Vanguard Jazz Orchestra Series

KENDOR MUSIC PRESENTS

Low Down

style: Basie swing
duration 3:40

by Thad Jones

INSTRUMENTATION

Full Score
Alto Sax I
Alto Sax II
Tenor Sax I
Tenor Sax II
Baritone Sax
Trumpet I
Trumpet II
Trumpet III
Trumpet IV
Trombone I
Trombone II
Trombone III
Trombone IV
Piano /Guitar (2 copies)
Bass
Drums

EXTRA SCORES & PARTS AVAILABLE

THAD JONES

Thad wrote his first jazz arrangement at age 13 when he was a trumpet player in his uncle's band in his native Pontiac, Michigan, along with brothers Hank (piano) and Elvin (drums). In the 1940's he served in the army, led a band of his own, and played with other bands before joining the Count Basie band in 1954. Nine years later he left Basie and began arranging for singers, small groups, and the big Harry James Band.

In 1965 Thad and drummer Mel Lewis formed their award-winning jazz orchestra. For the next 13 years this amazing band became an American jazz institution. They played Monday nights at the Village Vanguard in NYC on an almost continuous basis, won countless polls in "Down Beat," and recorded a series of albums that remain popular today, including "Consummation," "Central Park North," "Live At The Village Vanguard" and "Suite For Pops."

In 1979 Thad moved to and settled in Copenhagen, where he conducted the Danish Radio Big Band and later formed his own Eclipse big band featuring an illustrious mix of players from America and Europe.

TO THE DIRECTOR

Thanks for your interest in this great music. These rehearsal notes are meant as an adjunct to the most important work, fun really, of listening to the recordings or better still, attending a live performance. We've tried in this small space to give the student (that includes all of us) a few hints and awareness of opportunities to improve the performance.

First would be our primary objective, and that is to swing. This music is an outgrowth of music that was meant for dancing and when it's right, it makes you feel like moving. All the harmonic and rhythmic sophistication of Thad Jones and the other great writers, from Fletcher Henderson to Jim McNeely, occur in the framework of great time. To this end, we need to be comfortable playing our parts so that we can concentrate on connecting with the other parts of the ensemble. The suggested tempo markings represent the tempo that the composition was played at the time of Thad's departure from the band in 1979 and generally are the upper end of the scale. The arrangement can definitely be played slower, and should be if that makes it easier to swing. The VJO doesn't always play these pieces at the same tempo, as it's fun to experiment. Snooky's "golden moment" going into letter C is a good figure to hear when deciding on the tempo. It's one of the keys to the swinging feeling as it's a string of eighth notes and ends with a syncopated figure.

One more note before turning it over to David Demsey for some particulars. Most all questions of balance, blend and dynamics can be answered by simply knowing as much as possible about the music you are playing. What's the form of the tune? Are you playing the melody, a counter melody, a background? Who are you playing with? What's the chord and your position in it? You'll find even more questions and answers, and if you stay with it, you'll know why we're still, after decades of playing this music, engaged and dedicated to it. And remember, it's supposed to be fun.

The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra

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HISTORICAL AND REHEARSAL NOTES

This historic arrangement was one of "the original seven" that formed the repertoire of the original Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra (now the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra). To this day, in the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra band folders, *Low-Down* is #6 in the book. This new edition is taken directly from the original ink parts that were on the stands at the band's debut performance in February 1966, now housed in the Thad Jones Archive at William Paterson University, where Thad served as Founding Director of Jazz Studies.

These original seven charts were commissioned by Count Basie for an entire album of Thad Jones' music – but Thad's voicings and ideas were "modern" enough to Basie's ears that he never made the record, instead suggesting that Thad start his own band. The rest is history! Nevertheless, *Low-Down* still maintains that swinging Basie mindset, and should be rehearsed that way. Its basic foundations are a relaxed but powerful rhythm section with a driving ride cymbal beat and crisp hi-hat, underpinning saxes and brass that are tight, and always on the back of the beat. The saxes and brass play their upbeats as late as possible, locking in with the tight ride cymbal skip beat. A great description of the Basie time concept comes from the legendary Basie alumnus Frank Wess, who once said, "That accent is not on the upbeat of four, it's just before one!"

Low-Down is a 32-measure AABA form; this arrangement consists of repetitions of that 32-bar chorus with a band theme statement (rehearsal Letters A, B & D), a two-chorus trumpet solo (Letters E-m, then joined by the saxes at G and I), a shout chorus at Letters M-P, and a quick return of the "A" section of the theme at Letter Q.

As with many Basie arrangements, a number of key stylistic elements are not printed on the original chart. The rehearsal comments below are taken from recorded performances of the original recording by the Thad Jones- Mel Lewis Orchestra, and from later recordings and performances by the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. This arrangement can be performed at the deepest level when band members are hearing these great recordings in their minds as they play.

- On the introduction, the huge brass chords at the opening should be separated, as though they were written as quarter notes on beats 1 and 3 (off on 2 and 4). The sax figure in measure 8 has a long syncopated quarter note on the upbeat of beat 1.

- On the theme at Letters A, B and D, the long notes and their releases are as important as the attacks; saxes hold out the half notes until beat 1 in every measure, and the trombones should not breathe after the dotted half notes. At measure 13, saxes should snap off the marcato quarter notes; at measure 15, play that line legato with dynamic emphasis on higher notes and "ghosted" de-emphasis on lower notes.

- Leading into the theme's bridge at one measure before Letter C, the trumpets should make a big crescendo into the downbeat of Letter C; lead trumpeter Snooky Young had a wonderful way of "sitting back" and separating the first two syncopated notes at C – learn to imitate this magic moment on the recording.

- At Letter G, the trumpet solo continues into the bridge of the form, but the saxes enter with more than background figures; the trumpet soloist should engage in dialogue with the saxes, waiting for an opening in the third measure to resume the solo. This happens again at Letter I; Thad often kept playing "in the holes" of the sax soli through Letters J, K and L.

- Listen for the quote from the Basie classic *April In Paris* in measures 93-94.

- Although the backgrounds are getting more aggressive coming into Letter M, the ensemble shout chorus starts at a surprisingly low volume (another nod to the Basie style), then gradually increases in volume and intensity.

