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THE STUDY OF PRE-CLASSIC STRING WRITING AS EVIDENCED IN THREE QUARTETS BY CARL FRIEDRICH ABEL, OPUS 8, 12, 15

by

Carol Cohan

To fulfill the thesis requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Musical Arts

Major in Viola

Director of Research: Dr. James Riley

College-Conservatory of Music

of the

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PREFACE

Carl Friedrich Abel, gambist and composer, contemporary of Haydn and Mozart, is a forgotten figure in music history. Because few of his works have been published, I have chosen to study three of his quartets as examples of pre-Classic string writing, and to present them in score. I have added nothing in the scores which was not present in the parts. Obvious slurring omissions are marked with a broken line.

The first editions of the parts of these quartets were obtained on microfilm from the Trinity College of Music Library in London, and from Ried Music Library in Edinbourgh.

I am grateful to Dr. James Riley for his helpful advice and criticism in the preparation of this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

THE COMPOSER: HIS LIFE, TIME, AND PLACE IN MUSIC HISTORY

Carl Friedrich Abel was born in Cöthen on December 22, 1723. His father, Christian Ferdinand, was employed as a gambist at the Cöthen court and was there at the same time as J. S. Bach.[1] His older brother, Leopold August, was a violinist who studied with Franz Benda and played in various German orchestras. Many authorities state that Abel was a student of J. S. Bach at the Leipzig Thomasschule; however, no evidence of his name appears in the list of alumni from there.[2]

In 1748 Abel was employed as a gambist in the Dresden chapel where, according to Burney, he matured as a composer and musician. He served there for ten years under Johann Adolph Hasse, a composer of considerable stature who completely adopted the Italian style through his associations with Nicola Porpora and later with Alessandro Scarlatti.[3]

Events leading to Abel's residence in England are told by Burney:

> ...he quitted the service (in Dresden) in 1758 and departed from the capital of Saxony with only three dollars in his pocket. He travelled on foot to the next little German Province, where he found his talents were not only honoured but rewarded. This success, however, only raised his ambition, and excited a stronger desire to try his fortune elsewhere;

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[1] J. S. Bach's cello suites were probably written for Abel and with his technical assistance. See Phillip Spitta, Johann Sebastian Bach (London: Novello & Co. Ltd., 1899), p 708-09.

[2] C. S. Terry, John Christian Bach (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p 75.

[3] Samford Holm, Carl Friedrich Abel, Symphonist: A Biographical Study (Microfilm PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1953), p 6.

> he went therefore soon to another court, and still on to a third, remaining only at each long enough to acquire a sufficient sum to defray his expenses to a new scene of action; when at length he arrived in England, 1759, where his worth was soon discovered and rewarded.[4]

The London Publick Advertiser of March 27, 1759, carried an announcement of Abel's first concert in London to be given Thursday, April 5 at seven o'clock.[5] The concert was held in the Great Room at 21 Dean Street, Soho, and Abel played his own compositions on the gamba, the harpsichord, and the pentachord.[6] He is reported to have performed on the horn as well, but after 1765 he confined himself exclusively to the gamba. Of his gamba playing Burney said:

> His performance on the viol da gamba was in every particular complete and perfect. He had a hand which no difficulties could embarrass; a taste the most refined and delicate; and a judgment so correct and certain as never to let a single note escape him without meaning.[7]

When Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, established the band in 1761, Abel was appointed as gambist and given the title of chamber musician to Her Majesty.

When John Christian Bach arrived in London in late 1762, Abel was already well established, and the partnership of the two was destined to be successful for the next two decades.

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[4]Charles Burney, A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present (New York: Dover Publications, 1957) II, pp 1018-19.

[5]Terry, p 76.

[6]Robert Elkin, The Old Concert Rooms of London (London: Edward Arnold, Ltd., 1955), p 59. The pentachord was an instrument newly invented at the time. As the name implies it was a five-stringed instrument and was held between the knees.

[7]Burney, II, p 1019.

