JOHN MACKEY

Strange Humors

Saxophone Ensemble with djembe / 2021

Commissioned by the Cedar Ridge High School Saxophone Choir
Arminda Velasquez, director

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Instrumentation

2 Soprano Saxophones
2 Alto Saxophones
2 Tenor Saxophones
2 Baritone Saxophones
1 Bass Saxophone (optional)

Djembe

Program Note

The first version of "Strange Humors" was a student piece for string quartet and djembe that Mackey wrote while pursuing his graduate degree at The Juilliard School. It was later adapted for use by the Parsons Dance Company, with choreography by Robert Battle, and subsequently added to the repertoire of the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The piece represents a merging of musical cultures – the modal melodies and syncopated rhythms of middle Eastern music with the percussive accompaniment of African drumming, all – to quote Mackey – "passed lovingly through the brain of a very white kid from Ohio."

At the heart of "Strange Humors" lies the pulse of the djembe, which remains from the original version. The djembe, an hourglass-shaped drum played with bare hands, is a major part of the customs of west African countries such as Mali and Guinea, where djembe ensembles accompany many functional celebrations of society.

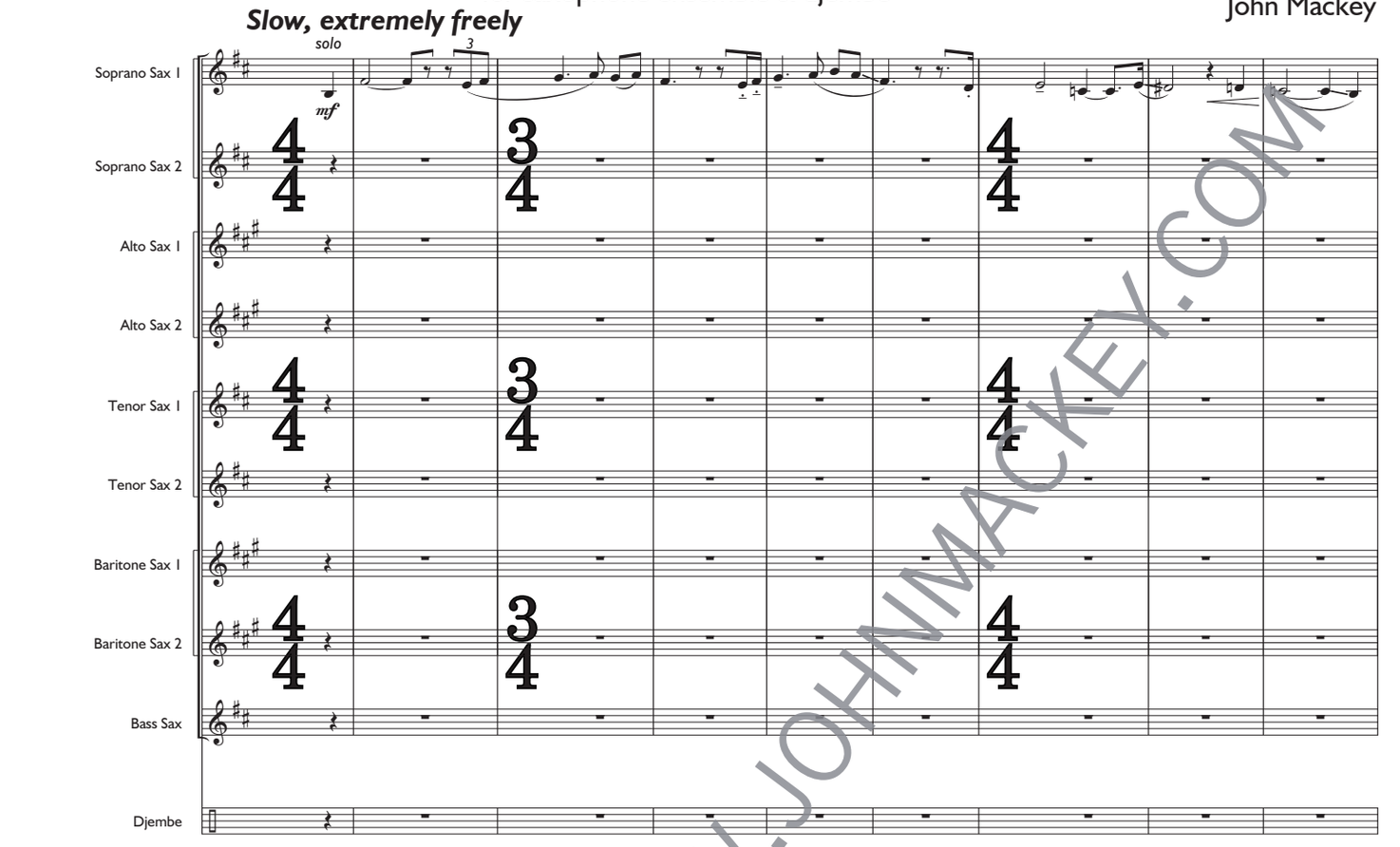
The piece opens with a sultry soprano saxophone, a line laced with Phrygian influence representing the "typical" melodies of the most northeastern parts of the African continent — most notably Egypt, but also parts of the Arabian peninsula. Later, the other saxophones emulate the snaking lines of the soprano. The groove of the djembe combined with the quirky rhythms throughout leave an impression that lingers in the listener's mind long after its conclusion.

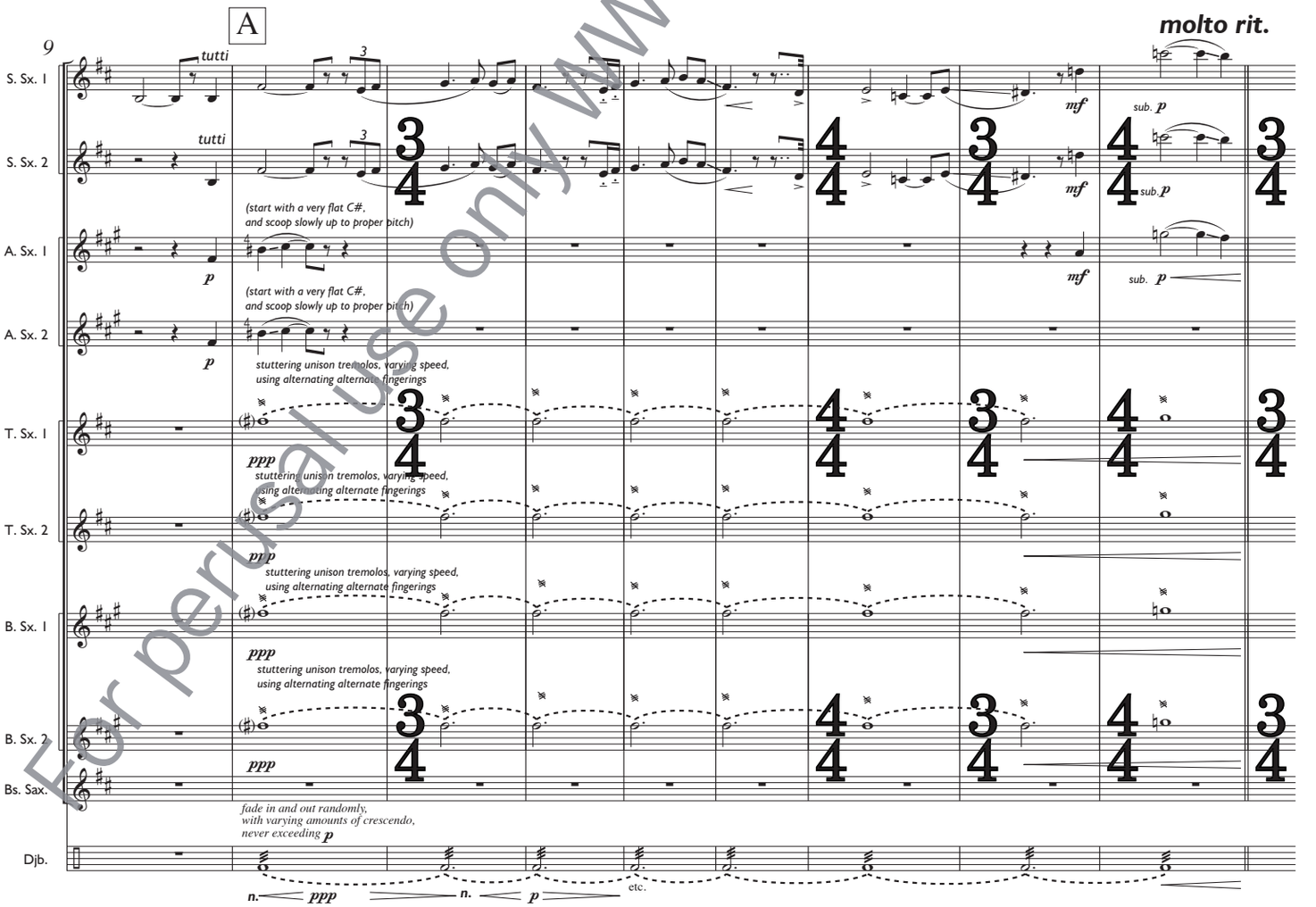
Program note by Jacob Wallace
Please credit Jacob Wallace when reproducing or excerpting this program note

