J.S. BACH

Cello Suites

Transcribed for Piano Solo

by ELEONOR BINDMAN

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"Bach cannot be limited or withdrawn
by confining him to the instruments of his lifetime."

"The informed performance of Bach is contained
in understanding of the concepts expressed in his form and structures
and insight into the significance of his art as a whole."

Rosalyn Tureck

J.S. Bach

Cello Suites for Piano Solo

Transcribed by
Eleonor Bindman

Illustrations by
Peter Nappi

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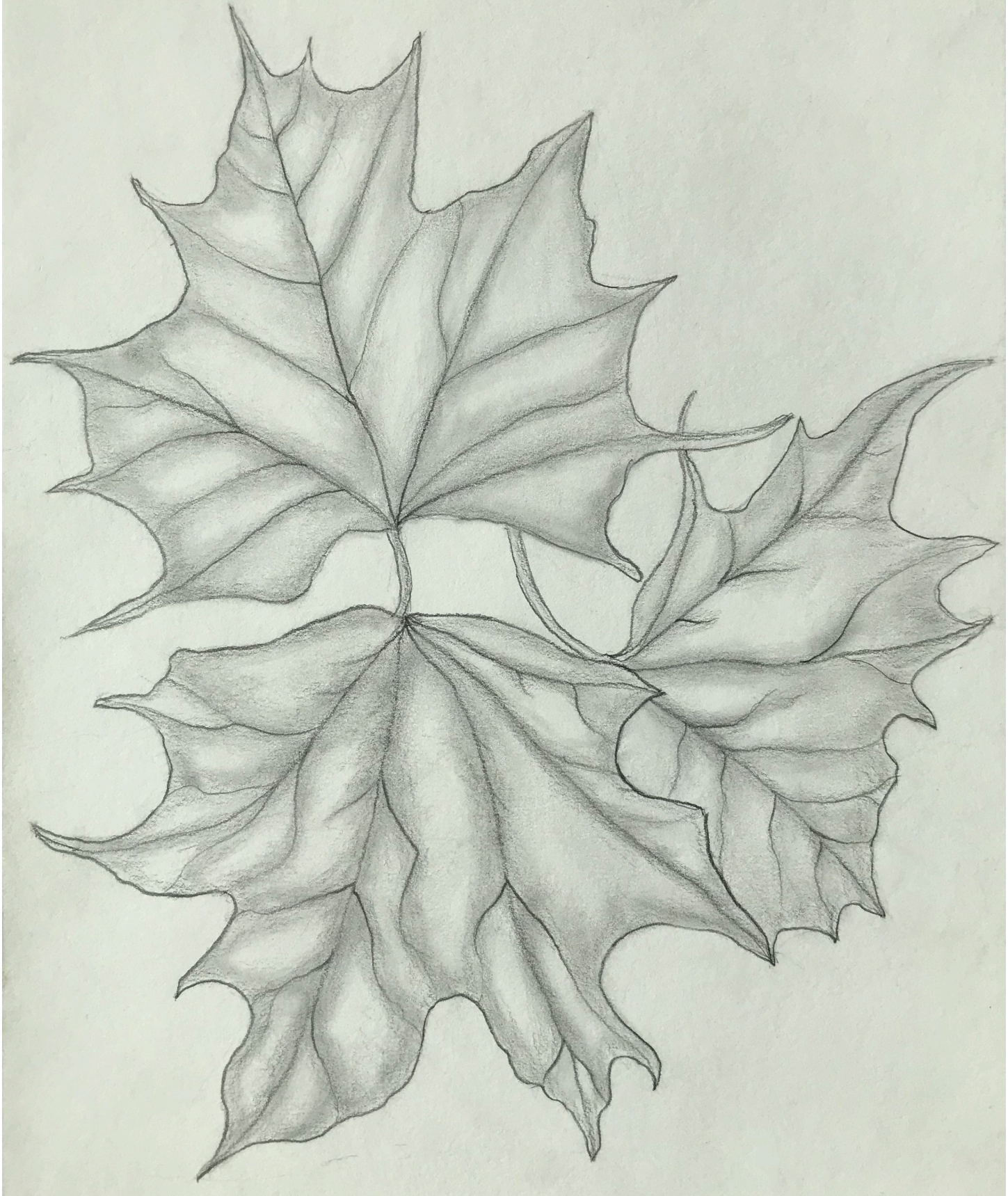
Bach's Cello Suites are more than great music. A cello's timbre is so similar to a human voice that we feel like we are being spoken to. We start paying attention, somehow understand the message, respond to it from within and enter into a dialogue. Ideas are presented and expounded, connections are made, questions are answered or dissipate into silence. Every thought has intriguing possibilities: it gets repeated or fragmented, turned upside down, shown from another perspective, then returned to its origin. There is nothing superfluous in this conversation, only revelations as we get closer to truth.

Transcribing the Cello Suites into keyboard notation put the shapes of Bach's linear thought, his patterns and implied counterpoint into much sharper focus. I am sharing this transcription with you in the spirit of an urtext edition: what Bach had left, without explicit speeds, dynamics or other printed "limitations." Although Baroque dance forms imply traditional character and tempi, Bach stretches stylistic limits with his content. Most of the movements (except the Sarabandes which need to be slow) can be satisfying to play at any tempo or dynamic level and serve as useful finger-building exercises and structural studies. Dynamics depend on one's mood and can change upon repeats so do experiment with them. Rosalyn Tureck's books are a great source of wisdom on embellishments and your own trial and error will help. My recent recording of this transcription reveals some new repeat possibilities as well. The division of one cello line between two hands was guided by logistics and distinction of counterpoint but it isn't written in stone. You might want to try some movements with the left hand alone. Adjusting your sitting position for the lower keyboard register is a good idea.

Bach reportedly said that "All one needs to do is play the right notes at the right time" but his music is a language of many hidden levels. To compensate for an unmarked score and provide some context, I include introductions to each Suite, with some observations, textual and structural highlights and rough metronome speeds. Lastly, there is a detailed "deconstruction," of the Prelude from Suite No. 1, as a model for analyzing the other 35 movements, which I highly recommend.

I hope and trust that you will enjoy playing the Cello Suites on the piano. Thank you for your interest in my work.

Eleonor Bindman, October 2020



Suite No. 1 in G major

Suite No. 1 is well-grounded in the key of G major, starting with an open tonic chord of G, the D a fifth above and a B a 10th above. Bach unifies this Suite by planting this chord, a compositional seed of sorts, in each of the six movements and continues to use a similar common feature in Suites 2 and 3. The calm and beneficent quality of G major coupled with the "seminal" approach created in me a strong association with growth, nature as a source and healer of all things, and the color green.

The beginning four measures of the familiar **Prelude** flow in 16th notes and spell out a harmonic progression of chords, just like the four incipient measures in Prelude No. 1 of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, another iconic "instrumental study set" of Bach's. However, here we are immediately faced with an element of instability within structure, the wavering BAB (or CBC) pattern, which becomes a source of variety and departure, making this Prelude longer and more interesting. You can see the three-note fragments (BAB, GF#G etc.) descend and lead into a new bass note in m. 5 (C#, the first accidental and leading tone of D major) and then lengthen into trills in m. 6. Measures 7-8 use already established patterns and in mm. 9-10 scale-wise motion and an arpeggio bit in the dominant key of D major end the "exposition" section.

In mm. 11 and 13 diminished harmonies slightly disrupt the emotional stability but resolve promptly in mm. 12/14. Measure 15 is already familiar. Then Bach inserts the first dramatic ascent by means of a pedal point based on G in mm. 16-18 which culminates in m. 19 – a new iteration of the initial chord – only to roll back into the C# to C (mm. 20-21) bass anchoring the Dominant chord statement in m. 22. The first half of m. 22 is an interesting blend of a D7 chord with an ascending D major scale and the unexpected C# causes a naturally expressive "stretch" of time and space before the arrival at the highest D where Bach puts a fermata. He wants us to pause midway through the piece, to interrupt the hitherto perpetual motion and take a breath. I took the liberty of inserting a 16th rest here instead of a tied 16th note after the fermata as we find in the manuscripts. A rest is a more logical notation of the concept and produces less "cognitive dissonance."

From the fermata through m. 28 the Prelude ascends and descends, occasionally stumbling into an Eb, Bb, G# and highlighting friction between flats/naturals and sharps/naturals of the same scale degrees. In mm. 29-30 Bach writes out an almost pedantic downward scale sequence before very intentionally dividing the line into

two voices, one settling on A and the other moving on and above the same A for six measures. Cellists use 2 strings for these voices but a pianist has to struggle for clarity when the hands share the same key. One solution is to experiment with transposing the repeated A into a lower register, either fully or partially, as I opted to do on my recording of this transcription. In mm. 37-38 the voices move to D (dominant) and a steadily ascending chromatic scale which finally bring us back to G major for the home stretch. Measures 39-41 are now further divided into three-voice chords but, unlike the beginning, there is no wavering anymore as we reach the last chord.

A tempo commonly heard for this Prelude is around 72 per quarter. Fluctuations are possible in transitional, more improvisatory passages but the broken chords need to remain steady. The dynamic level is generally mf but any harmonic or directional changes hold potential for subtle variety. The effect of repeating the same fragment as a softer "echo" may work in some instances (I like it in mm. 8 and 20) but it's better not to overindulge in that. And at the end, since the motion struggles upward and the energy increases, a crescendo makes sense.

The **Allemande** of Suite No. 1 starts with same chord as the Prelude and unfolds into an unhurried narrative with long phrases. I suggest switching hands in mm. 4/6 so that the repeated-note passages are executed with better phrasing. Measures 9 and 10 start with open chords, reminiscent of the Prelude, and I use that idea for the repeats in the recording, filling in the rhythmical gaps in mm. 1, 6, 7, 11, 12 etc., in order to create an endless stream of 16th notes, a nod to the Prelude. The tempo, dynamics and mood here should echo the Prelude as well.

This **Courante** is notable for very distinct and playful repeated intervals in the left hand, mostly perfect fifths. They occur throughout the entire movement, first in 8th notes and then in 16ths, conveying a light-hearted and contrasting change of pace after the first two movements and before the Sarabande. Bach is also playing around with the lower neighbor three-note figures from the Prelude here, repeating them in mm. 5/6, 11/12, inverting them in 14/15 and continuing during the second half with more fun interval play and pattern inversions. He drives the ending home with the three-note lower neighbor patterns in the right hand and a sequence of four perfect 5ths in the left. The "seed" chord here is spelled out backwards, from top to bottom, starting with the last two 16th notes of m.1. So long as the Courante is faster and lighter than the Allemande, a wide range of tempi is possible. You can try around 112 per quarter note.

The **Sarabande** is the most appropriate movement of Suite No. 1 for imitating the cello sound and enjoying the duration of the longer notes. The dotted rhythms with 32nd notes here are an indication that the tempo should be on the slow side even for a Sarabande, about 40 per quarter note. The first half employs straightforward harmony but the second has more variety: note the mood-altering modulation to E minor in mm. 11-12. In m. 15 I hold the D in the right hand because it's clearly intended as a part of the upper voice.

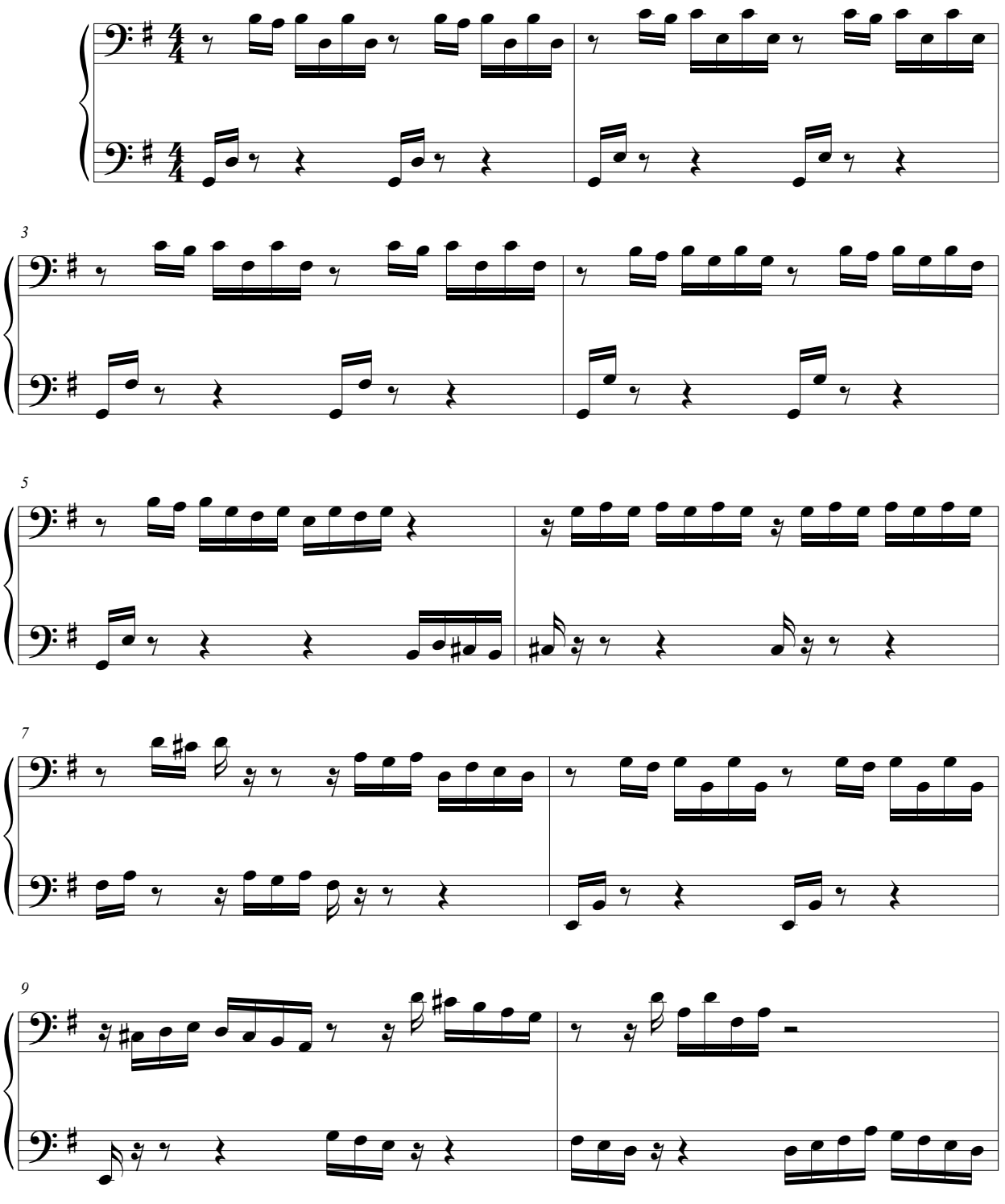
It's amusing to see how Bach uses the initial chord in the **Menuets**: very obviously in Menuet I and backwards in Menuet II (with a stray Eb), especially enhancing the contrasting minor mood by the downward motion. The presence of 16th notes implies a conservative tempo, 108 per quarter or slower. These sonorities remind me of a guitar, so I add some notes upon repeats to fill in the base line, as is often heard in guitar transcriptions of Bach.

The **Gigue** of Cello Suite No. 1 needn't be too fast, as it has some 16th notes which need to be articulated. I think of it at about 70-72 per dotted quarter and try to imitate the "hunting horn" sound: not too long, not too short, with a focused attack on every note. Our main chord – the only chord in this movement – is hiding in the fourth measure but hunting it down is no trouble at all. Upward tension builds in mm. 28-32 before a downward broken chord ending, its momentum slowed down via a group of four 16th notes in m. 33 for a built-in ritardando.

Cello Suite No. 1 in G major, BWV 1007

Prelude

J.S. Bach
Arr. E. Bindman



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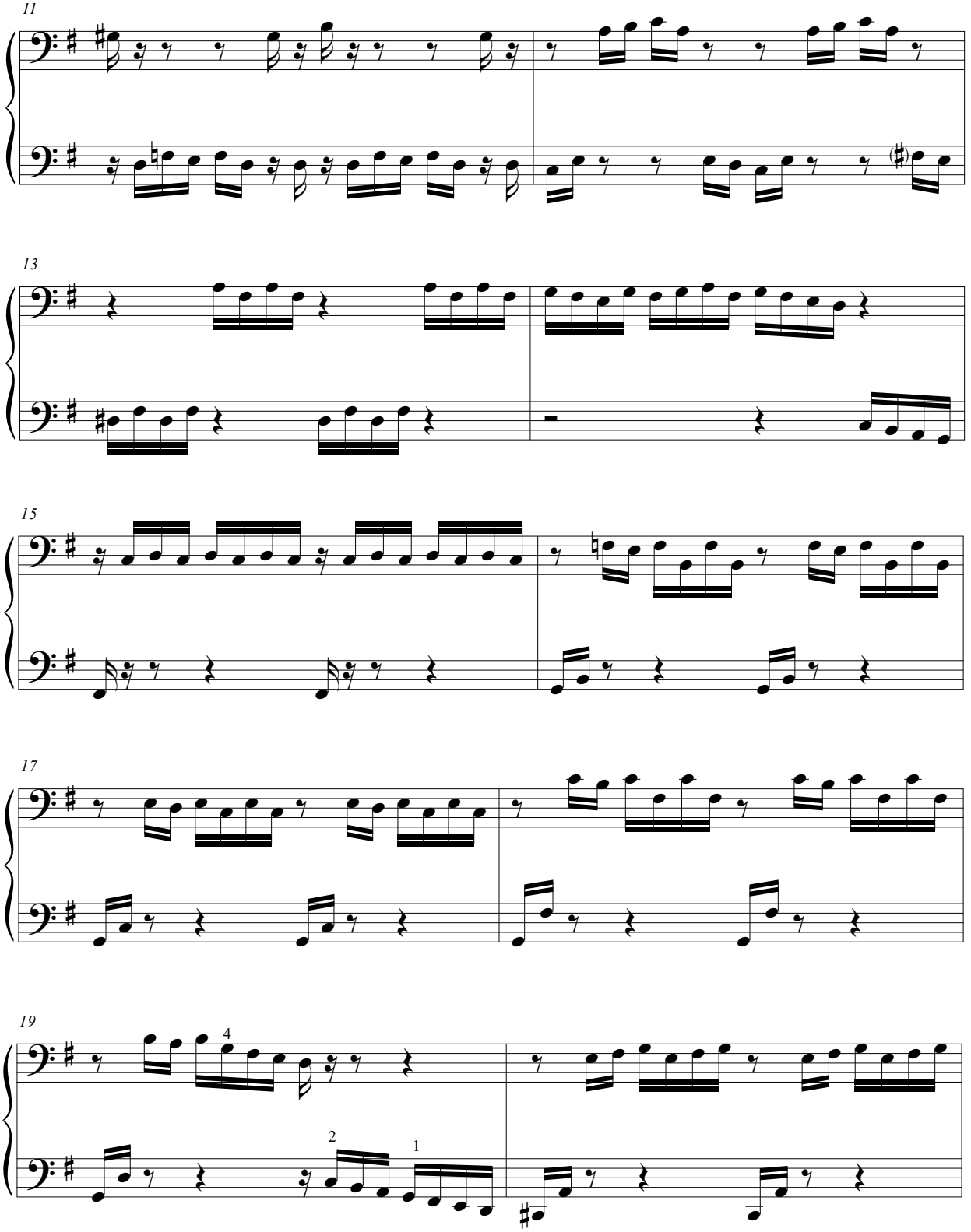
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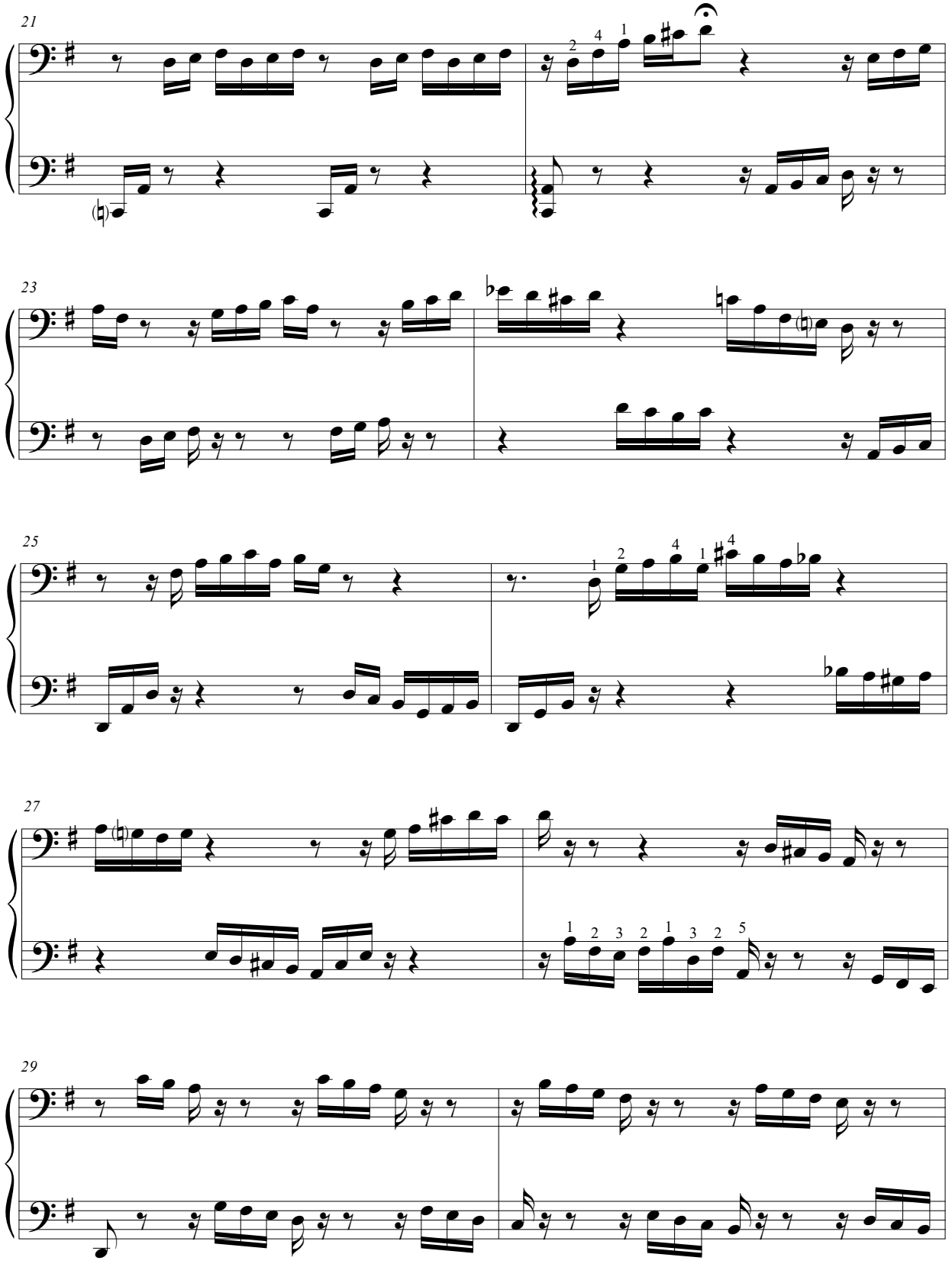
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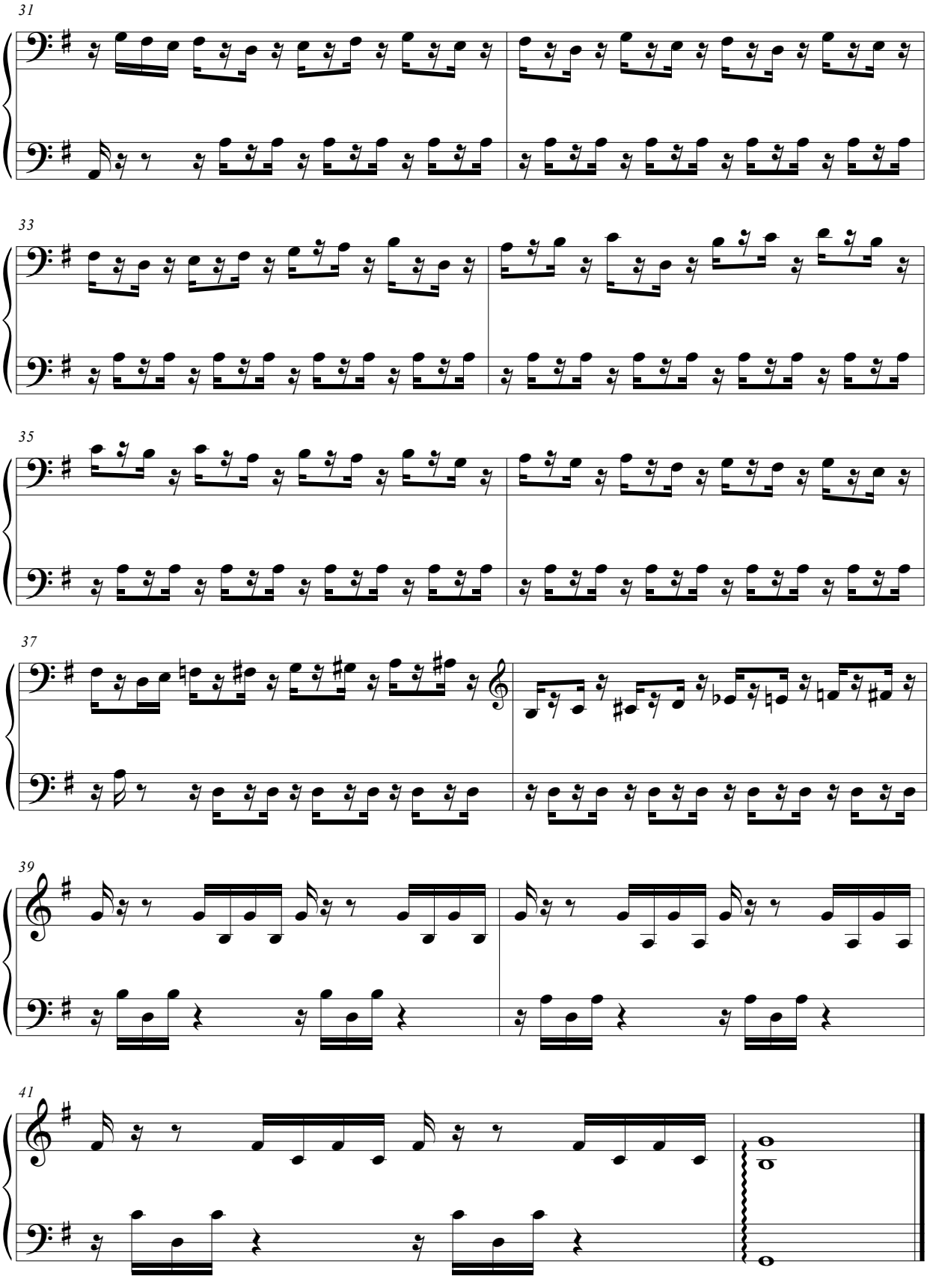
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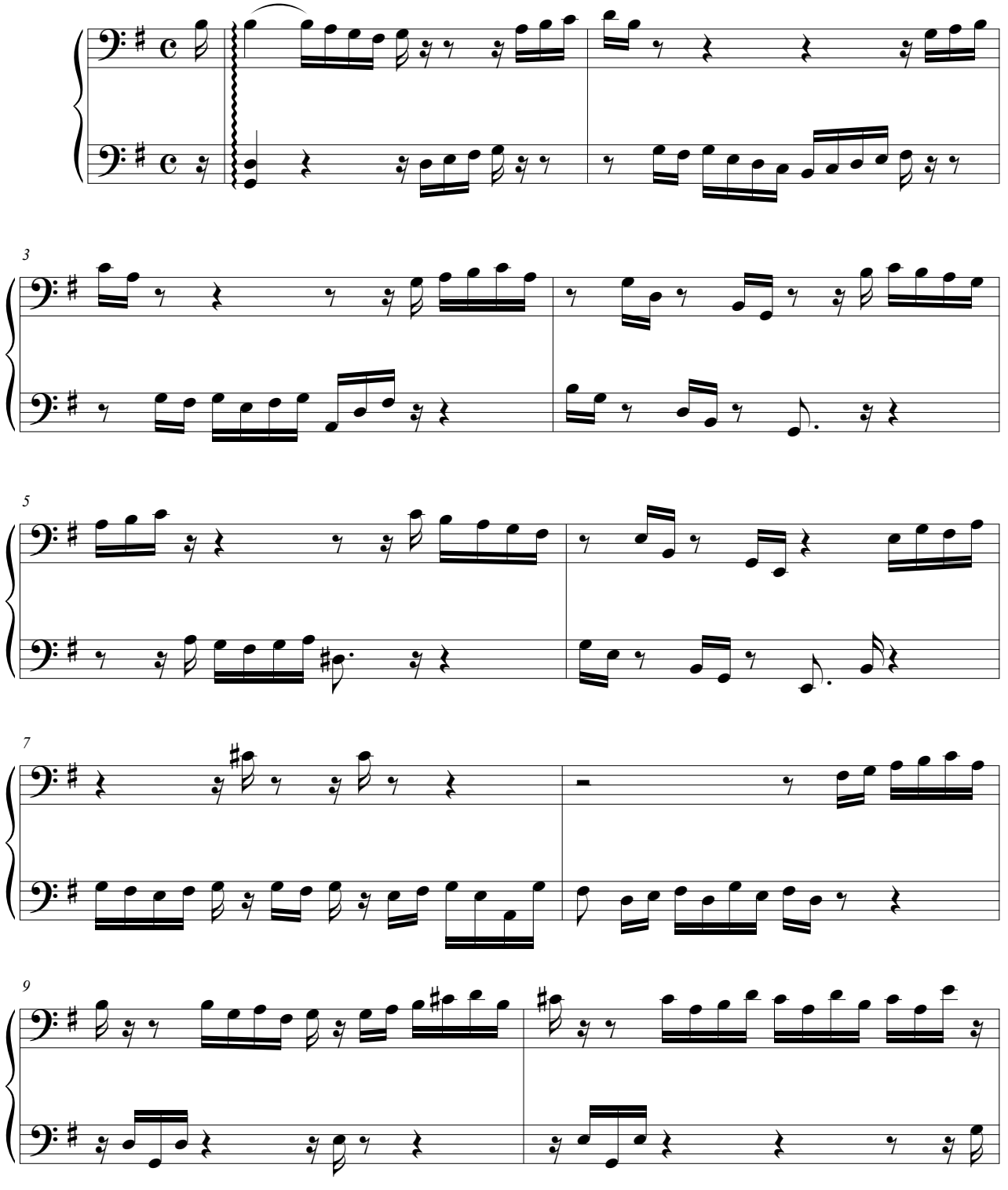
Allemande



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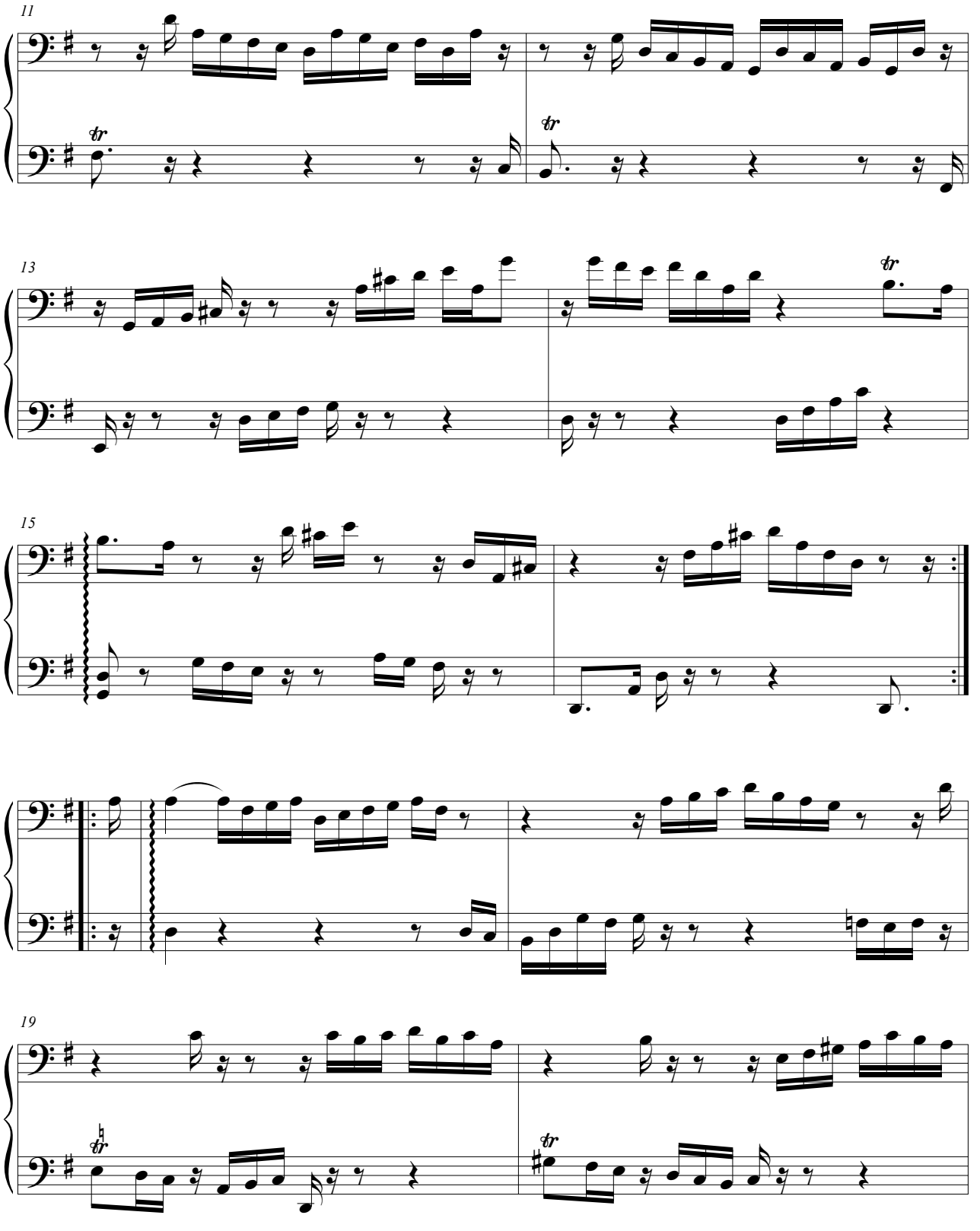
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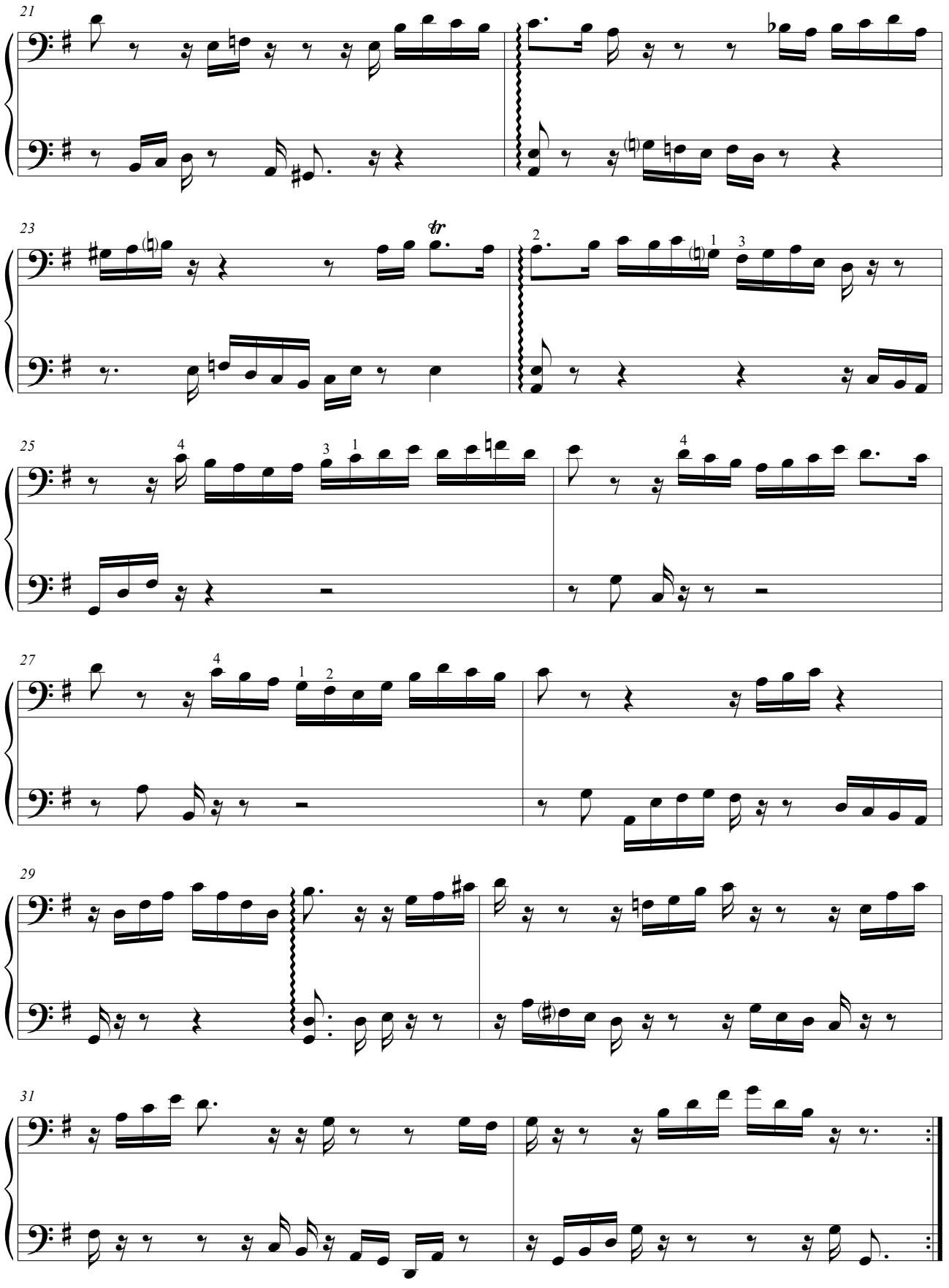
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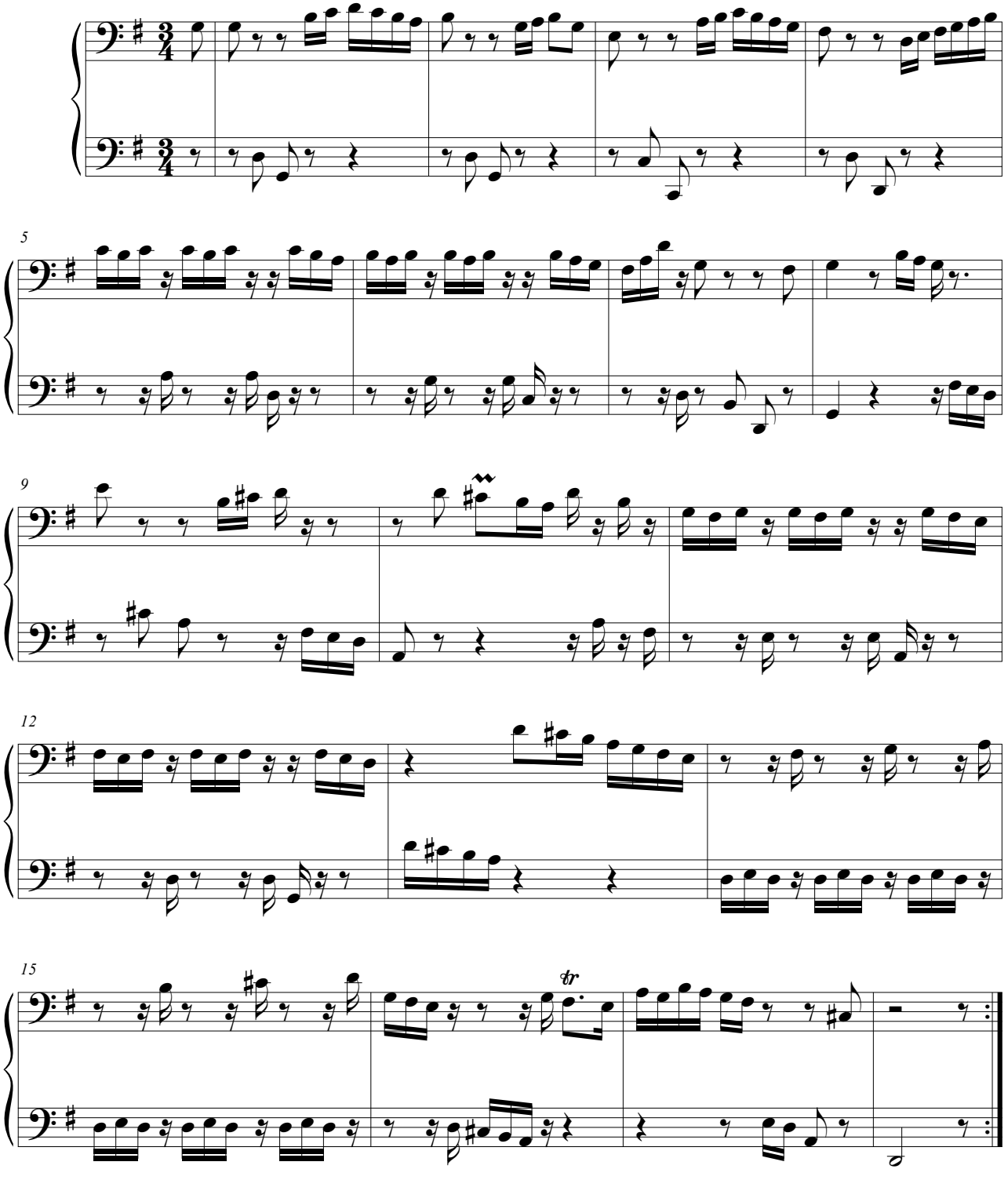
Courante



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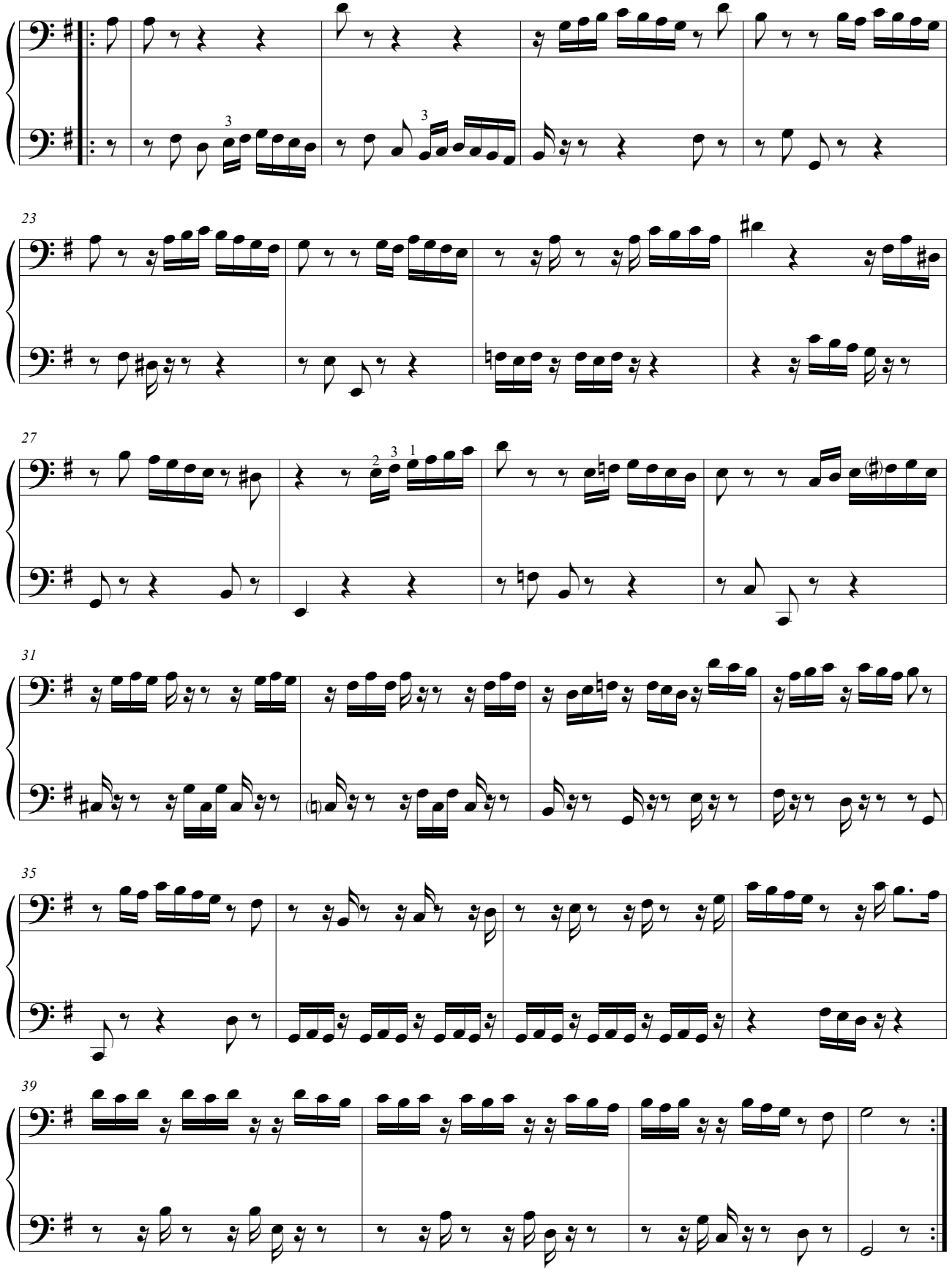
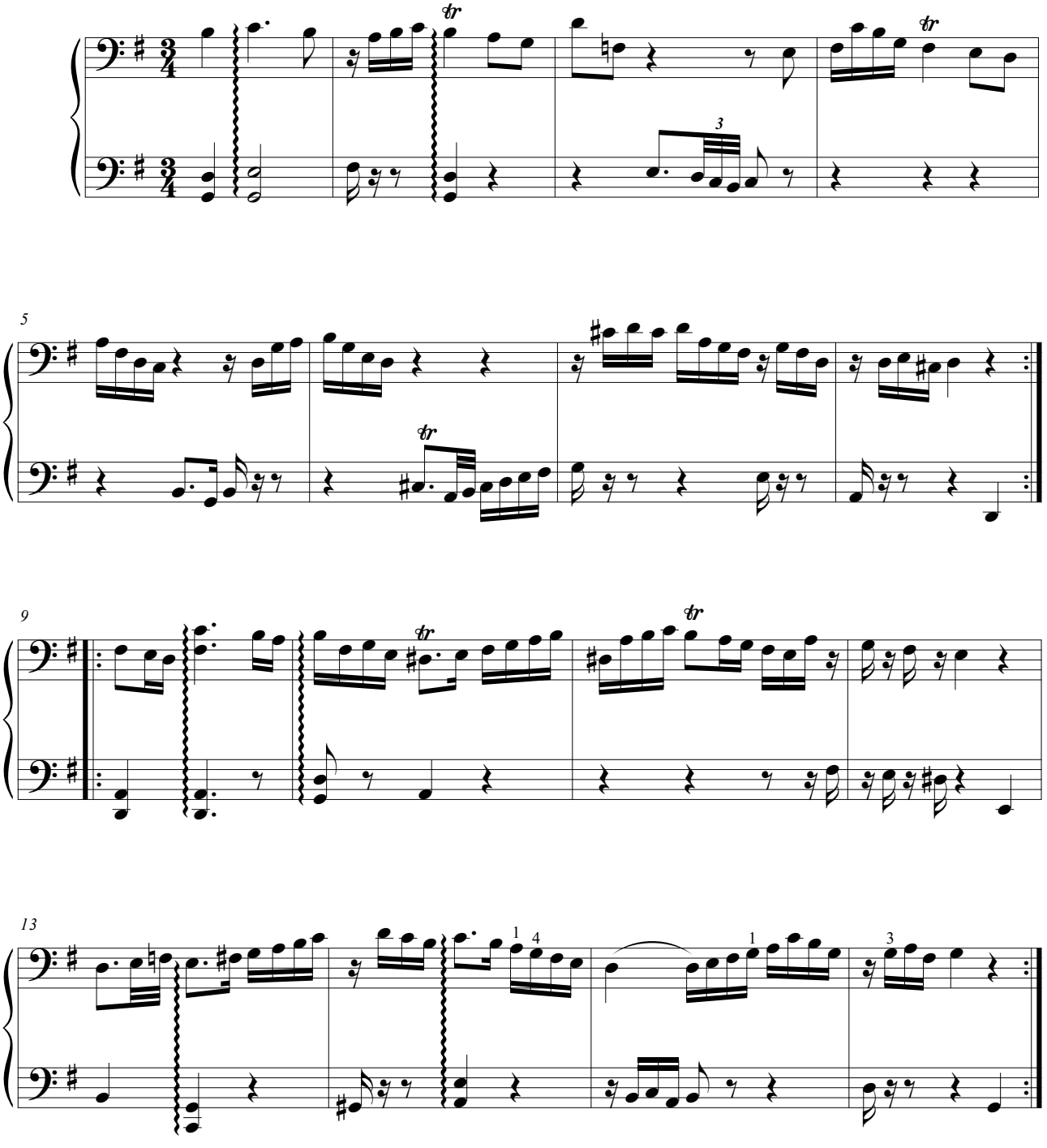


Sarabande



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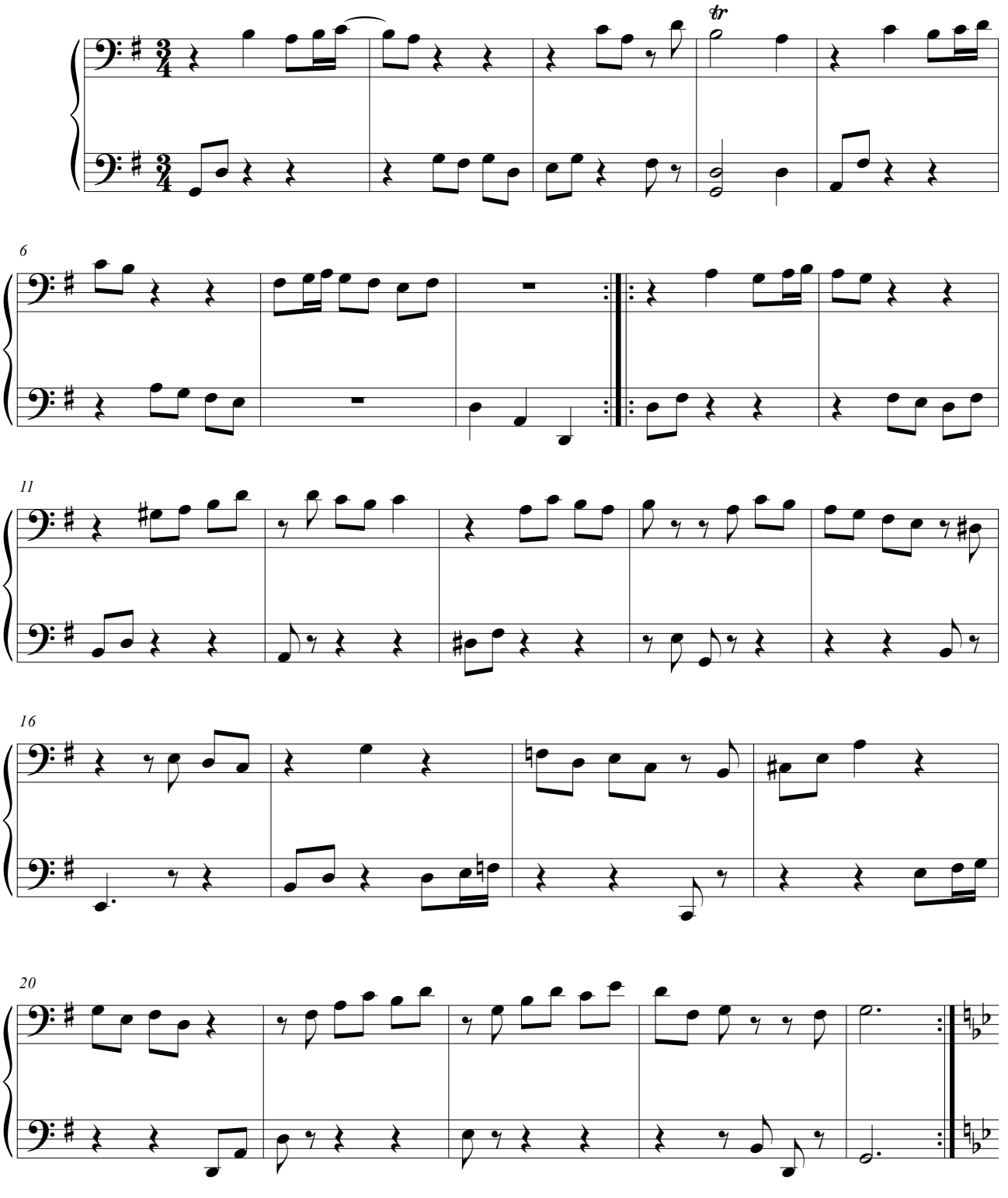
Menuet I



