SUU Drumline 2025

Exercise Packet

A Word from the Director

Welcome, and thank you for your interest in joining the 2025 Southern Utah University "Sound of Southern Utah" Drumline! This packet is for prospective members and anyone who would like to gain insight into our approach to rudimental drumming at SUU. Each exercise has been meticulously curated to develop and cultivate the skills and technique we will utilize as a drumline.

Within the idiom of drumline, technique and approach can vary wildly from group to group, even at the highest levels of the activity. As such, the purpose of this packet is to provide you with clear definitions of our distinctive approach, technique, and philosophy of drumming.

To make the most of this experience, I recommend taking time to thoroughly read through the technique and approach descriptions contained here to be mindful of as you work through the exercises. I also recommend memorizing the provided exercises.

I am looking forward to another year serving this institution and working with such talented performers and faculty here at SUU, Go T-Birds!

Sincerely,

Kevin Johnson
Drumline Director
SUU "Sound of Southern Utah" Marching Band

Technique and Approach Basics

For our purposes, we will regularly talk about the concept of **Free Rebound**. The concept of free rebound is simply that the player should use only as much pressure and control of the stick as is necessary to accomplish the musical task. We will talk more in depth about what this means and how to conceptualize it. But for now, the easiest way to describe free rebound is as a state of complete relaxation that balances speed, weight, and rebound to achieve the most efficient movement and sound quality.

Strokes

Legato (free rebound stroke): This will be our most basic stroke type. In this stroke, the player combines weight and energy (speed) to propel the stick downward to the drumhead, then allowing the impact to rebound the stick upwards back to its original position. It is imperative to allow the stick and drum tension to work to your benefit, I.E., allow your arm(s) to maintain a consistent state of relaxation, free of restricted motion via the fingers or wrist. When this stroke is done repeatedly, and with the correct approach, the stick will maintain constant motion either moving toward or away from the drum.

Marcato (controlled rebound stroke): This stroke is very similar conceptually to our free rebound stroke; However, this stroke has the player stop the stick in the downwards playing position. To achieve this stroke the player once again combines weight and speed to propel the stick downward towards the drumhead, but immediately after contact with the drum surface the fingers flex slightly preventing the stick from rebounding to its starting position. This action should be firm, but not tense and only use as much pressure as is necessary to accomplish. Think about it like you are “catching” the rebound. Marcato strokes are NOT to be confused with marcato articulation markings.

Taps: This is our smallest and least demanding stroke type, although they are the most difficult stroke type to balance and blend within a drumline. In short, taps start low and end low, and are achieved by creating a very slight lift from playing position and using the weight of the hand to propel the stick into the drum surface while still allowing the small natural rebound to occur. This is like the "catch" idea of the marcato stroke, but without the height and intensity. This stroke type will comprise a larger portion of show book than legato or marcato strokes and are commonly referred to as "inner beats."

All stroke types are primarily initiated with the wrist, but not isolated to ONLY the wrist. The fingers, forearm, upper arm, and shoulder all play a significant role in achieving high efficiency of movement. Proper utilization of the appendages should feel and look extremely relaxed and have a natural "flow" where all parts of the arms work in harmony with one another. The music itself will dictate how much of each is necessary at any given moment. All strokes should have plenty of weight (arm/hand) behind them to produce a full and resonant sound. Higher dynamic levels will require higher stick velocity, in part to produce big sound, but also to propel the stick with enough energy to allow it to rebound.

The Role of the Fingers

Each player will have their own unique anatomy of the hand, and therefore how each player utilizes their fingers will not be universal. However, as general rule, all fingers should be always contacting the stick with as little distance between each finger as possible. Your forward fingers (thumb, index and middle) create the grip fulcrum that allows the stick to pivot and rebound. These fingers should have reasonably firm control of the stick. The back (ring and pinky) fingers will play a larger role for some beating patterns, but not always. The back fingers are idle and ready to be utilized when needed.

Dynamics

One of the most important skills to master as an individual, or as a drumline, is mastery of dynamics. For our purposes, dynamic markings and stick heights are synonymous.

Dynamics = Height + Velocity

Height: The elevation at which the performer begins to exhort the implement towards the drumhead.

Velocity: The speed of the stick in a given direction. Here we will strive for a feeling of heavy stick and fast velocity.

Heights are Defined as:

pp – 1”
p – 3”
mp – 6”
mf – 9”
f – 12”
ff – 15” (full wrist rotation)
fff – 18” (with arm)

Snareline

The role of the snareline is to serve as the foundation and core support of the drumline, allowing for the tenor and bass lines to create the harmonic and melodic structure. Relevant information for timing, interpretation and style are established in the snareline and disseminated to the bassline, tenorline, and cymbaline.

Right Hand

The fulcrum, or pivot point, of the right hand lies between the thumb and index finger primarily (in some cases the middle finger as well) and is placed around 1/3 up from the butt of the stick. The stick should rest in the fleshy part of the palm that is opposite of the thumb while the remaining fingers should wrap naturally around the stick in a relaxed manor. There should be no gap between the thumb and third knuckle of the index finger. There should be a slight 45-degree angle of the hand (American Grip) that slopes down and to the right.

Left Hand

The position for traditional grip is similar to the shape of the hand when completely relaxed and hanging to the side of the body. That natural curvature should be always maintained while playing. The left-hand fulcrum is created with the thumb and index finger where the thumb rests on top of and maintains constant contact with the first knuckle (highest most) of the index finger. The stick rests on the cuticle of the ring finger. The middle finger stays relaxed resting along the stick while the ring finger and pinky work in unison to support the stick. The rotation of the left hand is like turning a doorknob, where the rotation is initiated at the elbow. Some upper arm rotation may be required.

Tenorline

The role of tenorline, with their tonal nature, is to provide a mid-range percussive voice to the soundscape that helps carry and convey musical ideas, particularly melodies and motifs. The tenorline has the greatest responsibility to achieve uniformity of touch, flow, space, and rhythm and technique above other sub-sections of the drumline, and that generally requires a greater effort.

Matched Grip

Matched grip simply means that each hand holds the stick in the exact same manor, they are matched together. The grip is created by gripping the stick 1/3 from the butt end, creating a fulcrum with the index finger, thumb and sometimes the middle finger. The remaining fingers curl gently, but firmly, around the bottom of the stick.

We will primarily be utilizing American grip and French grip for tenorline, meshing the two together depending on the musical situation. American grip should be used for most situations, but situations that demand more activation of the back fingers will require French grip. The only significant difference between the two styles is the angle of the wrist.

French grip is characterized as having both palms of the hands facing toward each other, thus requiring more finger movement to perform. The French grip uses smaller and faster muscle groups that will help with the finesse of faster musical passages. For louder and less demanding passages, always rotate the wrist in the American style grip.

Bassline

Being the most unique sub-section of the drumline, the role of the bassline to function as an individual unit as well as a drum ensemble. Individual responsibility is key to having a successful bassline. Each performer on bassline must master an exact interpretation of rhythm, space, volume, touch, sound quality, and flow. The sum of those parts combines to create a seamless sound with the desired blend, balance, and articulation. Bassline serves as a secondary foundation and low voice of our percussive "choir," providing direction, spatial reference, and harmonic structure to the full drumline section. The cohesion of the overall drumline is largely dependent on the exact clarity of all fundamental aspects of the bassline.

Grip

The grip we will utilize is almost the same as matched grip would be for snares or tenors, except the playing position places the mallets vertical (pointing upwards toward the ceiling) and the arms rotate out horizontally. For further detailed description of the grip, please read the matched grip explanation for snares and tenors.

Interpreting 2's, 3's, and 4's

The most important skill to cultivate as a bass drummer is maintaining seamless transition from player to player – drum to drum – and how to interpret those rhythms. Subdivision of rhythms, and the understanding of rhythmic subdivision, is crucial for success as a bassline. Most splits will be in groupings of 2 (16^{th} notes), 3 (24^{th} notes – sextuplets), and 4 (32^{nd} notes and above).

Once a bass drummer has mastered placing rhythms correctly with the appropriate entrance and spacing, only then can the player and observer alike notice the balance and blend of the bassline.

Unisons

Unisons add to the overall structure, density, and overall impact of the show music. As such, all members of bassline listen for perfect timing on unison hits. It is not merely enough that unison hits are timed together perfectly, but they must also be balanced perfectly. Bassline should balance in ascending order (4 listens to 3, 3 listens to 2 and so on).

Cymbals

The primary role of cymbals within a drumline is to add visual and auditory flare and color that accentuates the surrounding musical material. Being a member of the cymbal section is physically demanding and requires the cultivation of multiple unique skills.

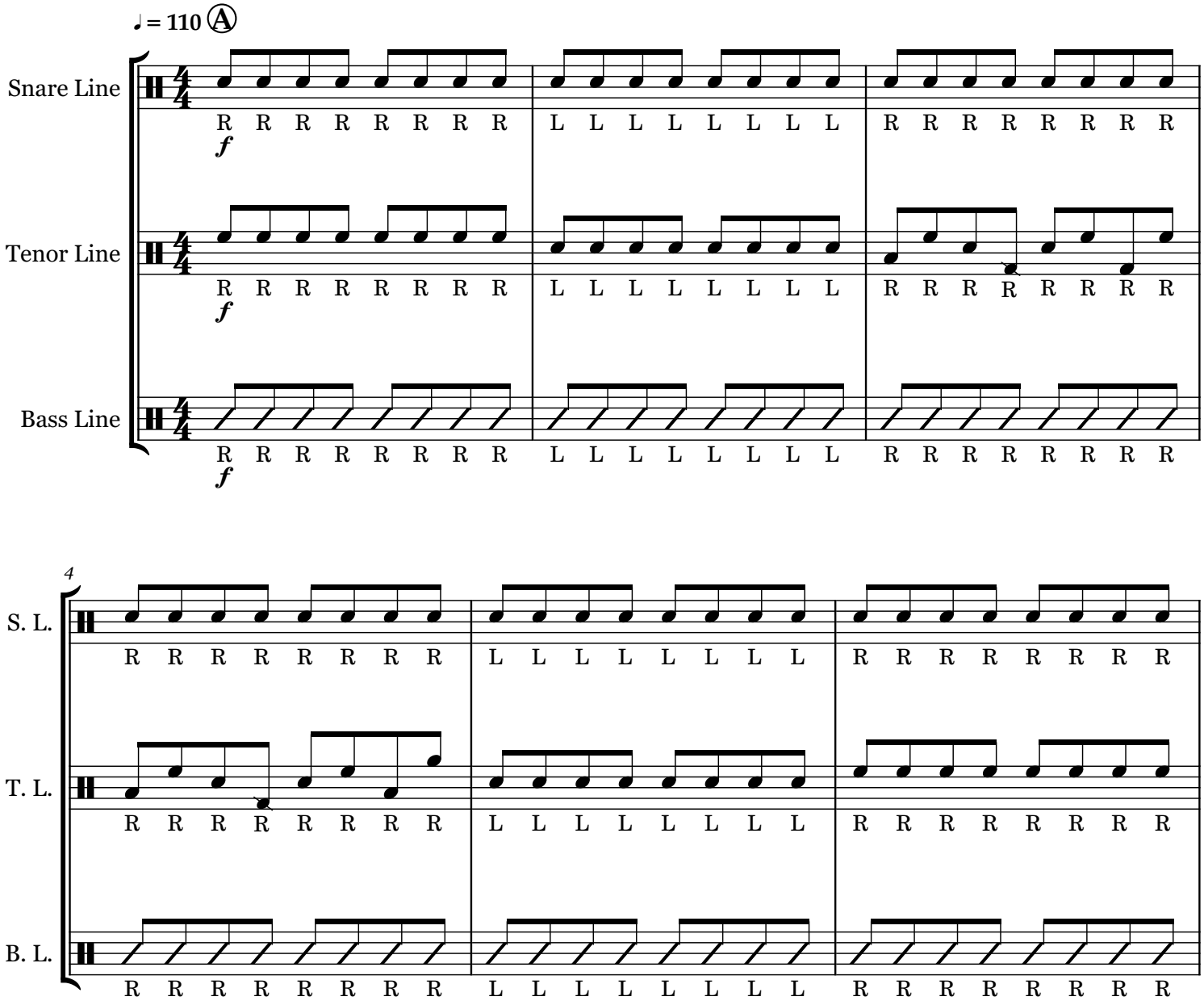
Physicality and Counting

Cymbals are the most physically demanding instruments in the drumline section. The cymbal-line is responsible for mastering a difficult visual package (like color guard) as well as a demanding musical package of difficult rhythms and syncopations. Strength training is not only recommended, its essential for playing the cymbals.