Strange Humors

for saxophone ensemble & djembe

John Mackey





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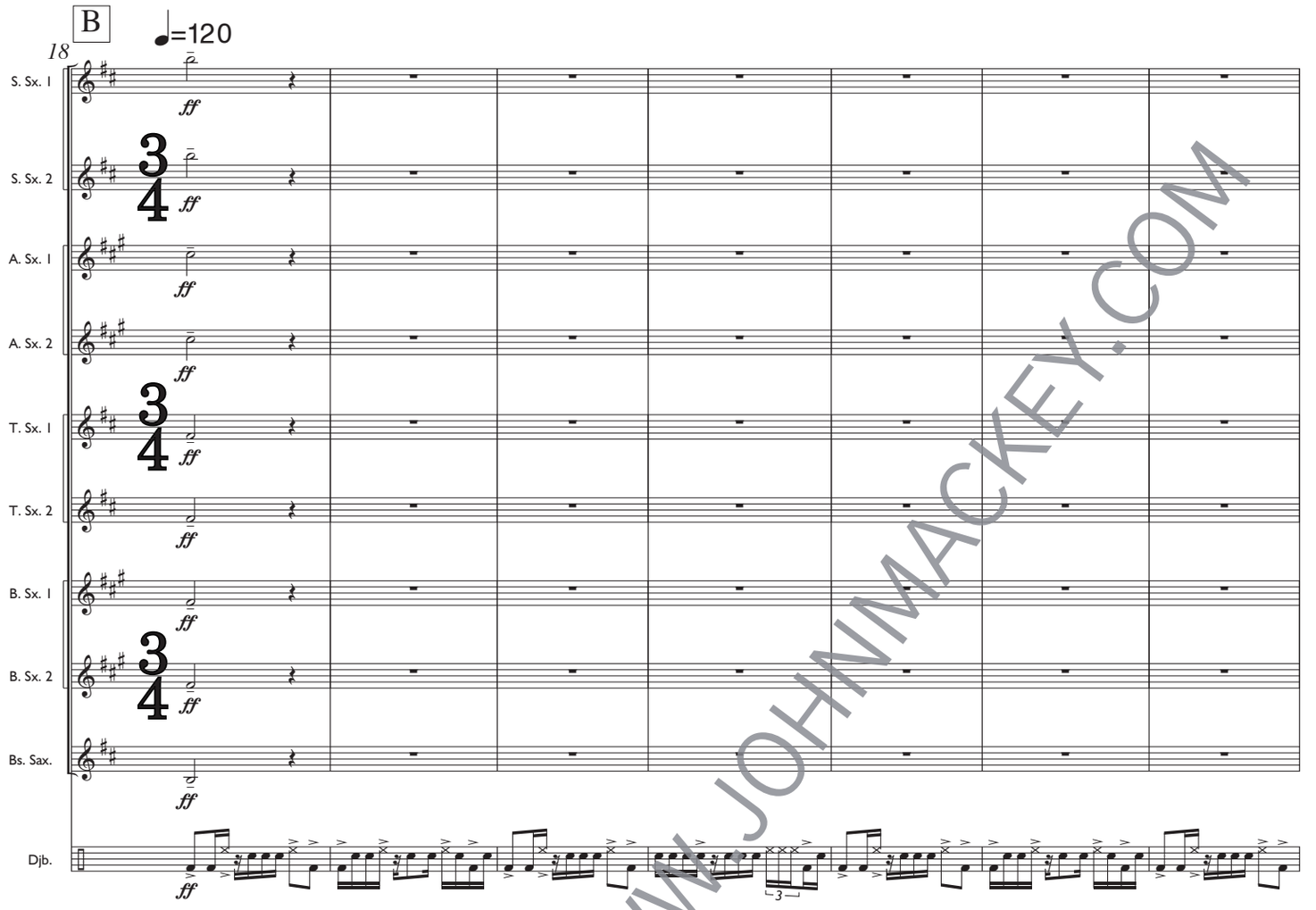

