David Heuser

what passes for discourse

for guitar and alto saxophone

2016
Duration approximately 5 minutes

D a v i d H e u s e r

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Commissioned by and composed for Duo Montagnard
(Joseph Murphy, saxophone; Matthew Slotkin, guitar)

Program Notes:

What passes for discourse was completed during the two 2016 U. S. National Presidential Conventions, which followed an unusually rancor-filled Republican Presidential primary (and a somewhat more normal, but still contested, Democratic one), and preceded the three month run-up to an unusual general election. The piece is a commentary on some aspects of political discourse that came to the fore during that process, including a focus on the personal, the repetition (and group chanting) of largely empty catch phrases, and a general lack of civility. None of these are new to American (or non-American) politics, of course, but even if there only *seemed* to be more rancor than usual, that rancor appeared to overshadow actual policy views everywhere, from the debate stage to the media coverage.

The piece opens with unison lines which split and fracture as they repeat and vary, the two performers taking on the role of political opponents who begin with relatively similar narratives, but who work only to differentiate themselves from each other. Near the middle of the work, there is an attempt at a clear and reasoned "policy statement" in the guitar. This is followed by a more off-the-cuff rejoinder in the sax, and leads into a debate between the two instruments. This roughly one-minute passage is loosely transcribed (rhythmically) from a section of the 10th Republican Debate (February 25, 2016, Houston) where Ted Cruz and Donald Trump (and some other candidates) spoke over each other. (If you are wondering, the guitar is Cruz.) In the last part of the piece, the two instruments present their "entrenched" positions again. And again.

I am grateful to the Duo Montagnard for commissioning *What passes for discourse.*

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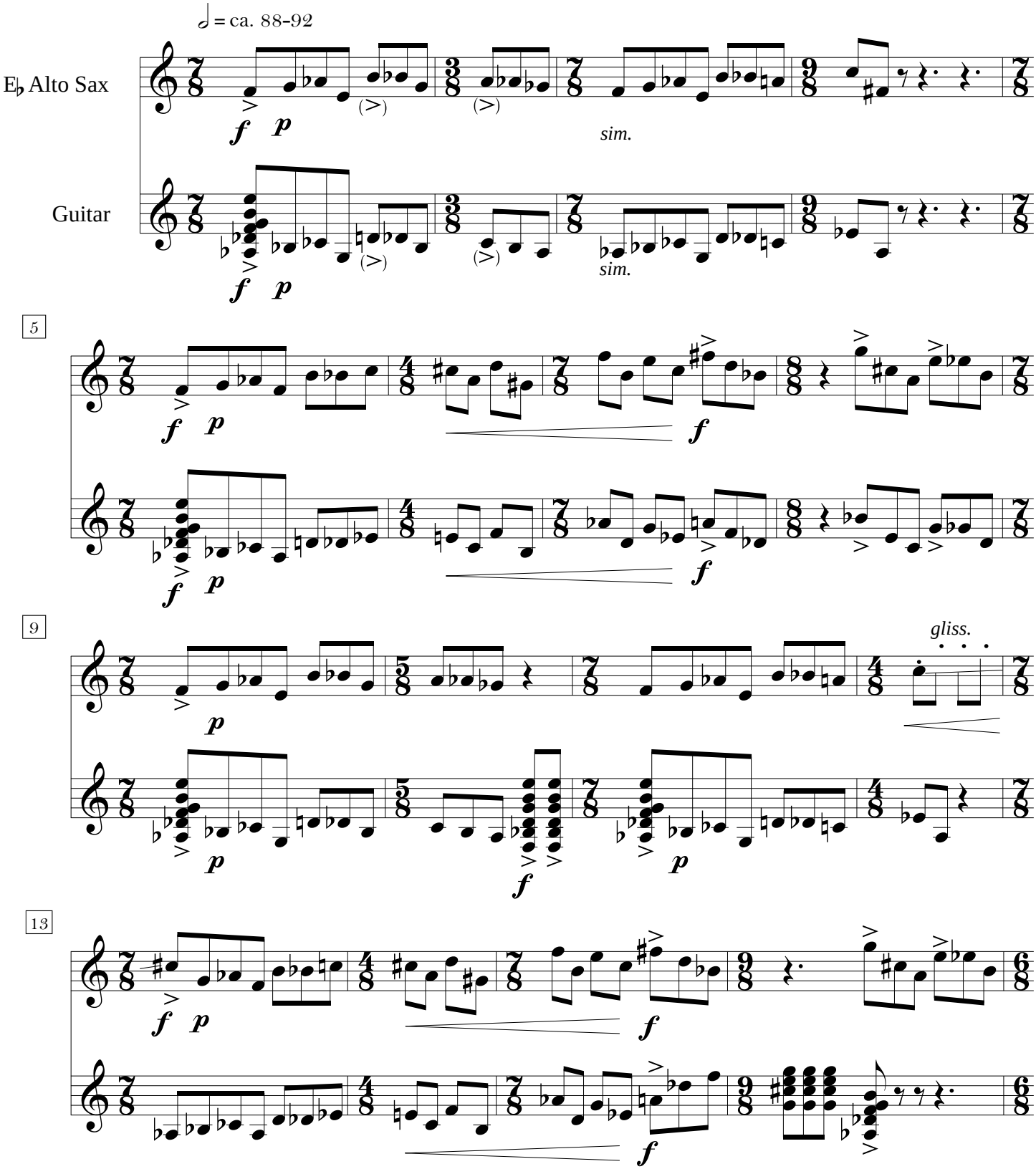

