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ISFAHAN

FROM "THE FAR EAST SUITE"

BY BILLY STRAYHORN

Transcribed by David Berger for Jazz at Lincoln Center

FULL SCORE

This transcription was made especially for Essentially Ellington 2005:
The Tenth 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, since 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 sub-tone 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 1 of a measure would be released on beat 3.

9. Unless they are part of a legato background figure, long notes should be played somewhat ***fp***; accent and 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 under- stand 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. 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 using alternate slide positions. It would be

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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 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 2 and 4 (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° 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 is where the climax most often happens.

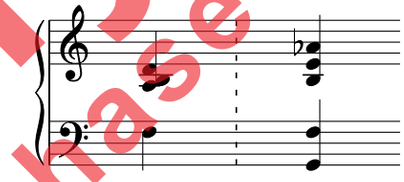
Soli: a harmonized passage for two or more instruments playing the same rhythm. It is customary for horn players to stand up or even move in front of the band when playing these passages. This is done so that the audience can hear them better and to provide the audience with some visual interest. A soli 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 Ryan Keberle for editing the score.

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ISFAHAN

INSTRUMENTATION:

Reed 1 - Alto Sax
Reed 2 - Alto Sax
Reed 3 - Tenor Sax
Reed 4 - Tenor Sax
Reed 5 - Baritone Sax
Trumpet 1
Trumpet 2
Trumpet 3
Trombone 1
Trombone 2
Trombone 3 (opt. bass)
Bass
Drums

ORIGINAL RECORDING INFORMATION:

Composer: Billy Strayhorn
Arranger: Billy Strayhorn
Recorded: December 20, 1966, in New York City
Time: 4:17
Master Number: TPA1-9152-1
Original Issue: *The Far East Suite,* RCA Victor LPM-3782 (mono)/LSP-3782 (stereo)

Currently Available on CD:
Duke Ellington's The Far East Suite (Remaster)
Bluebird (RCA/BMG) 55614-2

Personnel: Duke Ellington, conductor; Cat Anderson, Mercer Ellington, Herbie Jones, Cootie Williams, trumpets; Lawrence Brown, Buster Cooper, trombones; Chuck Connors, bass trombone; Johnny Hodges, Russell Procope, Jimmy Hamilton, Paul Gonsalves, Harry Carney, reeds; John Lamb, bass; Rufus Jones, drums.

Soloist: Johnny Hodges, alto sax.

—Phil Schaap, Curator, Jazz at Lincoln Center

REHEARSAL NOTES:

- When Ellington and Strayhorn put together "Impressions of the Far East," one of Duke's most adventurous and unique suites, they included a little-known ballad written to feature Johnny Hodges named **Elf.** Re-titled **Isfahan,** after the city in Iran, this piece seems to fit perfectly into the overall concept of the suite. Actually, "Impressions of the Far East" or "The Far East Suite," as it is sometimes known, is mostly about the Middle East.

- The form for **Isfahan** is ABAC A(ensemble) AC + tag. As is the case in so many of Strayhorn's scores, Ellington opts not to play the piano, thereby creating a lean landscape. Also, there is no guitar. There is already so much harmony and counterpoint in the horns that the addition of piano and/or guitar would just gum up the works.

- The focus of this piece is the alto saxophone solo. It is the opposite of the contemporary pop ballads, which is laden with histrionics. This solo is underplayed, *sotto voce*. However, in the few moments when Hodges builds up some tension, we realize that underneath all of that nonchalance is an intense and passionate man. He doesn't have to yell to express that intensity. Sometimes great emotion is best expressed in a whisper. This same approach to the dynamics is true throughout the band, both in the background and during the soft shout at letter **E.** Don't mistake the quiet dynamics for lack of precision and intensity.

- In keeping with the sad tradition of ignoring count-offs, one of the most difficult spots in this chart is the first measure at letter **A.** First, the alto soloist needs to set up the time during his pickup. Then, the rhythm section must establish the beat on the first beat of **A.** Next, the trombones must come in at the end of beat 1. This is tricky since there is an implied swing feel. A beat later, the remaining alto and two tenors play their counterline. Everyone except the baritone and the trumpets is involved in setting up the beat and the feel (at four different times)—therefore, four chances to miss. This demands concentration from all of those people during the count-off.

- Slow pieces like this magnify the little things. While the saxes are slurring their unison (no vibrato, or as Ellington would say, "dead tone") figures at **A,** the trombones need to put accents on their syncopated notes and *fp* on the long notes. Adding a pinch of lip vibrato warms it up nicely. Note that slide vibrato is considered over the top and inappropriate in the Ellington style.