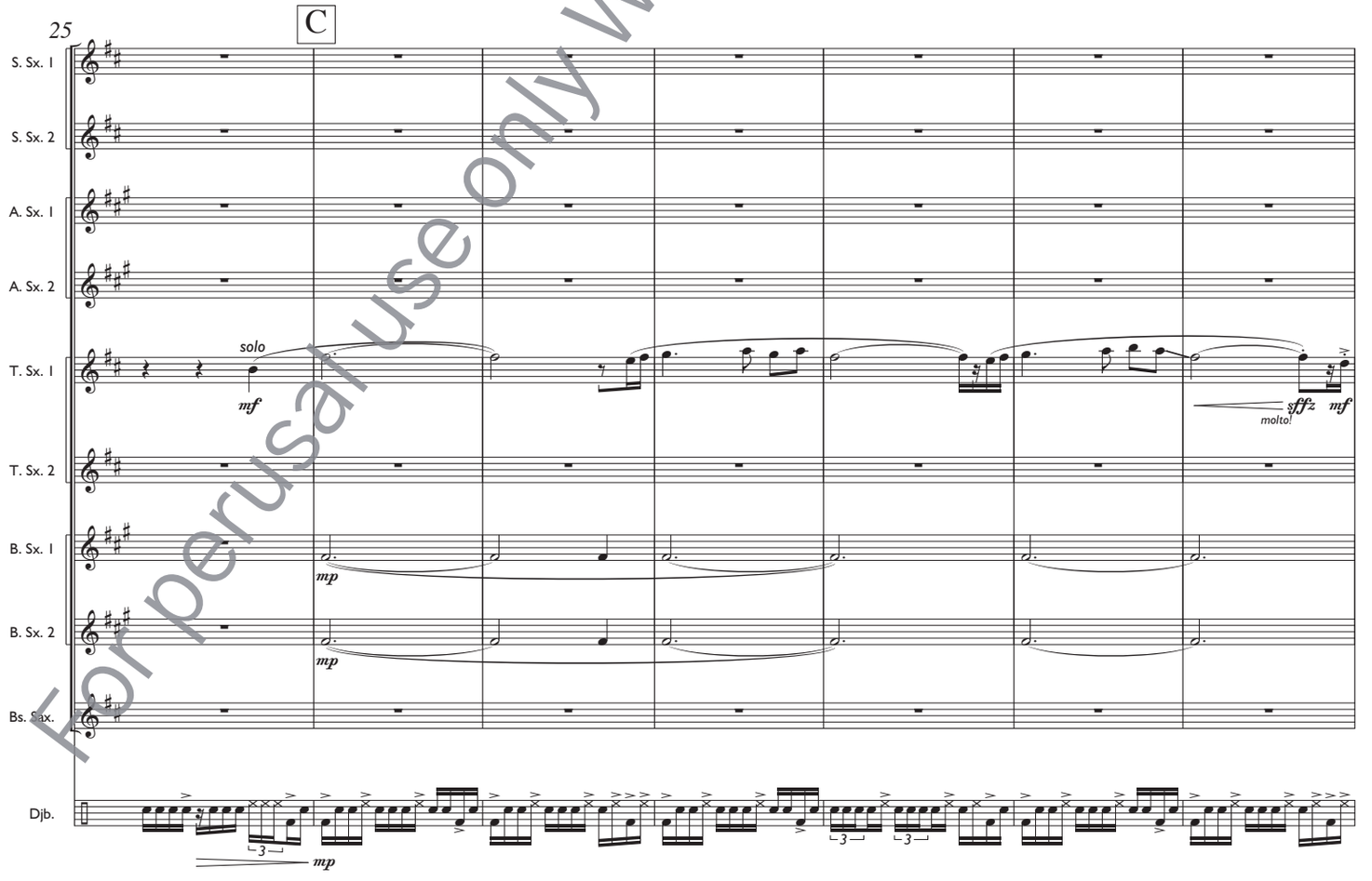

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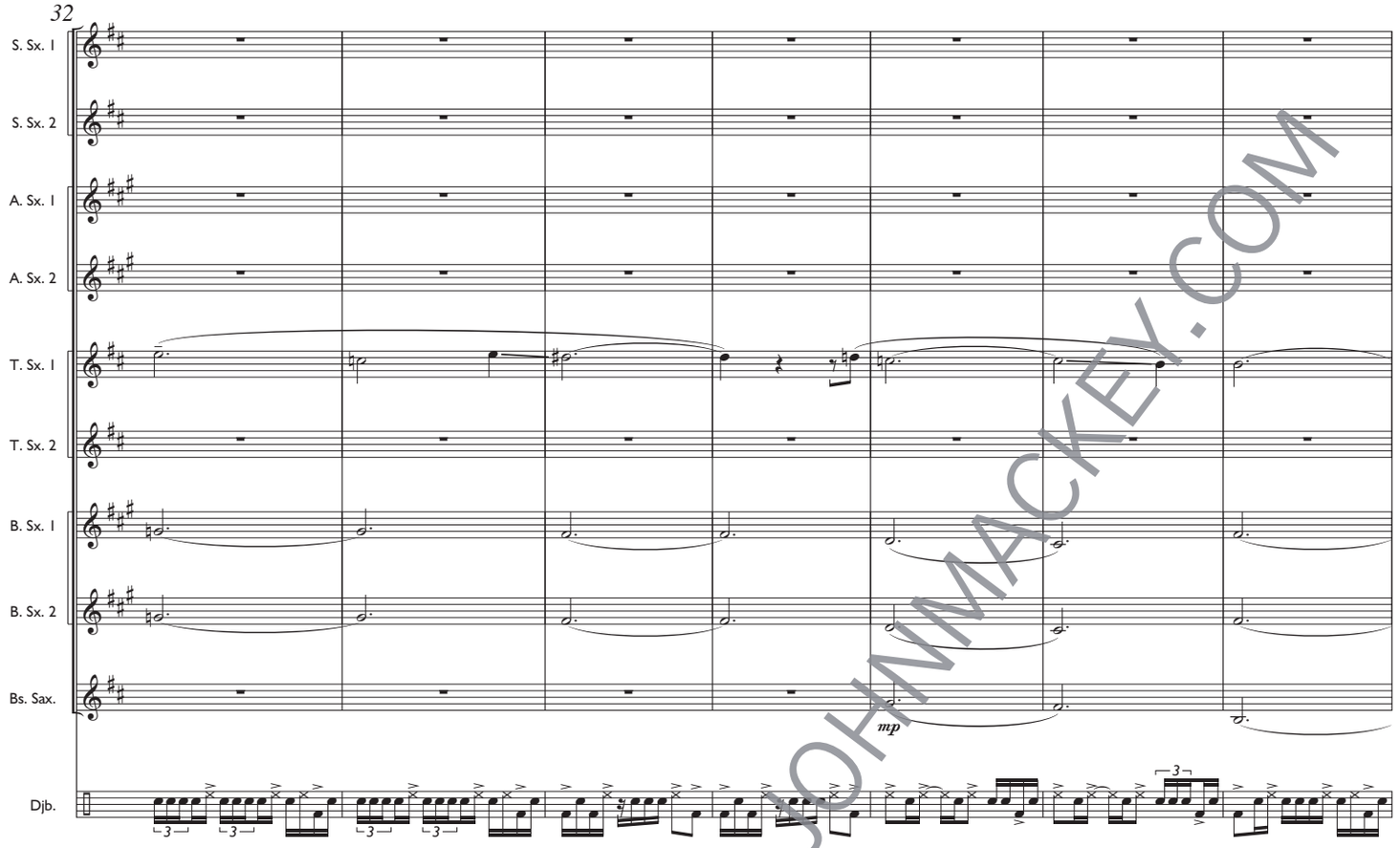

