Parley

for flute and cello

Catherine Neville
2025

While on a train, listening to a very animated conversation taking place in a language I don't speak, it occurred to me that that is what listening to atonal music is to some: a language they do not recognize, that holds familiar shapes and contours that help them make sense of what they are hearing, but in the end the details are unrecognizable. "Parley" as a title contains this idea: a deliberate misspelling of the French word 'parler,' it is both familiar and yet 'wrong.' So too the music of this duet: it is loosely based on a 12-tone row, but freely goes off course, it has some consonances that give hints of tonality, but isn't really tonal either.

As in the original conversation, the two voices of this duet at times try to speak over each other, get excited, ramble, and then come back to make an emphatic point. The conversation ended in an amicable agreement, which here I've represented with the same pitch in both voices, two octaves apart.

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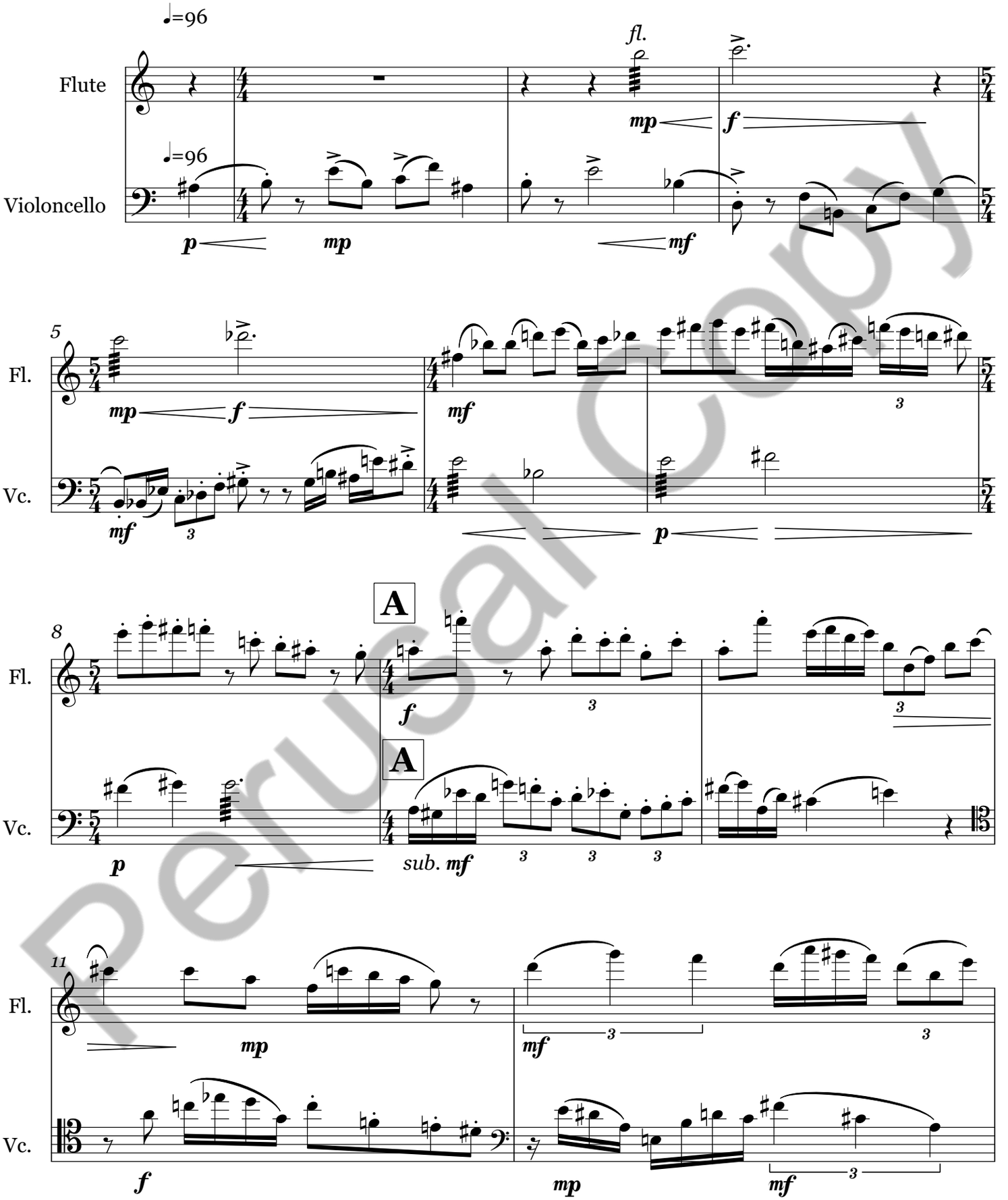

