Las Kazas de la Boda

a Sephardic Jewish wedding song
for Choir SATB and instruments ad lib.

arr. Sarah Riskind

Background Information

The Sephardim are descended from Jews who settled in modern-day Greece and other Balkan countries, Turkey, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt after being expelled from Spain and Portugal in the 1490s. Due to persecution in the 20th century, many Sephardic Jews now live in Israel, France, the Americas, and other parts of the world. The term "Sephardic" is often used to represent all Jews who are not Ashkenazi, or traditionally Yiddish-speaking Jews from German or Eastern European background, but there are also groups that fall into neither category.

Because Sephardic music was not notated until the 20th century, it is difficult to discern the age of most Sephardic melodies. Most Sephardic music reflects the Ottoman and Arabic cultures of the Mediterranean more than the Iberian peninsula, except for influences in the 20th century and beyond. Commercial artists and composers have interpreted Sephardic music in a range of styles, but it is important to understand that the harmonies, vocal timbres, instrumentation, and rhythms usually create more of a reimagining than a literal presentation of tradition.

"Las Kazas de la Boda" is a *cantiga de novia* or wedding song, specifically sung at a wedding feast, and it falls in the larger category of lyric songs that includes the majority of well-known Judeo-Spanish melodies. The main melodic source for this arrangement is a recording on Avner Perez's Maale Adumim Institute database, accessible at http://folkmasa.org/avshir/shirp.php?mishtane=39. The singers are Bulgarian Sephardic women at the Moadon Tiferet club in Jaffa, Israel. Other recordings of this ballad are located in record numbers 423, 505, and 736.

There is significant modal variation between each of these four recordings, but most Sephardic melodies from the Eastern Mediterranean exhibit influence from the Ottoman *makam* modal system, often including microtonal pitches. The metrical grouping of 2+2+2+3 demonstrates a strong connection to non-Jewish Bulgarian music.

Performance Suggestions:

- Experiment with a Balkan-style belt; the soprano/alto register is intentionally low in order to facilitate this vocal technique
- The ornamentation is based on the source recording, but performers are welcome to add and remove ornaments. Listening to the source recording will provide the best understanding.
- The pitched instrument can be one or more instruments in the written octave or an octave below, playing in unison or heterophony.
  - Traditional instruments: tambura, oud, kanun, kaval, gadulka
  - Effective substitutes could include: violin, rebec, mandolin, dulcimer, zither, harp, recorder, flute, bouzouki, and others
- For the unpitched instruments, a low or medium-pitch drum can be used as the main instrument, with tambourine entering as notated
  - Ideal instruments would be: tupan and tarabuka/dumbek

Text

The Judeo-Spanish language spoken by the Sephardic Jews is most commonly called Ladino, but other regional names include Spaniol, Djudezmo, Djudeo-spanyol, and haketía (Moroccan Judeo-Spanish). Since it was originally written in the Hebrew Rashi script, there are now many spelling systems and countless dialectic variations in pronunciation and vocabulary. This arrangement primarily uses the source recording's pronunciation, with the spelling system from the Ladino magazine *Aki Yerushalayim* that is used on the popular online discussion group Ladinokomunita (https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Ladinokomunita/info).

Pronunciation Guide:

- Vowels: same as Spanish
- Consonants: same as Spanish, except:
  - z is voiced, as in English
  - j is ʒ, as in French "jour"
  - g is a hard g, as in English "gate"
  - s at the end of a word is voiced, as in z

Translation

Estas kazas tan ermozas x2 Para ke bailen las novias Para bodas, Para bodas, la me senyora. Esta i otra. Lai lai lai	The houses are so beautiful For the brides to dance there For weddings For weddings, my lady, This one and another.
Estas mezas tan ermozas x2 Para ke bailen las novias Para bodas, Para bodas, la me senyora. Esta i otra. Lai lai lai	These tables are so beautiful For the brides to dance there For weddings For weddings, my lady, This one and another.
Estas kazas tan ermozas x2 Para ke bailen las novias Para bodas, Para bodas, la me senyora. Esta i otra. Lai lai lai	These houses are so beautiful For the brides to dance there For weddings For weddings, my lady, This one and another.
Afuera bailan las damas x2 Alientro bailan las nanas Para bodas, Para bodas, la me senyora. Esta i otra. Lai lai lai	Inside the ladies are dancing And outside dance the young girls, For weddings For weddings, my lady, This one and another.

Translation: Susana Weich-Shahak
"The Traditional Performance of Sephardic Songs" in *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Music,* ed. Joshua S. Walden

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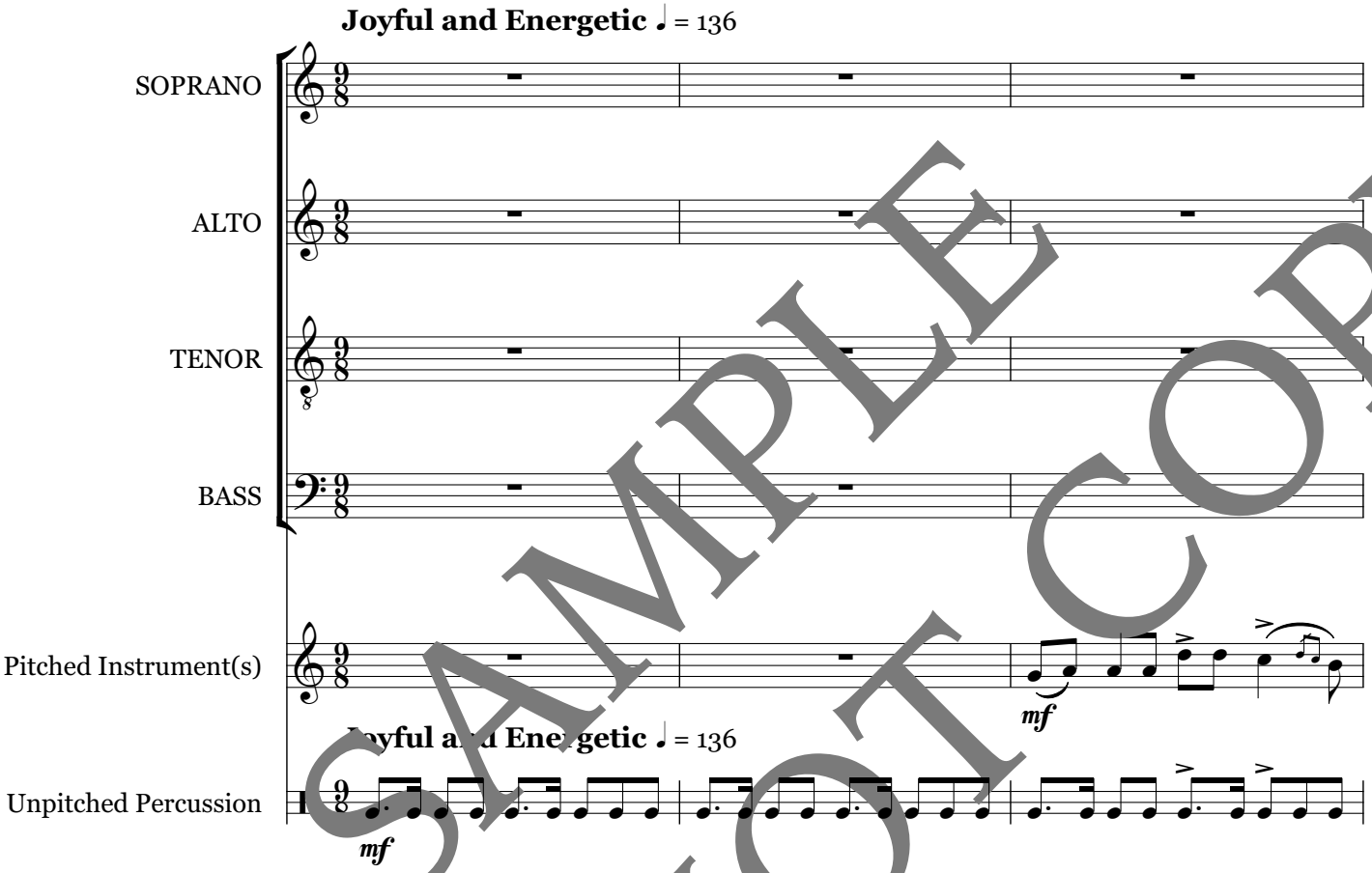
Sephardic Wedding Song from Bulgaria
arr. Sarah Riskind



