Prelude and Fugue No. 6 in D Major

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

Arranged for Handbell Quintet
by Larry Sue

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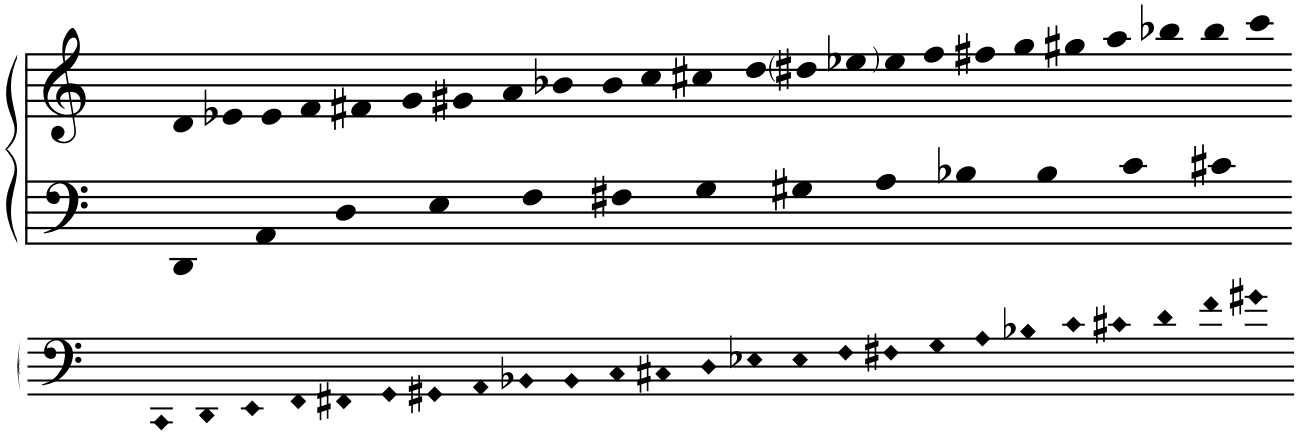
Performance Notes



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.

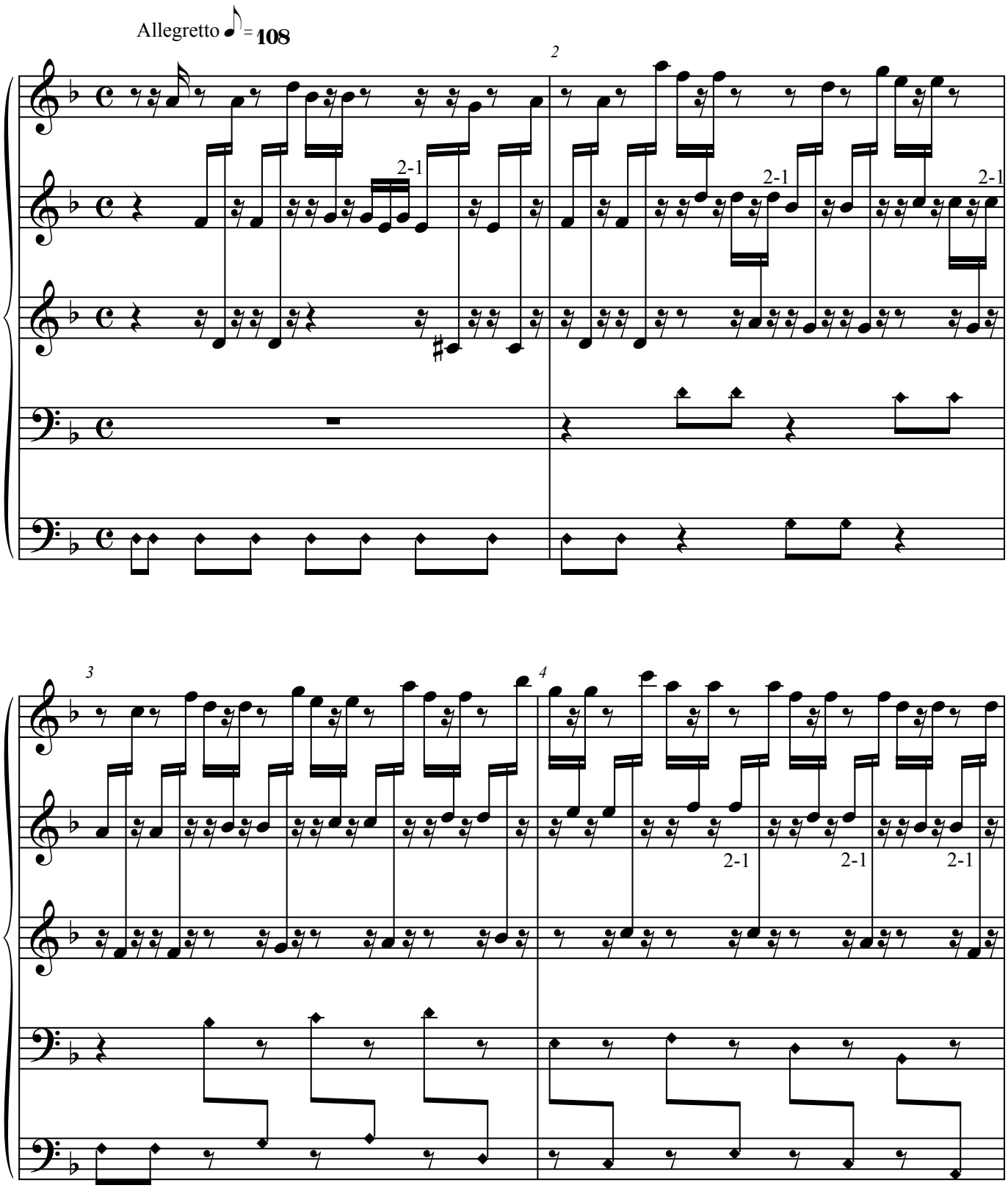
Prelude No. 6 has a bounce tinged with a bit of seriousness. Since it's chordally-based, feel free to apply LVUHC throughout or, if you prefer, just "sloppy damp" to provide a bit of sustain between notes. Chimes have been notated on the lower two parts to provide a somewhat "bassier" undercurrent, though the entire piece can be played on bells.

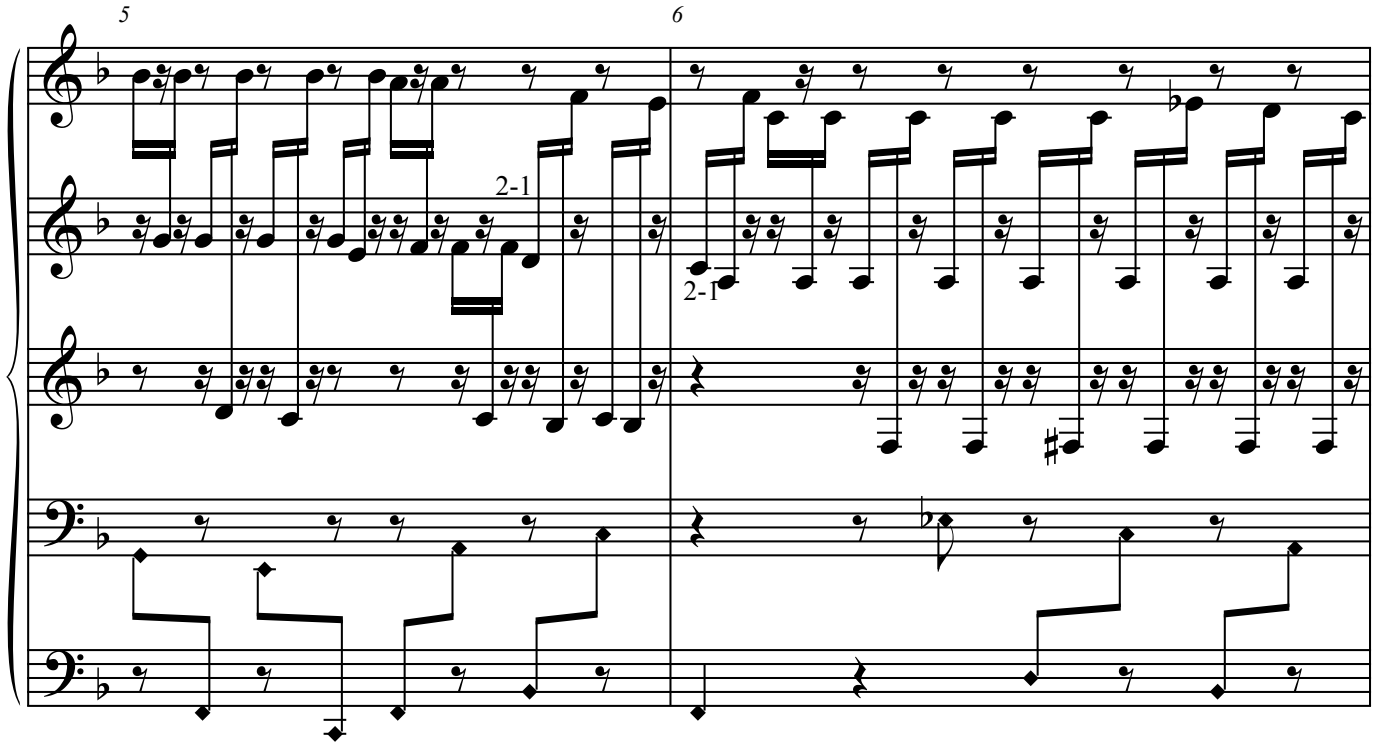
Fugue No. 6 is rather an exercise in passing bells from one player to another in the top three parts. Judicious use of table damping and passing will make it possible (at the marked tempo, it means that the hands will come within a hair's breadth of crashing into each other, so a pass with sloppy damping will we a reasonable alternative.