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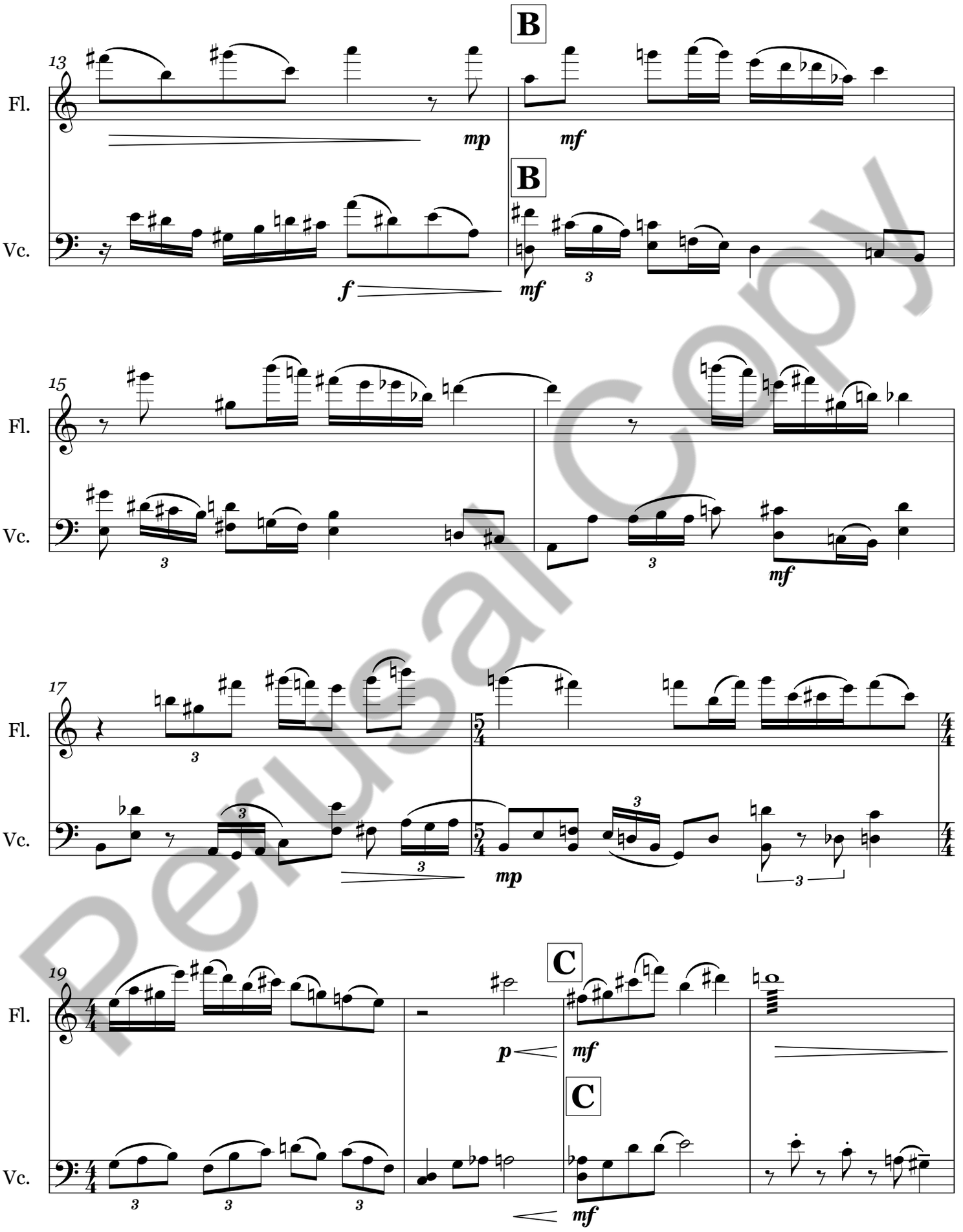

