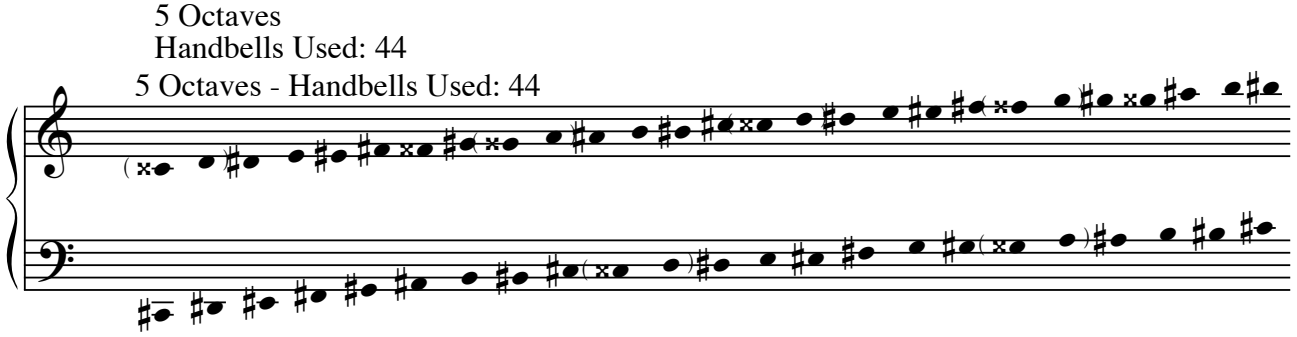
Prelude and Fugue No. 13 in F# Major

from "The Well-Tempered Klavier"
by Johann Sebastian Bach

Arranged for Handbell Sextet
by Larry Sue

Performance Notes



Sometime around 1720, "well-tempering", the tuning of a keyboard instrument was discovered. Without going into excruciating detail, this meant that it was now possible to play harpsichords and clavichords - and shortly thereafter, pianos - in every key.

In 1722, J.S. Bach combined this new technology with his inimitable compositional genius by writing preludes-and-fugue pairs in each major and each minor key. And as if that wasn't enough, in 1744 he did it again! The two sets of pieces are now known as Book I and Book 2 of "The Well-Tempered Klavier".

For nearly three centuries, they've been an indispensable part of the classical repertoire. As instructional works, they provide opportunity to learn the "sense of line" that's essential to great performance; as performance pieces, they charm and amaze ever after multiple hearings.

The two pieces for a particular key are intended to be played prelude first, fugue second. Invariably, this results in a beautiful contrast between the impressions created by each piece. Each prelude-fugue pair is arranged so they can be played back-to-back by the same (two to six) players.

Because of the nature of Baroque music, and the additional complexity injected by transferring it to handbells, these arrangements have been notated in "open score" format with use of cross-staffing to show where the musical lines are going; this is particularly true in the fugues.

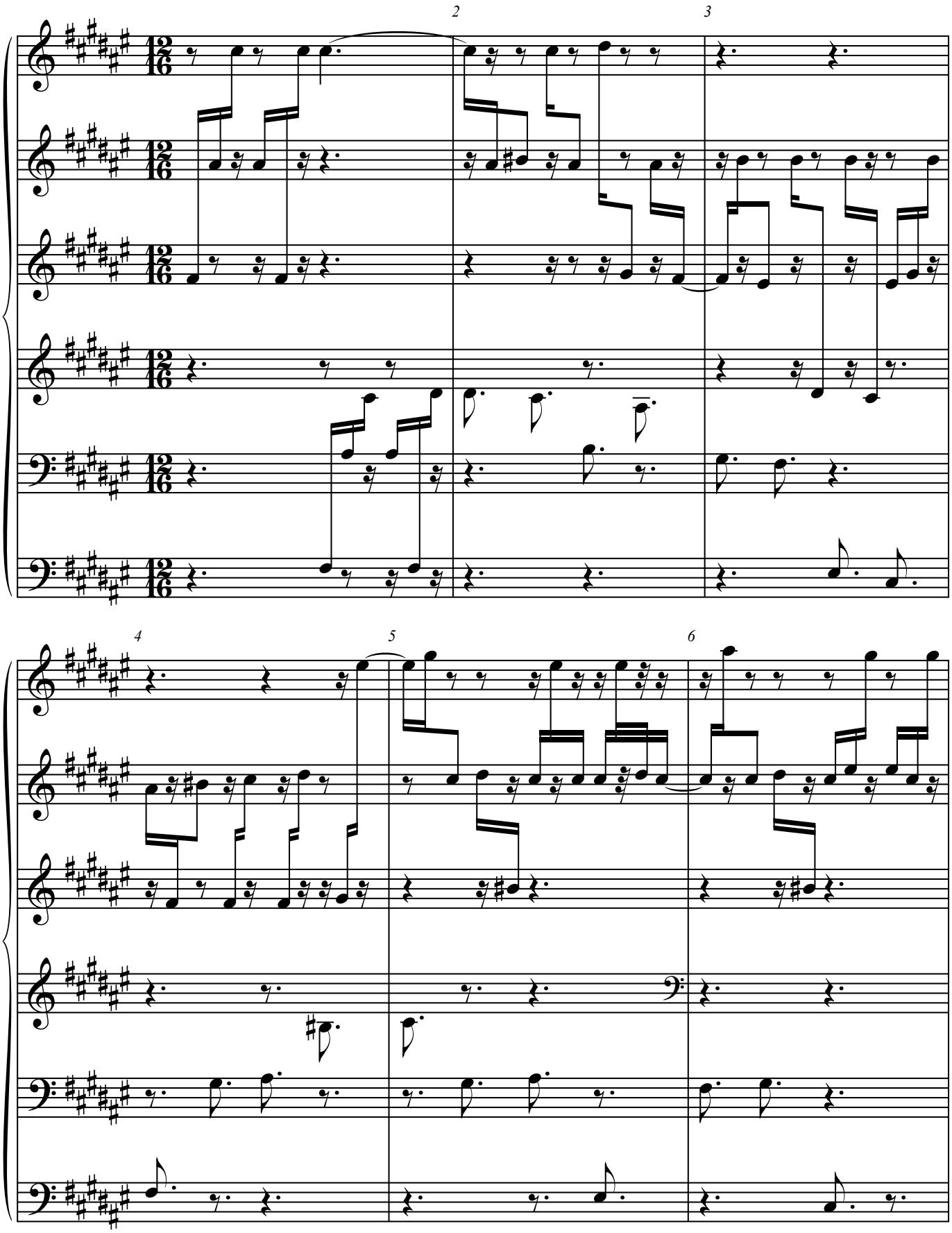
Prelude No. 13 is one of the metrically most unusual of the all the works that comprise the Well-Tempered Klavier. That's because the rhythmic subdivision of the measures continually shifts, and even contains somewhat extended syncopations that keep the listeners off balance. This, however, is the essence of great music - keeping the listeners (a bit) off balance - because then it's possible to lead them wherever you want them to go!

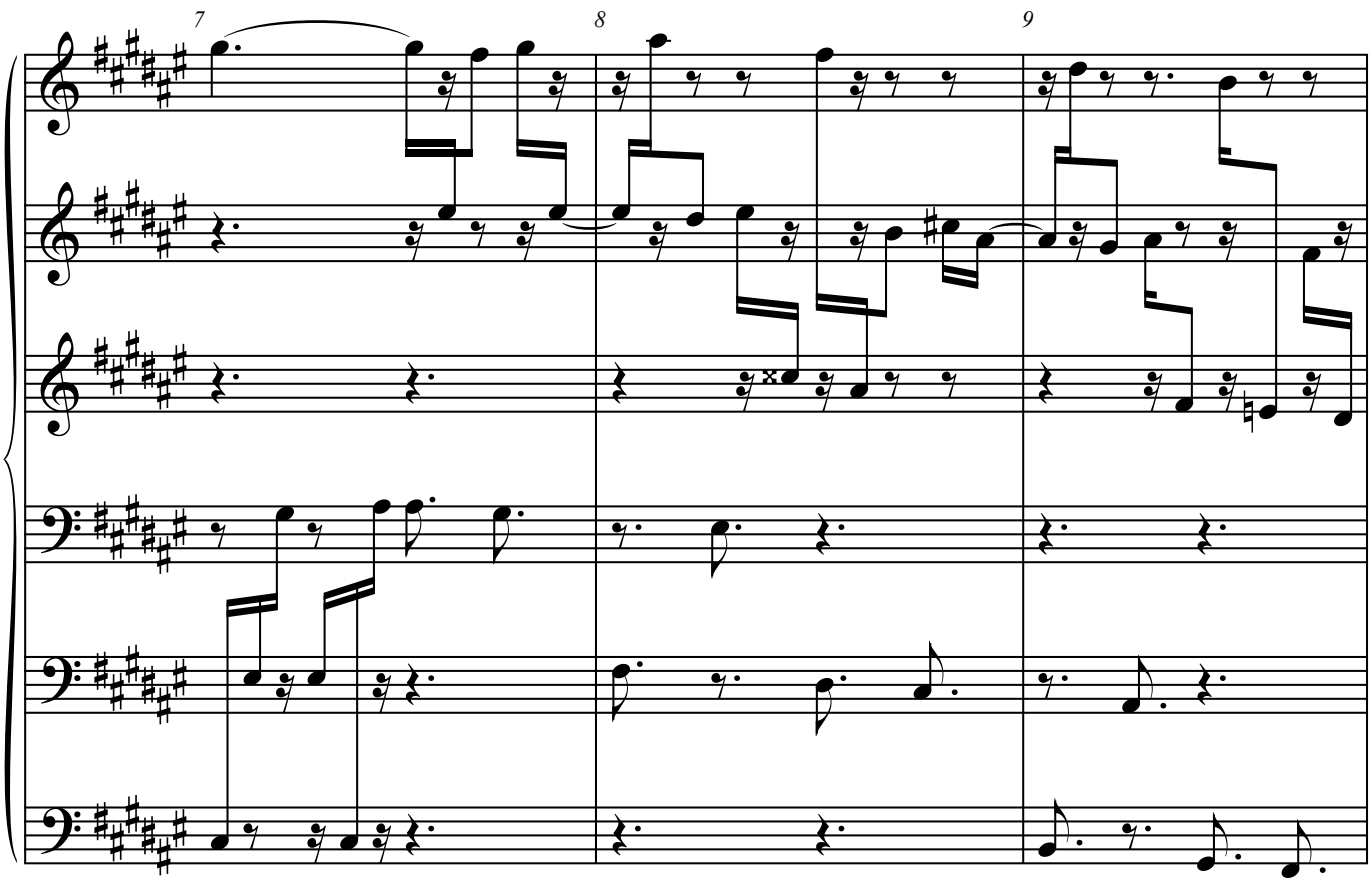
Fugue No. 13 has a repeated-sixteenth motif that's brought our - and subdued - by thumb damping those particular notes. The simple addition of these articulations adds a noticeable sprightliness to the fugue. Keep it light and bouncy!

