miniature score

george gershwin's
LULLABY

for

string quartet

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Sometime in 1919 or 1920 my brother George tried his hand at a short piece for string quartet and called it "Lullaby." (Possibly he originally intended it as a piano solo, in an unfinished manuscript of his I still have.) As a quartet it was played in the next several months at a number of private musicales of his many musician friends before – sometimes after – they'd get down to the more serious business of classical quartets and quintets. I attended three of these intimate sessions and could see and hear that "Lullaby" was invariably welcomed.

In 1922 George and lyricist B. G. DeSylva had practically finished the score for that year's *Scandals* when producer George White suddenly decided he wanted them to go ahead with *Blue Monday*, a one-act opera the collaborators had once mentioned they'd like to do. There were only five days left before the *Scandals* rehearsals were to begin, so my brother had an upright put into his bedroom, and there he and Buddy holed themselves up until the score was finished. I can't recall why George borrowed the opening theme of his string quartet for the beginning of an aria in *Blue Monday*. Maybe it was the urgency of the assignment, or perhaps by then George had come to regard "Lullaby" as merely an exercise. But borrow the opening bars he did, and that, so far as the composer was concerned, was the end of the string quartet, as I've no recollection of his ever mentioning it again.

Forty years later, in 1962, when Larry Adler, the harmonica virtuoso, was commissioned to do a film score, he told me one night he expected to use harmonicas in some sections of the underscoring: He'd play all four parts himself and then synchronize the tapes. The word "four" suddenly reminded me of "Lullaby" lying among a number of George's manuscripts in my upstairs workroom. I showed it to Larry who asked if he could borrow it. The notion was that he'd make a transcription for harmonica and string quartet which he would premiere at the Edinburgh Festival with the Edinburgh Quartet. On August 29, 1963 their performance was warmly received. Recently, in a new arrangement by Morton Gould for harmonica and string orchestra, Gould and Adler included the piece (called there "Lullaby Time") in an RCA Victor album titled *Discovery*.

But it was not until October 29, 1967 that "Lullaby" was publicly performed as the quartet George had written nearly half a century earlier. Following Adler and Gould's interest I had mentioned the composition to Harold Spivacke, Chief of the Music Division, the Library of Congress, and an authority on George's concert work. Dr. Spivacke felt that the Juilliard String Quartet might welcome the piece. And indeed after they had given it a first reading they scheduled it for their October concert at the Library of Congress, a concert widely broadcast.

Now "Lullaby" is published from my brother's manuscript. It may not be the Gershwin of *Rhapsody in Blue*, *Concerto in F*, and his other concert works, but I find it charming and kind.

Ira Gershwin

April, 1968

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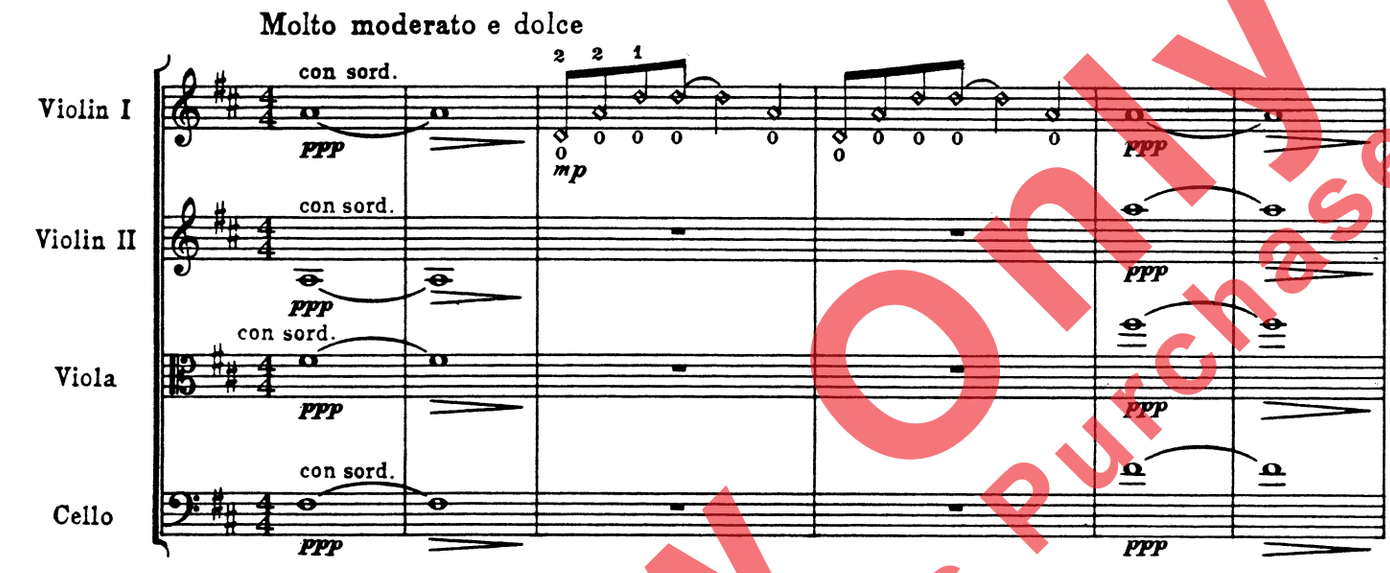
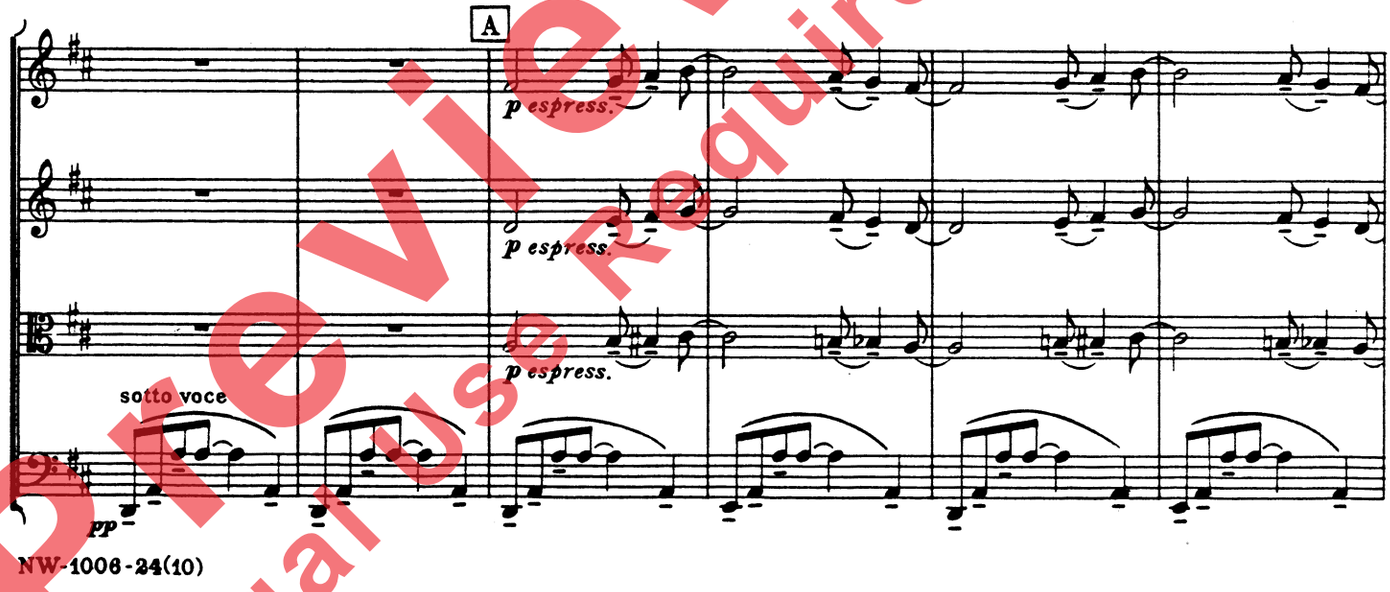
LULLABY

