Jazz at Lincoln Center Library

HARLEM AIRSHAFT

Composed by Duke Ellington

Transcribed by David Berger for Jazz at Lincoln Center

FULL SCORE

This transcription was made especially for *Essentially Ellington* 2003:
The Eighth Annual Jazz at Lincoln Center High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival.

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ESSENTIALLY ELLINGTON
Annual High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival

Jazz at Lincoln Center

NOTES ON PLAYING ELLINGTON

At least 95% of modern-day large ensemble jazz playing comes out of three traditions: Count Basie's band, Duke Ellington's band, and the orchestrations of small groups. Those young players interested in jazz will be drawn to small groups for the opportunity to improvise and for practical reasons (it is much easier to organize four or five people than it is 15). Schools have taken over the task (formerly performed by dance bands) of training musicians to be ensemble players. Due to the Basie Band's popularity and its simplicity of style and emphasis on blues and swing, the better educators have almost exclusively adopted this tradition for teaching jazz ensemble playing. As wonderful as Count Basie's style is, it doesn't address many of the important styles developed under the great musical umbrella we call jazz. Duke Ellington's comprehensive and eclectic approach to music offers an alternative.

The stylistic richness of Ellington's music presents a great challenge to educators and performers alike. In Basie's music, the conventions are very nearly consistent. In Ellington's, there are many more exceptions to the rules. This calls for greater knowledge of the language of jazz. Clark Terry, who left Count Basie's band to join Duke Ellington, said, "Count Basie was college, but Duke Ellington was graduate school." Knowledge of Ellington's music prepares you to play any big band music.

The following is a list of performance conventions for the great majority of Ellington's music. Any deviations or additions will be spelled out in the individual performance notes that follow.

1. Listen carefully many times to the Ellington recording of these pieces. There are many subtleties that will elude even the most sophisticated listener at first. Although it was never Ellington's wish to have his recordings imitated, knowledge of these definitive versions will lead musicians to make more educated choices when creating new performances. Ellington's music, though written for specific individuals, is designed to inspire all musicians to express themselves. In addition, you will hear slight note differences in the recording and the transcriptions. This is intentional, as there are mistakes and alterations from the original intent of the music in the recording. You should have your players play what's in the score.

2. General use of swing phrasing. The triplet feel prevails except for ballads or where notations such as even eighths or Latin appear. In these cases, eighth notes are given equal value.

3. There is a chain of command in ensemble playing. The lead players in each section determine the phrasing and volume for their own section, and their section-mates must conform to the lead. When the saxes and/or trombones play with the trumpets, the lead trumpet is the boss. The lead alto and trombone must listen to the first trumpet and follow her. In turn, the other saxes and trombones must follow their lead players. When the clarinet leads the brass section, the brass should not overblow him. That means that the first trumpet is actually playing "second." If this is done effectively, there will be very little balancing work left for the conductor.

4. In Ellington's music, each player should express the individuality of his own line. He must find a musical balance of supporting and following the section leader and bringing out the character of the underpart. Each player should be encouraged to express his or her personality through the music. In this music, the underparts are played at the same volume and with the same conviction as the lead.

5. Blues inflection should permeate all parts at all times, not just when these opportunities occur in the lead.

6. Vibrato is used quite a bit to warm up the sound. Saxes (who most frequently represent the sensual side of things) usually employ a heavy vibrato on harmonized passages and a slight vibrato on unisons. Trumpets (who very often are used for heat and power) use a little vibrato on harmonized passages and no vibrato on unisons. Trombones (who are usually noble) do not use slide vibrato. A little lip vibrato is good at times. Try to match the speed of vibrato. Unisons are played with no vibrato.

7. Crescendo as you ascend and diminuendo as you descend. The upper notes of phrases receive a natural accent and the lower notes are ghosted. Alto and tenor saxophones need to use subtone in the lower part of their range in order to blend properly with the rest of the section. This music was originally written with no dynamics. It pretty much follows the natural tendencies of the instruments; play loud in the loud part of the instrument and soft in the soft part of the instrument. For instance, a high C for a trumpet will be loud, and a low C will be soft.

8. Quarter notes are generally played short unless otherwise notated. Long marks above or below a pitch indicate full value: not just long, but full value. Eighth notes are played full value except when followed by a rest or otherwise notated. All notes longer than a quarter note are played full value, which means if it is followed by a rest, release the note where the rest appears. For example, a half note occurring on beat one of a measure would be released on beat three.

9. Unless they are part of a legato background figure, long notes should be played somewhat *fp*, accent then diminish the volume. This is important so that the moving parts can be heard over the sustained notes. Don't just hold out the long notes, but give them life and personality: that is, vibrato, inflection, crescendo, or diminuendo. There is a great deal of inflection in this music, and much of this is highly interpretive. Straight or curved lines imply non-pitched glisses, and wavy lines mean scalar (chromatic or diatonic) glisses. In general, all rhythmic figures need to be accented. Accents give the music life and swing. This is very important.

10. Ellington's music is about individuality: one person per part—do not double up because you have extra players or need more strength. More than one on a part makes it sound more like a concert band and less like a jazz band.

11. This is acoustic music. Keep amplification to an absolute minimum; in the best halls, almost no amplification should be necessary. Everyone needs to develop a big sound. It is the conductor's job to balance the band. When a guitar is used, it should be a hollow body, unamplified rhythm guitar. Simple three-note voicings should be used throughout. An acoustic string bass is a must. In mediocre or poorly designed halls, the bass and piano may need a bit of a boost. I recommend miking them and putting them through the house sound system. This should provide a much better tone than an amplifier. Keep in mind that the rhythm section's primary function is to accompany. The bass should not be as loud as a trumpet. That is unnatural and leads to over-amplification, bad tone, and limited dynamics. Stay away from monitors. They provide a false sense of balance.

12. Solos and rhythm section parts without chord changes should be played as is or with a little embellishment. Solos and rhythm section parts with chord changes should be improvised. However, written passages should be learned because they are an important part of our jazz heritage and help the player understand the function of his particular solo or accompaniment. Soloists should learn the chord changes. Solos should not be approached as opportunities to show off technique, range, or volume, but should be looked at as a great opportunity to further develop the interesting thematic material that Ellington has provided.

13. The notation of plungers for the brass means a rubber toilet plunger bought in a hardware store. Kirkhill is a very good brand (especially if you can find one of their old rubber ones, like the one I loaned Wynton and he lost). Trumpets use 5" diameter and trombones use 6" diameter. Where Plunger/Mute is notated, insert a pixie mute in the bell and use the plunger over the mute. Pixies are available from Humes & Berg in Chicago. "Tricky Sam" Nanton and his successors in the Ellington plunger trombone chair did not use pixies. Rather, each of them employed a Nonpareil (that's the brand name) trumpet straight mute.

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Nonpareil has gone out of business, but the Tom Crown Nonpareil trumpet straight mute is very close to the same thing. These mutes create a wonderful sound (very close to the human voice), but they also create some intonation problems that must be corrected by the lip only. It would be easier to move the tuning slide, but part of the sound is in the struggle to correct the pitch. If this proves too much, stick with the pixie—it's pretty close.

14. The drummer is the de facto leader of the band. He establishes the beat and controls the volume of the ensemble. For big band playing, the drummer needs to use a larger bass drum than he would for small group drumming. A 22" is preferred. The bass drum is played softly (nearly inaudible) on each beat. This is called feathering the bass drum. It provides a very important bottom to the band. The bass drum sound is not a boom and not a thud—it's in between. The larger size drum is necessary for the kicks; a smaller drum just won't be heard. The key to this style is to just keep time. A rim knock on two and four (chopping wood) is used to lock in the swing. When it comes to playing fills, the fewer, the better.

15. The horn players should stand for their solos and solis. Brass players should come down front for moderate to long solos, surrounding rests permitting. The same applies to the pep section (two trumpets and one trombone in plunger/mutes).

16. Horns should pay close attention to attacks and releases. Everyone should hit together and end together.

17. Brass must be very precise when playing short notes. Notes must be stopped with the tongue, à la Louis Armstrong!

18. Above all, everyone's focus should remain at all times on the swing. As the great bassist Chuck Israels says, "The three most important things in jazz are rhythm, rhythm, and rhythm, in that order." Or as Bubber Miley (Ellington's first star trumpeter) said, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing."

GLOSSARY

The following are terms that describe conventions of jazz performance, from traditional New Orleans to the present avant garde.

Break: within the context of an ongoing time feel, the rhythm section stops for one, two, or four bars. Very often a soloist will improvise during a break.

Call-and-response: repetitive pattern of contrasting exchanges (derived from the church procedure of the minister making a statement and the congregation answering with "amen"). Call-and-response patterns usually pit one group of instruments against another. Sometimes we call this "trading fours," "trading twos," etc., especially when it involves improvisation. The numbers denote the amount of measures each soloist or group plays. Another term frequently used is "swapping fours."

Coda: also known as the "outro." "Tags" or "tag endings" are outgrowths of vaudeville bows that are frequently used as codas. They most often use deceptive cadences that finally resolve to the tonic, or they go from the tonic to the sub-dominant and cycle back to the tonic: I V/IV IV #IV^{o} I (second inversion) V/II V/V V I.

Comp: improvise accompaniment (for piano or guitar).

Groove: the composite rhythm. This generally refers to the combined repetitive rhythmic patterns of the drums, bass, piano, and guitar, but may also include repetitive patterns in the horns. Some grooves are standard (i.e., swing, bossa nova, samba), while others are manufactured (original combinations of rhythms).

Head: melody chorus.

Interlude: a different form (of relatively short length) sandwiched between two chorus forms. Interludes that set up a key change are simply called *modulations*.

Intro: short for introduction.

Ride pattern: the most common repetitive figure played by the drummer's right hand on the ride cymbal or hi-hat.

Riff: a repeated melodic figure. Very often, riffs repeat verbatim or with slight alterations while the harmonies change underneath them.

Shout chorus: also known as the "out chorus," the "sock chorus," or sometimes shortened to just "the shout." It is the final ensemble passage of most big band charts and where the climax most often happens.

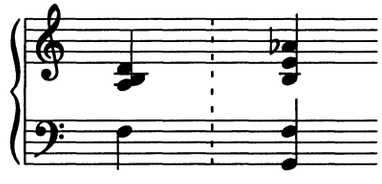
Soli: a harmonized passage for two or more instruments playing the same rhythm. It is customary for horn players to stand up or even move in front of the band when playing these passages. This is done so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli sound particular to Ellington's music combines two trumpets and a trombone in plungers/mutes in triadic harmony. This is called the "pep section."

Stop time: a regular pattern of short breaks (usually filled in by a soloist).

Swing: the perfect confluence of rhythmic tension and relaxation in music creating a feeling of euphoria and characterized by accented weak beats (a democratization of the beat) and eighth notes that are played as the first and third eighth notes of an eighth-note triplet. Duke Ellington's definition of swing: when the music feels like it is getting faster, but it isn't.

Vamp: a repeated two- or four-bar chord progression. Very often, there may be a riff or riffs played on the vamp.

Voicing: the specific spacing, inversion, and choice of notes that make up a chord. For instance, two voicings for G7 could be:



Note that the first voicing includes a 9th and the second voicing includes a ♭9 and a 13. The addition of 9ths, 11ths, 13ths, and alterations are up to the discretion of the pianist and soloist.

THE FOUR ELEMENTS OF MUSIC

The following are placed in their order of importance in jazz. We should never lose perspective on this order of priority.

RHYTHM: meter, tempo, groove, and form, including both melodic rhythm and harmonic rhythm (the speed and regularity of the chord changes).

