We Are Broken

for nine bass clarinets

JONATHAN RUSSELL

PROGRAM NOTE:

All of us are broken in some way. Life just does that to you. Whether it's the loss of a loved one, the end of a relationship, a professional setback, or even that bully in 4th grade whose confidence-shrinking taunts still linger inside you. We all have parts that are stunted, twisted, broken. How much of our life do we spend avoiding those parts, suppressing them, pretending they're not there, or acting out to avoid acknowledging them? What if, instead, we were able to really look at our own brokenness, acknowledge it, try to make peace with it? And what if we could do the same with those around us – see and acknowledge their brokenness, indeed finding in it our common humanity? This piece is meant to create some space to acknowledge and reflect on our own brokenness, realize that we are all broken together, and hopefully find some peace and acceptance in this realization.

The immediate inspiration came from the brilliant television show, "Better Call Saul," which traces the transformation of an earnest, good-hearted, if ethically challenged young lawyer named Jimmy McGill into the over-the-top, flamboyant, near-caricature criminal cartel lawyer, Saul Goodman, who we meet in "Breaking Bad." We see that a series of failures and traumatic events in his life push him over the edge; the gaudy, amoral Saul Goodman persona he adopts is his way of coping, of avoiding having to face his own deep brokenness. It got me thinking about my attraction to dark television shows like Better Call Saul, Breaking Bad, The Sopranos, Game of Thrones, etc., and how the common denominator is that they are all about how people deal with their own brokenness – in most cases, in deeply destructive ways. There are also occasional characters in these shows who flip the script, whose brokenness instead leads them to become stronger or more self-aware or more humble or more empathic. Can we similarly flip the script in our own lives?

The piece was composed for and premiered by my Boston-based bass clarinet ensemble Improbable Beasts at the ICA Low ClarinetFest 2023 in Glendale, AZ.