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

Larry Sue

Prelude No. 6

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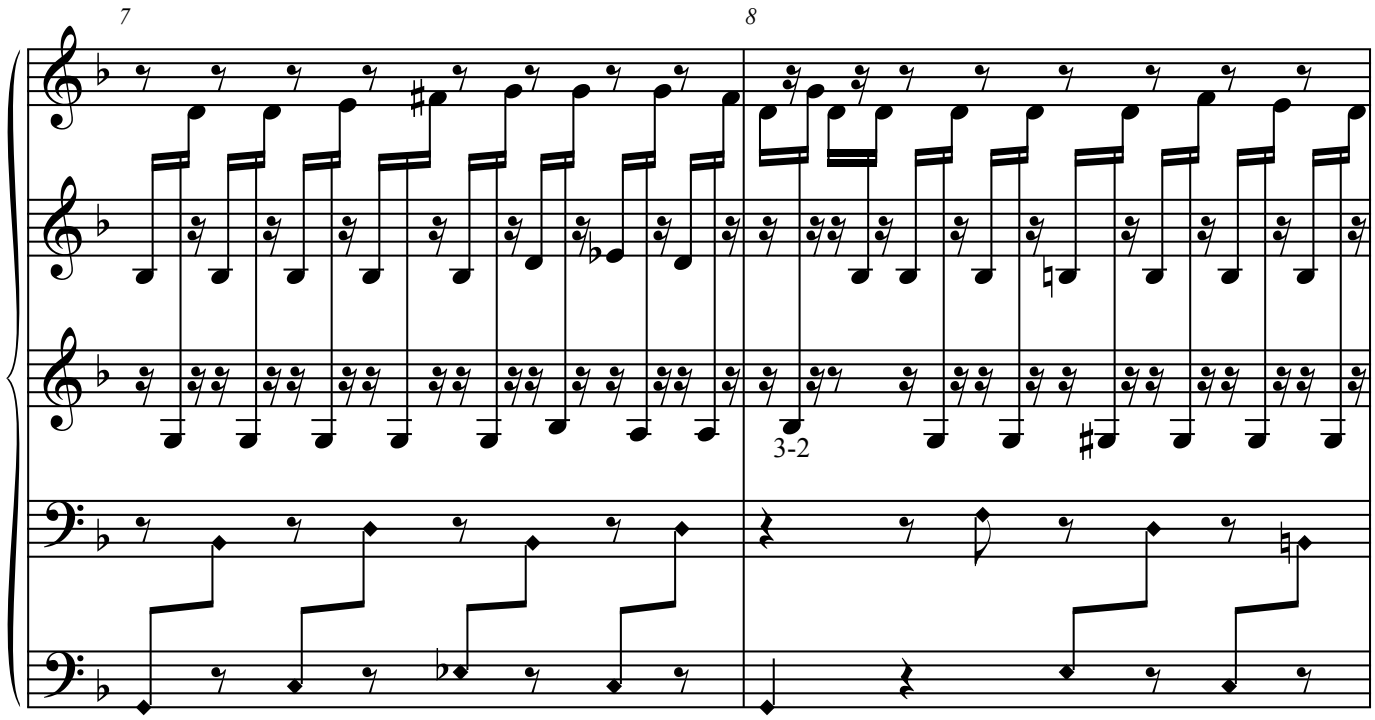
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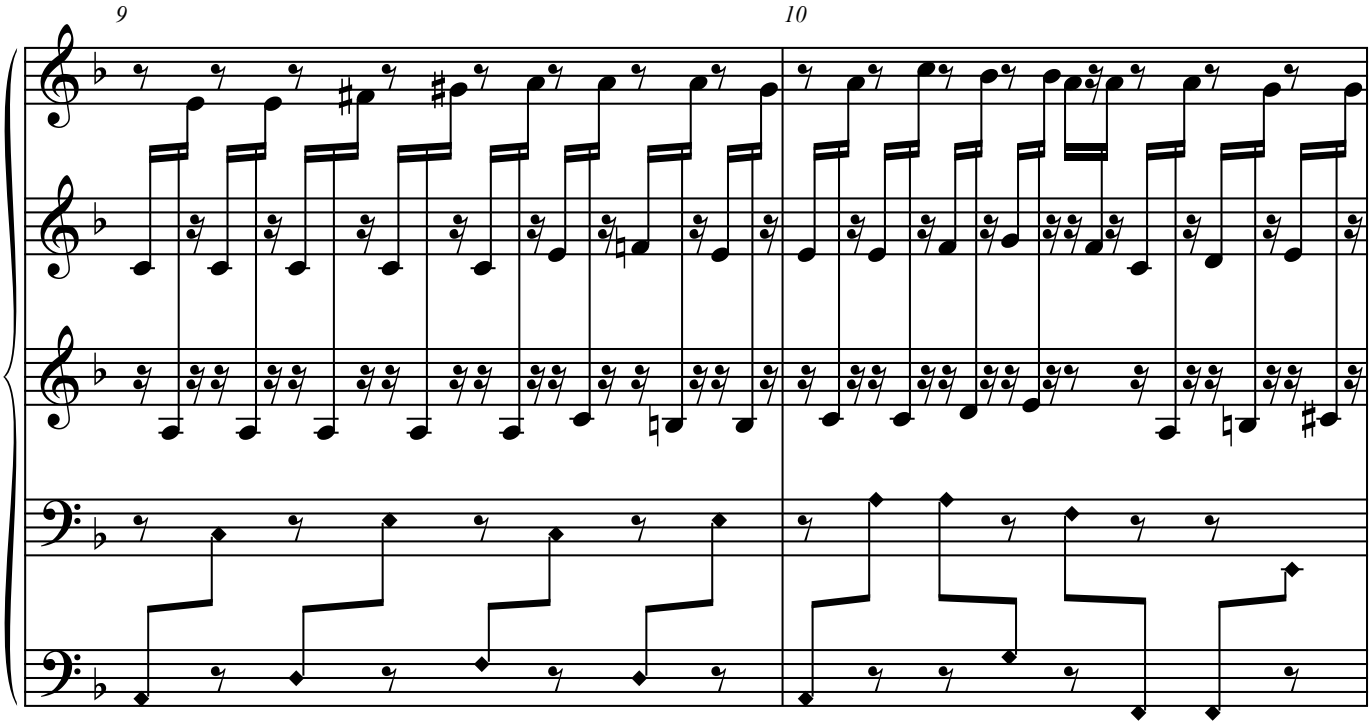
