Antonio Vivaldi

Four Concertos Op. 3

RV 519, 567, 230, 265

Transcribed for keyboard in Anne Dawson's Book

Edited by Edmund Correia and Eleanor Selfridge-Field

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This edition of the four transcriptions of Vivaldi concertos found in Anne Dawson's manuscript book of keyboard music (preserved in the Manchester UK Public Library; used by permission) supplements the edition of the printed sources for Vivaldi's twelve concertos *L'estro armonico*, Op. 3 (1711), brought out by Dover Publications Inc. (1999). The concertos transcribed by Dawson were Nos. 5, 7, 9, and 12.

Who was Anne Dawson?

Nothing is known about the life of Anne Dawson, an Englishwoman who lived in the eighteenth century. Her "book," an anthology of keyboard transcriptions prepared in the first half of the eighteenth century, contains arrangements of works from a number of prints of instrumental music by various composers. Collections of miscellaneous pieces were commonly made by young students (women and men) of performance. Vocal students formed their own "book" of arias to sing. Those studying keyboard instruments might collect exercises arrayed to demonstrate the range of their skills.

The Vivaldi transcriptions in Dawson's collection depart from the norm for student and amateur collections in that it changes the medium of performance from string emsemble to keyboard. In the process of adaptation, Dawson provided her own embellishments. She transposed only one work (No. 12). This suggests that the key of E Major (which she altered to D) was a treacherous one unequally tempered keyboard instruments.

Since Vivaldi did not write any keyboard music, the transcriptions are immediately valuable simply because they enable a single player of modest accomplishment to sight-read well-known works without the intervention of other performers.

Features of the Dawson Transcriptions

The transcriptions of Vivaldi's concertos found in the book compiled for Anne Dawson appear to have been written for a single-manual instrument (simultaneous duplication of tones between hands is carefully avoided). The style of ornamentation employed was originally associated with seventeenth-century virginal music. By the eighteenth century, however, the virginal was certainly past its prime (the "youngest" virginal now extant was built in 1680). This leaves open the question of whether Anne Dawson's instrument was a virginal, a spinet, or a single-manual harpsichord.

The virginal typically had only one string per key. The instrument's overall range of 32 keys was severely restricted. Its successor, the spinet, was a somewhat more robust instrument with a keyboard of four to four-and-a-half octaves (49 to 54 keys). Like the virginal, it usually had only one set of strings. Thus dynamic range was limited and timbral contrast impossible on either instrument. The more rugged harpsichord, in contrast, could have one manual or two, usually had several stops (facilitated by multiple sets of strings) to provide timbral contrast, and could have a range of up to five octave (61 keys), extending from *FF* to f^3.

What makes the differences between these instruments relevant to the Dawson transcriptions is the variable notation of octave doublings. In many passages, the added lower note (not present in Vivaldi's score but arguably sounded by an accompanying string bass) is written in the usual fashion. Yet in quite a few other instances, the octave doubling is simply written by the figure "8." under the basso continuo. It appears that this was a purely notational convention (i.e., the transcriber wanted to avoid using leger lines). It is curious, however, that he (or she) never gave such a notation under a $C^\sharp$.

This leaves open the alternative possibility that the instrument for which these works were transcribed had a short octave (the remapping of the pitches of white-key tones beyond the apparent range of the instrument to the lowest black notes). However, in the accumulation of detail from the four works transcribed, no consistent pattern of remapping emerges. It is most unlikely that the numeral "8." indicated the use of an 8' stop, since to produce notes an octave below those already notated, a 16' stop would be required.

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Dawson, Vivaldi, and J. S. Bach

Vivaldi's Op. 3 became a model for a new style of composition. Among other transcriptions of the concertos, the best known are those of J. S. Bach. He transcribed concertos Nos. 3 and 8-12. His transcriptions are variously for harpsichord, organ, and string orchestra with solo harpsichords (see Table 1). Thus for Concertos Nos. 9 and 12 (RV 230, 265) one can compared Dawson's arrangements with Bach's (in both cases for harpsichord).

Bach's choice of performing medium was systematic: the works published for solo violin and string orchestra were transcribed for harpsichord (RV 310, for example, became BWV 978). Those for two violins (RV 522, 565) were transcribed for organ solo (BWV 593, 596). The concerto No. 10, for four violins and string orchestra (RV 580), became a concerto for four harpsichords and string orchestra (BWV 1065). Table 1 summarizes the relationships between Vivaldi's models, Bach's transcriptions, and those appearing in the Dawson book. In contrast to Dawson's E-to-D transposition for No. 12, Bach chose E-to-C.

Keyboard transcriptions of Vivaldi's *L'Estro armonico*, Op. 3						
Amsterdam: Roger, c.1711			Transcription by J. S. Bach [c.1711-1717]		Transcription in Anne Dawson's Book [18th century]	
No.	Instrumentation	Key	Instrumentation	Key	Instrumentation	Key
1	VVVV[Vc]	D				
2	VV[Vc]	d				
3	V	G	BWV 978 [for harpsichord]	F		
4	VVVV	e				
5	VV	A			Harpsichord or virginal	A
6	V	a				
7	VVVVVc	F			Harpsichord or virginal	F
8	VV	a	BWV 593 for organ	a		
9	V	D	BWV 972 [for harpsichord]	D	Harpsichord or virginal	D
10	VVVVVc	b	BWV 1065 for 4 harpsichords and string orchestra	a		
11	VVVc	d	BWV 596 for organ	d		
12	V	E	BWV 976 [for harpsichord]	C	Harpsichord or virginal	D

Table 1. Transcriptions of Vivaldi's *L'Estro armonico*, Op. 3 by J. S. Bach and as found in the Dawson book.

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Critical Notes

In the following places, the lower note of the left-hand octave is a "realization" of a numeral. (The works are numbered by their order in Vivaldi's Op. 3. The superscripts indicate beat numbers within the bar).

No. 5	I	Bar 84^3
	III	Bars 116^2-118^3
No. 7	I	Bars 1^1-2^2
		Bars 3^2-4^2
	II	Bars 5-12
No. 9	II	Bars 1-4
		Bars 7-8
		Bars 31-35
	III	Bars 9-14
		Bars 24-35
		Bars 82-87
		Bars 96-105
No. 12	II	Bars 5-6
		Bars 31-32

Adaptations are otherwise few. The change in the rhythmic figuration from four sixteenths to three in Bars 22-26 of the final movement of No. 12 is made to avoid note repetitions that would be hard to execute on the keyboard at a rapid tempo. In a few passages the register has been changed or a harmony has been simplified (or enriched). In only one passage (occurring in the first movement of No. 12) have new notes been added: in Bars 58-59^1 and 60^3-64^4 an apparent abridgement of *bariolage* figuration for the violin used in the orchestral version has been introduced.

What is most striking in the performance of these works is the entirely different character that the music acquires when the Dawson ornaments are used. In effect, they emphasize accentuation that might otherwise be unnoticed on a keyboard instrument of the time.

Eleanor Selfridge-Field (1998)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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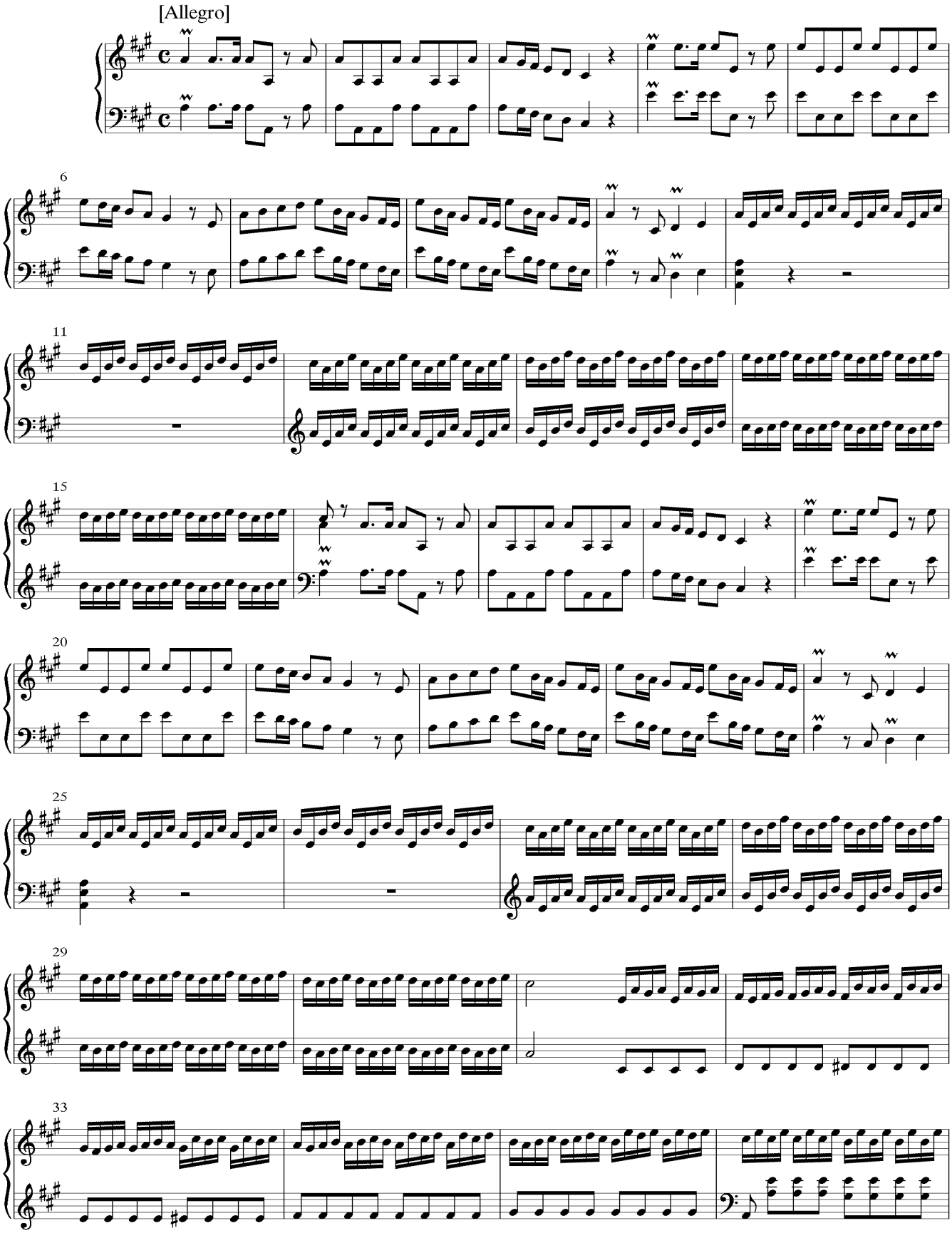
Sonata in A Major for Keyboard

based on Vivaldi's Op. 3, No. 5

[Allegro]



