CLASSICAL GAS

By Mason Williams
Arranged by Bill Purse
Edited by Aaron Stang

Teacher Notes

Classical Gas

Background:

A melodic and inventive composition from the Warner Bros.-Seven Arts album *The Mason Williams' Phonograph Record,* "Classical Gas" reached number two in 1968 in the U.S. and number nine in Britain. It showcases the guitar in an orchestral setting and provides a broad spectrum of styles in just three minutes. "Classical Gas" was the first international hit recording to fuse classical and rock music and encouraged other successful fusion experiments by jazz, classical, and rock artists during the 1970s. The middle section of "Classical Gas" is well known as the theme for the TV series "Wide World of Sports."

Mason Williams

Mason Williams was born August 24, 1938, in Abilene, Texas, and surprisingly did not take up the guitar until he was a mathematics student at Oklahoma City University. It was during his time in the U.S. Navy that he found time to develop his songwriting skills. Afterward, he became a folk singer in the Los Angeles area and then became a regular writer for "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" (one of the most popular TV shows of the late sixties). Mason is a man of many talents. He has received an Emmy award for his TV comedy writing and has his photographic work in the permanent collection of New York City's Museum of Modern Art. Mason is still busy in the music business with his composition "Symphonic Bluegrass" being performed by more than forty symphonies.

Performance Notes

Overview:

- The CD recording that comes with this arrangement or the original recording should be studied by the director and players to familiarize themselves with the feel of the arrangement and especially the chains of syncopations scattered throughout this work. After listening to the recording, the score for director and parts for students should be followed while listening. The syncopations in this work may seem complex and difficult when represented in notation but feel very natural when performed; therefore, it is very important to get the feel of the piece through concentrated listening. The dynamics and their variations are very important in this work and need to be followed as written, especially when melodic content is repeated.

Section A:

- Provides an easy flowing introduction at a slower tempo than the rest of the work. The $\frac{4}{4}$ time signature change at measure 7 can be counted out loud in rehearsal while conducting to keep the ensemble together.
- The triplet figures in measure 9 can almost be felt as $\frac{9}{8}$; the ensemble must watch the conductor to perform this measure properly. Note it is slower (ca. ♩ = 80) and immediately goes back to the original tempo after completing the measure. The lower parts provide the downbeat for each triplet and should be solidly performed to establish the new tempo for Guitar 1.

Section B:

- Establishes the tempo for the remainder of the piece (ca. ♩ = 140) and original melody.
- There is a call-and-response throughout this section for Guitar 2 and Guitar 3 with the melody in Guitar 1. These responses need to be present but not stronger than Guitar 1.

Section C:

- Is the most syncopated section in the piece and is where the most rehearsal time will be spent. Count out loud while the ensemble rehearses at a very slow tempo; this is the section of music where concentrated listening of the CD will pay off.
- Guitar 1 must really come out in measures 34–36 to lead into the second theme. It may be easier for Guitar 1 to count: 123 123 123 123 12 12 12 rather than trying to count in $\frac{3}{4}$ as written.

Section D:

- Measure 55 has a meter change to $\frac{5}{4}$; it helps to count out loud measures 55–58 to keep all four parts synchronized. Guitar 4 and the Bass must be very solid in measure 56 since the other three parts answer the bass notes.
- Guitar 1 needs to sustain all the notes in measures 57–58. The Dm9 chord shape diagram is provided, and Guitar 1 simply needs to play the notes and then sustain each one shown in the dia gram.

Section E:

- Is a new contrasting theme (the one used by "Wide World of Sports"). Guitar 4 and/or the Bass must pay close attention to the rhythms because this section features their lines with the other parts just supporting it.

Section F:

- Is the development section of the piece, and following the written dynamics is very important for all the performers.
- Guitar 2 has a harmonized line with Guitar 1 at measures 66, 68, 70, and 72; these need to stand out from the other lines but not dominate Guitar 1.

Section G:

- Is the climax of the work and needs to have the strongest dynamic level.
- Measures 85–88 will need to be counted aloud at rehearsals to lock all the performers together and come in together at letter H.

Section I:

- Is a recap of Section C with a slight variation and ending phrase.
- Guitar 2 needs to perform all accents on the upbeat from measures 109–110.
- Make sure that all guitars are watching the conductor to establish the ritard. and give the final cut-off so that all instruments end together.

Special Notes:

Guitar 1:

- Is a more advanced part where the student will need to play in the 5th position. This can easily be played by reading the supplied tab. Tab is provided for Guitar 1 for sections D through G.

Guitar 2:

- Is a 1st-position part with the eighth note the smallest written value.

Guitar 3:

- Is a 1st-position part with the eighth note the smallest written value.

Guitar 4:

- This is a treble-clef bass part. It can be played on guitar and/or doubled on bass guitar.

