Goldbug Variations

for Harpsichord

September 9—October 24, 2011 Duration: about 21 minutes

for Elaine Funaro

Program notes

In 1980, I was living in a crude hunting cabin in the woods of Maine. At an estate auction I bought an old upright piano for $75 and took it two miles from the paved road up to the cabin, cleared out the mouse corpses, and got to composing. In early 1981, I started a large work for two pianos, in variation form with a theme vaguely reminiscent of the Aria used by J. S. Bach in the *Goldberg Variations*. After many adventures, some eighteen months later it was complete, 22 minutes long, and named *Goldbug Variations*. By then I was studying physics at NTSU and had access to fine pianists at the music school, and in November of 1982 the variations had its one and only performance for some twenty people. Later, I arranged the piece for full orchestra, but it never saw the light of day.

In 2007 I wrote the *Ananda Concerto* for violin and orchestra for my friend Eric Pritchard. For the middle movement, I took the best ten minutes of the old *Goldbug Variations* and reworked it for the concerto.

Eric started performing my music in the spring of 2006. Elaine Funaro attended the first such concert at Duke, and asked me to write a piece for harpsichord. This was a big challenge, as I do not have access to an instrument, and my piano writing tends to be heavy on the pedal and dynamic changes. However the idea percolated for several years. In the fall of 2011, after eight months away from composition to author my *Autobillography*, I was ready for this new adventure. I took the theme from the original *Goldbug*, but nothing else, starting from absolute scratch. As pianos are ubiquitous and harpsichords rare, and I am an unknown composer, I have made an arrangement for piano.

My fellow composers frequently criticize my “incessant tonality”, while some audience members have asked me “Why do you write atonal music?” The chromatic nature of this theme forces me to be harmonically adventurous, while the antique nature of the instrument gives a traditional ambience, trills and all.

Posthumous apologies to Sebastian Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, D. Scarlatti, Couperin, and Scott Joplin, who made this work possible by being in the public domain.

Technical issues for performers

After listening to Glenn Gould play the *Goldberg Variations,* I was very careful to mark all the tempos, which was not an option for Bach. Performers should follow these for the overall tempo of each variation until they know the piece very well. I usually end up asking musicians not to play too fast.

In general, my style tends to legato unless otherwise specified. When short notes are desired, I have put in dots, but otherwise notes should get a full value. I have written in extensive finger pedaling, but this is only a minimum, the rest being up to the discretion of the performer. I have included some slurs even though these are not necessarily idiomatic in harpsichord literature, to make the intended articulation more evident. The piano edition has many more. It would be best to play this piece in a room with generous reverberation.

We have short attention spans these days, and this is a comparatively long work for our time. I have no objections to a short selection presented on a concert instead of the whole piece, as long as the theme is included.

Bill Robinson

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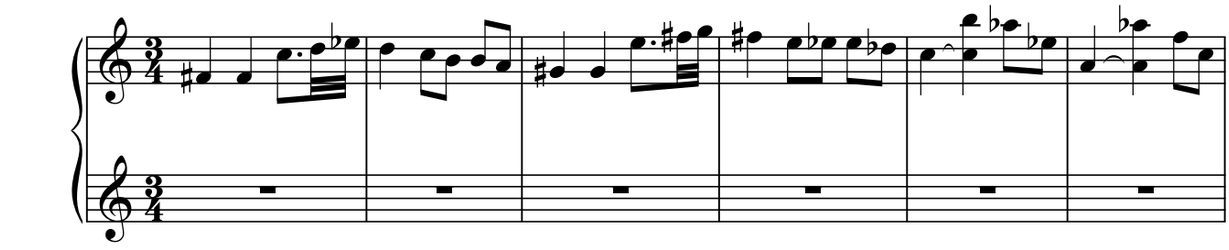
Cover credits; border from an early edition of J. S. Bach’s *Goldberg Variations*. Gold bug coin from *The Market Garden*, June 27, 2011 article “Taking Issue with Some Gold Bugs”.

Goldbug Variations for Harpsichord [21']

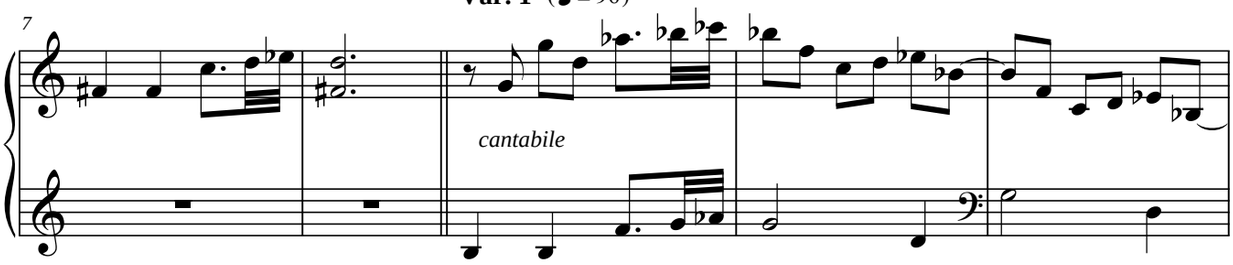
Theme

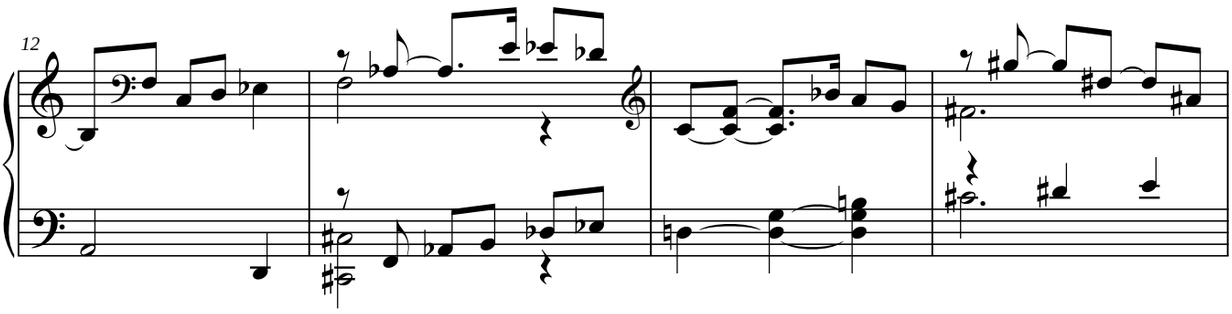
Moderato (♩ = 66)

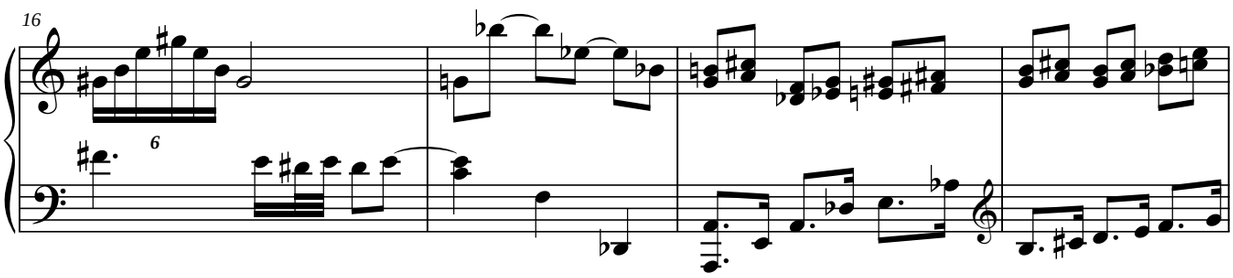
Bill Robinson

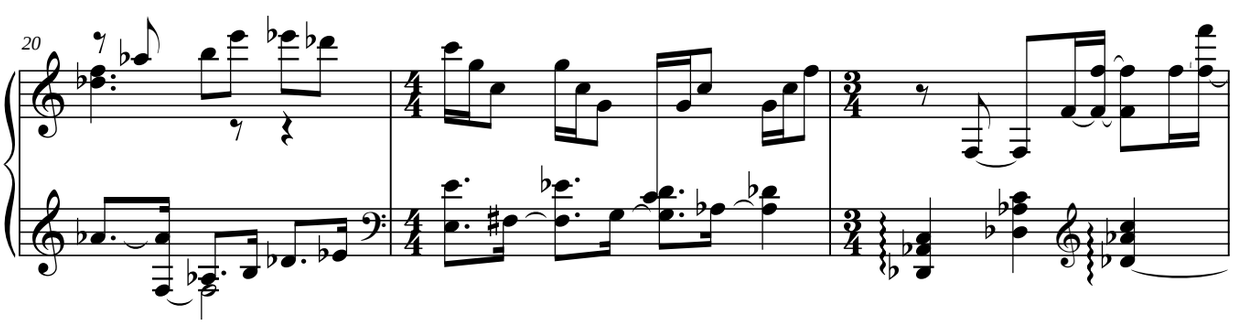


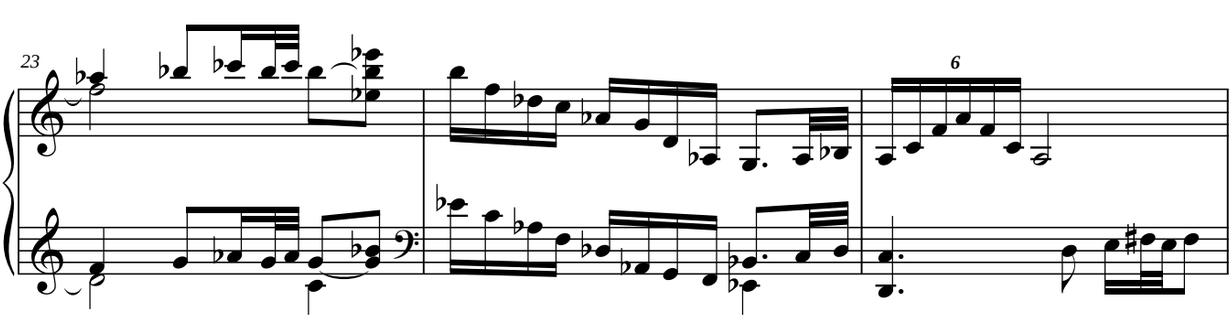
Var. 1 (♩ = 90)











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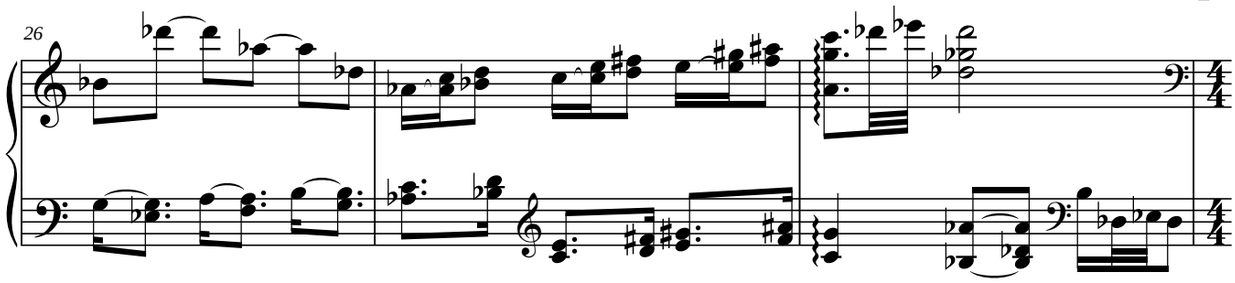
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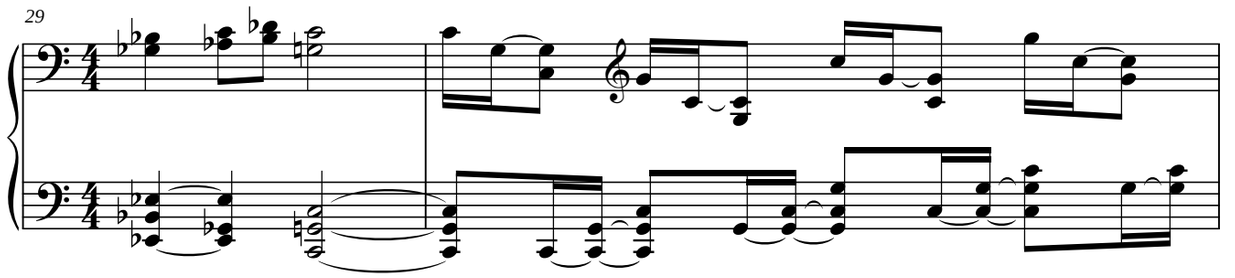
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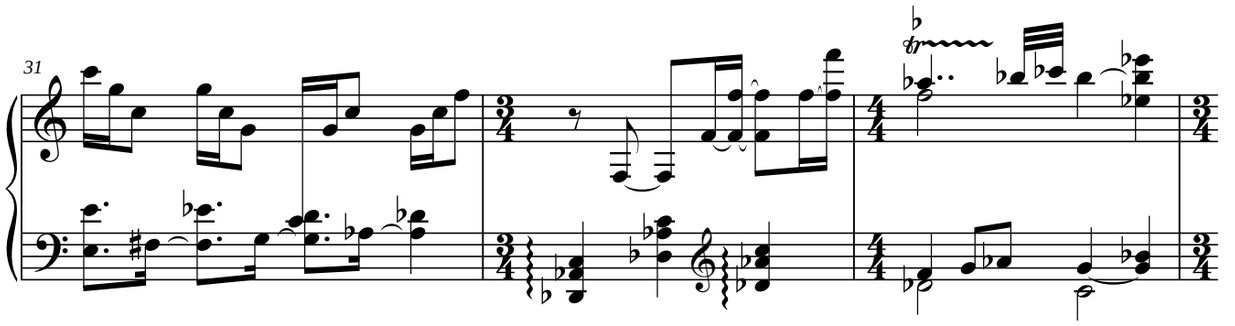
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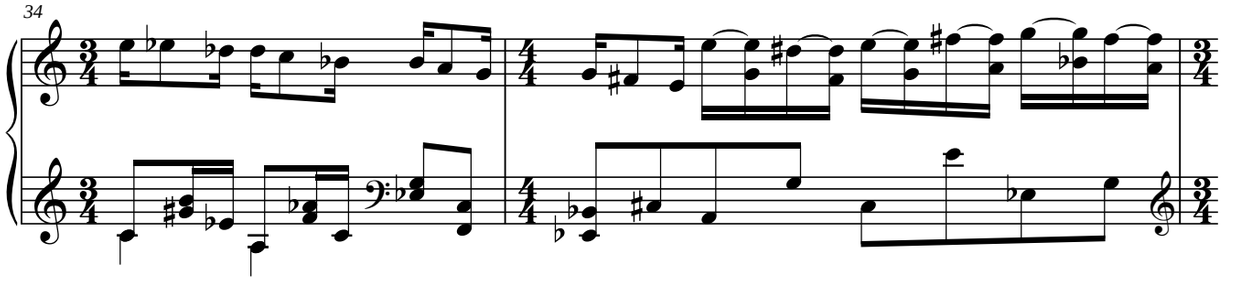
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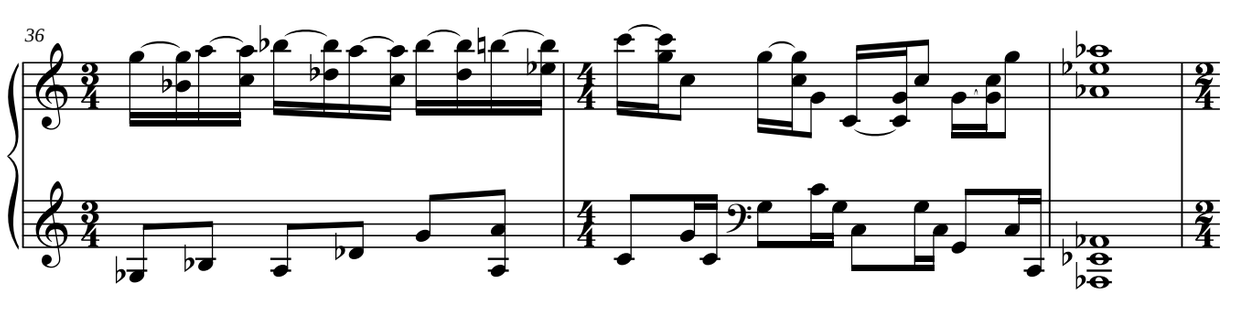
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Var. 2 **Slow** (♩ = 66)

