WOODWINDLY

Erlkönig (Erl-King)

by Franz Schubert

ARR. HUGH LEVEY

WIND QUINTET

SCORE & PARTS

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WW-039-W5

Erlkönig (The Erl-King)

FRANZ SCHUBERT

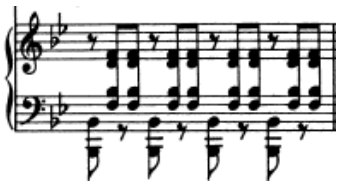
Erlkönig (The Erl-King) is a dramatic poem by the famous German writer and poet, Goethe, written in 1782. Although it has been set to music by many composers, the most well-known is the 1815 setting by Franz Schubert for voice and piano.

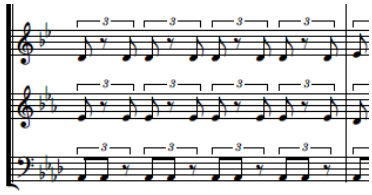
The Erl-King is a challenging work for the singer because they must portray four distinct characters; narrator, father, son and the Erlkönig himself. Schubert's writing is different for each character in terms of pitch, harmony, rhythm, key (major and/or minor), and melodic shape. Singers usually alter the timbre of their voice to emphasise the different roles.

In this arrangement for wind quintet, the arranger takes the timbre differences a step further by assigning the characters to different instruments in the quintet. The flute plays the role of narrator, the clarinet is the anxious son, the horn plays the reassuring (but then worried) father, and the oboe plays the Erlkönig with his beautiful enticing melodies that try to lead the boy astray. The full words in English and German are on the following page, so the players can understand the story that is being told.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

This arrangement remains faithful to Schubert's original melody, structure, and harmony. However, the key has been changed from G minor to F minor to suit the instruments' tessituras. The rhythmic accompaniment is identical except for bars 58-71 where the right hand off-beat triplets have been altered so an element is on the beat. This is to aid good ensemble playing, but can be altered to the original, if all players prefer. So Schubert's figure: becomes:





The tempo marking of 140 is a guide. Between 130 and 152 bpm should be fine.
Duration: approx. 4 minutes, 15 seconds.

Cover images: (1) Der Erlkönig by Ludwig Ferdinand Schnorr von Carolsfeld, circa 1830s, Public domain via Wikimedia Commons. Original painting in Bavarian State Painting Collections, (2) Instruments, Yamaha Corporation, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

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Erlkönig (The Erl-King)

LYRICS BY JOHANN WOLFGANG VON GOETHE

ORIGINAL GERMAN

(Wer reitet so spät durch Nacht und Wind?
Es ist der Vater mit seinem Kind;
Er hat den Knaben wohl in dem Arm,
Er faßt ihn sicher, er hält ihn warm.

Mein Sohn, was birgst du so bang dein Gesicht? –
Siehst, Vater, du den Erlkönig nicht?
Den Erlenkönig mit Kron' und Schweif? –
Mein Sohn, es ist ein Nebelstreif. –

"Du liebes Kind, komm, geh mit mir!
Gar schöne Spiele spiel' ich mit dir;
Manch' bunte Blumen sind an dem Strand,
Meine Mutter hat manch gülden Gewand." –

Mein Vater, mein Vater, und hörest du nicht,
Was Erlenkönig mir leise verspricht? –
Sei ruhig, bleibe ruhig, mein Kind;
In dürren Blättern säuselt der Wind. –

"Willst, feiner Knabe, du mit mir gehn?
Meine Töchter sollen dich warten schön;
Meine Töchter führen den nächtlichen Reihn,
Und wiegen und tanzen und singen dich ein." –

Mein Vater, mein Vater, und siehst du nicht dort
Erlkönigs Töchter am düstern Ort? –
Mein Sohn, mein Sohn, ich seh' es genau:
Es scheinen die alten Weiden so grau. –

"Ich liebe dich, mich reizt deine schöne Gestalt;
Und bist du nicht willig, so brauch' ich Gewalt." –
Mein Vater, mein Vater, jetzt faßt er mich an!
Erlkönig hat mir ein Leids getan! –

Dem Vater grauset's; er reitet geschwind,
Er hält in den Armen das ächzende Kind,
Erreicht den Hof mit Mühe und Not;
In seinen Armen, das Kind war tot.