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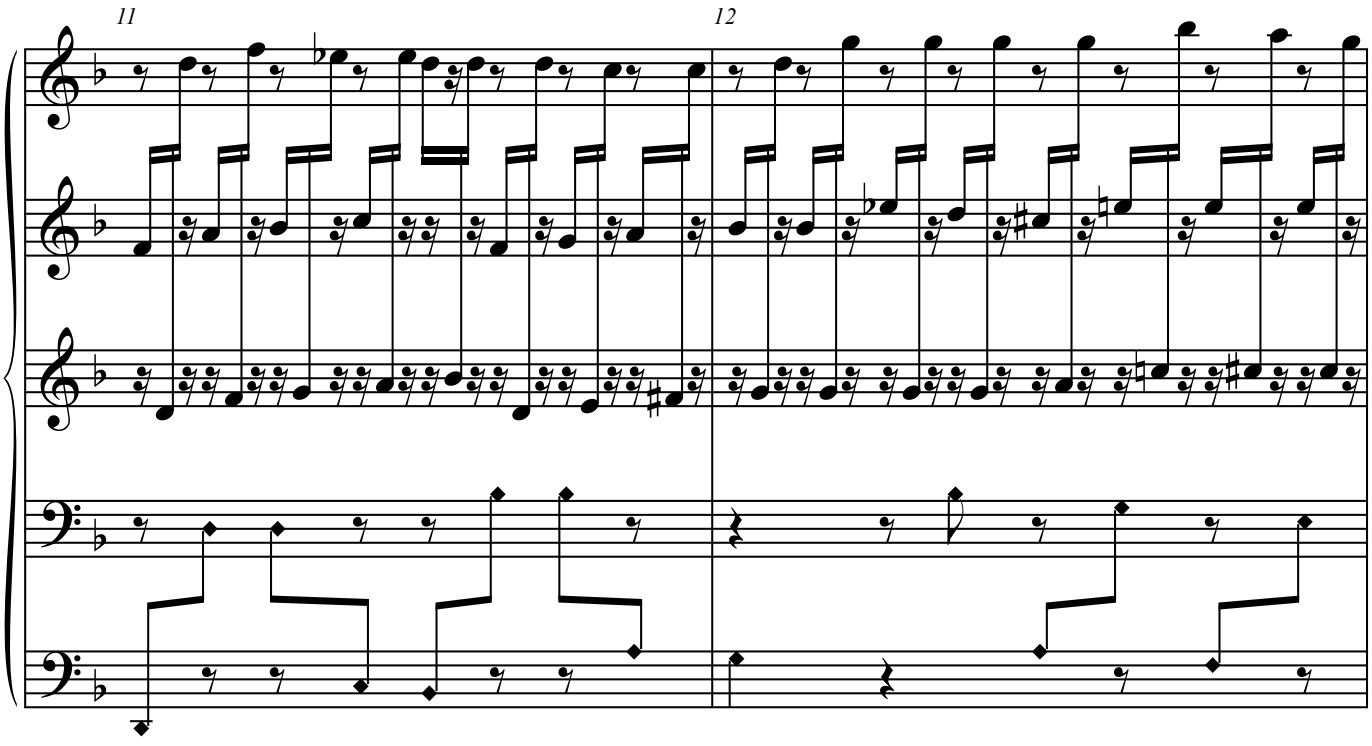
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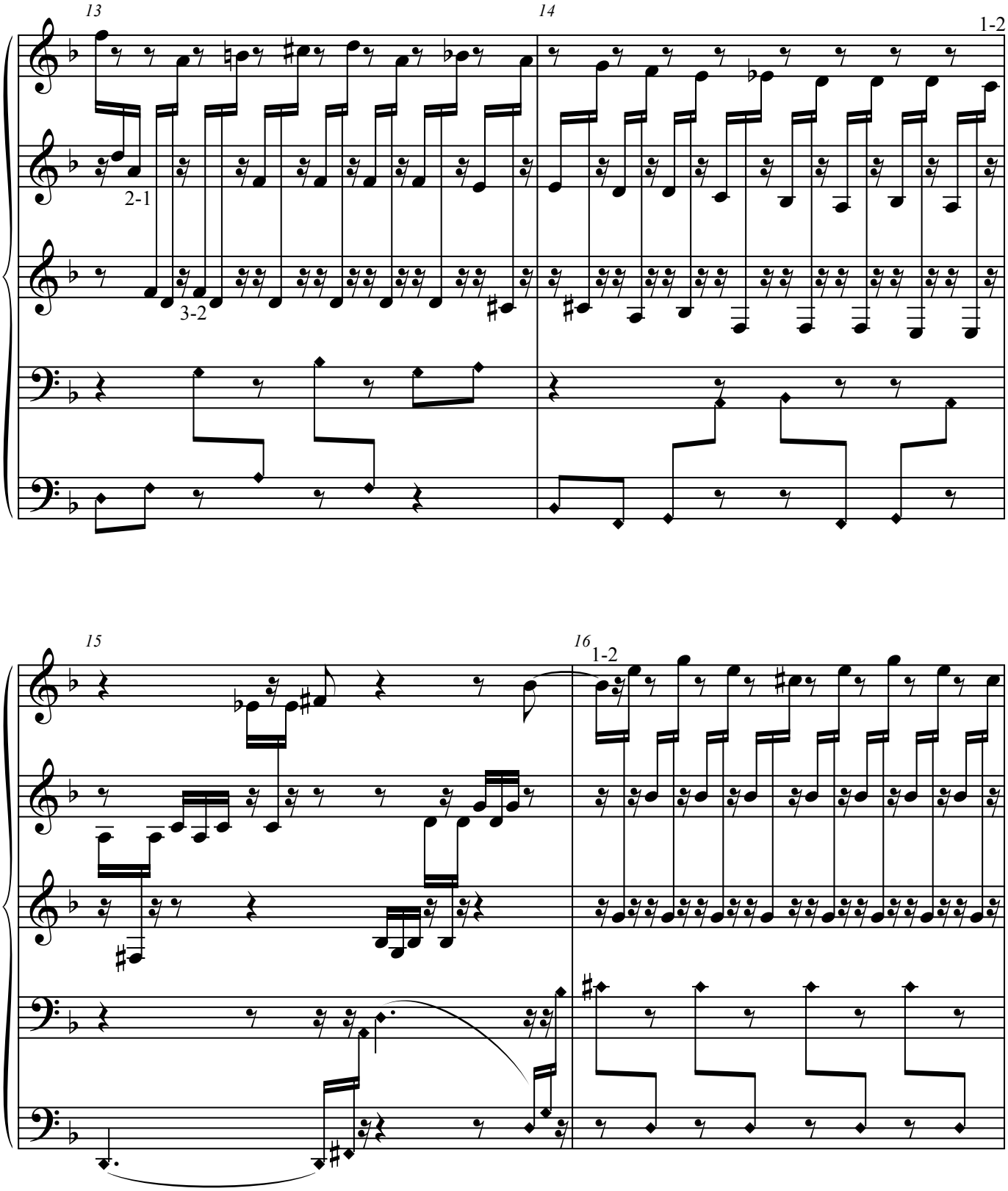
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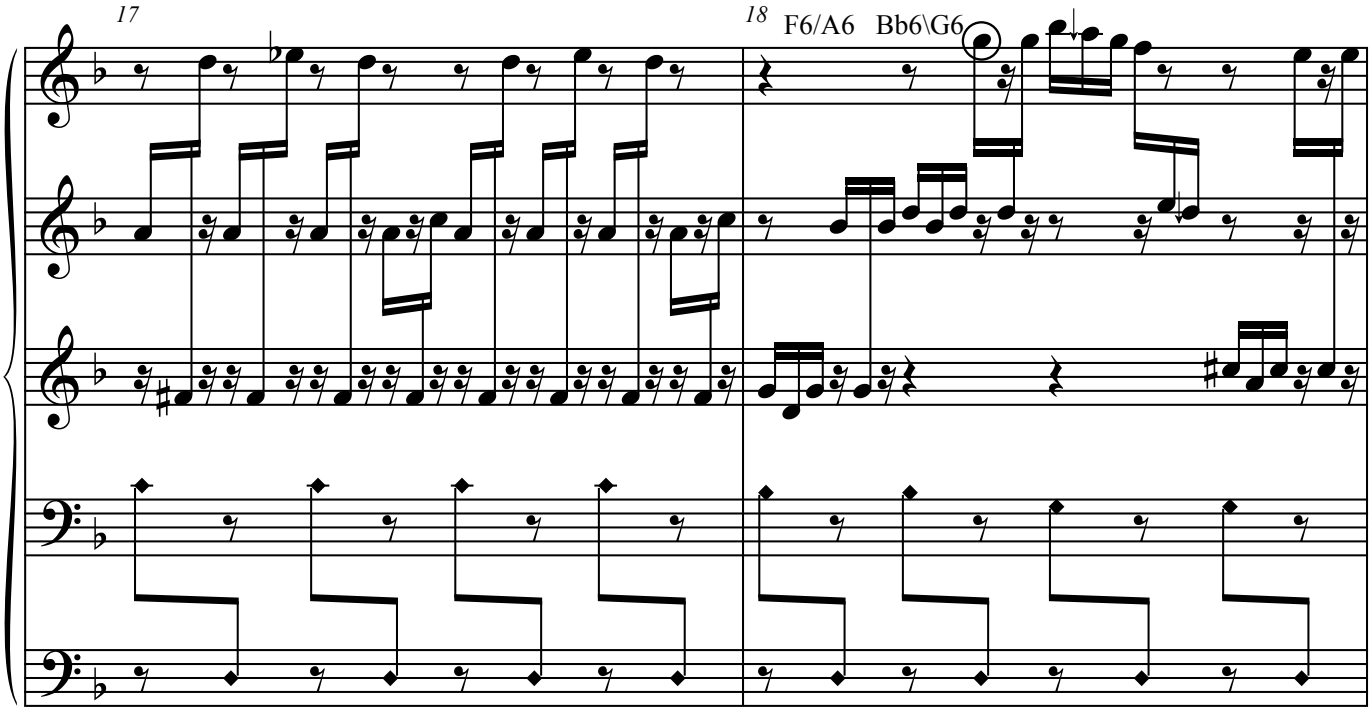