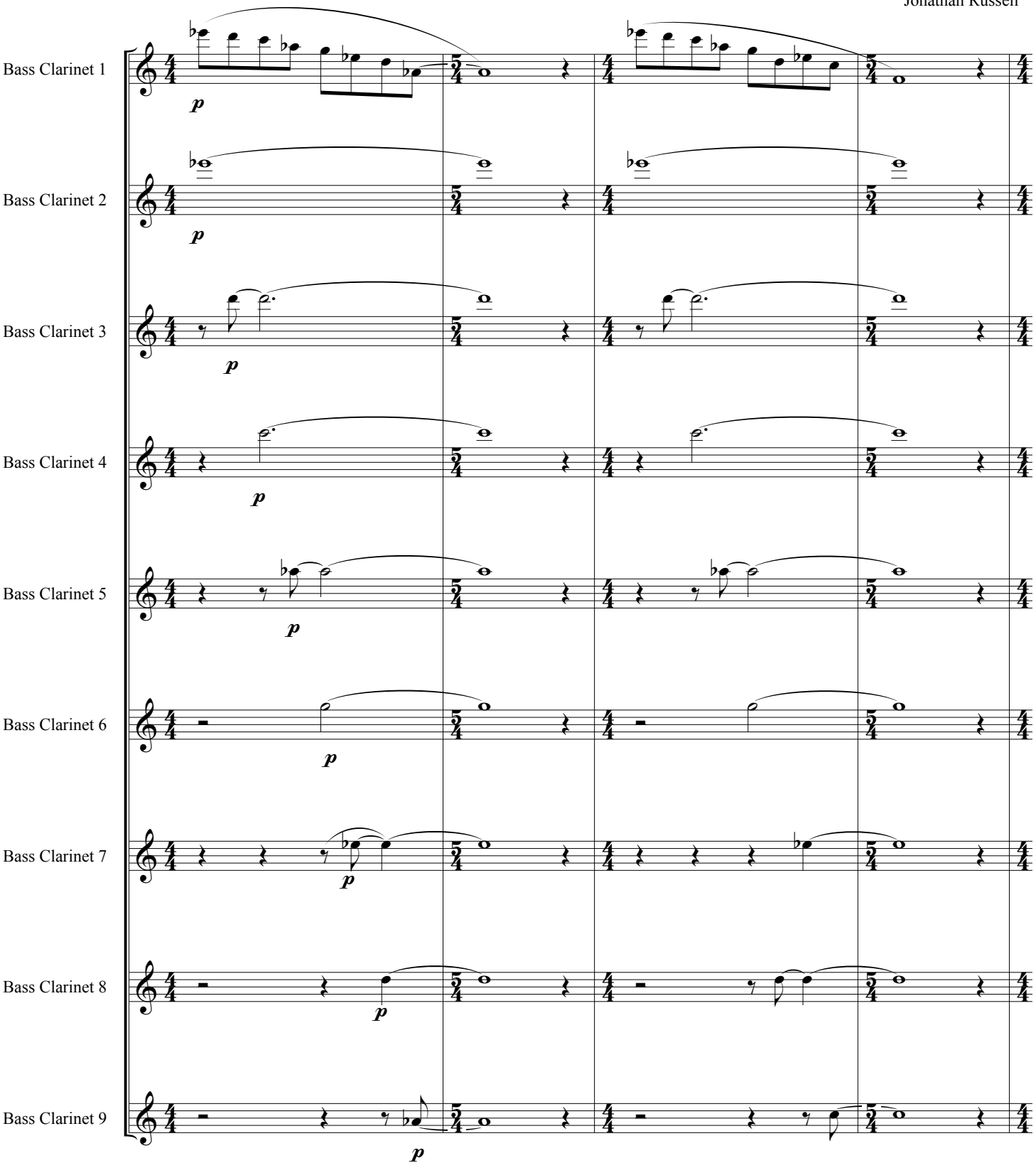
Score

We Are Broken

Composed for Improbable Beasts for the 2023 Low Clarinet Festival

Slowly, with some rubato

Jonathan Russell



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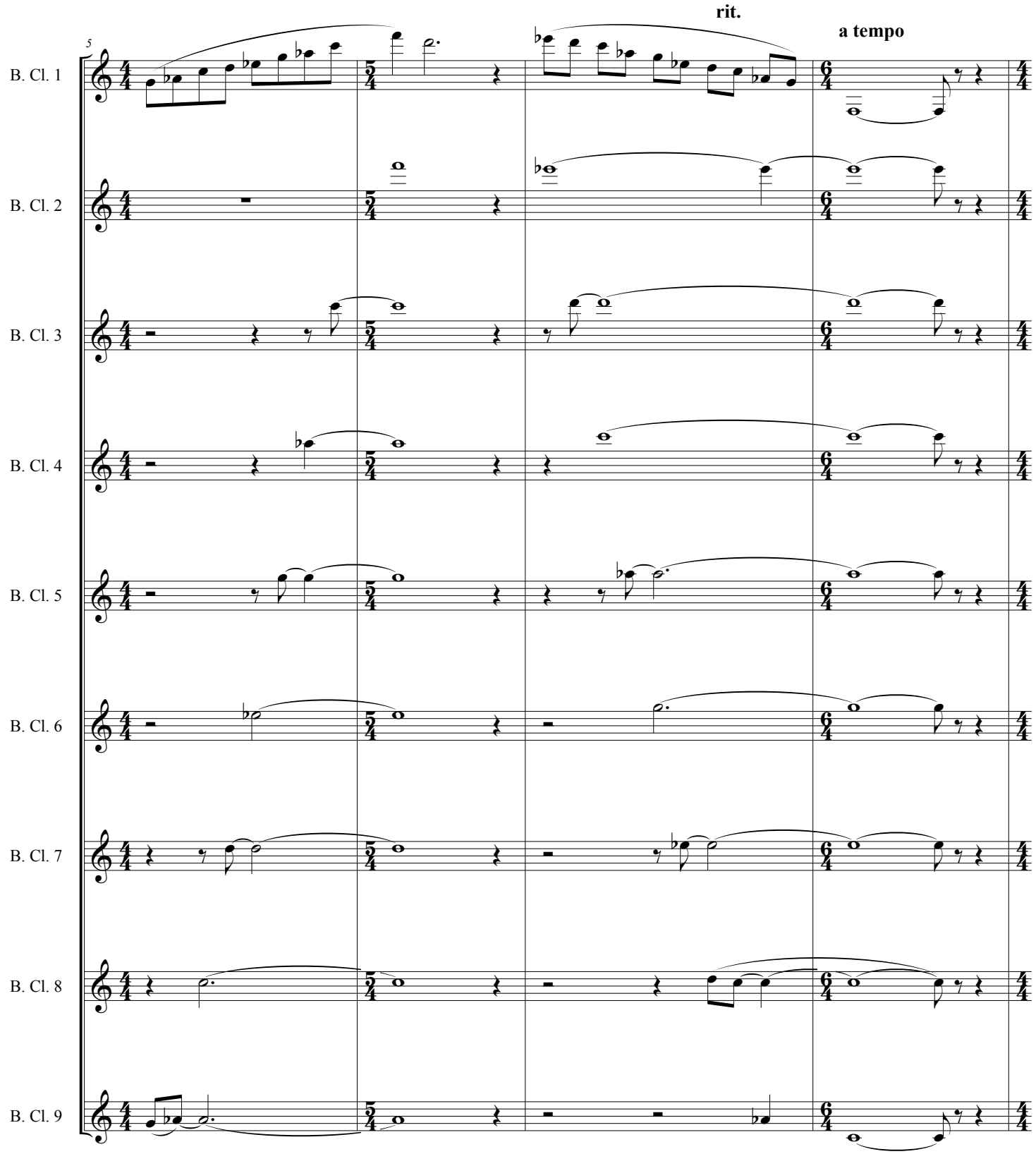
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a tempo
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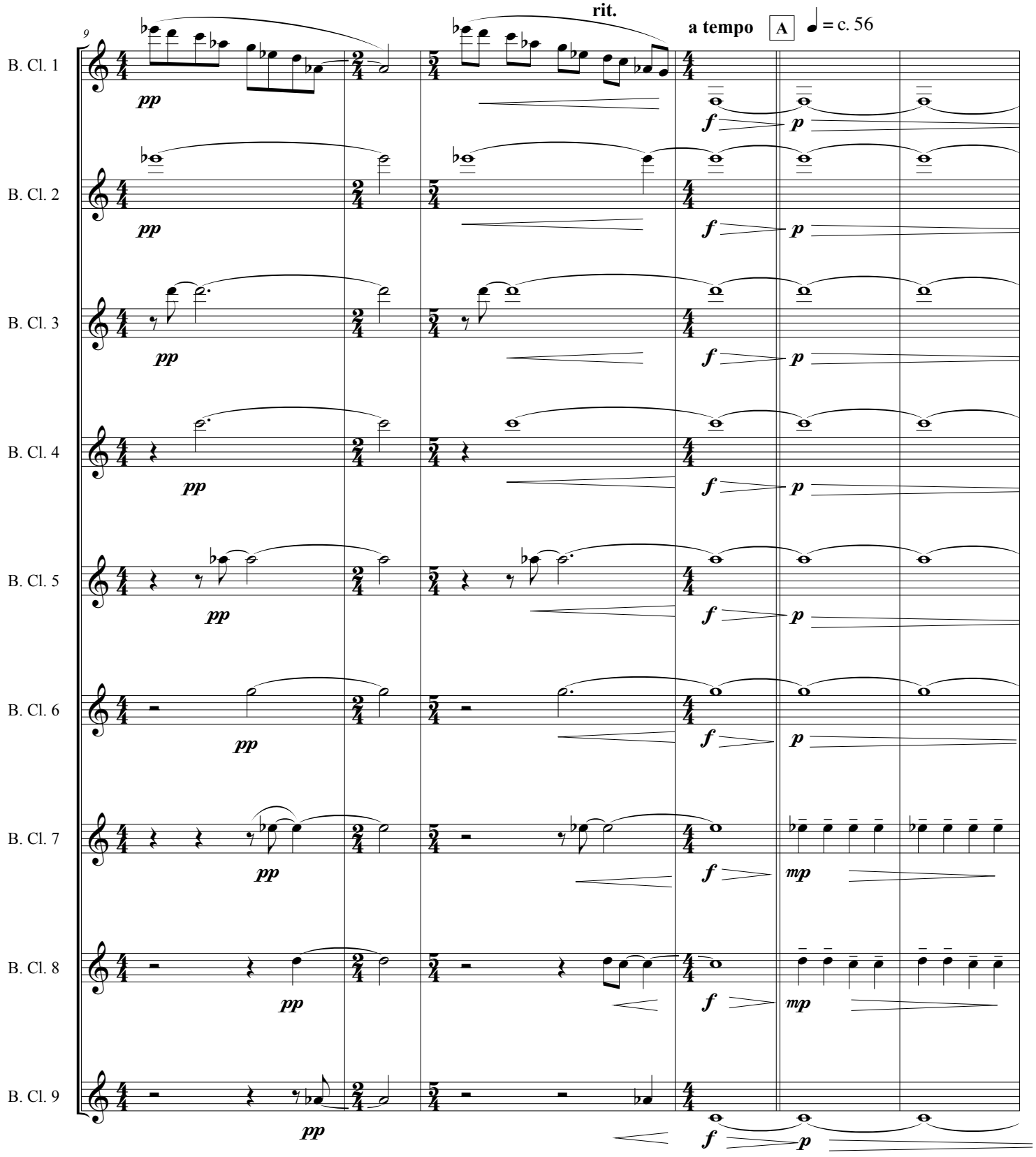
B. Cl. 6
B. Cl. 7
B. Cl. 8
B. Cl. 9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rit.
a tempo
A
= c. 56
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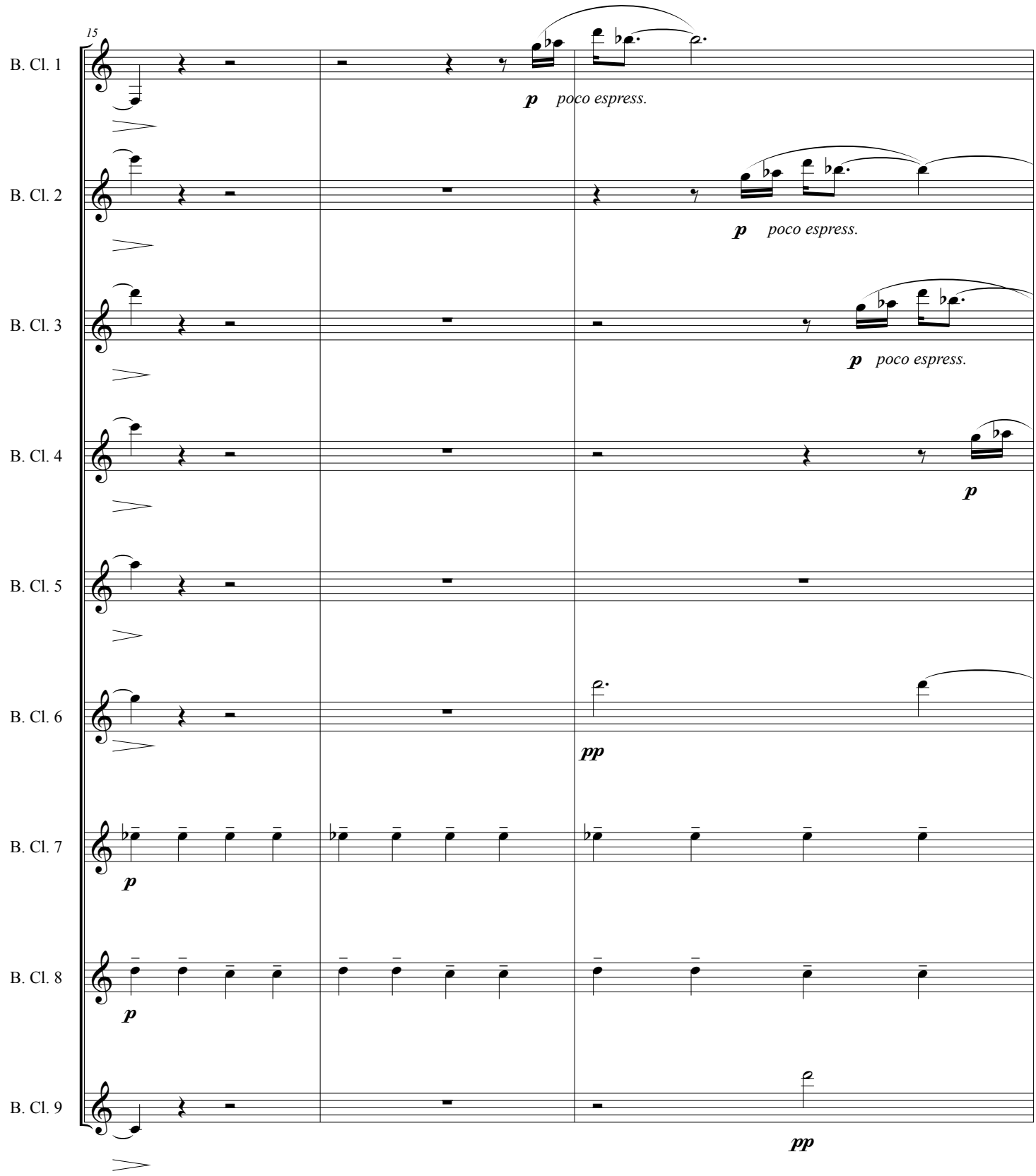
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B. Cl. 4
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p poco espress.
p poco espress.
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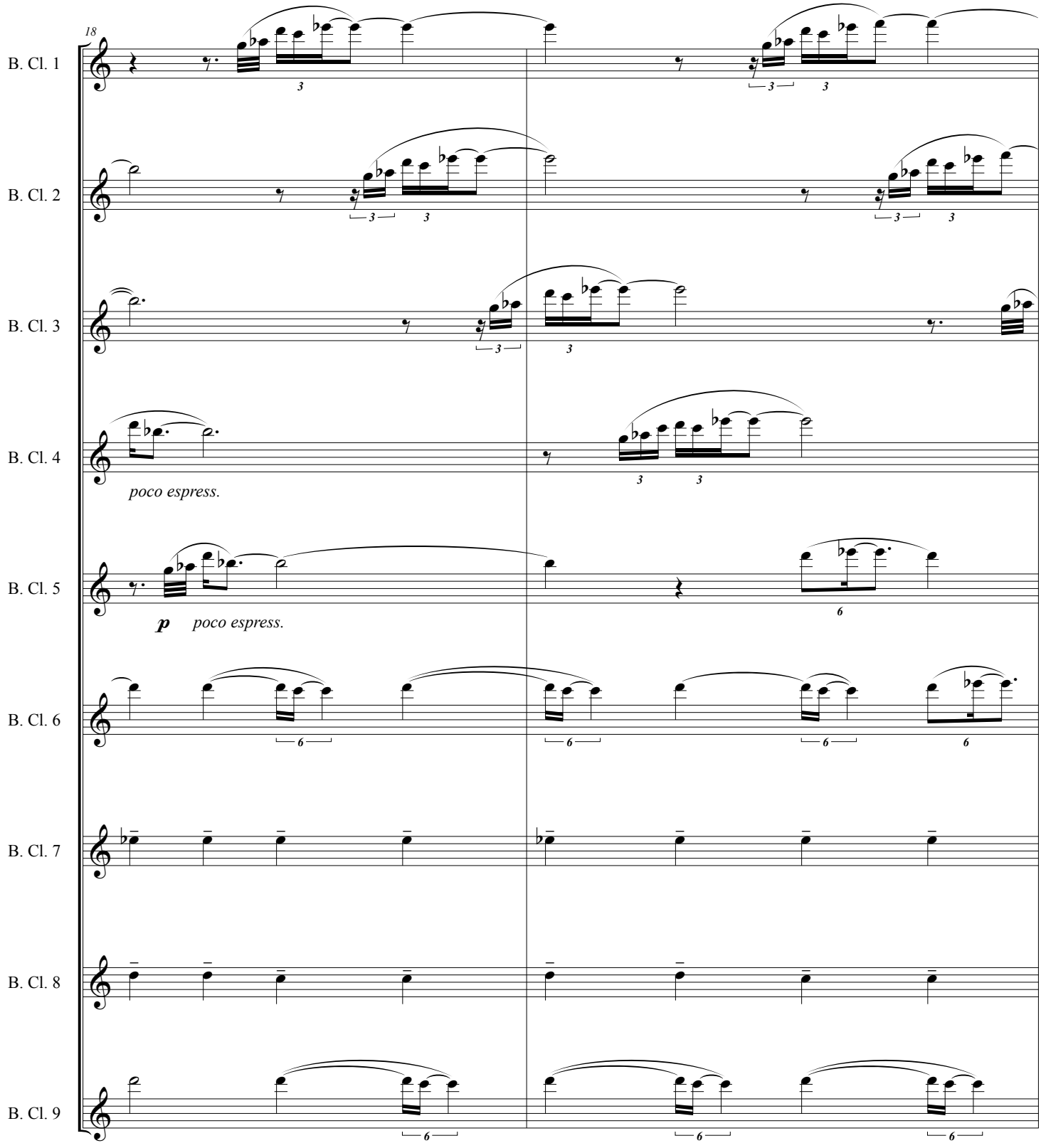
