FIRST YEAR CHARTS

FOR JAZZ ENSEMBLE

Unexcused Absences

By Zachary Smith

INSTRUMENTATION

Conductor
1st E♭ Alto Saxophone
2nd E♭ Alto Saxophone
1st B♭ Tenor Saxophone
2nd B♭ Tenor Saxophone (Optional)
E♭ Baritone Saxophone (Optional)
1st B♭ Trumpet
2nd B♭ Trumpet
3rd B♭ Trumpet (Optional)
1st Trombone
2nd Trombone (Optional)
3rd Trombone (Optional)
Guitar Chords
Guitar (Optional)
Piano
Bass
Drums

Optional/Alternate Parts

C Flute
B♭ Clarinet
Vibraphone
Tuba (Doubles Bass)
Horn in F (Doubles 1st Trombone)
Baritone Horn T.C./B♭ Tenor Saxophone (Doubles 1st Trombone)

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NOTES TO THE CONDUCTOR

I wrote this piece as a tribute to the group Sly & the Family Stone, whose music strongly influenced American pop music and jazz.

As a suggestion prior to working on this chart, consider recommending your band check out some classic tunes by Sly & the Family Stone such as "Dance to the Music," "Everyday People," and "I Want to Take You Higher." Listen to bassist Larry Graham, who is credited with the invention of slap bass technique, and to the precision of drummer Greg Errico (who later played with the group Weather Report and the Jerry Garcia Band).

Unexcused Absences employs a few classic drum techniques from the late 1960s. For example, "four on the floor" in mm. 28–34, where the bass drum plays quarter notes on all four beats. This groove would eventually be used in disco music of the 70s and today's electronic dance music. It also uses a "heartbeat" bass drum rhythm throughout much of the arrangement, which is the bass drum on beat 1 and the "and" of 2 and 3.

A lot of the success of this chart rides on your rhythm section locking in on these grooves and playing as a unit. As an advocate of a tight rhythm section, I suggest that in addition to utilizing rehearsal time tightening up the horns, also invest time in the rhythm section. For example, make sure the bass drum and bass player are always hitting beat 1 together. Listen for the balance: Is the guitar too loud? How is the bass tone? Are you getting too much snare and not enough bass drum? Or vice versa? Can anyone hear the piano?

Once the band has a handle on the notes and rhythms, try having the band play with a metronome. It is a great way to show them where they are tending to drag or rush figures. For example, in the first measure, young players tend to rush the note on the "and" of beat 4. Remind them to subdivide the quarter note on the "and" of 3 into two eighth notes: "dah, dah, dit dah-ah dit." The trumpet section often tends to rush beat 2 in mm. 21 and 23.

There is a big fall-off on beat two of m. 36. Remind your horn players to blow twice as much air when they are falling and to try to match the first trumpet player in rate and length of the fall. The saxophone section is featured beginning at m. 68. Ideally, the whole rhythm section drops out and lets them show what great rhythmical time they have. But if needed, it's ok to add a hi-hat (or a cowbell) on all 4 beats in mm. 68–75.

Regarding articulations, remember that in jazz charts a marcato (^), or rooftop accent, is played like a fat, accented short note—think "daht!" The staccato should be very short—think "dit." If practical, soloists should stand up for solos. And finally, make sure everyone is having fun when they perform. It is ok to move around a little, smile at each other, clap your hands, and enjoy the moment!

Enjoy!

—Zachary Smith

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Zachary Smith

Zachary Smith is a noted composer, arranger, and professional trumpet player and has led the New Orleans music ensemble Dixie Power Trio for the past twenty-five years. He earned a BS in jazz performance at the University of North Texas and has maintained a busy performing, writing, and teaching schedule in the Washington, D.C. area. Zack has garnered a large following as an arranger for his brass ensemble writing and won the 2012 Humboldt State University Brass Chamber Music competition.

CONDUCTOR
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UNEXCUSED ABSENCES

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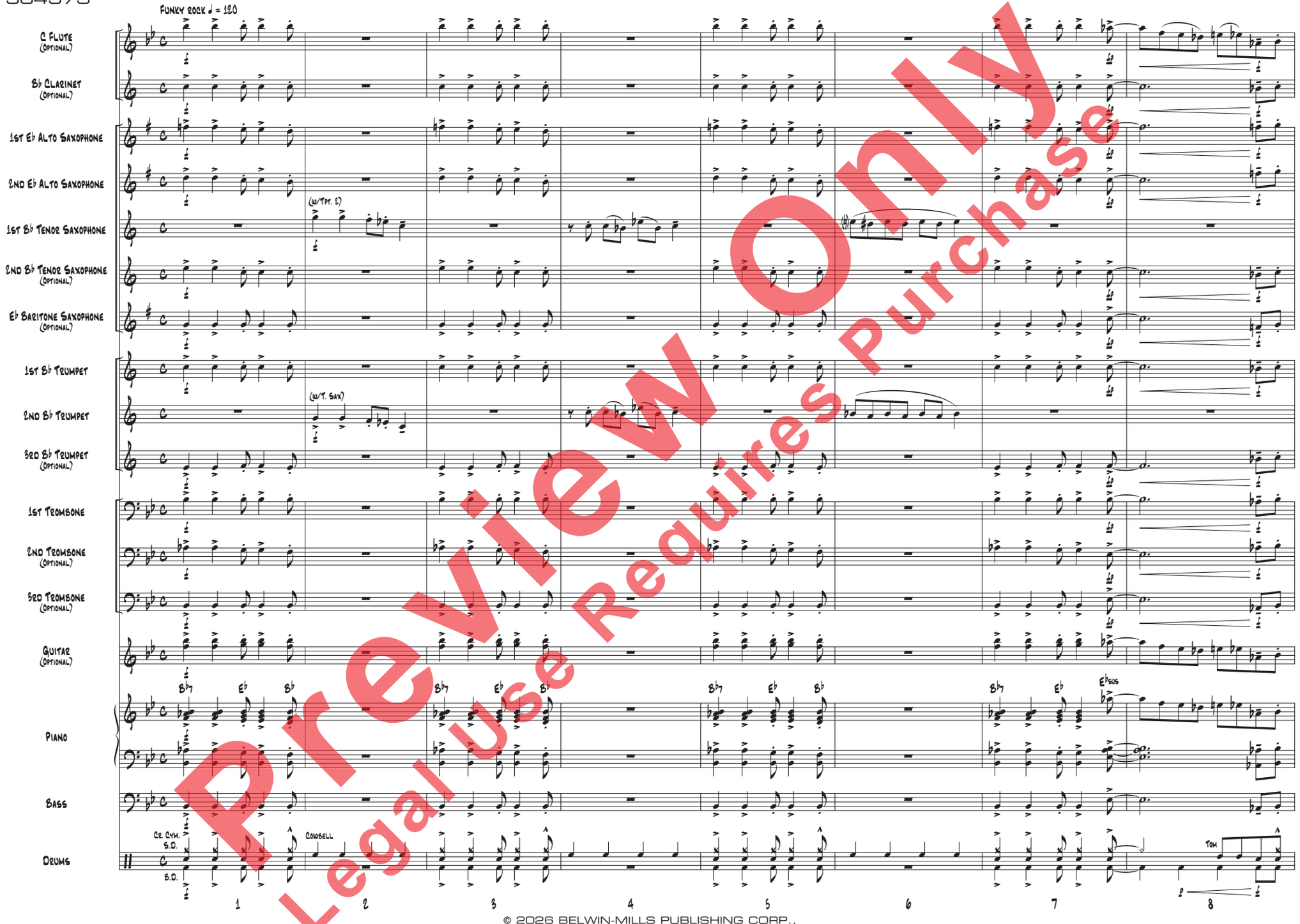