Have patience and persevere - at the end of the path lies a gorgeous performance!

Larry Sue

Prelude No. 13

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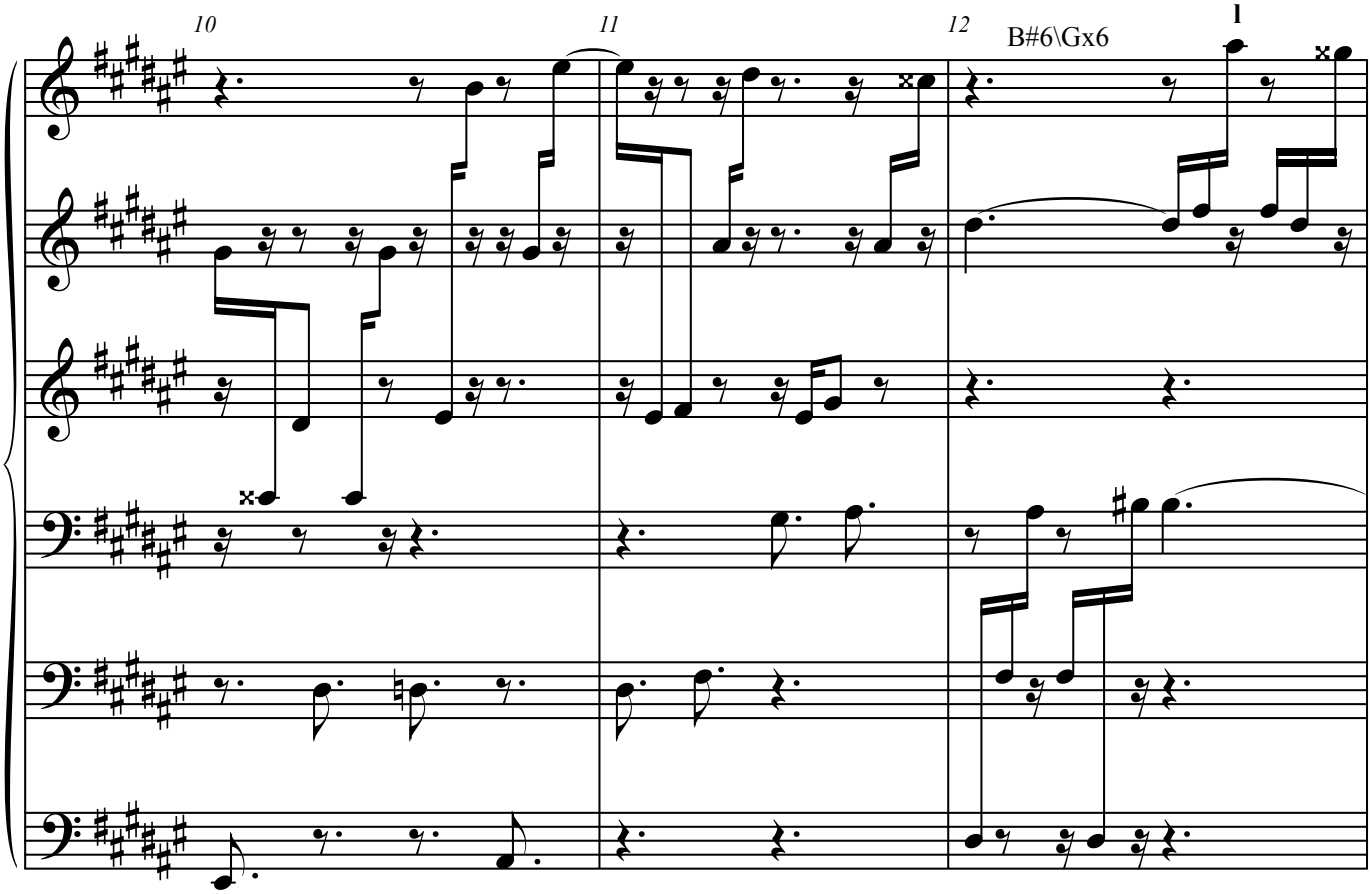
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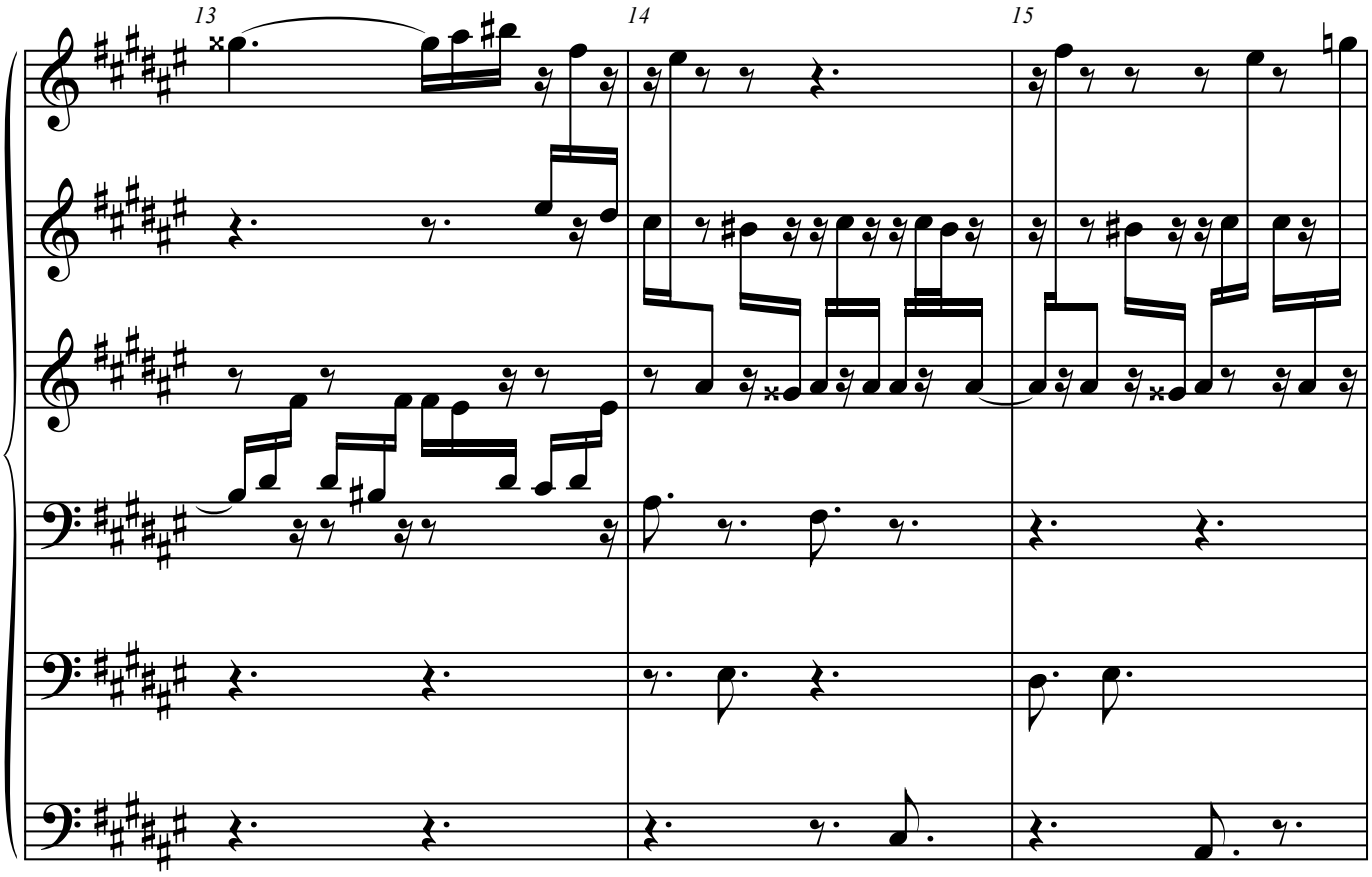