pp
p
p
pp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poco espress.
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p poco espress.
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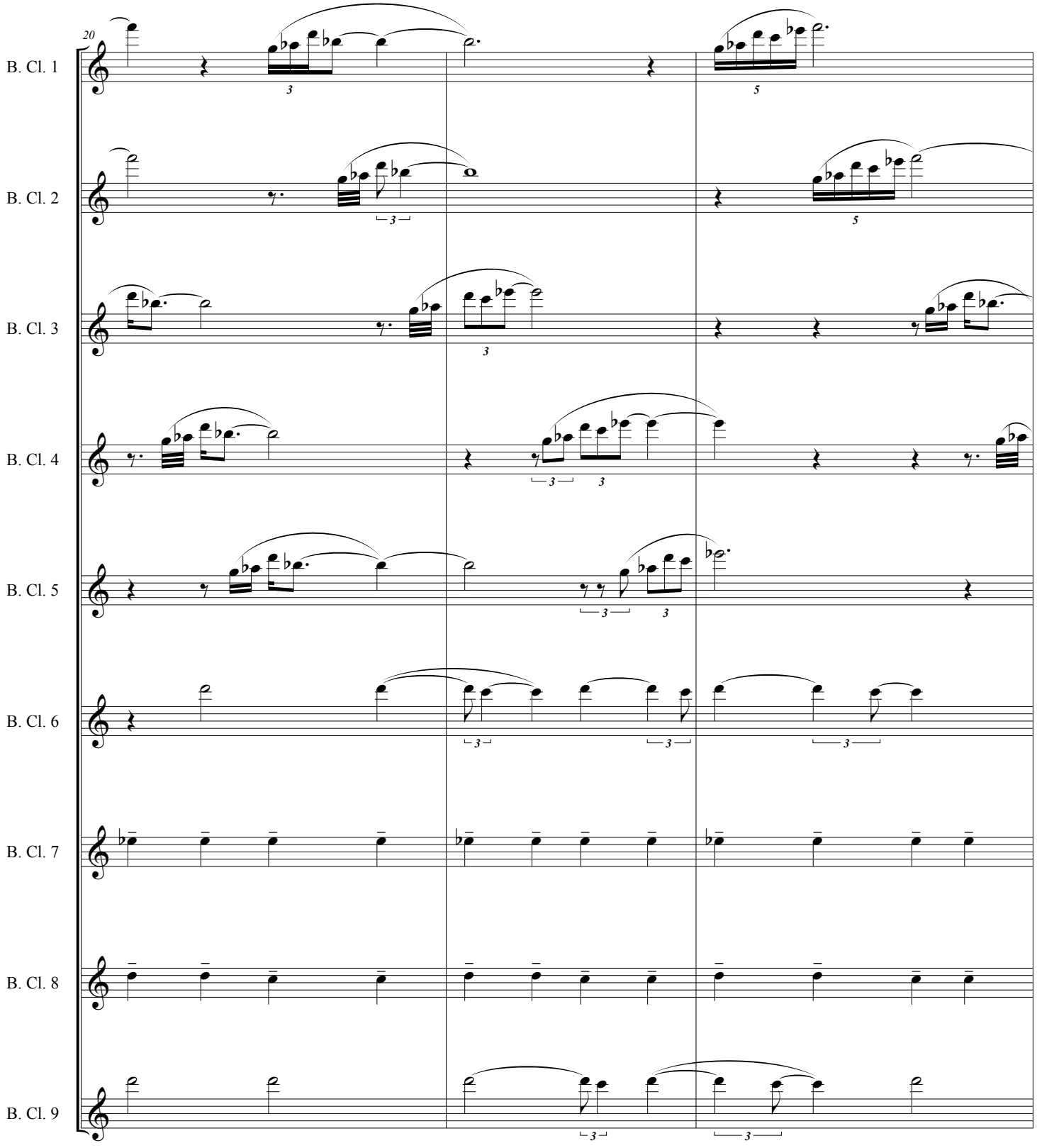
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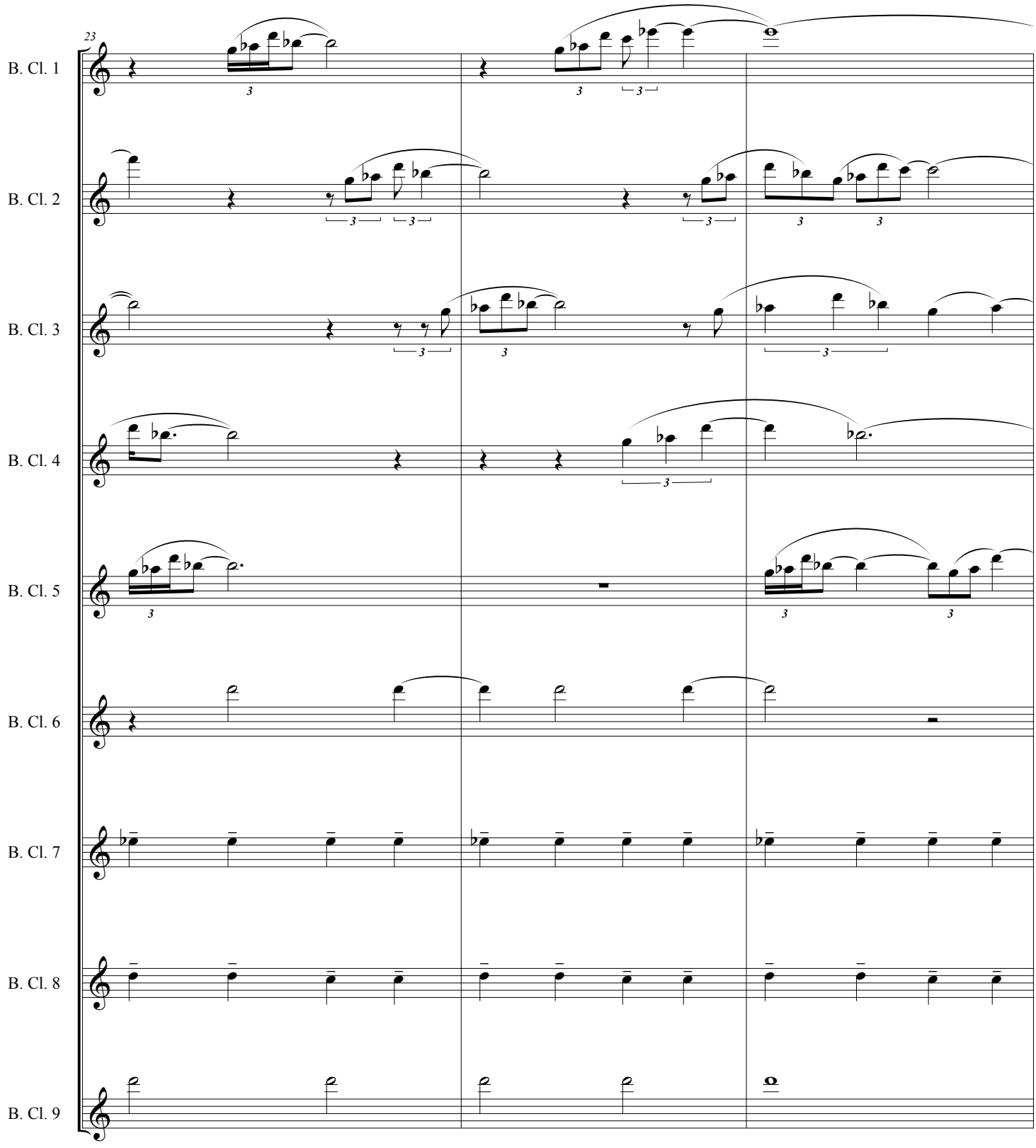
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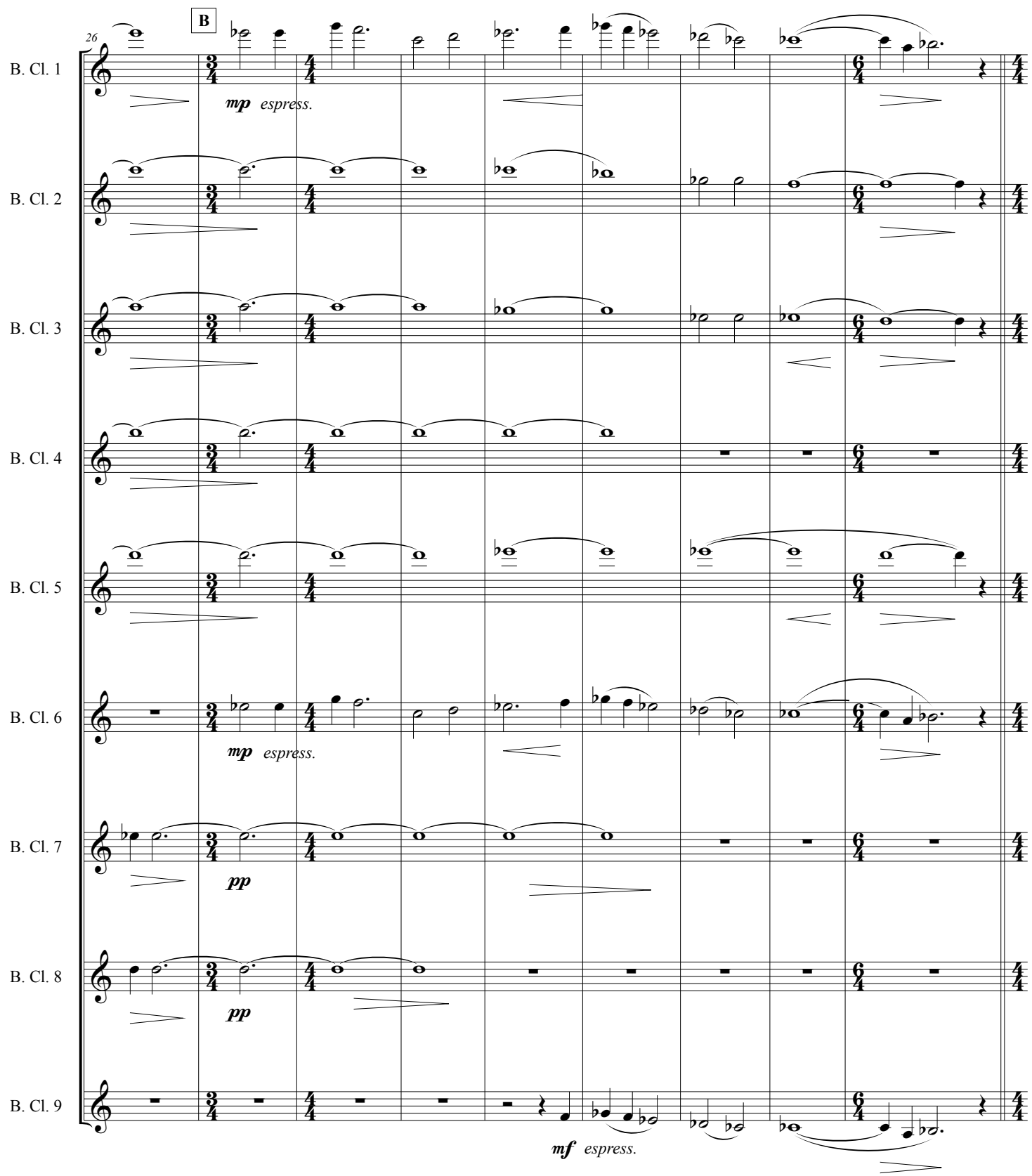
rit.
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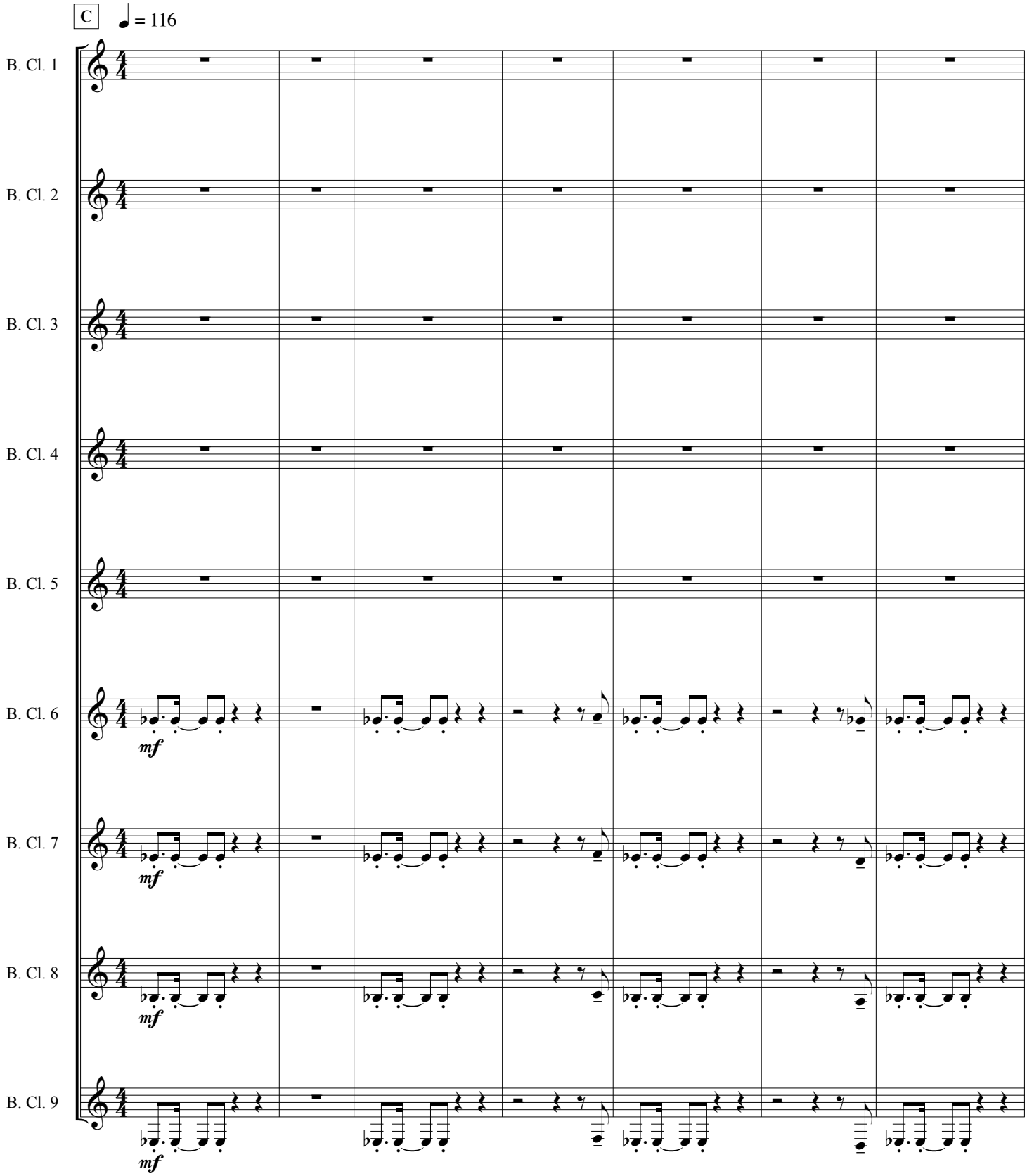
mp espress.
mp espress.
pp
pp
mf espress.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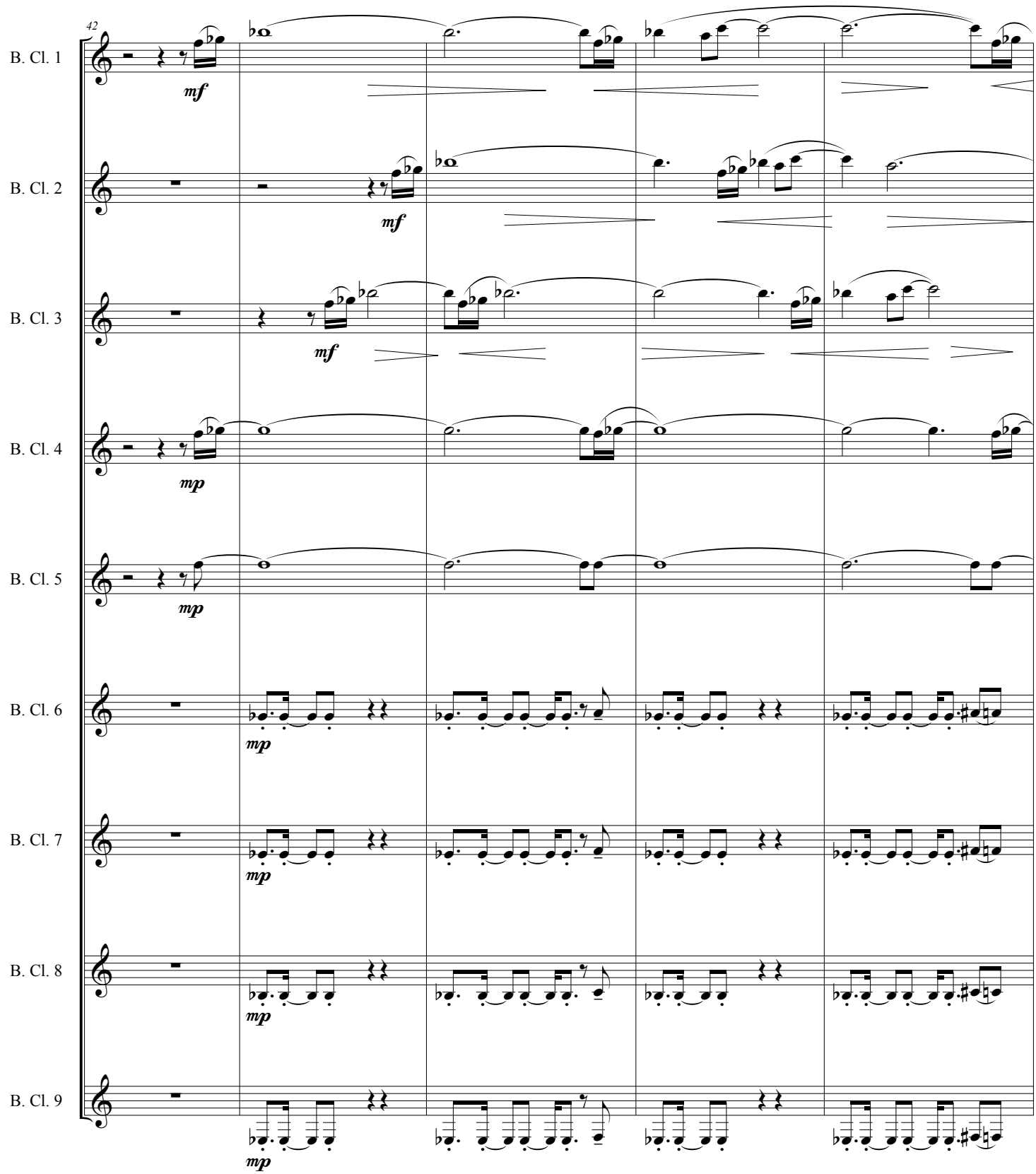
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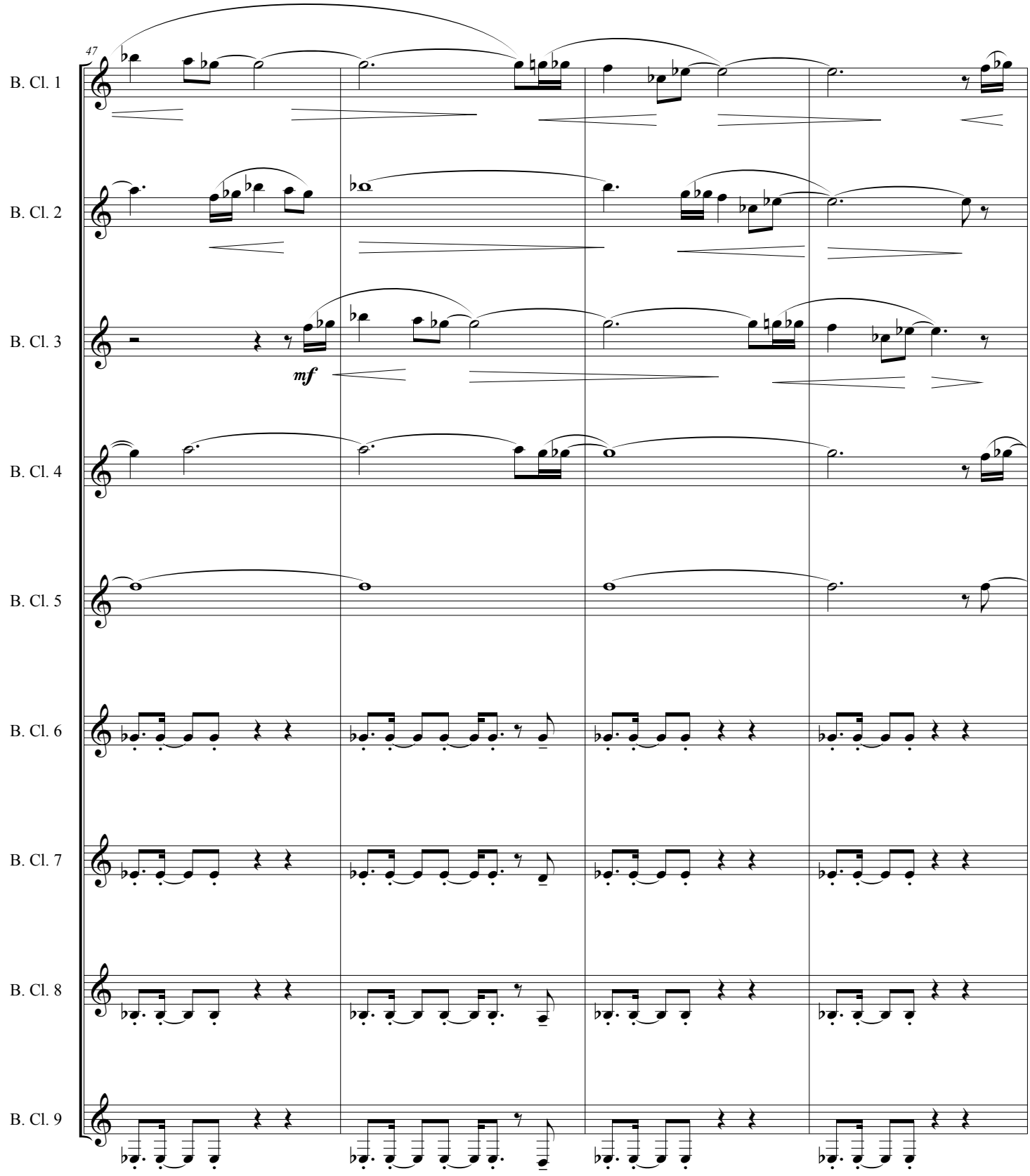