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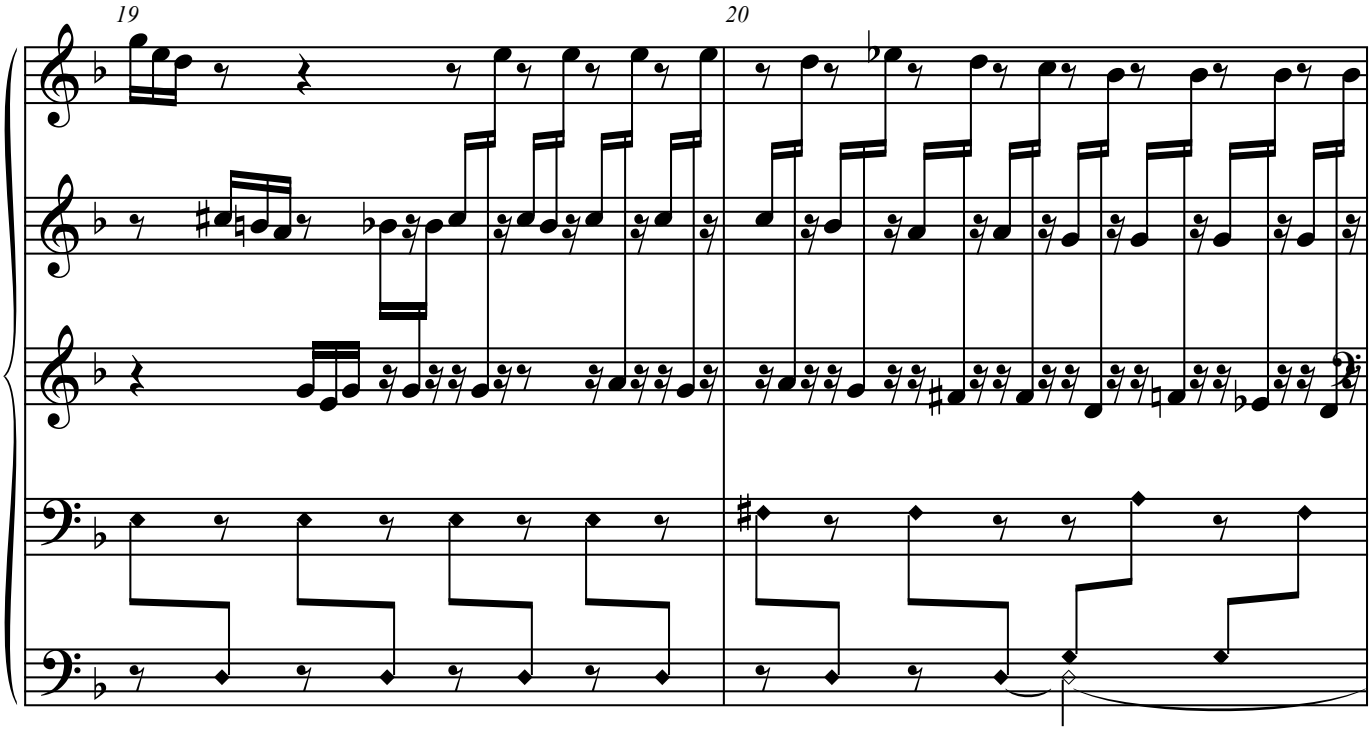
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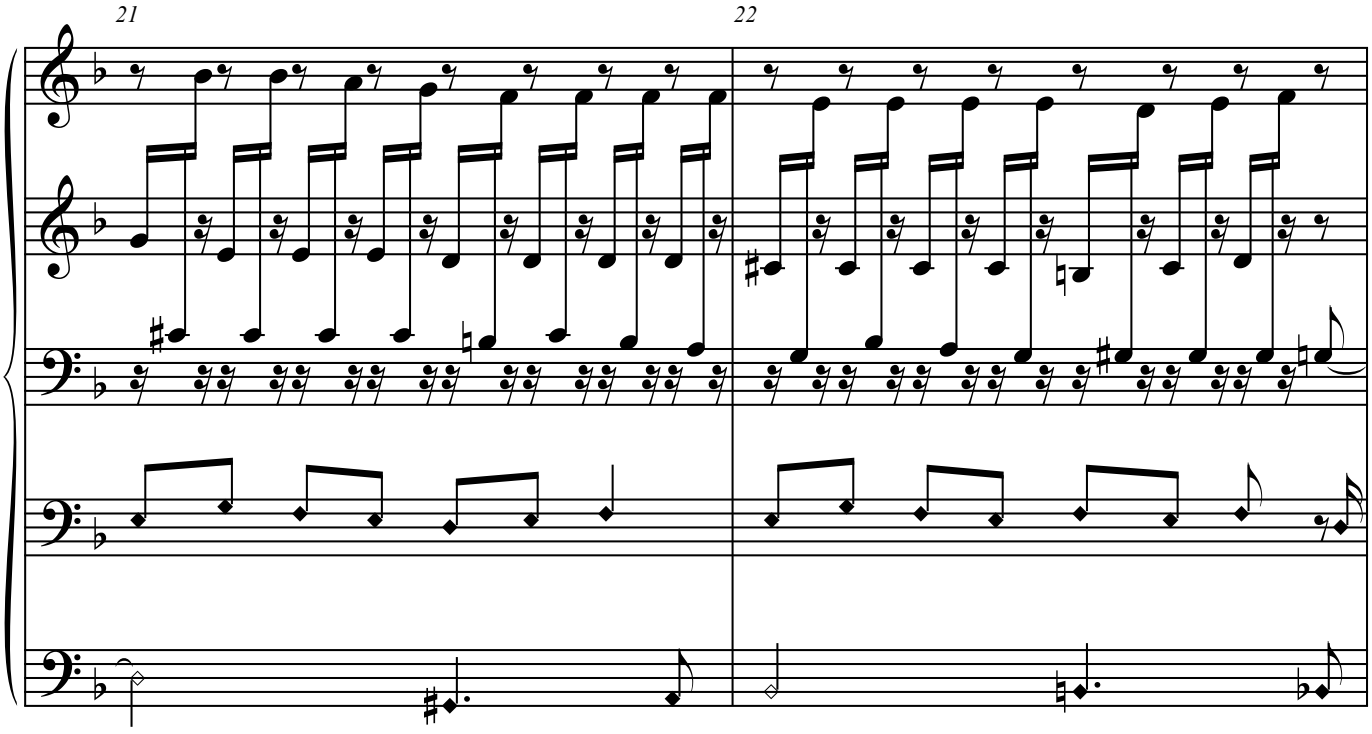
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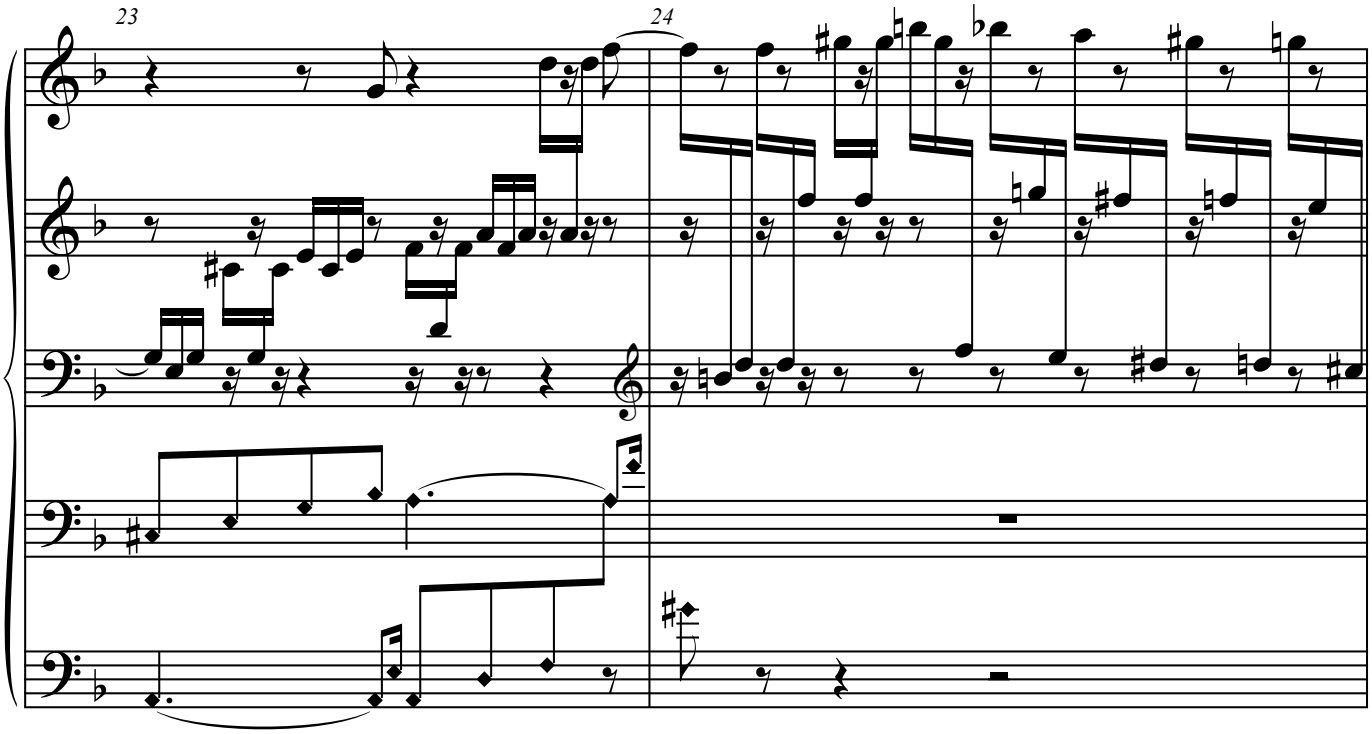
