Prelude and Fugue No. 4 in C# Minor

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

Arranged for Handbell Quintet
by Larry Sue

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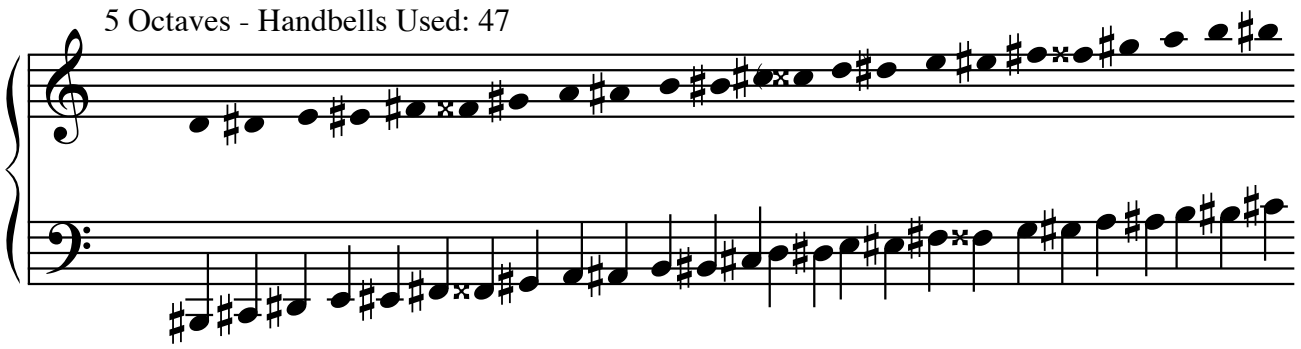
Performance Notes



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.

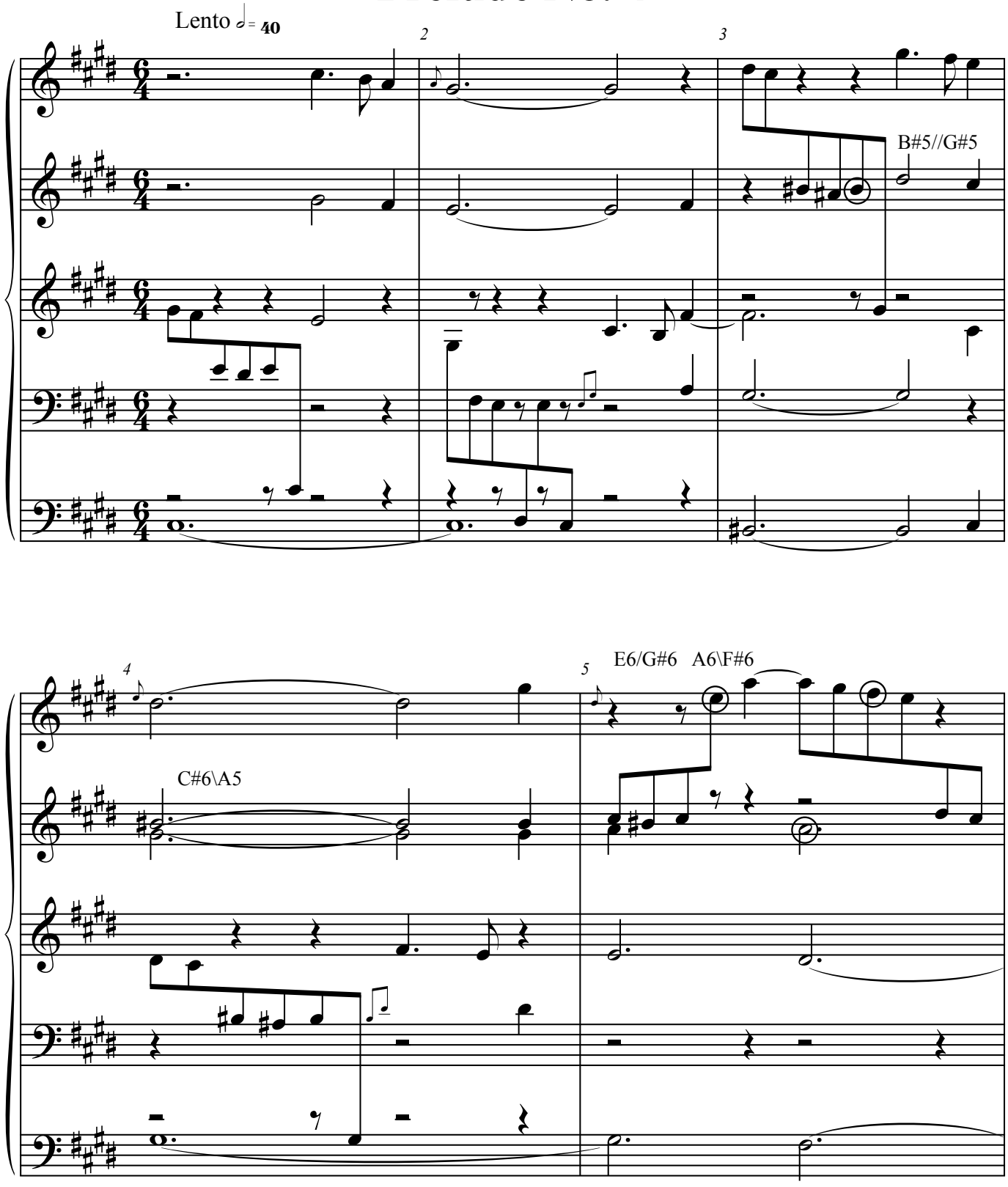
Prelude No. 4 has a thoughtful, pensive feel. Keep it smooth and gentle throghout.

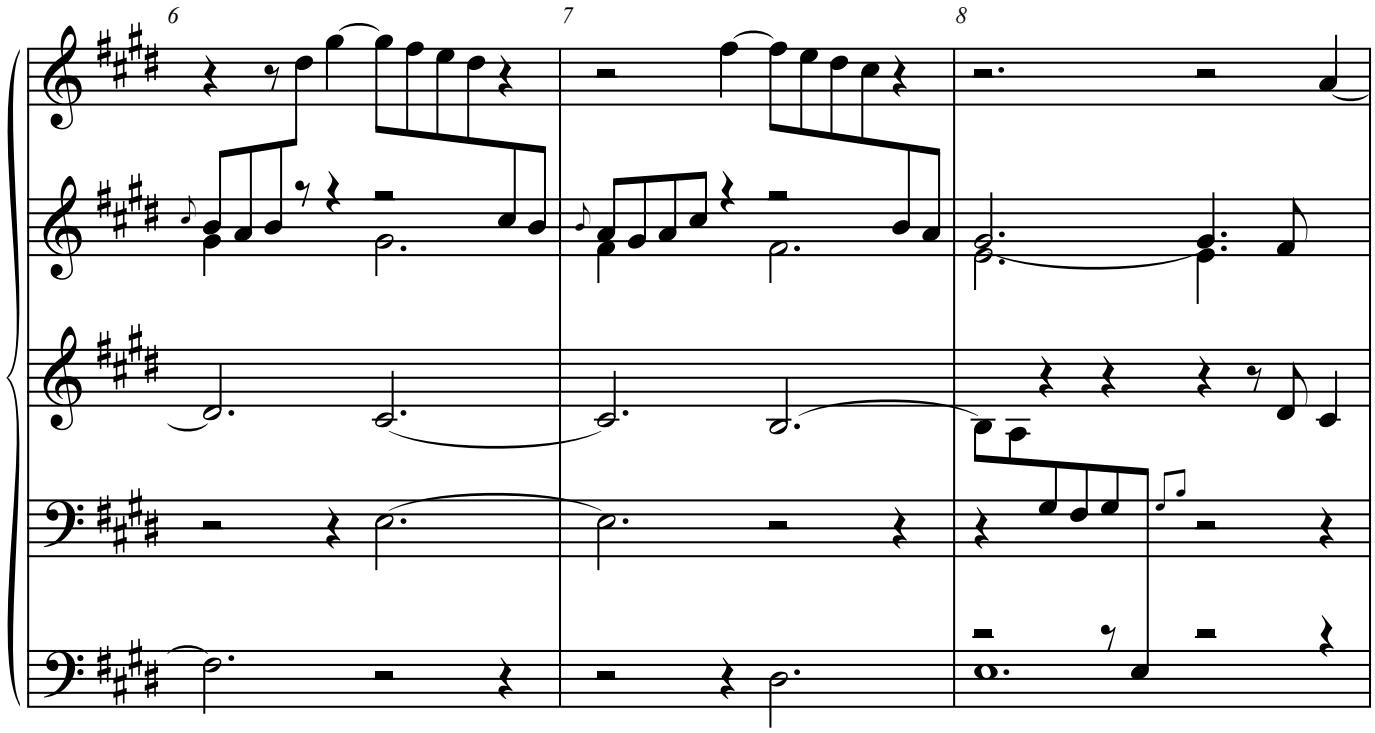
