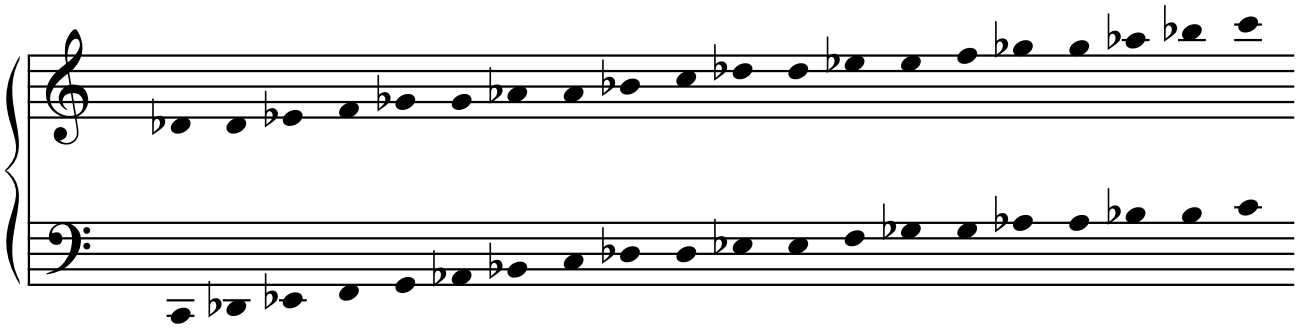
Prelude and Fugue No. 17 in Ab Major

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

Arranged for Handbell Quintet
by Larry Sue

Performance Notes

5 Octaves
Handbells Used: 40



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.

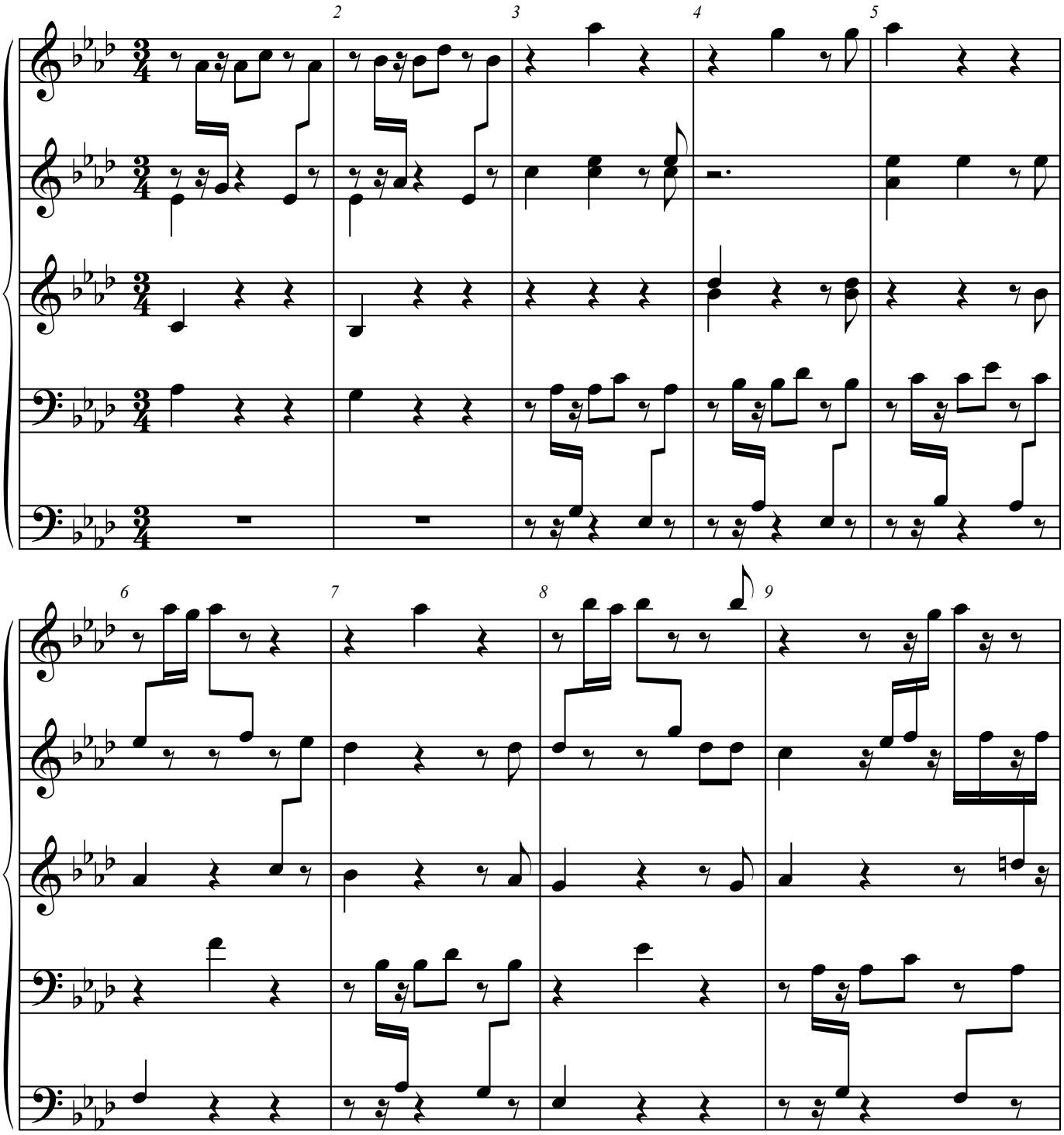
Prelude No. 17 isn't terribly difficult for quintet (well, your mileage may vary...), but it struck me that it's so wonderfully written that when arranged for the number of ringers, the parts can be set so that the choreography performance practically builds itself. When you have the parts under control, do find a way to step back and see what's happening.

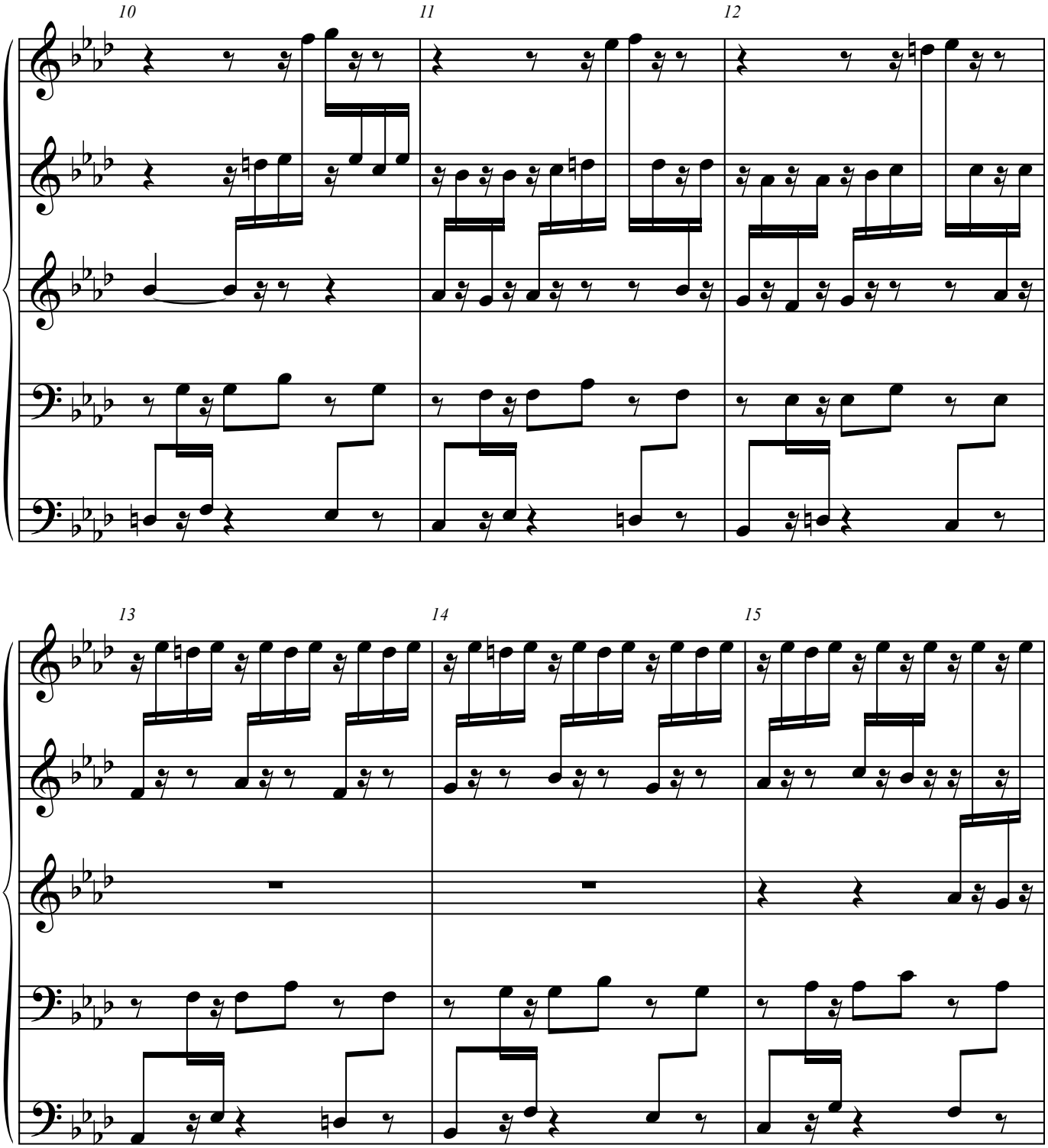
Fugue No. 17 is another wonderful piece that has a continual, pleasant movement. The sixteenth note runs, especially those extending into the bass, will determine your performance tempo. Remember to have fun!