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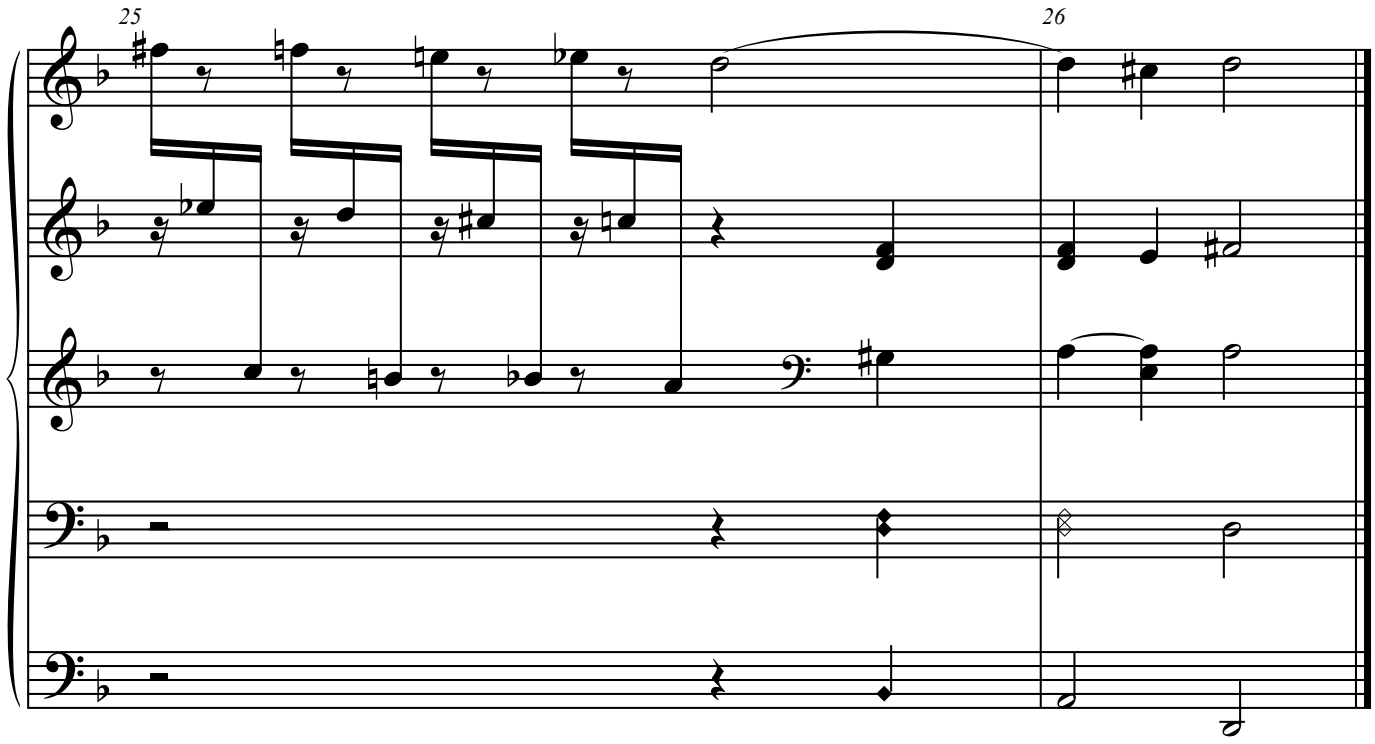
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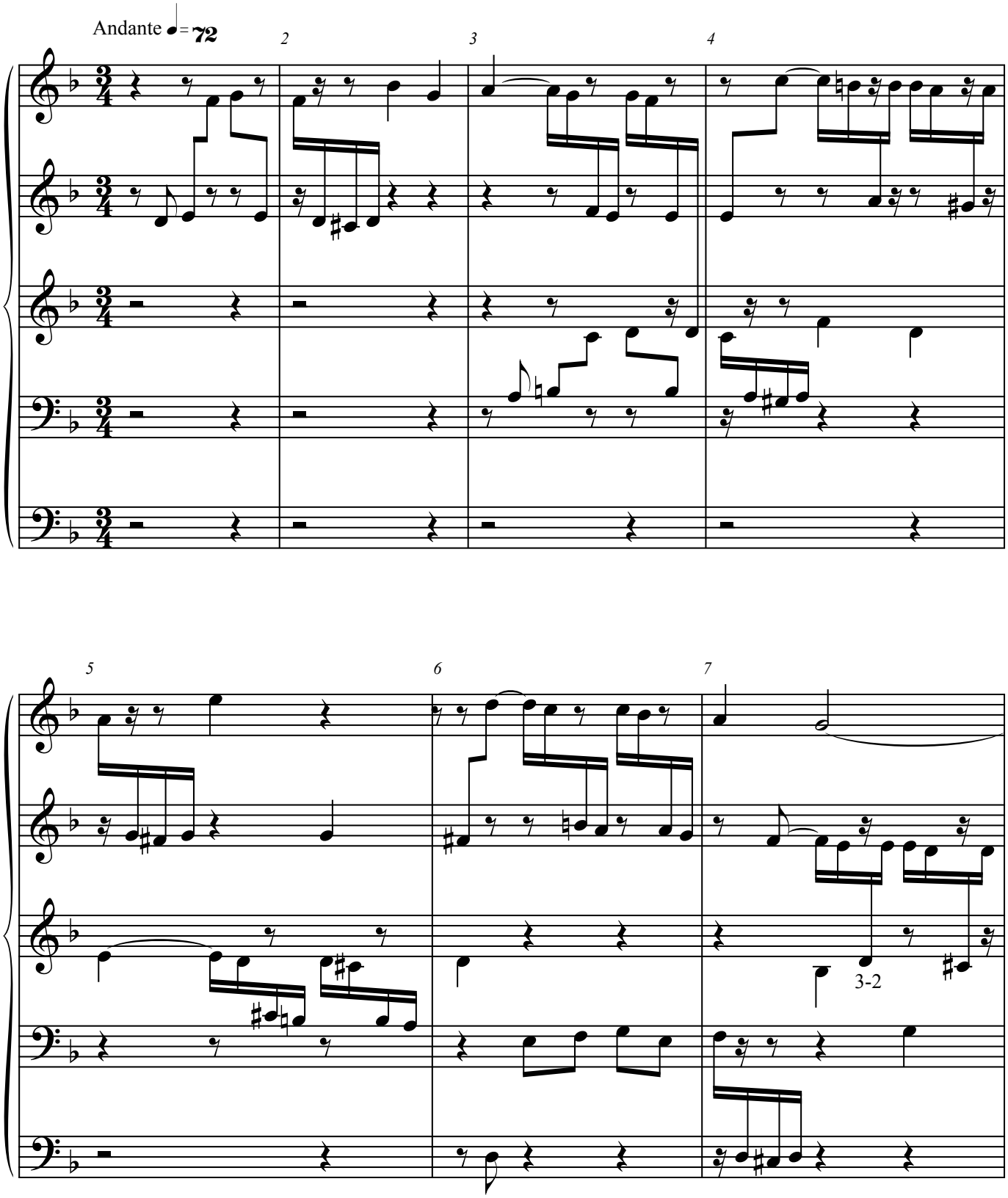
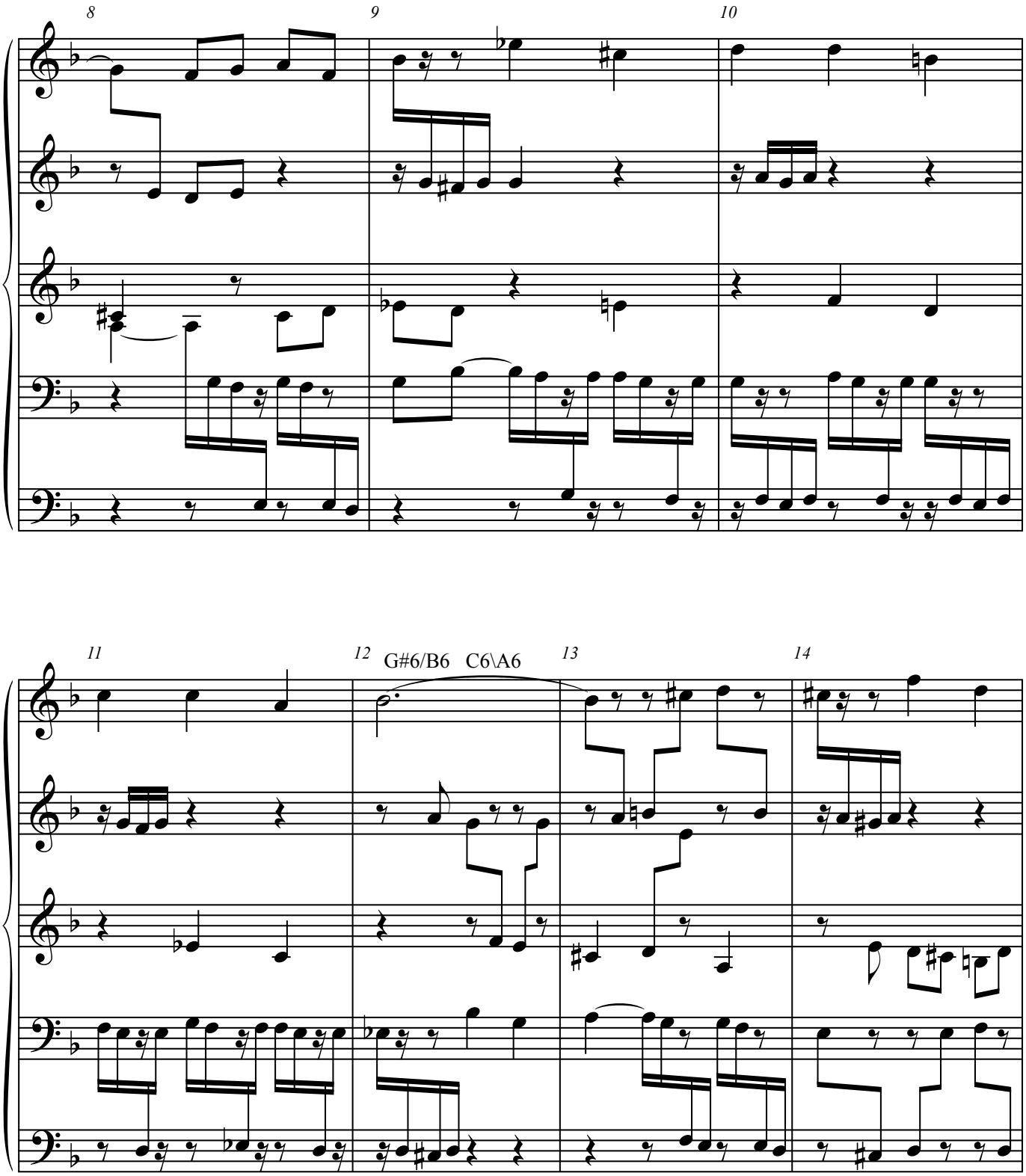
Fugue No. 6

