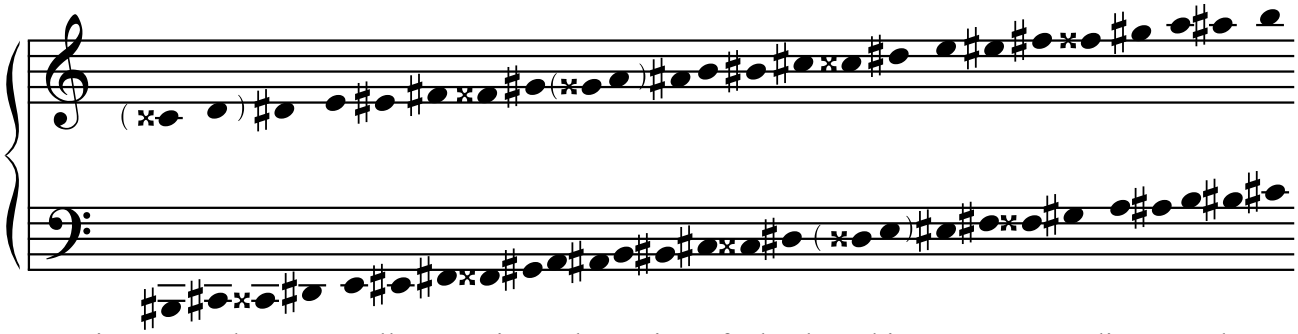
Prelude and Fugue No. 18 in G# Minor

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

Arranged for Handbell Sextet
by Larry Sue

Performance Notes

5 Octaves
Handbells Used: 48



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.

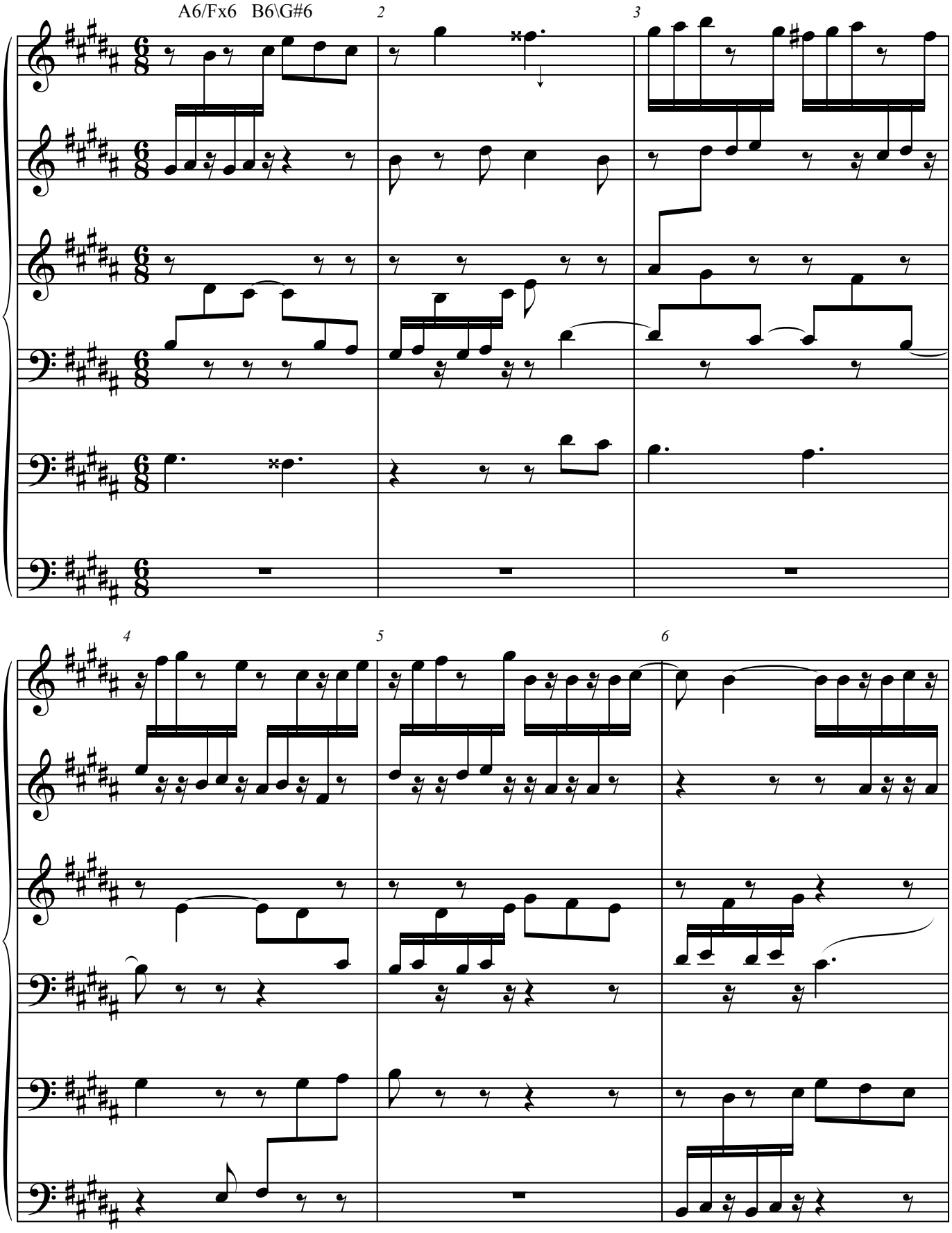
Prelude No. 18 is a wonderfully smooth piece sextet - the topmost position has just a bit of four-in-hand in the beginning, and then it flows easily (well, sort of...) after that point. Just remember to keep your hands light and fast, and keep on following the lines as they roll by!

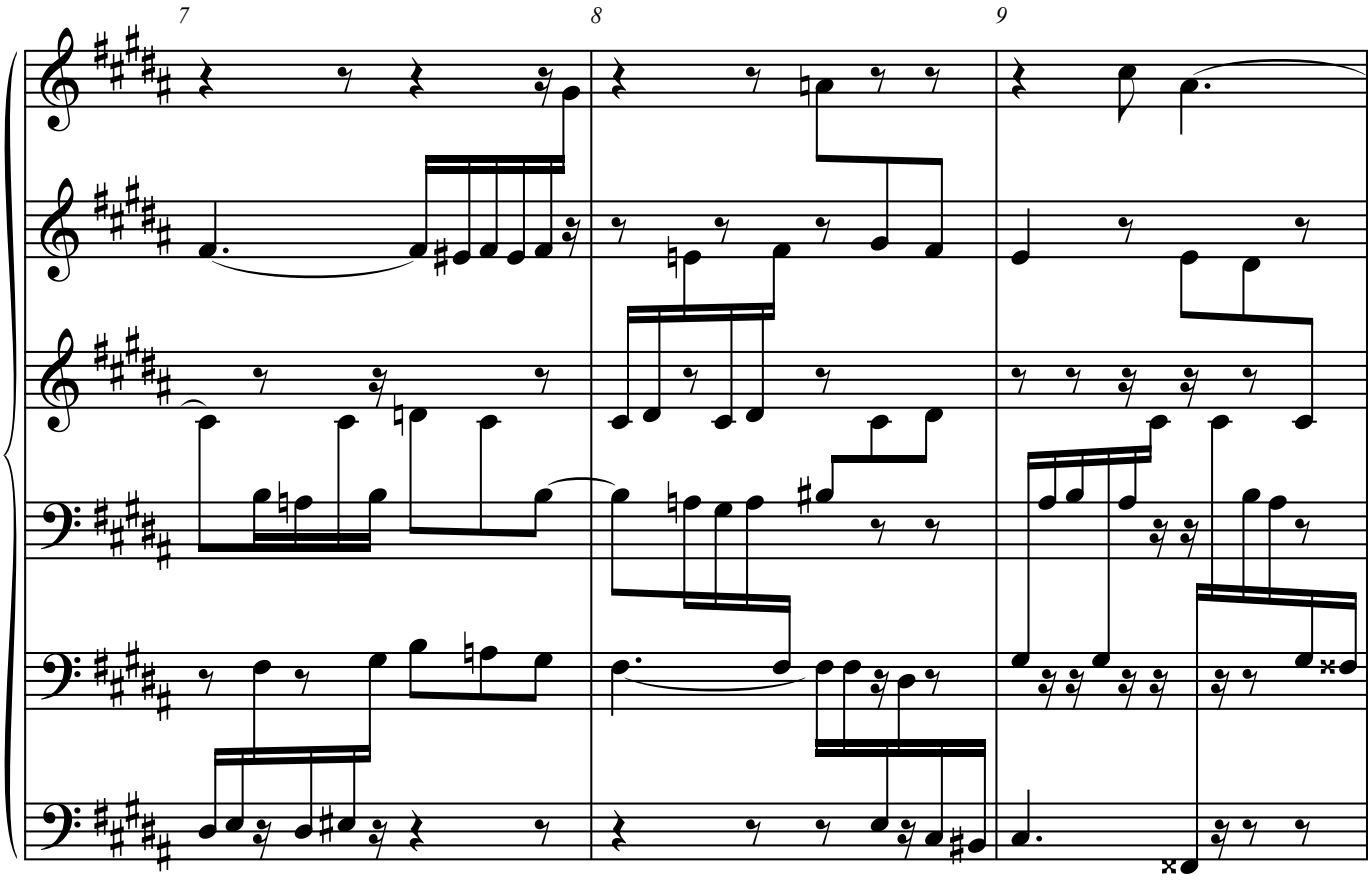
Fugue No. 18 is rather more demanding, given the interwoven running lines, but is playable. The "alternate paw" technique is needed by the ringer in the uppermost position (the two "knock" bells are played independently by using the pair of fingers that hold them to "flick" them) - practice your Vulcan salute, and it should be well under control!