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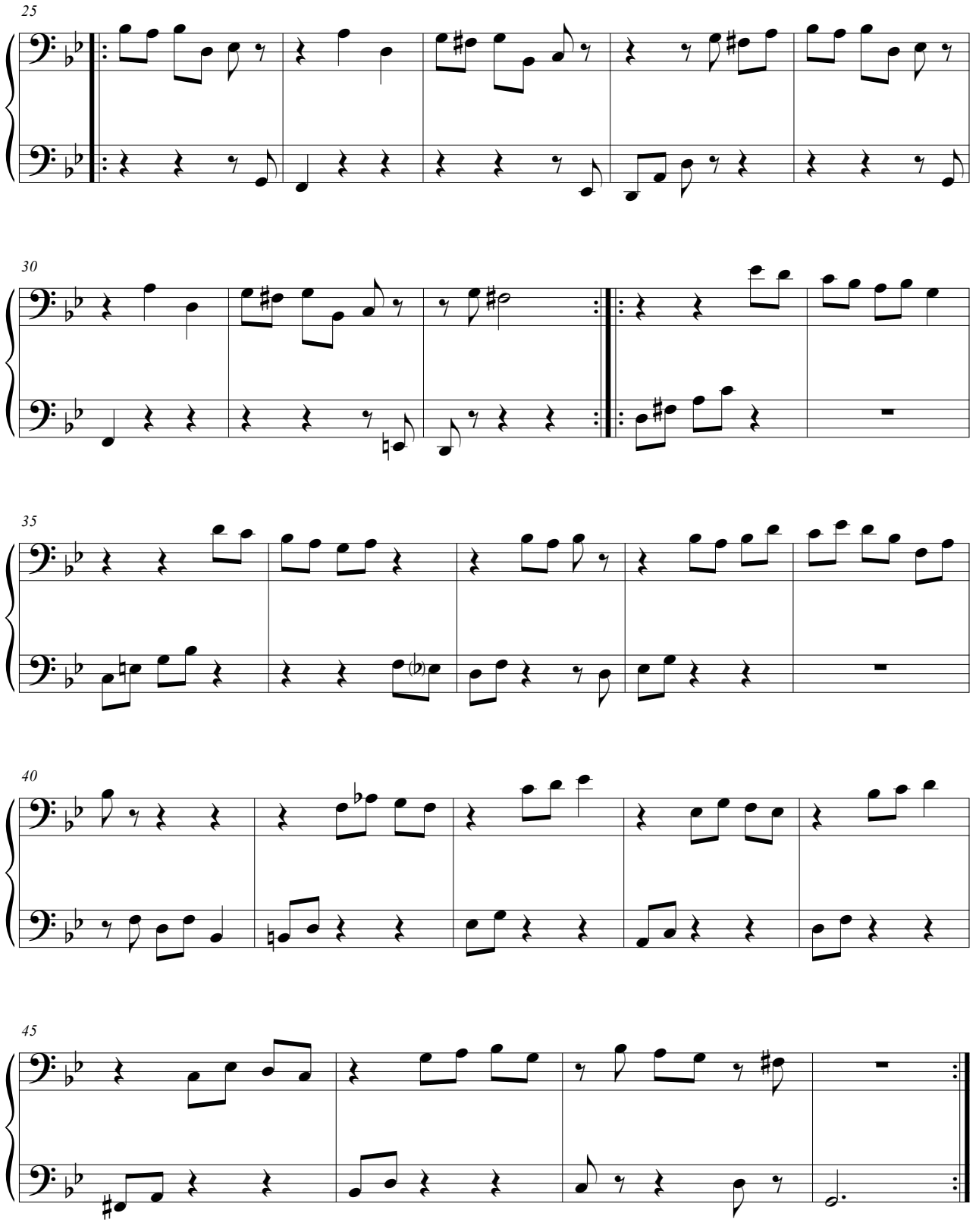
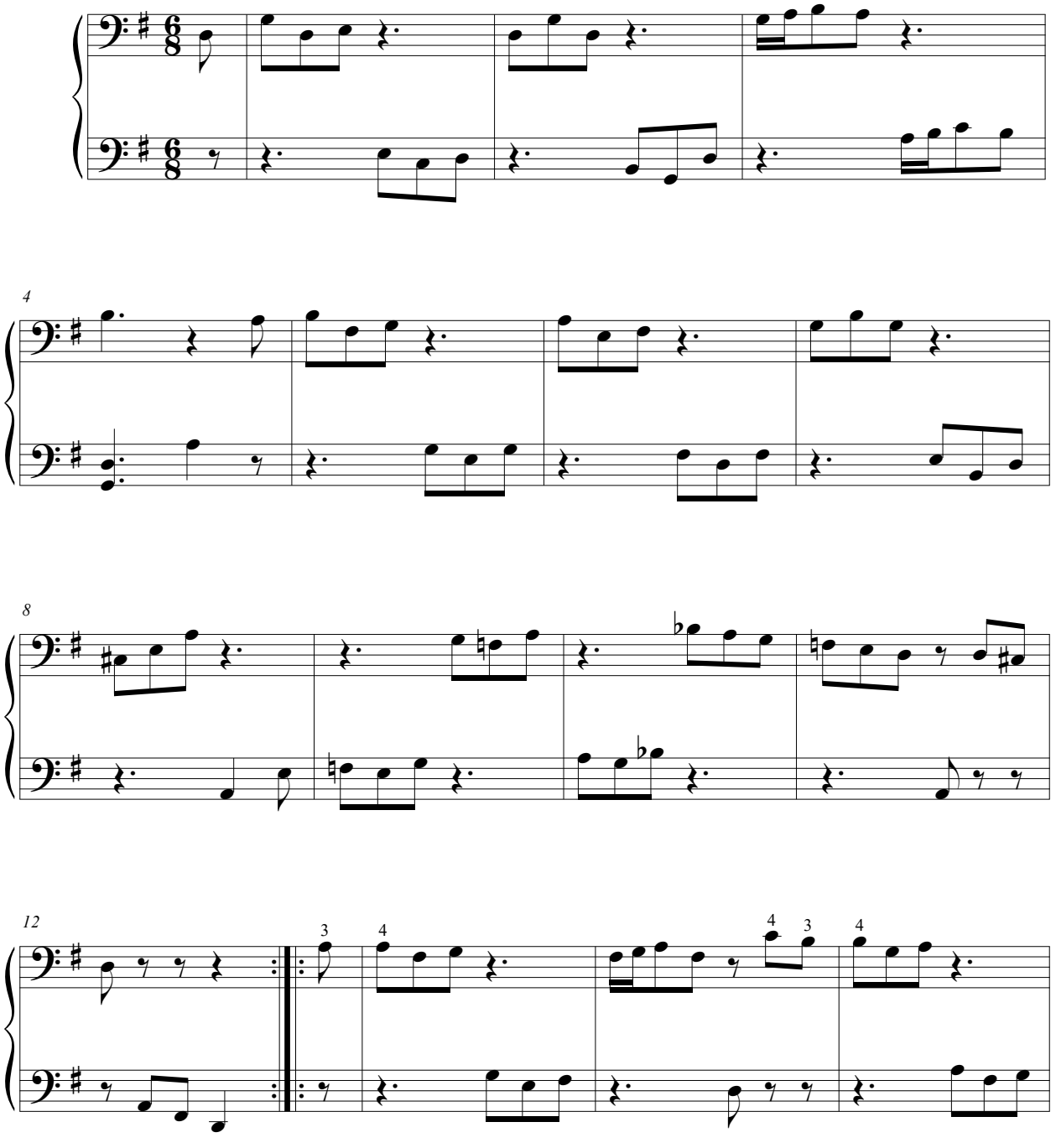
Menuet II



Menuet I da capo

Gigue



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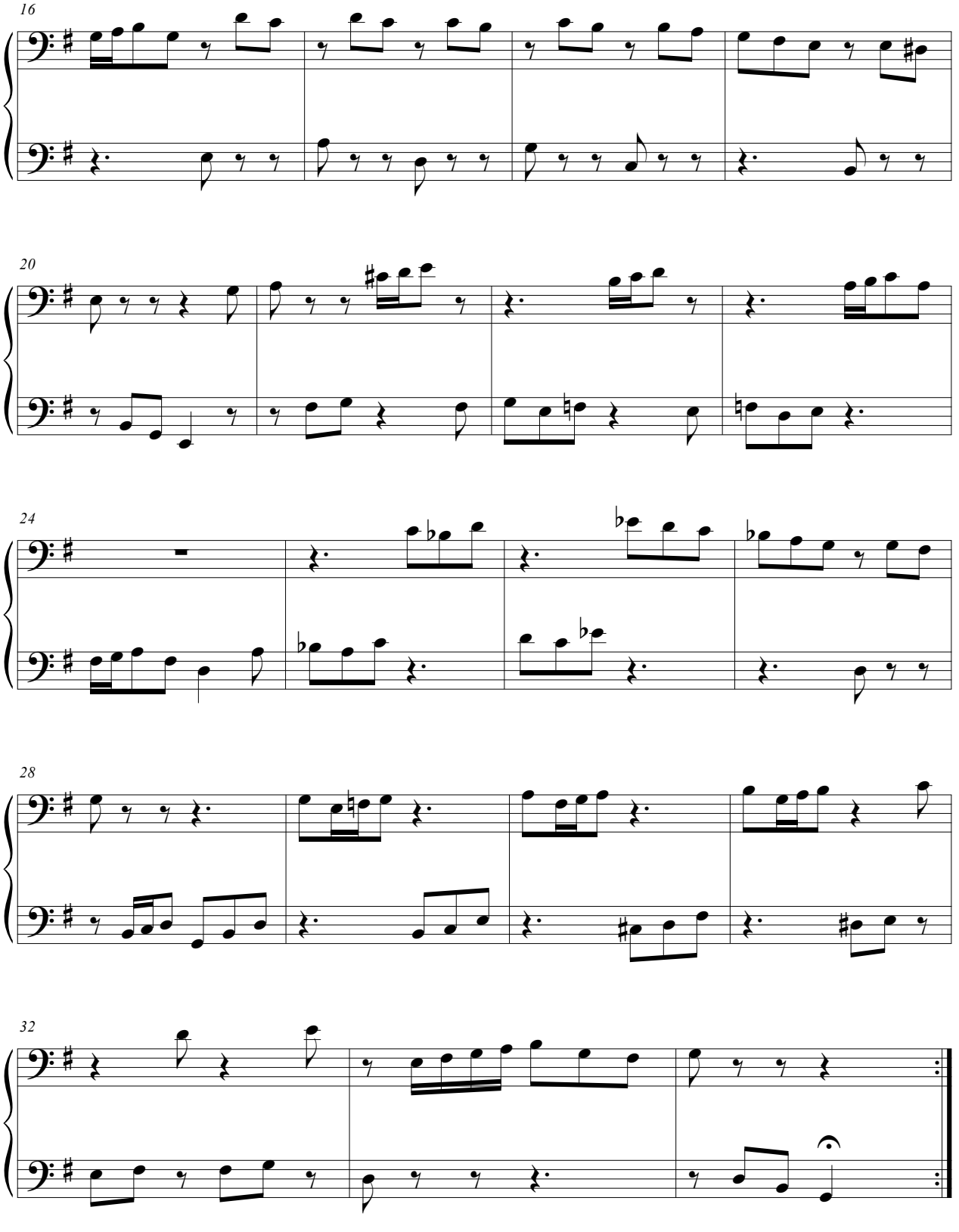
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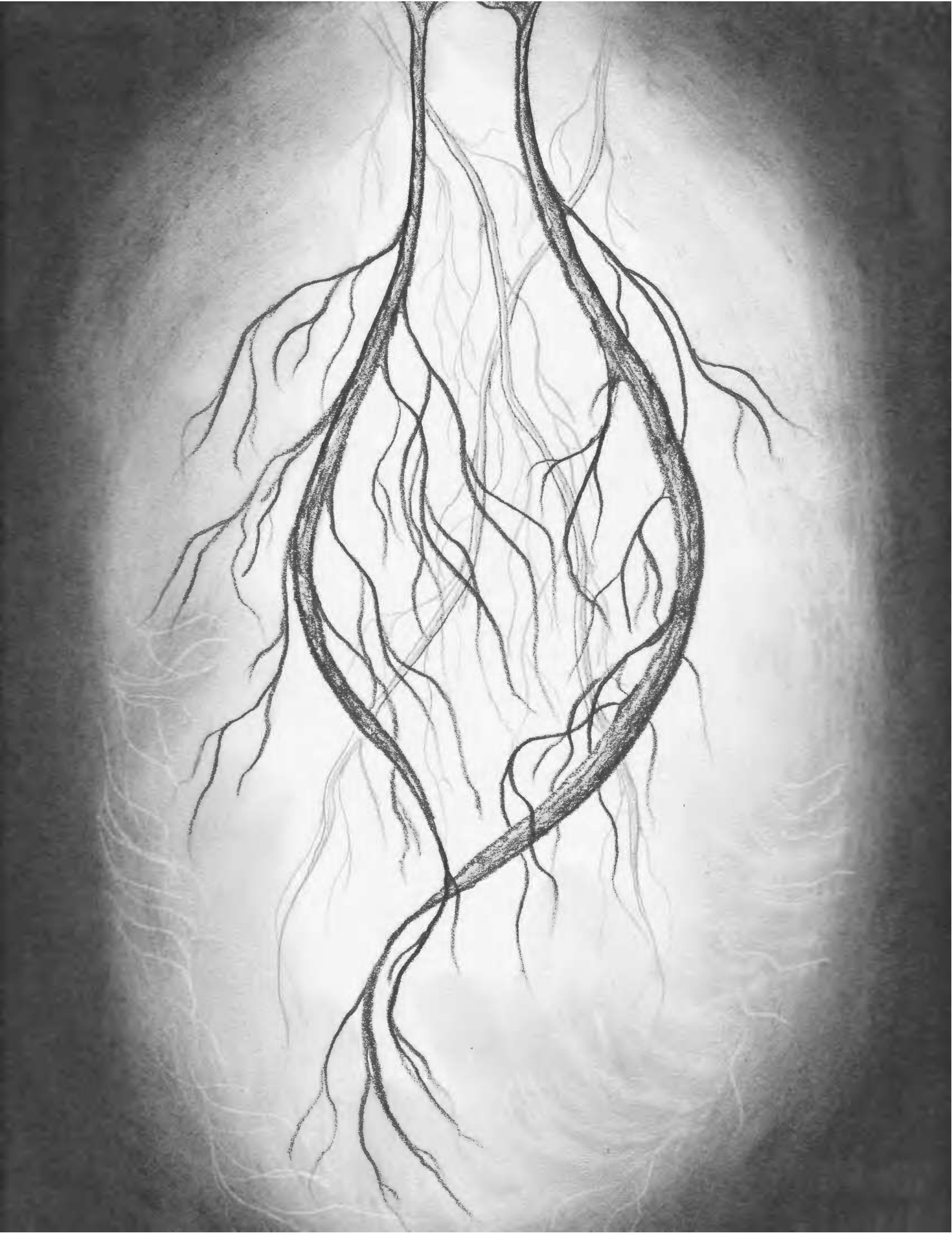


Suite No. 2 in D minor

The second Suite dwells in a very different emotional realm than the first: instead of growth, we now have introspection. The Prelude feels like a search in the darkness, a series of questions without answers. It reminds me of Auguste Rodin's sculpture "The Thinker:" a man, dark gray, deep in thought and resigned to fate.

The D Minor triad – our unifying element which starts every movement, except Minuet II and the Gigue – tentatively reaches up in the first three notes of the **Prelude.** It rolls back immediately toward a C# and then tries to ascend again, this time to a diminished 7th, then rolls back to start a third, even wider climb of an octave. (A similar pattern of three expanding waves is later used in the left-hand theme of Chopin's *Prelude Op. 28 No. 6* in B minor, creating an equally dramatic effect). The three questions are expanded in mm. 5-12 into two-measure units and then we arrive into F major, the relative key, in m. 13. The first "triad" question is repeated, then the second one. Then we have an unfolding with three increasing ascending phrases in mm. 17-19, all with the longest note on the second beat. Just like in the beginning, this "stop" in the middle of a measure creates a sense of hesitation, indecision. Bach continues, increasing tension in a recitative style, to a dominant chord in m. 48 which clearly stops the motion for the first time. After the fermata, an unexpected Eb major measure continues our journey toward the end. In the manuscripts, the last five measures of this Prelude have long blocked chords but many cellists arpeggiate them in 16th notes. I chose to do so as well, since it feels awkward to stop the momentum built up in mm. 55-58. I start the pattern from the top, so the upper notes C#, D, D and C# may carry the melodic continuity started by the Eb and D in m. 58. In the score, I wrote out the arpeggios in the right hand and the blocked chords are in the left so you may choose which you prefer to play. The style of this Prelude encourages broad rubato but the approximate tempo in 16th-note passages should be 50 per quarter note.

The **Allemande** seems straightforward and robust after the probing Prelude. An interesting 32nd-note run in m. 9 interrupts the consistent rhythm only once, hinting at a slightly slower overall tempo, around 72, and maybe at a possibility for similar rhythmic embellishment upon repeat. To offset the following movement, this one should be relatively loud overall.

The rhythmic texture of the **Courante** is similar to that of the Allemande, so we must highlight the differences: a strong downbeat of a 3/4 time signature, a faster tempo (90?) and a lighter, somewhat hollow-feeling touch, imitating a harpsichord.

Each half starts and ends with arpeggiated chords which I like to sustain slightly, even using the pedal for repeats. There's clearly implied counterpoint in mm. 7, 9, 13-16, 25 and 27-end. The preferable overall dynamic here would be piano to mezzo piano.

In the **Sarabande,** we return to a gray mood. Mstistlav Rostropovich described this movement as "very, very sad" and my inclination is to play it "sotto voce." It has the same prolonged notes on the second beats as the Prelude, reducing momentum. F major brings warmer emotions in mm. 9-12 but this hopeful start to the second half quickly gives away to contrapuntal, descending "sighs" in mm. 17-18, returns to D minor in 21-24 and ends after an intense and chromatic ascent in 25-28. The build-up in the last four measures allows for a strong ending, but can also be interpreted with a diminuendo and ritardando, an exhausted resignation to fate.

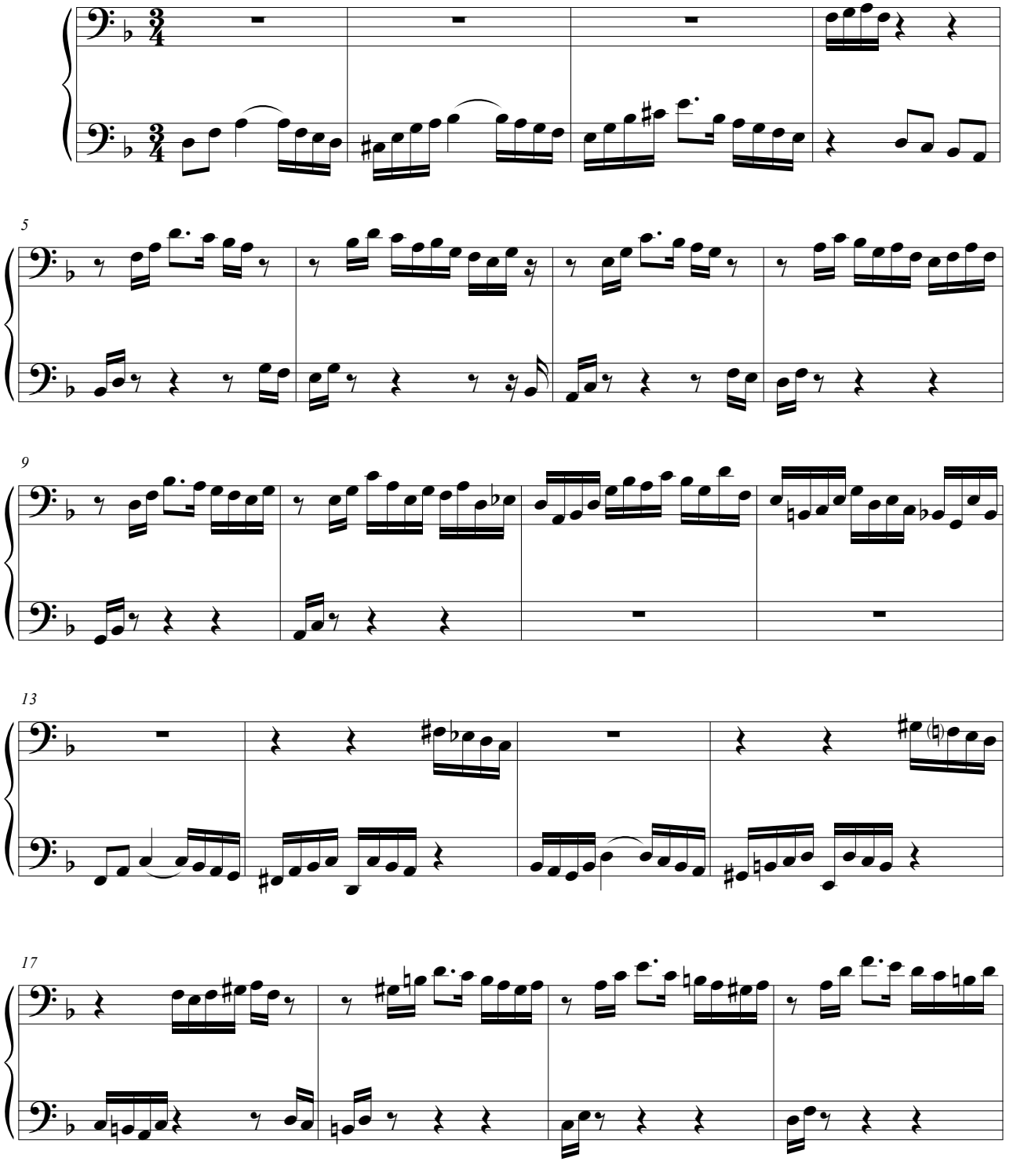
Menuet I echoes the Sarabande in its mood, somewhat muted emotionally, as if dancing in a distant dream. This is one movement where the soft pedal can be used for repeats if not throughout. By necessary contrast, **Menuet II** in the parallel major key brings to mind Schumann's "Happy Farmer" from *Scenes of Childhood* and doesn't require much of an interpretive effort as long as it's played loudly and in strict tempo – both Menuets sound good at 120 per quarter note. When returning to Menuet I, it works well to transpose both hands up an octave in mm. 22-24 for an interesting ending.

The **Gigue,** with its decisive beginning and fast-and-steady 3/8 meter is by far the most energetic movement in the two Suites we've had so far. The descending perfect 5^{th} (A-D) and diminished 7^{th} (Bb-C#) of measures 1-2 are the connection to the Prelude, an inversion of the first two "questions." There is a continuous presence of a 16th-note pattern, first found in m. 15 and repeated in 17, 19, 21-23, 25-28, 49-51, 53-55, 61-64 and 69-71, which gives this movement an almost manic character, further punctuated by repeated bass notes in mm. 21-23 and 69-71. I play those bass notes as alternating octaves during the repeats, which would be impossible on the cello but is often done in the left hand of Bach's keyboard works. This movement sounds good either at a moderate or a very fast tempo, I enjoy letting it take over in a devilish frenzy, to counterbalance the rest of the Suite, with the final effortless two-octave arpeggio triumphing over the initial tentative triad of this Suite.

Cello Suite No. 2 in D minor, BWV 1008

Prelude

J. S. Bach
Arr. E. Bindman



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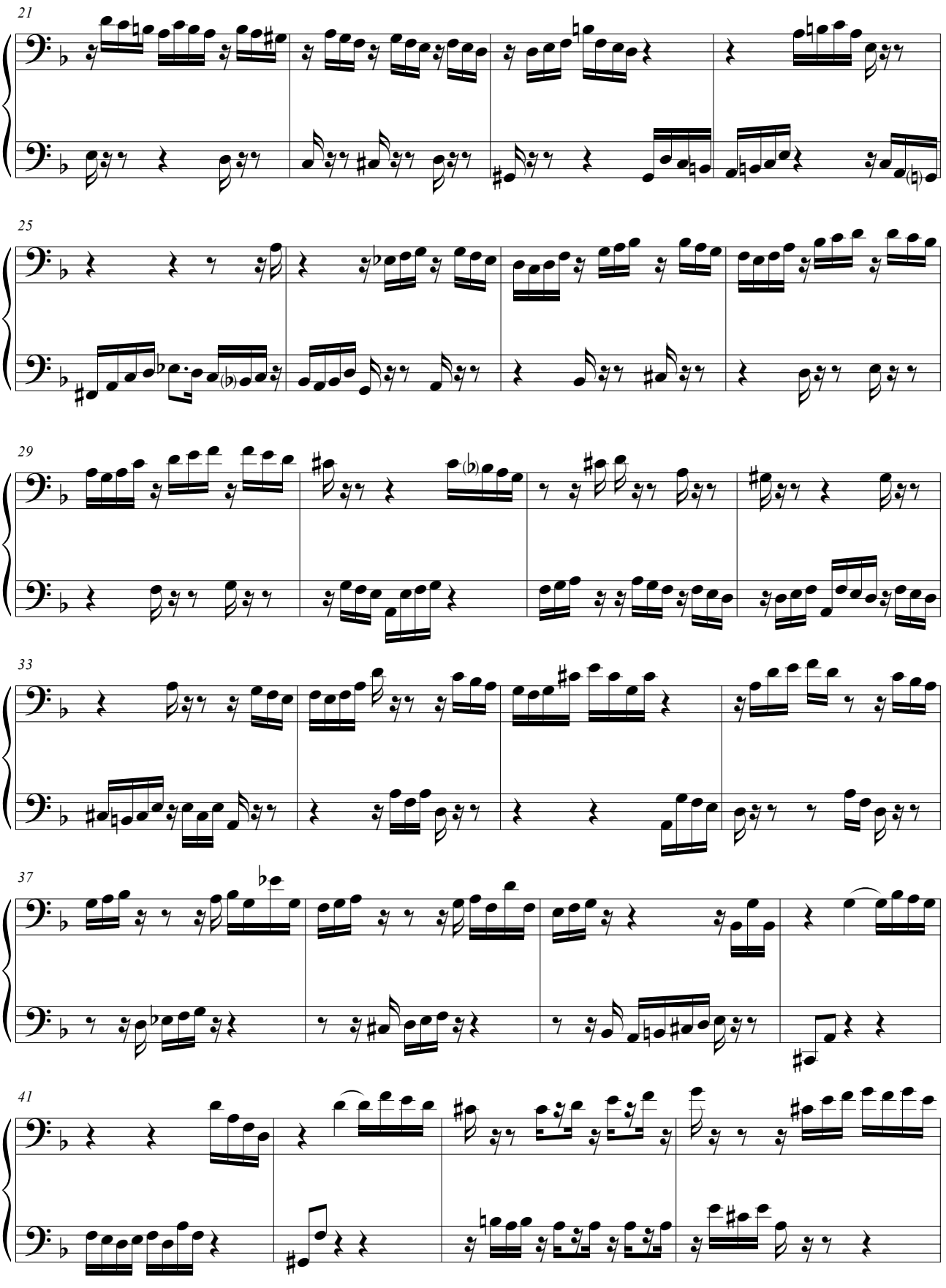
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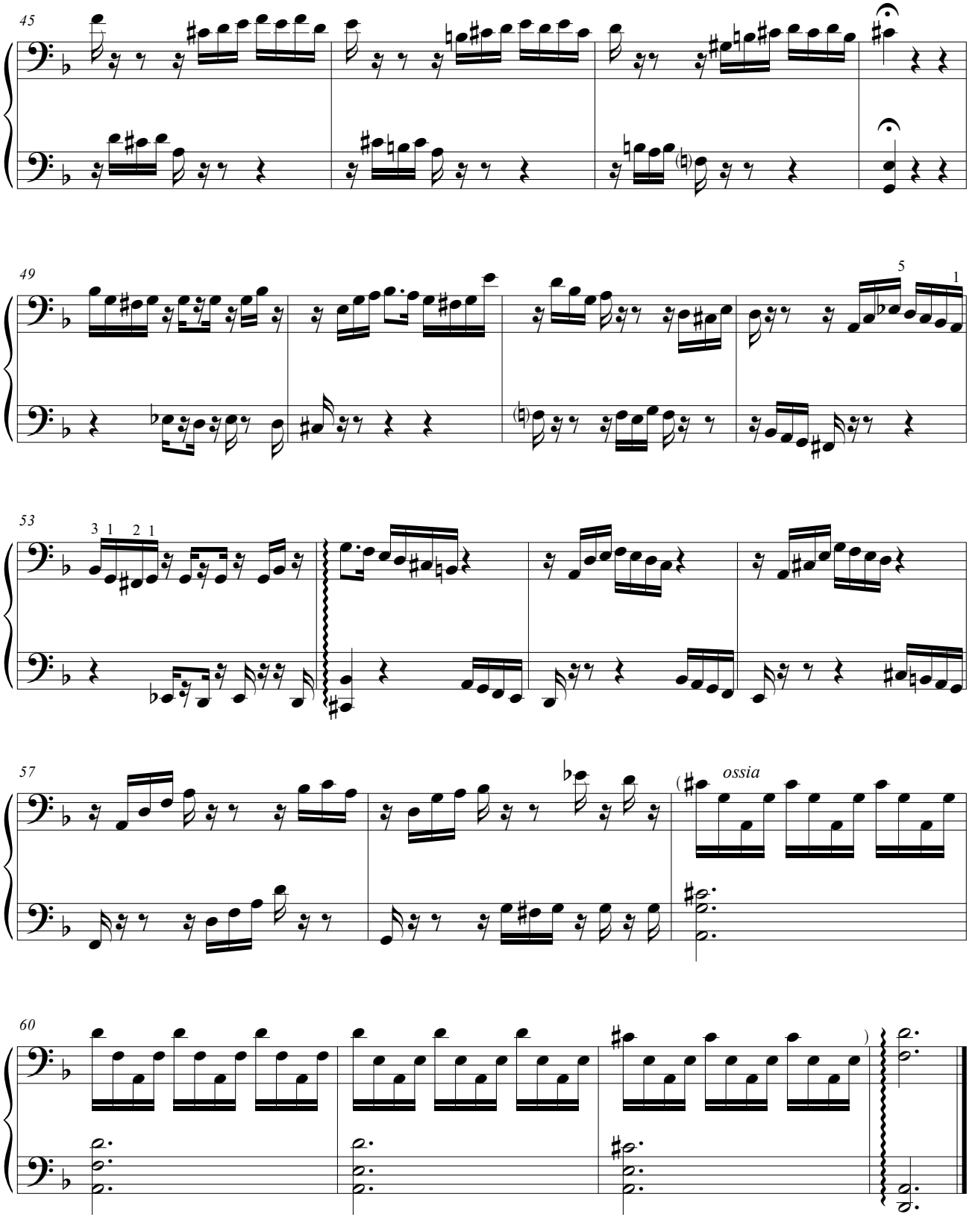
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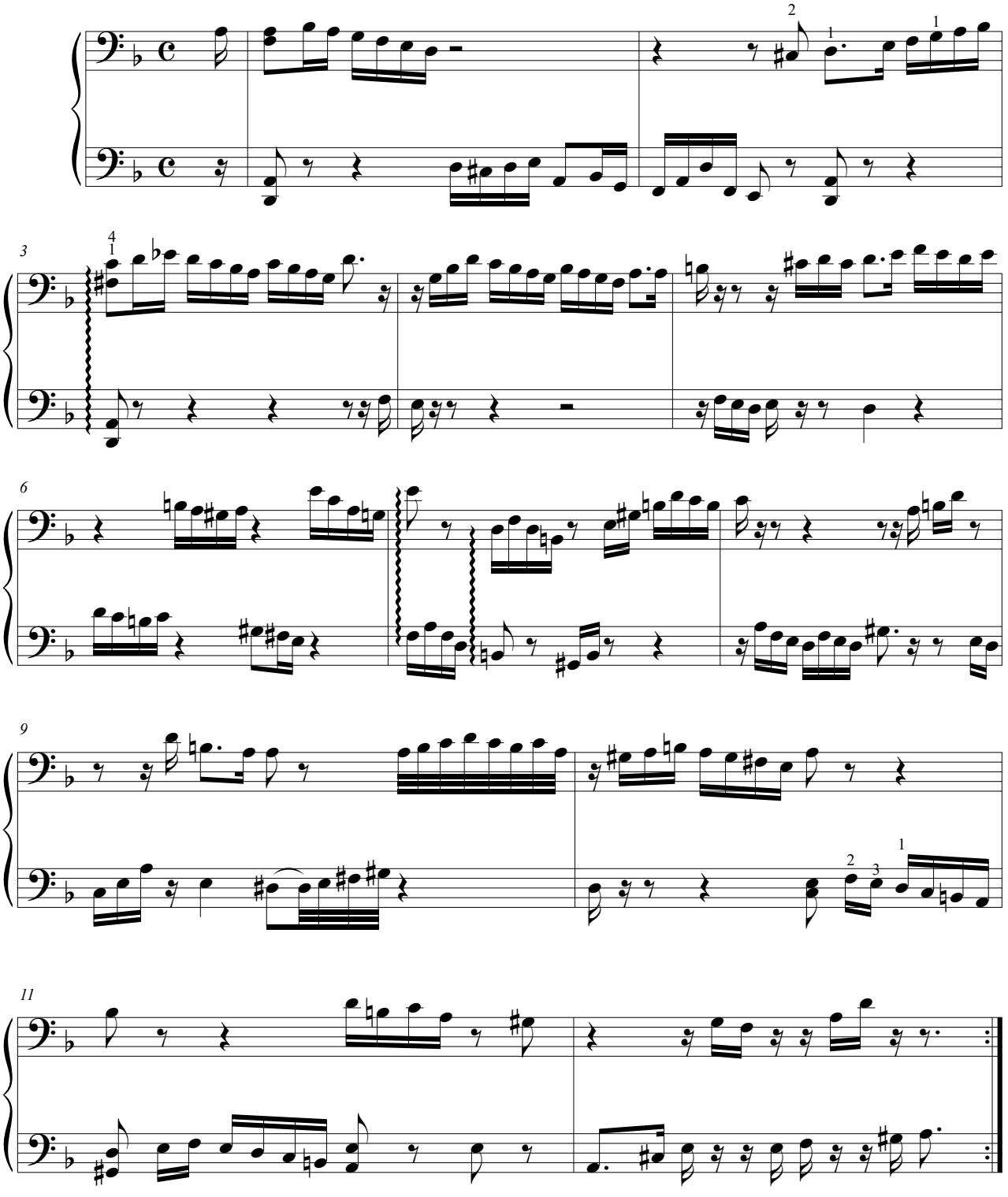
Allemande



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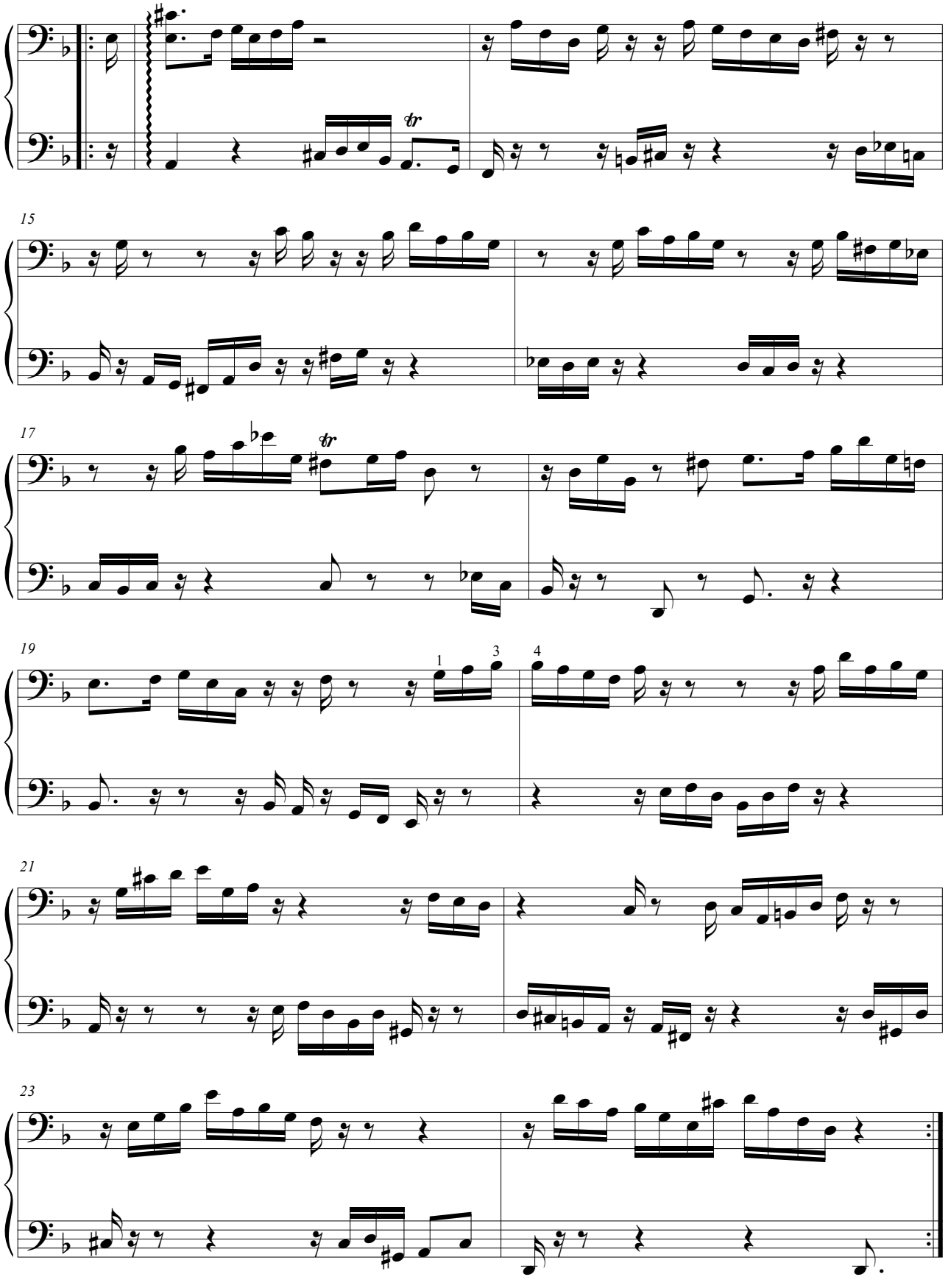
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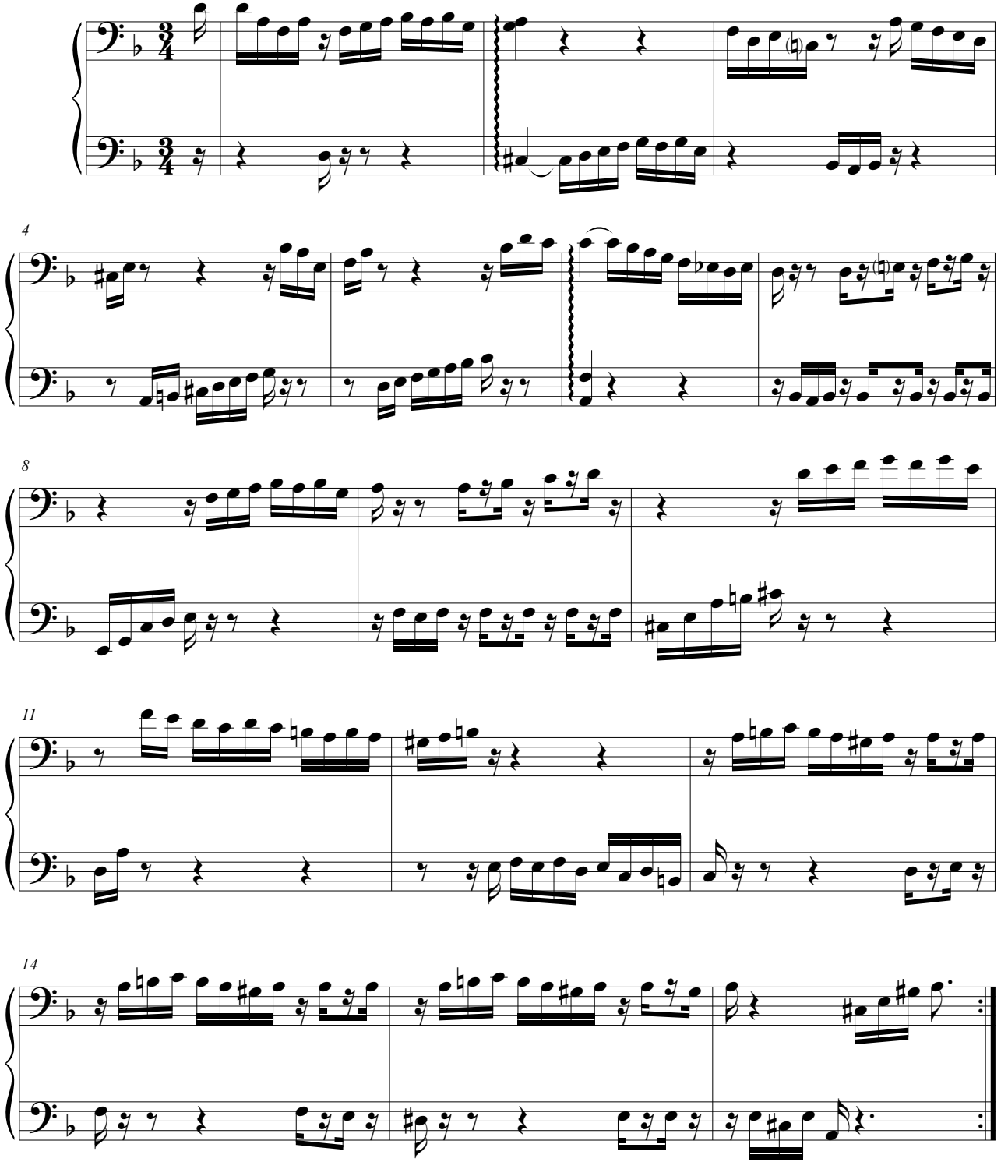
Courante



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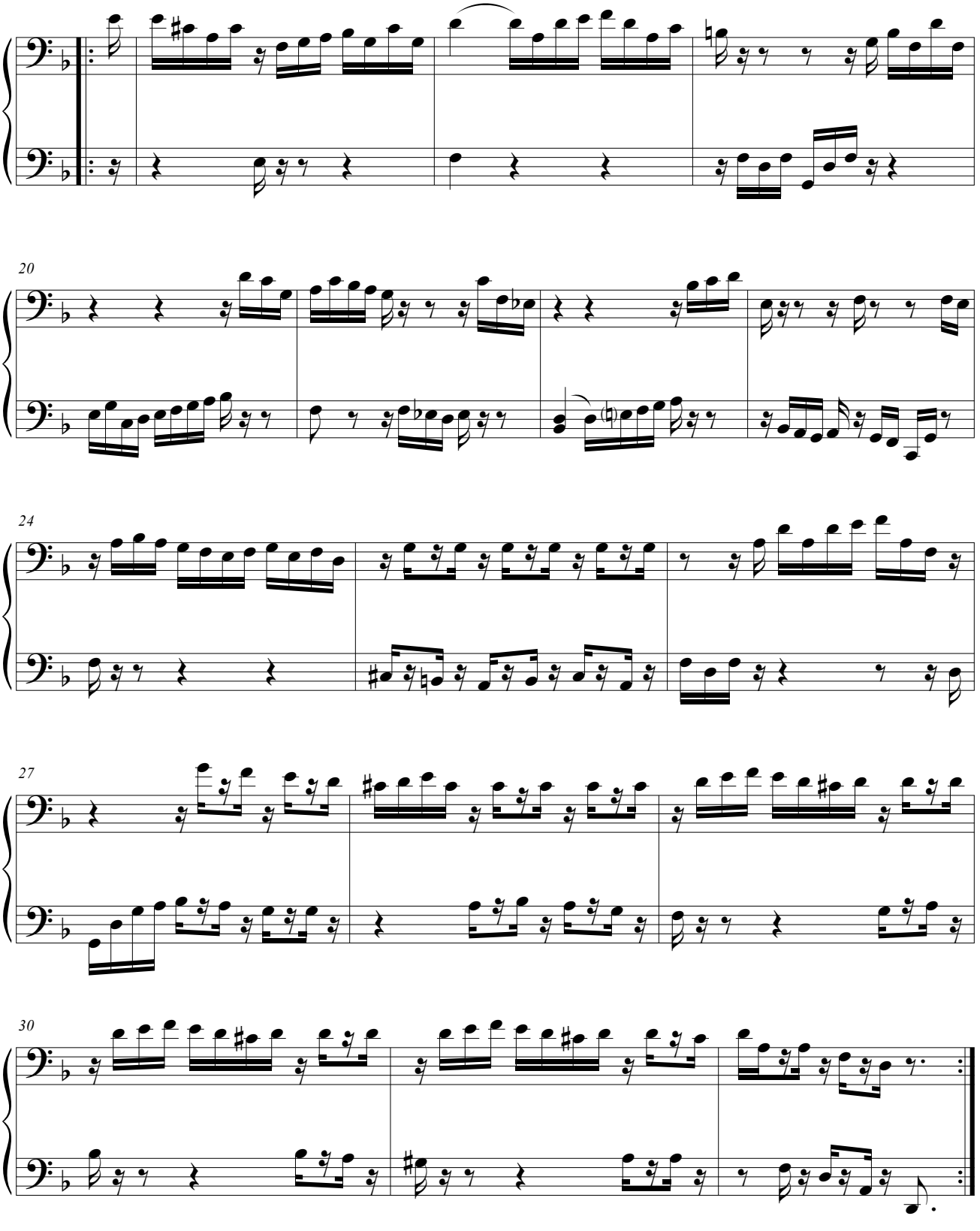
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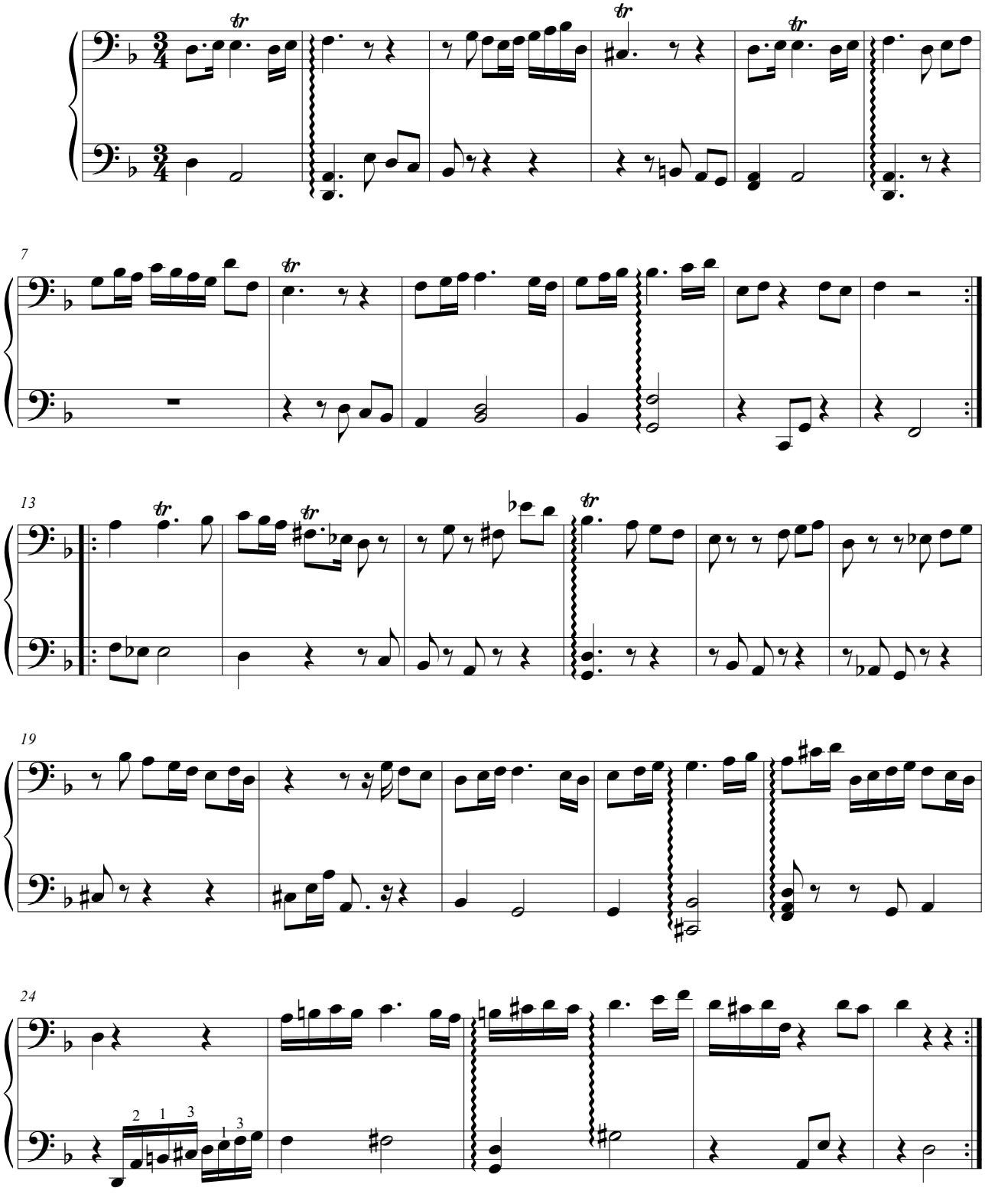
Sarabande