MELODY: what players play: a tune or series of notes.

HARMONY: chords and voicings.

ORCHESTRATION: instrumentation and tone colors.

—David Berger

Special thanks to Andrew Homzy for editing the score.

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HARLEM AIRSHAFT

INSTRUMENTATION:

Reed 1	Alto Sax	Trombone 1
Reed 2	Alto Sax	Trombone 2
Reed 3	Tenor/Clarinet	Trombone 3 (opt. Valve)
Reed 4	Tenor Sax	Guitar
Reed 5	Baritone Sax	Piano
Trumpet 1		Bass
Trumpet 2		Drums
Trumpet 3 (opt. Cornet)		

ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION:

Composer: Duke Ellington
Arranger: Duke Ellington
Recorded: July 22, 1940, in New York City
Time: 2:57
Master Number: BS-054606-1
Original Issue: Victor 26731
Currently Available on CD: *The Blanton-Webster Band,* Bluebird (RCA/BMG) 5659-2
Personnel: Duke Ellington, piano; Wallace Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Rex Stewart, cornet; Lawrence Brown, Joe "Tricky Sam" Nanton, trombones; Juan Tizol, valve trombone; Otto Hardwick, Johnny Hodges, Barney Bigard, Ben Webster, Harry Carney, reeds; Fred Guy, guitar; Jimmie Blanton, bass; Sonny Greer, drums.
Soloists: "Tricky Sam" Nanton; Cootie Williams; Barney Bigard, clarinet; Williams; Bigard.

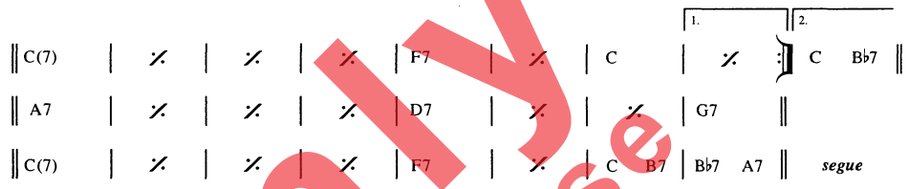
REHEARSAL NOTES:

- **Harlem Airshaft** is Ellington's answer to **In the Mood.** The opening arpeggiated figure in the trumpet at letter **A** bears great similarity, as does the repetitive riff nature of the entire arrangement.

- A prototypical swing chart, **Harlem Airshaft** features soli sections by each of the horn sections and trumpet and clarinet solos building to a screaming finish. The form is: 12-bar intro followed by four choruses of AABA; the A section is an eight-bar blues, and the bridge is a version of the rhythm changes bridge. There is a short four-bar tag at the end of the last chorus.

- In his own inimitable fashion, Ellington told us that **Harlem Airshaft** is a piece of program music describing the sounds and smells of one's neighbors wafting through the open windows into one's apartment on a hot day. There is fighting, joking, lovemaking, several radio stations and record players, and all kinds of cuisine. This would account for the three different key centers of the introduction and the different characters of the soupy saxophone harmonies, swinging sax unisons, sliding trombones, and arpeggiated trumpet calls. Perfect! Except for one thing—the title came later. Originally called **Once Over Lightly,** this piece then had a working title of **Rumpus in Richmond** before Ellington came up with his wonderfully picturesque title and story. Incidentally, the piece we now know as **Rumpus in Richmond** began its life as **Brassiere.** So much for taking the Maestro at face value. But how much more fun is this piece when we conjure up that swinging uptown miniature courtyard?

- Typically Ellington would start this piece with a piano introduction (with bass and drum accompaniment)—very often a couple of choruses of A♭ blues. Personally, I find that the key center shifts of the introduction become less integral to the piece when proceeded by that length of A♭ major. My suggestion is to highlight the key relationships and have the pianist play either blues in C or a chorus on the changes of **Harlem Airshaft** in C in front of the chart:



- The written intro forecasts the entire scope of the piece, so it is essential that all the appropriate stylistic conventions be employed in order to give each phrase its own distinct character. For instance, the saxes should accent the three g's (concert) in their opening figure (this phrasing comes back at **A** in the trumpets and **G** in the saxophones) and then completely switch gears and pour on the vibrato when they go into harmony on the fifth bar (this section returns at **C** and **E**). We should hear the trombones sliding down and up on their triplet in the ninth bar (similarly at **I**).

- Letter **A** is one of those wonderful contrapuntal passages where two totally self-sufficient melodies are played at the same time. The lead played by the third trumpet encourages individual sounds and approaches. The unison saxes should employ dynamics as well as bluesy moans and bends to color their legato line. A similar switch of lead happens at different times in the saxes and trombones. This demands a bigger commitment from everyone in the band, not just the three lead players.

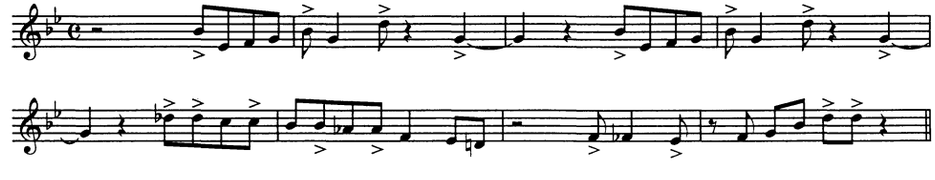
- The trombone solo at **C** is the melody of the tune (it is stated by the tutti ensemble in the last chorus at **O**). Note that the b-natural in the third bar was most likely intended to be an a-natural. This style of plunger trombone emulates the human voice and needs plenty of energy and volume to overcome the resistance of the mute and the plunger—exciting stuff when it is done right.

- The breaks at **E, F,** and **H** are natural booby traps for every band. Careful attention should be paid to make sure that the tempo does not vary during the break and also when the rhythm section re-enters. The normal tendency is for the band to slow down.

- The clarinet solo at **I** was an afterthought and very likely was contributed spontaneously by Bigard. The clarinetist should make sure to complete his tenor duties before switching to clarinet. This will require entering after the start of the chorus, thereby giving the trombones a chance to state their theme.

- The brass chords at **K** need to be played with accents. This gives them definition and forward motion.

- Letters **M** and **N** give the band the opportunity to swing at a soft dynamic. This passage is dependent on the use of accents. I have marked accents on the fourth beats of bars 2 and 4. These are heavy accents called *scronches* (fourth beat anticipated downbeats). Accents should also be applied to the upper notes of the lines and to upbeats of the repeated pitches:



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- The bass and guitar (assuming both instruments are acoustic) should retain the same volume that they have been playing previously throughout this soft section so that some focus will be on them. The bass needs to walk up in the high register to lighten up the feel, but the intensity must keep building.

- Letter **O** builds to the climax at **P,** where we pull out all the stops. The brass must use heavy accents on each note, and the saxes must accent the top notes in each phrase (all the a-flats, then the c-flats, etc.). Each section must make sure to cut off their final note in time.

- With all of these details to remember, don't lose sight of the main purpose of this piece—it is music to be danced to. In 1940, the Ellington band's main function was that of a dance band. This is certainly one of their most danceable pieces and oh so much more.

David Berger

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COMMENTS FROM WYNTON MARSALIS:

This arrangement is a good study in dynamics and harmonic progressions (even before we reach letter **A**). It's difficult to capture the rhythmic feel of this piece, a medium-tempo shuffle. It requires hard work with the rhythm section: they should play heavy, round beats, still keeping it light and grooving on the top. The sax break at letter **C** is a great example of blues harmonies. Have your players dissect the harmonies to see how the tones create the feeling of blues.

The series of riffs that come in at letter **E** can teach the band how to swing inside the context of the rhythm section and how to play together. The riffs continue, and you'll find other devices like call-and-response (between the trombones and clarinet at letter **I,** for example) and breaks. At letter **N** is an example of the "big four" (a heavy accent on the fourth beat). All of these devices come from the New Orleans style of jazz.

Letter **P** to the end is a classic shout chorus: the reeds have moving passages; the clarinet plays the high, exciting part; and the horns shout. This, too, has its origins in New Orleans jazz.

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CONDUCTOR

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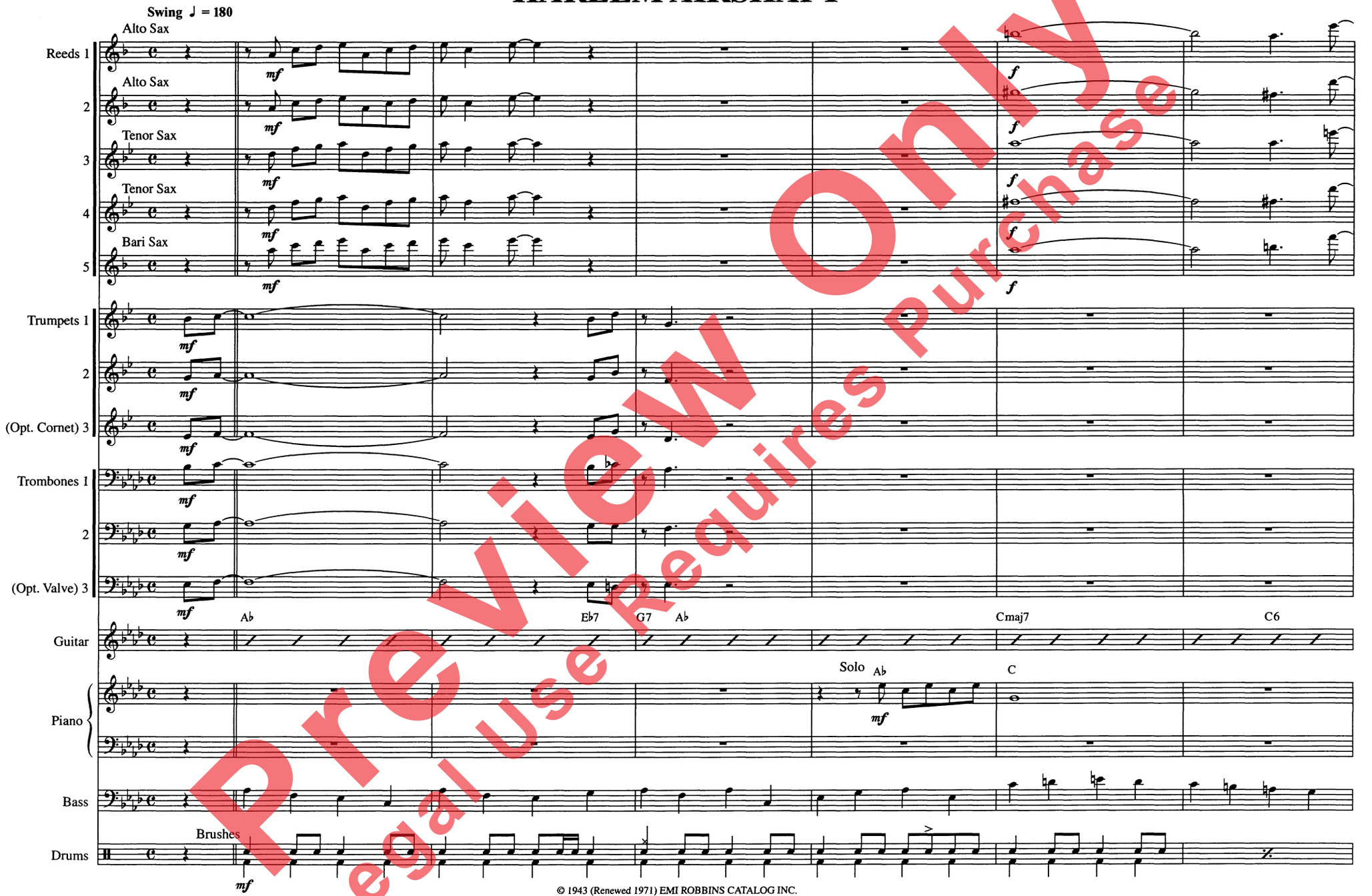