Fugue No. 4's themaic satement starts deceptively slowly, but continues to add more and more to play until there are streams of sixteenth notes. Also, the main technical challenge is that of ringing one note while malleting with the other hand. Because of this, you may have to overcome the temptation to start with too fast a tempo - take your time and enjoy the piece (the main determiner of performance tempo probably will be the bottom two parts in measure 52)! This fugue was in cut time in the original score; it has been rewritten in 2/4 to make the flow of the voices somewhat more apparent.

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

Larry Sue

Prelude No. 4

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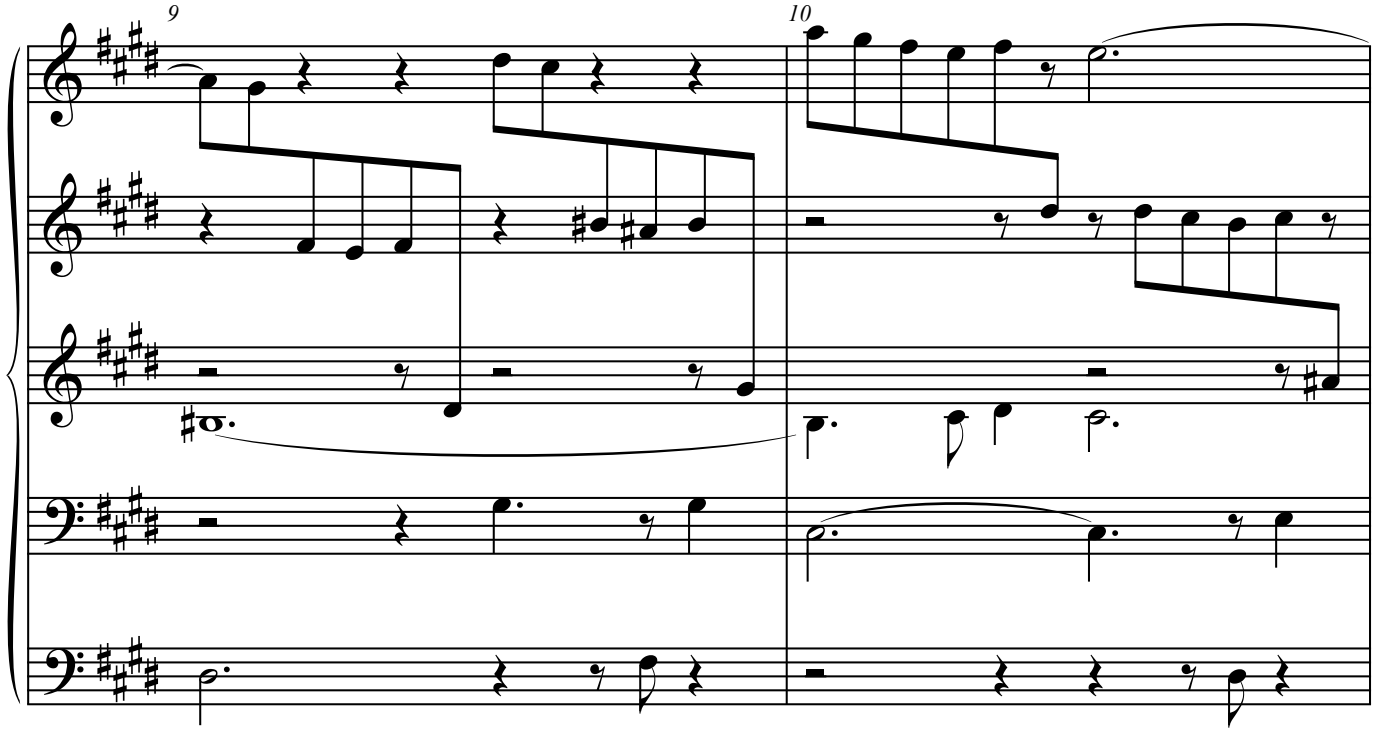
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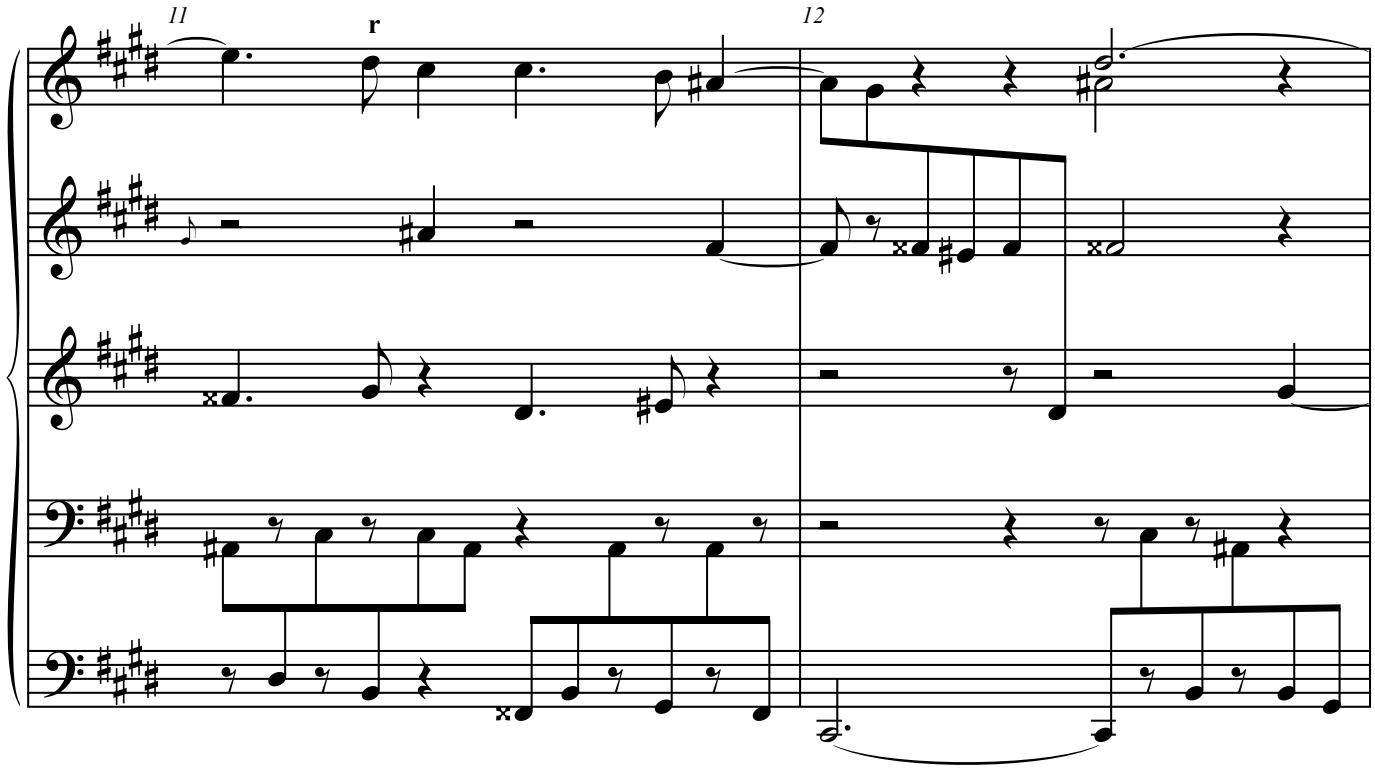
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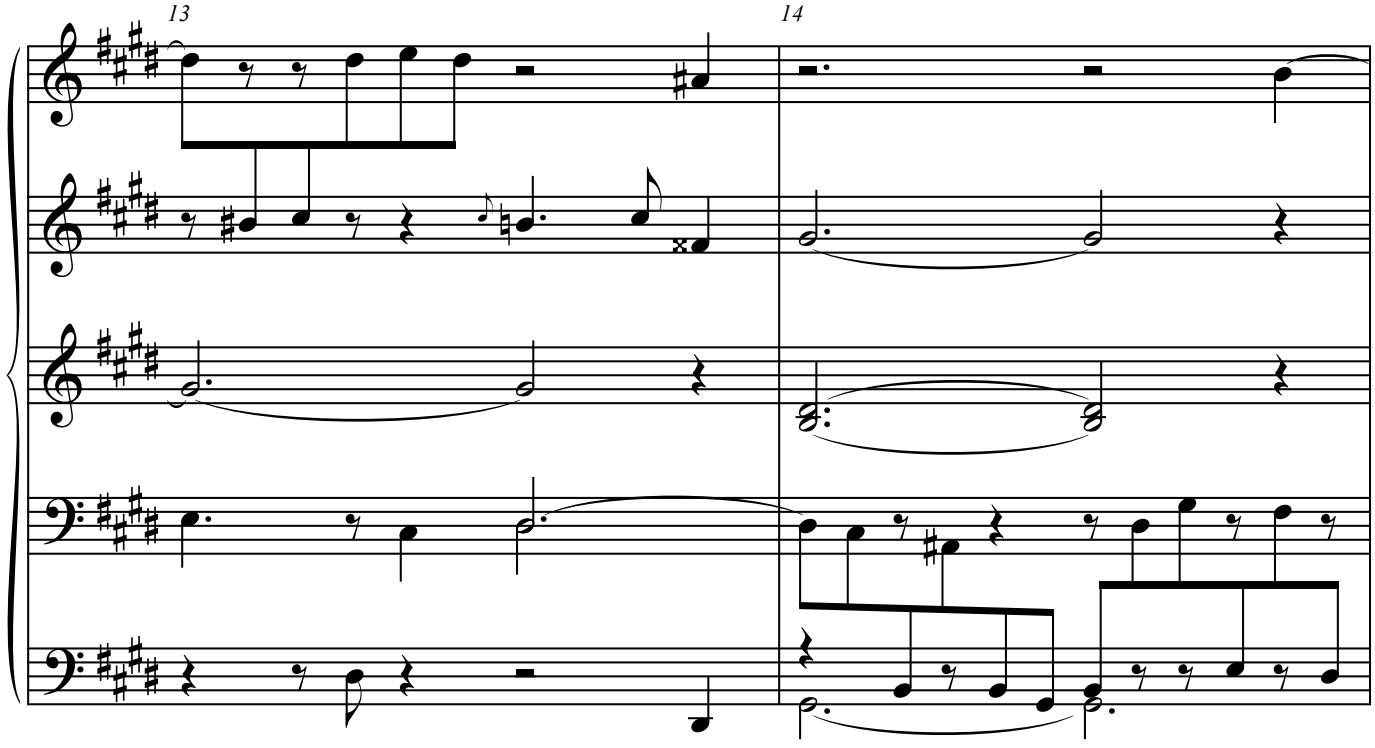
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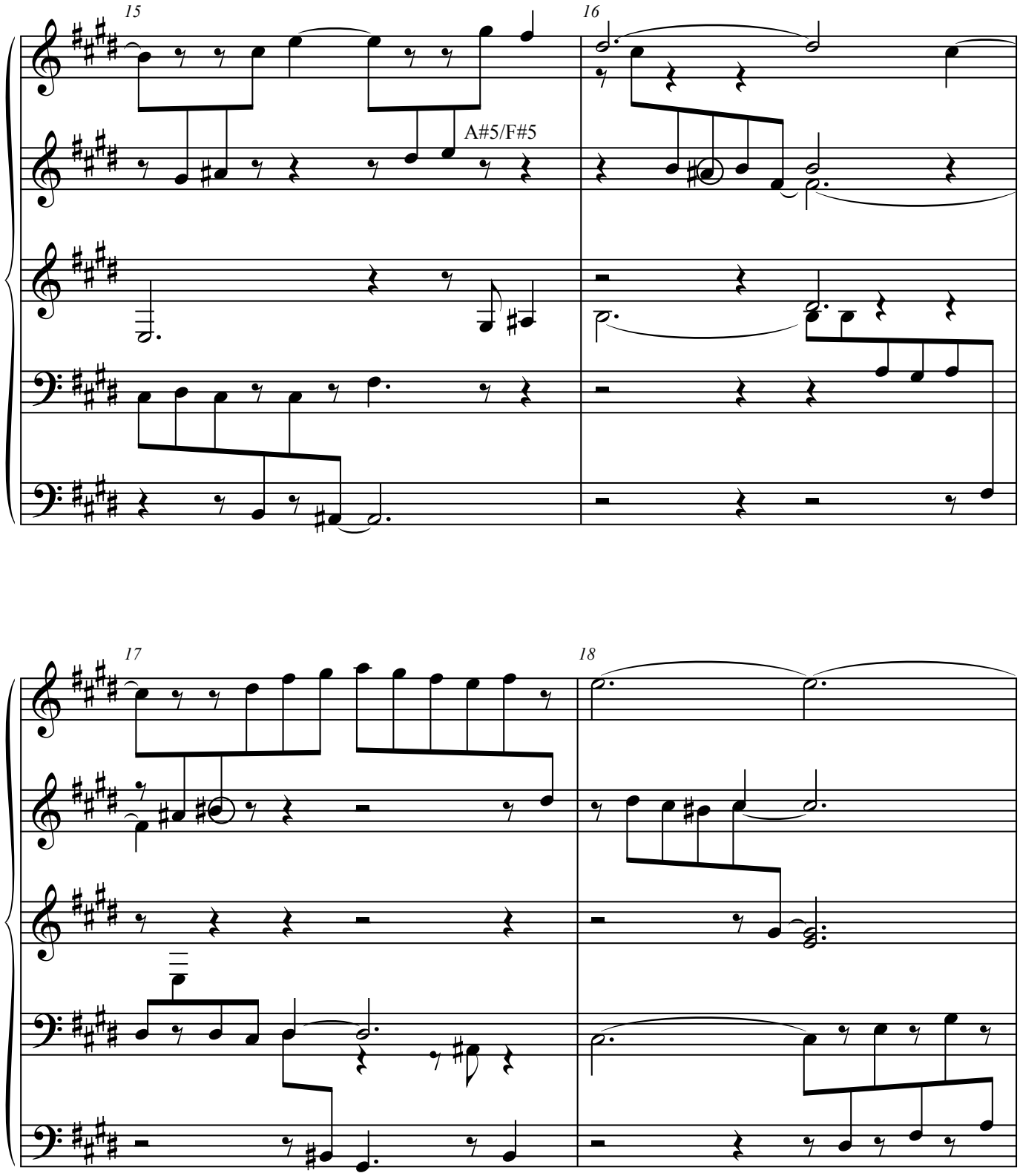
