SATURN DEVOURING HIS SON

a tone poem on a painting by Francisco de Goya

JOHN WILLIAM BRINK

PERUSAL SCORE

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Premiered on
February 20, 2025 by
Lena Stechuk, piano.

Kresge Theatre, College of Fine Arts
Carnegie Mellon University
Pittsburgh, PA.

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PREFACE

In a private manner, Francisco de Goya (1746 – 1828) created his own rendition of a painting originally by Peter Paul Rubens (1577 – 1640). Initiated in 1819 and completed in 1823, this work was displayed in his dining room, accompanied by five other paintings of similarly dark themes. It is believed that Goya initially adorned his home with more uplifting artworks, but later replaced them with some of his most terrifying creations. These uncommissioned pieces, never intended for public viewing, reflect his increasingly somber mood, depicting scenes of malevolence and conflict.

According to Roman mythology, it was foretold that one of Saturn's sons would overthrow him, just as he had overthrown his father, Caelus. To prevent this, Saturn devoured his children immediately after their birth, consuming the gods Vesta, Juno, Neptune, Dis, and Ceres. His wife, Ops, eventually concealed their sixth child, Jupiter, on the island of Crete, deceiving Saturn with a stone wrapped in swaddling clothes. Unlike the painting, the myths typically depict Saturn swallowing his children whole and later regurgitating them alive after ingesting the stone, rather than chewing them as shown in the artwork. Ultimately, Jupiter fulfilled the prophecy by overthrowing his father.

Various interpretations of the painting's meaning have been proposed, such as the conflict between youth and old age, and the concept of time as the devourer of all things. This theme is echoed in a musical piece of the same name, illustrating how time can be the greatest adversary, regardless of one's divinity or sanctity.

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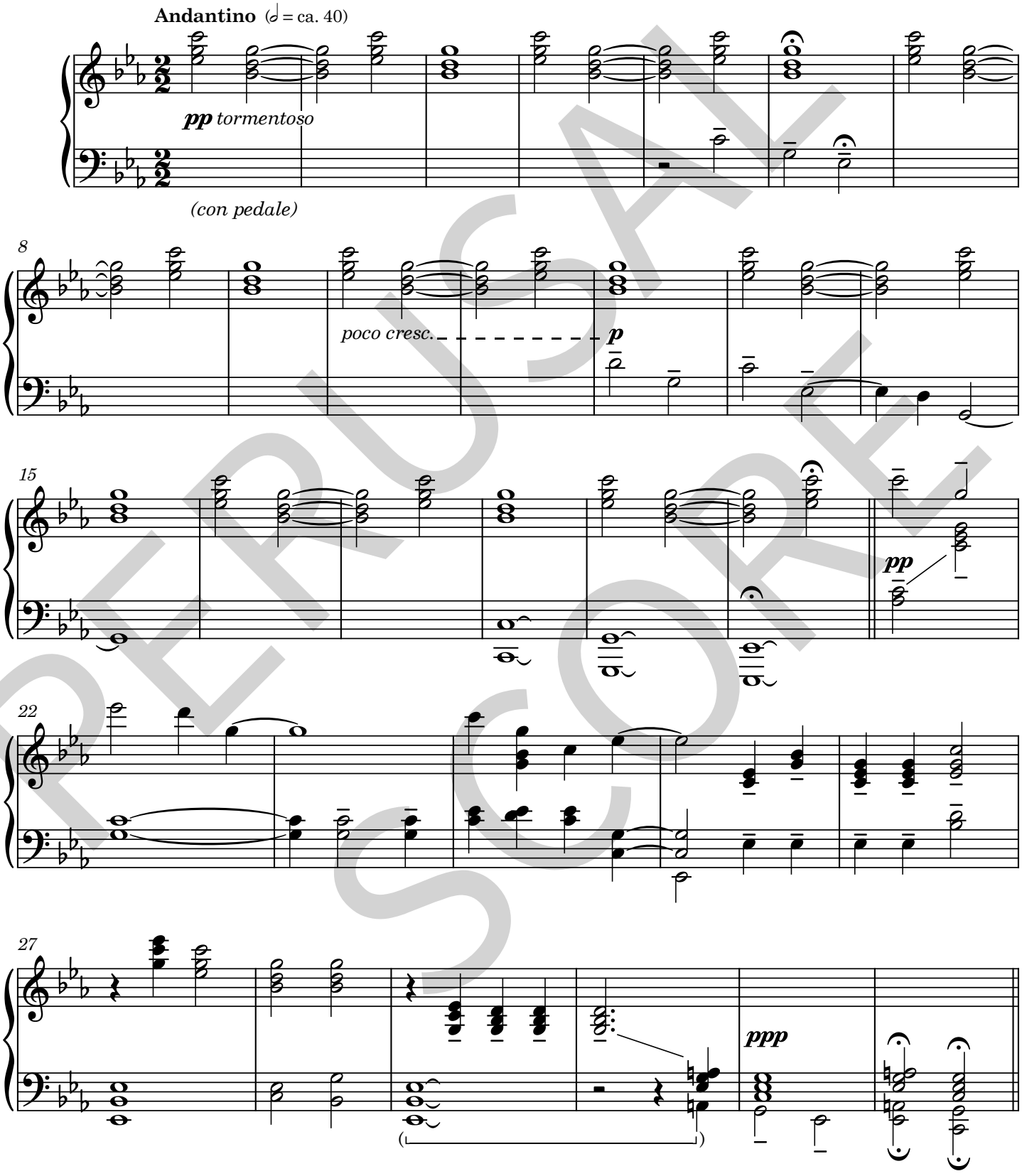
John William Brink (2023, rev. 2025)



