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Jack-in-the-Bach's Suite

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Jack-in-the Bach's Suite

For Solo Piano

Joe Clark

Op. 53b, No. 2

I. Prelude

II. Allemande

III. Sarabande

IV. Courante

V. Menuet

VI. Gigue

Performance Notes:

The “Prelude” of this Suite was originally conceived as a stand-alone piece based upon the premise of breaking out of a frozen register: that is, a system wherein each pitch class is initially present in only one octave. For instance, the piece beings with the A above middle C, and until the frozen register is broken, the only A present is the one above middle C. I termed the work “Break-Out Toccata”, after the principle of gradually breaking out of the restrictions inherent in the frozen register. At this point, my instructor suggested expanding the Toccata into a multi-movement work. Unbidden, the idea of a Baroque suite came to mind, after the English Suites of Bach. This movement could work as a Prelude or Gigue – and I had been recently interested in Baroque music. Perhaps it wouldn’t bear much actual resemblance to a Bach suite, but it might share some abstract qualities on a very high level. I knew this was an idea I wanted to pursue.

The result is the piece now in front of you. Each movement begins in the same frozen register and breaks out more or less quickly. Although it may not be strictly adhered to for much of the work, its characteristic intervals and sonorities surely continue to exert their influence. This concept gave rise to the title "Jack-in-the-Bach's Suite", welding together the ideas of breaking out and Bach suites. Each movement is named after a Baroque dance found in one of Bach’s English Suites. The only minor change in order, switching the Courante and Sarabande, was made in order to have what I felt was a better balance of “fast” and “slow” movements. As in Bach’s music, any sense of dynamics and articulation is left up to the performer. As this piece is intended for piano – rather than harpsichord – please feel free to make use of the full colors available to you. However, a few general guidelines must be made regarding performance: First, all ornamentation (trills, mordants, and grace notes) should occur before the beat they belong to. Second, the sustain pedal should be used only sparingly (if at all), except where marked.

I. Prelude
This movement opens with a perpetual motion of eighth notes, droning on the A above middle C. Excursions are made from this drone point to gradually introduce all twelve tones of the frozen register that characterizes the work. Overlapping ostinato patterns are developed in the middle section. At the very end, the perpetual motion finally begins to break down, preparing us for the remainder of the piece.

II. Allemande
The Baroque Allemande is characterised by constant sixteenth note motion – which feature I have faithfully reproduced here. Sections of chromatic and tertiary harmony are balanced throughout. The initial flowing melody attempts to reproduce a Baroque-type idea, complete with ornamentation, inside the frozen register. By the end, driving rhythmic accompaniments have transformed it into something rather different.

III. Sarabande
The first time that motion has really slowed down, the Sarabande features subtle changes of color and harmony. The idea of overlapping ostinati from the Prelude returns, as does the idea of a drone – now transferred to a major seventh in the left hand.

IV. Courante
This Courante is perhaps the most Baroque of all the movements in its use of ornamentation and motivic sequencing. However, periodic interruptions keep any would-be dancers on their toes. As stated directly above the movement, all trills are to an upper neighbor one half step above and all mordants are to a lower neighbor one half step below.

V. Menuet
Another “slow” movement, this Menuet is a reflection on mortality. A quote from Saint-Saens’s “Danse Macabre” is evident. More assiduous performers may also locate quotes from Schubert’s “Death and the Maiden” quartet and the “Dies Irae” chant. All arpeggios/rolls should be noticeable but not overdone.

VI. Gigue
The Gigue juxtaposes dissonant tone clusters with a rollicking melody – two disparate elements derived from the same frozen register. Care should be taken to observe the difference between 6/8 and 3/4: especially when the two hands are in different meters. The difference between the two is deliberate and should be brought out.

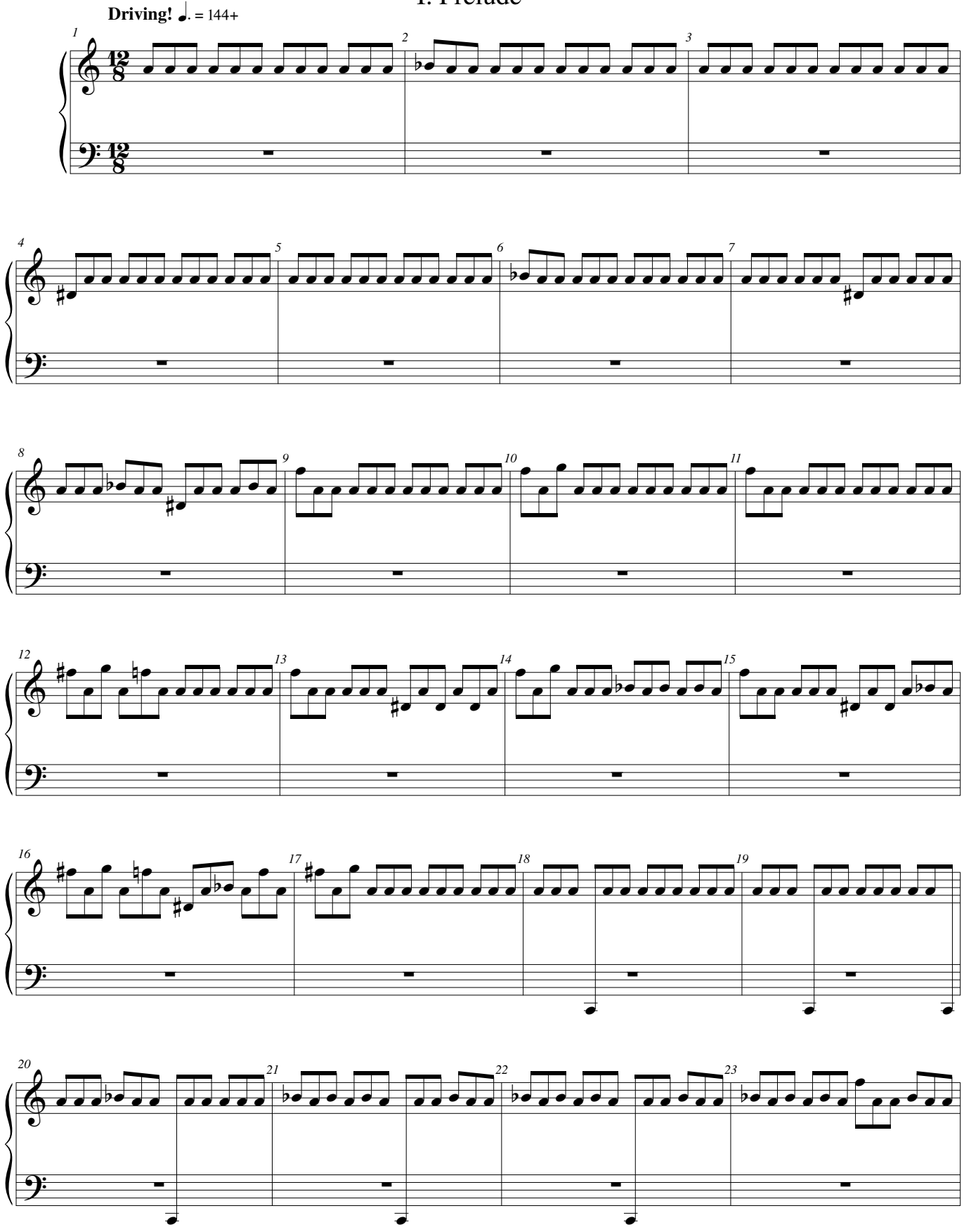
A note on page set-up: As a pianist by avocation, I know full well how irritating it is to have to turn pages. This piece is designed to be printed double-sided to facilitate page turns, with the following exceptions: Page 11 should be printed on the reverse of page 9, with page 10 attached as a fold-out page. Likewise, page 14 should be printed on the reverse of page 12, with page 13 attached as a fold-out page.