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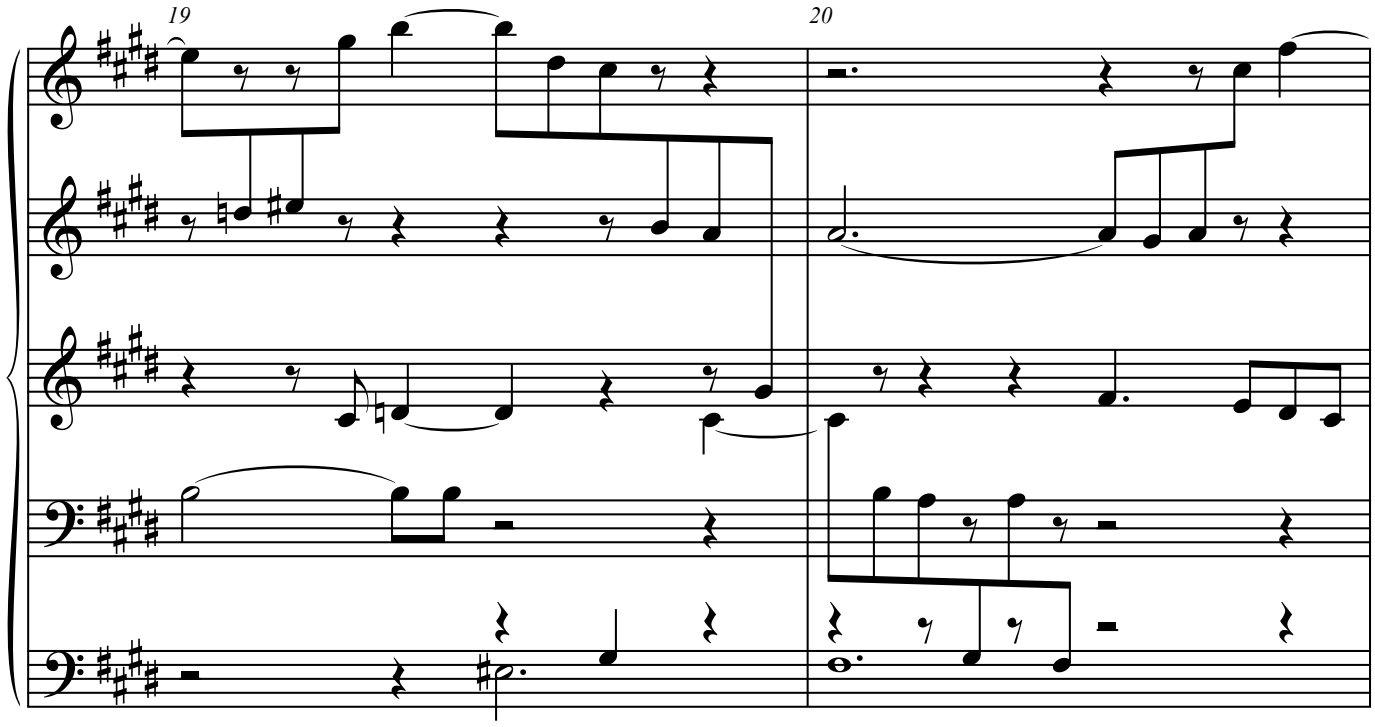
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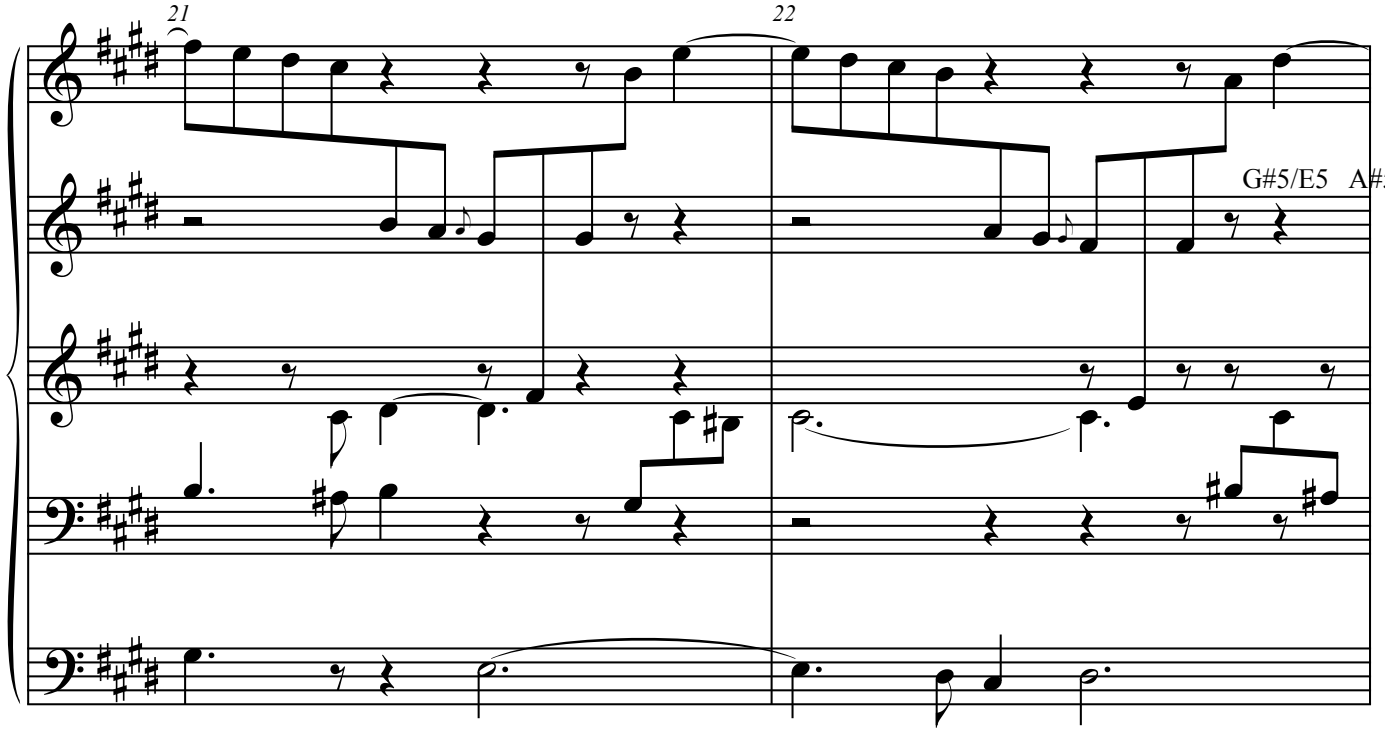
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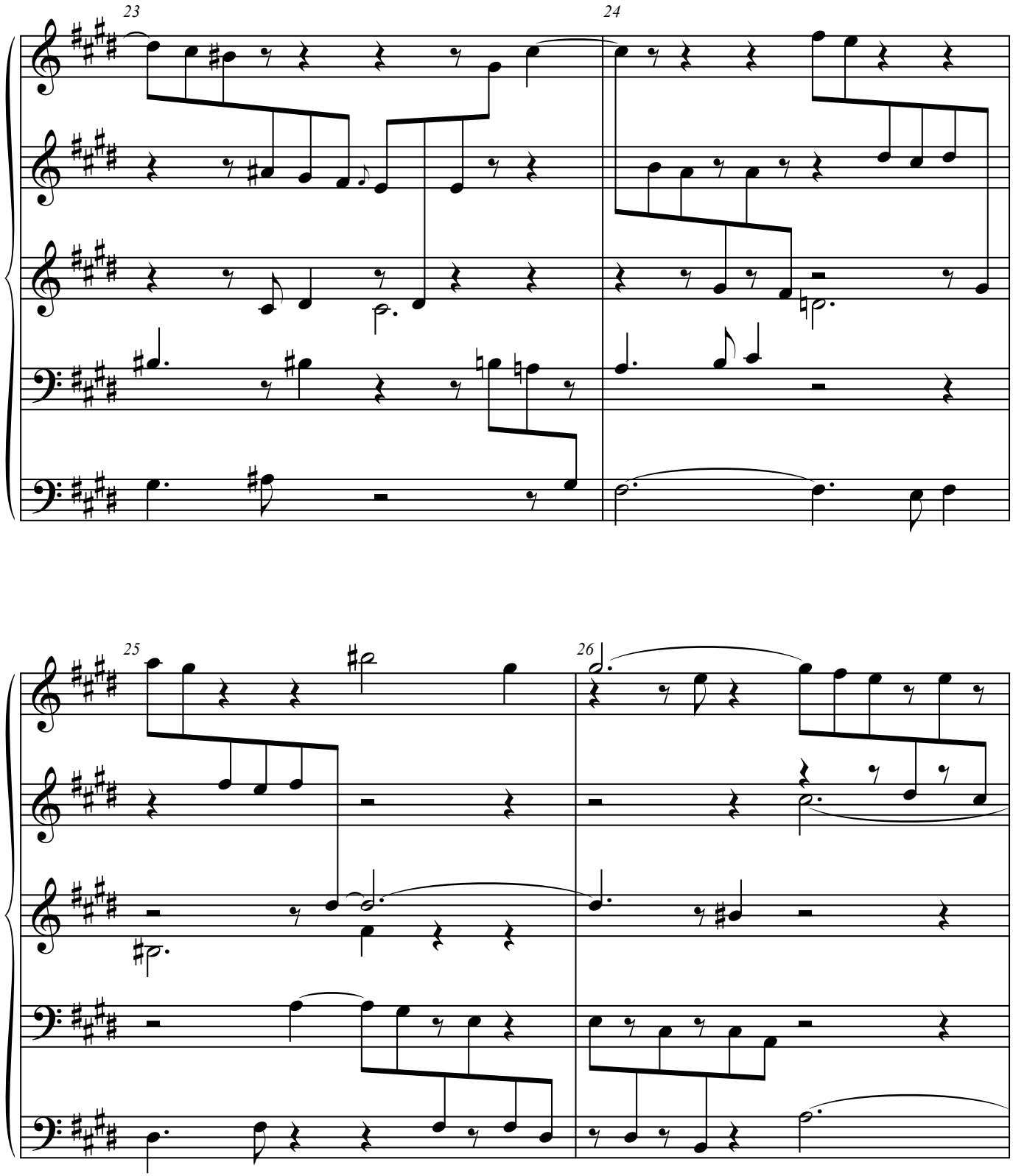
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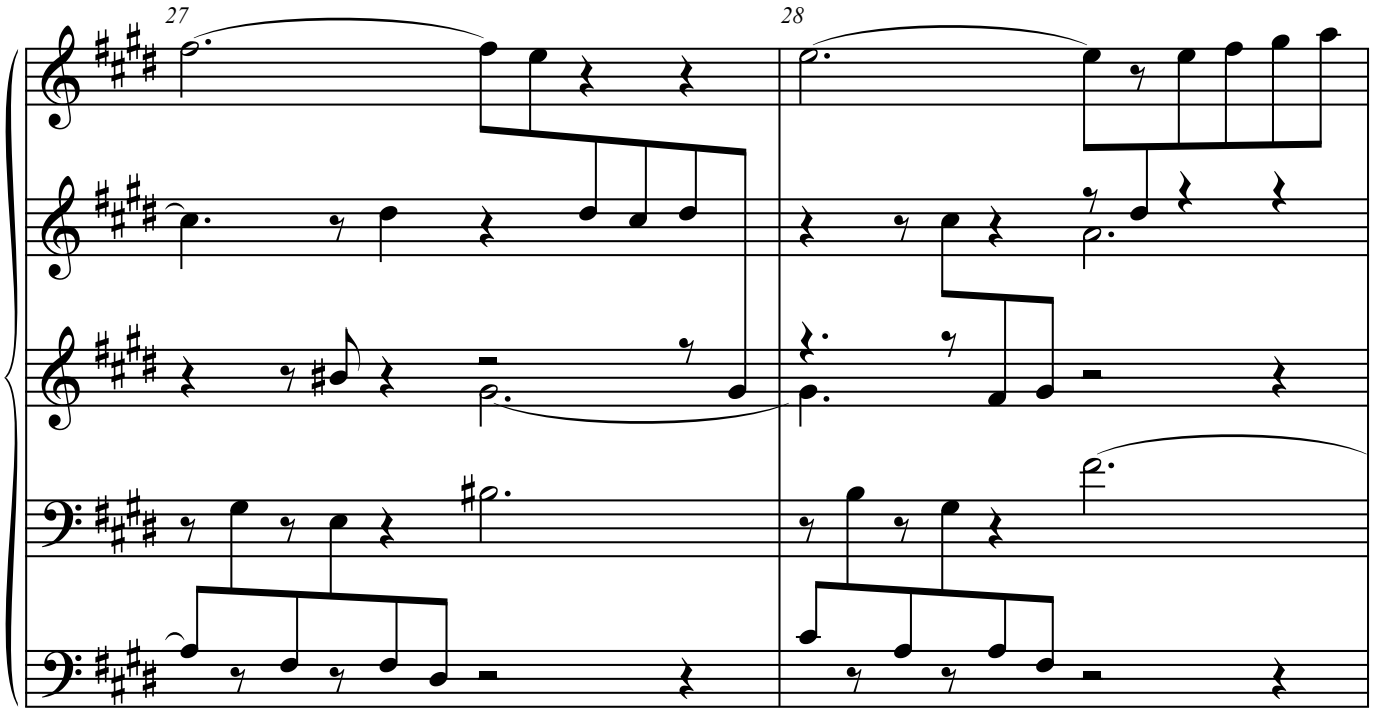
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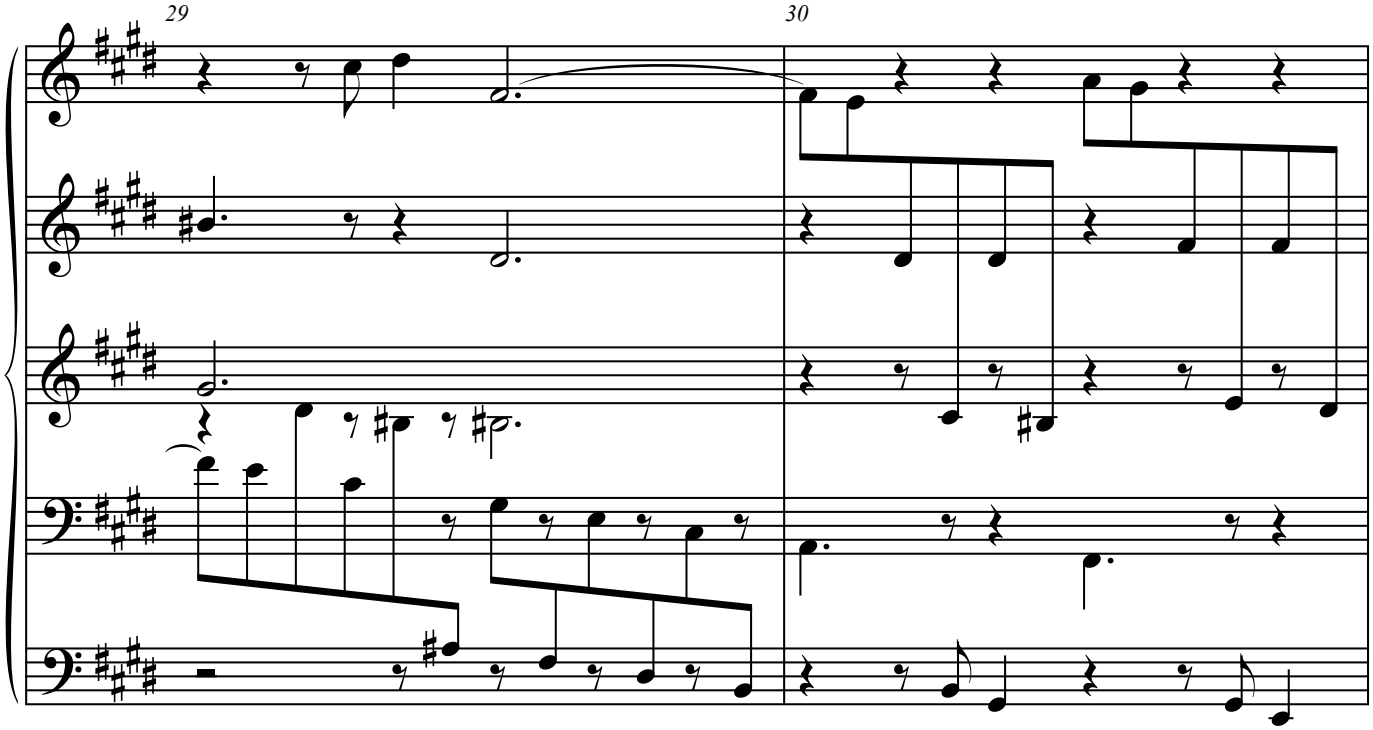
