Robert SCHUMANN

TOCCATA in C

Opus 7

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Robert SCHUMANN 1810 - 1856

TOCCATA in C

Opus 7

As a young student at the age of 19, Schumann was torn between filial duty and desire to become a musician. His mother was anxious for him to continue reading law, but the creative urge and his destiny as a composer were stronger.

So it was that he composed a virtually unplayable "exercise" in double notes, setting it aside for a few years until study with Friedrich Wieck led to greater proficiency. Originally entitled *Étude Fantastique en double-sons* *, it is fascinating to see how it was transformed during the 4 years before its eventual publication in 1834; the ugly duckling became a swan and an obligatory work in the forming of so many pianists for almost 200 years.

Schumann certainly often heard Wieck's pupils, especially his daughter (and future bride) Clara practising various exercises in double notes, including a toccata by Czerny which inspired his own. Written at a similar age and with a similar goal to Chopin's opus 10 études, he sweetens dreaded technical exercises including awkward leaps, dramatic changes of dynamic, fugato, cross-rhythm, pedal point and staccato octaves. With subtle persuasive harmony and syncopated accompaniment, arduous labour becomes the joyful discovery of romantic chromaticism and unfamiliar pianistic problems, closing with a particularly original coda, the right hand sounding like a locomotive.

Dedicated to his friend Ludwig Schuncke, Leipzig saw its first performance in public by Clara two days before her fifteenth birthday on the 11th September 1834; she must have been quite a prodigy! Mendelssohn

attended, and the magazine *Der Komet* published a favourable critical review:

> *"her last piece, a Toccata by Schumann, made a wonderful impression. The work is cast in originality and novelty and, despite its strict style, created deep magic on her public. She knows how to interpret the music poetically and to breathe soul into it through and through. With much delicate and deeply-felt shades of the highest splendour, she enlivened our evening."*

Clara's "poetic performance" contradicted her father's interpretation and apparently he asked Schumann "to rewrite the closing bars — the conclusion was just not brilliant enough!"

Unlike many of his early compositions, Schumann always held it in high esteem commenting : "it conveys to the music lover at least a vague idea of the effort that went into it." Apparently he played it "often and idiosyncratically, in a calm, moderate tempo, unlike Tausig's ** *presto*". Through all its evident virtuosity, the Toccata bears witness to creative vitality, often unfortunately lost in so many interpretations that are limited by the challenge of ever faster metronomic performance.

Clara Wieck

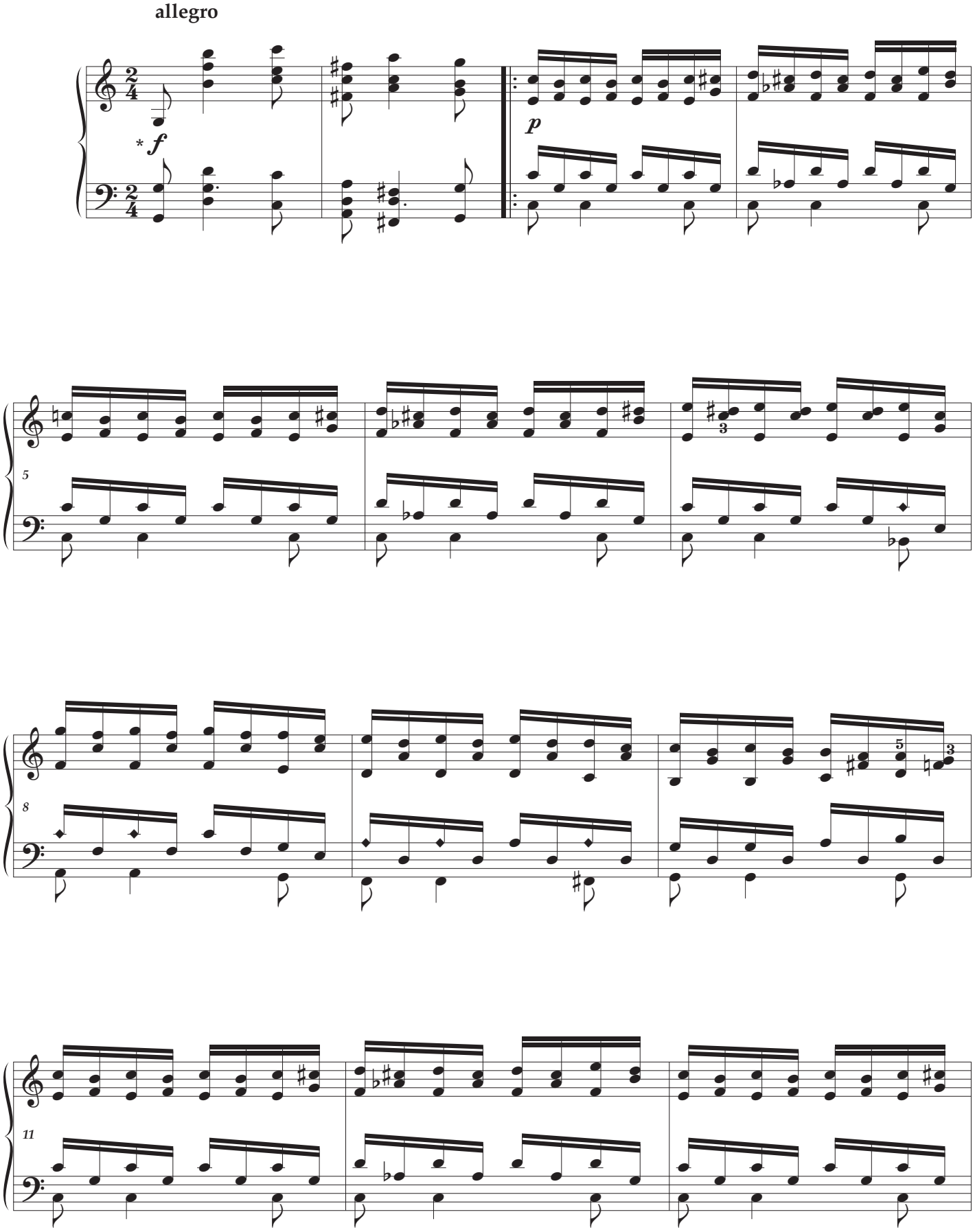
Clara's edition of 1885 cites the following: "to allow the musician the greatest possible freedom, only passages that might be misunderstood have been marked more clearly." Accordingly, it included very few performance instructions. The present edition however does suggest some dynamics, phrasing, accentuation and fingering. In addition, a few diamond-headed notes propose inaudible omission for those who have hands of normal extension; alterations to the text are annotated with an asterisk.