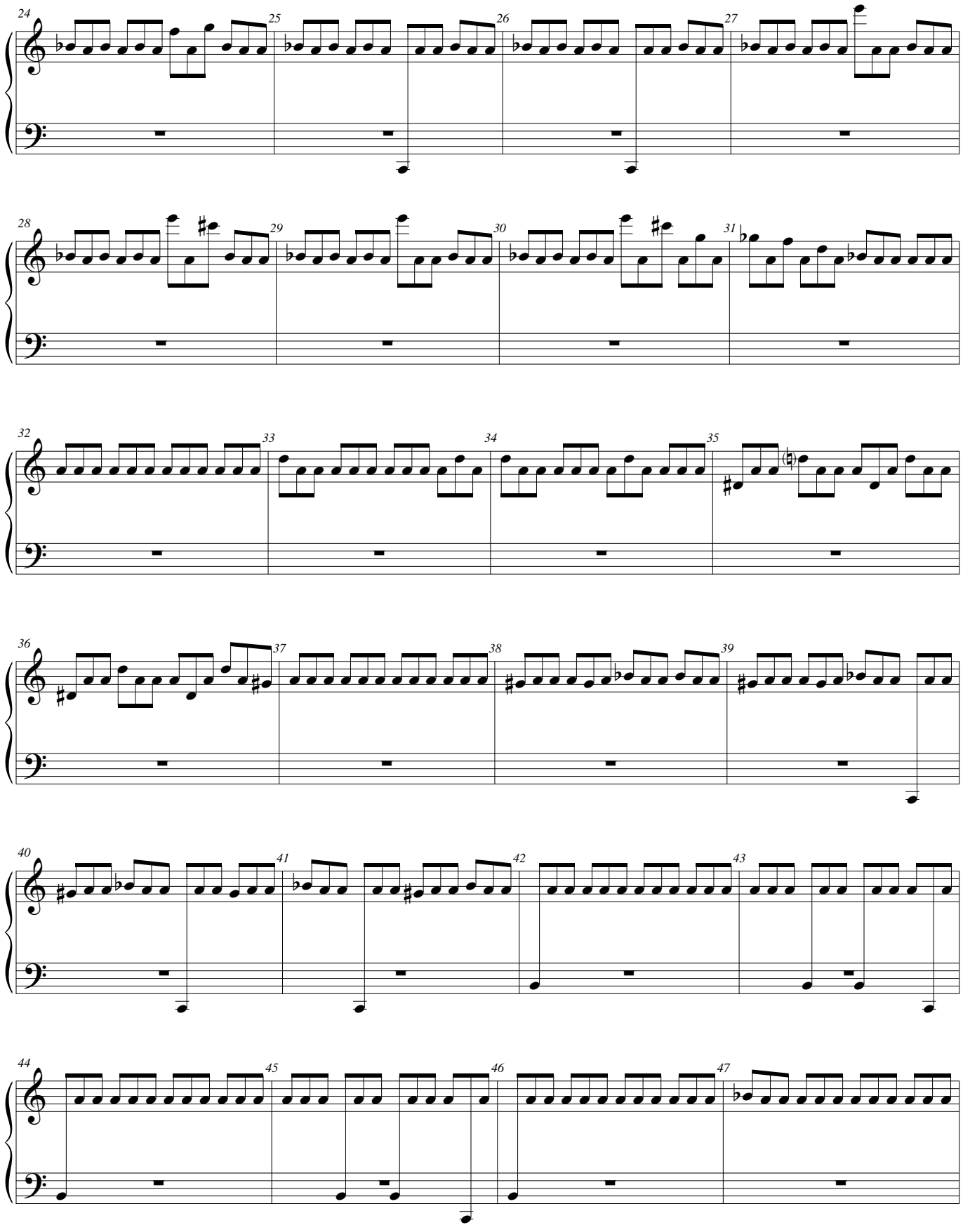
~Joe Clark, 20.04.13

Jack-in-the-Bach's Suite

For Solo Piano

I. Prelude

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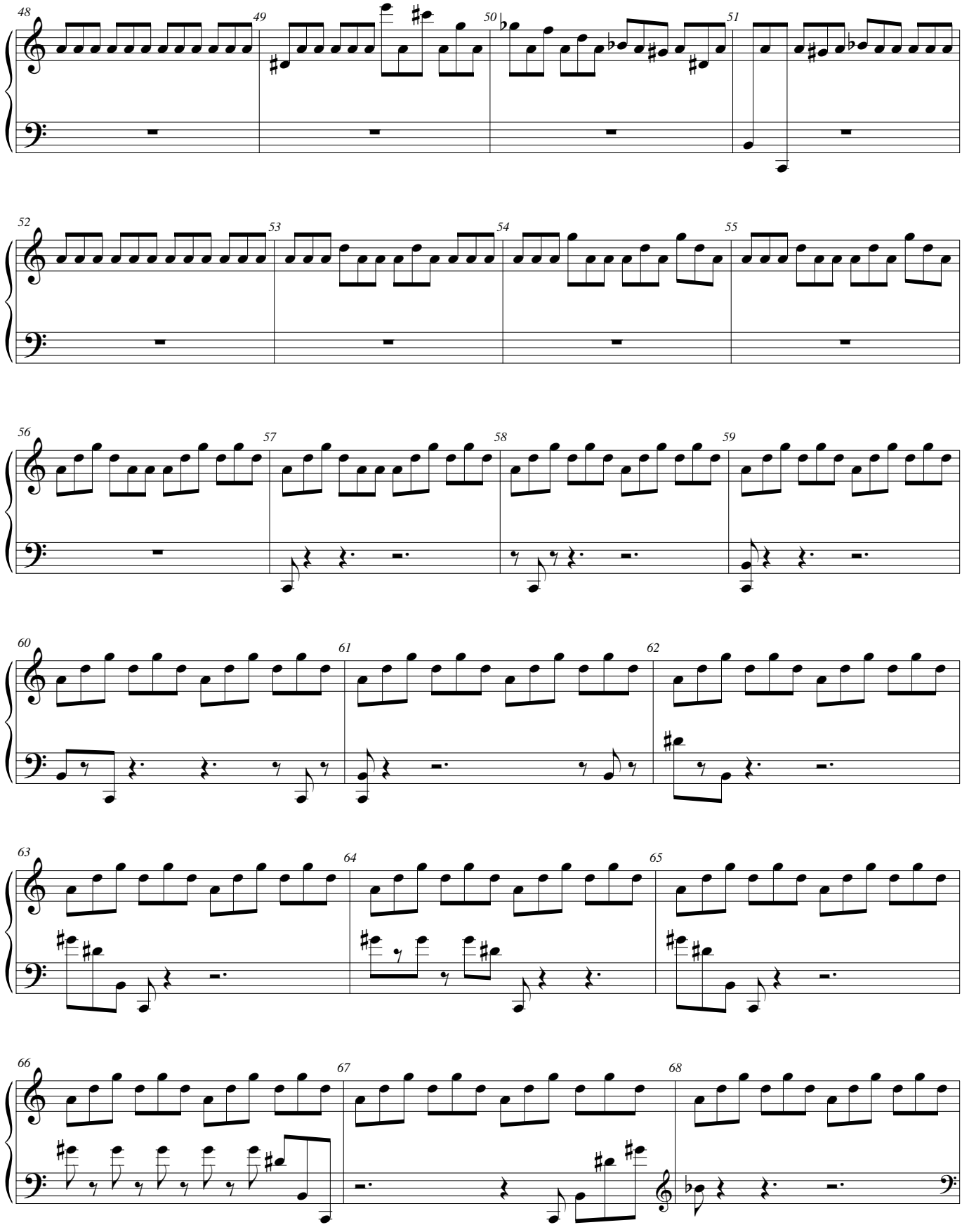