Finally, being able to accurately count and subdivide is a must. Every single aspect of cymbal playing relies on a very strict sense of timing both visually and musically. Every single action or movement will have an associated count or subdivision.

SUU 8's & Accents 2025

Kevin Johnson



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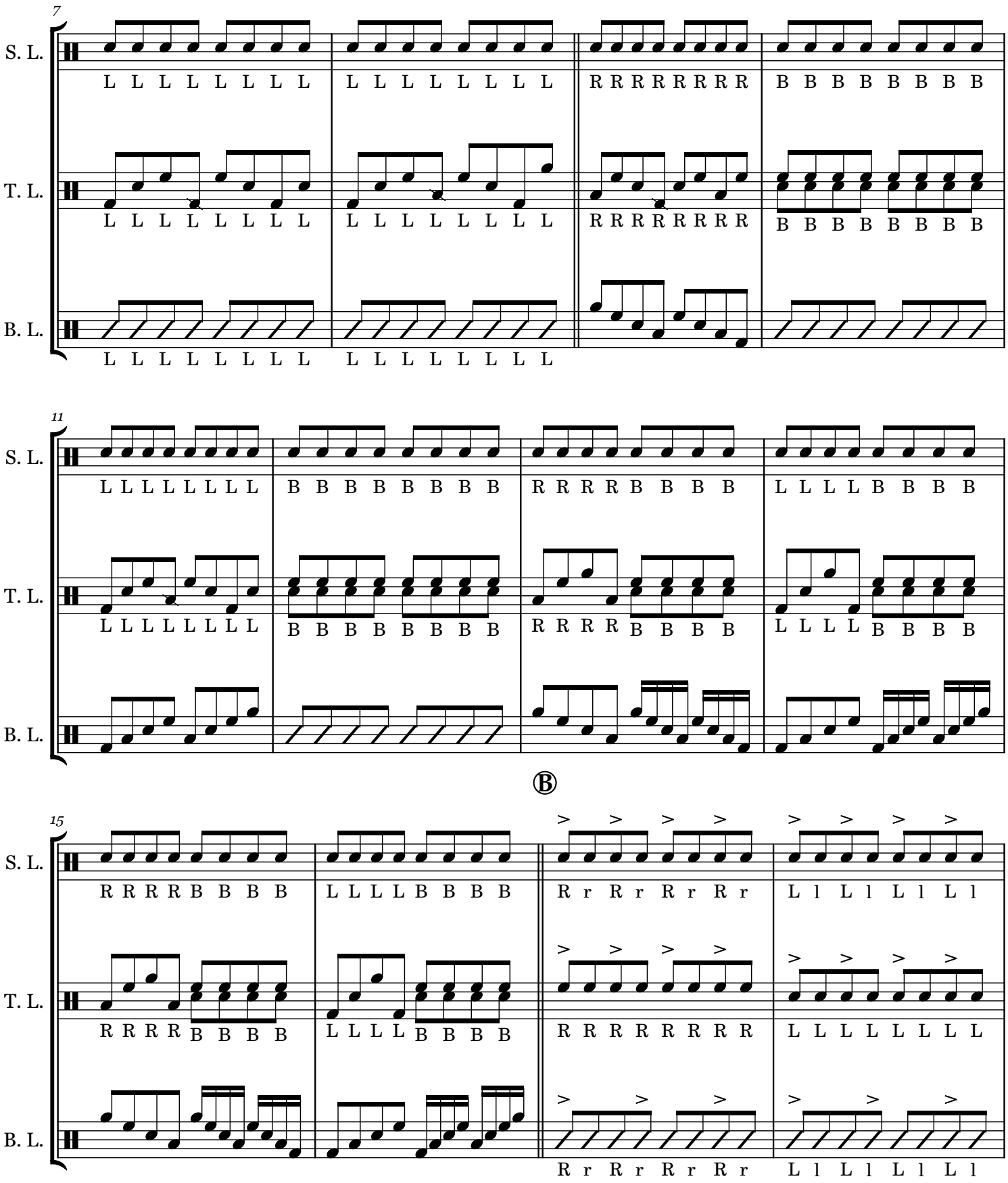

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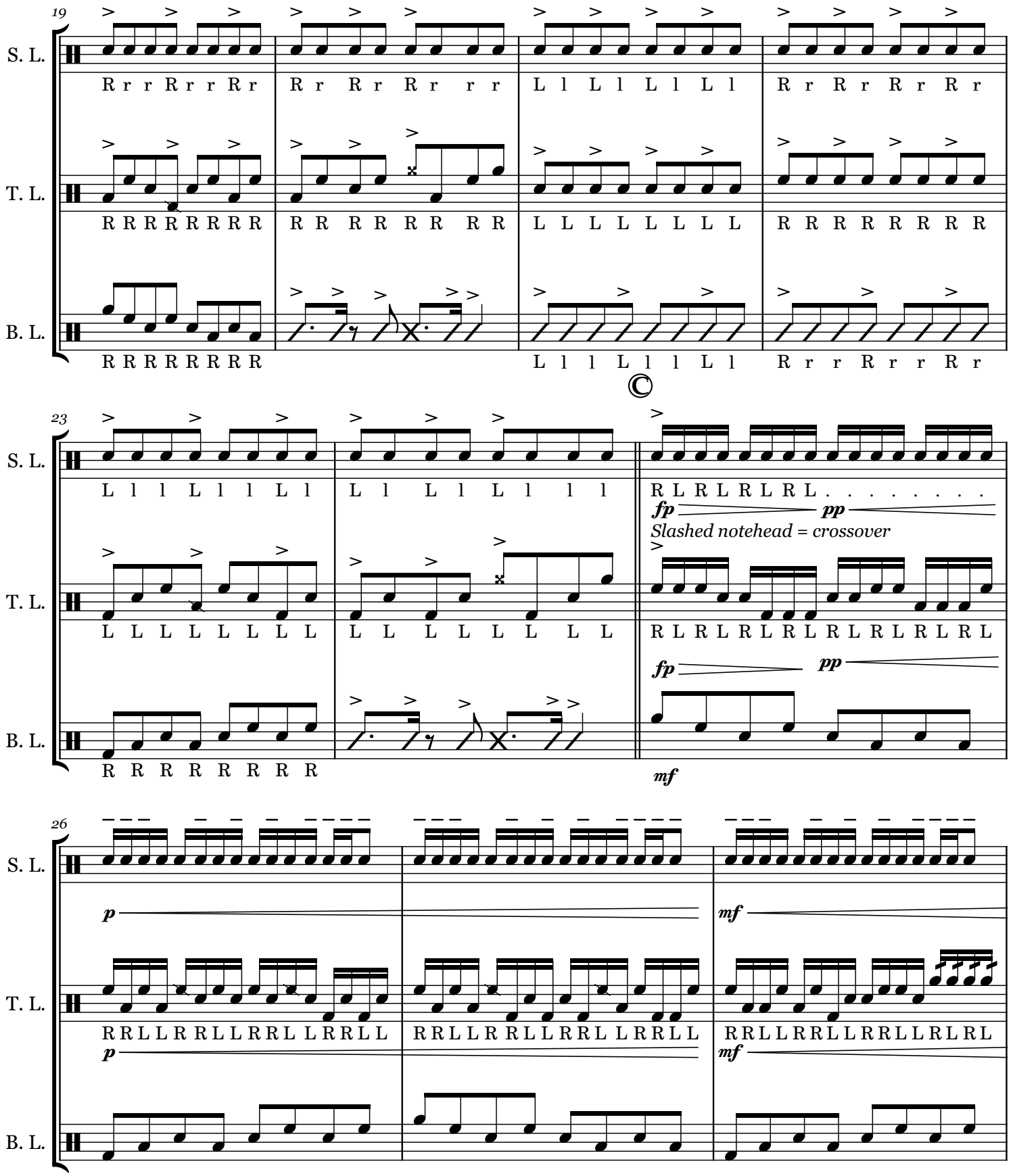

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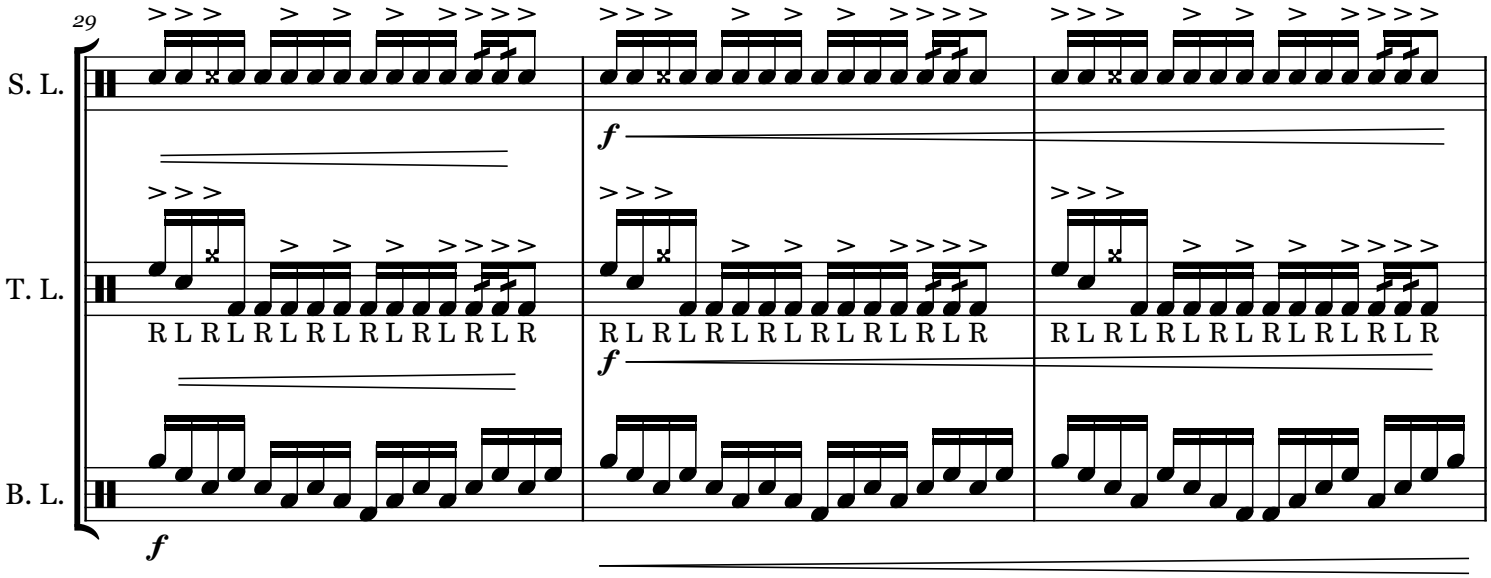