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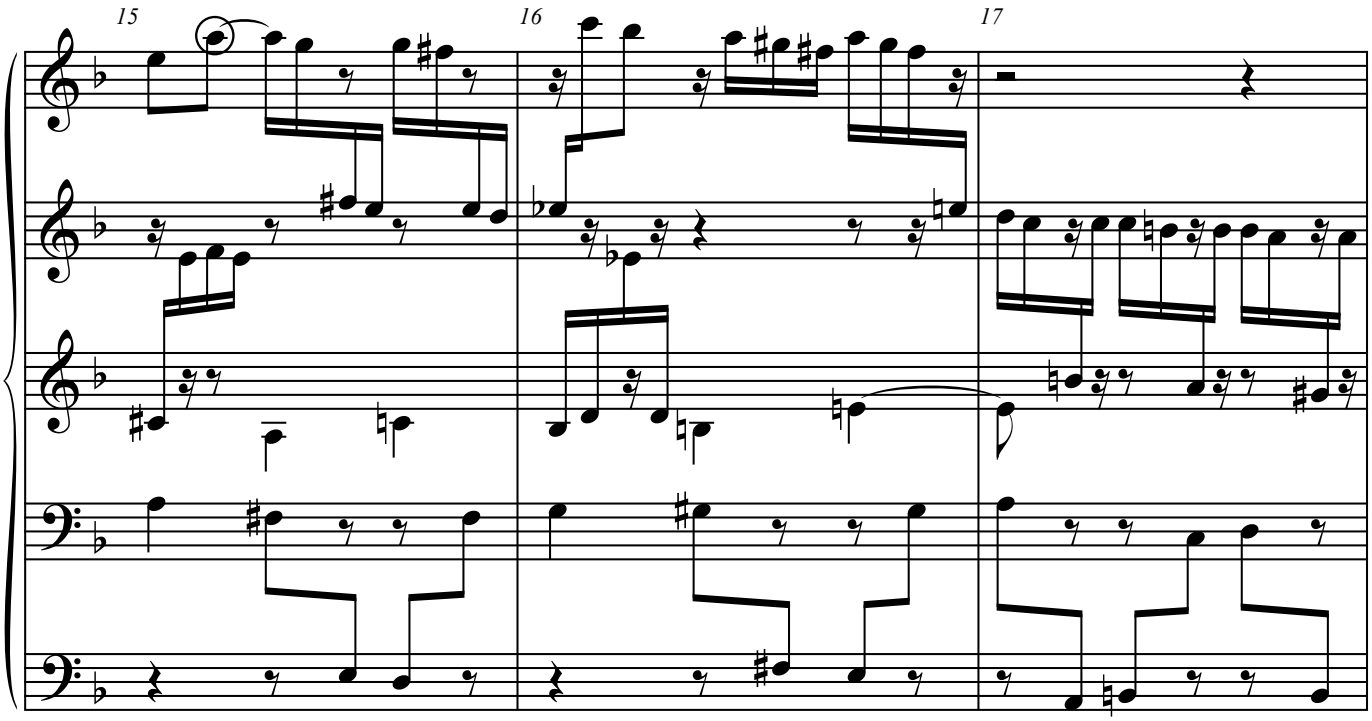
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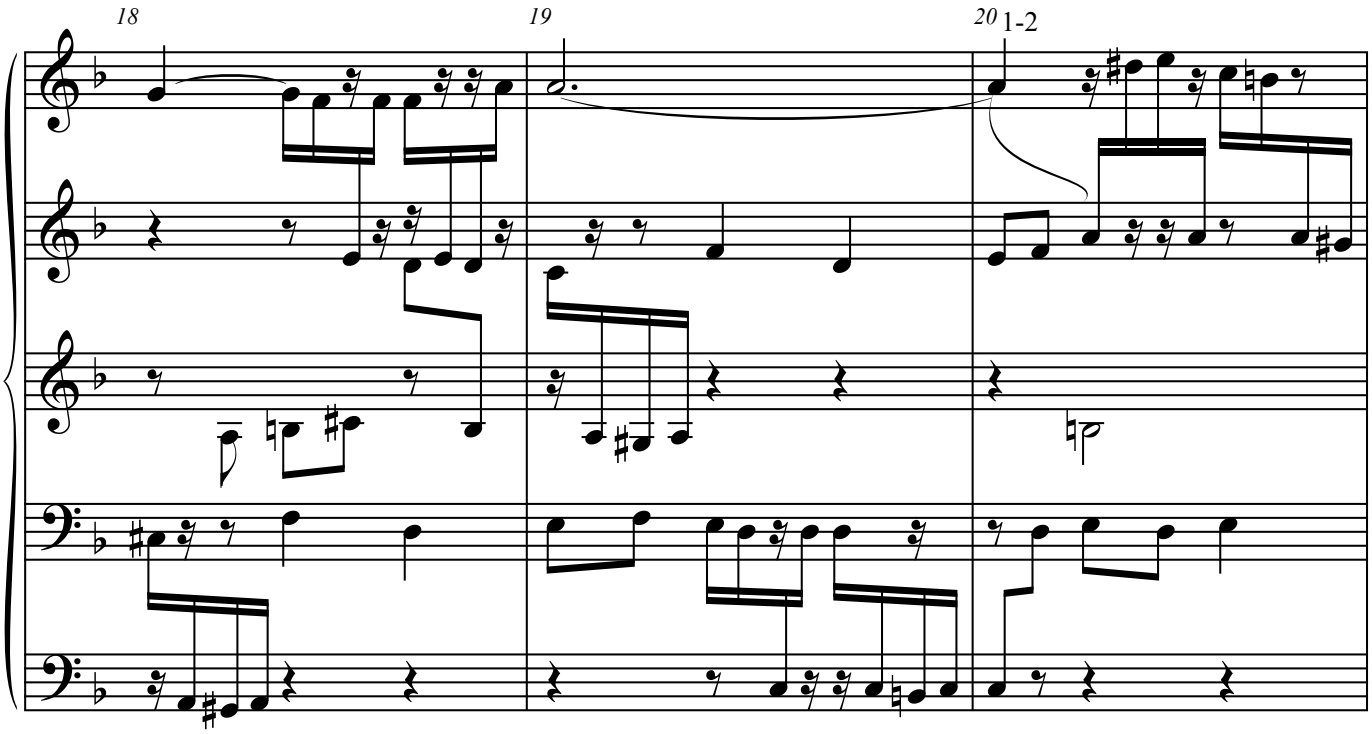
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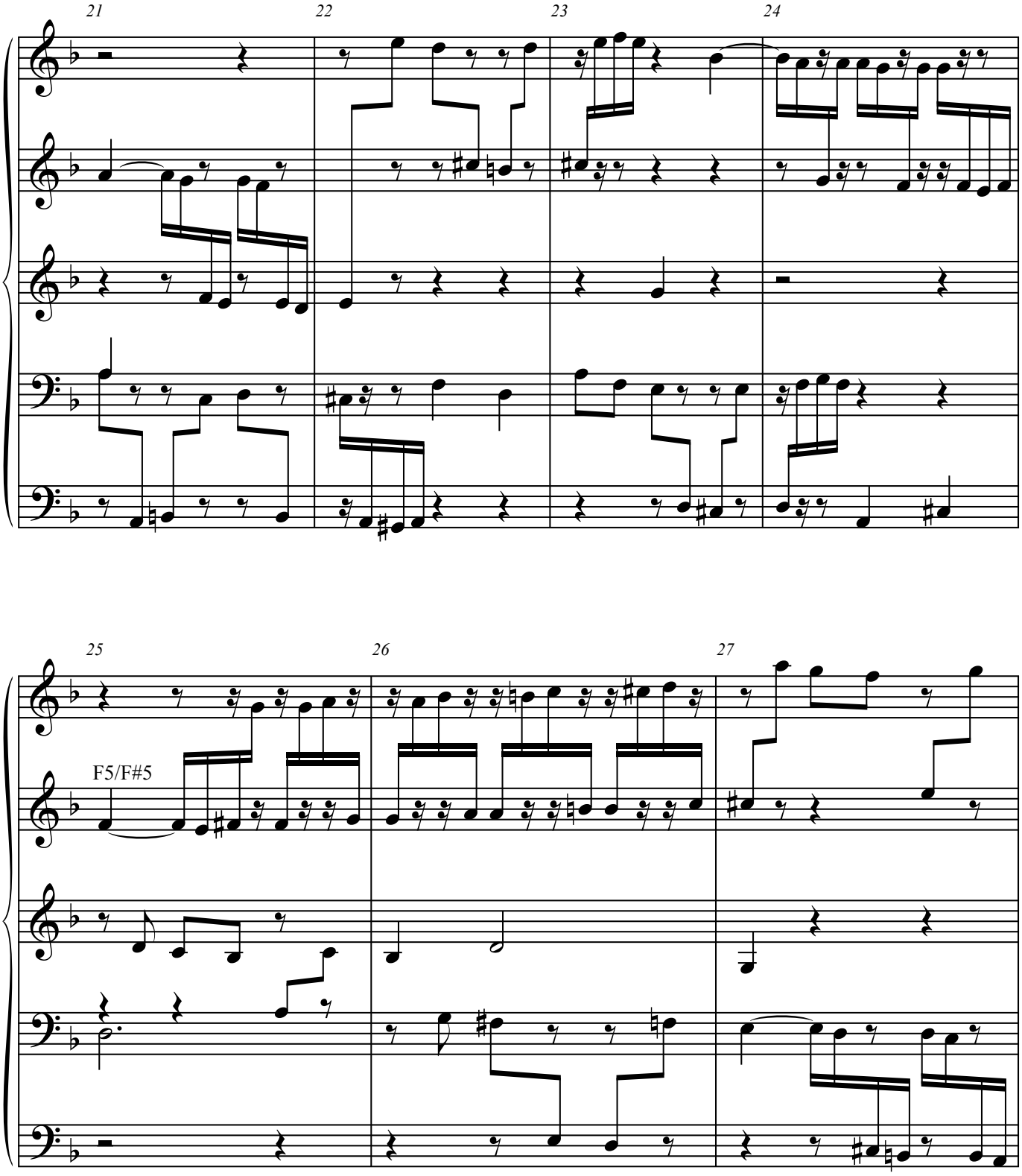
