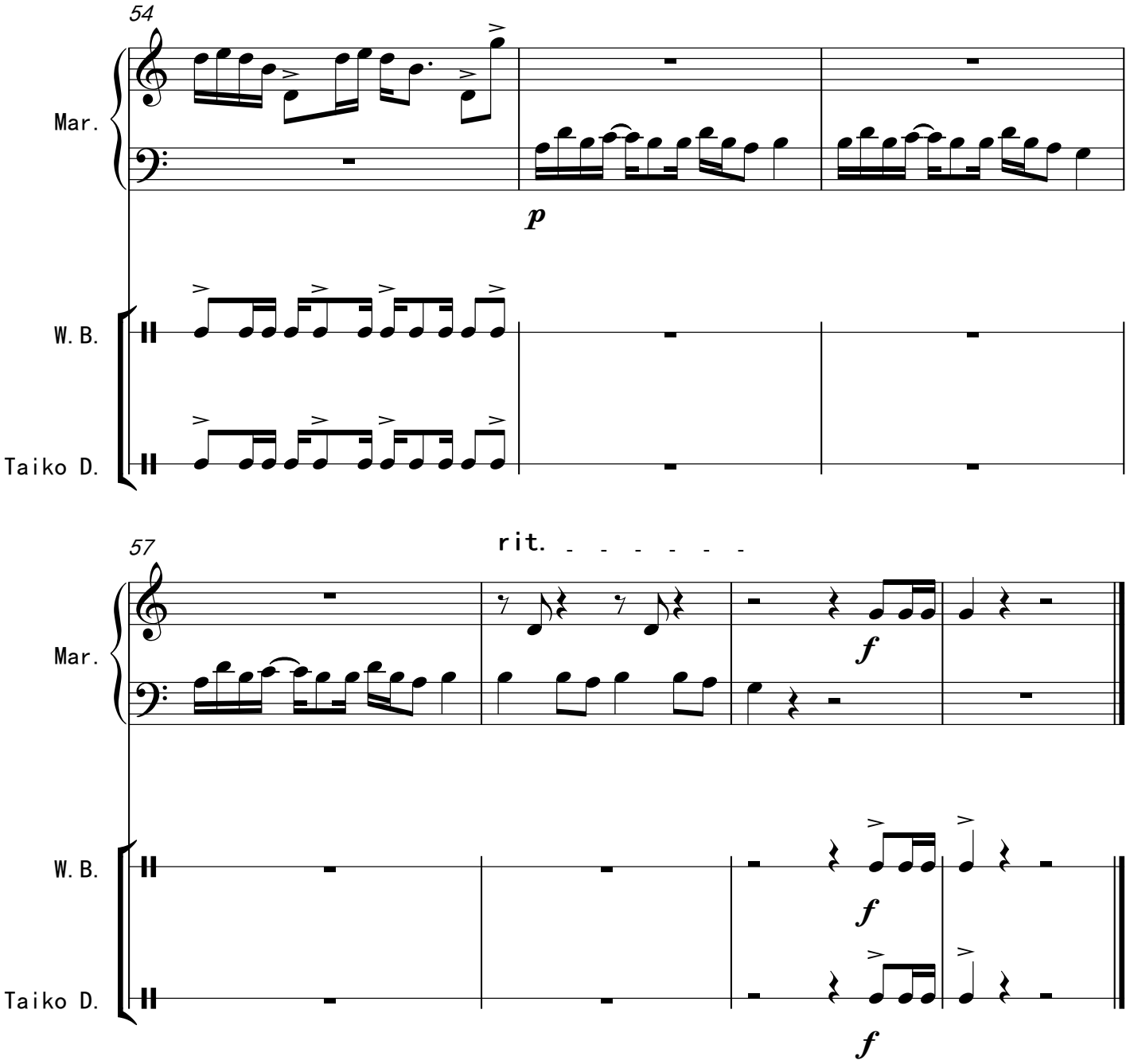
Mar.
fff
W.B.
ff
Taiko D.
ff
50
Mar.
W.B.
Taiko D.
52
Mar.
W.B.
Taiko D.


54
Mar.
p
W. B.
Taiko D.
57
rit.
Mar.
f
W. B.
f
Taiko D.
f

SWORD

-for orchestra-

Wenxiang Feng

Orchestra

1 Flute

1 Oboe

1 Clarinet in B♭

1 Bassoon

1 Horn in F

1 Trumpet in B♭

1 Trombone

1 Tuba

Wood Block

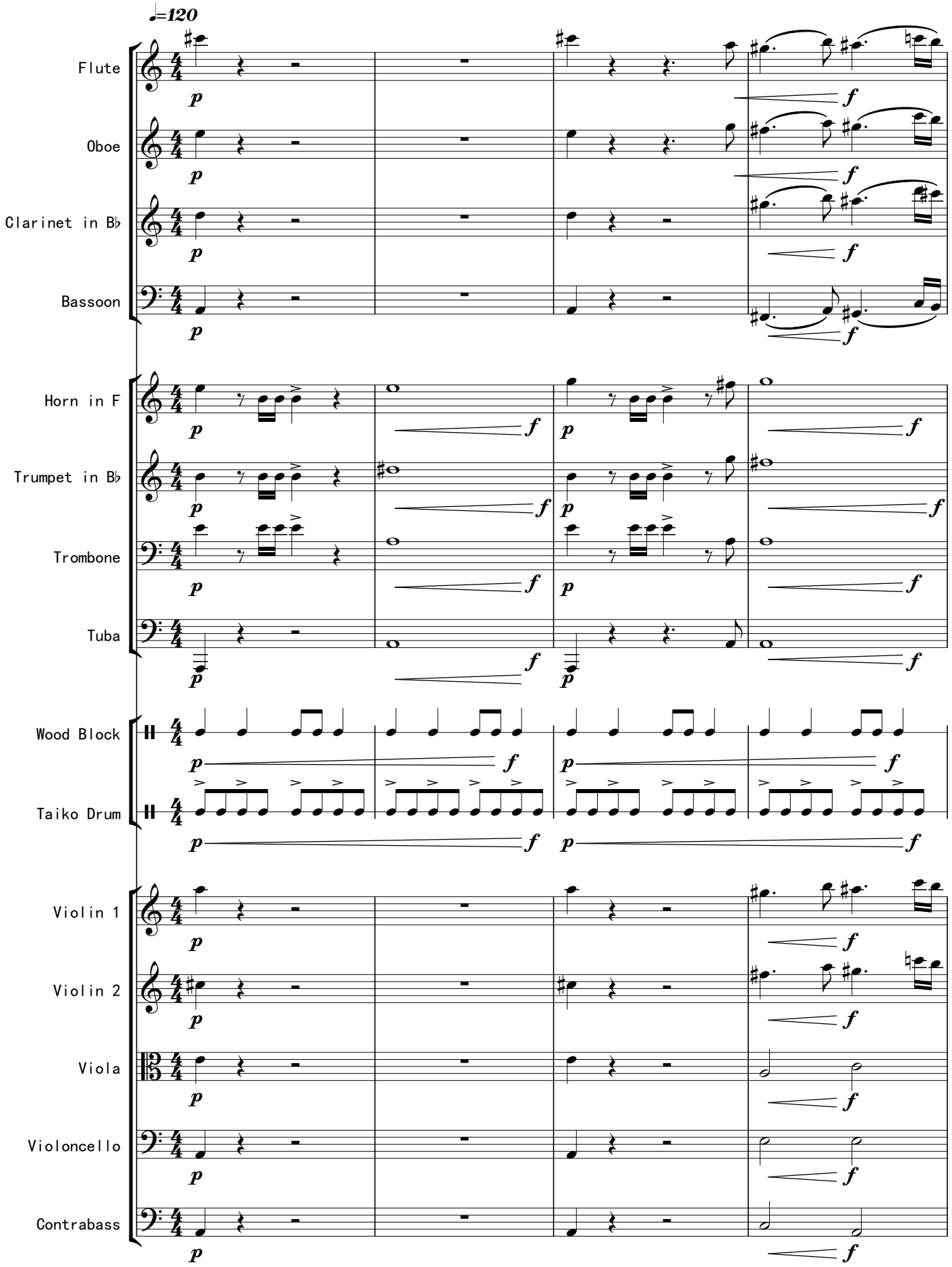
Taiko Drum

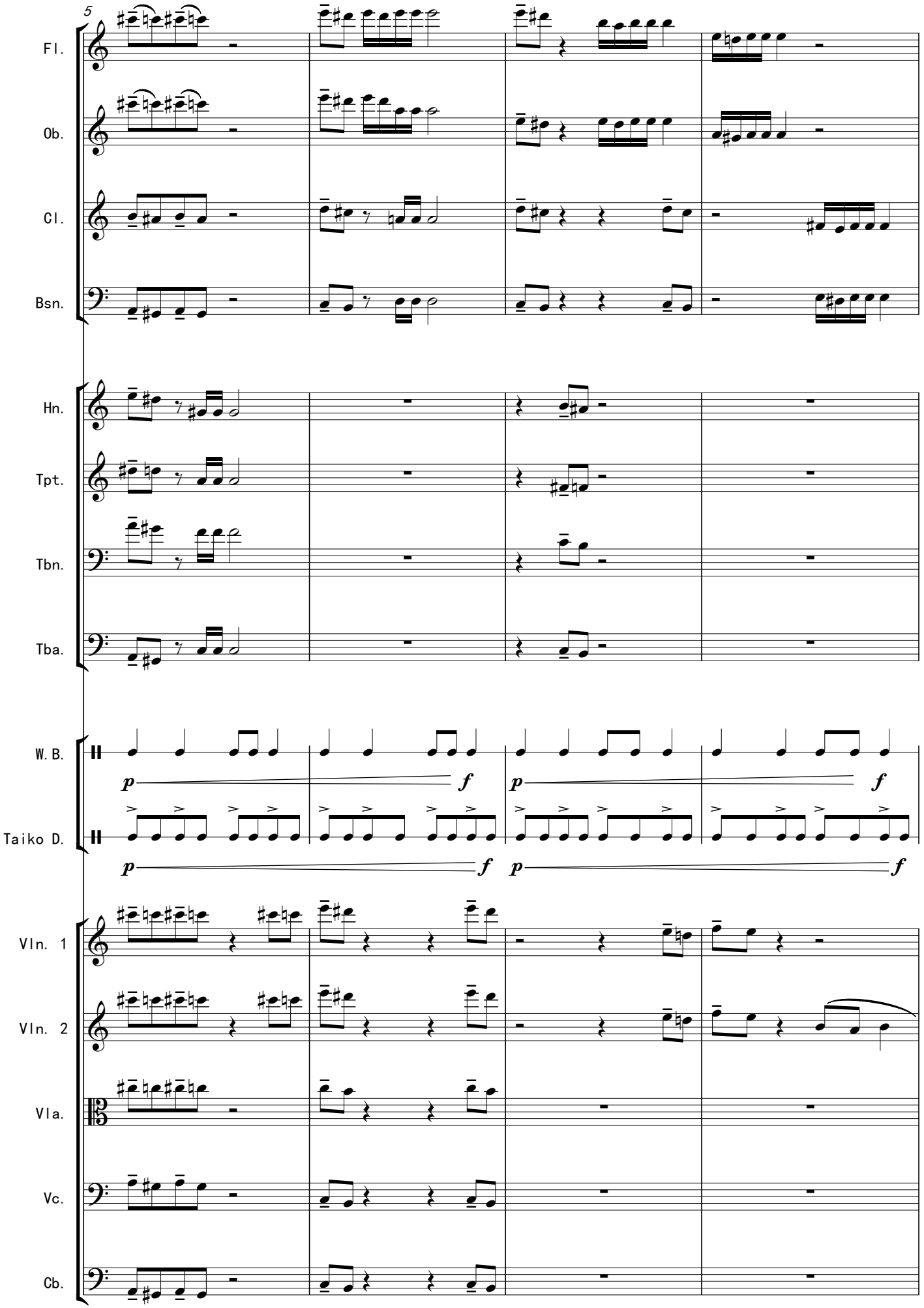
Strings（4，4，2，2，1）

Duration（appr.):15'