LITERAL ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Who rides, so late, through night and wind?
It is the father with his child.
He has the boy well in his arm,
He holds him safely, he keeps him warm.

My son, why do you hide your face in fear? –
Father, do you not see the Erl-King?
The Erl-King with crown and cape? –
My son, it is a streak of fog. –

"You dear child, come, go with me!
(Very) beautiful games, I play with you;
Many colourful flowers are on the beach,
My mother has many a golden robe." –

My father, my father, and do you not hear
What the Erl-King quietly promises me? –
Be calm, stay calm, my child;
Through dry leaves, the wind is sighing. –

"Do you, fine boy, want to go with me?
My daughters shall wait on you finely;
My daughters lead the nightly dance,
And rock and dance and sing to bring you in." –

My father, my father, and don't you see there
The Erl-King's daughters in the gloomy place? –
My son, my son, I see it clearly:
There shimmer the old willows so grey. –

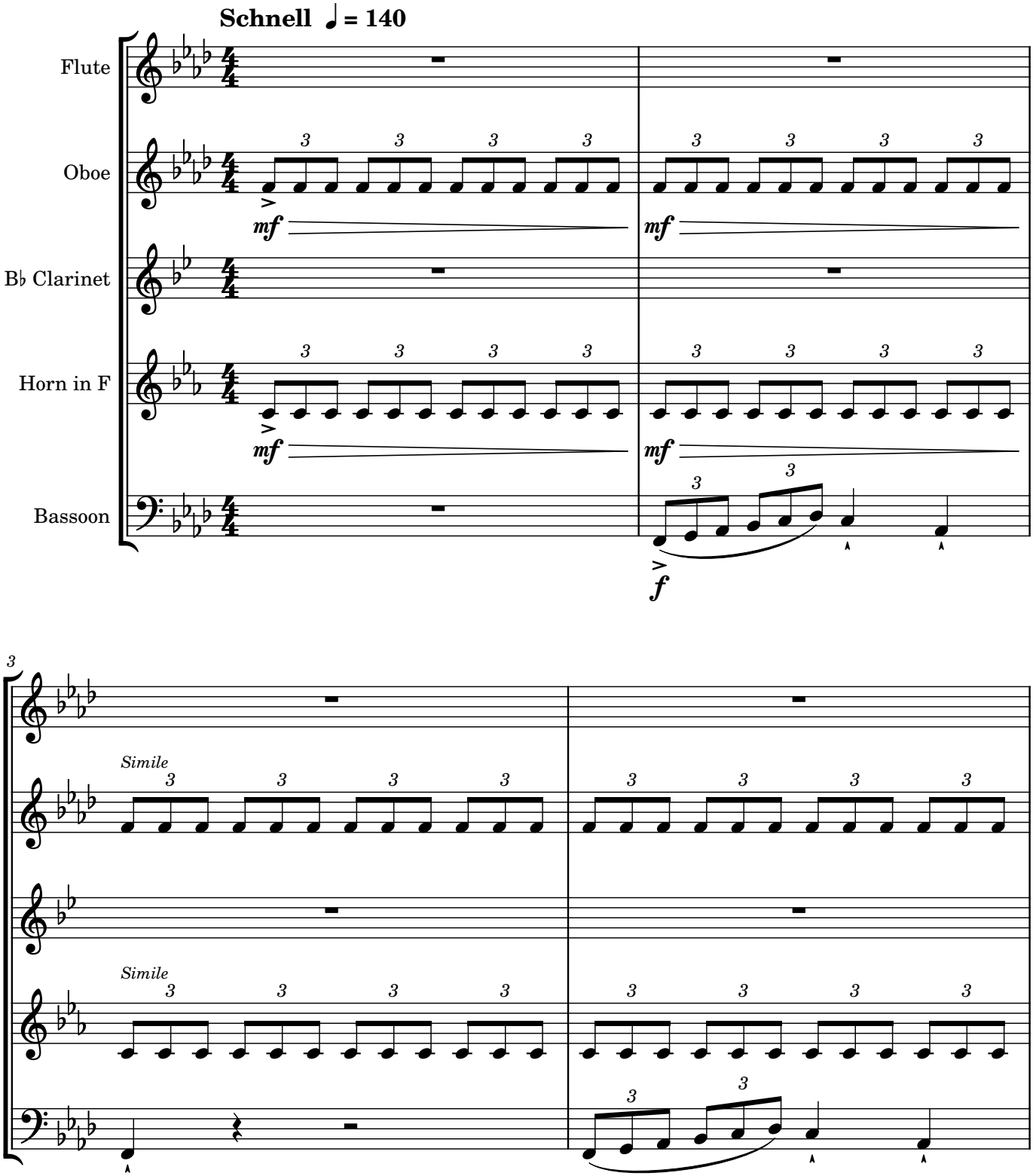
"I love you, your beautiful form excites me;
And if you're not willing, then I will use force." –
My father, my father, he's touching me now!
The Erl-King has done me harm! –