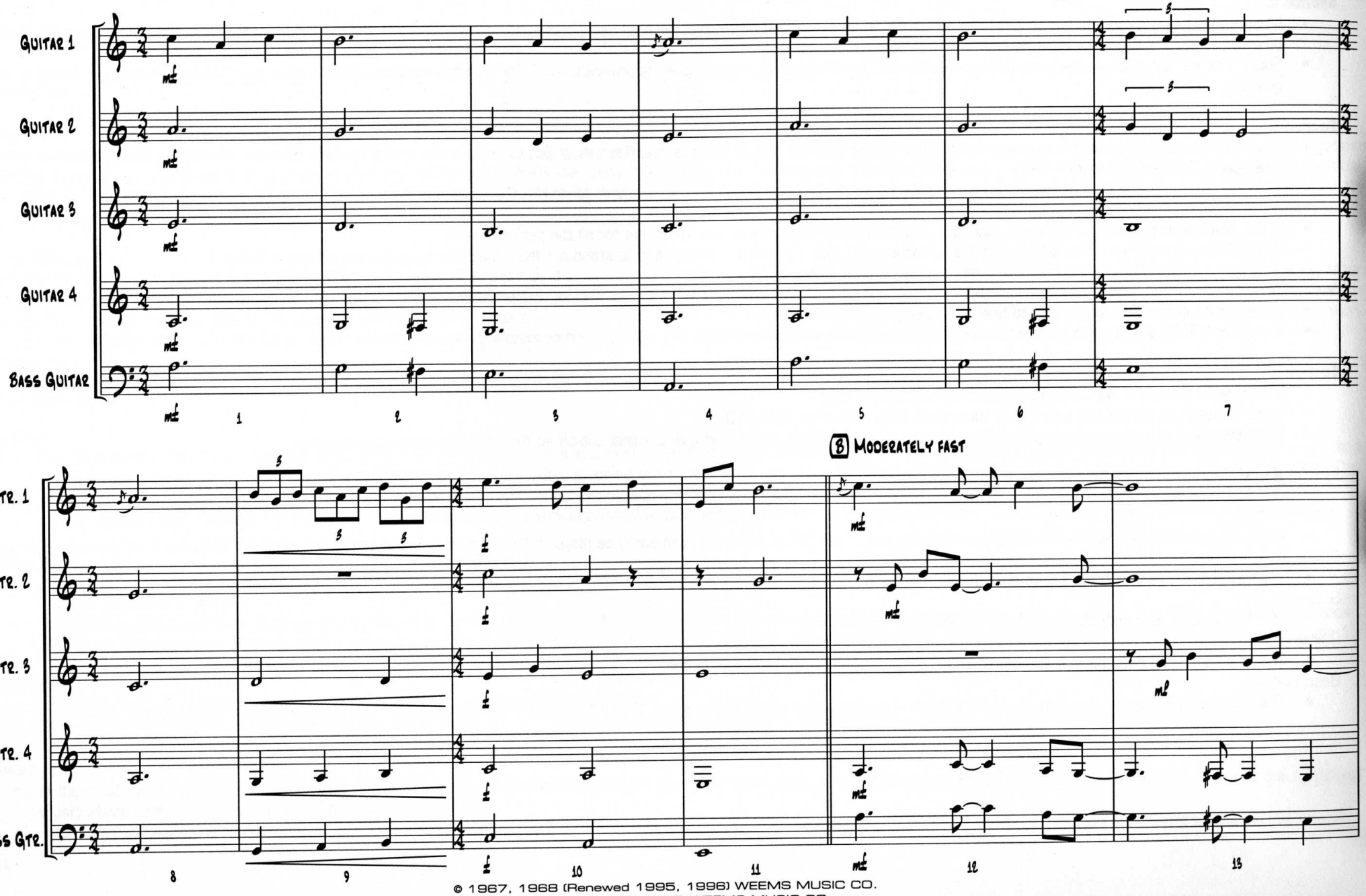
Bass Guitar:

- This is an optional bass guitar part. It doubles Guitar 4 exactly but is written in bass clef. If your bass player cannot read bass clef, have him or her use the Guitar 4 part.