SWORD

Wenxiang Feng

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Hn.
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Tba.
W.B.
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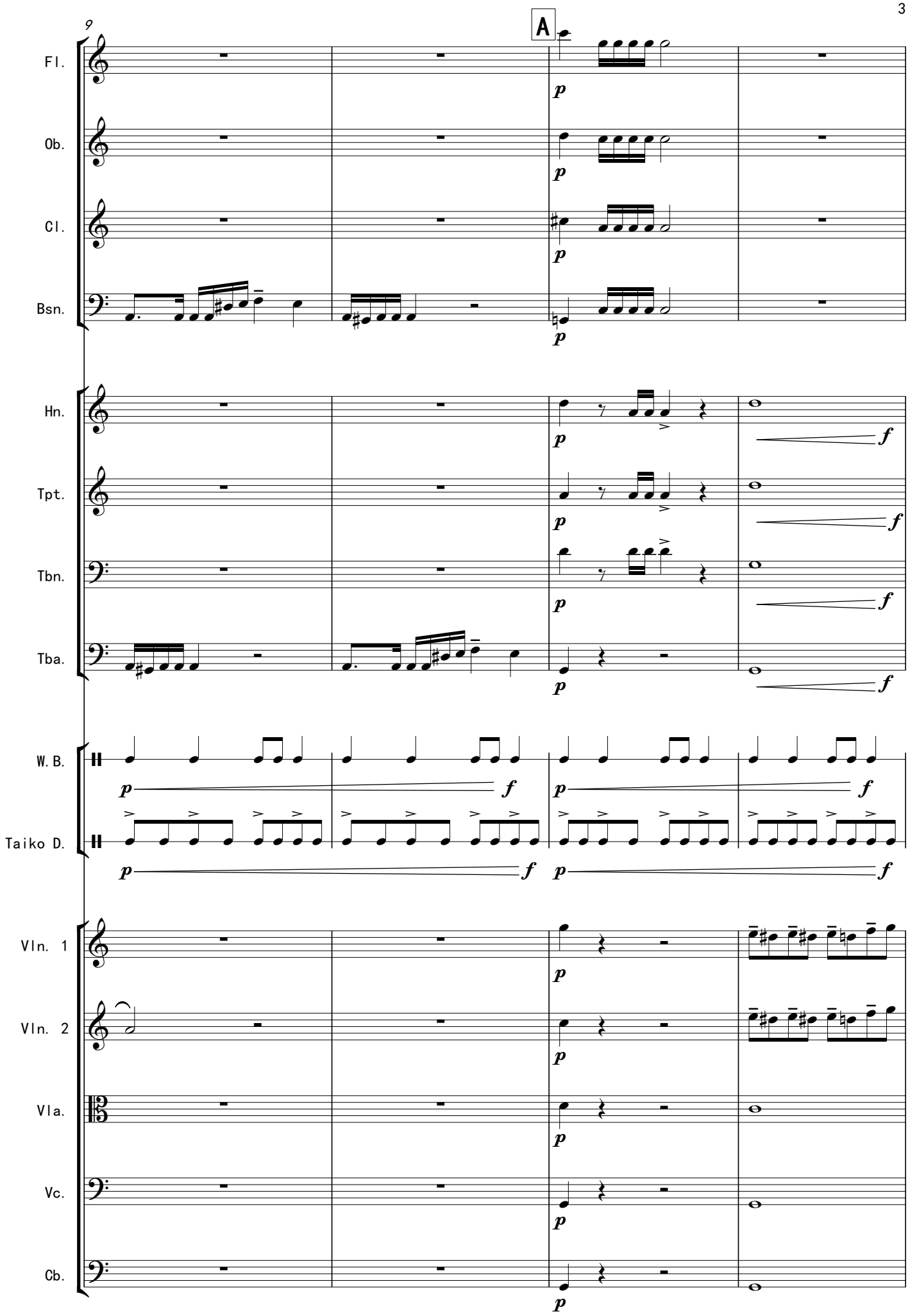
Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
p
f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Vc.
Cb.
p
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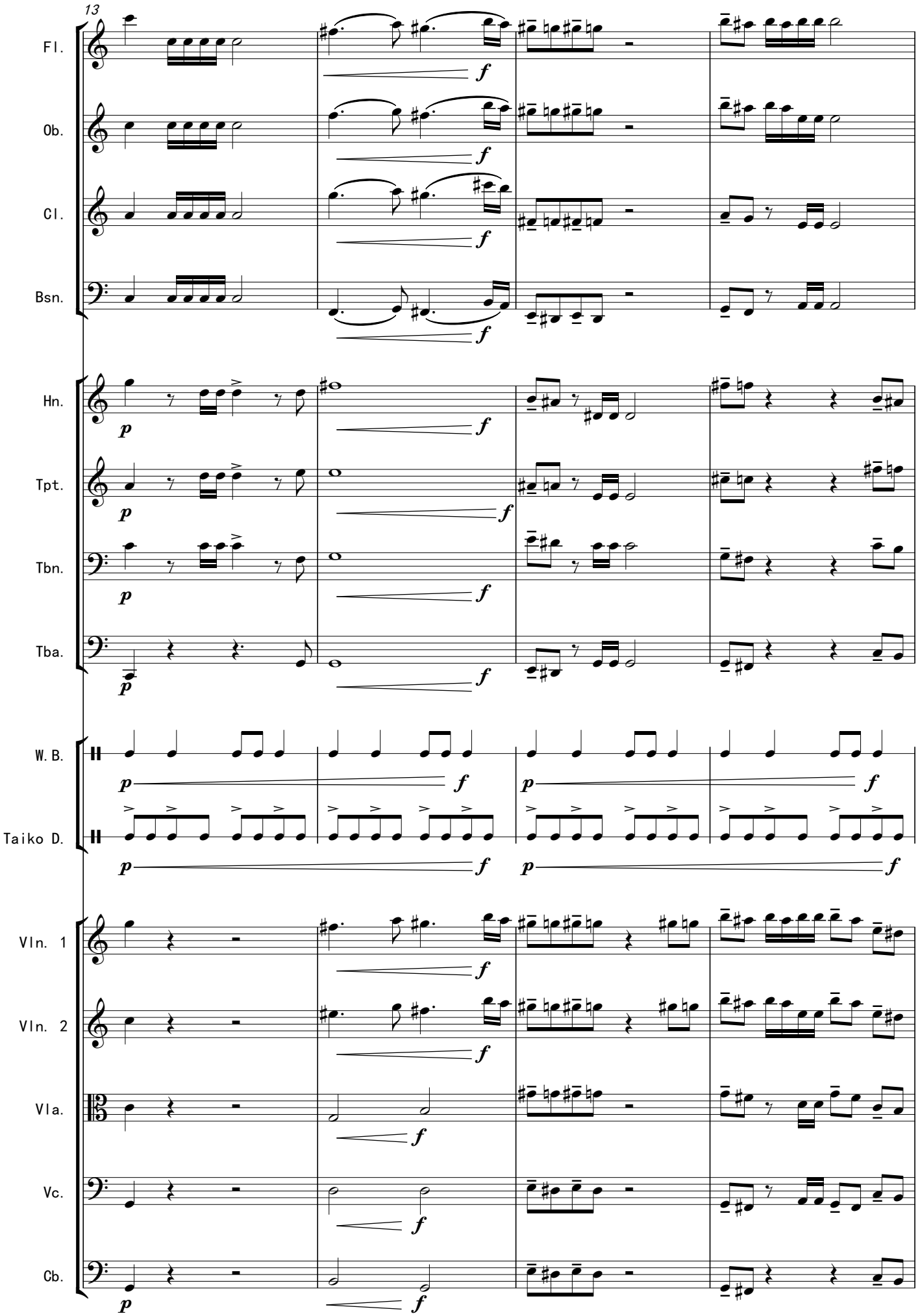
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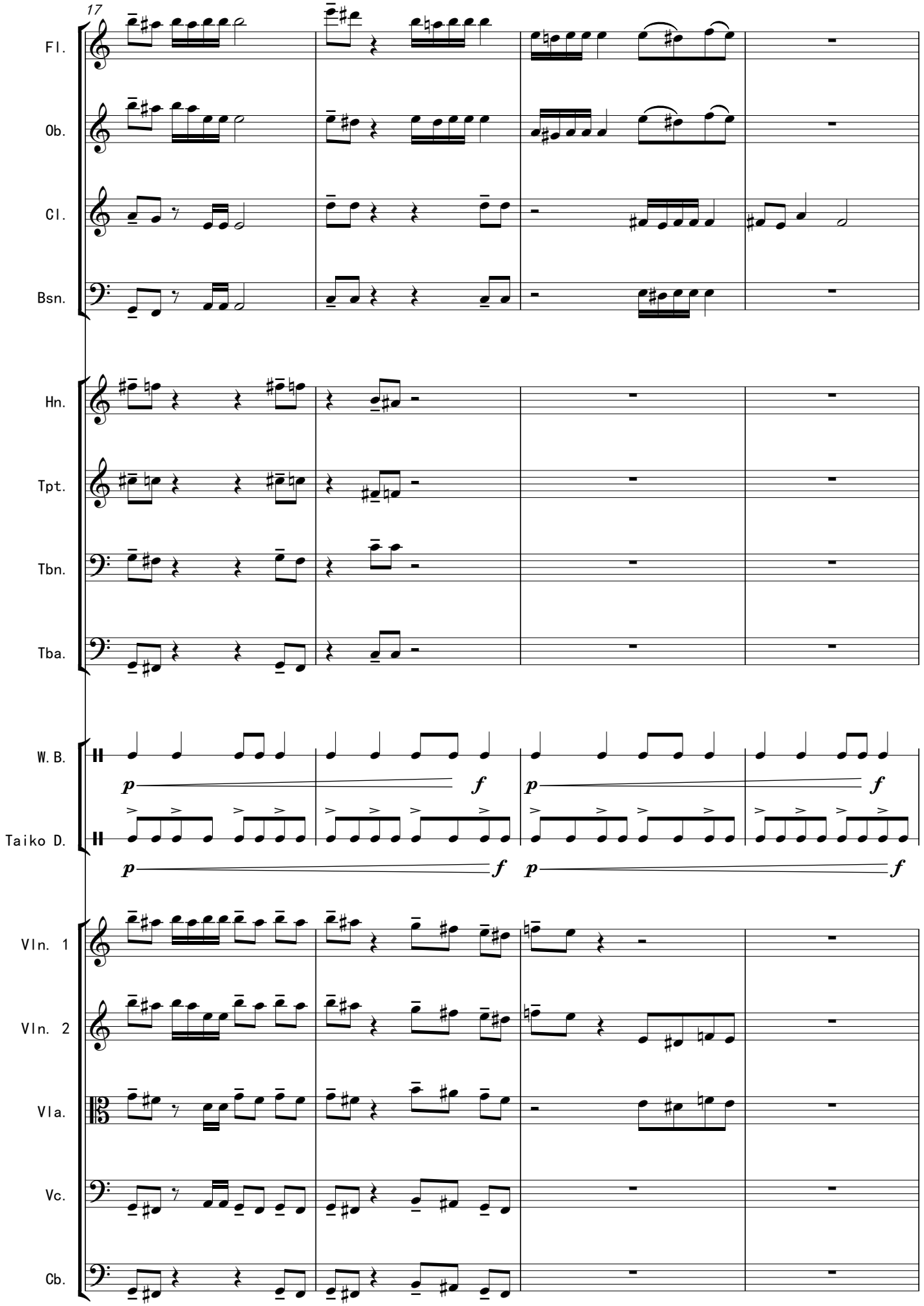
Cb.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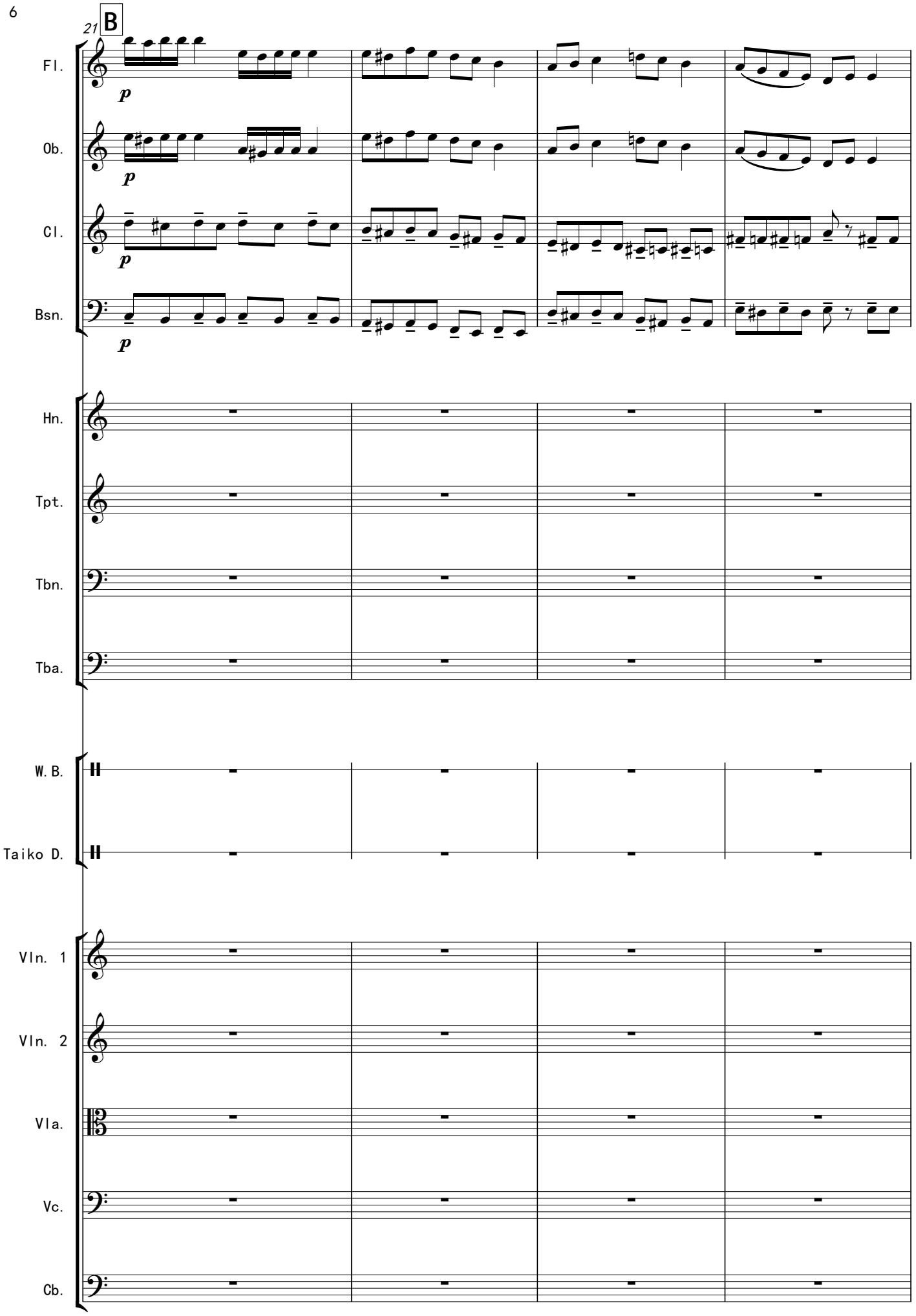
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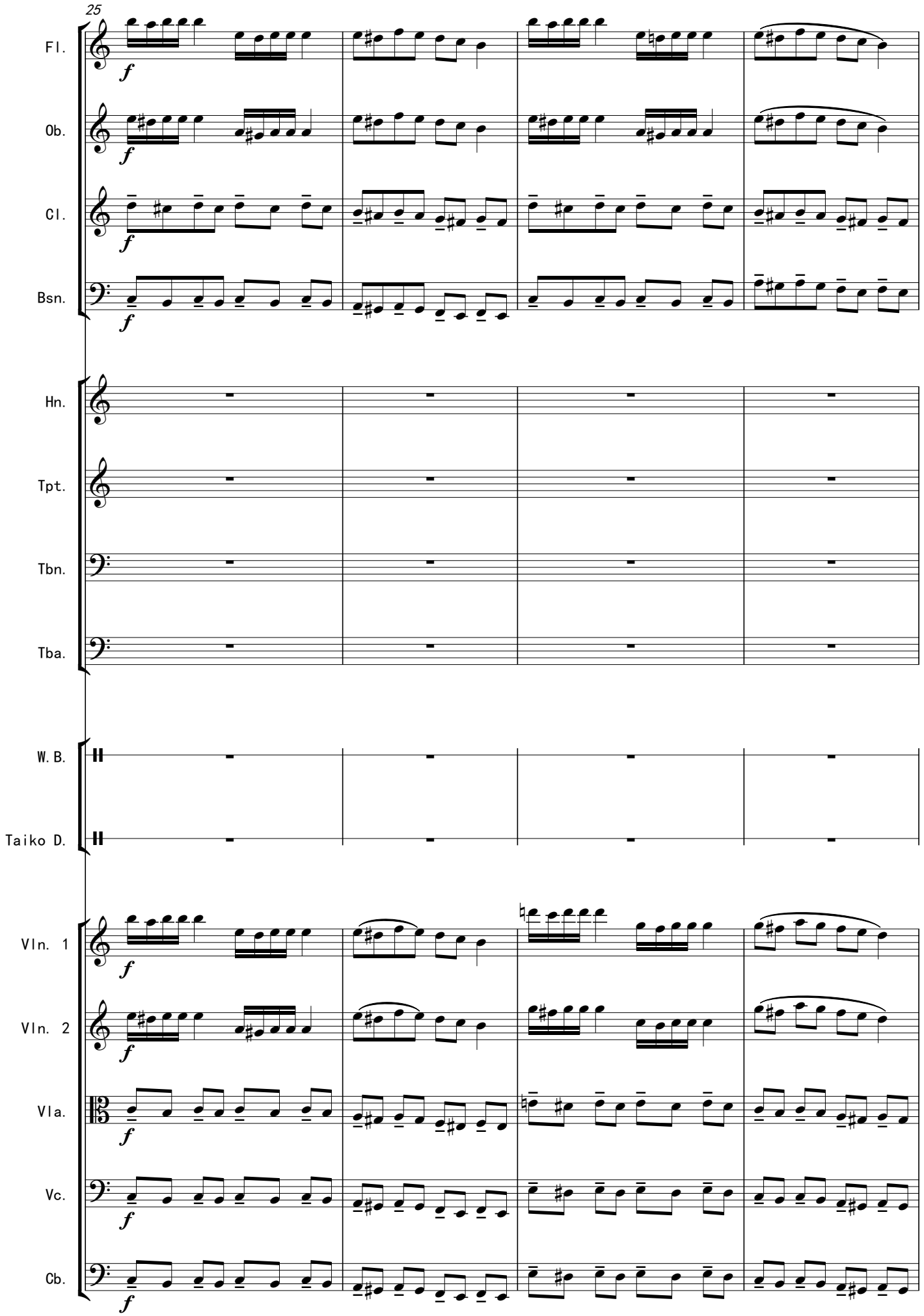
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Cb.
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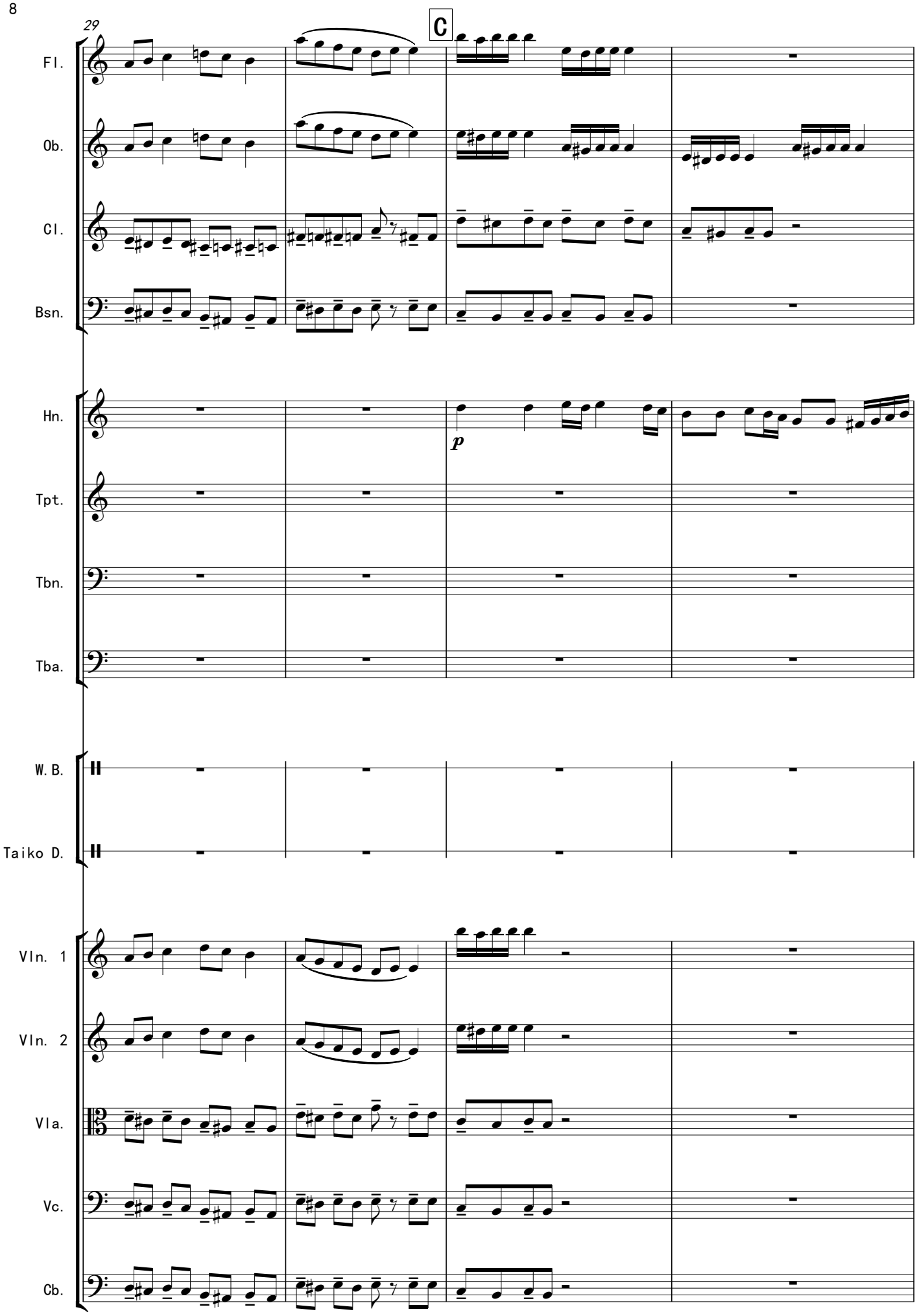
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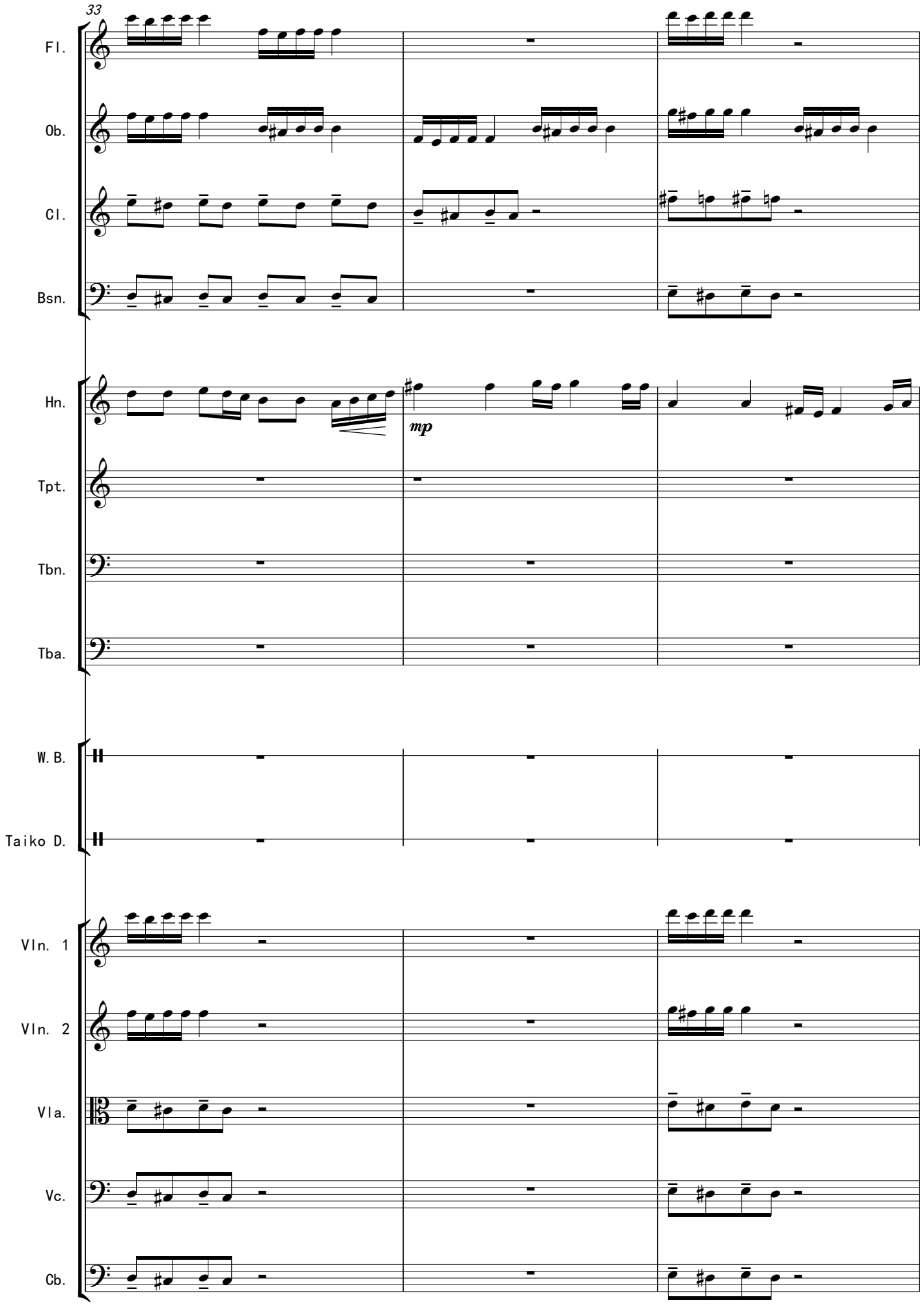
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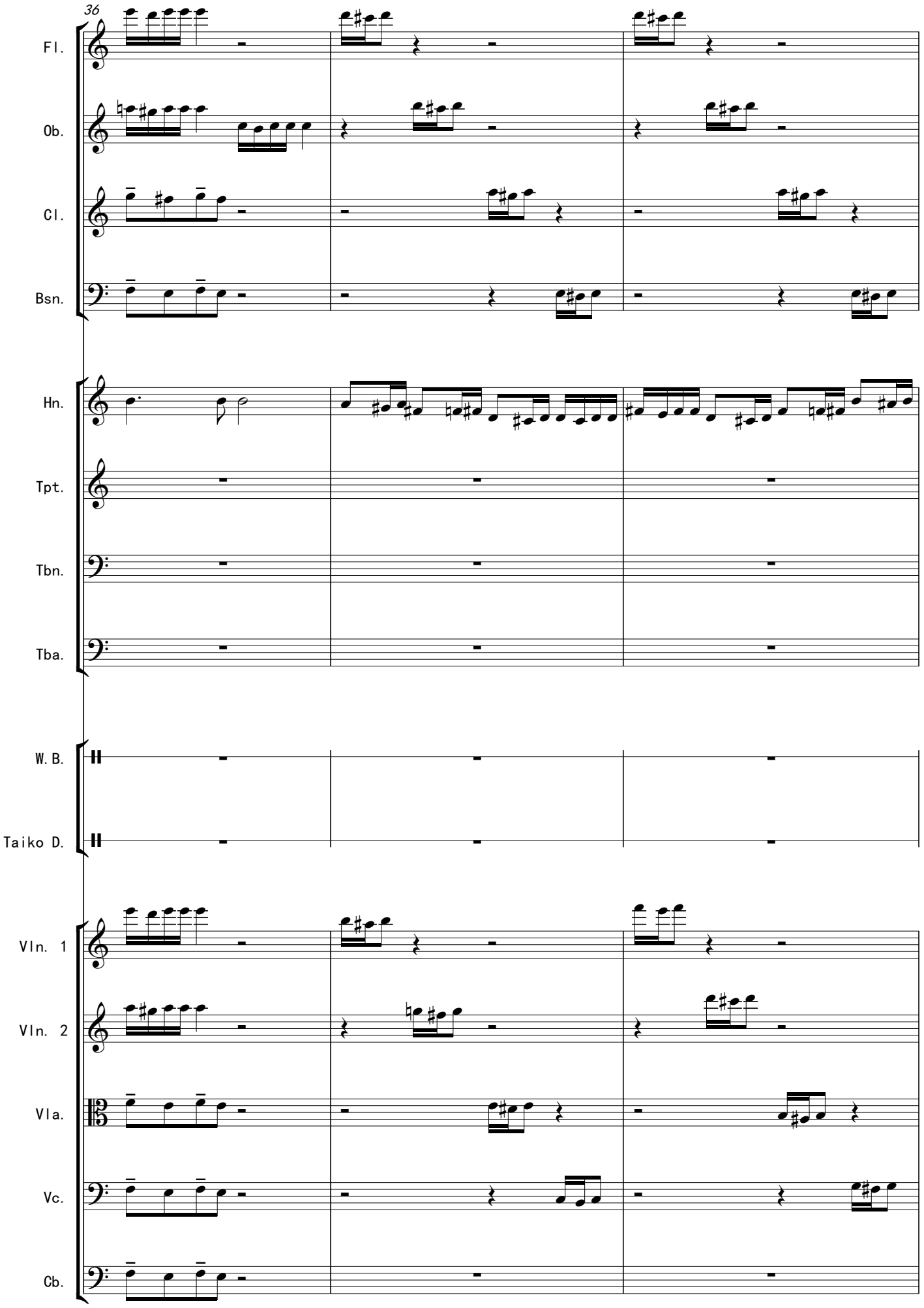
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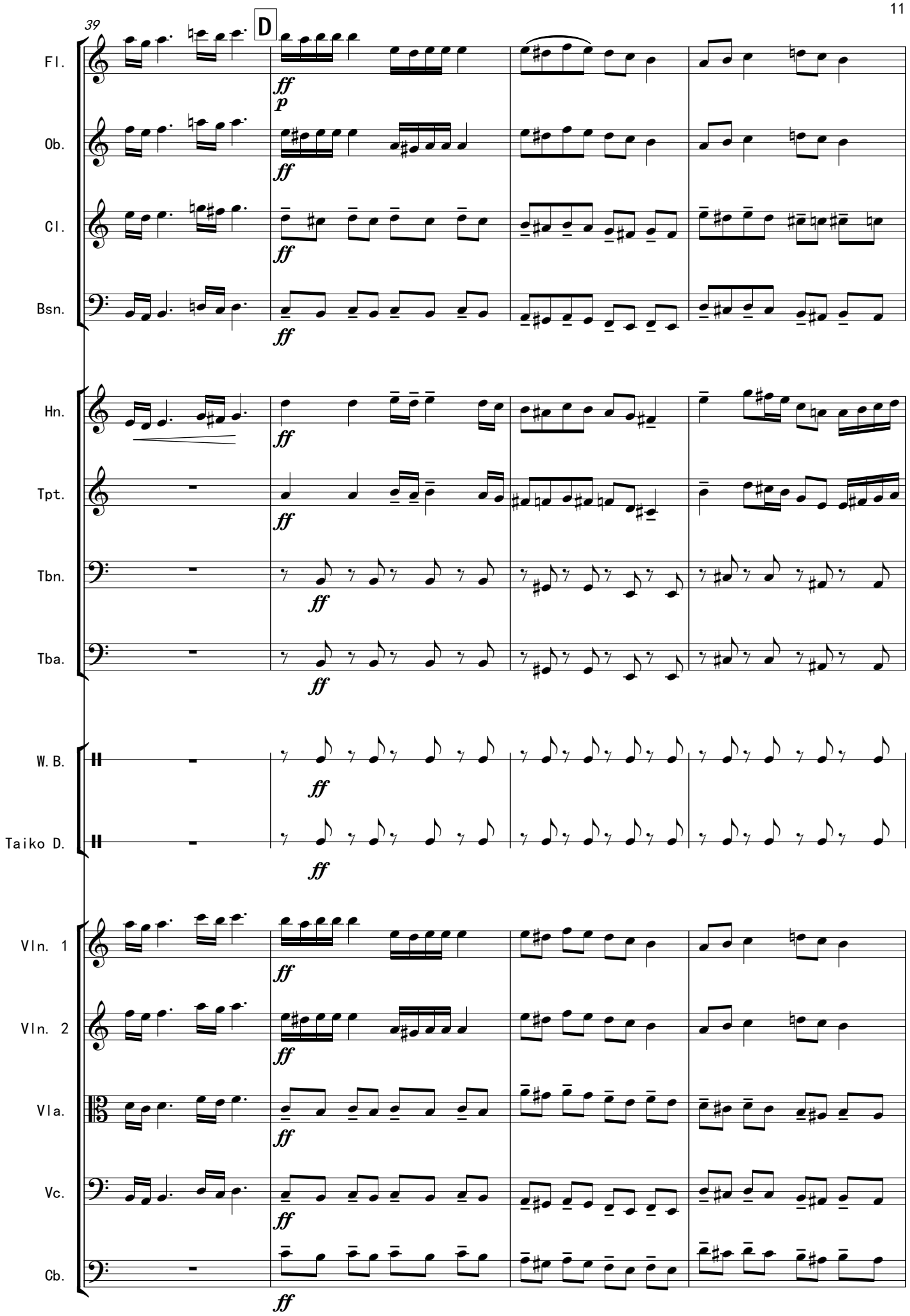
