Invisible Cities (iii):
ERSILIA

for
Chamber Orchestra

Composed by
JOSIAH WOLF OBERHOLTZER

2015

PREFACE

1

In Ersilia, to establish the relationships that sustain the city's life, the inhabitants stretch strings from the corners of the houses, white or black or gray or black-and-white according to whether they mark a relationship of blood, of trade, authority, agency. When the strings become so numerous that you can no longer pass among them, the inhabitants leave: the houses are dismantled; only the strings and their supports remain.

From a mountainside, camping with their household goods, Ersilia's refugees look at the labyrinth of taut strings and poles that rise in the plain. That is the city of Ersilia still, and they are nothing.

They rebuild Ersilia elsewhere. They weave a similar pattern of strings which they would like to be more complex and at the same time more regular than the other. Then they abandon it and take themselves and their houses still farther away.

Thus, when traveling in the territory of Ersilia, you come upon the ruins of abandoned cities, without the walls which do not last, without the bones of the dead which the wind rolls away: spiderwebs of intricate relationships seeking a form.

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

2

"Are we still in the South Reach?"

"Reach? No. The islands --" The chief moved his slender black hand in an arc, no more than a quarter of the compass, north to east. "The islands are there," he said. "All the islands." Then showing all the evening sea before them, from north through west to south, he said, "The sea."

"What land are you from, lord?"

"No land. We are the Children of the Open Sea."

Arren looked at his keen face. He looked about him at the great raft with its temple and its tall idols, each carved from a single tree, great god-figures mixed of dolphin, fish, man, and seabird; at the people busy at their work, weaving, carving, fishing, cooking on raised platforms, tending babies; at the other rafts, seventy at least, scattered out over the water in a great circle perhaps a mile across. It was a town: smoke rising in thin wisps from distant houses, the voices of children high on the wind. It was a town, and under its floors was the abyss.

- Ursula LeGuin, *The Farthest Shore*

3 Instrumentation

- Flute
- Bass clarinet
- Oboe
- Baritone saxophone
- Acoustic guitar
- Piano
- Percussion
    - bamboo wind chimes
    - four toms
    - five wood blocks
    - snare drum
    - marimba
    - crotales, two octaves
    - tam-tam
    - bass drum
- Violin
- Viola
- Cello
- Contrabass

4 Performance notes

Six players -- flute, bass clarinet, oboe, violin, viola and cello -- receive a shaker -- caxixi, maraca or similar. Four players -- guitar, piano, percussion and contrabass -- receive a chromatic pitch pipe -- a circular harmonic-like instrument generally used for tuning vocal groups.

The shakers should be placed on or suspended from their respective performer's music stands, or wherever convenient.

The pitch-pipes should be played by inhaling or exhaling -- as indicated -- through fully half of the circumference of the instrument, creating a rich cluster.

For all winds, a +-symbol indicates slap tonguing.

For guitar, the coda symbol indicates a percussive damping of the strings.

Piano plays with pedal to their discretion throughout the first four sections of the piece. The sound should be generally dry, although some pedal should be used when appropriate for phrasing and blending, especially on tremolo passages. The sustain pedal should remain fully depressed for the entirety of section D. Inside-piano glissandi are notated proportional to the lower interior portion of the instrument -- from the lowest string up to the first cross-bar -- and should be played with the fingertip.

Percussion should use hard sticks on toms, woodblocks, snares and crotales, and softer mallets on marimba, bass drum and tam-tam (when ergonomic to do so).

All mordents and trills are a major 2nd, unless otherwise specified. All tremolos are unmeasured and should evoke an even, cloud-like texture.

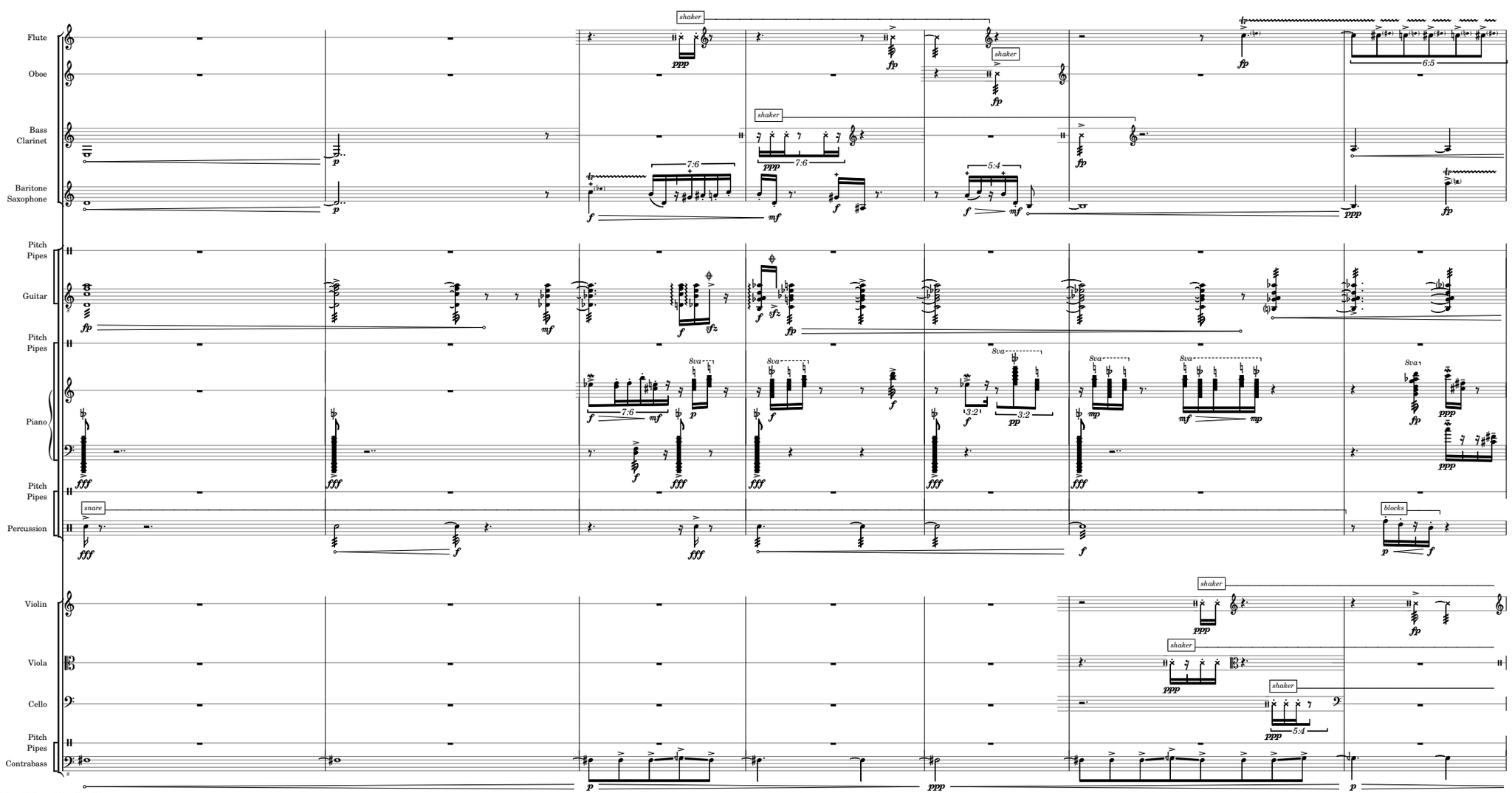
Invisible Cities (iii):

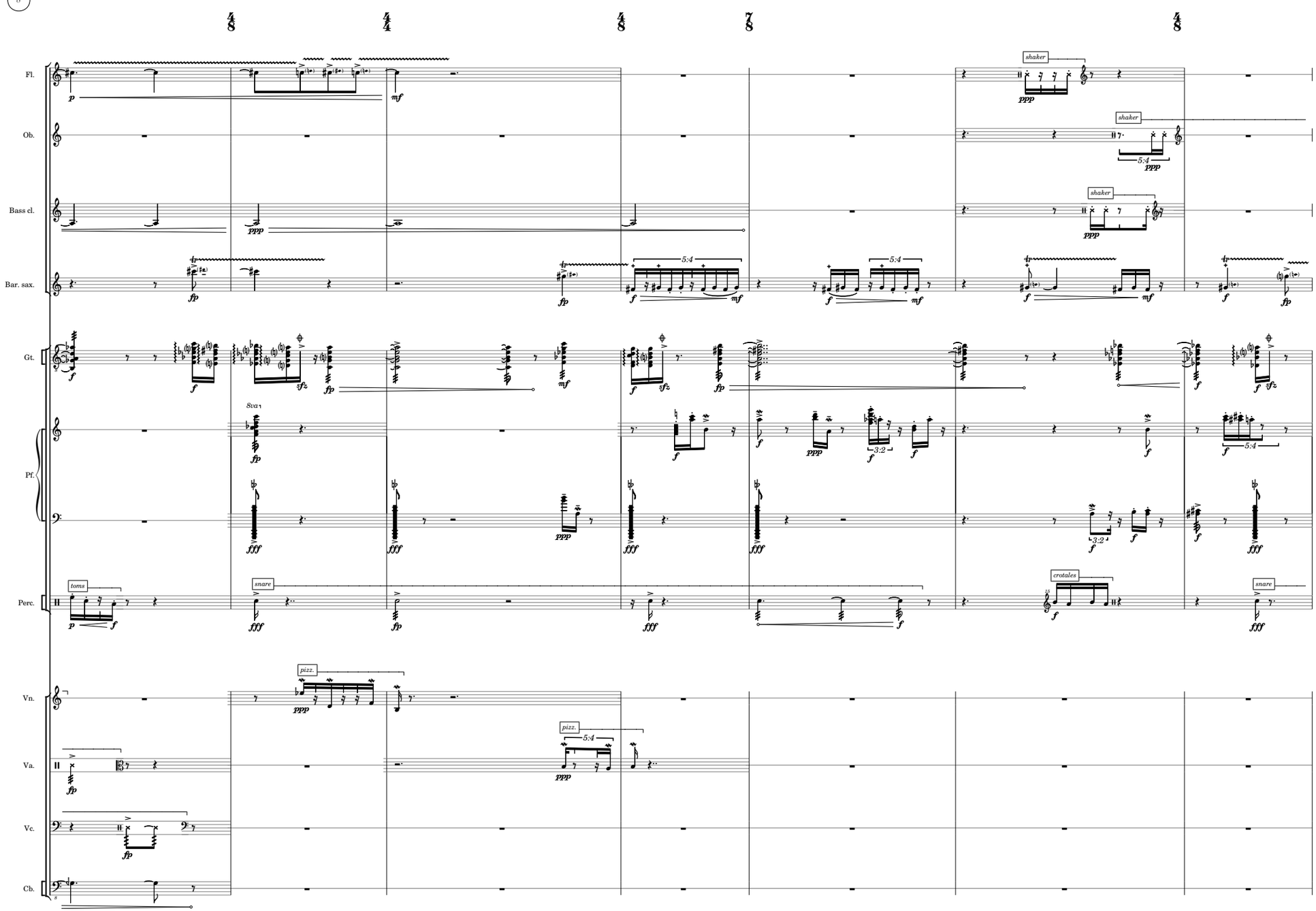
ERSILIA

(a botanical survey of the uninhabited northeastern isles)

for Ensemble Dal Niente

Josiah Wolf Oberholtzer (1984)