- Letter **B** has the saxes switch to unison, which requires the use of vibrato for warmth.

- When the baritone takes over the melody for the two measures before **D,** he or she immediately switches the feel to straight (even) eighth notes. The accent on the downbeat of the second bar adds so much character.

- The soft ensemble shout at **E** is a typical tutti section (four-part close harmony doubled in each section). In order to make this kind of writing come alive, everyone needs to play his or her part with conviction like it is the melody (that is true of every written part at any time), and the baritone sax and 2nd trombone, who are doubling the 1st trumpet down the octave, need to bring their parts out just a pinch. If these dynamics are adhered to, your ensemble will get a nice shimmer. Remember, this is subtle. Notice that this is the only section of the entire piece where the bass and drums go into four. This is essential to the effectiveness of the form.

- There are several breaks during the piece. The silence is excruciating. We love the suspense. It is a perfect study in balance and the art of complementation. Everyone's part is so integral that it makes each member of the ensemble want to play his or her part with pride.

—David Berger

COMMENTS FROM WYNTON MARSALIS:

- **Isfahan,** with its soft, sustained tones, is a great arrangement to help students develop their sound. Played softly, sweetly, and with soul, it offers a chance to really hear the sound of your band.

- It is very difficult for a young rhythm section to play a ballad. The bass and drums should keep in mind the swaying, to-and-fro motion of a nice slow dance.

- Watch the intonation of the ensemble part at letter **E.** Here the rhythm section changes from a two- to a four-beat groove. Now's the time for the band to sing out.

- The internal dynamics are very important throughout the piece. The subtle nuances are not written. You must add the dynamic ebb-and-flow.

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Essentially Ellington

The *Essentially Ellington* High School Jazz Band Competition & Festival *(EE)* is one of the most unique jazz programs for high school bands in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. *EE* extends the legacy of Duke Ellington by widely disseminating his music, in its original arrangements, to high school musicians for study and performance. Utilizing Ellington's music challenges students to increase their musical proficiency and knowledge of the jazz language. *EE* consists of the following initiatives and services:

- **Supplying the Music:** Each year Jazz at Lincoln Center (JALC) transcribes, publishes, and distributes Duke Ellington charts (along with additional educational materials) to high school bands in the U.S. and Canada and American schools abroad.
- **Talking About Duke:** Throughout the school year, band directors and students correspond with professional clinicians who answer questions regarding Ellington's music. *EE* strives to foster mentoring relationships through e-mail correspondence, various conference presentations, and the festival weekend.
- **Sharing Experiences:** Students are encouraged to enter an essay contest by writing about an experience they have had with jazz music. The first-place winner earns the honor of naming a seat in Frederick P. Rose Hall—home of Jazz at Lincoln Center.
- **Professional Feedback:** Bands are invited to submit a recording of their performance of the charts either for entry in the competition or for comments only. Every submission receives a thorough written assessment.
- **Finalists and In-School Workshops:** Fifteen bands are selected from competition entries to attend the competition and festival in New York City. To prepare, each finalist band receives an in-school workshop led by a professional musician. Local *EE* participants are also invited to attend these workshops.
- **Competition & Festival:** *EE* culminates in a three-day festival at Jazz at Lincoln Center's new Frederick P. Rose Hall. Students, teachers, and musicians from across North America participate in workshops, rehearsals, and performances. The festival concludes with an evening concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall that features the three top-placing bands, joining Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra in an all-Ellington performance.
- **Band Director Academy:** This professional development program for band directors is designed to enhance their ability to teach and conduct the music of Duke Ellington and other big band composers. Led by prominent jazz educators each summer, this five-day program integrates performance, history, pedagogy, and discussion into an intensive educational experience for educators at all levels.
- ***Essentially Ellington Down Under*:** A partnership between Jazz at Lincoln Center and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowen University, *EE Down Under* mirrors the model JALC has produced successfully in the U.S. and Canada by bringing the music of Duke Ellington to secondary schools in Western Australia.

As of May 2004, *EE* has distributed 60,000 scores to more than 3,500 schools in all 50 U.S. states, schools in Canadian provinces, American schools abroad, and schools in Western Australia. Since 1996, more than 200,000 students have been exposed to Duke Ellington's music through *EE*.