- Dynamic contrasts happen at Letter O, and again at measure 125; in both spots there is a loud initial accent, followed by subito piano and a crescendo. Letter P should start very quietly to make room for a big crescendo. Make a smooth transition into the abbreviated return of the theme at Letter Q. The first two beats of measure 136 are played on Thad's recording almost like a quarter note triplet.

Significant recordings of *Low Down*:

- Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, *All My Yesterdays* (2 CDs and 89-page booklet; recorded 2/7/66 and 3/21/66; released 2016 during the 50th anniversary week at Village Vanguard jazz club) Resonance HCD2023

- Mel Lewis Jazz Orchestra, *The Definitive Thad Jones, Vol 1* (recorded 1988) Jazz Heritage Society 5179015

- Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, *Forever Lasting: Live in Tokyo* (recorded 11/26-28/10) Planet Arts 101116

David Demsey
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Curator, Thad Jones Archive
William Paterson University

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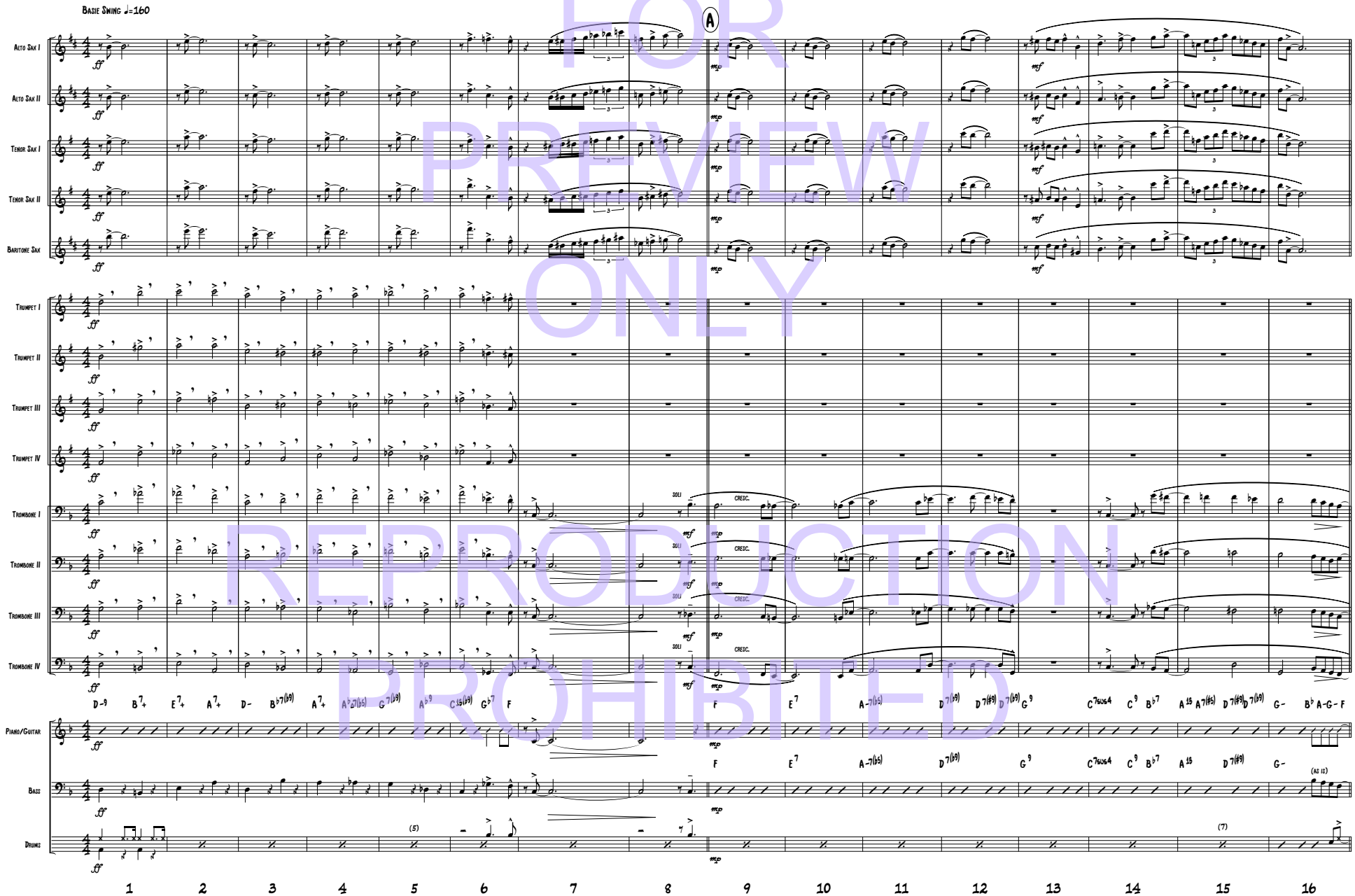
SCORE