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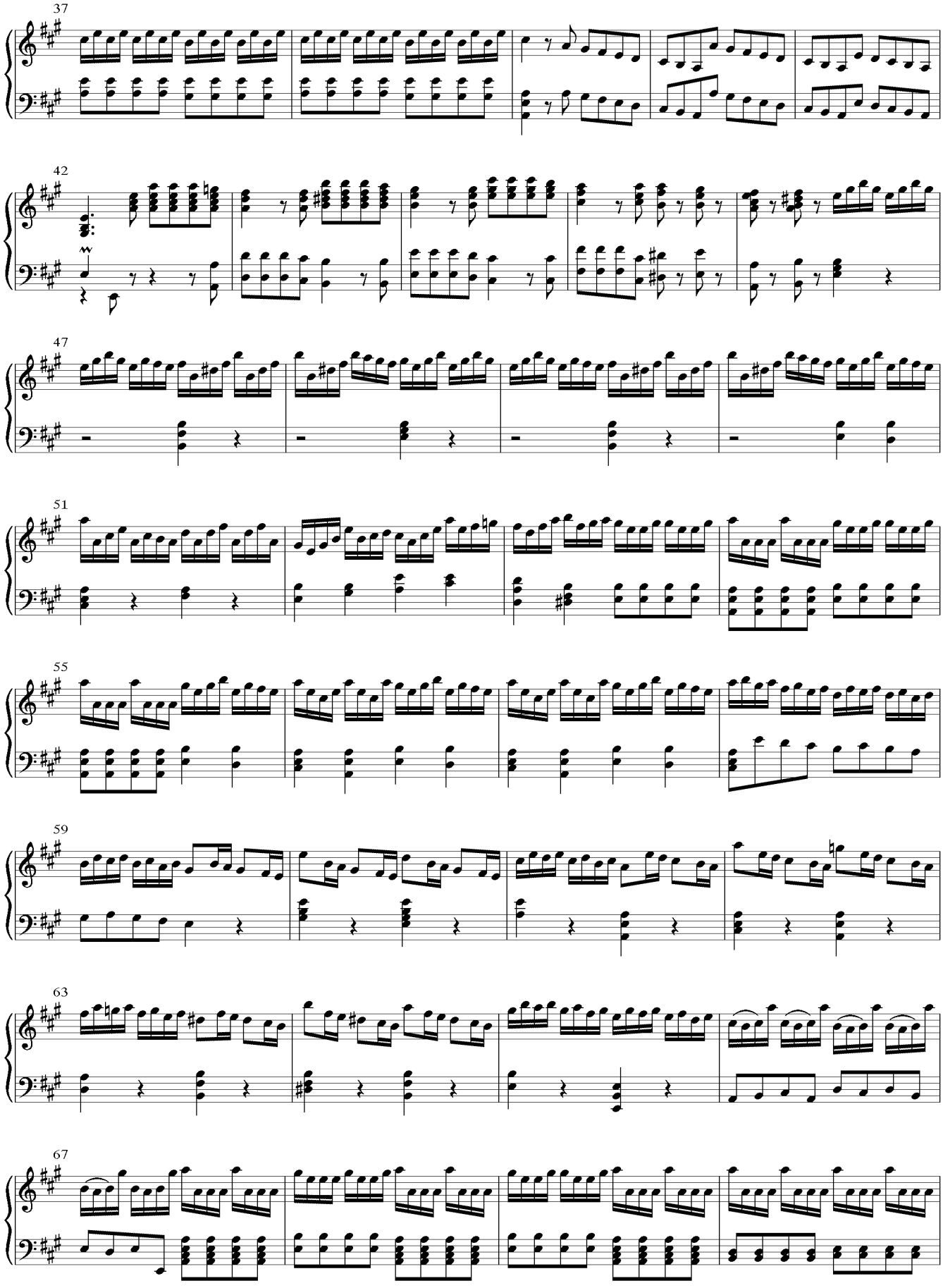

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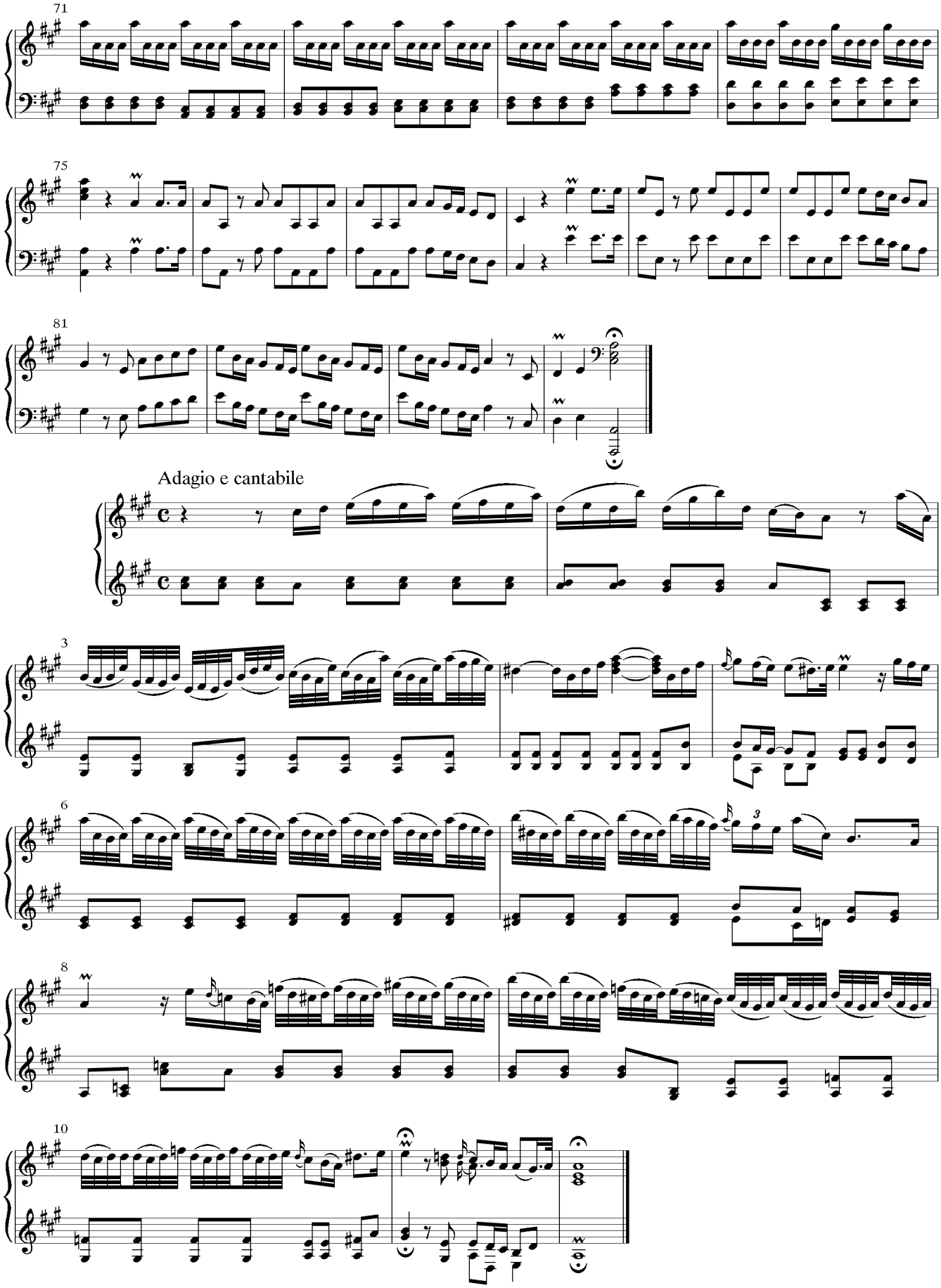

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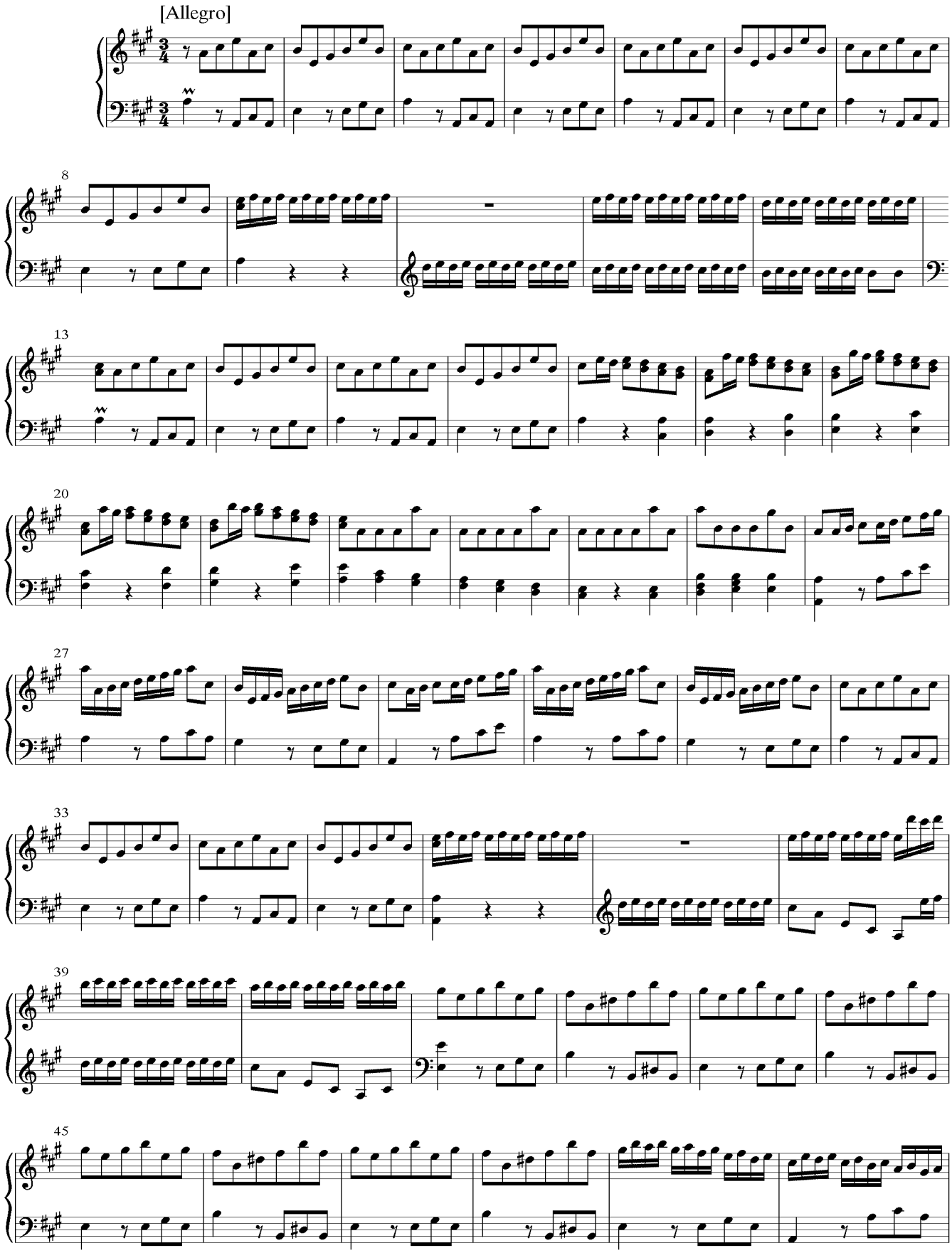