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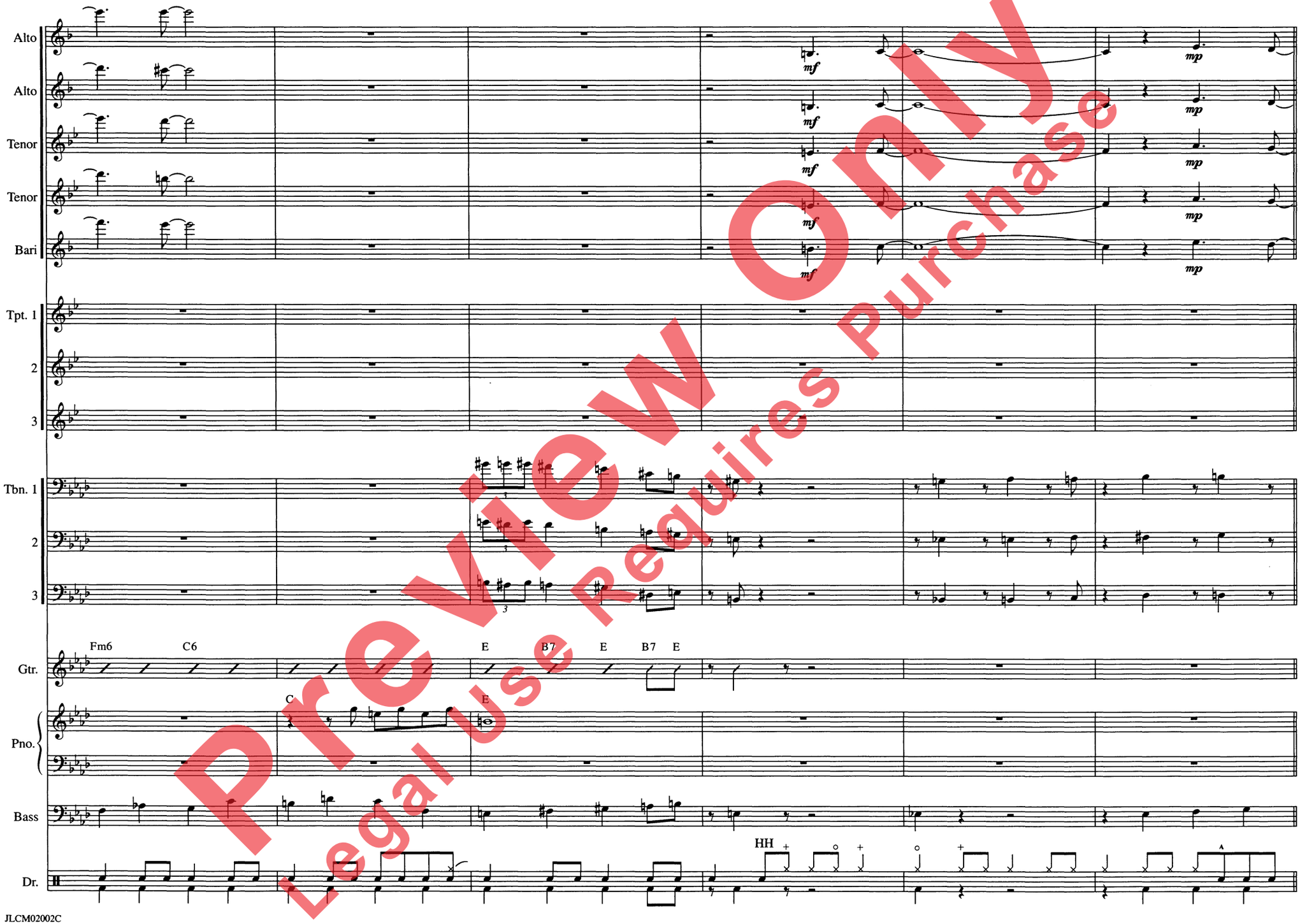
Harlem Airshaft



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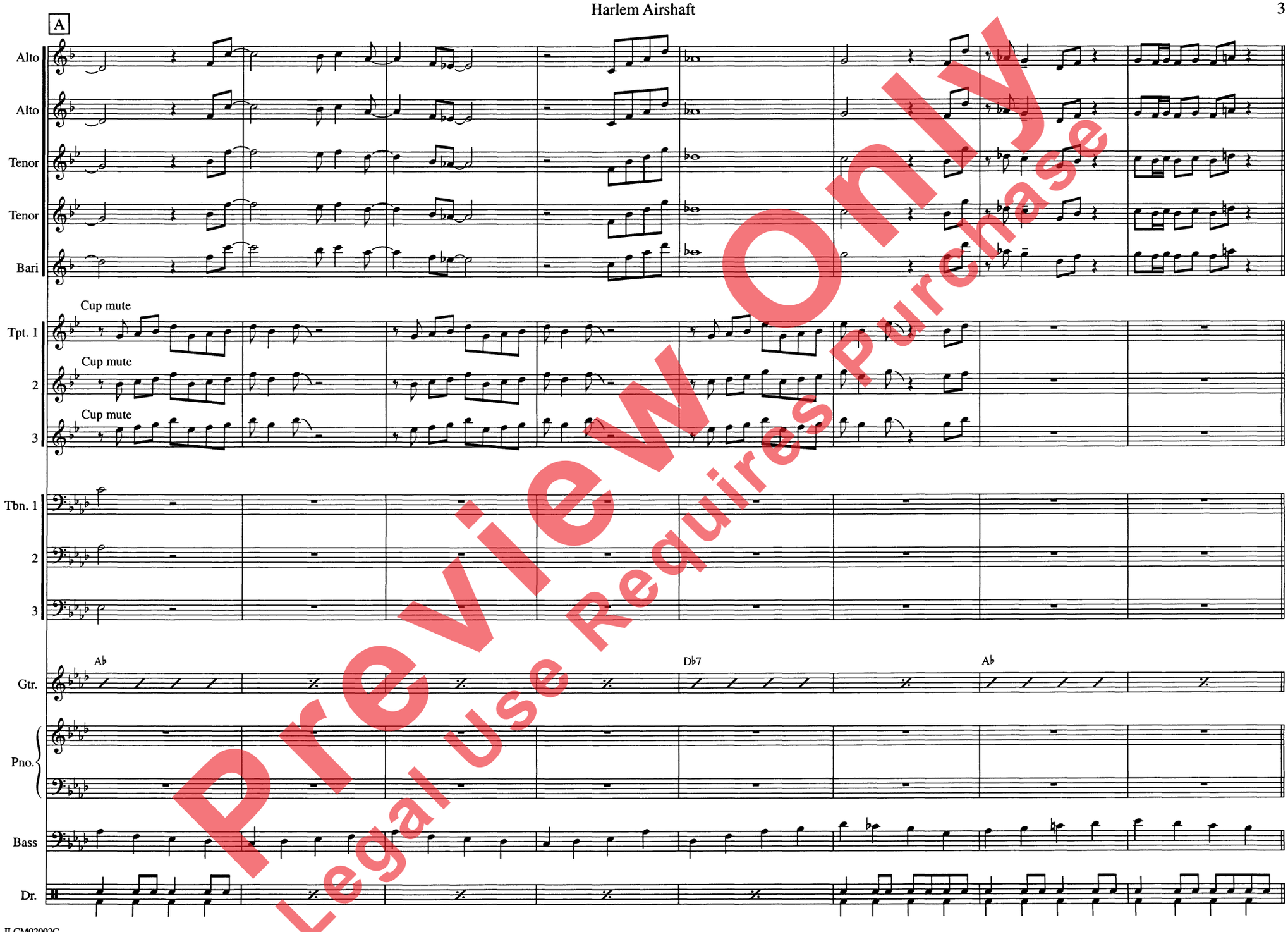

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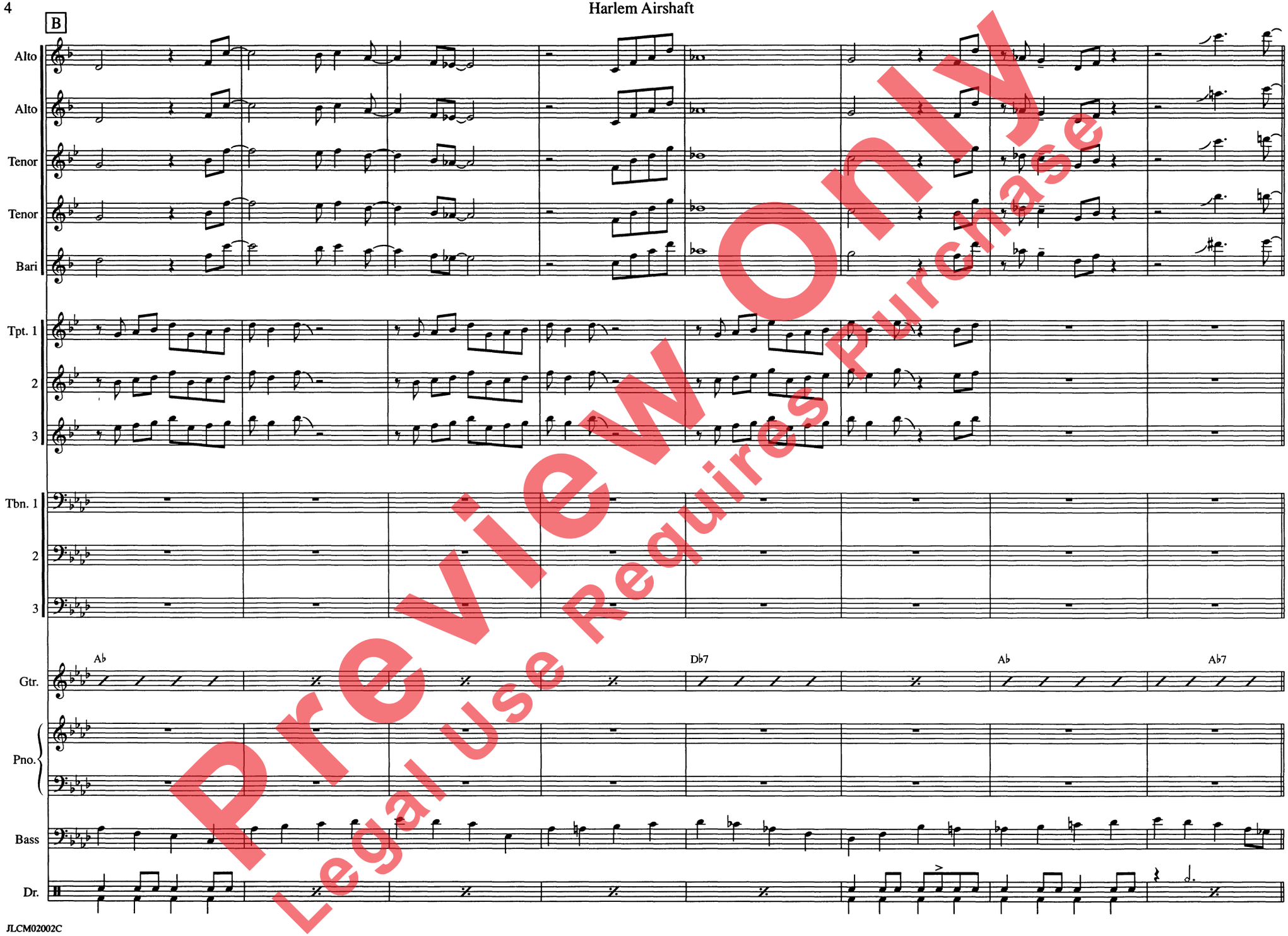

