Edie Hill

SPECTRAL SPIRITS

a concert work for twenty-four voices

FOR PERUSAL ONLY



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Spectral Spirits

Prelude: These Birds

Take note. These birds are still singing to us. We must listen.
-Holly J. Hughes

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Passenger Pigeon

Eyewitness: Henry David Thoreau and the Passenger Pigeon

"Blue...dry slate...blue, like weather stained wood...a more subdued and earthy blue than sky...a fit color for this airiel traveller as its path is between sky and earth."

-Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) American author and naturalist
-adapted from *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Christopher Cokinos

The Naming

Echtopistes migratorius. Wandering wanderer.

Passenger Pigeon

from the painting by James J. Audubon, 1824. On Sept. 1, 1914, Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo.

See how she bends to him, her beak held within his
while she waits for his food to rise up to her hunger.

He rests on the arcing branch, his neck a perfect answer to hers,
wings held aloft and slightly splayed while long tail feathers stream

away, Prussian blue going to dusk, breast russet, branch below
studded with viridian lichen to match his coat, colors chosen

by Audubon as he painted them in courtship *in situ*.
See how her colors foreshadow the fall—dun, mustard, black—

how her tail balances his wings painted in parallel planes,
how the drooping oak leaf holds them in place, stasis

in which they are aware of no one but each other.
Audubon captured then in gouache, graphite, and pastels,

not knowing they would soon be gone; in his time
they were more numerous than all other species combined.

They say the pigeons flew over the banks of the Ohio River
for three days in succession, sounding *like* a *hard gale at sea.*

Years later, guns spattered shot into skies stormy with pigeons.
Thousands plummeted, filling railroad cars bound for fine restaurants.

Now, of those hundreds of millions that once darkened
the skies, we are left with Martha, who never lived in the wild,

stuffed in the Smithsonian, Prussian-blue feathers stiff,
glass eyes staring, waiting, still, for her mate.

-Holly J. Hughes

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Carolina Parakeet

Eyewitness: Gert Goebel and the Paroquets

"In winter...flocks of paroquets were a real ornament to the trees stripped of their foliage...a flock of several hundred...settled on a big sycamore...the bright green color of the birds…the many yellow heads looked like many candles.
[In Germany] a young birch...was set in a pail of water. In the warm room it produced delicate leaves...and on Christmas Eve, was decorated with gilded and silvered nuts, apples and candies, not unlike these bird-covered tree tops, these enormous Christmas trees of the forest."

-Gert Goebel (1816-1896) German settler in eastern Missouri, from a translation of his 1877 autobiography
-adapted from *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Christopher Cokinos

The Naming

Puzzi la neé. Head of yellow. Conuropsis carolinensis.

Carolina Parakeet

Incas, the last Carolina parakeet, died in his cage at the Cincinnati Zoo on Feb. 21 1918, only six months after the death of Lady Jane, his companion of thirty-two years.

From Mexico to New York they flew, tail feathers streaming,
startling in the monochrome of winter's eastern shore.

When their forests were cut, they swooped to the farmlands
in waves of color—yellow, green, orange—lit in fruit trees,

found the soft squish of peaches, cherries, figs. Descending
three hundred at a time, in crayon-box flocks, they were shot

by farmers defending their crops—who could fault them?
Shot for their tail feathers, all the rage on ladies' hats,

shot because they would not desert each other, each staying
by its wounded mate until hunters picked them off,

one by each last, bright, exotic, faithful one.

-Holly J. Hughes

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Northern Curlew

Eyewitness: Lucien M. Turner and the migration of the Curlews

"A most graceful undulation...like a cloud of smoke wafted by the lightest zephyr.
The whirl and rise...(Their) aerial evolutions...(are) most wonderful..."
-Lucien M. Turner (1848-1909) - American ethnologist and naturalist
-adapted from "Where Have All the Curlews Gone?" by Paul A. Johnsgard

The Naming

Numenius borealis. Swiftwing. Sweetgrass. Little Sicklebill.

Northern Curlew

I grew up reading The Last of the Curlews before bed,
your crescent-moon beak beckoning me north.

Even then you were almost gone, though millions of you
once filled the skies, migrating from the northern tundra

to South America, feeding on grasshoppers along the way.
Within twenty years, your vast flocks were brought down

by market hunters, fire suppression, tilling of the prairies,
eradication of grasshoppers. Before hunting was banned,

two million curlews were killed each year.
Here's the part that still makes me weep:

You were wiped out because you stayed
by your fallen companion; from you

I learned what loyalty means. Today, birders
search for you along Galveston's shore,

sometimes catch a glimpse, memory being so strong.
No one knows for sure you're gone. You live on

in the pages of a book, a waning crescent moon.
-Holly J. Hughes

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IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

Eyewitness: Mr. Wilson and the Ivory-bill

"The first place I observed this bird at...was twelve miles north of Wilmington...North Carolina. There I found the bird from which my drawing was taken. ...
…
While taking the drawing, he cut me severely in several places...on the whole, displayed such a noble and unconquerable spirit, that I was...tempted to restore him to his native woods. He lived with me nearly thr ee days...refused all sustenance, and I witnessed his death with regret."

-Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) Scottish-American poet and ornitologist, 1811
-adapted from *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Christopher Cokinos

The Naming

Campephilus principalis. Principal lover of grubs. Splendid recluse of the swamp.

Ivory-billed Woodpecker

I wish I'd been at the sighting that inspired its nickname,
the Lord God bird. I'd love to see this woodpecker,

perhaps extinct, perhaps not; no one knows for sure.
Standing twenty inches tall with white wing patches

and a flashy red crest, who wouldn't say *Lord God,*
look at that? Once it made its home in the hardwood

forests of the south; birders say its ivory bill could pierce
bark eight inches deep. Imagine the racket. Even so,

they were vulnerable: a single pair needed six square miles
of wet forest with dead trees in which to search for grubs.

In 1948, when a Louisiana forest was cleared for a soy plantation,
the last population vanished. The Cuban subspecies survived

a few more decades, but by 1970, logging had reduced its population
to eight pairs. In the 1990s, explorers in the mountains near Moa

found fresh signs of feeding, caught a glimpse of a bird that may
have been the ivory bill, but that sighting was never confirmed.

Since then, more reports have surfaced, suggesting
the Lord God bird may not be gone. A few still hide,

spectral spirits, reminding us of the shimmering line
linking memory and desire, reminding us that perhaps

it's not too late to save them, to save us all.

-Holly J. Hughes

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This work was commissioned for
The Crossing - Donald Nally, conductor -
with generous support provided by
John Hawthorn and Danielle Macbeth.

Spectral Spirits

Holly J. Hughes

Edie Hill

Additional text by:
Henry David Thoreau, Gert Goebel
Christopher Cokinos, Lucien M. Turner
Paul A. Johnsgard, Alexander Wilson

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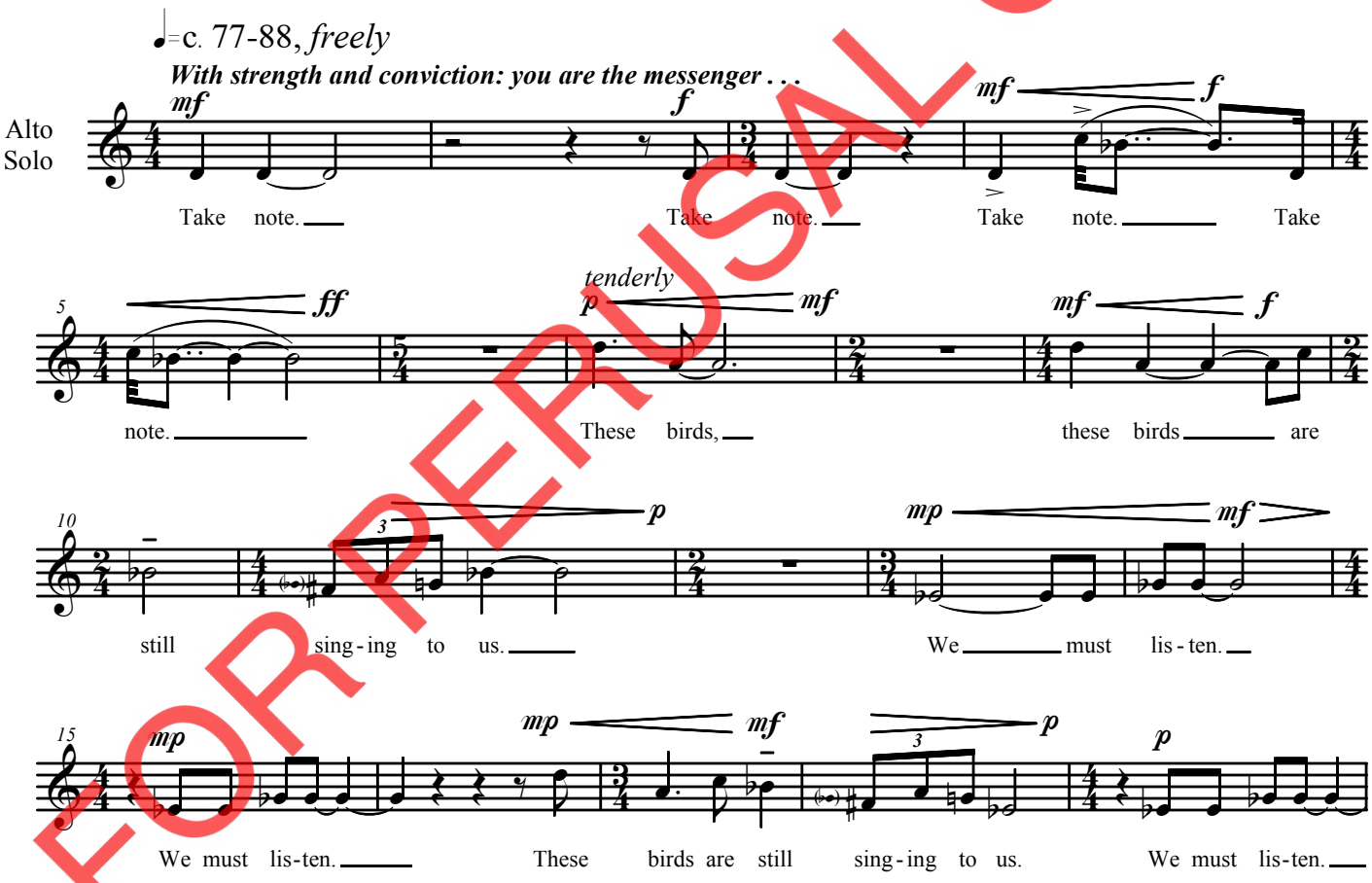
Prelude: These Birds



Poetry from *Passings* by Holly J. Hughes
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Christopher A. Cokinos,
Hope is the Thing with Feathers (2000, 2009). Used with permssion.

Paul A. Johnsgard, *Where Have All the Curlews Gone*
From *Natural History*, August 1980
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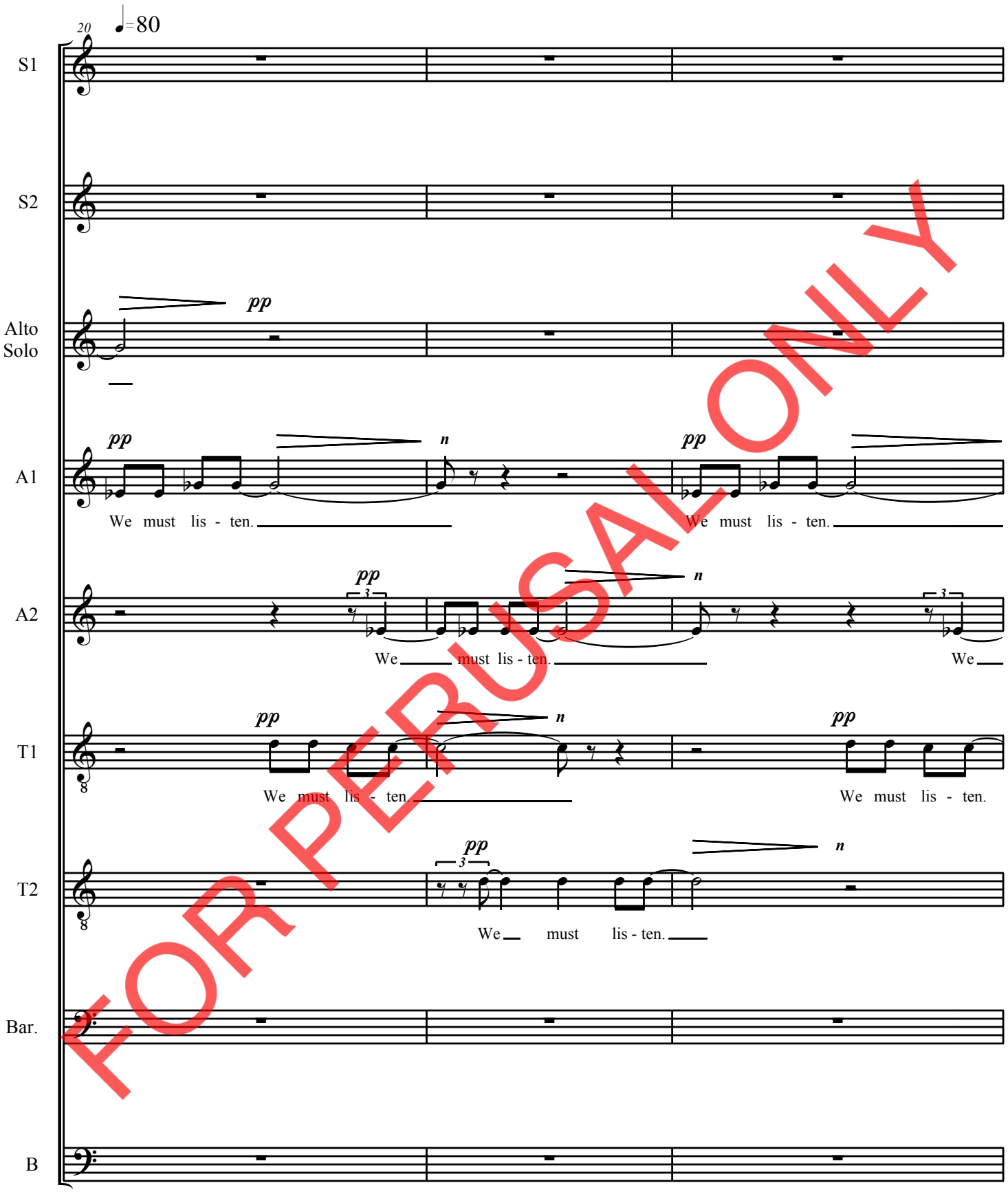

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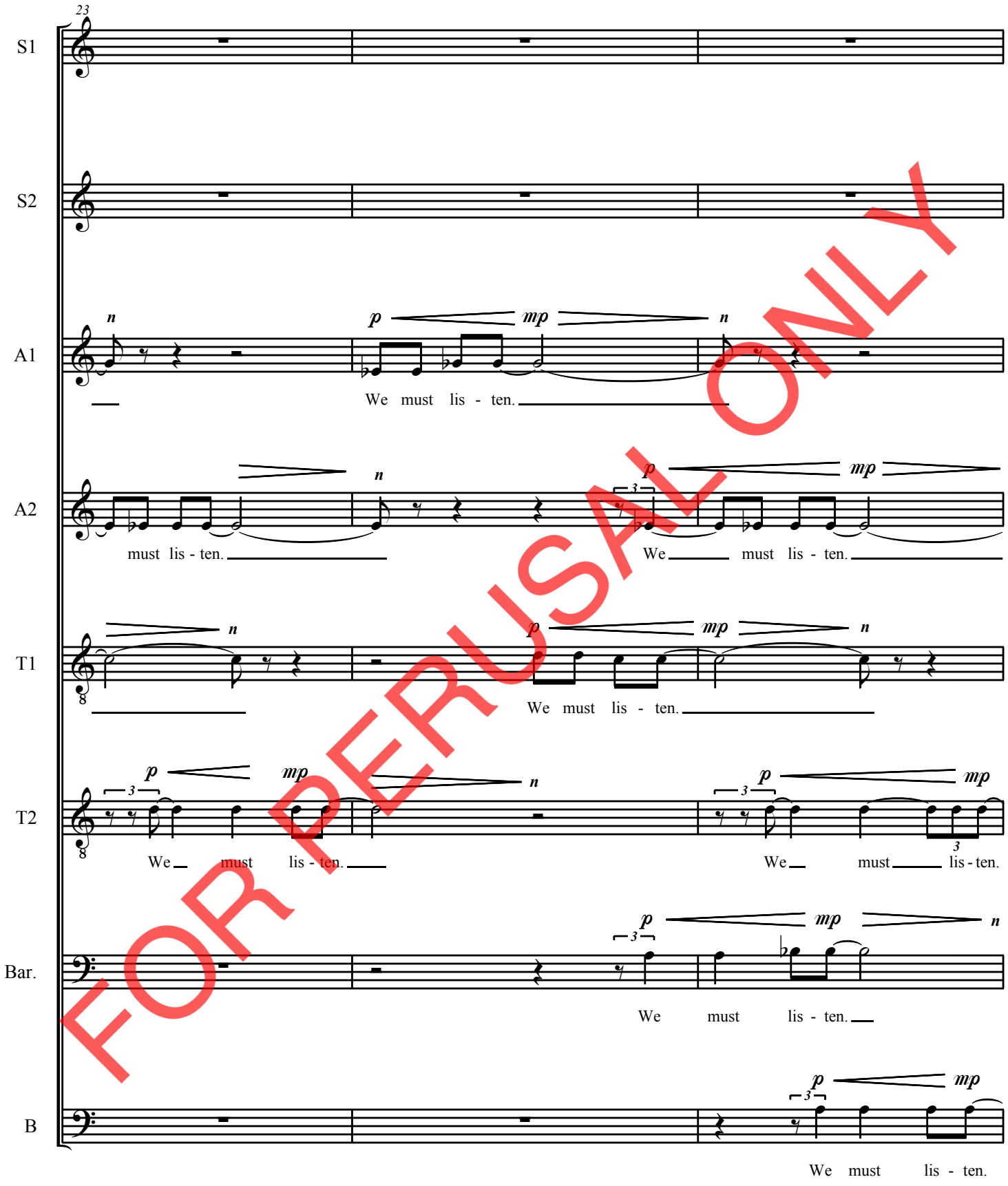

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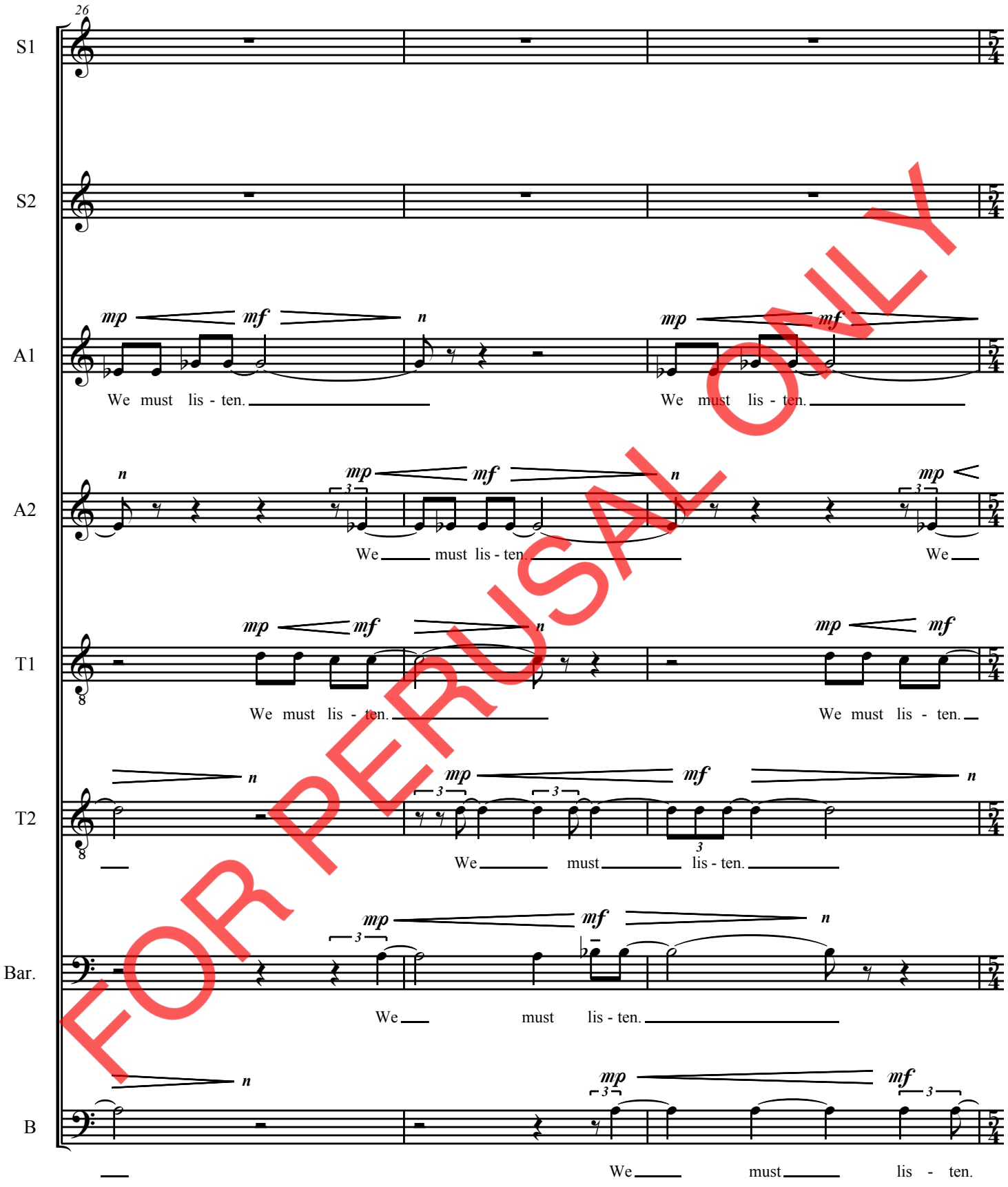

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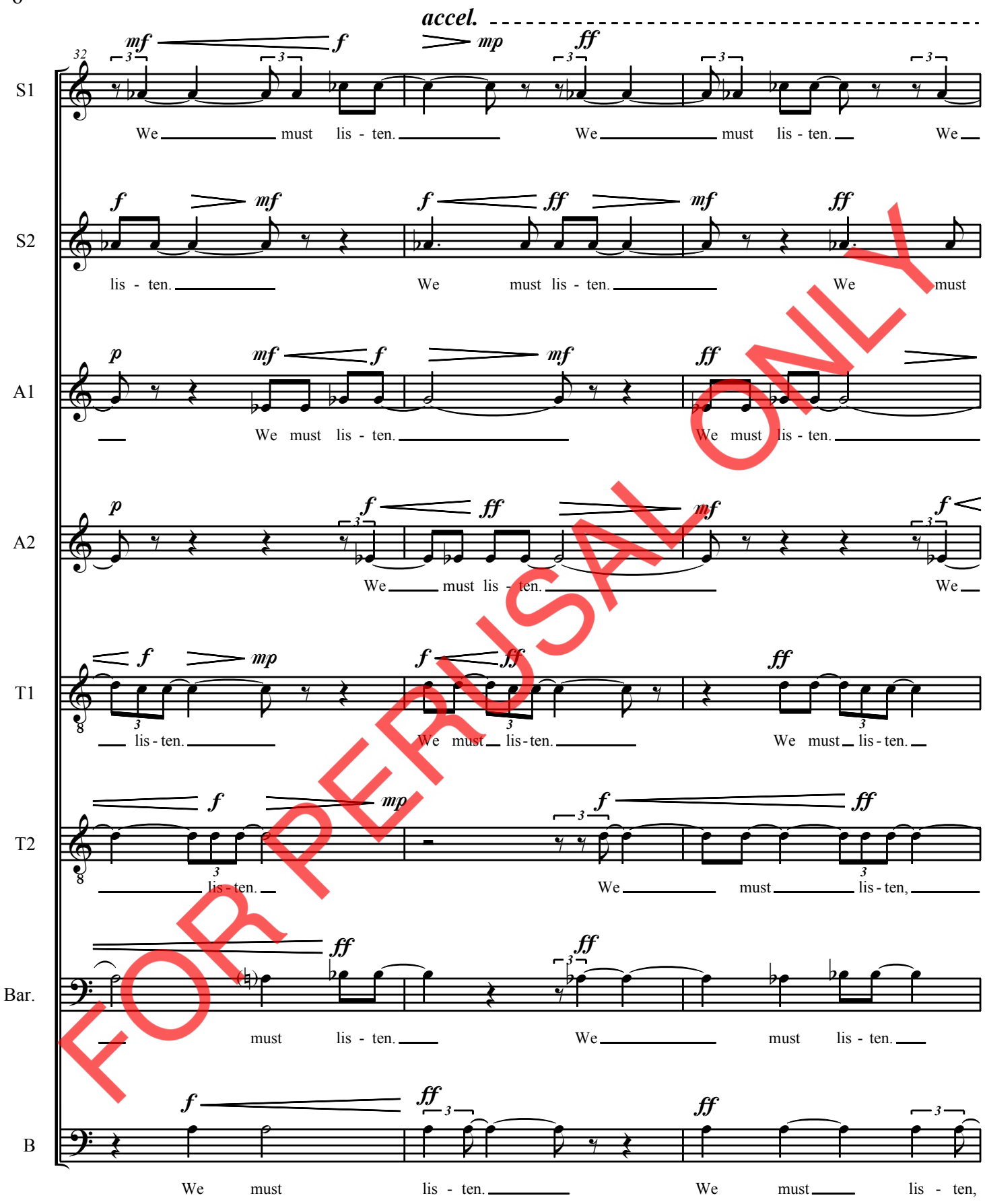

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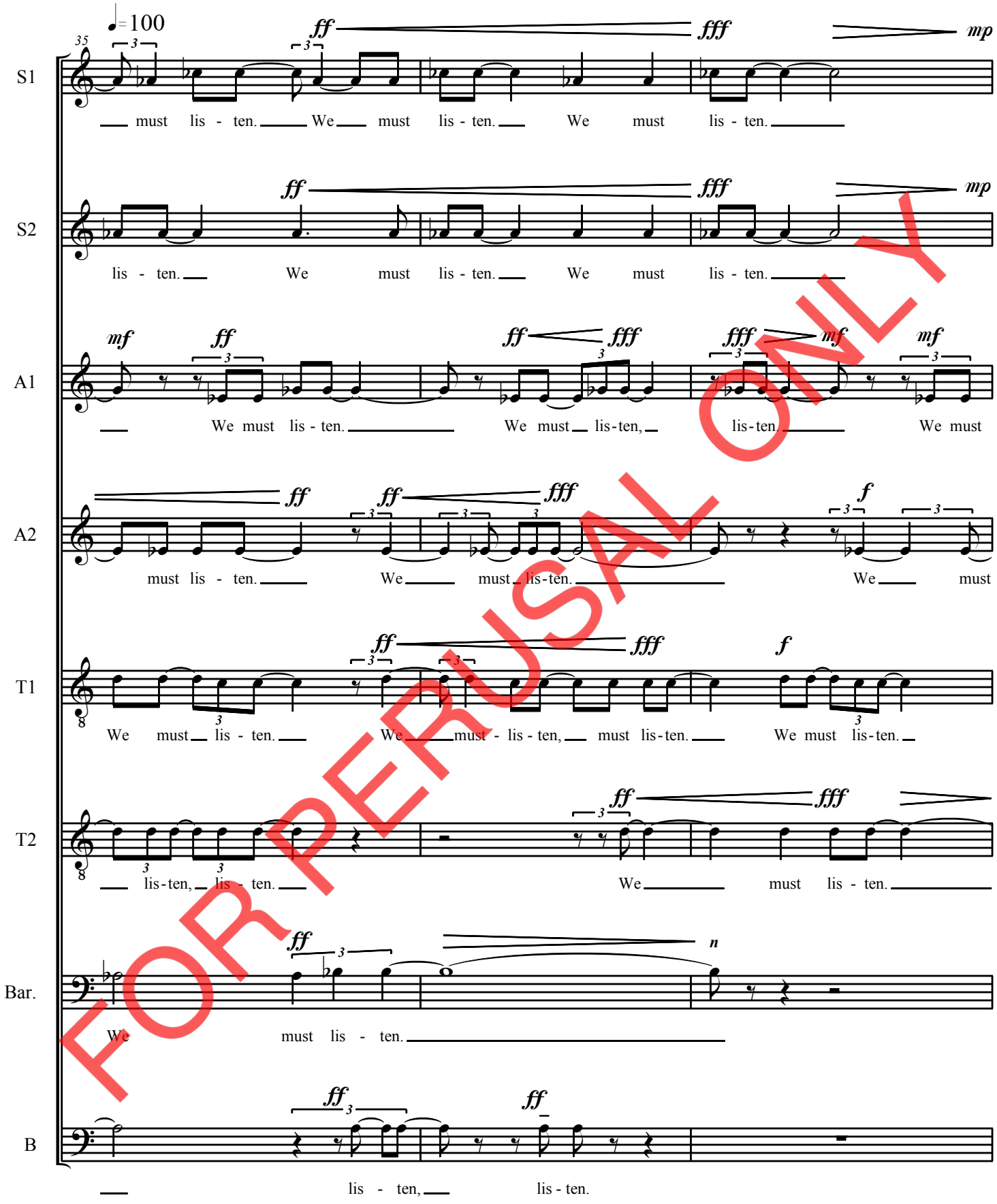

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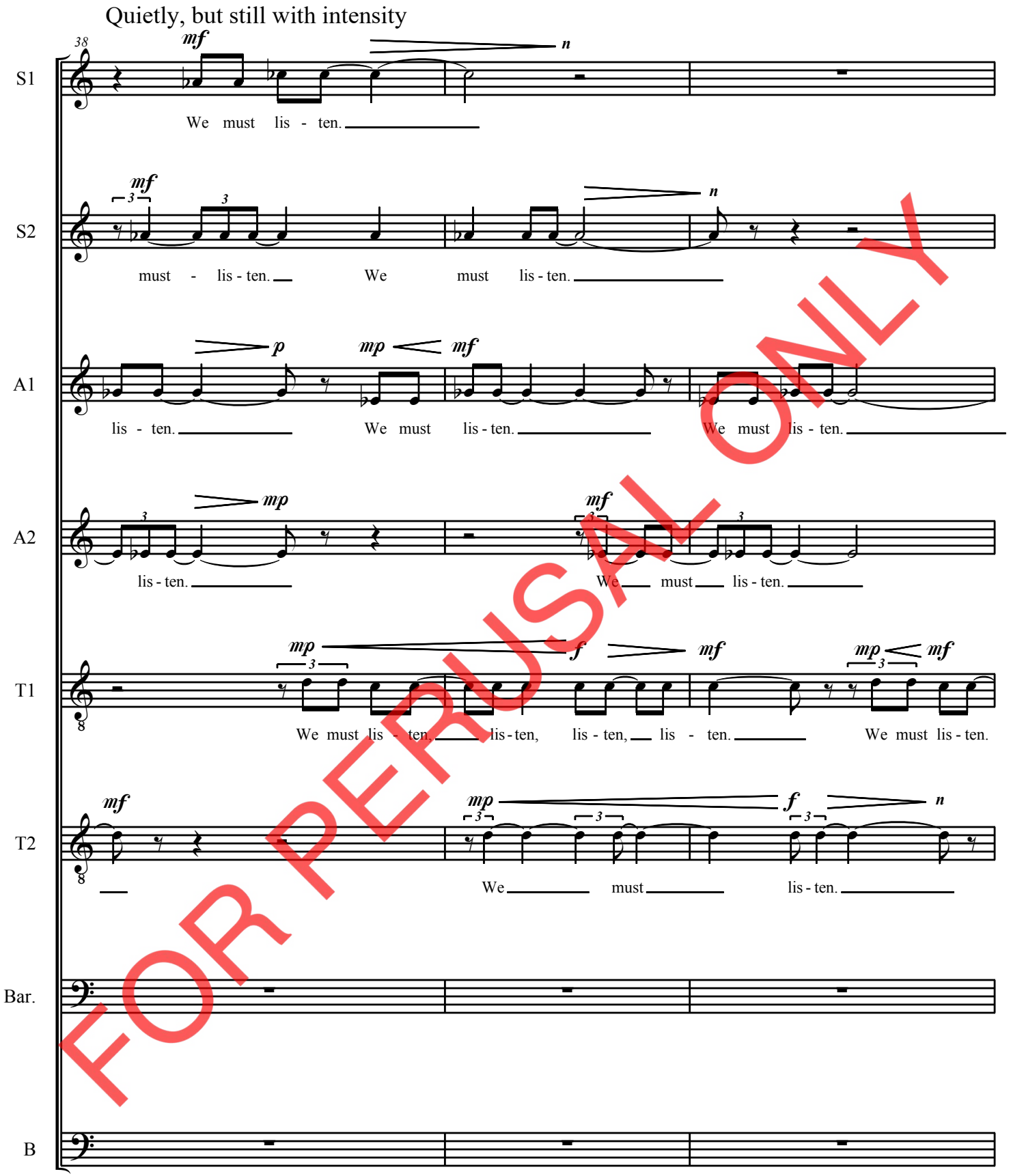

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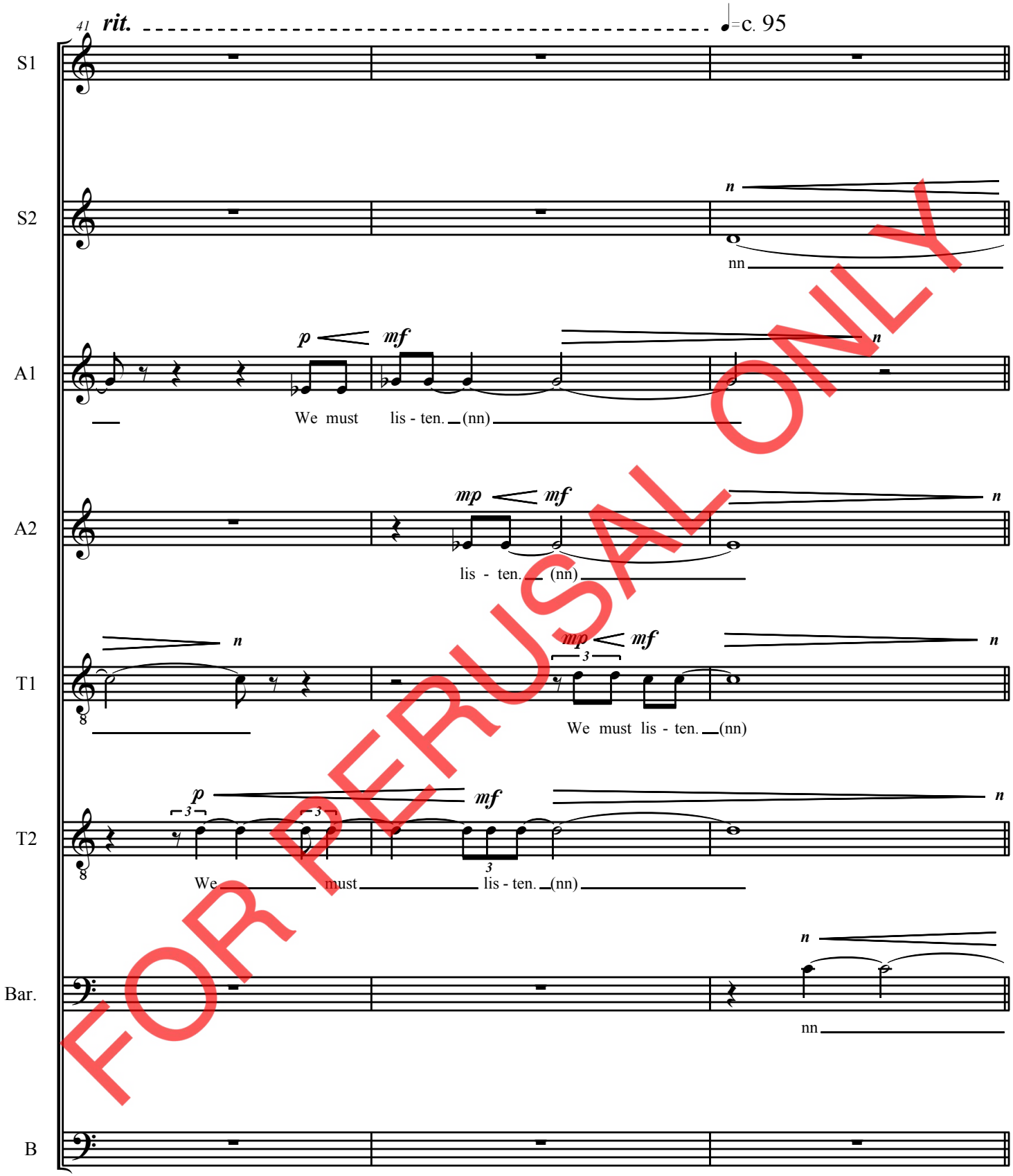

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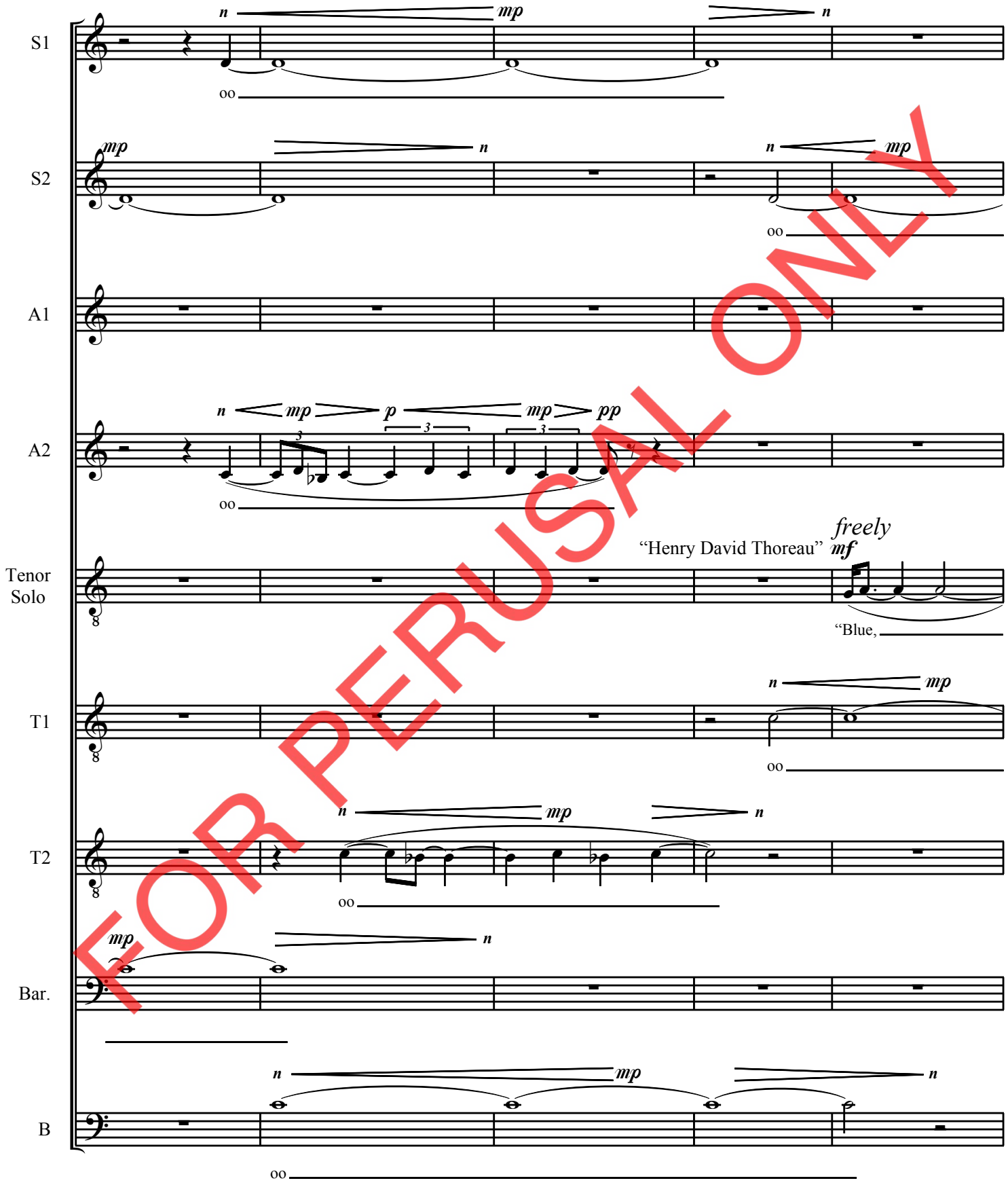
Eyewitness: Henry David Thoreau and the Passenger Pigeon



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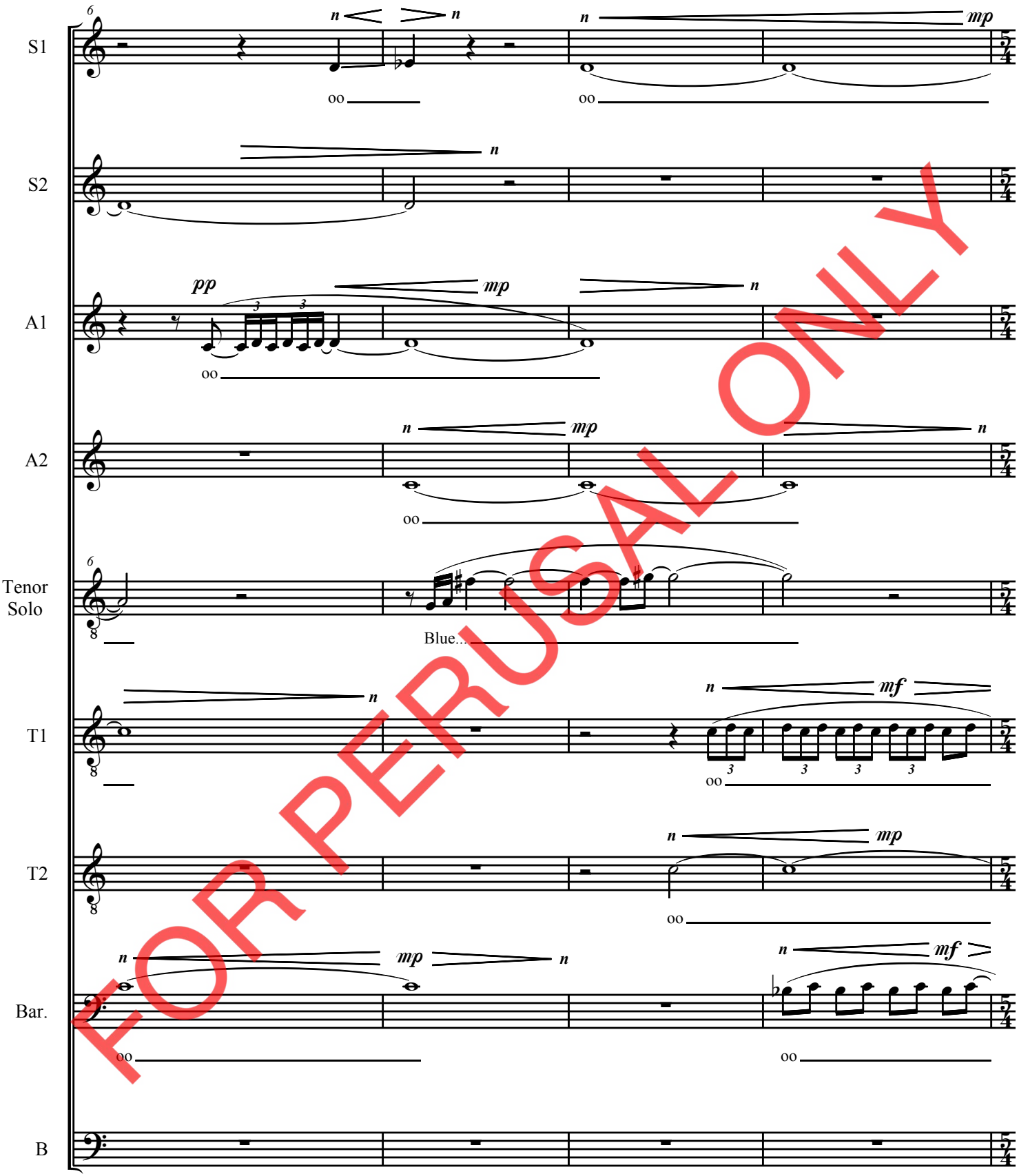