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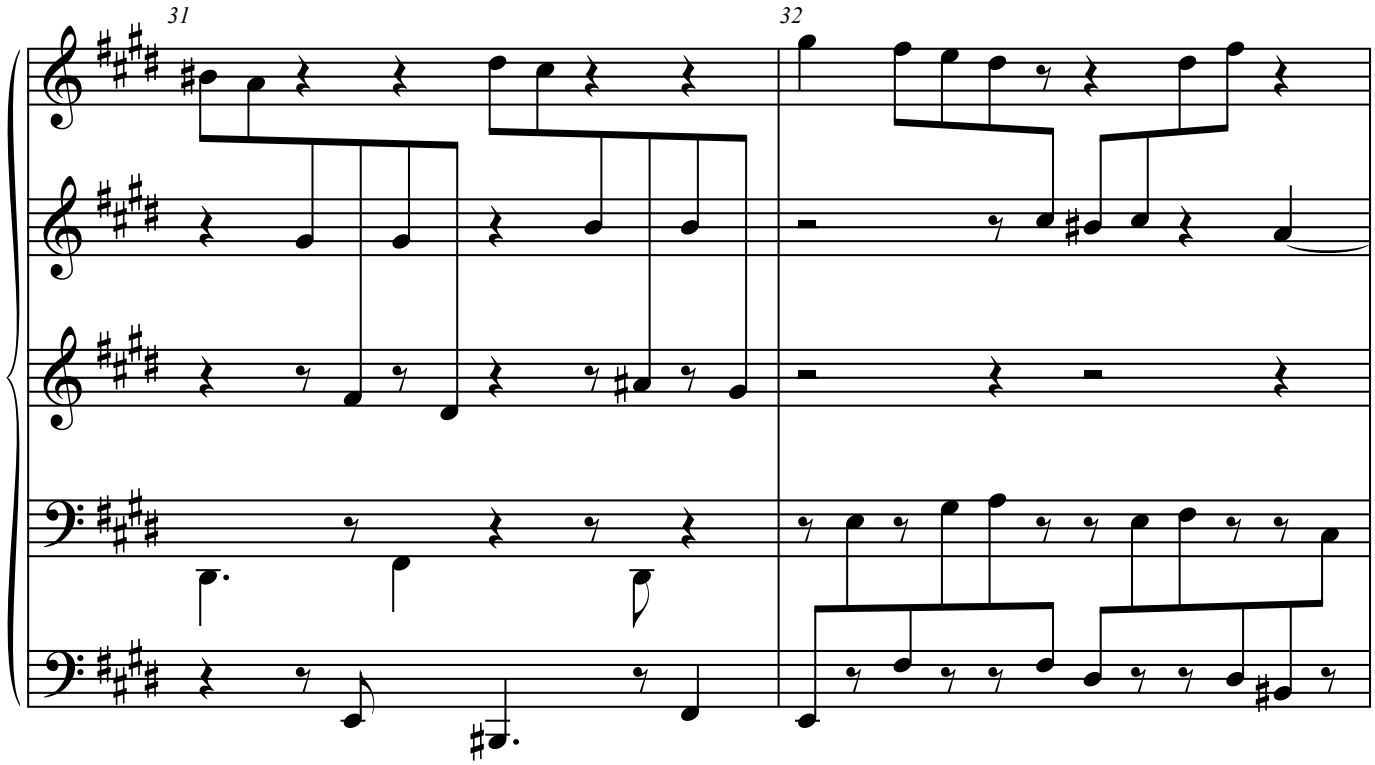
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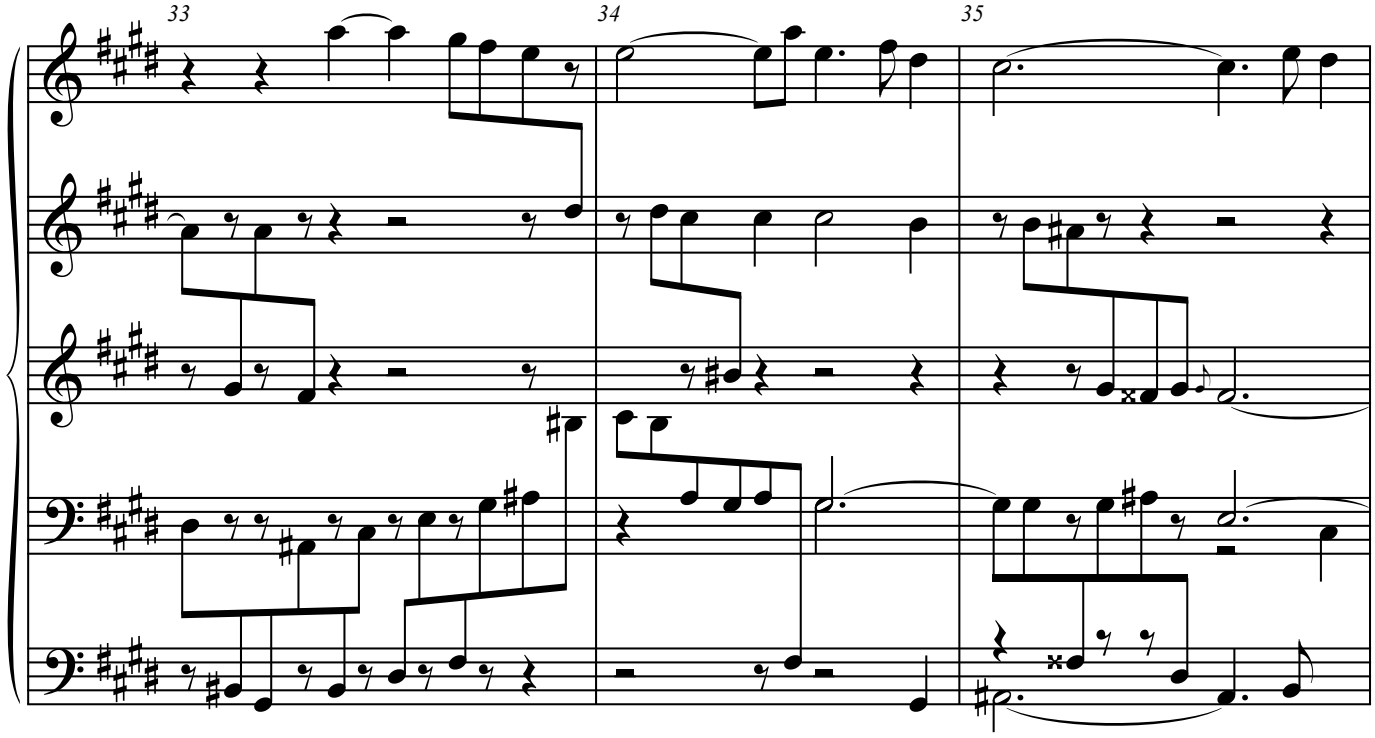
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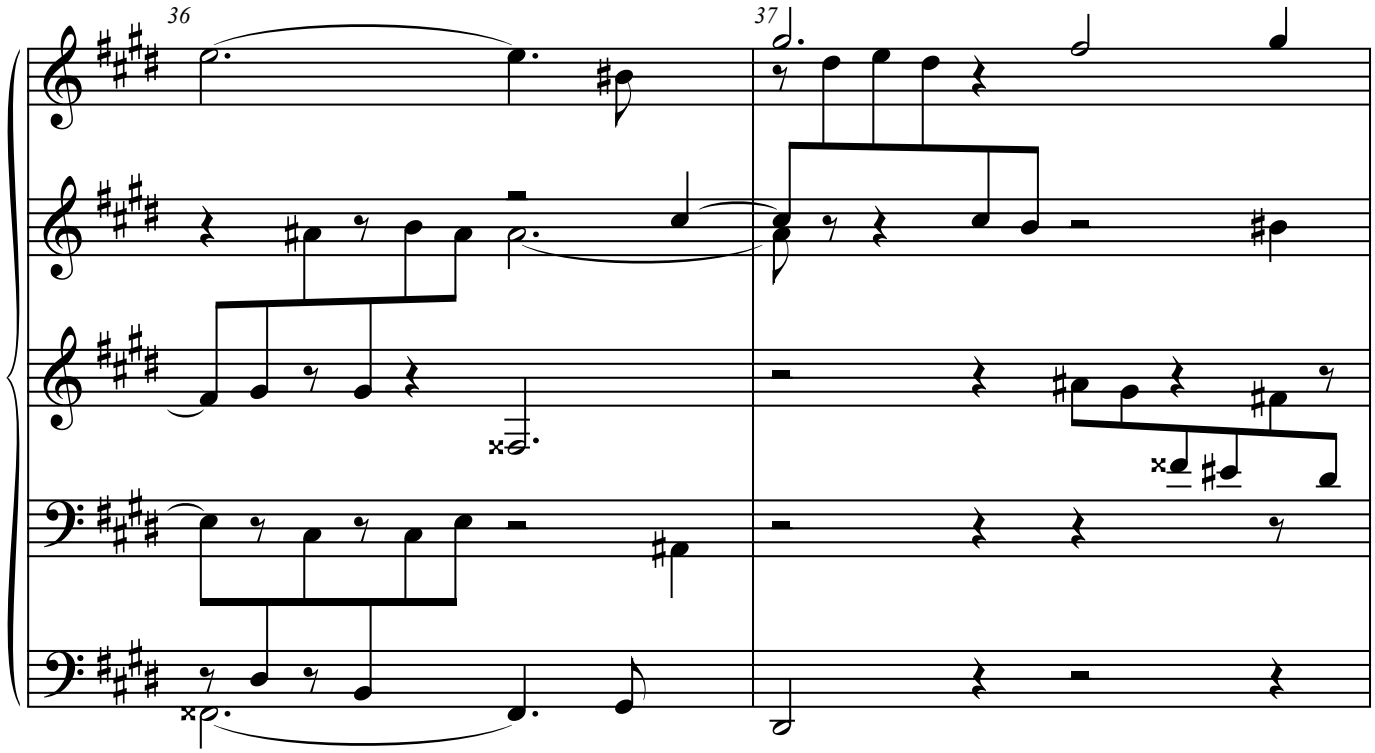
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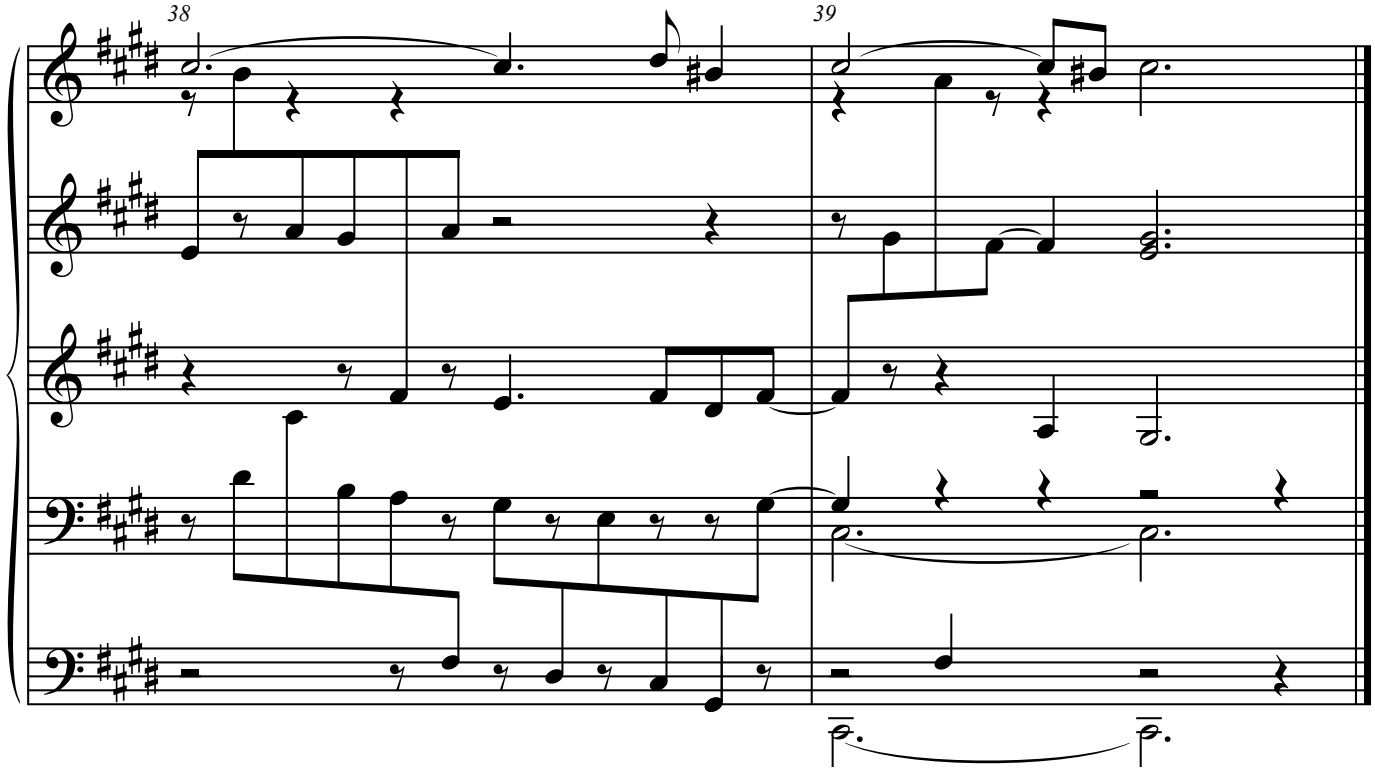
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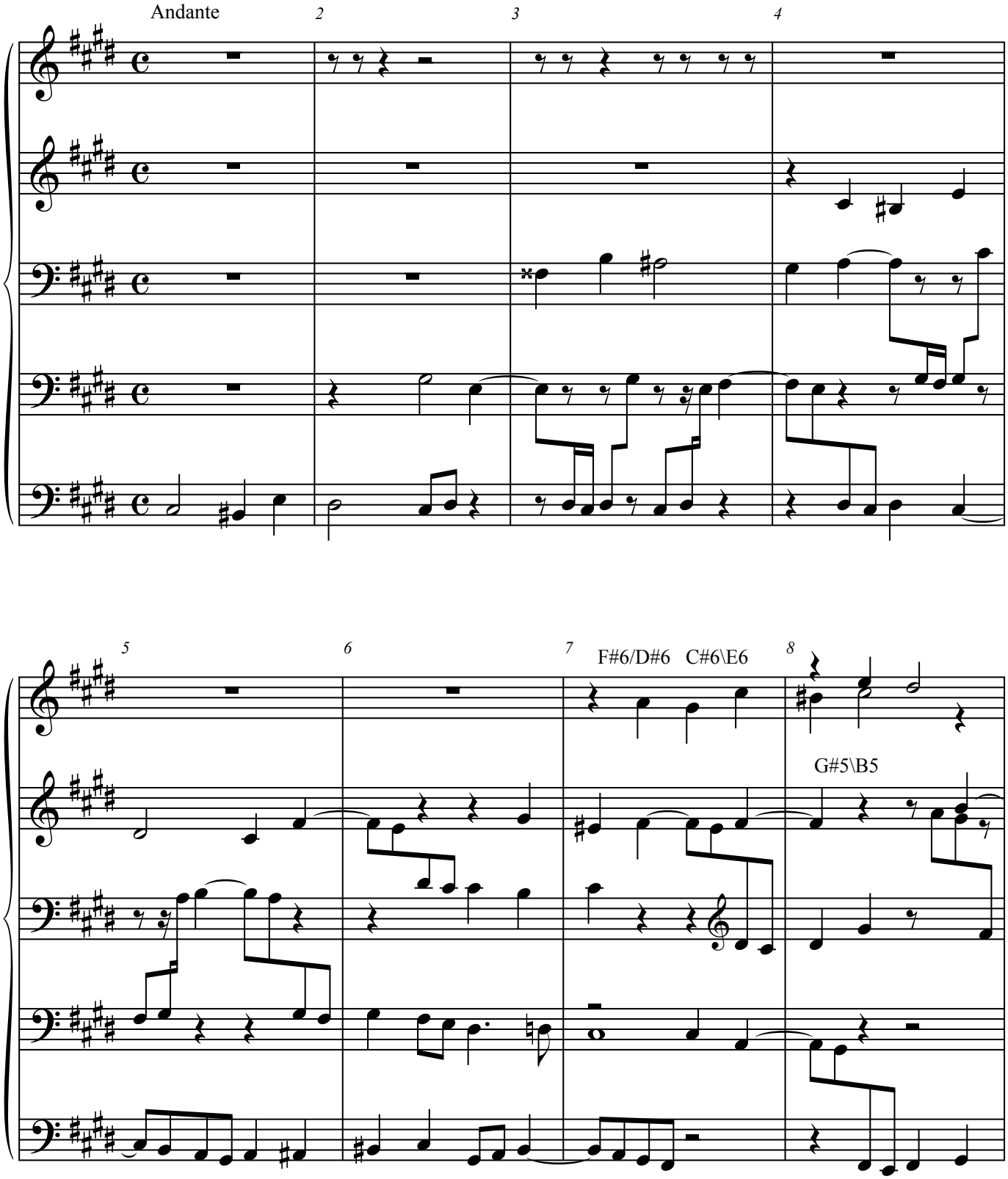
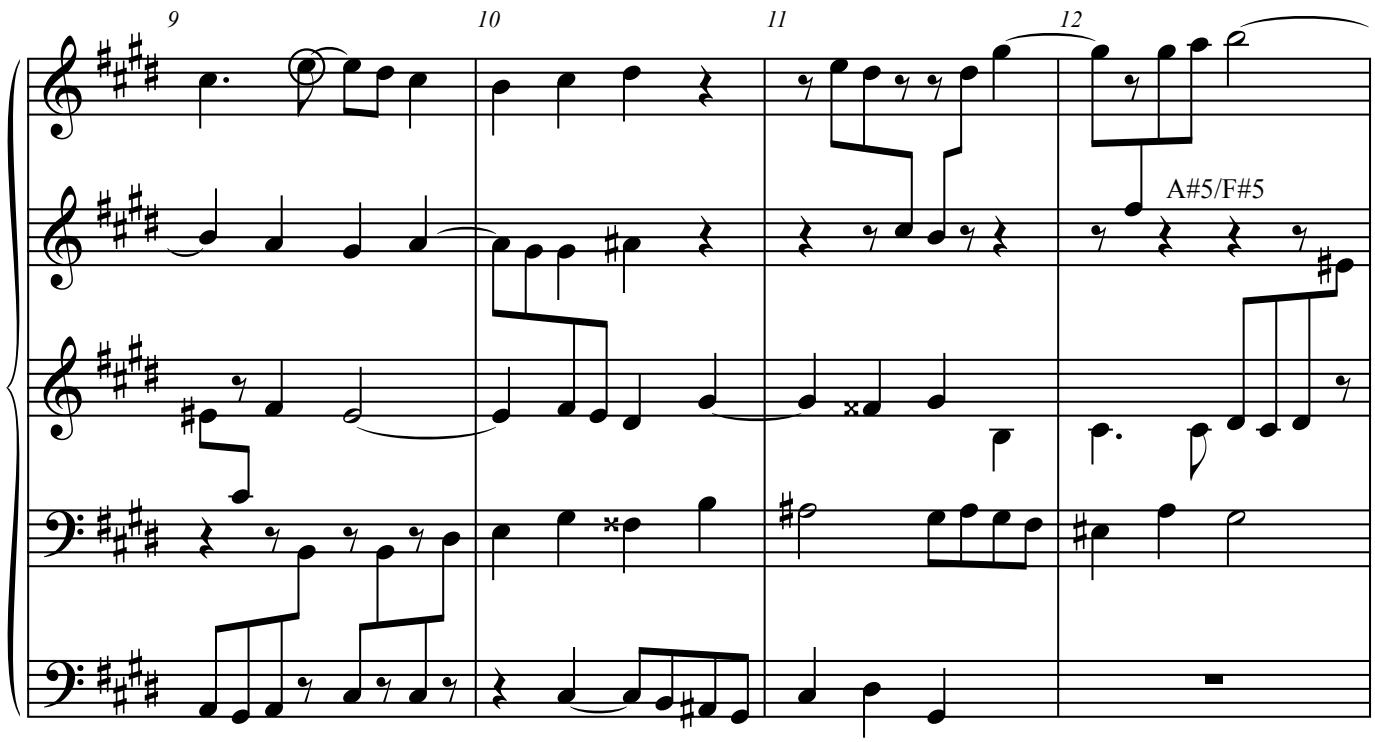
Fugue No. 4