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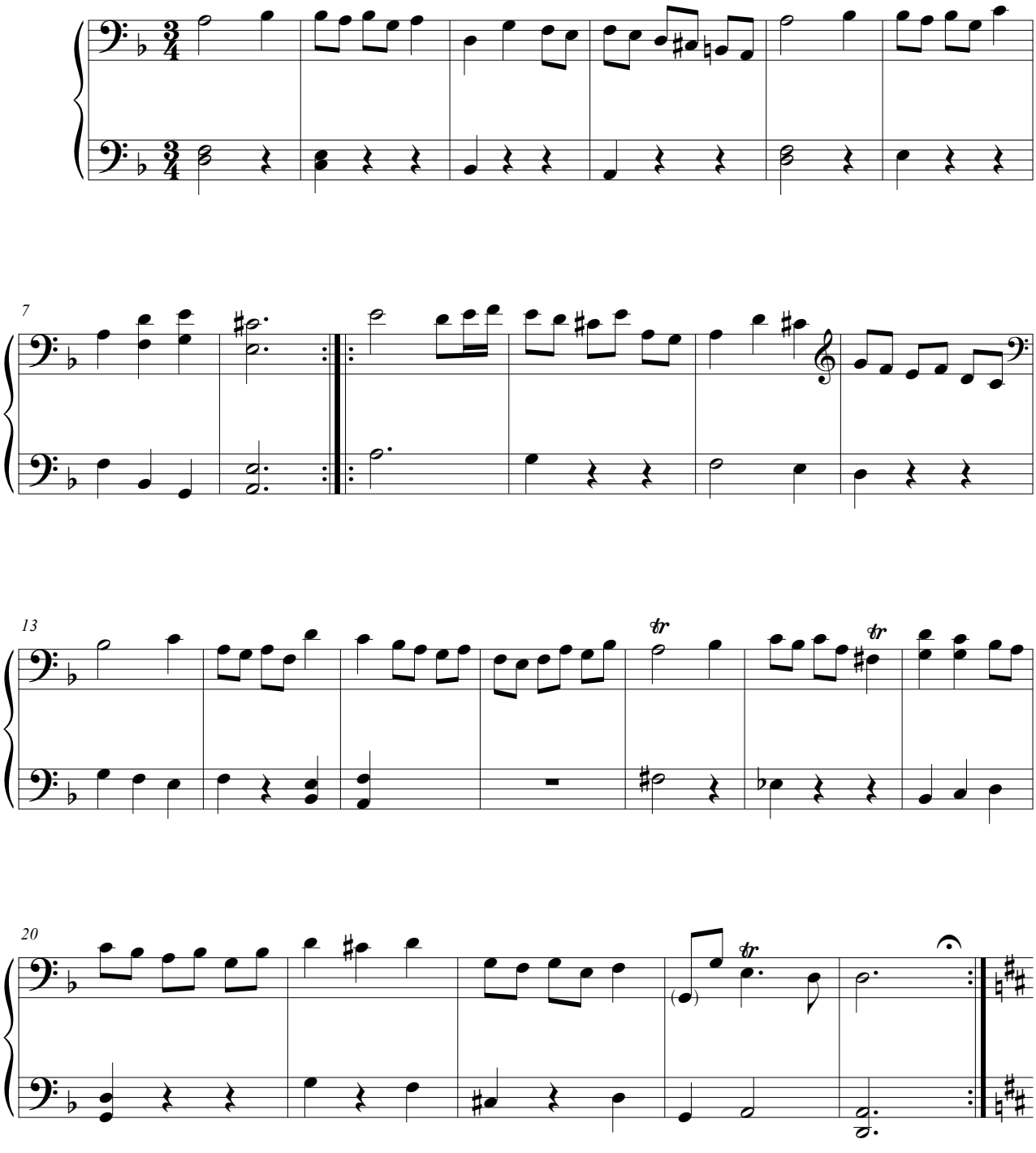
Menuet I



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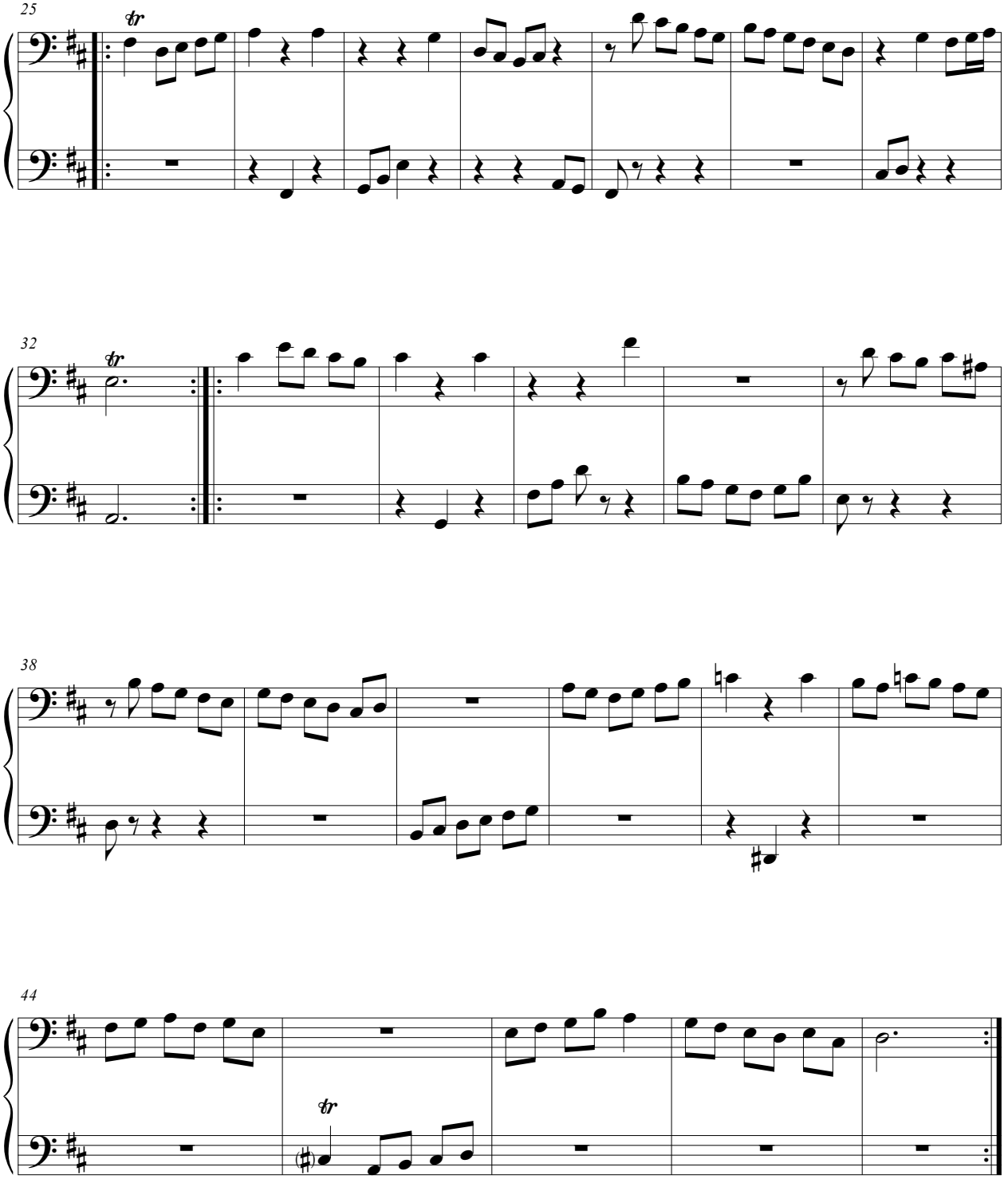
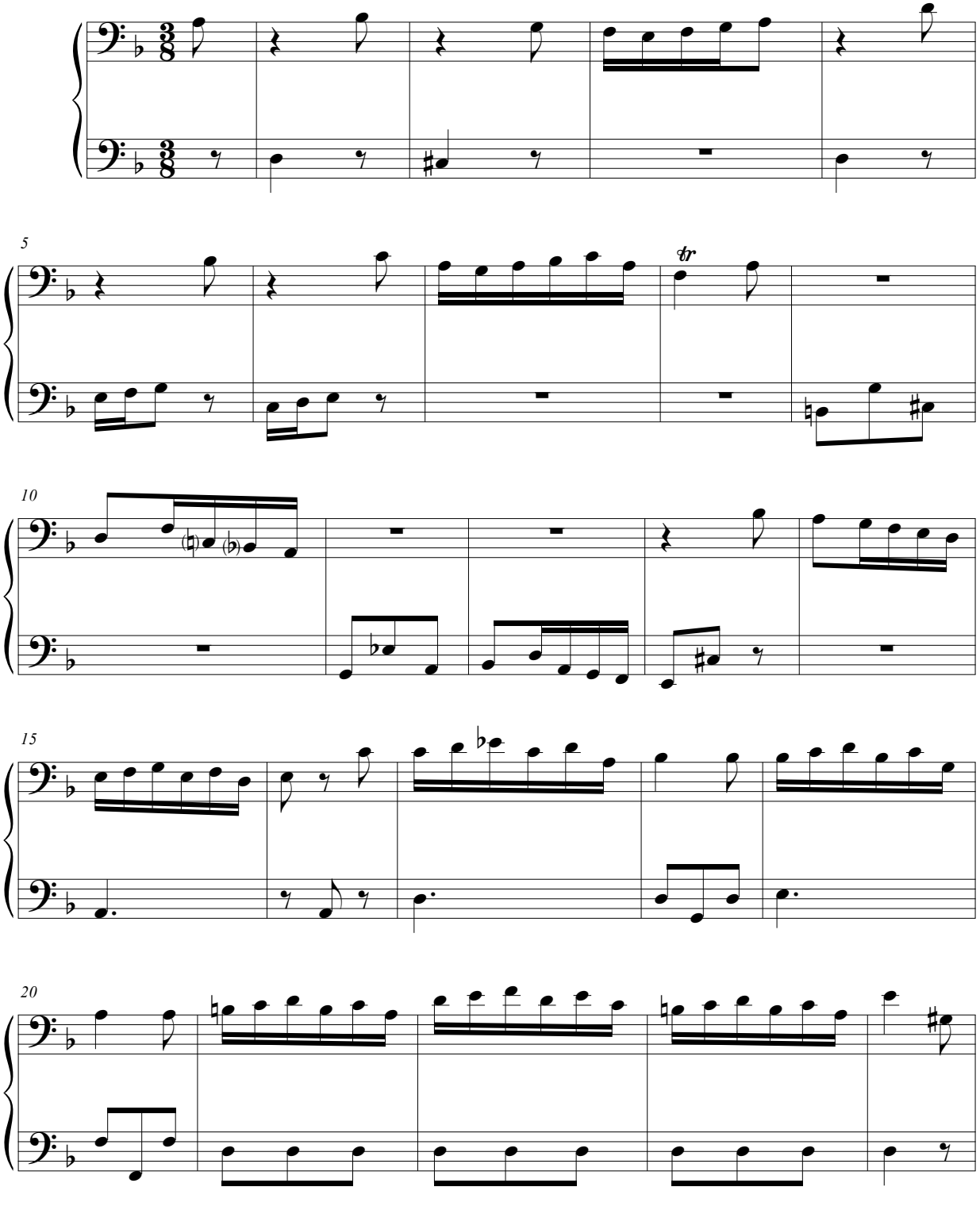
Menuet II



Menuet I da capo

Gigue



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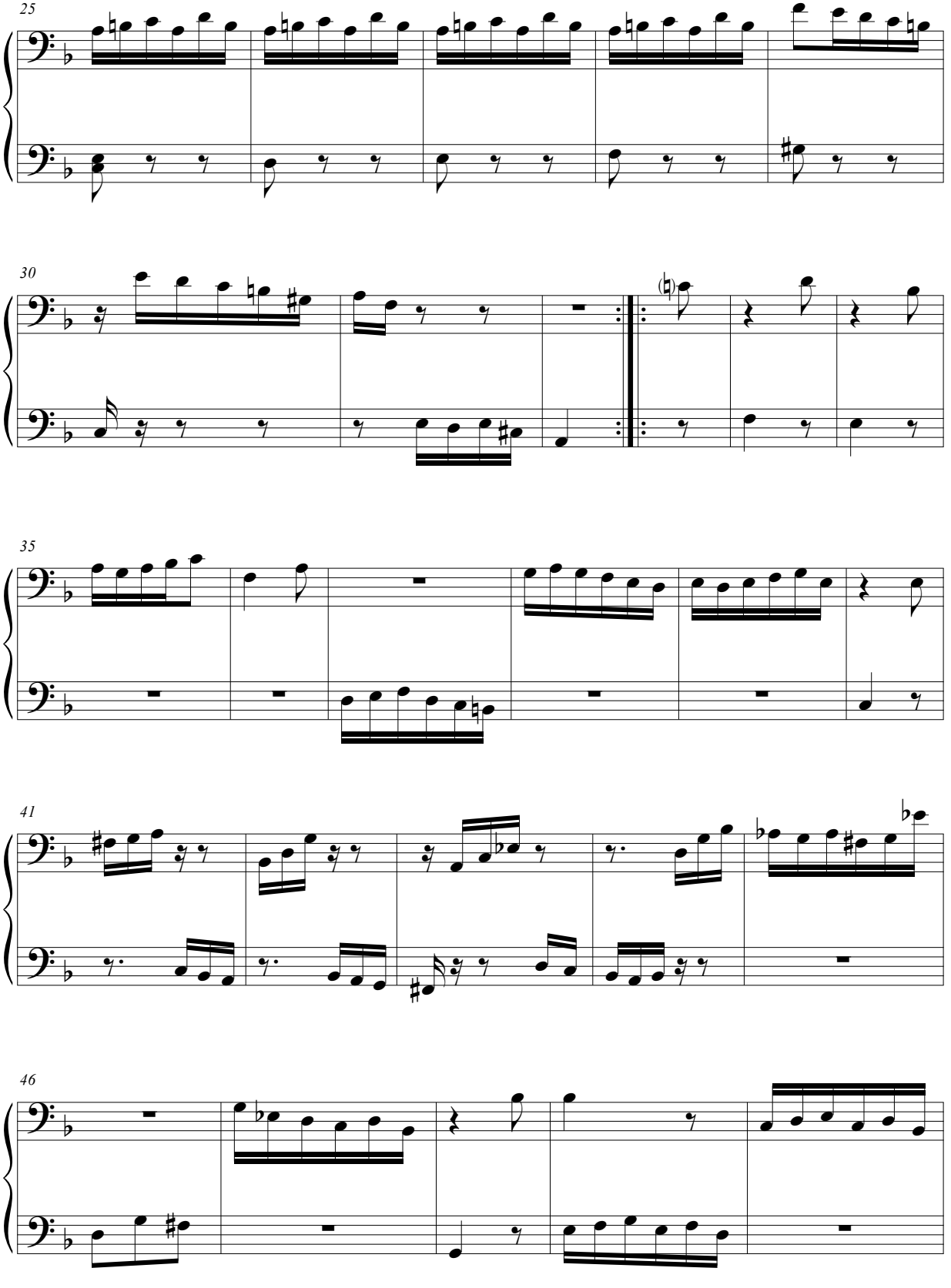
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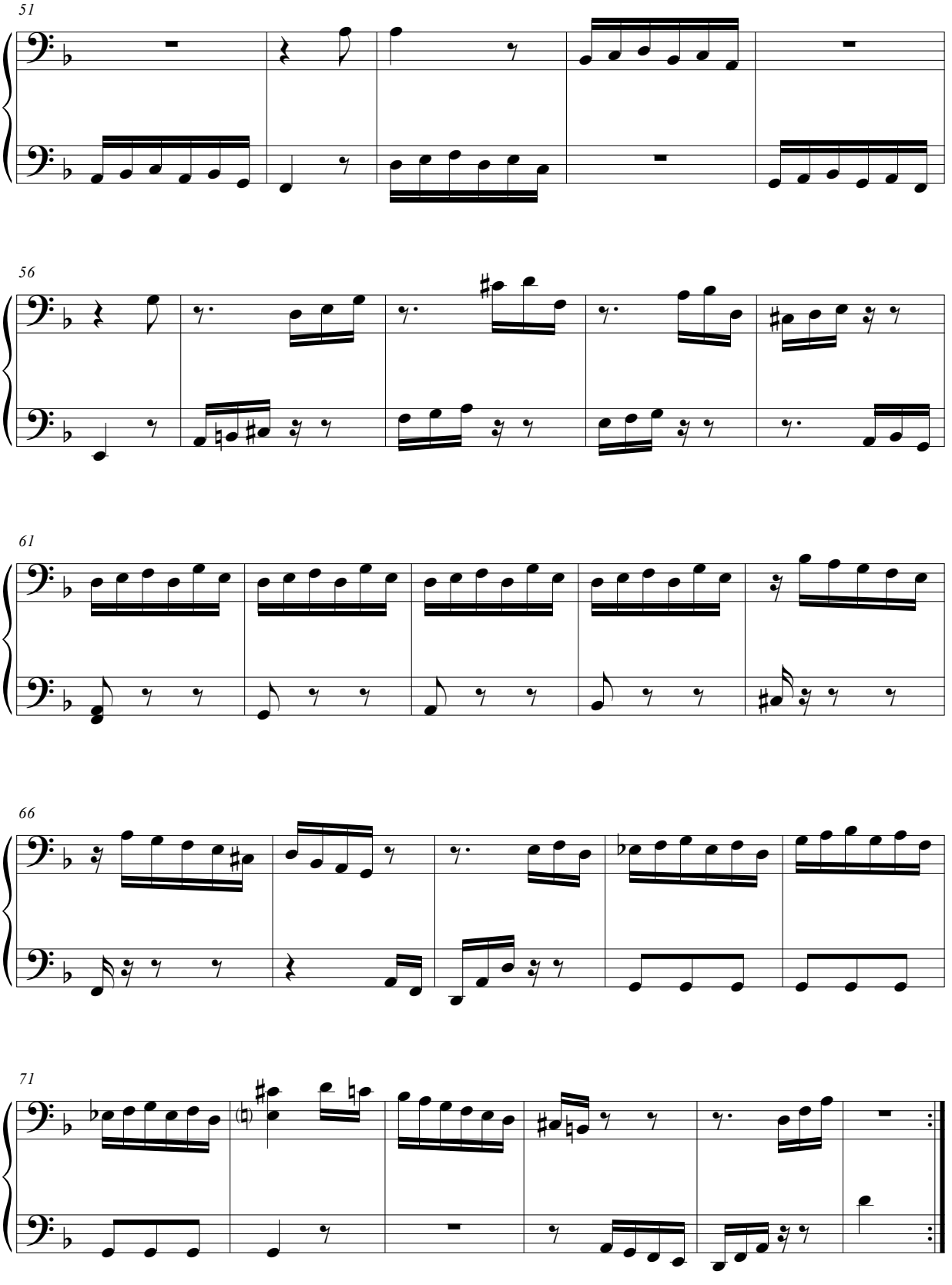
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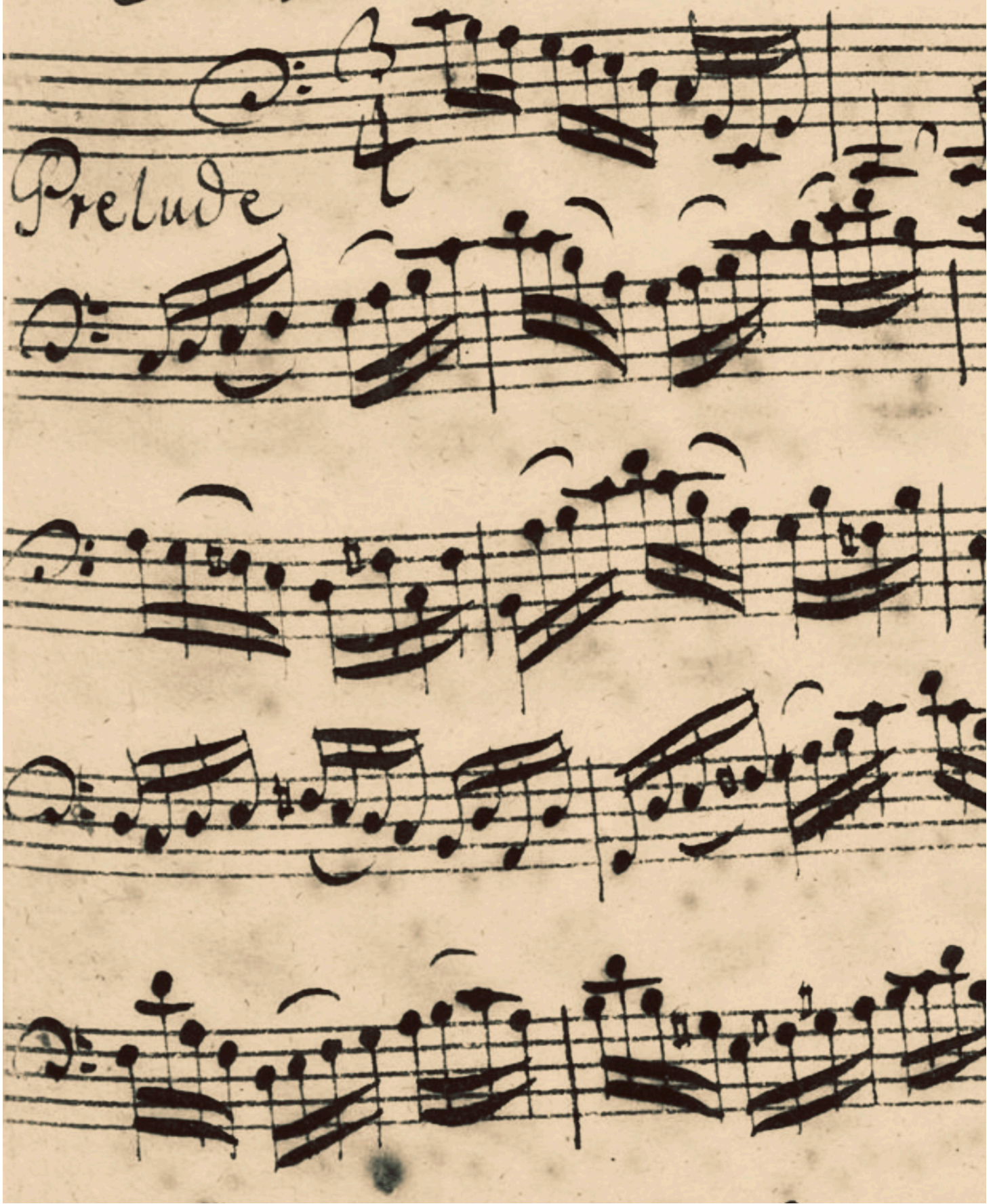
Suitte . 3.

Prelude



Suite No. 3 in C major

C major is the key of ultimate stability (and visual simplicity on a keyboard) and Suite No. 3 starts with a no-nonsense claim to its domain: a downward scale plus arpeggio, all in the first measure, constituting the conceptual thread of this Suite. Whereas most Baroque or Classical pieces will likely use main chords at the start and have plenty of scale-wise motion, the extent to which Bach presents the "unadulterated" octaves of scales and apreggios here reads like a statement. Try as you might, expressive possibilities are overshadowed by the cognitively primal musical message, pattern after pattern, and it all feels very healthy and full-blooded. The illustration you see is the beginning of the Prelude in the musical handwriting of Anna Magdalena Bach, the second wife of the composer. She was the source of stability and comfort in his domestic life for almost 30 years and copied much of her husband's music, including the complete Cello Suites.

The simple yet remarkable **Prelude** could pass as a warm-up exercise for any instrument, but it also manages to be musically satisfying. Measure 19 gives us a first glimpse of something new, leading to a contrapuntal diminished harmony in m. 21 and gently lowering us into a few Philip Glass-ian measures (27-32, a nice opportunity for a contrasting soft dynamic and some pedal). The sequence in mm. 37-44 develops into a wonderful pedal point which starts at m. 45 and continues through m. 60. The piano gives us an opportunity to continuously hold the G an octave lower than the repeated one (mm. 45-61) with the left hand which reinforces the pedal point and effectively adds to the sonority, so feel free to experiment with that. The dominant chord in m. 77 is followed by a reiteration of the first measure in 78, but ending instead with a "surprise" C minor chord with A on top, melodically enhancing the ensuing chord progression of V7-I-V-I when connected with the respective upper notes B, C, C, B, C. Bach could have ended with the tonic chord in m. 82 but he regales us with another pedal-point in a coda, leading to a long trill in mm. 85-86 (use the middle pedal of the piano if you can, to help sustain the bass and manage the trill). To drive his point home, Bach decides to use that nice first measure of the scale and arpeggio yet again. Third time is a charm, wouldn't you agree?

The **Allemande** is jolly and almost comical in its continued emphasis of the scale through various playful combinations of 32nd and 16th notes. Measures 6-7 even use a scale going upward in thirds! This is an excellent example of Bach throwing away the conventions of a dance form and just doing his thing. The quarter notes here would be quite slow, about 50, since they are often divided into 32nd notes.

Arpeggios take over for the beginning of the **Courante** but they are quickly joined by scales in mm. 4-7. In traditional 3/4 time yet written almost exclusively in a steady stream of 8th notes, this movement is completely devoid of the stylistic intricacies of a French Courante and persists in the simple and joyful mood set by the Prelude and Allemande. A good target tempo is 160 per quarter note but it would also sound lovely at a more measured and elegant pace.

Our third **Sarabande** sounds more like a dance than the first two because of its simple initial rhythm and phrasing. There is a hint of dialogue after the double bar and quite a few interesting modulations before a D minor cadence at m.16. The hearty key of C major wards off the philosophical depth that abounds in the others Sarabandes. In my imagination, this is a comfortable dance of a happily married couple, at 50 per quarter note.

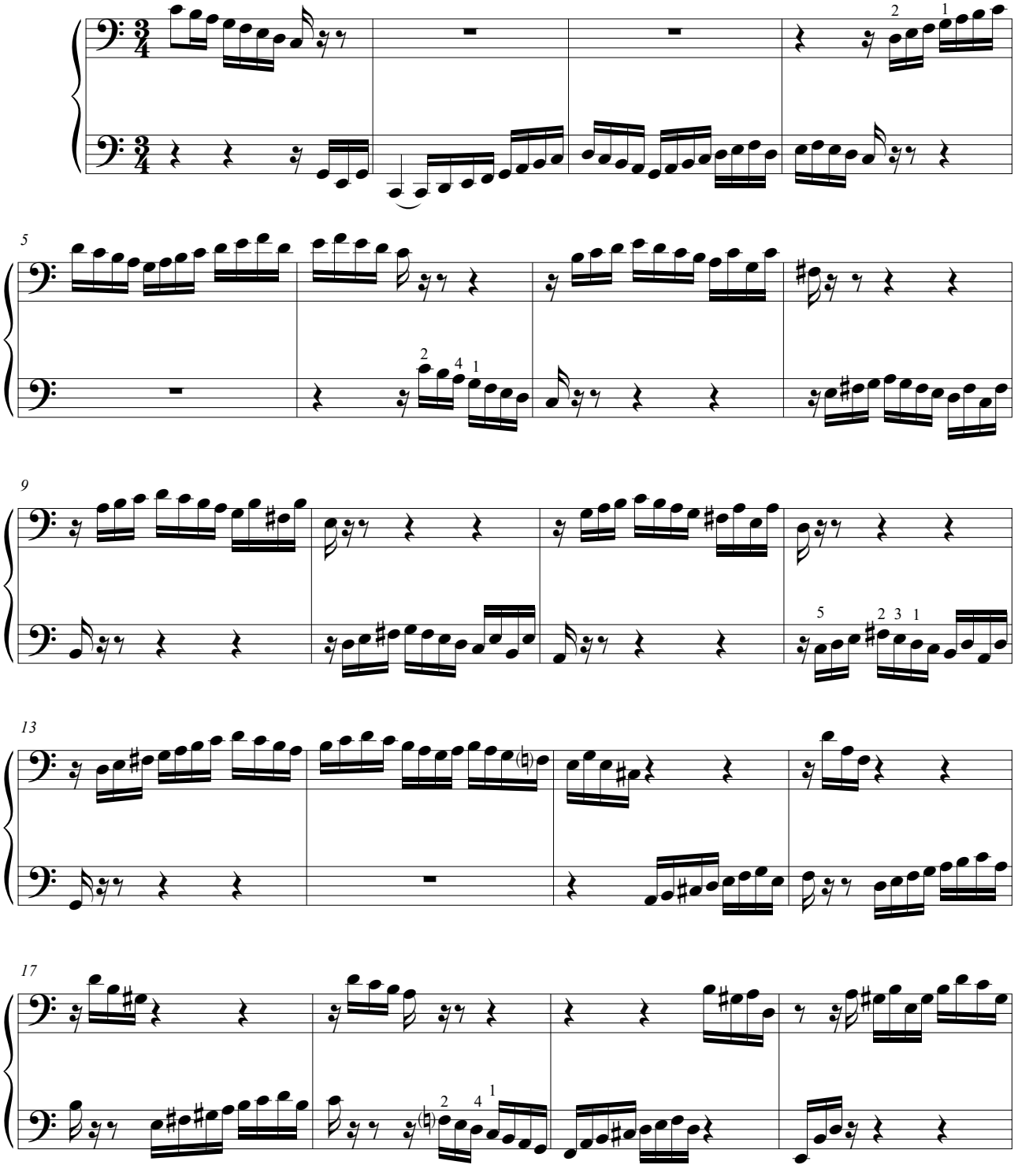
The two **Bourrées** of Suite #3 are very well known, second in popularity only to Prelude 1 of all Cello Suites movements. Bourrée I is the only movement in Suite No. 3, besides the Sarabande, which doesn't make obvious use of scales or arpeggios. It is packed with implied harmony and counterpoint (the first four measures are clear I-V-V7-I chords), unlike Bourrée II which melancholically meanders along the C minor scale and sounds very sad and lonely despite crossing into Eb major for a while. As we are all accustomed to the commonly conveyed character of these two dances, I made an effort to give them new personalities for the recording, deliberately speeding up Bourrée I (96), and choosing a slower tempo and a muted dynamic range for Bourrée II (66). To further underscore the forlorn character of Bourrée II, I added short fragments of counterpoint for the repeats.

The **Gigue** goes back to spelling C major out in the first two measures, and splits into two alternating voices in mm. 21- 31. In measures 33-39 Bach uses both voices to punctuate the rhythm, evoking a peasant dance mood. He continues the fun in the second half, now spelling the C-major scale out with an "upper neighbor" following each note in mm. 49-50. Then he pretty much follows the blueprint of the first half and ends, with a wittily "interrupted" downward C major scale juxtaposed with an ascending C major arpeggio in mm. 105-108, easily seen when divided between the two hands on the piano.

Cello Suite No. 3 in C major, BWV 1009

Prelude

J.S. Bach
Arr. E. Bindman



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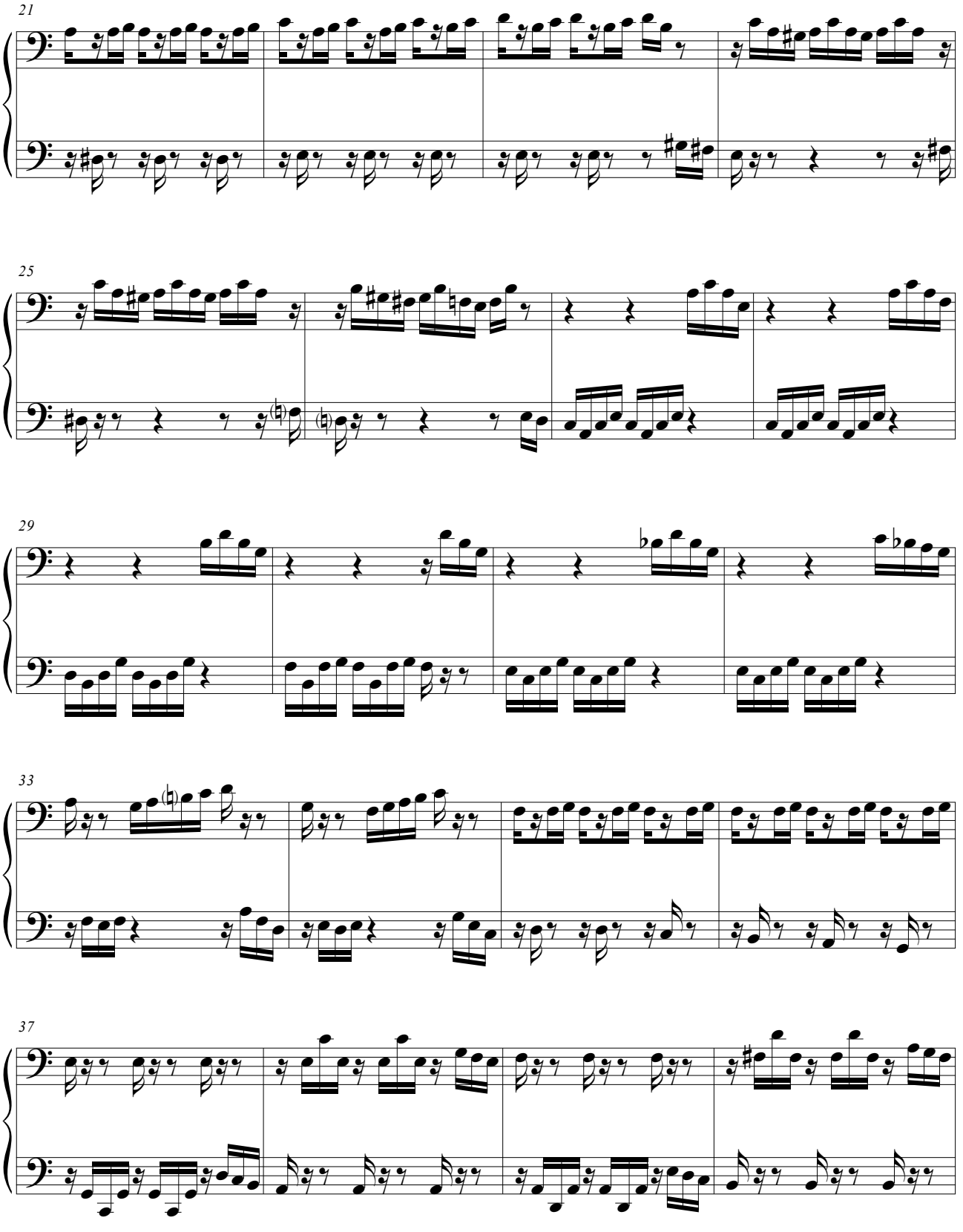
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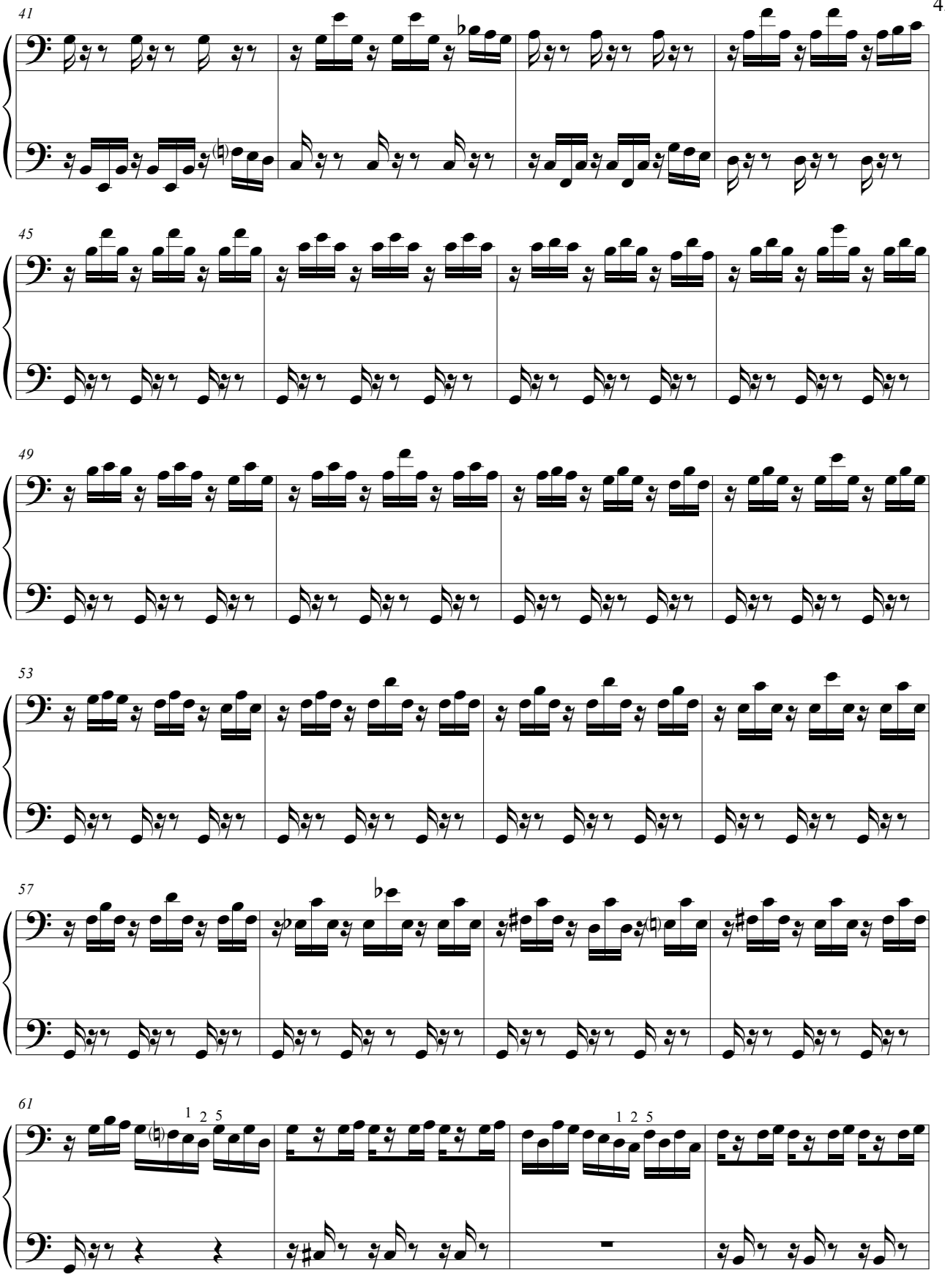
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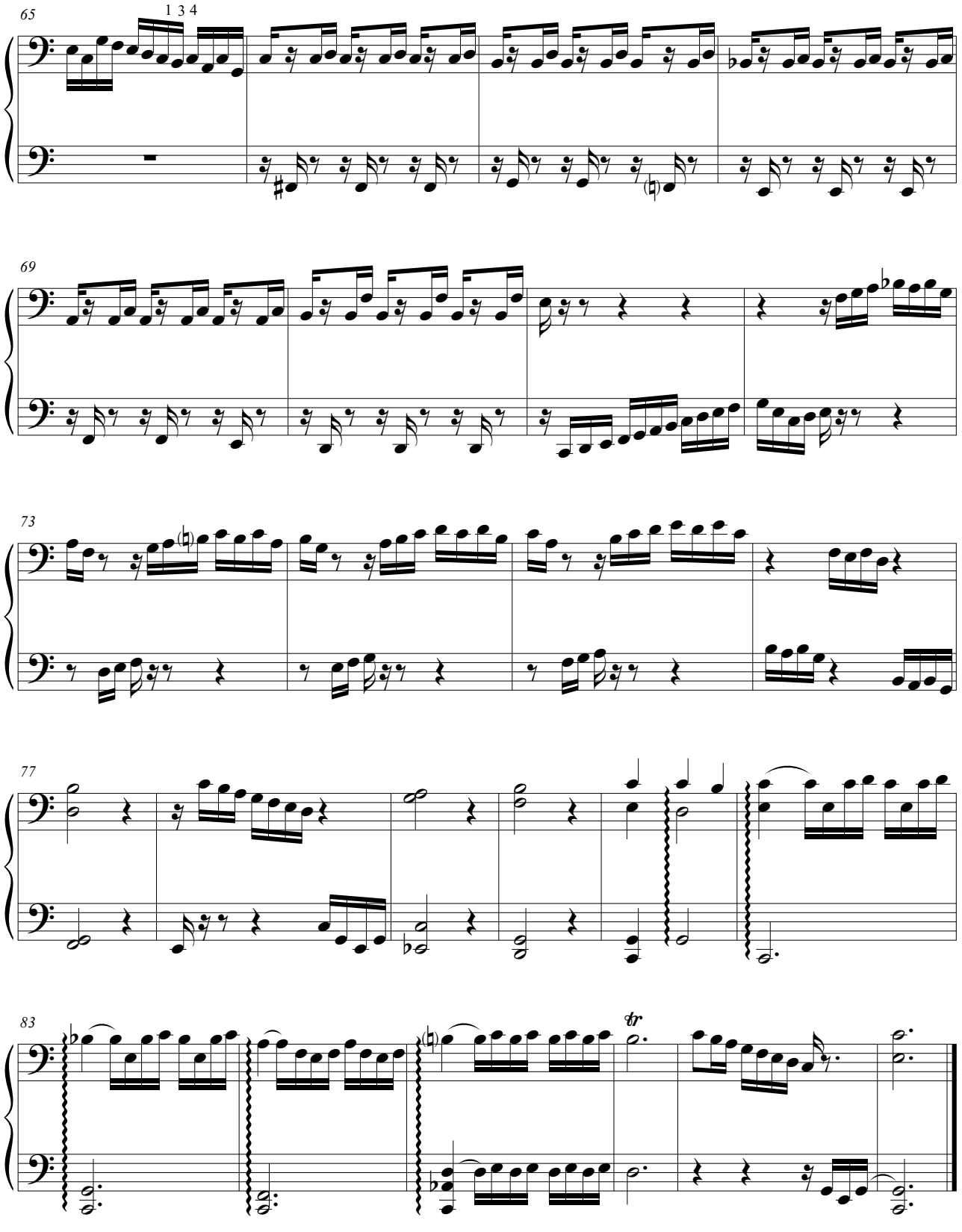
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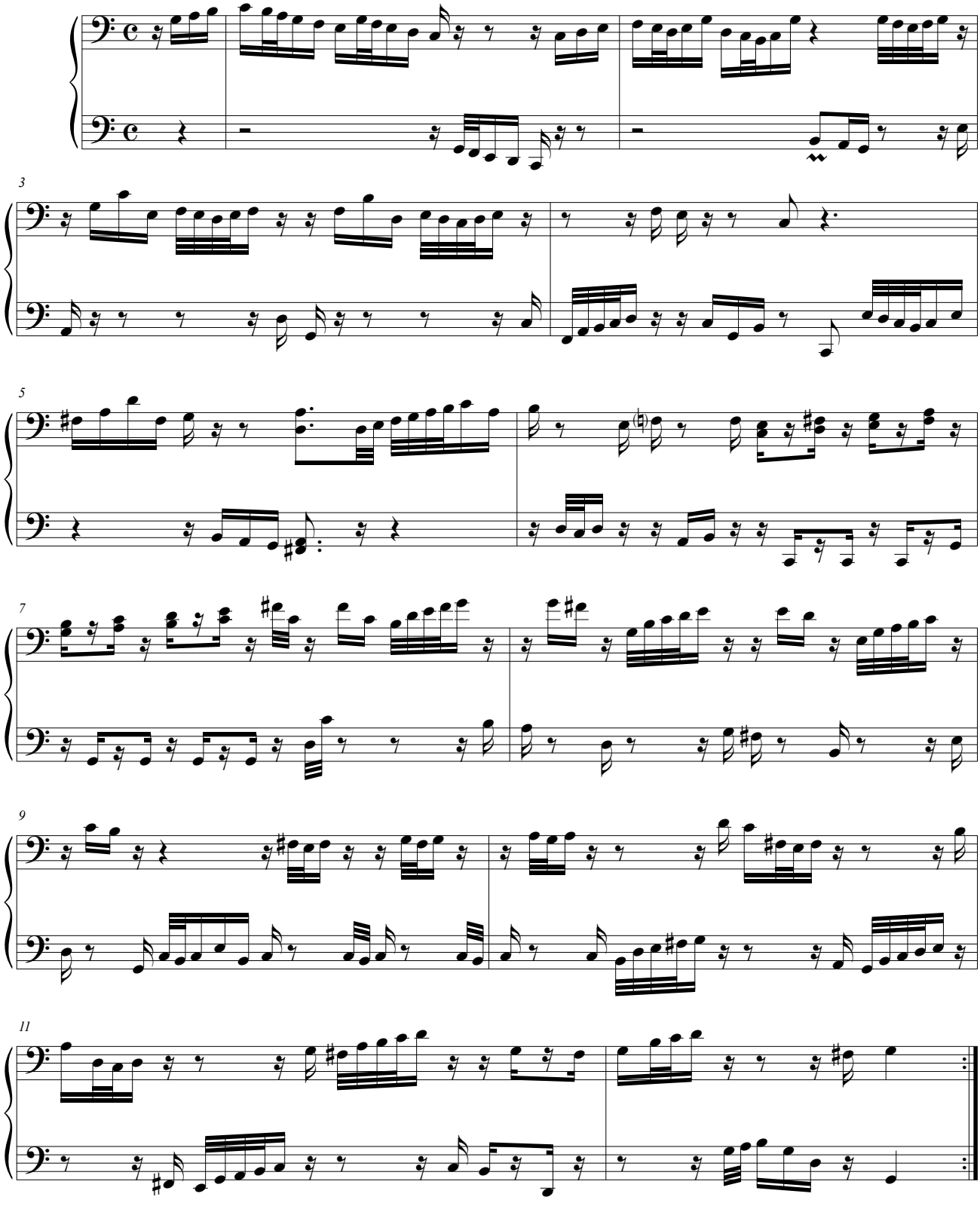
Allemande



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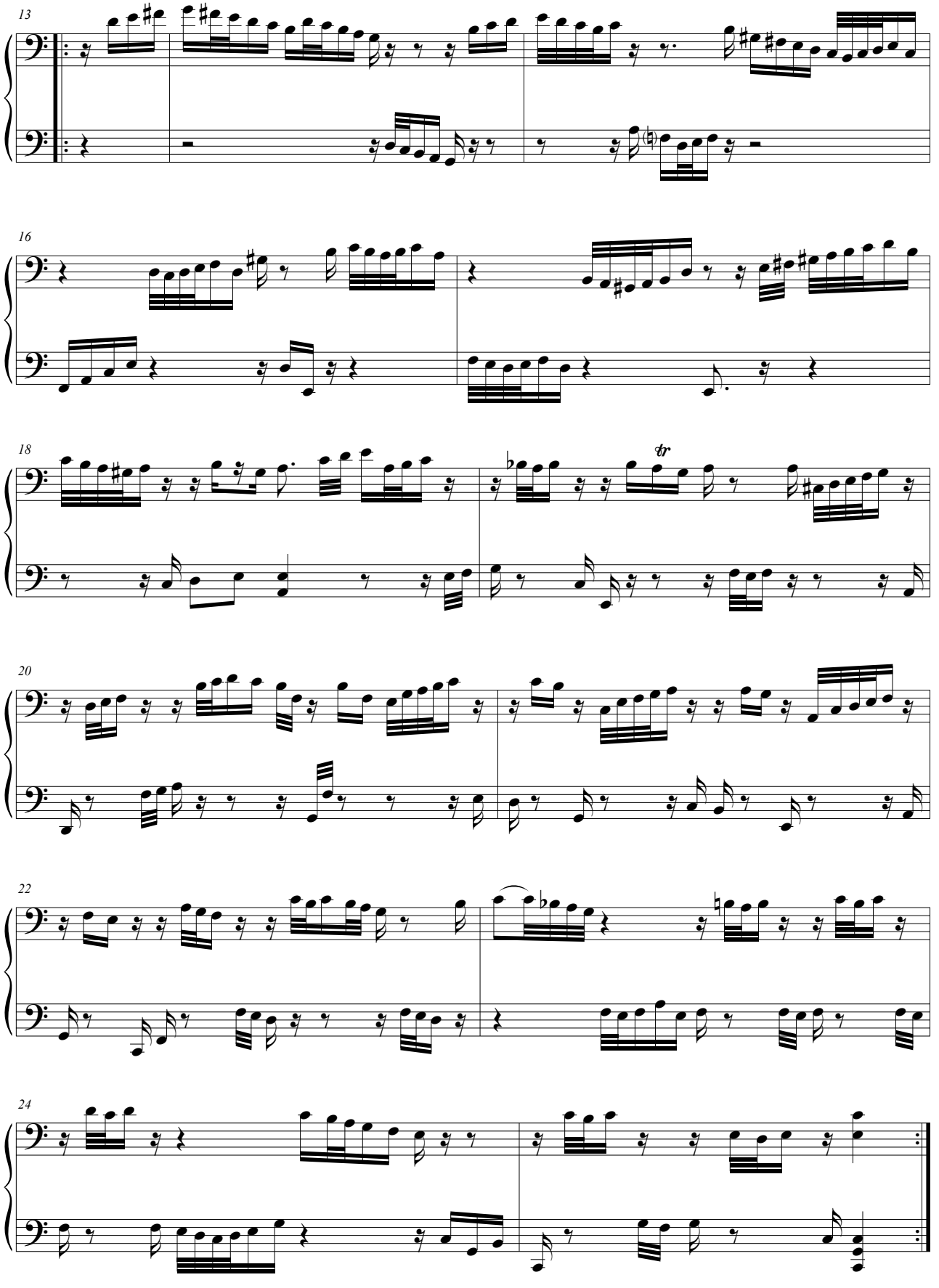
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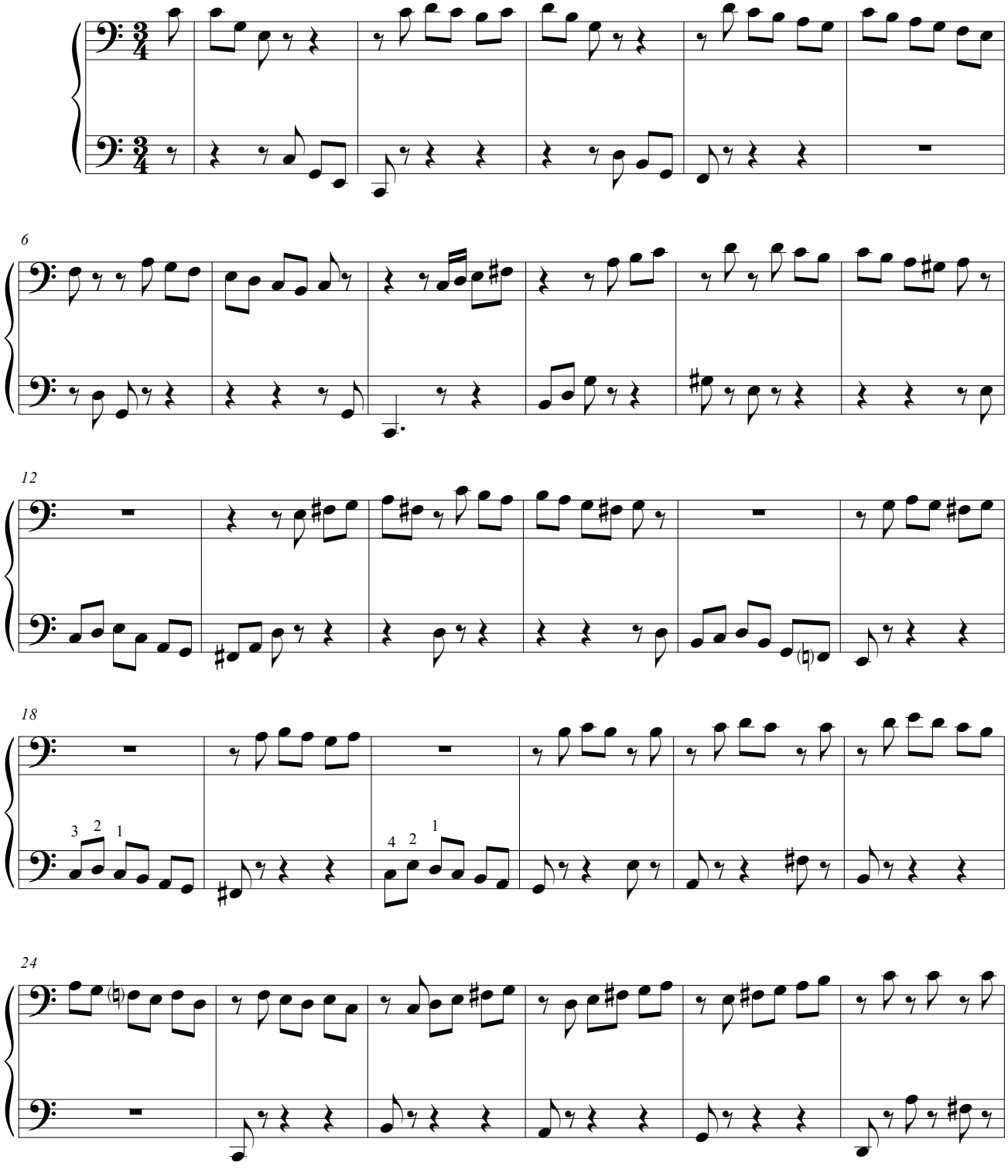
Courante