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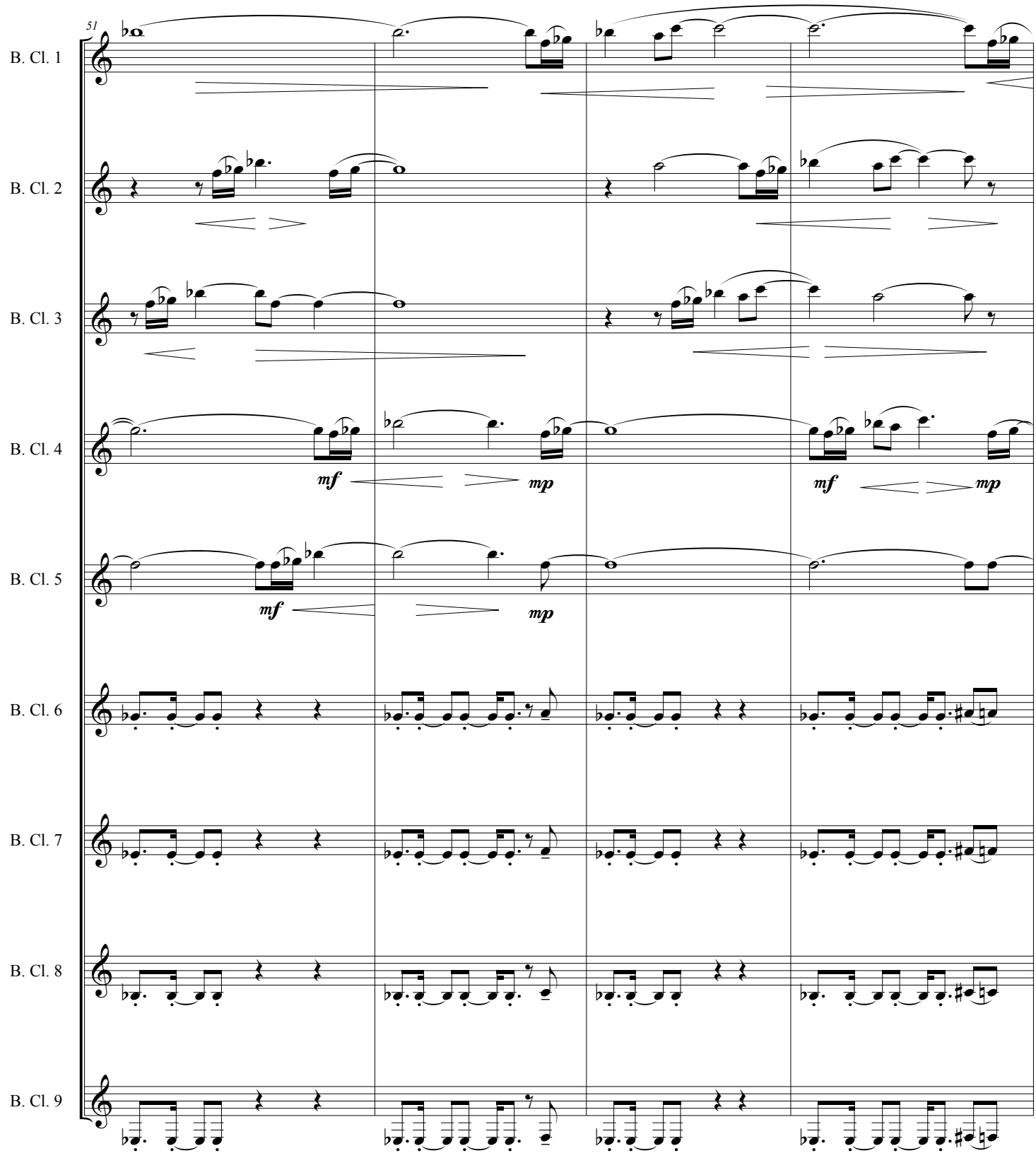
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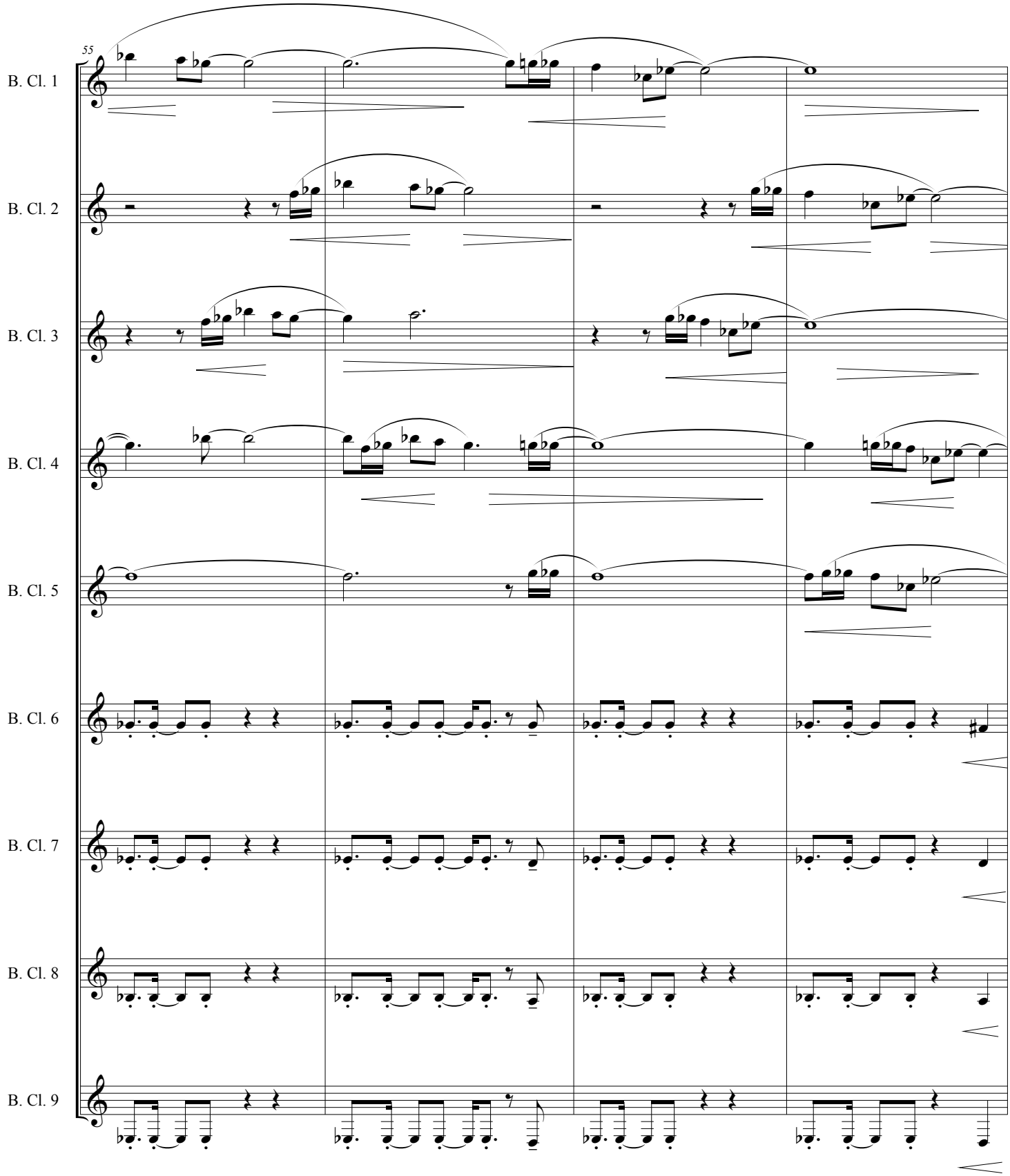
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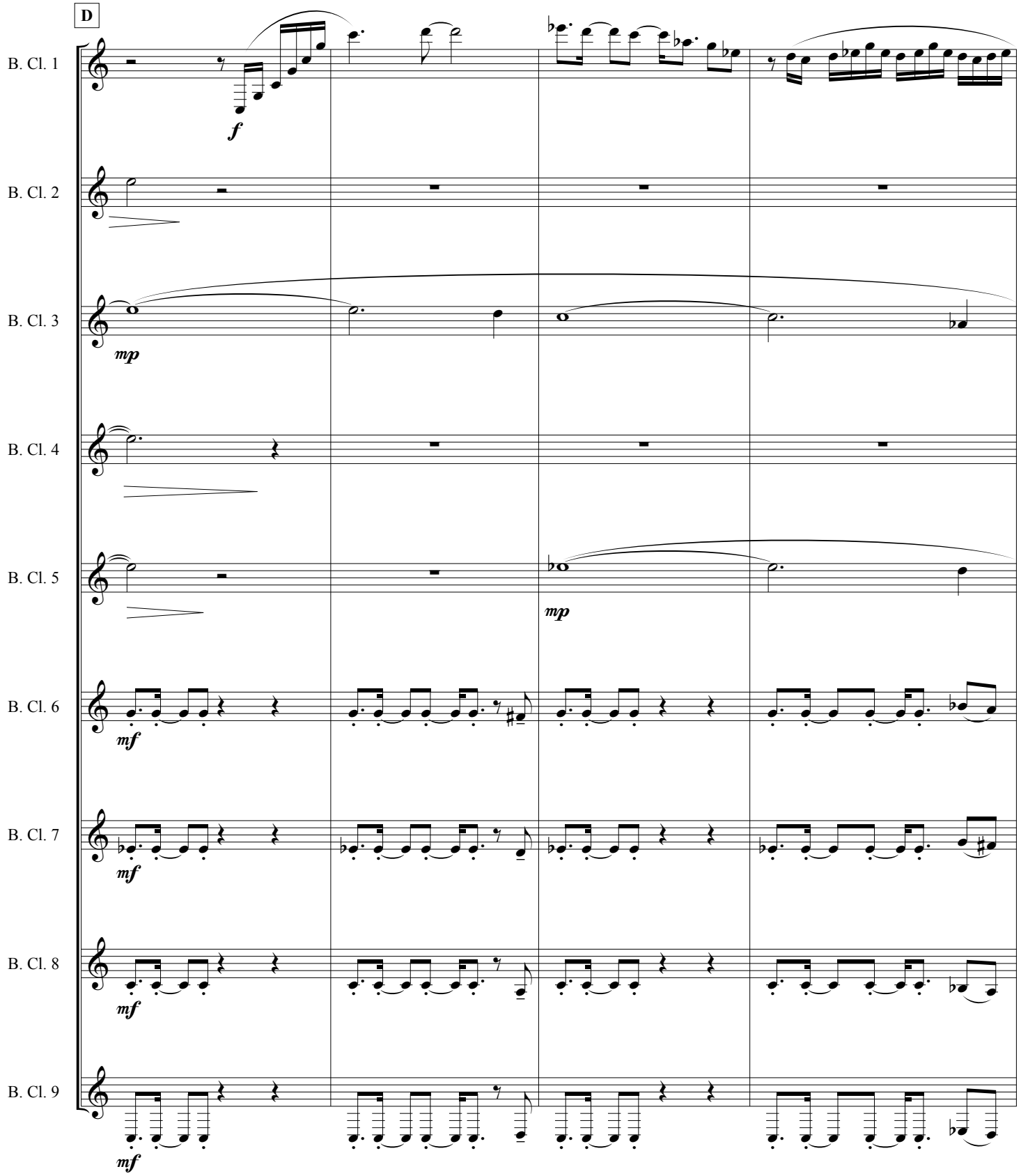
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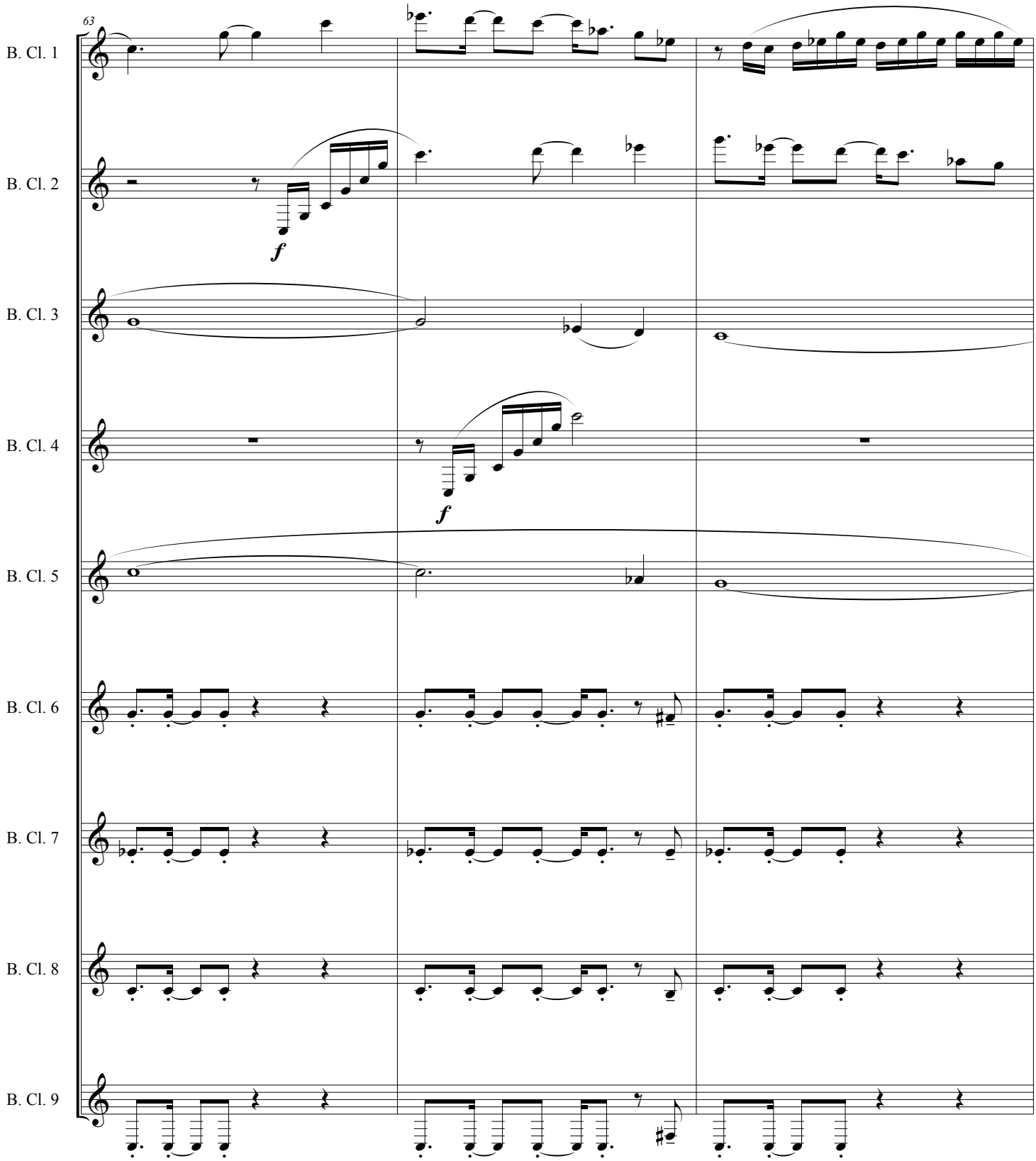
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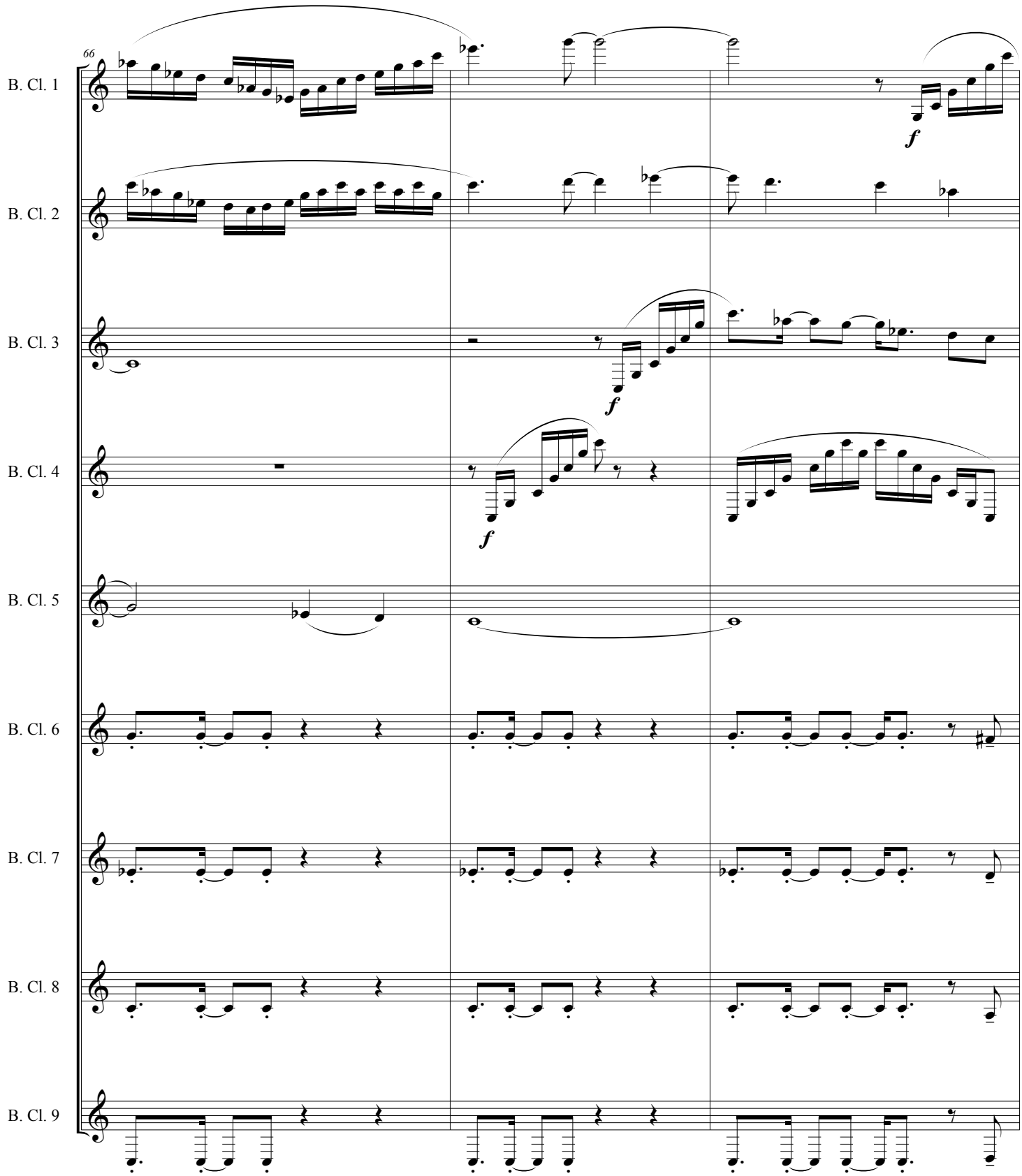
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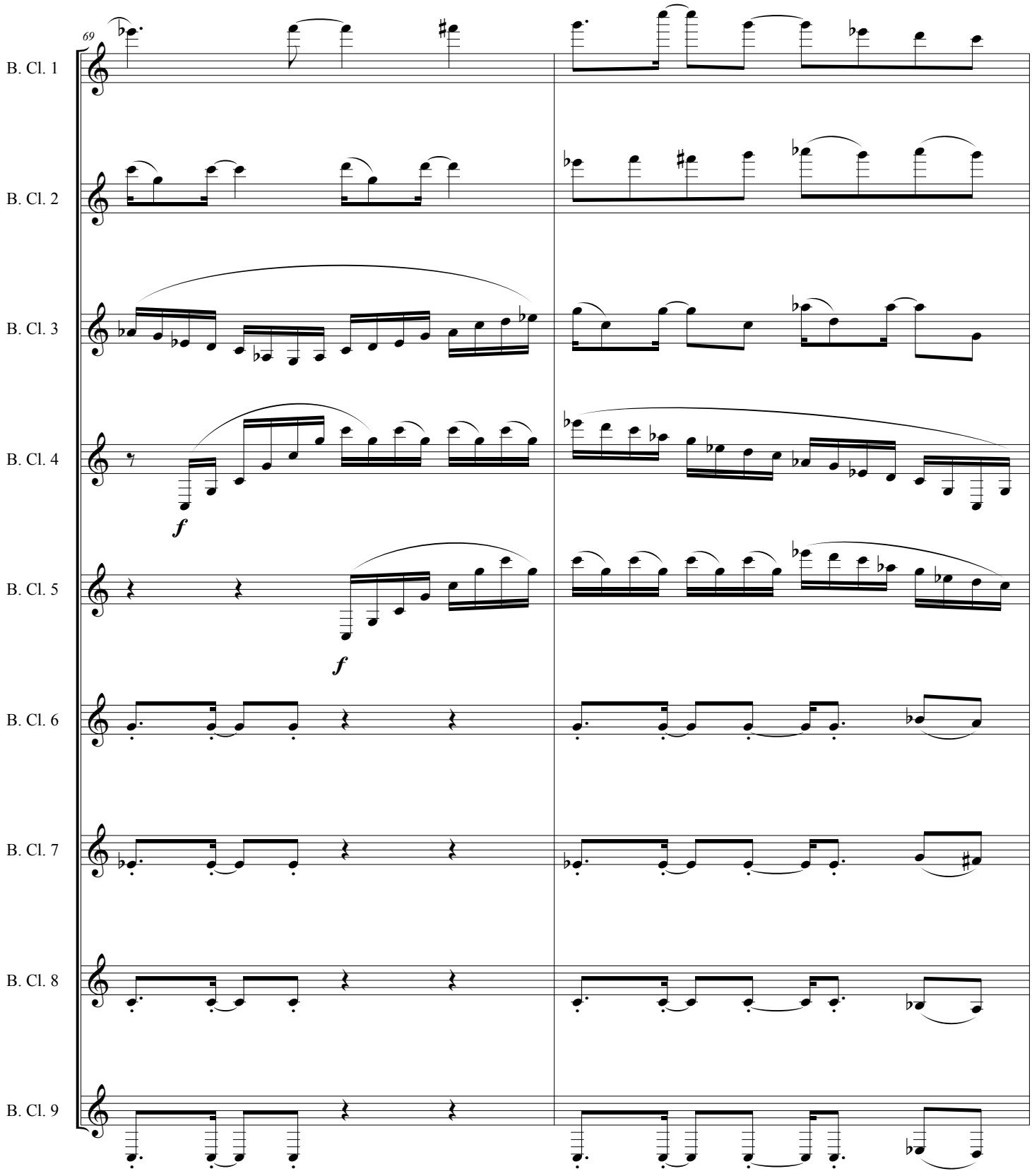
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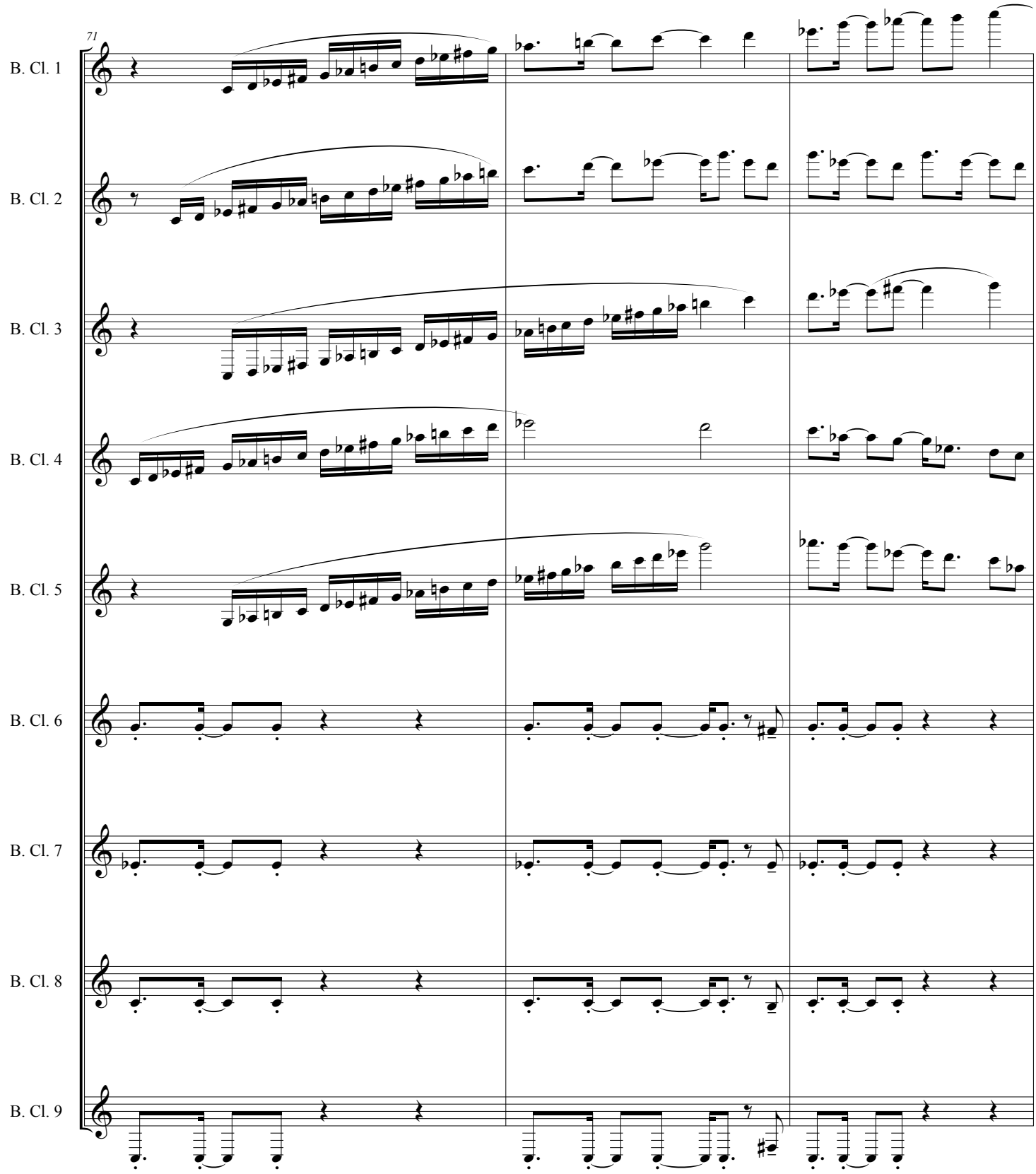
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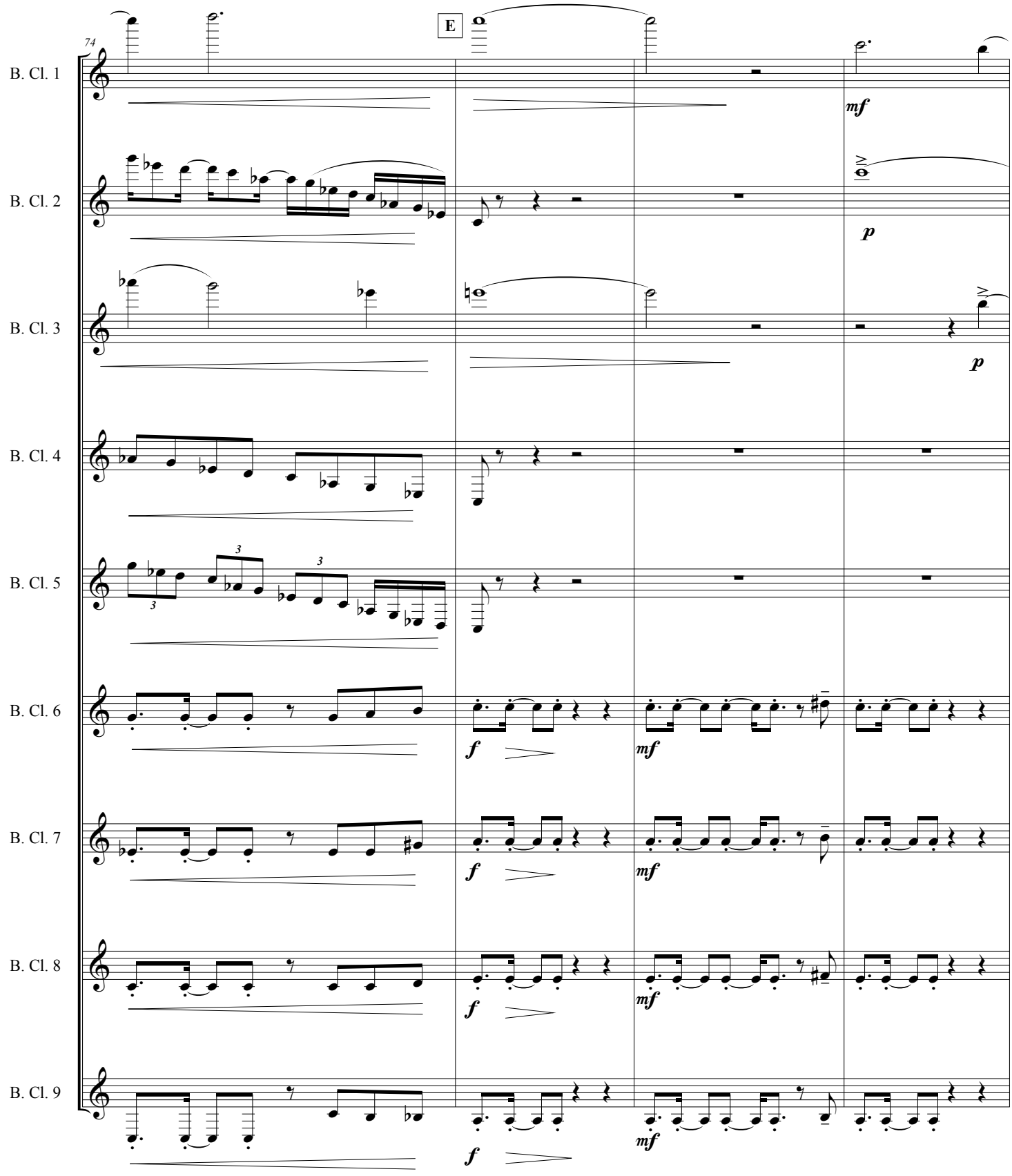
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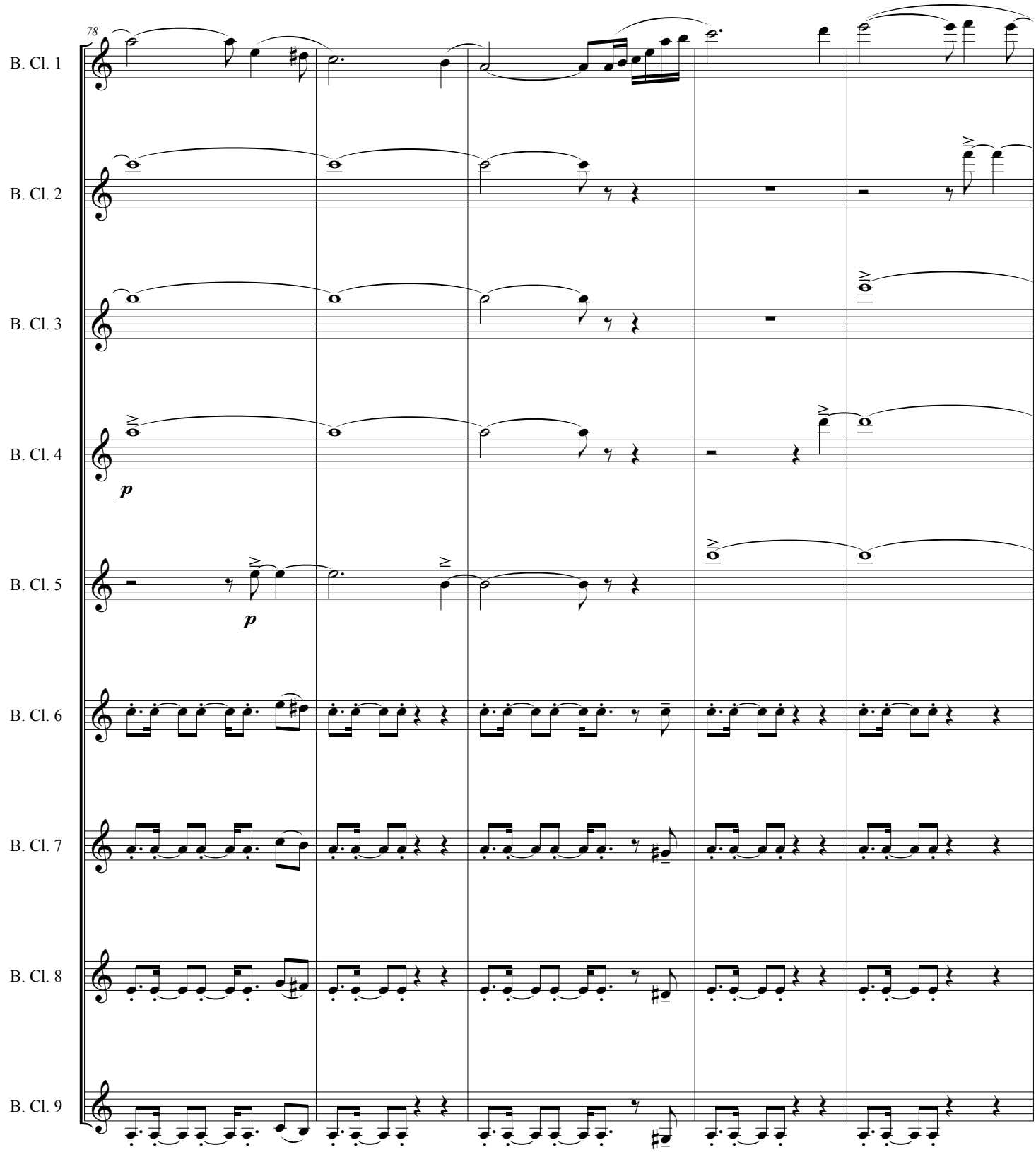