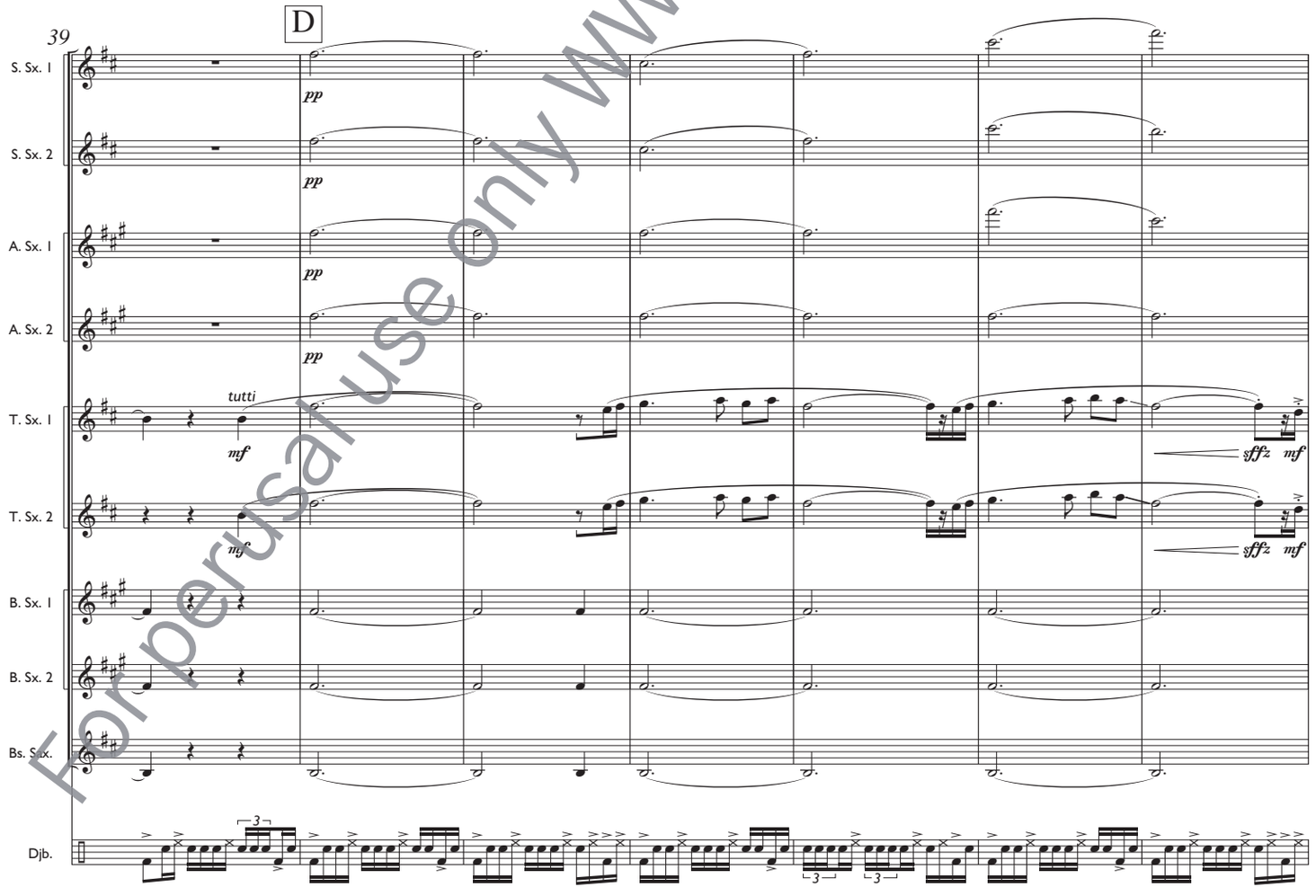

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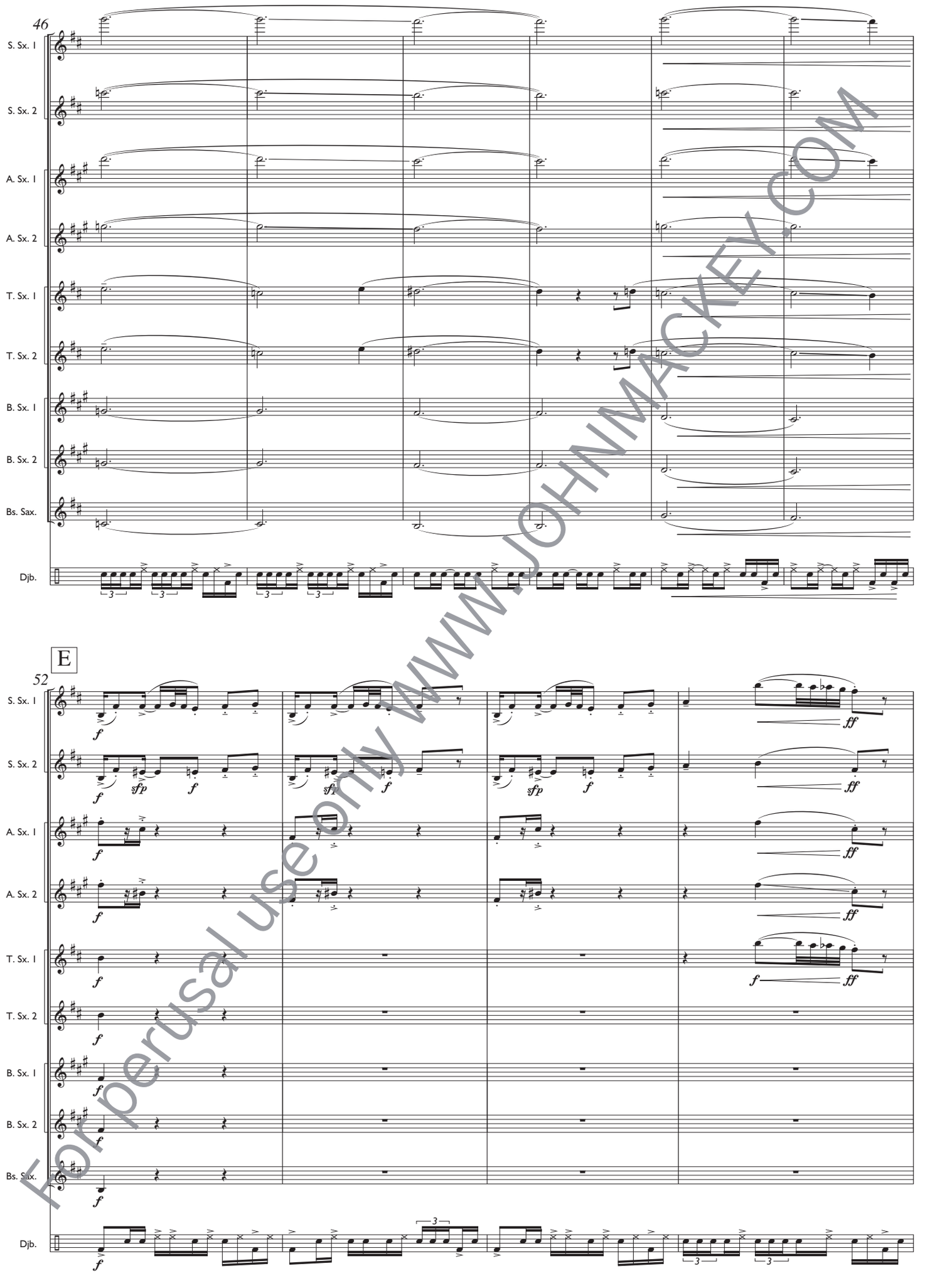

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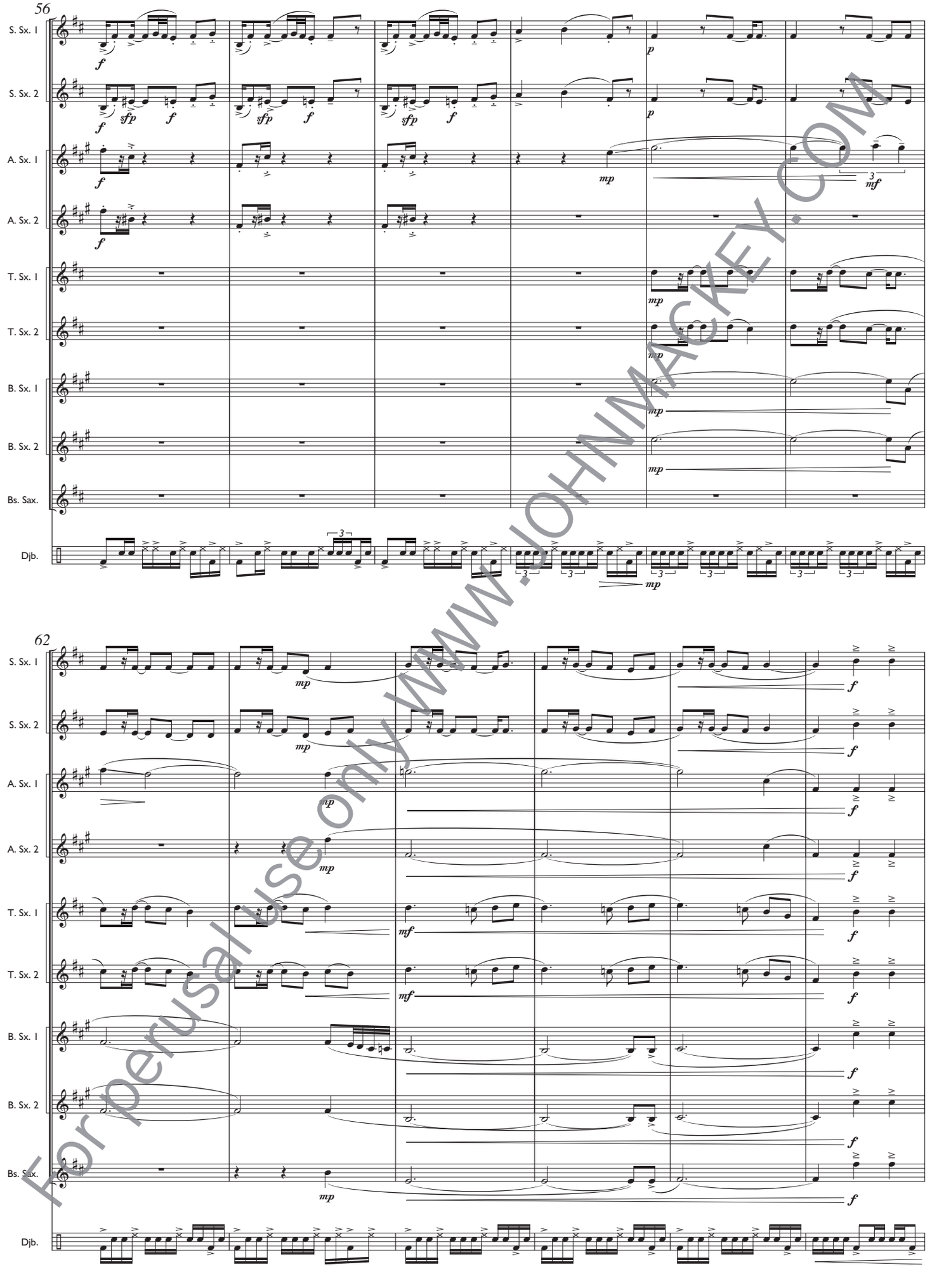