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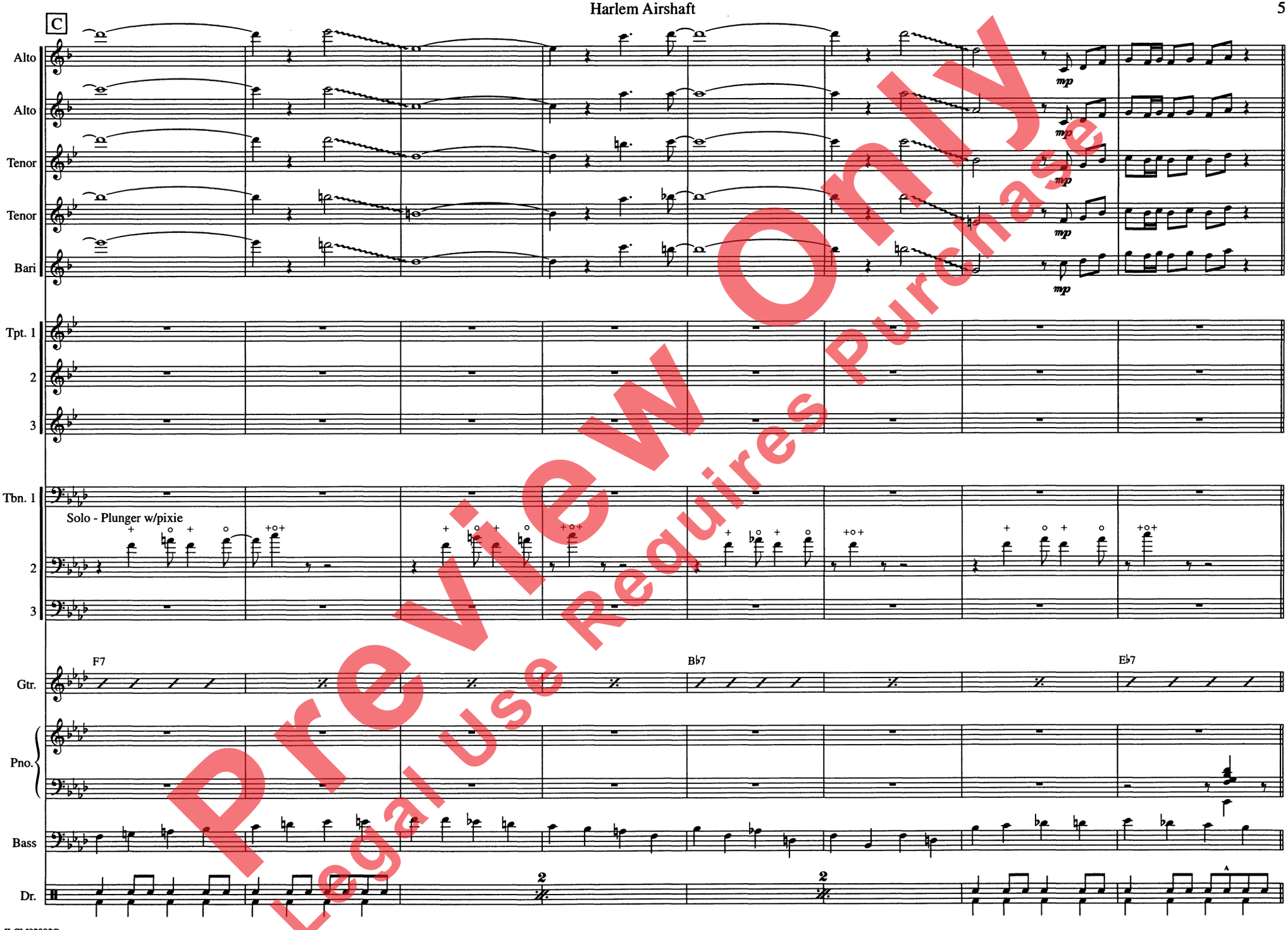

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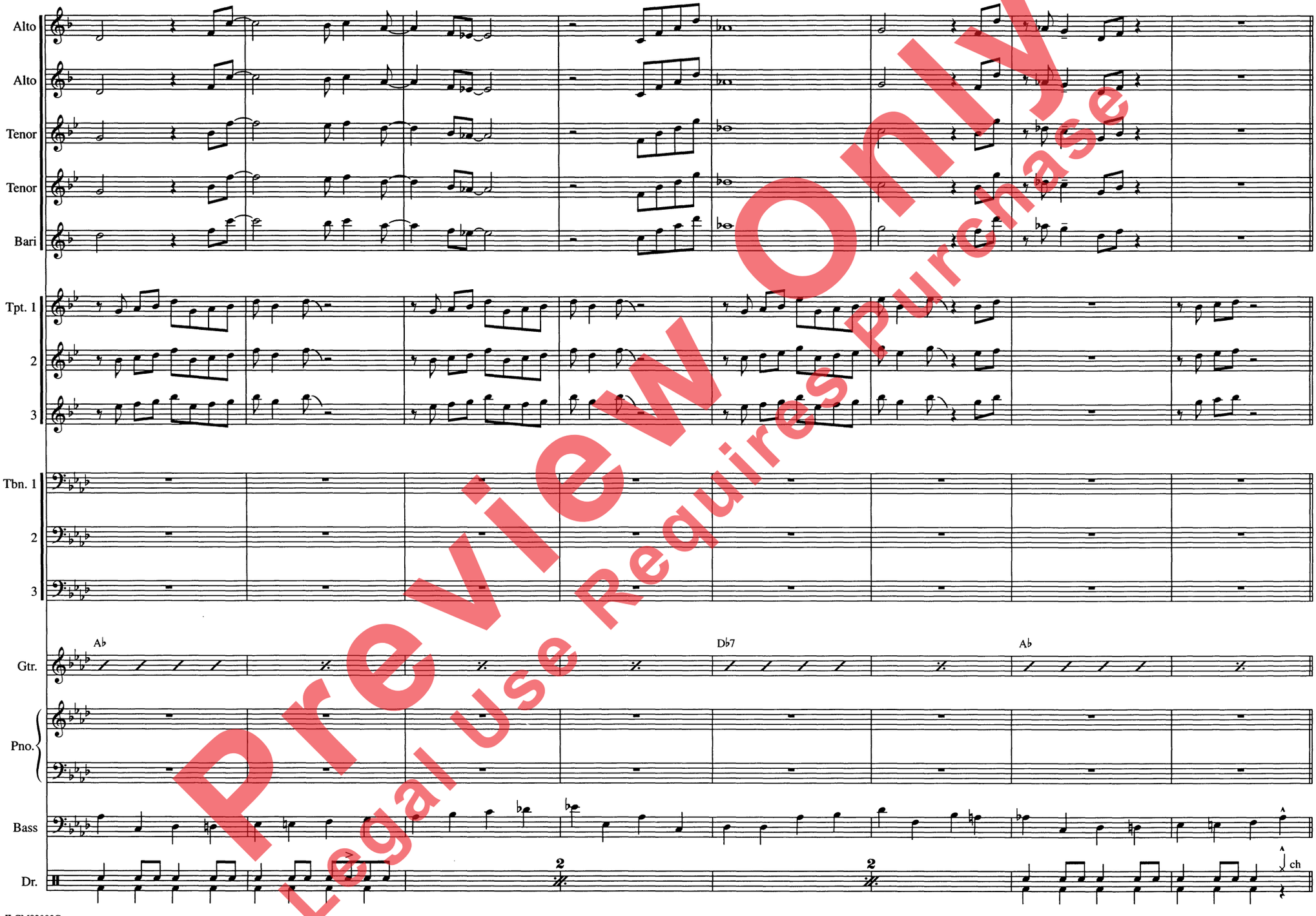

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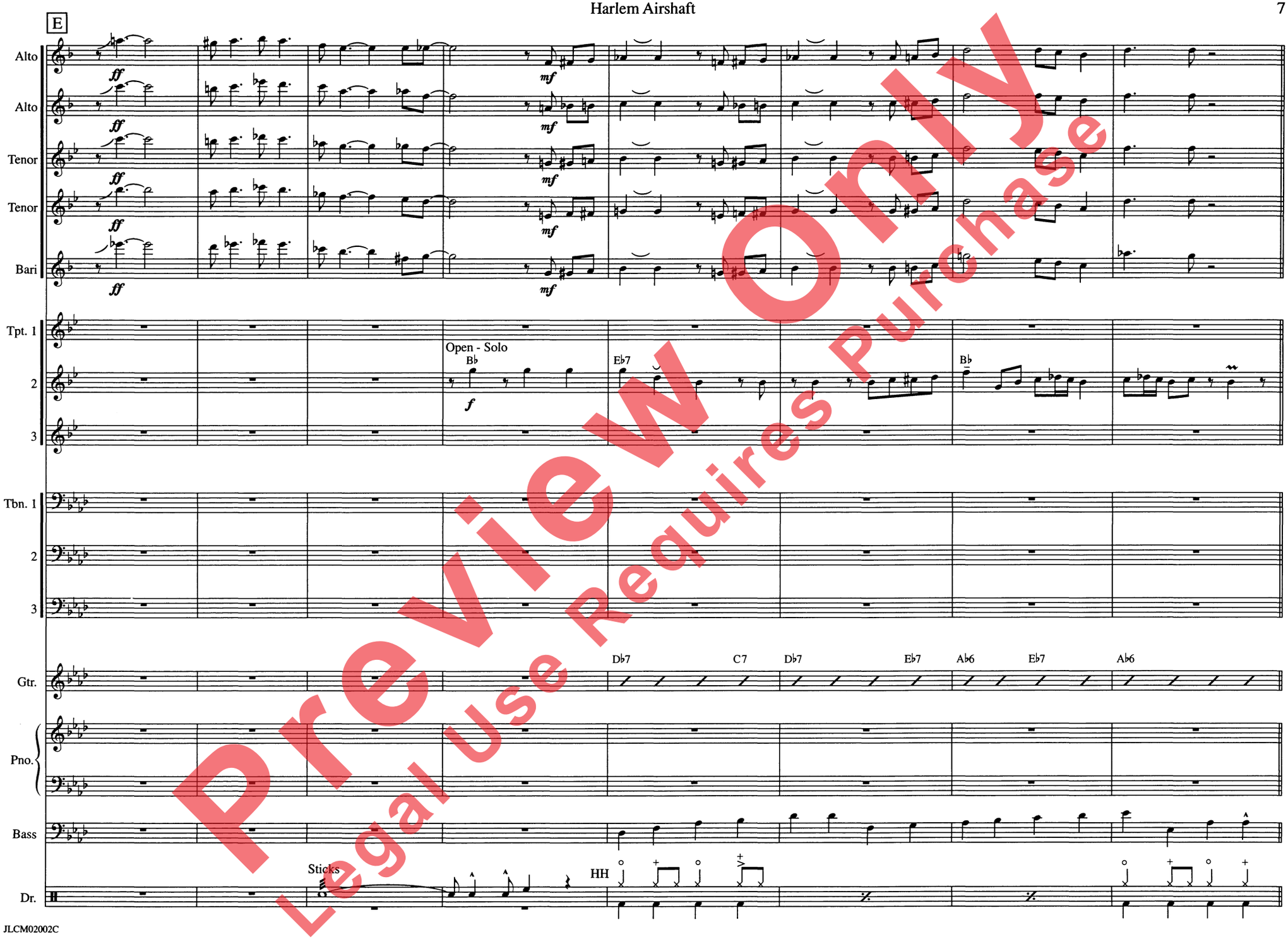