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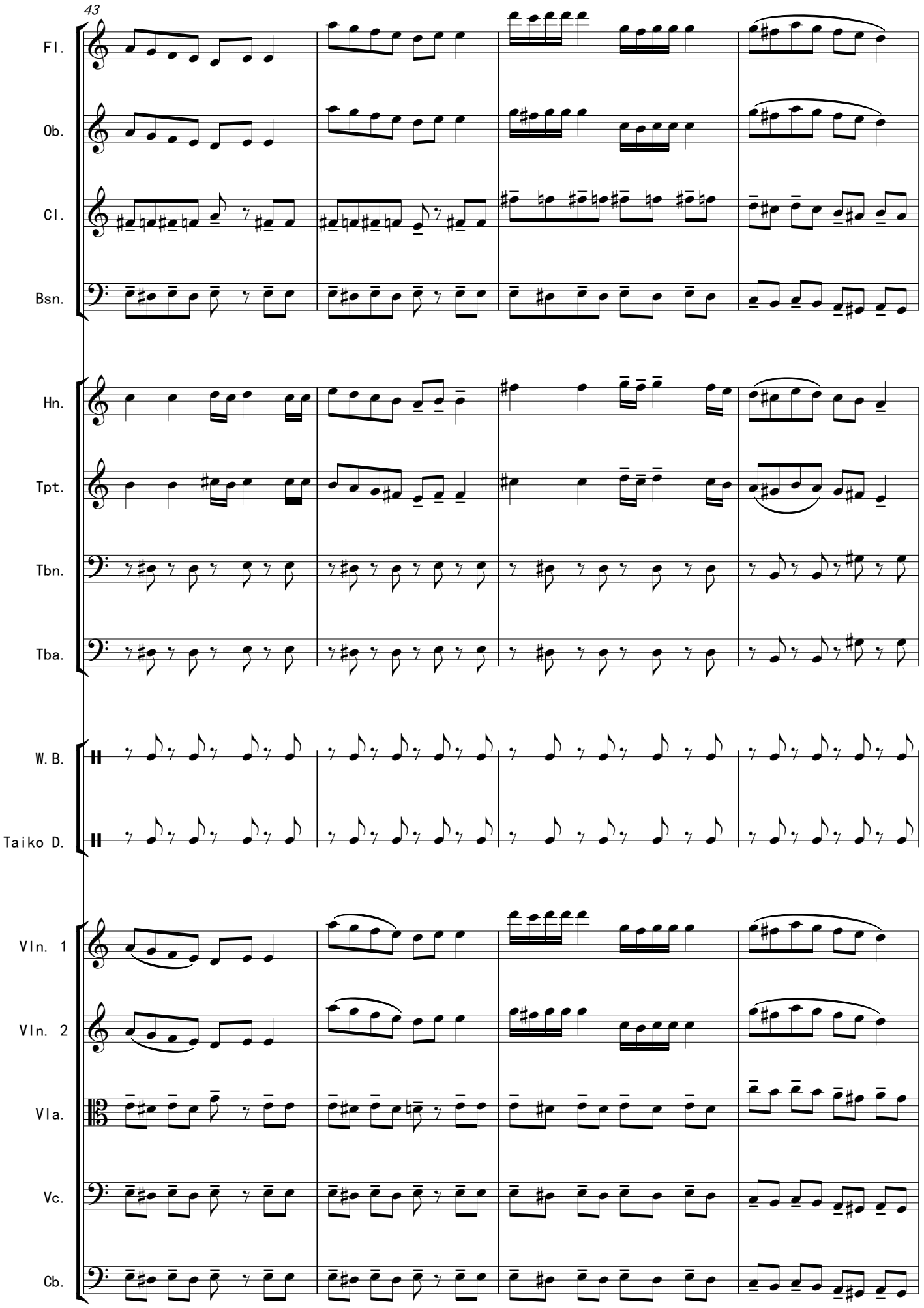
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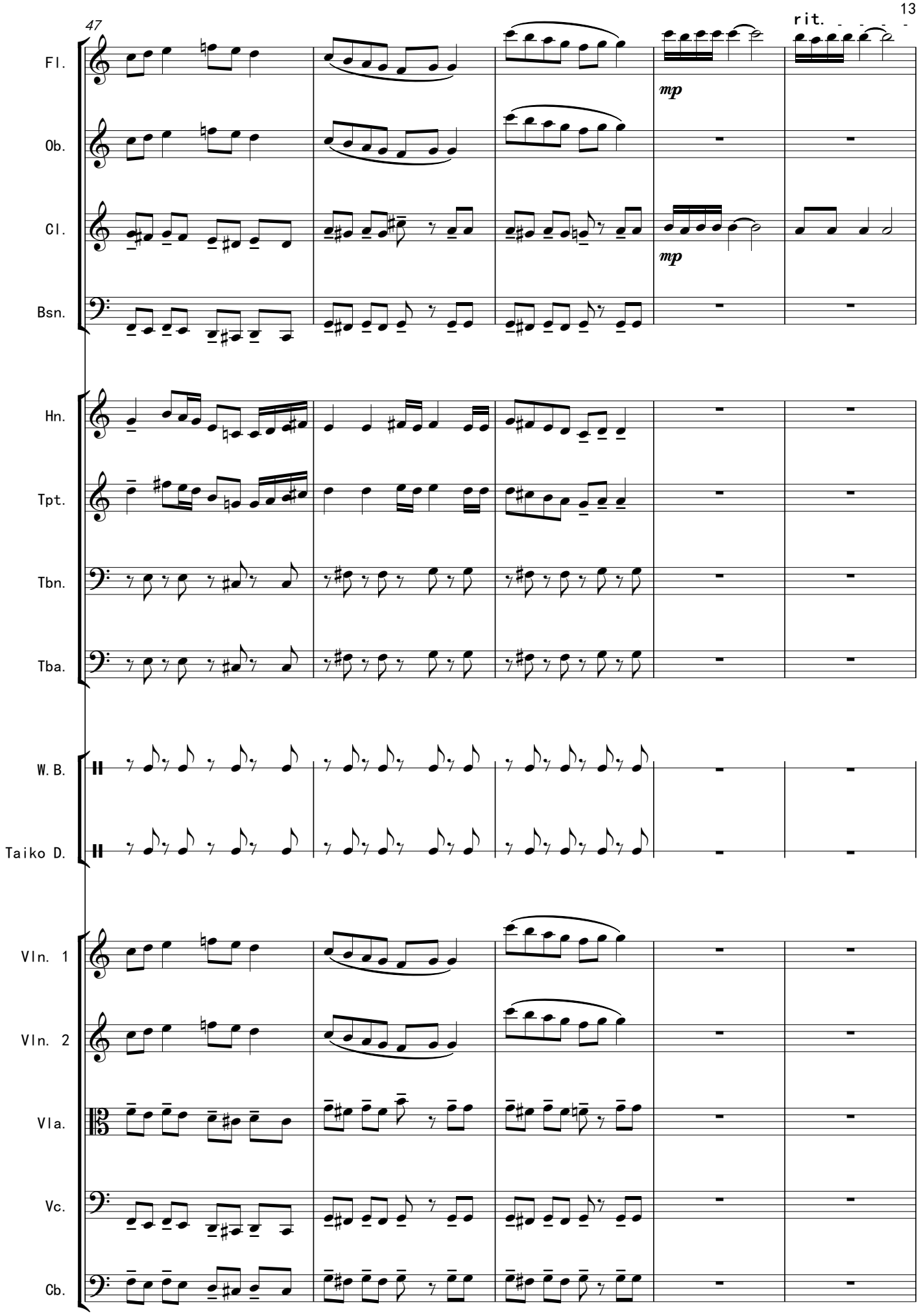
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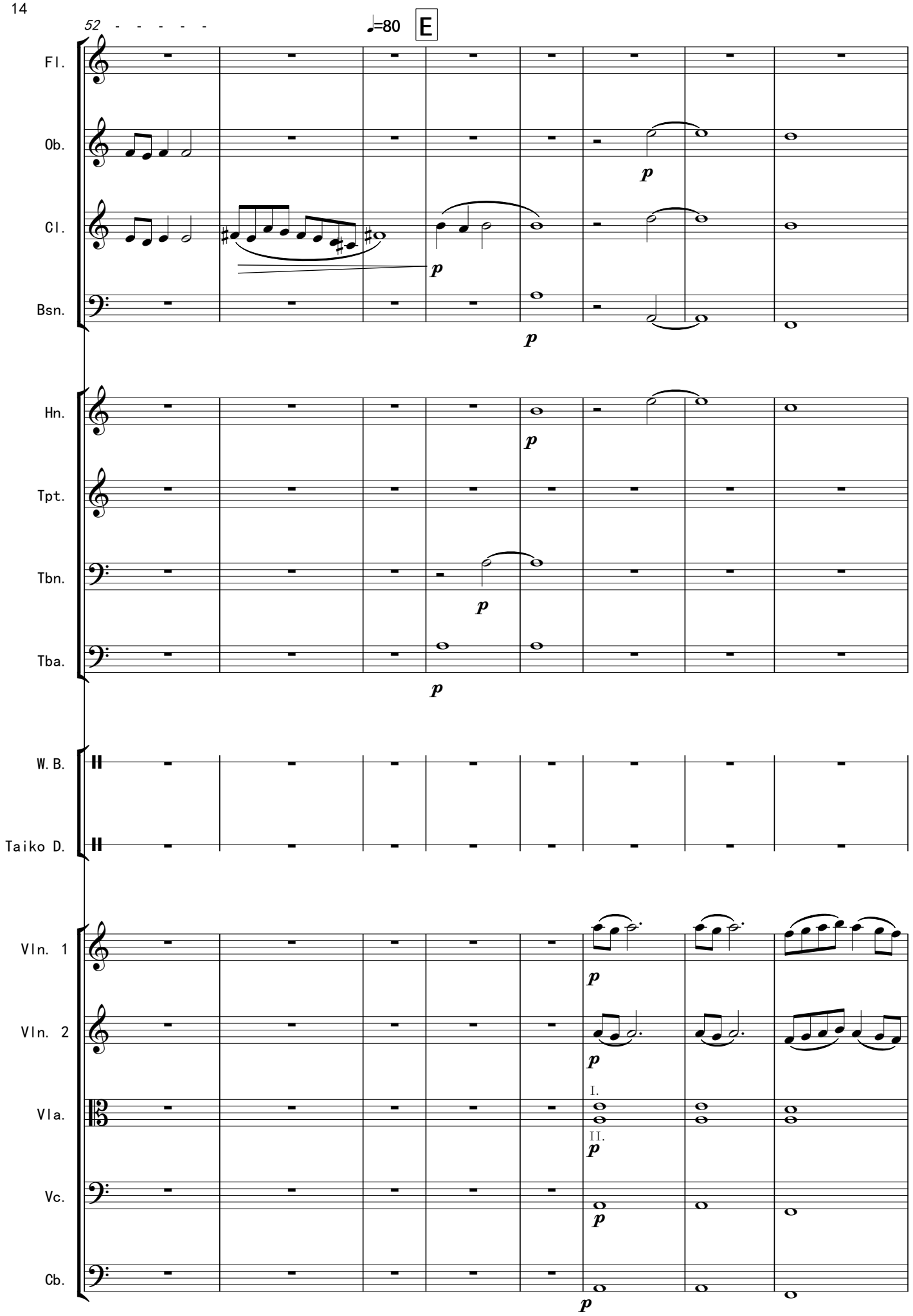
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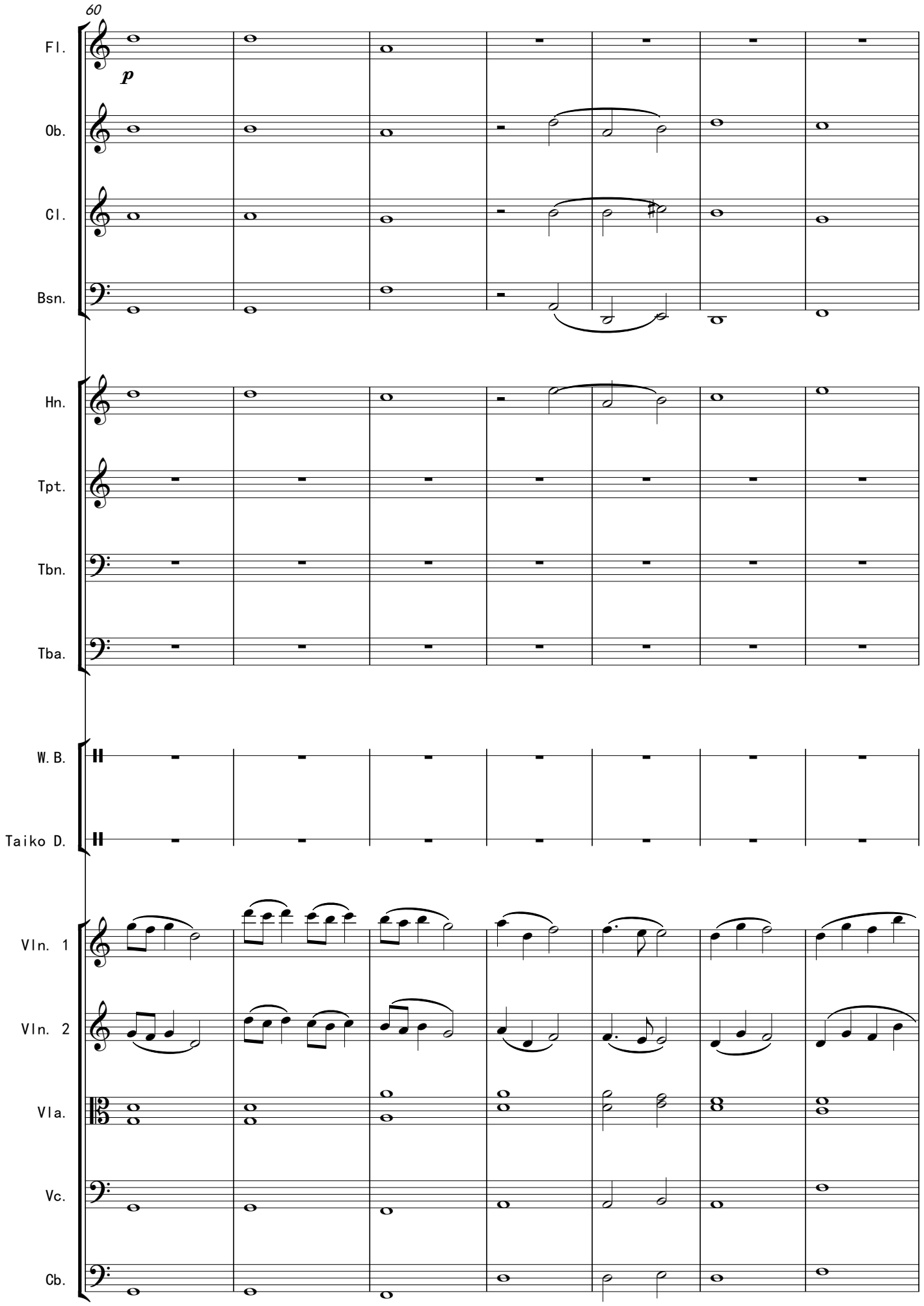
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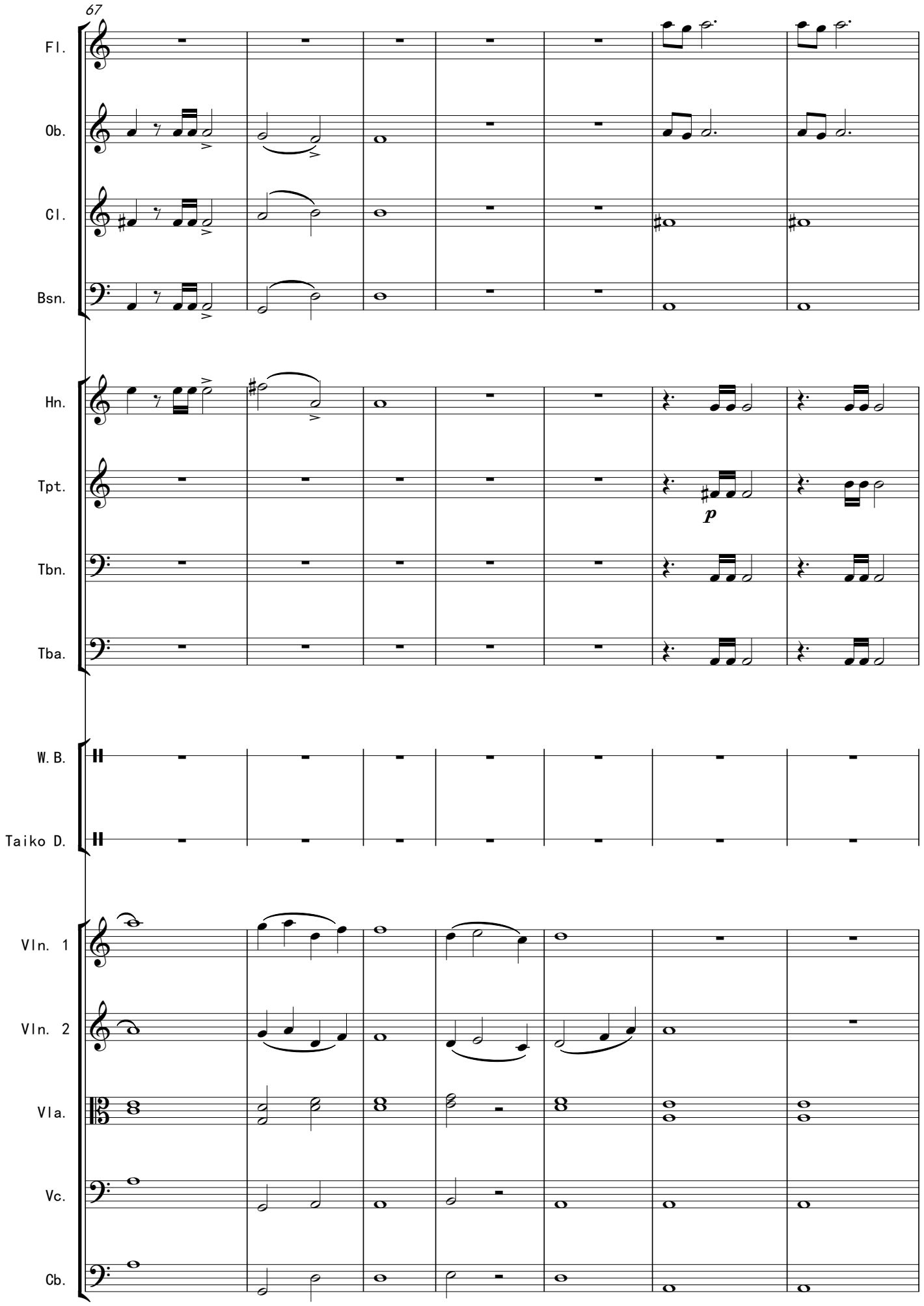
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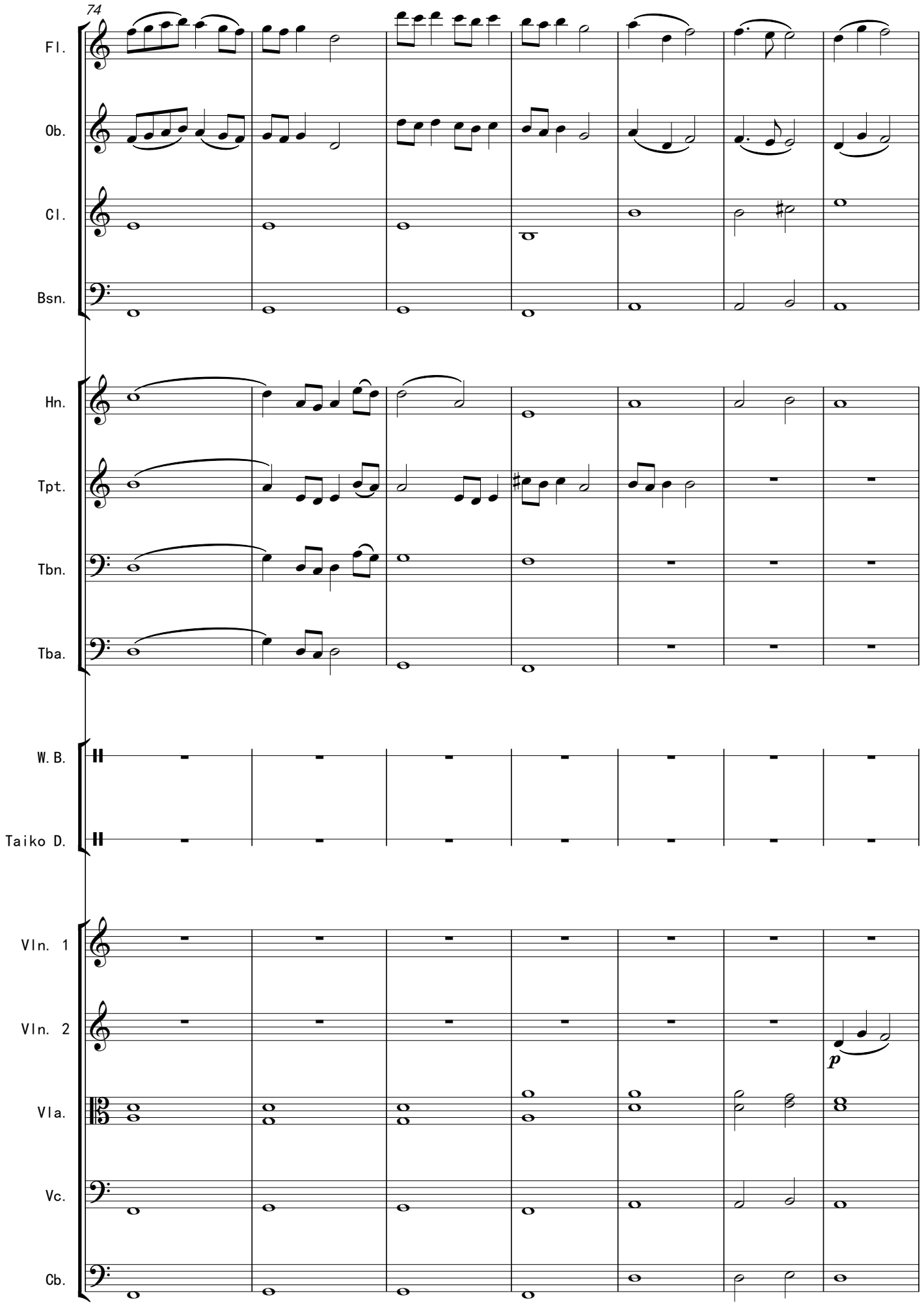
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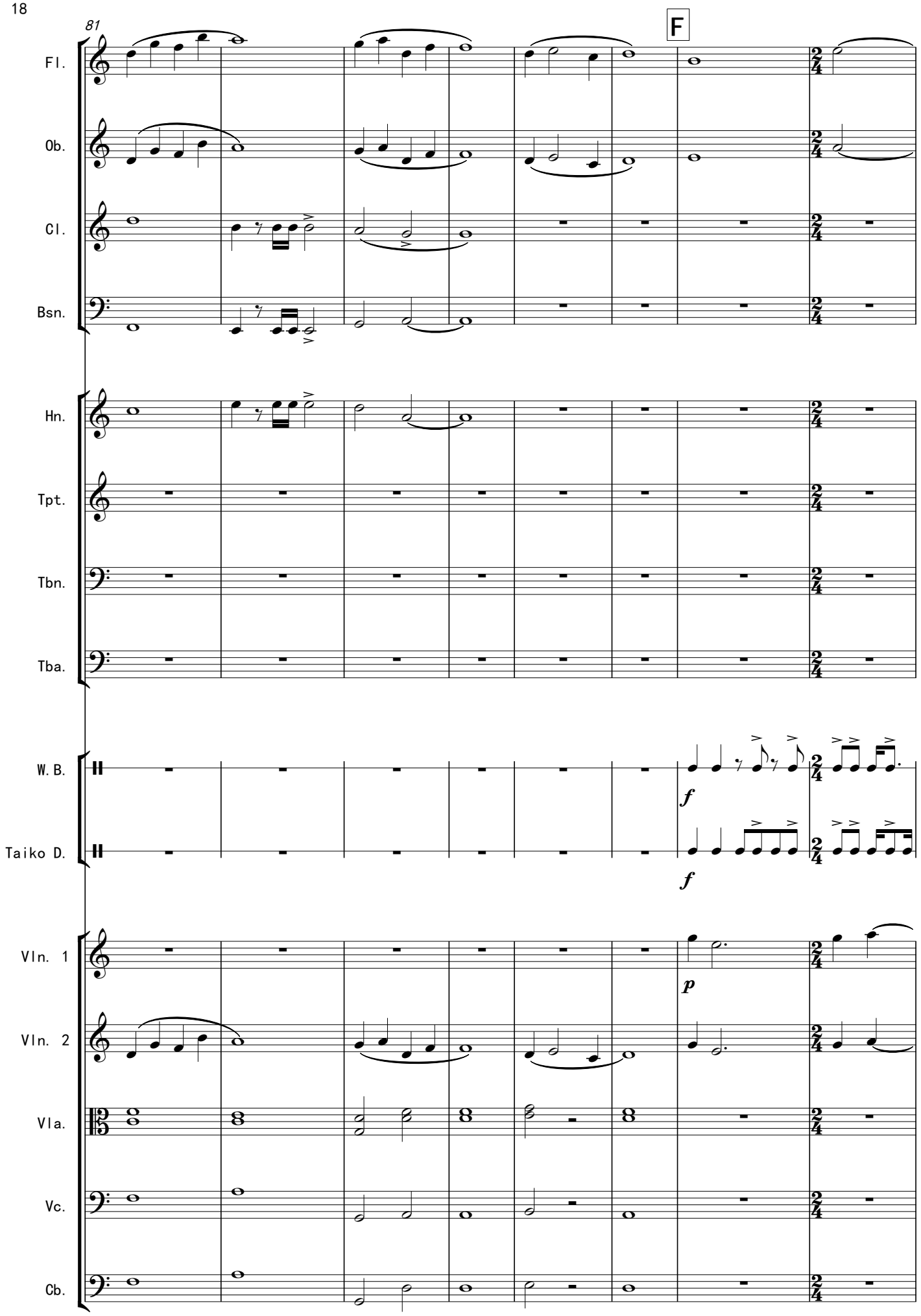
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Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
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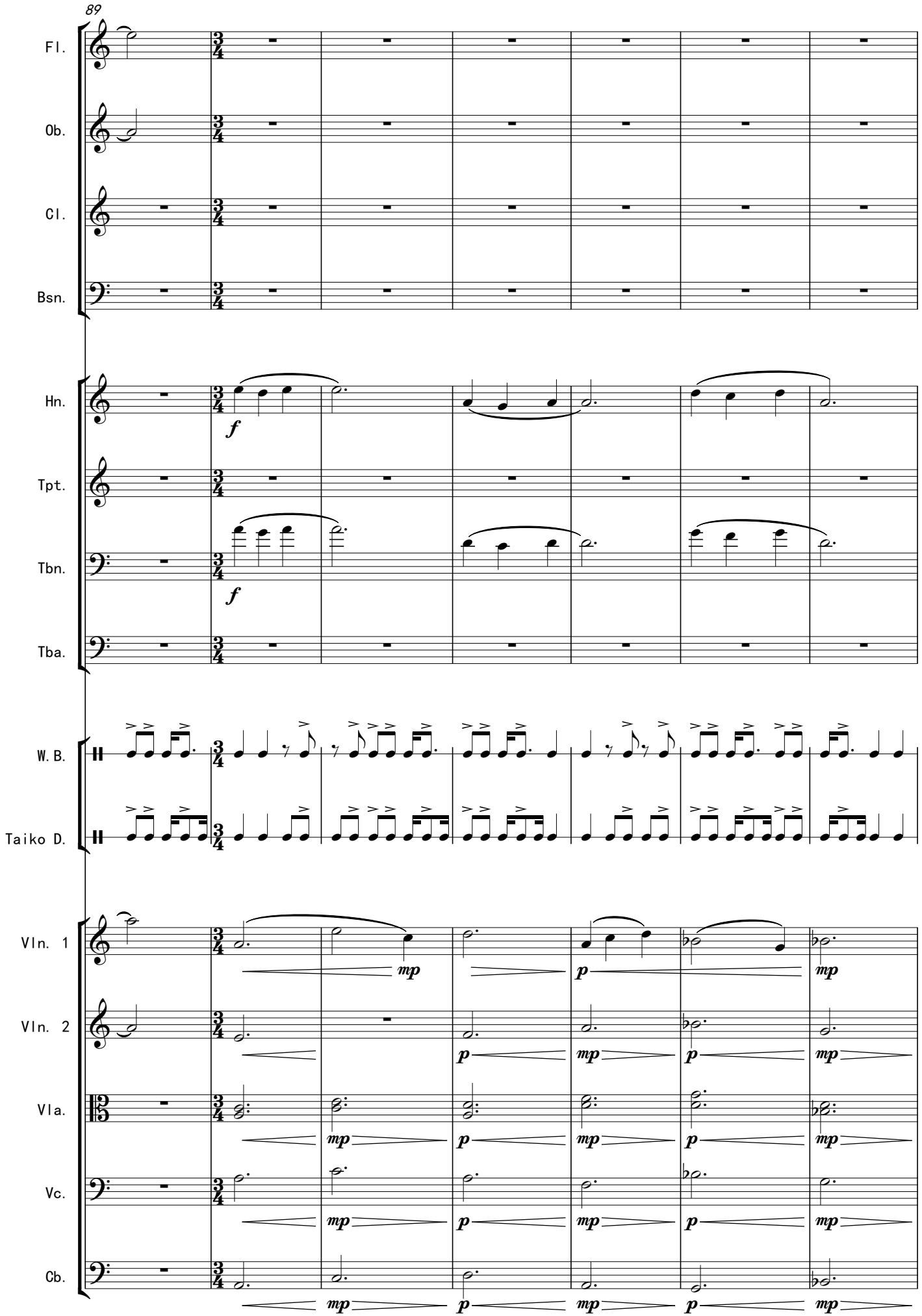
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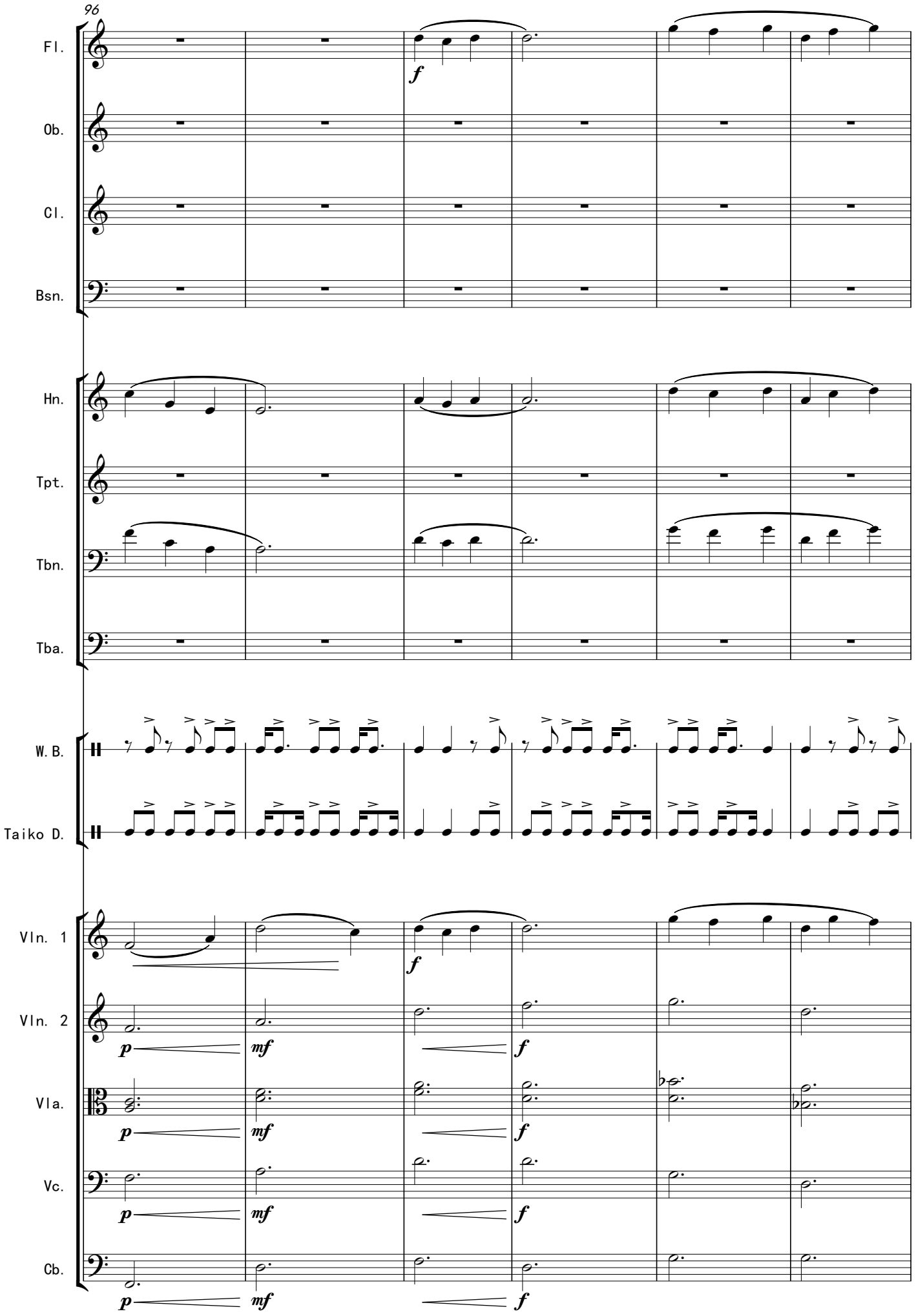
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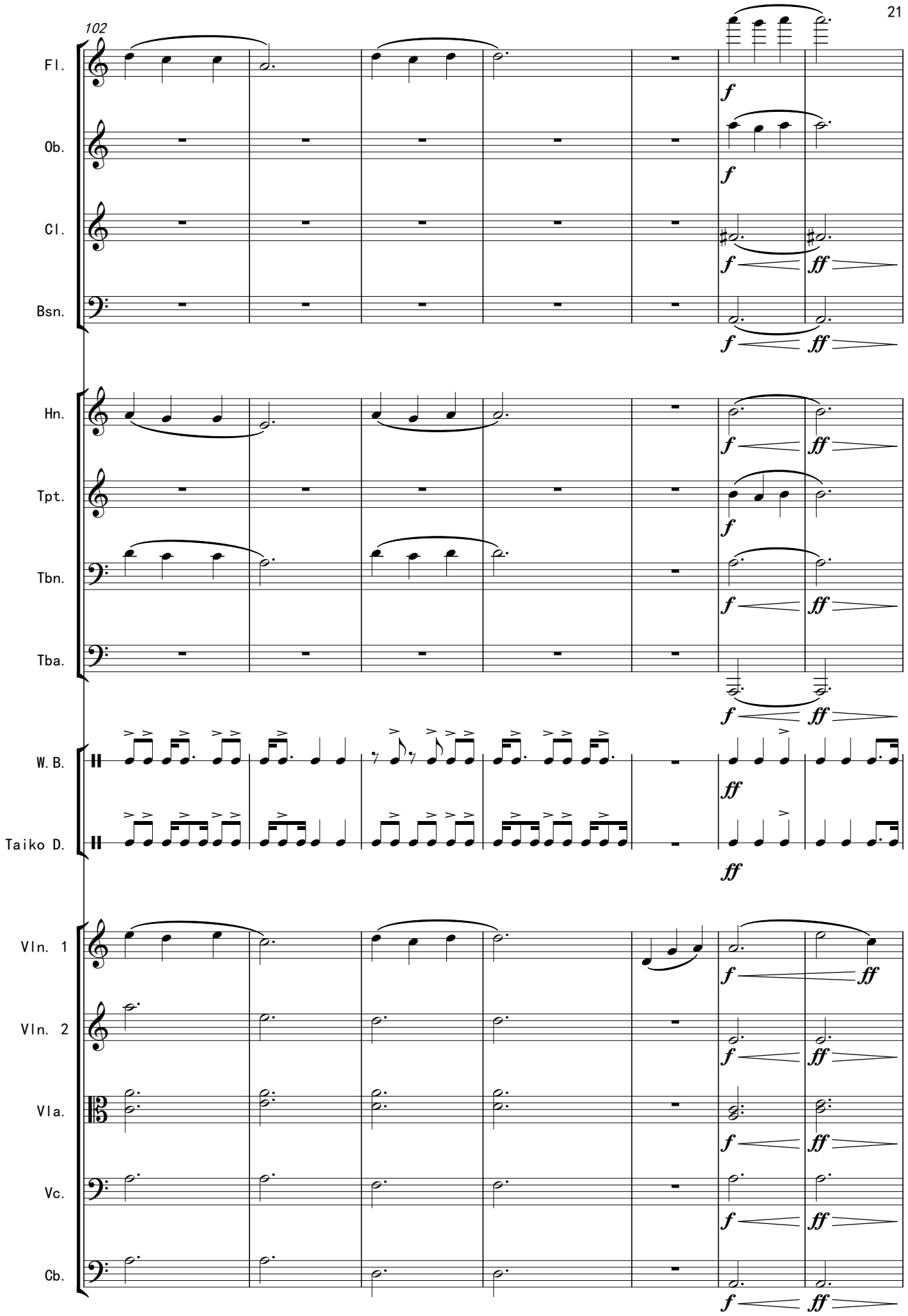
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Vln. 2
