Passacaglia and Fugue

J. S. Bach

BWV 582

Arranged by Peter Billam

For Piano Four Hands

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Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor

The *Passacaglia et Thema Fugatum* in c minor, BWV 582, is one of the first fruits of Bach's early mastery. Probably written at Arnstadt, where Bach was from 1703 to 1708, it sythesises its models, Buxtehude, Reinken, and the French style, but far surpasses them in dramatic intensity, in vigour, in its ability to affect and excite.

Johann Sebastian Bach was appointed in 1703 as organist of the new Wender organ in the *Neue Kirche* (now called the *Bachkirche*), giving him for the first time in his life free access to a fine modern organ. It would have been tuned at about A = 465, a semitone above modern concert pitch, probably in Werckmeister temperament.

The passacaglia owes debts to Buxtehude's ostinato works, notably to his Passacaglia in d minor BuxWV 161. In mid-October 1705 Bach walked the 400 kilometers from Arnstadt to Lübeck to visit Buxtehude, then 68 years old; he only had permission to be absent for four weeks, but he stayed sixteen weeks, probably returning during January 1706. Probably Bach wrote his Passacaglia and Fugue afterwards, as he absorbed his experience. The Passacaglia has twenty variations. The cantus firmus moves to the soprano voice in bar 88, becomes florid at bar 104, dissolves at bar 112 and returns in triumph at bar 128.

For the fugue, the passacaglia theme is divided into two halves, the first half of which enters in the alto, and the second of which, set in quavers, is its contersubject in the tenor. The fugue borrows Reinken's "permutation fugue" idea, in which each voice enters with the same series of subjects and countersubjects. So when the soprano enters in g minor in bar 174, the alto moves to the first countersubject in quavers and the tenor to a second countersubject in semiquavers; when the bass enters in c minor in bar 181, the tenor becomes free counterpoint. The voices rotate themes again at bar 186 in g minor and bar 192 in c minor.

The Passacaglia and Fugue is a summit of the organ repertoire; but there is also an important tradition of playing it on stringed keyboard instruments. The manuscript, which according to Albert Schweizer vanished in the mid-1800's, was apparently headed *Cembalo e pedale*, and Schweizer opined that it was *in erster Linie für das Cembalo mit Pedal und erst in zweiter für die Orgel geschrieben* (in Ernest Newman's translation, "was written in the first place for the cembalo with pedal, and later arranged for the organ"). Such instruments are rare these days, but Jakob Adlung, in *Musica Mechanica Organoedi* (1768), describes clavichords and harpsichords with pedals like an organ pedal-board. They would have been used mainly for practising organ pieces. Bach did possess three of these, and according to Forkel, Bach "like to improvise on a two-manual clavier with pedal".

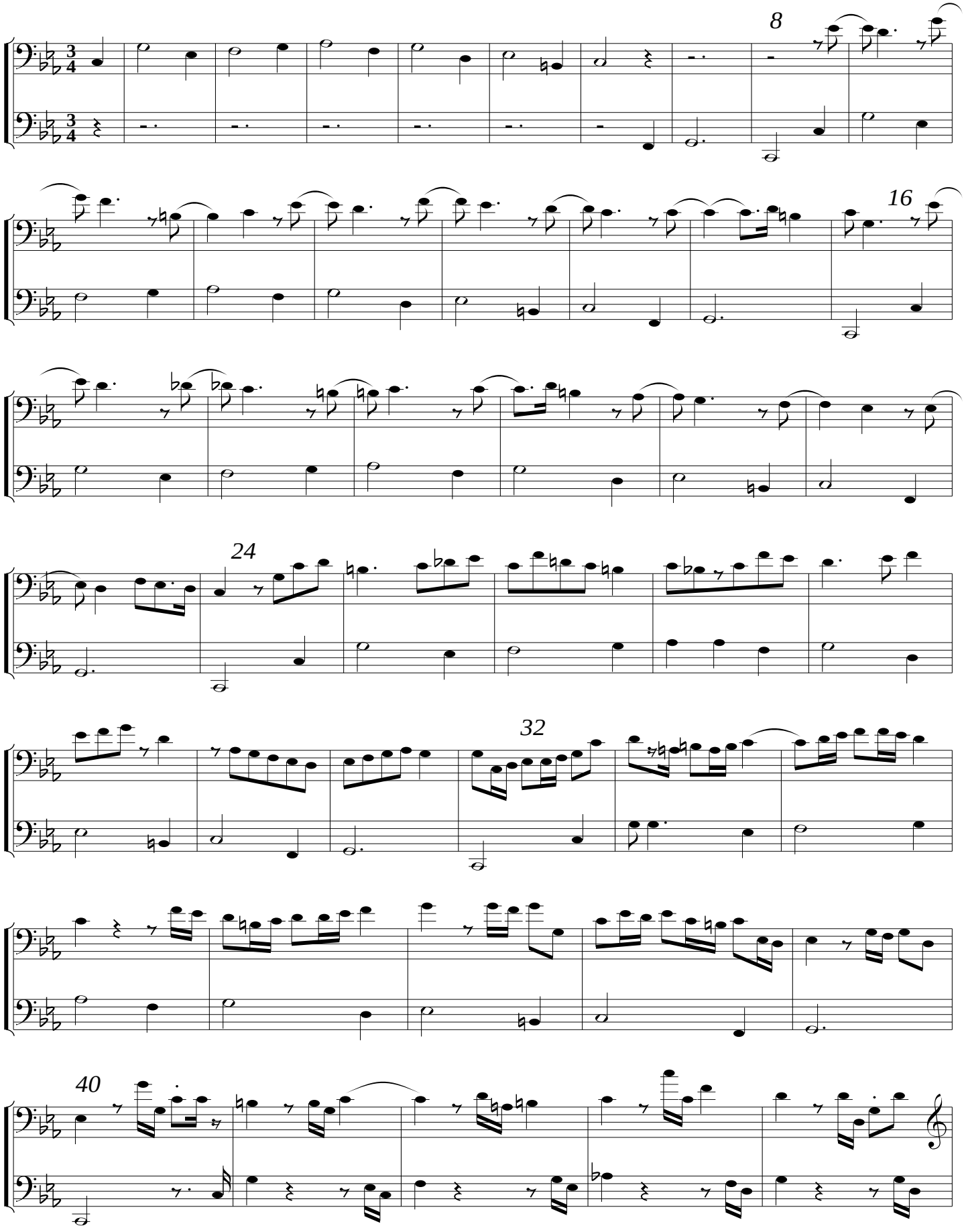
Marcel Dupré suggests 60 crochets per minute for both the Passacaglia and the Fugue. The american organist E. Power Biggs has recorded the Passacaglia on a harpsichord with pedals (made by John Challis); he suggests "The music seems equally at home in the sonority of strings or pipes, and it assumes a different individuality in each. The harpsichord, perhaps, allows greater rhythmic suppleness and more tempo contrasts between variations". He takes the Fugue at about 76 crochets per minute, and most of the Passacaglia around 66; the variations at bars 40, 72, 96, 112 and 120 he takes around 52, that at bar 144 slower still at around 44, and the running variations at 80 and 88 much faster at around 100 crochets per minute. He uses *inégale* quavers from bar 24 and semiquavers from bars 40 and 112. In addition, each variation is shaped with its own arc, moving fastest around its fifth or sixth bar.

The last quaver in bar 164 is usually granted a fermata and followed by a dramatic pause. Bach writes the upbeat to the Fugue, the middle C in bar 168, into the final chord of the Passacaglia; this note is often re-taken, in the tempo of the Fugue, after the end of the chord.

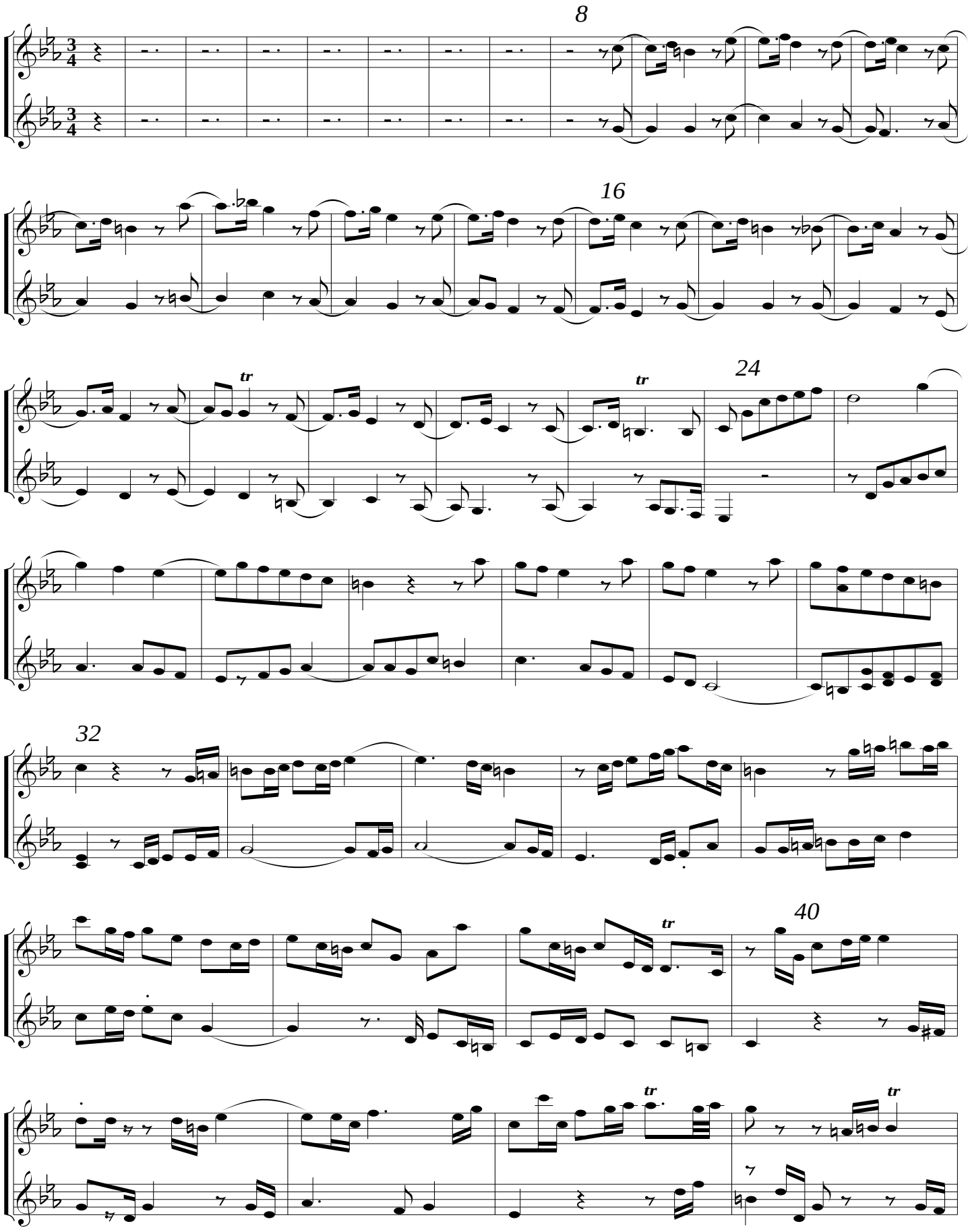
The aim of this arrangement for piano four hands is to make this music available to piano players, and to make it as practical to sight-read as possible, to minimise the time spent in working out details. The typical four-part texture is shared with two parts to each player; this divides the organ manual parts between the two players. Sometimes this makes the voice-leading less clear, but the original for organ can always be consulted. Some thought has been given to feasible page turns. Some registration decisions, such as adding octaves, have been made, and conflicts between parts have been resolved.