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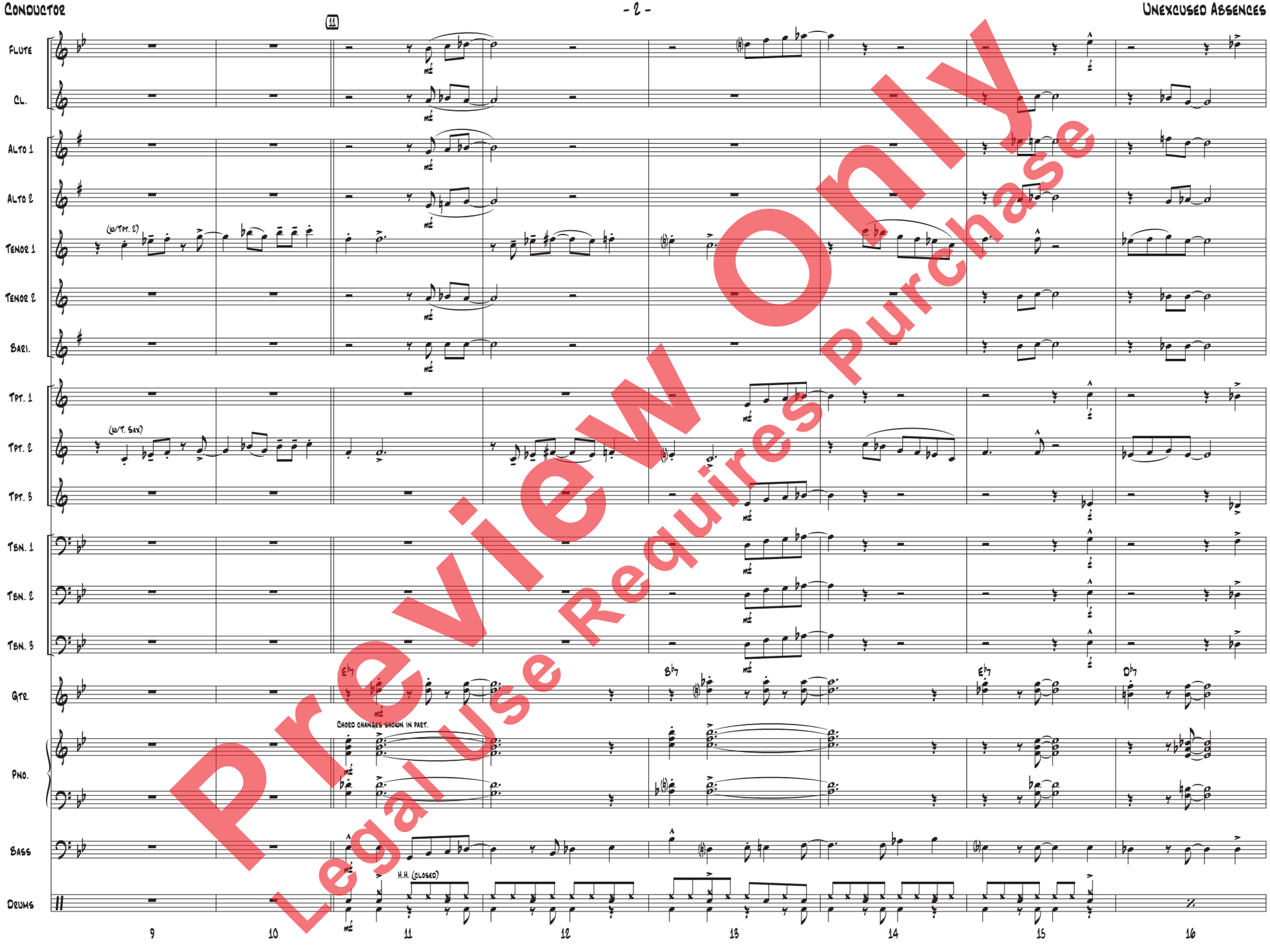

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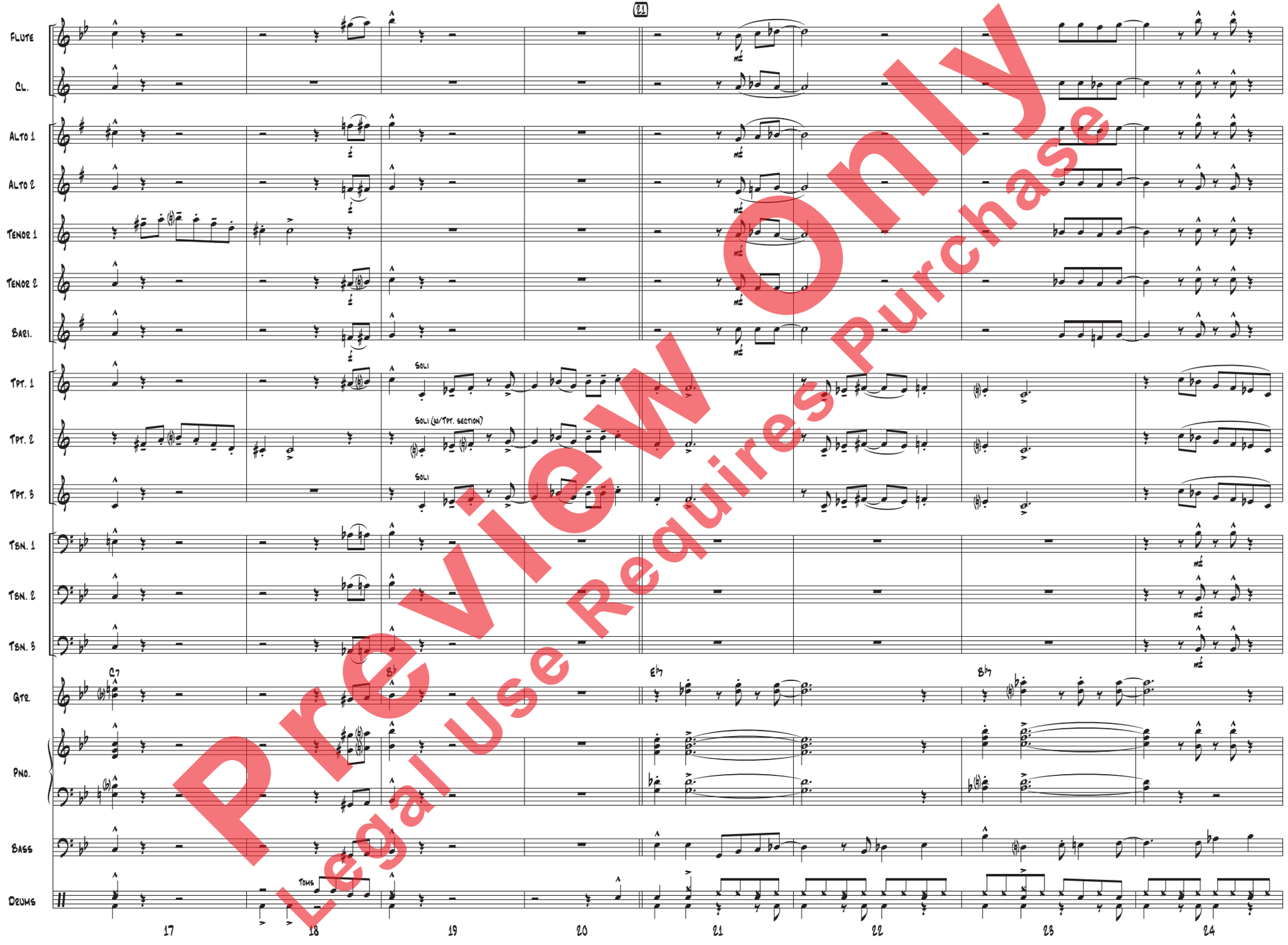