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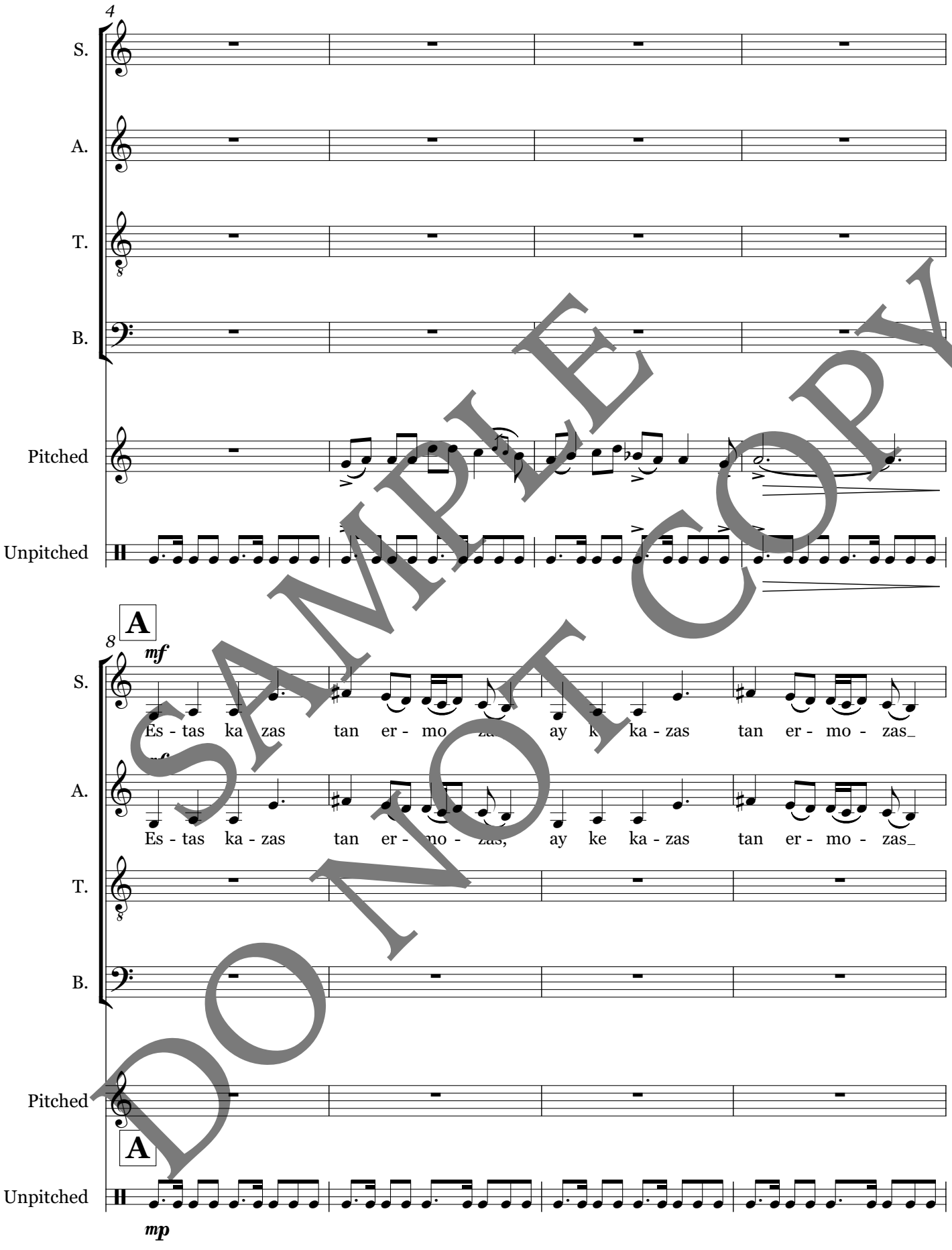