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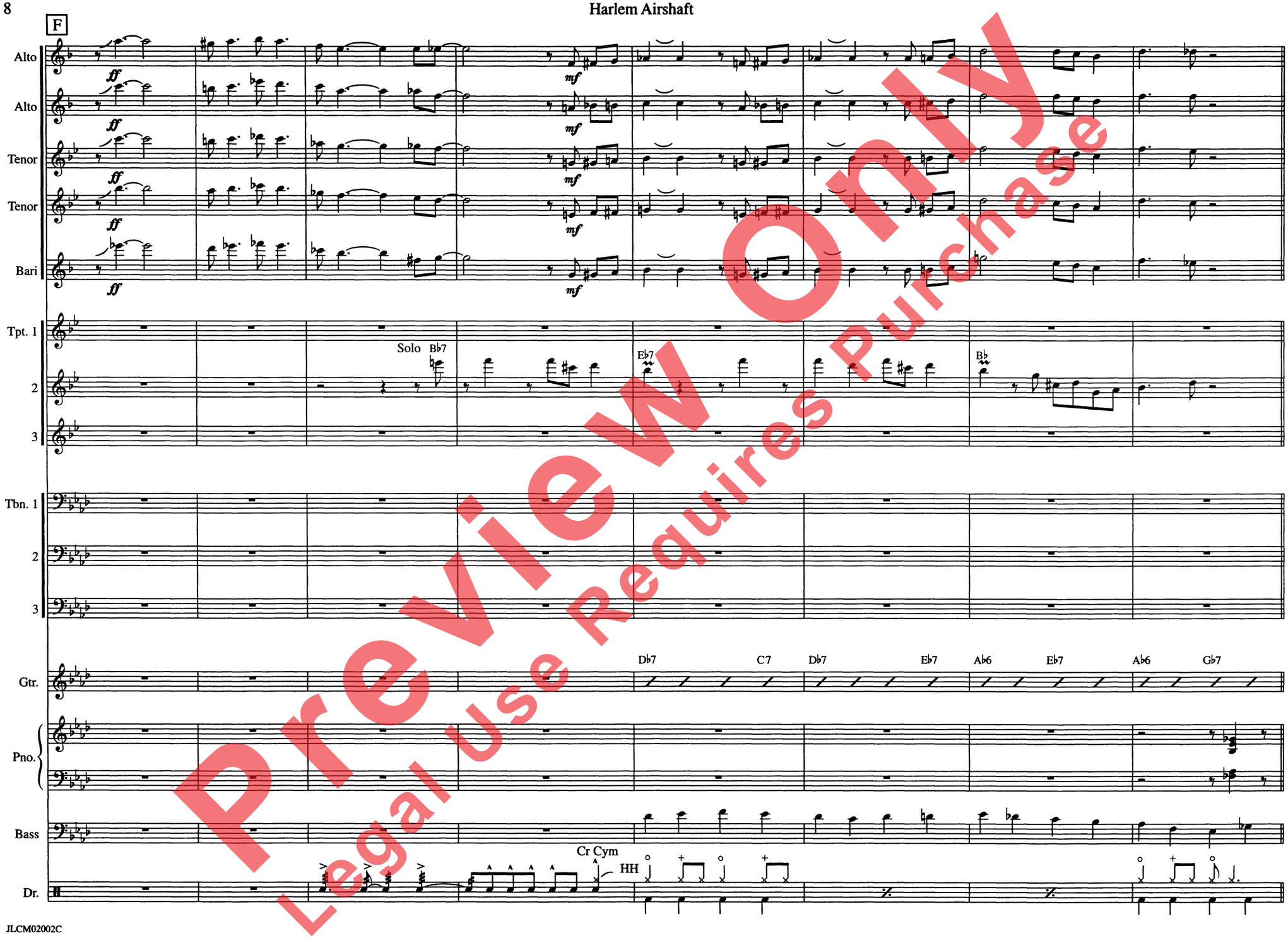

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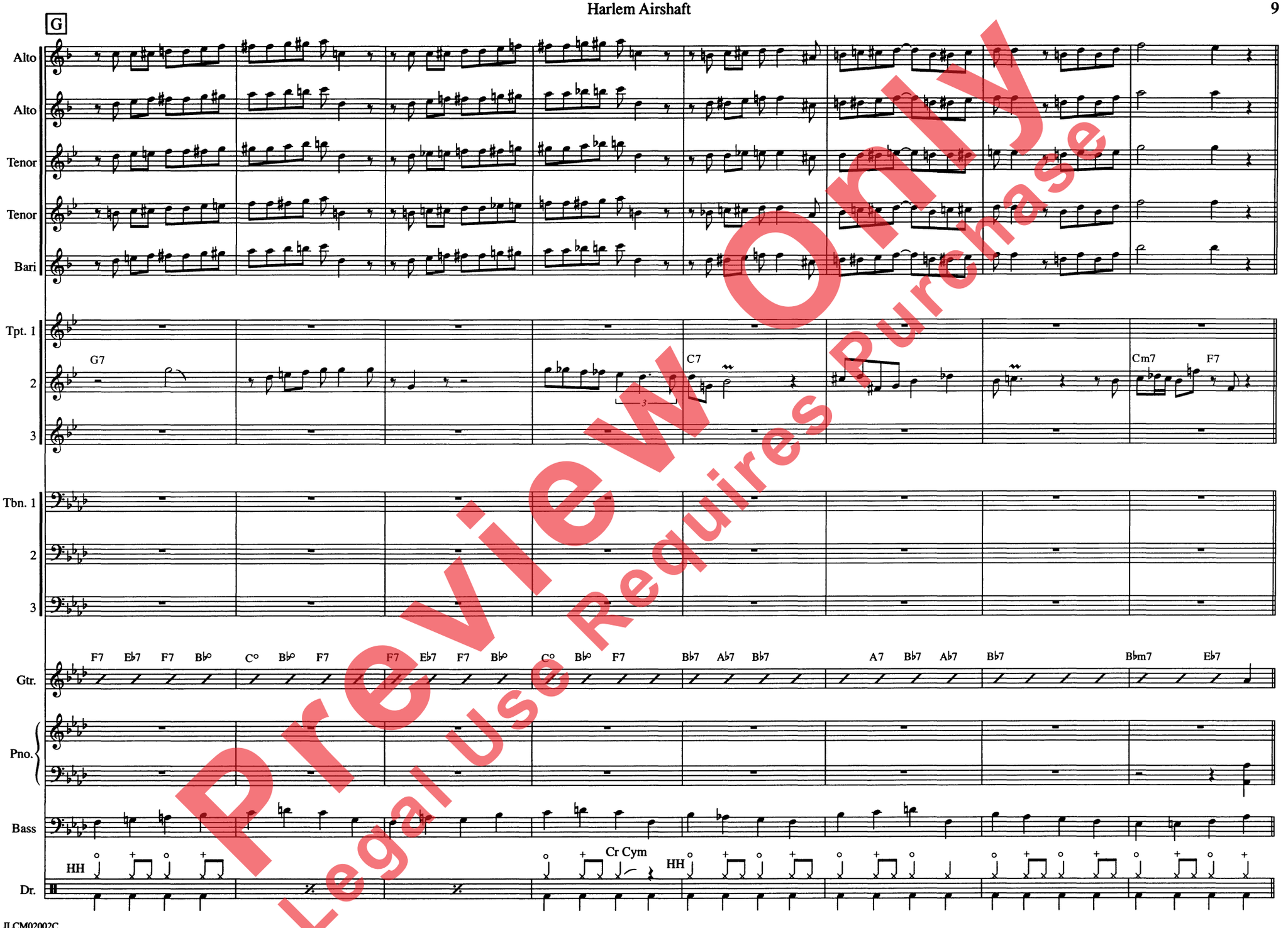

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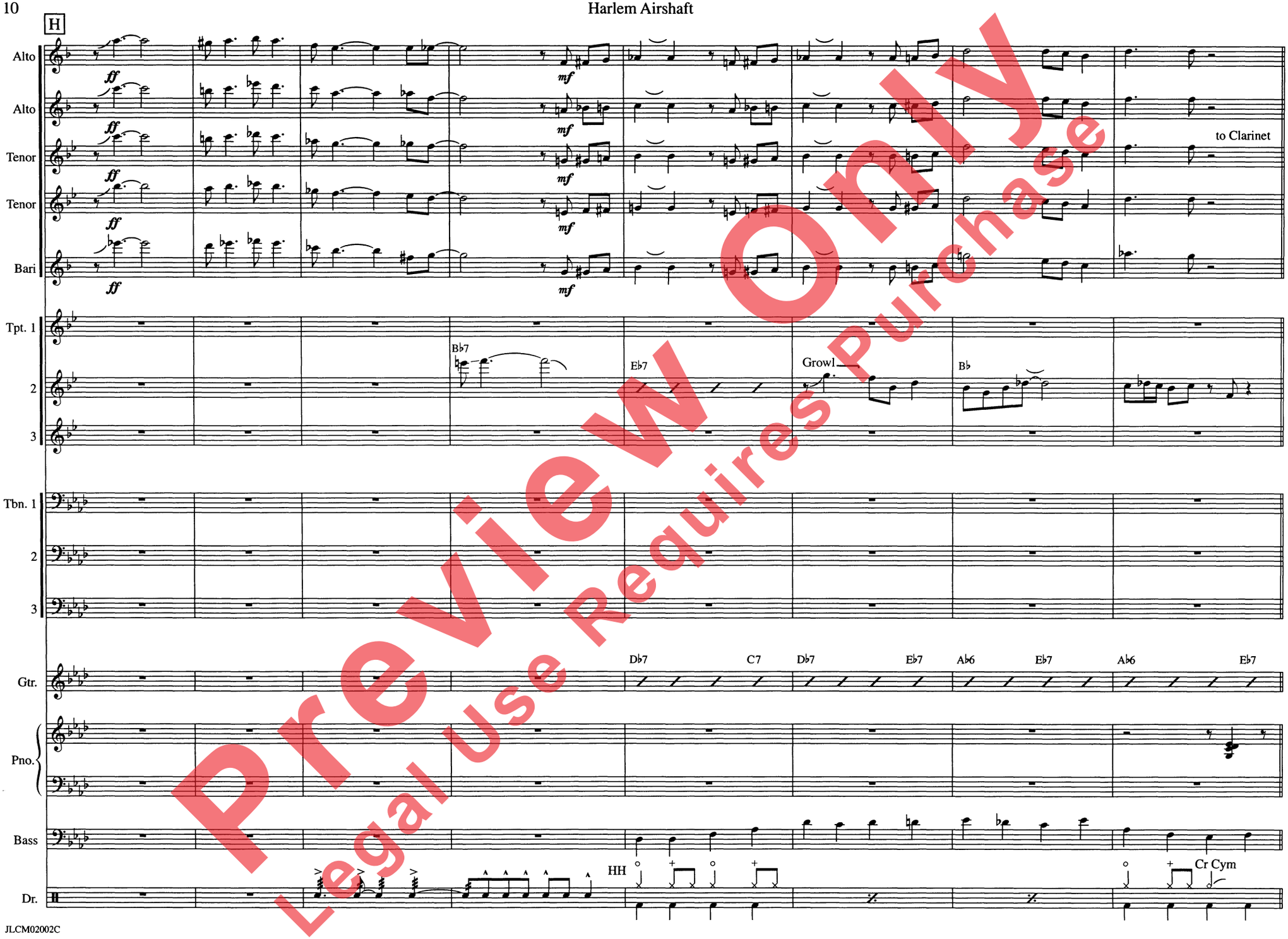