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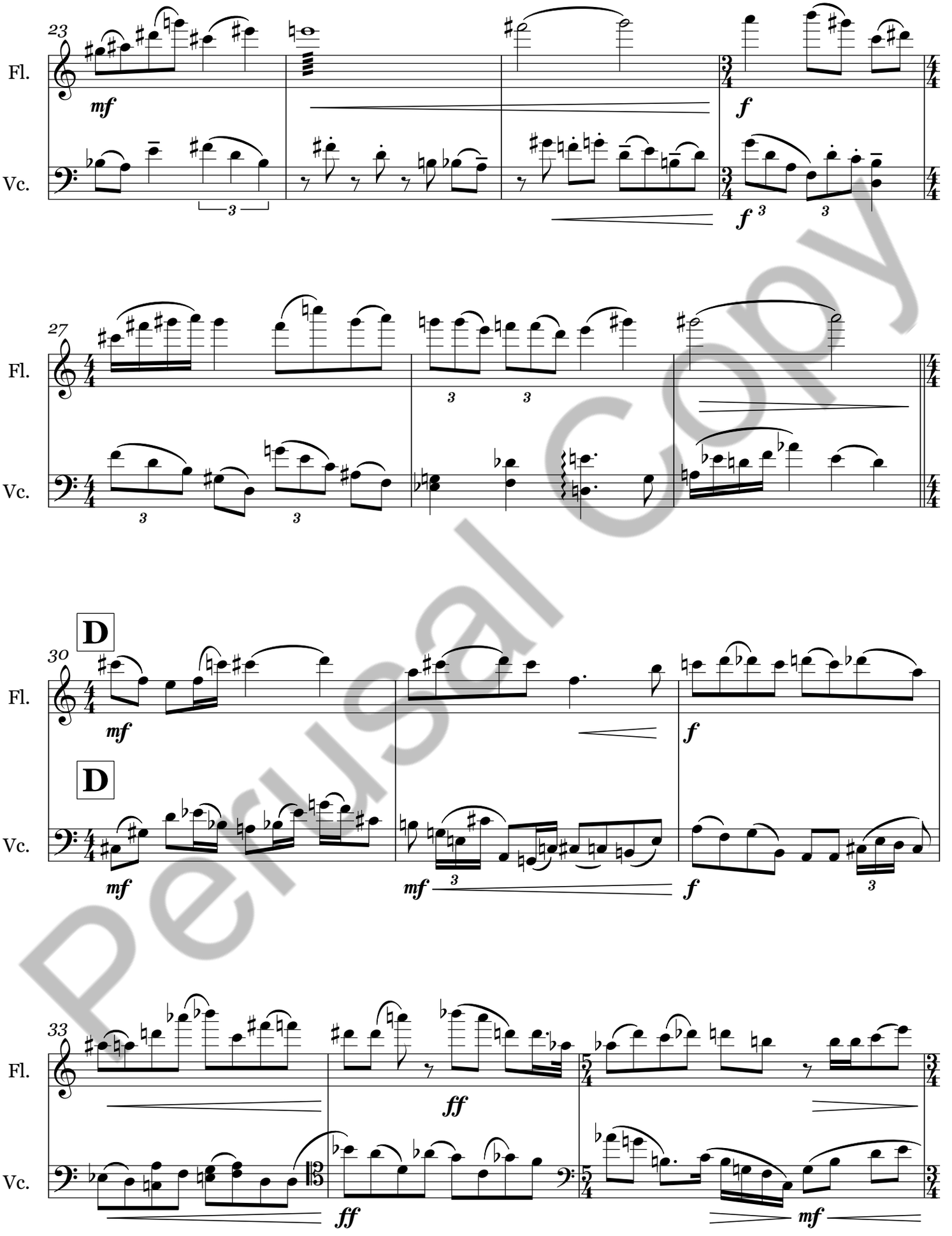