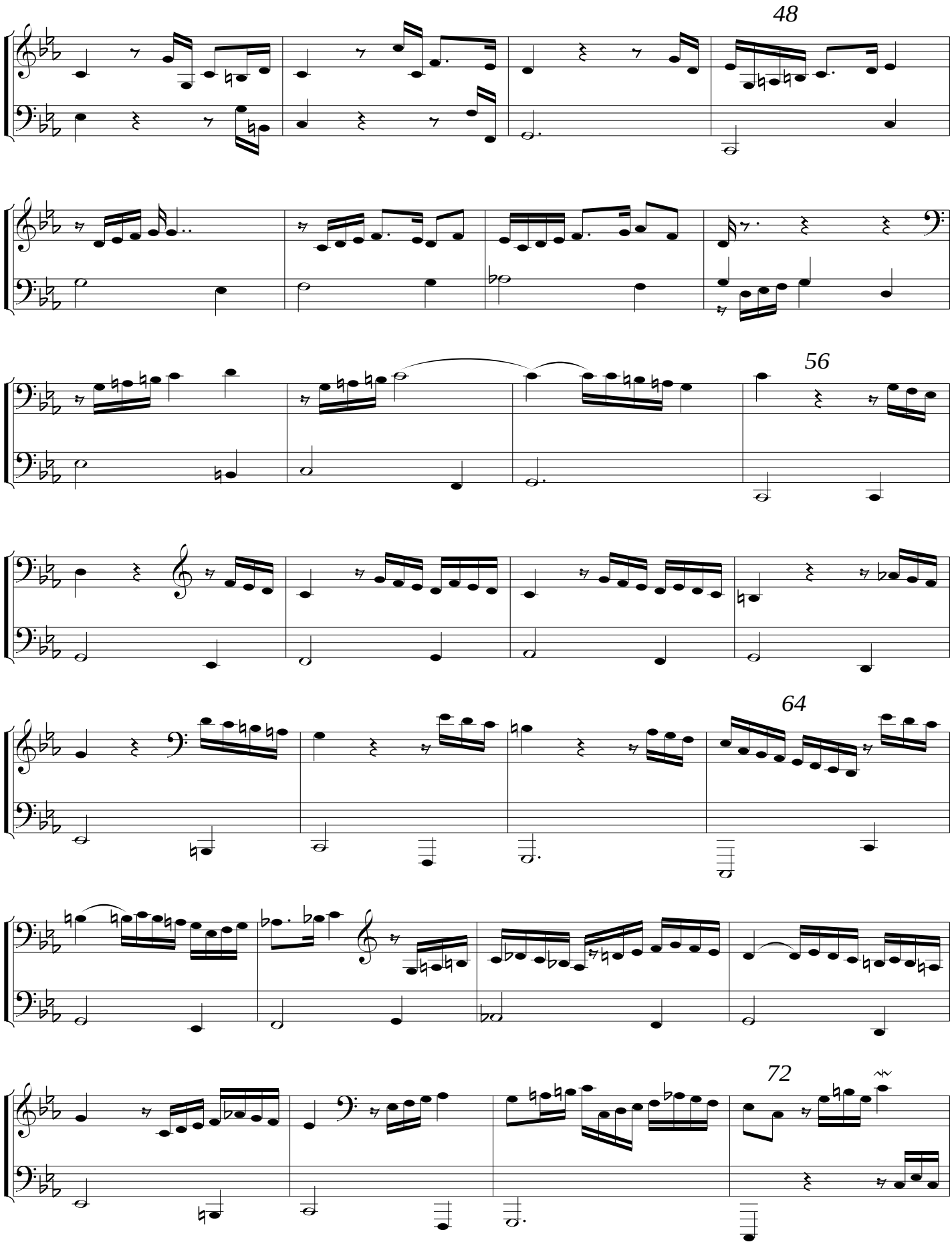
Peter J Billam, *www.pjb.com.au*

Passacaglia and Fugue



Passacaglia and Fugue

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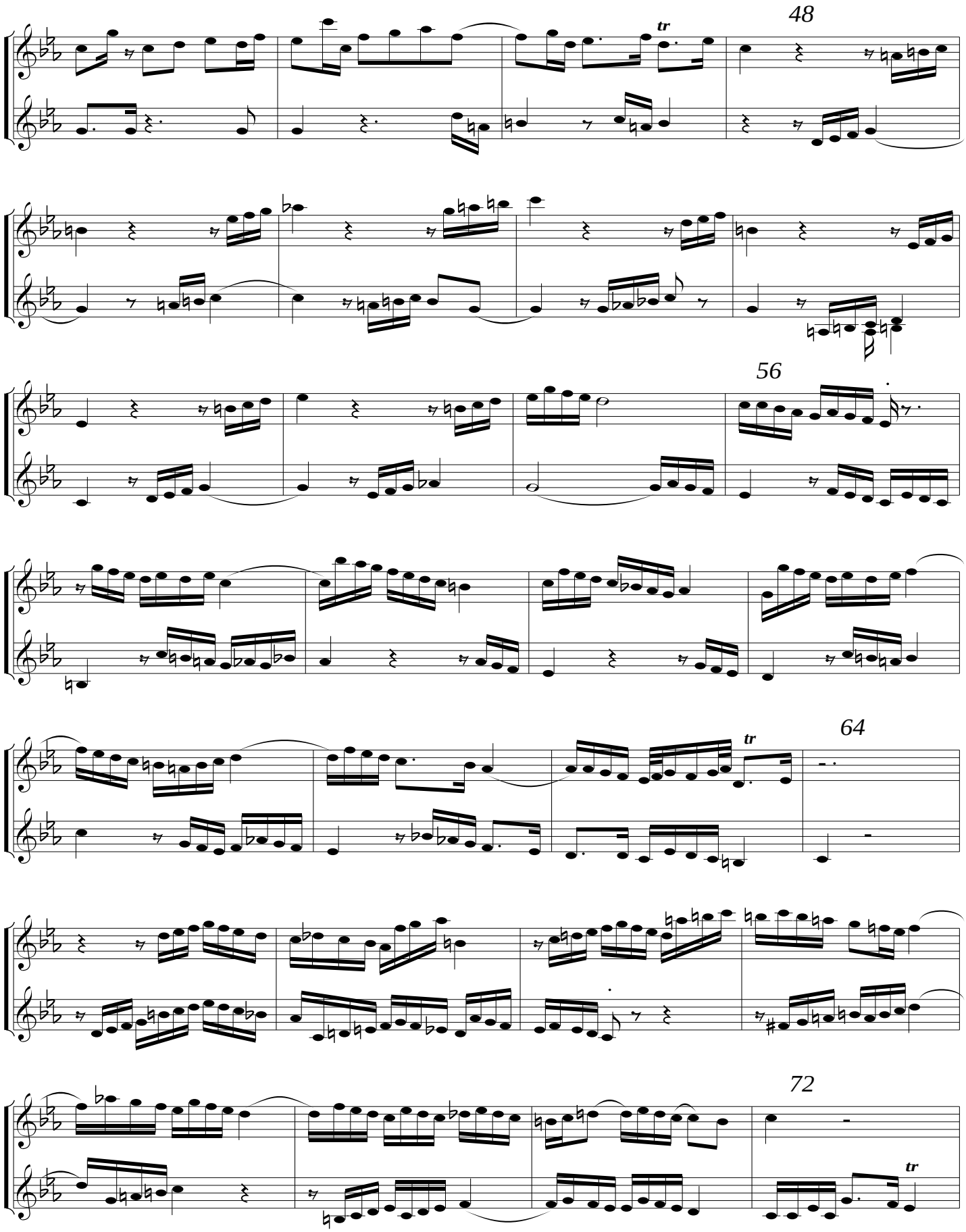
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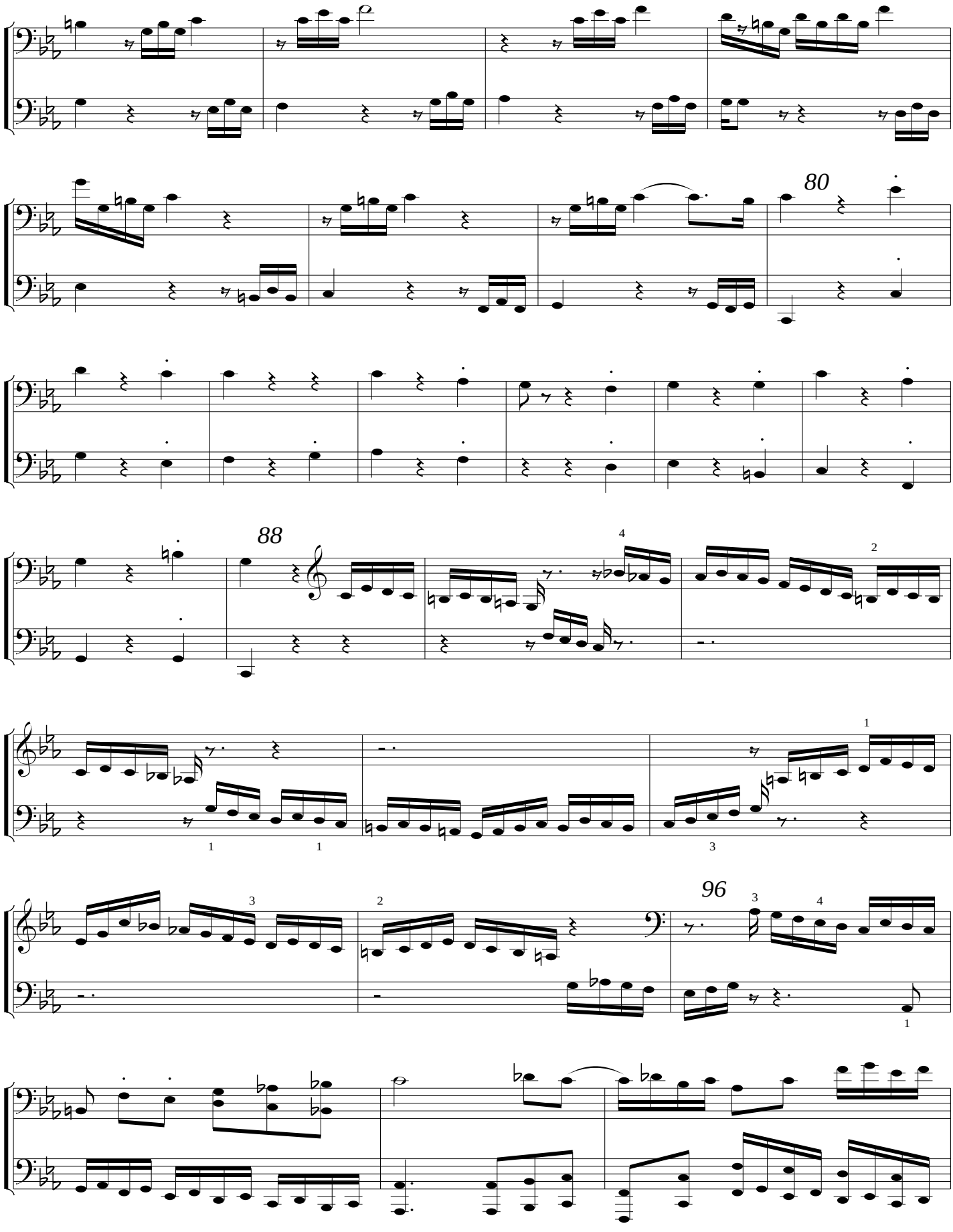
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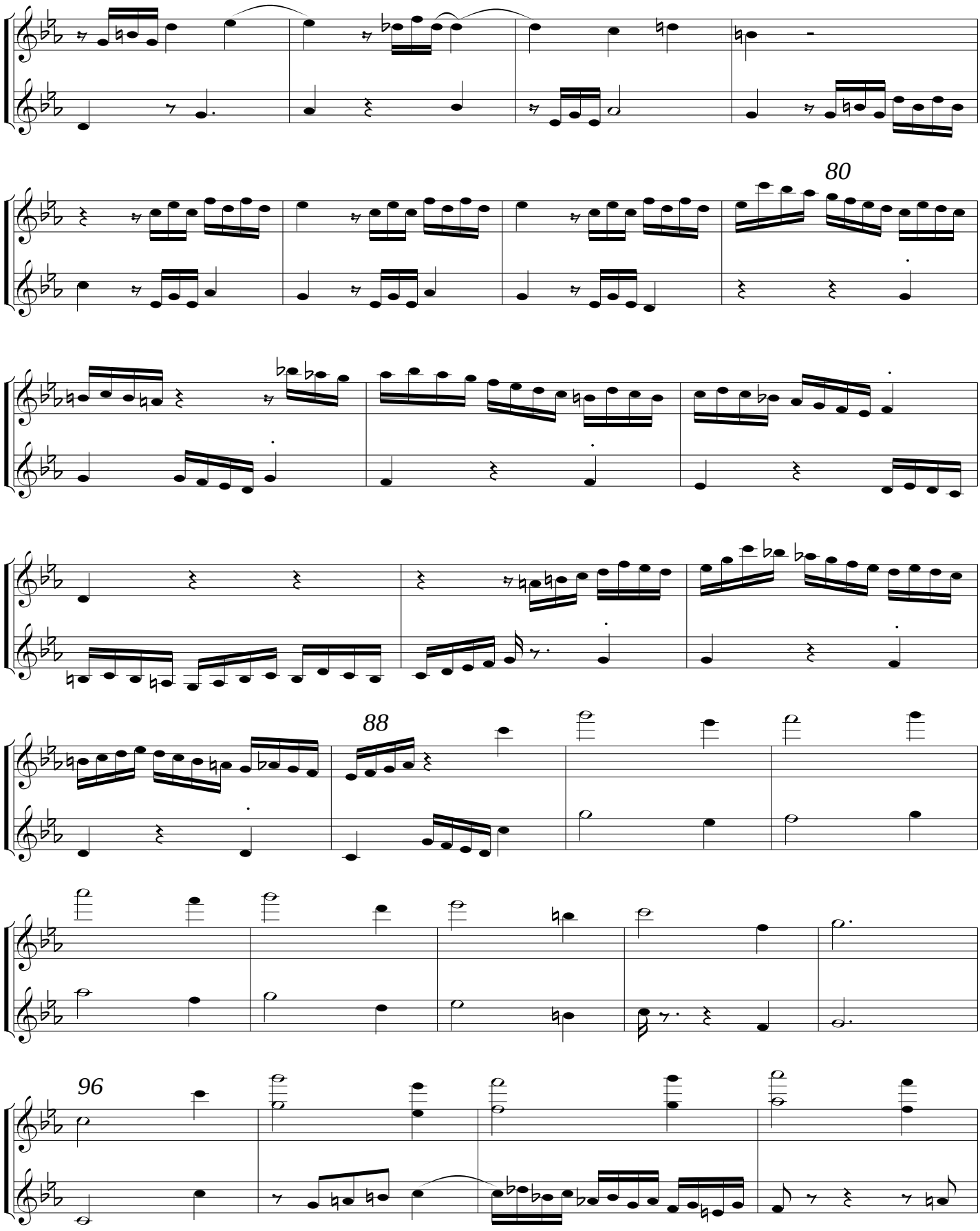