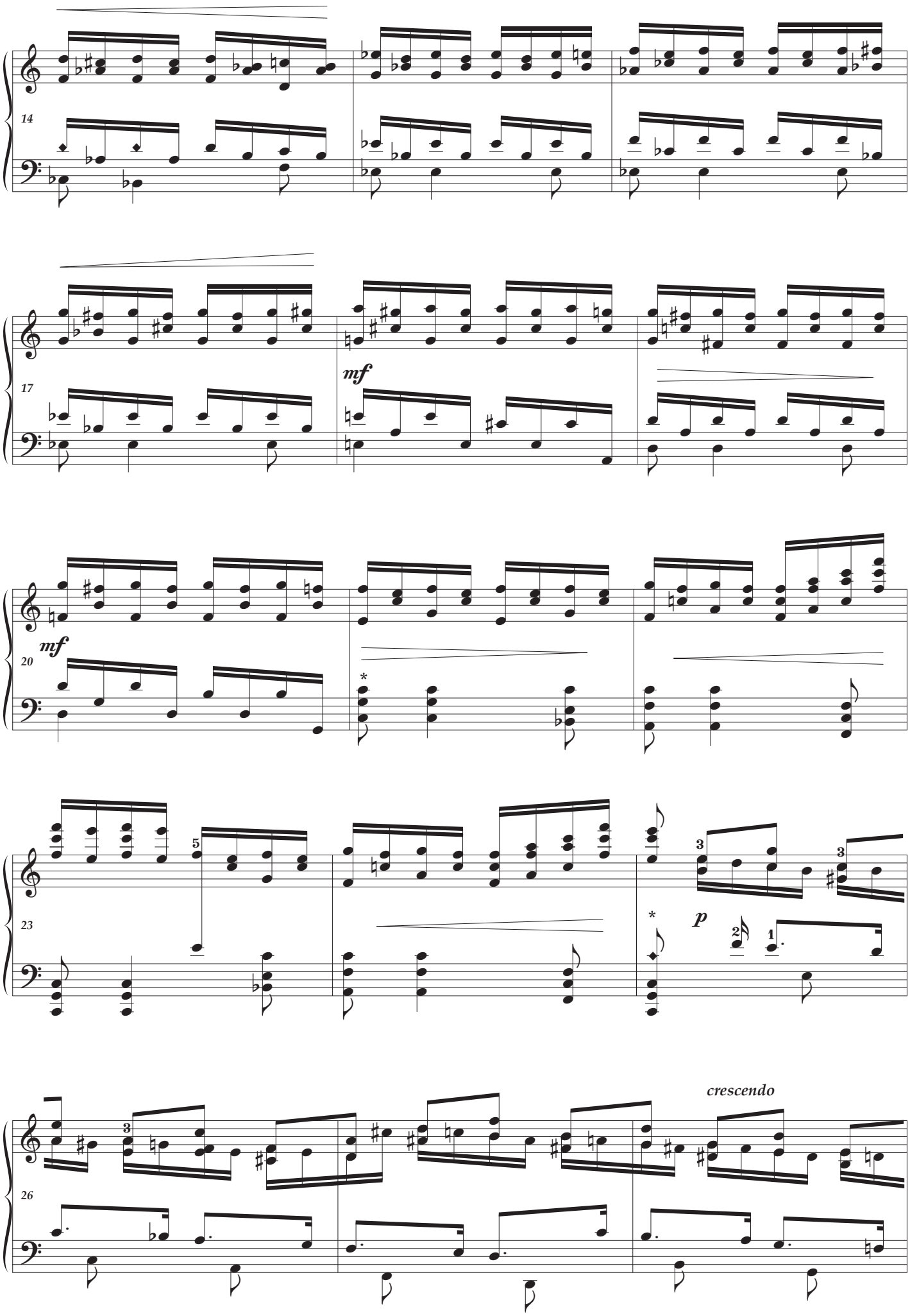
Ray Alston February 2021

* a copy is available on the IMSLP site

** Carl Tausig 1841-1871 another child prodigy and pupil of Liszt

TOCCATA

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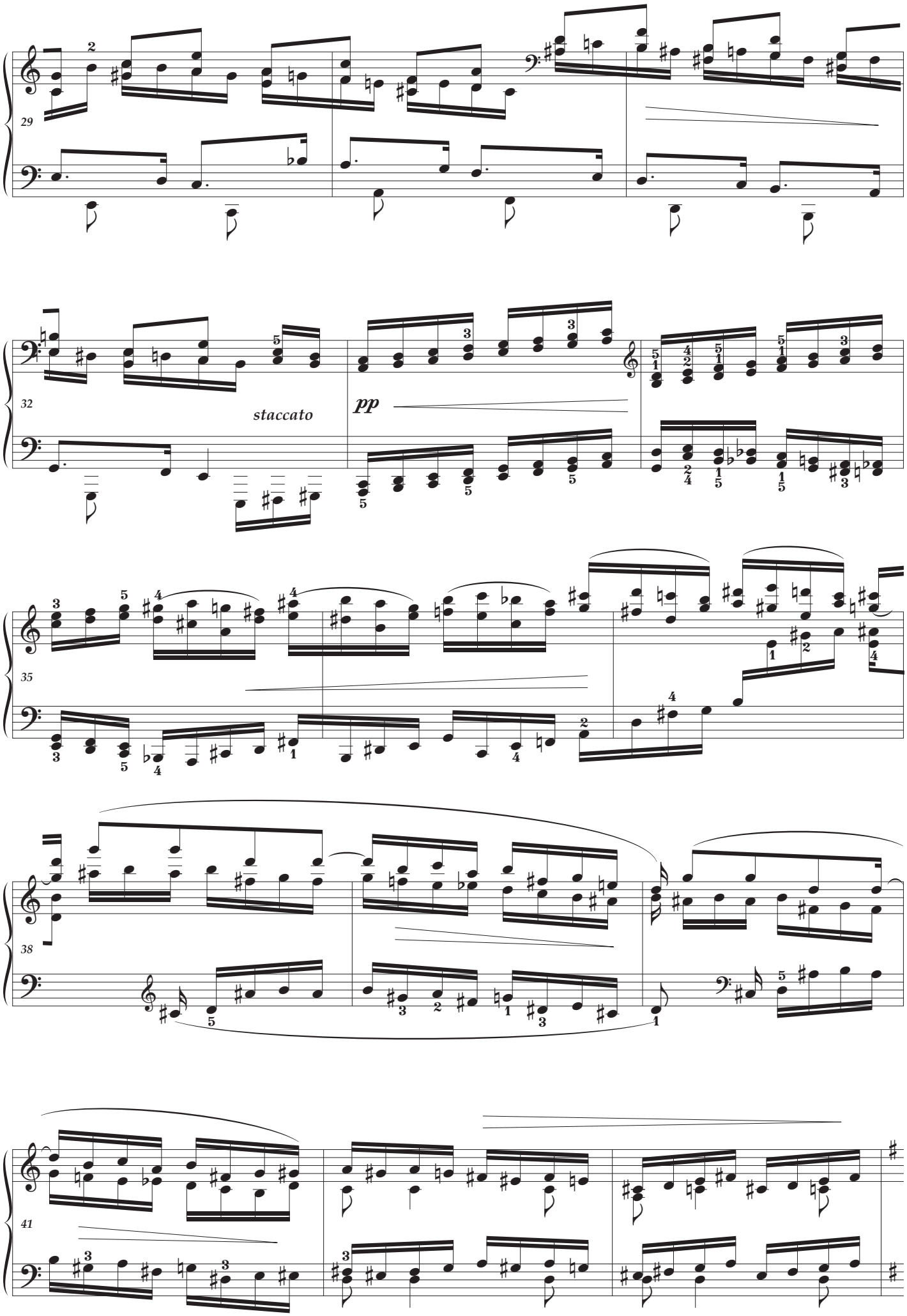
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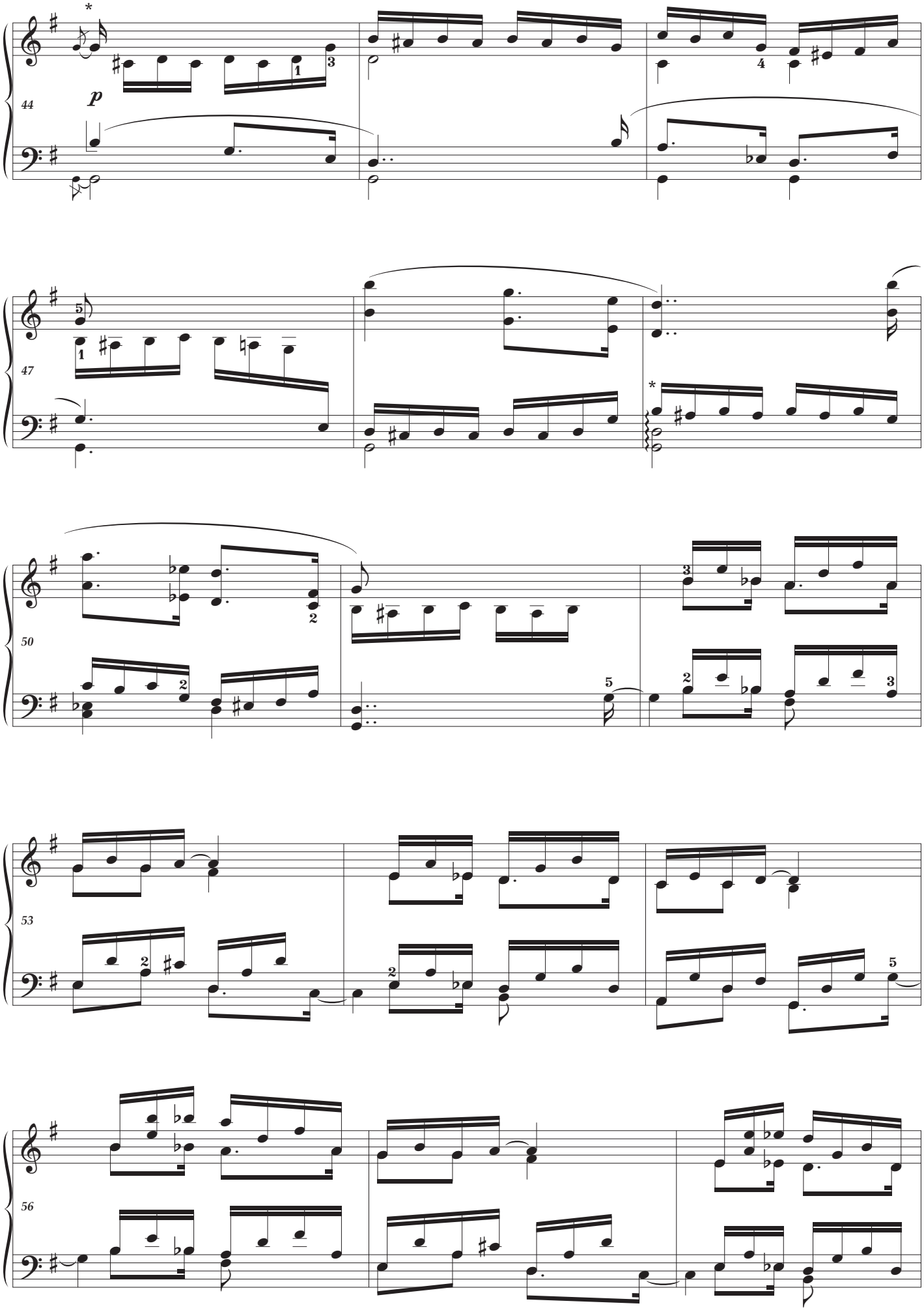
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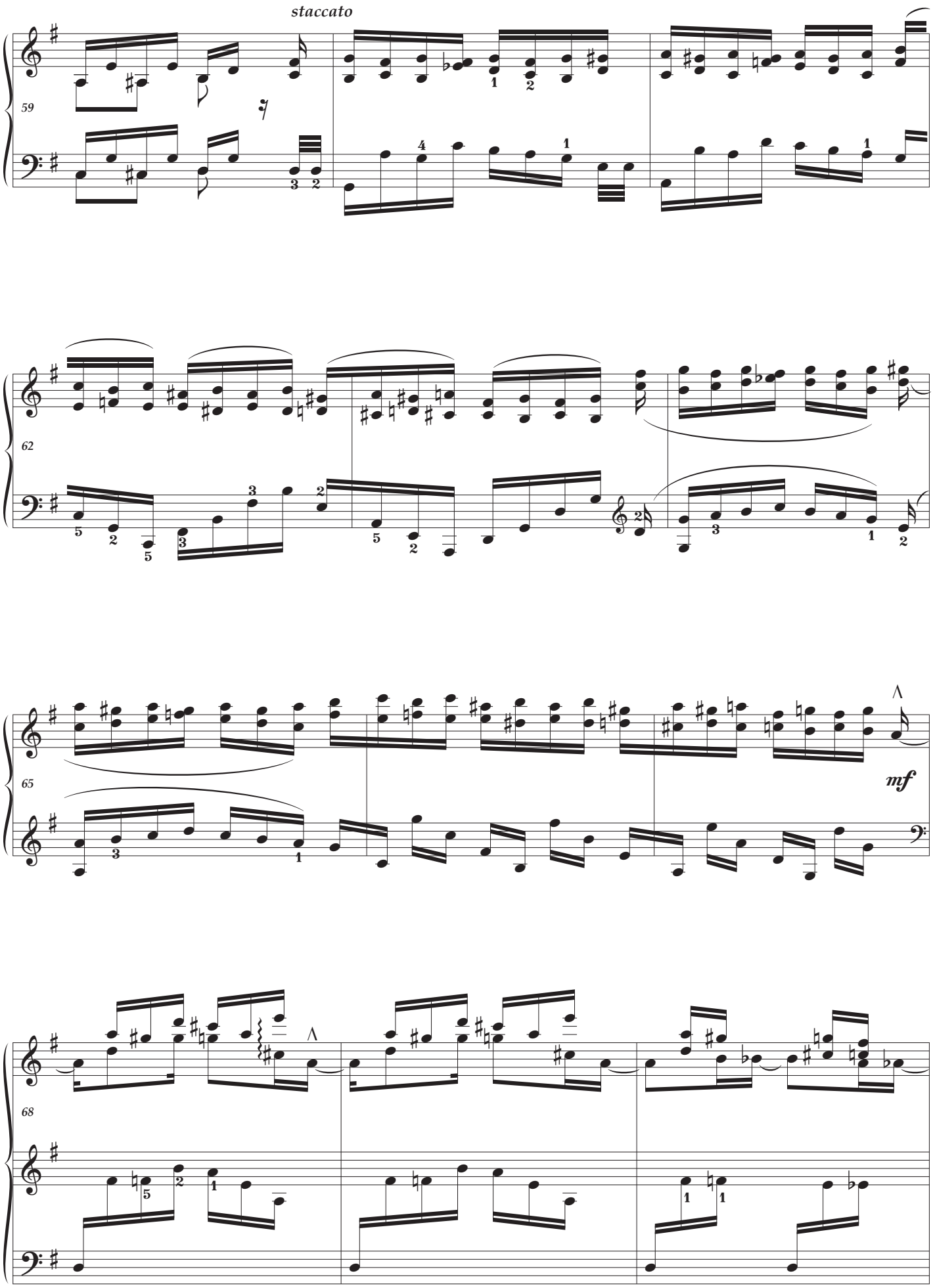