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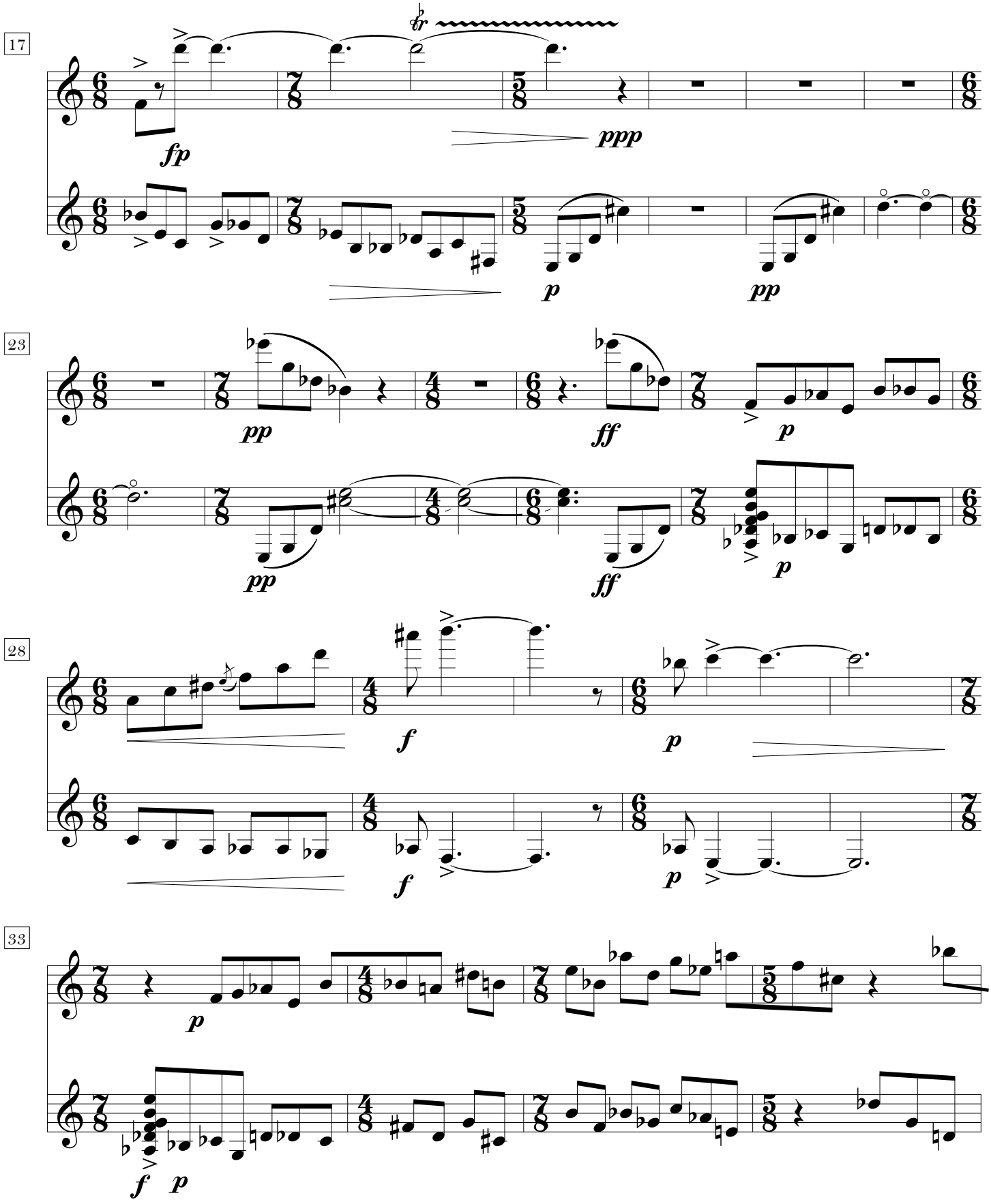