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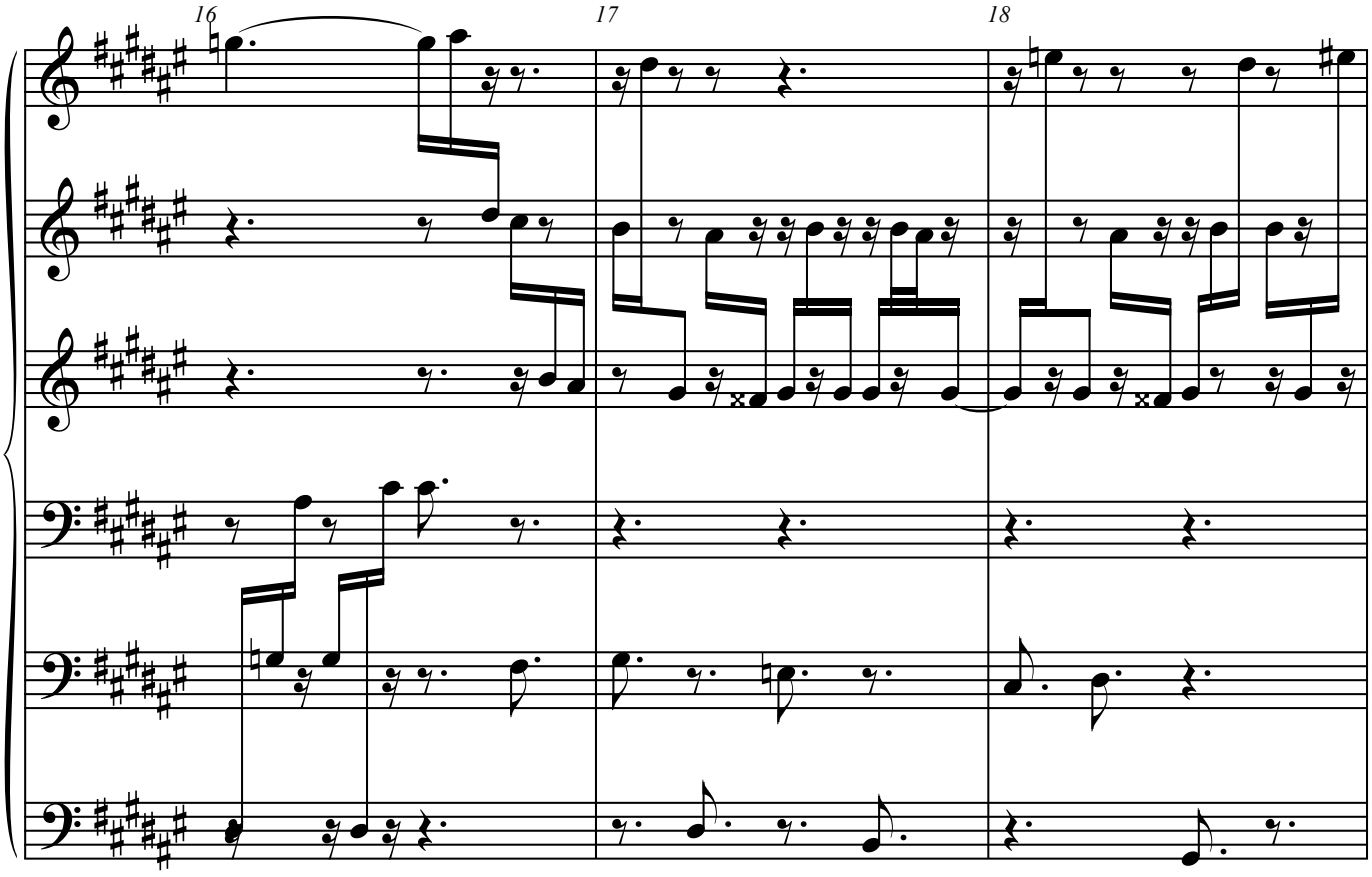
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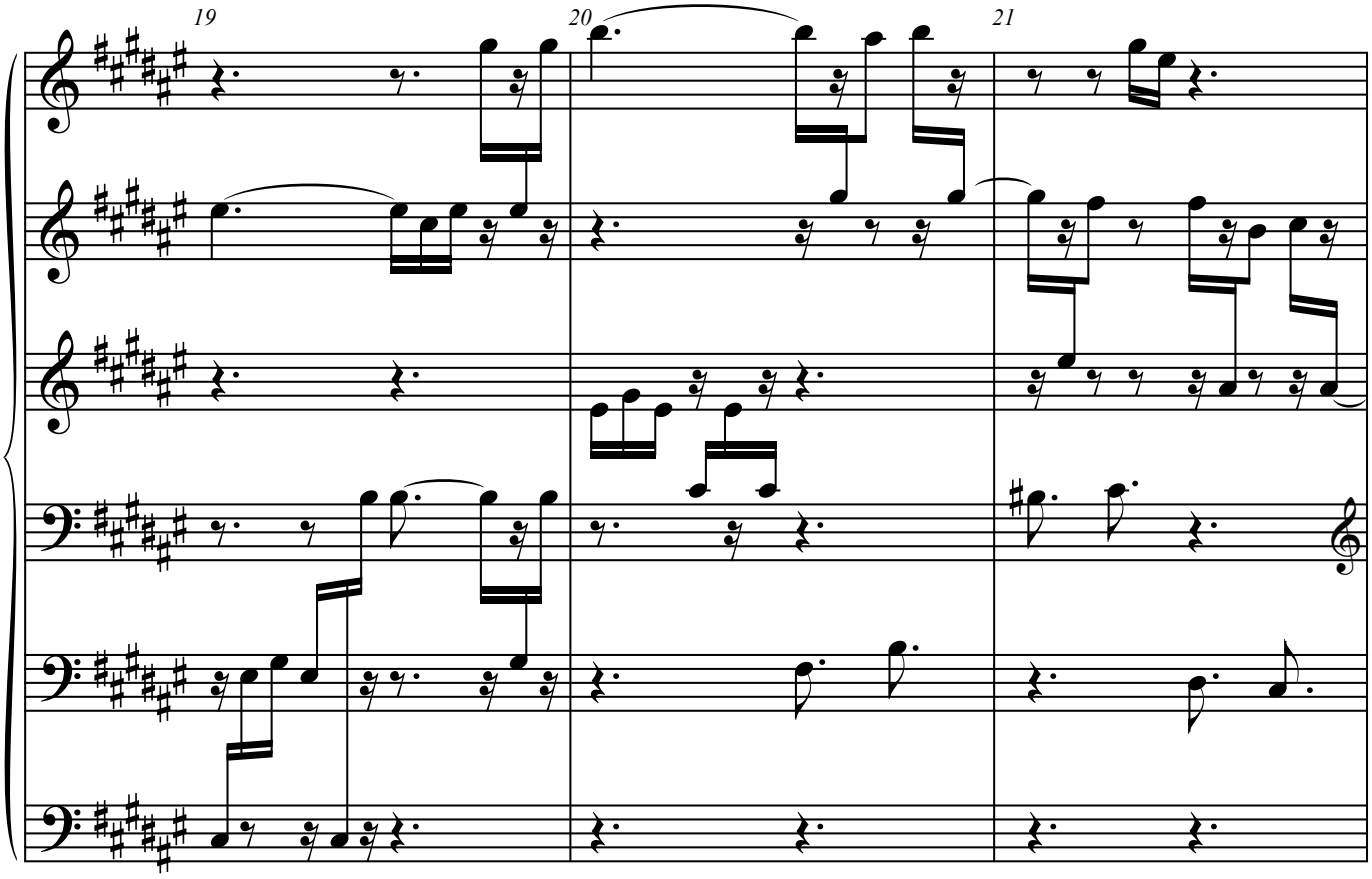
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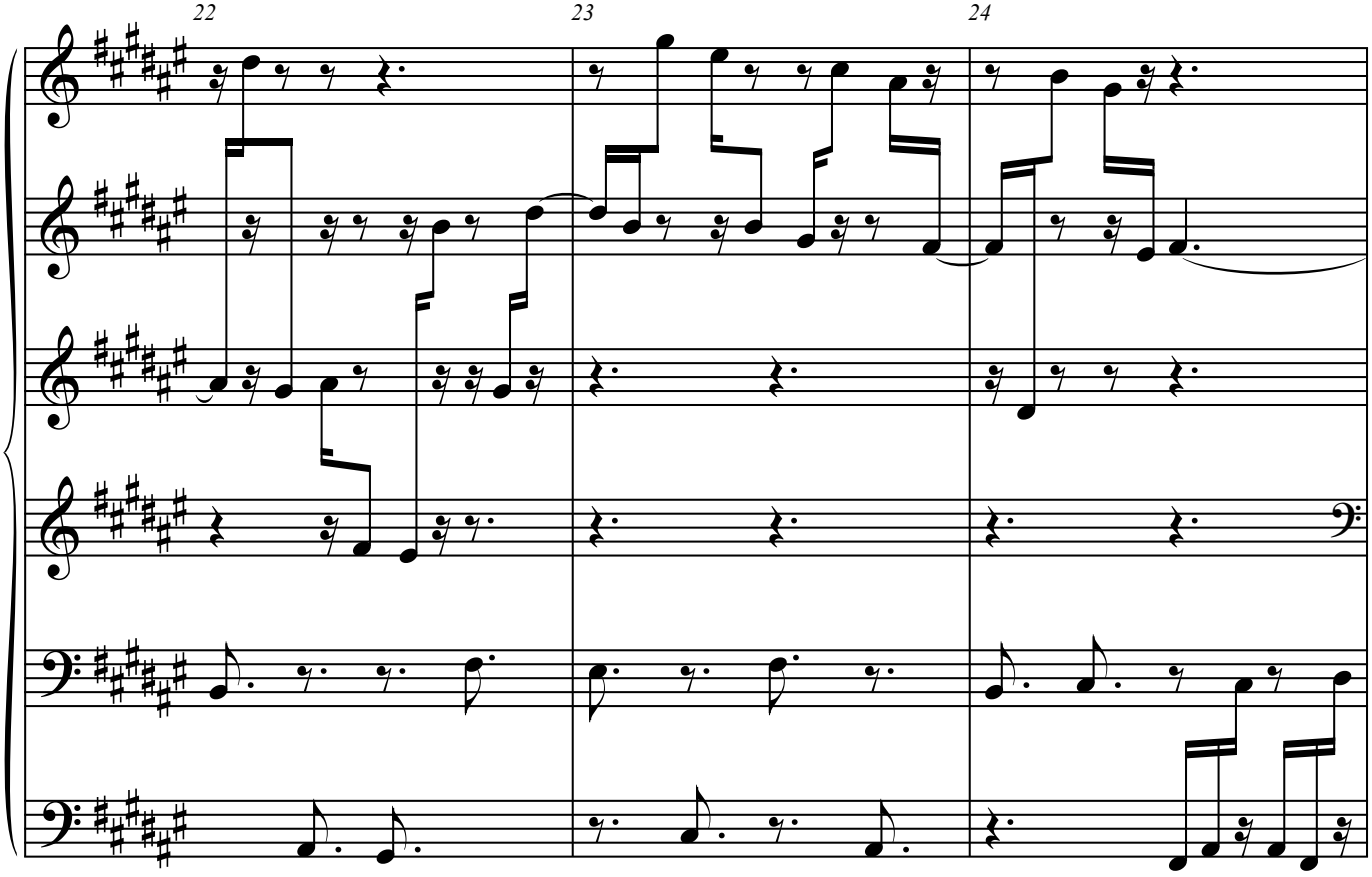