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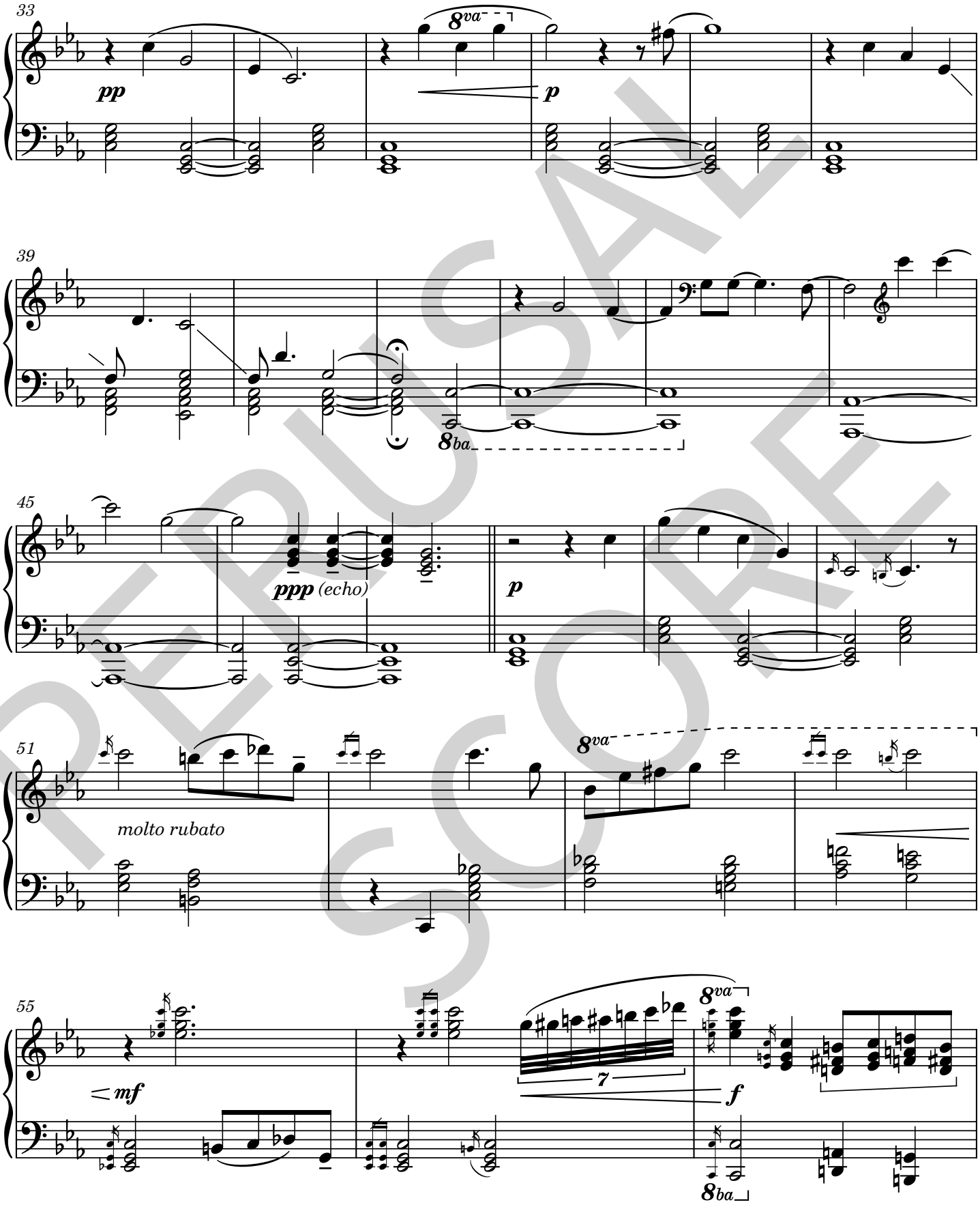