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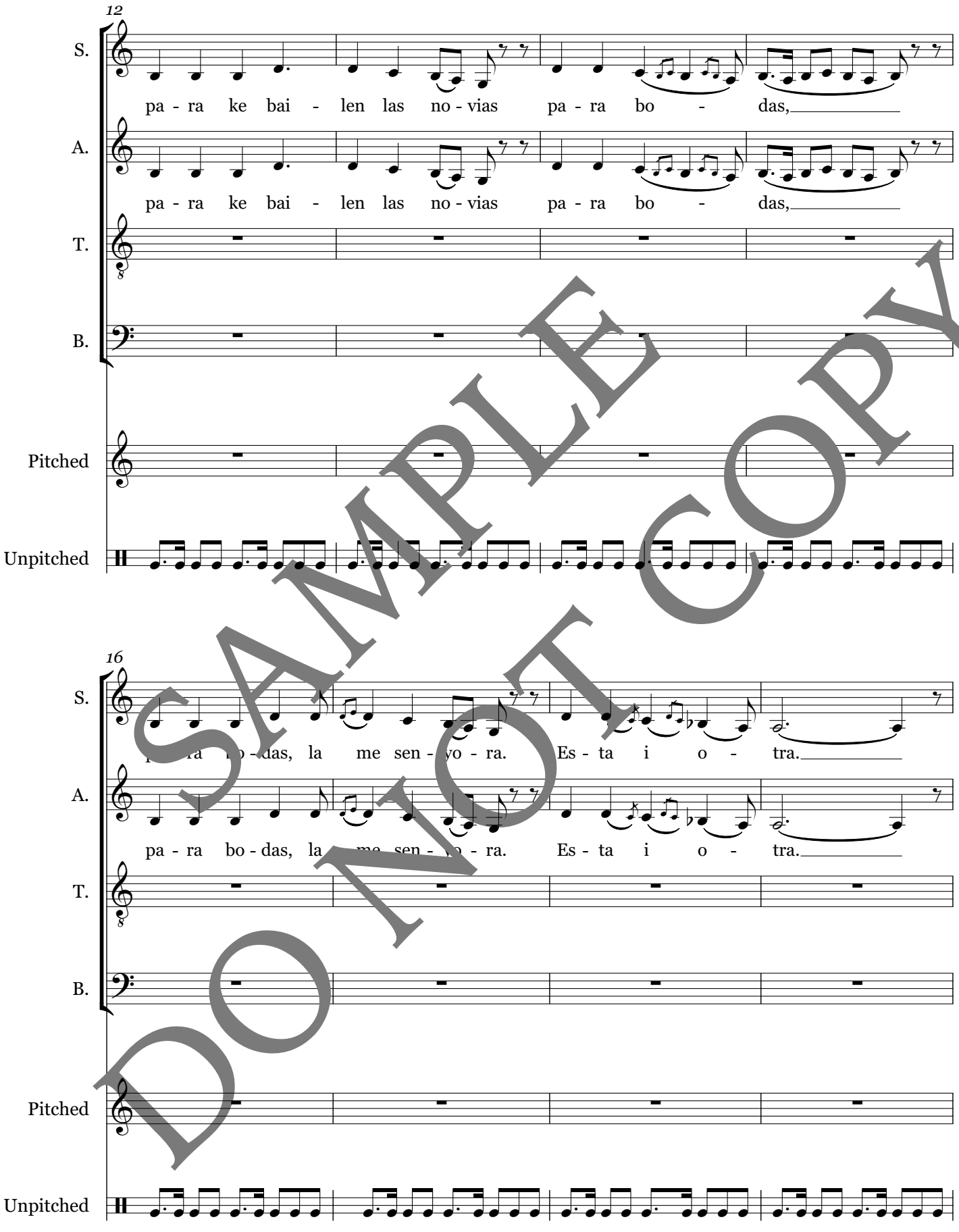

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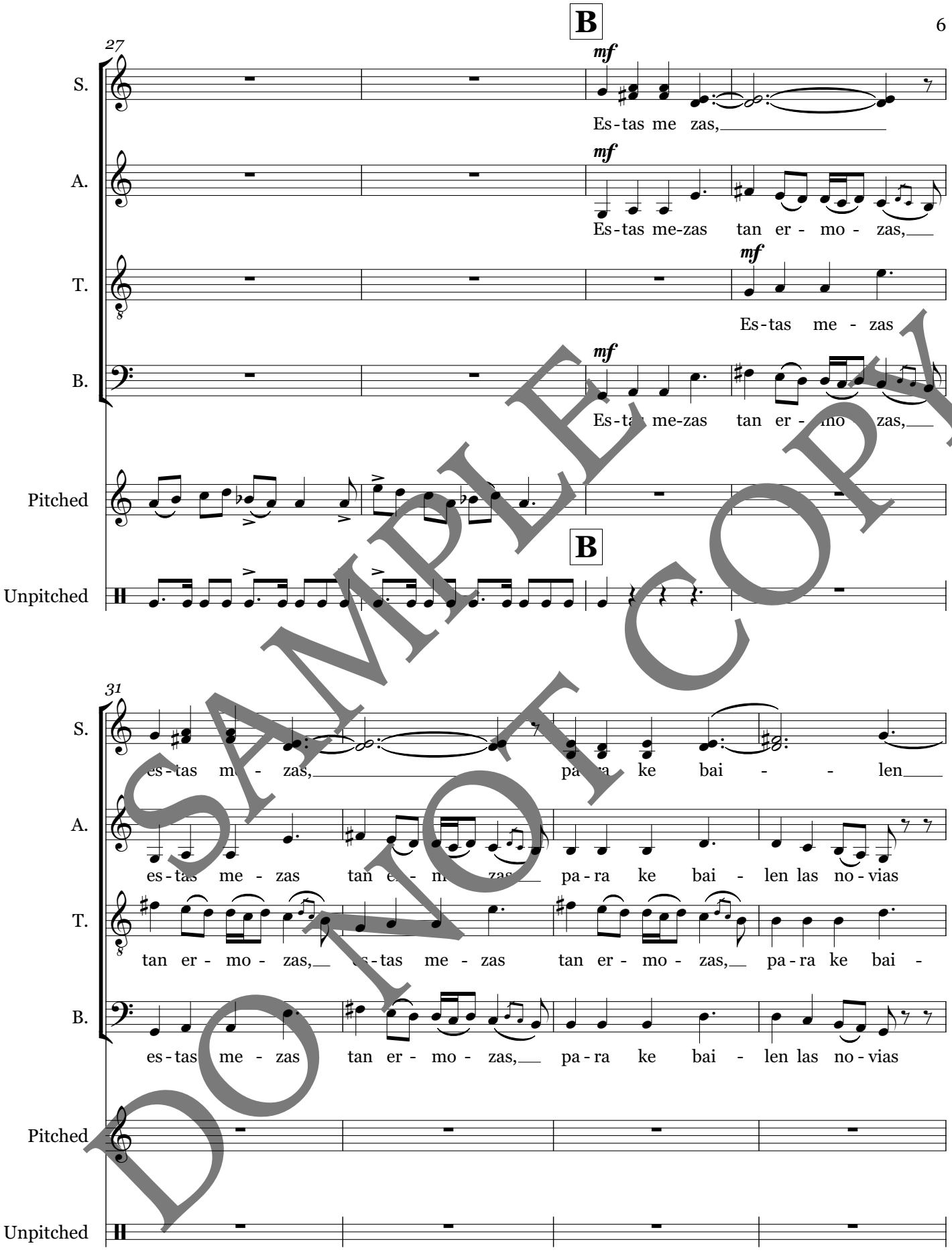

