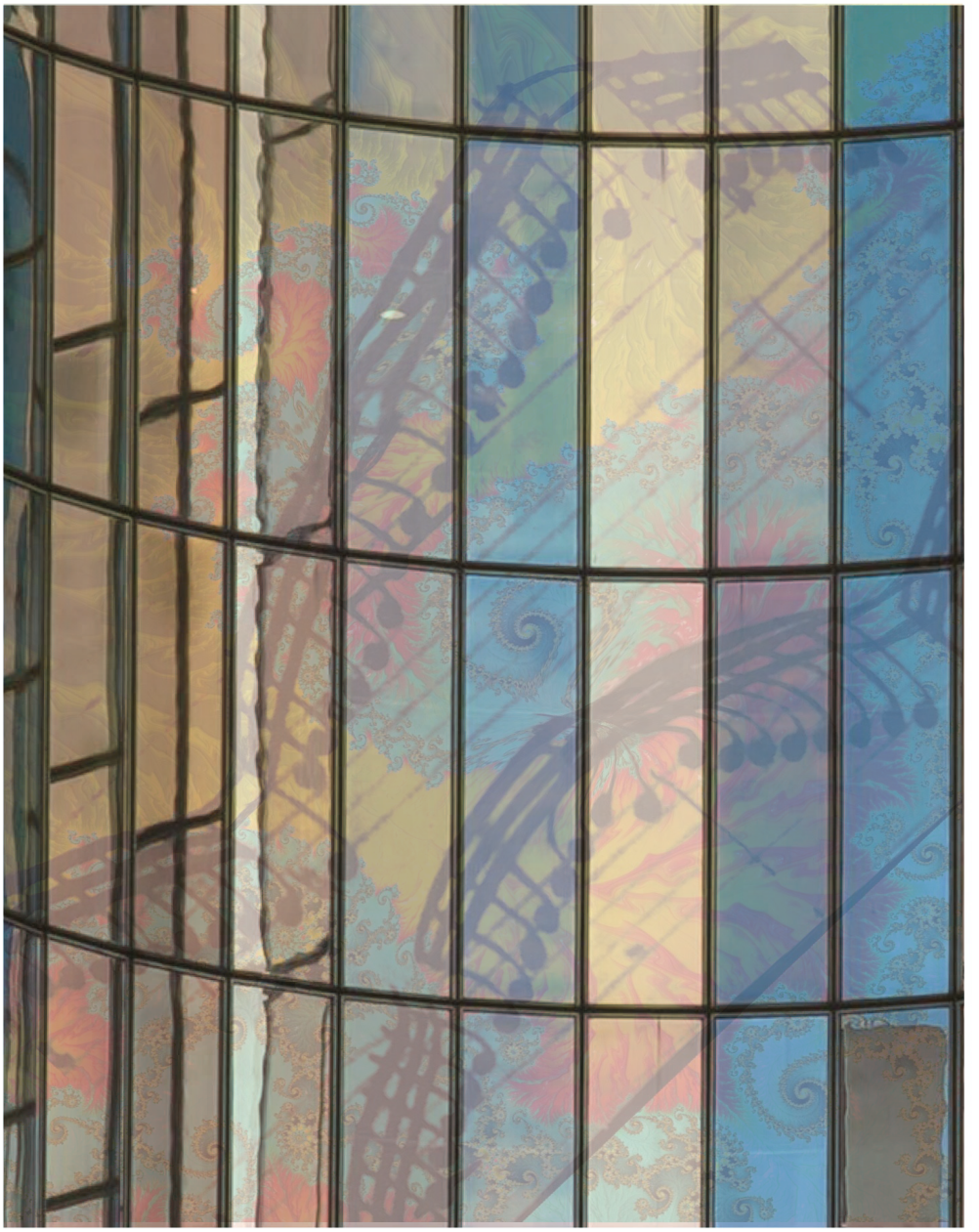


Affettuoso from Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, BWV 1050

J.S. Bach

Arranged for Piano Solo by Eleonor Bindman

Affettuoso from Brandenburg Concerto No. 5, BWV 1050.