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For more information about *Essentially Ellington* please contact:

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CONDUCTOR

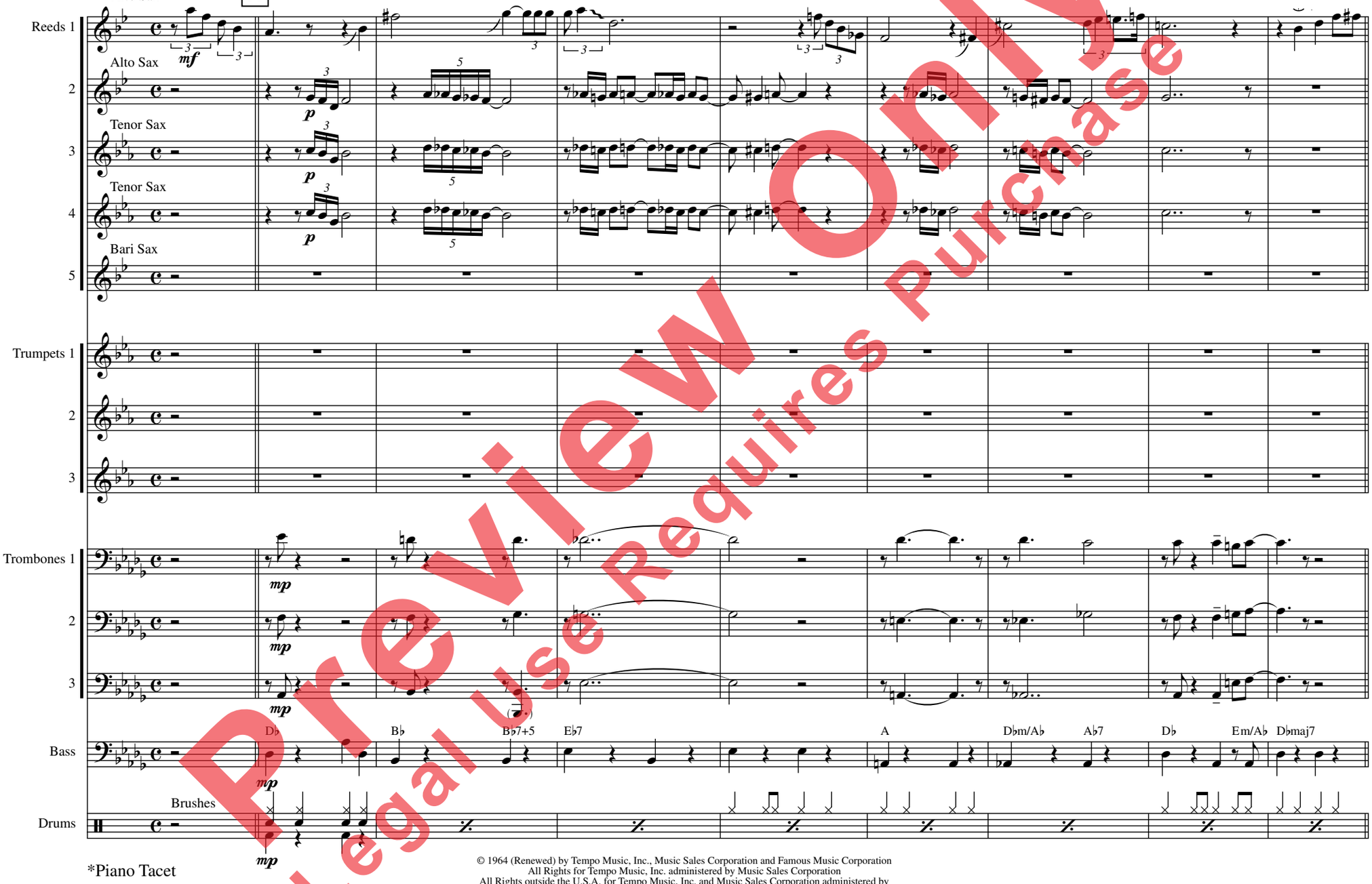
Jazz at Lincoln Center - Essentially Ellington

ISFAHAN

from "The Far East Suite"

By Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn

Transcribed by David Berger



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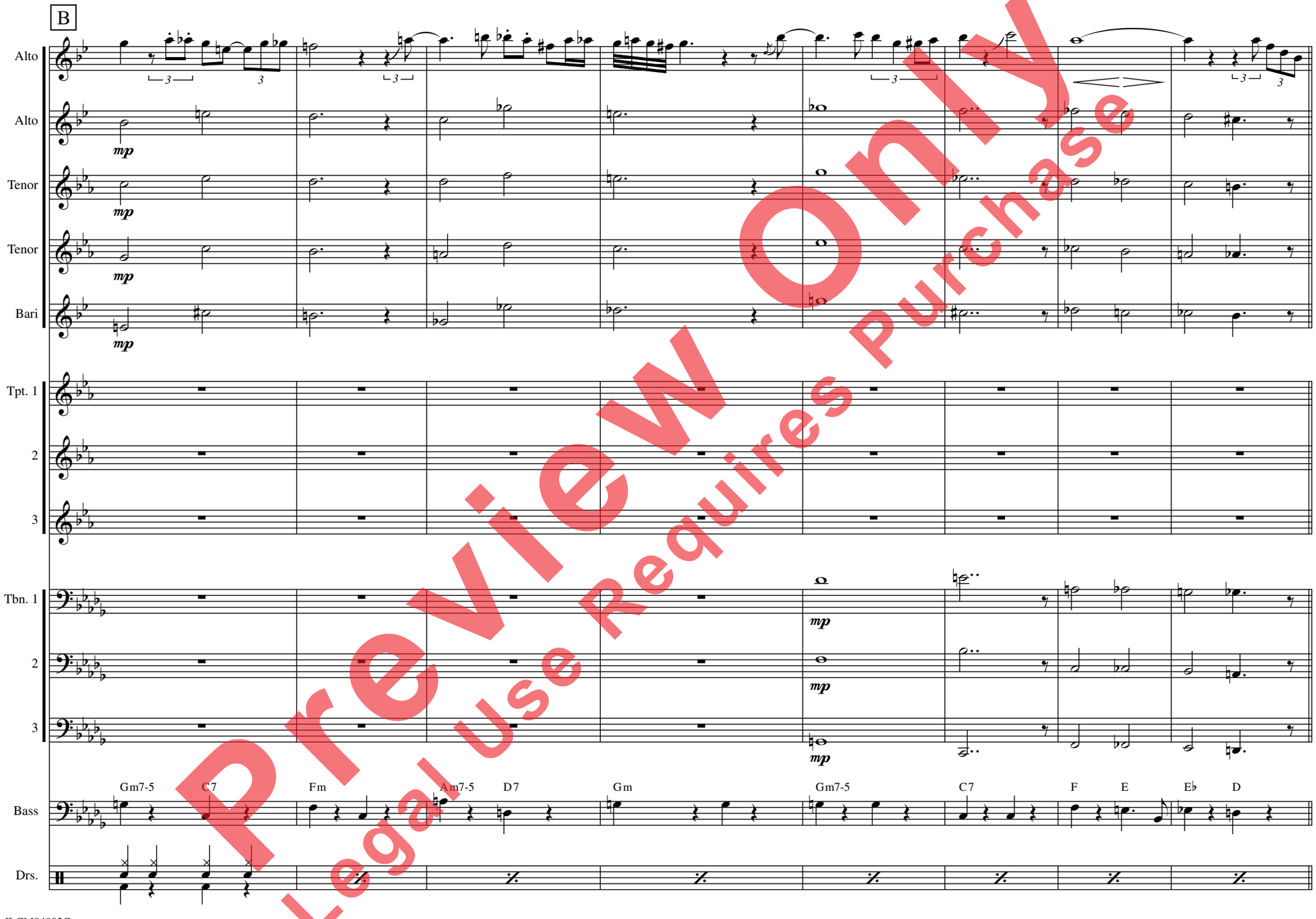