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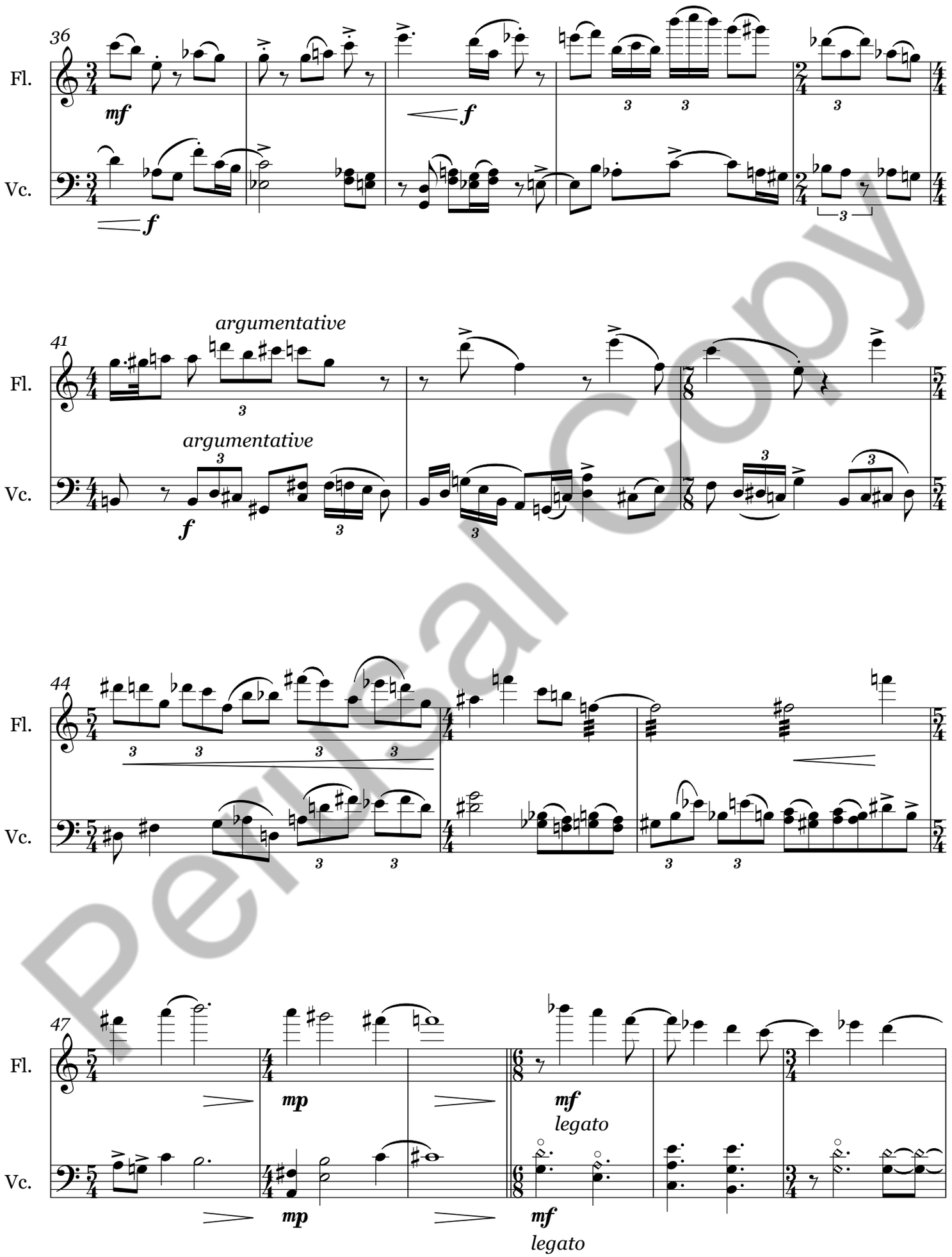