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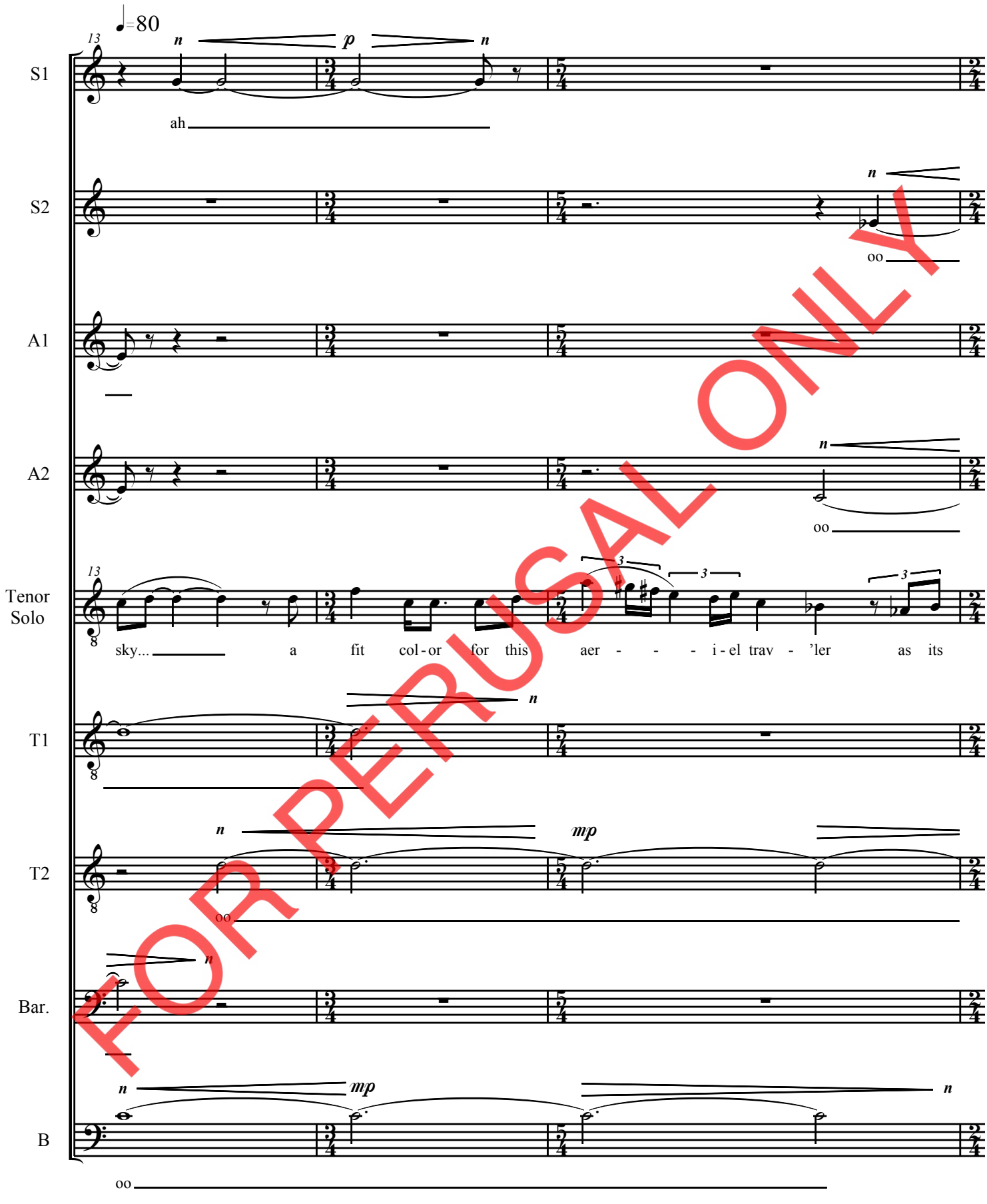

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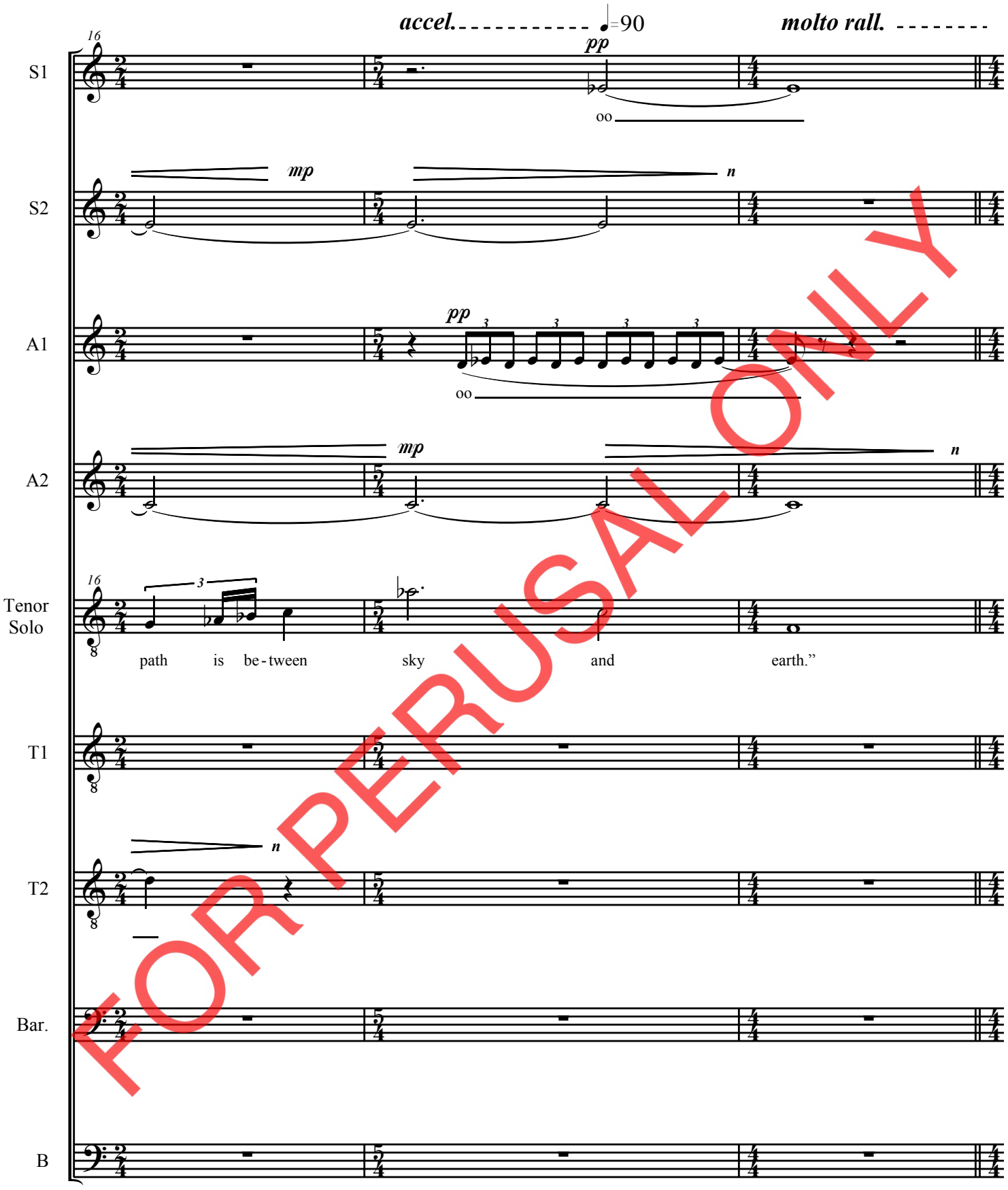

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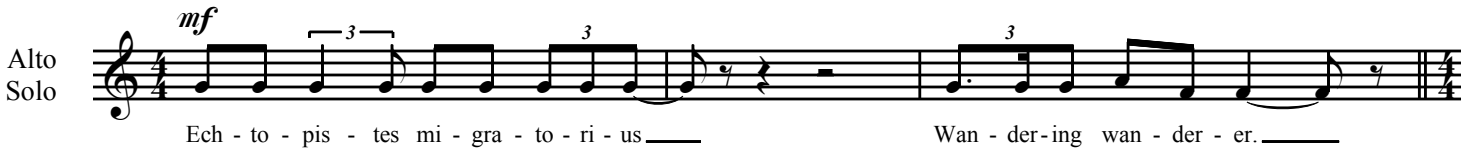
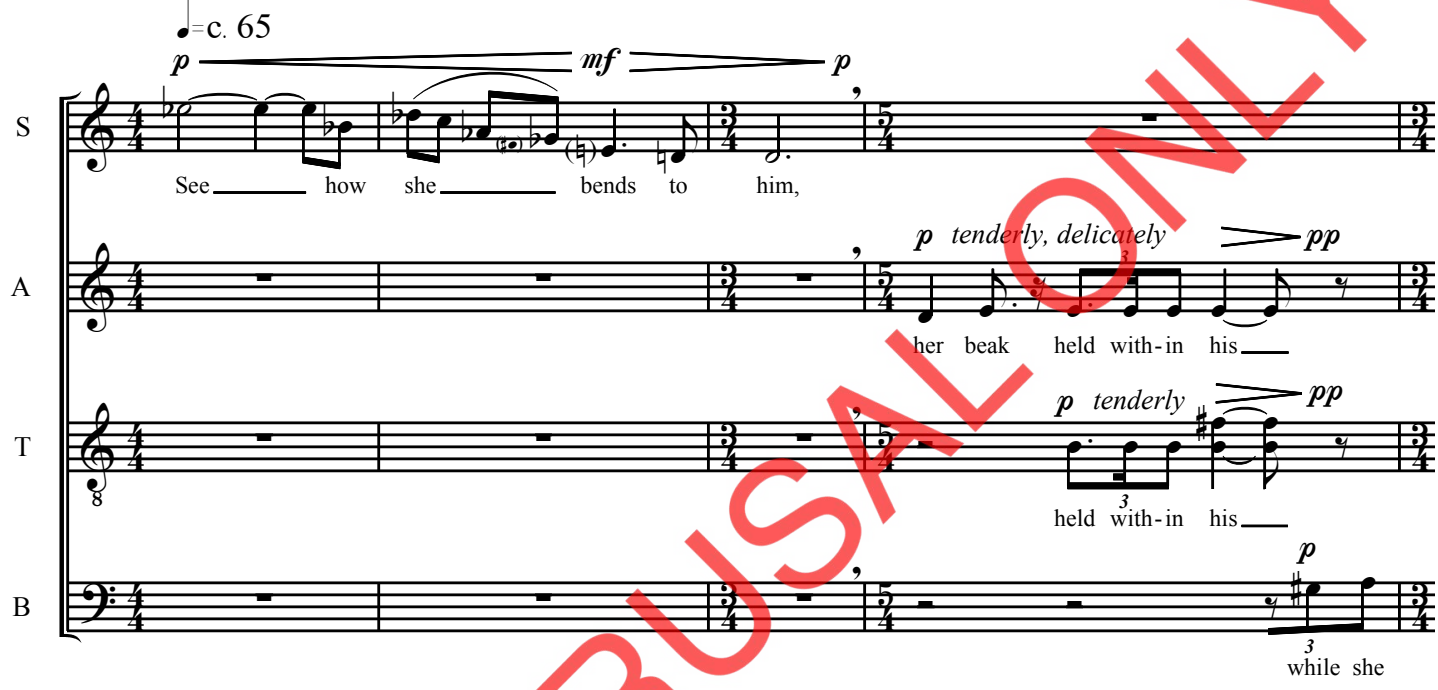
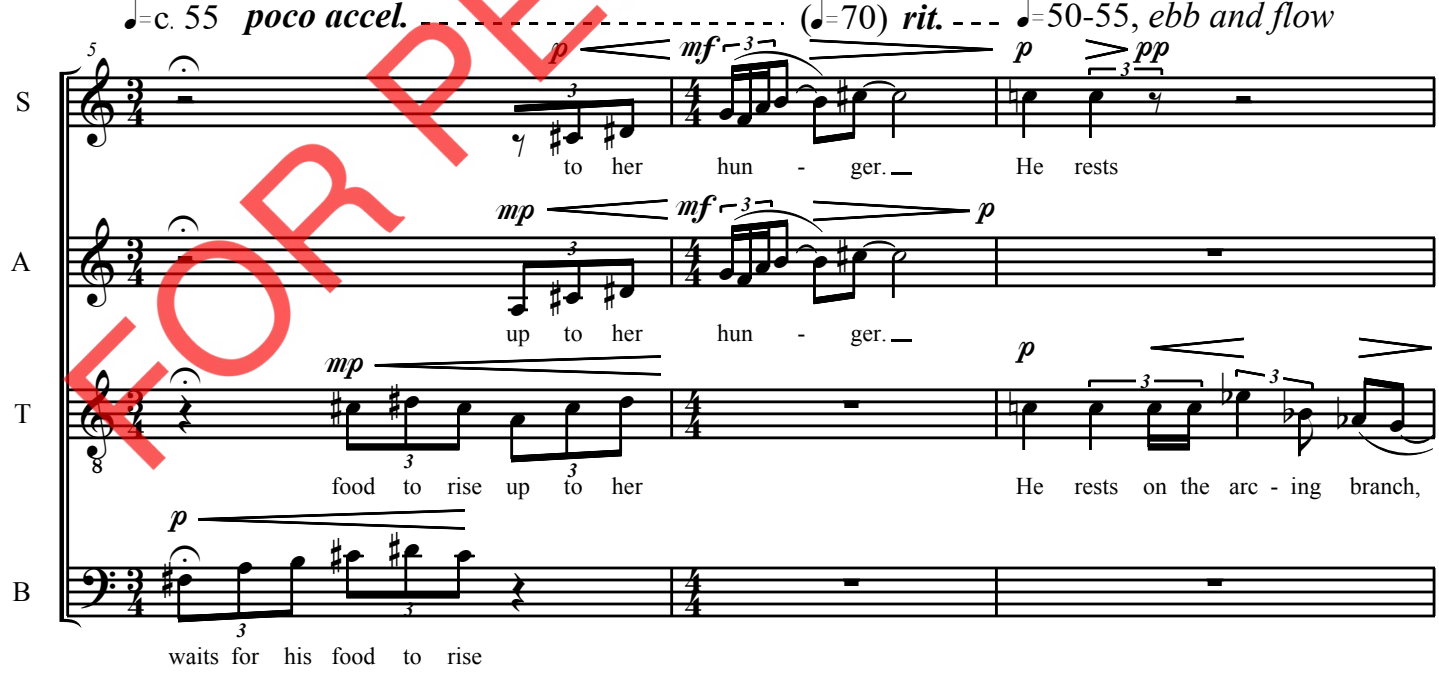


PASSENGER PIGEON

from the painting by James J. Audubon.
On Sept. 1, 1914, Martha, the last passenger pigeon, died in the Cincinnati Zoo.

HOLLY J. HUGHES EDIE HILL





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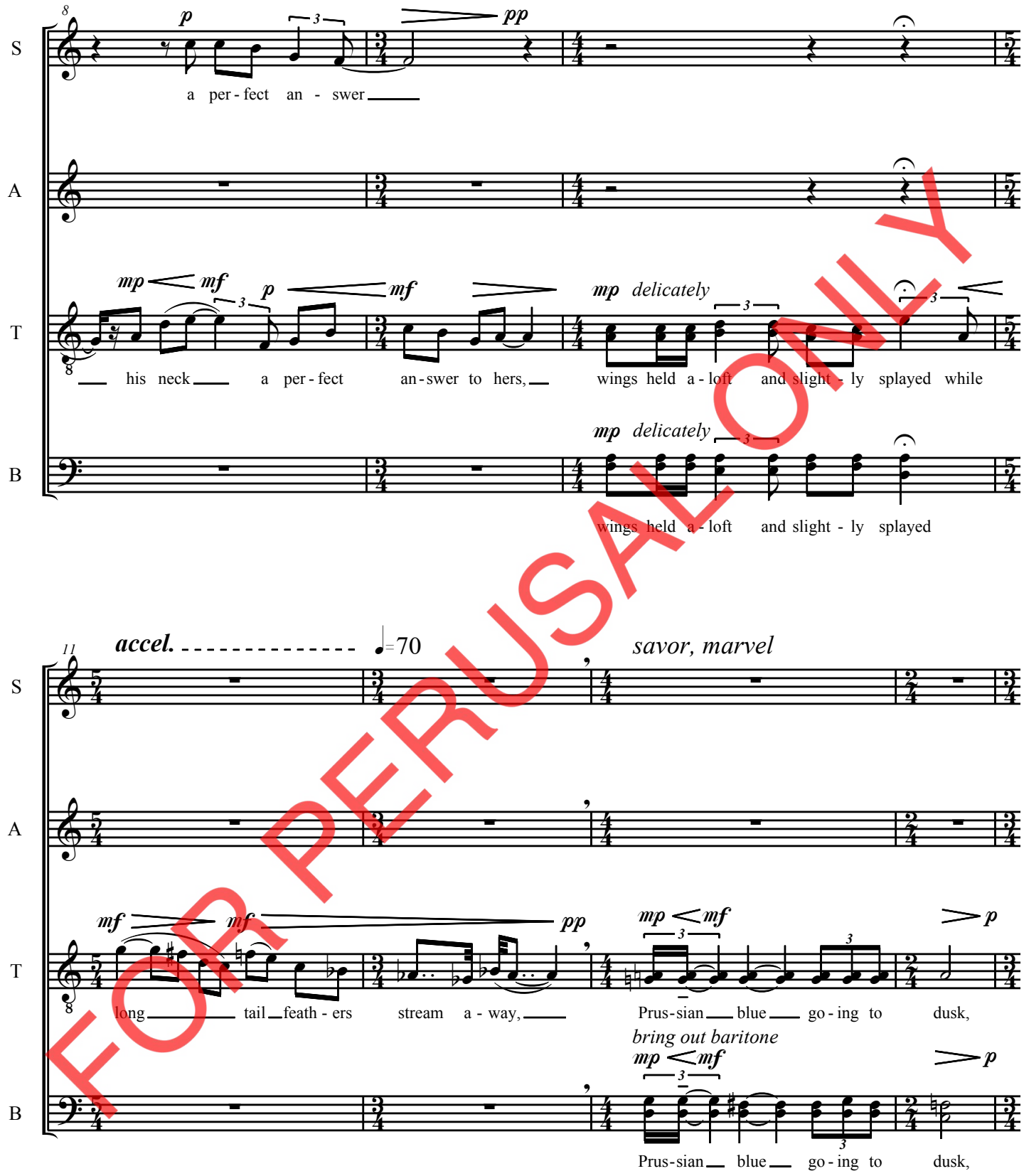

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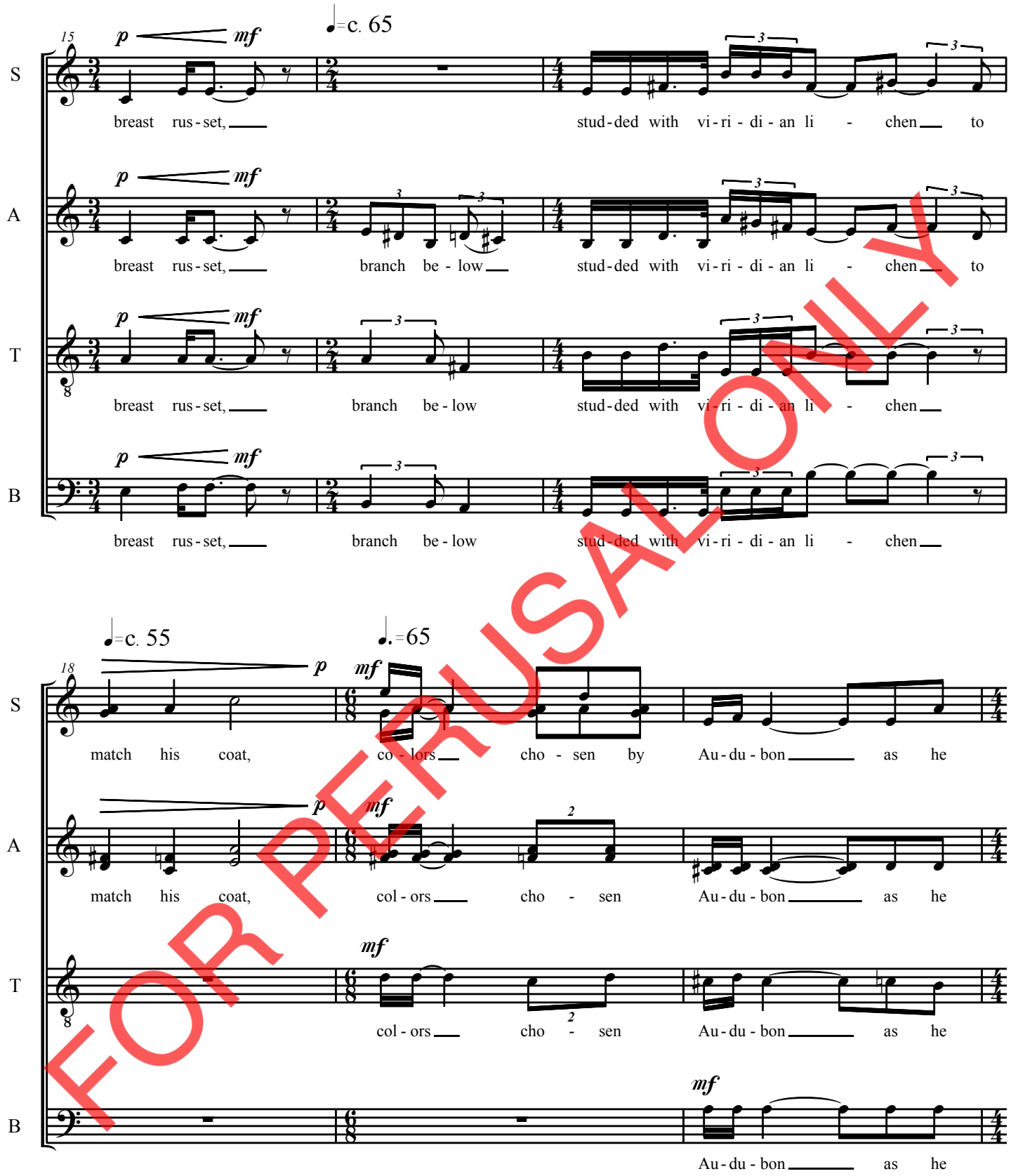

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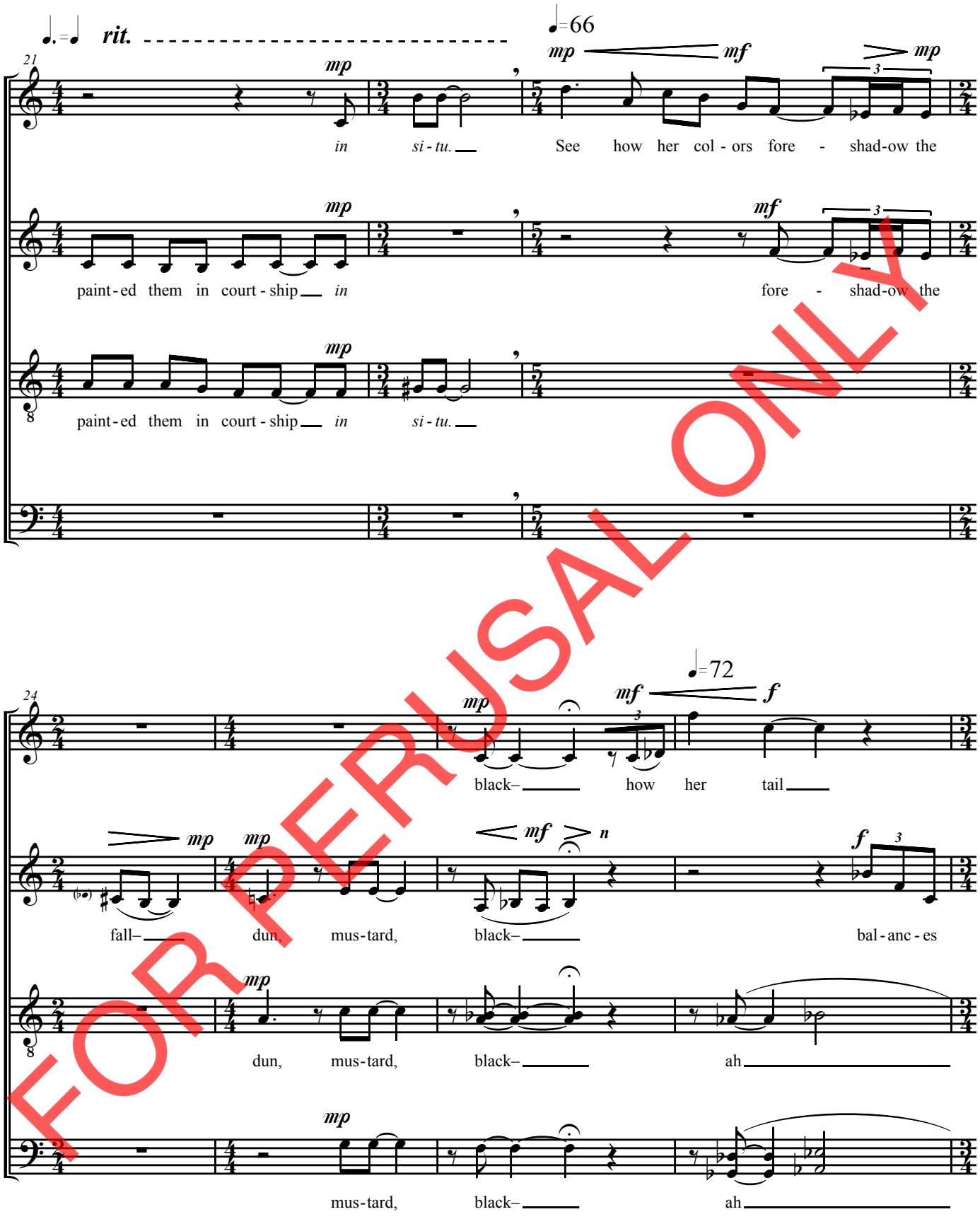

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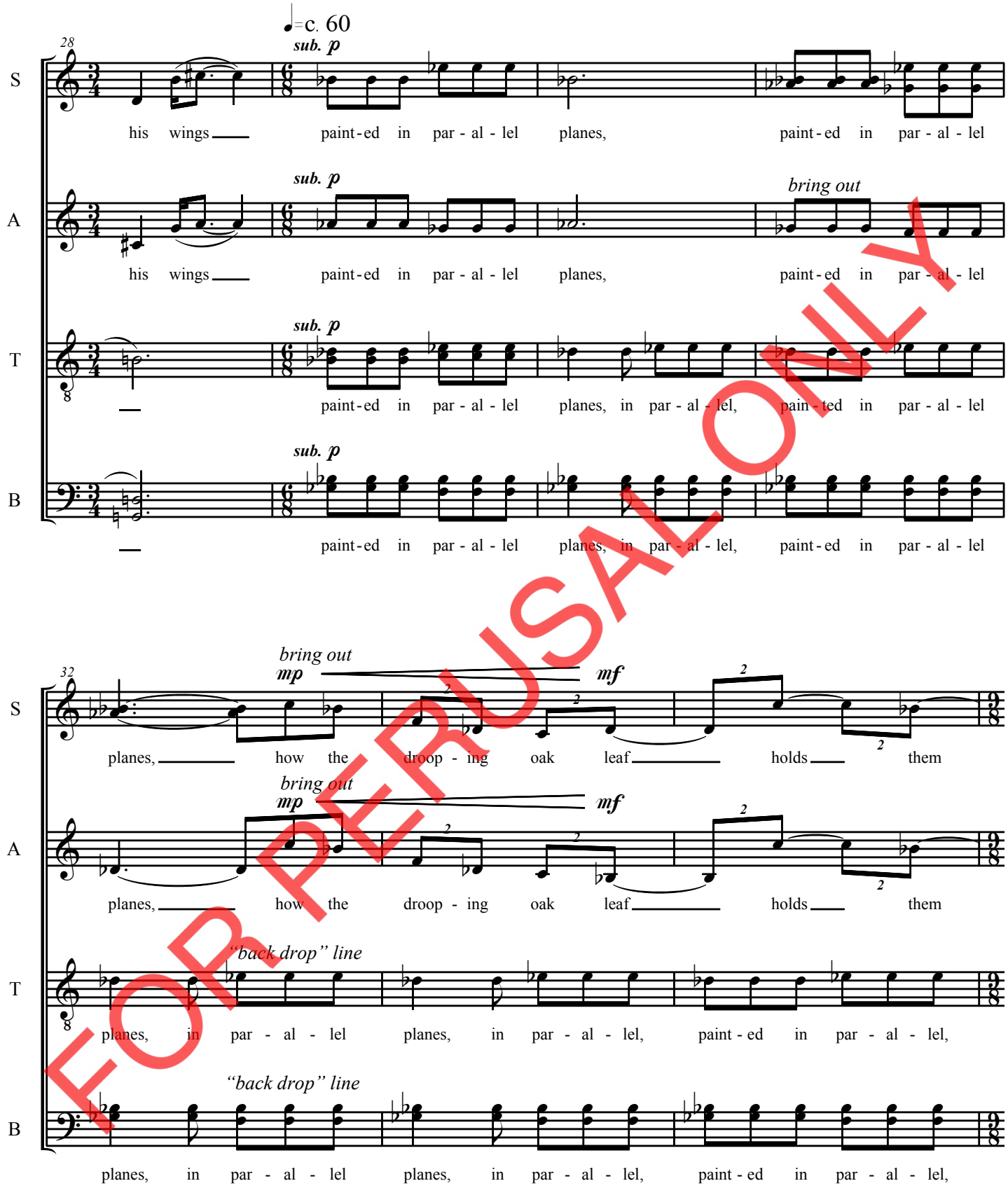

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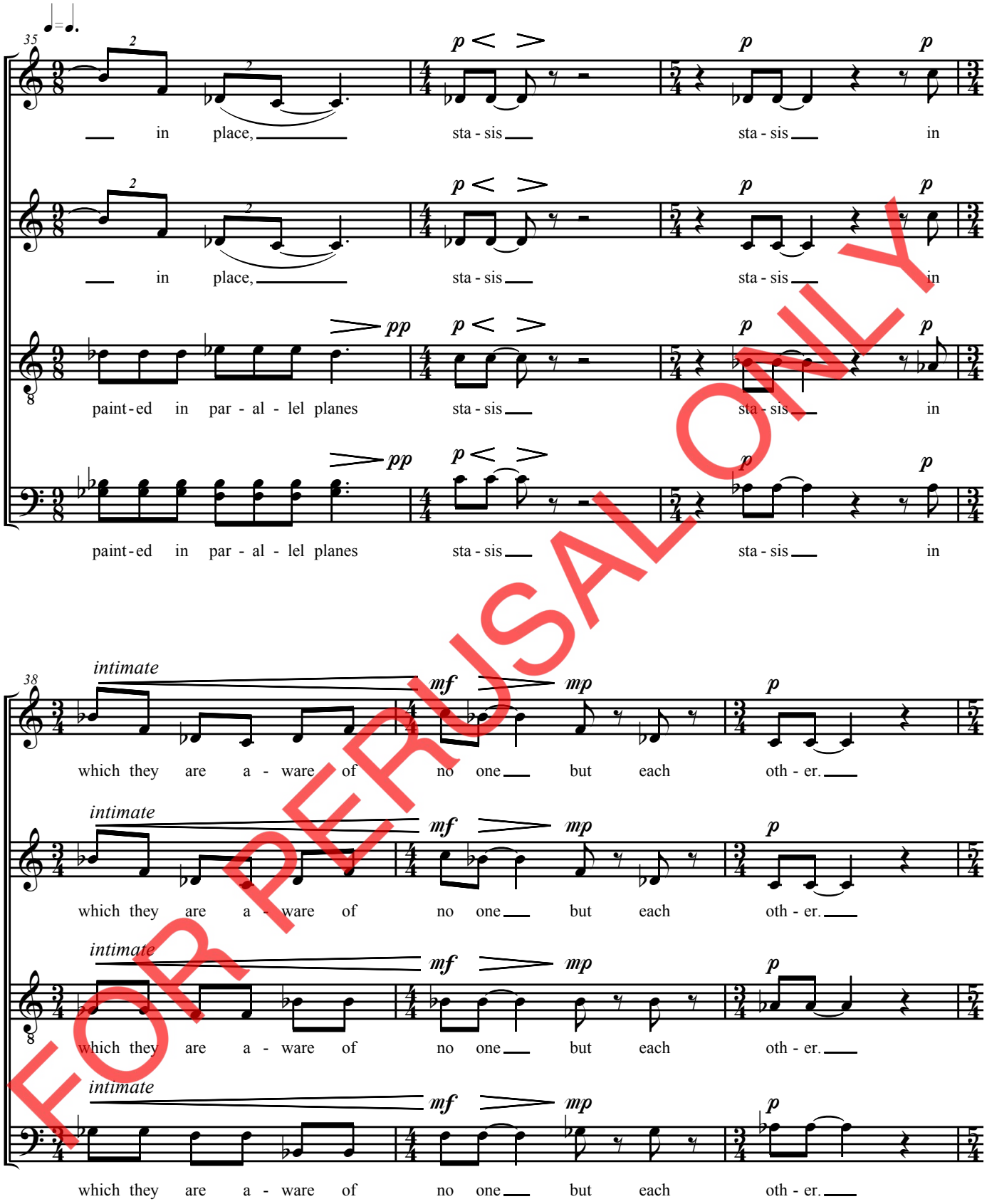

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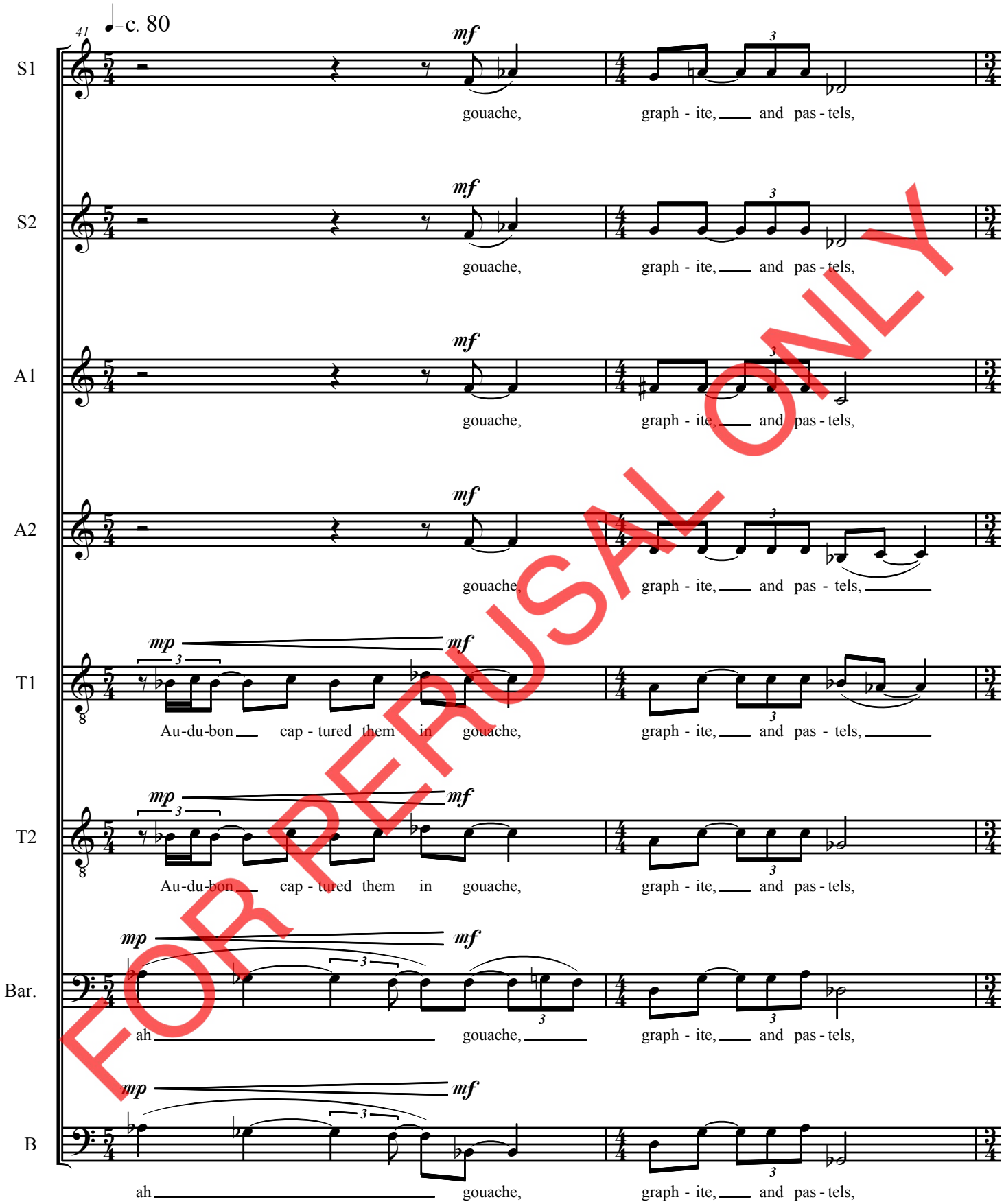

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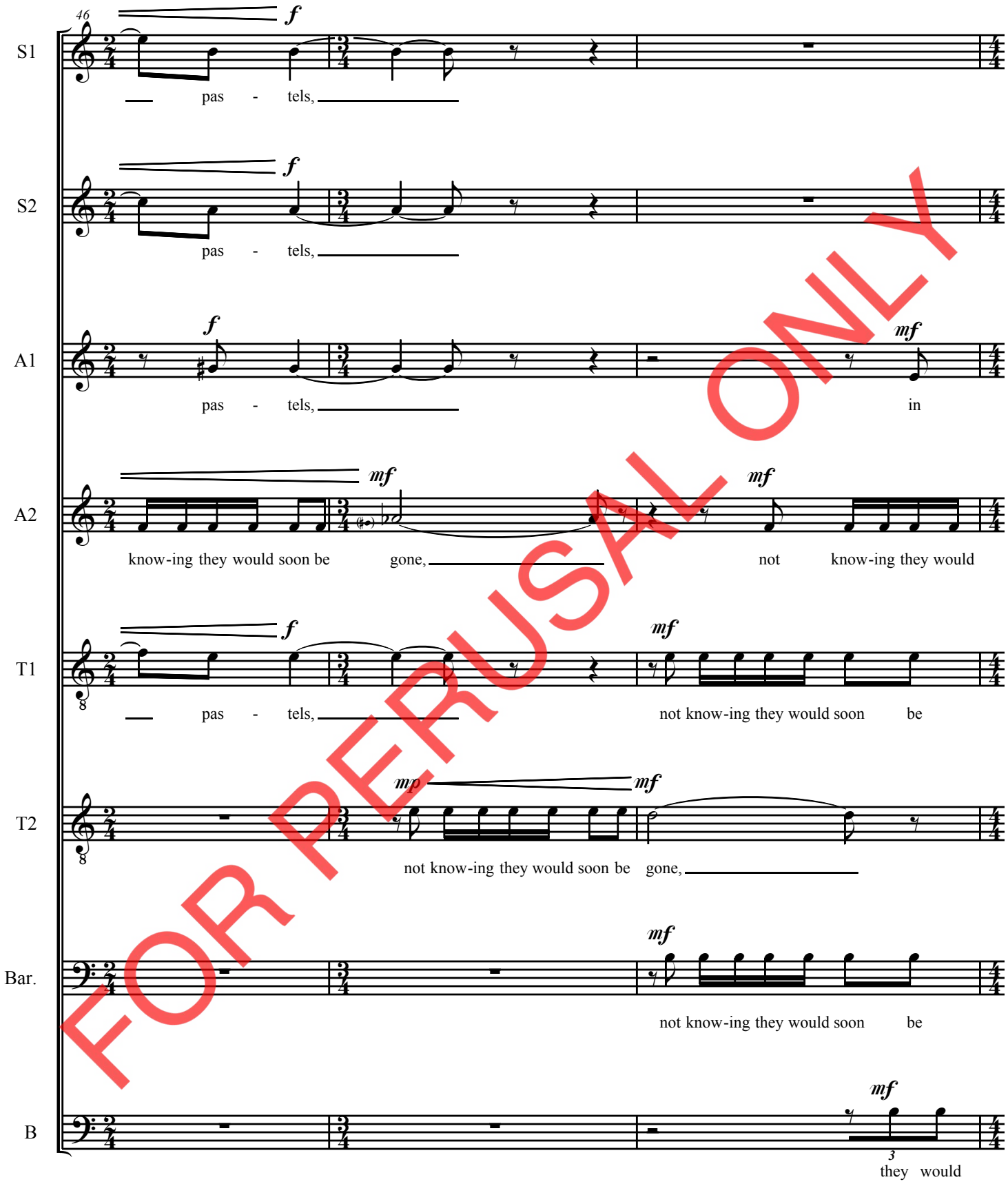

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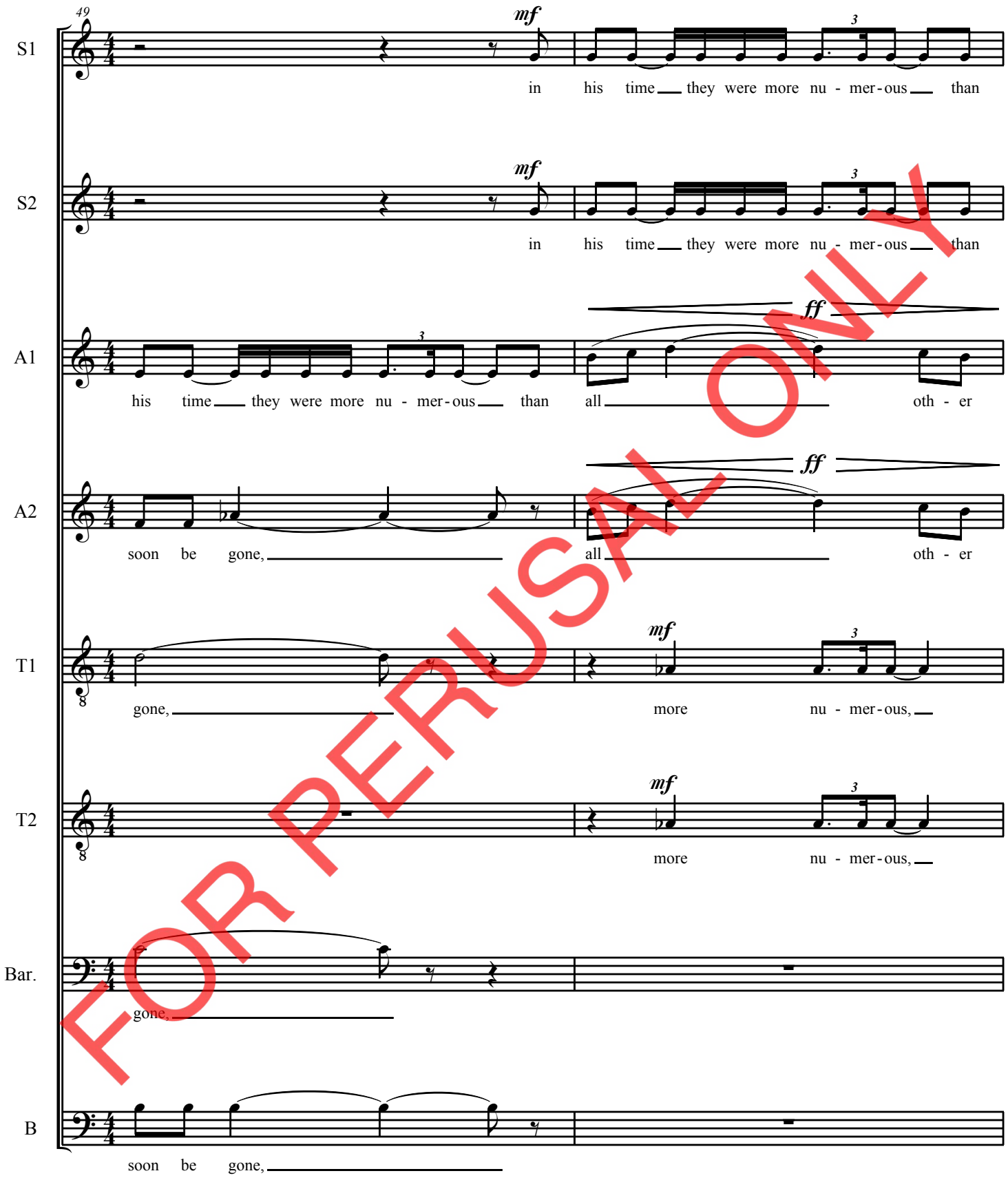

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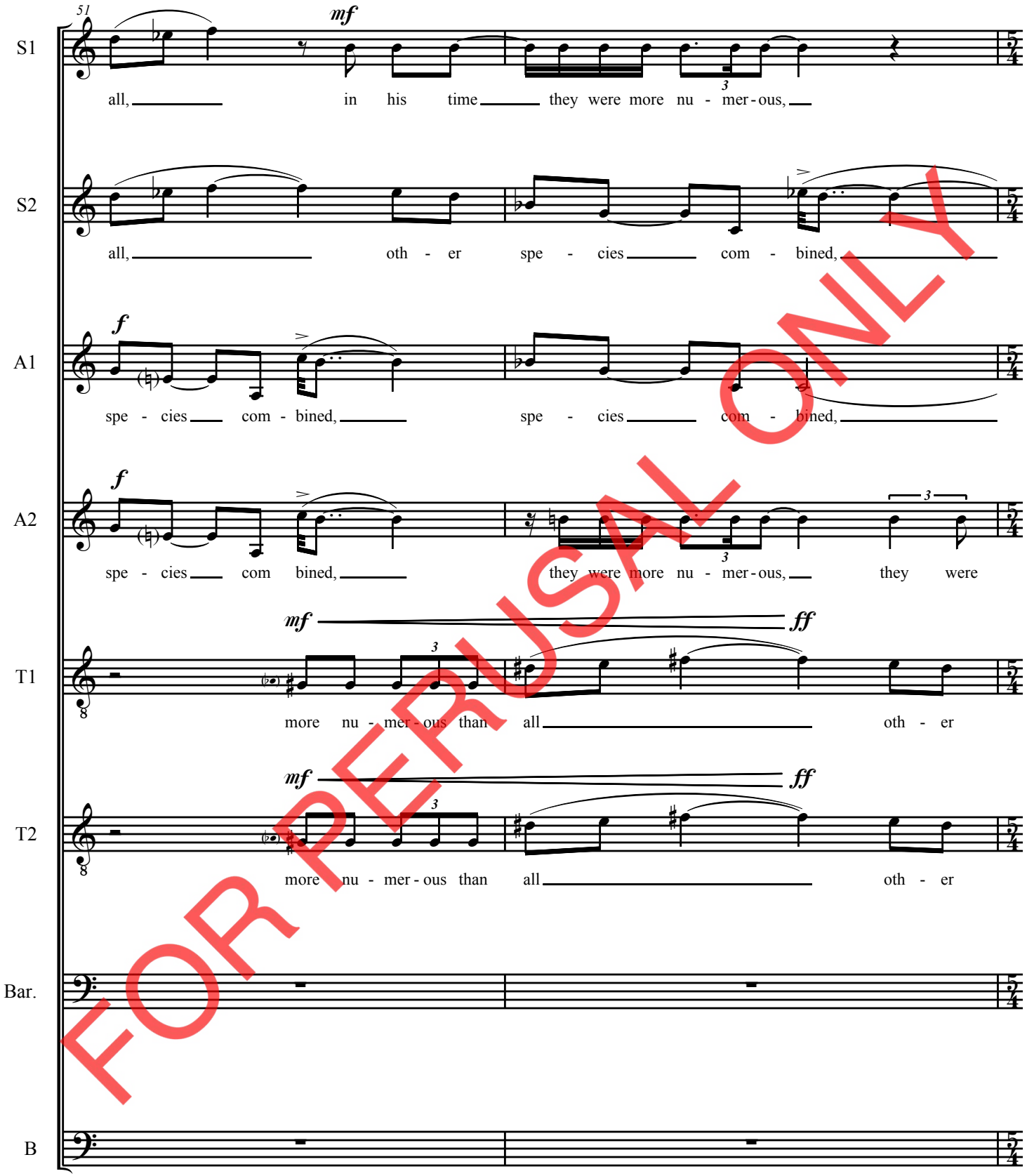