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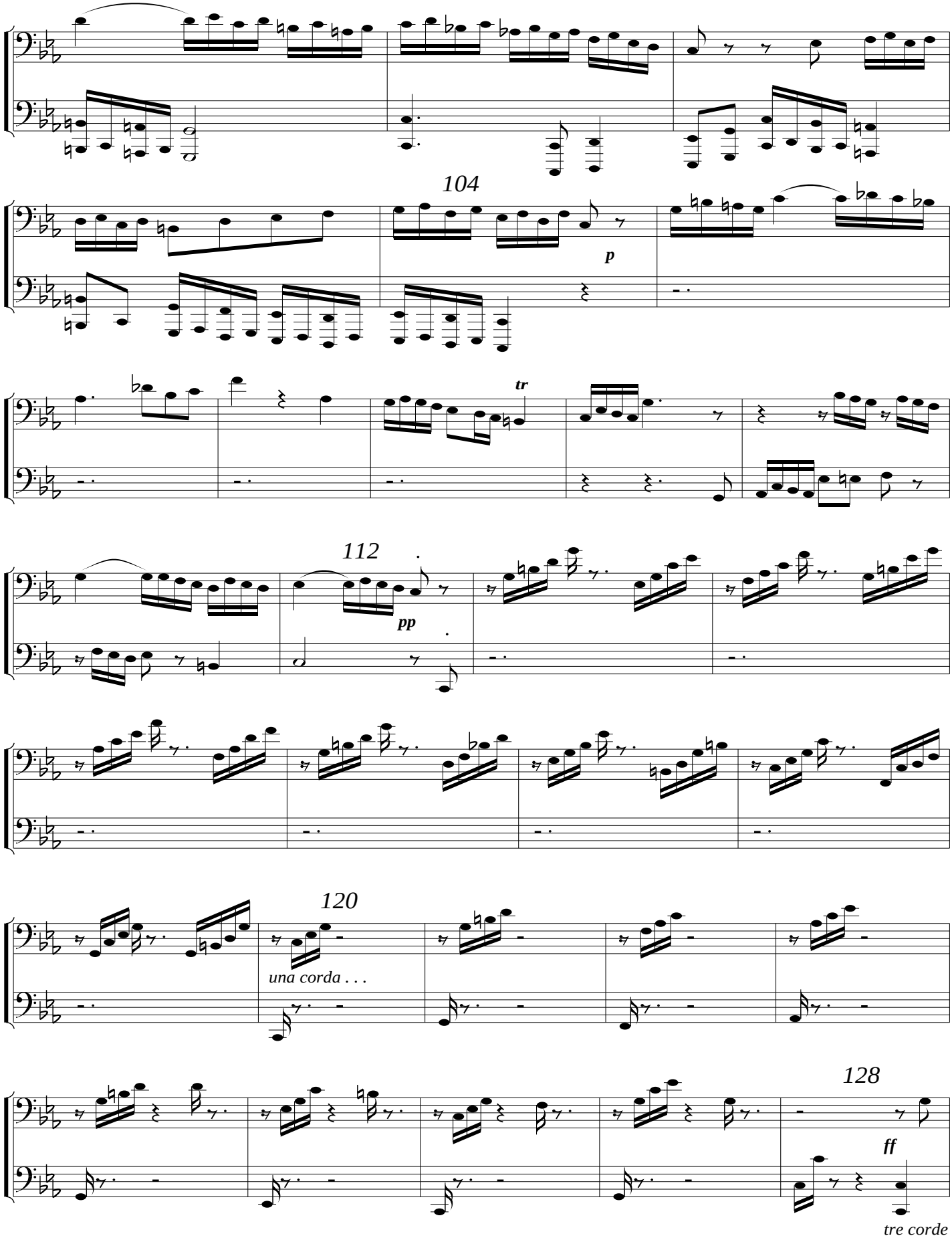
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112
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120
una corda . . .
128
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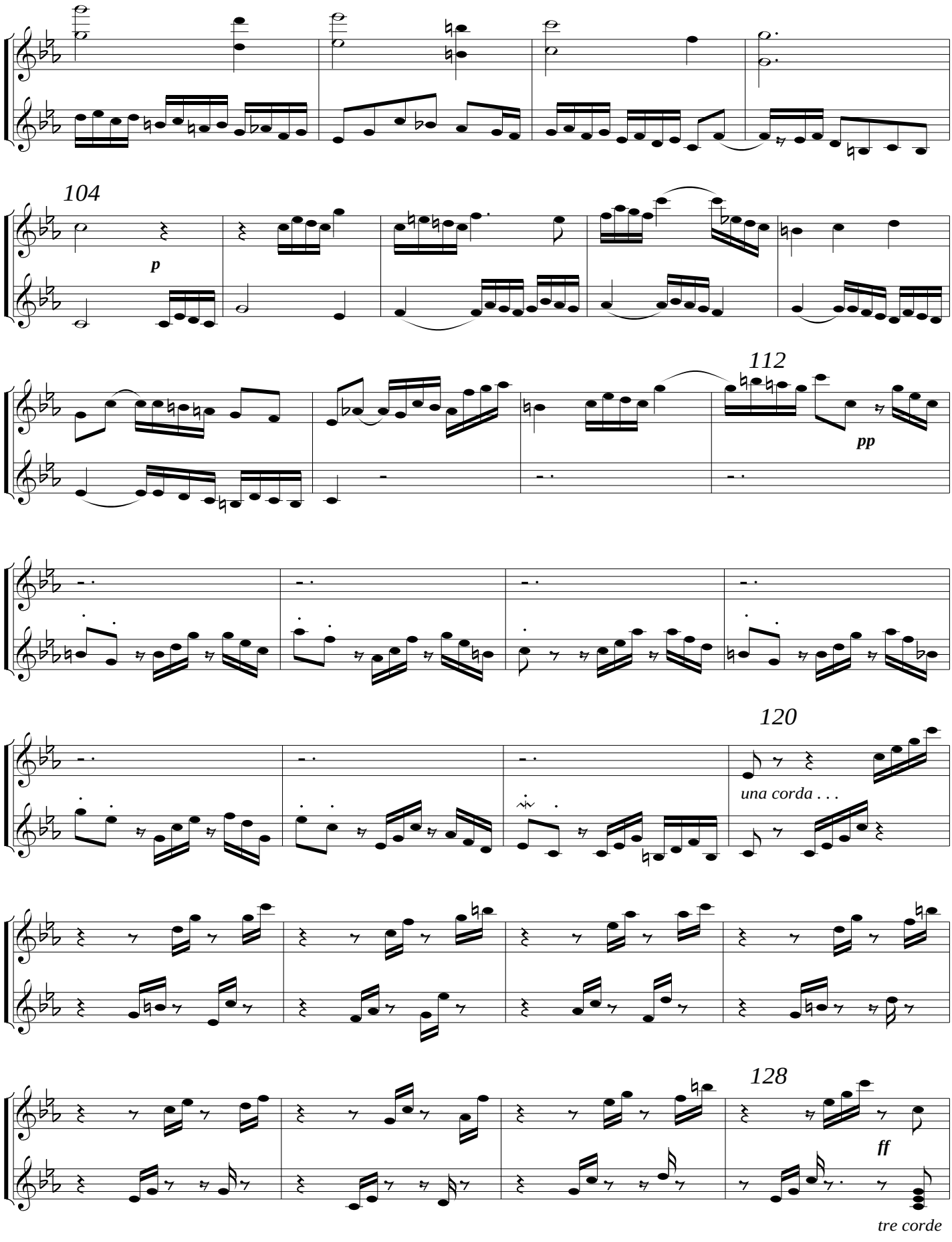
