Libby Larsen

WHITE PIECES

for Piano, white keys only

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KENWOOD EDITIONS

Libby Larsen

WHITE PIECES

for Piano, white keys only

Commissioned by Margaret Mills.

Premiere by Margaret Mills, piano, December 2018.

Duration: 13 minutes

PROGRAM NOTE

White Piece 1

Built on a fleeting 32nd note turning motive, B-C-D-C-B, *White Piece 1* is my musical response to the last line of T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*, (1925) "This is the way the world ends, ... Not with a bang but a whimper." I highlighted the motive with silence, space, rising lyric gestures, white-key geysers and expressive markings to create an idea of a piano work may have existed but now remains only in fragments of itself suspended in crevices in the air and the broken narrative of memory.

White Piece 2

White Piece 2, a quiet rapture, is my response to H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)'s poem *The Whole White World*, (1921). The poem palpitates with excitement and anticipation which I animate musically by creating a breathless, oscillating sextuplet (ii6/4 – i5/7) in the left hand. A melodic line soars over it, through it, under it and over it again, suggesting a fundamental key but never resolving to it, perpetually aloft. The B-C-D-C-B turning motive is embedded in the fabric of the music and is heard throughout.

White Piece 3

White Piece 3 is a flat-out, white-key boogie with the energy of the Big Bopper (J.P. Richardson)'s 1959 rockabilly song *White Lightning.* The piano is a cultural vehicle. Beyond its identity as an instrument the piano can, and does, convey all kinds of cultural messages, brought to us through the elegant hands of pianists from all walks of life. Boogie is one of these walks. An American verb/noun/adjective the word represents a state of being to an American way of life. From time to time the B-C-D-C-B motive makes appearances, developed and disguised.

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White Piece 4

I used Locrian mode (B-B white -key octave on a piano keyboard) to compose *White Piece 4*. Using the B-B scale, I composed a melody and, for the first half of the piece, placed it in the right hand over a one-measure B-B ostinato in the left hand. For the second half of the piece the roles are reversed, placing the ostinato in the right hand and the melody in the left. The B-C-D-C-B turning motive is embedded in the fabric of the music and is heard throughout.

White Piece 5

In *White Piece 5,* I imagined the keyboard as an anemometer (a wind meter). Using the pitch D (a step above middle C) as its axis, diatonic white-keys spin around it with the energy and drive of a prevailing steady wind. As the piece progresses, the set of pitches expand outward from the D axis. The right hand gradually adds white-key pitches above it while the lower voice of the left hand shifts its pedal tone downward from it moving from G to A, then to E followed by D. Finally, as the lower left hand moves downward to a C pedal, we feel tonic resolution of the previously unresolved B-C-D-C-D turning motive.

--Libby Larsen

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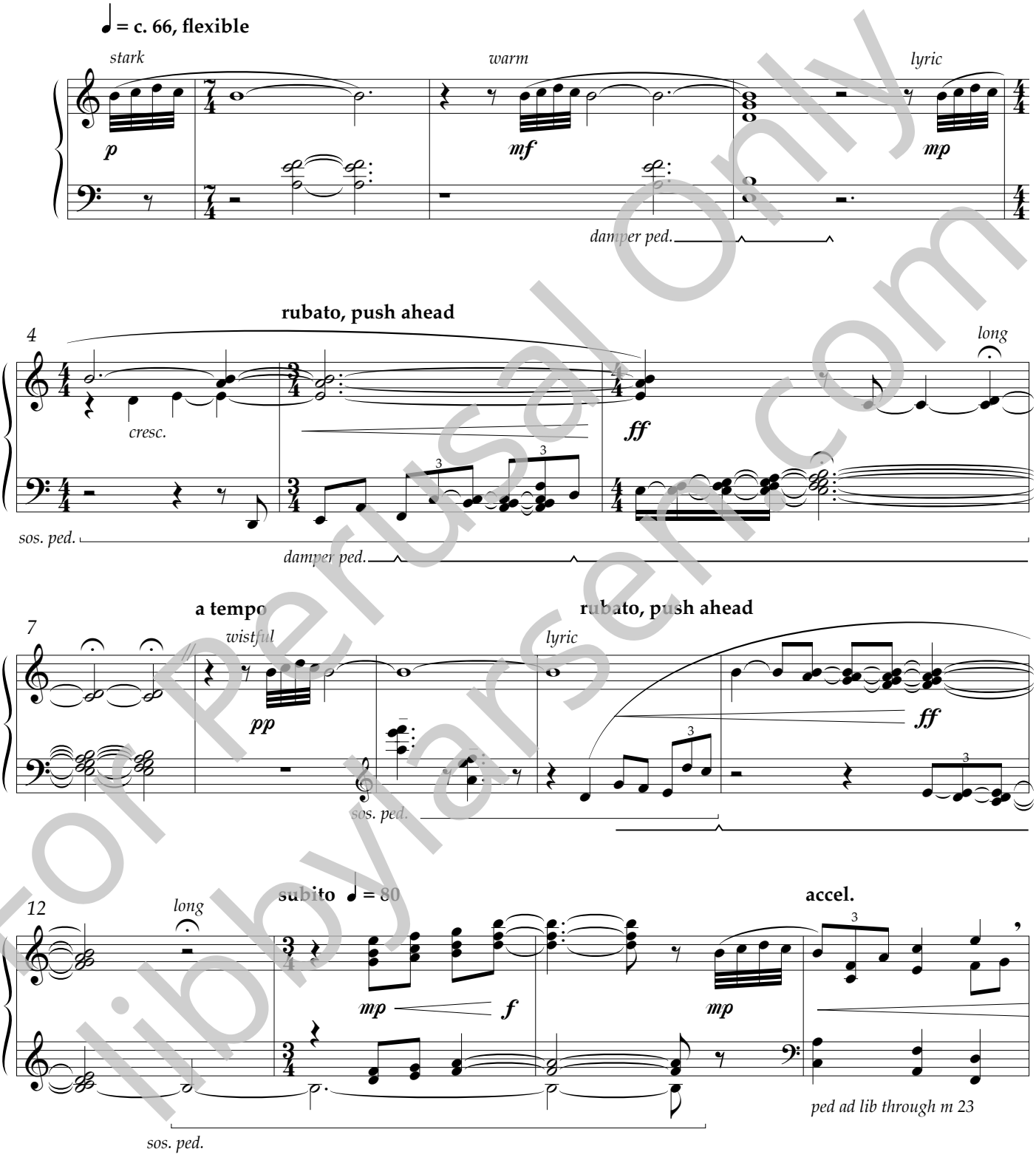
White Pieces