While transcribing the complete Brandenburg Concertos for piano duet, I realized that some of the slow movements could work really well for solo piano. The *Affettuoso* from the ever-popular fifth concerto is one of them, scored as a trio for flute and violin soloists with harpsichord accompaniment. Since the release of the *Brandenburg Duets* recordings, it has become one of the most widely streamed tracks, along with the *Adagio* from Concerto No. 1. As implied by the title, it should be played "with feeling, in a tender, loving way." At least that's how the term is defined in dictionaries. What kind of an emotion should we try to convey here?

My personal feeling while playing this movement might best be described as "melancholic." Dense polyphony and dotted rhythms which need to be played exactly in time don't allow for much "expansive" phrasing, mannerisms or tempo changes. The key is B minor (a significant one for Bach, think of the B Minor Mass), the texture is transparent and the movement takes its time, structured in chains of lengthy phrases which end by modulating into a new key. It sounds best, in my opinion, when presented simply, almost matter-of-factly, keeping track of all theme entries and imitating the sound of a harpsichord, with very little pedal just to help connect voices.

Of interest here is the treatment of the group of 6 descending 16^{th} notes, first introduced by Bach in mm. 7 - 9. After inverting it 3 times (mm. 14 - 16) he fully develops it in the middle of the piece (mm. 24 - 31), stating it 4 times in a row, then doubling it in 3rds plus following up with 2 transitional canonic measures (30 - 31) where the last 3 notes assume a new upward direction. This stretch is the needed structural and emotional break: dotted rhythms stop and the even rhythmic flow gives us an opportunity for a slight "rubato" and more expression. Bach writes a similar episode at the end (mm. 40 - 44) and its resolution in m. 45 is followed by a final calm statement of the opening.

This arrangement is for the "advanced" pianist, since managing an additional middle voice between the right and left hands is a challenge. Most of the time it's clear which hand is able to reach the required notes but sometimes there is a wide stretch for both hands and you will need to "break" the interval. The slow tempo and using the pedal will facilitate things and allow you to create the needed tonal balance. Listening to an orchestral recording is the best reference as it will clearly delineate the different parts in your mind. Please remember that trills and mordents should be slow at this tempo and feel free to play more or less of them. Enjoy!