It horrifies the father; he swiftly rides on,
He holds the moaning child in his arms,
Reaches the farm with great difficulty;
In his arms, the child was dead.

Erlkönig (The Erl-King)

Goethe

Franz Schubert (arr. Hugh Levey)



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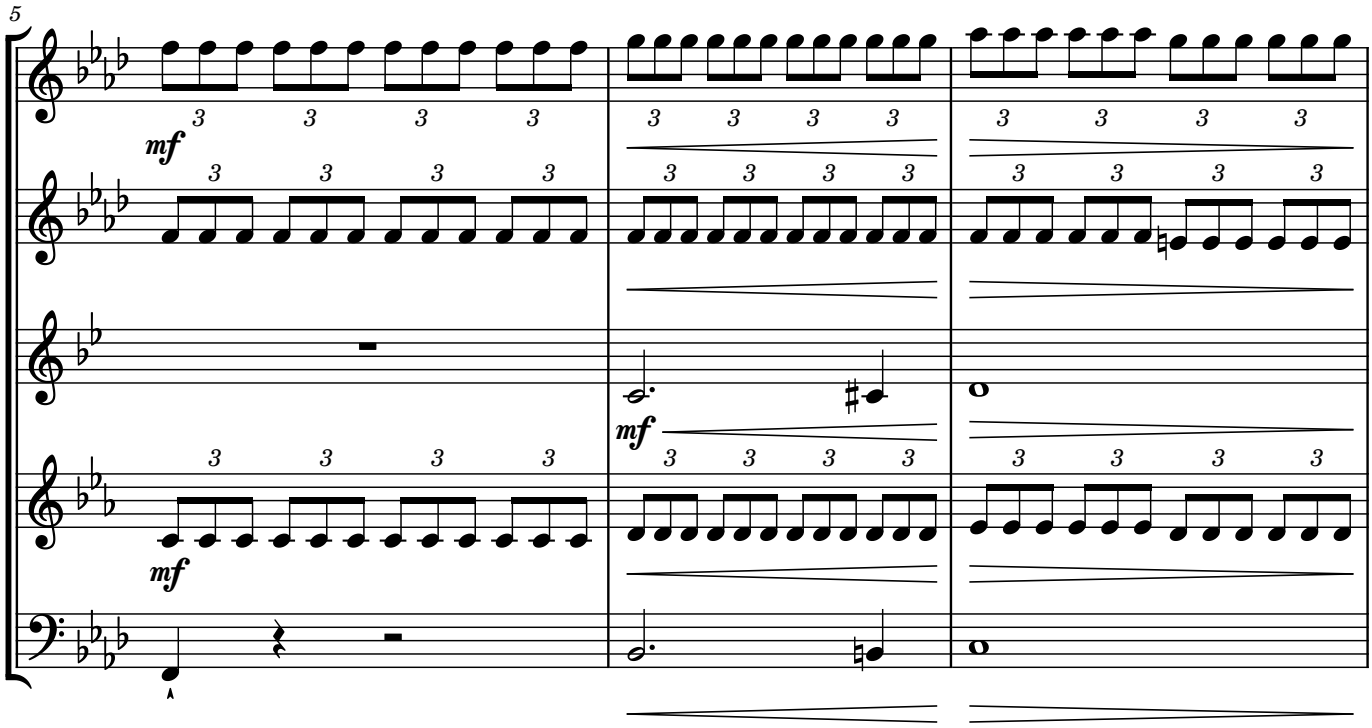