for Margaret Mills

White Piece 1

Libby Larsen, 2018



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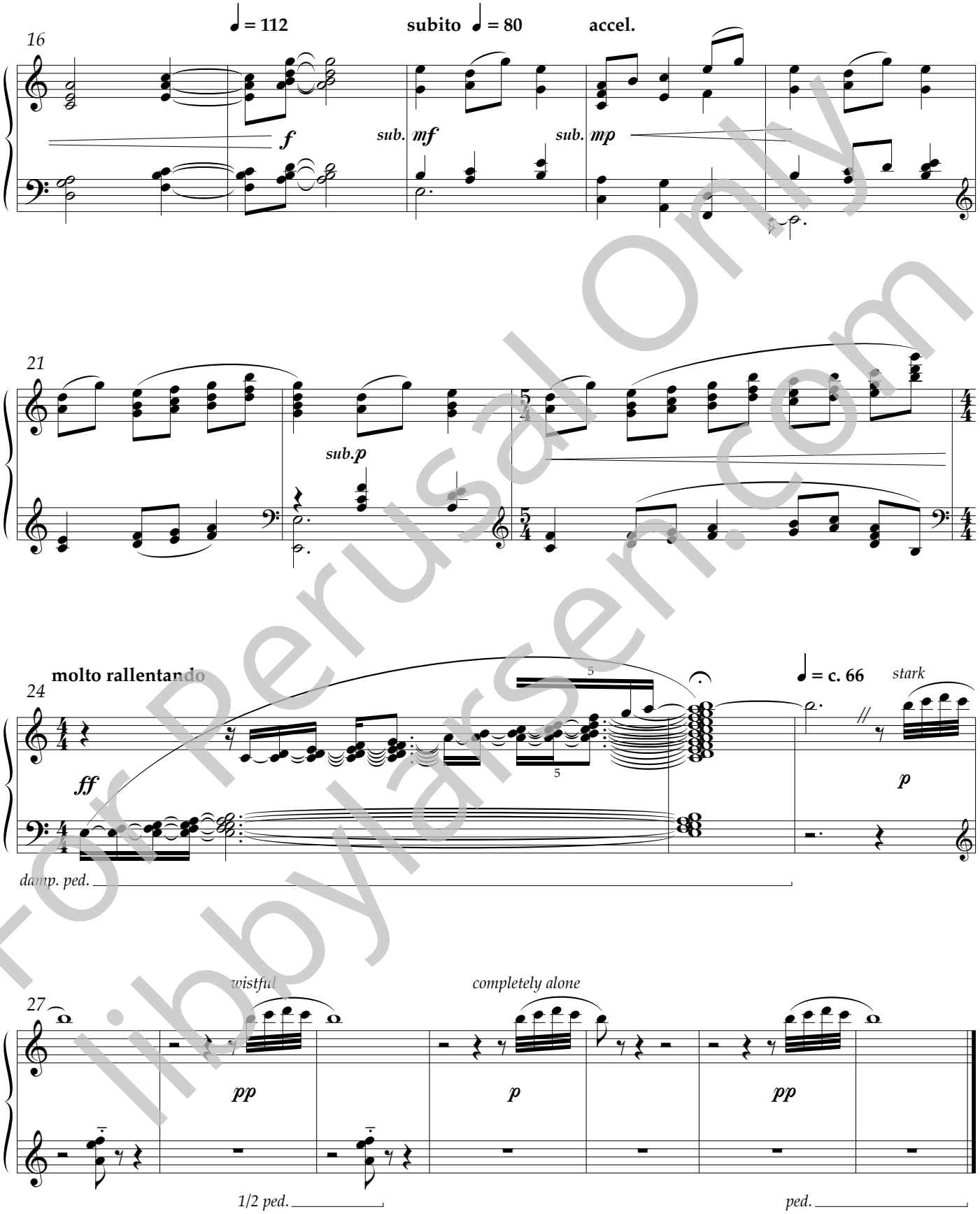

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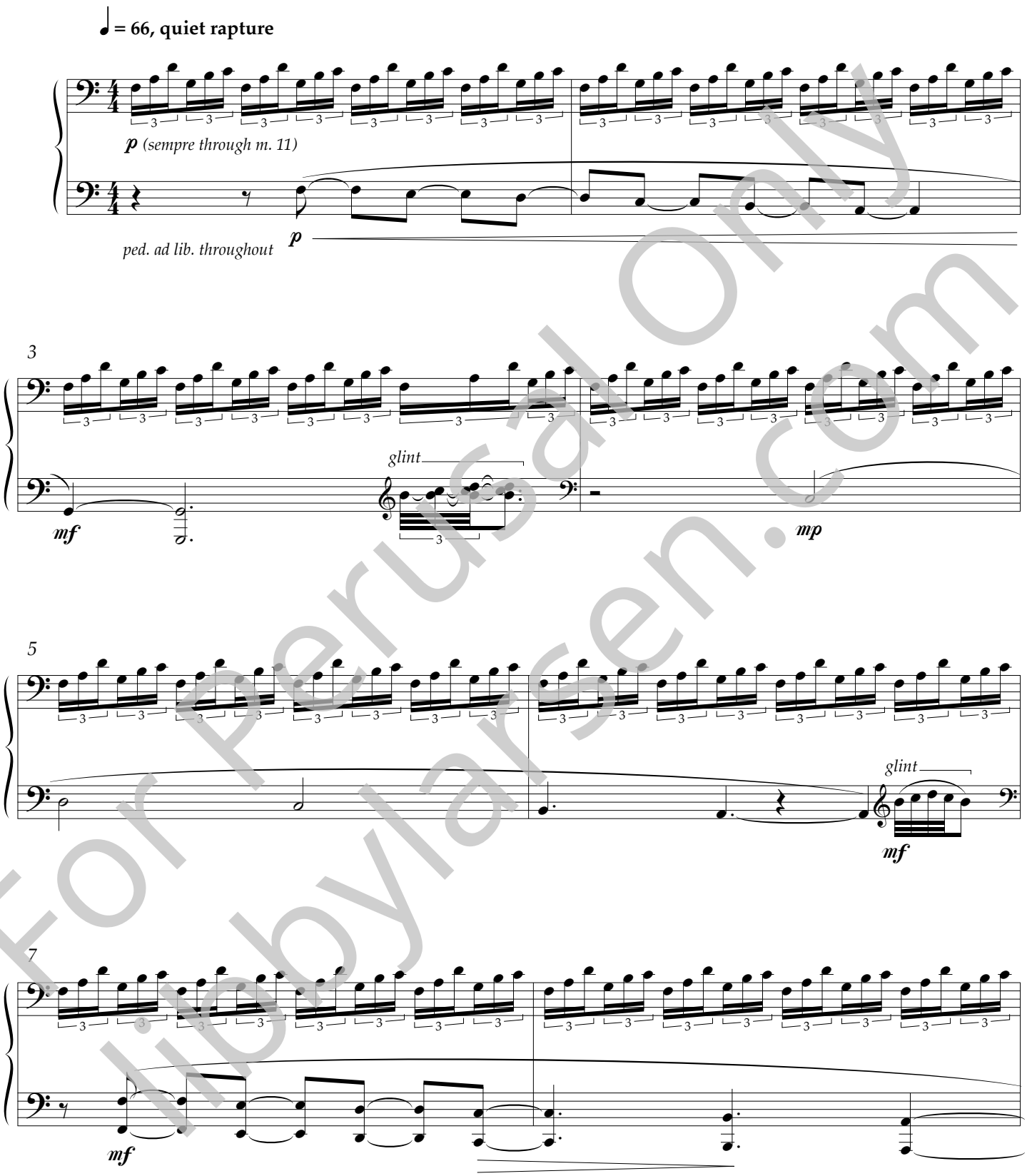
White Piece 2