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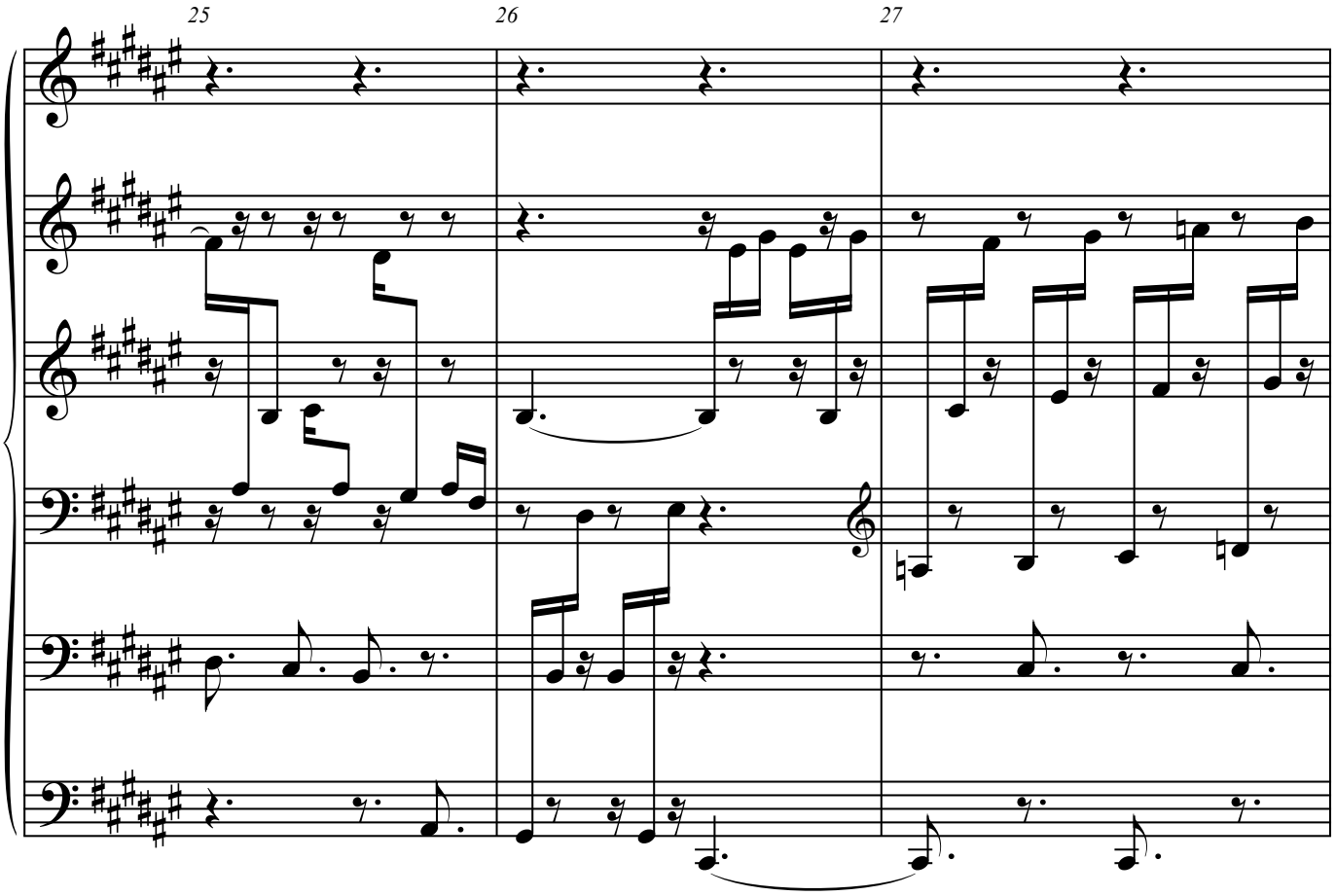
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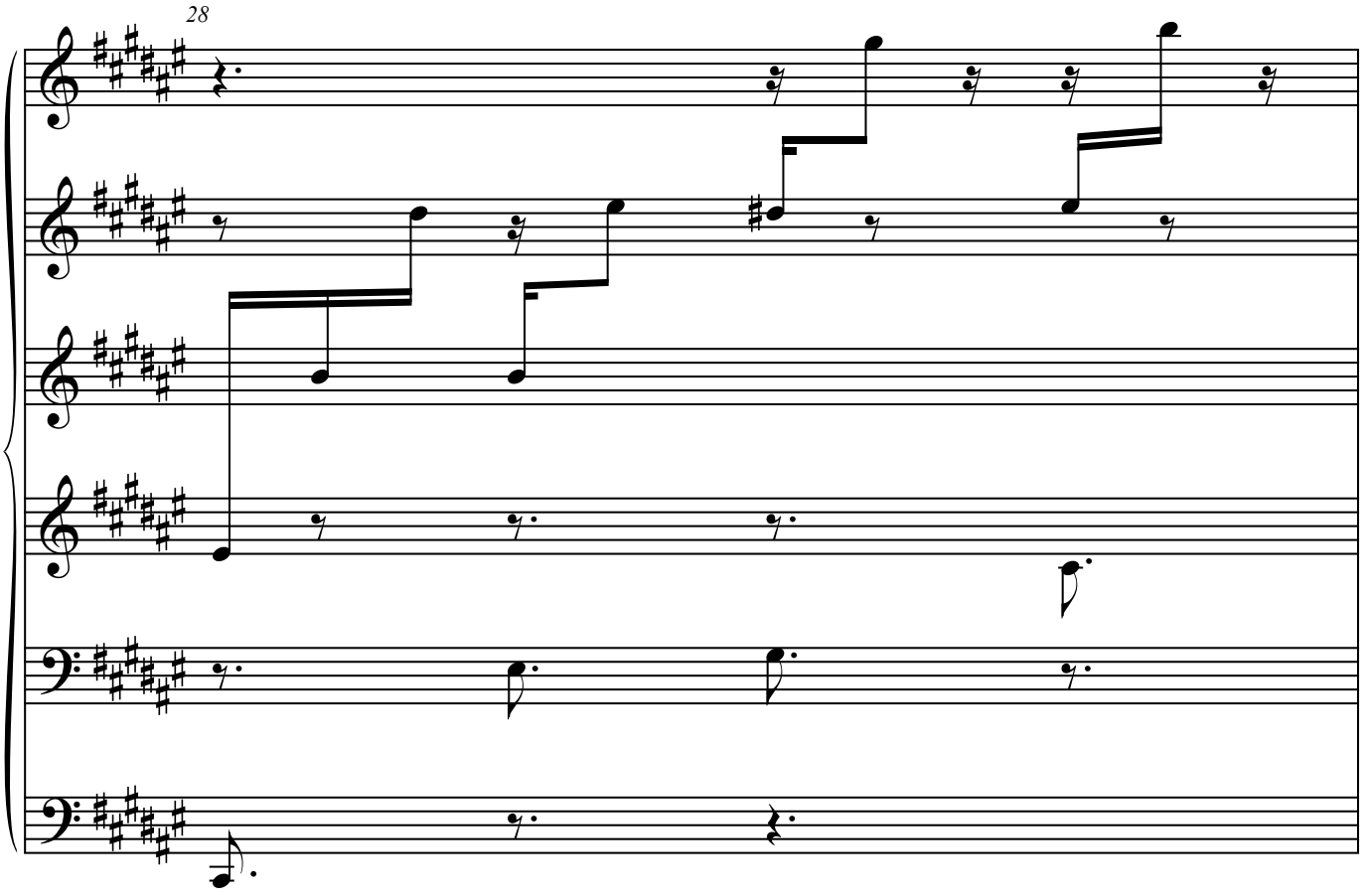
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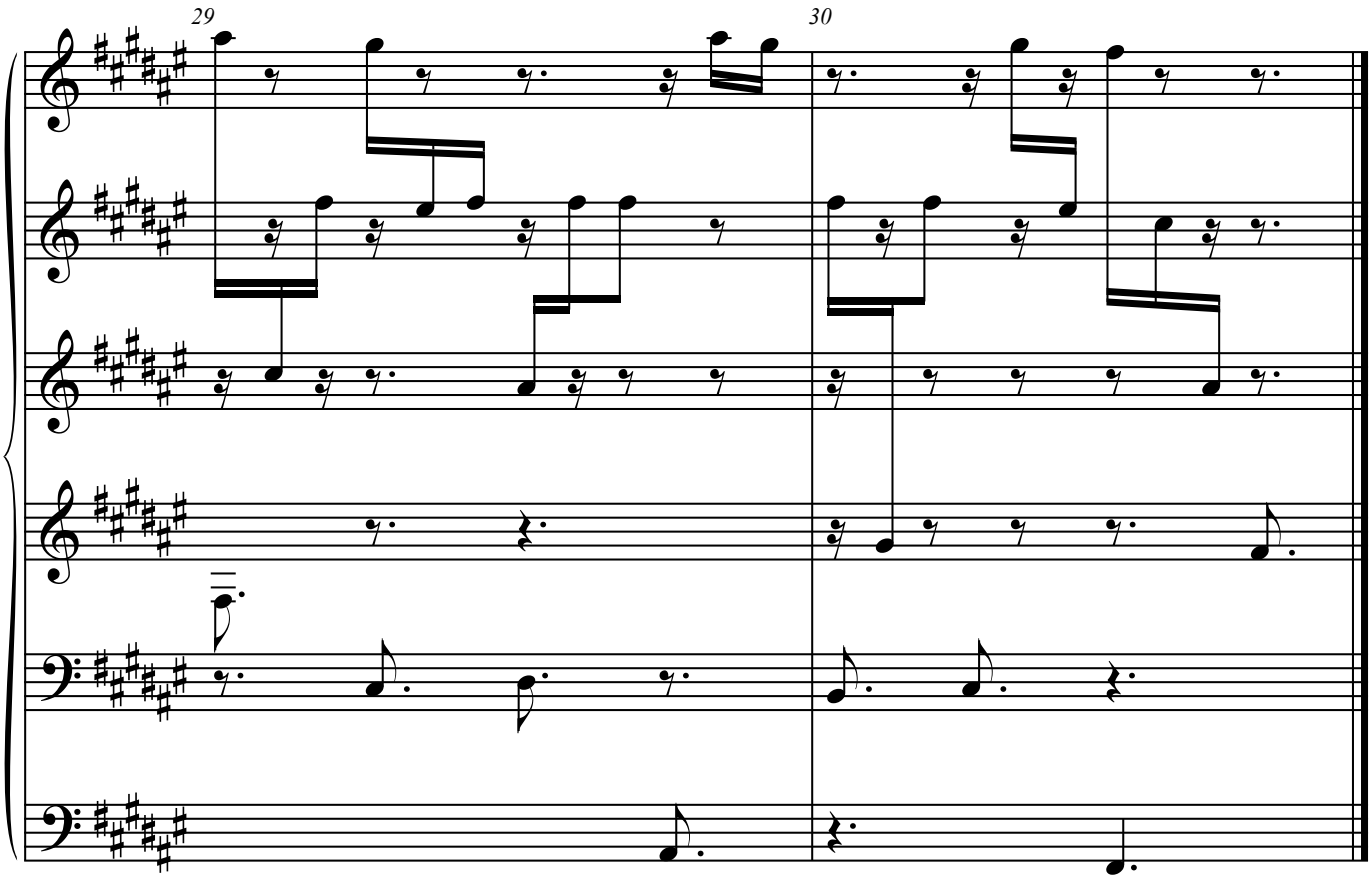