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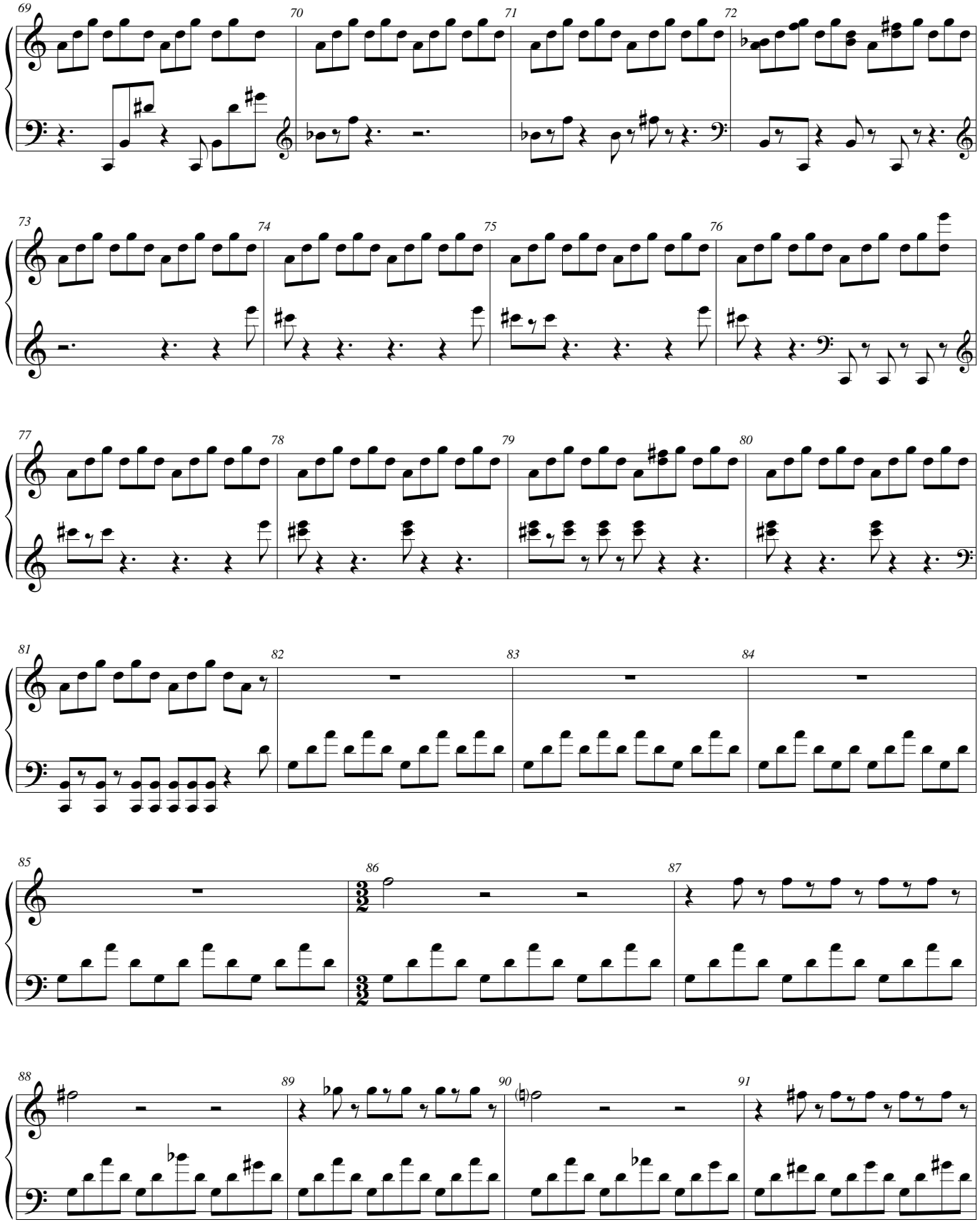
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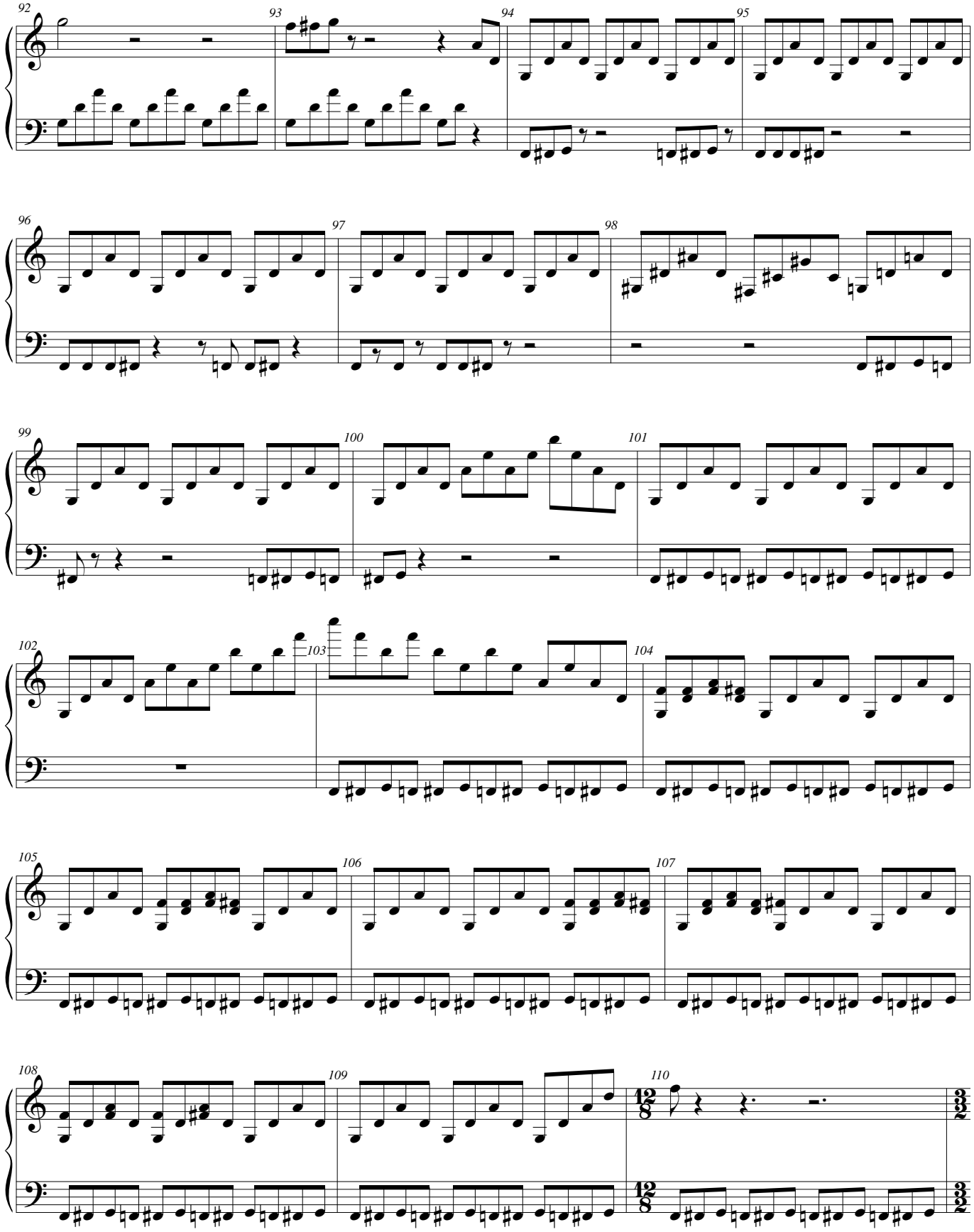
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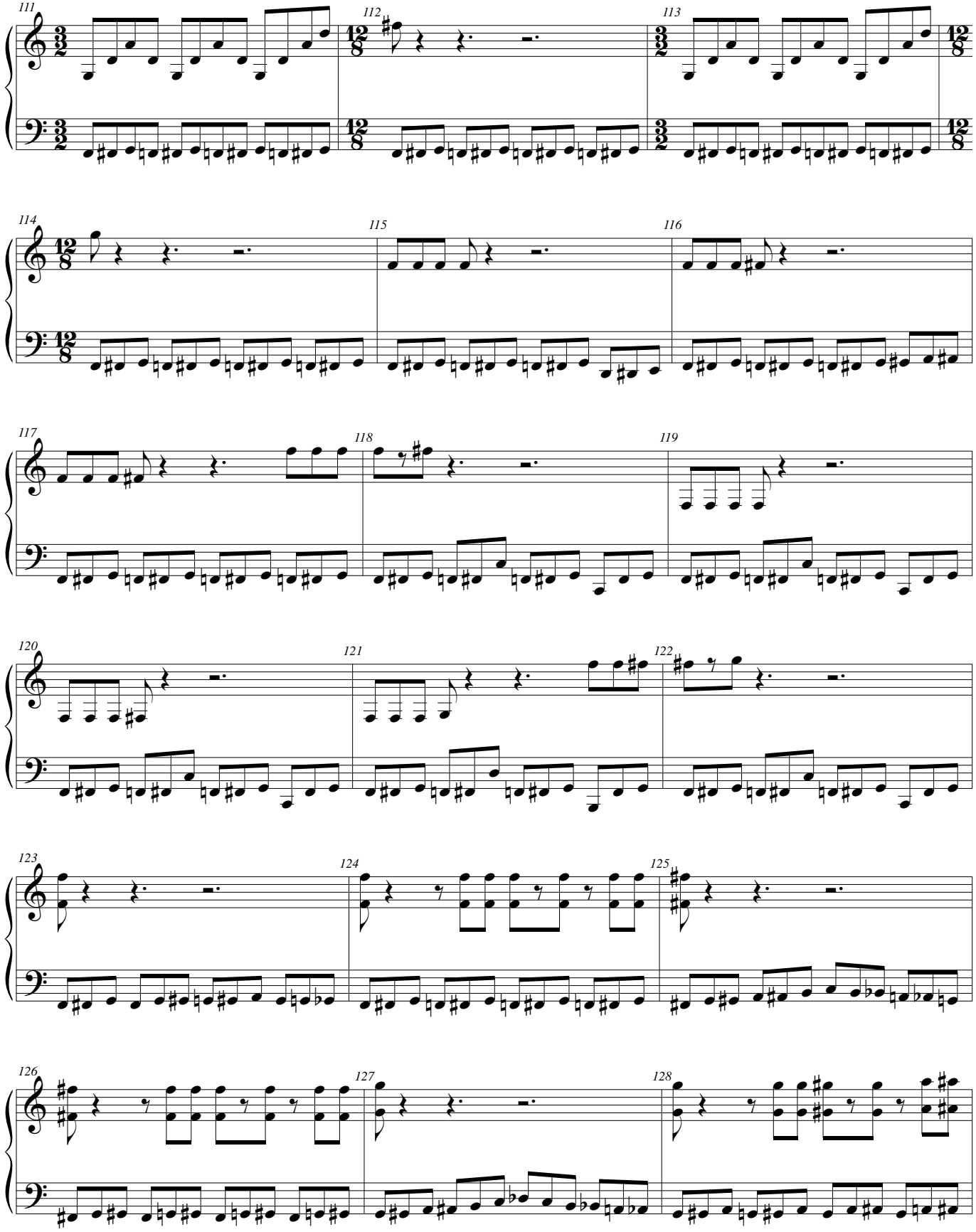