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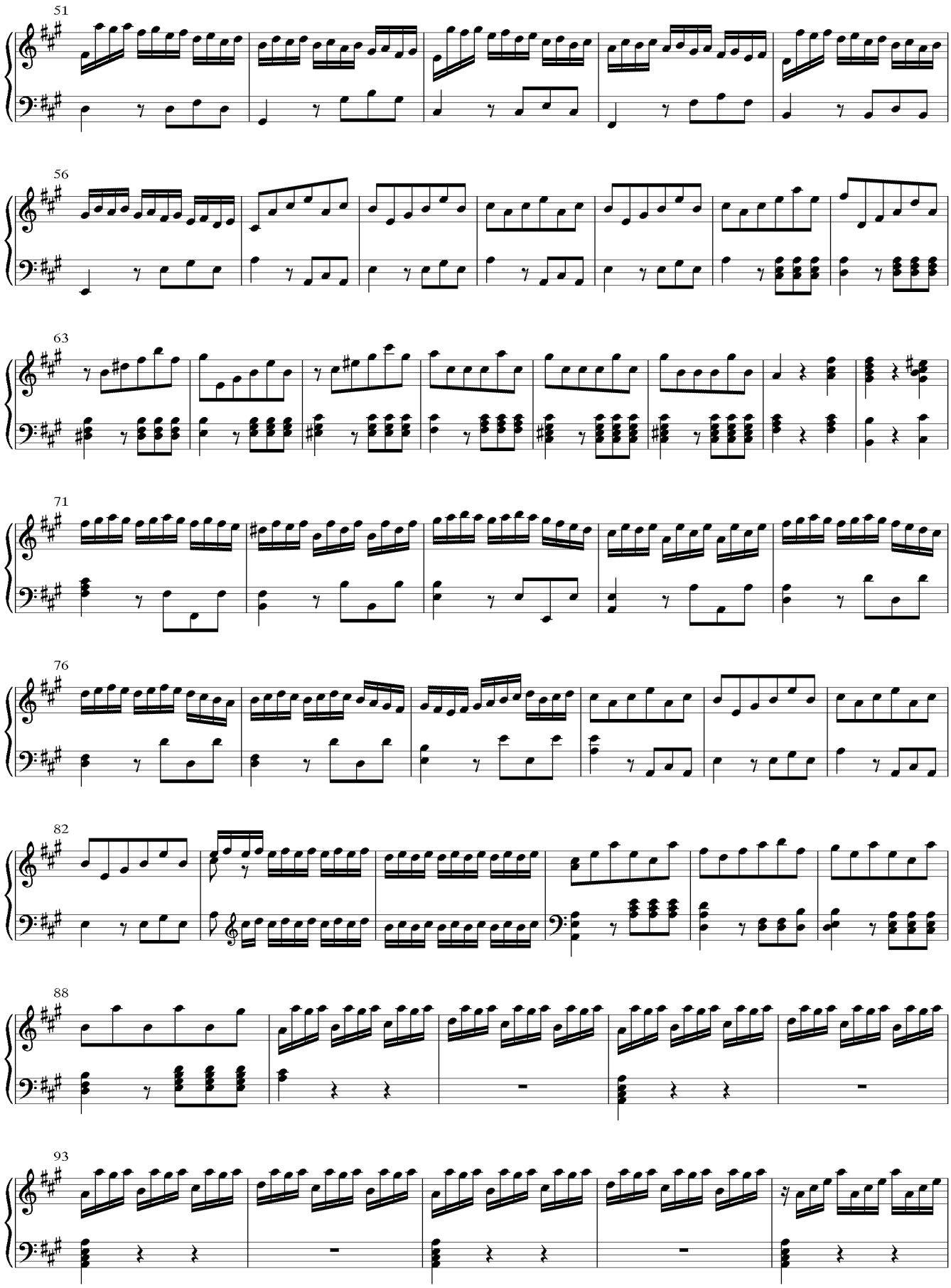

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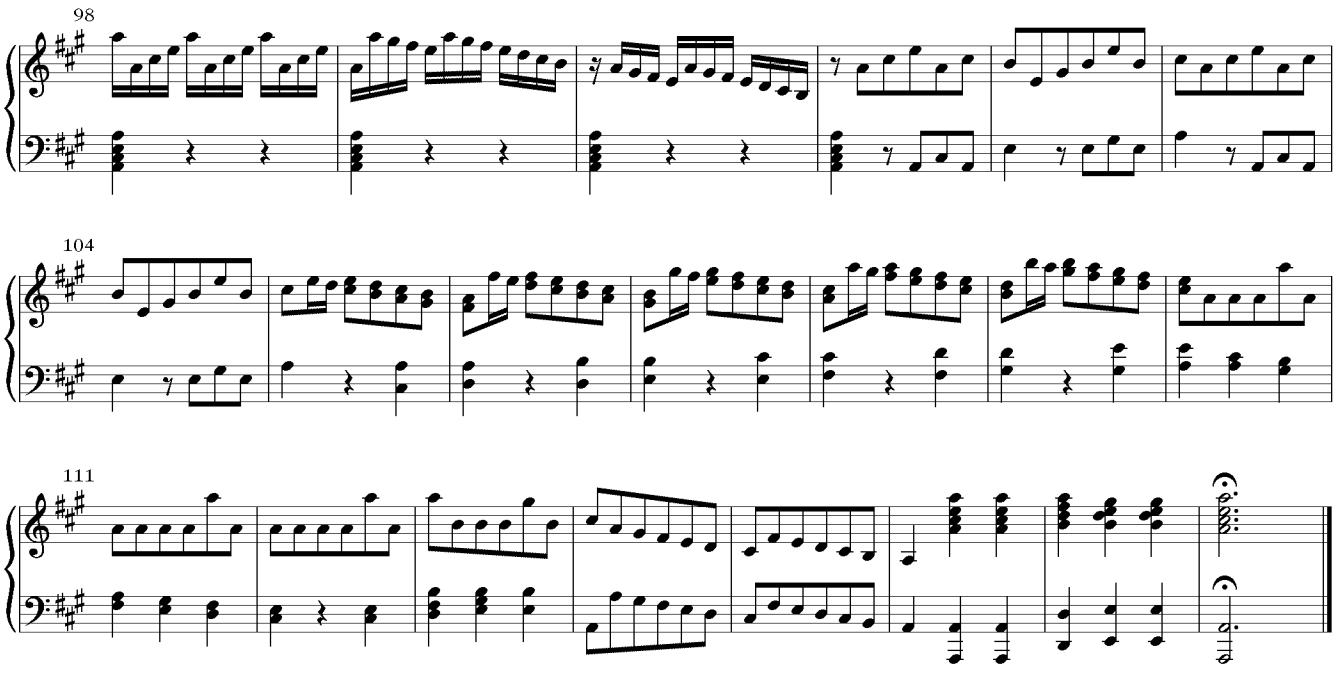

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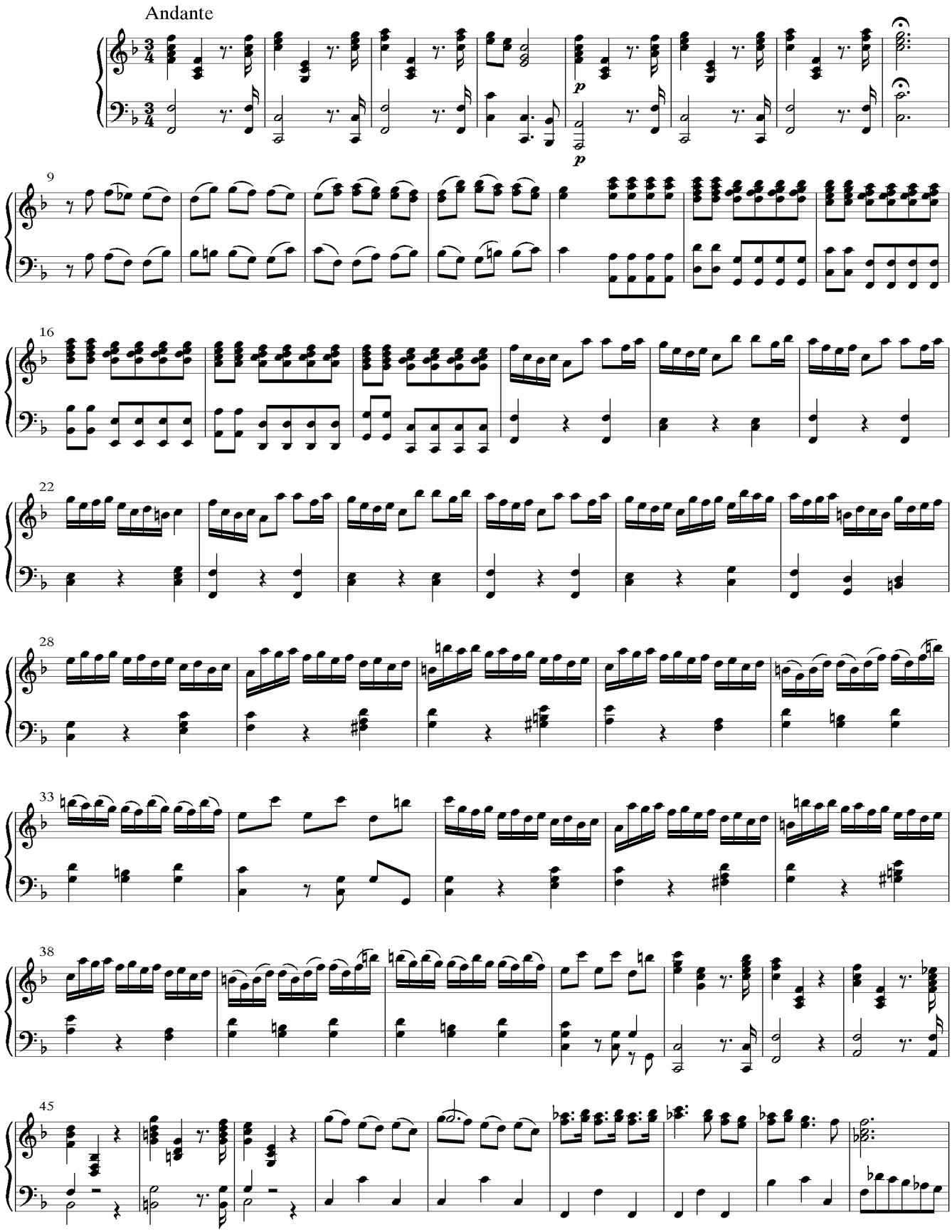
Sonata in F Major for Keyboard

based on Vivaldi's Op. 3, No. 7



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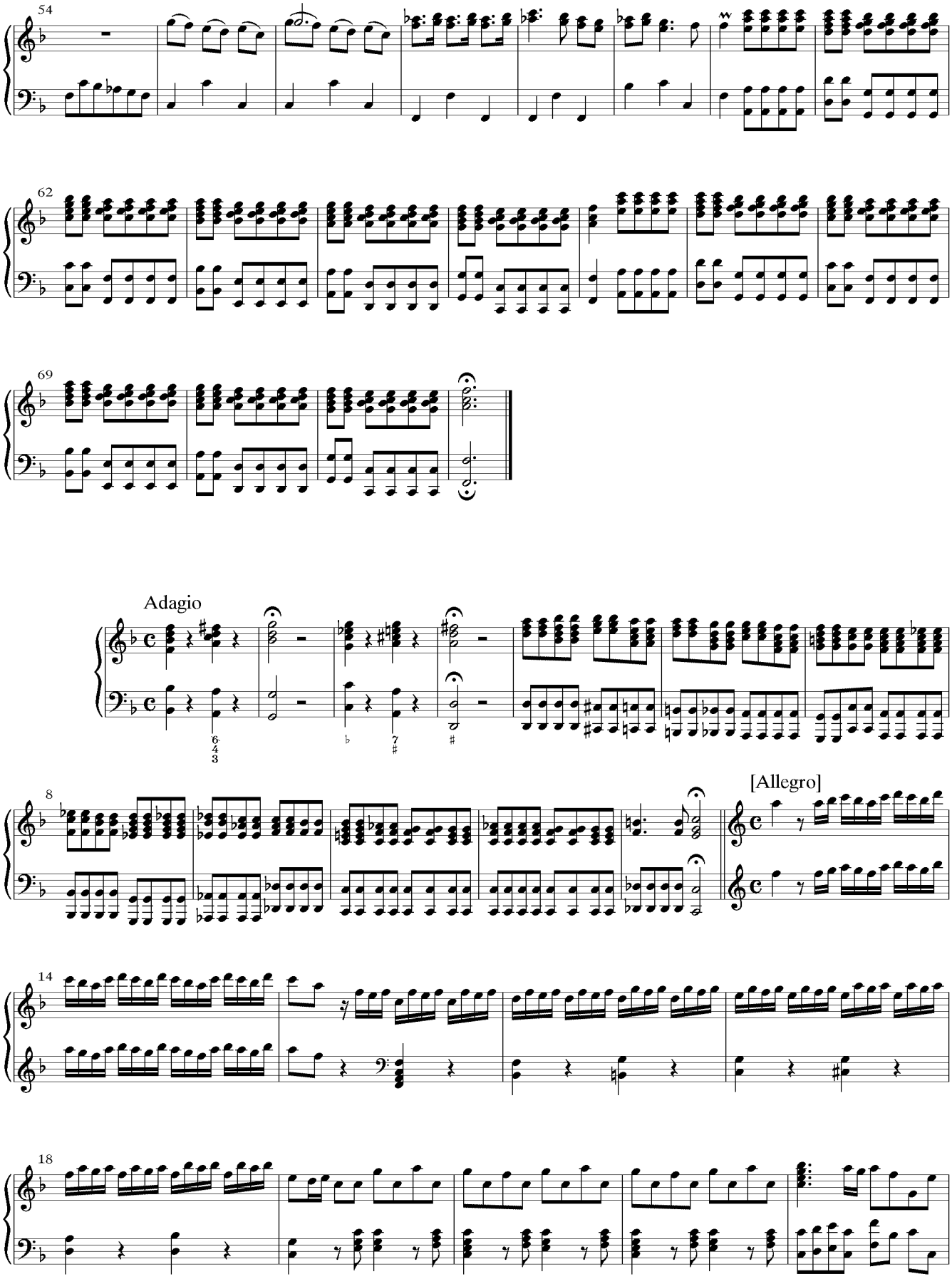