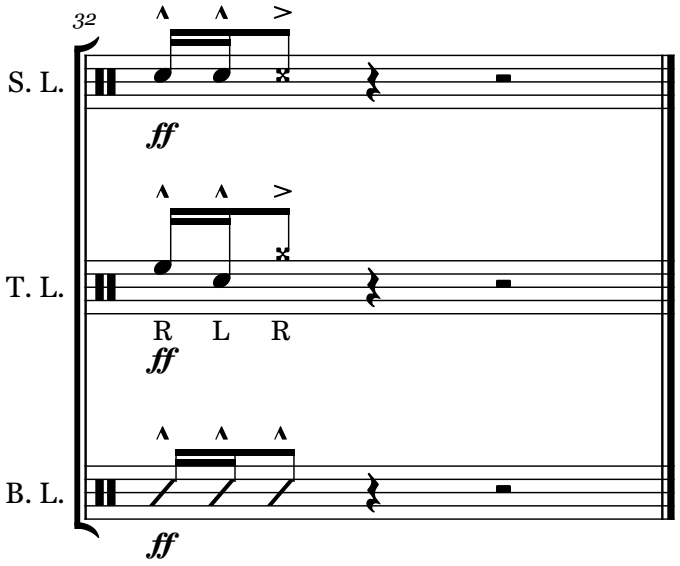

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SUU Stick Control 2025

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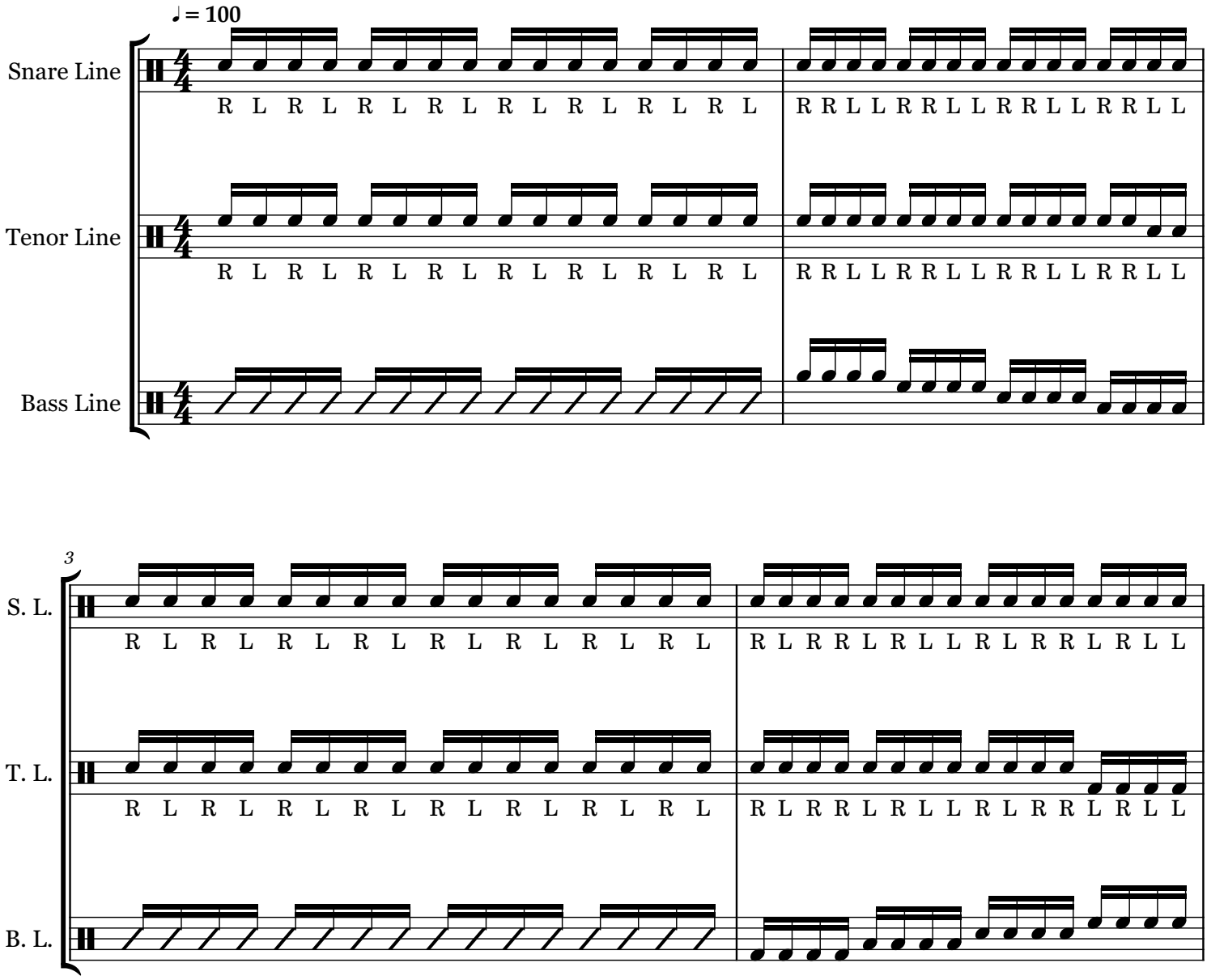

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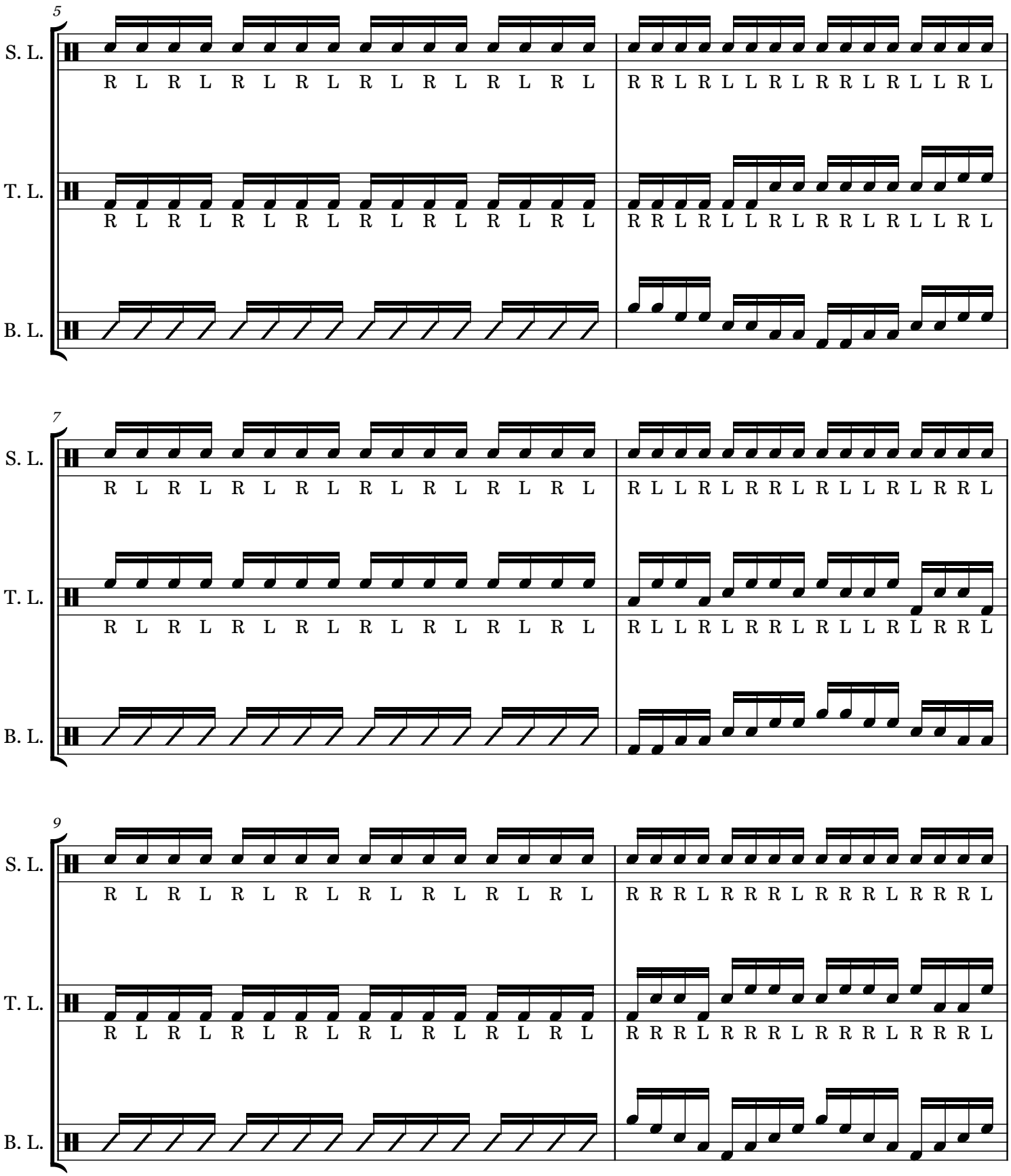

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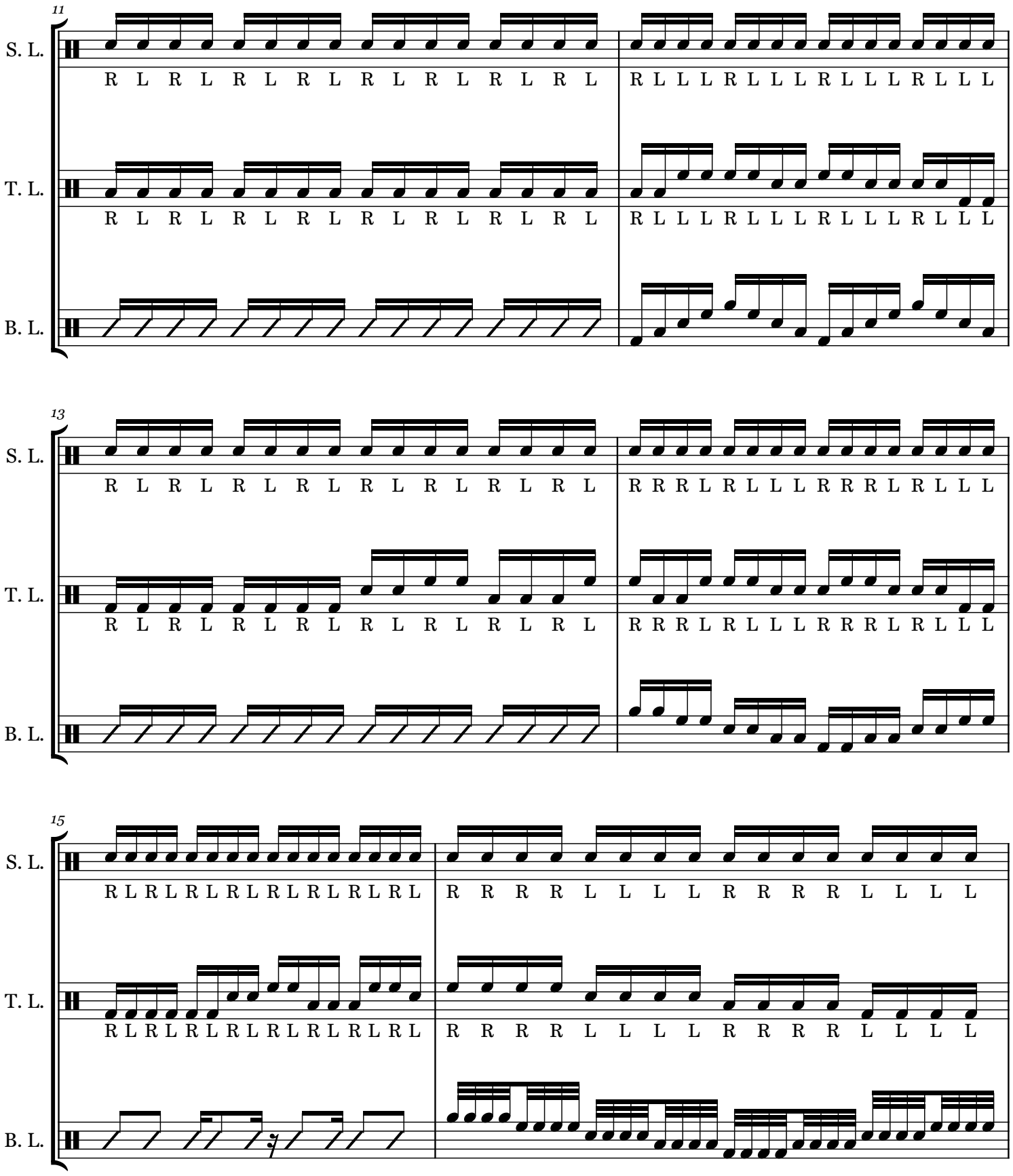

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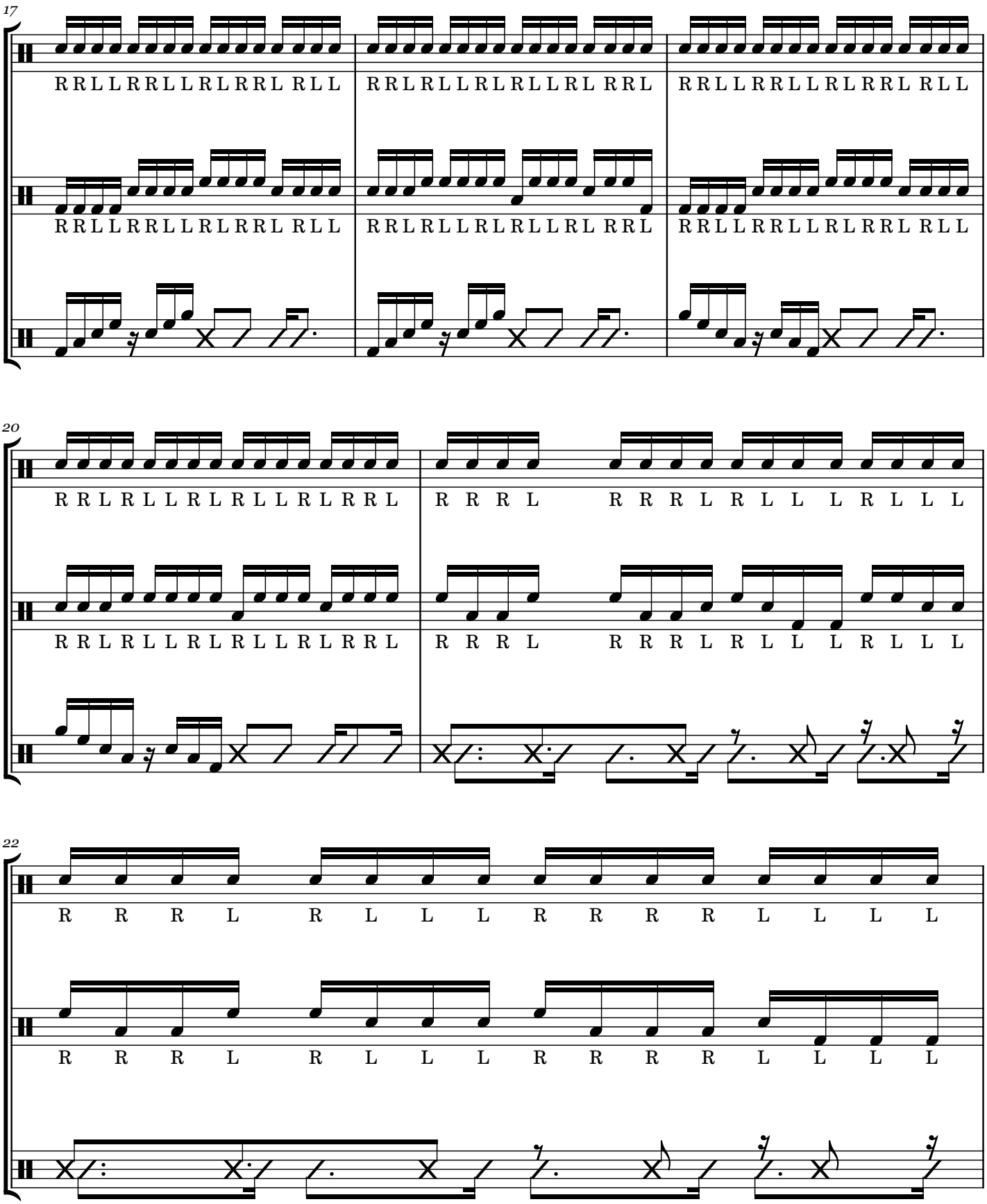