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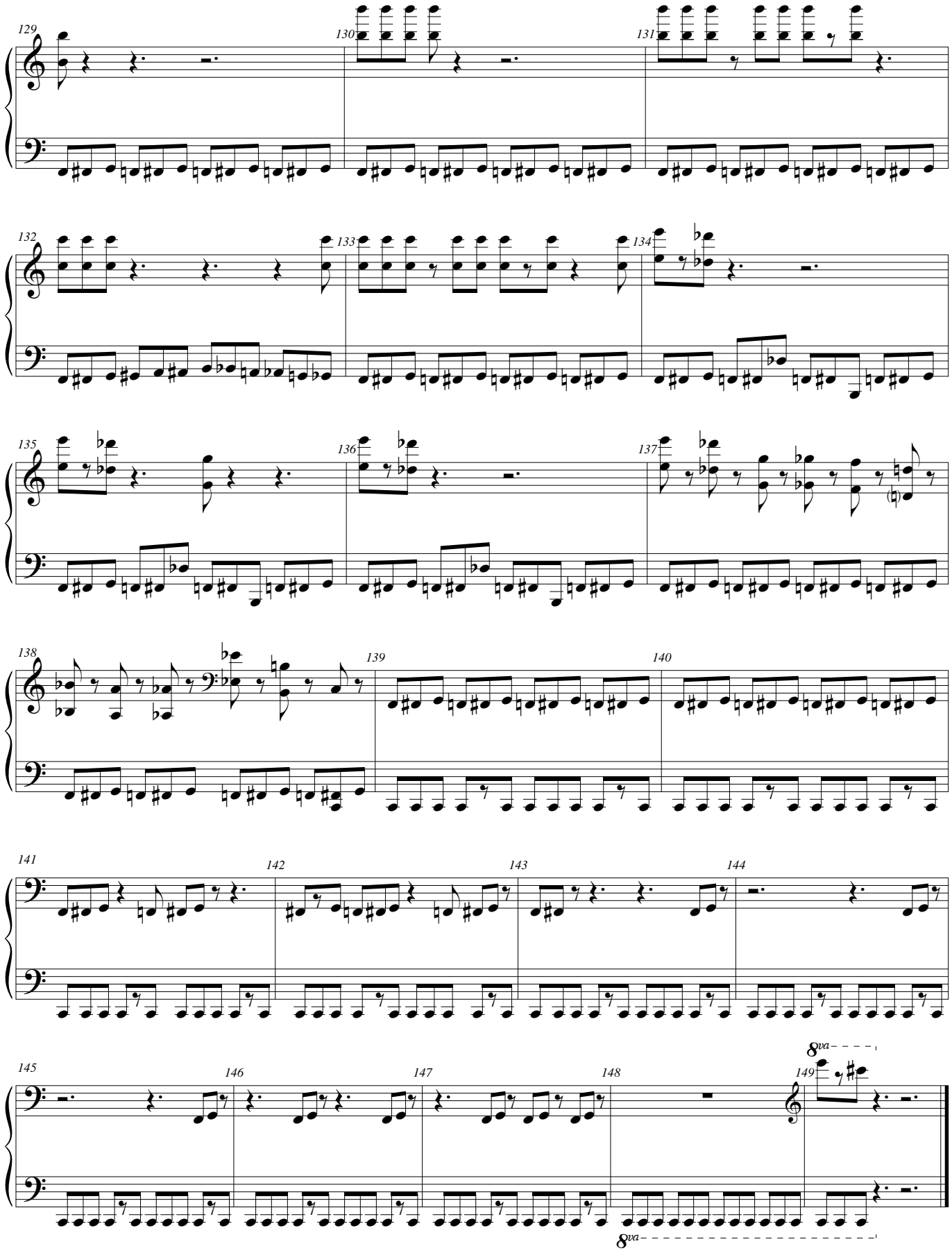
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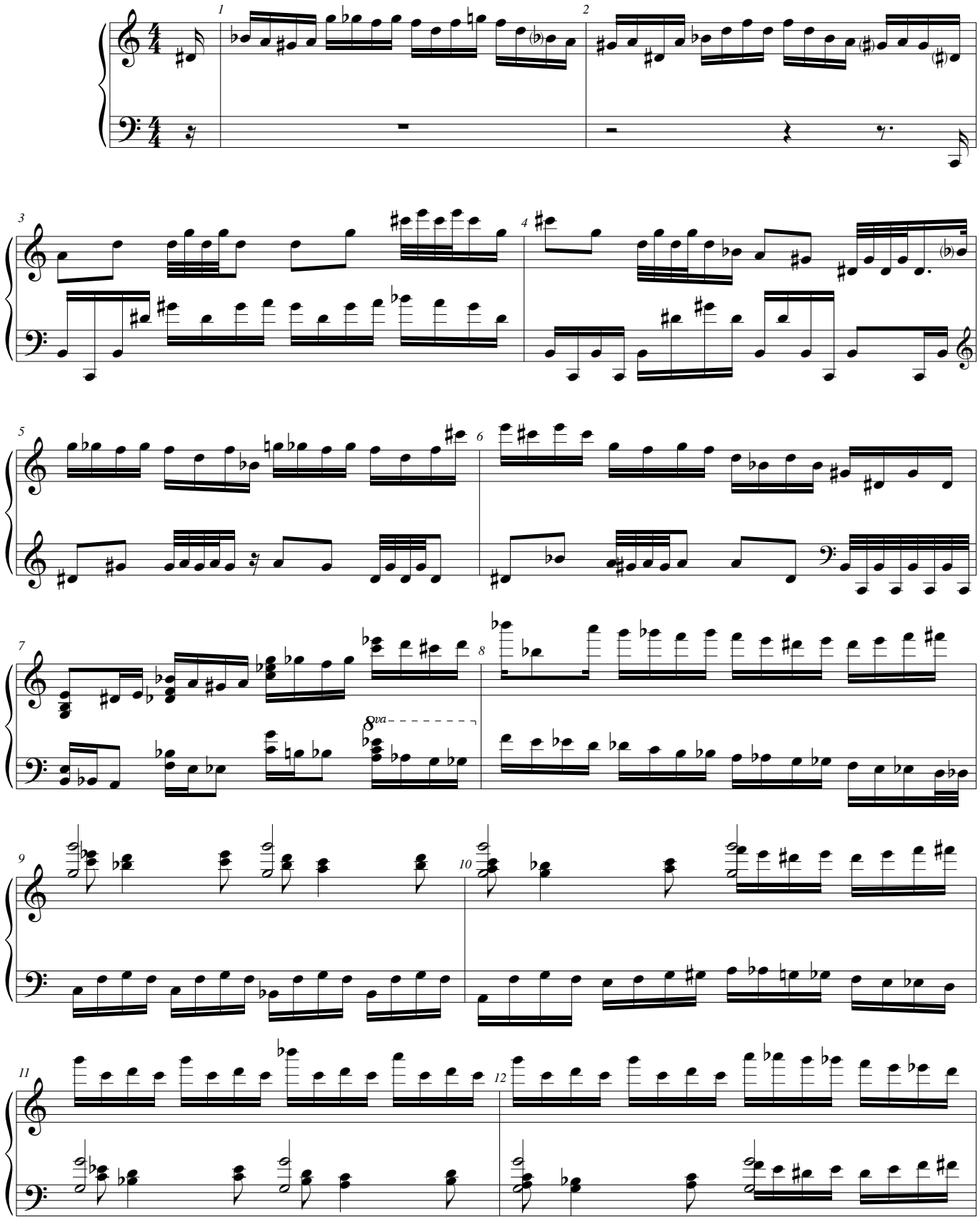
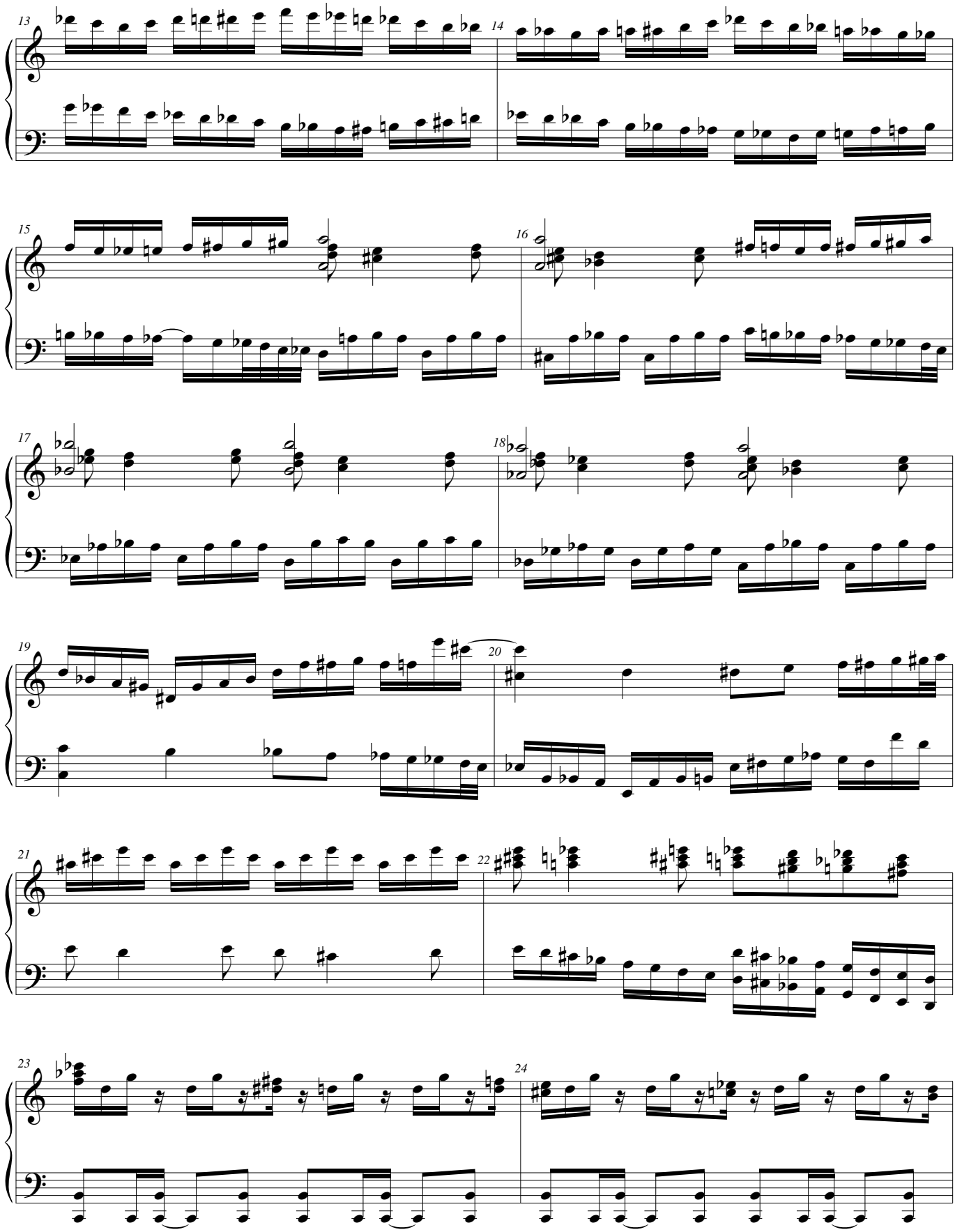
II. Allemande