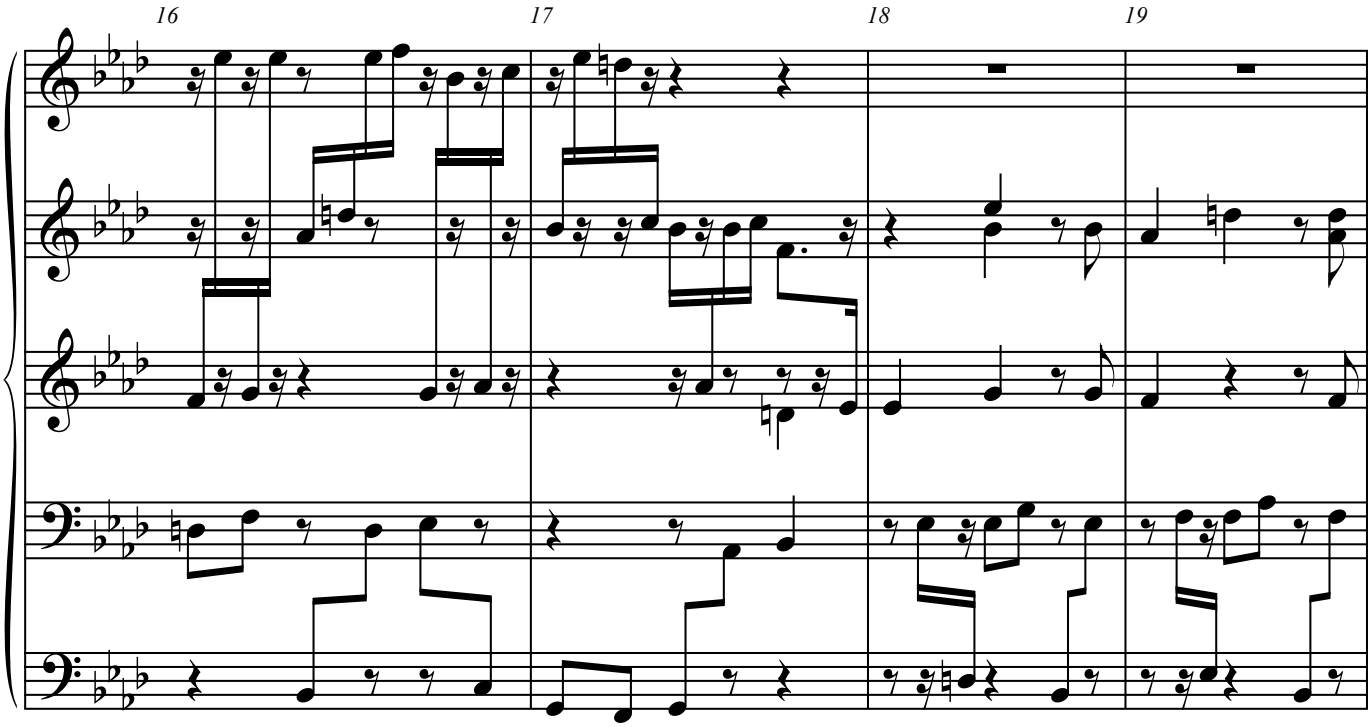
Have patience and persevere - at the end of the path lies a gorgeous performance!