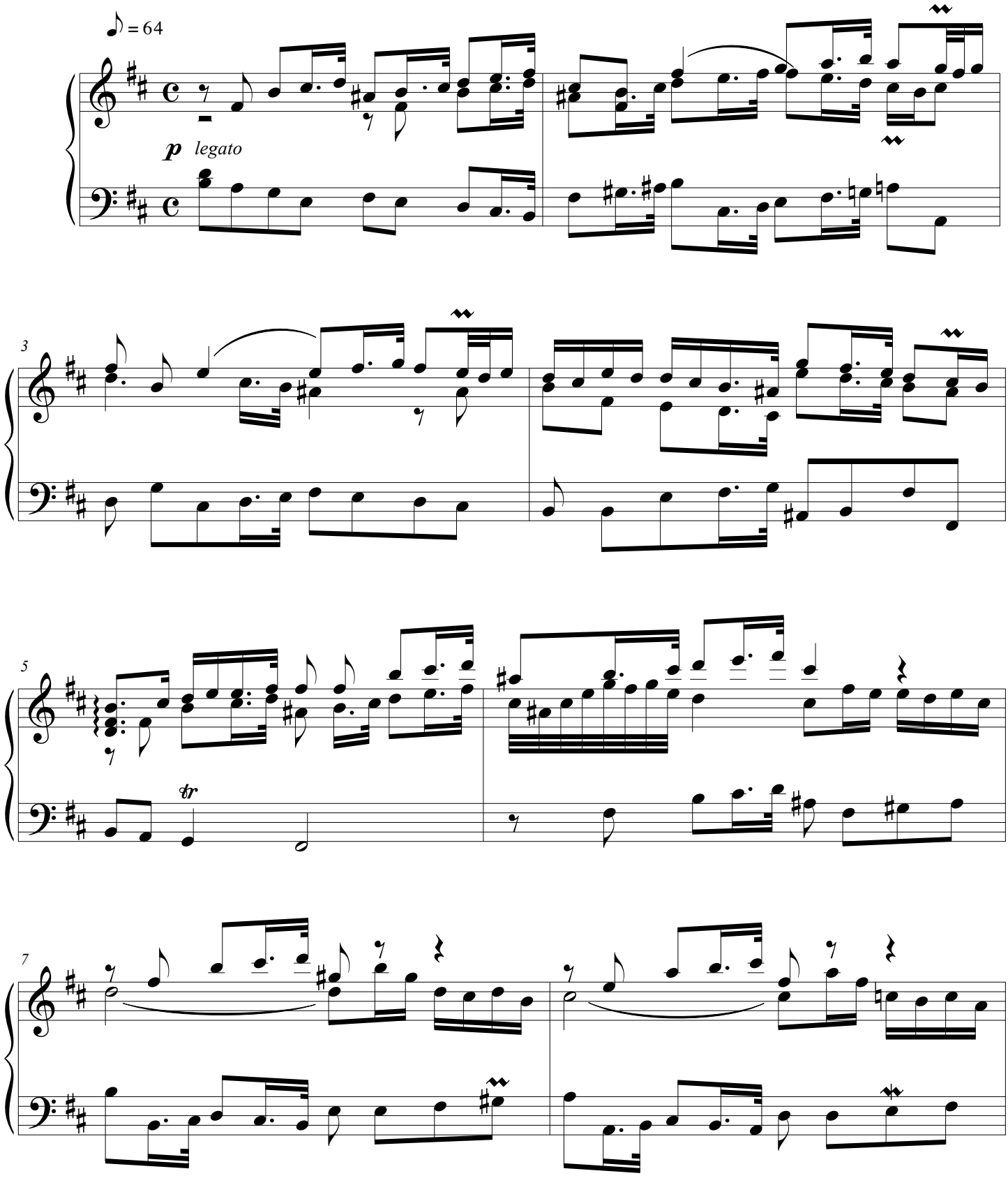
Eleonor Bindman
March 2023

Affettuoso

From Brandenburg Concerto No. 5

J.S. Bach

Arr. E. Bindman