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.
f
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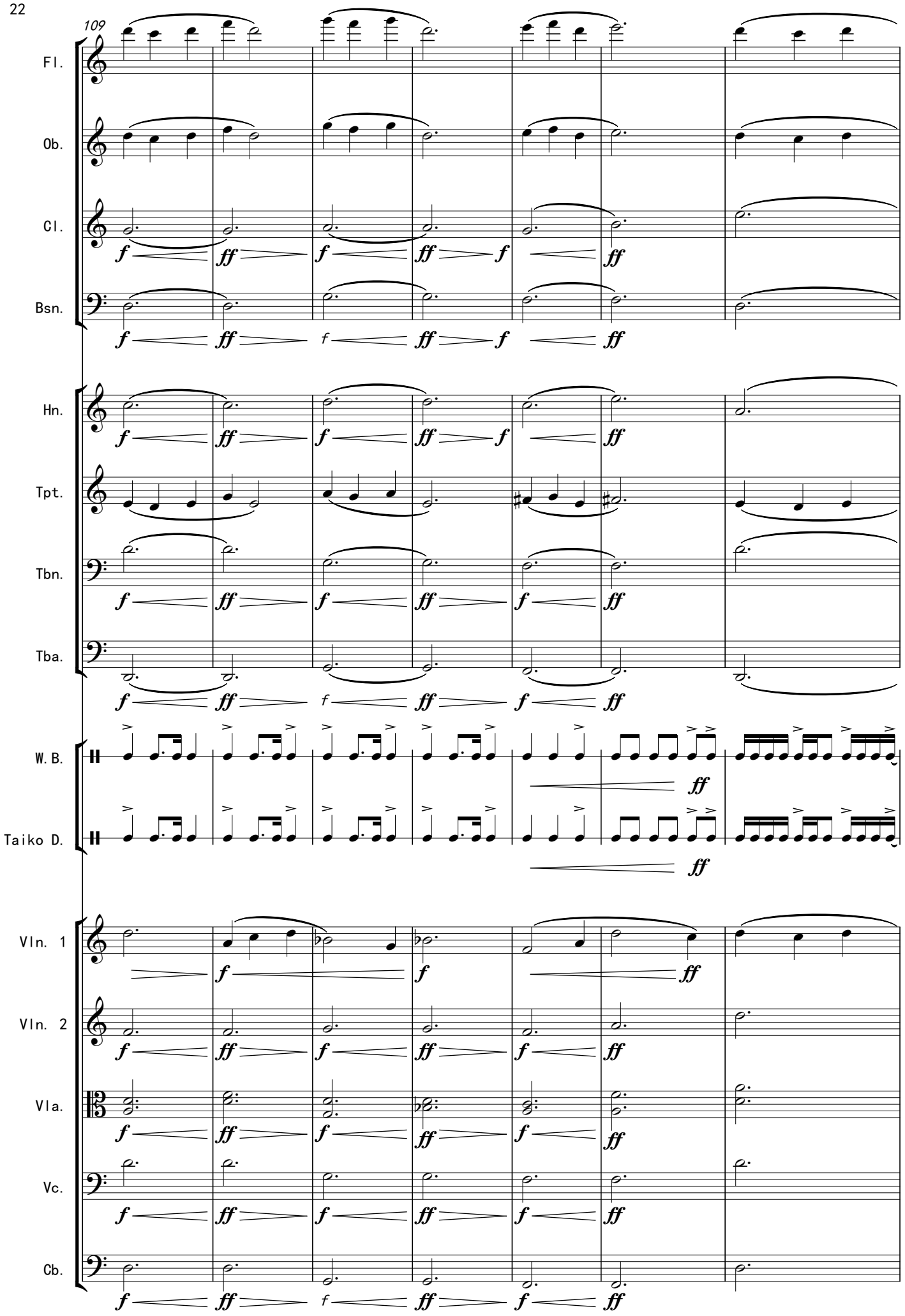
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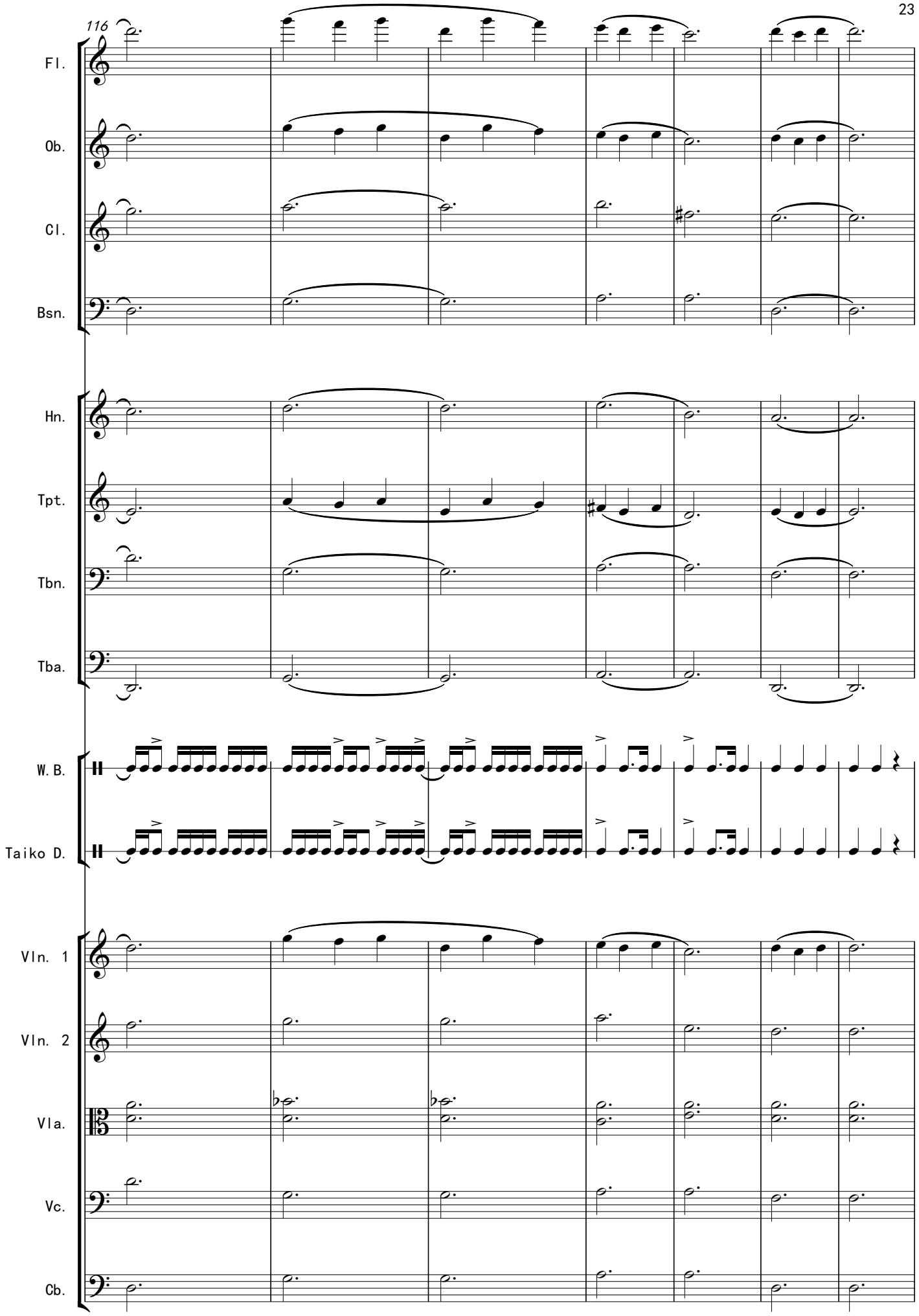
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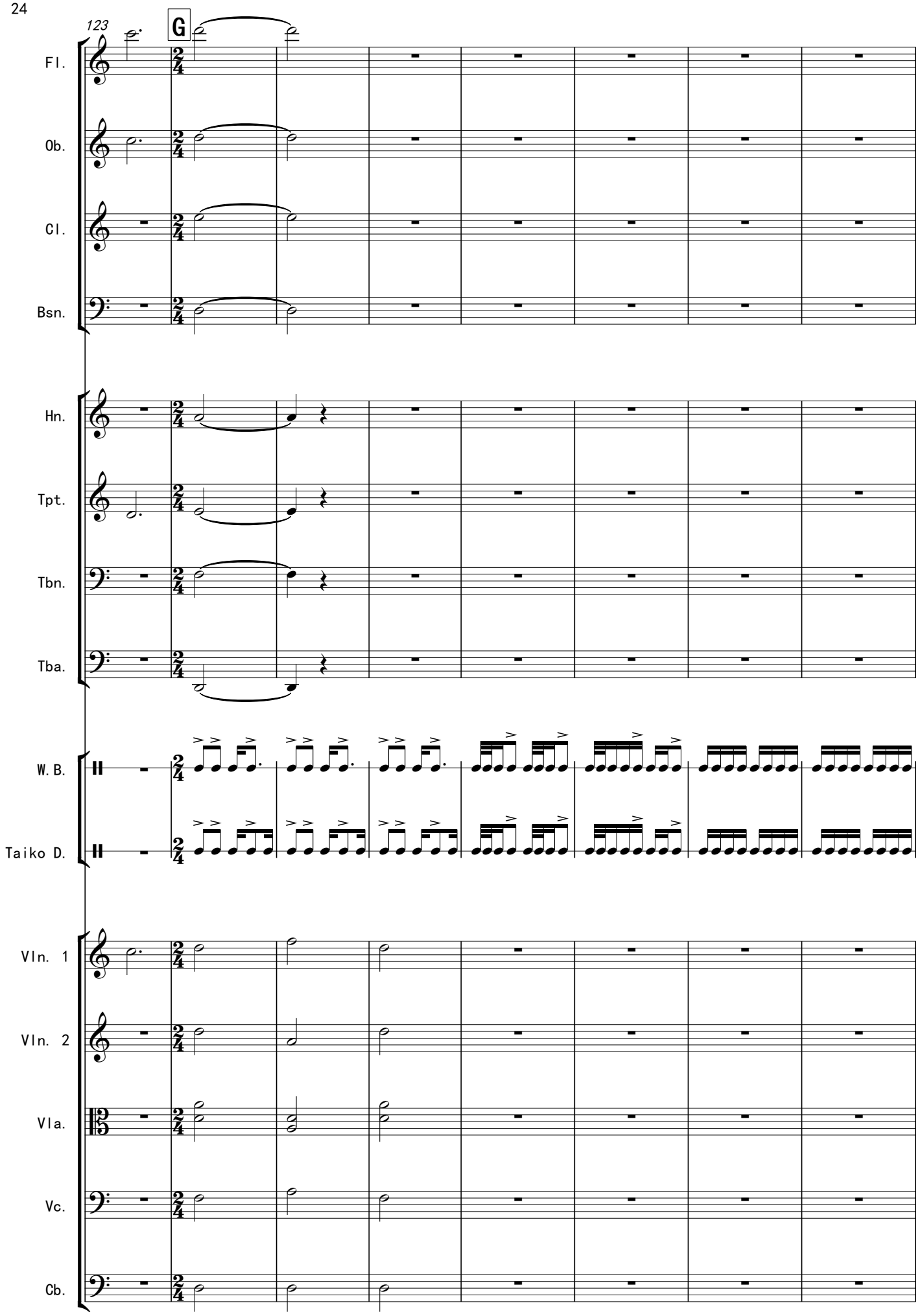
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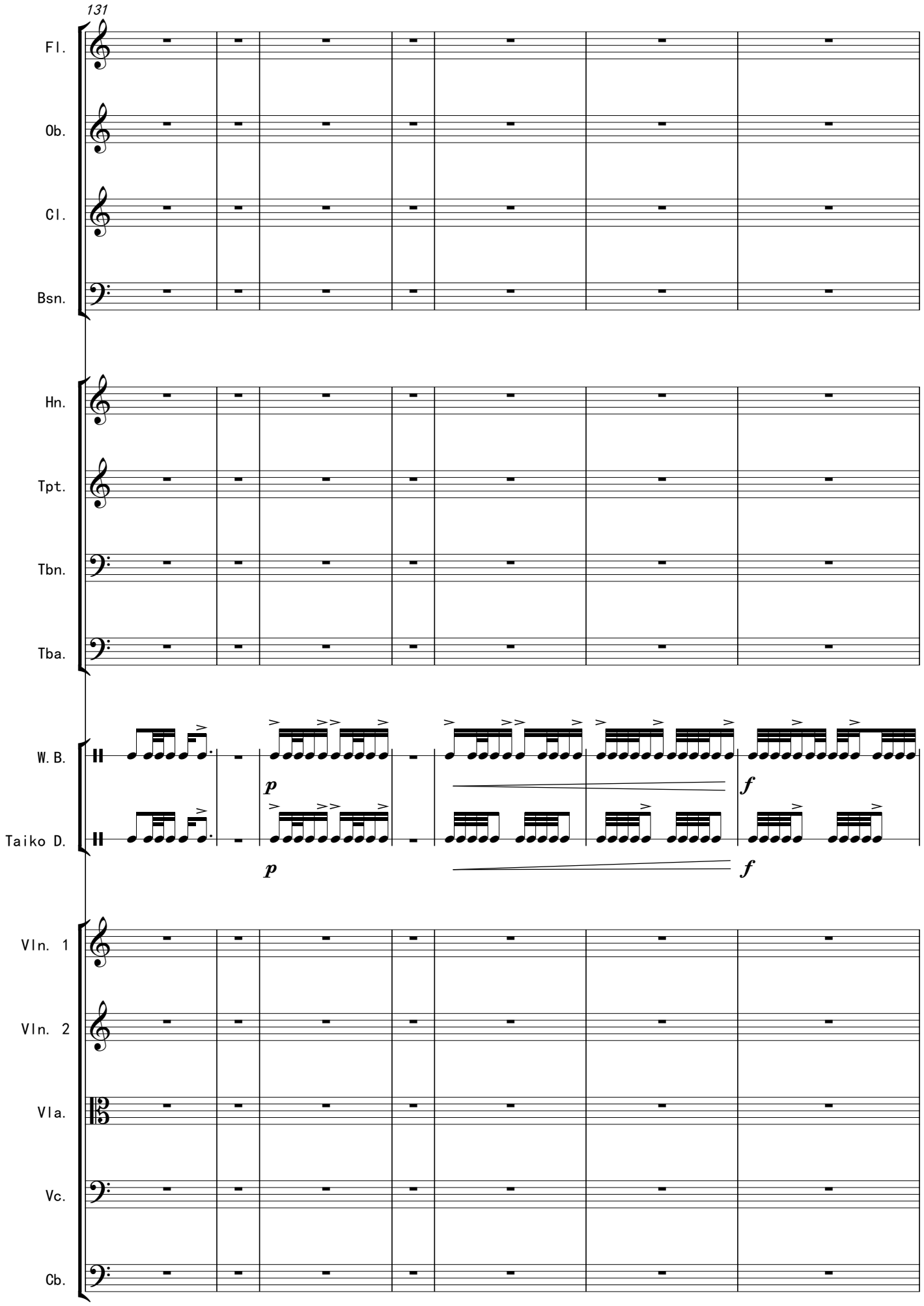
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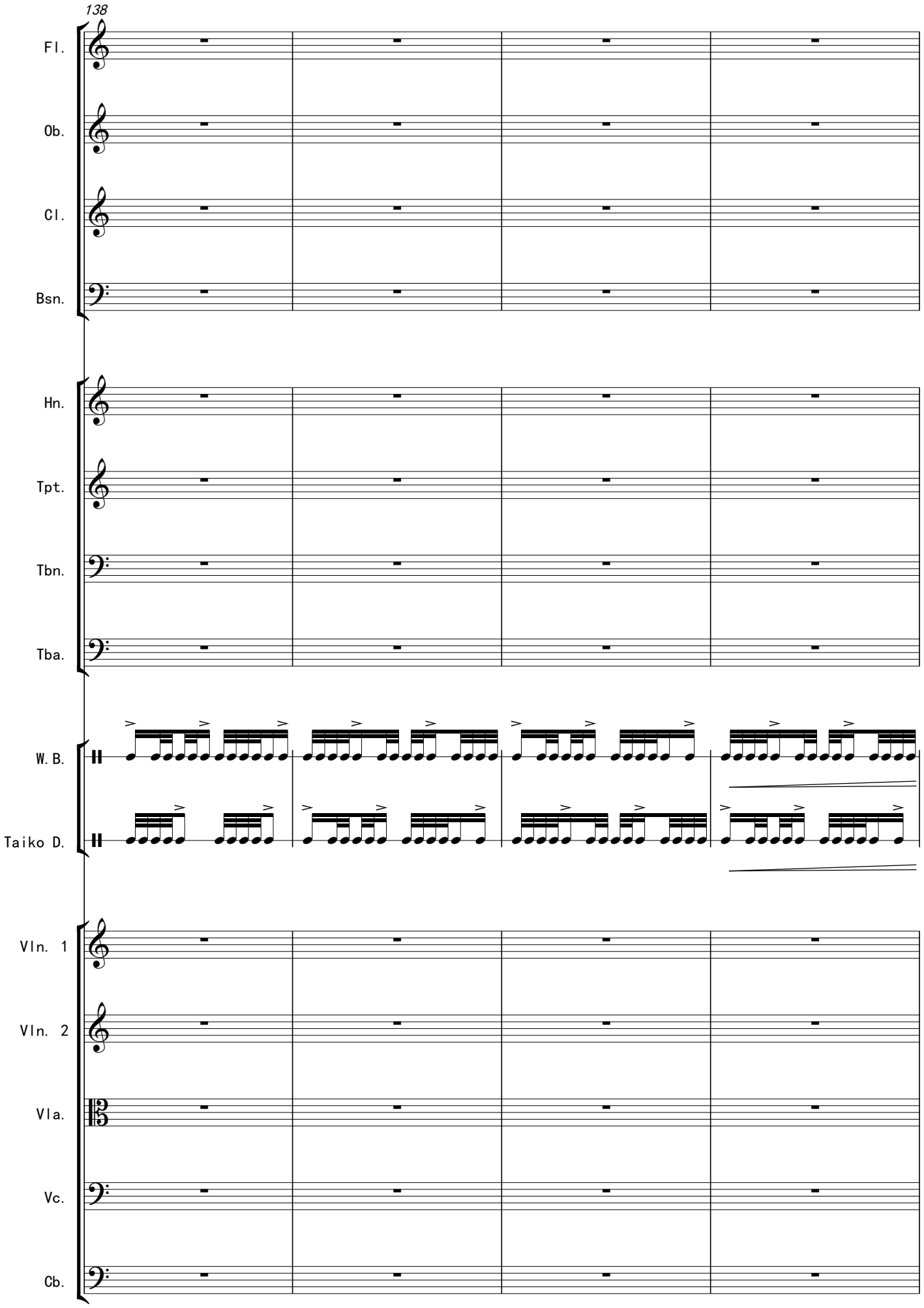
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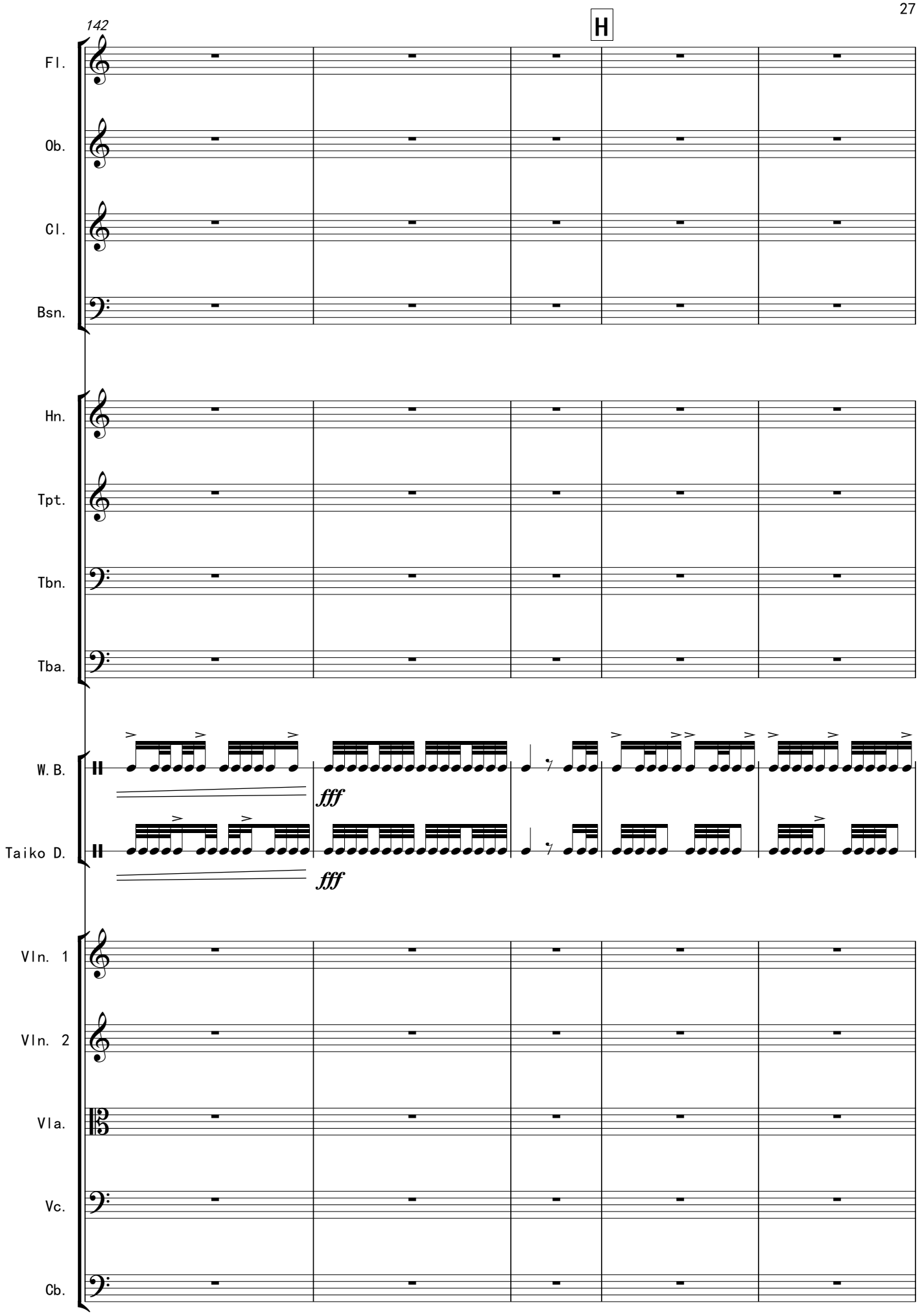
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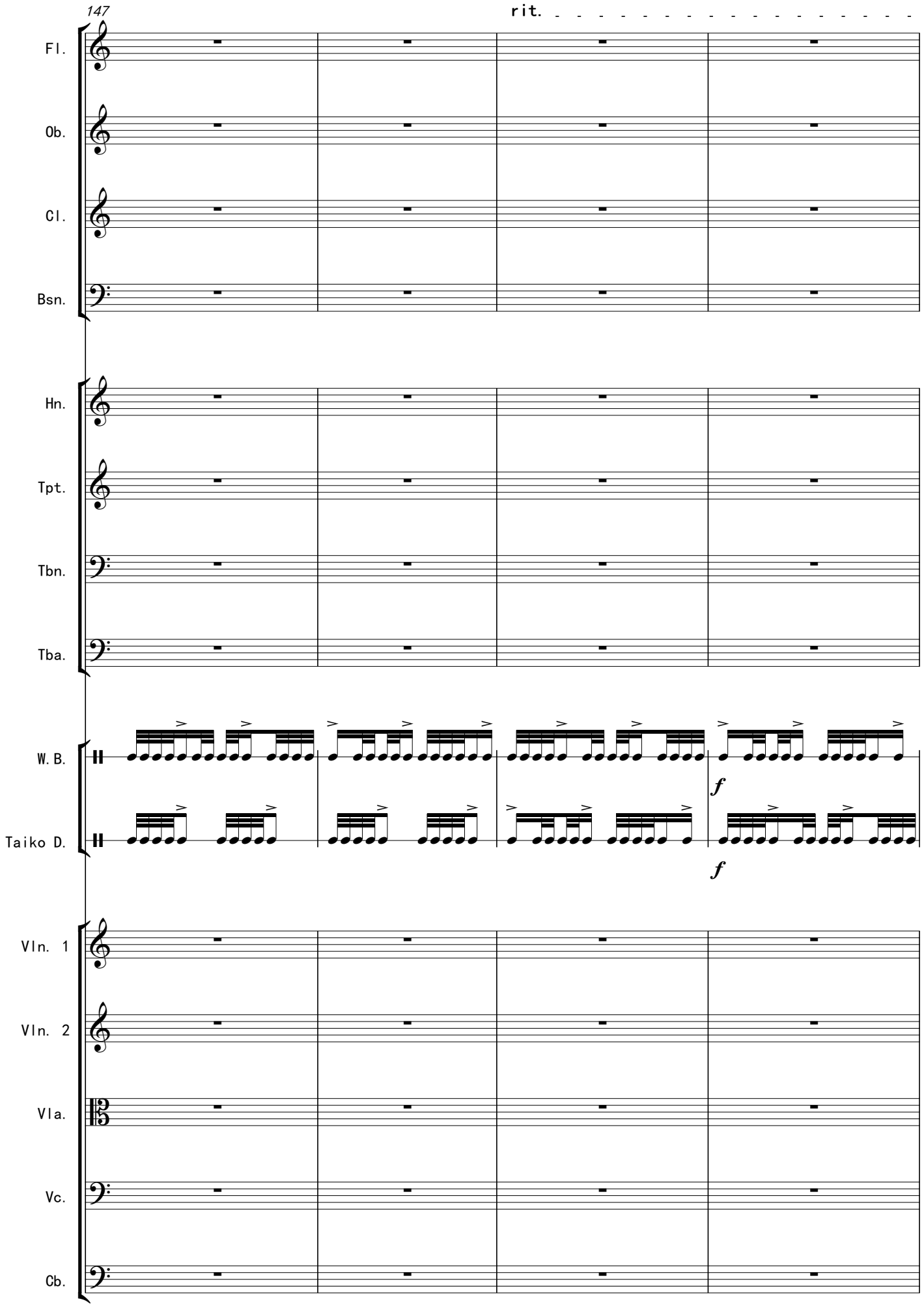
147
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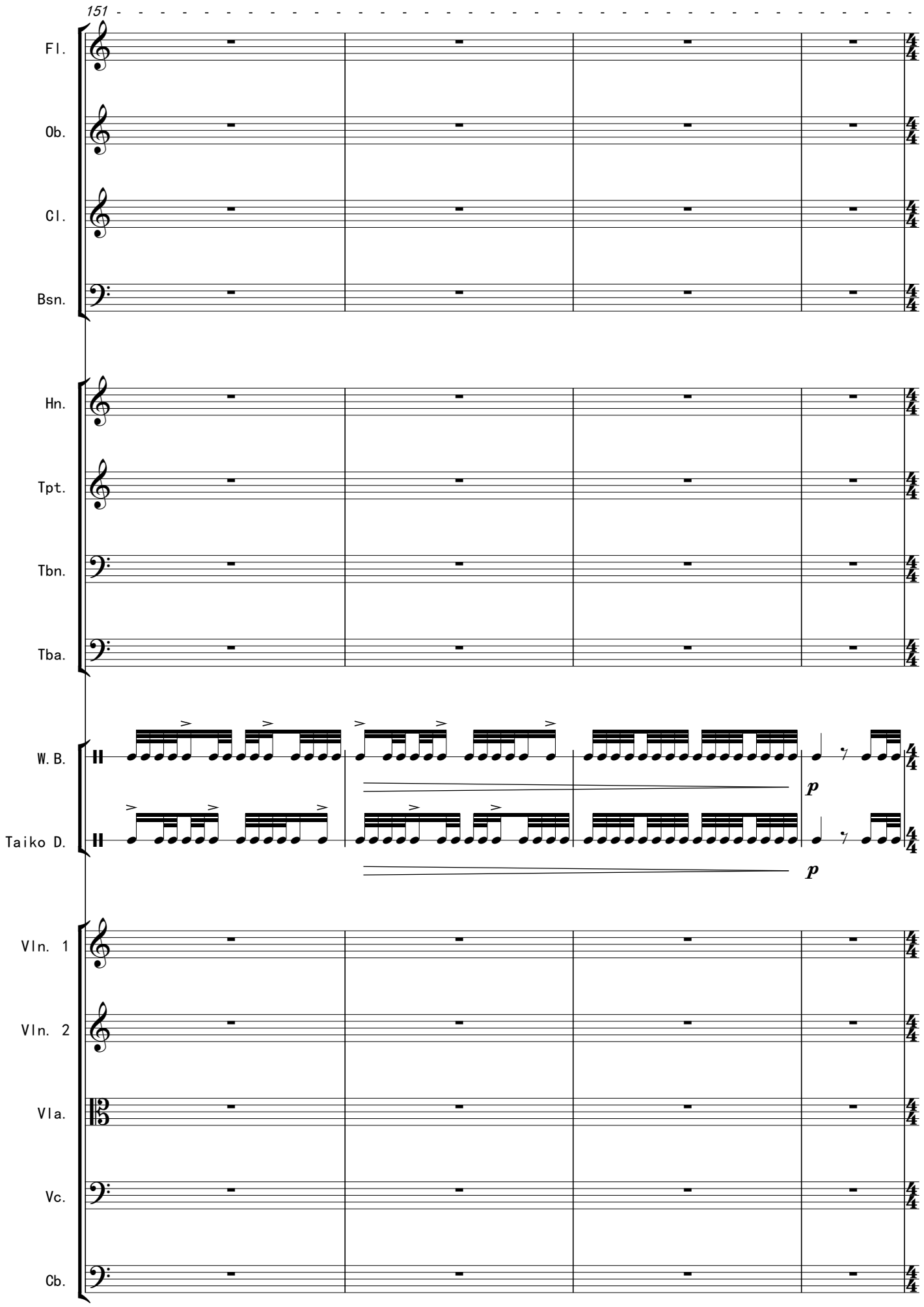
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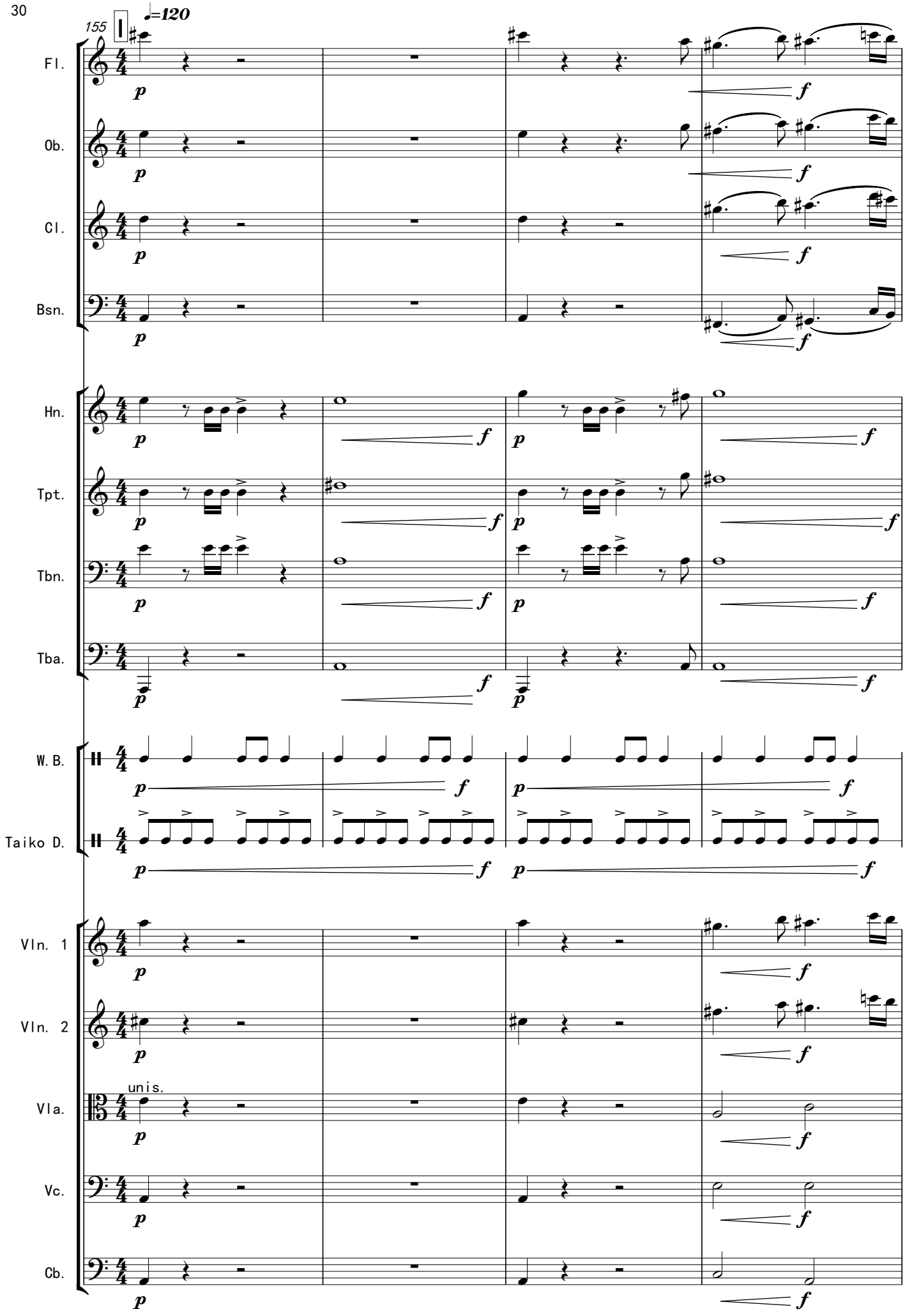
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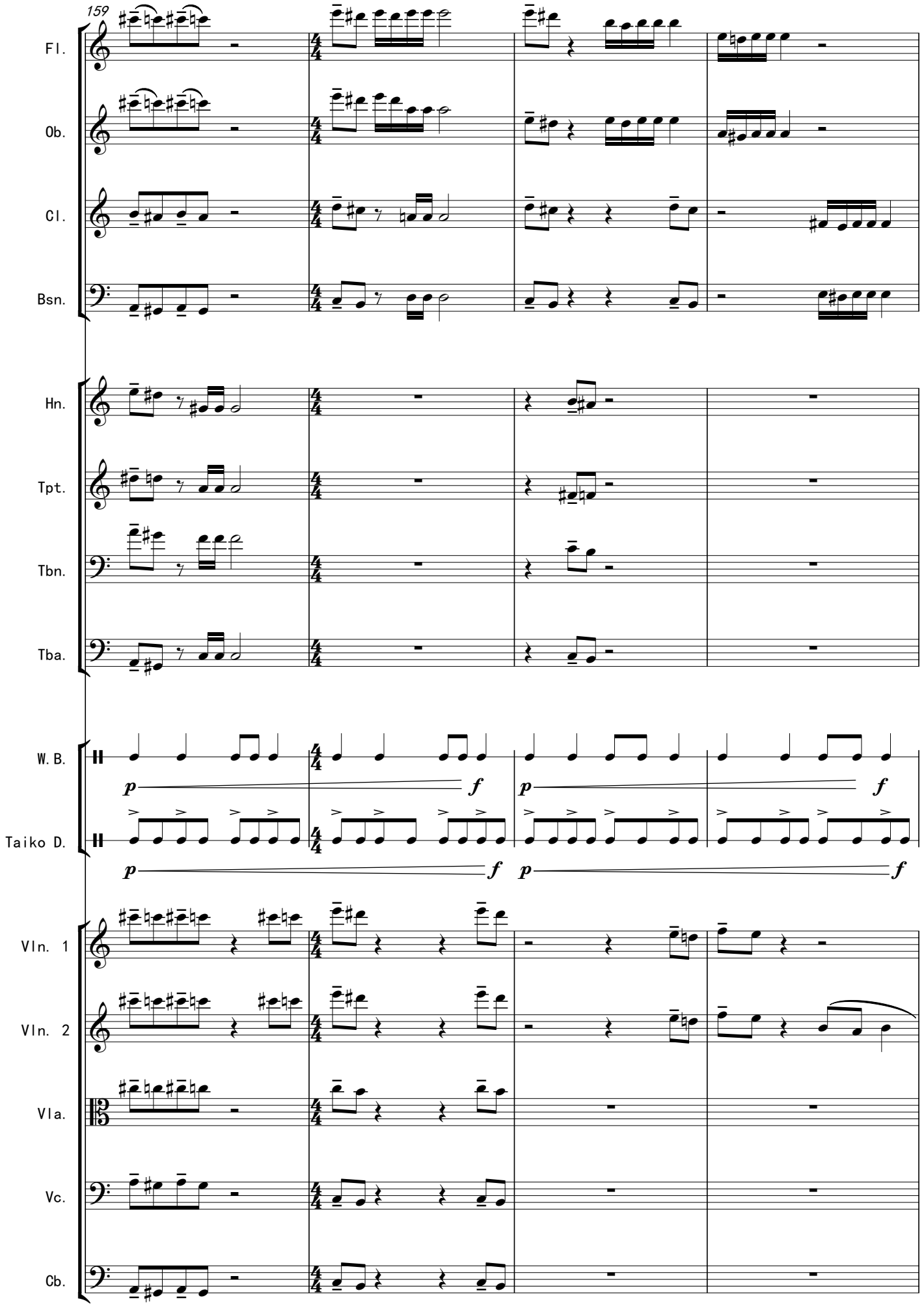
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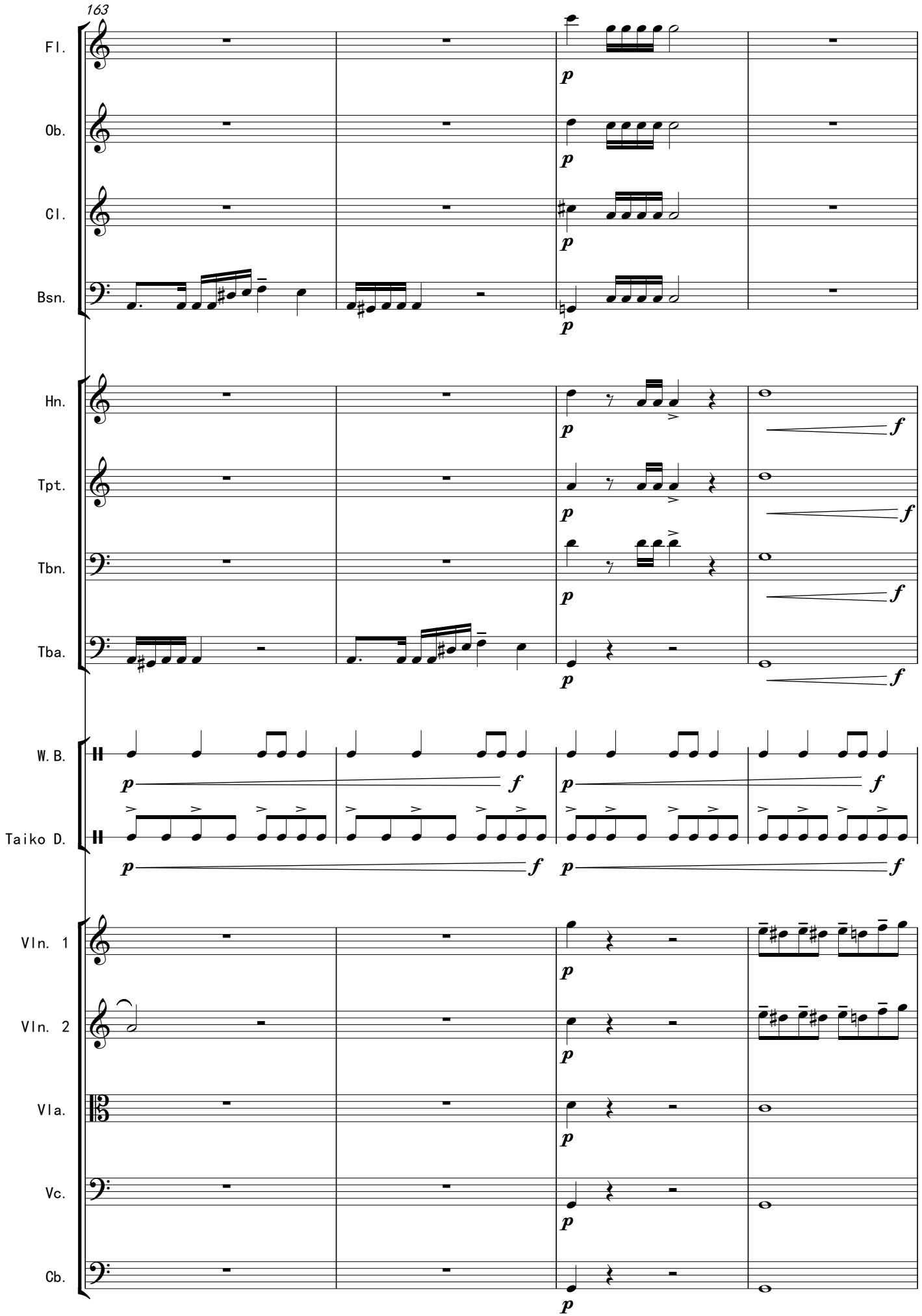
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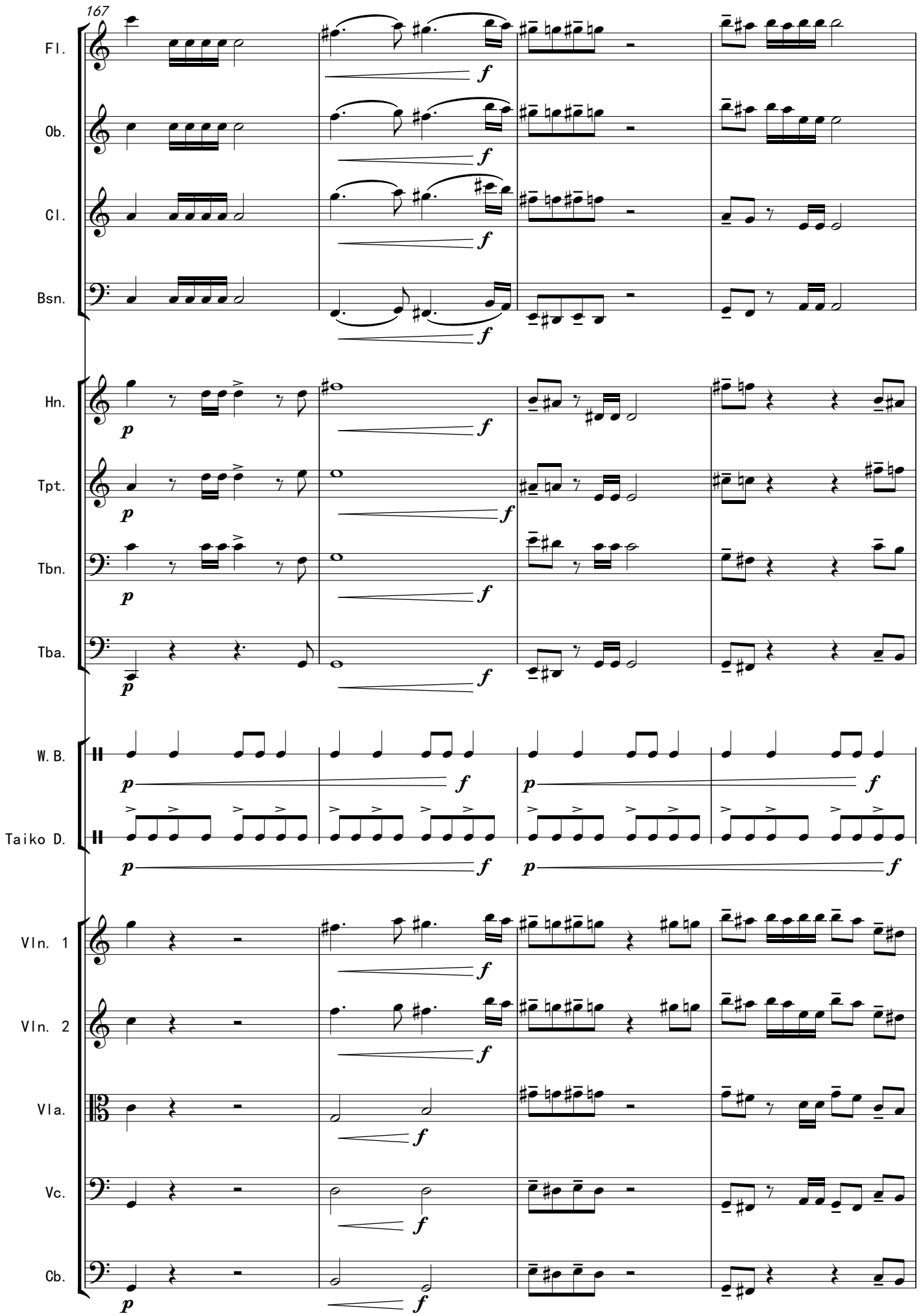