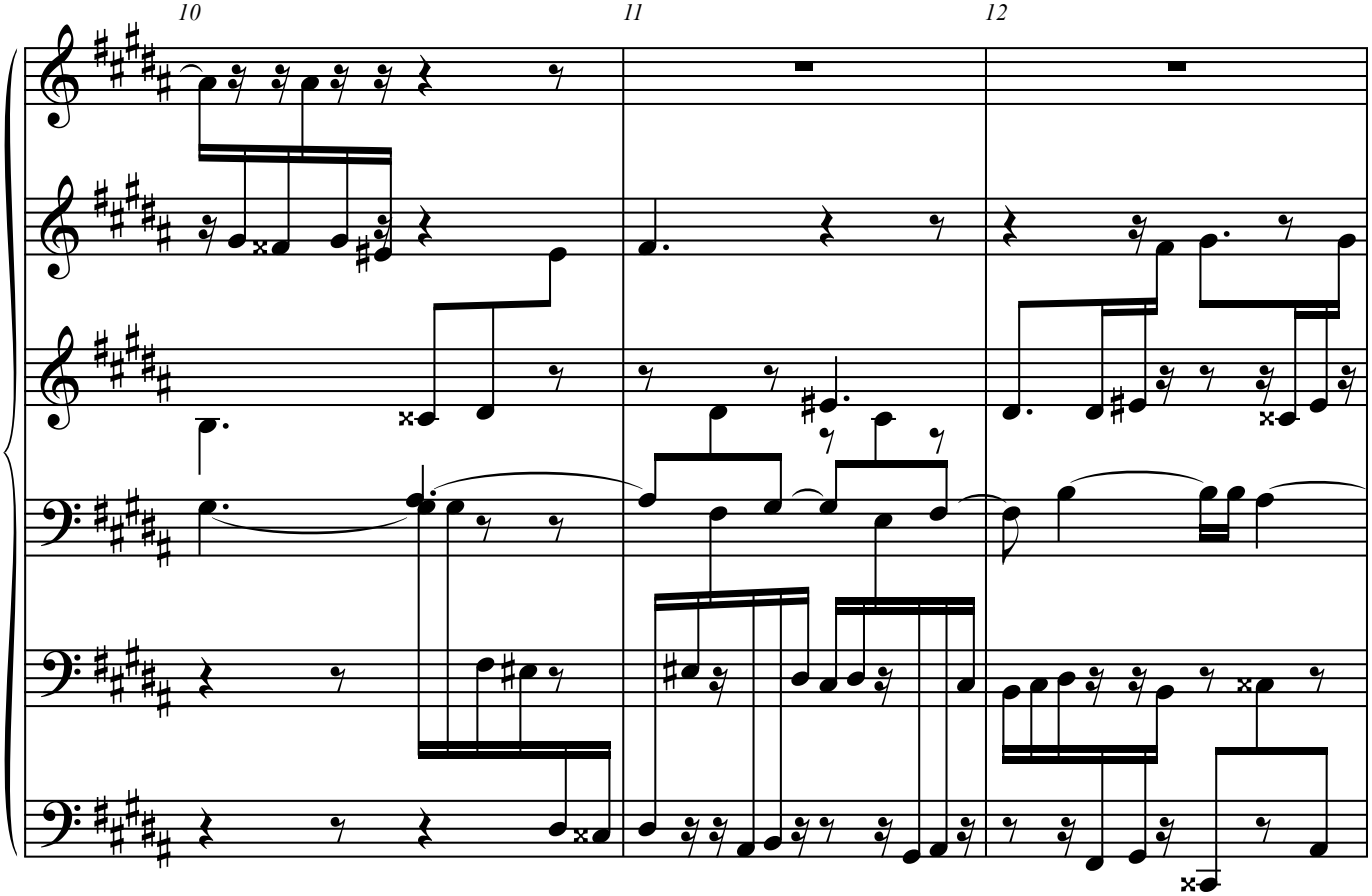
Have patience and persevere - at the end of the path lies a gorgeous performance!