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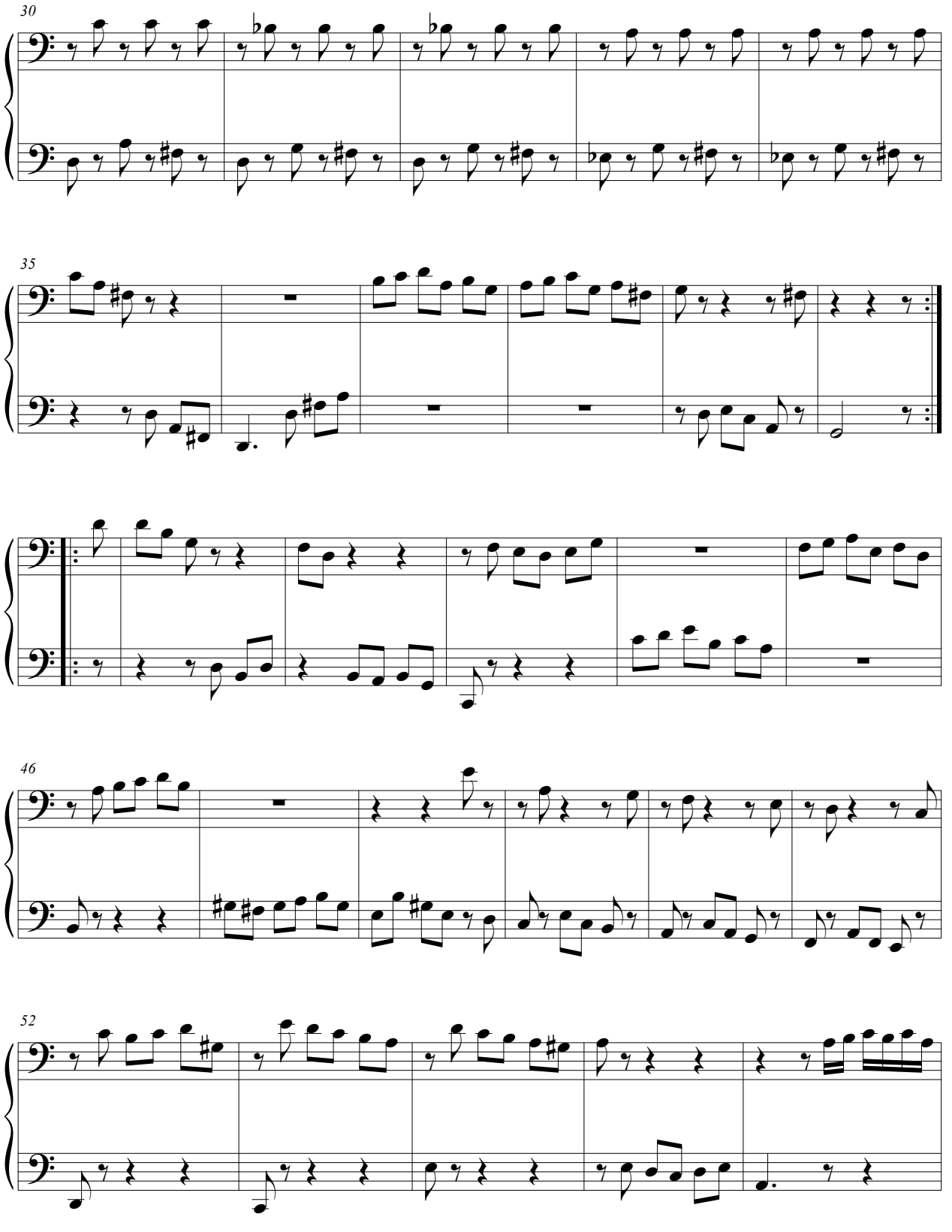
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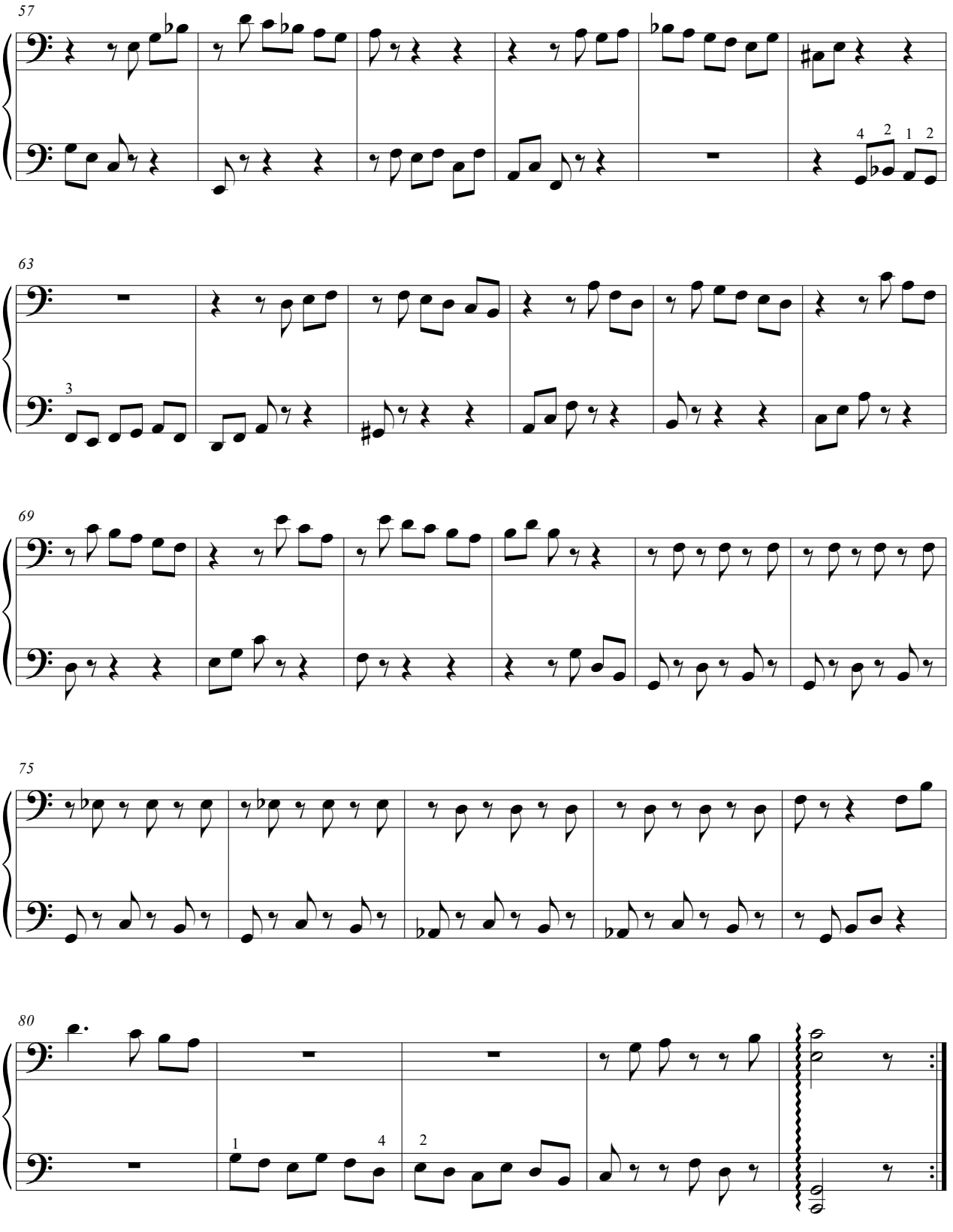
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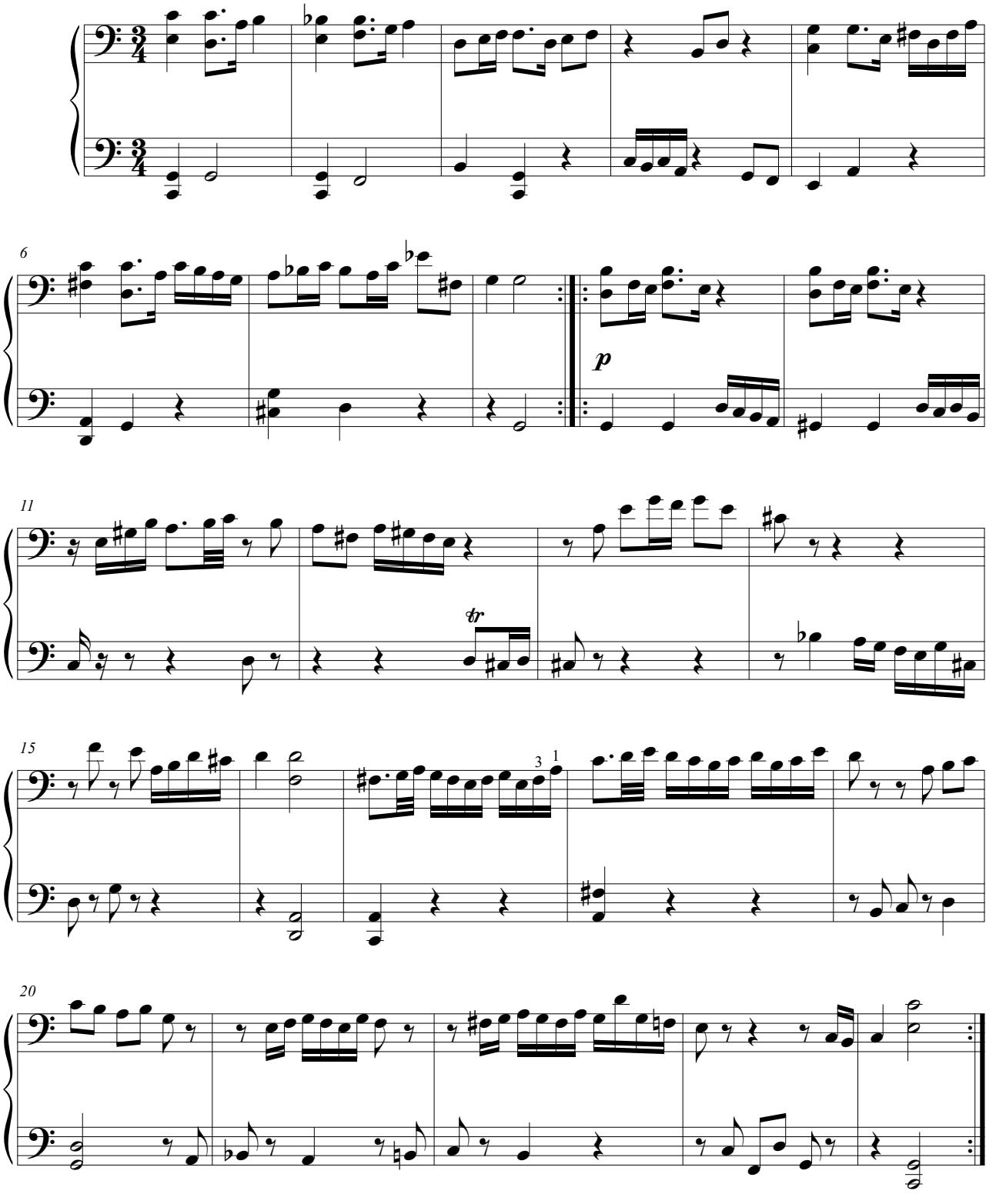
Sarabande



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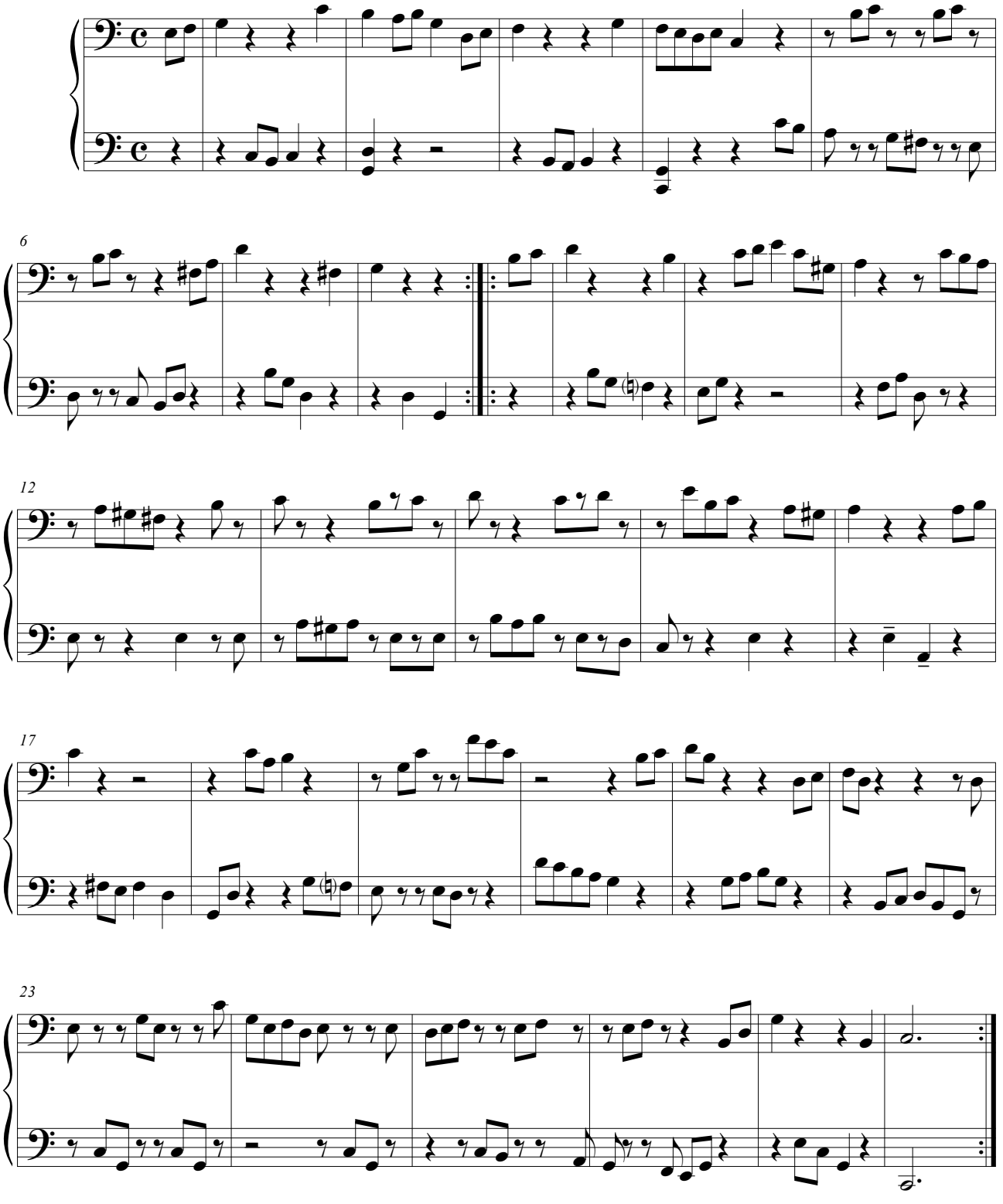
Bourrée I



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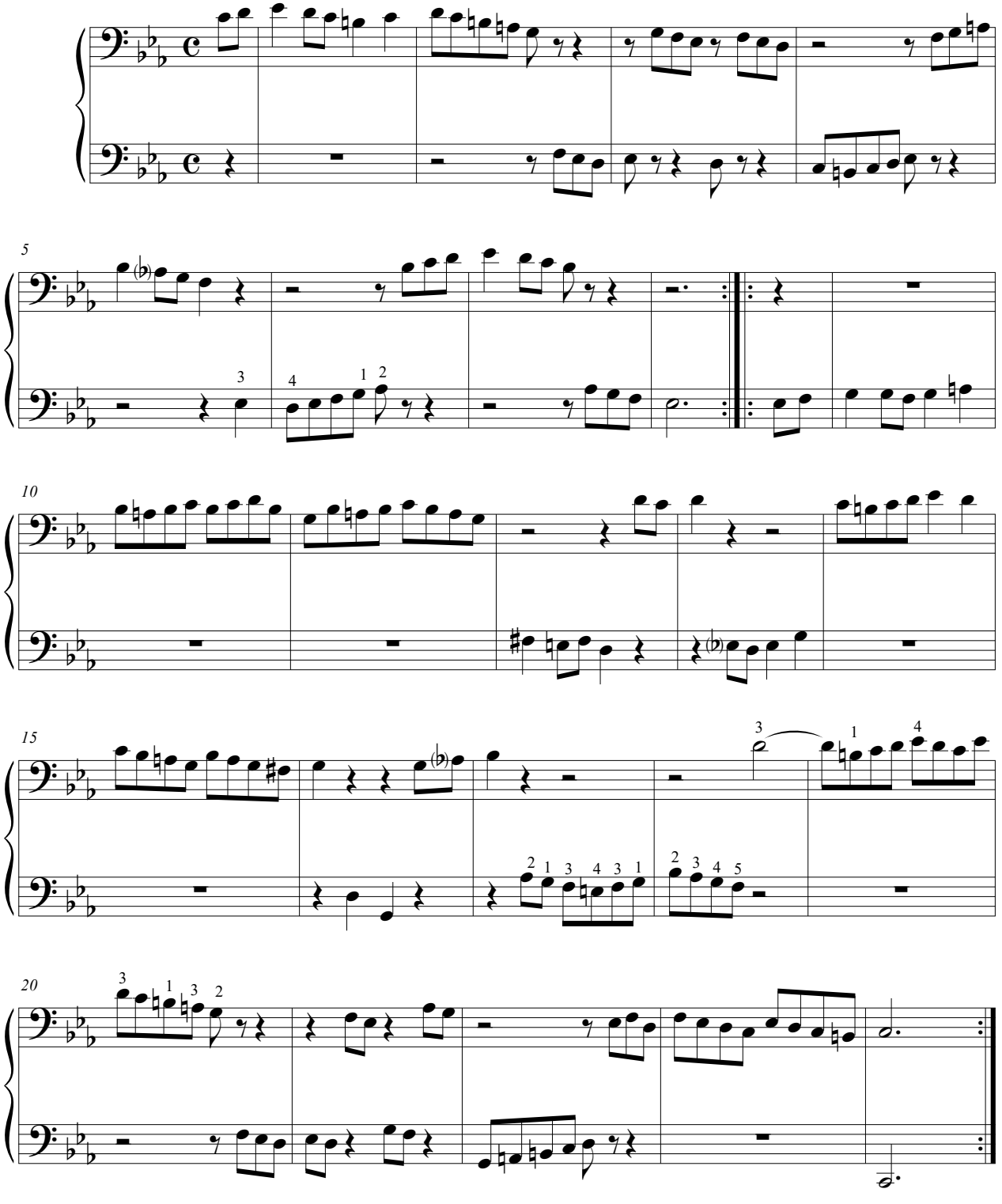

Bourrée I da capo

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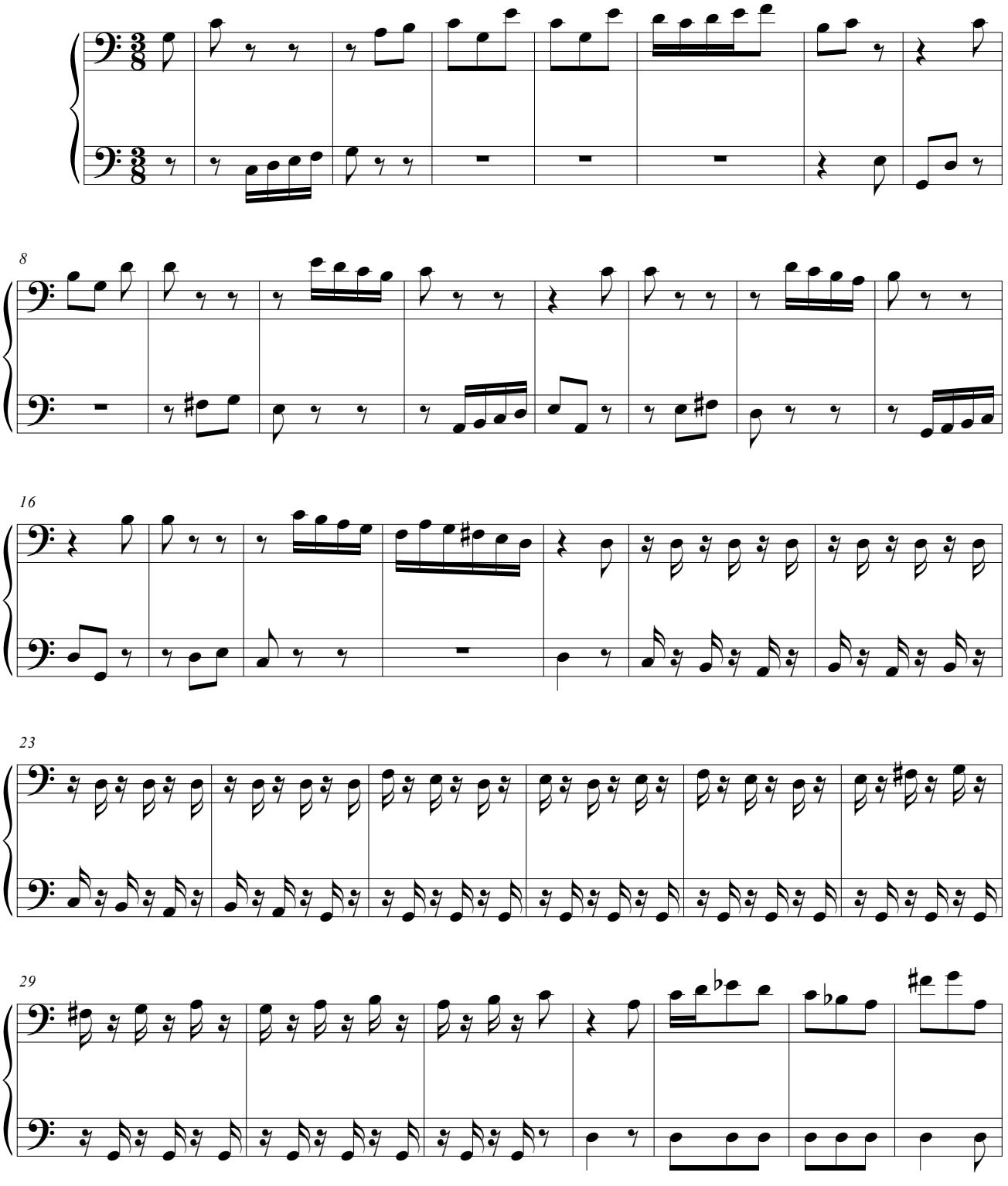
Gigue



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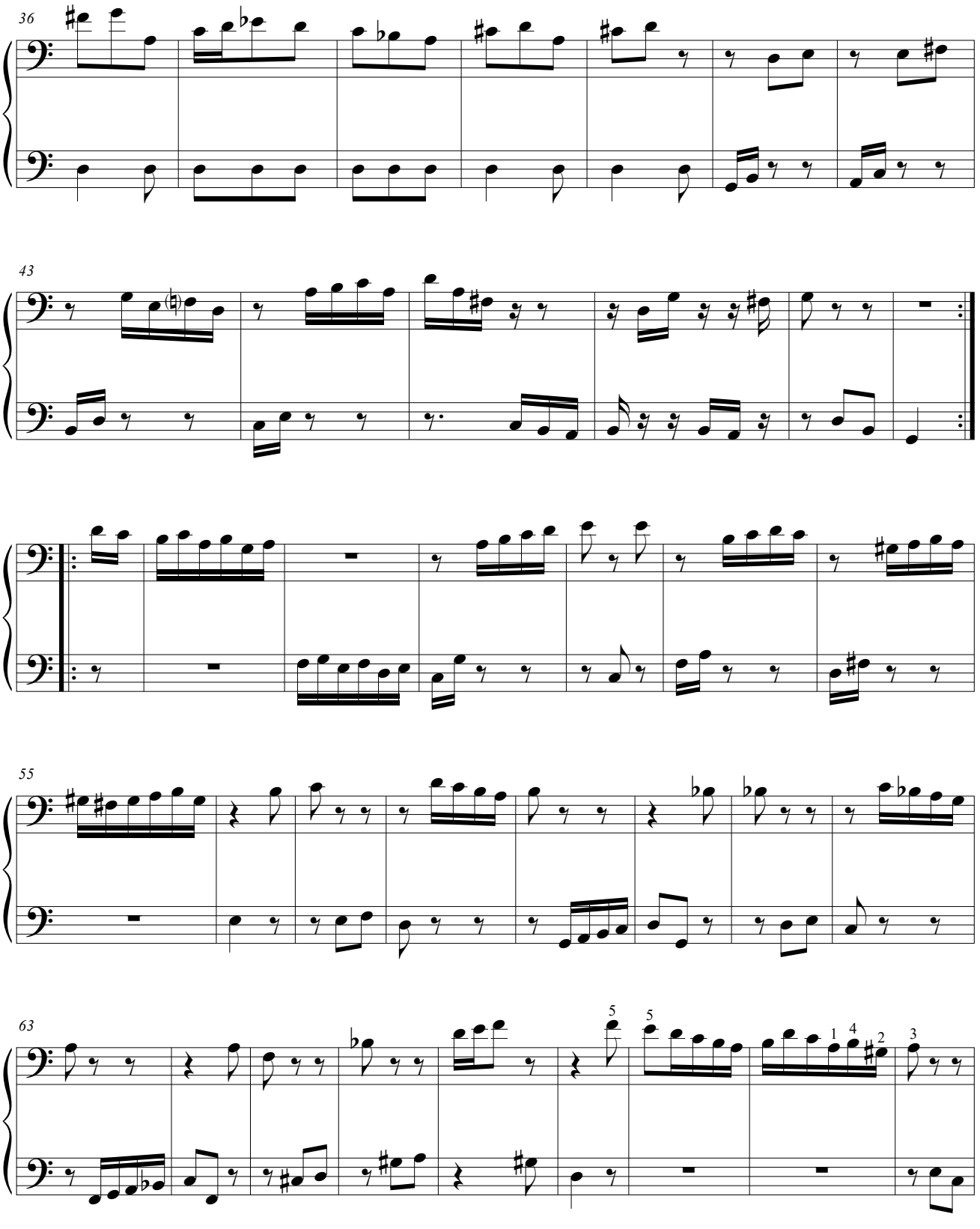
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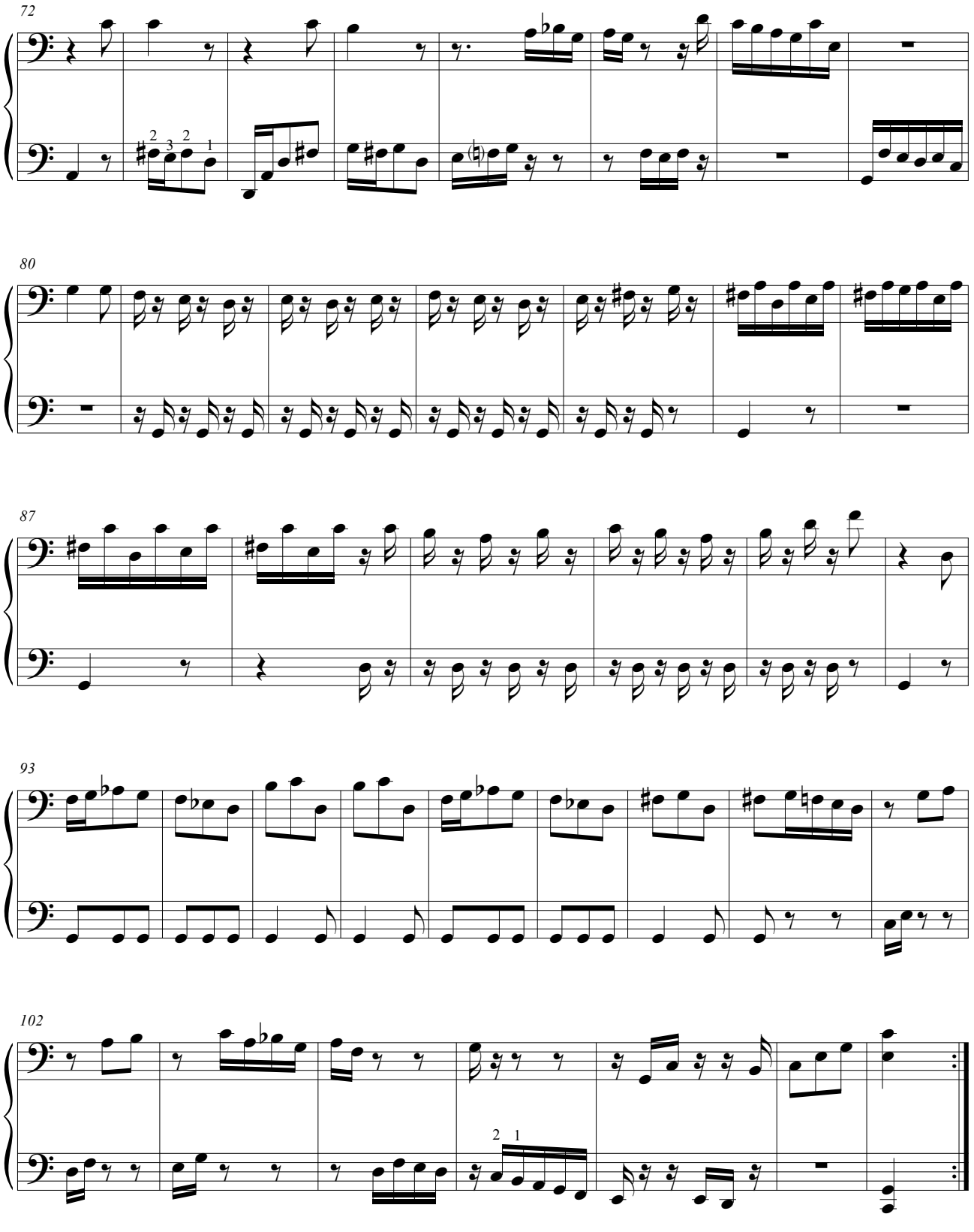
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Suite No. 4 in E-flat major

Cello Suite No. 4 marks the beginning of the second half of this cycle, the last three Suites being longer, more complex and more difficult to perform. While somewhat awkward for a string player, the key of E-flat major gains idiomatic and expressive facility on a keyboard.

The Prelude sounds almost "Romantic" on the piano and is best described by the overused adjective "beautiful." What exactly makes it so? Hard to explain, but these arpeggios descending from far above, often traversing two octaves, feel like a gentle stream of kindness, of heavenly grace enveloping us all. The 16-note episodes are clouds passing through, only to return us back to equilibrium. This Prelude perfectly illustrates an important "trade secret" of J. S. Bach: starting a pattern on the second note of a measure, instead of on the first. This compositional device, whether used intentionally or not, is the key to that singular "endless" quality of his music. The rift between the downbeat and the beginning of the arpeggio creates an ambiguity of emphasis and effectively cancels our auditory awareness of the bar lines.

The inner patterns of the arpeggios contain rich layers of implied polyphony and this Prelude works in a wide range of tempi (I currently prefer mm. 52-54 per half note). Starting at m. 49 and through the end, I would suggest following the directional and harmonic implications of the 16th-note fragments without feeling constrained by diligent counting. And by all means, use that damper pedal for the arpeggios, your foot will probably land there before you even know it.

The **Allemande** brings us back to earth with a distinct accent on the first beat and a general feeling of rhythmic and melodic stability, providing a strong and mutually beneficial contrast to the Prelude. It can be a great warm-up at a slow tempo or a fun romp at a very fast one. I would keep the target tempo at about 80-92 beats per quarter note, since the next movement is traditionally speedier and lighter.

This **Courante** is true to its name, florid and dance-like. Like the Prelude, it starts with a descending arpeggio, but this is no longer a unifying element of several movements, as seen in Suites 1, 2 and 3. Downward 8th notes switch to upward 16ths, followed by more downward 8ths and then a long string of upward triplets.

This variety and balance of rhythmic subdivision is quite remarkable and the unexpected changes, especially when the triplets appear, create a visceral effect, as a new dance step would. I play it at around 120 per quarter note.

An understated emotional attitude may benefit this particular **Sarabande** as the rhythmic structure here is sparse, mostly quarter notes and dotted rhythms, and less appropriate for declamatory deviations. To me it's the most dance-like of the predominantly "philosophical" Sarabandes and the fastest one, around 52 for each quarter beat.

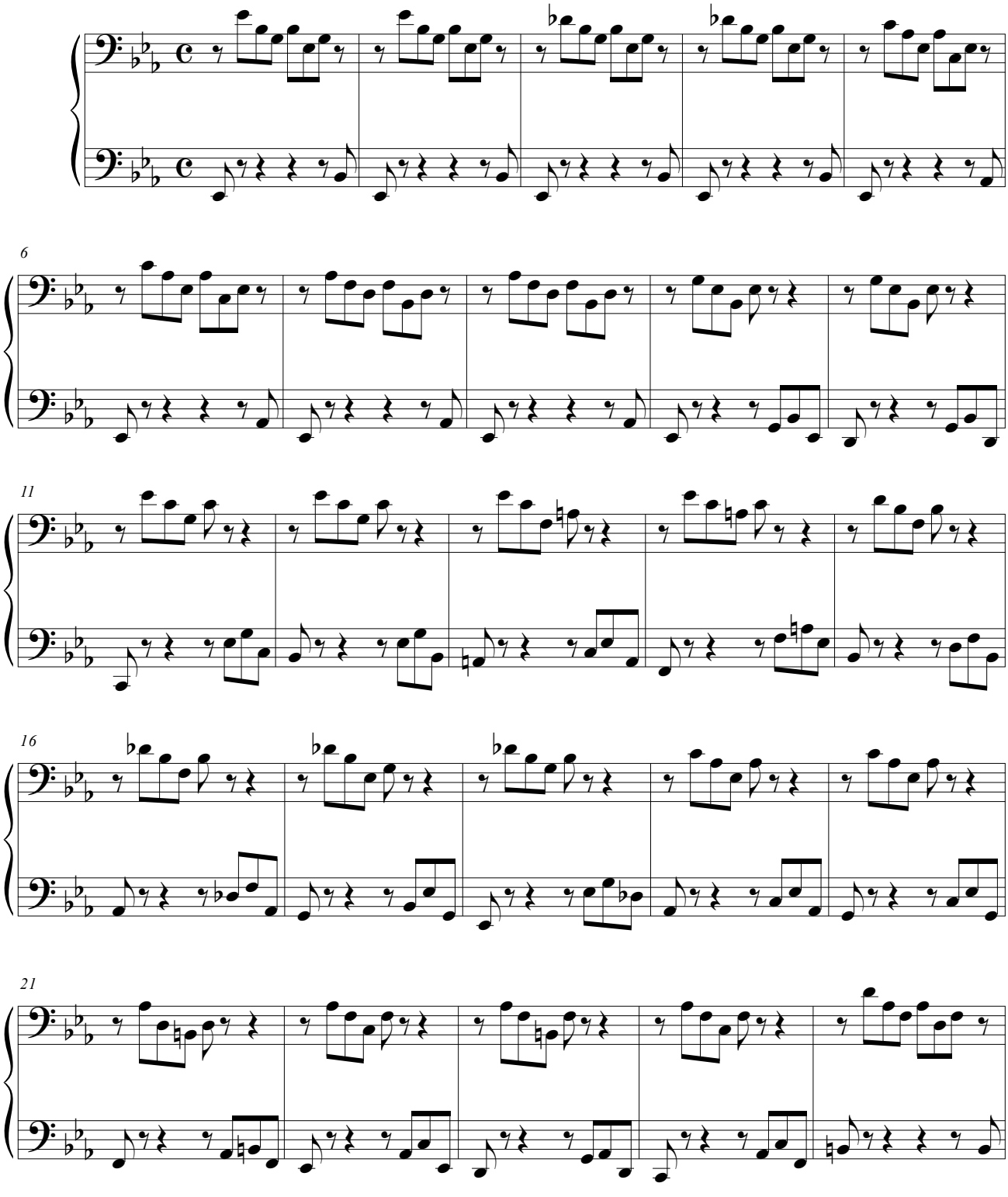
Bourrées I and II mark an interesting transition from the first half of the cycle: they are both in the main key, whereas the Minuets and Bourrées of Suites 1, 2 and 3 alternated parallel major and minor. Bourrée I contentedly toys with a five-note pattern, tossing it around various scale degrees, pairing it up, doubling up the pairs and then inverting it in the second half. The playful style of Bach's own manipulations seems conducive to fun register changes upon repeats. Bourrée 2 is the shortest unit of the entire cycle, 12 measures of mostly quarter notes, with distinctly syncopated upper part against a steady bottom, as if bouncing the accent around, still in somewhat comical mode. The suggested speed might be 68 per quarter note, with both dances exactly in the same tempo.

The French term "**Gigue**" derives from the English "jig" and this movement could indeed pass for an Irish jig or an old American fiddle tune, were it written an octave higher and a semitone lower, in D major. The repetitive three-note "lower mordent" pattern winds up the energy and makes us want to stomp our feet, grab a partner and do-si-do. Incidentally, Do-Ti-Do, is the major recurring unit in this great finale to Suite No. 4. Play it as fast as you can.

Cello Suite No. 4 in E-flat Major, BVW 1010

Prelude

J.S. Bach
Arr. by E. Bindman



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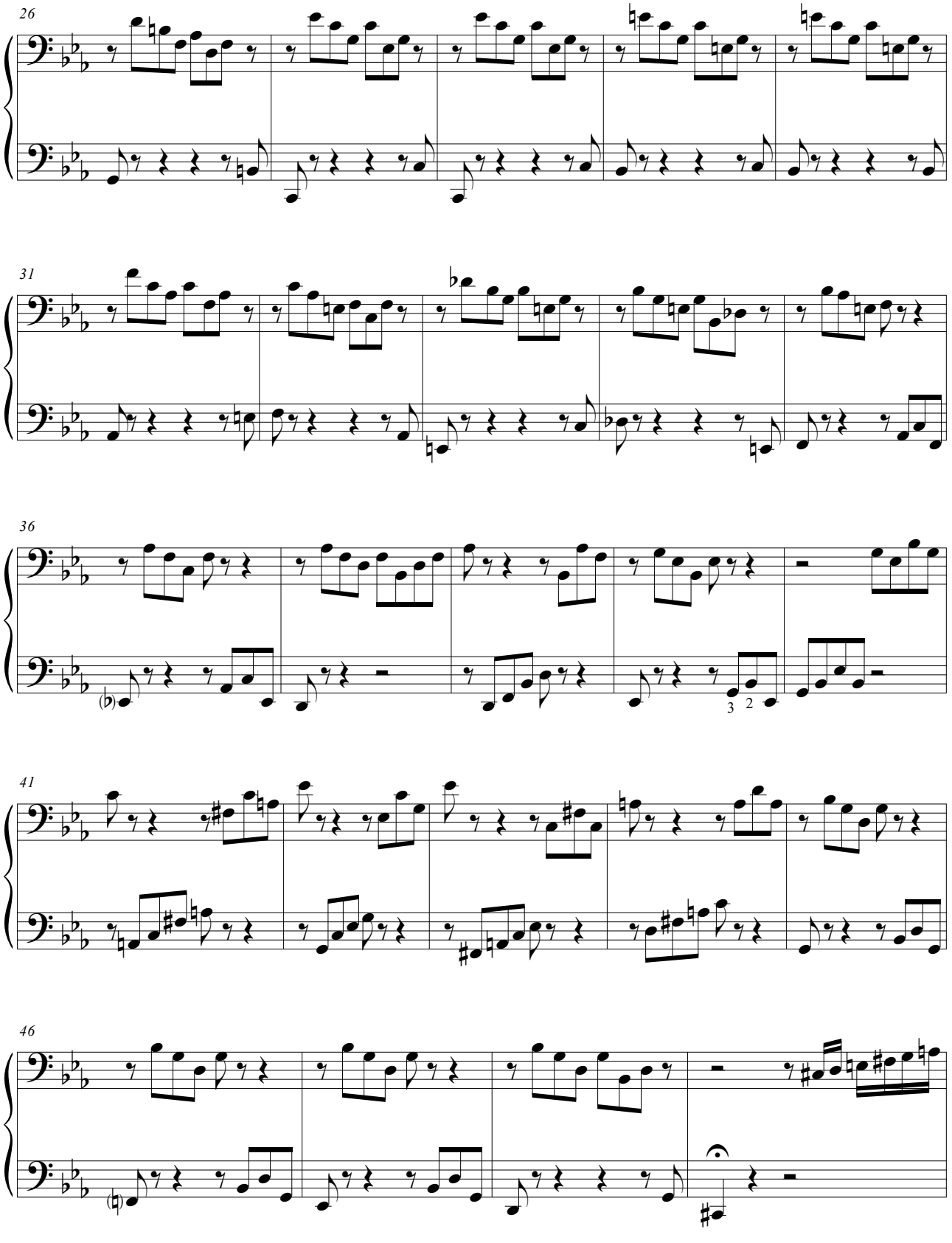
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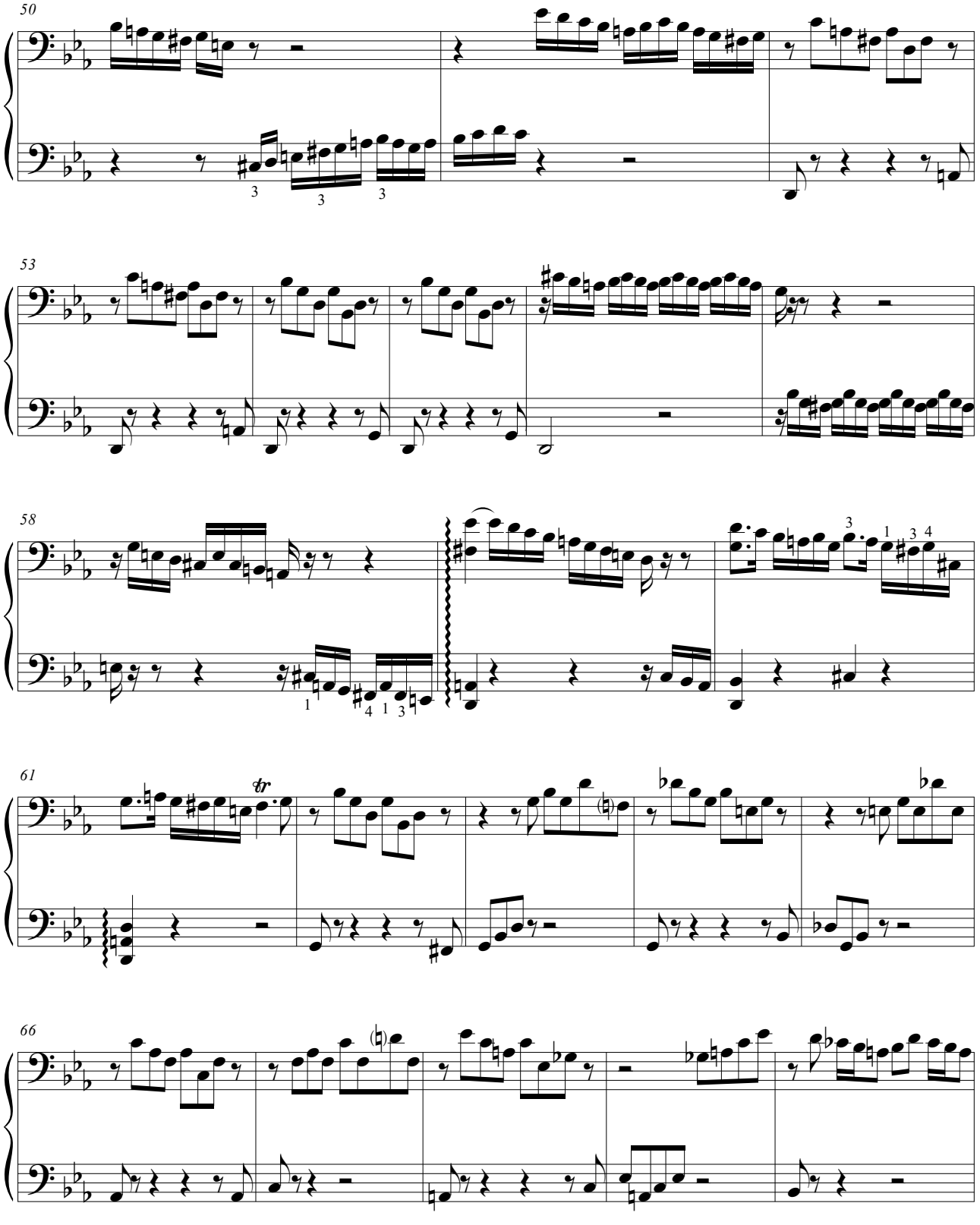
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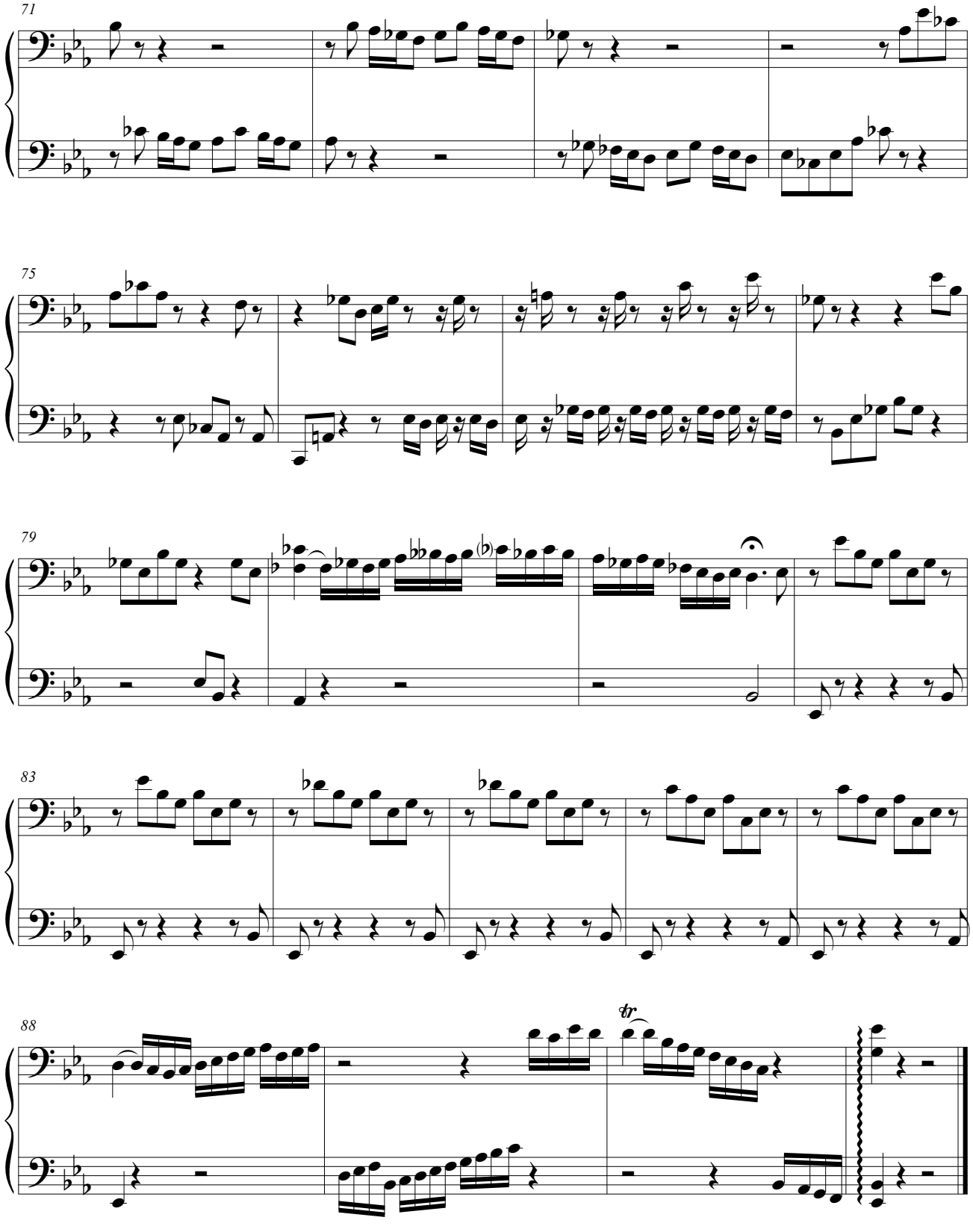
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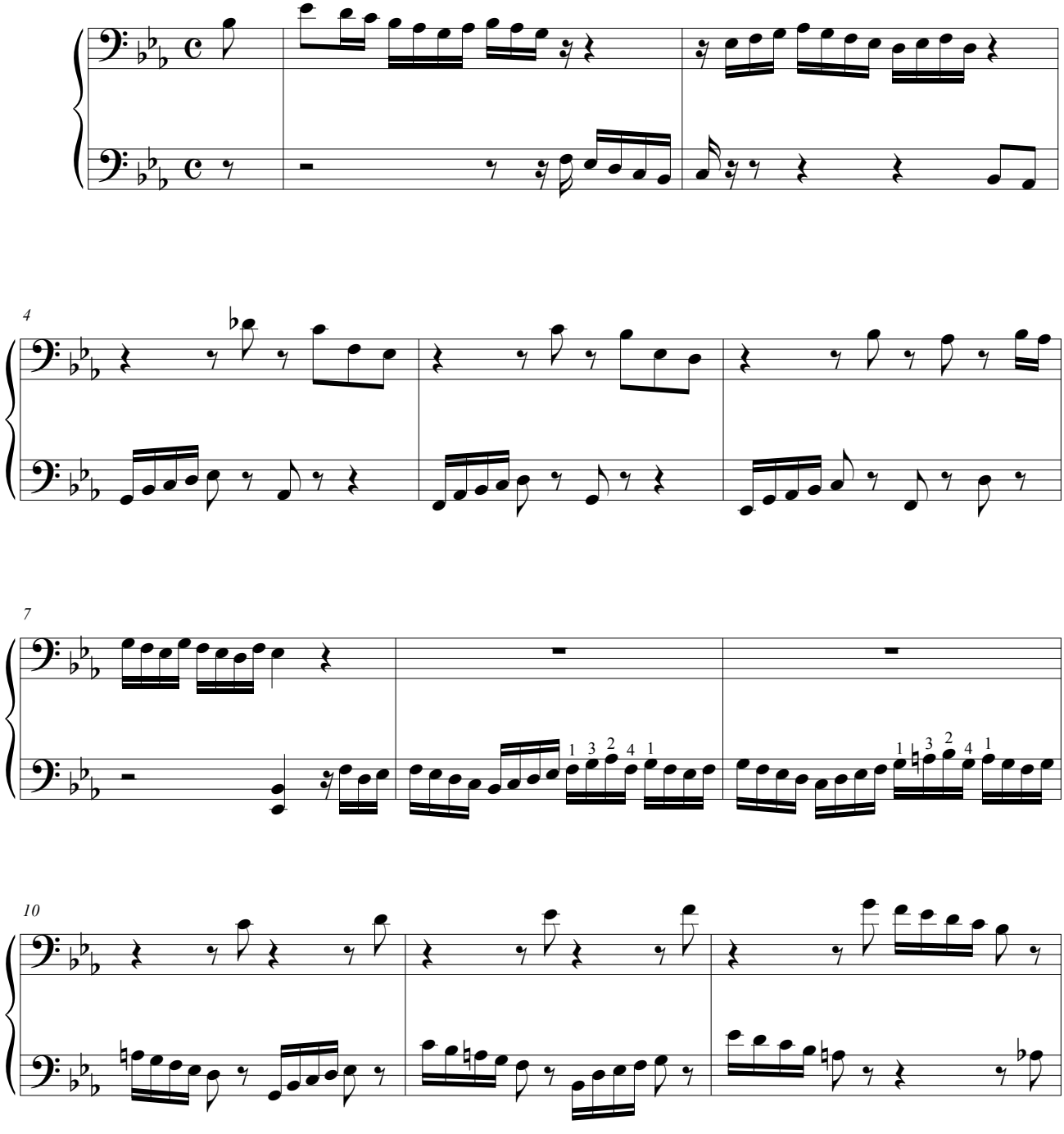
Allemande