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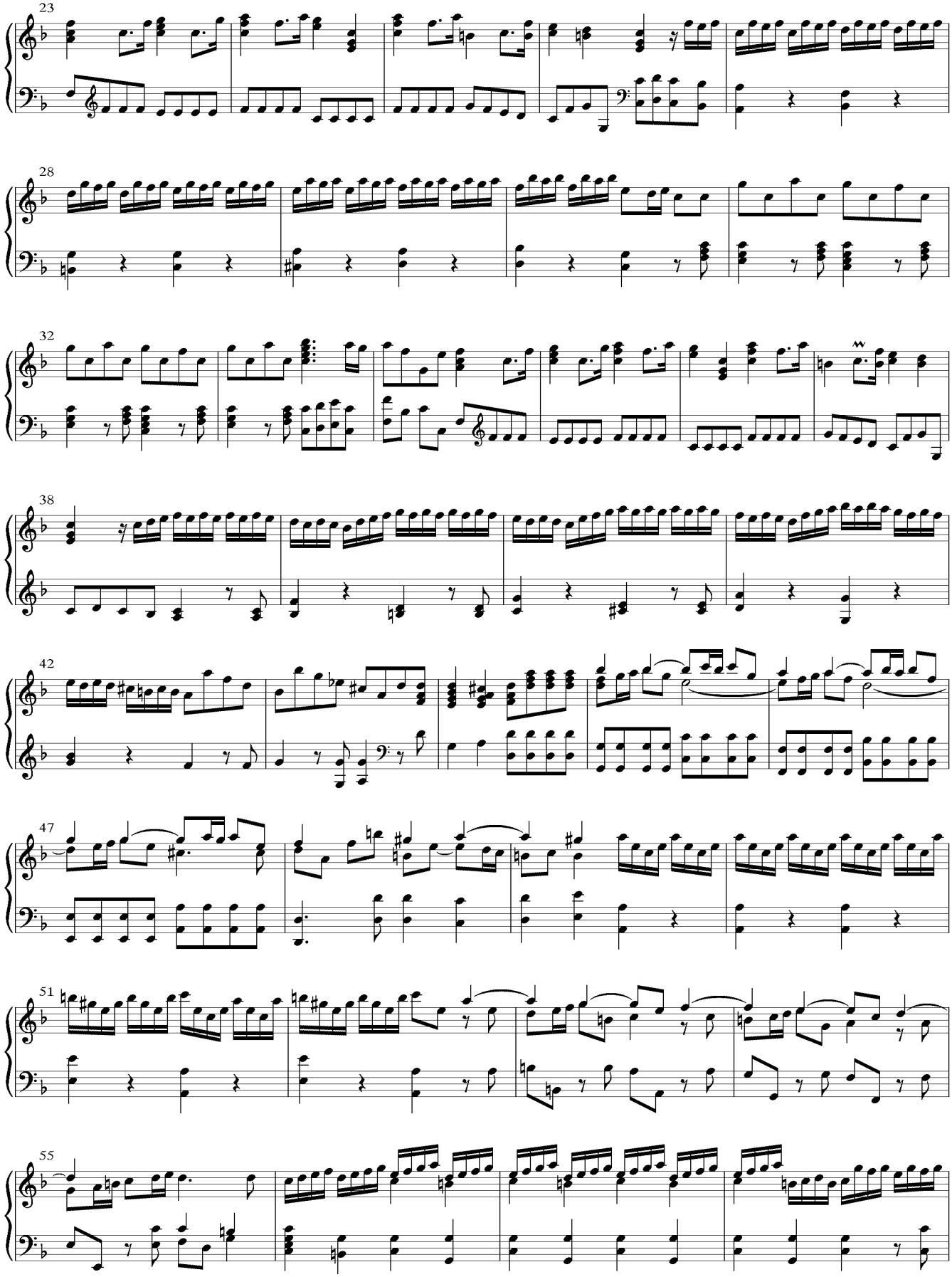

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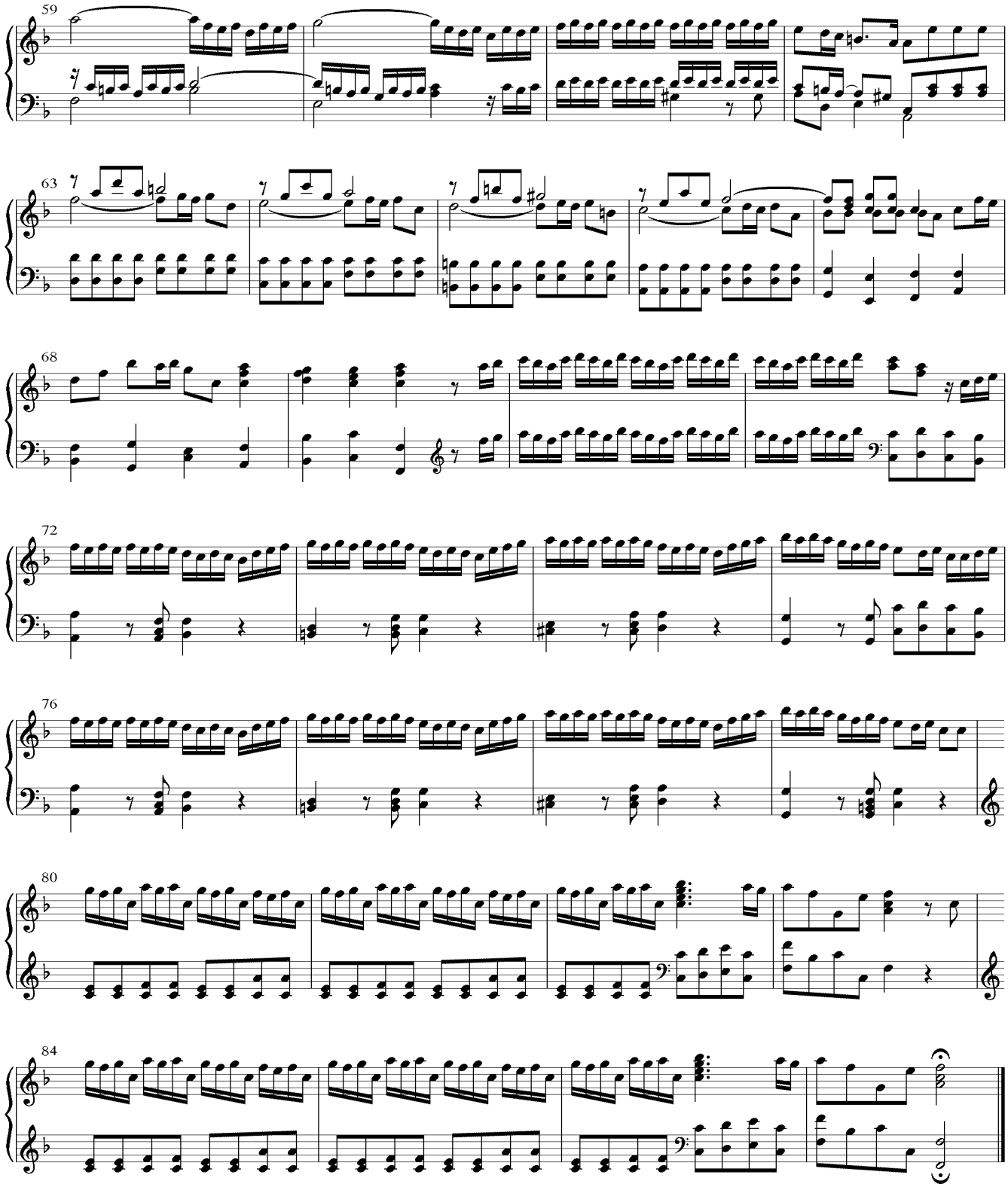

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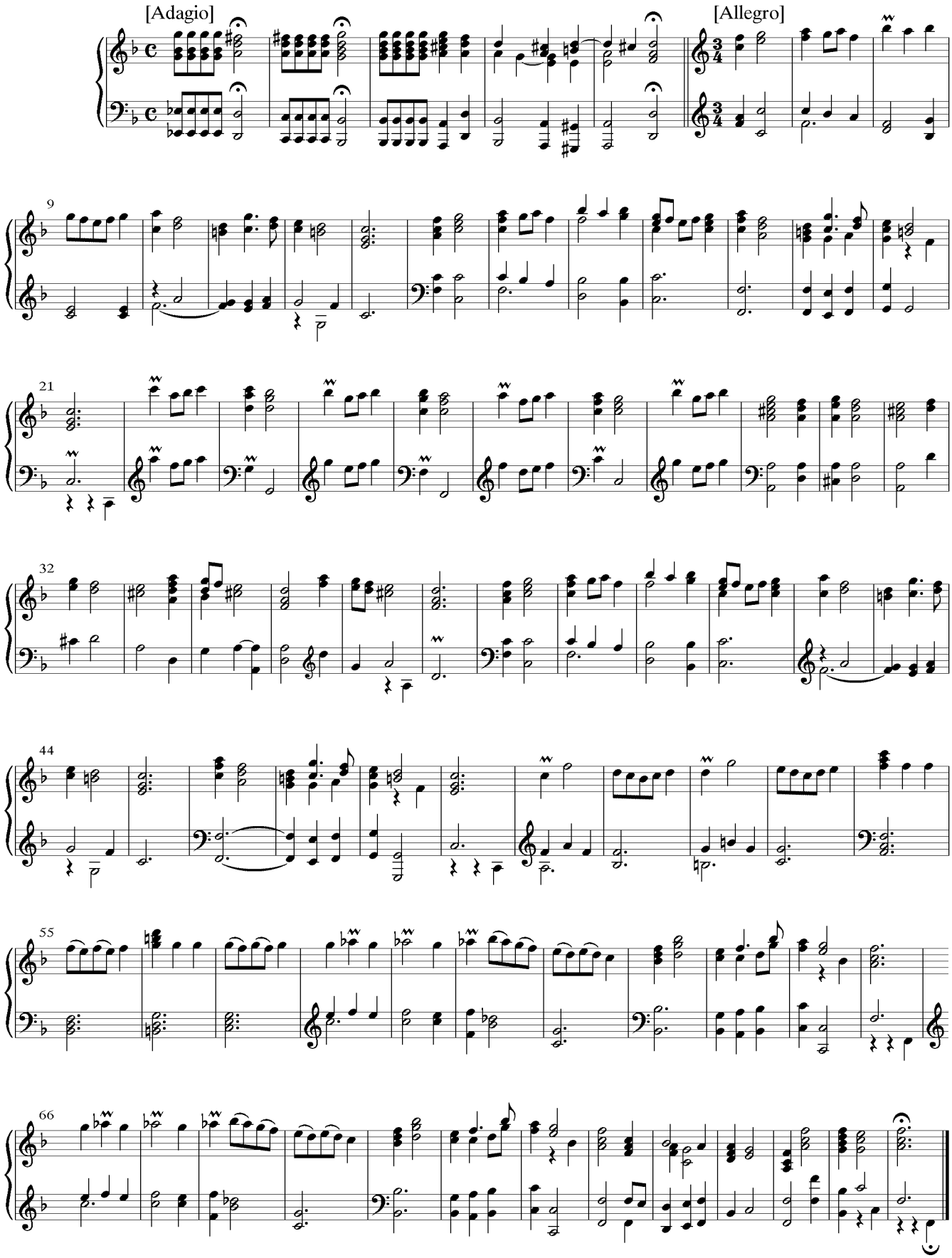