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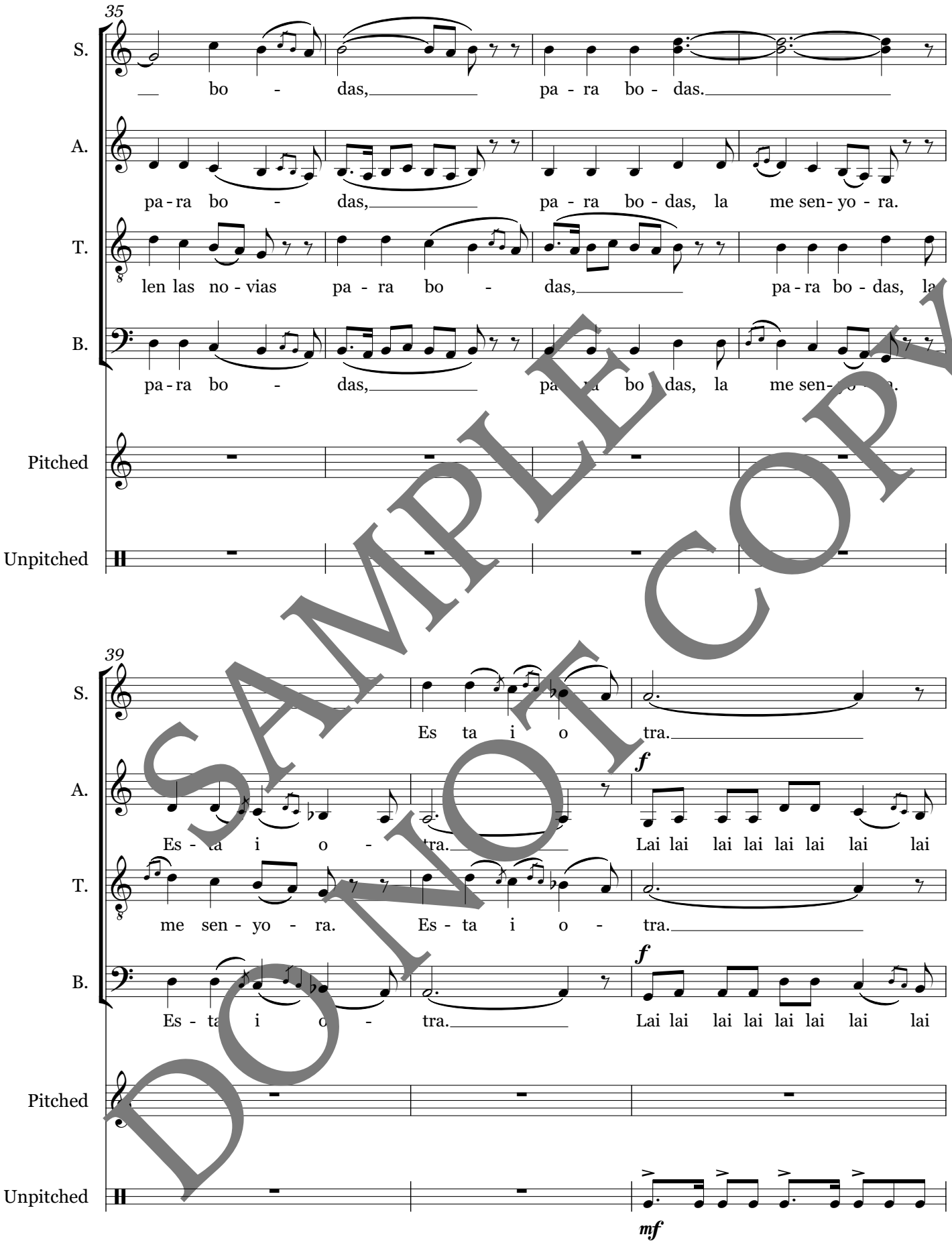

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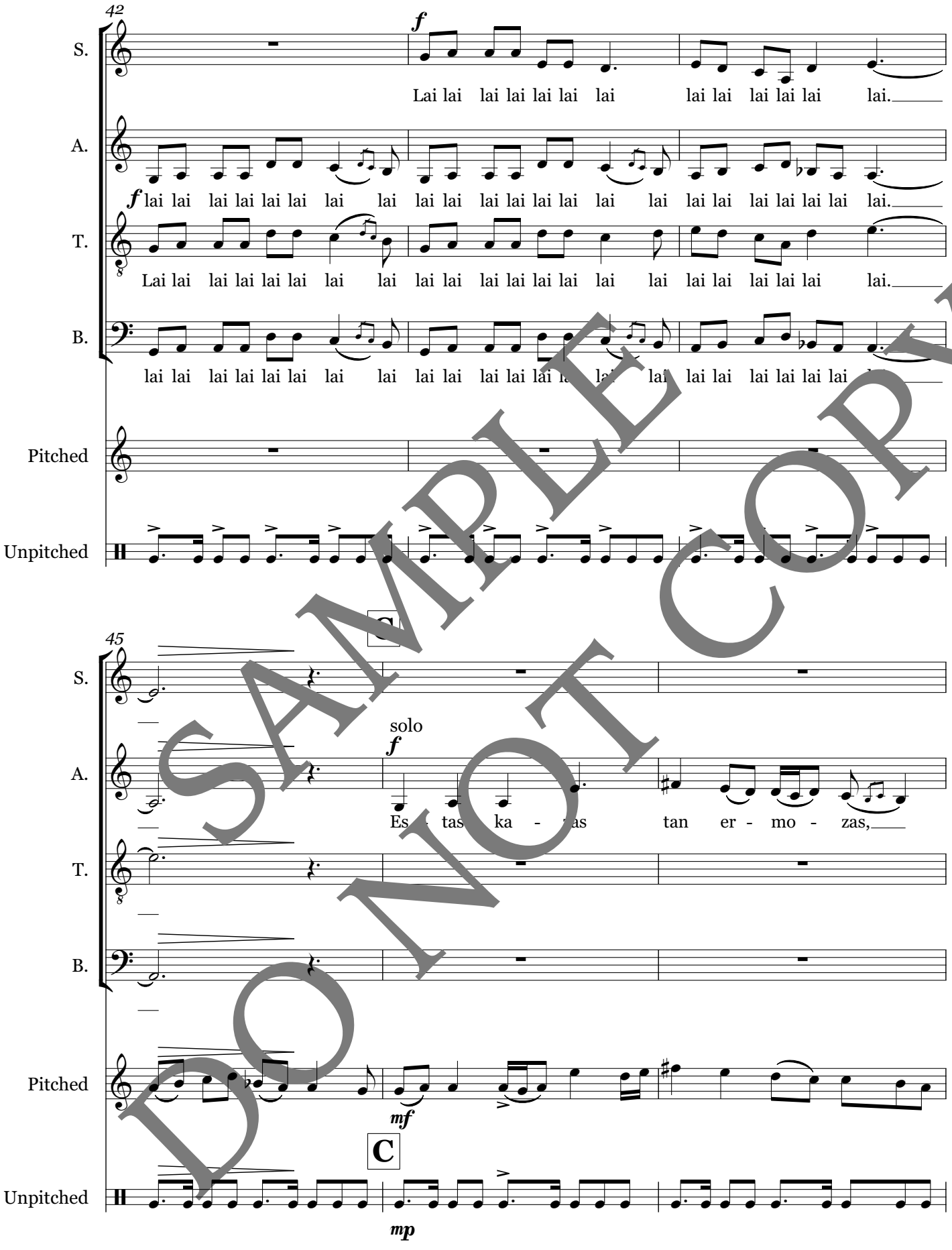