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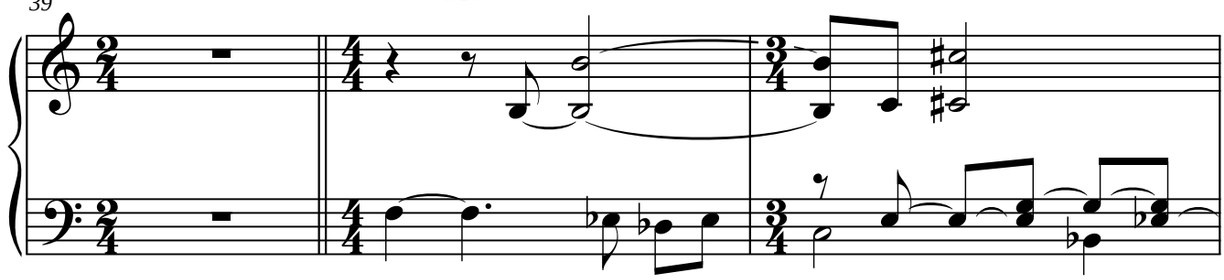

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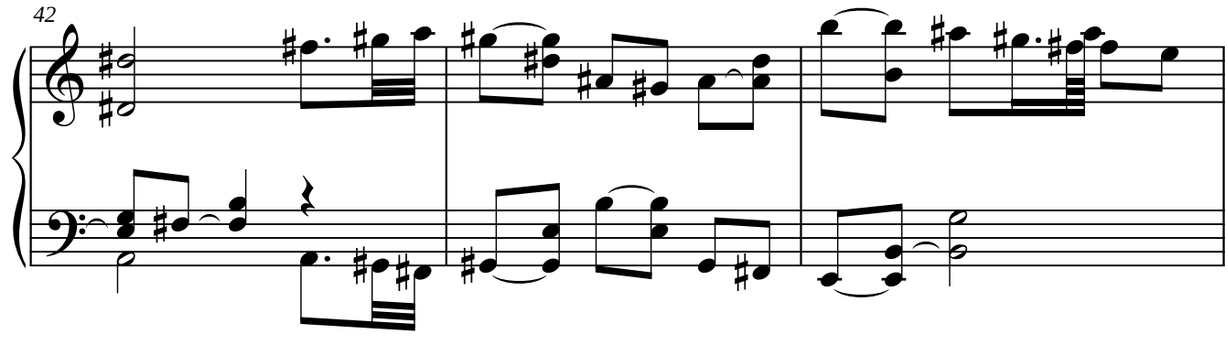

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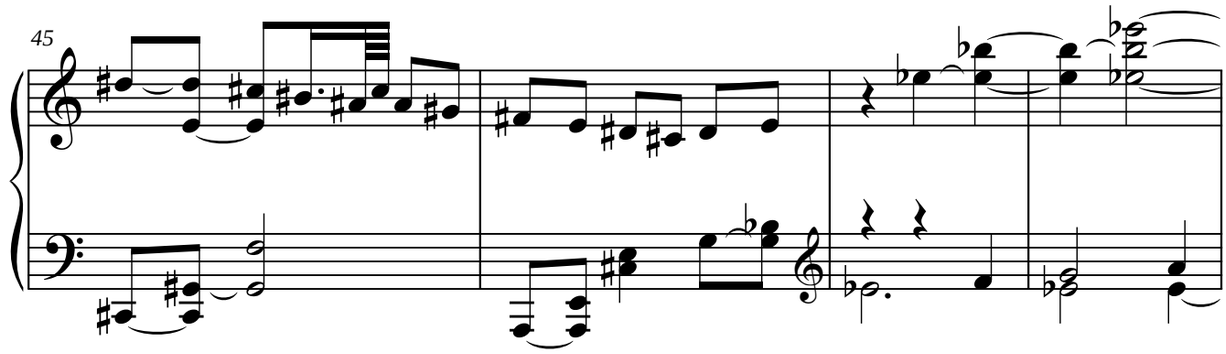

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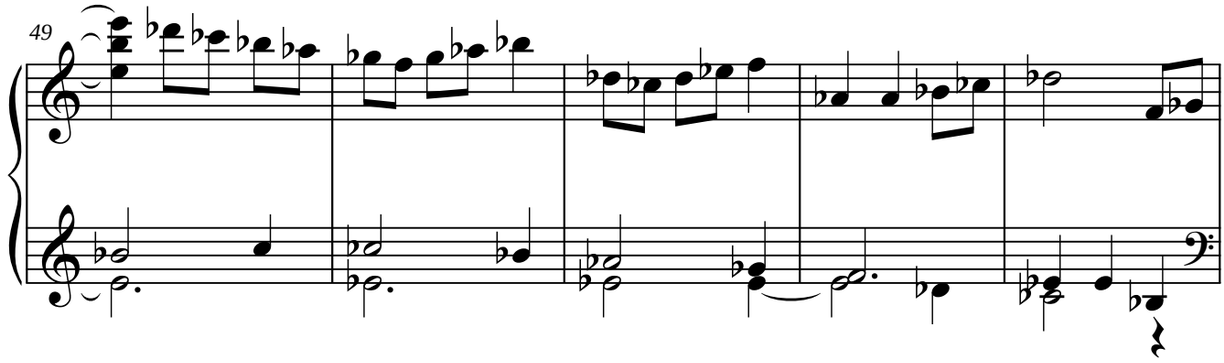

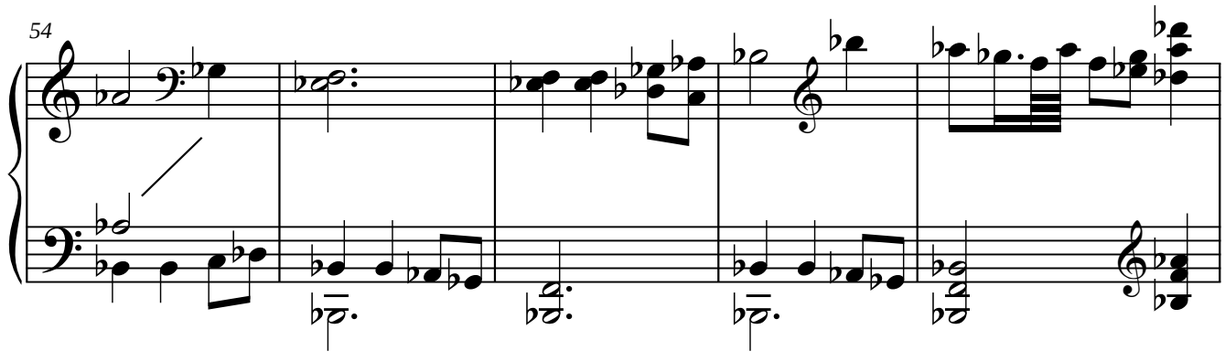
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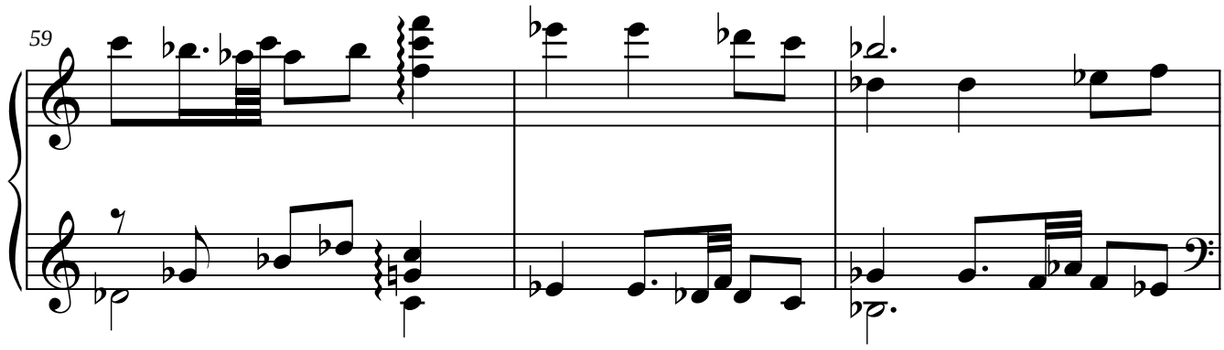
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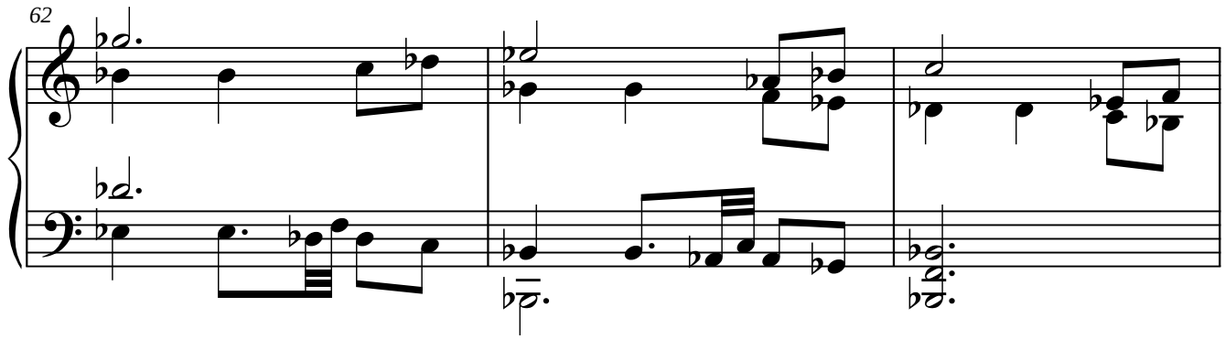
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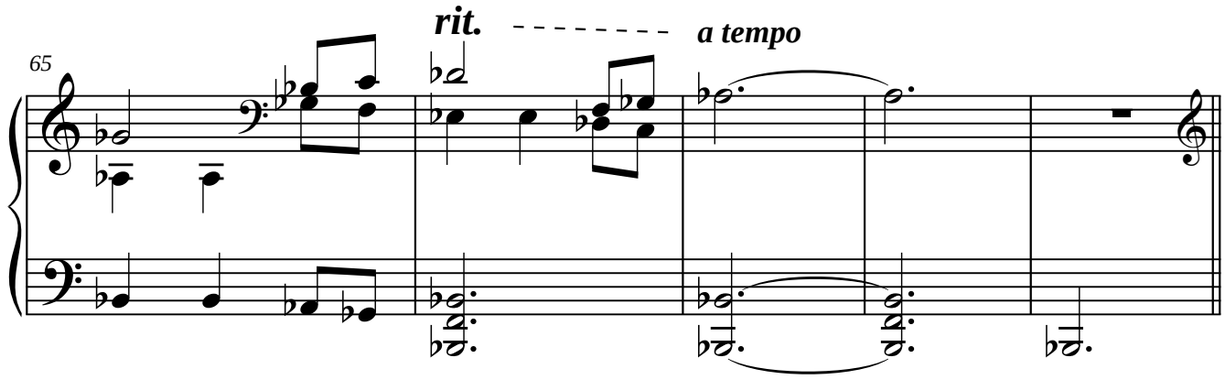
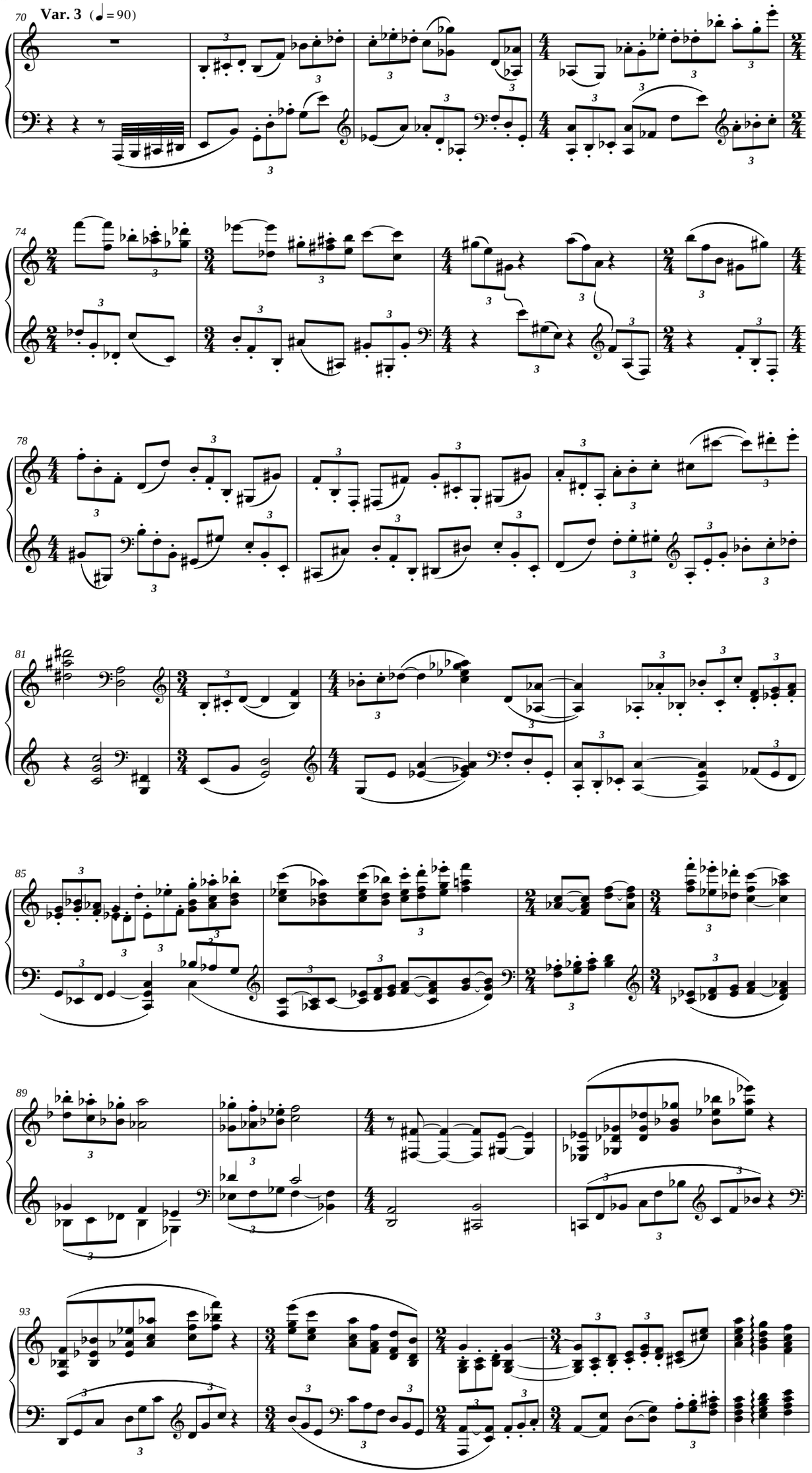