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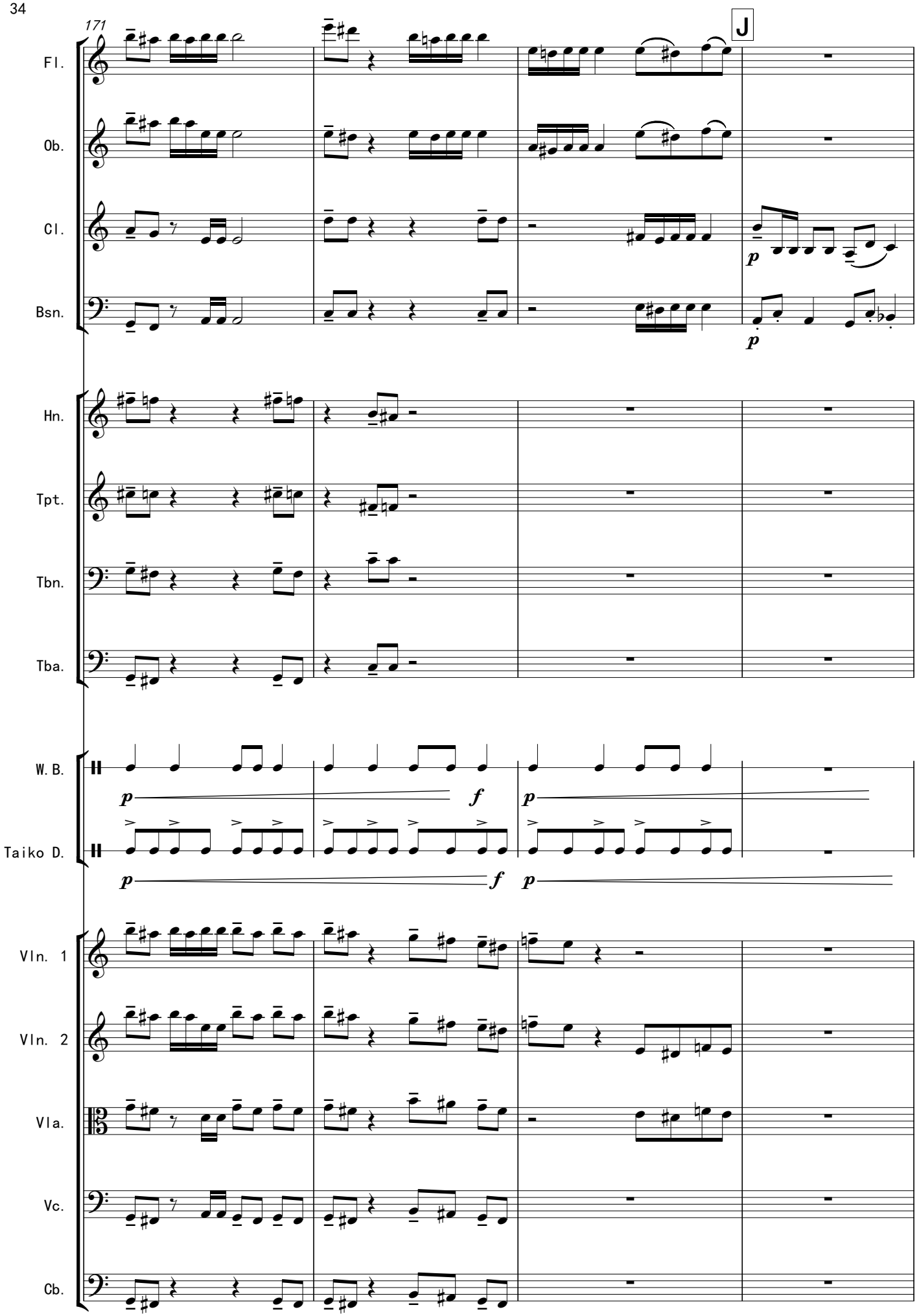
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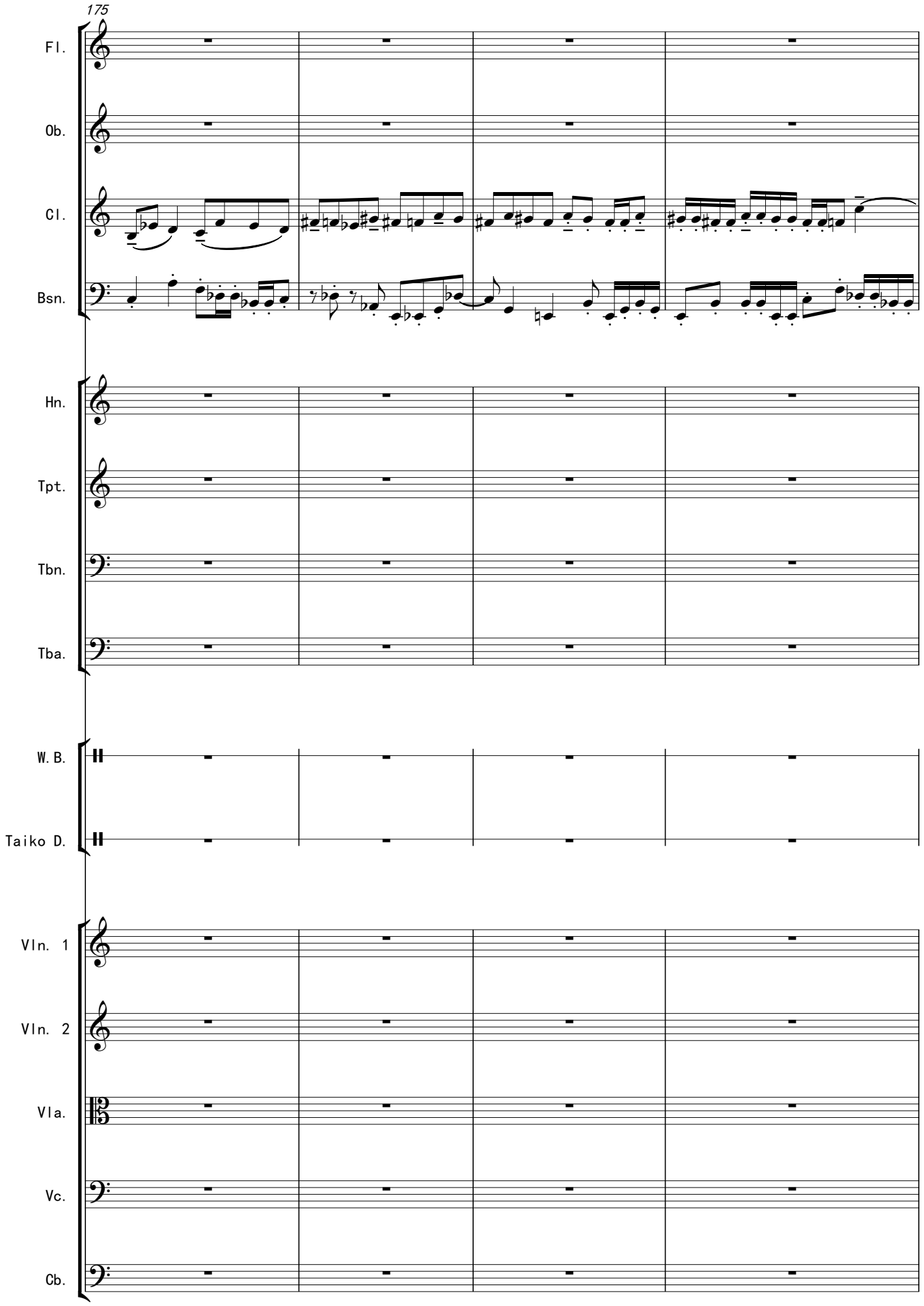
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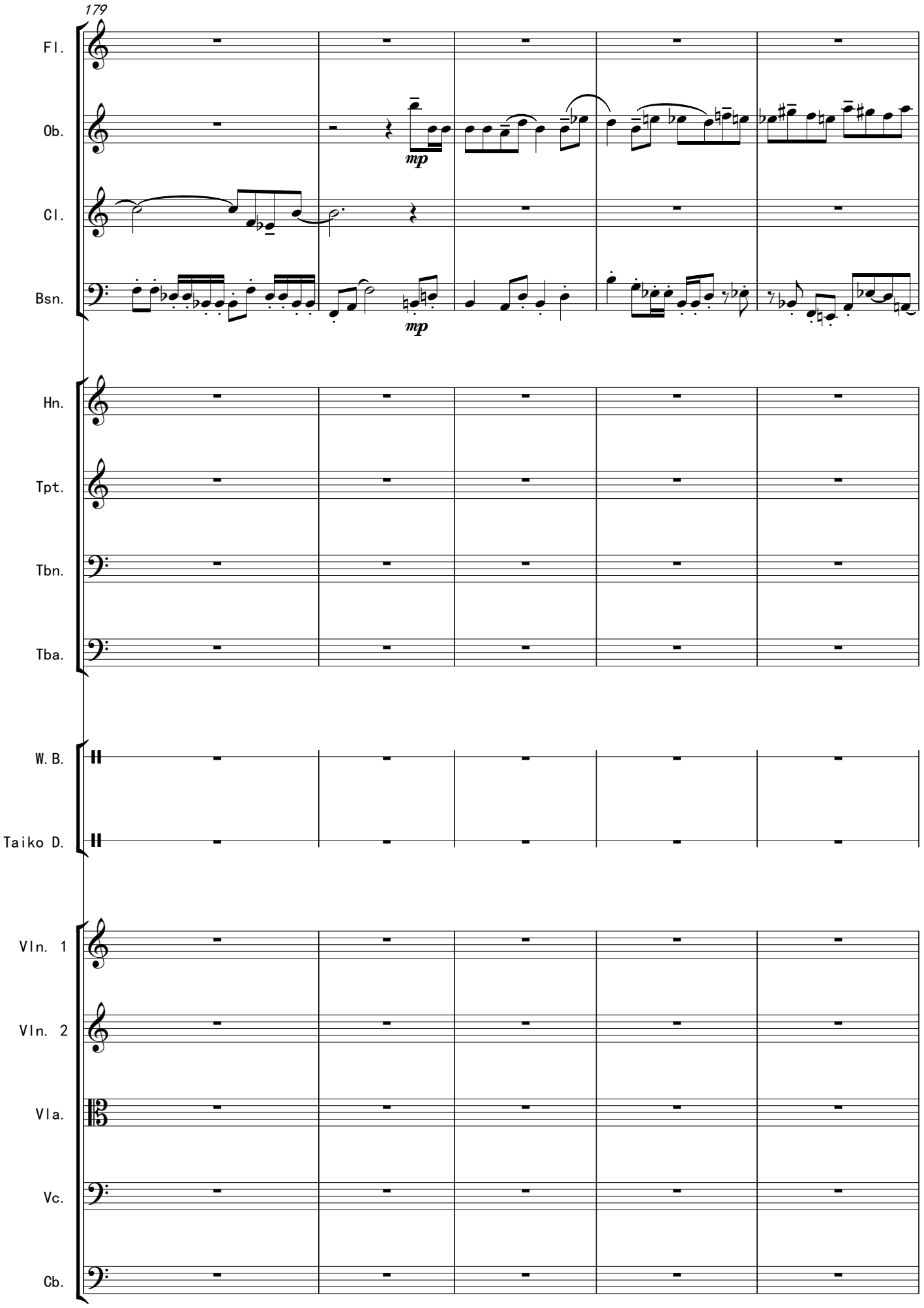
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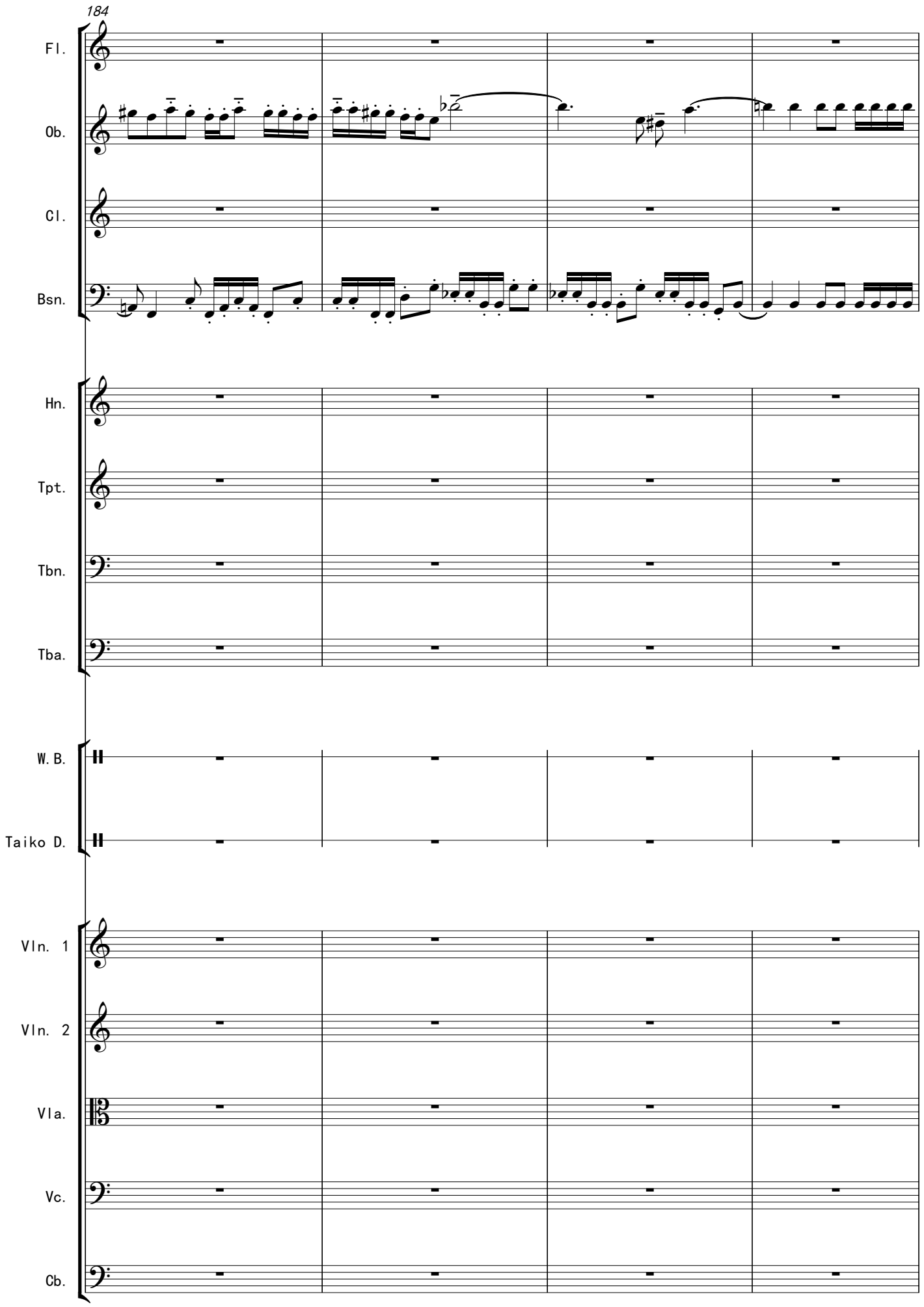
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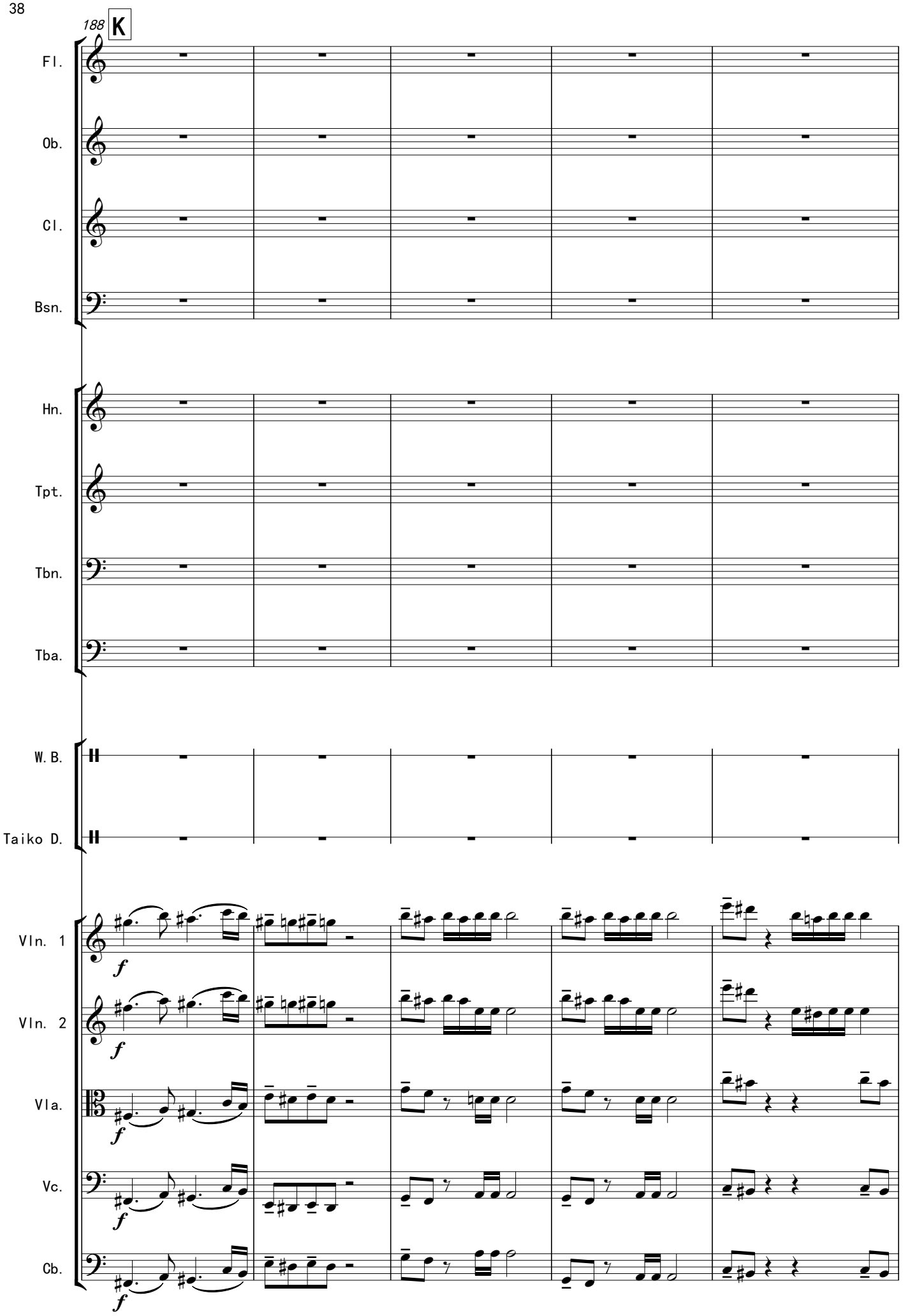
188
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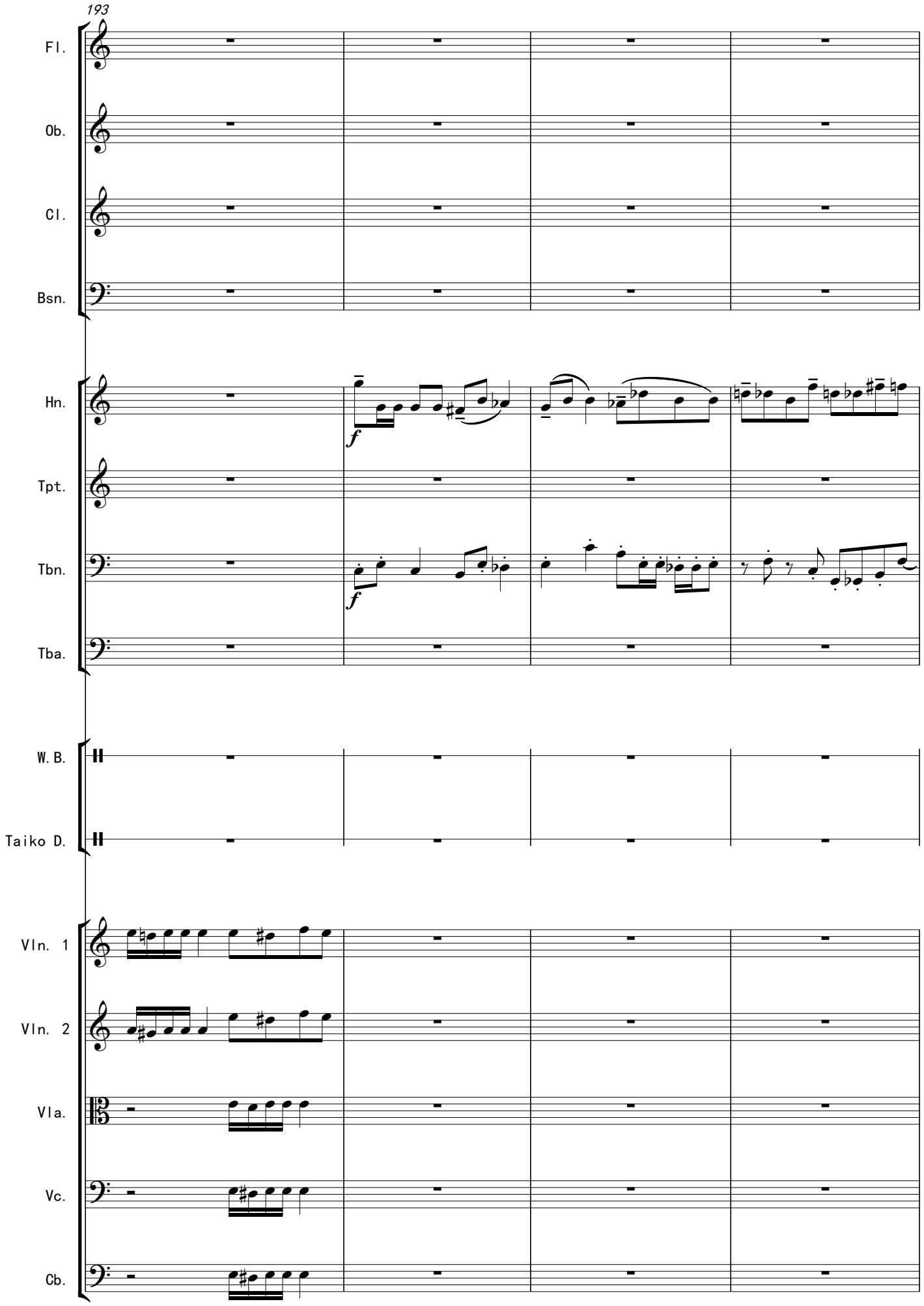
193
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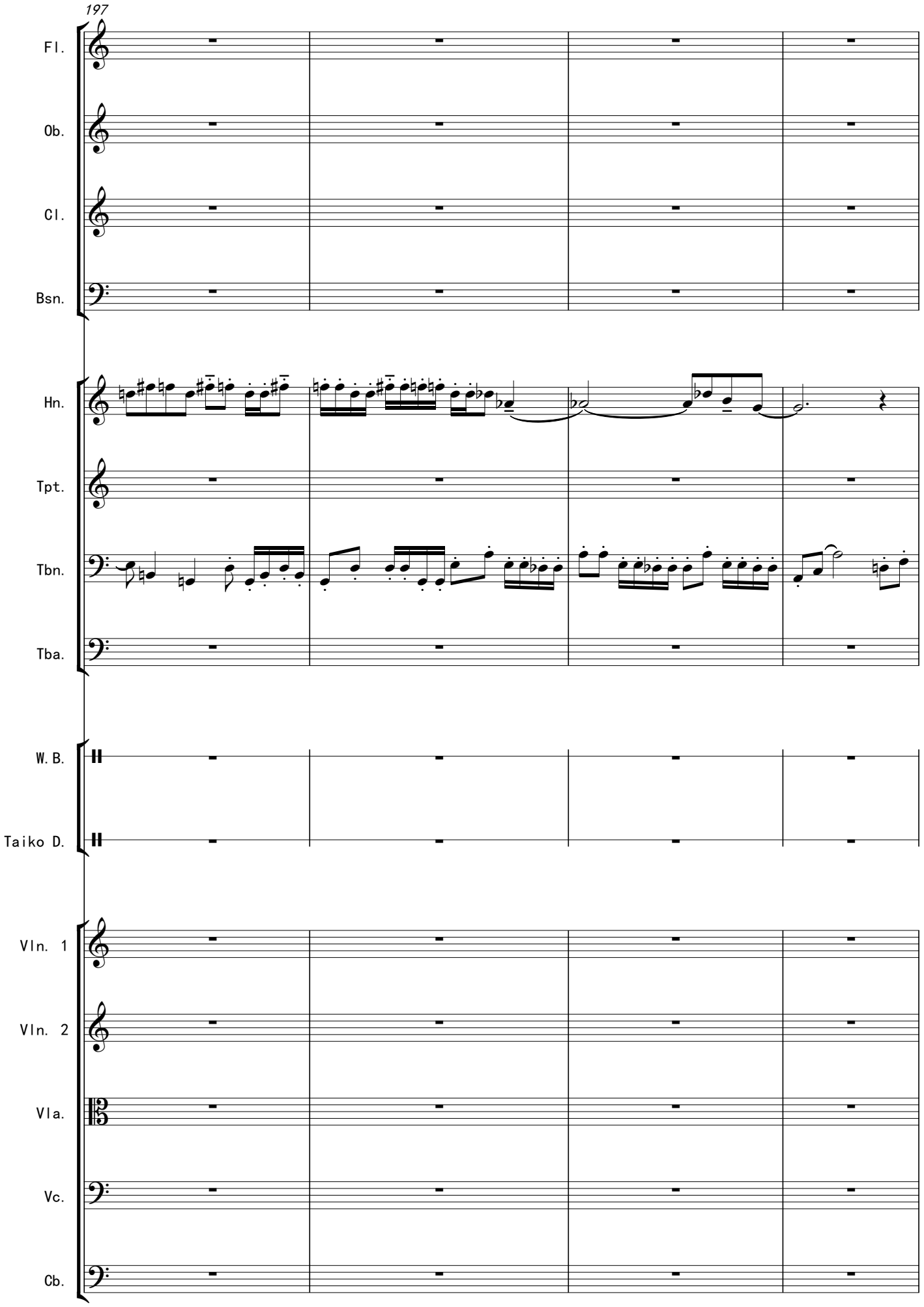
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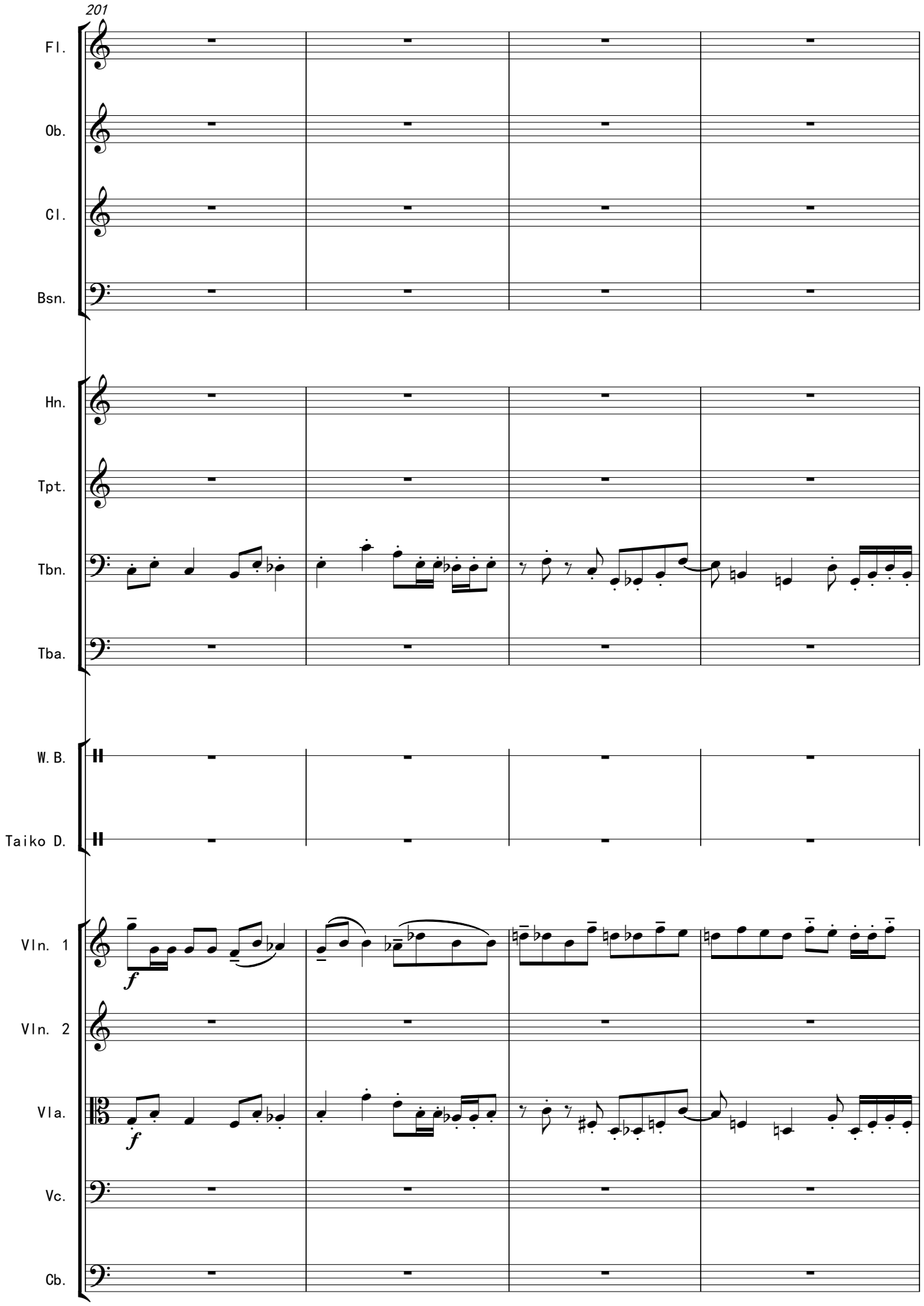
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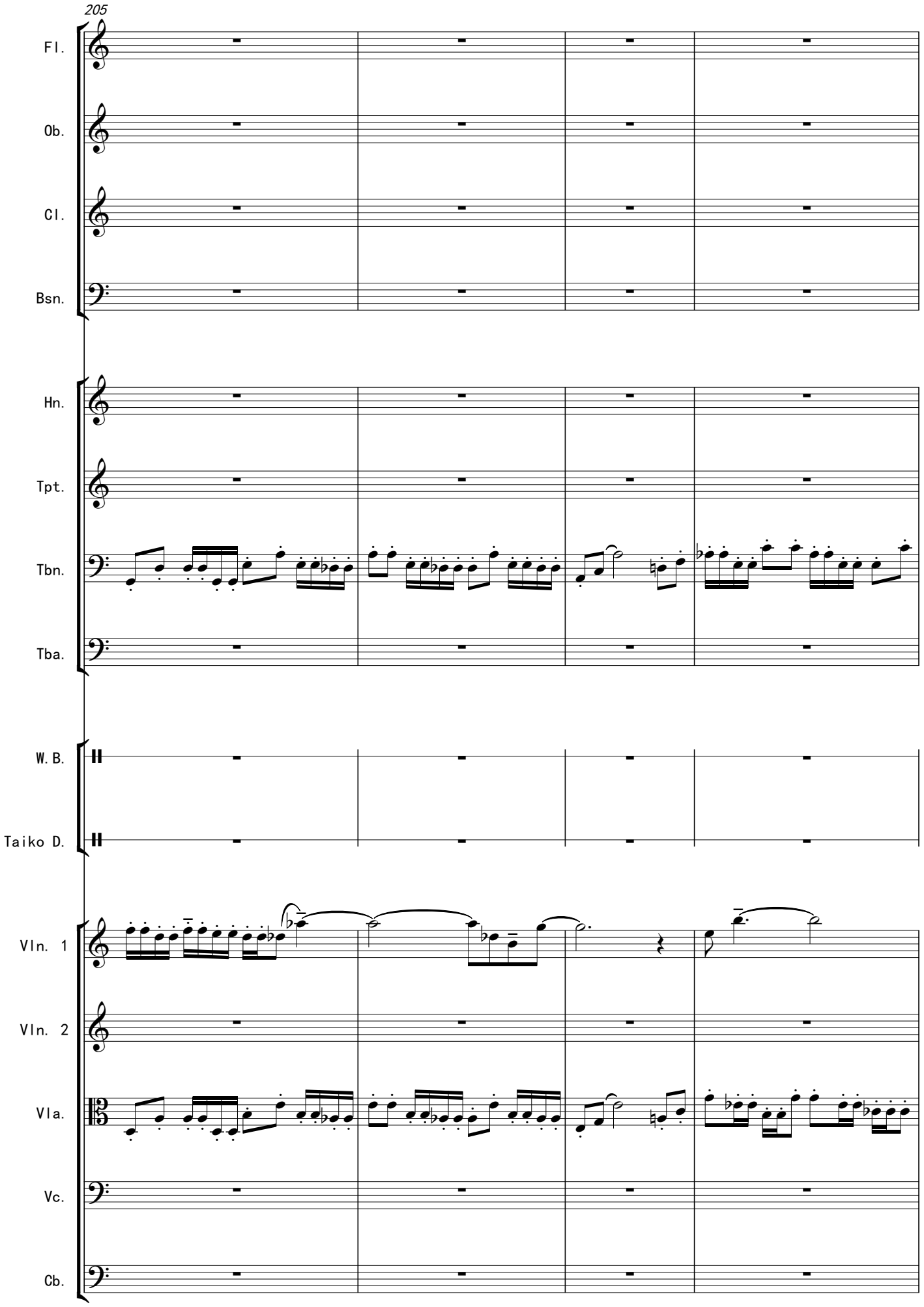
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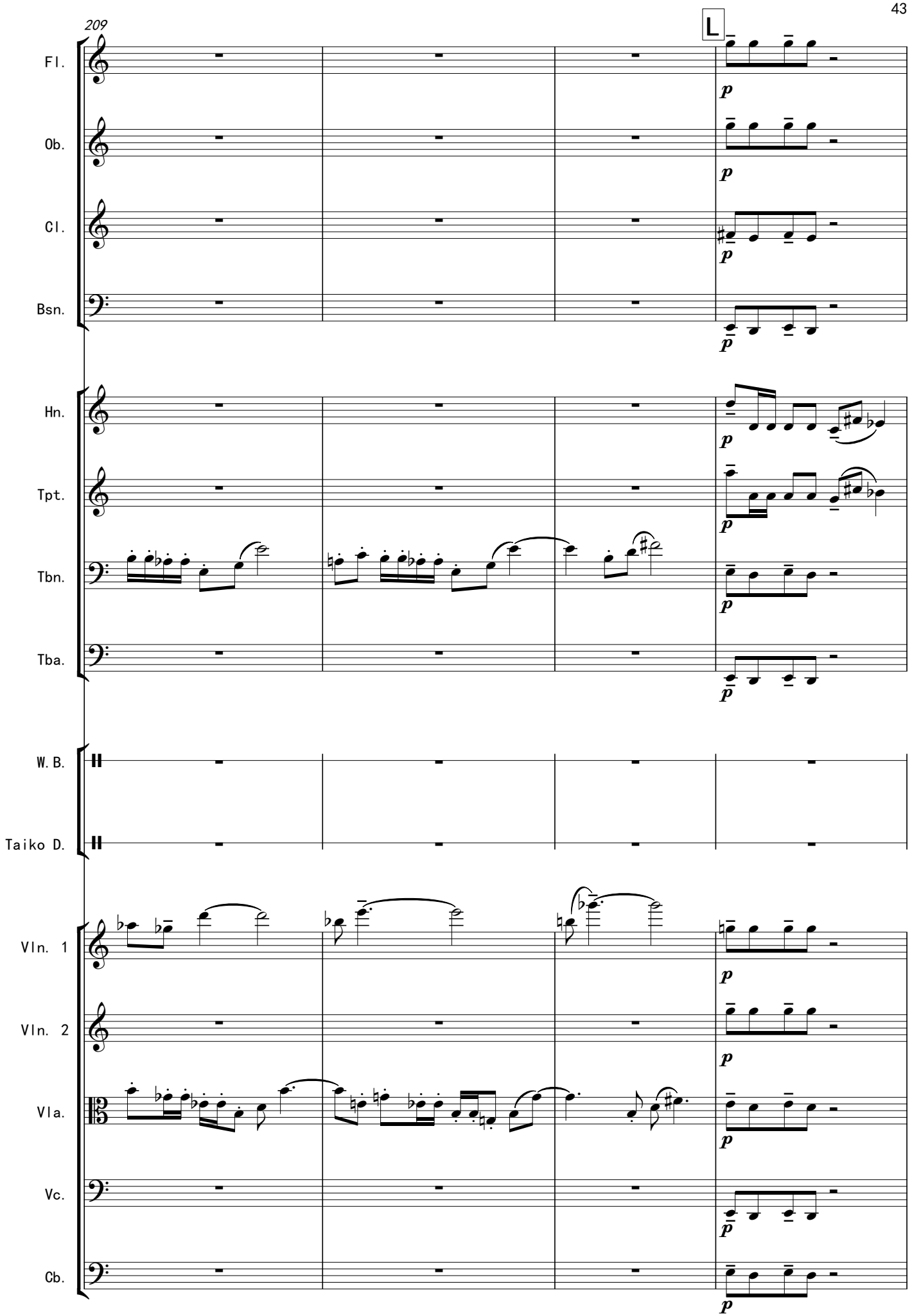
209
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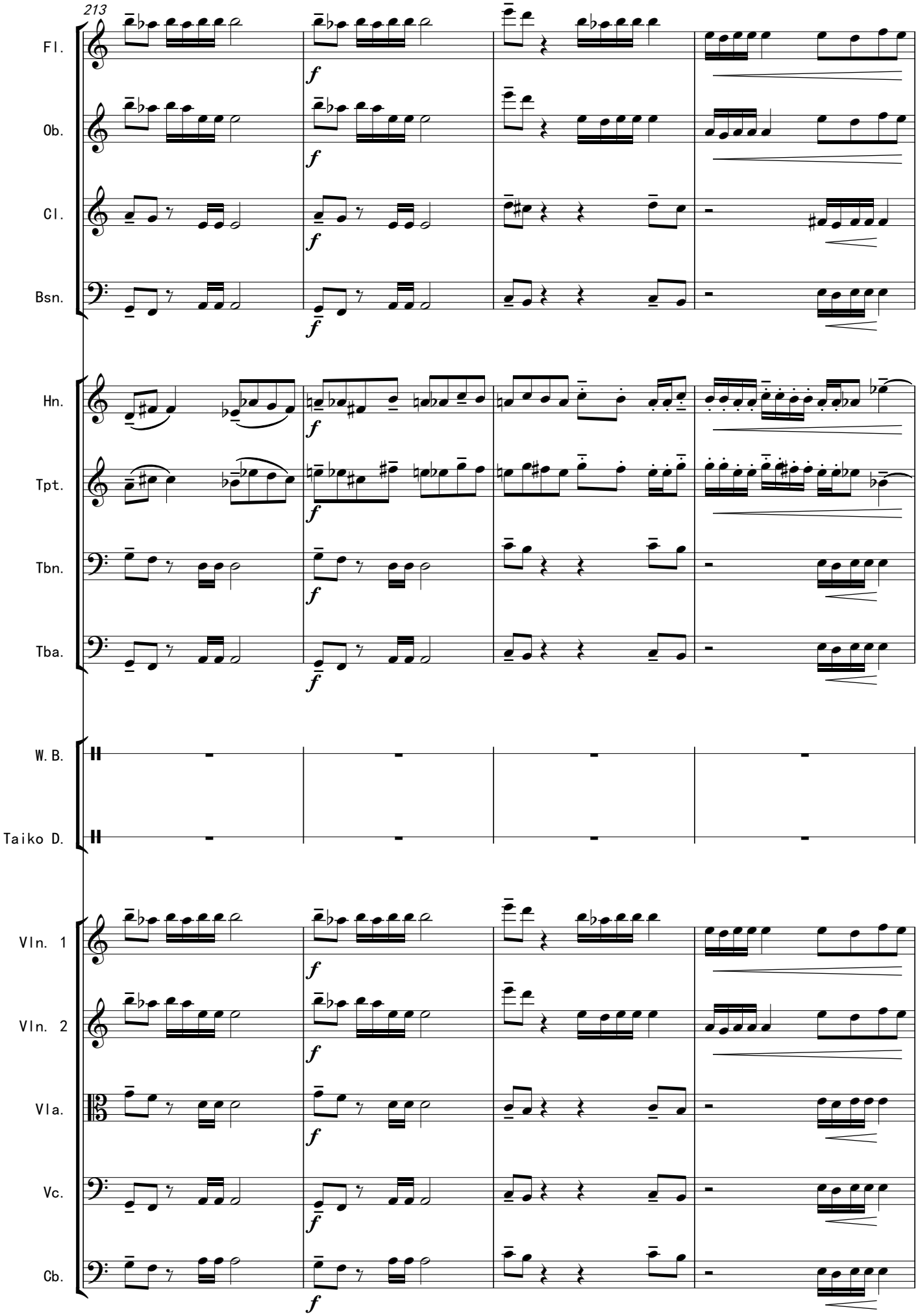
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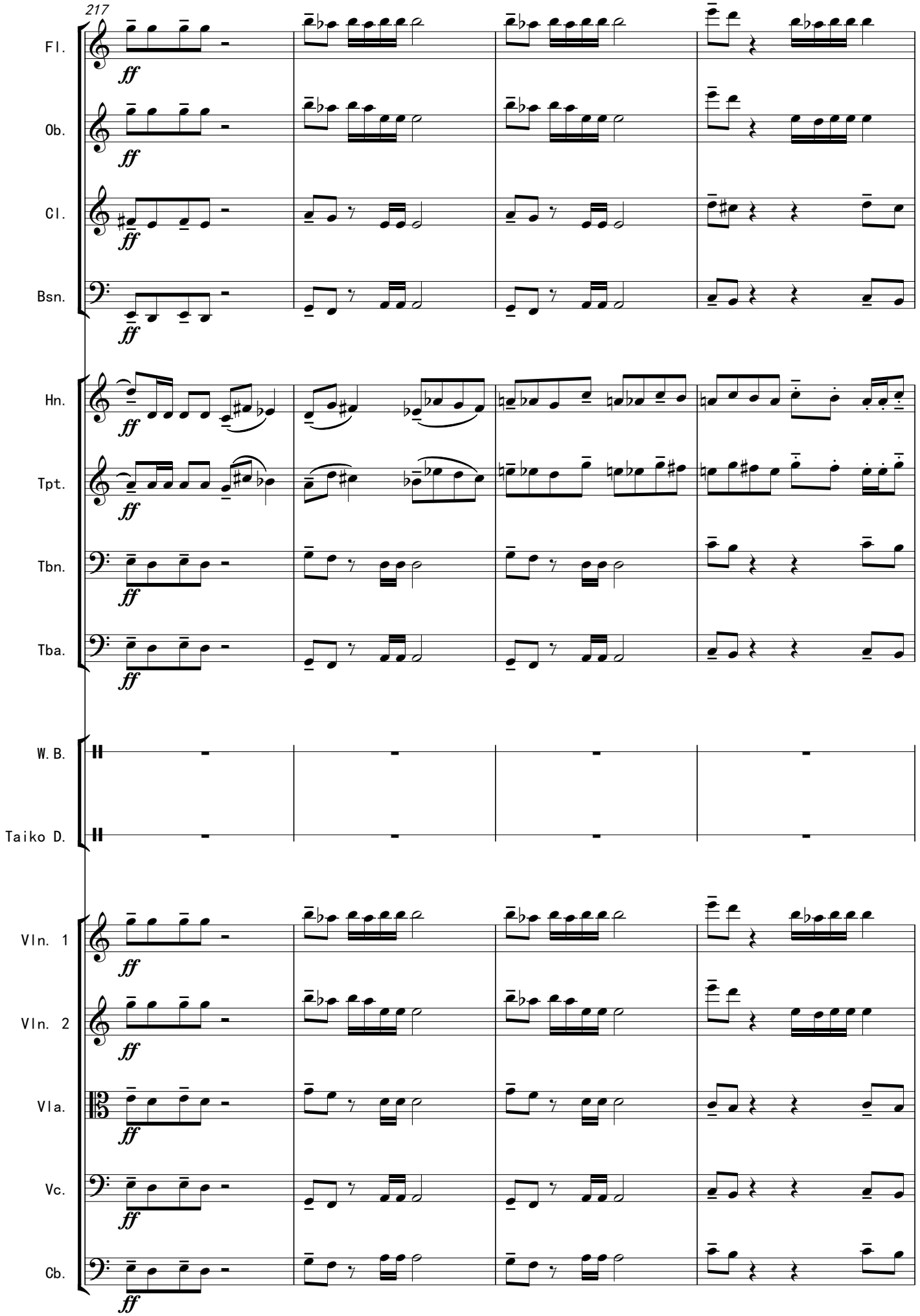
