SUSQUEHANNA

An Overture for Orchestra

KILE SMITH

TAU.IMPRINTS

Susquehanna

An Overture for Orchestra
Kile Smith

Instrumentation

2 Flutes, Piccolo
2 Oboes, English Horn
2 Bb Clarinets, Bass Clarinet
2 Bassoons

4 F Horns
3 Bb Trumpets
2 Trombones, Bass Trombone
Tuba

Timpani
3 Percussion
1: Snare Drum
2: Field Drum (with snares) or Large Snare Drum, Triangle
3. Bass Drum, Crash Cymbals

Strings

Duration, 8 minutes

Commissioned for the 40th Anniversary of the Susquehanna Symphony Orchestra, Sheldon Bair, Founder and Music Director.
Premiered 4 March 2017, Bel Air, Maryland.

Susquehanna was the first and last title I chose for this piece. Well, every title is the last choice of the composer, I suppose, but while *Susquehanna* was commissioned to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Susquehanna Symphony Orchestra, I rejected the title as soon as it had occurred to me.

We're used to Native American place names here, but I wasn't sure if *Susquehanna* would hold any attraction to anyone outside of Pennsylvania and Maryland. I cast about for other ideas. The 40th is the ruby anniversary, but *Ruby* reminded me of the Kenny Rogers song. It also sounded like I was trying to steal a title from Michael Torke, he of the many excellent color titles for his brilliant pieces, so I let it go. Generic, celebratory titles also did not appeal to me.

Going back to the Susquehanna River for which the orchestra is named (it empties into the Chesapeake very near the orchestra's home in Bel Air, Maryland—I also toyed with *Bel Air* and *Havre de Grace*, come to think of it), I found that the Lenape words making up the name mean "oyster river." I love oysters, especially raw, but I had hoped for something more appropriate to the occasion.

My research into the river brought me to the realization that I knew next to nothing about it. I knew it came from New York State, somewhere, and went through Harrisburg. I have seen it described, in fact, as starting in New York and flowing south through Pennsylvania, but that's an oversimplification. The closer I looked, the more fascinated with the Susquehanna I became.

It begins in Cooperstown, exiting from Lake Otsego (also called Glimmerglass), not all that far from where my wife grew up. (Jackie was east of there, at the headwaters of the Delaware, and I grew up near the Delaware in South Jersey, but that's another story.) The Susquehanna then slants southwest and drops, indeed, into Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania was so happy to welcome it, it built a town right there and called it Susquehanna. But the river changes its mind and jumps right back into New York. This is what I never got before. It goes back up, to Binghamton, and then meanders around in South Central New York for a while, before swinging back, southeast, finally into Pennsylvania and coal country.

Between Scranton and Wilkes Barre it tacks southwest again, and is soon joined by the Susquehanna West Branch, having risen up well over in west central Pennsylvania, almost as far as DuBois and Punxsutawney. Up and down it winds, and just above Selinsgrove and Sunbury is where it decides to join the main branch. By now this is one seriously large waterway, barreling past Harrisburg, where Sheldon Bair grew up, and past Elizabethtown, where he went to college. Under Rt. 81 and under the Pennsylvania Turnpike is where most people will see the river, as it heads in a fairly straight and wide southeastern shot, on into Maryland and the Chesapeake.

It is the longest East Coast river in the U.S. that empties into the Atlantic. It is also (I have no idea how they calculate this) one of the oldest rivers in the world. The river is older than the mountains it snakes through, how *do* they know that. *Susquehanna*, I now thought, was an excellent title.

The music follows an emotional traversal of the river's course, but the main tune at letter H, introduced by the solo horn, has another source. Last year I wrote a hymn tune for the dedication of a new division of pipes in our church. I was in the early stages of thinking about the orchestra commission, and a few days after I finished the hymn, I knew that the tune was exactly the type of thing I needed for that spot in (what would be called) *Susquehanna*. There are some meter changes in the hymn because of how I handled the text, which I thought I would even out for *Susquehanna*, but it resisted every attempt at smoothing. So the meters stayed.

The music at the beginning of the piece I composed on top of, as it were, the hymn tune, with the idea that they could be played together near the end. The beginning is in D, the hymn is in G. How to get back to D, which should not be a difficult task, proved so for me. I solved it with an unusual modulation. At letter K, at the full restatement of the beginning D major music, I underlay it with a strong pedal point of G, which continues until the G major chord already in the theme arrives, nine bars later. Then it proceeds as normal, feeling, I do believe, as if it carries everything along with it, into Havre de Grace and the bay.

Susquehanna

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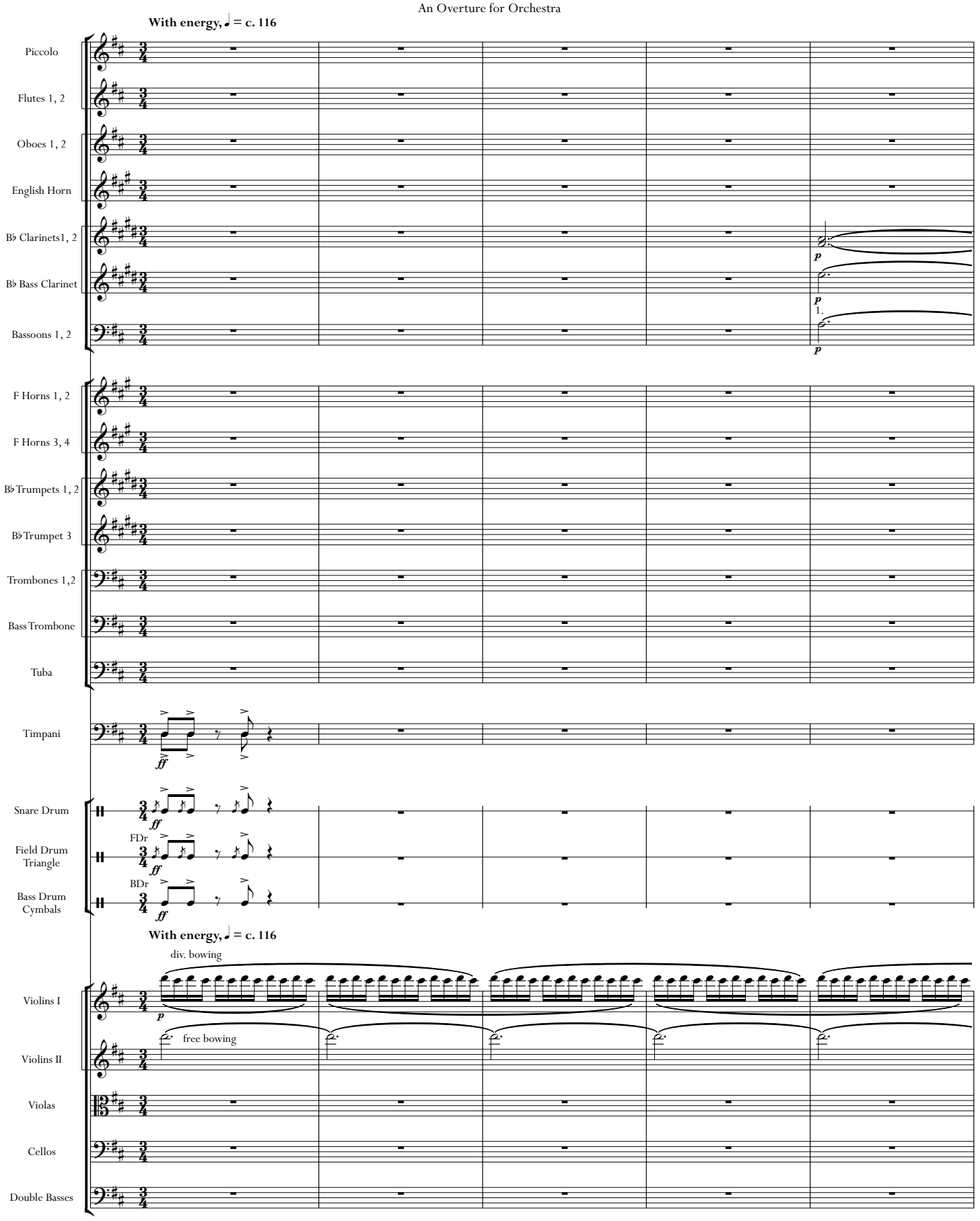