rit.
a tempo
65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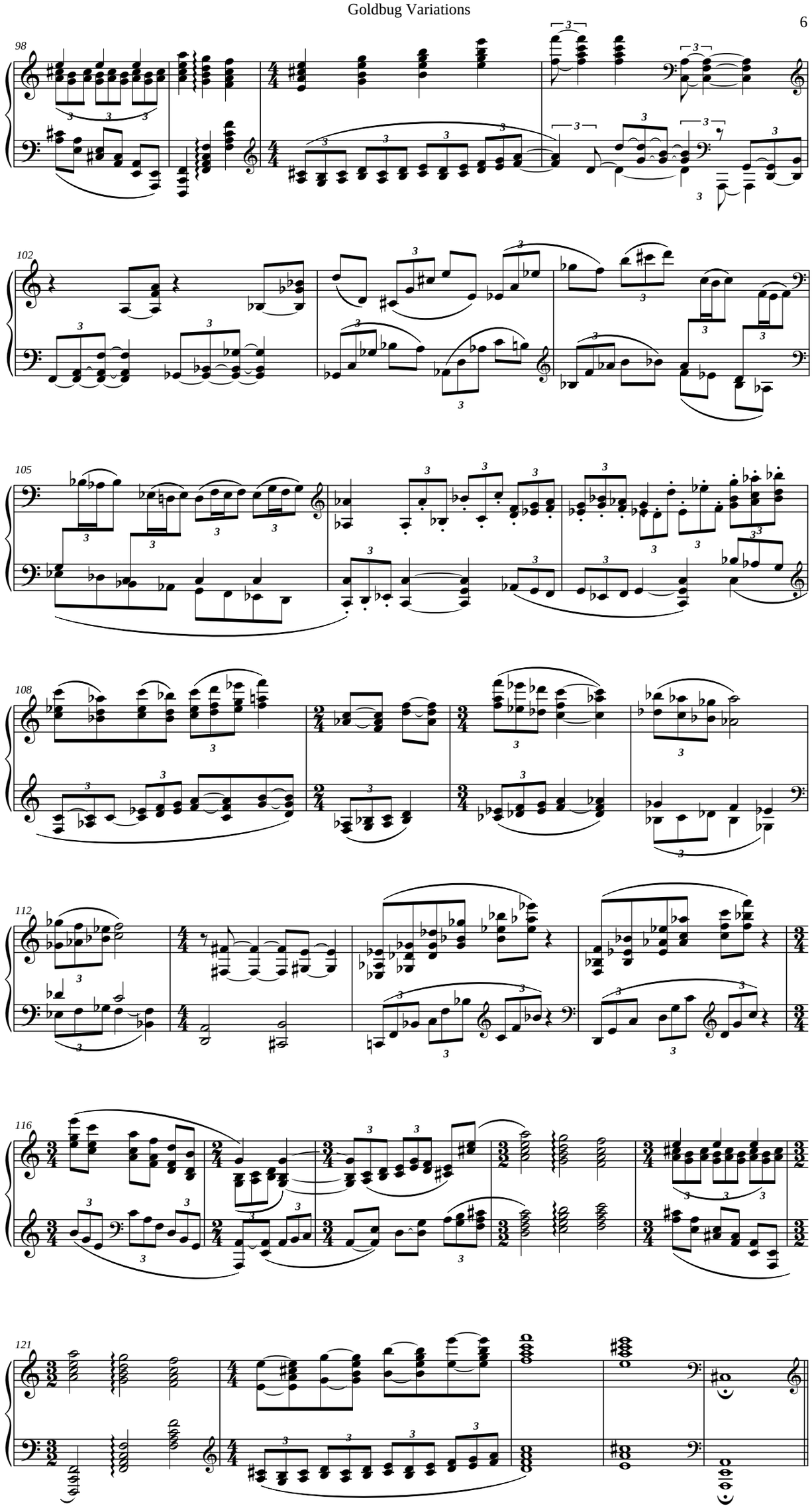
Var. 3 (♩= 90)
74
78
81
85
89
93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102
105
108
112
116
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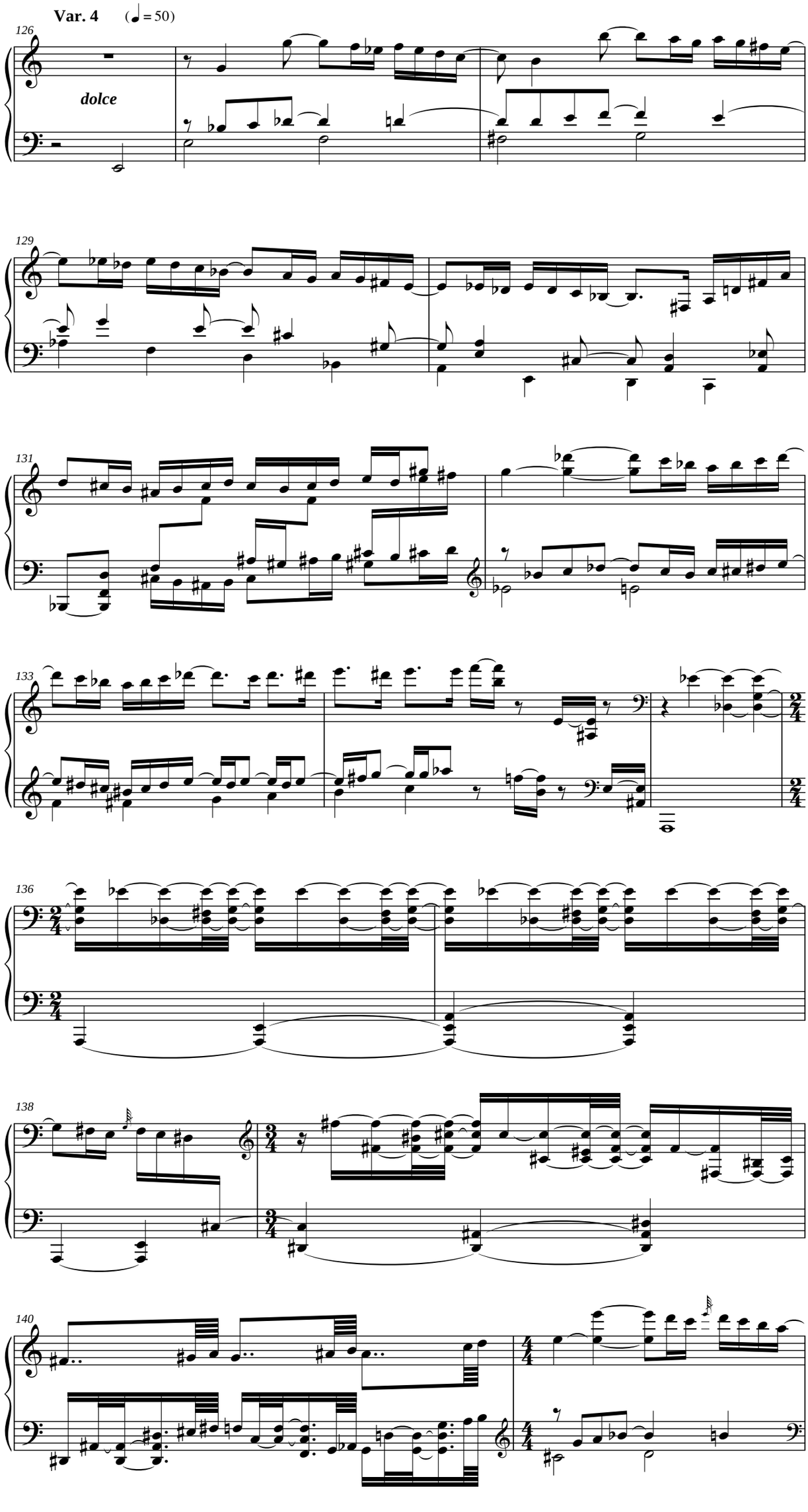
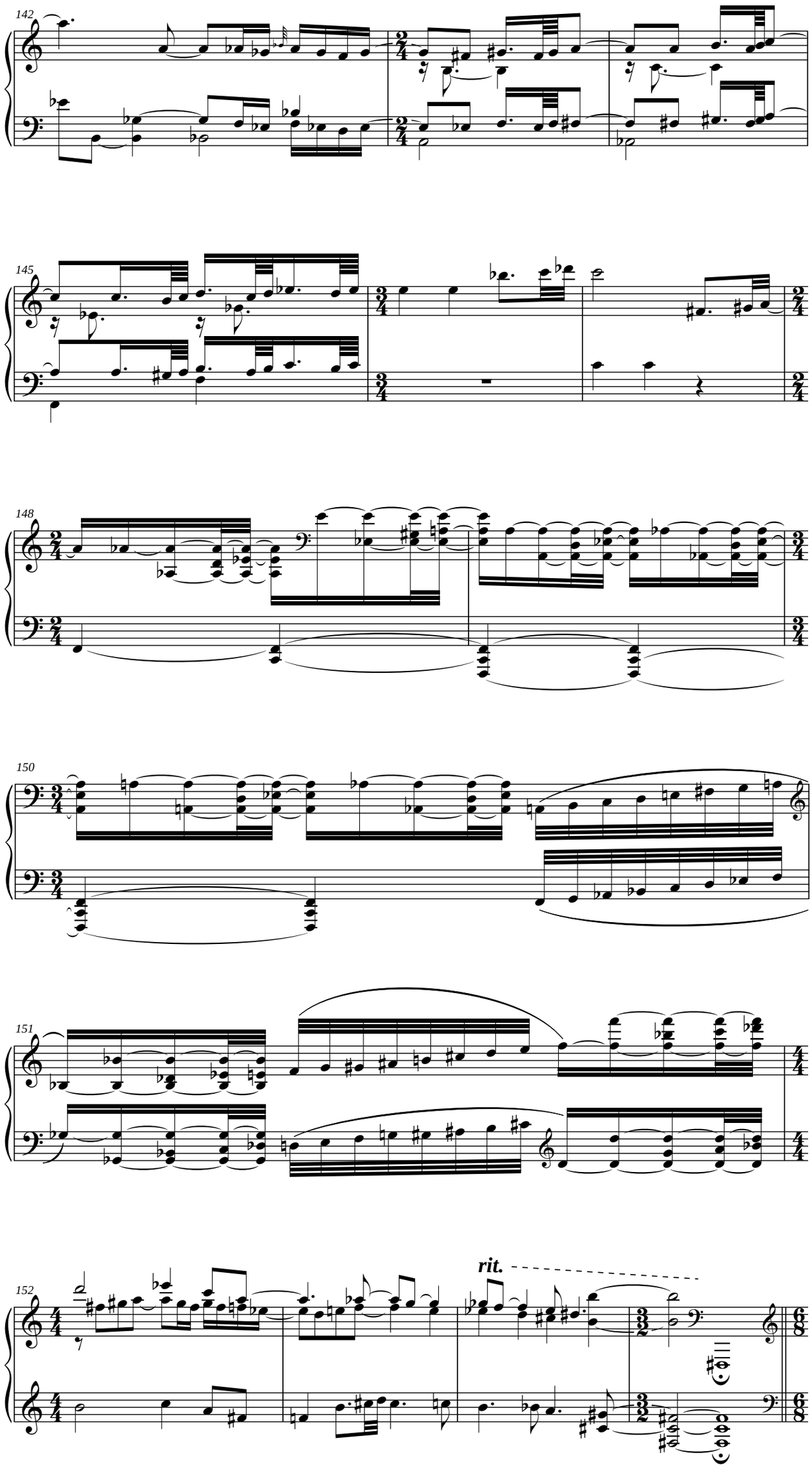
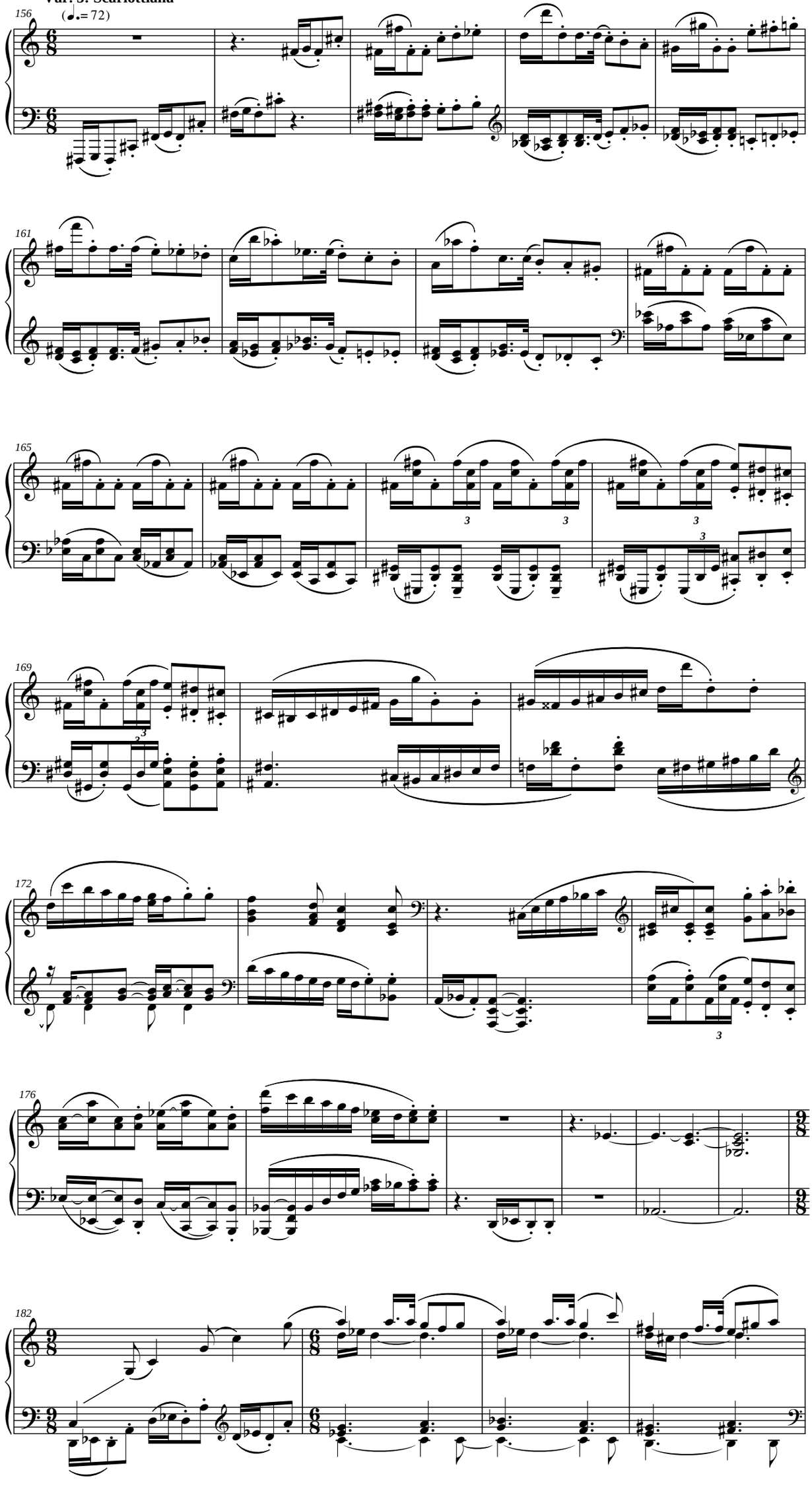
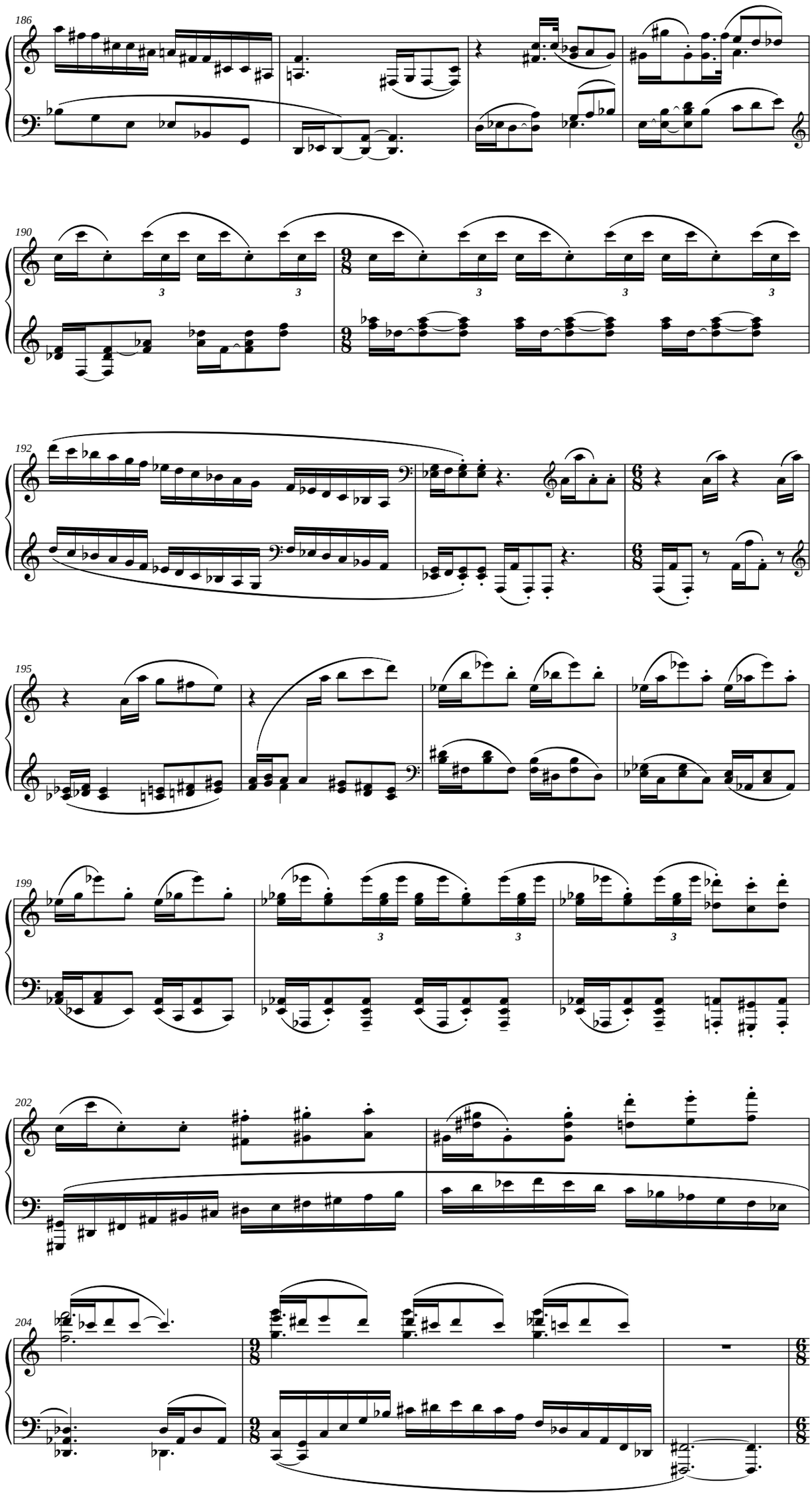

