THE UNNAMEABLE

FOR KEYBOARD SAMPLER AND SOUNDFILE

KYLE GANN

2012

Kyle Gann: *The Unnameable* (2012)

for keyboard sampler and soundfile

The Unnameable is a paradigmatic piece for me, a distilled essence of what I've tried to do in some of my other music. I have sometimes said that I want my music to be a cross between Mahler and Phill Niblock. What I miss in Niblock's slowly glissandoing drone music (or rather, what I have to include to feel satisfied composing) is a *melodic* element, a human, conventionally musical thread that the listener can identify with - hum along with, in fact. What I miss in Mahler is a kind of tranquil immobility. *The Unnameable* (of the two allowable spellings, I use this one to distinguish it from the English edition of Beckett's great novel of the same name) has a melodic form, though it is submerged in a layer of undulating overtone series'. The subjective element, represented by the keyboard solo, disappears into the wall of overtones, somewhat like a person walking into a lake, exploring the bottom of it, and then emerging again. Microtonal and in just intonation, the piece shuffles among six harmonic series', on the 1st, 7th, 9th, 11th, and 13th harmonics of B-flat, plus one on a fake but more exotic 17th harmonic on the 15/14 ratio - a set of chords I've used before in *Charing Cross* and *Nonexistent Landscape*. There are about 32 pitches, in a scale given below. The voice-leading (the way lines in the texture move to the next chord) approaches immobility. A single motive embodies the subjective element, that of a major second - although the major second can variably be 231, 204, 183, 165, or 151 cents in size. It comes to seem like a leap compared to the tiny increments of the contrapuntal background, and yet at every point the motive clarifies the melody's position in the harmonic series of the moment. I'm trying to create a kind of musical ecstasy, but I would be uncomfortable with a music that left the human element, and even a playful element, behind.

World premiere: March 29, 2012, at the Open Space Festival, University of Northern Colorado, played by the composer

Duration: 12 minutes

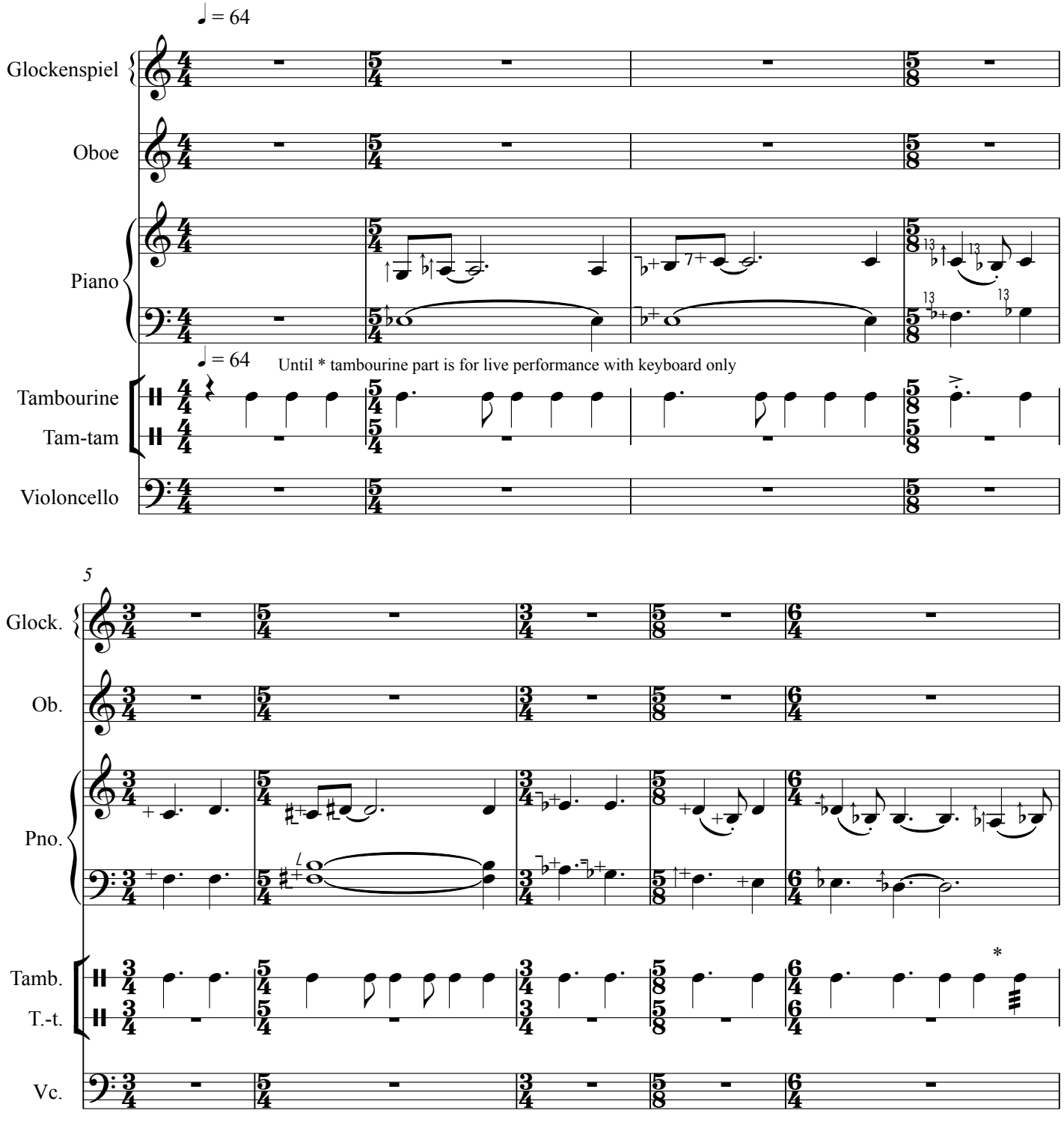
- Kyle Gann

Scale of Pitches for *The Unnameable*:

Johnston notation	Ratio to Bb	Cents above Bb
Bb7+	63/32	1173
Ab^^	121/64	1103
A+	15/8	1088
Ab13+	117/64	1044
Ab7+	7/4	969
G13*L*	195/112	960
G^	55/32	938
G+	27/16	906
Gb13	13/8	841
F#*L*+	45/28	821
F^+	99/64	755
Gbb77+	49/32	738
F+	3/2	702
E^*L*	165/112	671
Fb137+	91/64	609
E+	45/32	590
Eb^	11/8	551
D#*L*	75/56	506
Ebb1313	169/128	481
Eb7+	21/16	471
D+	81/64	408
D	5/4	386
C7+	35/32	357
Db13	39/32	342
C#*L*+	135/112	323
Db7^	77/64	320
C+	9/8	204
Cb13^	143/128	192
B*L*	15/14	119
Bb^	33/32	53
Bb13	65/64	27
Bb	1/1	0

