Overture to "Les Francs-Juges" (abridged)

Hector Berlioz

Scored for 12 trombones

arranged by

Bob Reifsnyder

Music from the

ROMANTIC BONE COLLECTION

VOLUME ONE

About the Composer

The Overture to "Les Franc-Juges" of Hector Berlioz (1803-69), composed in 1826, is his first extant composition programmed by today's symphony orchestras. In 1825, Berlioz composed a Solemn Mass (unfortunately lost) that became his first artistic success, receiving several performances and several positive reviews. This encouraged him to write his first opera, but "Franc-Juges" was rejected by all four Parisian opera houses as well as a German Opera House that initially showed some interest. Berlioz revised it twice in later years to no avail and he eventually destroyed it, saving only the overture and a couple of arias and duets. These were introduced to 1830s audiences in his own self-produced symphony concerts. This failure led him to finally enroll in the Paris Conservatory in the fall of 1826, which eventually led to his muted acceptance as a composer by the Parisian public.

The most unique feature of the overture is a short 16-measure passage in the middle where he actually uses two time signatures at once (common time and 3/4). This was indeed revolutionary for the period; it took 55 years for another major work to use this device (the overture to Wagner's "Parsifal" has an extended section in common time and 6/4). I chose to edit this passage by using only one time signature, thus alleviating the confusion such an event is likely to cause. Berlioz was much more popular in Germany during his lifetime and this work illustrates that quite dramatically; stylistically, it is very close to von Weber and exhibits almost no characteristics of French 19th-century music. For an untrained musician of 23, however, it is truly a remarkable composition.

About the arranger

Bob Reifsnyder, a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy, has two degrees from Juilliard and a Doctorate from Indiana University. As a trombone teacher, he has served on the faculties of the Juilliard Pre-College Division, Indiana University, Indiana State University, and Ithaca College. As a professional trombonist, he has been a member of the West Point band, the National Orchestra of New York, the Spoleto Festival orchestra, Goldman Band, Ringling Brothers, the German orchestras of Bielefeld, Kaiserslautern and Solingen, Terre Haute Symphony, Tri-Cities Opera, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, Manitowoc Symphony and the Wisconsin Philharmonic. As a gig musician, he has appeared with the Metropolitan Opera, the orchestras of Wuppertal and Dusseldorf in Germany, L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Chamber Orchestra of Lausanne, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Syracuse Symphony, Binghamton Pops, Ithaca Opera, the Wisconsin orchestras of Sheboygan, Oshkosh, Green Bay and the Fox Valley Symphony.

Notes for this arrangement

1. Performance- These works are designed to add to the performance repertoire of the low brass choir.

2. Clef reading- These arrangements will hopefully also serve as advanced clef practice for trombonists playing the top parts. It is unfortunate that clef reading skills don't seem to be a priority for many contemporary trombone teachers, but the ability to transpose at sight remains a prerequisite for becoming an excellent professional musician. Please keep in mind that the first time one has to ask a conductor for a transposed part is likely the last time one will perform with that ensemble!

3. Scoring- There is some octave displacement to keep the individual parts within the comfortable range of the performing instruments and to establish the alto trombone as the highest voice.

4. Range- The basic range of these transcriptions is from high D to low B. For each of the three quartets, the ideal mix would be alto, .525 bore tenor, .547 bore tenor and bass trombone.