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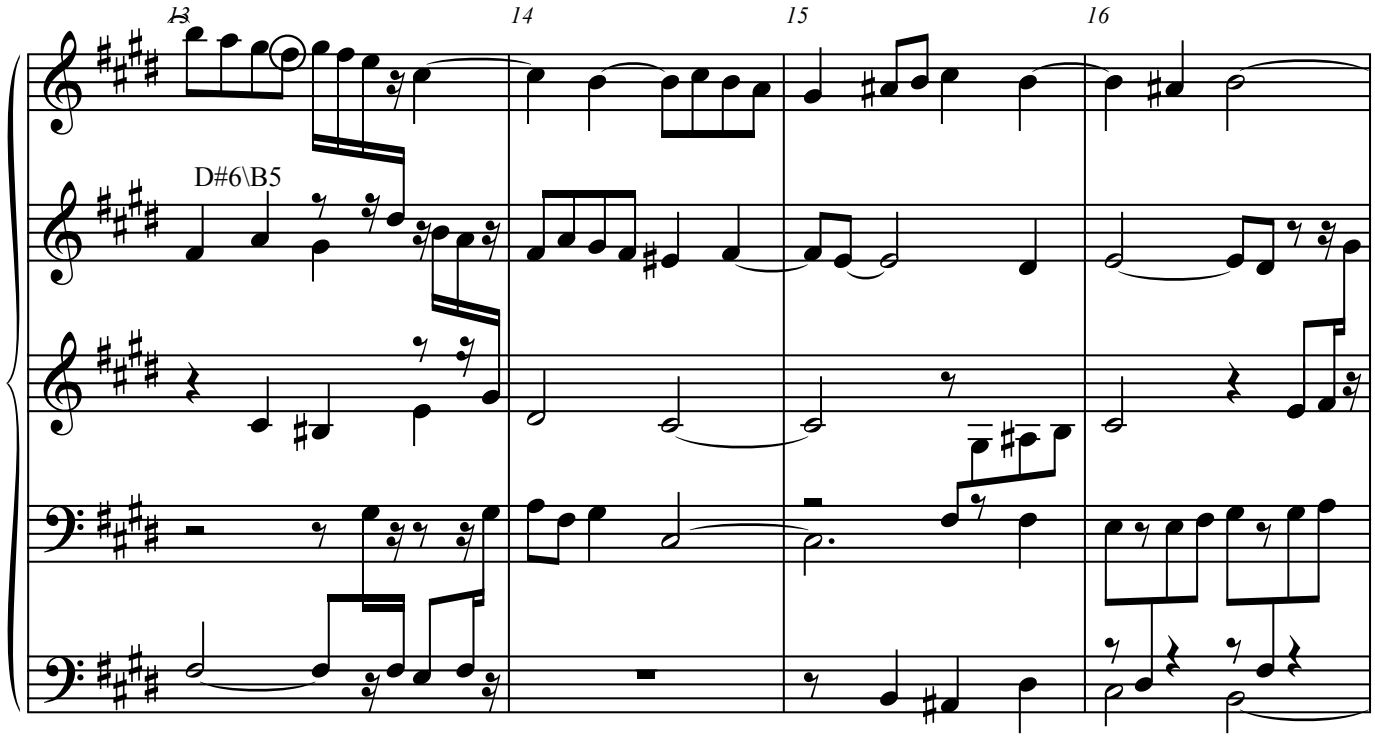
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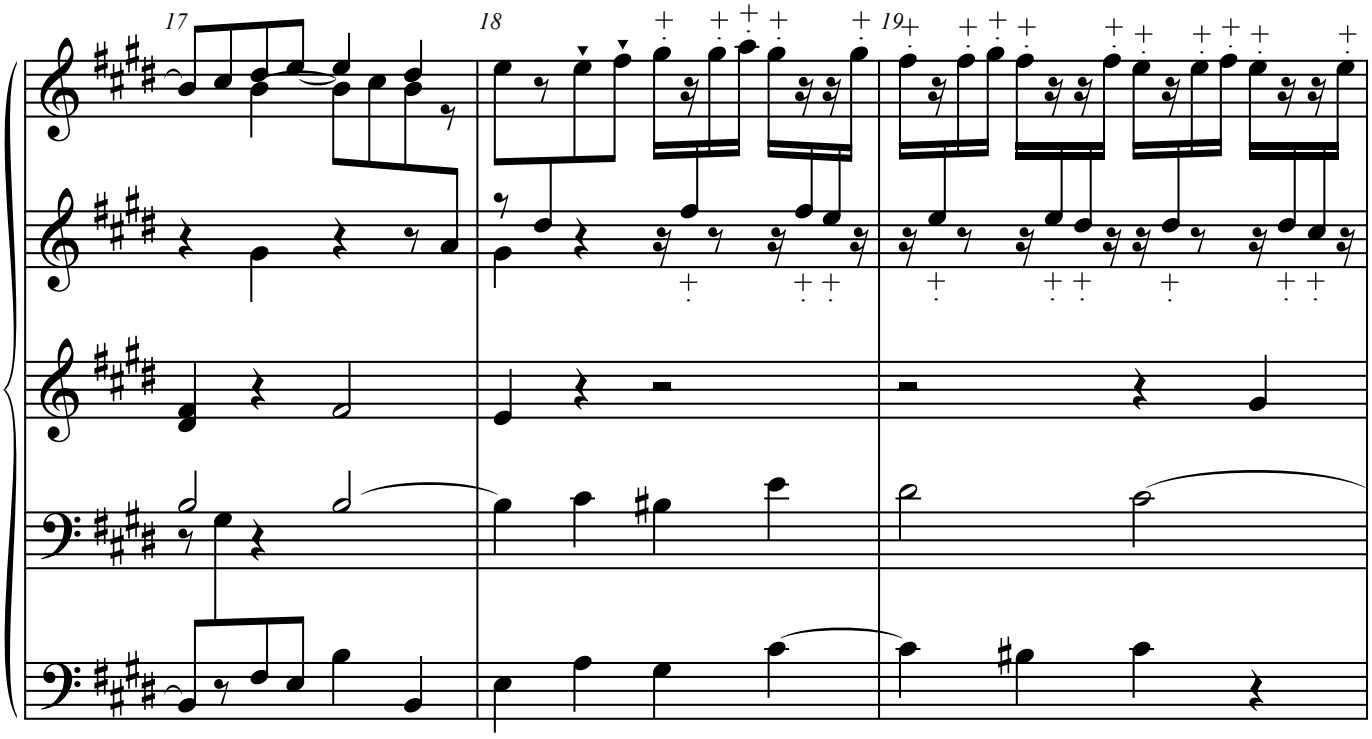
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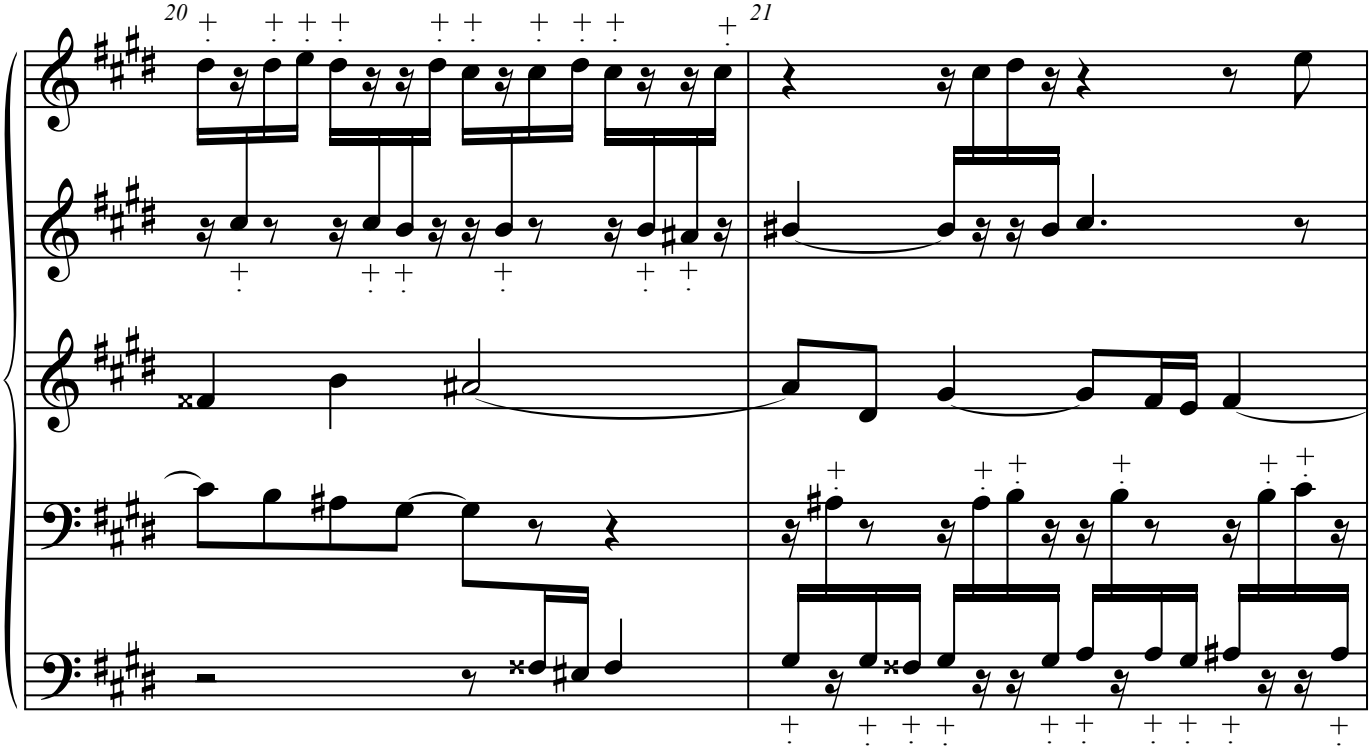
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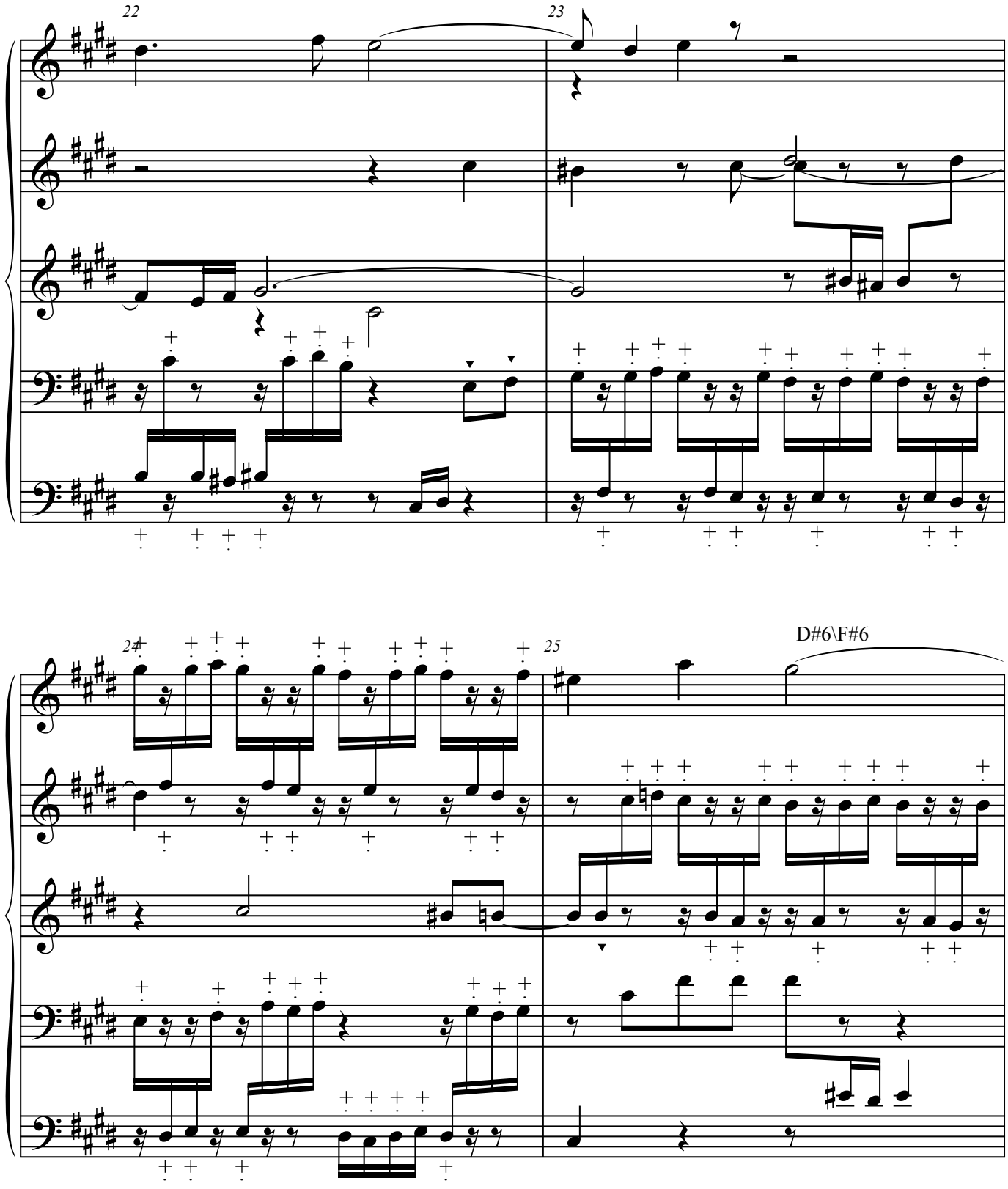
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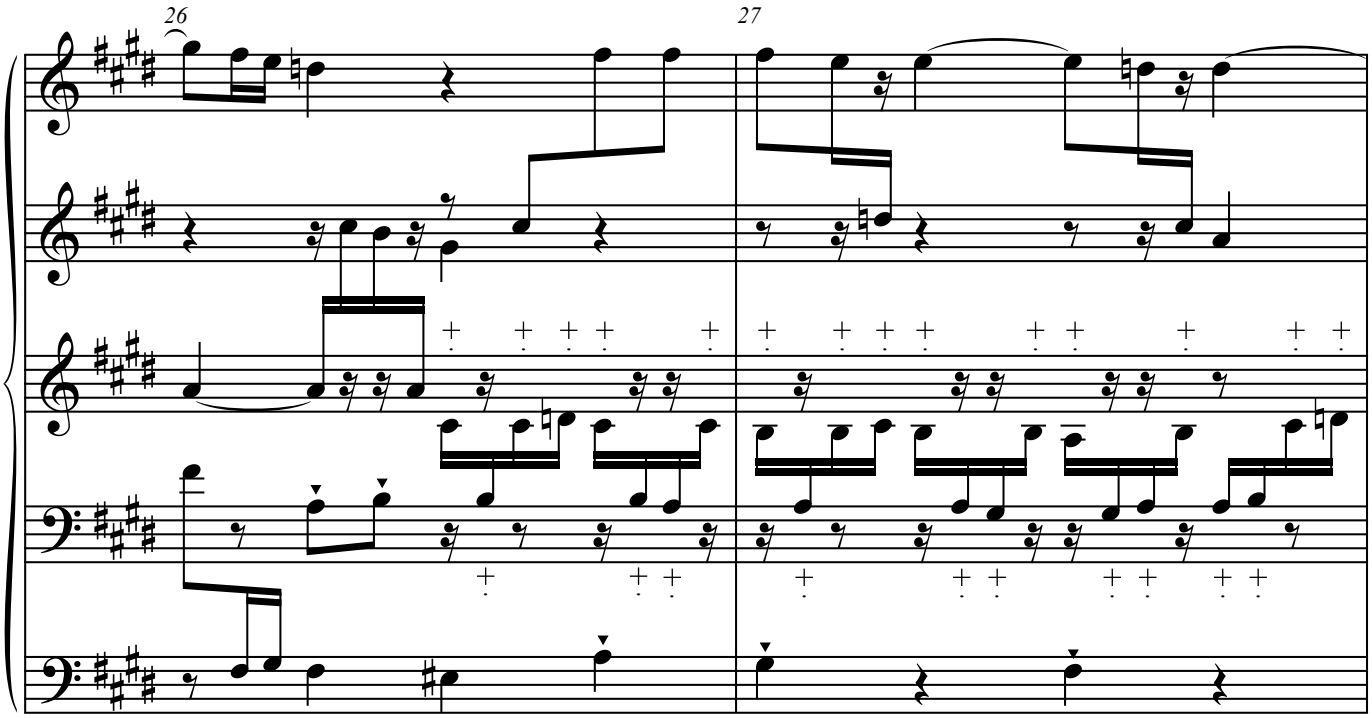
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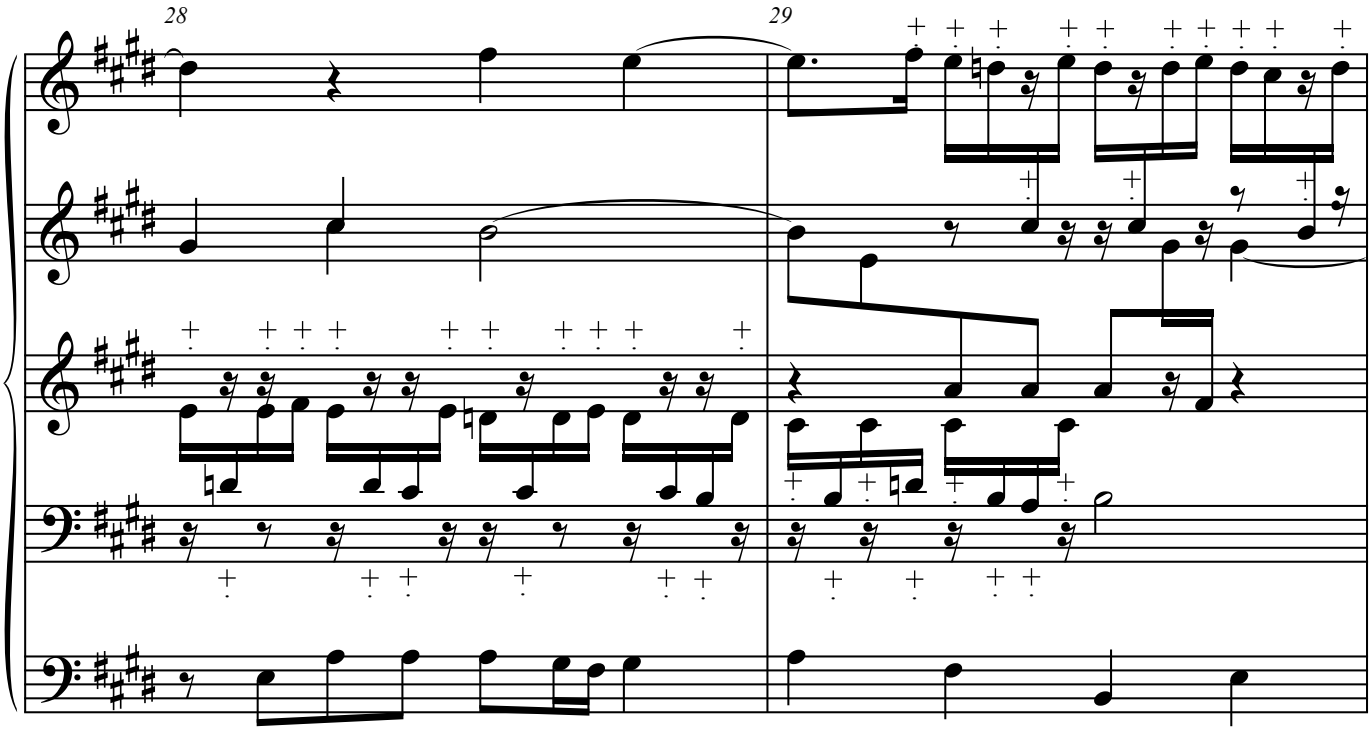