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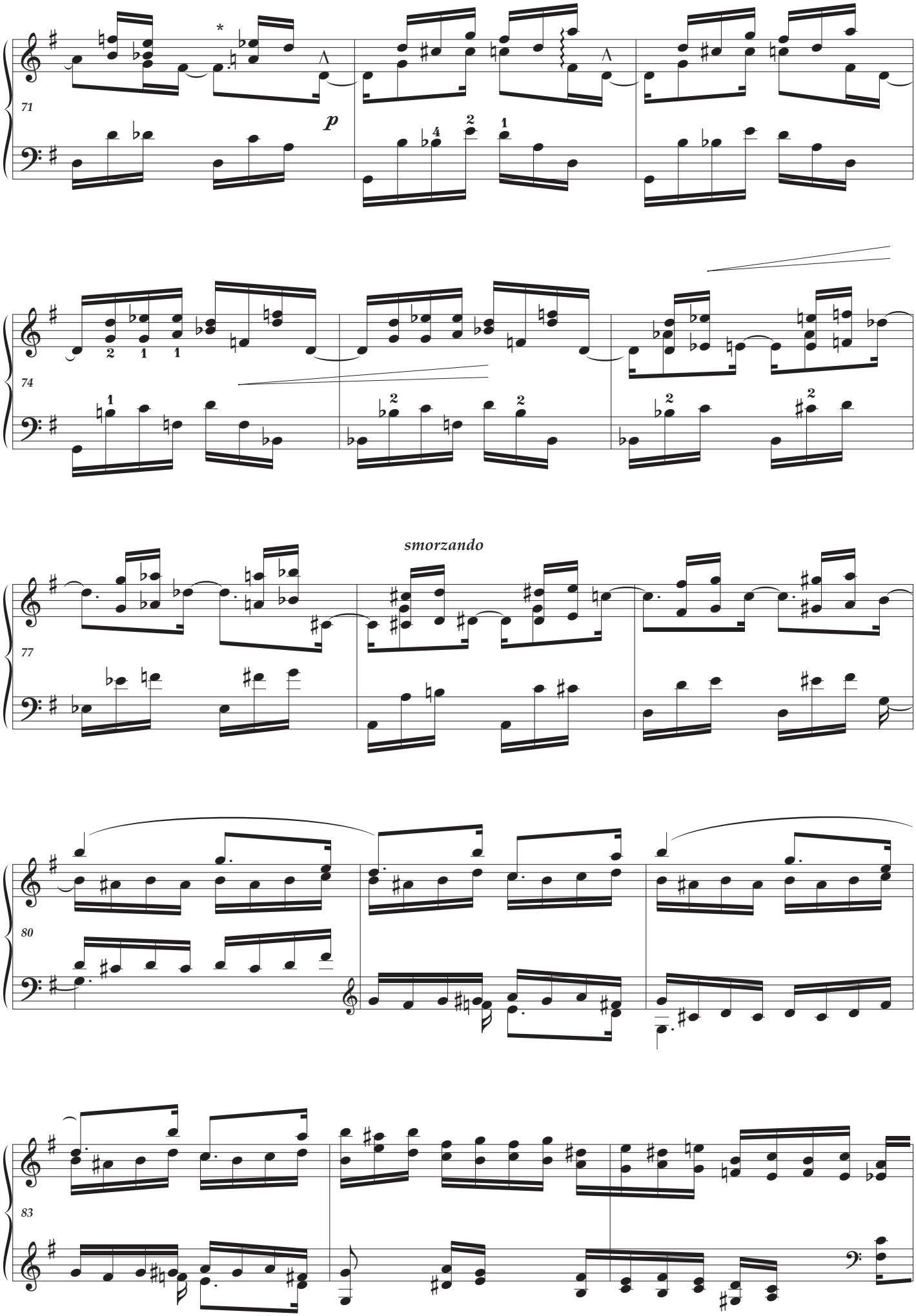
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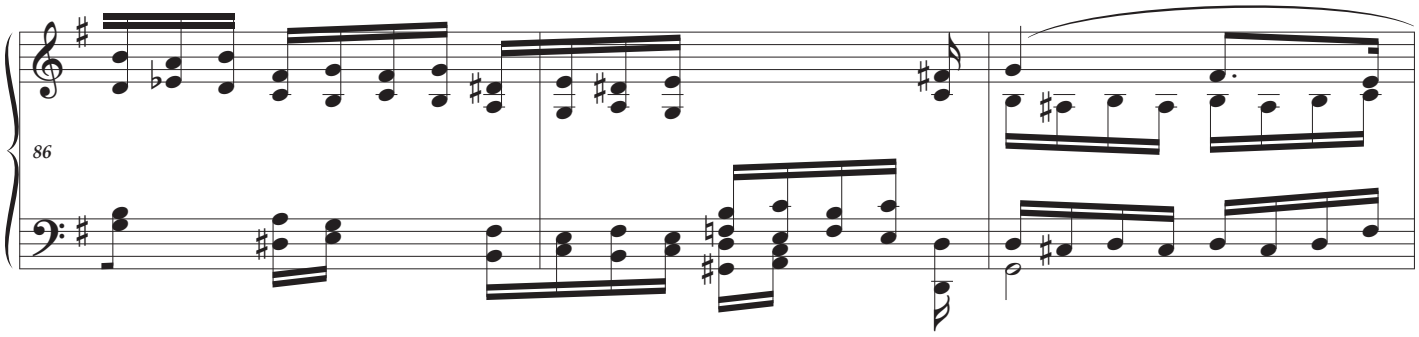
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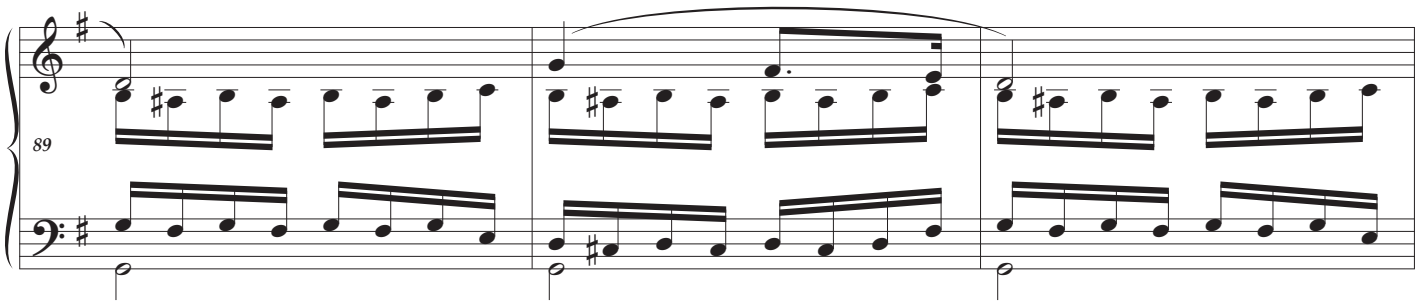
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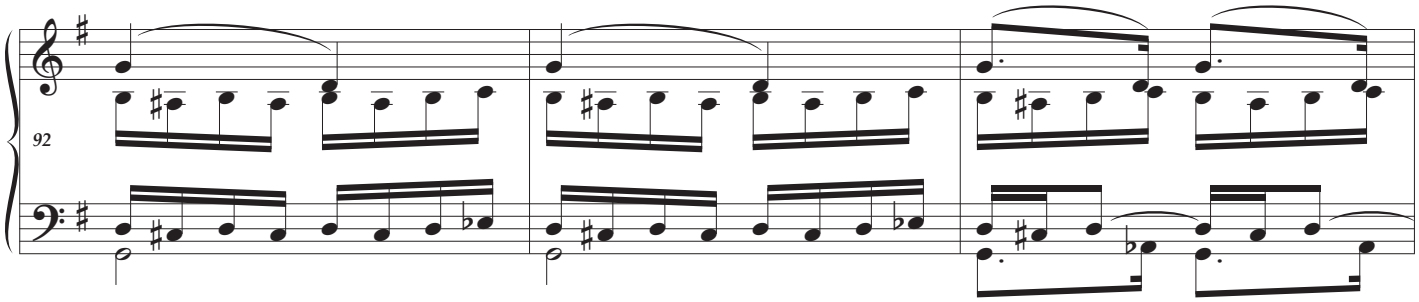