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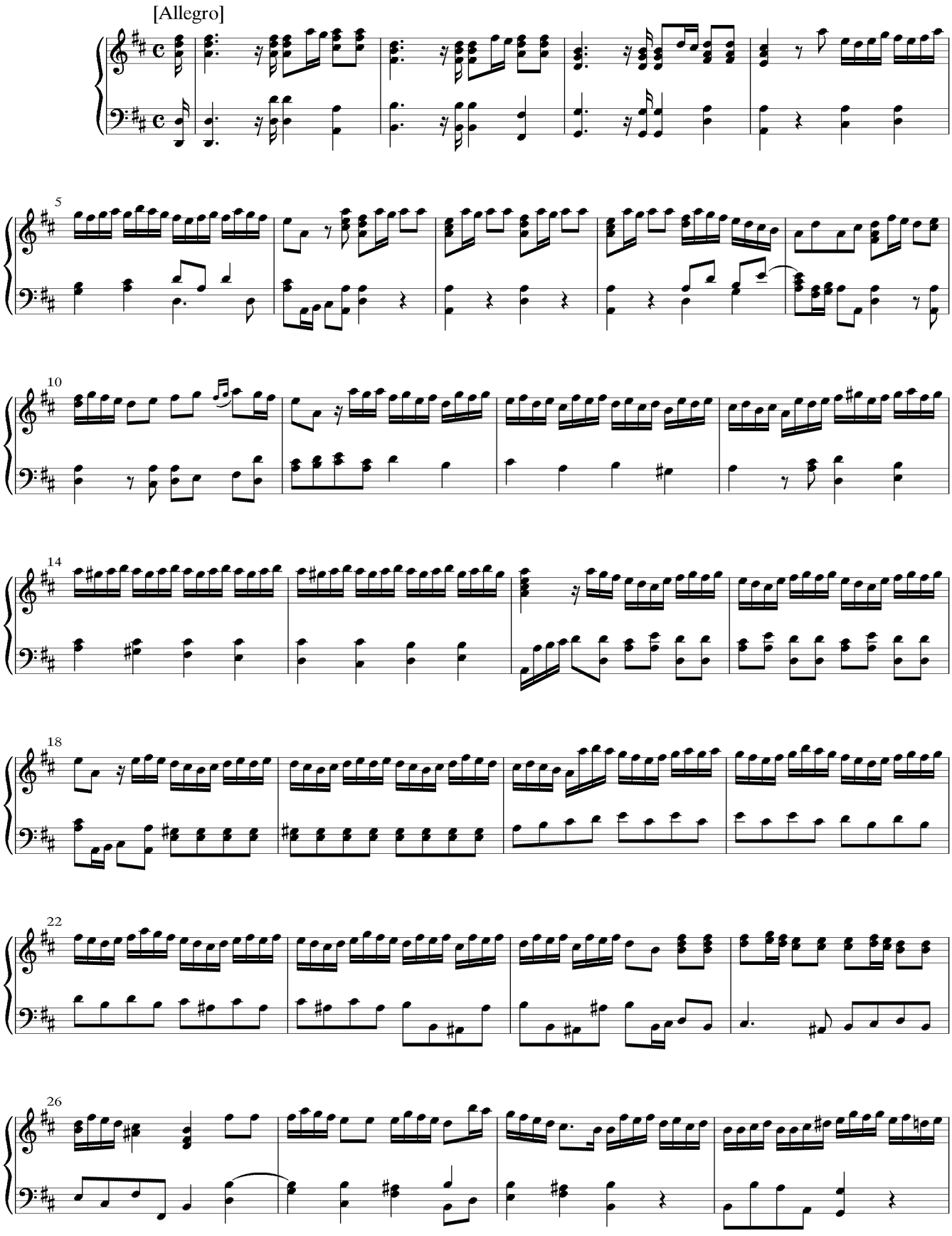
Sonata in D Major for Keyboard

based on Vivaldi's Op. 3, No. 9



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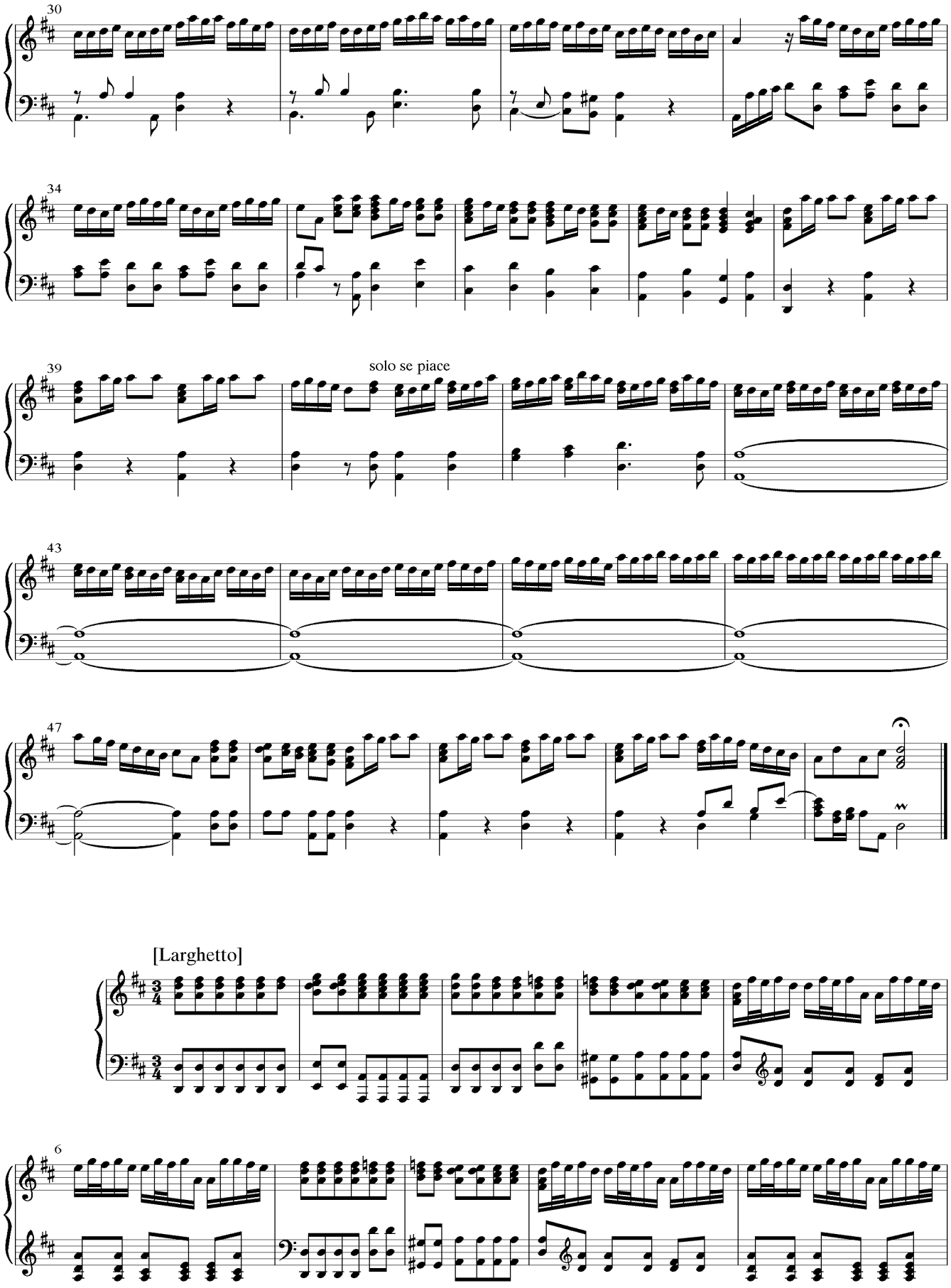

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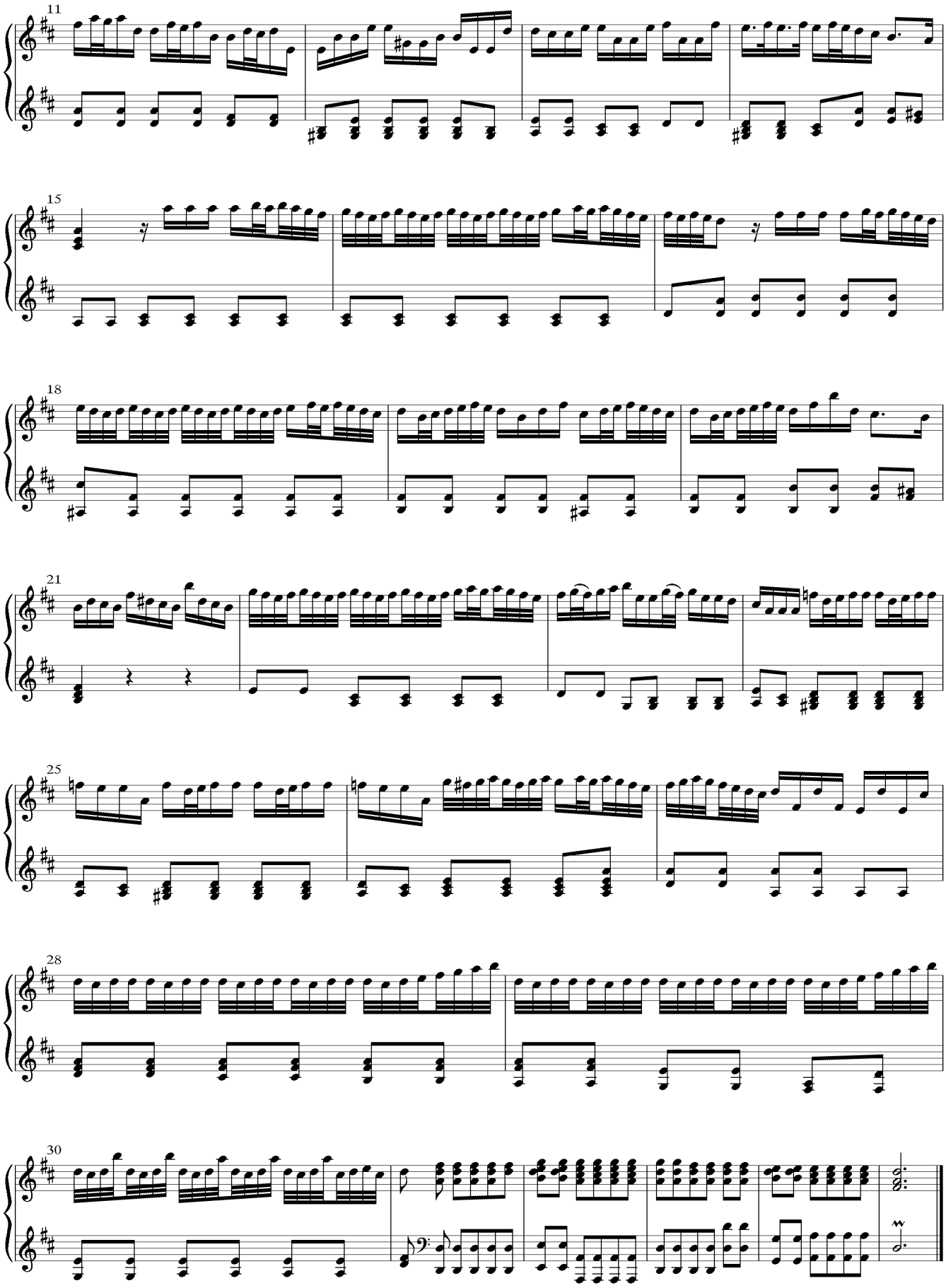