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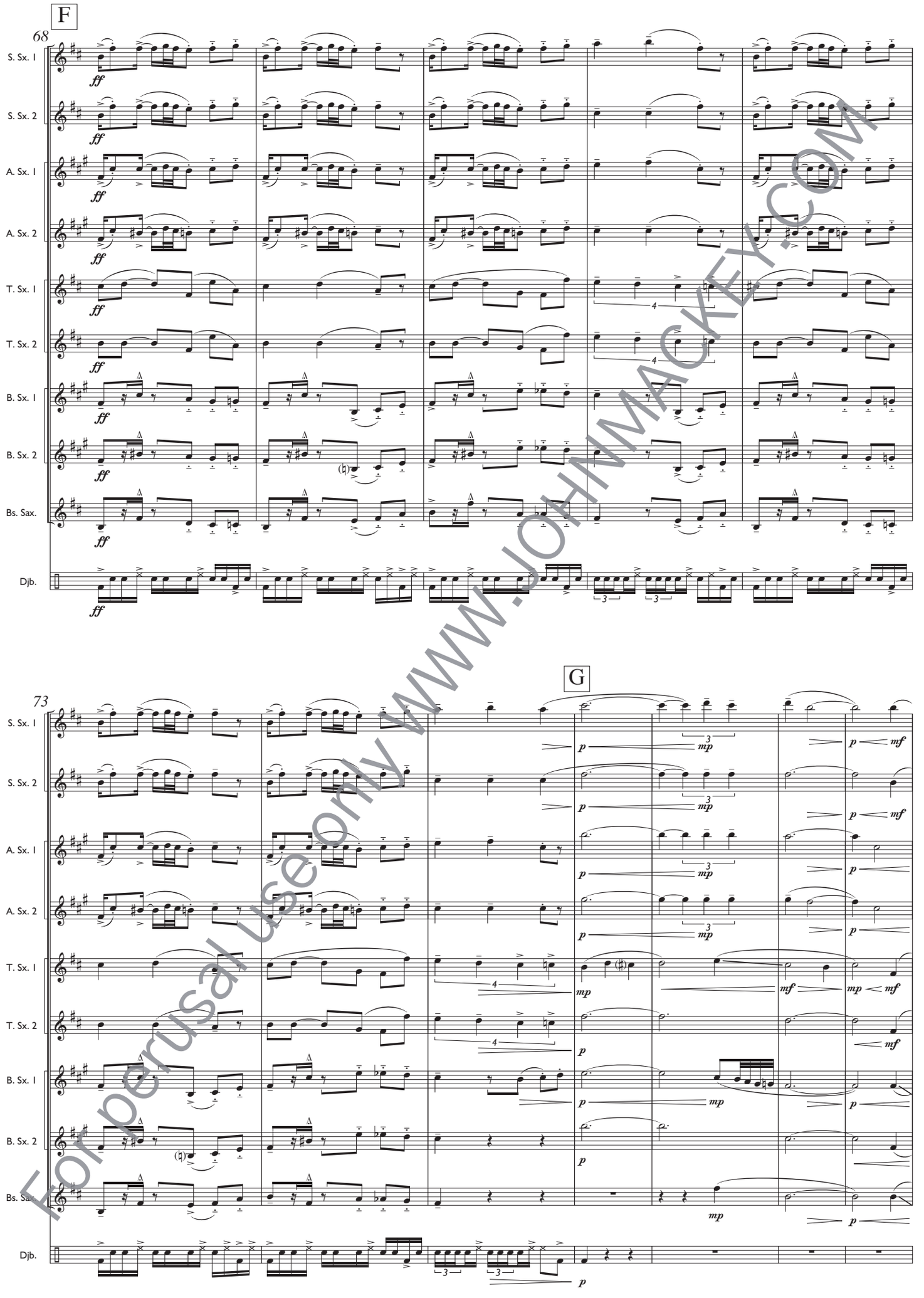

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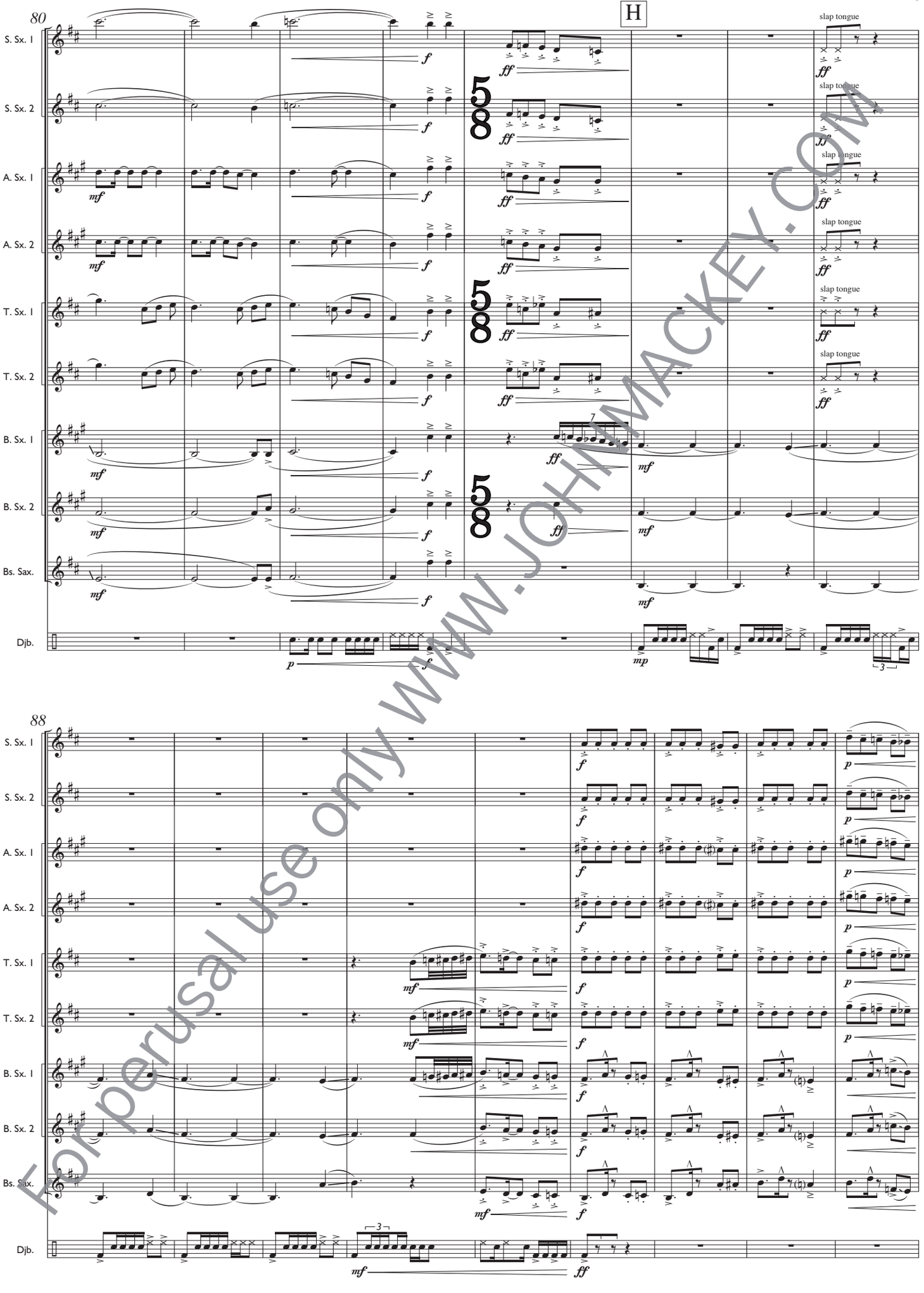