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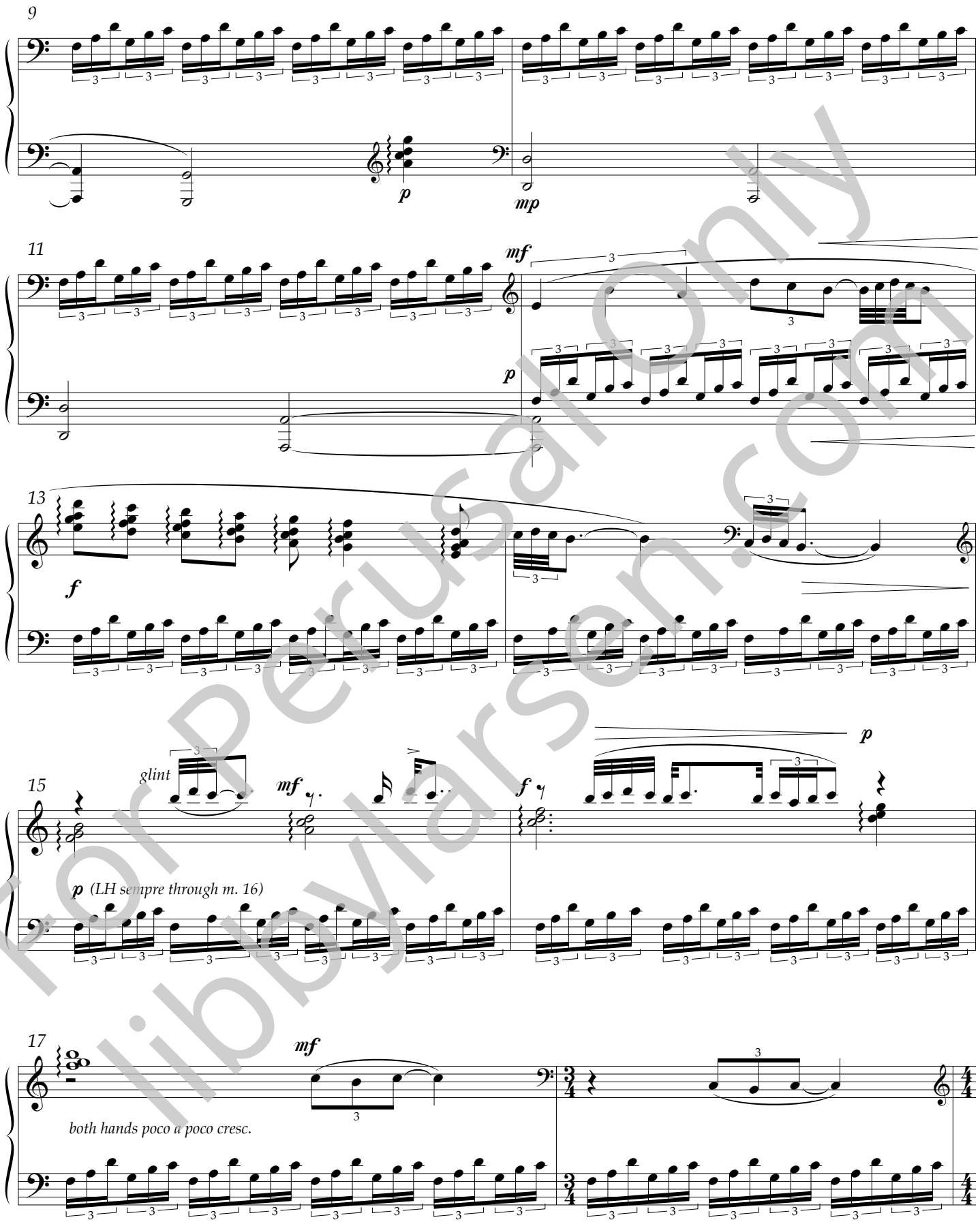

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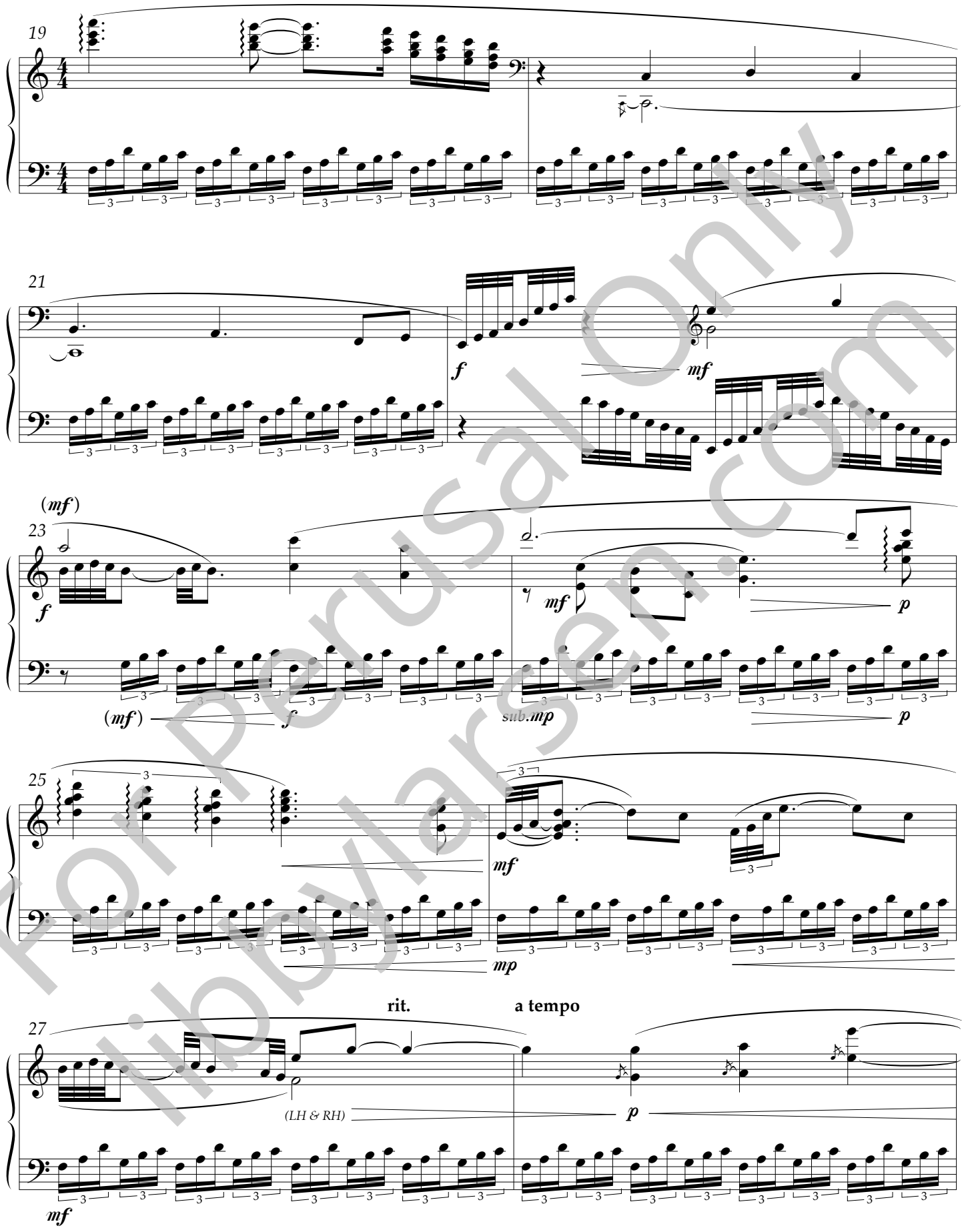