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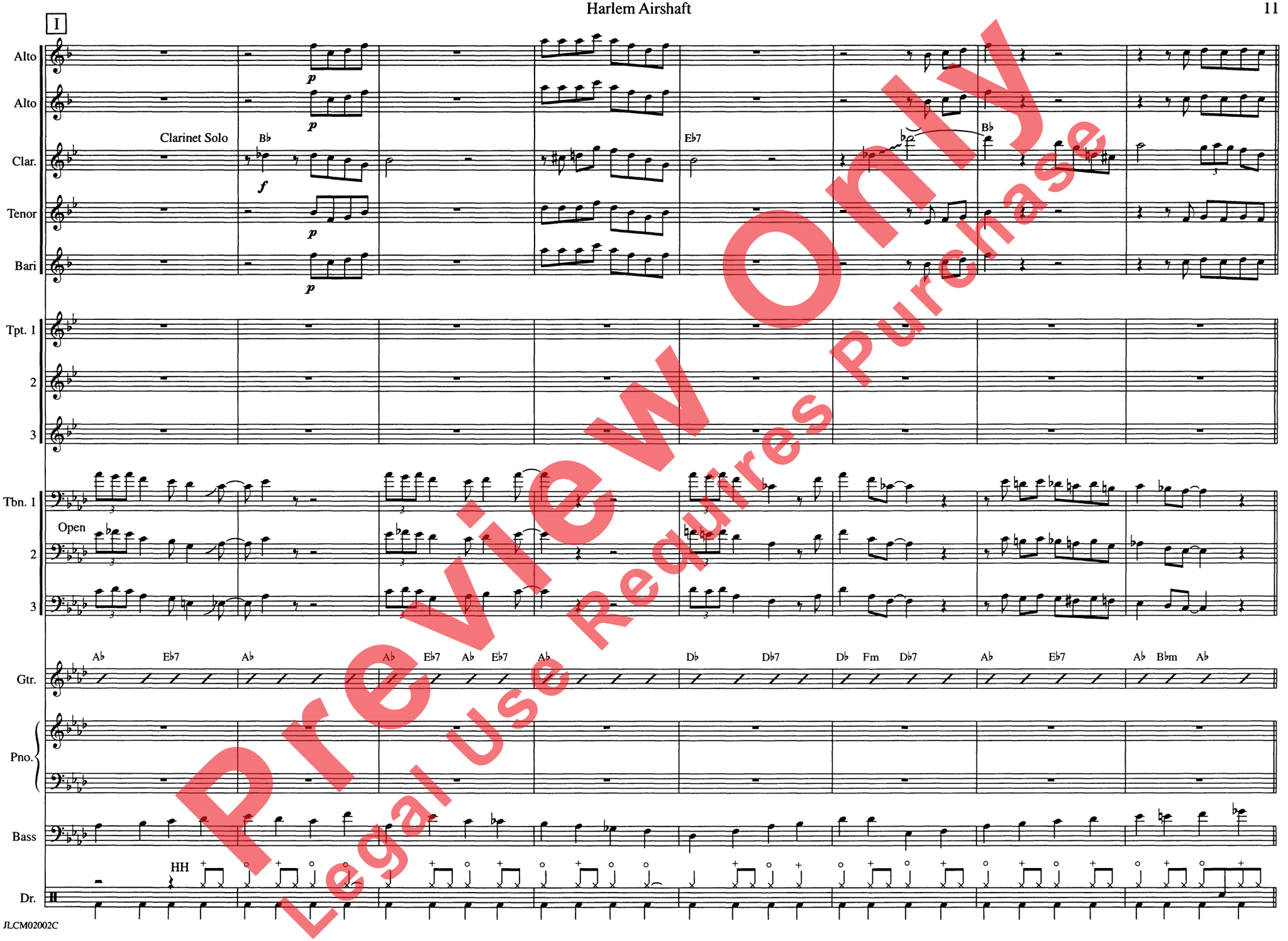

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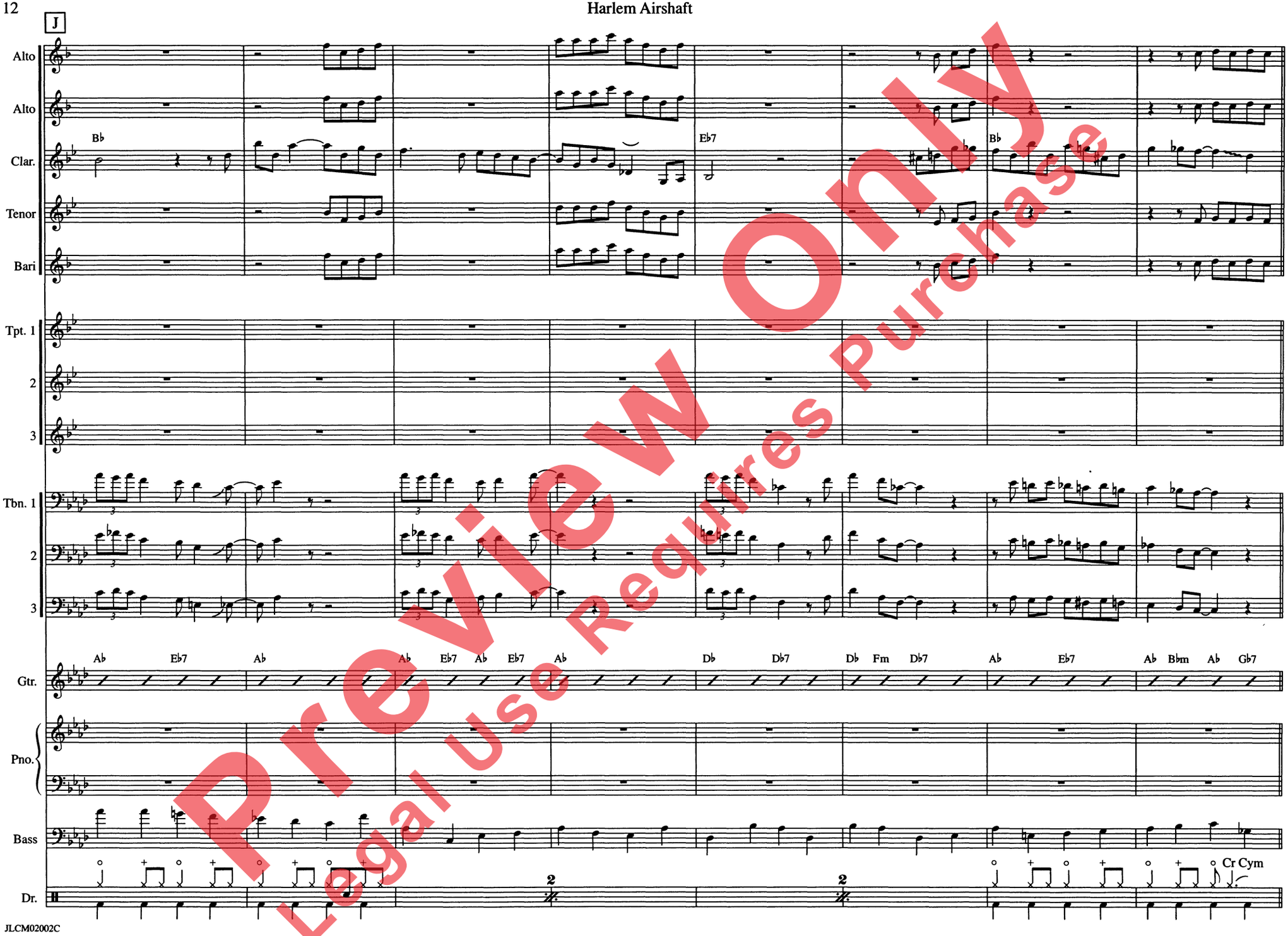

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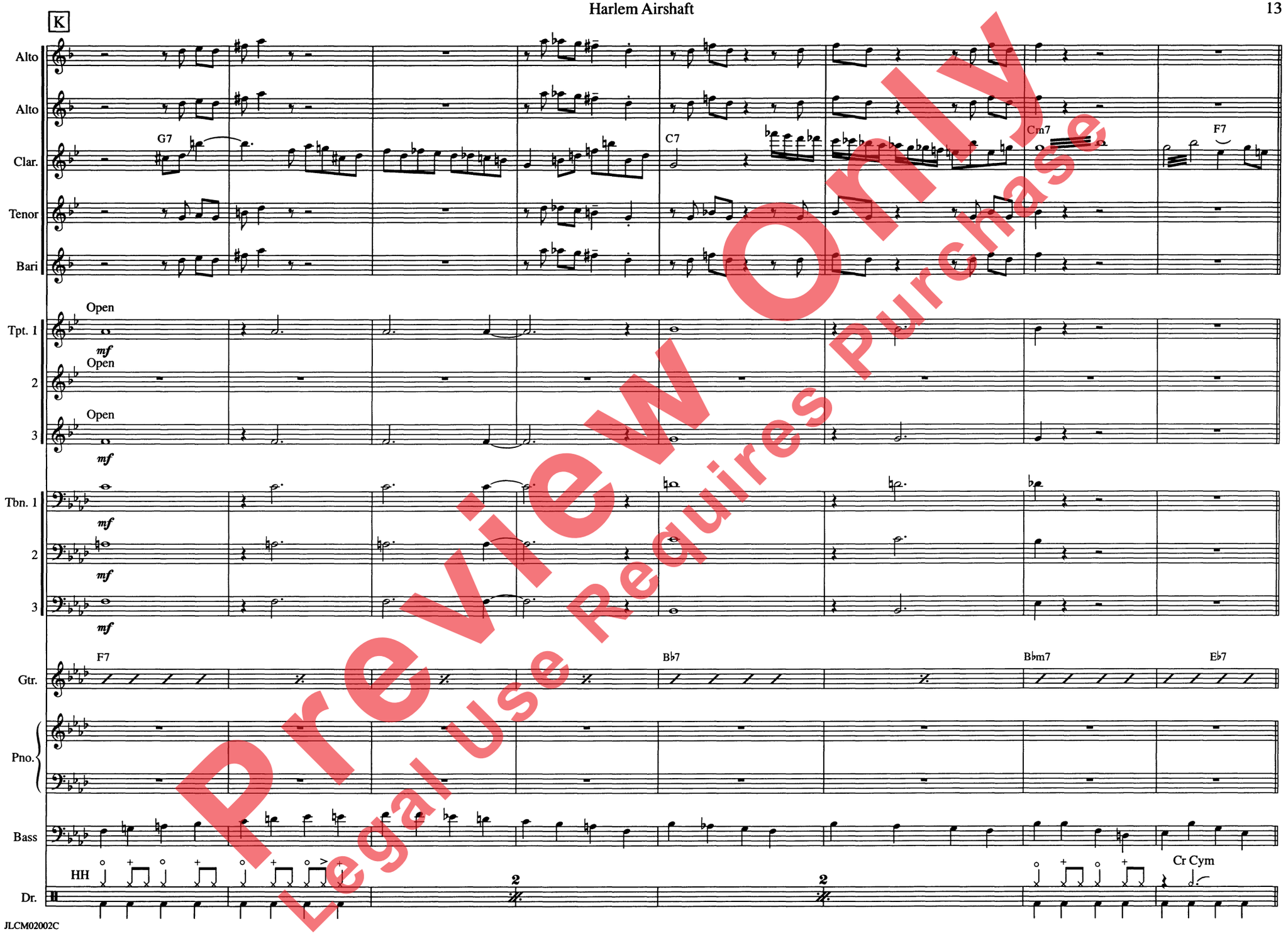