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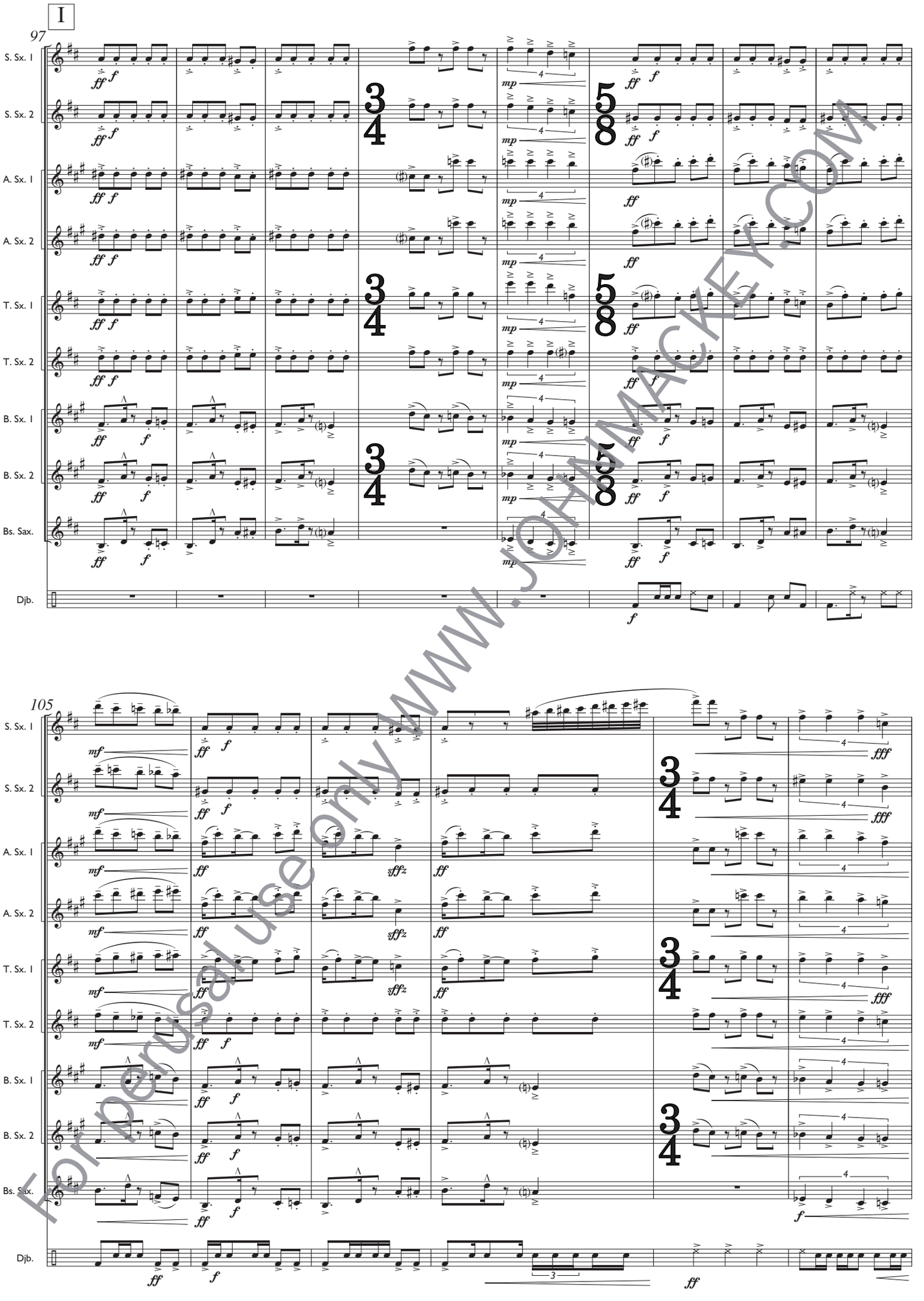

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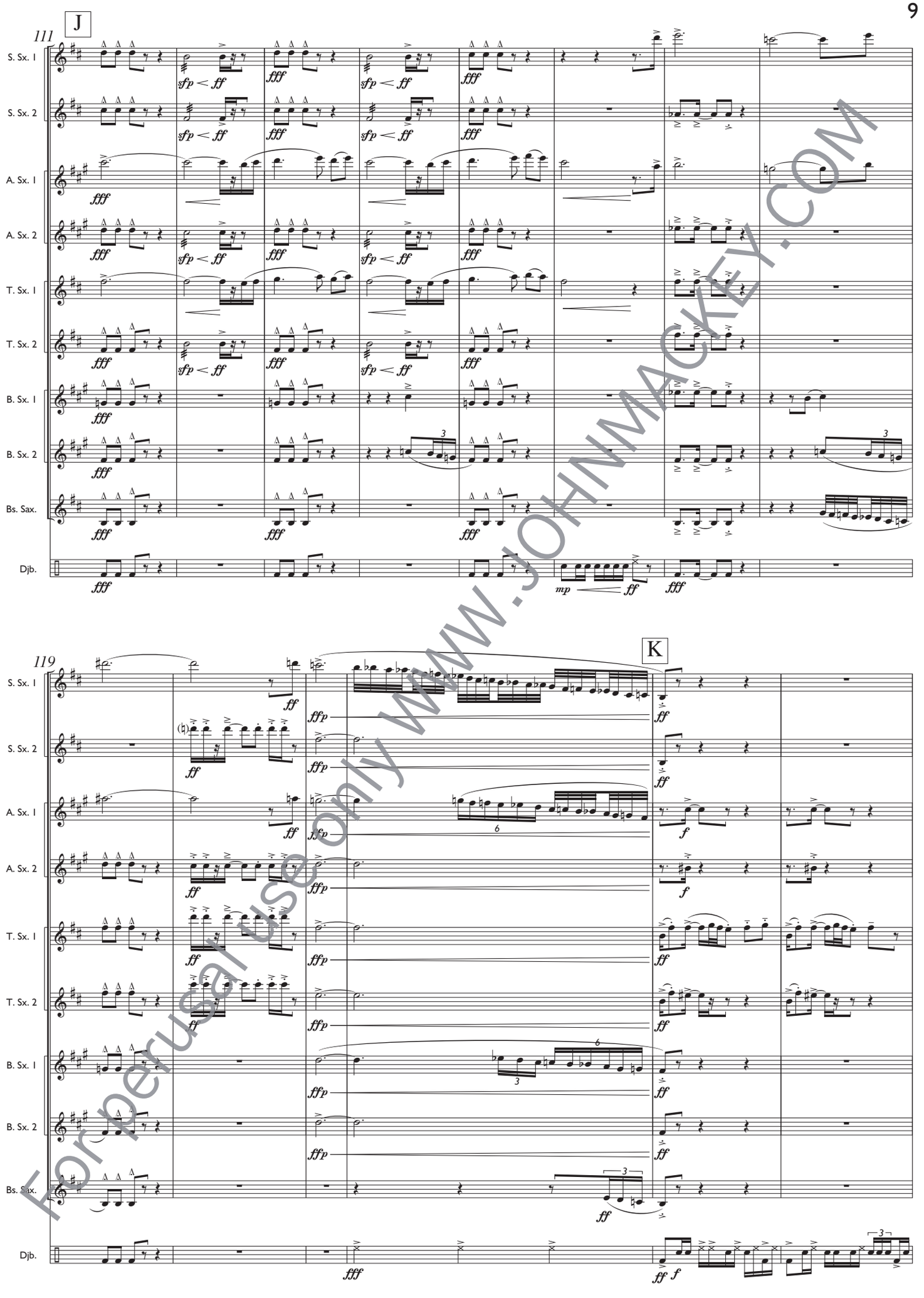