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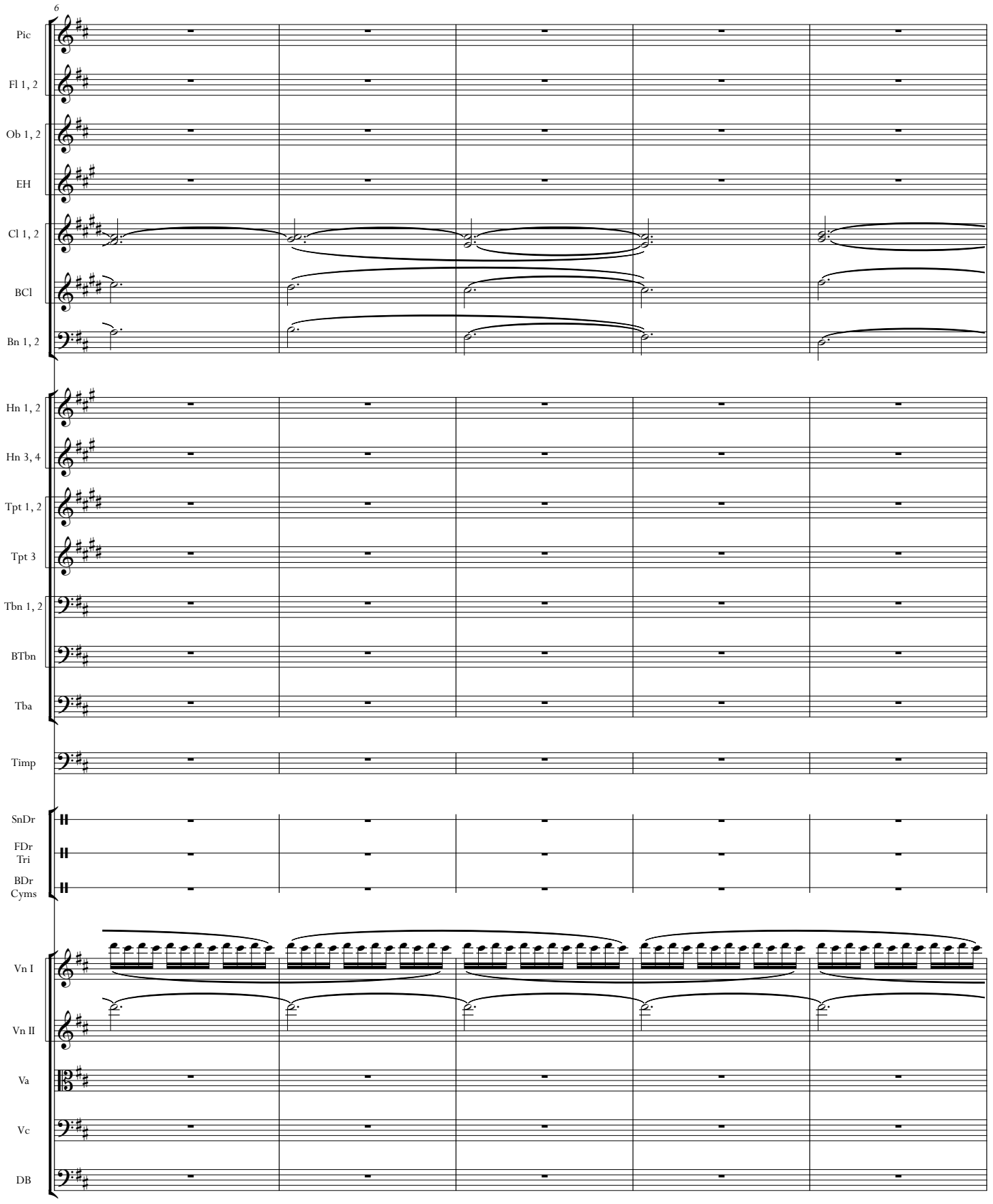
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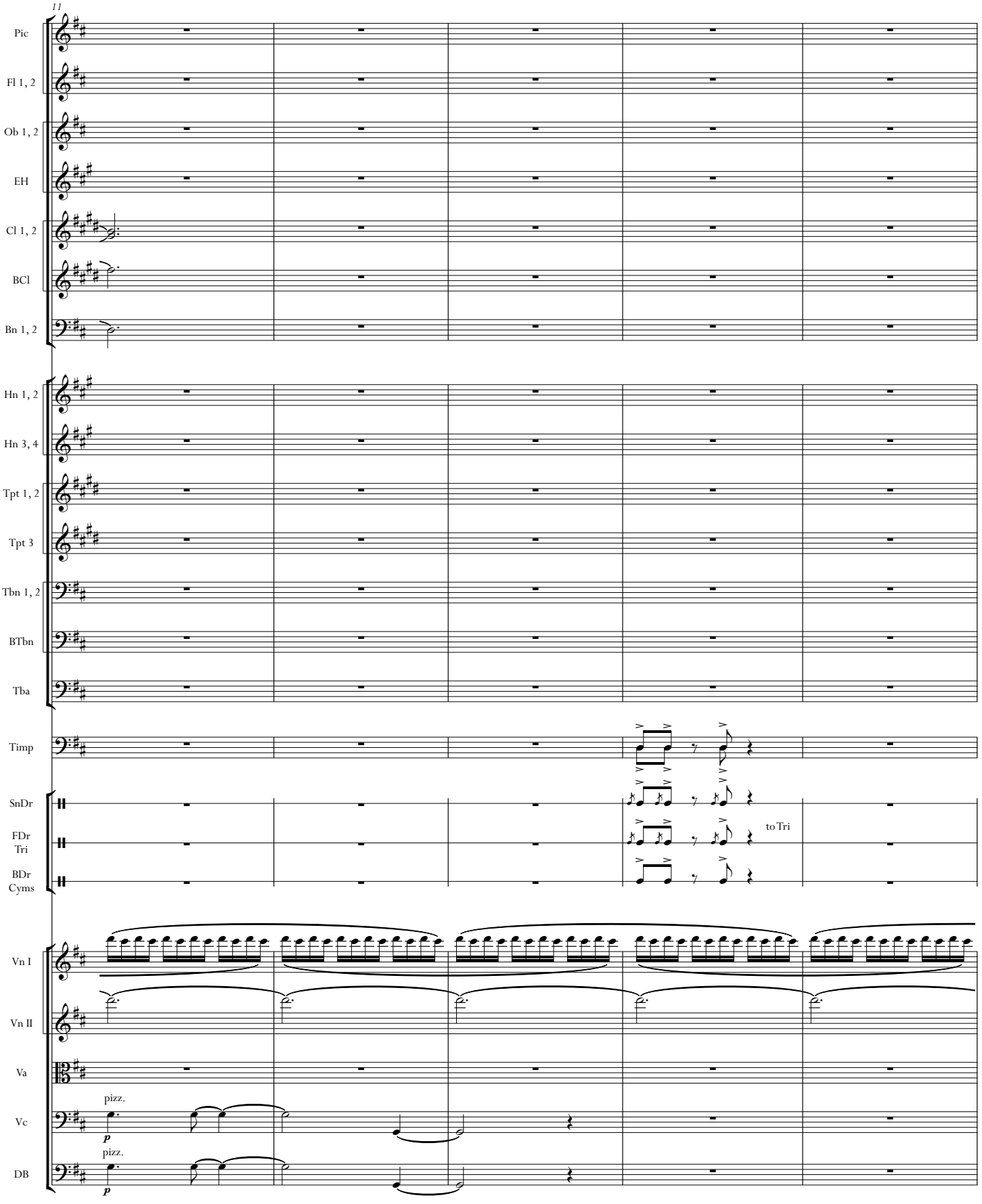
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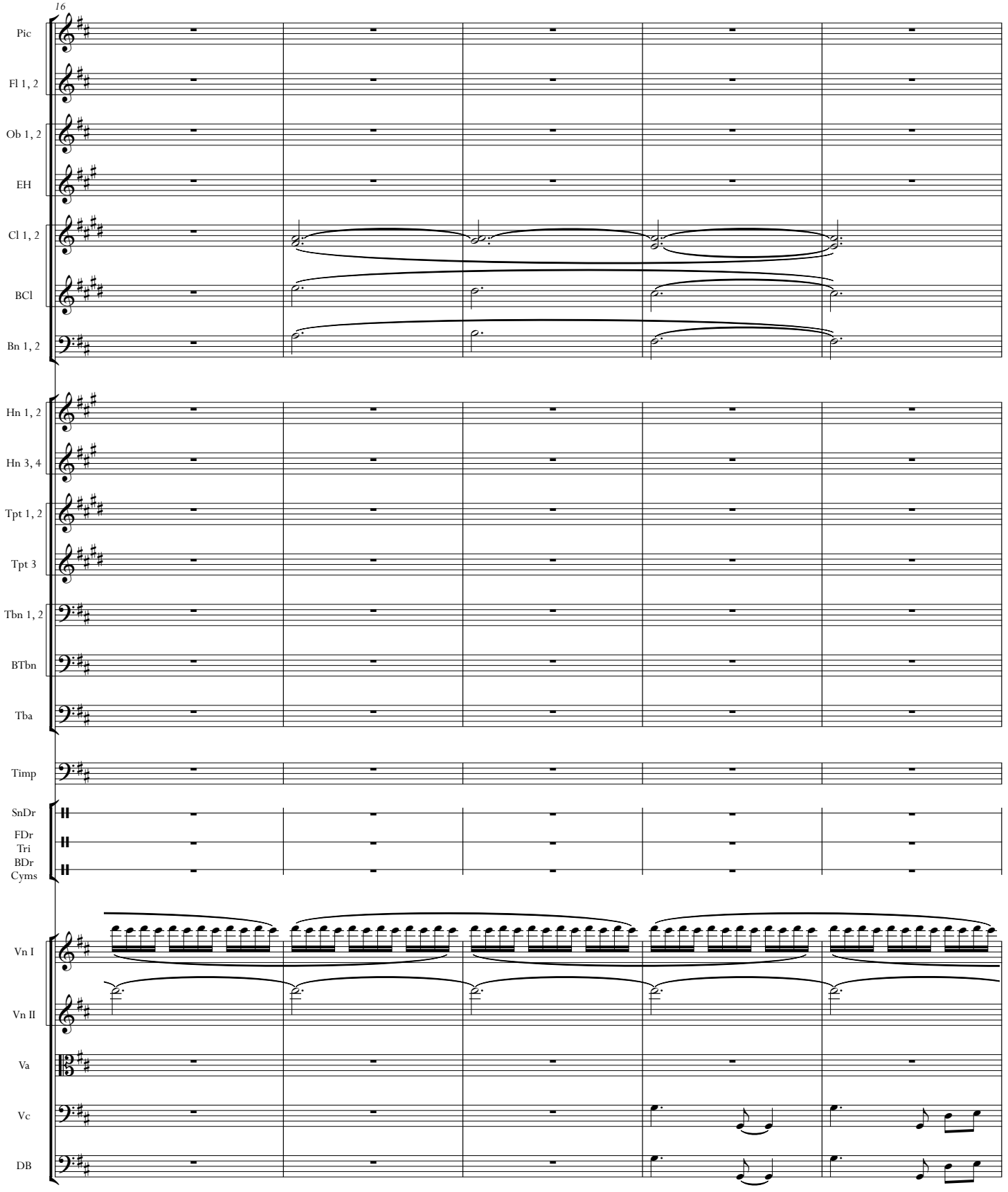
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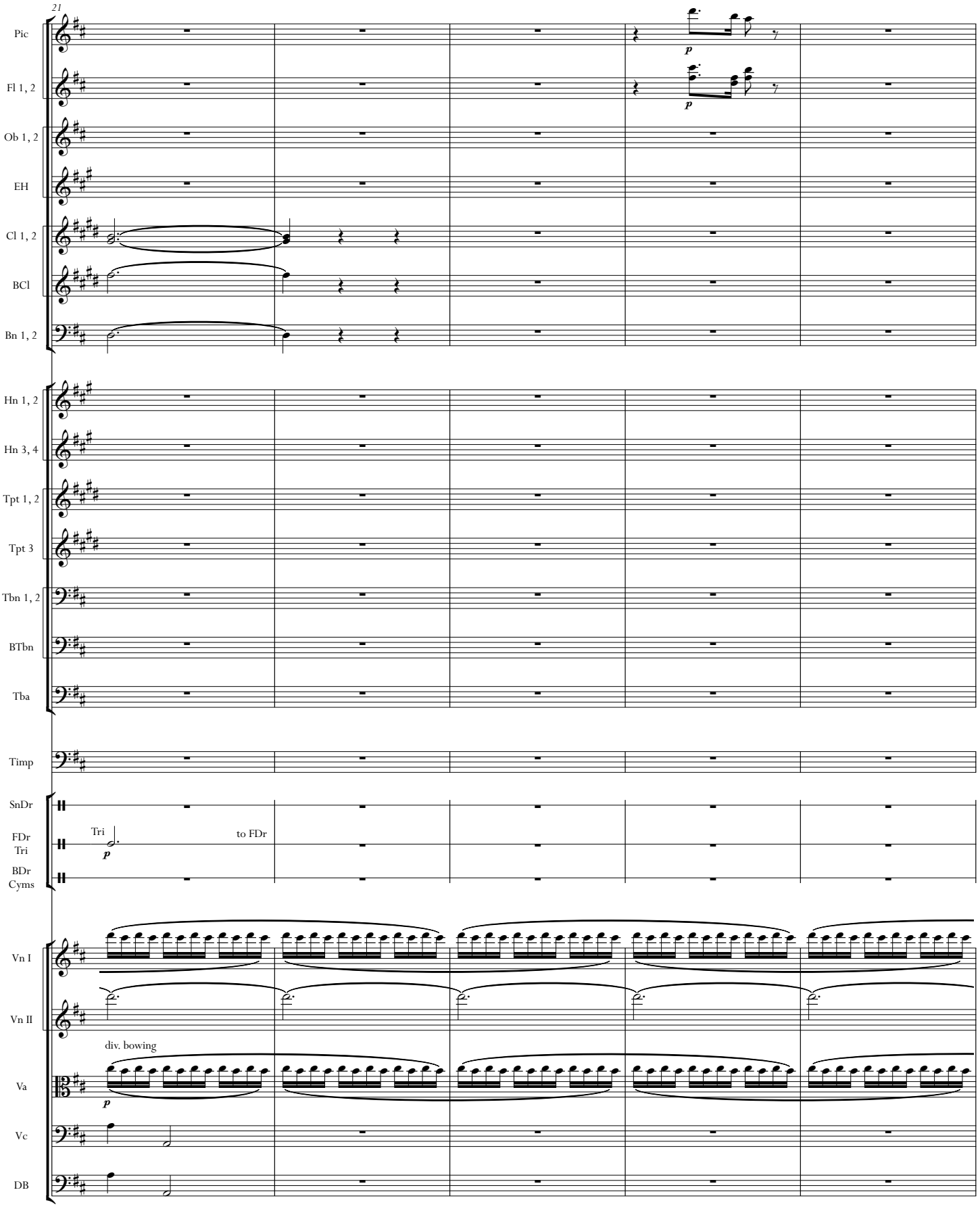
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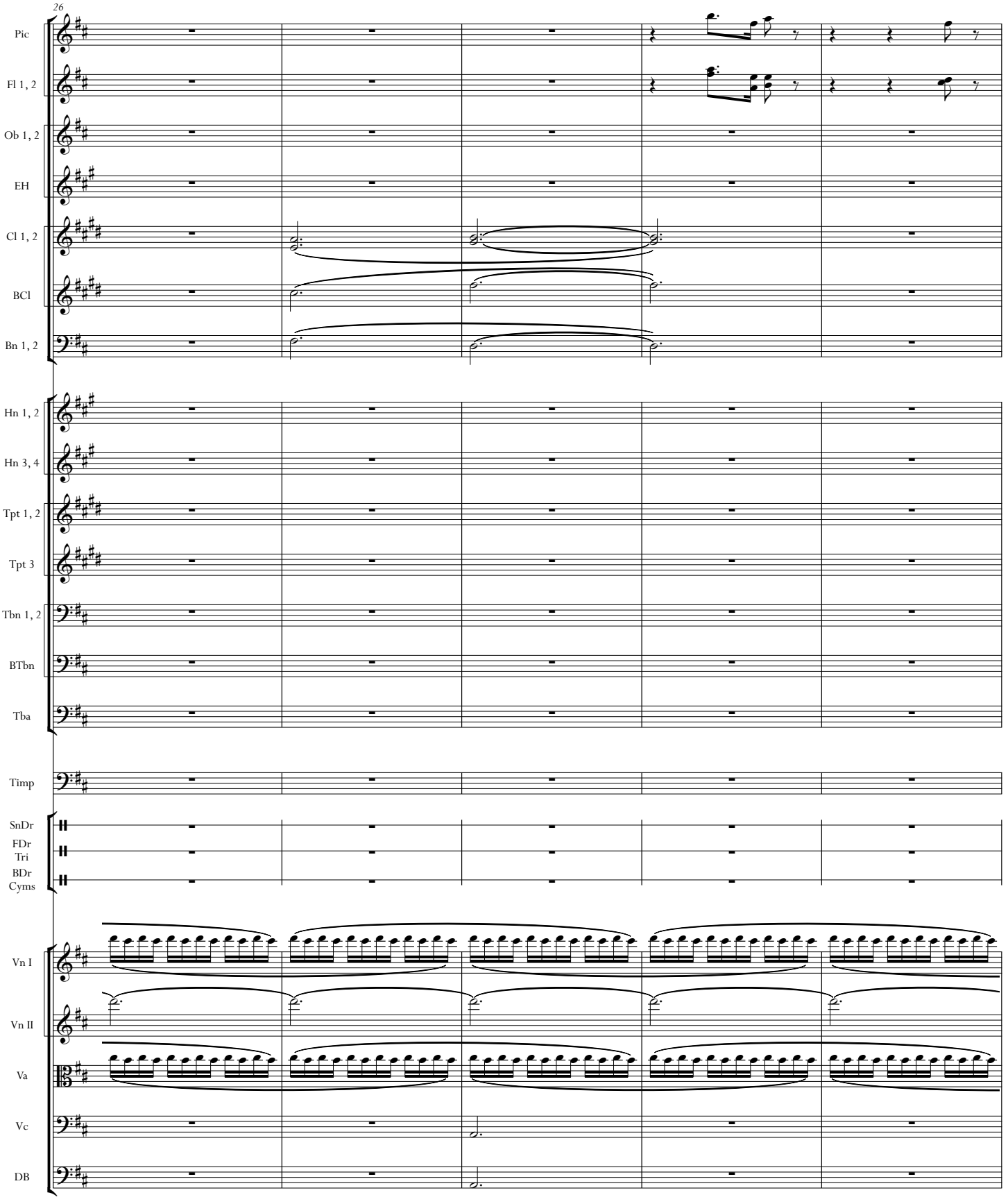
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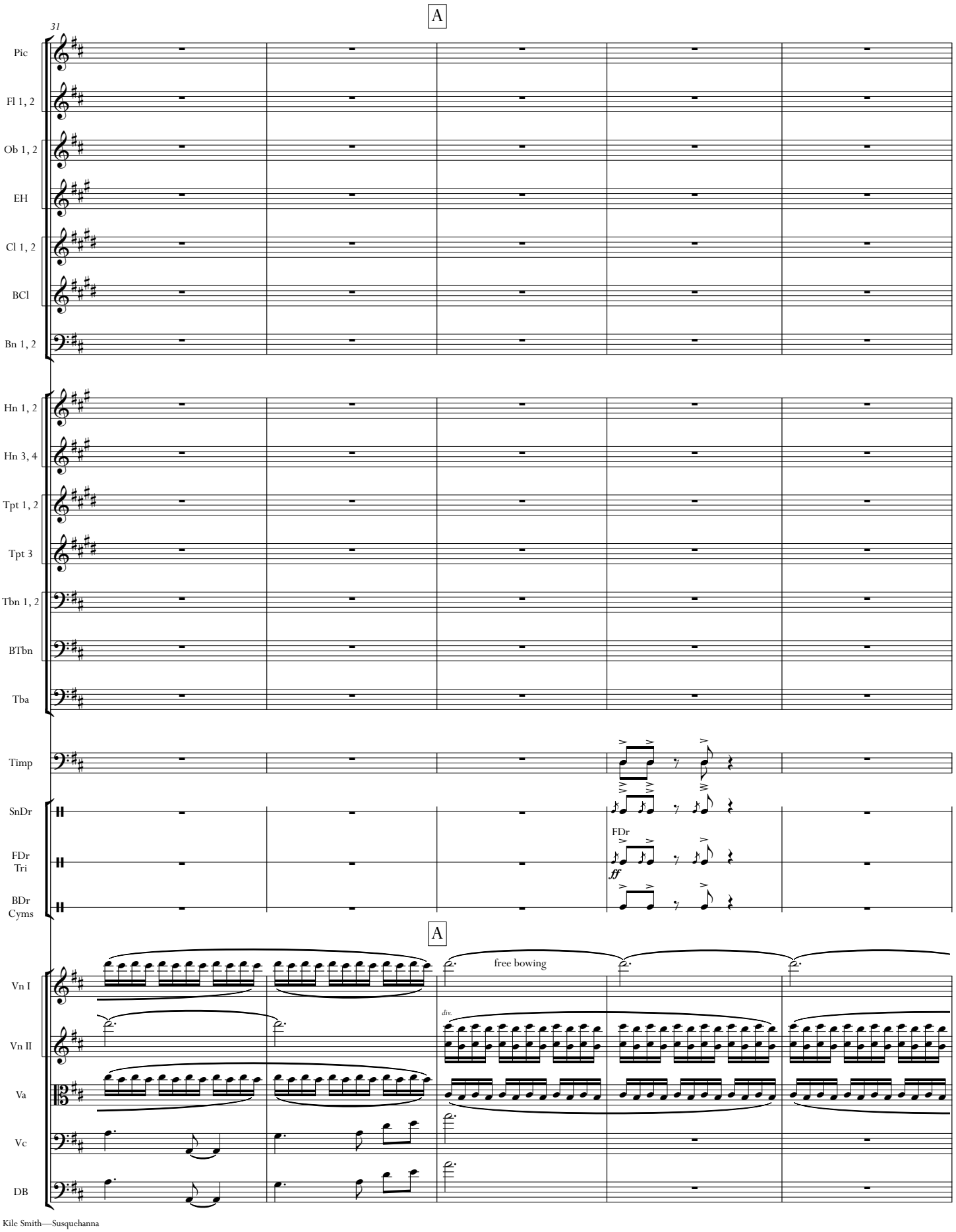