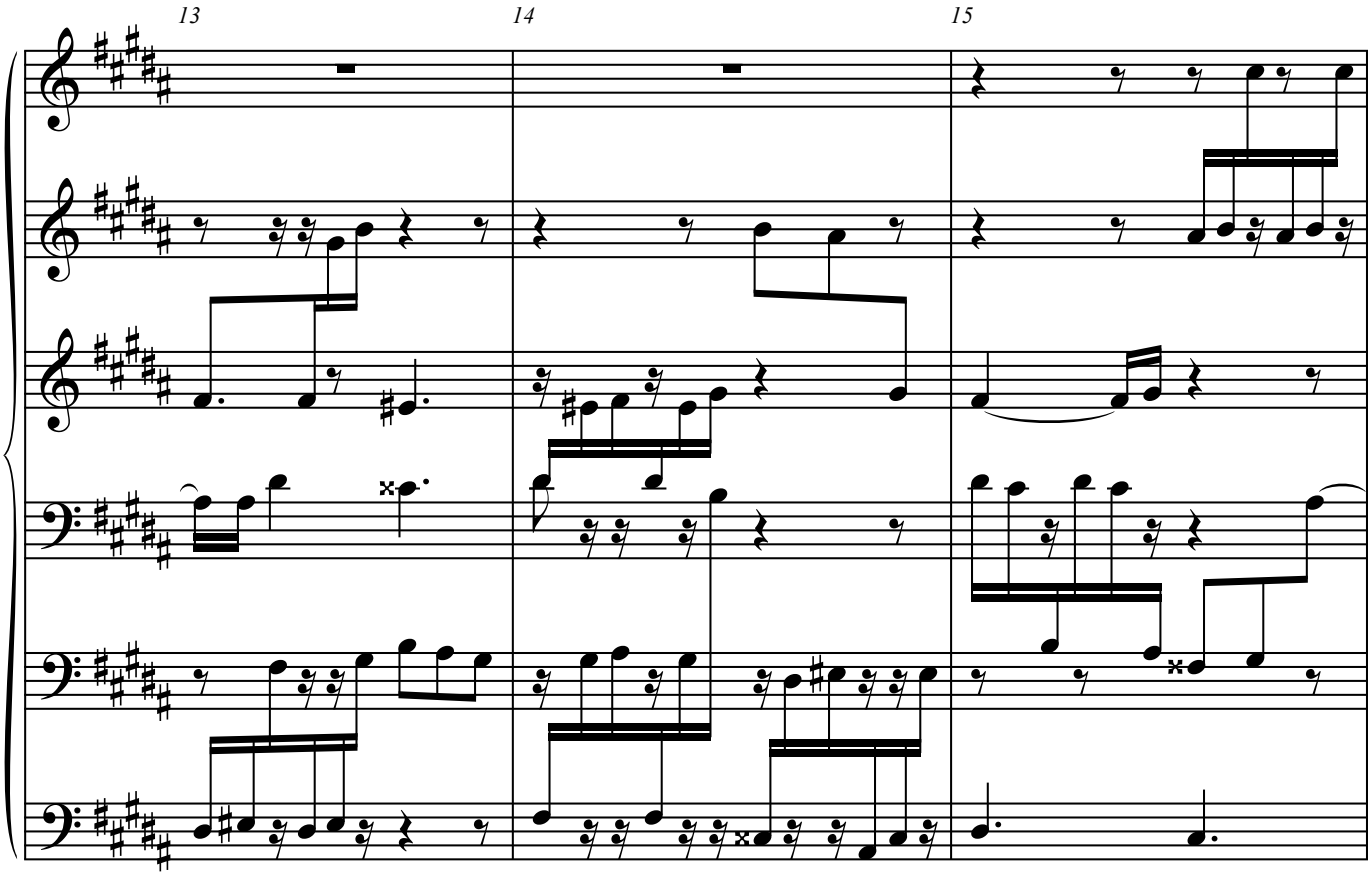
Larry Sue

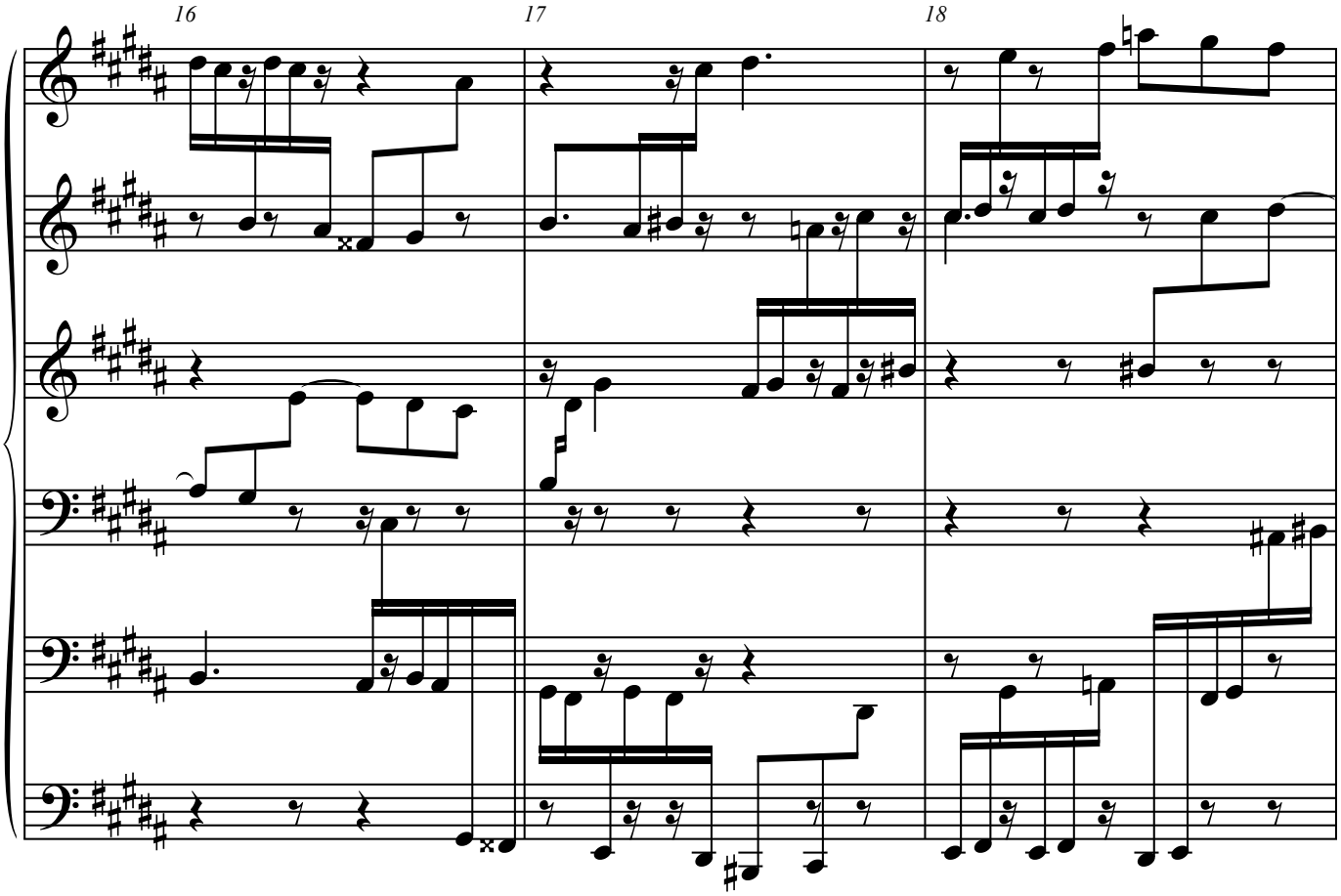
Prelude No. 18

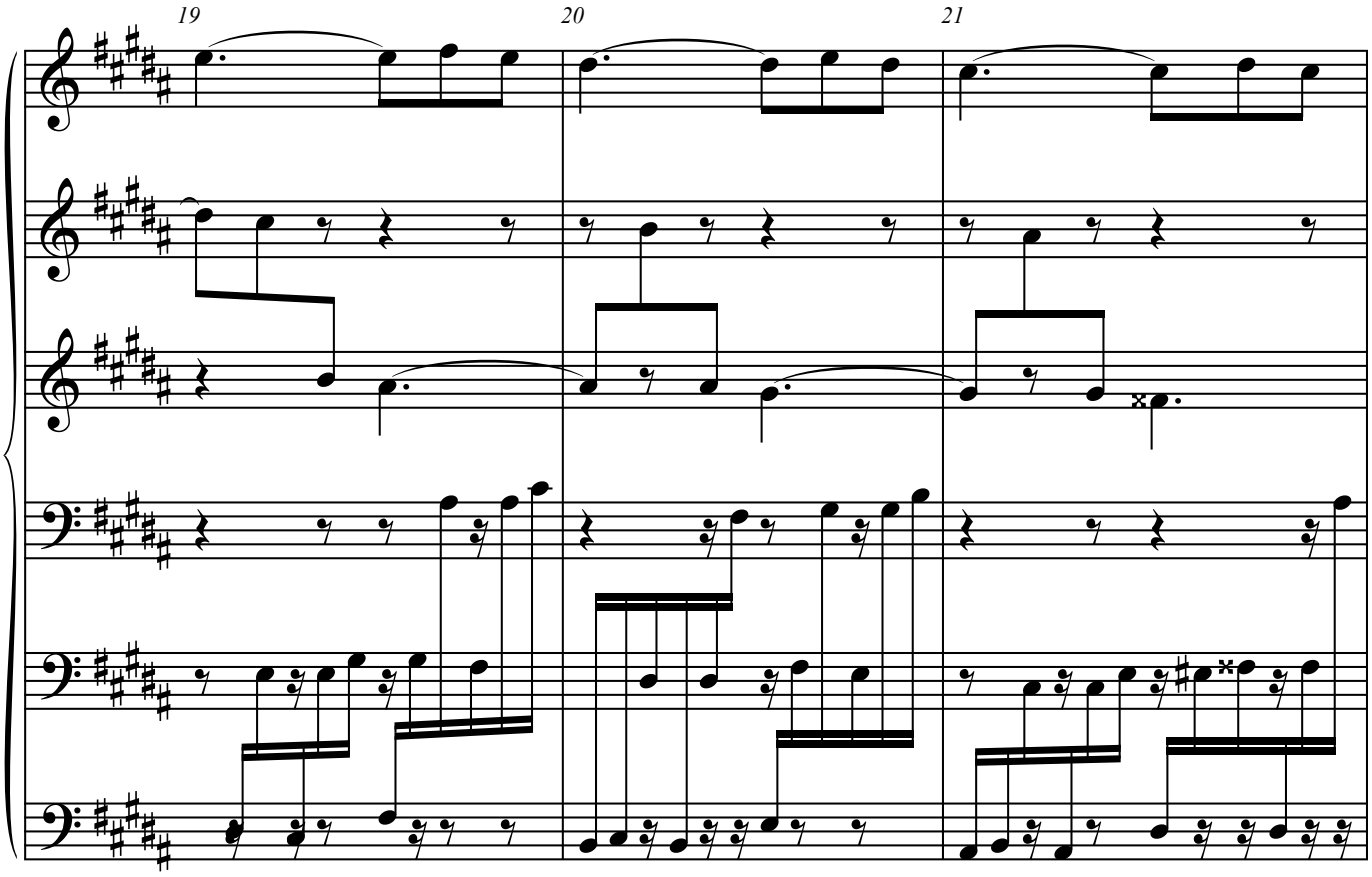


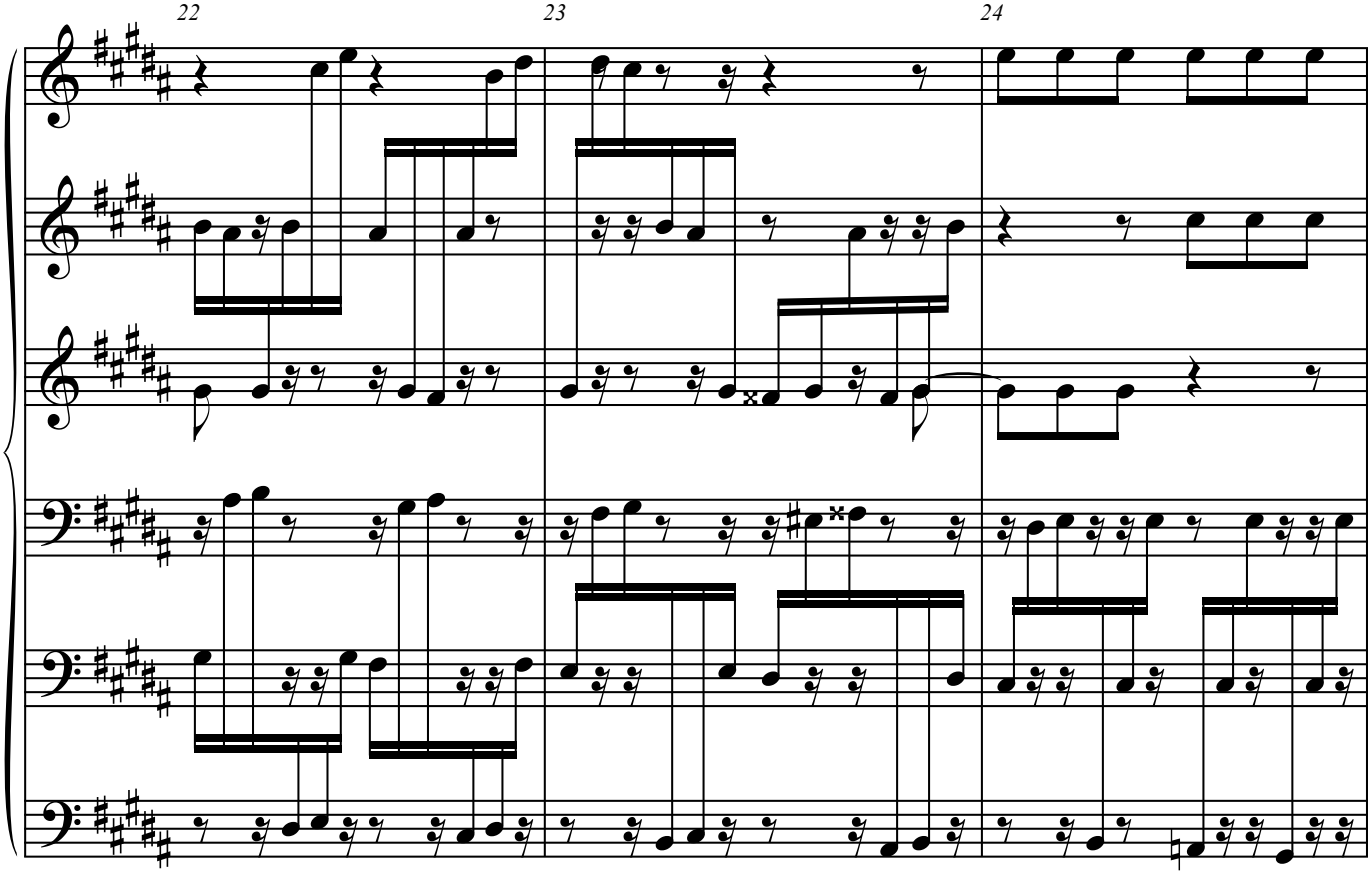

7
8
9