The first Bach-Abel concert was announced in the Publick Advertiser in February, 1765:

> For the benefit of Mr. Bach and Mr. Abel: Great Room in Spring Gardens, near St. James Park, this day February 29. A new Serenata in two Acts composed by Mr. Bach. To which will be added several new Pieces of Instrumental Music by Mr. Abel. To begin at exactly Half an Hour after Six. Tickets at Half-a-Guinea each to be had at Mr. Bach and Mr. Abel's lodgings in Meards Street, St. Ann's, Soho.[8]

In 1765 the first real series of Bach-Abel concerts was shifted to the Carlisle House, the establishment of the notorious Theresa Cornelys, who had a small musical background as a professional singer in Amsterdam, bought the Carlisle House in 1760, and from 1763 it was "a popular entertainment place for balls, masquerades, and musicales that were exceedingly fashionable, if not always well-behaved."[9] It was here that the Bach-Abel concerts were inaugurated with a successful subscription series of six concerts. A series of fifteen concerts each followed in 1766 and 1777. By 1768 these concerts were so popular that they were moved to Almack's because it was feared that the Carlisle House could no longer hold the tremendous crowds.[10] Their stay at Almack's, formerly called Thatched House Tavern, between 1768 and 1774 was probably the most financially successful period in the careers of both Bach and Abel.

In 1773 John Gallini, a Swiss-Italian dancing master who came to London in the 1750's, bought a mansion at Number 4 Hanover Square and built a new suite of rooms called the New Assembly Rooms.[11]

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[8]Terry, 78.

[9]Helm, 45.

[10]Elkin, 78.

[11]Elkin, 92.

Originally Bach and Abel each had a quarter-share of the property, Gallini supplying the other half, but within a few years Gallini bought them out and became sole owner.[12] From this time on the popularity of the concerts declined. Reasons for the decline have been stated by Percy Young:

> Moreover, the publick was fickle. Referring to the Subscription Concerts inaugurated by Abel and Bach, Slingsby's Musical Biography remarked, 'After having for many years conducted these concerts with credit and reputation, the publick grew tired of them and the proprietors were compelled to withdraw themselves with the loss of a great sum of money.'[13]

In 1781 Bach died and Abel tried to continue the concerts on his own; however, they were unsuccessful and Abel had to give them up. After 1785 the Professional Concerts replaced the Bach-Abel Concerts. Grieved over Bach's death, Abel remained in London until 1782, when his desire to see his brother and his country led him to return to Germany. During that visit he performed magnificently on his gamba and received from the Crown Prince of Prussia a costly casket and 100 louis d'or.[14] He spent several years thereafter in Paris where it appears he began his over-indulgence in drink which eventually caused his death. It is reported that he was able to conceal his drunkenness even when performing. Before concerts his friends dined with him for the purpose of keeping him sober; however, they did not succeed. He arrived in an inebriated state on stage; his instrument already tuned, he proceeded to play "almost better

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[12] Elkin, 92.

[13] Percy M. Young, The Concert Tradition from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century. (Loudin: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965), p 165.

[14] Wilhelm Joseph Von Wasielewski, The Violoncello and its History, Trans. Isobella S.E. Stigard (New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), p 33.

than ever."[15] But when he finished playing, the curtain had to be lowered because Abel could not get up from his chair.

He returned to London in 1785 and performed once more at the newly established Professional Concerts of Salomon and Mara at the Pantheon. His last appearance was at Mrs. Billington's Concert in May 1787.

Because of his drunkenness Abel was not accepted into higher society, and when he died in June, 1787, he was buried "without any honours conferred by the profession, but followed to his grave by a few select friends."[16]

Although greatly overshadowed by Haydn and Mozart, Abel was a musician perceptive enough to recognize the changing style which was taking place in Europe in the mid-18th century. He once wrote of J. S. Bach and C. P. E. Bach:

> If Sebastian Bach and his son Emanuel, instead of being music directors in commercial cities, had been fortunately employed to compose for the stage and public of great capitals, such as Naples, Paris, or London, and for performers of the first class, they would doubtless have simplified their style more to the level of their judges; the one would have sacrificed all unmeaning art and contrivance, and the other have been less fantastical and recherché; and both, by writing in a style more popular, and generally intelligible and pleasing would have extended their fame, and been indisputably the greatest musicians of the eighteenth century.[17]

In experimenting with the galant style he laid the groundwork for future

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[15] Terry, p 104.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Hans T. David and Arthur Mendel, The Bach Reader (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1966), p 362.

composers. With J. C. Bach he "... brought about a total revolution of our musical taste."[18]

Their concerts were the chief entertainment of London musical life for over twenty years and were a decisive influence in the establishment of permanent concert societies. In this respect Abel deserves a noteworthy place in music history. As a composer, however, he tended to look backward instead of forward, never rising above the simple experiments of galant style with which he is associated.

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[18]Burney, II, p 1015.