Var. 4
(♩ = 50)
126
dolce
129
131
133
136
138
140


142
145
148
150
151
152
rit.

Var. 5: Scarlottiana

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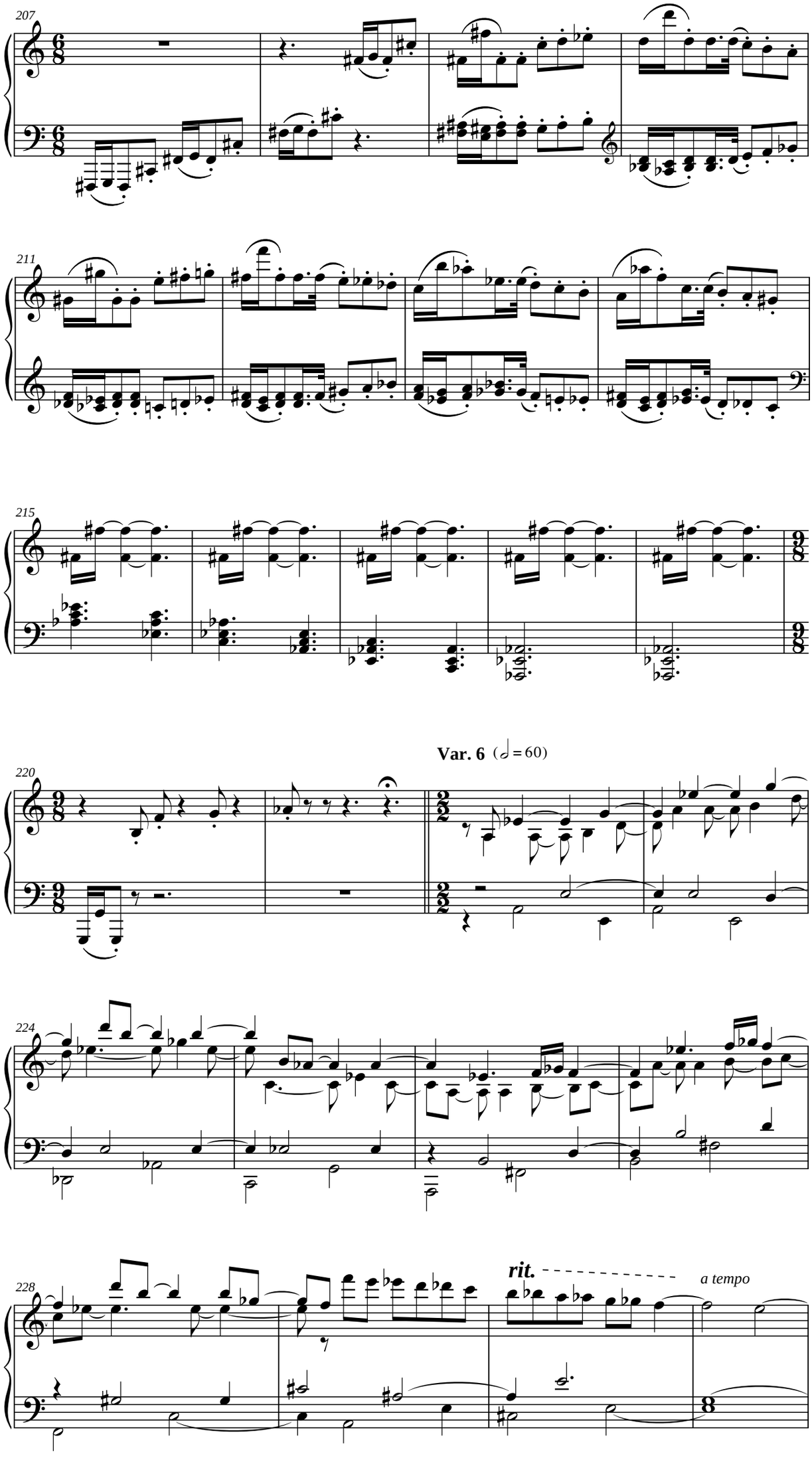
192
195
199
202
204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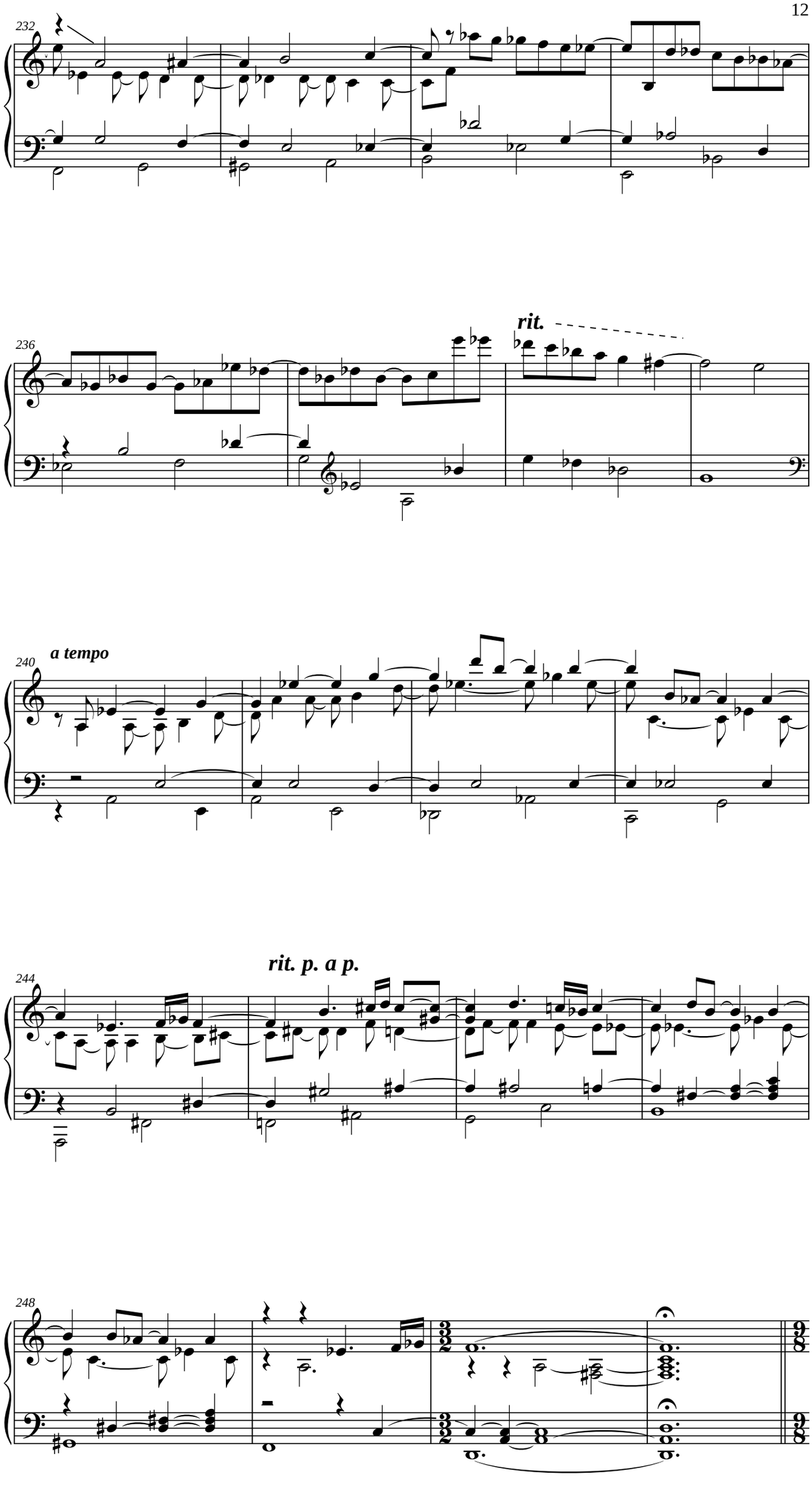
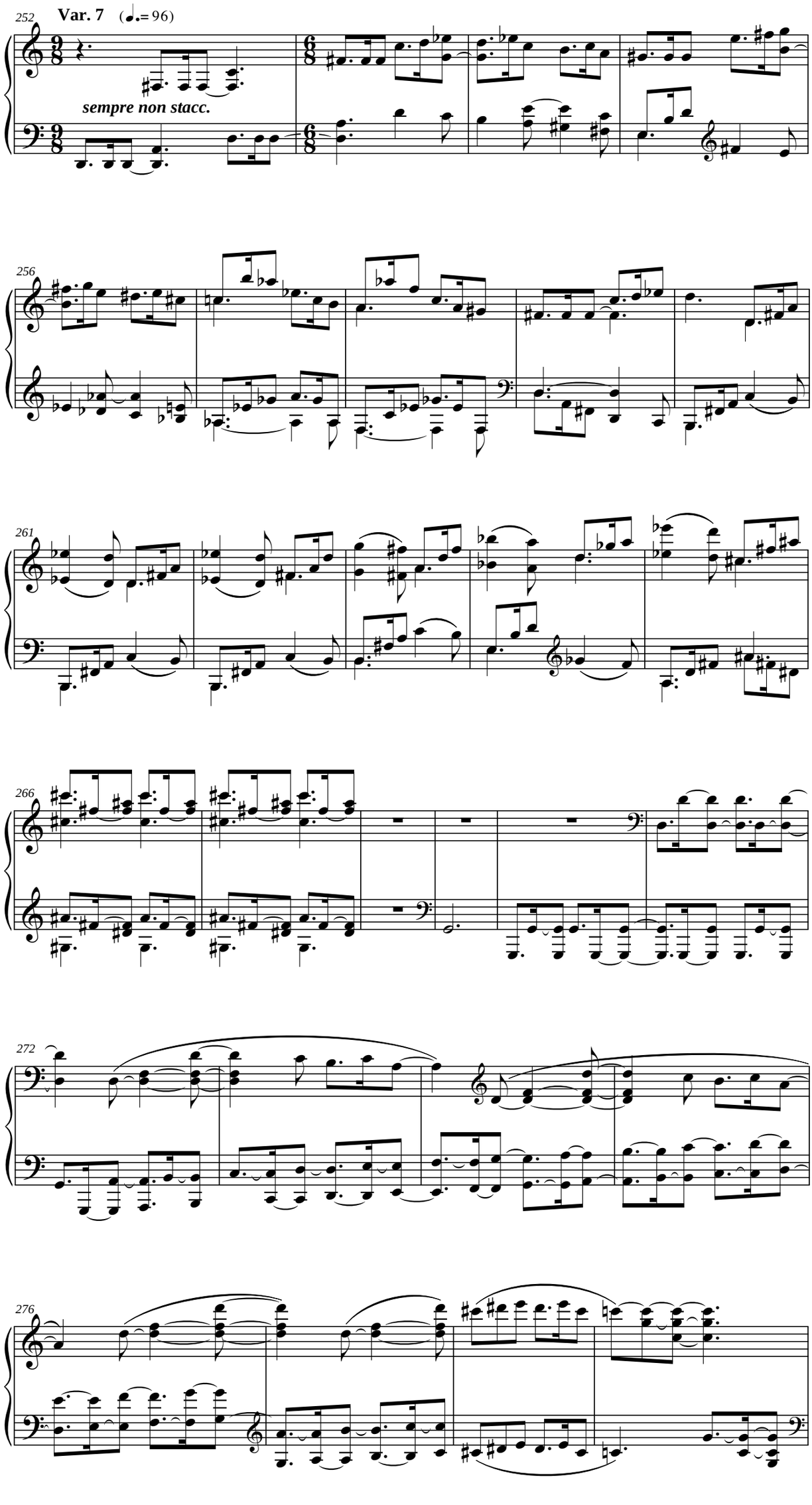
211
215
Var. 6 (𝅗𝅥 = 60)
220
224
228
rit.
a tempo