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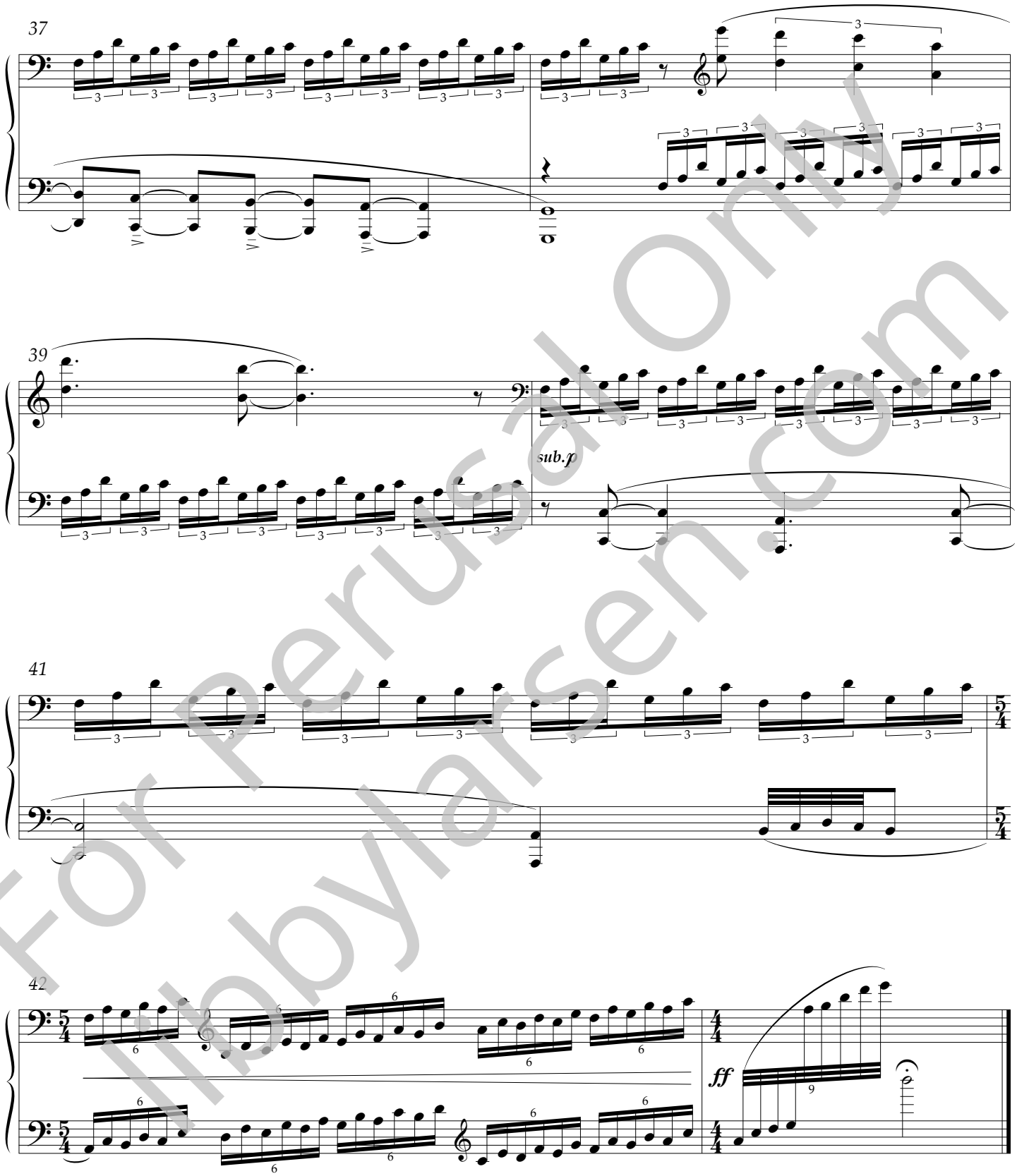

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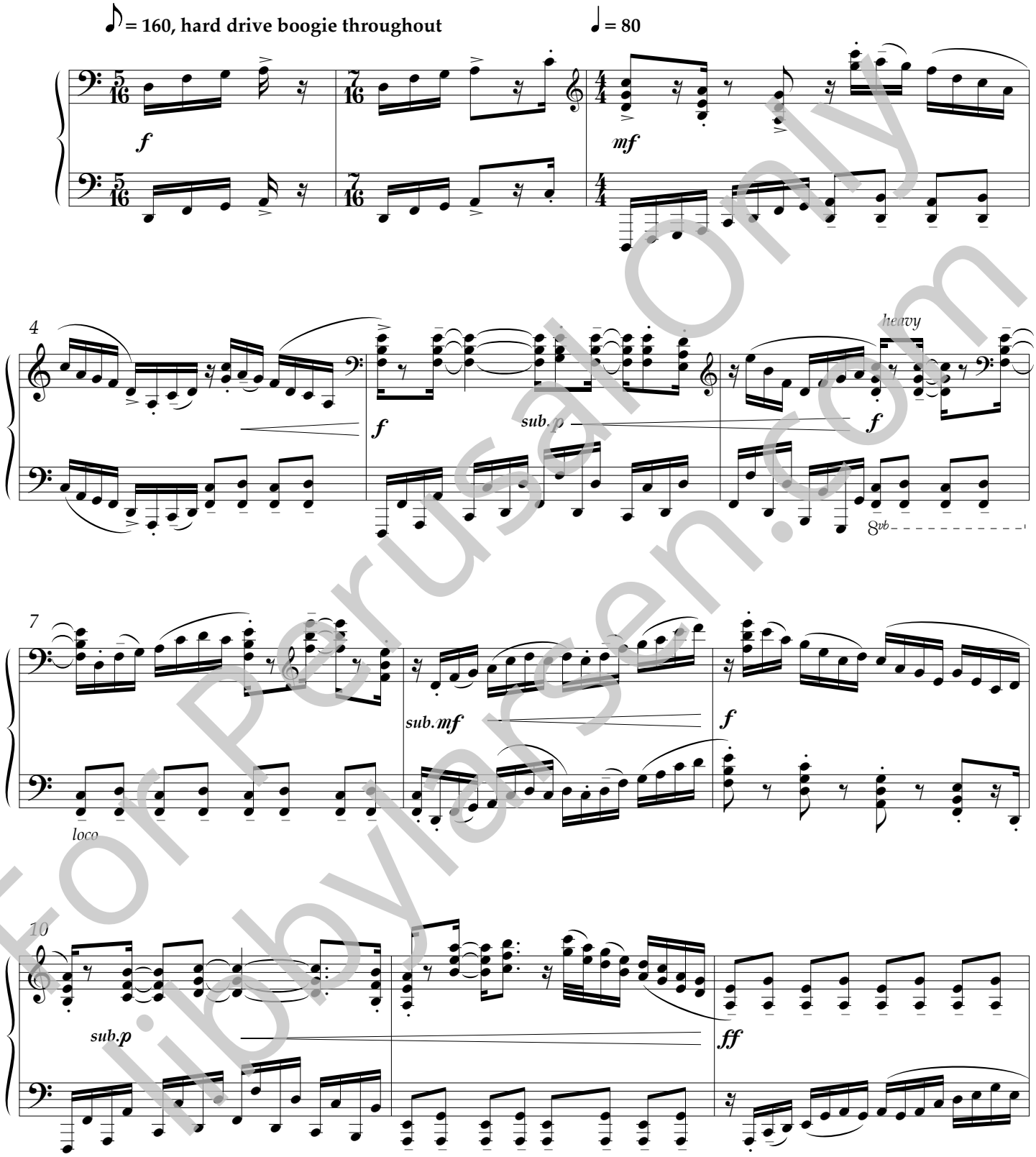
White Piece 3