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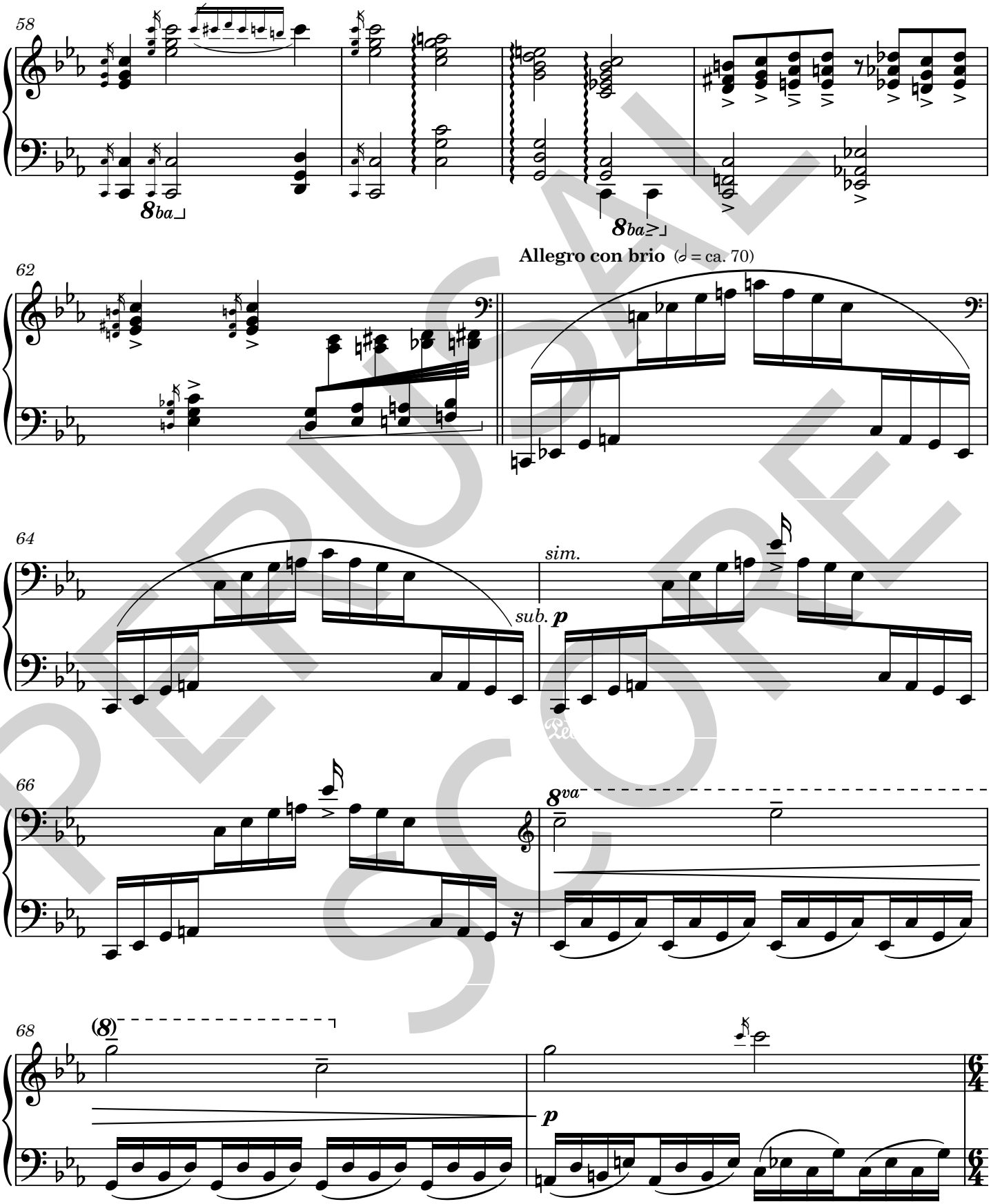

