Philip Schuessler

Precision Music for Shitty Instruments

For four players

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(2020)

Pendula Music
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Written for the Southeastern Louisiana Contemporary Ensemble

Precision Music for Shitty Instruments

Performance Notes:

This work is written for four players performing unspecified instruments. Each player has a primary instrument and a set of auxiliary instruments. Primary instruments are intended to be instruments that meet any one (or more) of the following criteria:

What is a shitty instrument?

1) An instrument that is broken in some capacity that inhibits it from being ideally suited for performance in a conventional chamber music setting in front of an audience; the instrument should still be able to produce sound, though sound production should be hindered in a subtle or severe way (i.e. some or all pitches do not sound without creating noise, or some or all pitches are out of tune, etc.)
2) A toy instrument or replica instrument that is not intended, in a standard sense, for precise execution of pitches and rhythms.
3) An instrument that is intentionally modified in one or more ways so as to hinder standard sound production.

NOTE: A "shitty" instrument is *not* defined as an instrument that is intentionally performed poorly.

Though specific pitches are not indicated in the score, primary instruments must be able to produce four different pitches, designated *low*, *medium low*, *medium high*, and *high*. Players assign a single pitch for each space on the staff, and they retain those pitches for the entirety of the piece. Pitch relationships can be of any type, as long as there is a clear distinction among the four gradations. It does not matter how close or distant any given adjacent relationship is (the low pitch and the medium low pitch, for instance, could be a semitone apart, or they could be an octave apart). In general, players should avoid clear diatonic, triadic, major/minor relationships among the four pitches.

Auxiliary instruments can be pitched (unspecified) or unpitched instruments of four relative gradations of sound (*low*, *medium low*, *medium high*, *high*). These instruments can be four of the same type of instrument (such as four metal pots of different sizes) or four discreet and separate instruments. In general, auxiliary instruments may be considered "non-standard" instruments, or they may fall into the general category of auxiliary percussion. These instruments do not have to necessarily be "shitty," per se (they don't have to be broken or modified). Examples of auxiliary instruments may include: clay or metal pots, wood blocks, glass jars, antique cymbals, small drums, tambourines, duck calls, rubber chickens, triangles. Auxiliary instruments may also be generated electronically or mechanically.

Players must be able to move between their primary and auxiliary instrument(s) with relative ease. Though the two types of instruments are not played simultaneously, there are various instances where the players move rapidly back and forth between them. Should their primary instrument require the use of both hands, players should still be able to play auxiliary instruments (with foot pedals or blown with their mouth, for instance).

Some or all instruments may be amplified to create balance with other instruments in the ensemble.

The players each read from two staves. The bottom staff is for the primary instrument; the top staff is for the auxiliary instruments.

Due to the indeterminate nature of the instrumentation, there are few indicated dynamics or articulations in the score, and there are no phrase markings whatsoever. In general, instruments should be played throughout at *mf*– indicative of lying somewhere within the middle of the instrument's dynamic range. All instruments should be balanced dynamically as much as possible.

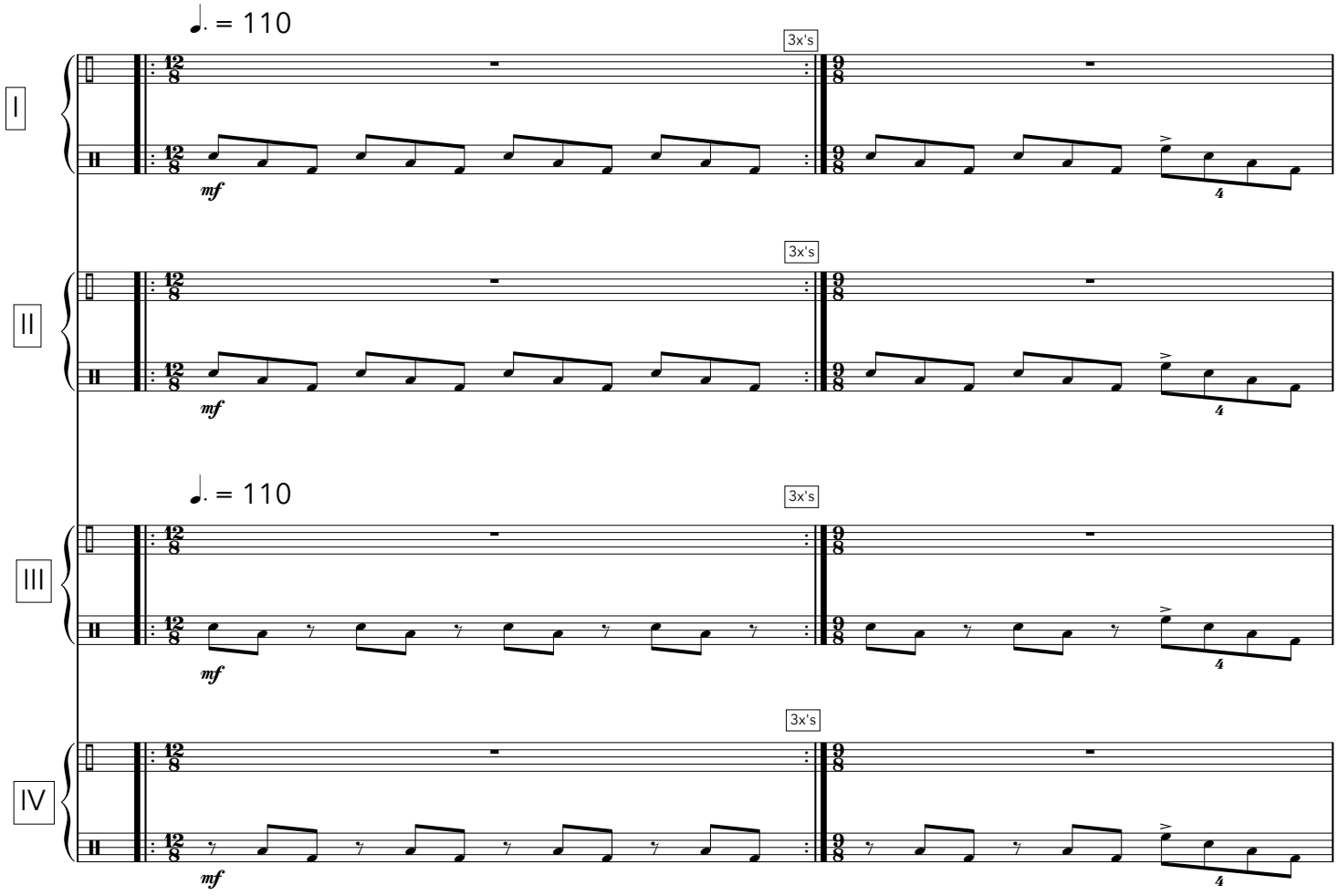
A primary intention behind the composition of this work is for players to perform the notated score as accurately and rigorously as possible despite the inherent obstructions and flaws that arise from playing affected instruments.

Precision Music For Shitty Instruments

quartet for open instrumentation

Philip Schuessler

(2020)



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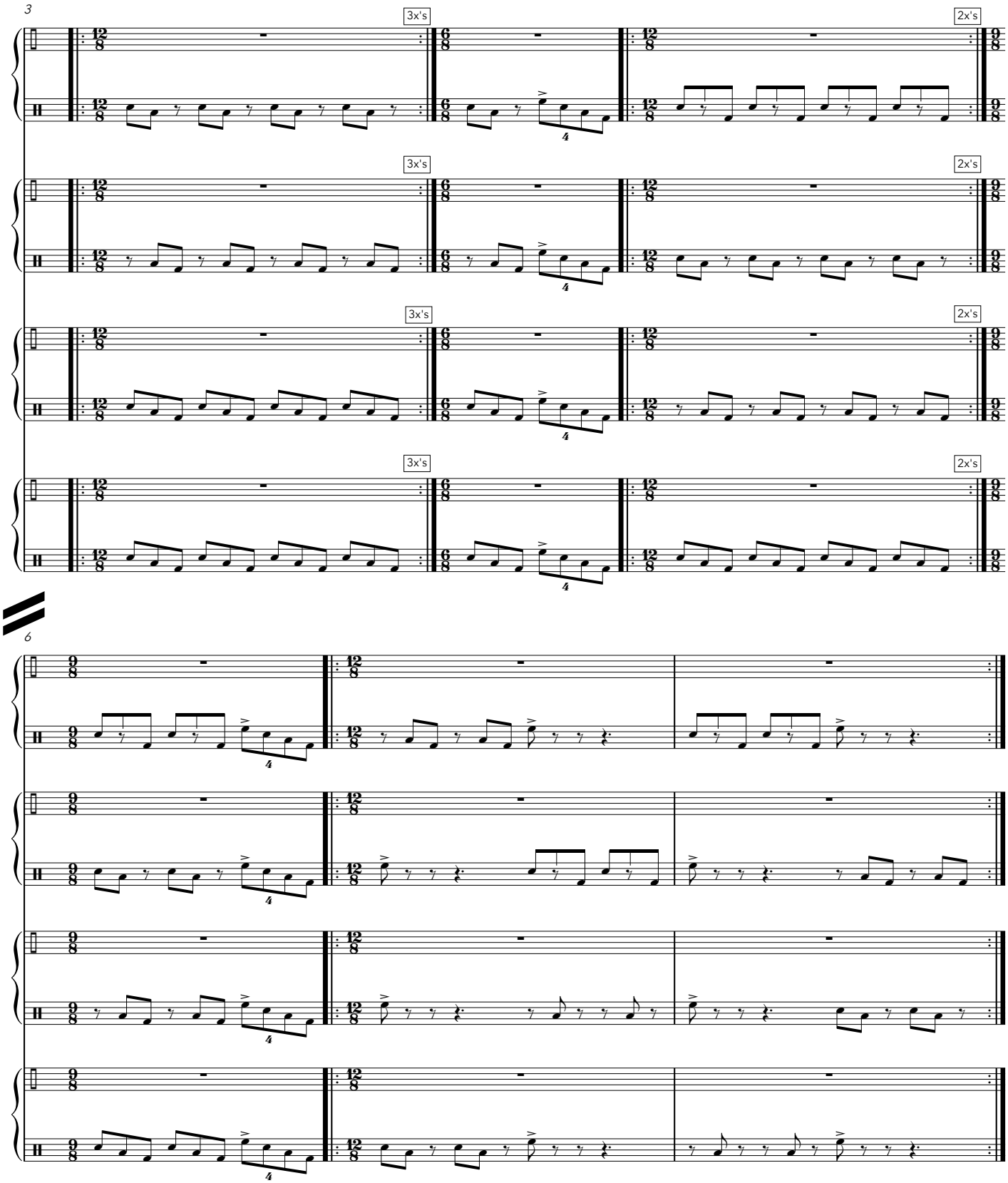
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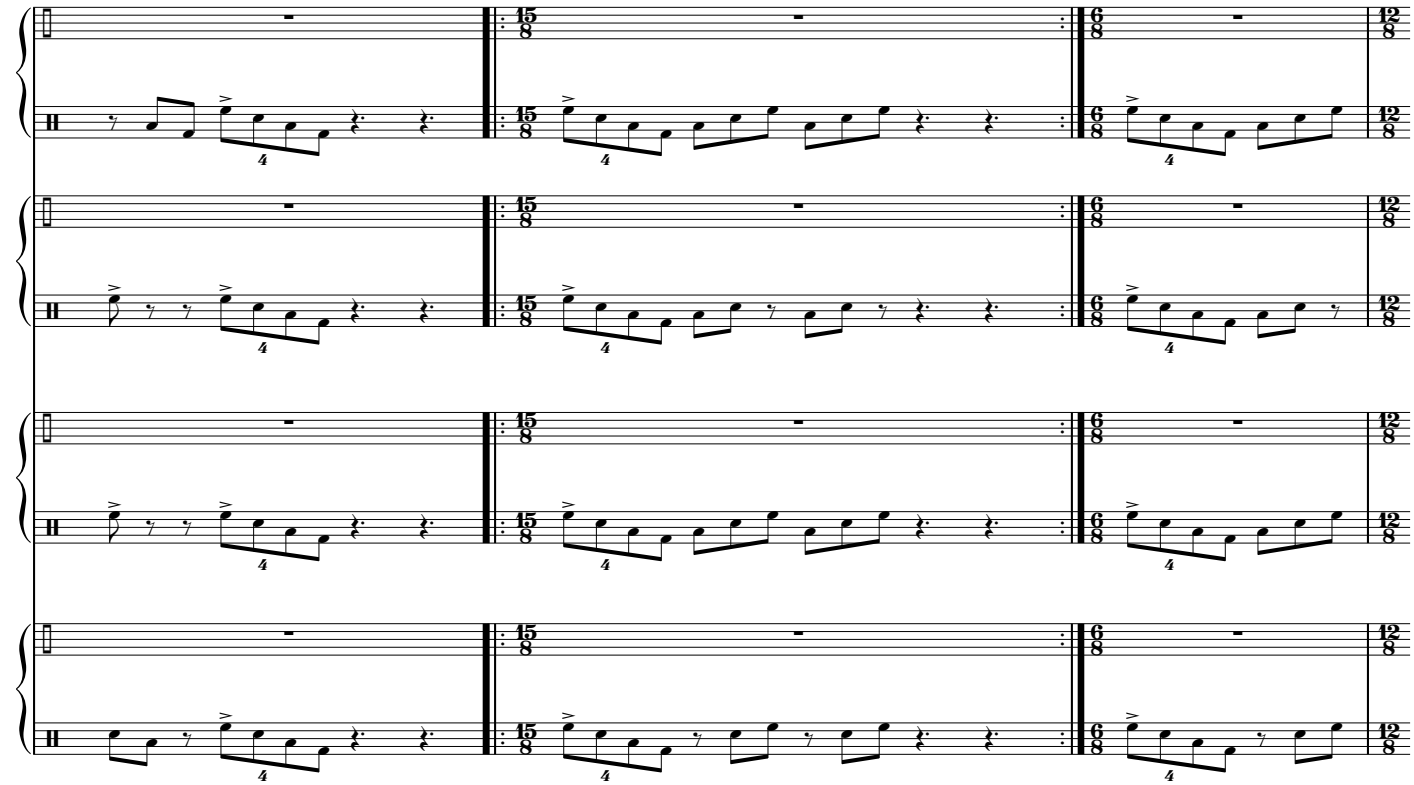

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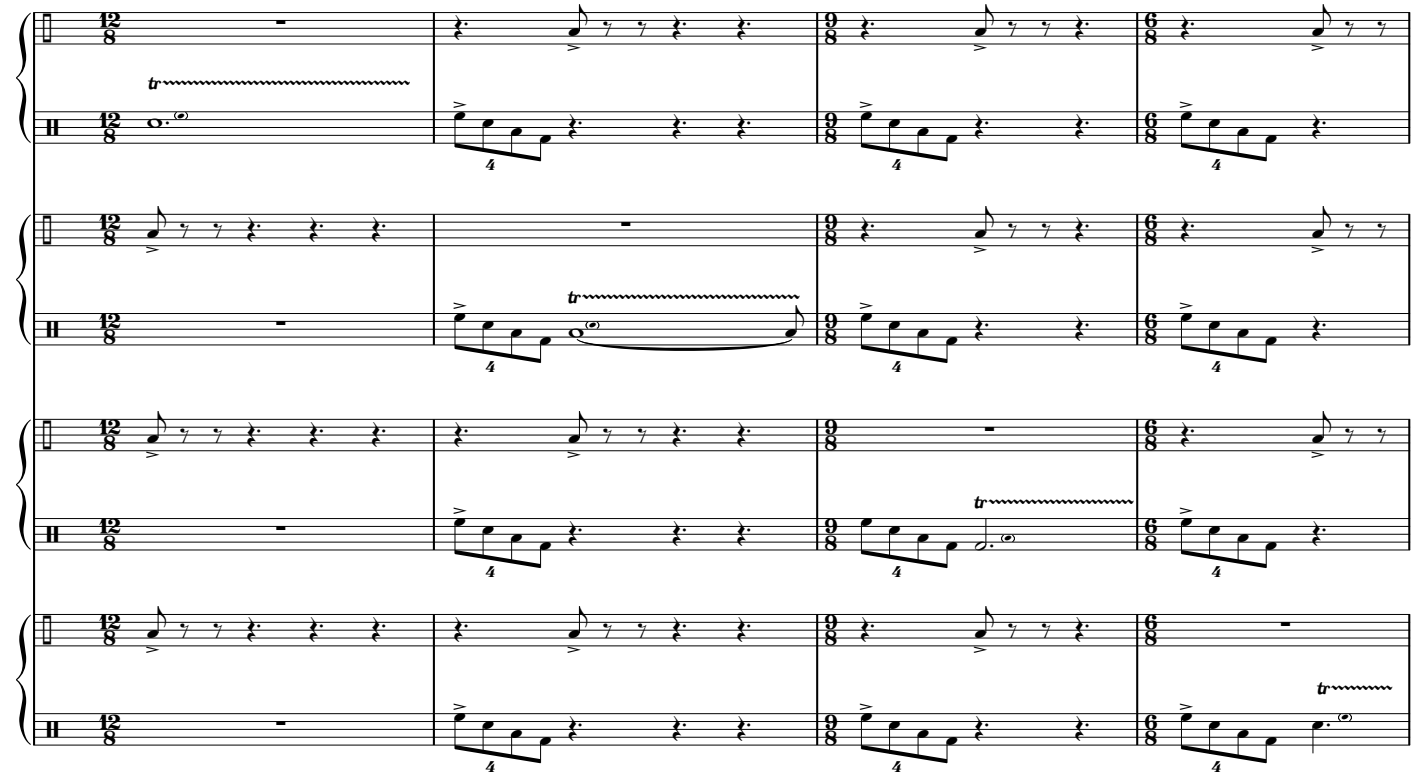