Fugue No. 13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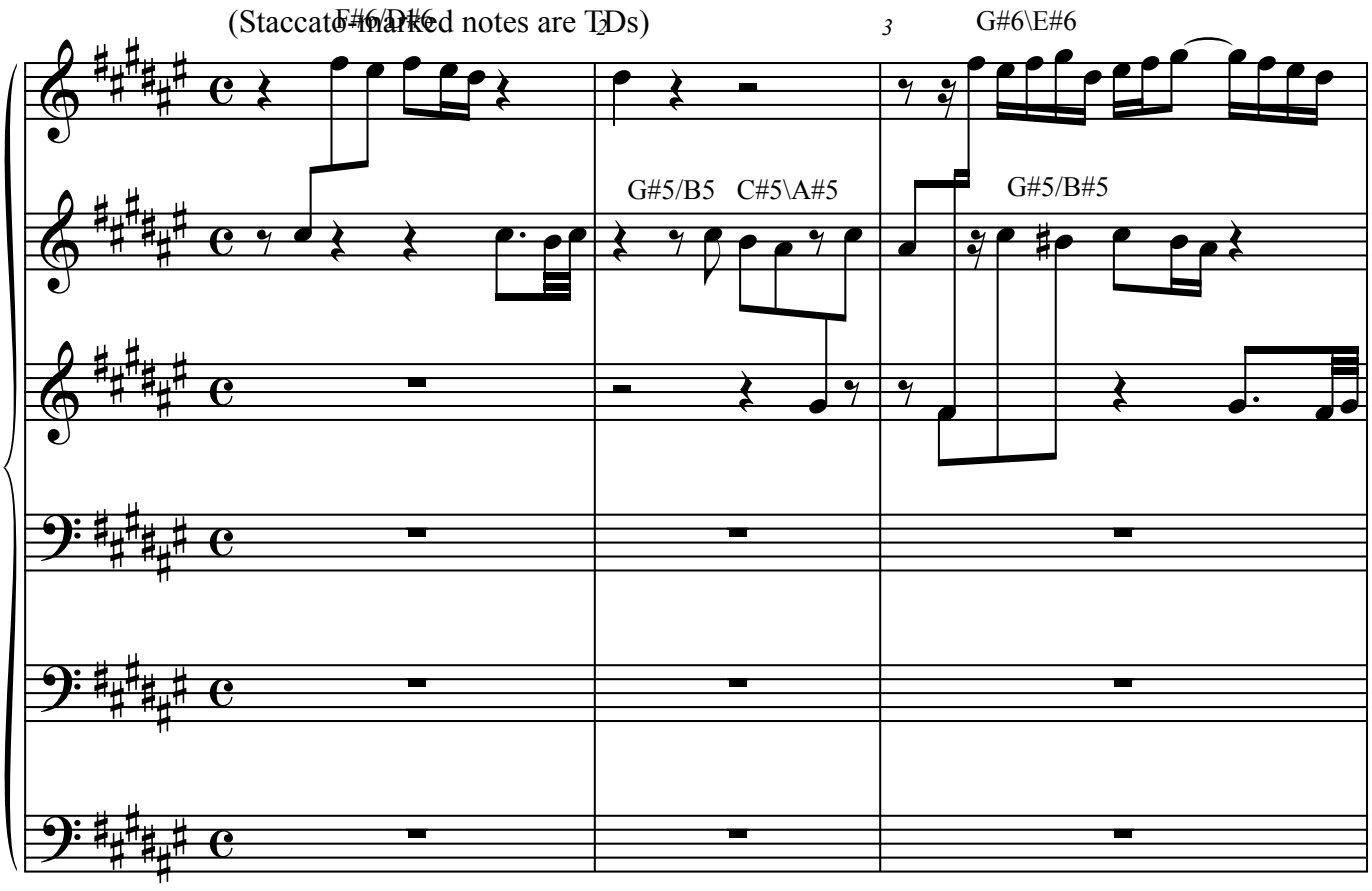
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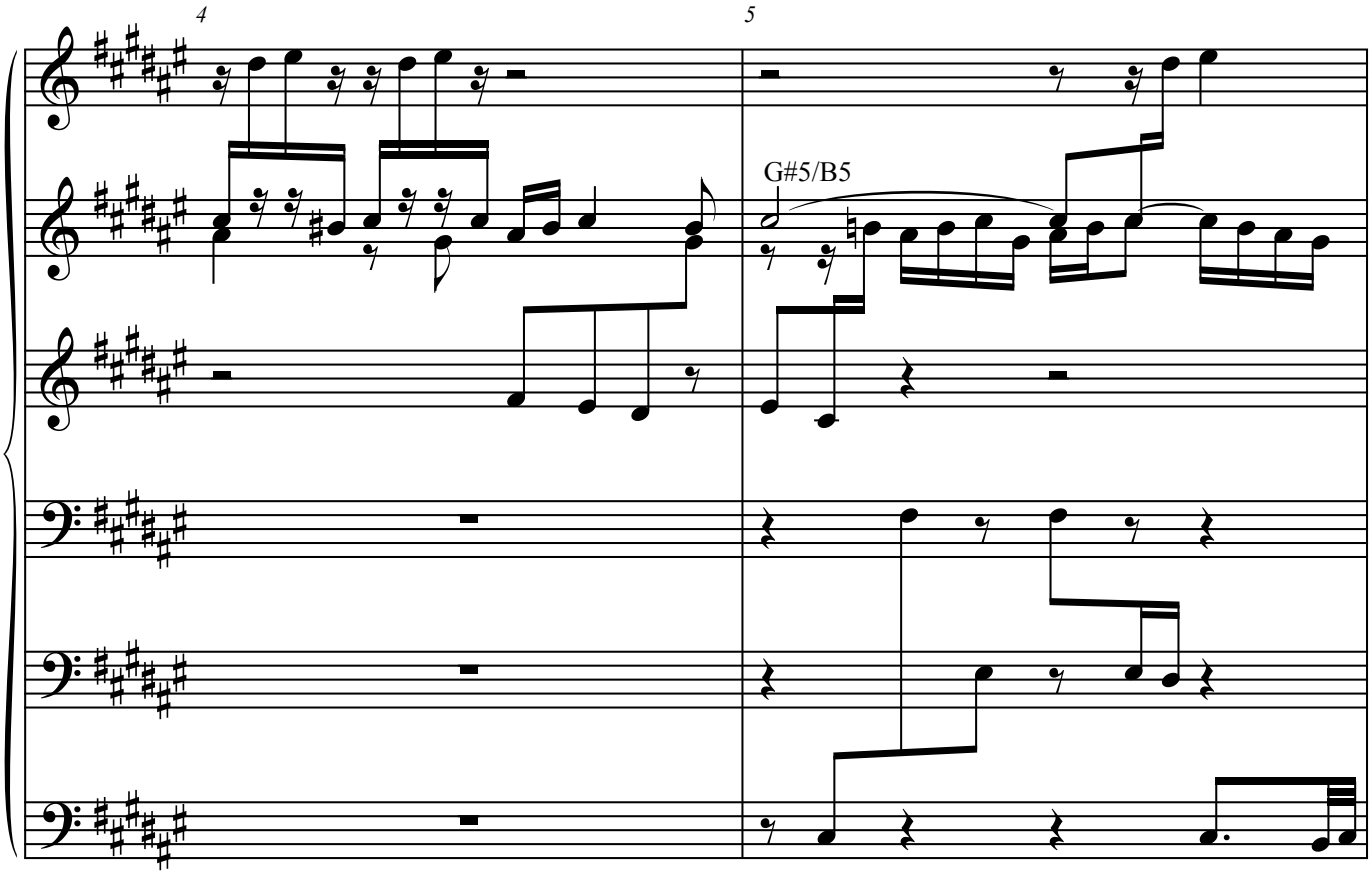
G#6\E#6
G#5/B5
C#5\A#5
G#5/B#5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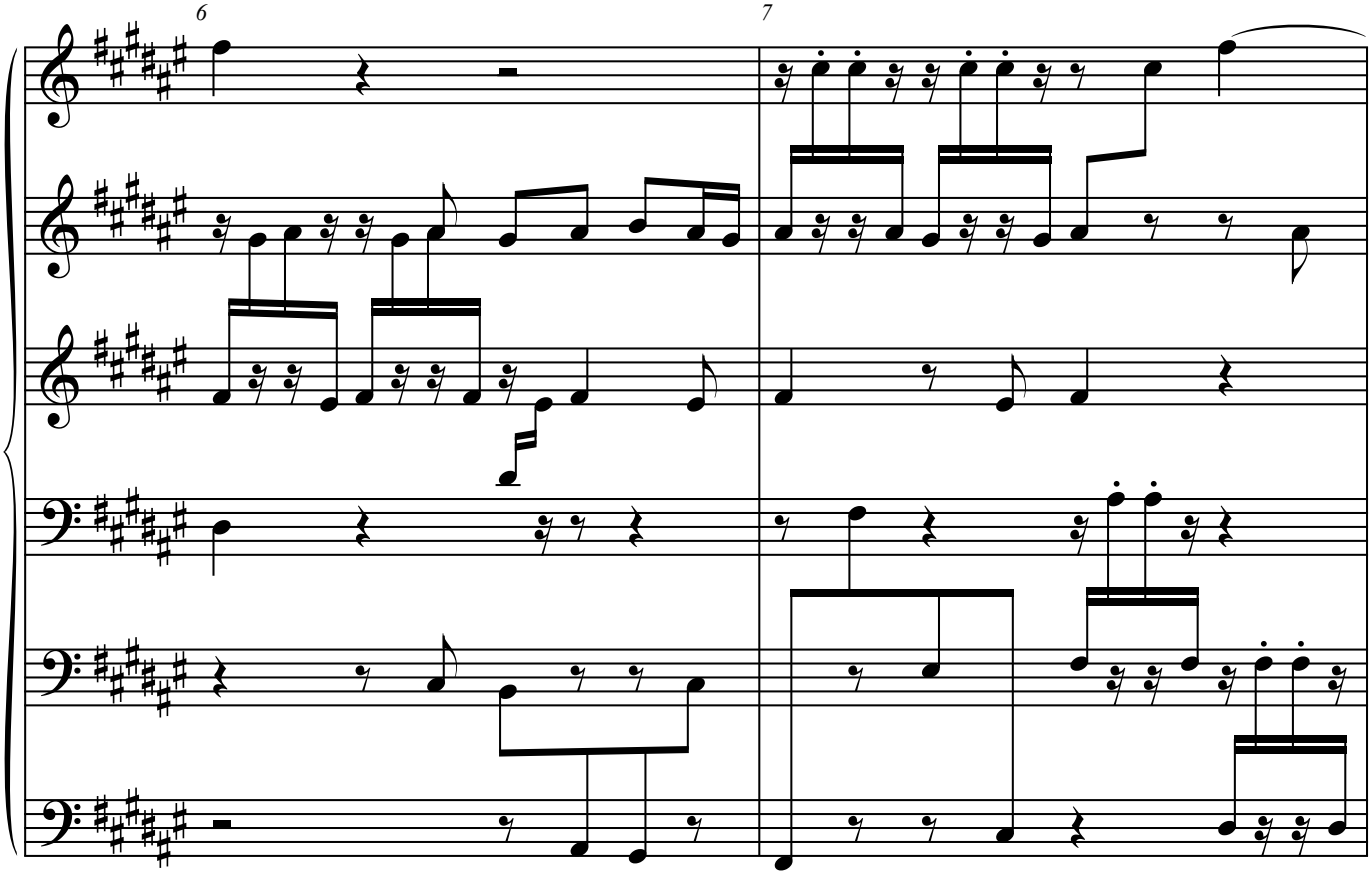