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shaker
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snare
crotales
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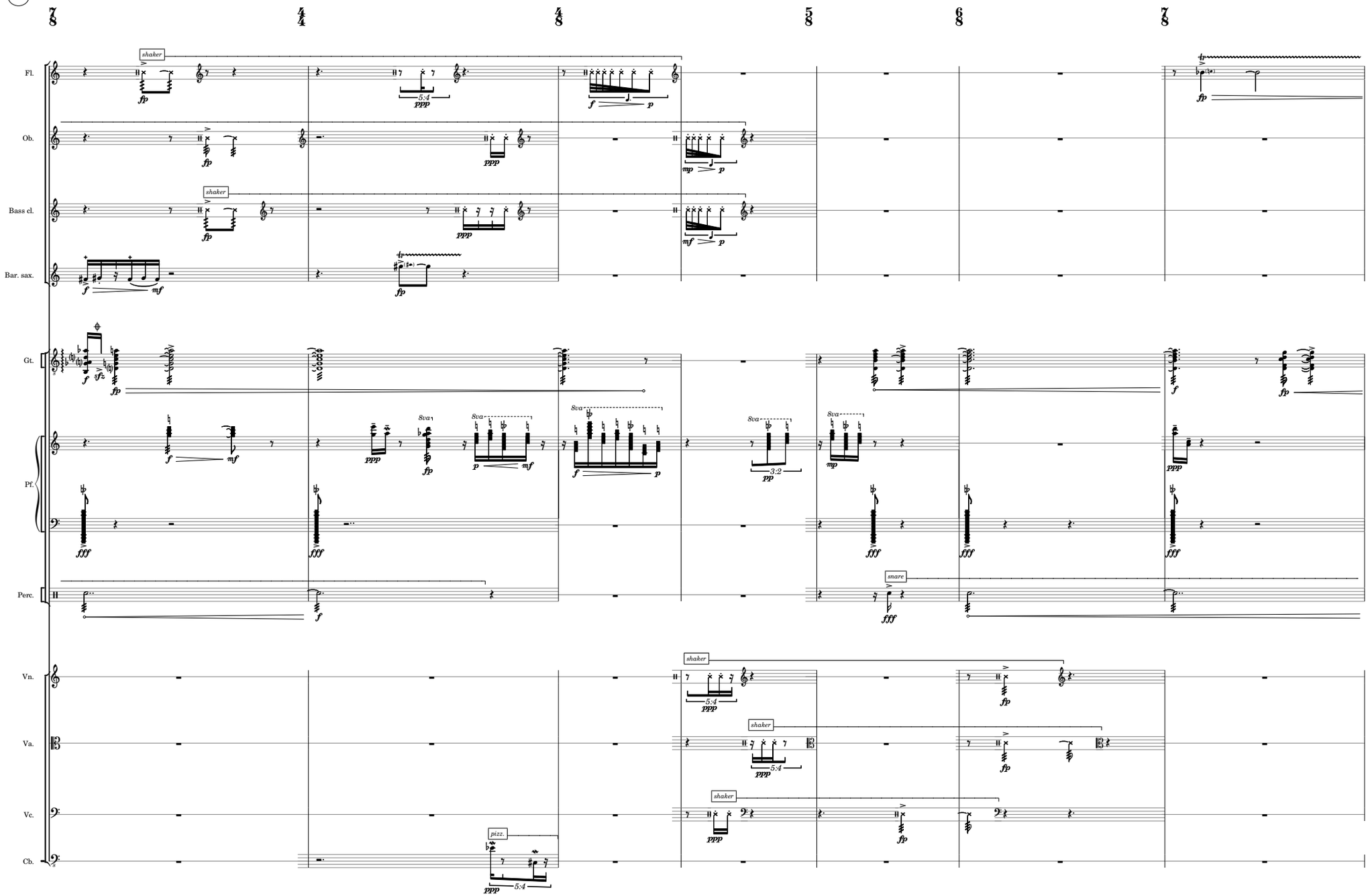
3:2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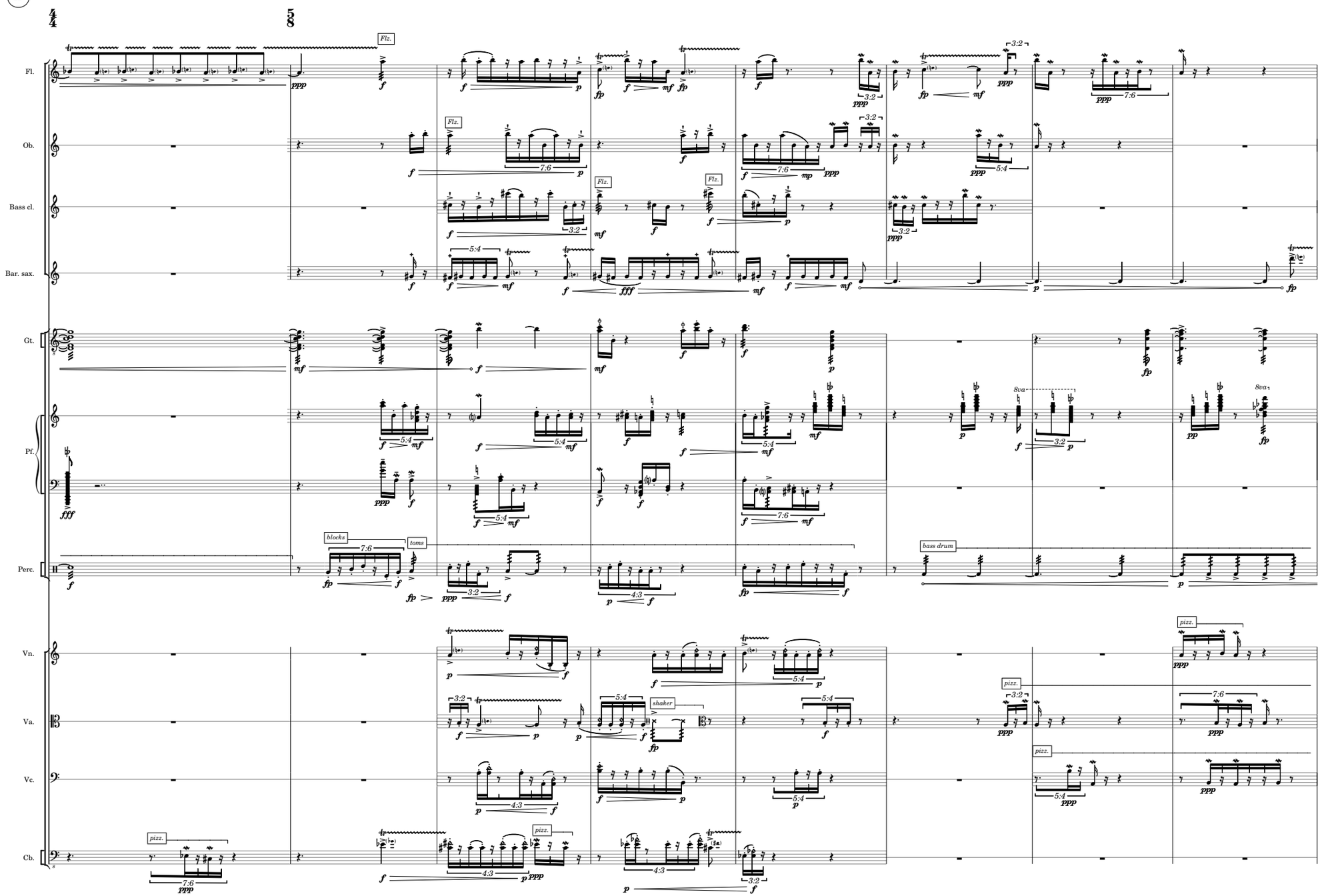
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bass drum