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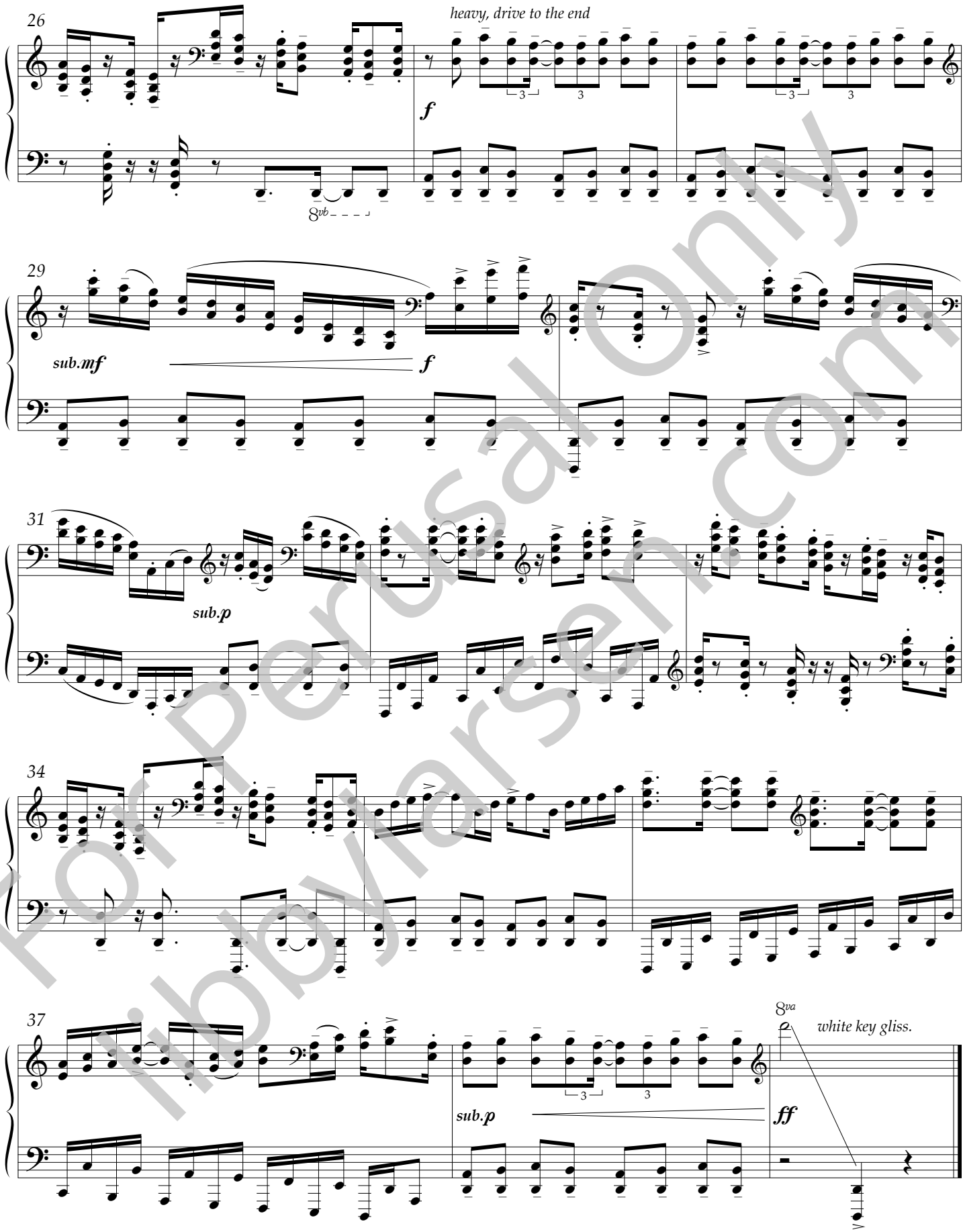