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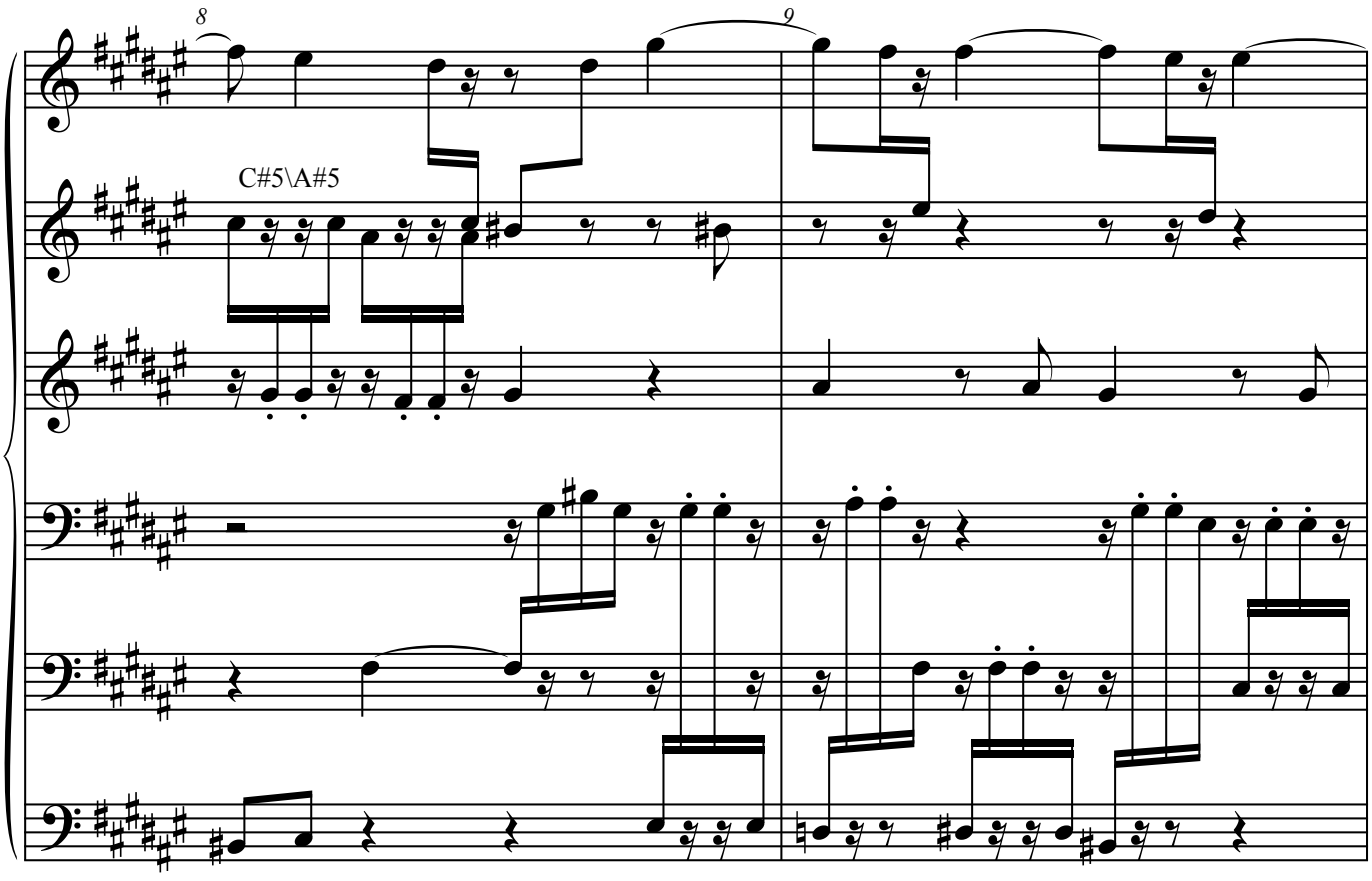
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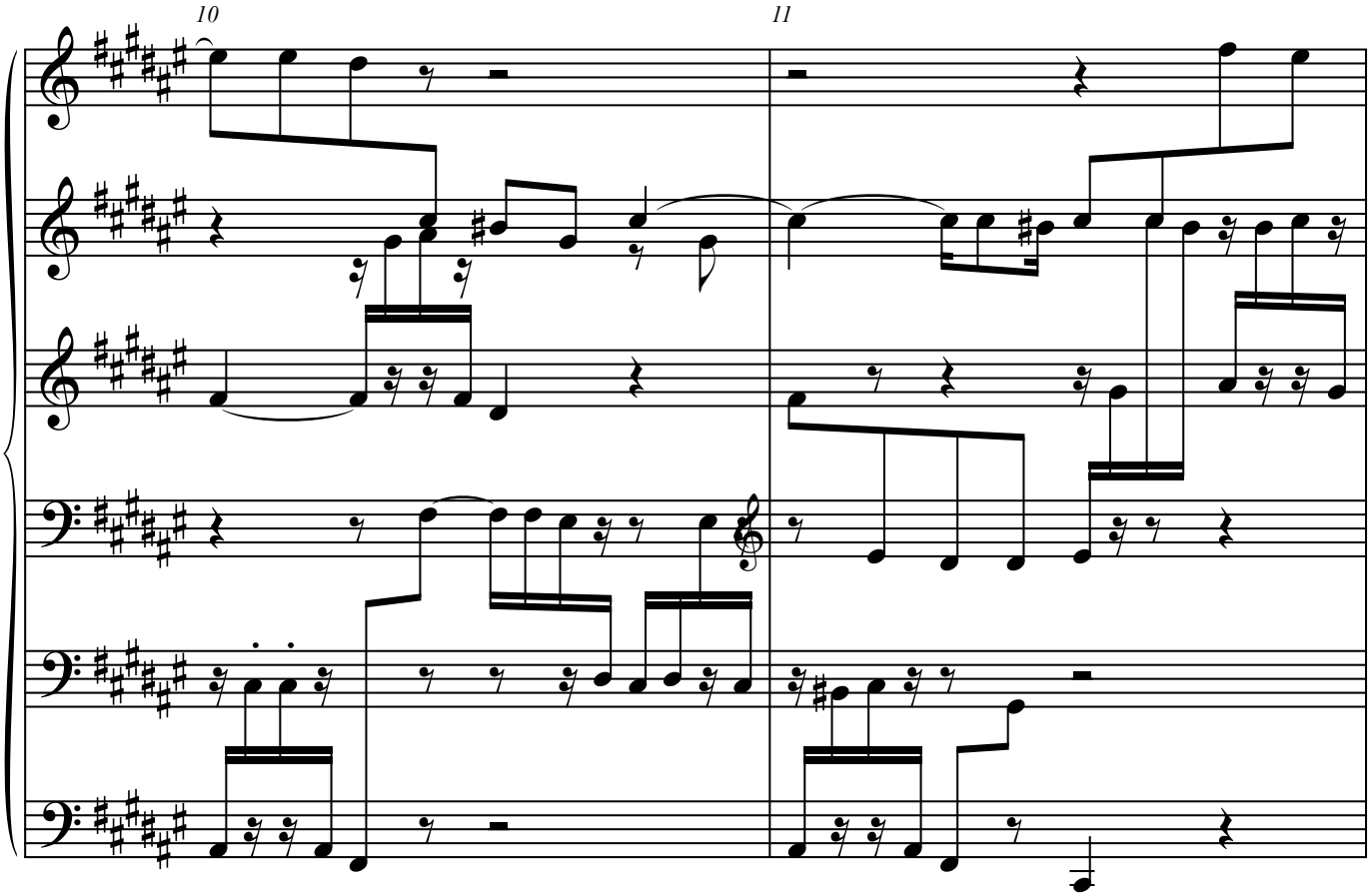
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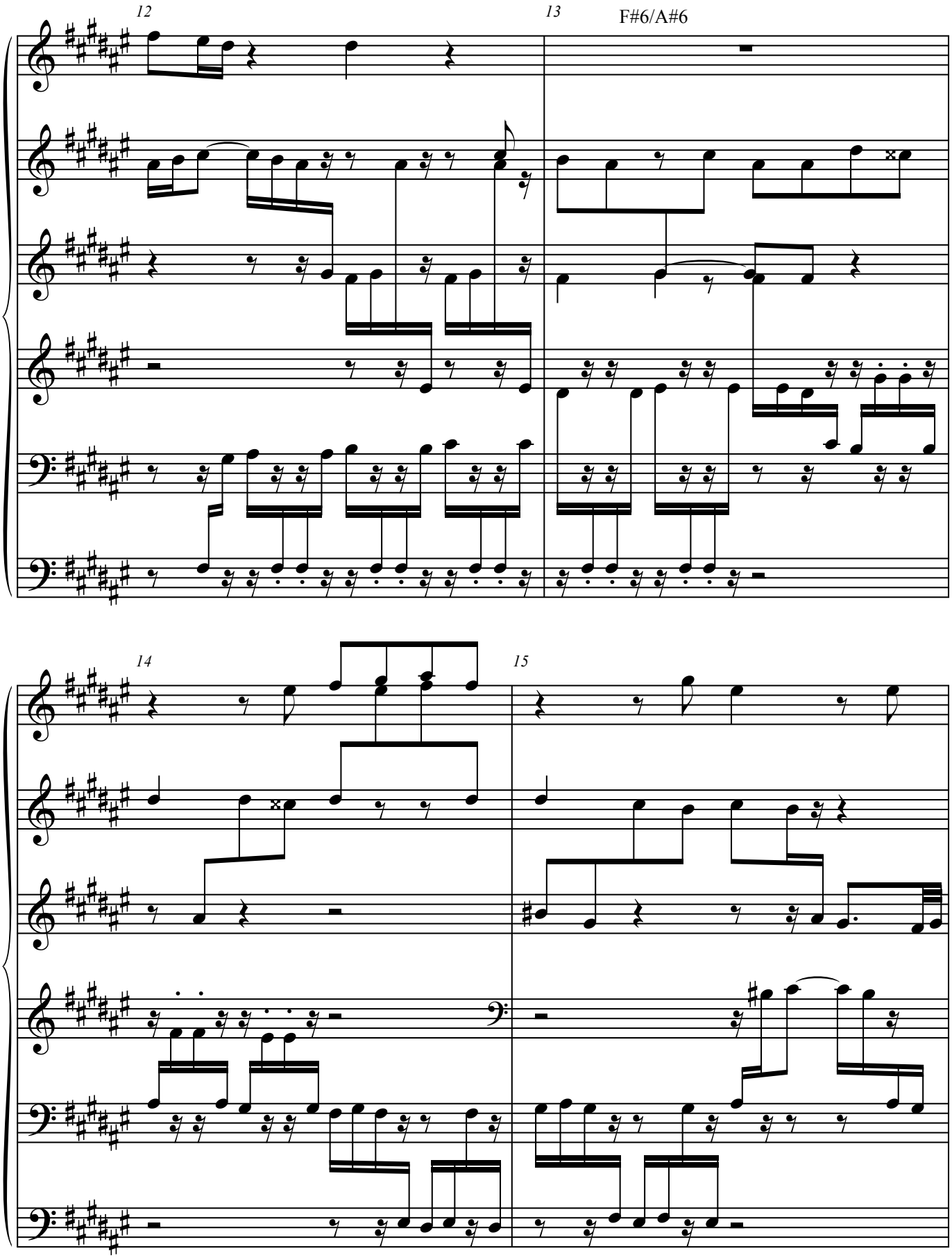