Low Down

Composed and arranged
by Thad Jones



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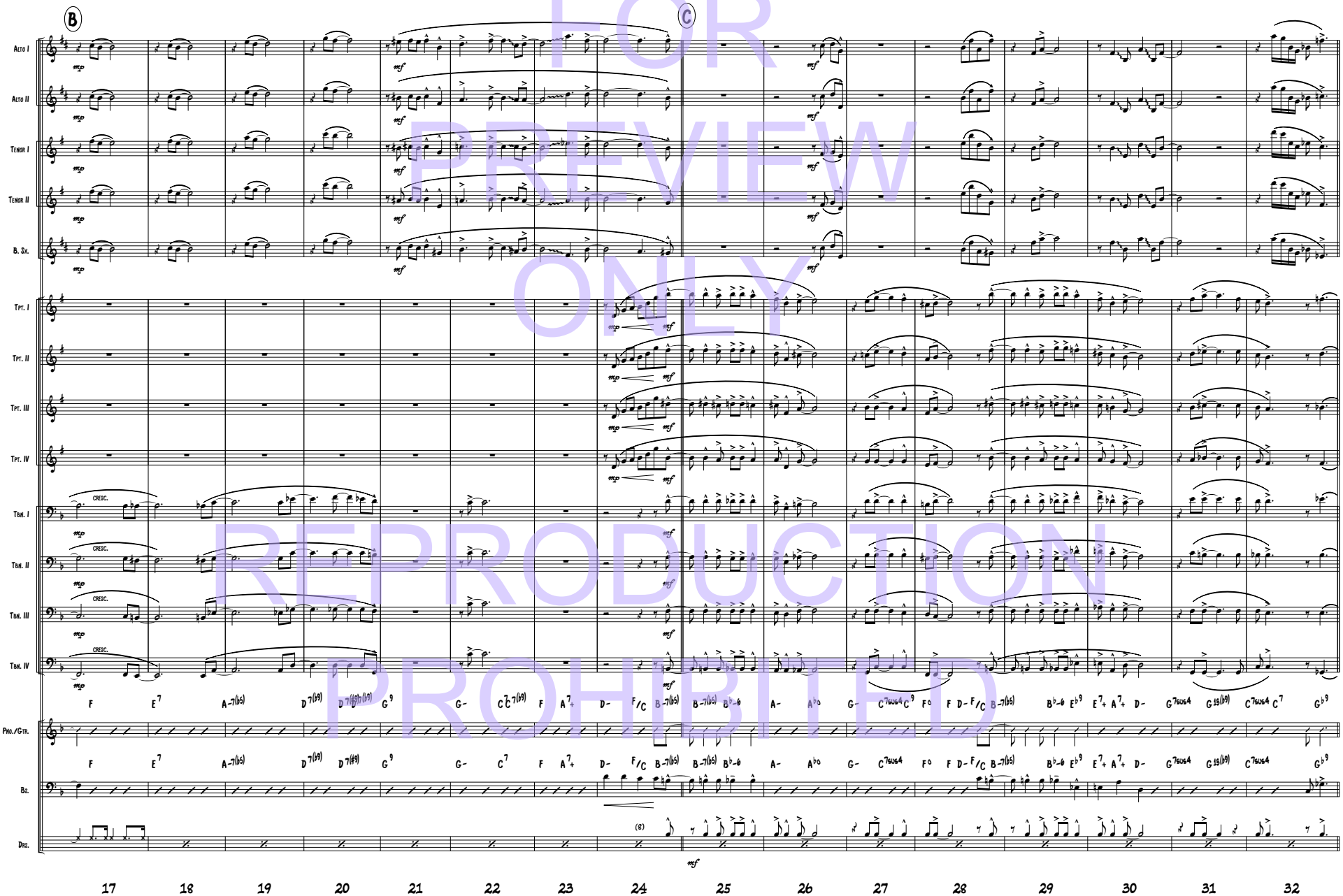

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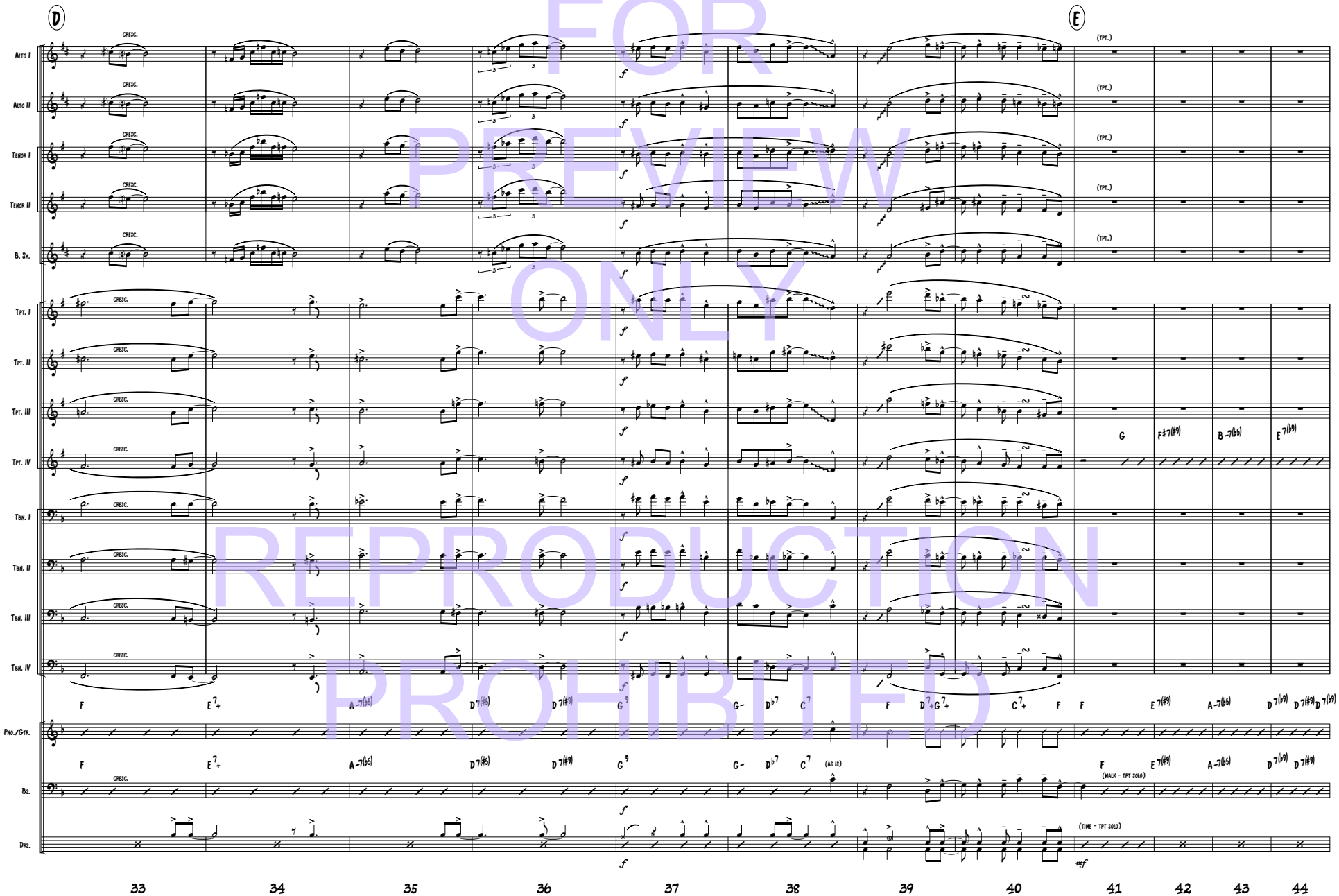