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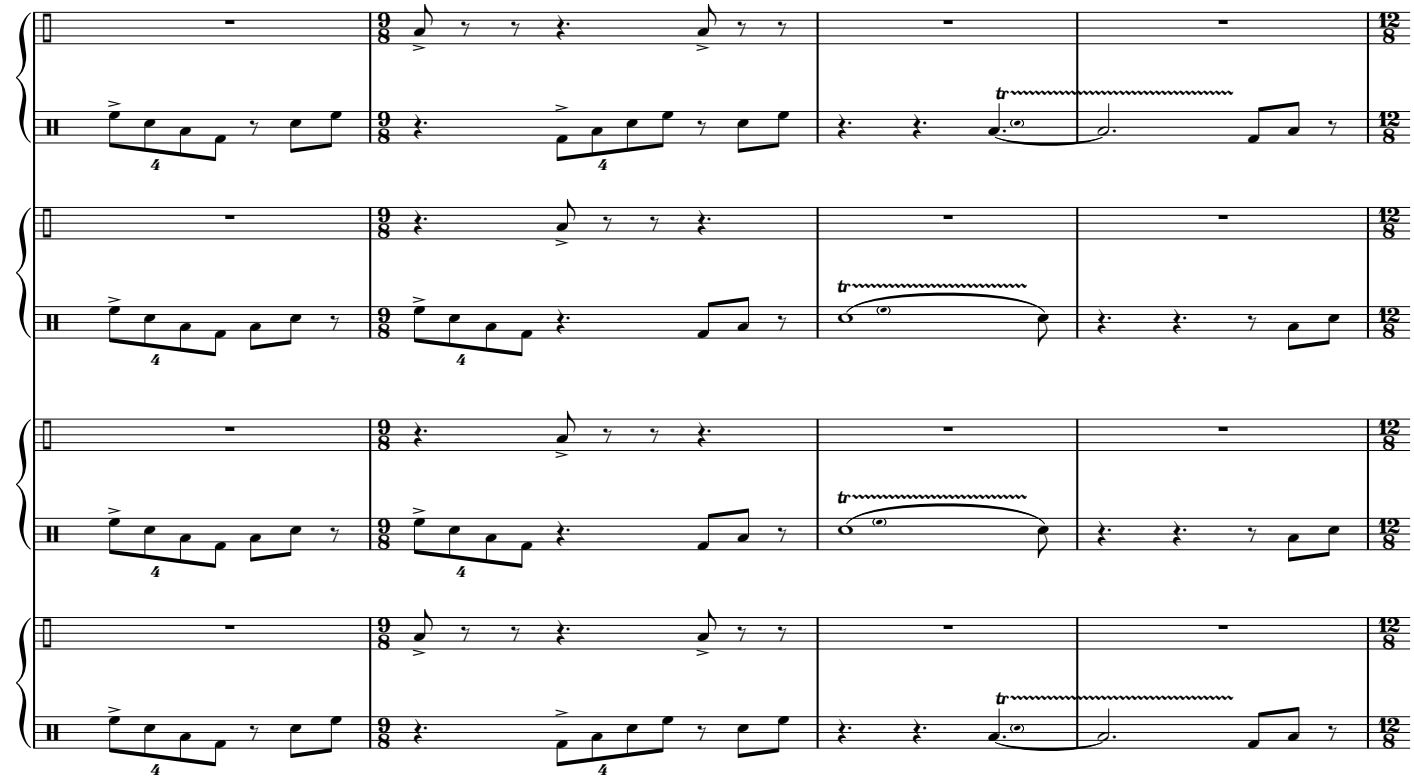

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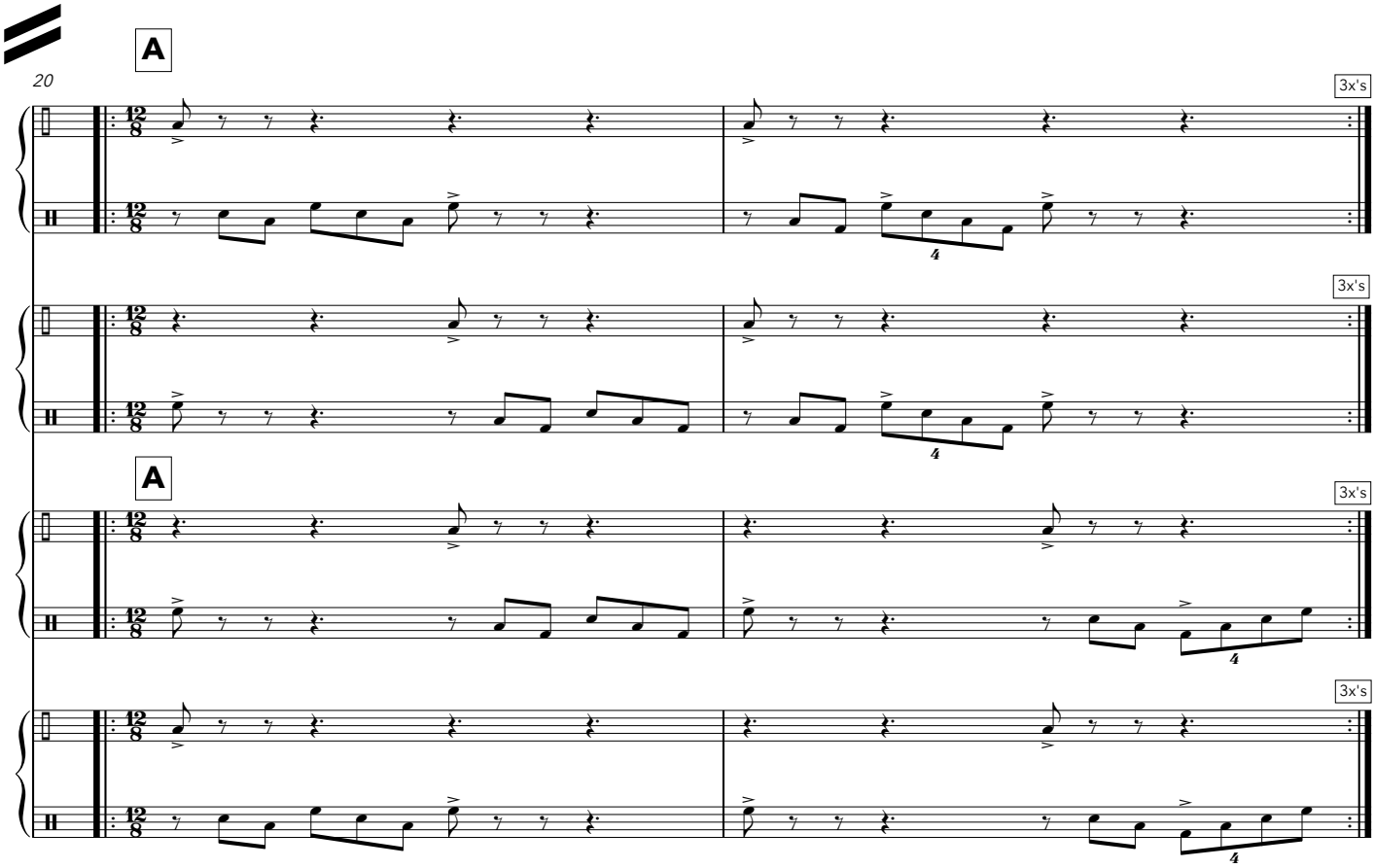

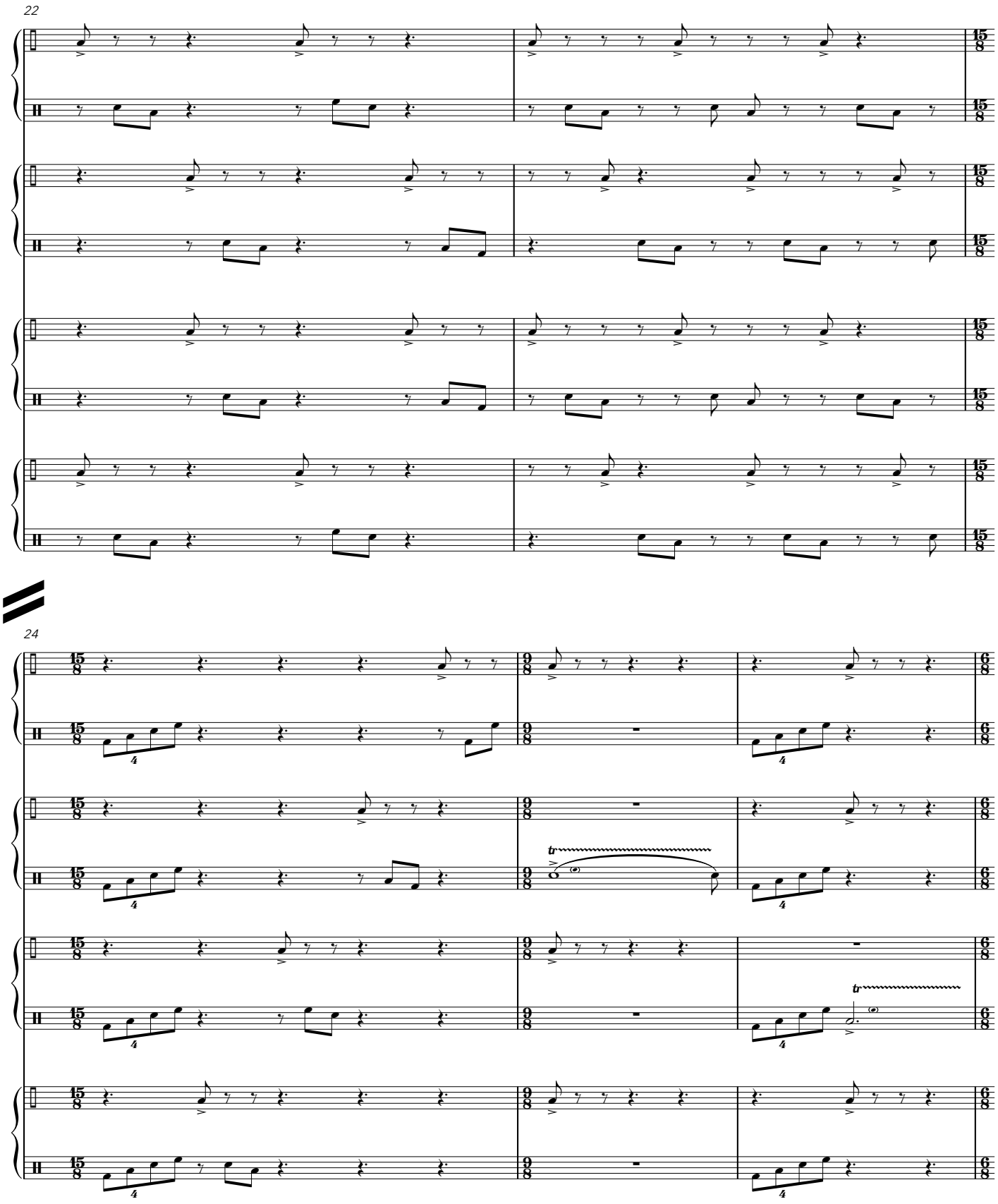
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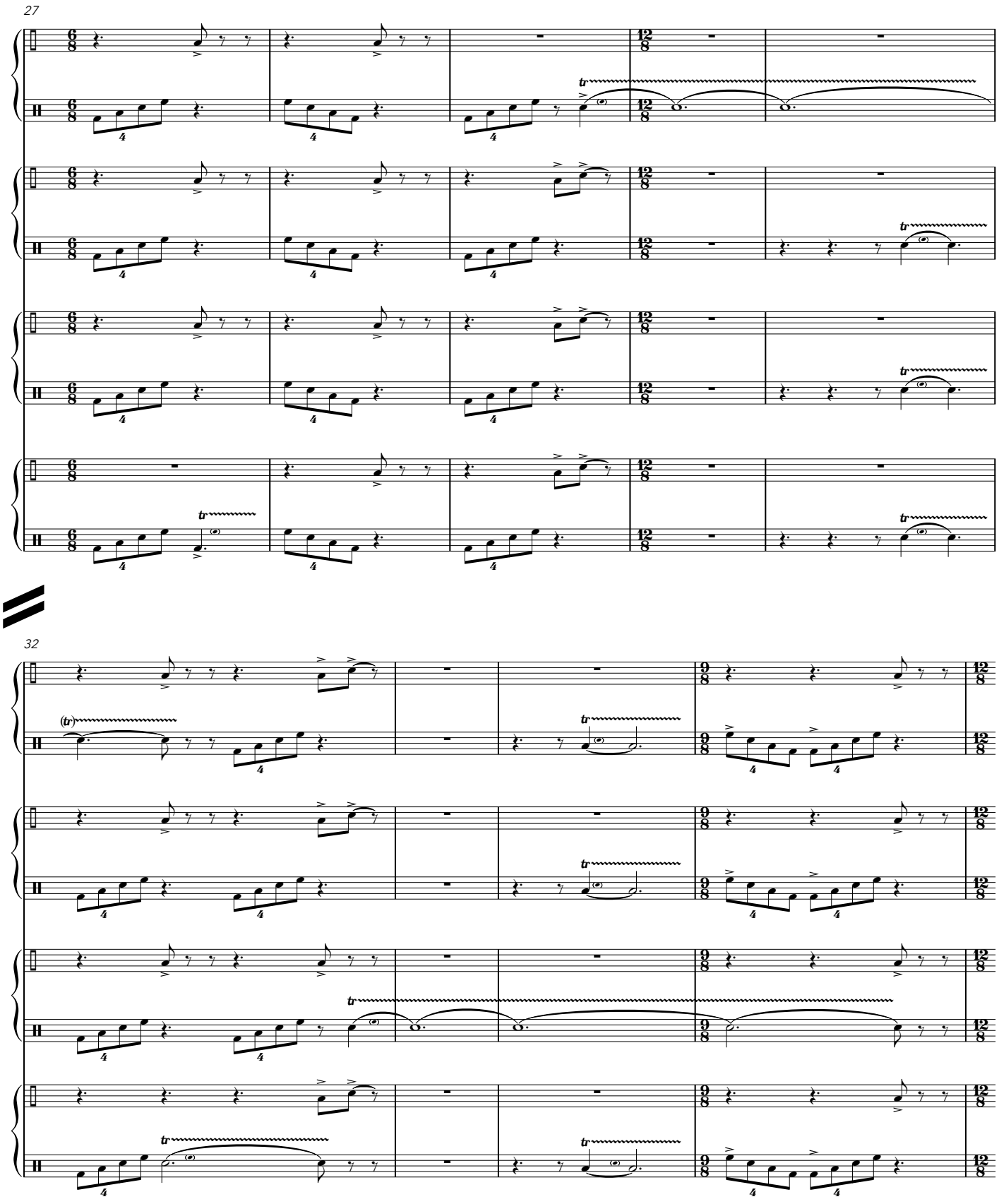
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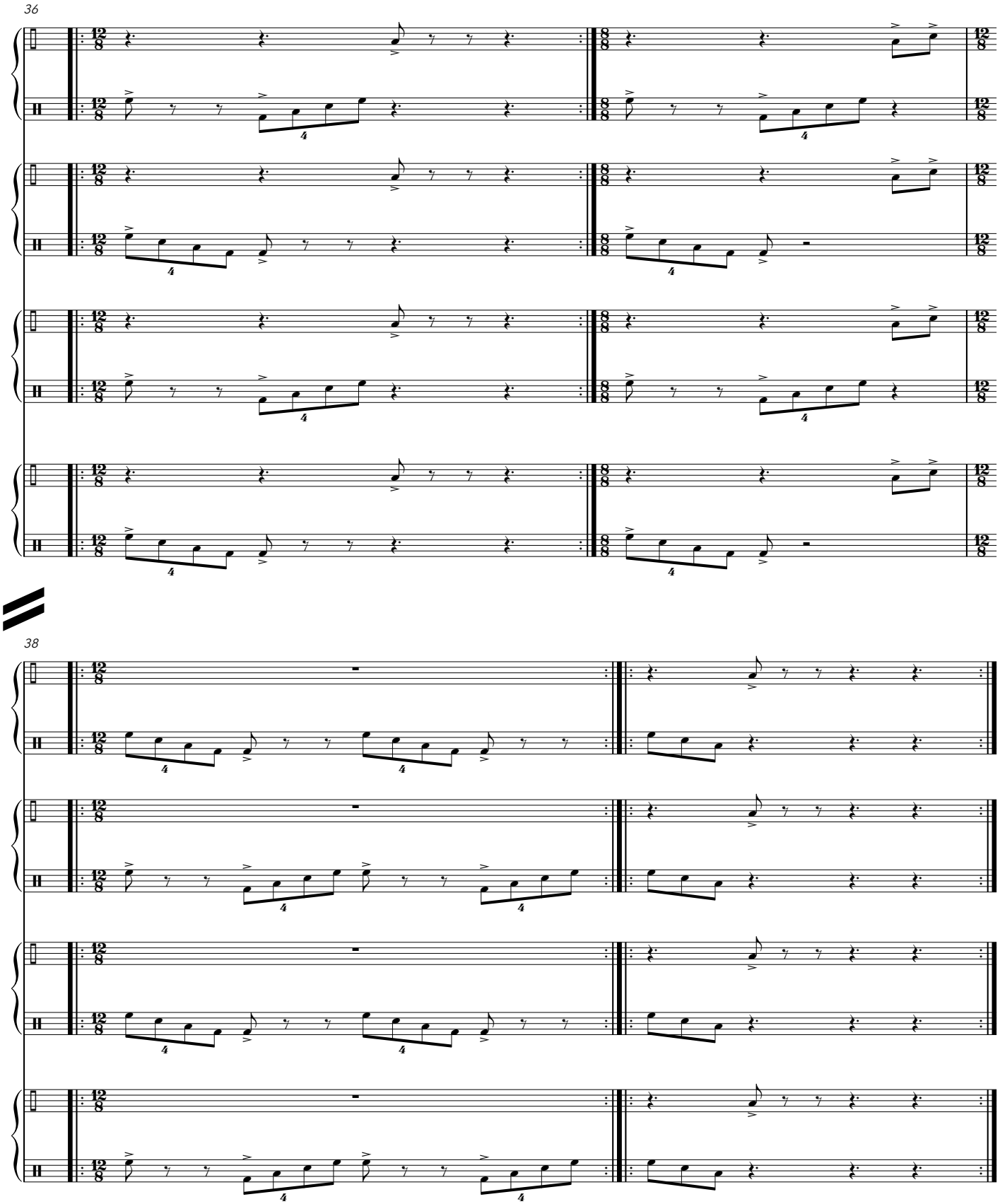
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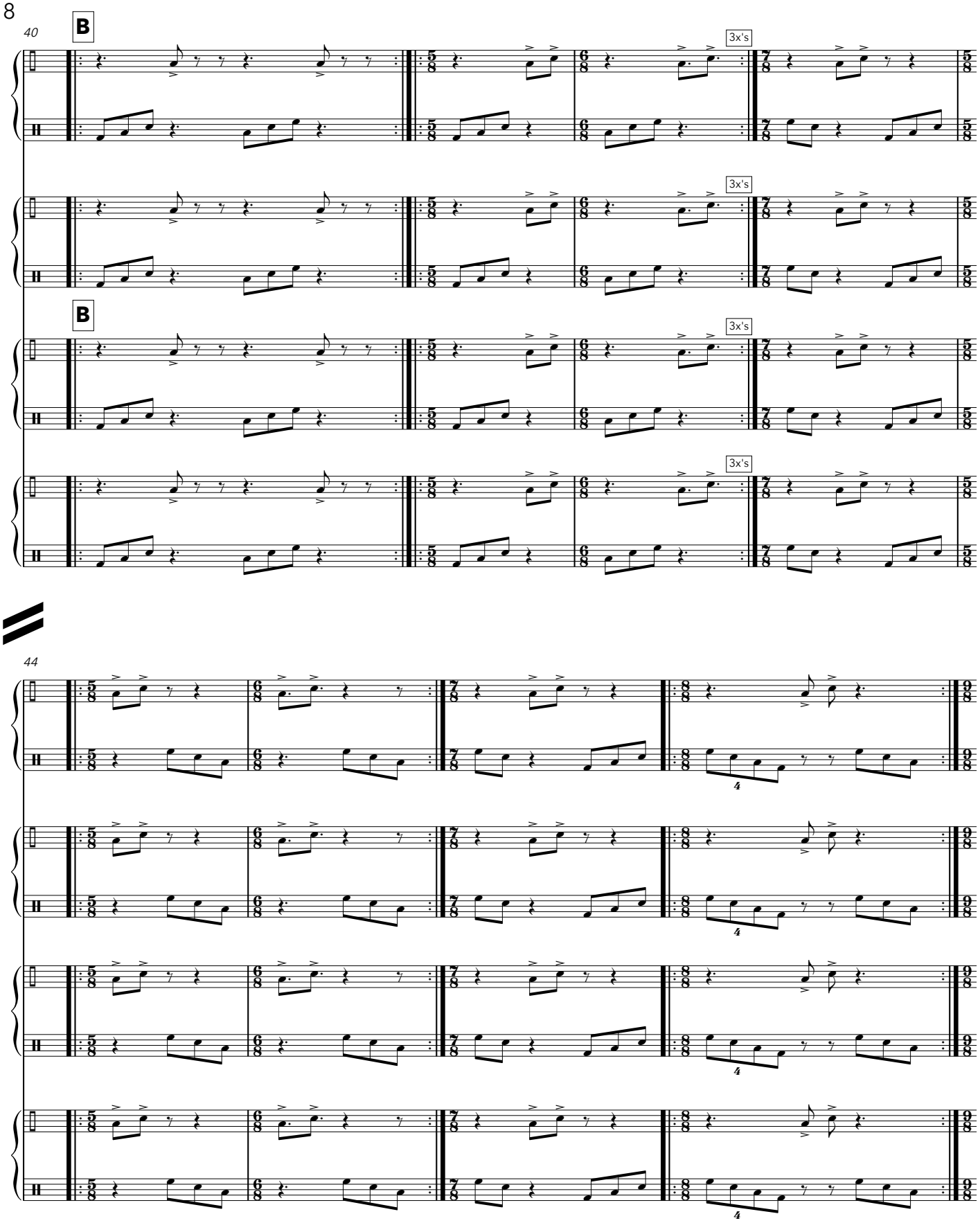
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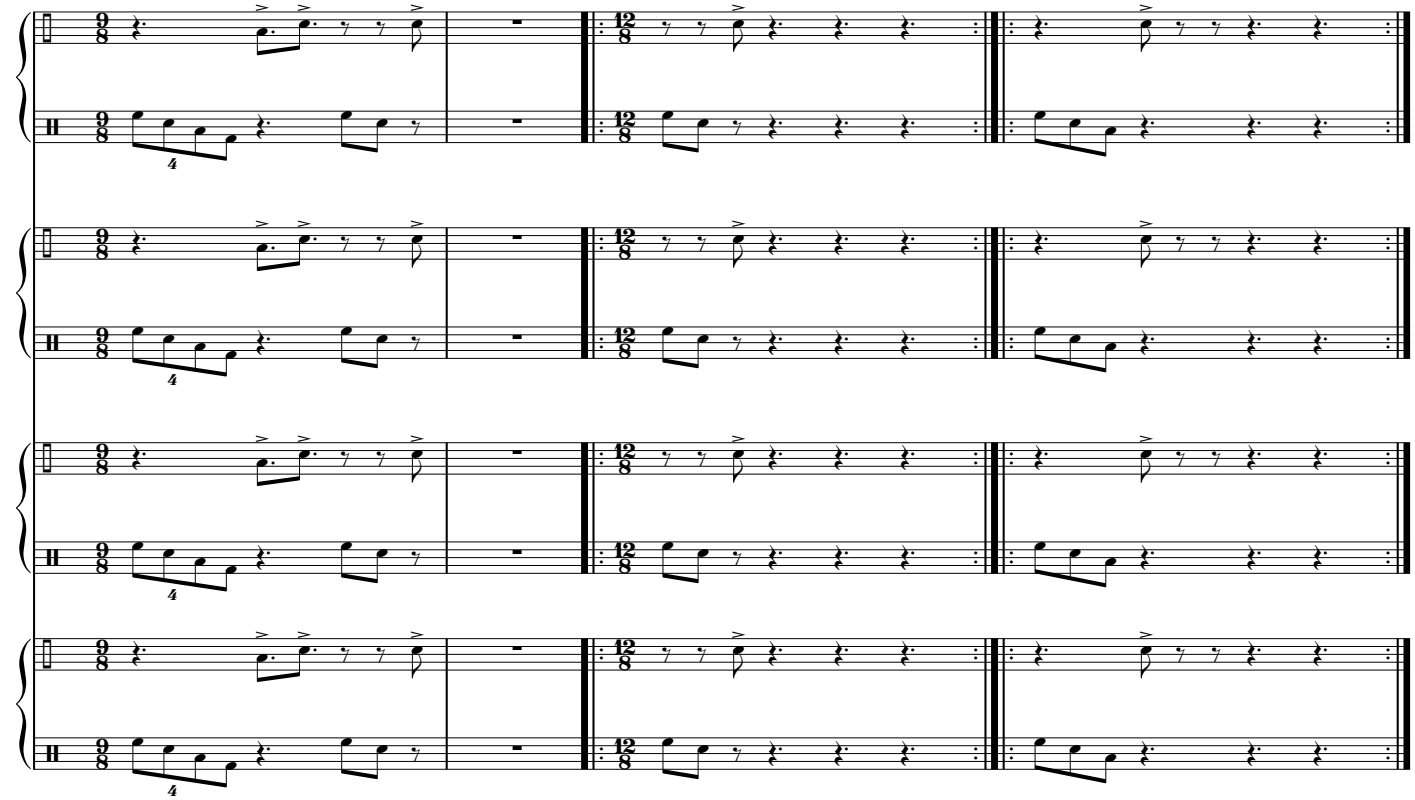