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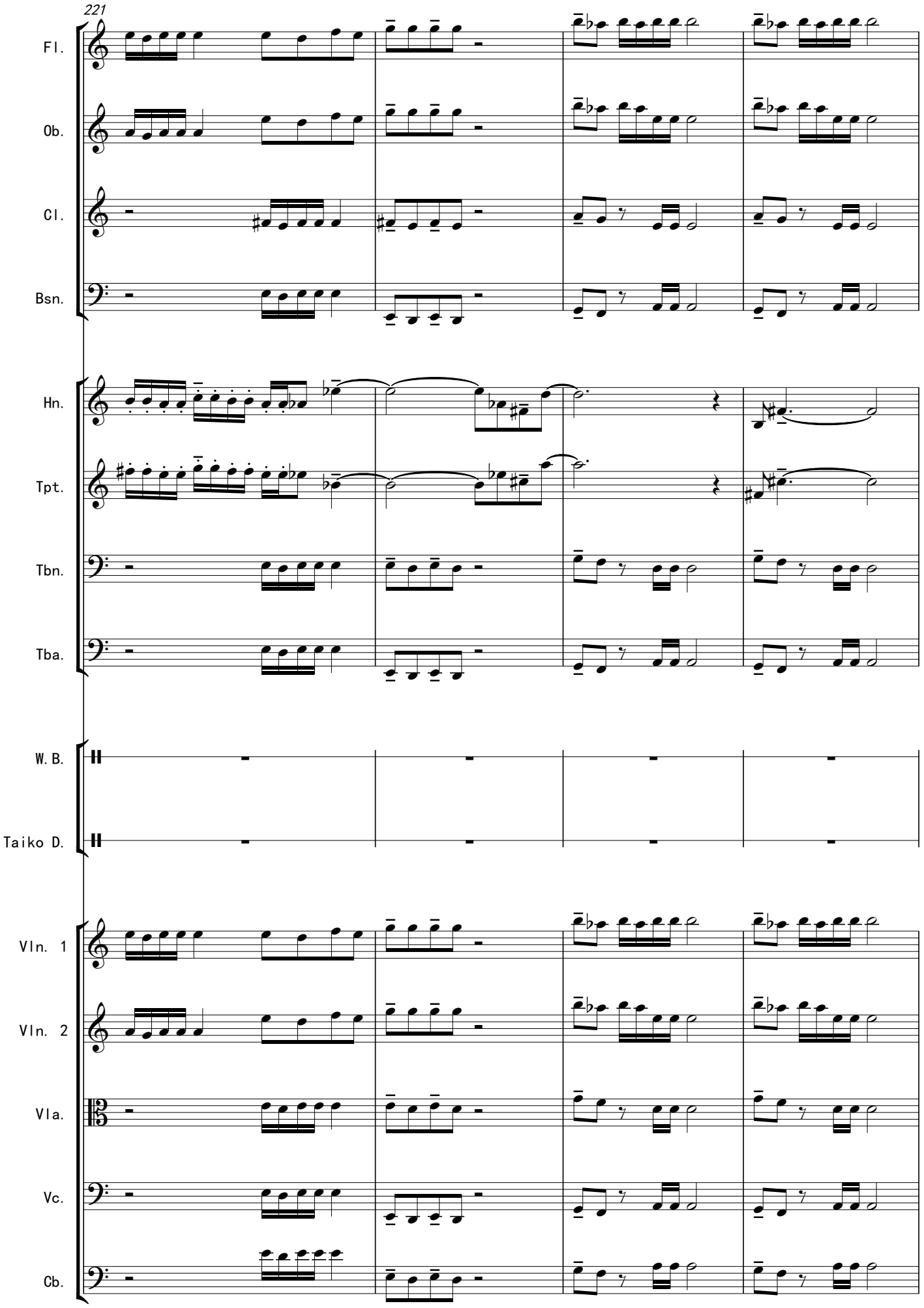
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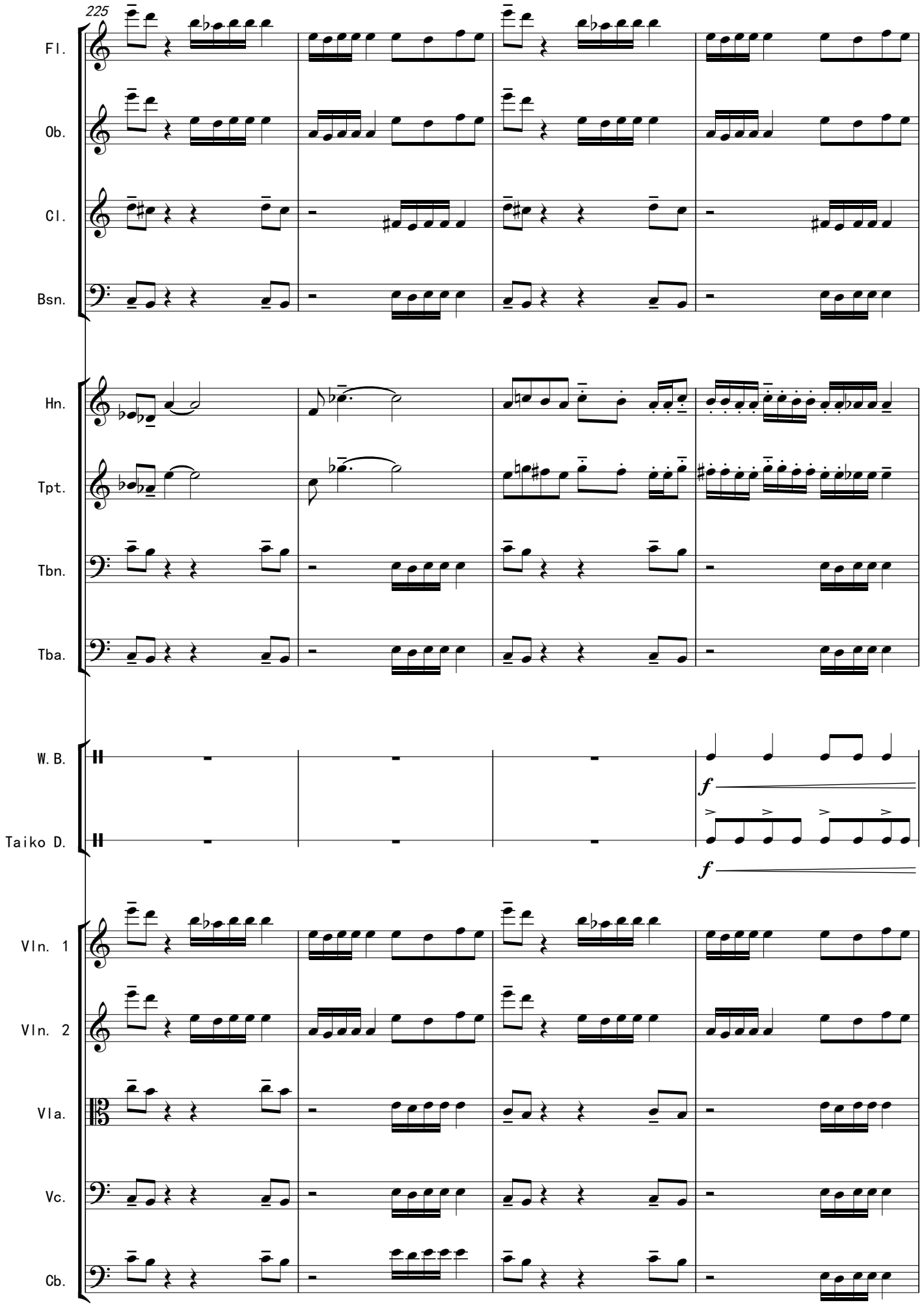
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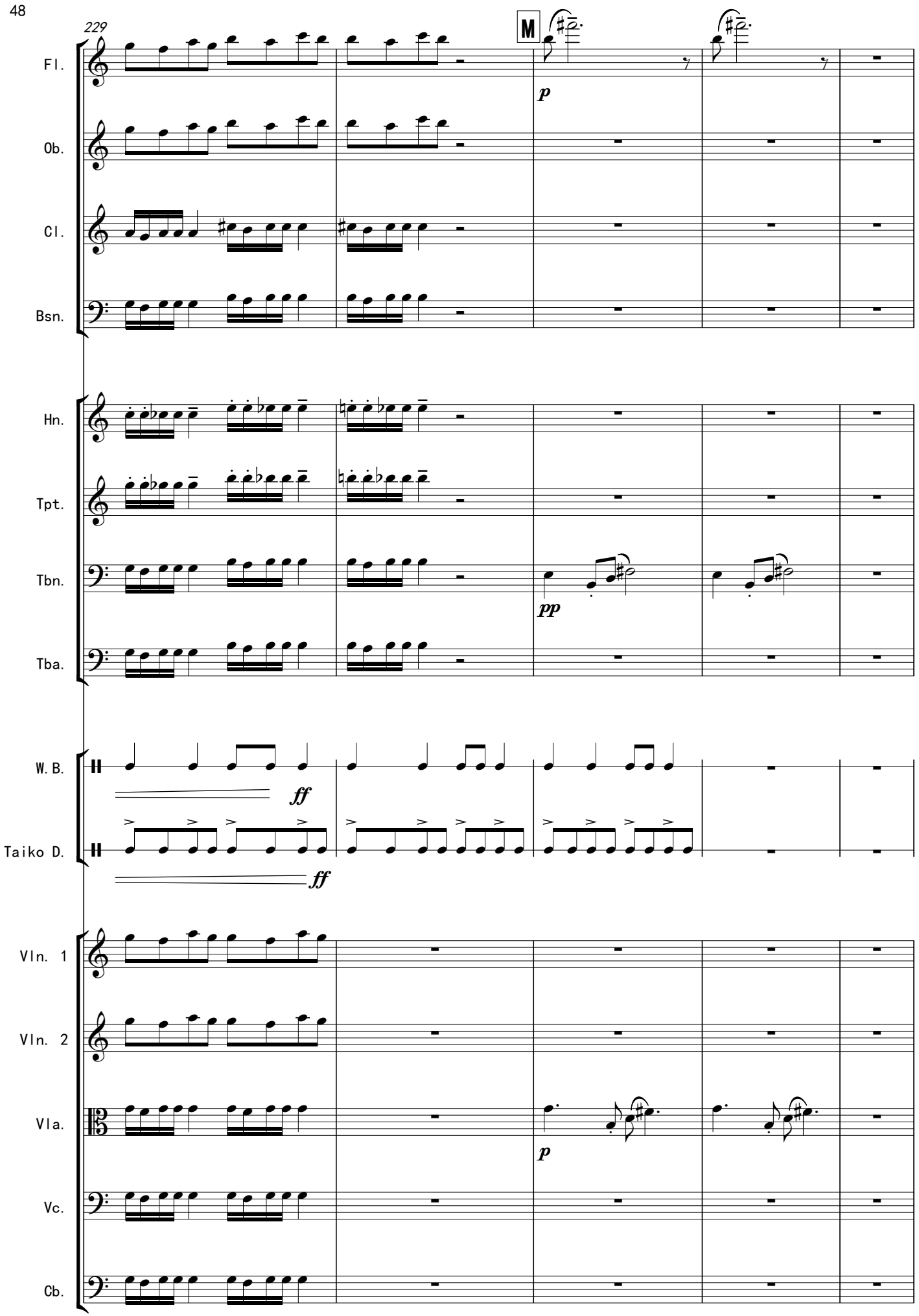
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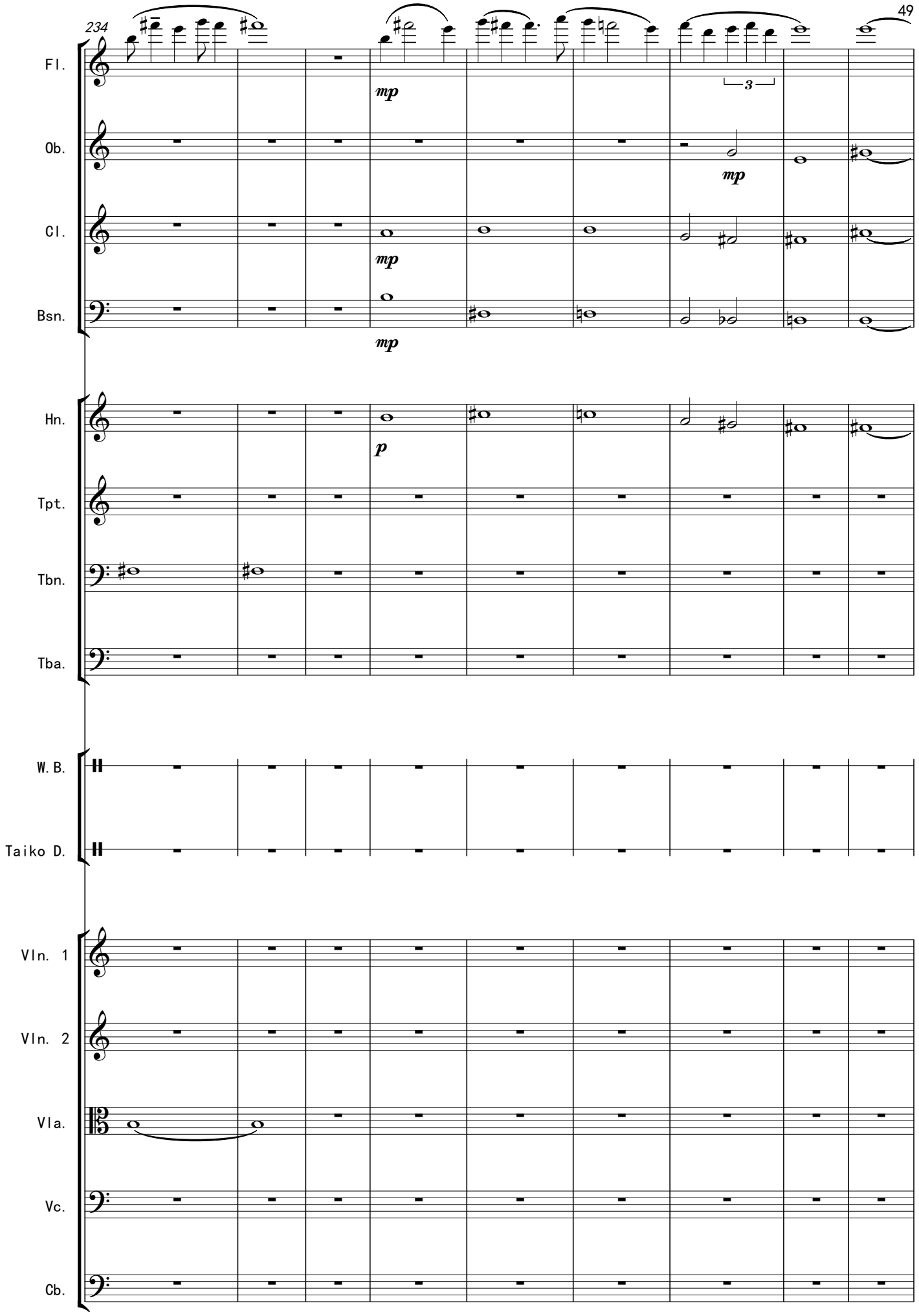
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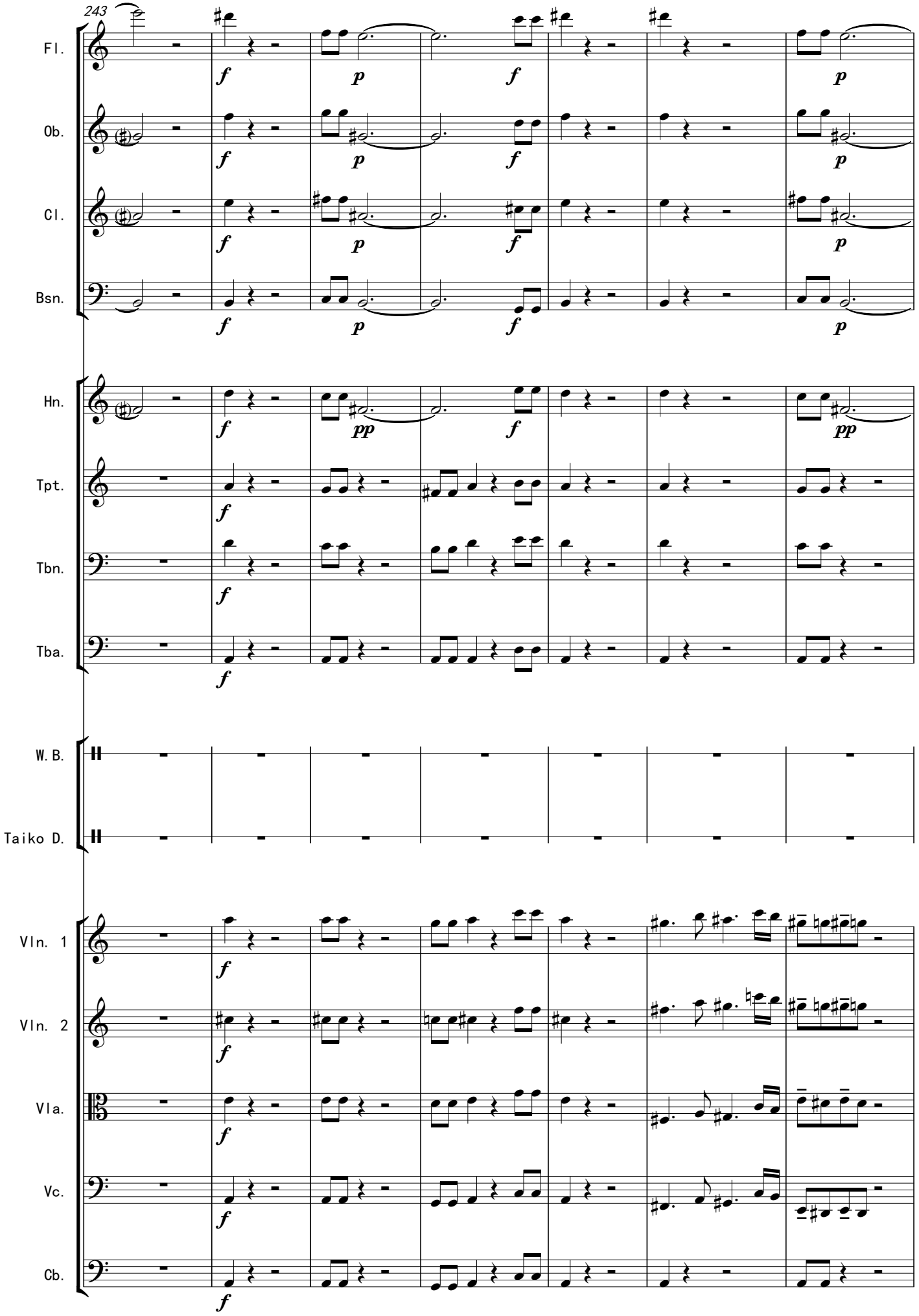
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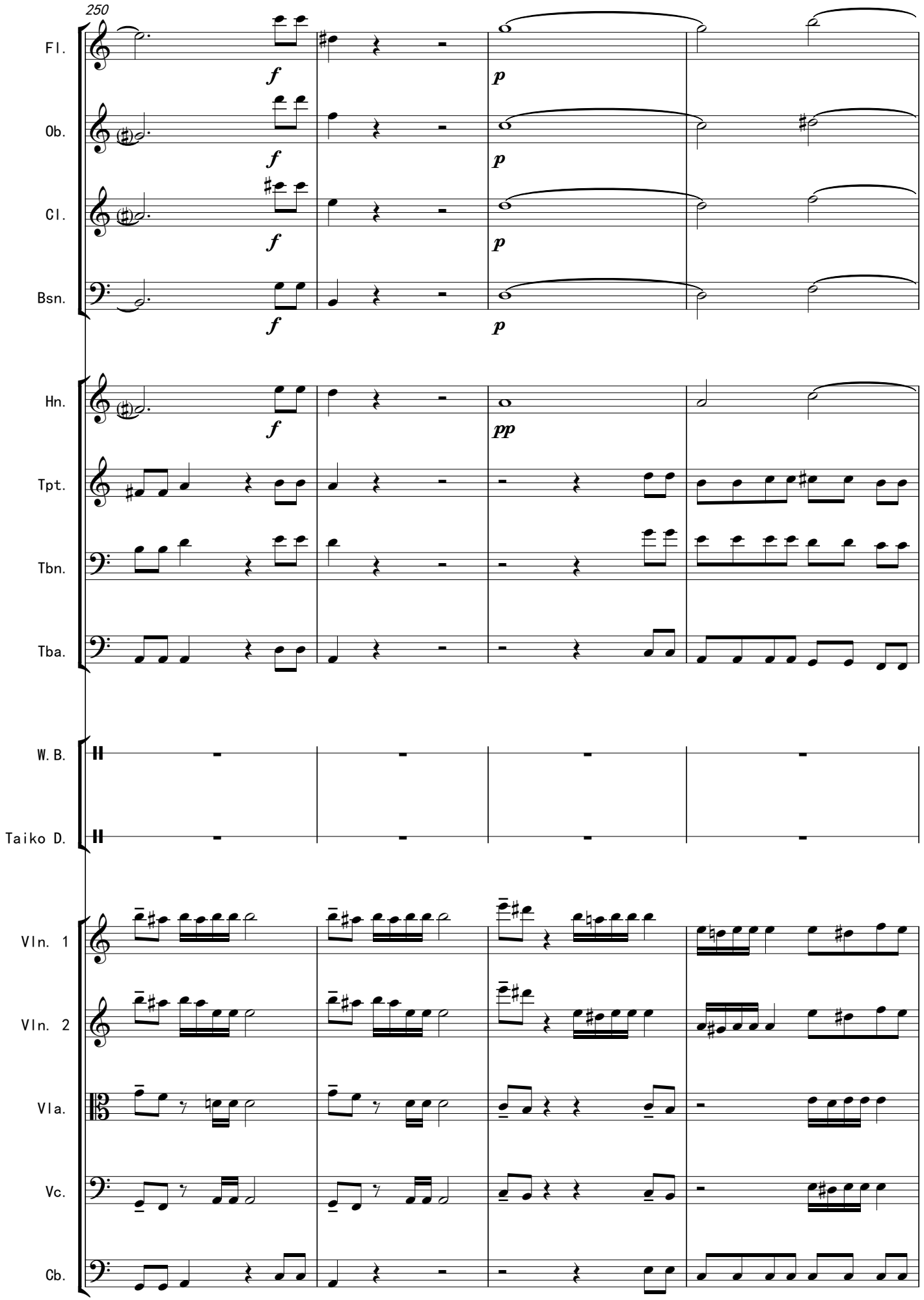
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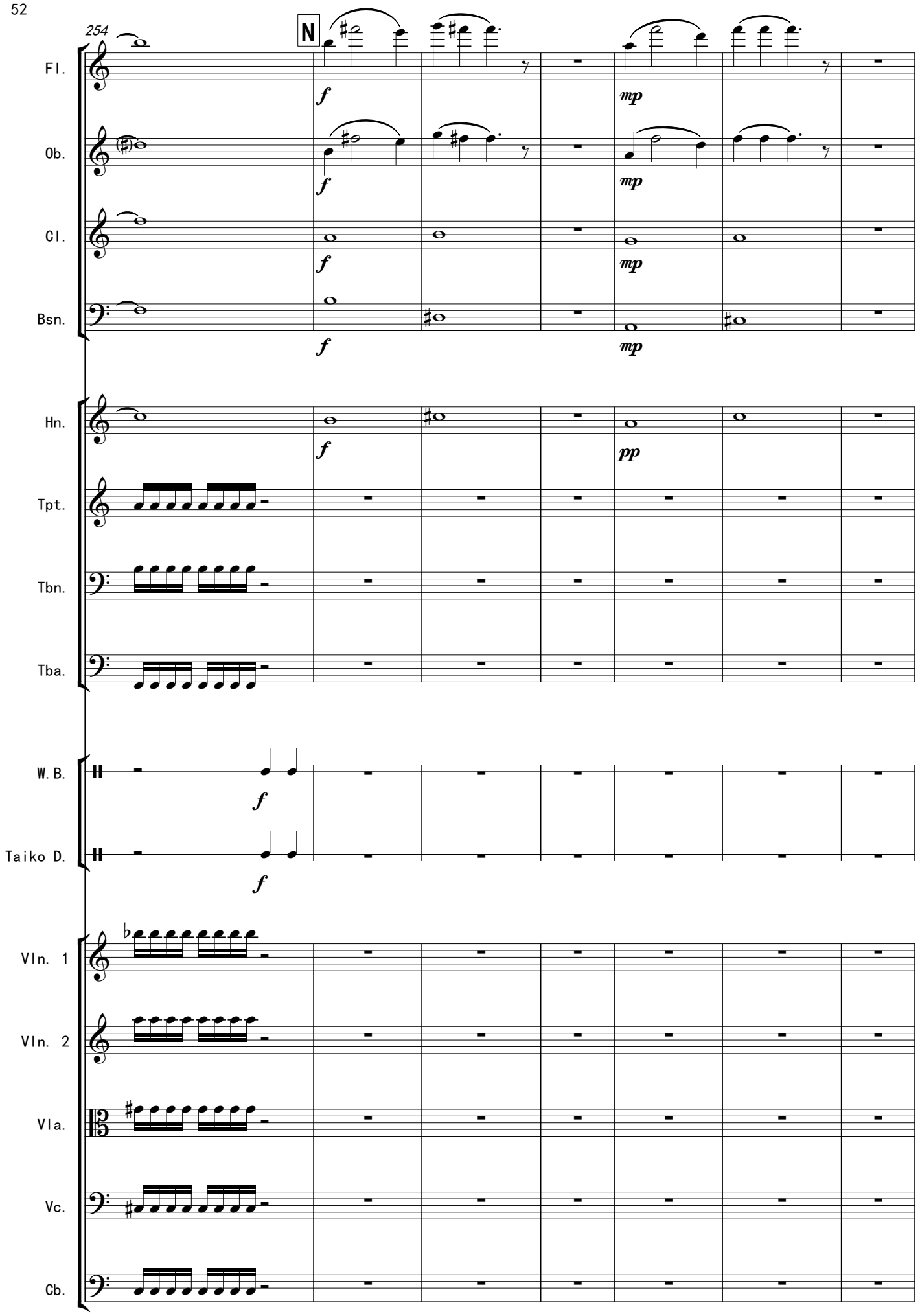
254
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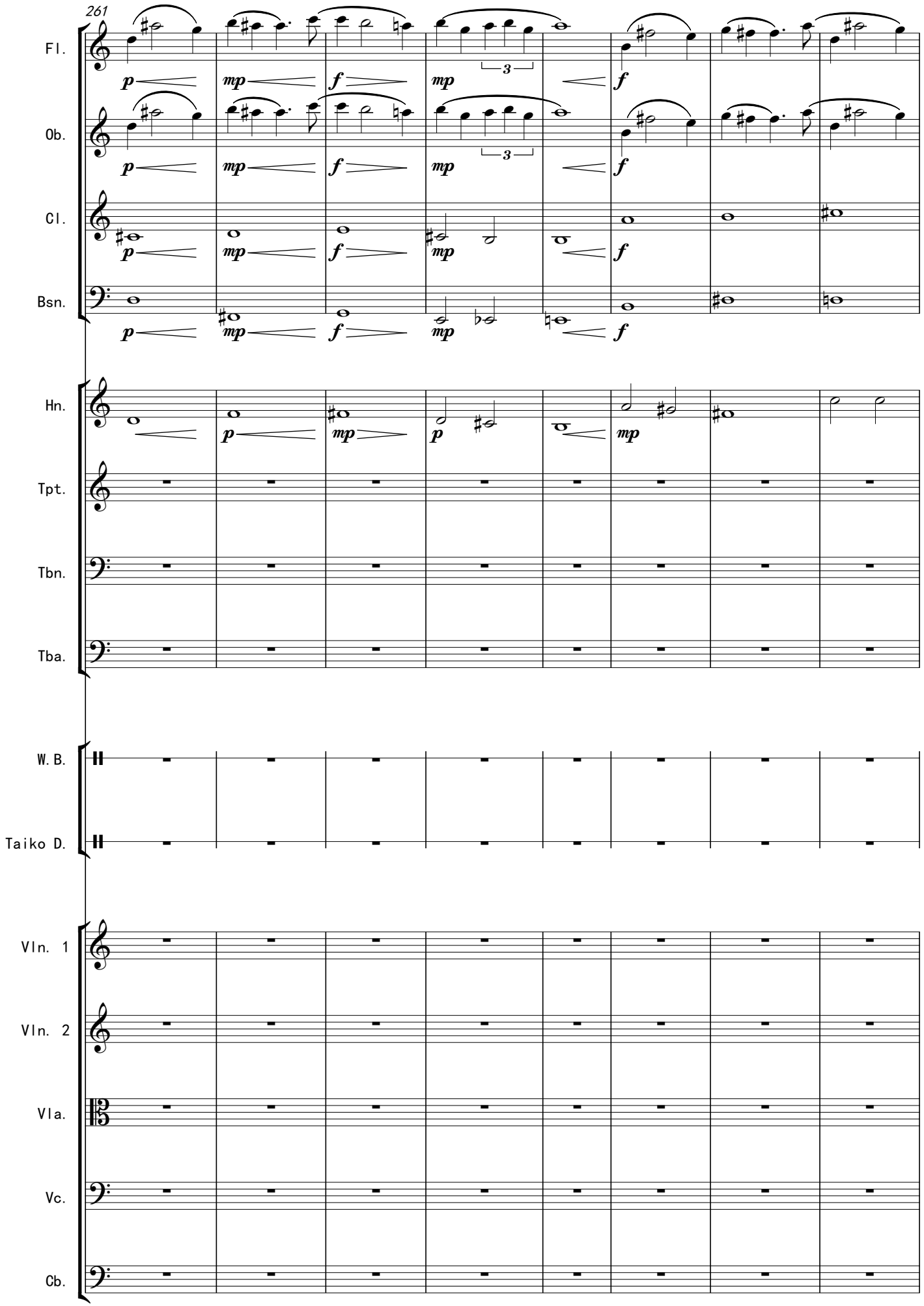
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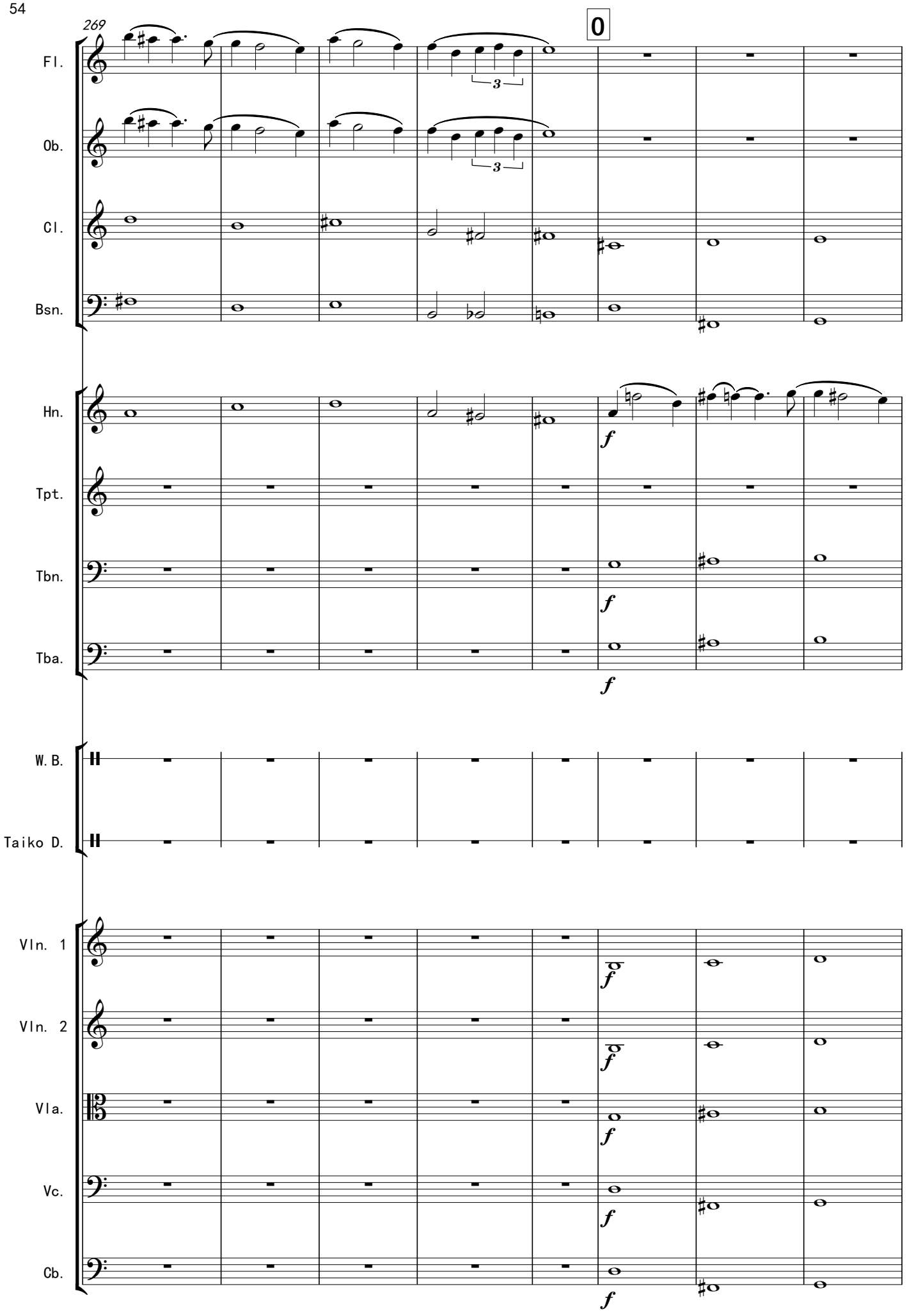
269
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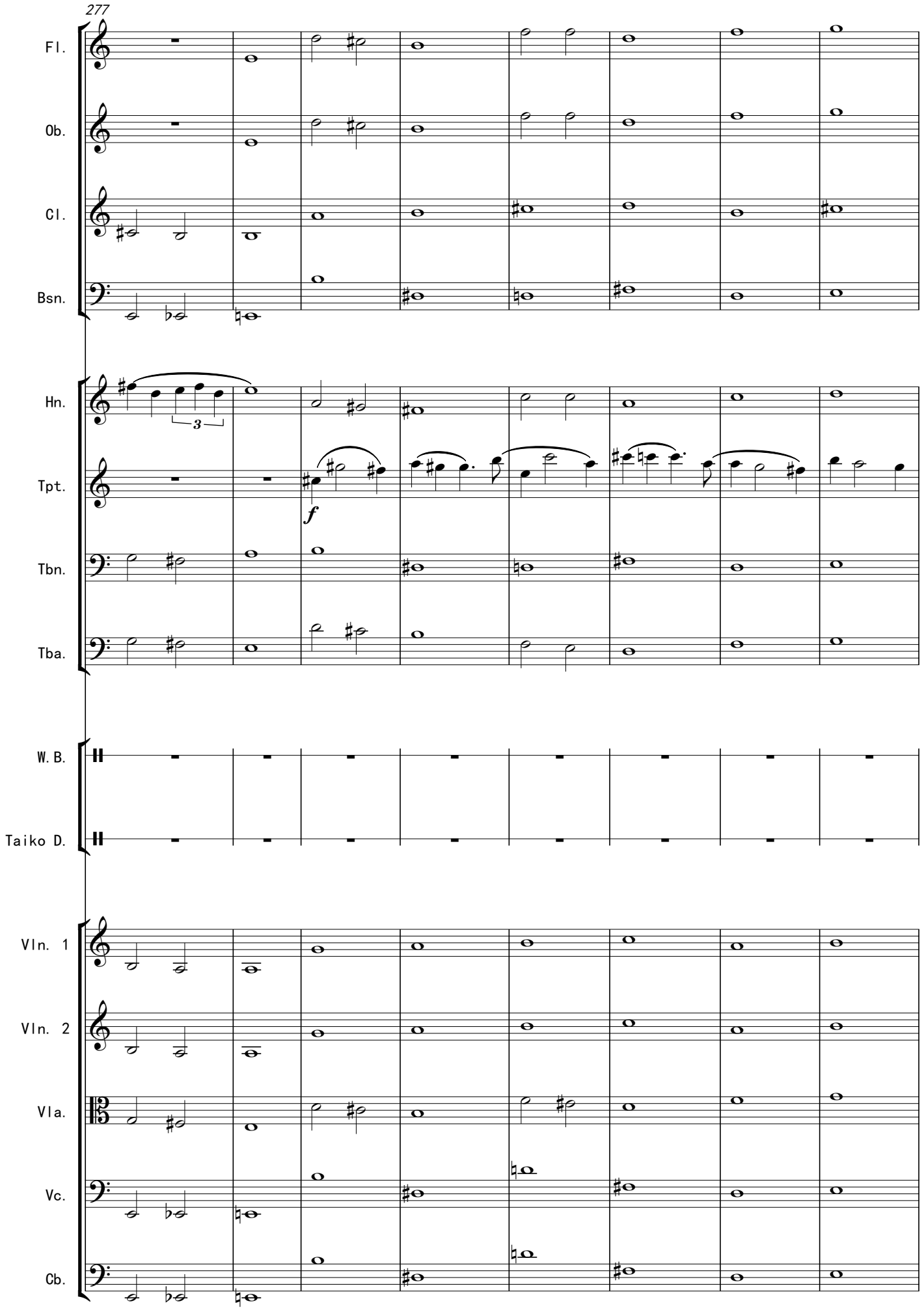
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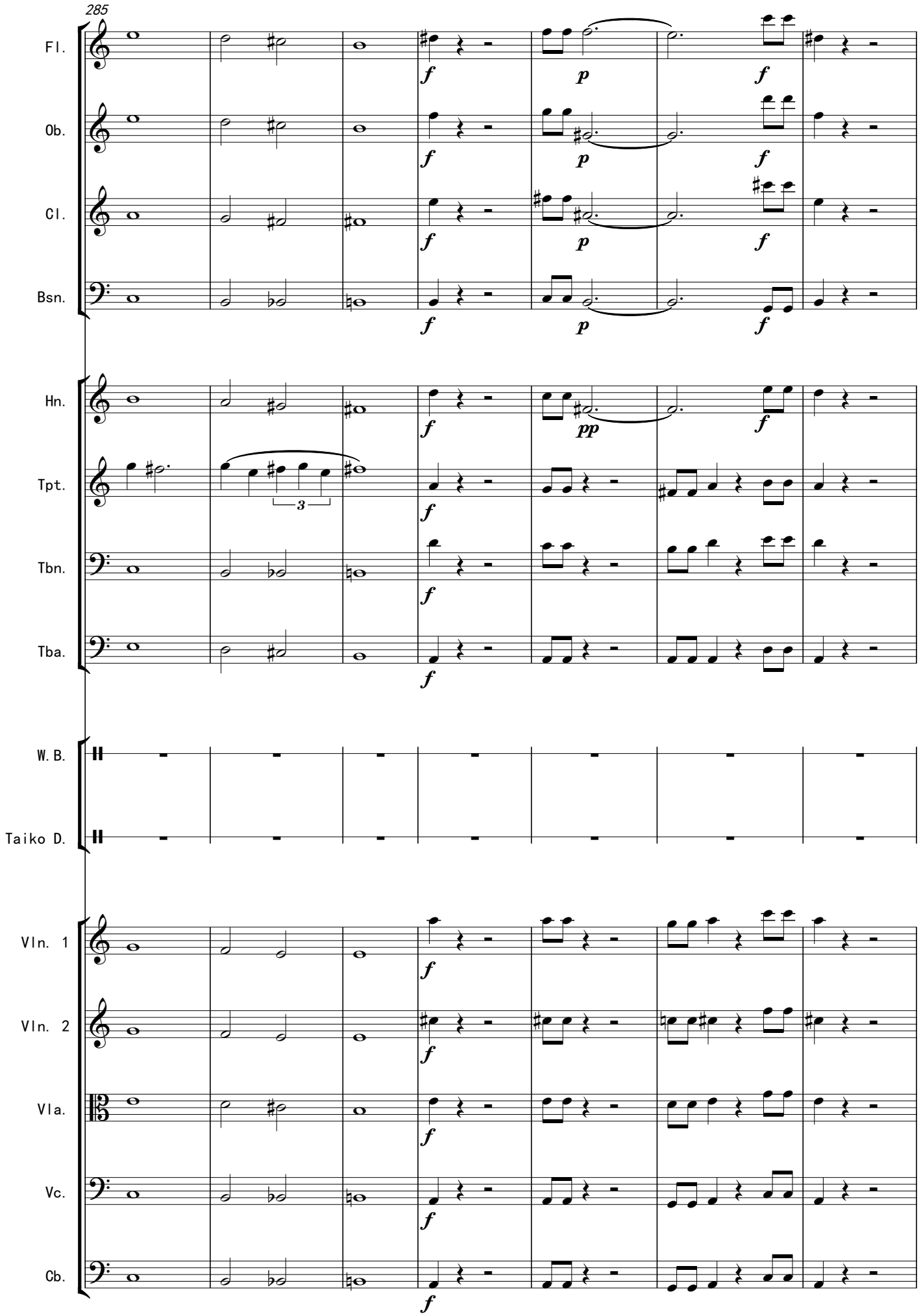
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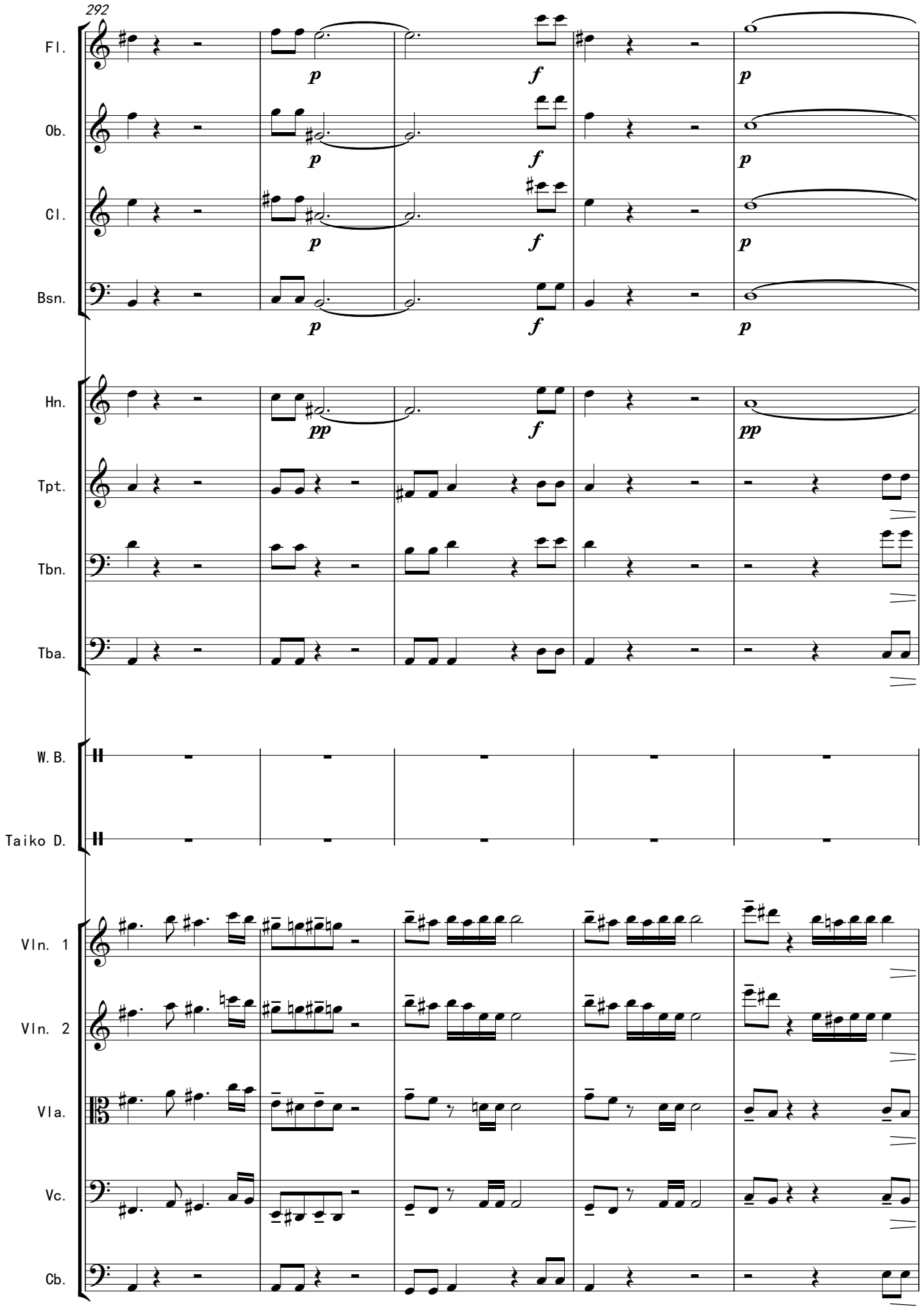
292