232
236
rit.
240
a tempo
244
rit. p. a p.
248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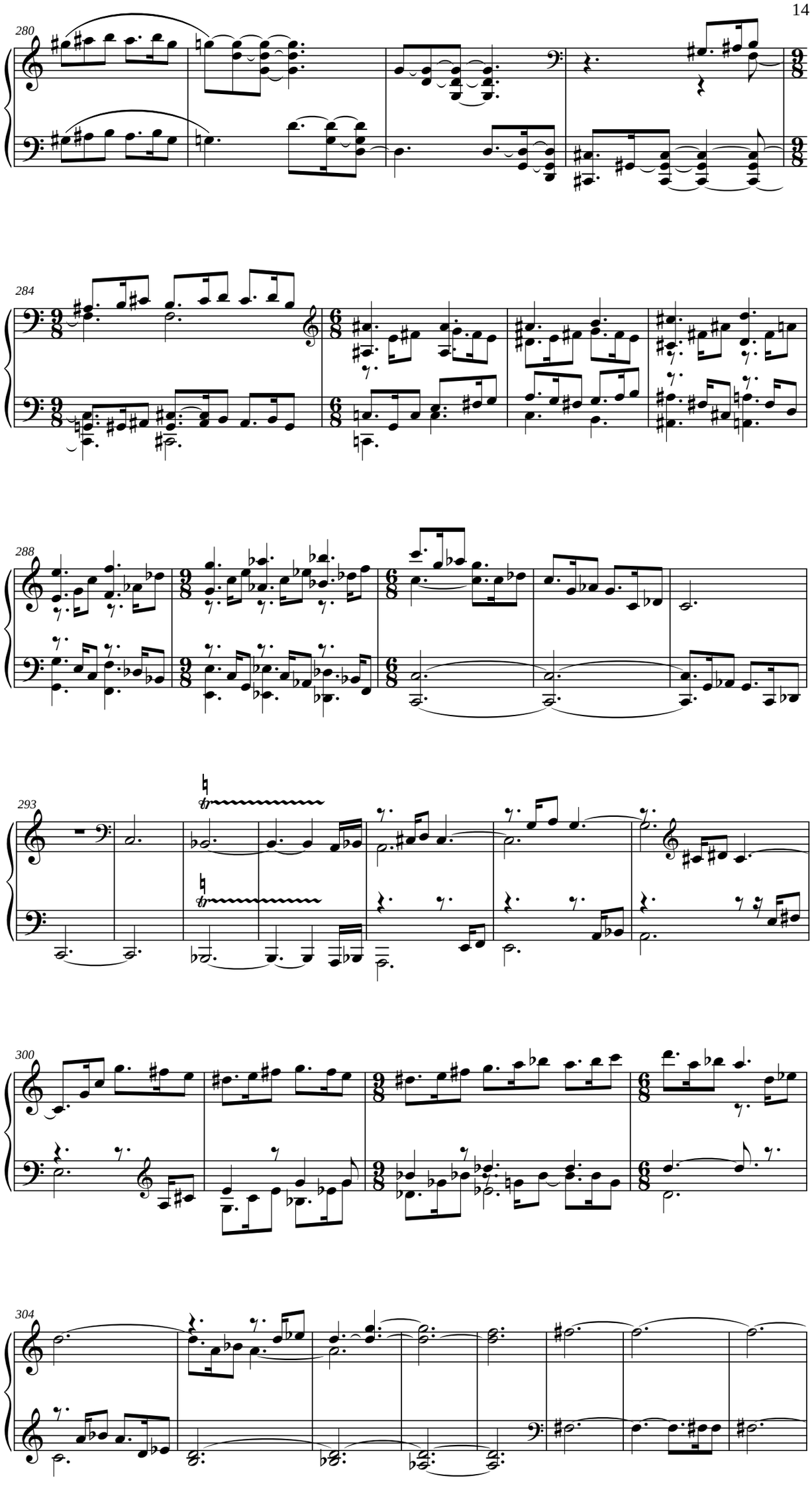
Var. 7 (♩.= 96)
sempre non stacc.
256
261
266
272
276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288
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300
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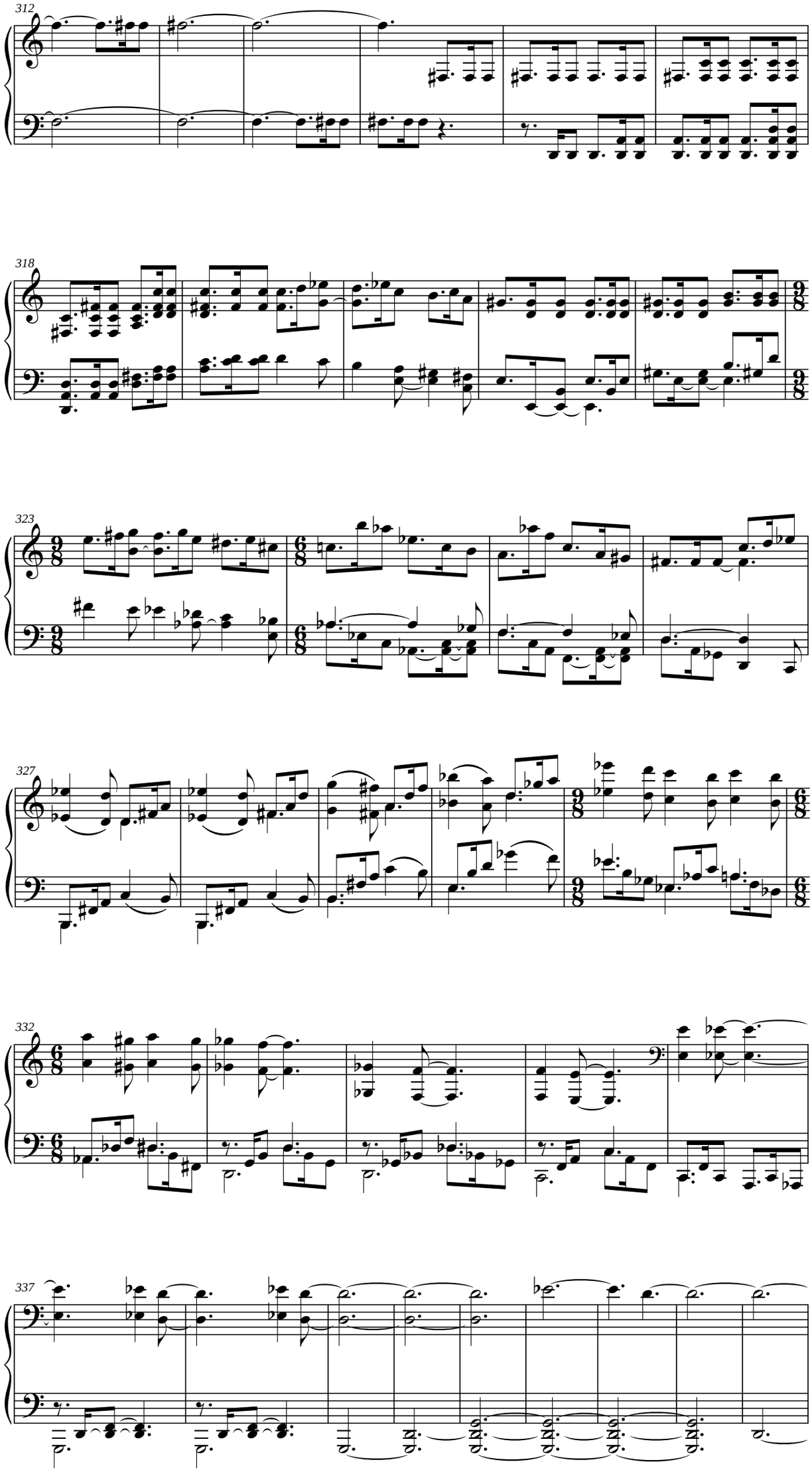
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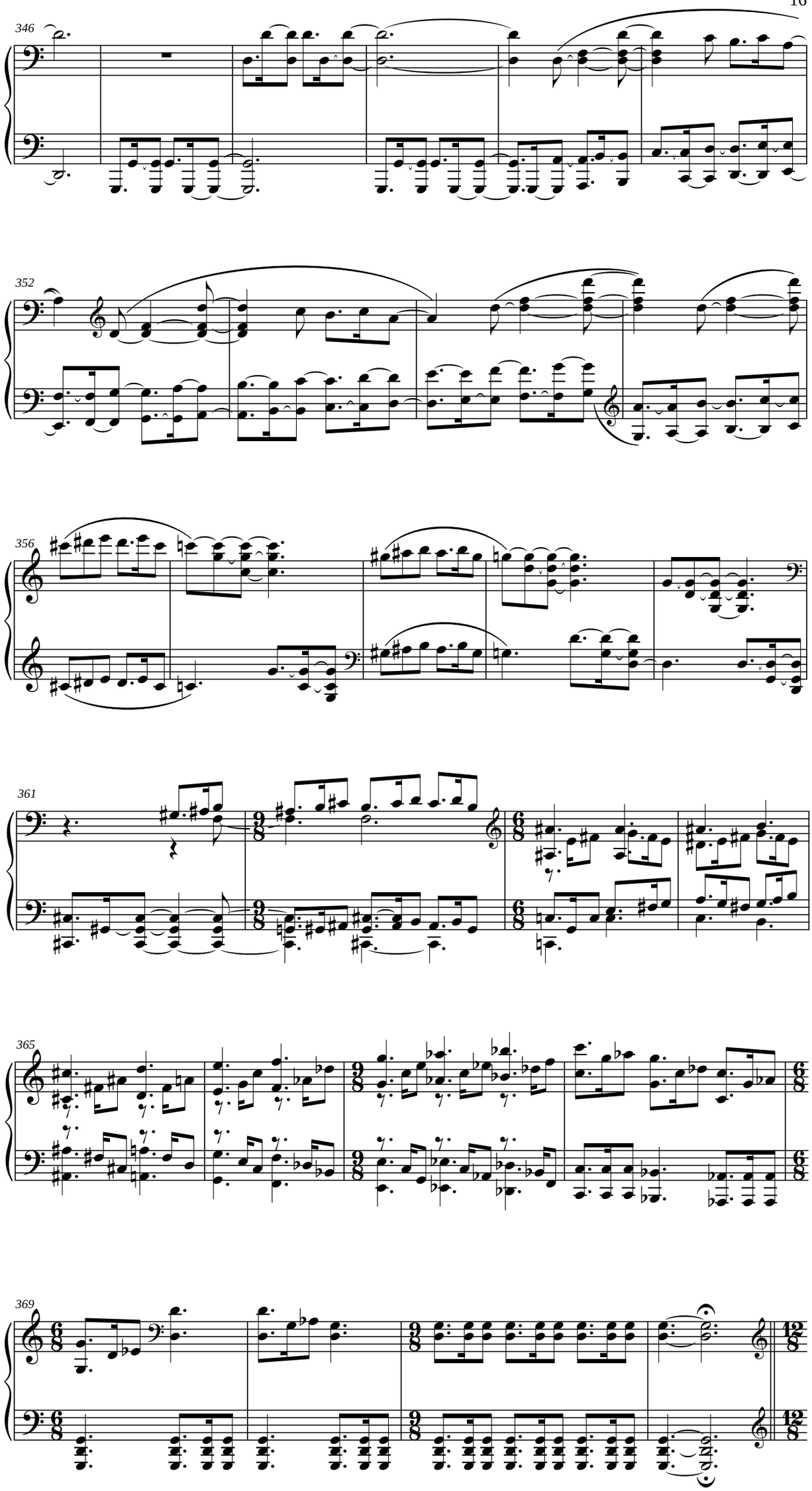
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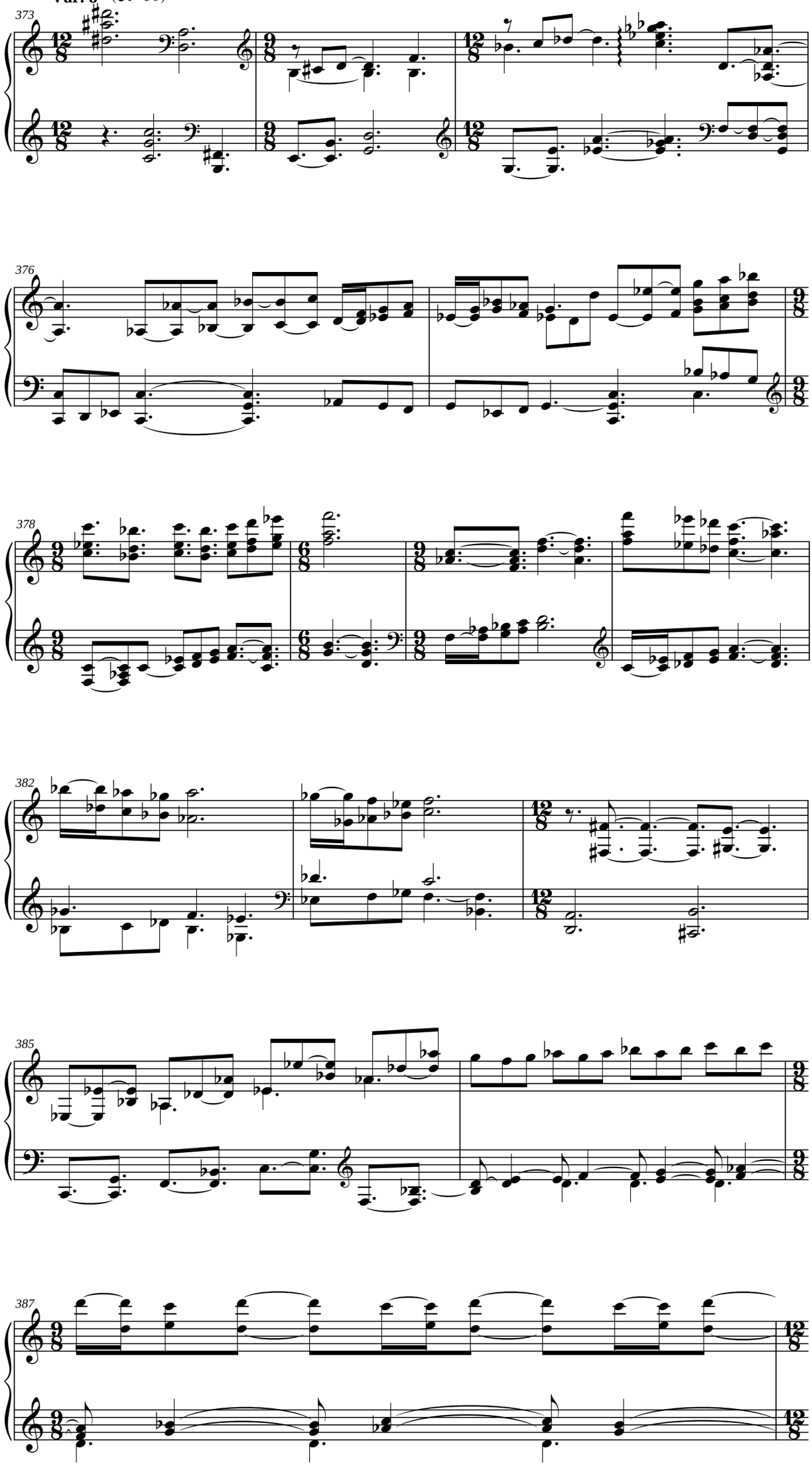
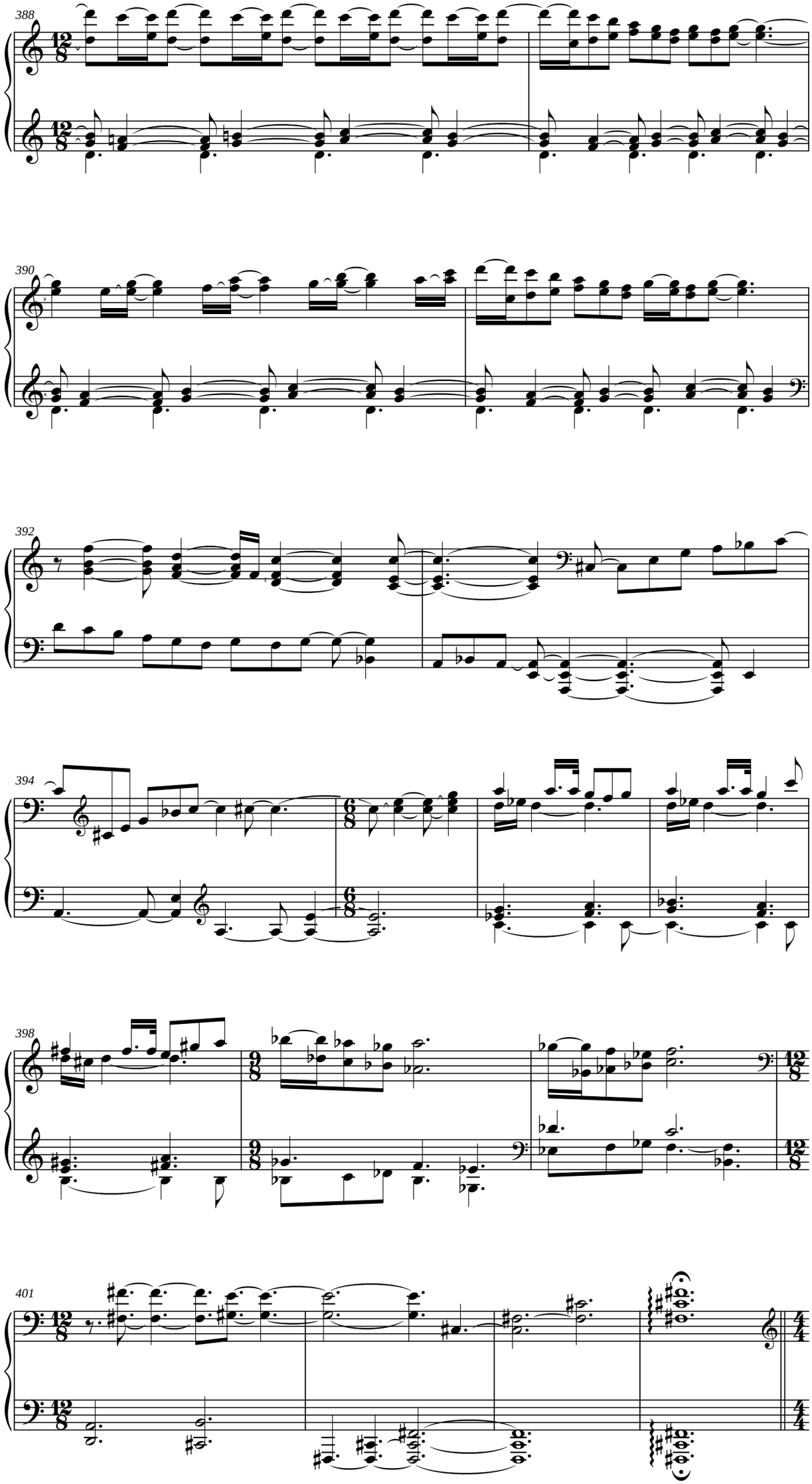
Var. 8 (♩.= 50)