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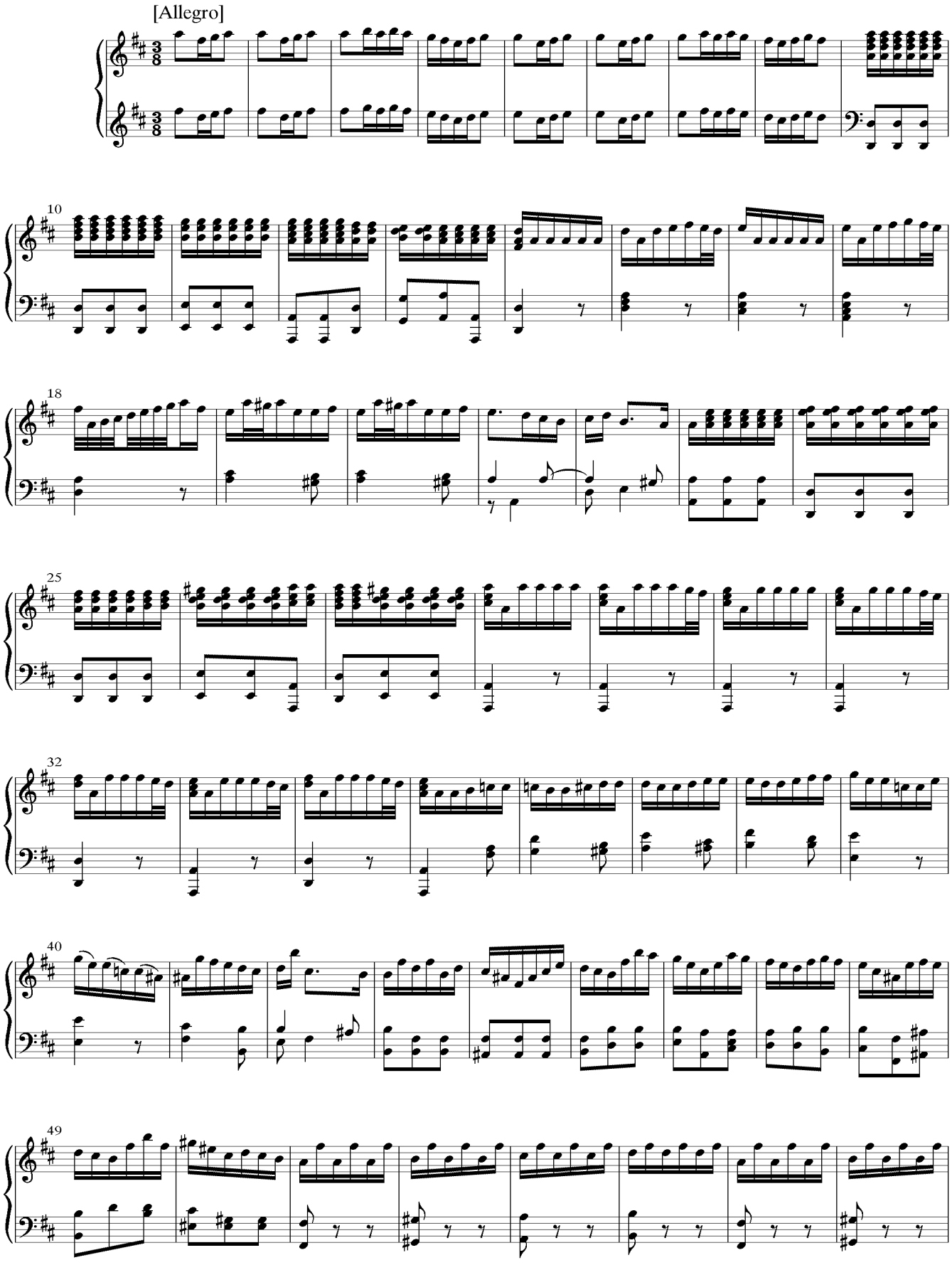

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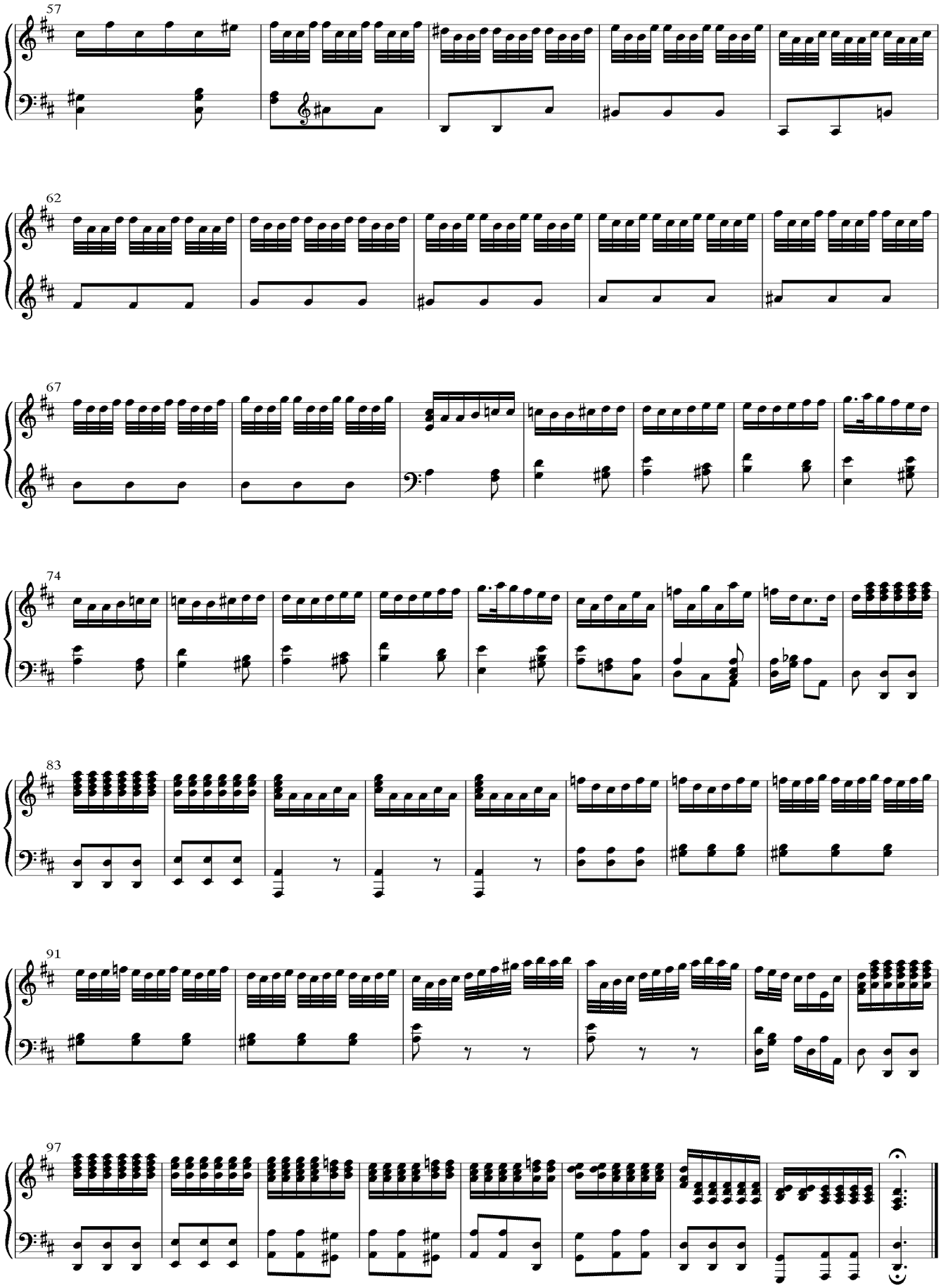

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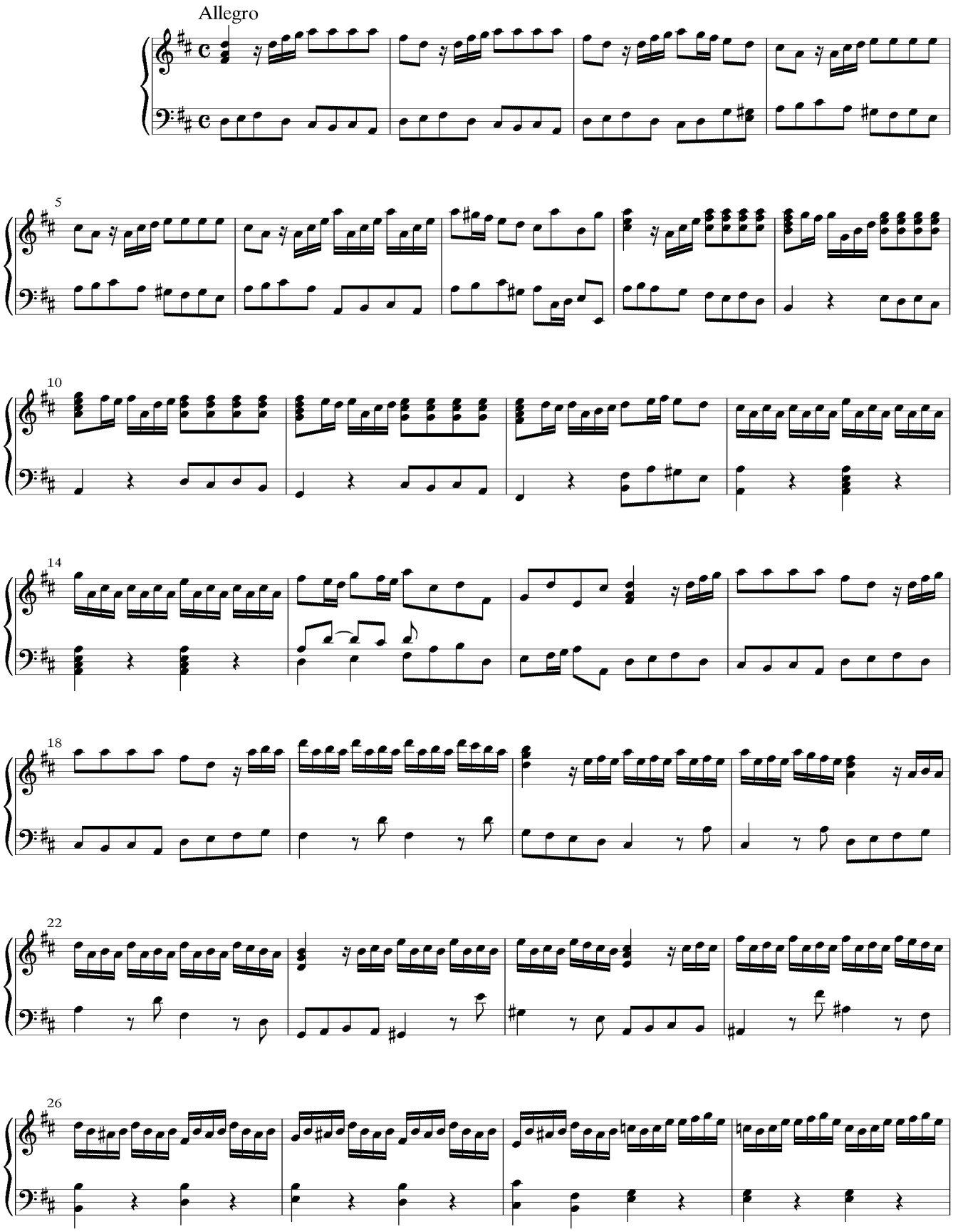
Sonata in D Major for Keyboard