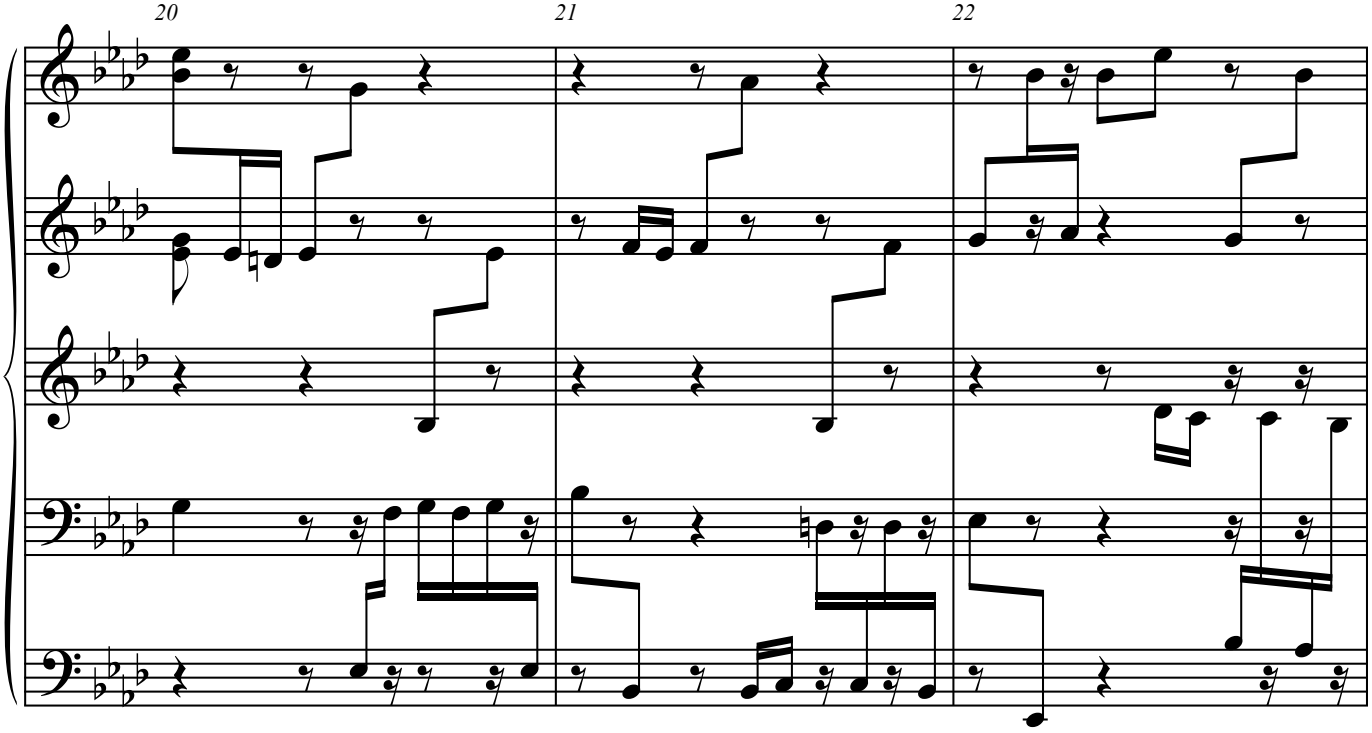
Larry Sue

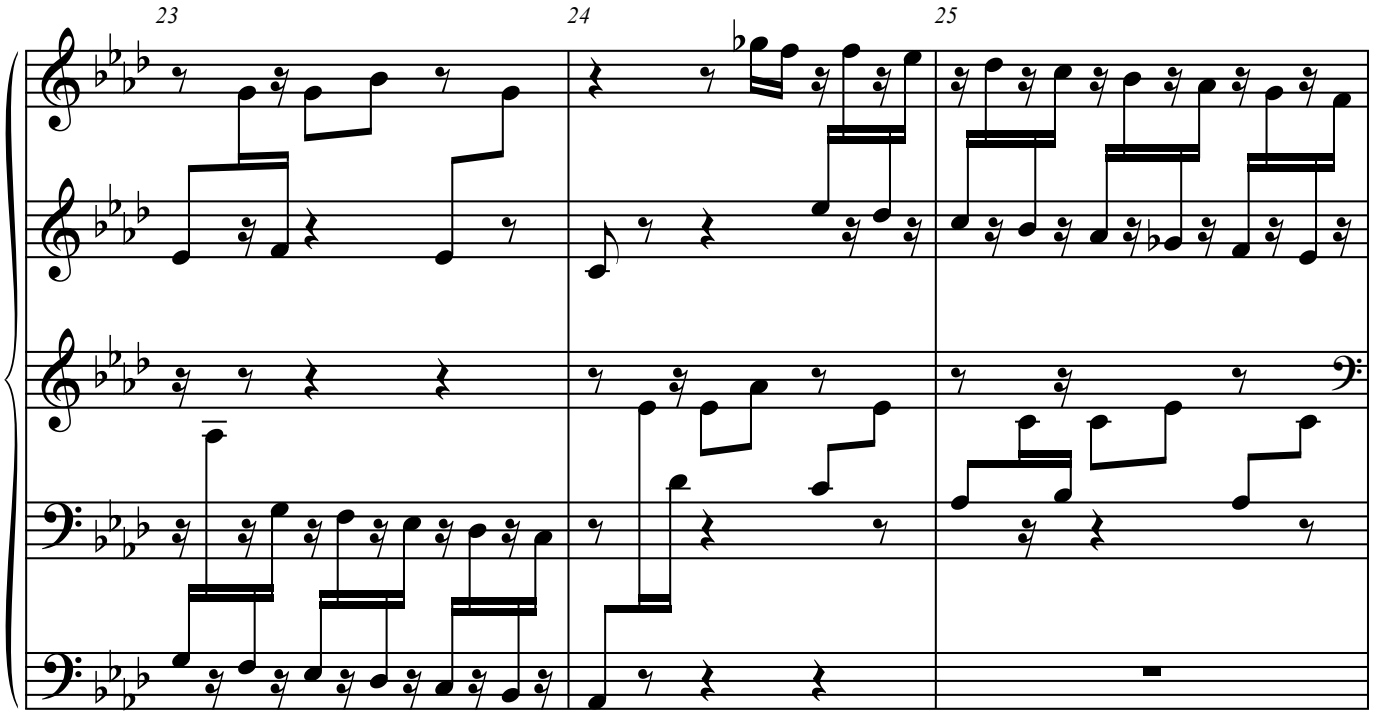
Prelude No. 17

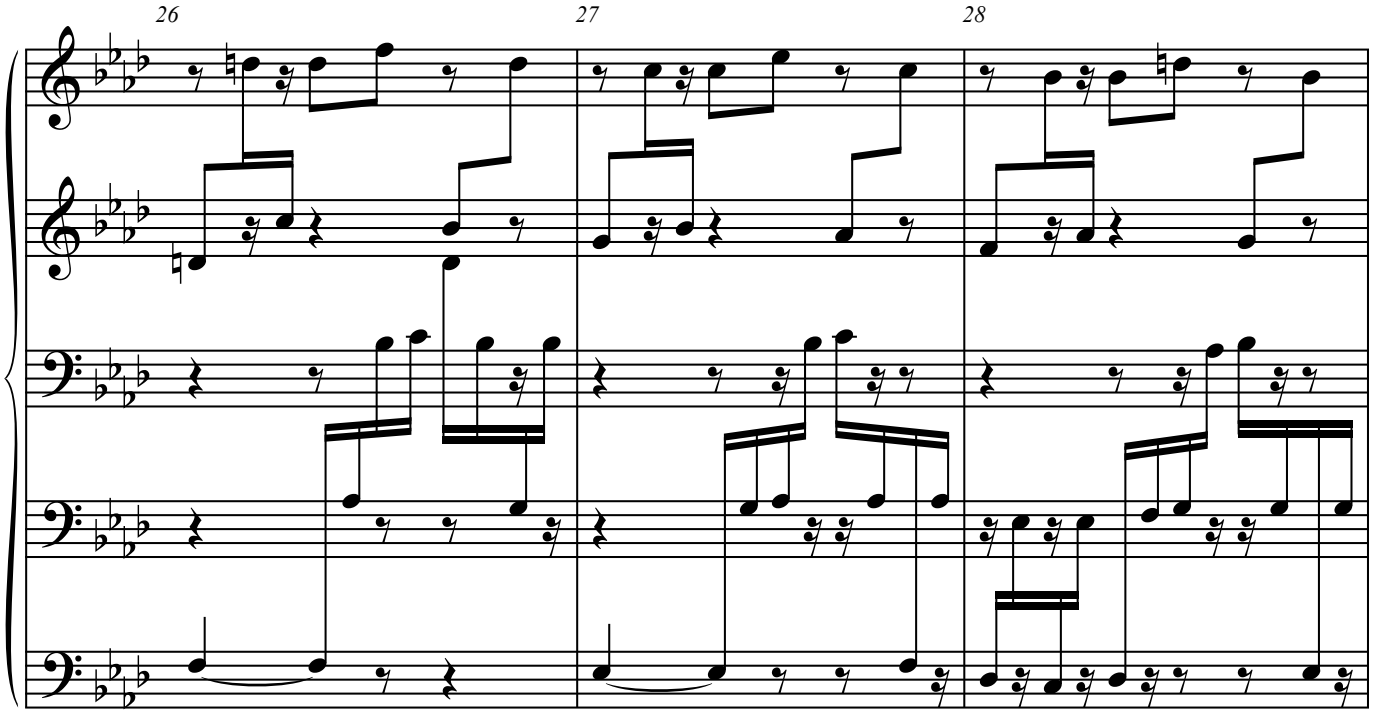


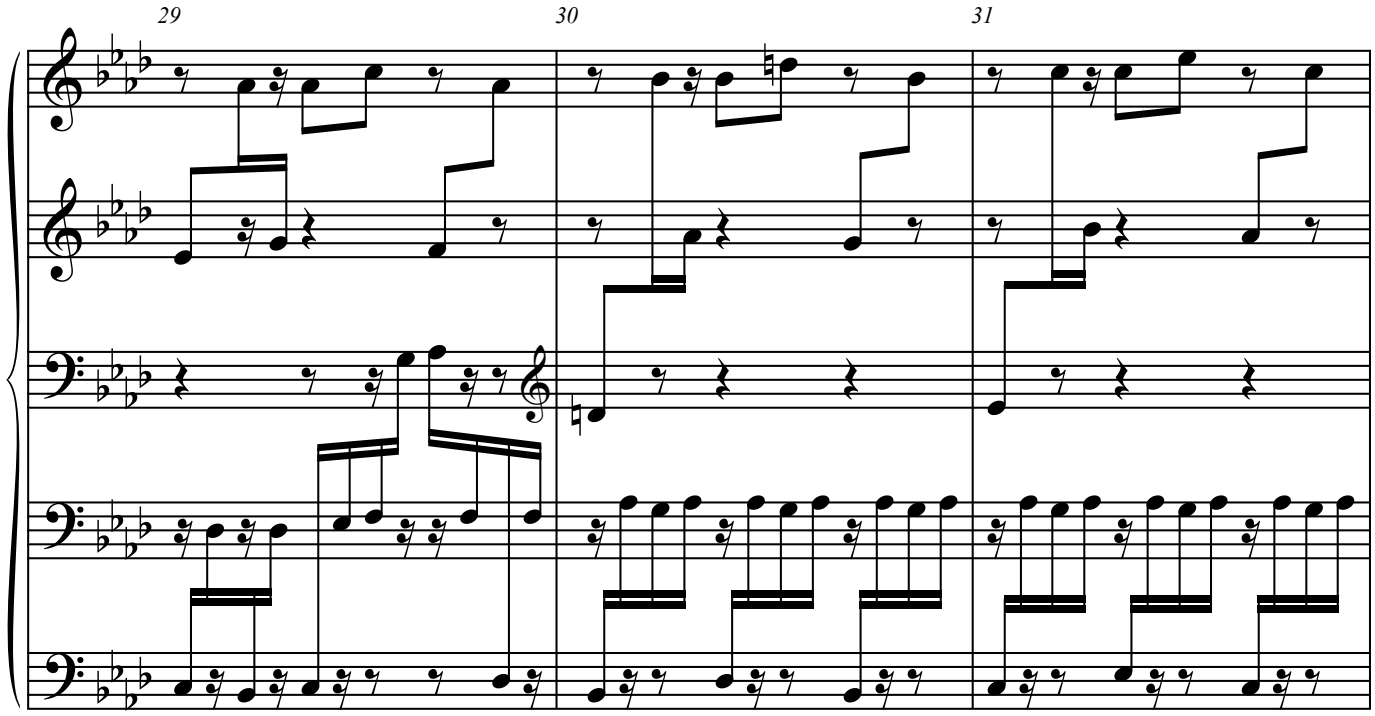

10
11
12
13