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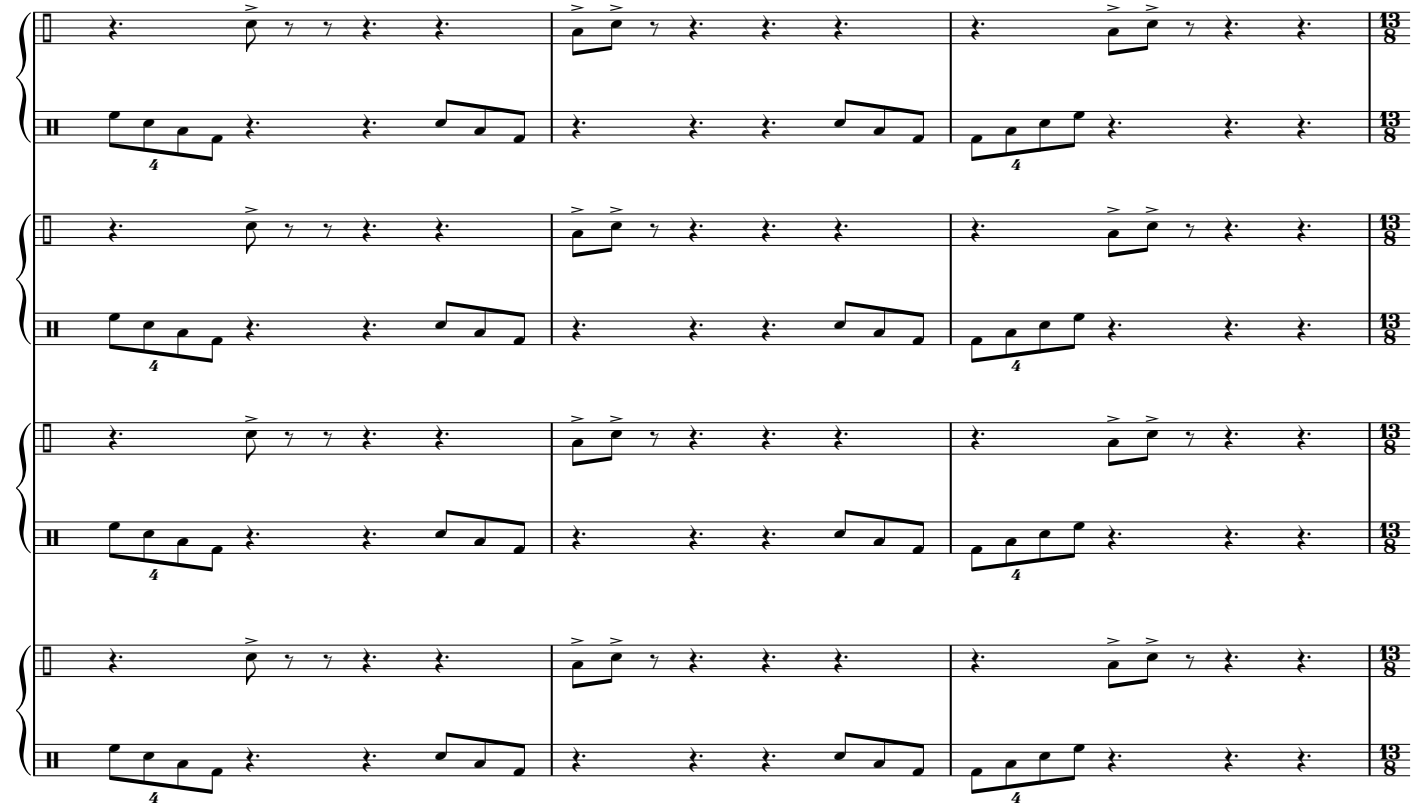

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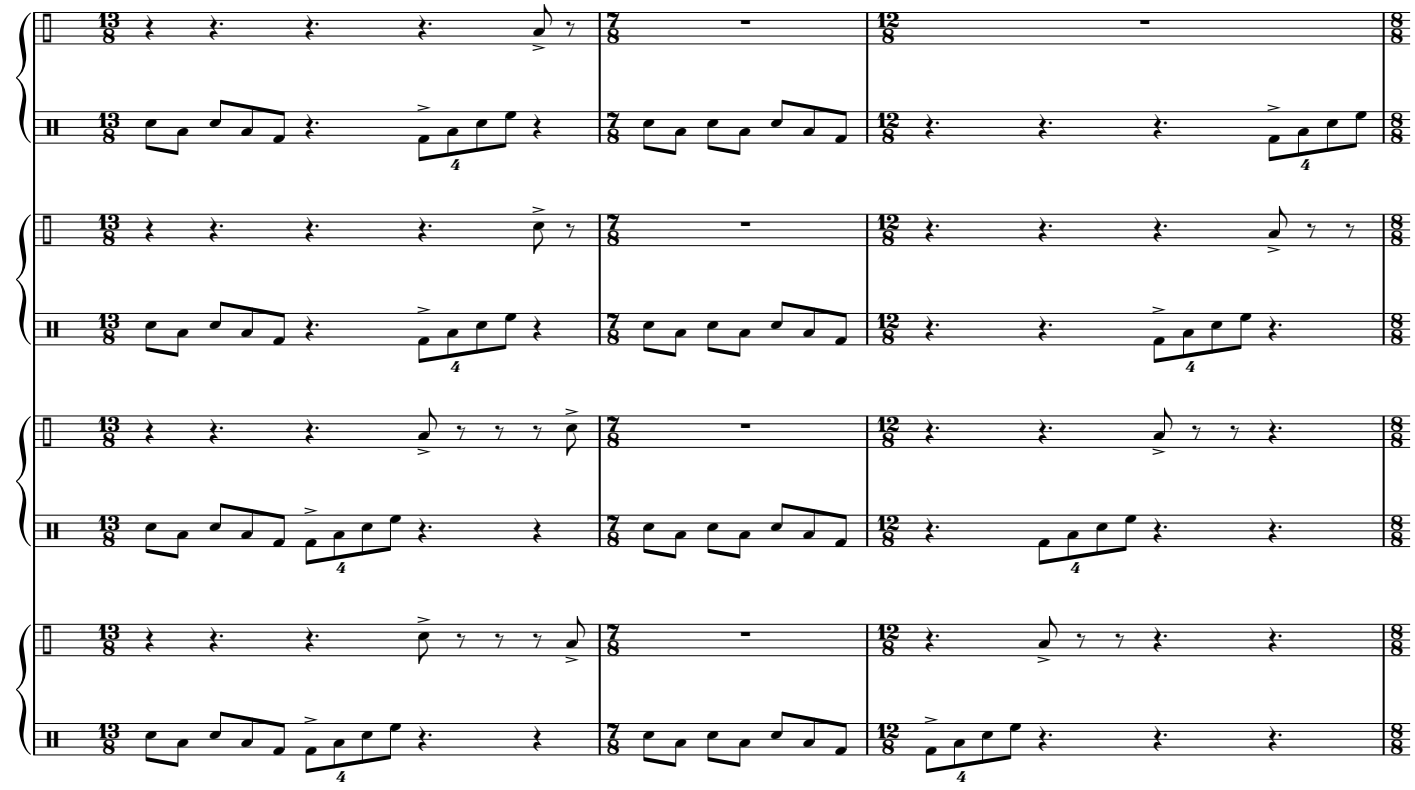

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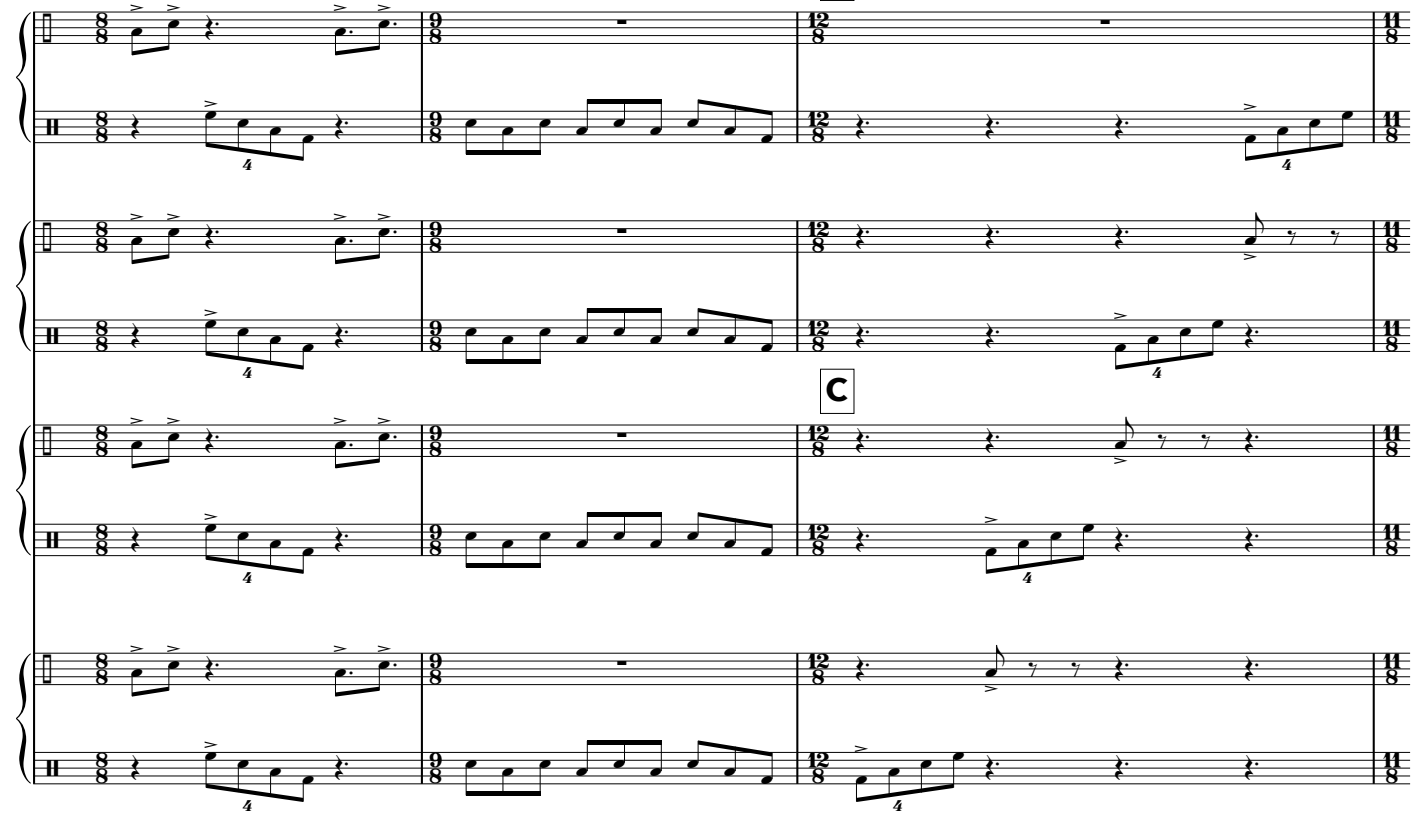