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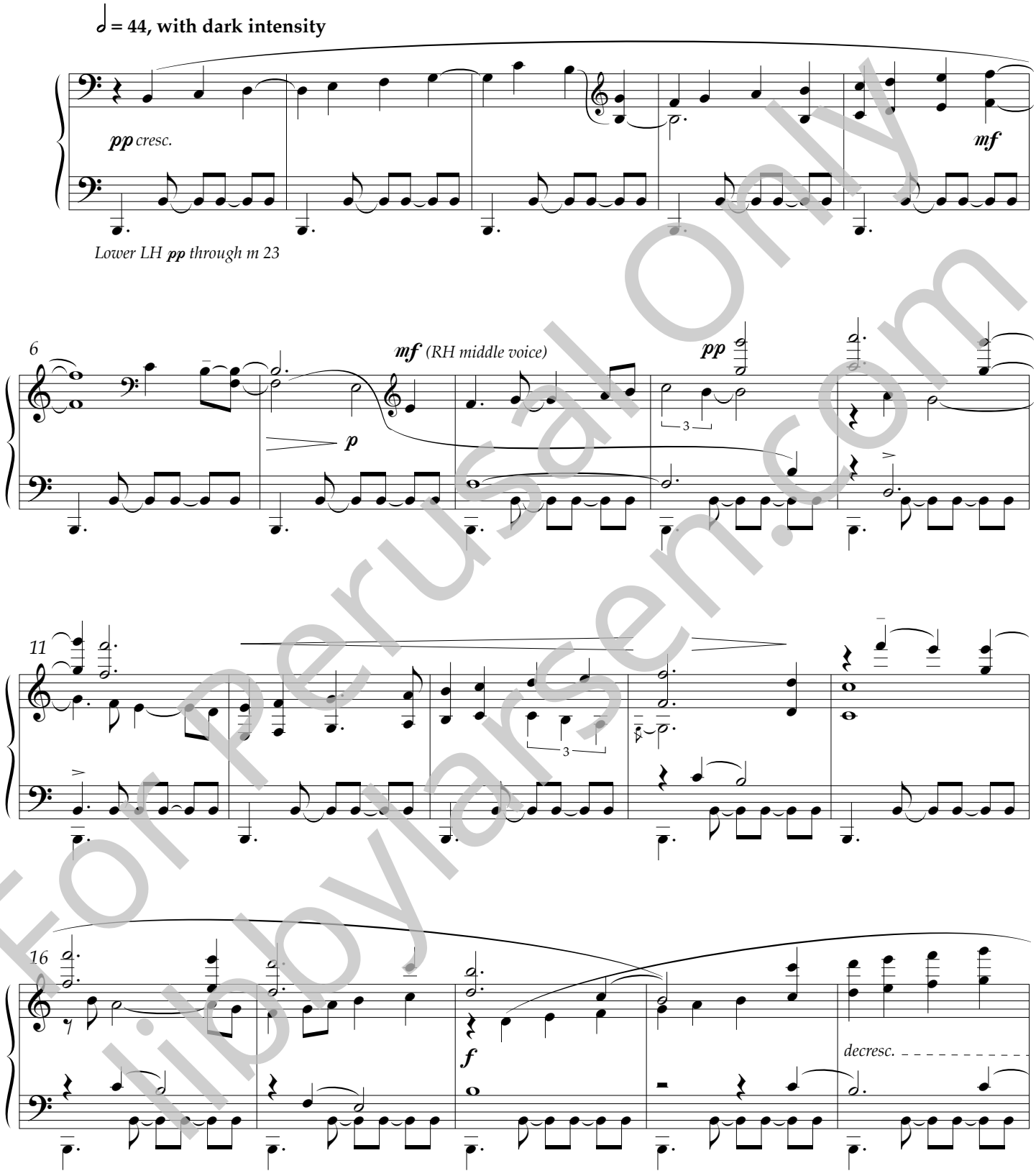

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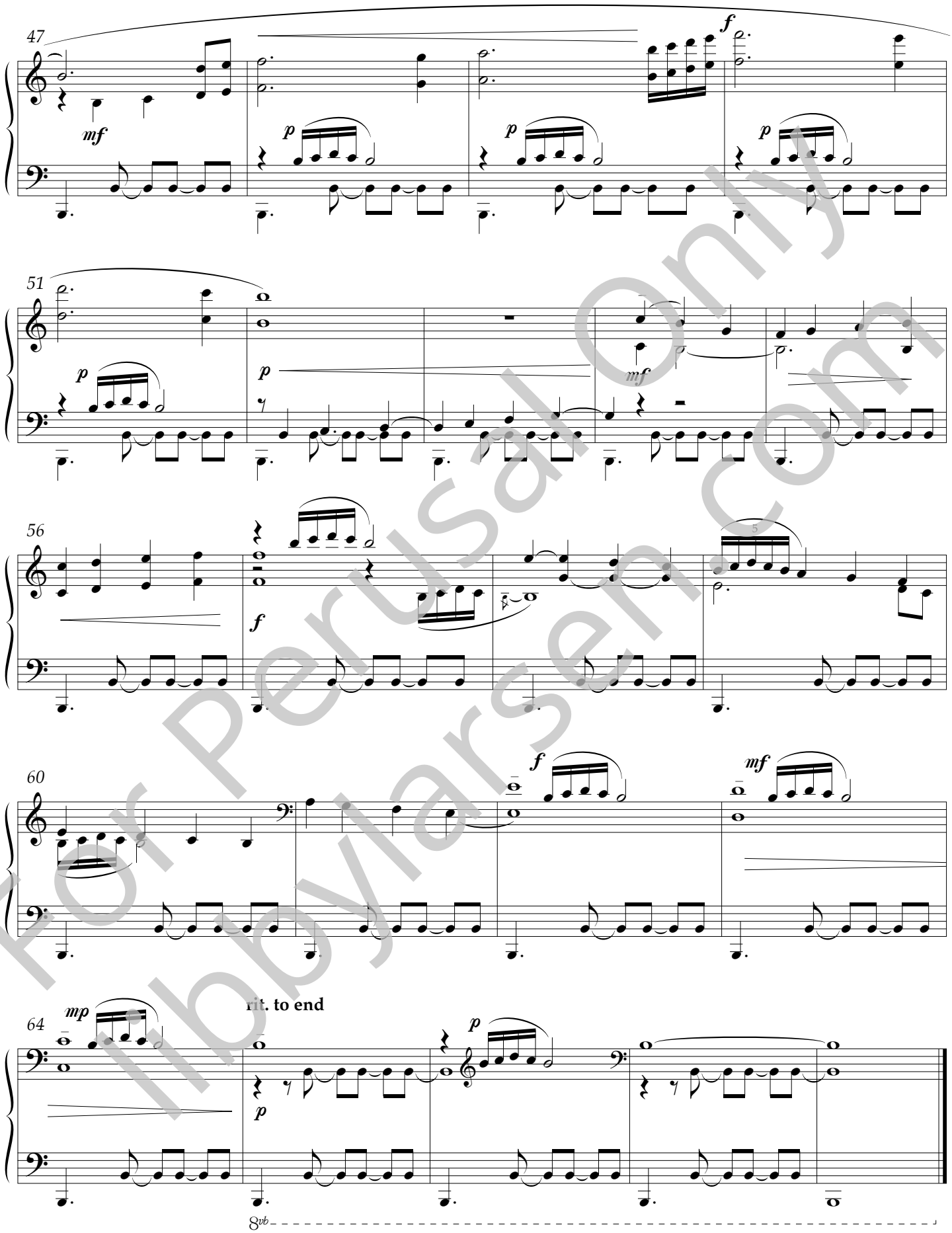