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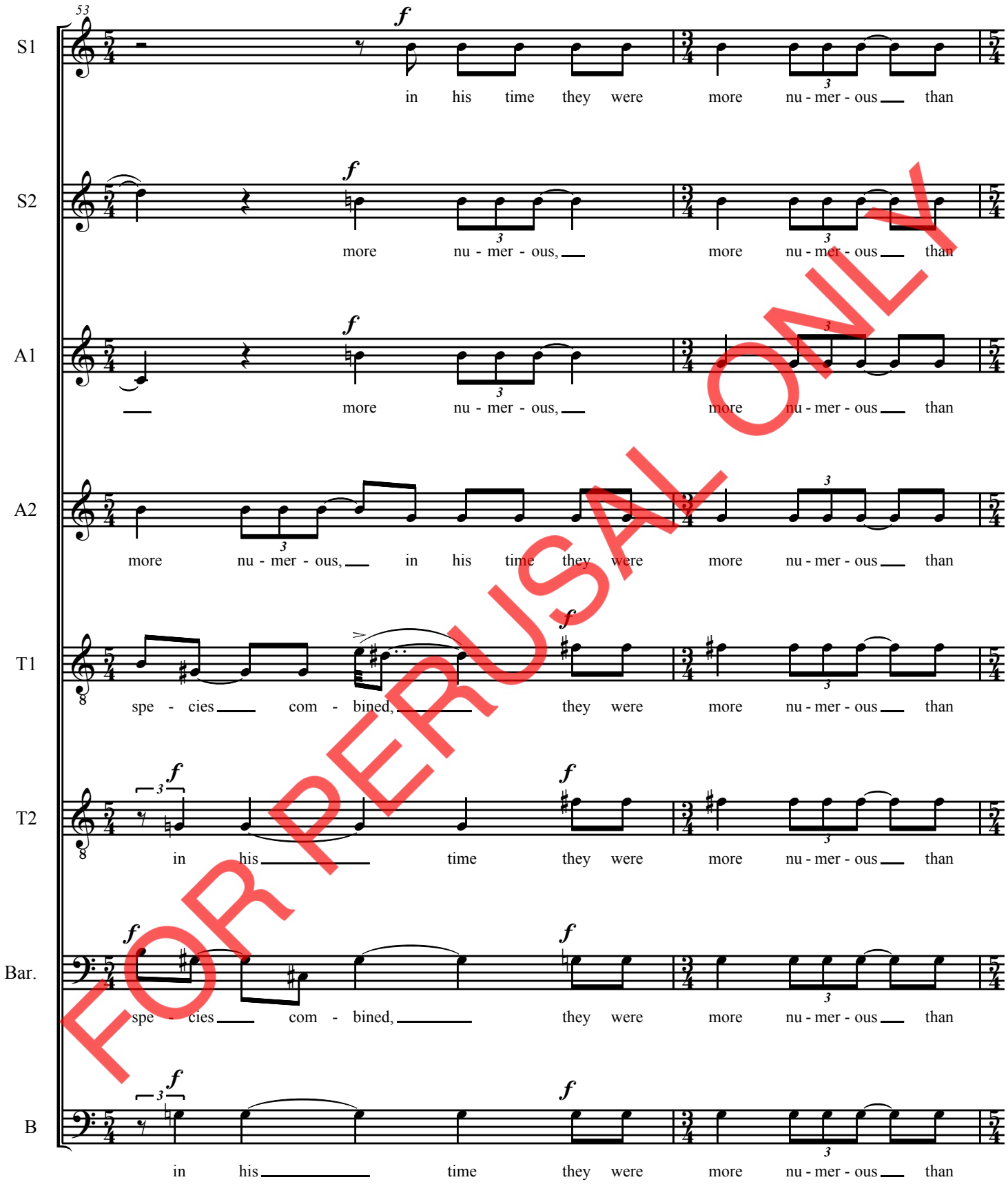

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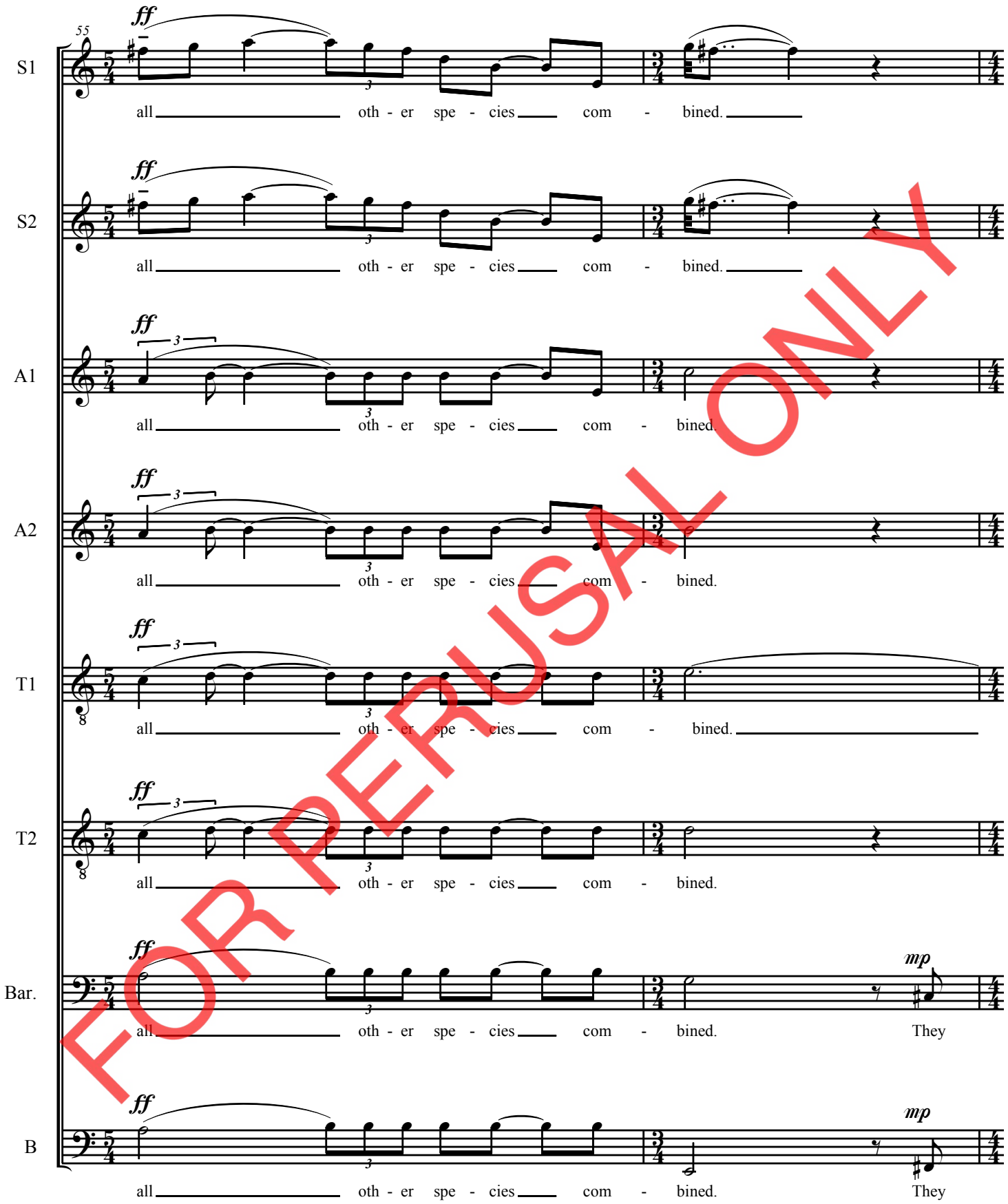

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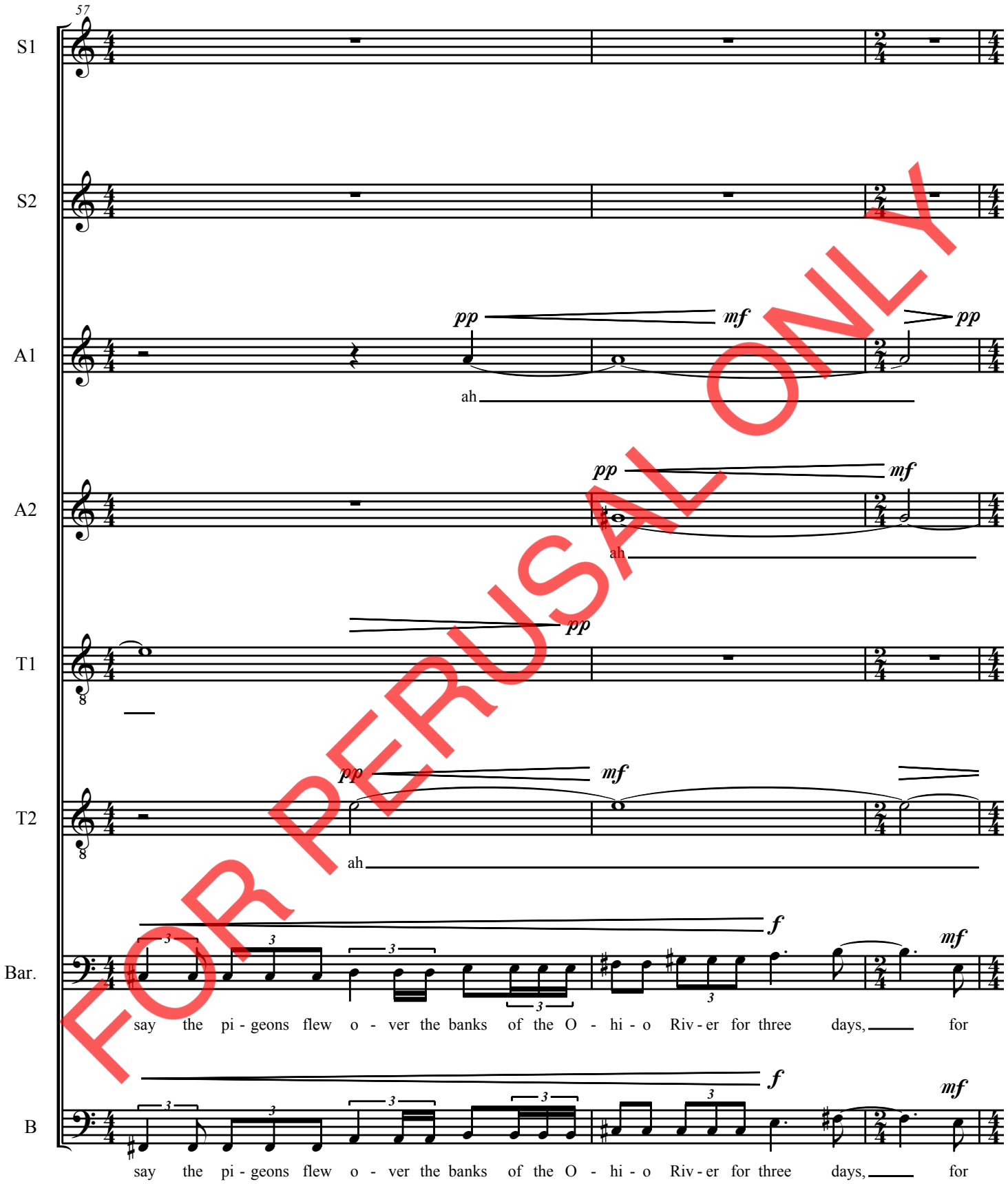

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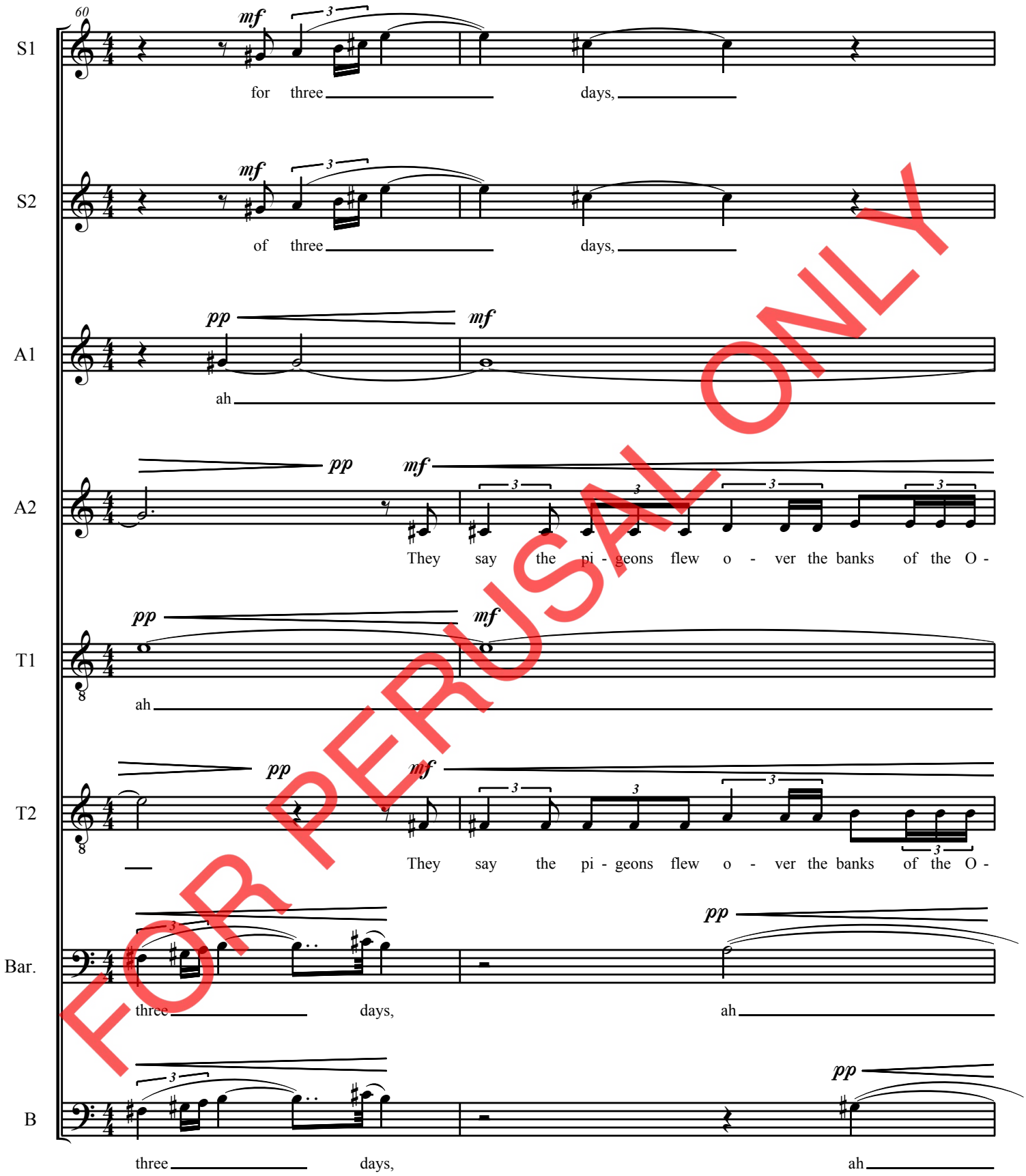

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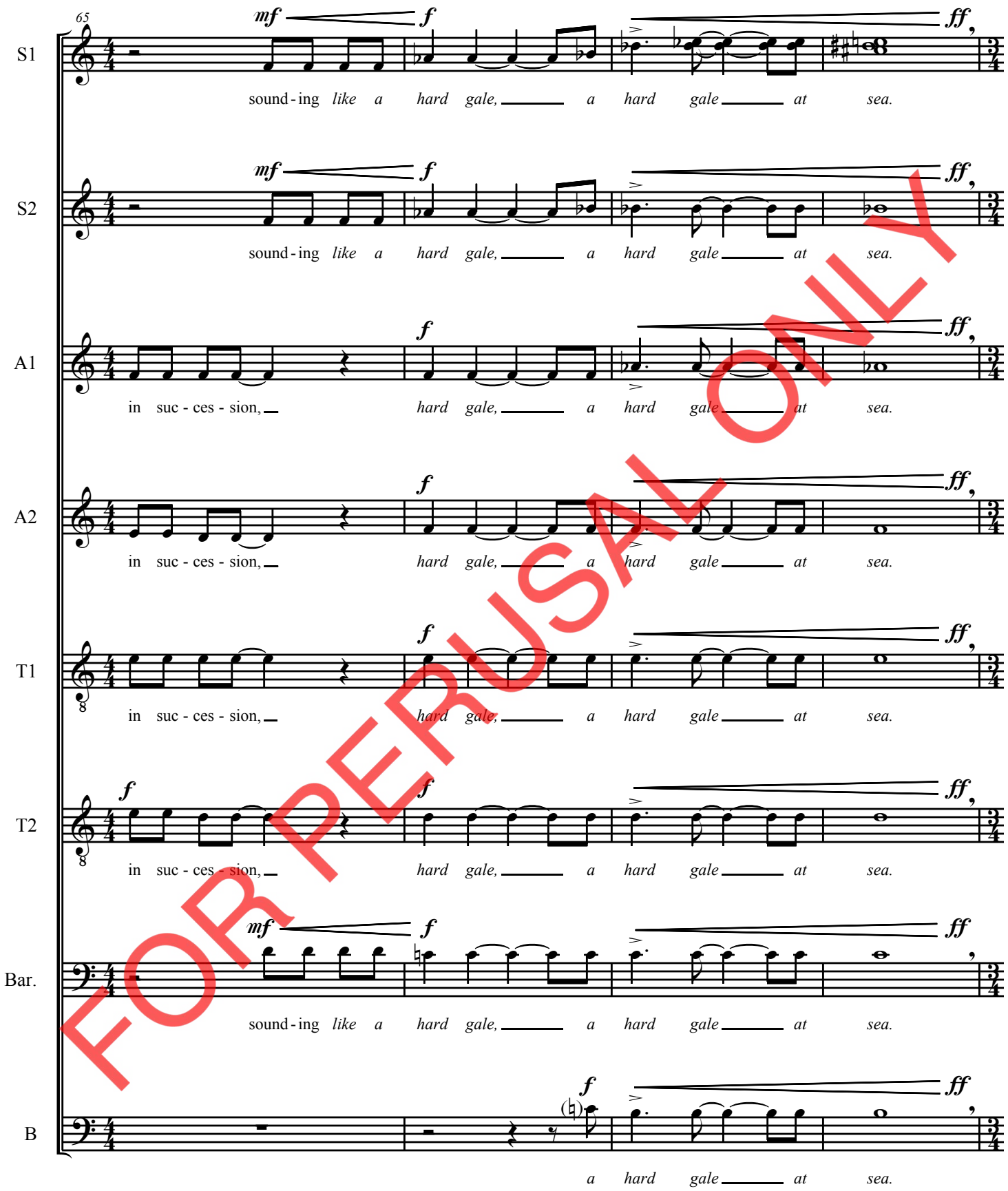

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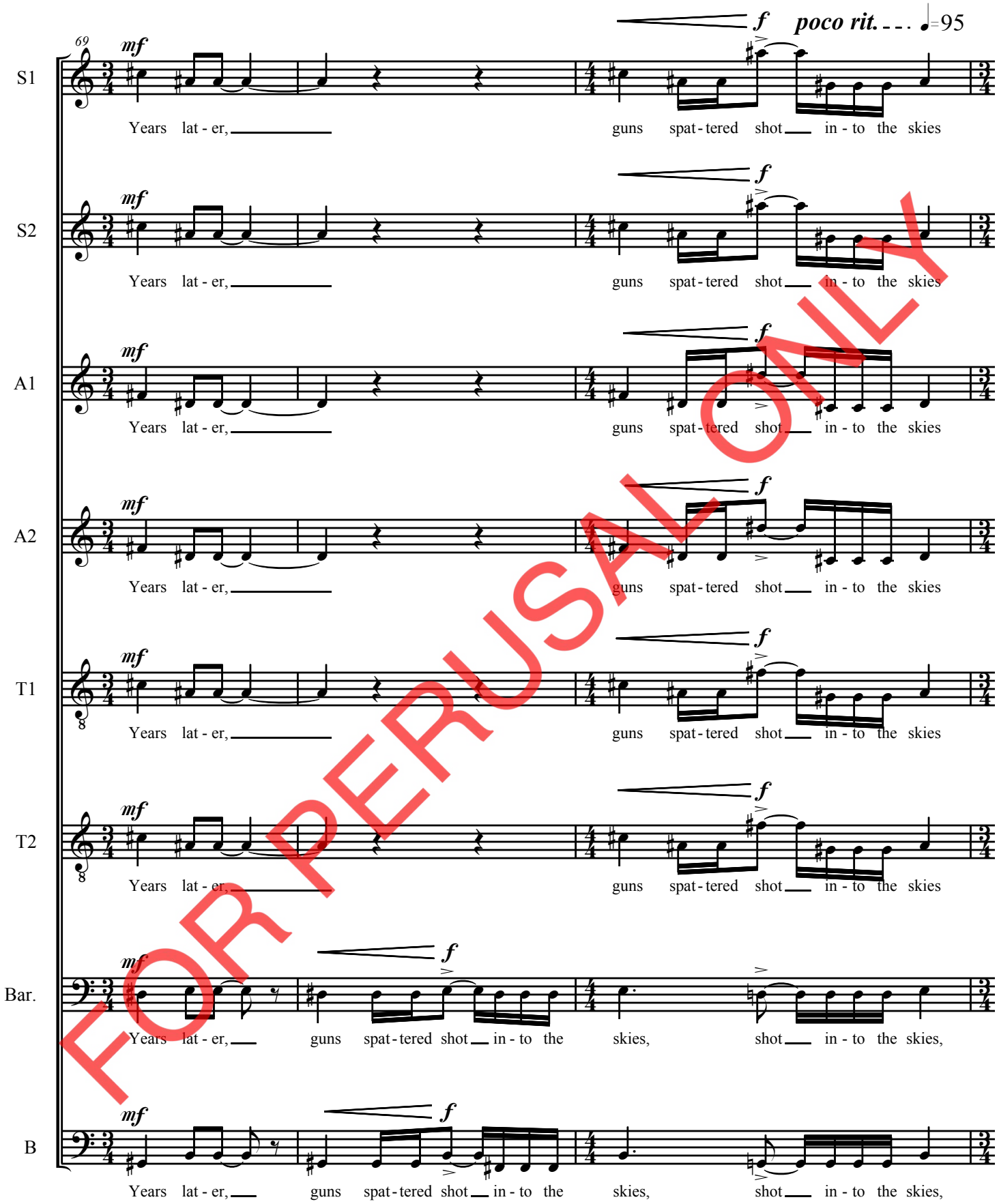

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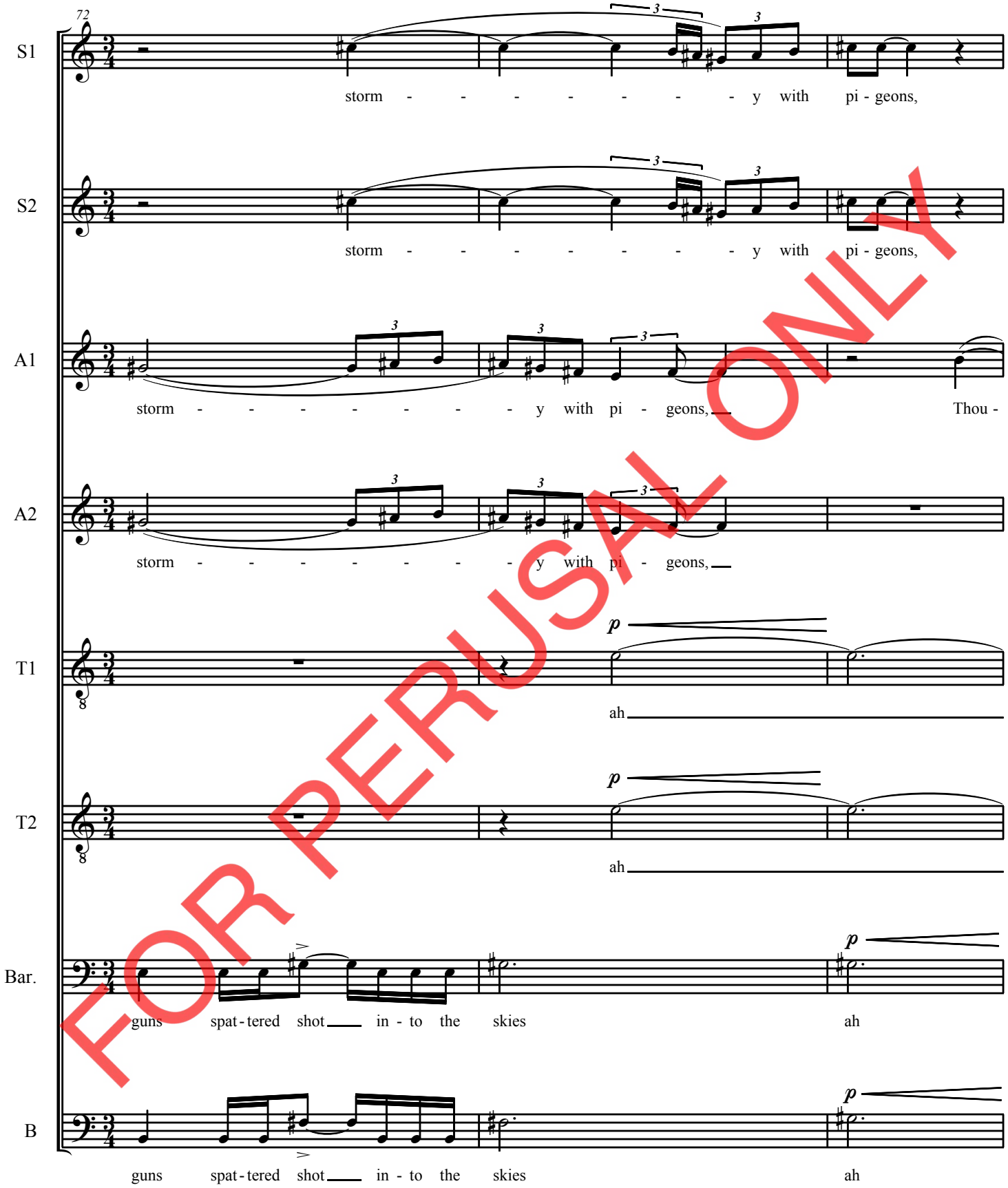

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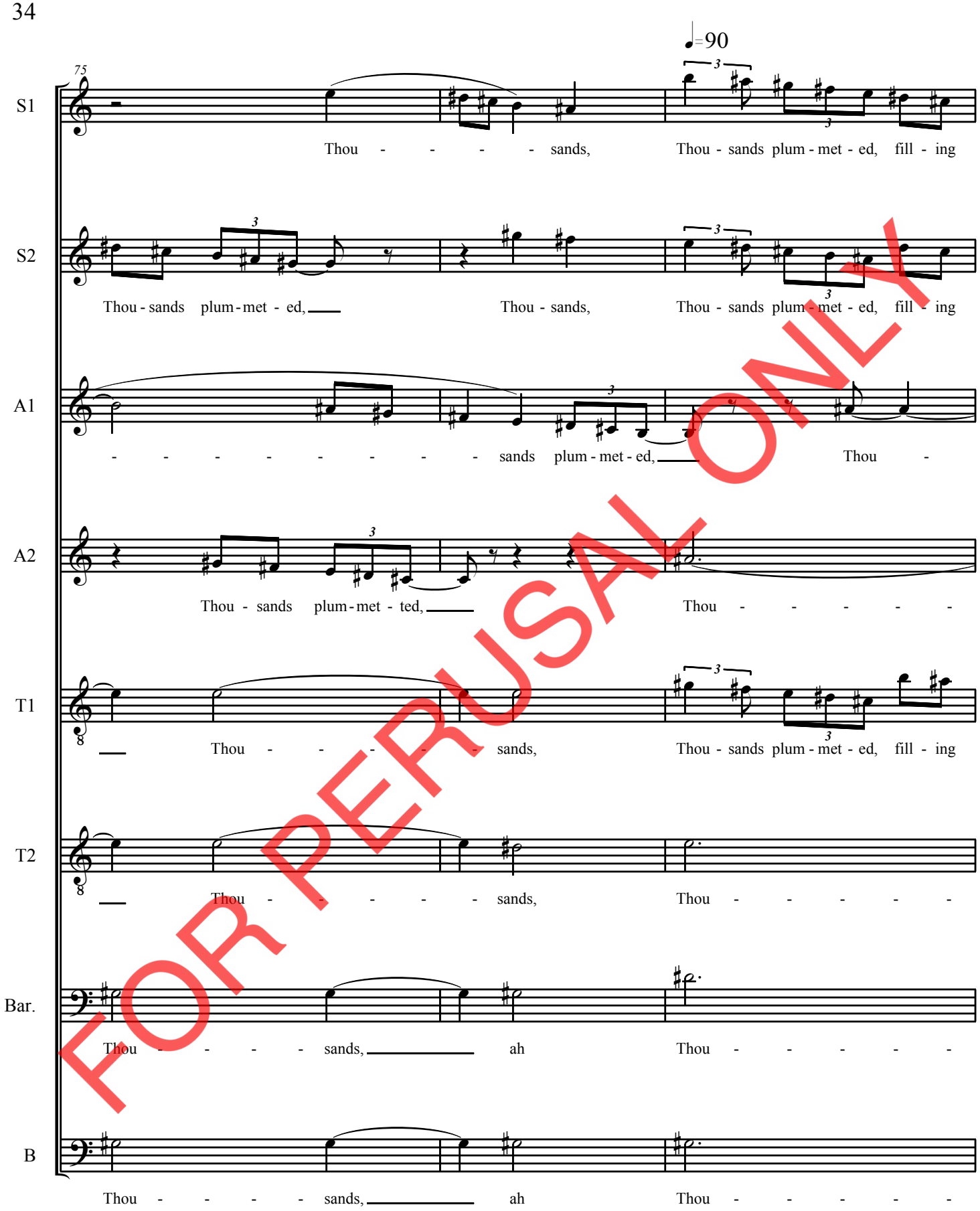

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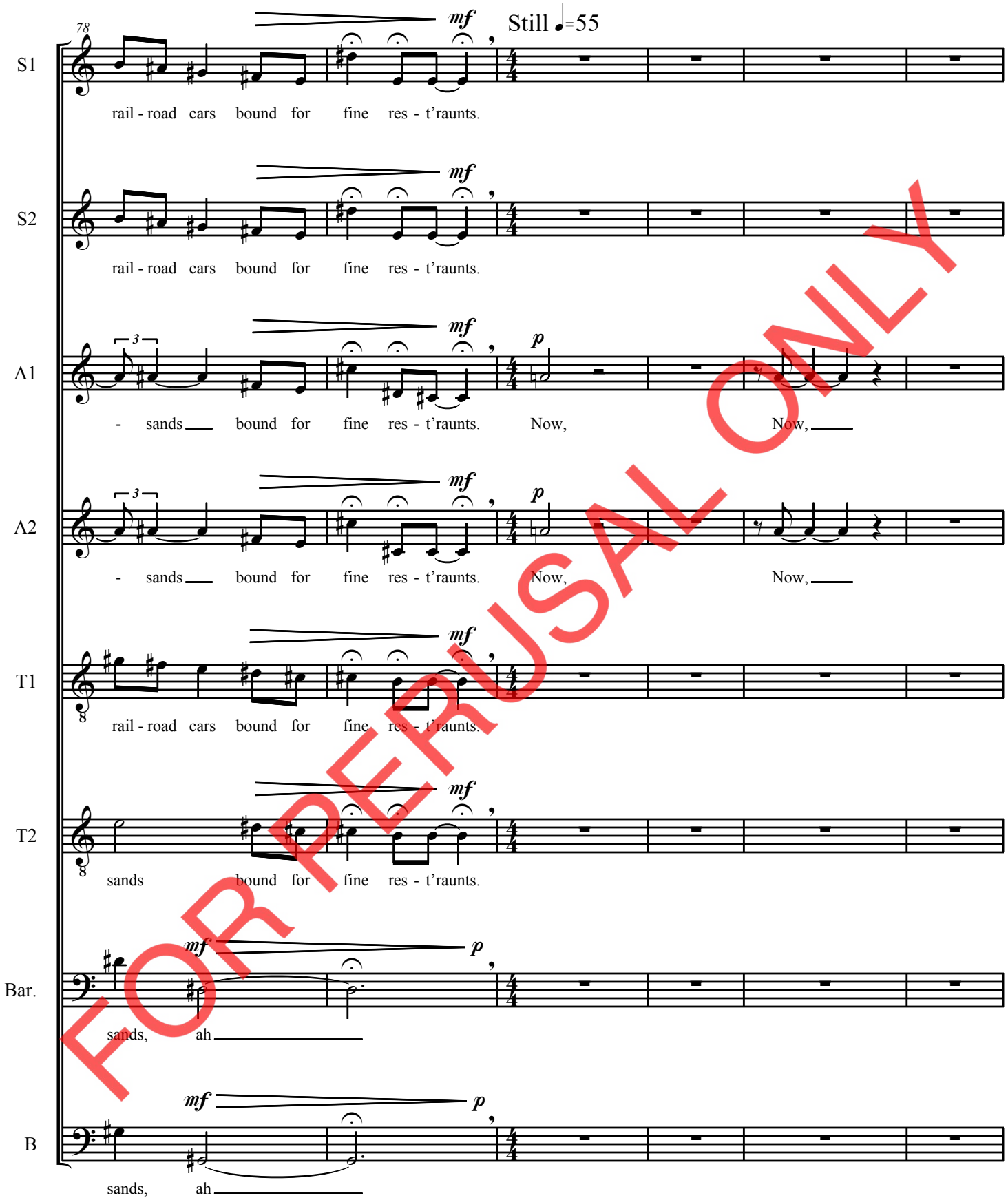

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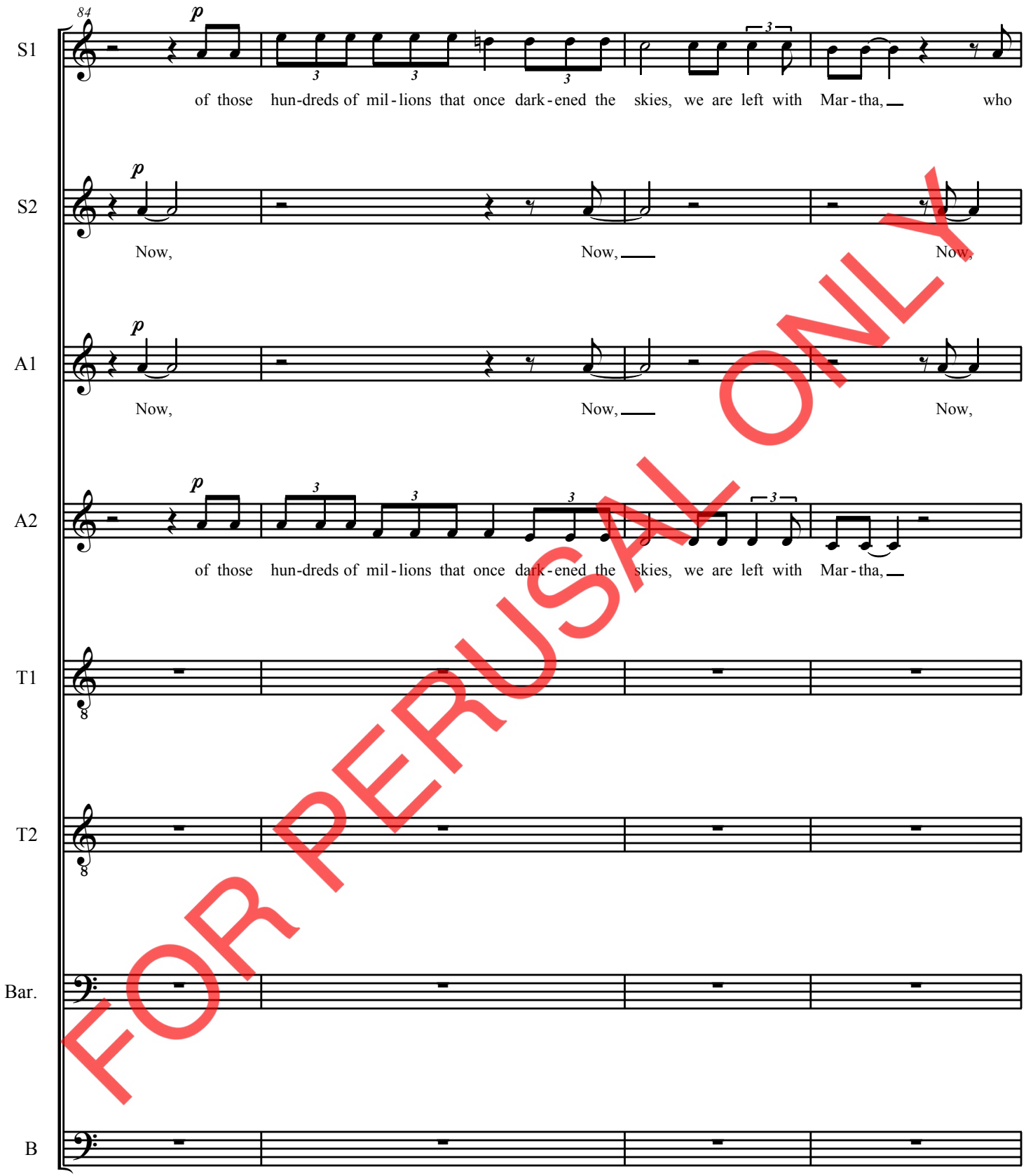

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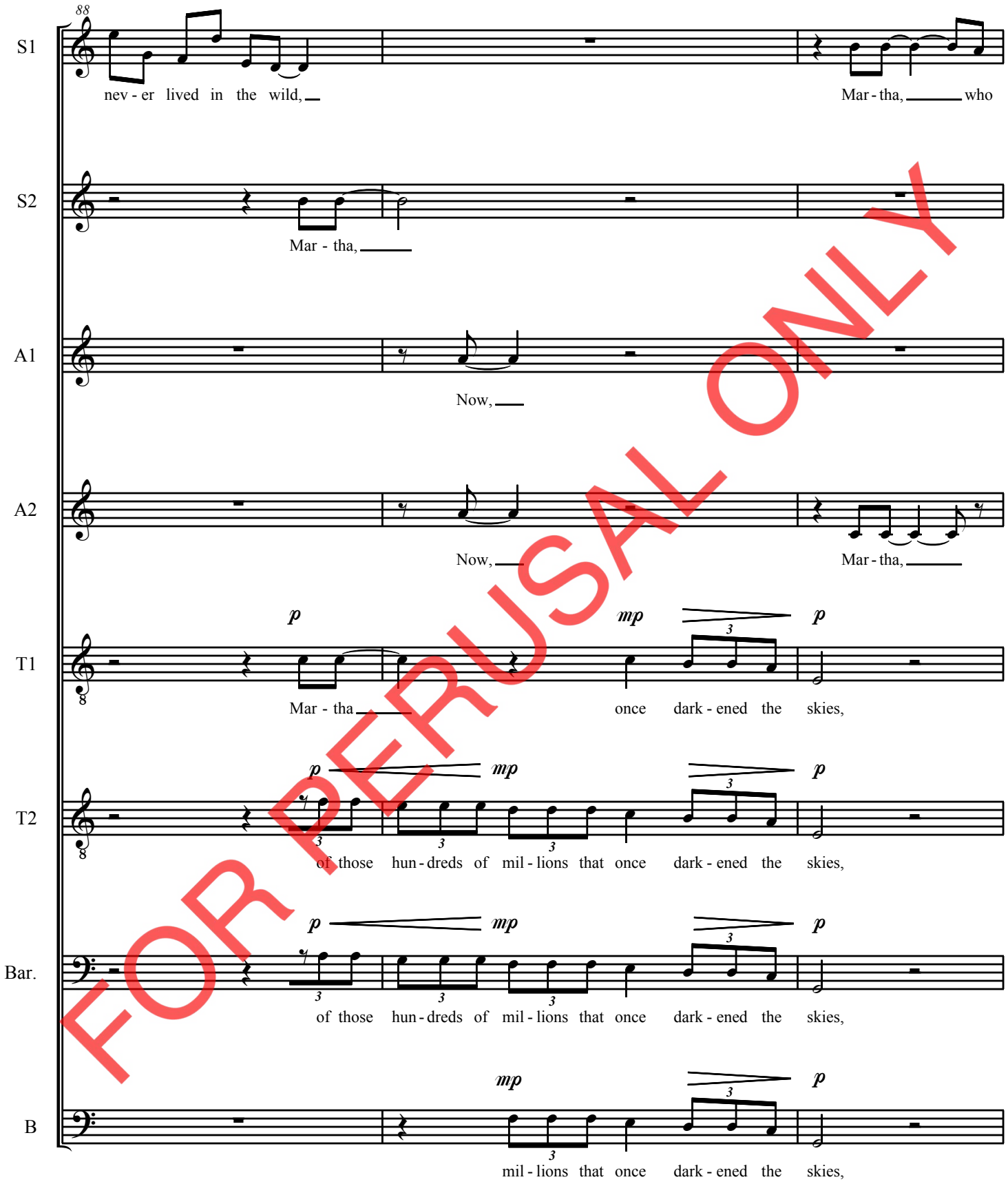

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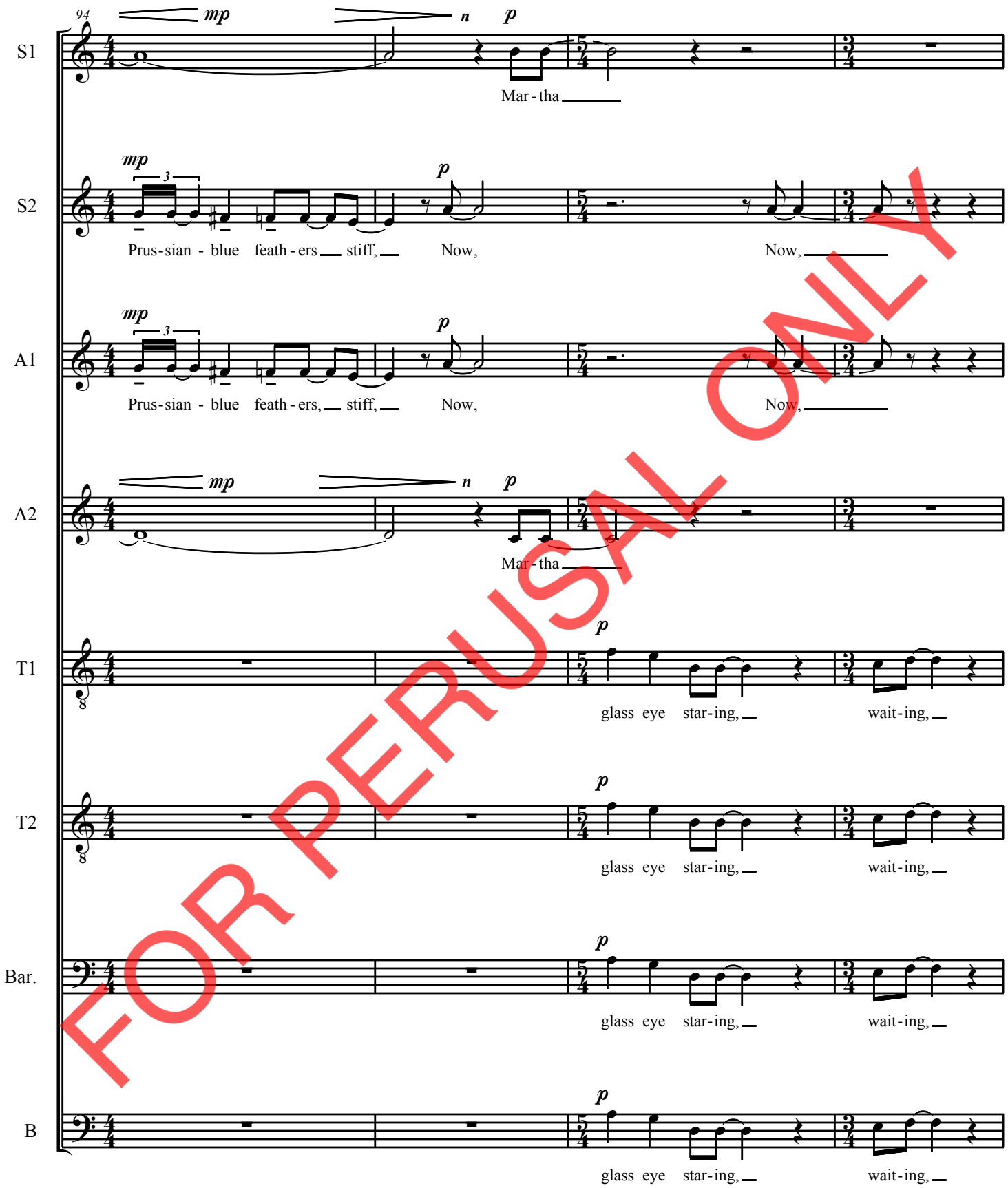

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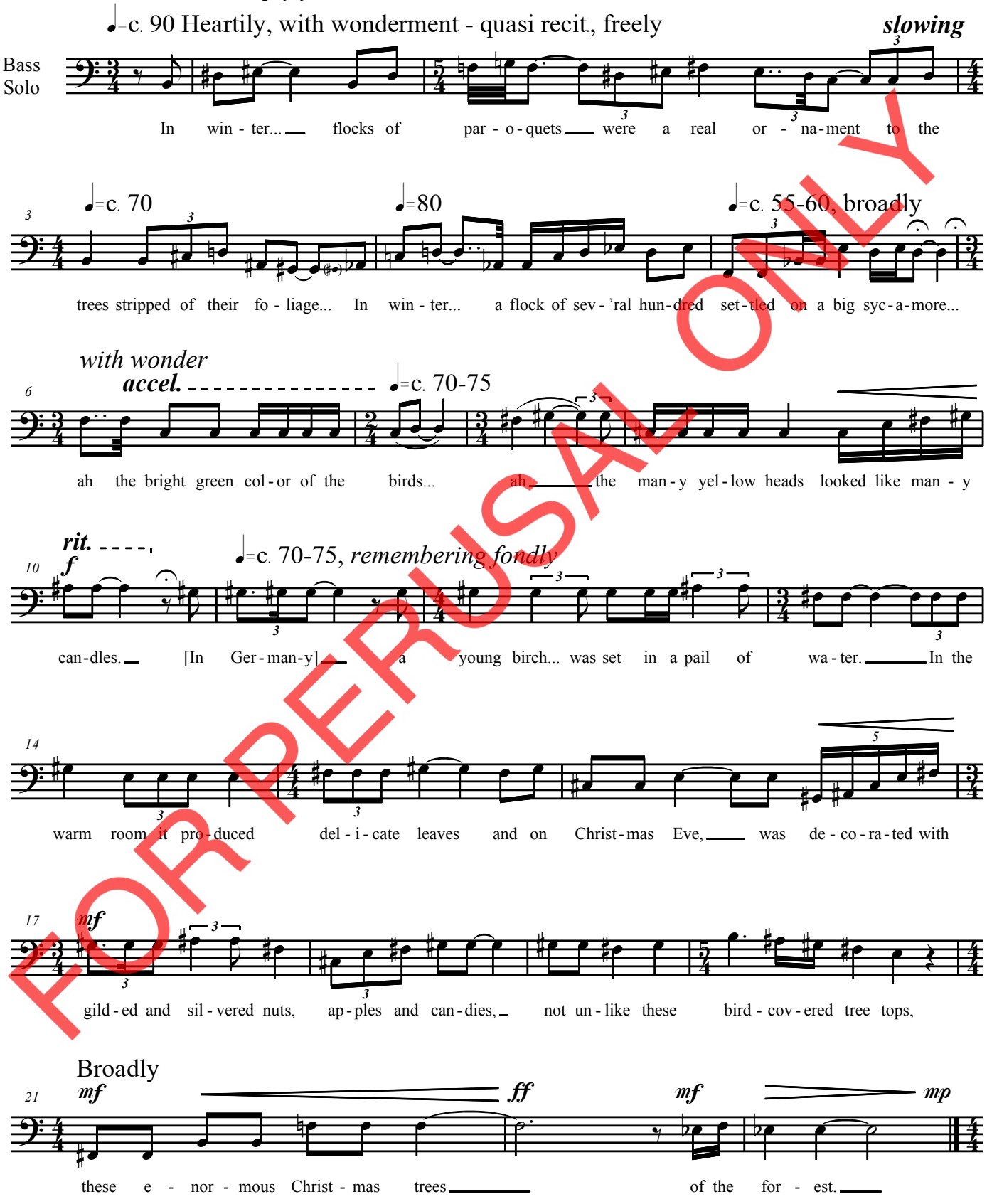
Eyewitness: Gert Goebel and the Paroquets

Eyewitness: Gert Goebel, German settler in eastern Missouri,
from a translation of his 1877 autobiography.