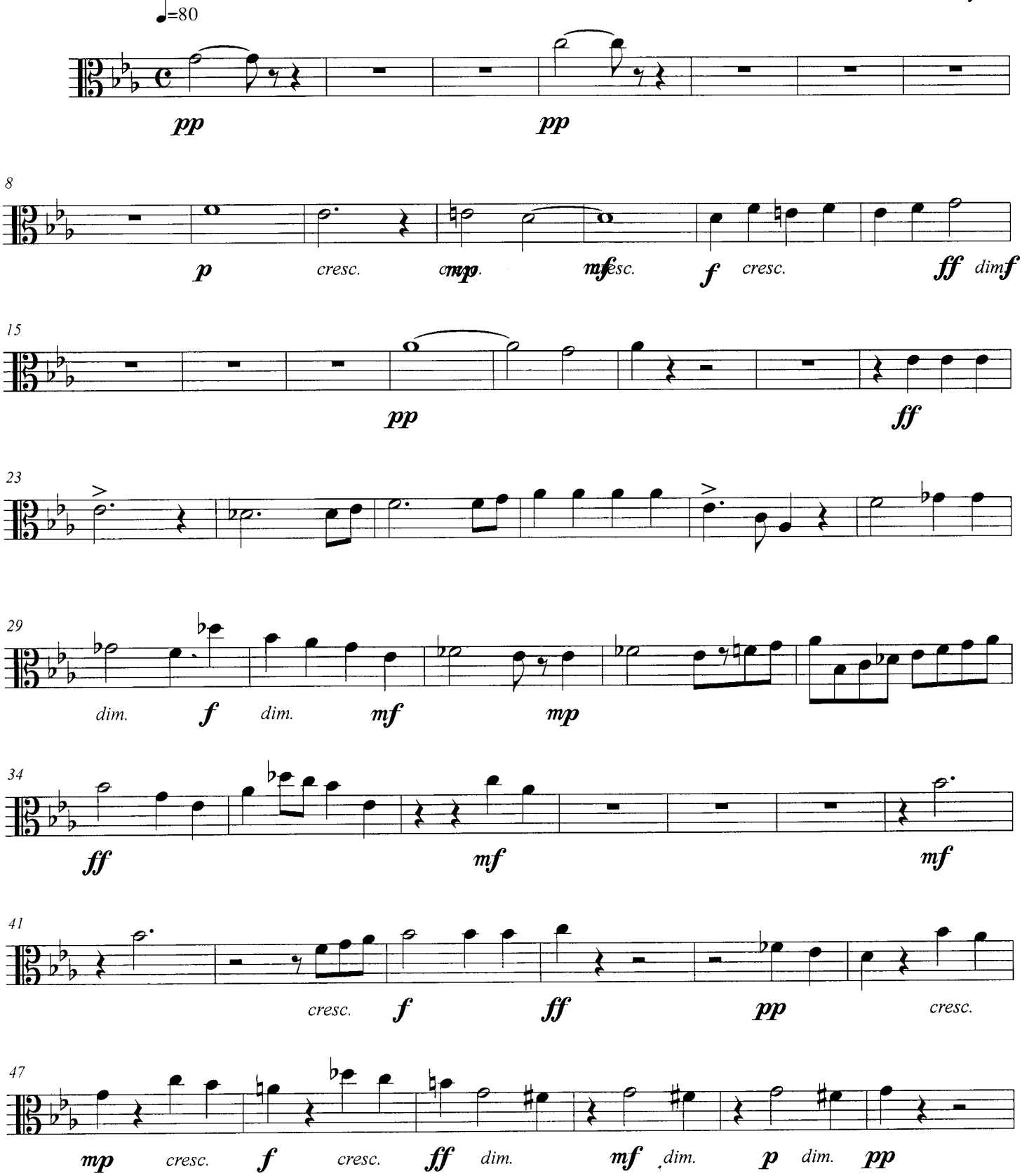
5. Breathing and Articulation- There are no breath marks in these transcriptions; that is perhaps the most personal decision a brass player ever makes. There are, however, notes left out in extended passages that would be otherwise impossible to perform well, hopefully in the most appropriate locations. Performers are also encouraged to add slurs whenever it is deemed appropriate.

Trombone 1

Overture to "Francs Juges"