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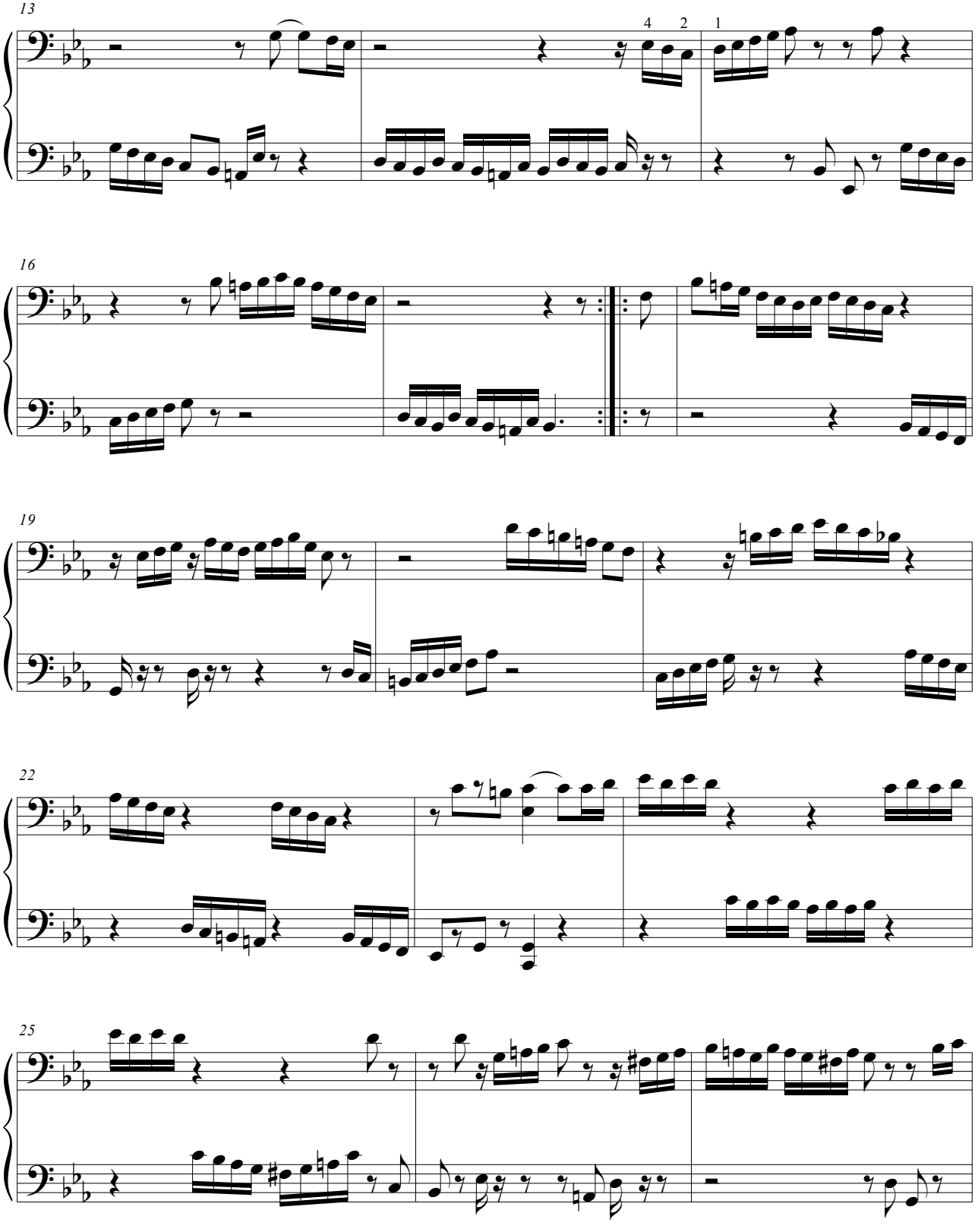
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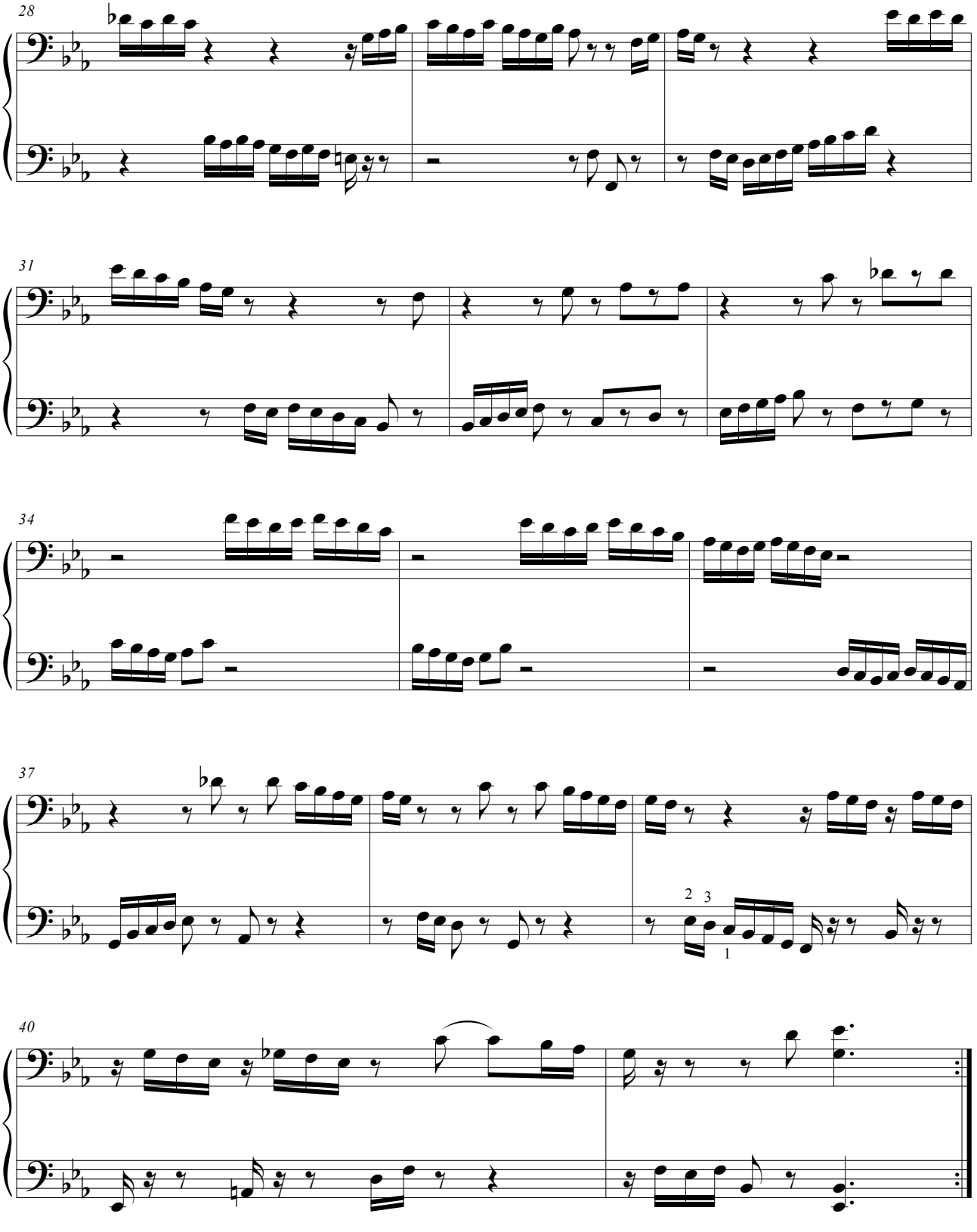
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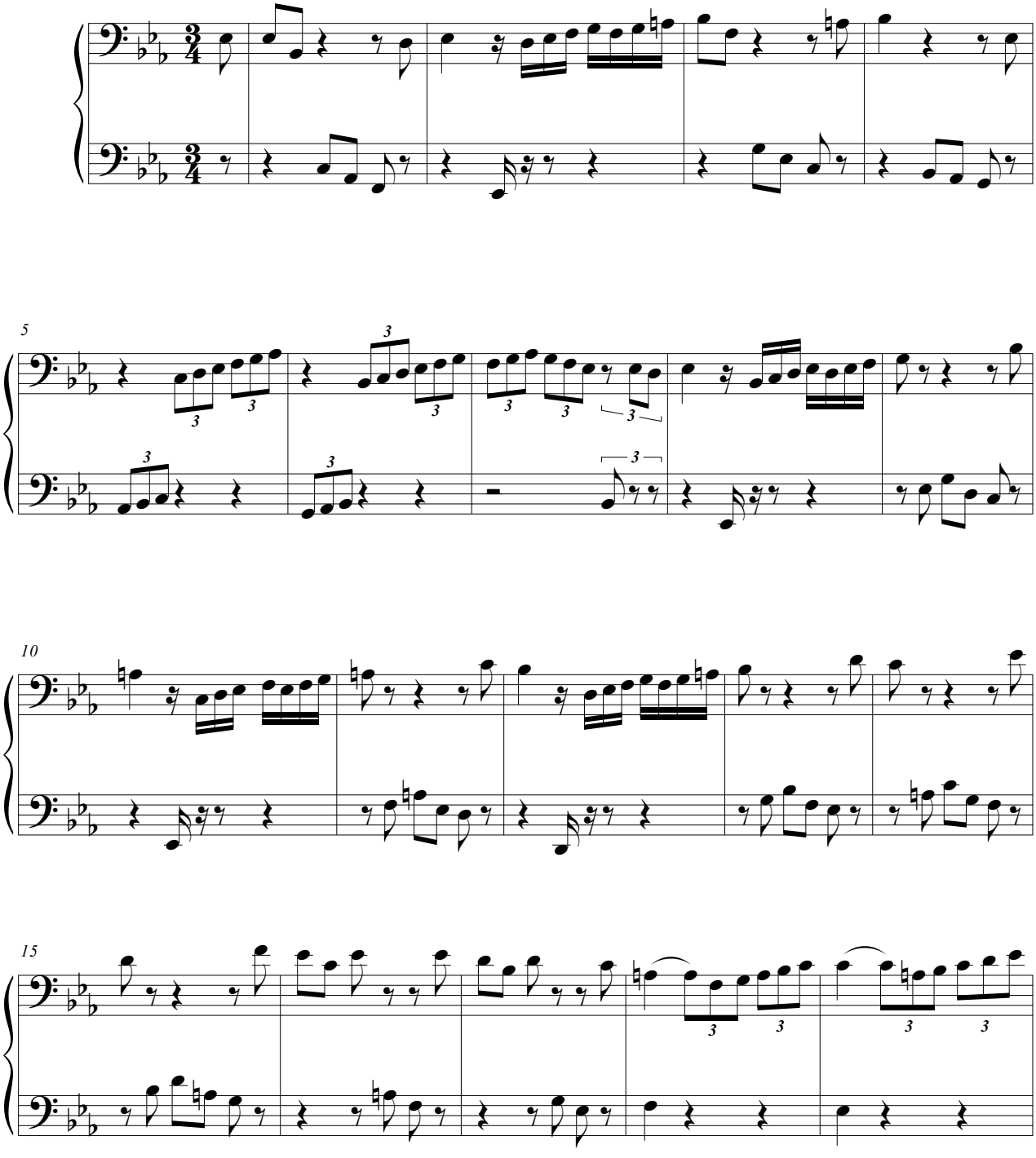
Courante



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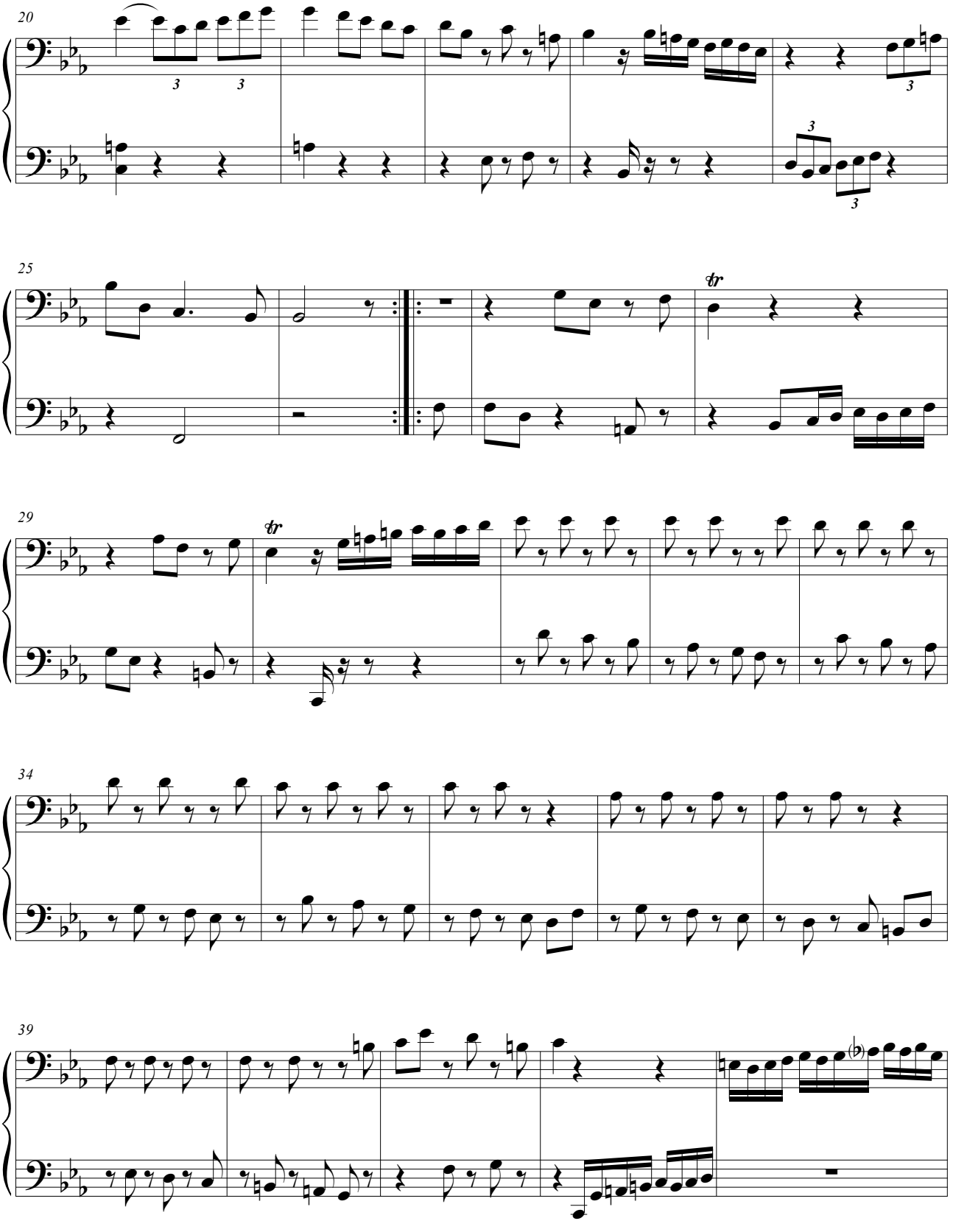
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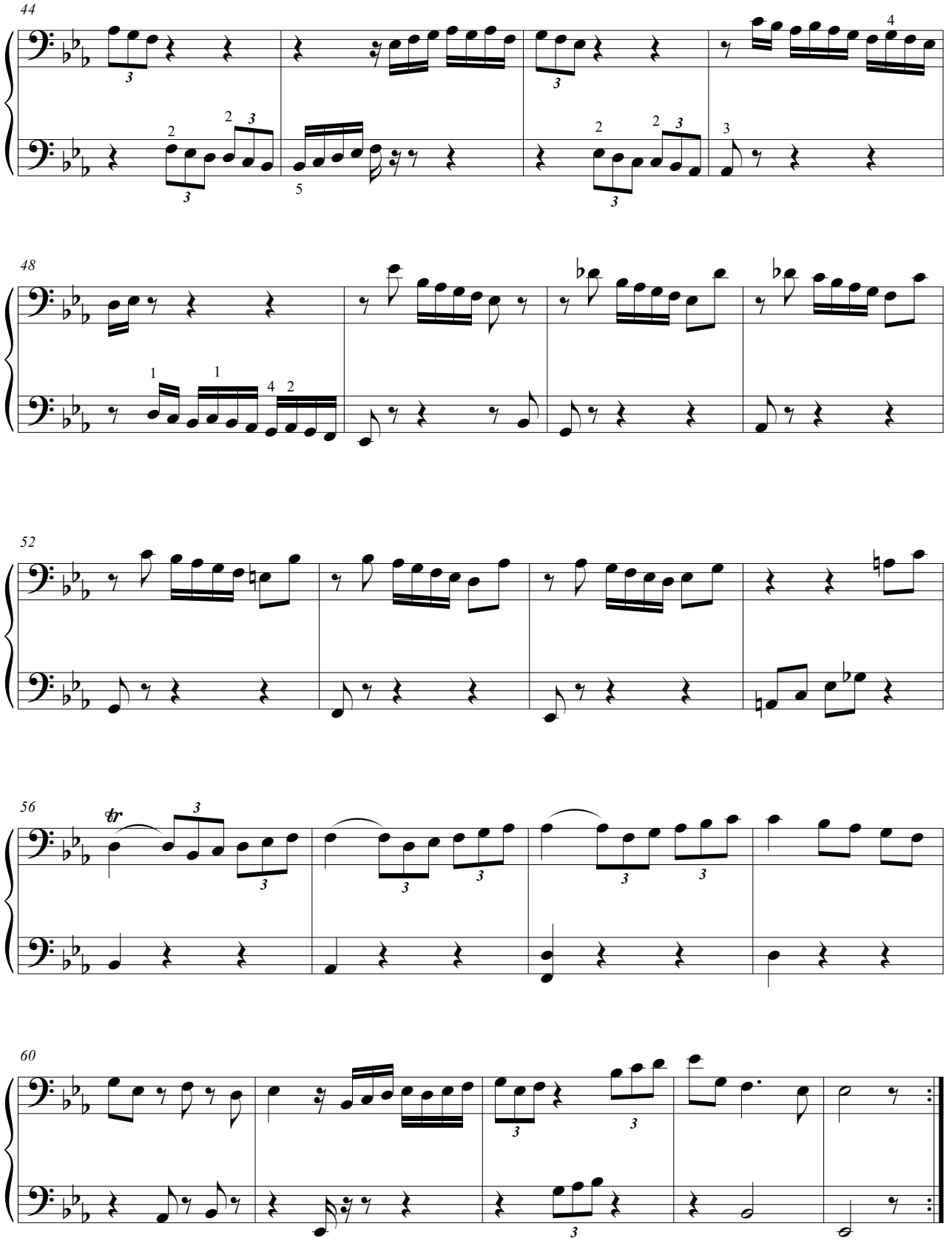
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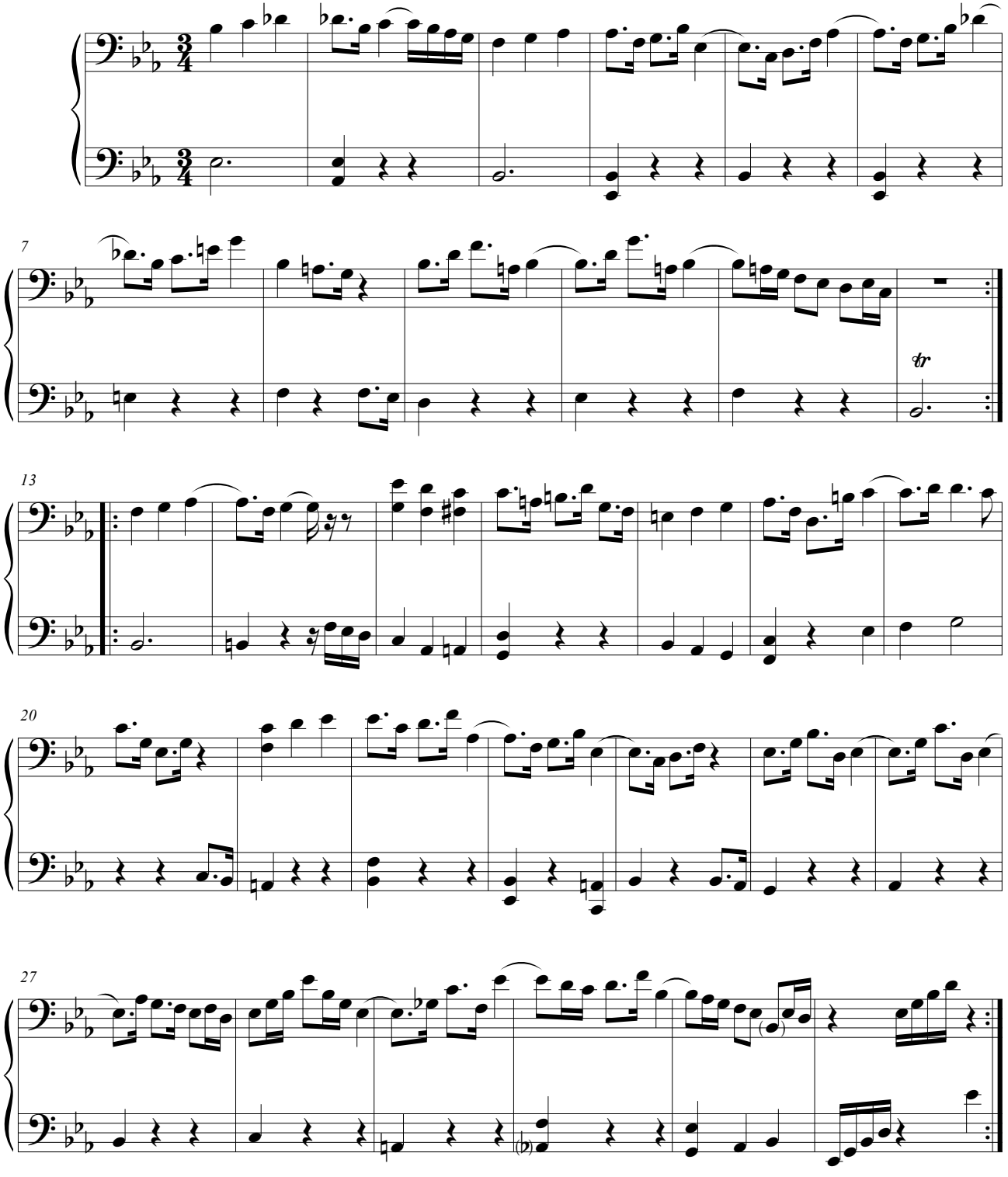
Sarabande



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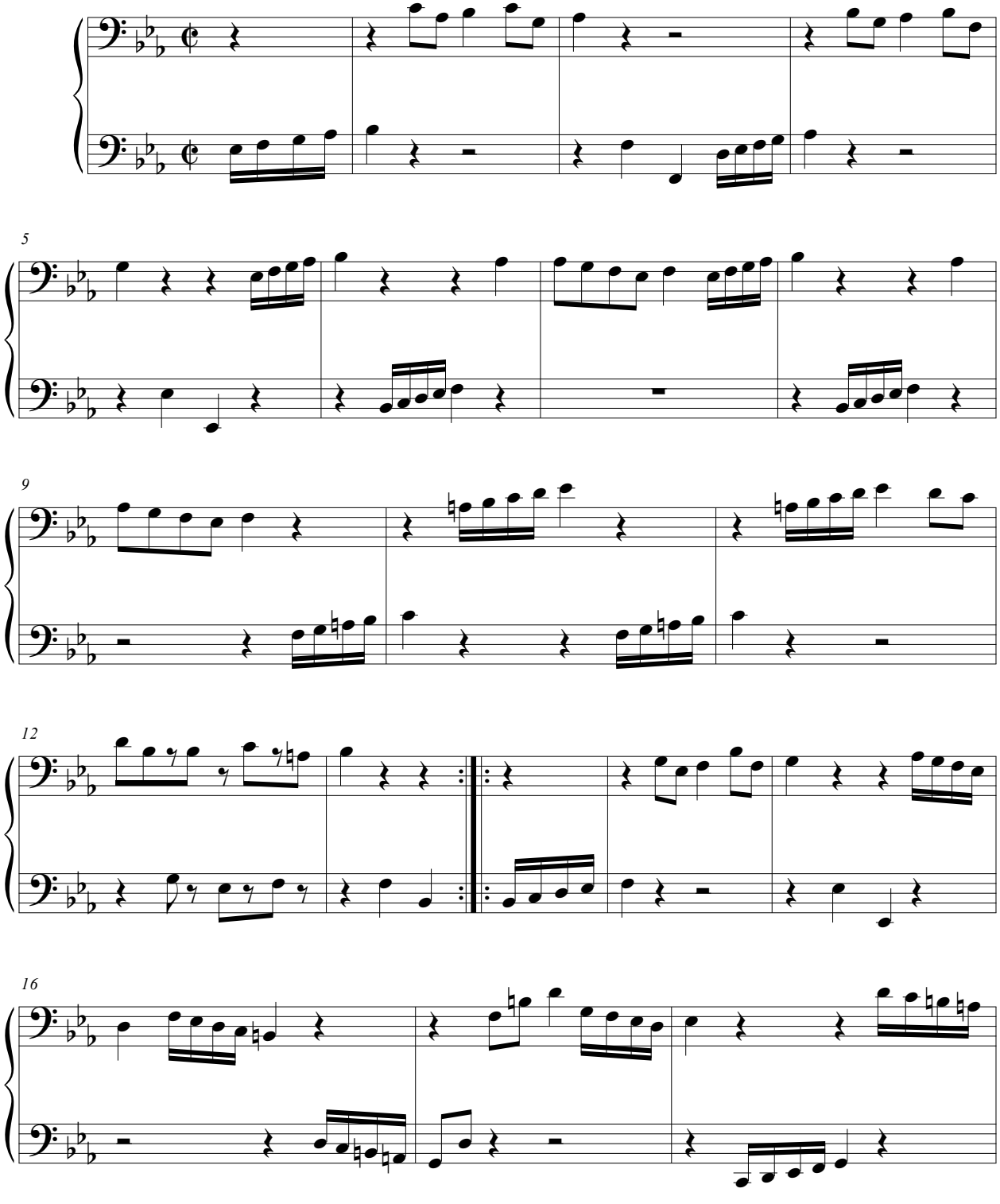
Bourrée I



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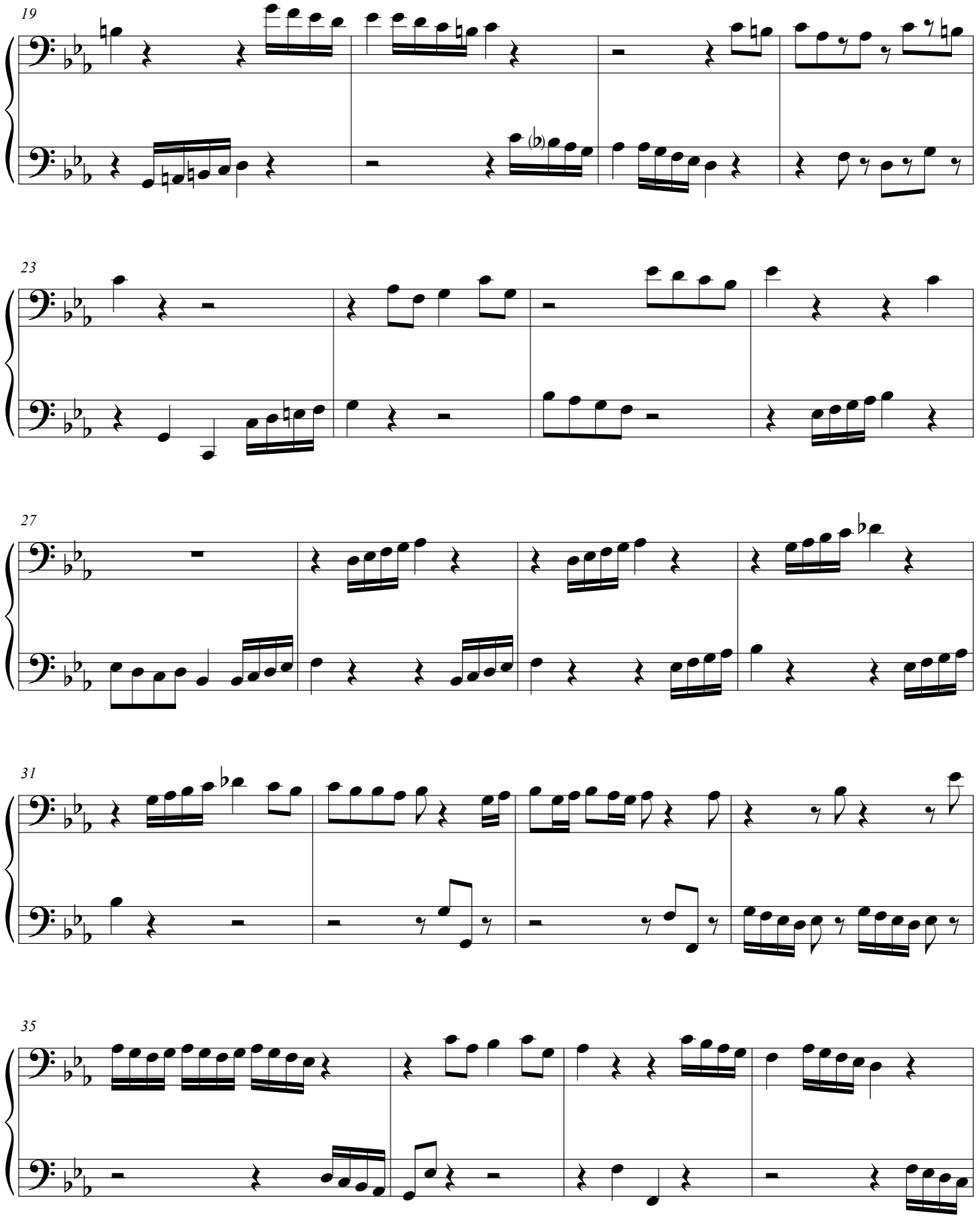
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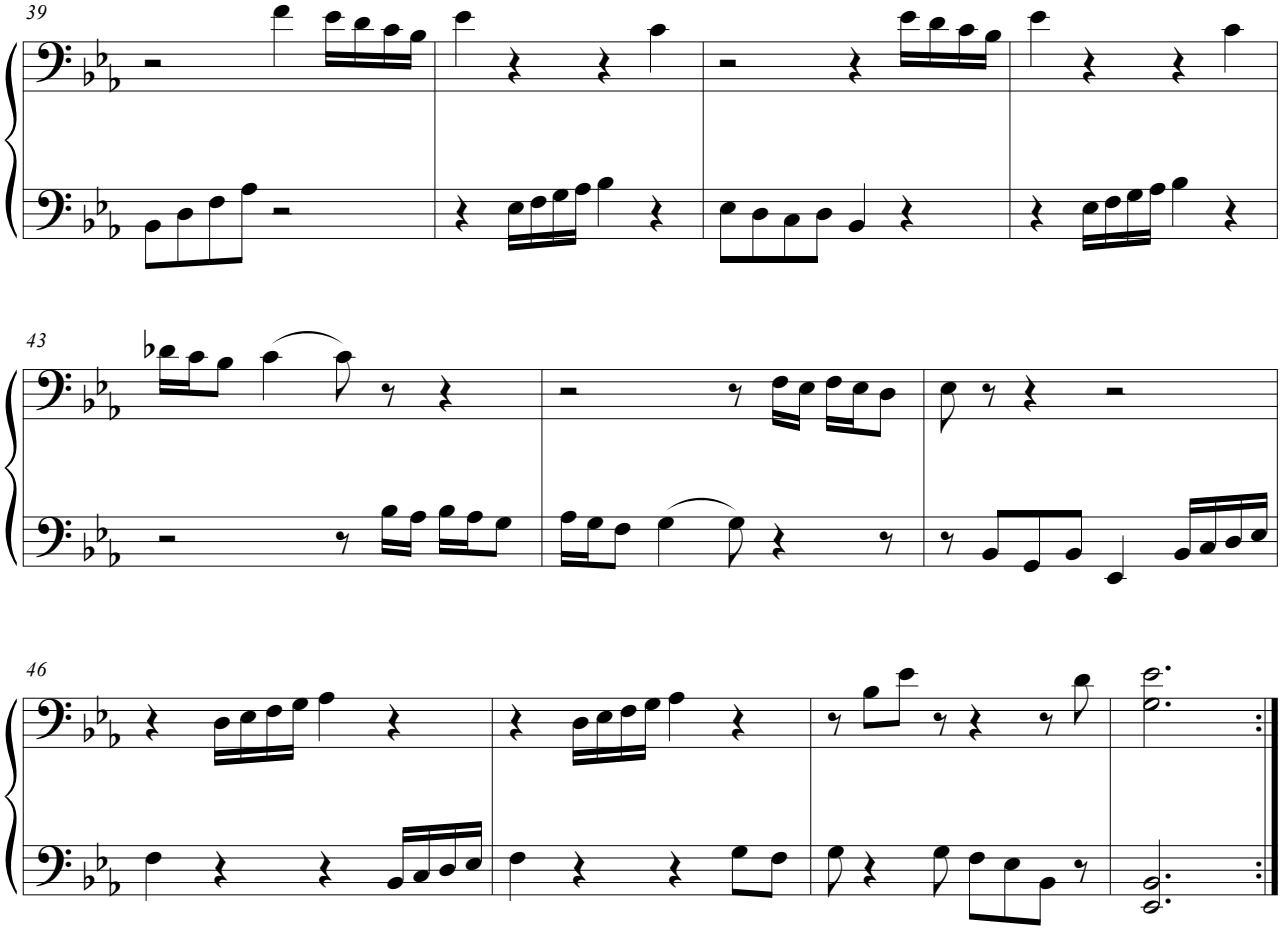

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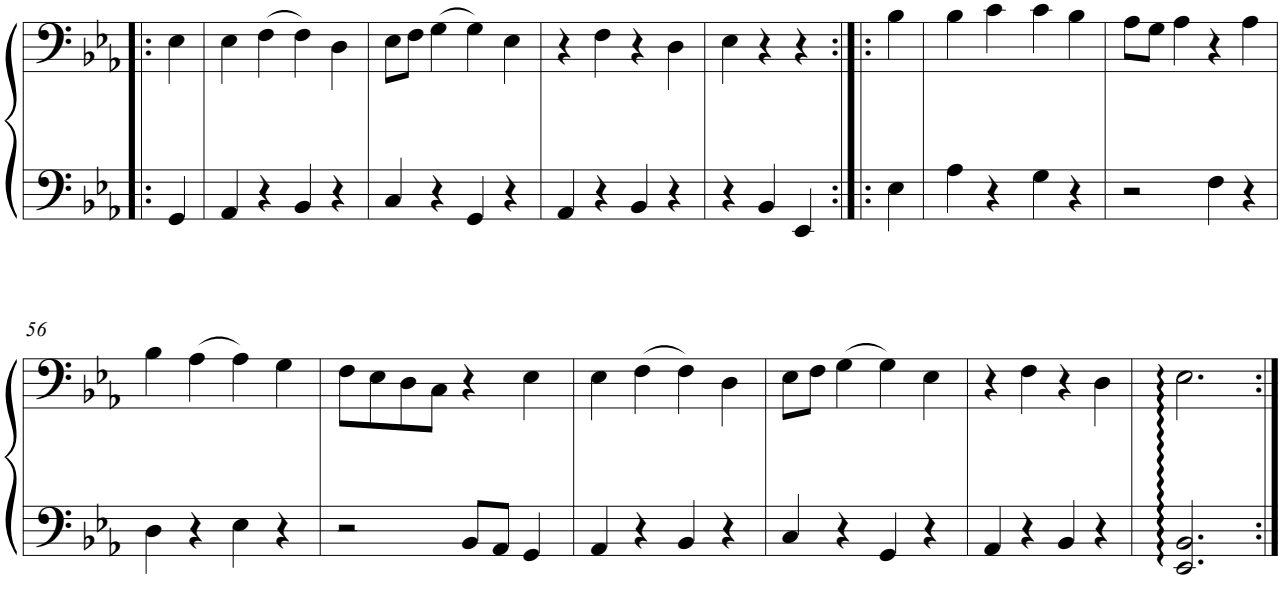
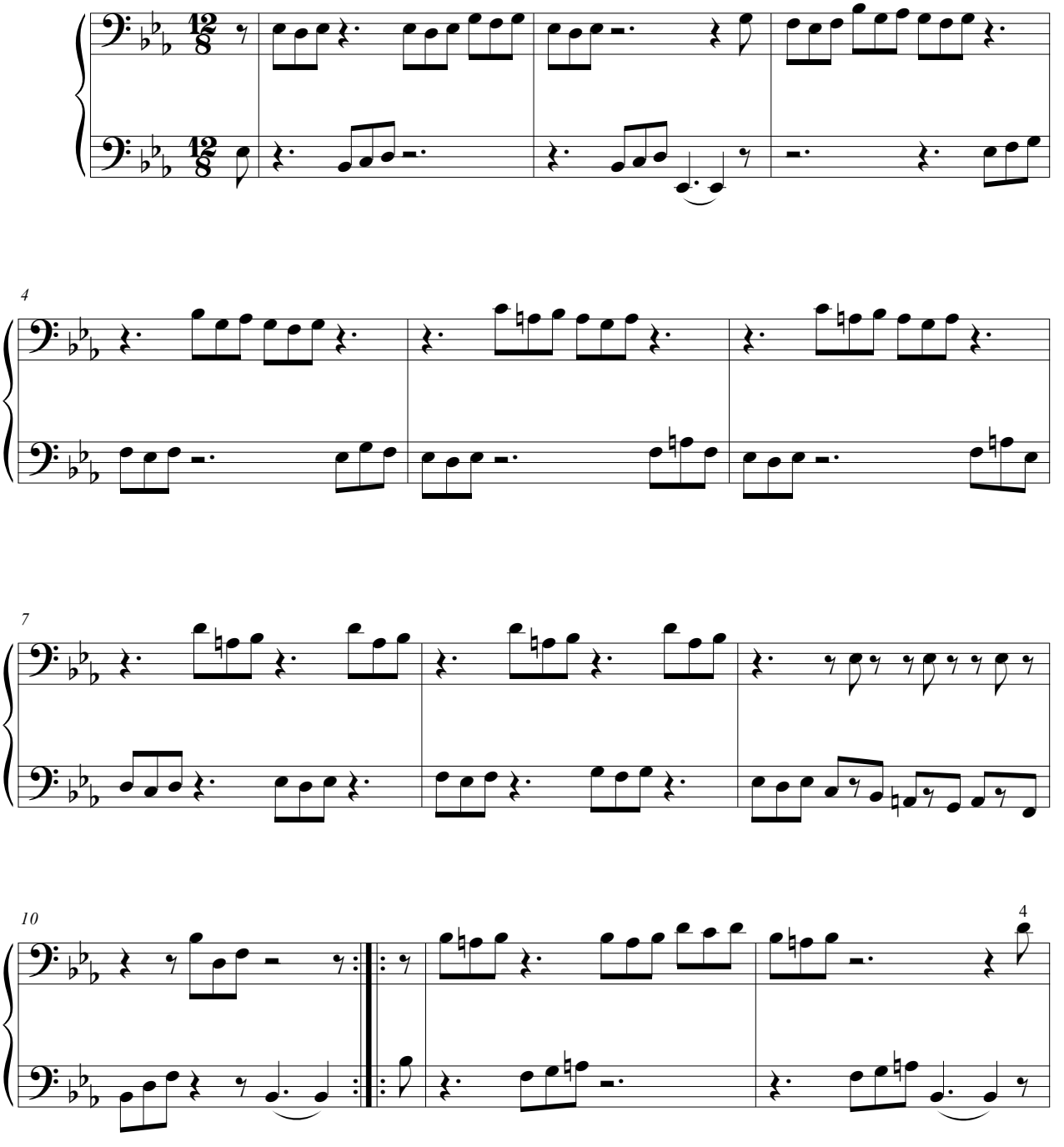


Bourrée I da capo

Gigue



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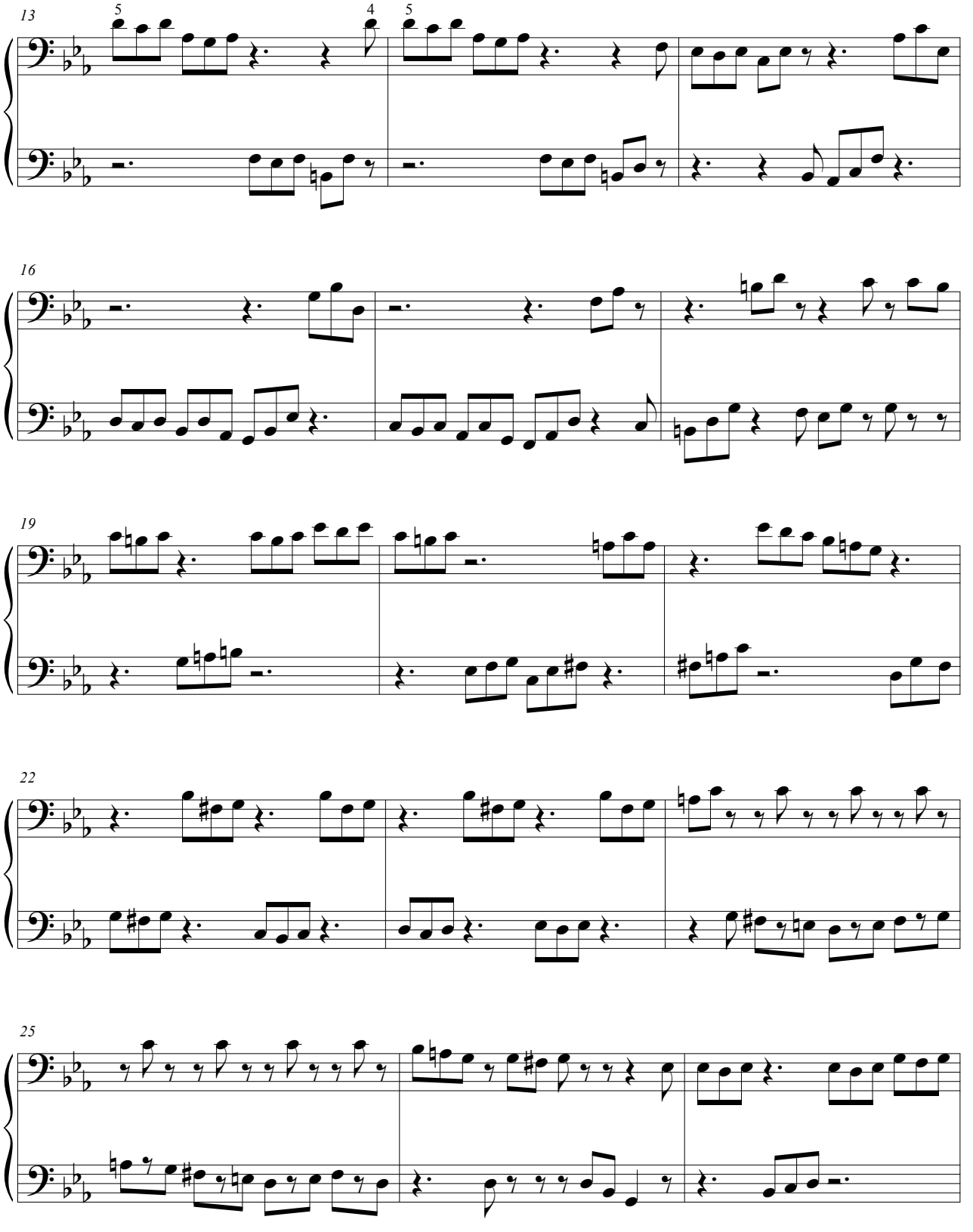
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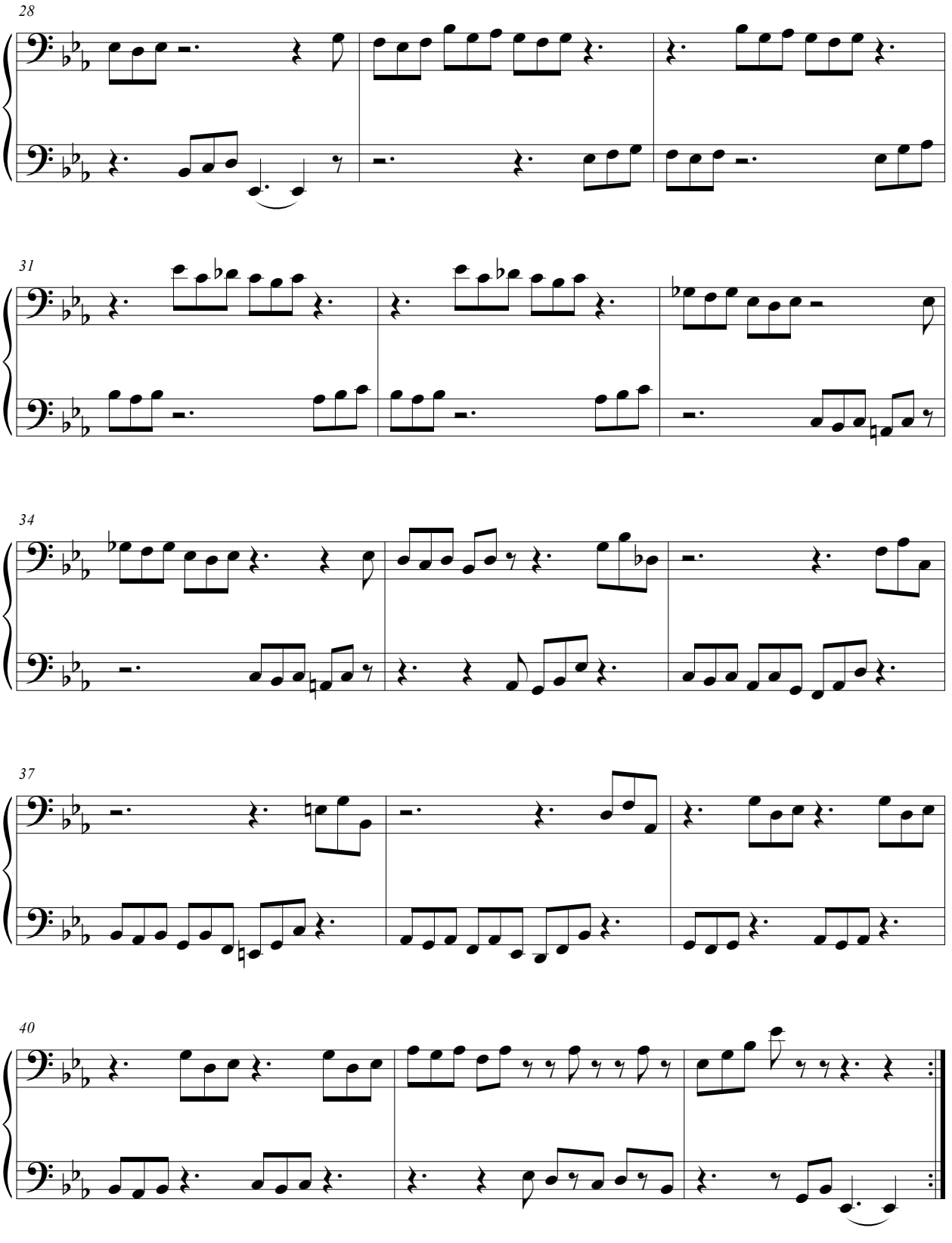
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Suite No. 5 in C minor

Unlike the first three, Suites 4, 5 and 6 lack a common structural "seed," and get progressively longer and more varied in their expression. As the middle of the second set, **Suite No. 5** is written in a minor key - like Suite No. 2 - and is an important transition to Suite No. 6 in length and complexity. The color that comes to mind is purplish-black, maybe because I hear the beginning as very dramatic, the feeling of C minor recalling the introduction of Beethoven's piano Sonata Op. 13 (known as "The Pathetique") and Bach's own keyboard Partita No. 2. Bach adds a little hurdle for the cellist by indicating a different, lower tuning of the highest string, from A natural, which doesn't "belong" in C minor to G, the dominant. He actually transcribed this Suite himself for the lute, as BWV 995.

The Prelude of Suite No. 5 is actually a prelude and fugue, written in two distinct sections. The introduction in French Overture style sustains long implied pedal points (C for nine measures and G for five measures) before a glimpse of the relative E-flat major in m. 17. After this brief ray of light we are immediately cast back into despair of G minor in mm. 18-21. A C minor 7^{th} chord in m. 22 starts an improvisatory transition to the second section: in much faster 3/8 time, structurally a fugue, despite being notated in one voice only. This movement is an excellent demonstration of Bach's "implied counterpoint" craftsmanship: even the fugue's subject contains a sequence of three ascending notes which may be interpreted as a dialogue. He dresses the subject and its components in various guises with virtuosity and humor, going through a multitude of keys. In m. 171 we have a "deceptive" G pedal point which feels like a final cadence but instead results in a coda of sorts, repeating the subject then pushing off the same low G into ascending arpeggios in mm. 189-195, ending on a G7 chord. The subject is stated for the last time in m. 197 and even extended with a third internal sequence, (in the recording I play left-hand octaves in mm. 197-203 and 206). Then the bass leads from F to F# to a G before plunging us back down into a low C, starting the closing fifteen measures which contain yet another chromatic – and therefore dramatic – ascent in the bass from C, D, E flat to E natural, F to F sharp to G. Playing the last page of this Prelude makes me feel more like a rock guitarist than a classical pianist. Approximate target tempi are: prelude at 63 per quarter, then fugue at 72 per dotted quarter note.

After the intense ending of the Prelude, the **Allemande** feels very stately, more of a march than a dance, maybe even a funeral one, its dotted rhythms and 32nd notes echoing the French Overture opening. Bach writes an abundance of chords, more than in any preceding Allemande, with clearly indicated harmony changes. Target tempo is around 80 per quarter note.

Our **Courante,** the only one written in 3/2 time, sounds quite energetic and direct, I'd play it at 88 per half note. This movement, like the Allemande, has harmonies punctuating almost every measure, exaggerating the first beats and making the phrase endings sound almost abrupt. The mood is hard to pin down but the "stomping" feel of the downbeat and sharp rhythm make me think of a later dance form, the Polonaise, which usually has a different beat subdivision but is also in triple time.

The unusual harmonic blueprint of Suite No. 5 is continued in the **Sarabande**, written exclusively monophonically. It's almost like a "binary" computer language in that its building blocks are either pairs of 8th notes or single quarter notes. Speed: 60-72 per 8th note. I won't attempt to further describe this movement; hearing it speaks volumes where words fail. To me, it is the most perfect emanation, the soul of the entire Cello Suites cycle.