The Unnameable

Kyle Gann
2012



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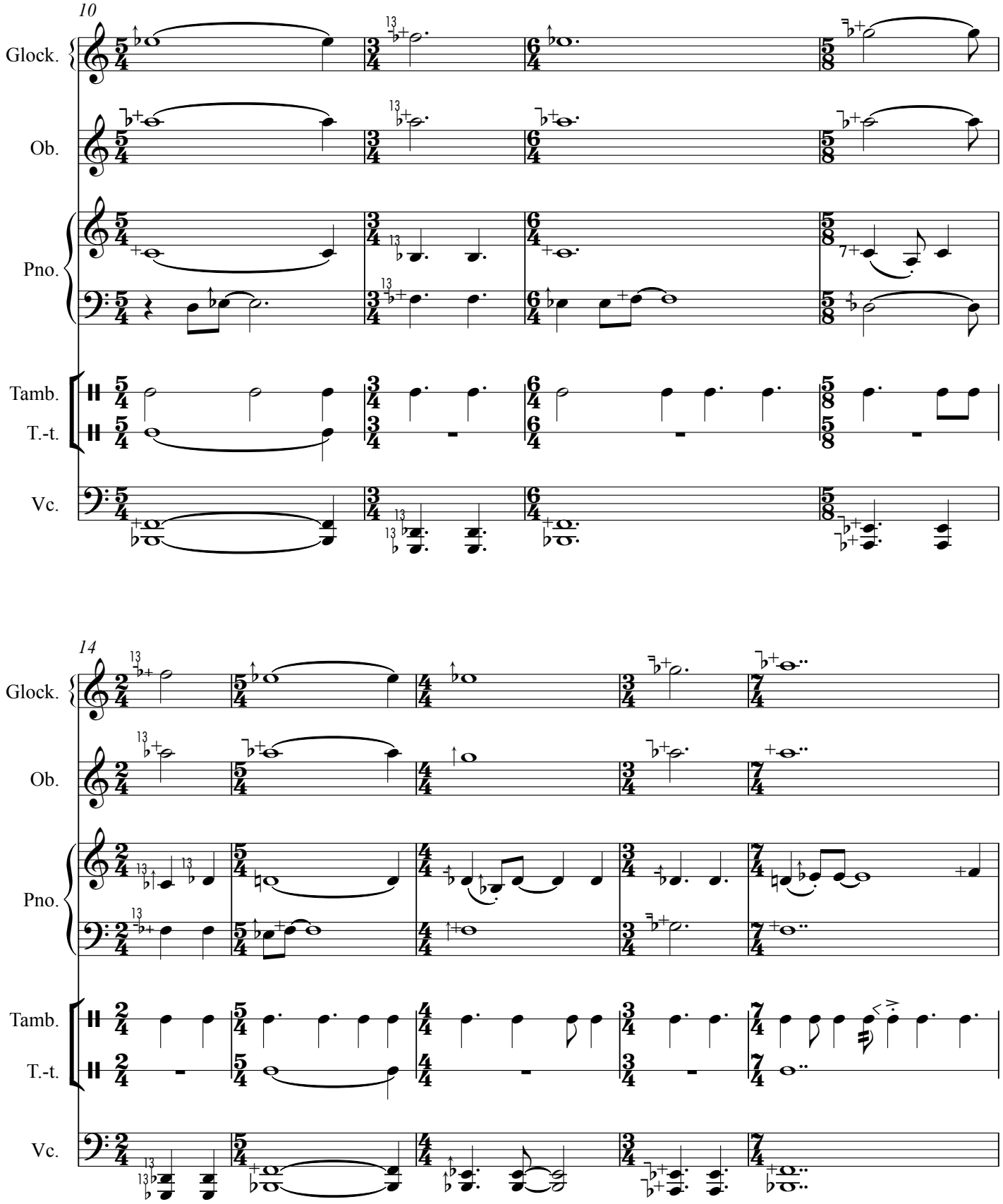
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T.-t.
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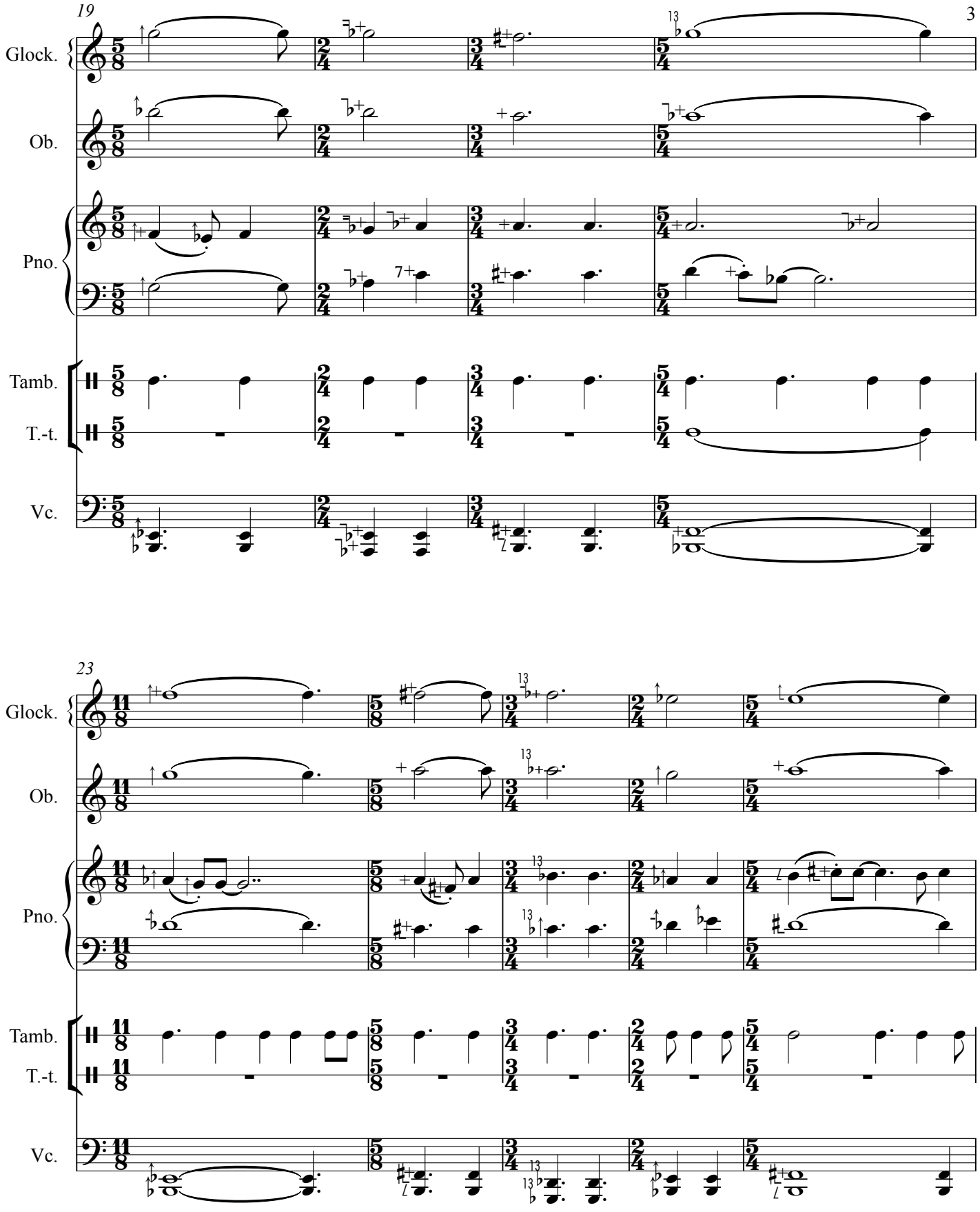
T.-t.
Vc.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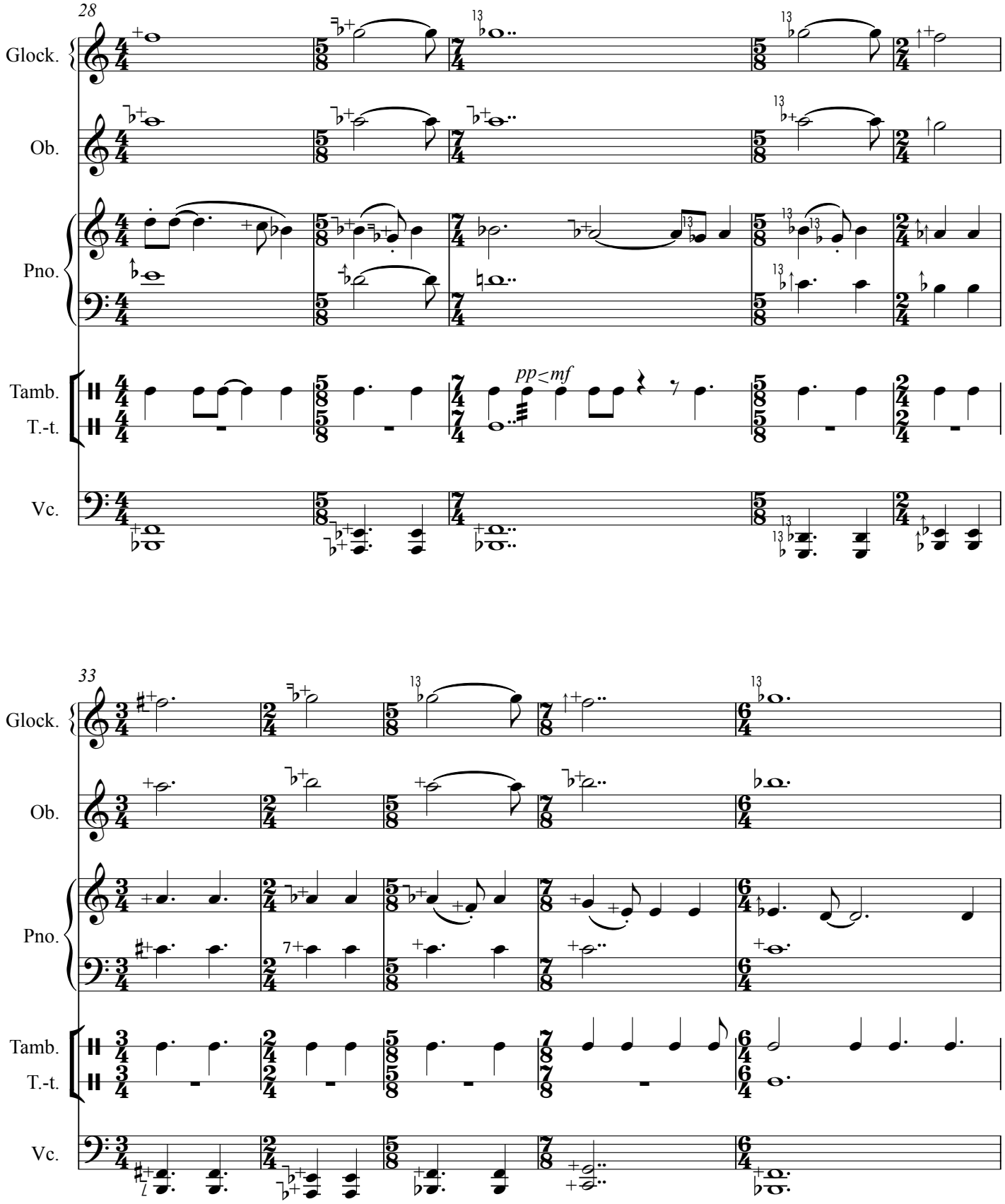