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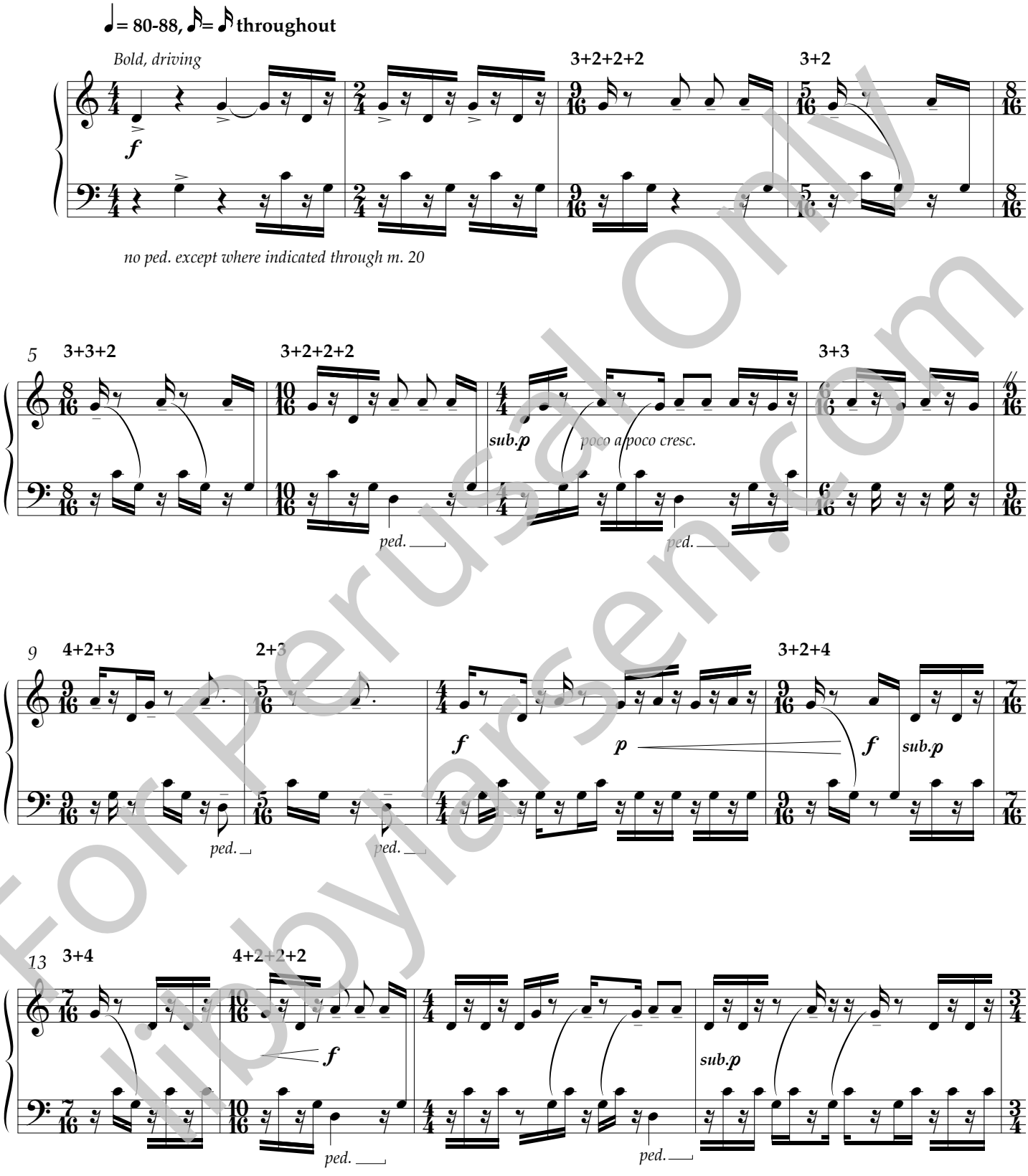

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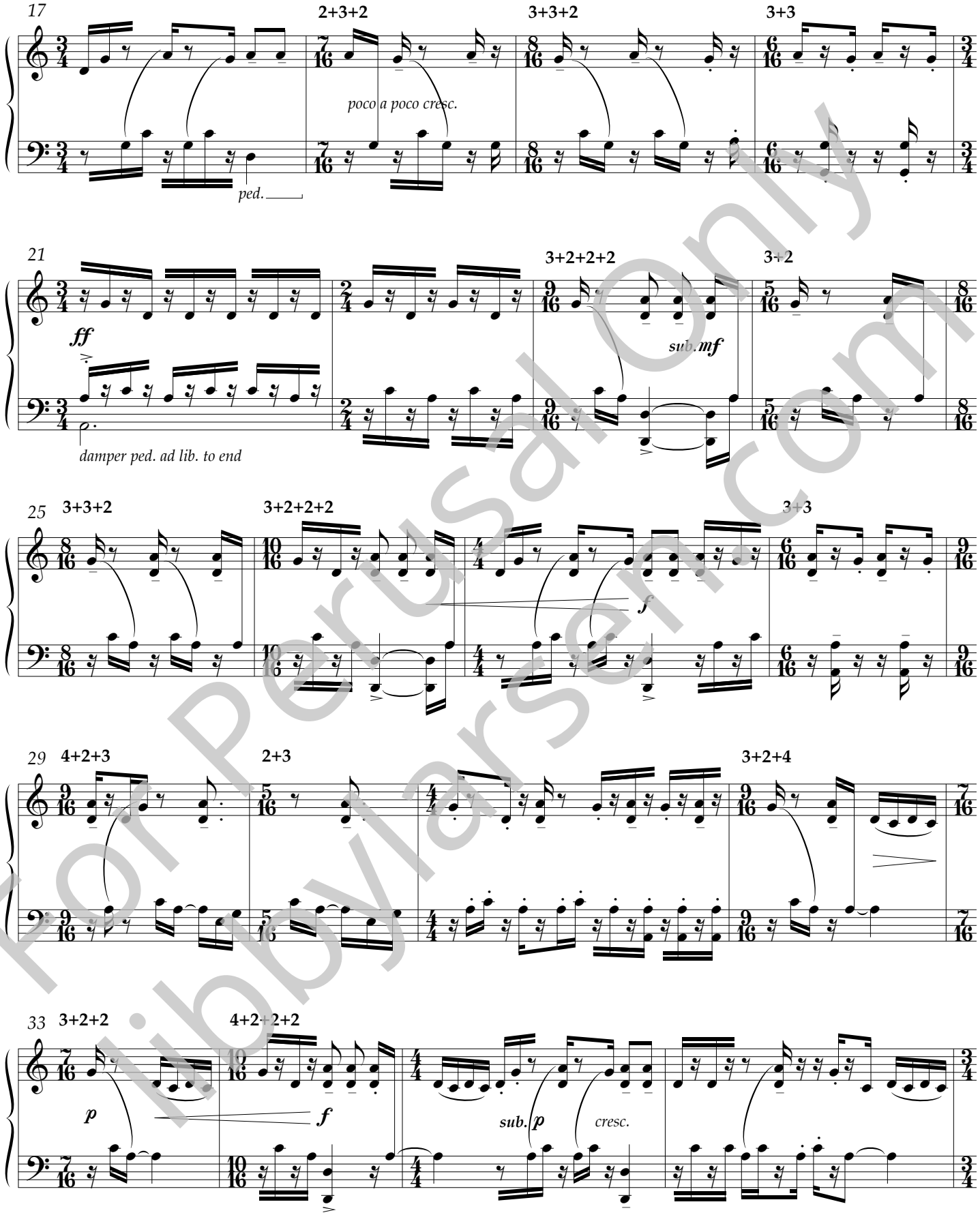