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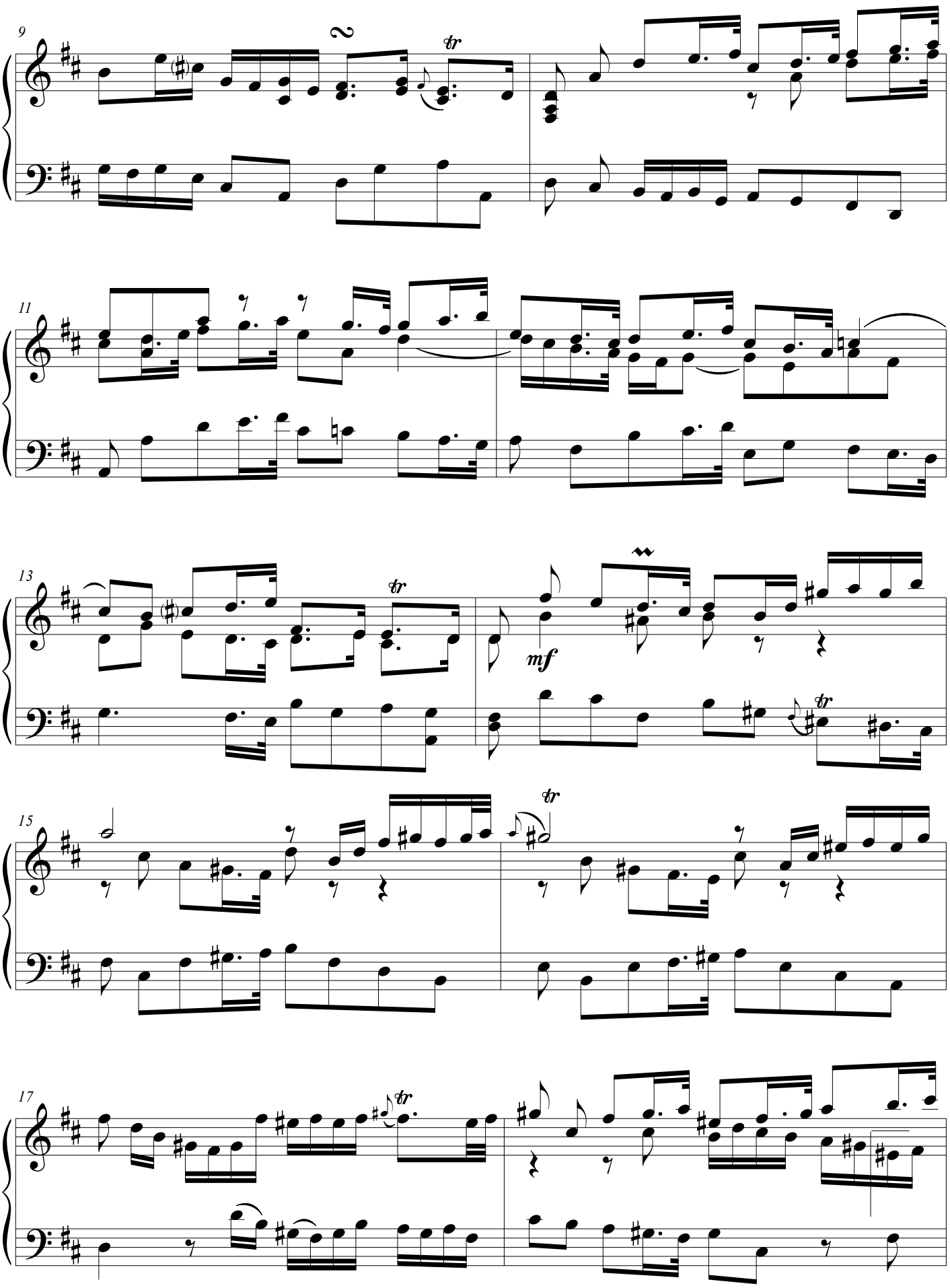
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