Vc.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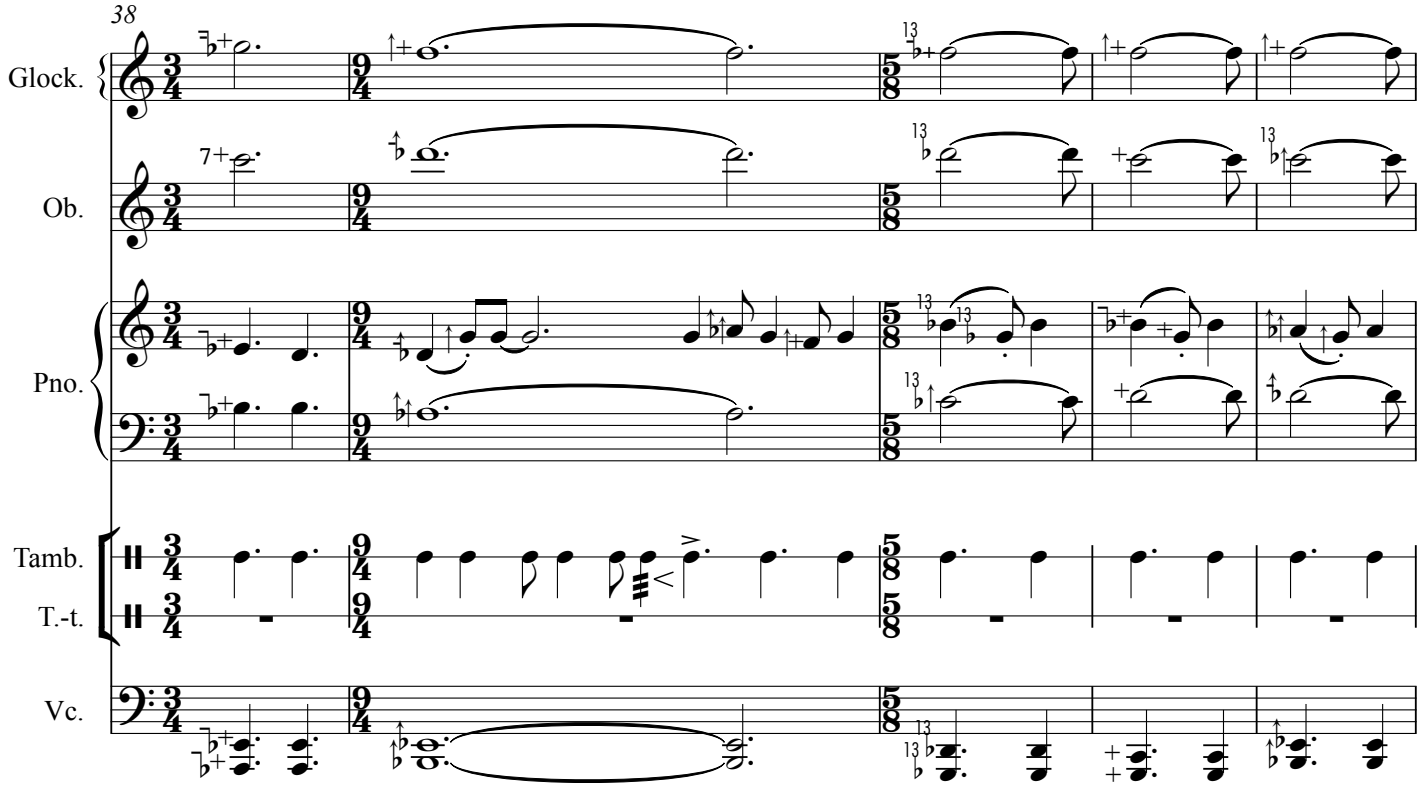
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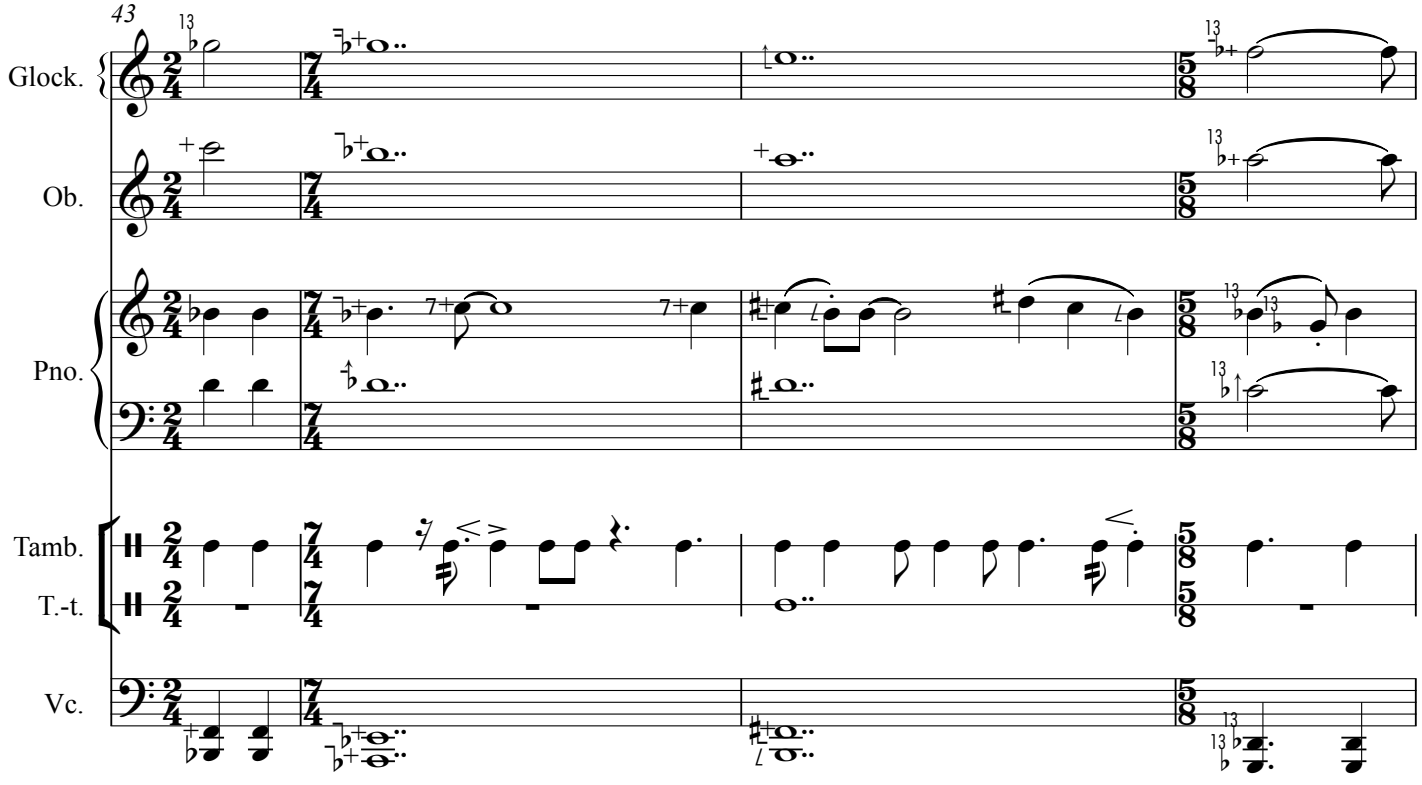
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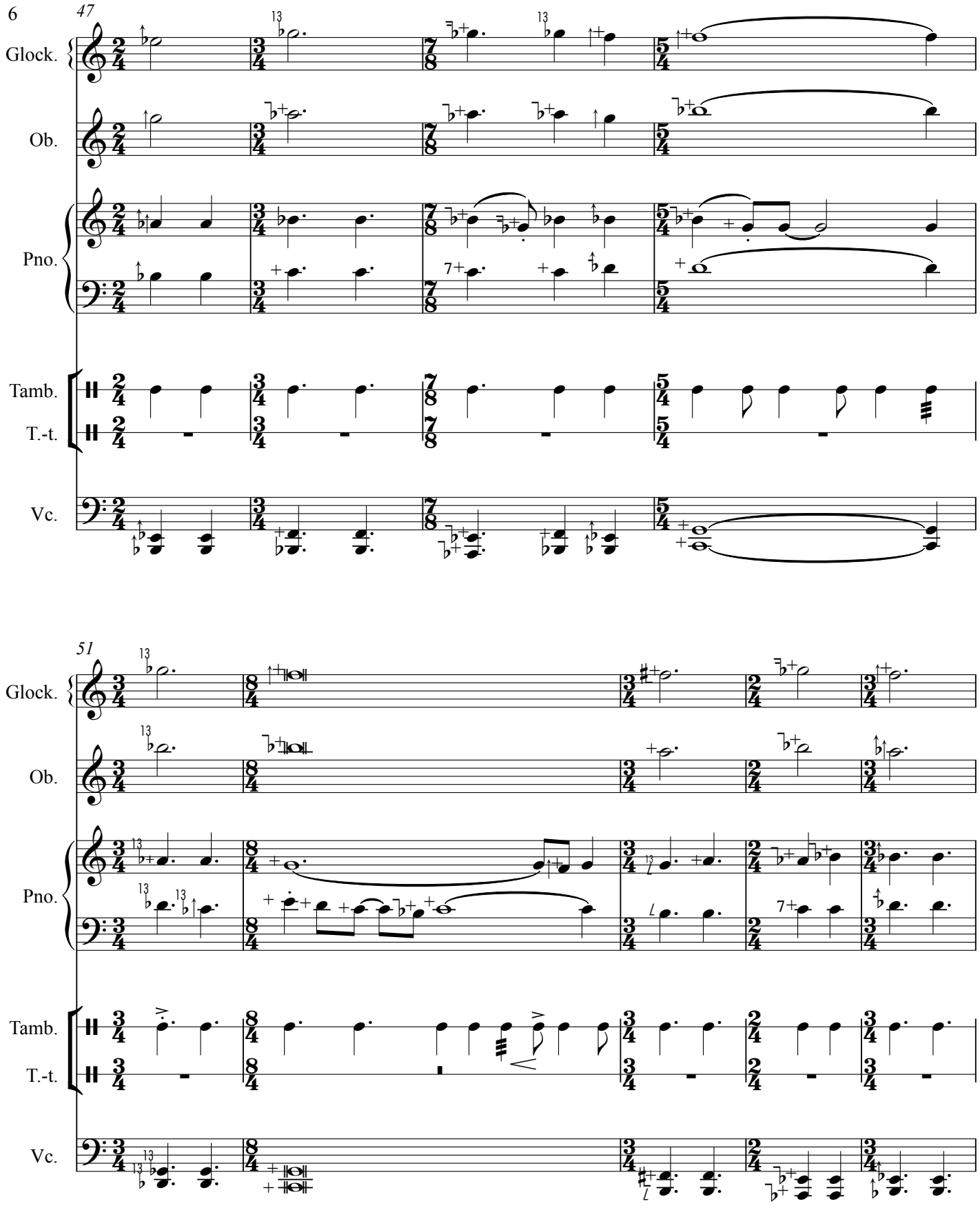
Vc.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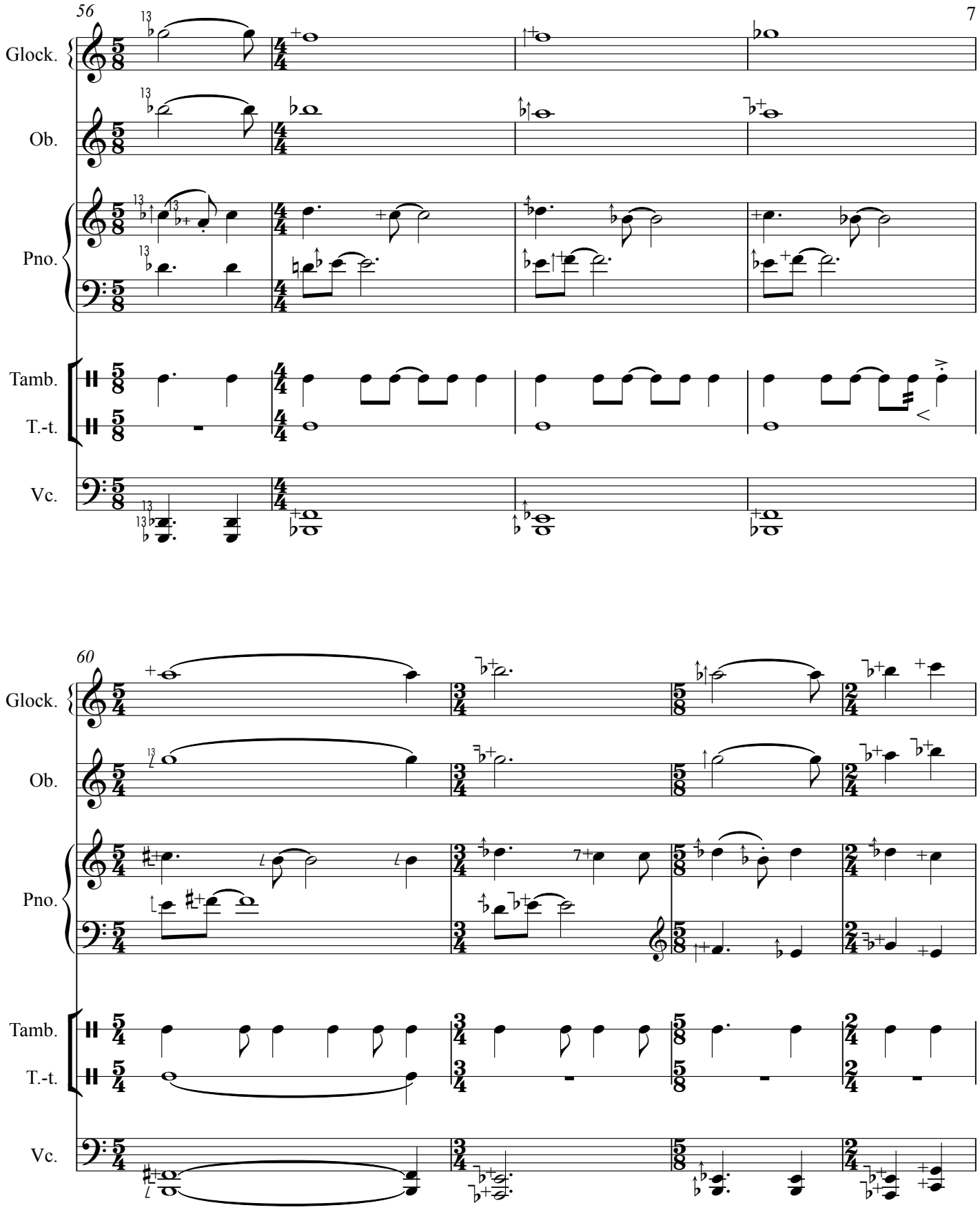