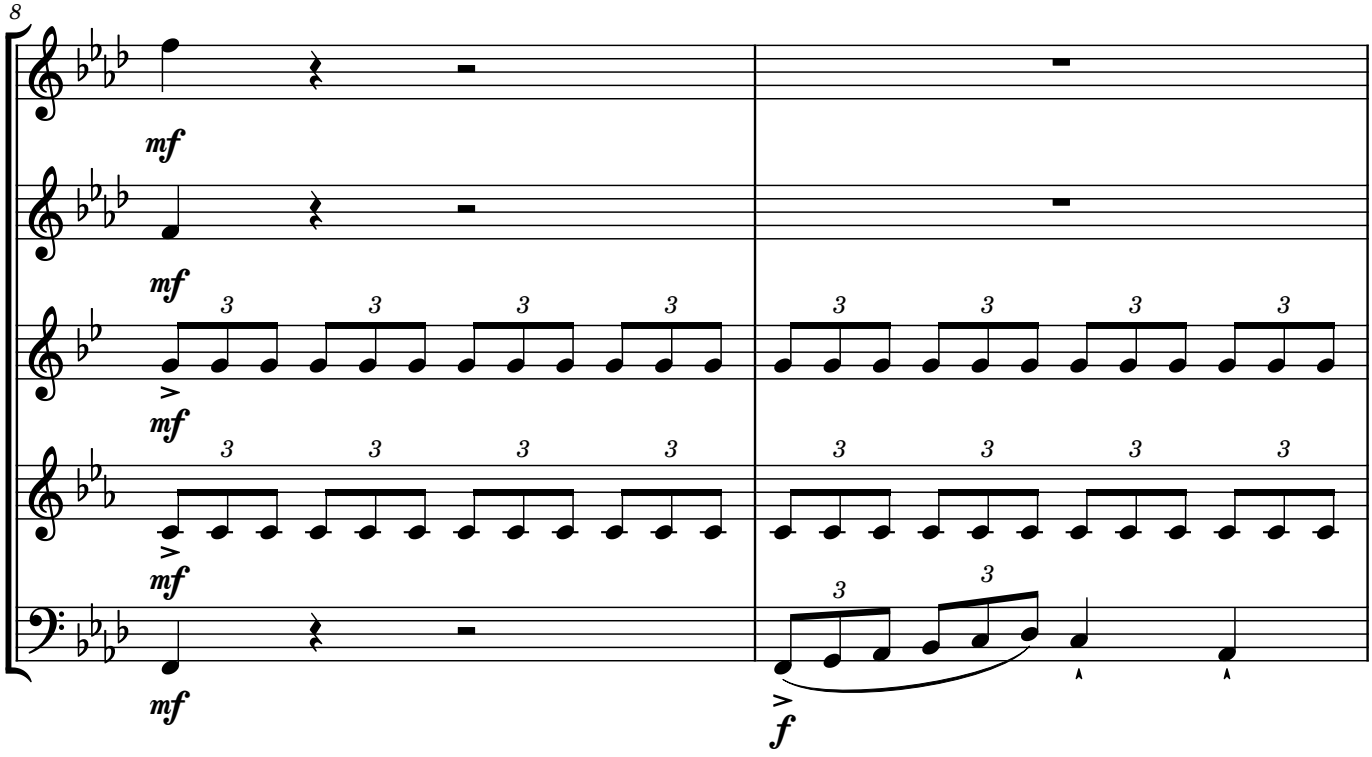