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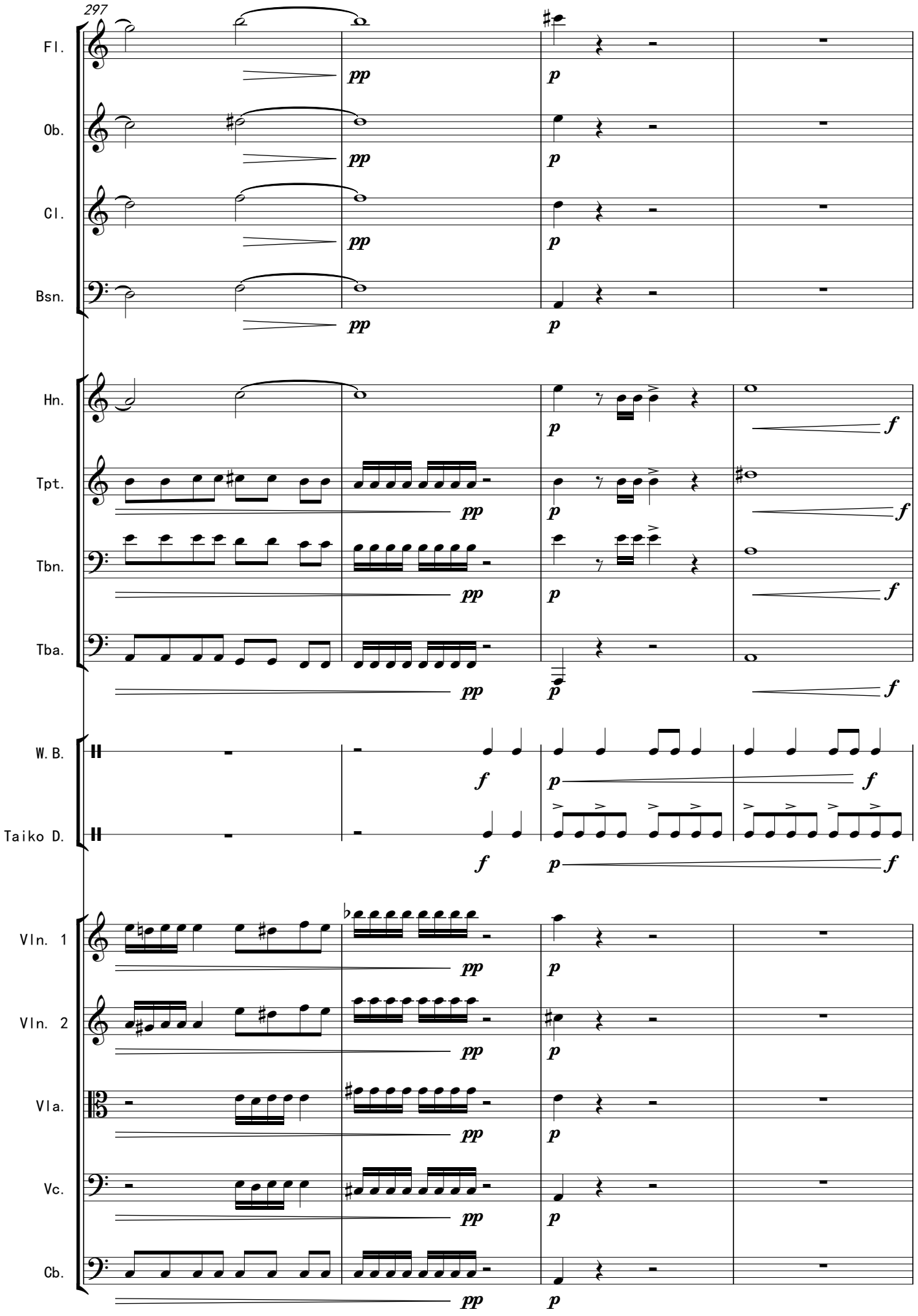
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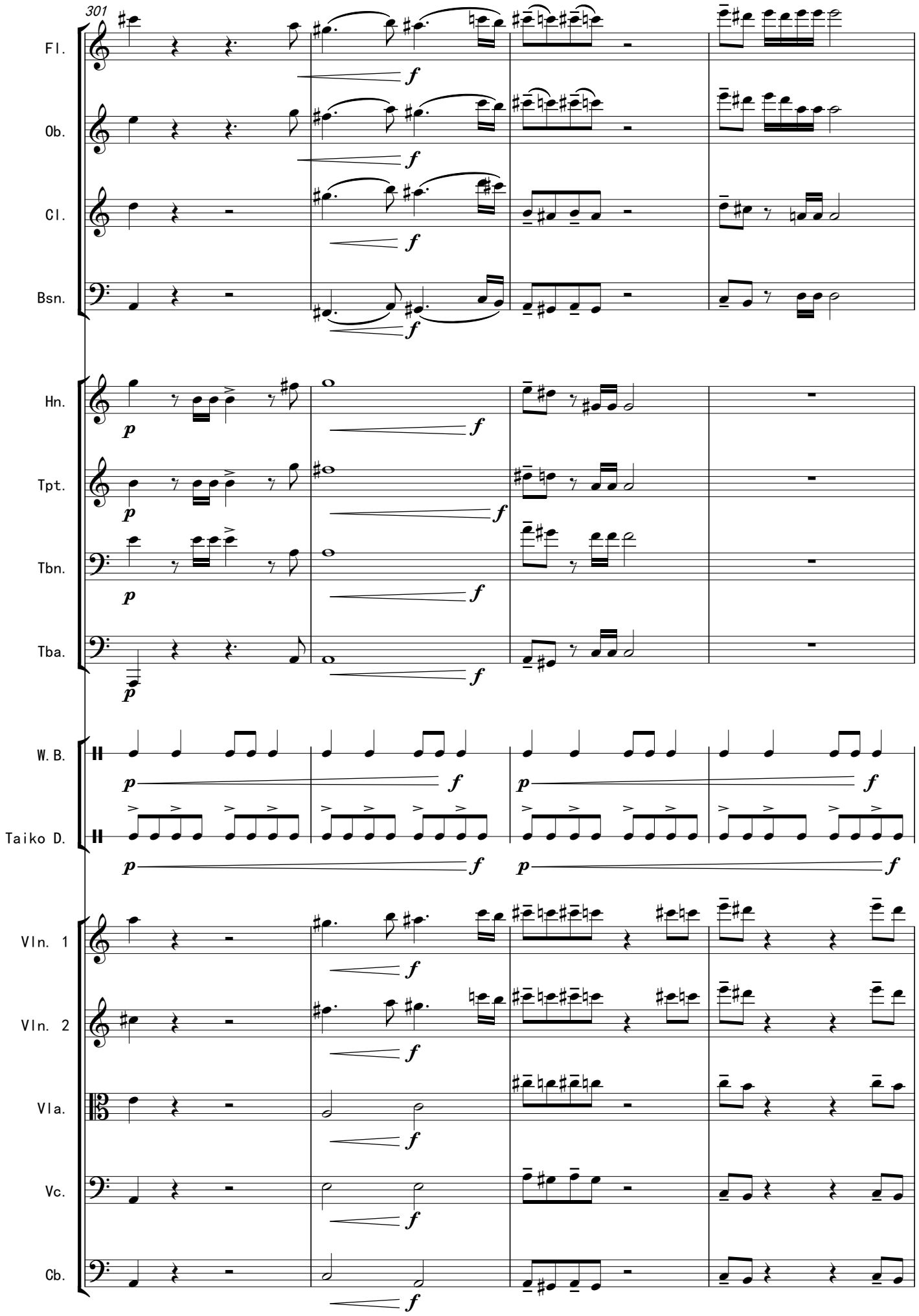
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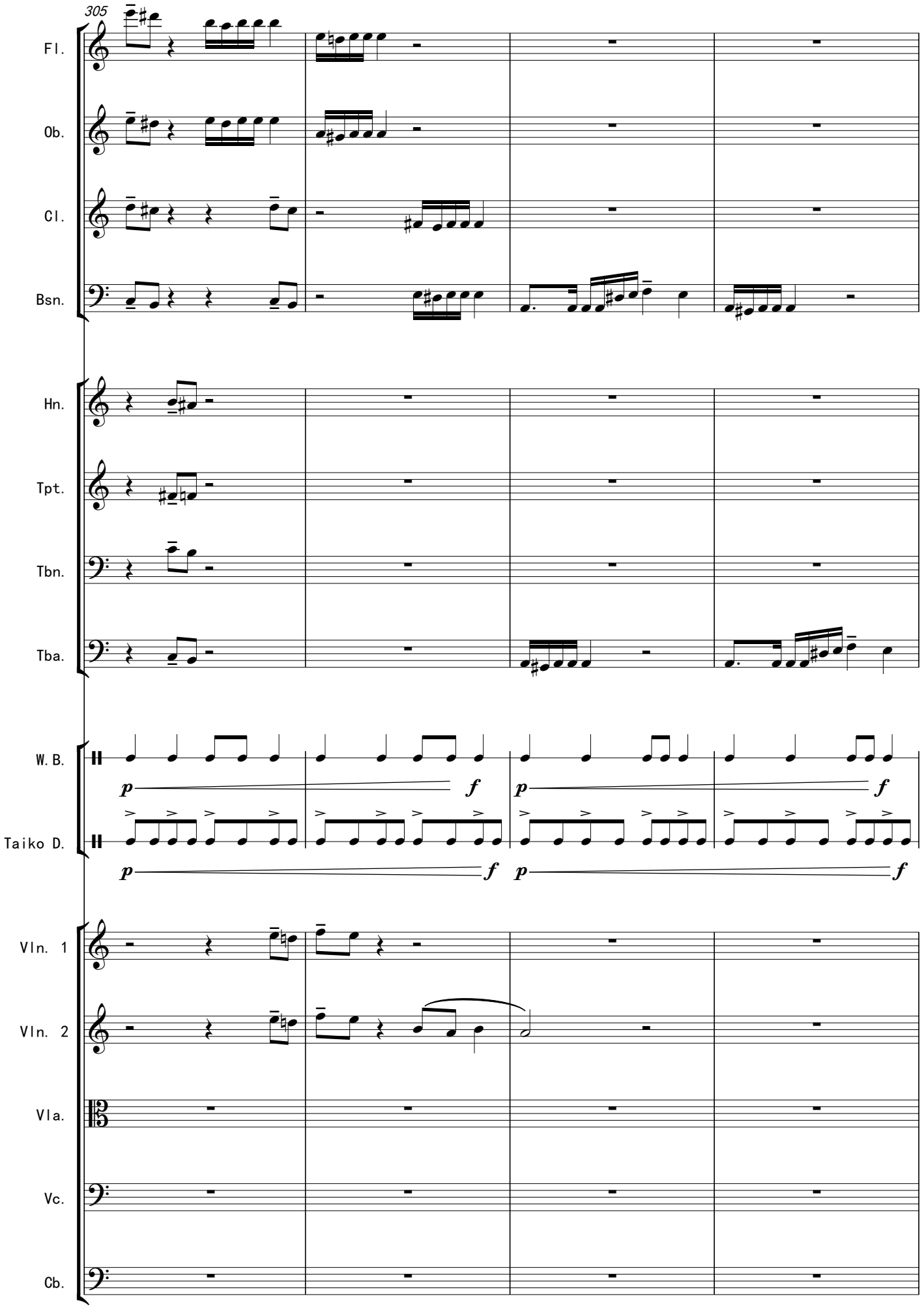
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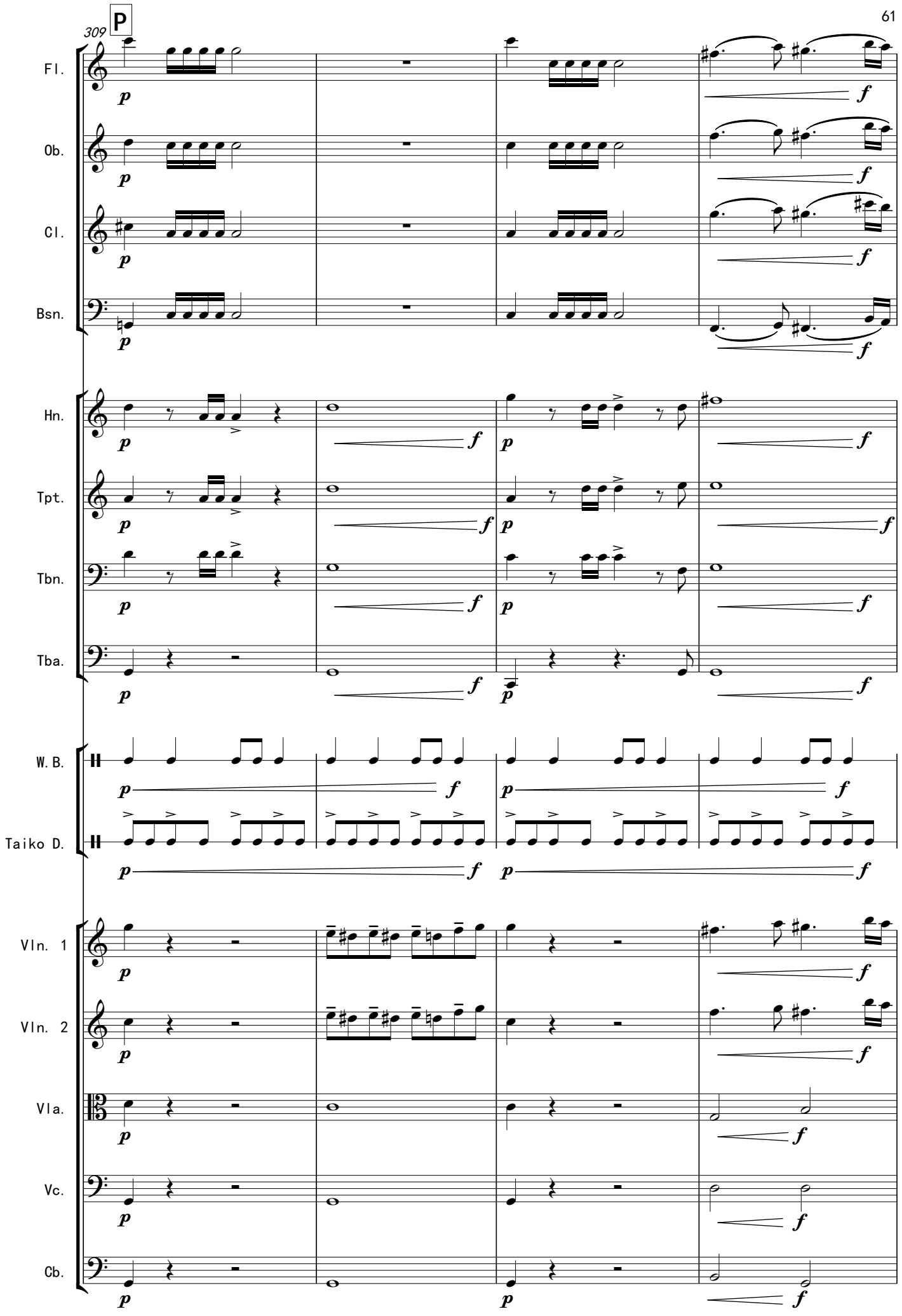
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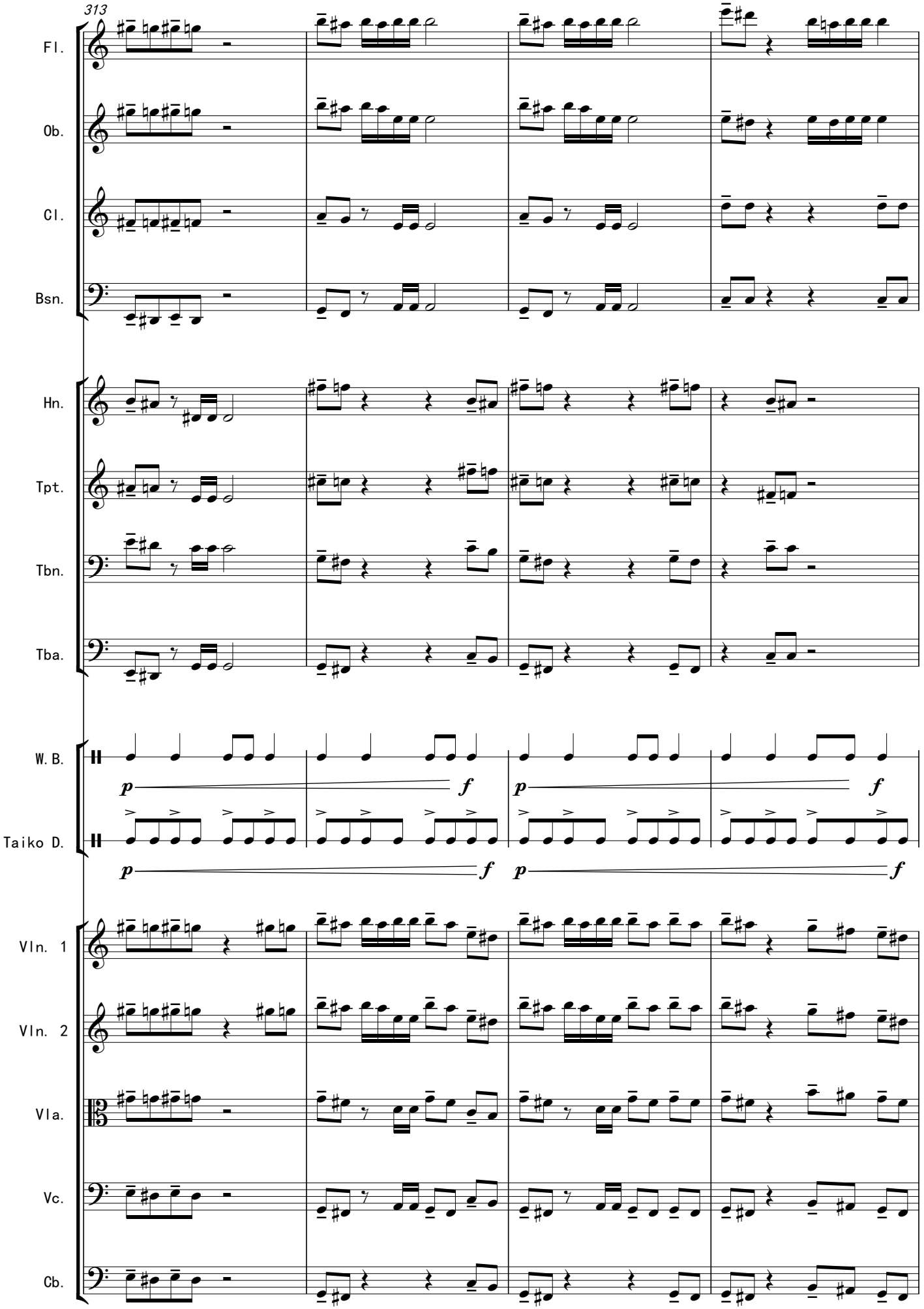
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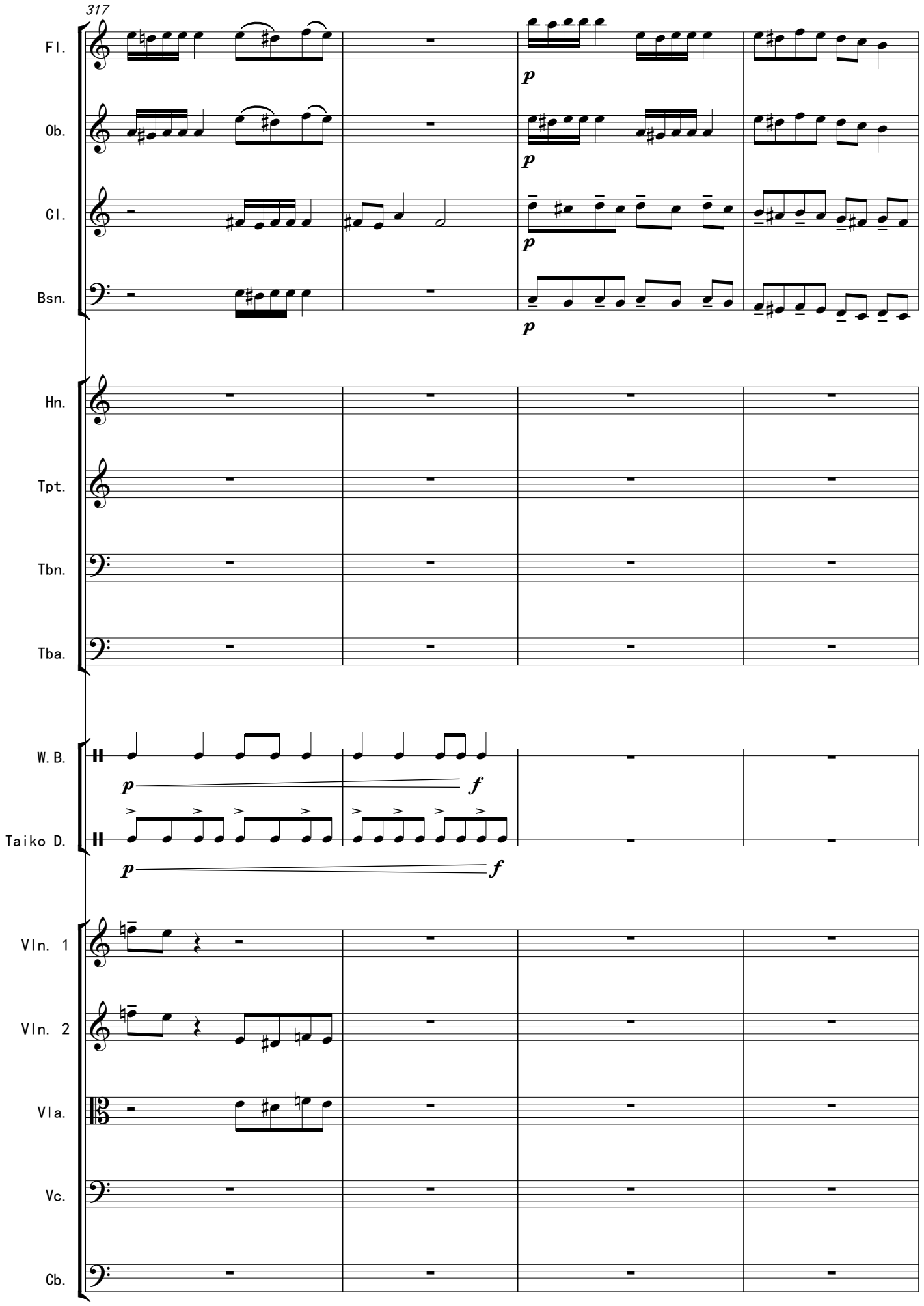
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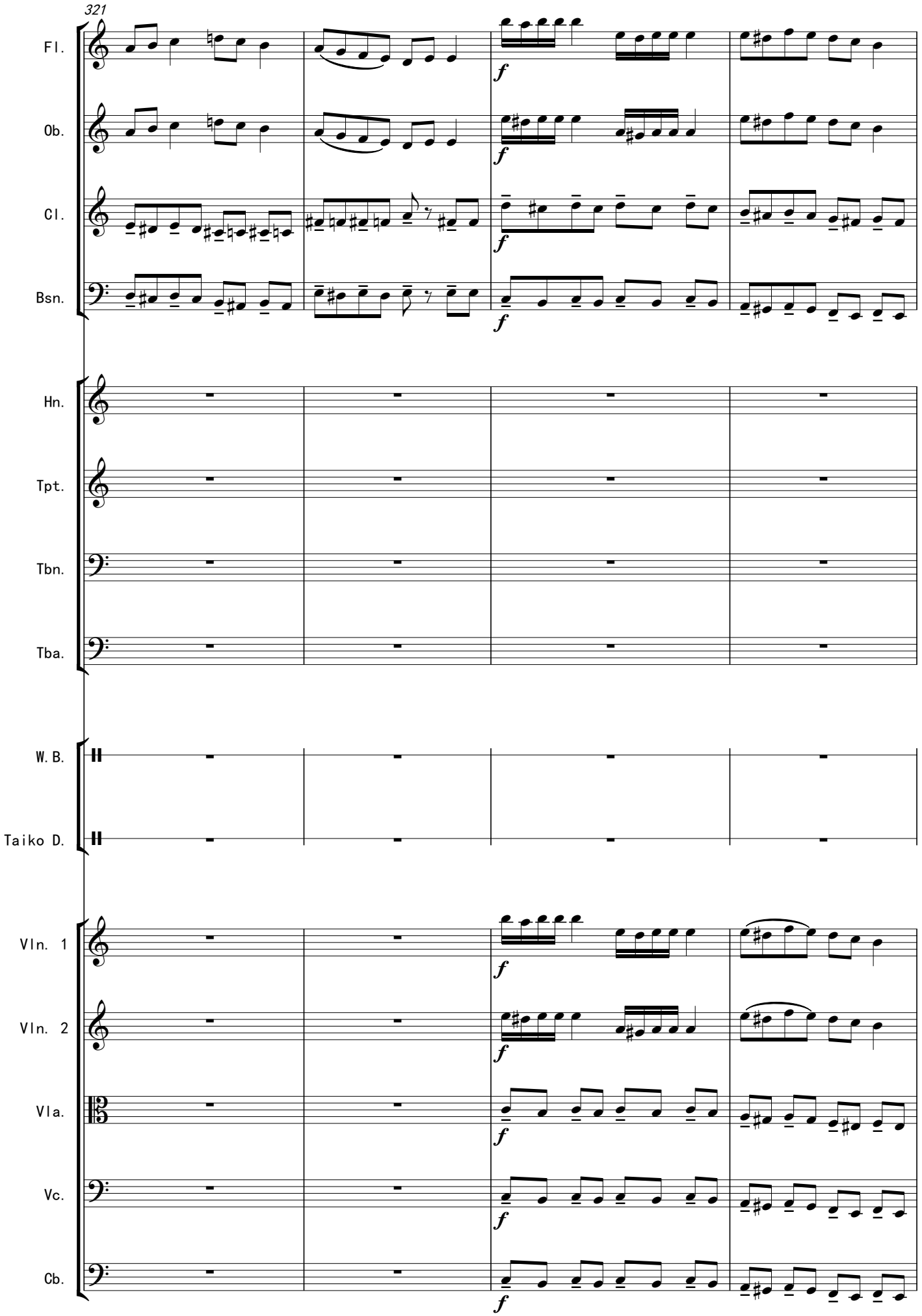
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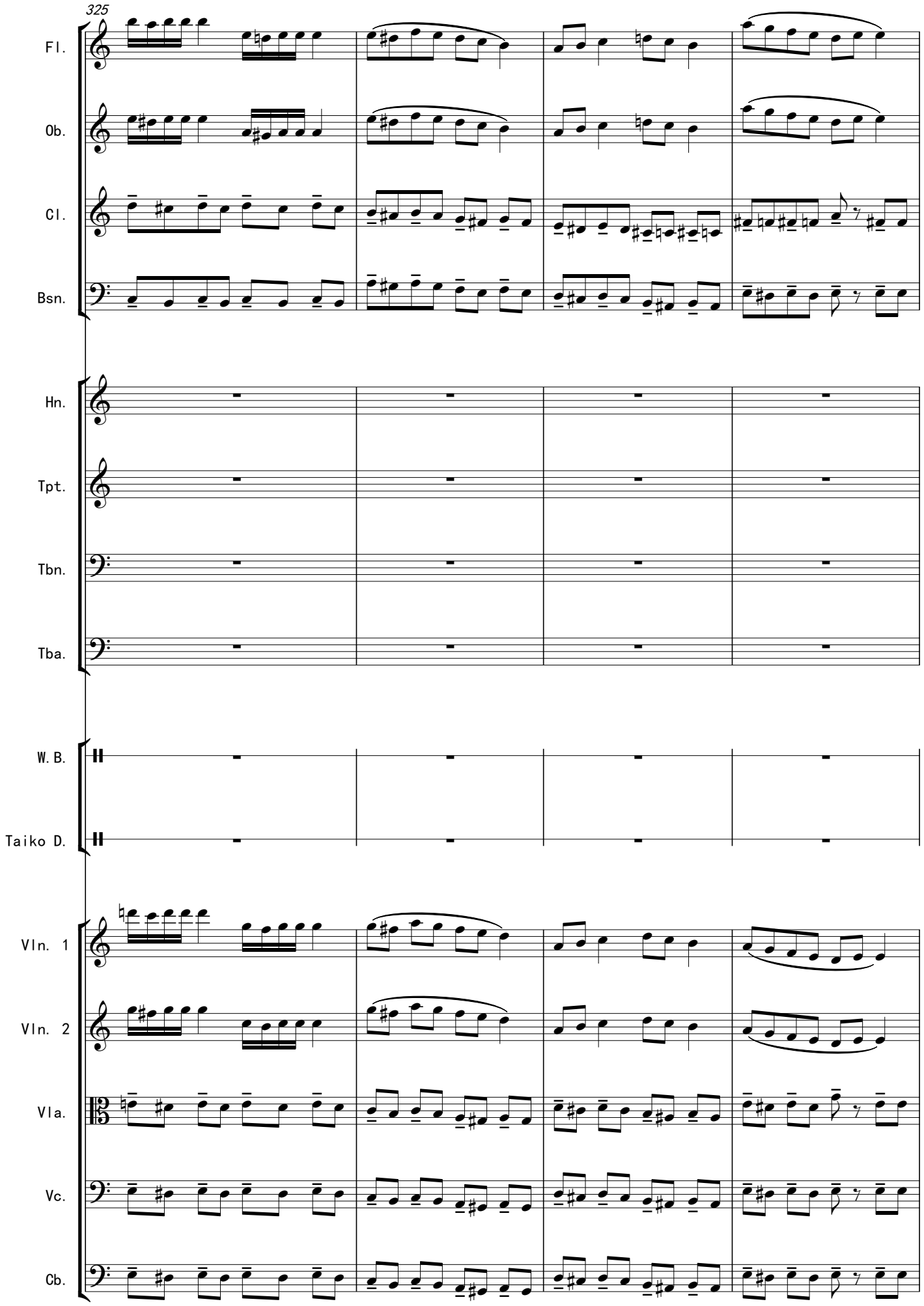
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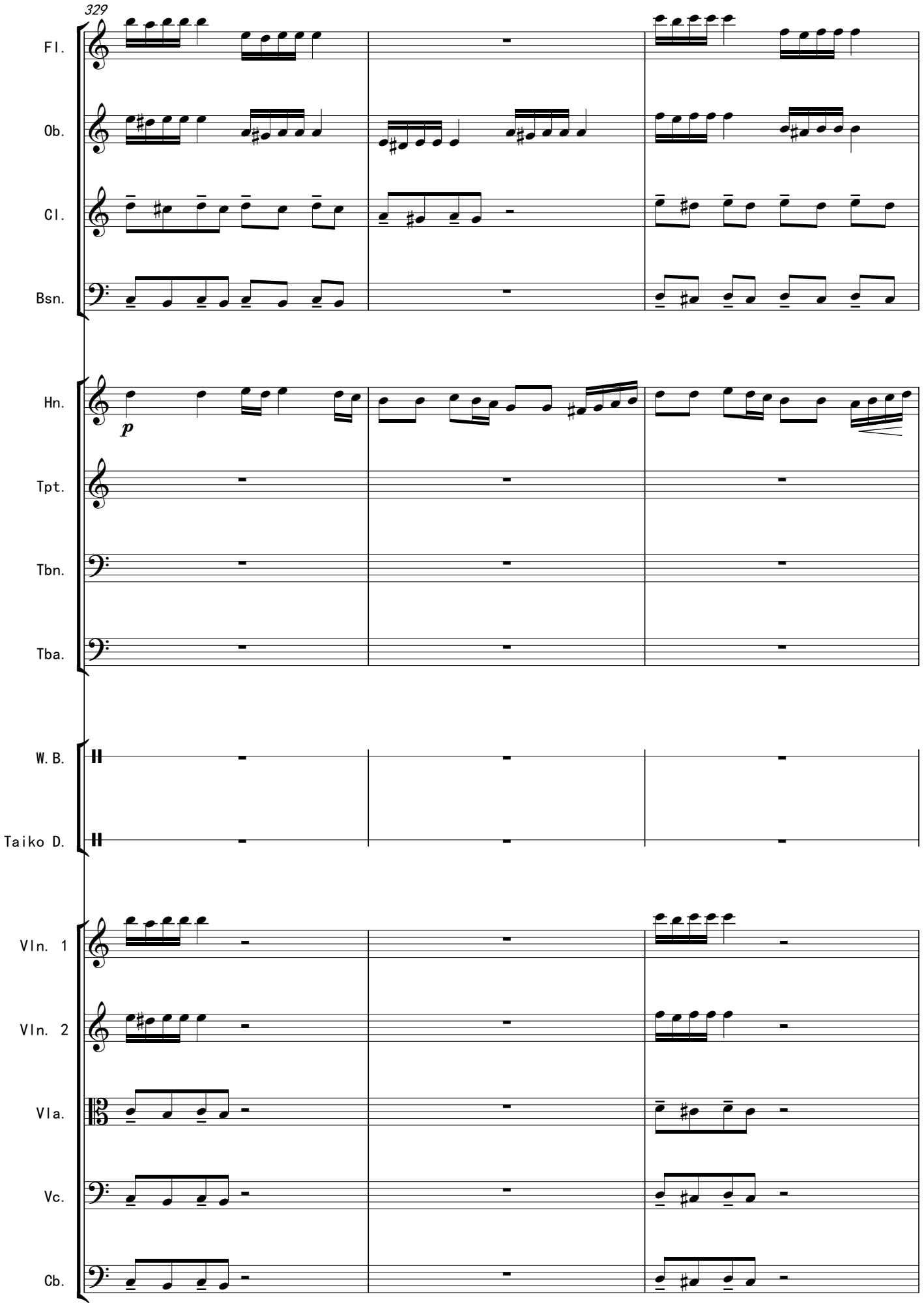
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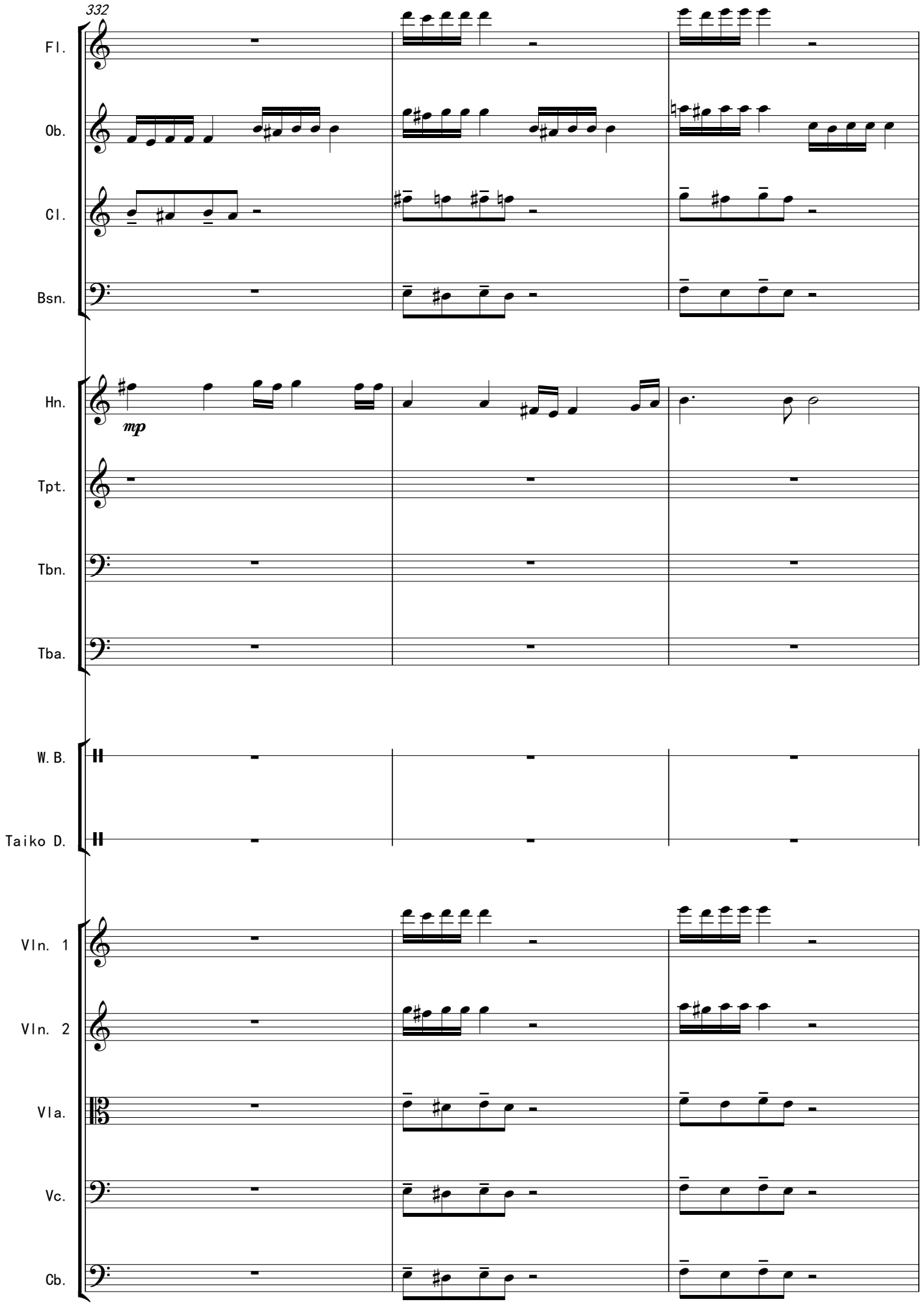
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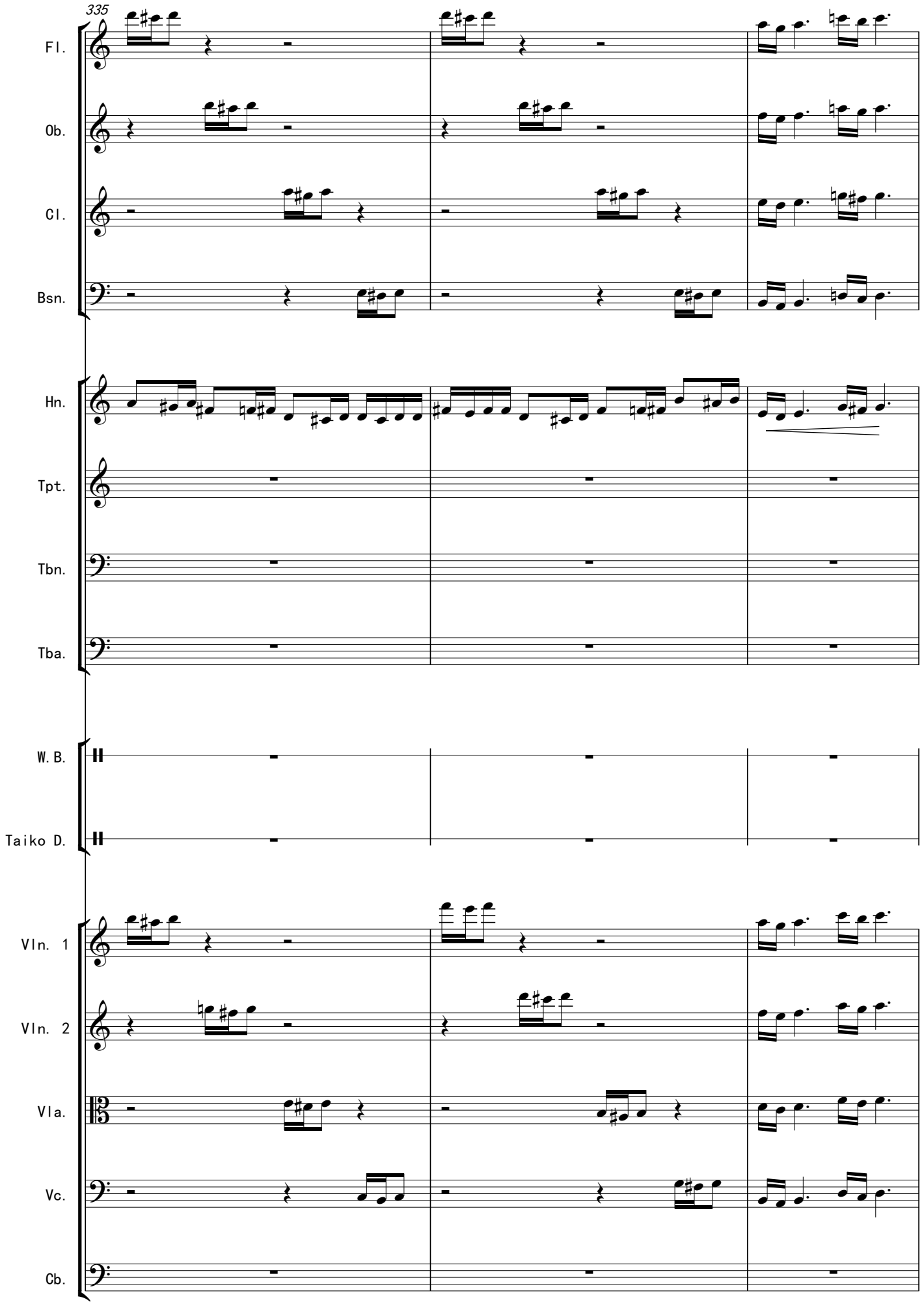
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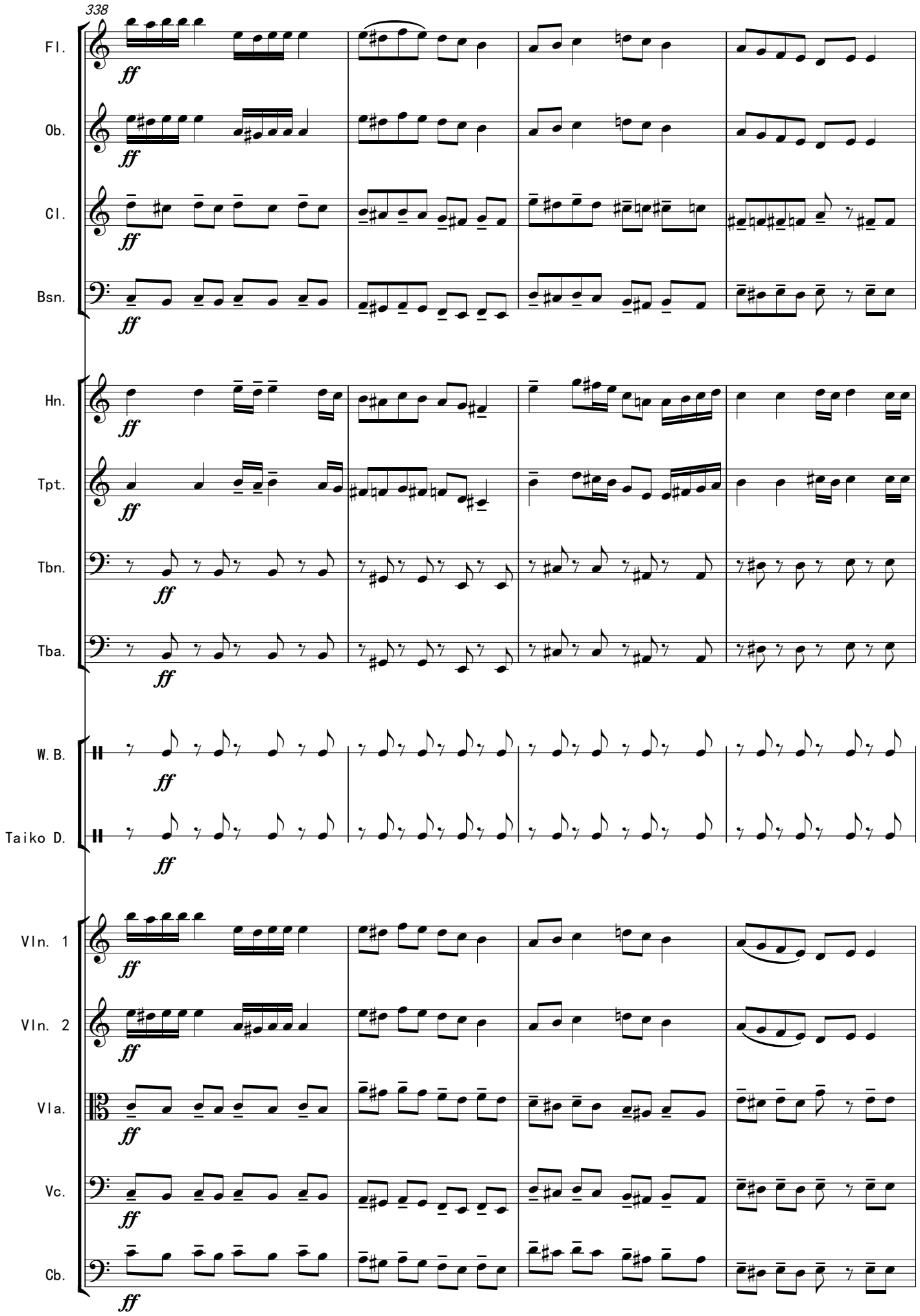