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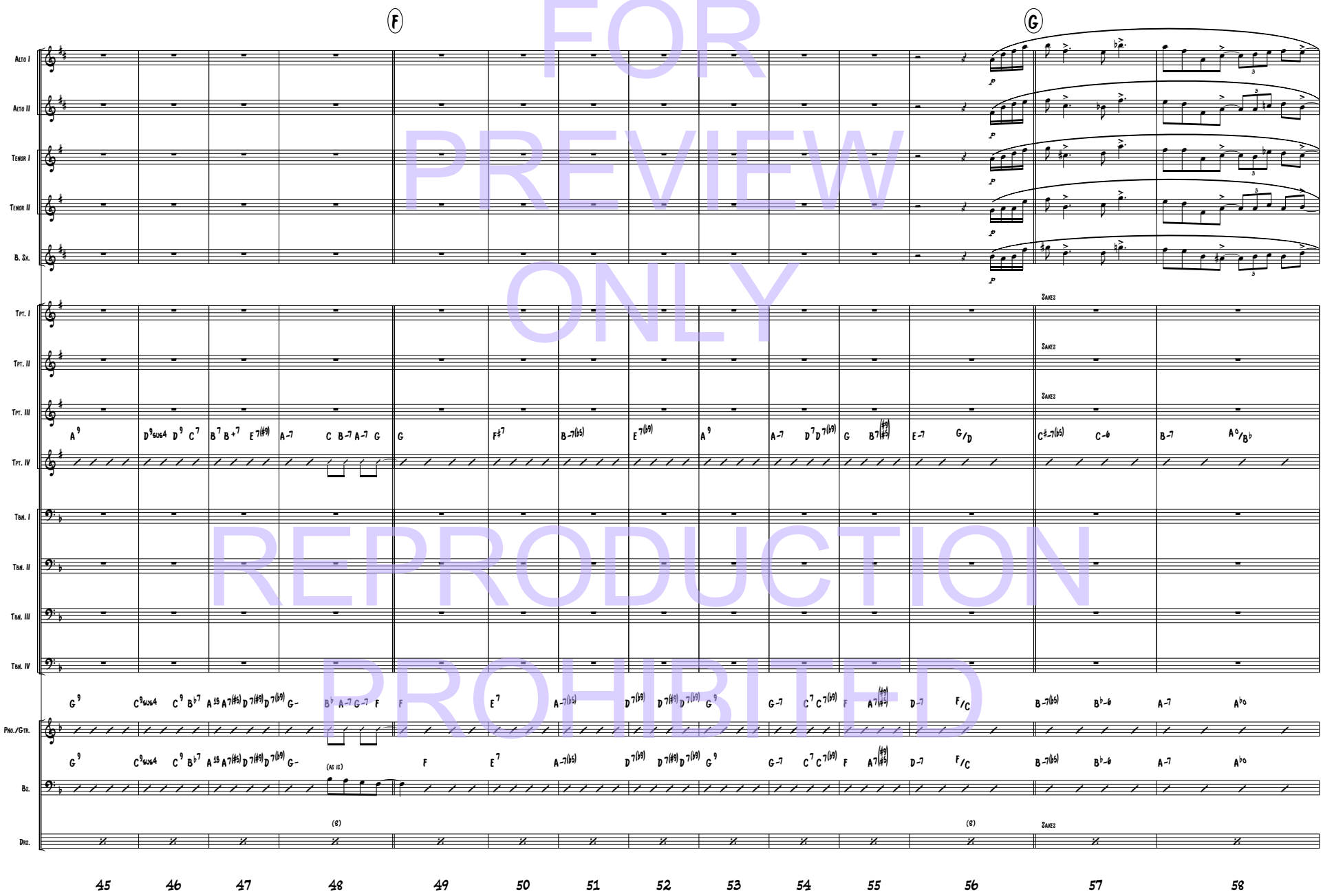

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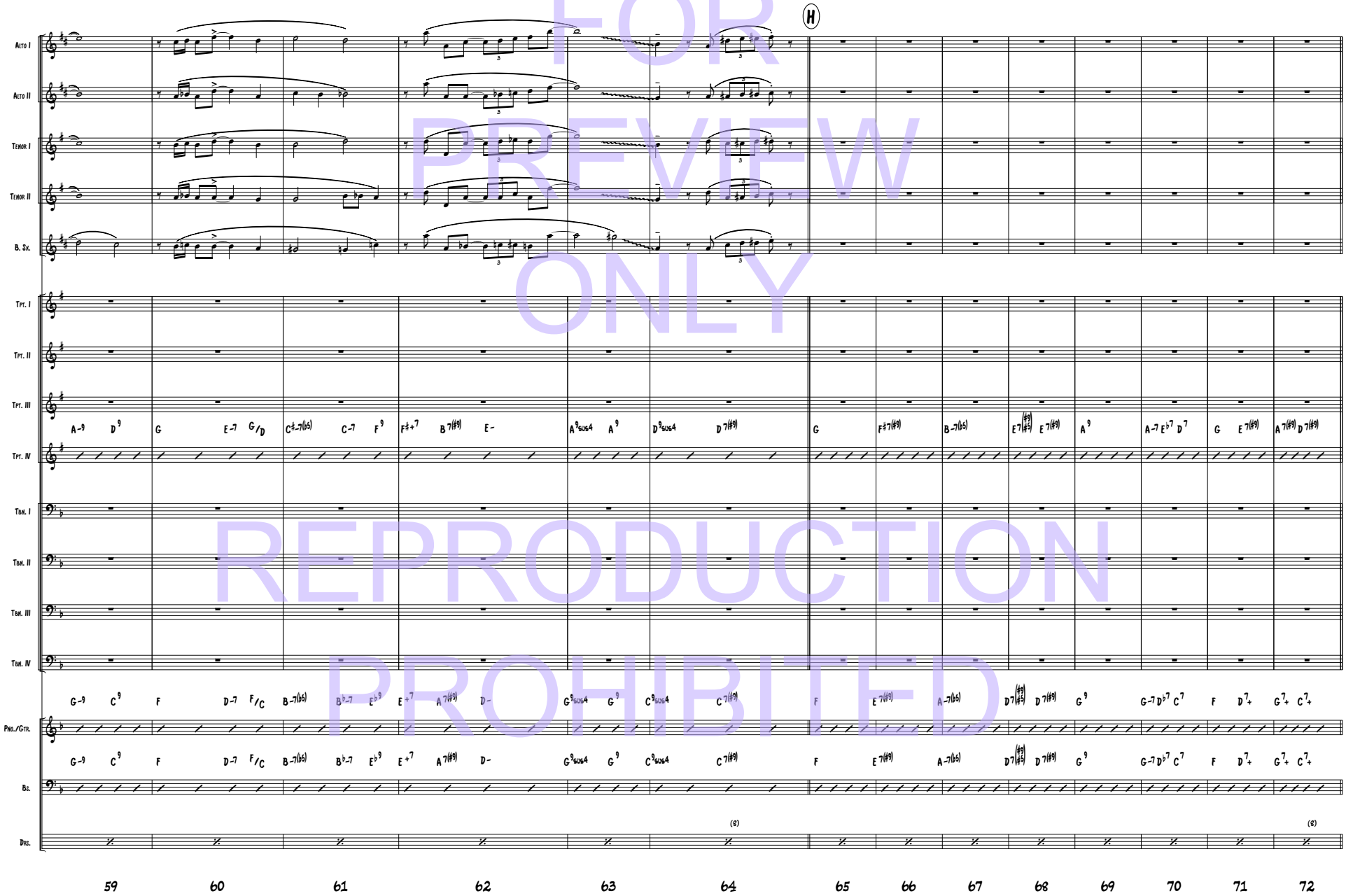