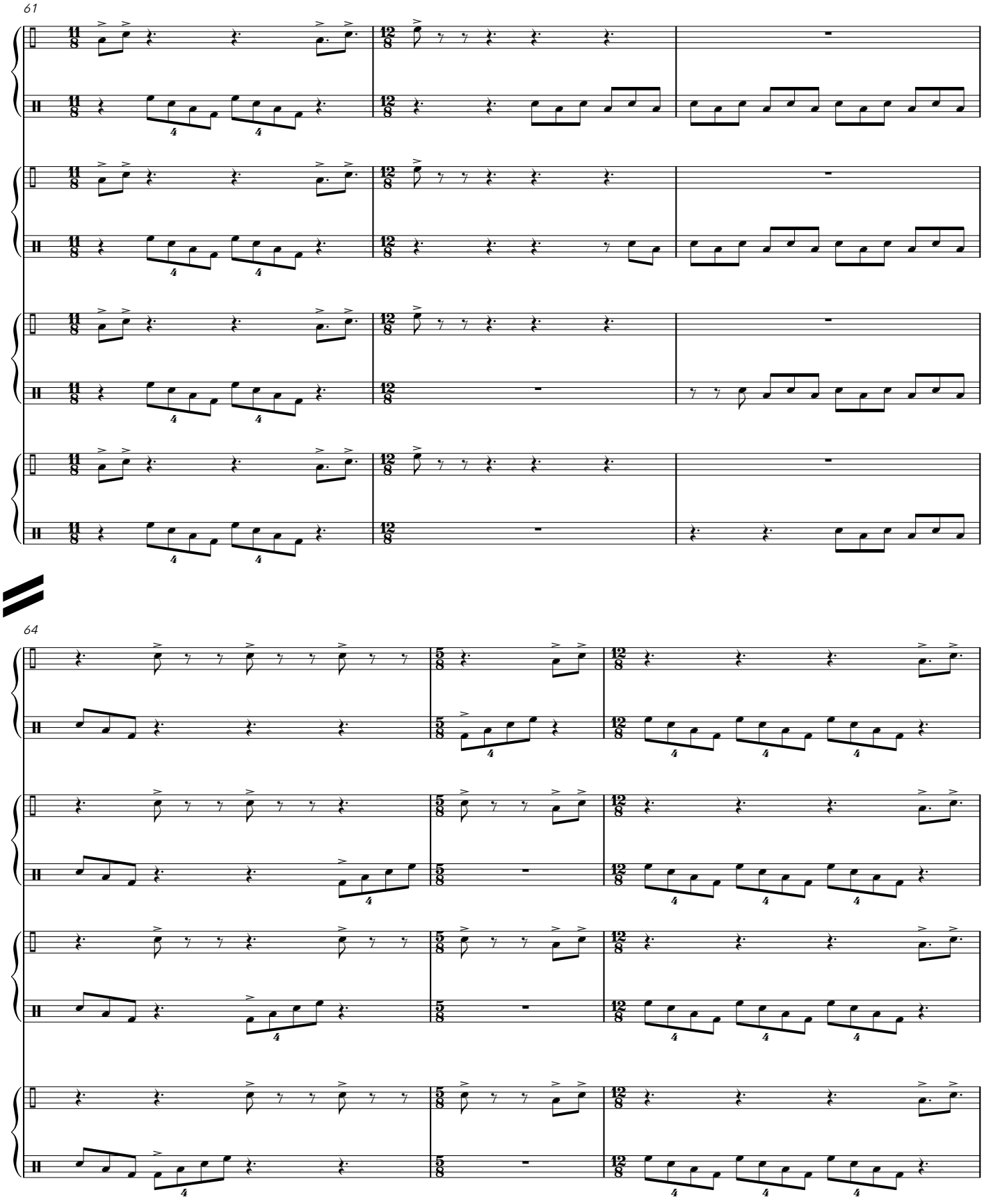
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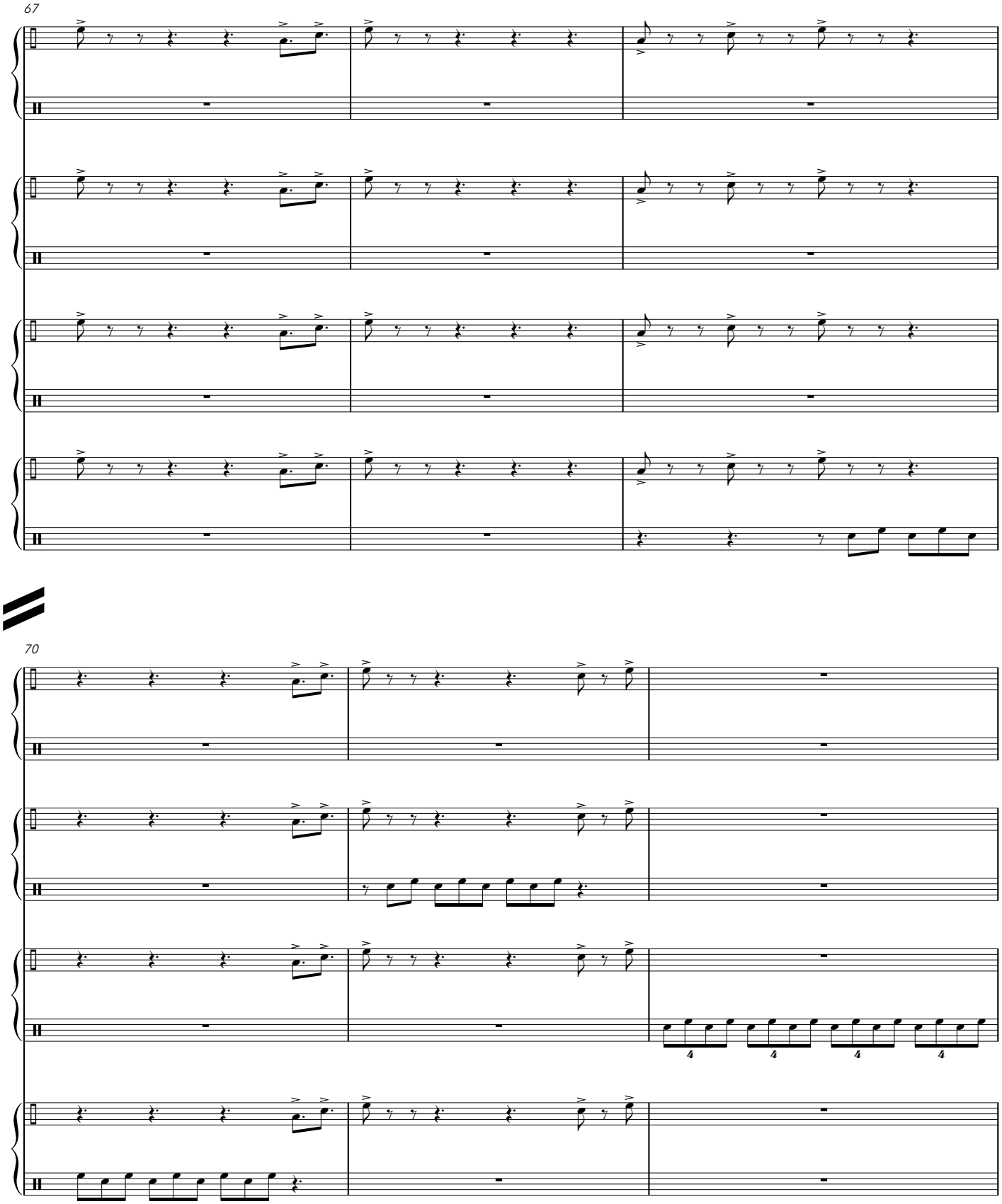
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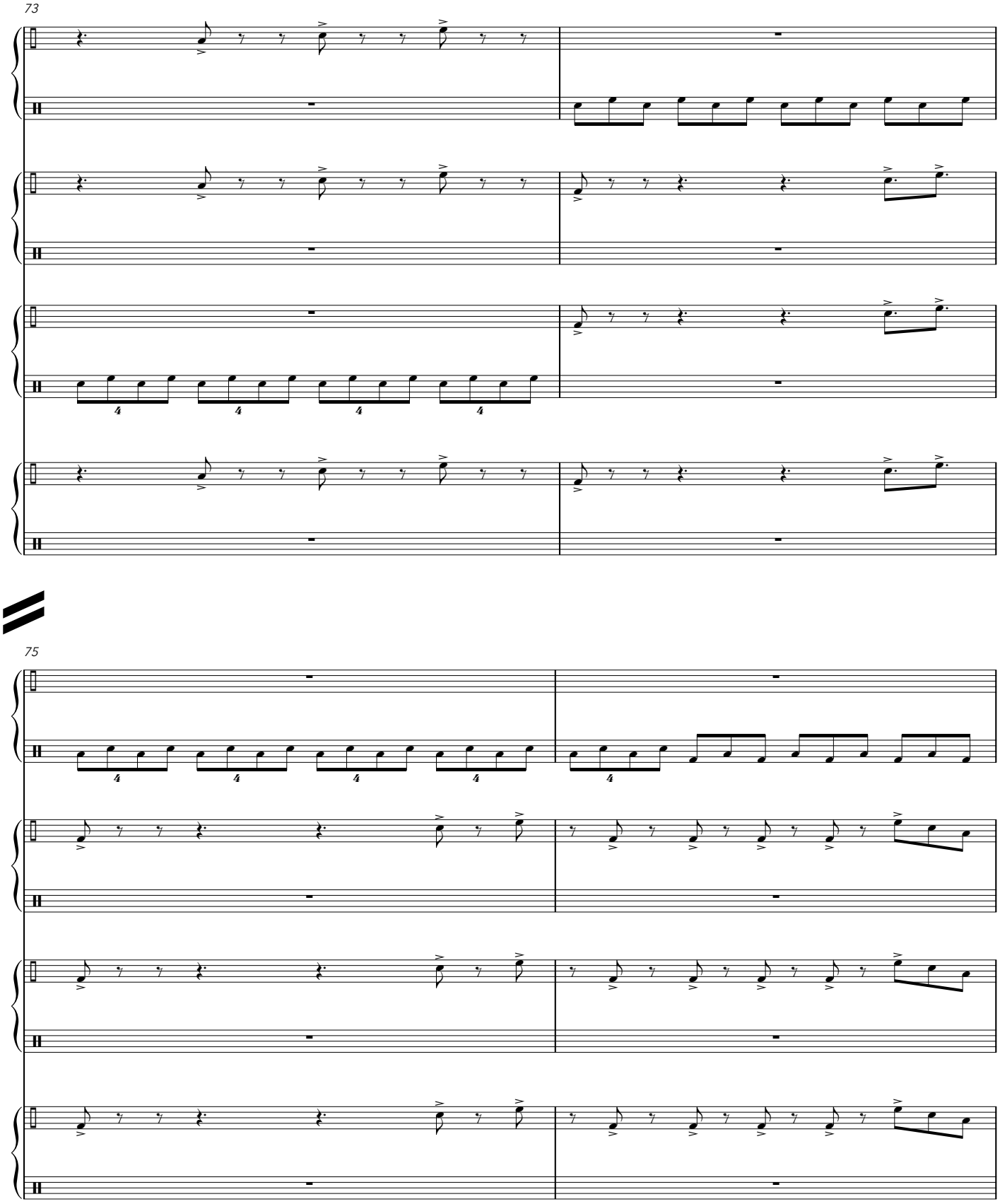
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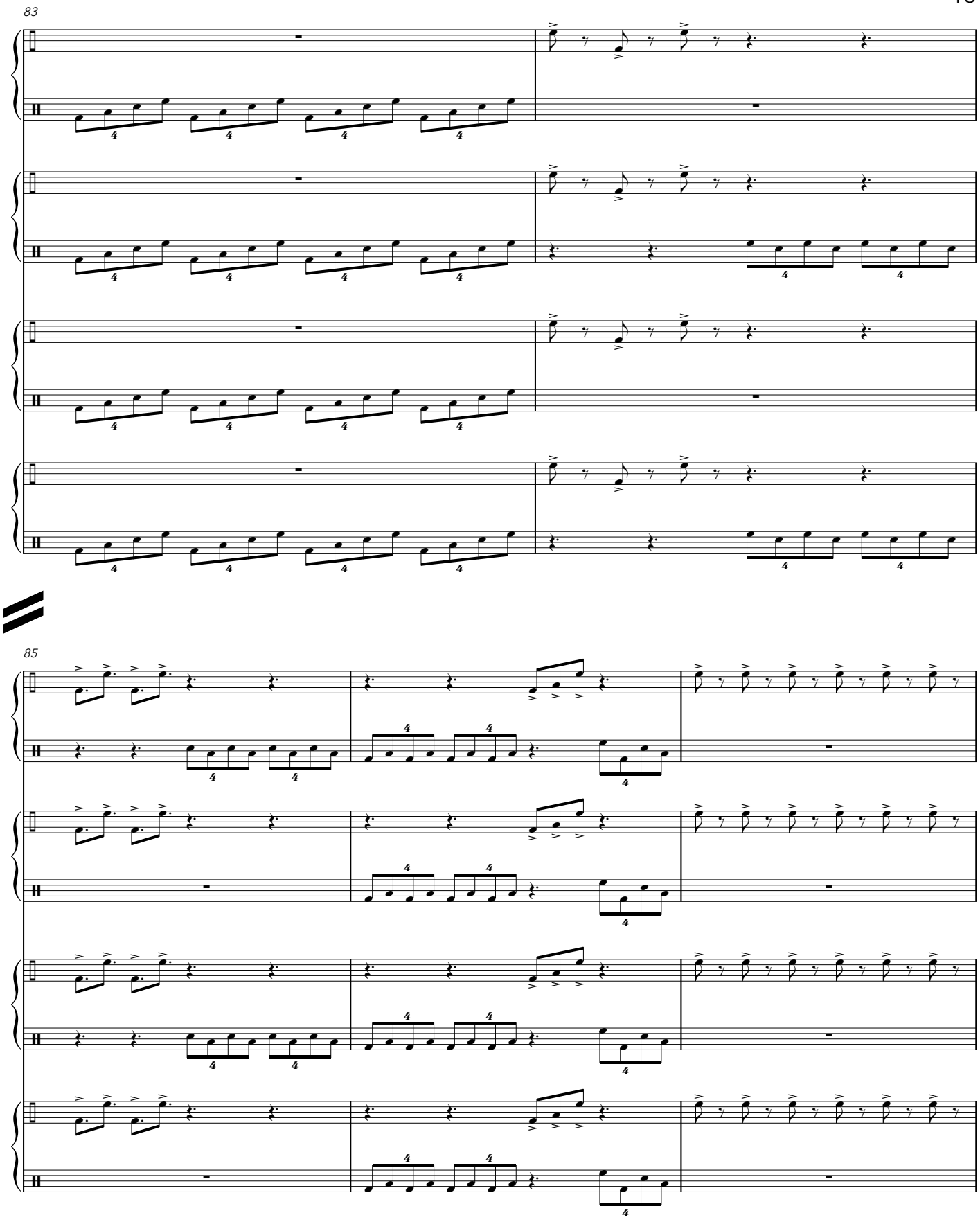
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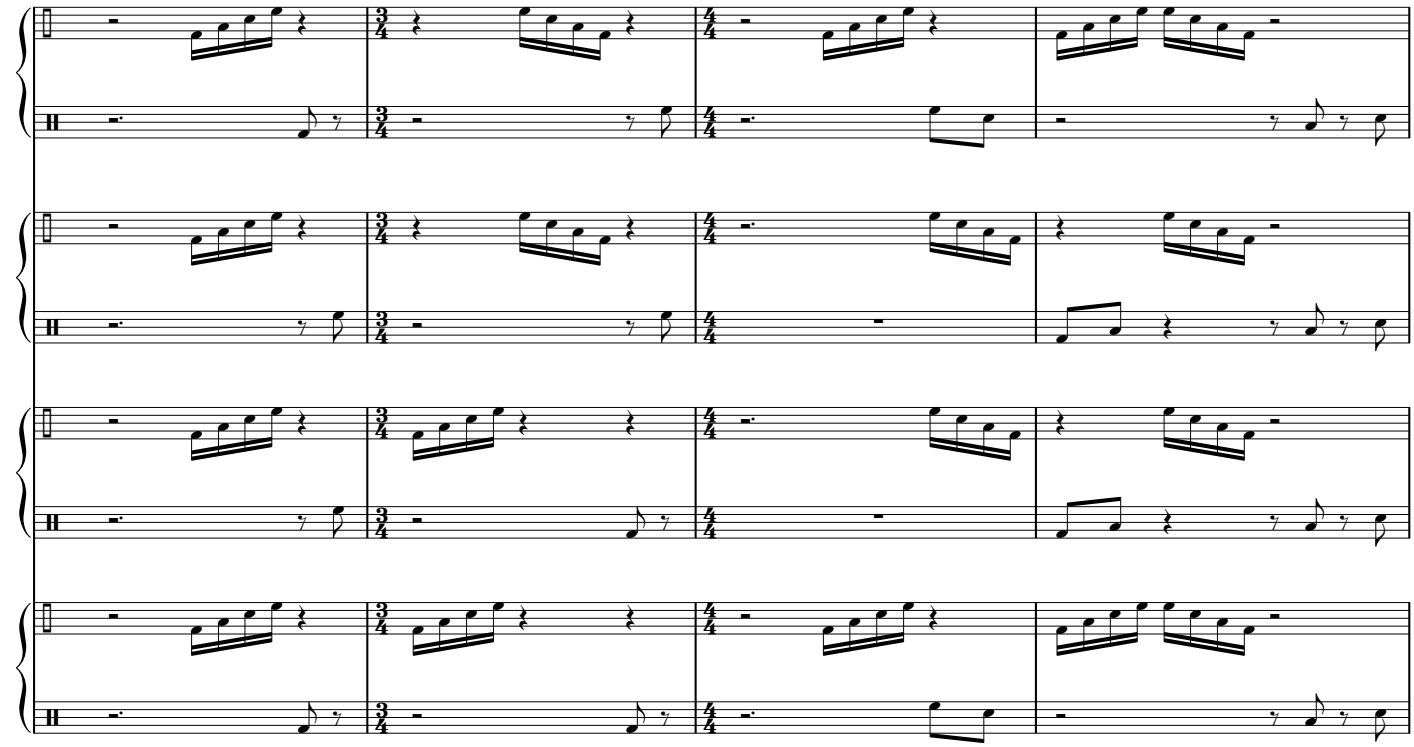