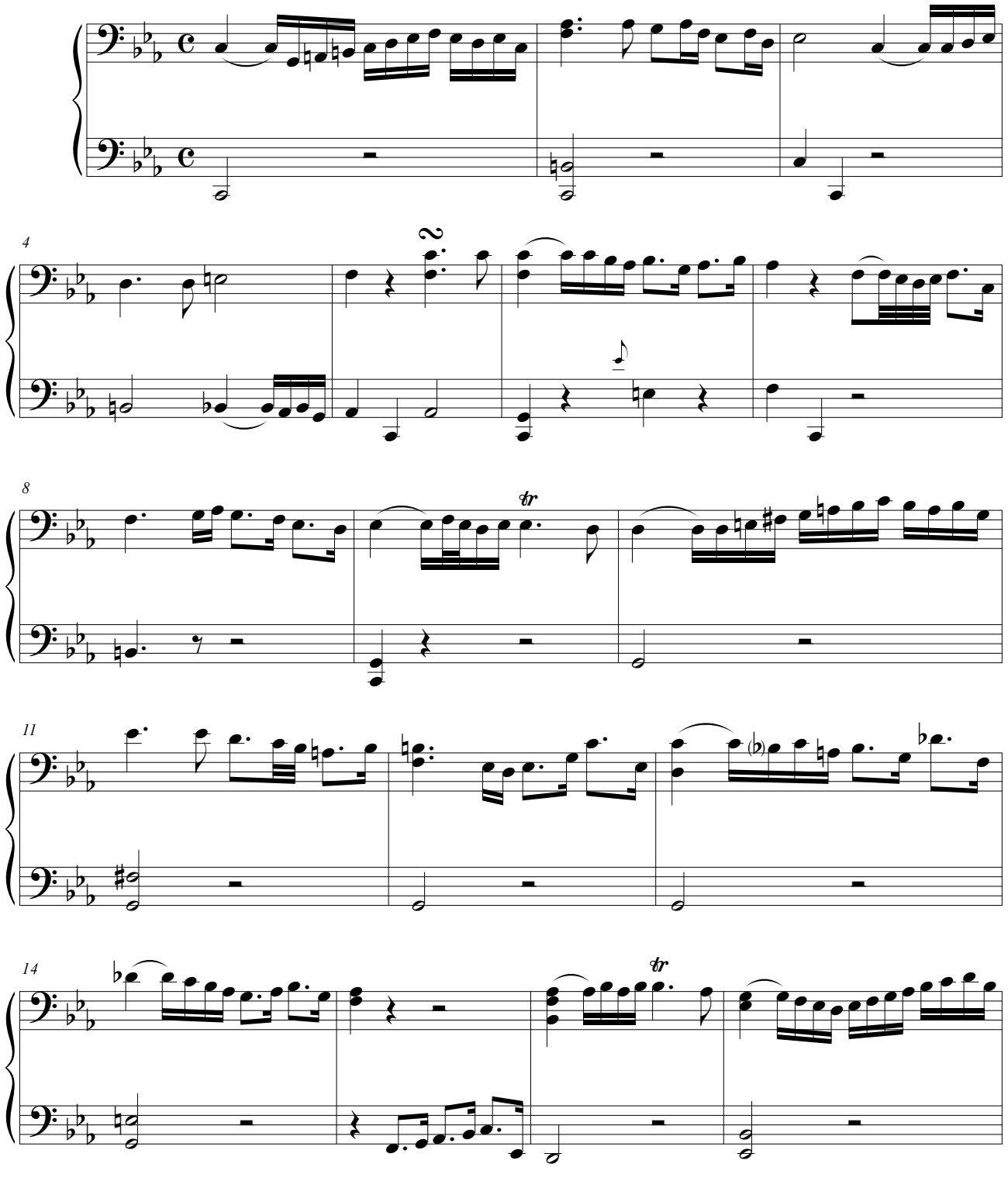
Gavotte I is a bit melancholic, still carrying a residue of the Sarabande, but with playful little echoes. **Gavotte II,** in the same key of C minor, is a single legato line in triplet rhythm, sounding like something Brahms might have written, very passionate and rhapsodic. Here Bach twice repeats the content of the short four-measure first half during the eighteen-measure second half, so I think it makes sense not to take this particular repeat. The pair sounds good in the same tempo – with some rubato possible in Gavotte II – at around 69 per half note.

This **Gigue** is in French style, built on short repeated dotted-rhythm fragments with many sequences, and written in 3/8 time. The relentless drive and fast tempo seem surprisingly interrupted by long notes. For the repeats, in mm. 15, 18, 61 and 64, I liked the idea of inserting the dotted thematic fragment underneath the held notes, re-filling the rhythmic "negative space" in a way. In mm. 55-56, Bach creates two consecutive chromatic trills culminating in the highest note of the movement, an F above middle C. After such a moment of drama, the final descent sounds even more authoritative. A good tempo would be 80 per dotted quarter note.

Cello Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011

Prelude

J.S. Bach
Arr. E. Bindman



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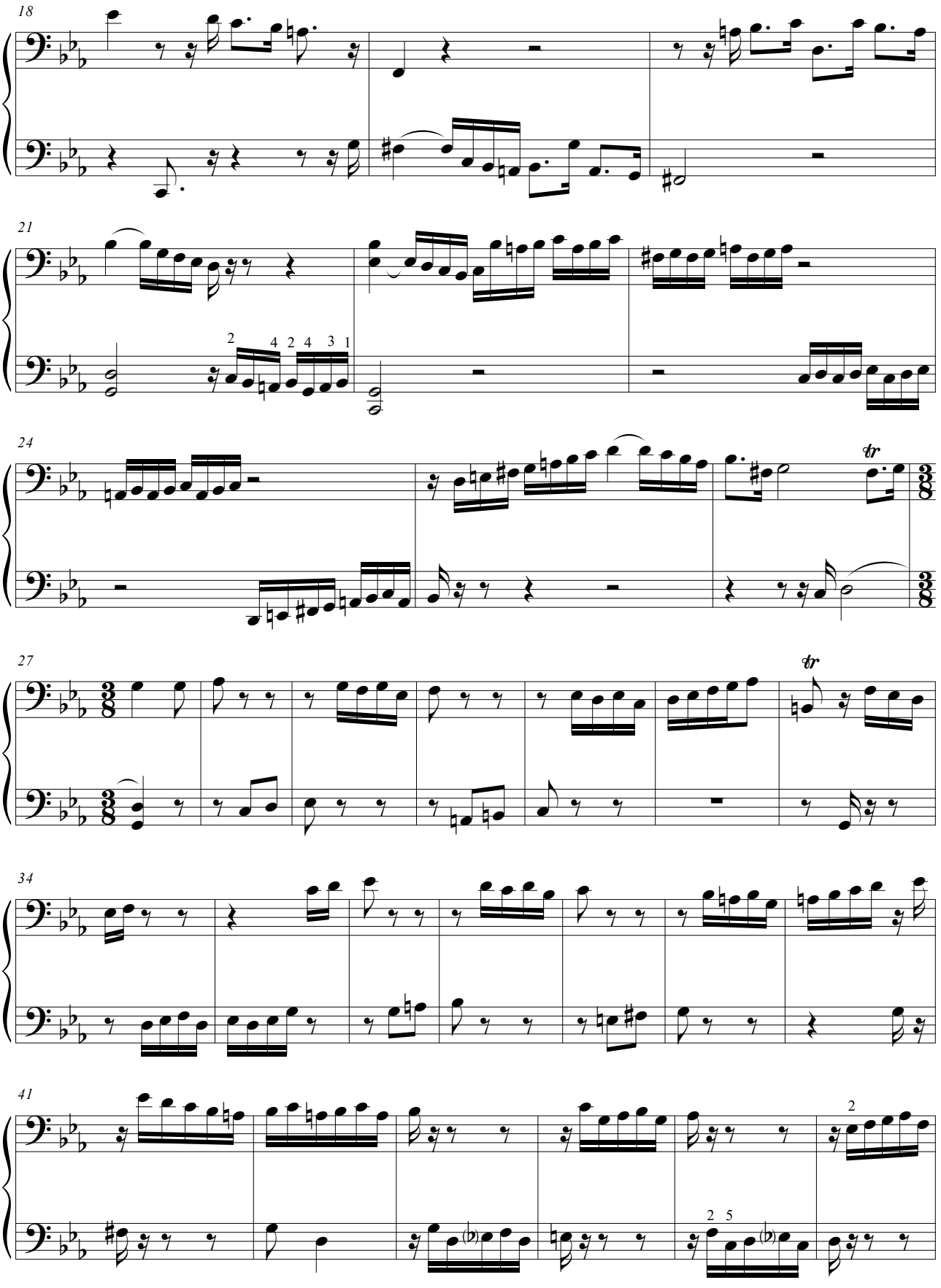
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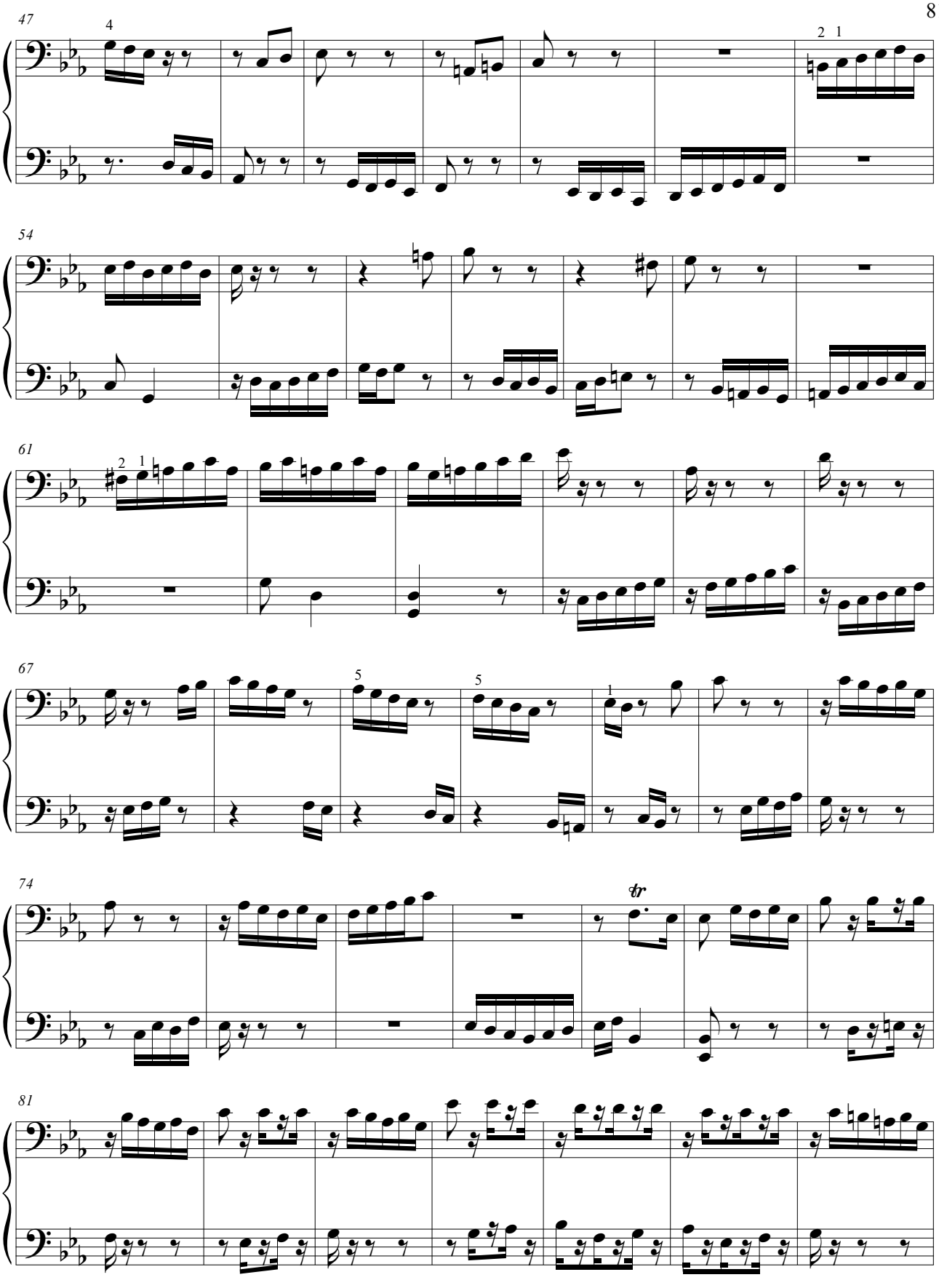
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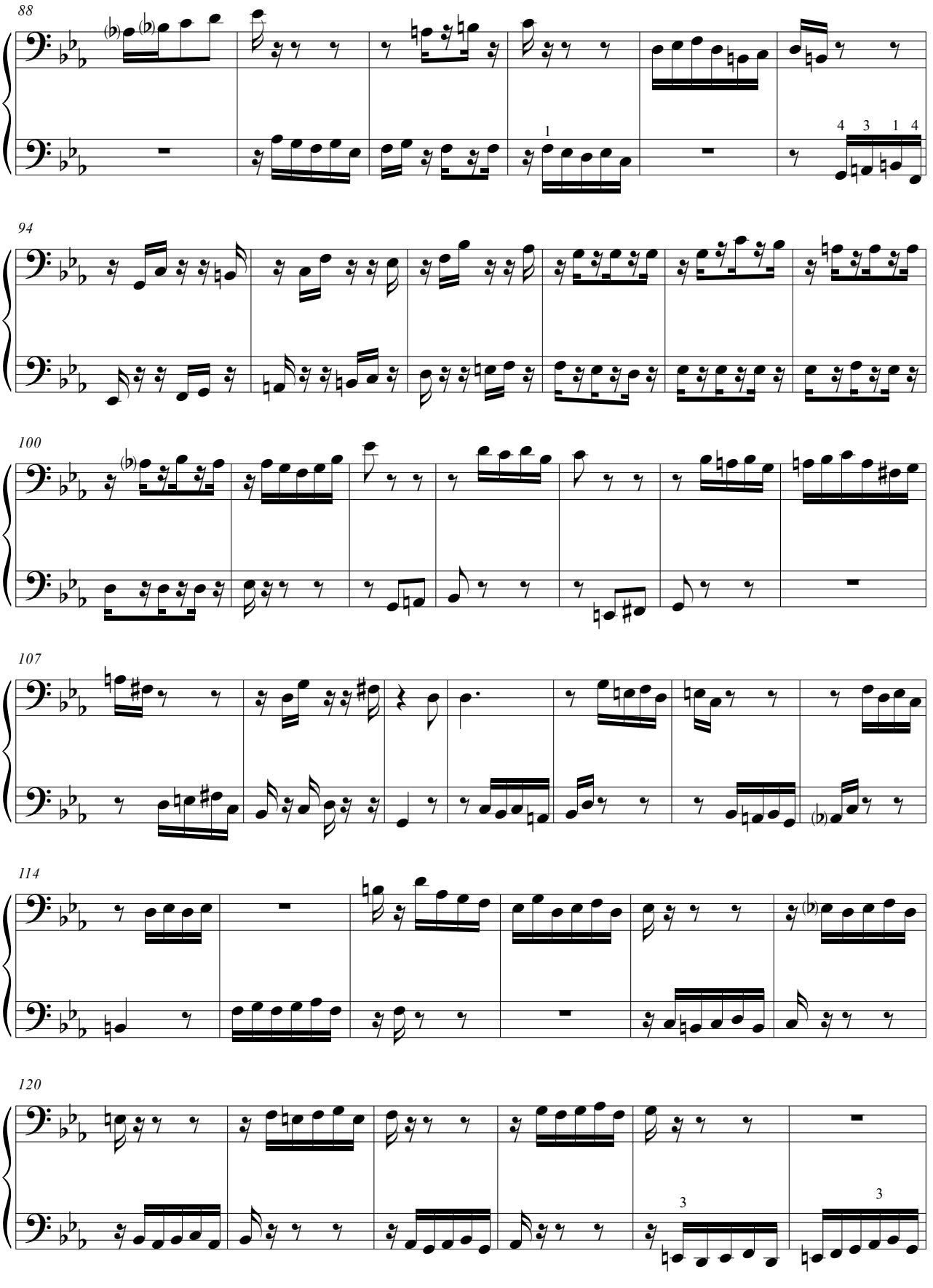
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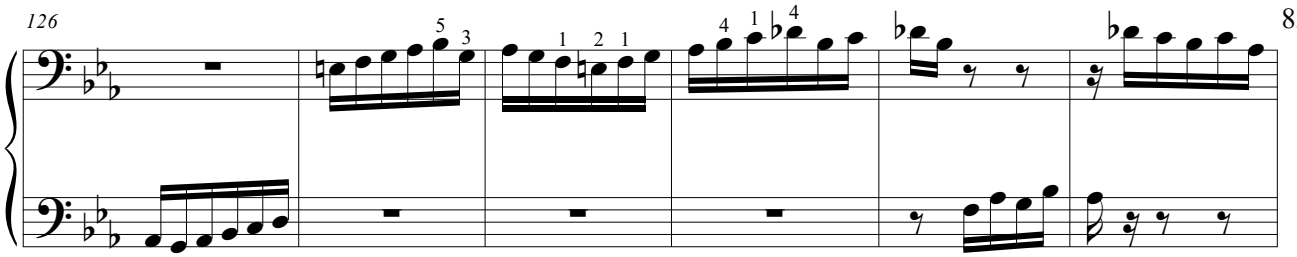

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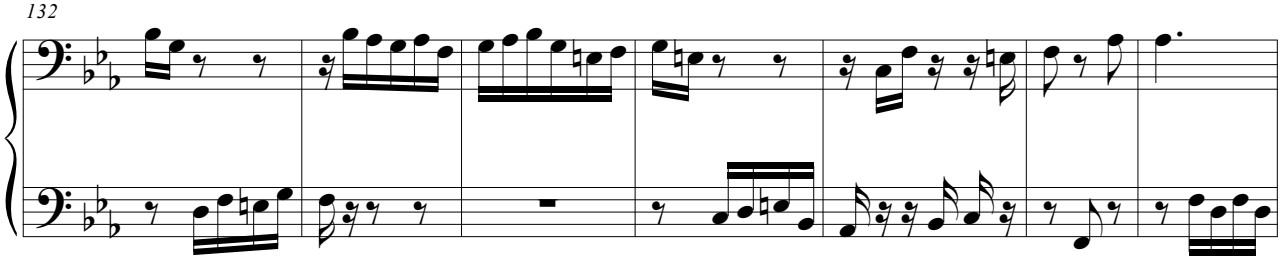

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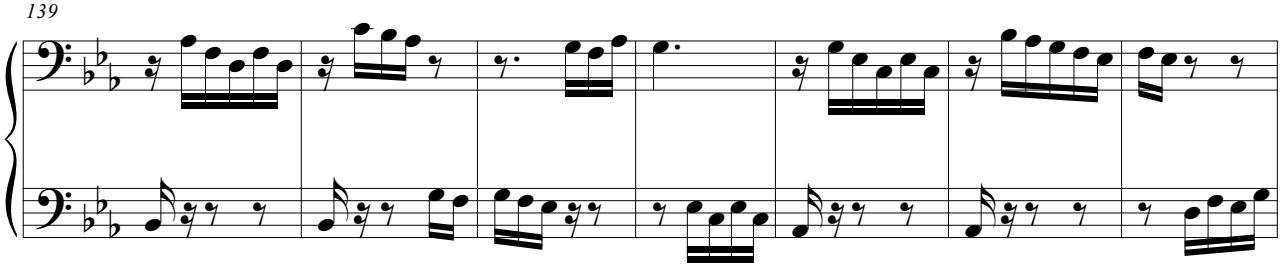

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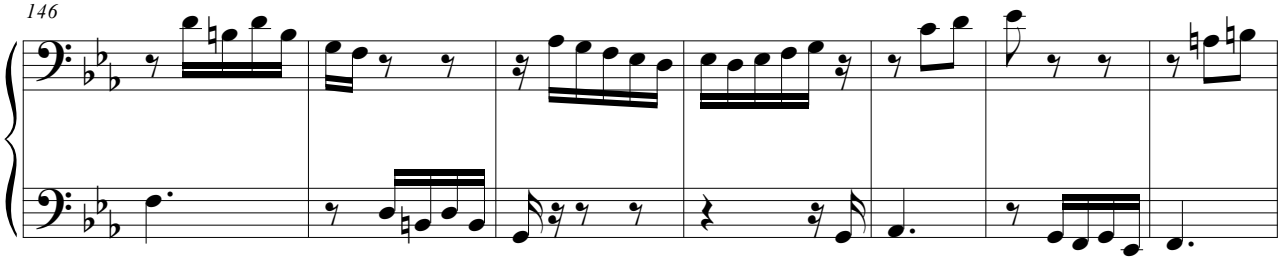

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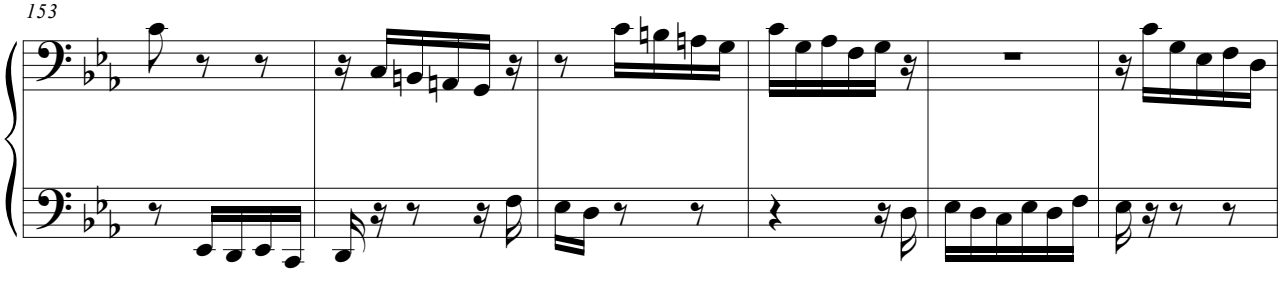

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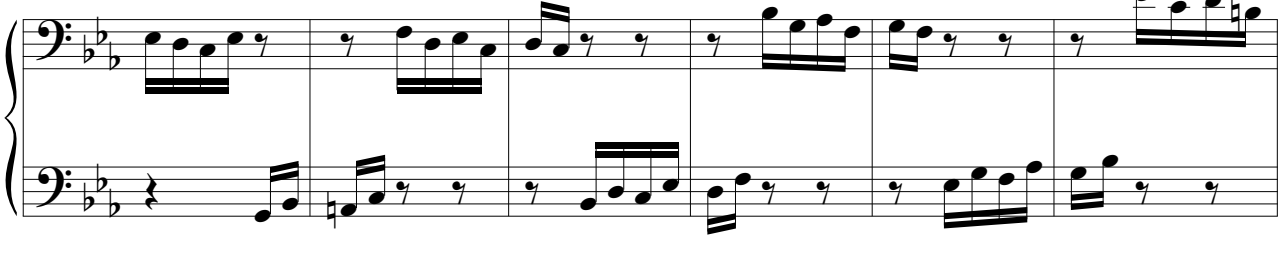

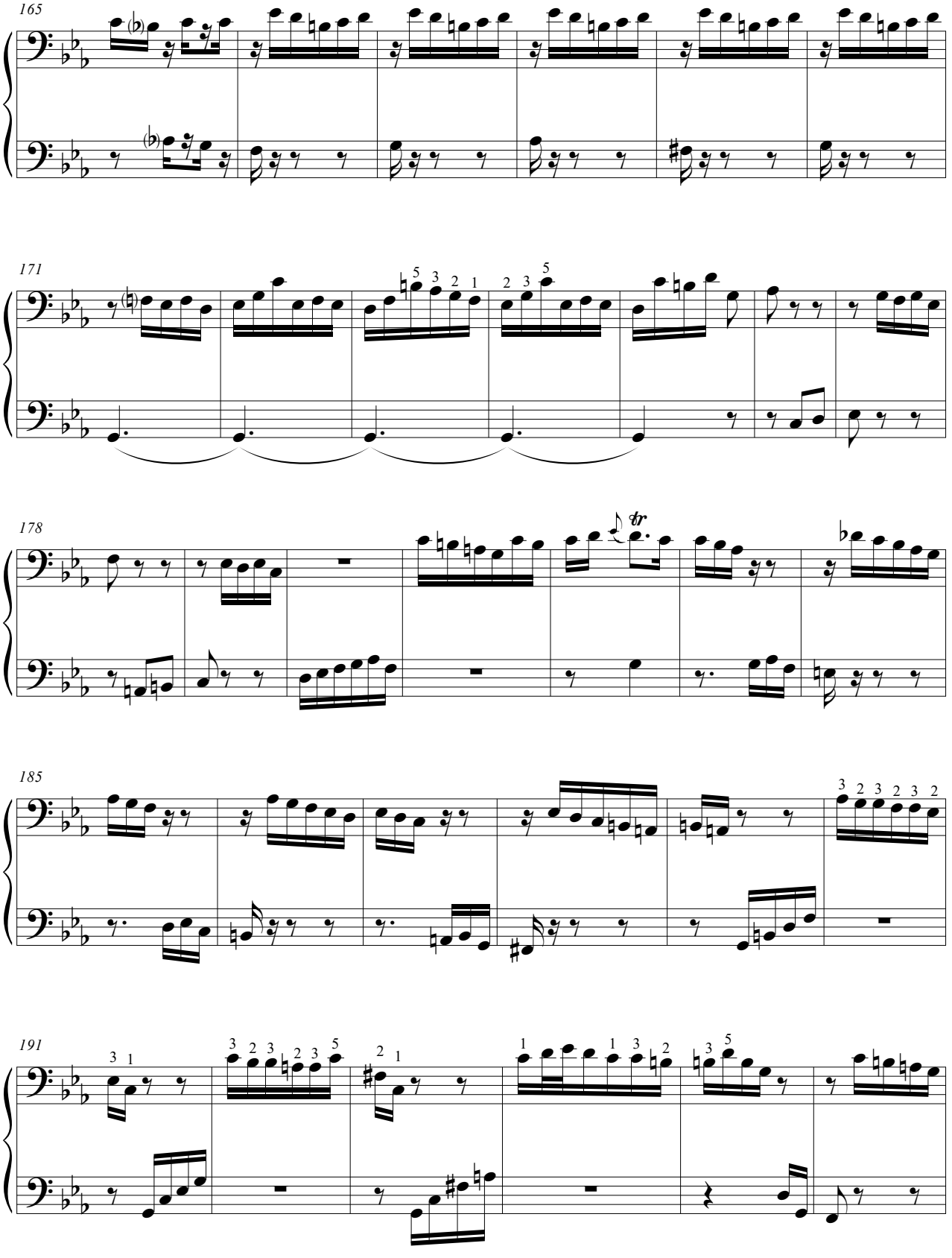
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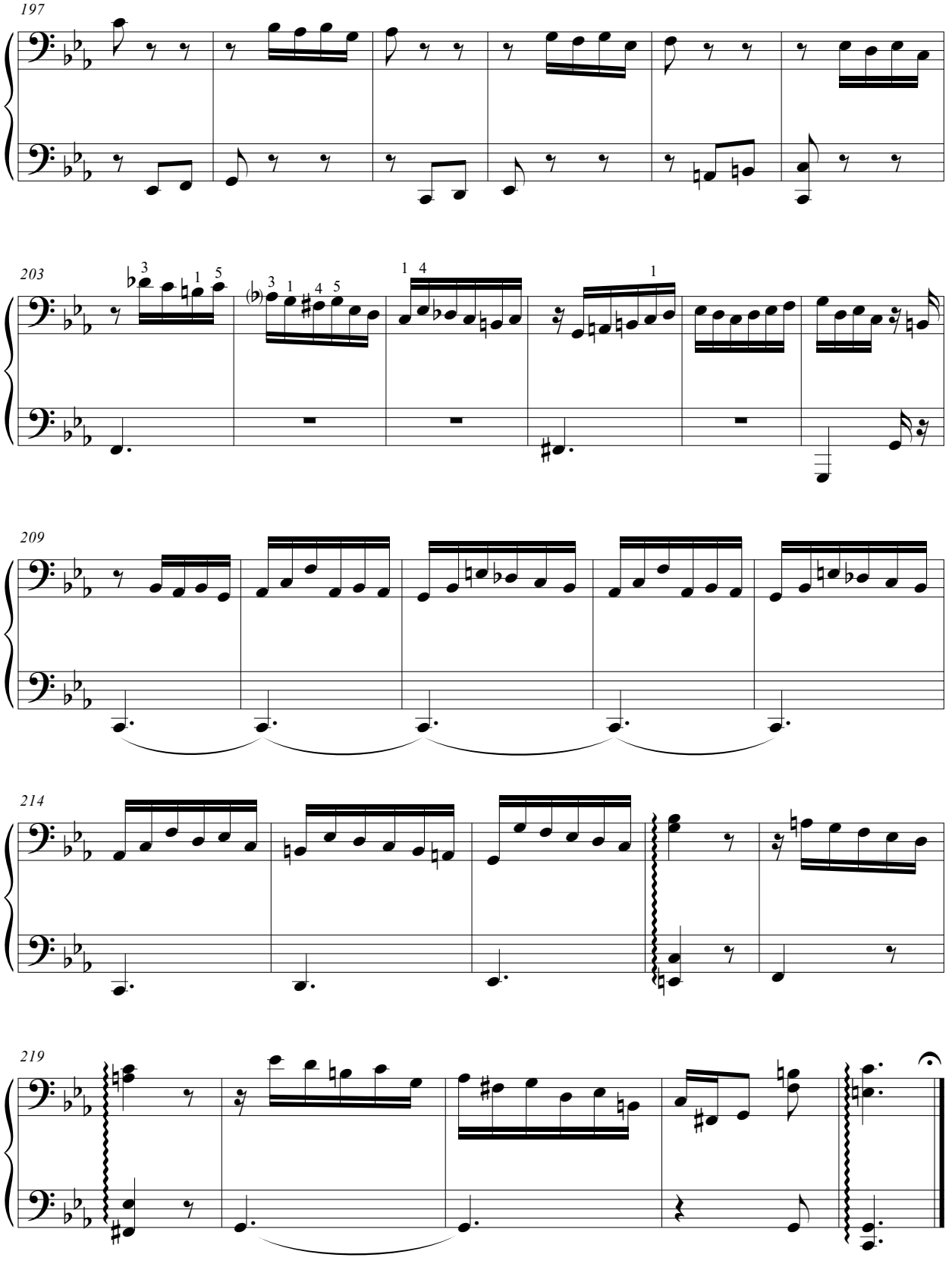
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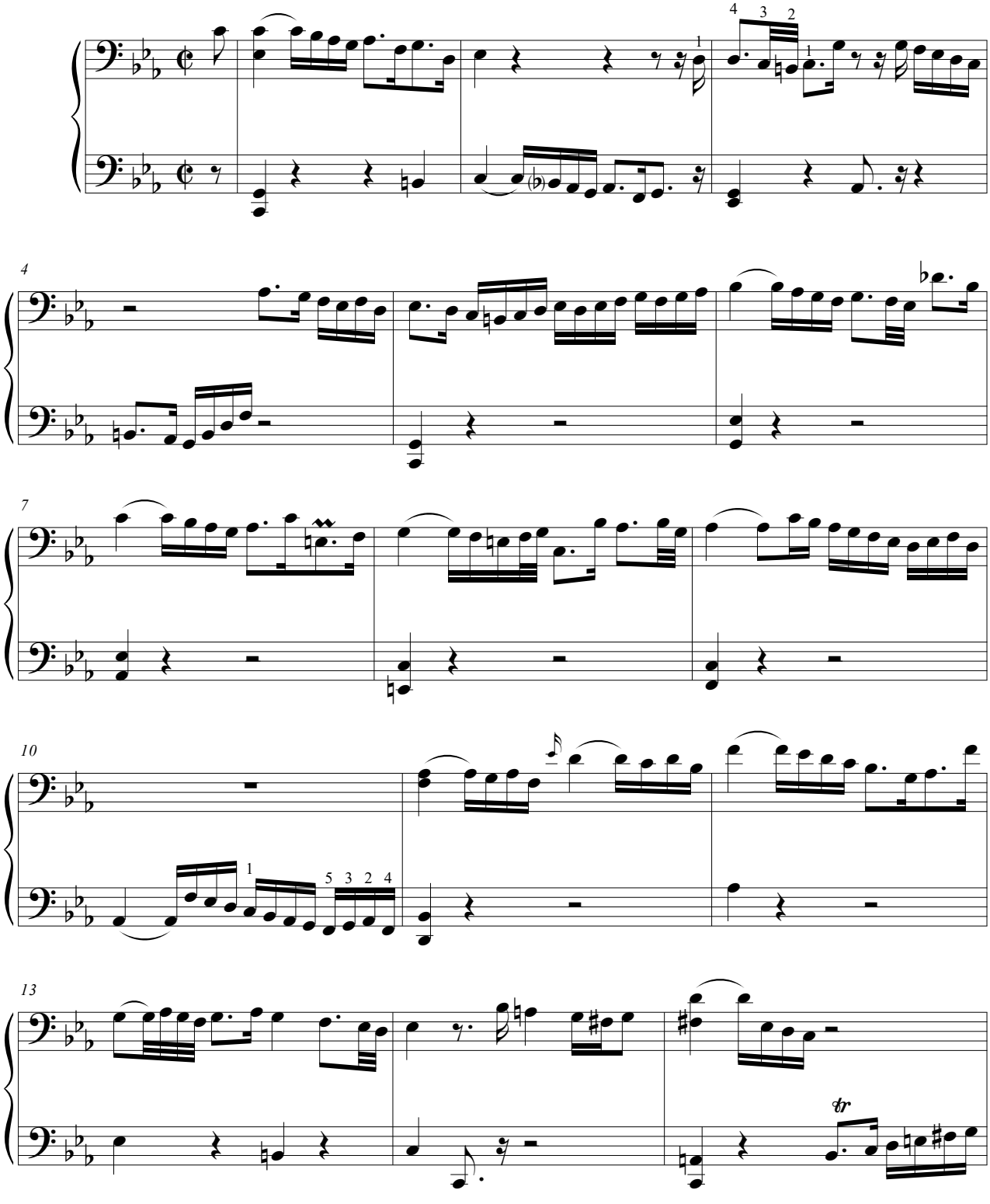
Allemande



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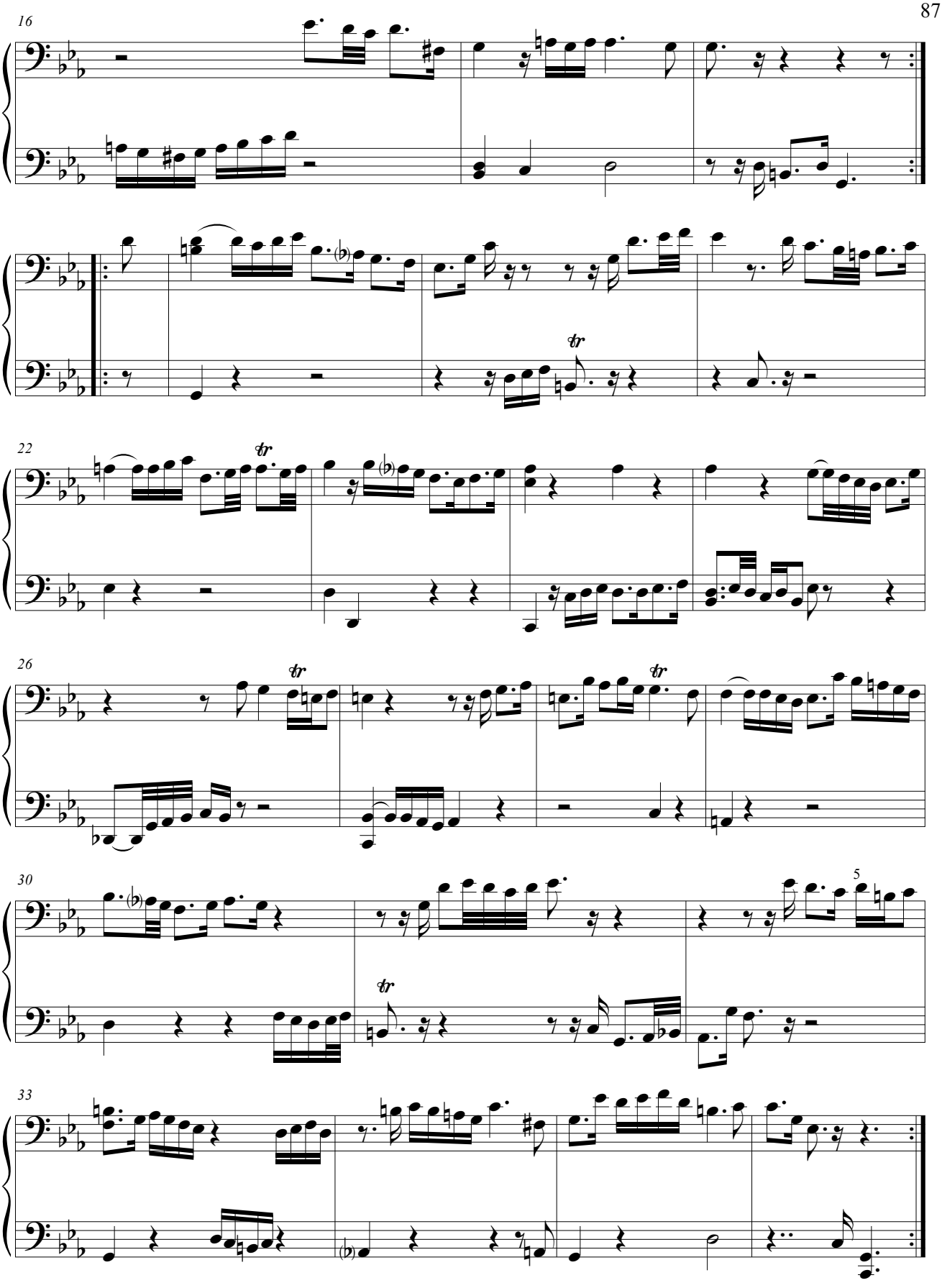
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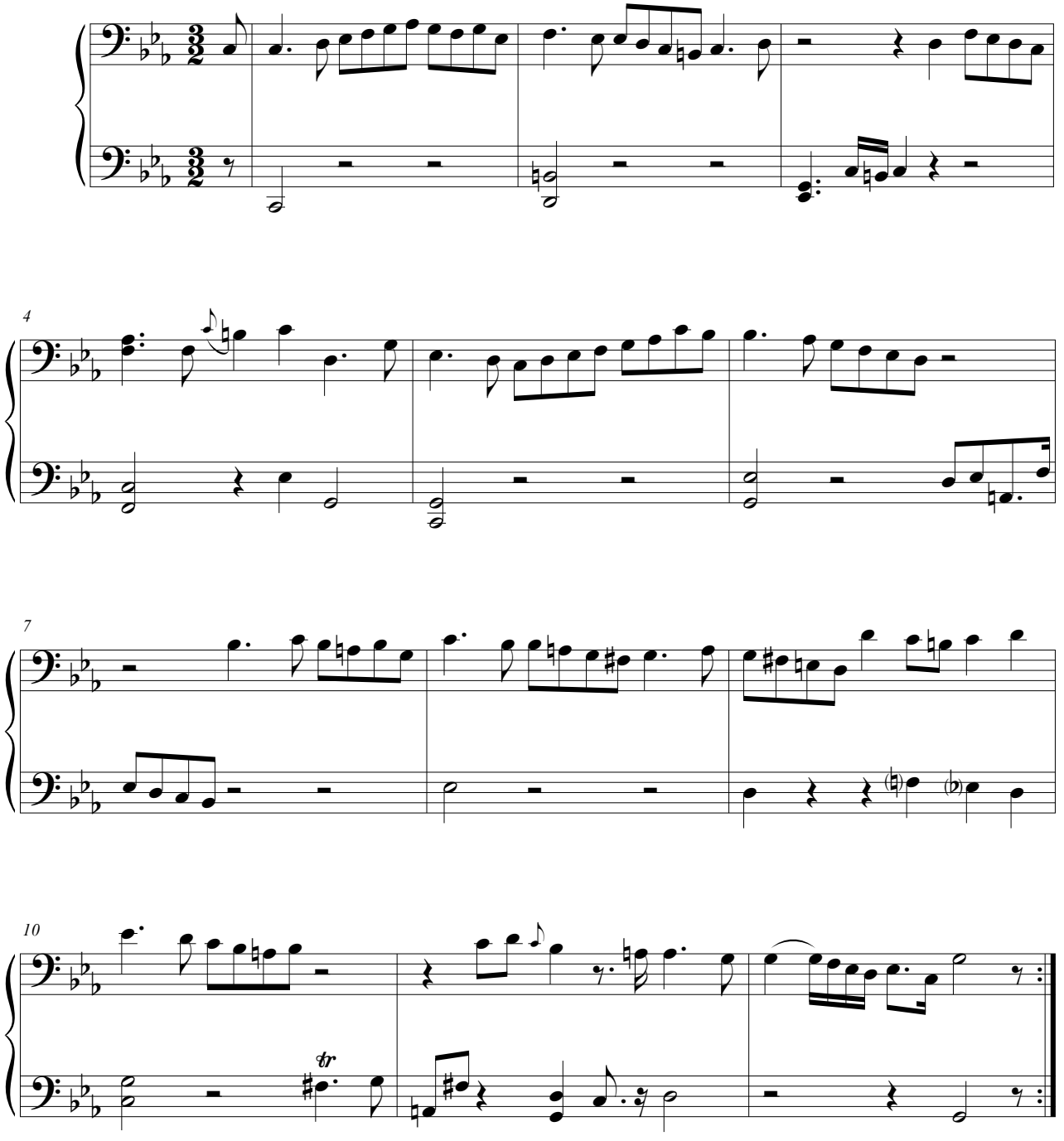
Courante



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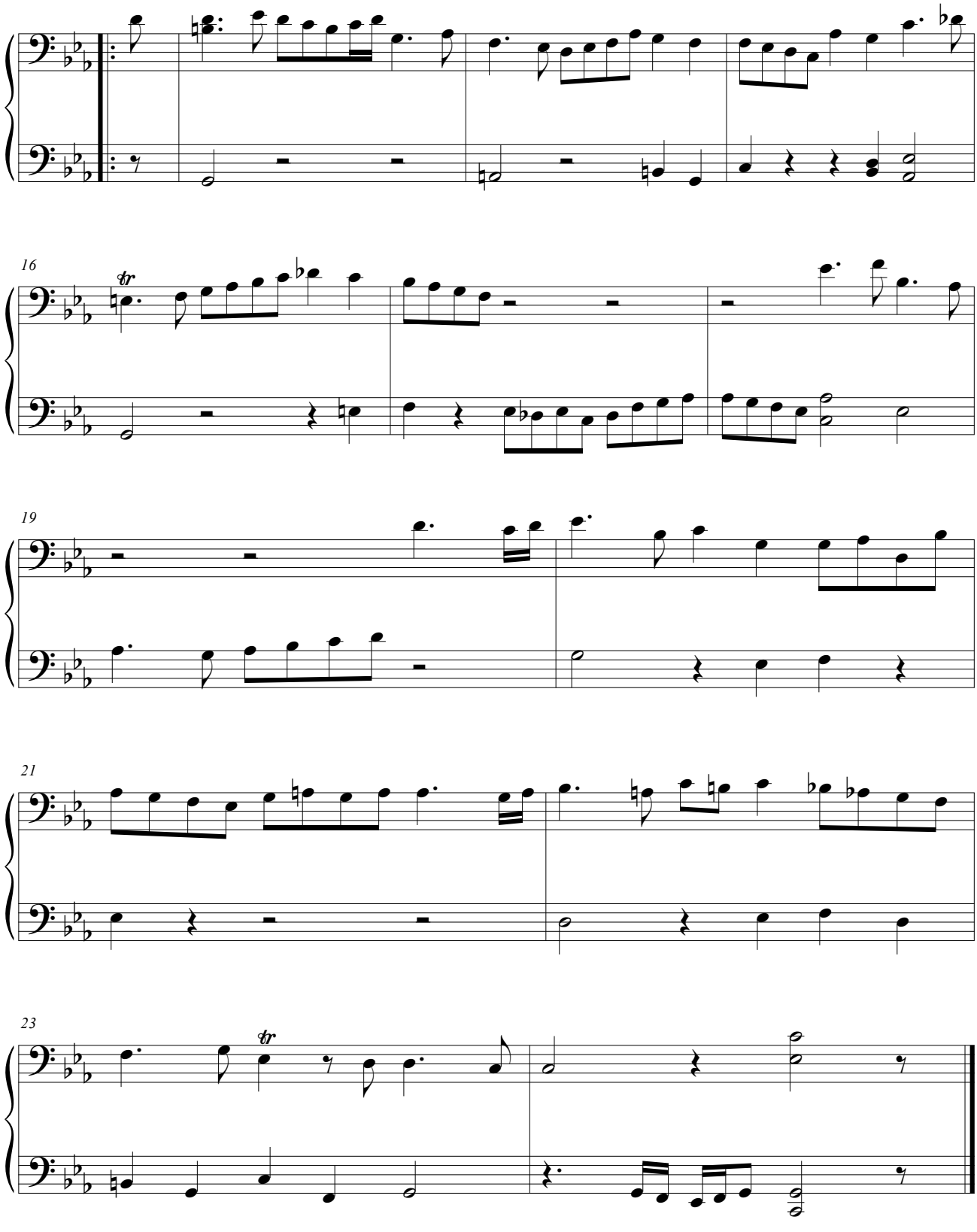
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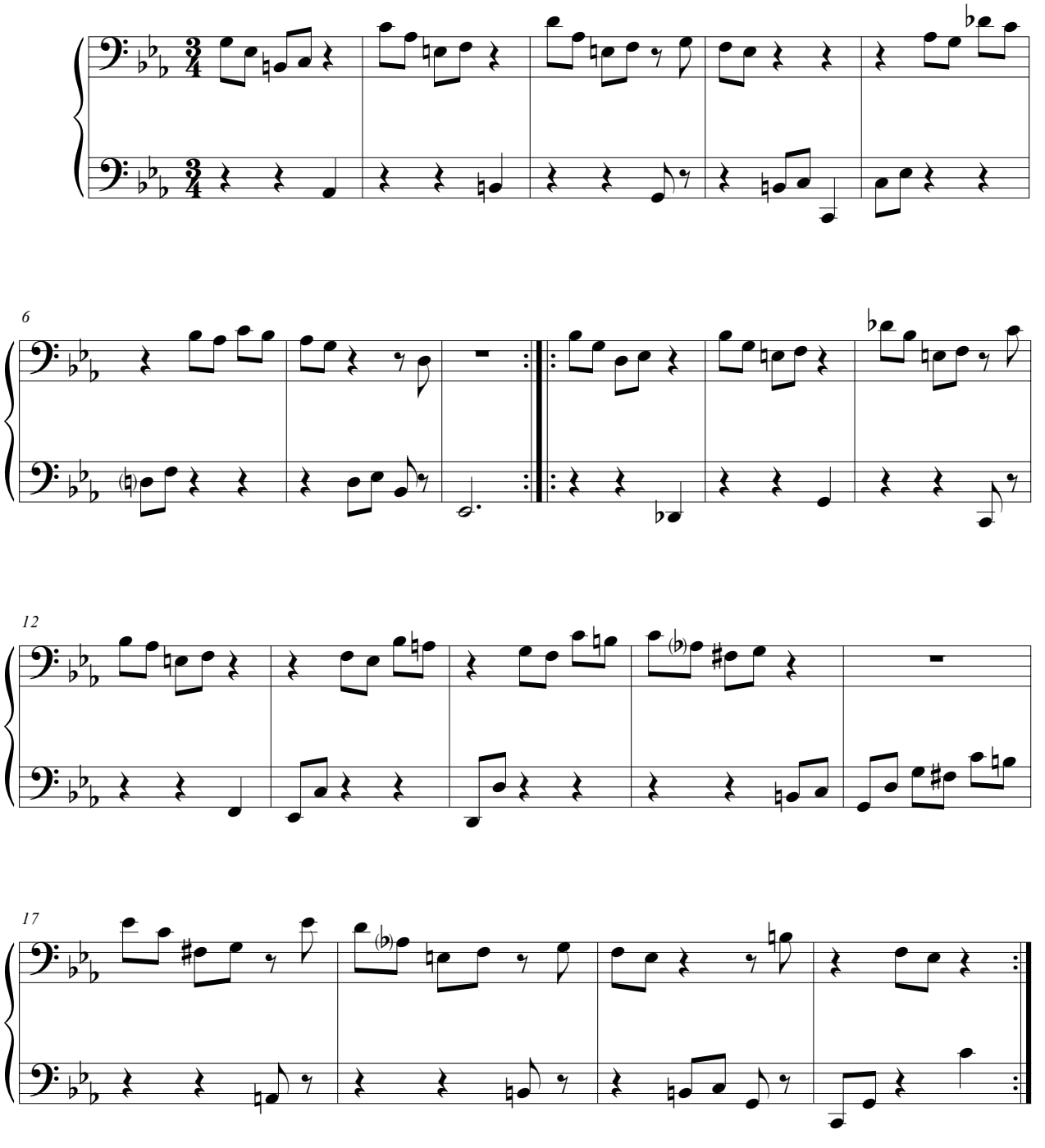
Sarabande



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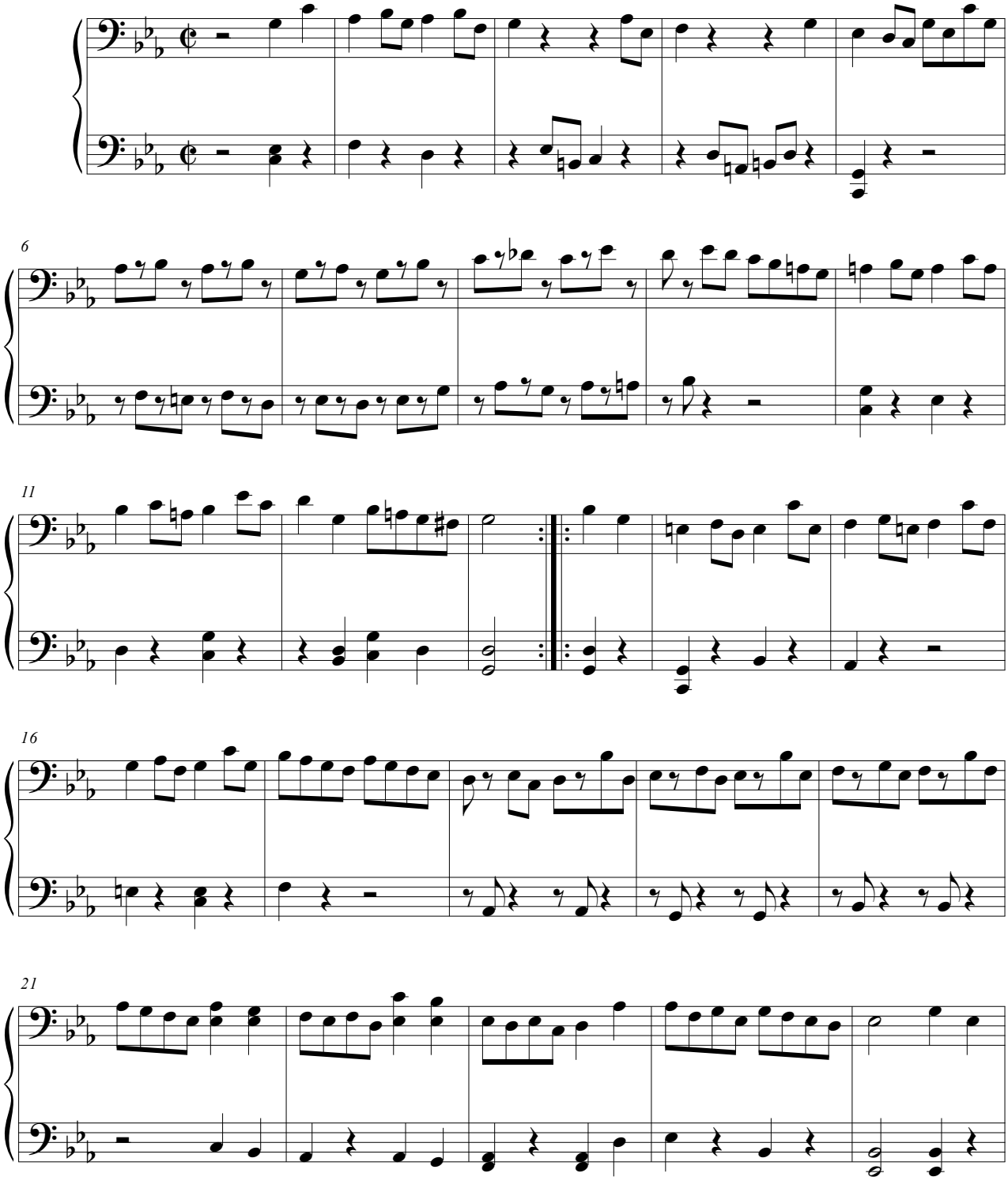
Gavotte I