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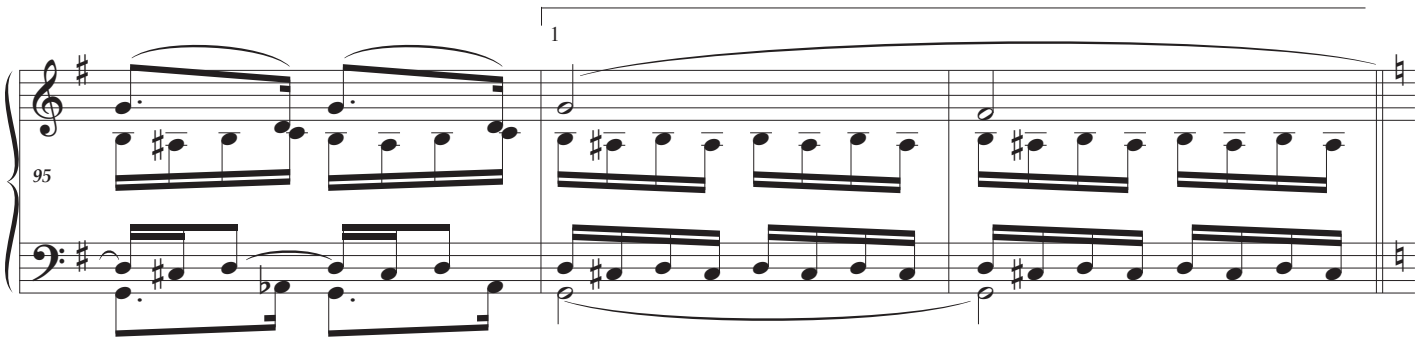
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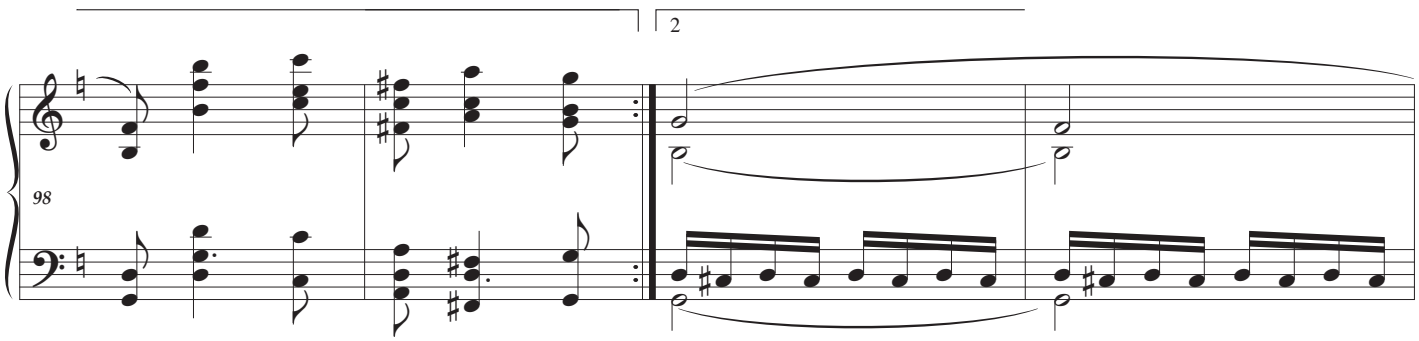
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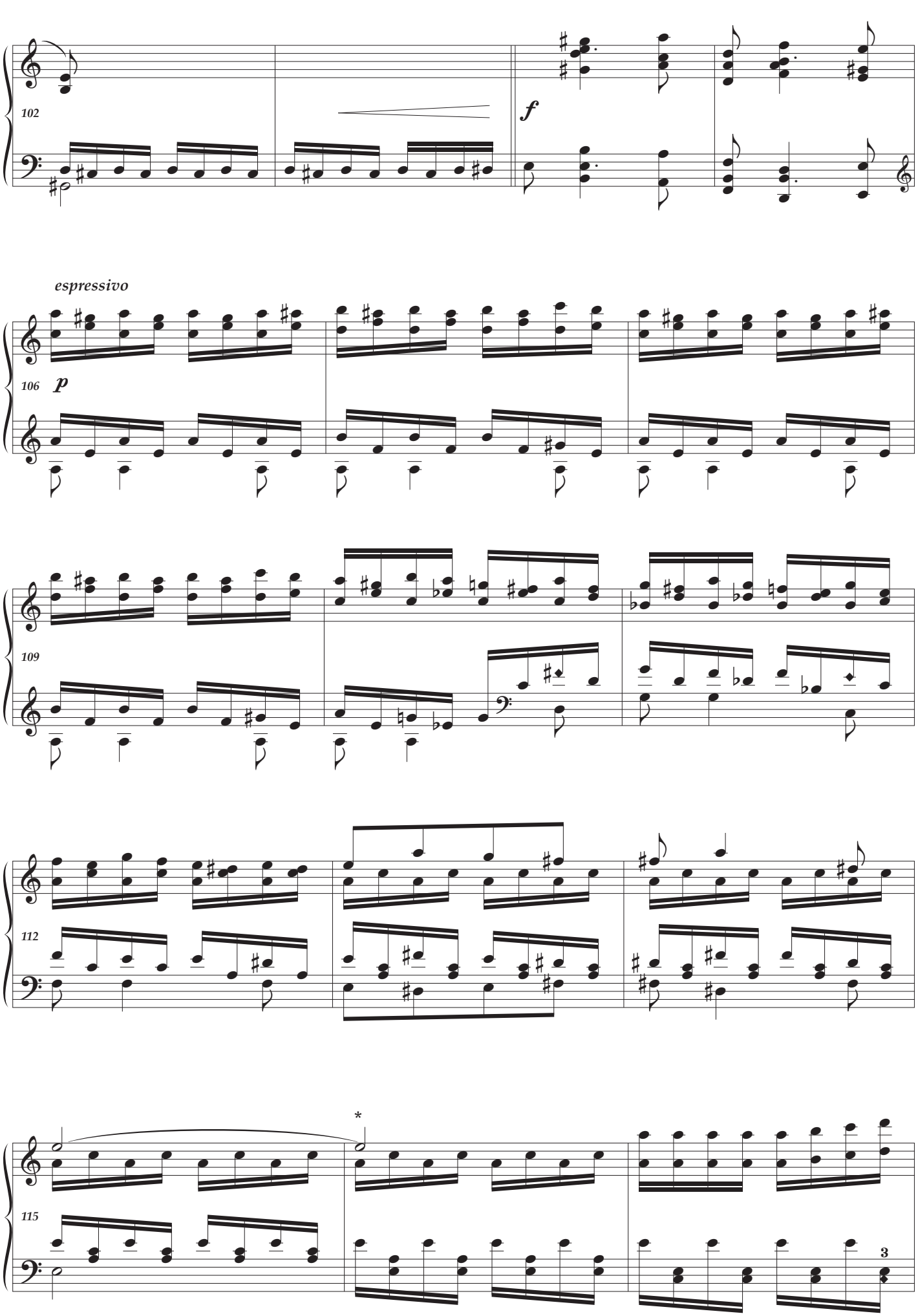
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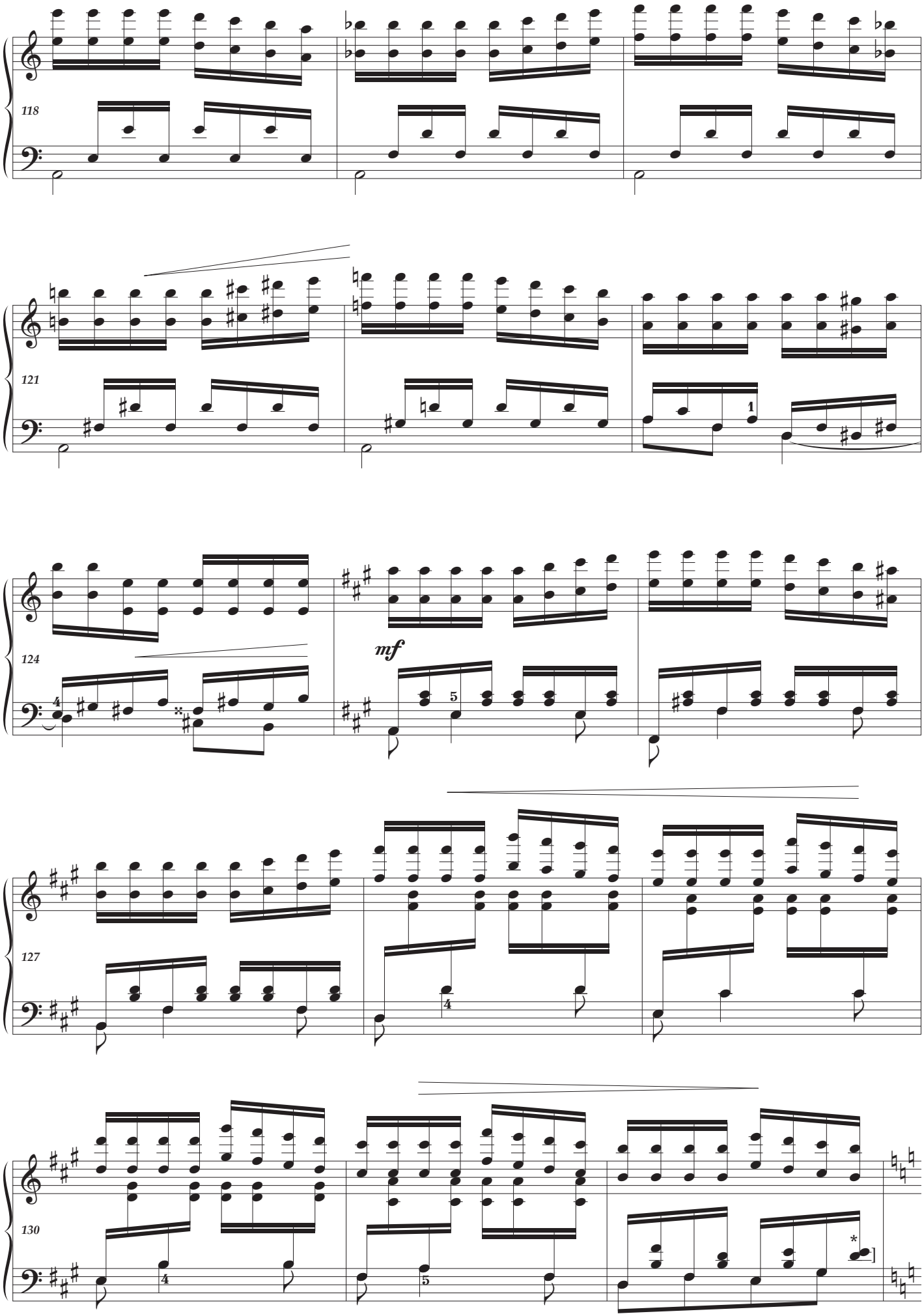
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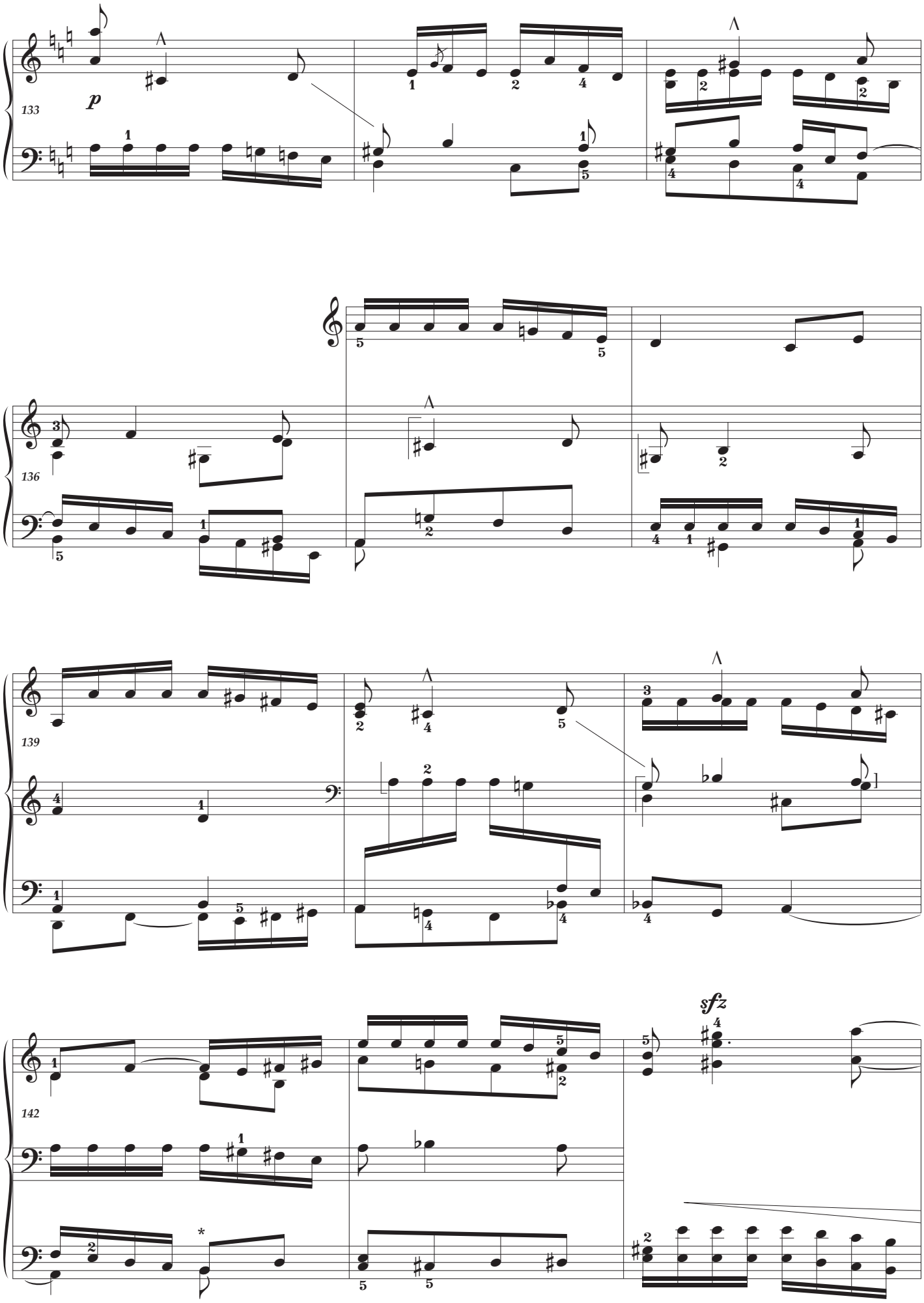