For String Quartet

GEORGE GERSHWIN
(1898-1937)
Posthumous





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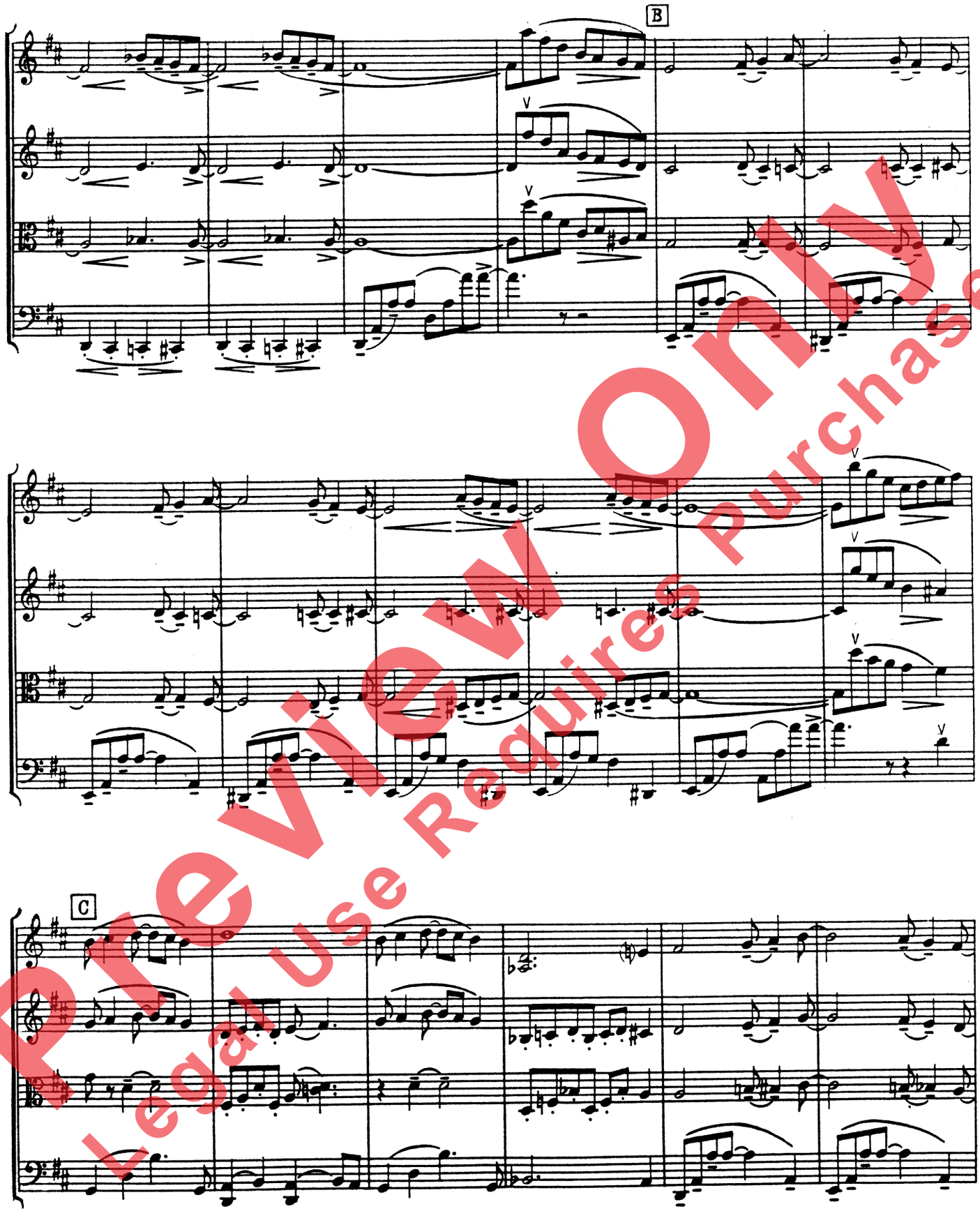

