24 Preludes for organ, op. 24

The first of these Preludes to make it onto paper was the present B major, which I inscribed after improvising it in another key during a church service early in 1980. I had no advance inkling I would be playing this piece that day, but other numbers in this collection were improvised after being worked out mentally to varying degrees. I recall being haunted for days by the present D-flat major (which has always remained in that key). But after all that rehearsal in my inner ear, playing it as a postlude the following Sunday actually felt somewhat anti-climactic! Most of the Preludes fell in the spectrum in between. A motive or group of motives would occur to me and I would save it for that Sunday. I happened to be visiting my twin brother in California in July of 1986 when Flor Peeters died. Although I had no access to a keyboard, I was embroiled in work on my Spanish Rhapsody for clarinet and piano, which alternates between a tango 2/4 and a fandango 3/4. When some elegiac music in 6/8 began occurring to me in D minor, I thought that this music would make an effective clincher for the organ Preludes, one that I could work out after getting back to New York. Meanwhile, however, in Los Angeles, I was having trouble continuing work on the Rhapsody, so I arranged through a friend to get access to a local church. There I cathartically played the Prelude in pretty much its present form. The idea to use double pedal at the end (the final reference to the main, dotted motive) came to me only after I returned to Gotham, however.

I knew I wanted to collect all these sketches in some organized way (as I later did with my piano improvisations, opus 63), but found that the material sometimes transmogrified itself into other forms. (The trio of the second Habañera in my 'cello and piano Partita, for example, had begun life one Sunday morning.) So, the opus number 24 was set aside, but its contents were for the most part plastic. I don't do much composing these days, so I feel more comfortable than I have heretofore allowing these works to be fixed into the present format. The most recent Prelude in terms of raw materials is the E-flat minor which my records indicate dates from 1992. Early this year, I made a final selection, transposing as needed and putting all the numbers through a final edit. Some changes were minor, such as the exuberant grace note E leading to the final statement of the main tune in the opening C major Prelude. (It answers the note D at the corresponding point in the march's half cadence.) The B-flat major underwent the biggest alteration. A big pedal solo with doubled hands, suitable for pulling out all the proverbial stops, became a gentle intermezzo with the melody in the left hand, two accompanying voices in the right hand, and no pedal at all!

A number of vocal and instrumental works of mine are now available online. I would like to dedicate the current collection, whose complete contents will first be promulgated in this wise, to Dan Long, the gentleman initially responsible for making organ music from my pen available for downloading. He has been

putting Preludes that he himself wrote, alternately lovely and stirring, on the Web, so it seems natural for me to follow suit with all this trunk music of mine.

I do not find that the current generation of organists, for all their technical fluency, are as well versed in aspects of improvisation (free or chorale driven) as were the masters I was emulating in my own erstwhile study. (I admit that the emphasis was already shifting then, and I was largely following my own predilections in the 70s and 80s. So, I guess that means that the stature of improvisation has itself declined.) Another factor in the warehousing I have done of these *morceaux* until now is their relative lack of originality. I've made such a point of the genesis of these numbers not to call attention to any supposed improvisatory prowess, but rather by way of apology for the ineluctably derivative nature of quite a few passages. When improvising, one is in the here and now exigency of getting the idea occurring to one into audible form, and making a convincing connection with what has preceded it. There is really no time to think about being original! It is my hope that players and listeners will find more to enjoy in the sheer invention and élan of this music, will simply look elsewhere for the more groundbreaking revelation. Schoenberg says that composition is slowed-down improvisation. The congregations all those Sundays (and Wednesday evenings in Christian Science services, too) then were hearing speeded-up composition and, thanks to Dan, now others can too.

Victor Frost
3 IV 02
New York City

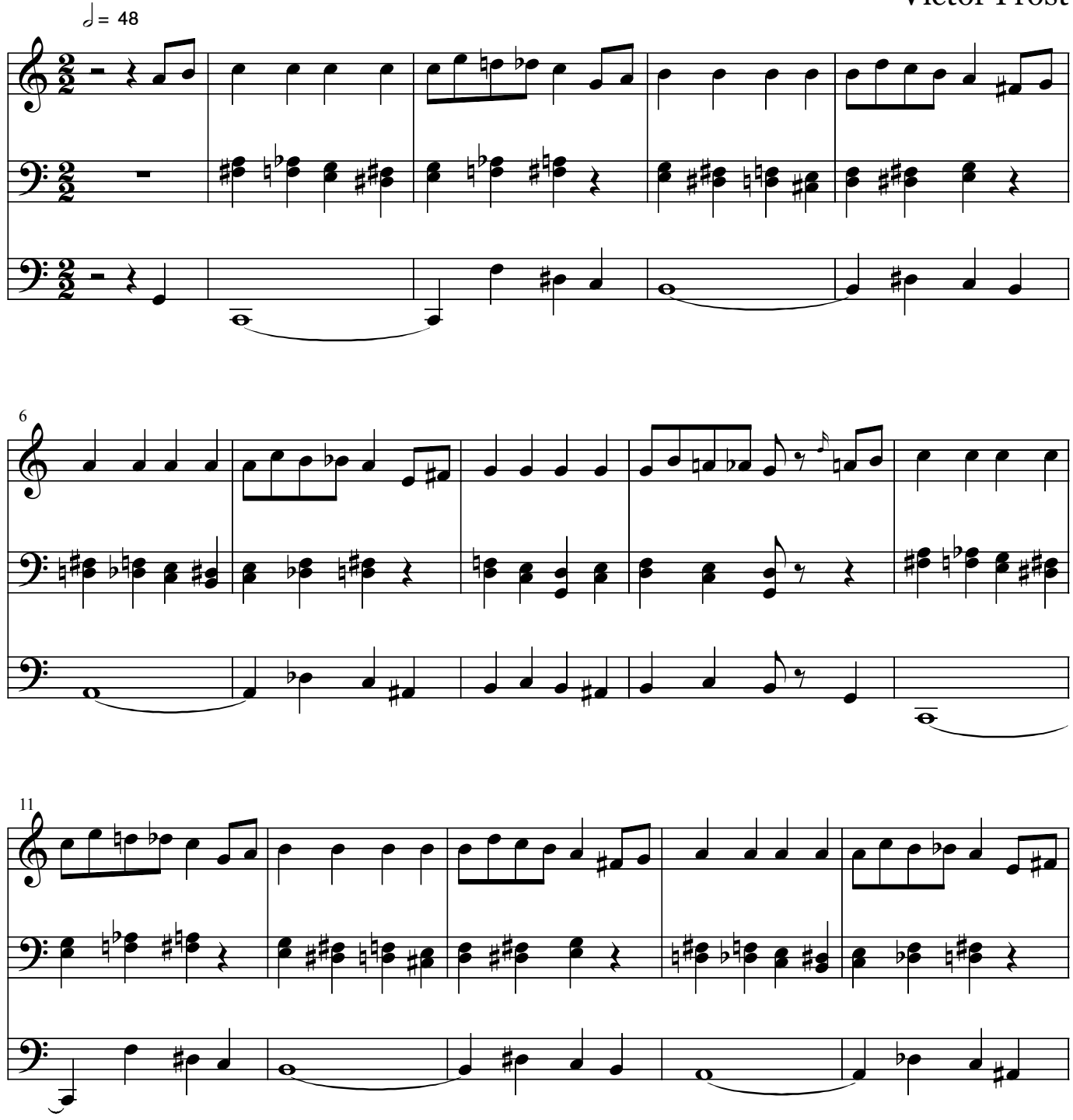
to Dan Long

Twenty-four Preludes

for organ, op. 24

1.

Victor Frost



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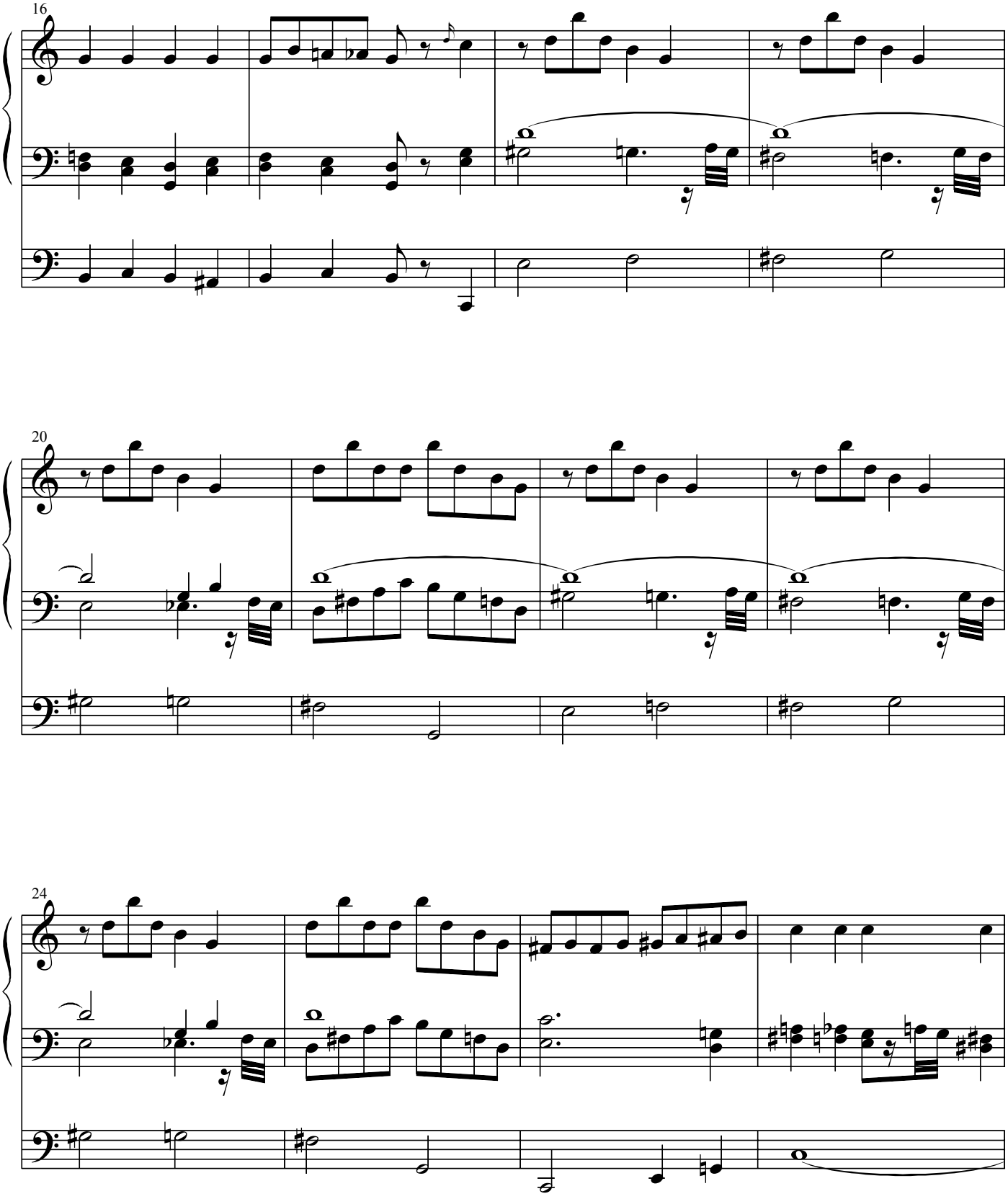
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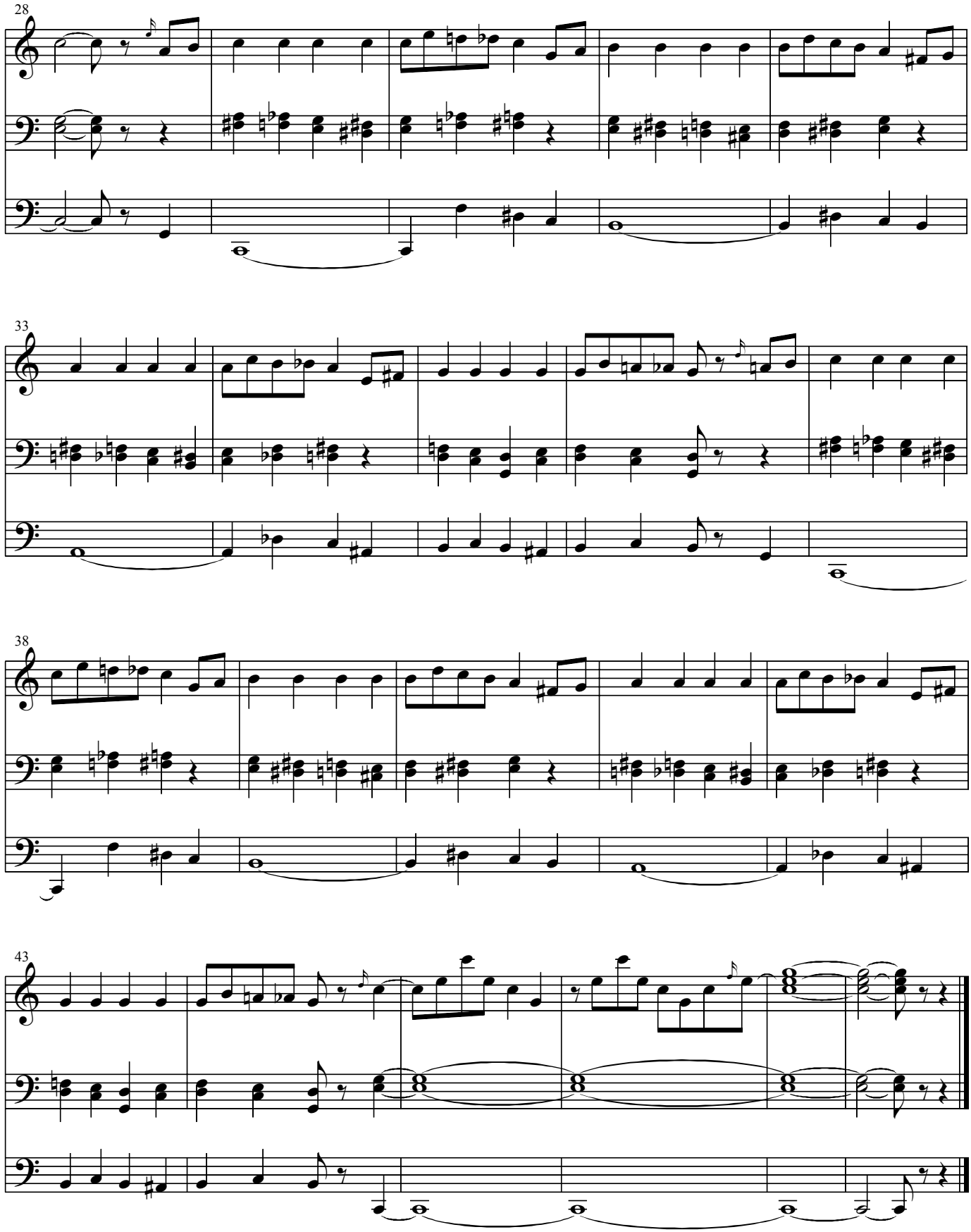
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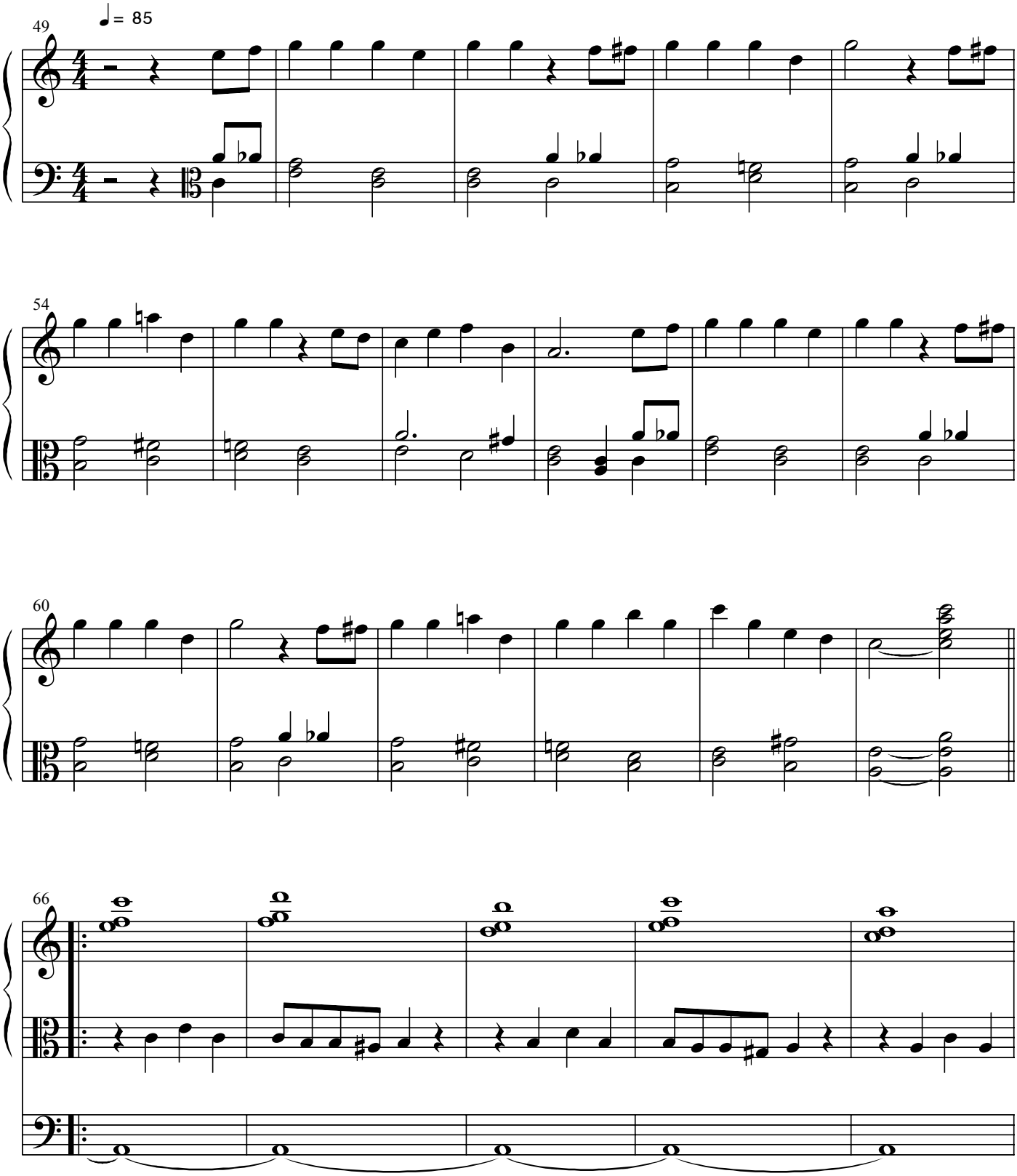