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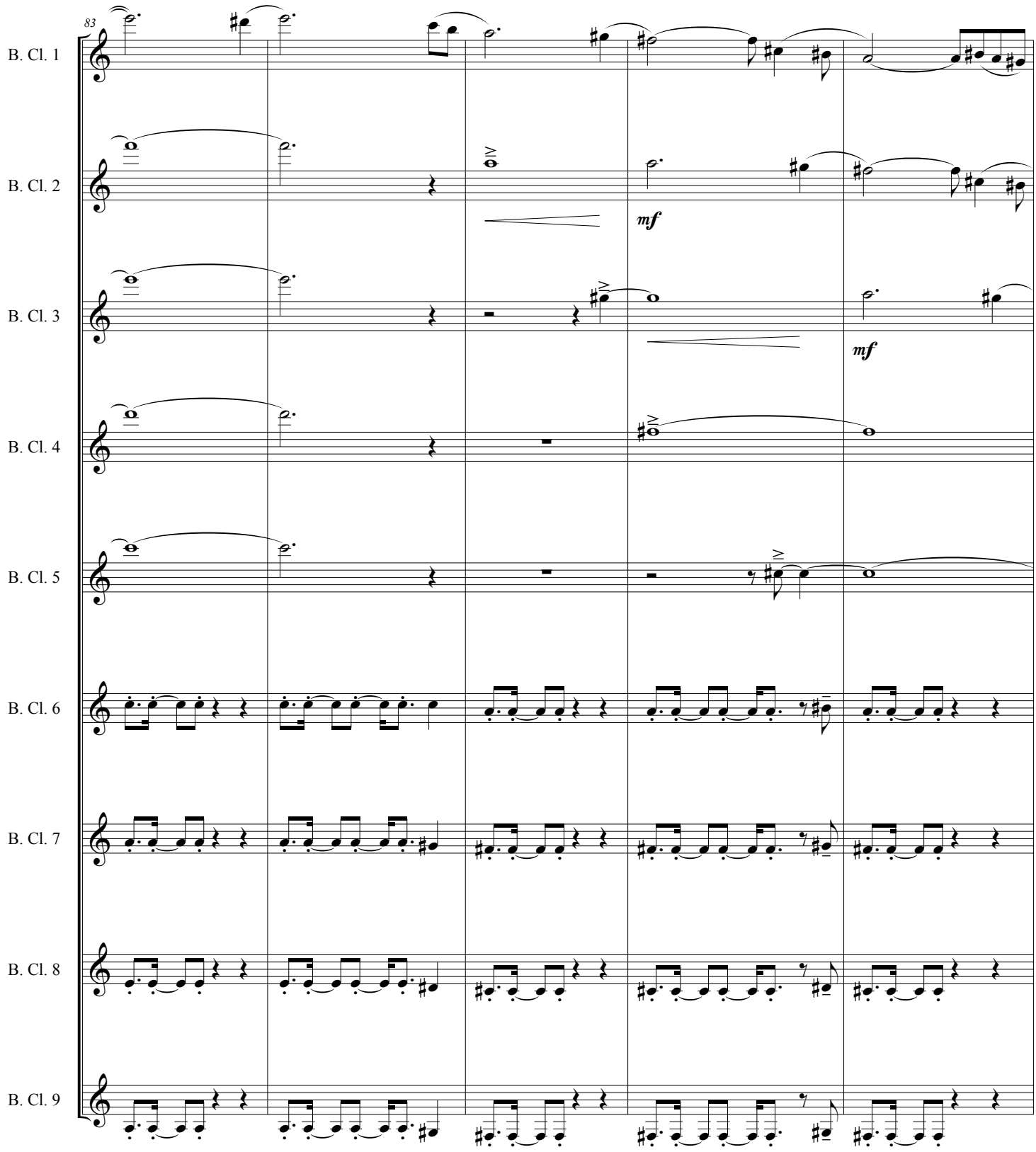
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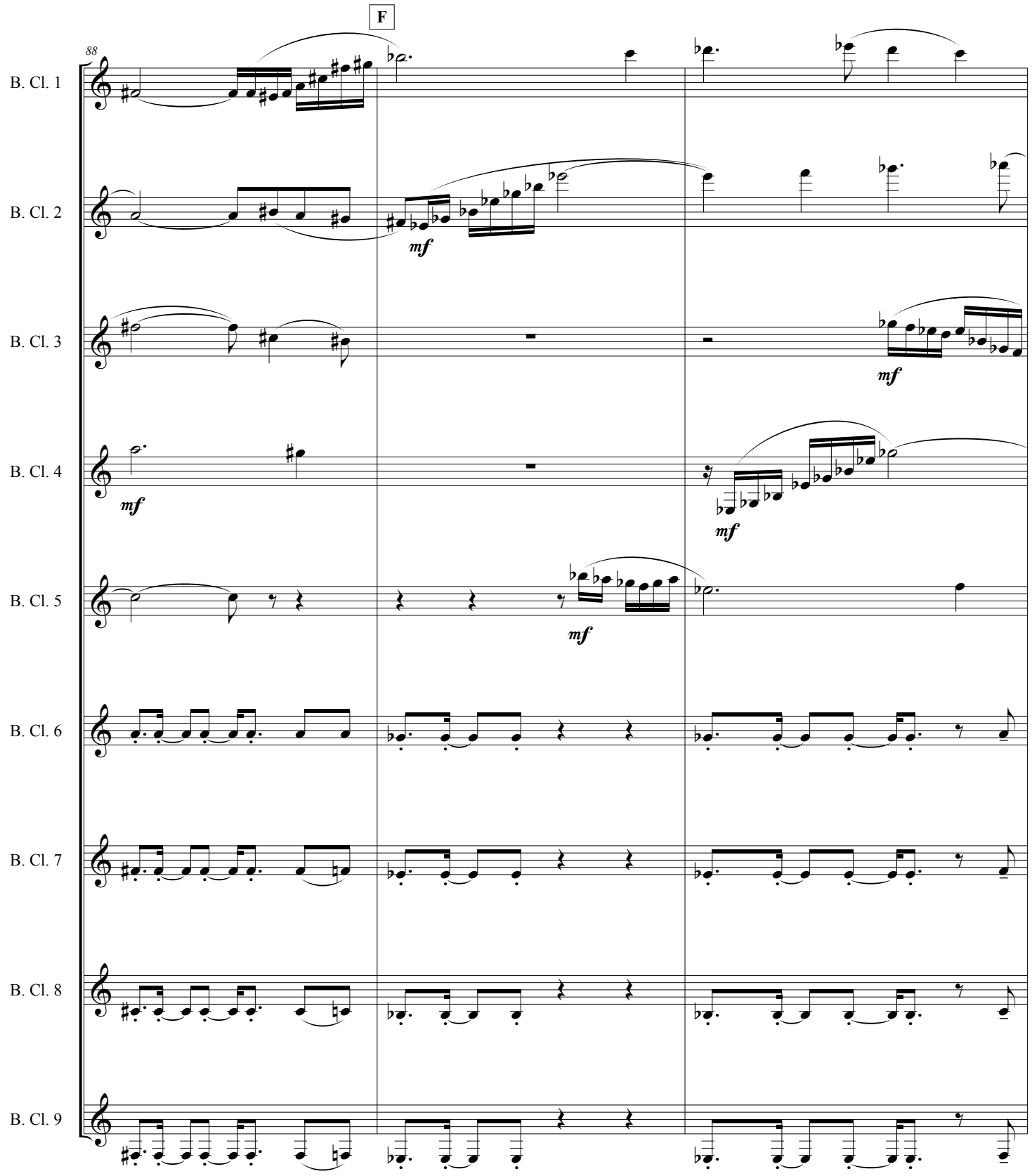
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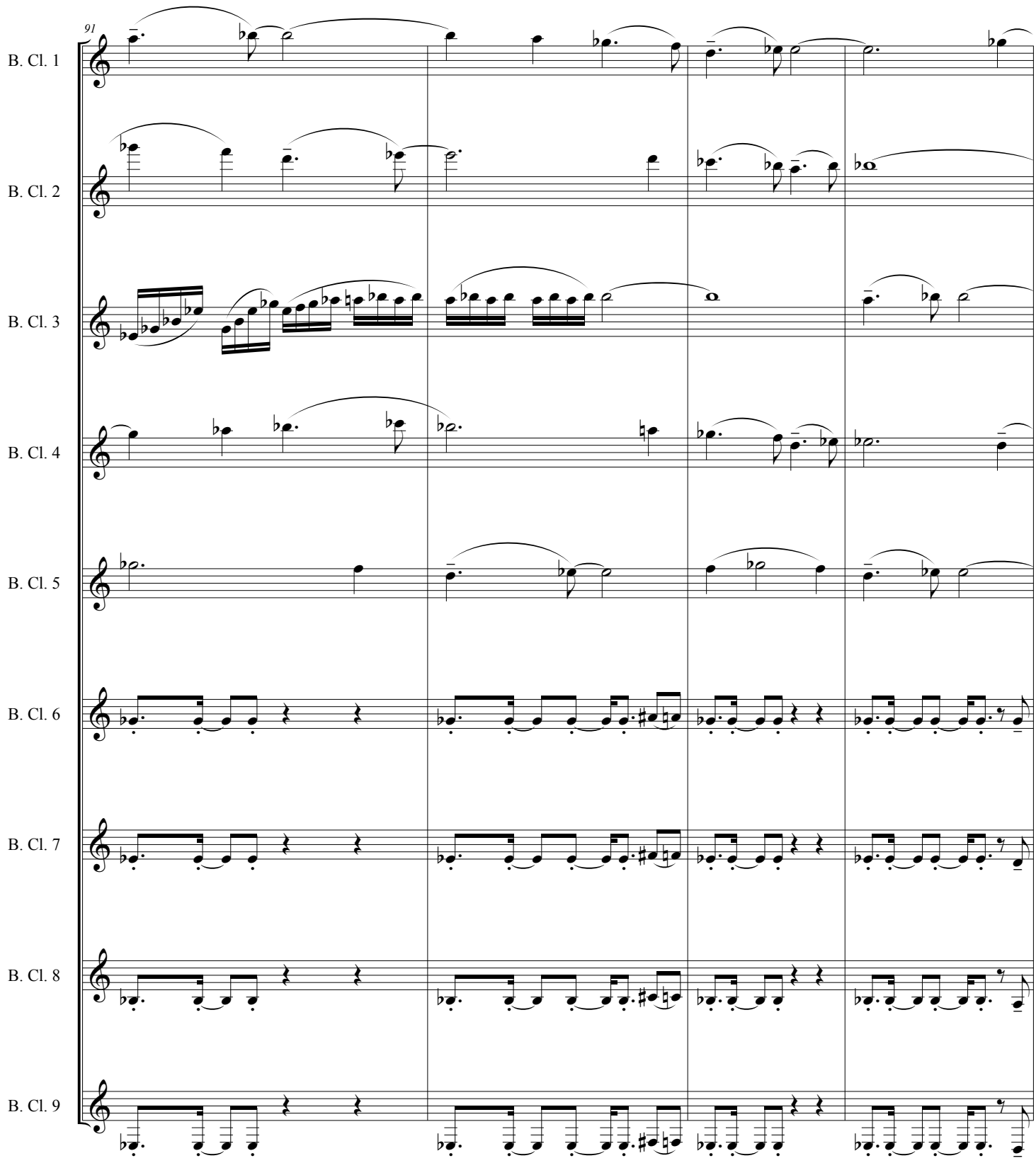
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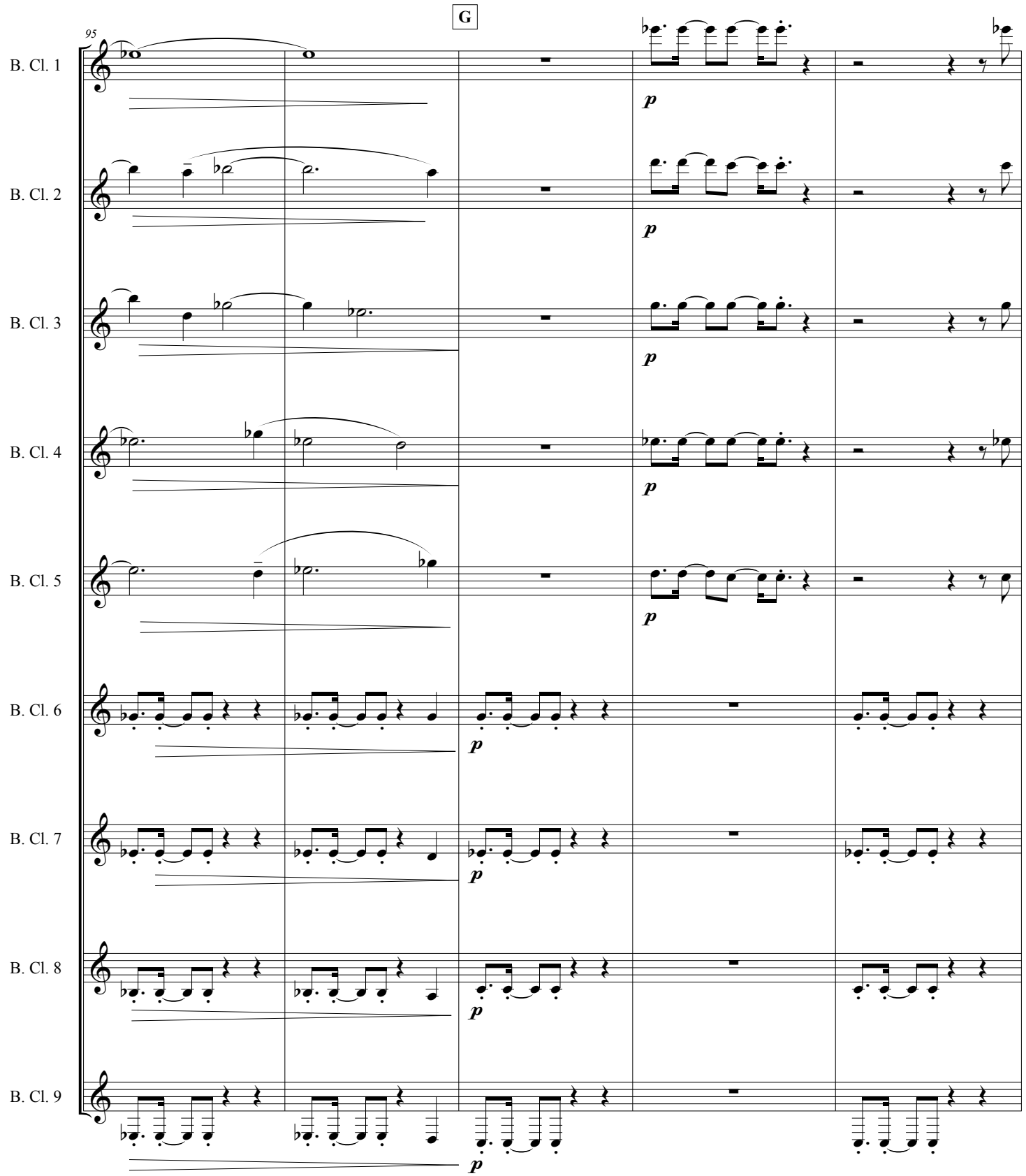
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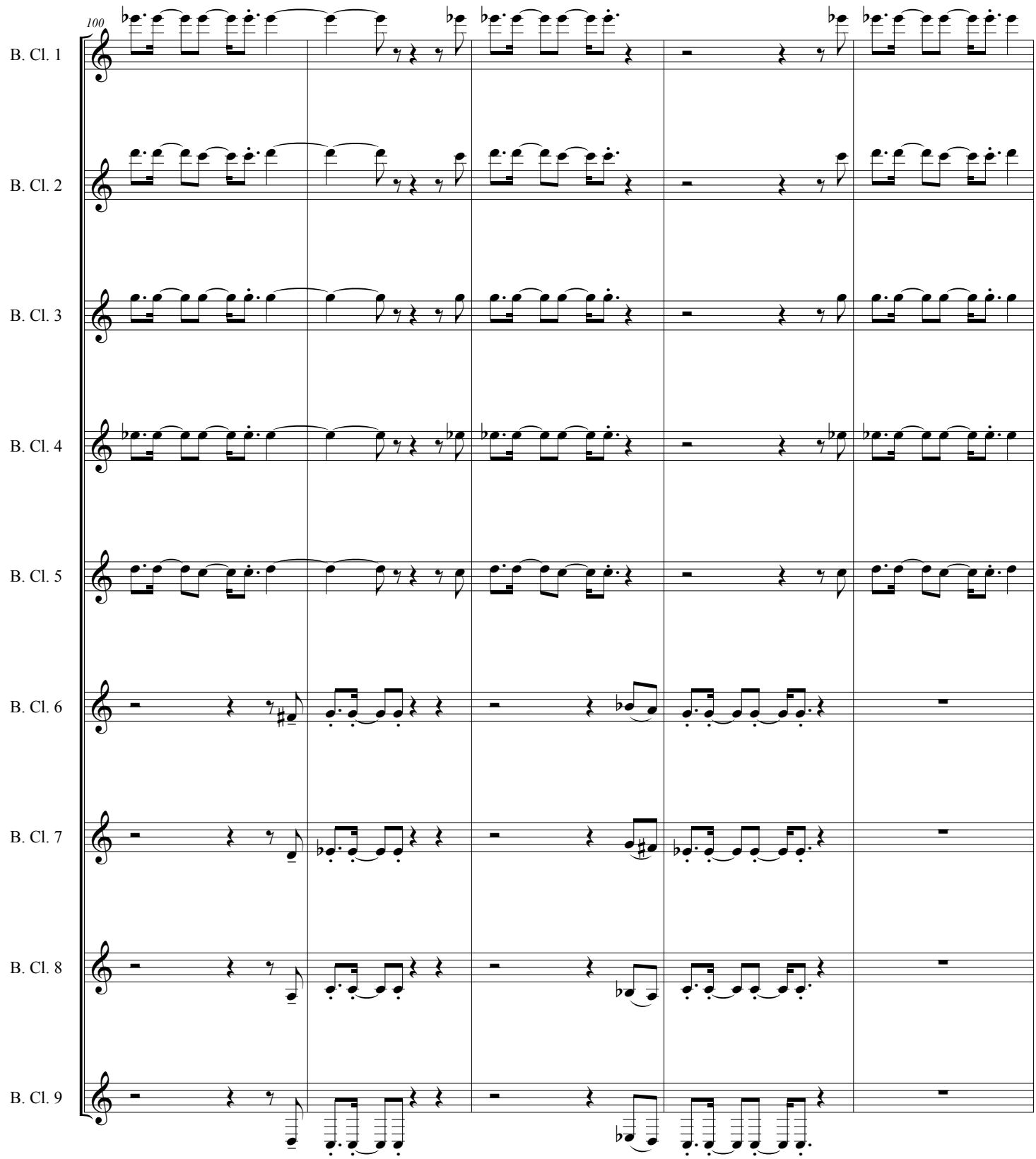
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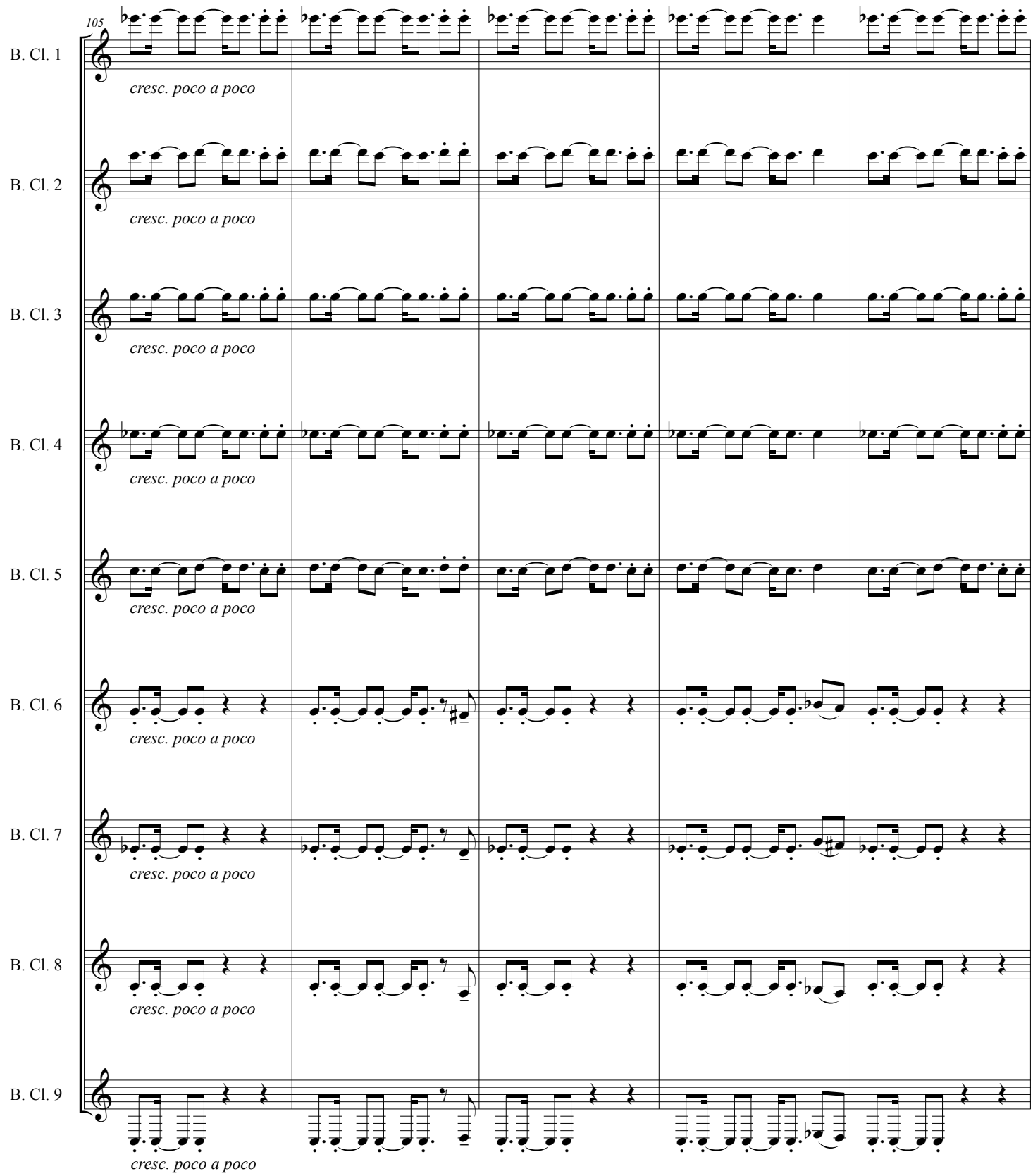
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cresc. poco a poco
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cresc. poco a poco
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cresc. poco a poco
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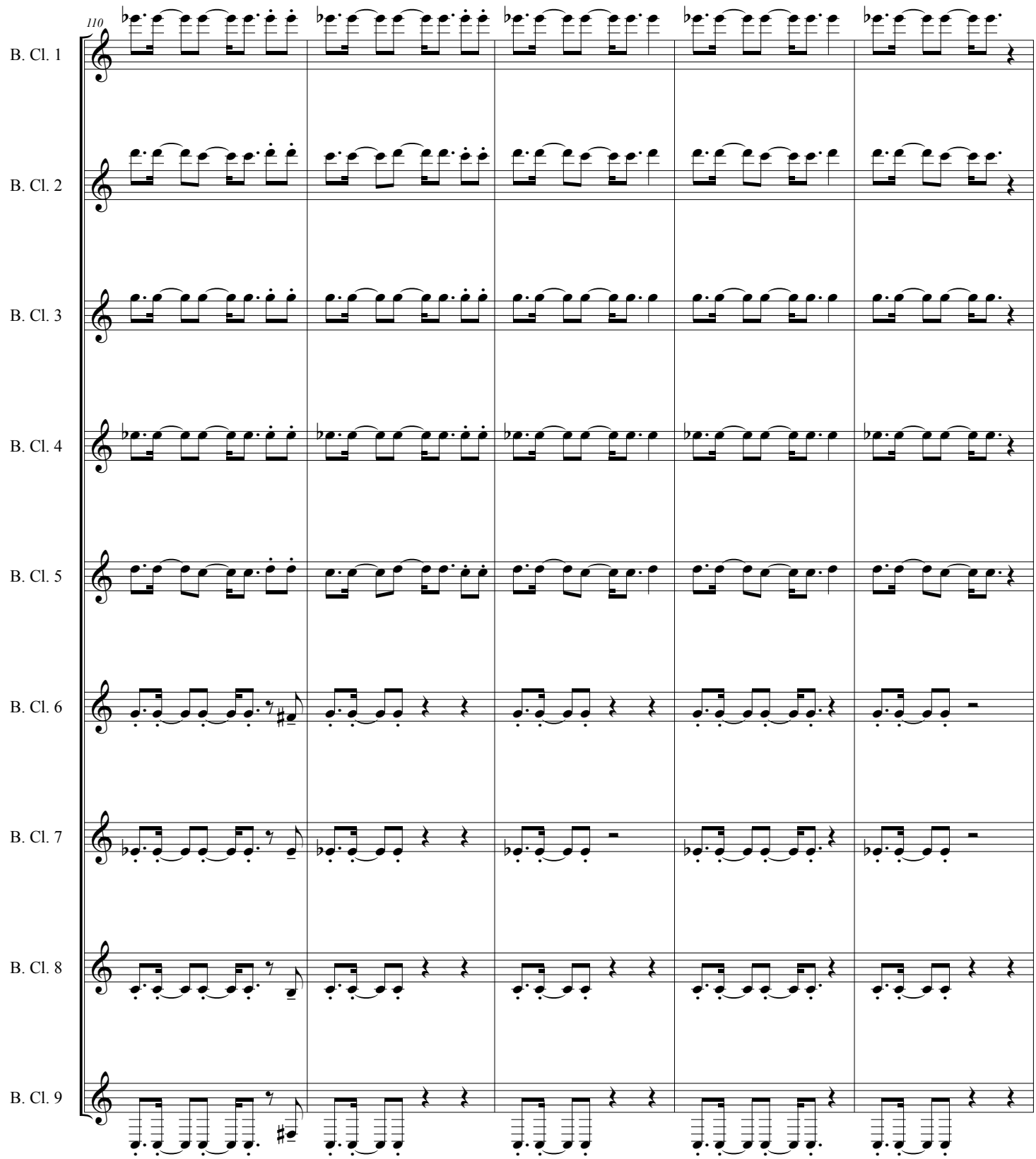