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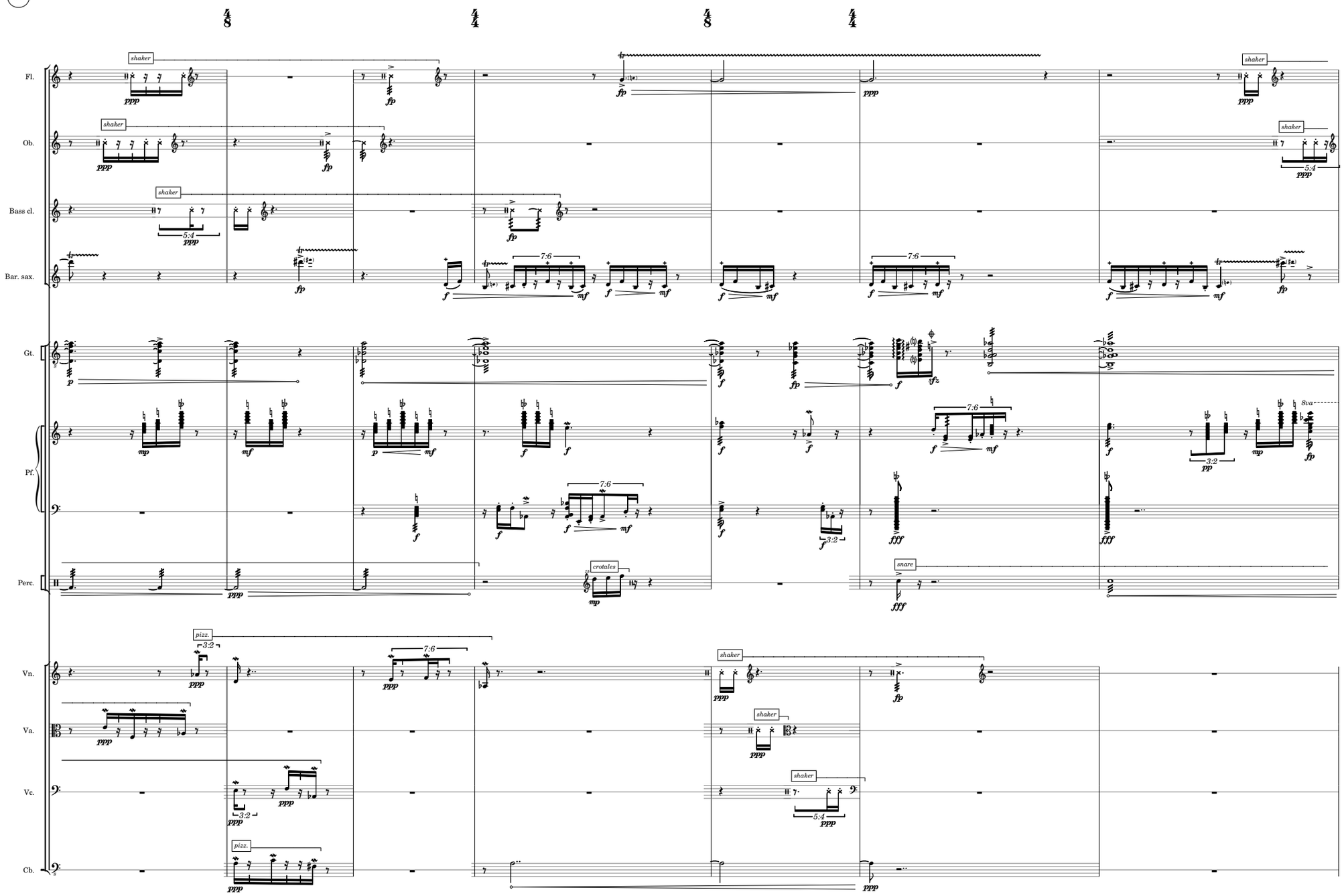
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crotales
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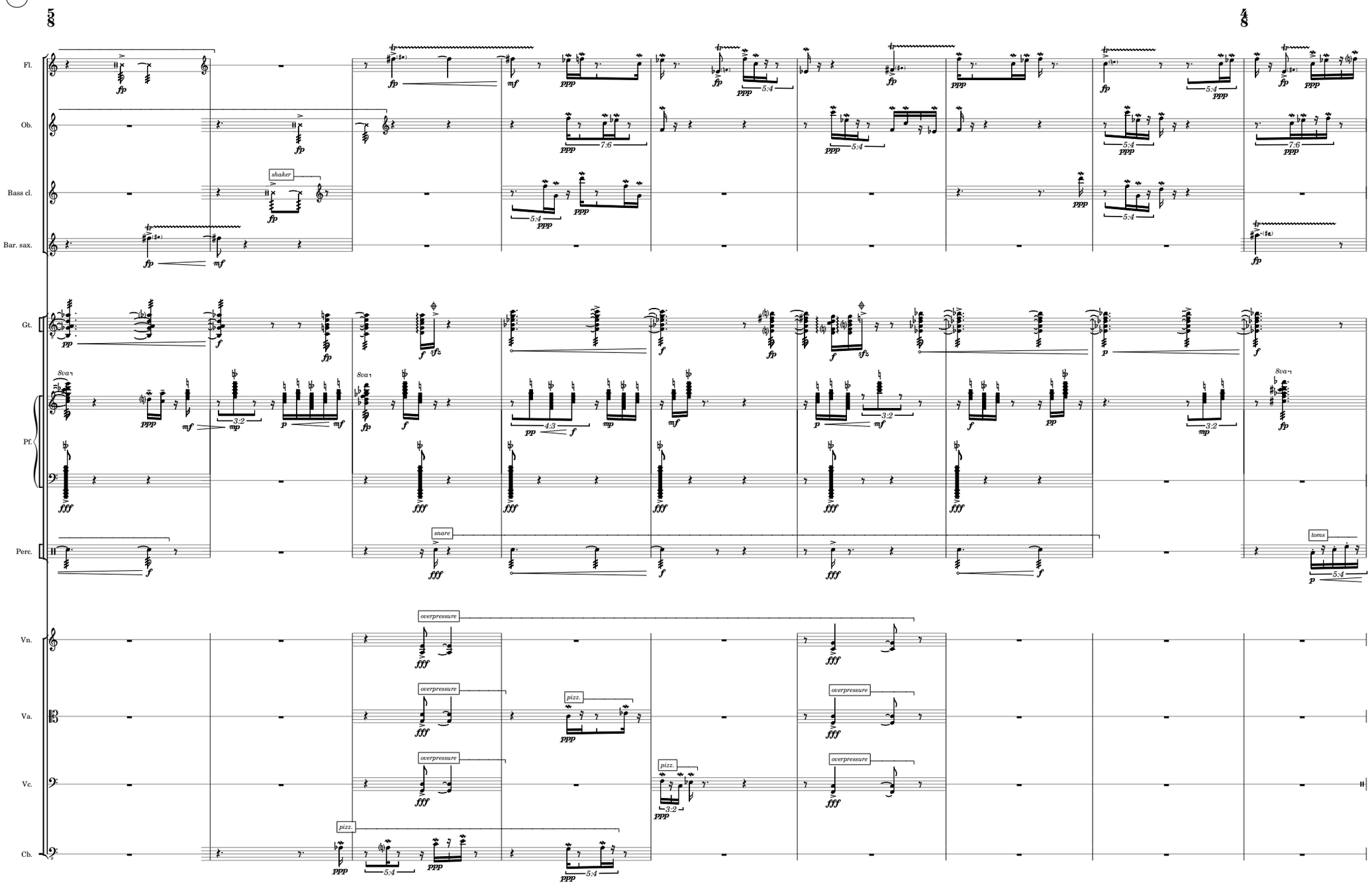
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shaker