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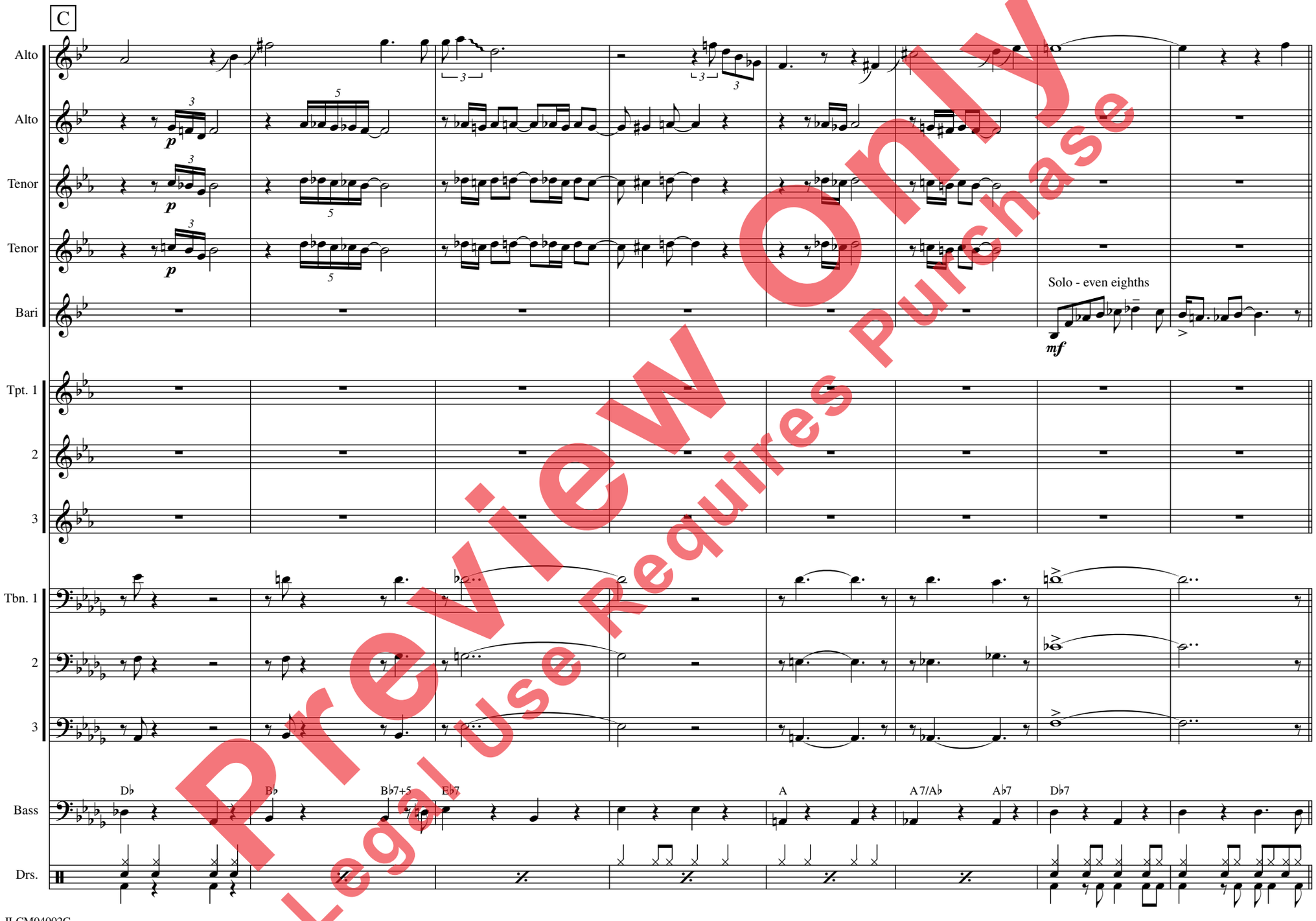

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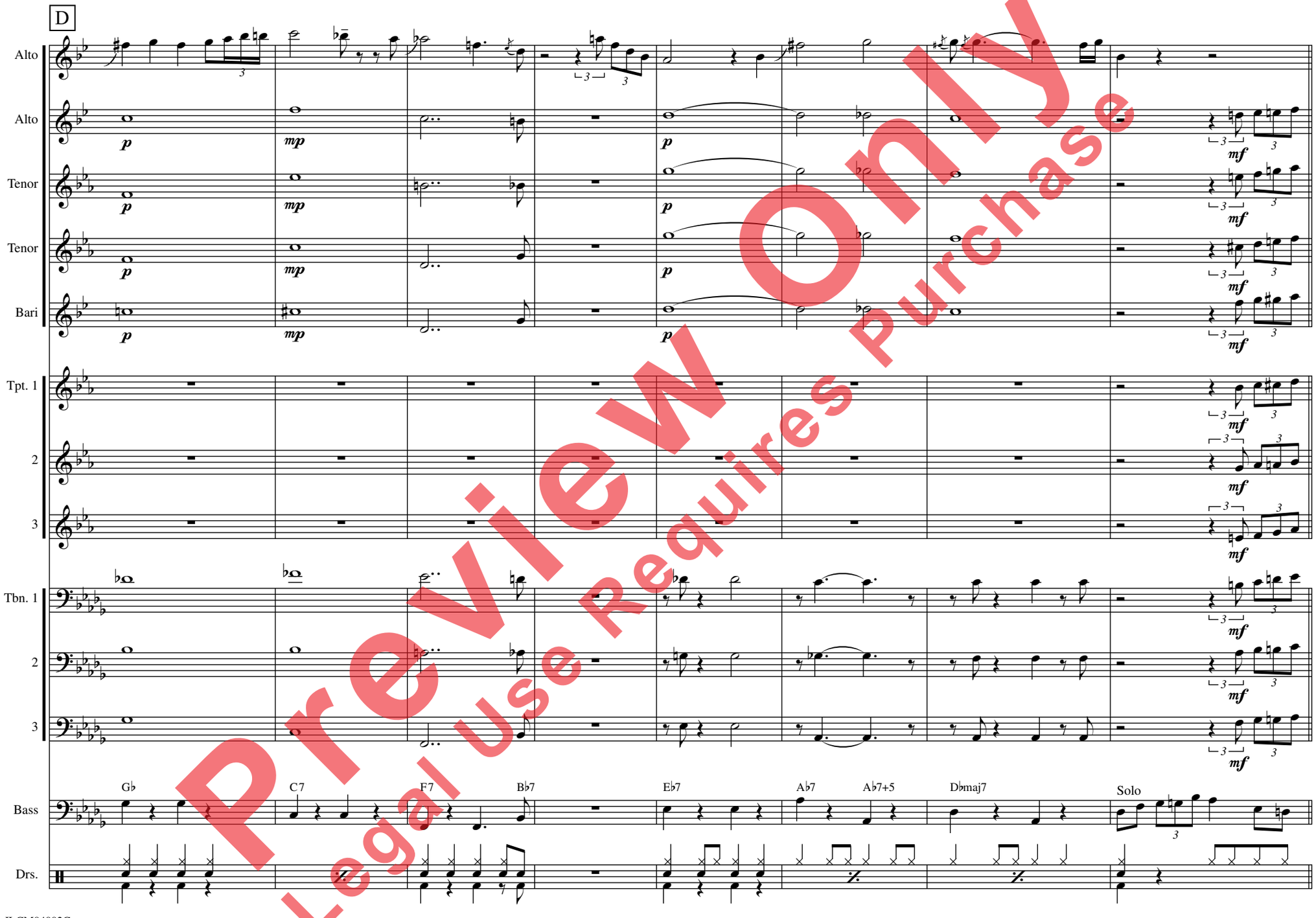