14
15

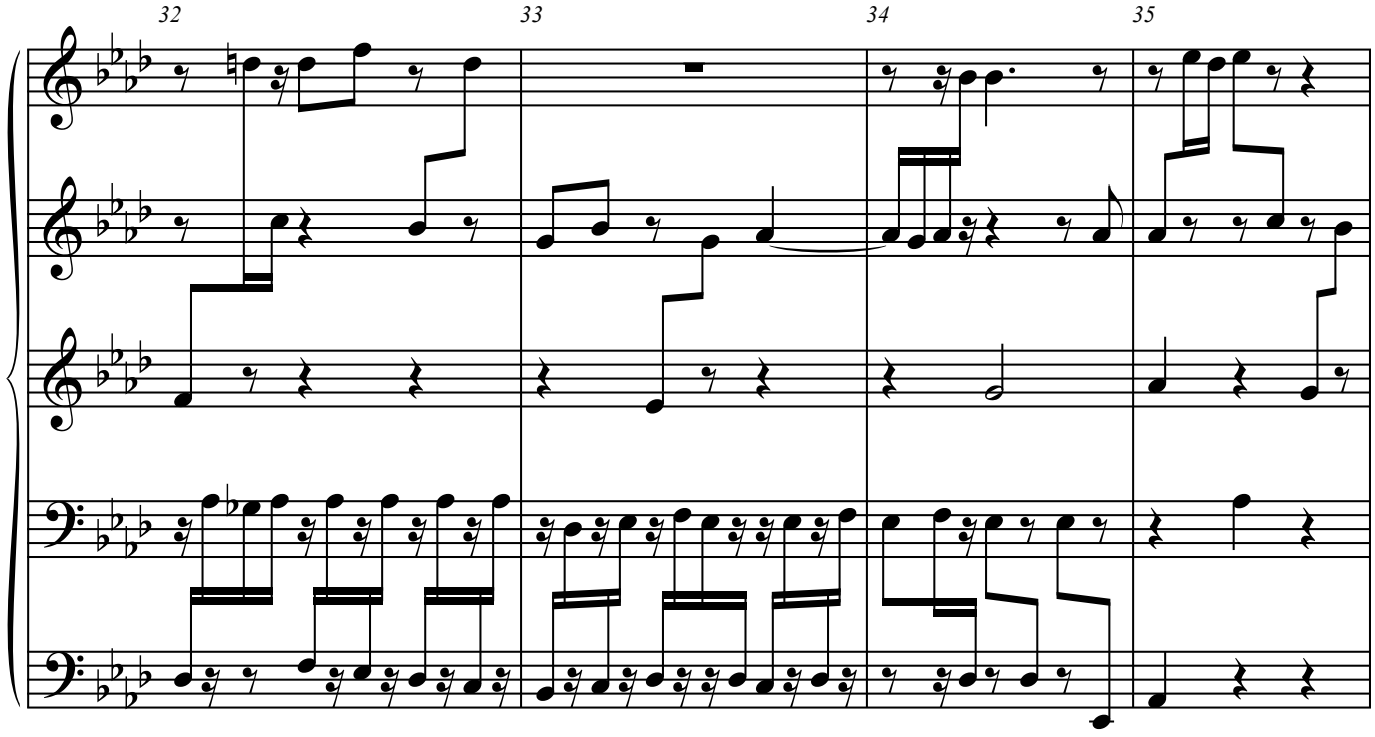

16
17
18
19

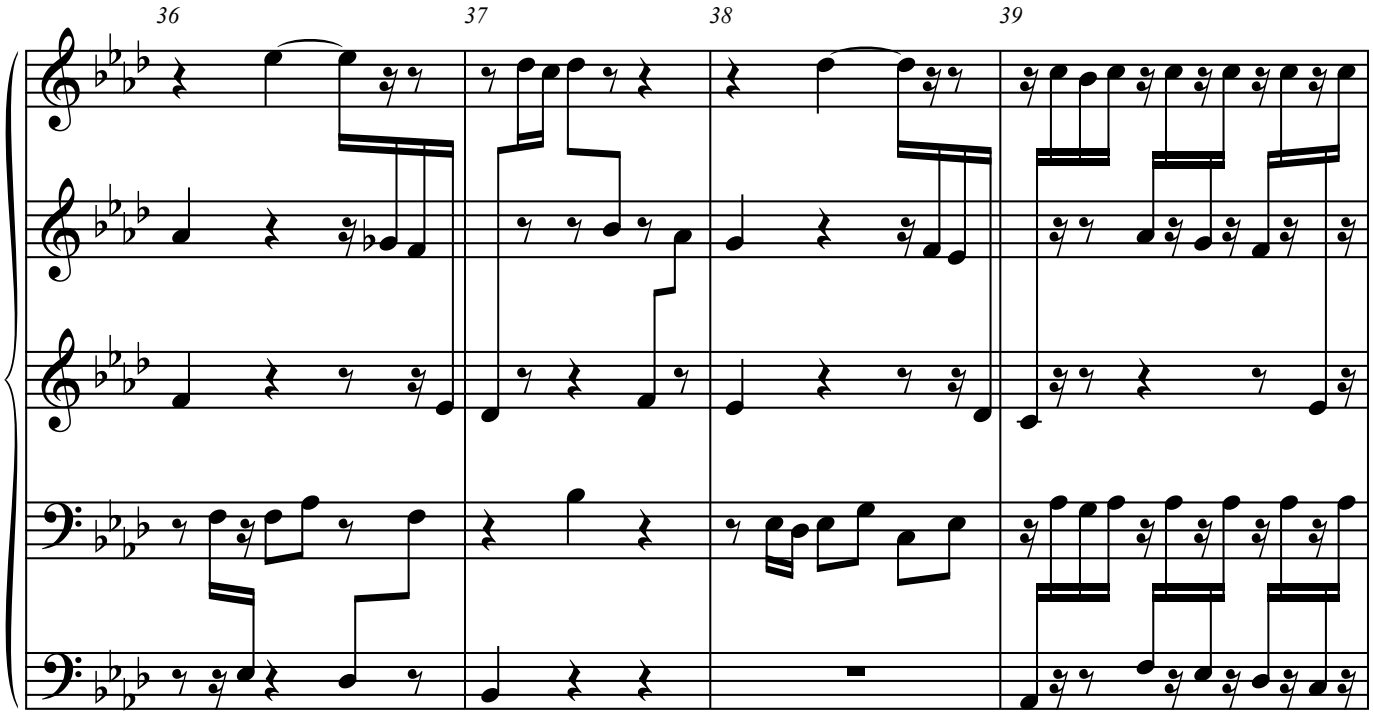

20
21
22

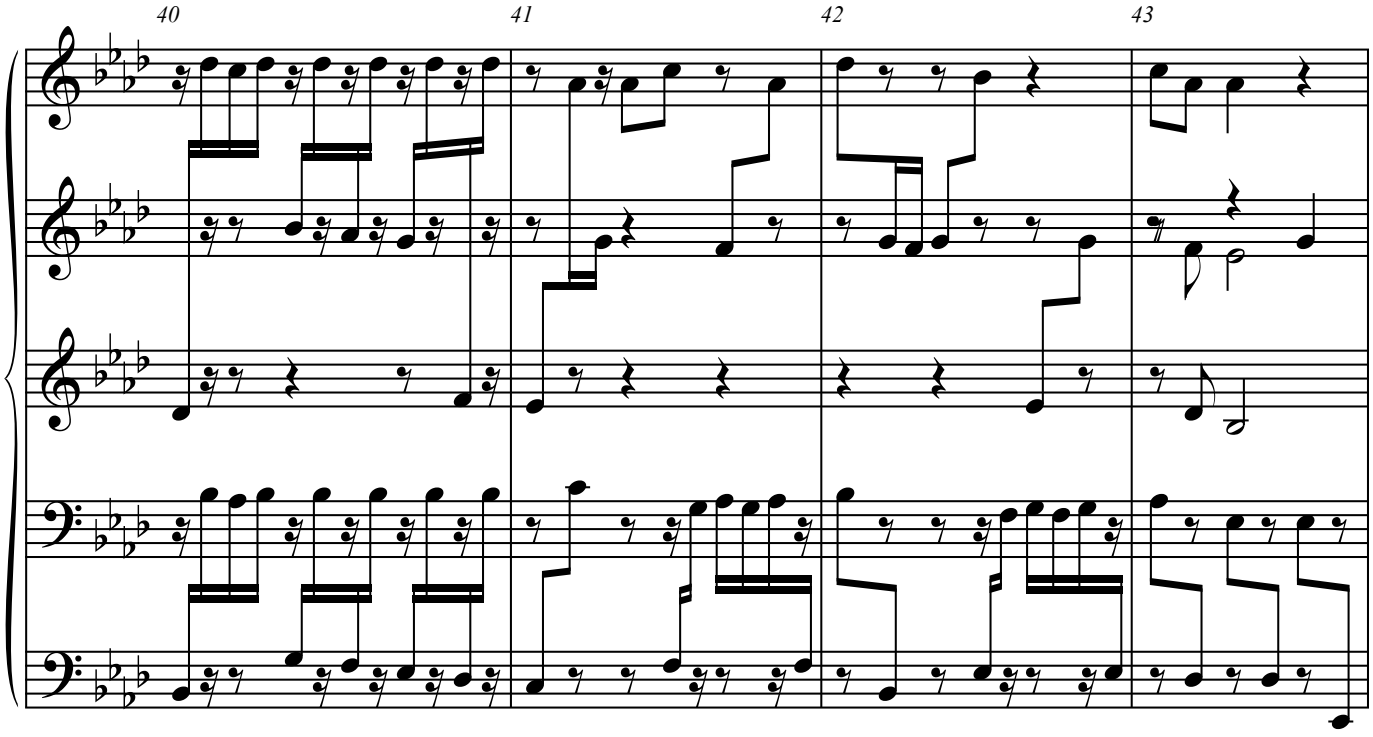

23
24
25


26
27
28

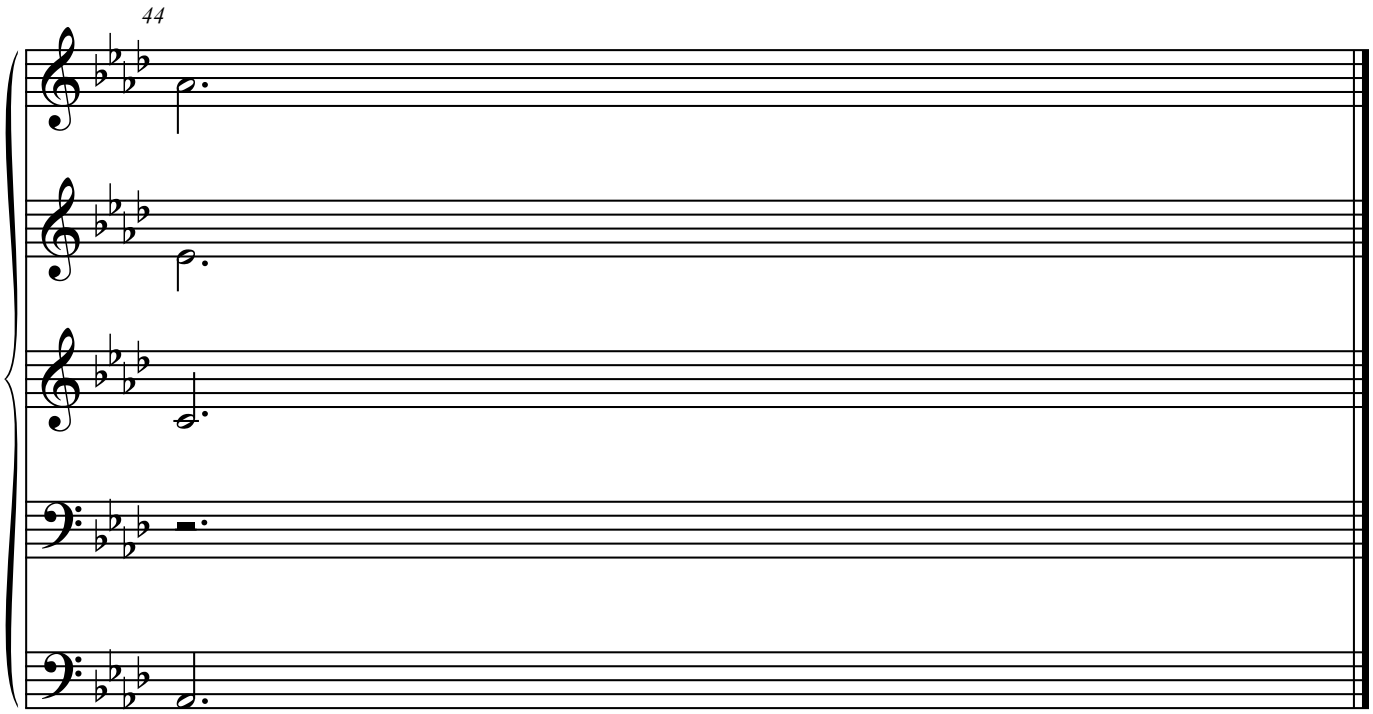