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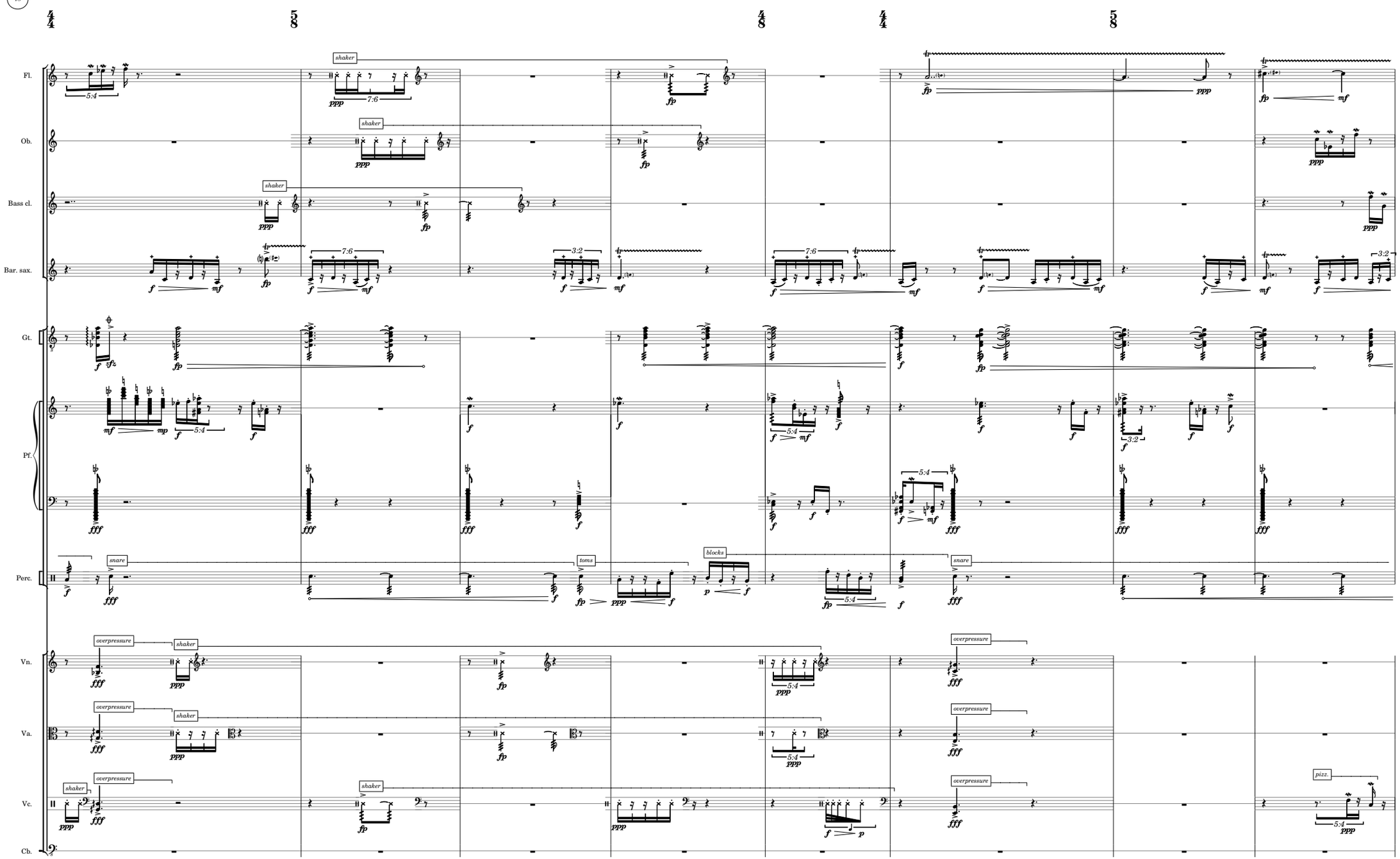
toms
overpressure
pizz.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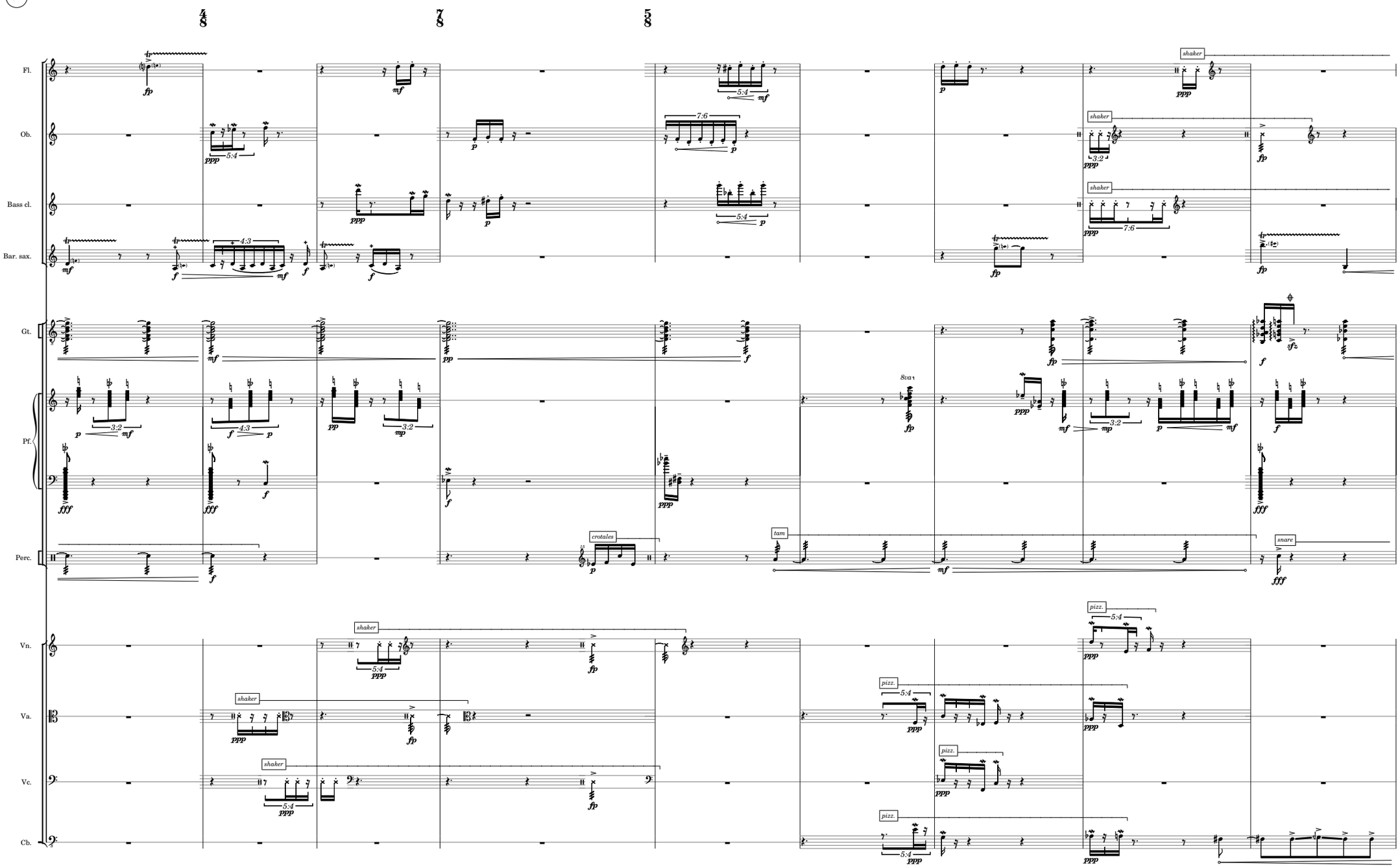
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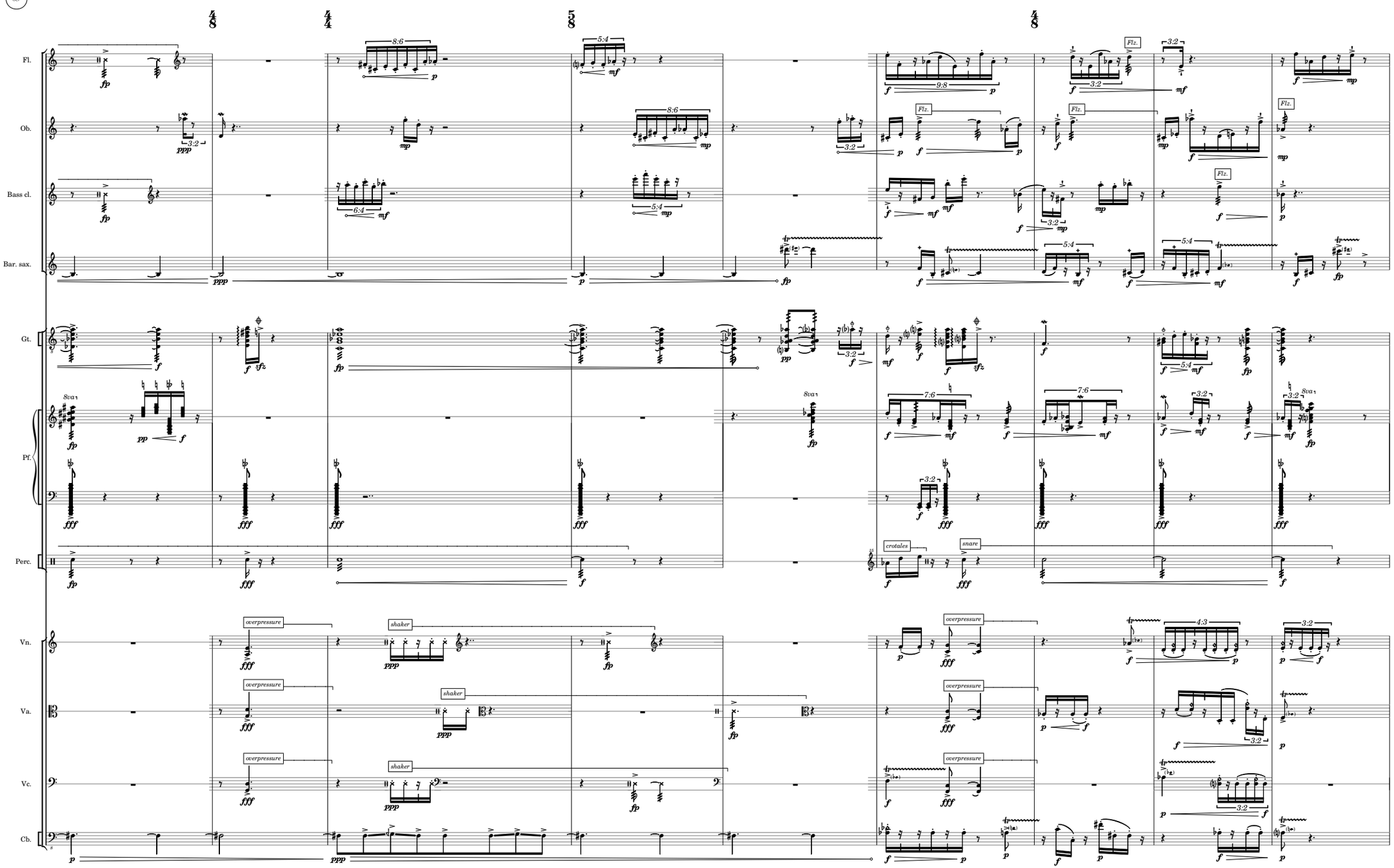
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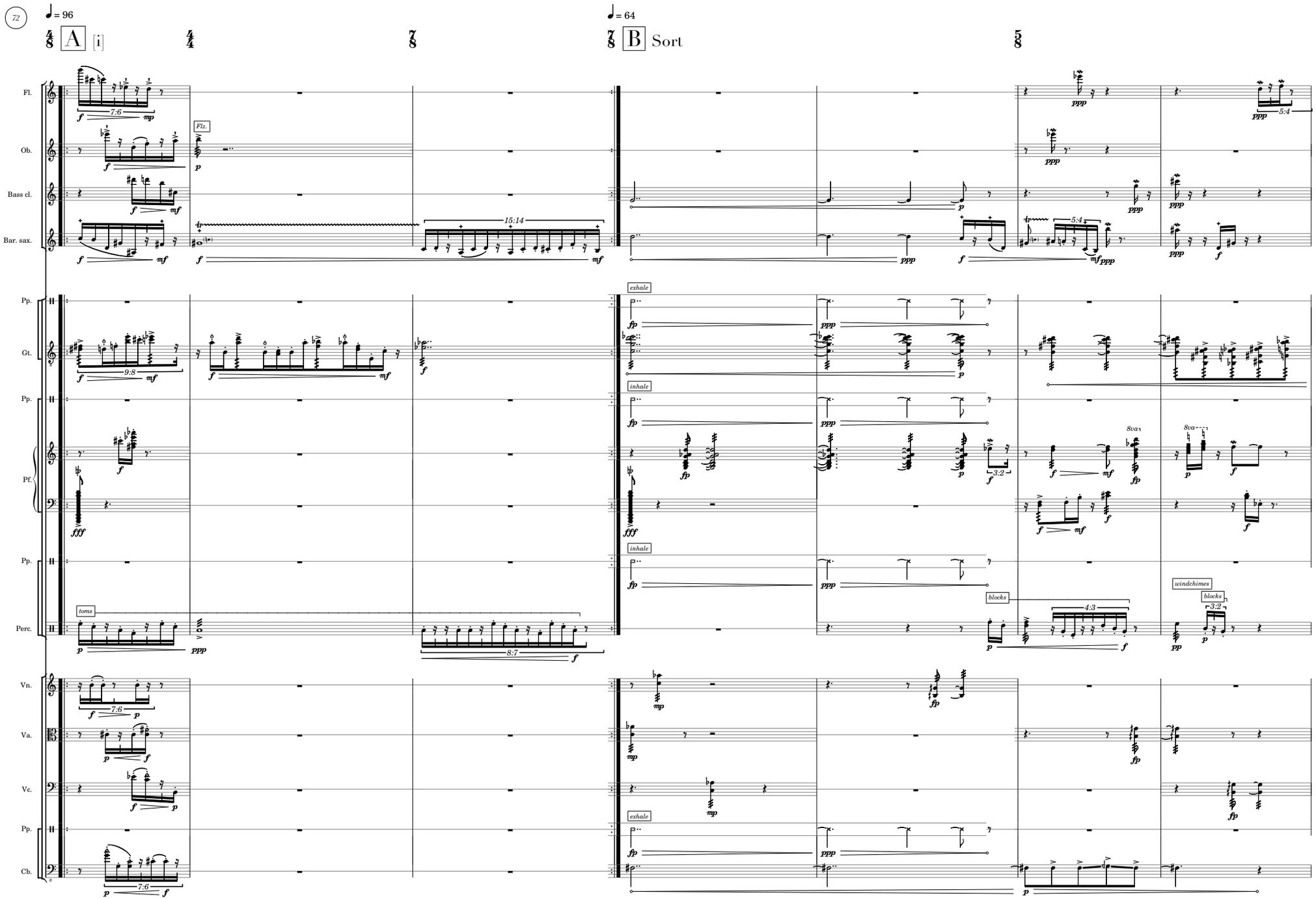