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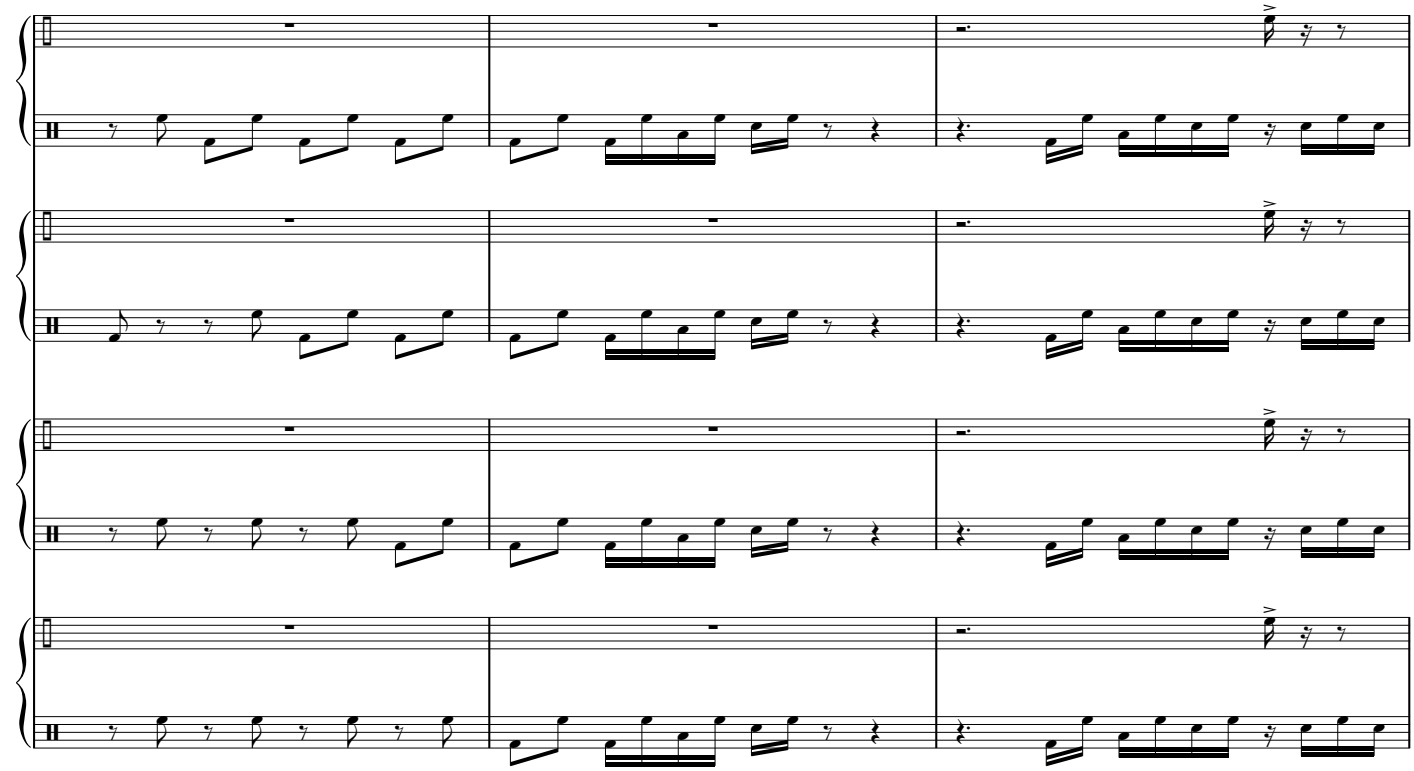