Relaxed ♩ = 88

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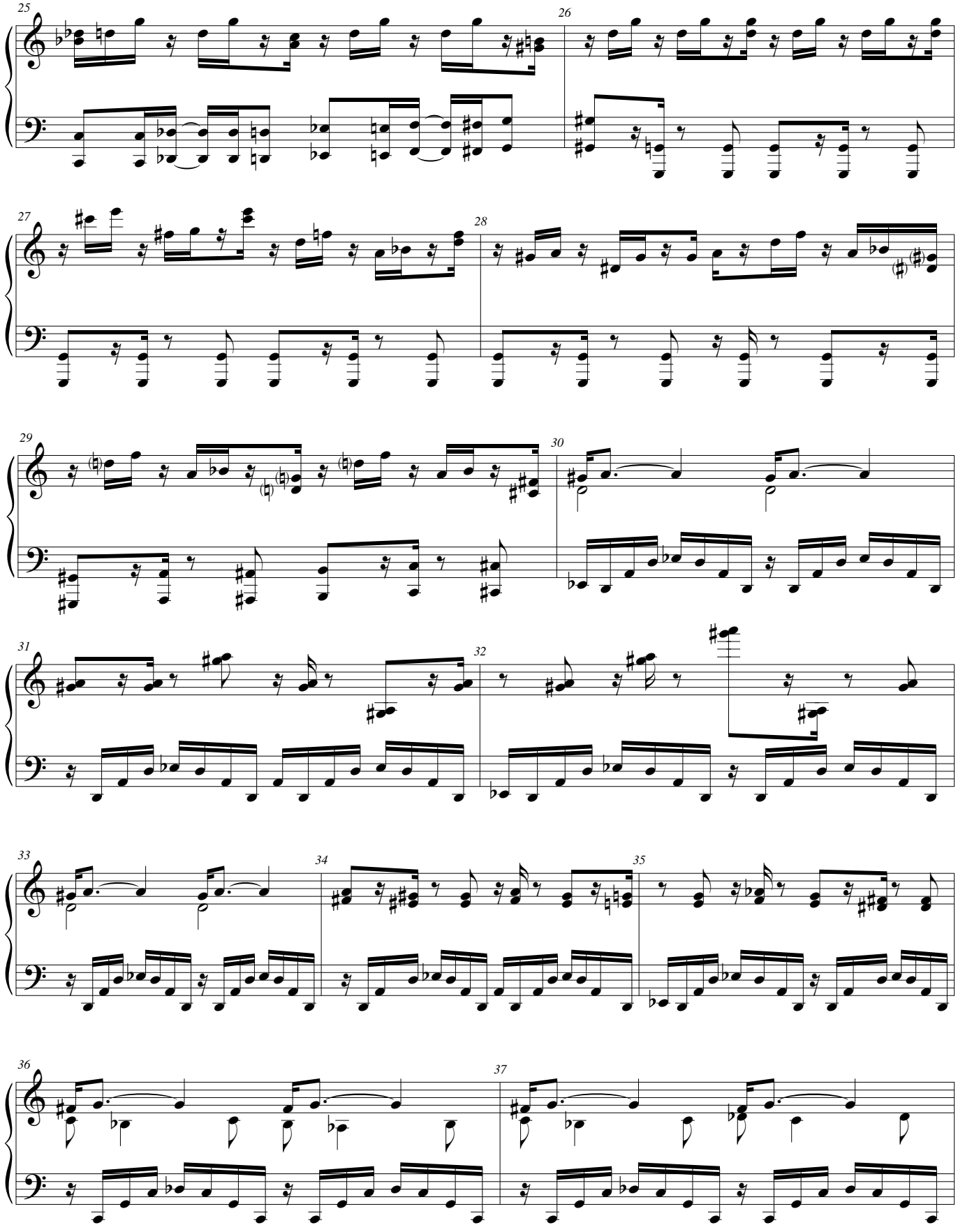
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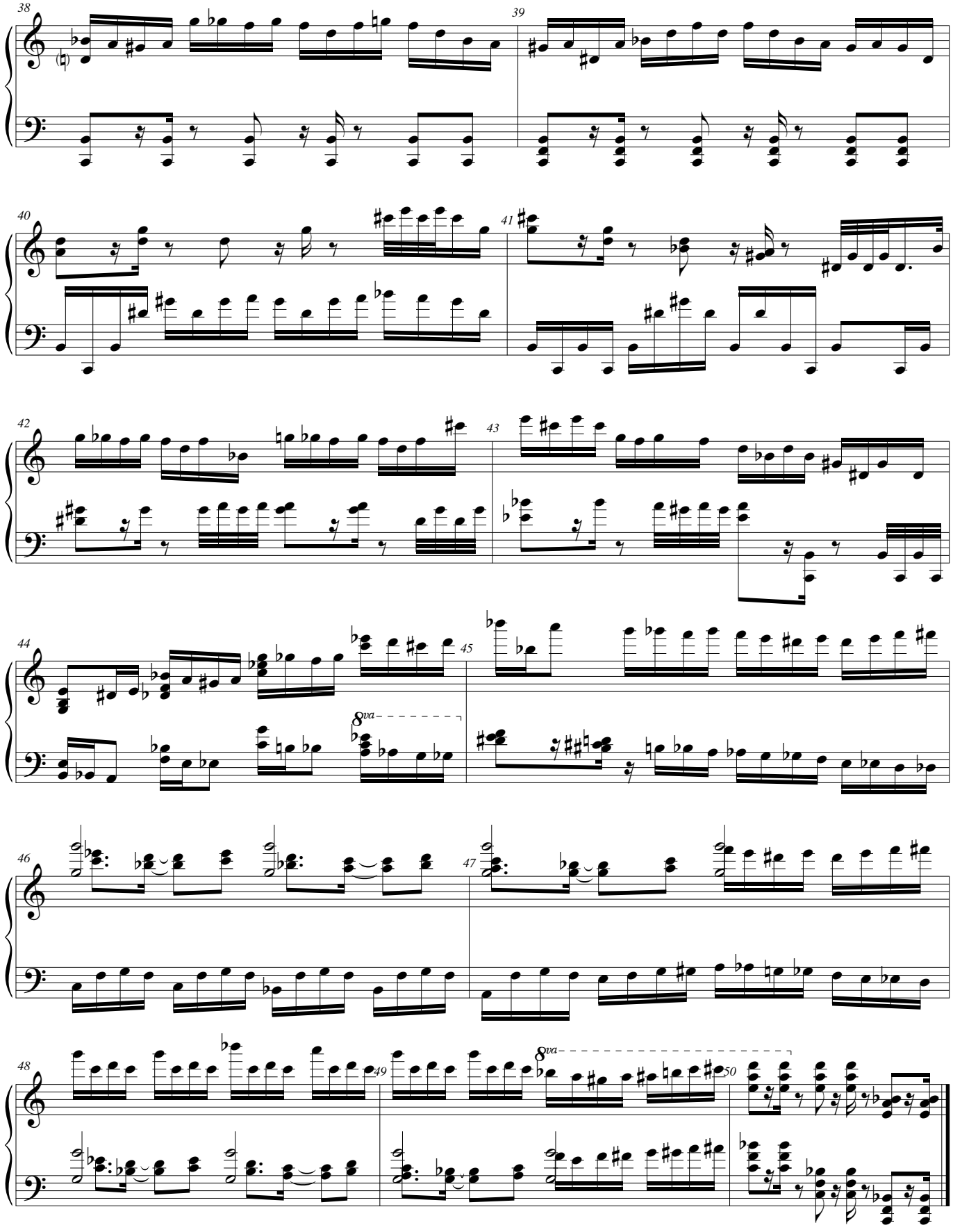
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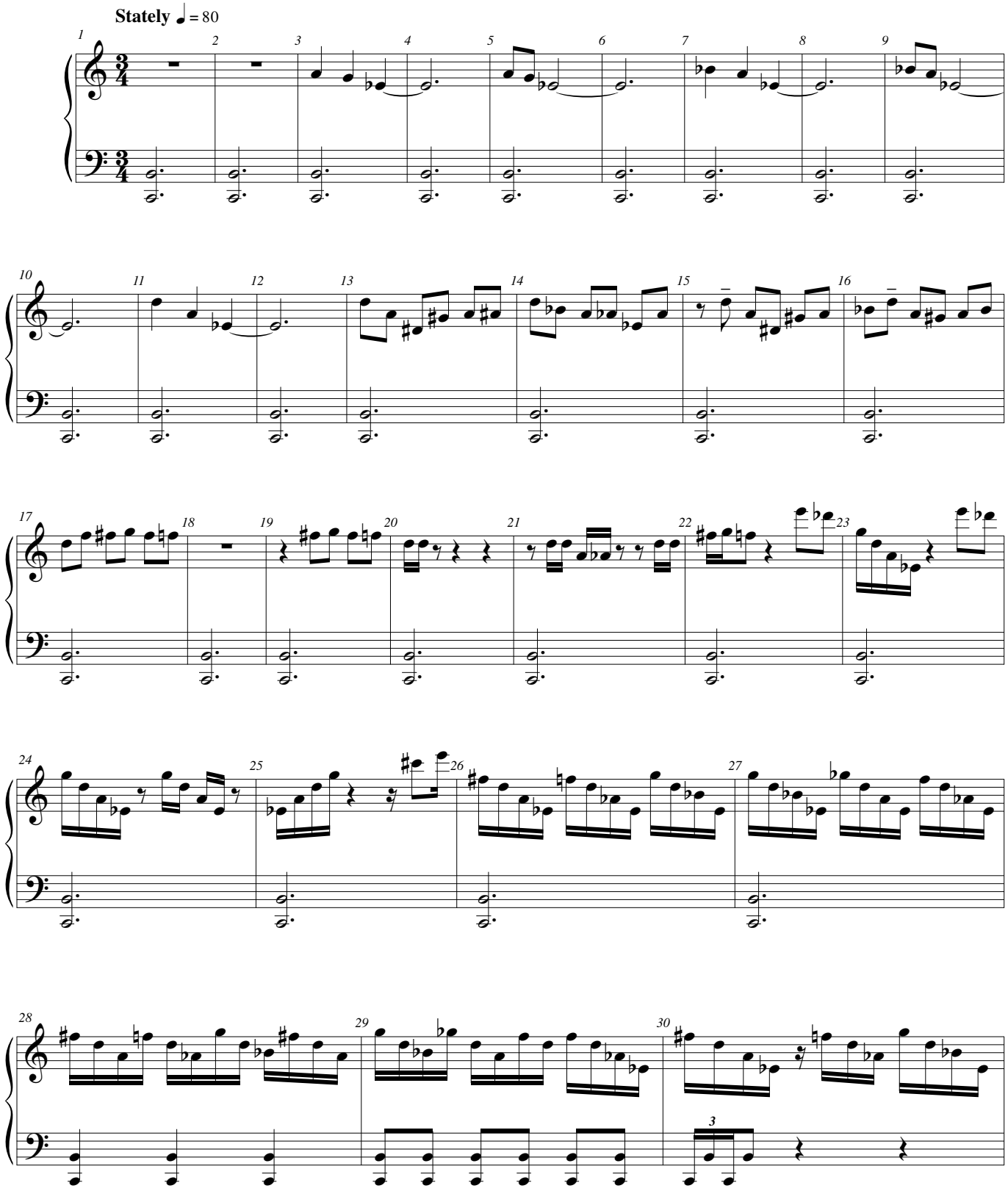
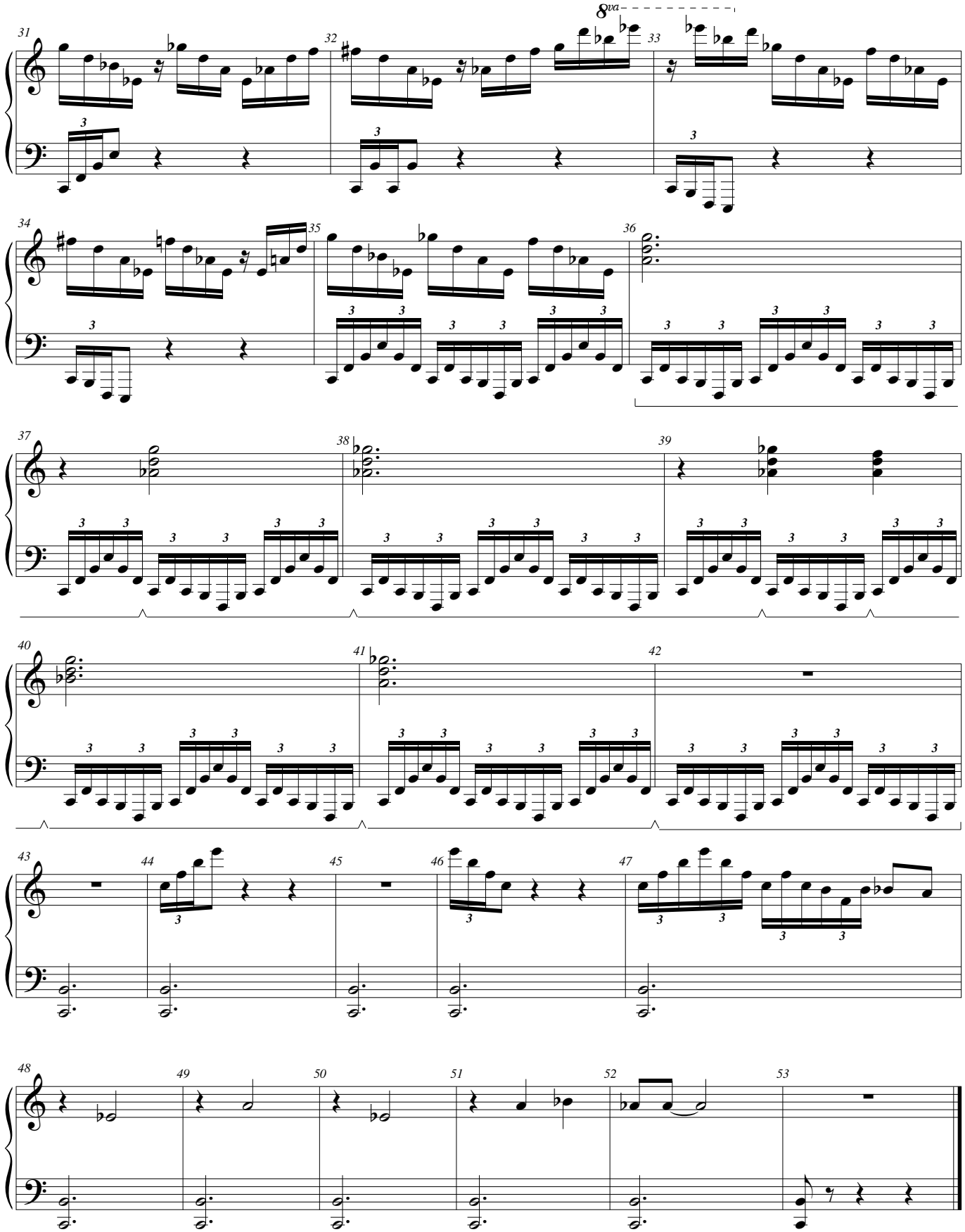
III. Sarabande