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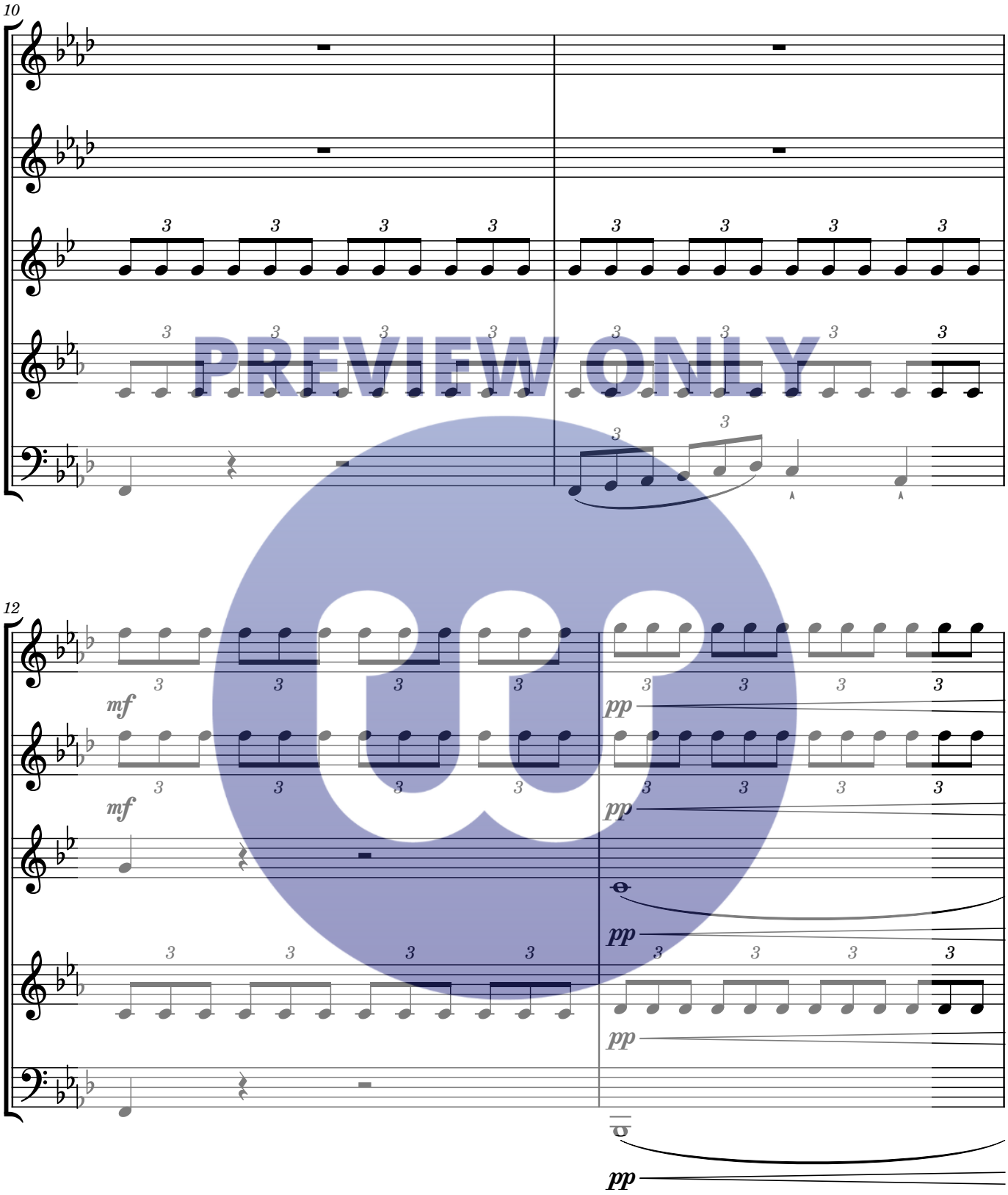