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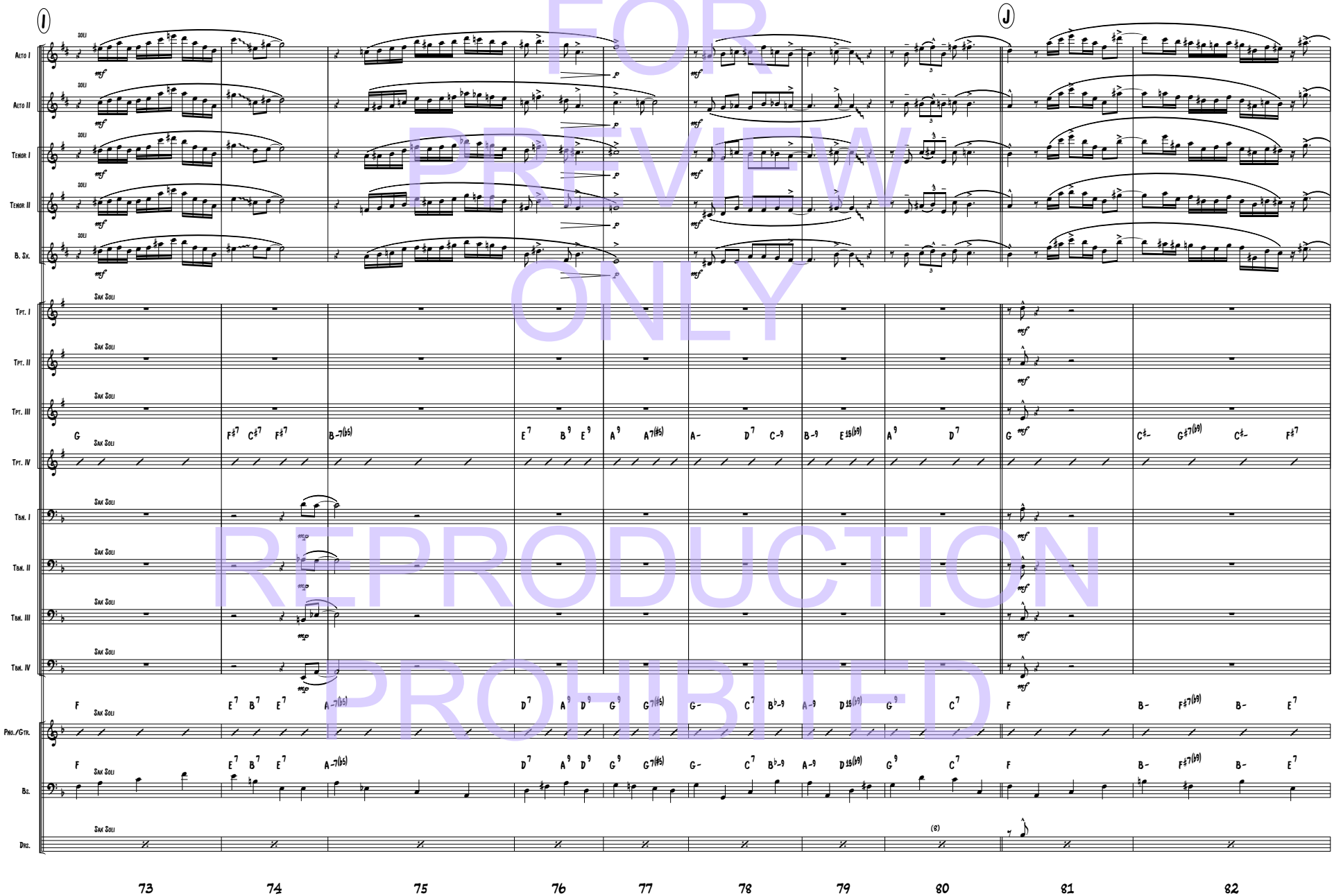