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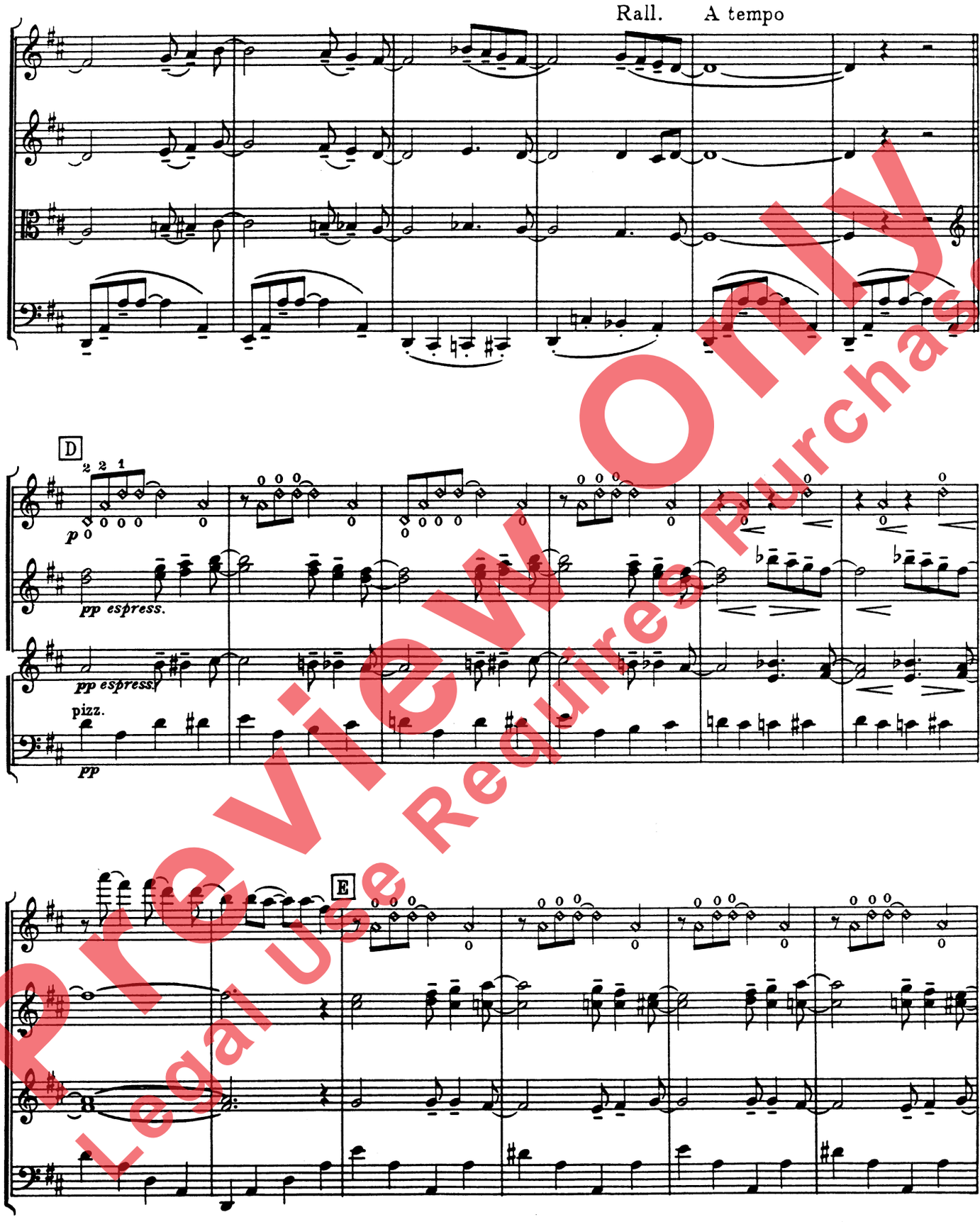