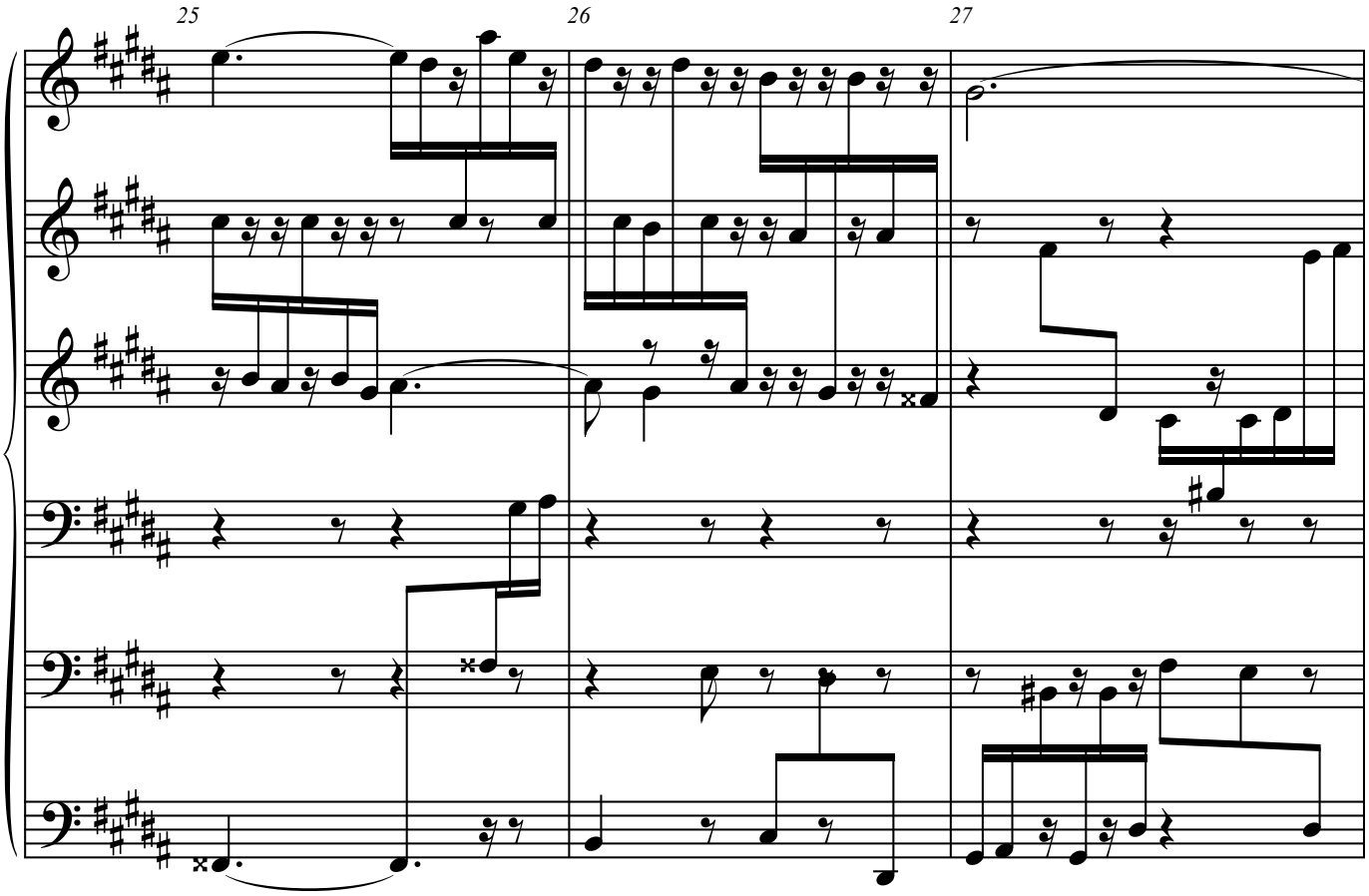

10
11
12

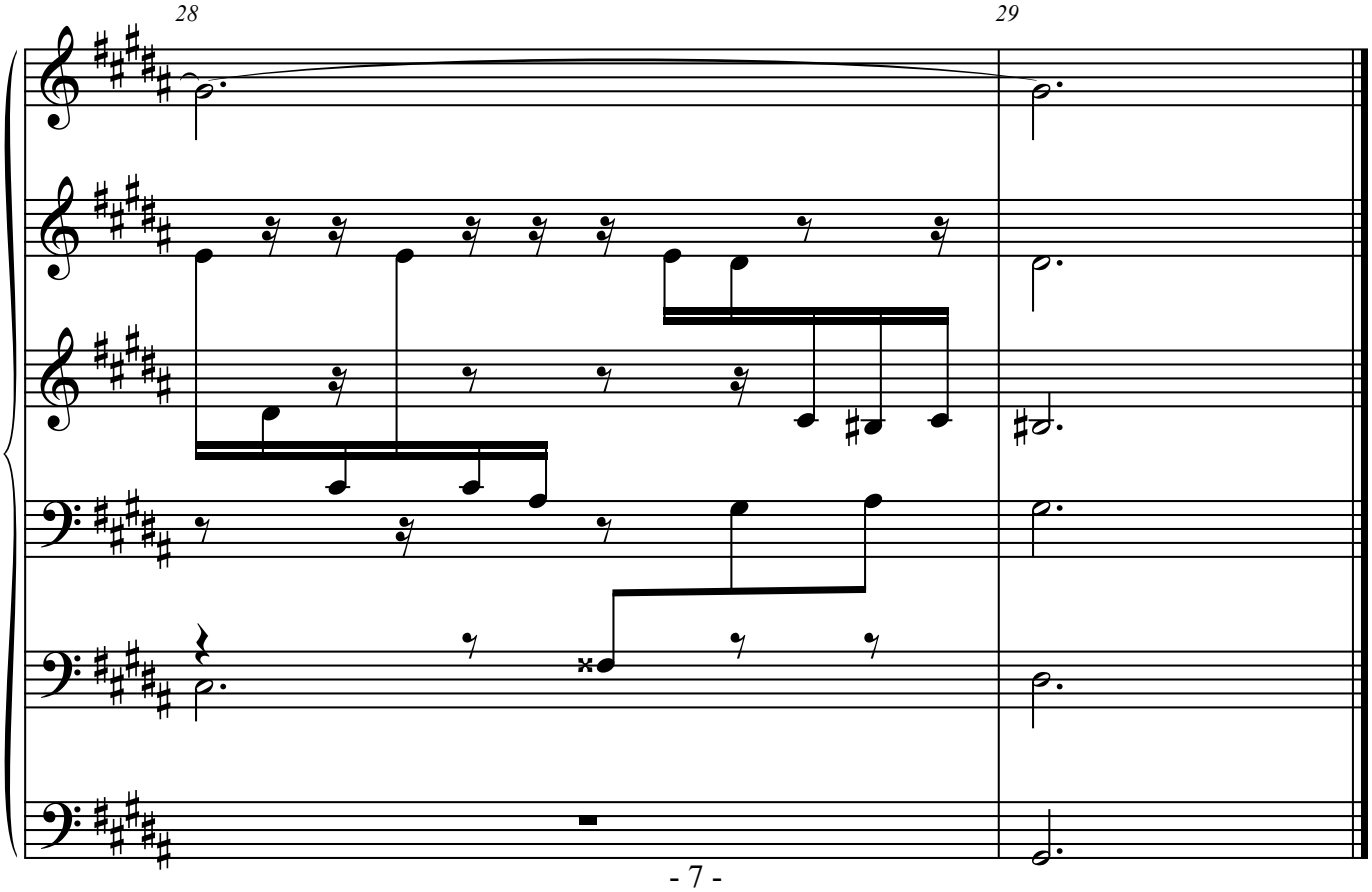

13
14
15


16
17
18

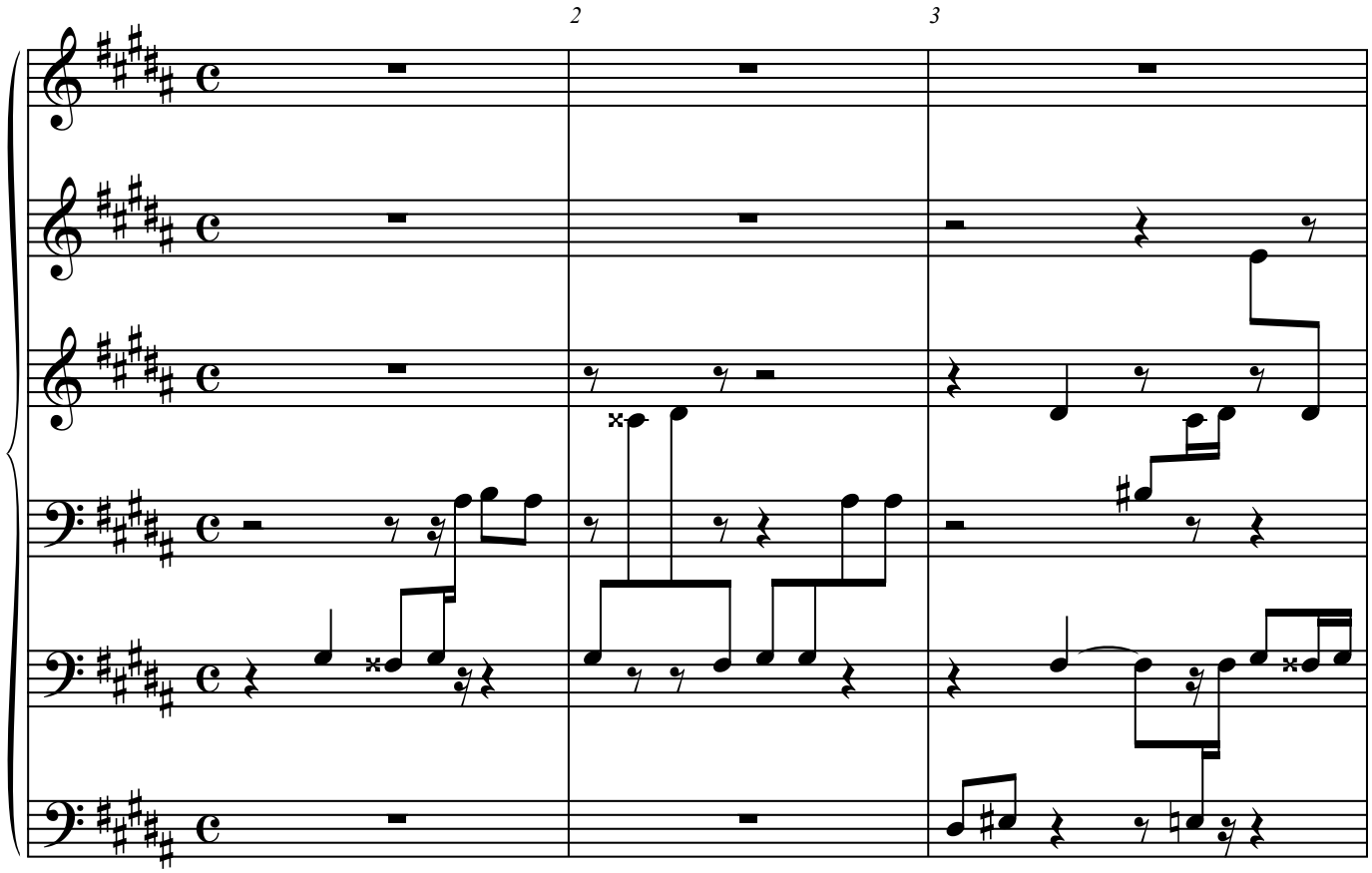

19
20
21

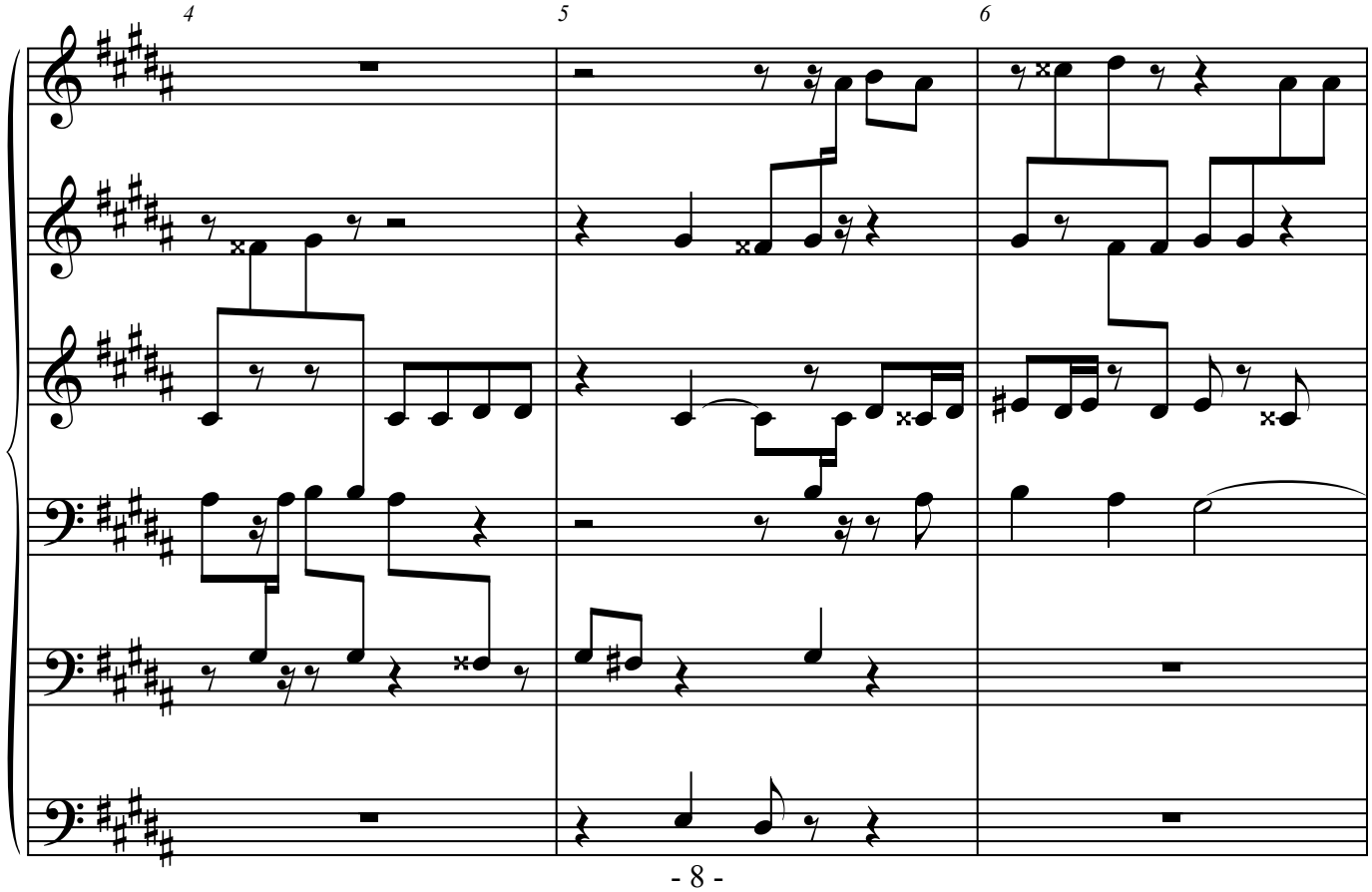

22