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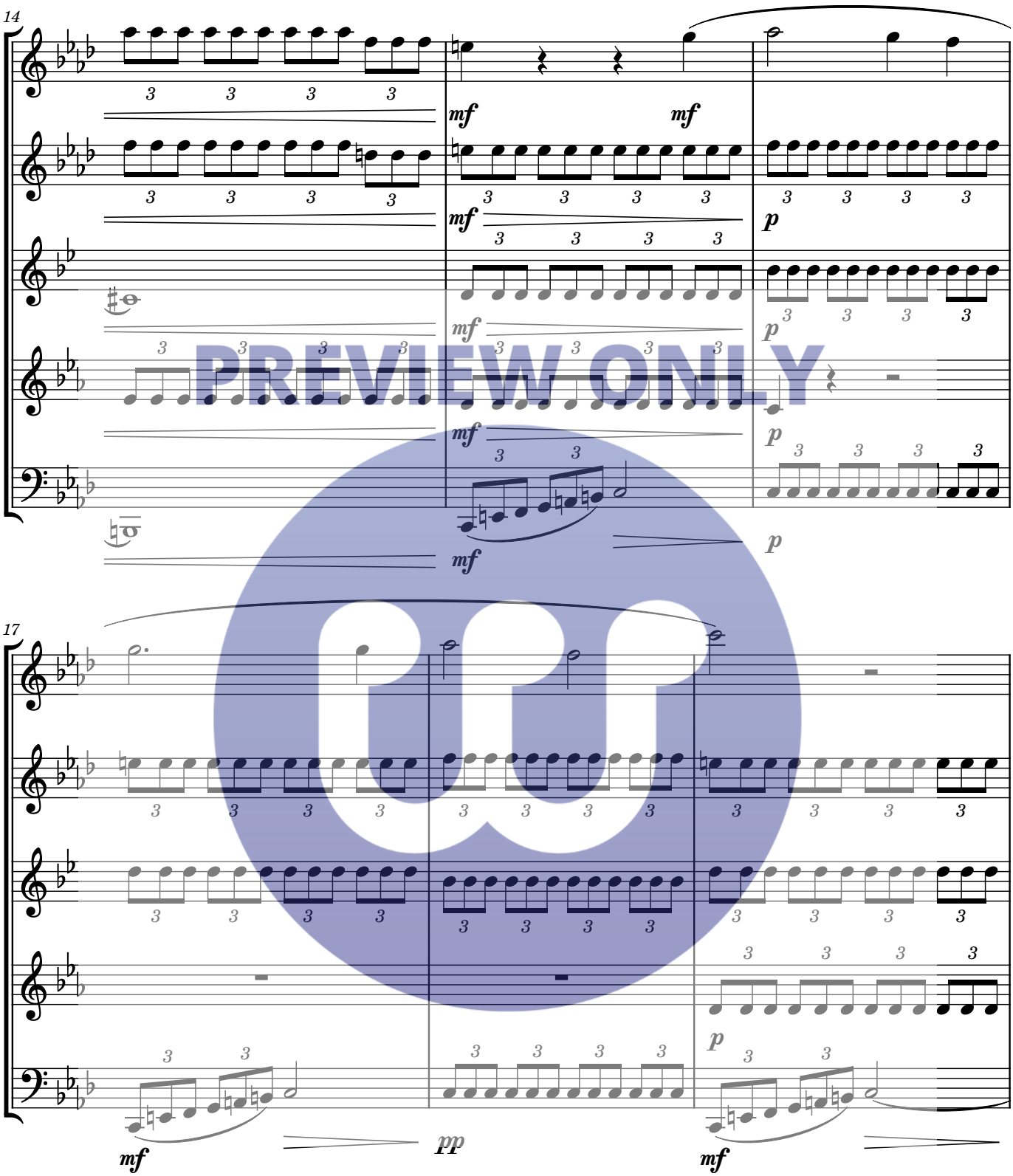