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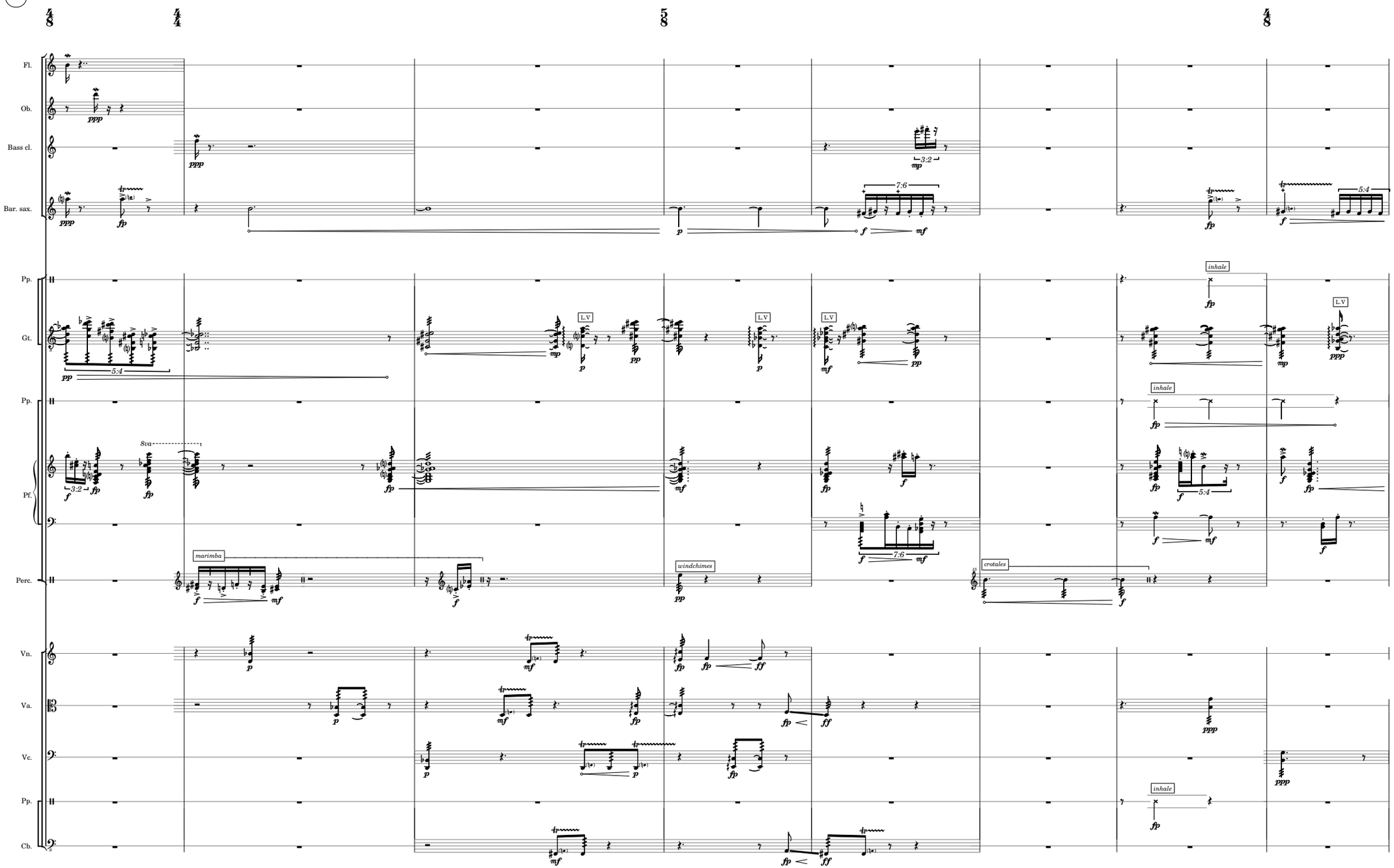
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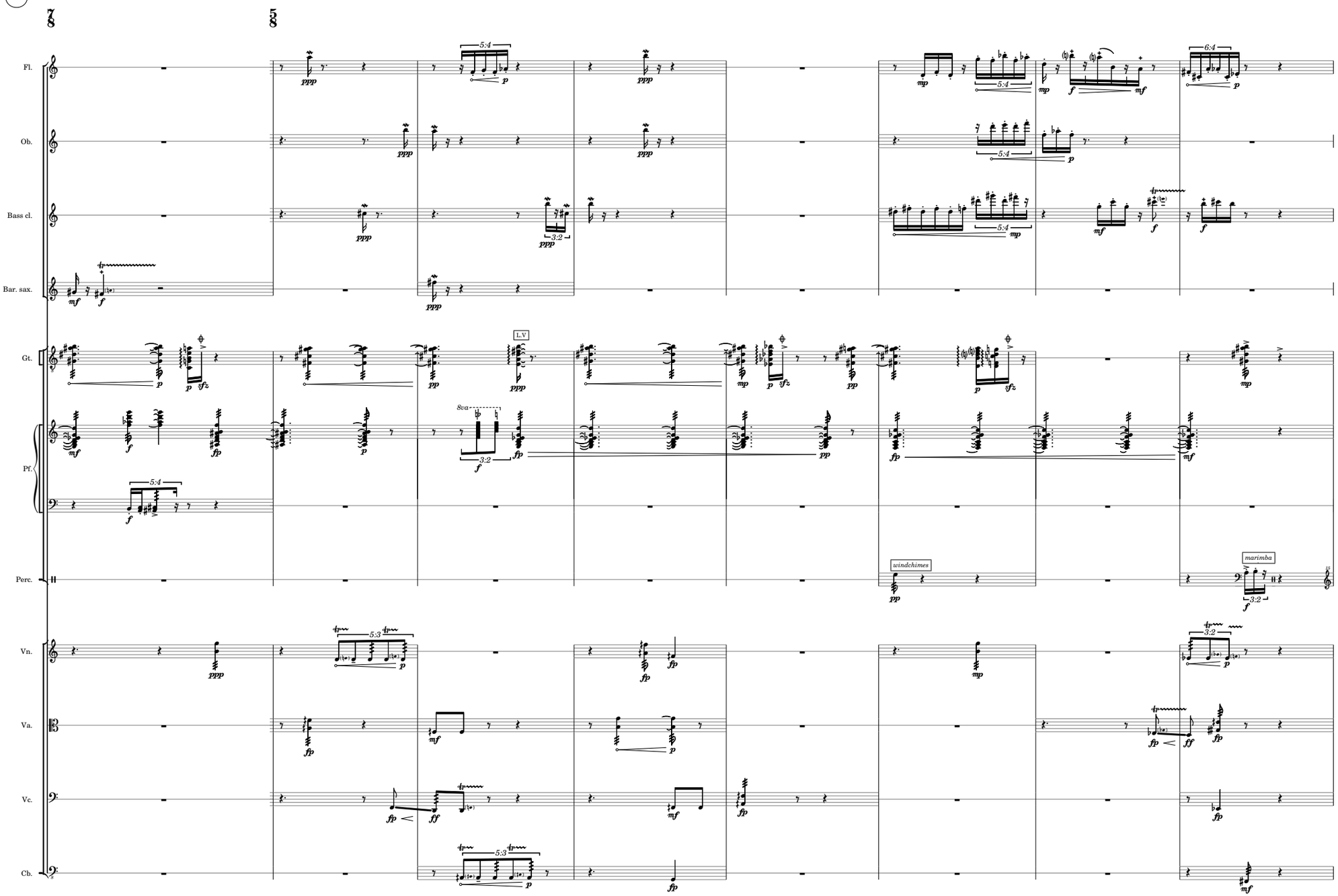
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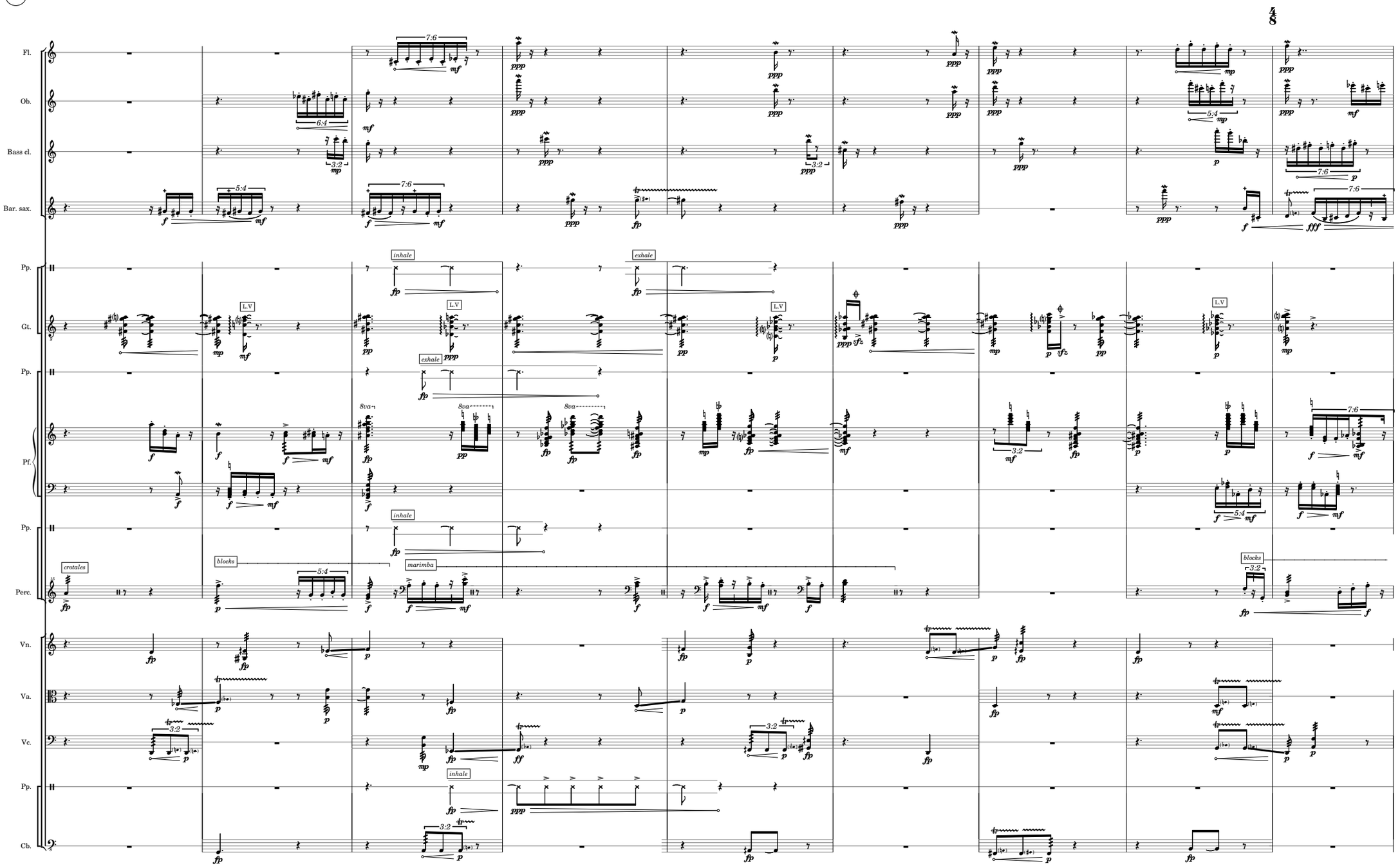
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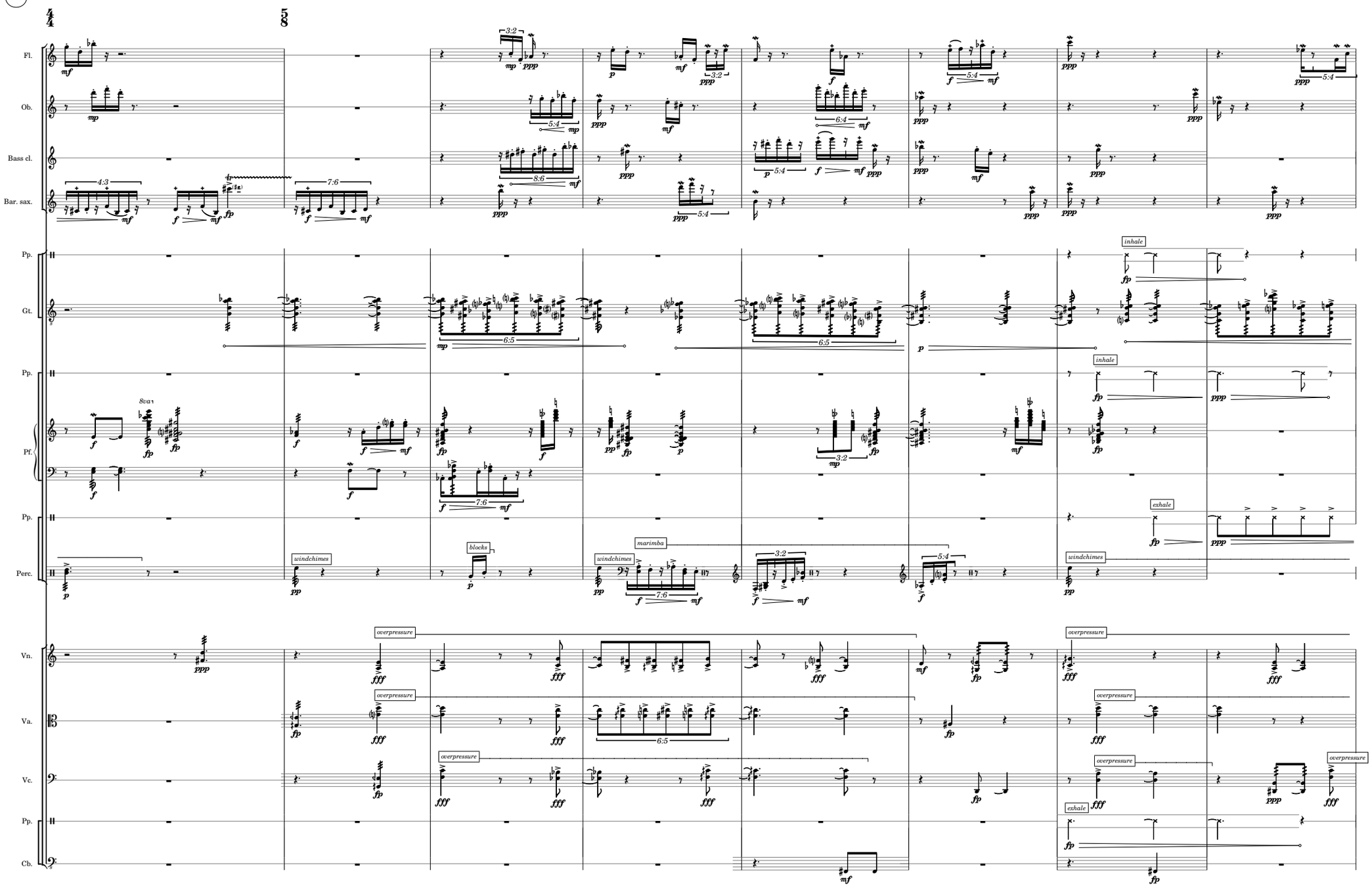