CONDUCTOR
ELM02017

CLASSICAL GAS

Music by MASON WILLIAMS
Arranged by BILL PURSE



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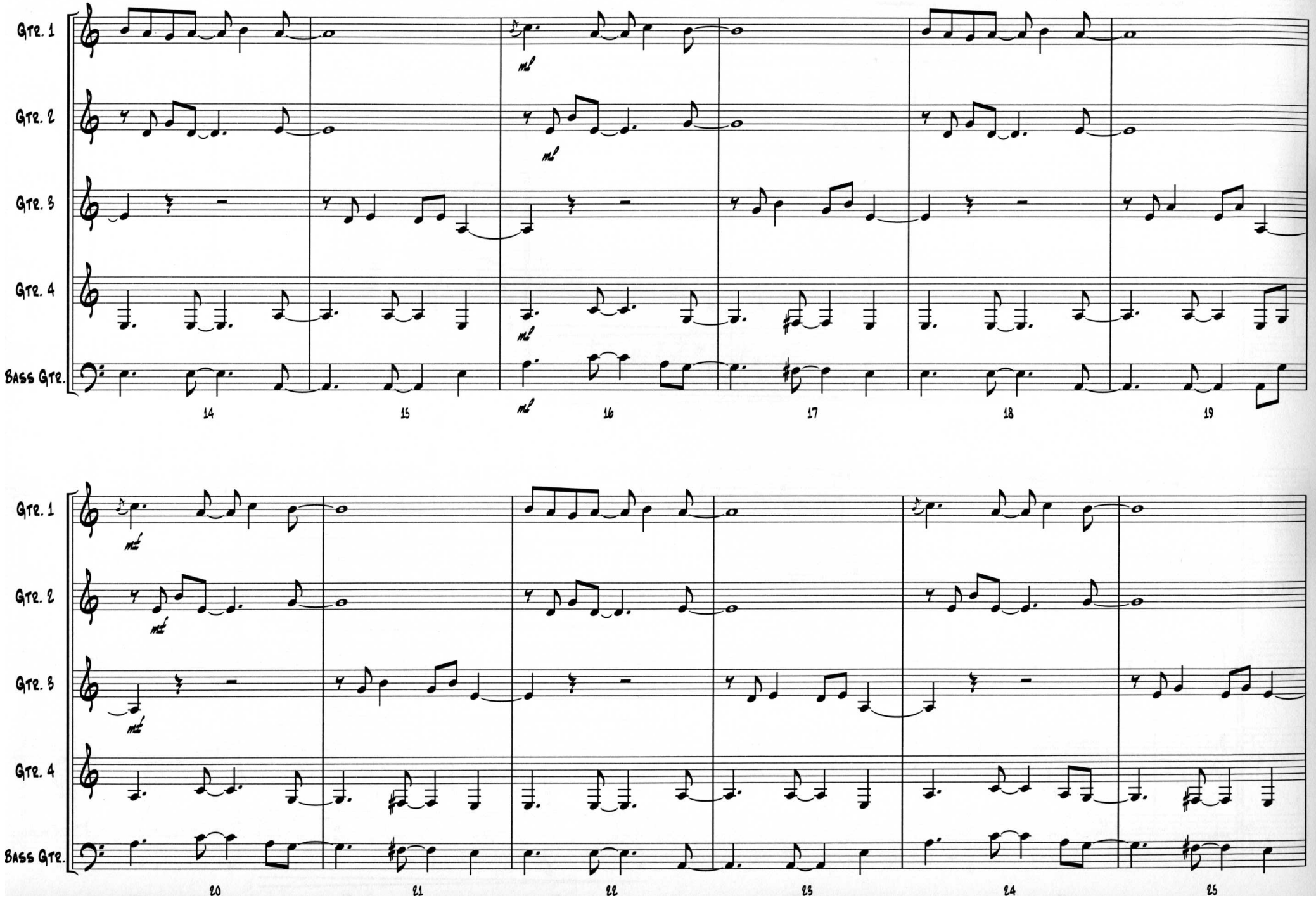
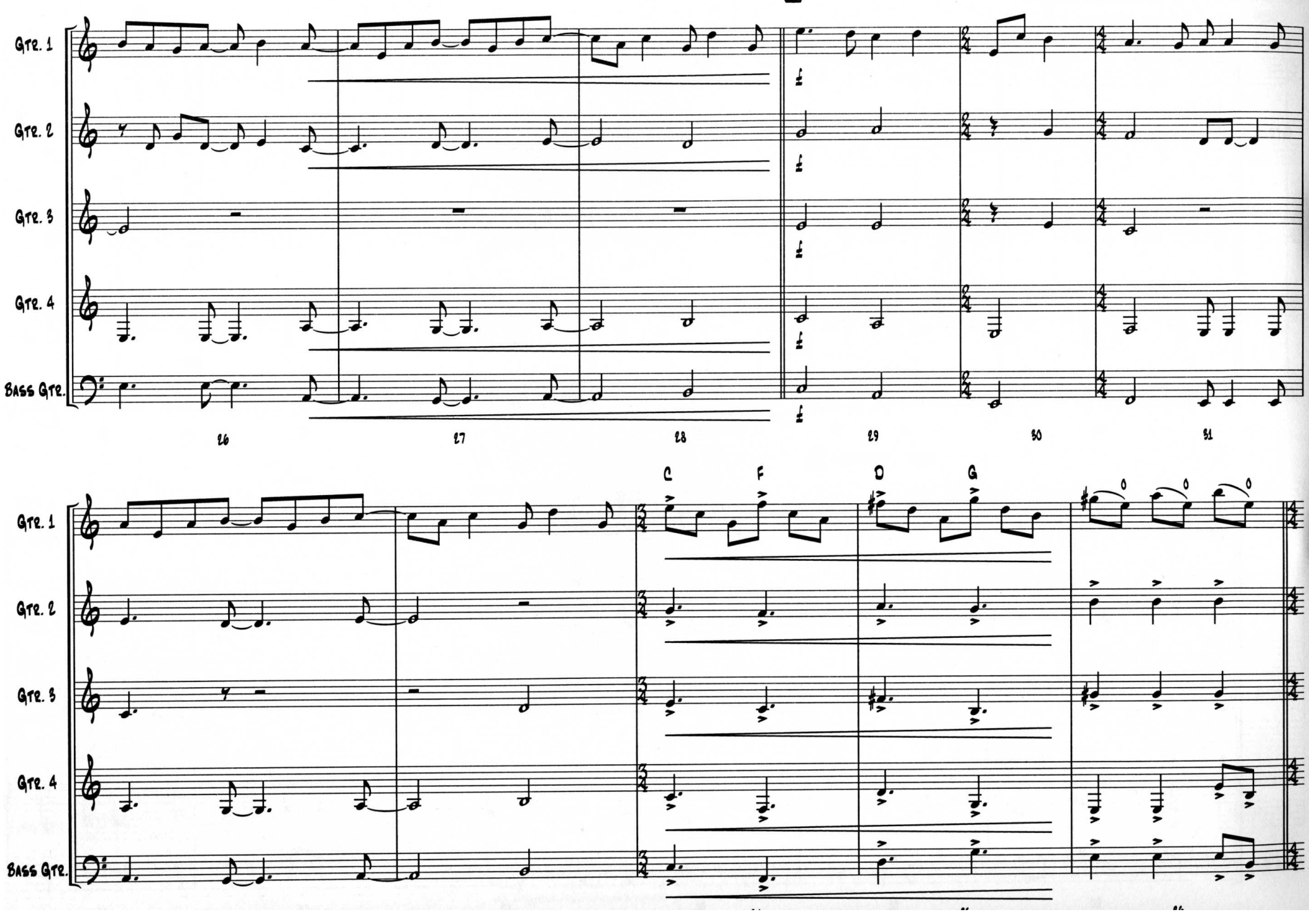