29
30
31

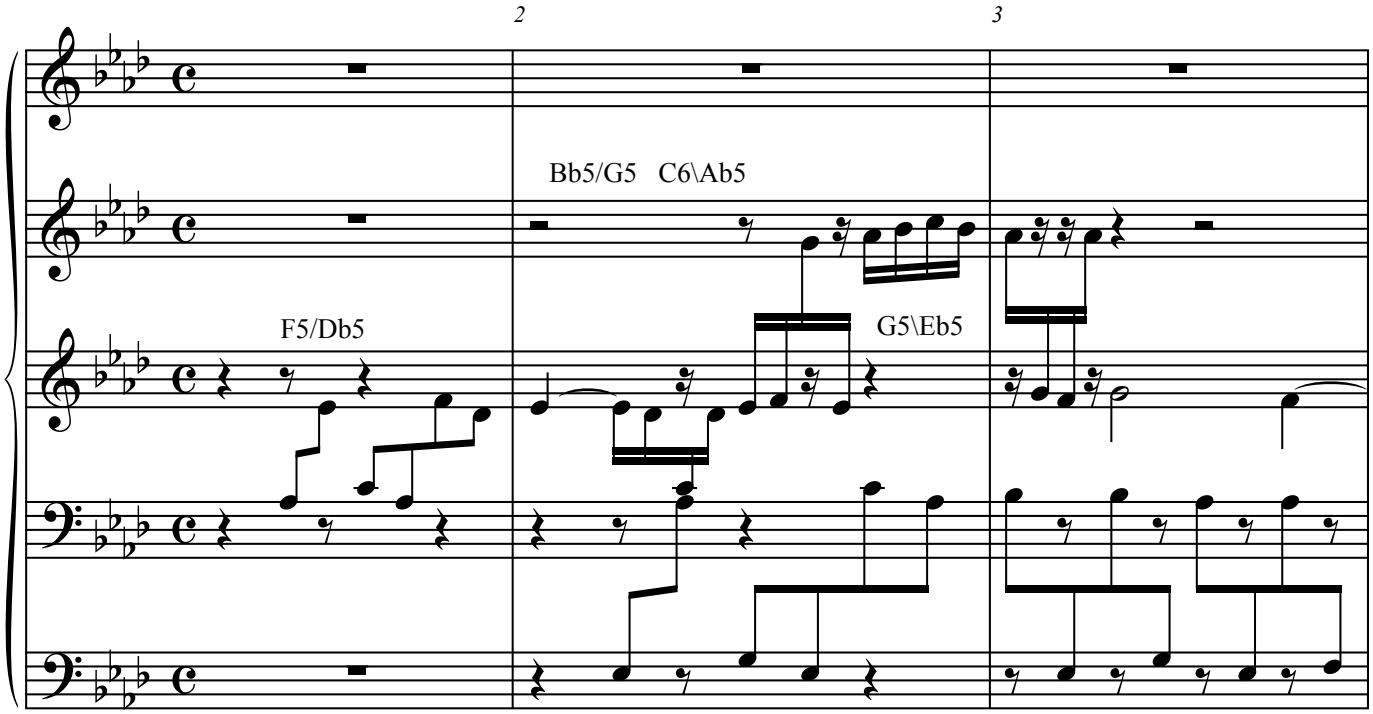

32
33
34
35

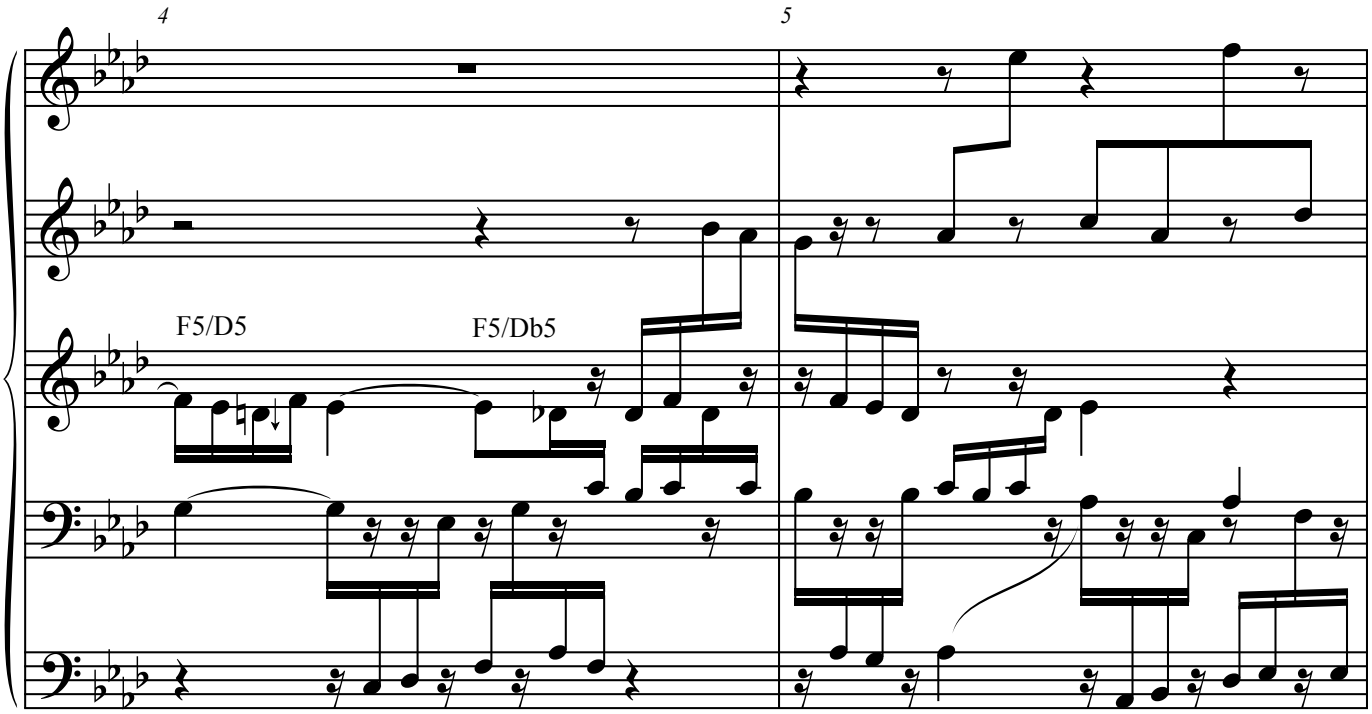

36
37
38
39

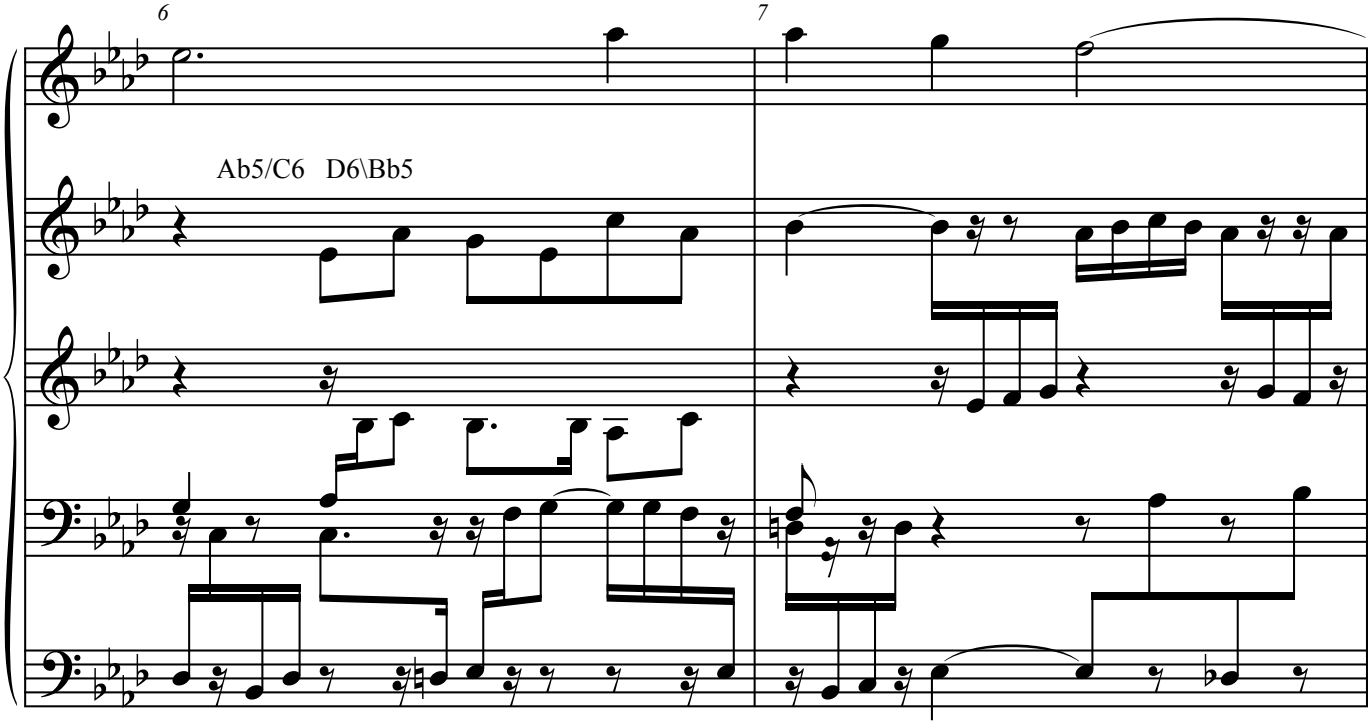

40
41
42
43