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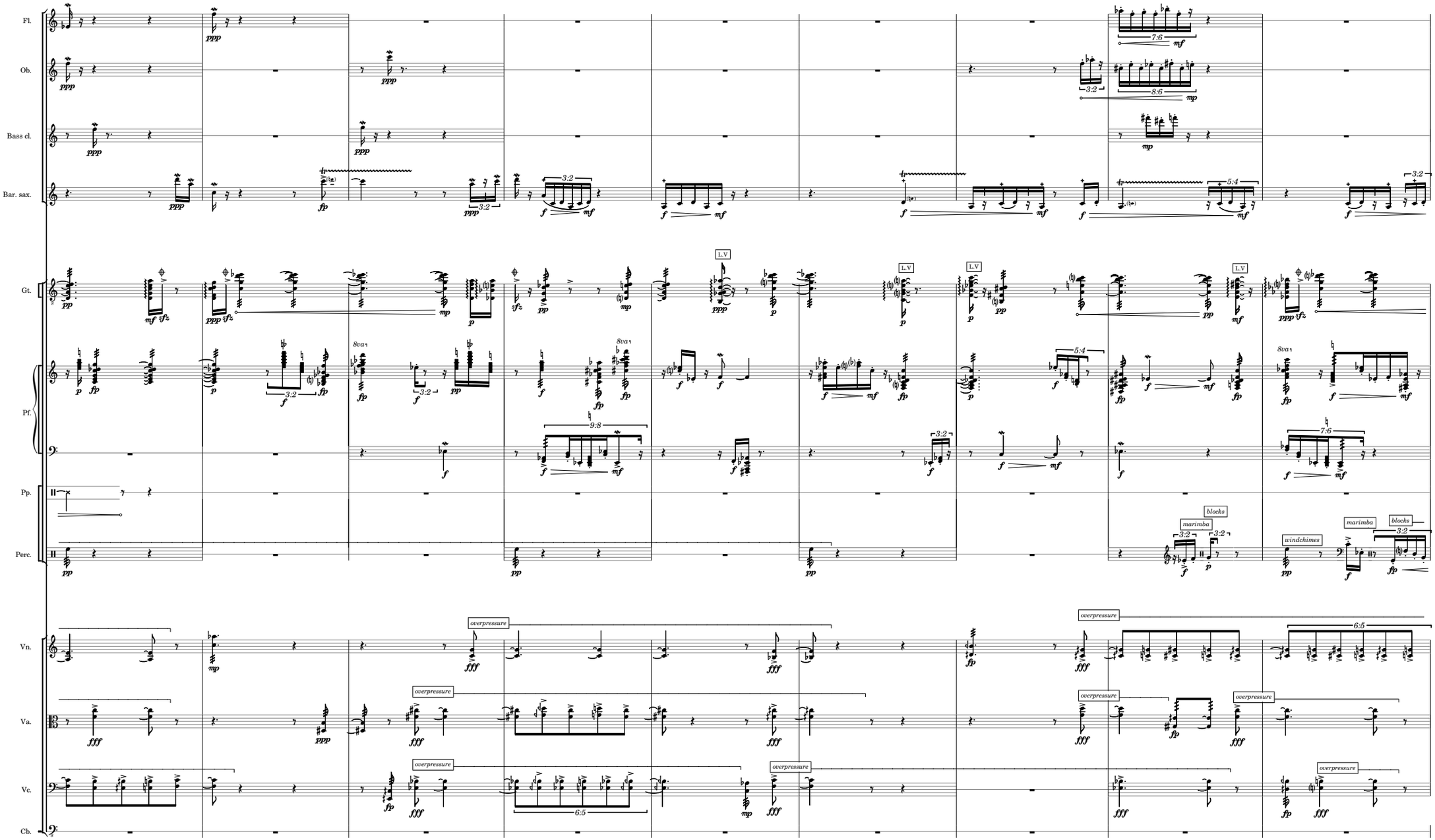
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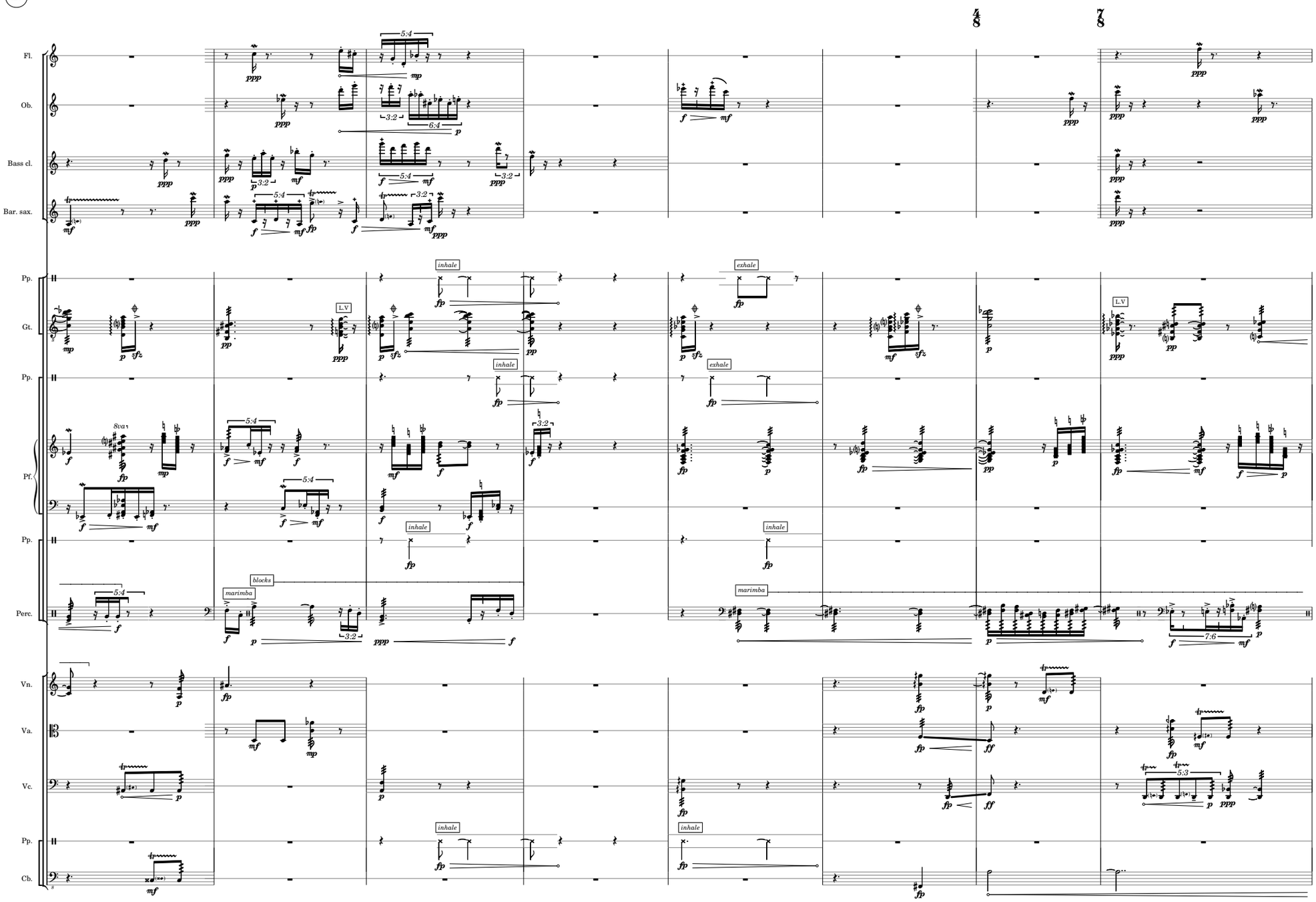
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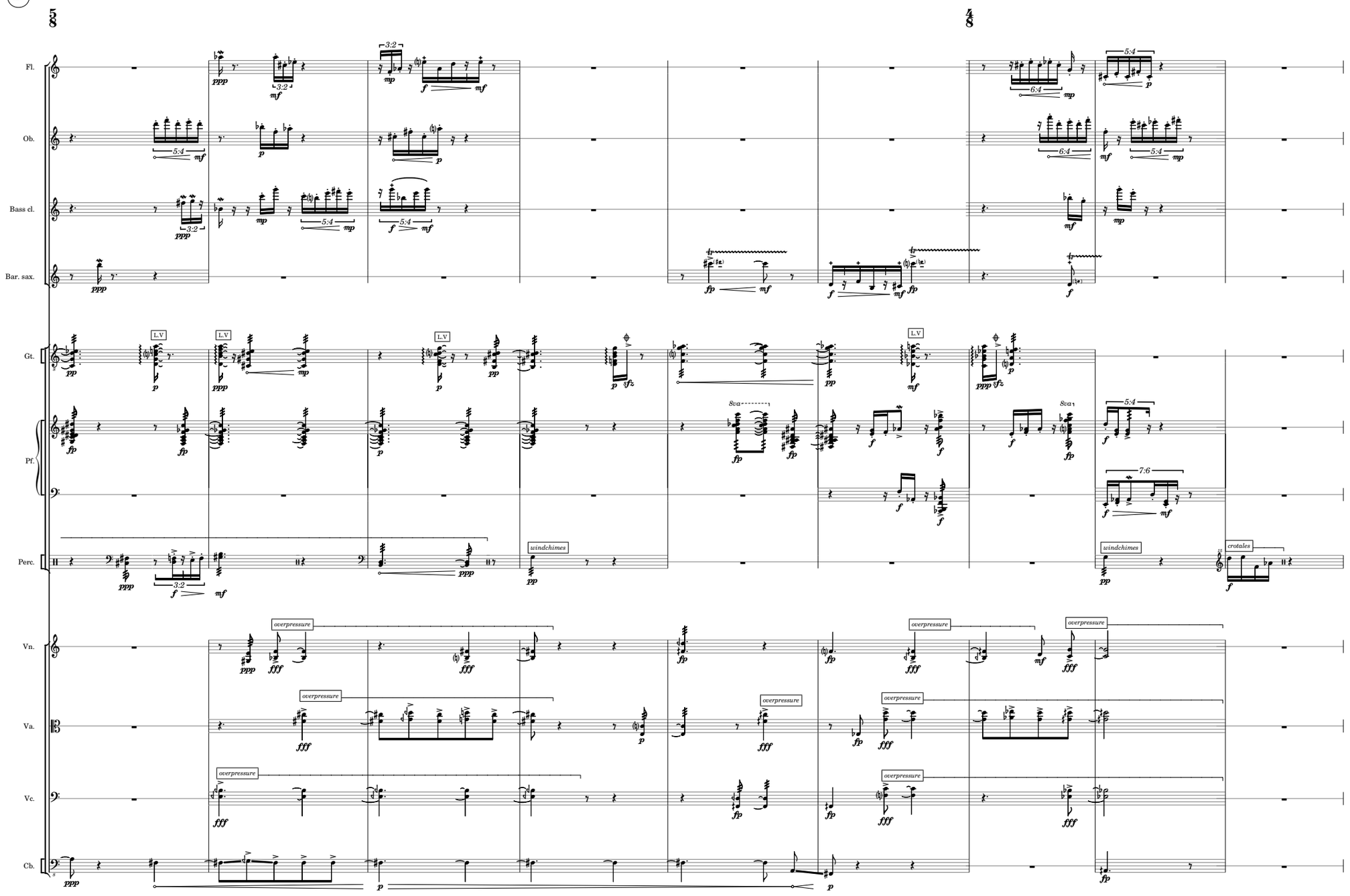