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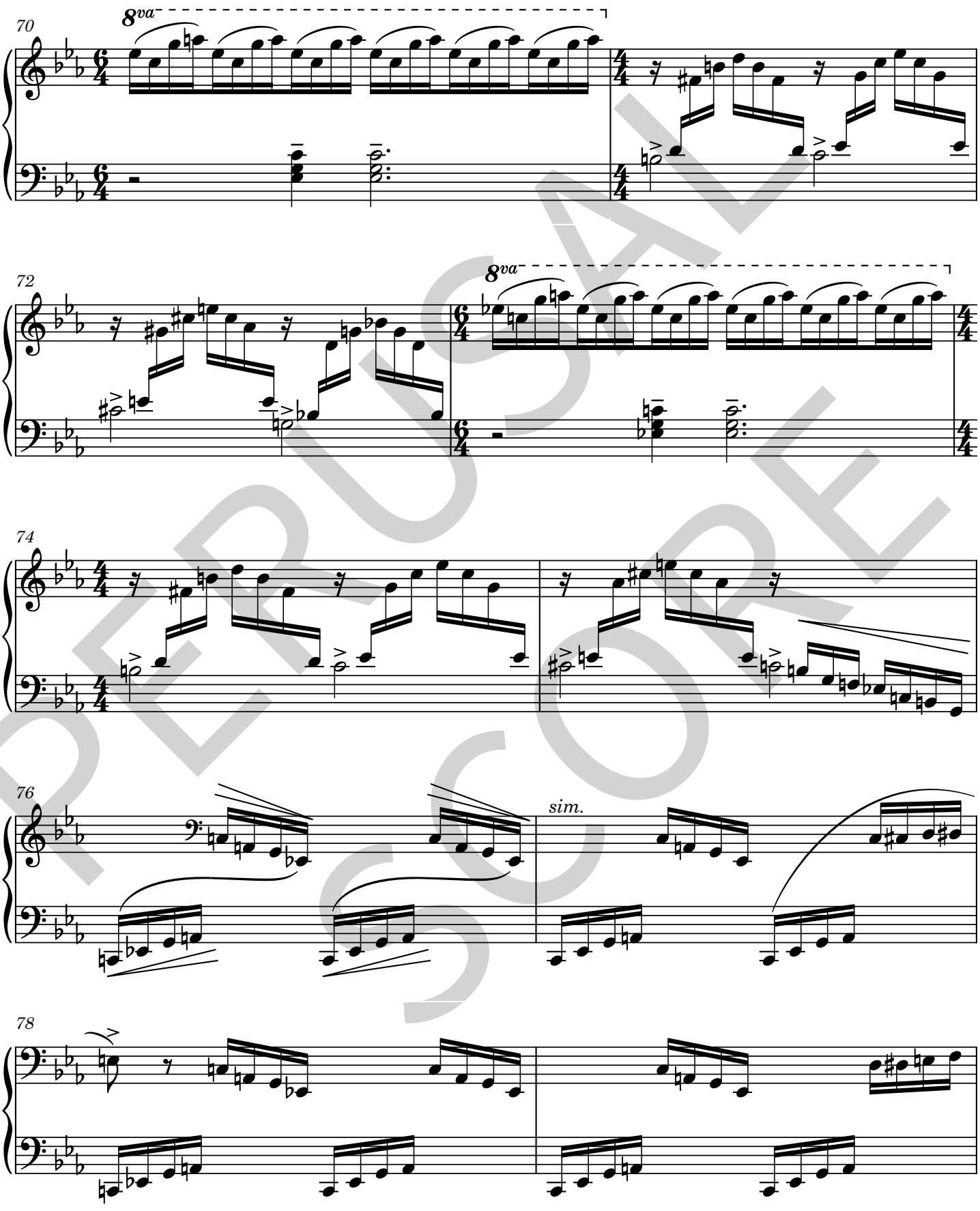