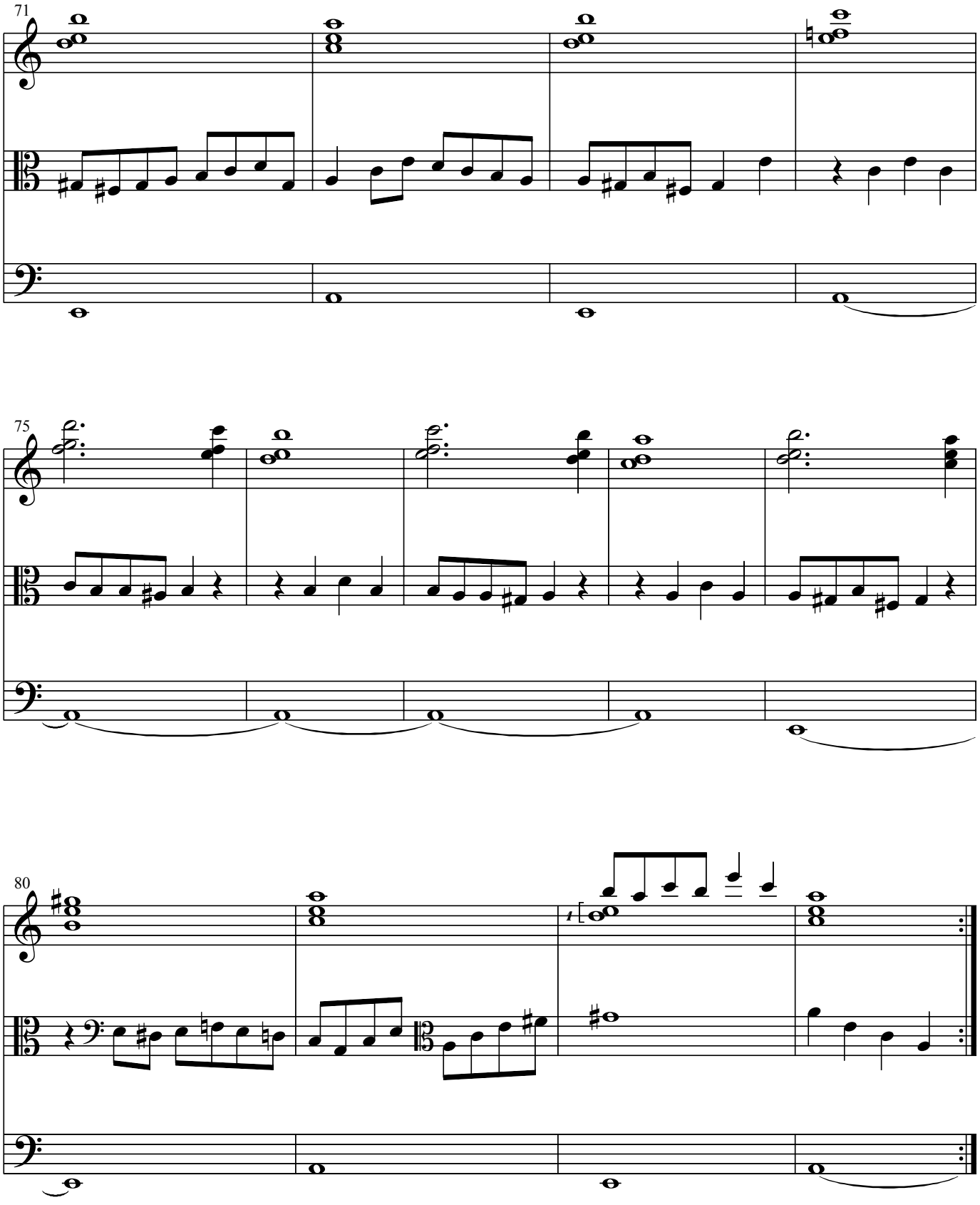
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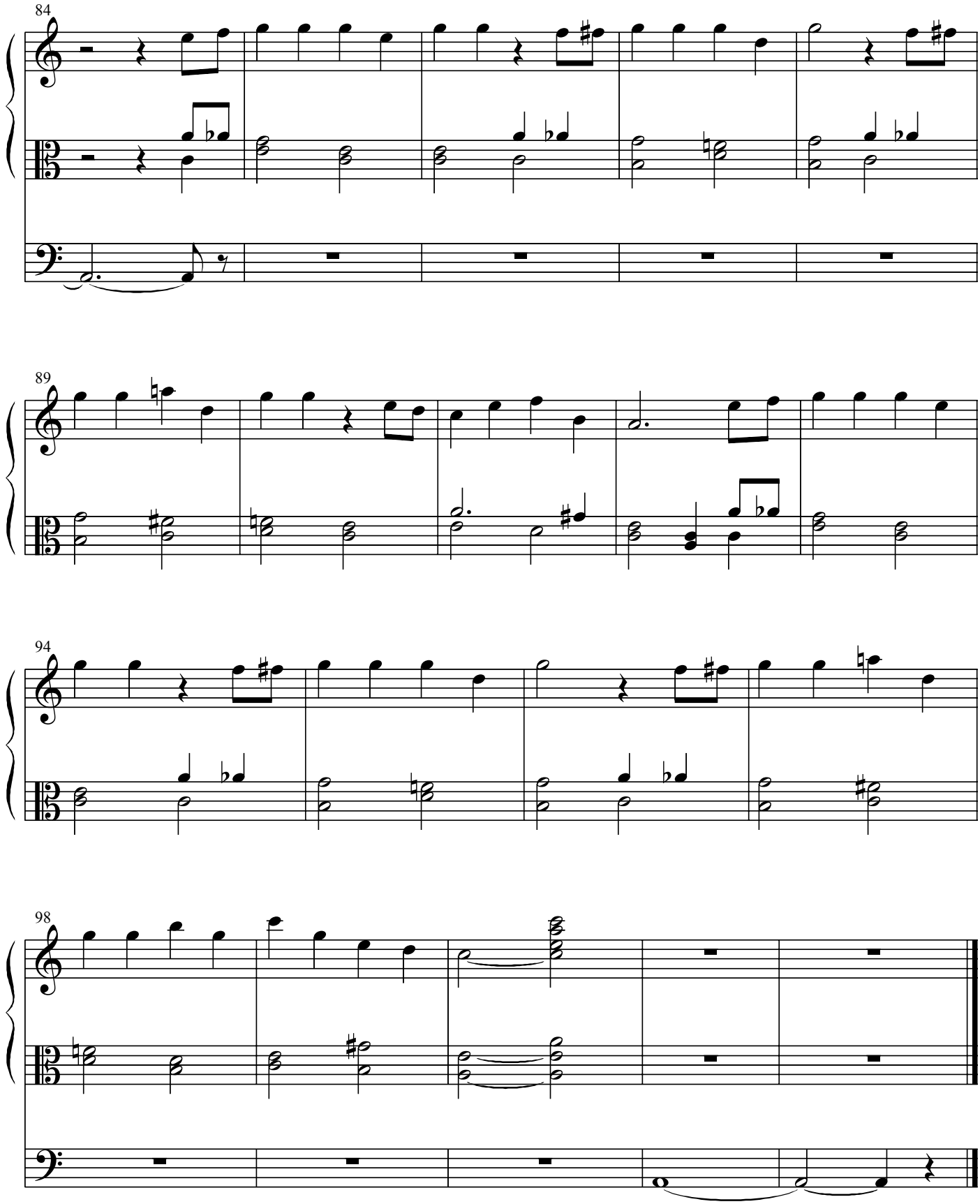
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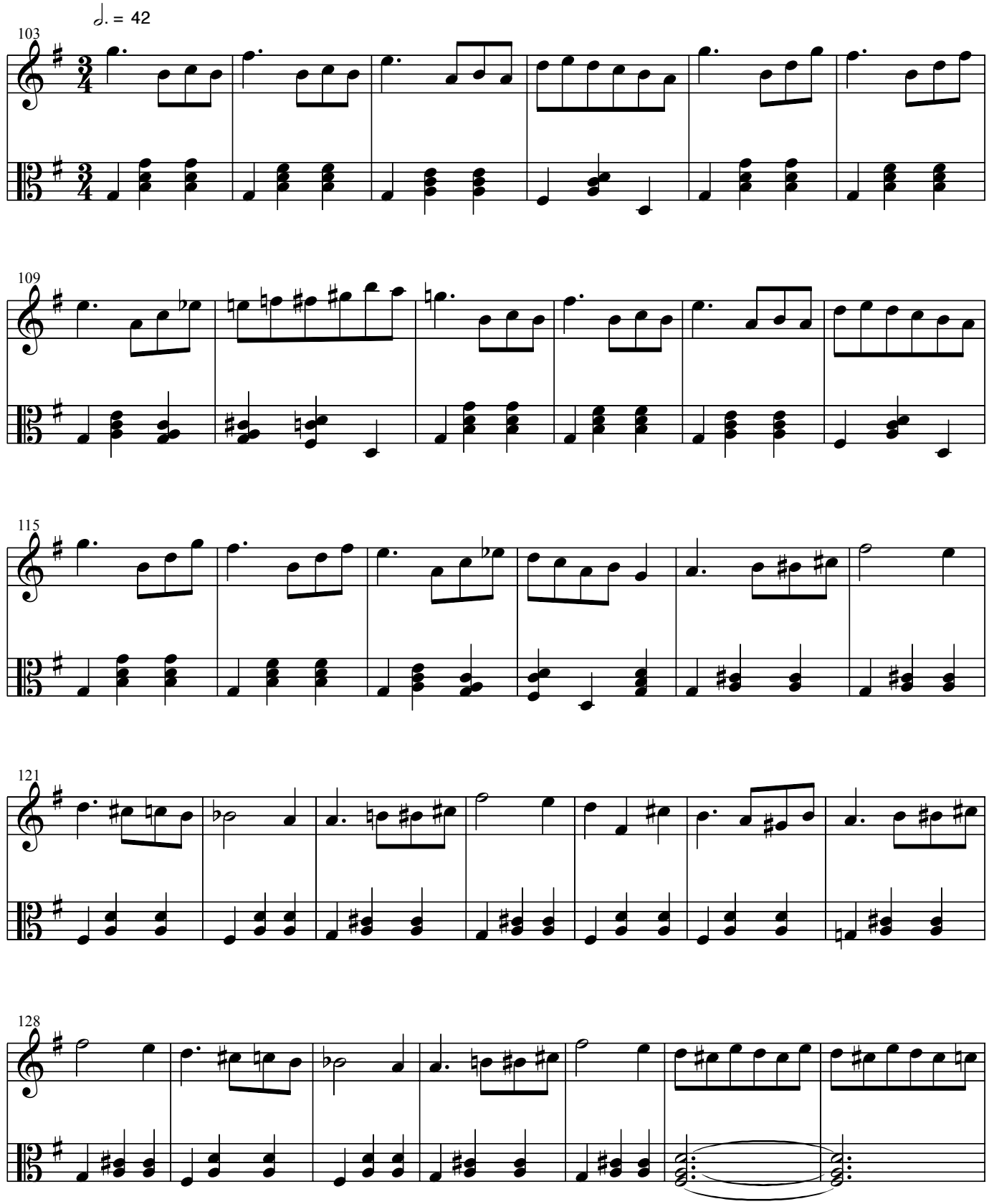