cresc. poco a poco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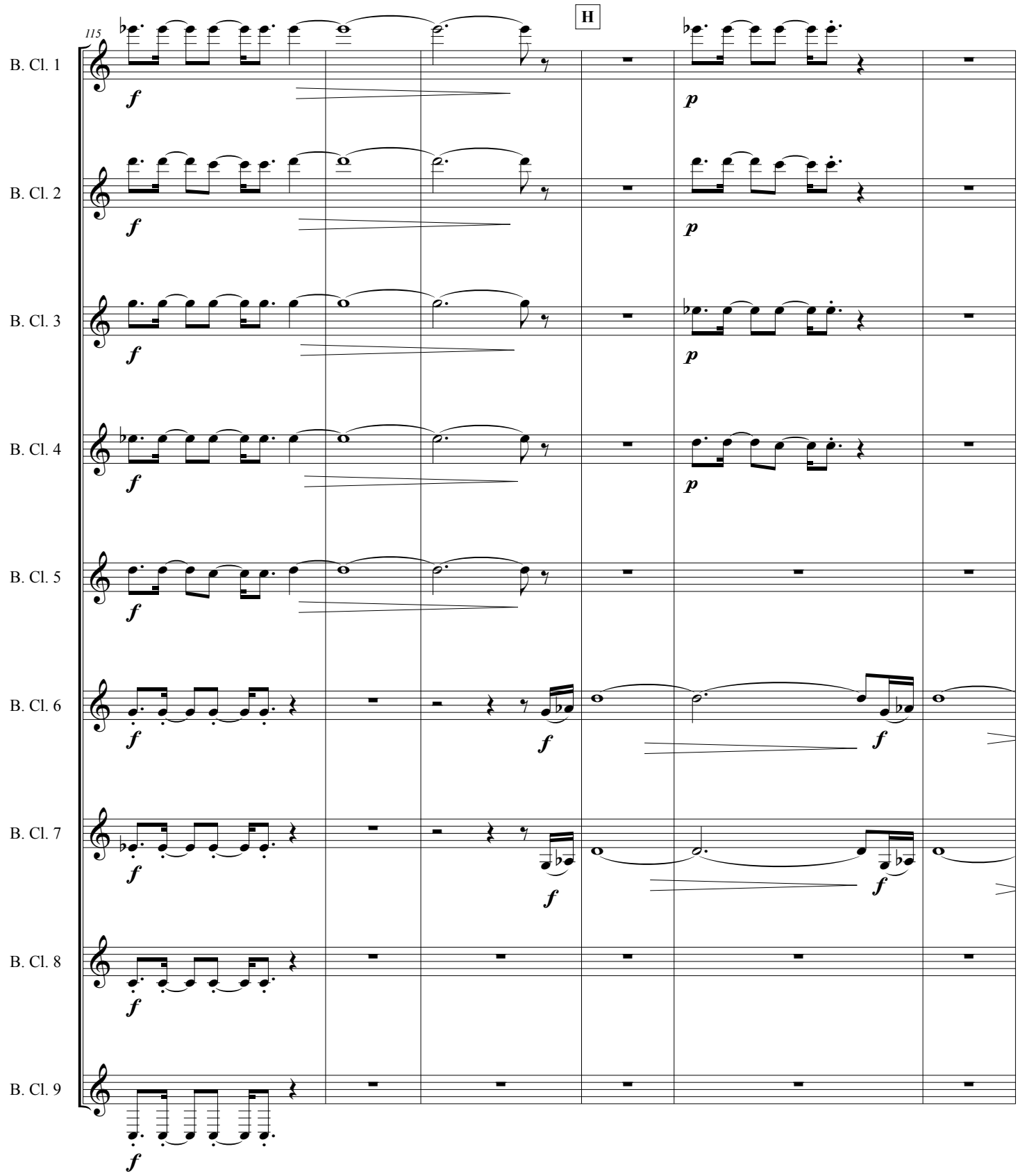
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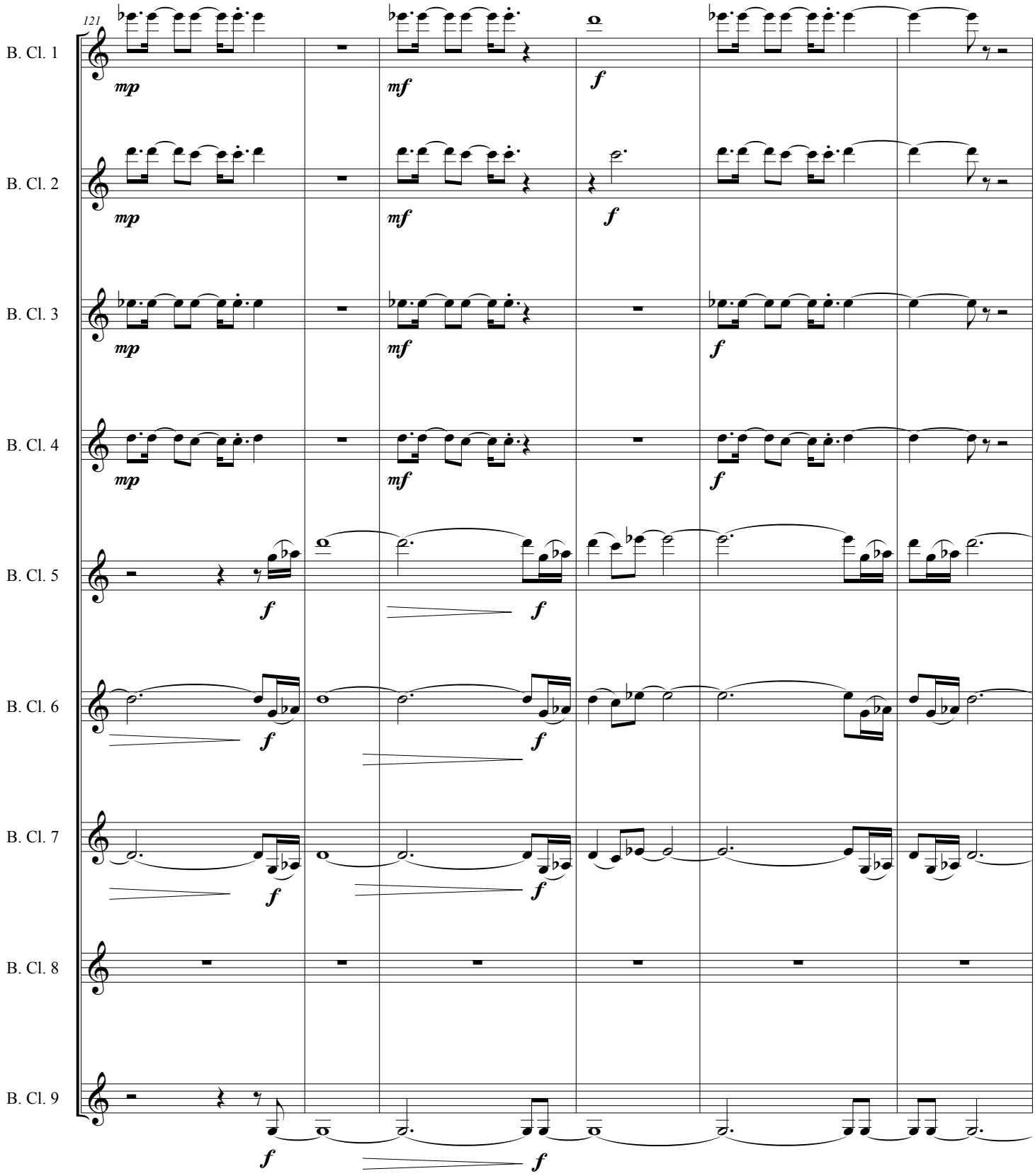
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mp
mf
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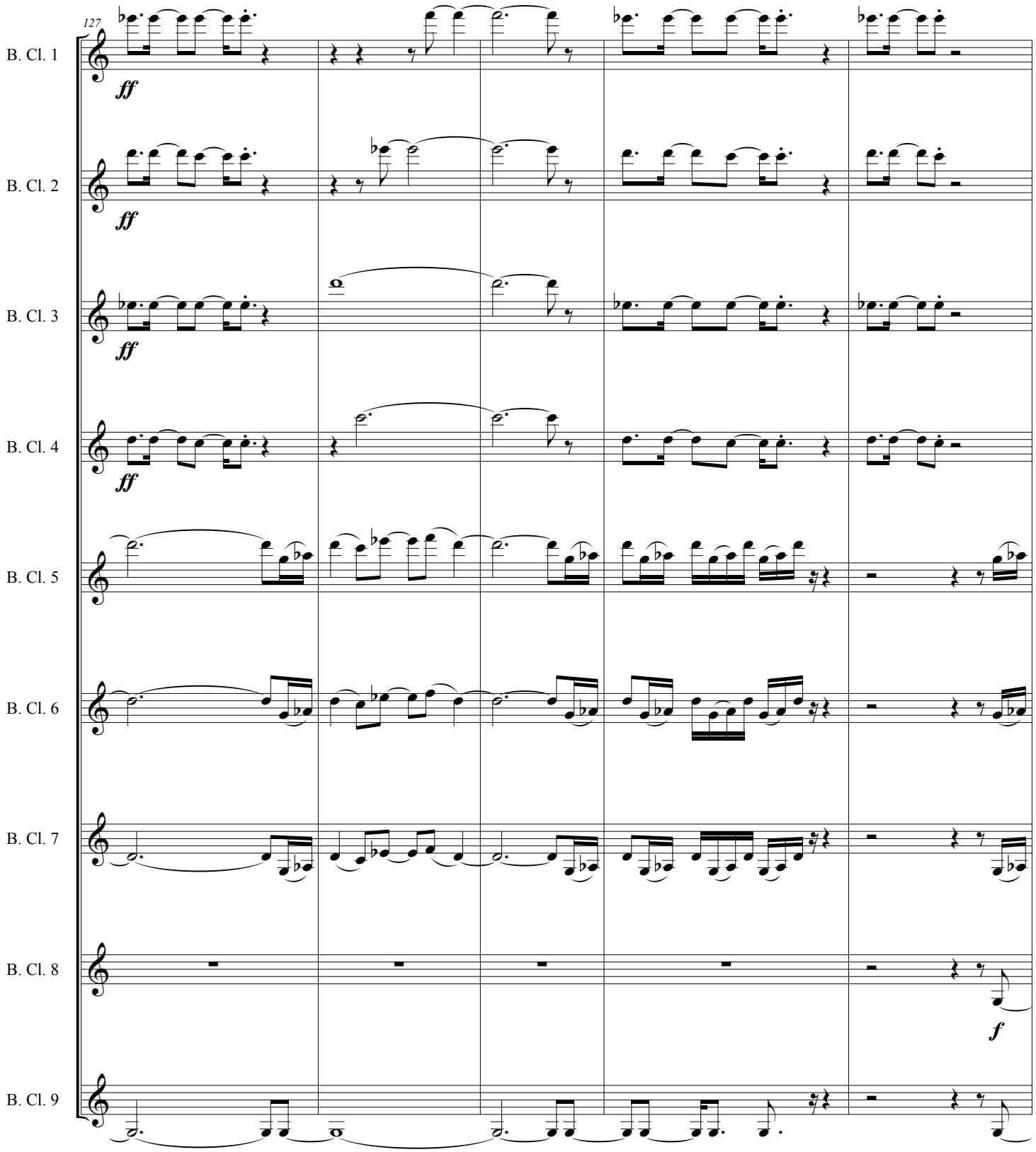
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B. Cl. 9
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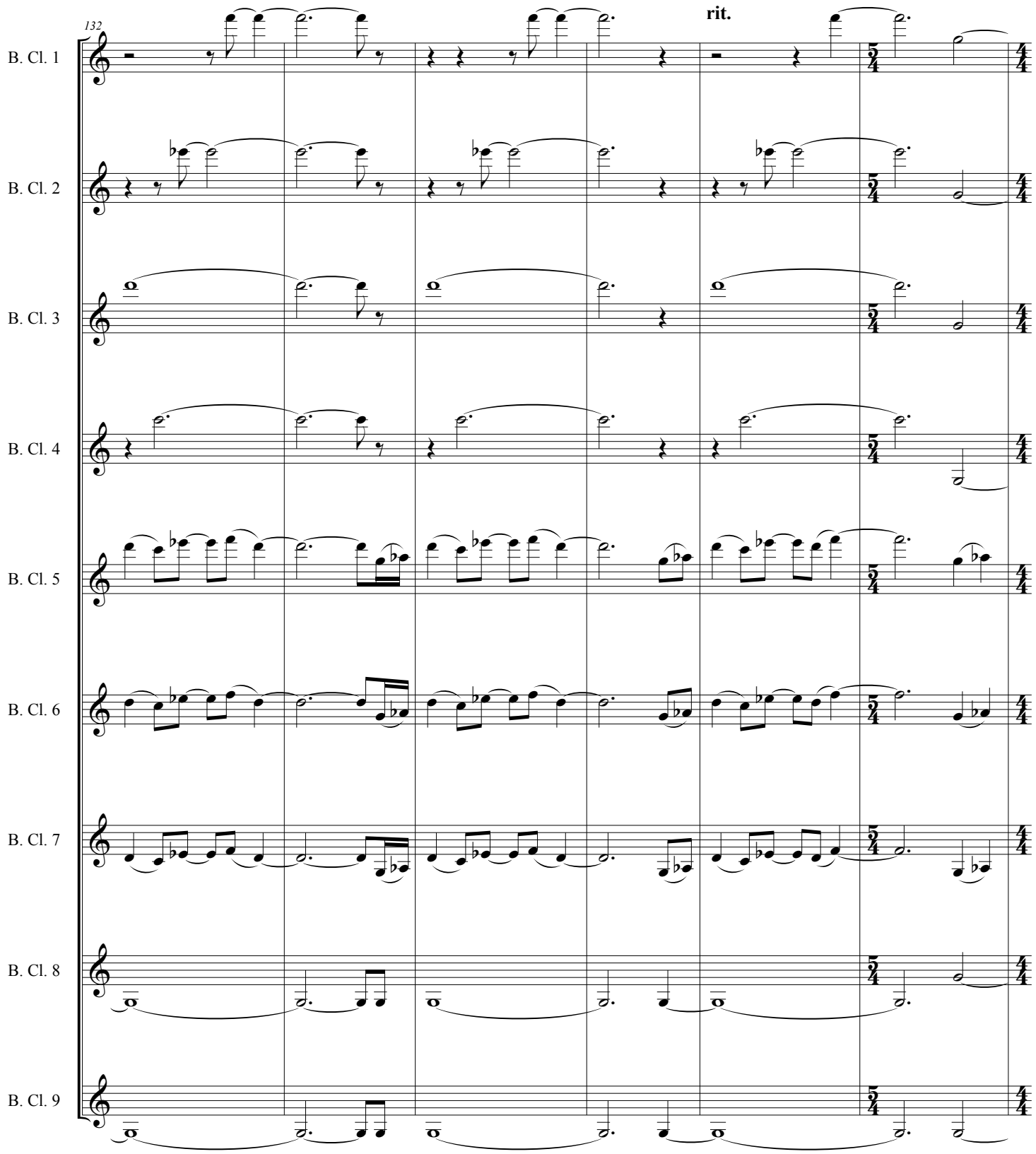
ff
ff
ff
f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rit.
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B. Cl. 2
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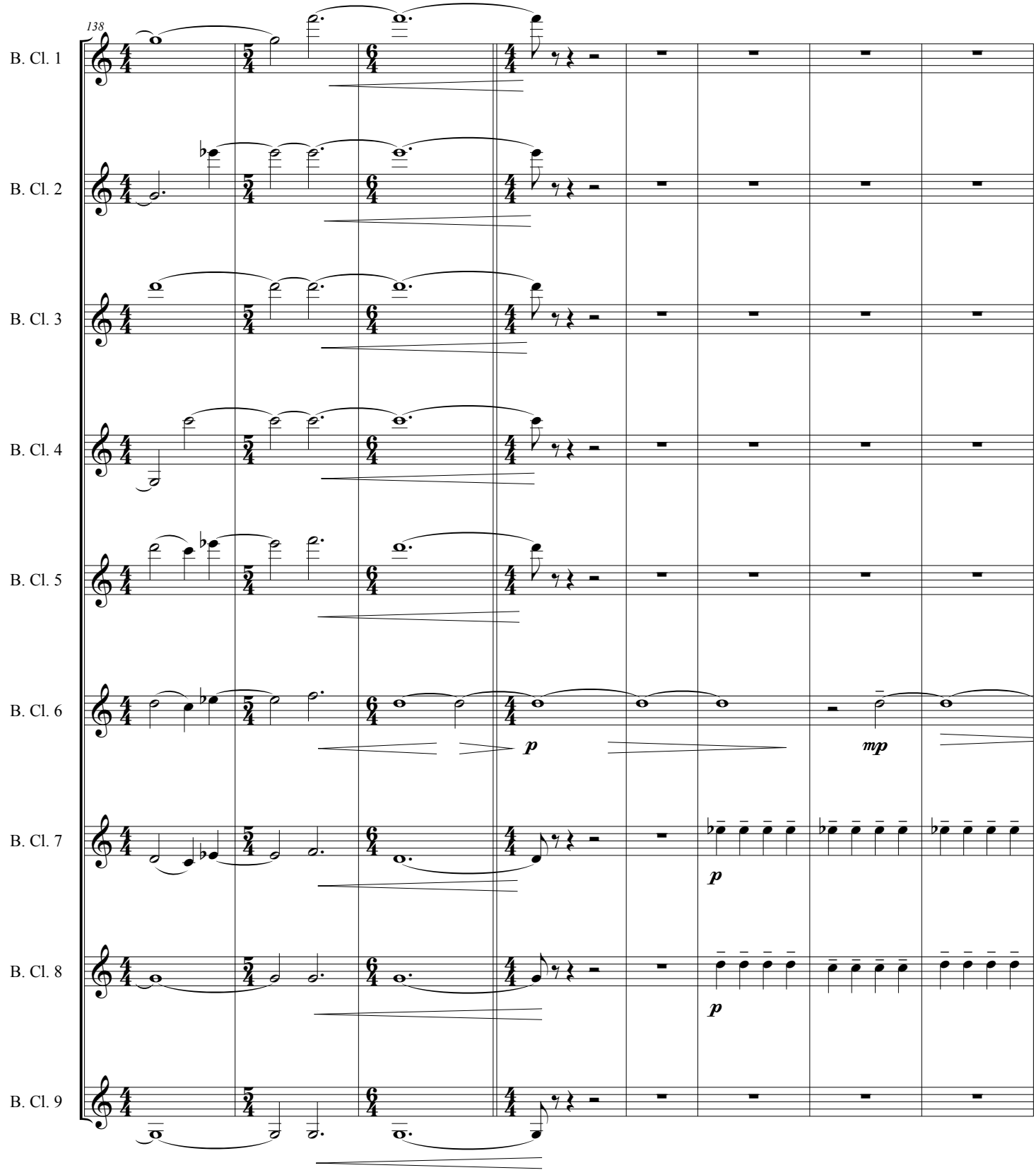
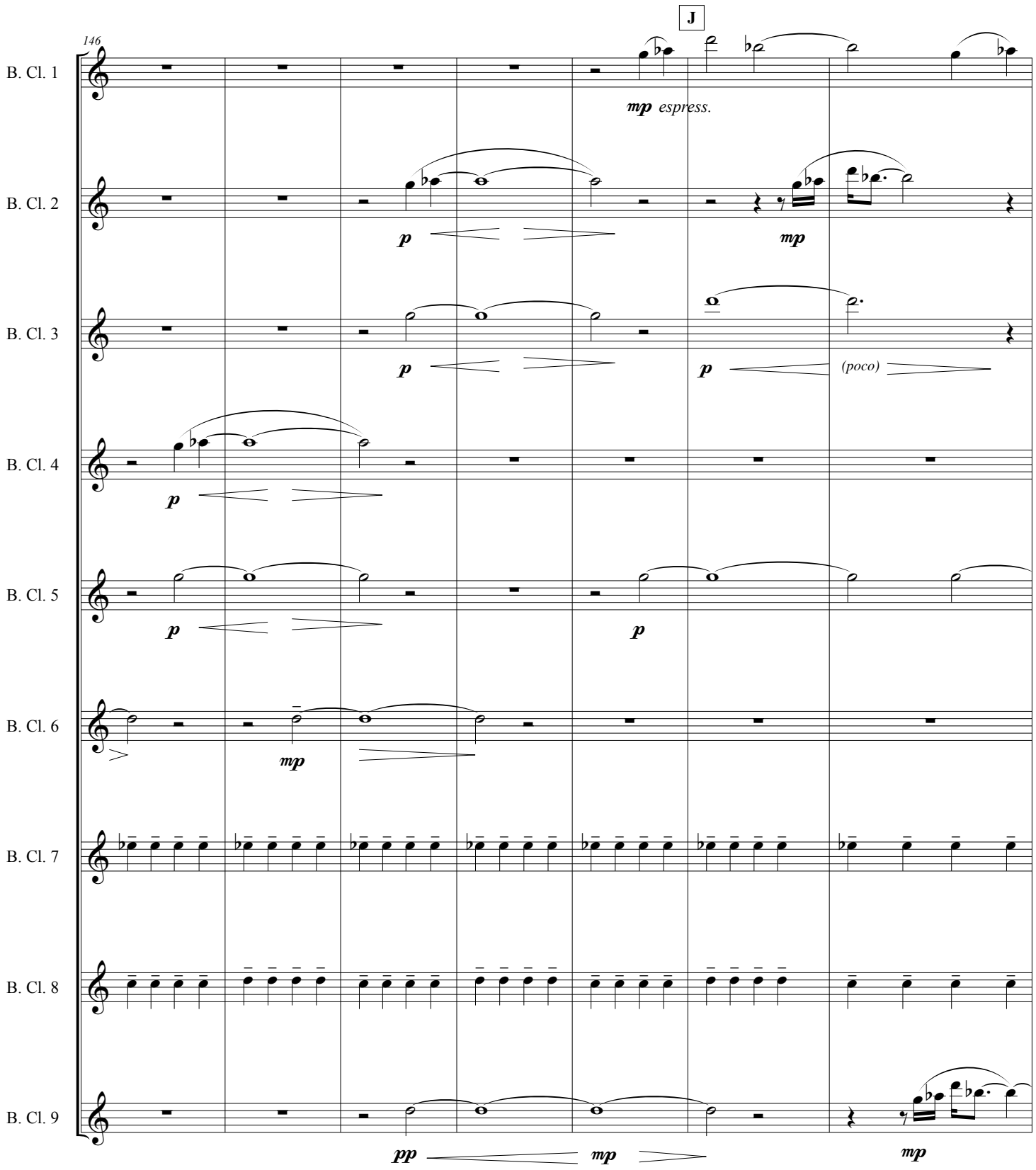
B. Cl. 8
B. Cl. 9