Berlioz

Bob Reifsnyder



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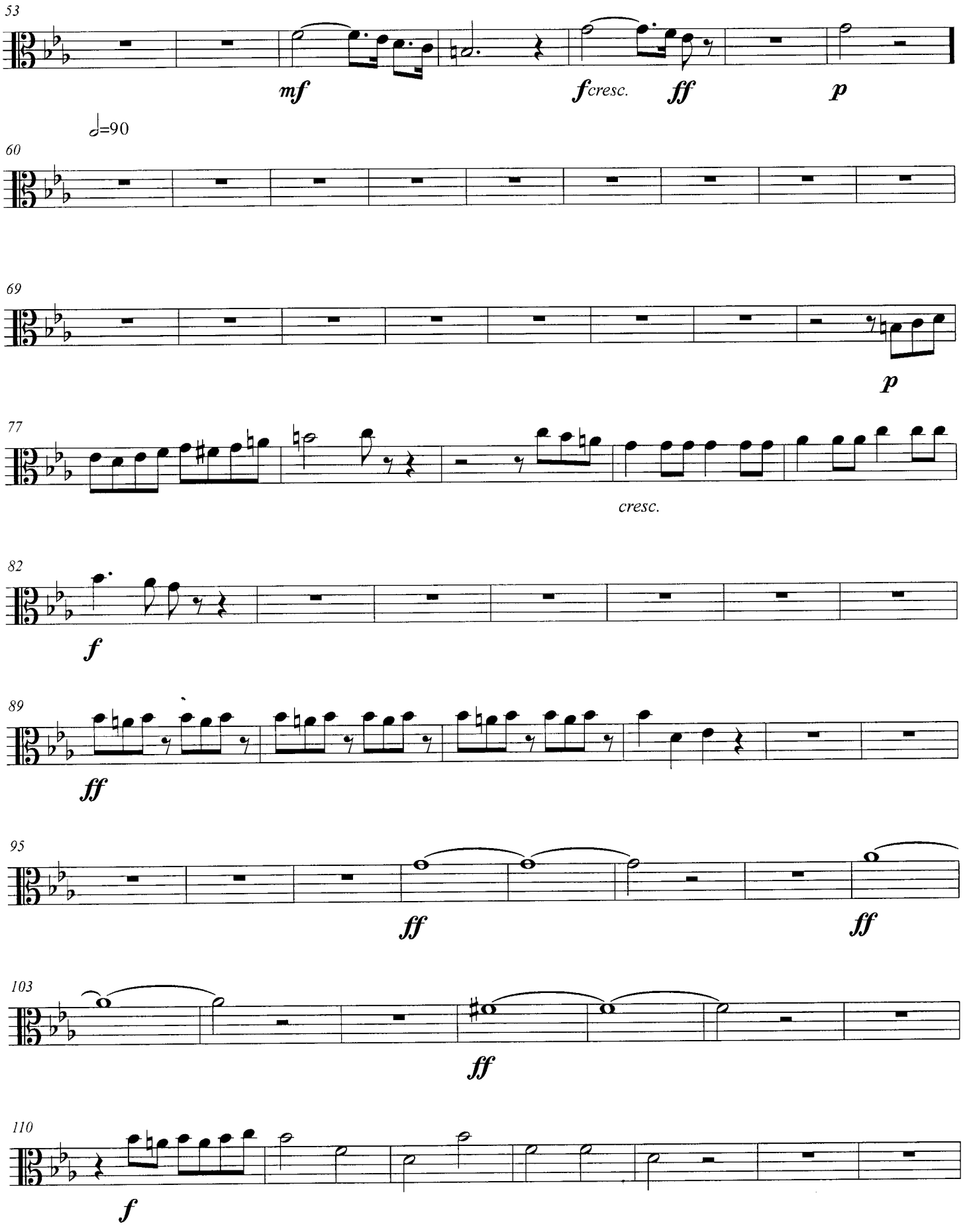
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