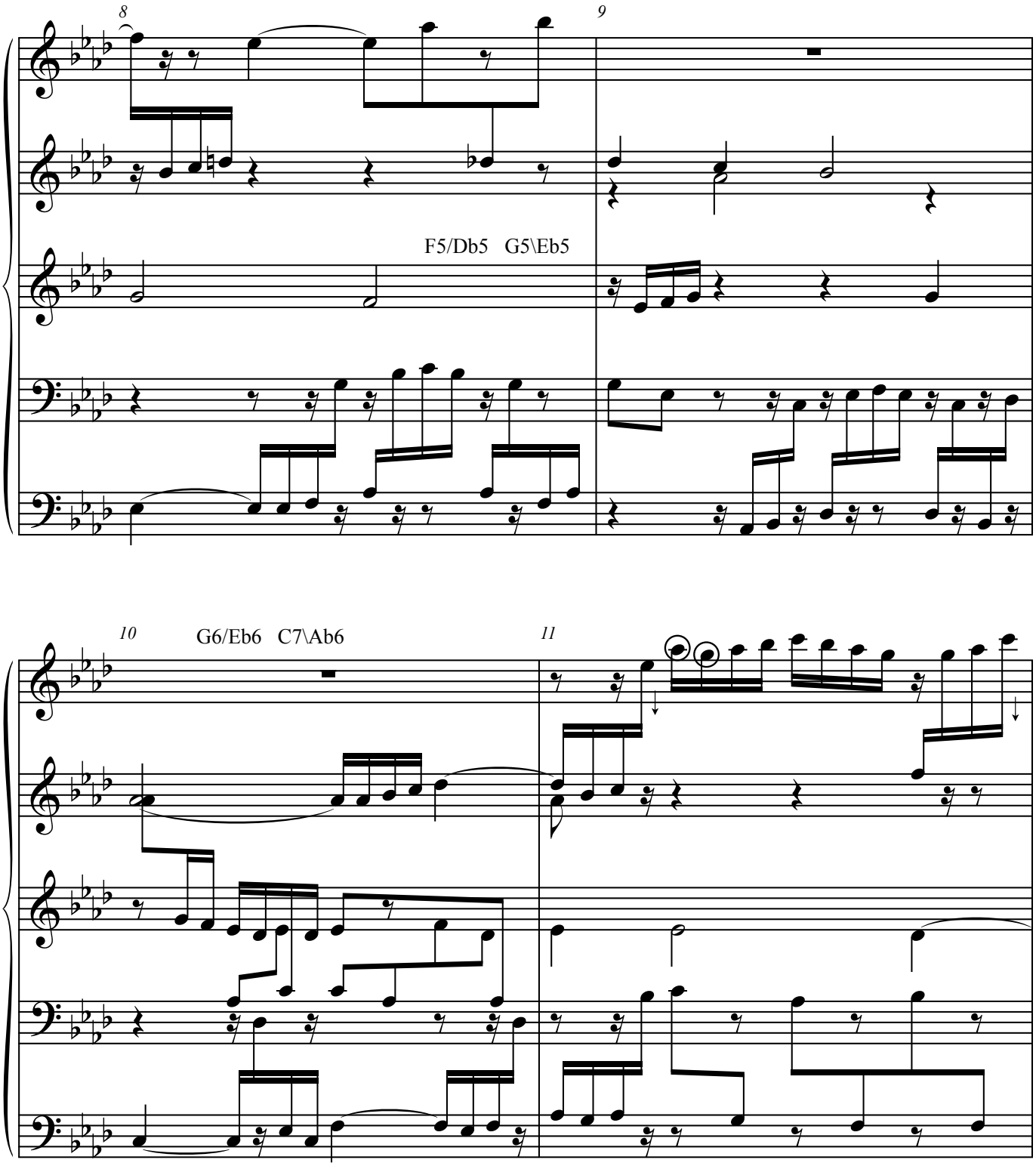
Fugue No. 17

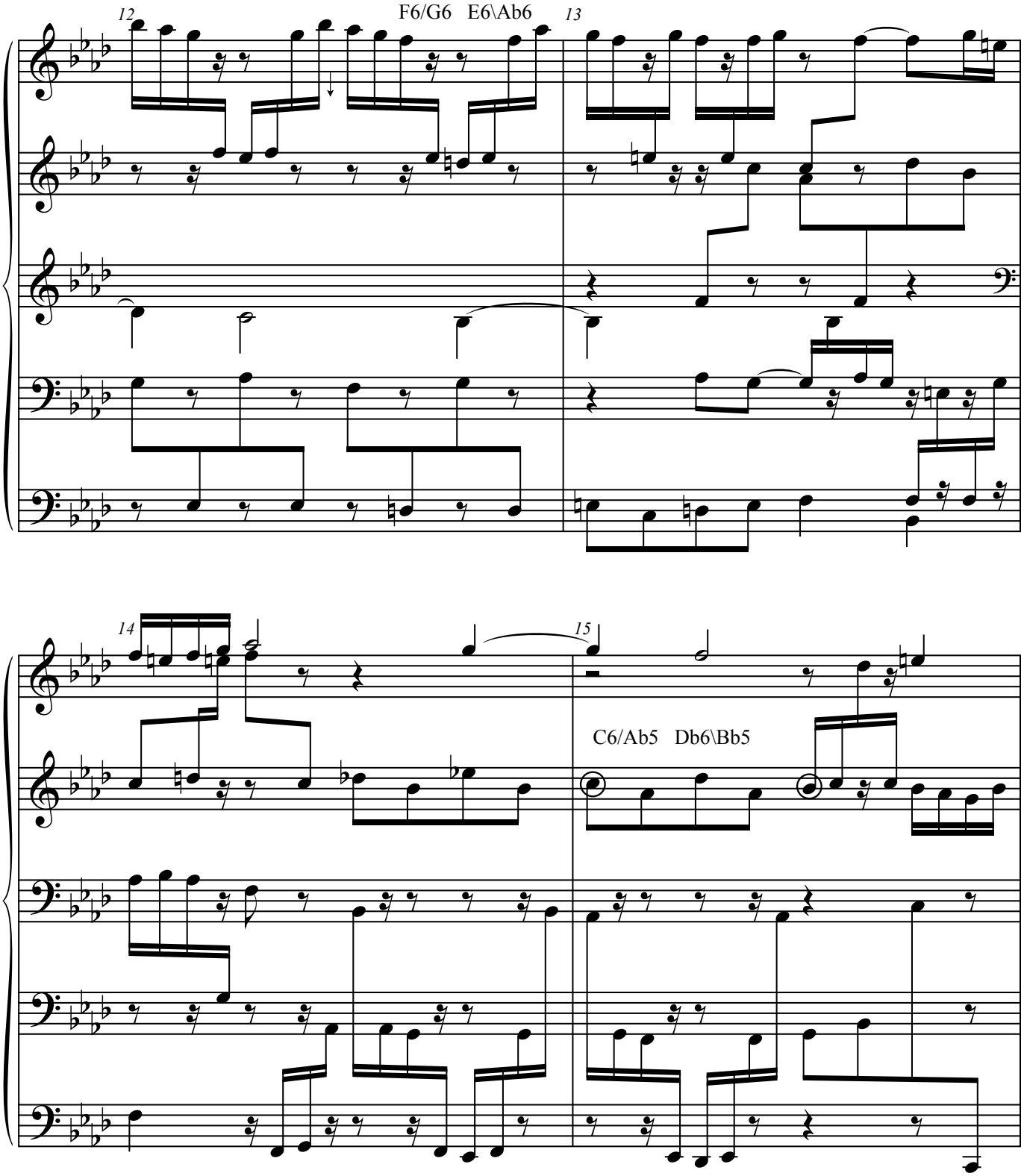


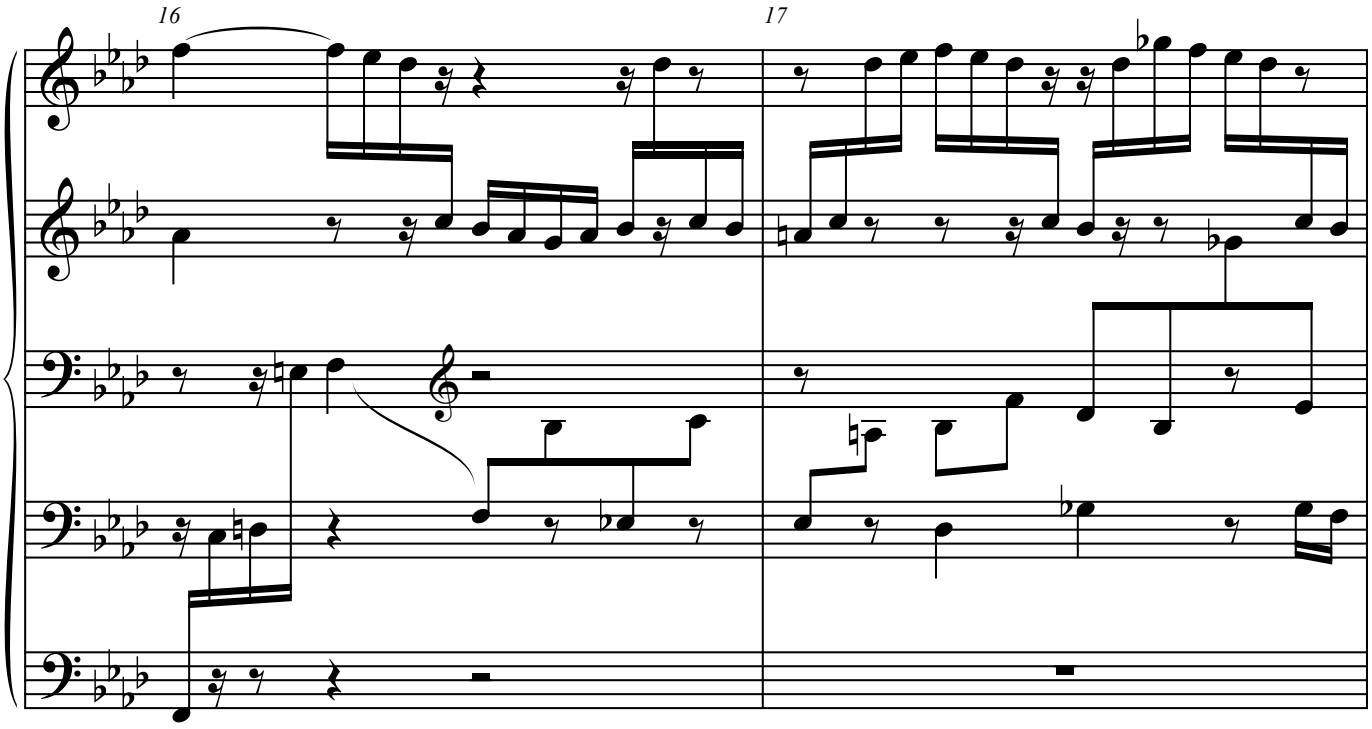


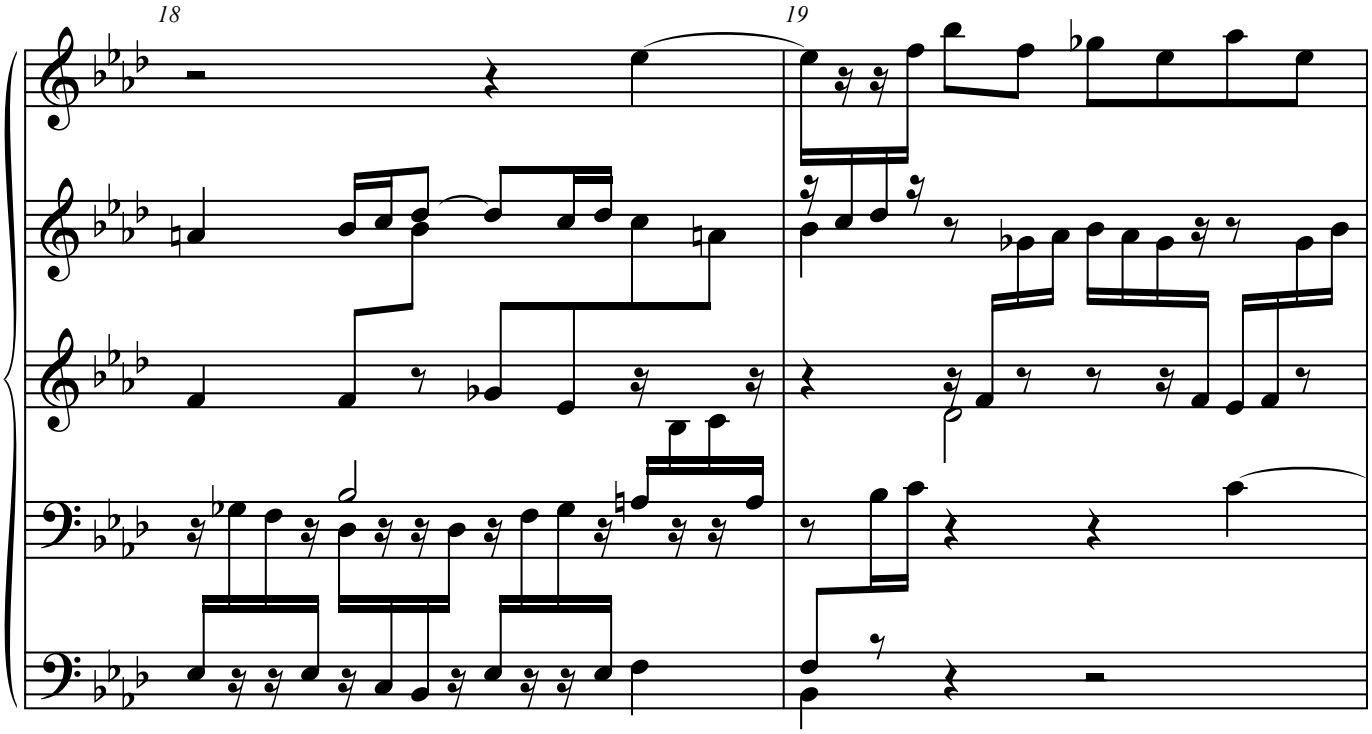

4
5
F5/D5
F5/Db5

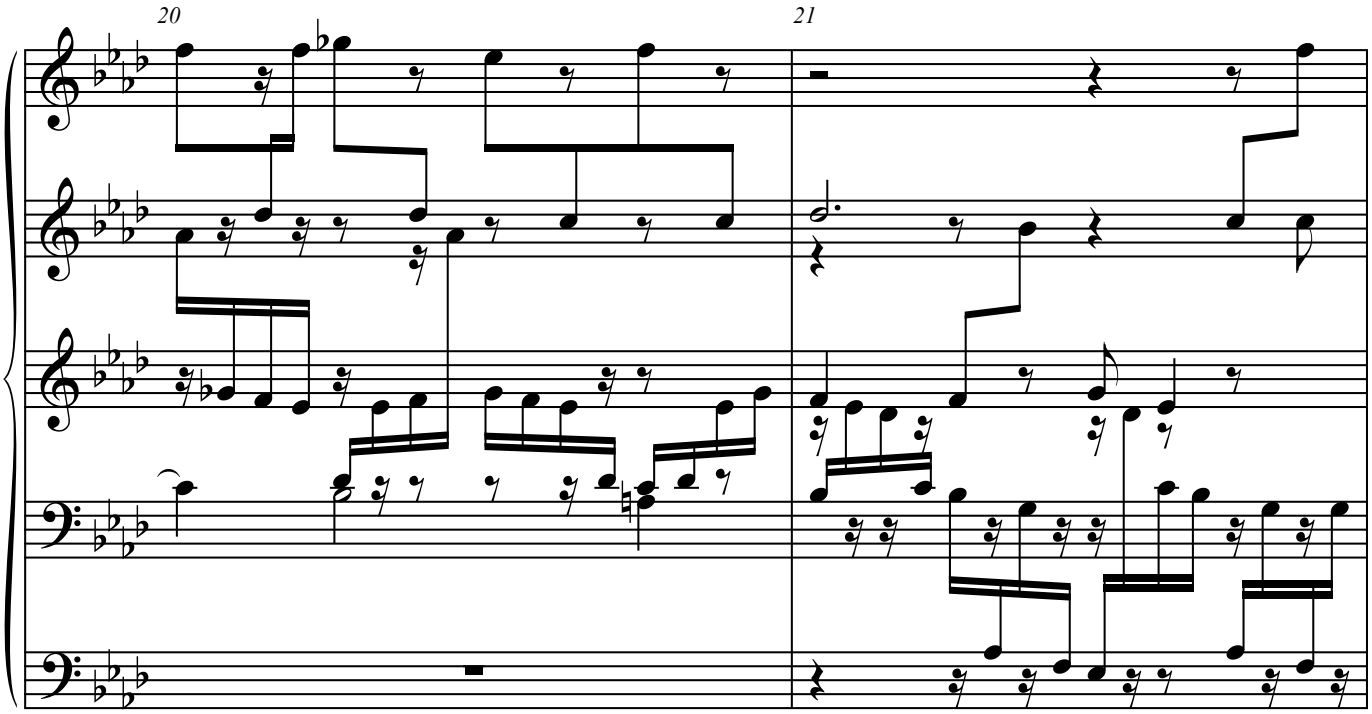