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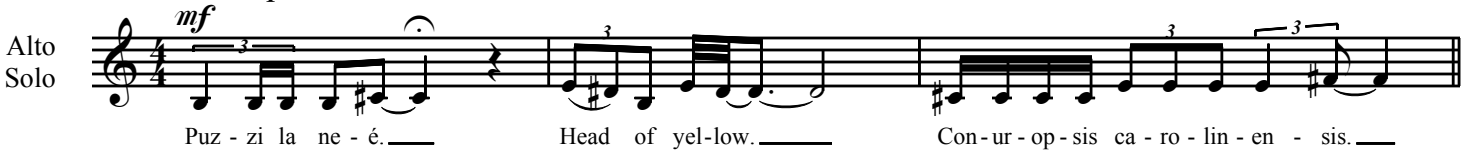

CAROLINA PARAKEET

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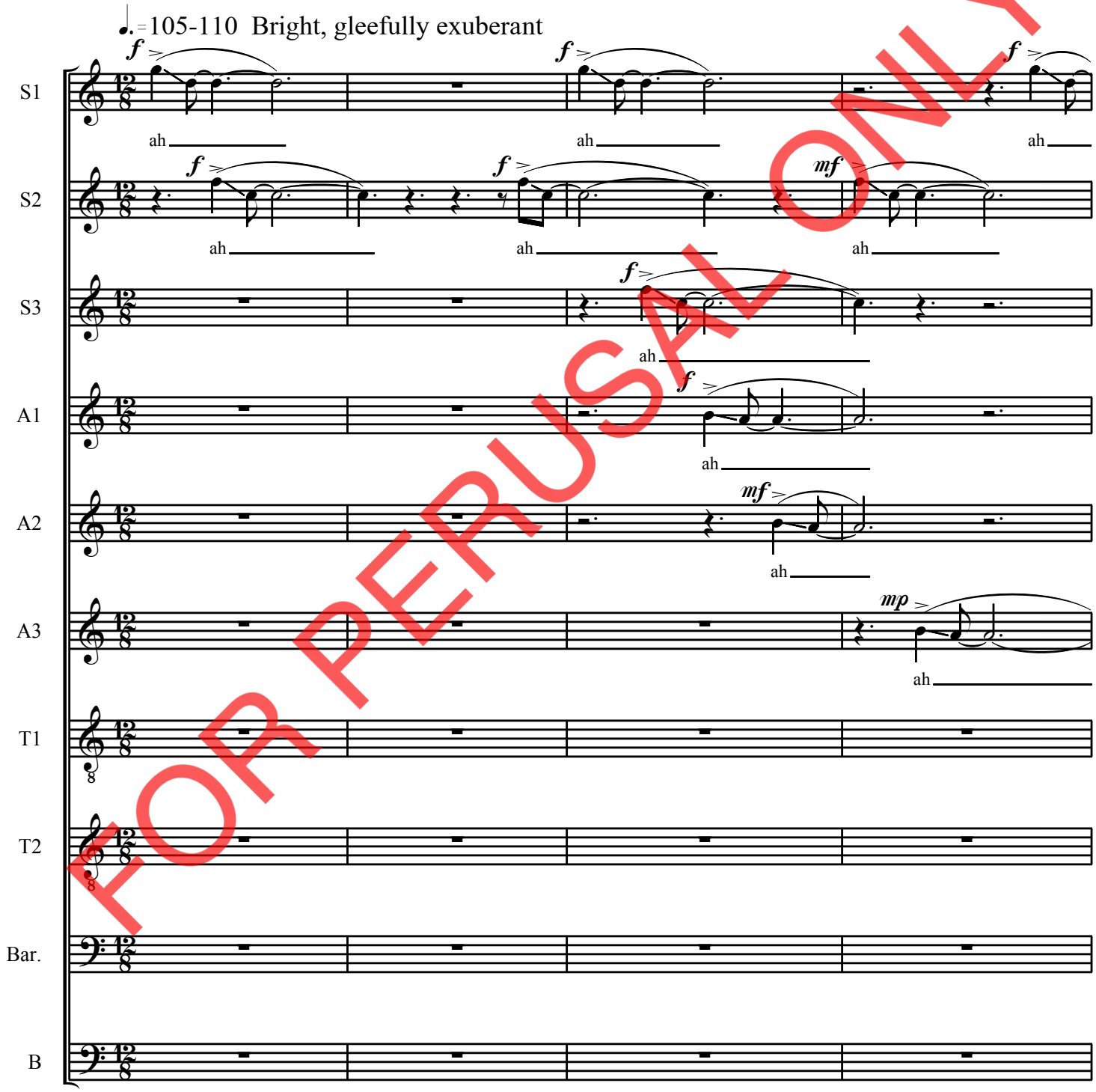
HOLLY J. HUGHES — EDIE HILL



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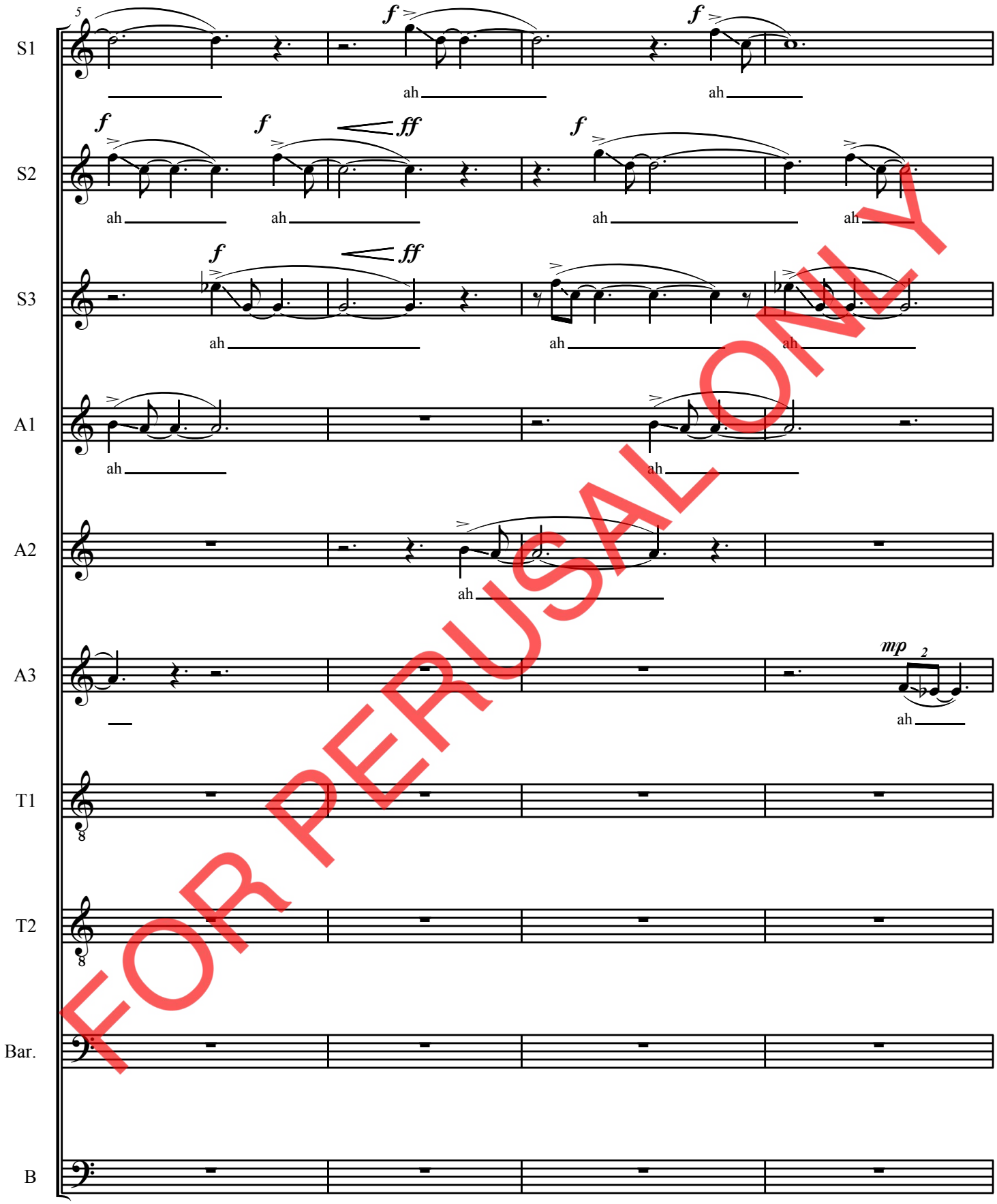

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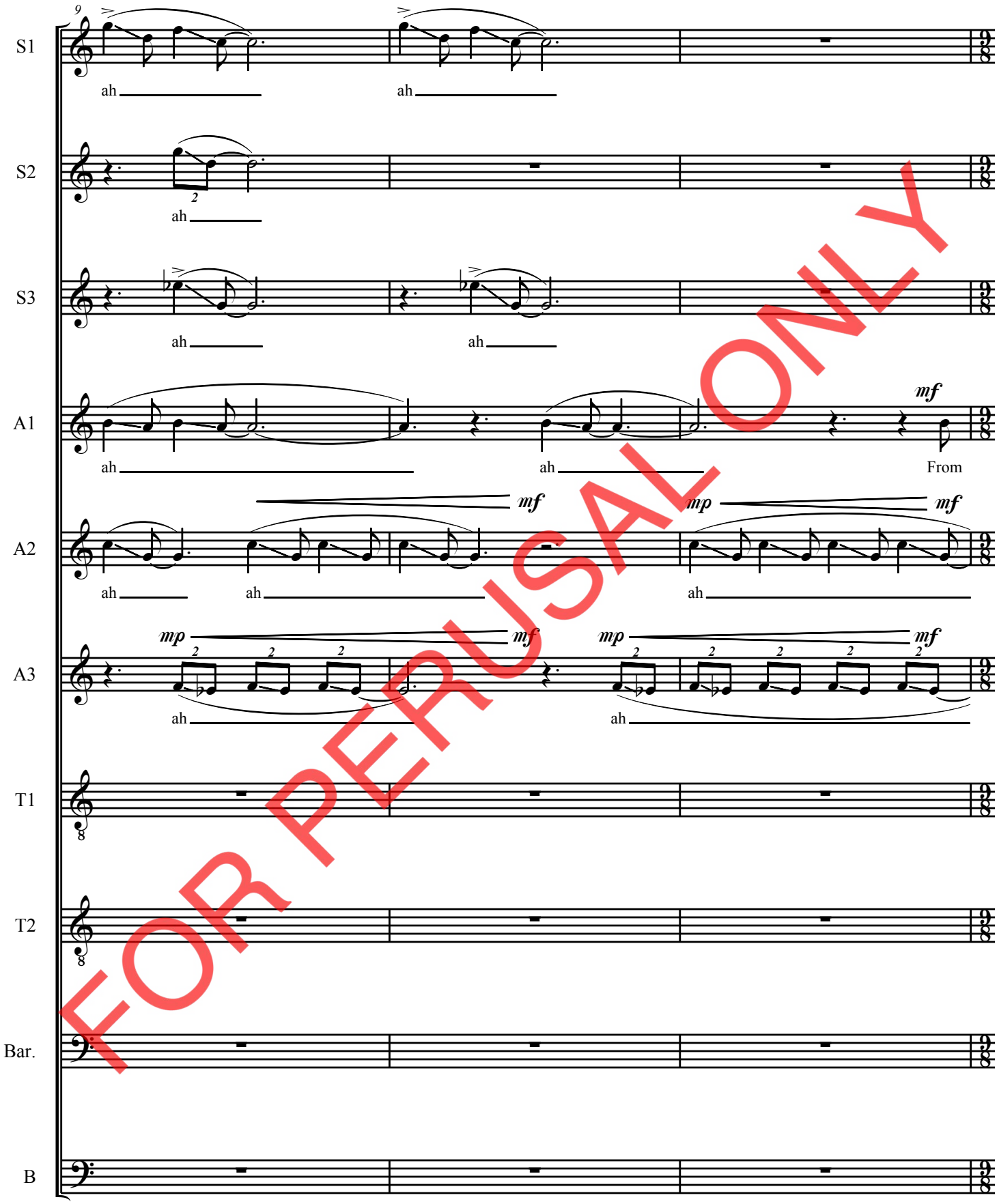

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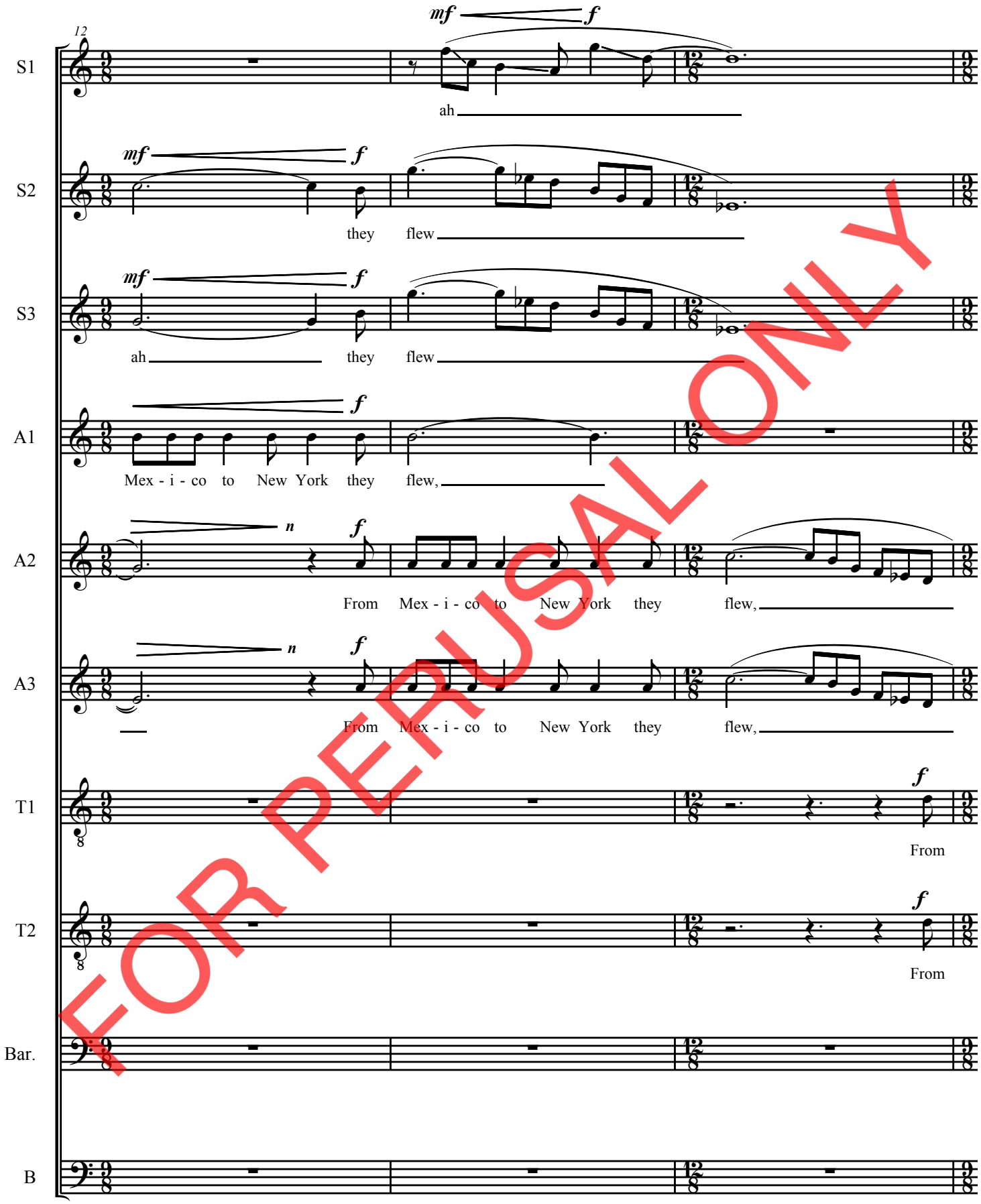

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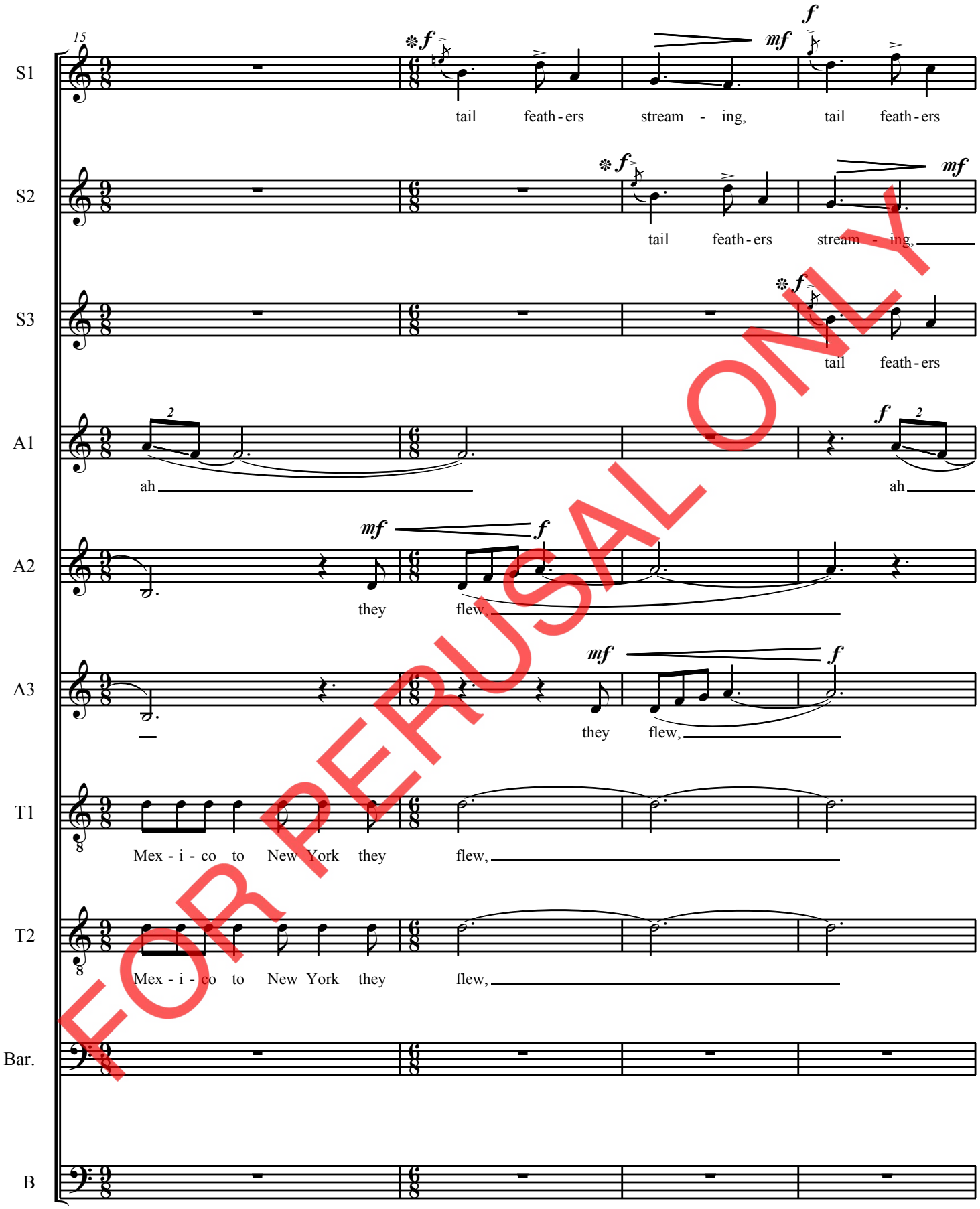

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* Grace notes occur on the beat

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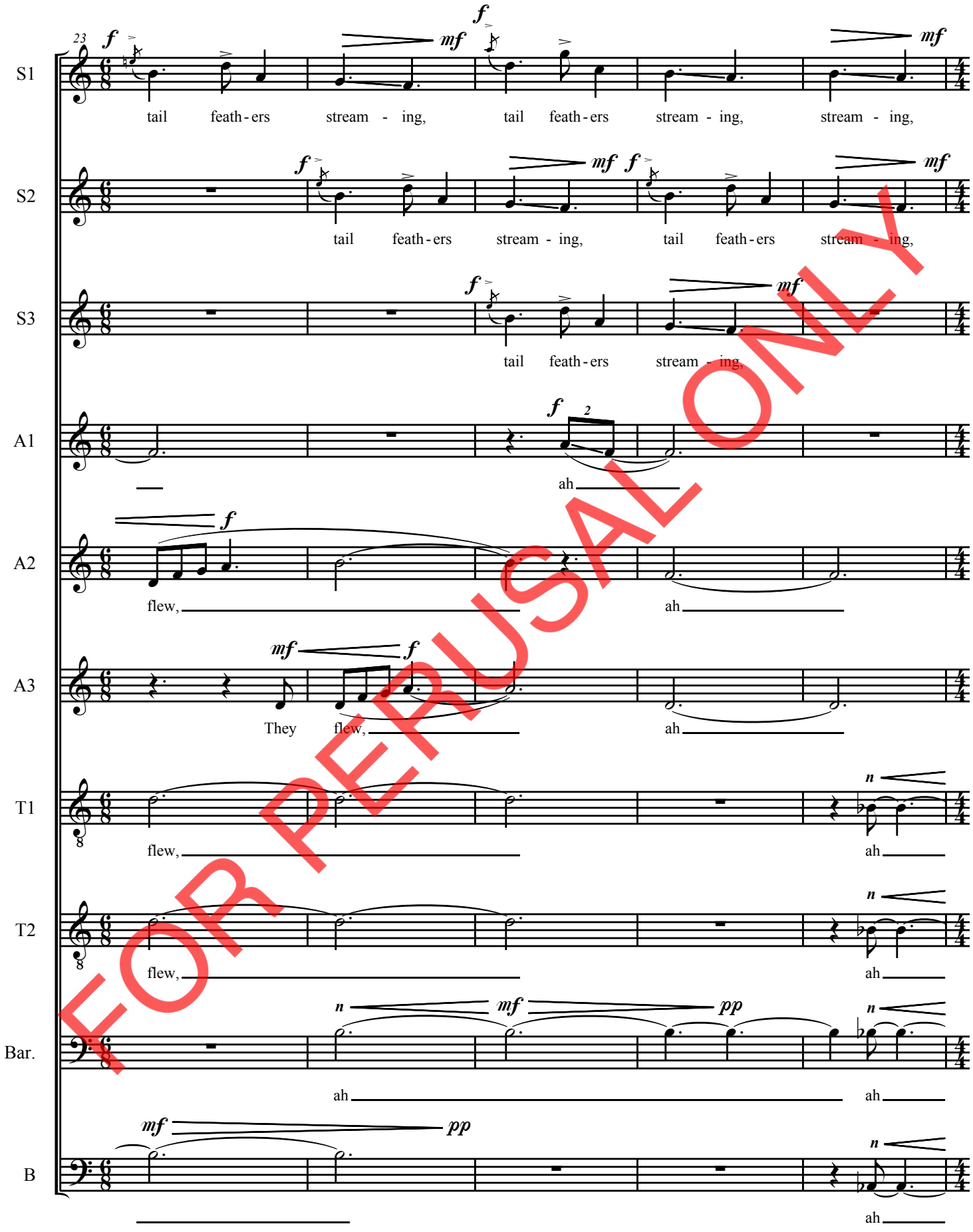

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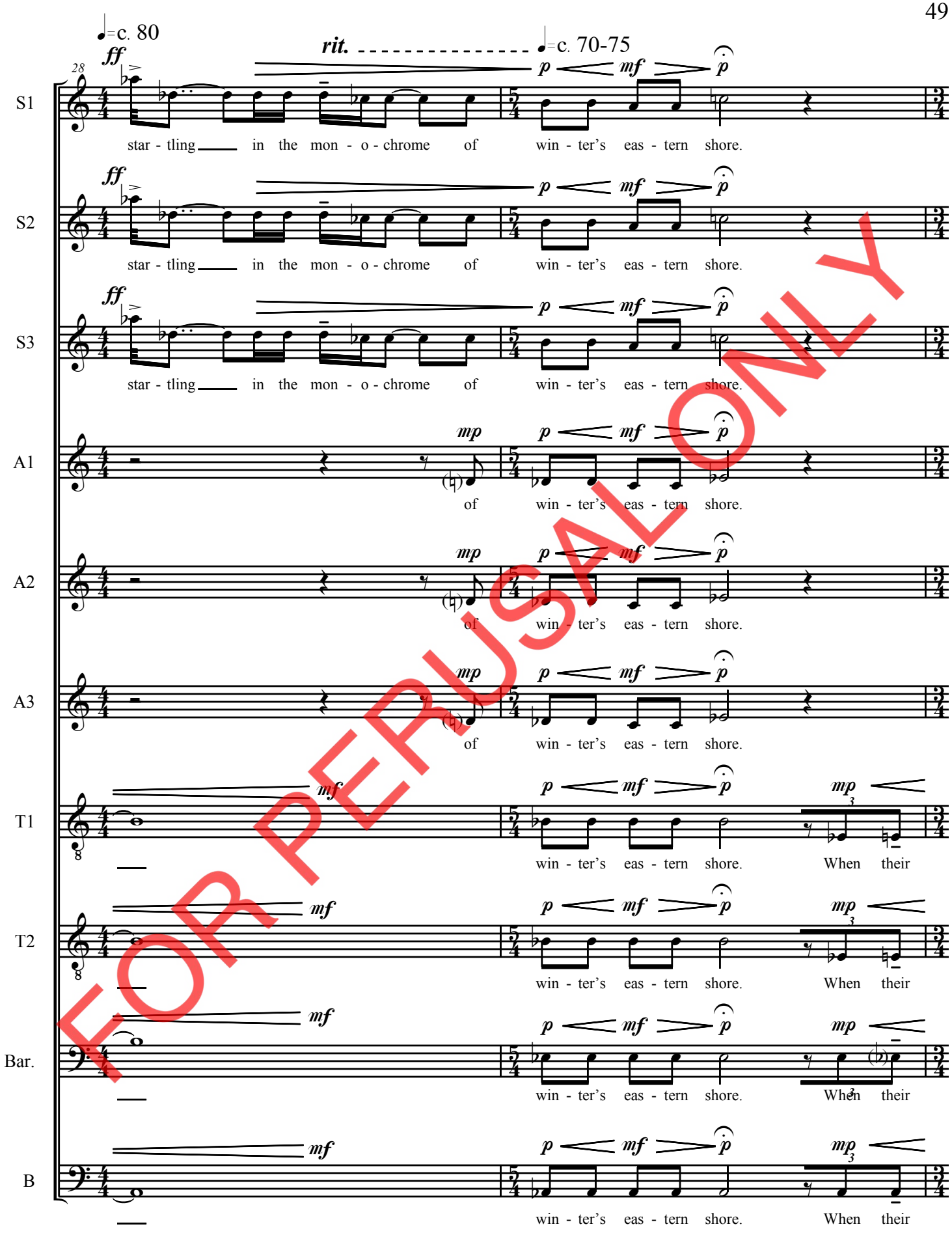

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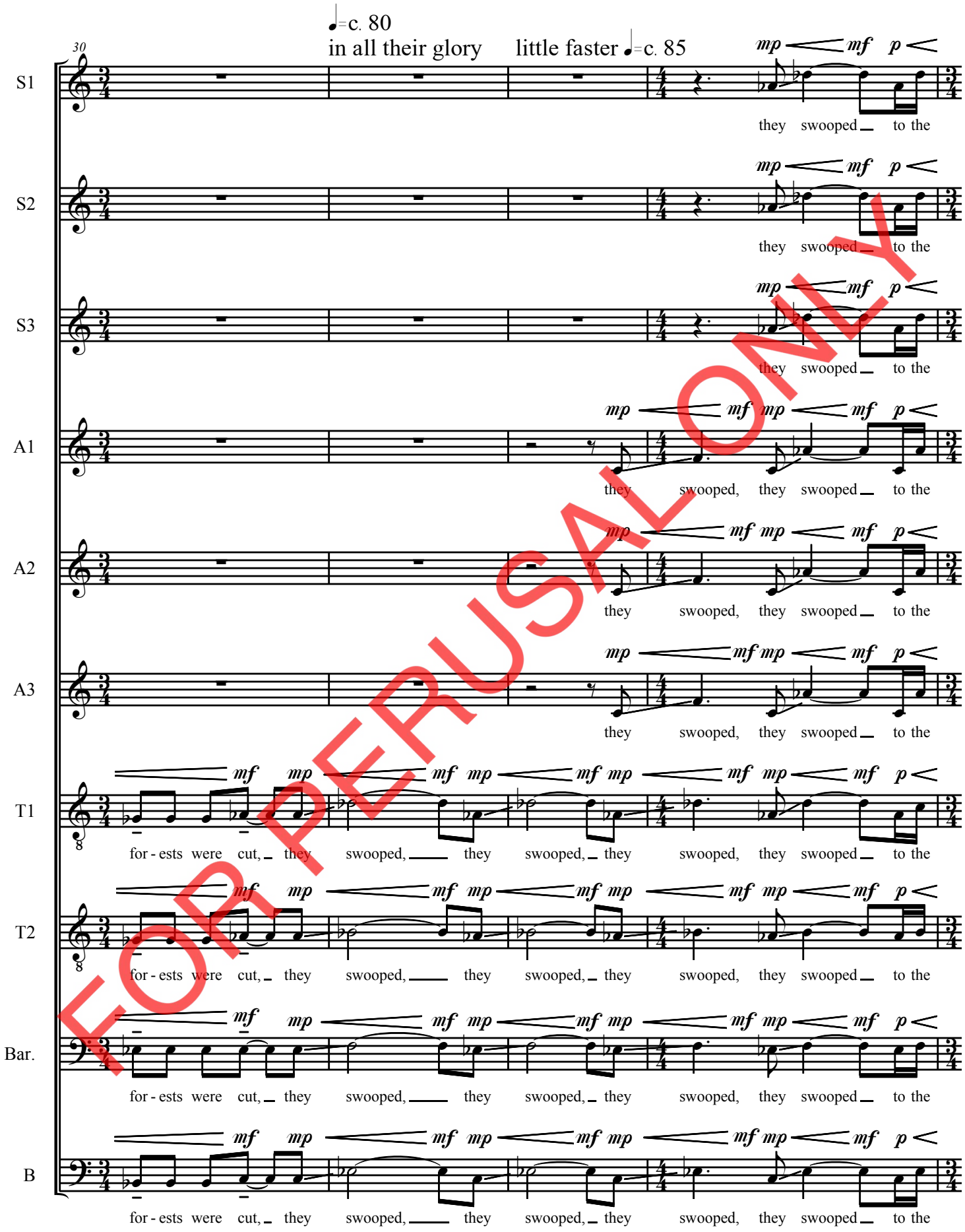

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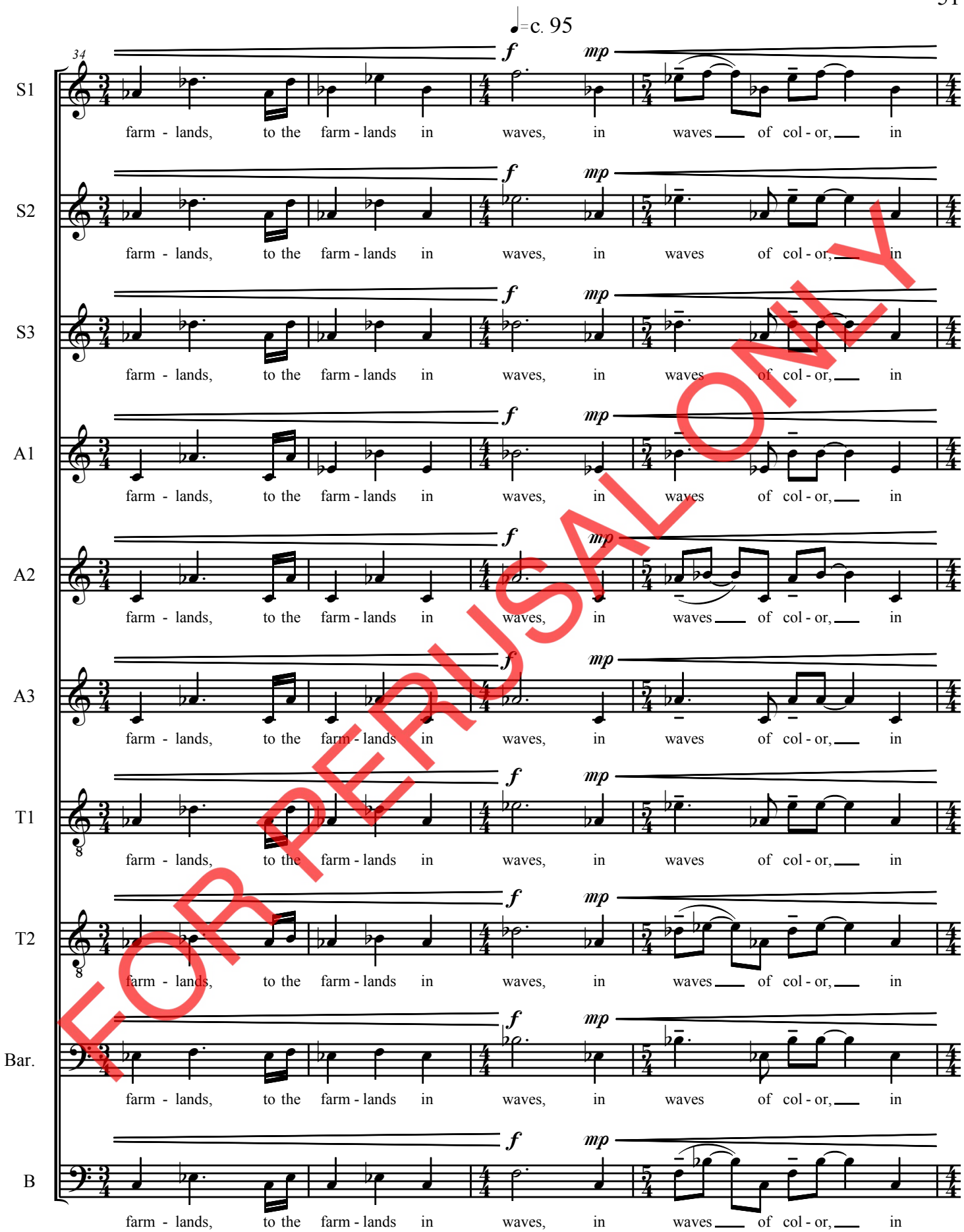

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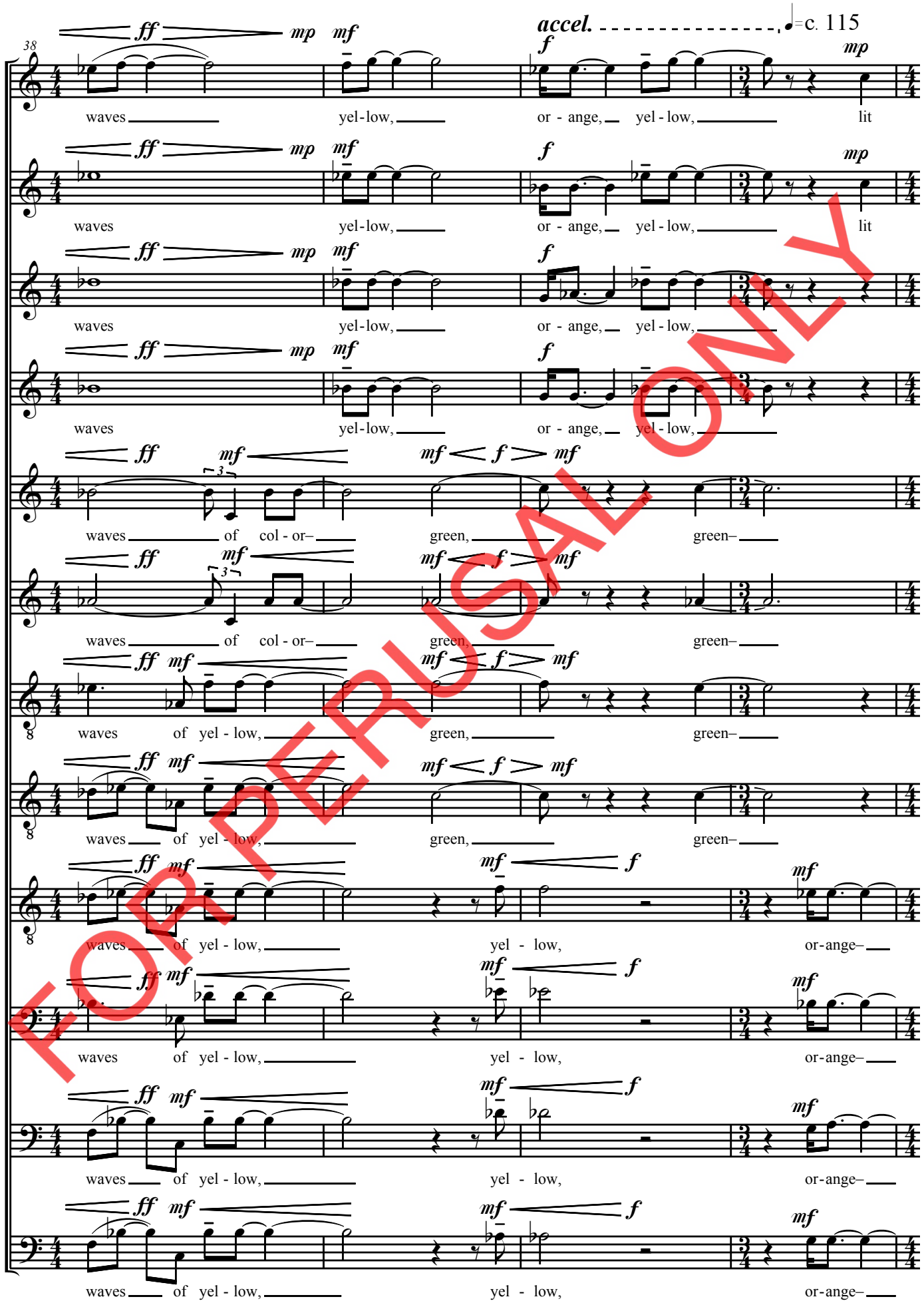

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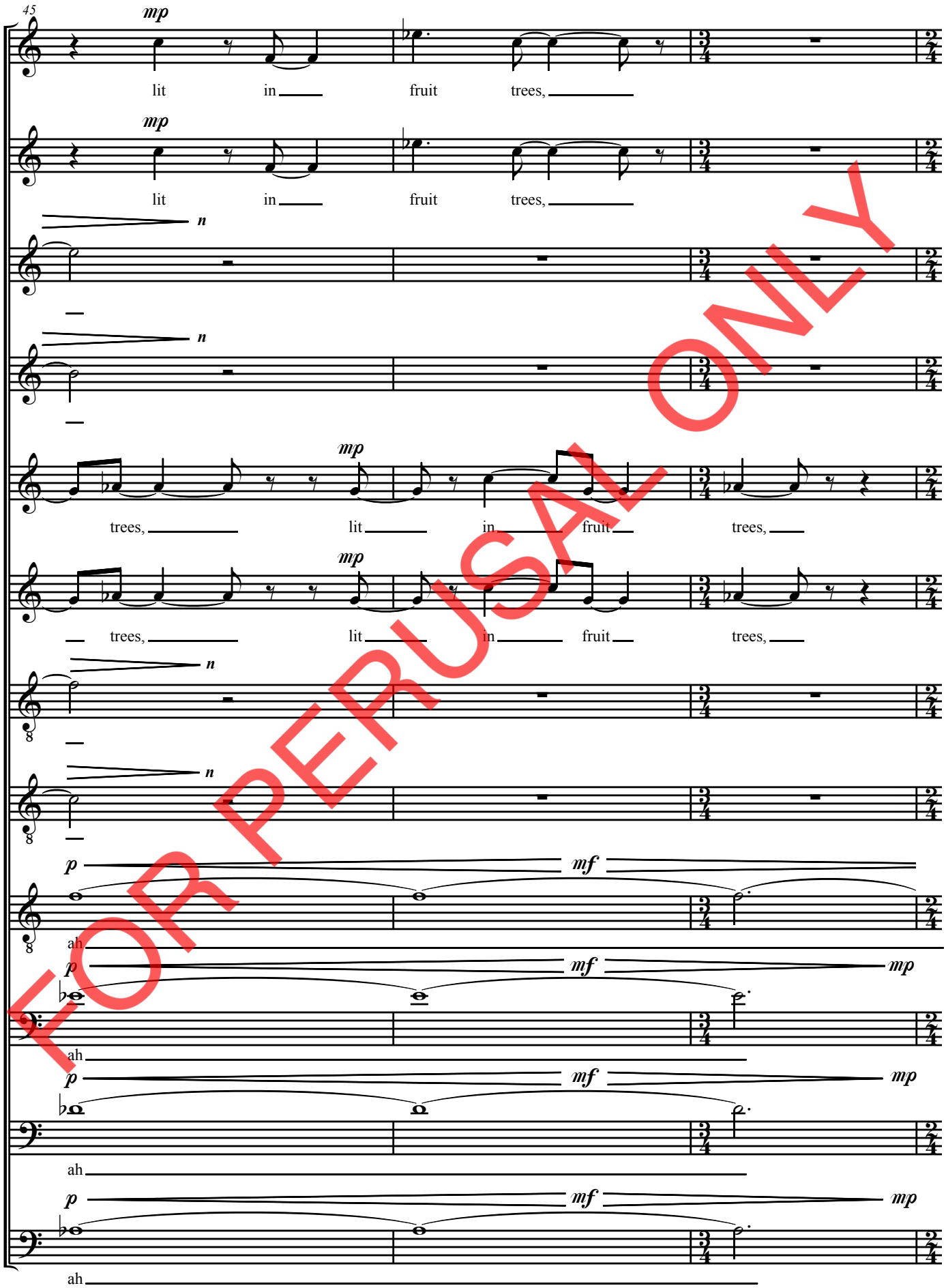