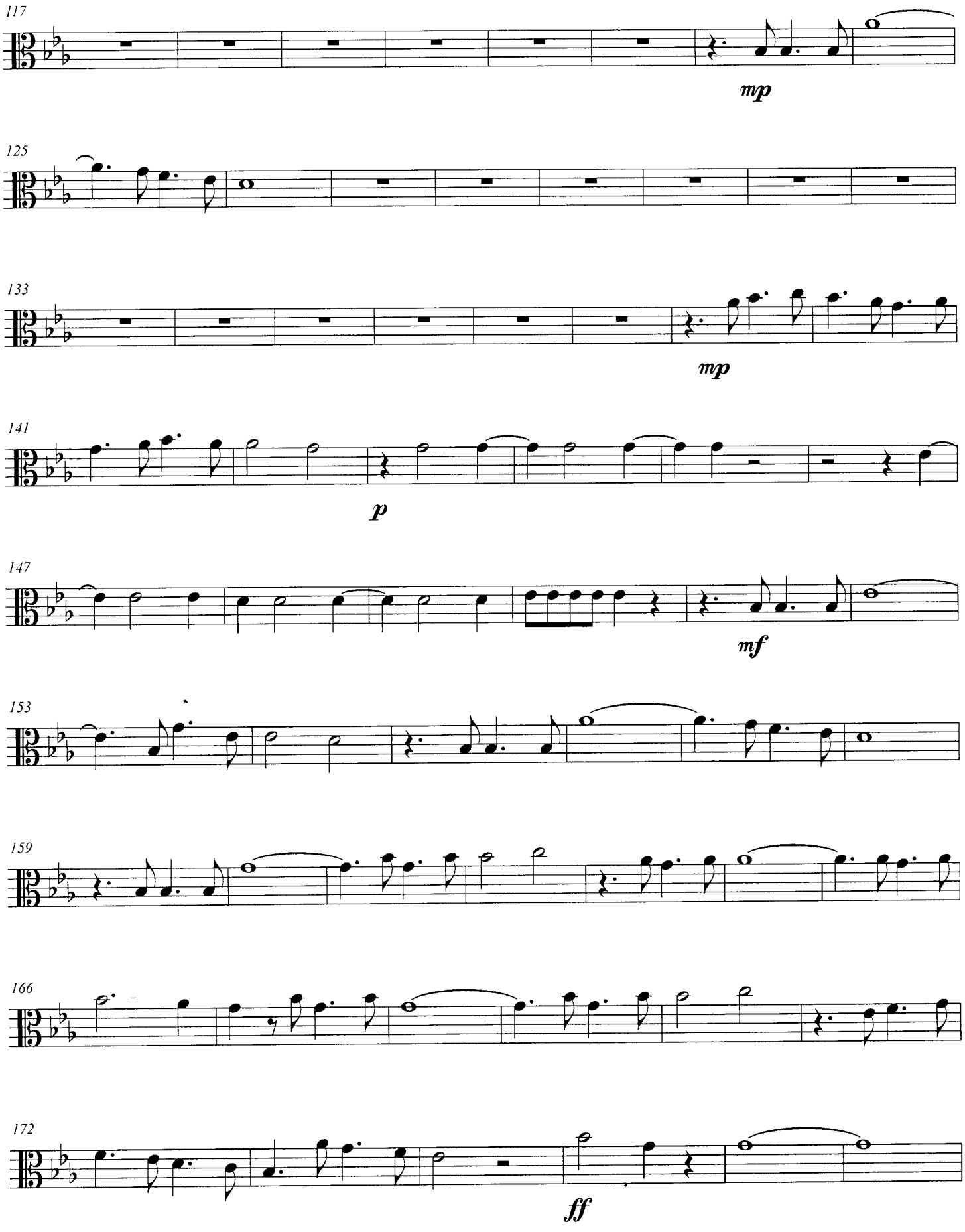
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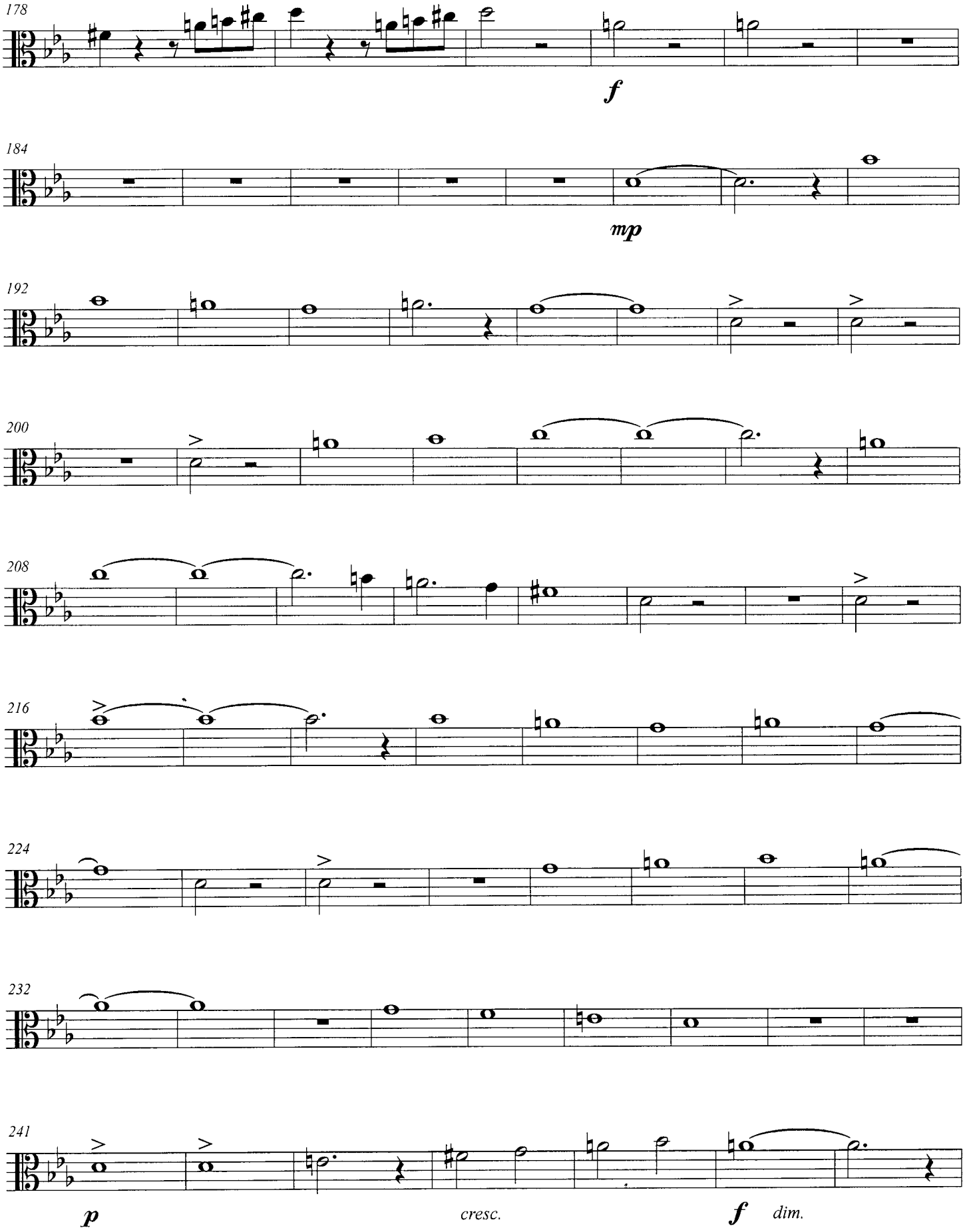