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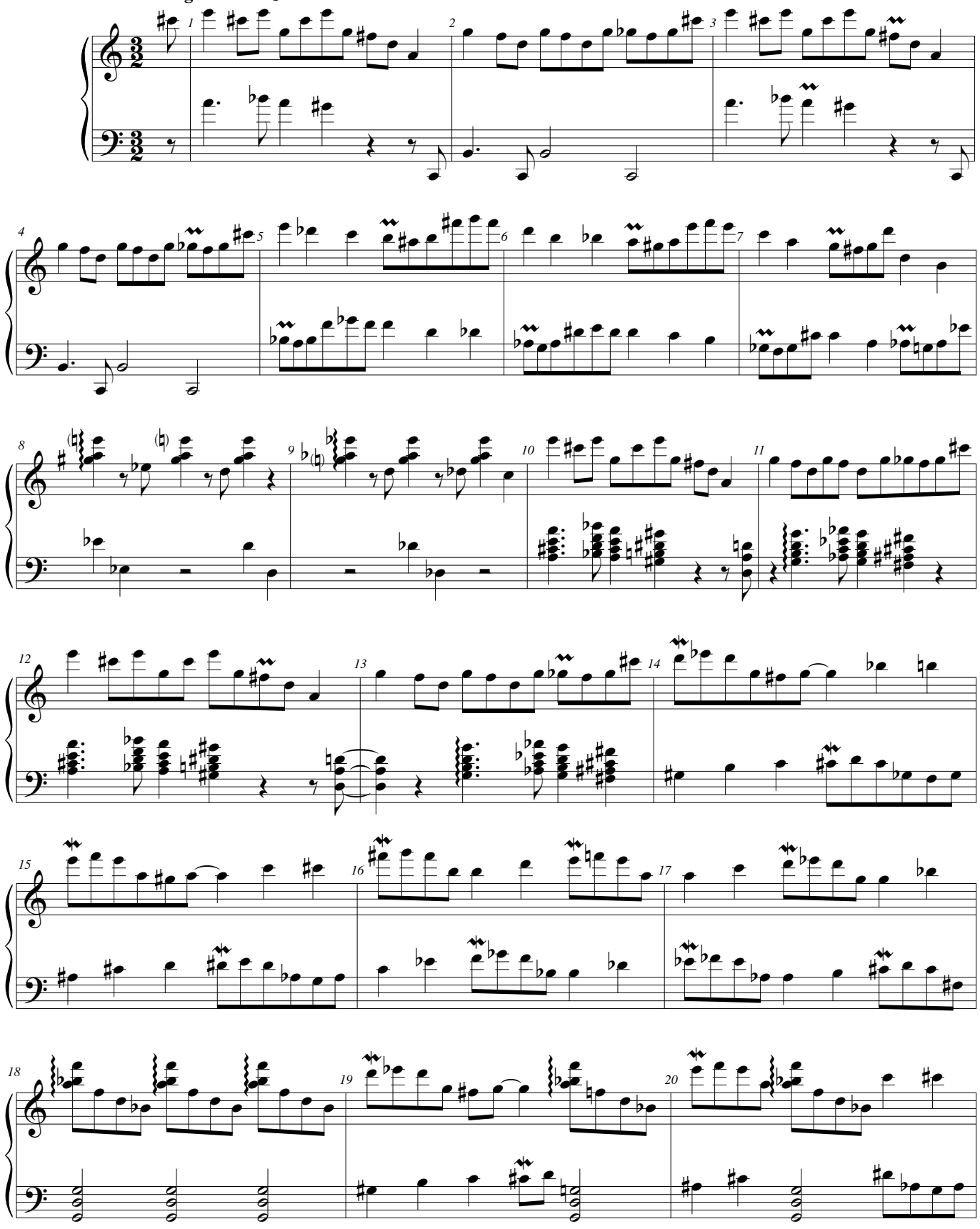
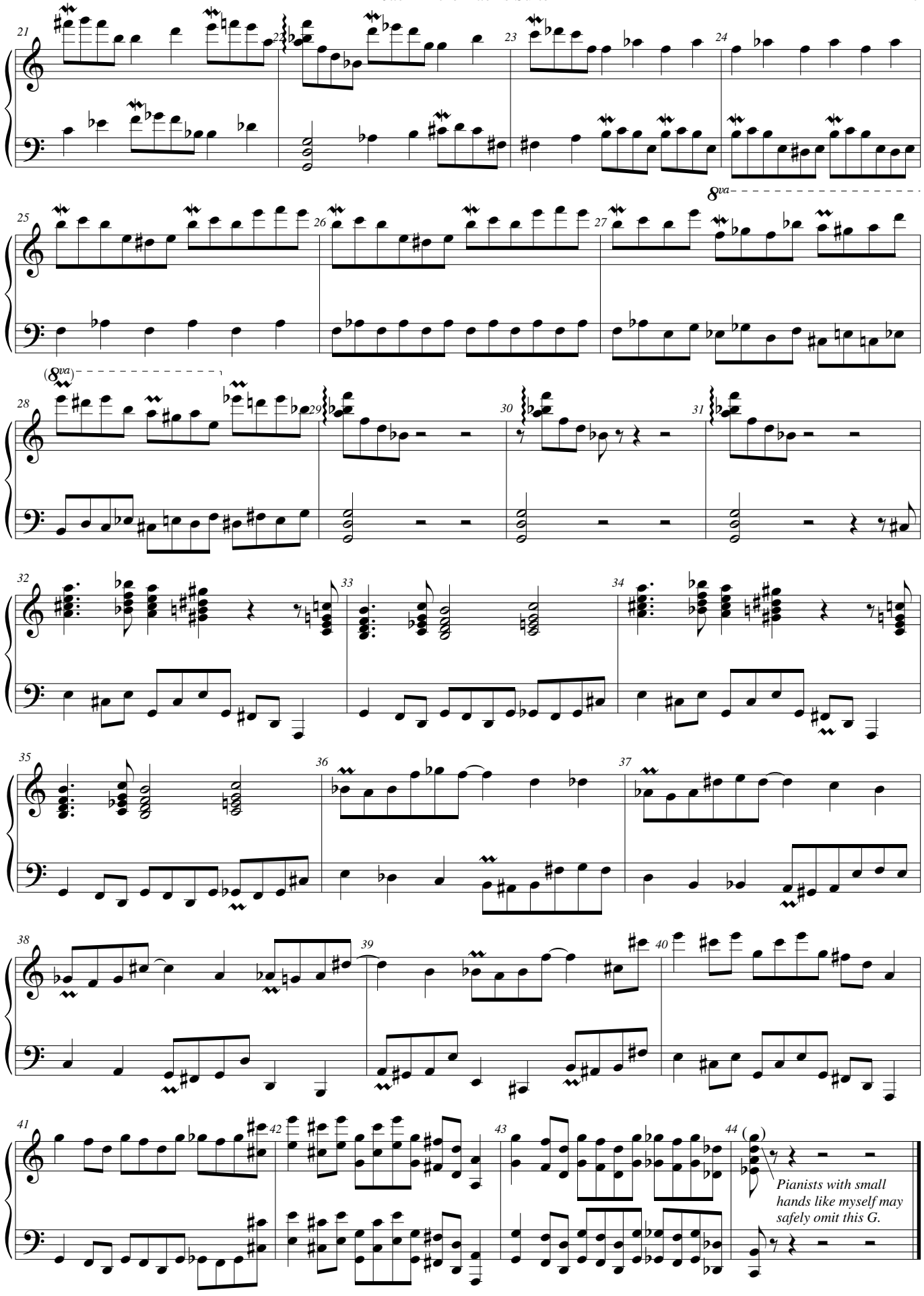
IV. Courante

N.B. All trills are to an upper neighbor one half step above.
All mordants are to a lower neighbor one half step below.