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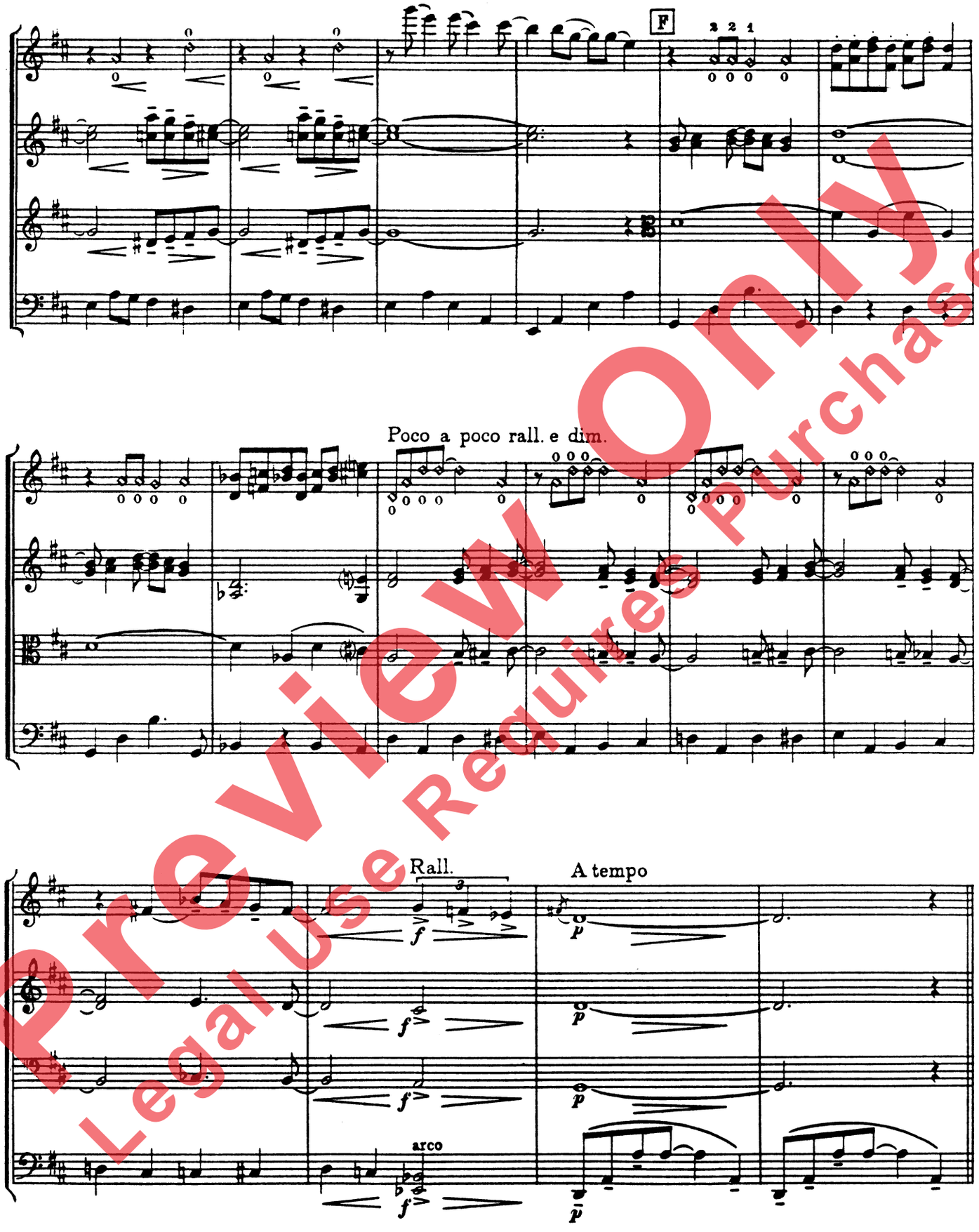