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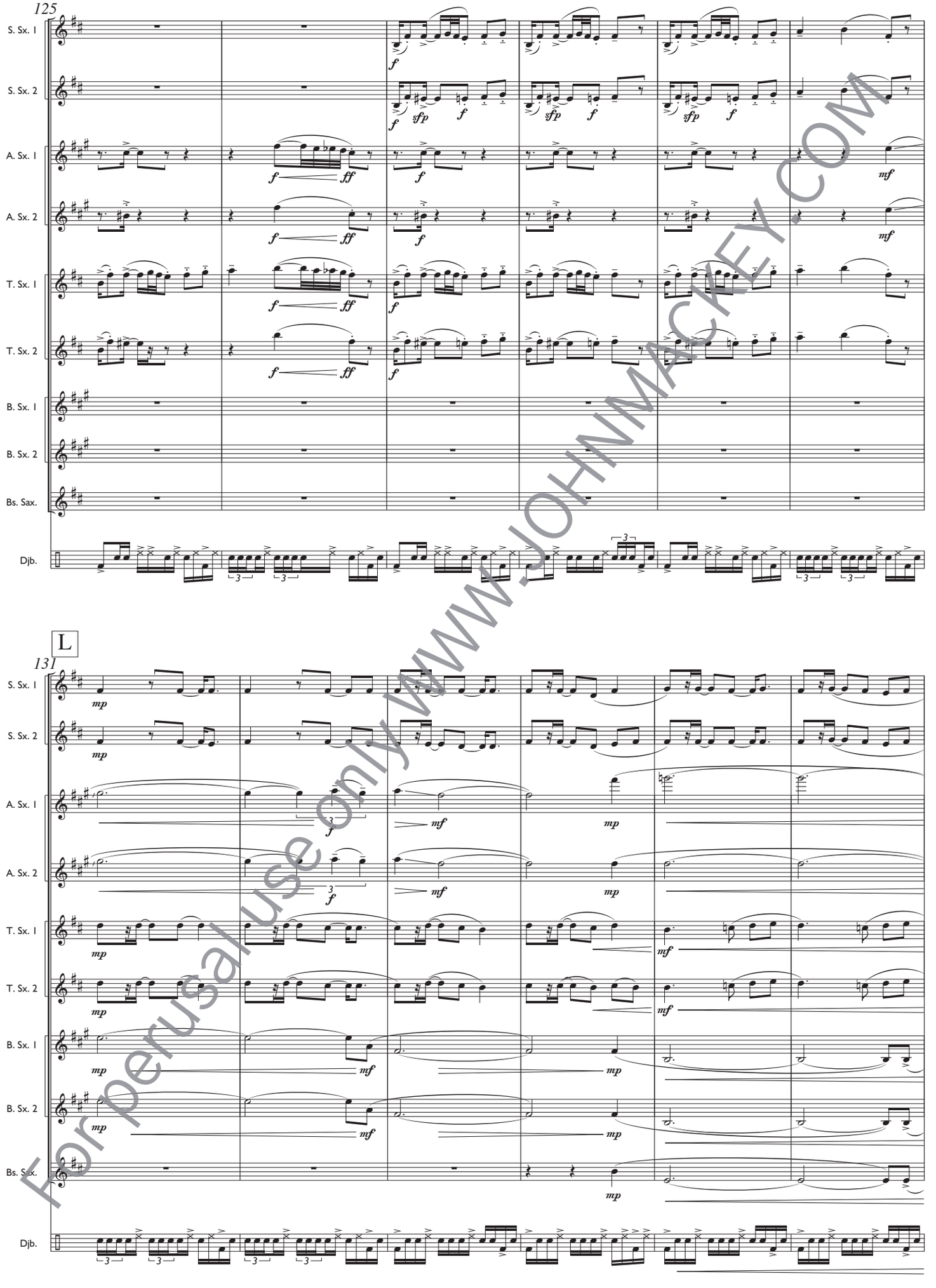

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M

137

S. Sx. 1
S. Sx. 2
A. Sx. 1
A. Sx. 2
T. Sx. 1
T. Sx. 2
B. Sx. 1
B. Sx. 2
Bs. Sax.
Djb.

143

deadstroke

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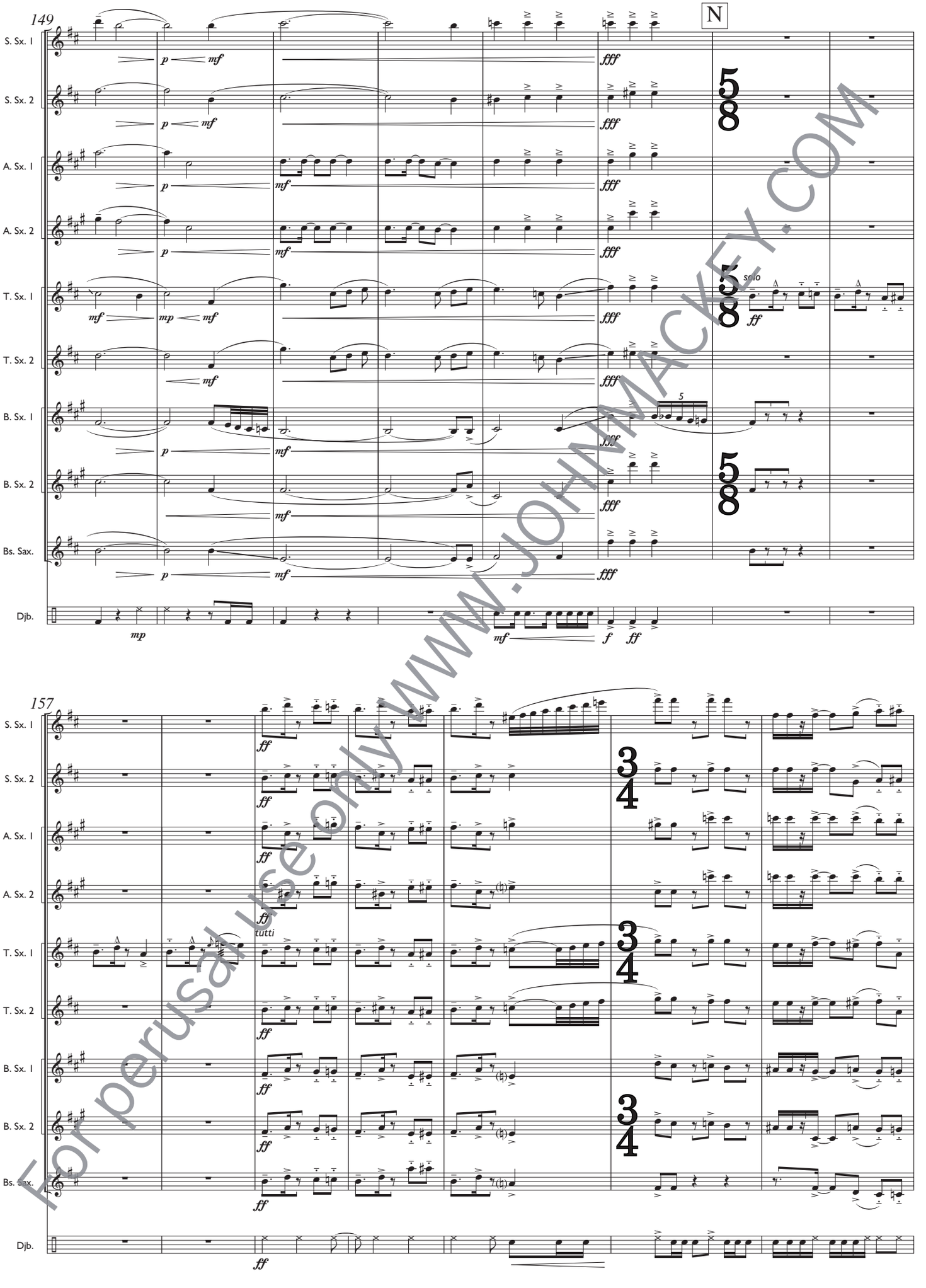