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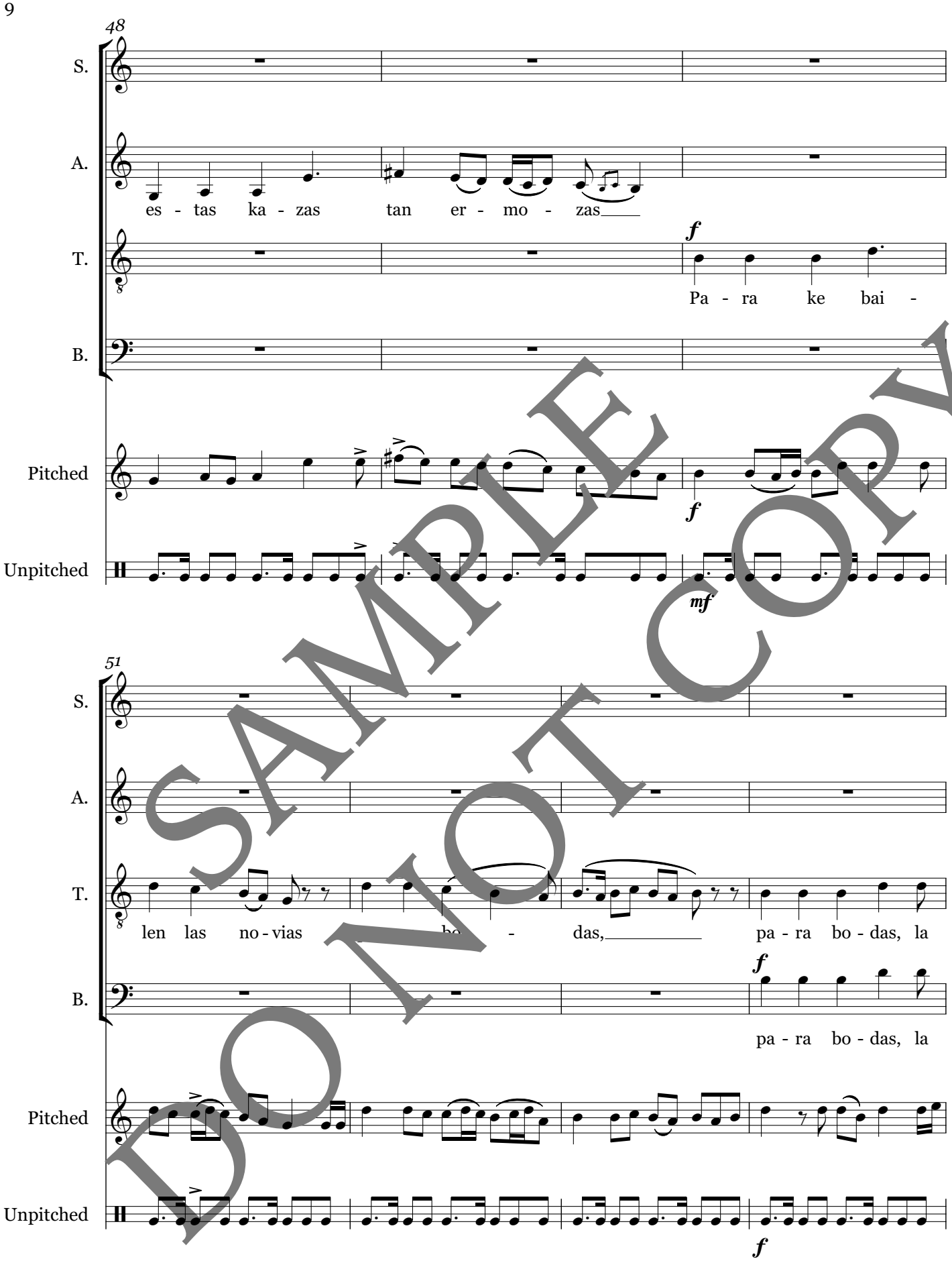

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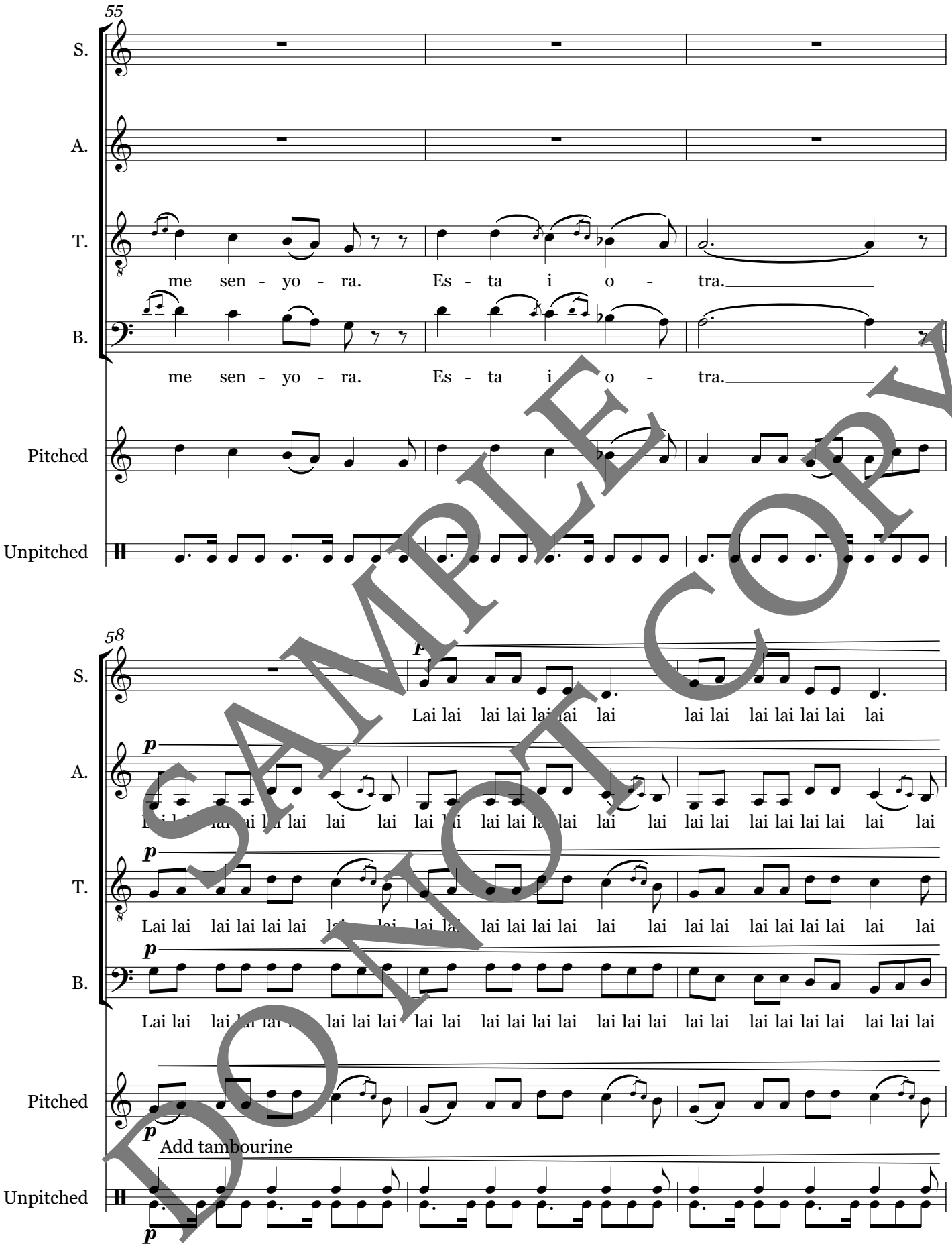