23
24

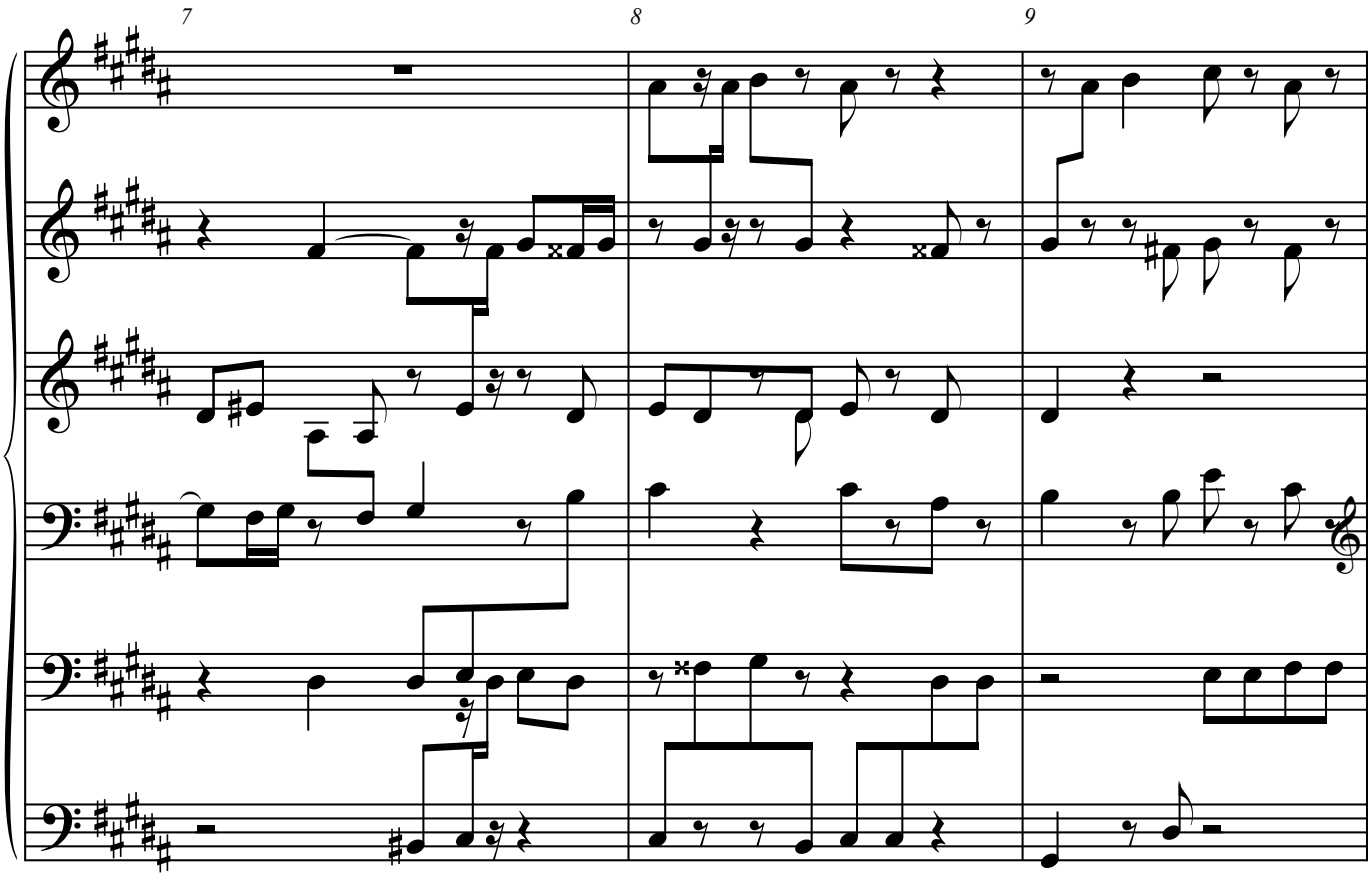

25
26
27


28
29

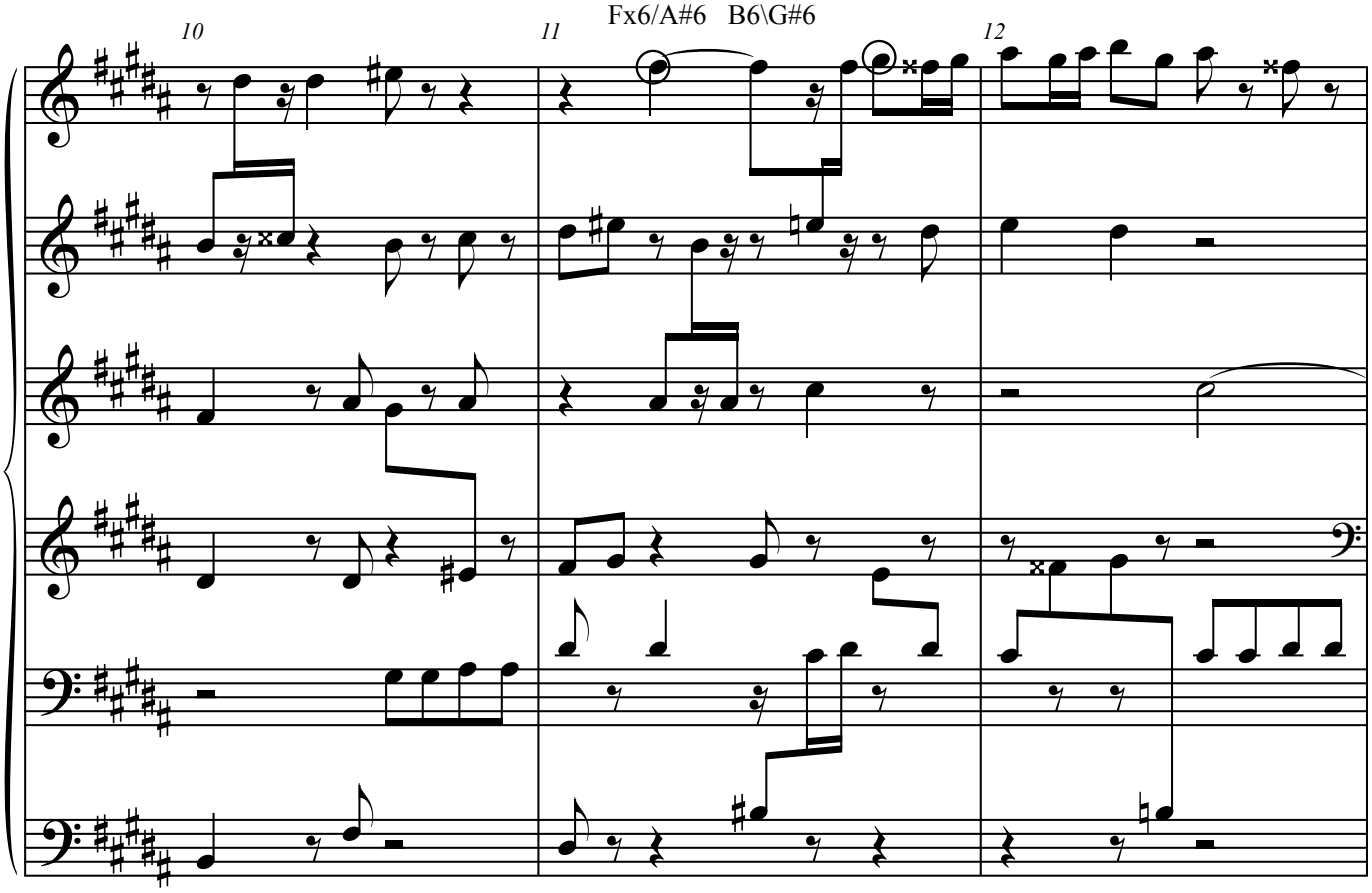
Fugue No. 18

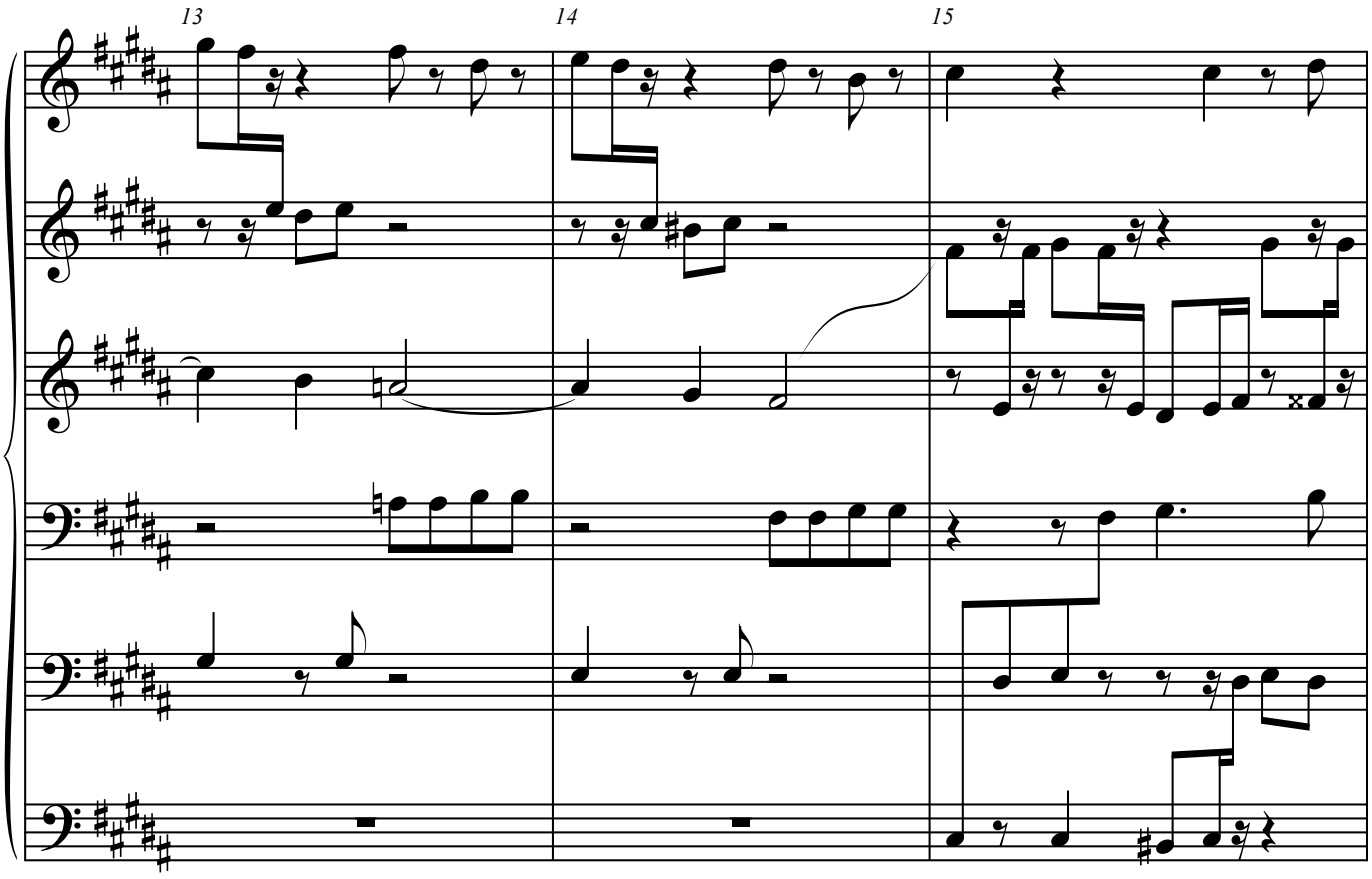


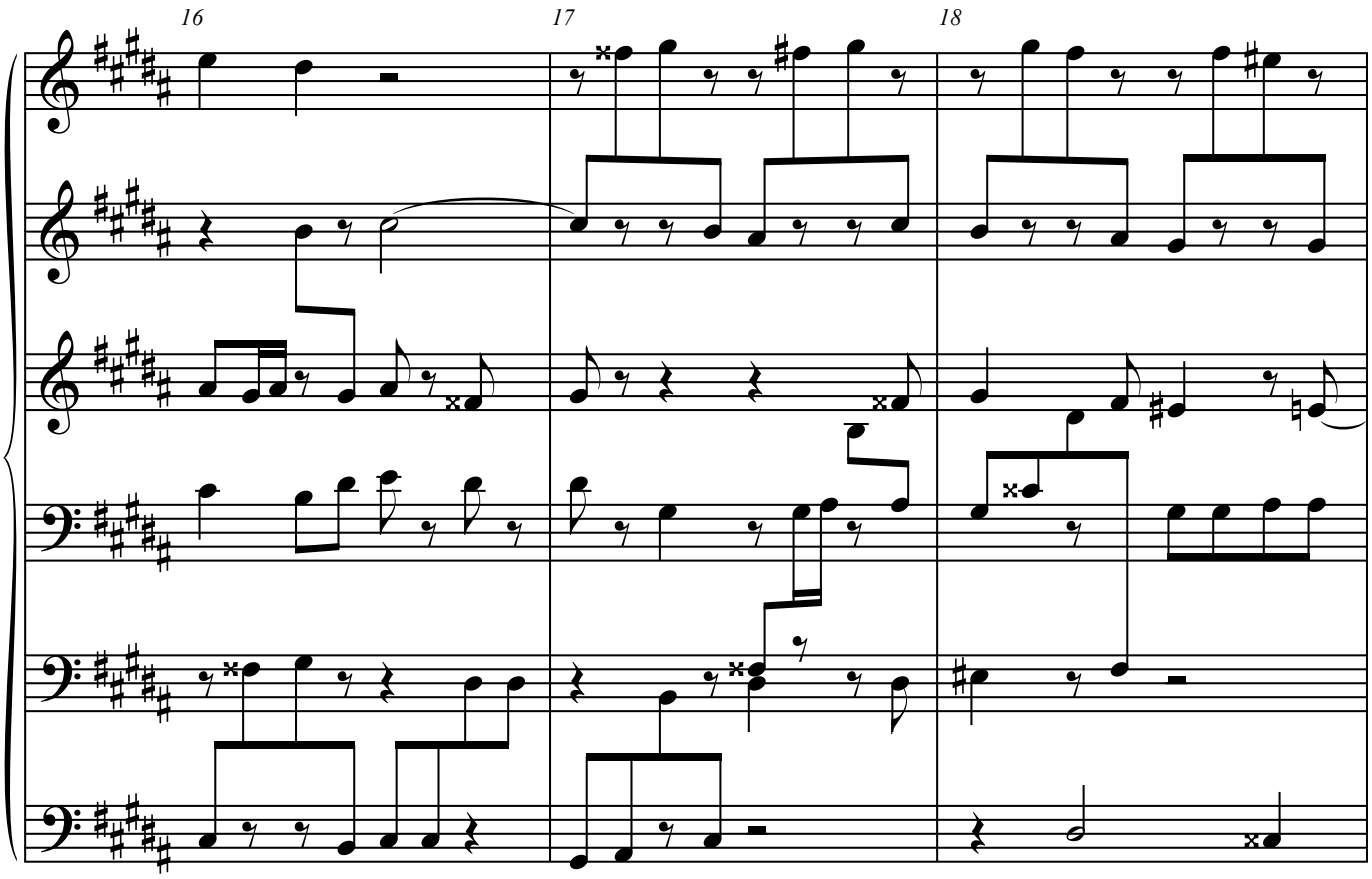