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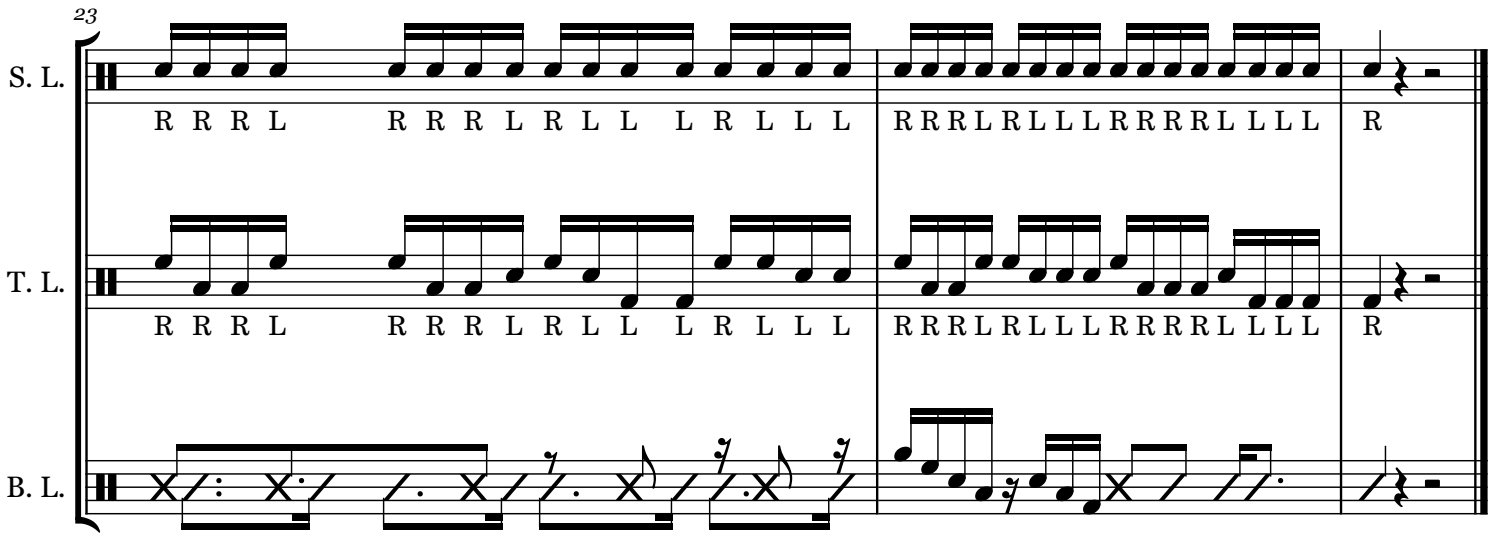

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SUU Double-Triple Beat 2025

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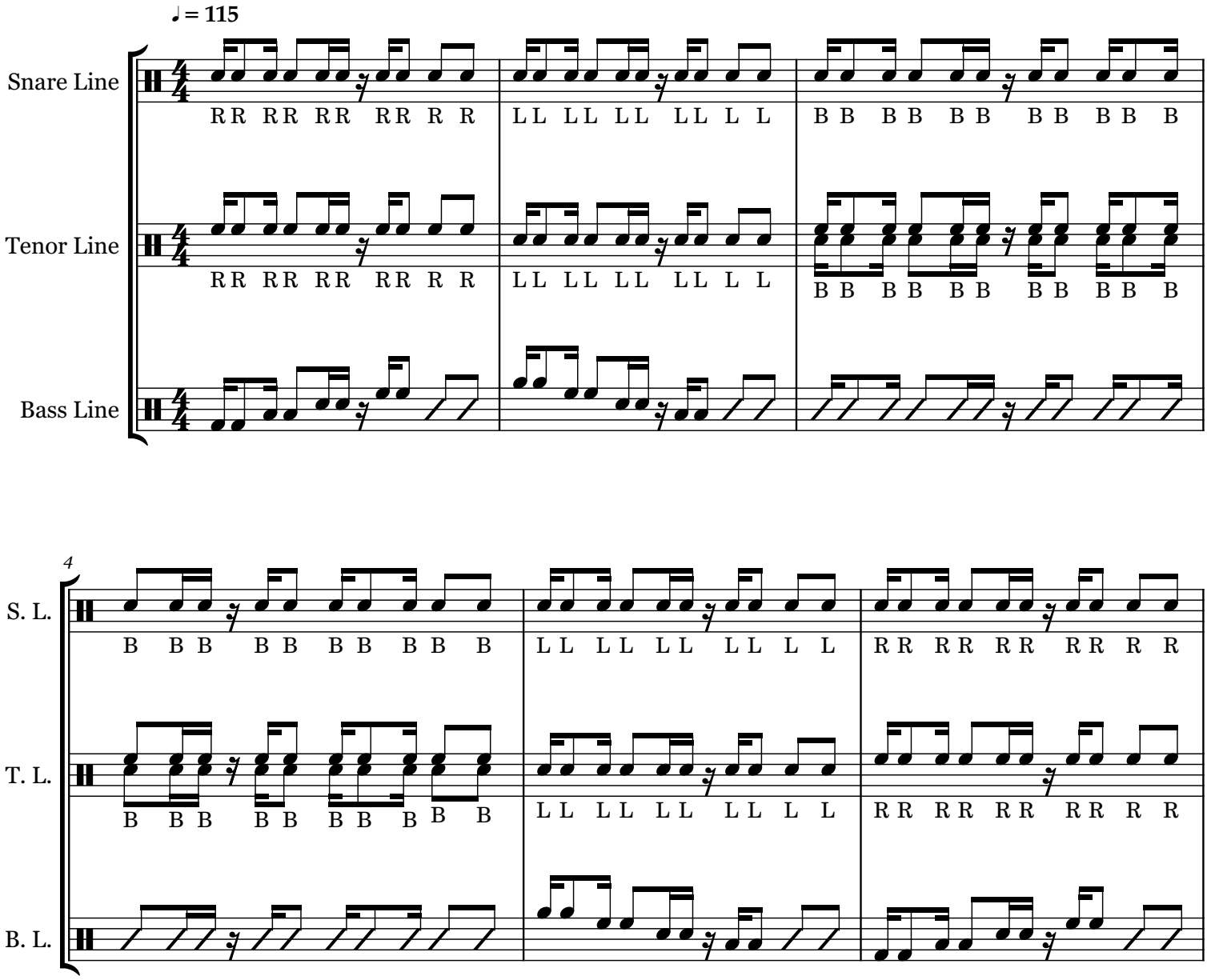

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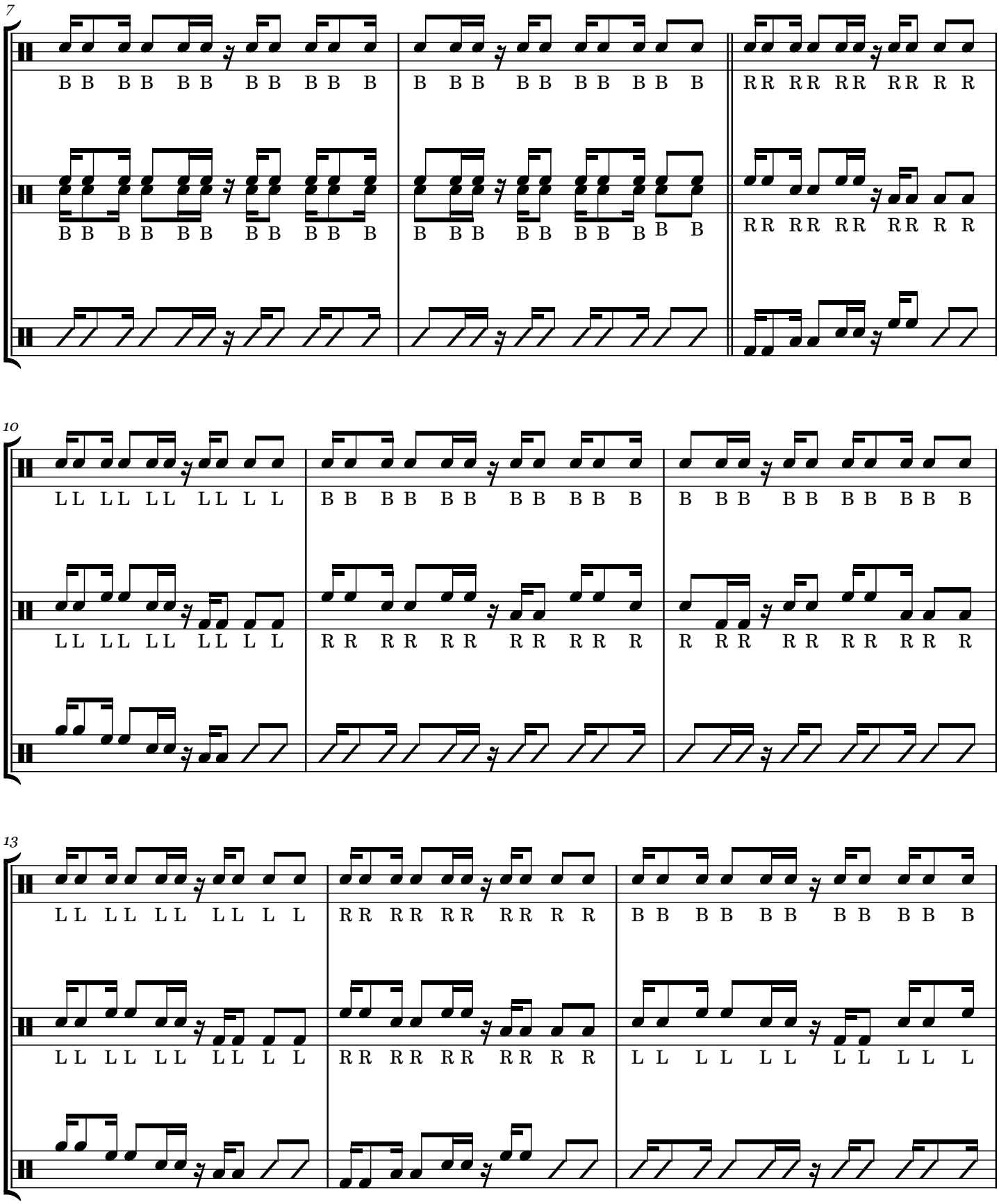