Flowing Forward 𝅗𝅥 = 80

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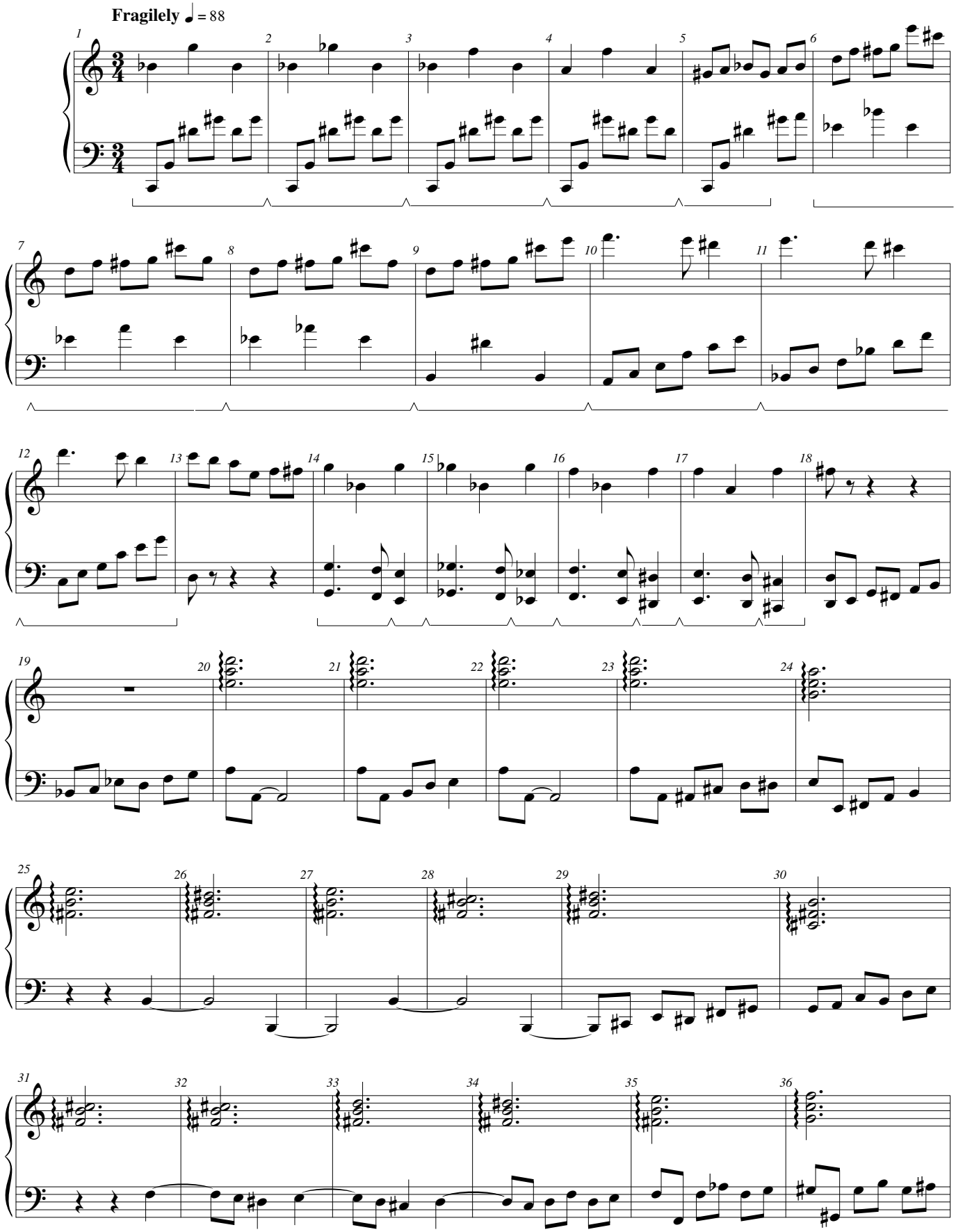
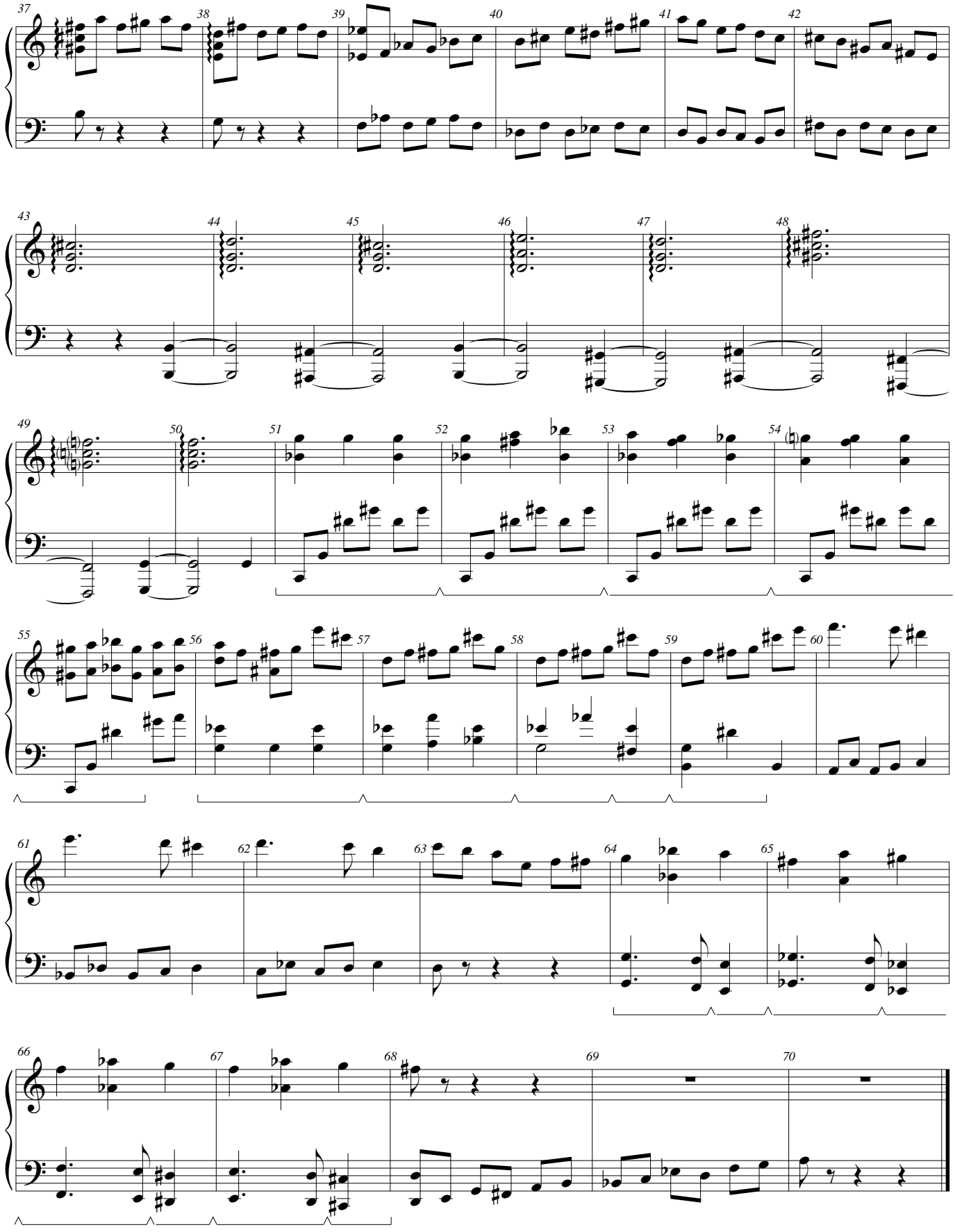
(8va)
Pianists with small hands like myself may safely omit this G.