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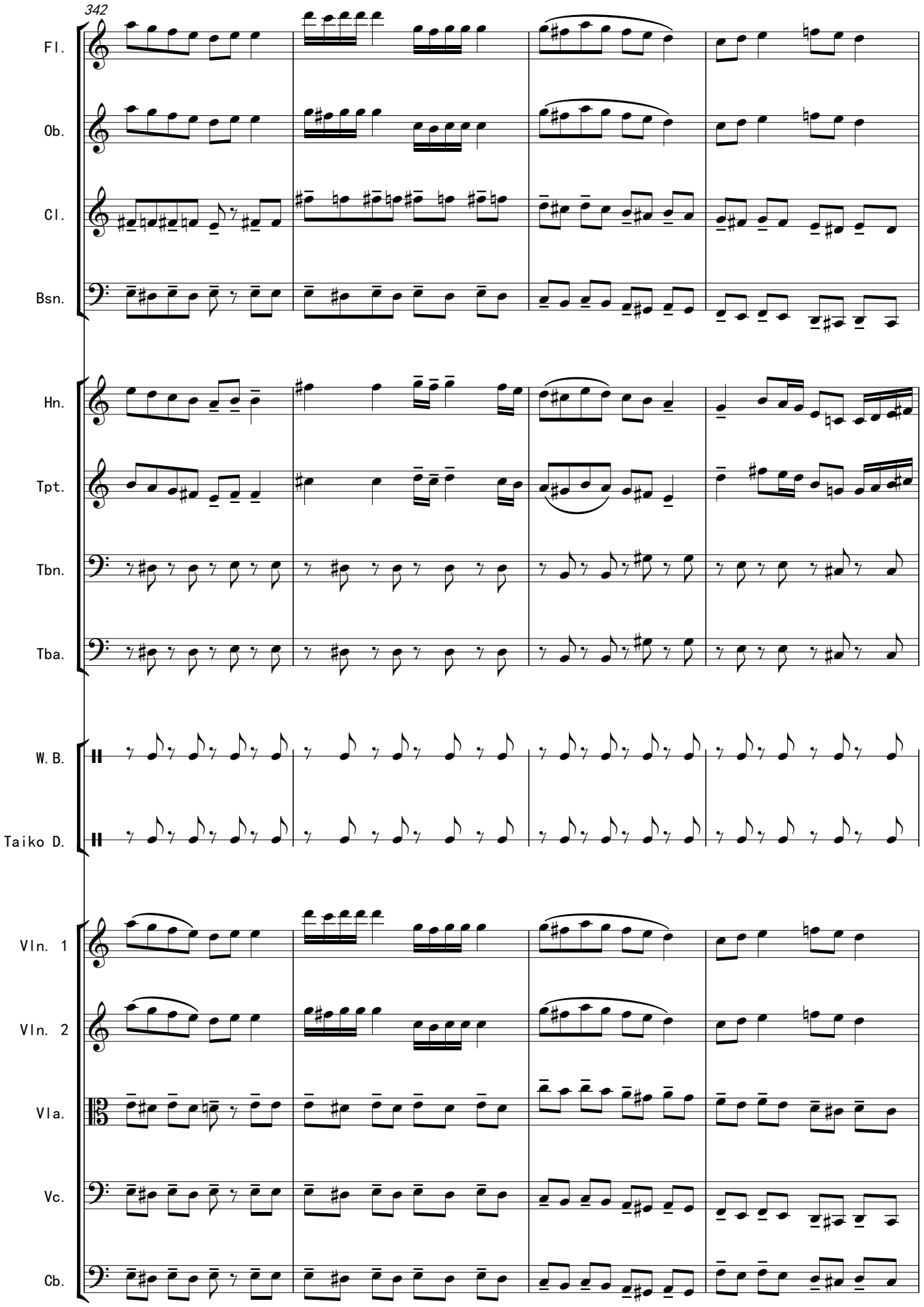
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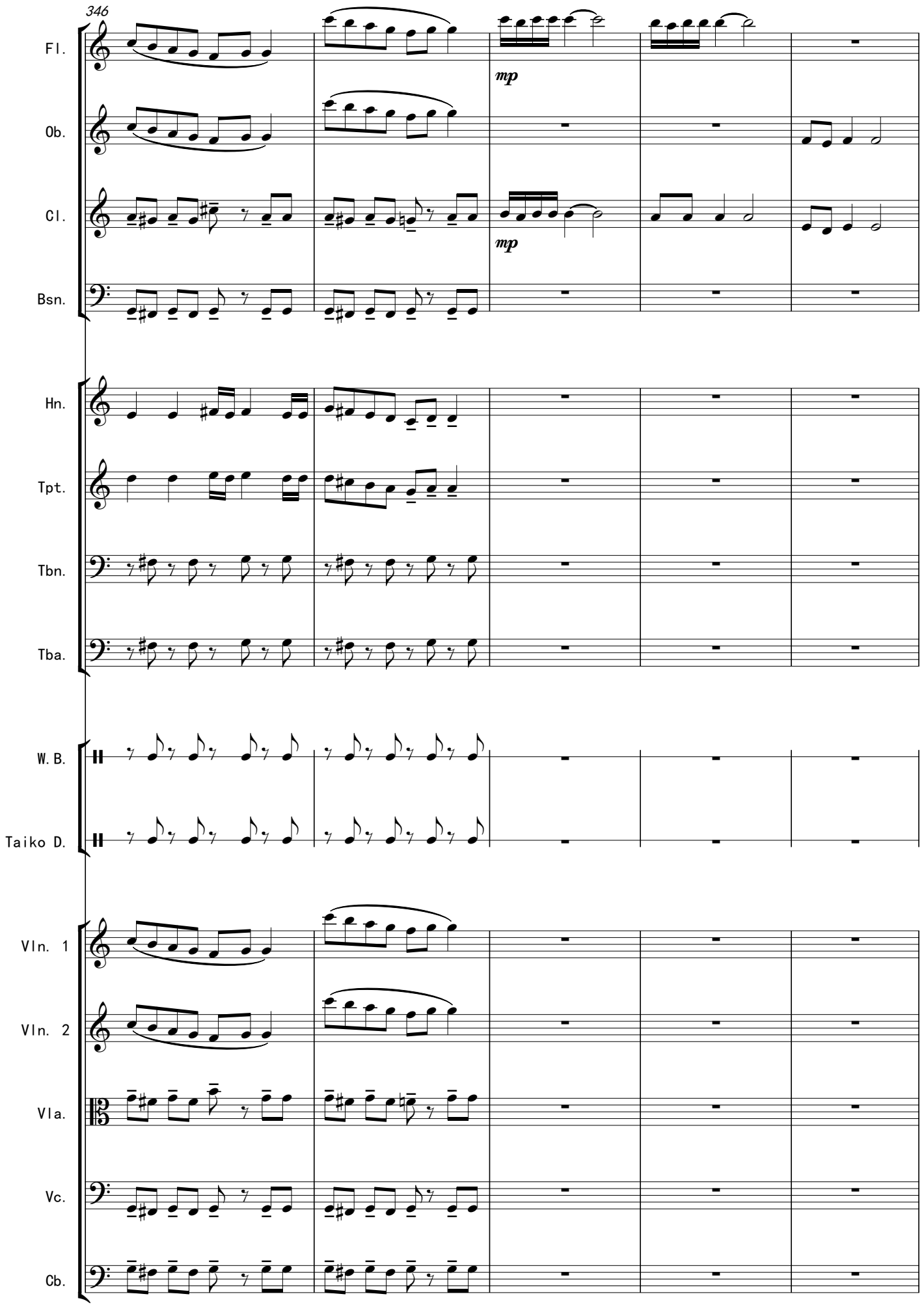
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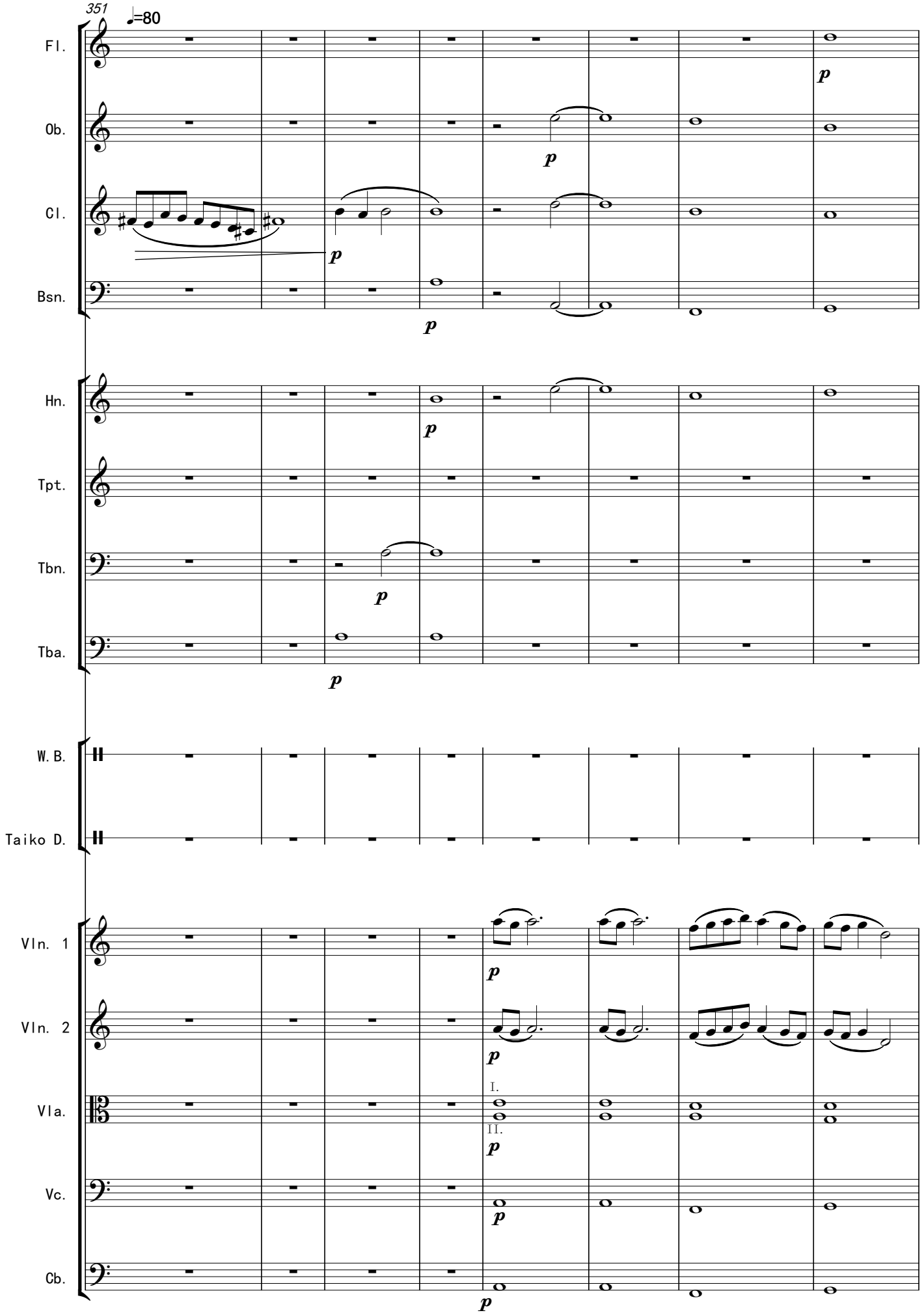
351
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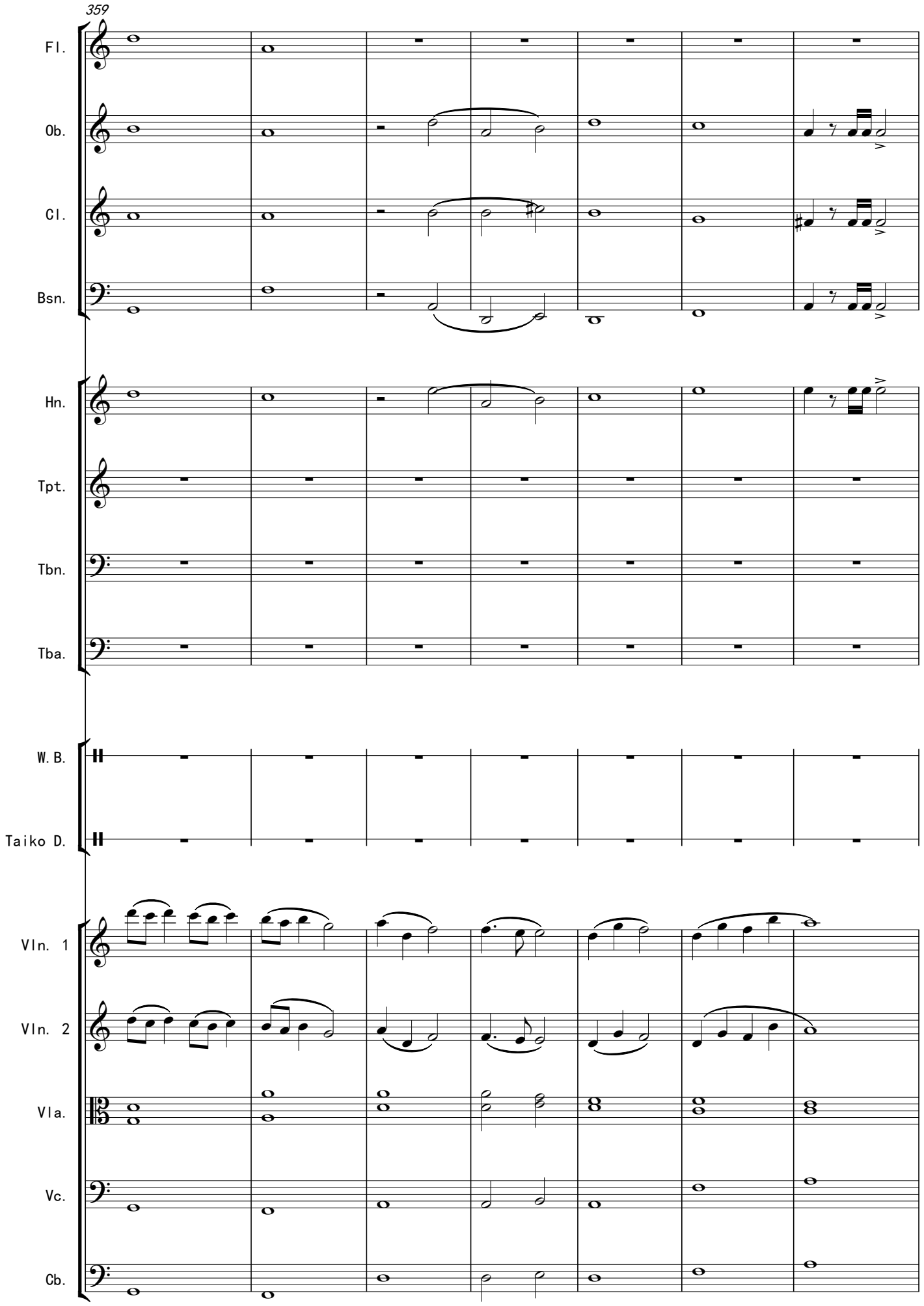
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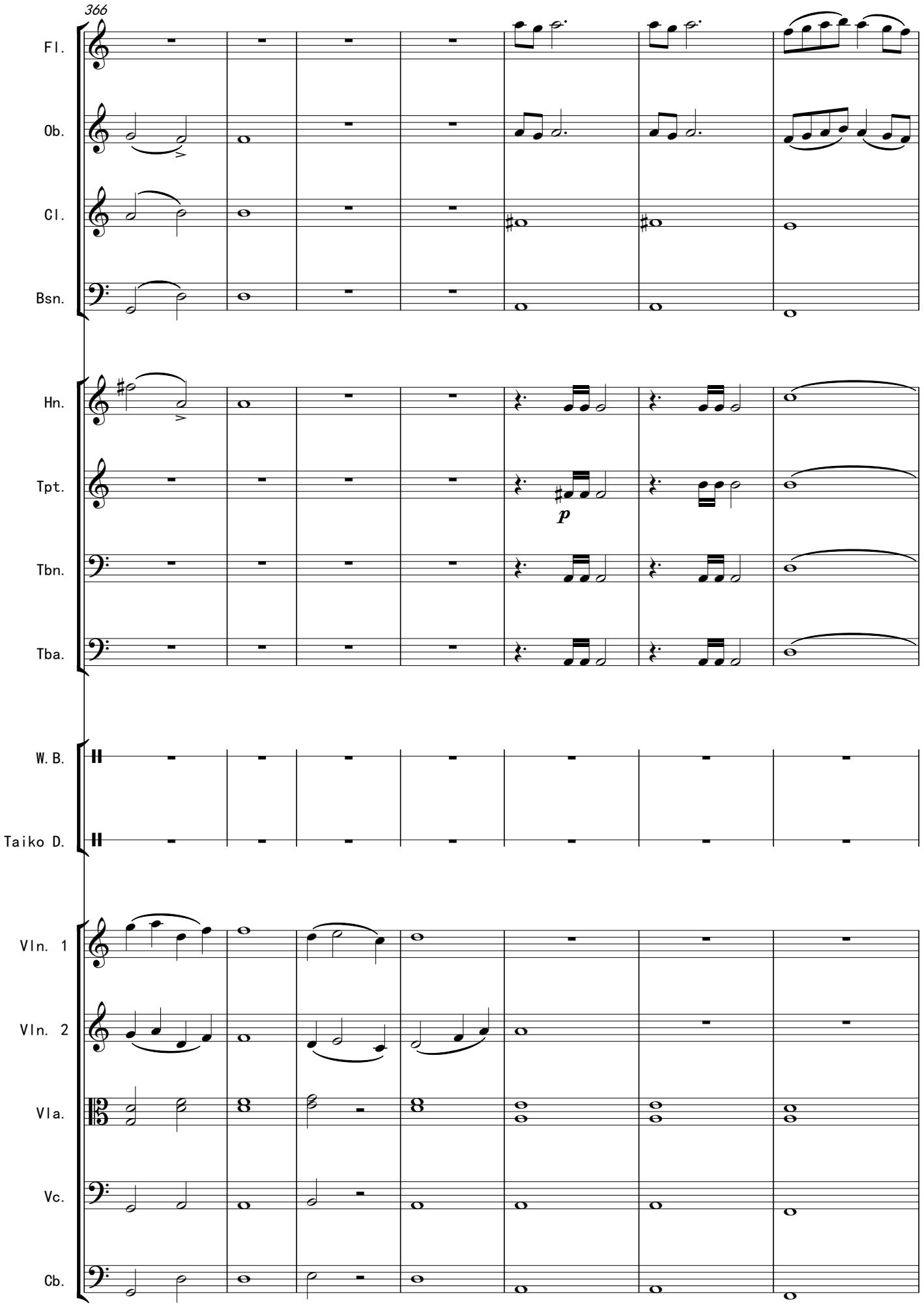
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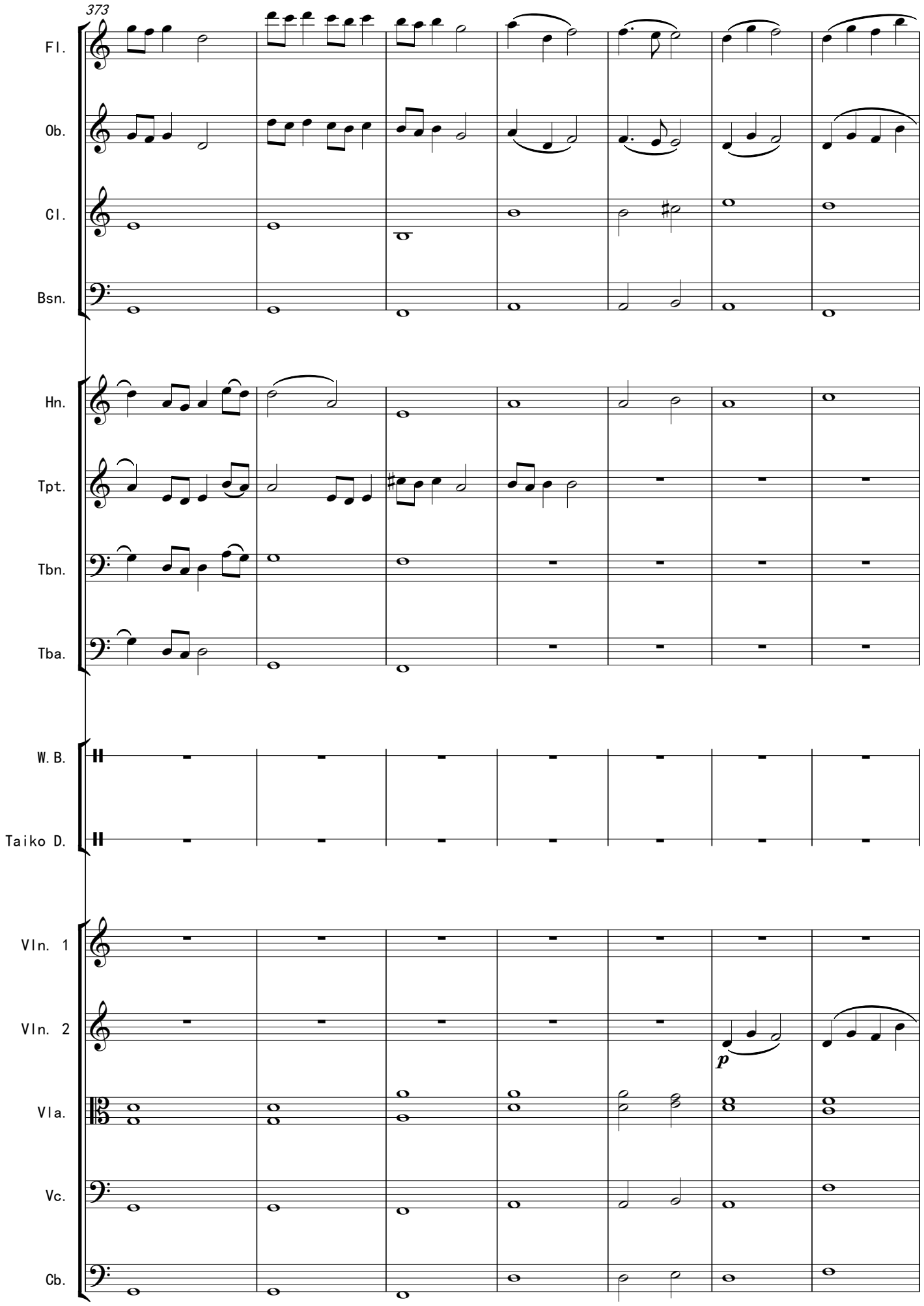
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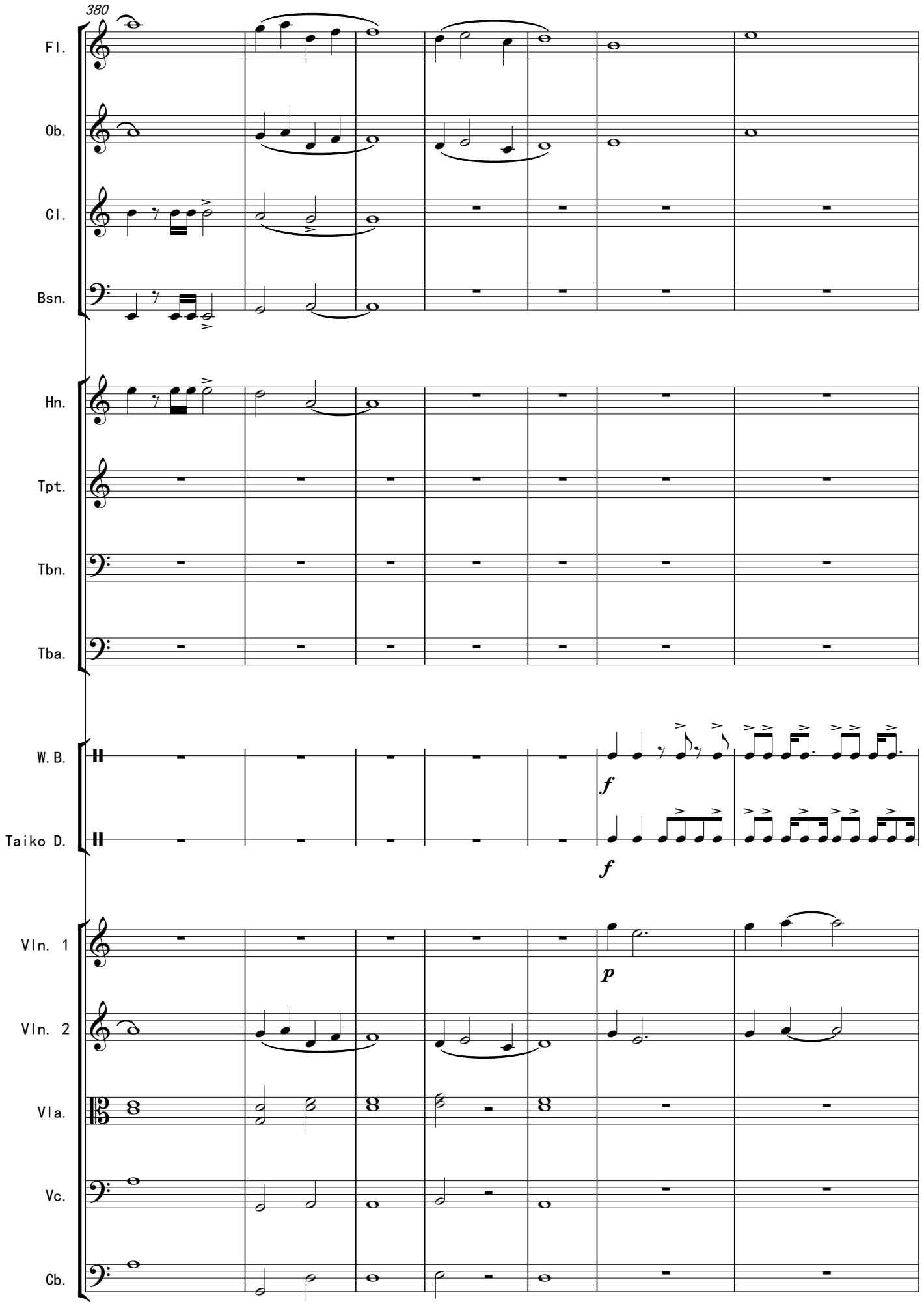
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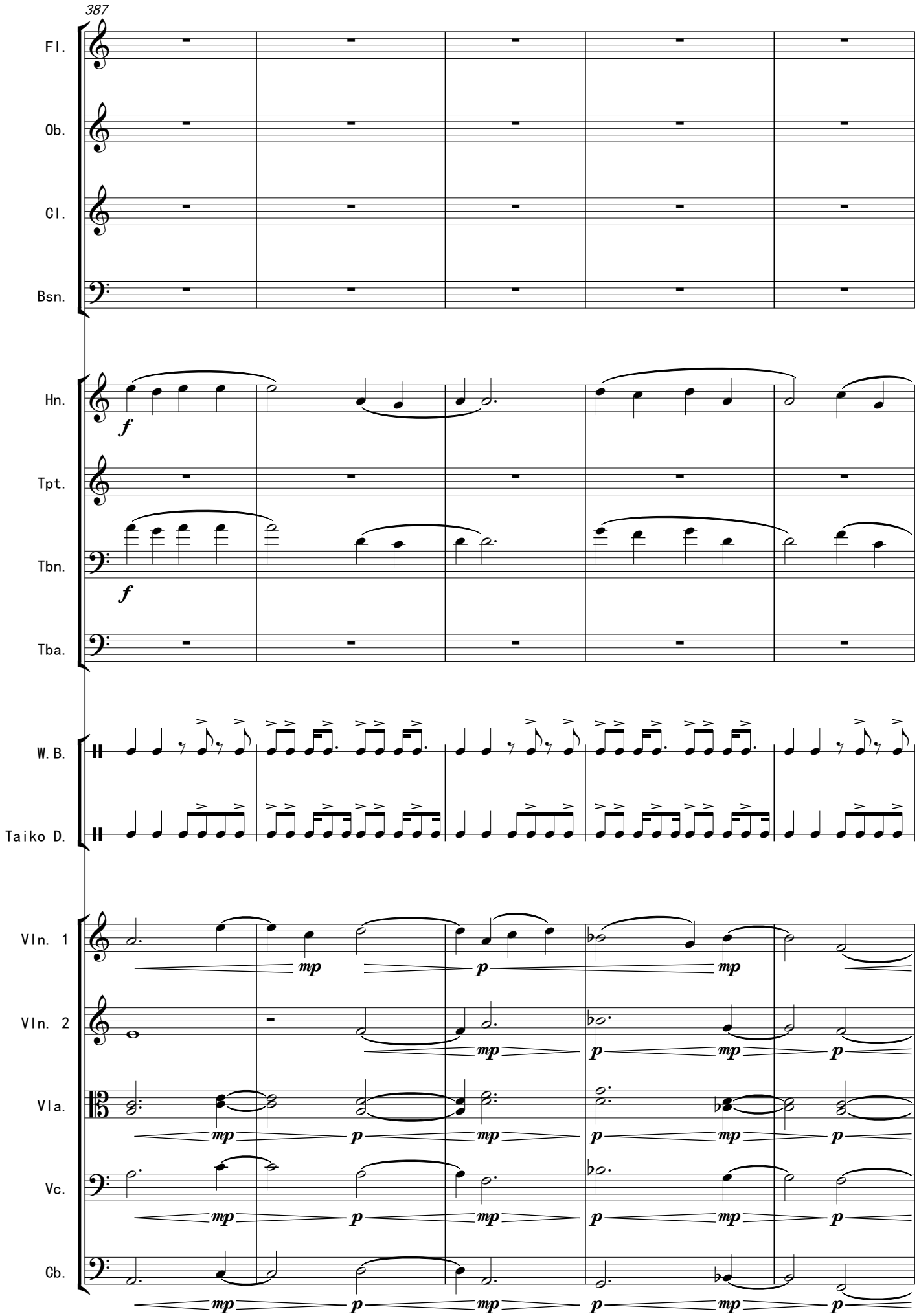
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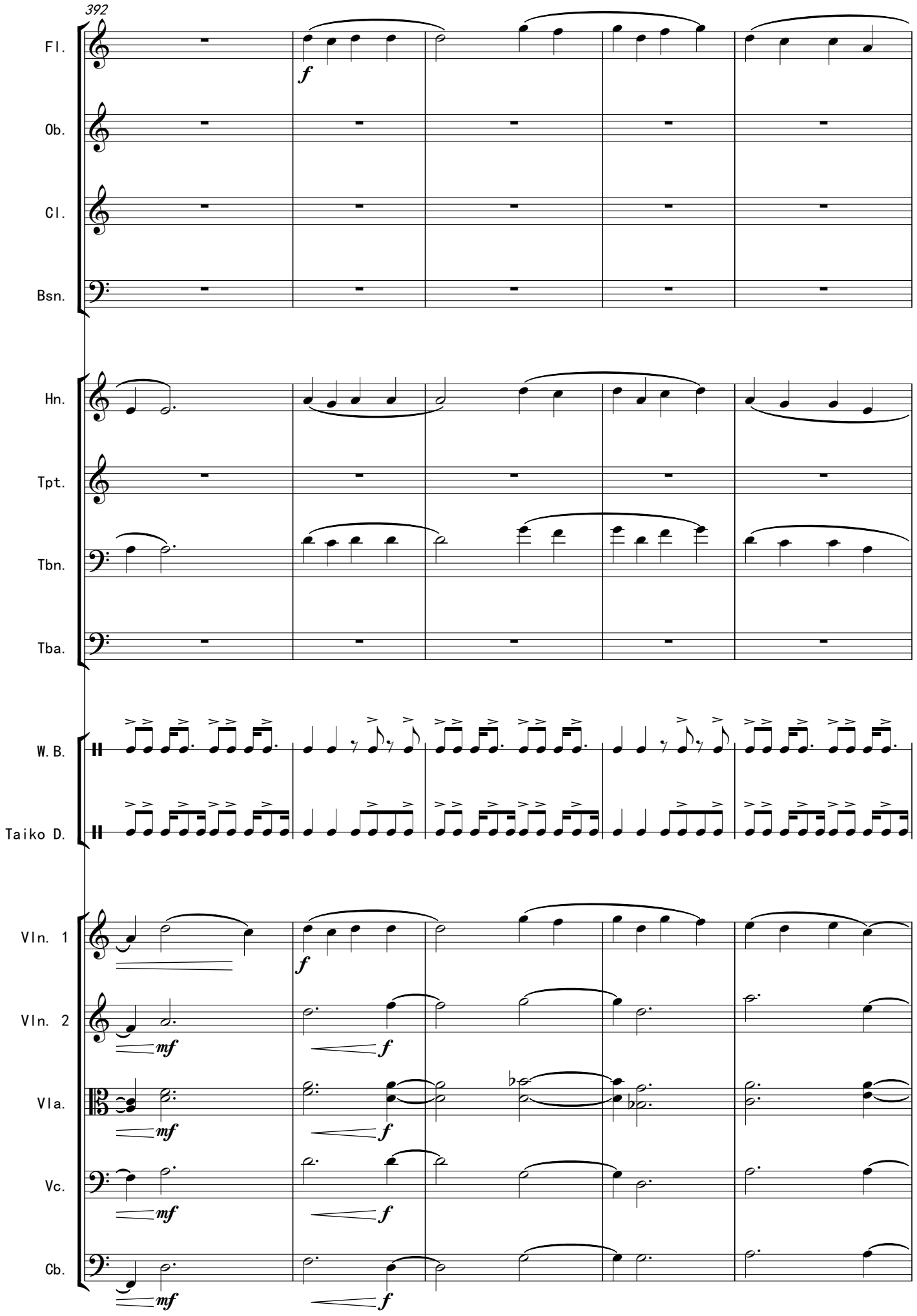
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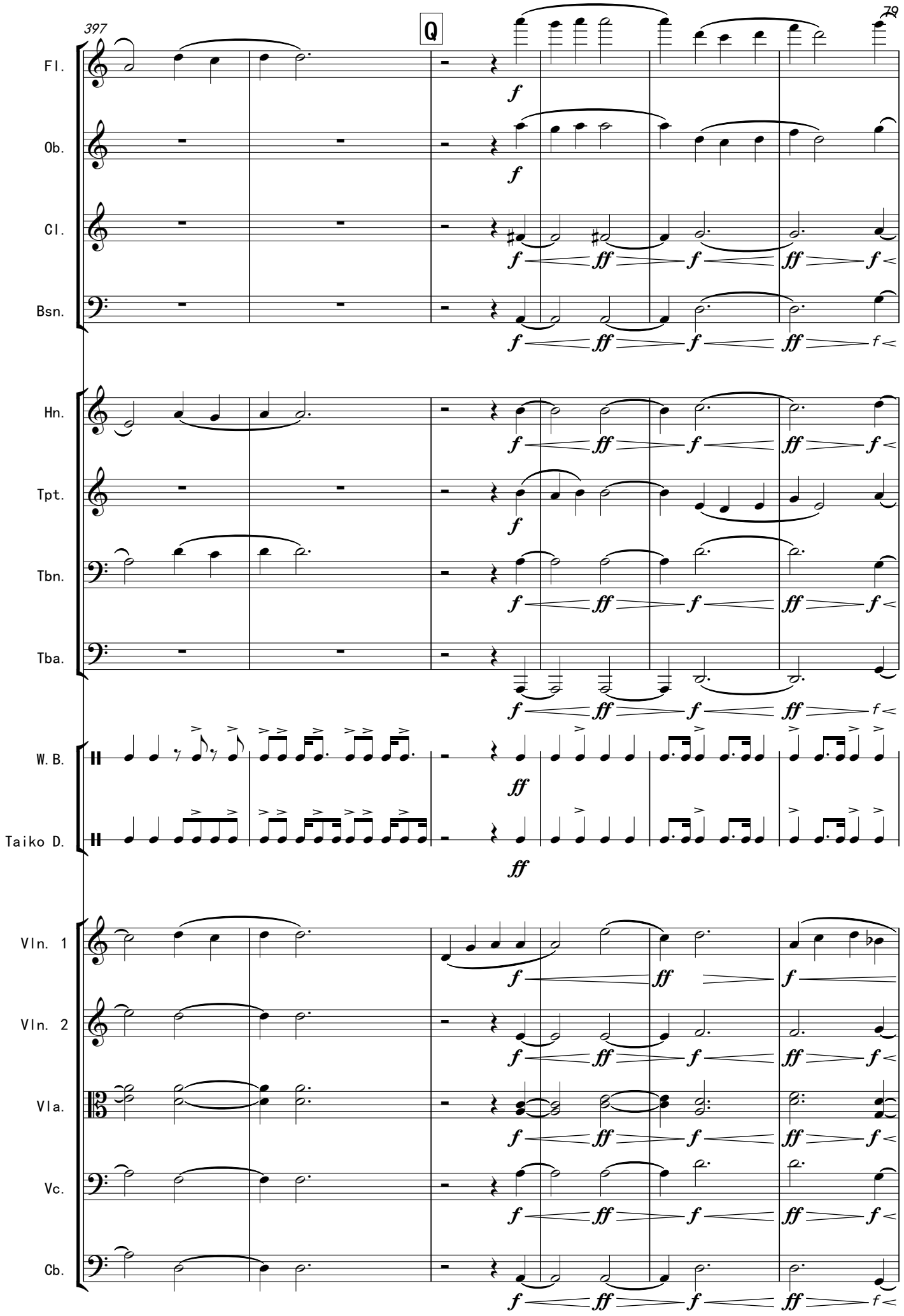
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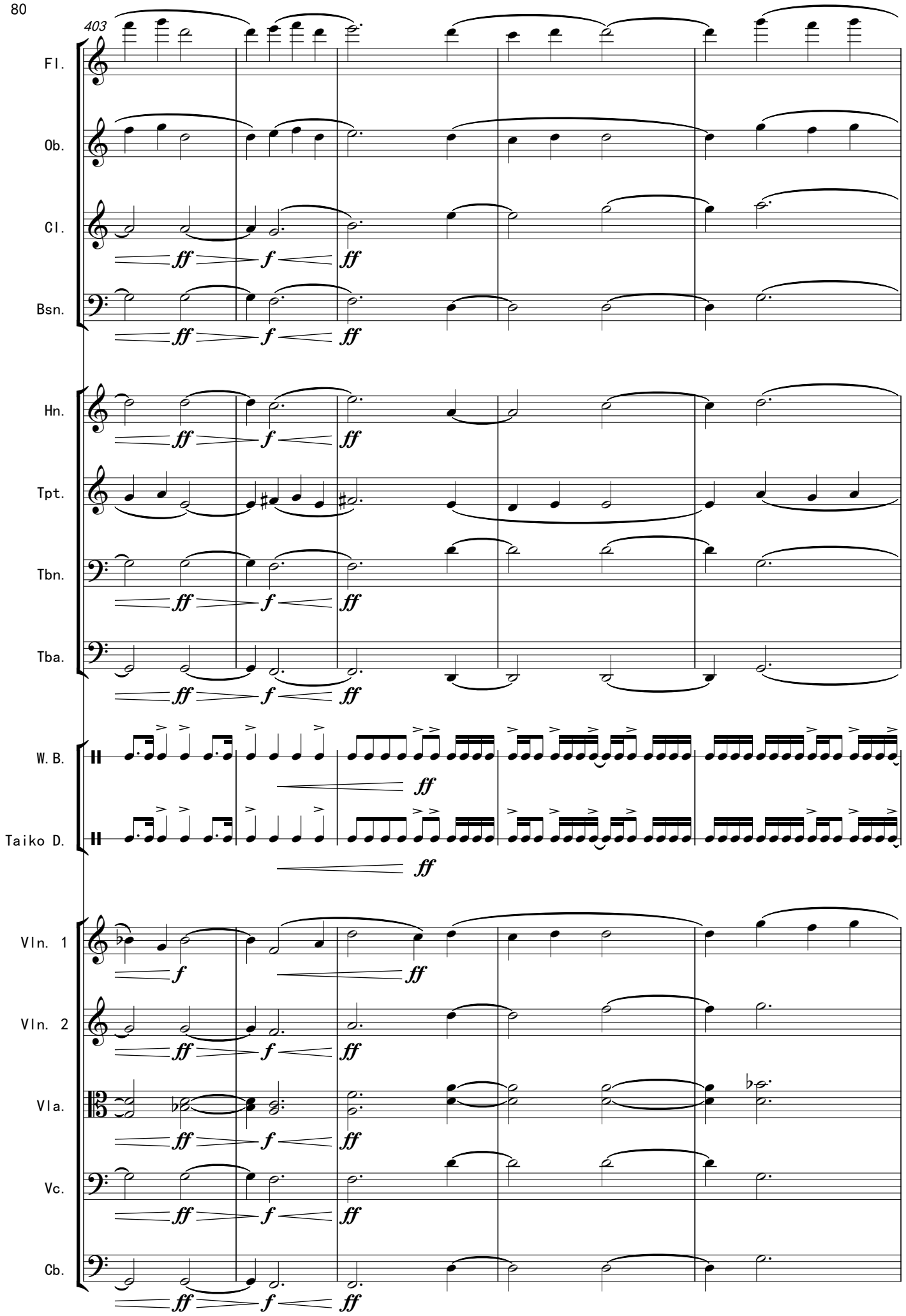
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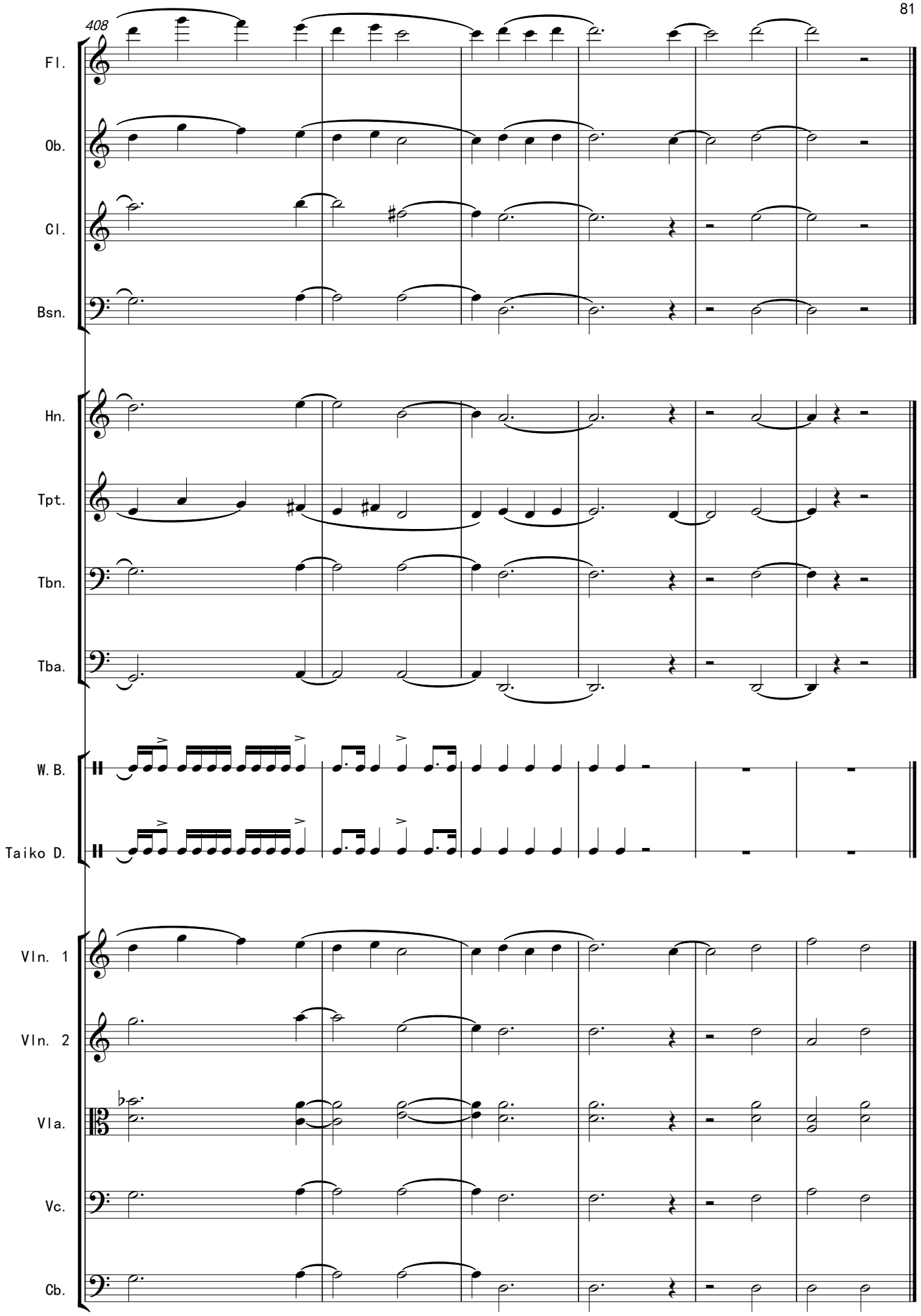
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