We Are Broken

I ♩ = c. 63

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B. Cl. 9
mp espress.
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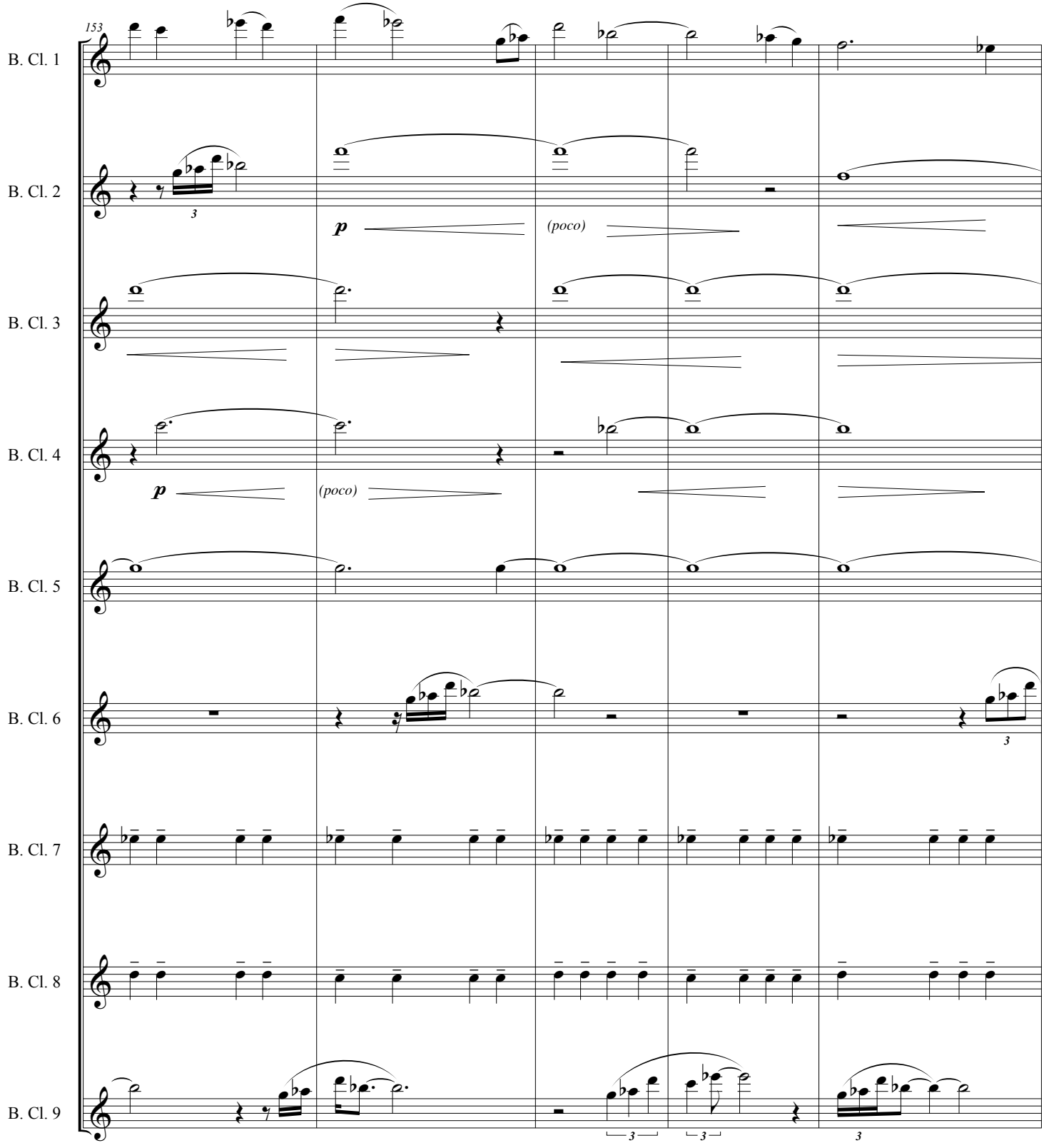
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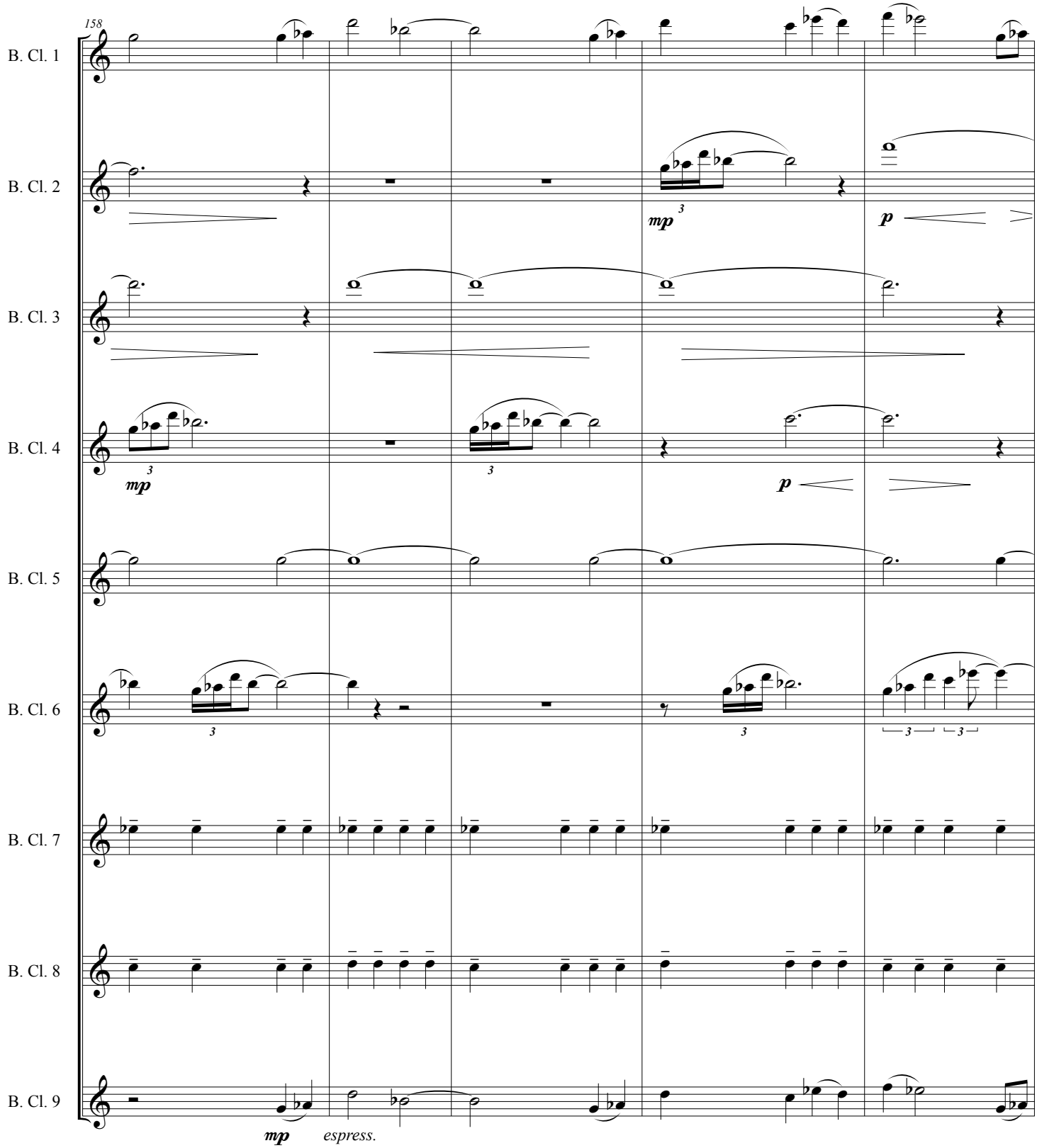
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B. Cl. 9
mp
mp
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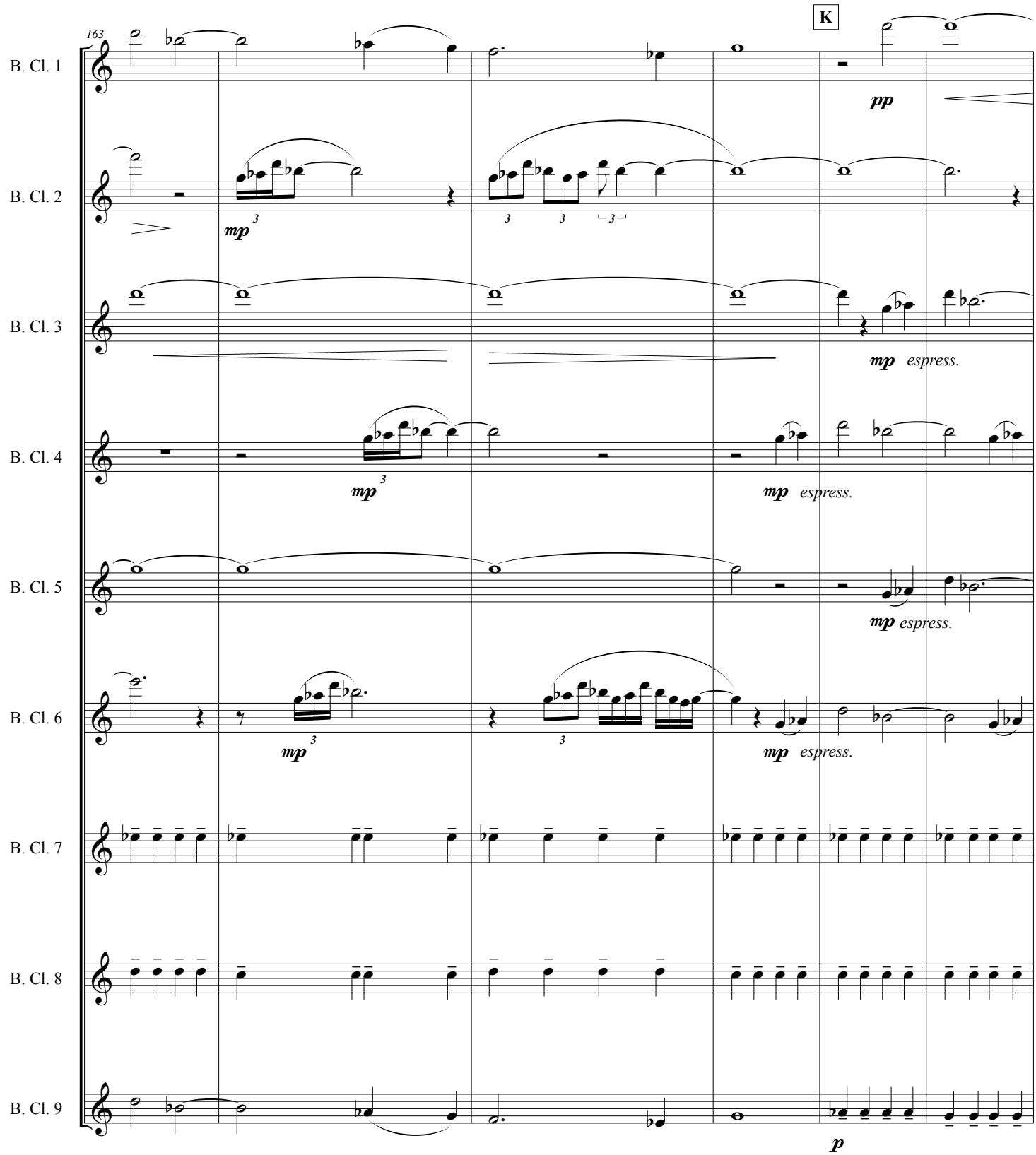
163
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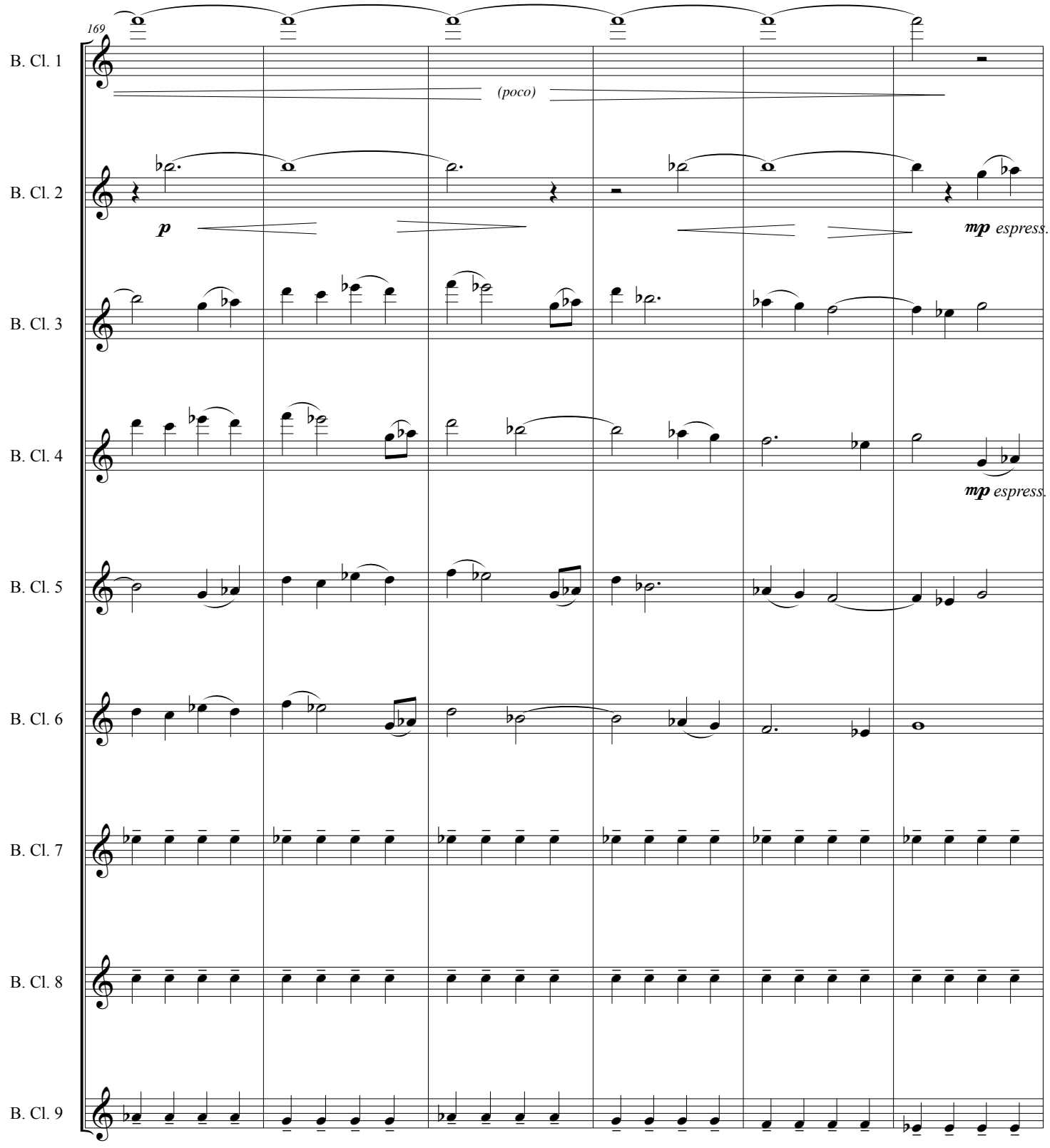
169
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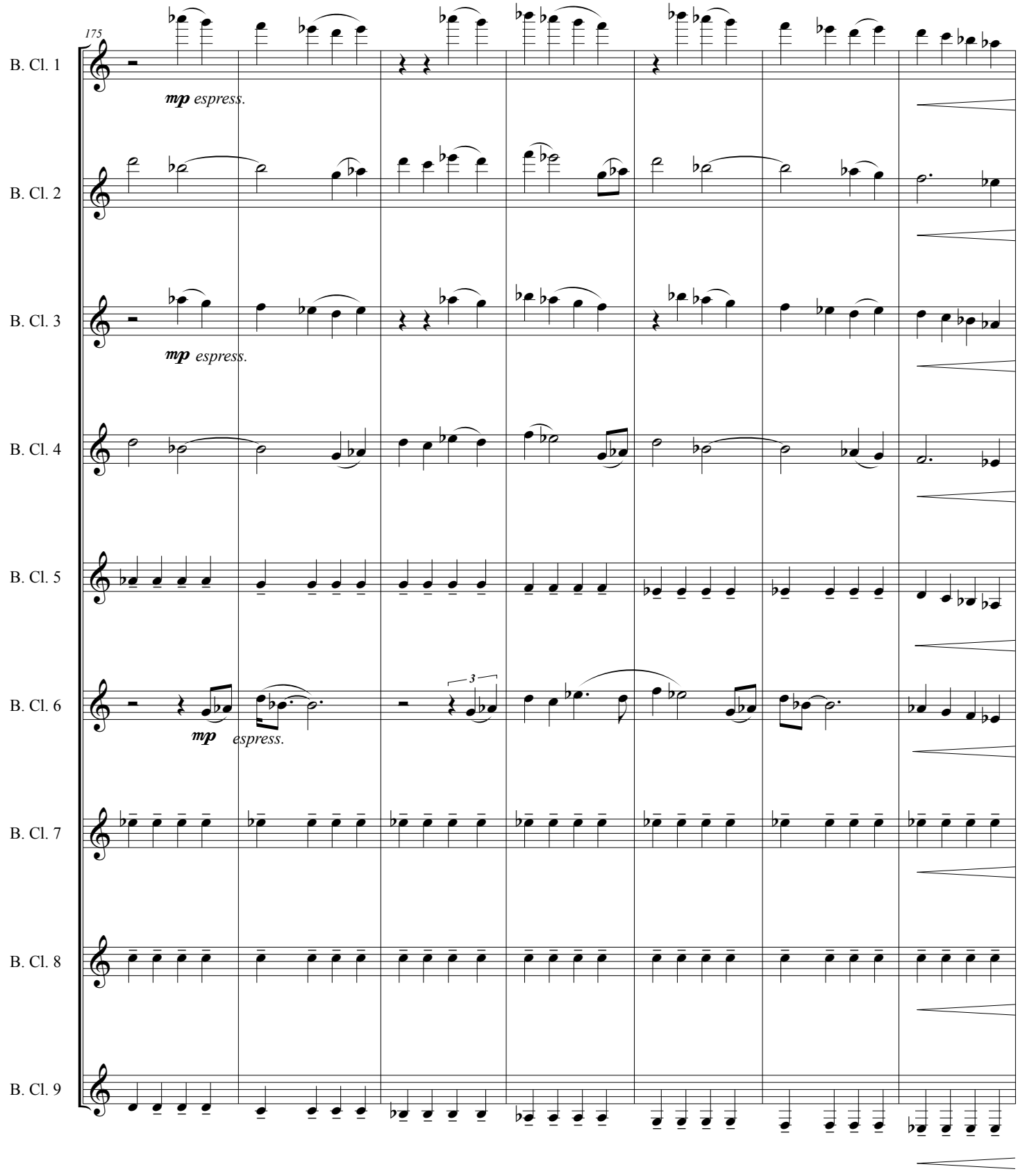
175
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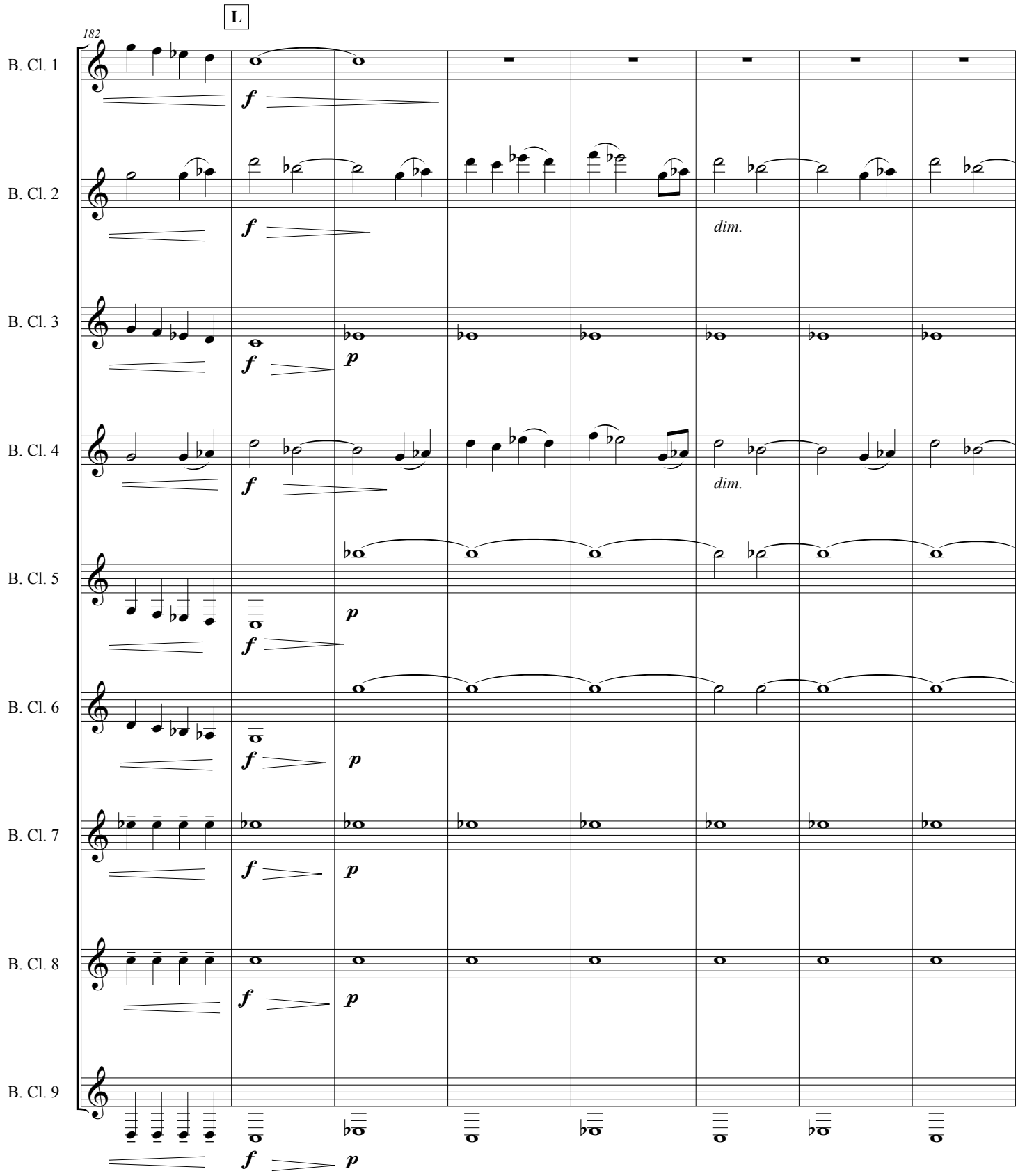
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182
B. Cl. 1
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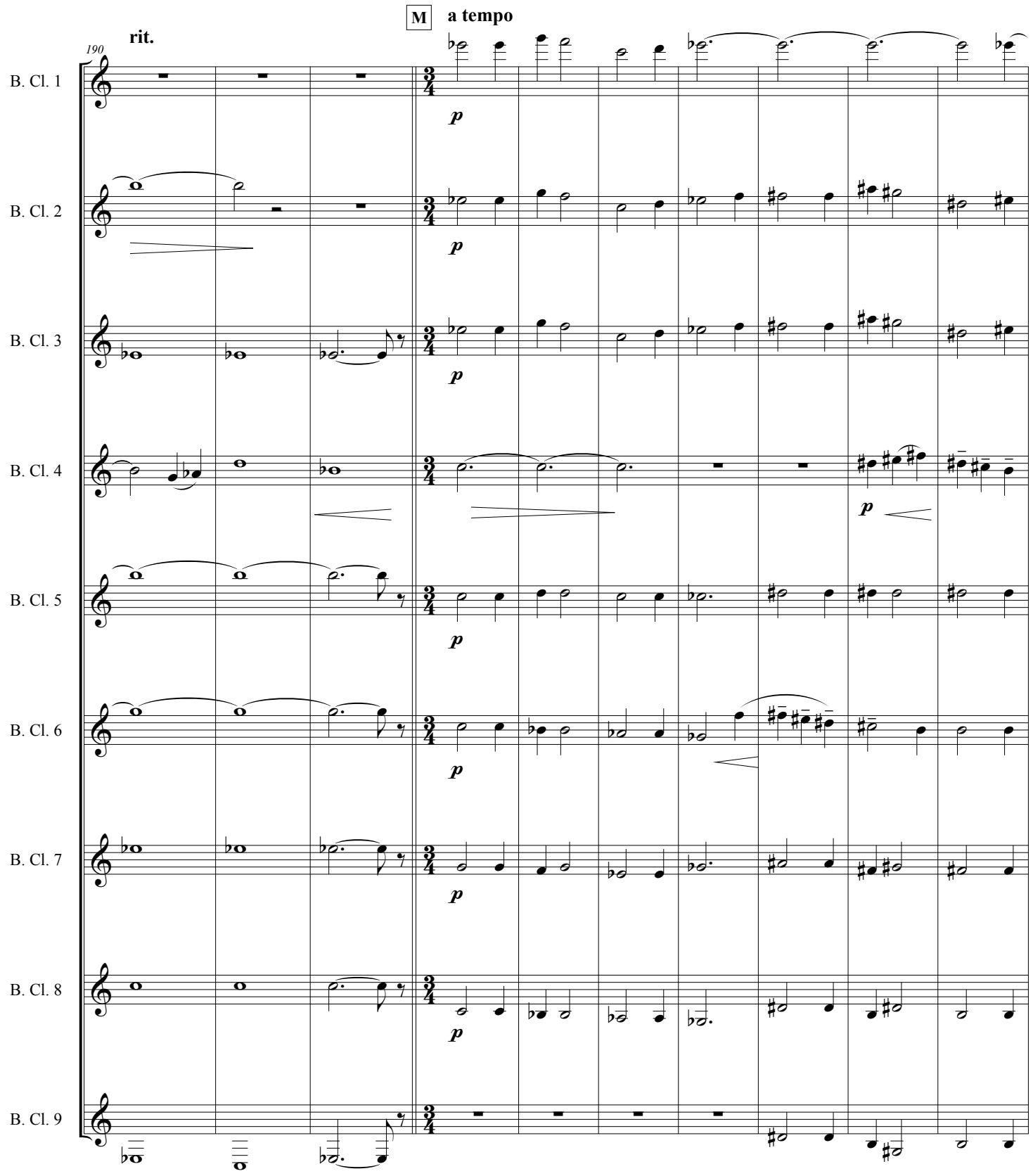
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190
B. Cl. 1
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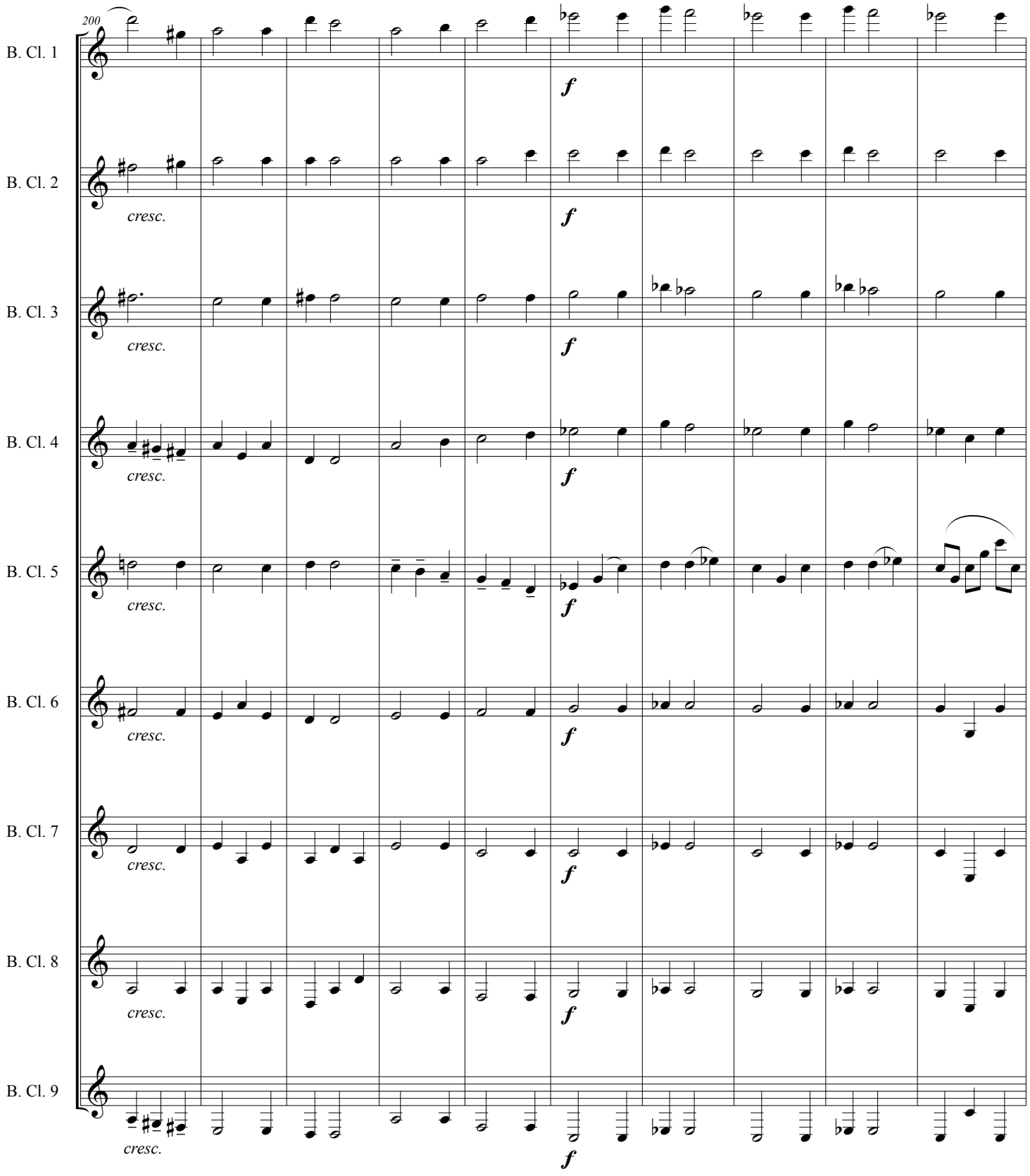
200
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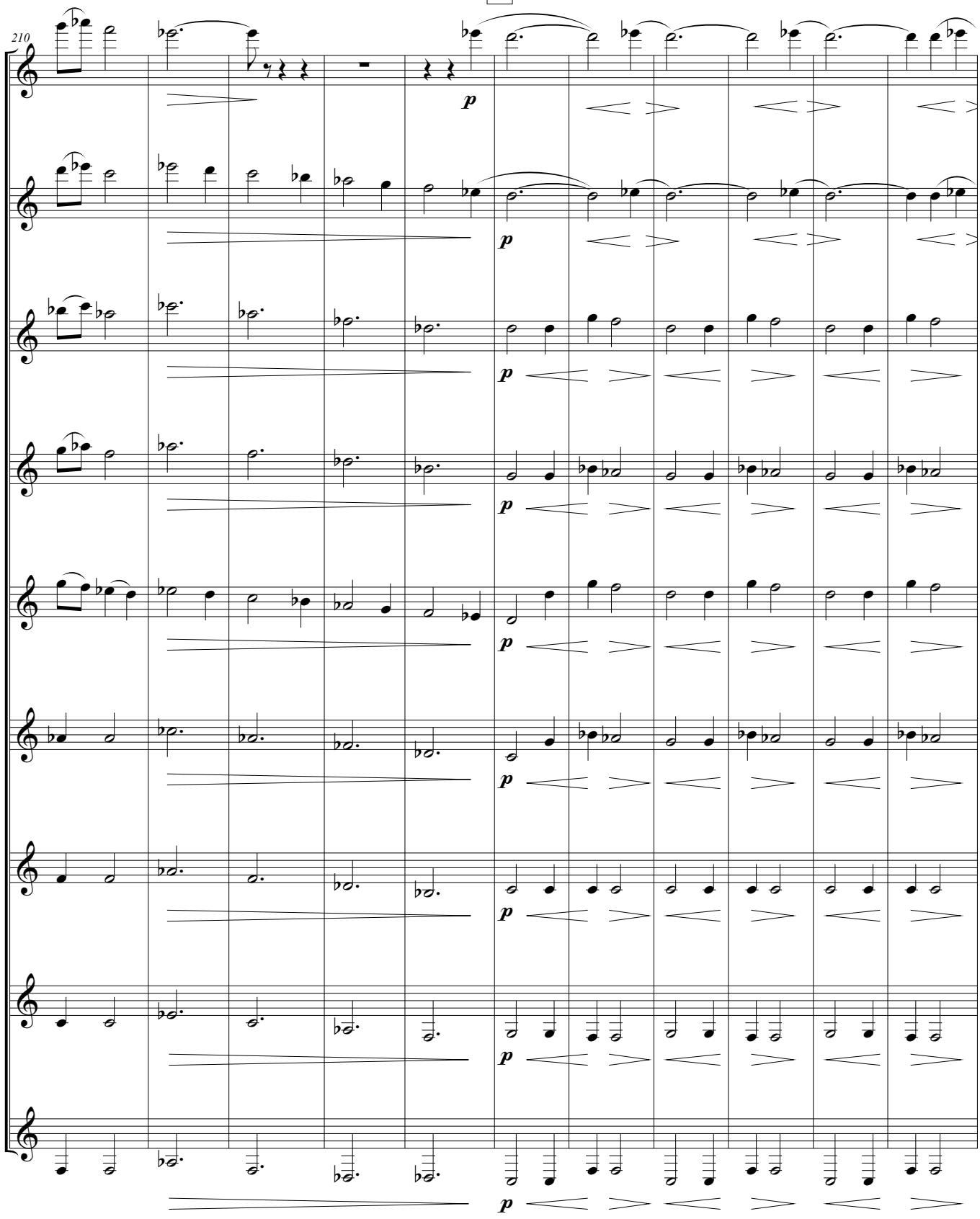