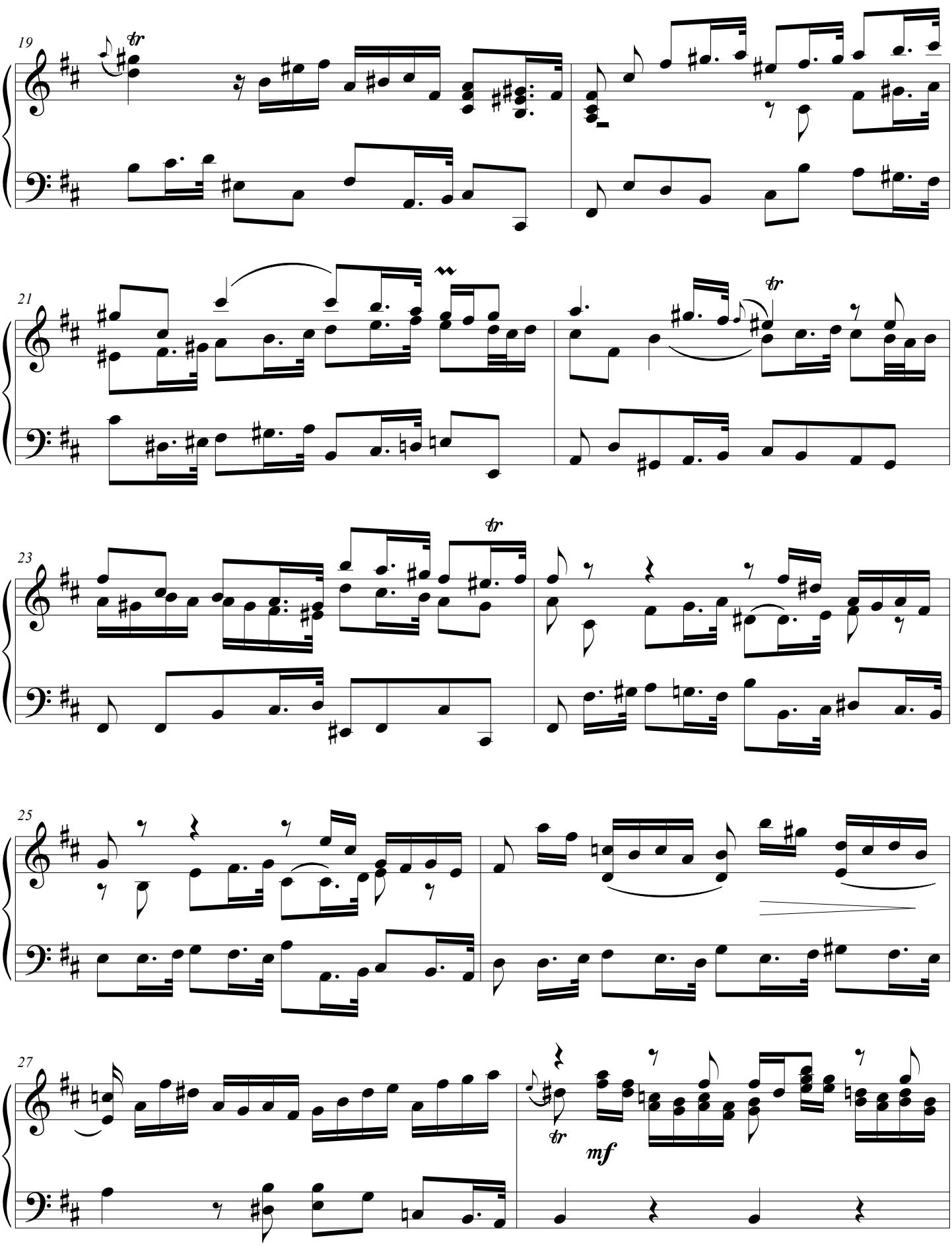
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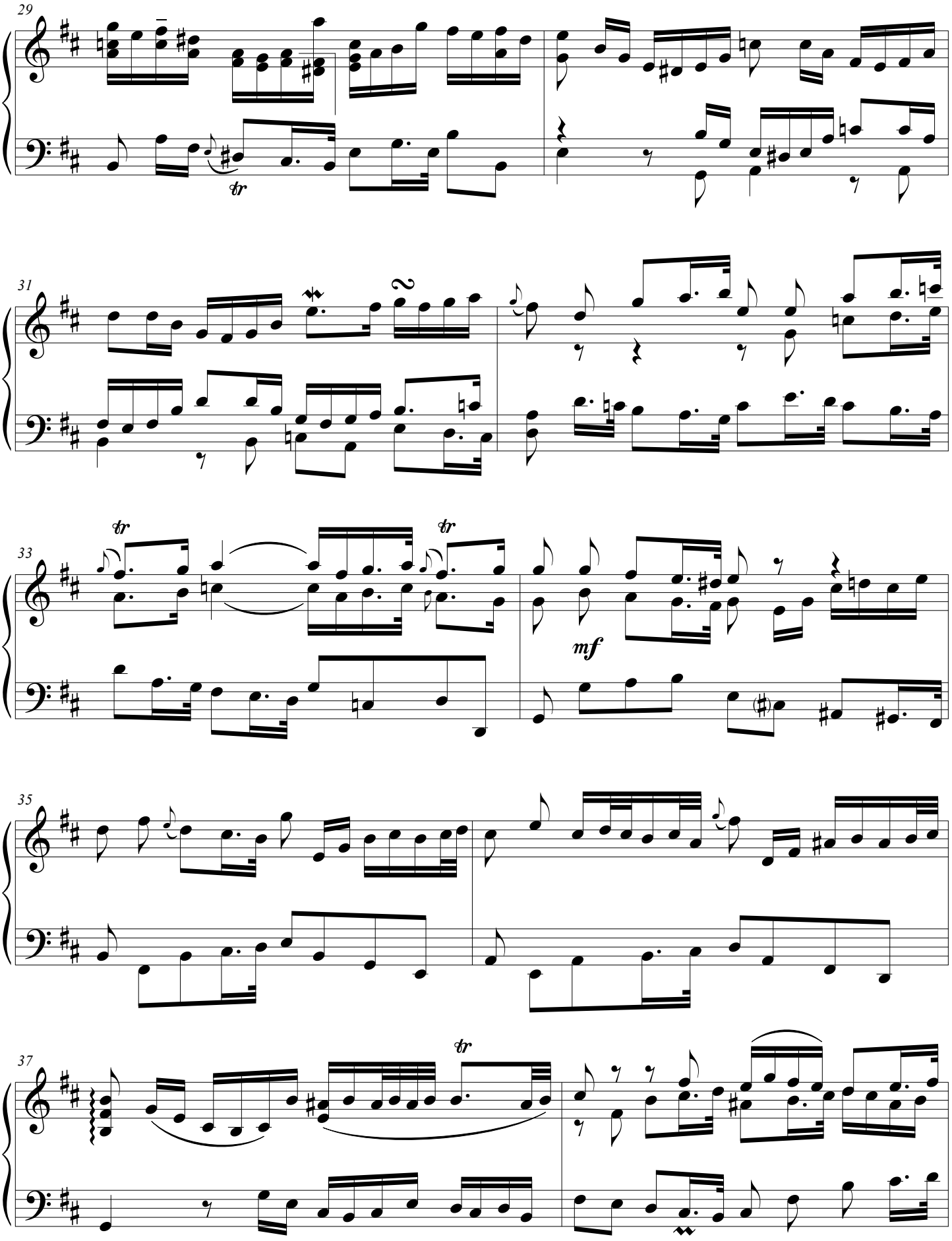