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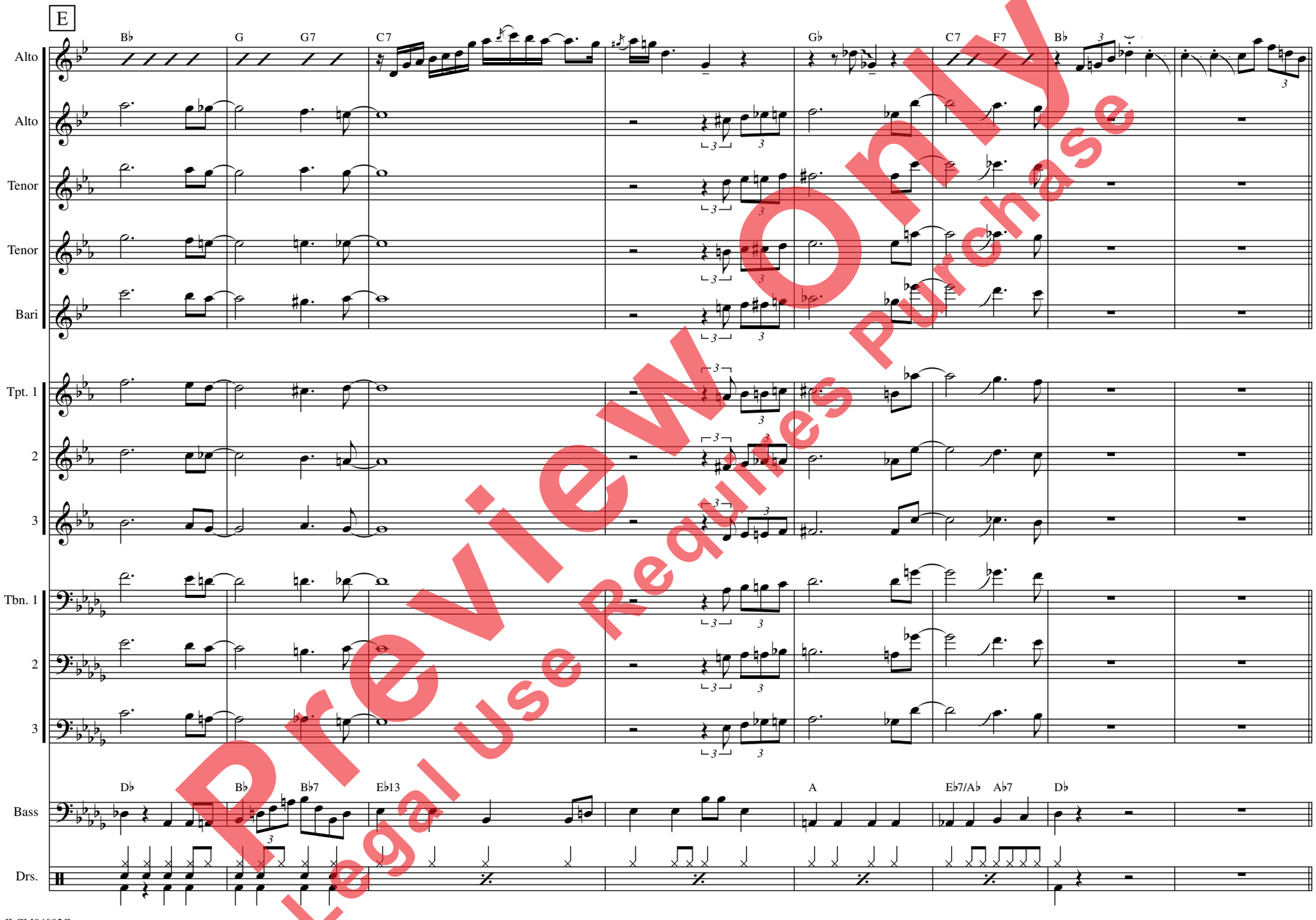