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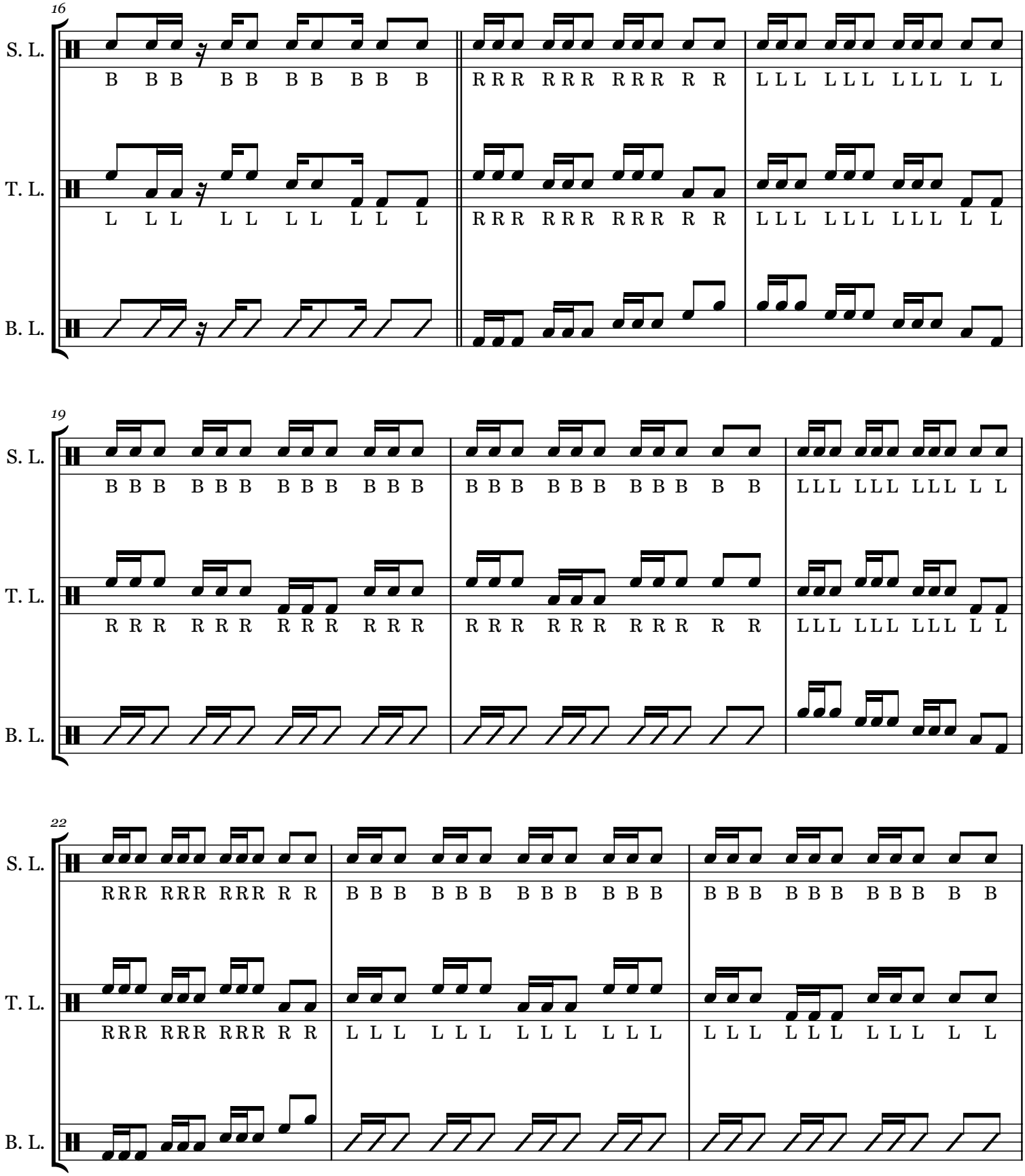

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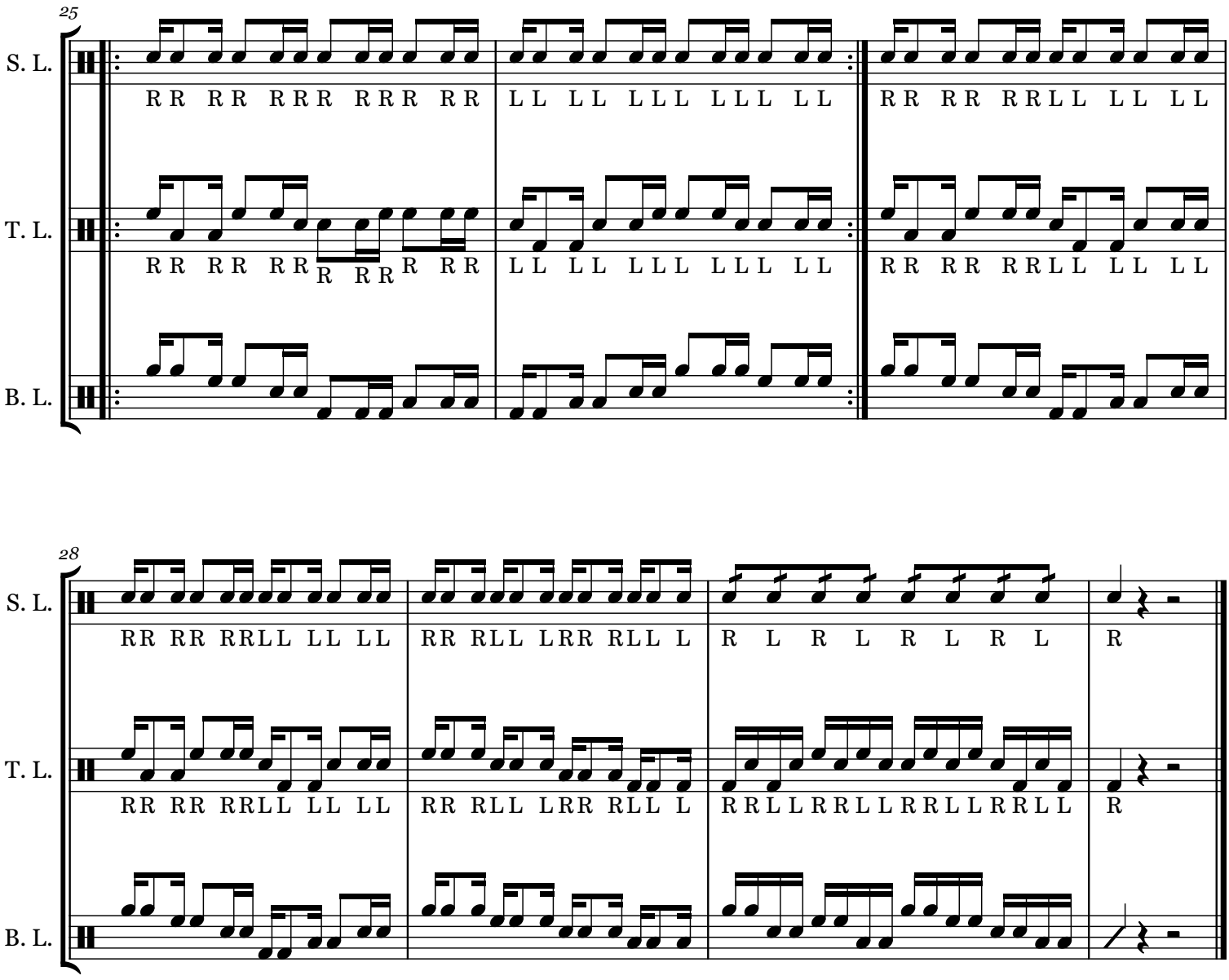

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SUU Hugga Digga Burr 2025

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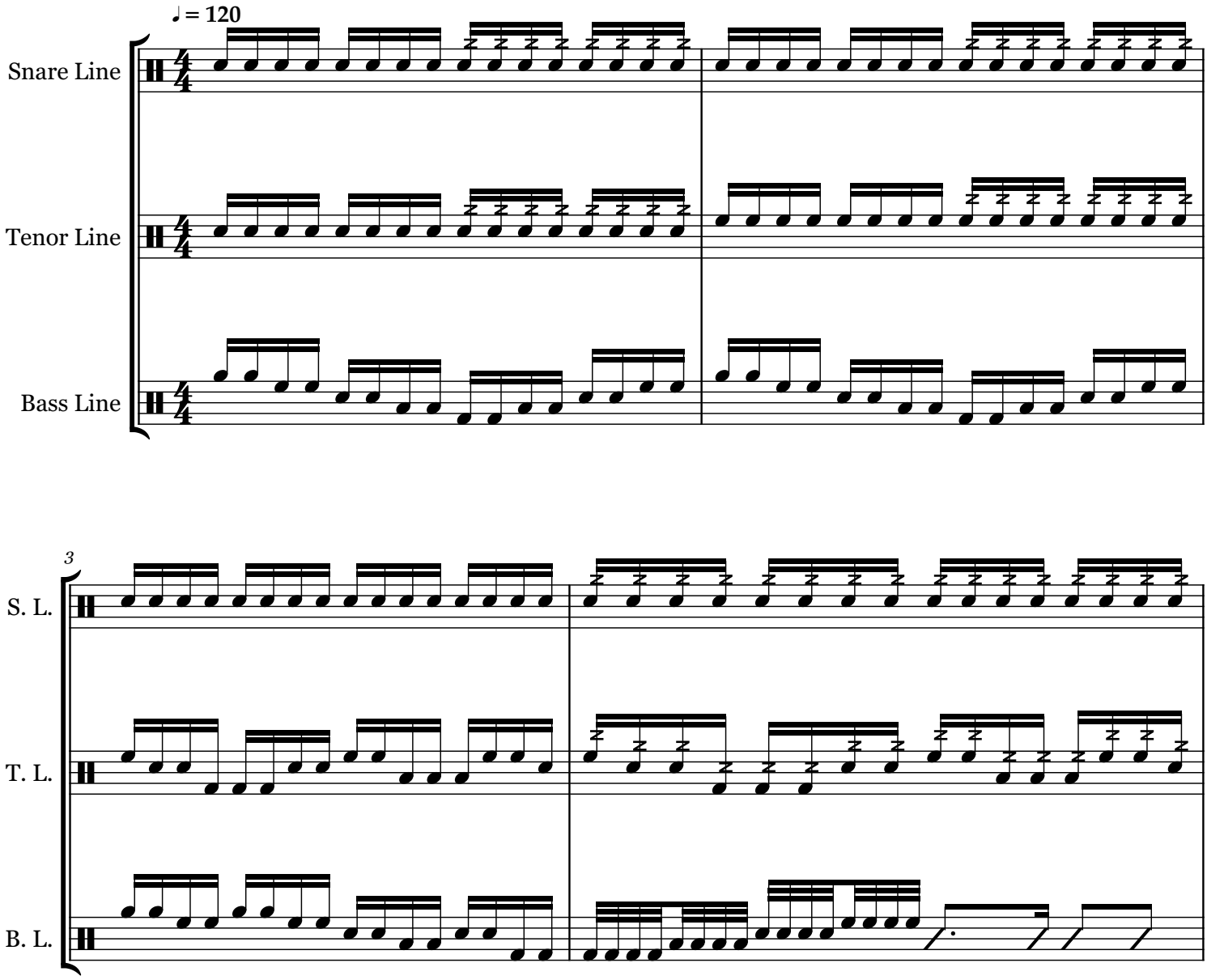

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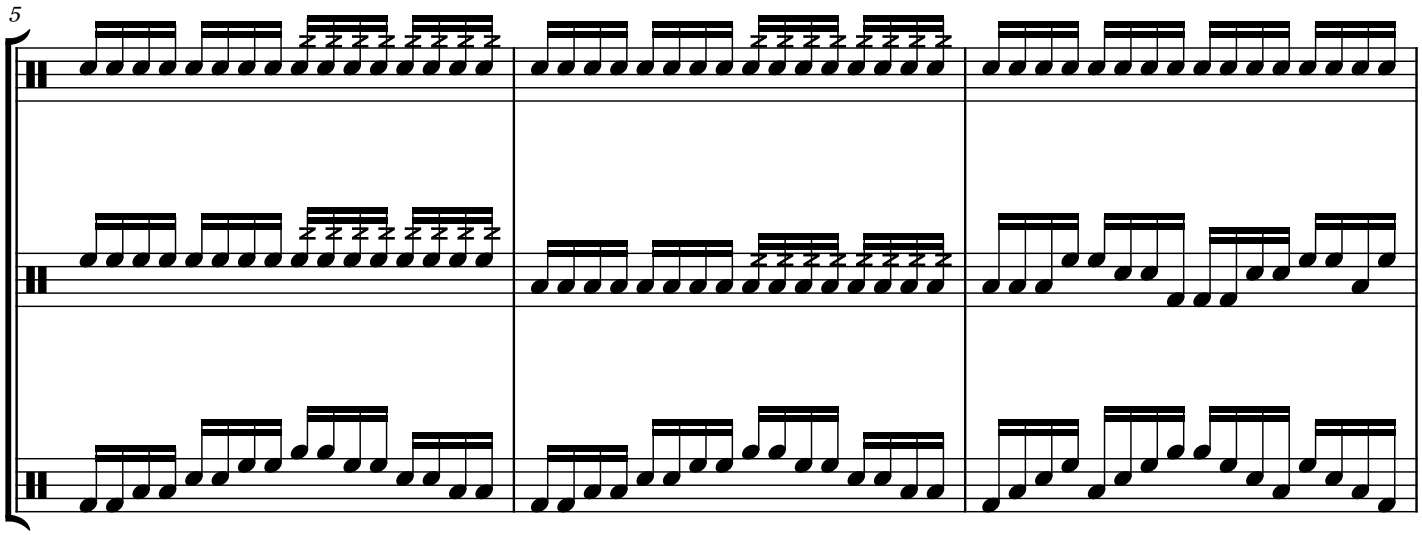