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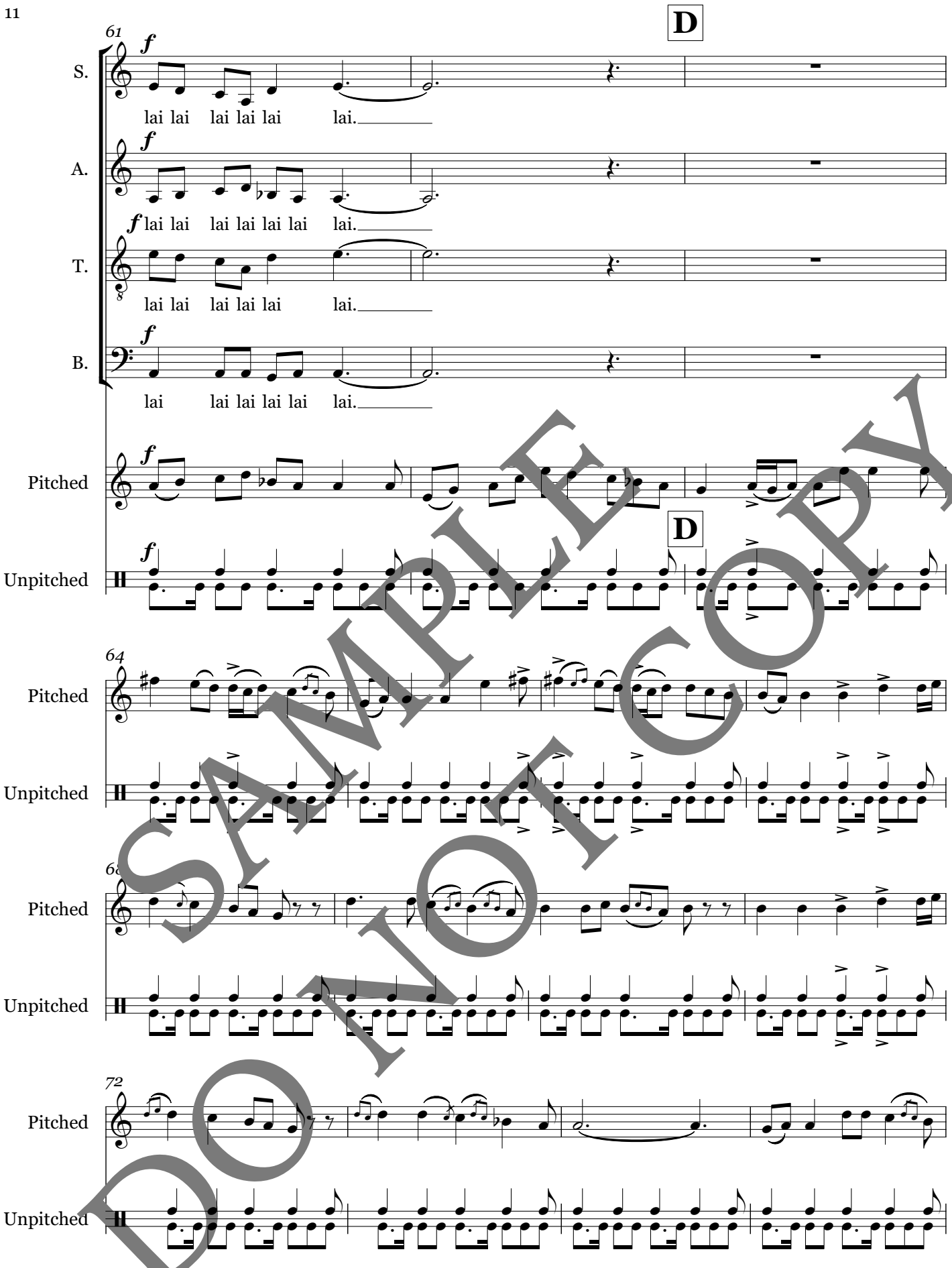