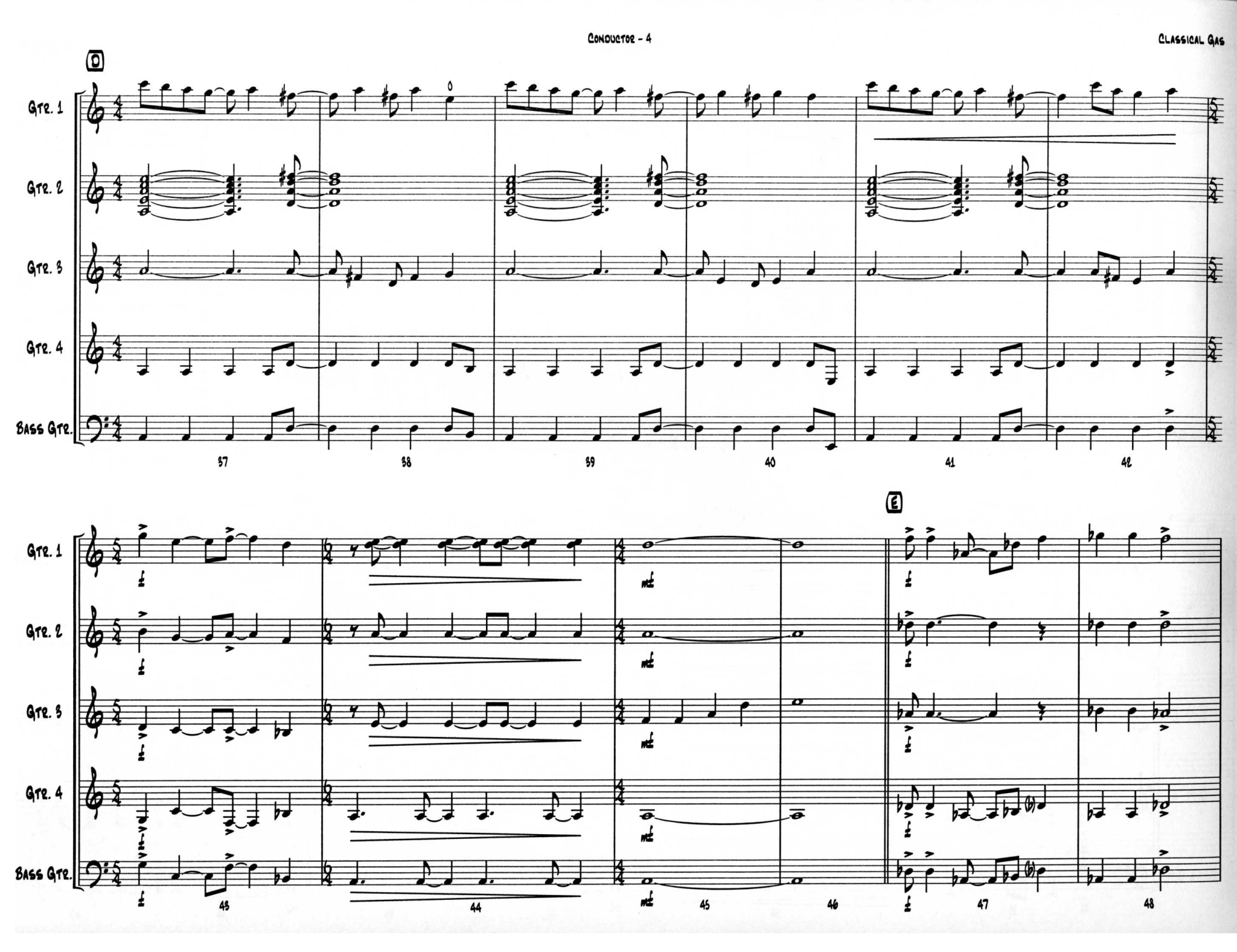
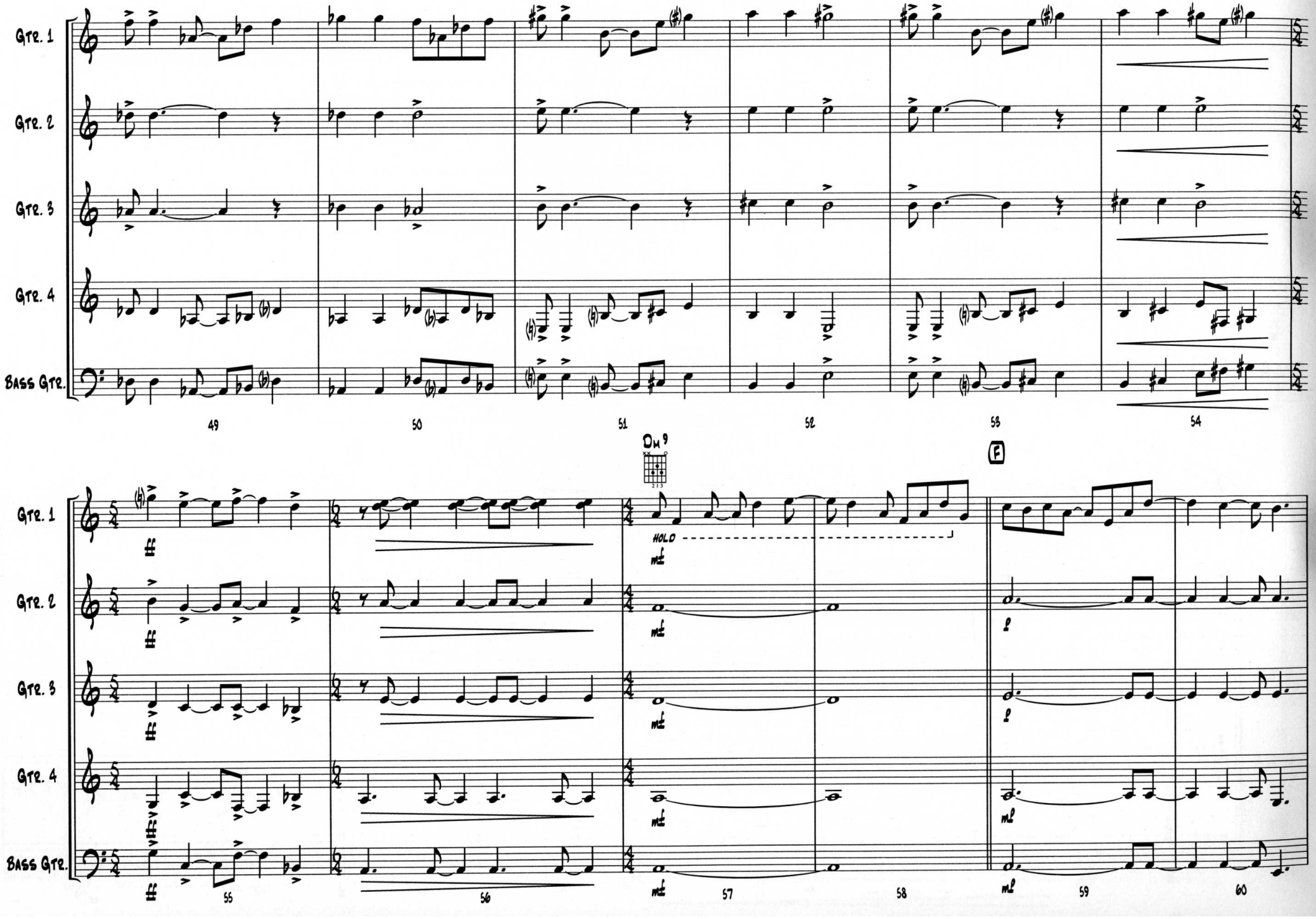

Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
mf
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25


C
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
26
27
28
29
30
31
C
F
D
G
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.


D
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
37
38
39
40
41
42
E
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
43
44
45
46
47
48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Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
49
50
51
52
53
54
Dm9
F
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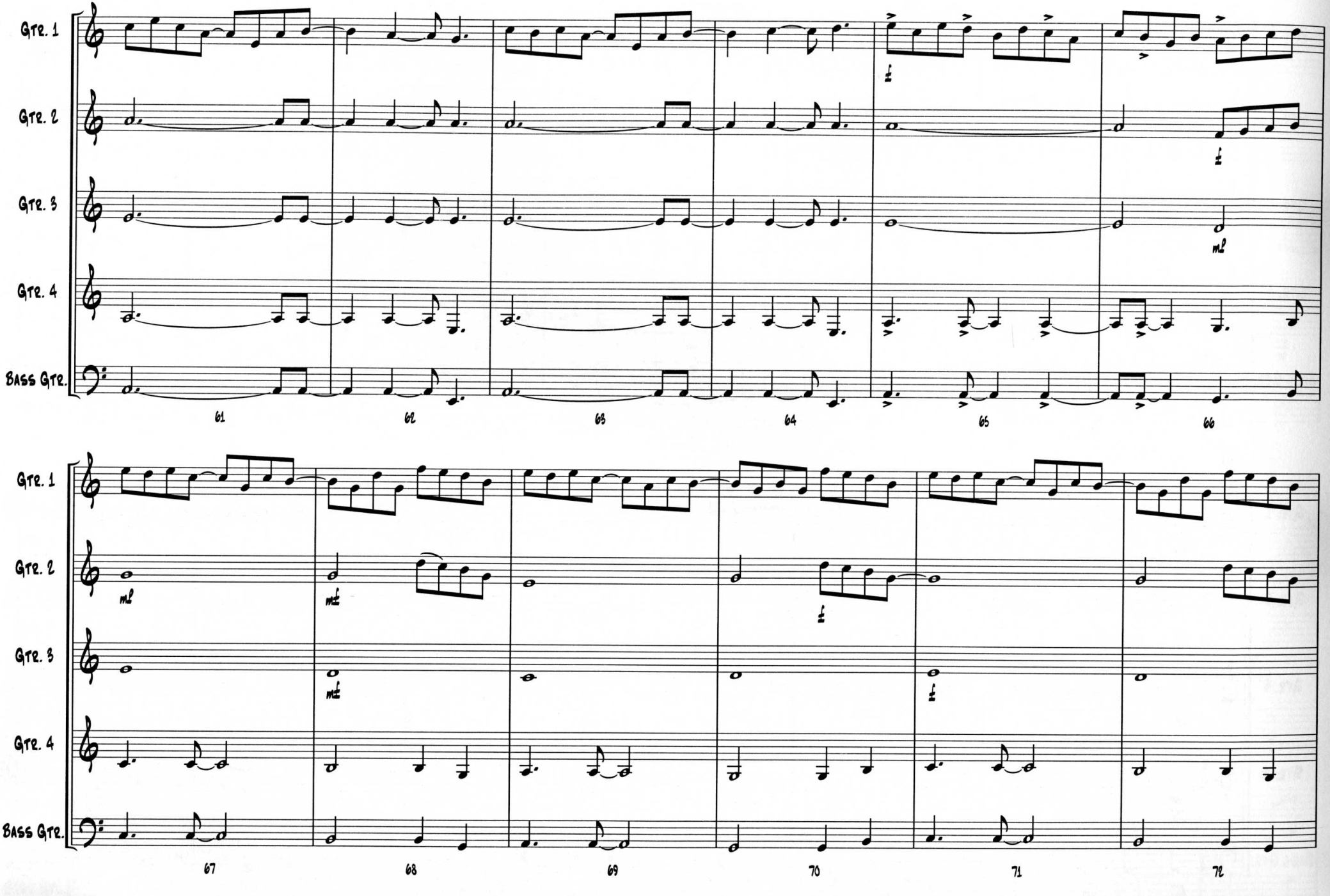
mf
mp
55
56
57
58
59
60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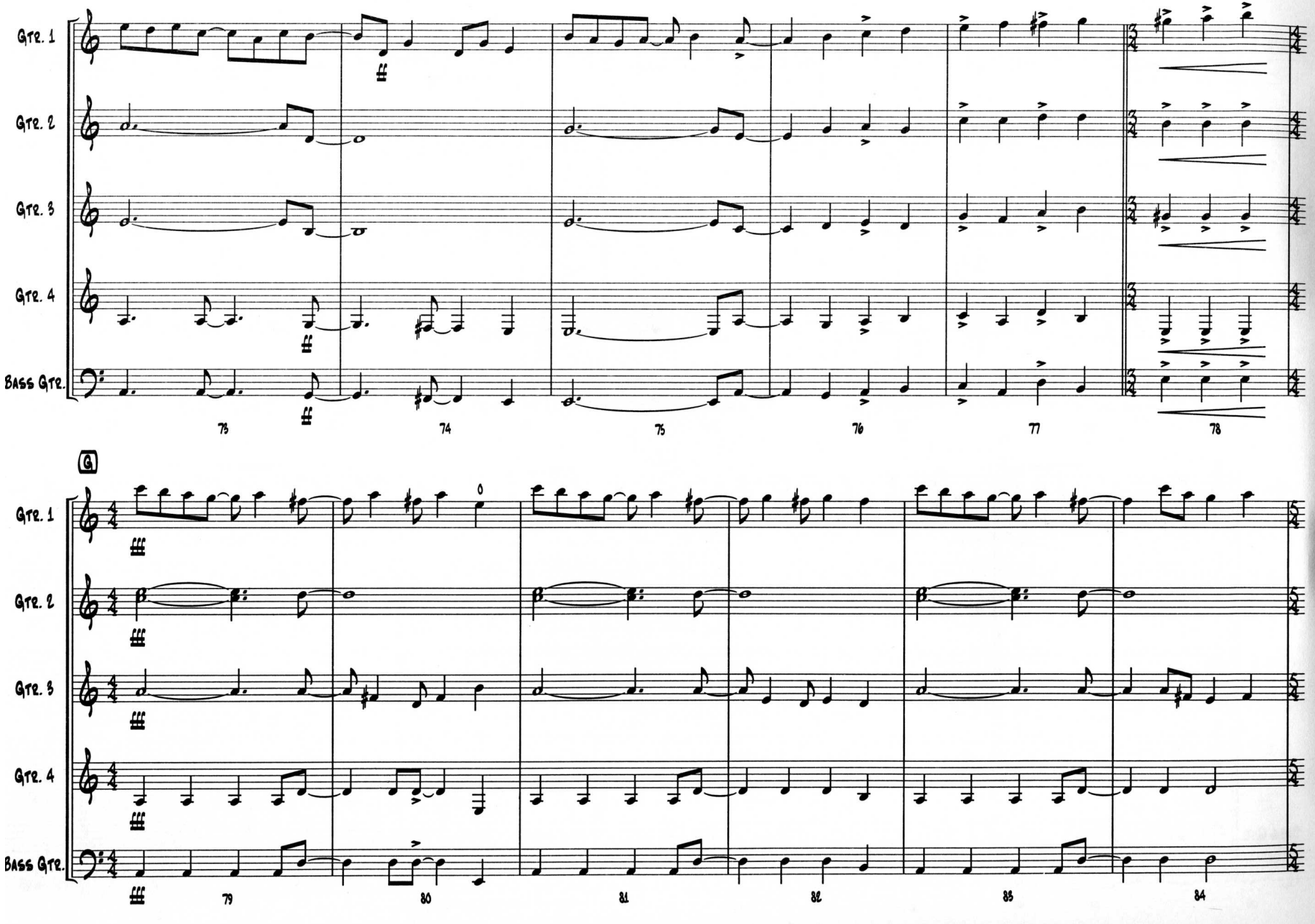
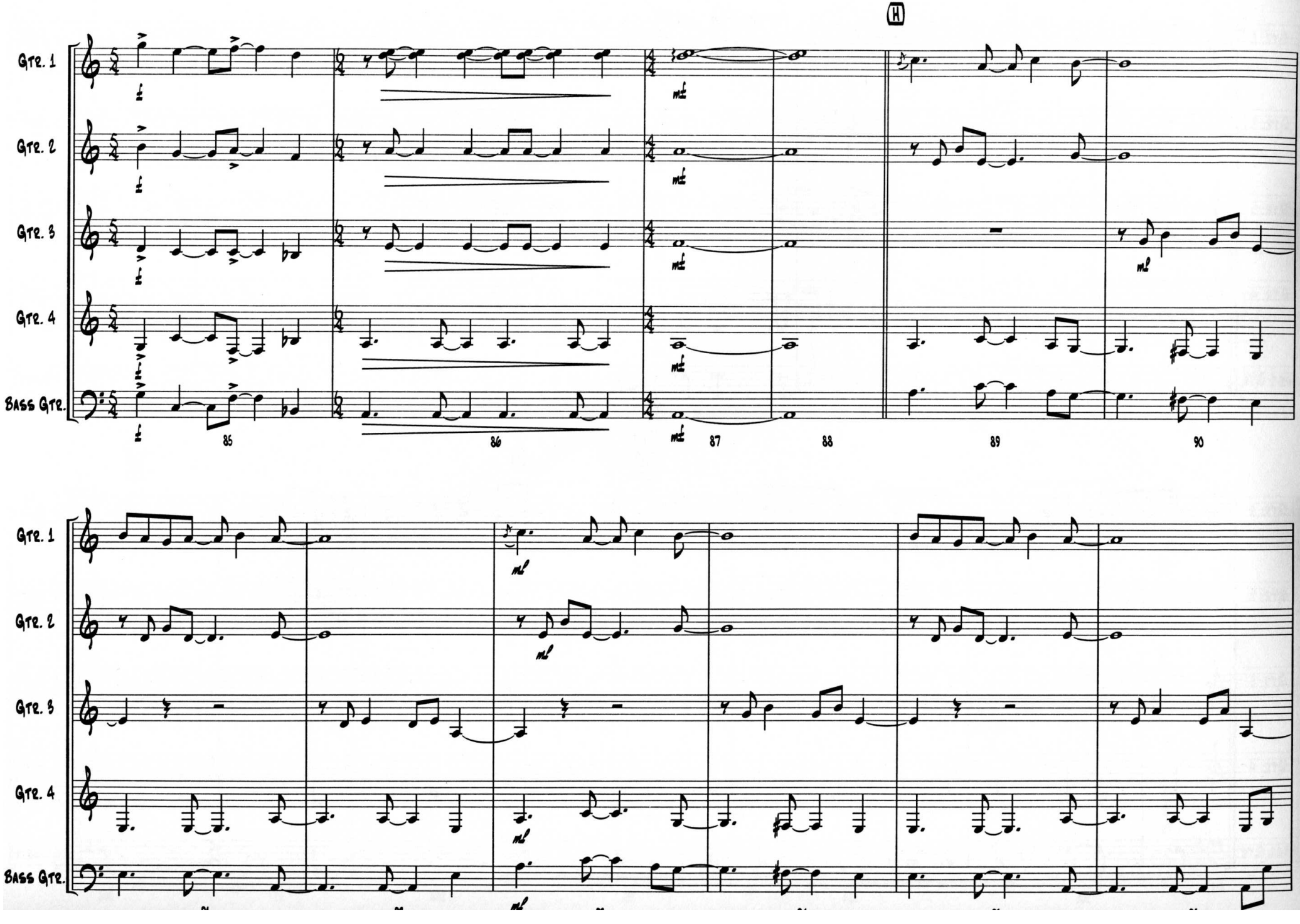
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
61
62
63
64
65
66
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
67
68
69
70
71
72


Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
73
74
75
76
77
78
G
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
79
80
81
82
83
84


H
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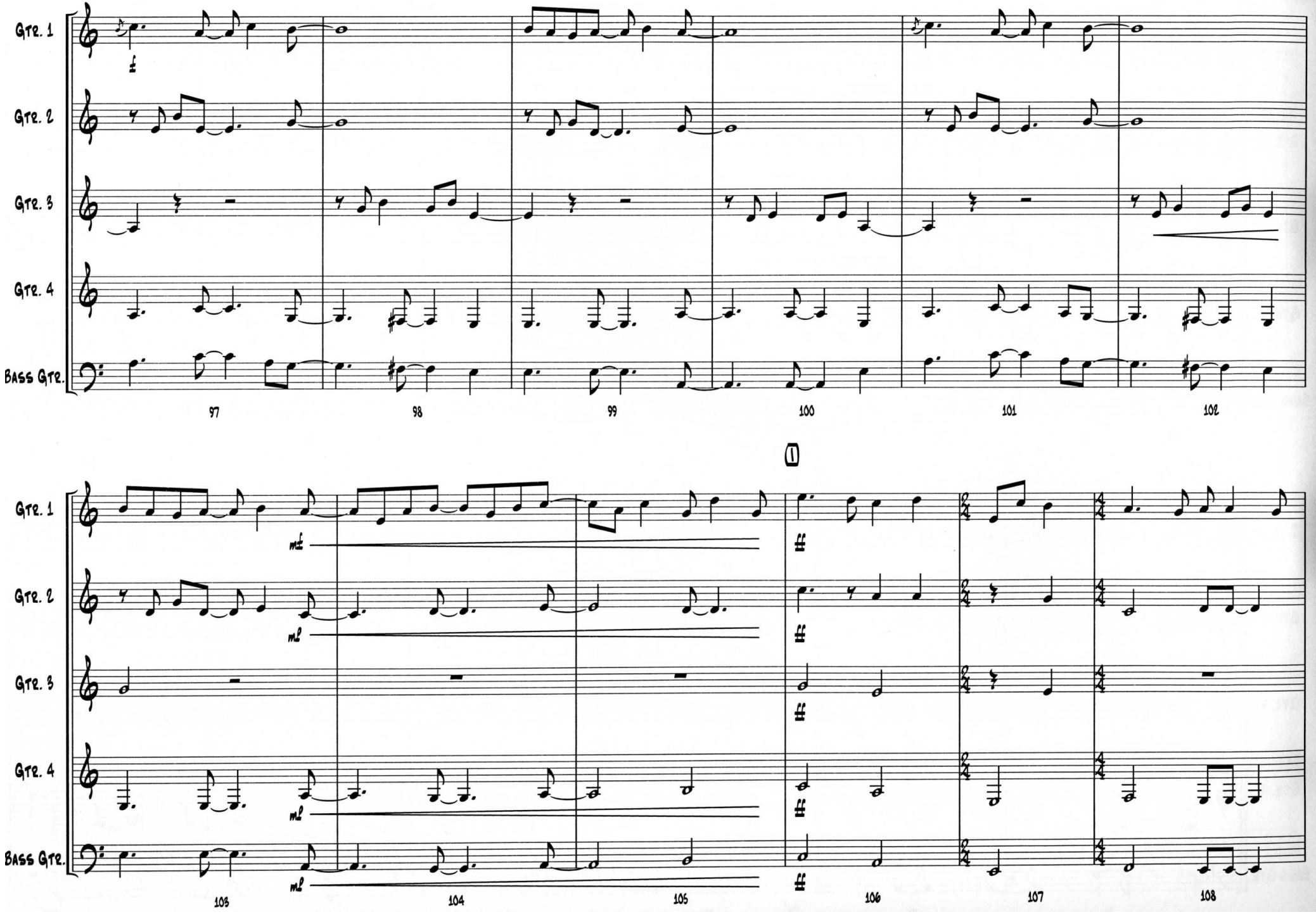
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
85
86
87
88
89
90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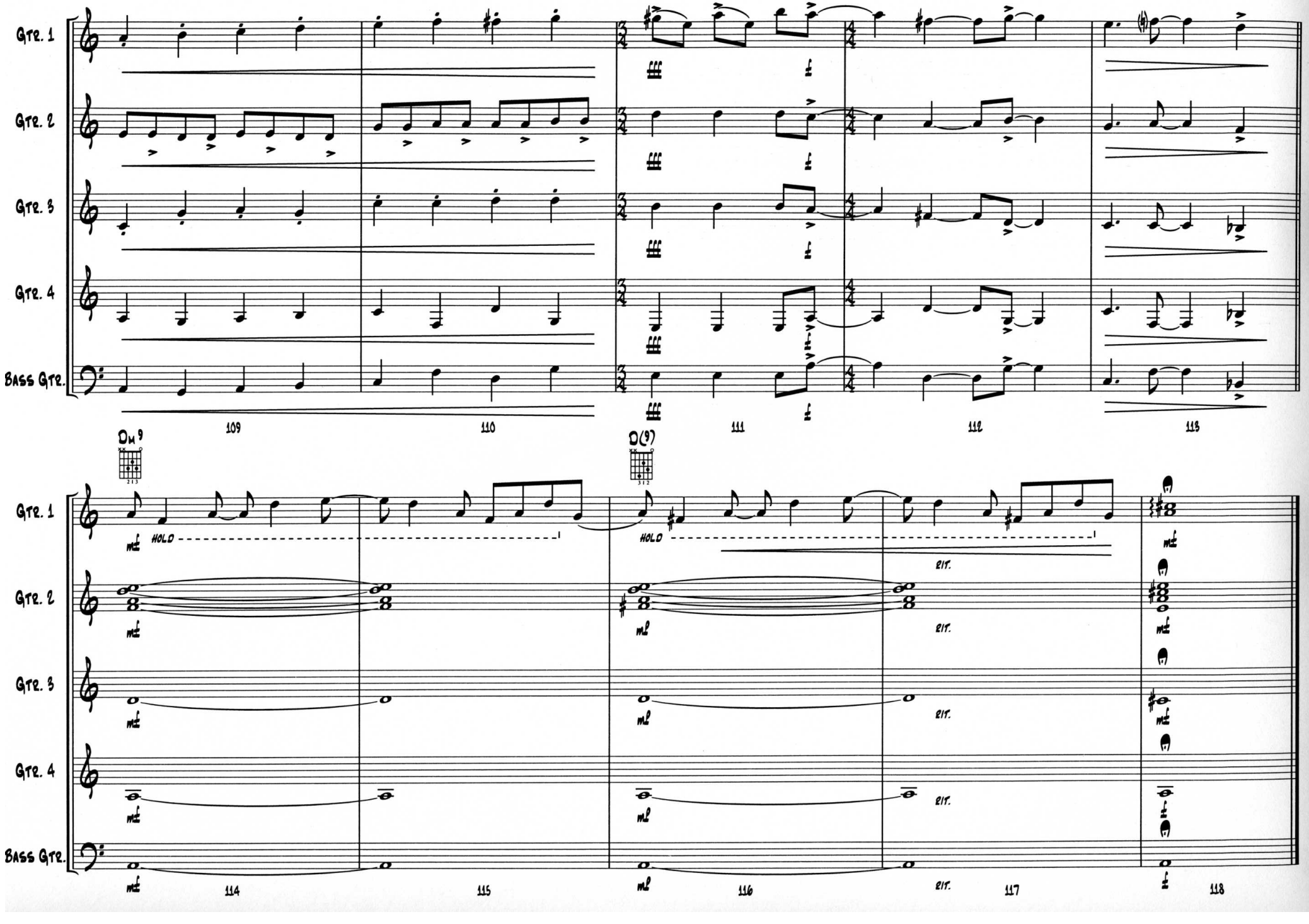
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
97
98
99
100
101
102
1
Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
103
104
105
106
107
108


Gtr. 1
Gtr. 2
Gtr. 3
Gtr. 4
Bass Gtr.
fff
f
109
110
111
112
113
Dm9
D(9)
mf
HOLD
rit.
114
115
116
117
118