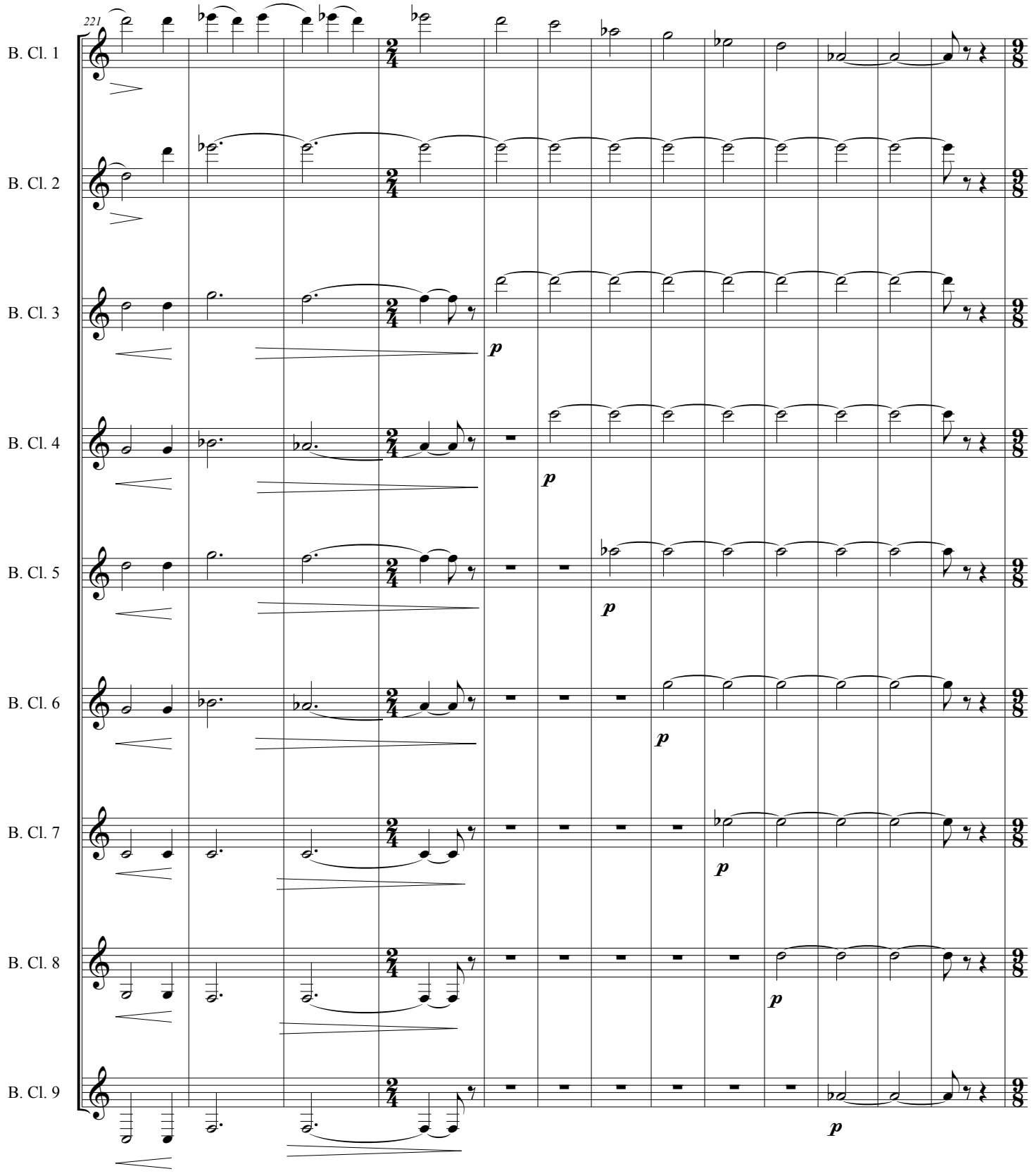
221
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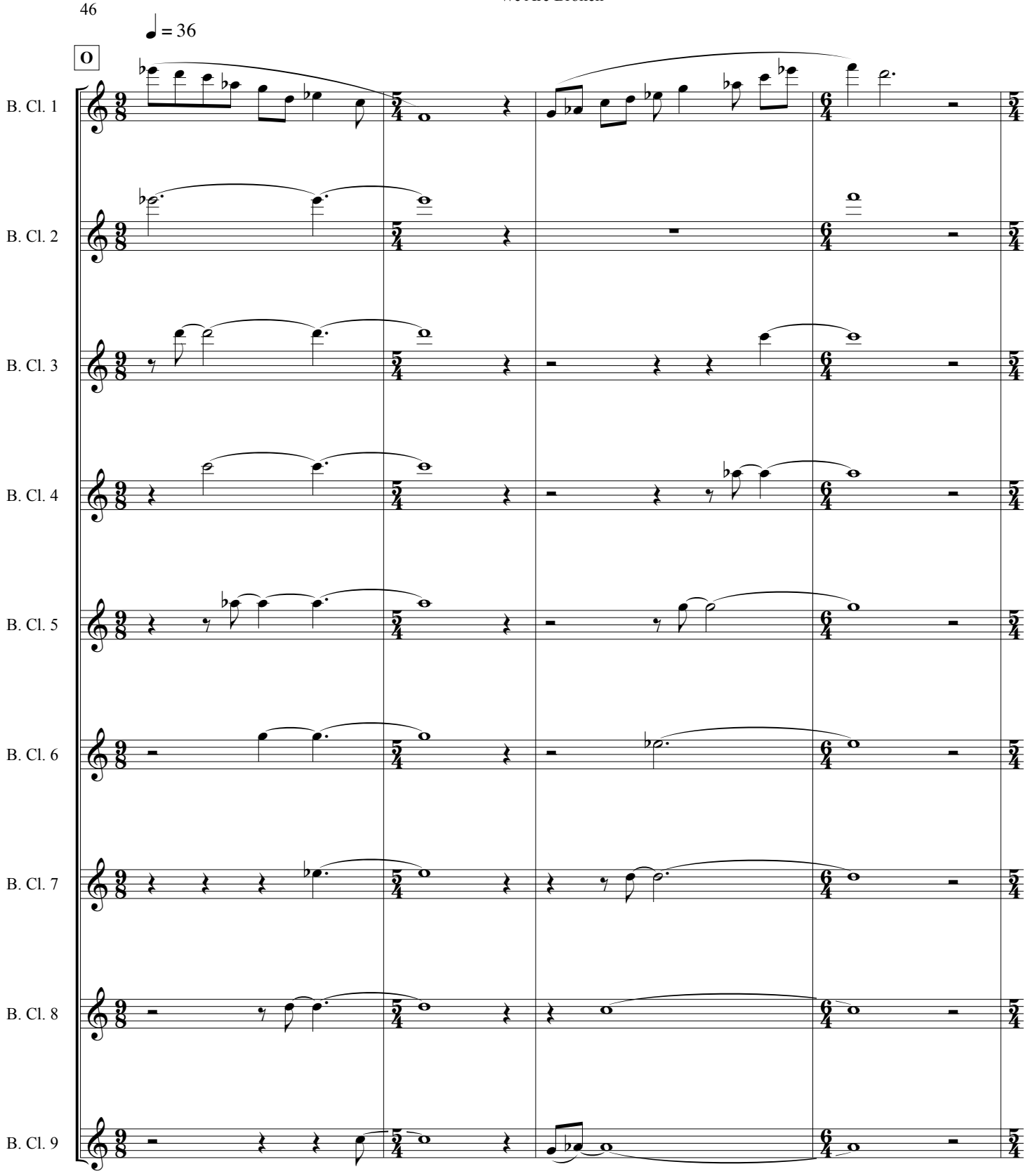
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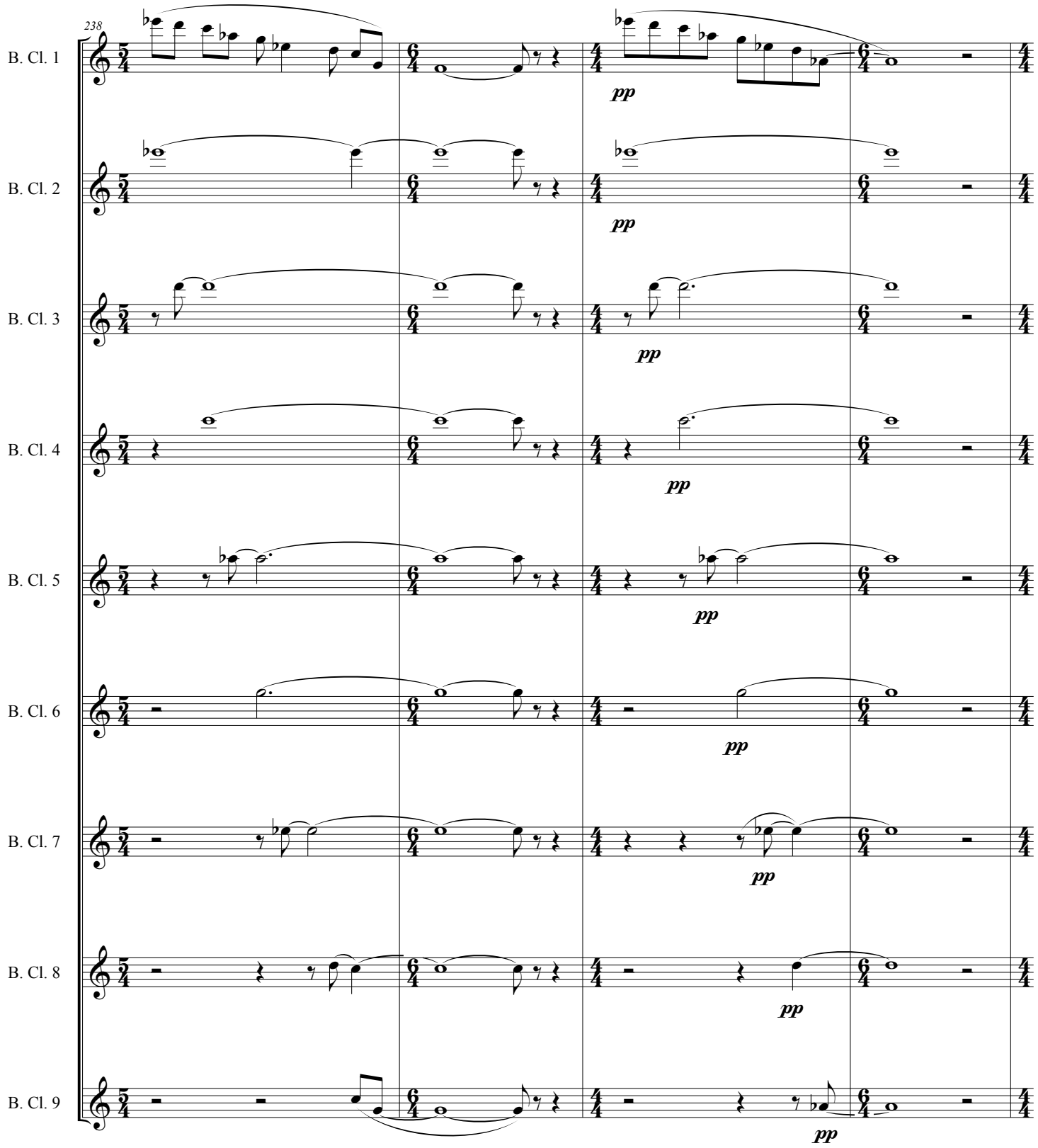
238
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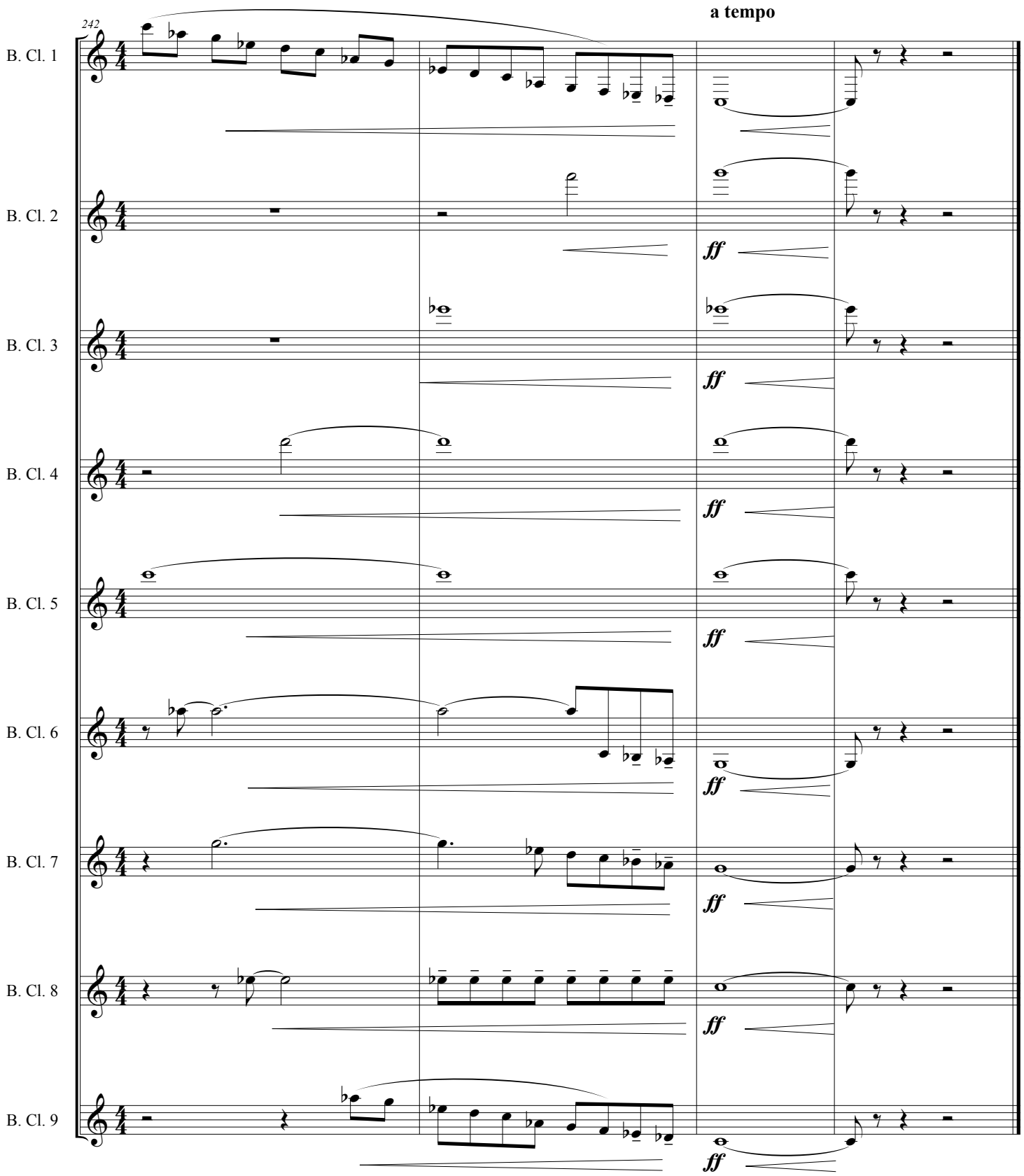
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242
B. Cl. 1
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