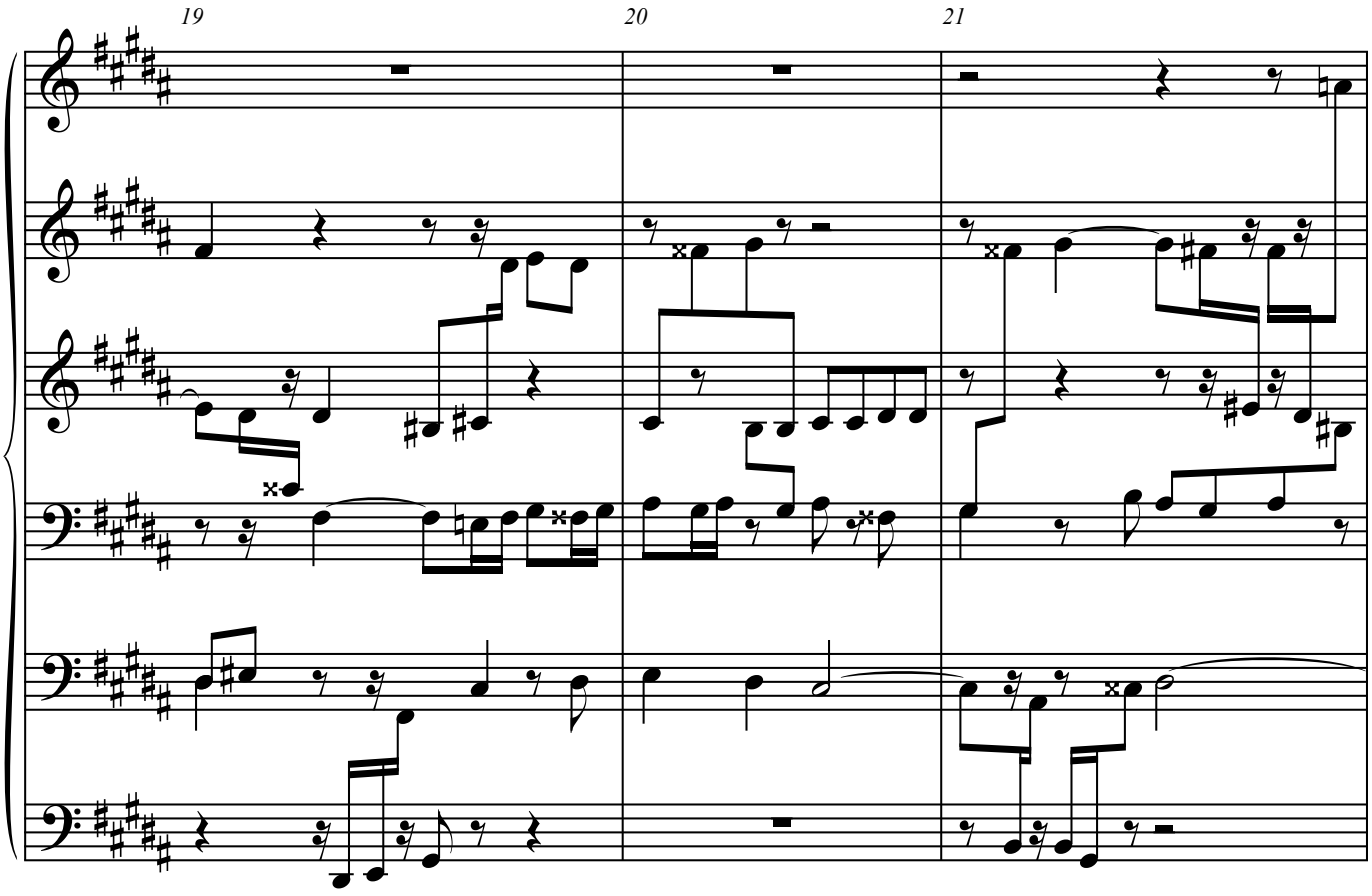


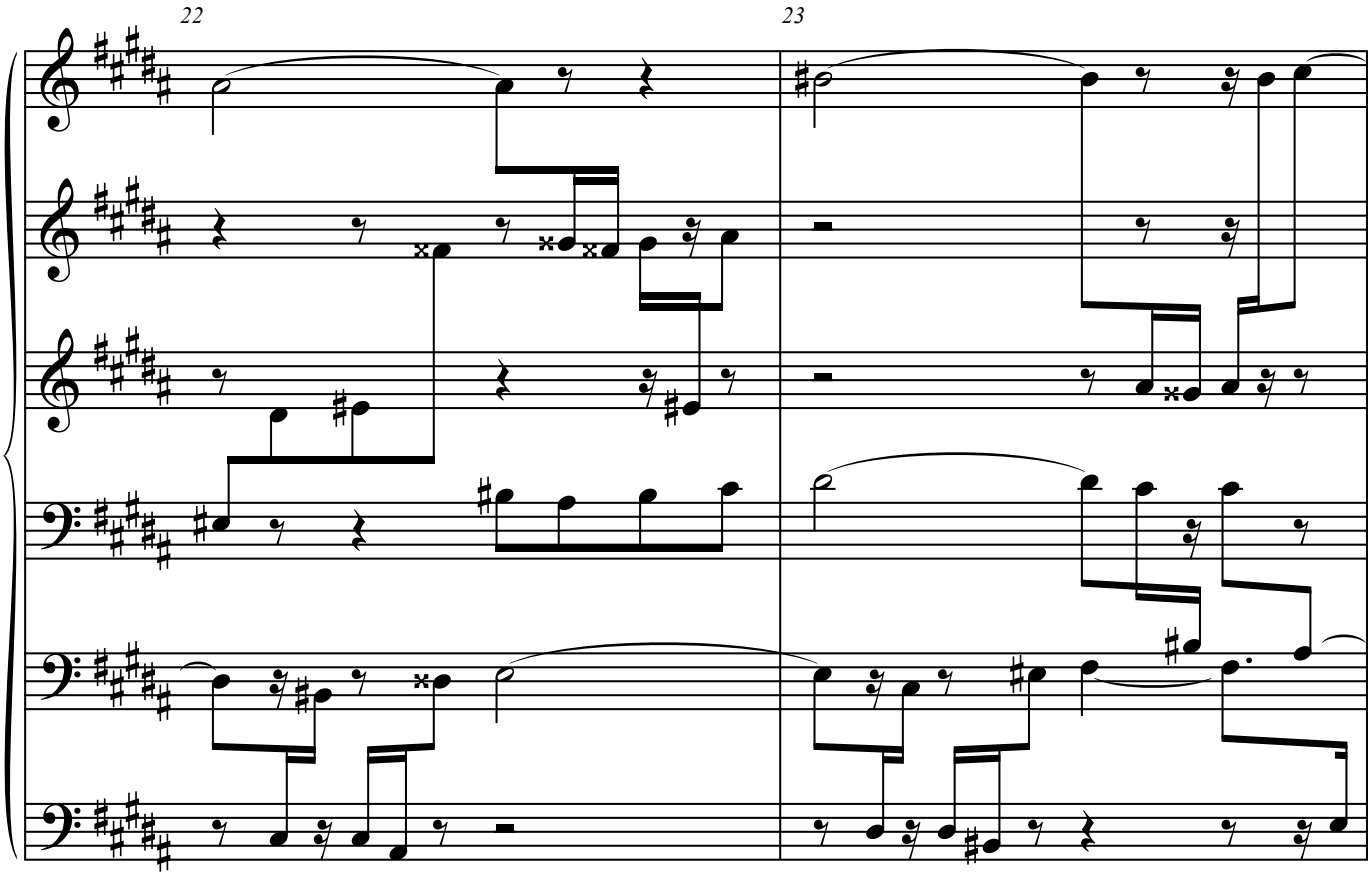
Fx6/A#6 B6\G#6

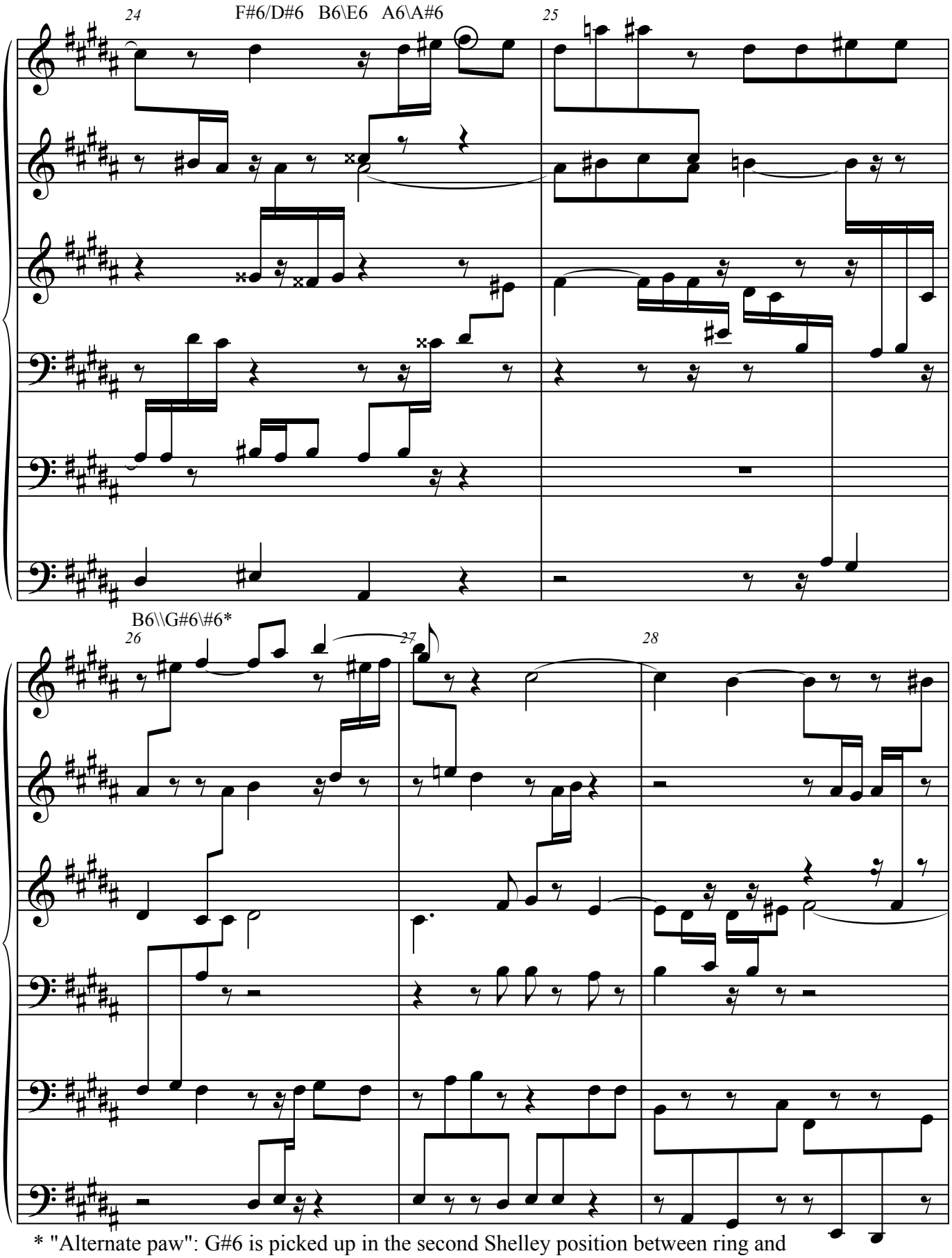



13
14
15

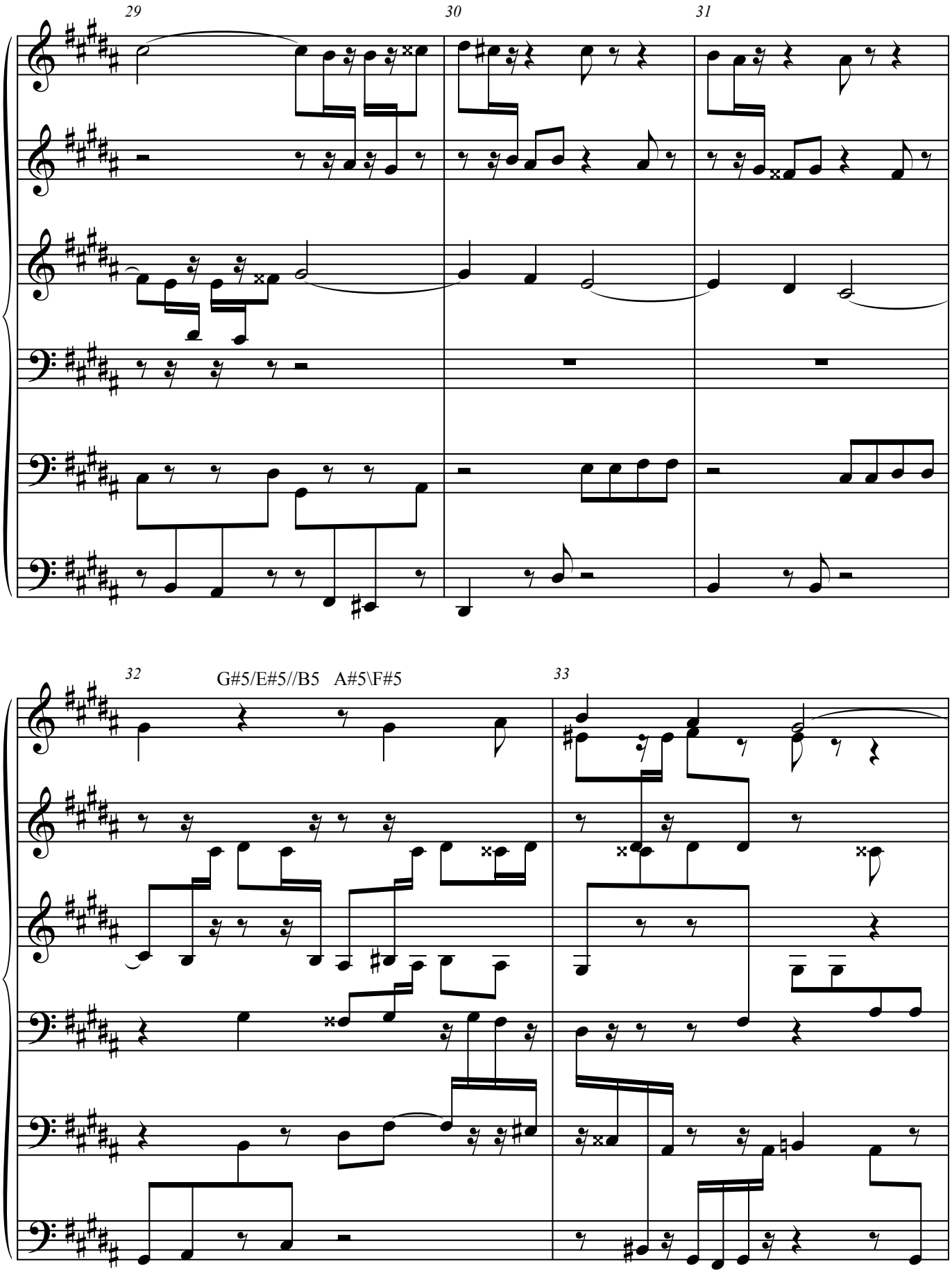

16
17
18