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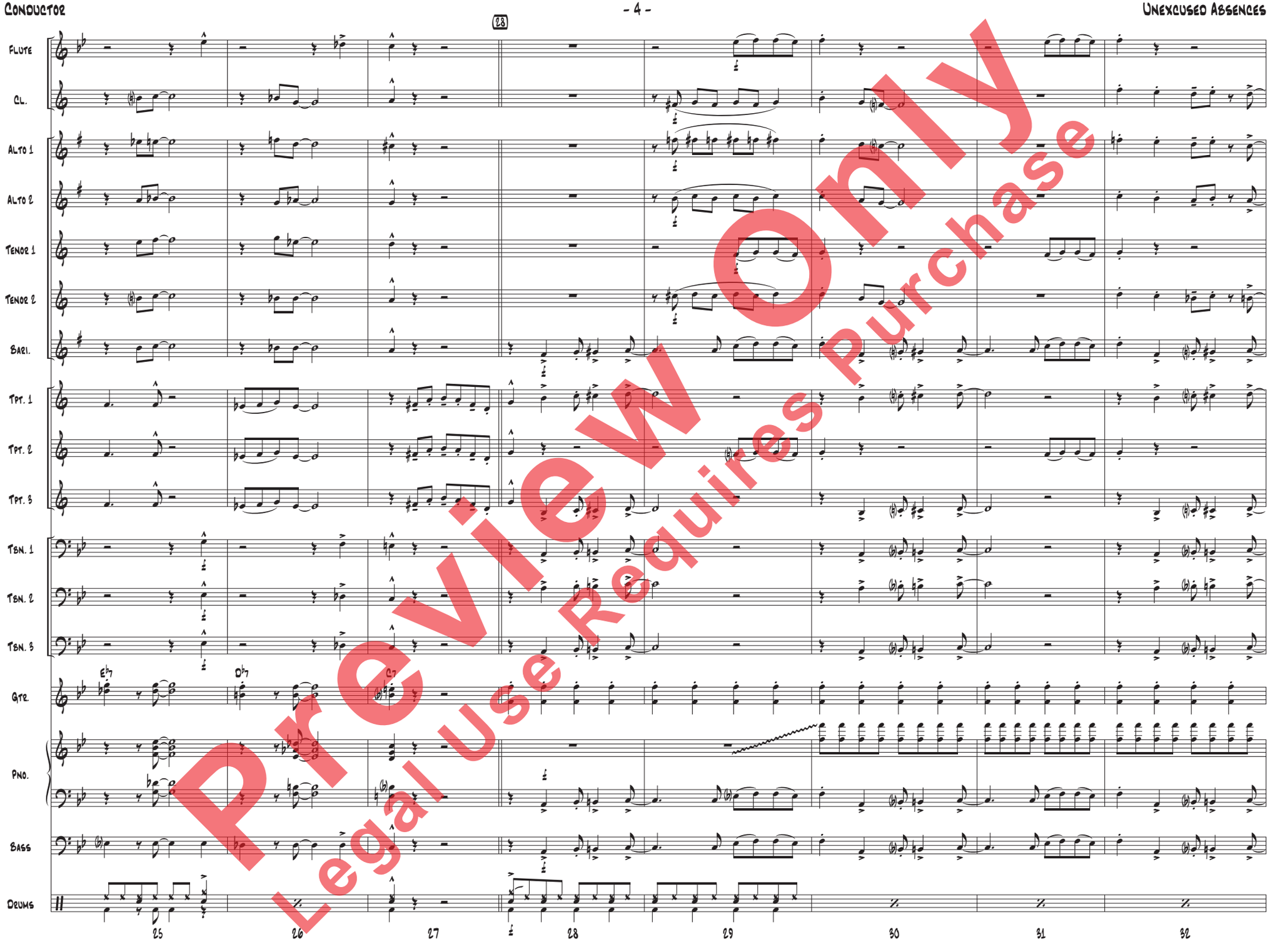

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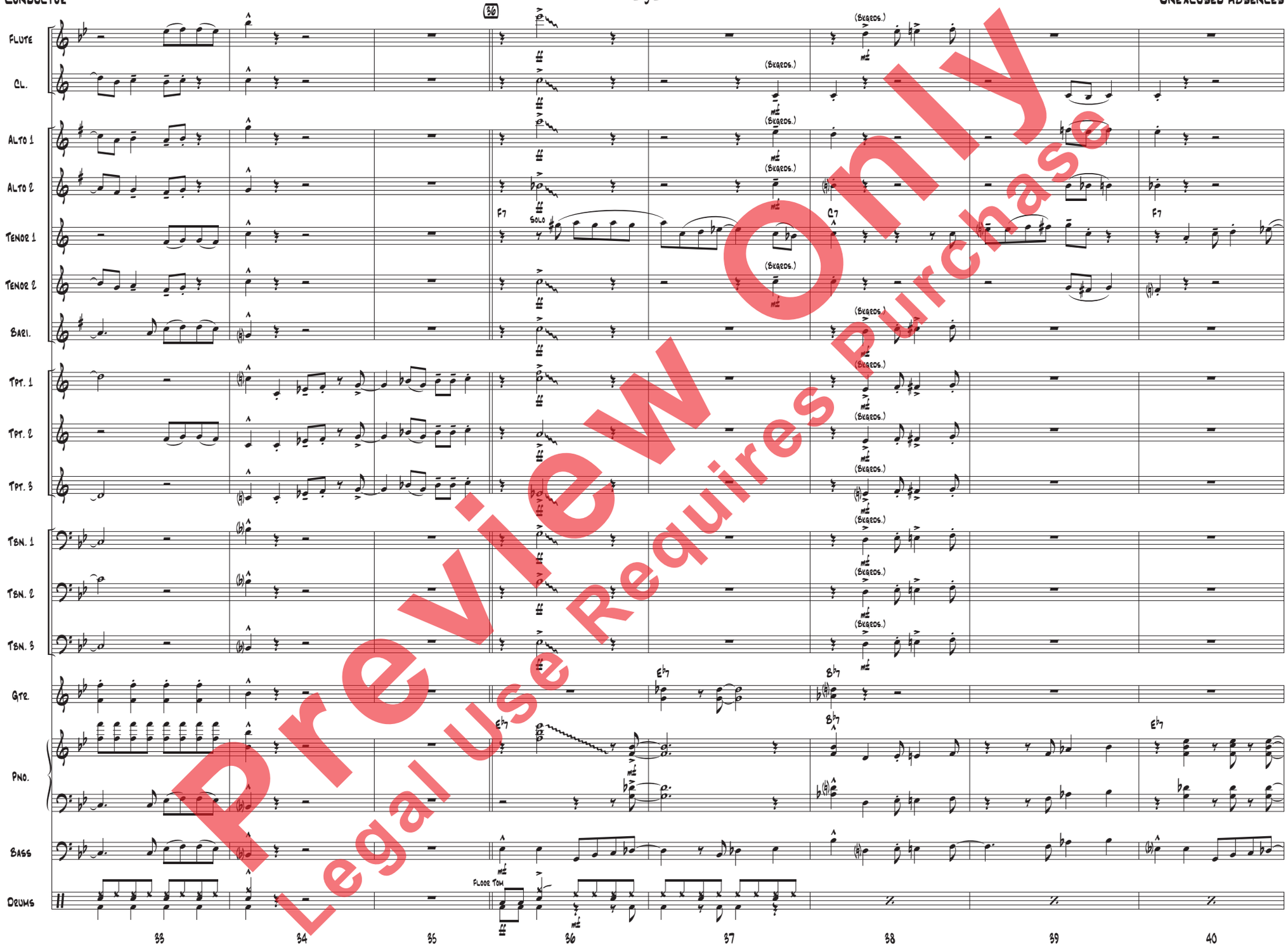