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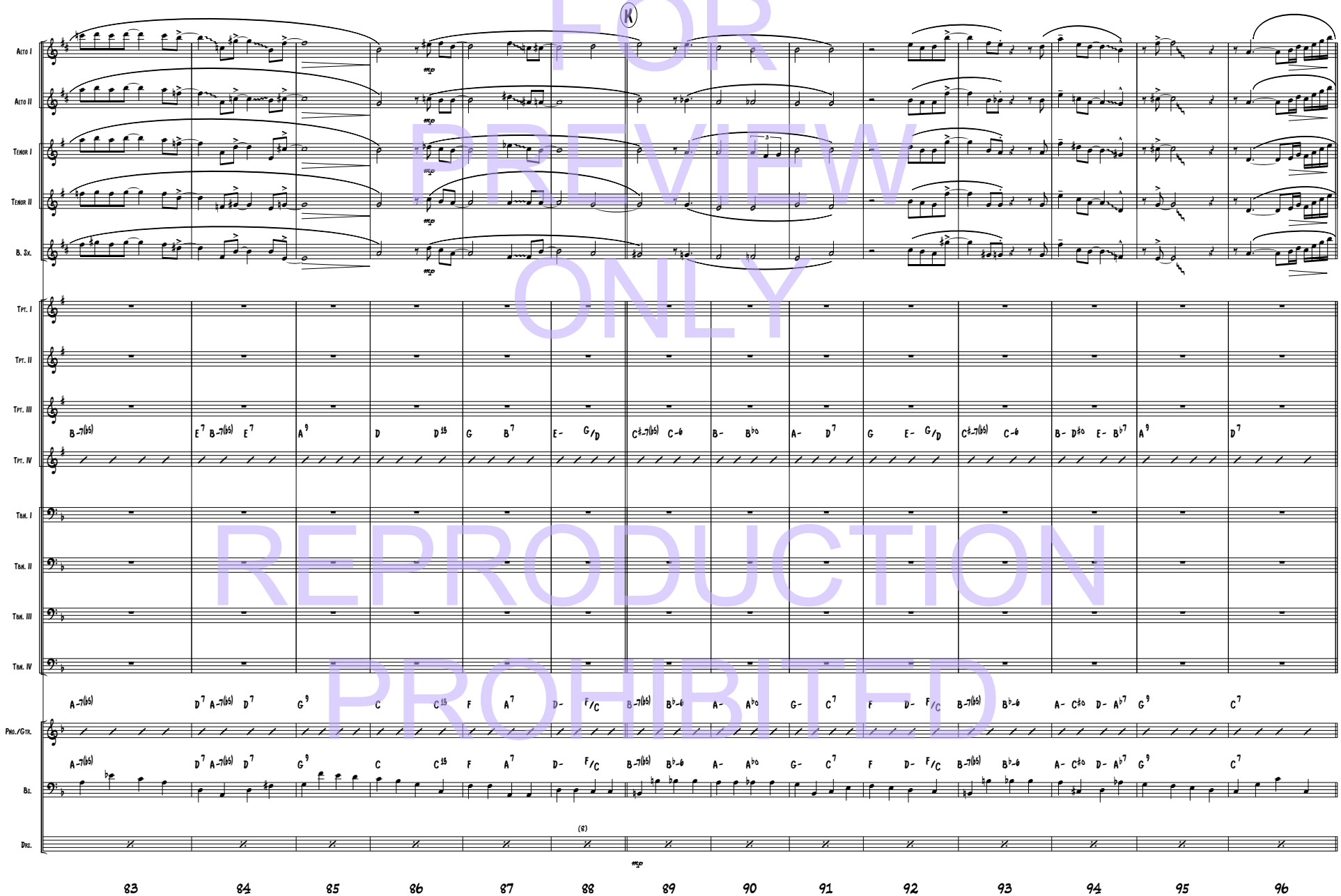

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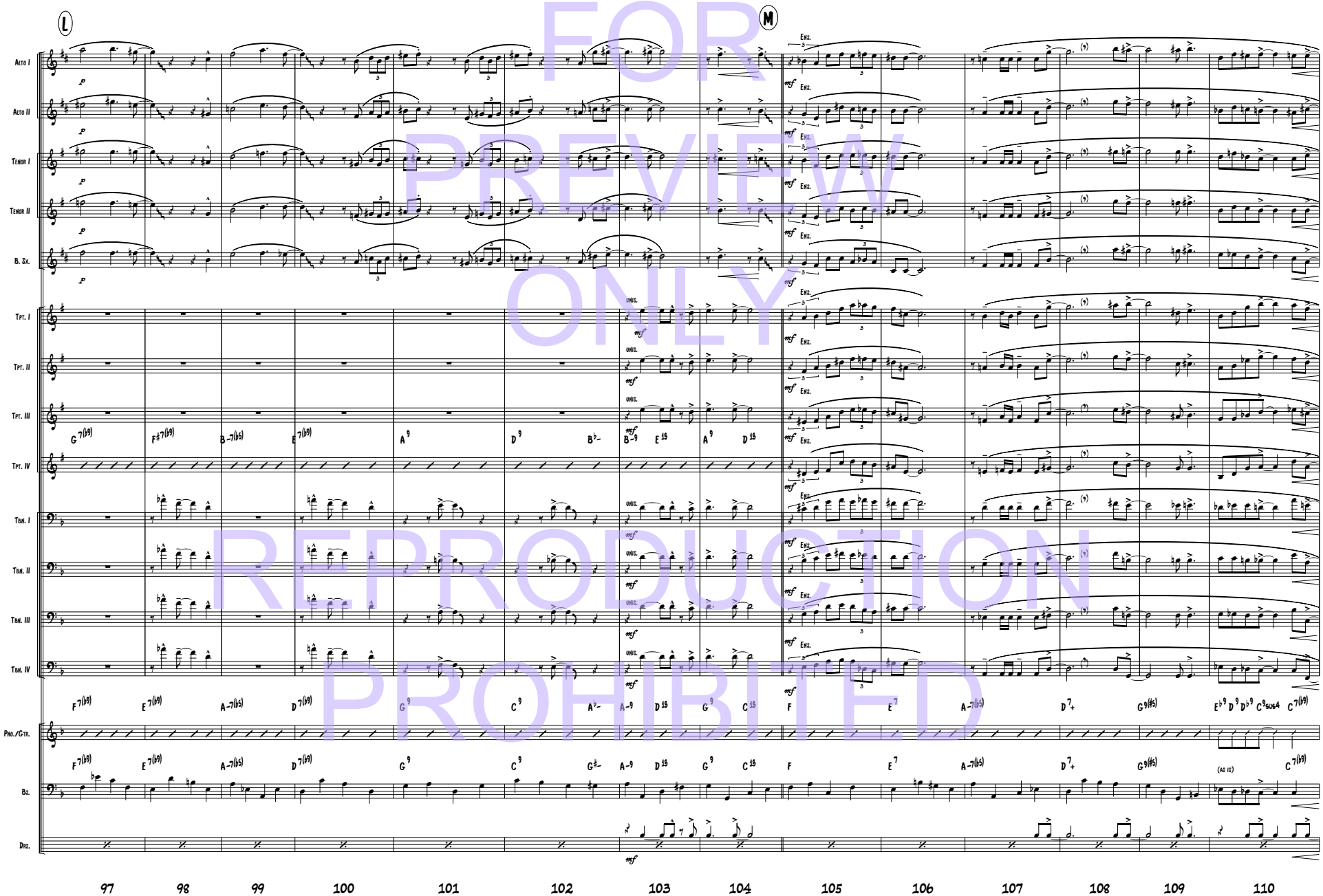