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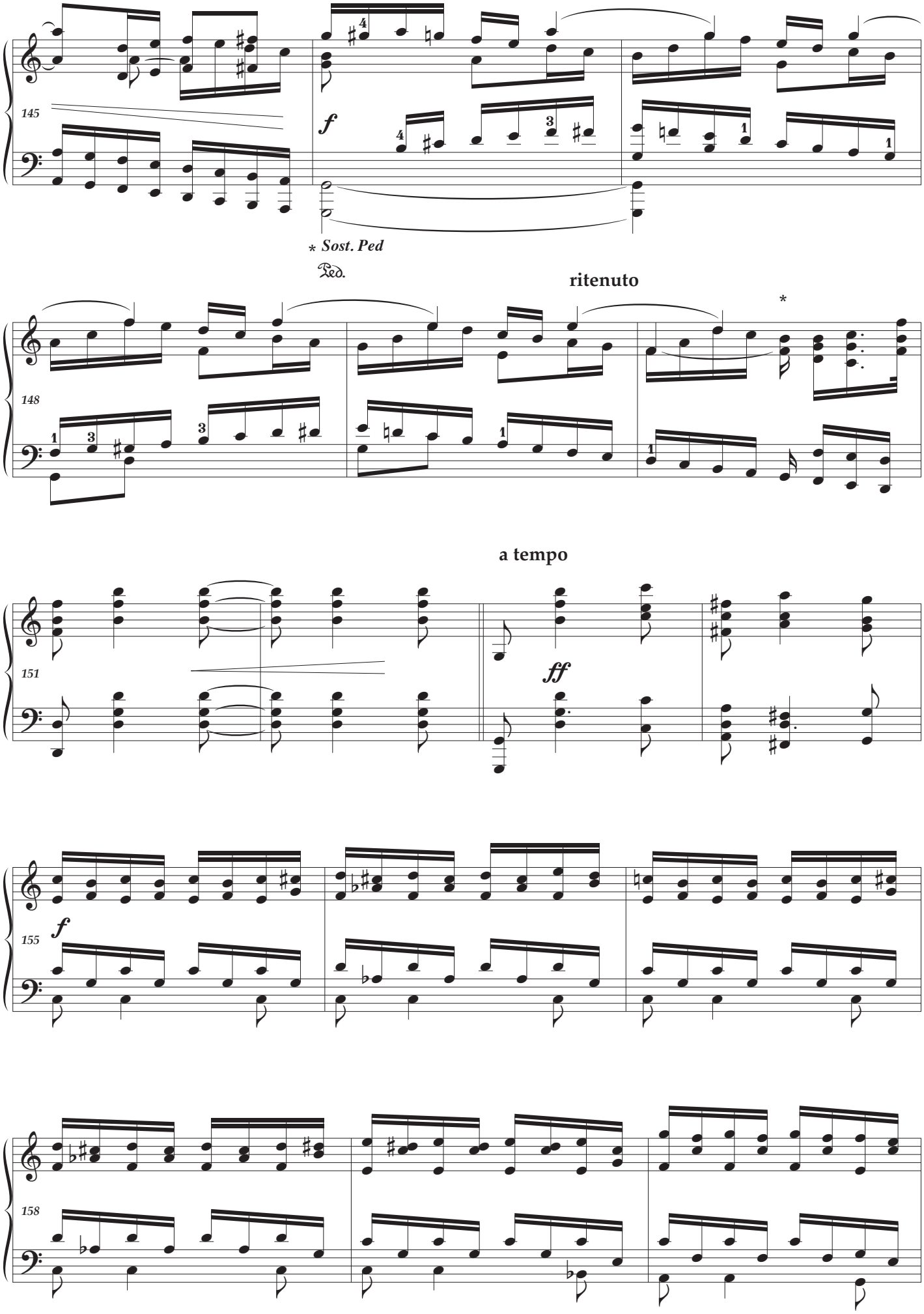
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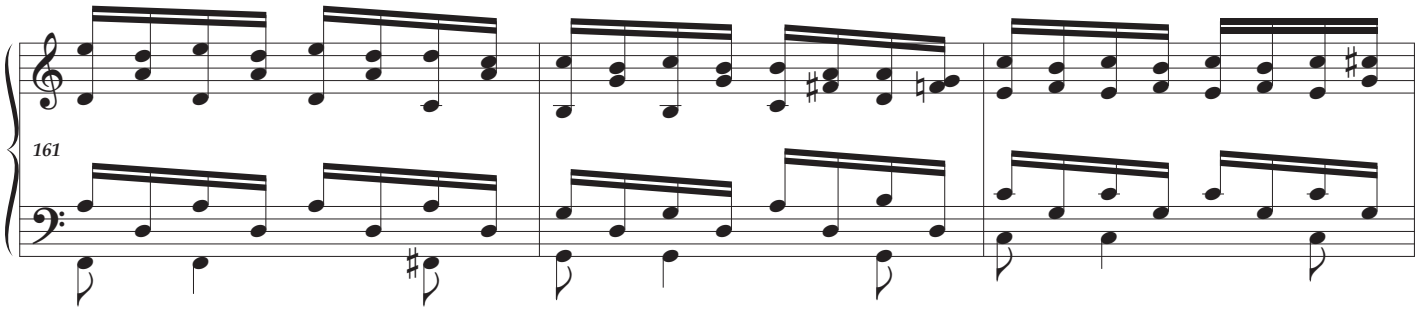
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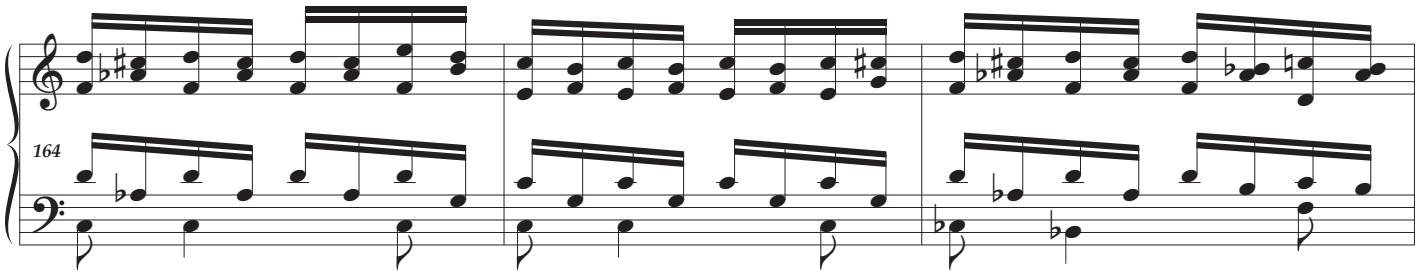
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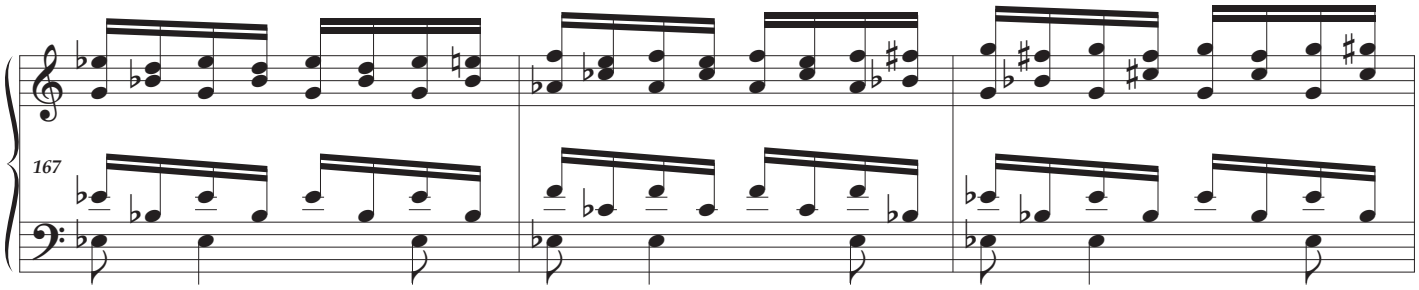