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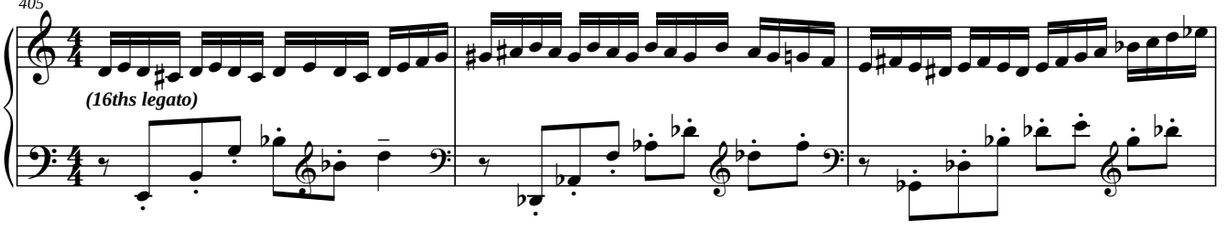
390
392
394
398
401

Var. 9: Presto (♩ = 104)

405

(16ths legato)



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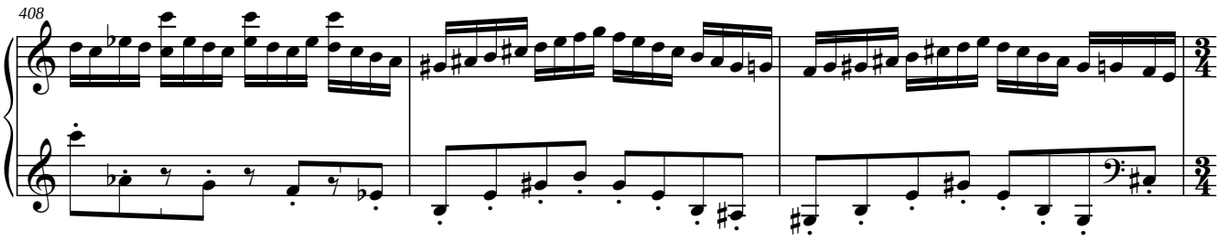

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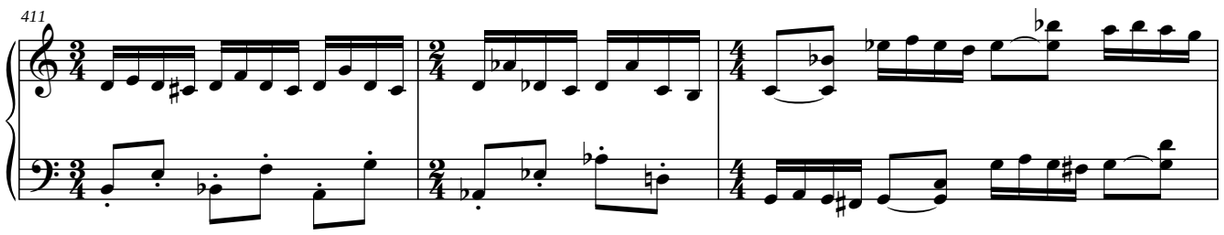

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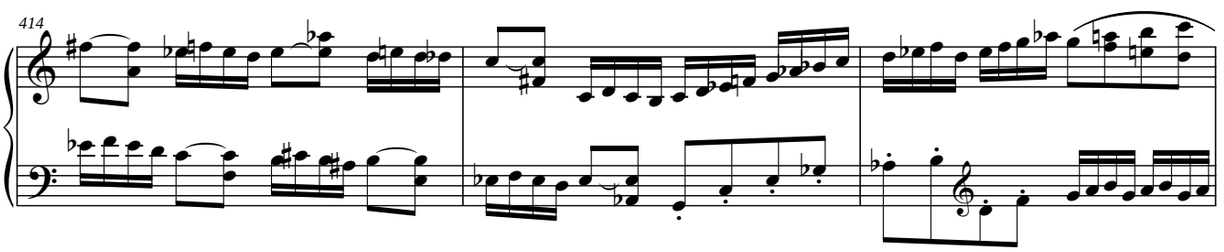

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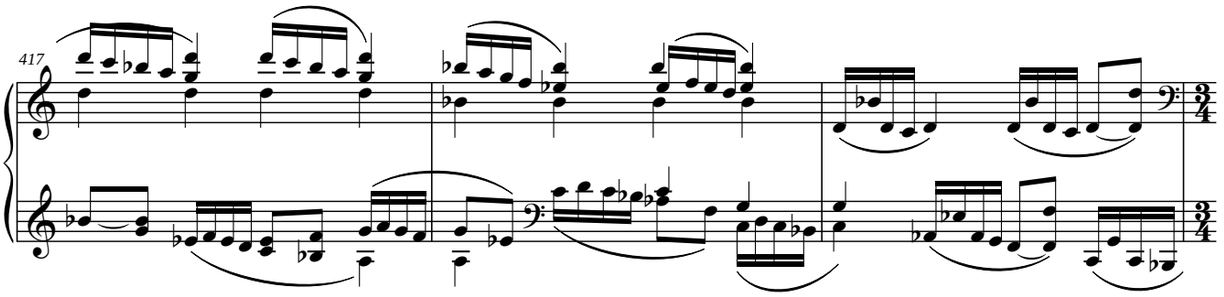

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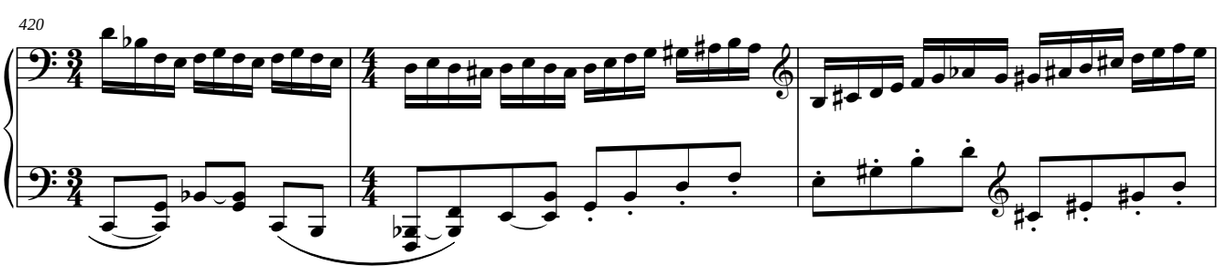

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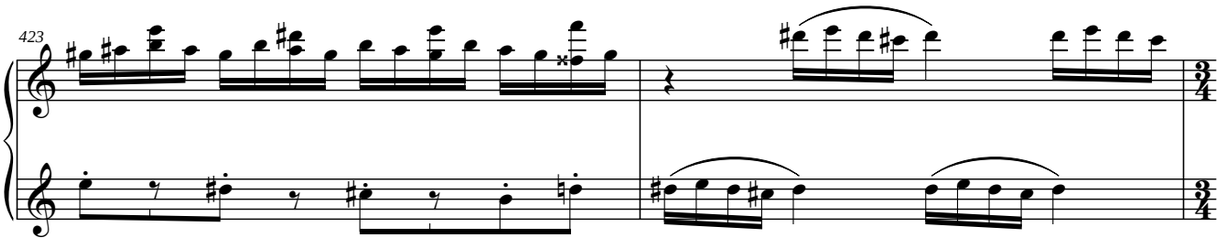