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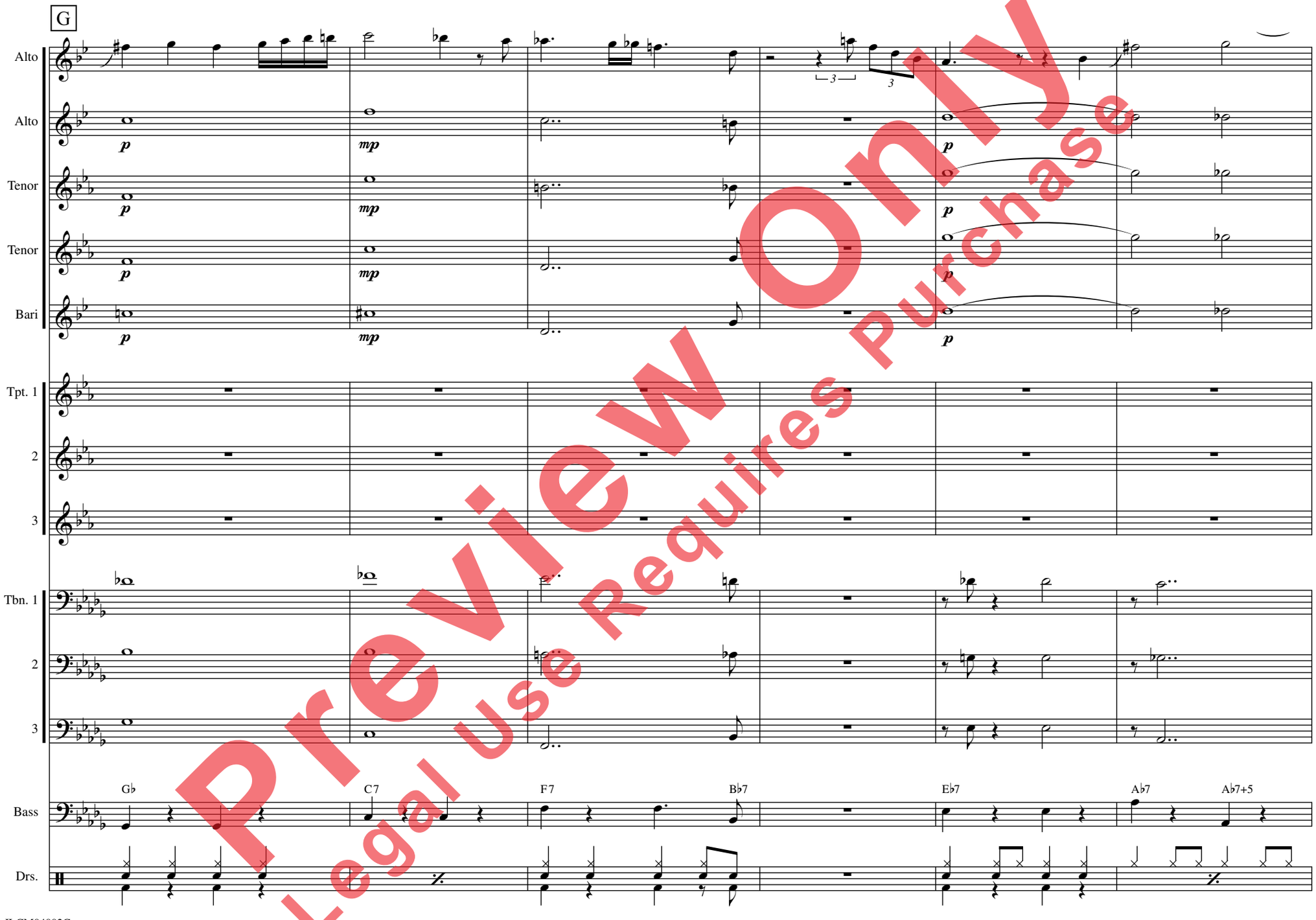