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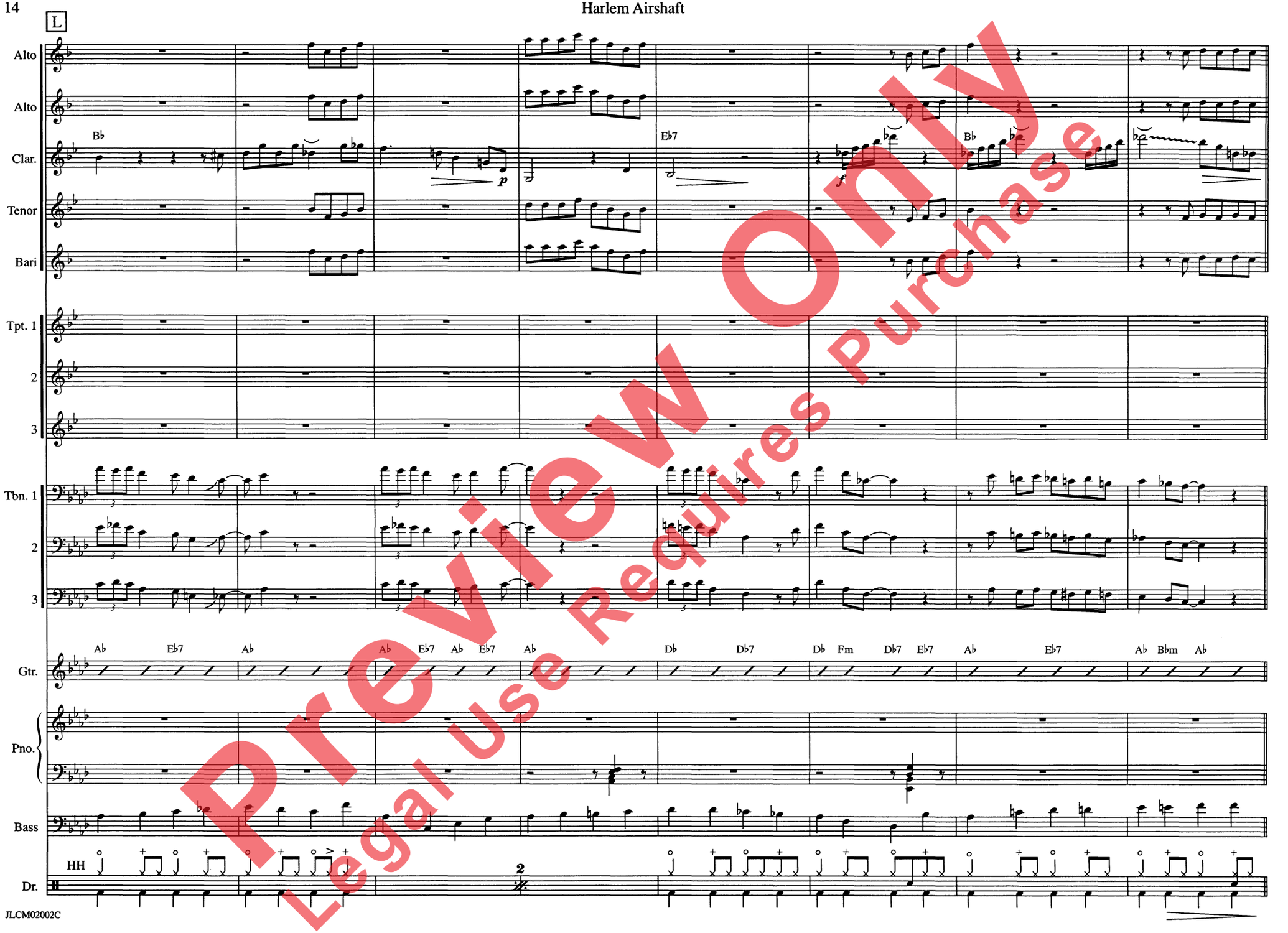

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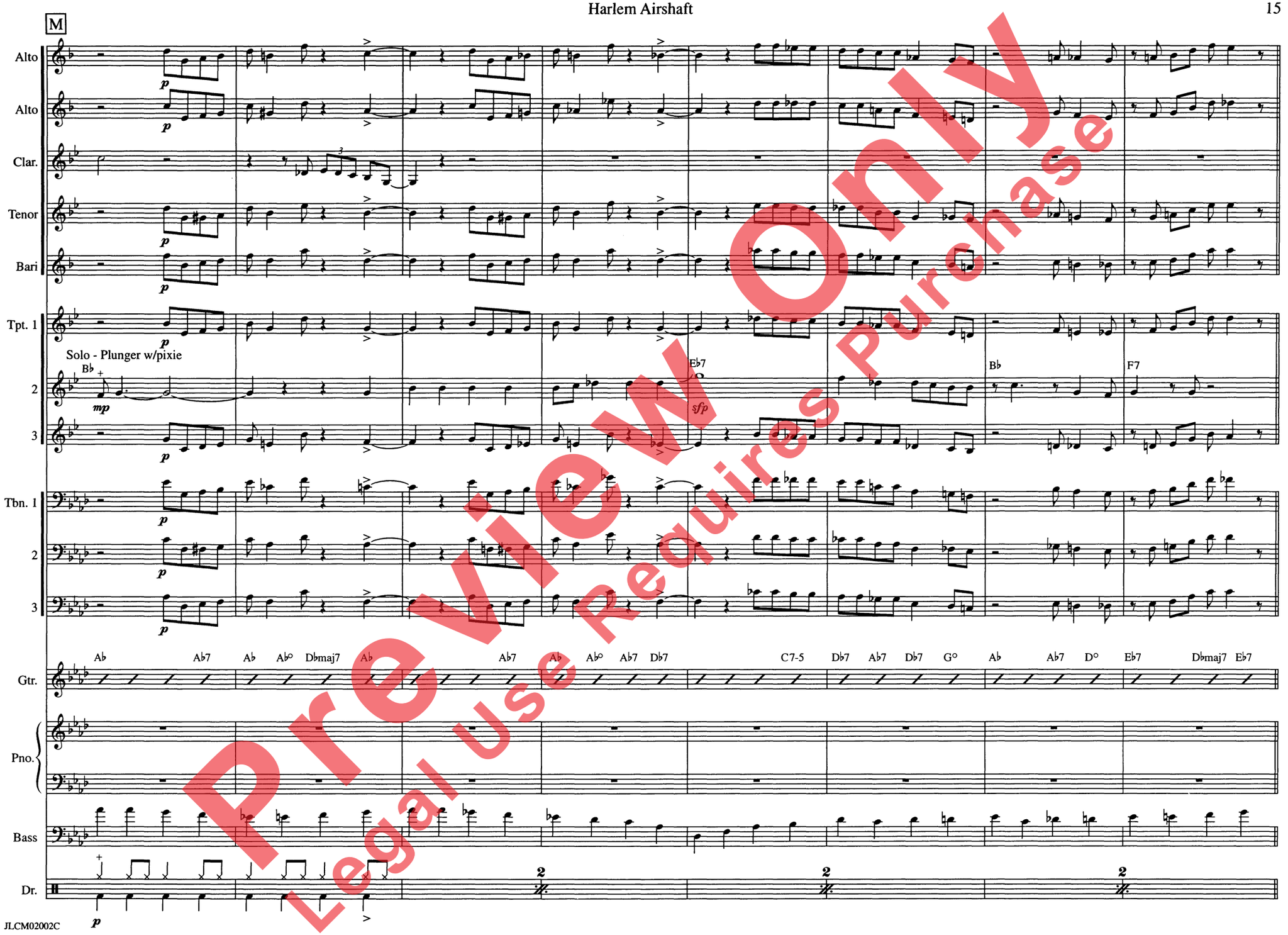

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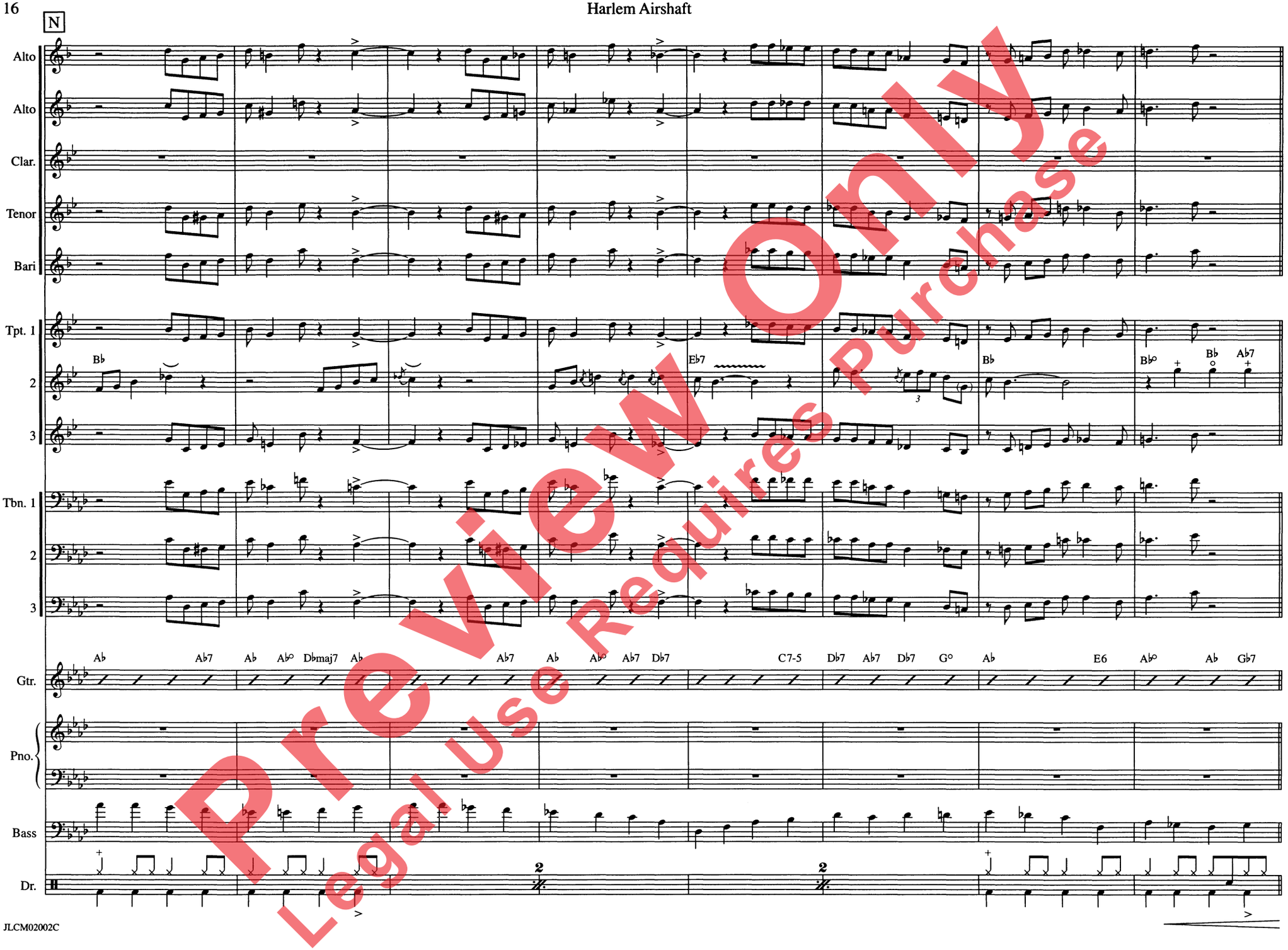