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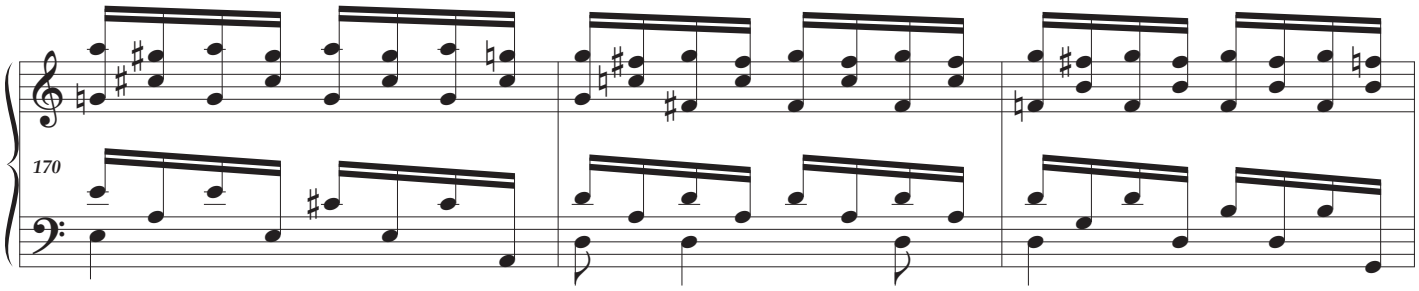
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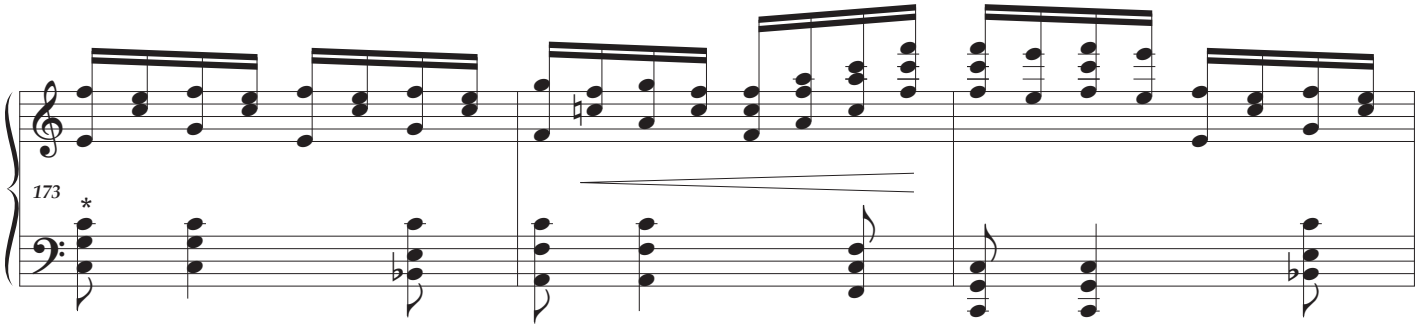
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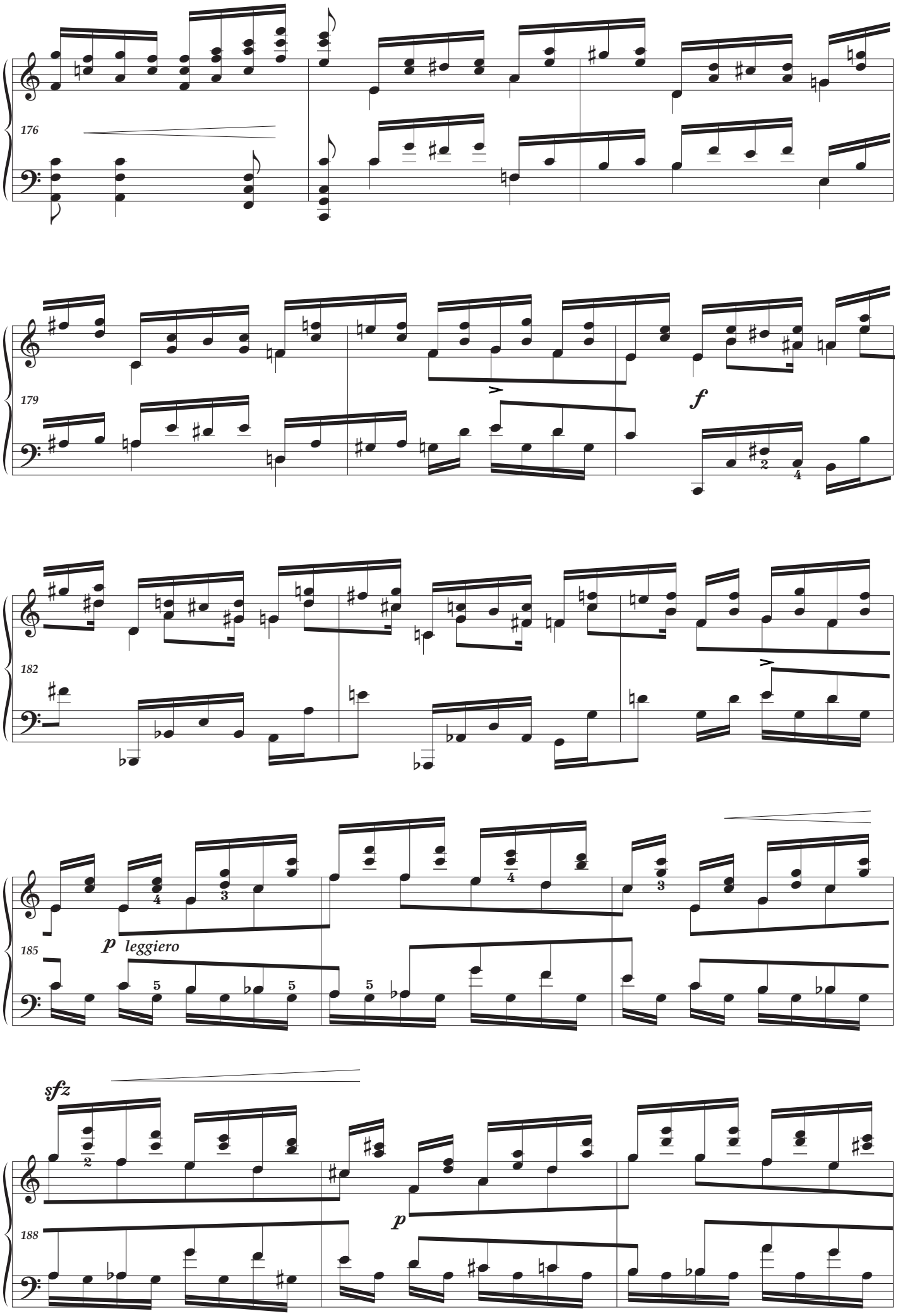
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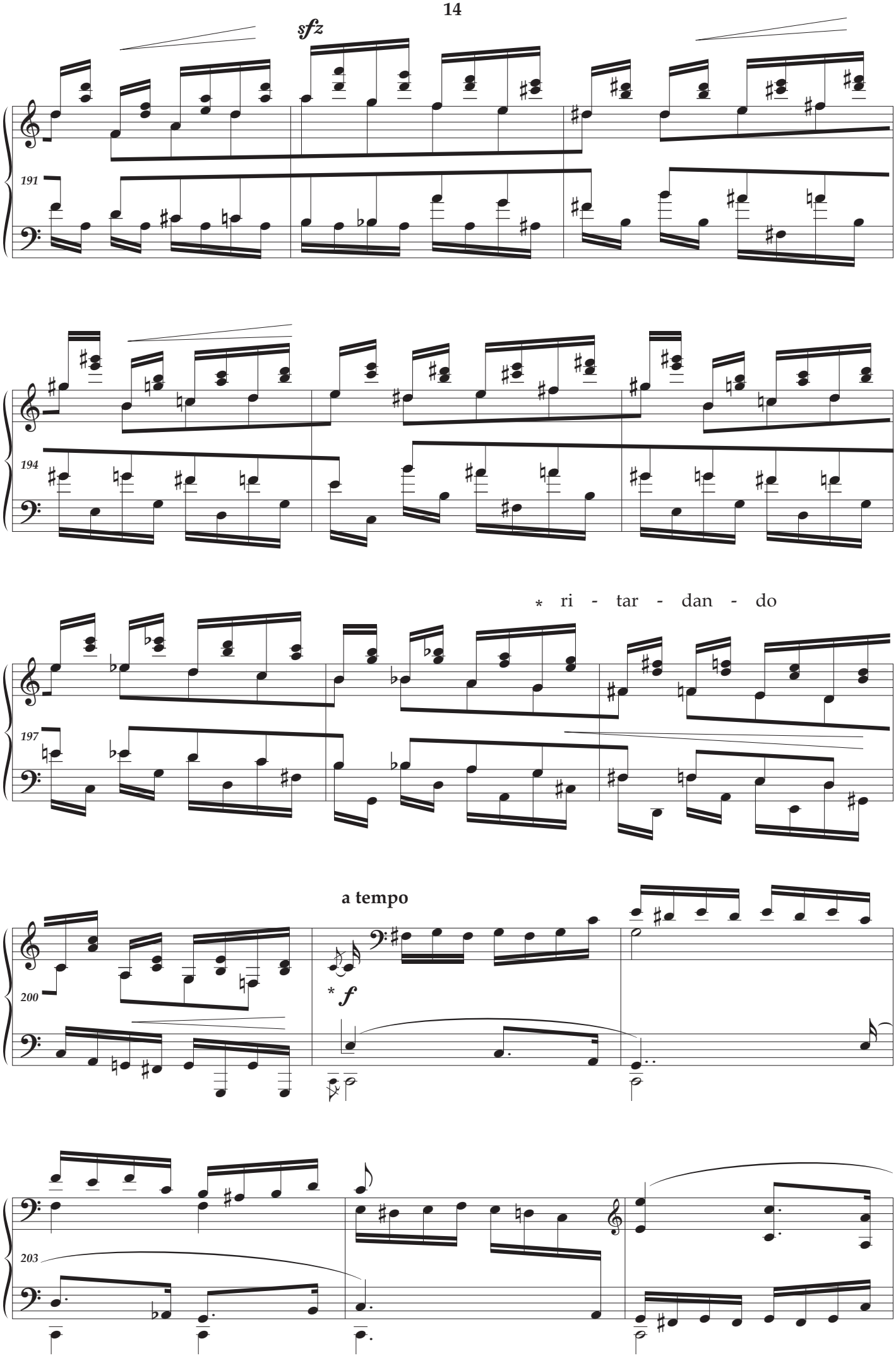
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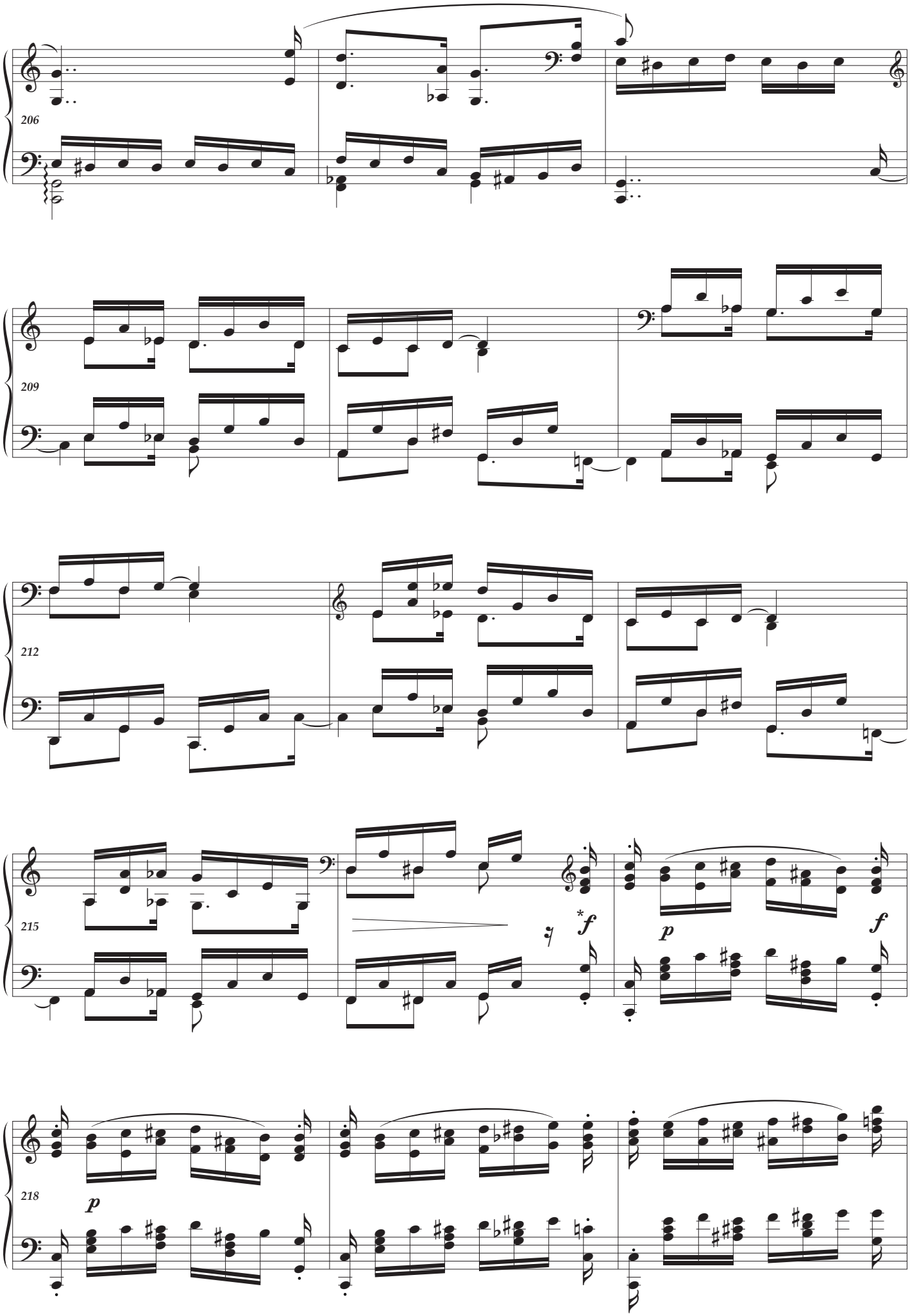