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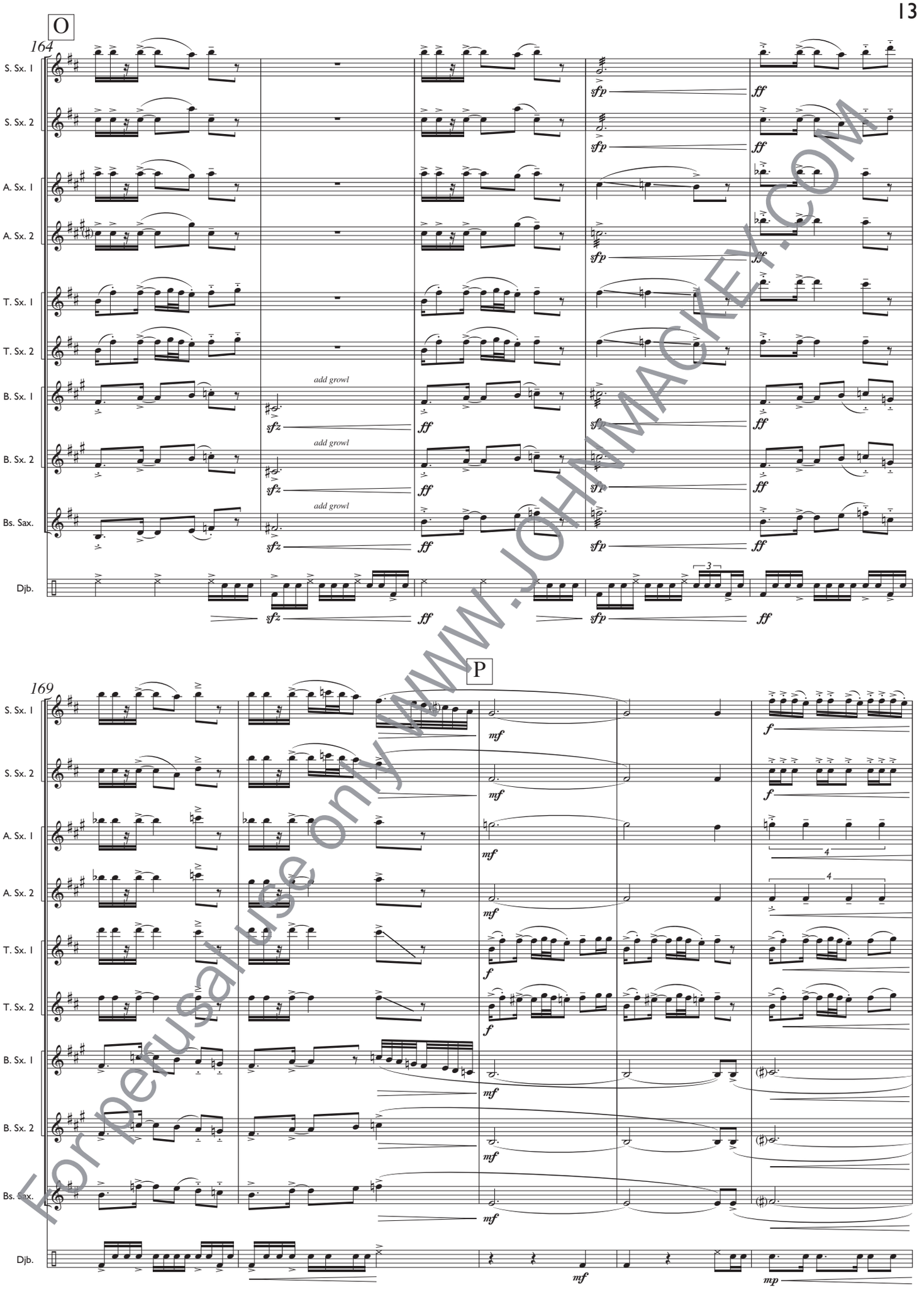

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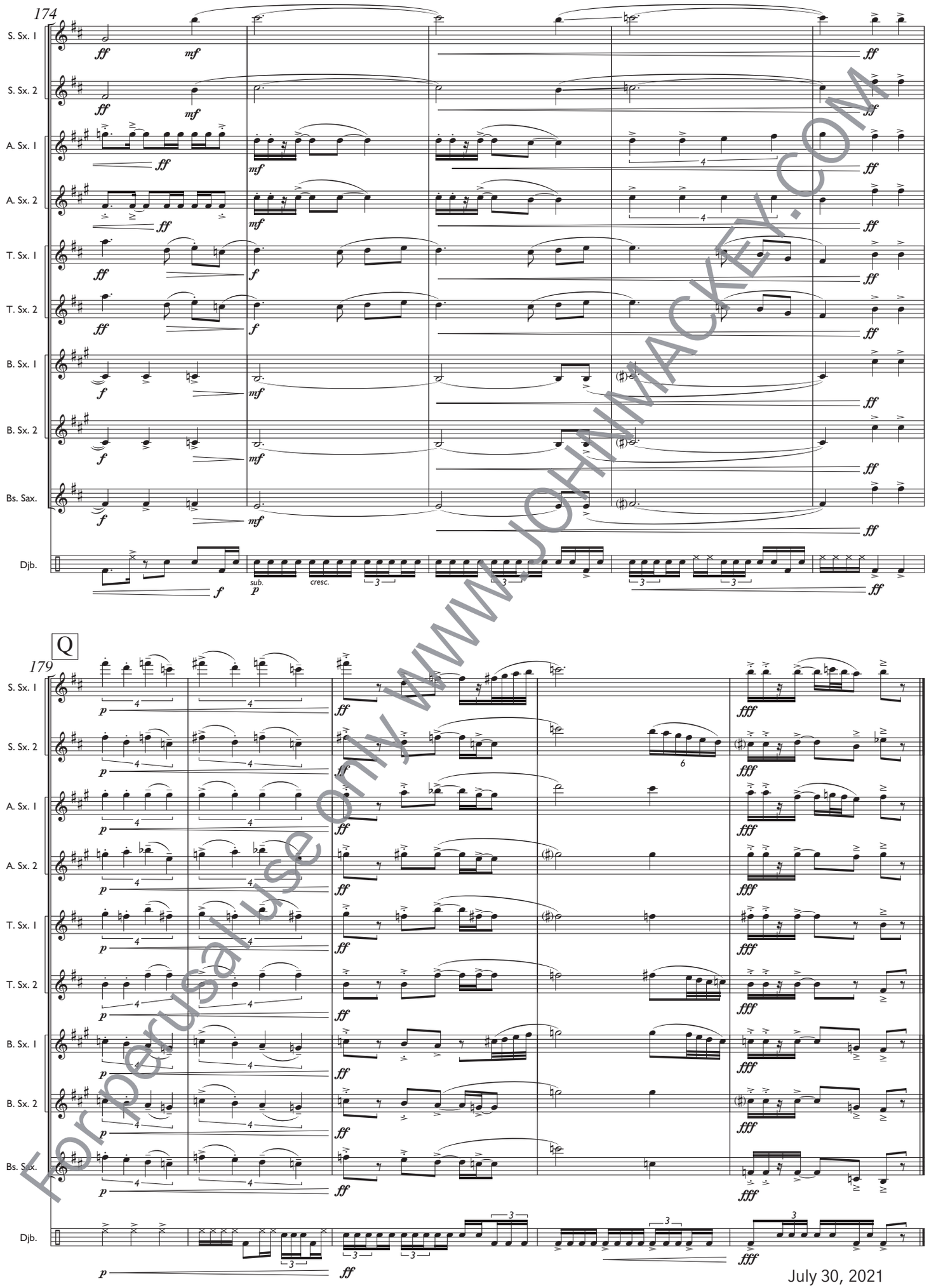

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July 30, 2021
San Francisco, CA