Vc.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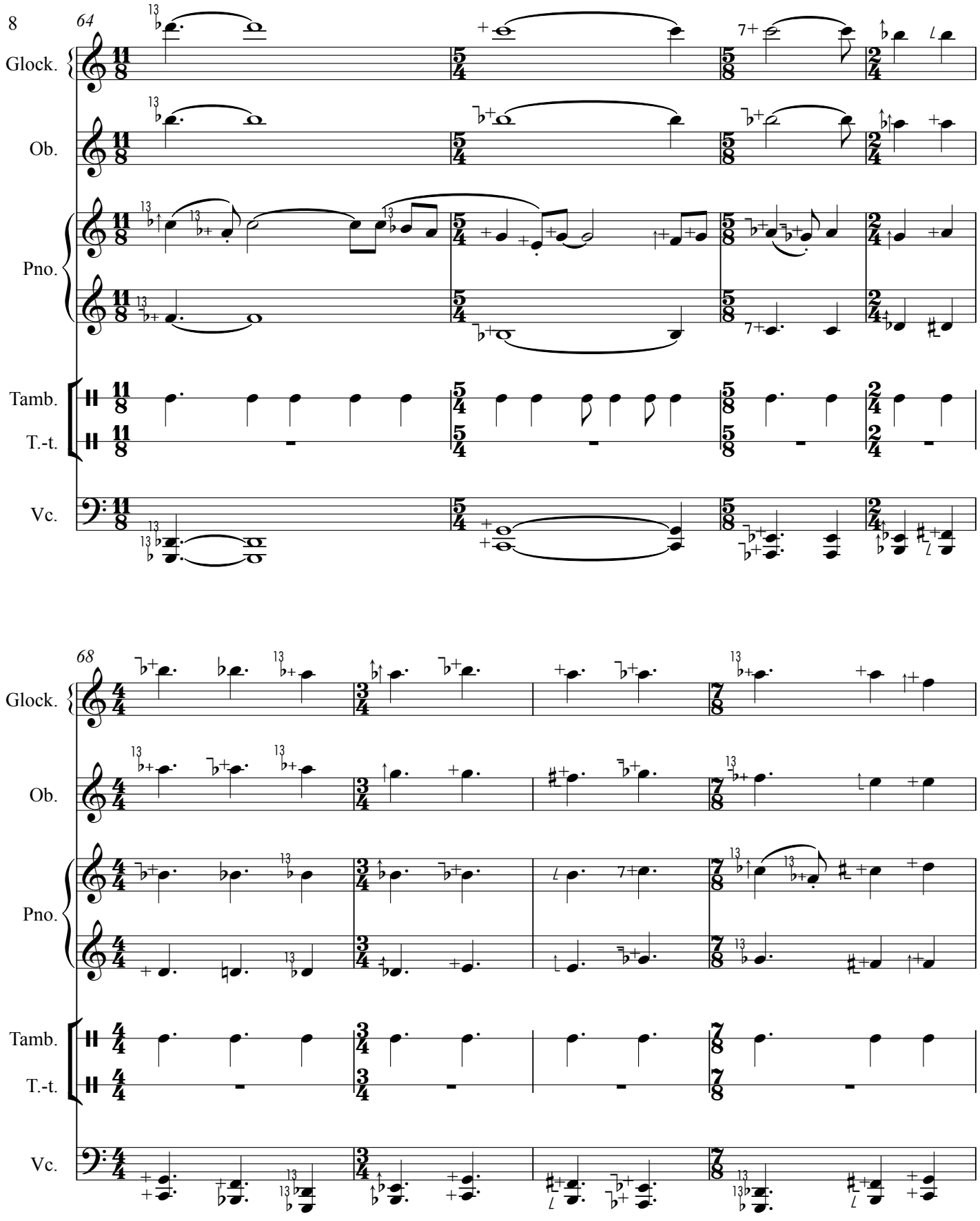
Vc.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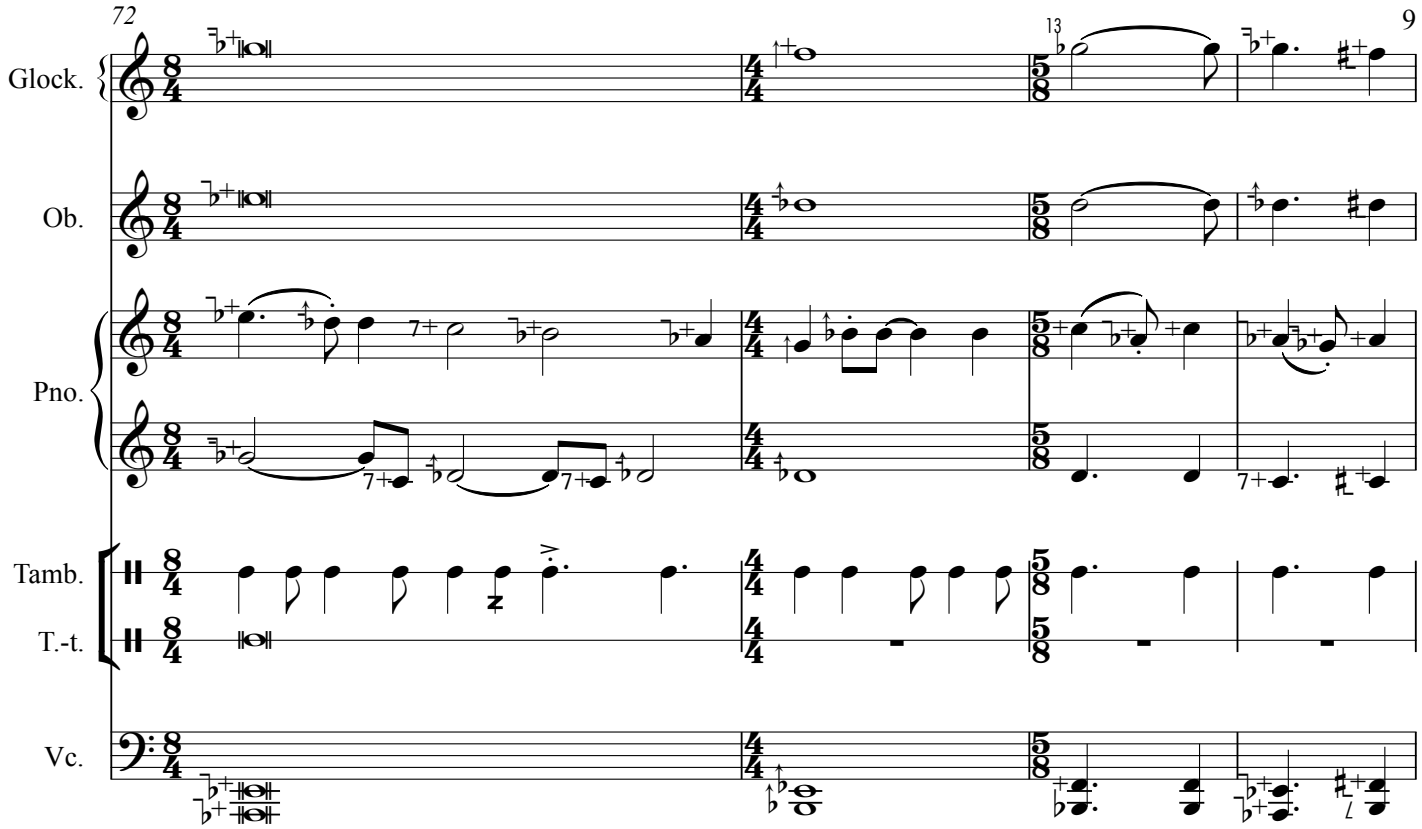
Vc.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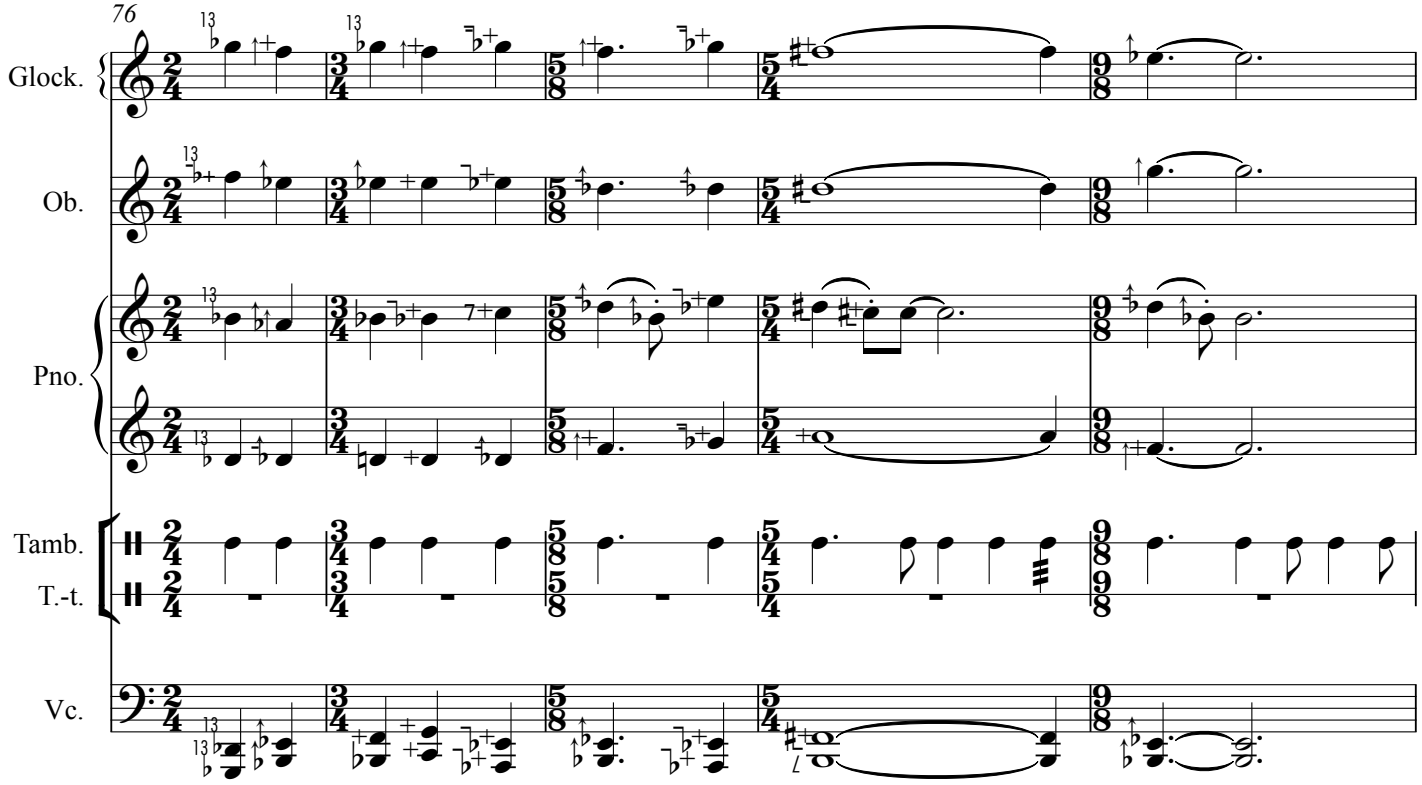
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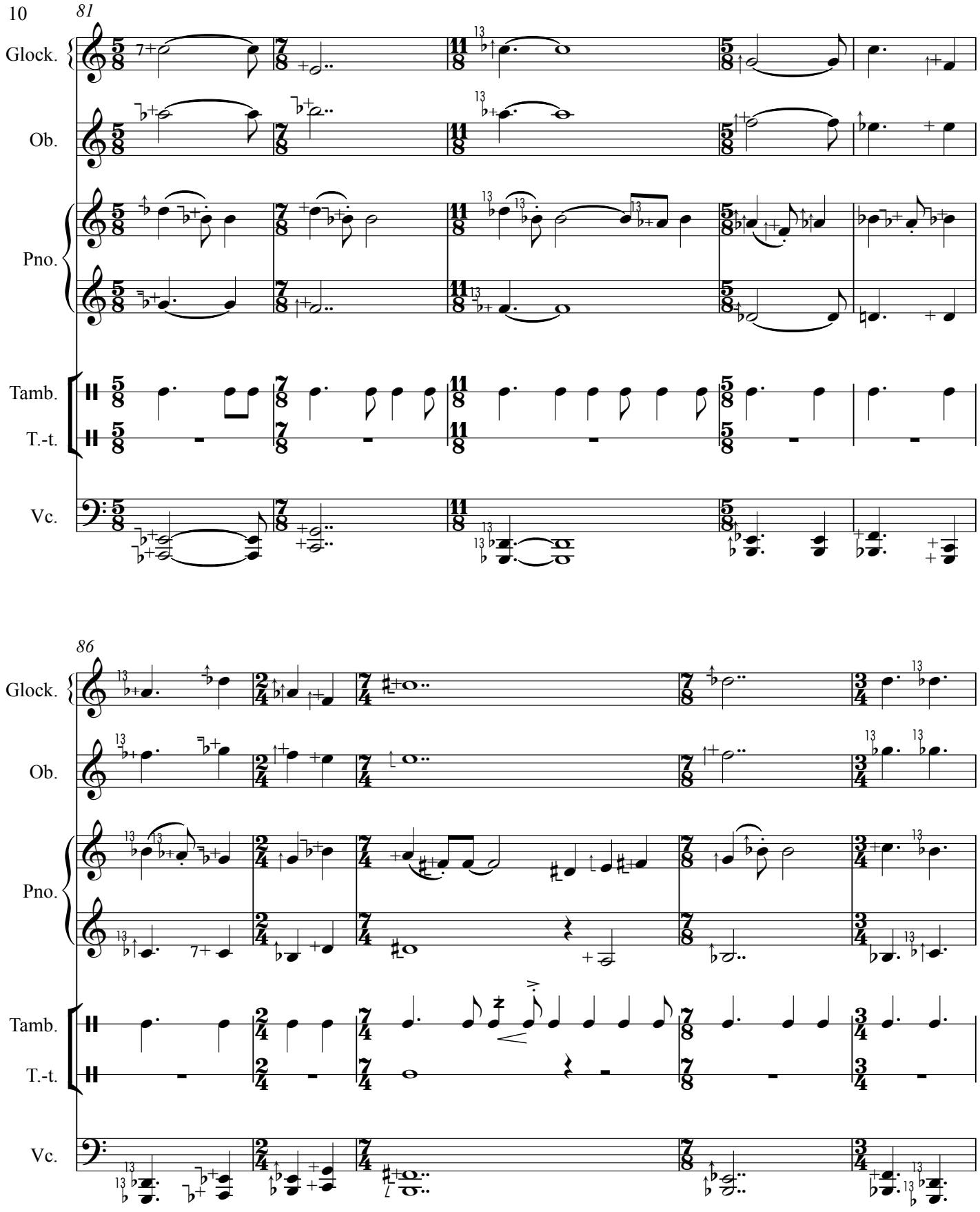