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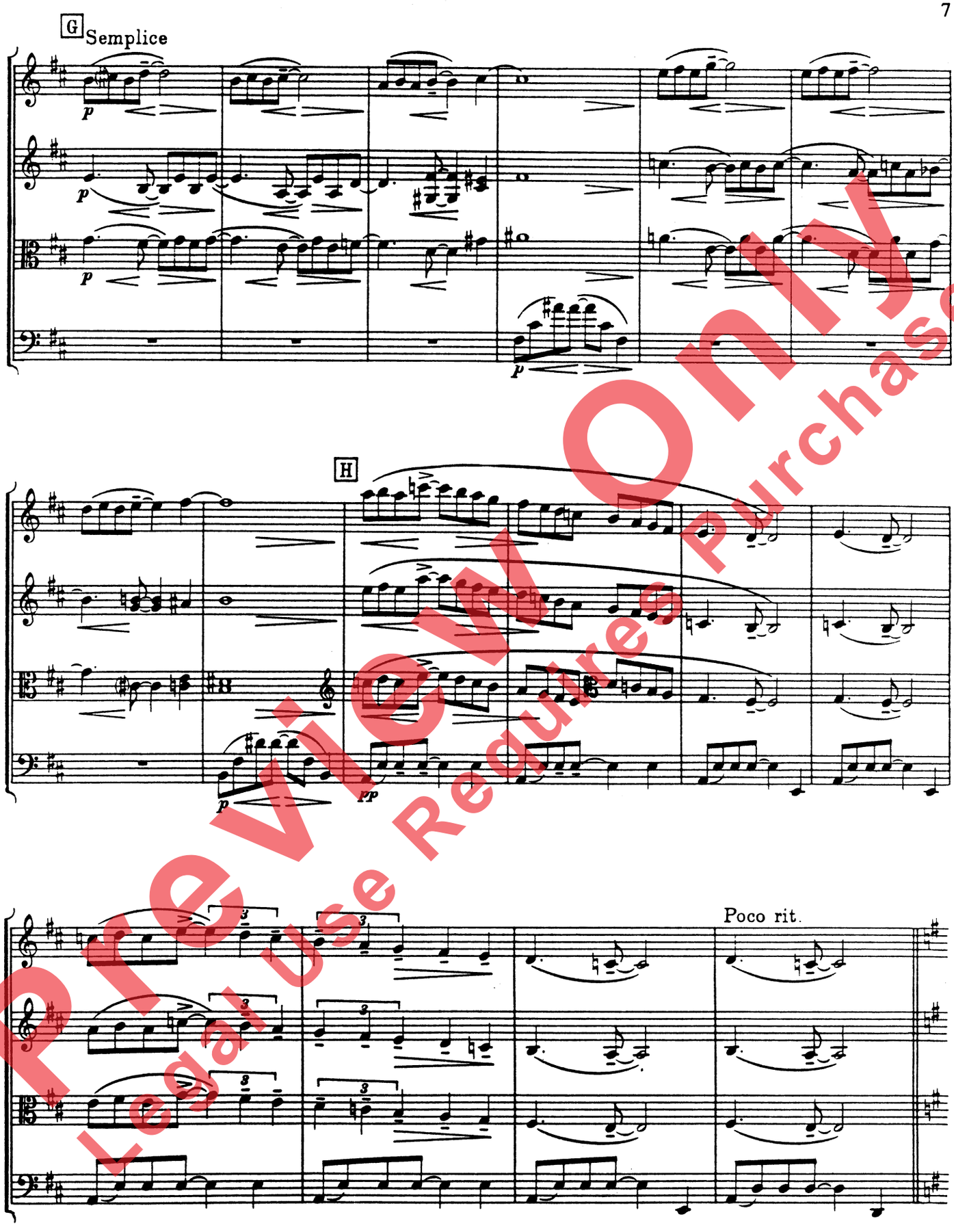

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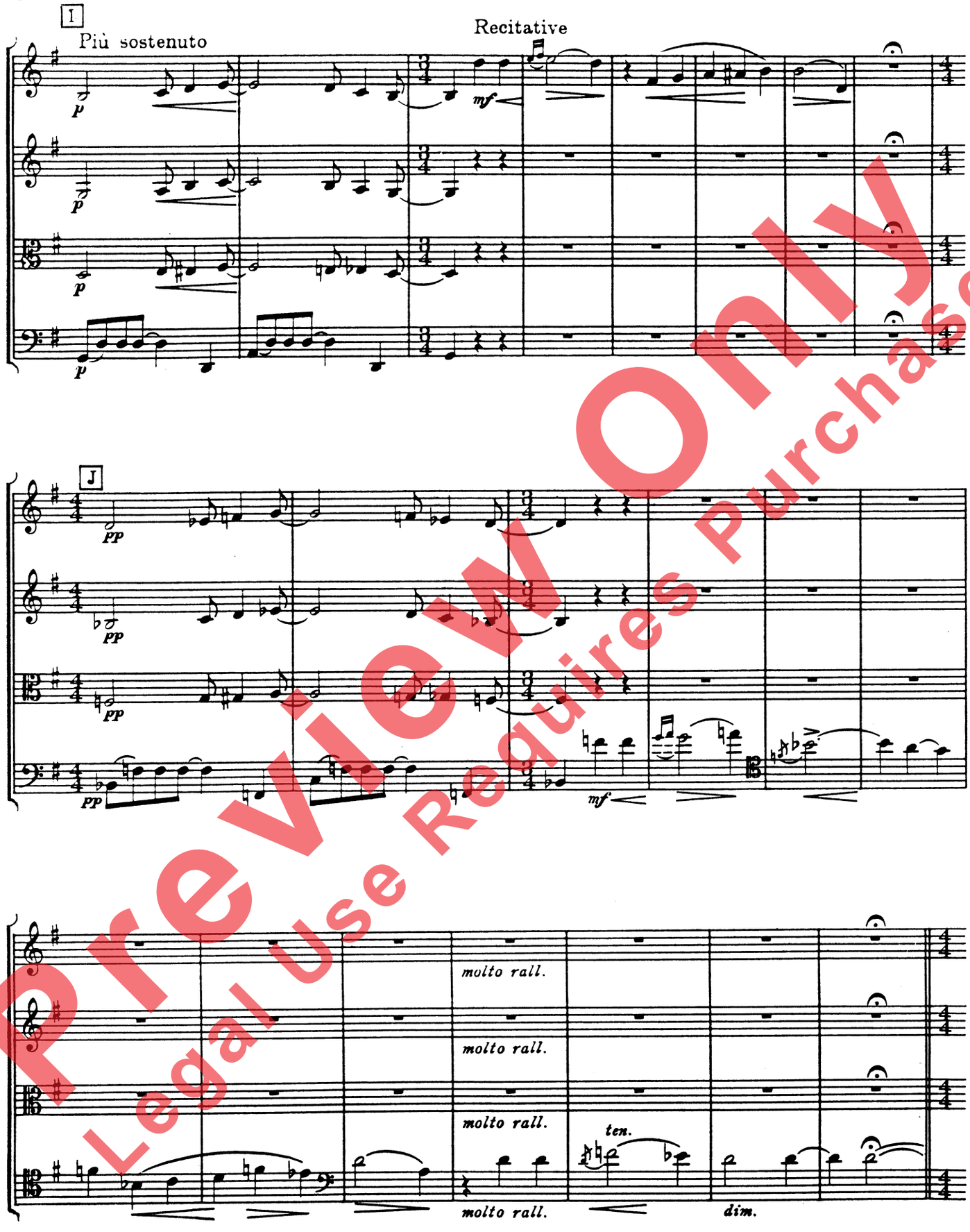