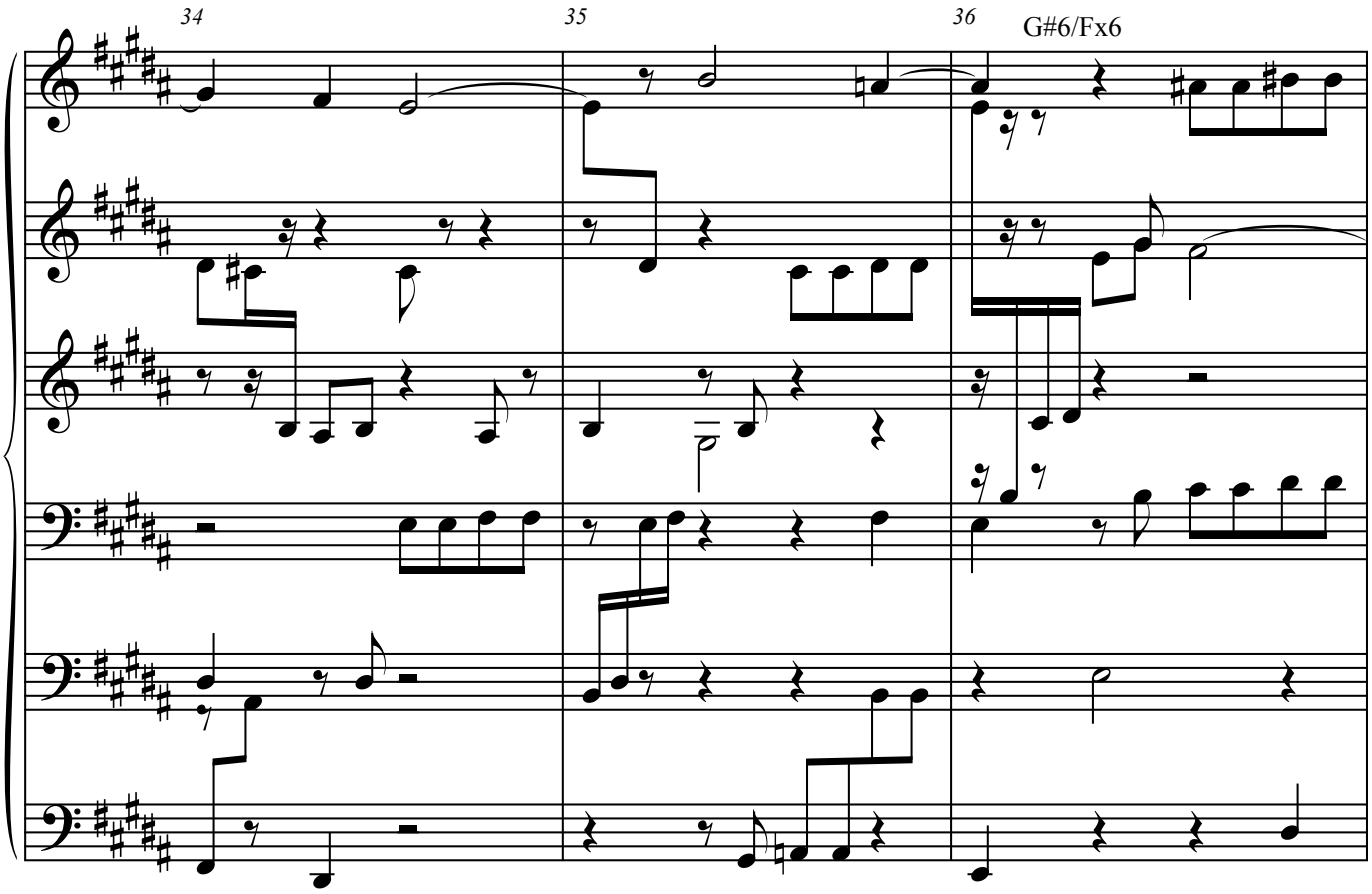

19
20
21

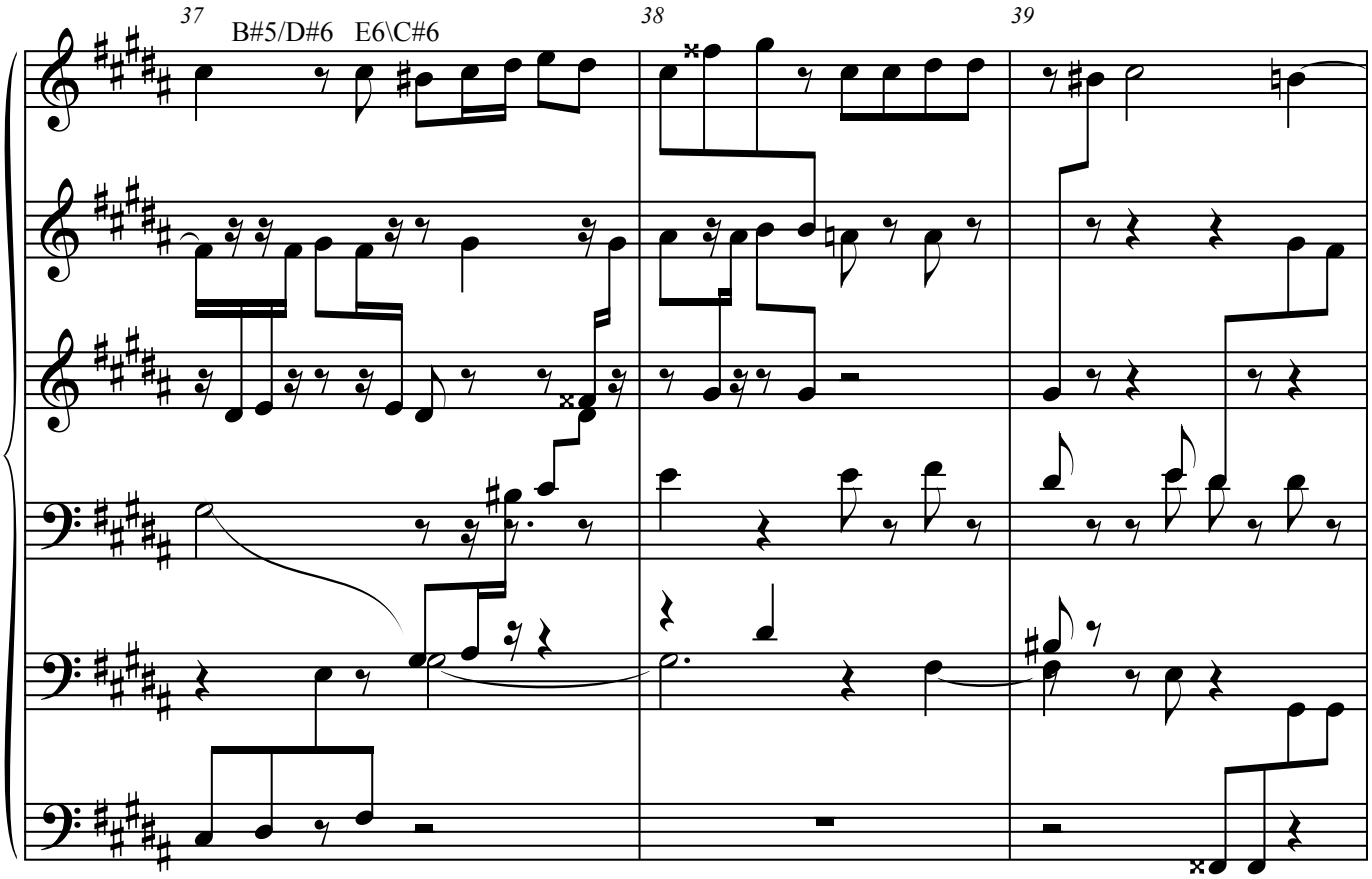

22
23

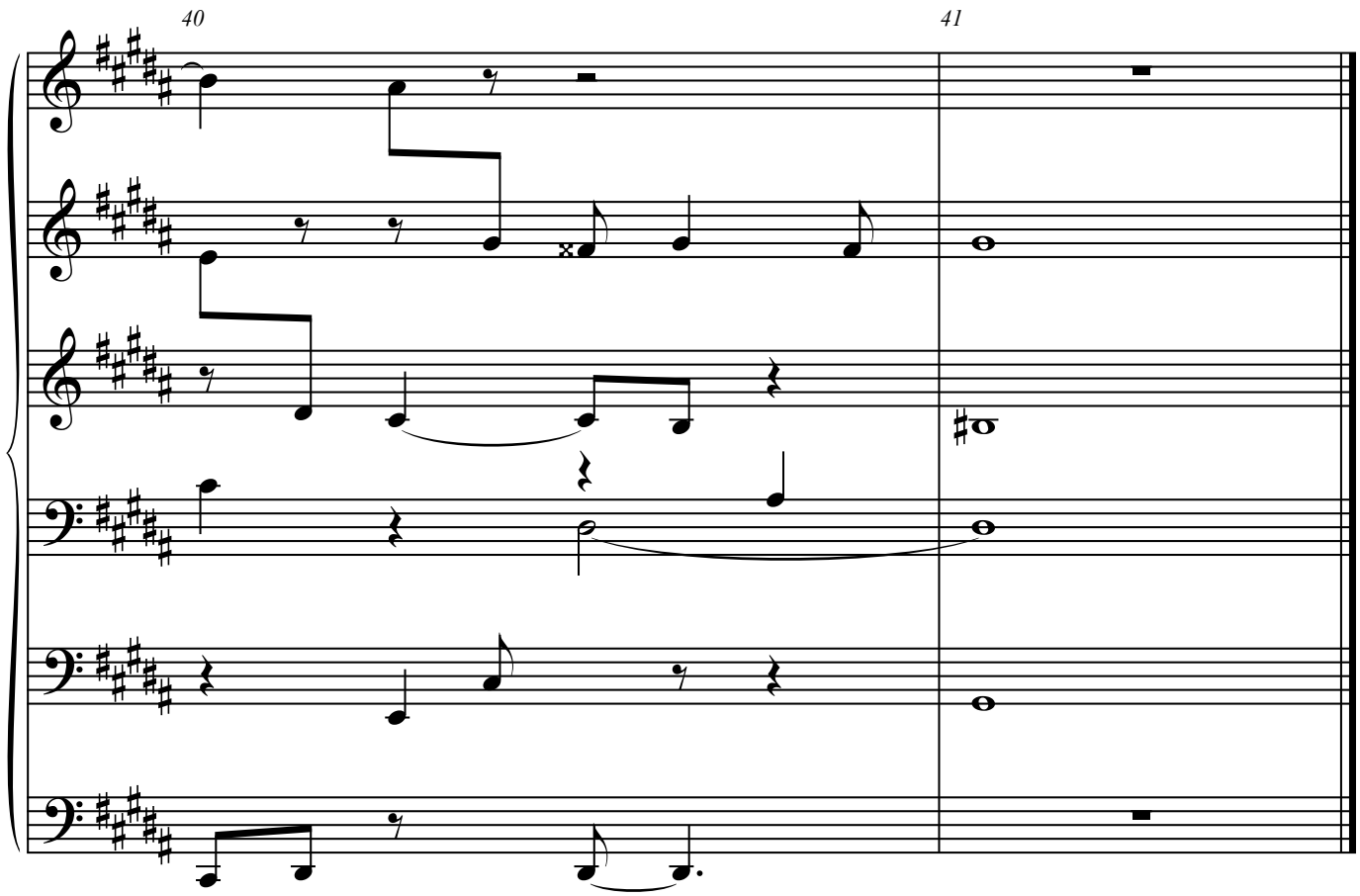


* "Alternate paw": G#6 is picked up in the second Shelley position between ring and little finger. B6 may be rung separately by flicking the index and middle fingers independently.


29
30
31
32
G#5/E#5//B5 A#5\F#5
33


34
35
36
G#6/Fx6


37
B#5/D#6 E6\C#6
38
39


40
41