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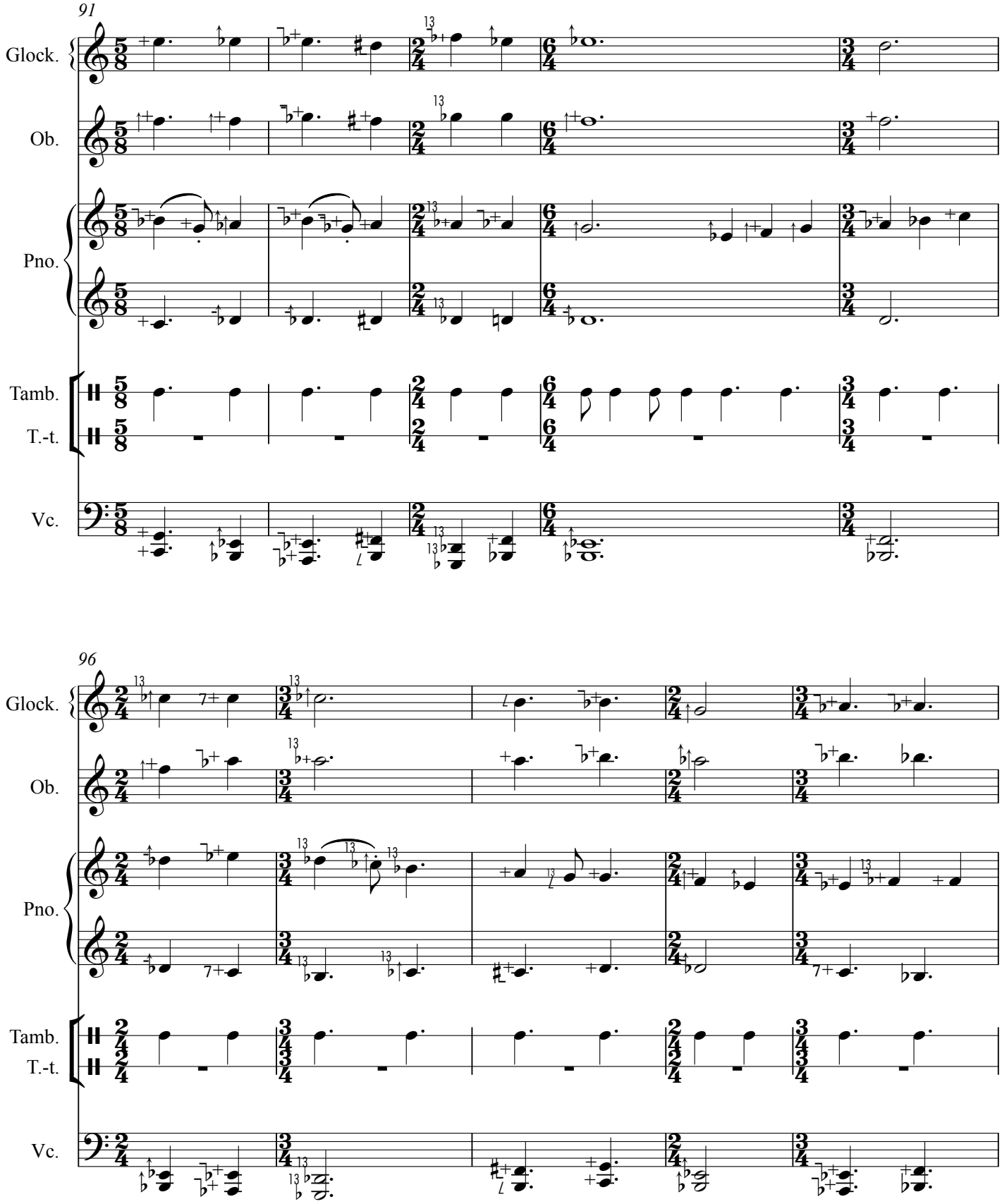
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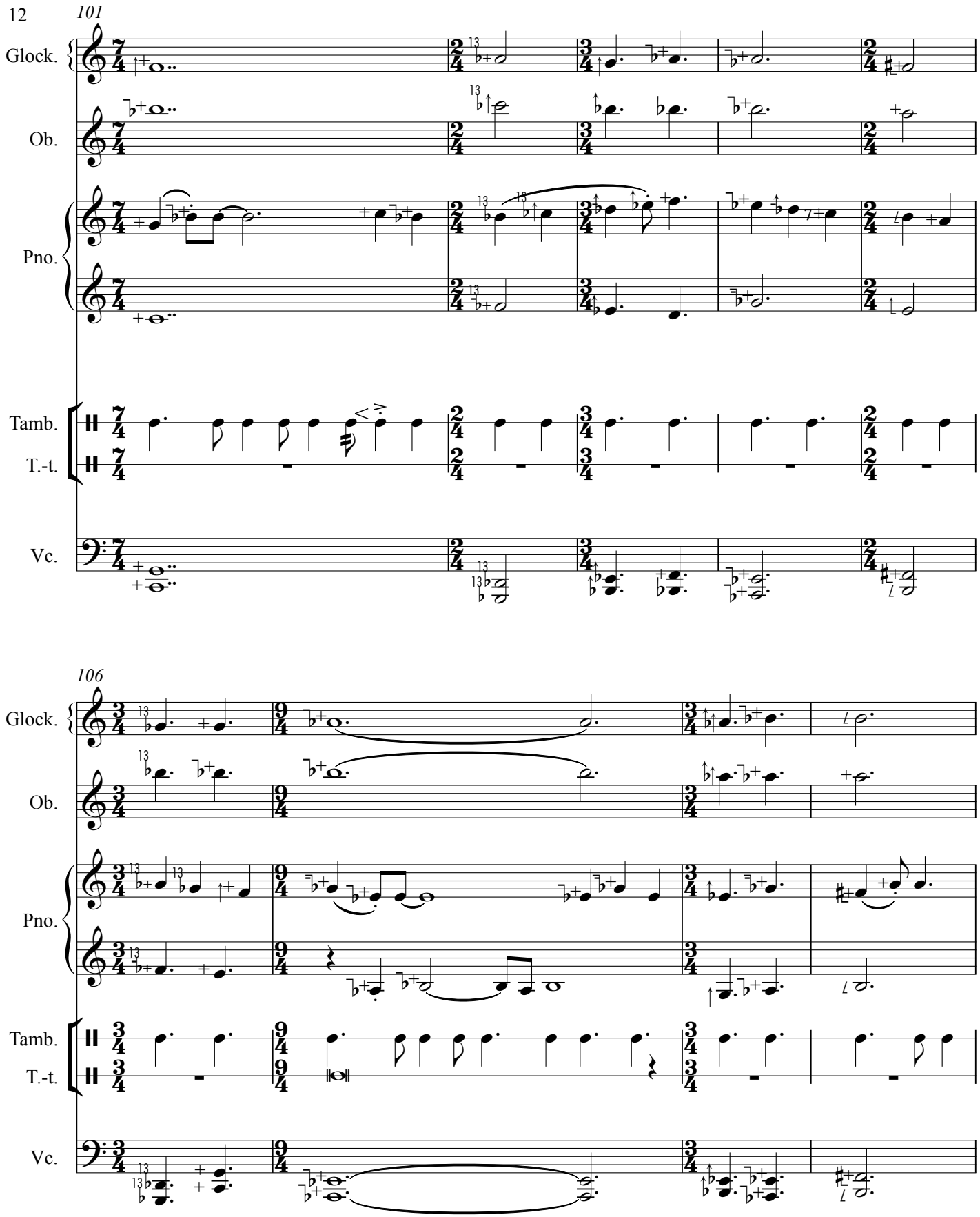
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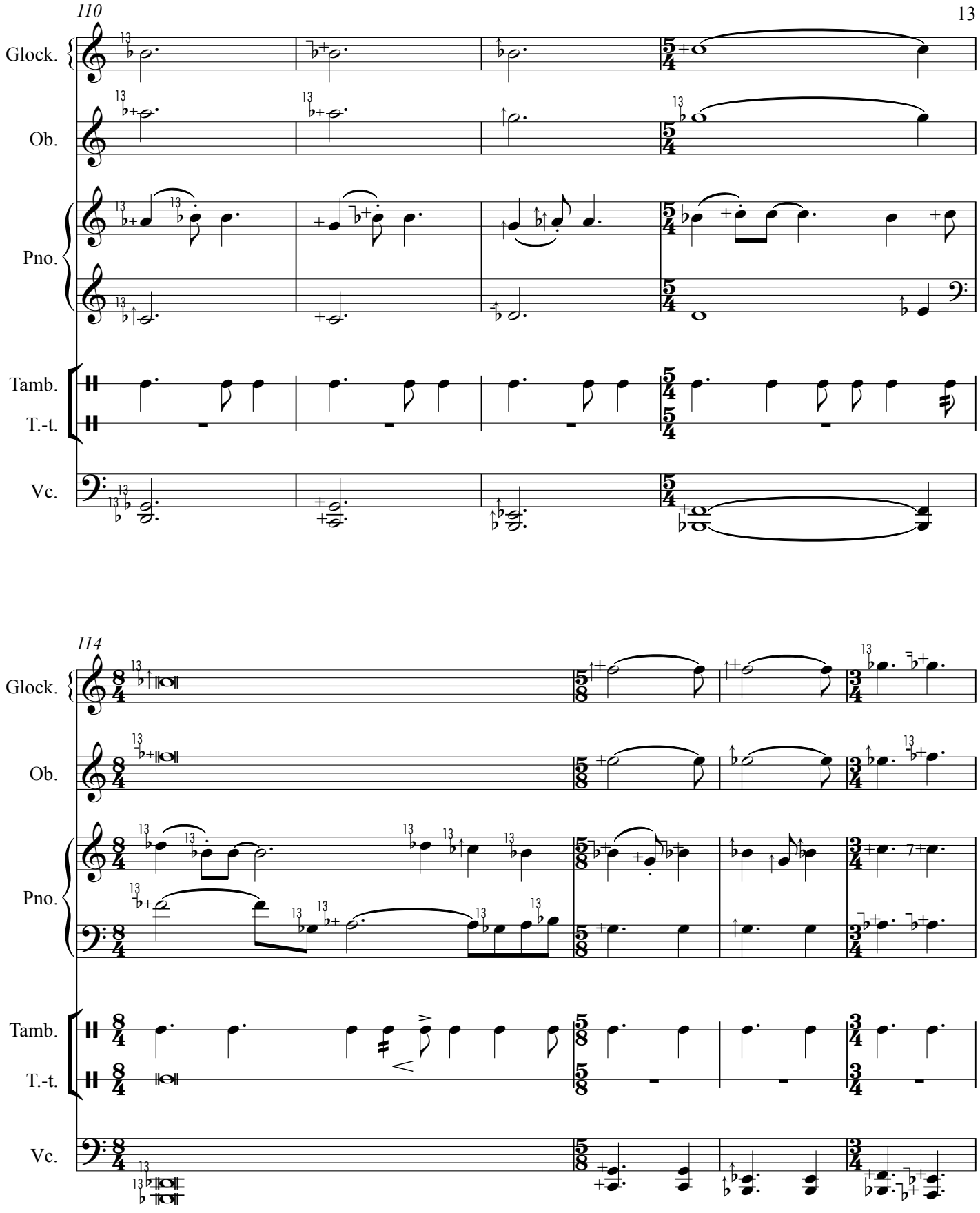
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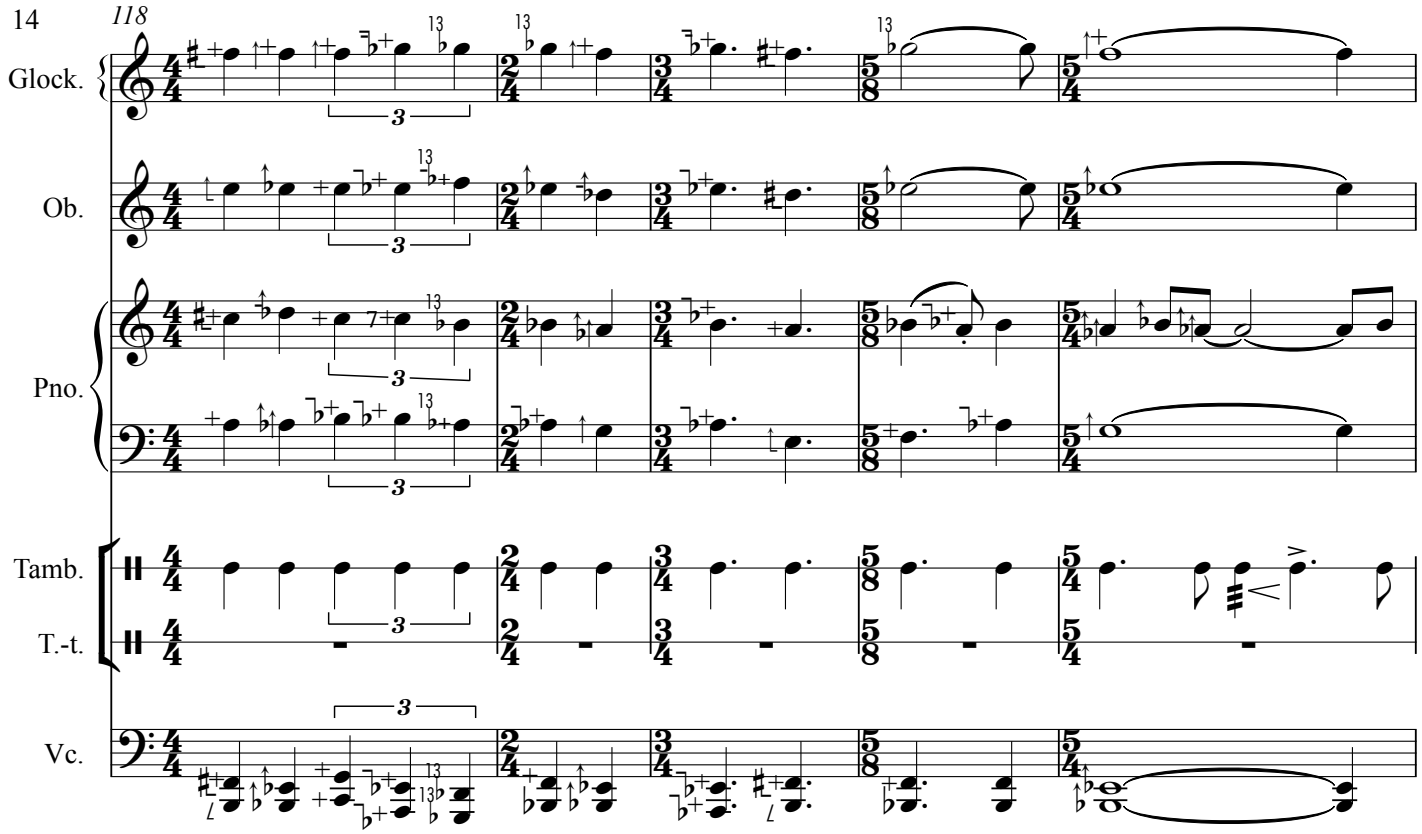