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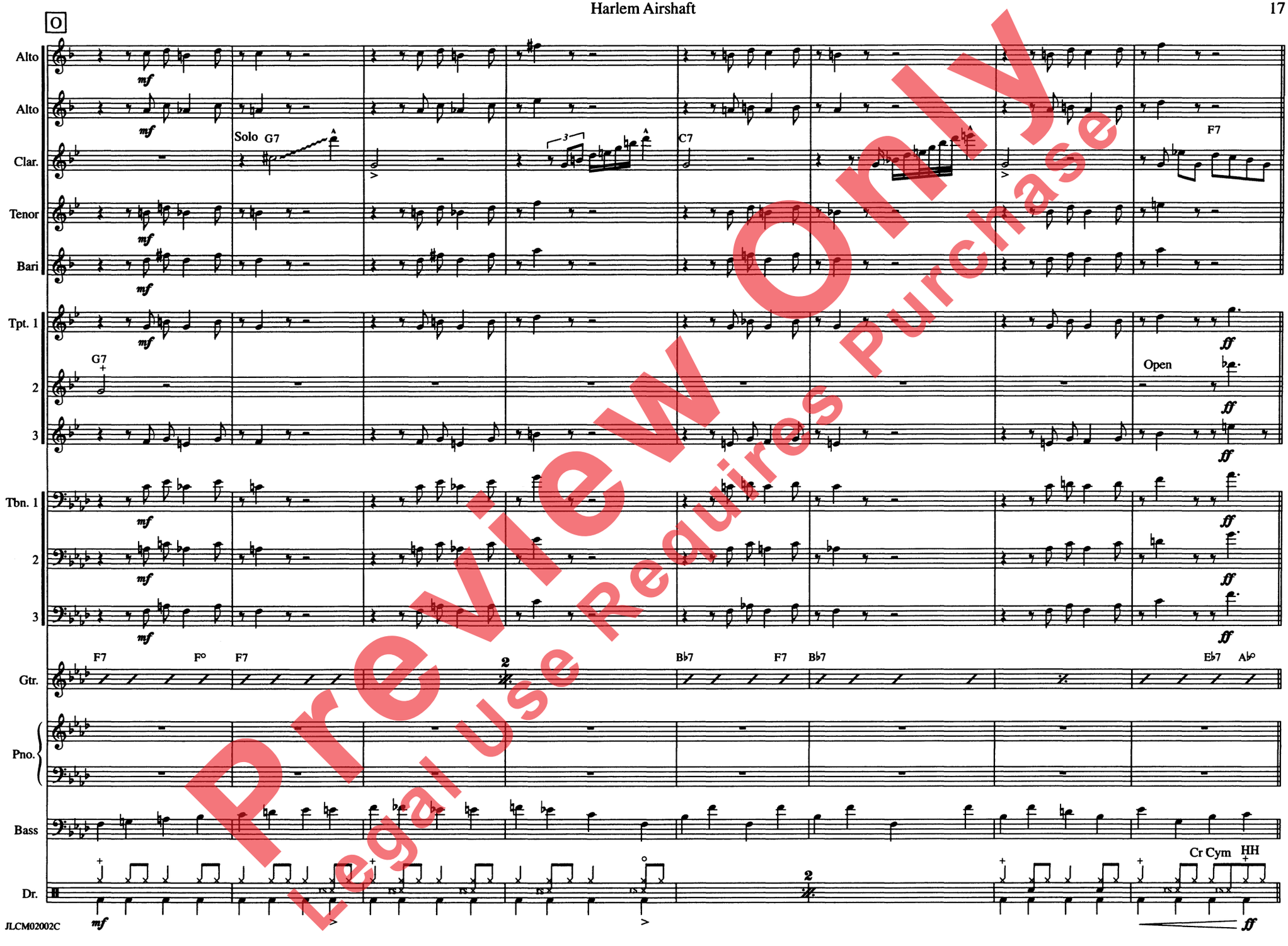

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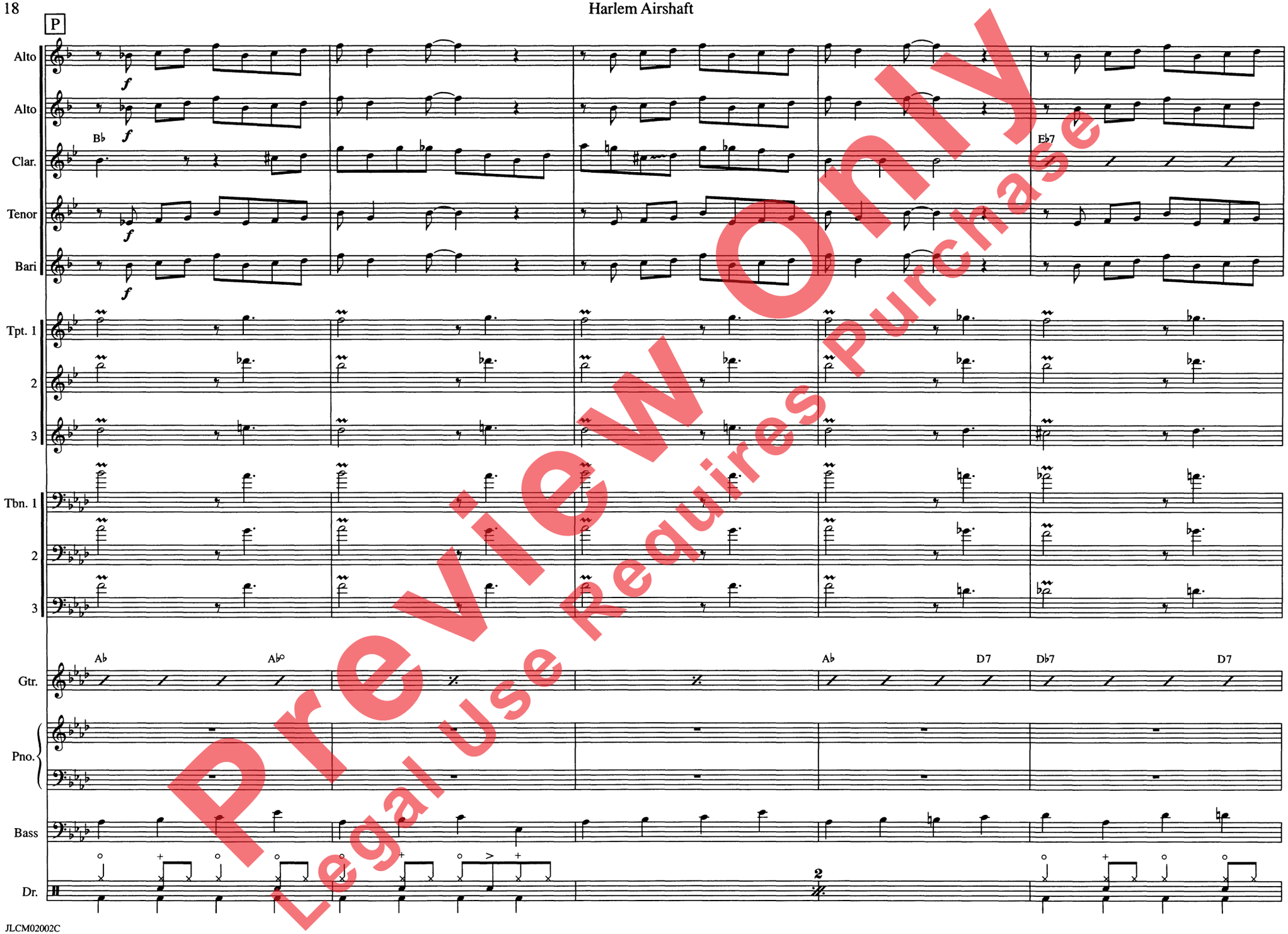

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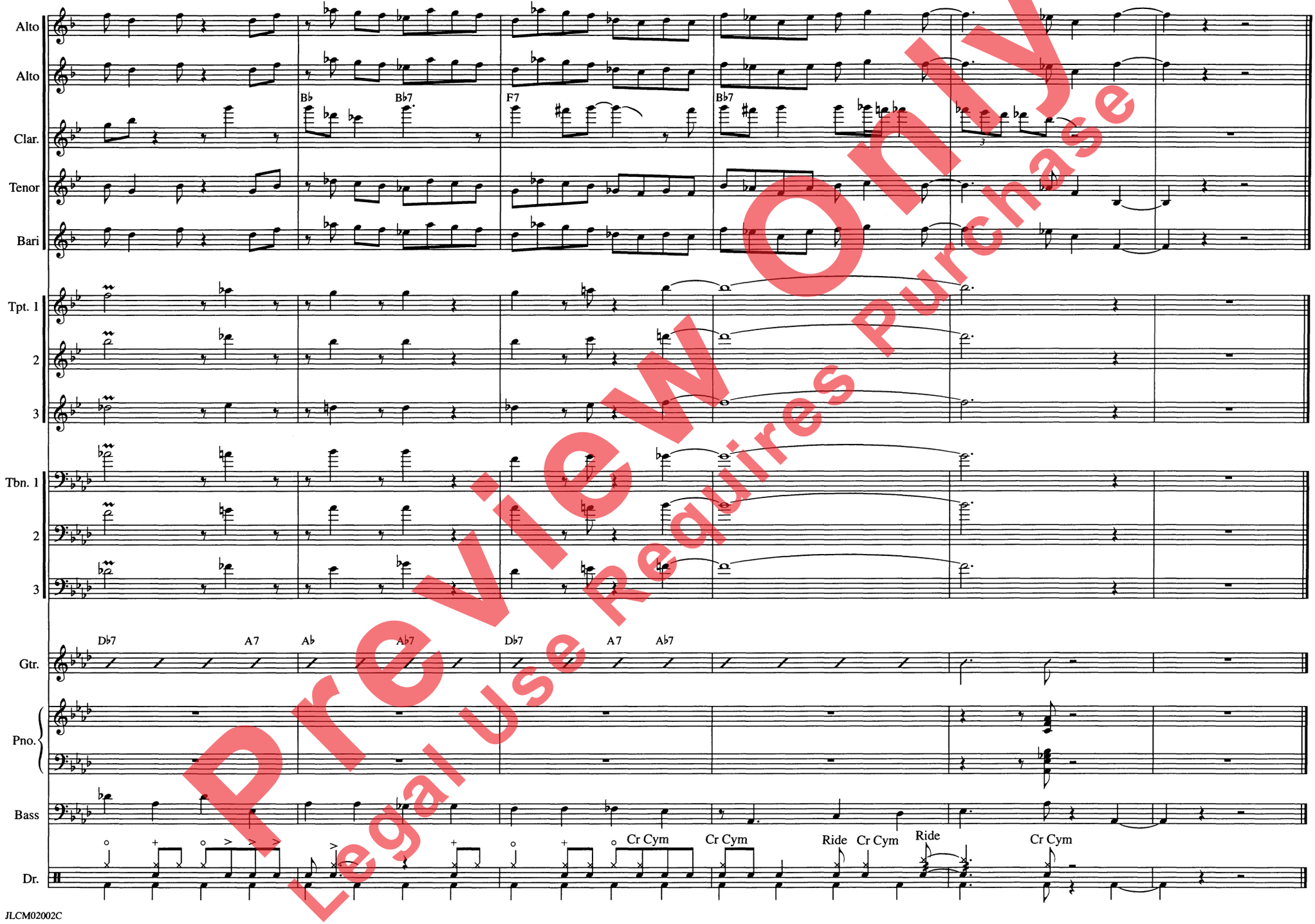

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