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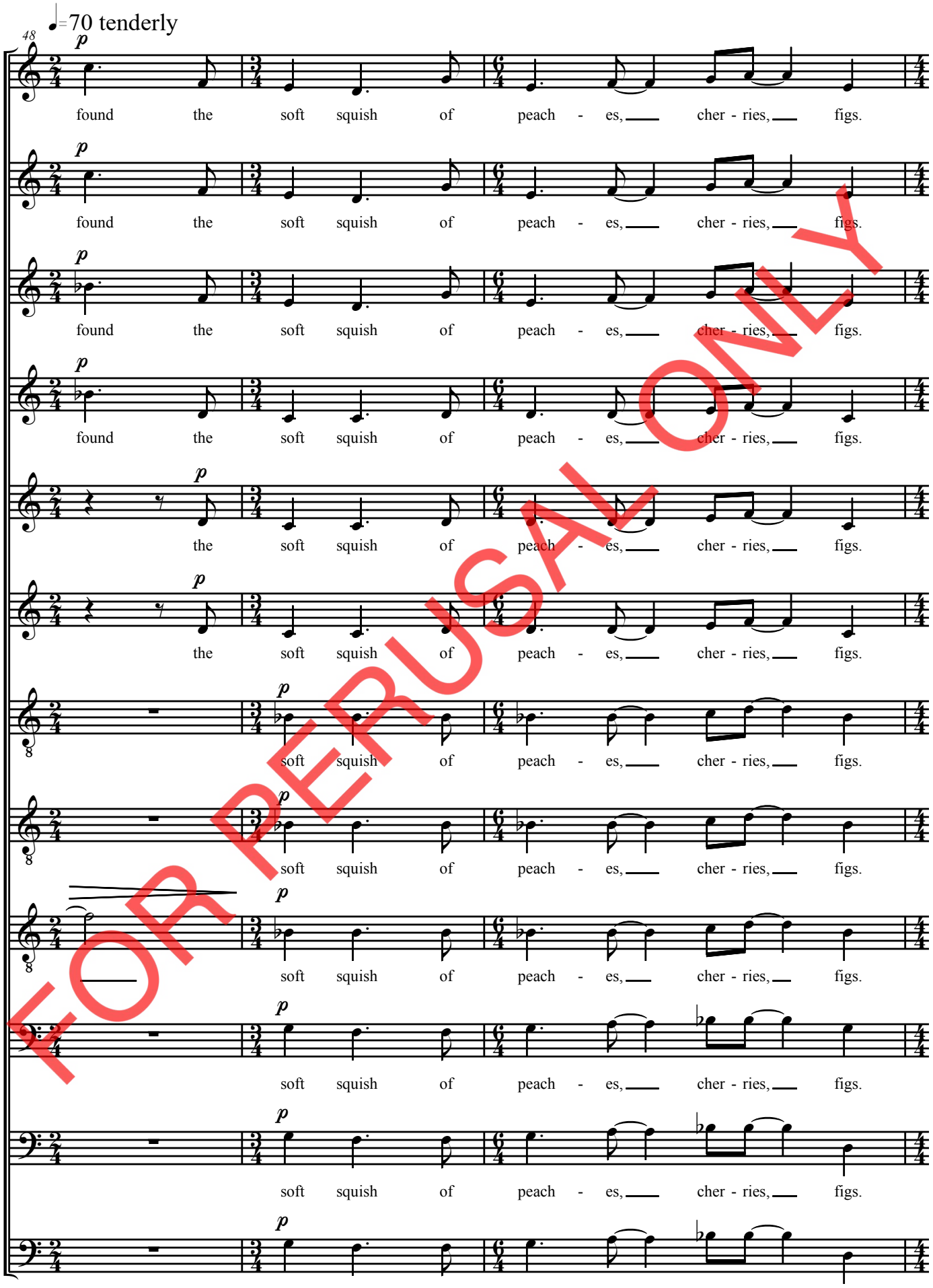

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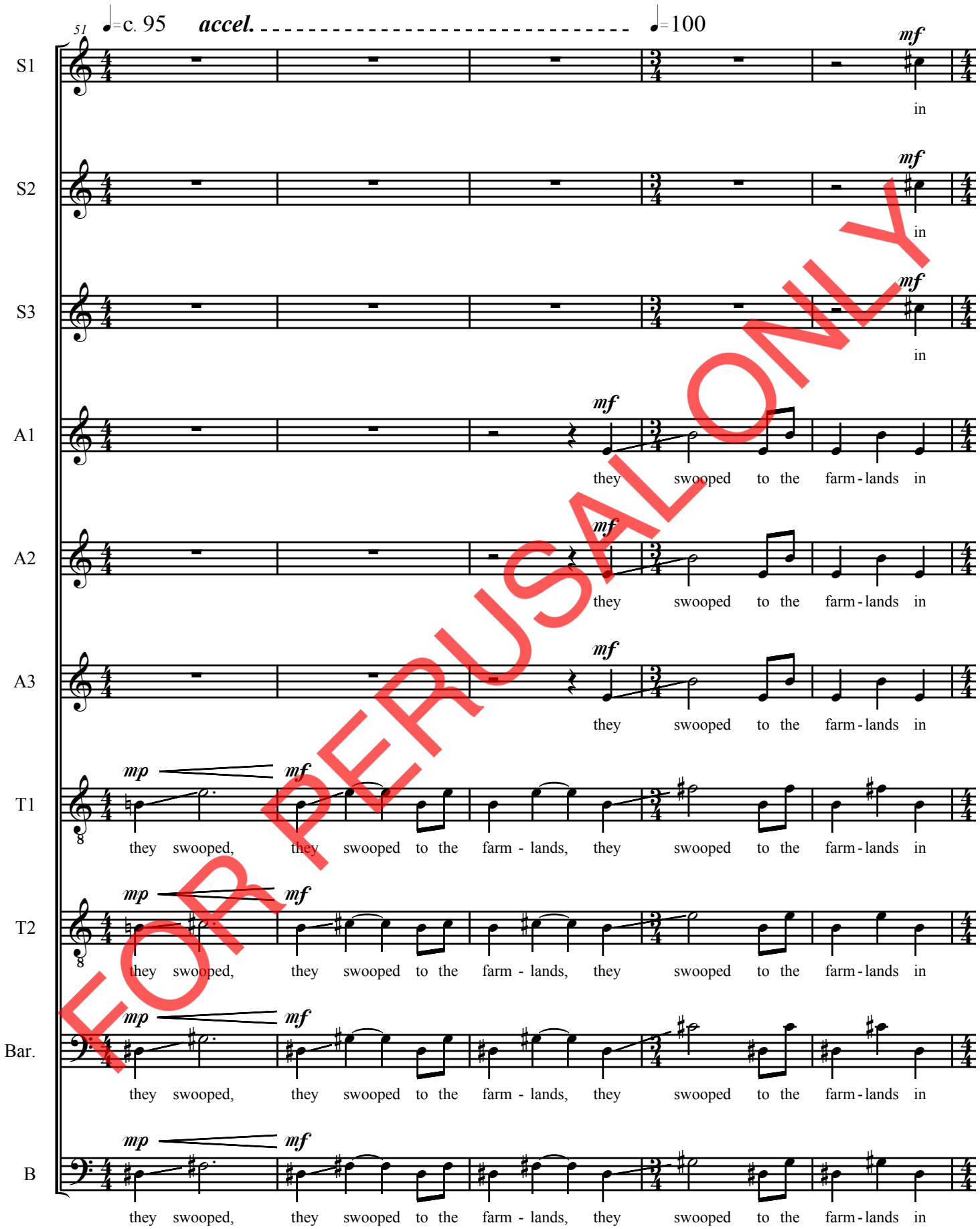

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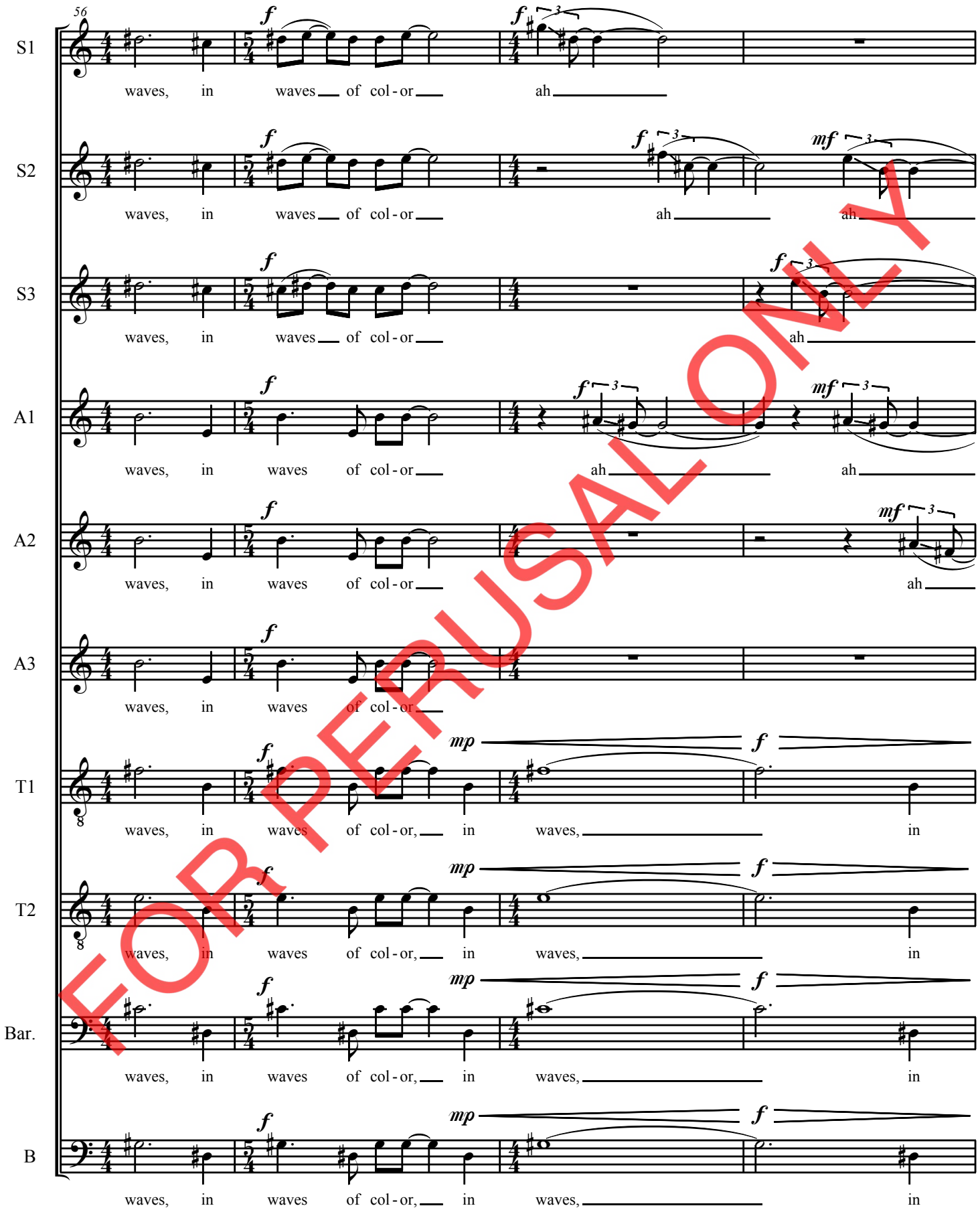

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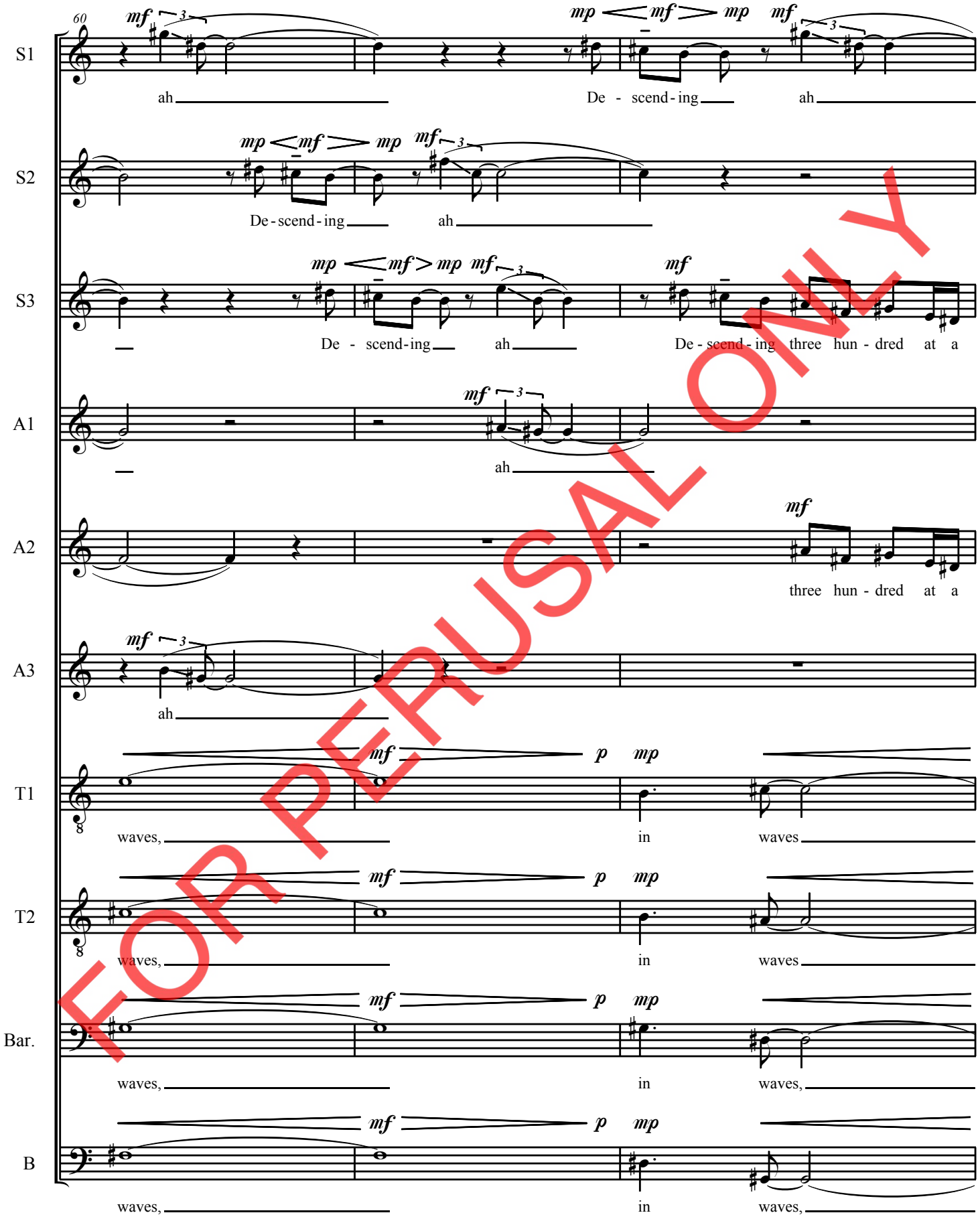

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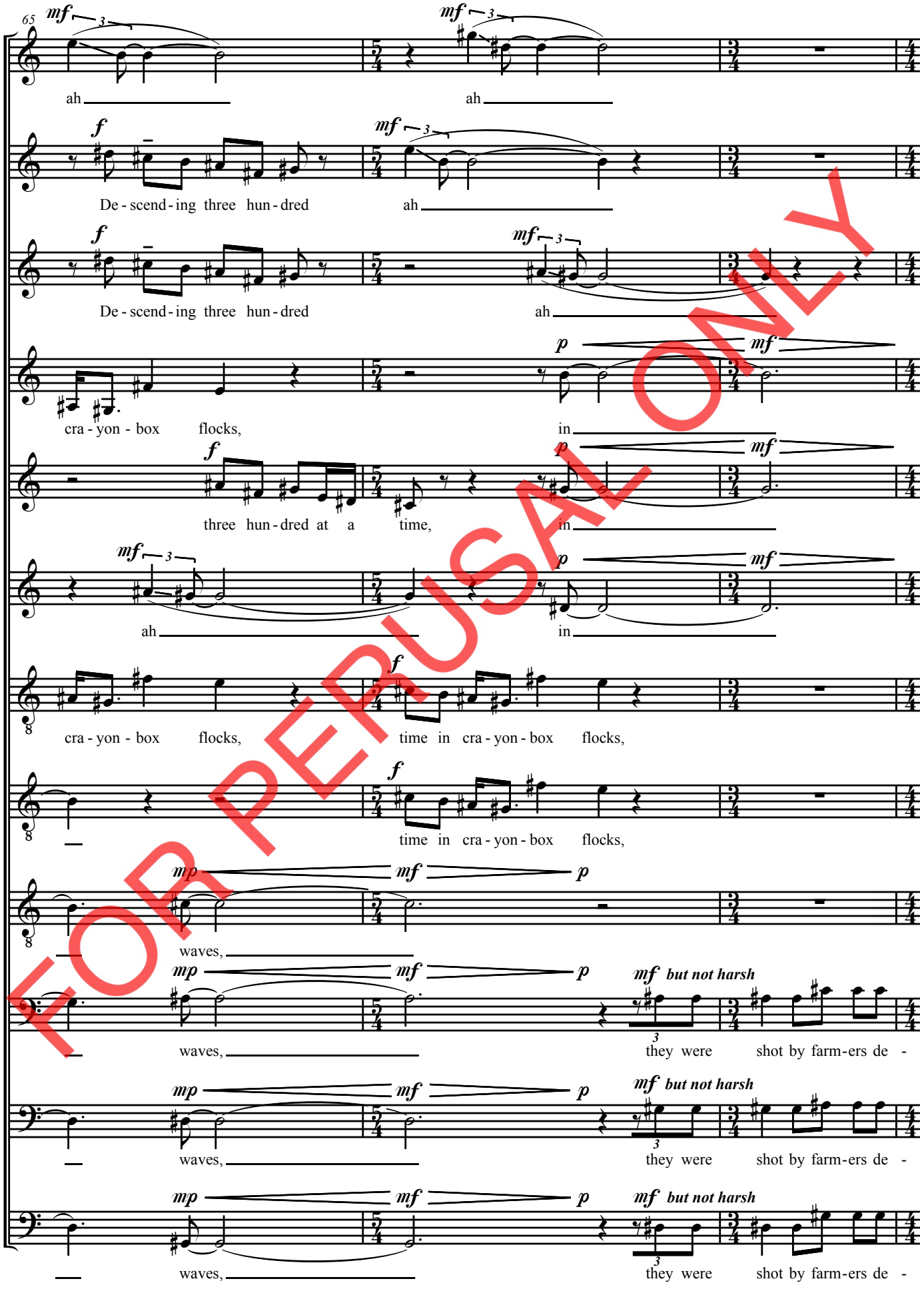

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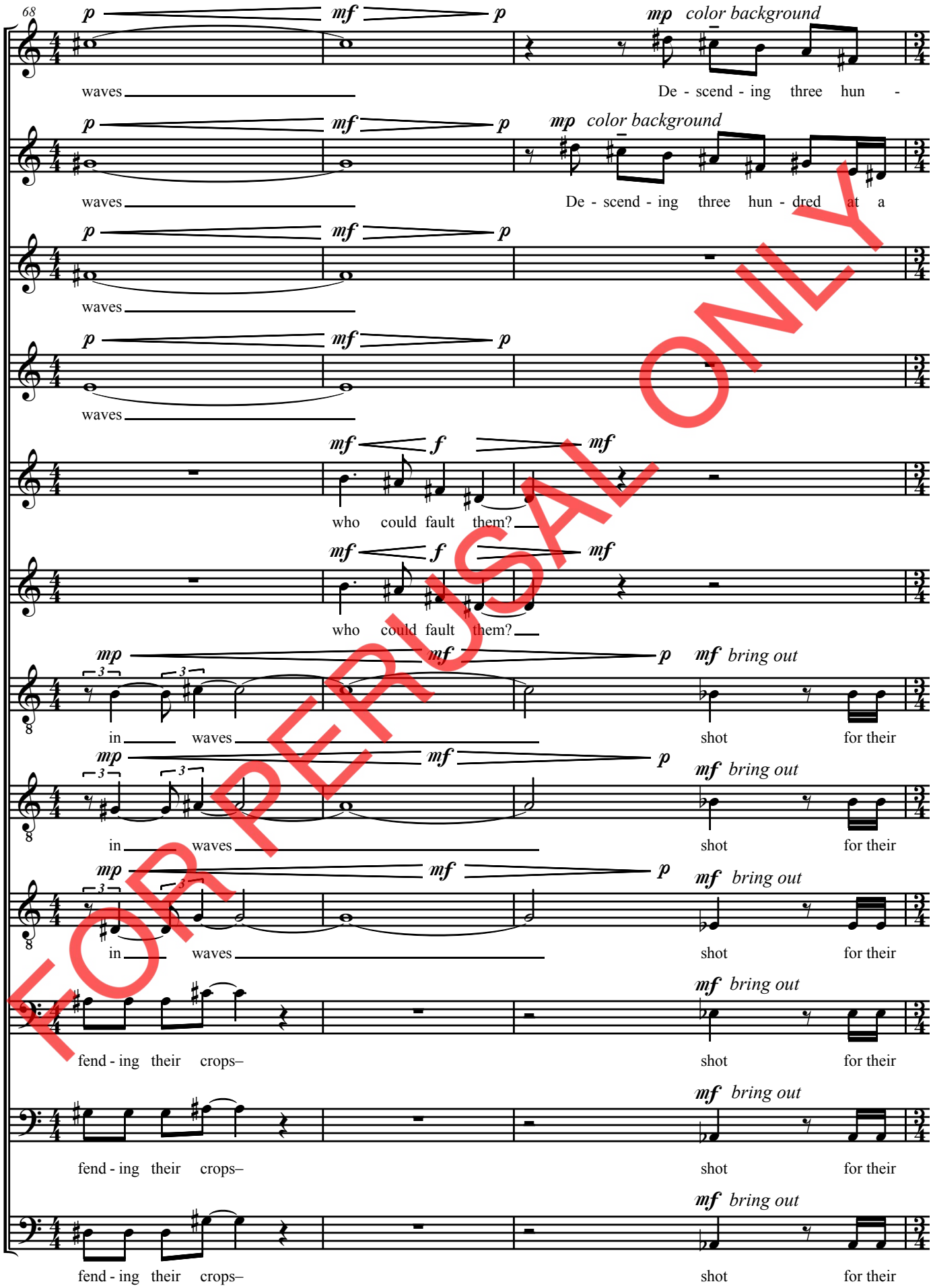

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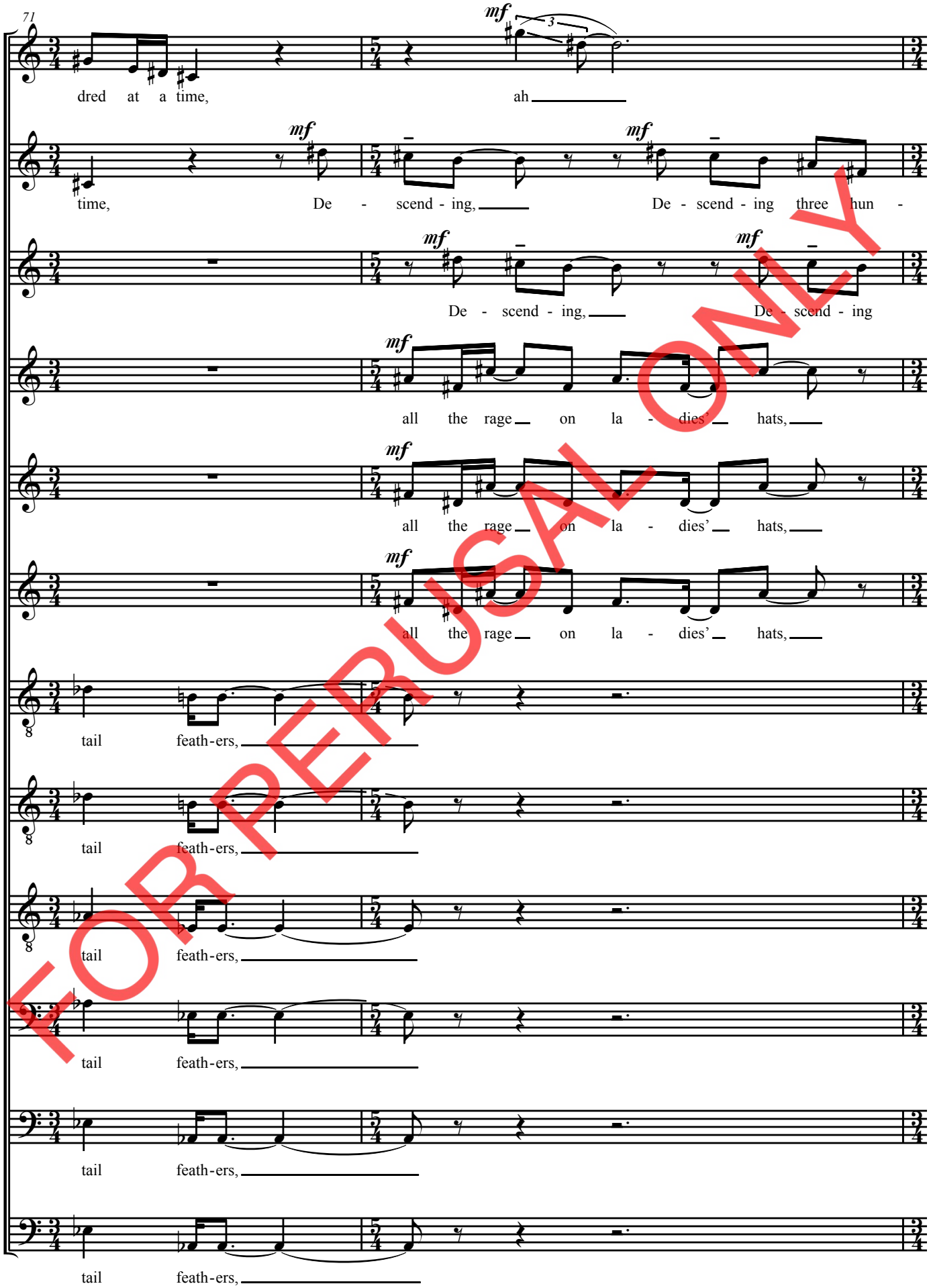

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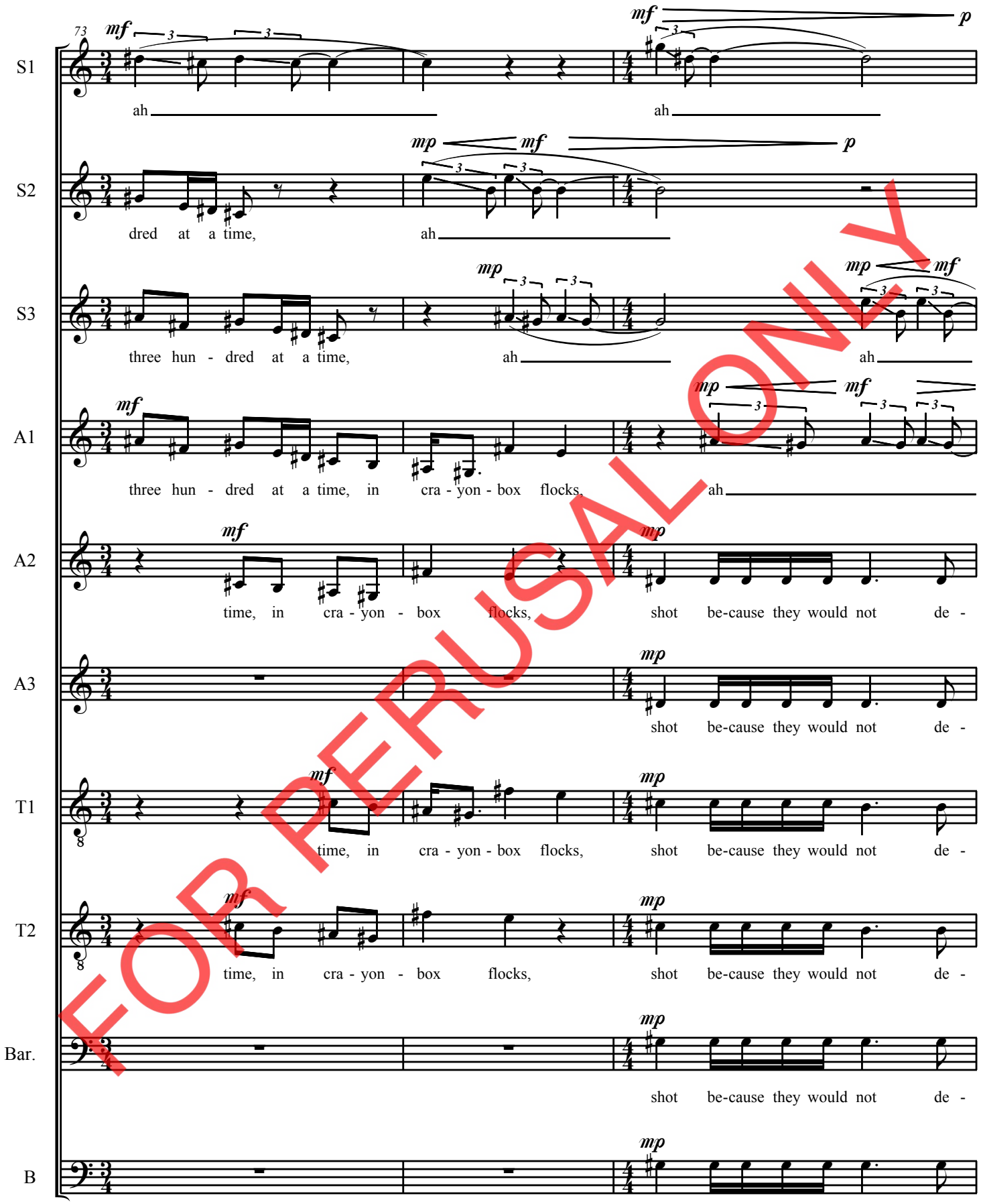

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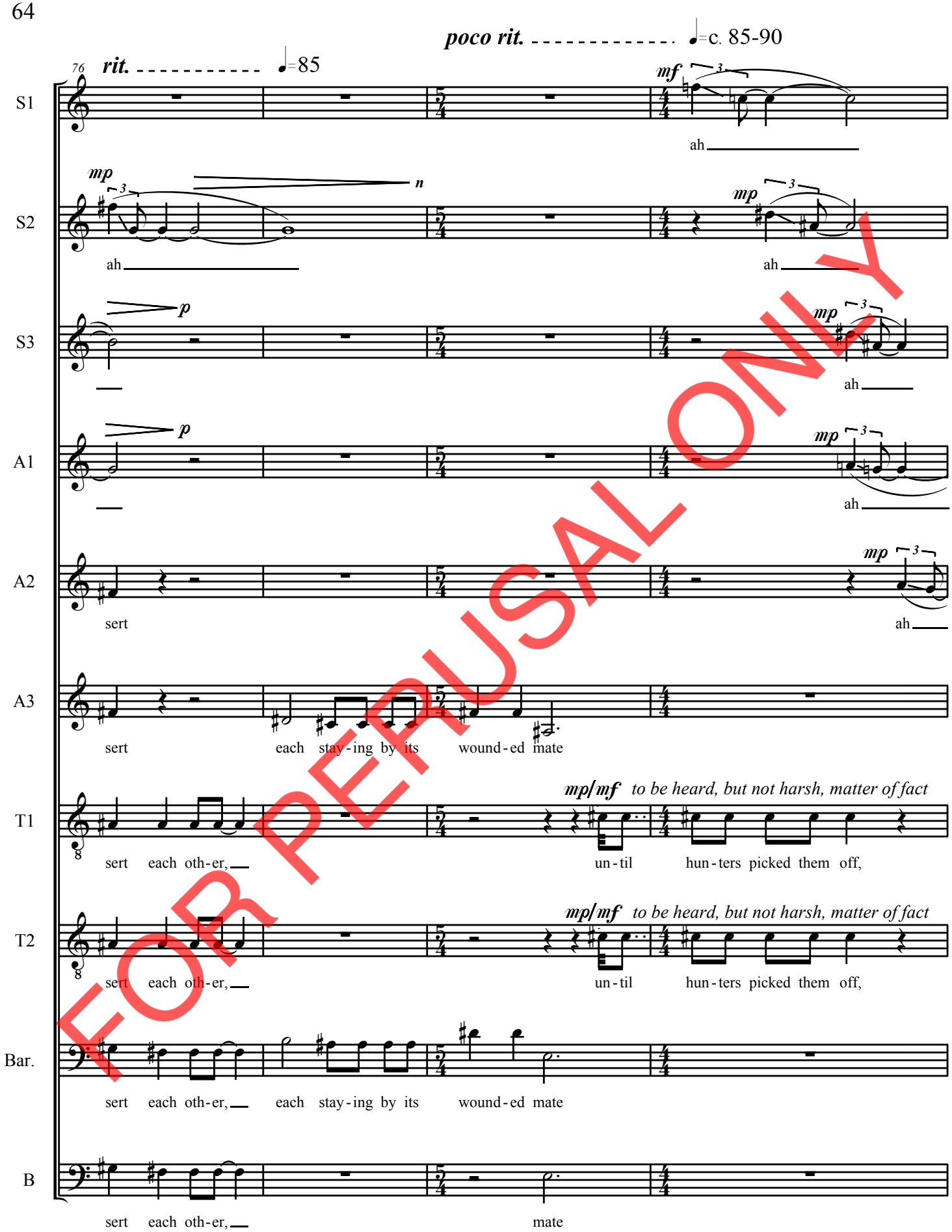

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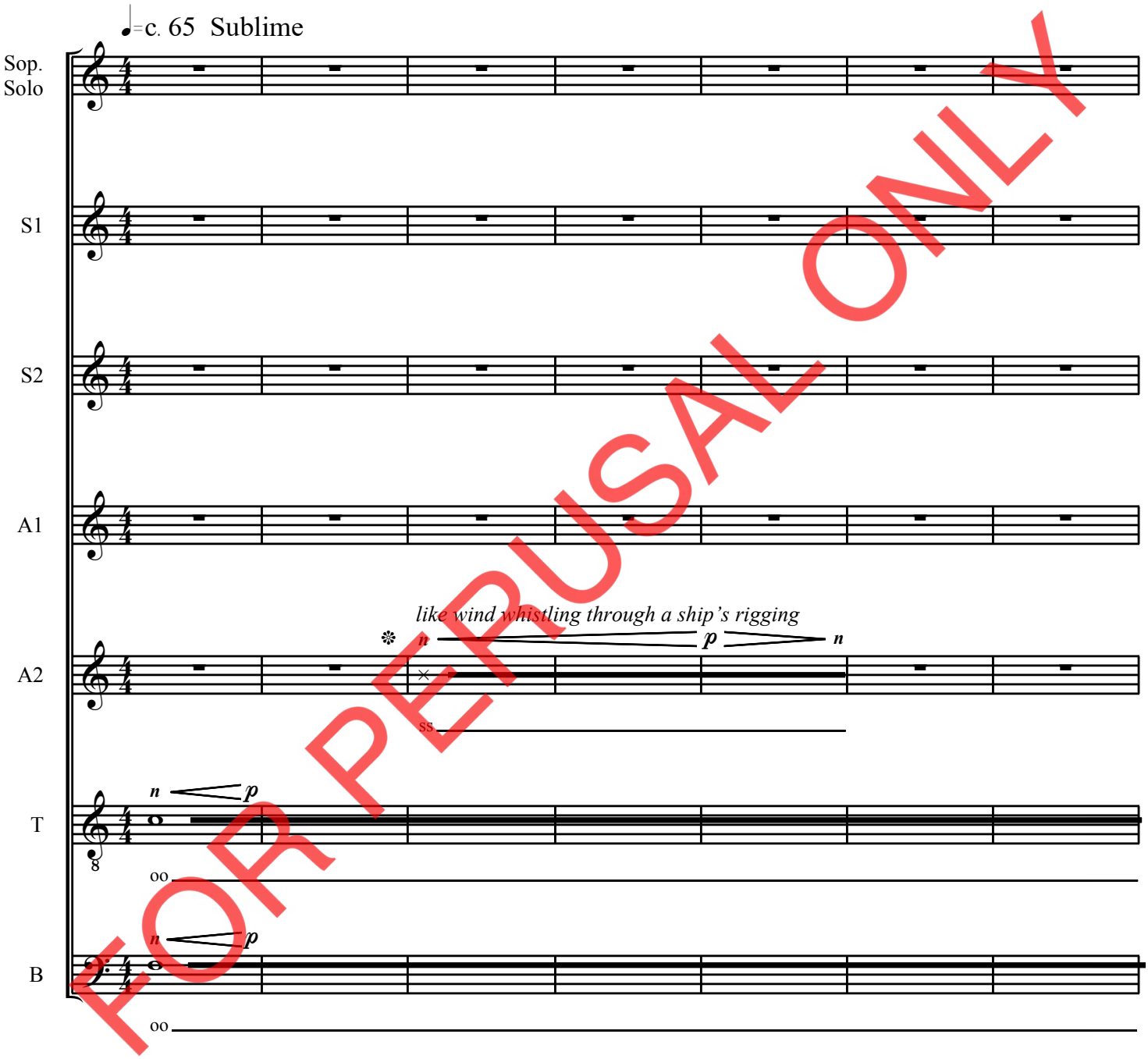
Eyewitness: Lucien M. Turner
and the migration of the Curlews

Eyewitness: Lucien M. Turner (1848-1909) - American ethnologist and naturalist
adapted from "Where Have All the Curlews Gone?" by Paul A. Johnsgard



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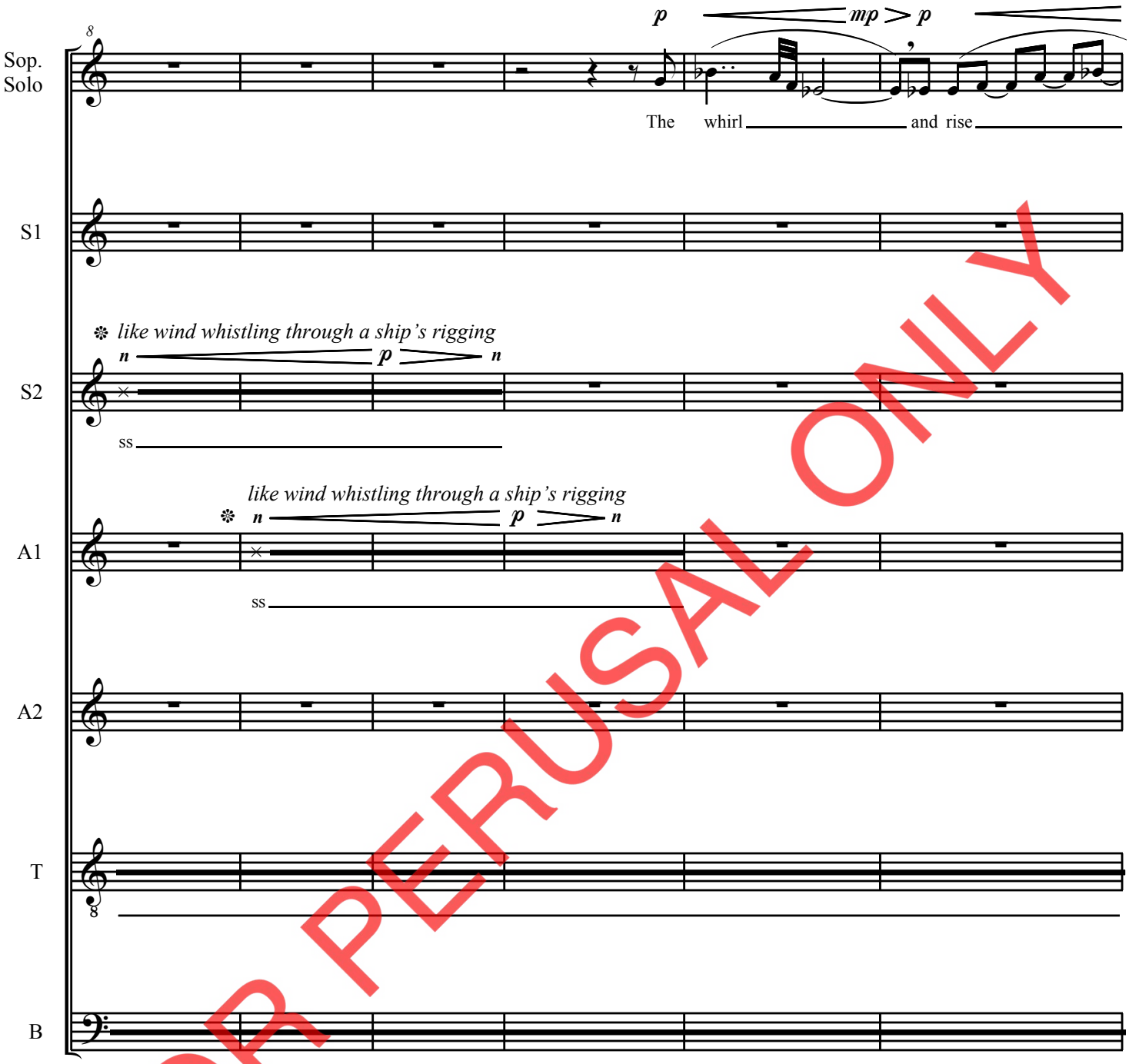
* place tongue just back of hard palate and/or front of soft palate to create quiet whistles mixed with "ss" sounds. The sound should move/be variable.



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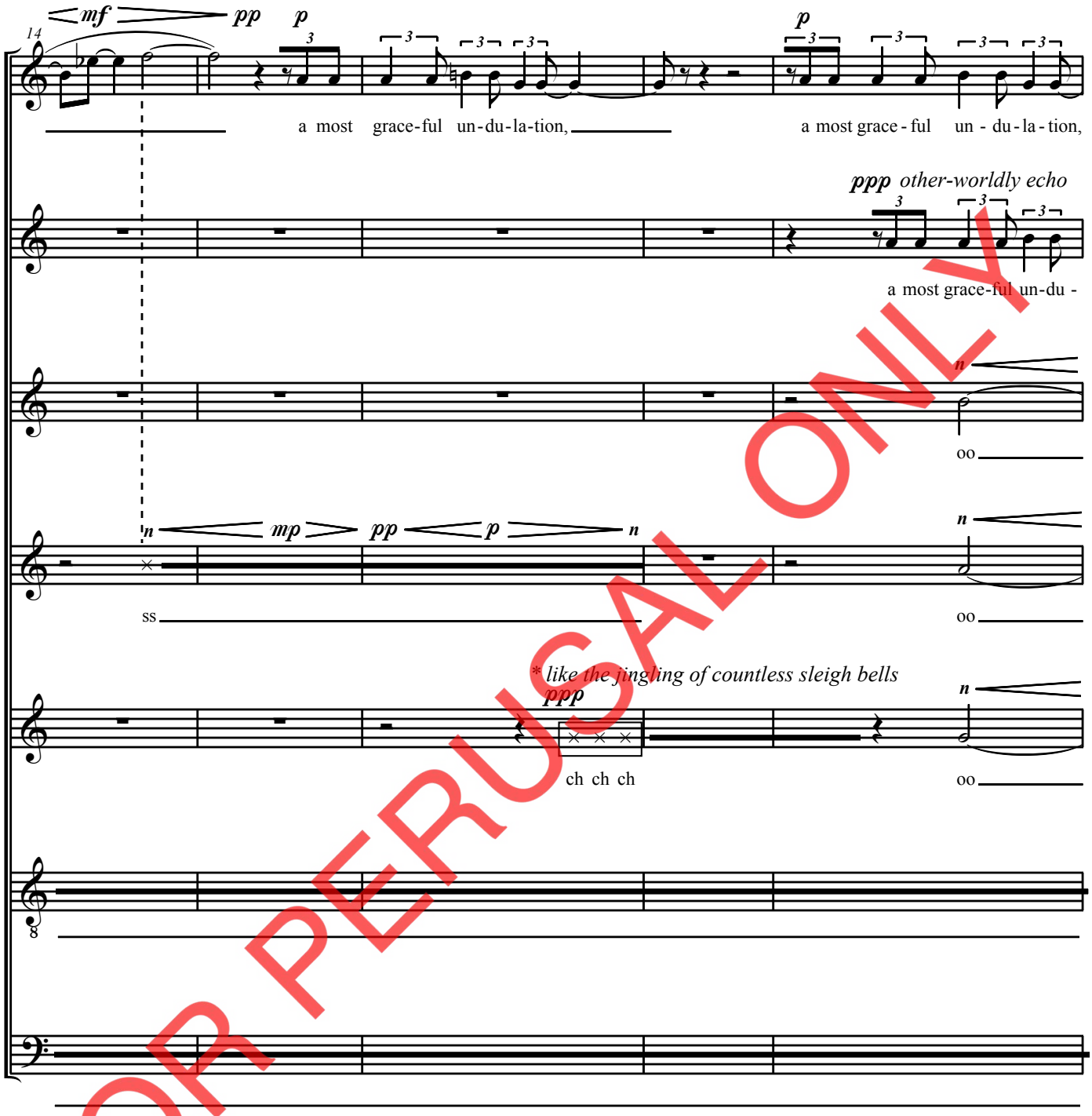

* "ch" as in "chocolate", but a soft, distant "ch". Imagine sleigh bells and what they would sound like when they are so far away in the open sky, barely audible.