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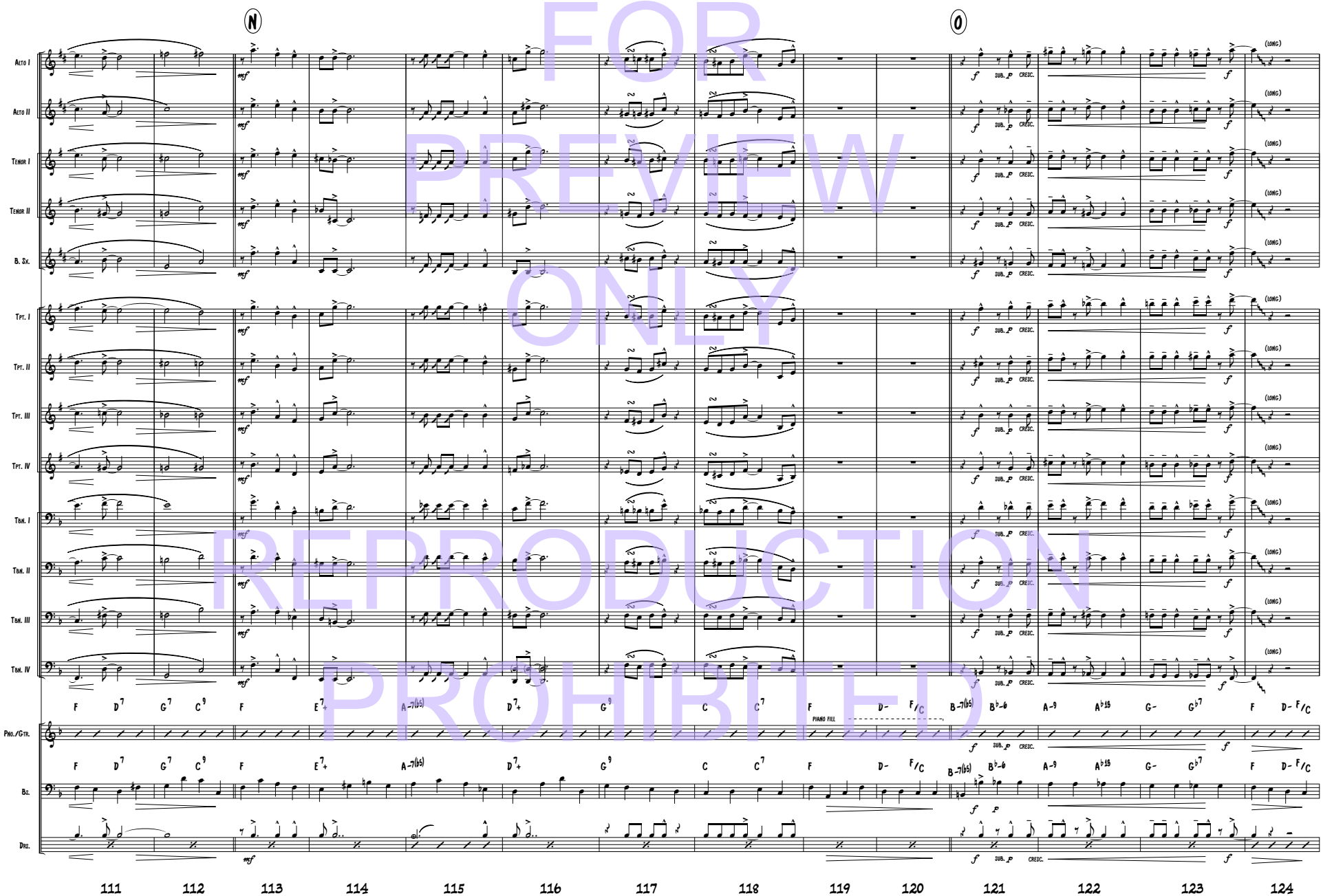