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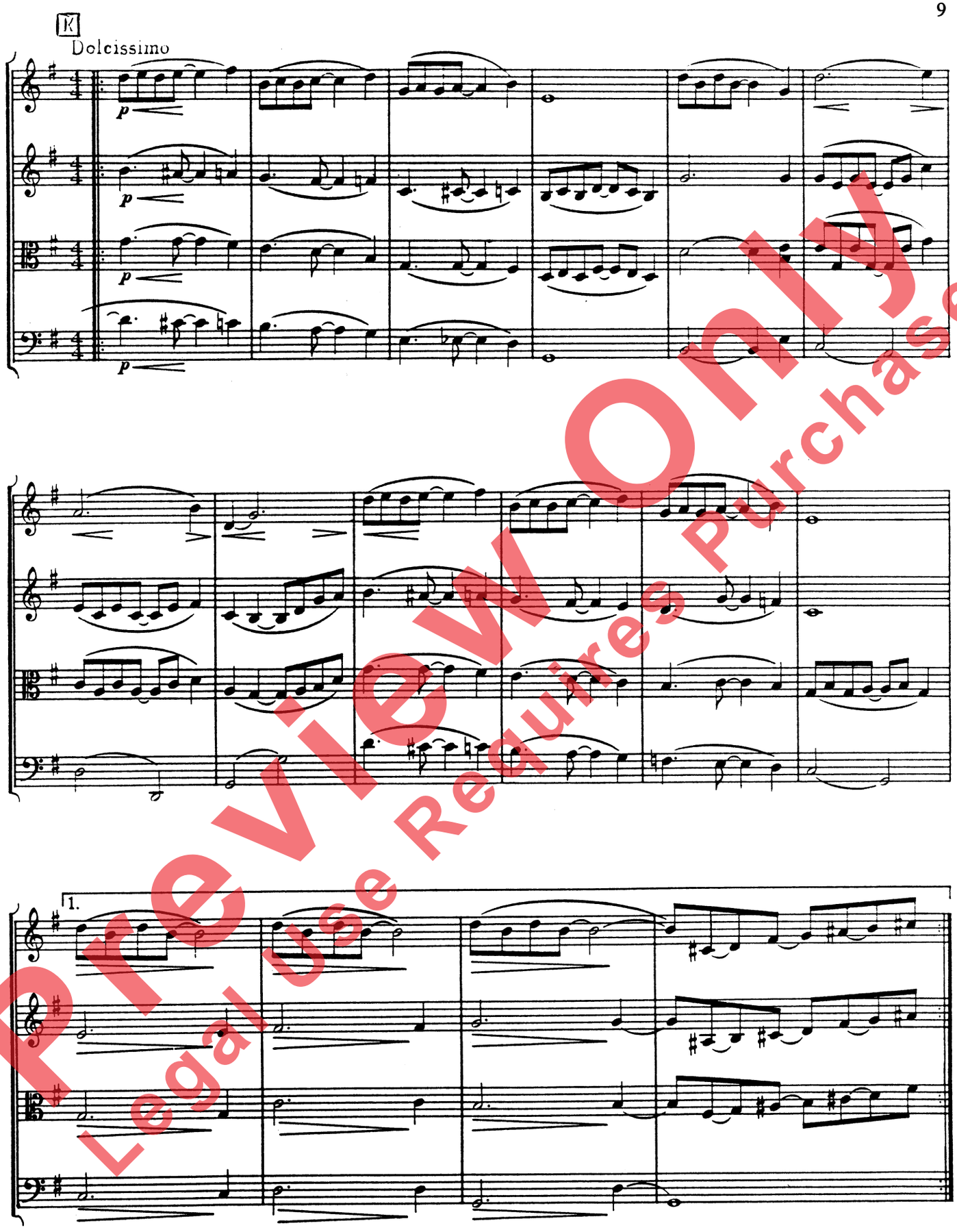