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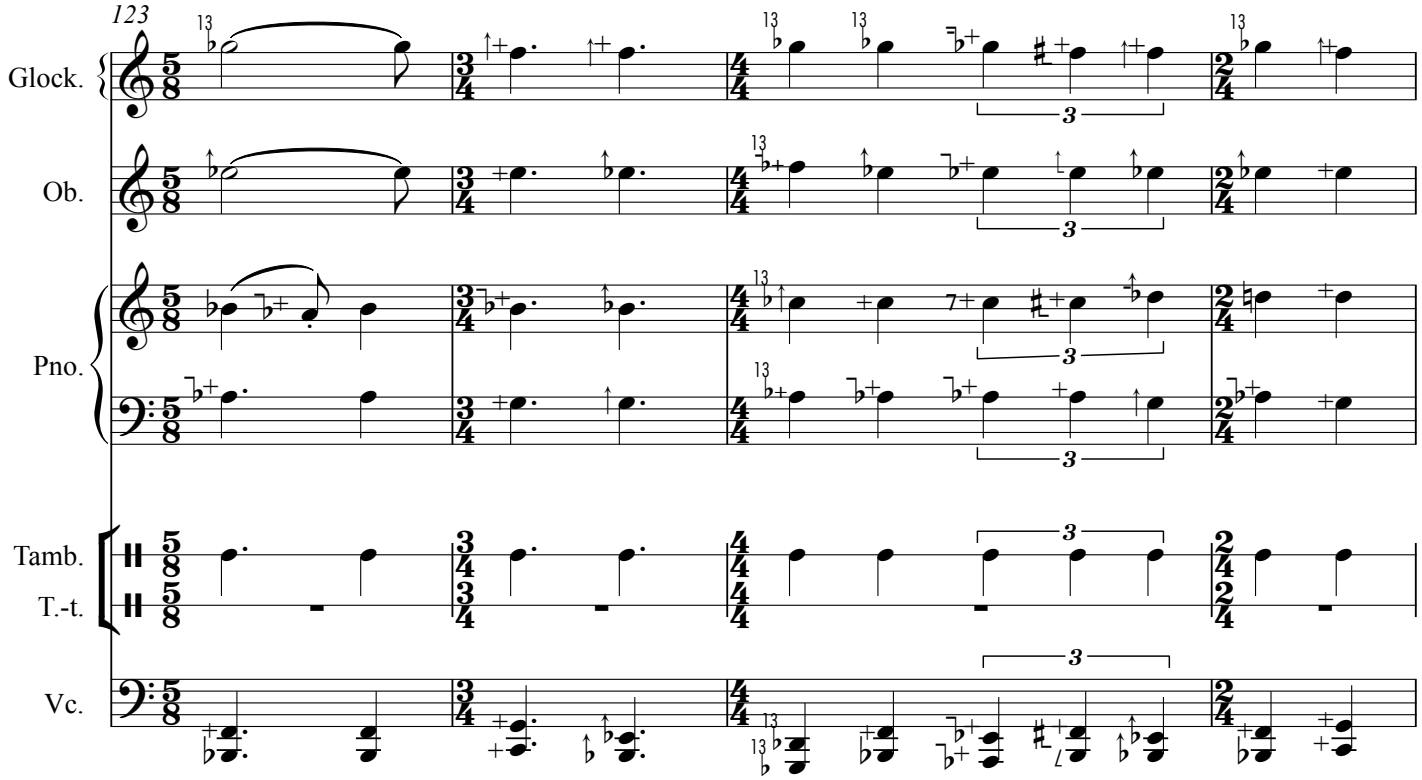
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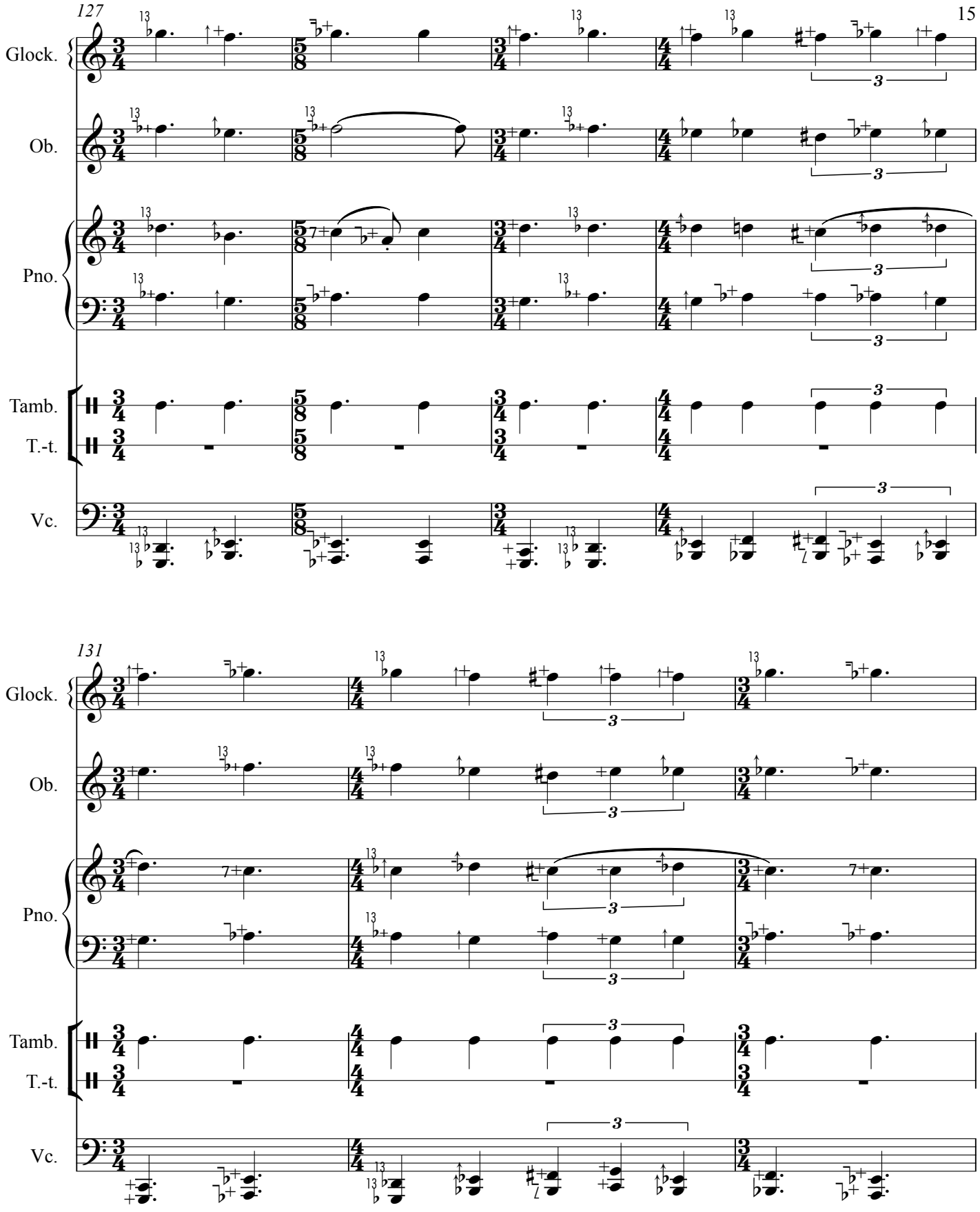
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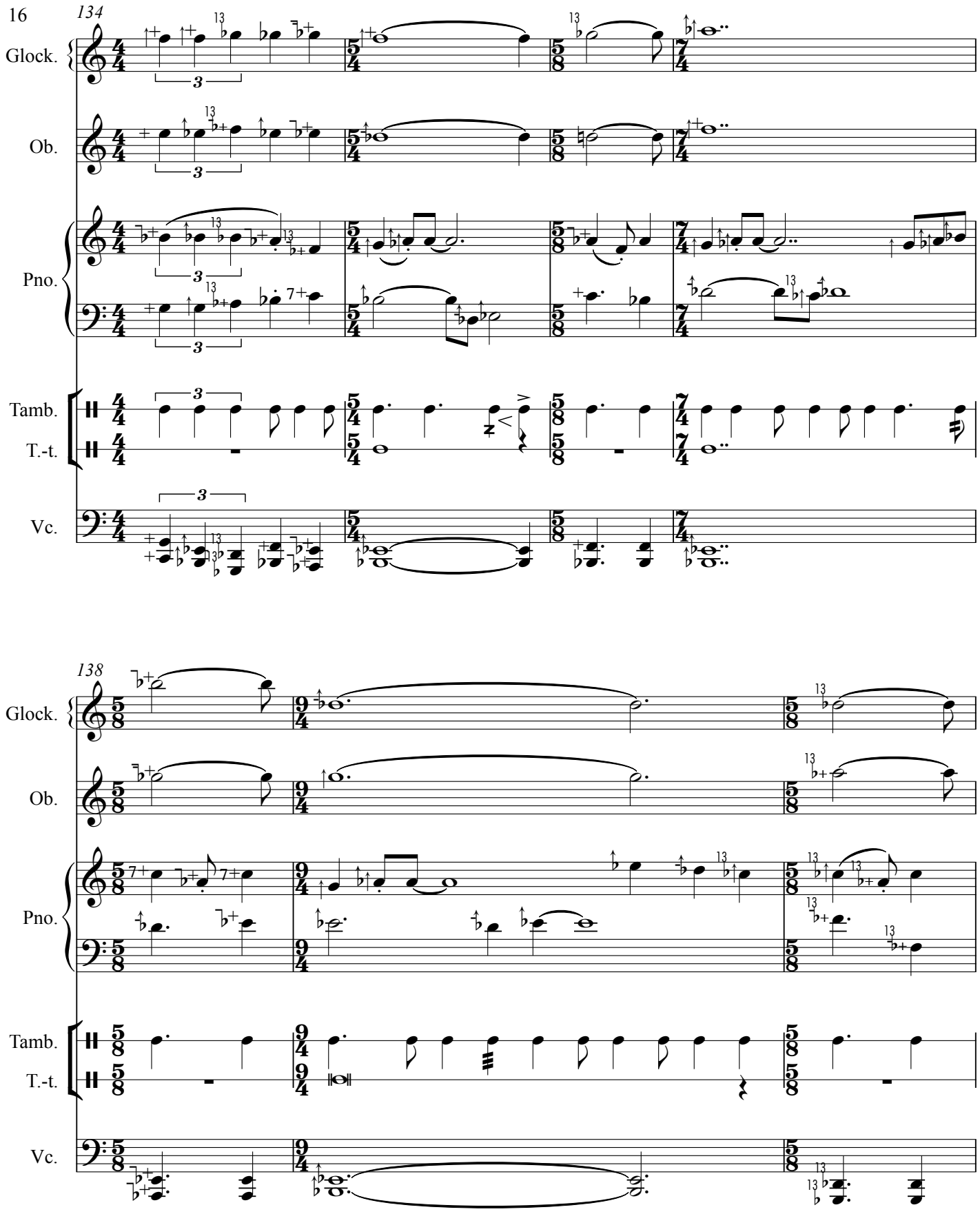
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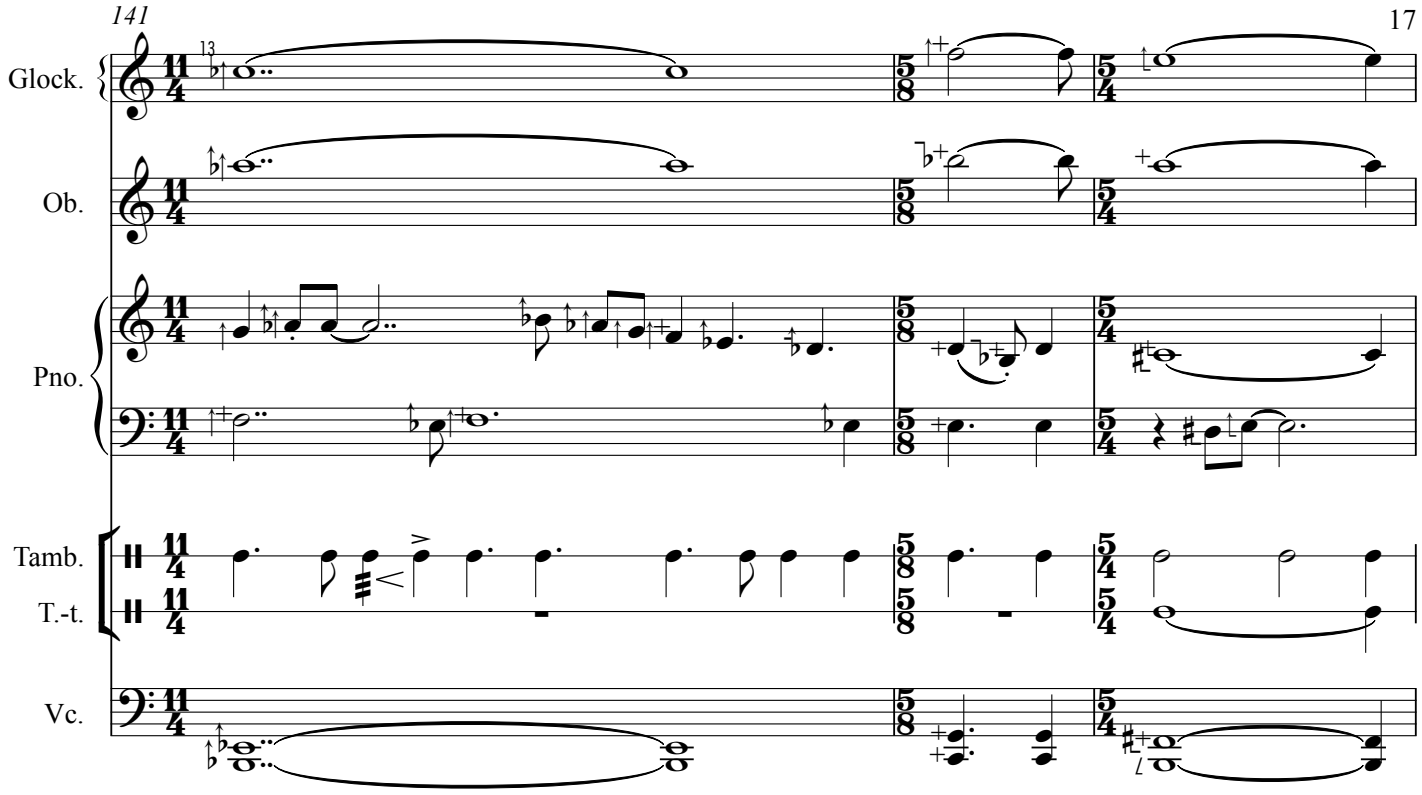