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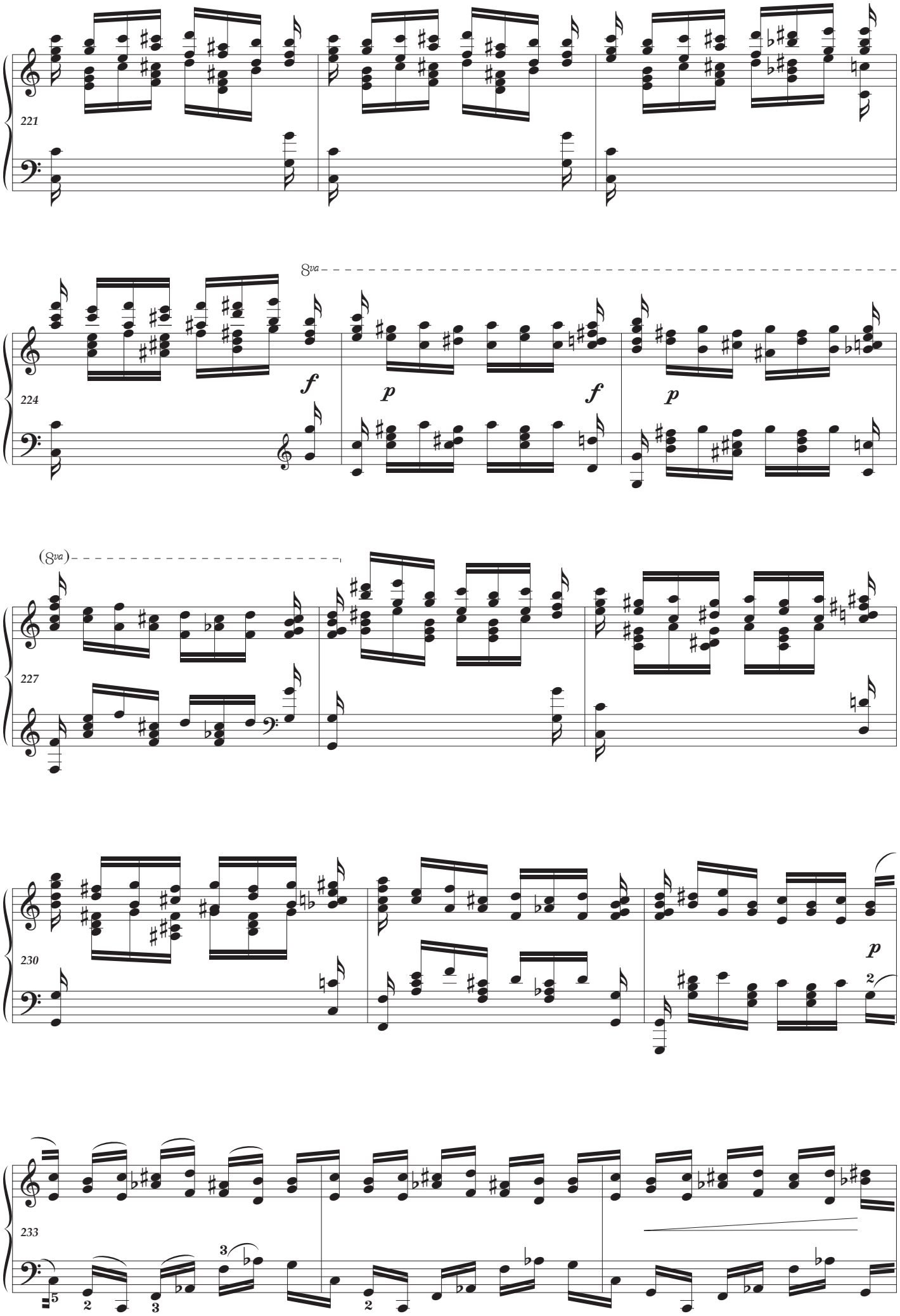
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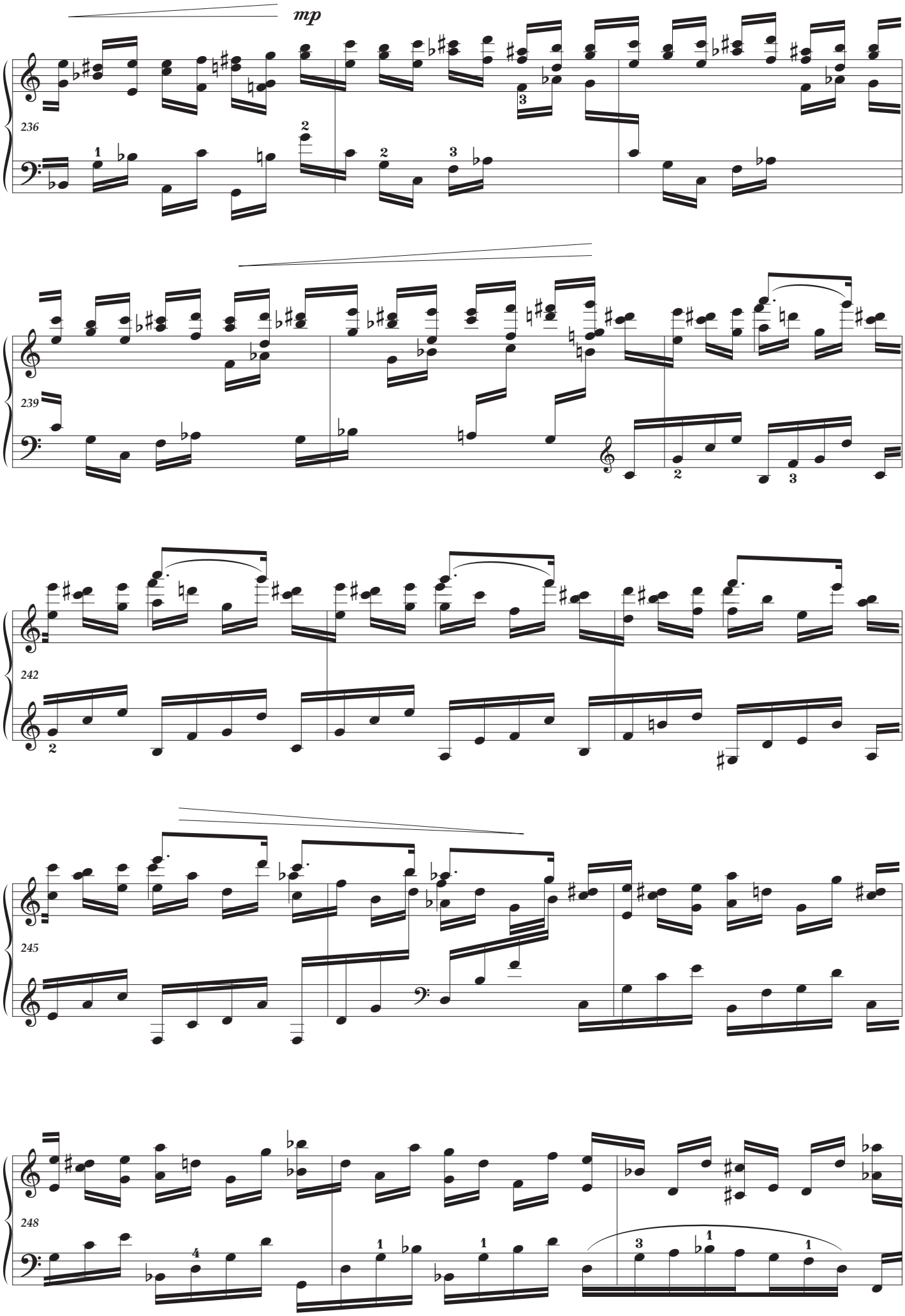
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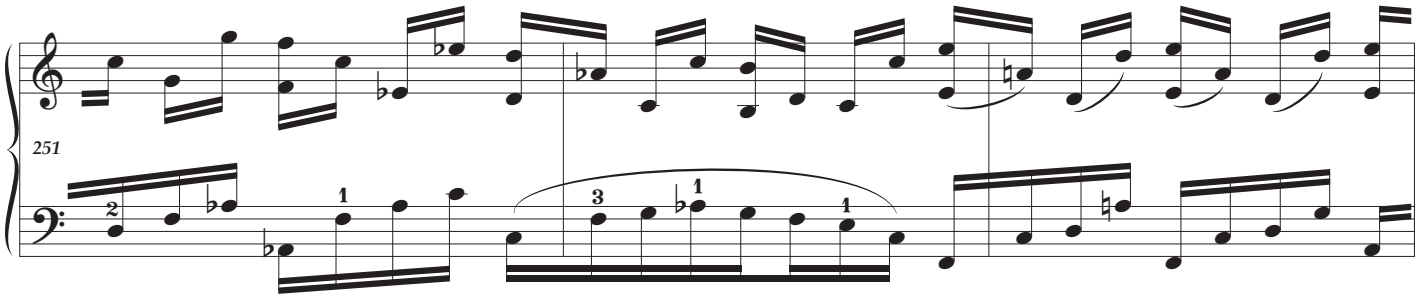
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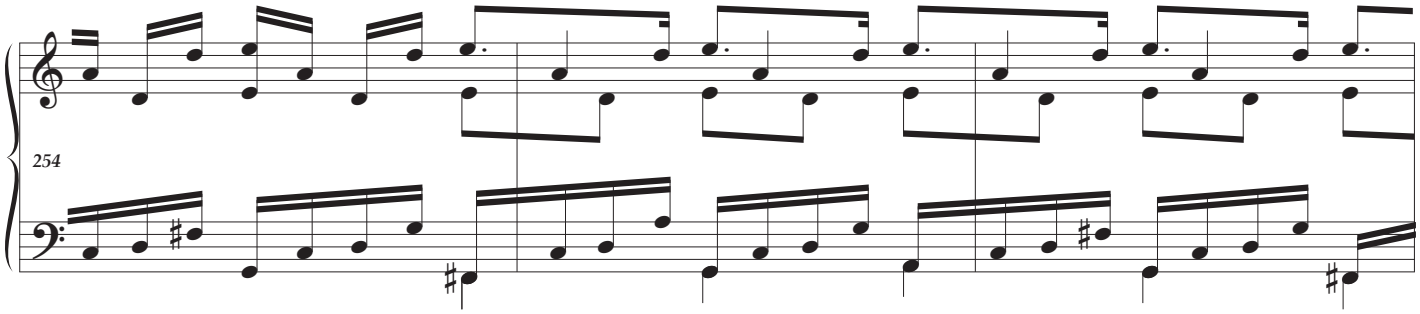