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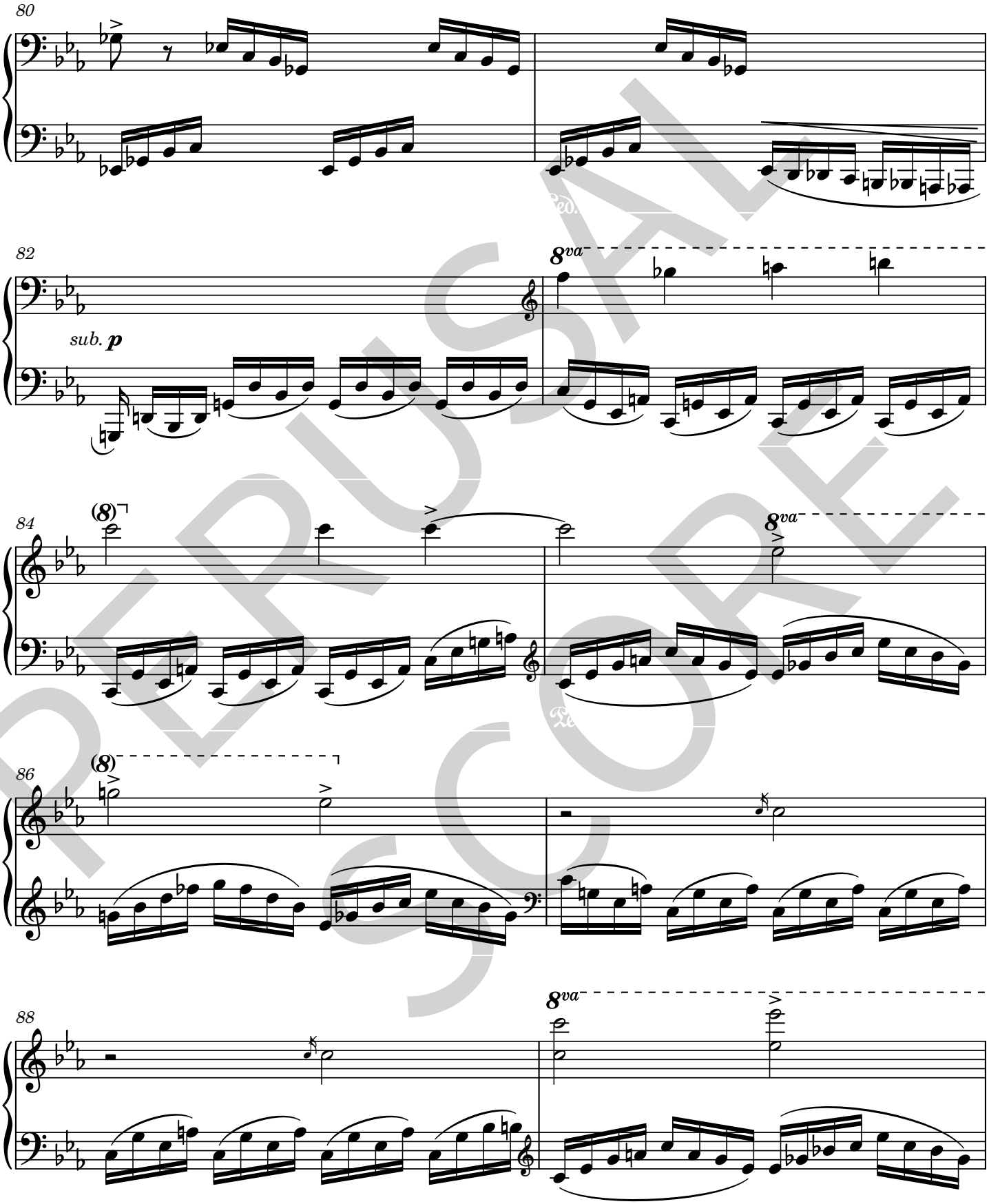