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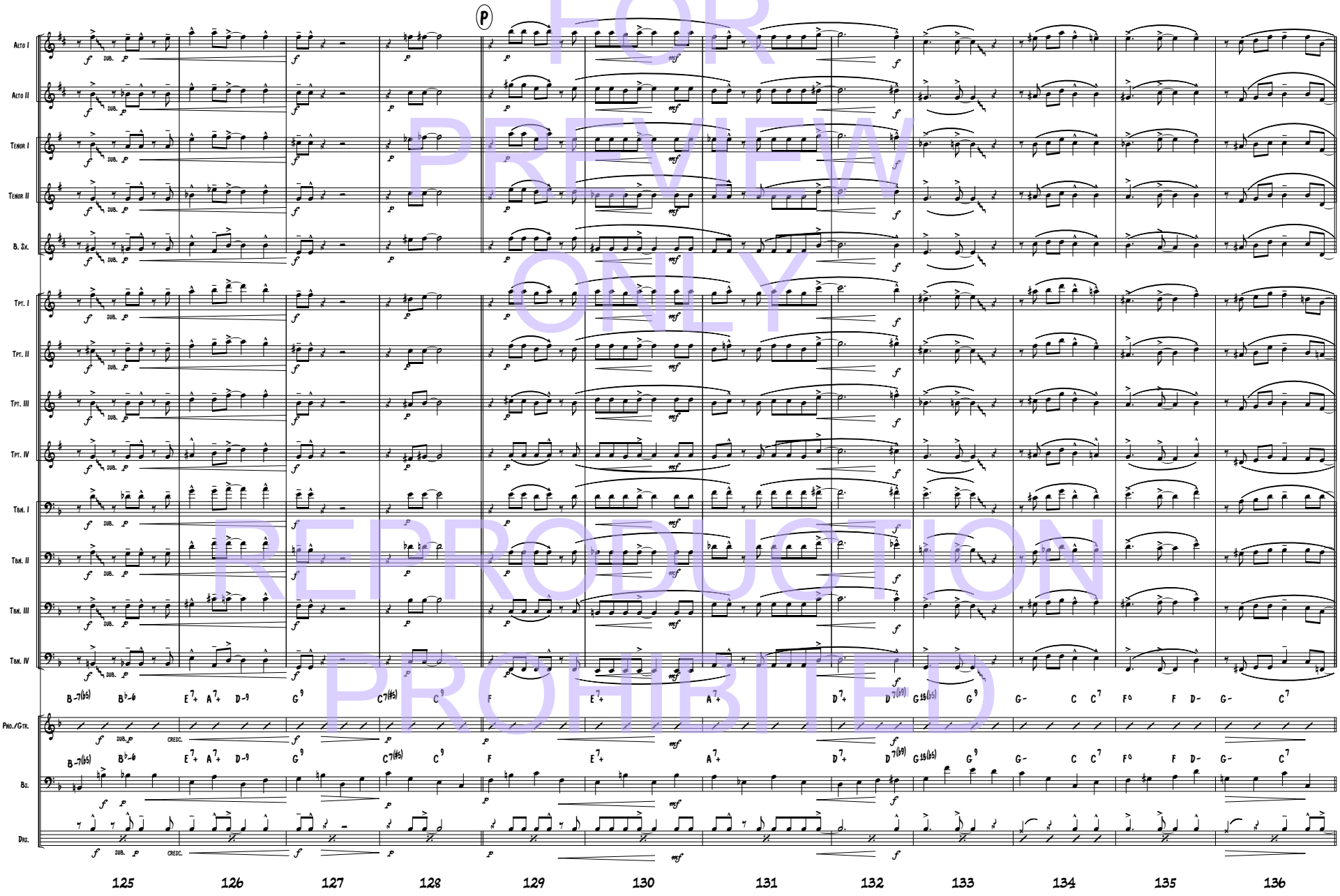

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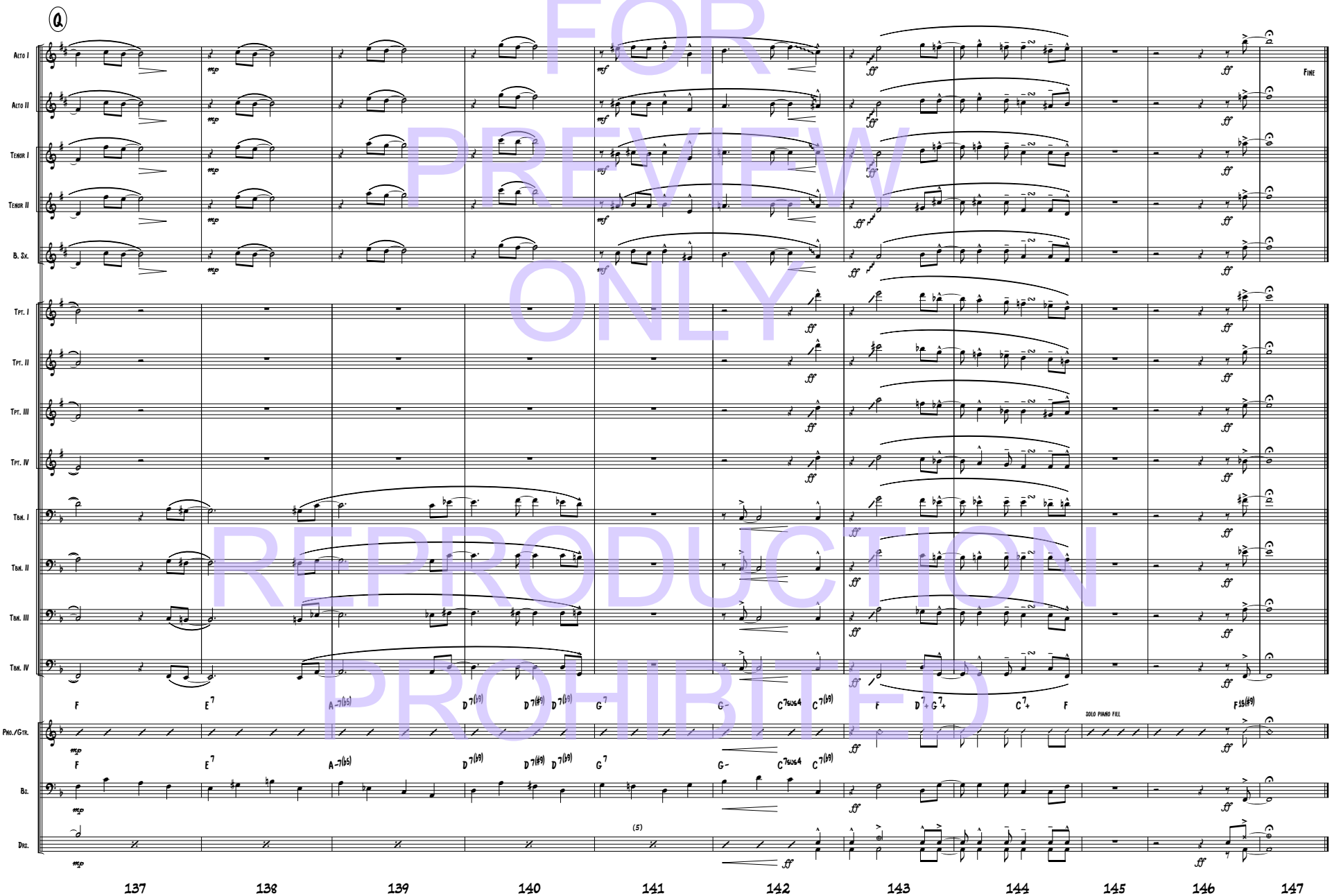

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