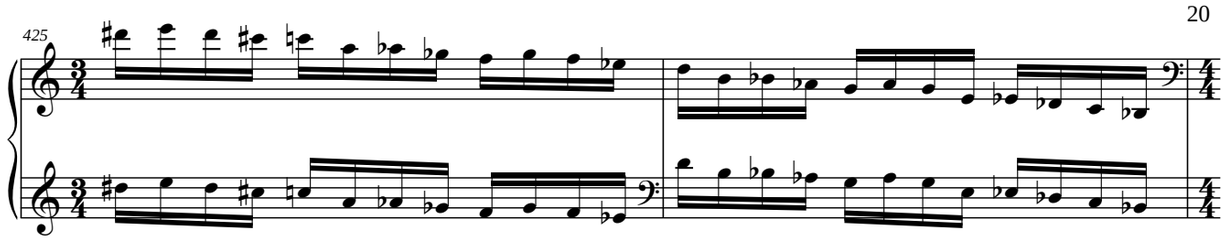
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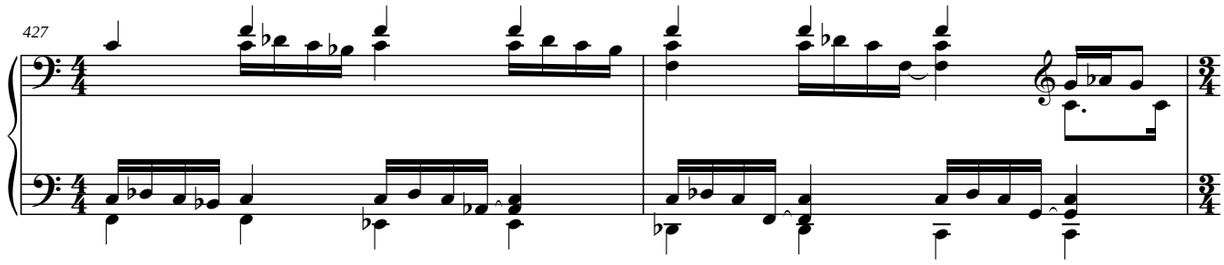
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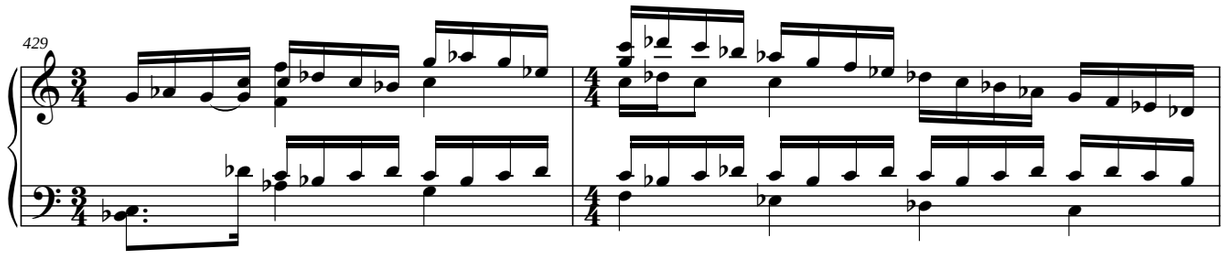
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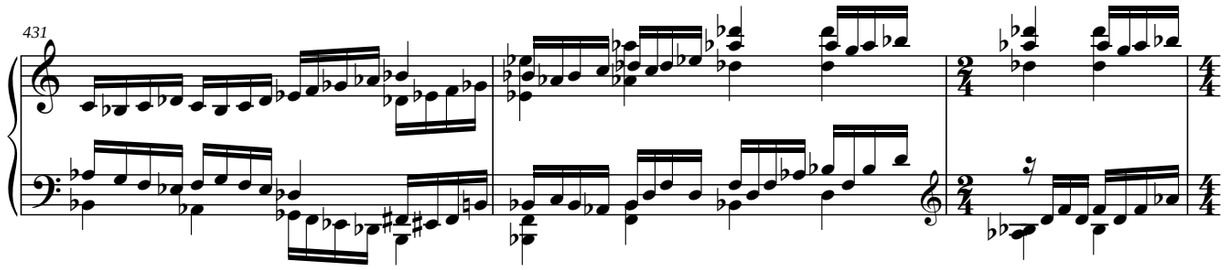
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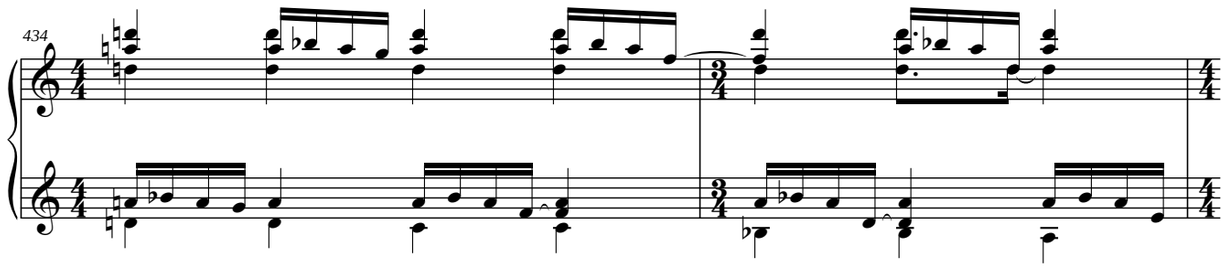
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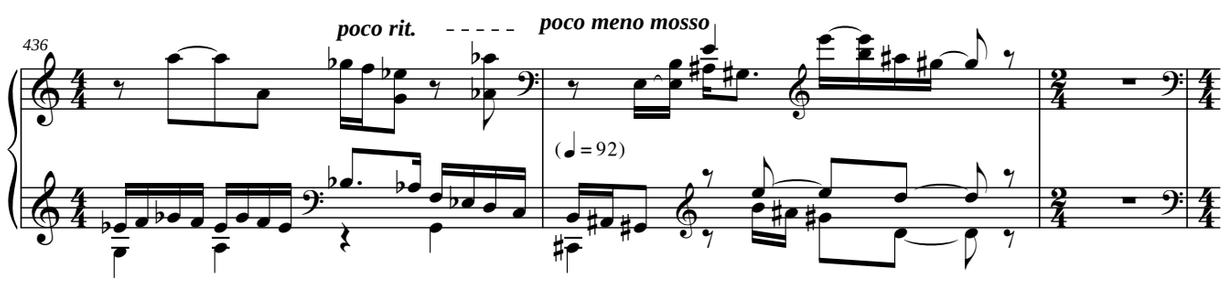
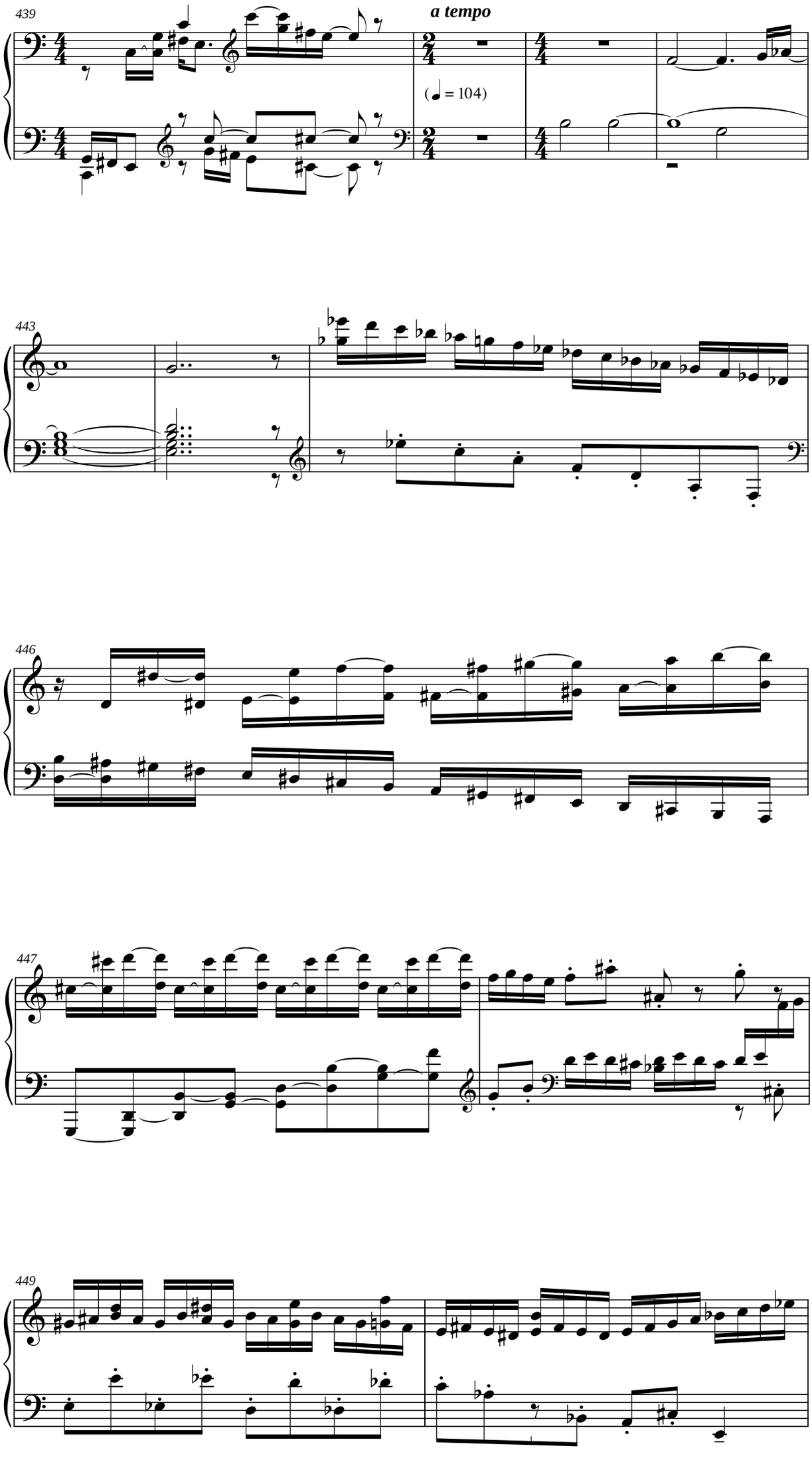
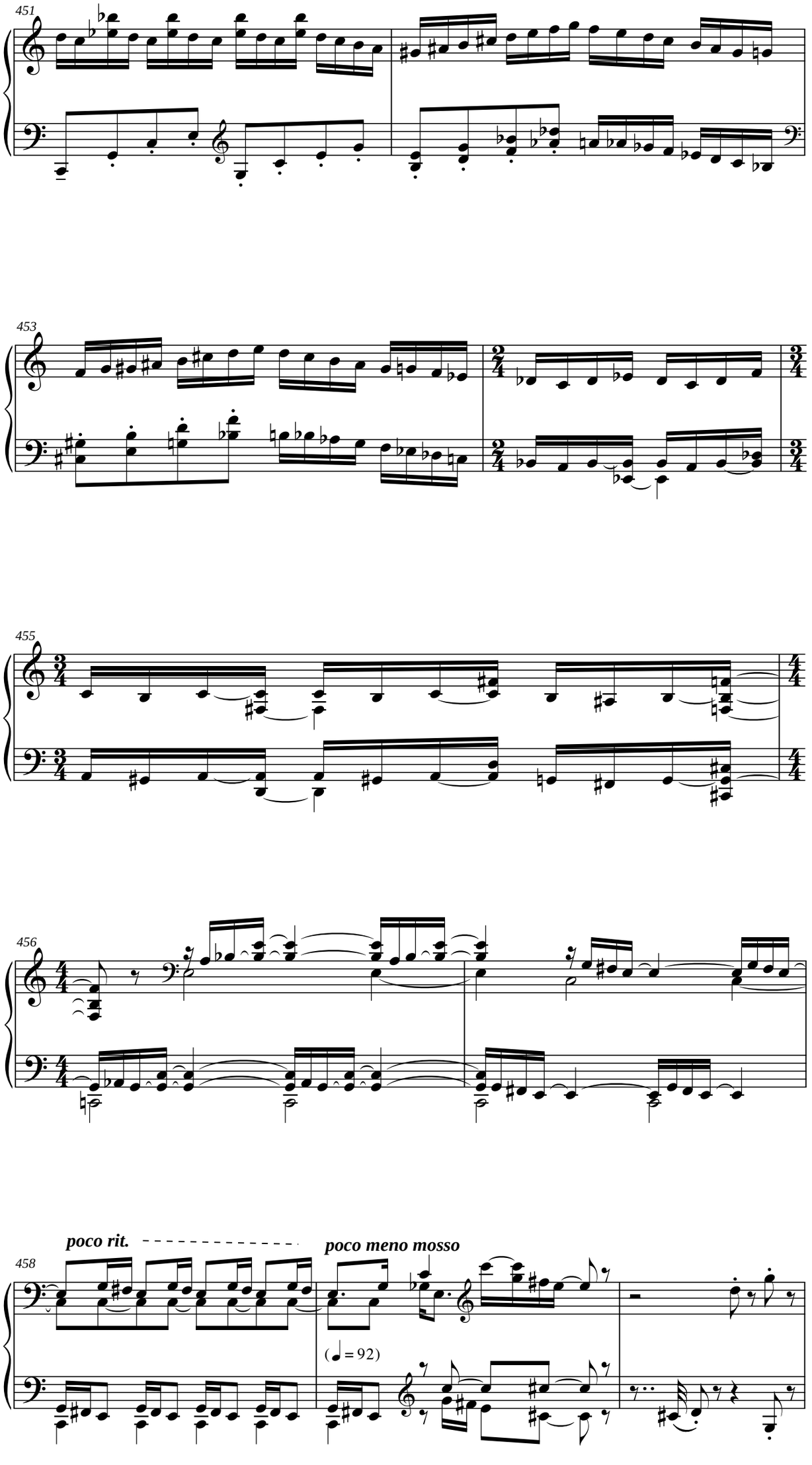

436
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
(♩ = 92)


439
a tempo
(♩ = 104)
443
446
447
449


451
453
455
456
458
poco rit.
poco meno mosso
(♩ = 92)

Var. 10 (♩ = 100)