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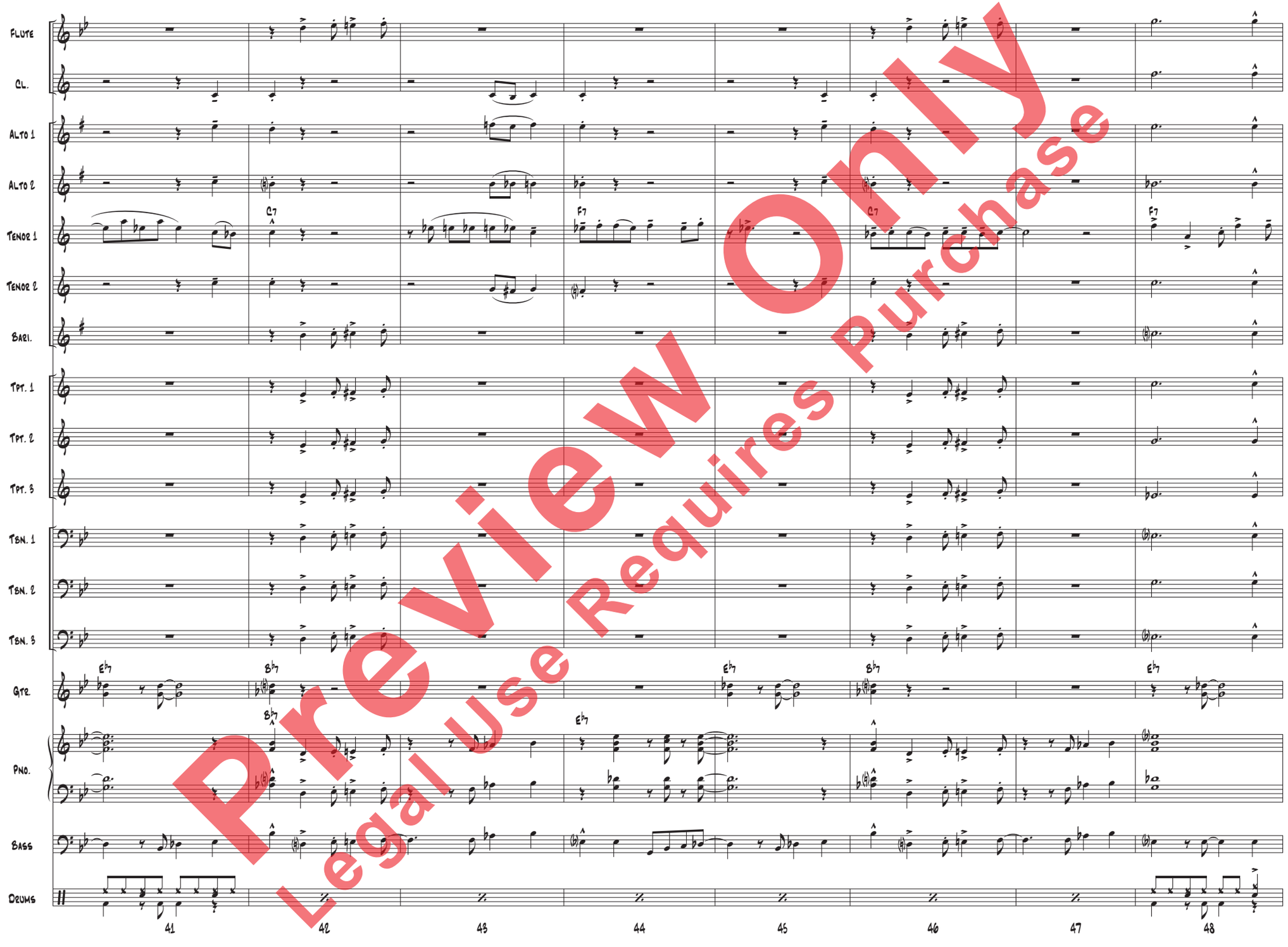

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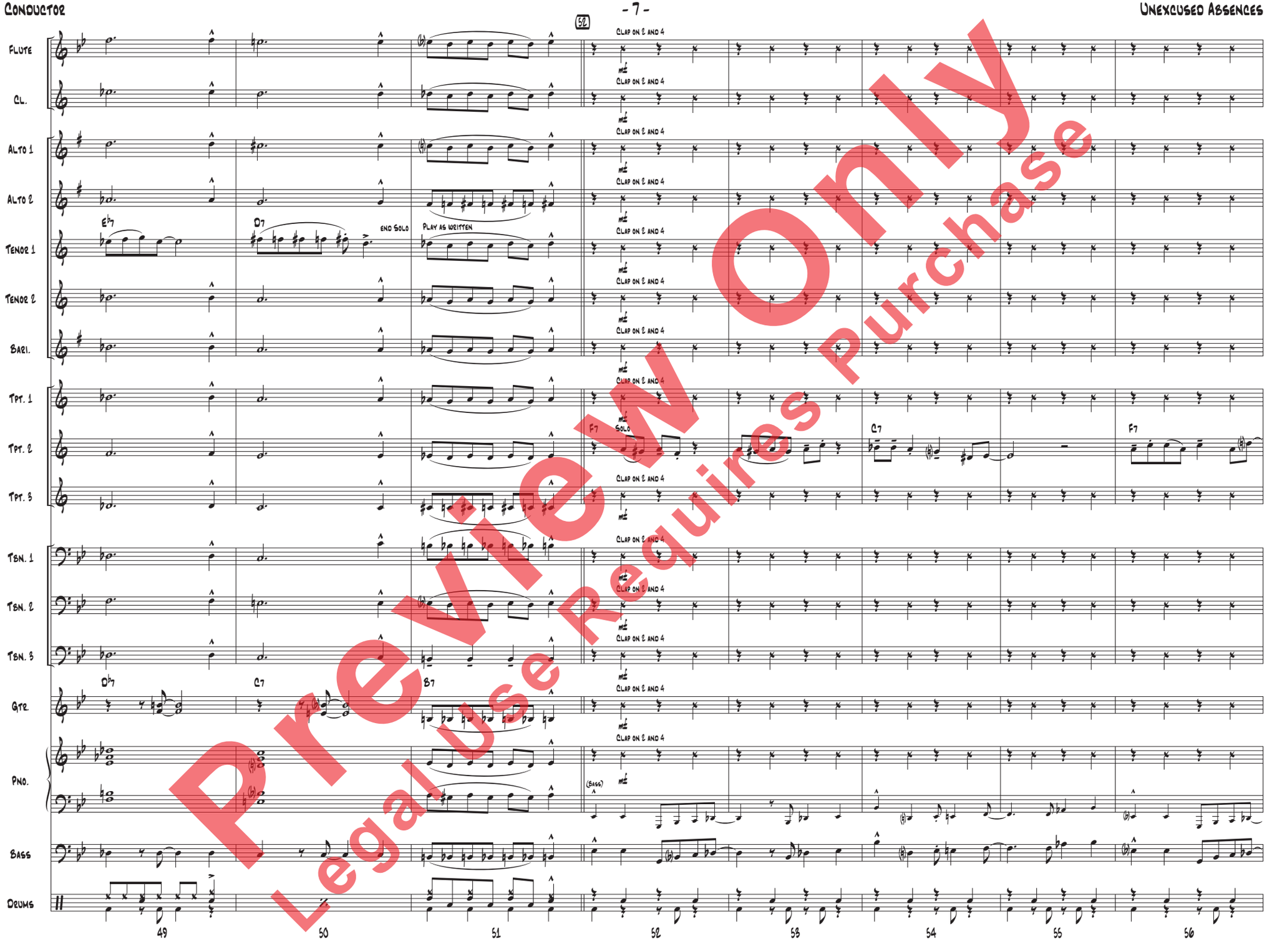