tre corde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una corda . . .
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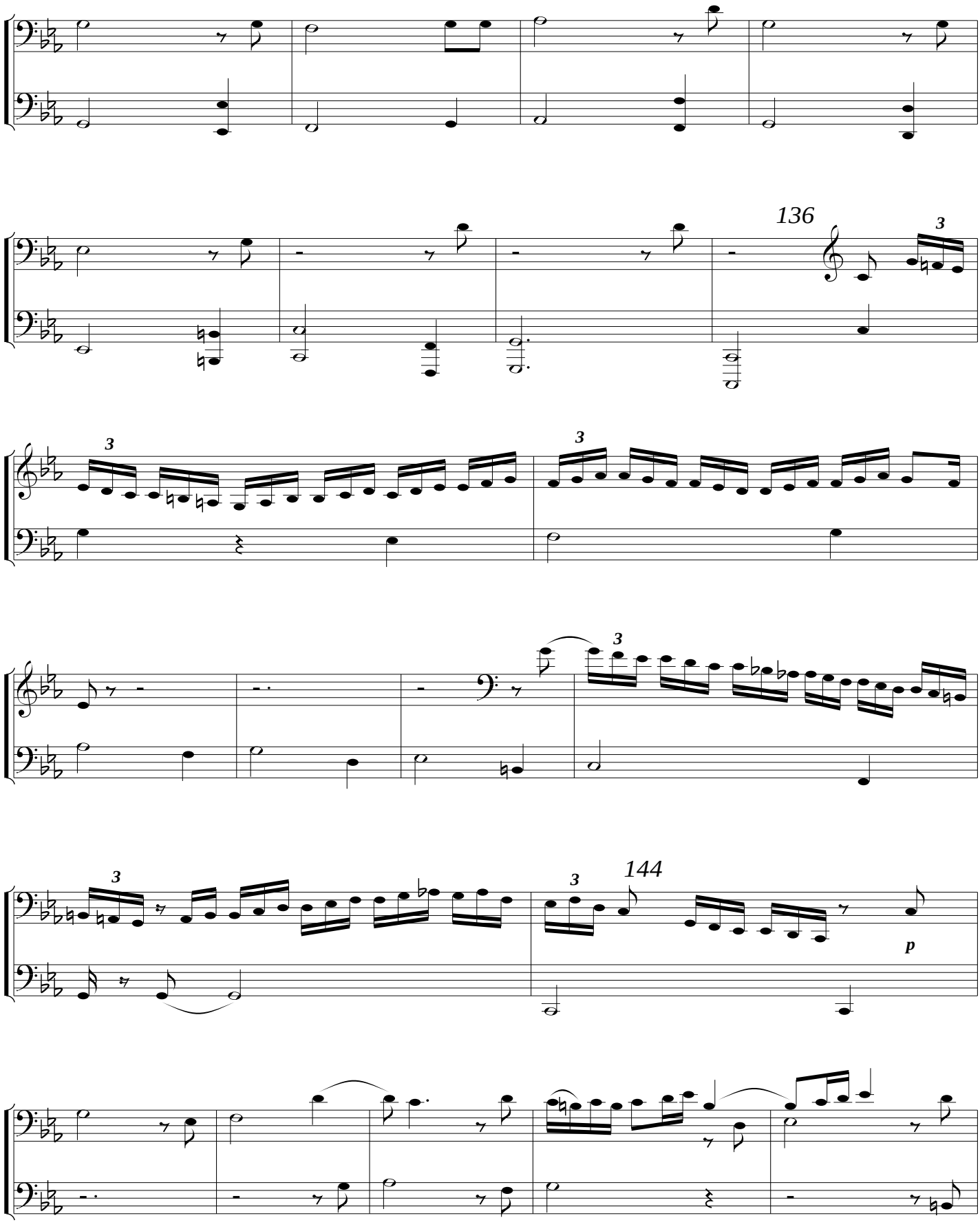
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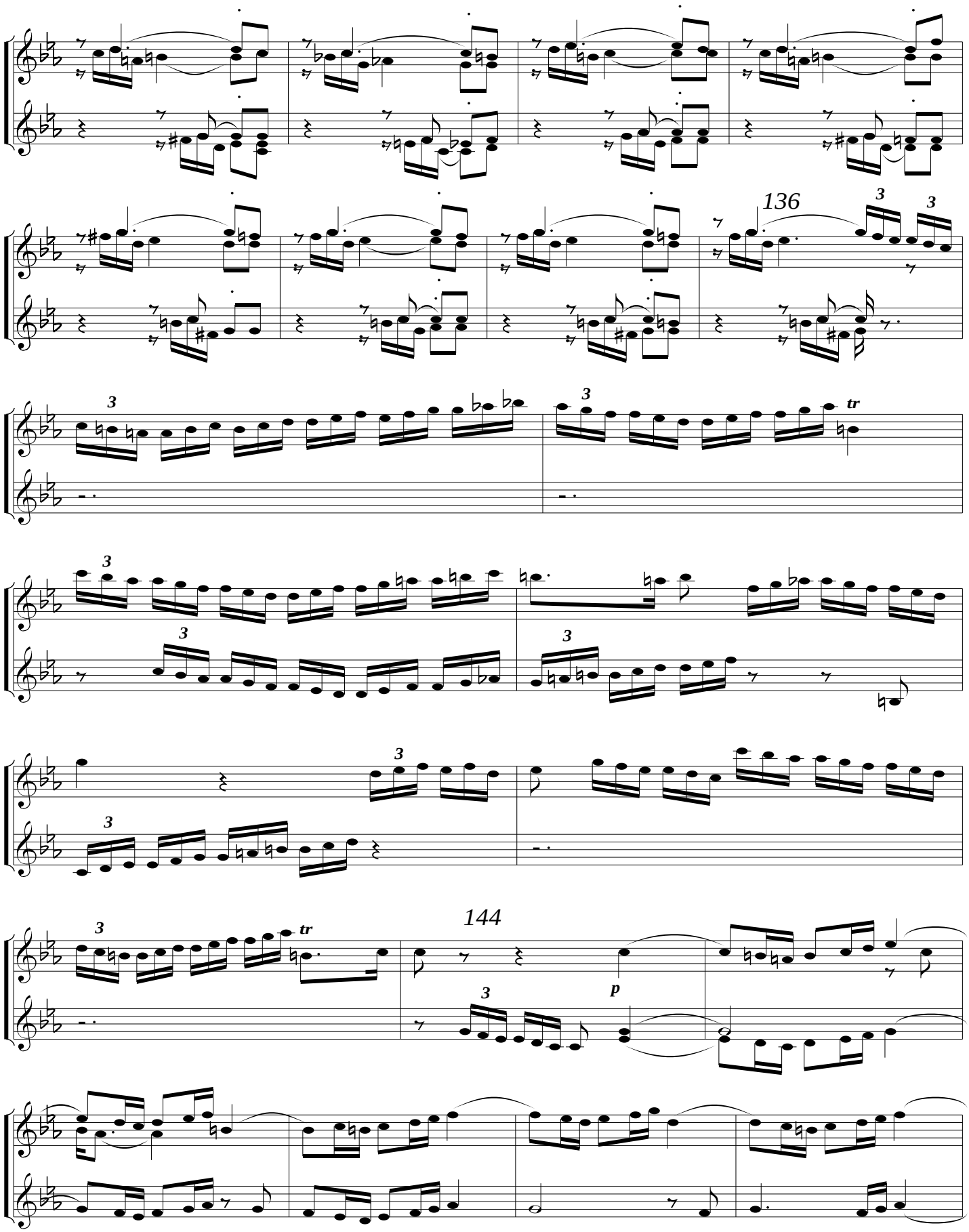
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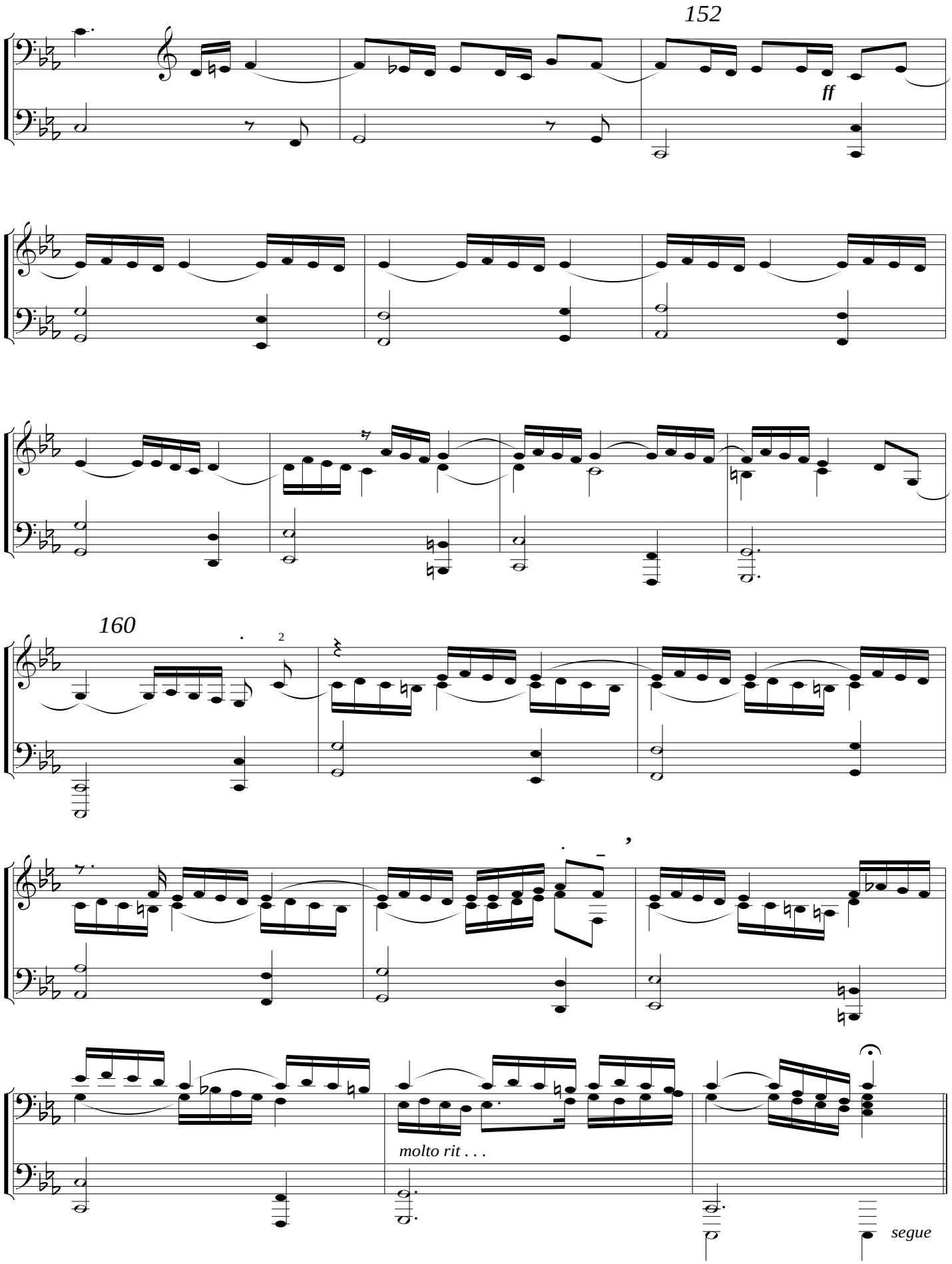