V. Menuet

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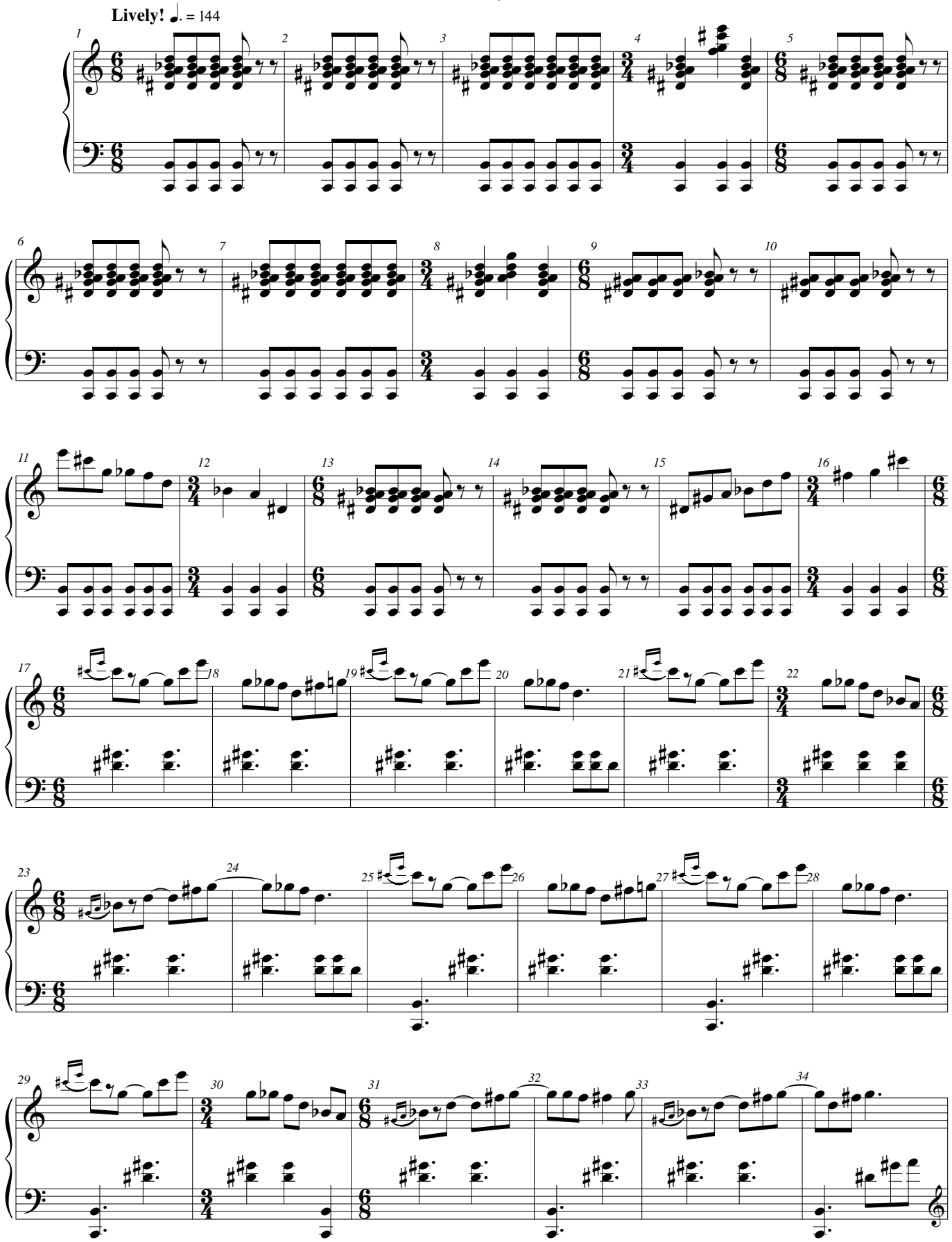
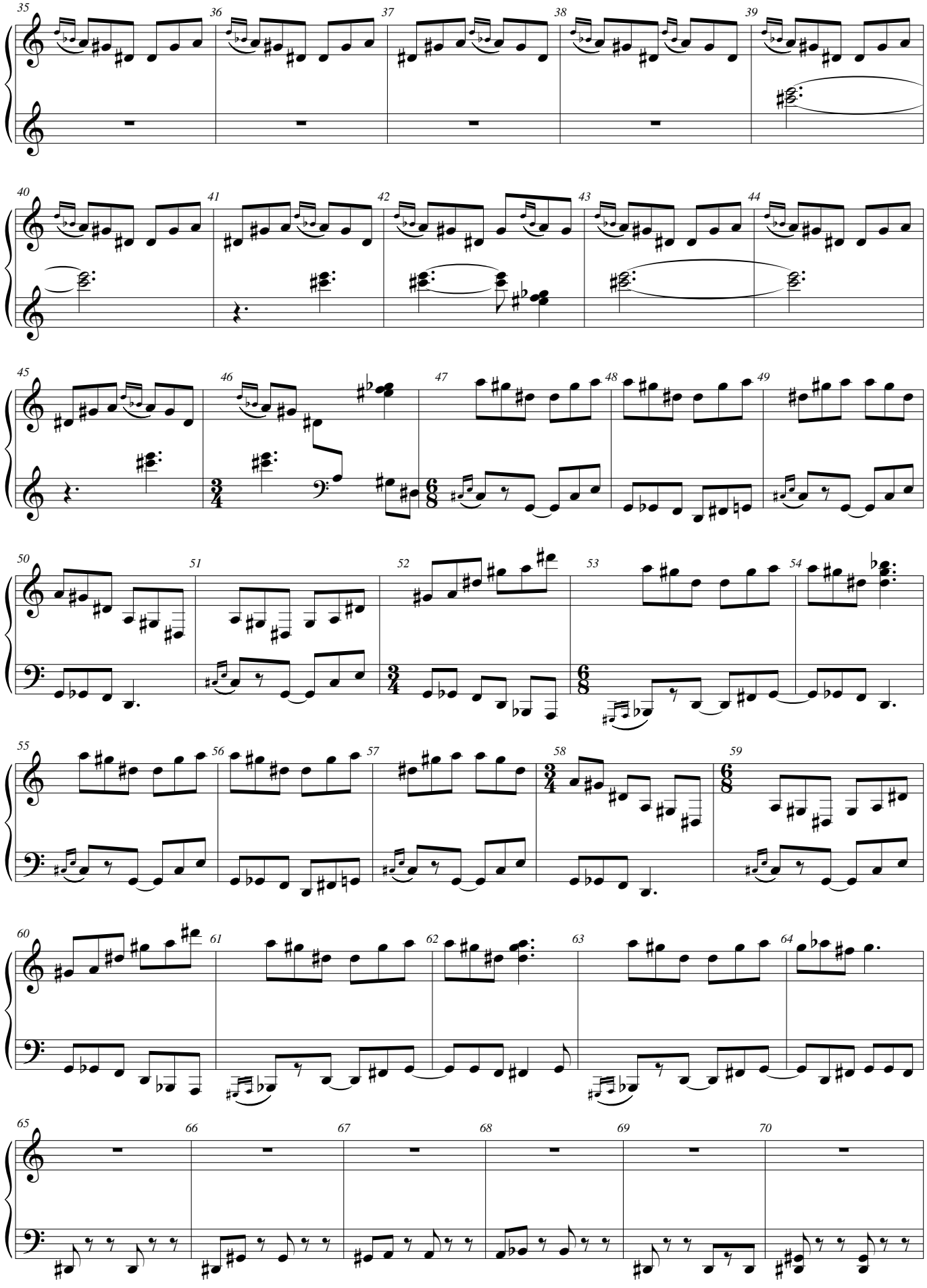
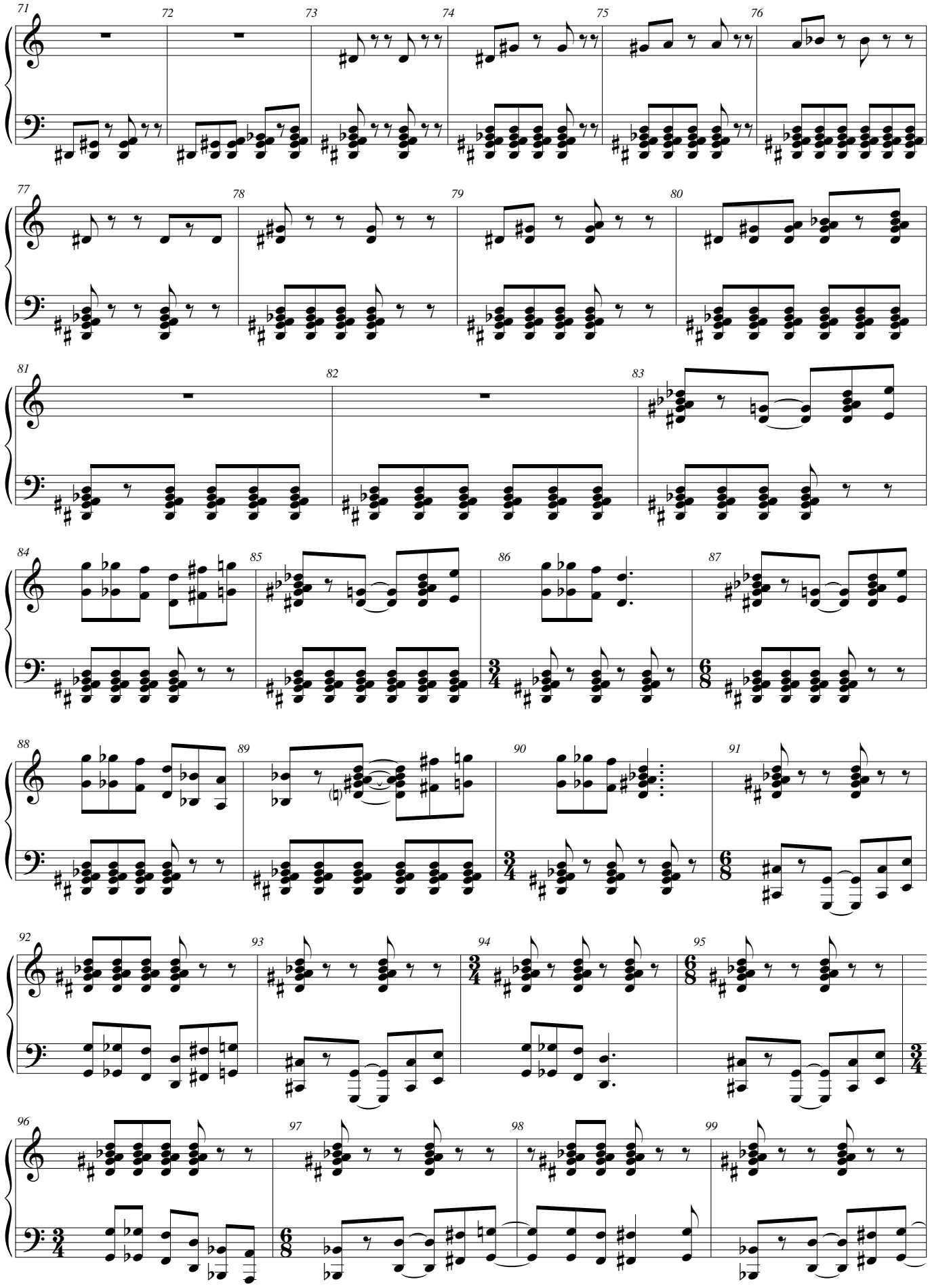
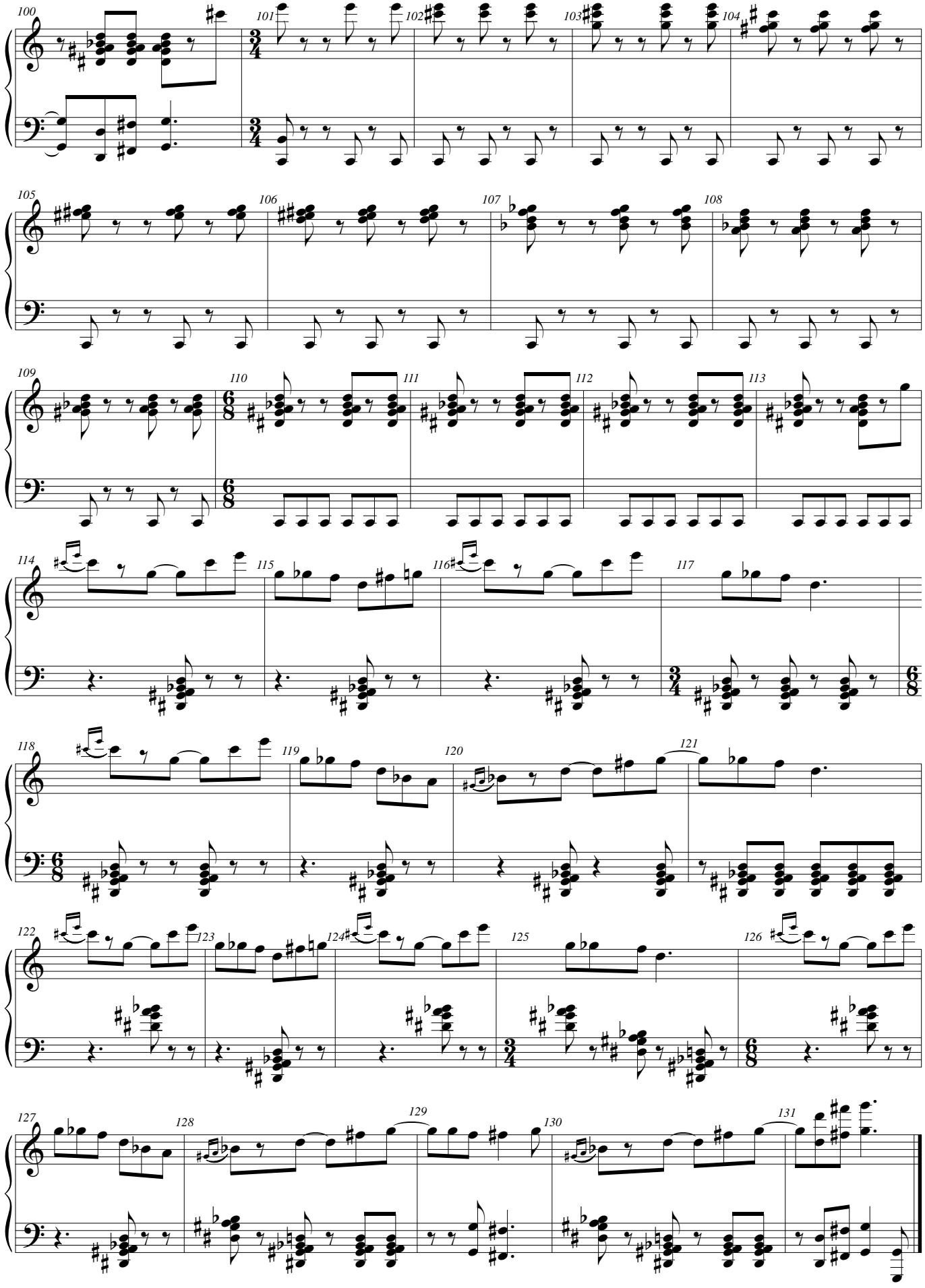
VI. Gigue





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