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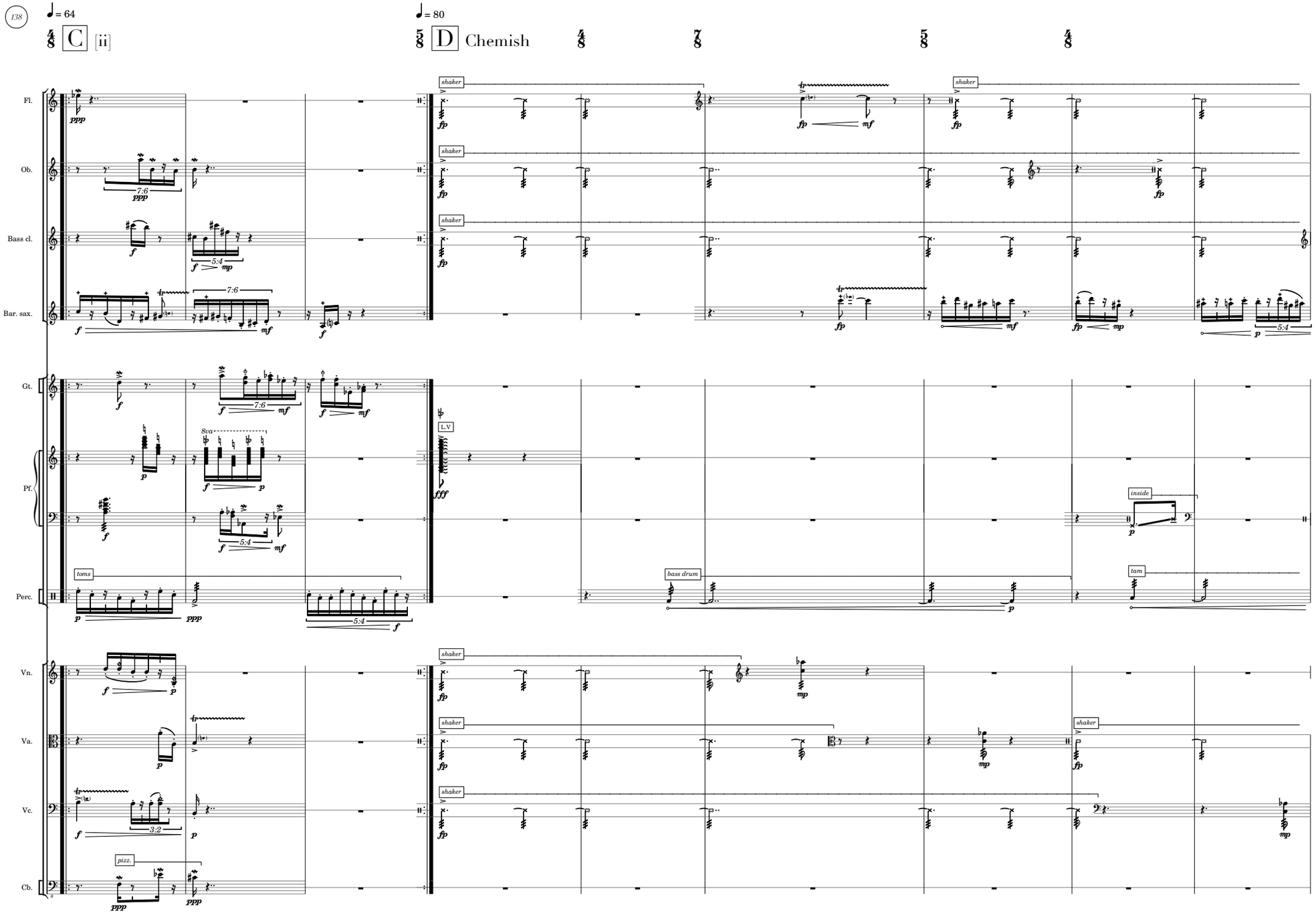
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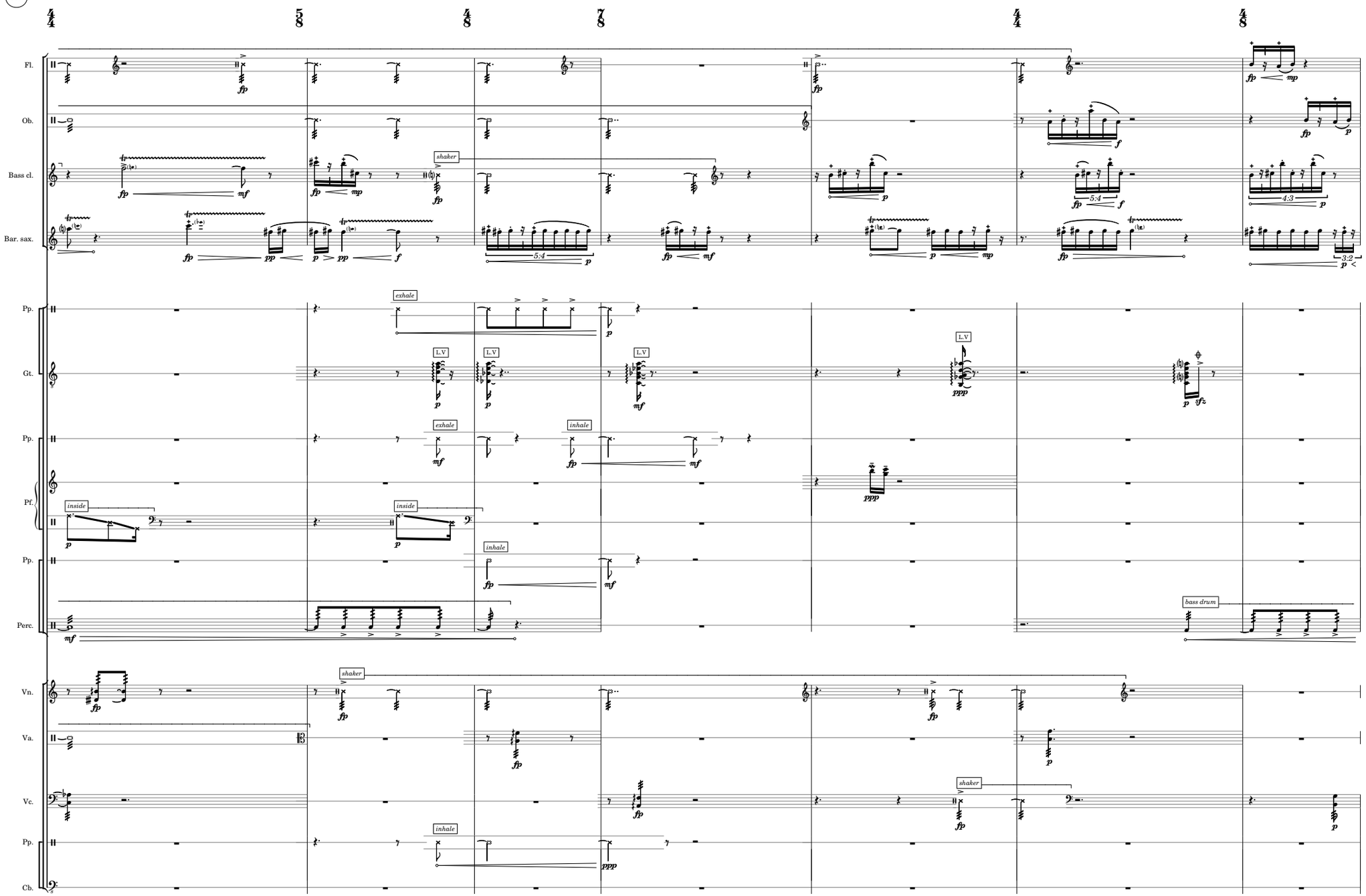
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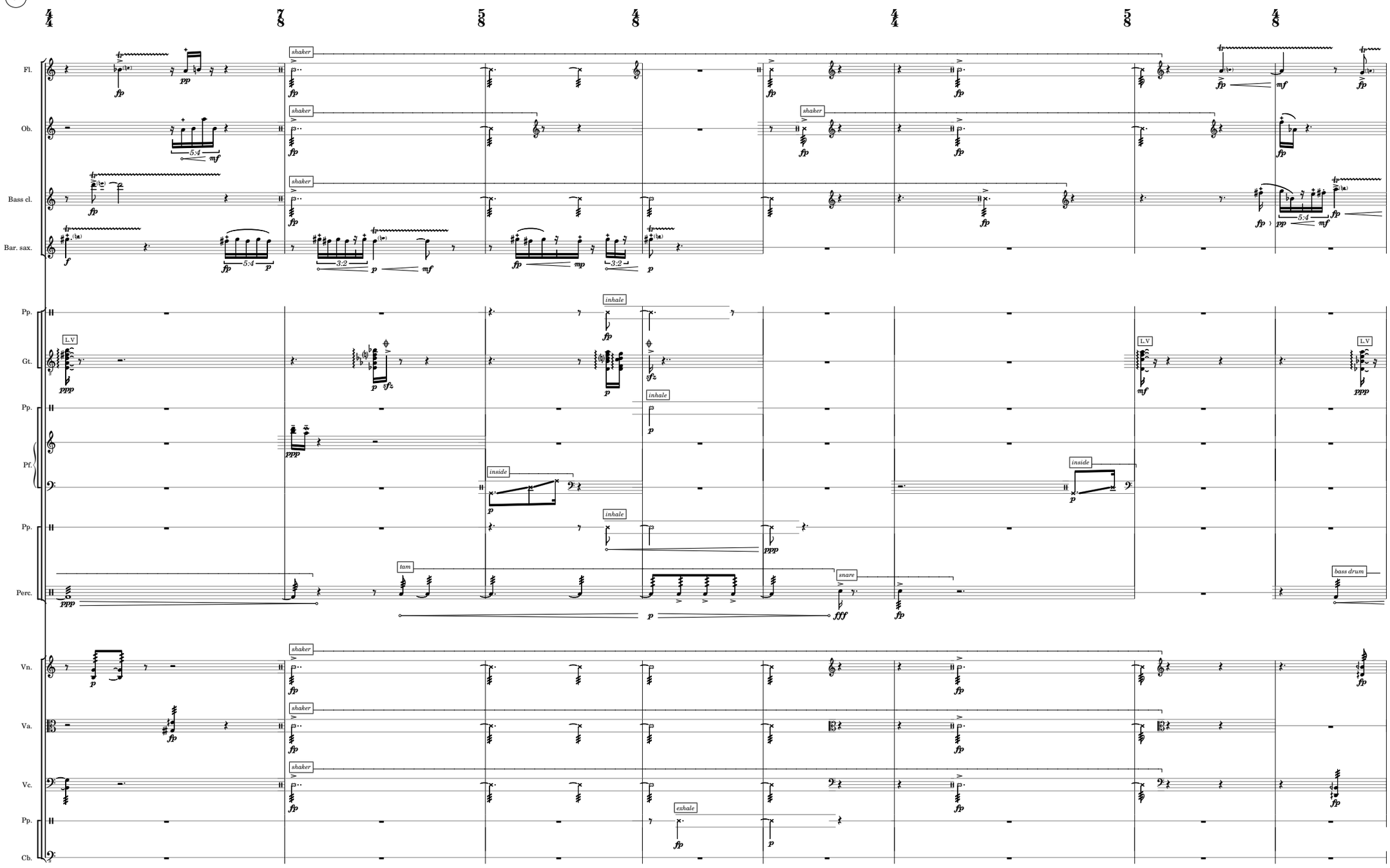
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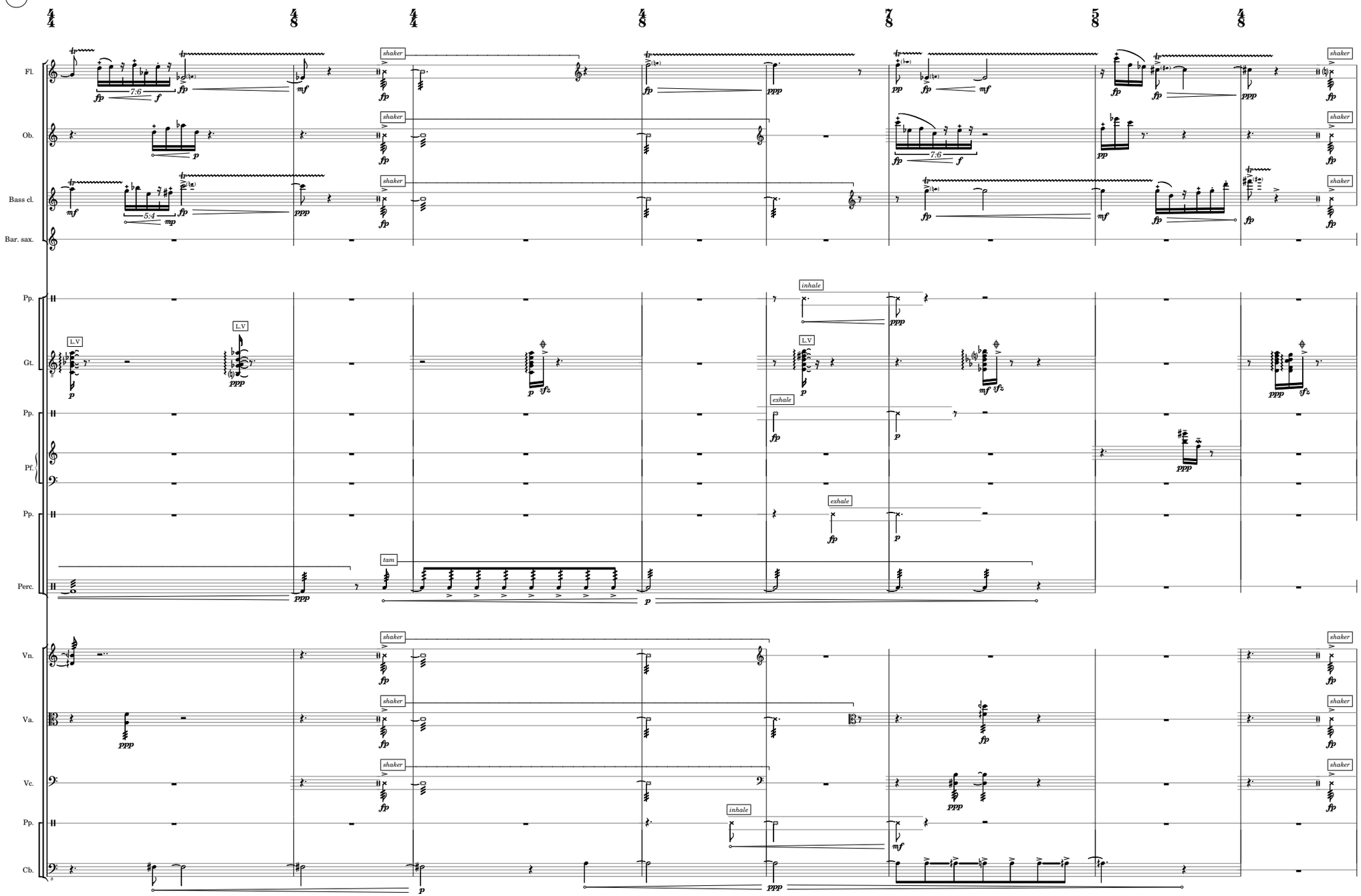