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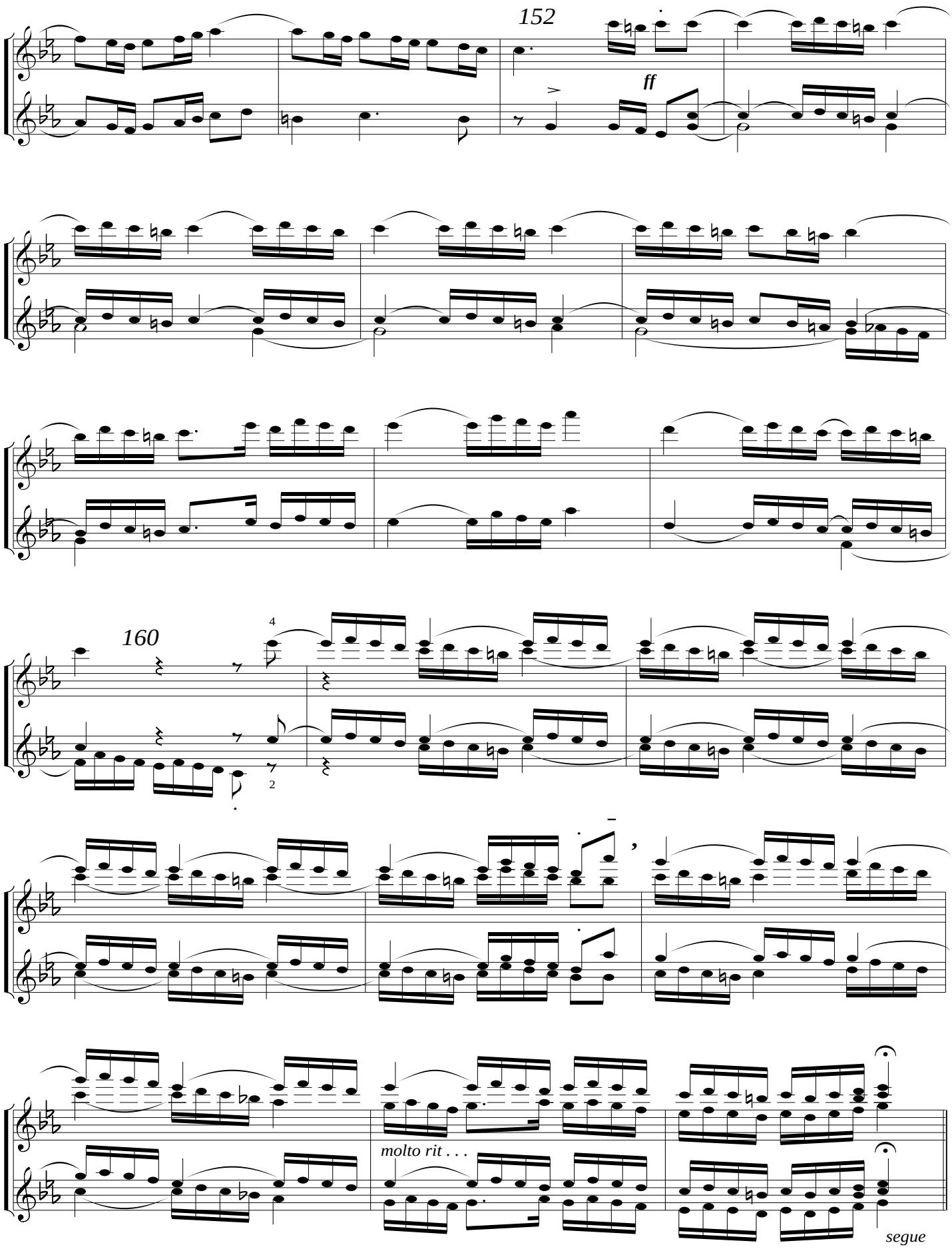
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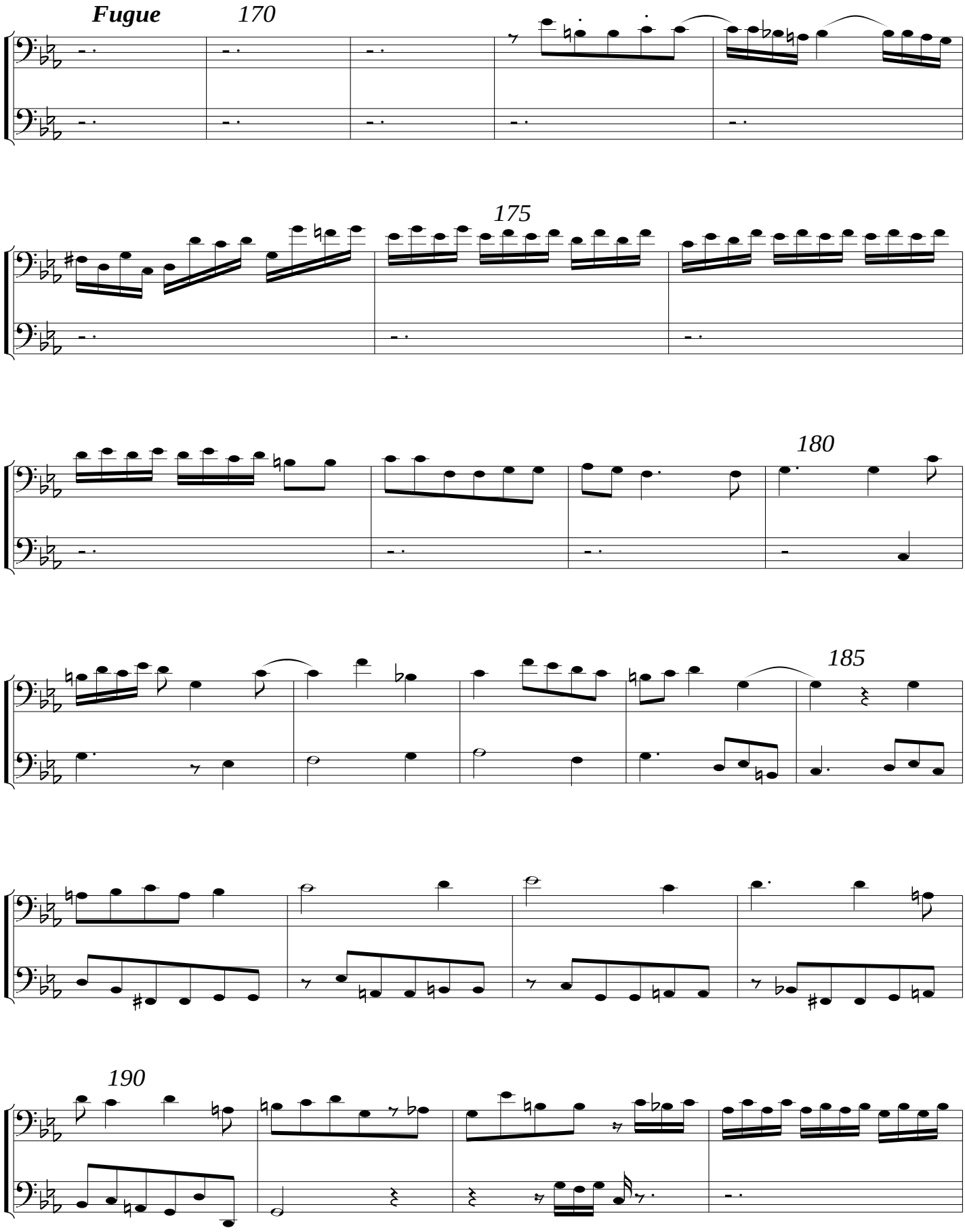
Fugue
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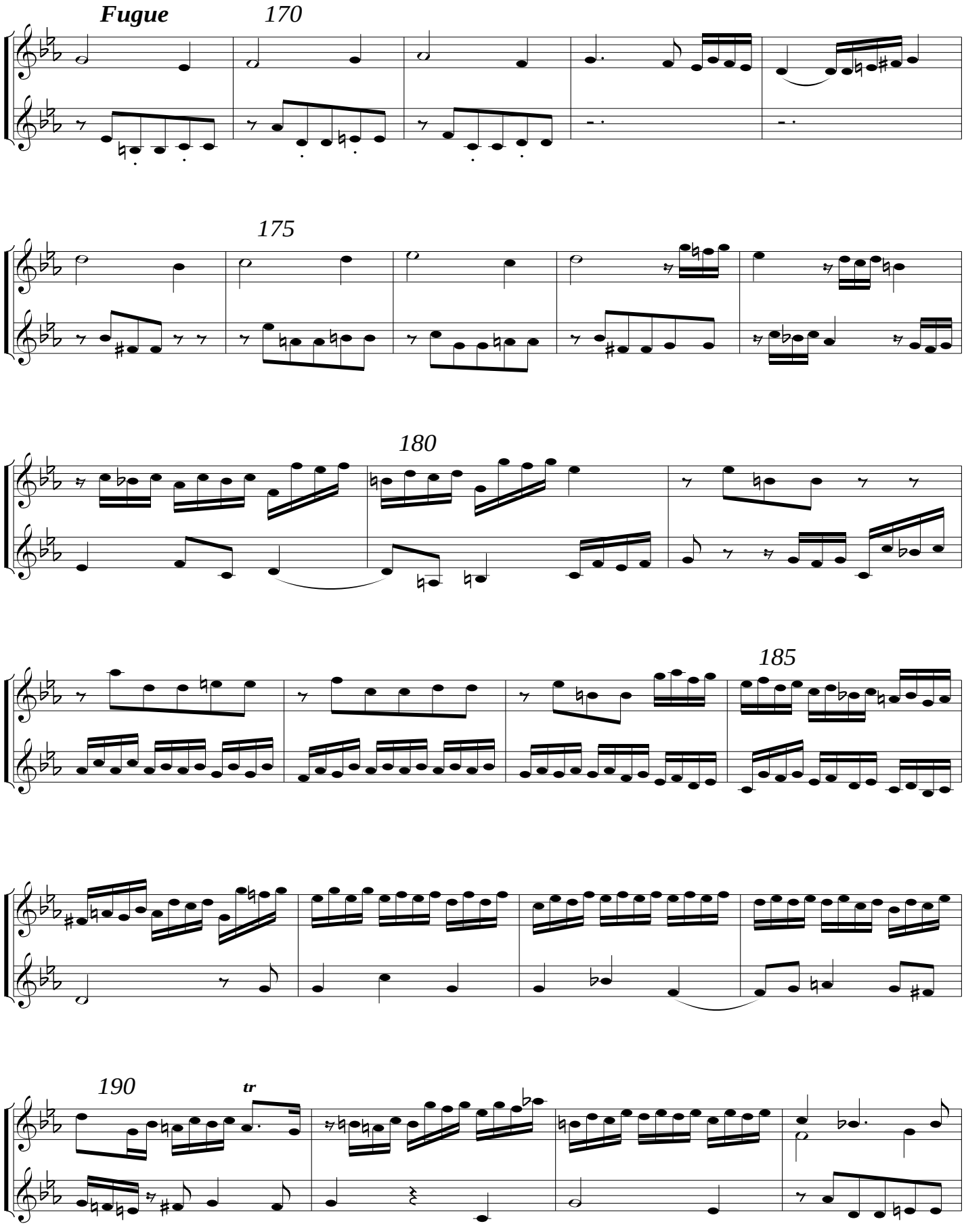
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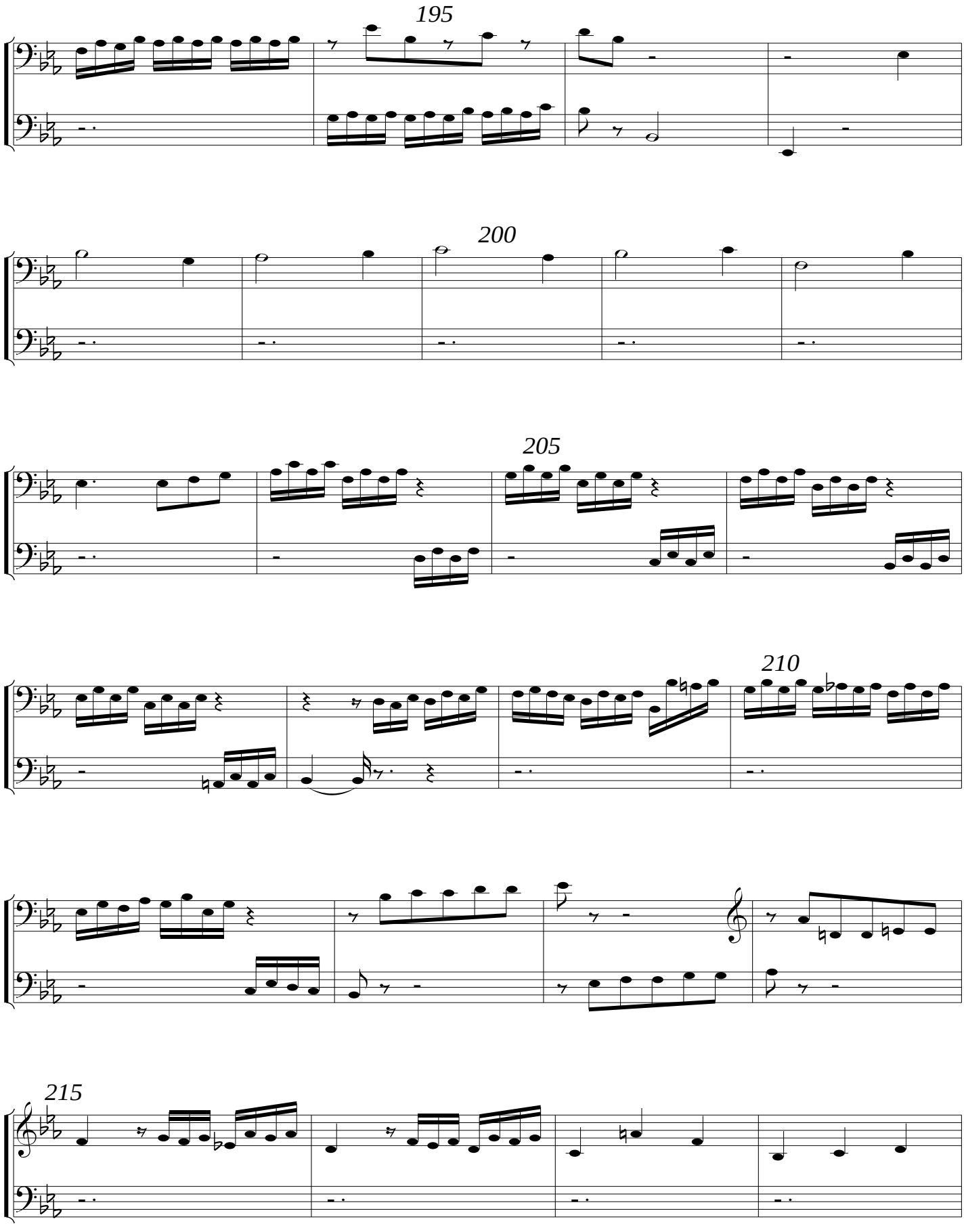