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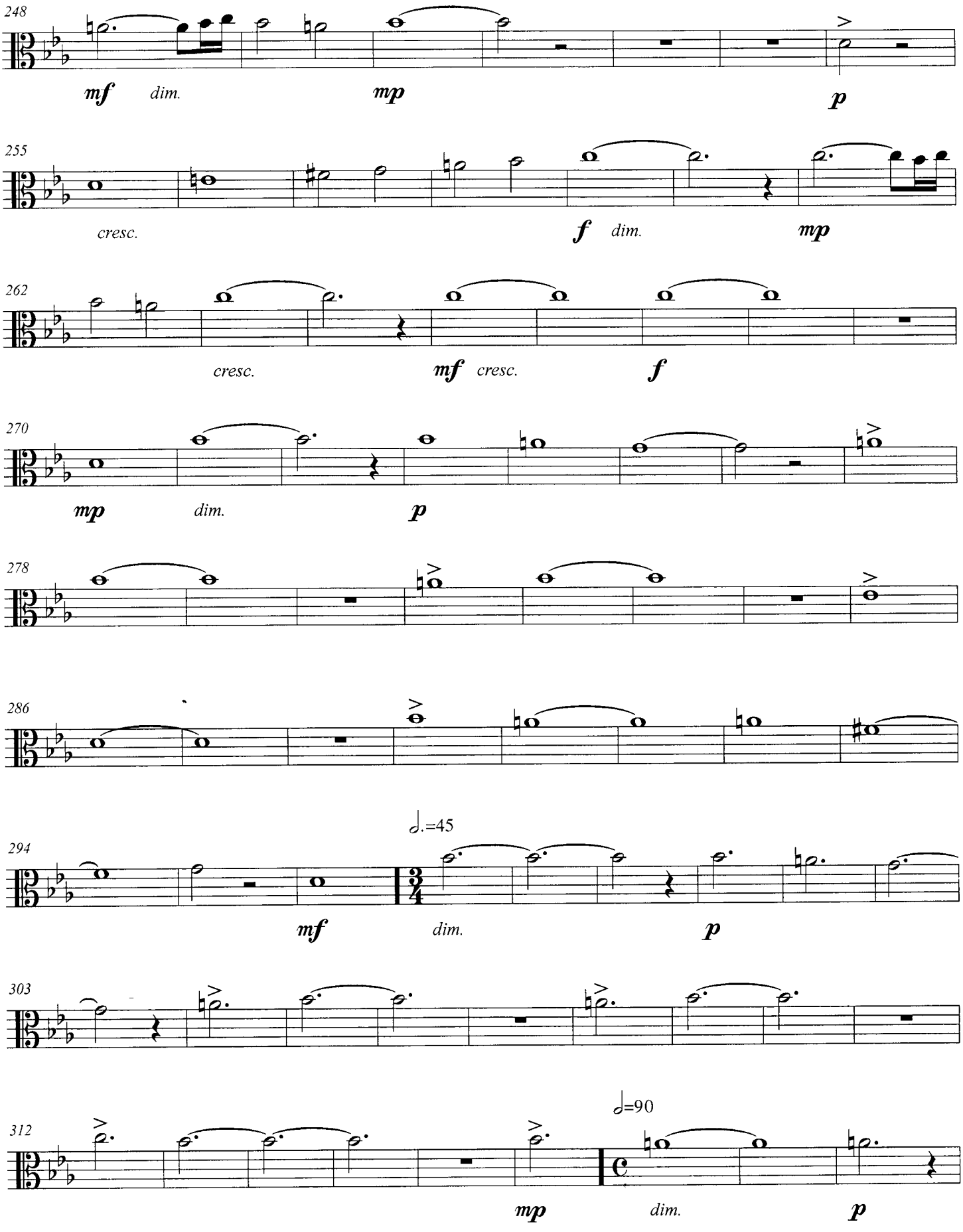
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