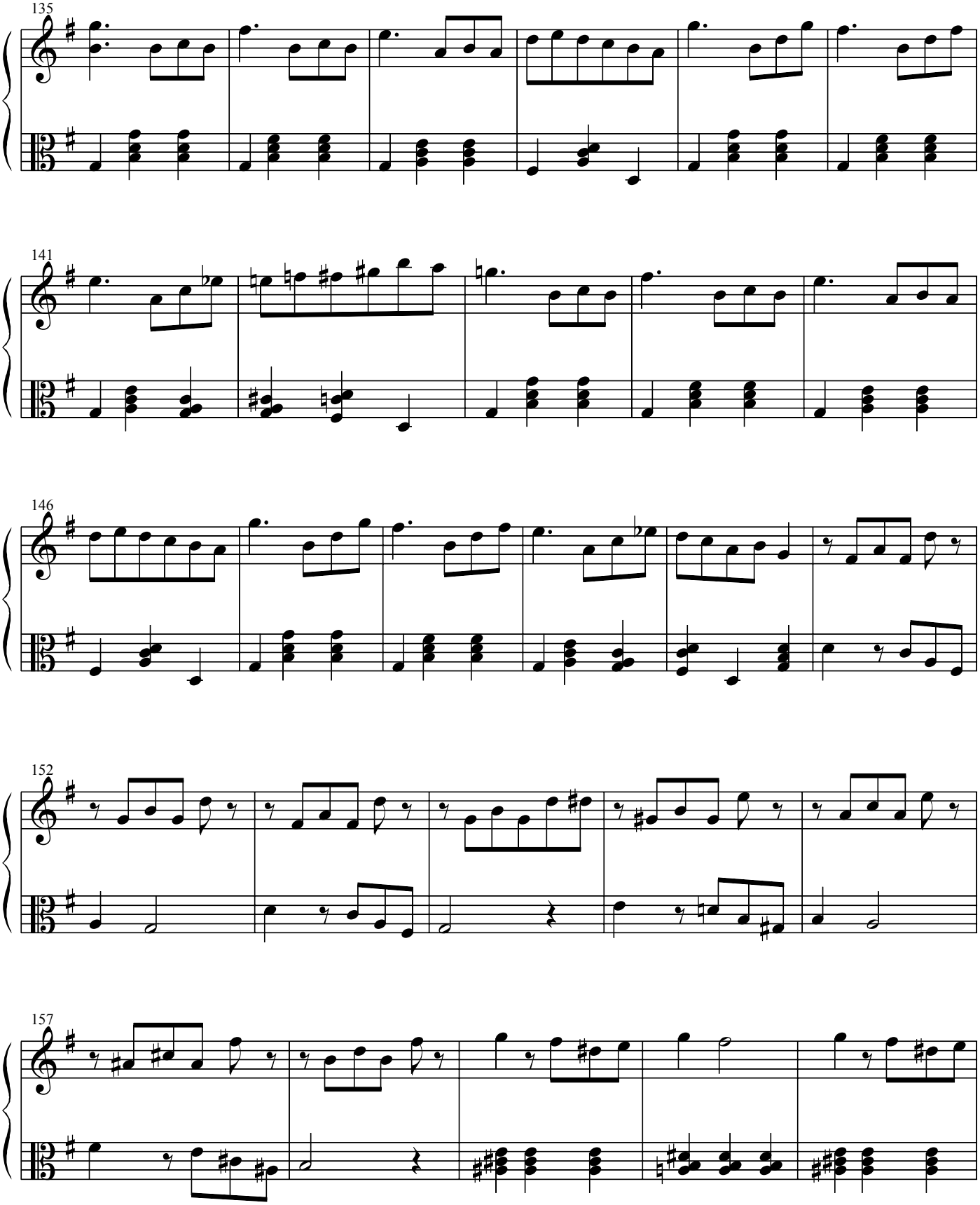
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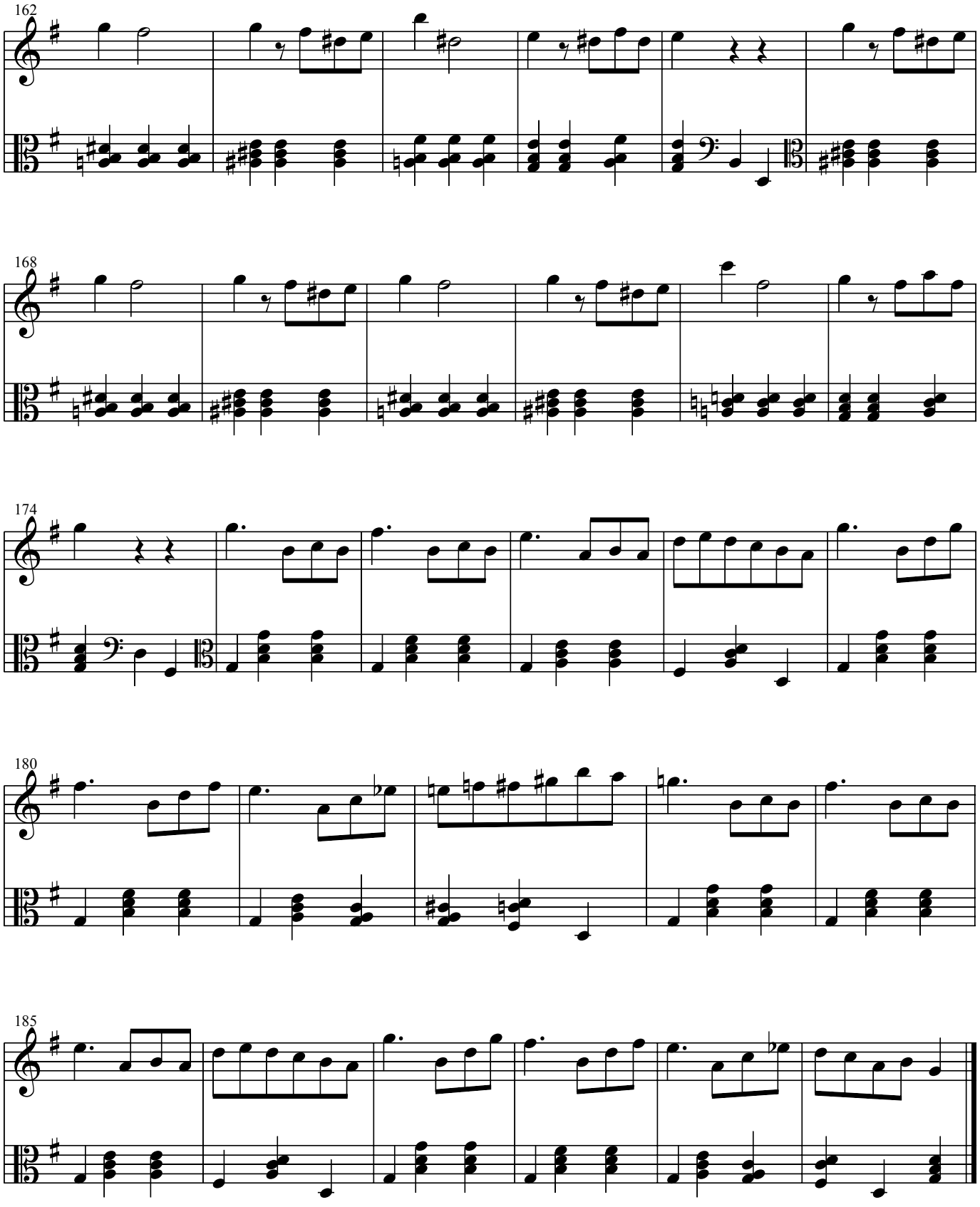
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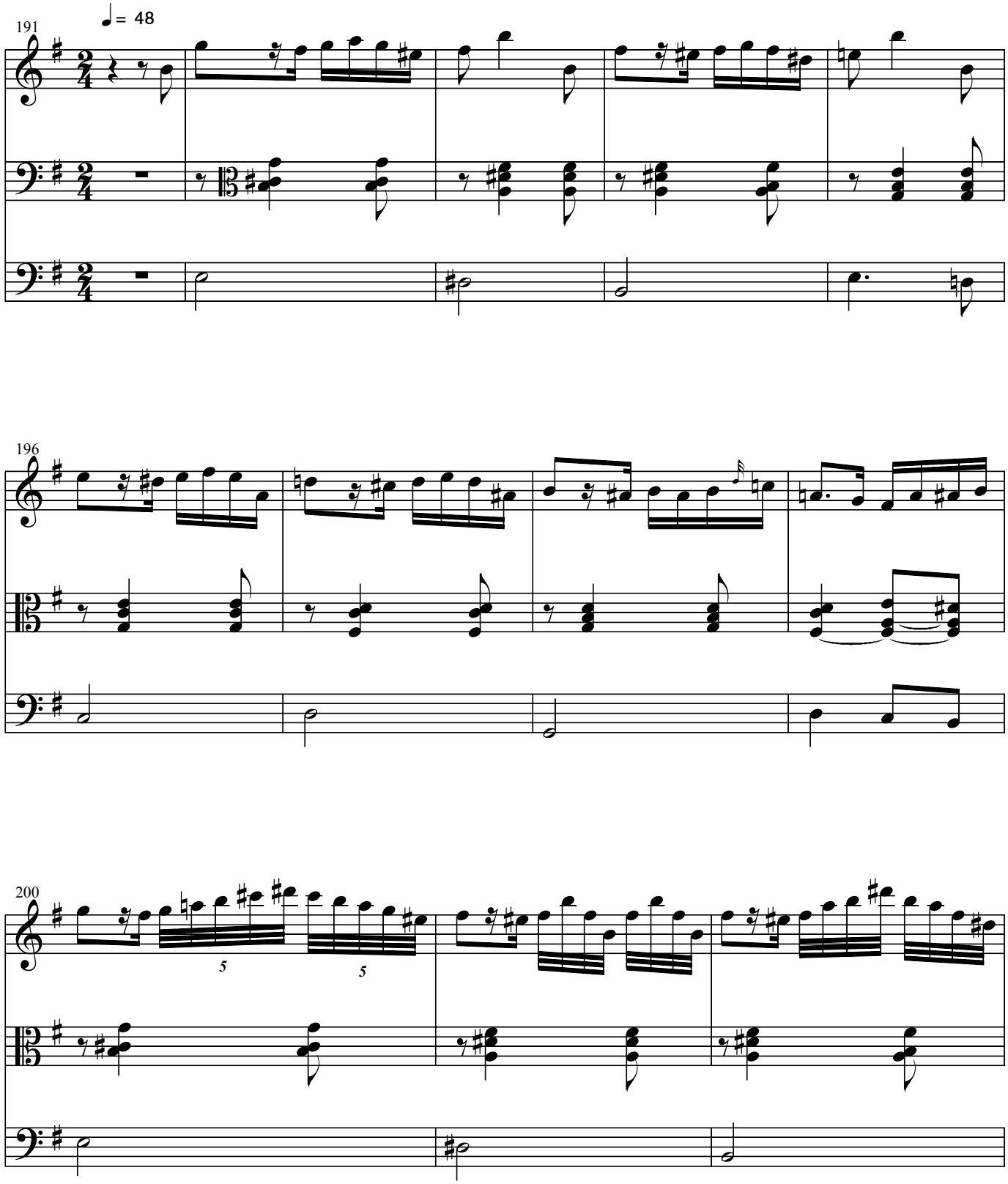

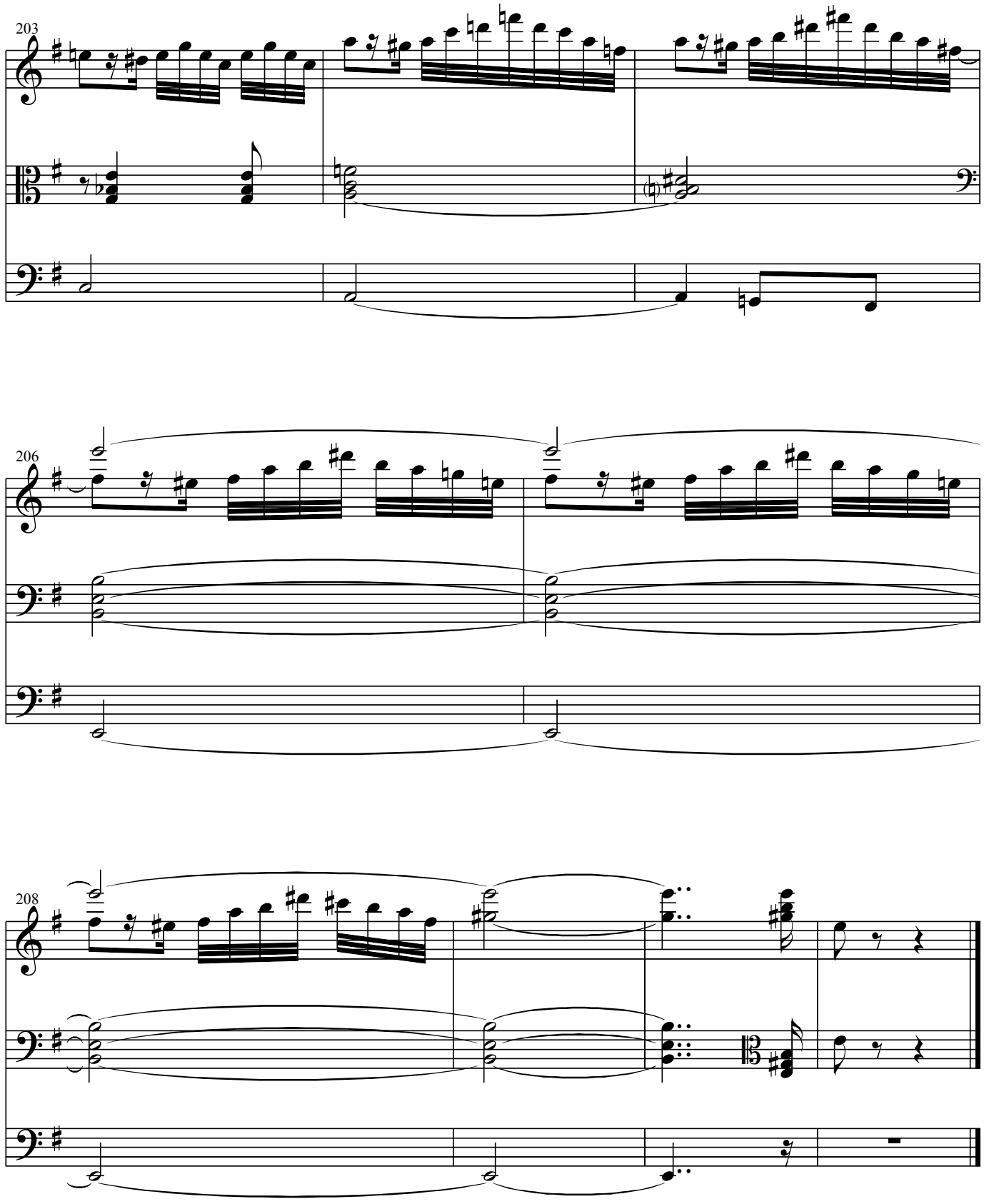
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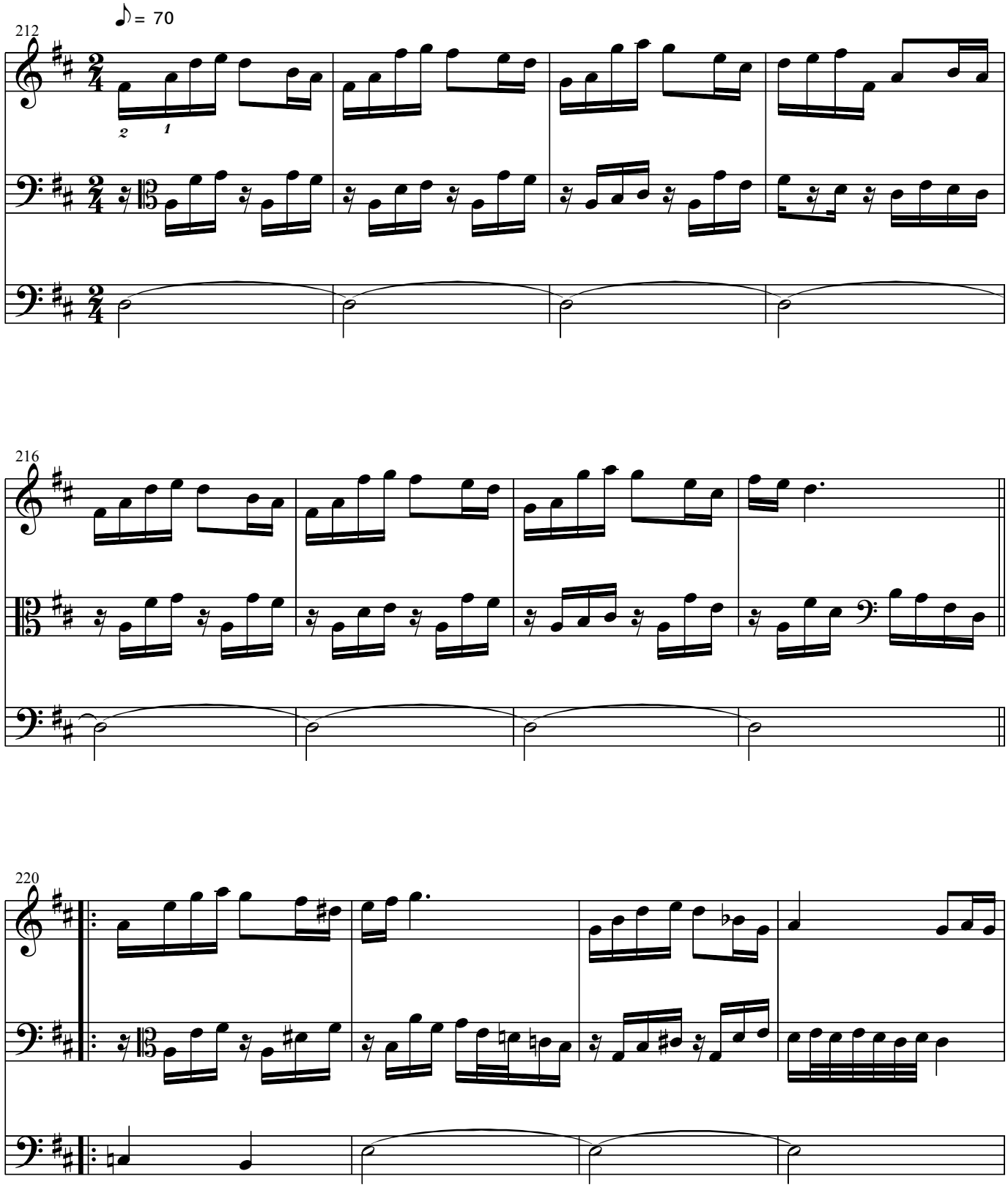