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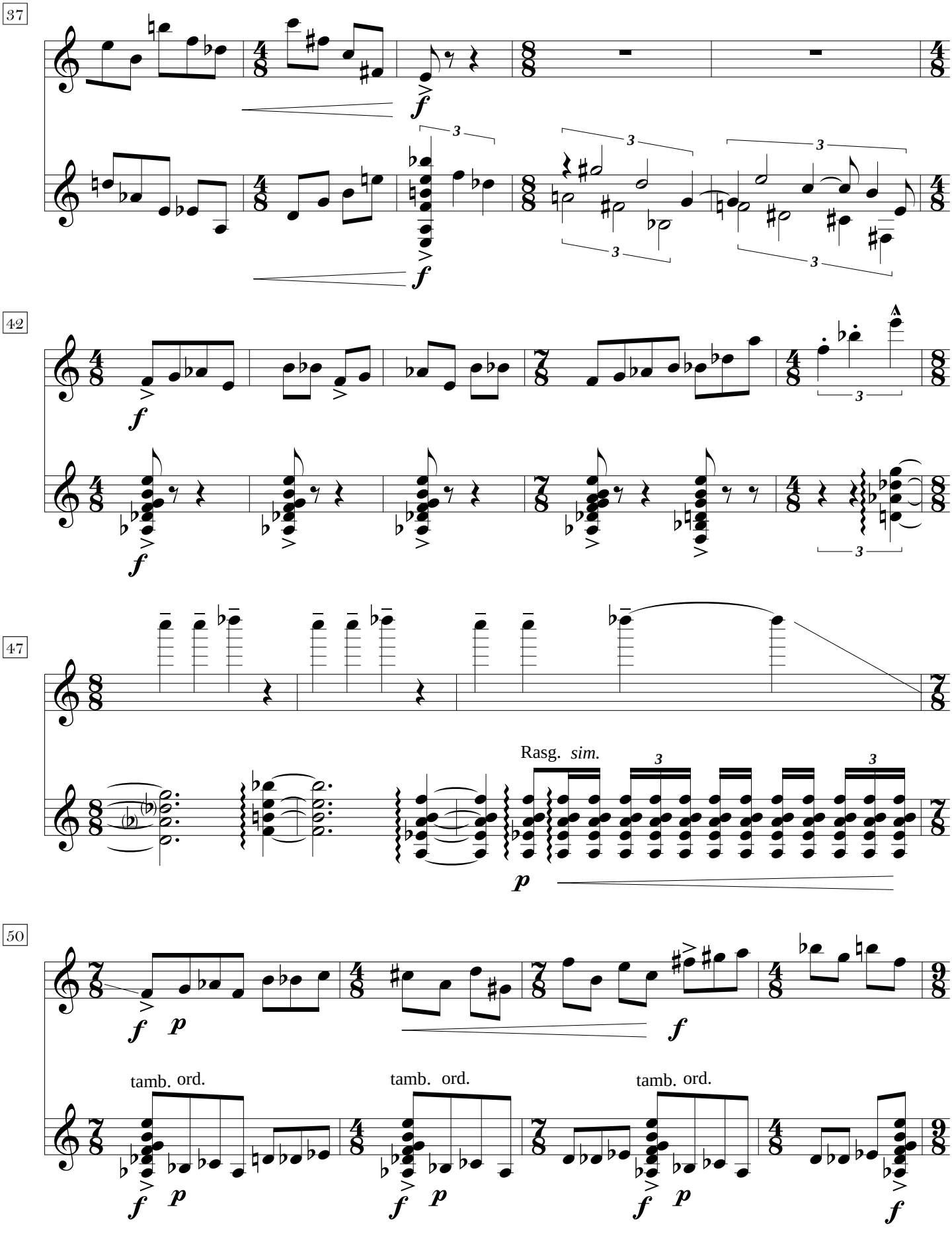
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