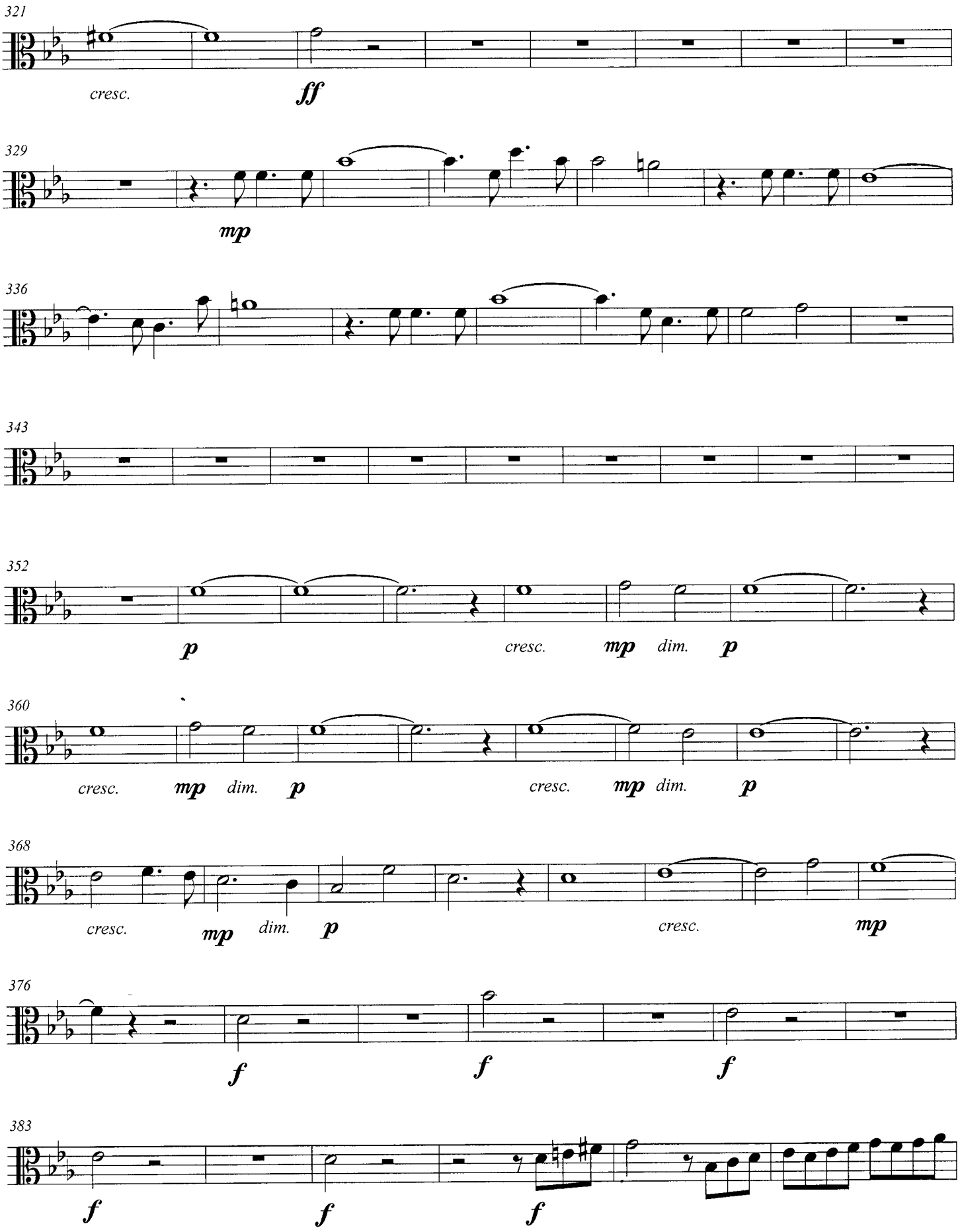
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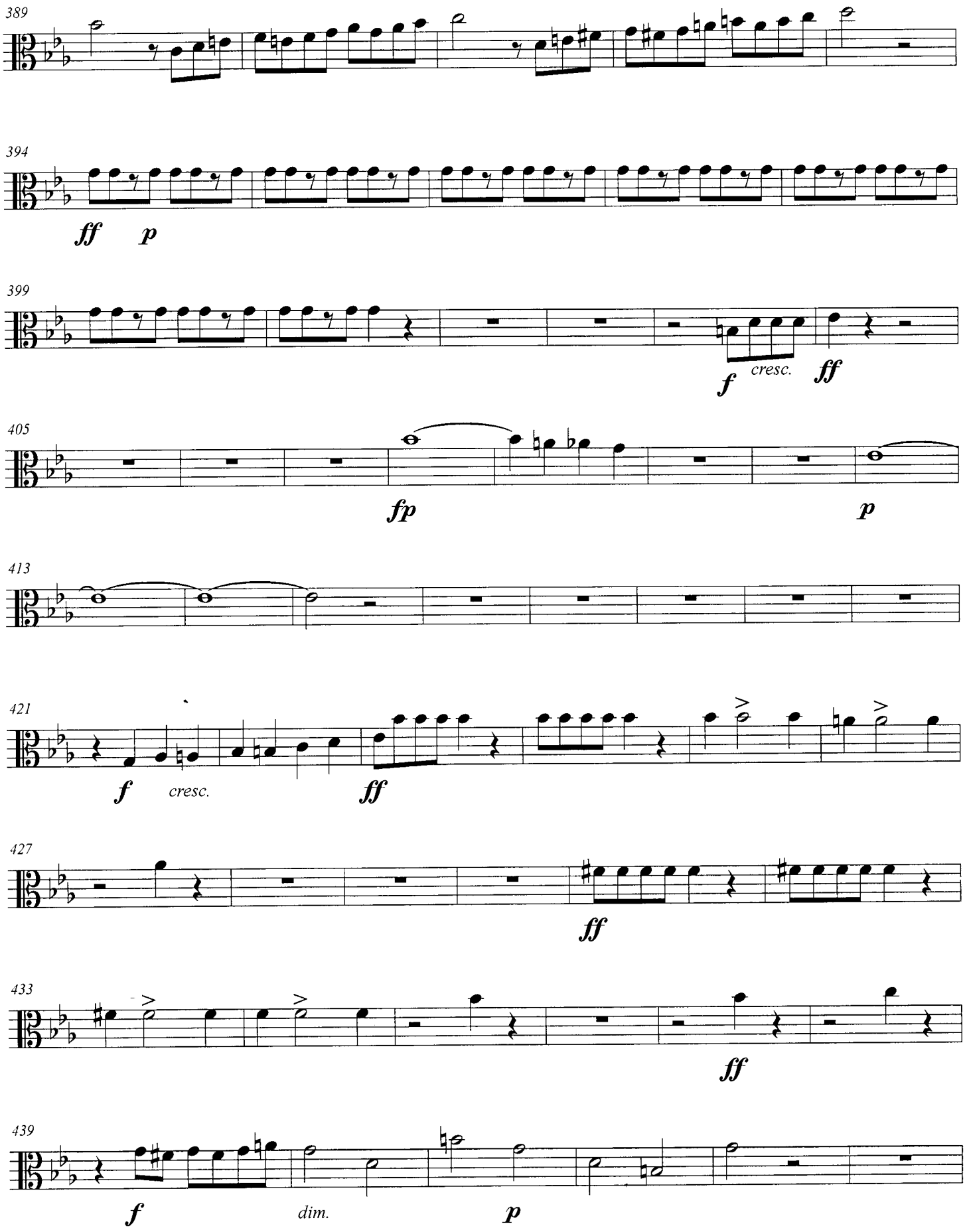