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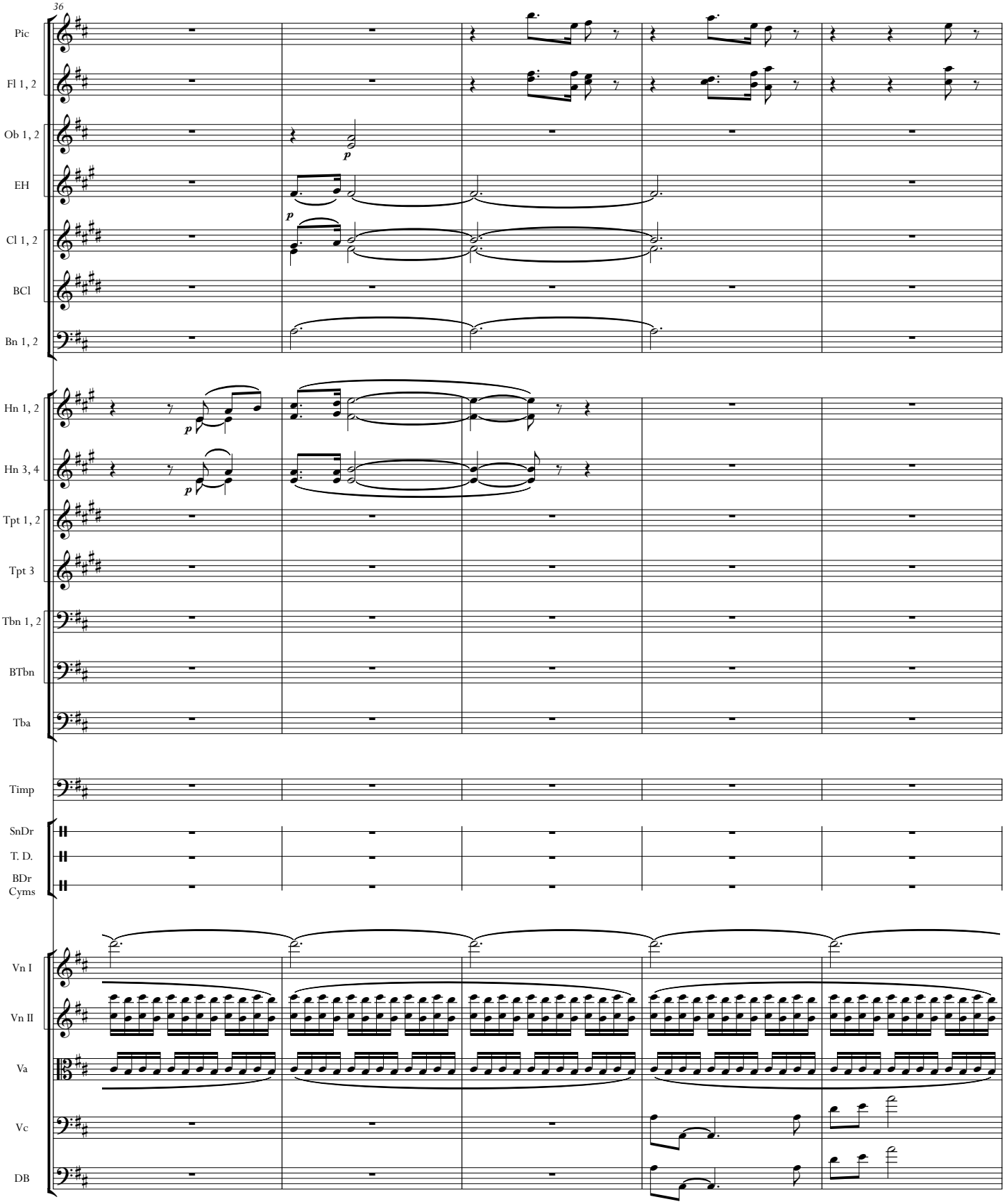
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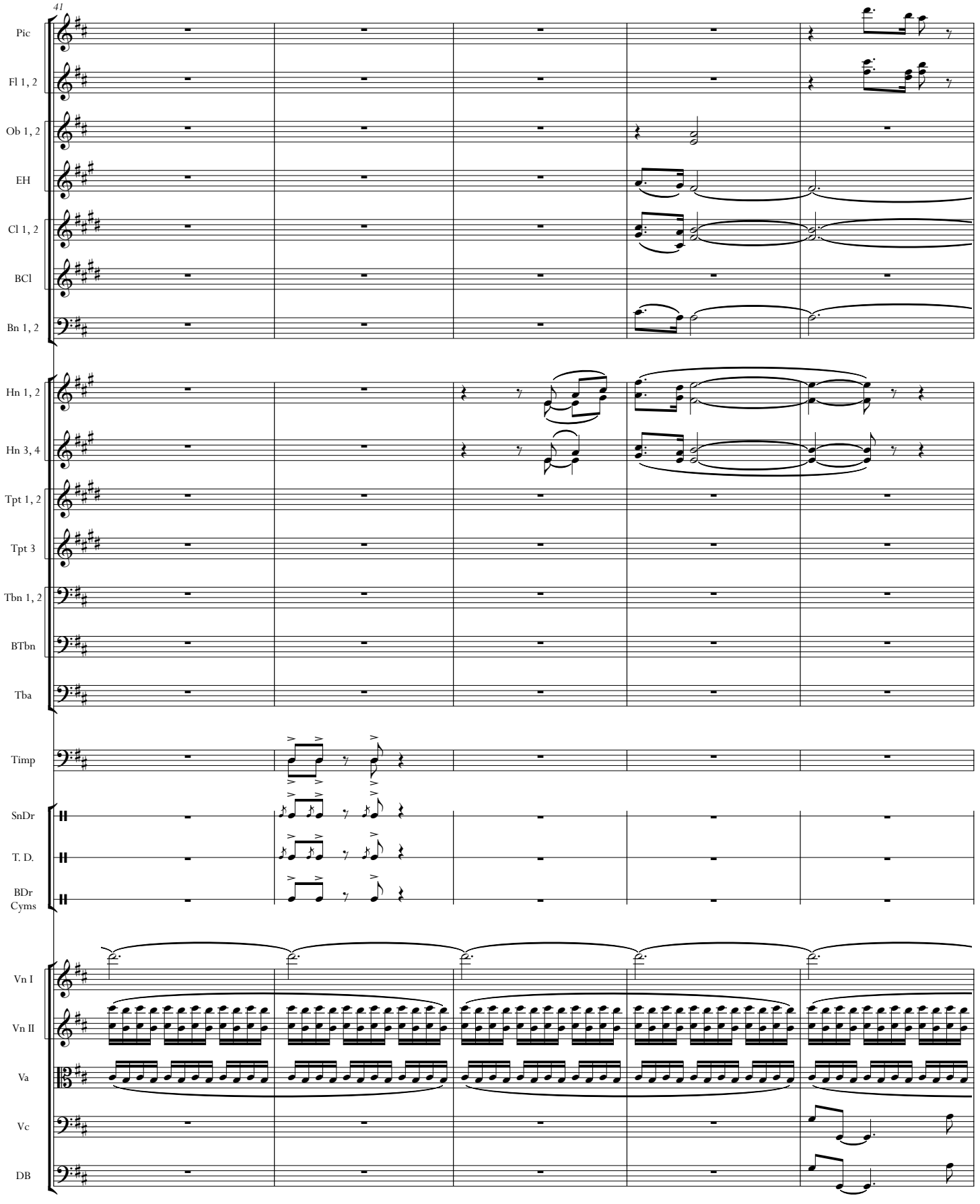
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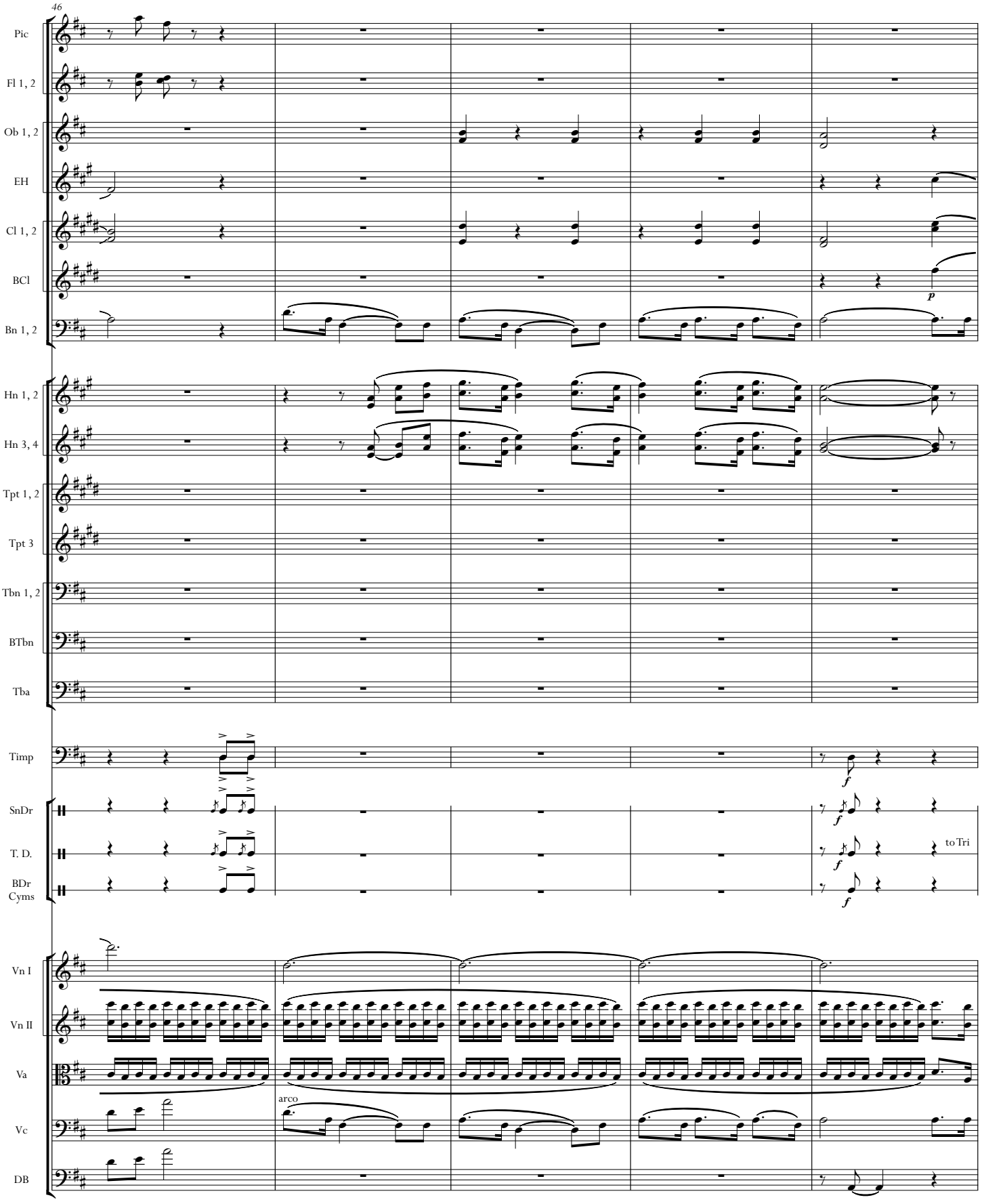
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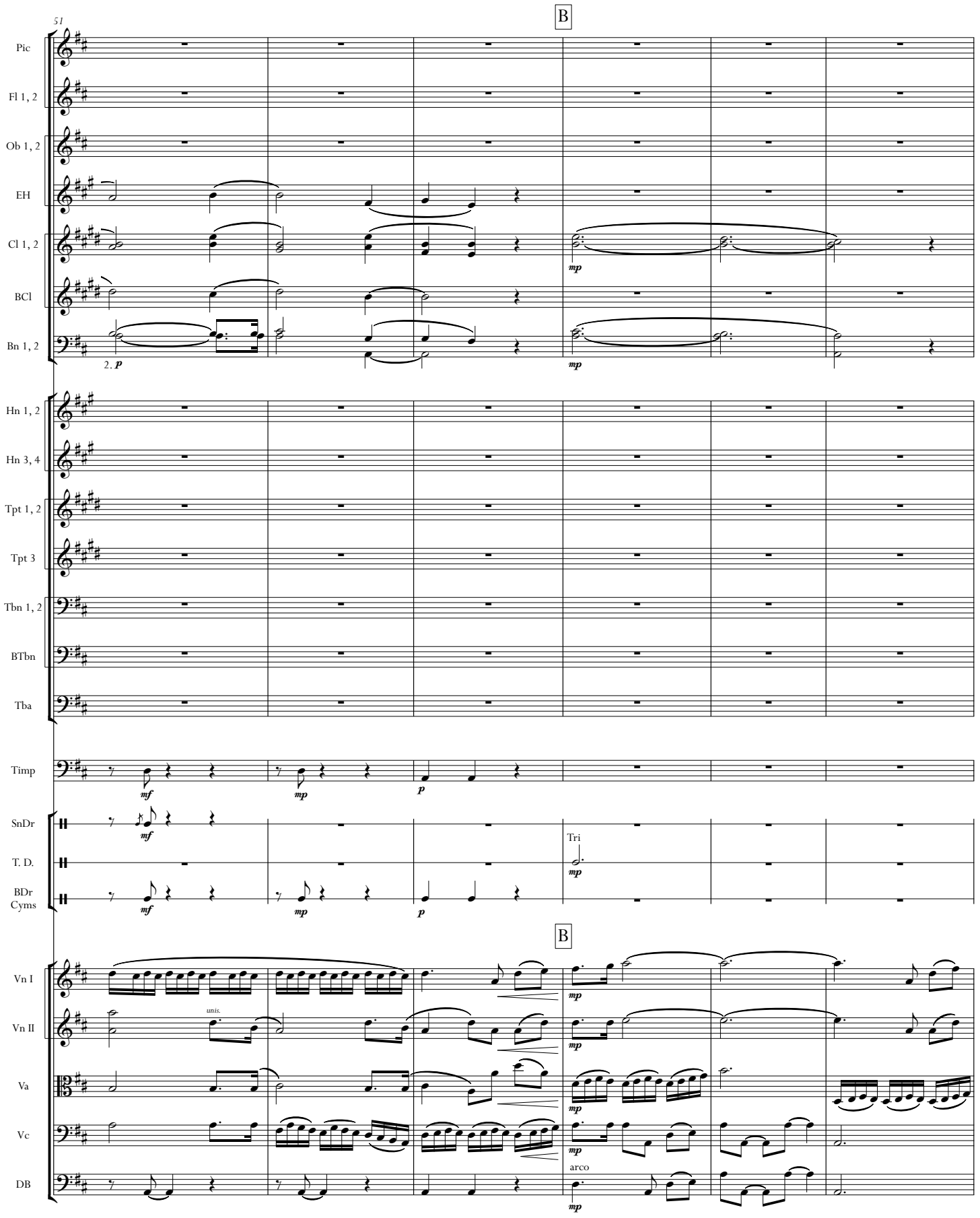
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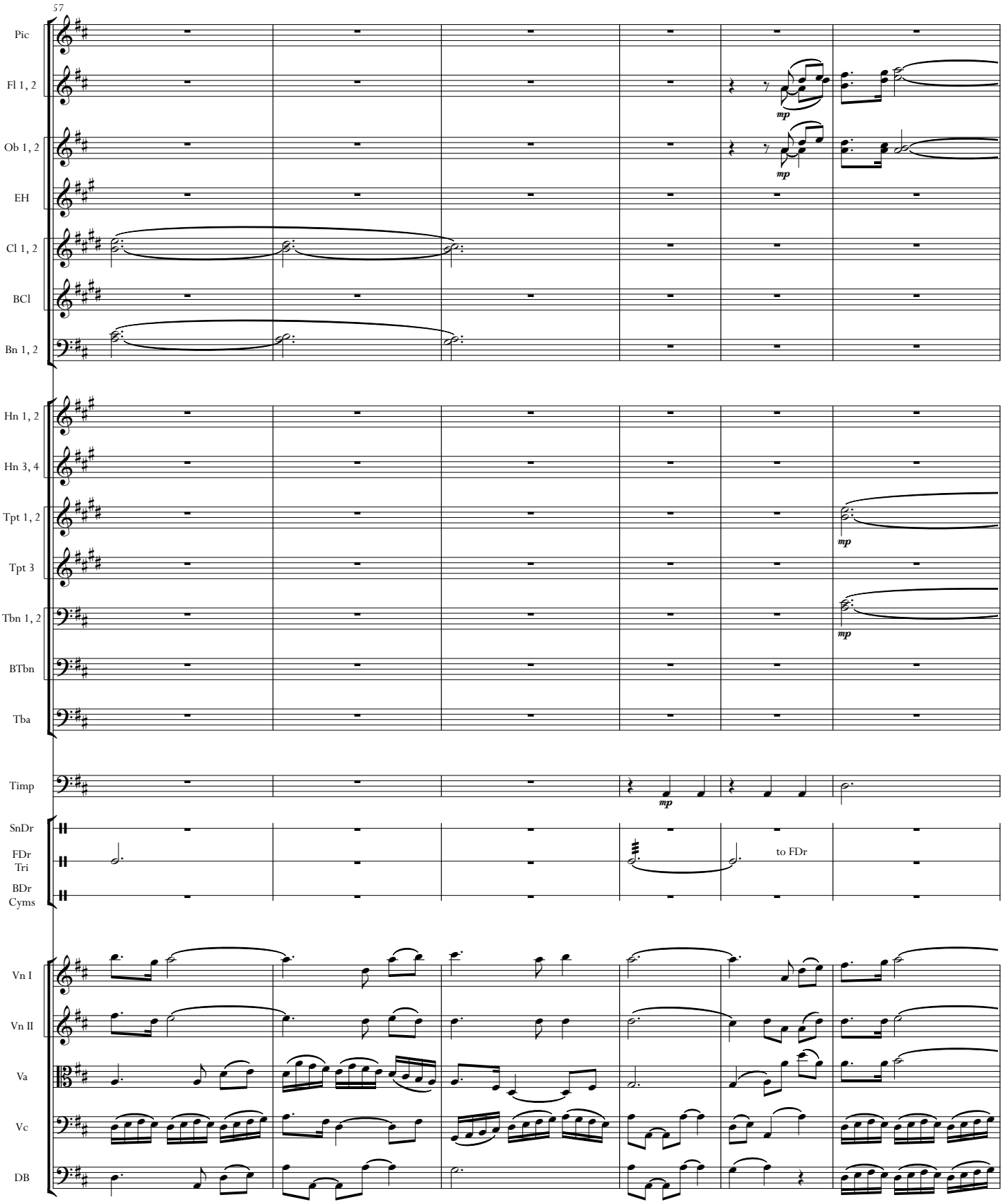
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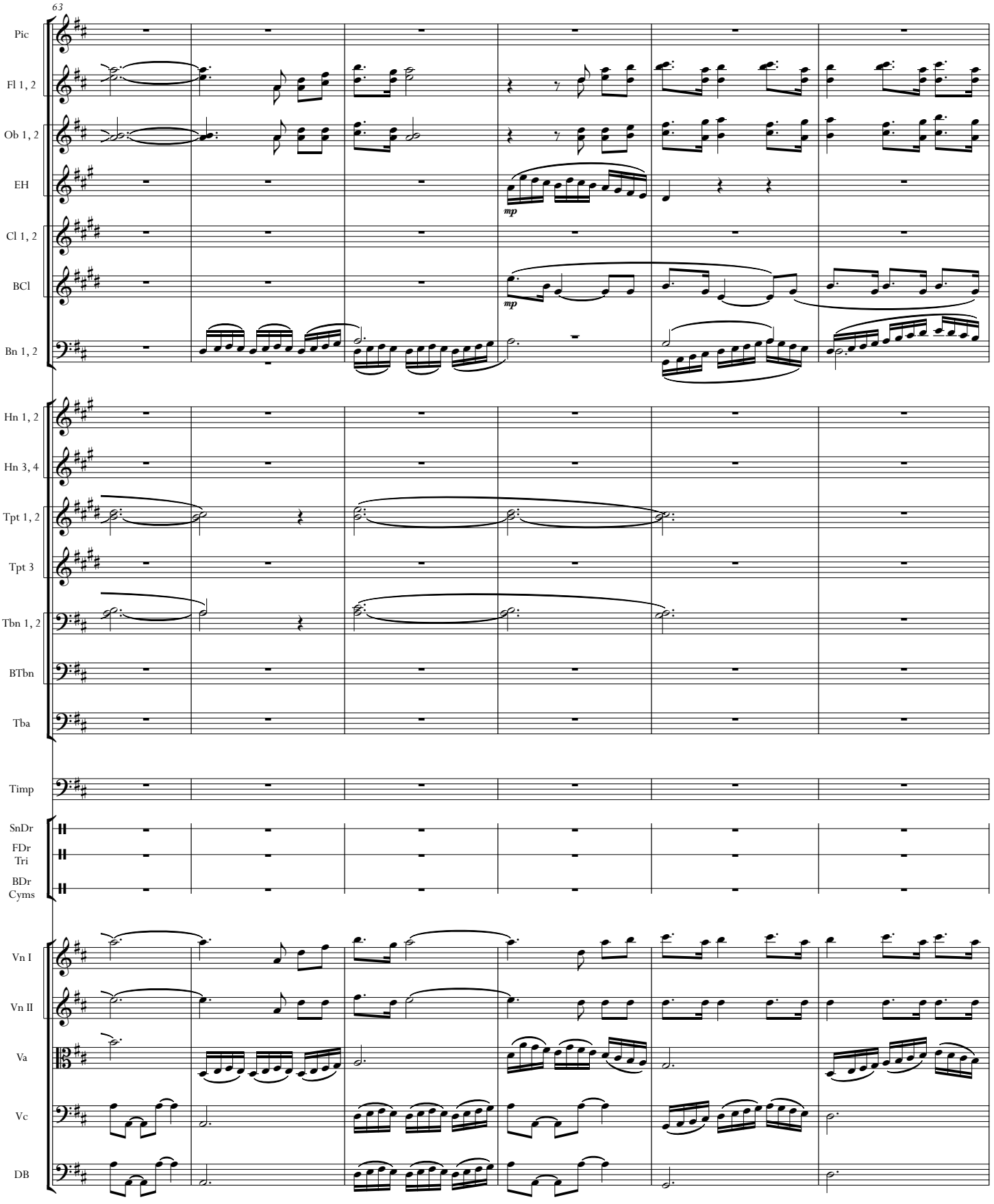