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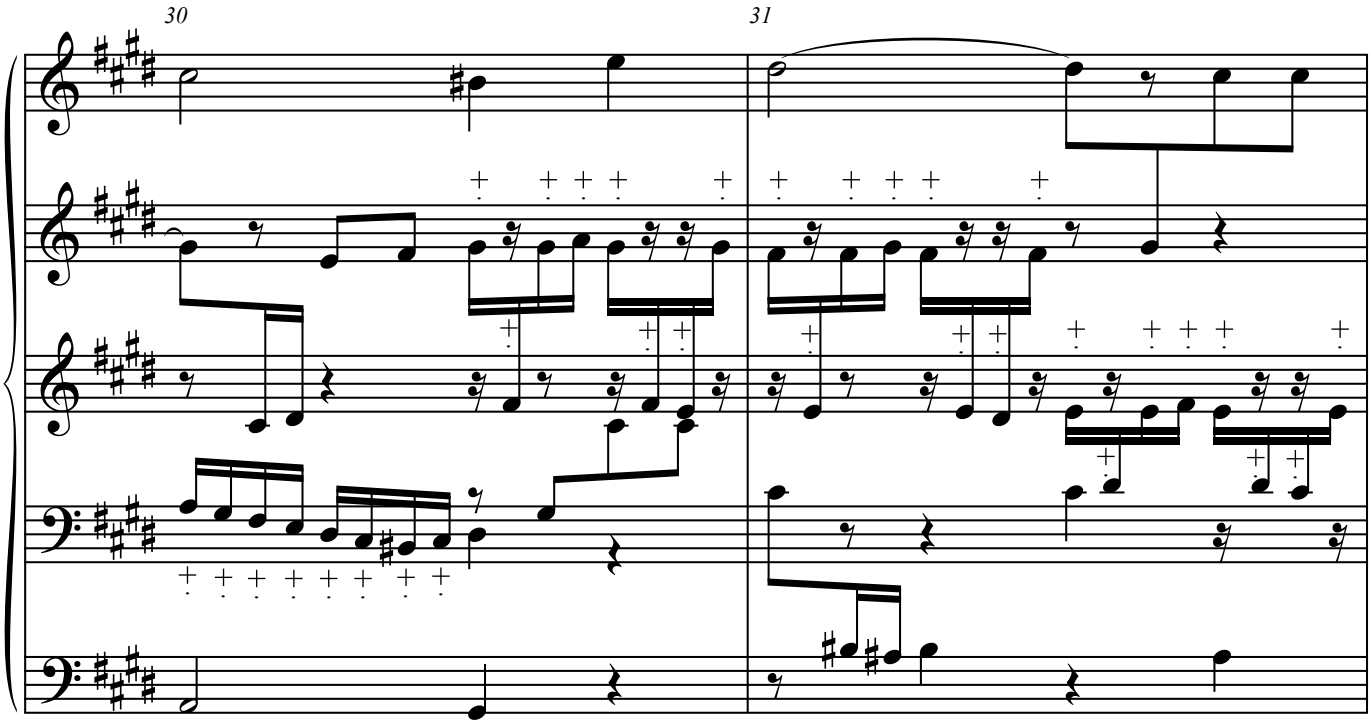
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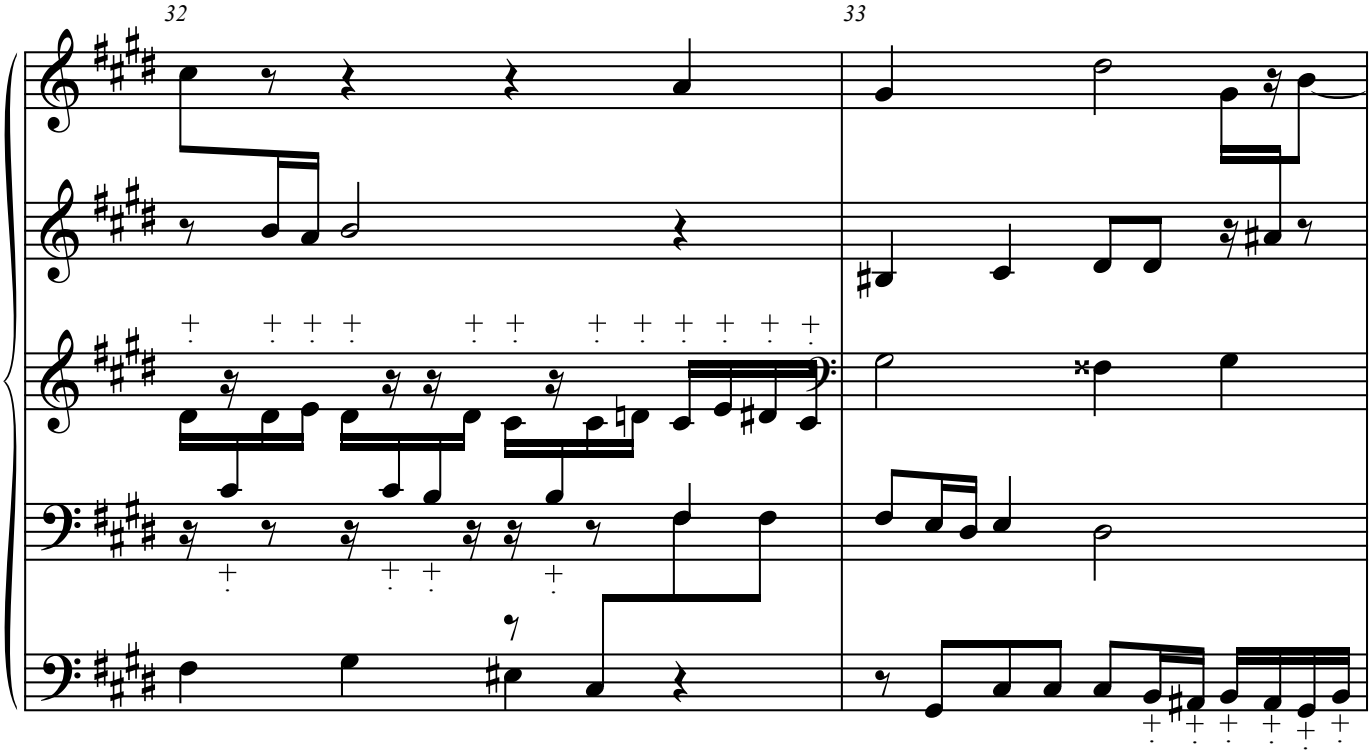
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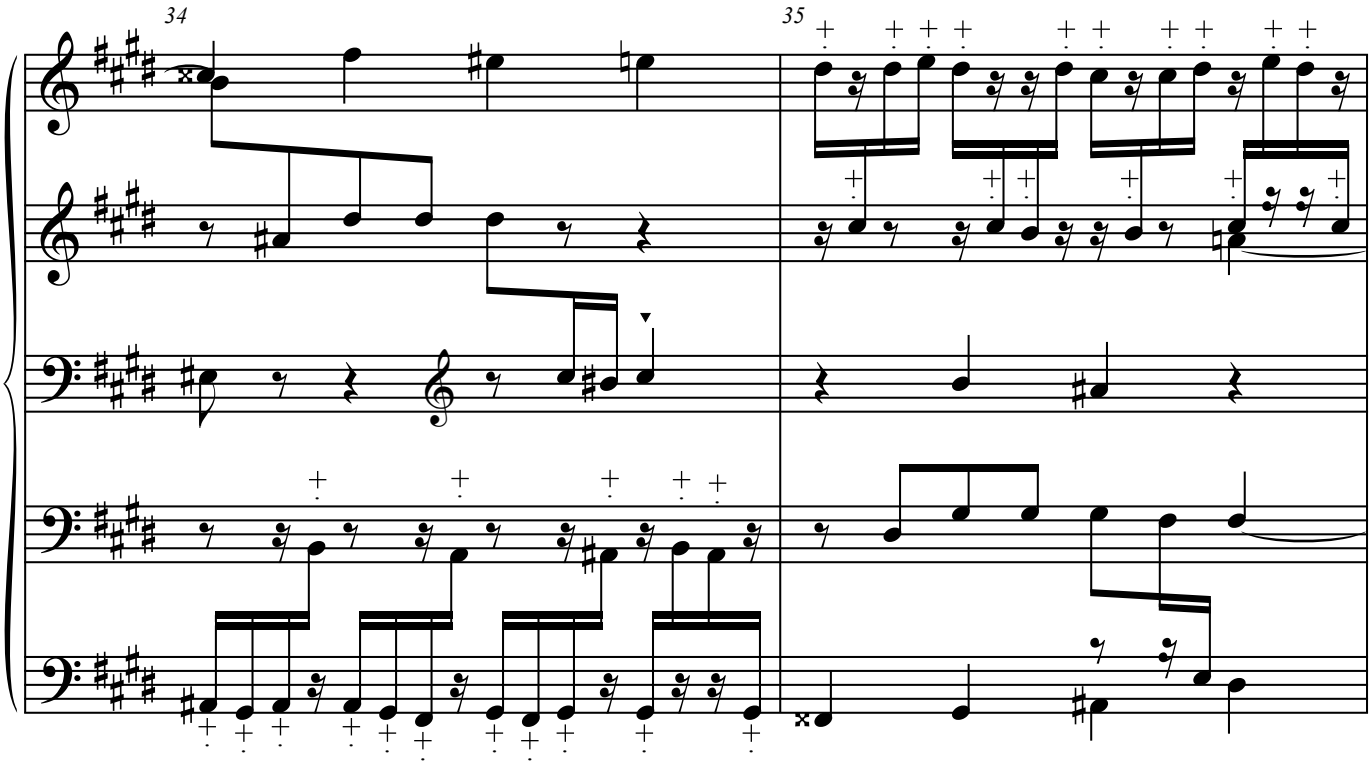
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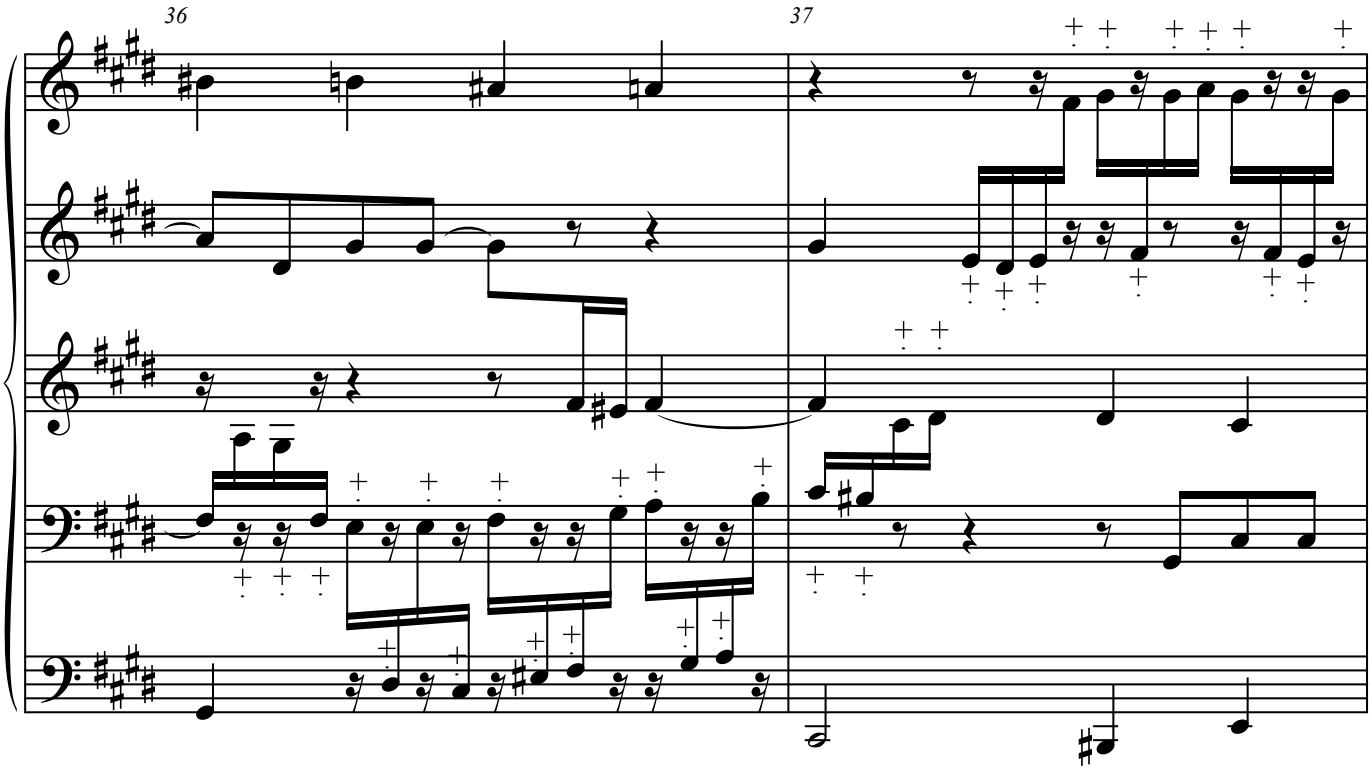
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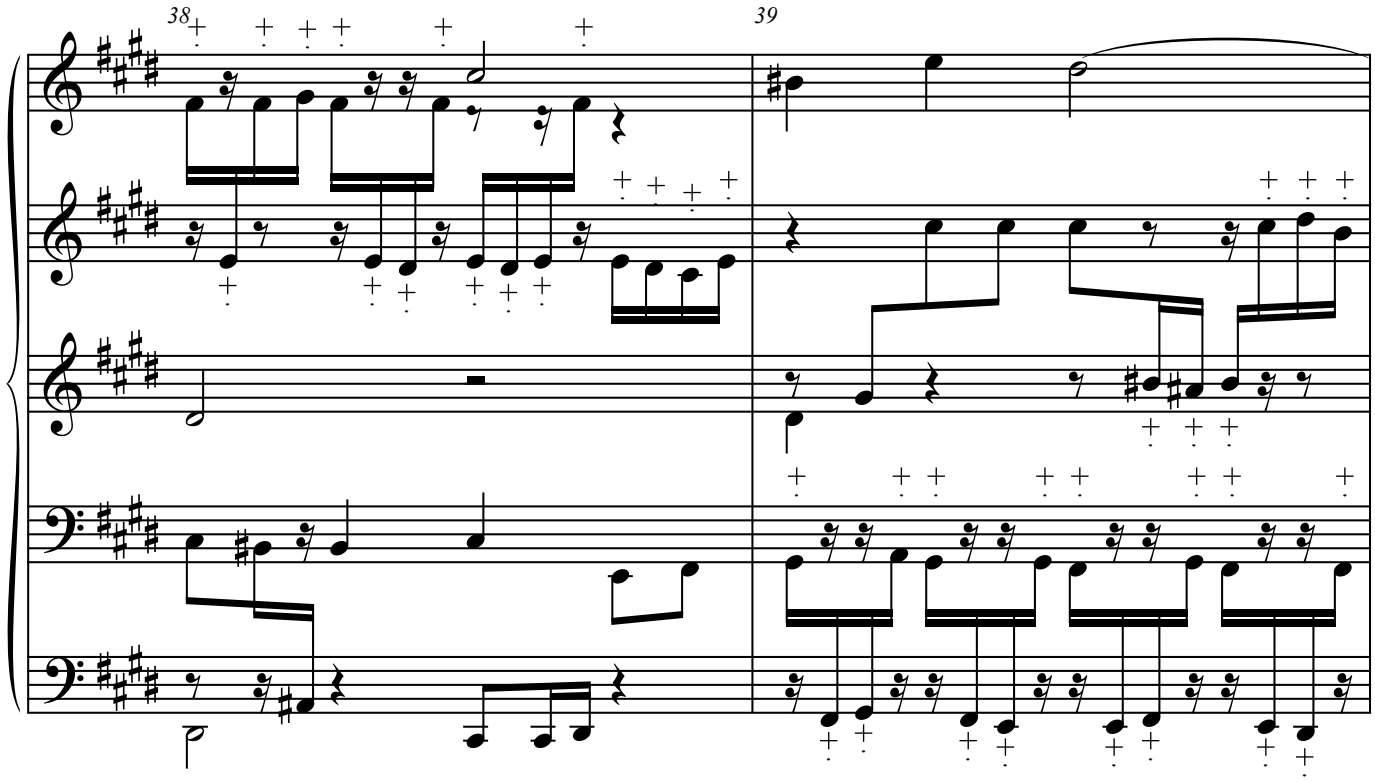