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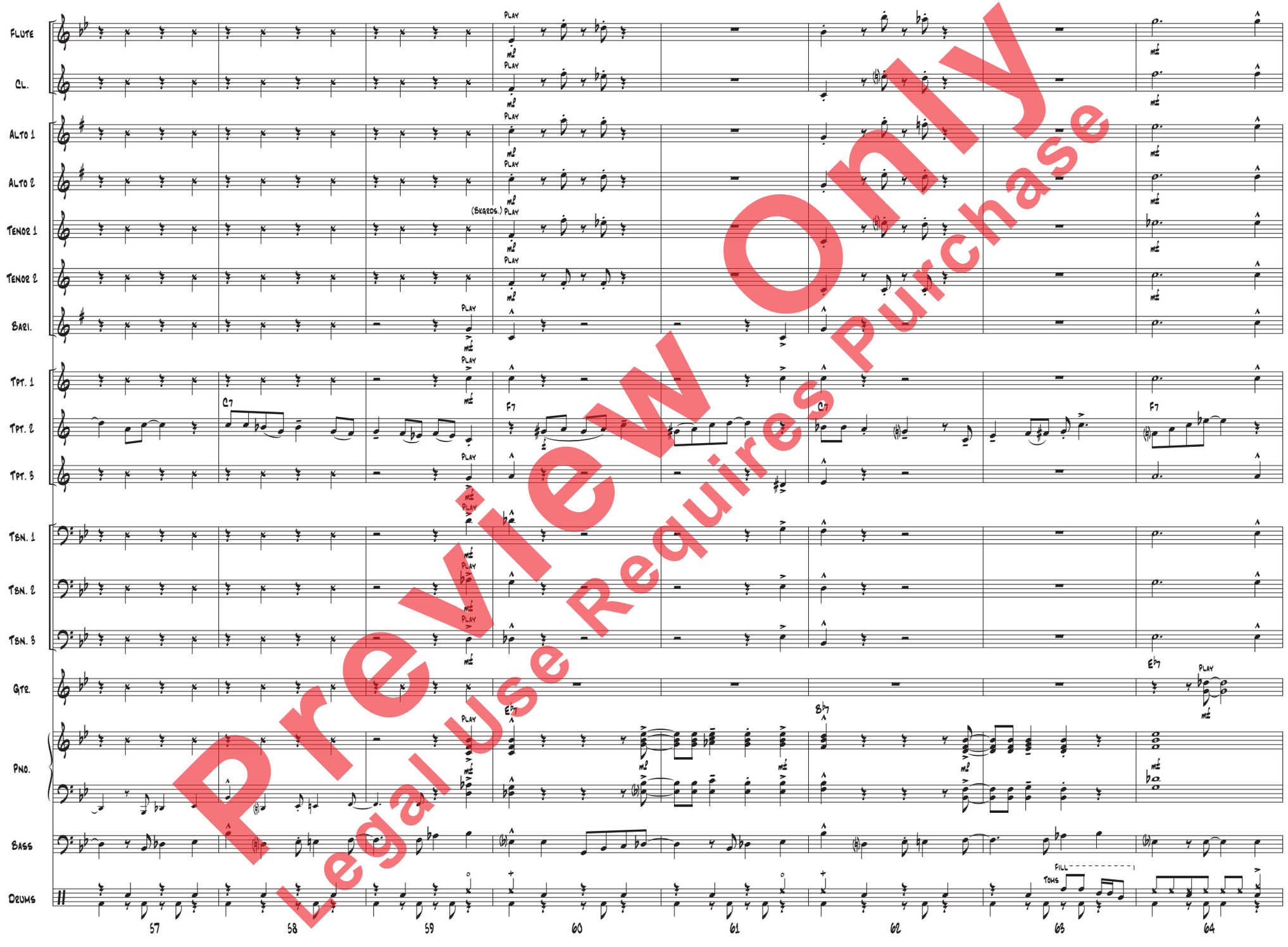