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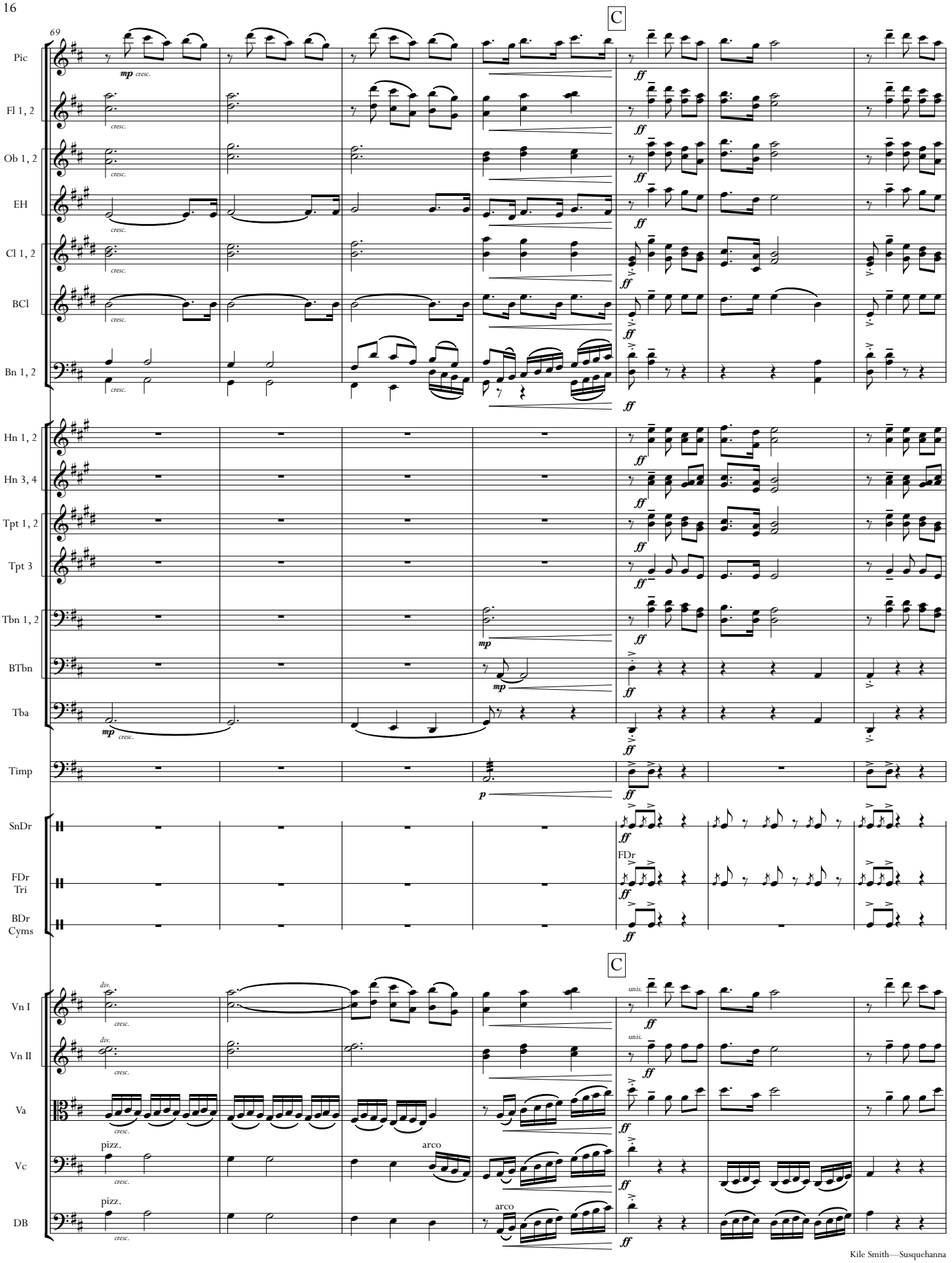
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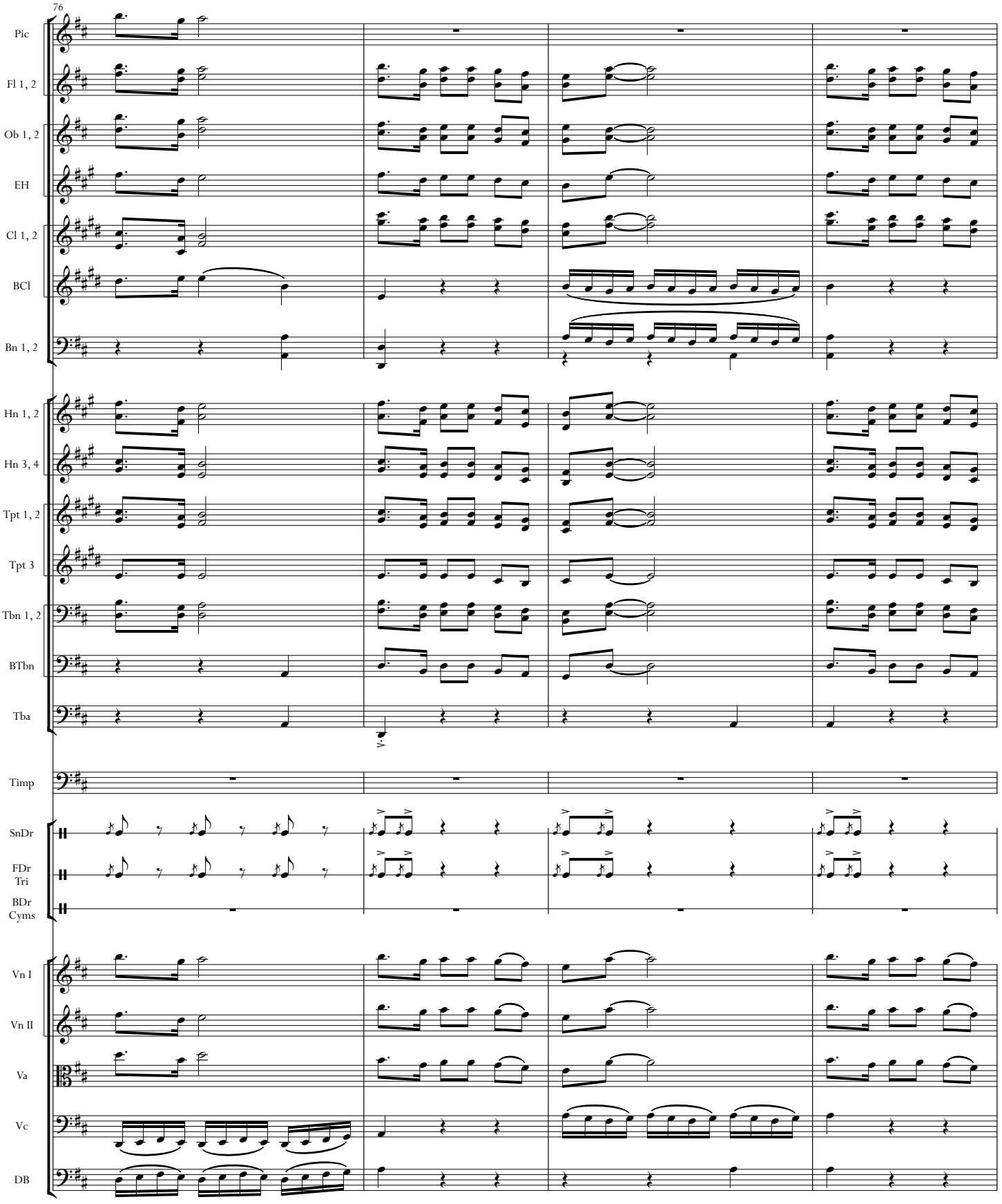
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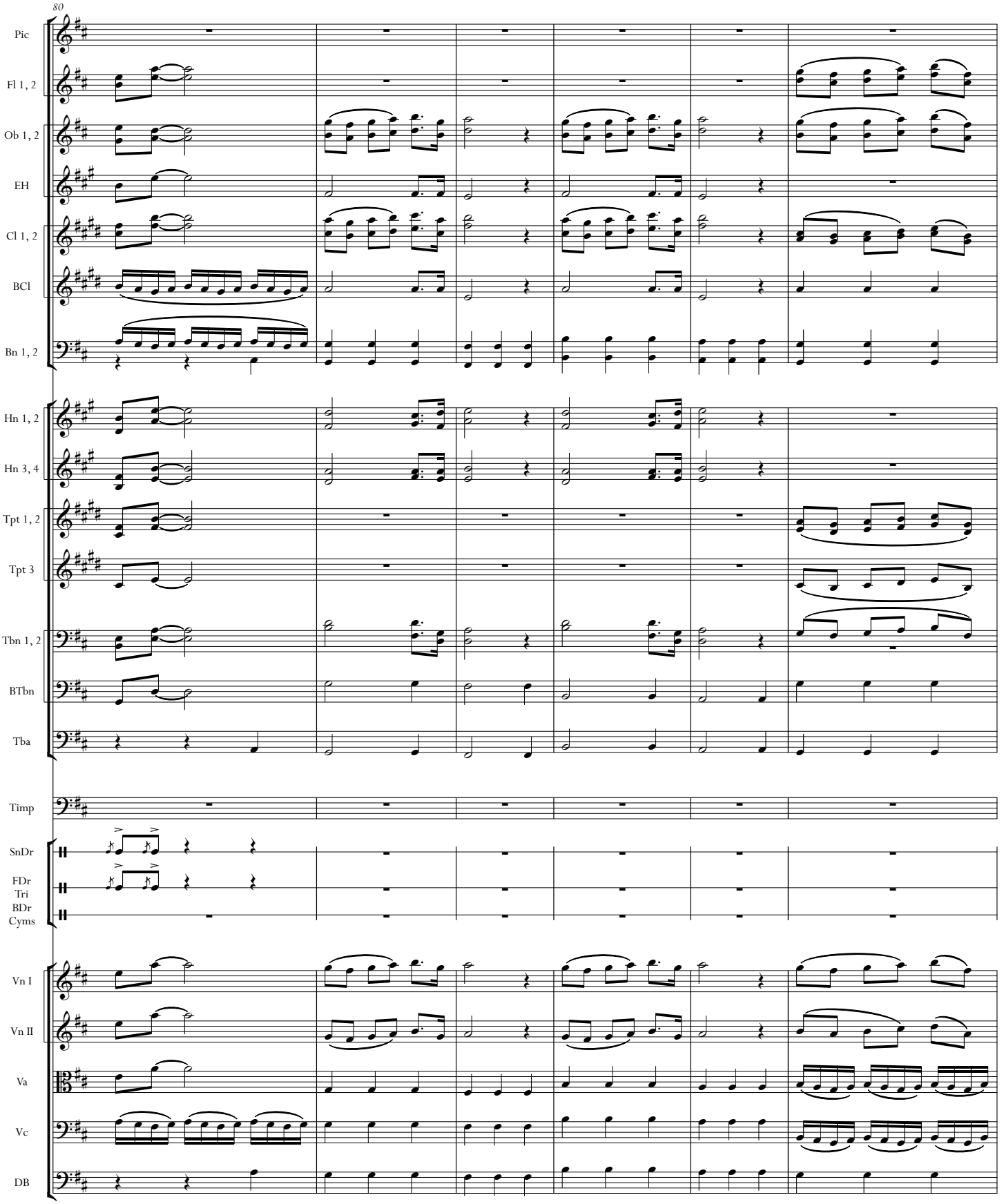
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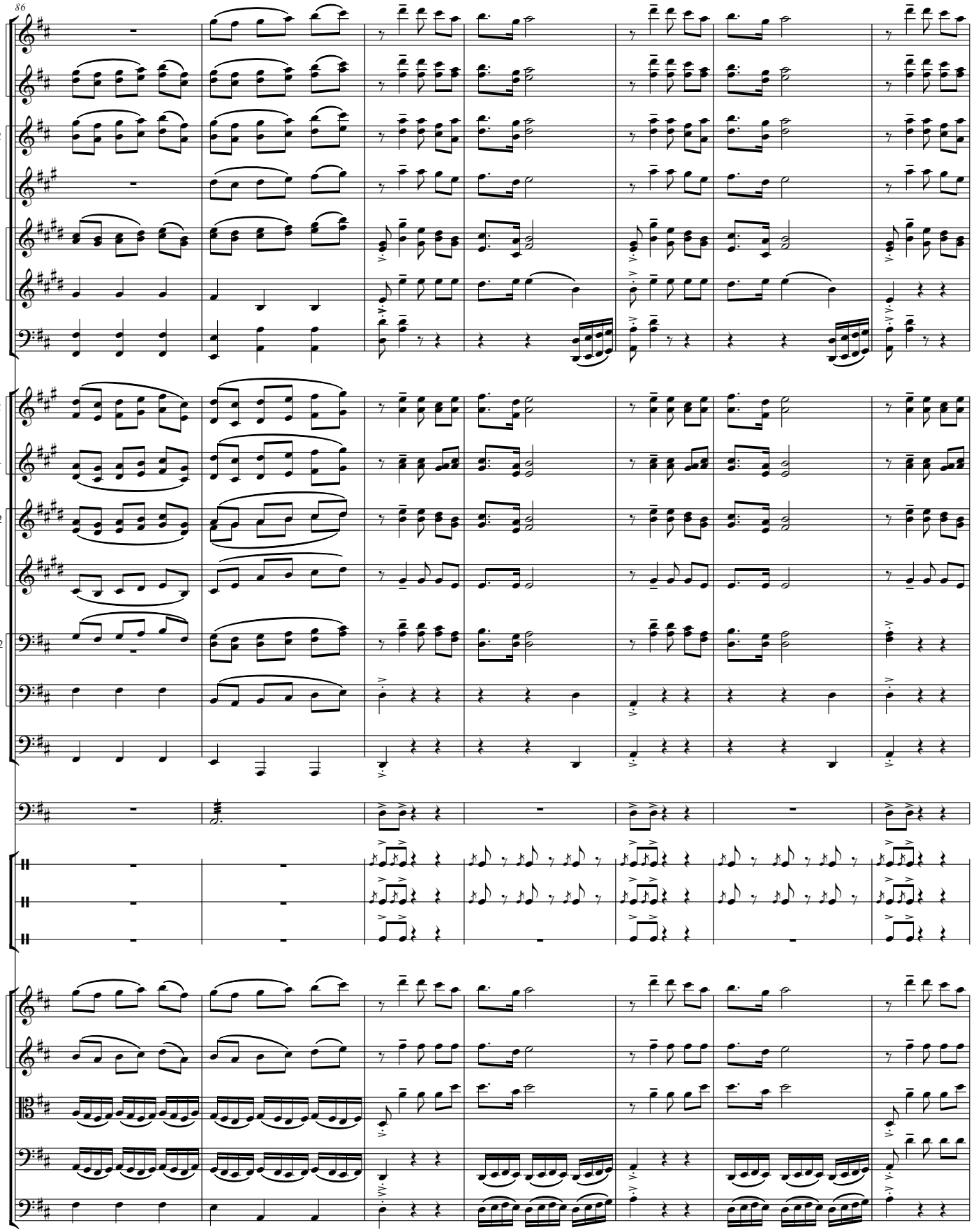
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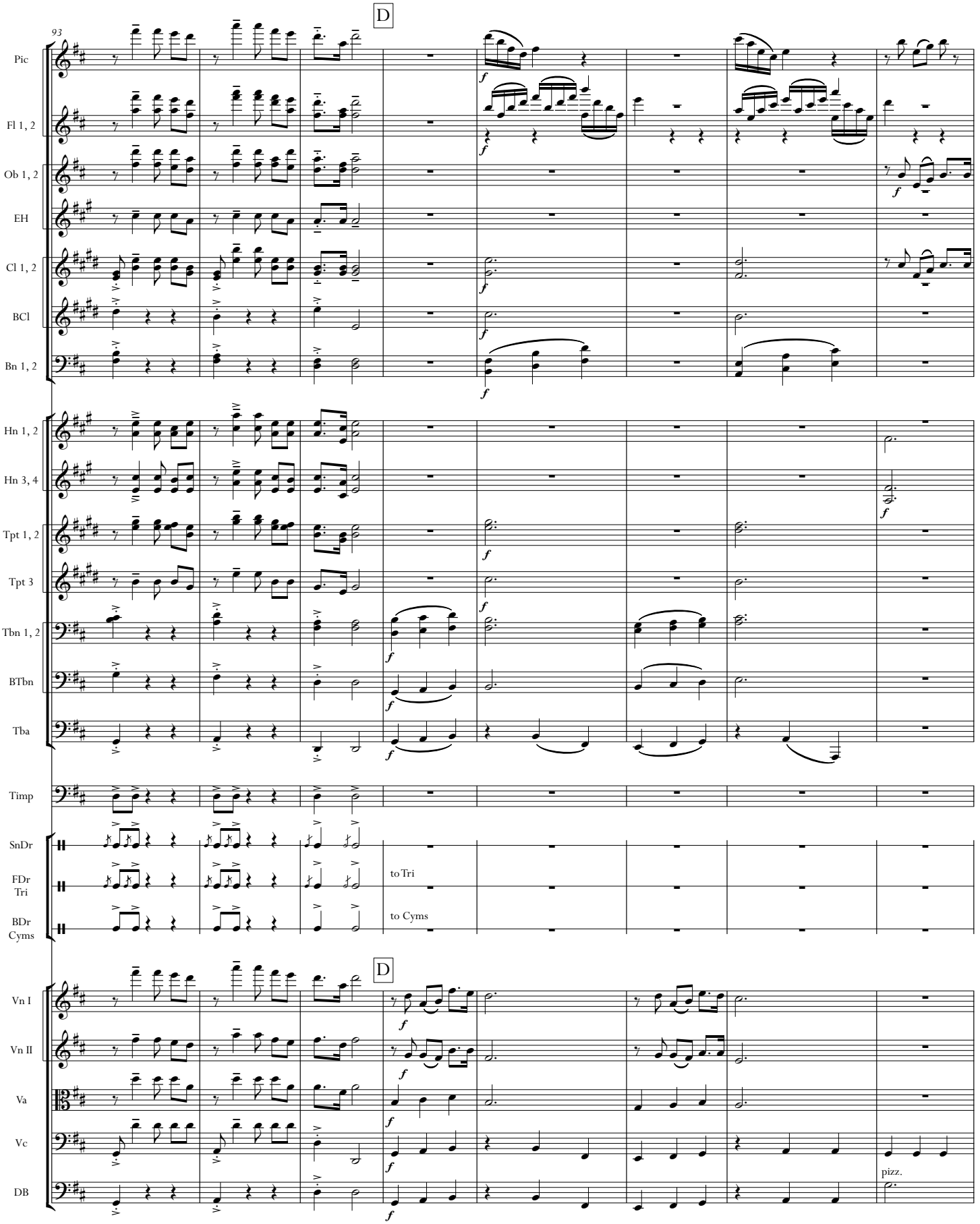
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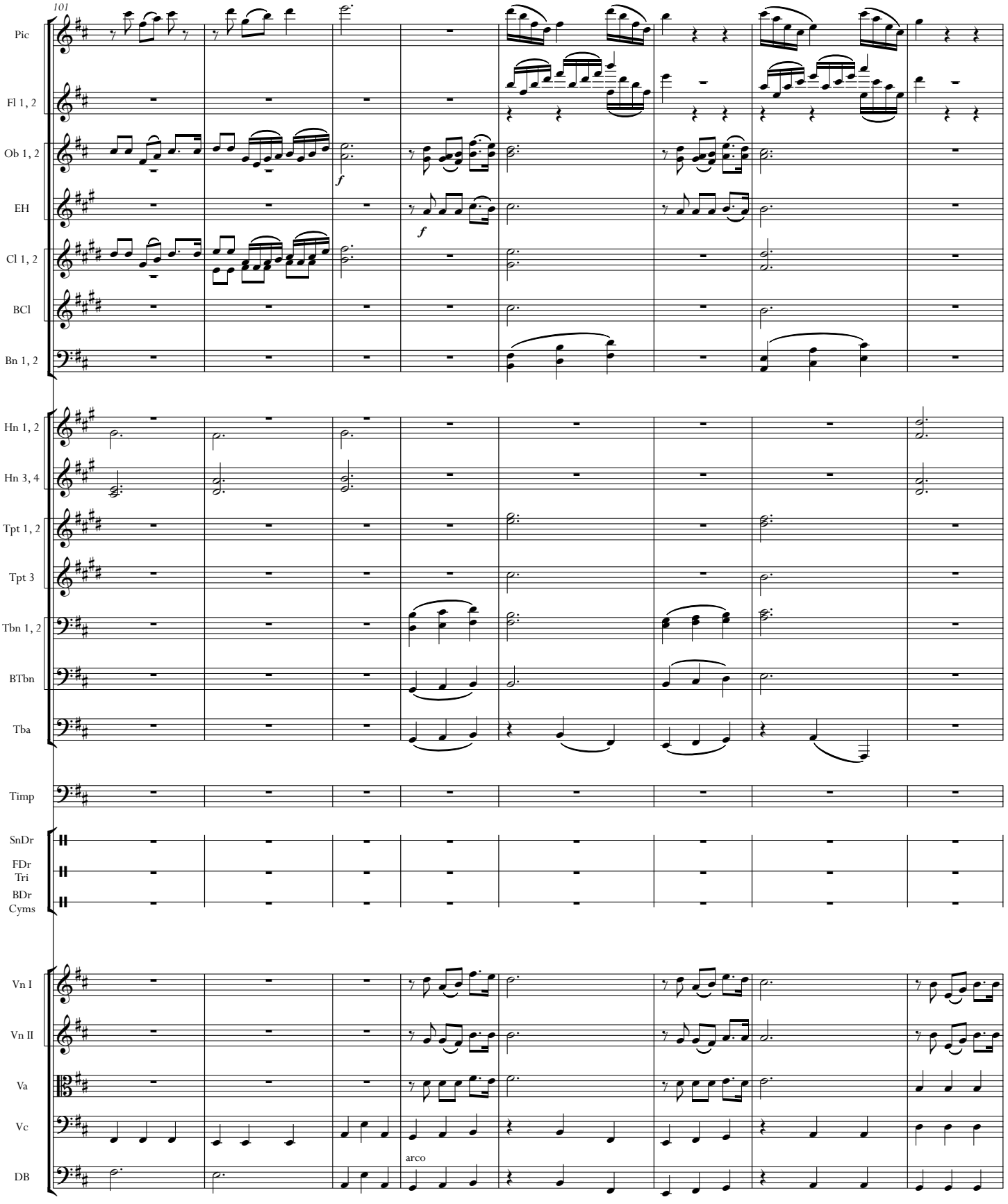