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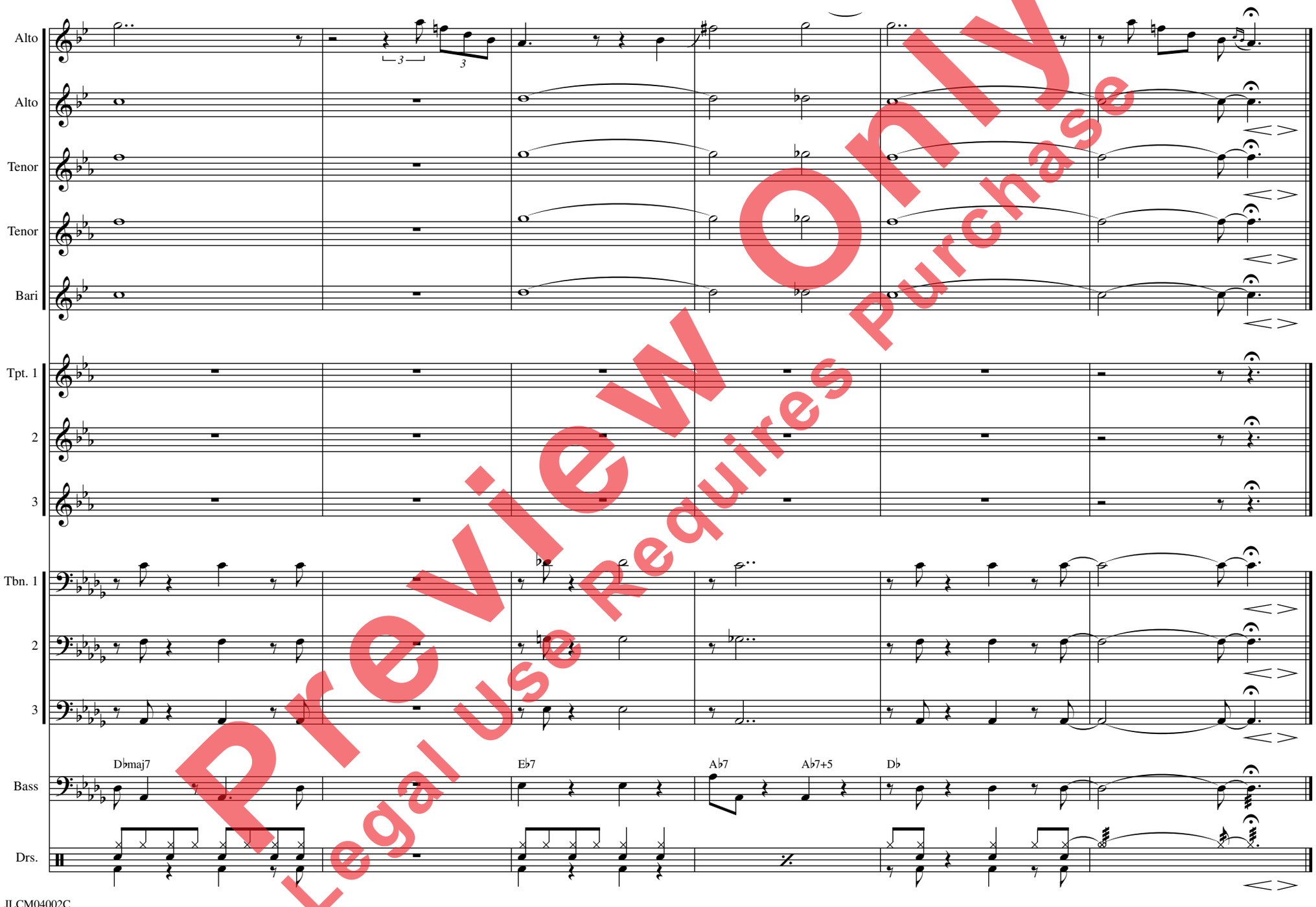

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