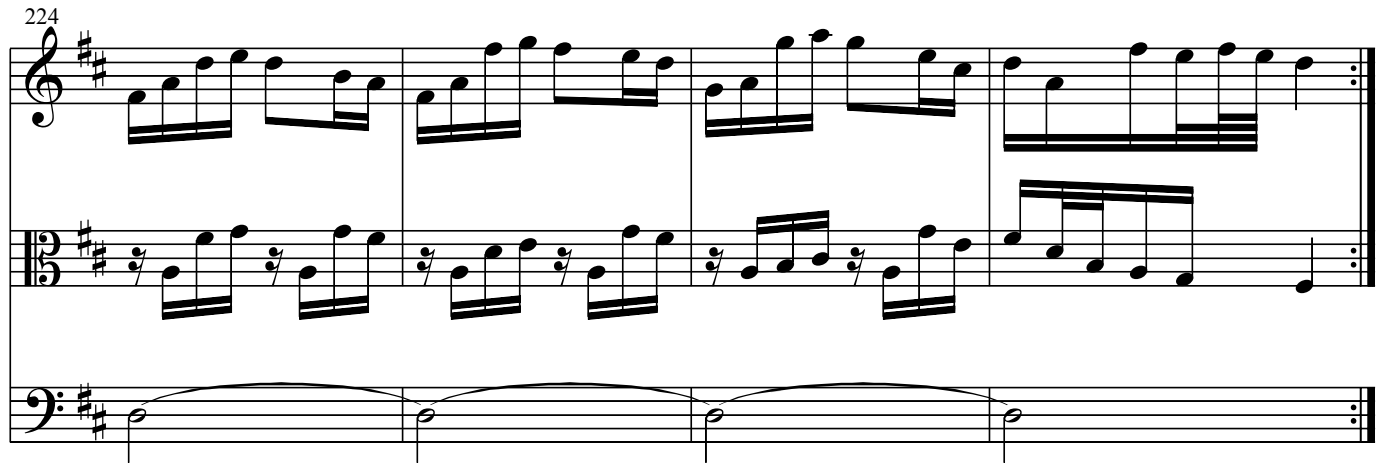

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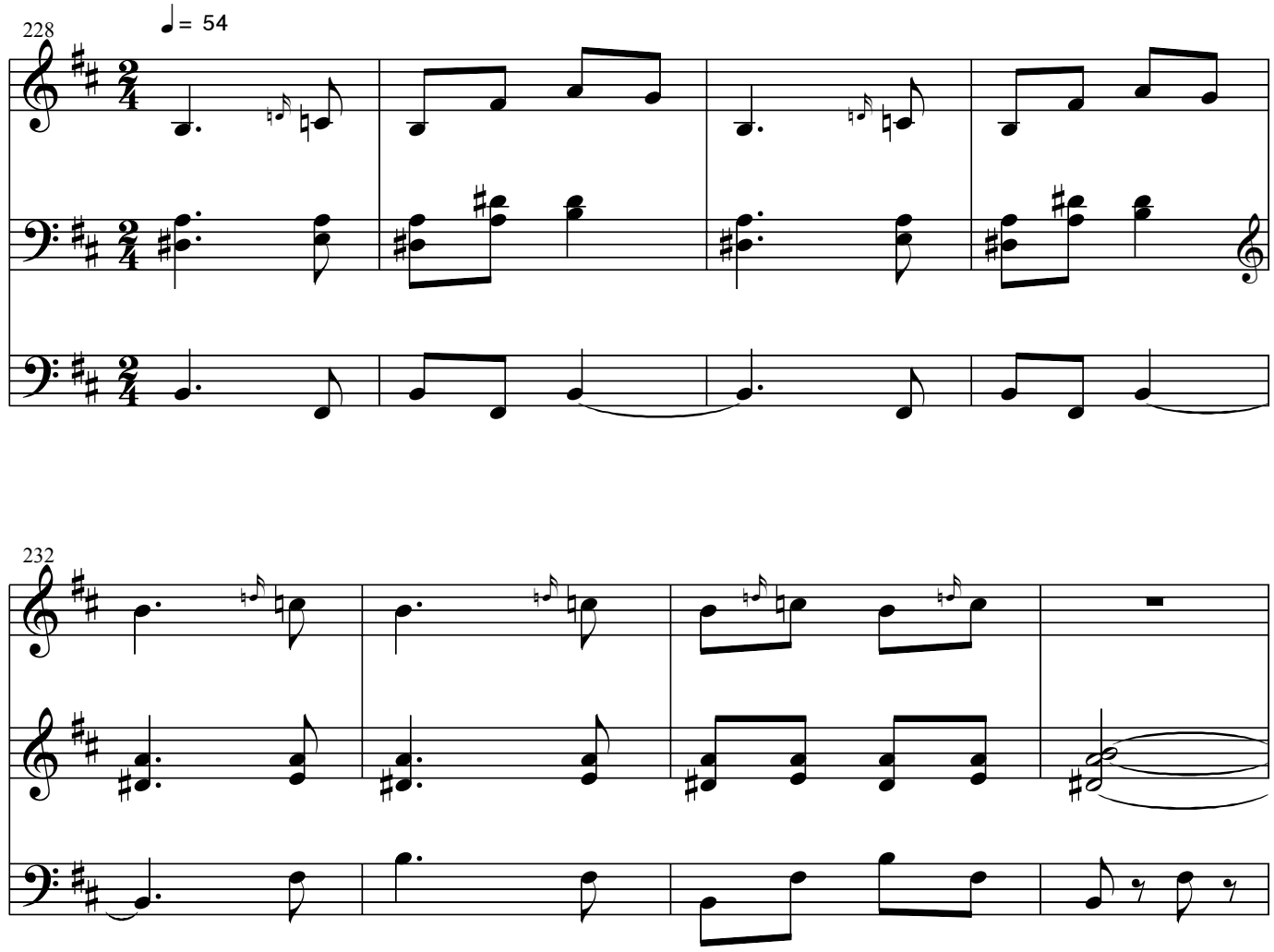

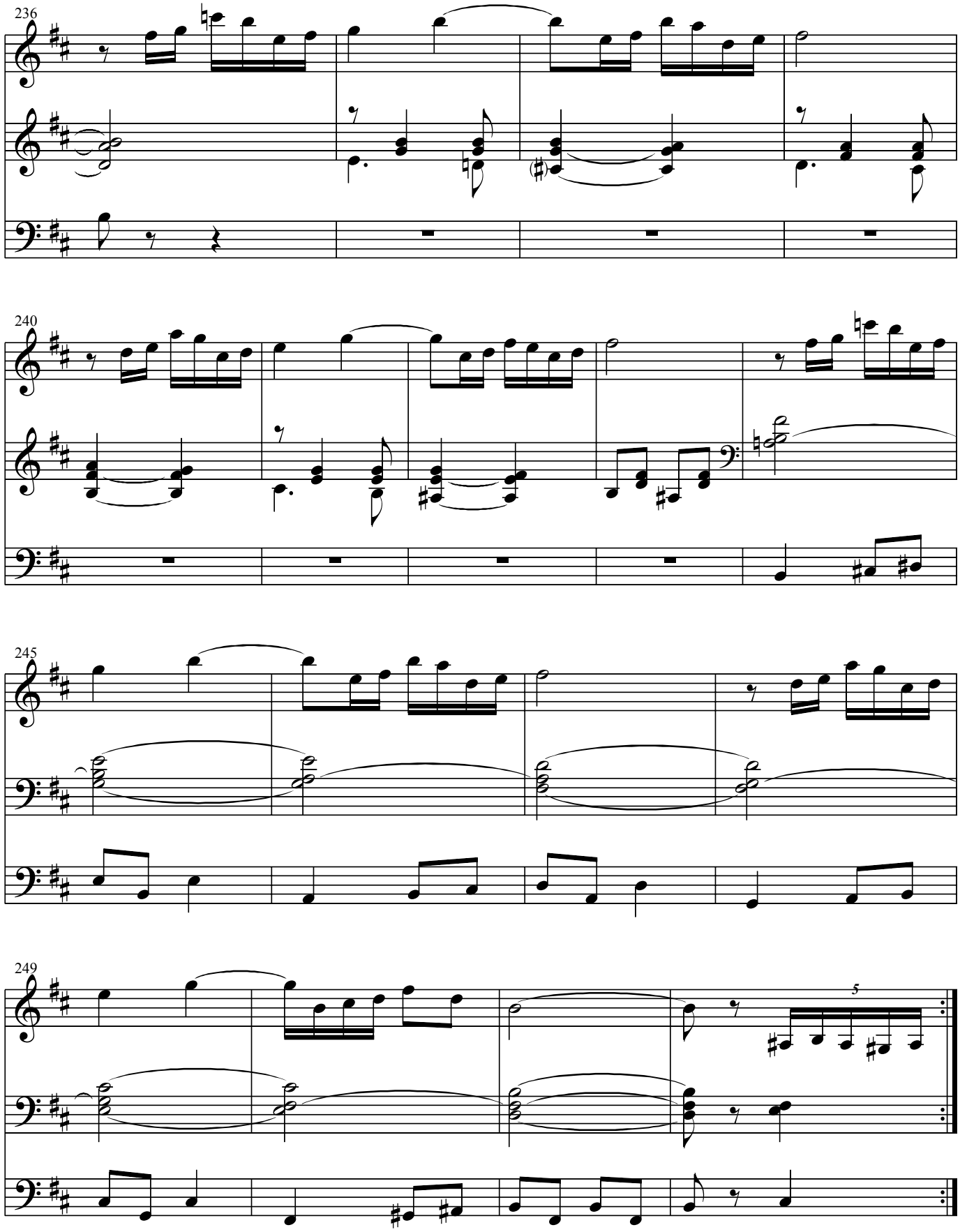
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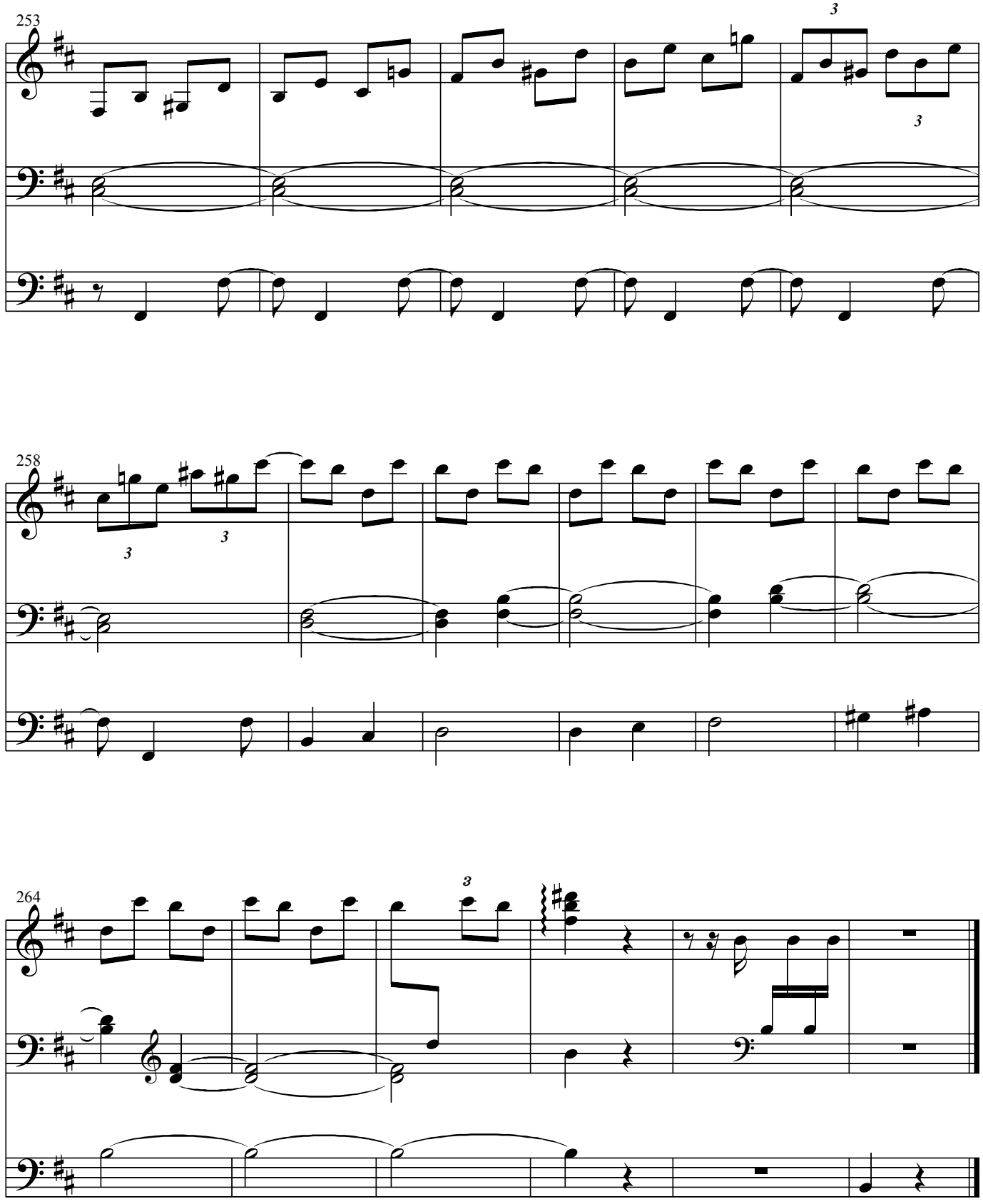
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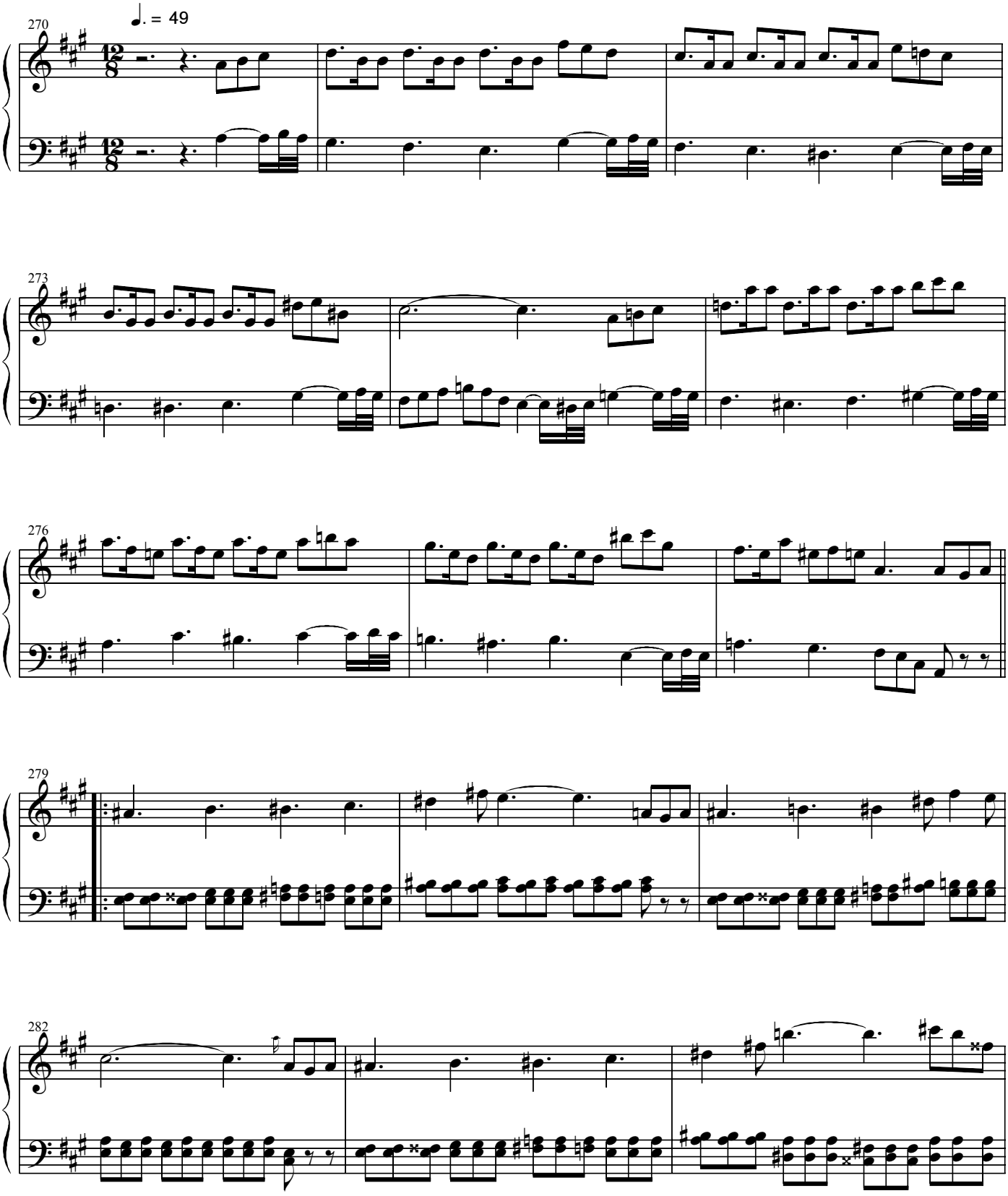