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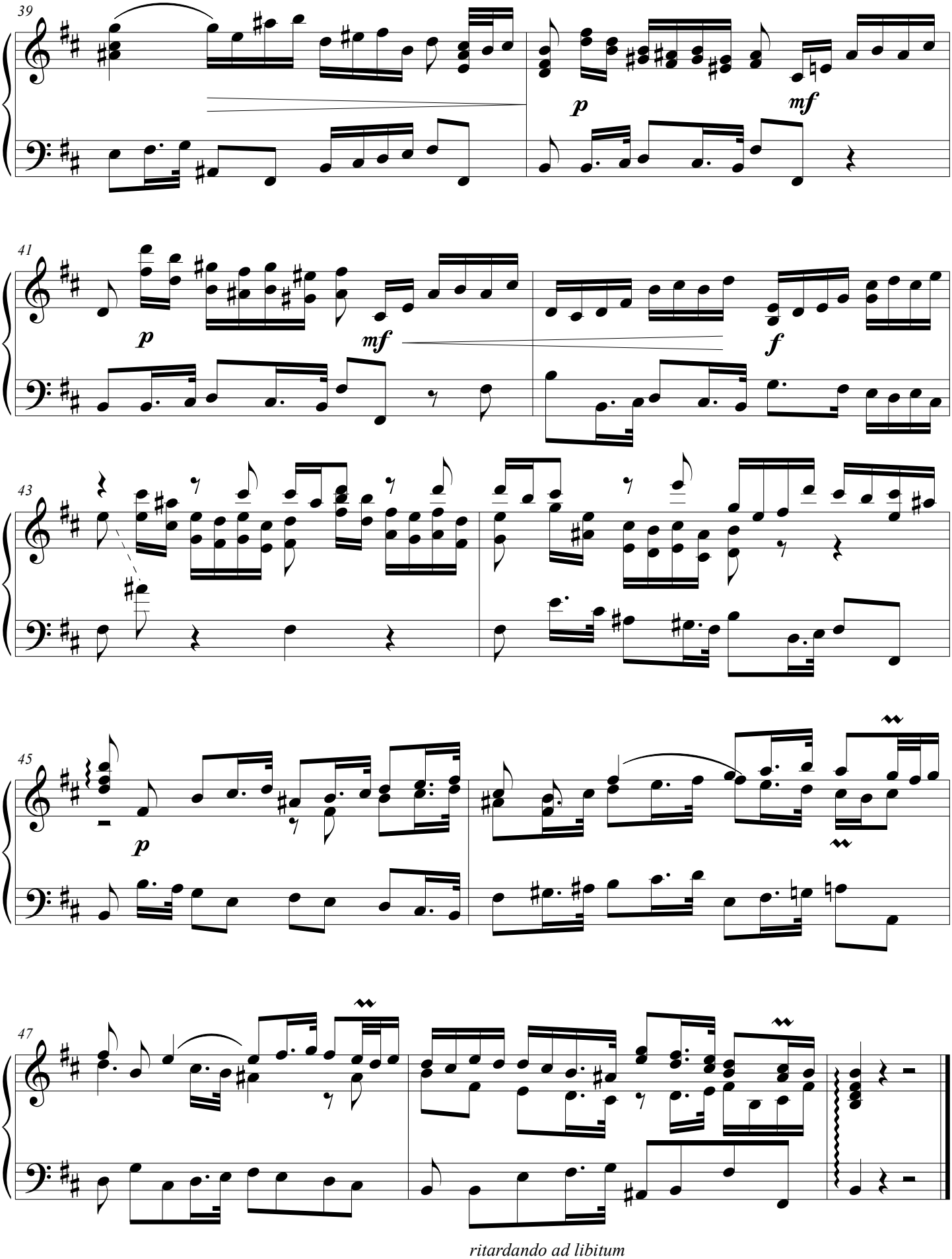
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