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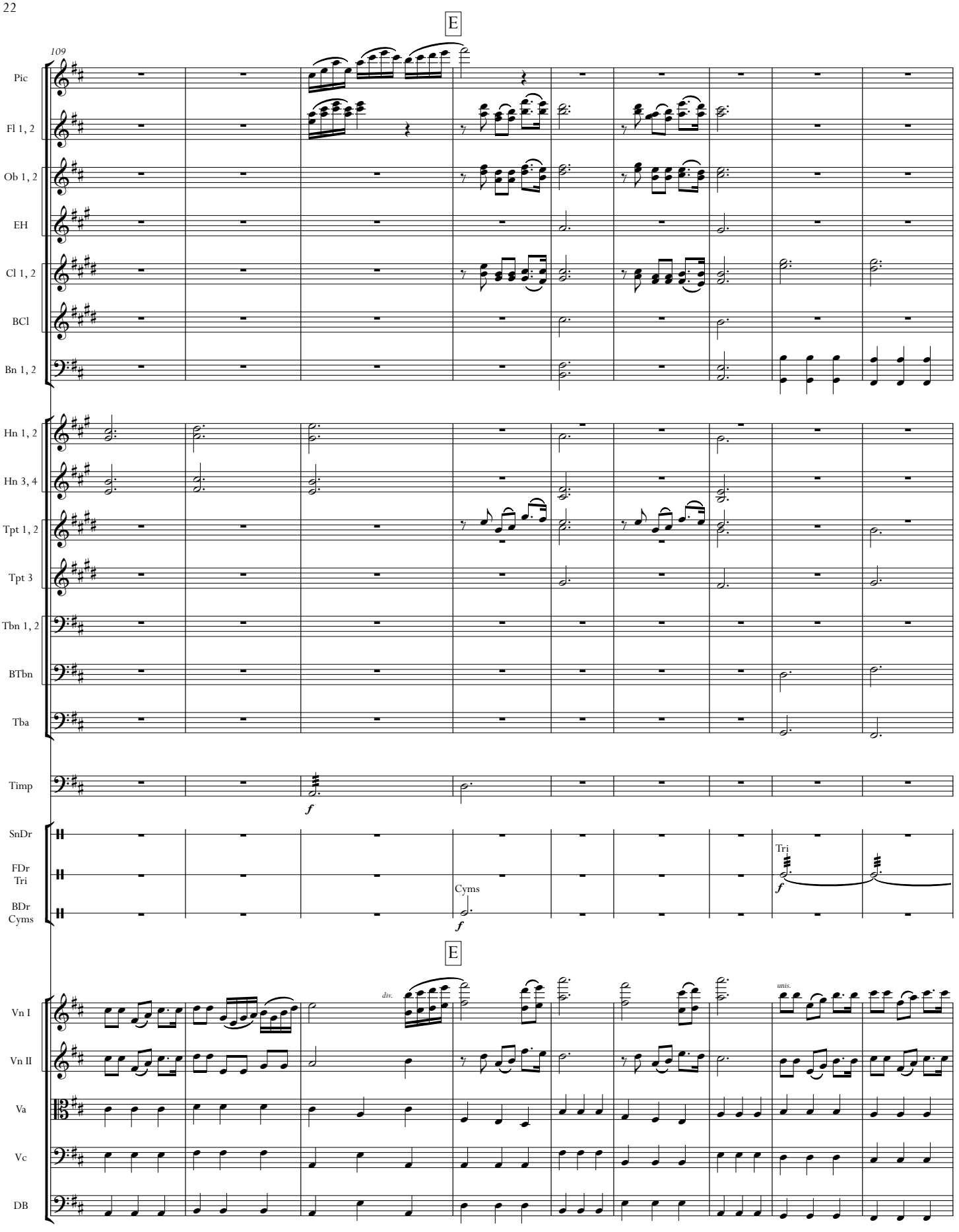
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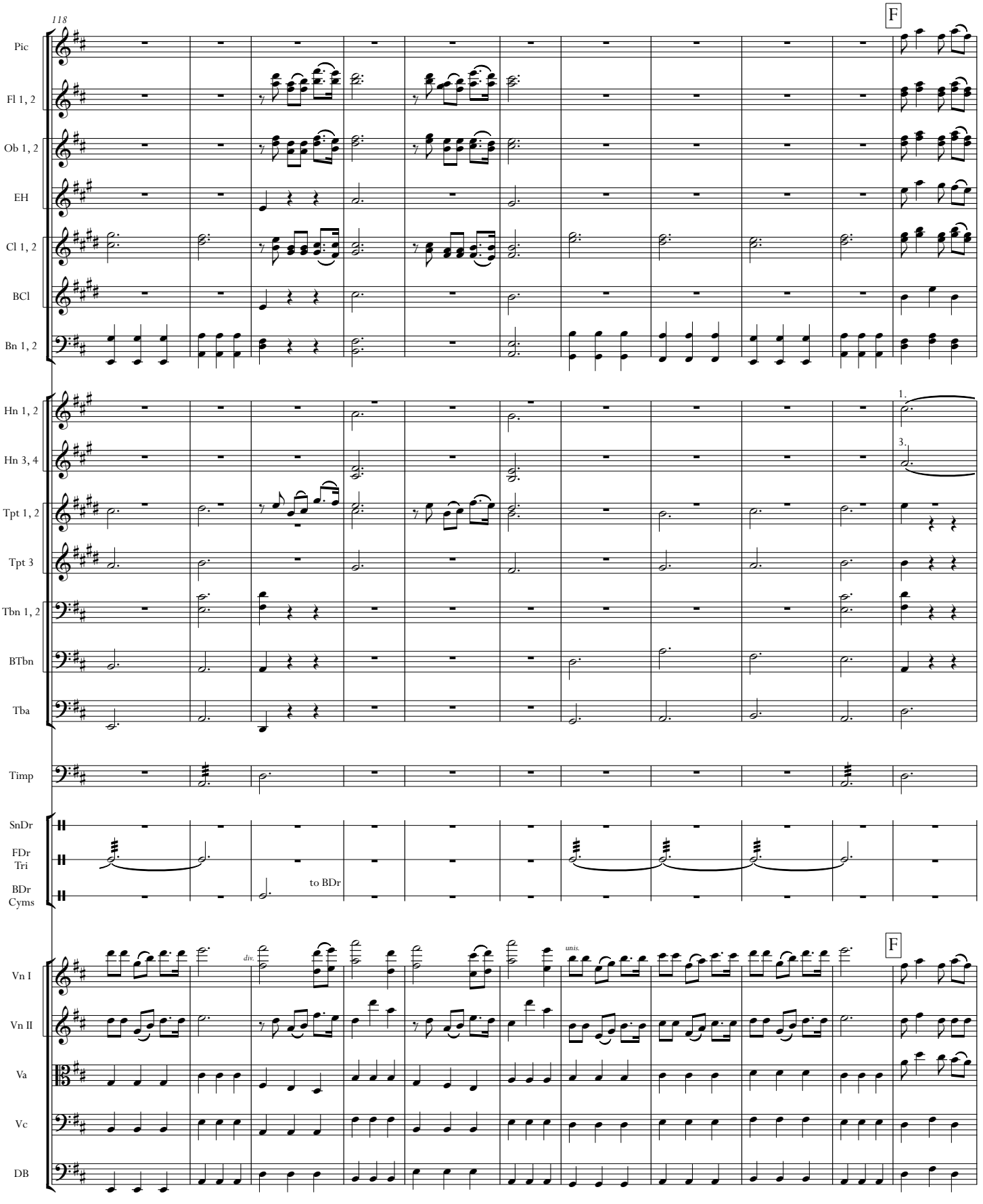
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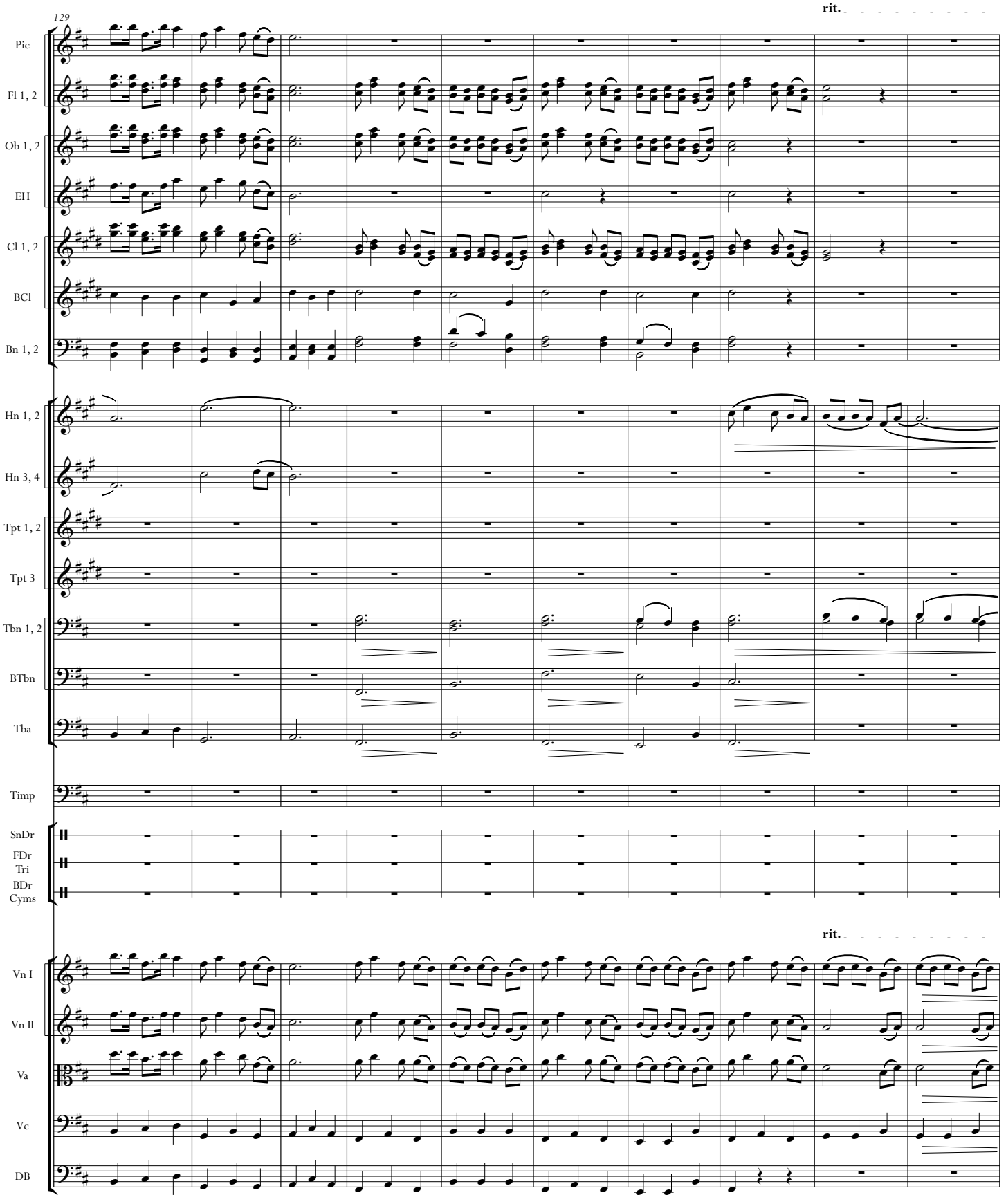
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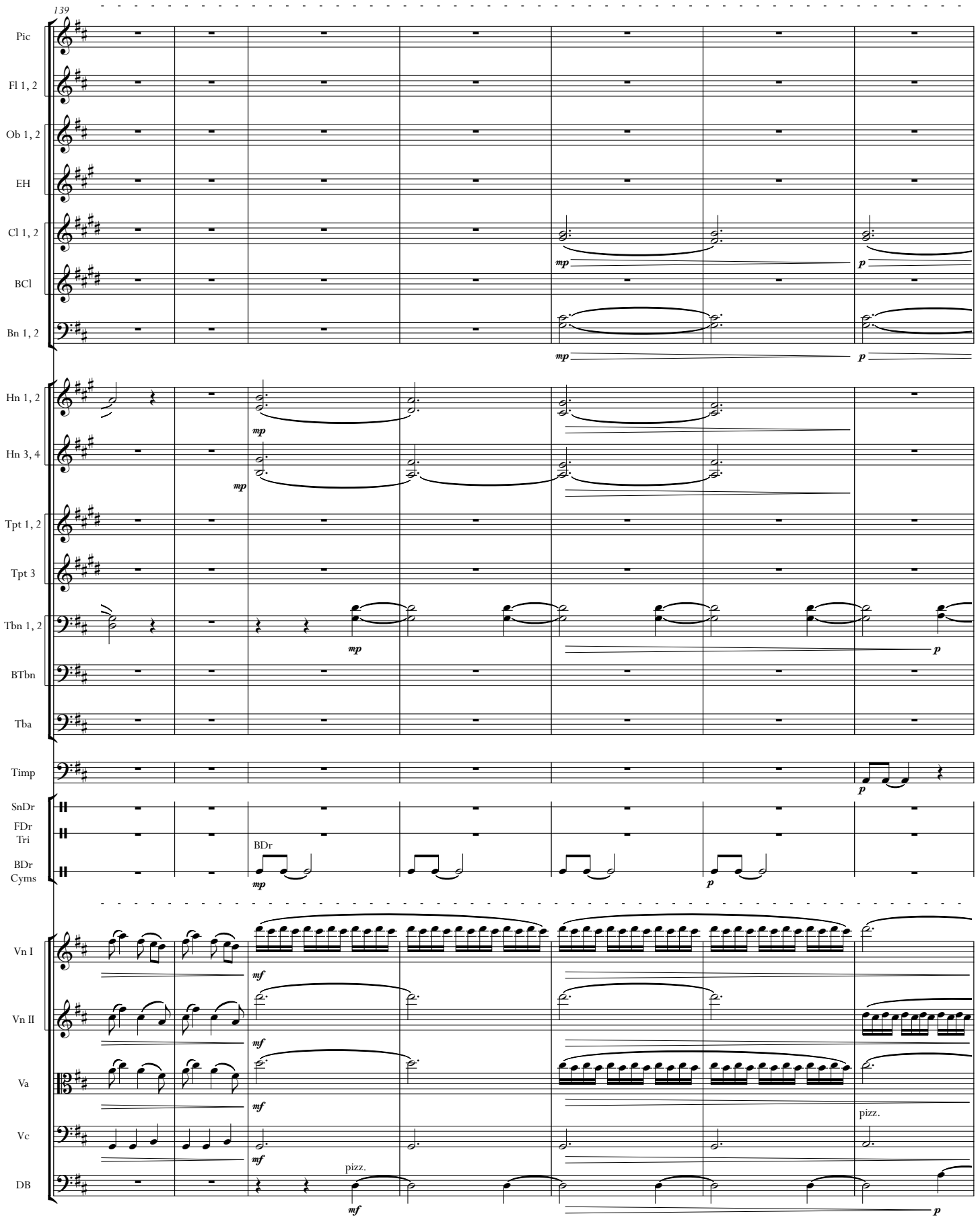
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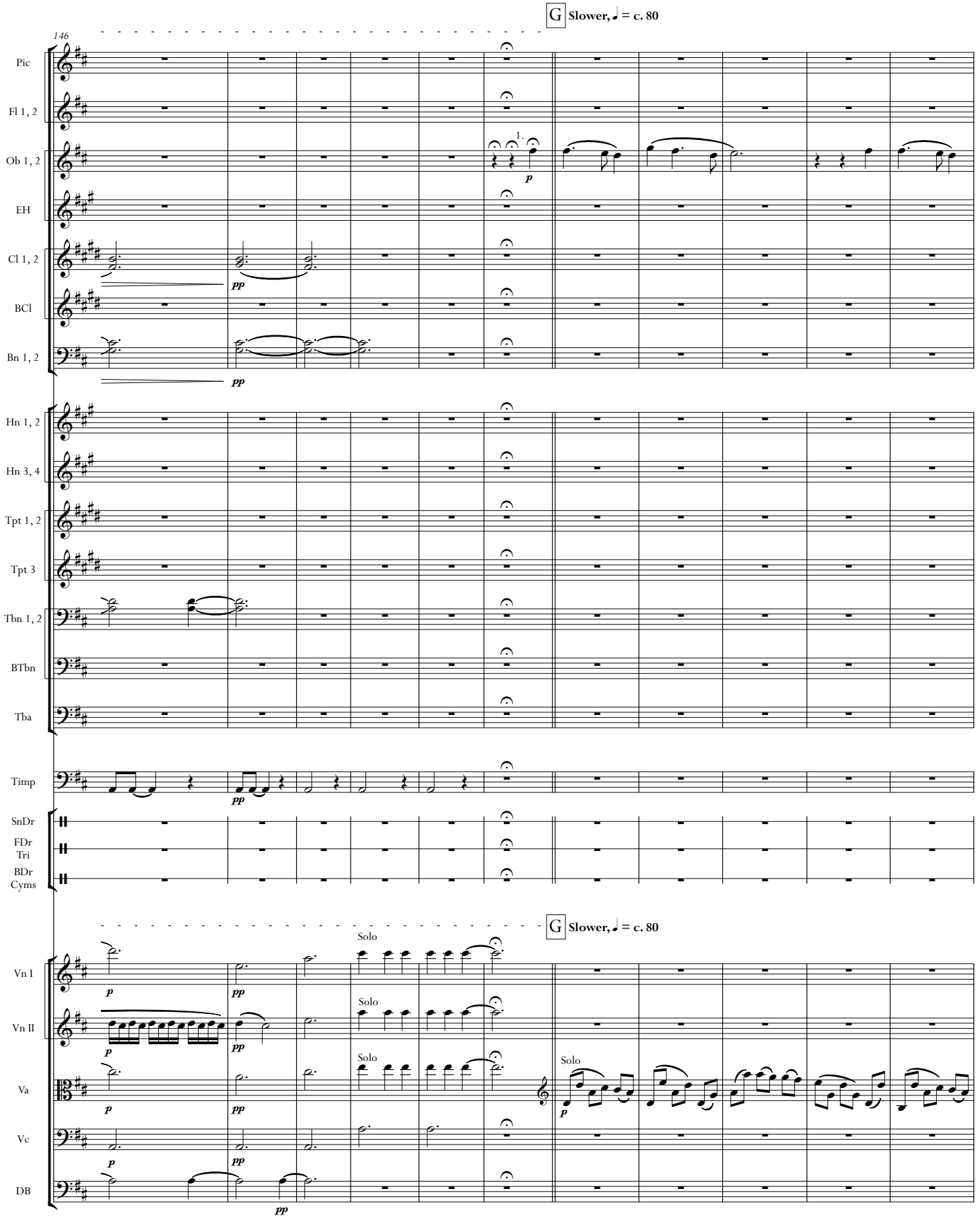
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Tpt 3