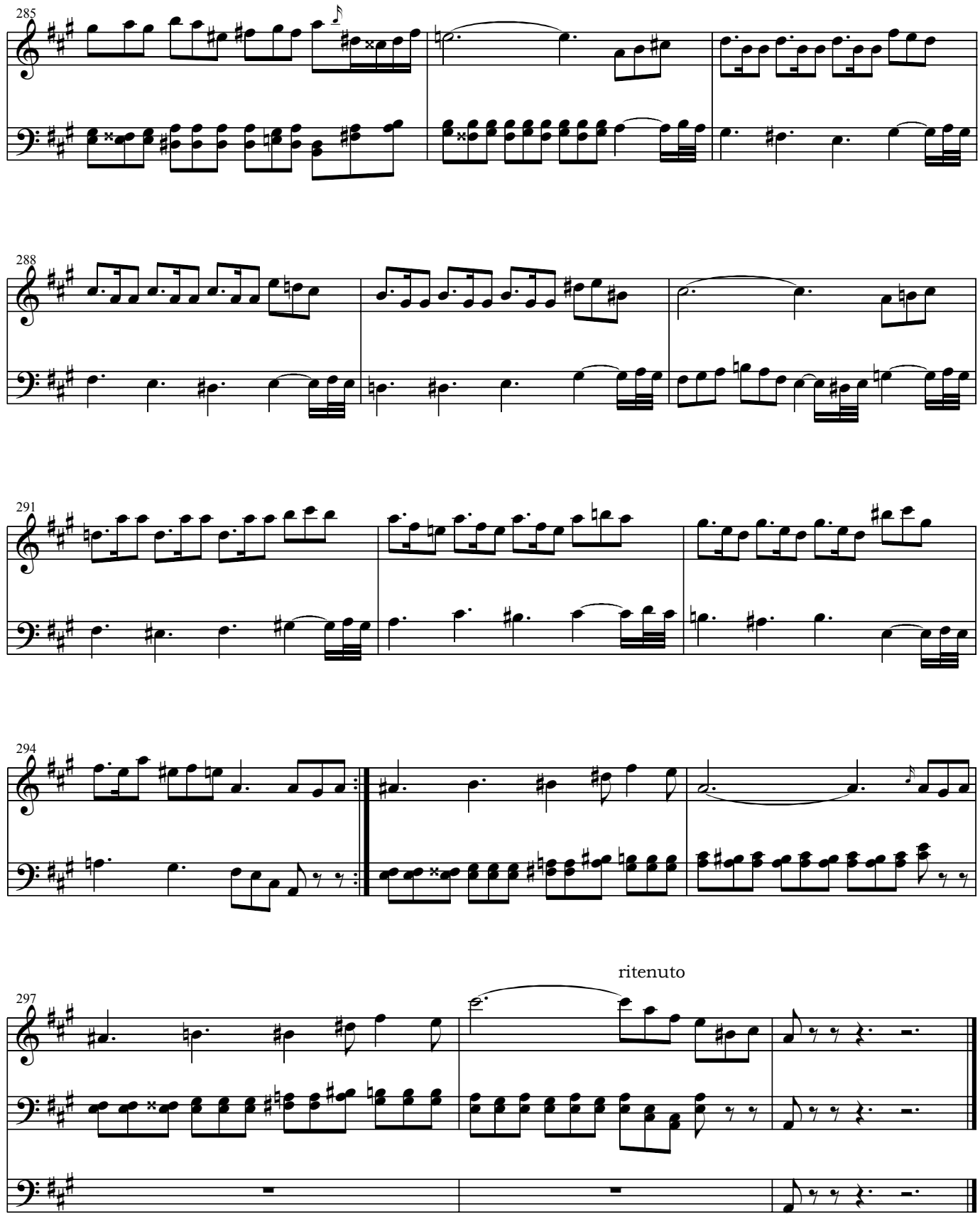
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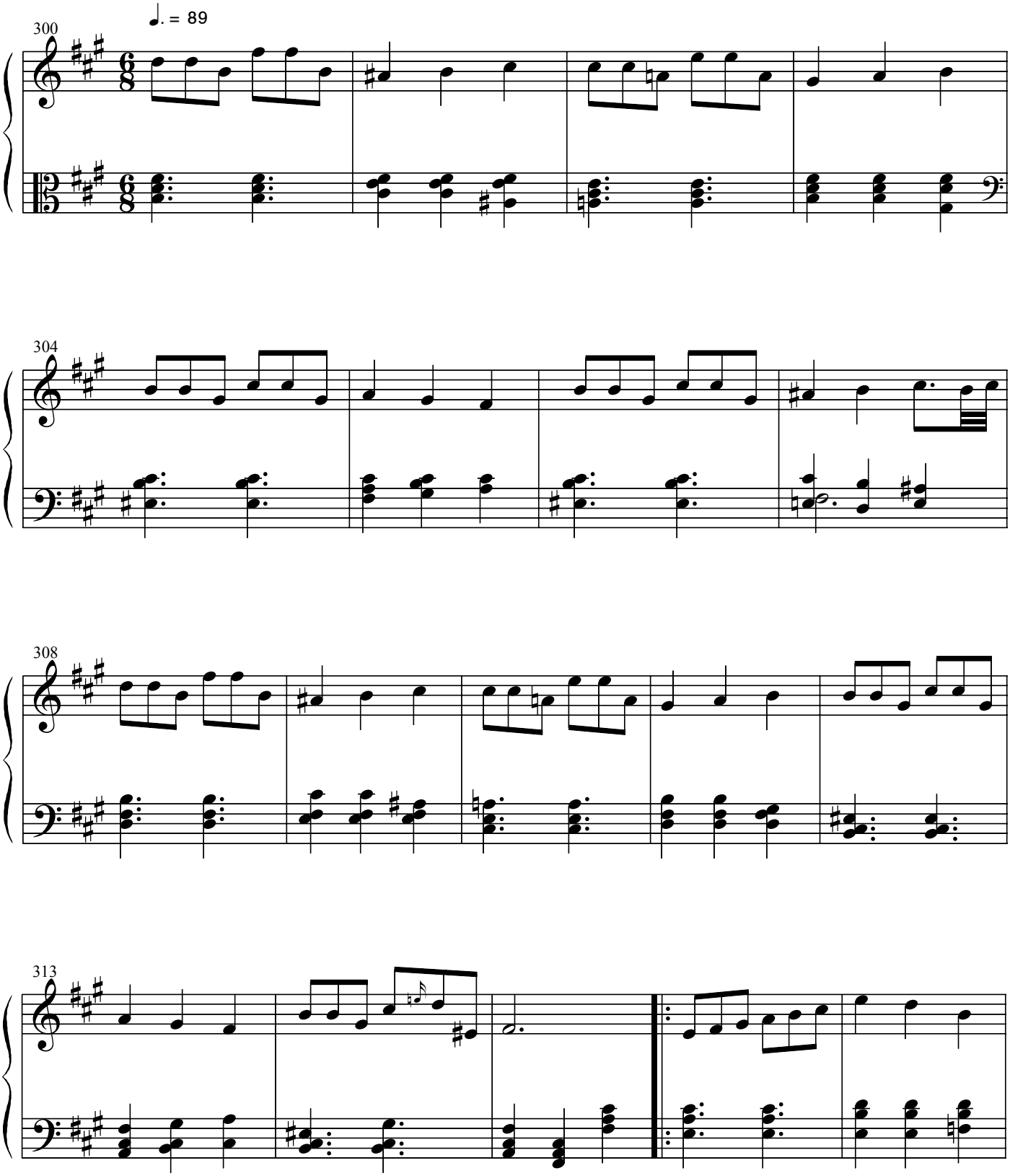