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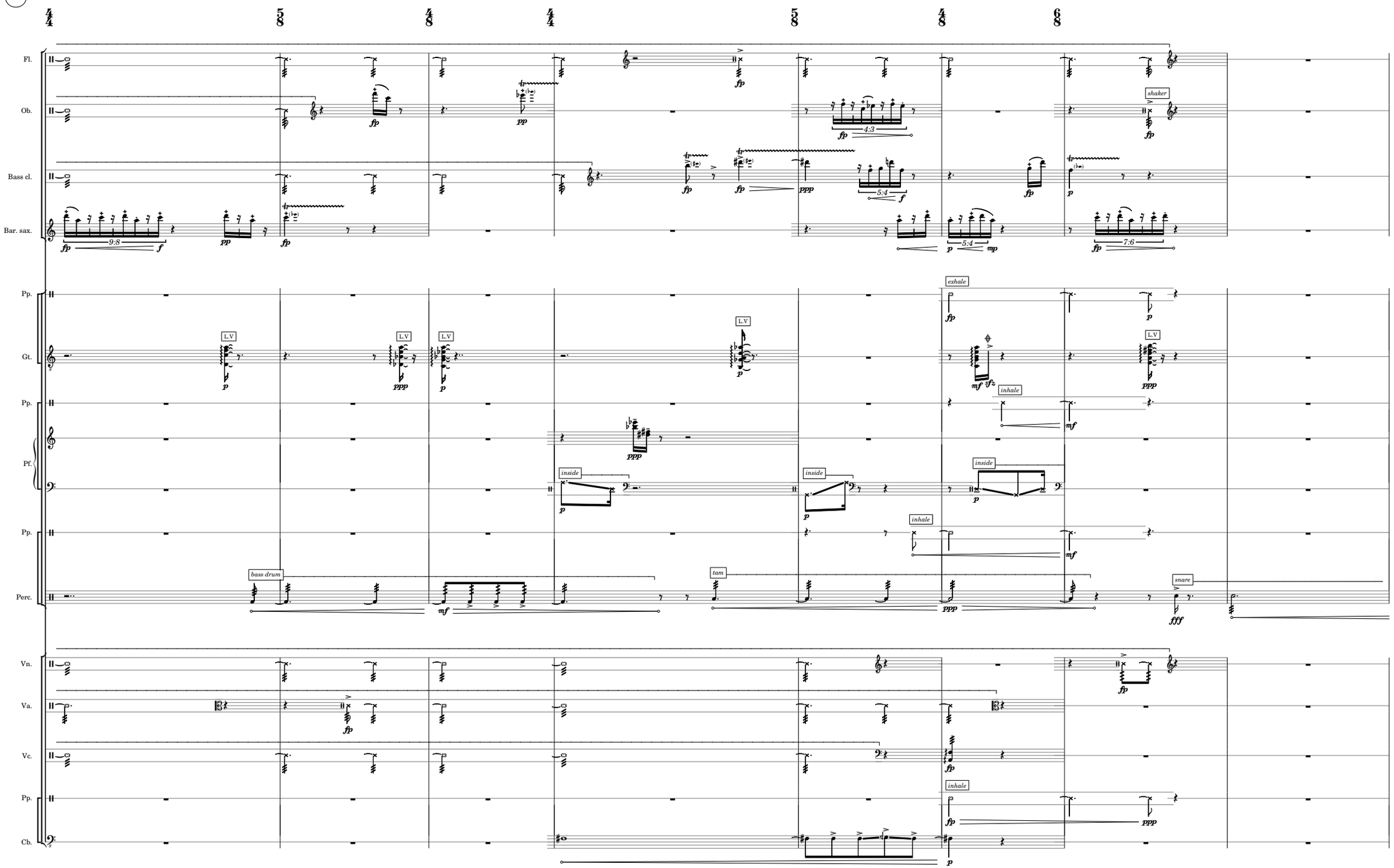
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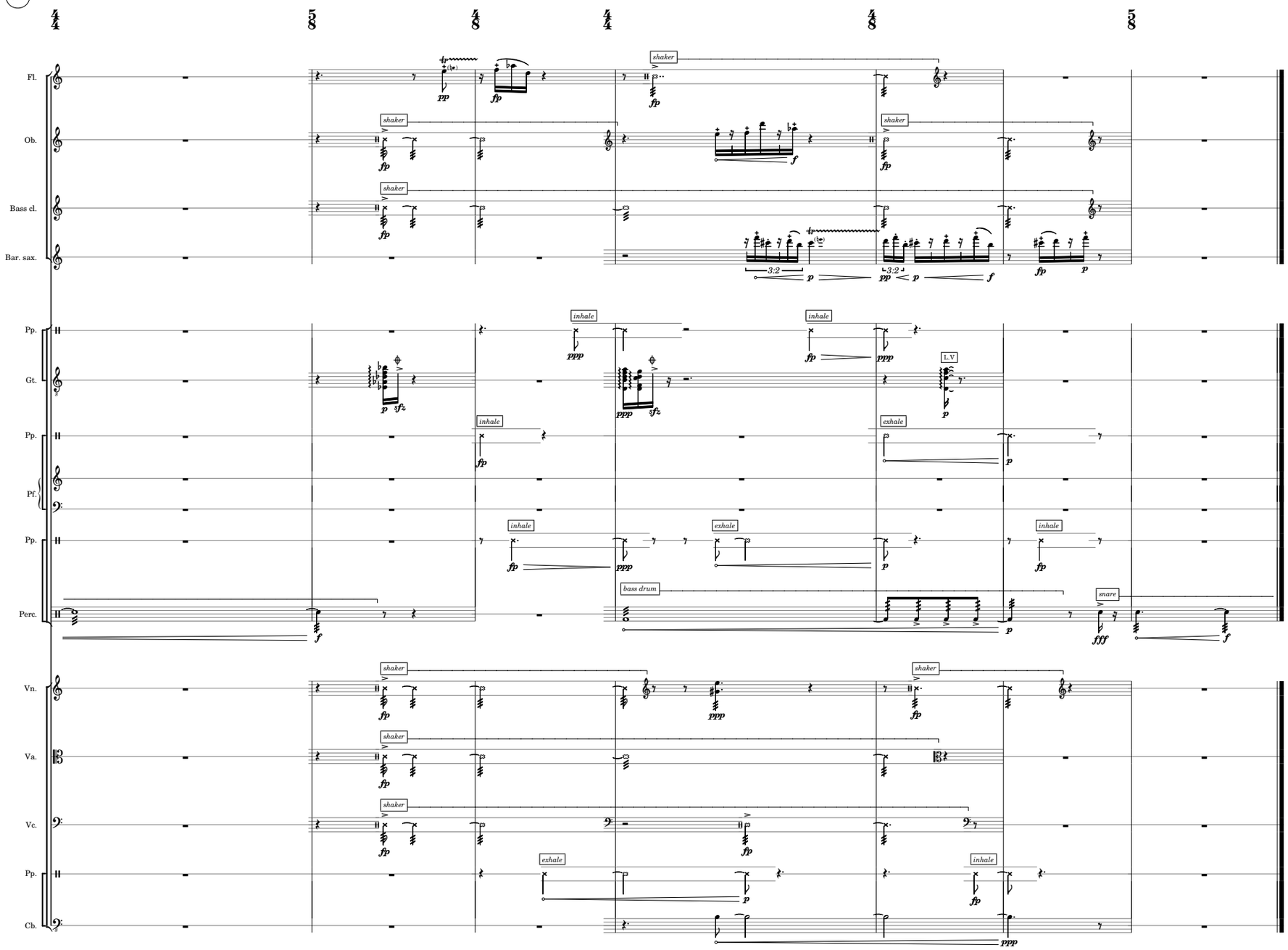

Portland, OR
January 2015 - April 2015

2014-05-15

Scores available from the composer at
www.josiahwolfoberholtzer.com

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