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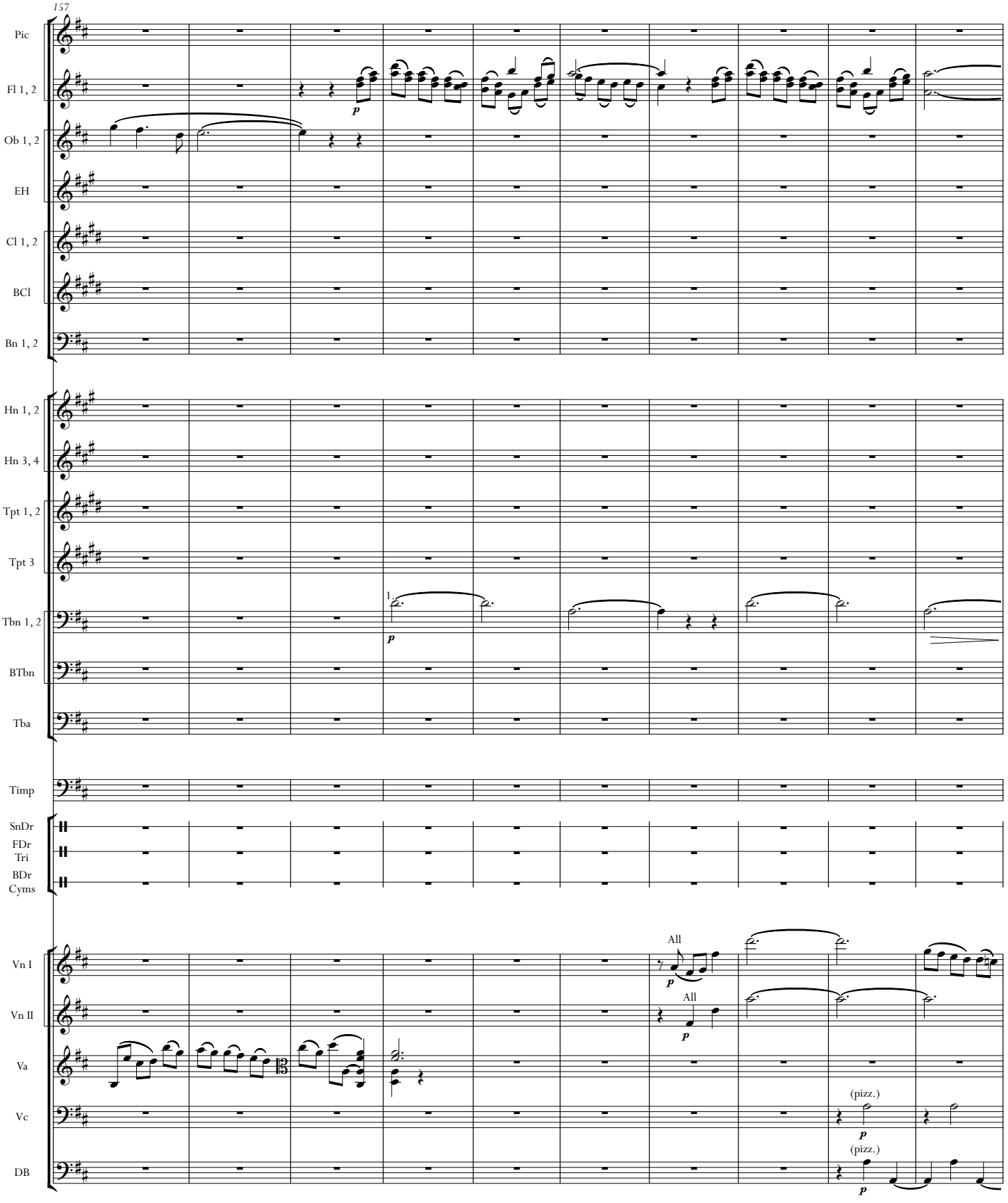
G Slower, ♩ = c. 80
Solo
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB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Vn II
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Vc
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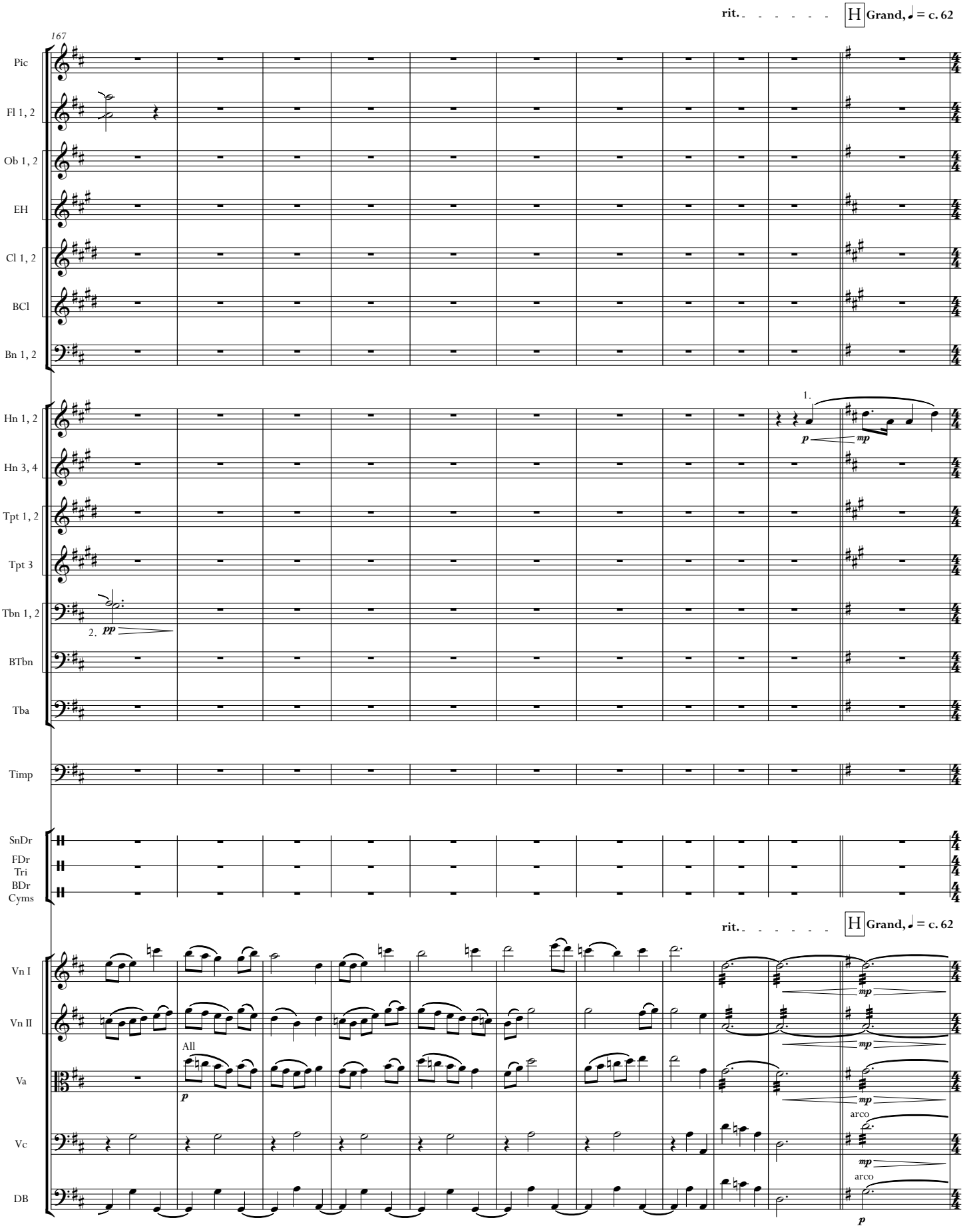
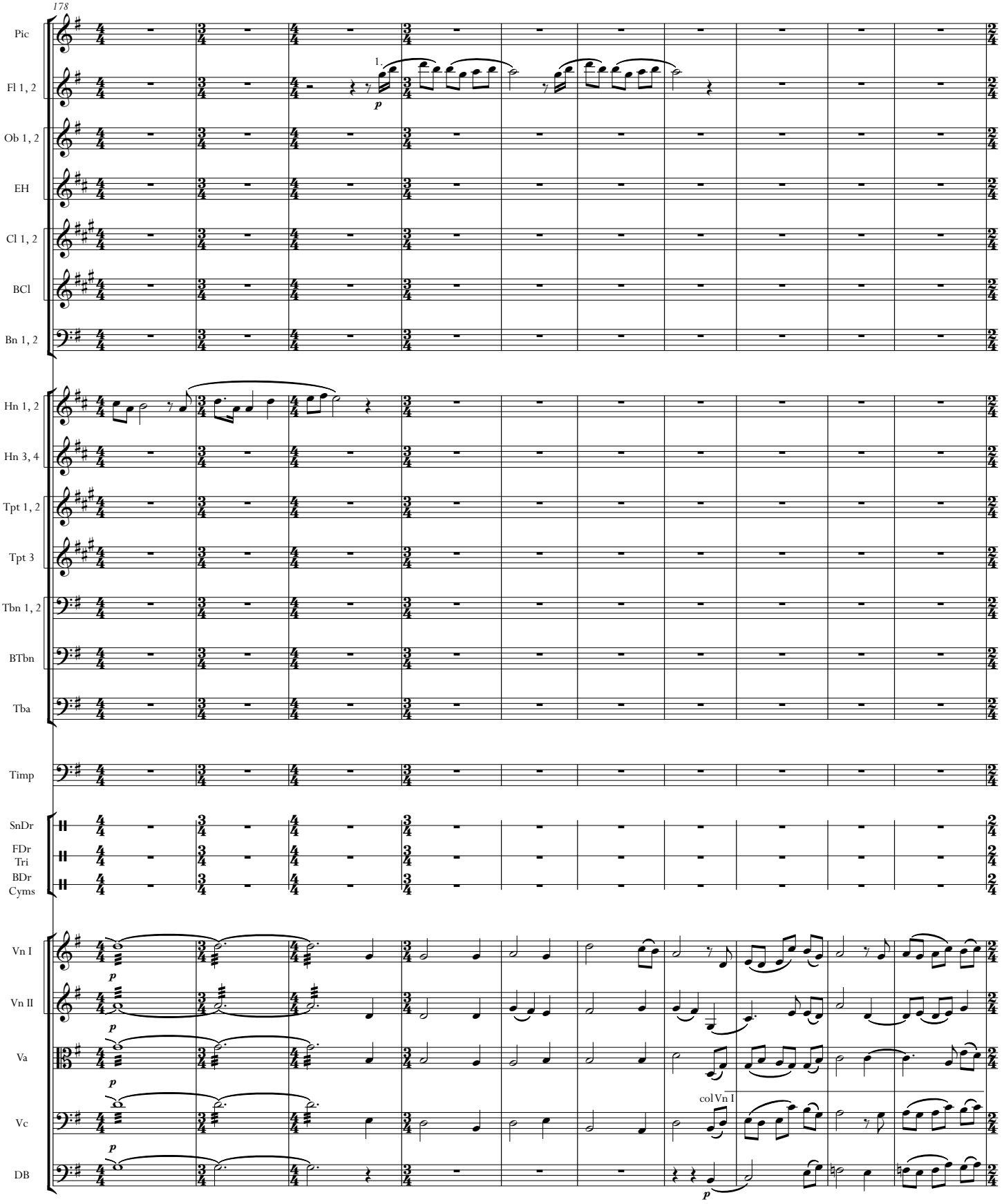
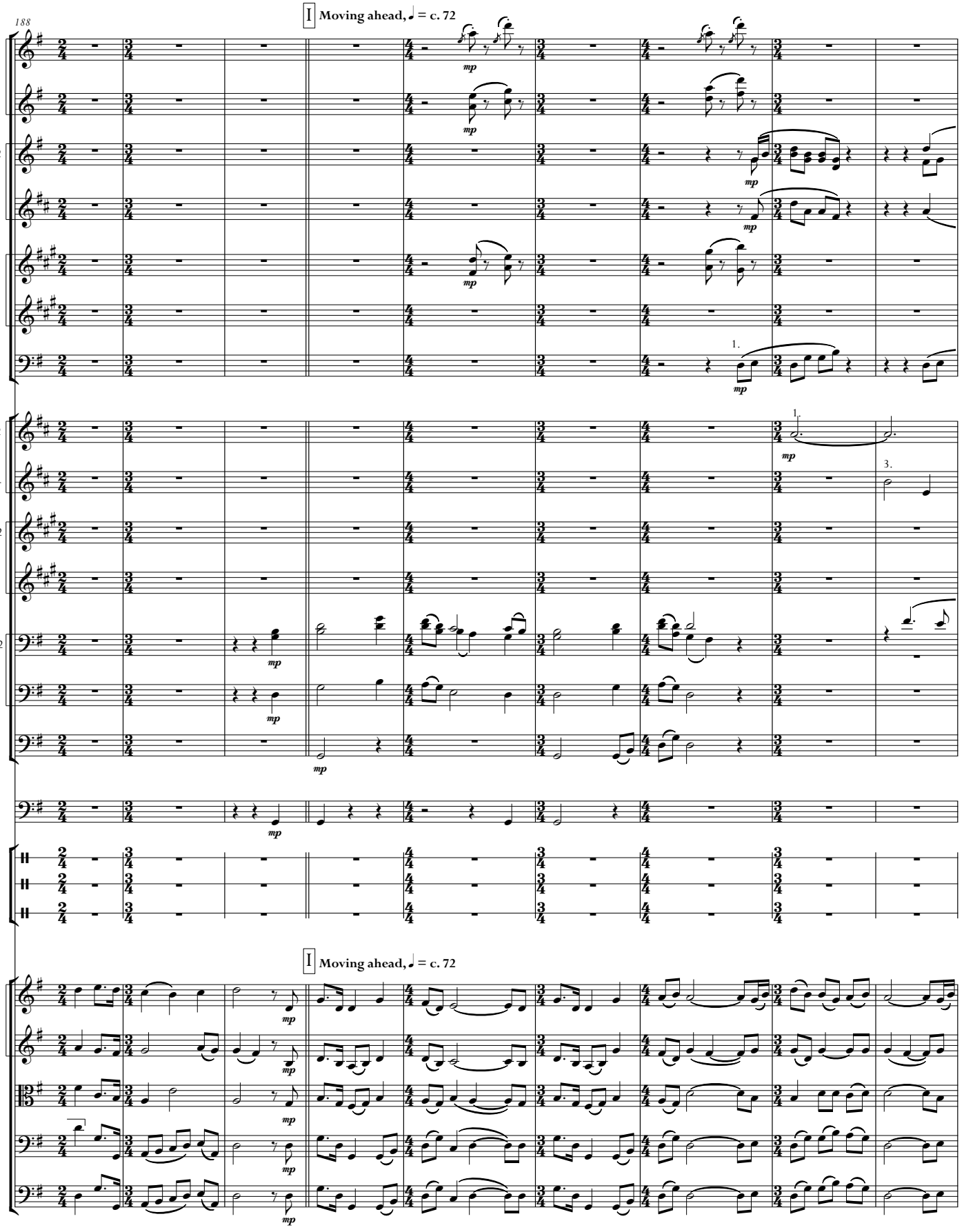
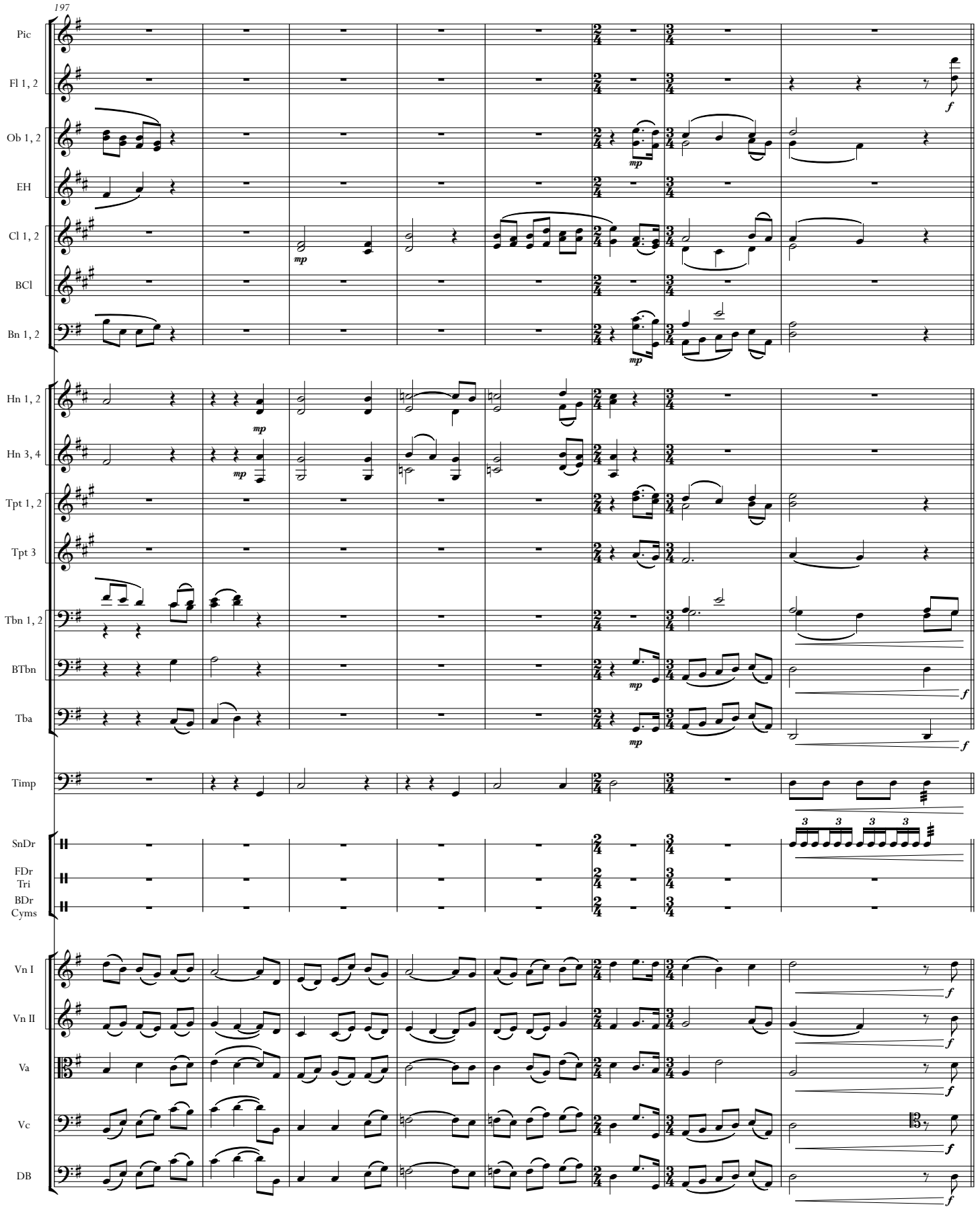
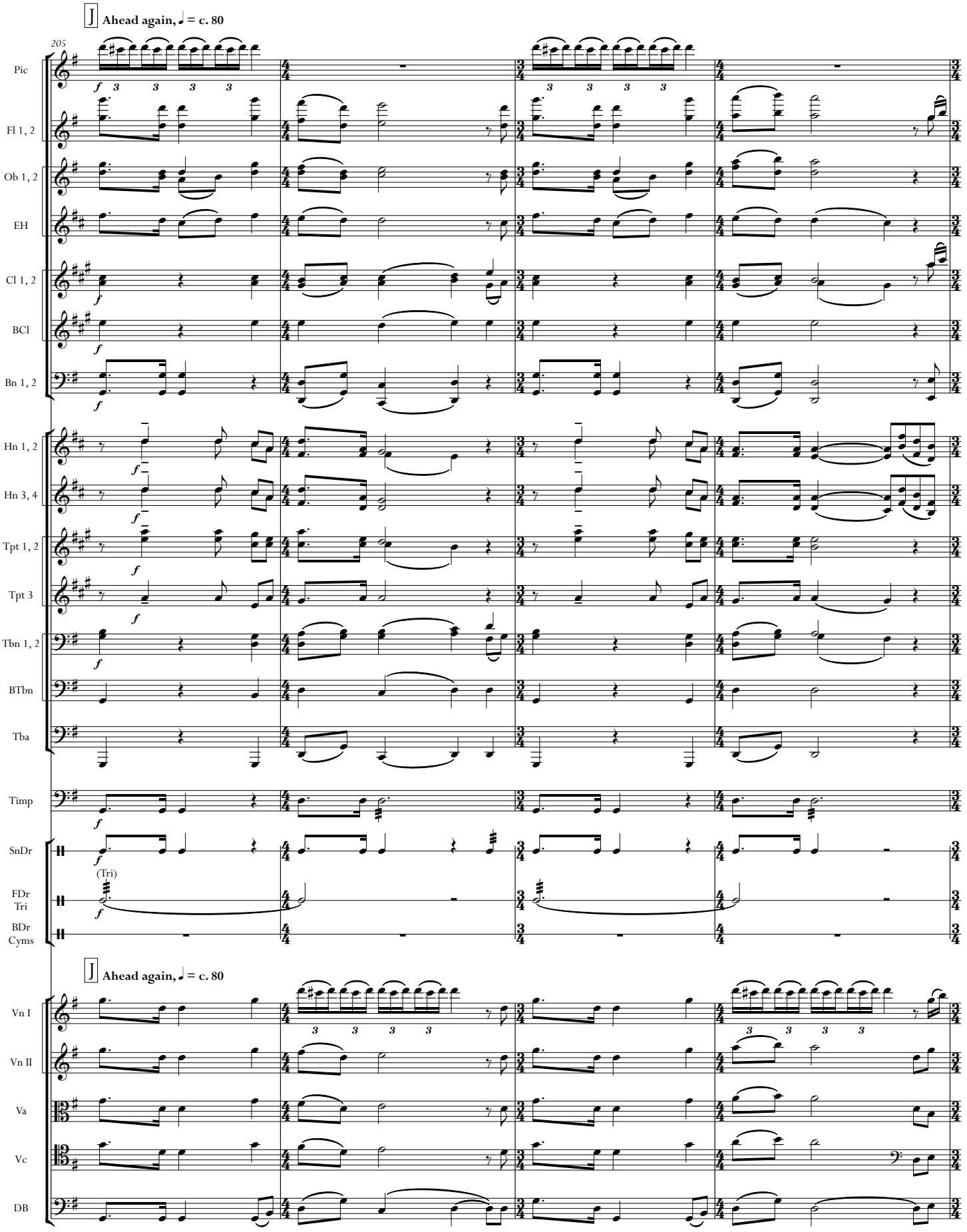
All
(pizz.)