6
7
Ab5/C6
D6\Bb5

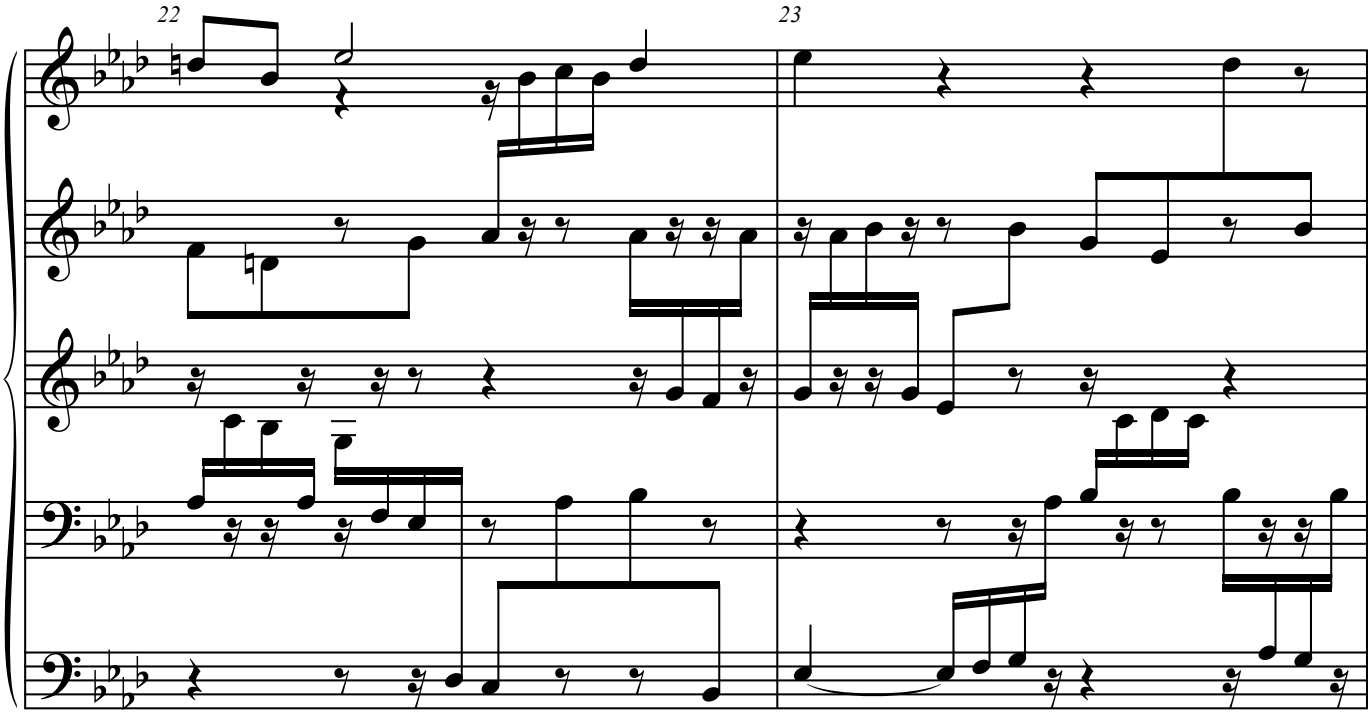

8
9
F5/Db5 G5\Eb5
10
G6/Eb6 C7\Ab6
11

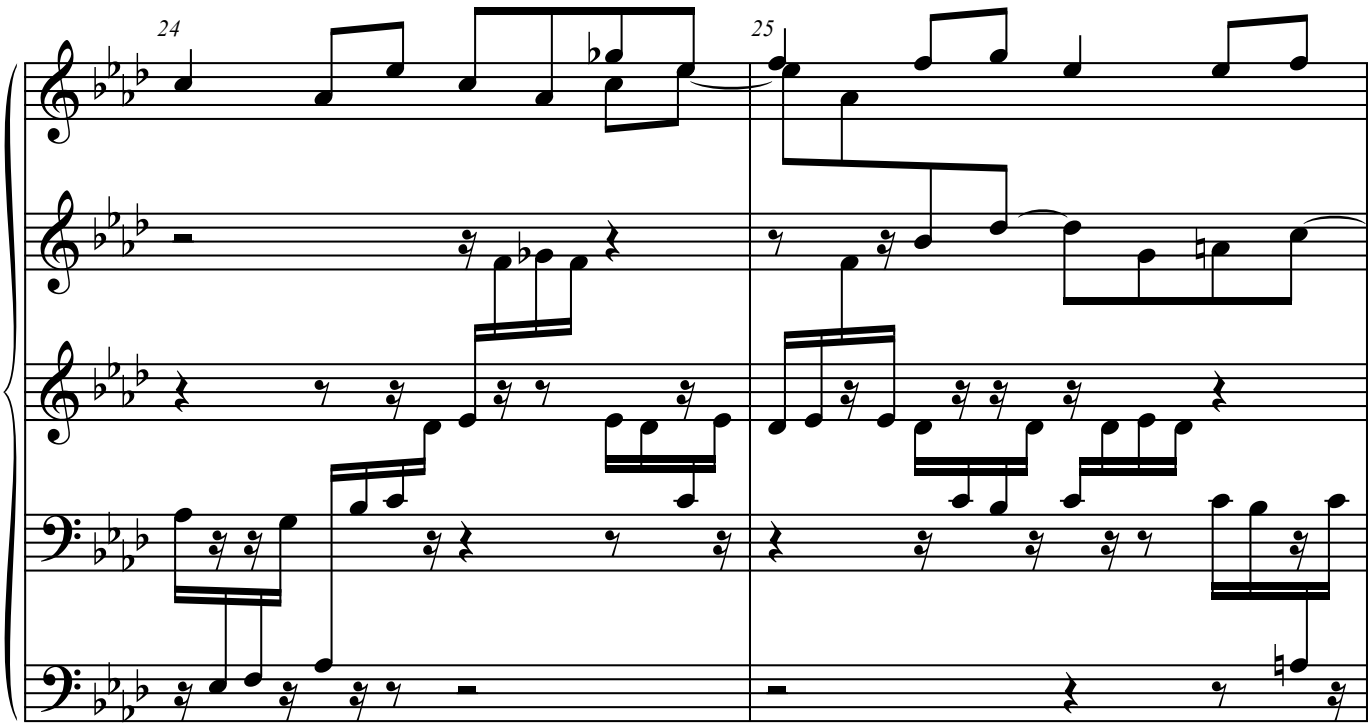

12
F6/G6 E6\Ab6
13
14
15
C6/Ab5 Db6\Bb5