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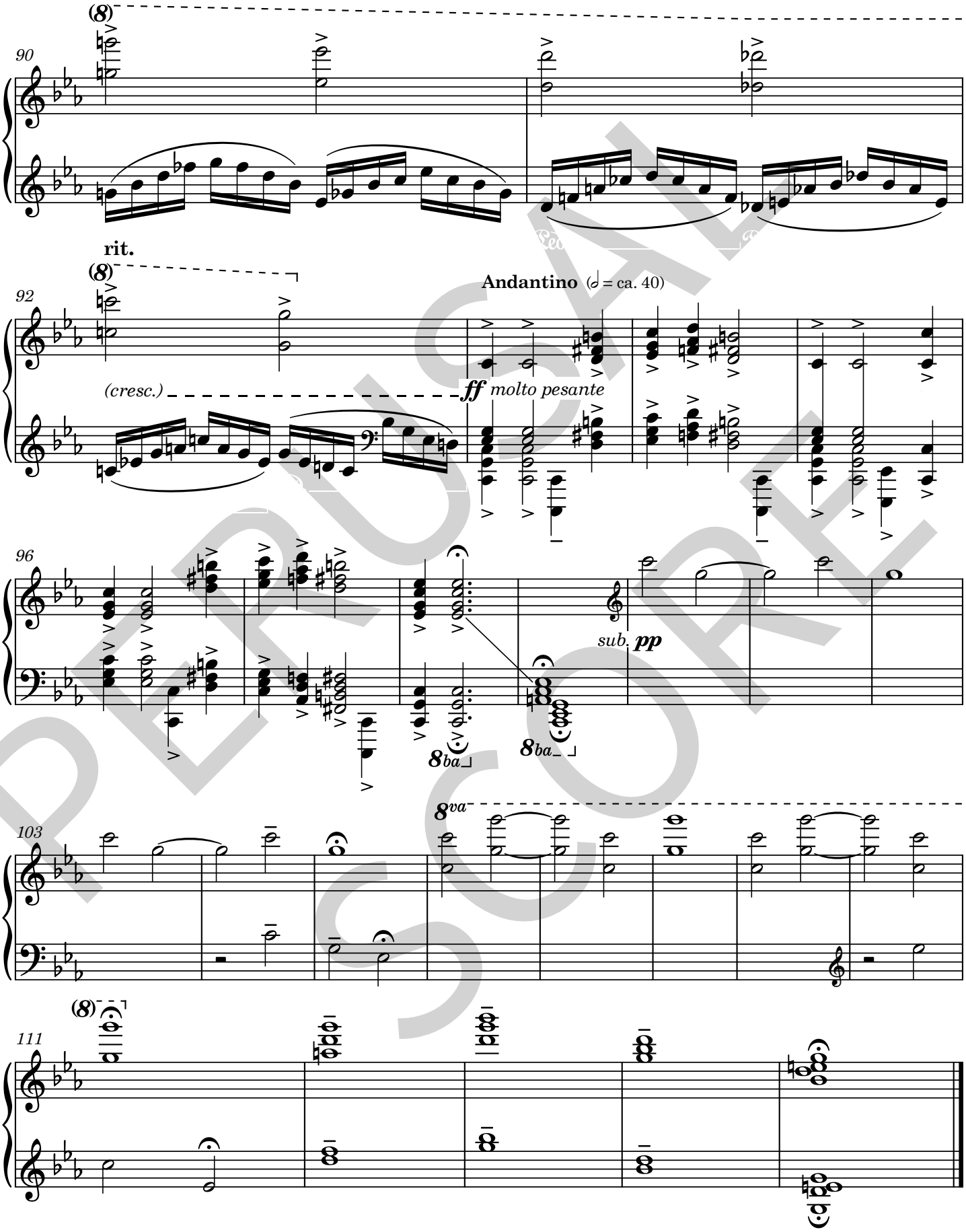

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