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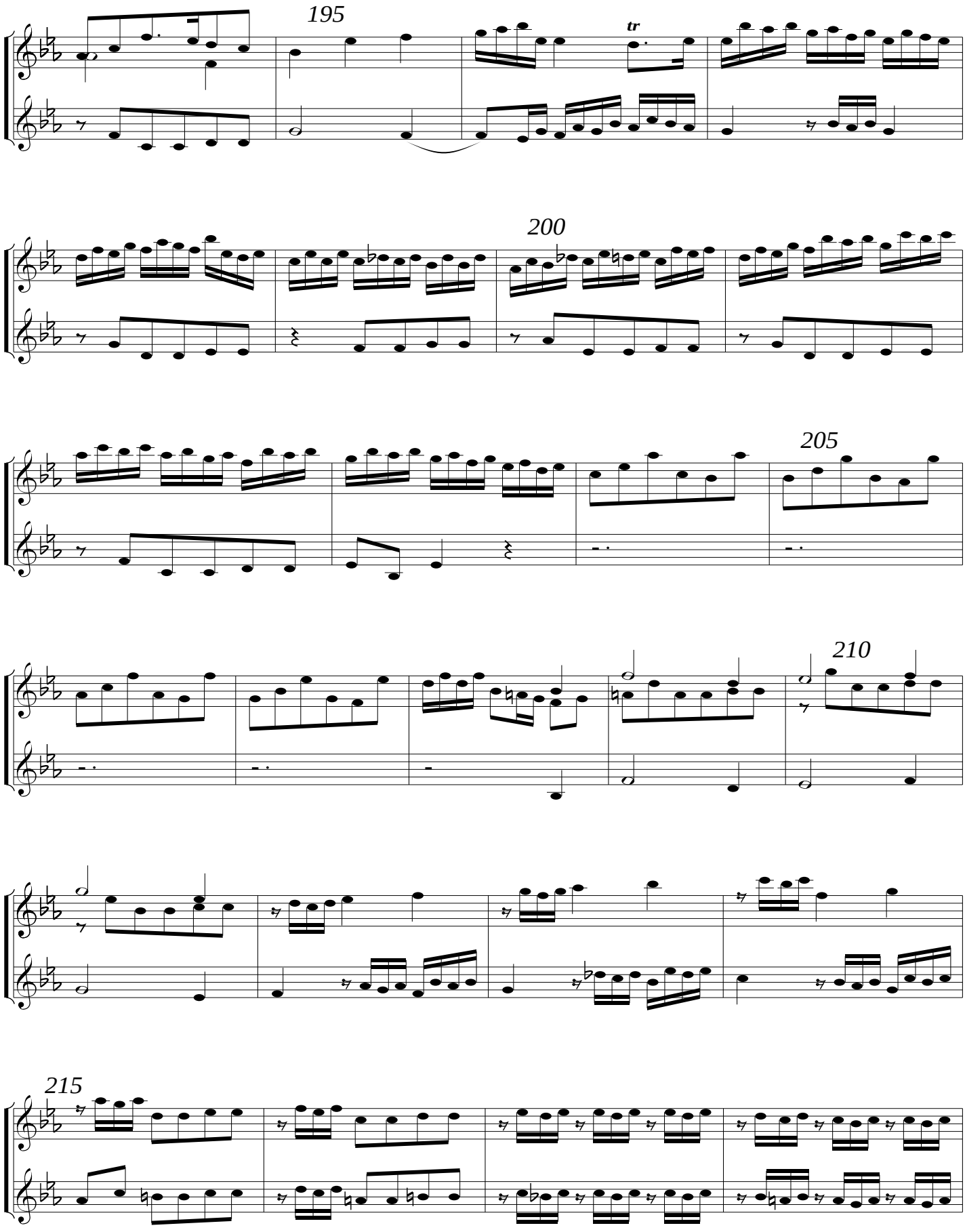
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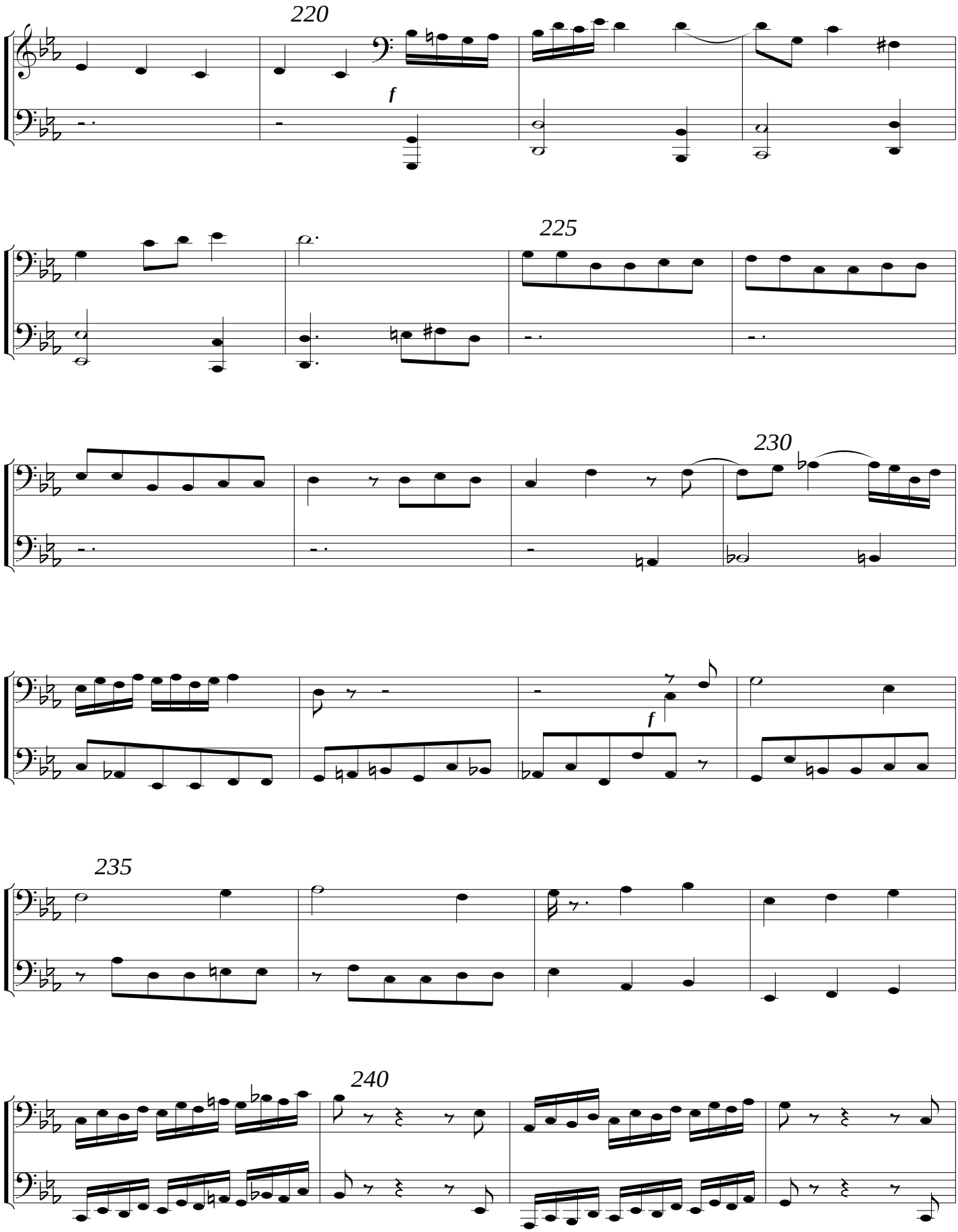
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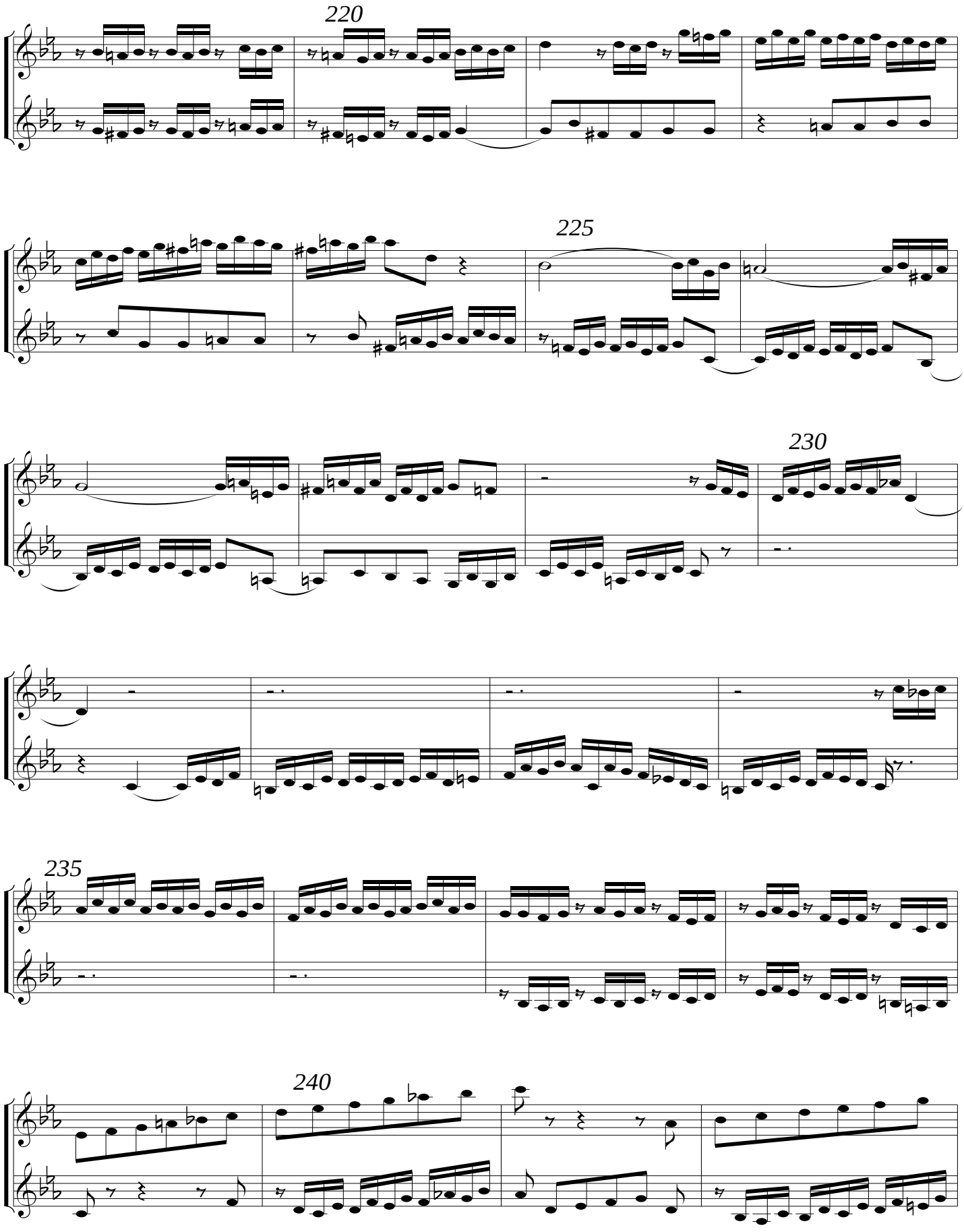
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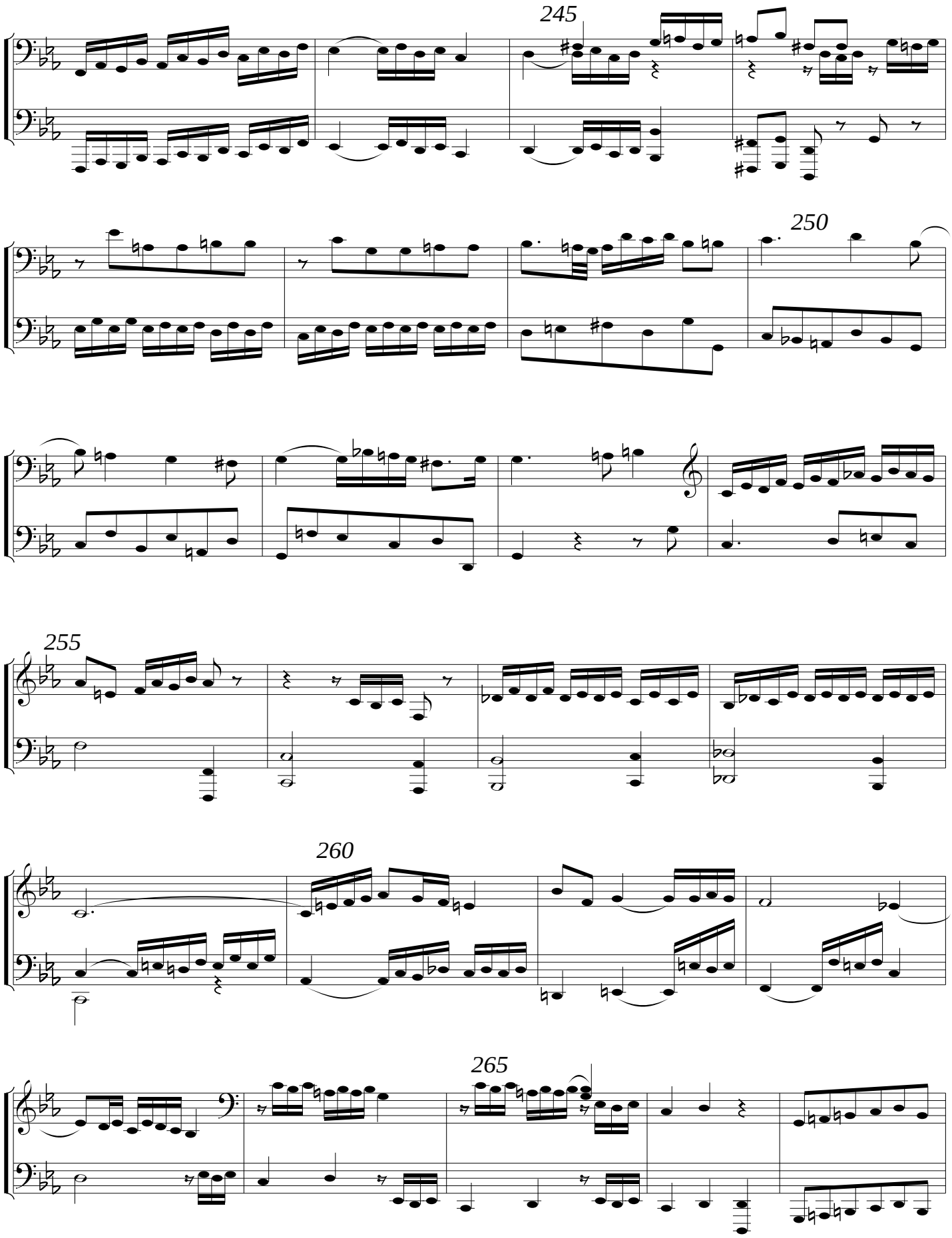