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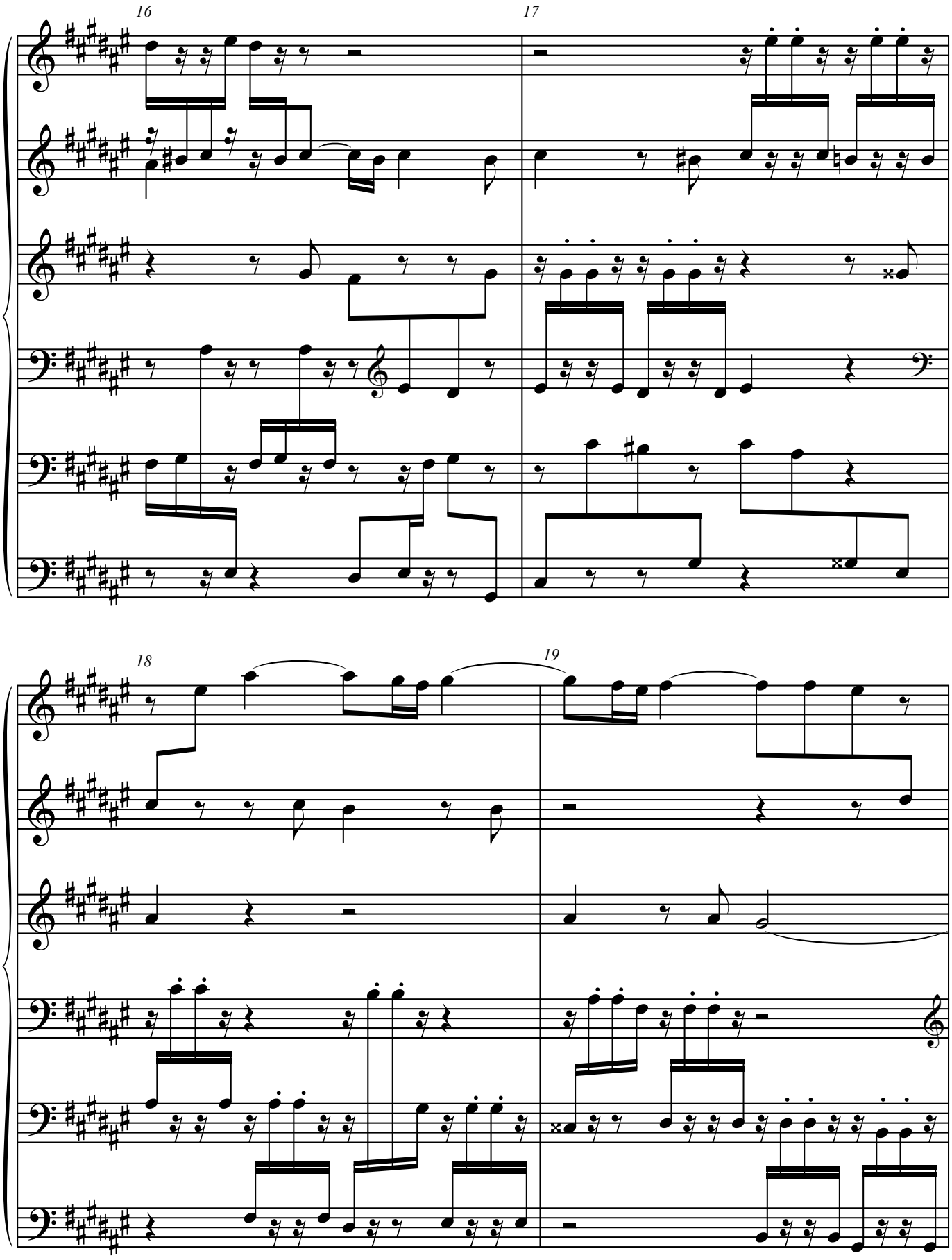
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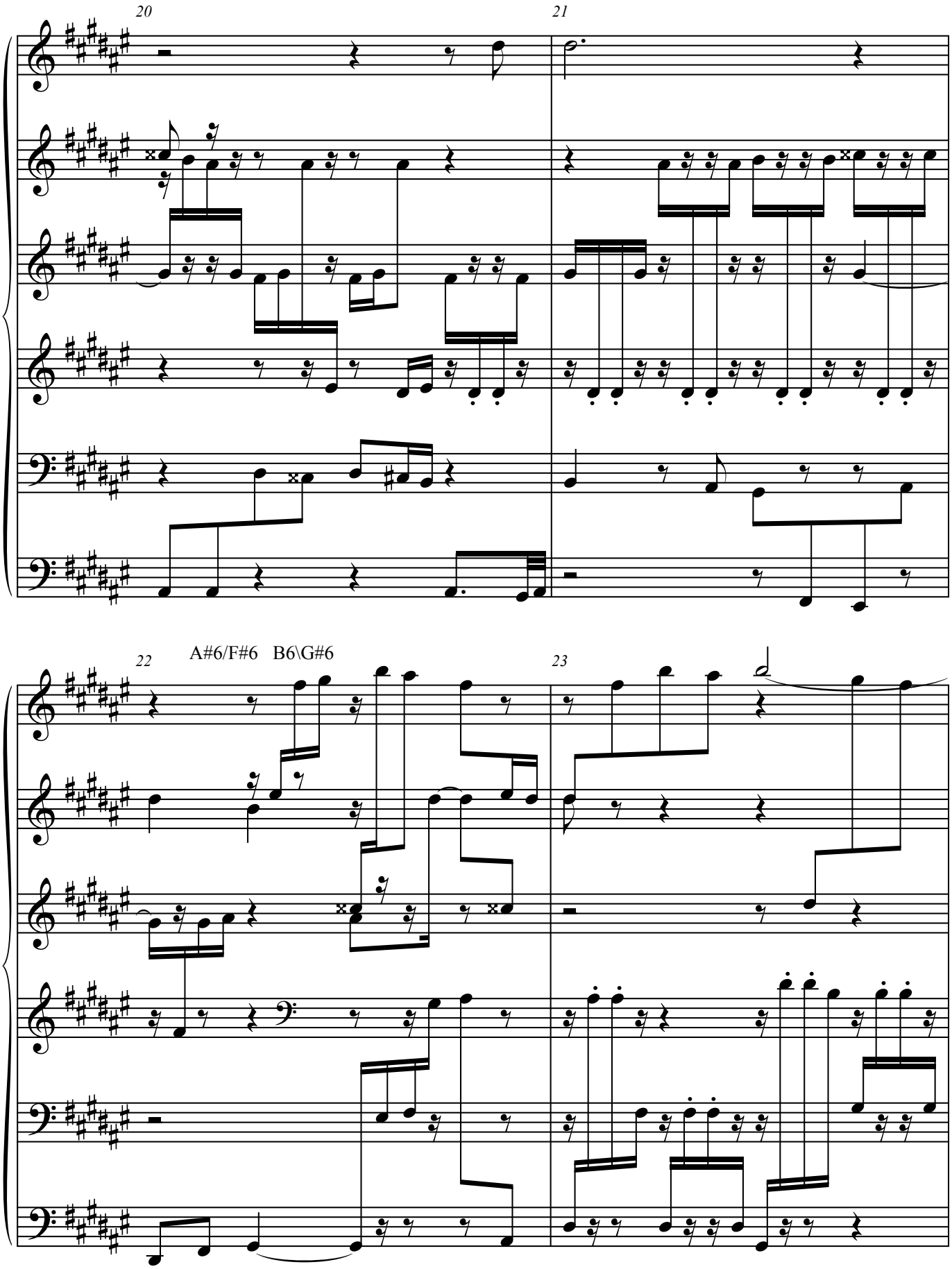
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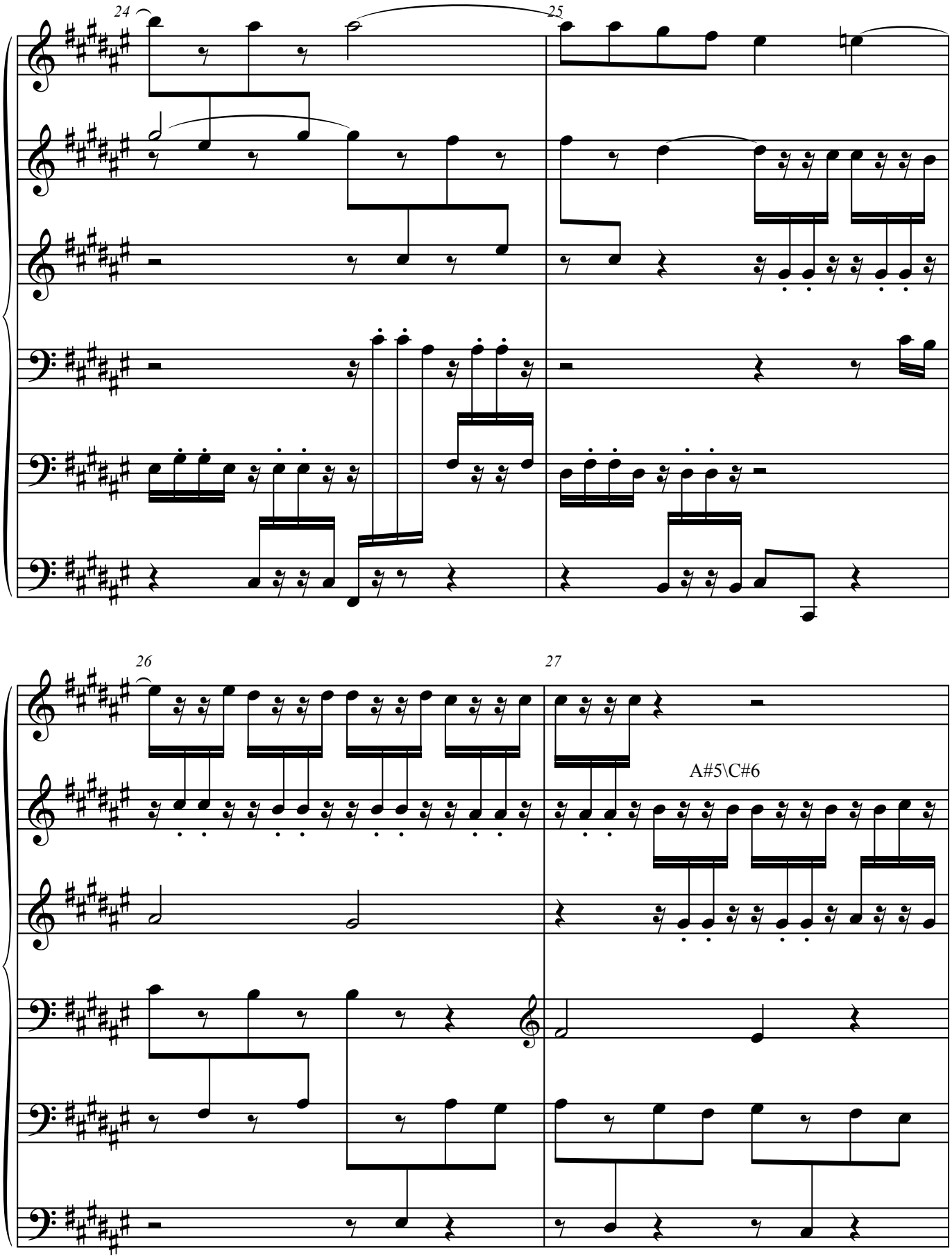