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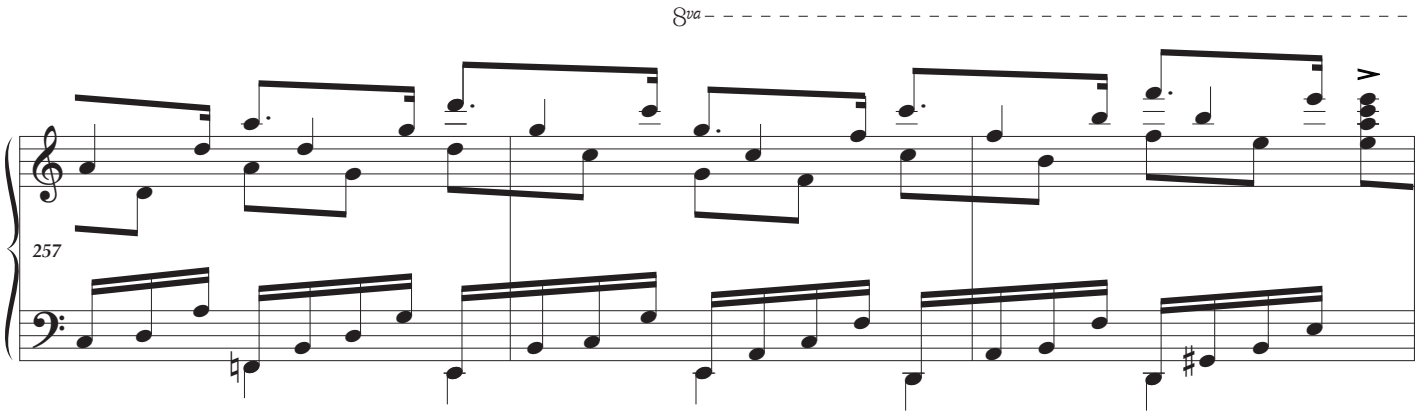
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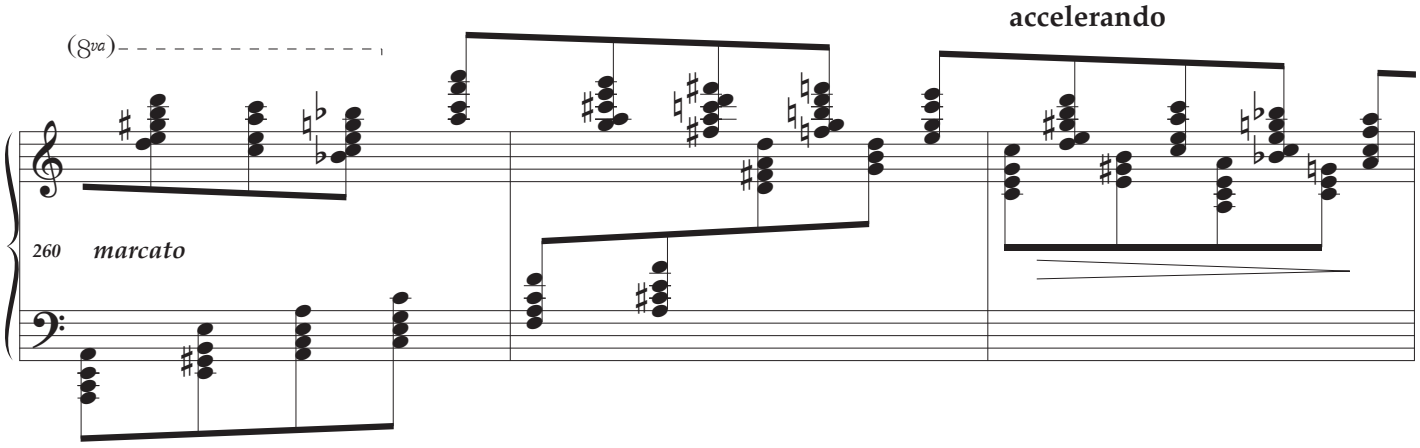
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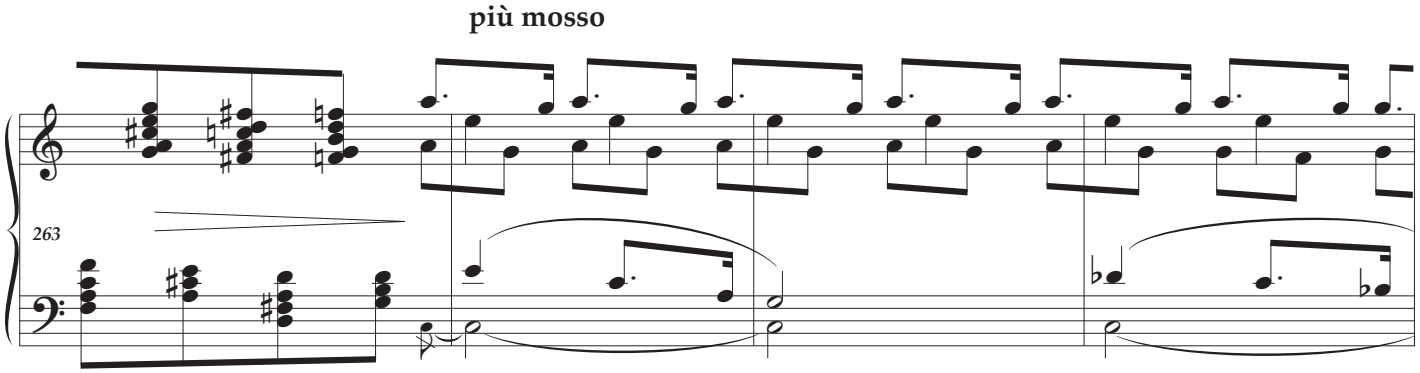
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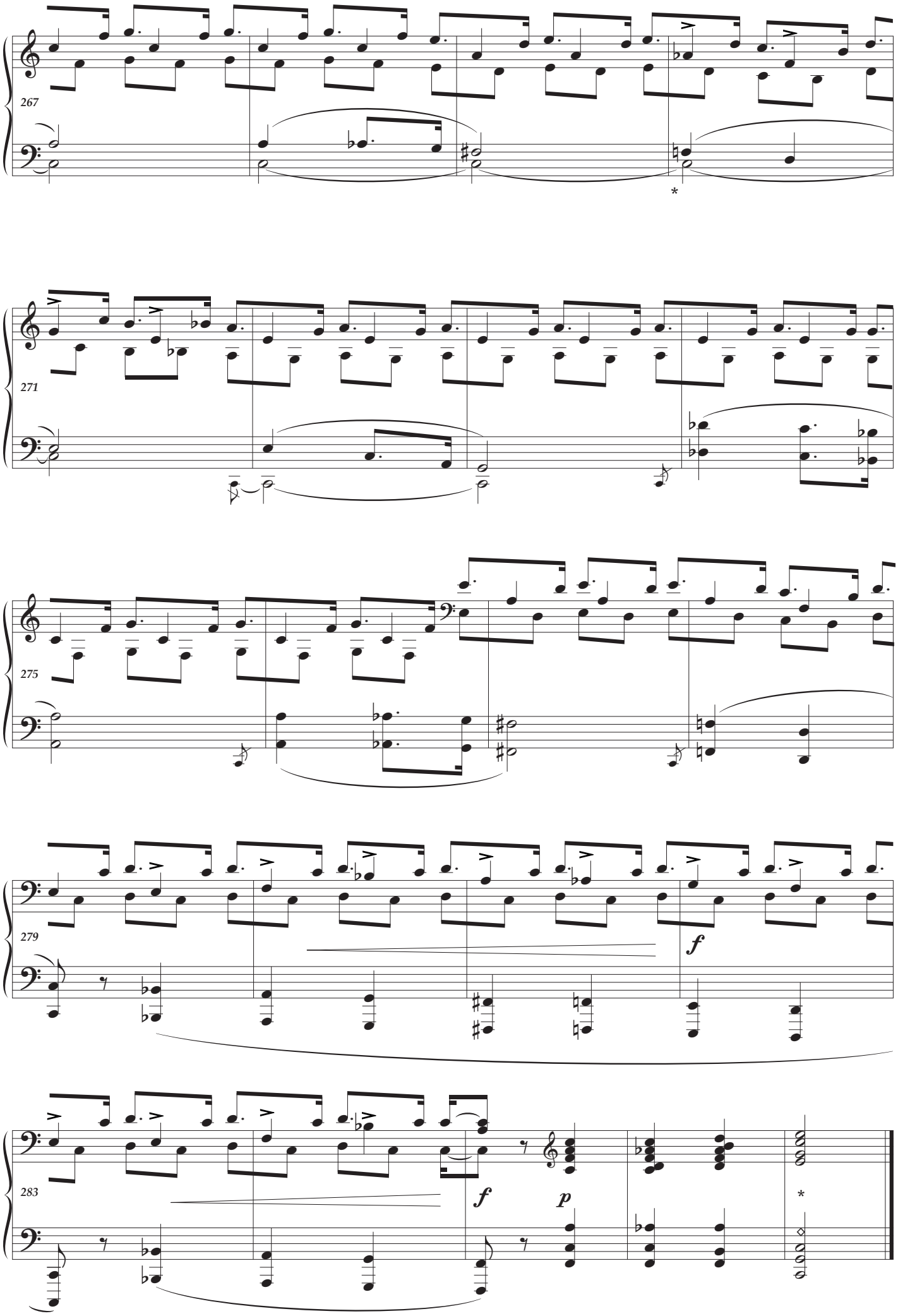
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