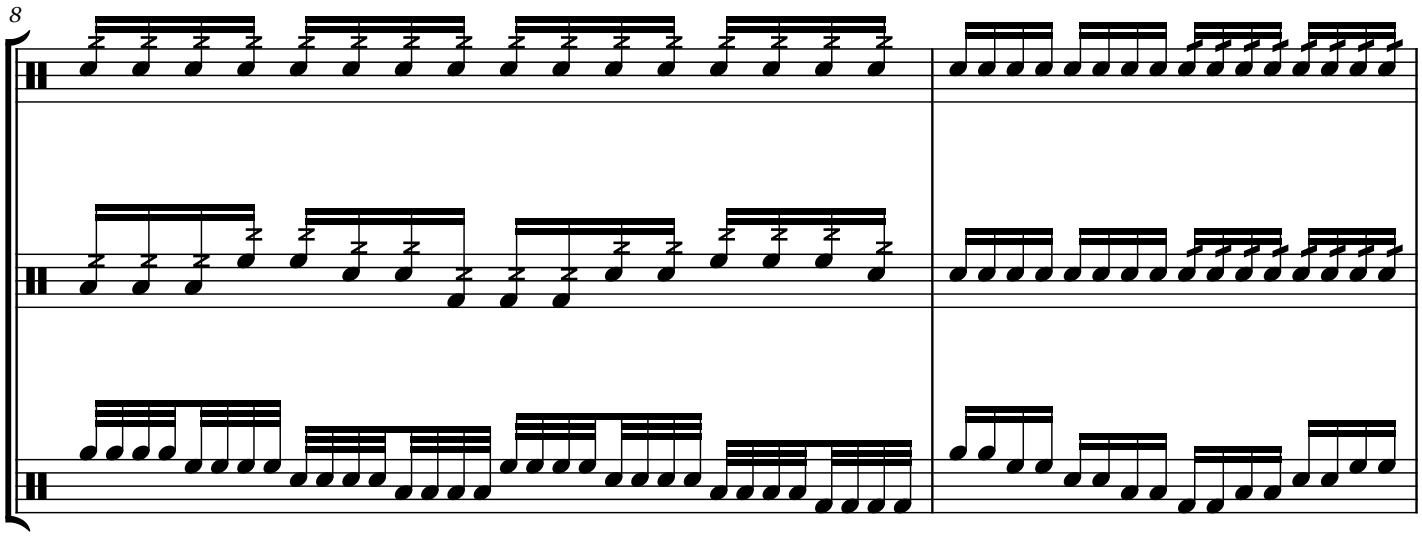

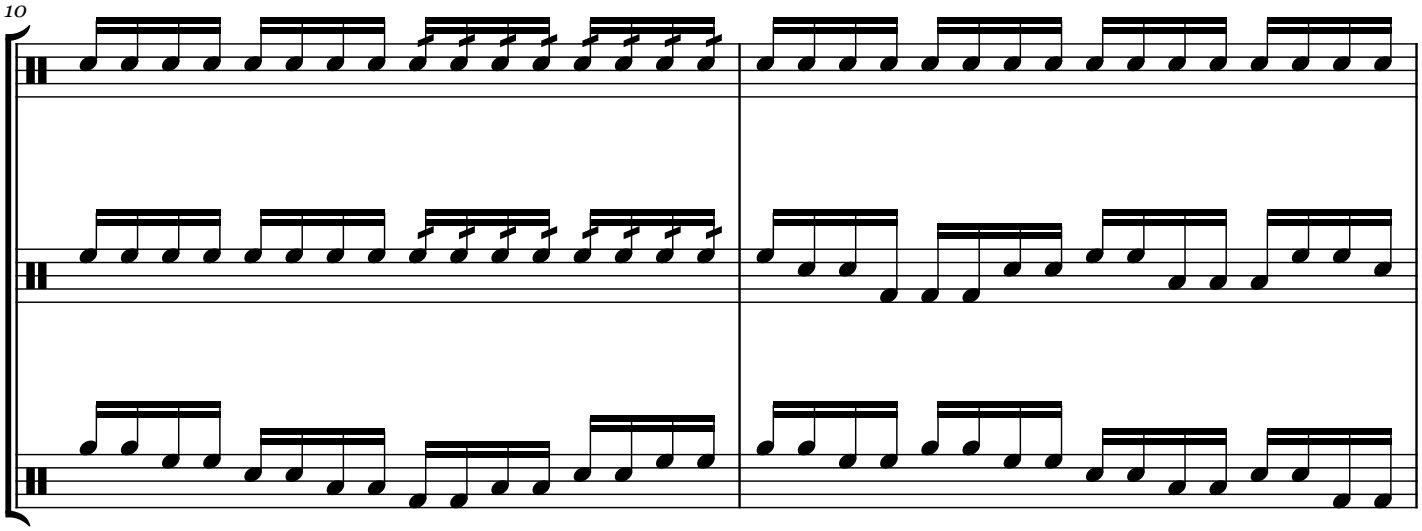

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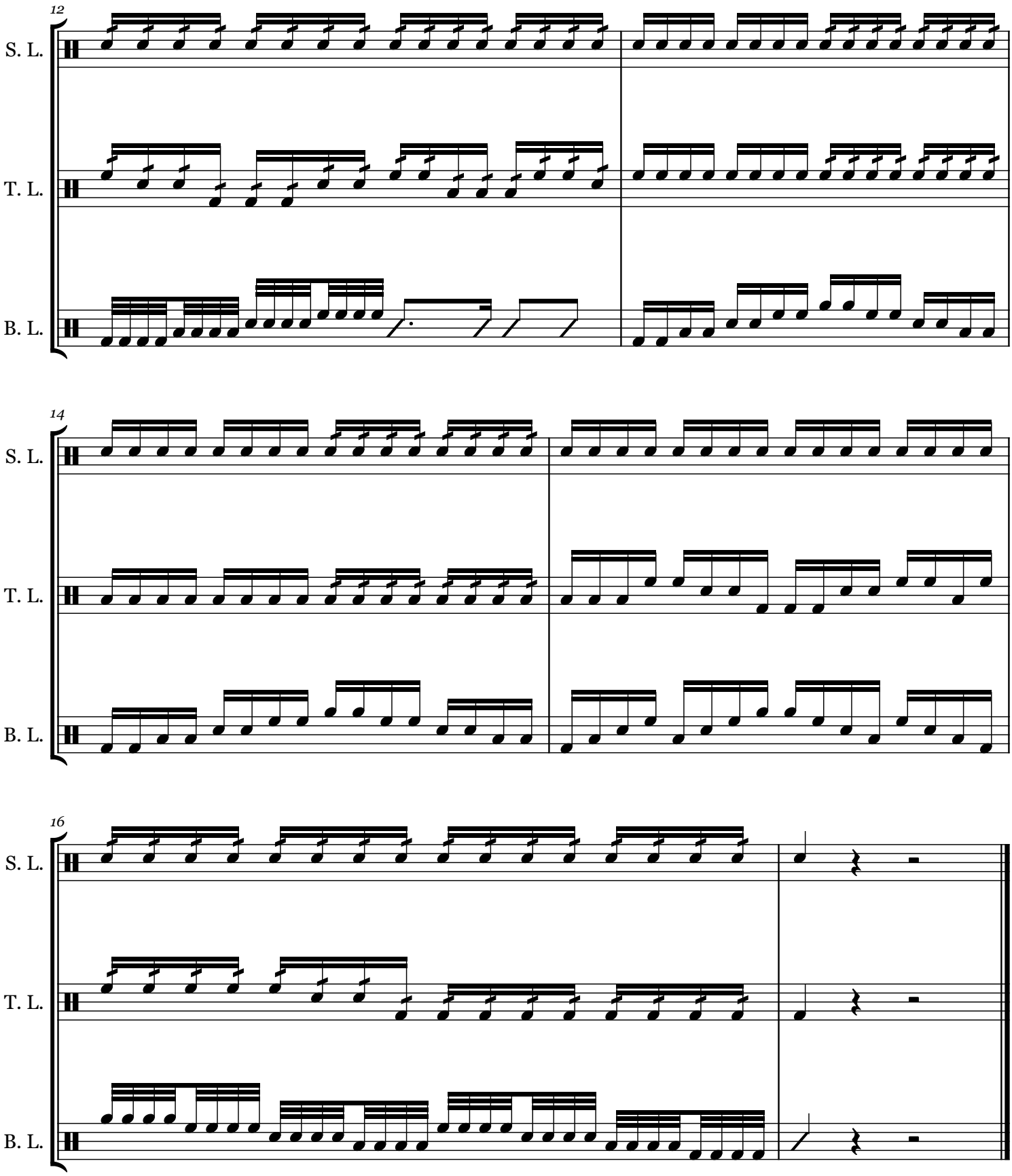

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SUU Triplet Rolls 2025

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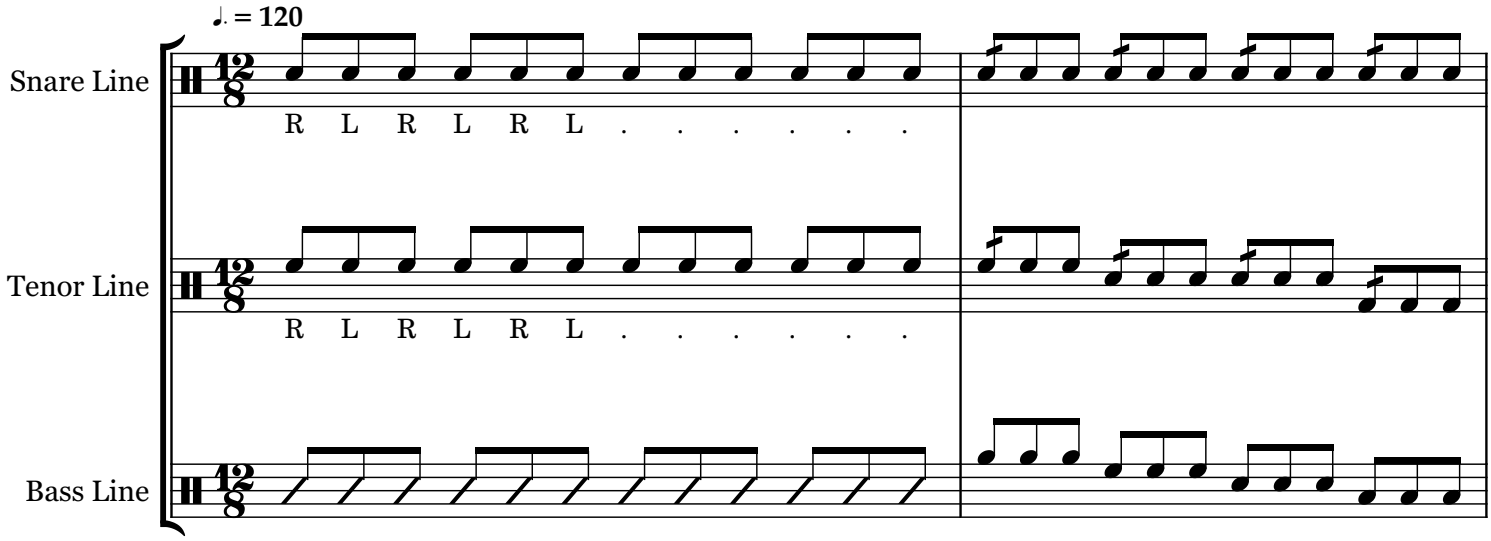