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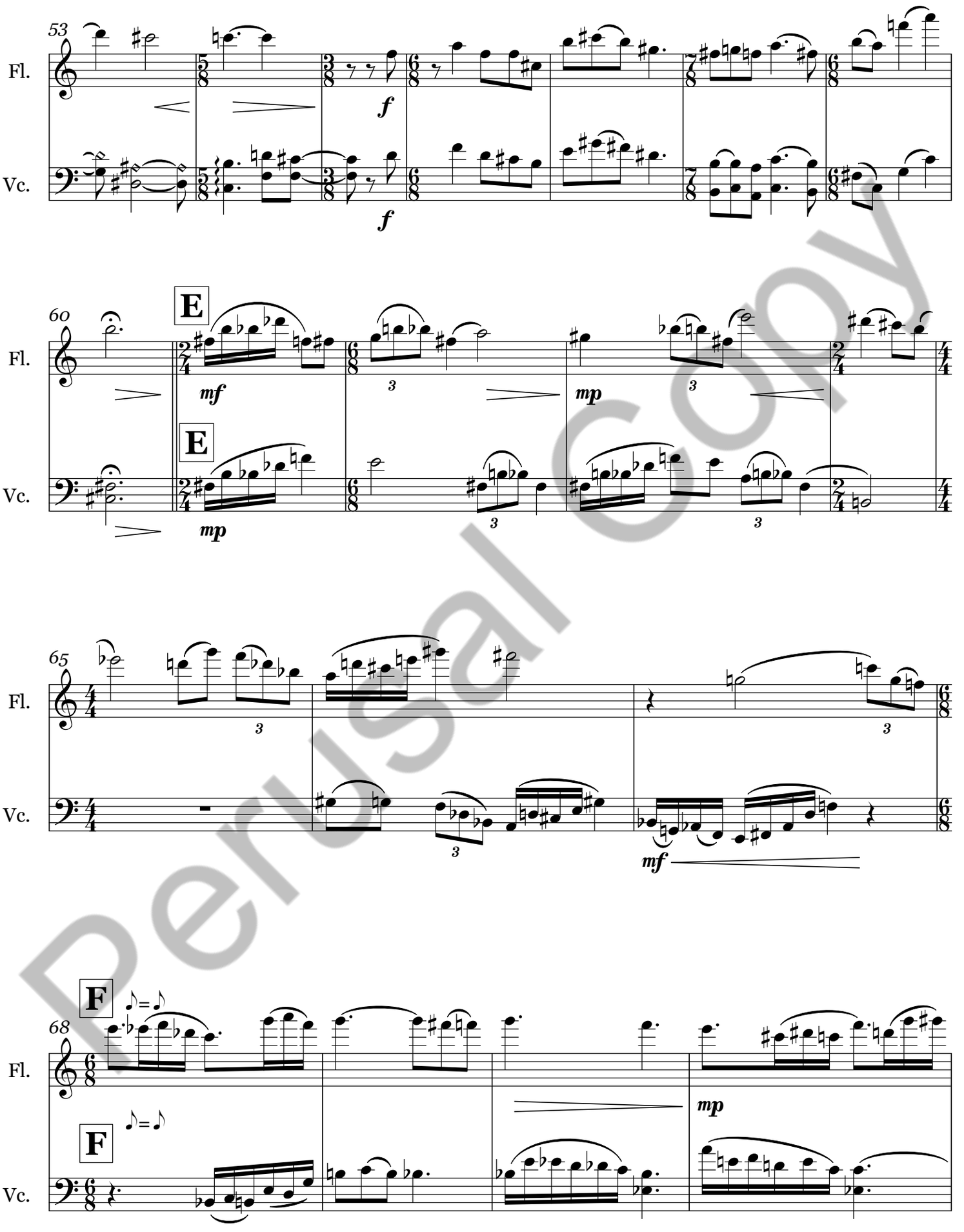