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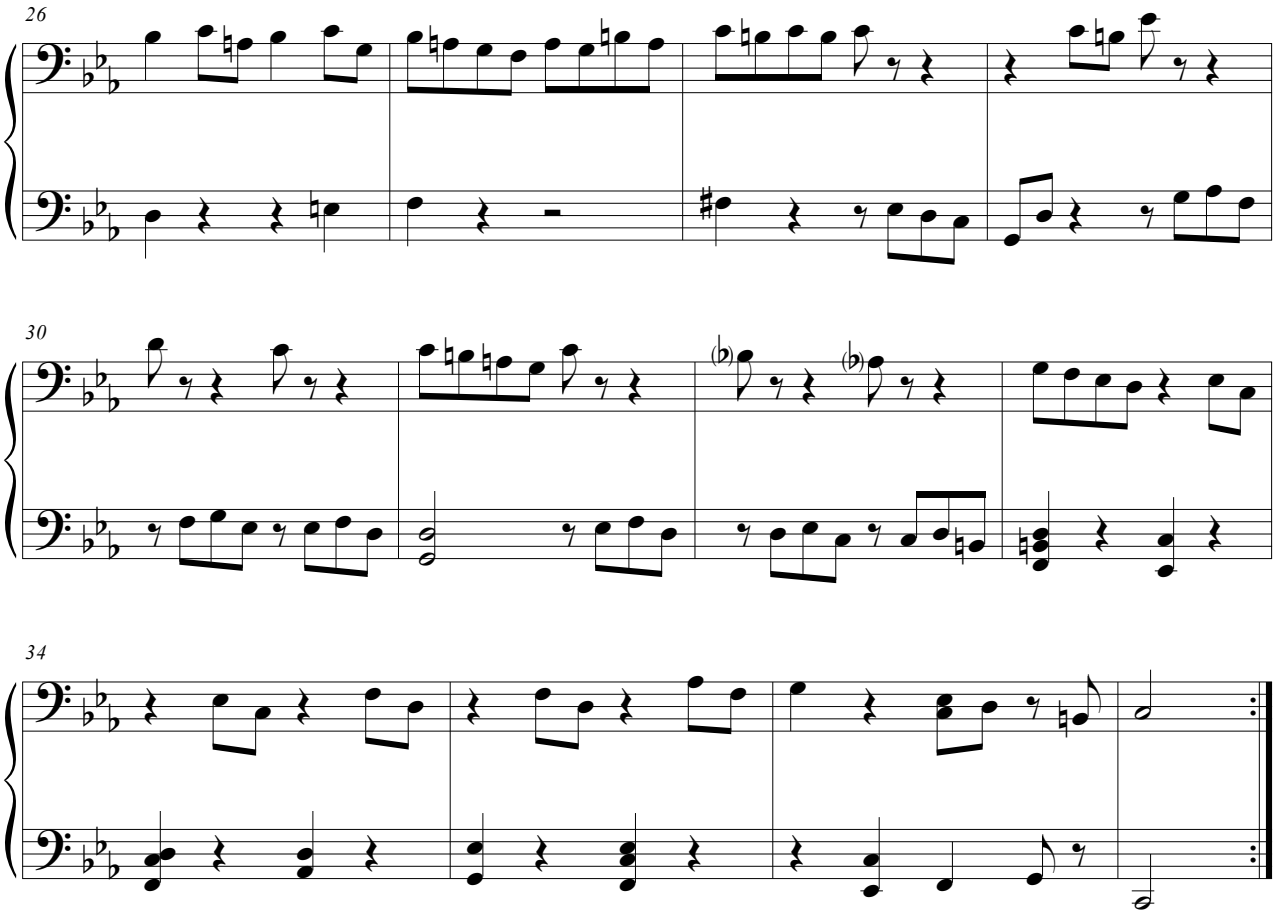
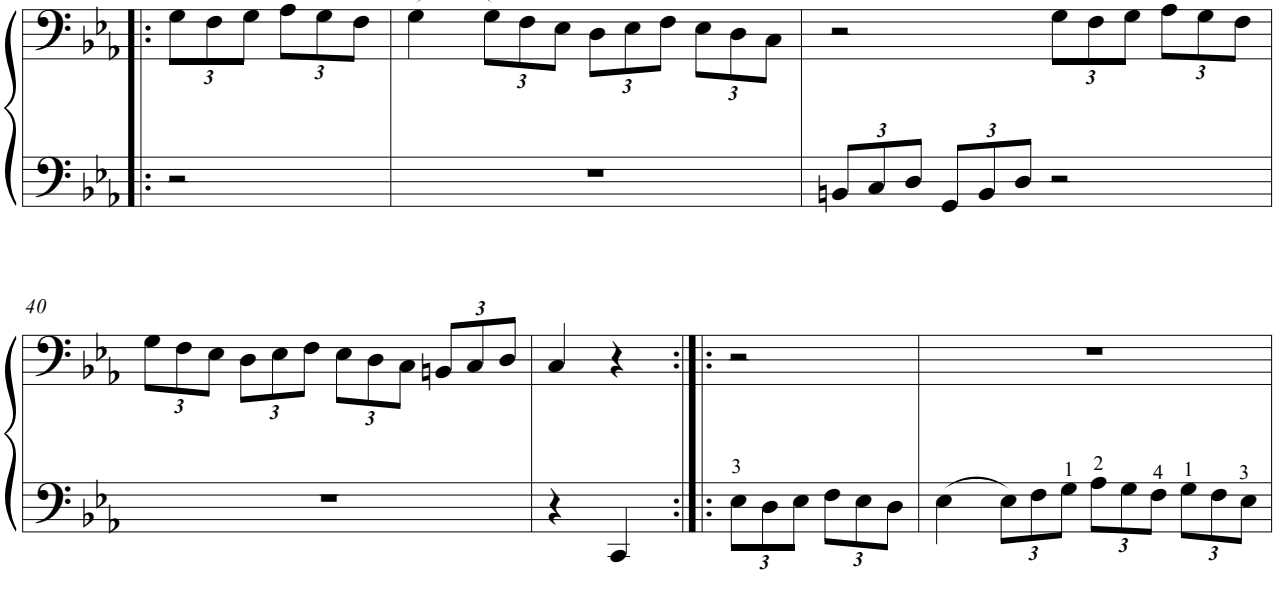
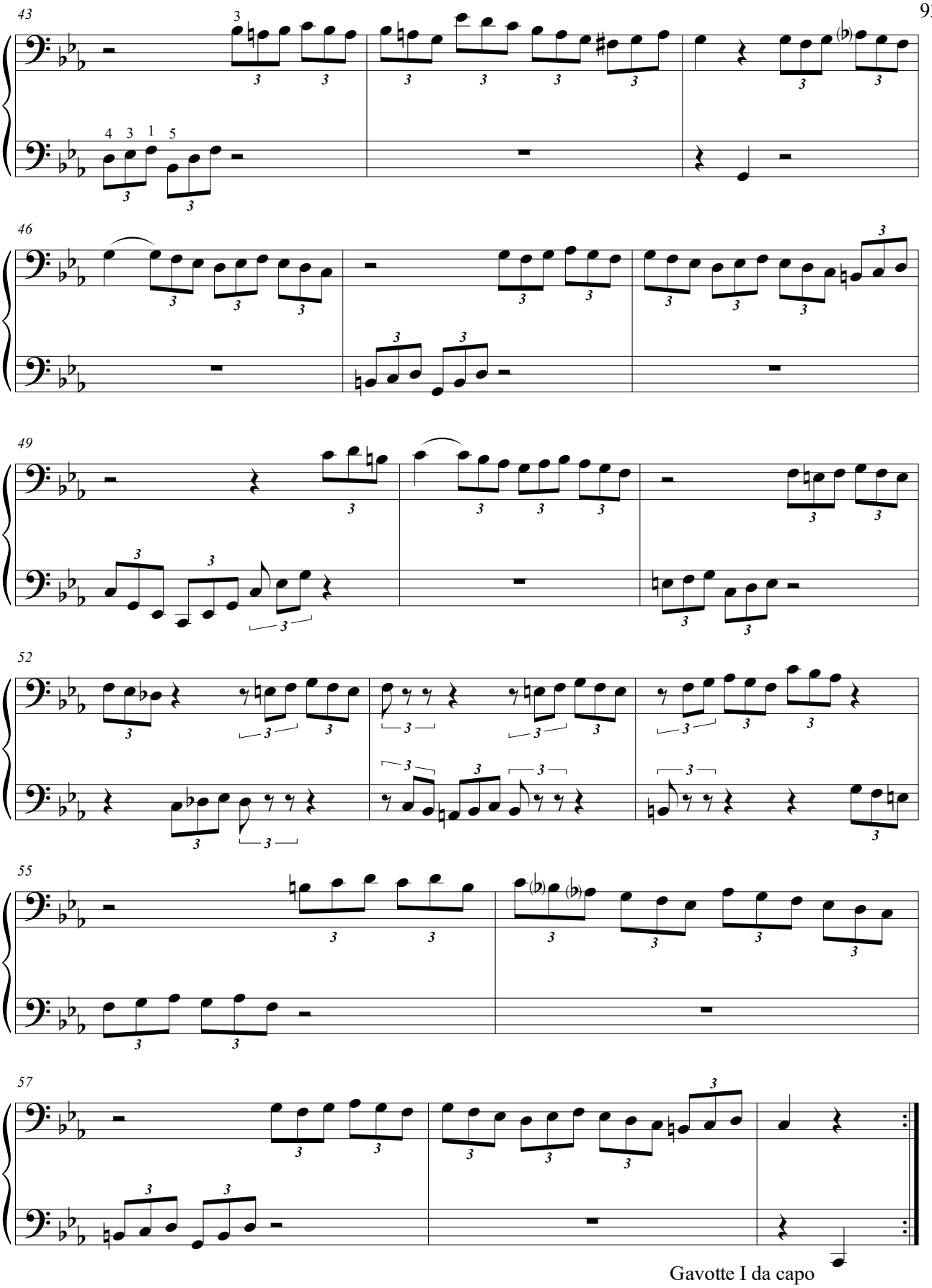


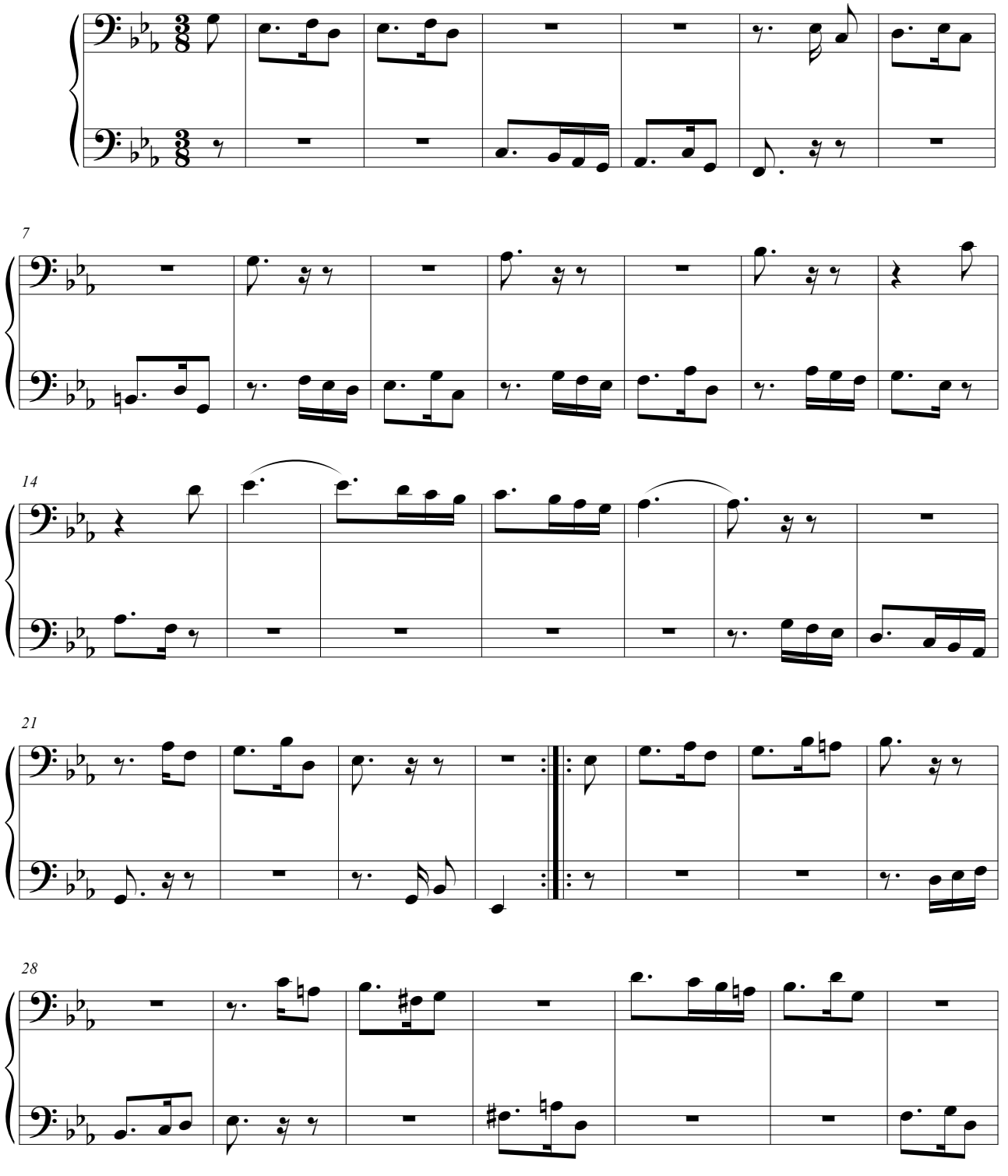
Gavotte II





Gavotte I da capo

Gigue



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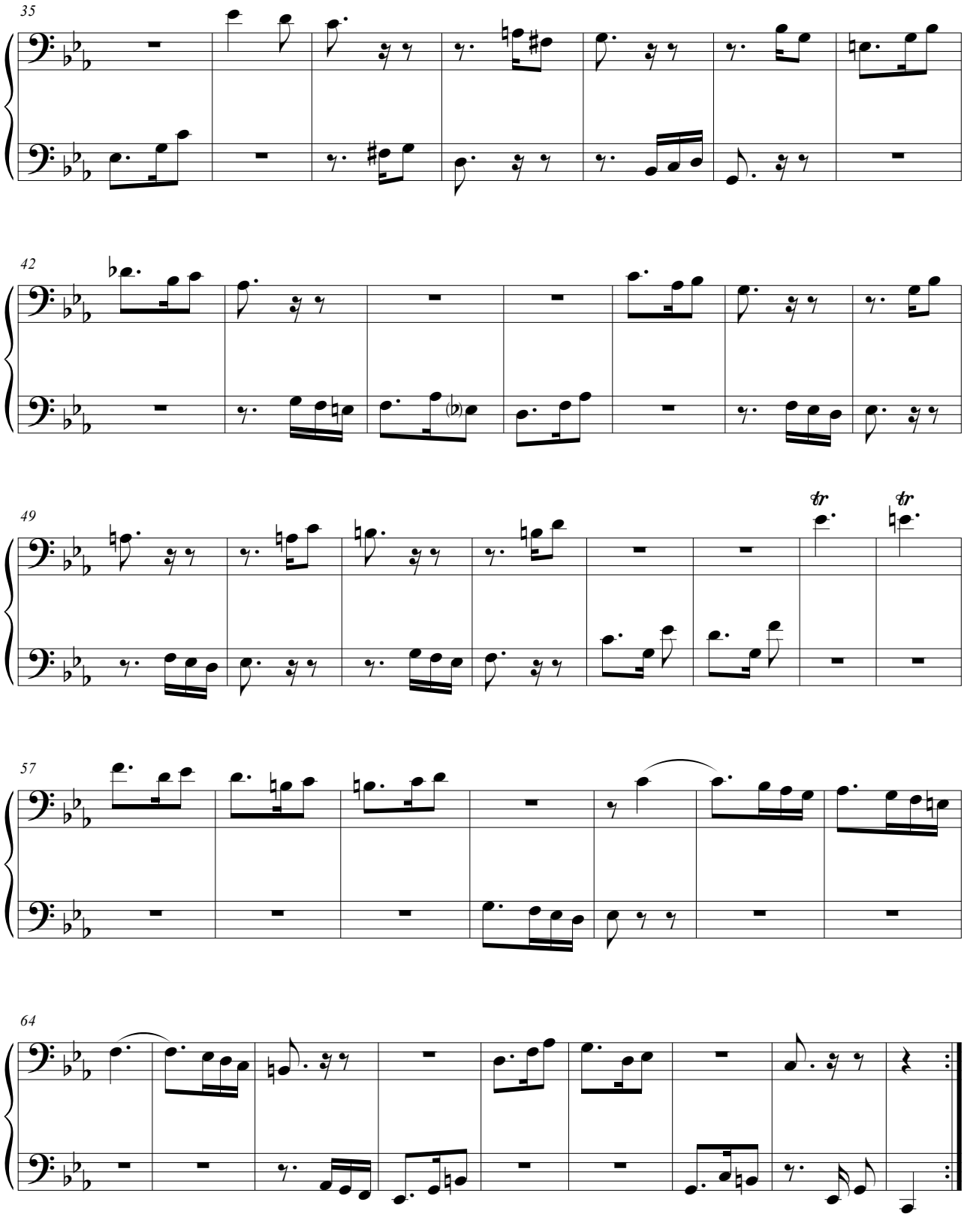
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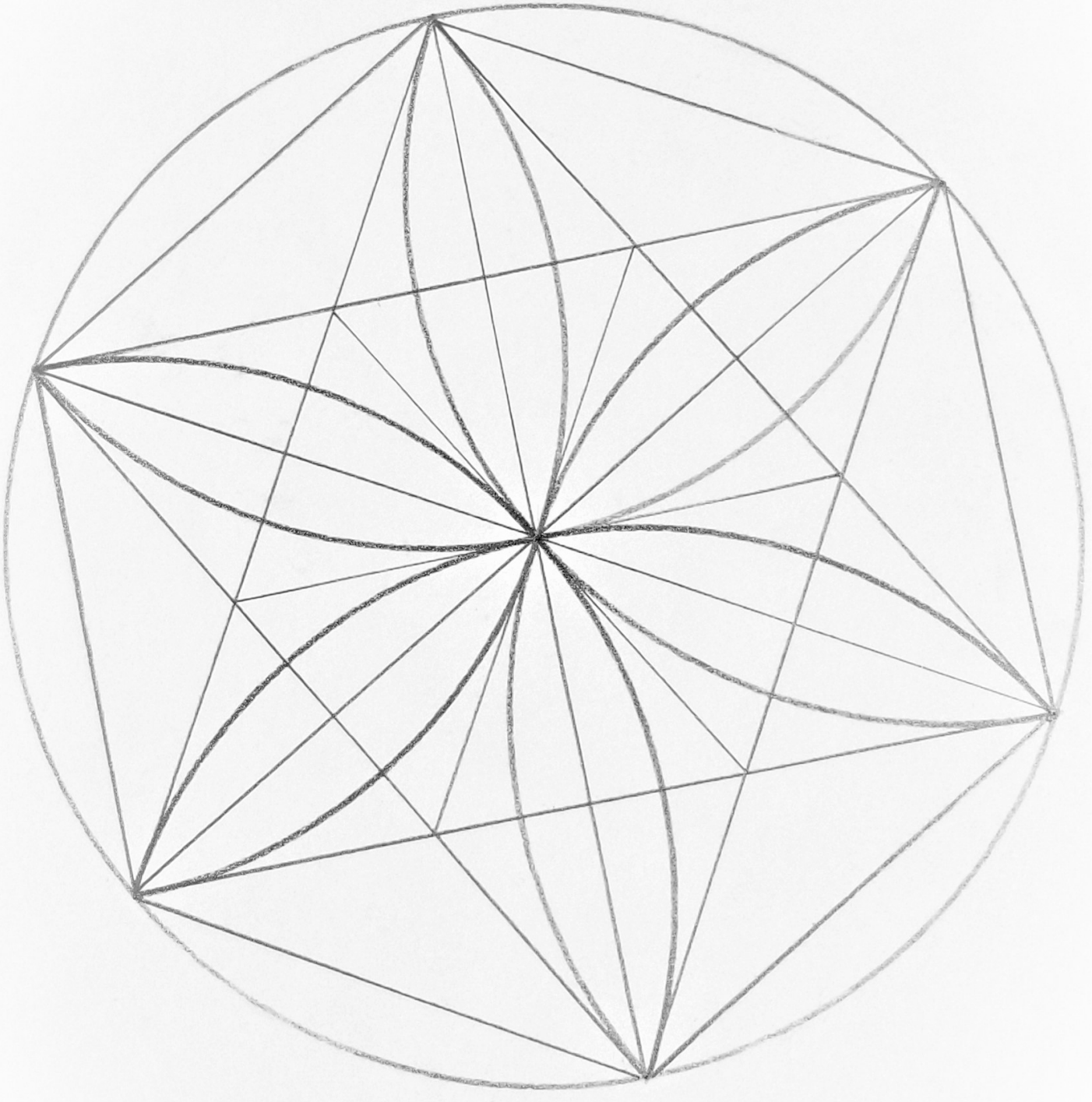


Suite No. 6 in D major

Since Cello Suite No. 6 was written for a five-string instrument, it has the widest range, reaching more than an octave above middle C. It is also the longest of the Suites and the most harmonically rich. Because of its increased treble range and chord density, Suite No. 6 really blossoms on the piano. In addition, the bright and sunny key we associate with Beethoven's "Ode To Joy," D major, adds a particularly jubilant character to this last installment of the cycle. I can't help but wonder if Bach was thinking that writing in "D," the first letter of Dominus Deus, would be a fitting ending mode for the set. After all, we do know that he kept the Creator in mind when he was composing.

The character of the **Prelude,** like in Suite No. 4, changes when transcribed for the piano: as the repeated notes naturally adapt to two hands it speeds up and plays like a toccata. Of course one needs to be careful not to start too fast because there are 16th notes at the end and they need to be clear. This is the only movement where the Anna Magdalena autograph contains stray "echo" dynamic markings which I include in the score. These dynamics are more appropriate for a cello's more restrained tempo; at a faster speed they may seem unnecessary especially in the beginning, but that's a matter of taste. I prefer to use the Forte/Piano echo effect for the many later iterations of the theme as well as in mm. 23-30. It's also advisable to designate some generally soft sections when the theme is absent, like in mm. 41-53, for instance. The dotted rhythms followed by faster notes in the mm. 78-80 sequence shouldn't be read strictly; they are just long notes followed by a "roll" to a 6^{th} above. I use the right pedal in mm. 59, 85 and 86, just for a change in texture. Although the chords in mm. 98-99 are broken up by most cellists, I found Mstislav Rostropovich's no-nonsense blocked-chord rendition appealing and decided to follow suit.

Learning the **Allemande** initially feels like an exercise in counting because of the abundance of dotted rhythms and a myriad of 32nd and 64th-note combinations. As one internalizes the flow it reveals a subtly lyrical quality and a veritable treasure of harmonic overlay. The entire Allemande is only twenty measures long but it takes between seven and eight minutes to play it. It flows well at 40 per each 8th note. A pianist cannot get away with playing much faster here, as opposed to the Prelude, since each melodic, harmonic and rhythmic nuance claims its own time. This is anything but a dance, it's a song, a confession. A truly marvelous movement.

The **Courante** needs to provide a contrast between the sinuous Allemande and the equally expansive forthcoming Sarabande. It certainly delivers, presenting us with characteristic Courante features: an energetic dance feel, bouncy 8th-16th note rhythmic patterns as well as extensive runs of fast 16th notes. It needn't be too fast so many tempos will work; I prefer 100 per quarter note.

I already referred to Brahms – a composer who often turned to earlier music for inspiration – in my description of Gavotte II from Suite 5 and I can't help but think of him again when writing about this **Sarabande**. It's evocative of a Brahms Intermezzo, feels as if it had been written for the piano and resembles the Allemande in approach: another song-like piece, with expansive phrasing, longer 3/2 measures and rich harmonies. All chords in the score have the arpeggio signs next to them since our point of reference is the cello but for the keyboard a simple block-chord rendition would also be a sound choice. A variety of tempi is possible here, as Bach truly takes a "Romantic" approach, abandoning the form in favor of content and writing with great sincerity and depth of emotion. See what feels right to you.

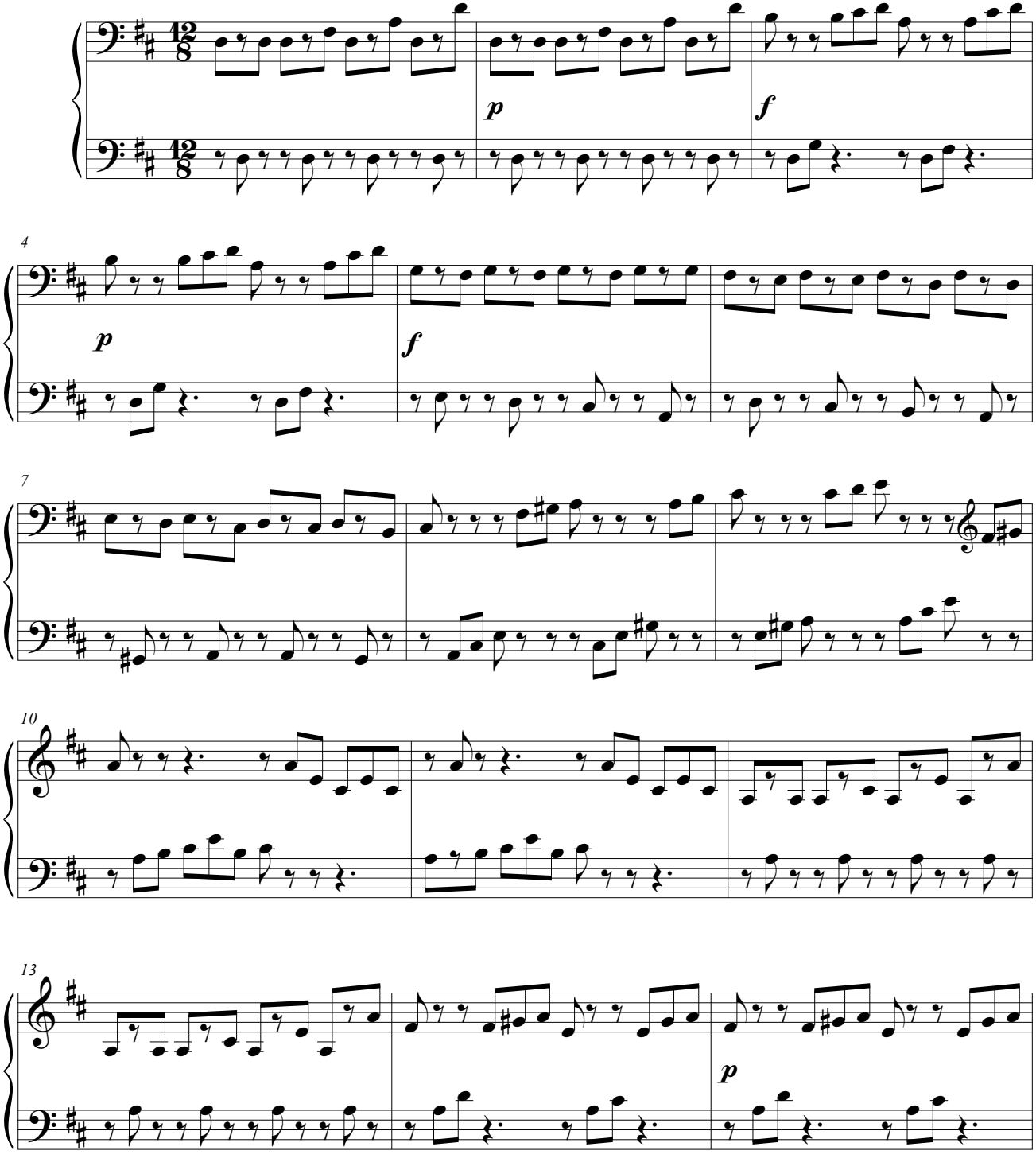
The Gavottes of Suite 6 are both in D major, delightful, viscerally satisfying and compelling us to move. **Gavotte I** is a richly harmonic catchy tune, reminiscent of many light-hearted movements from Bach's Orchestral Suites, listening to which is useful for determining the right character here. **Gavotte II**, because of its hurdy-gurdy drone accompaniment and the key of D major, has a personality similar to the famous Musette from the Anna Magdalena notebook. Just like in Gavotte II of the 5th Suite, Bach inserts the four-measure theme of part 1 twice inside part 2 so a repeat of the longer one seems unnecessary. 80-90 per half note is a good tempo.

The first eight measures of the last **Gigue** remind me very much of celebratory horn calls, perhaps at the conclusion of a successful hunt. It's a straightforward, uplifting movement with simultaneous layers of 8ths and 16th notes demanding a virtuosic approach with some degree of abandonment and a fairly fast tempo, maybe 90 per dotted quarter note. Even if played at a slower tempo, is has plenty of character and is an exciting way to cap off the incredible thirty-six-movement kaleidoscope of the six Cello Suites.

Cello Suite No. 6 in D major, BWV 1012

Prelude

J.S. Bach
Arr. E. Bindman



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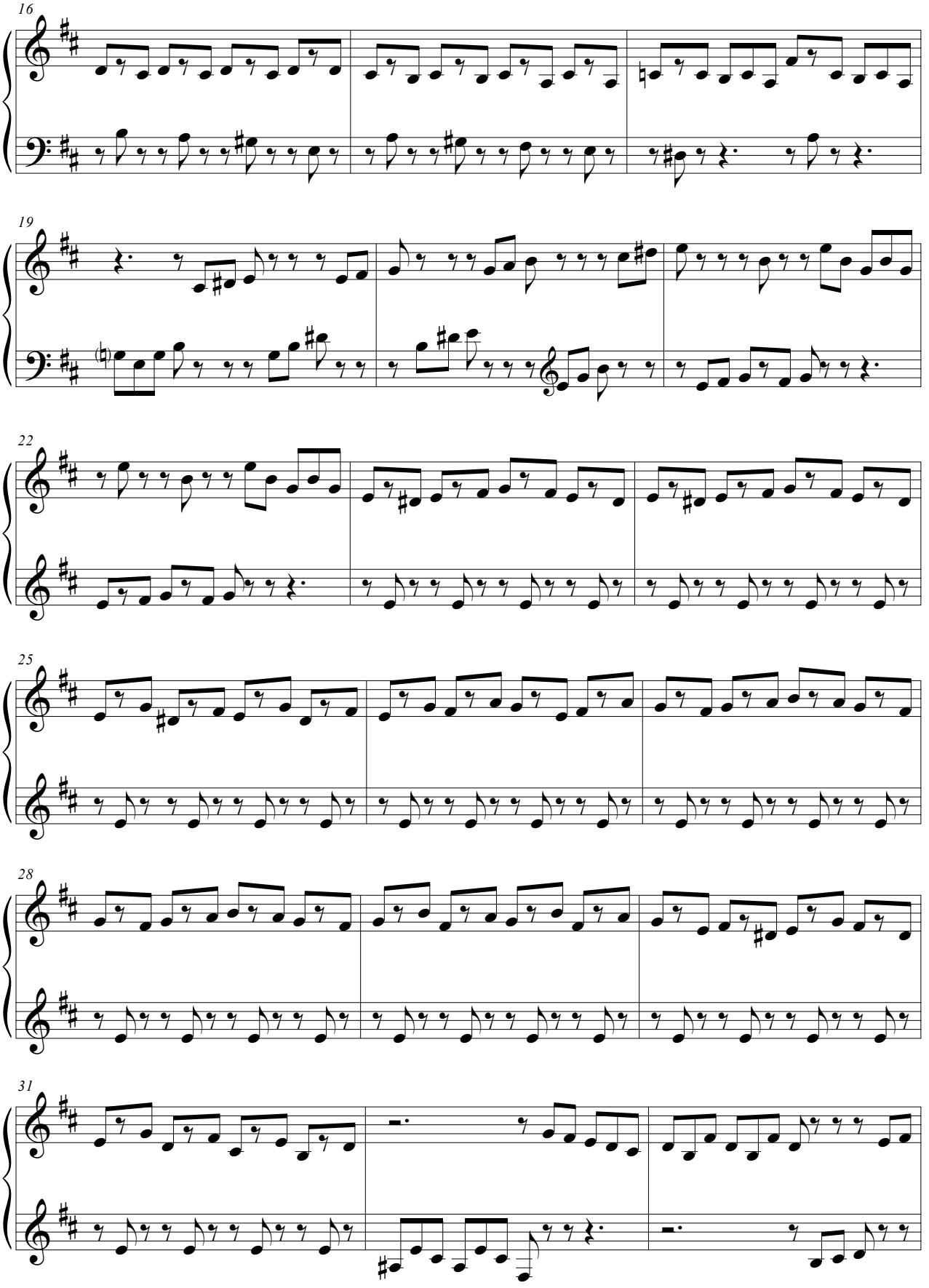
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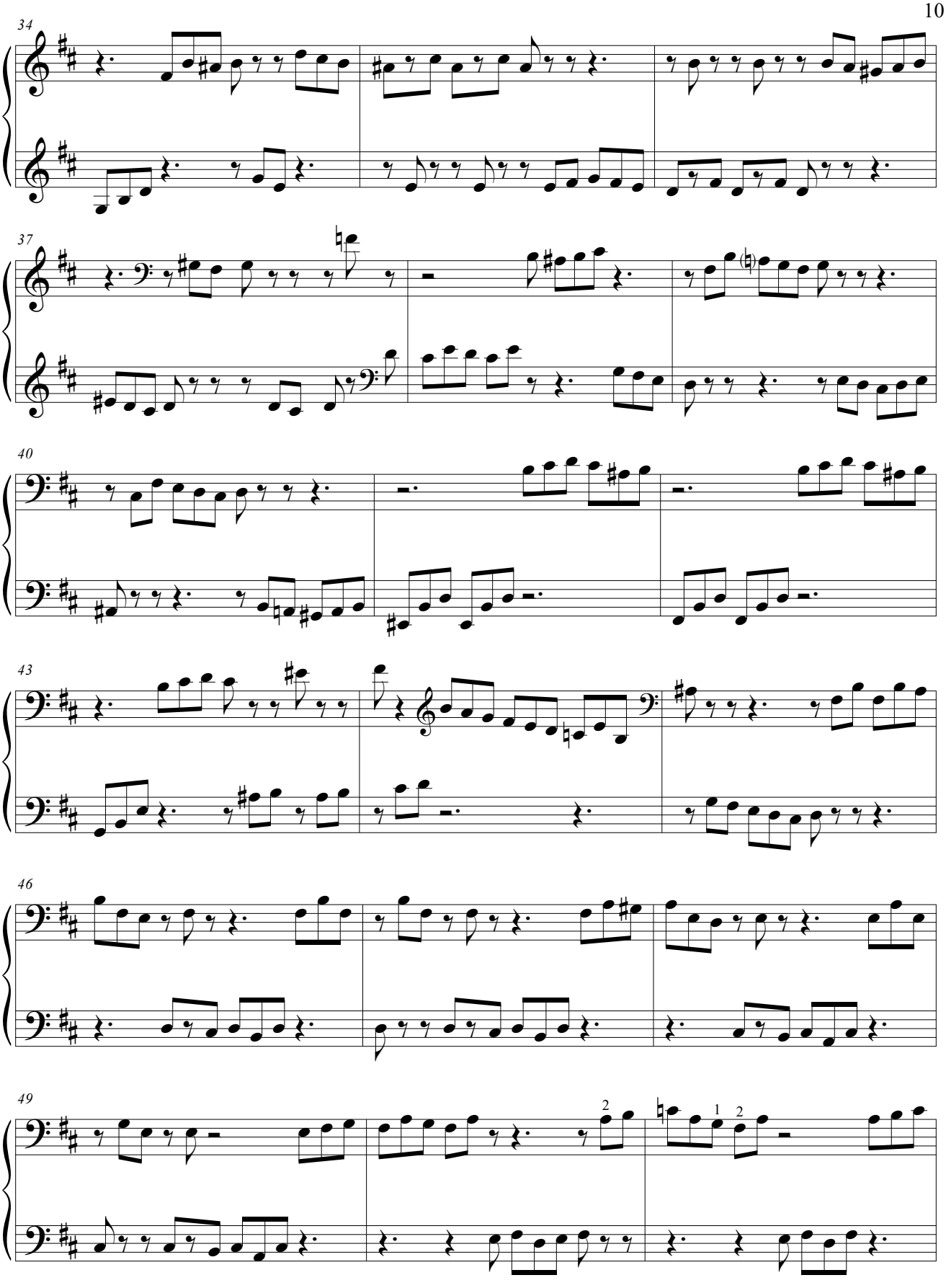
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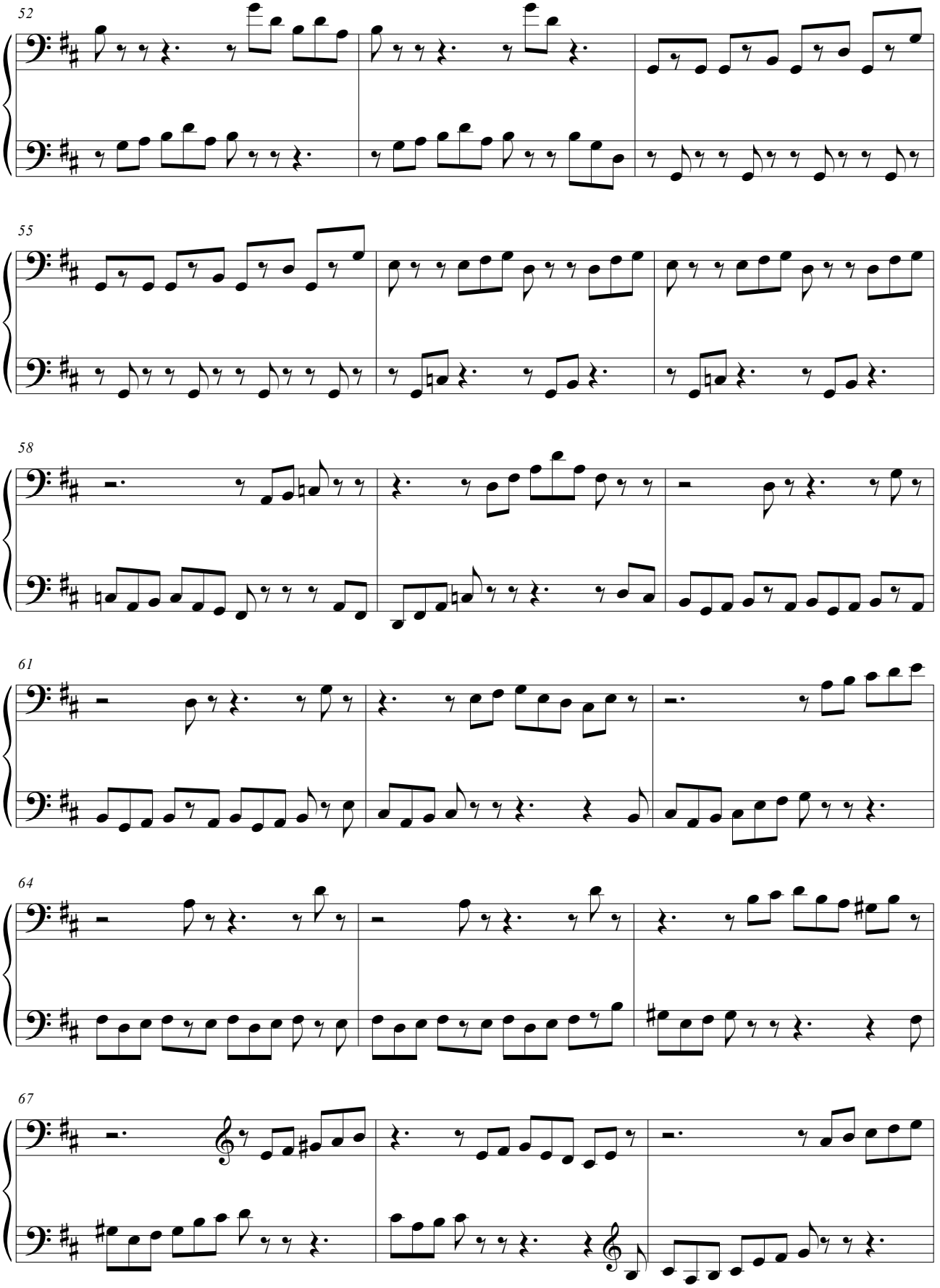
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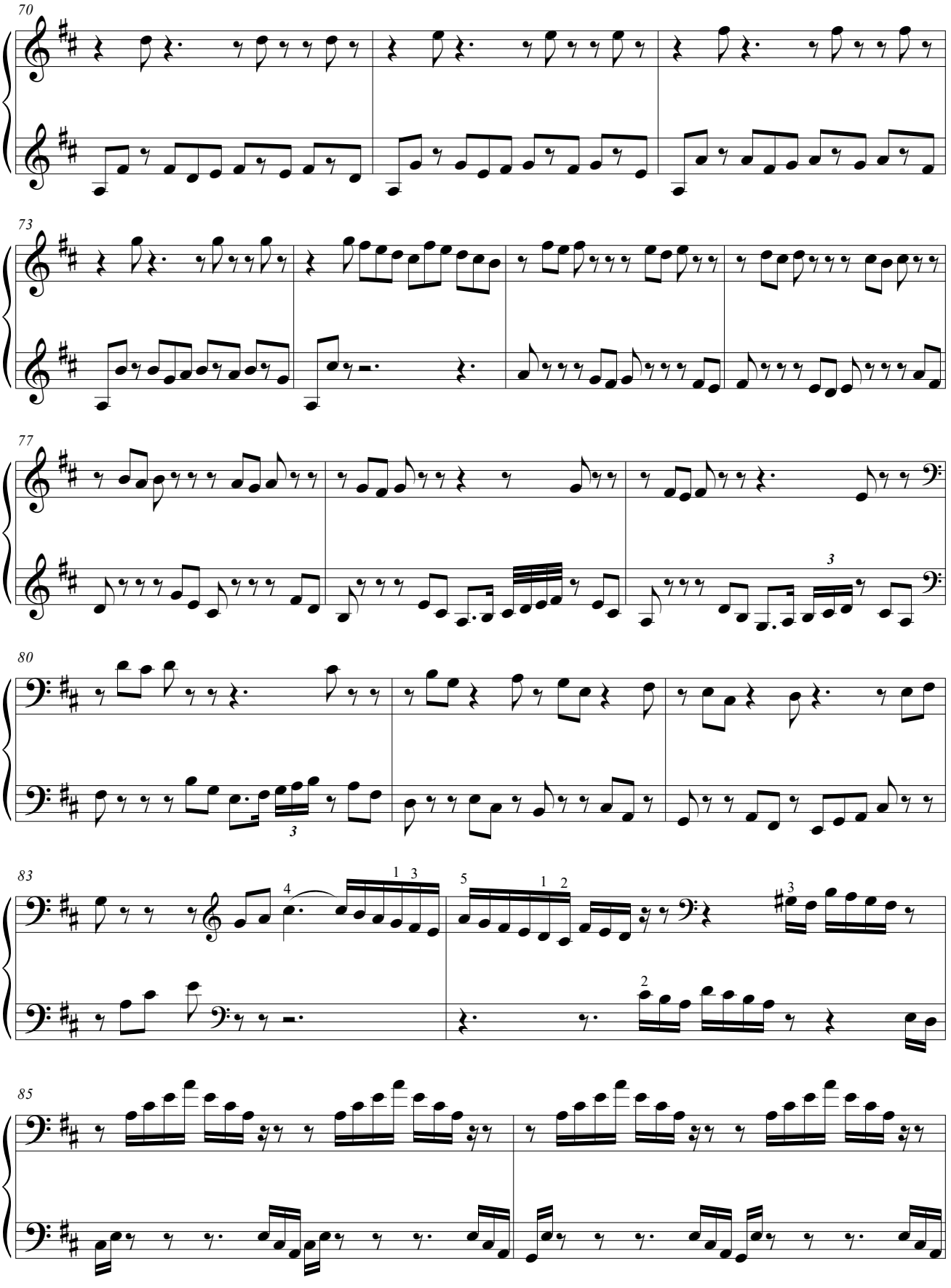
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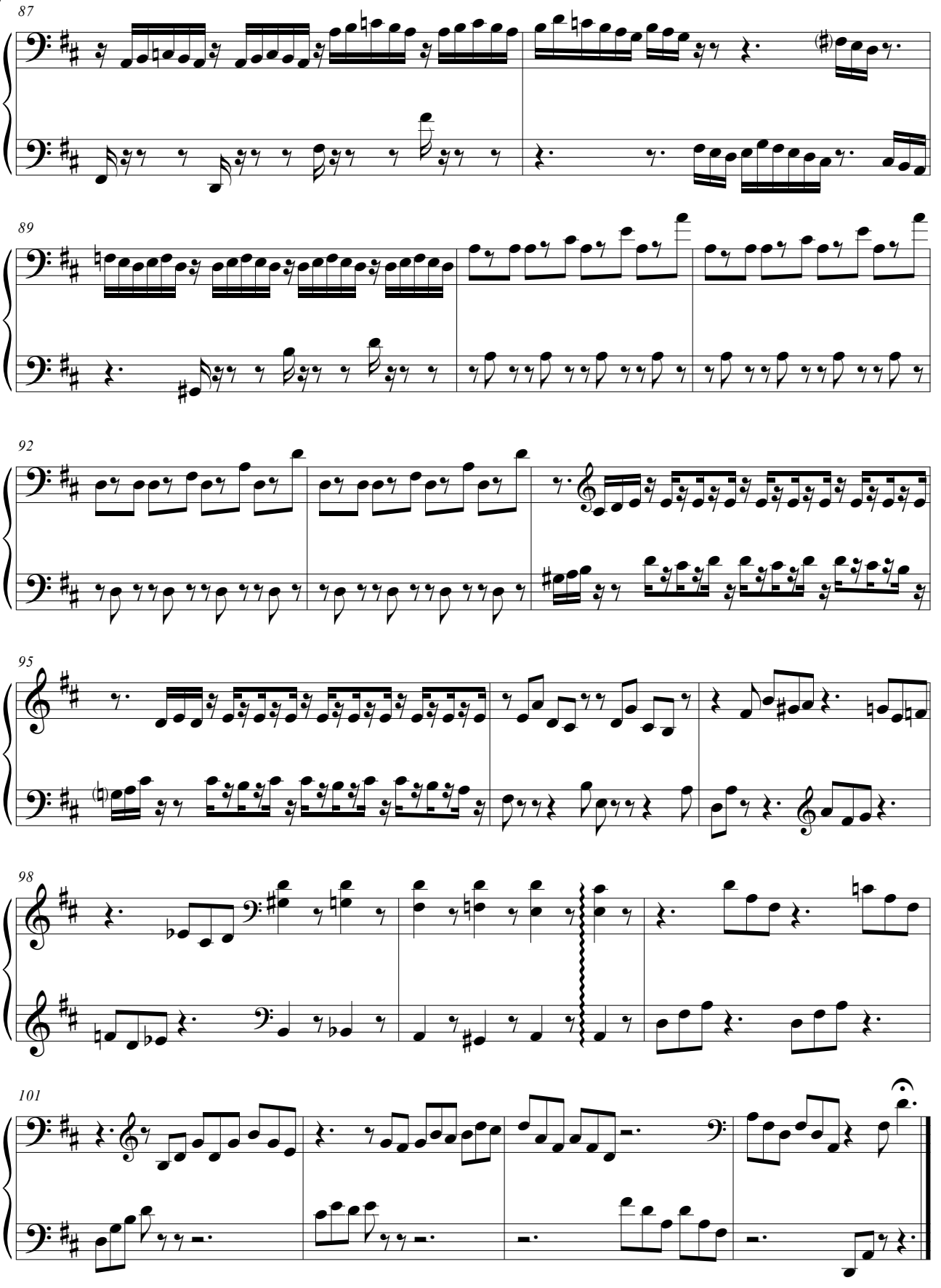
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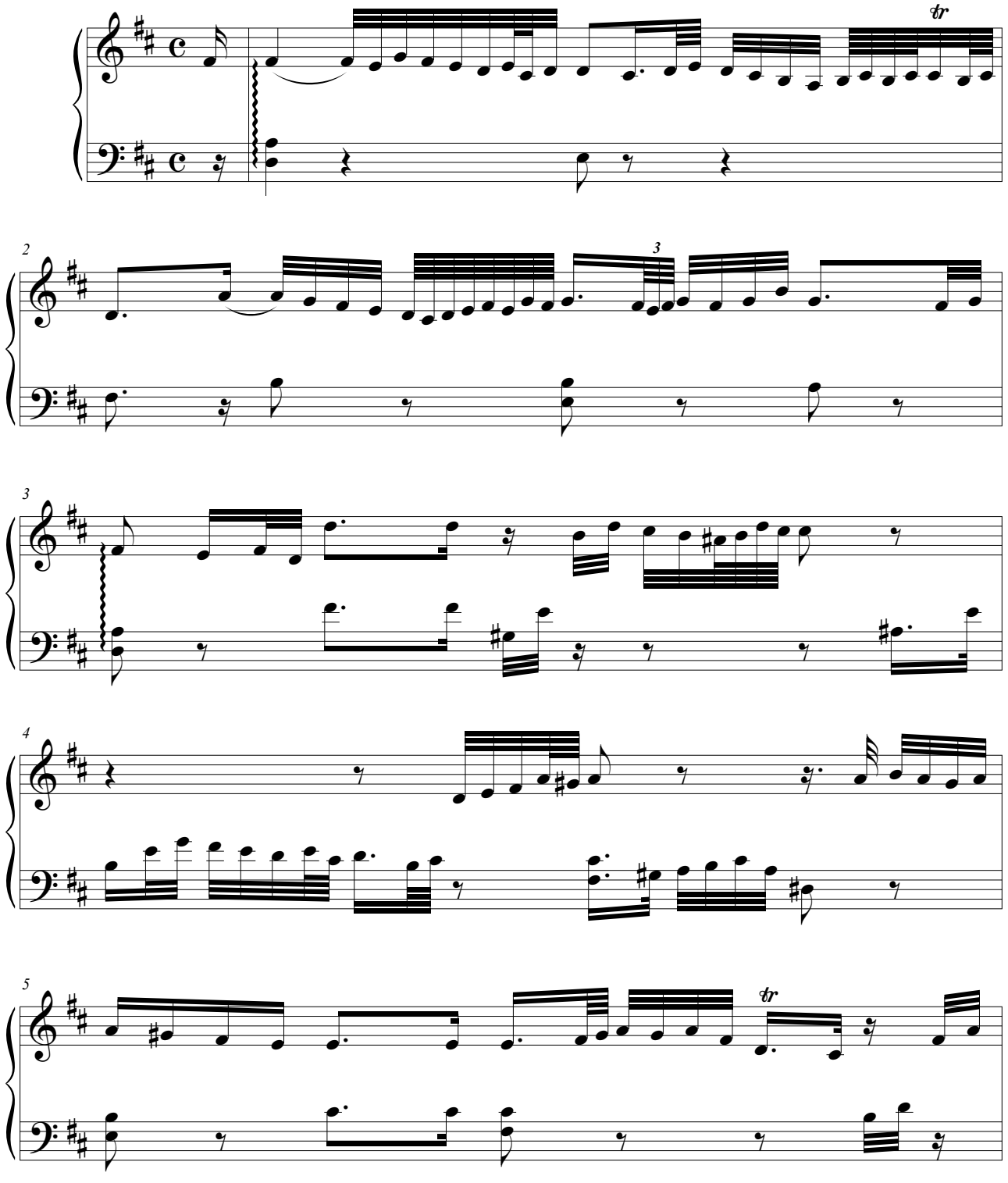
Allemande