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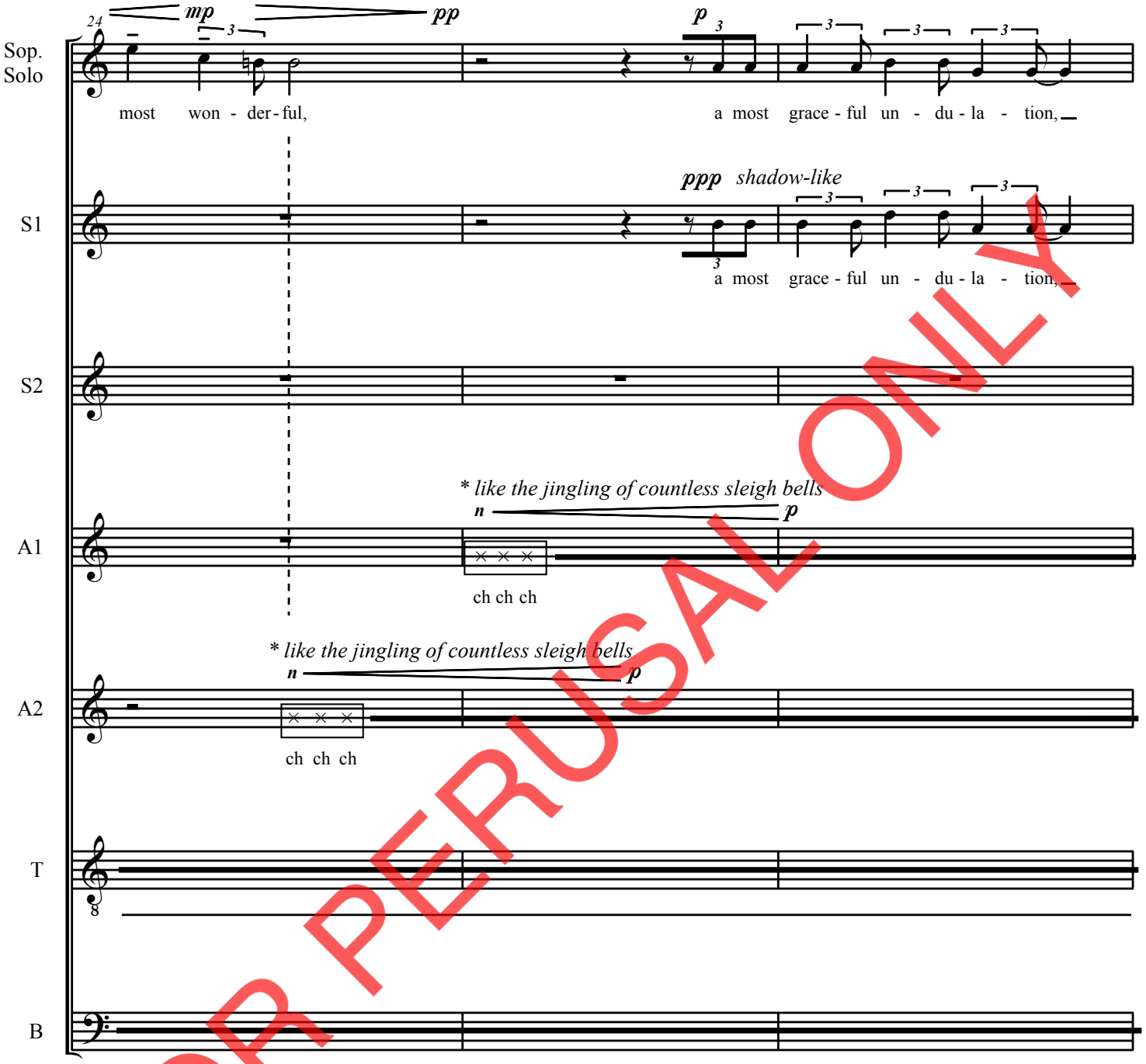

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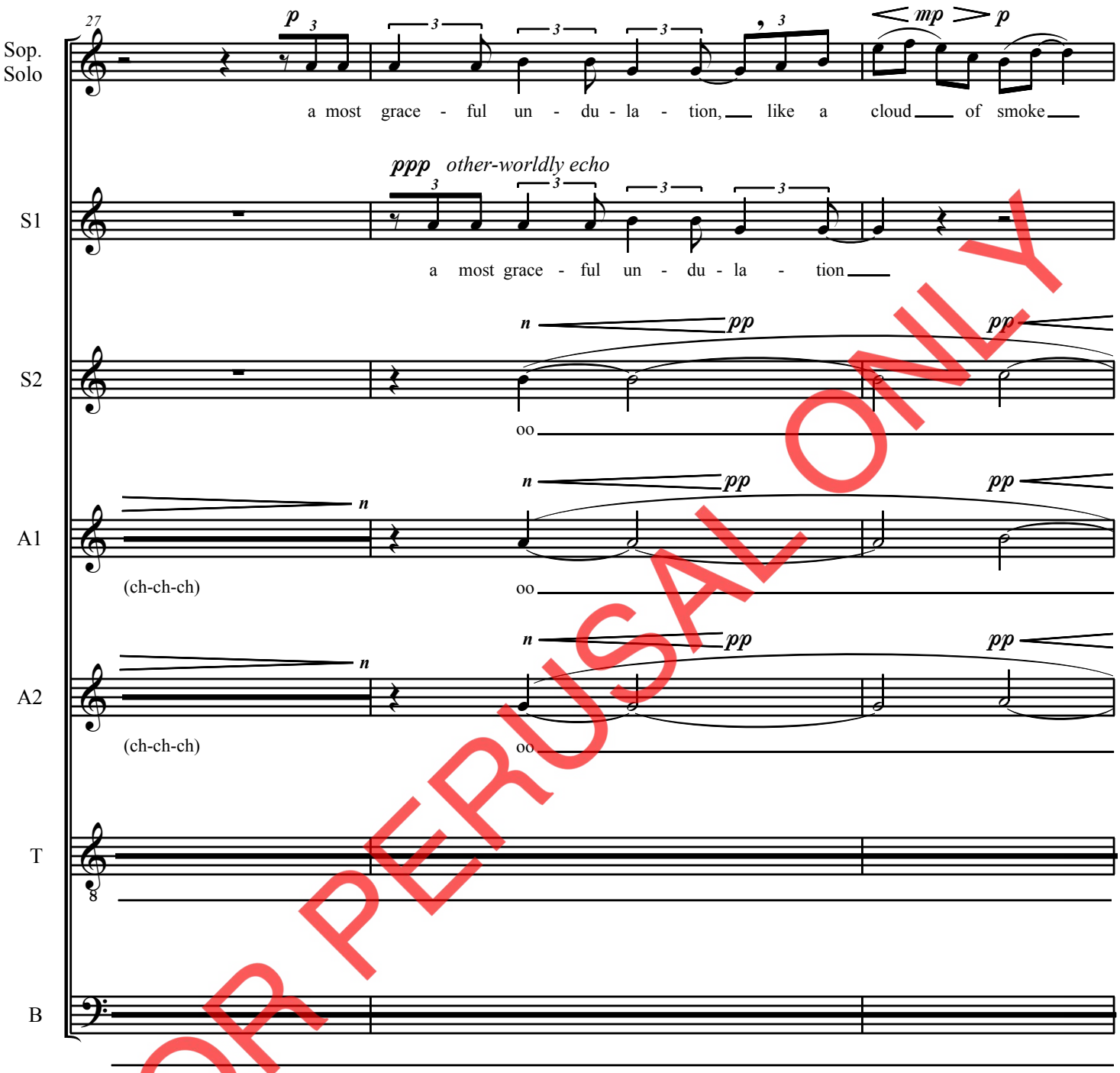

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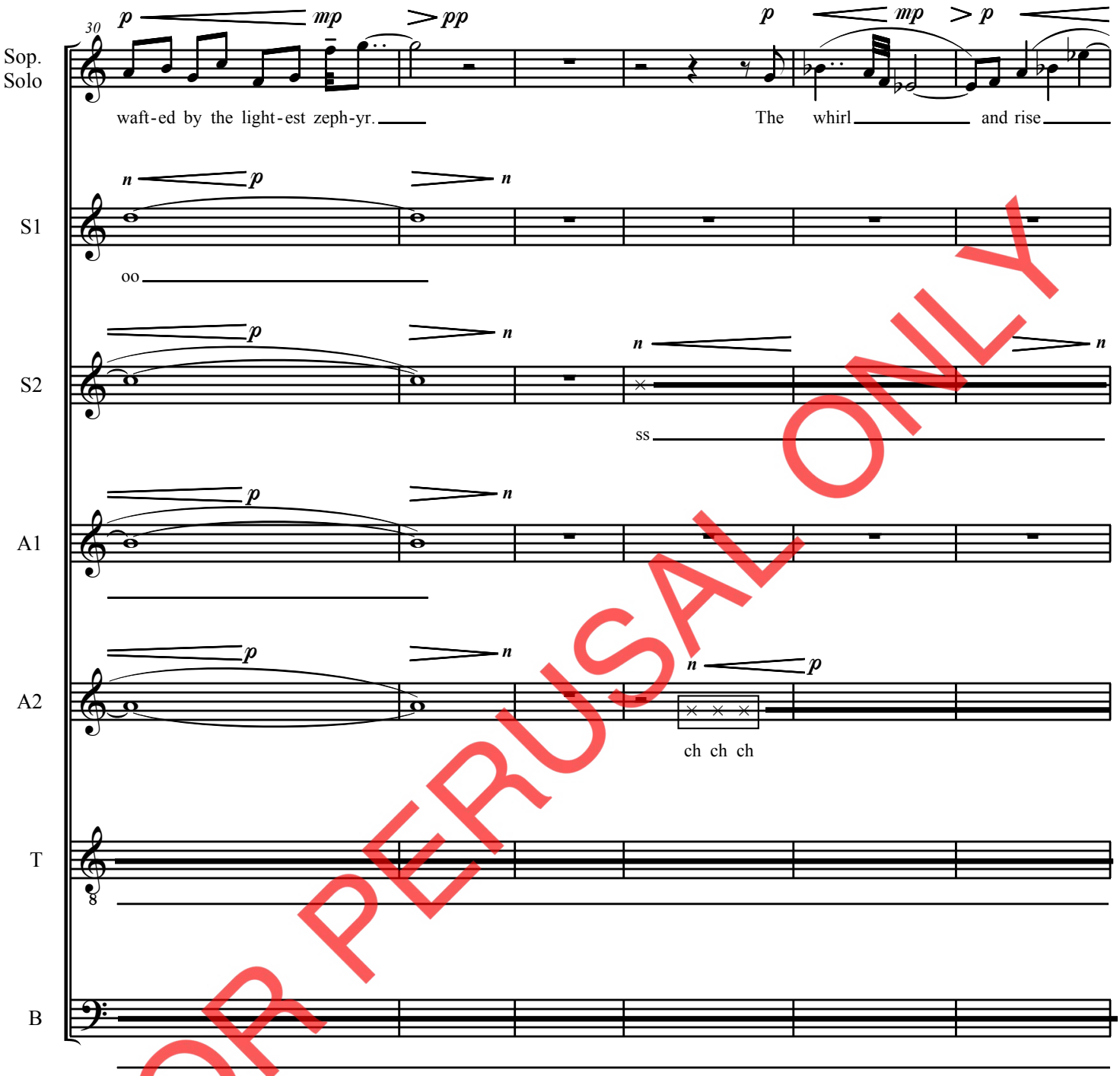

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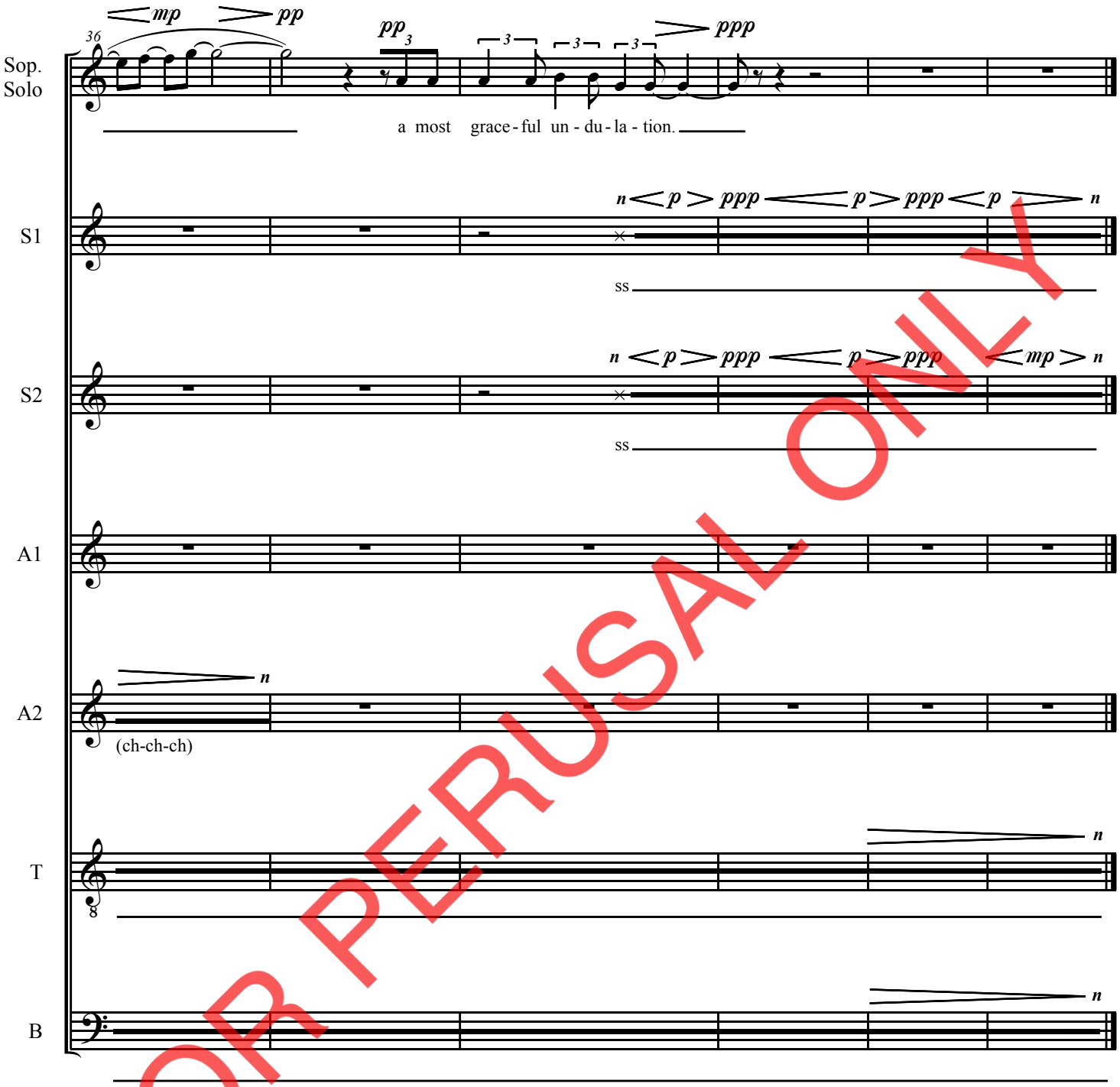

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Alto Solo

mp dolce

Nu - men - i - us bo - re - a - lis. Swift - wing. Sweet - grass. Lit - tle Sic - kle - bill.

NORTHERN CURLEW

HOLLY J. HUGHES

EDIE HILL

♩=c. 65

accel.

S

A

mp tenderly

I grew up read - ing The Last of the Cur - lews be - fore bed, your

T

B

4

♩=c. 95

rit.

♩=c. 65

S

A

cres - cent - moon beak beck - on - ing me north. E - ven then you were al - most gone, E - ven

p *pp* *mf* *p*

T

north. E - ven

p *p*

B

E - ven then you were al - most gone, E - ven

pp *mf* *p*

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Music Services by Paul Gerike

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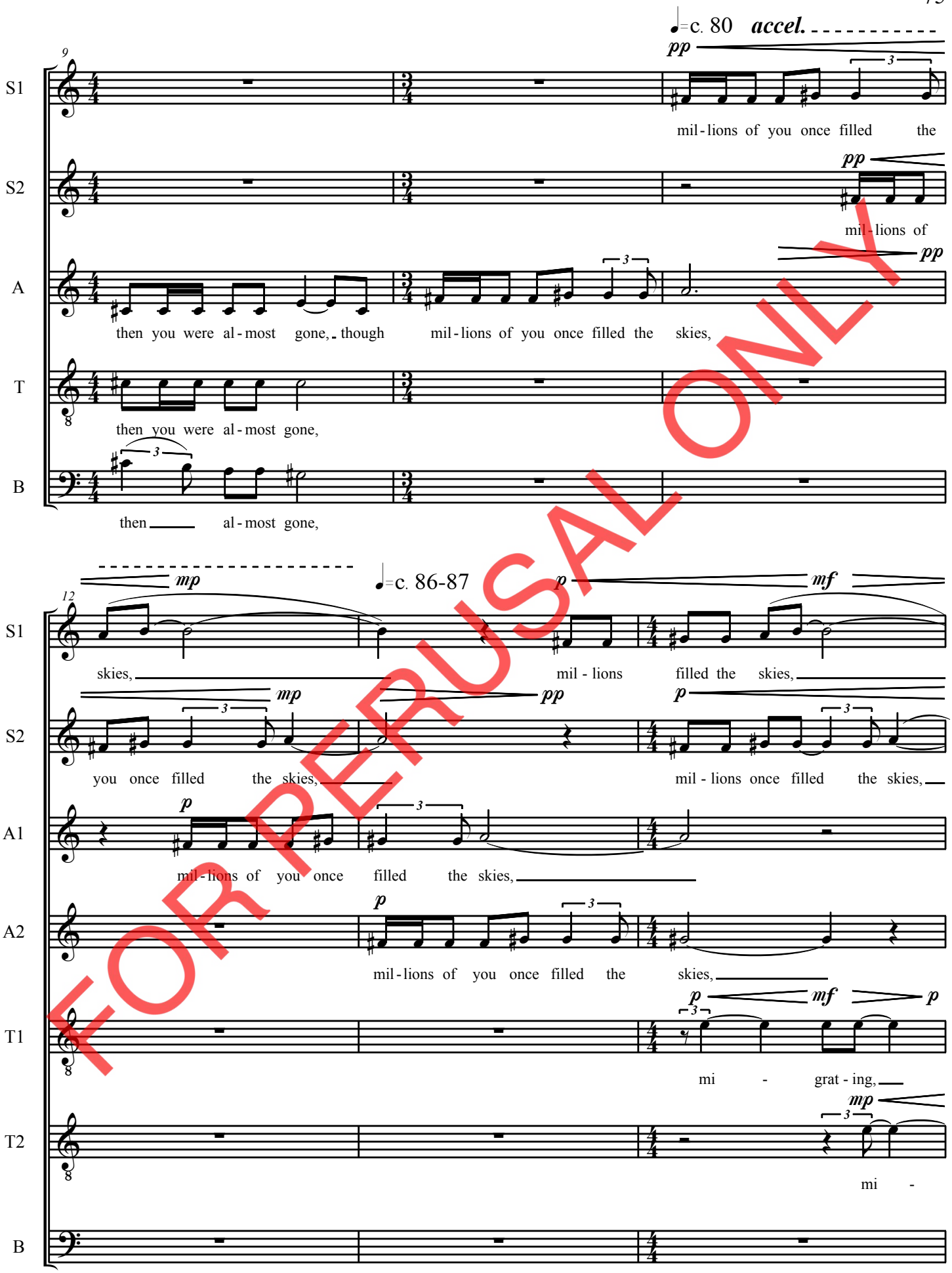

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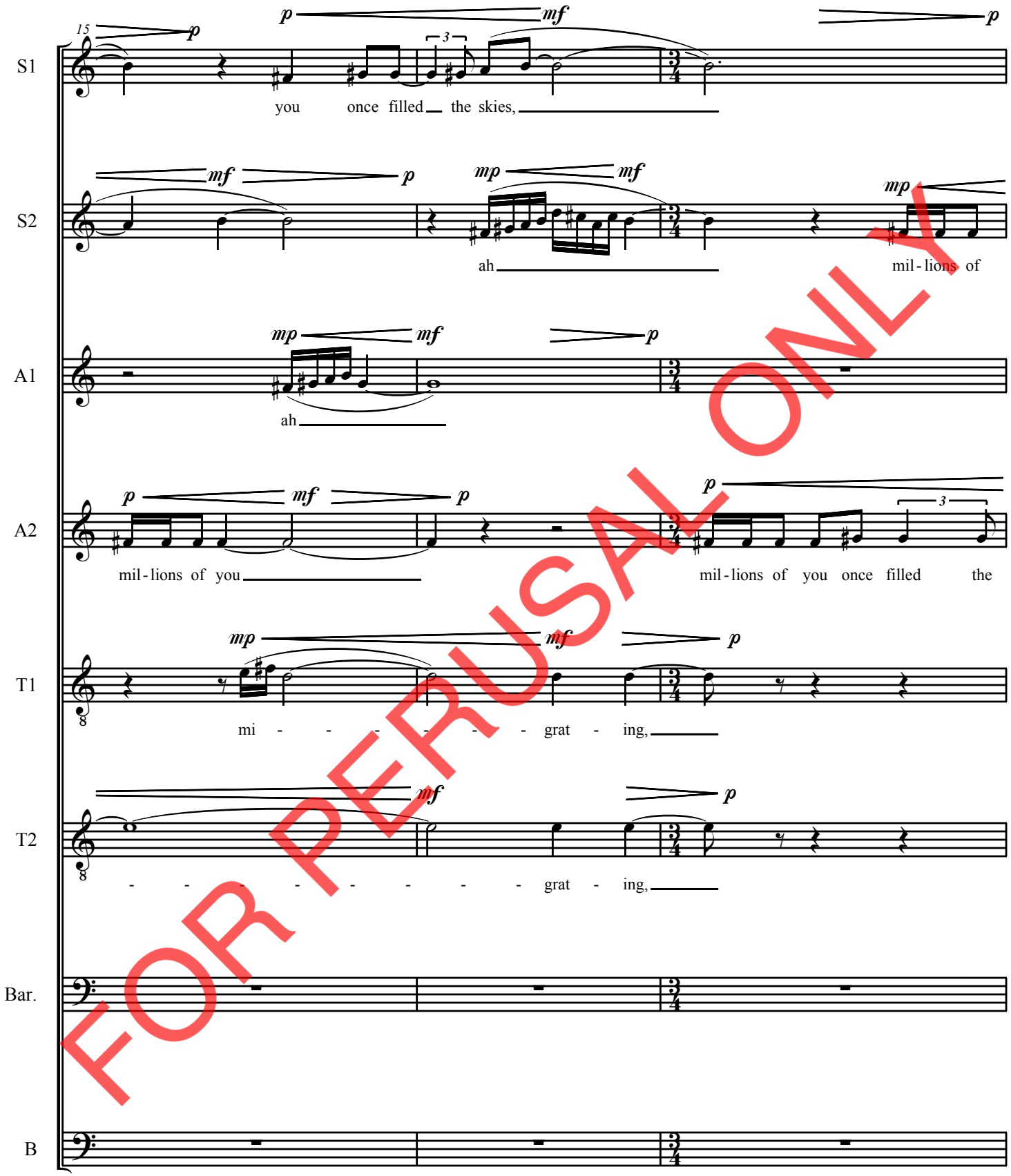

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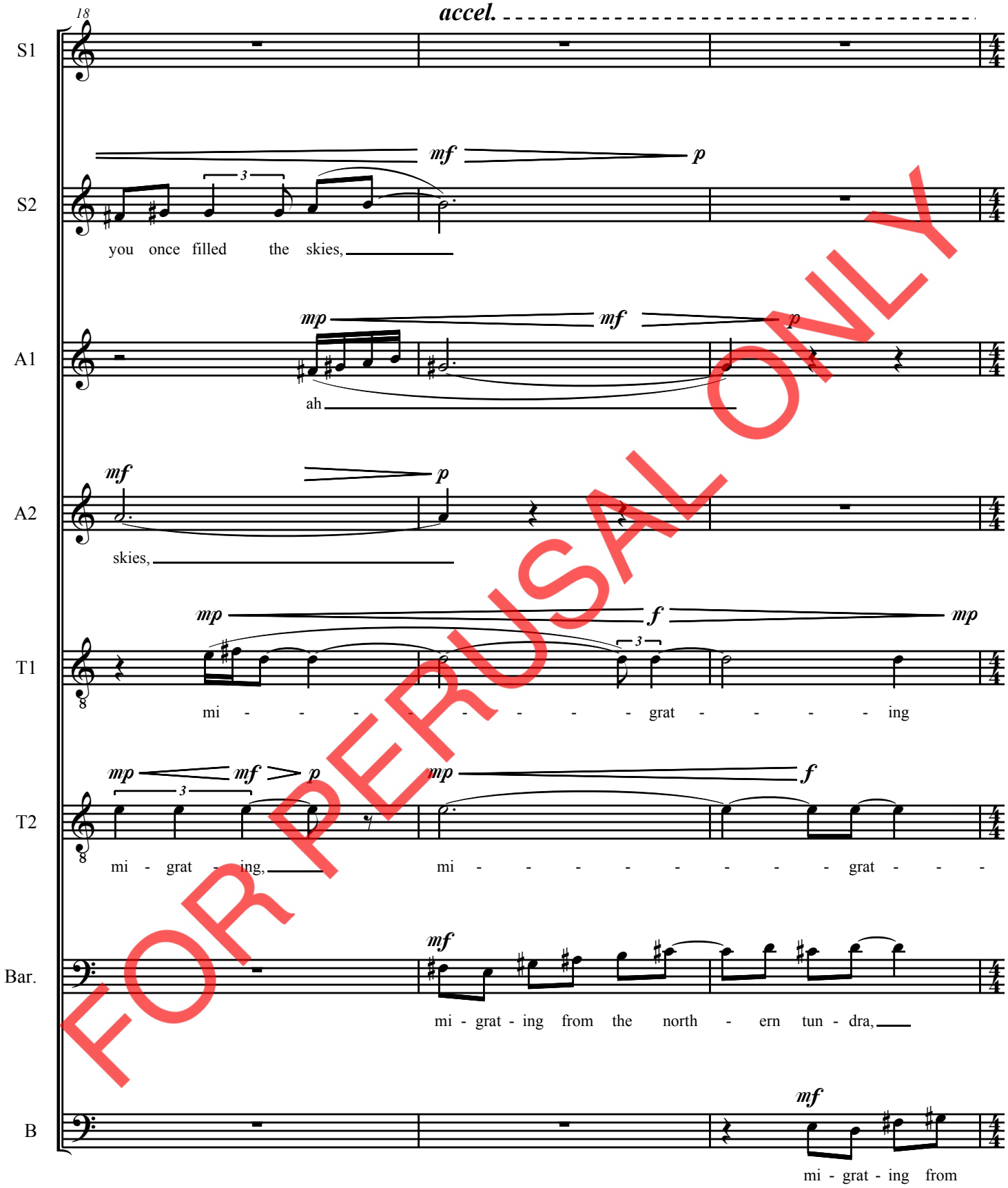

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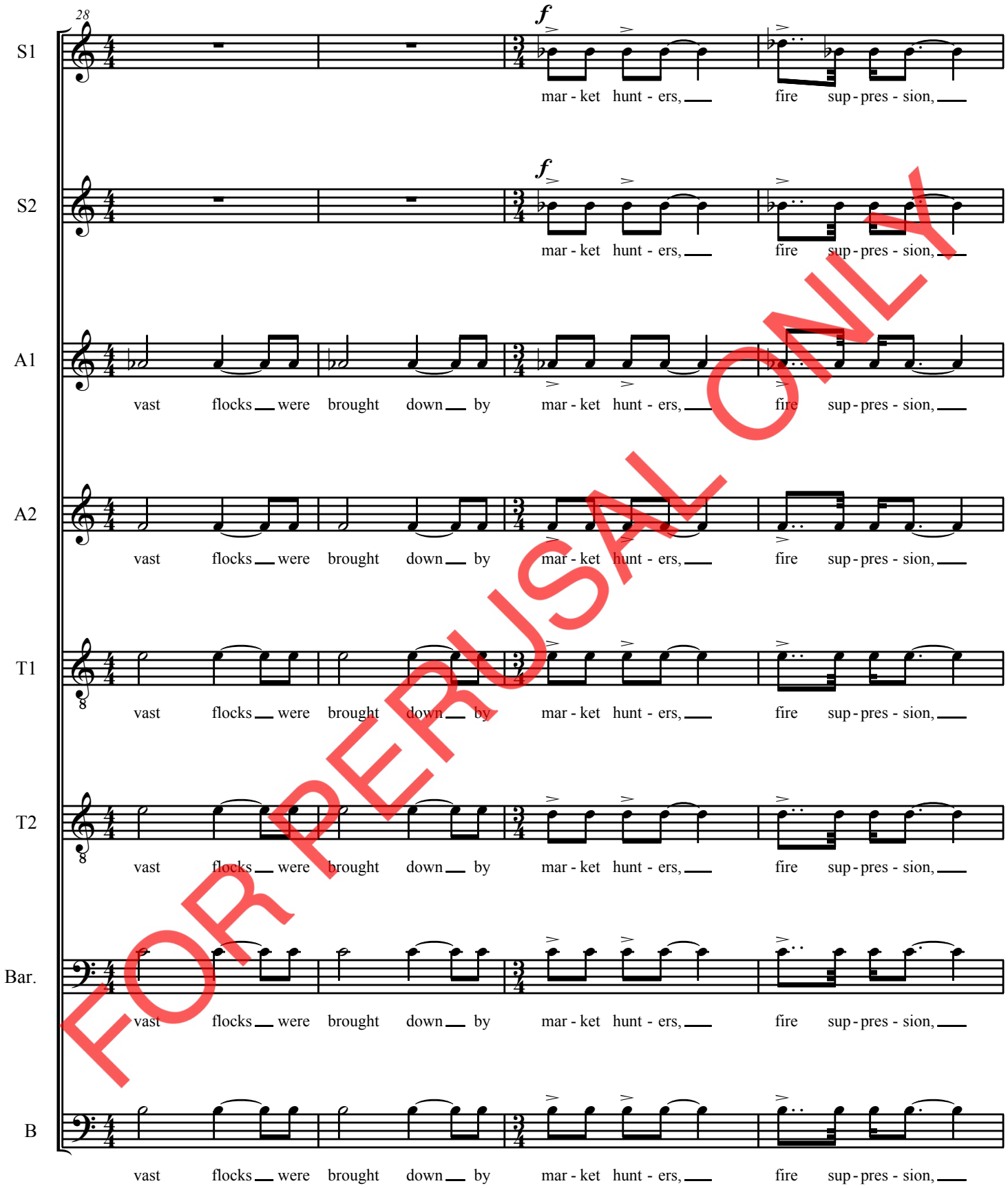

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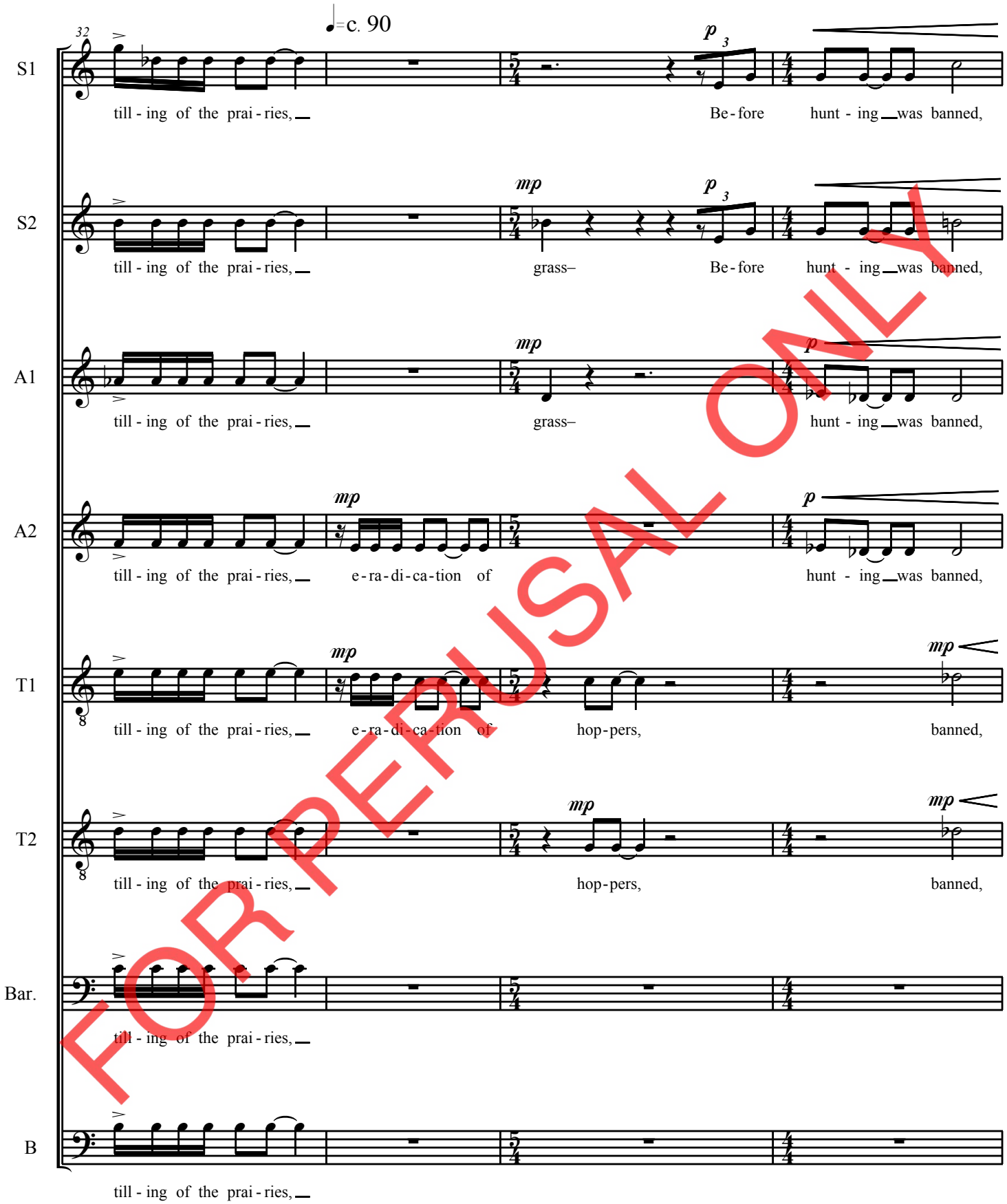

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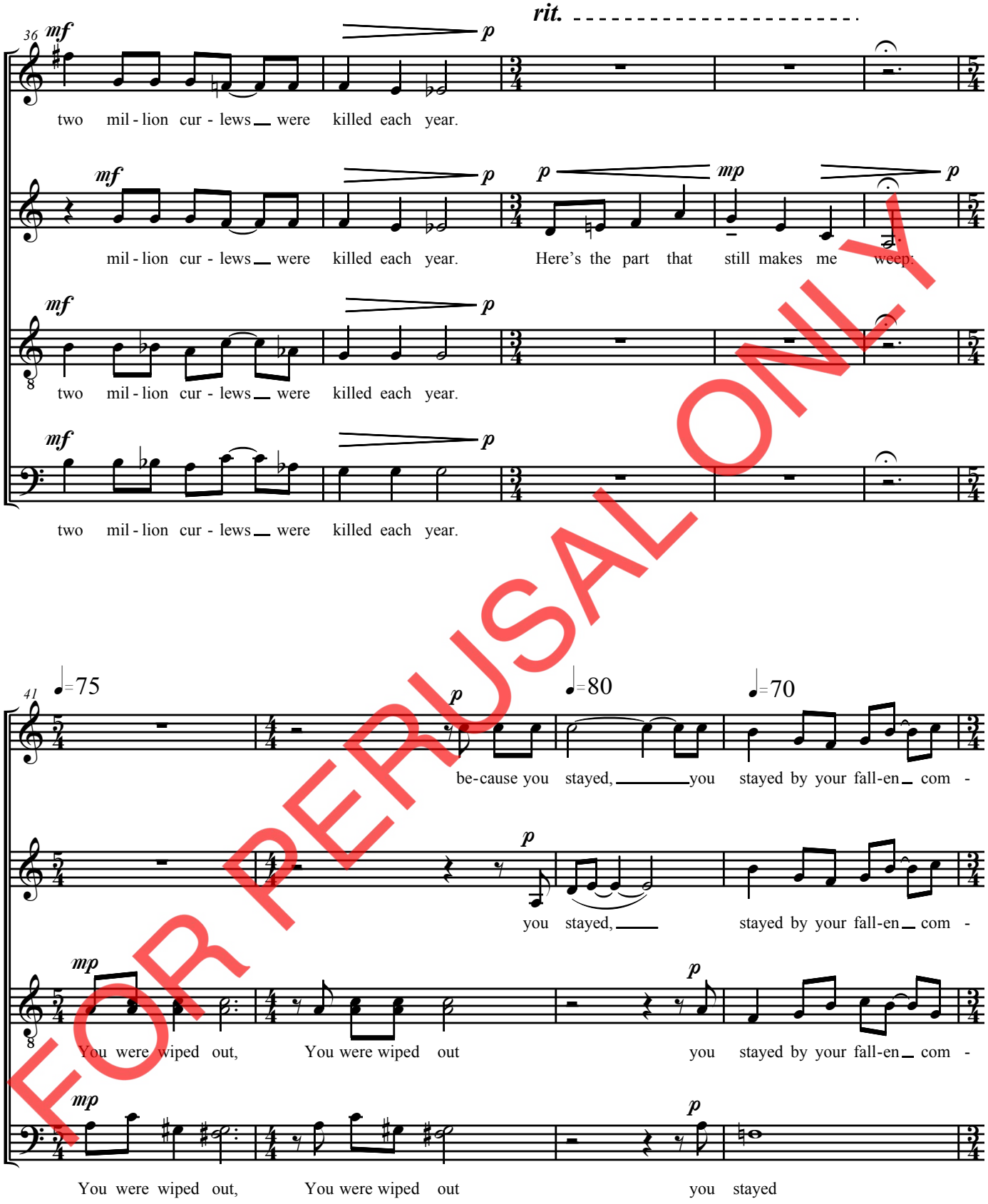

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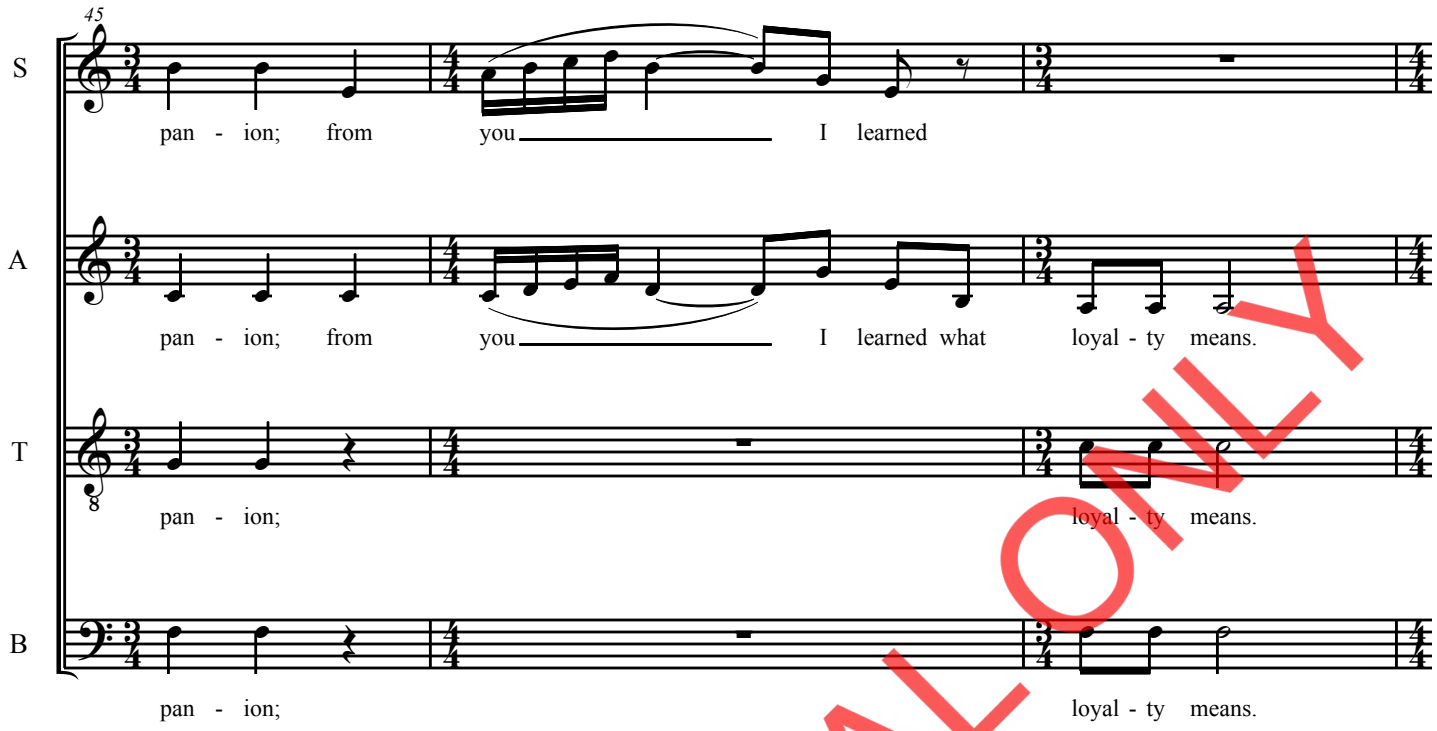

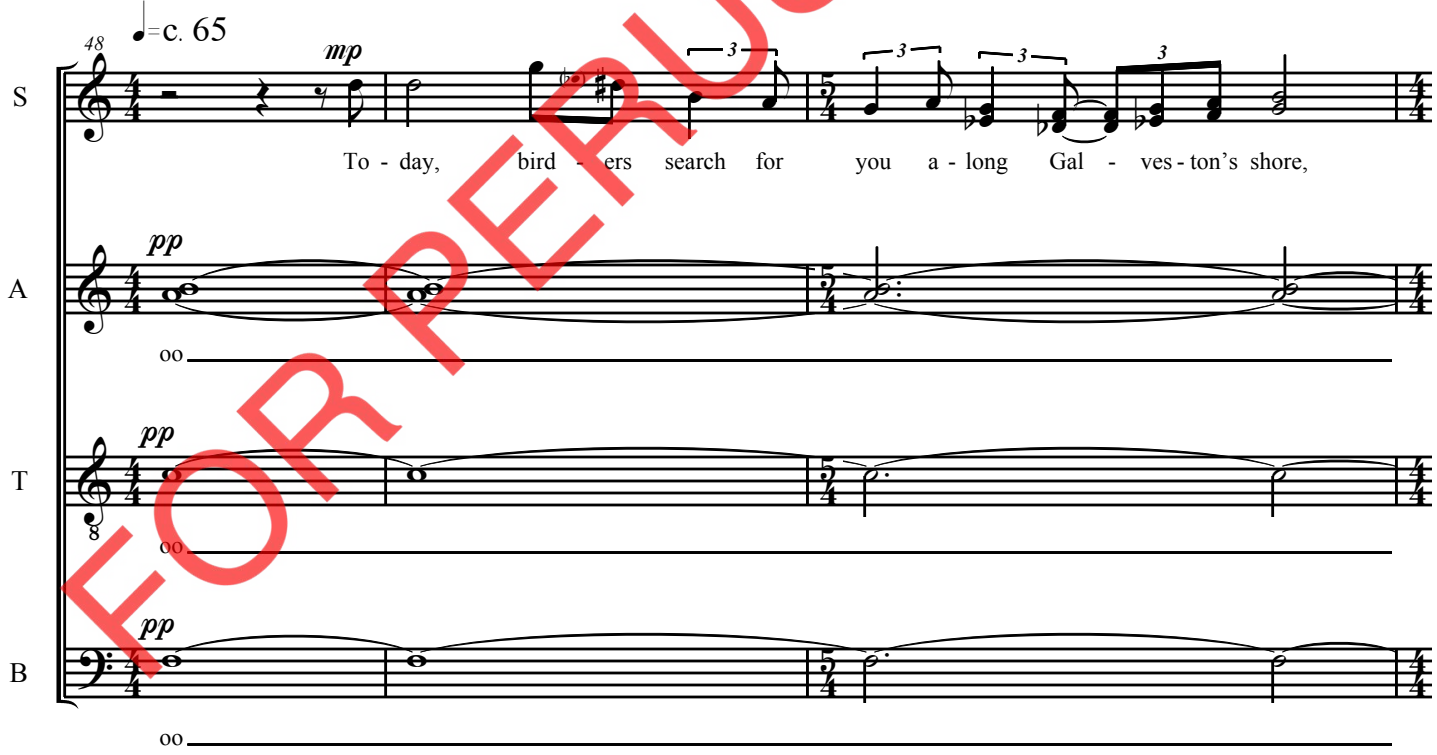

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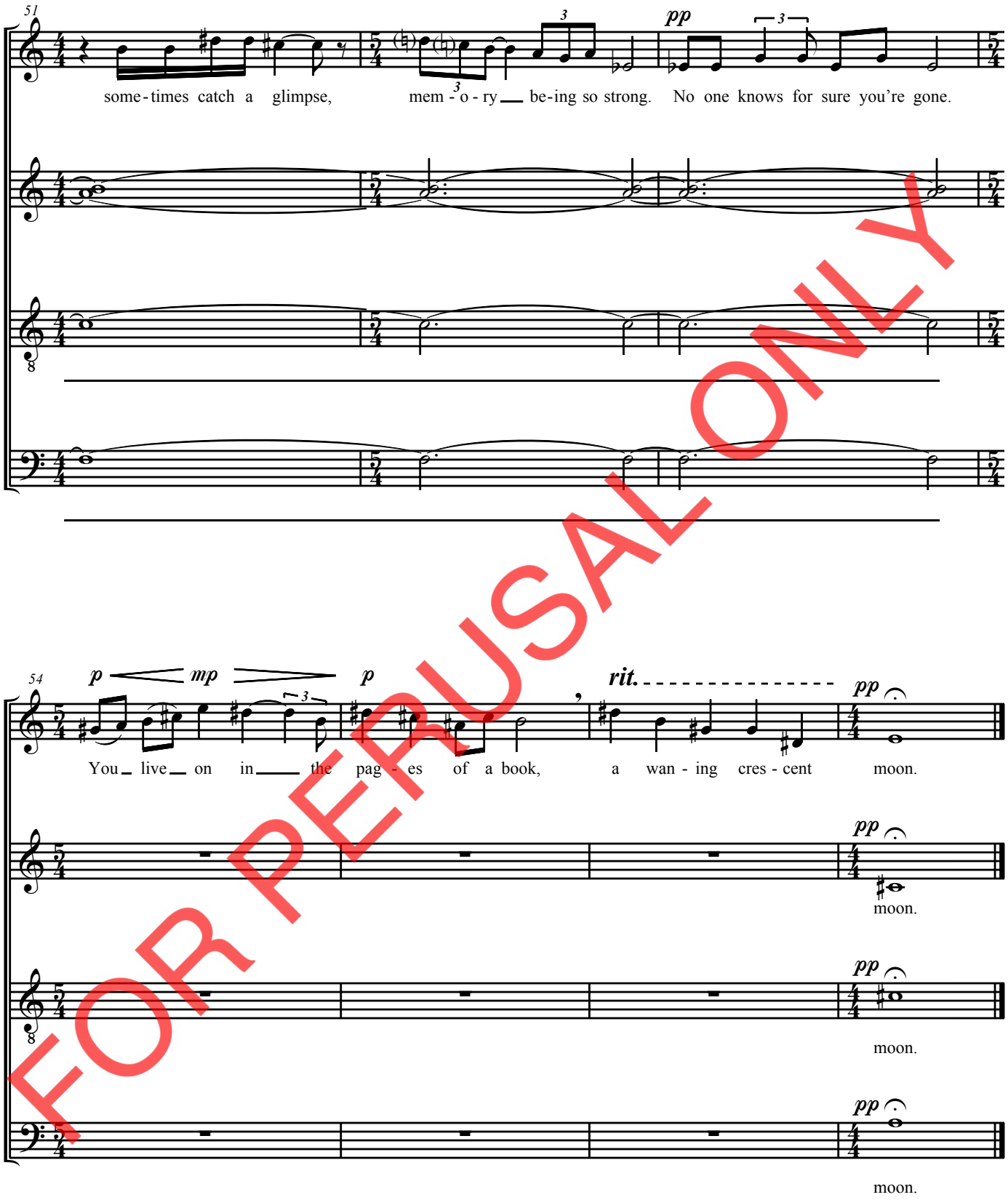