CHAPTER II

THE POSITION OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN LONDON DURING THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The performance practice of music in the Elizabethan era was one of personal participation. Performance in a madrigal or a fancy was considered to be socially acceptable. In 1597 Thomas Morley wrote:

> But supper being ended and music books (according to the custom) being brought to the table, the mistress of the house presented me with a part earnestly requesting me to sing; but when, after many excuses, I protested unfeignedly that I could not, every one began to wonder; yea, some whispered to others demanding how I was brought up, so that upon shame of mine ignorance I go now to seek out mine old friend Master Gnorimus, to make myself his scholar.[1]

Every aristocratic family had a chest of viols; fancies or madrigals were played or sung by members of the family or their guests. During that time the violin was considered to be an alehouse instrument, not suitable or dignified enough for the aristocratic families who preferred the softer, more veiled tone of the viols. Toward the end of the 17th century the Italian sonata along with the violin family was accepted in England. Foreign virtuosi, such as Baltzar and Matteis, impressed the English with their display of technique and singing quality; later, composers such as Corelli, Geminiana and Scarlatti

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[1]Thomas Morley, A Plain and Easy Introduction to Practical Music, Ed. R. Alec Harmon (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1966), p 9.

were regarded as masters of the Italian art.[2]

After the Revolution of 1689 the English bourgeoise nobility with its new cultural ideal was destined to control Britain for many years. This ideal, practicality in all things, encompassed not only patronage of the arts but also philosophy and science. Their success at commerce enabled them to pay well for their art, and they spent much on paintings, fine furniture, and music. The Elizabethan practice of participation was replaced by a preference for listening. The following quotation by John Locke in 1693, only 100 years after Morley, describes the new attitude.

> A good hand upon some instruments is by many people mightily valued; but it wastes so much of a young man's year, to gain but a moderate skill in it, and engages him often in such odd company.[3]

Such a situation led to increased professionalism, and the public concert and passive listening developed tremendously during the 18th century.

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[2]Anthony A. Wood's diary of 1658 reports the following:

> Tho. Balsar or Baltzar, a Lubecker borne, and the most famous artist for the violin that the world had yet produced, was now in Oxoir... A. W. did then and there to his very great astonishment, hear him play on the Violin. He then saw him run up his Fingers to the end of the Fingerboard of the Violin, and run them back insensibly, and all with alacrity and in very good time, which he nor any in England saw the like before.

[3]Earnest Meyer, English Chamber Music, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1946), p 250.

English concert life became a haven for foreign composers such as Handel, J. C. Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Abel. The choral tradition of English composers was still carried on, but instrumental music in 18th century England prospered under foreign influences of the trio sonata, the sinfonia, and forms which developed in Italy, France, and Germany but flourished in England.

The amateur and the dilletante, whose interest in music was a diversionary one, developed along with the growth of the public concert. The gentlemen who played the violin and the ladies who played the flute had no time to study counterpoint or harmony; thus they required a type of music that was within their technical and intellectual grasp. The music had to be simple and had to be completely written out with careful markings of dynamics and nuances.

Lower standards of musical taste became general in the pre-Classic era and music was measured only by its entertainment value.[4] Thus sonata form, the serenade, the divertimento replaced the learned fugues. Rococo composers experimented with these new devices, improved them to a certain extent, and passed them on to the great masters with whom we associate the Classic period - Haydn and Mozart.

THE PHYSICAL CONDITION OF STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE TIME

The 18th century was a most important period in the development of the violin and bow.[5] The outline and body length of about fourteen

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[4]Homer Ulrich, Chamber Music (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), p 115.

[5]David Boyden, The History of Violin Playing from its Origin to 1761. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p 329.

inches have not changed since Stradivarius established his classical model around 1700. The old neck was rounder, thicker, and shorter, which meant a shorter vibrating string resulting in more difficulty for the left hand in reaching around to the lowest string and in shifting. The old neck projected almost straight down from the body, whereas today it is somewhat angled down.

A more brilliant tone was made possible when the flat model of Stradivarius and his followers replaced the more highly arched model of the older Amati and Stainer violins.

The older bridges were slightly lower, flatter in arch, and not as sloped toward the E string side. The final form of the eighteenth century bridge was established by Stradivarius; except for being slightly thicker and a bit higher it is essentially the same design as the modern bridge.[6]

The old fingerboard was not parallel to the neck of the violin, and a wedge had to be inserted between the neck and fingerboard to adjust the height of the bridge and the strings. The fingerboard was usually wider at the peg box and narrower at the bridge - just the opposite of today's model. In 1750 the fingerboard was two and one-half inches shorter than it is today, enabling the player to execute notes only up through the seventh position.[7]

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[6] W. Henry, Arthur F. and Alfred E. Hill, Antonio Stradivari, His Life and Work (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p 205.