461

468

finger pedal

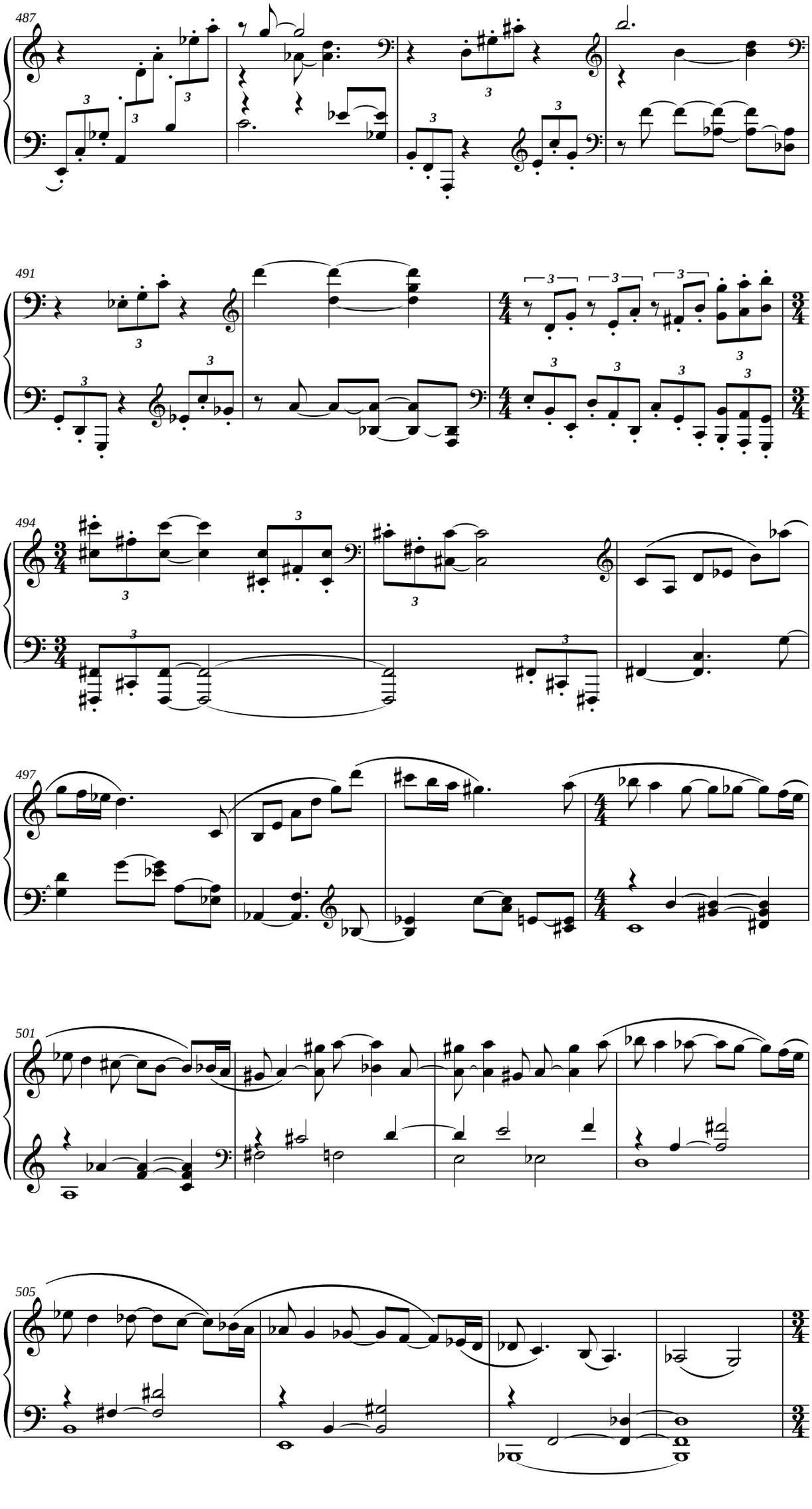
sim..

473

477

481

484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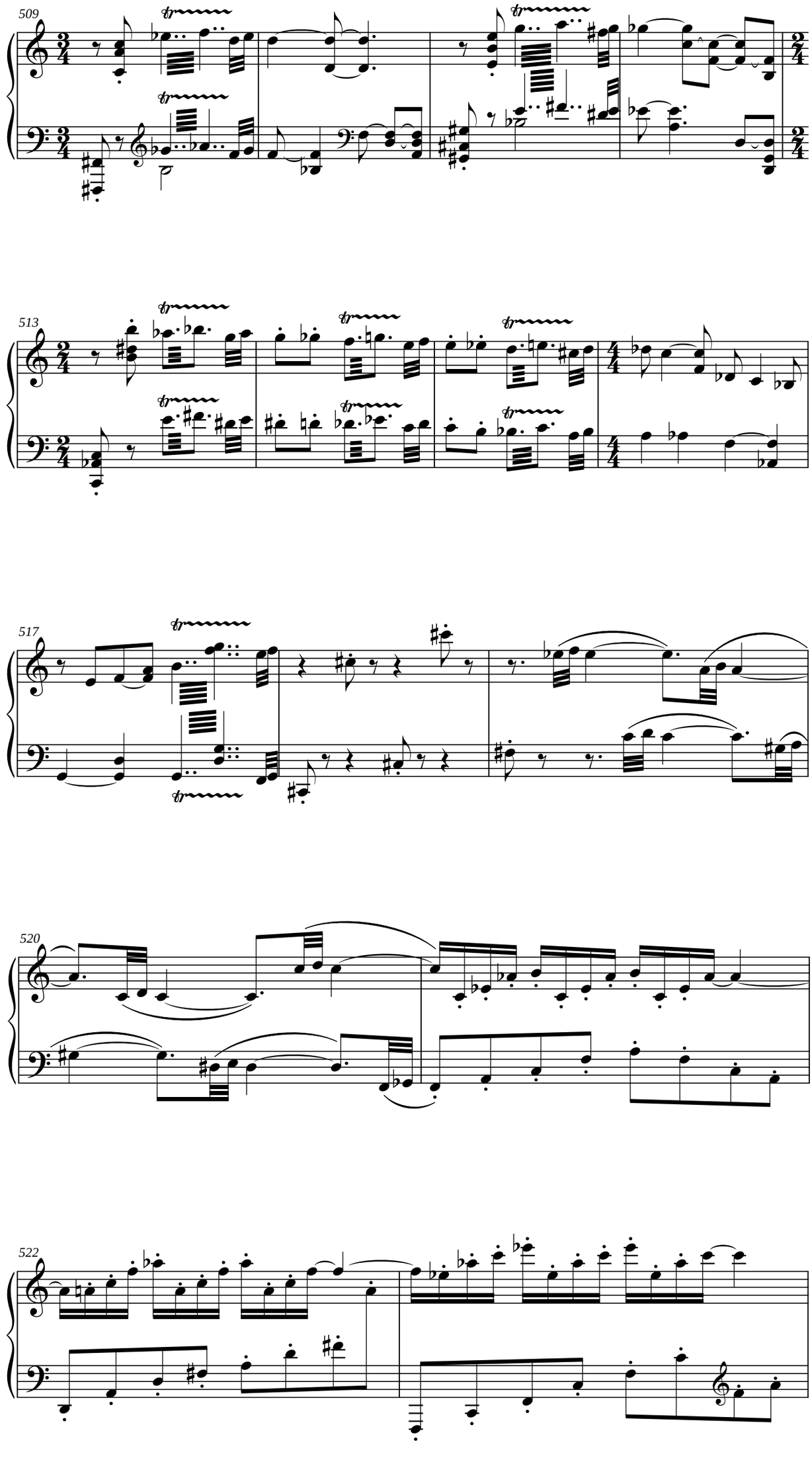
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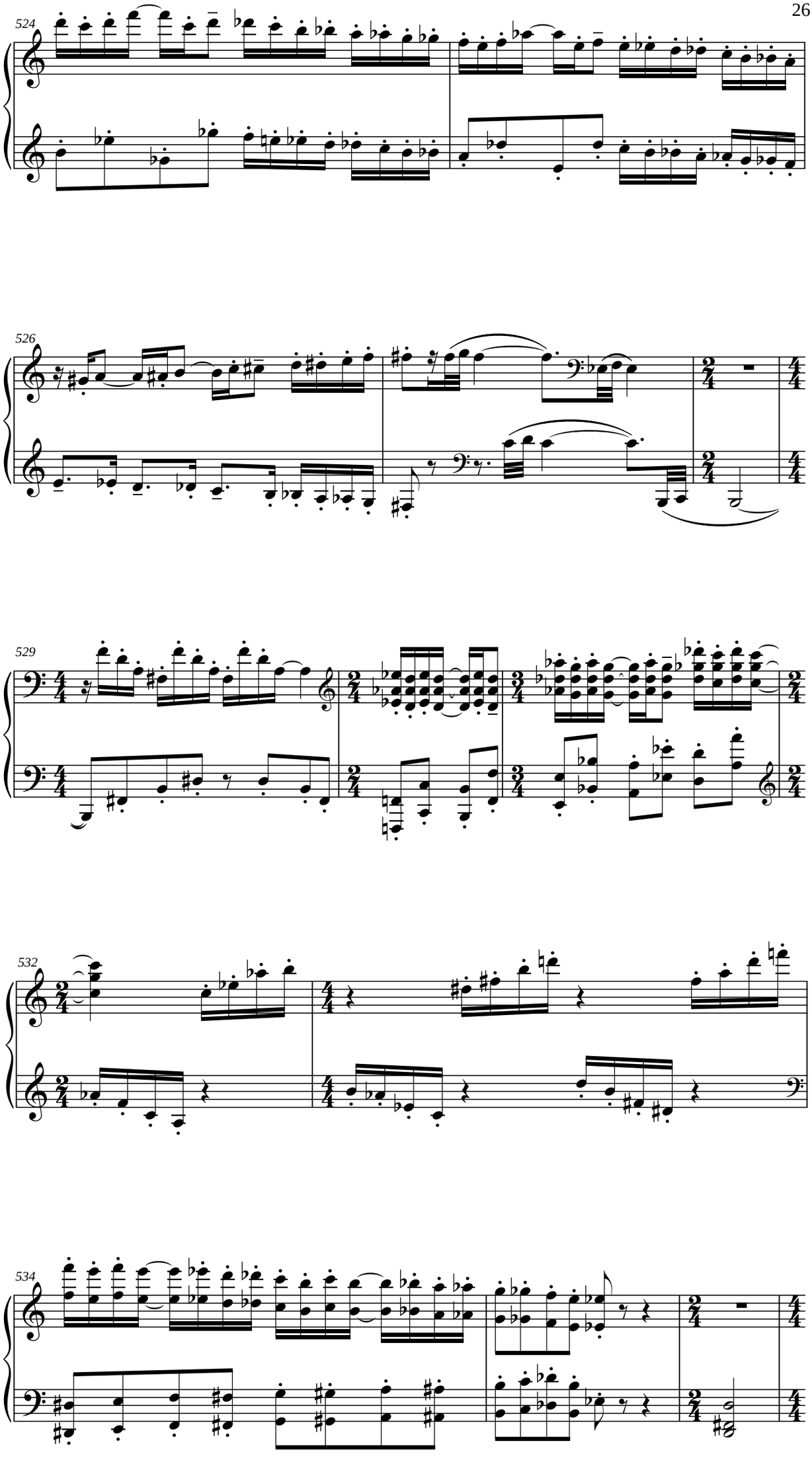
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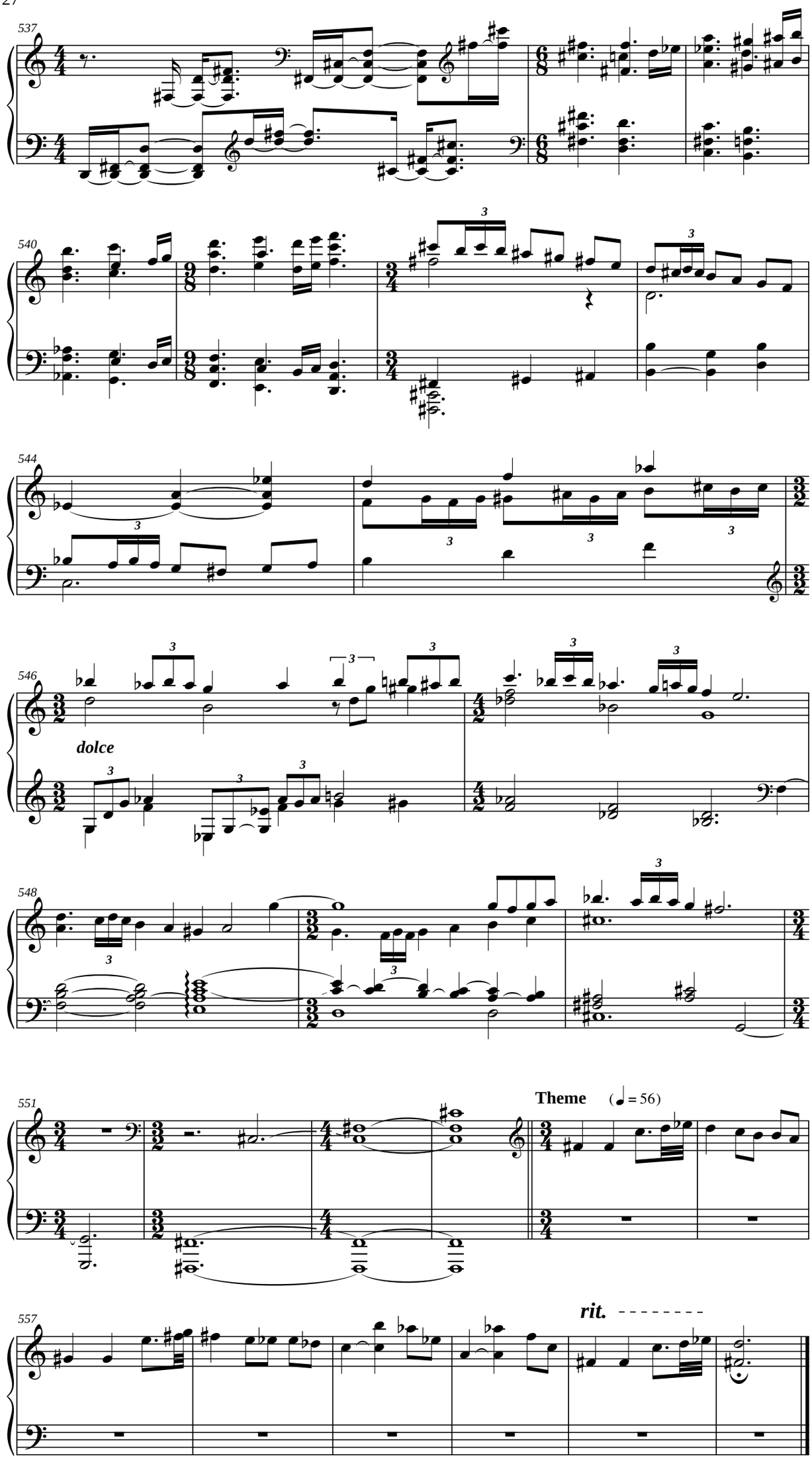
534


537
540
544
546
dolce
548
551
Theme
(♩ = 56)
557
rit.