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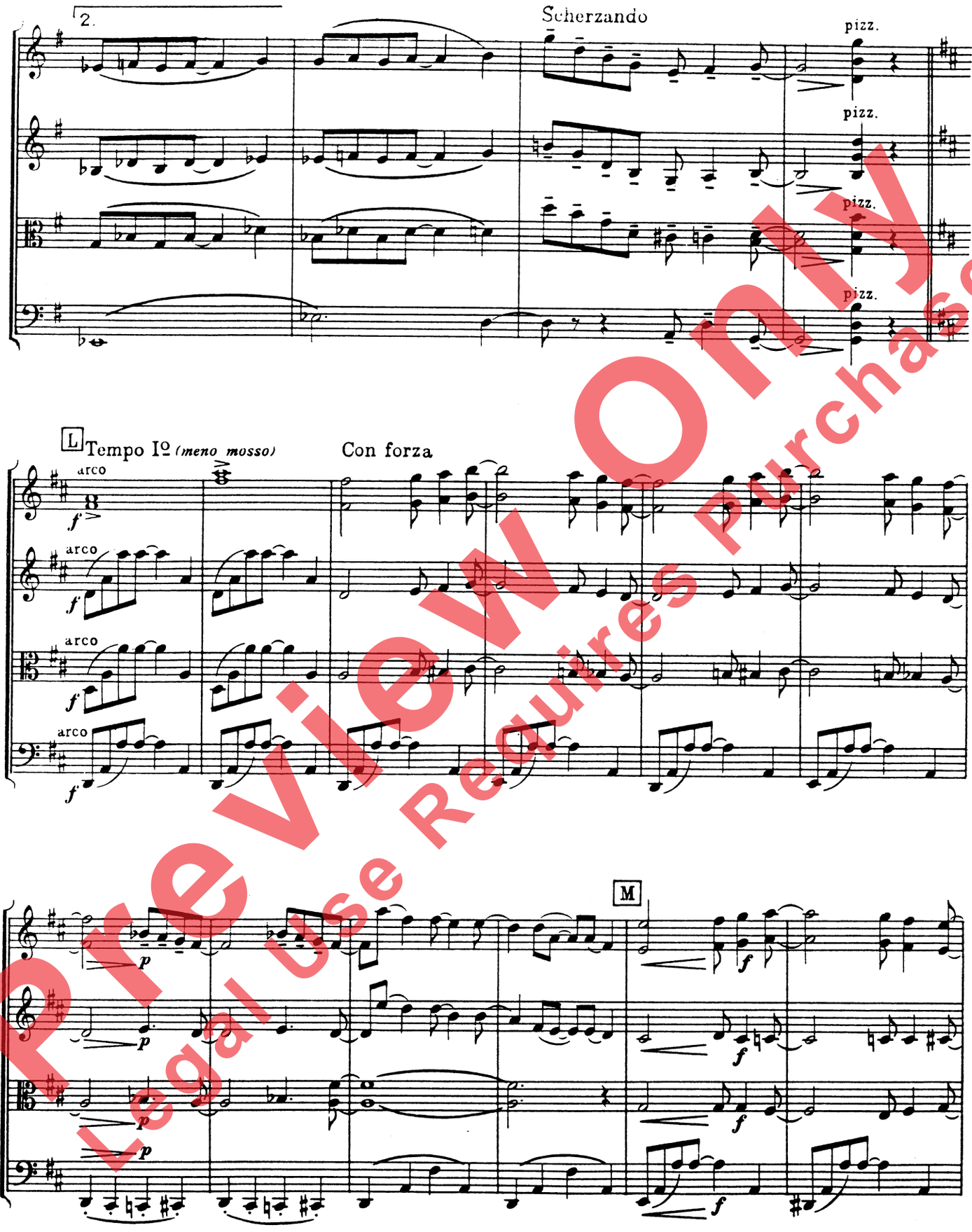

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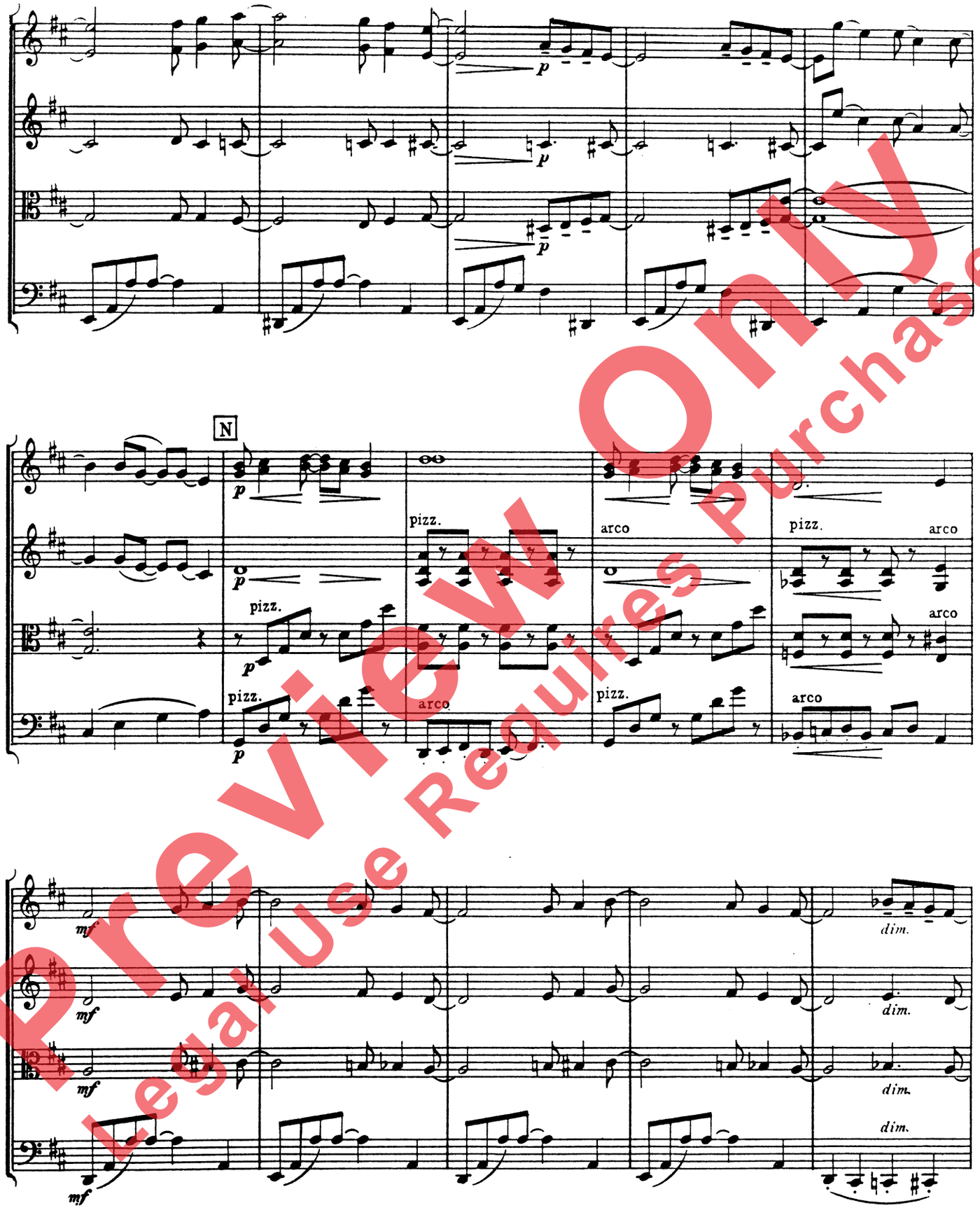