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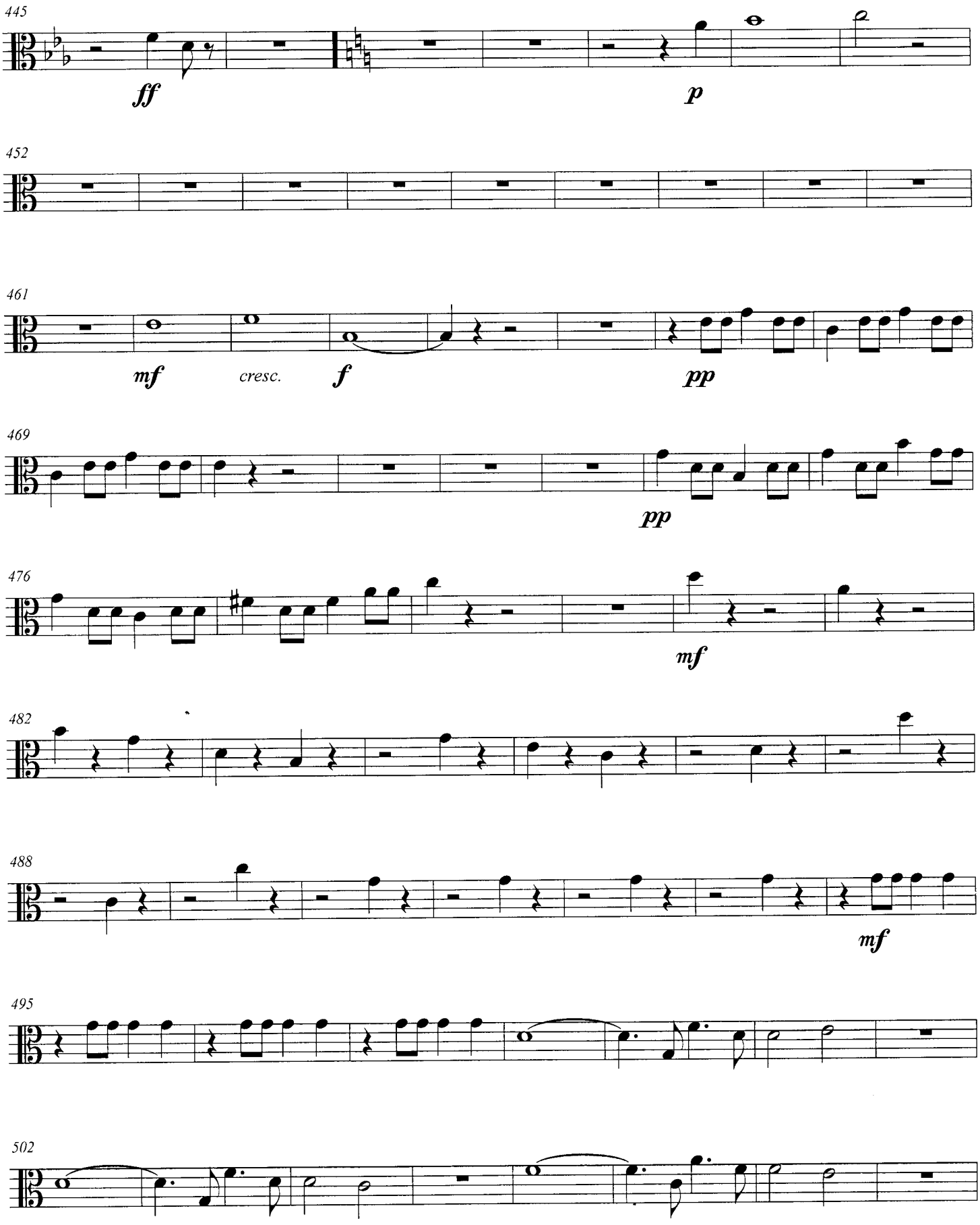
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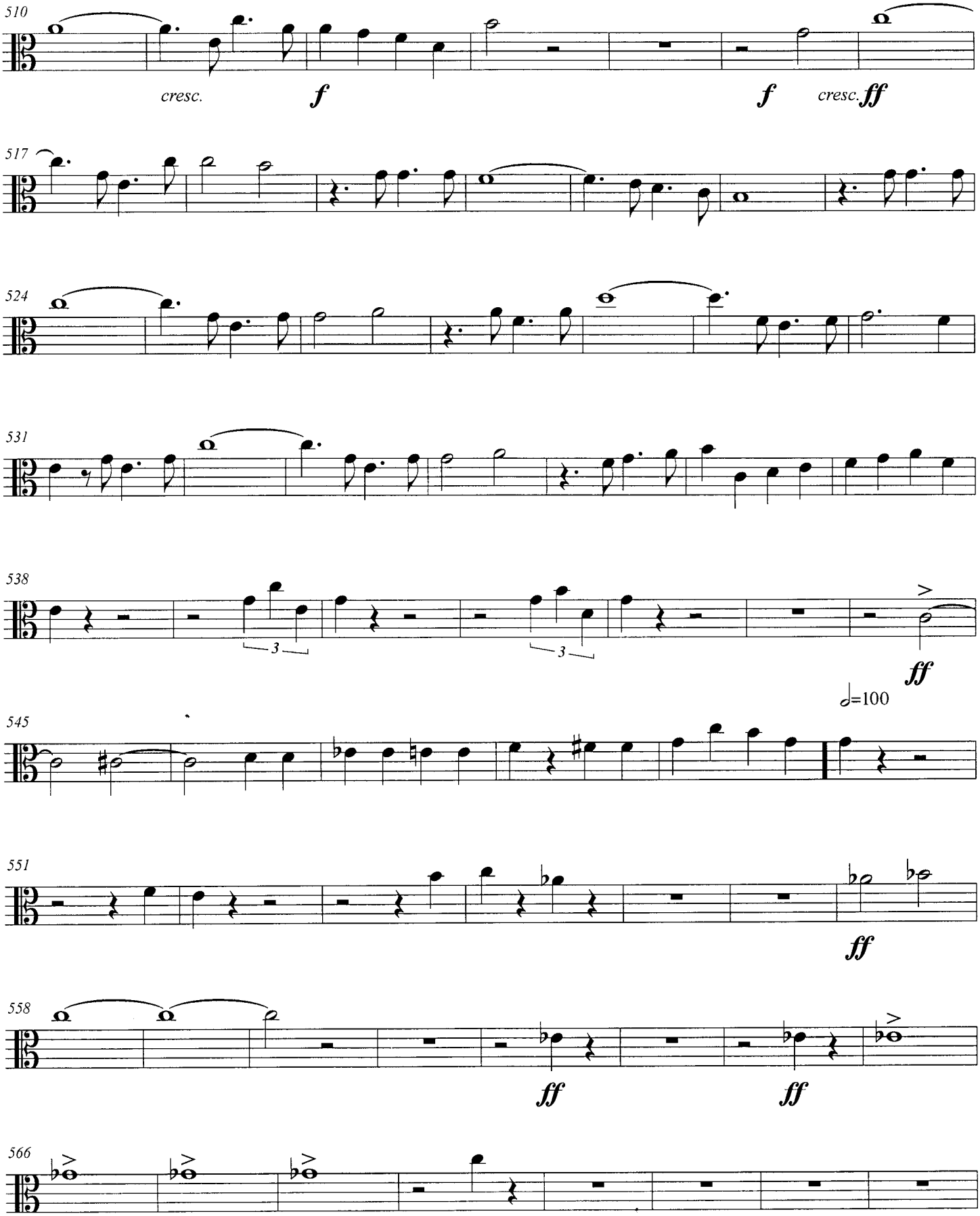