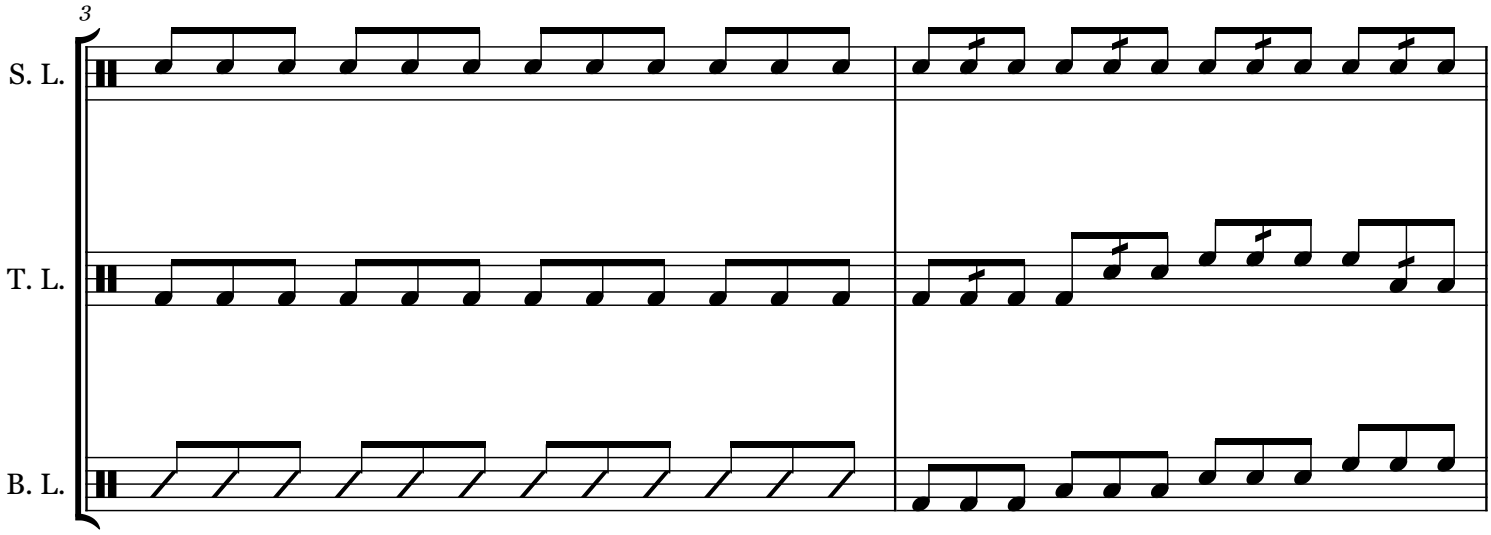

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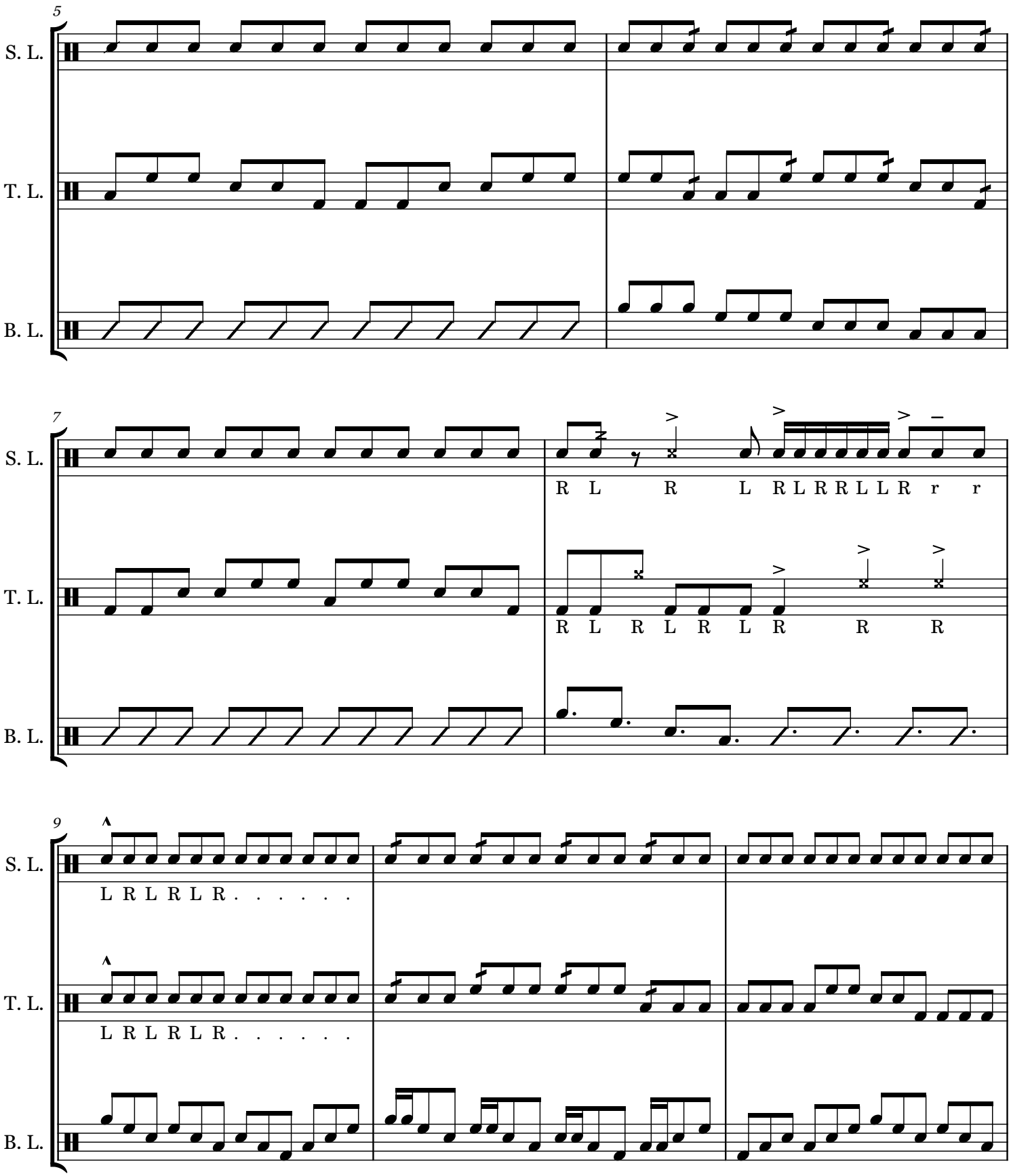

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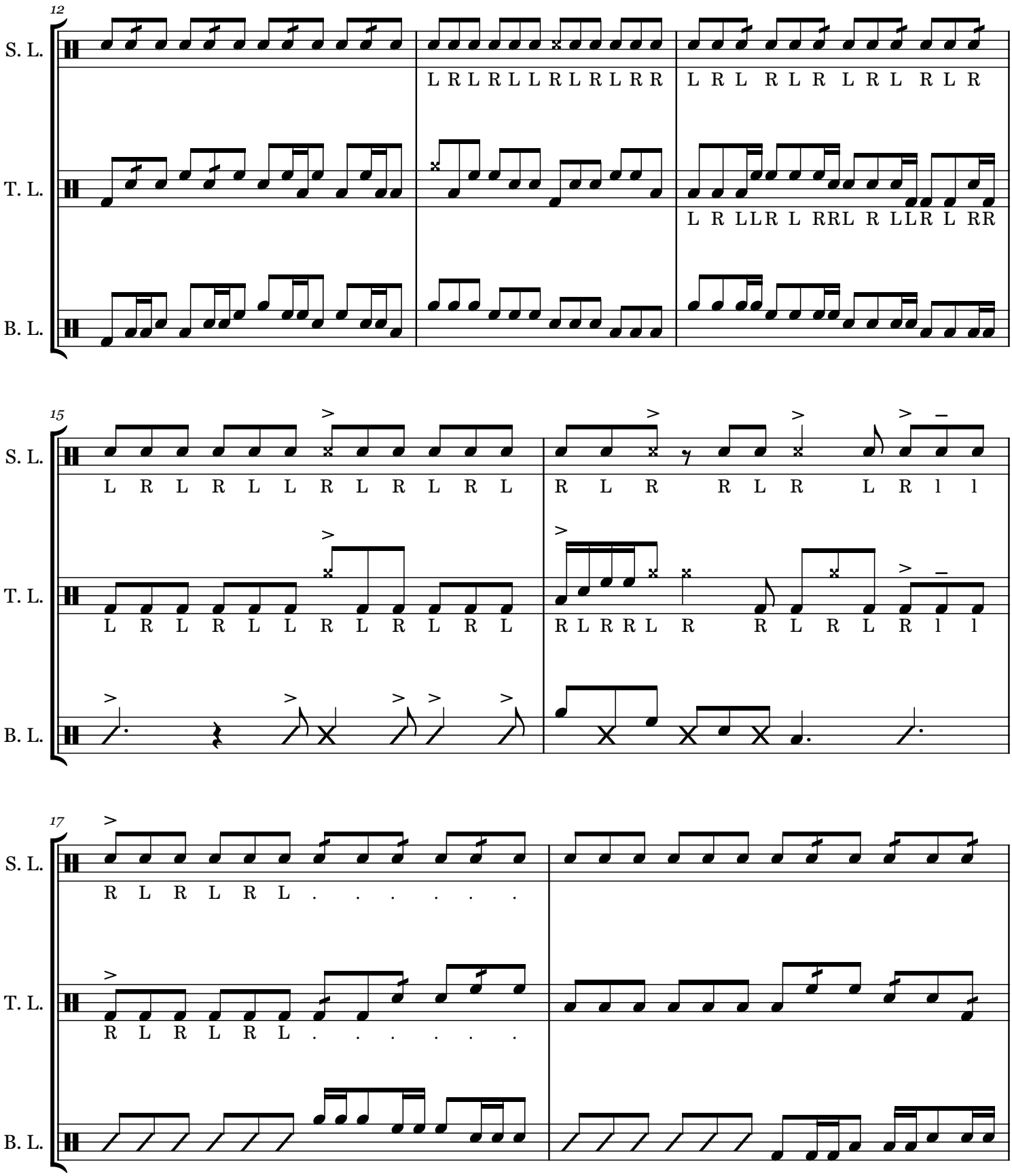

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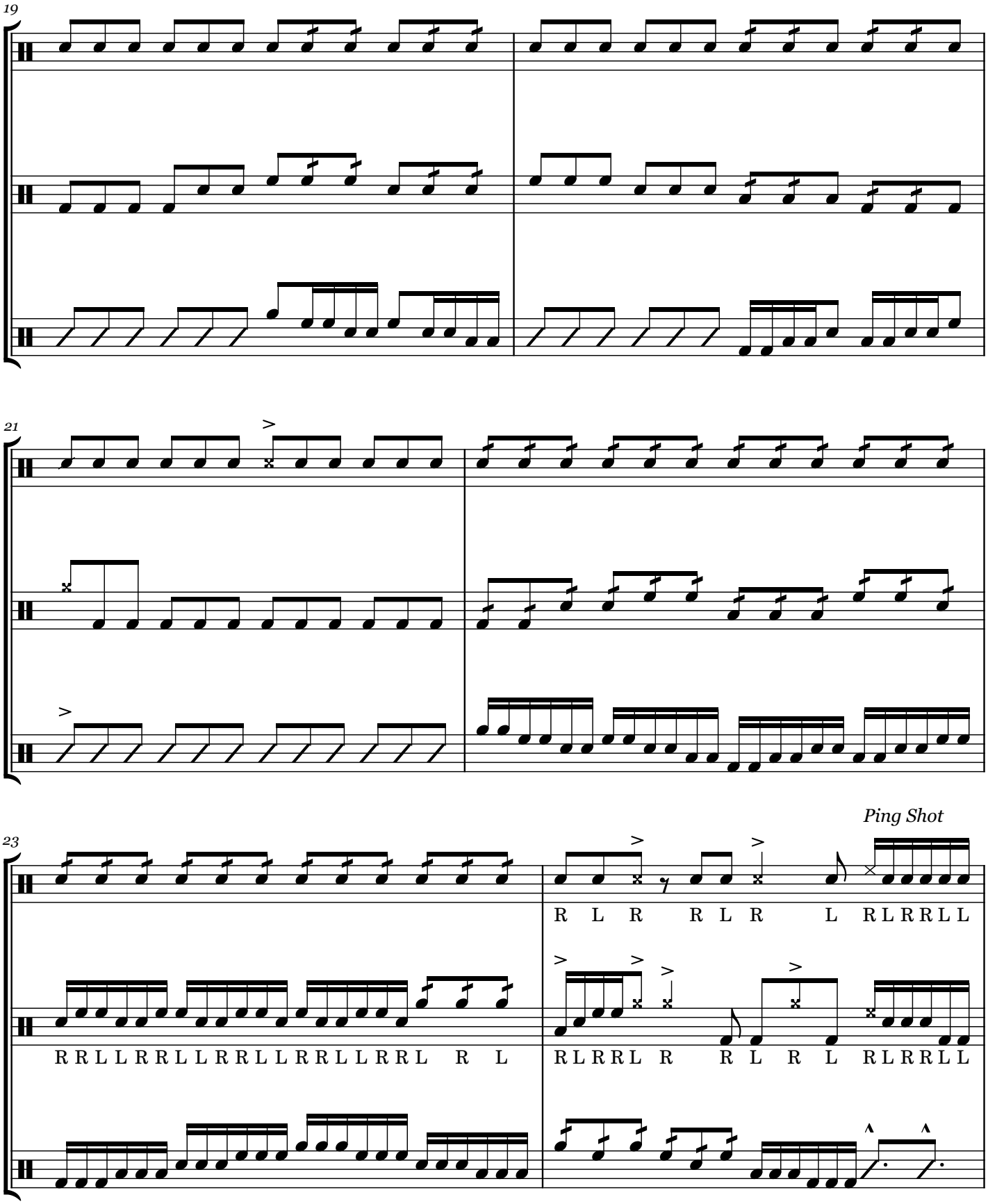