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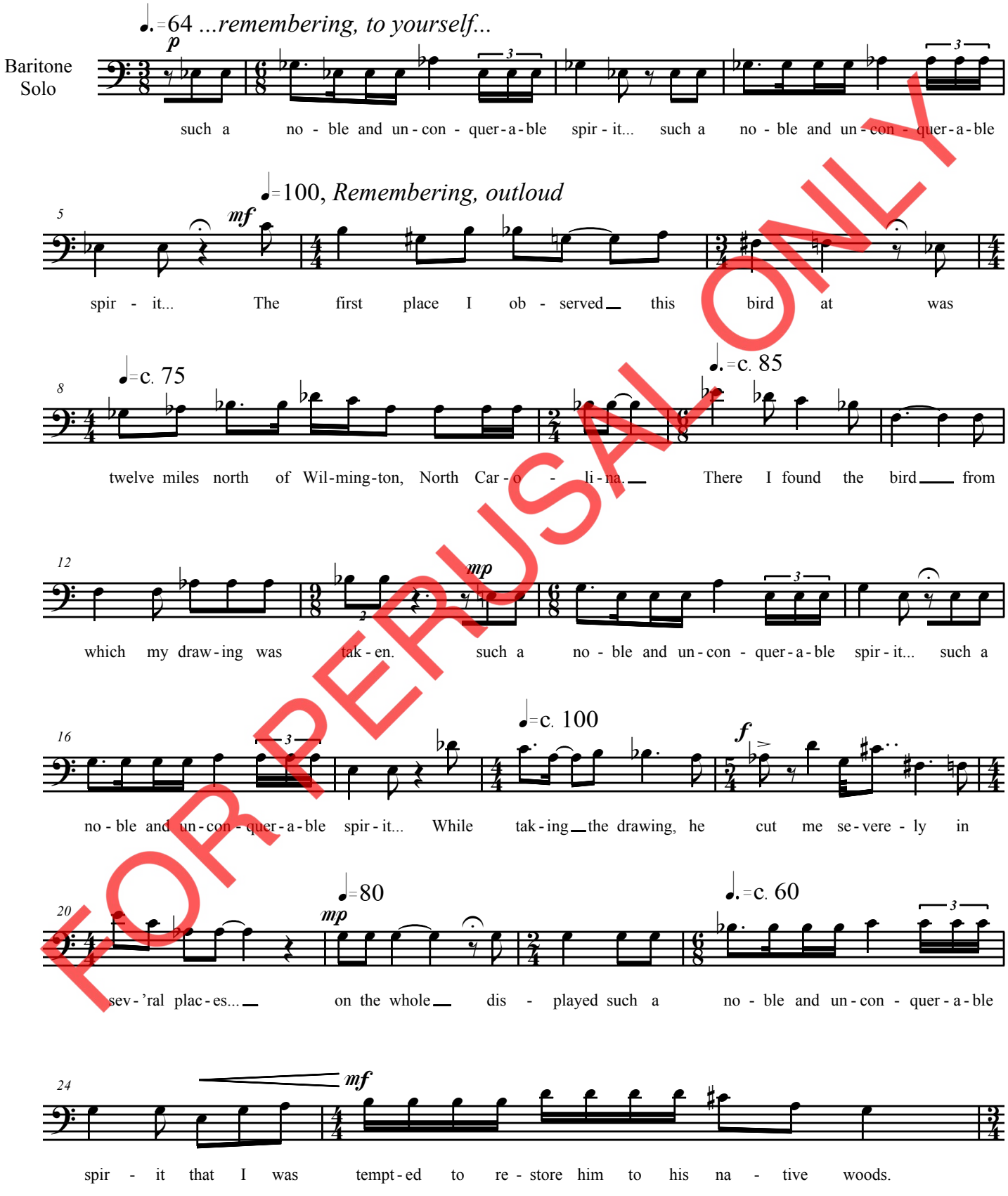
Eyewitness: Mr. Wilson and the Ivory-Bill

Eyewitness: Alexancer Wilson (1766-1813) Scottish-American poet and ornithologist, 1811
adapted from *Hope is the Thing with Feathers* by Christopher Cokinos



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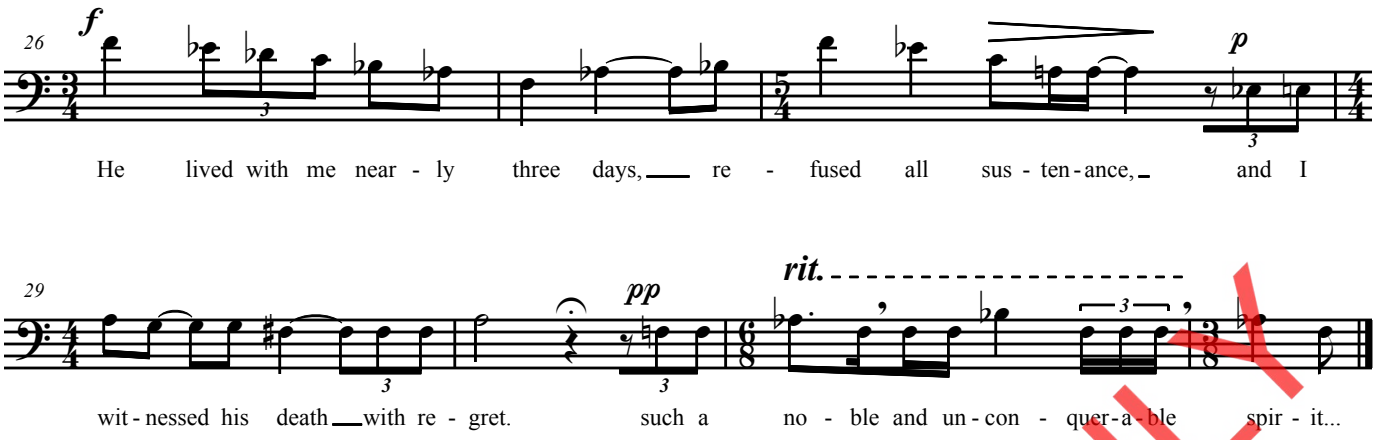

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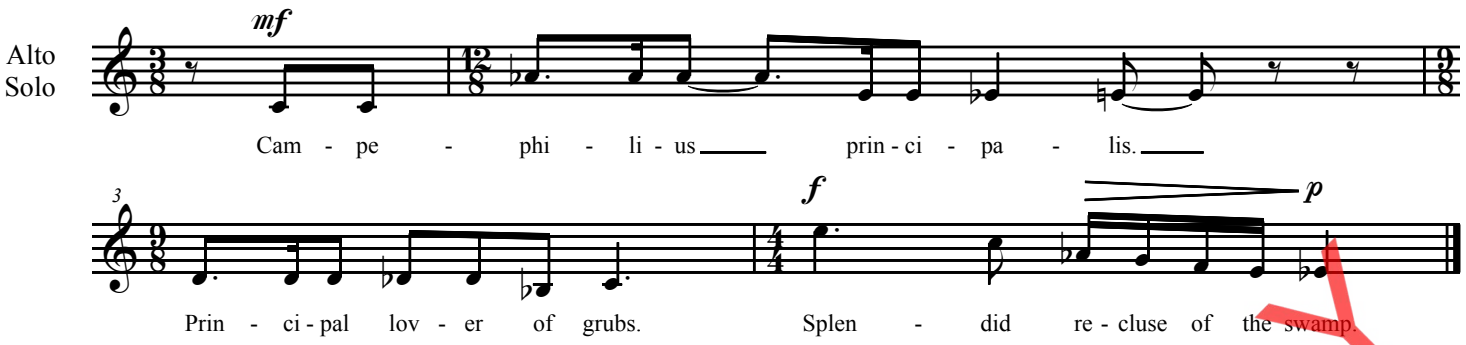
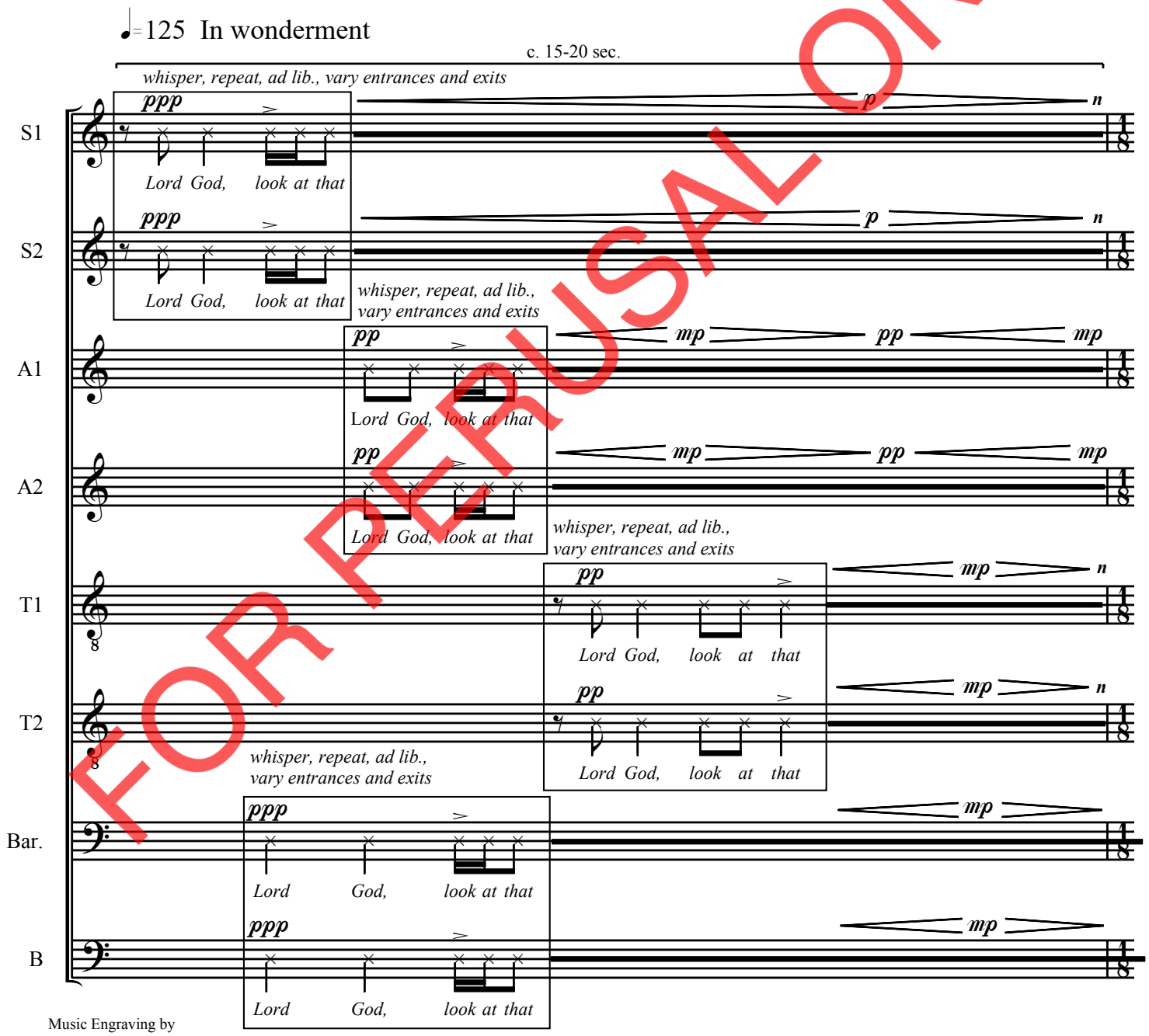


IVORY-BILLED WOODPECKER

HOLLY J. HUGHES EDIE HILL



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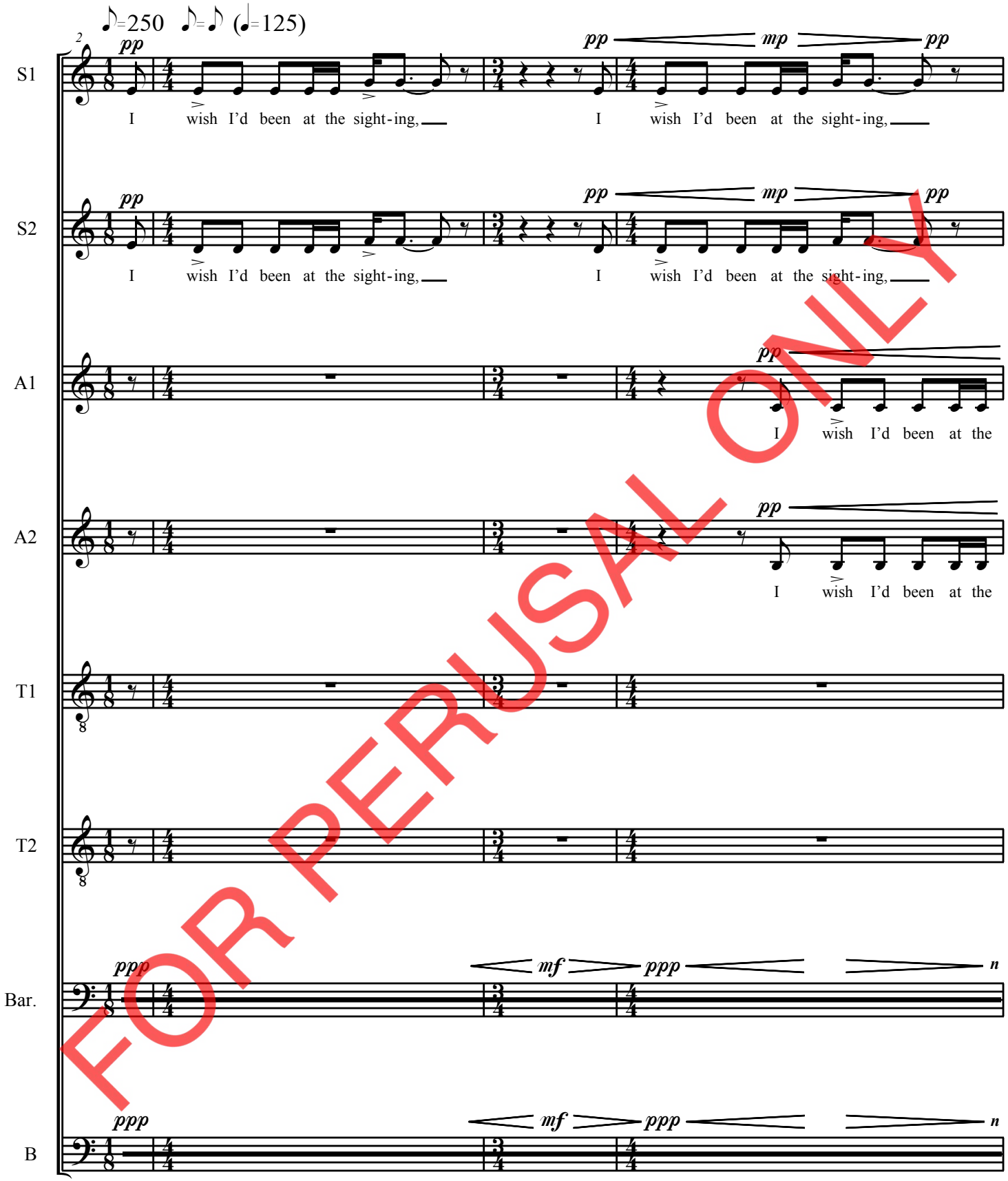

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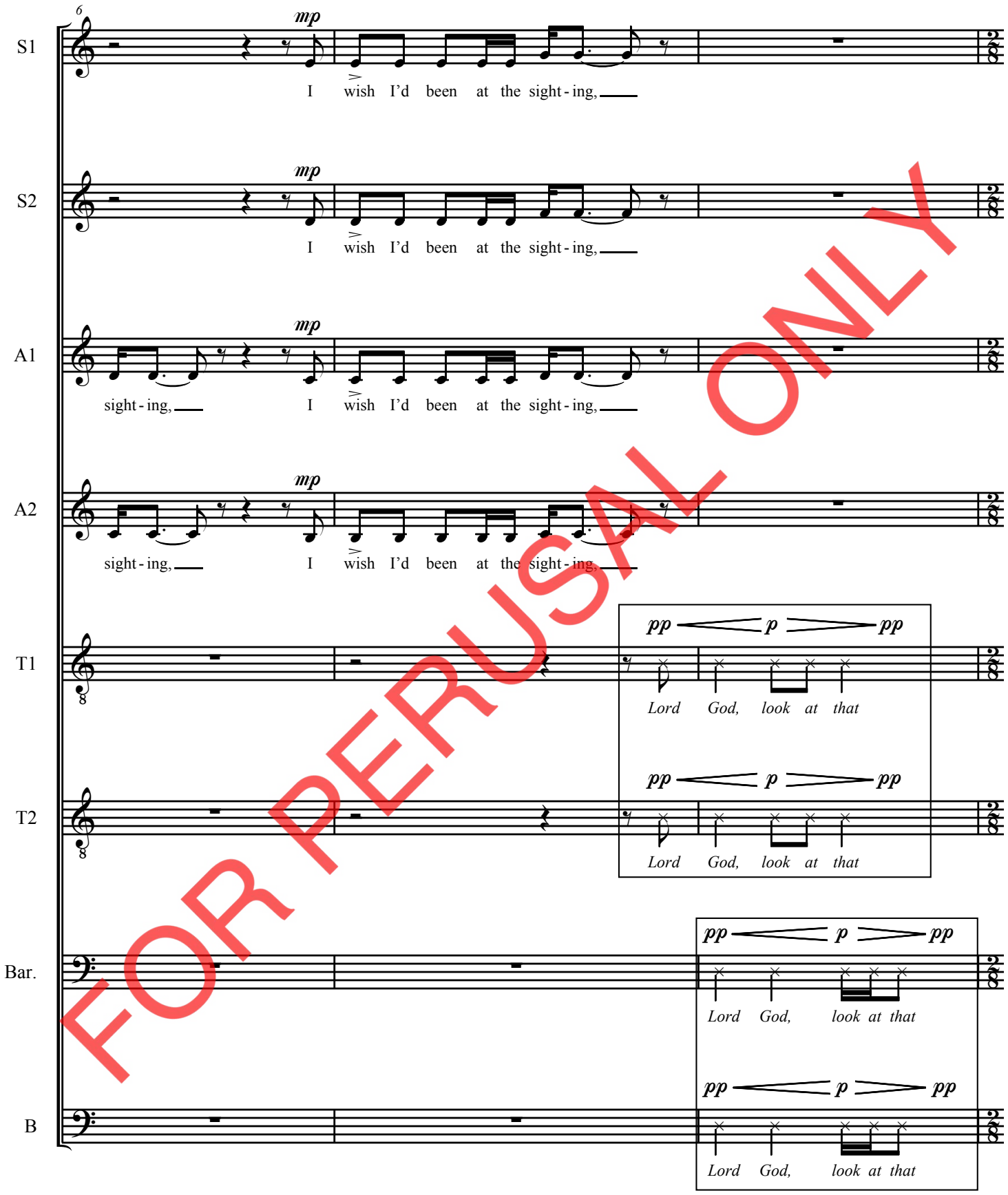

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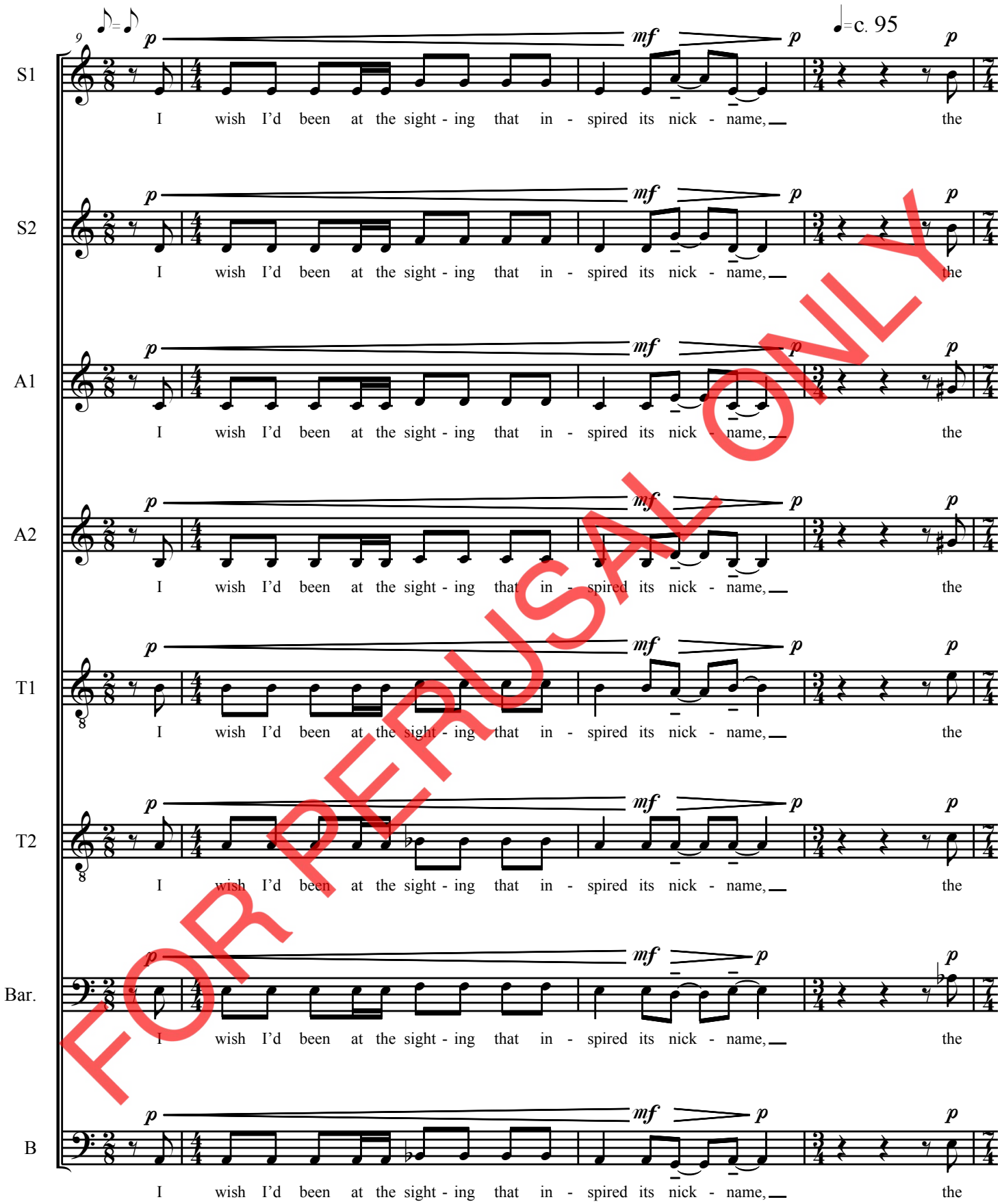

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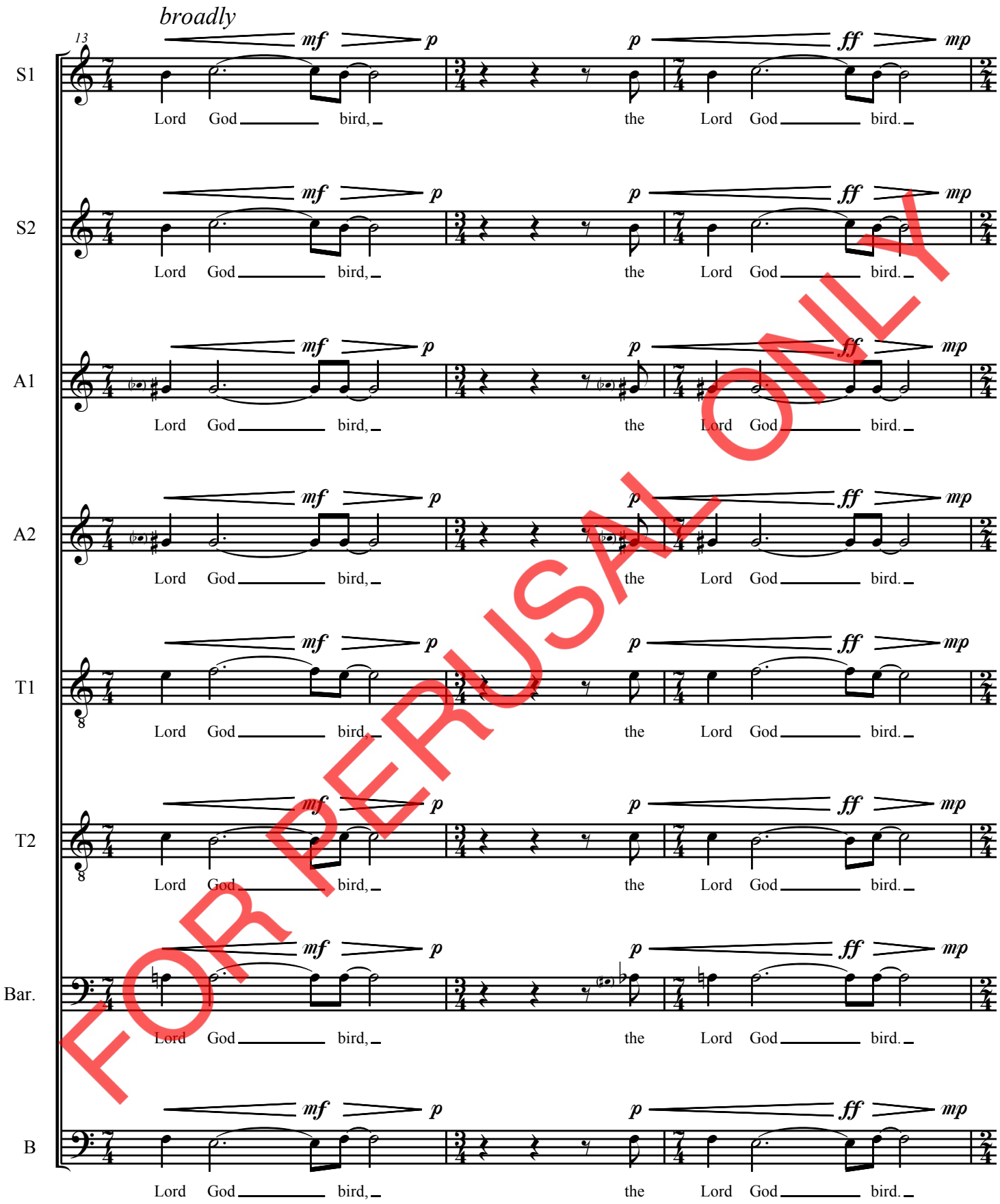

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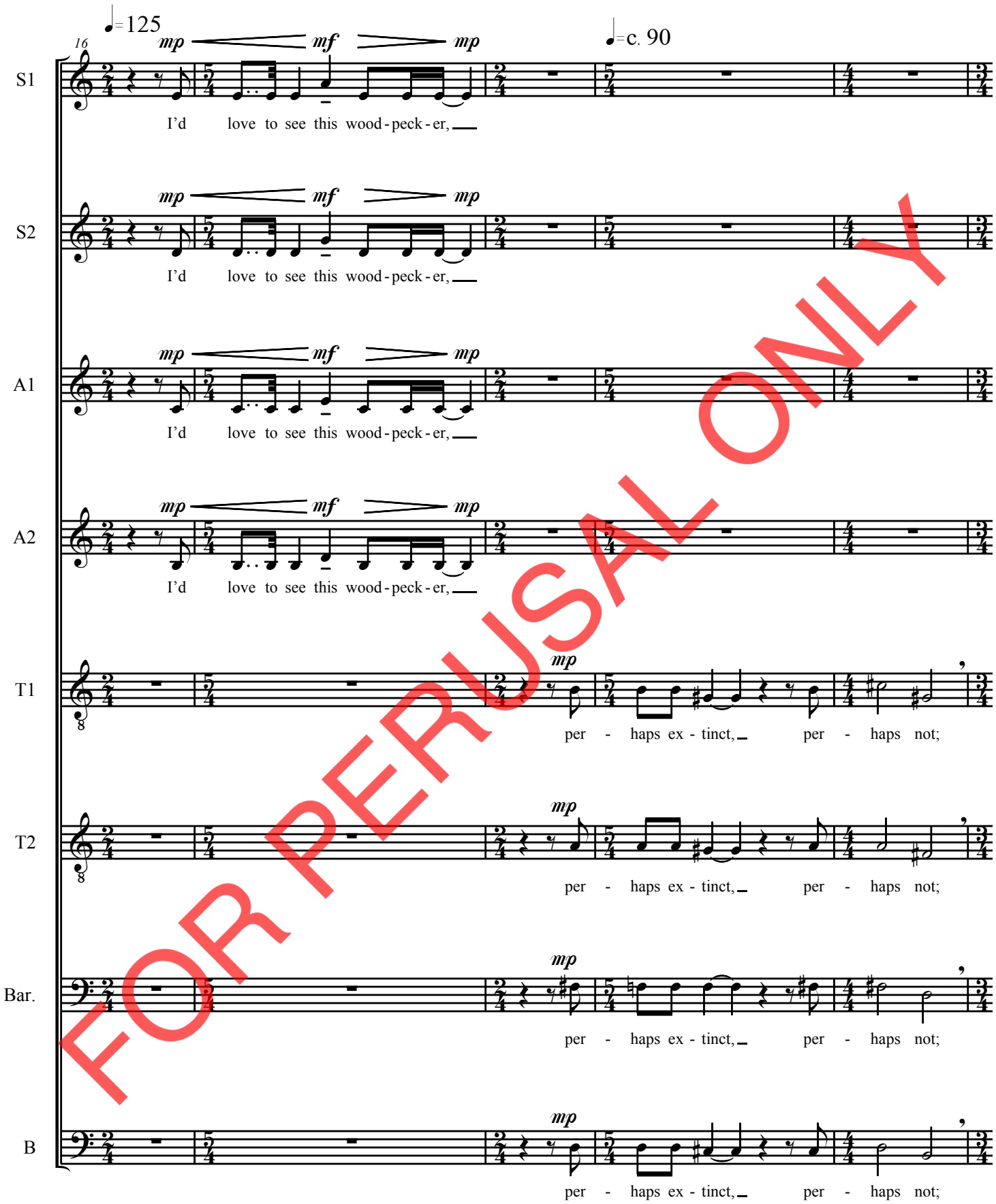

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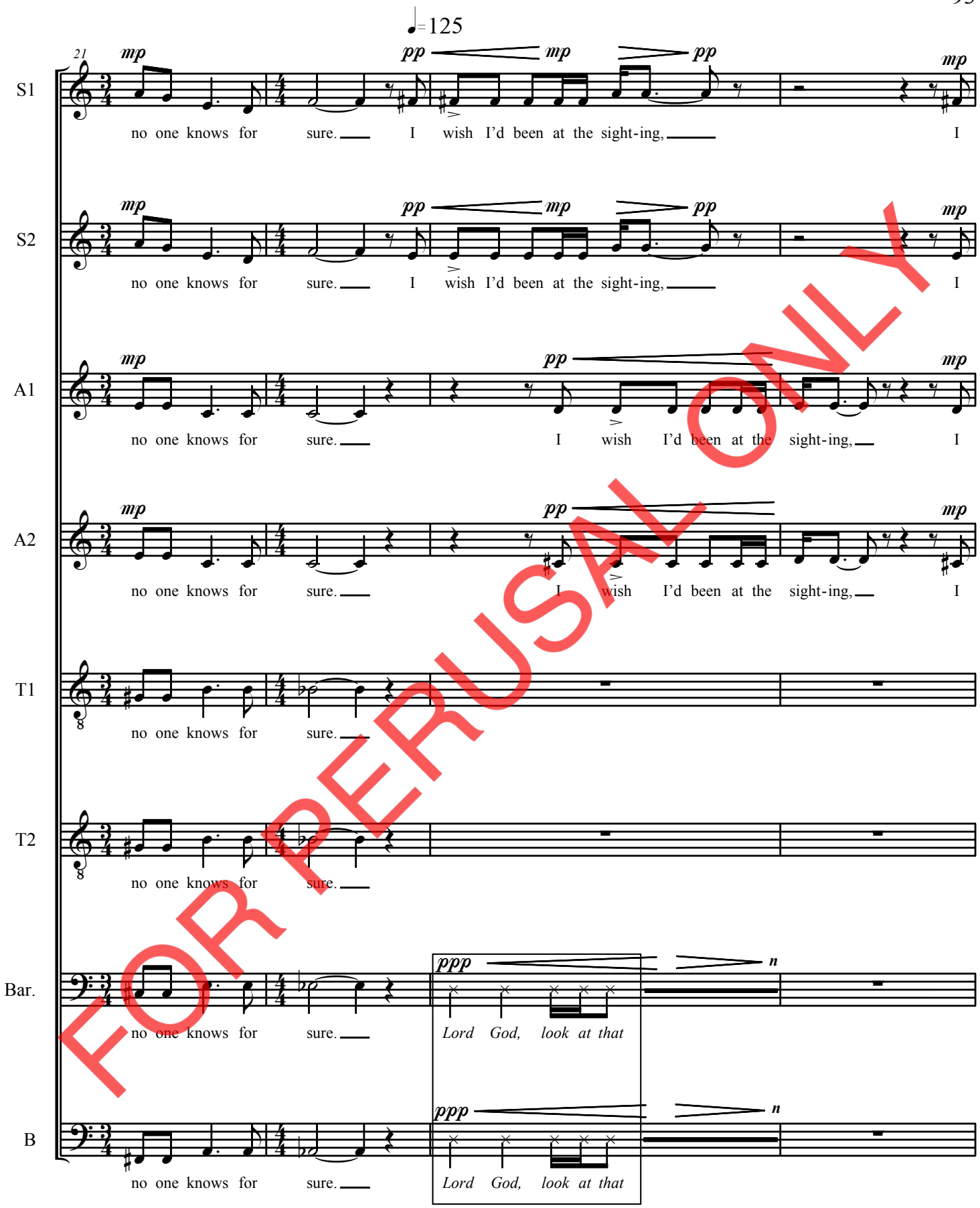

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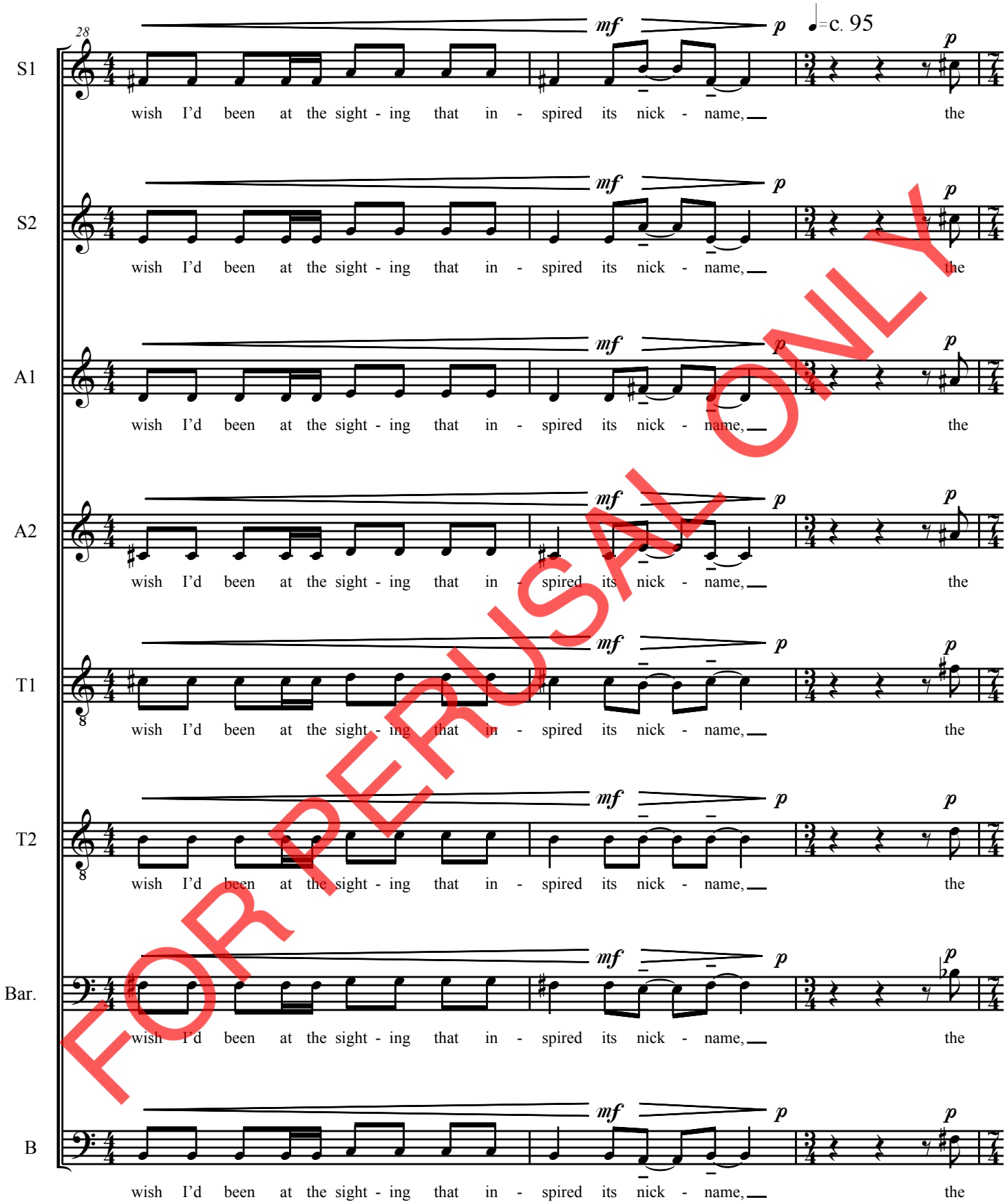

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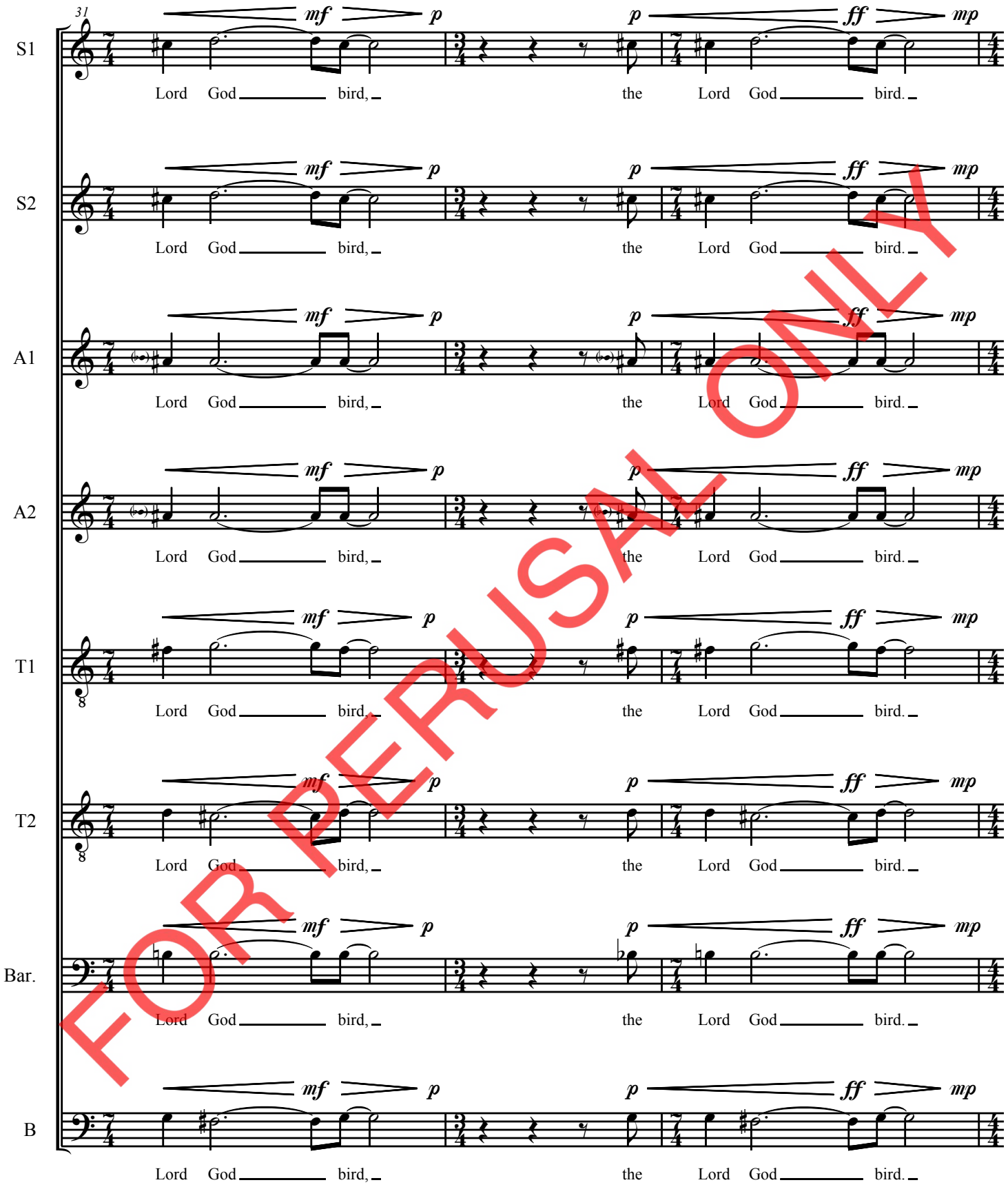

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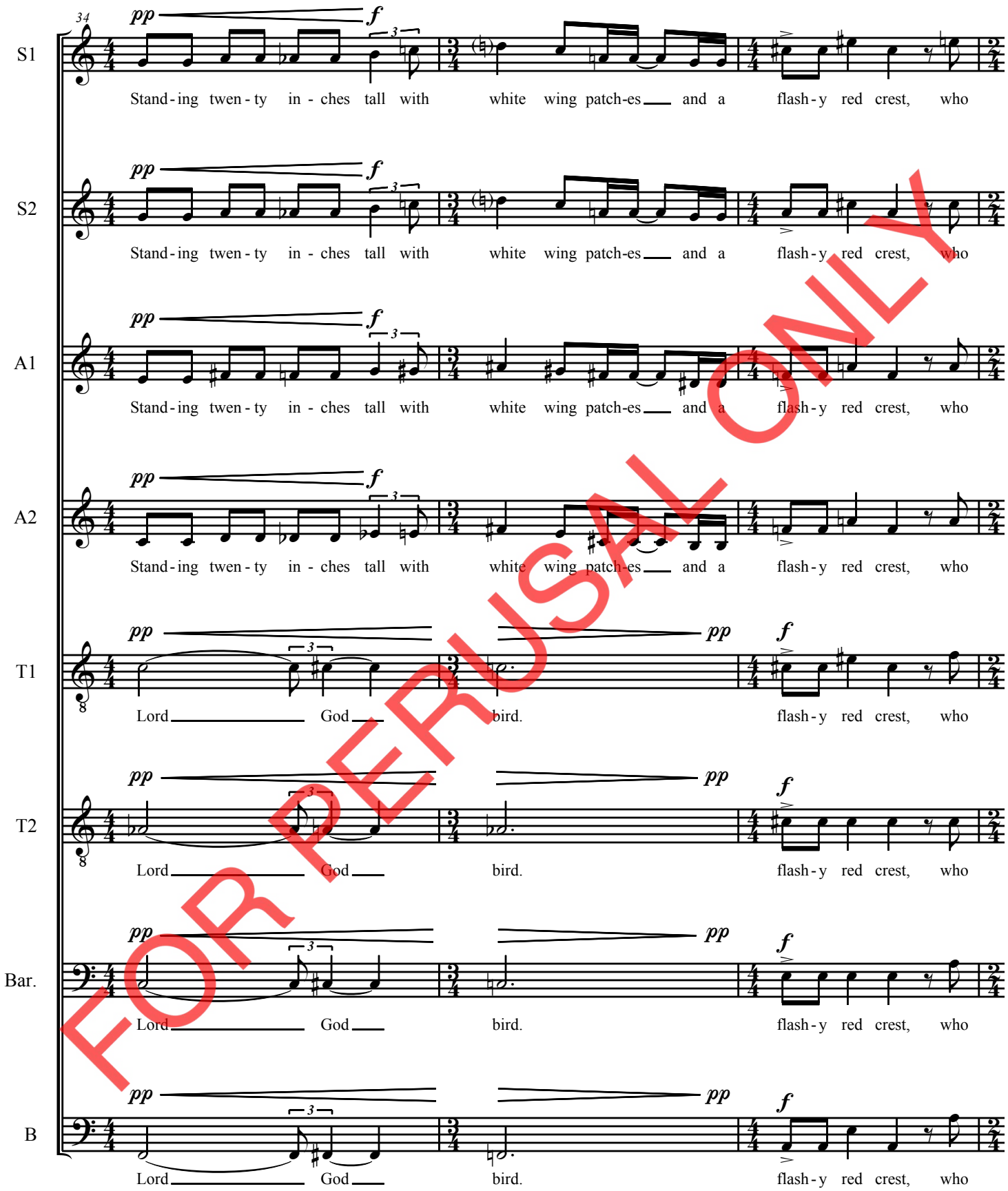