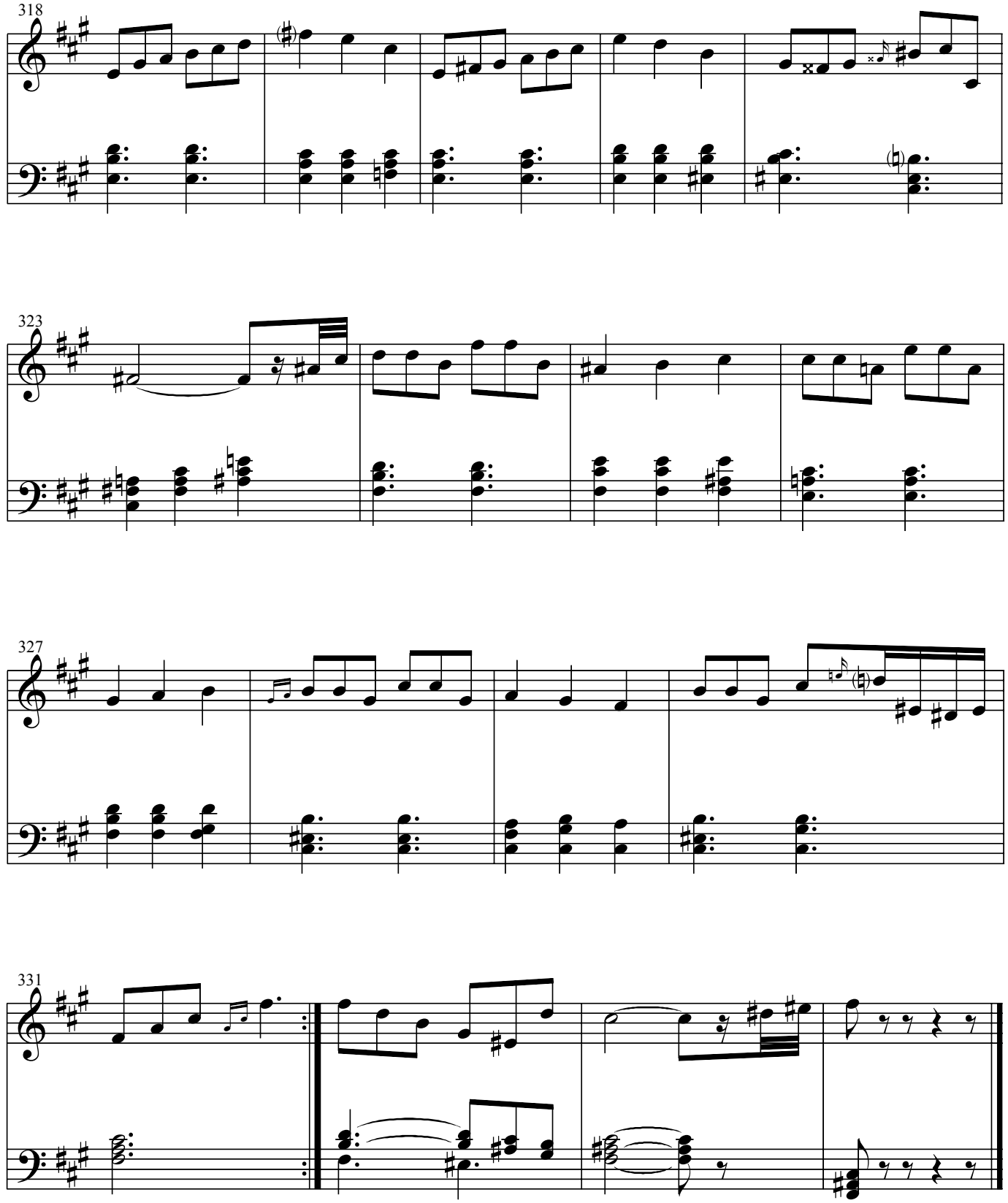
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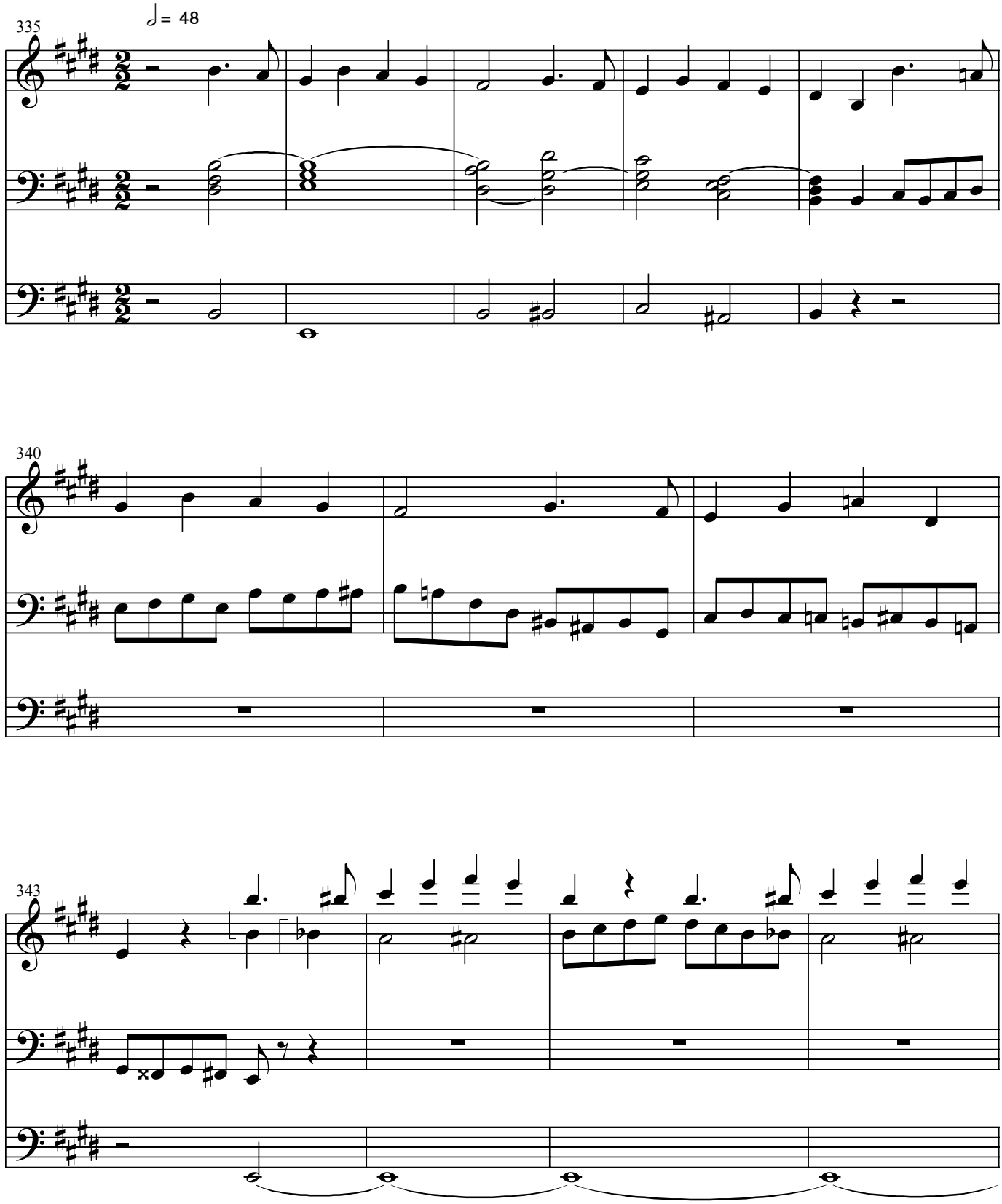

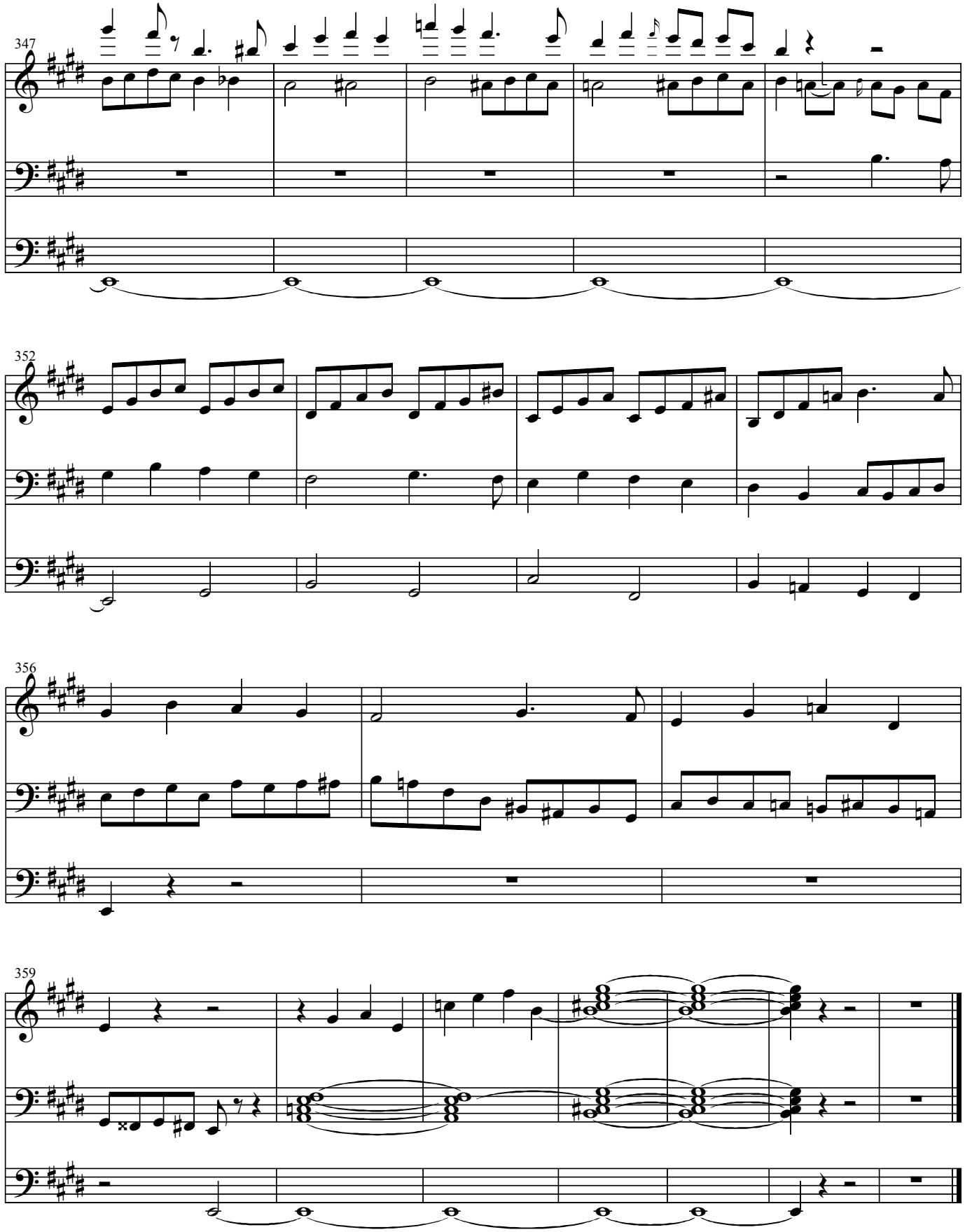
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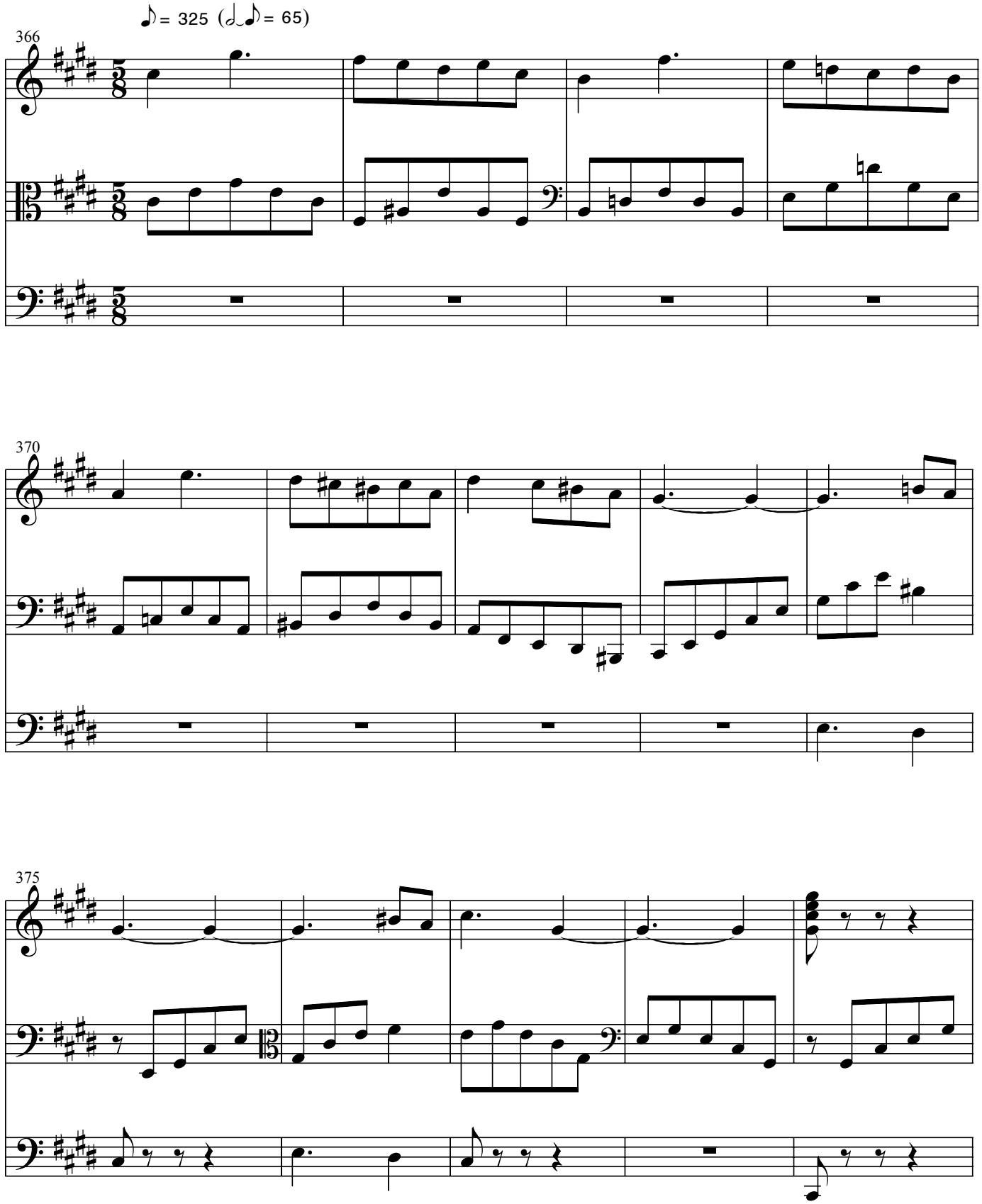