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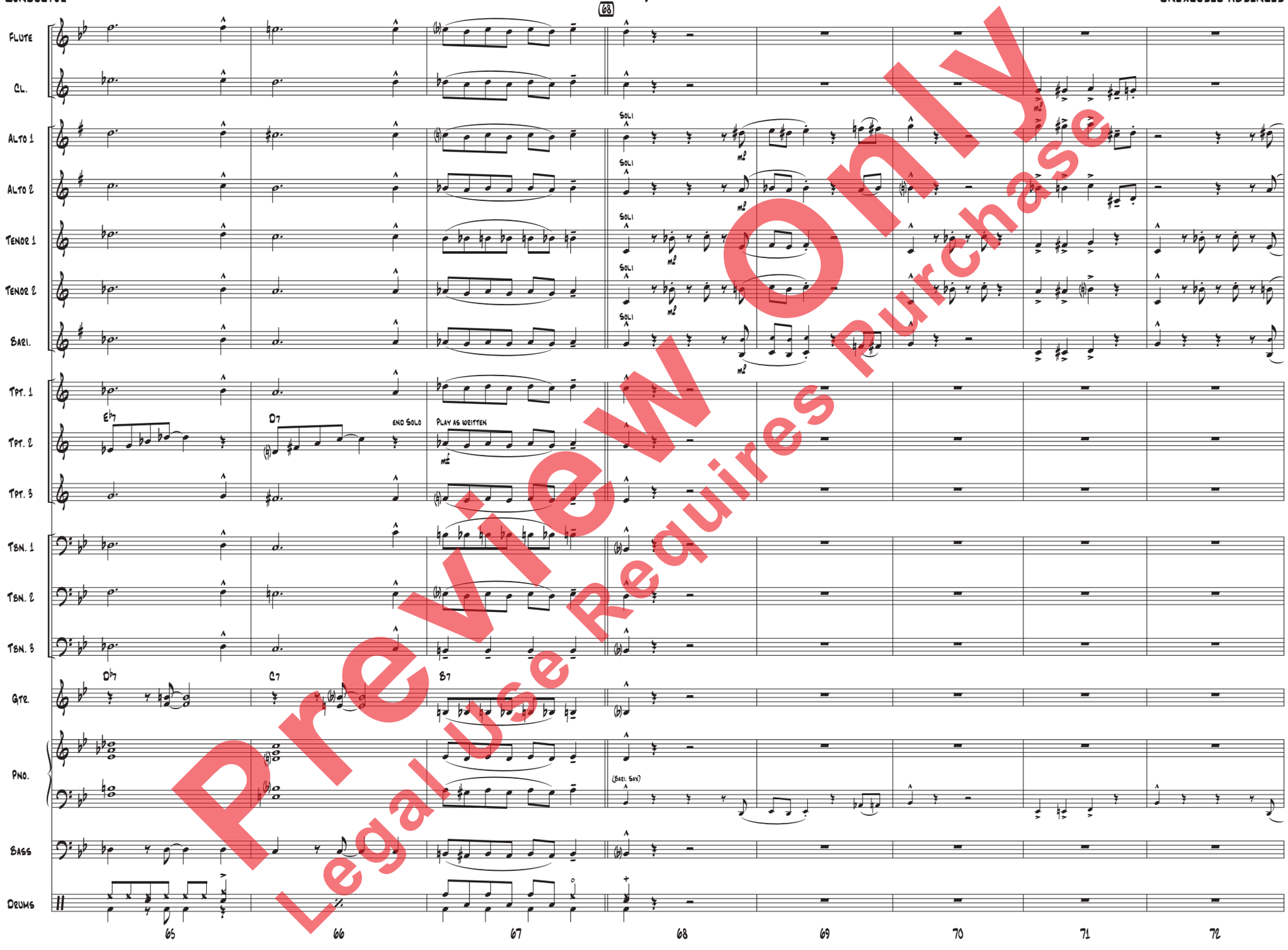

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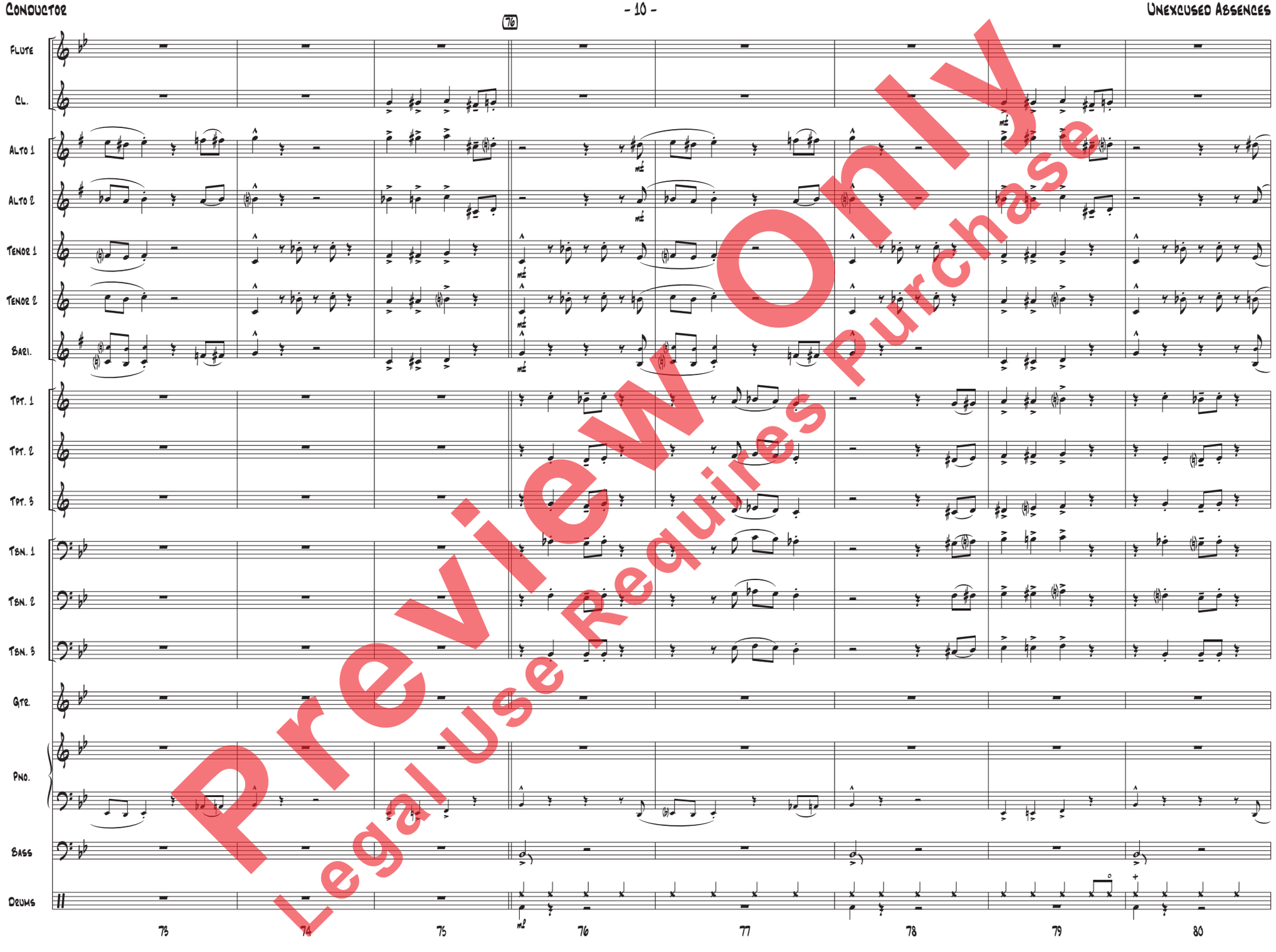