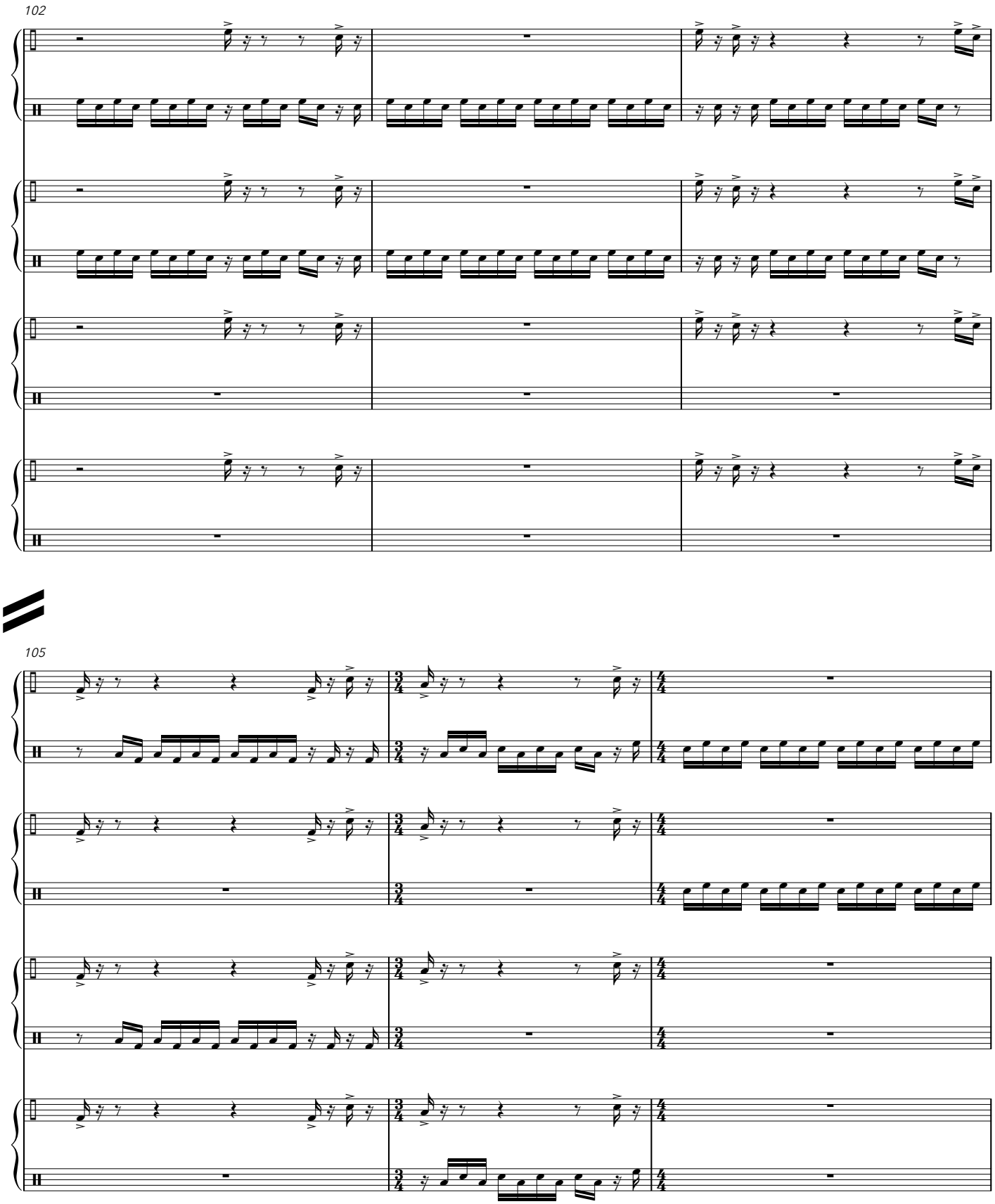
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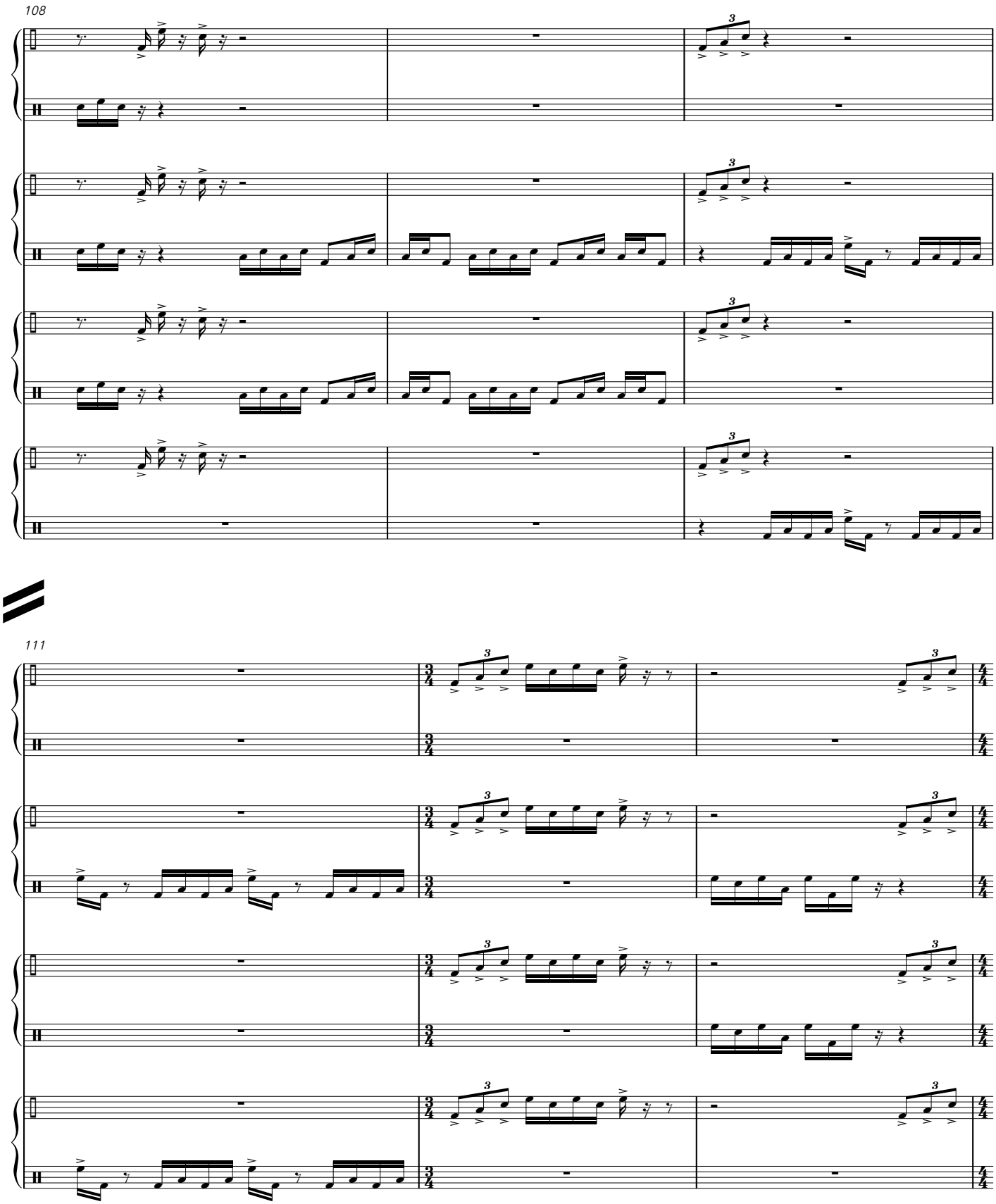
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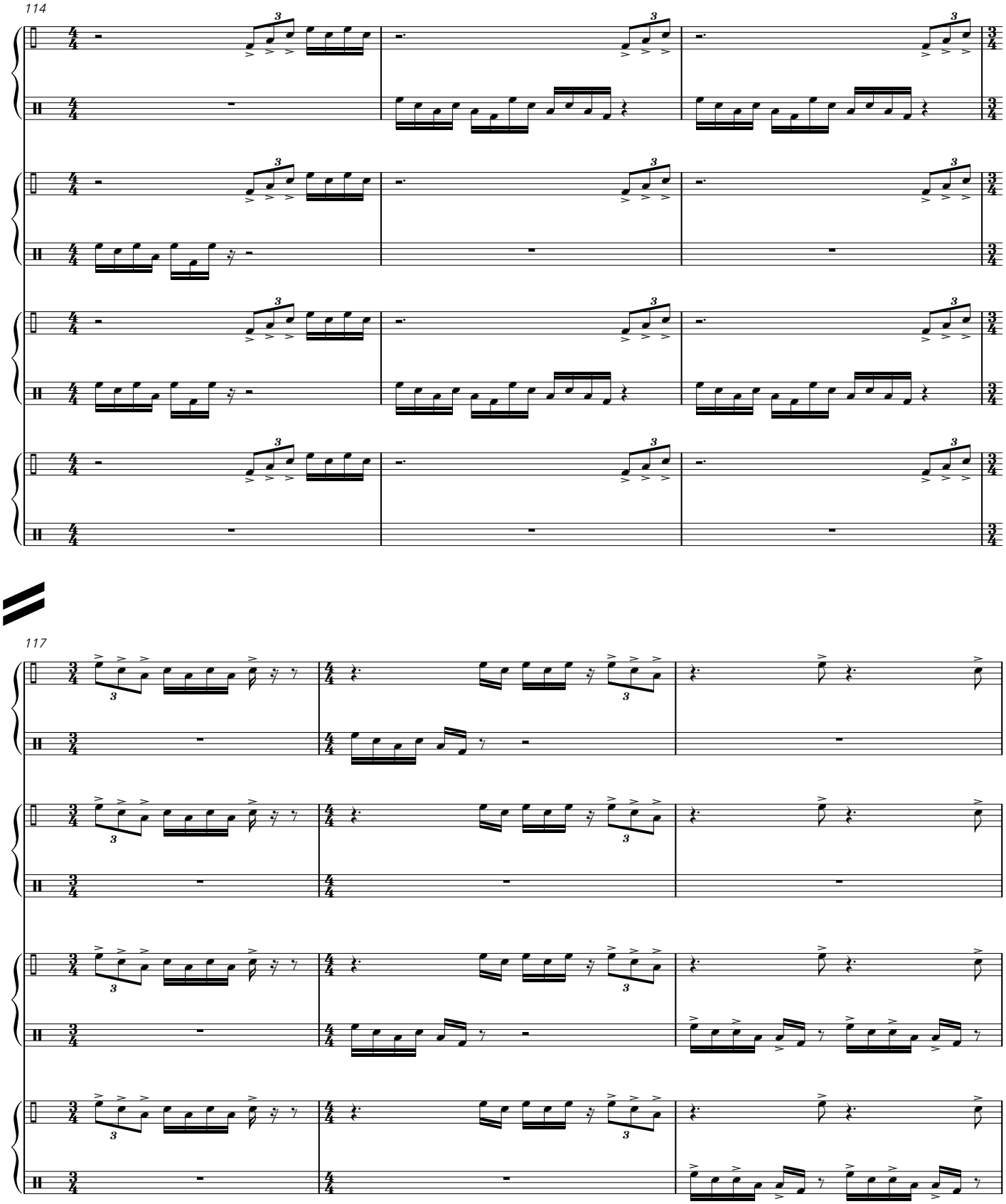
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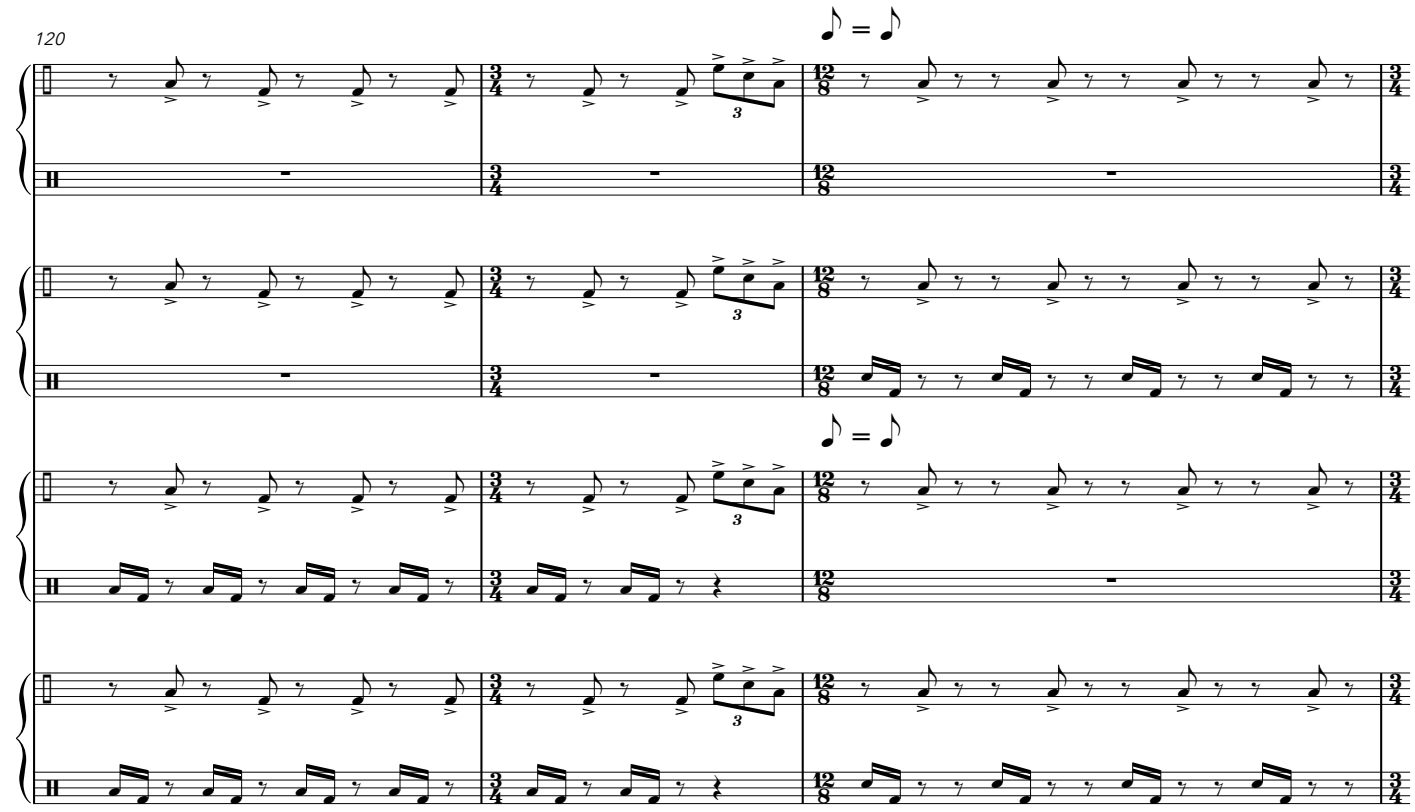
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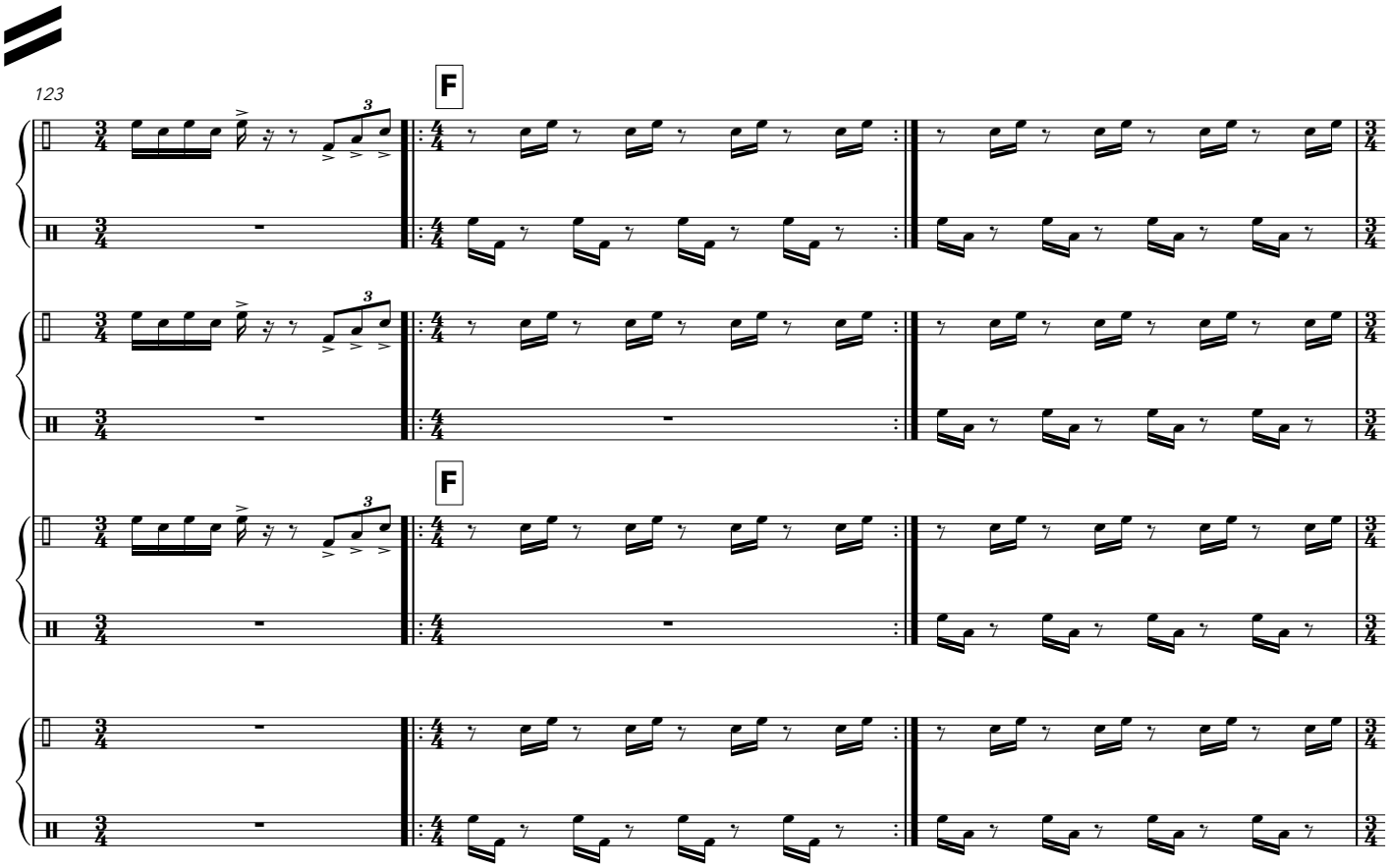
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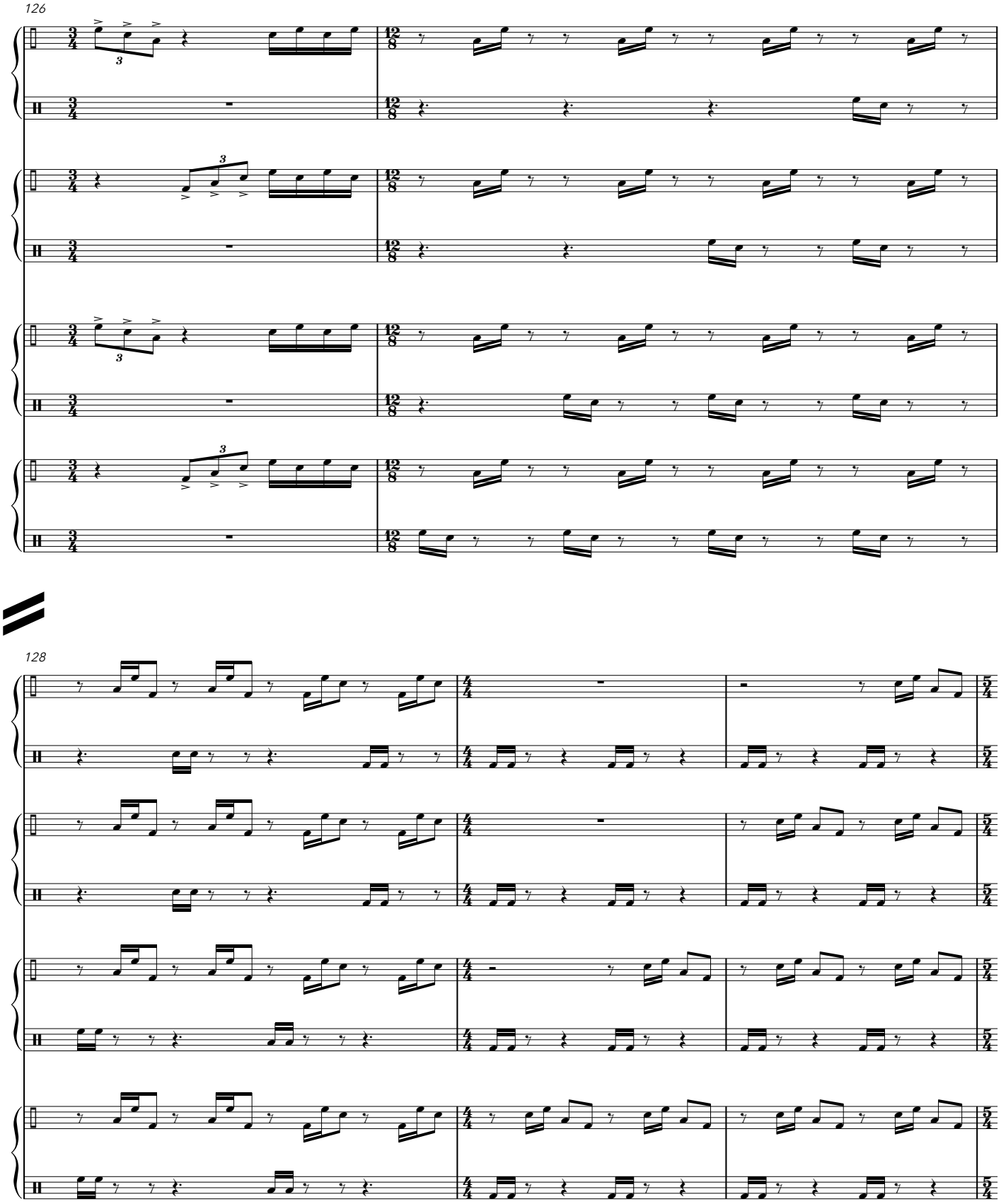
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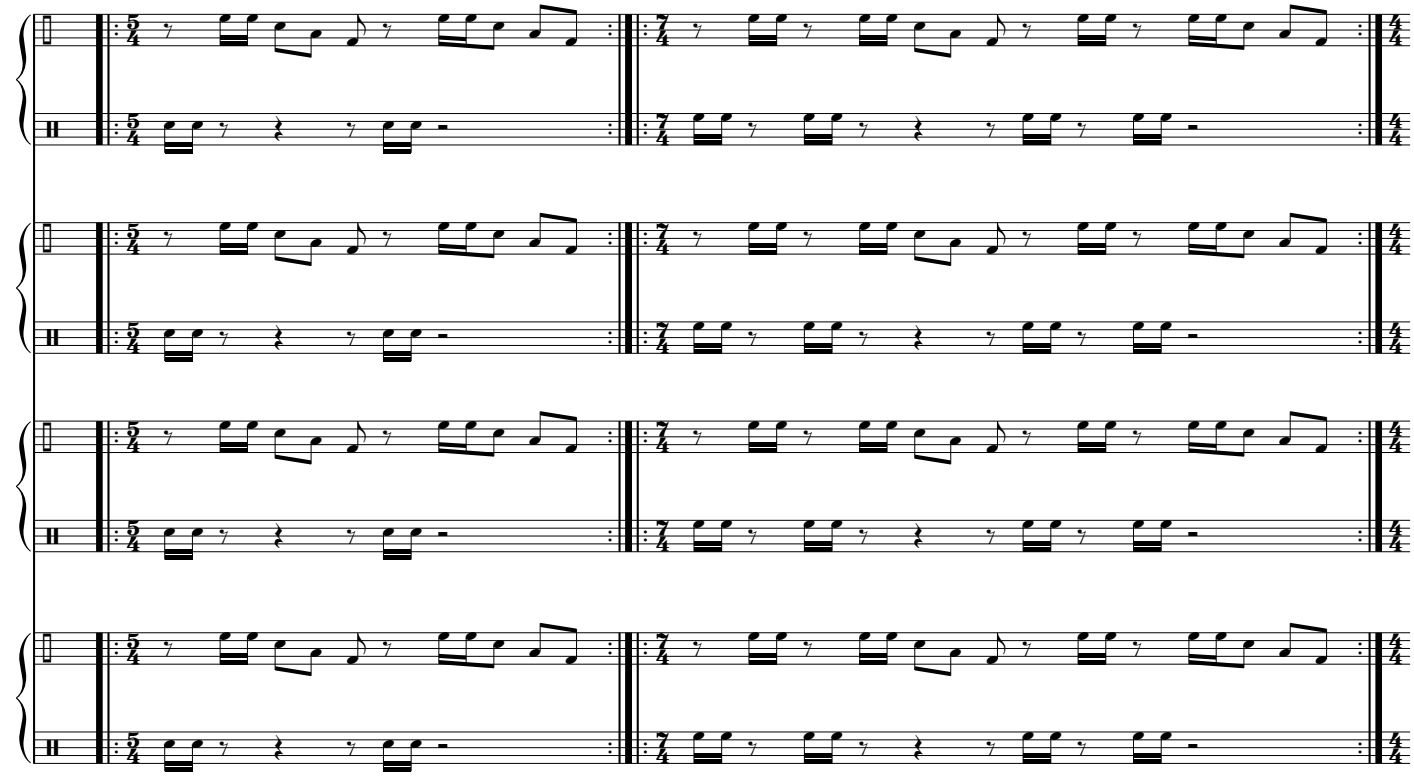

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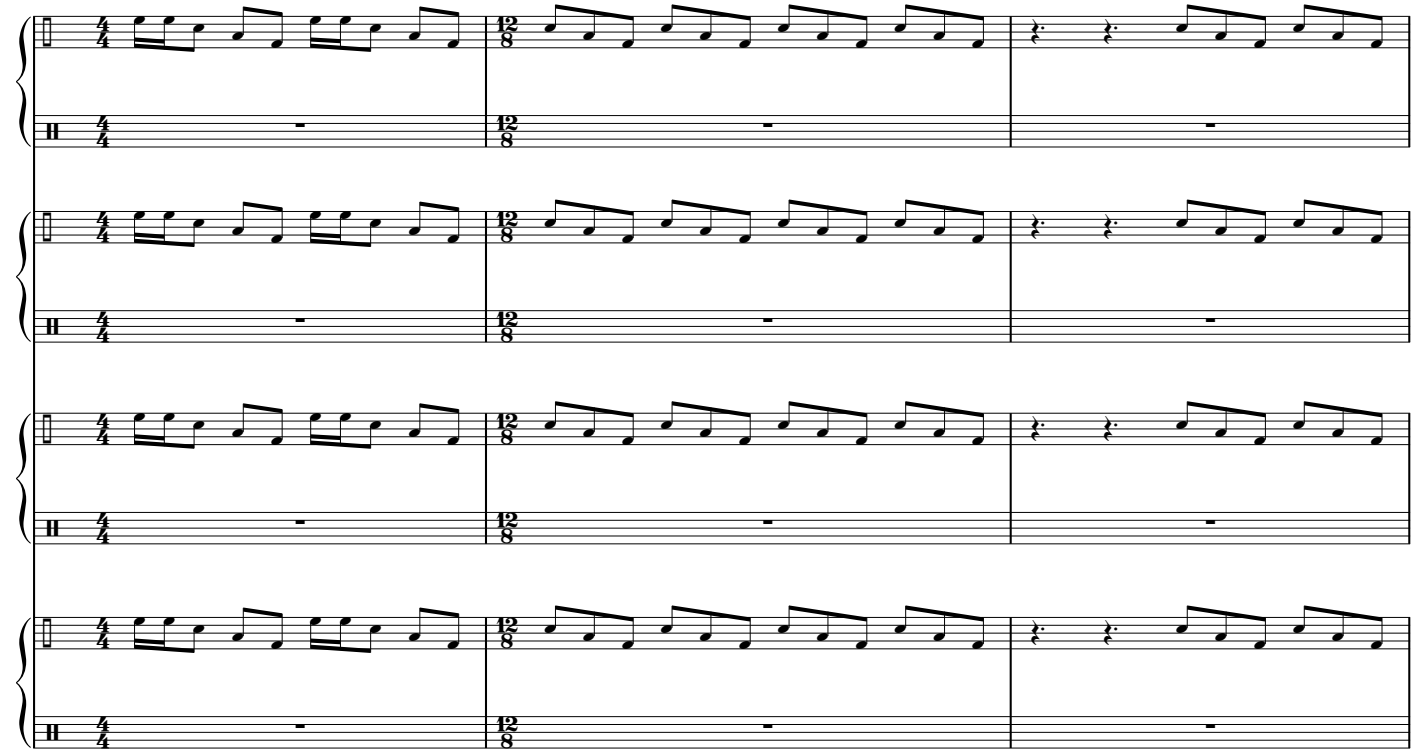