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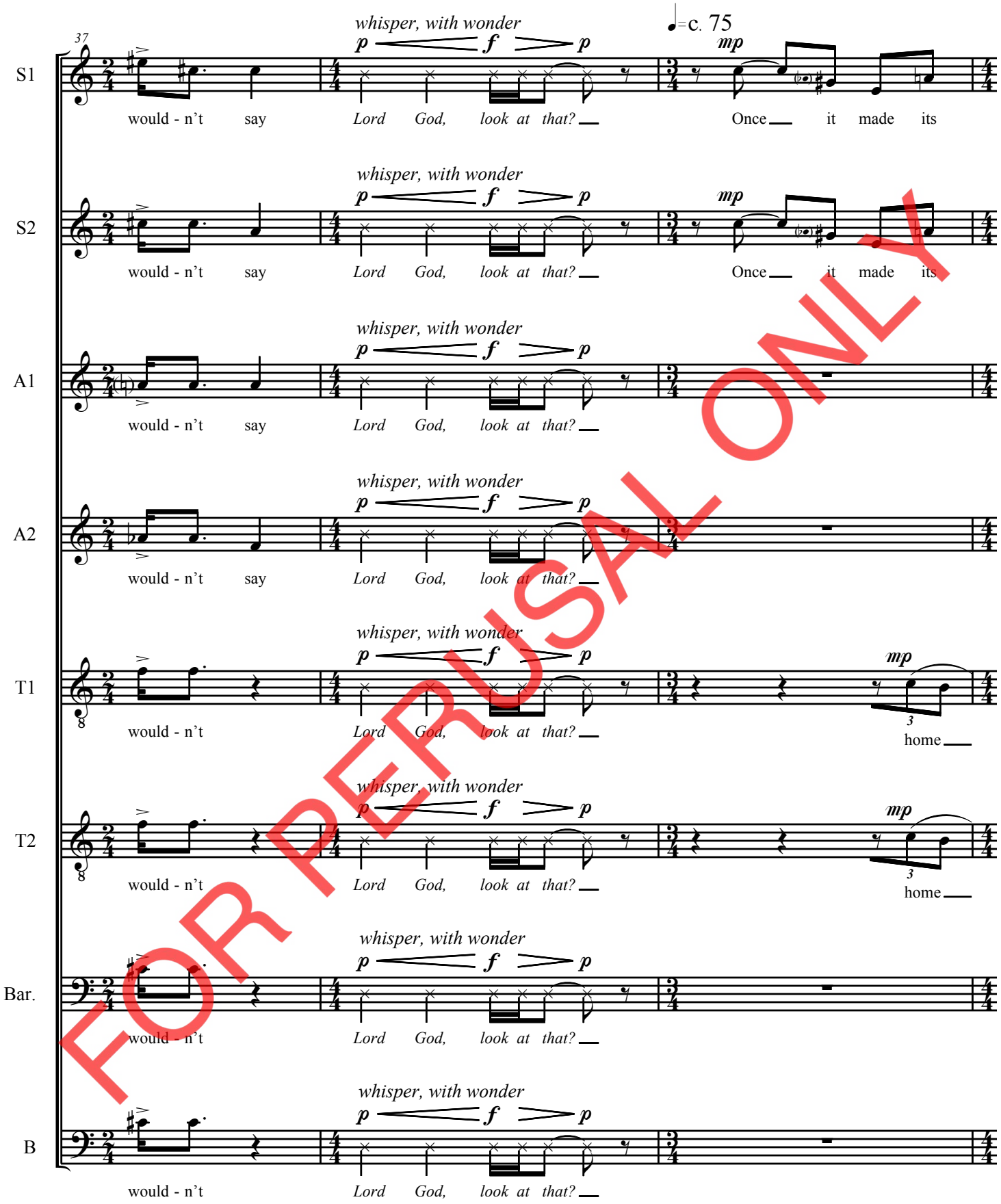

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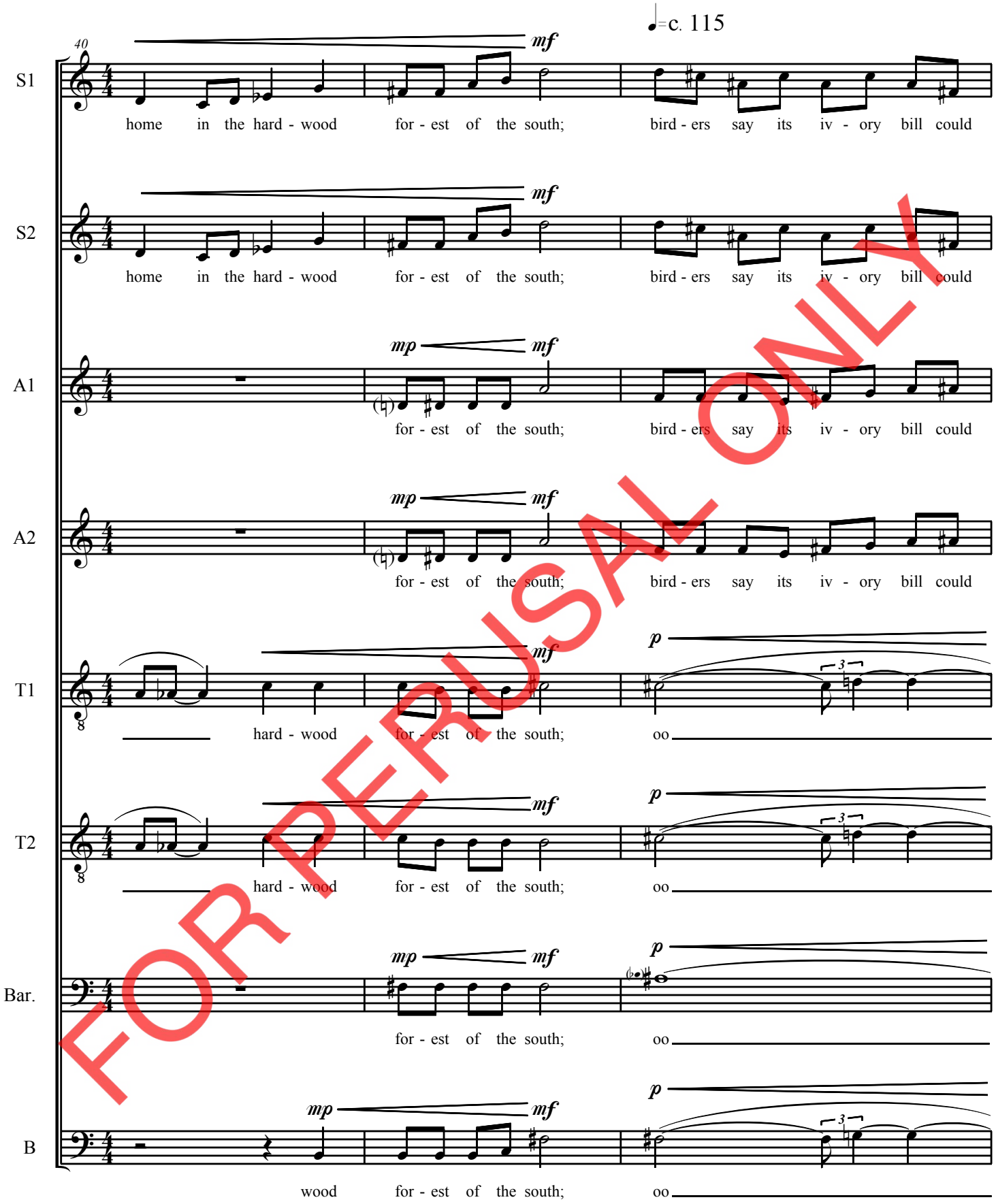

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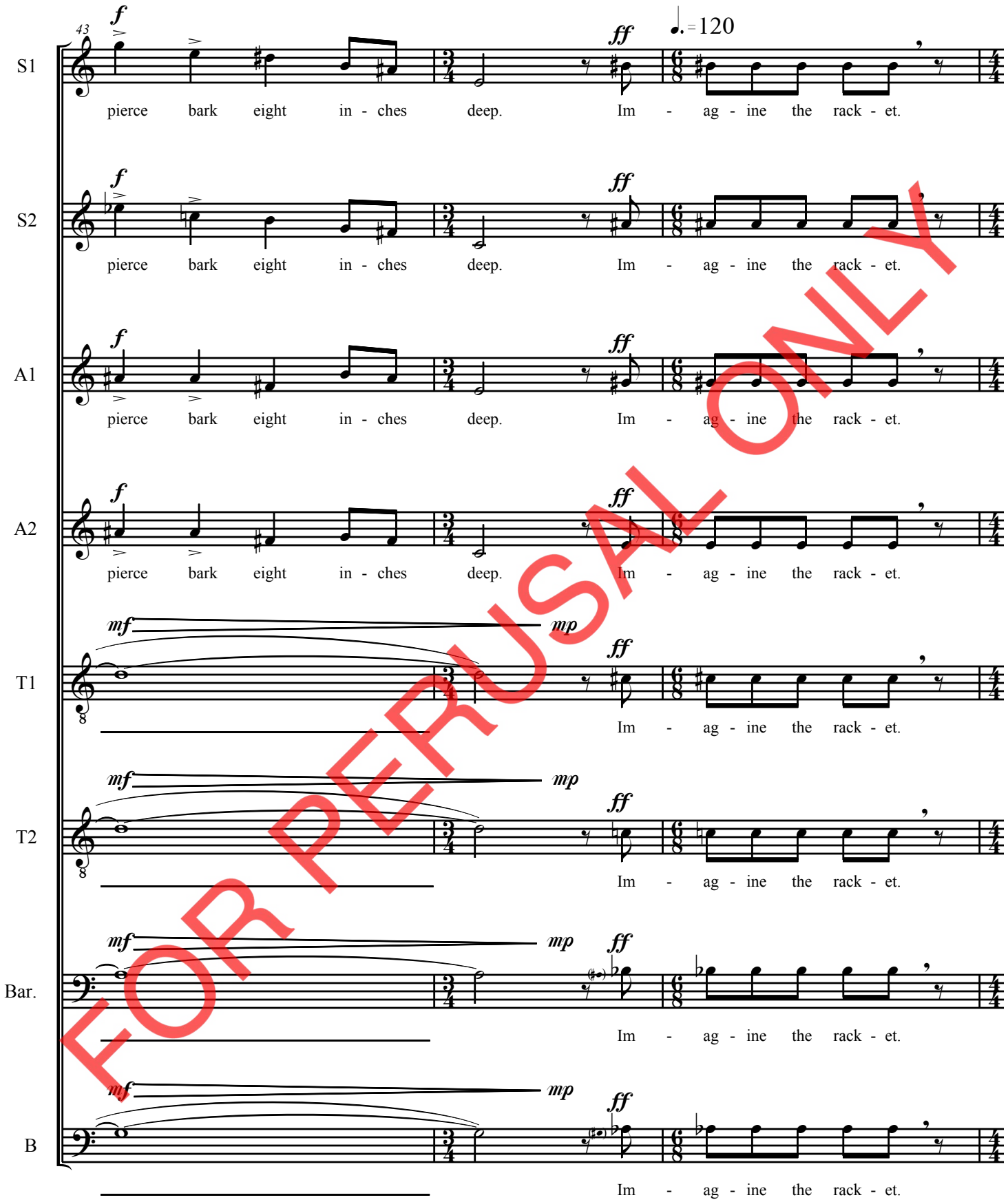

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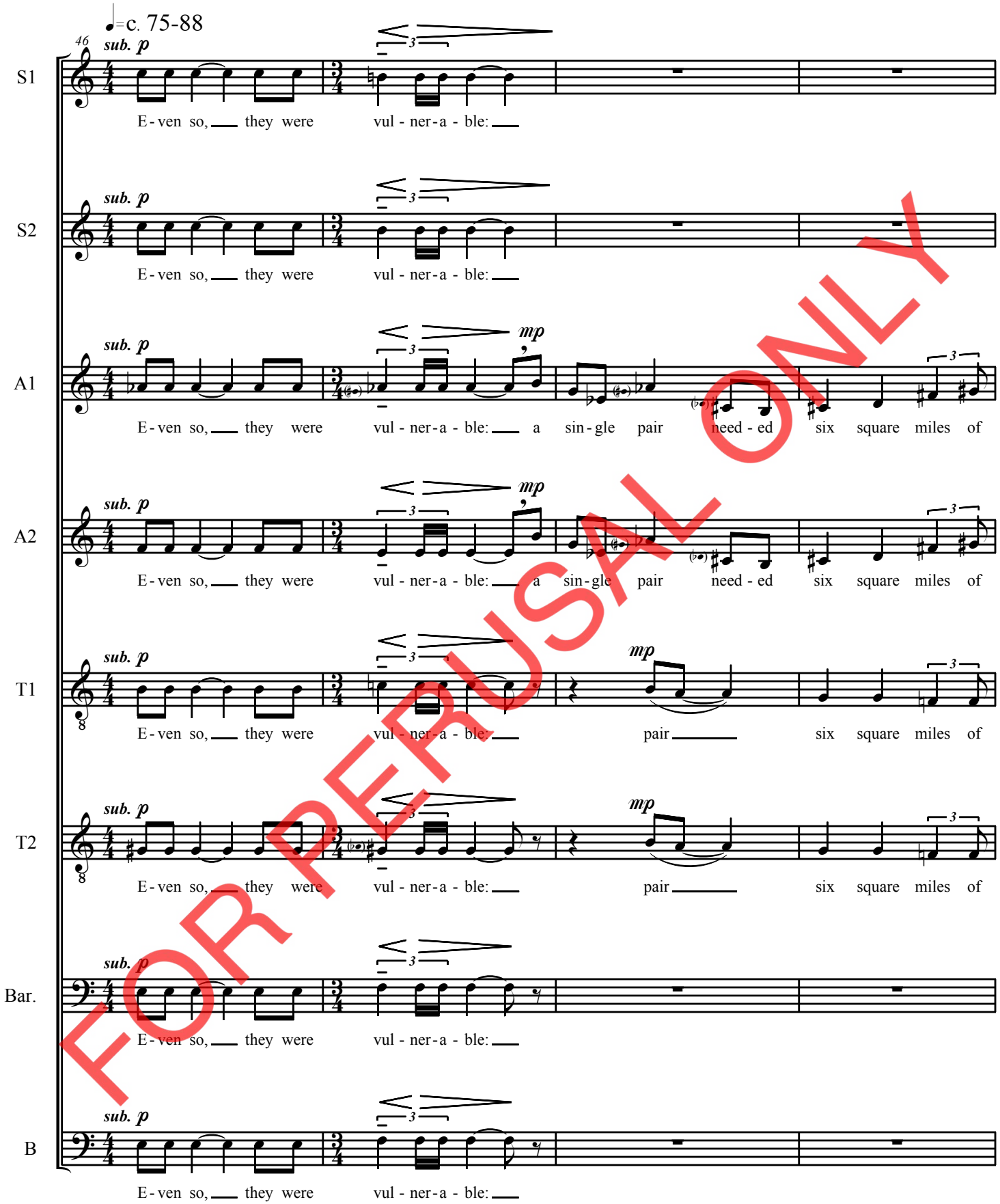

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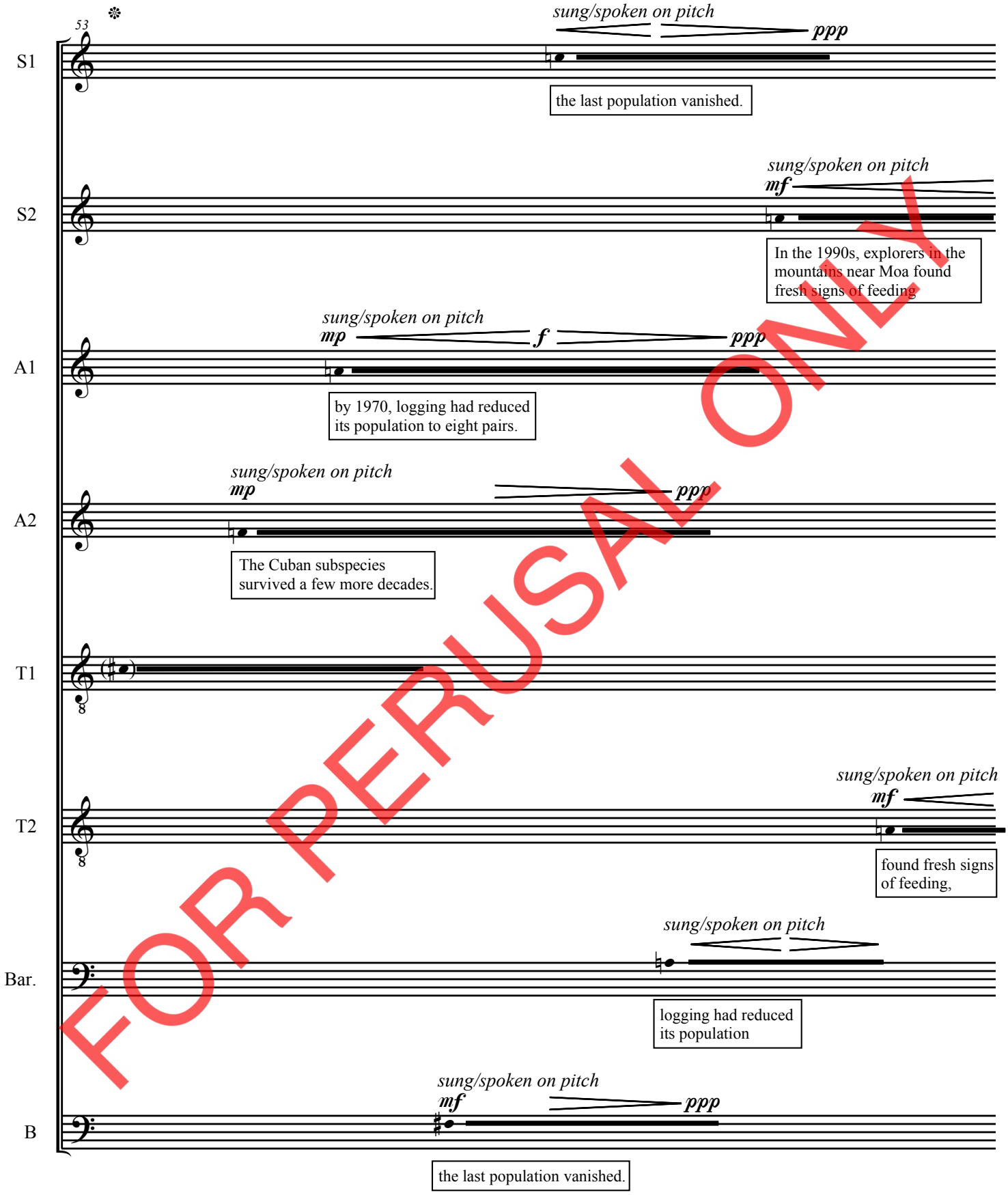

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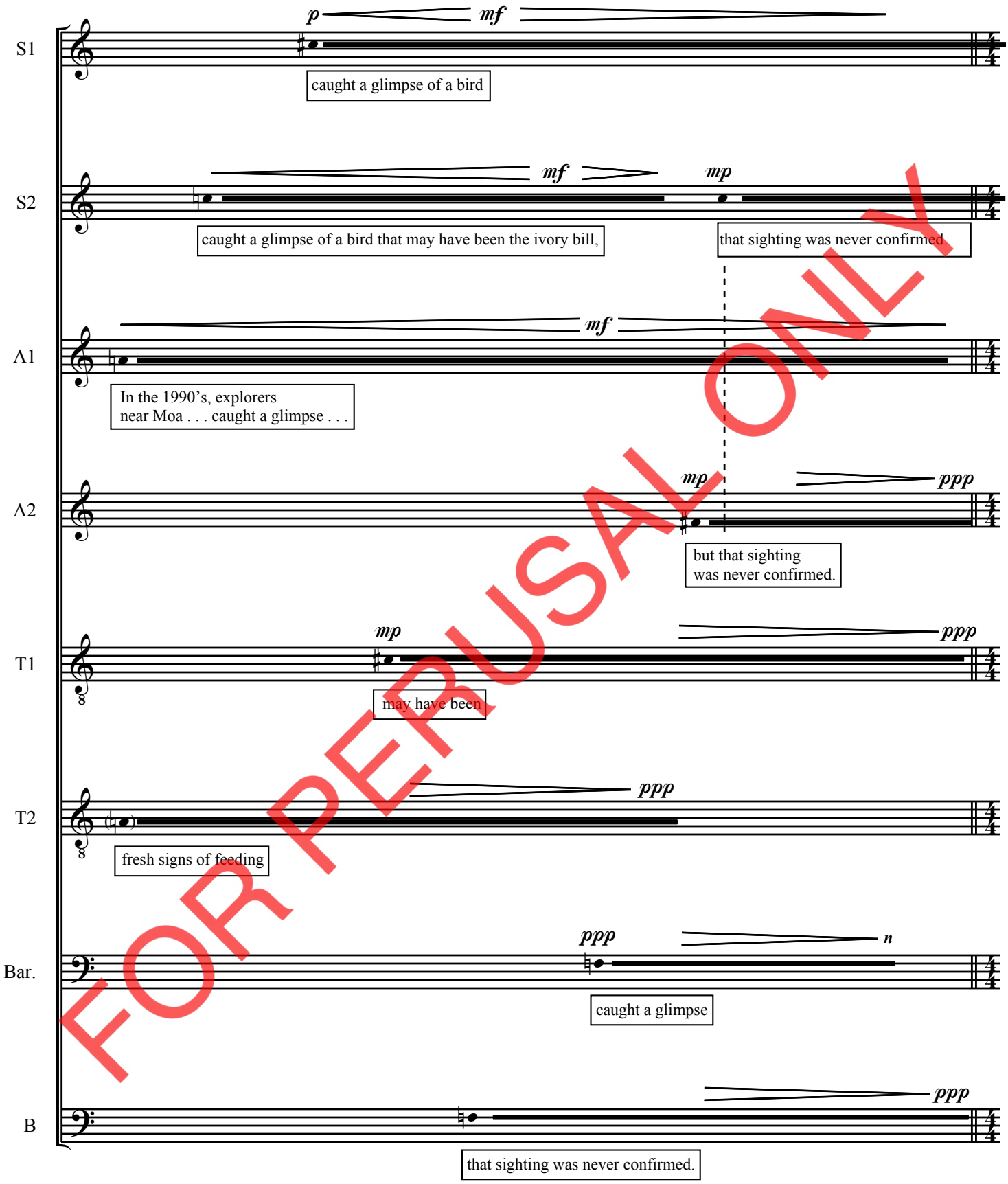
* Stagger entrances, allow time to repeat each phrase 2-3 times



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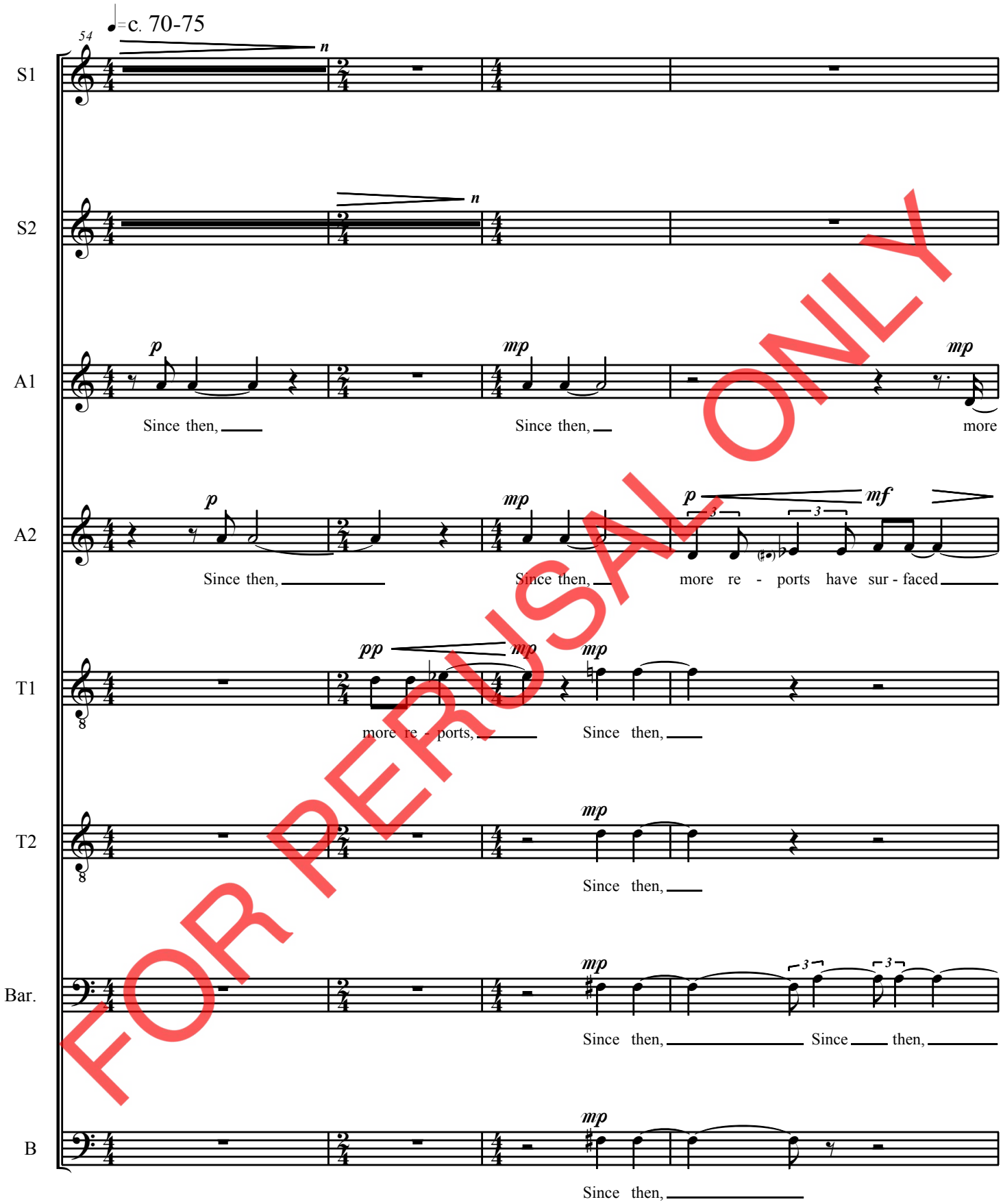

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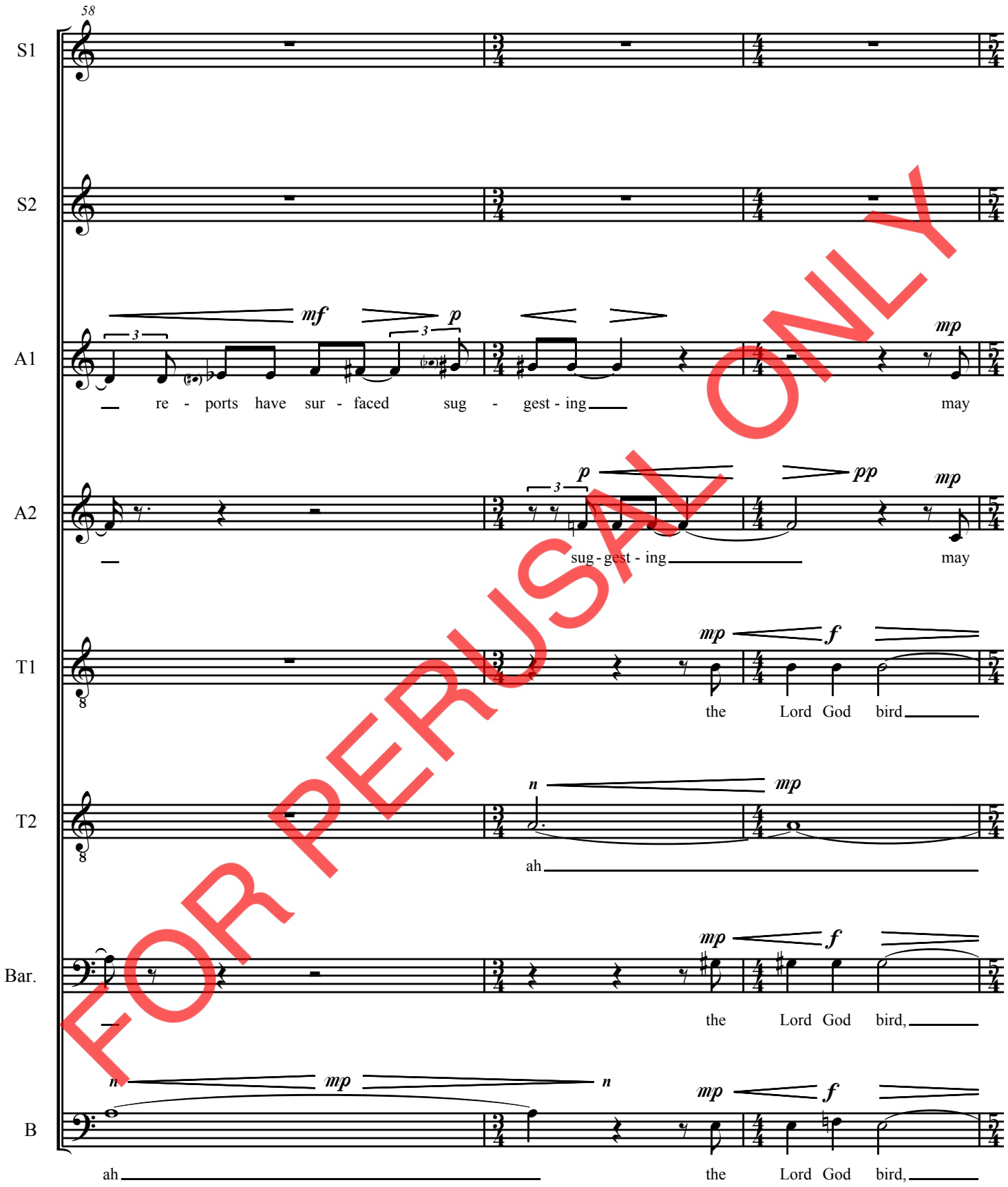

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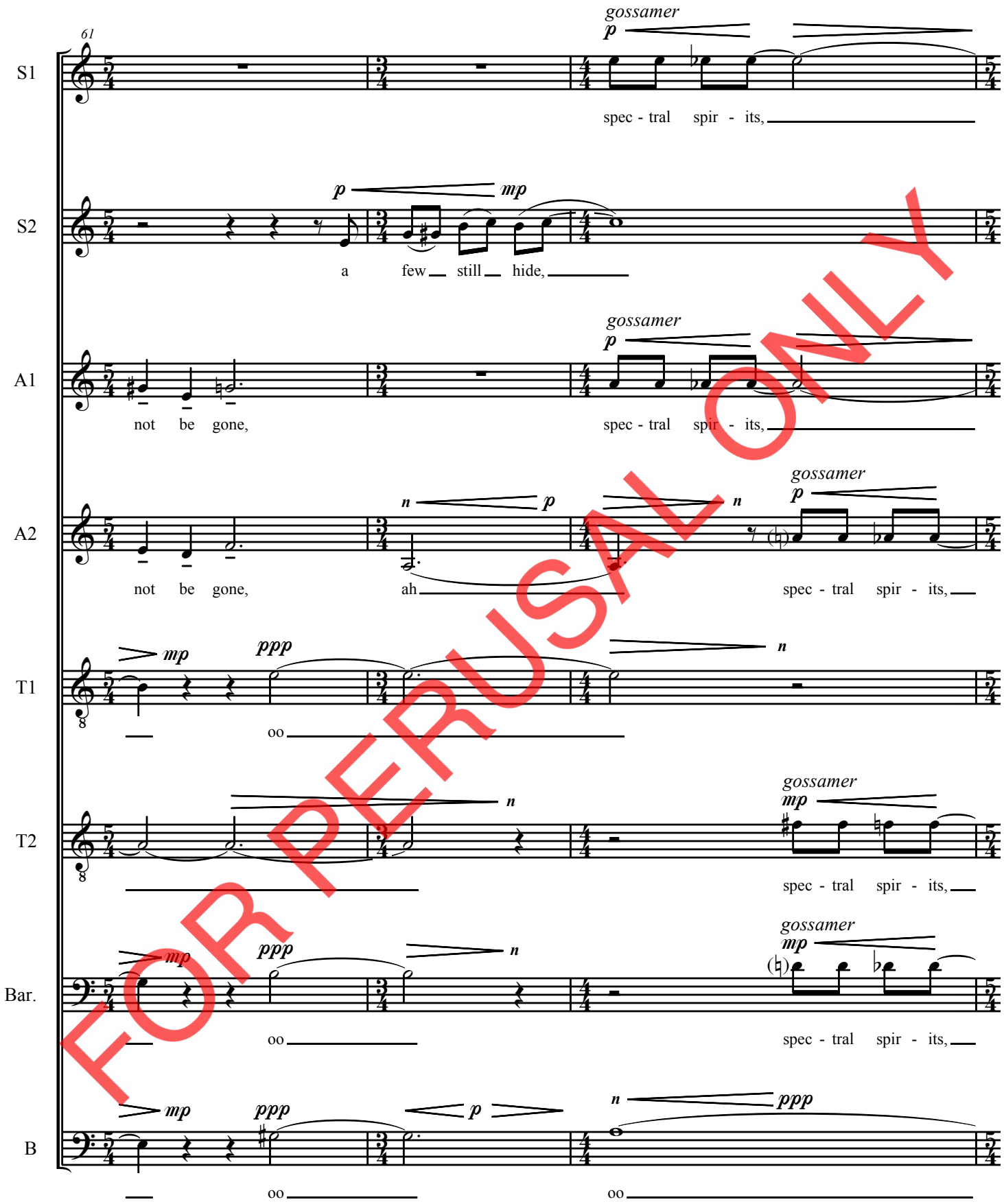

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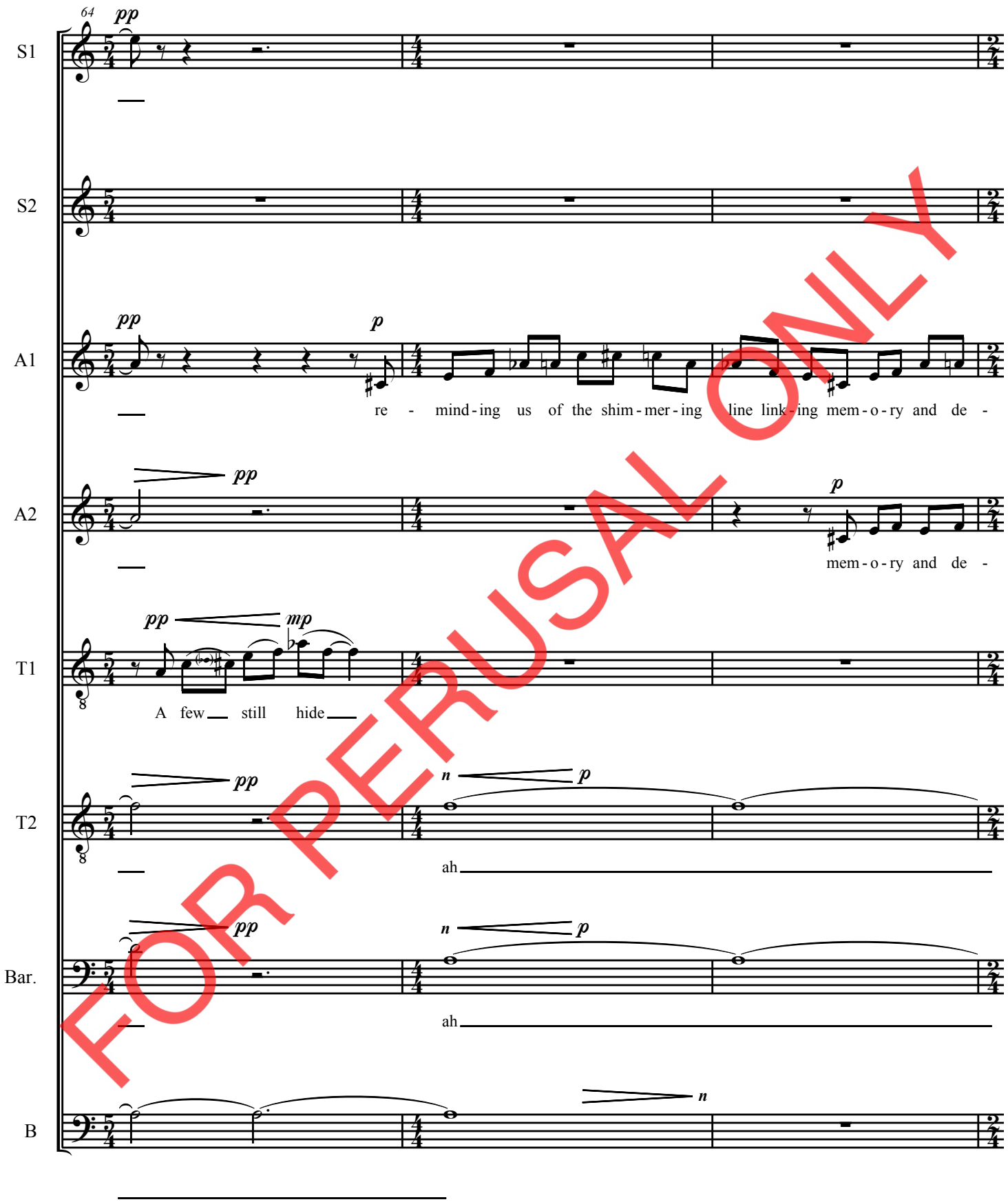

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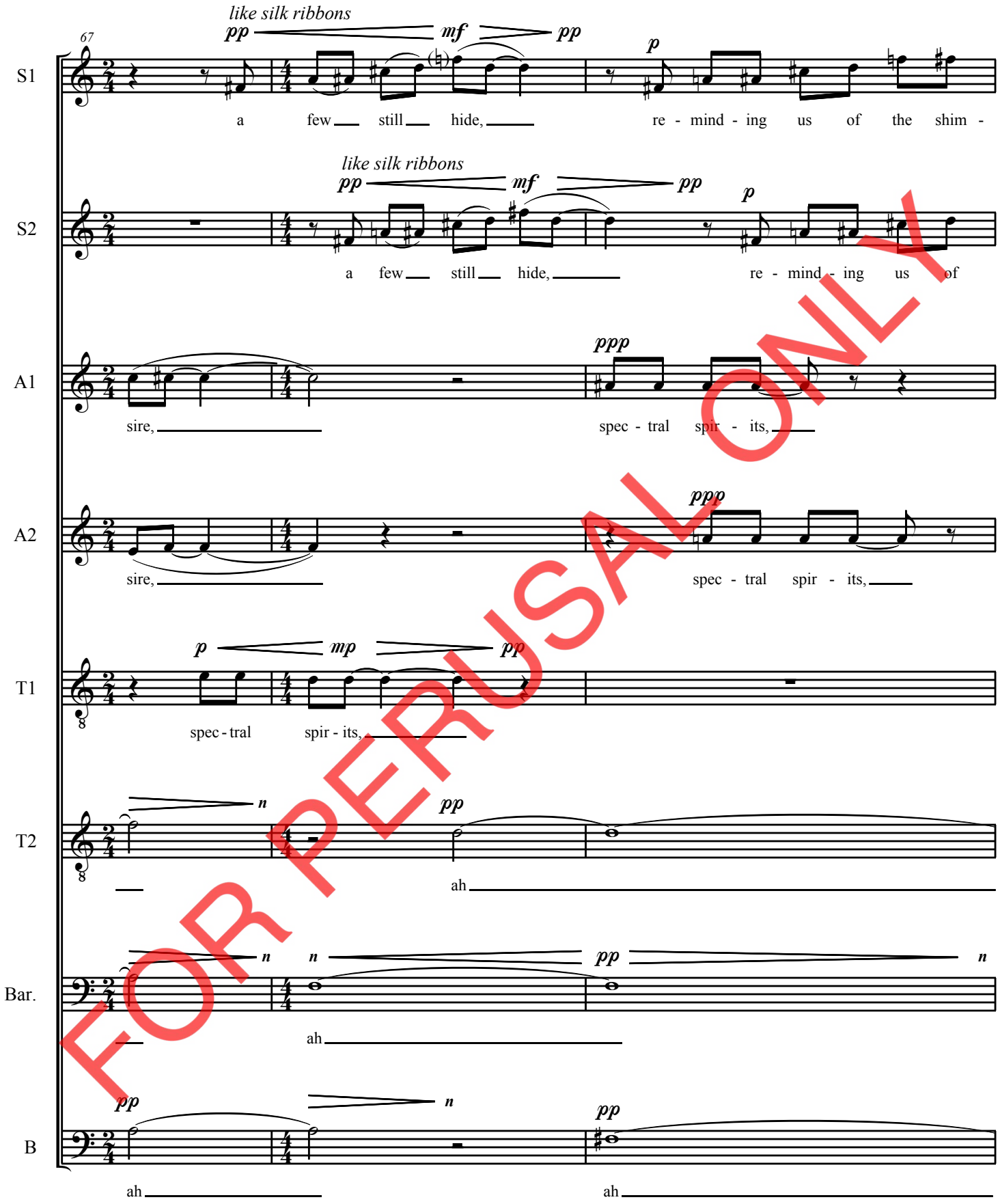

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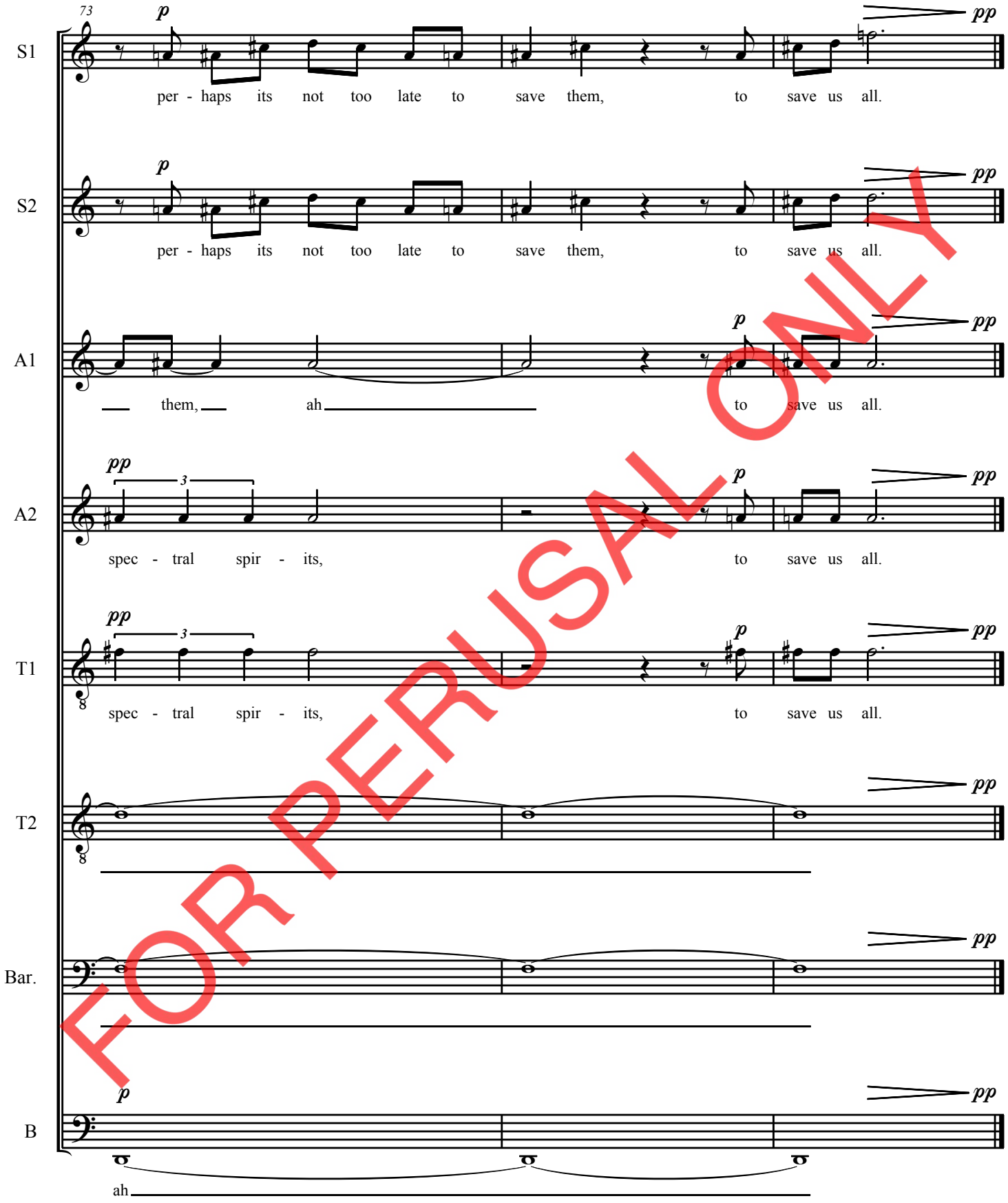

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Described as "...bold...radiant, deftly crafted..." (Musical America), Edie Hill's music is performed all over the world. Venues have included Lincoln Center, Met Cloisters (NYC), Carnegie's Weill Recital Hall (NYC), Musis Sacrum in Arnhem, Holland, LA County Museum of Art, Library of Congress, Minneapolis' Walker Arts Center, St. Paul's Schubert Club, Berwald Hall (Stockholm Sweden), Liviu Cultural Center (Romania), Feszek Müvészklub (Budapest), St. Peter's Basilica (Vatican City).

A three-time McKnight Artist Fellow and a two-time Bush Artist Fellow, Hill has received grants from the Jerome Foundation, ASCAP, New Music USA, Meet The Composer, Minnesota State Arts Board, Chamber Music America, and was awarded a Doctor of Humane Letters from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota. The album, *Born: music of Edie Hill and Michael Gilbertson* won the 2023 GRAMMY® for "Best Choral Performance" for The Crossing (Donald Nally, conductor). She has a B.A. from Bennington College and earned her M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Minnesota.

Composer in Residence at Schubert Club from 2005-2017, she ran and grew the Mentorship Program for high school composers. She was Composer Mentor for MN Varsity for composers 14-18 years of age co-sponsored by The American Composers Forum and Classical Minnesota Public Radio. She has lectured at colleges, universities and various institutions in the States and abroad.

For Hill, writing music is an opportunity to research, learn, muse, reach down deep, and allow inspiration to come from the stuff of life. Her compositions are fueled by her experiences, passions and curiosities.

for complete biography as well as works for perusal and sale, visit ediehill.com

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