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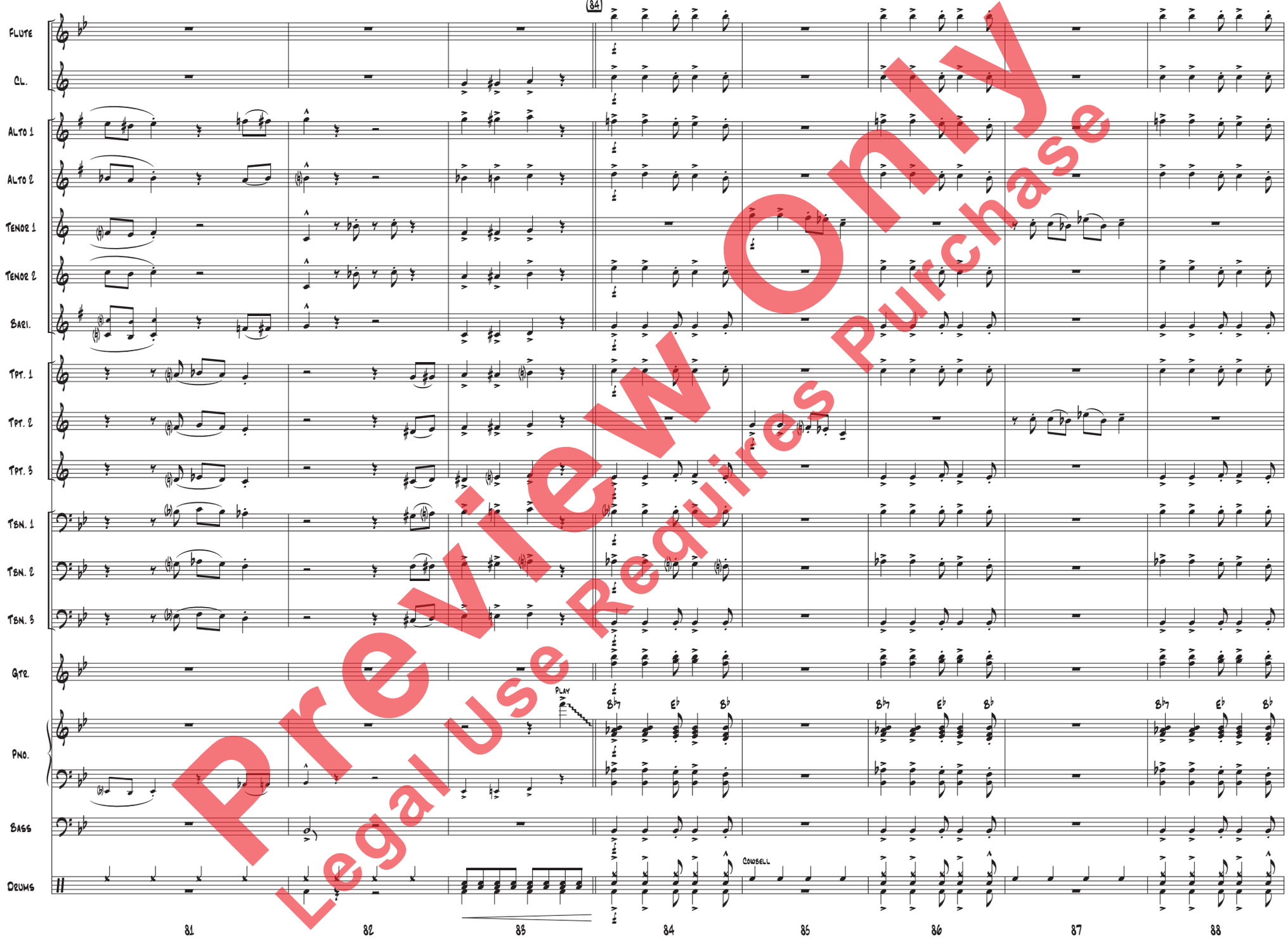

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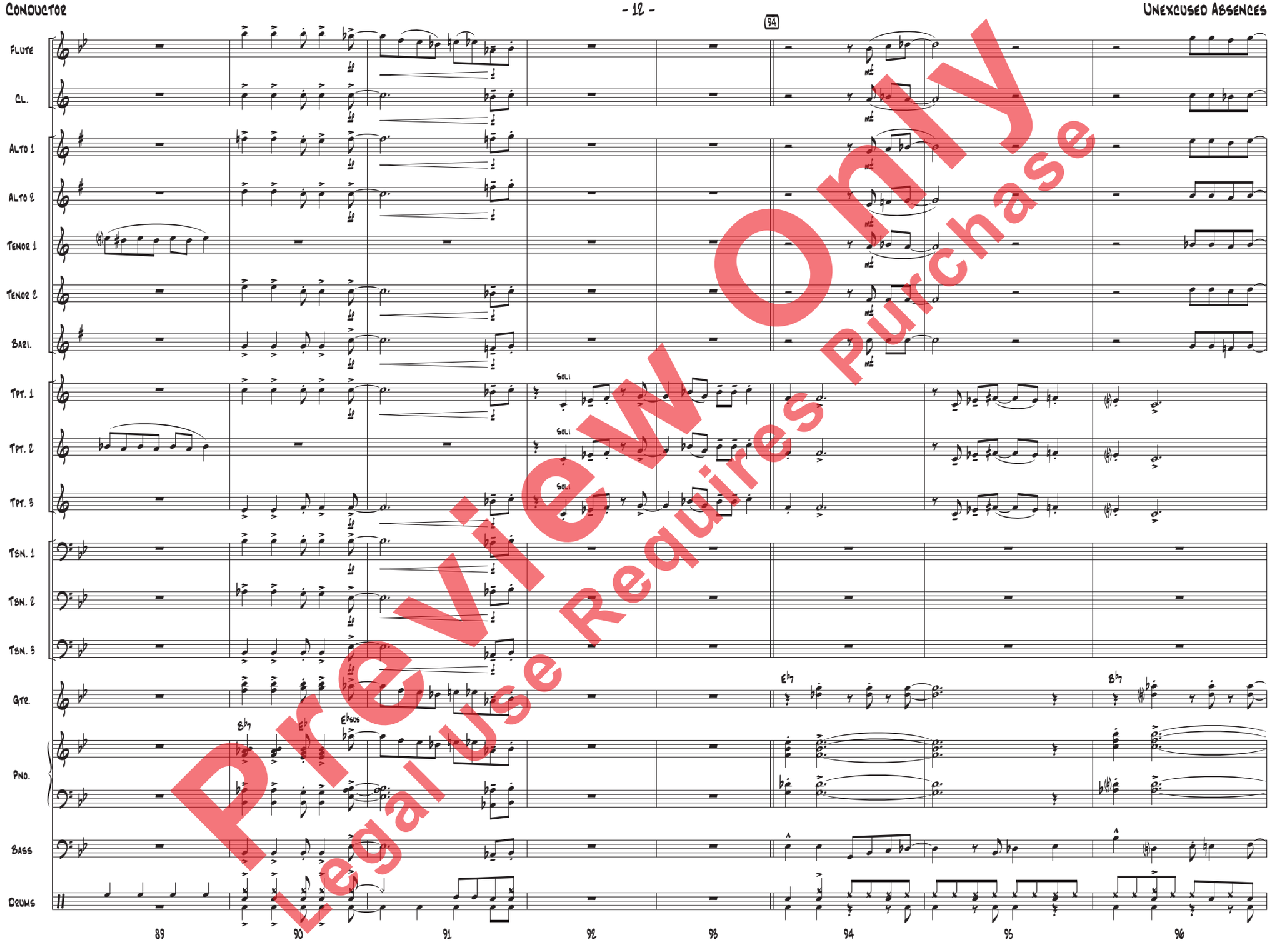