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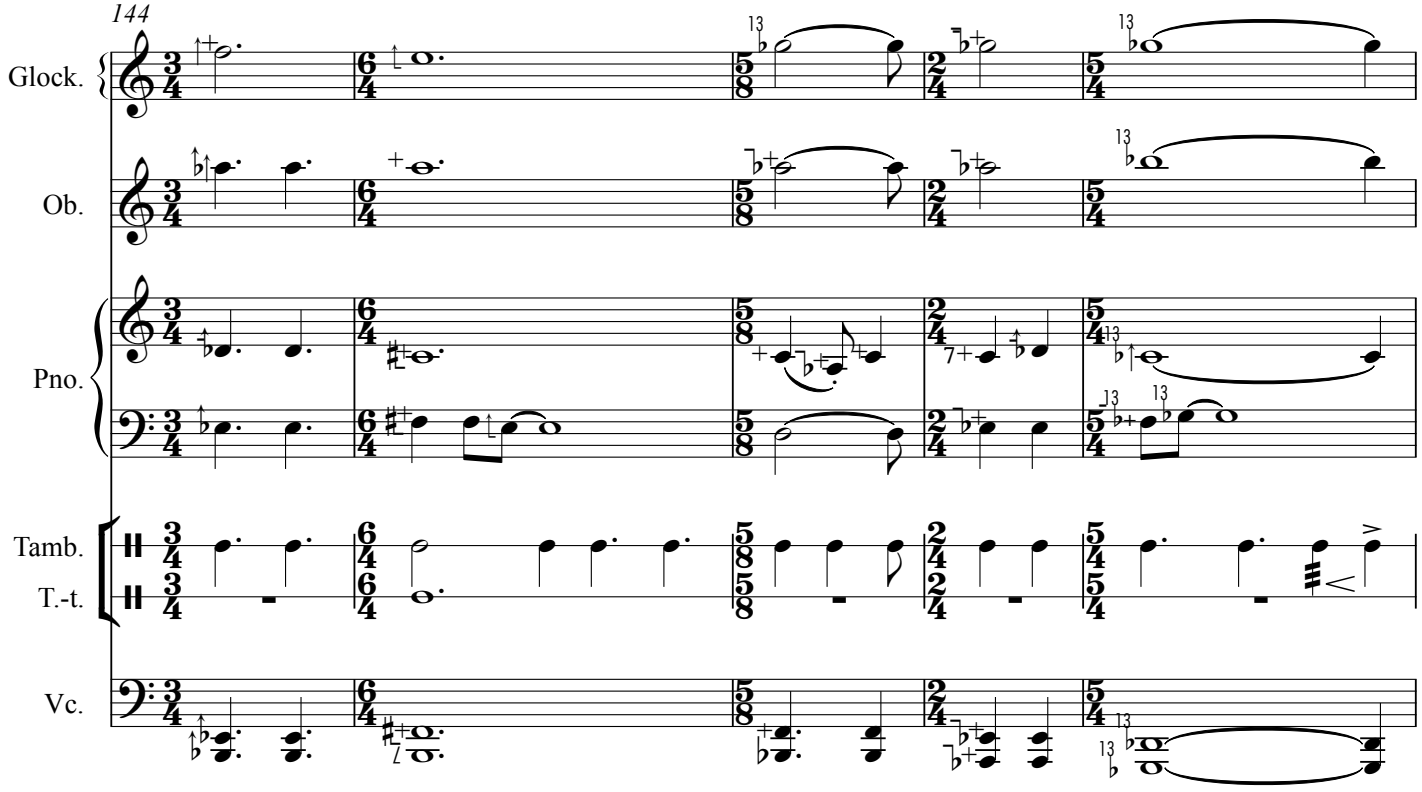
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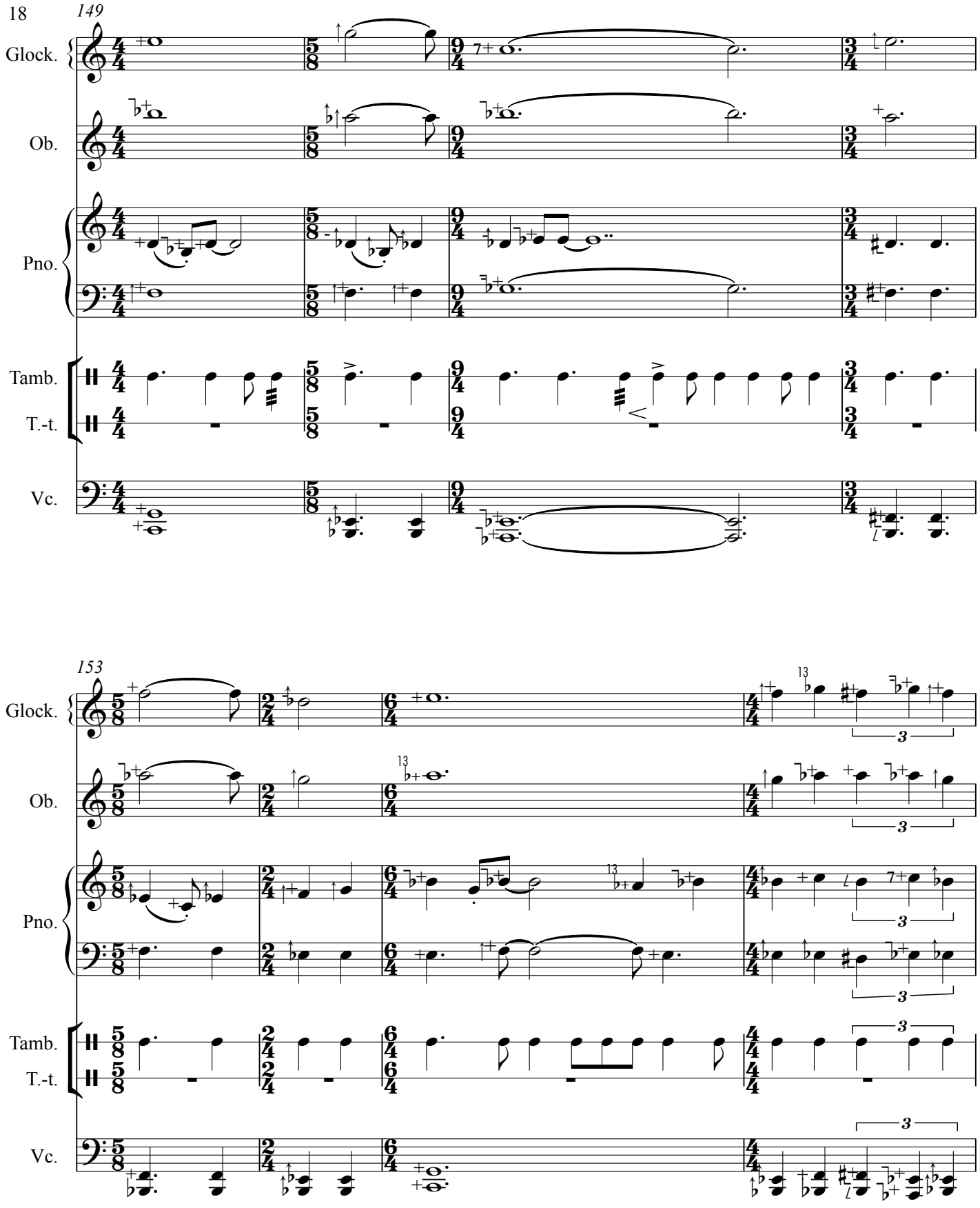
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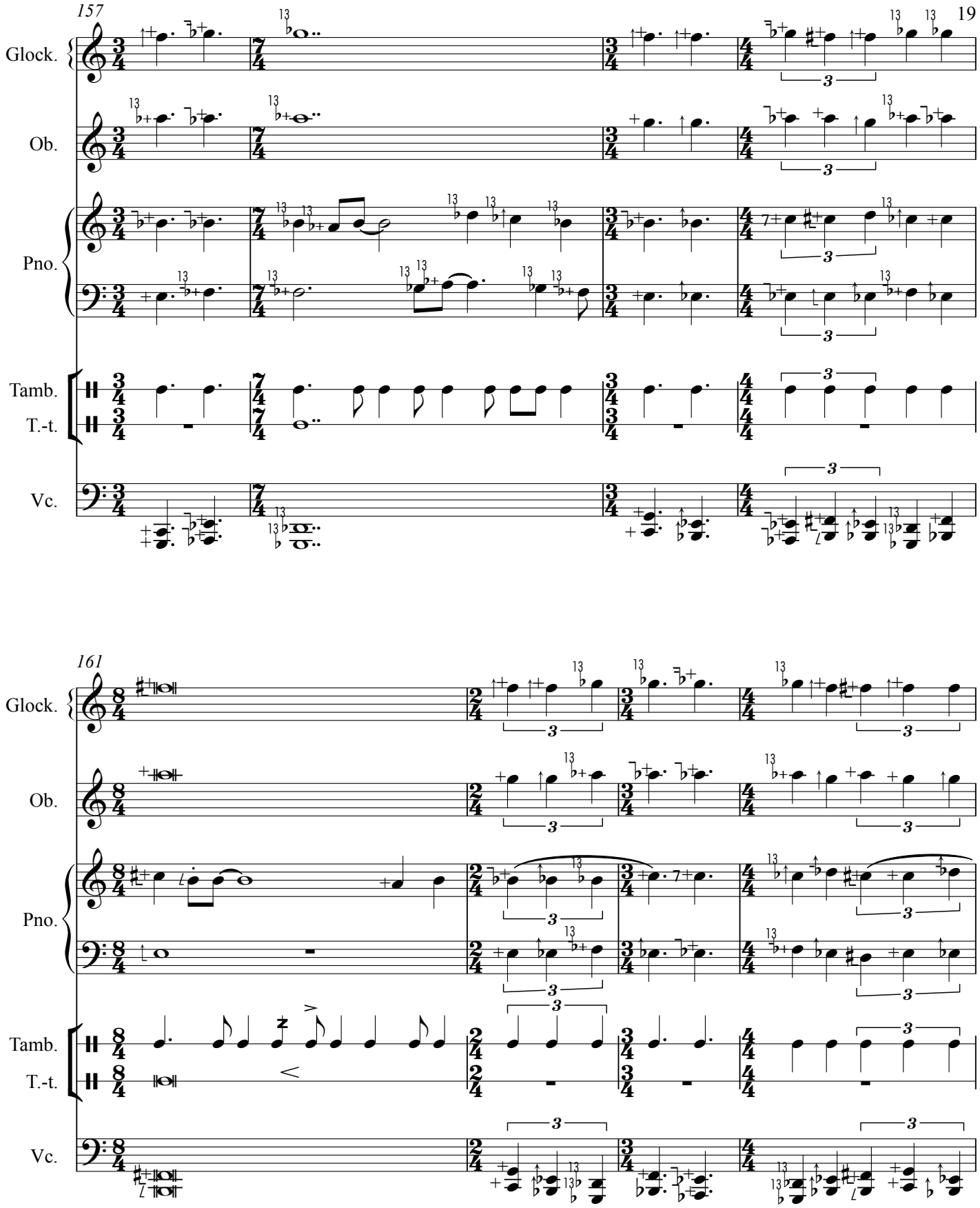