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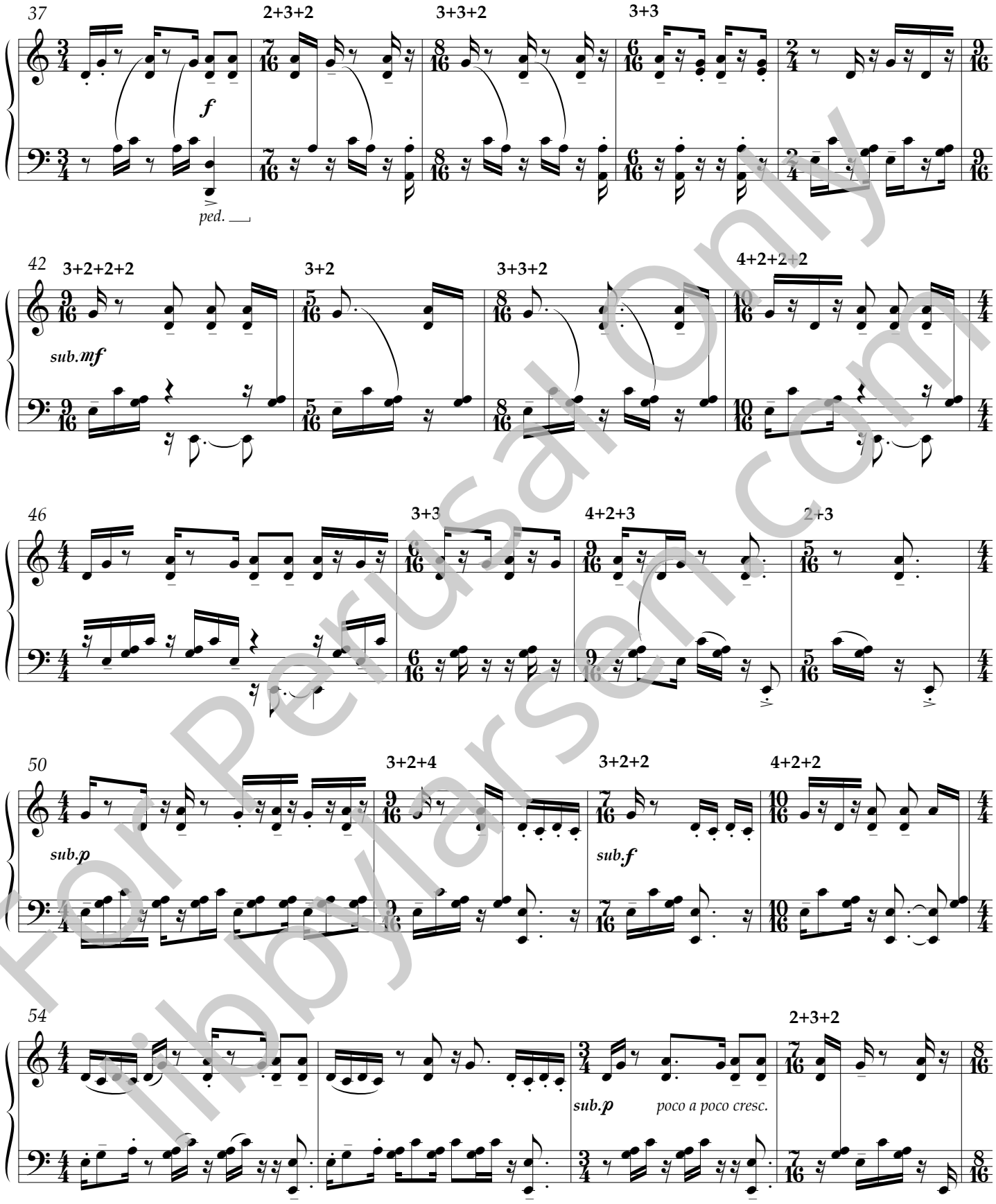

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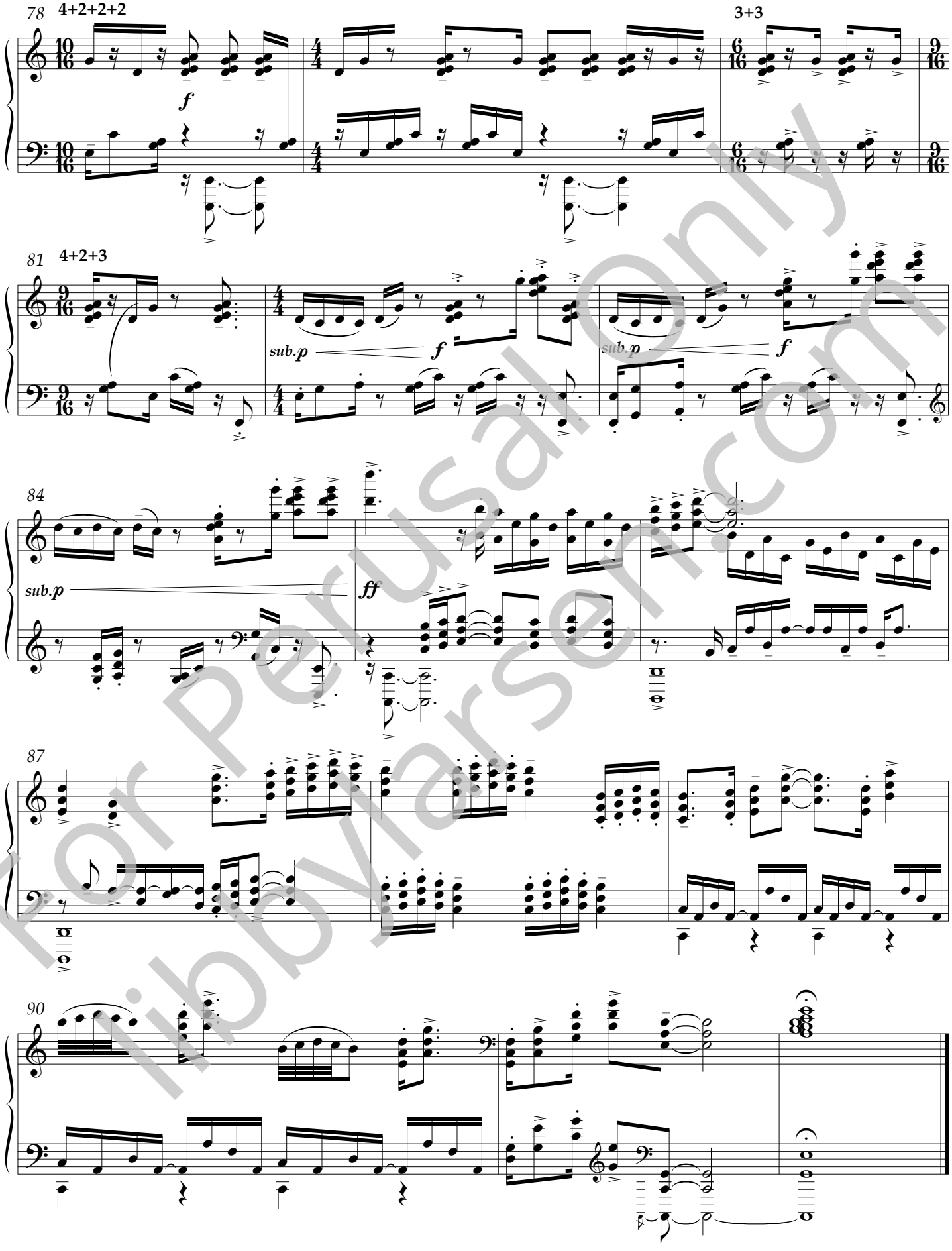

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