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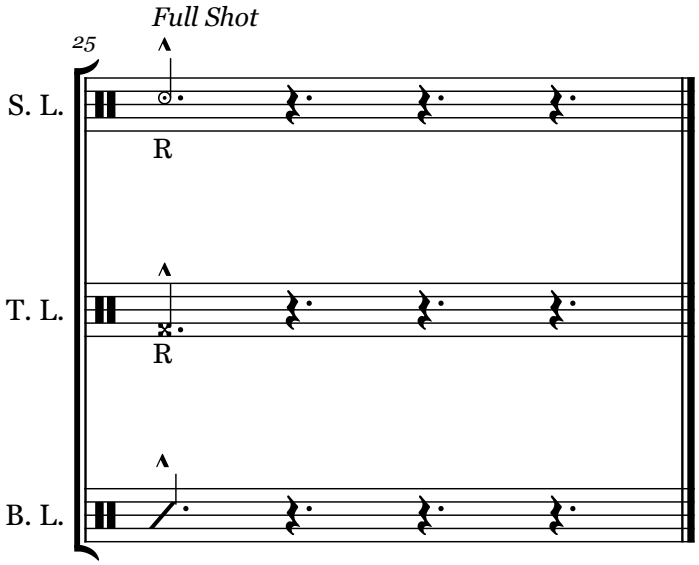

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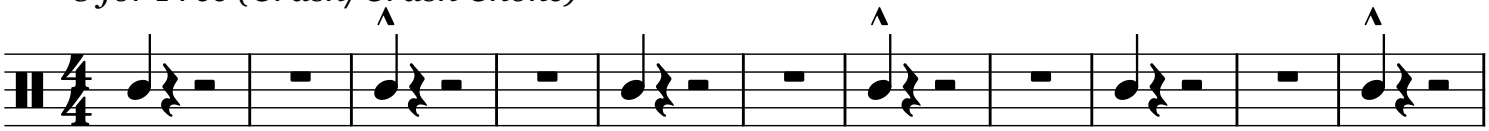
Cymbal Exercises

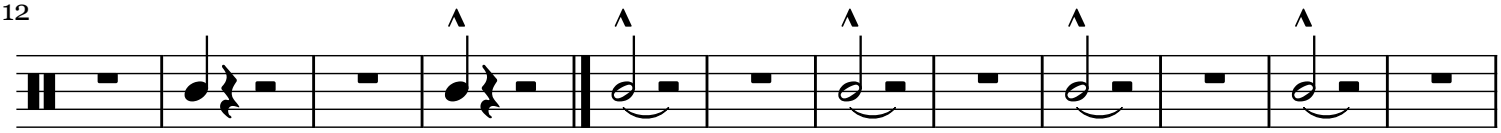
Kevin Johnson

8 for Free (Crash/Crash Choke)



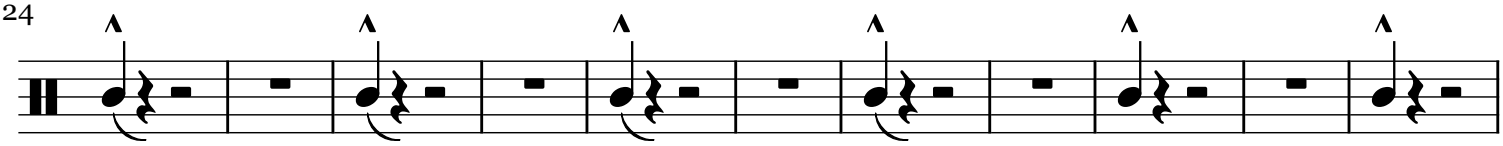
Crash - Choke Breakdown

12



Delayed Crash Choke
Crash on 1
Choke on 3
Flat on 5

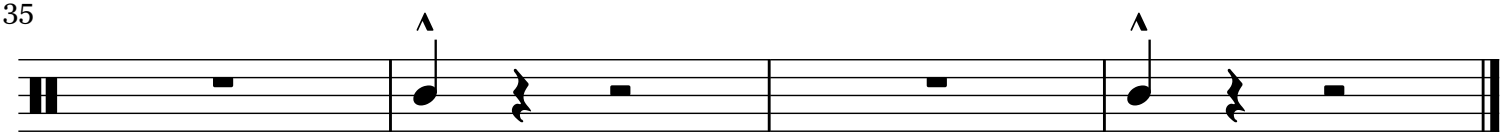
24



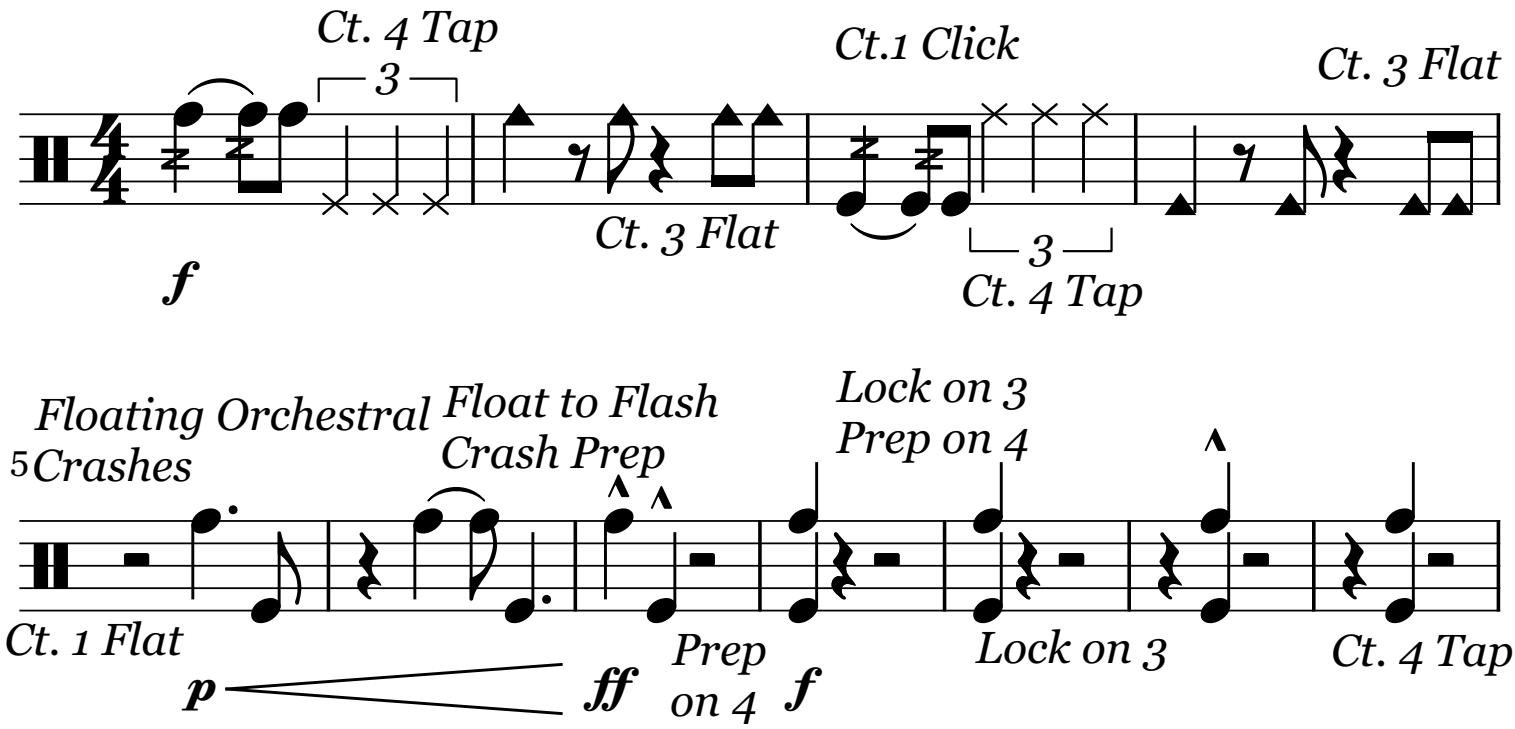
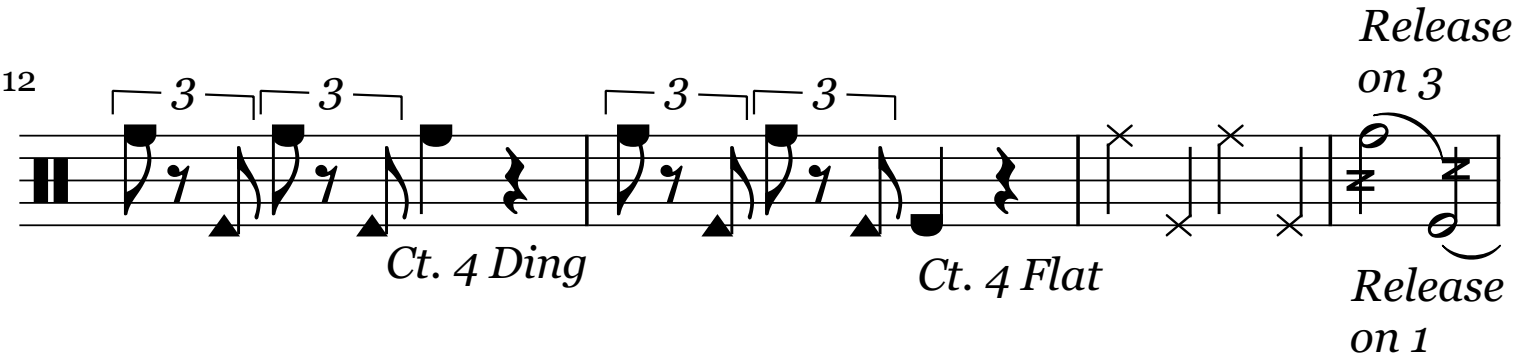
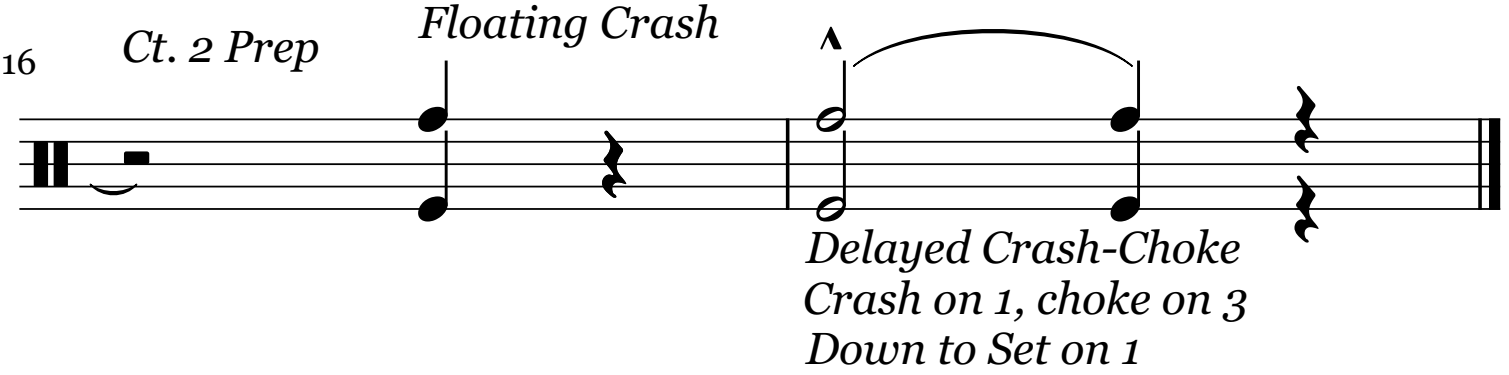
Delayed Crash Choke
Crash on 1
Choke on 2
Flat on 5

Full Crash Choke

35



Drop to Set on 3

SUU Cymbal Etude

Eric Kruse
Shalamar Georgia-Clark
Arr. Kevin Johnson