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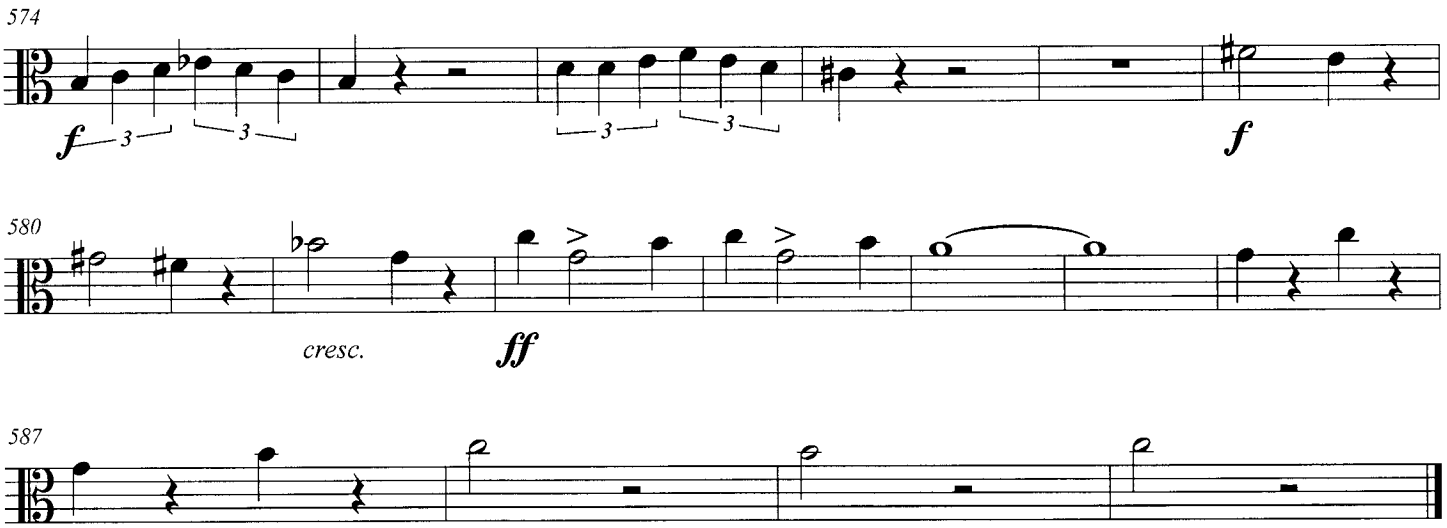
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