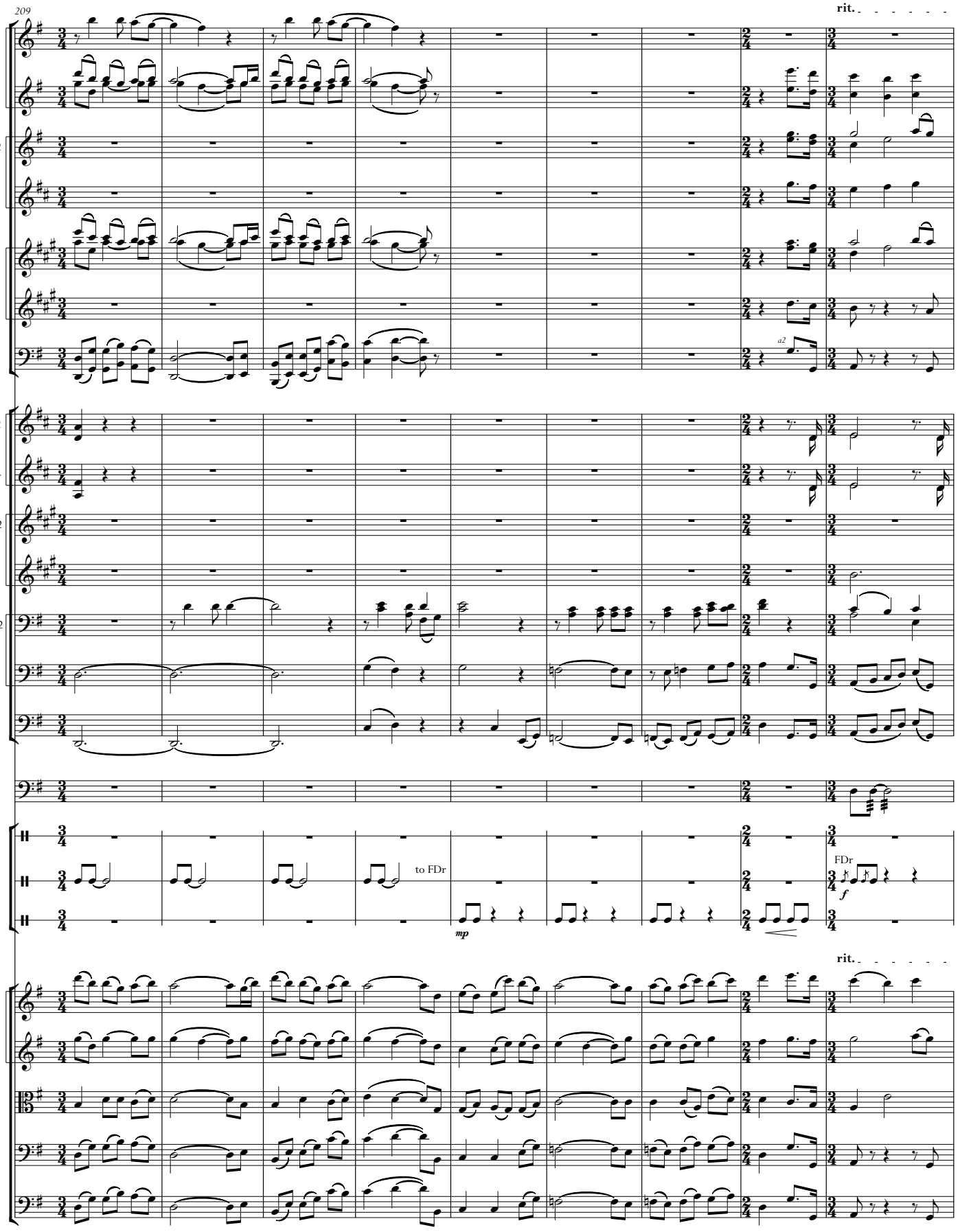

rit.
H Grand, ♩ = c. 62
167
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
1.
p
mp
2.
pp
rit.
H Grand, ♩ = c. 62
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
All
p
mp
arco
p

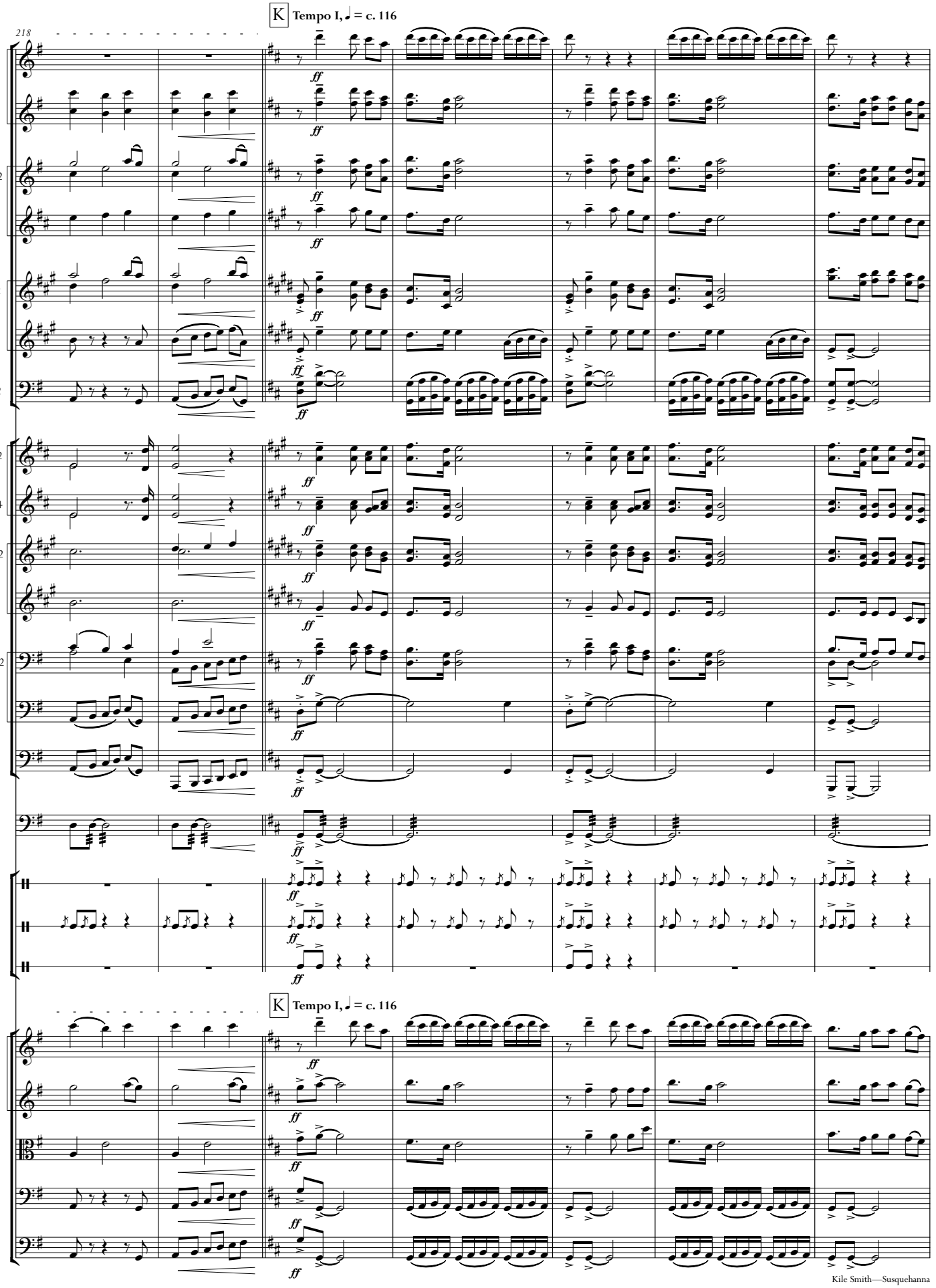

178
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
1.
p
col Vn I

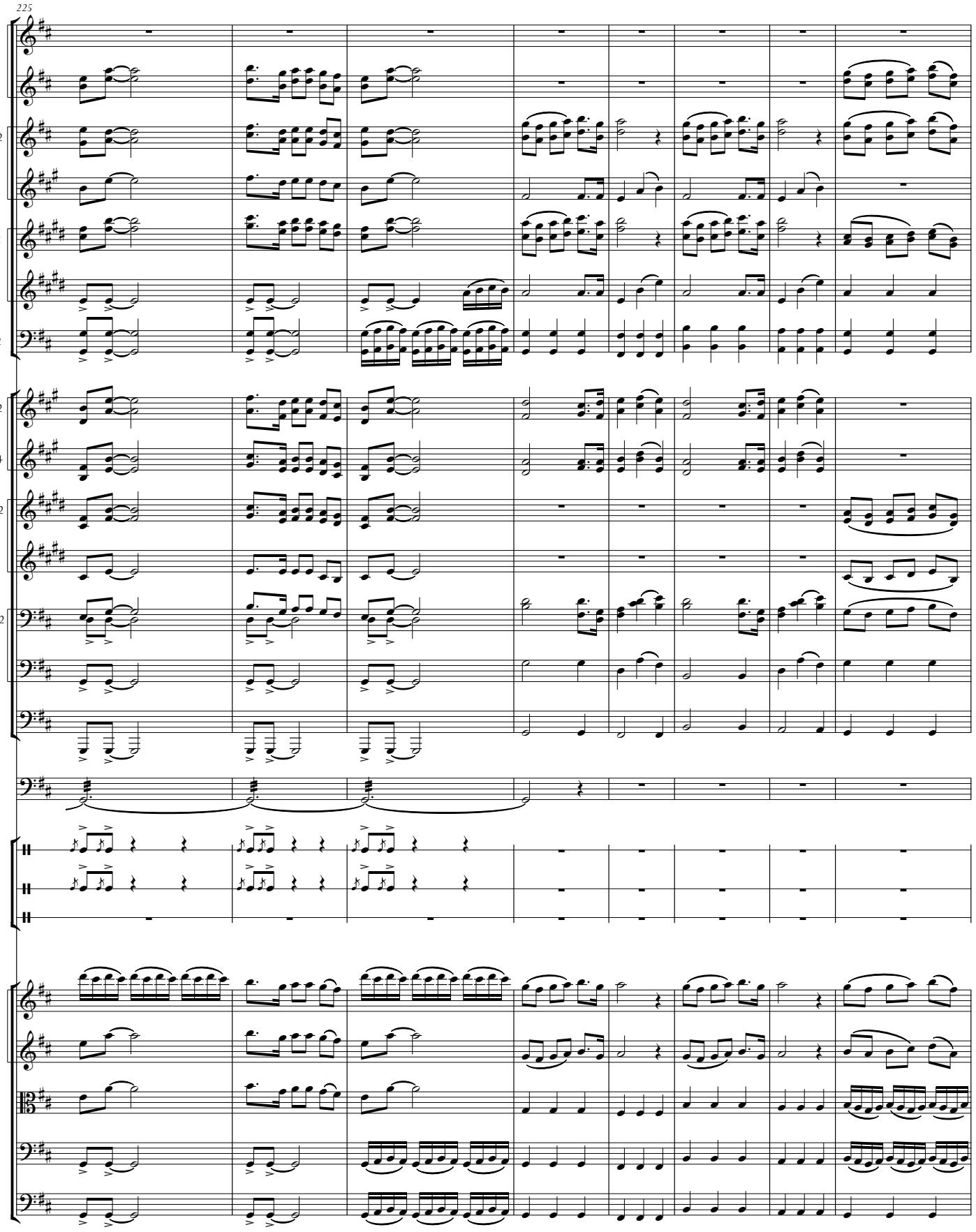

188
I Moving ahead, ♩ = c. 72
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
I Moving ahead, ♩ = c. 72
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
mp
1.
3.