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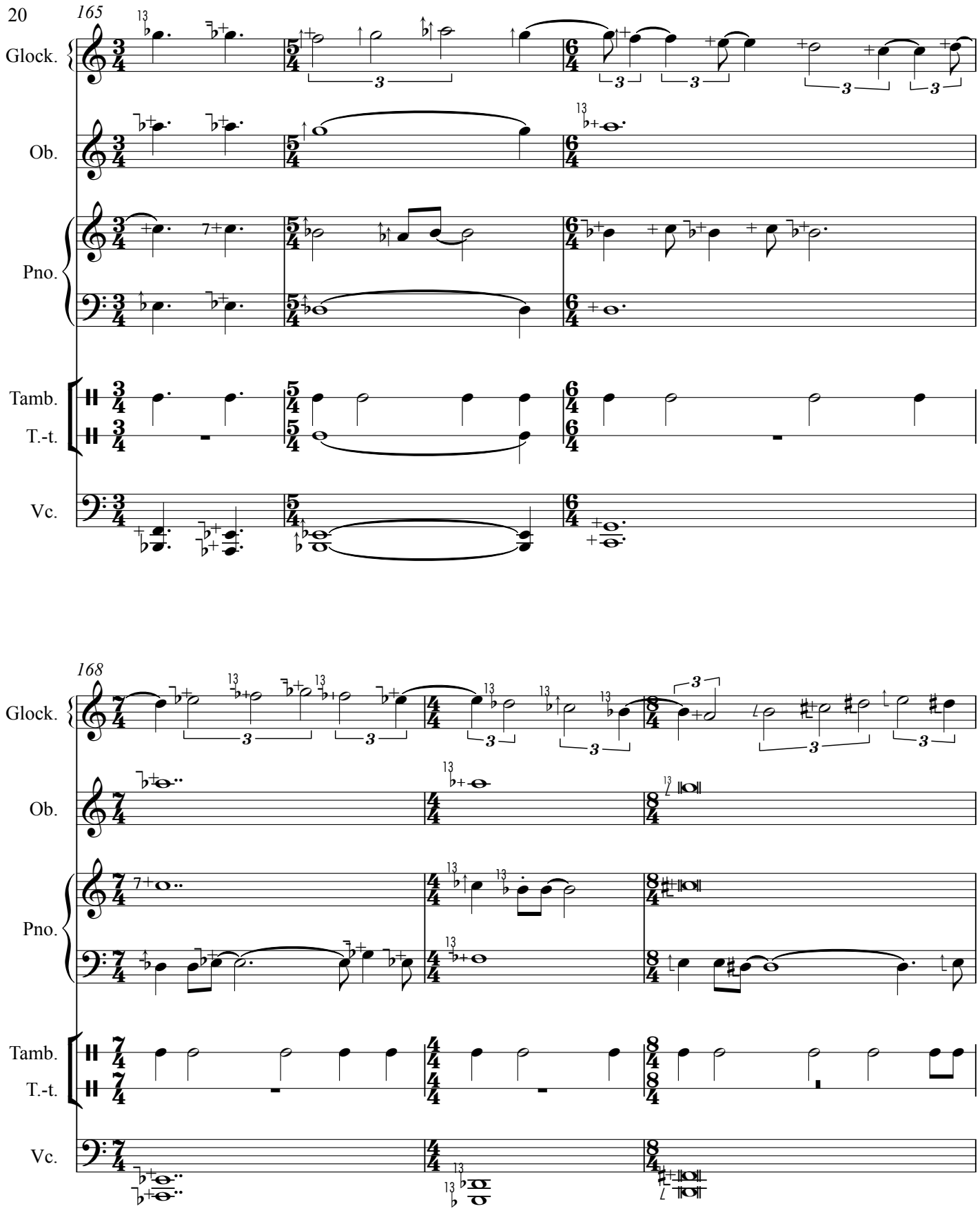
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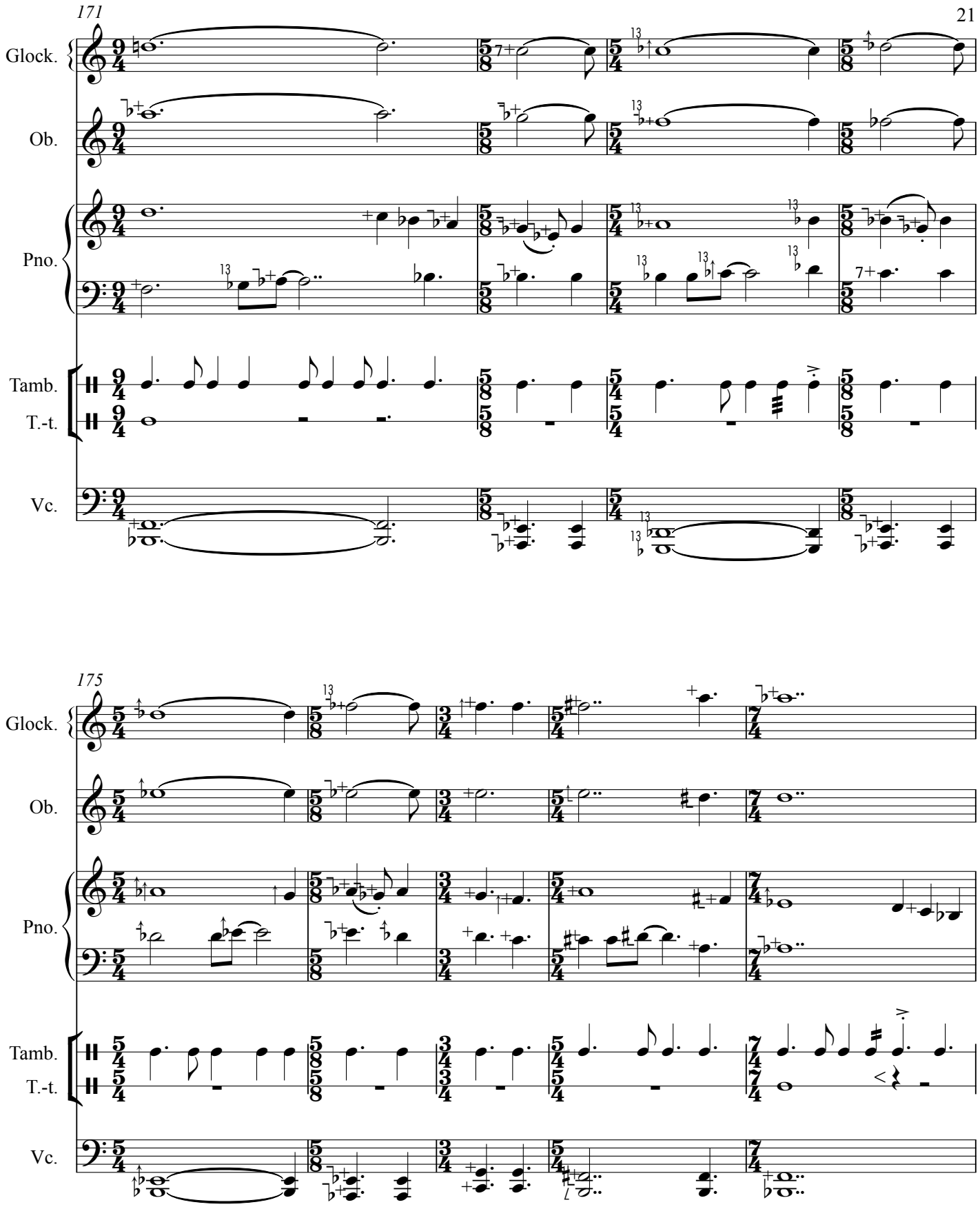
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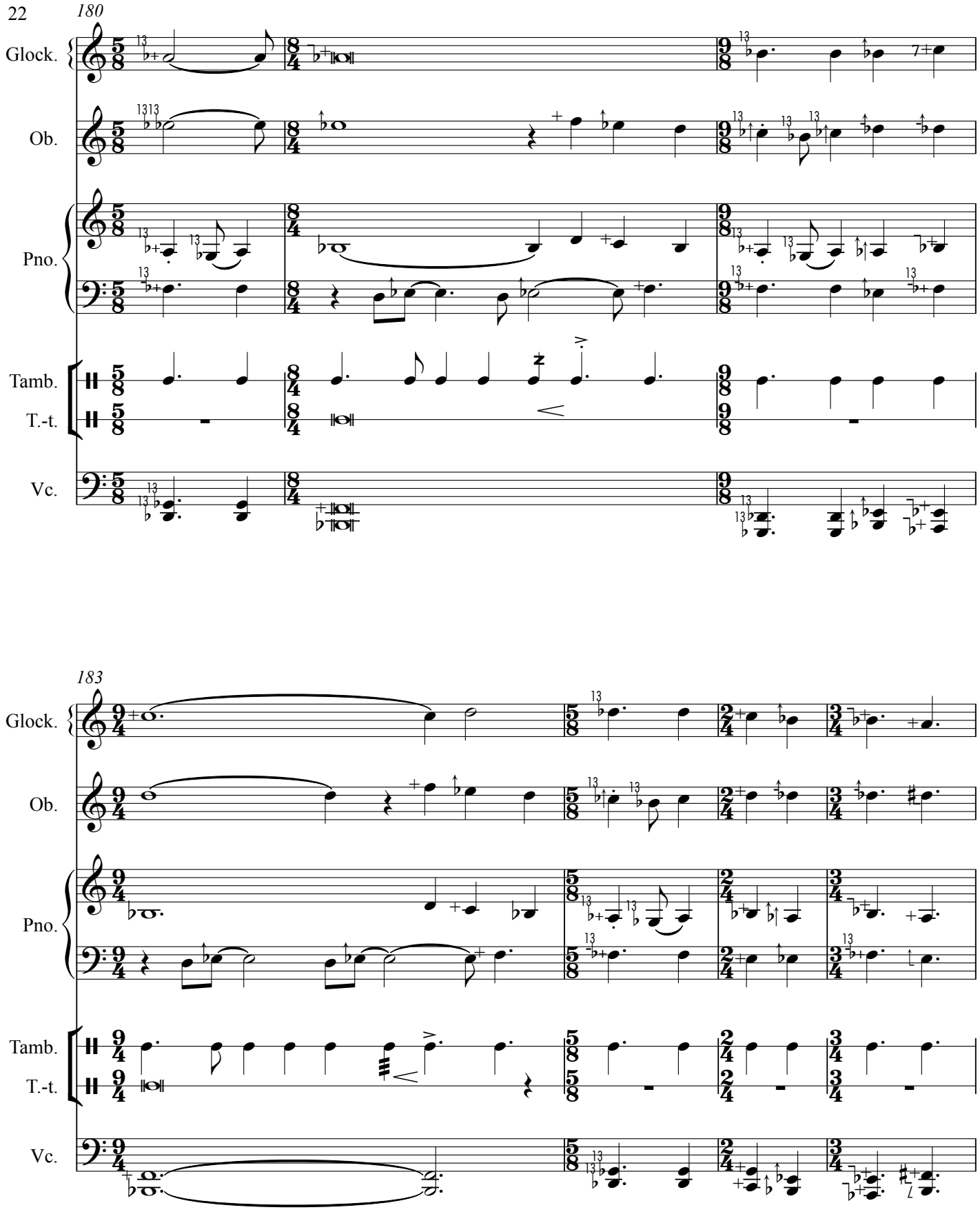
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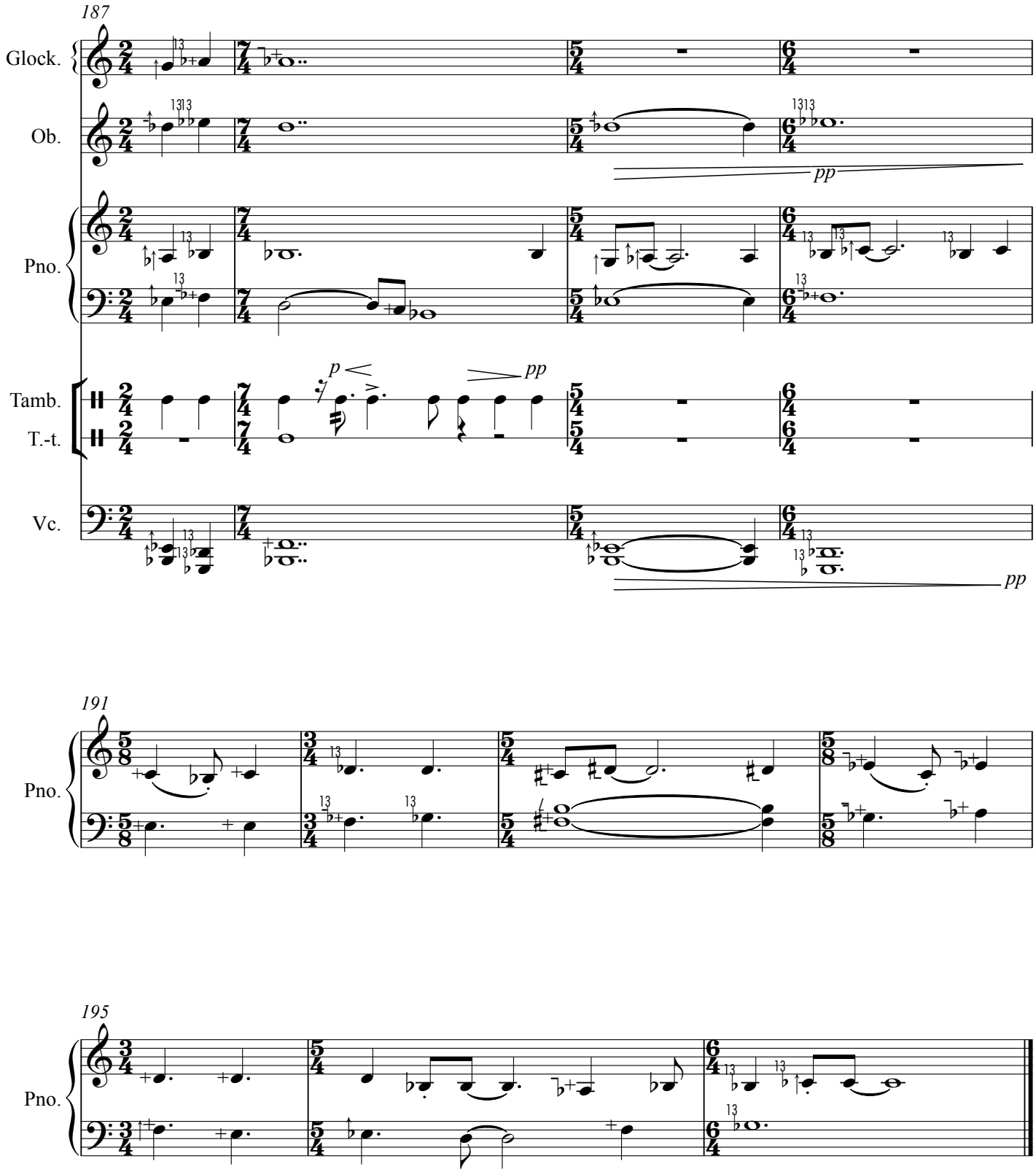

February 27 - March 8, 2012
Germantown, NY