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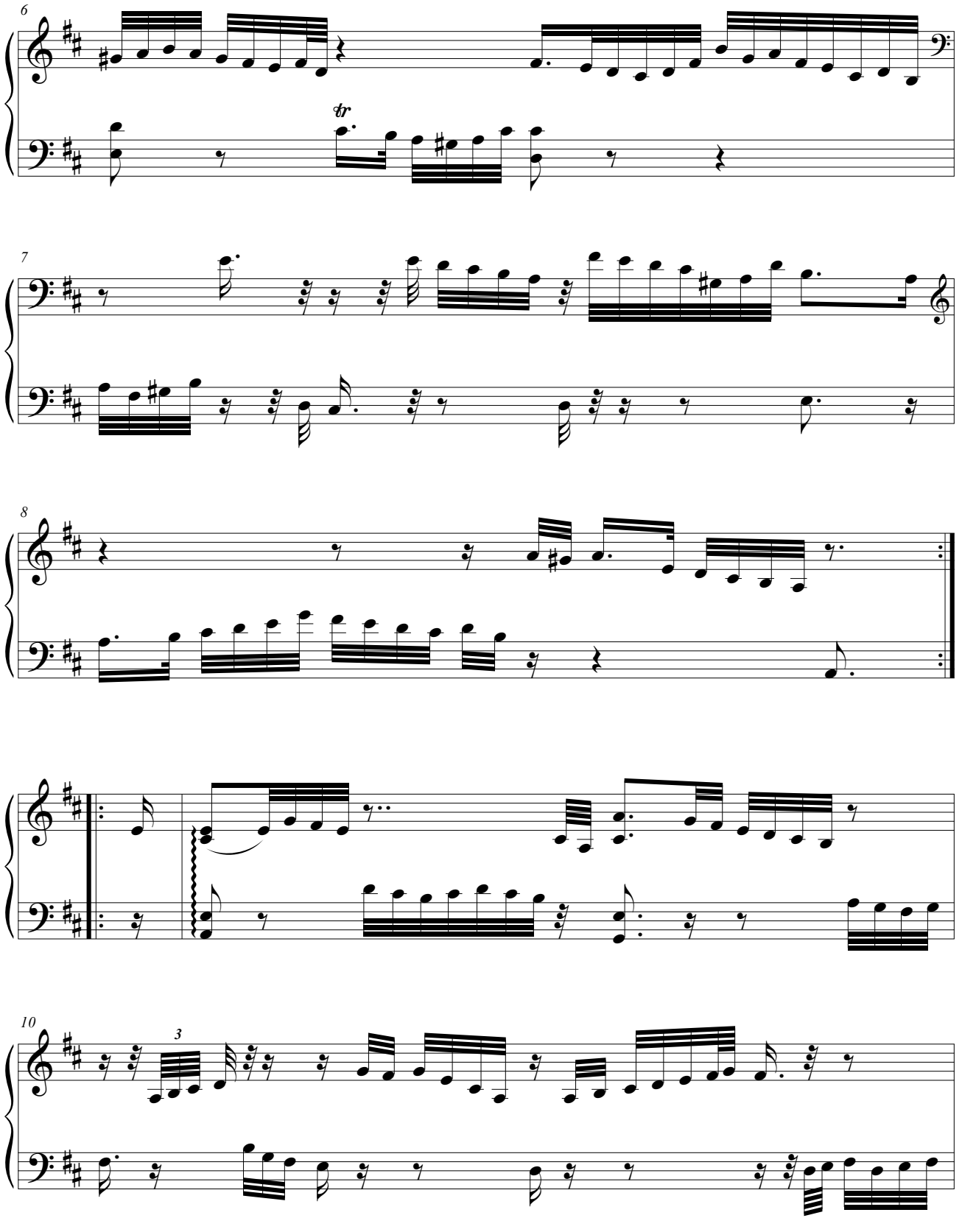
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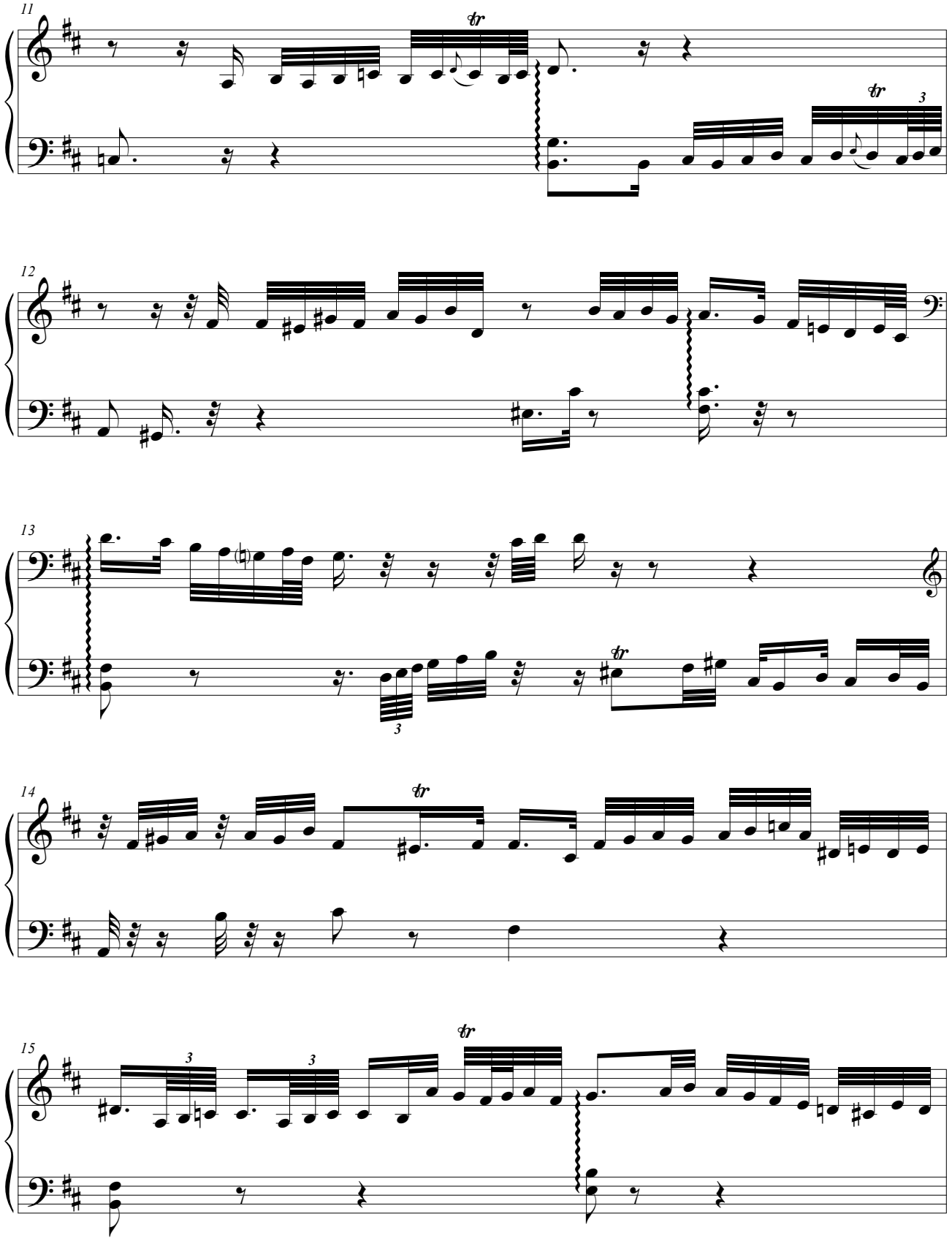
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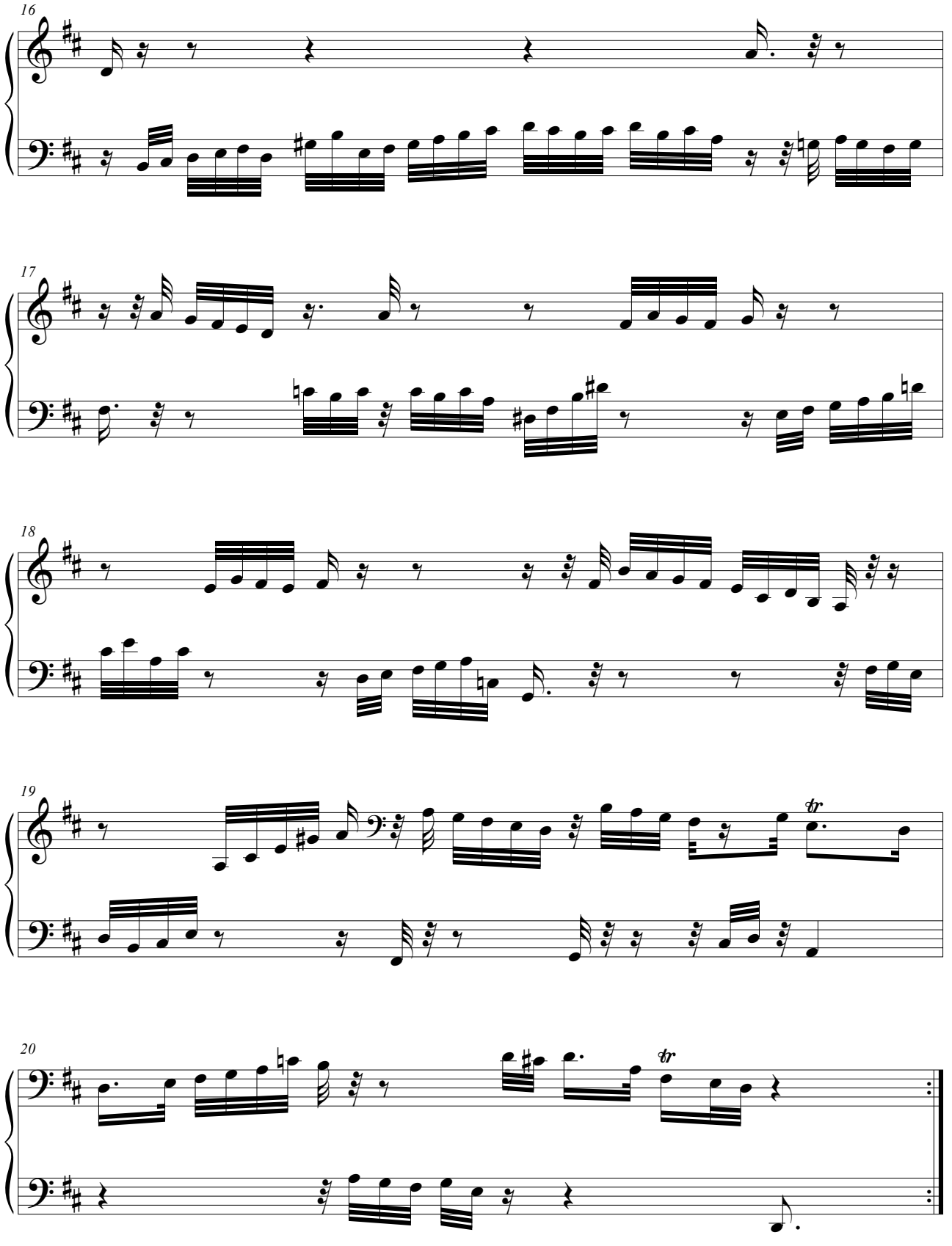
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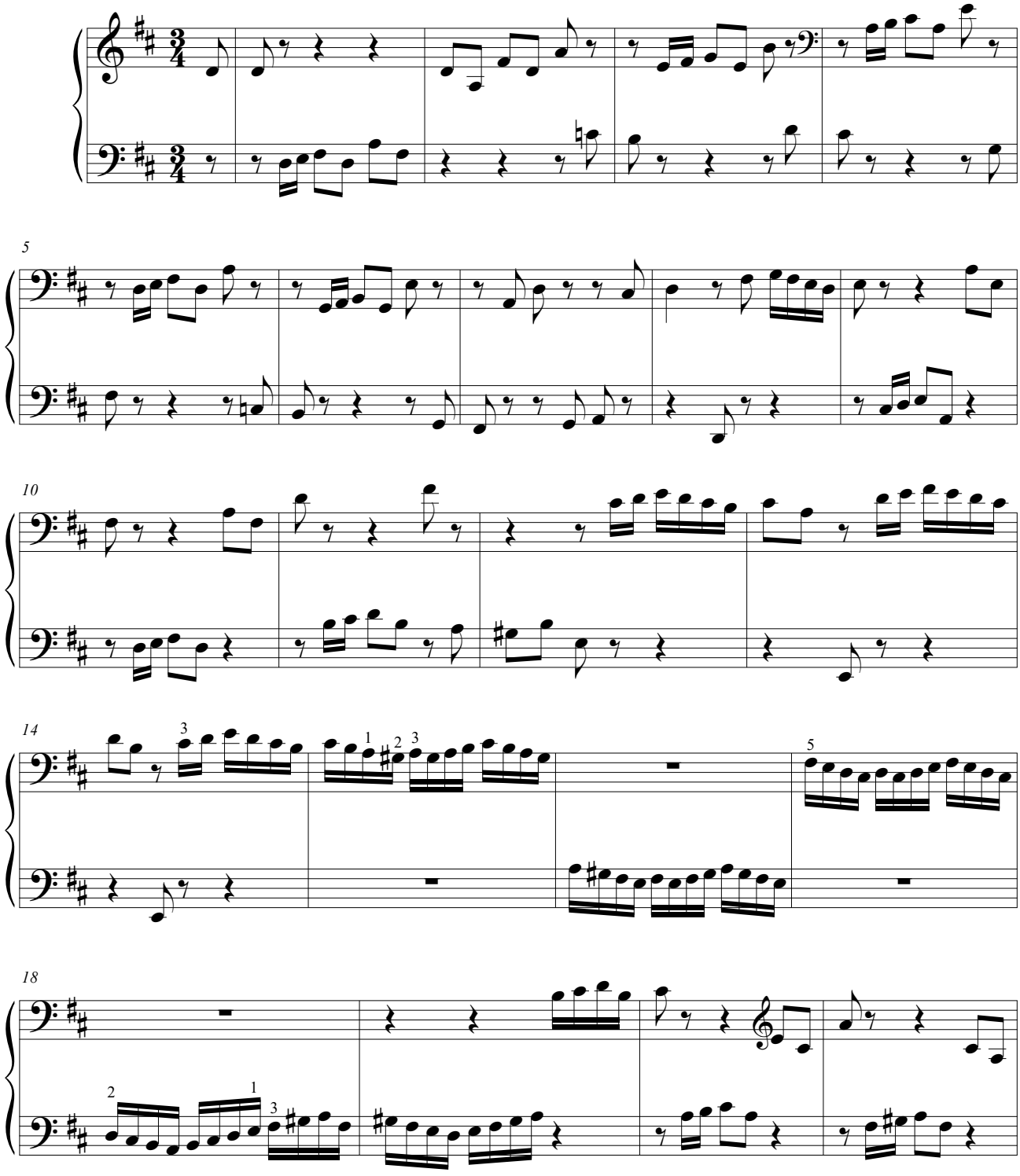
Courante



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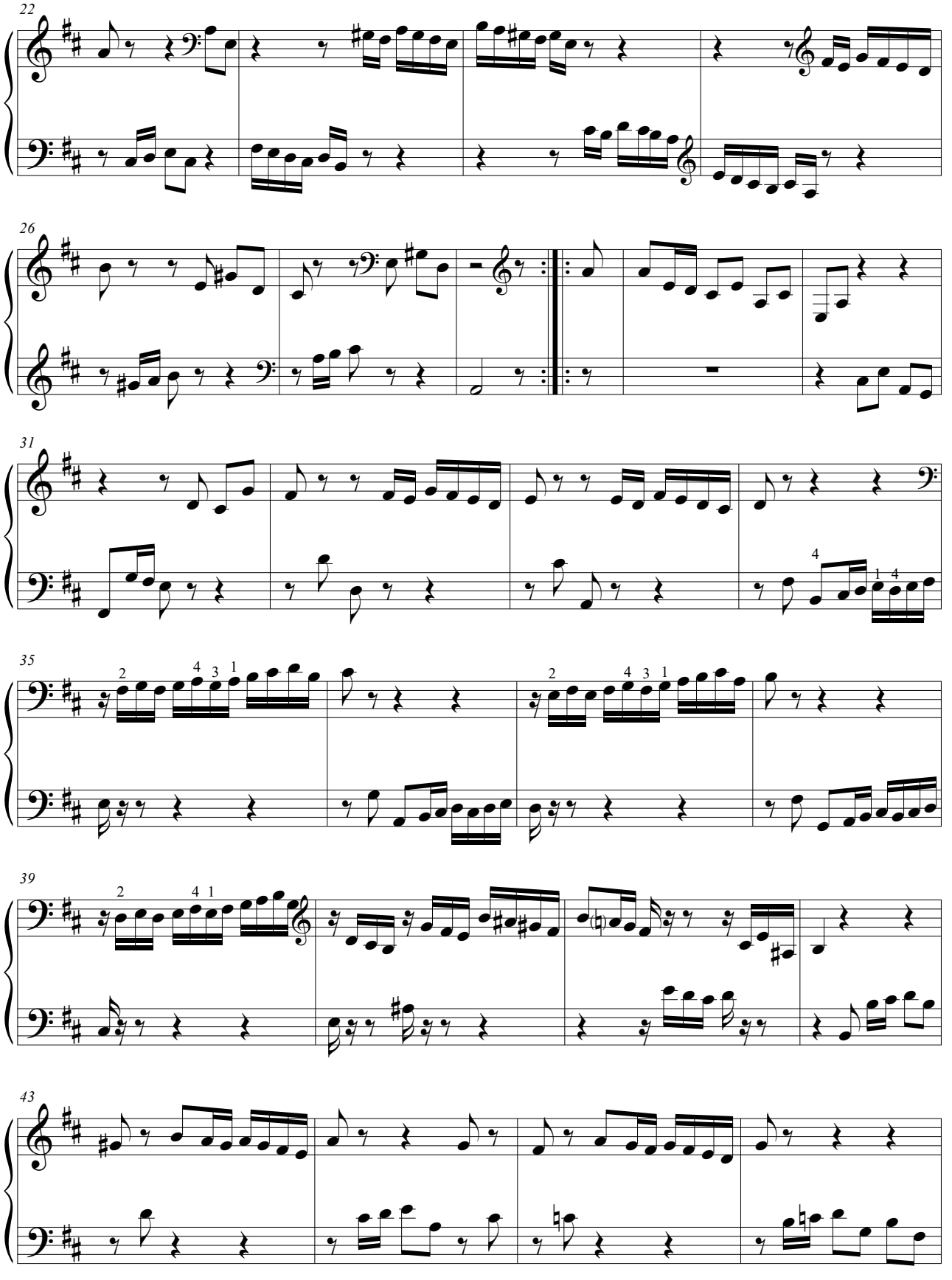
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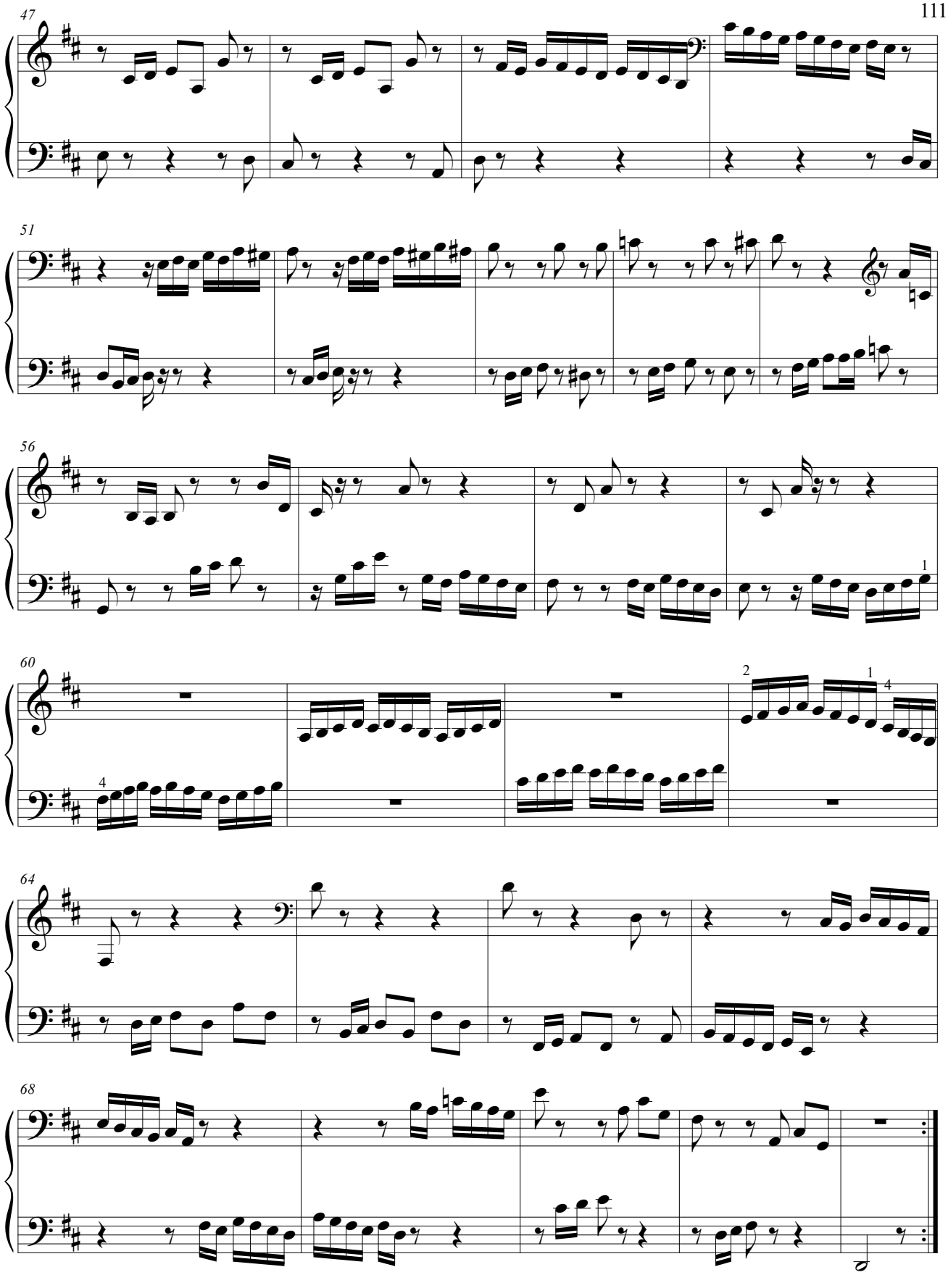
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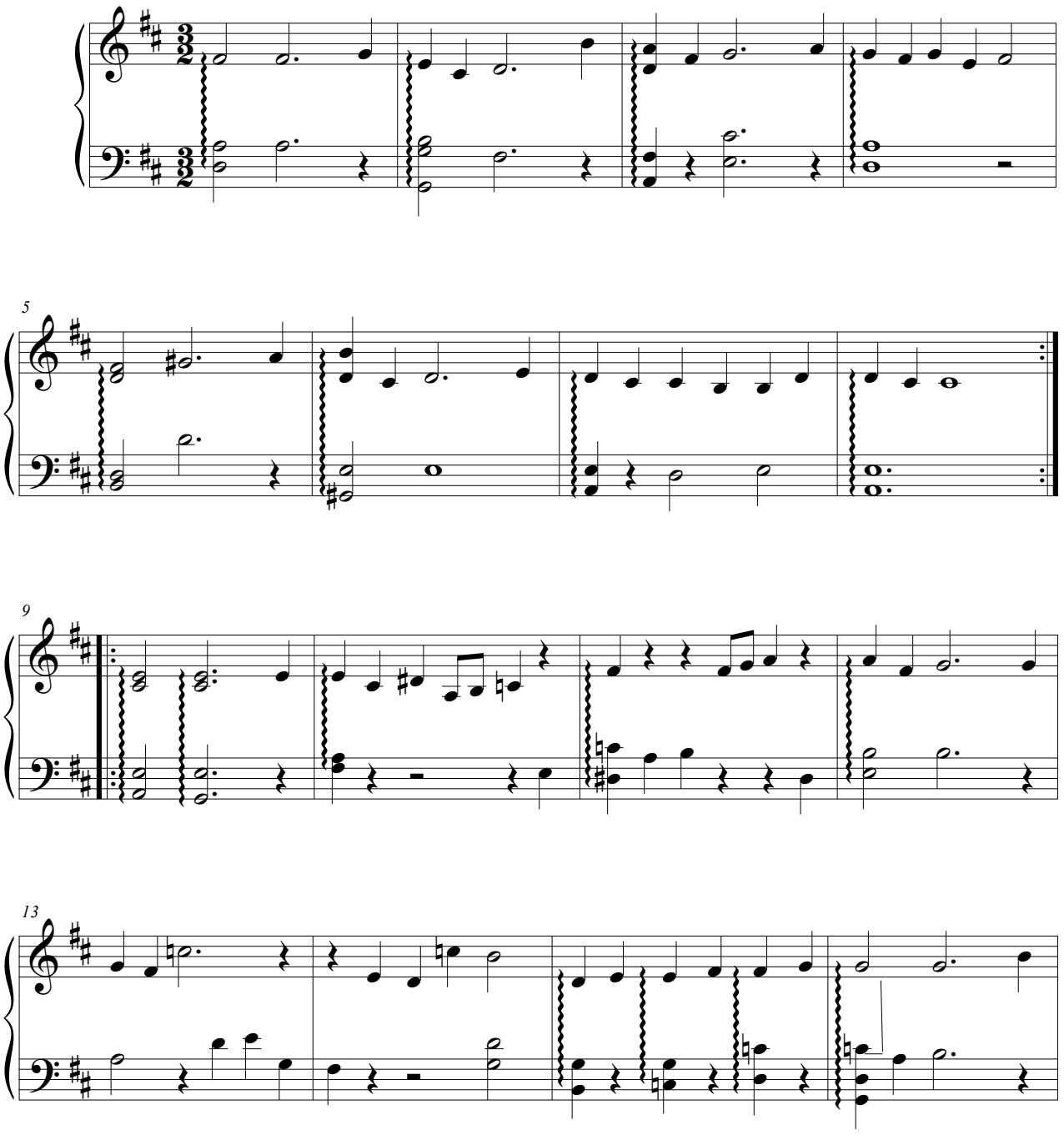
Sarabande



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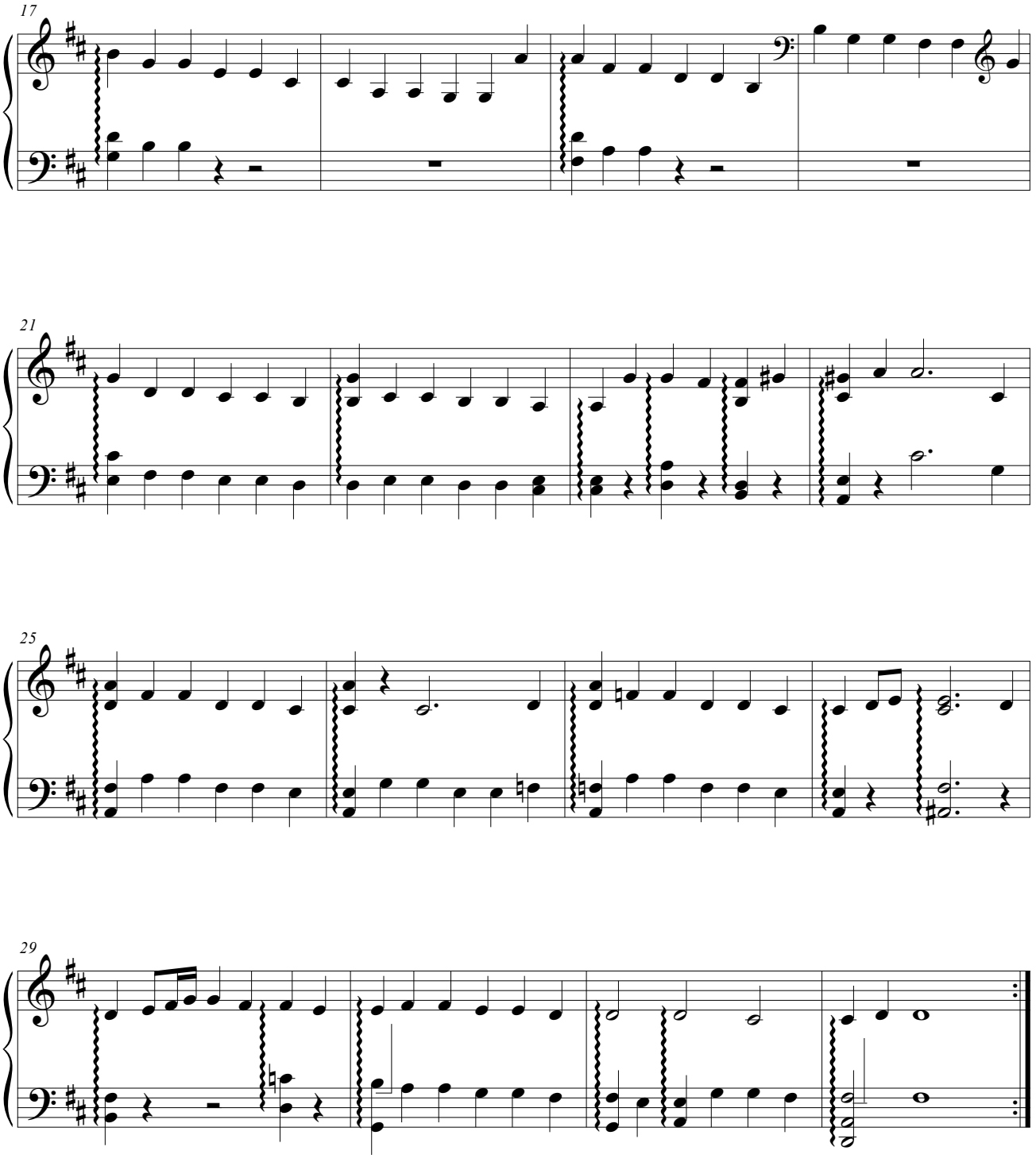
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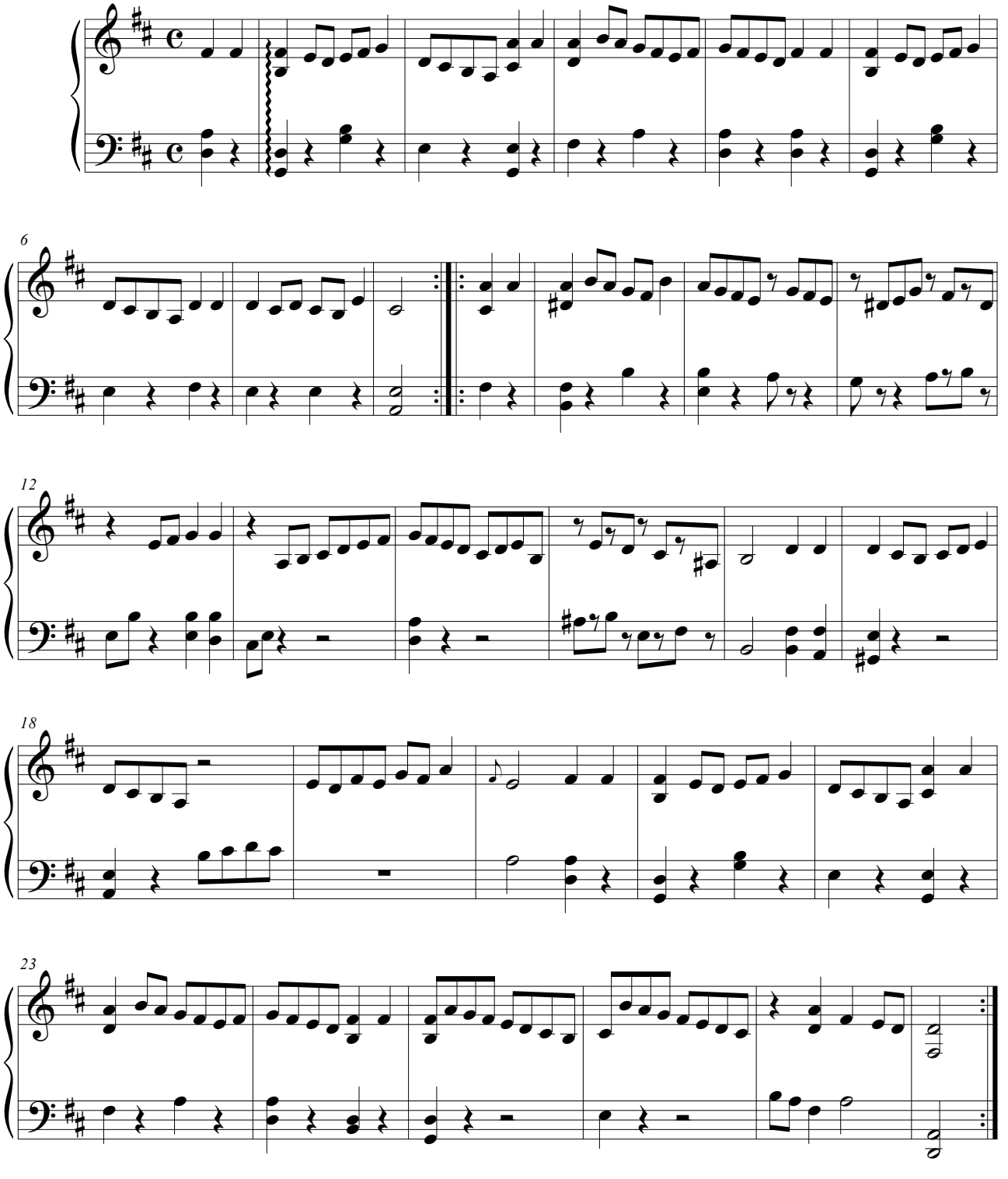
Gavotte I



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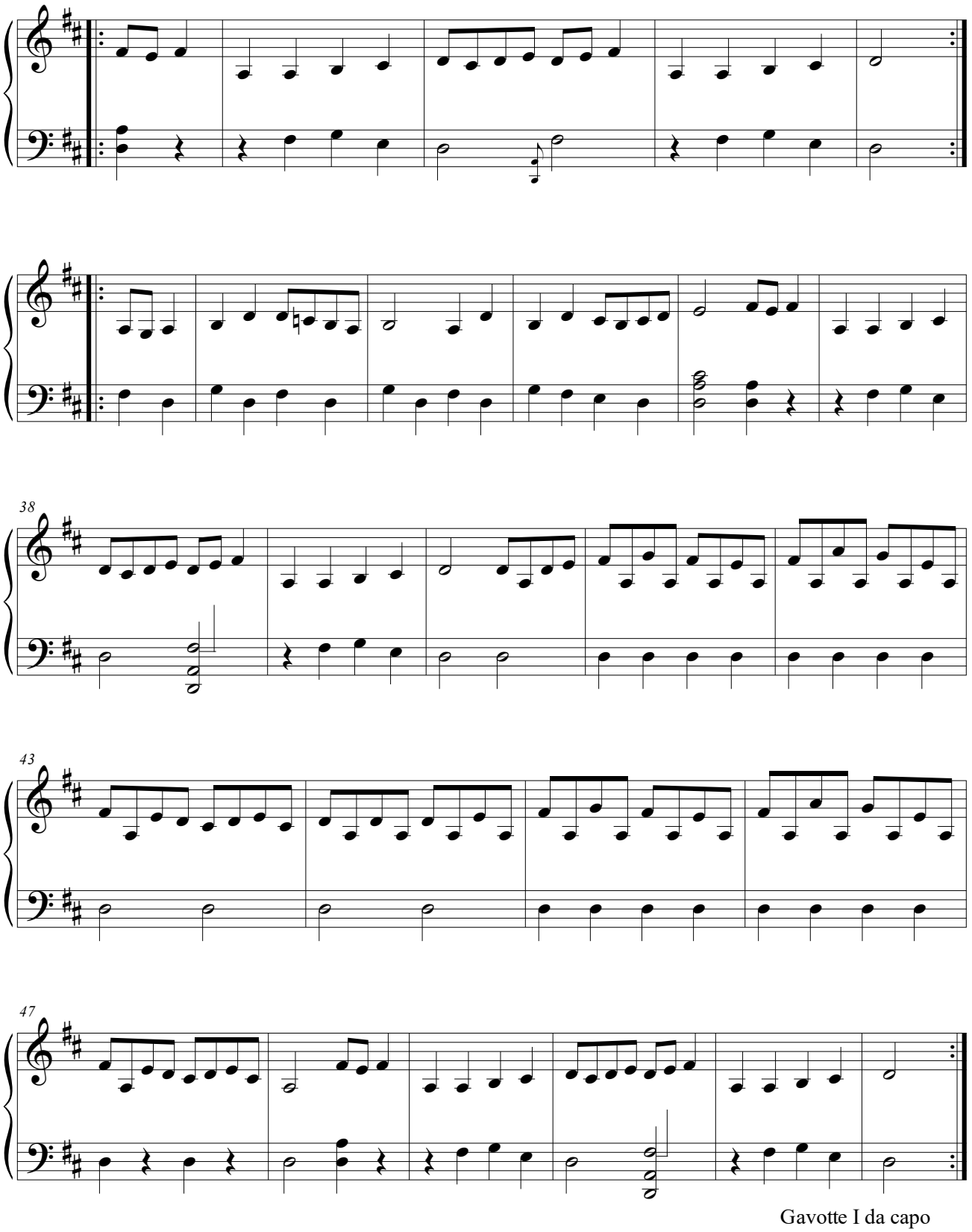
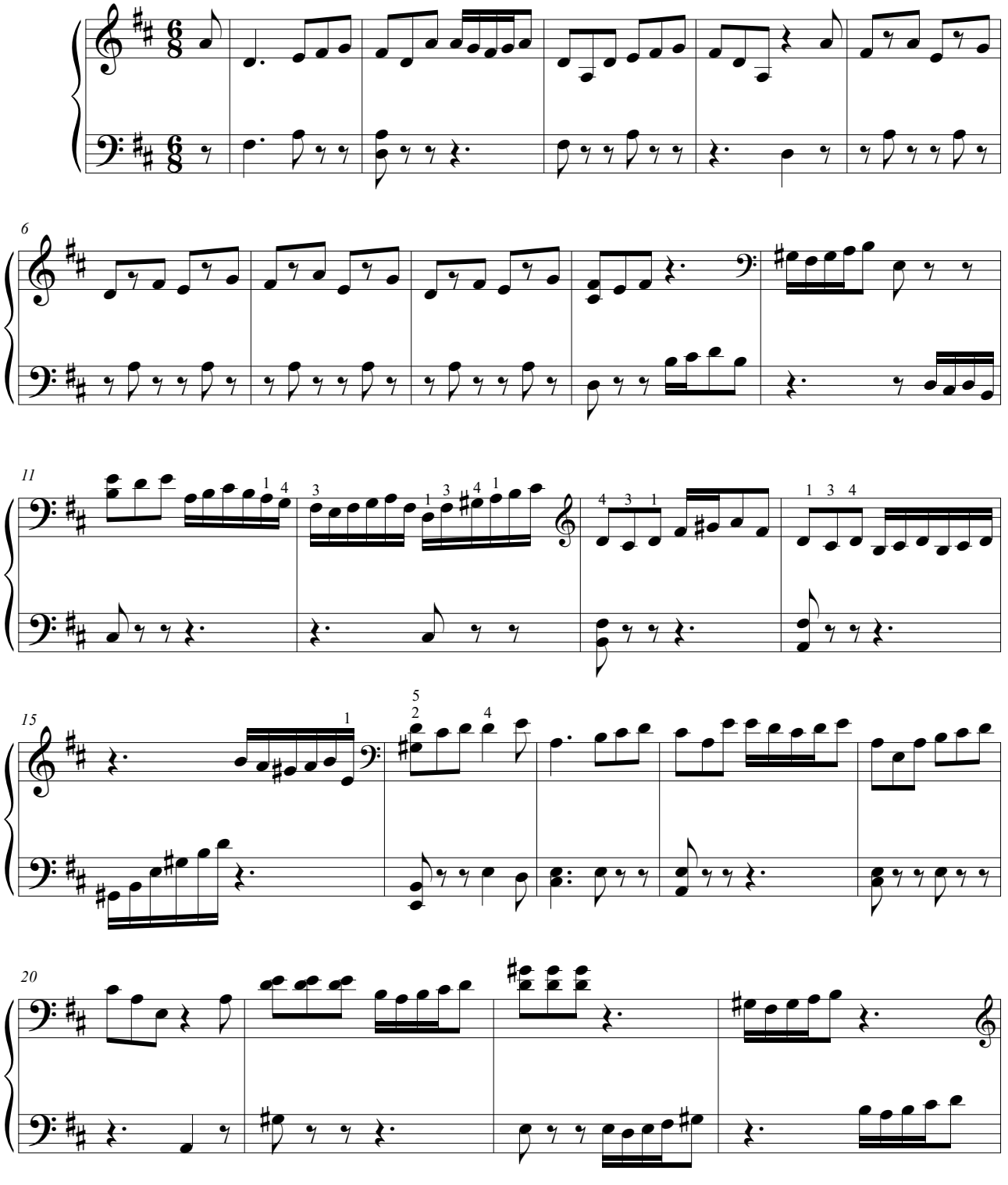
Gavotte II



Gavotte I da capo

Gigue



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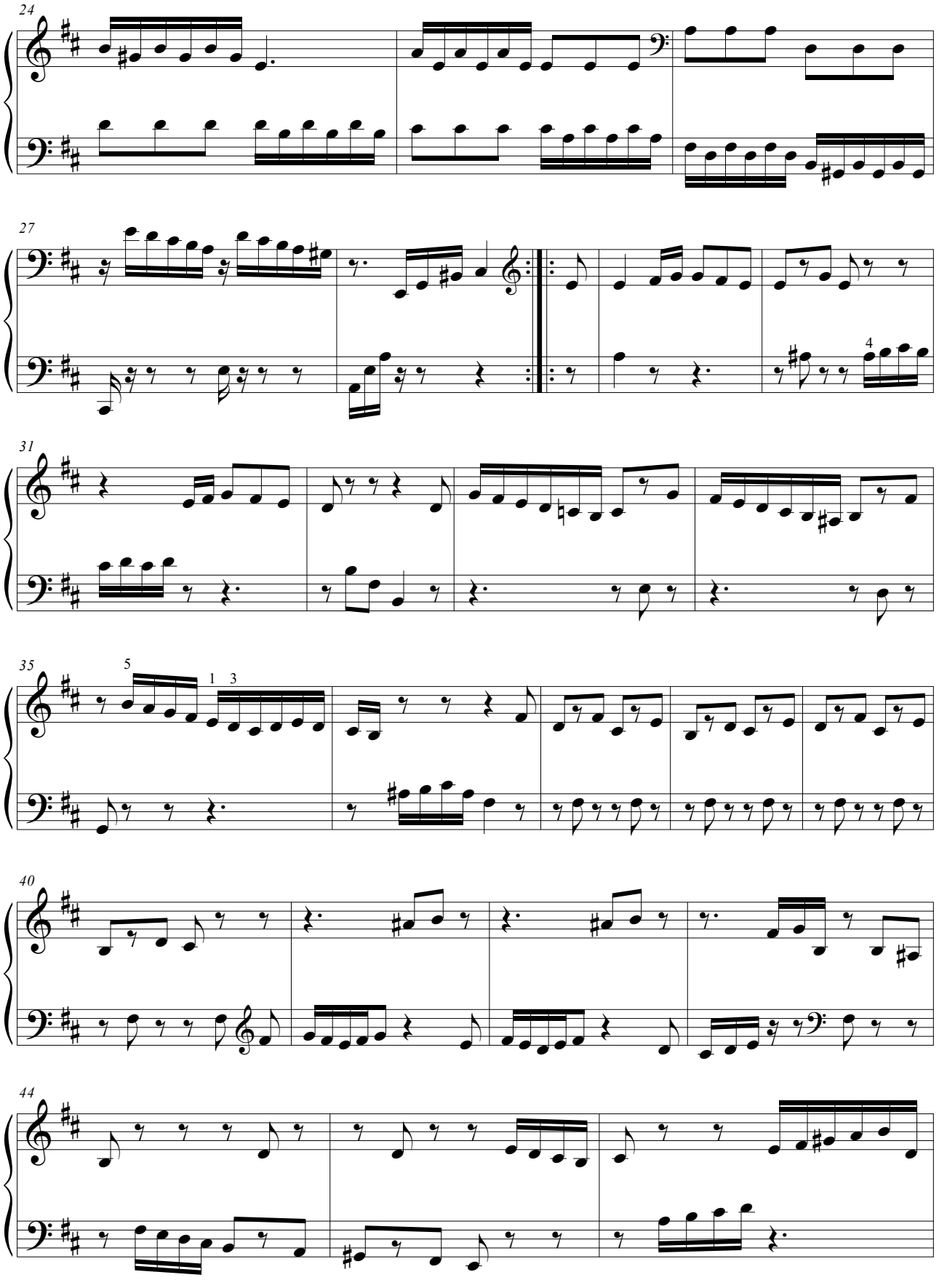
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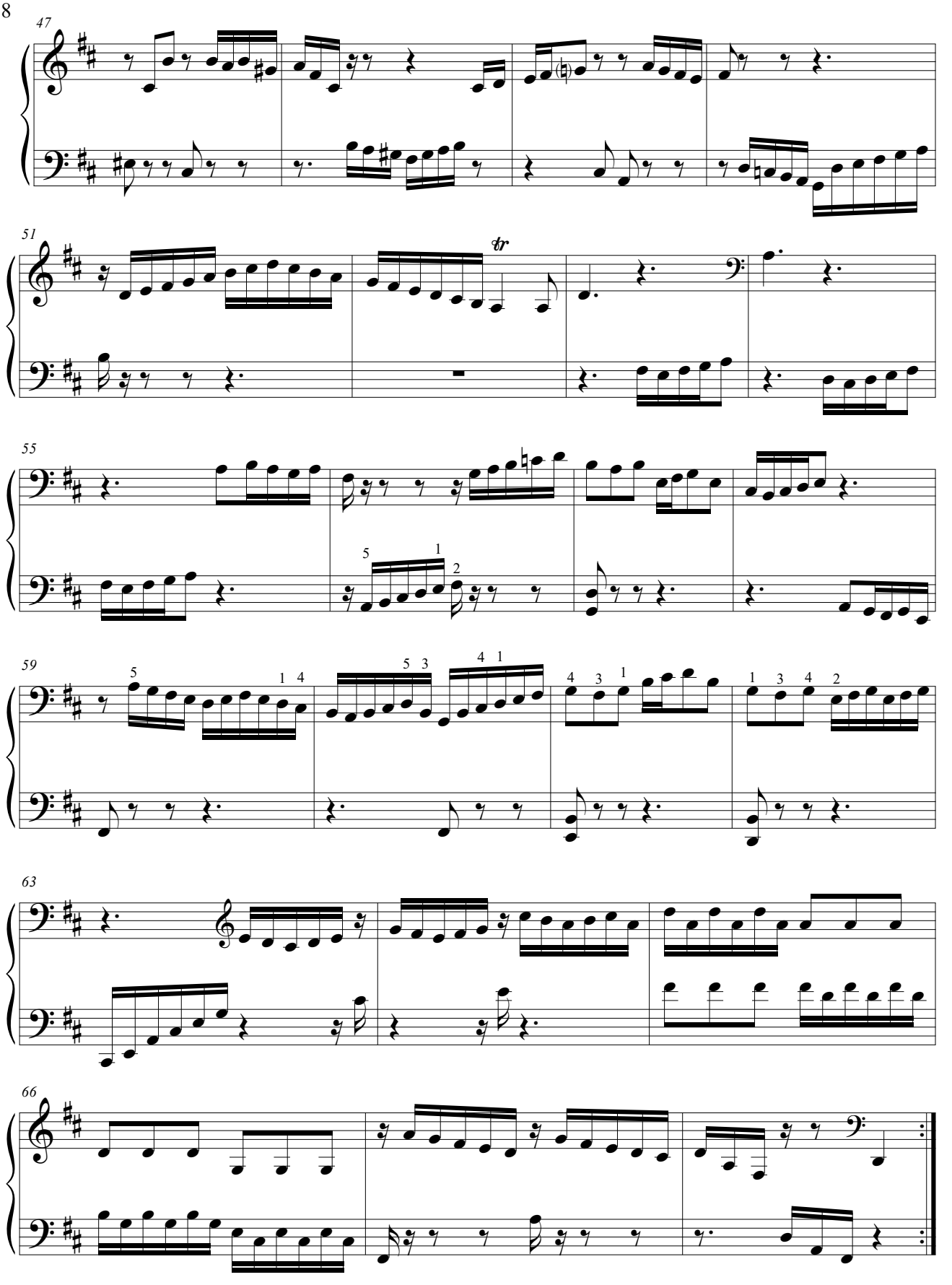
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About the illustrations

As I was preparing to record my piano version of the Cello Suites, I learned that, entirely coincidentally, my friend Peter Nappi has been making drawings of leaves framed by notation of the Prelude to the first Cello Suite. Since I already thought of Suite No.1 as related to growth and greenery, I asked Peter to make drawings for this volume. Here is how he describes working on our project and the illustrations themselves:

"The Process began with weeks of making gesture drawings while listening to the Suites. I'd often even draw with eyes closed, trying to get closer to an instinctive response to the music. I then went over my scrawled sketches, drawing images from them. Finally I refined what I was depicting, eventually stripping away text, 'clever' musical and historical references, and even color. So these drawings represent my most direct and most visceral visual response to the music.

Suite One is a foliage piece, drawn from life.

Suite Two is about searching in darkness, drawn largely from imagination.

Suite Three: in doing gesture drawings for Suite Three, I found myself instinctively referring to the female form. It was a short associative leap that led me to the J. S. Bach's second wife, Anna Magdalena. We decided that an image of the beautiful surviving Cello Suites autograph she produced would be a perfect illustration to add to the score.

Suite Four inevitably involved an object associative of both descent and flight, here drawn from life.

The expansive nature of **Suite Five** led me to the only drawing of the series with more than one point of focus.

In making gesture drawings for **Suite Six**, the angular nature of the prelude, so unlike any of the previous five, led me to draw exclusively in straight lines and sharp angles. This led to a purely geometric solution, a study of the six-sided figure."

I am delighted to present Peter's work in this score, together with subtly colored backgrounds to convey the emotional impressions. Connections between music and visual images have always been rewarding to me as I hope they will be to you.

J.S. BACH, Arr. E. Bindman
"Cello Suites Transcribed for Piano Solo"
Illustrations by Peter Nappi

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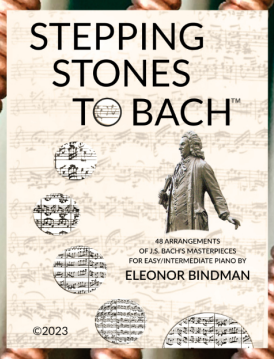
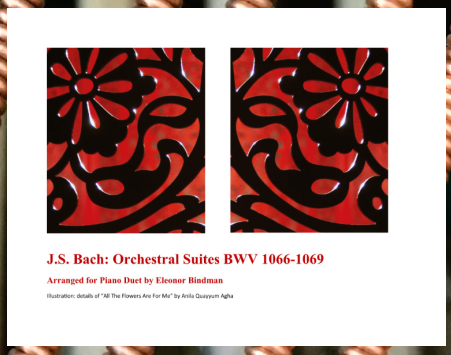
"If you didn't know the cello originals, you'd happily accept these as keyboard suites. … spectacular in Bindman's hands… Fascinating, and fun" —Graham Rickson, *The Arts Desk*

"…This new piano version of the Cello Suites can sufficiently shift one's attention from logistical obstacles to cultivating tone and expression." —*Pianist Magazine*

"Bindman's arrangements faithfully include the notes you will find in the original Bach, but have become works that are new, unique, and completely satisfying on their own terms."
—Barry Lenson, *Classical Archives*

Also Available at EleonorBindman.com





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