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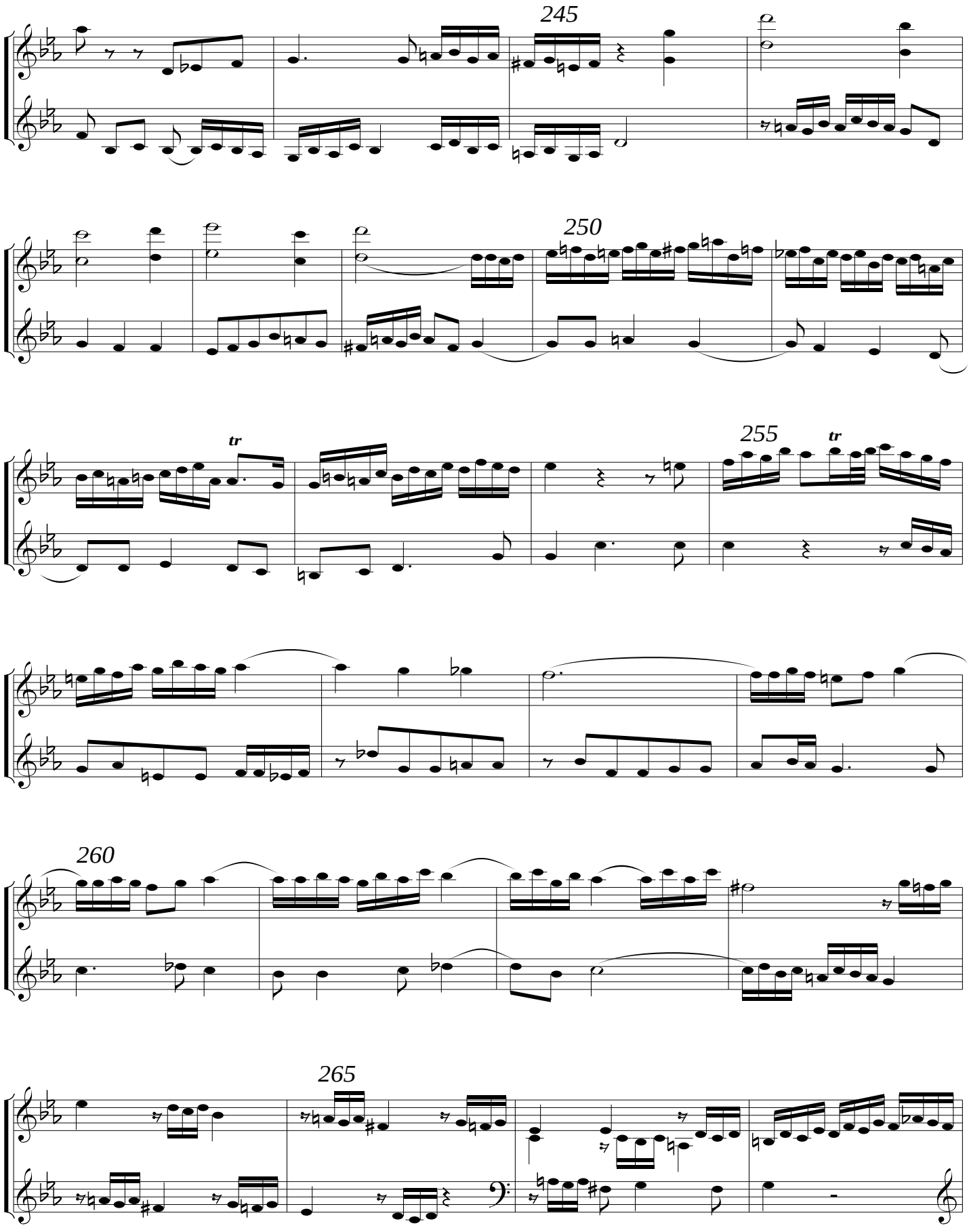
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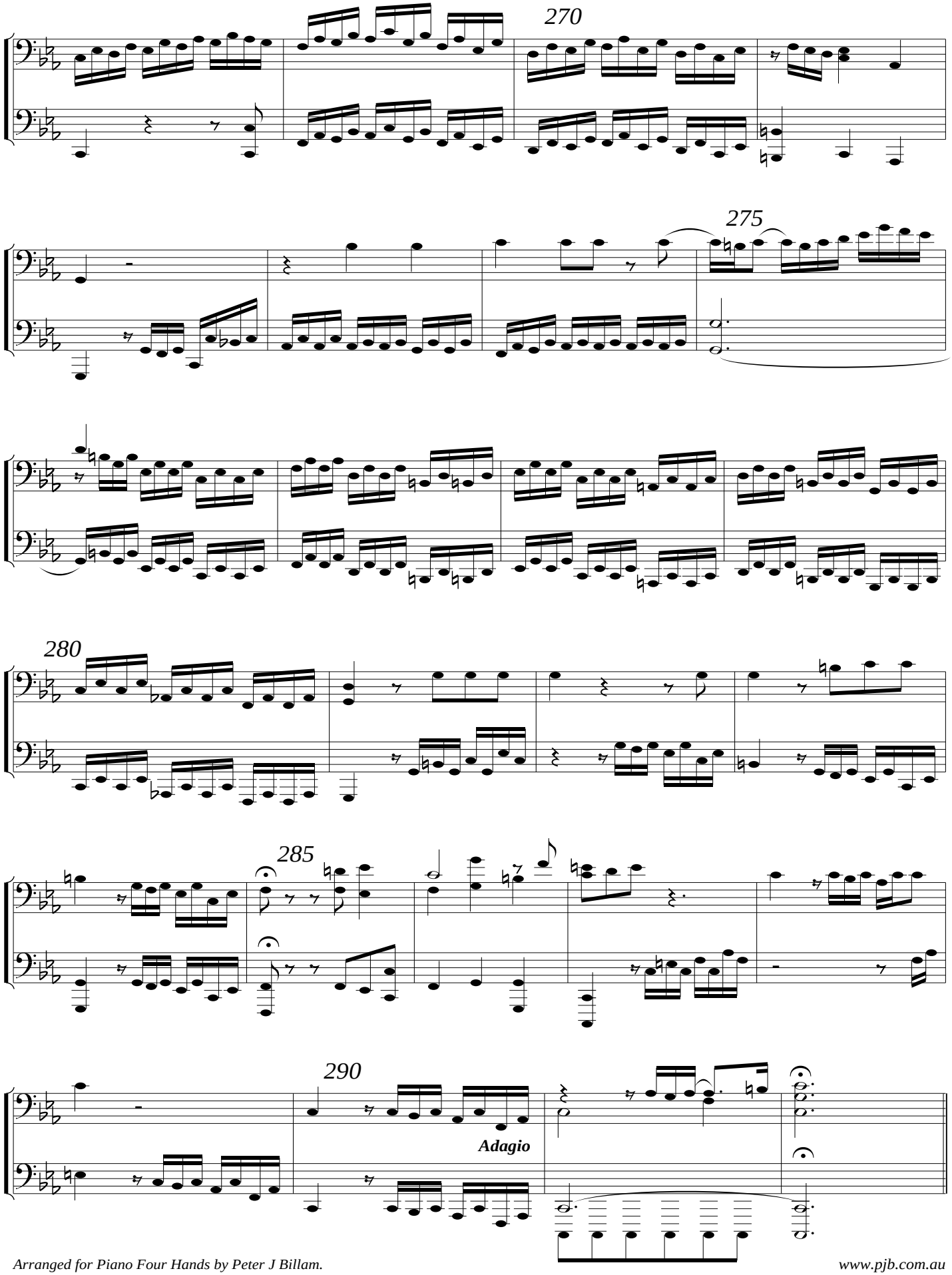
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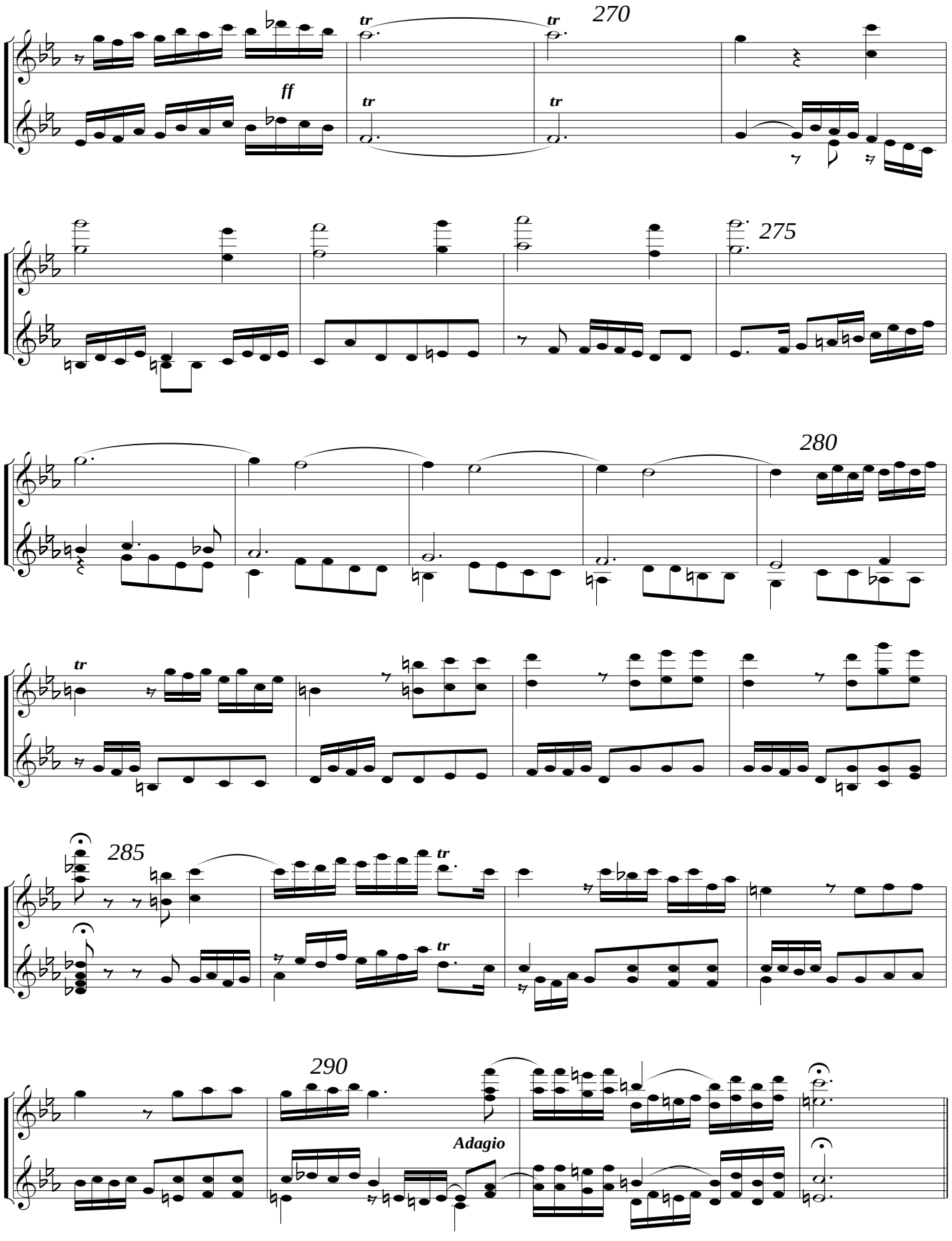
Adagio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Adagio