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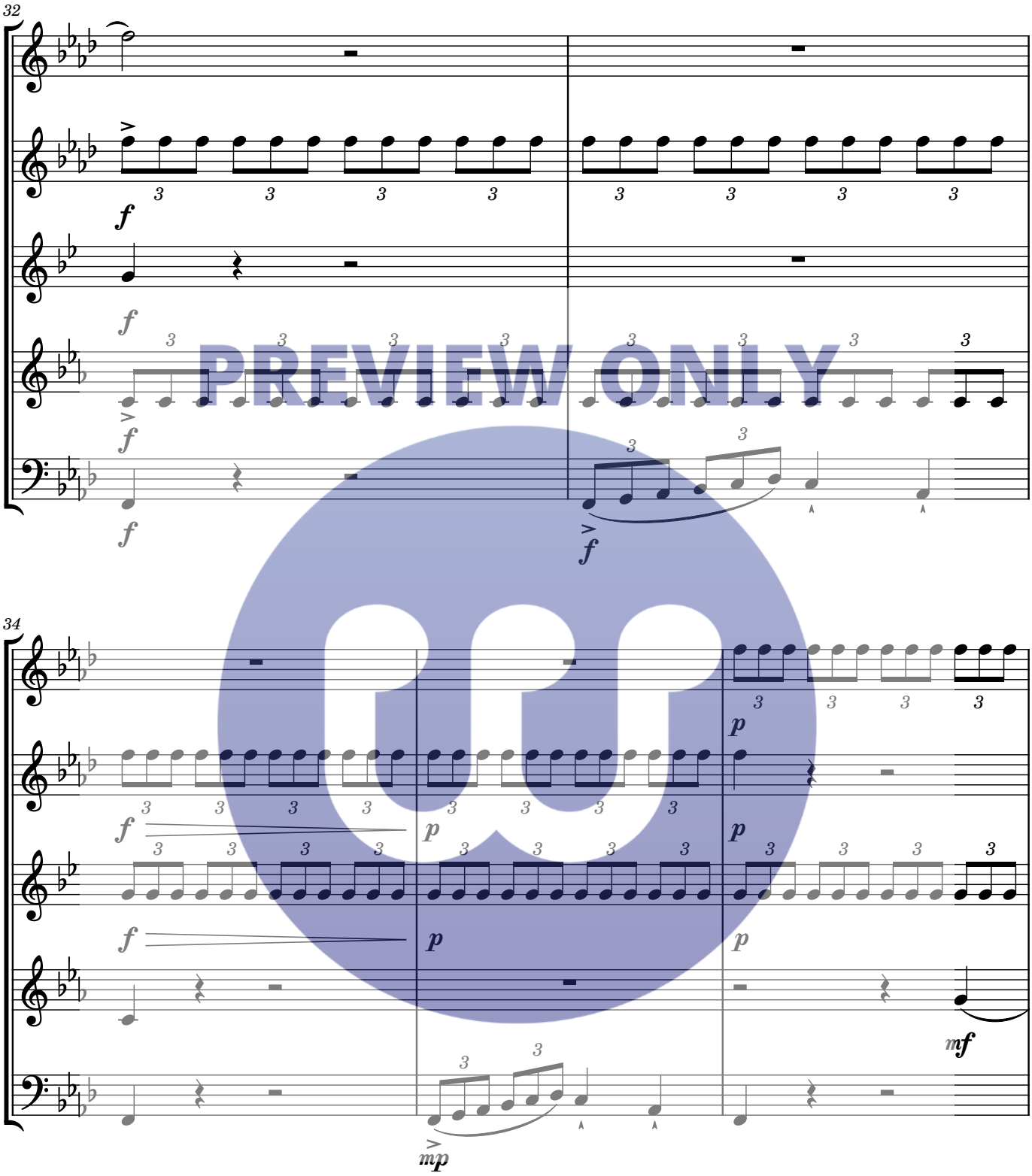

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