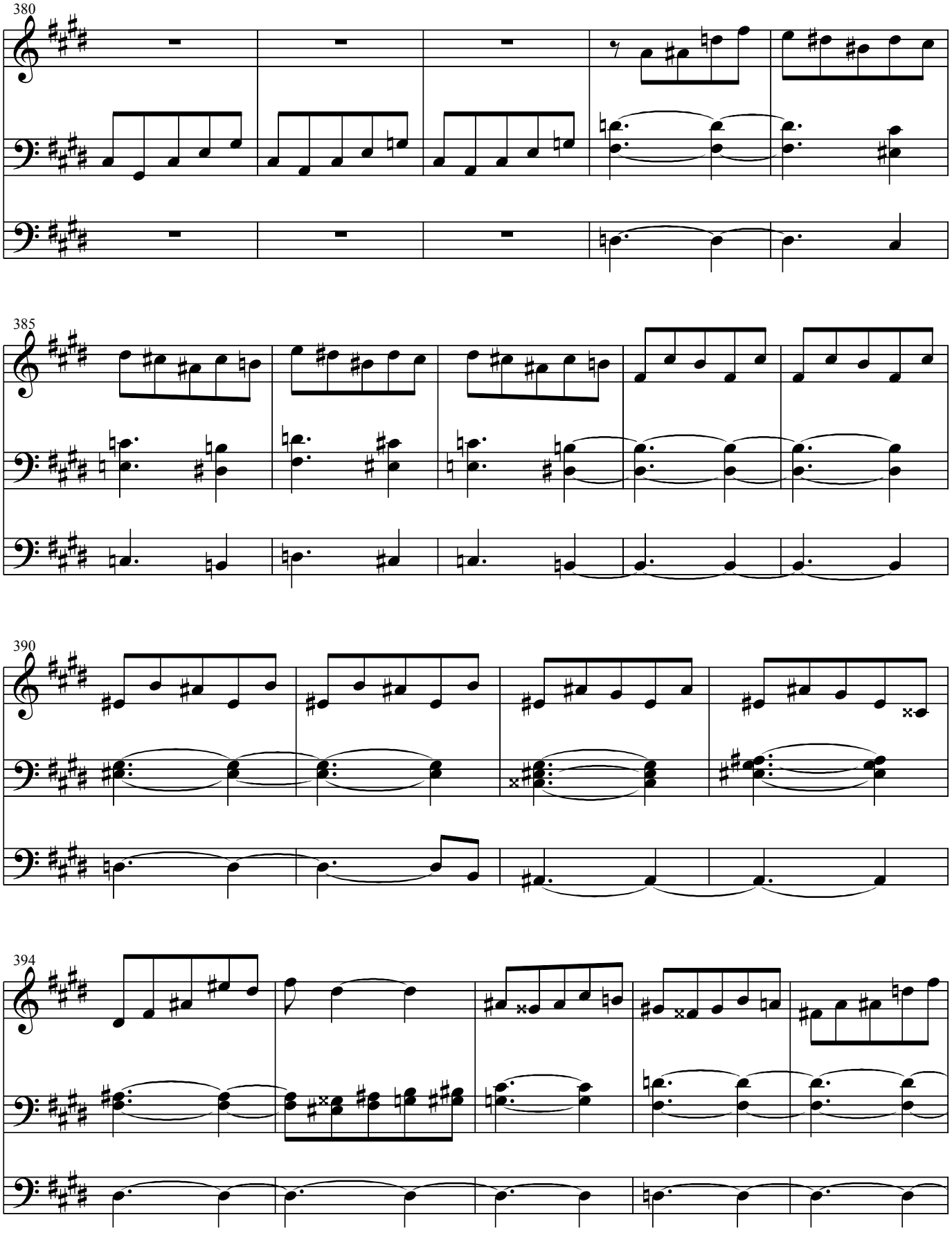
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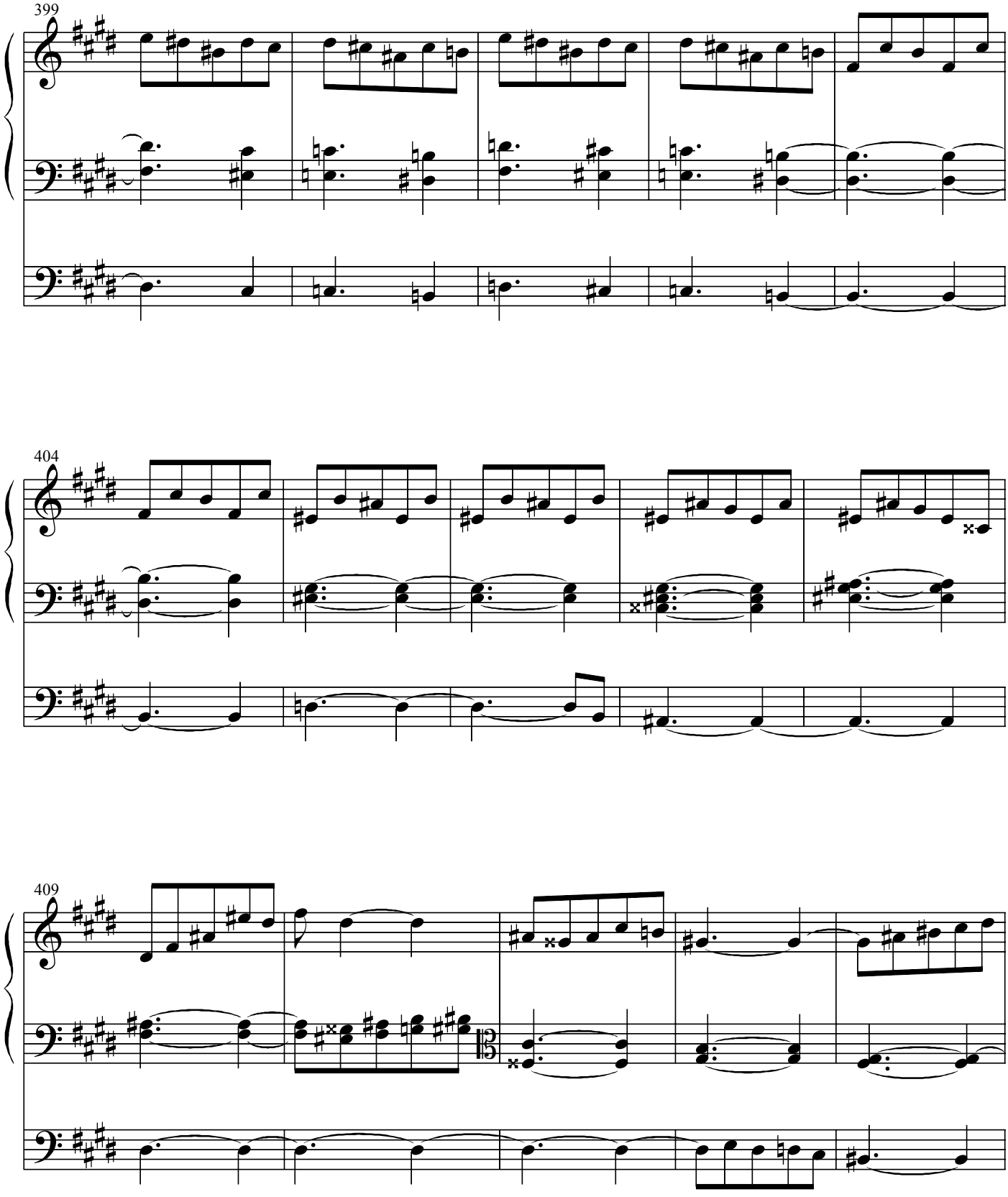
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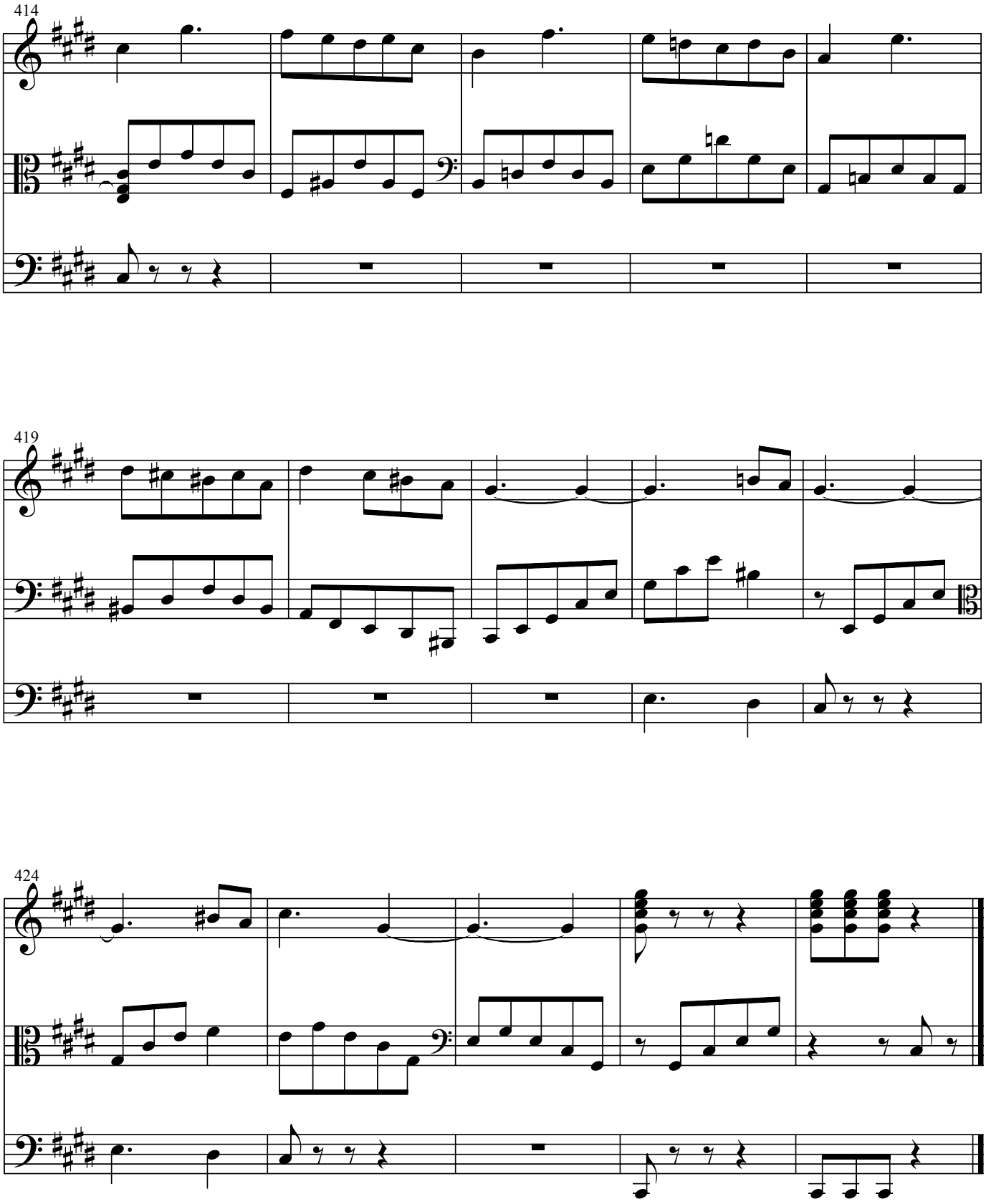
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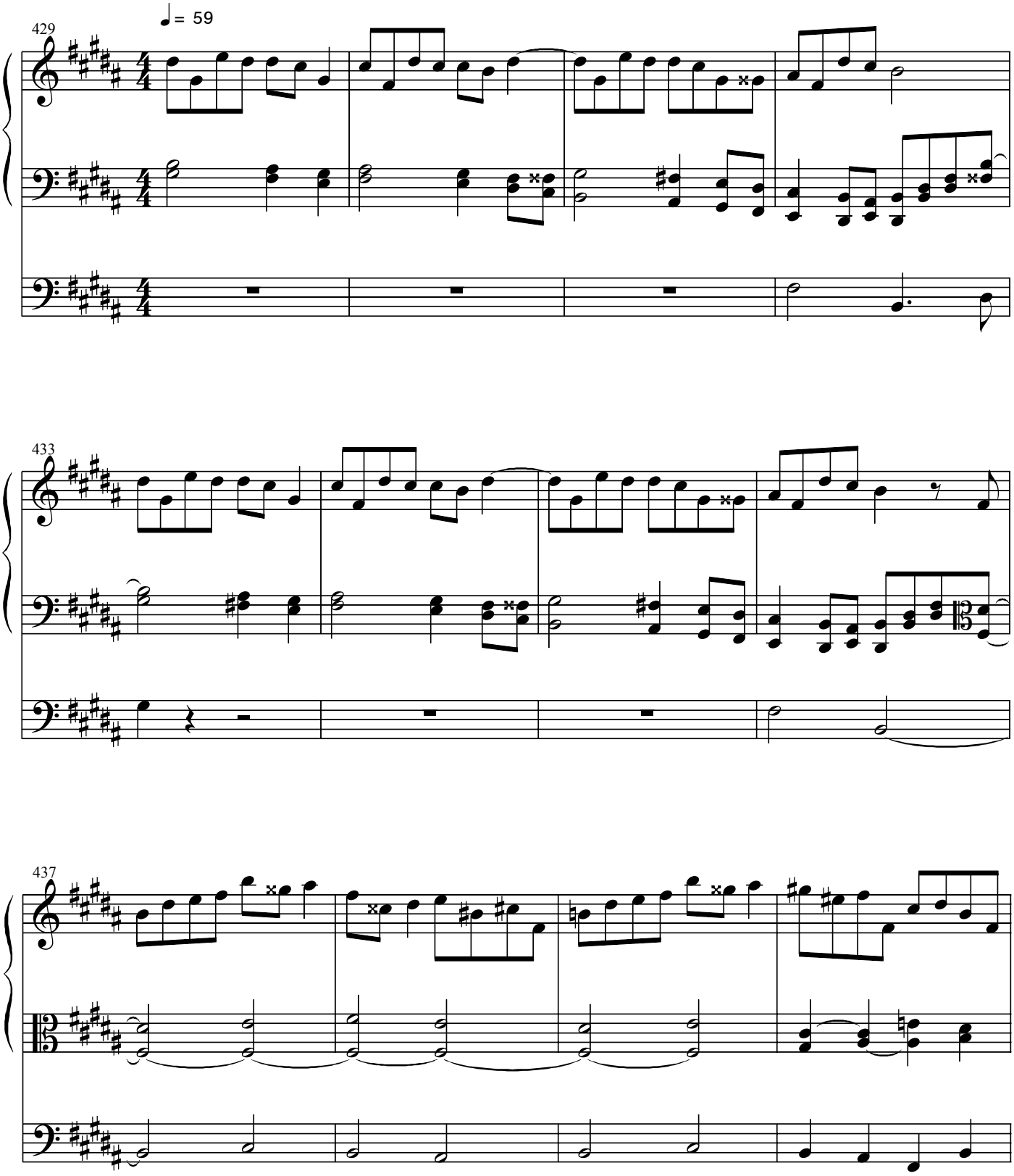