Peter Billam was born in London in 1948, studied piano, and lived in Switzerland from 1973 to 1983, where he studied composition, classical guitar, flute and voice, worked as Musical Director of the *Théâtre Populaire Romand*, and as recording engineer, record producer and computer programmer. He moved to Tasmania in 1983, and lectured in composition at the Conservatorium. He founded **www.pjb.com.au**, becoming the first composer to sell scores on-line, taking scores from Composer to Performer in one immediate step. *Www.pjb.com.au* offers a new approach to music publishing. These pieces are **written to be read, made to be played !**

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Arrangements include: By J. S. Bach: *Trio BWV 655*, piano and flute; *Vor deinen Thron BWV 668*, piano; *Fugue in F minor BWV 689*, SATB recorders; *Four Duets BWV 802-5*, keyboard; *Six Preludes and Fugues* from Book I, keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1031* transposed into G major for alto recorder and keyboard; *Flute Sonata BWV 1032* completed by Peter Billam for flute and keyboard, also in C major for alto recorder, and in G major for descant; *Ricercare a 3, from the Musikalisches Opfer* for keyboard; *Ricercare a 6*, for sSATBG recorders, or strings, or two keyboards; and *Fuga Canonica in Epidiapente*; from the *Art of Fugue*: *Contrapuncti 1*, *4* and *9* for keyboard, and *Contrapunctus 14* as completed by D. F. Tovey, for keyboard, or for SATB recorders, or for strings; *Passacaglia and Fugue in c* for piano four hands; *Chorales with Descant* for melody instrument and piano; *Cello Suites I*, *II* and *III* for flute or alto recorder, *Forty Chorales* for piano, *Der Geist hilft* for SATB-SATB recorders. By Brahms: *Fugue in Ab minor for organ*, for SATB recorders and gamba, in A minor; *Choralvorspiele for organ* plus settings by Isaac, Bach, Praetorius, recorders. *John Carr, Divisions on an Italian Ground*, flute or recorder and guitar. Franz Liszt, *Late piano pieces*, G.F. Händel: *Concerto Grosso in A minor* op 6 no 4, harpsichord and recorders; *Recorder Sonata in Bb* no 5, in G for tenor recorder and keyboard. Claudio Monteverdi, *Ecco Mormorar l'Onde*, SSATB recorders. Arnold Schoenberg: *Verklärte Nacht* for piano. Franz Schubert: *Four Songs*, voice and guitar; *Dances*, recorders and guitar, *Dances*, piano 4 hands. Scriabin, *Two Preludes op.67; Five Preludes op.74*, piano. Telemann, *Twelve Flute Fantasias*, recorder. Wilbye, *Draw on sweet Night*, SSATTB recorders, and for flute choir. *Twelve Italian Songs*, voice and guitar; *Seven English Songs*, voice and guitar; *Fourteen Folk Dance Tunes*, recorder and guitar; *Bushband Dances*, violin, accordeon and banjo; *Easy Classical Pieces*, Bb trumpet and piano; *Famous Beginnings*, for piano.

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