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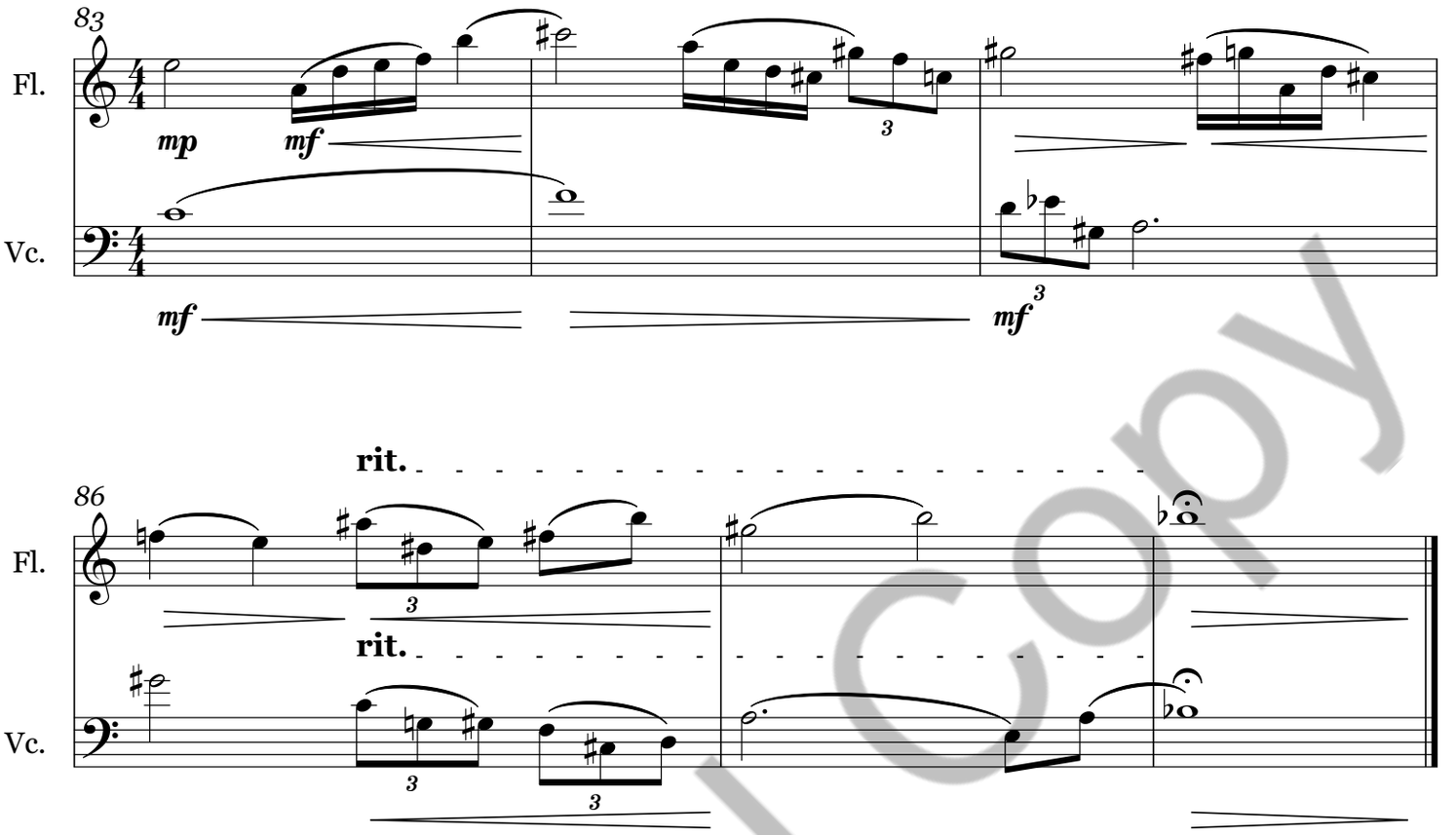

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