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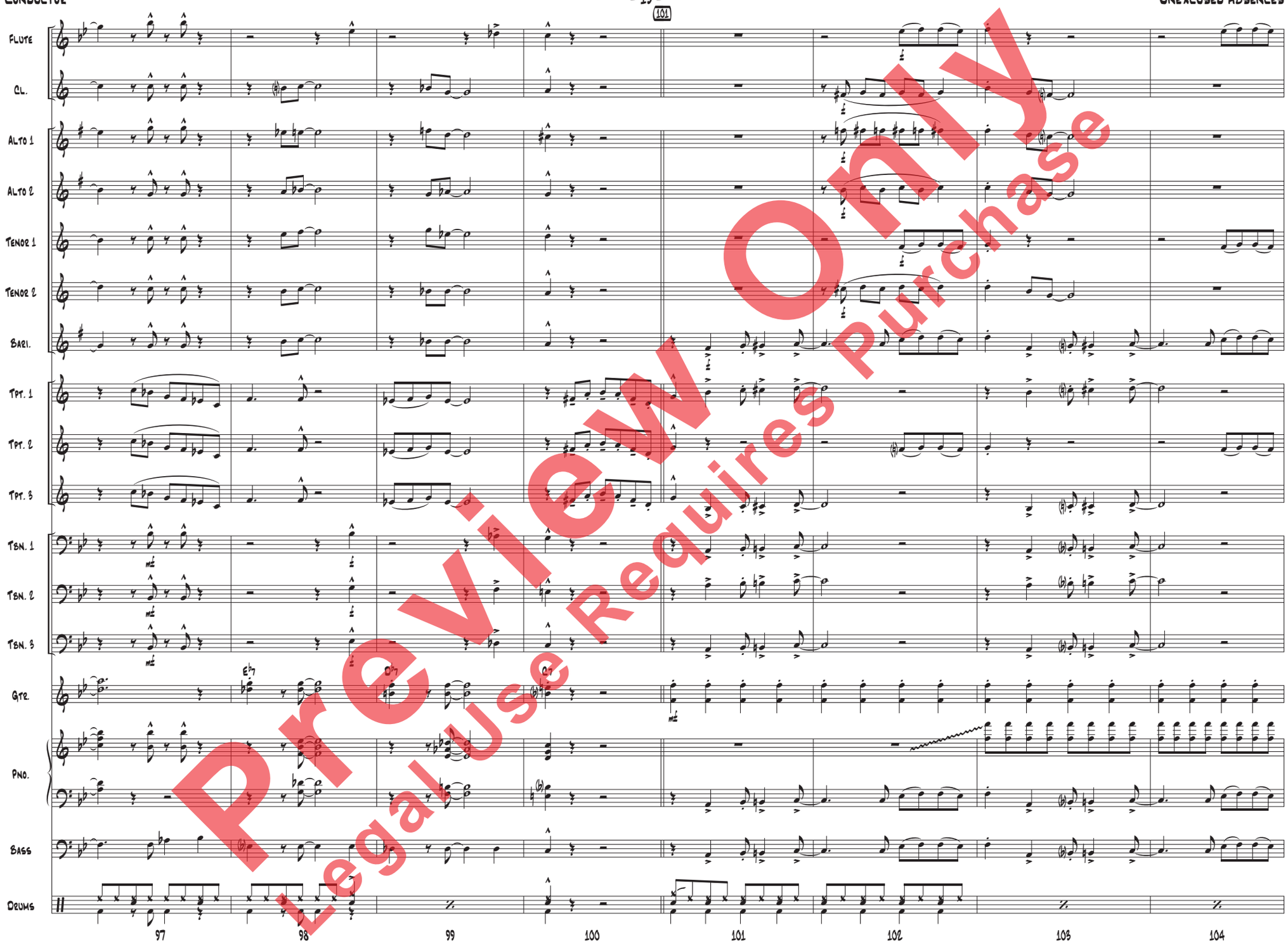

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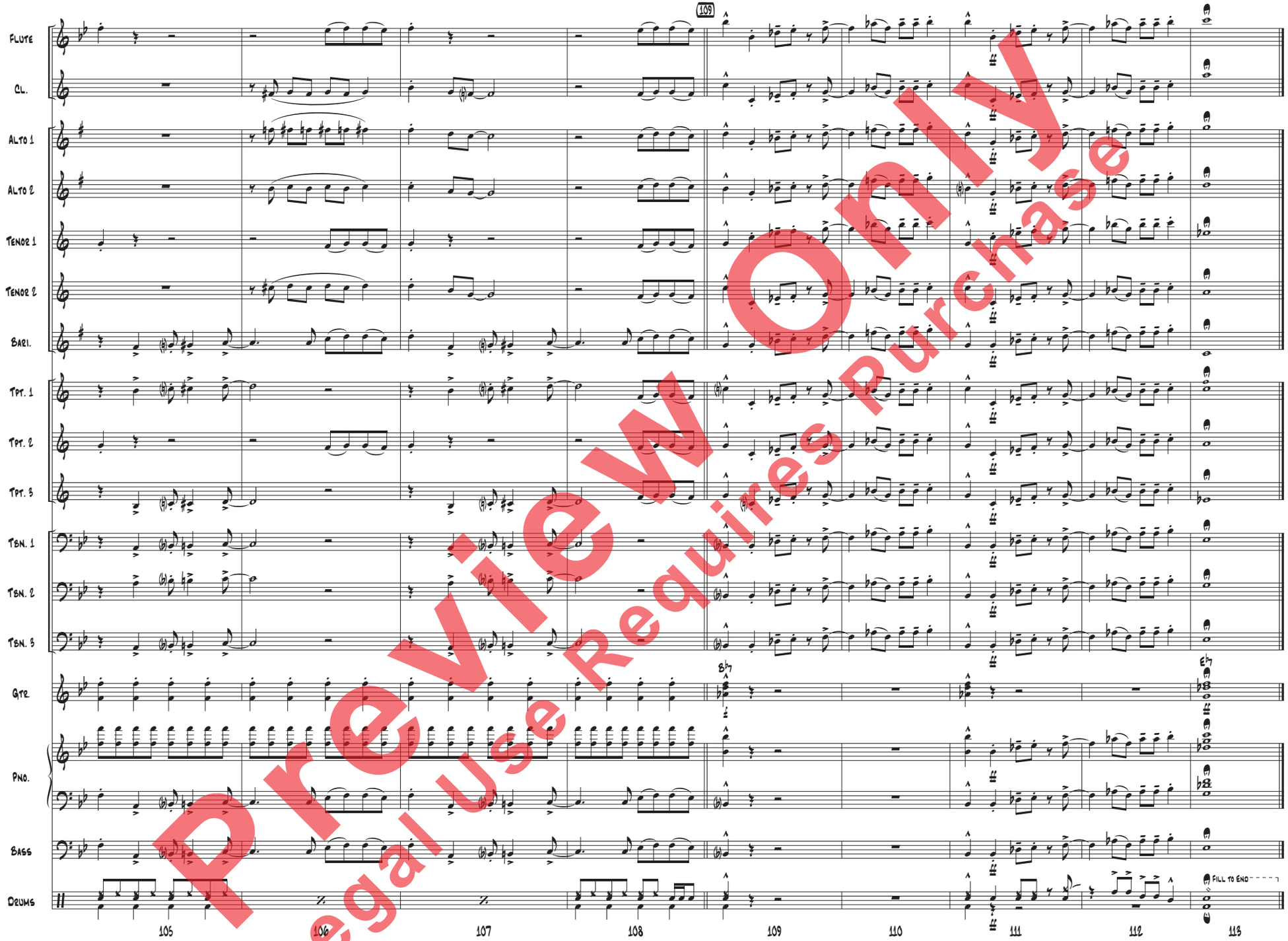

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