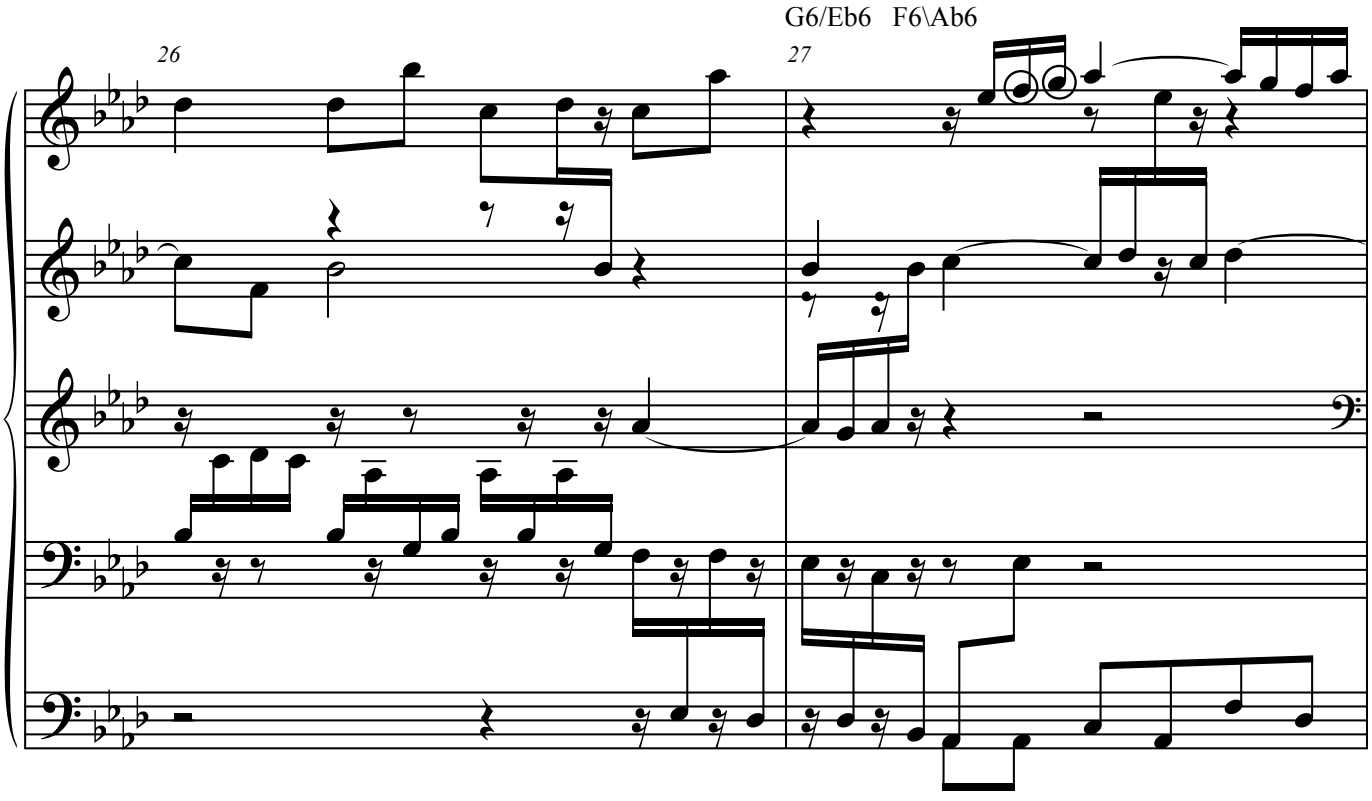

16
17

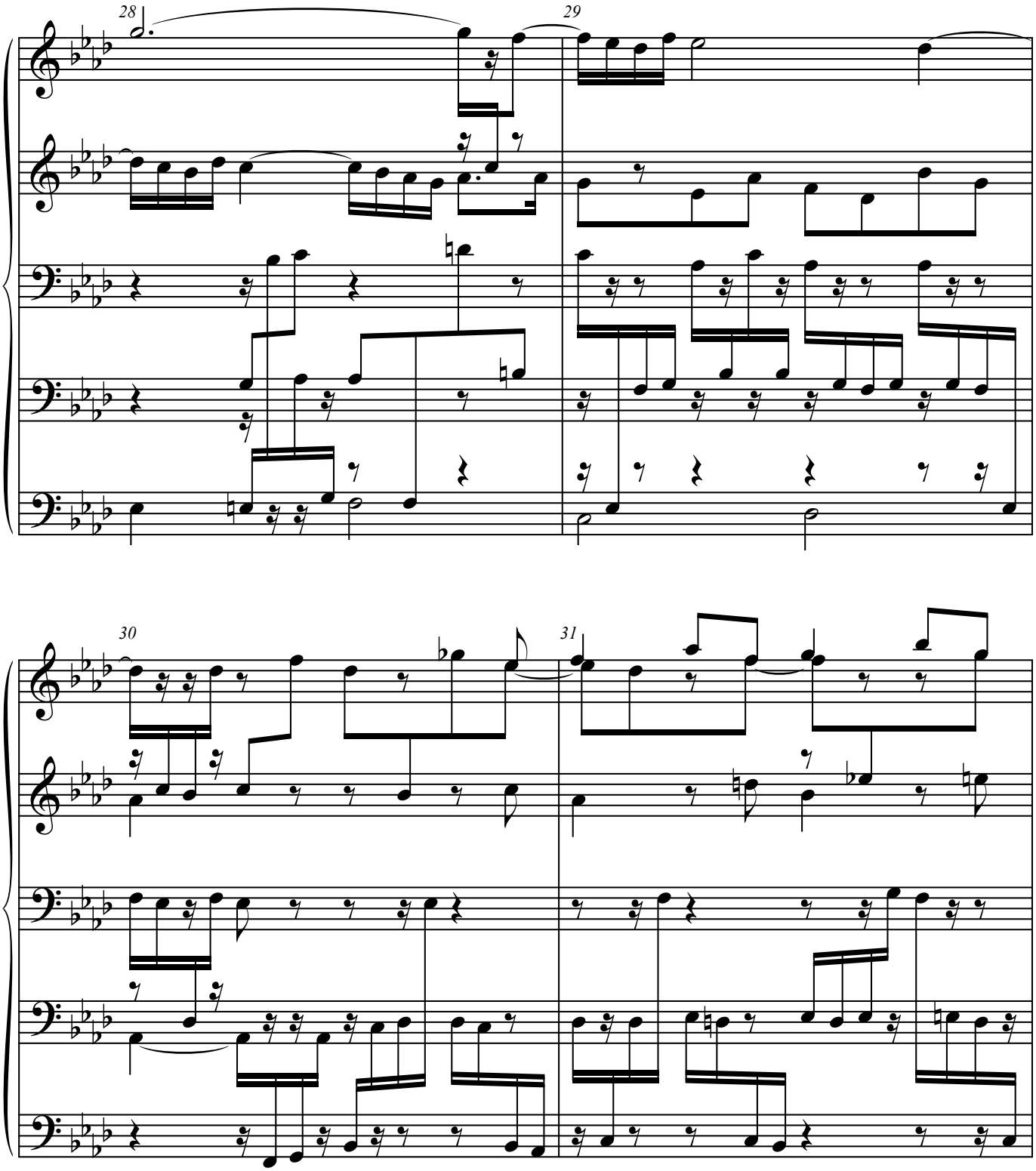

18
19

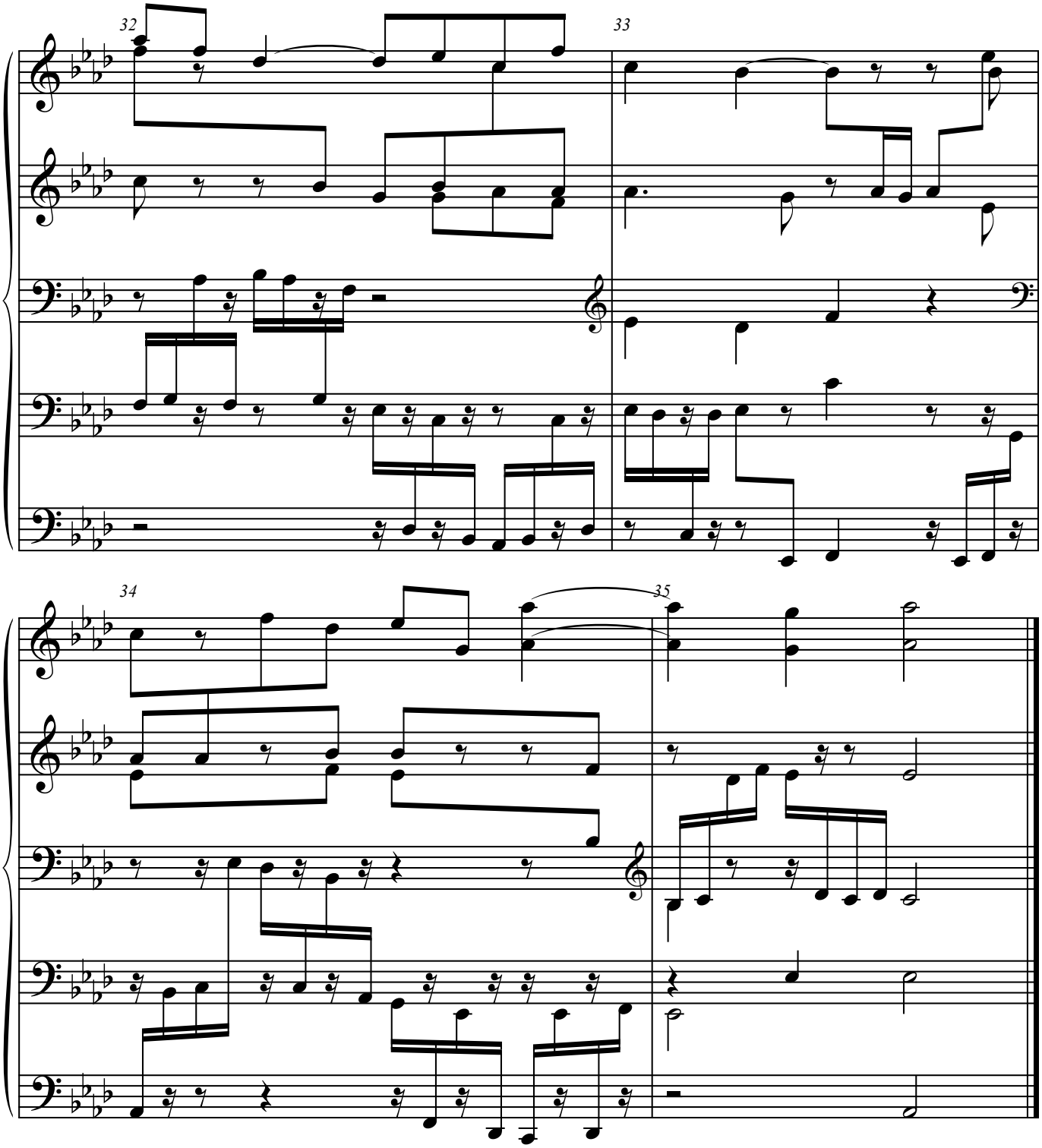

20
21


22
23


24
25


G6/Eb6 F6\Ab6
26
27


28
29
30
31


32
33
34
35