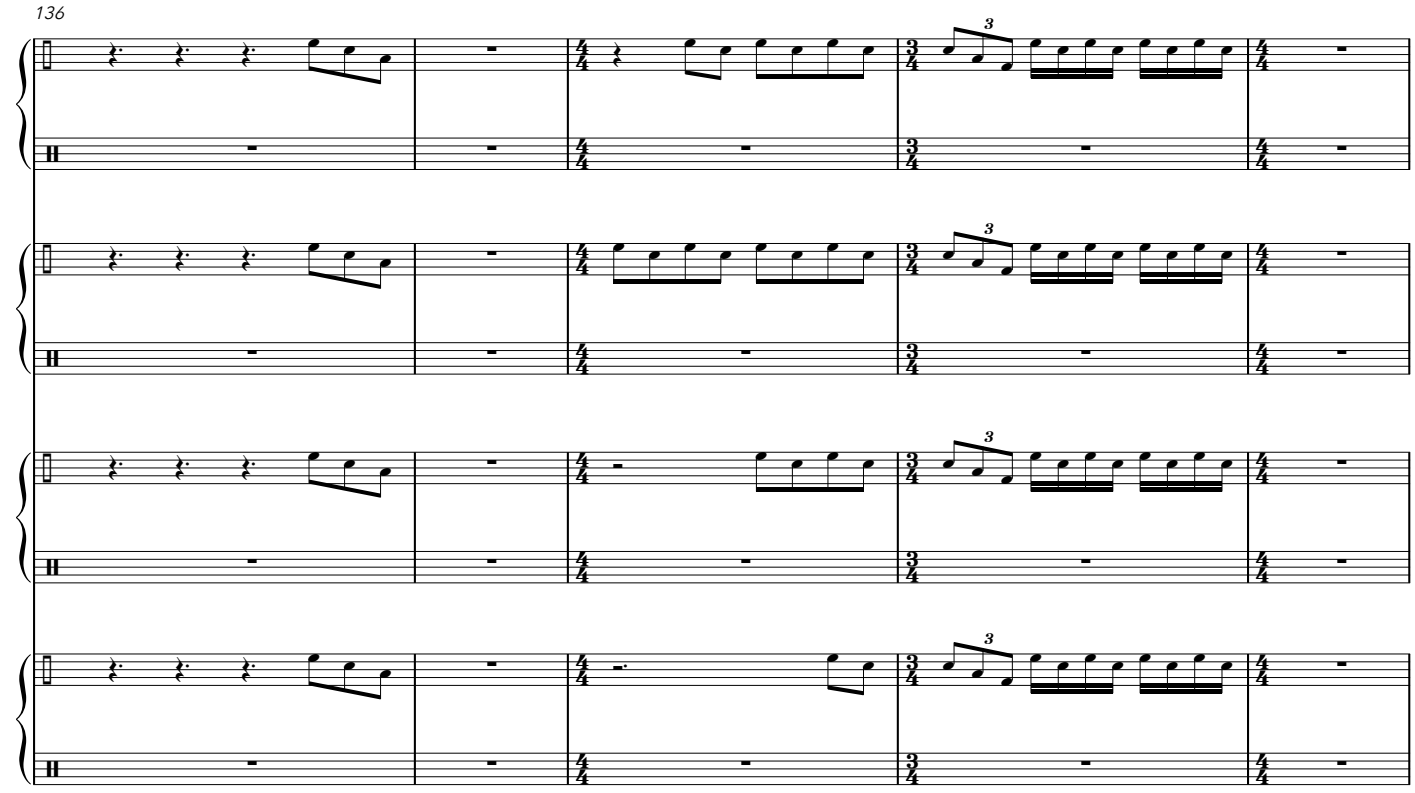
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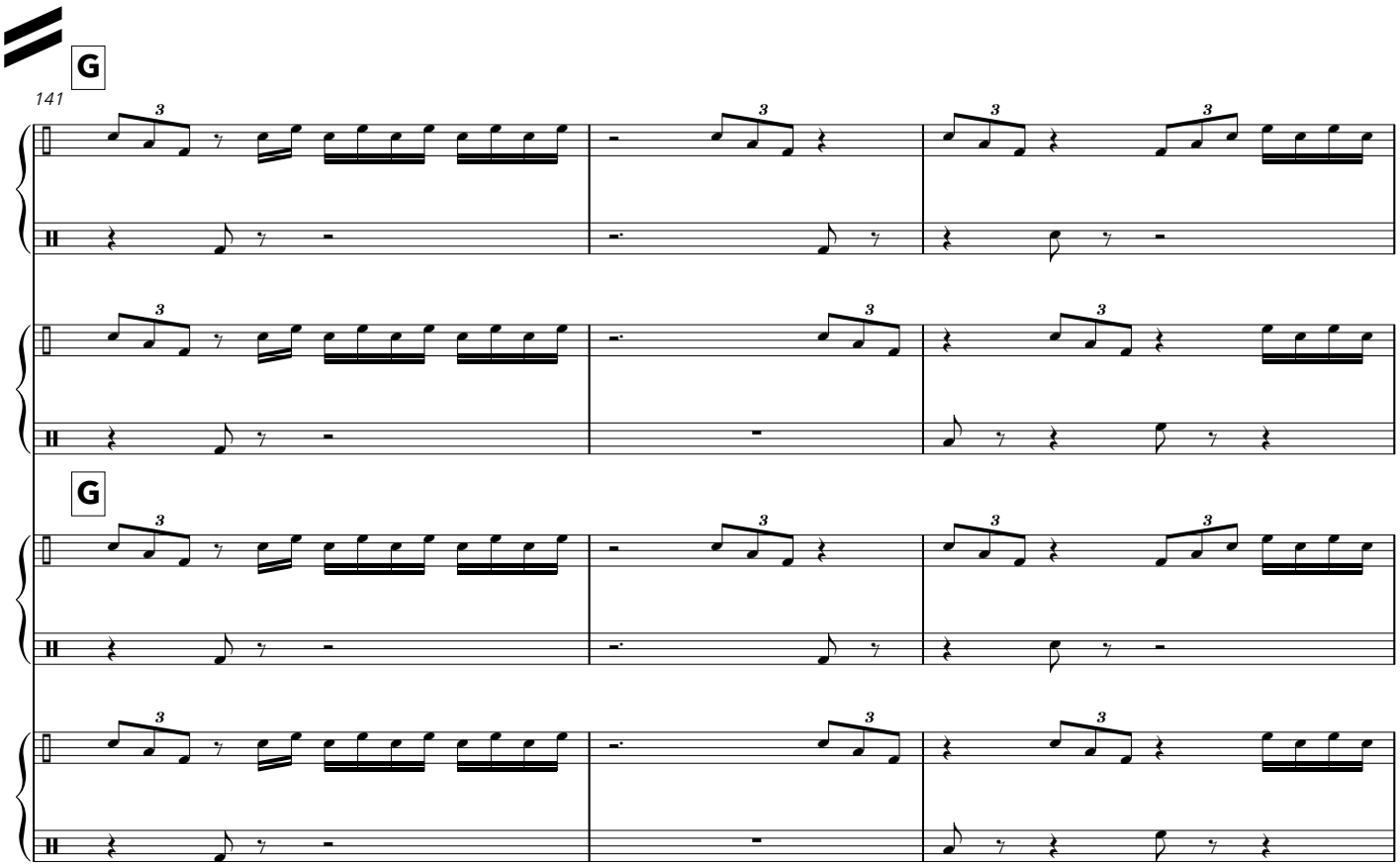
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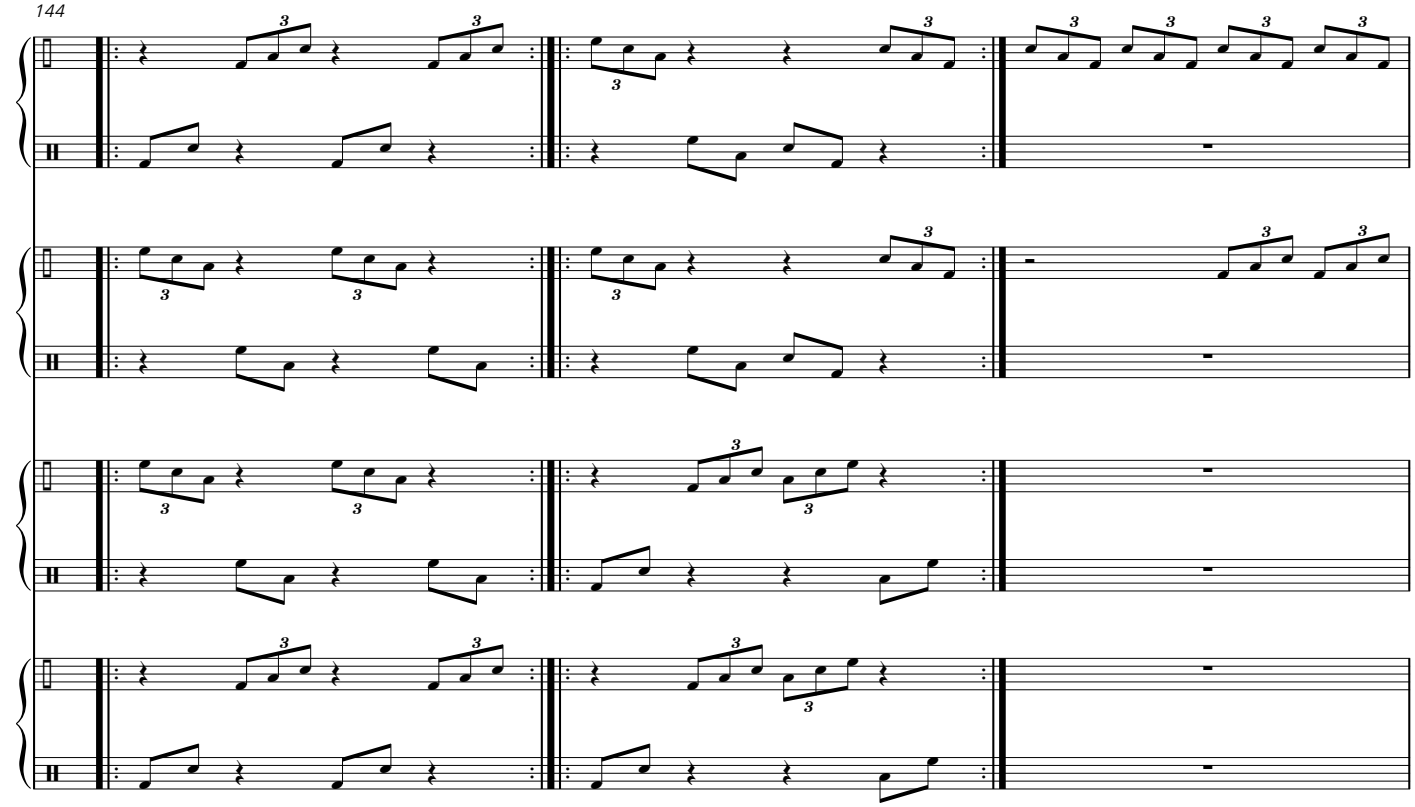

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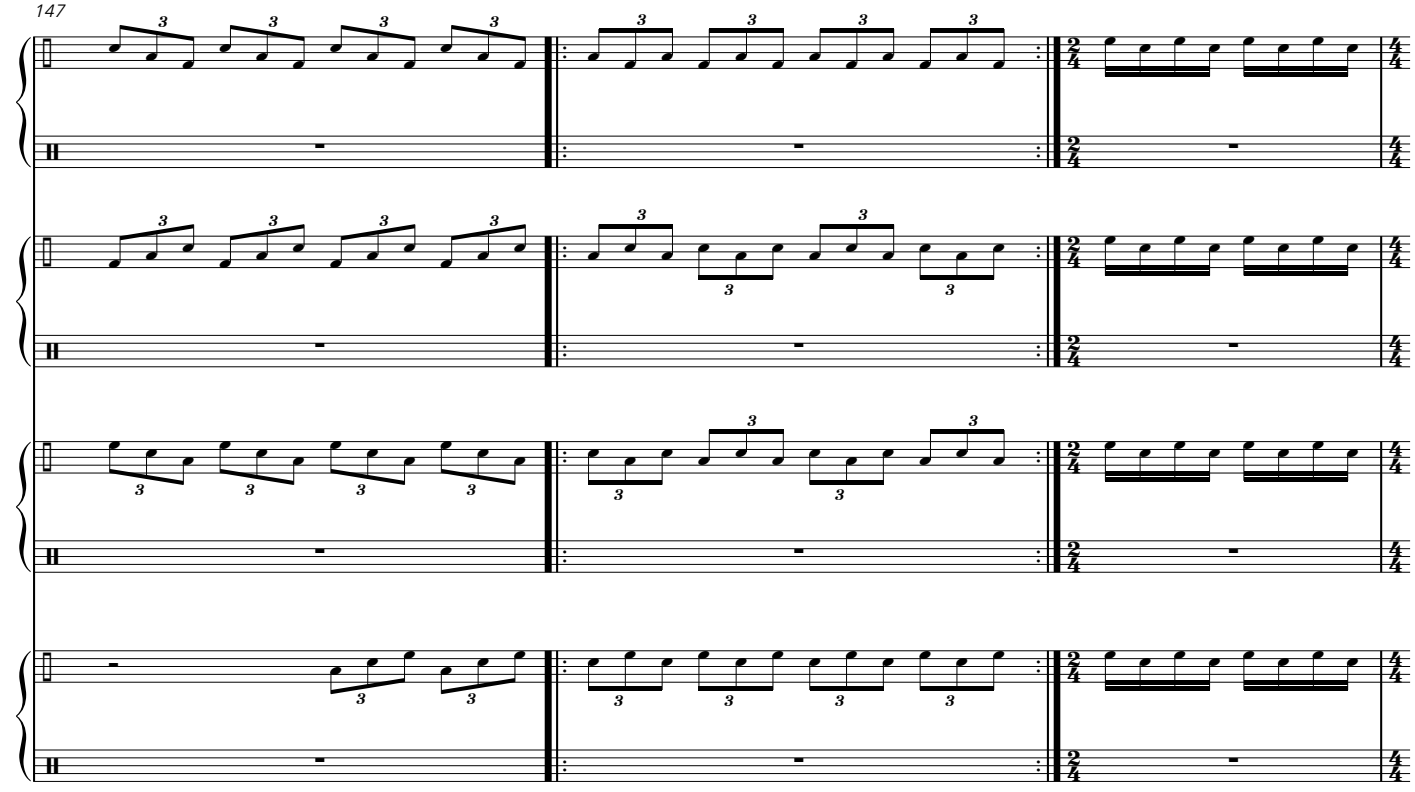

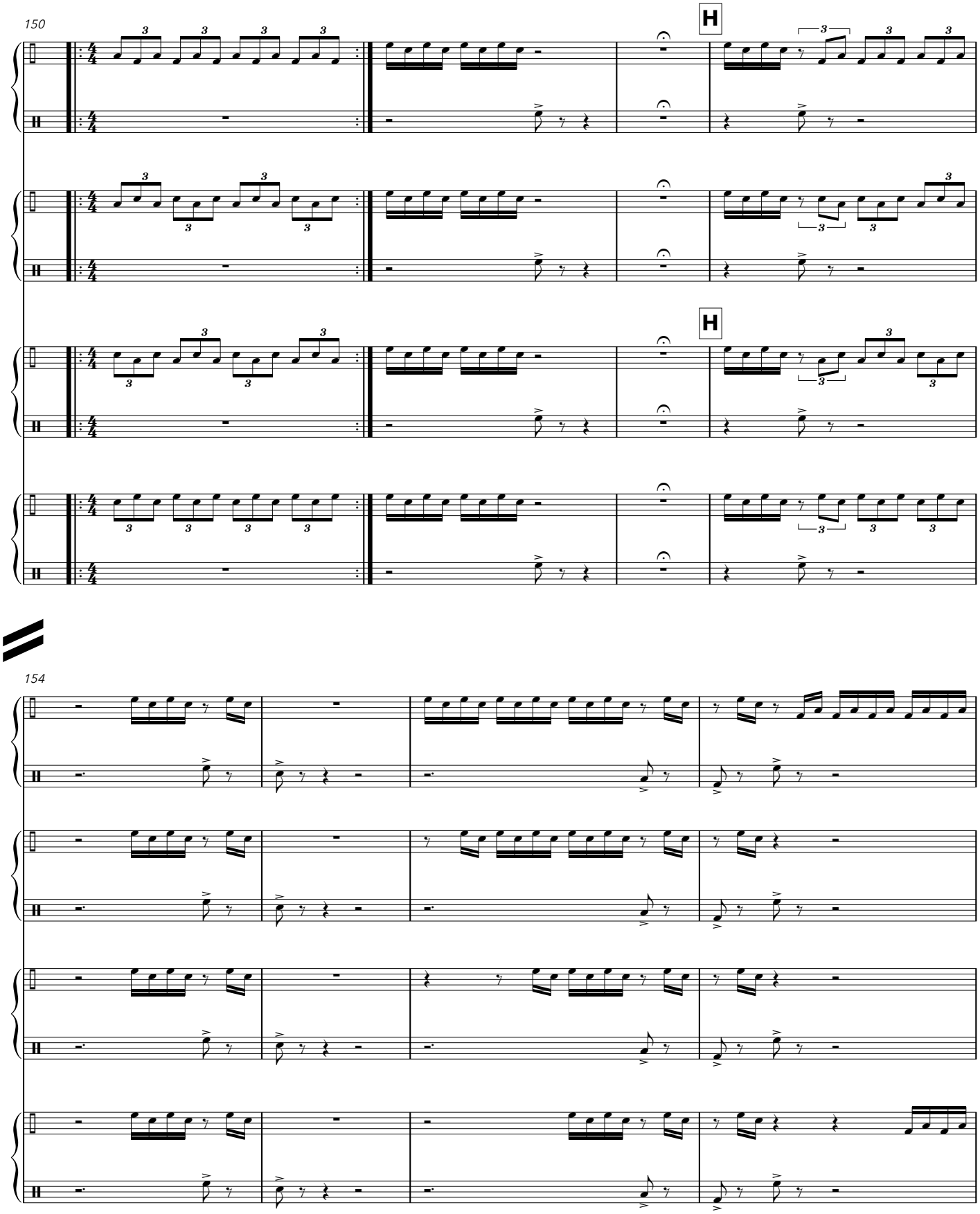
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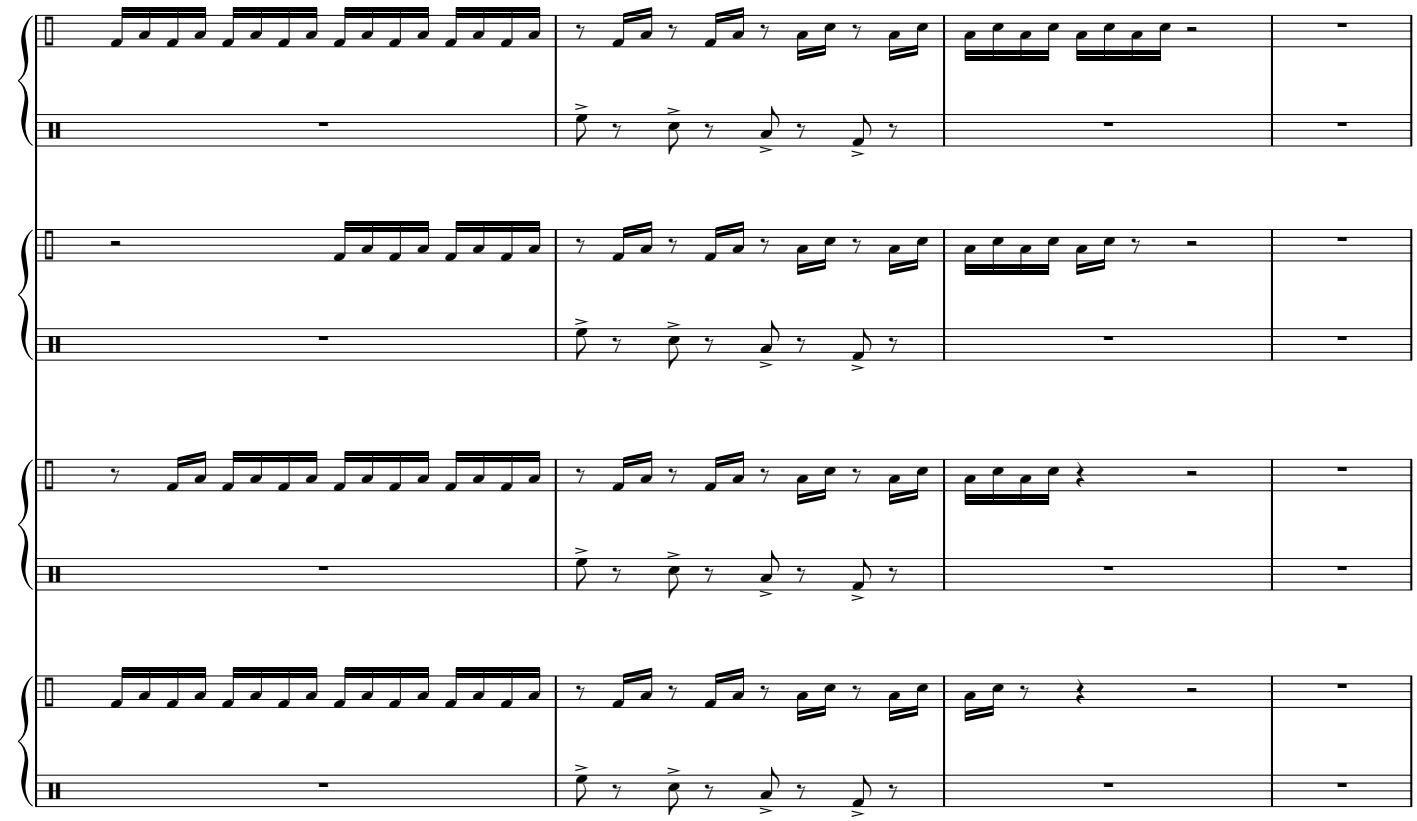