based on Vivaldi's Op. 3, No. 12

Allegro



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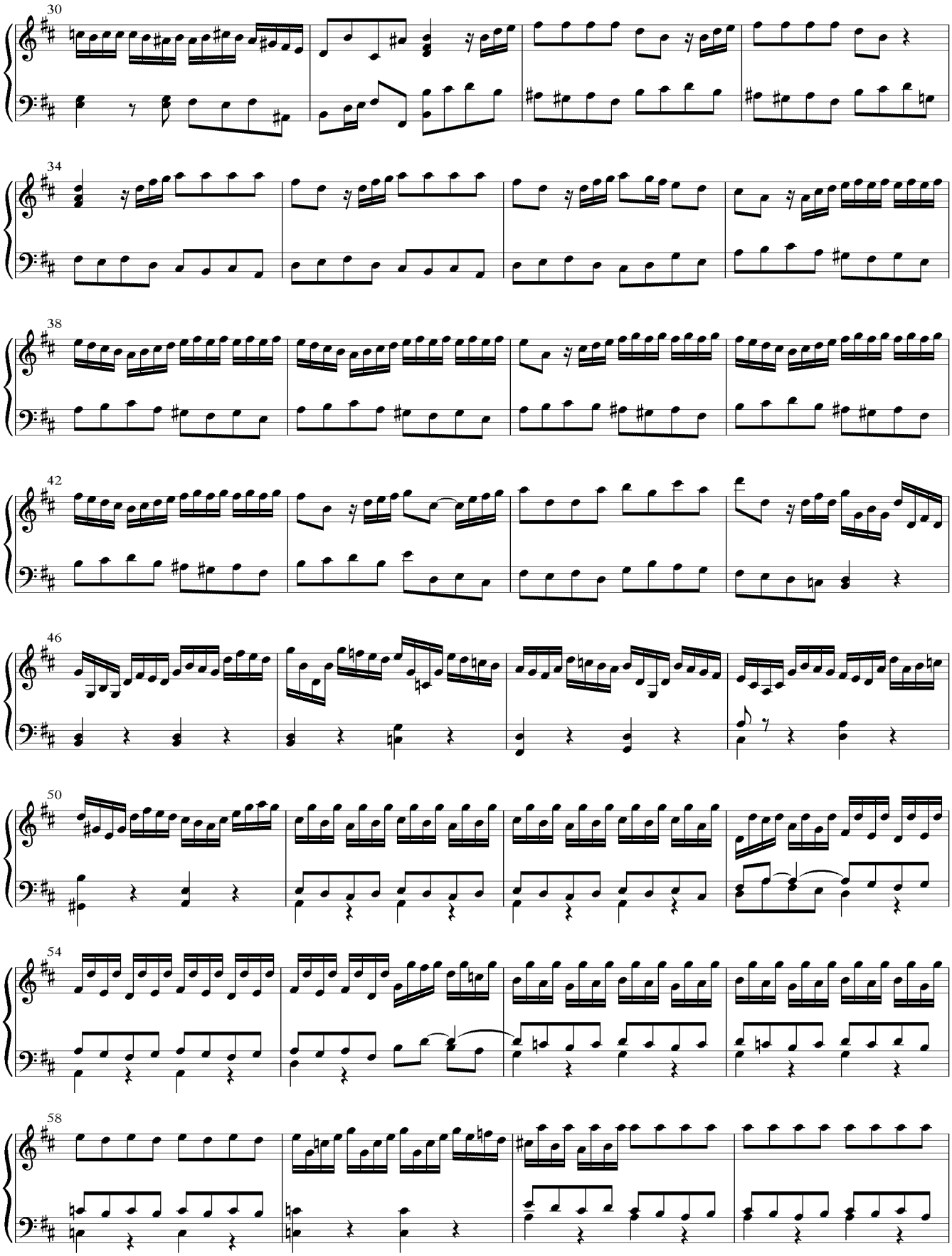

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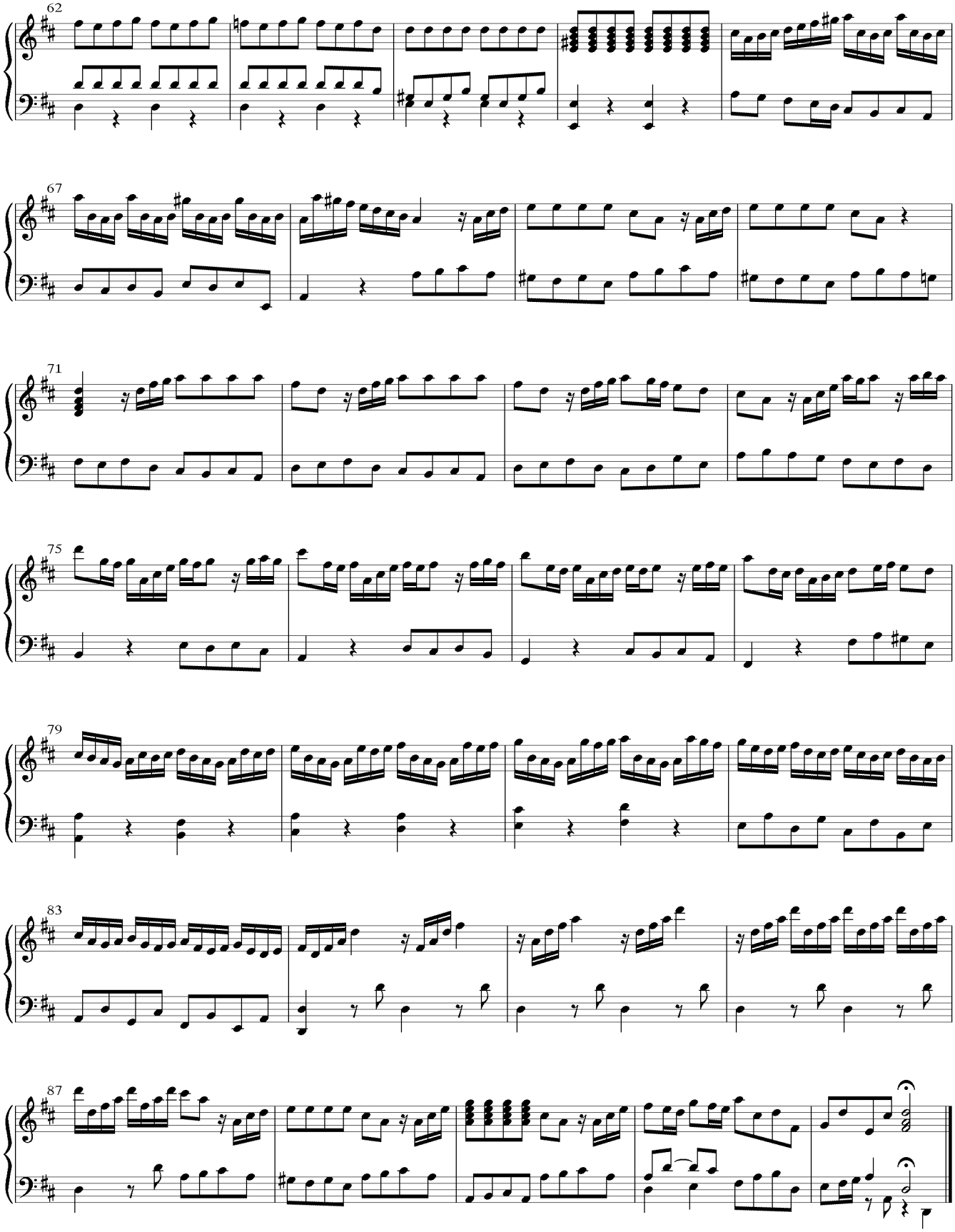

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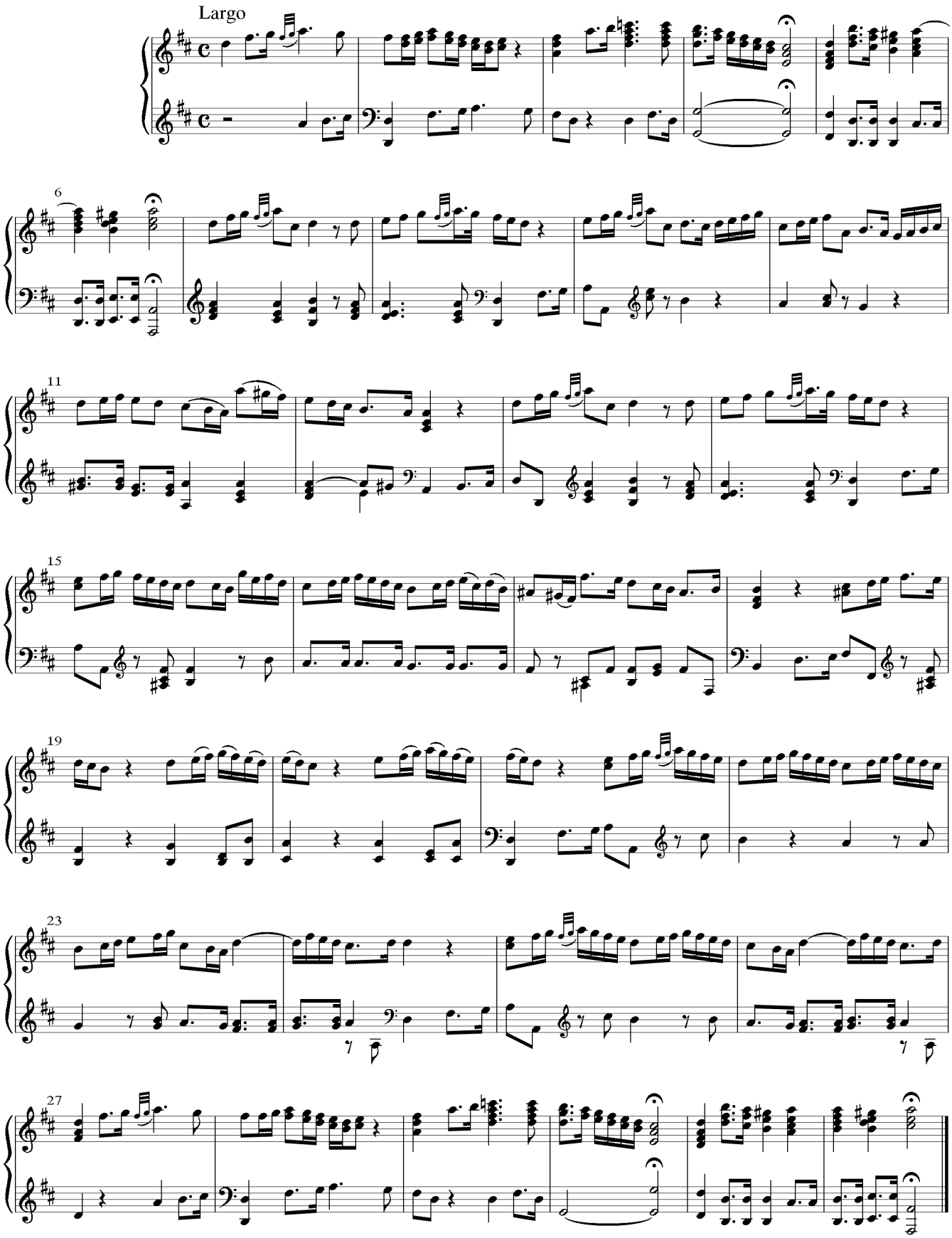