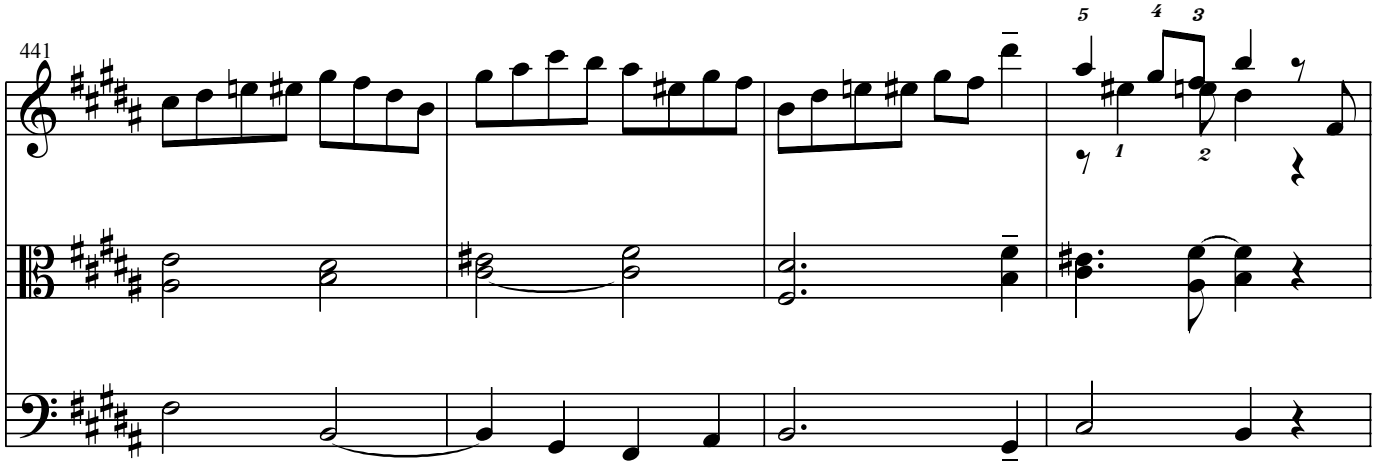
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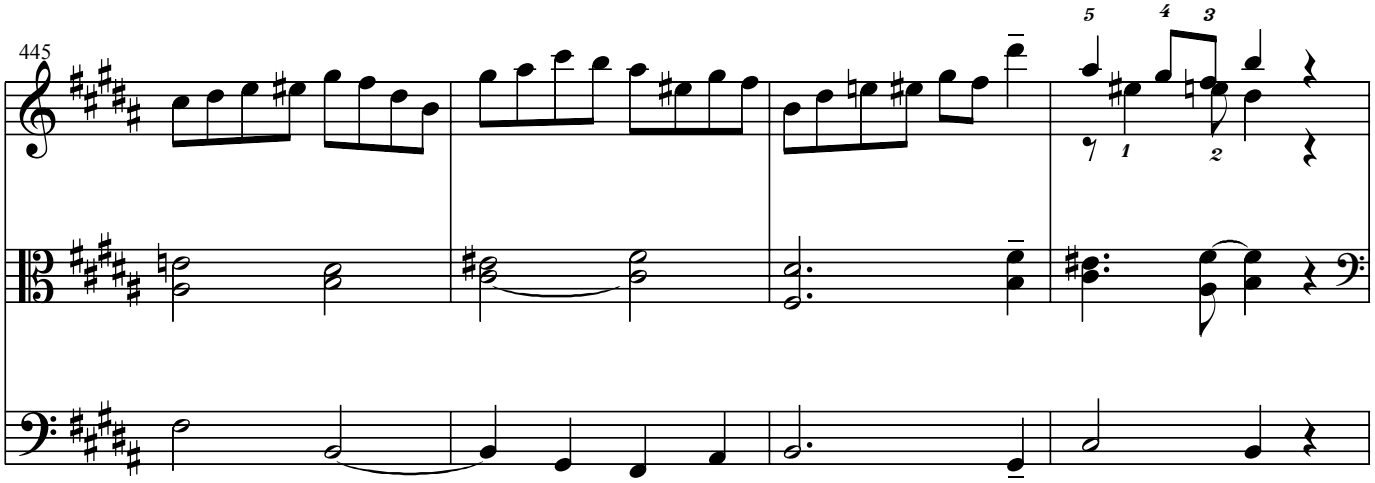
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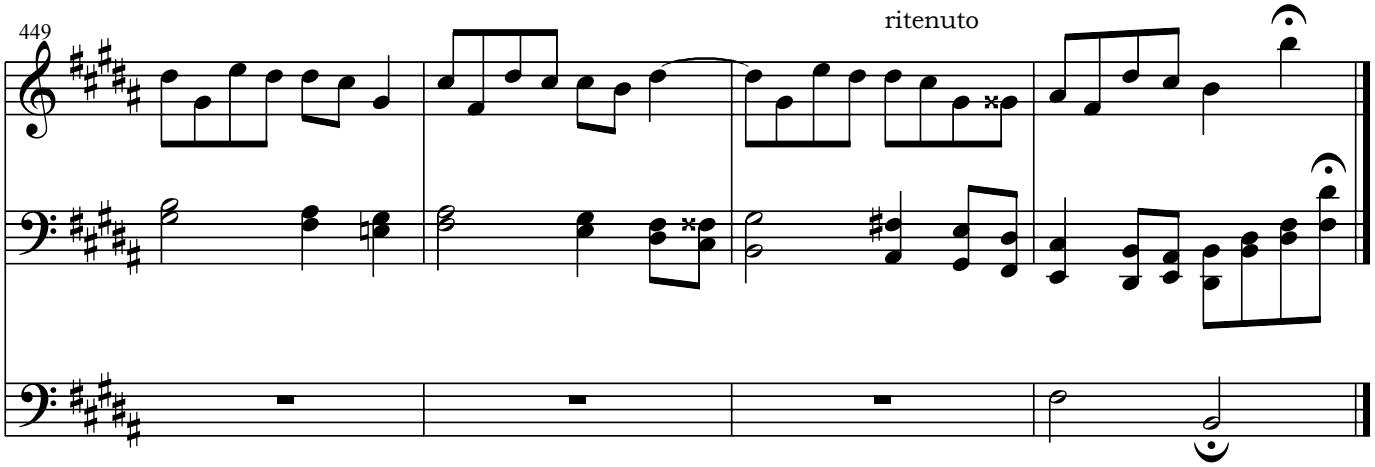
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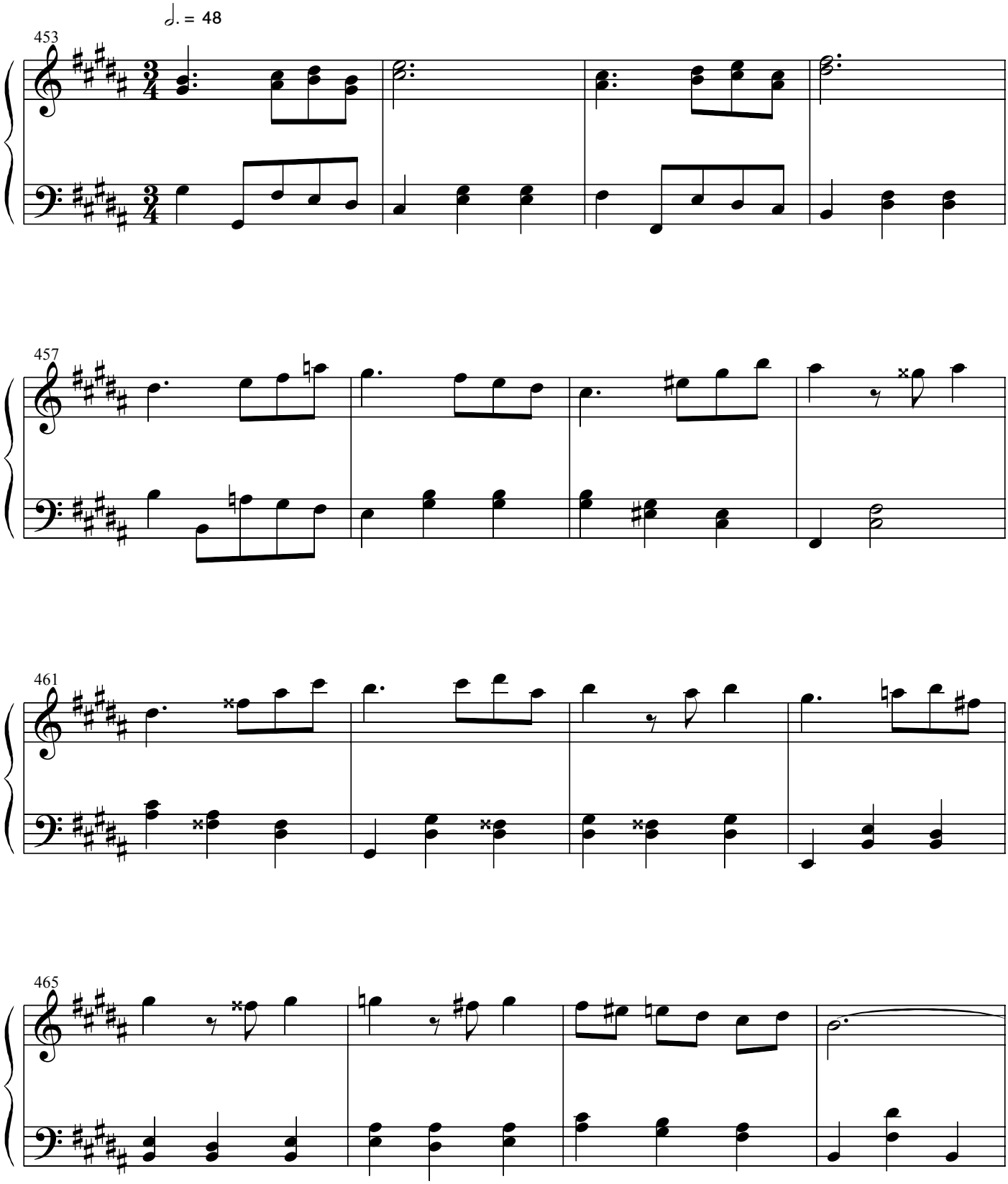

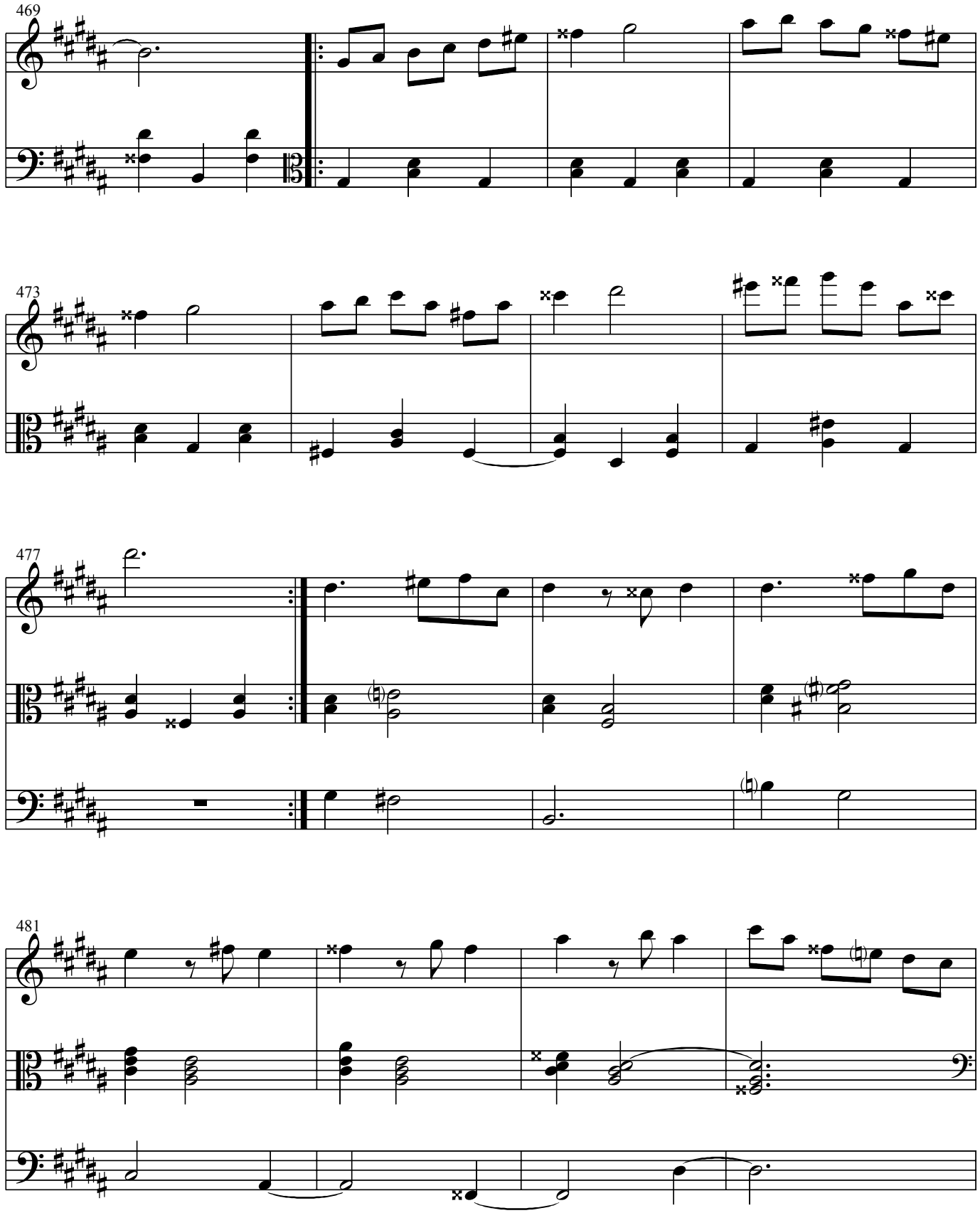
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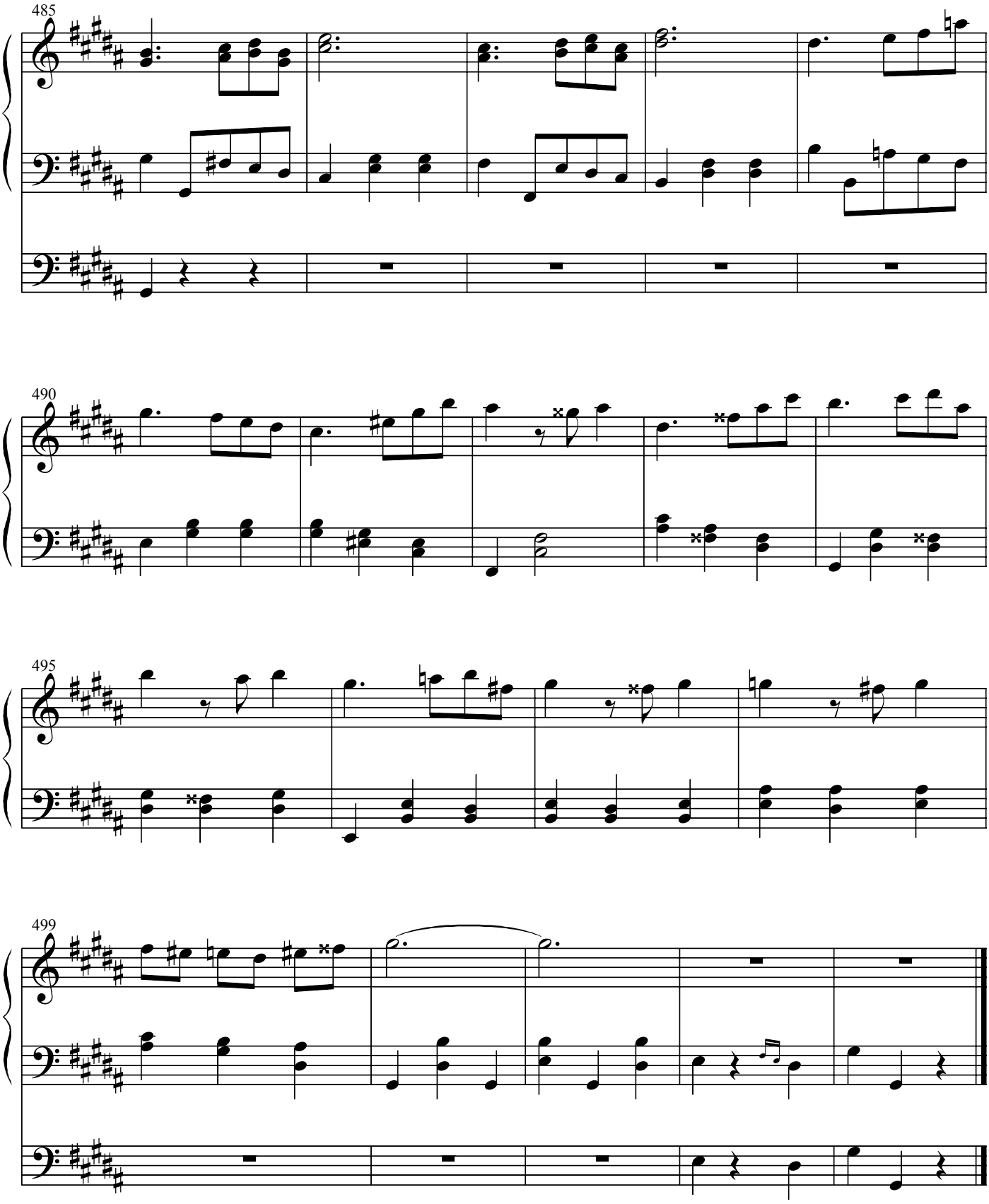
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