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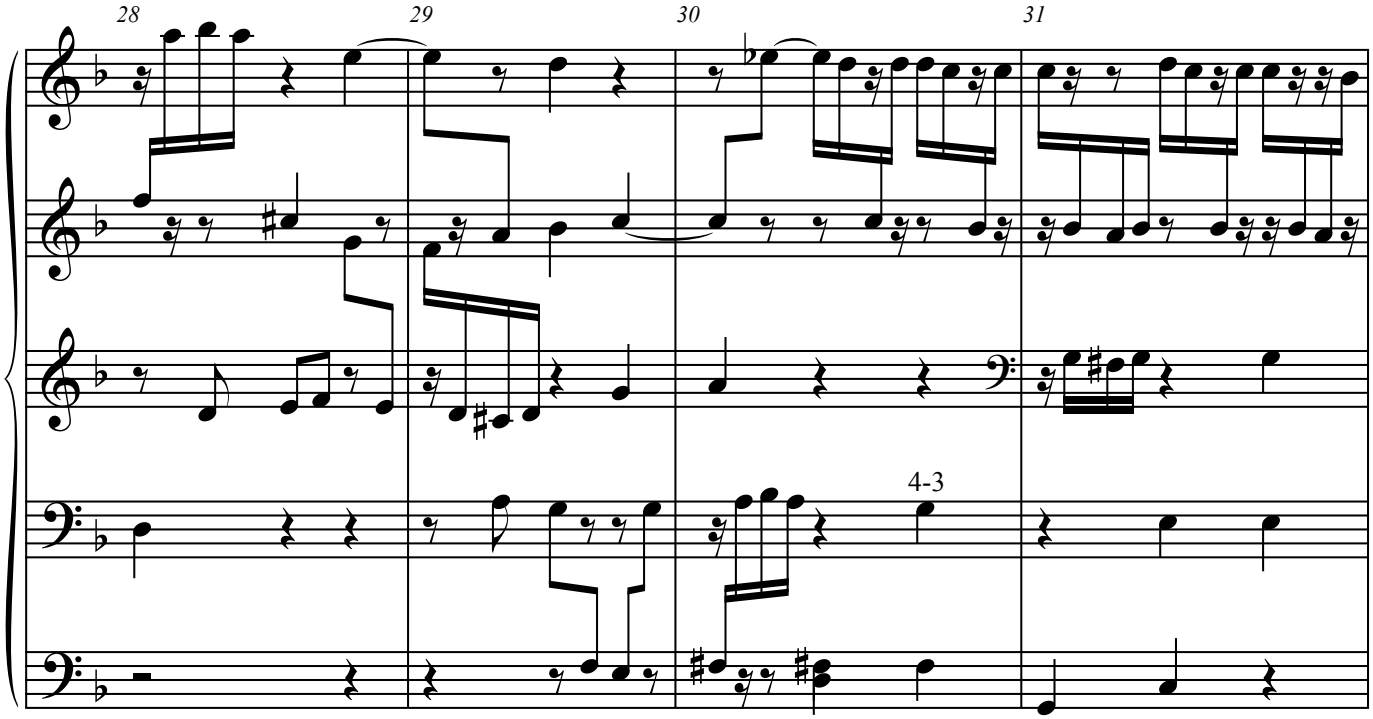
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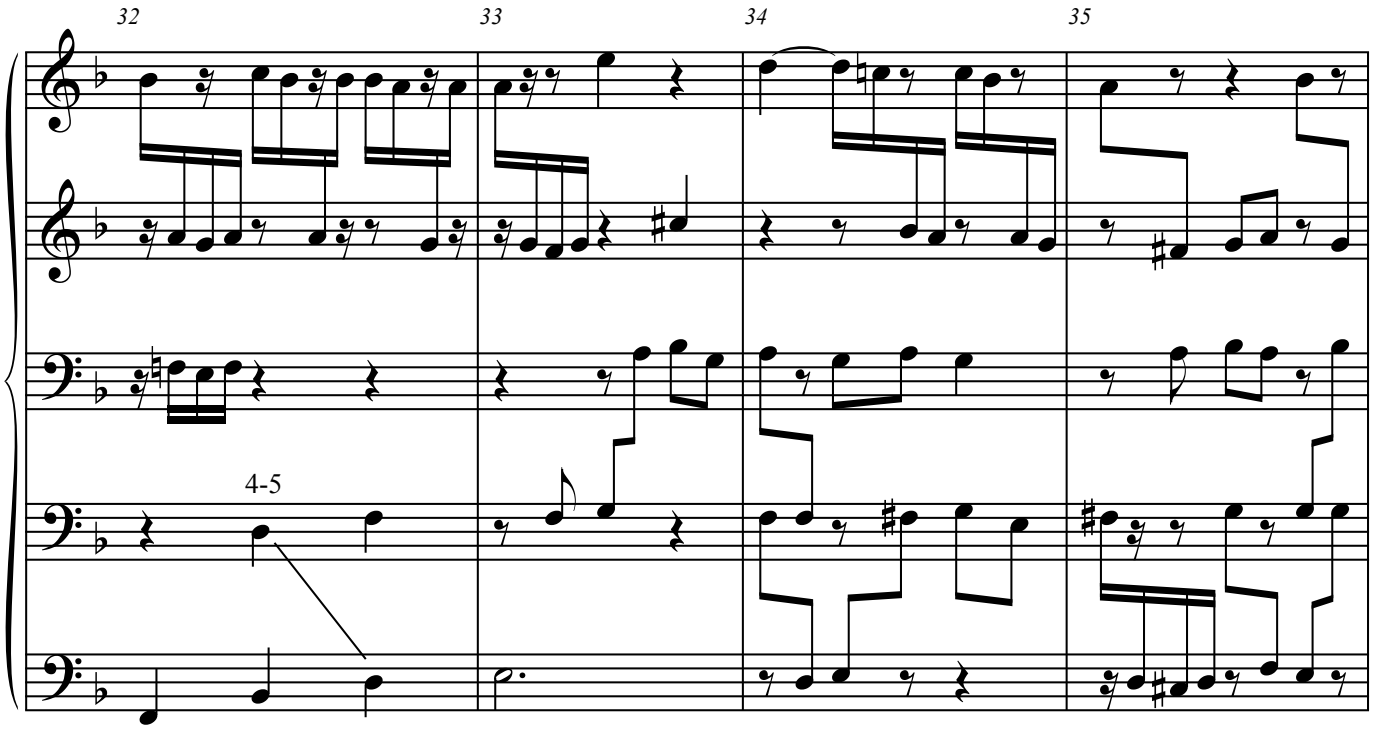
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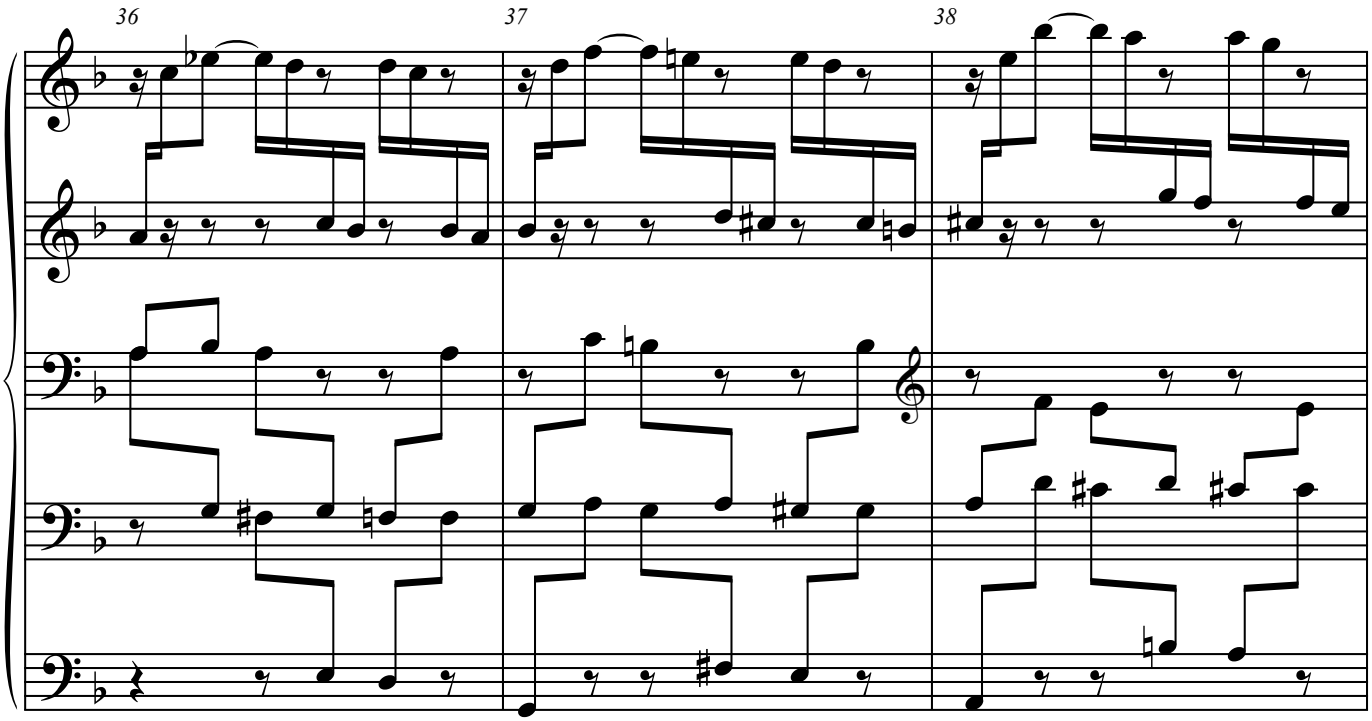