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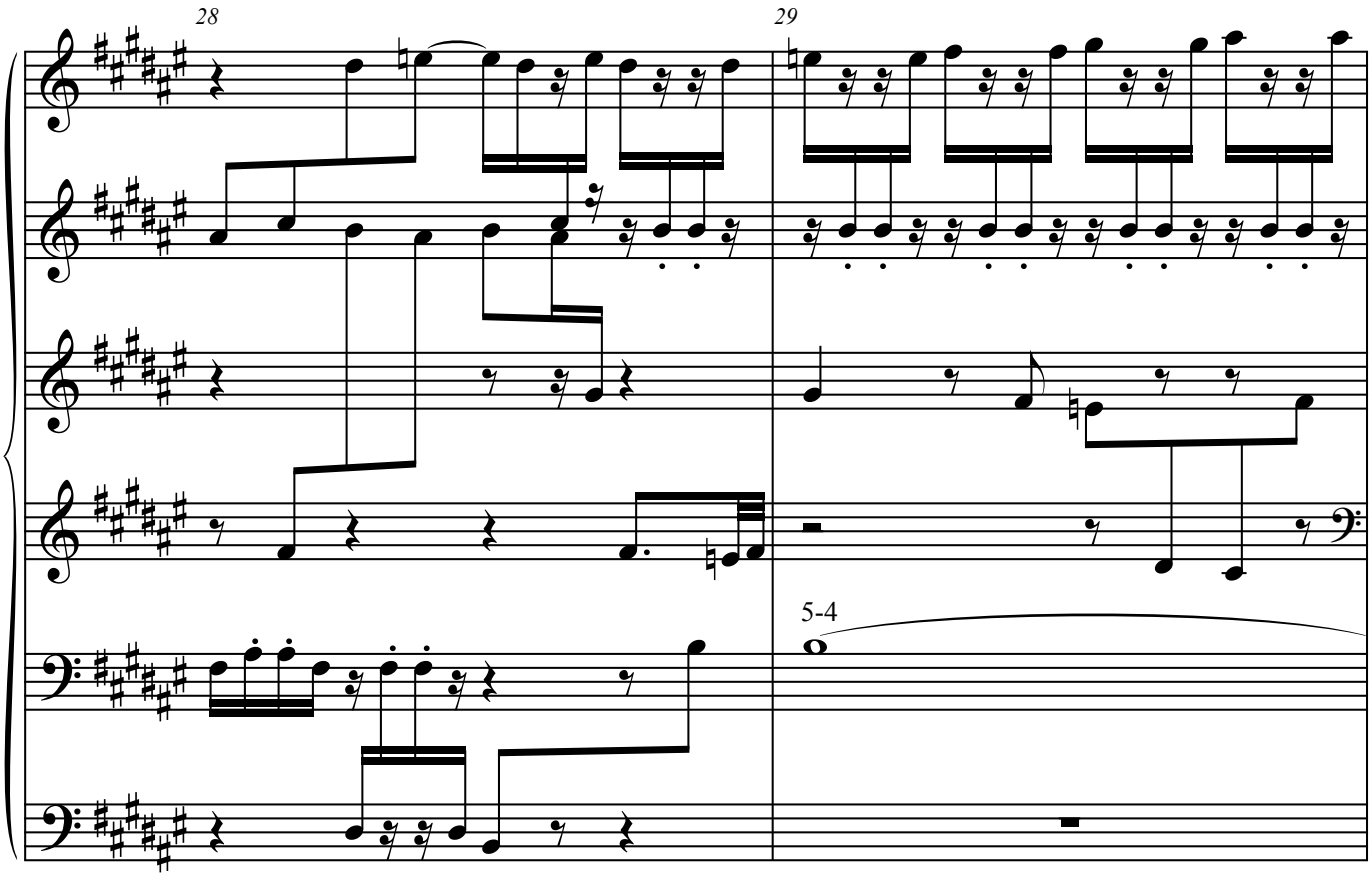
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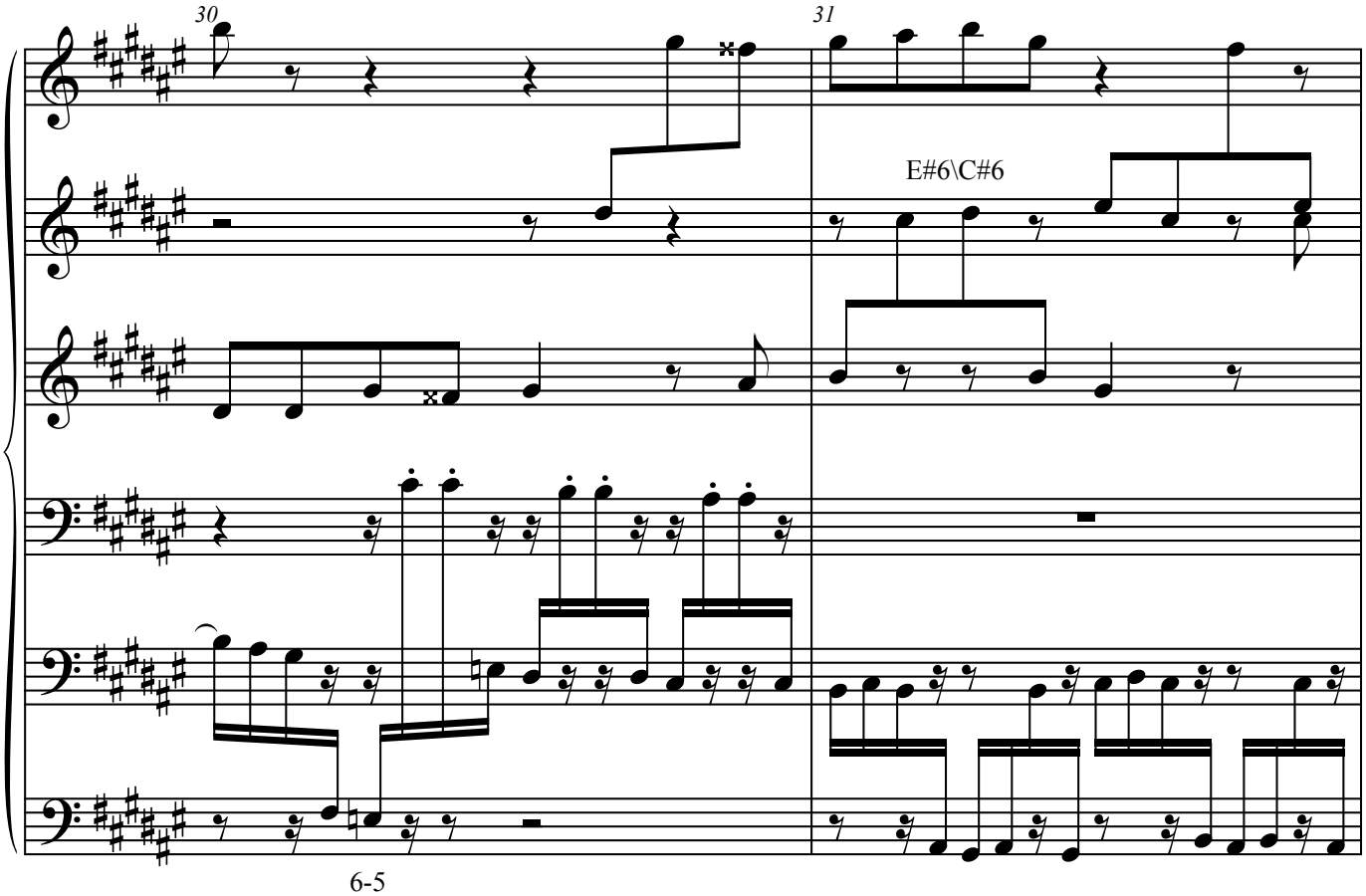
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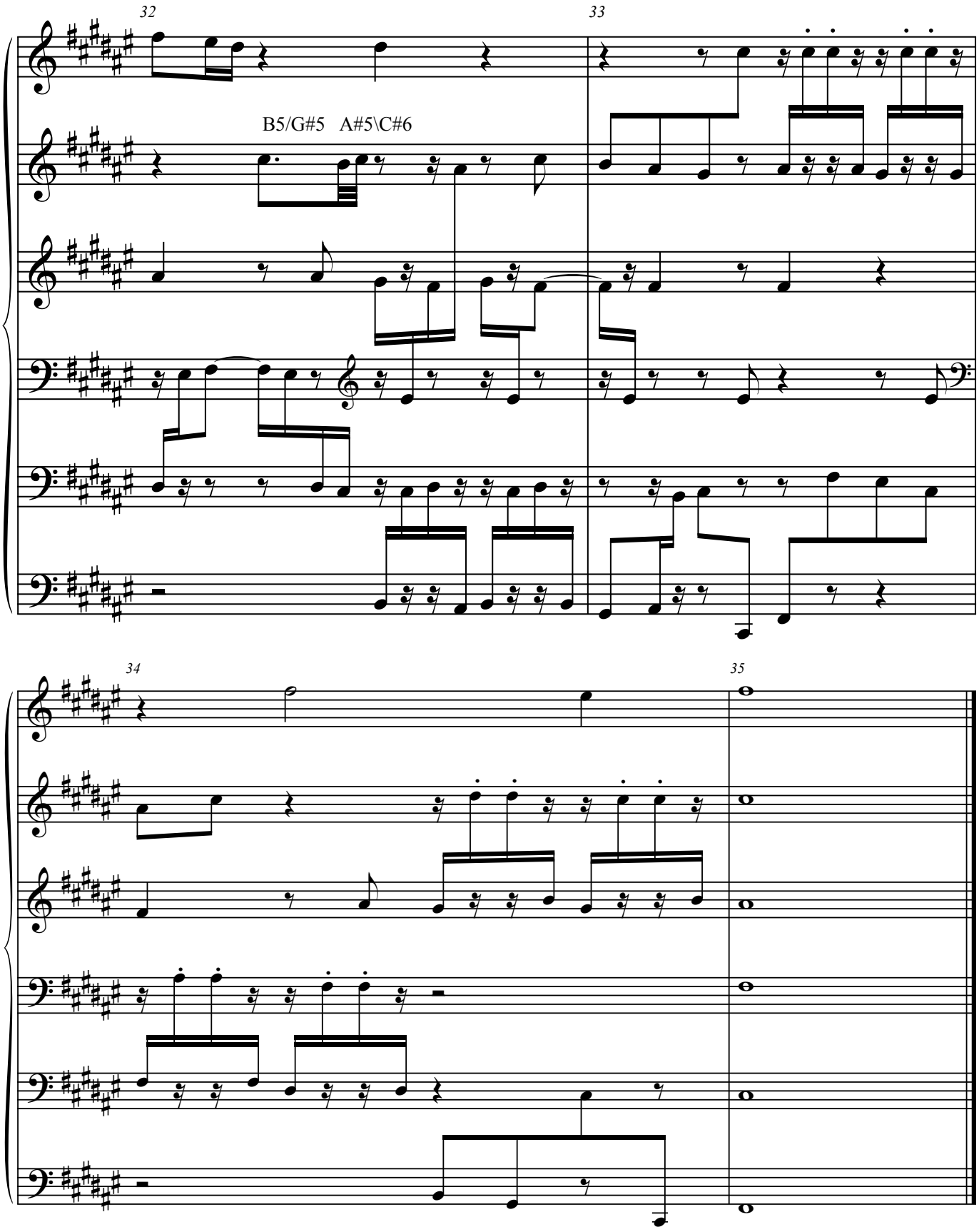
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