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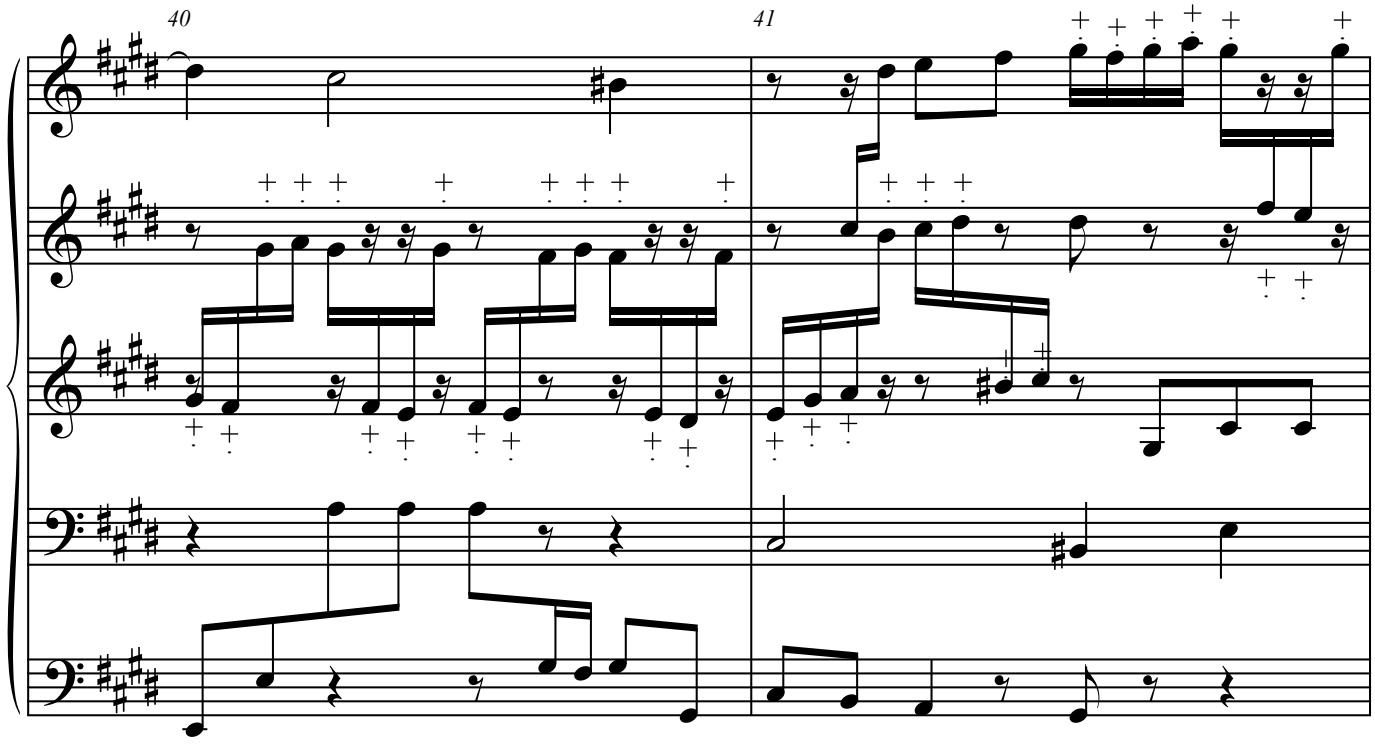
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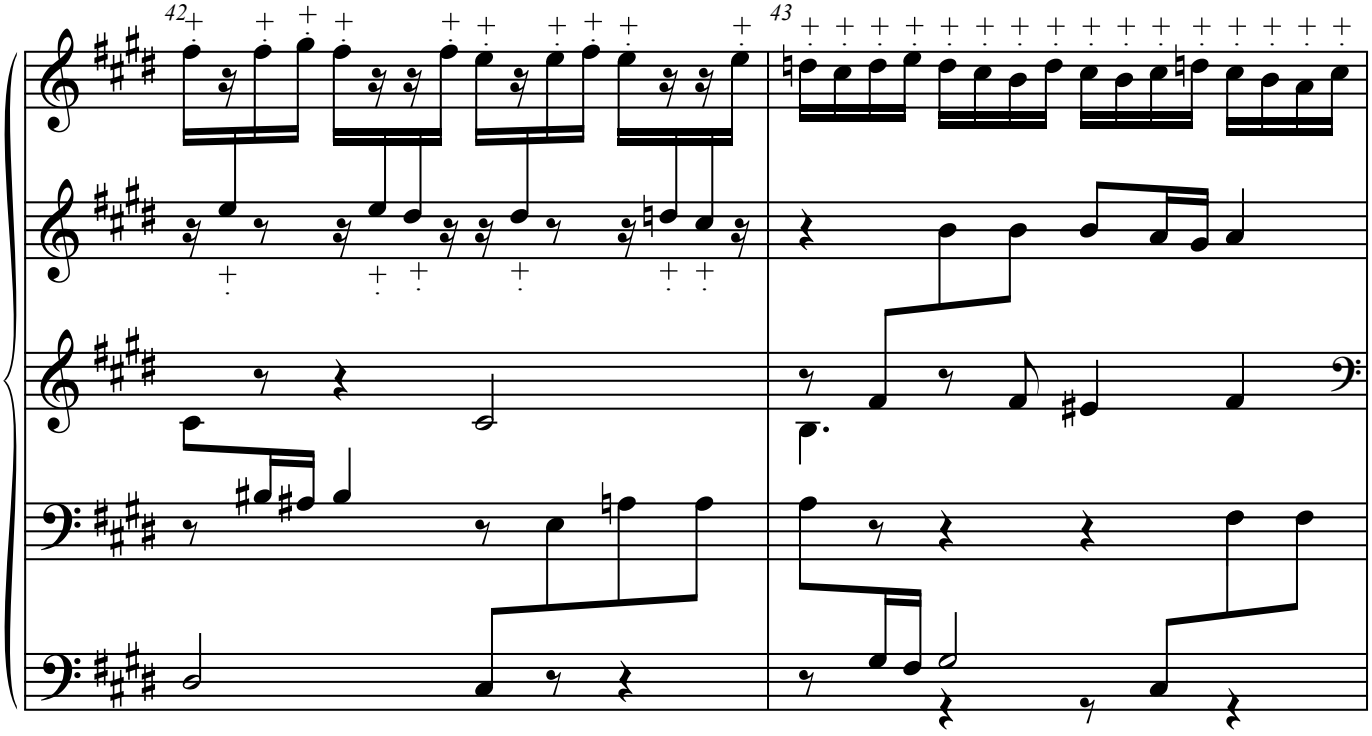
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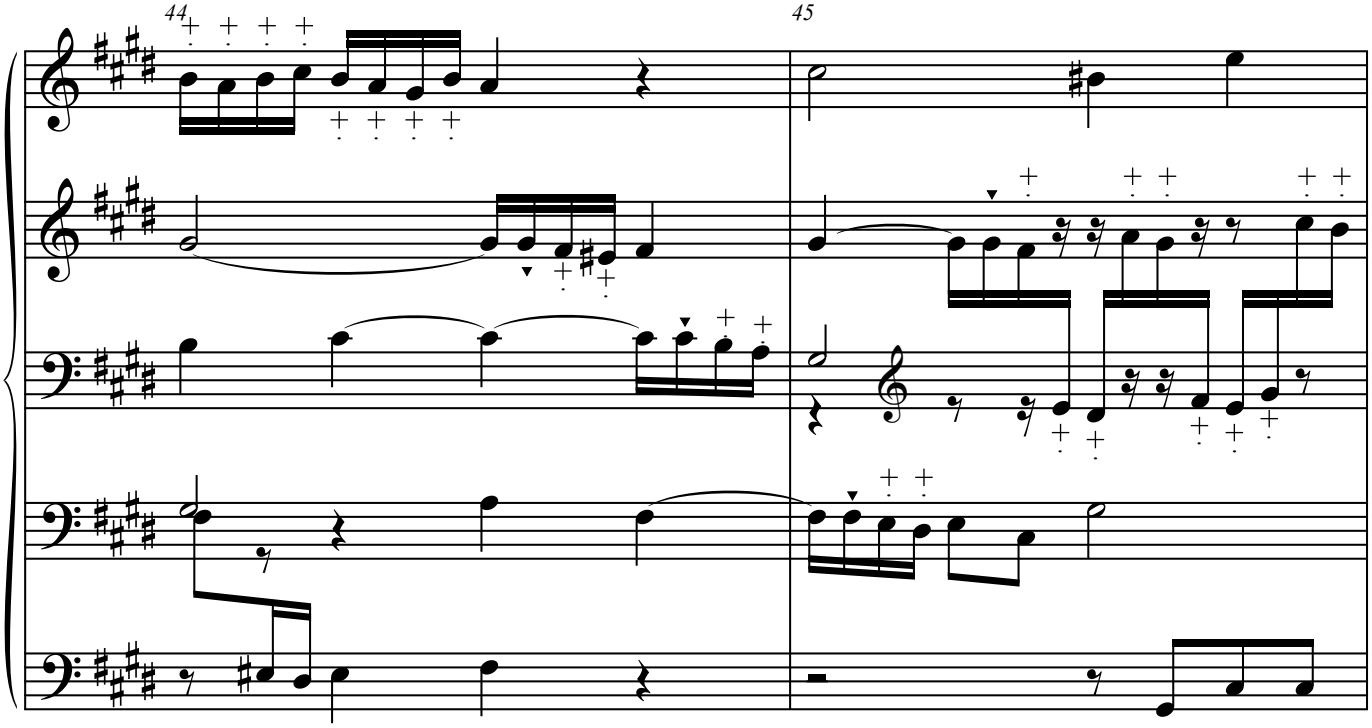
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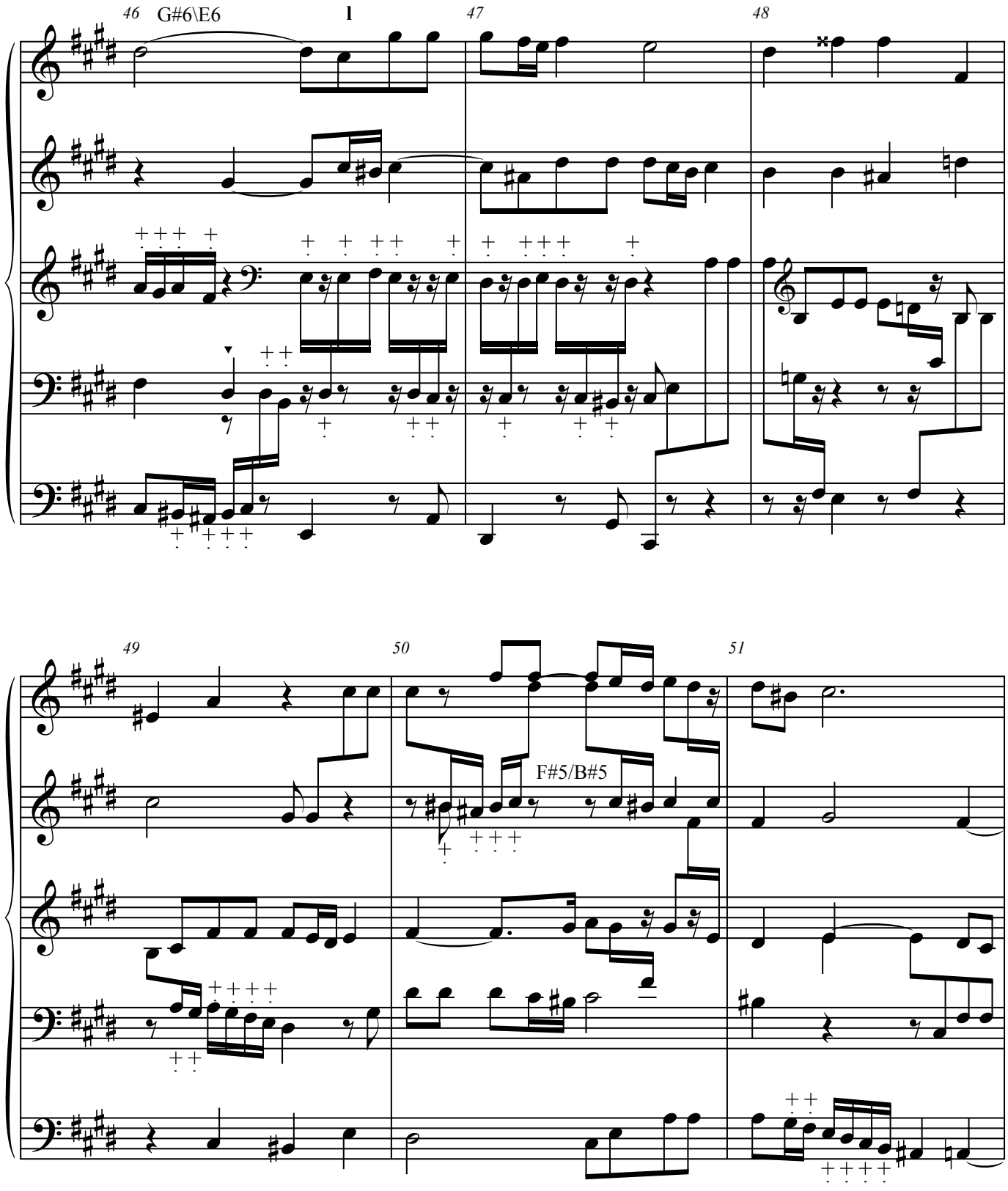
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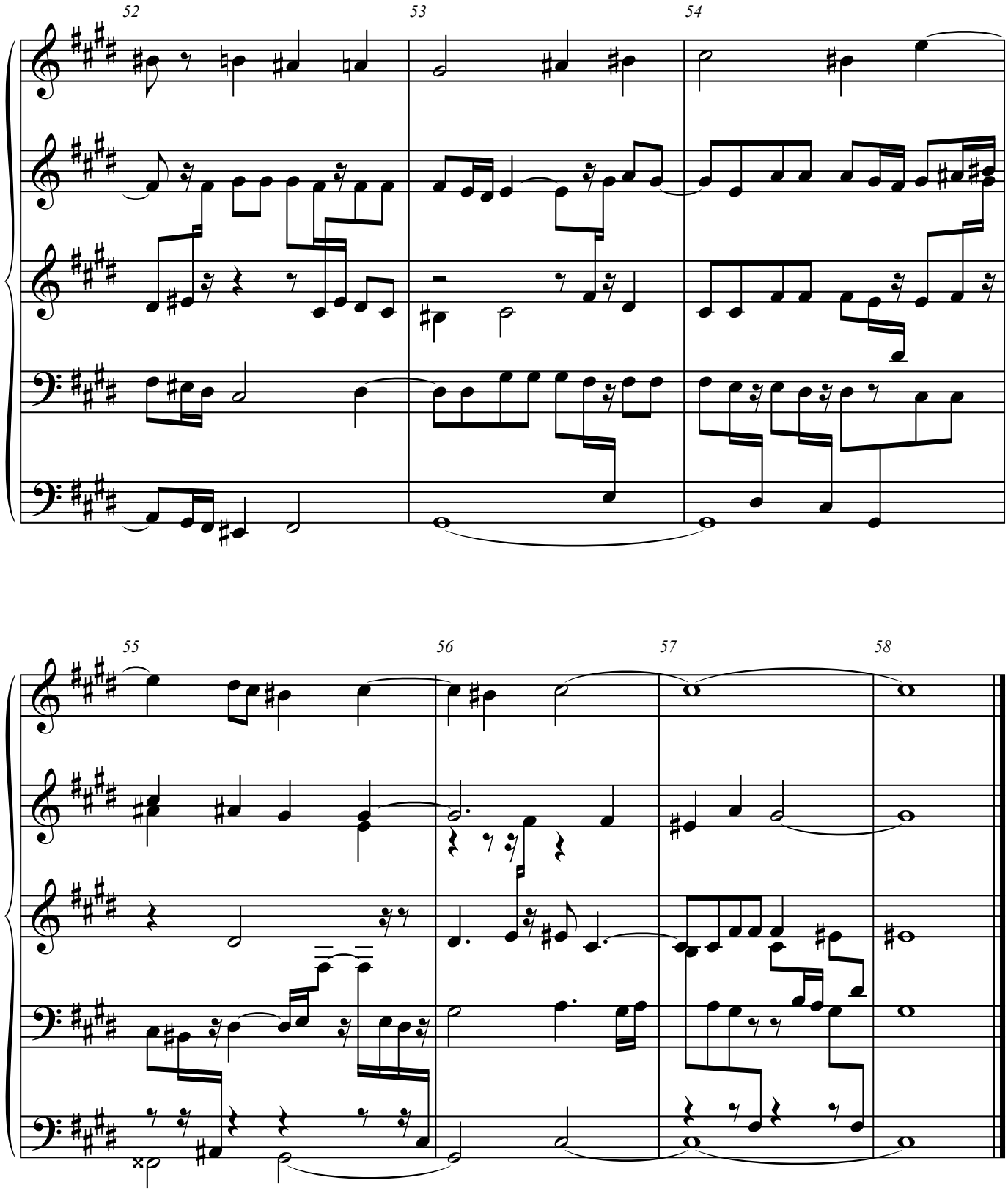
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