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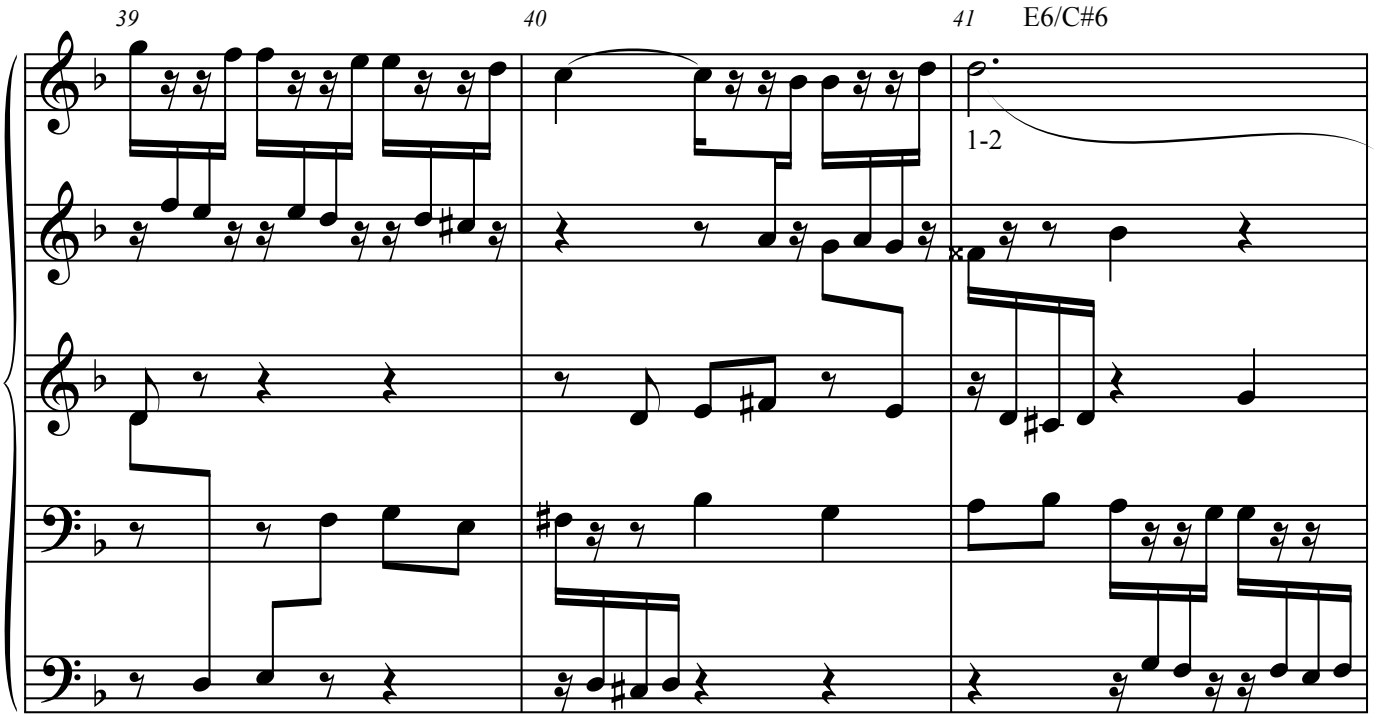
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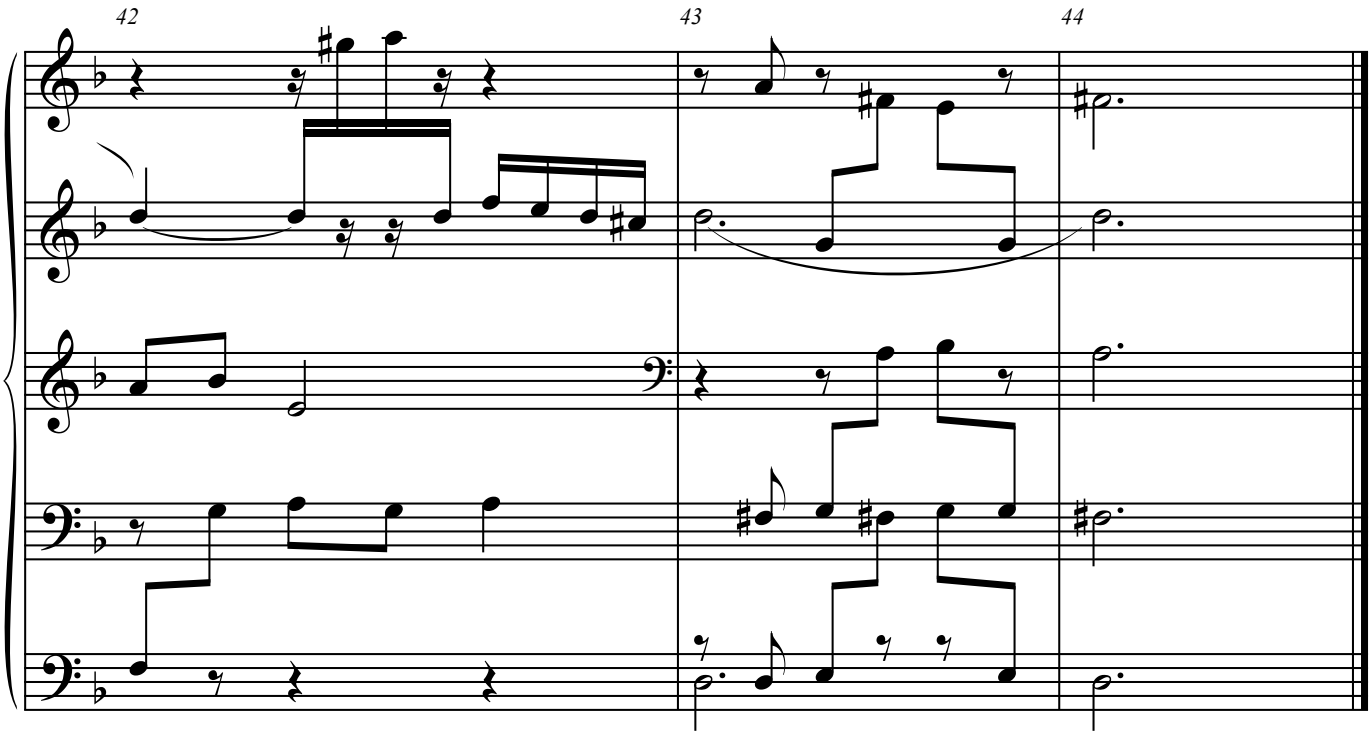
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