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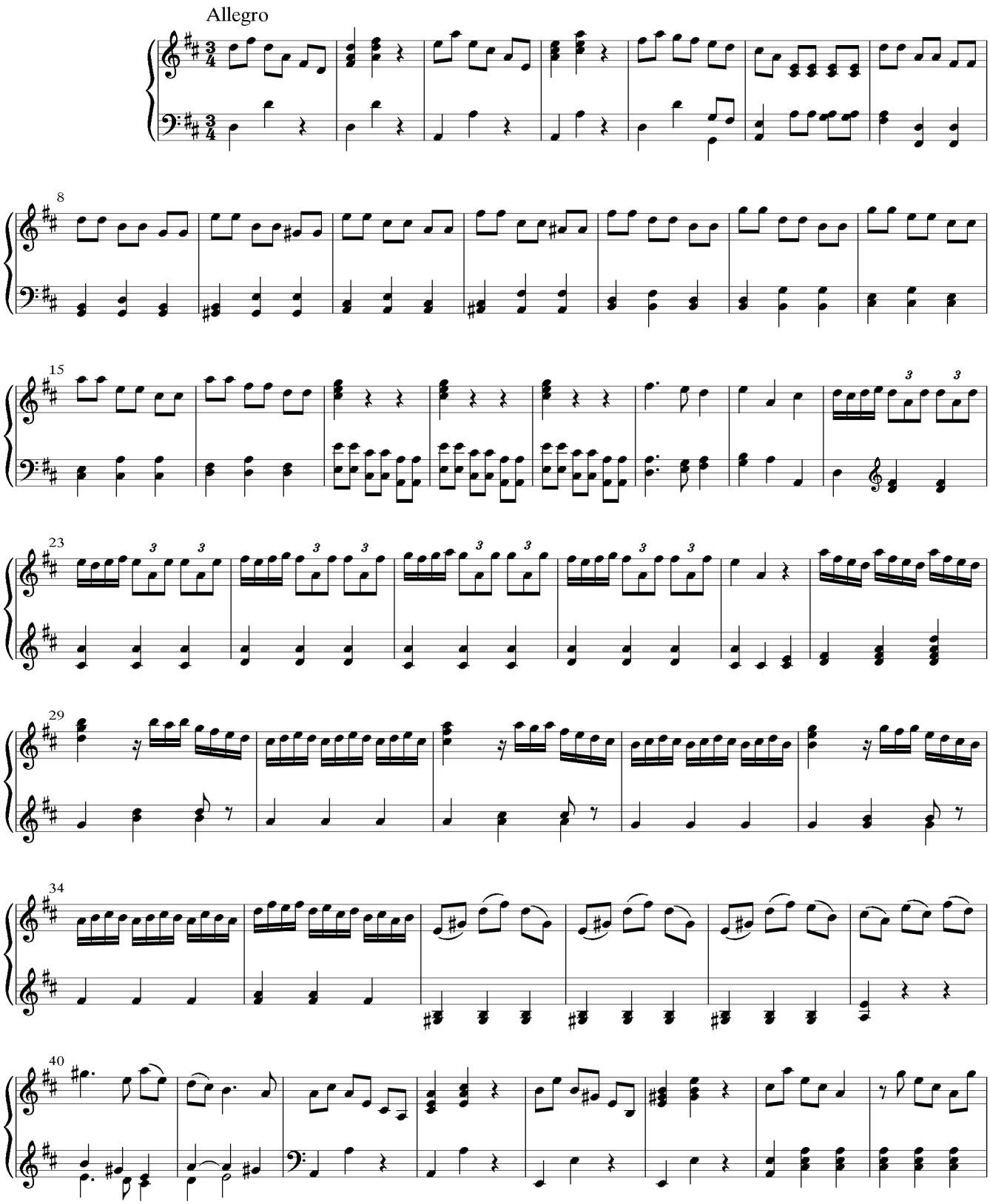

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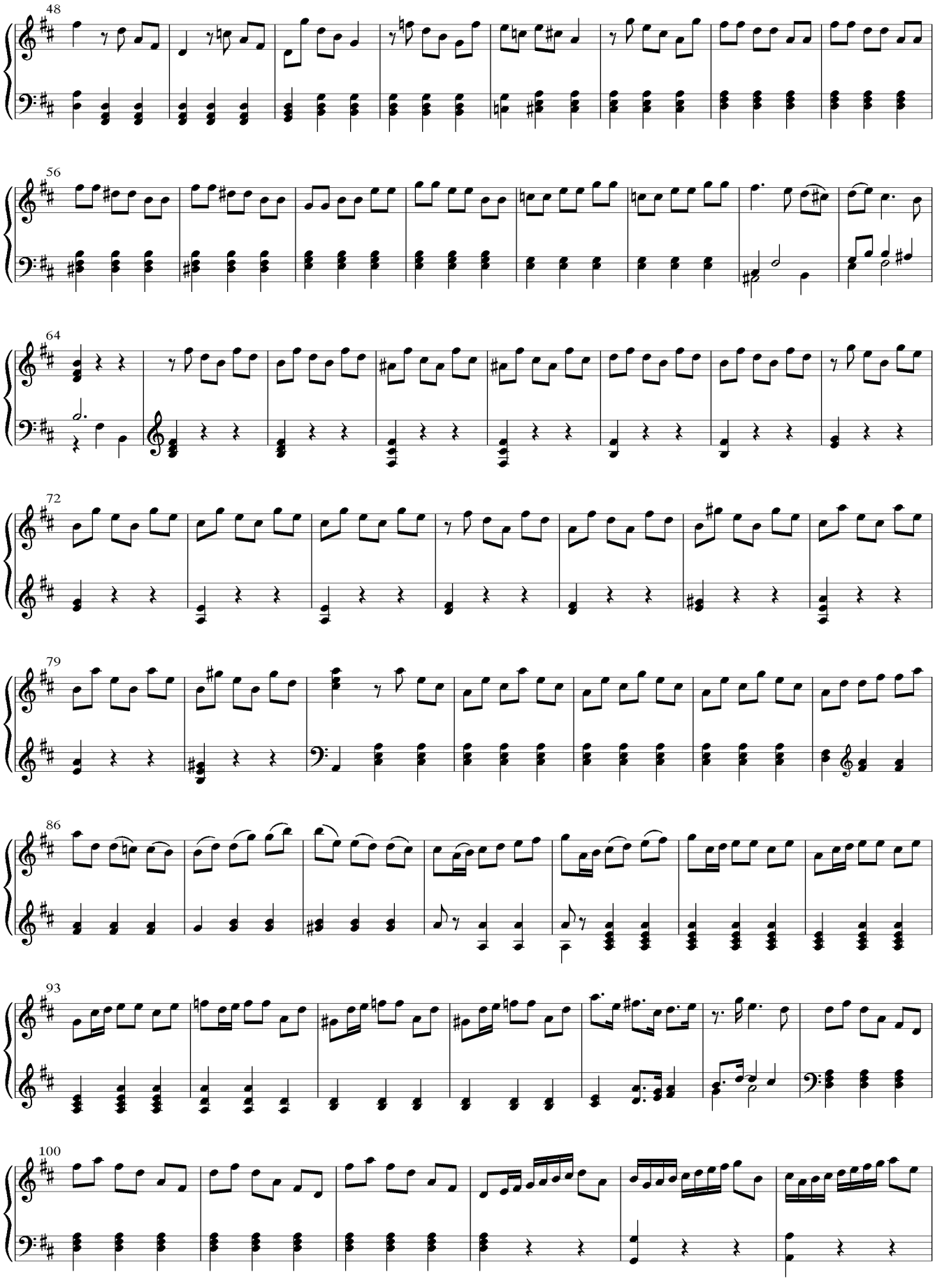

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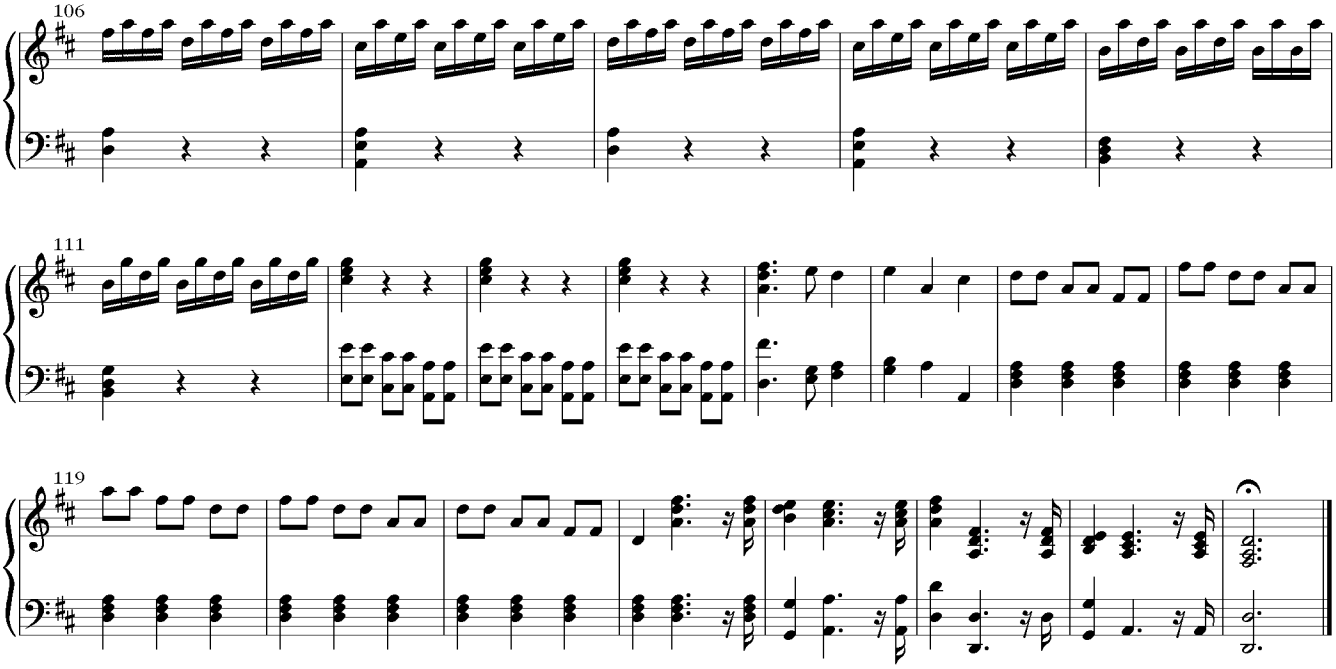

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