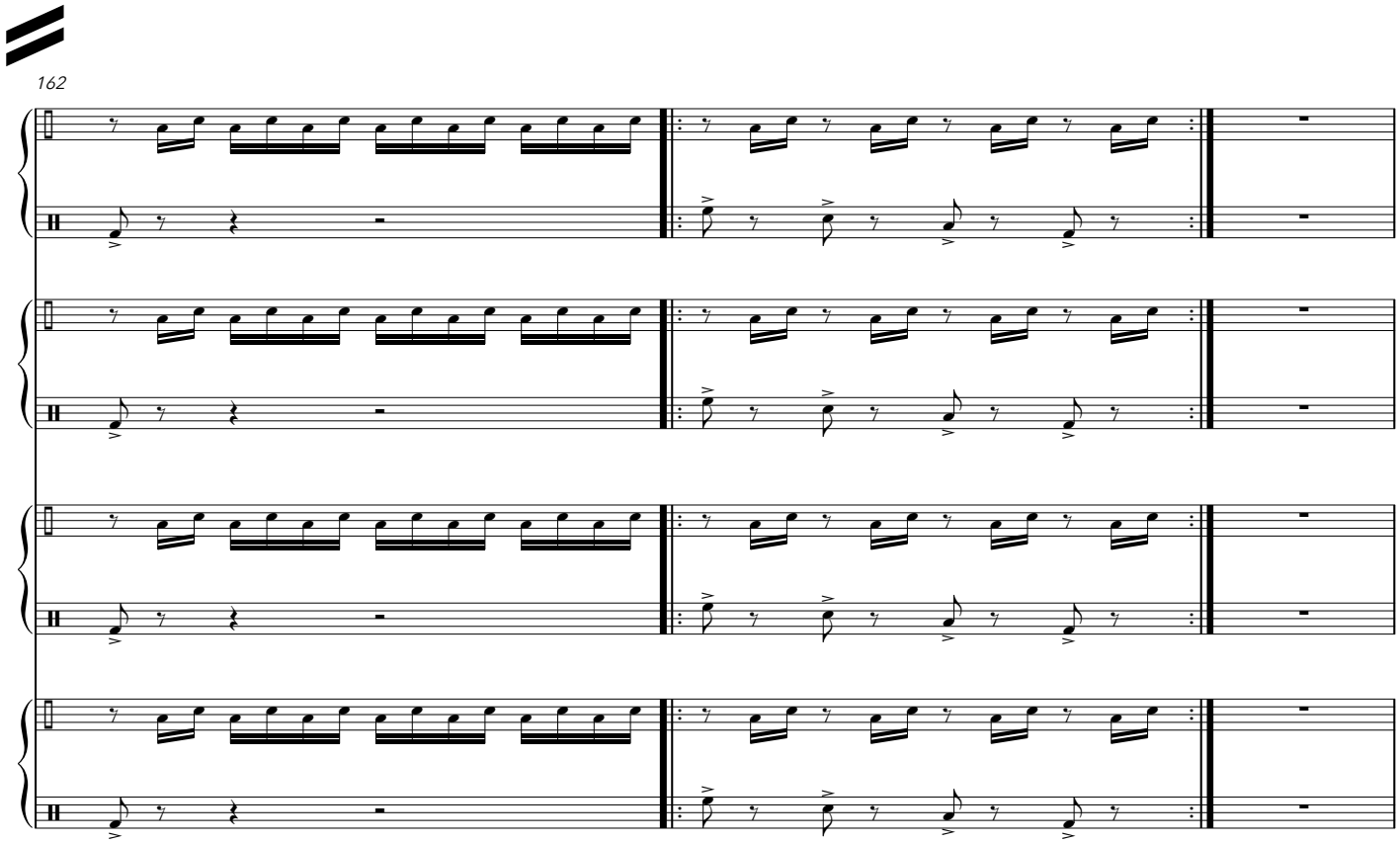

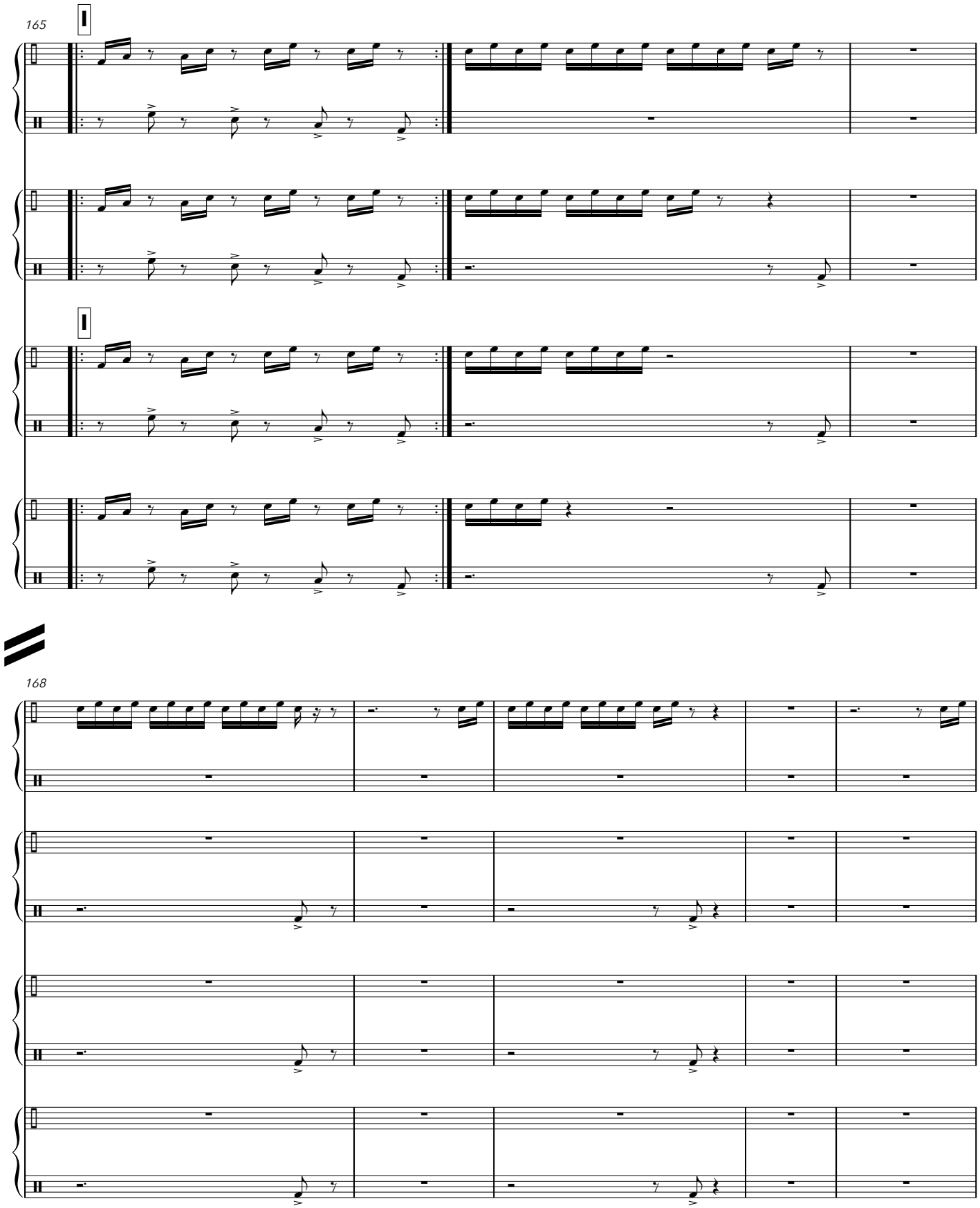
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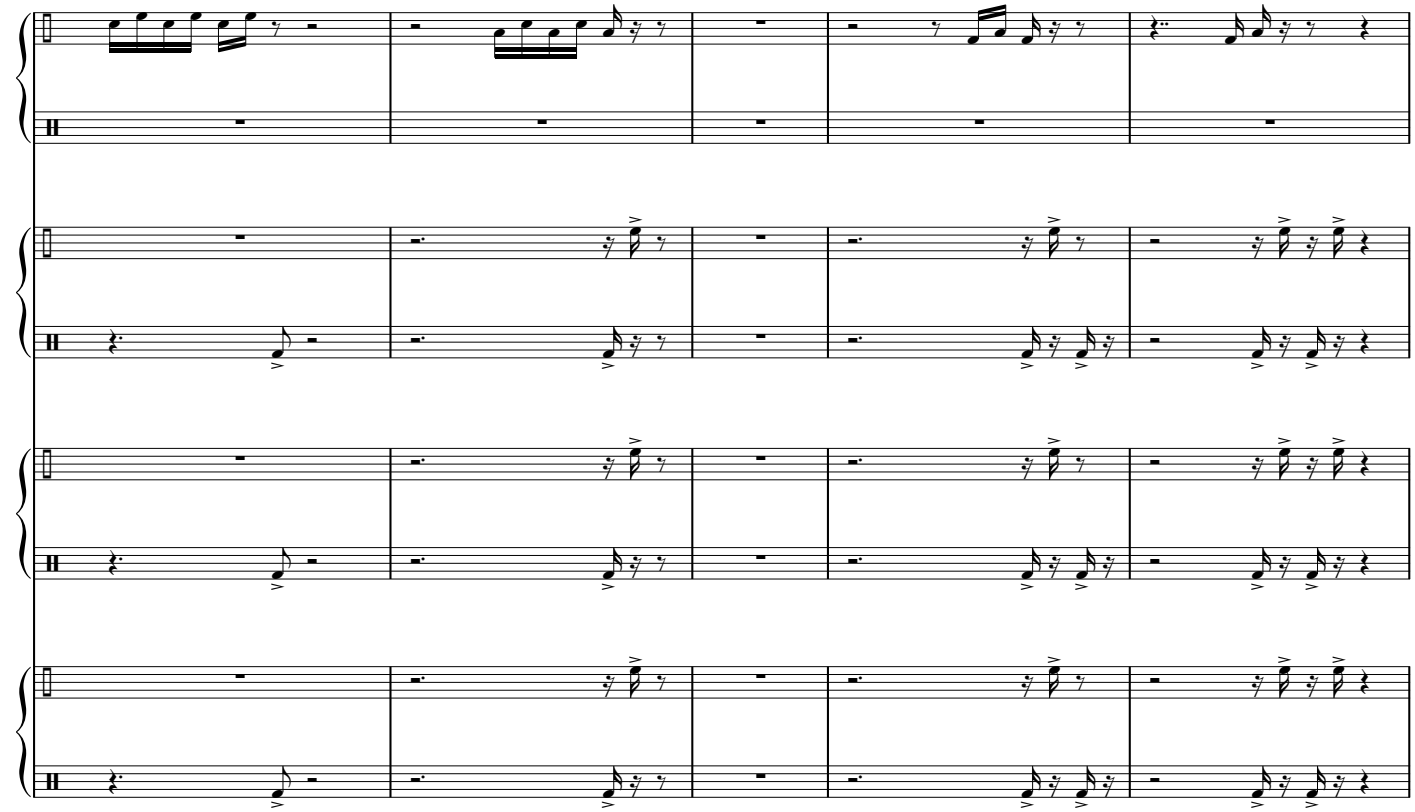
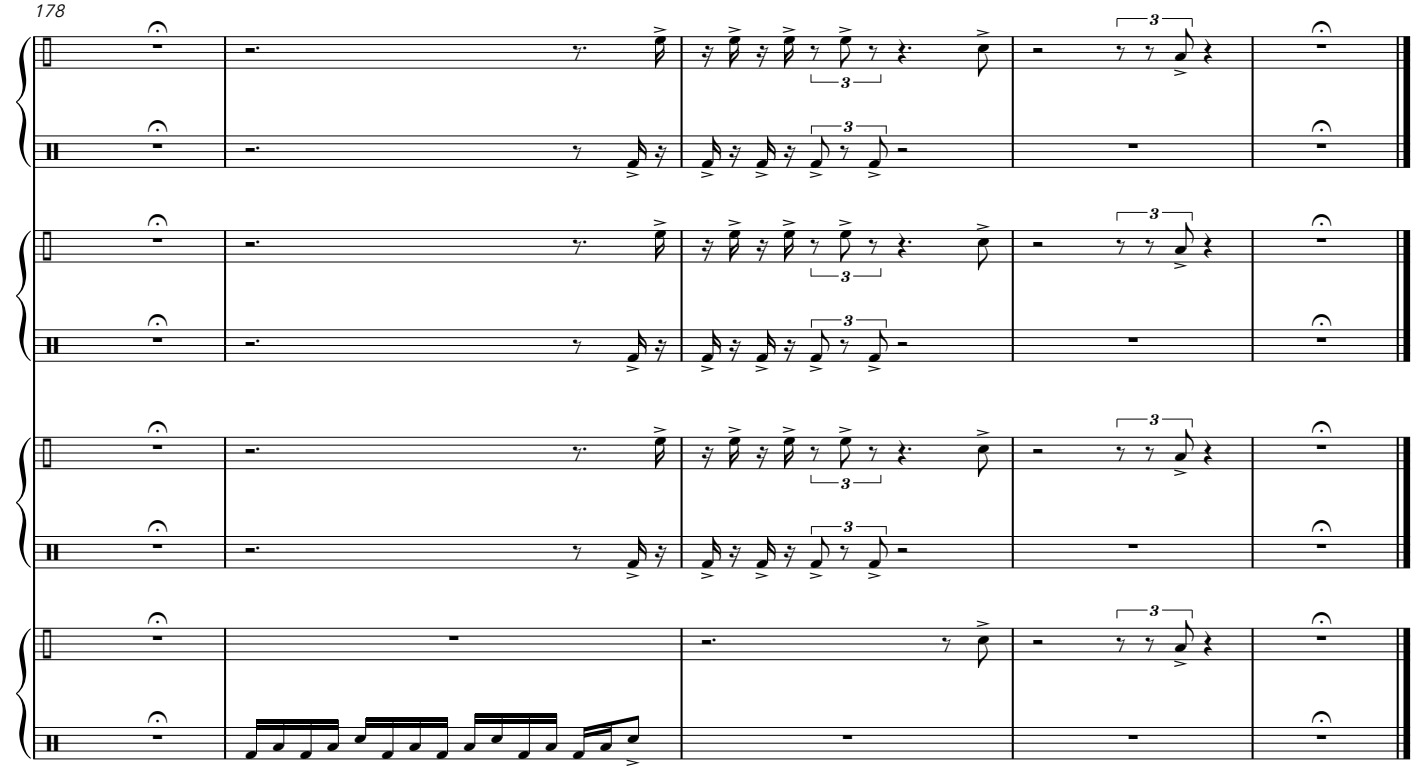
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