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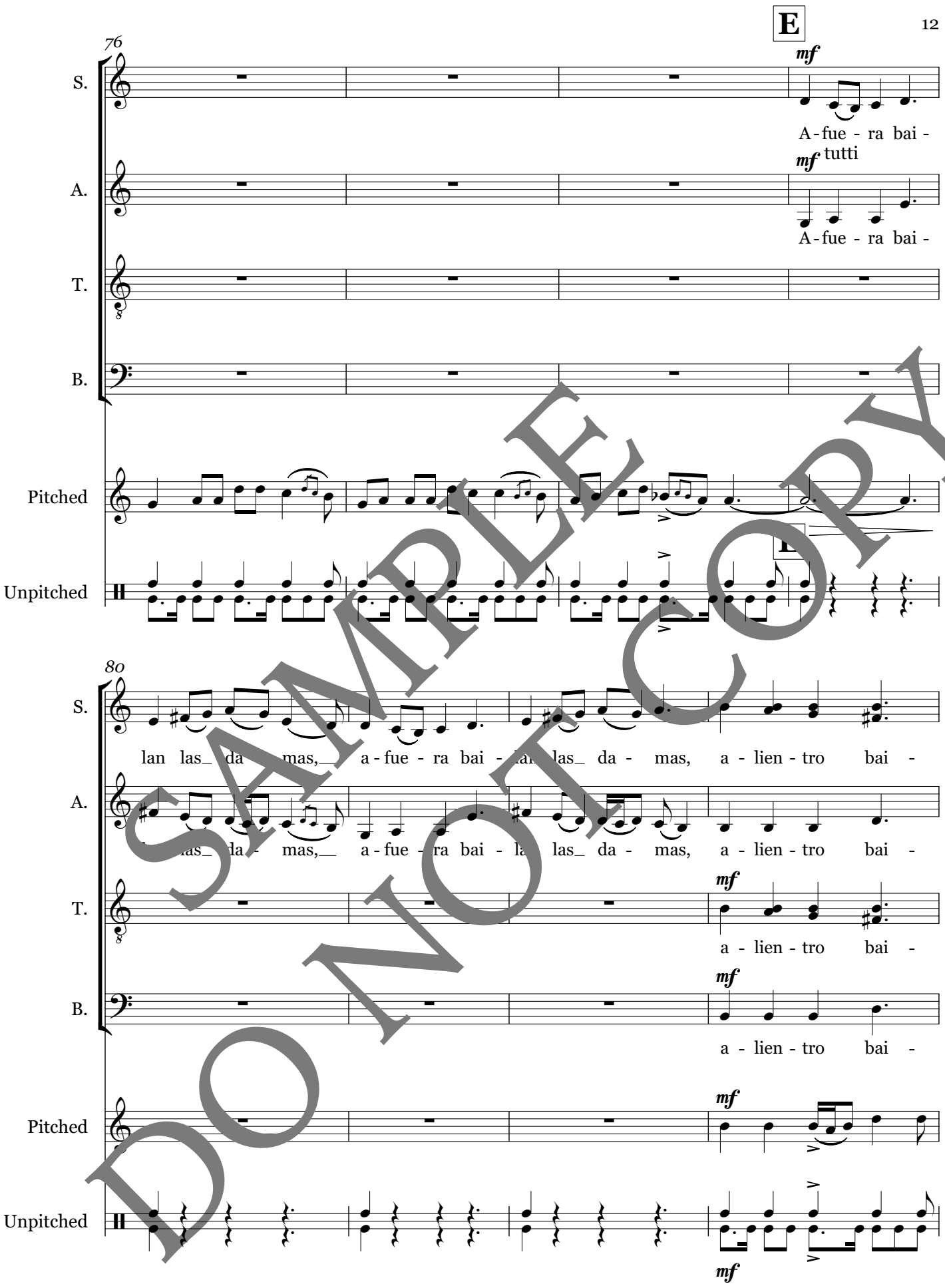

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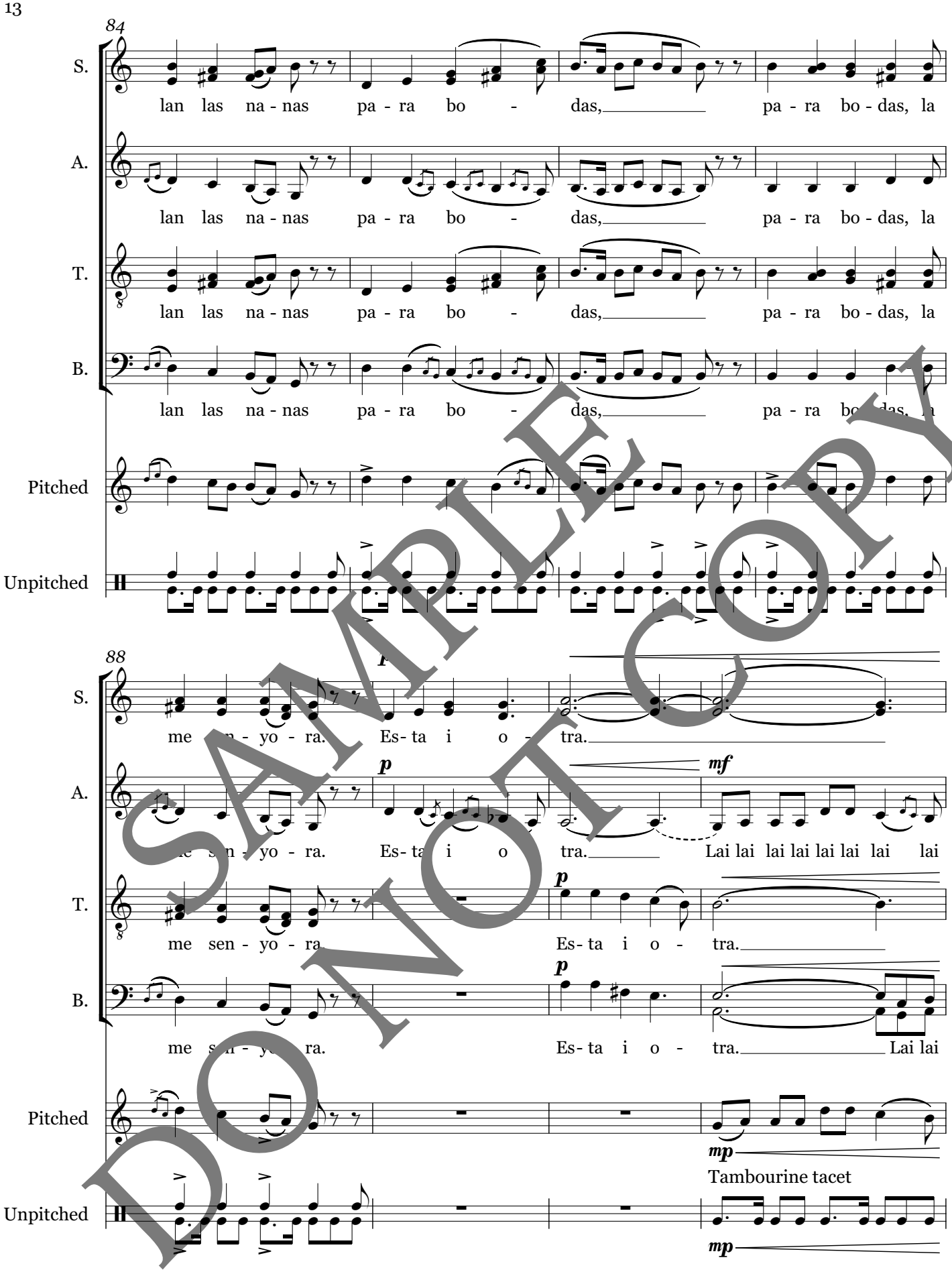