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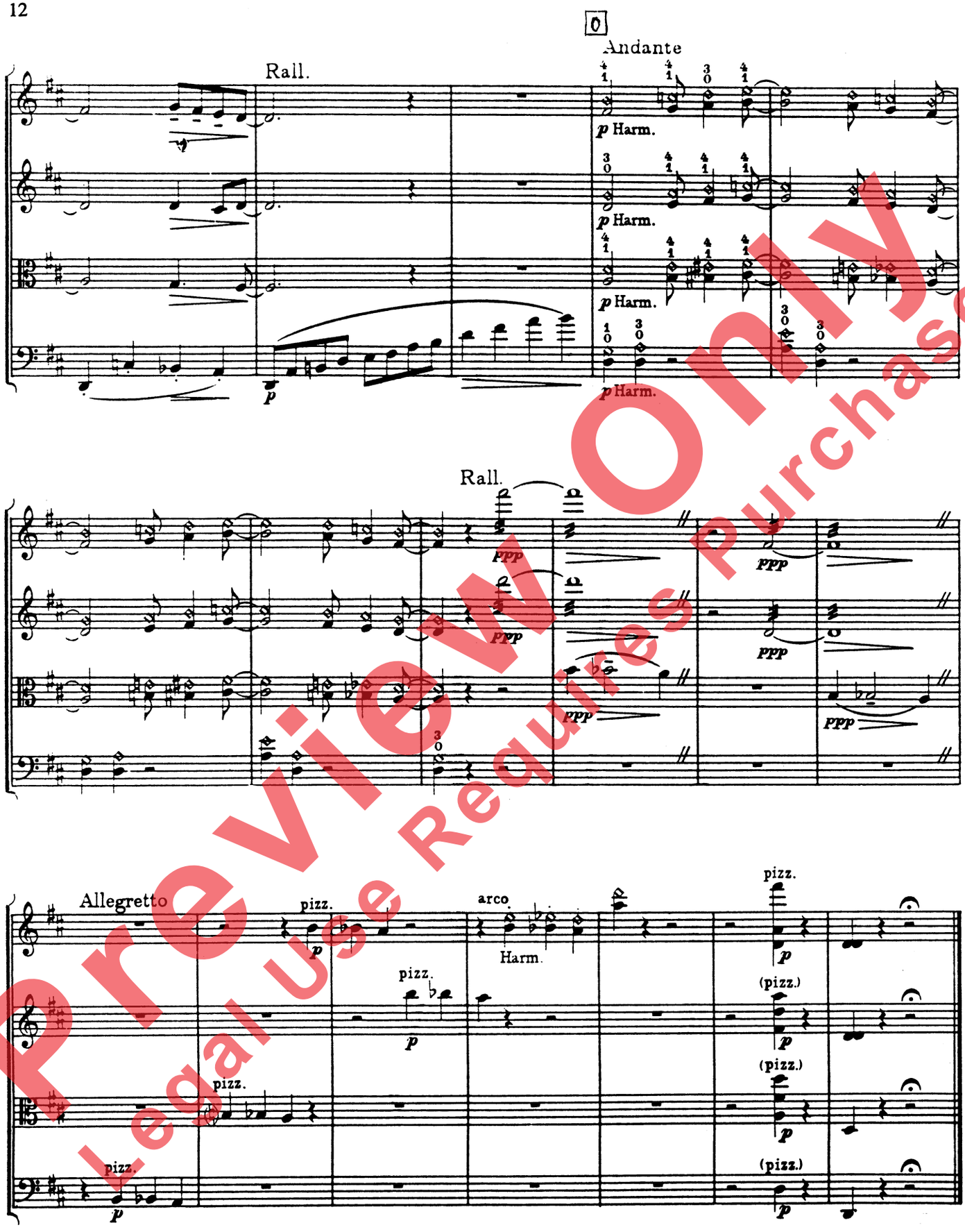

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