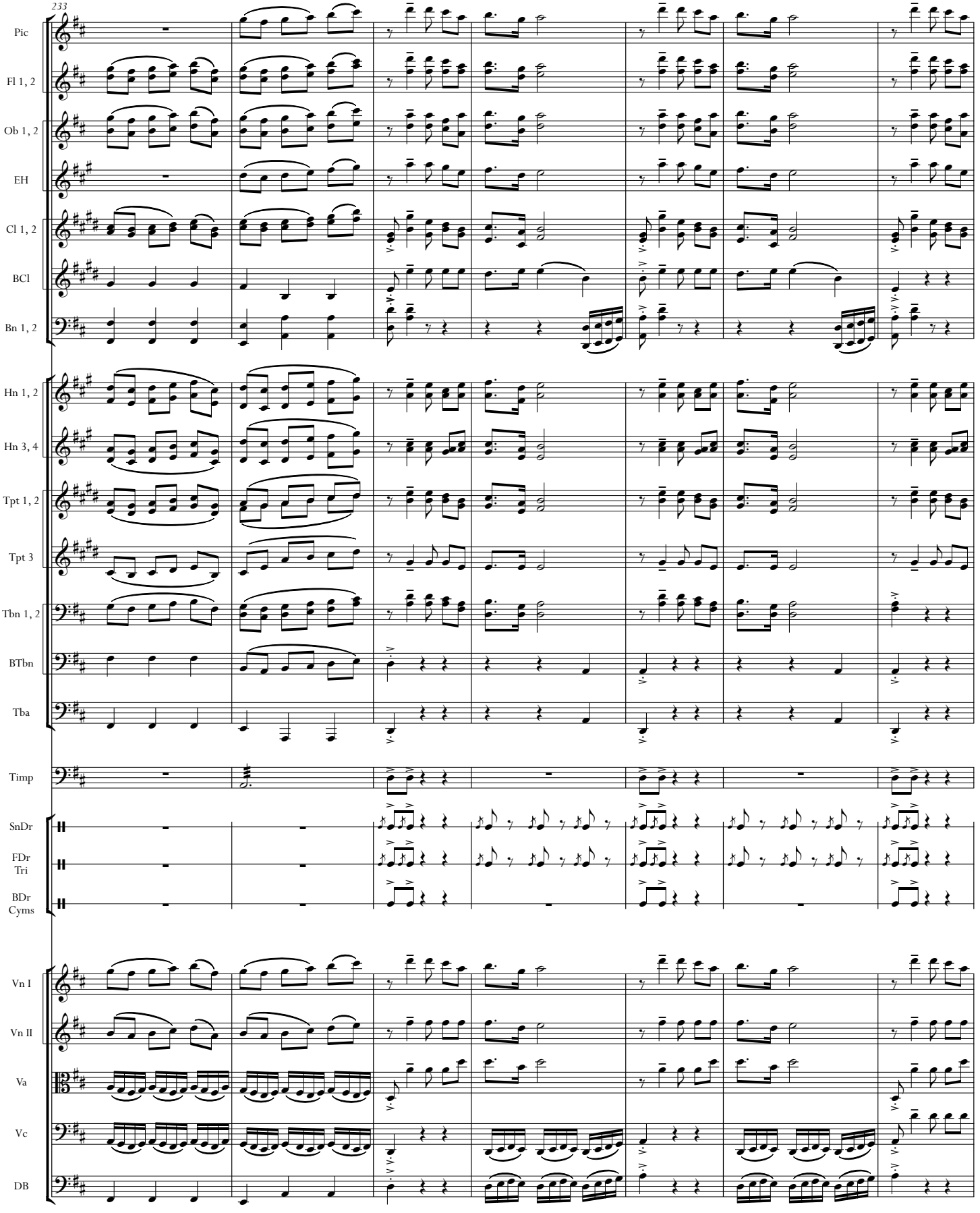

197
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
mp
f

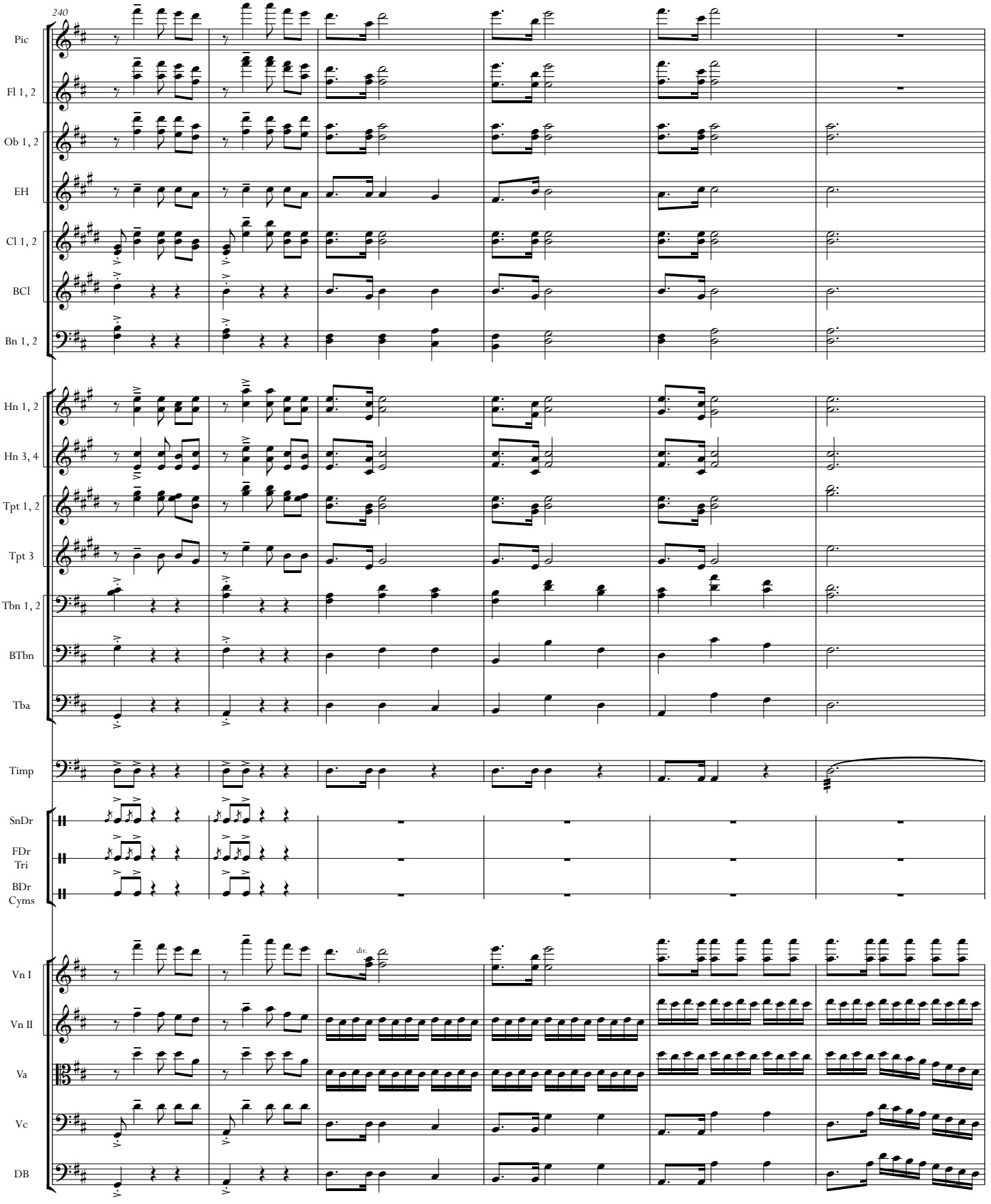

J Ahead again, ♩ = c. 80
205
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
(Tri)
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
J Ahead again, ♩ = c. 80
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB

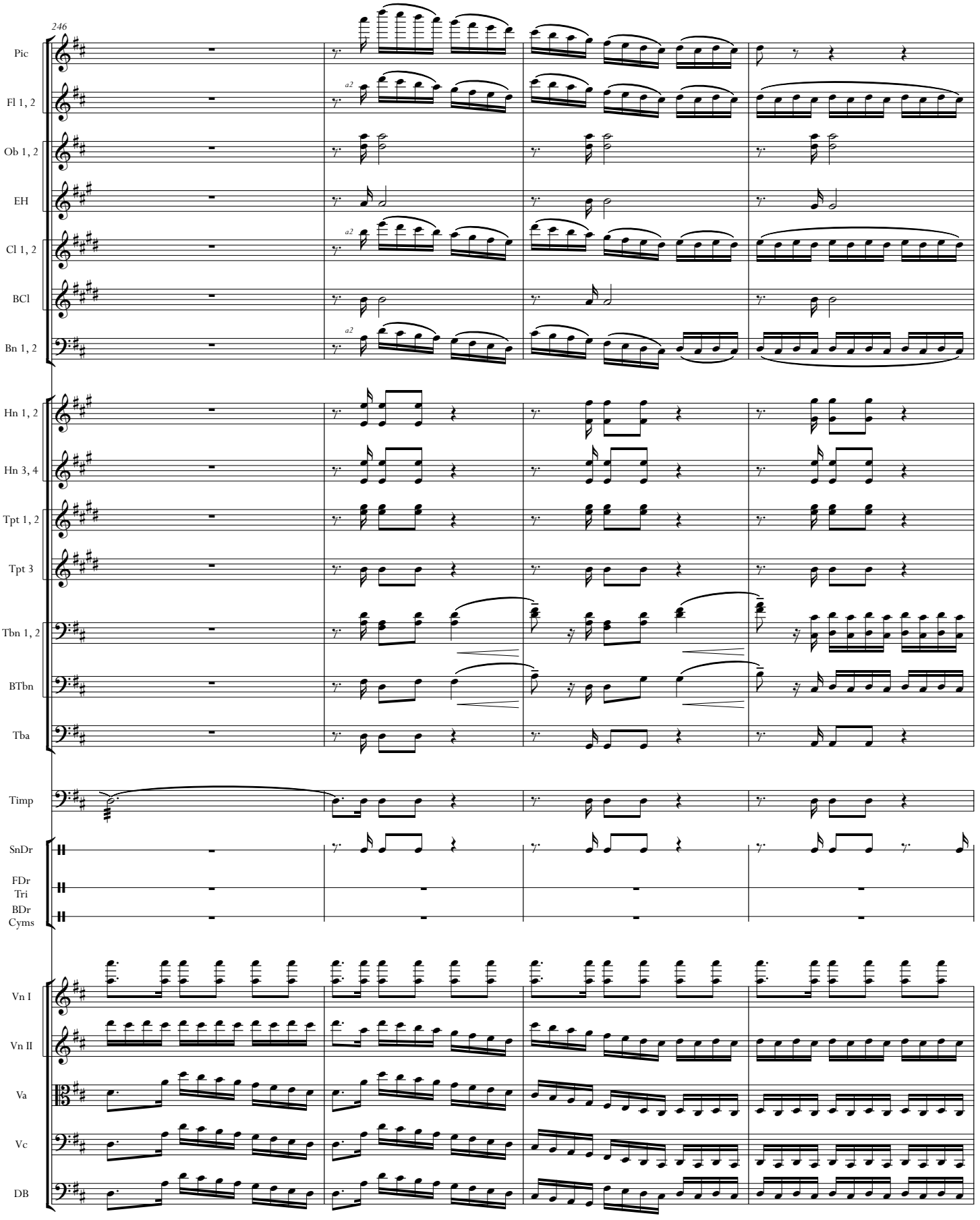

209
rit.
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
a2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
to FDr
mp
FDr
f
rit.
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB

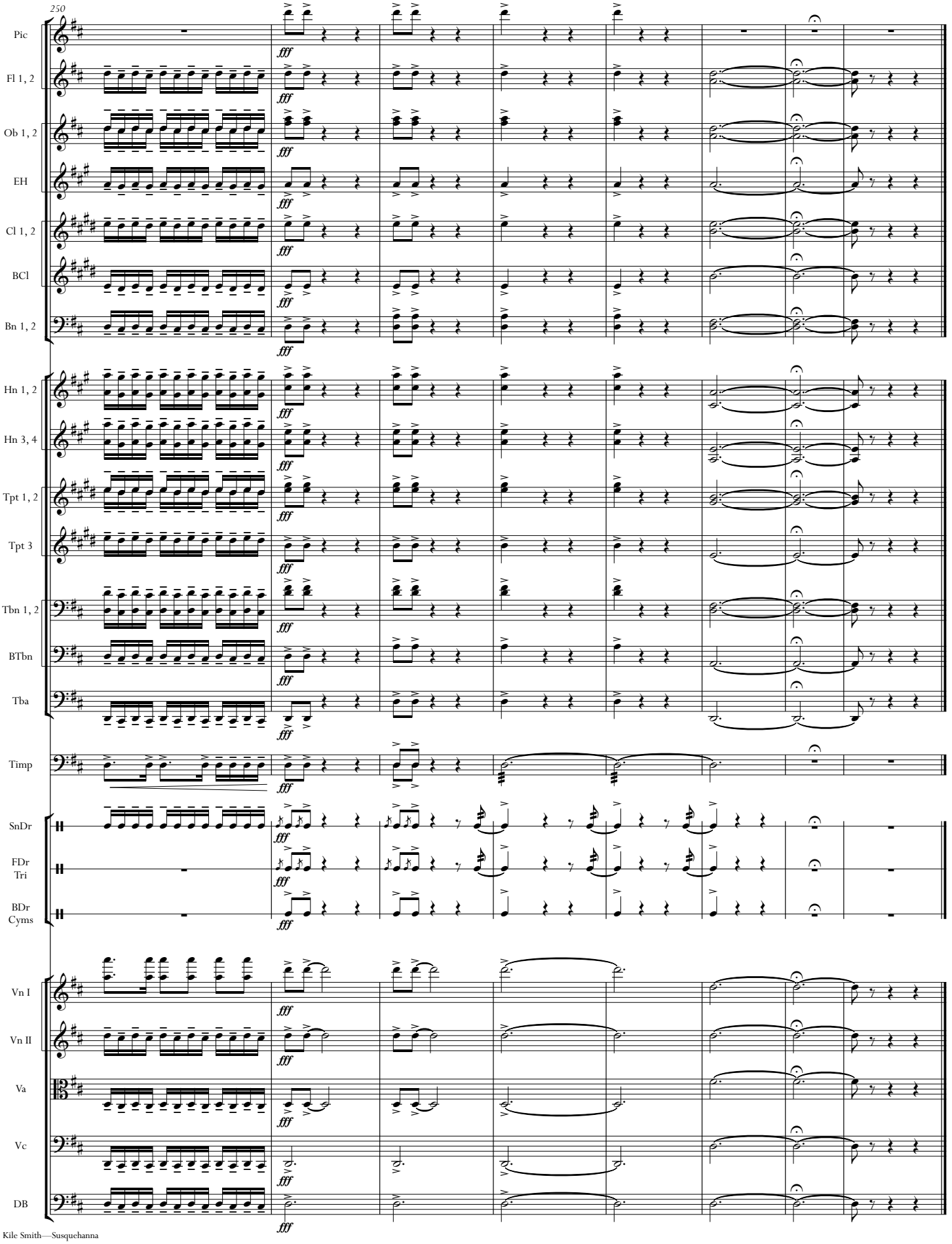

218
K Tempo I, ♩ = c. 116
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
K Tempo I, ♩ = c. 116
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
ff


225
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB


233
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB


240
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
div.


246
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
a2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB


250
Pic
Fl 1, 2
Ob 1, 2
EH
Cl 1, 2
BCl
Bn 1, 2
Hn 1, 2
Hn 3, 4
Tpt 1, 2
Tpt 3
Tbn 1, 2
BTbn
Tba
Timp
SnDr
FDr
Tri
BDr
Cyms
Vn I
Vn II
Va
Vc
DB
fff