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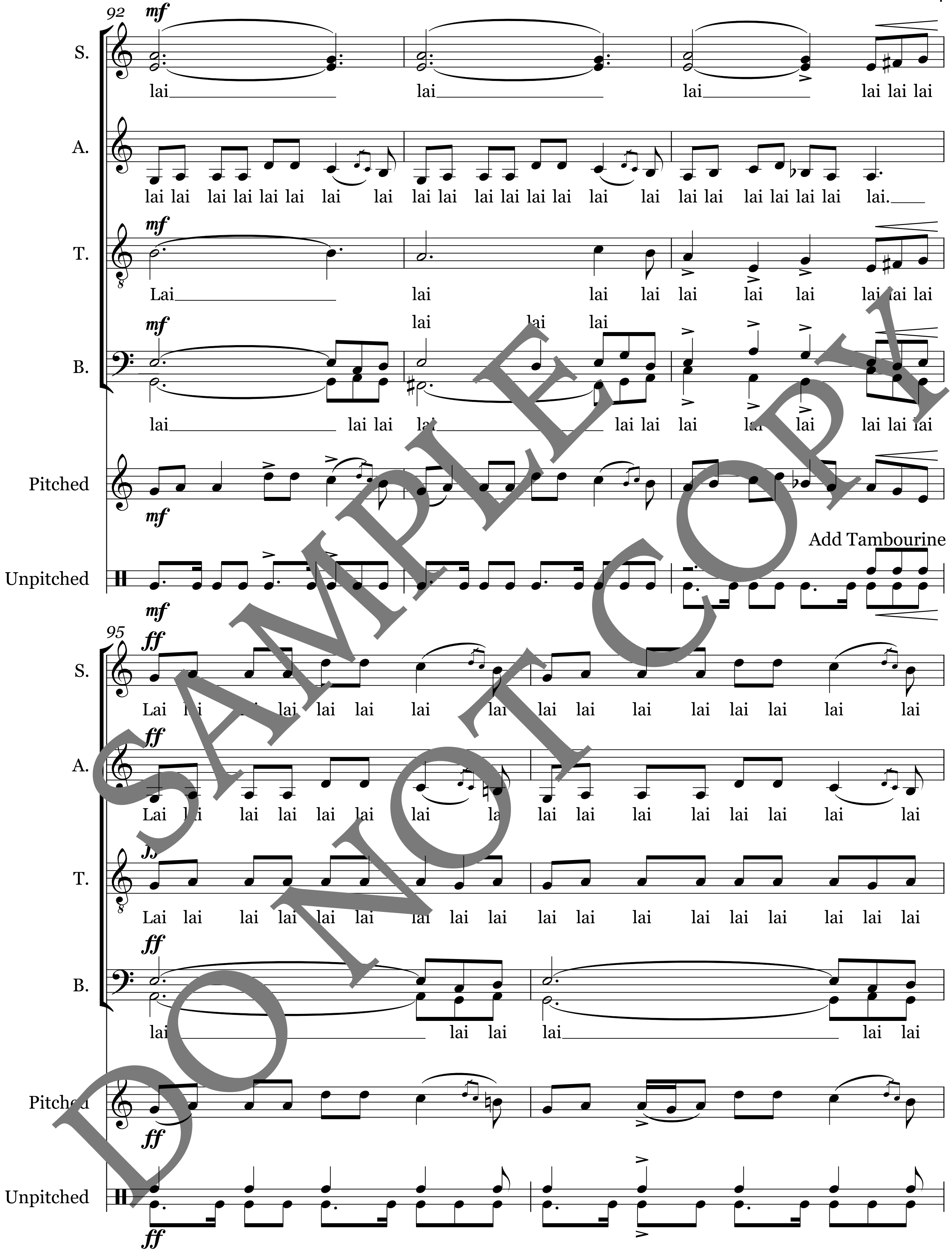
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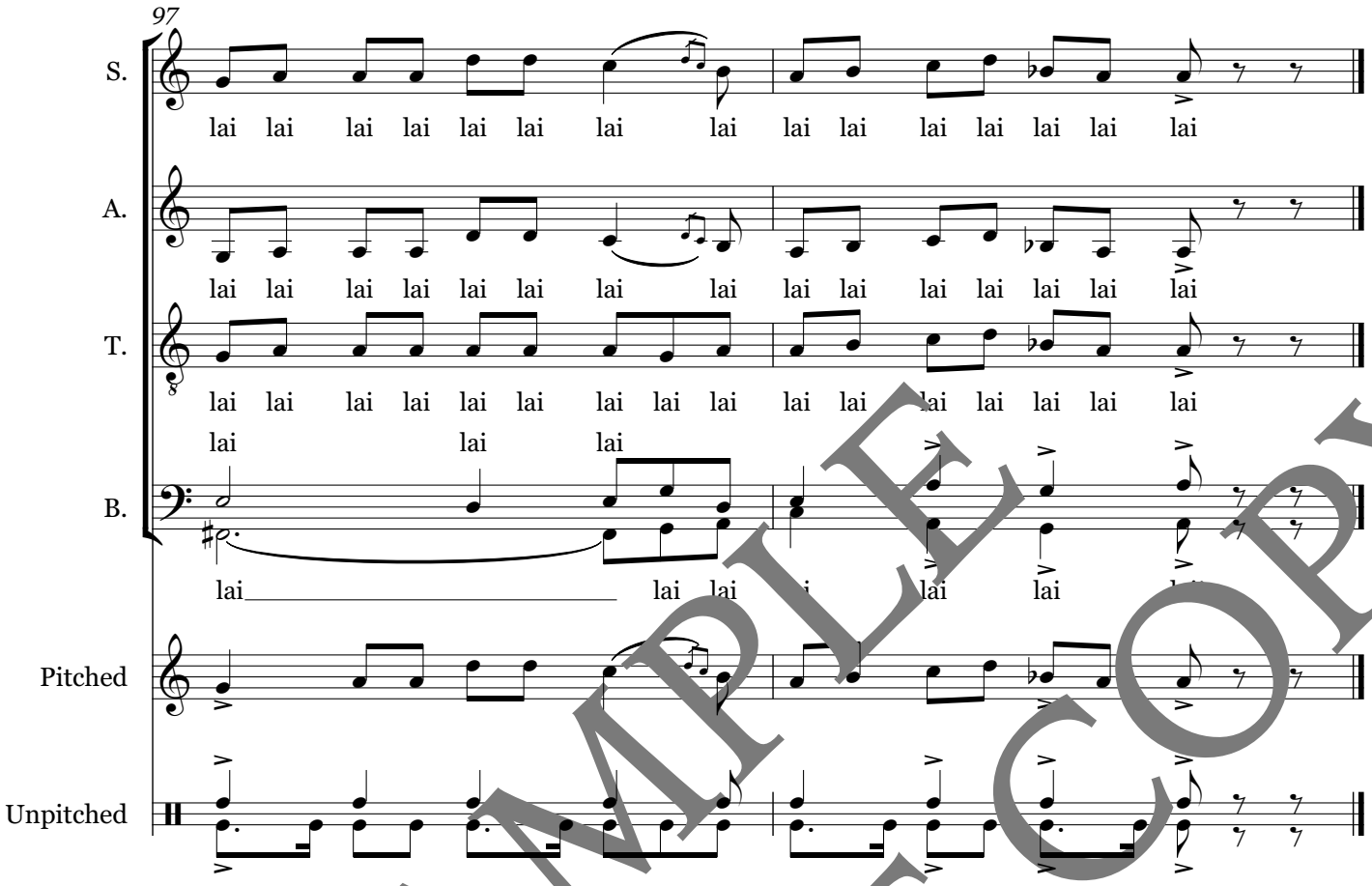

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