[7] David Boyden, "The Violin and its Technique in the 18th Century," Musical Quarterly, January, 1950, p 11.

Strings were made of gut. Leopold Mozart makes no mention of wound strings, and Quantz mentions only the G string as being wound. Curt Sachs dates the use of wound strings as 1772, but also states that 80 years later "such strings were not yet universally accepted."[8] In any case the use of a gut G string made the response unreliable and may account for the general neglect of this string by composers of the period.

The chin rest is a 19th century invention attributed to Spohr. Various methods of holding the violin at the breast, or at the collar bone against the neck are described by Leopold Mozart. He prefers holding the violin against the neck with the chin on the right side of the violin, "whereby the violin remains unmoved in its place even during the strongest movements of the ascending and descending hand."[9] Nevertheless, without the aid of a chin rest left hand facility was hampered, as the left hand was also needed to support the violin.

By the early years of the 18th century the bow was either straight or had a slightly convex shape, and the hair was almost parallel to the stick since the frog and tip were about the same distance from the hair. The modern bow dates from about 1780 and is attributed to Francois Tourte. It was concave in shape, longer, and the old tip was replaced by a hatchet head shape in order to prevent the hair from hitting the stick. The new bow had greater momentum and elasticity; with less "give" and more power it was capable of effects such as sforzando and martelé. By being more elastic and taut, it was capable of off-string strokes; it could execute

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[8]Curt Sachs, The History of Musical Instruments (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1940), p 361.

[9]Leopold Mozart, A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing, trans. Editha Knocker (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), p 54.

long crescendos as were indicated in orchestral music of the time.[10] By 1800 technique in violin playing was much improved owing to improvements in construction of both the violin and bow.

The cello began as a bass viola da braccio[11] and was used to provide the bass part of all kinds of music. Until 1625 the cello and viola da gamba were both used as the bass of the string family. They were used side by side in orchestras of the 17th century. The popularity of the viola da gamba made it difficult for the cello to prosper as a solo instrument, as the sweet tone of the gamba was preferred even in Leopold Mozart's time. One of the first methods for cello was written in 1741 by Michel Corette who wrote about various kinds of bowing in addition to treatment of the thumb position.[12] He also gave instruction for changing from gamba to cello, an indication that this practice was already in existence.

By 1756 the cello was firmly established as part of the ensemble and according to Leopold Mozart, "it is customary to play the bass part on this instrument."[13]

The fame of Franciscello as a cello virtuoso was responsible for the rise in popularity of that instrument in Italy and the decline of the viola da gamba. Quantz was very impressed with Franciscello as an artist and mentions his palm-down bow grip,[14] as opposed to the

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[10]Anthony Baines, ed. Musical Instruments Through the Ages (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), p 124.

[11]Sachs, p 362.

[12]Wasielewski, p 57.

[13]Mozart, p 11.

[14]Baines, p 141.

underhand gamba technique. Around 1770 Jean Louis Duport's treatise on the cello standardized the thumb position and the overhand bow technique.[15]

The fingerboard of the cello had to be lengthened like that of the violin because by the end of the century compositions for the cello were written for much higher notes than were encountered up to that time.[16]

The end pin was invented in the 19th century by Servais (1807-66) who is said to have introduced it "when old age and infirmity made it difficult for him to grip the cello between his knees or rest it on a stool.[17]

The viola has always been considered a second-class instrument. Quantz found it necessary to warn the violist against spoiling a passage played in unison with the violins,[18] and Leopold Mozart laughed at cellists who permitted the bass part of their solo to be accompanied by a viola.[19] Quantz writes:

> The viola is commonly regarded as of little importance in the musical establishment. The reason may well be that it is often played by persons who are either still beginners in the ensemble or have no particular gifts with which to distinguish themselves on the viola,

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[15]Shiela Nelson, The Violin Family (London: Dennis Dobson, 1964), p 45.

[16]Baines, p 145.

[17]Nelson, p 46.

[18]J. J. Quantz, On Playing The Flute, Trans. Edward R. Reilly (New York: Free Press, 1966), p 238.

[19]Mozart, p 11.

> or that the instrument yields all too few advantages to its players, so that able people are not easily persuaded to take it up. I maintain, however, that if the entire accompaniment is to be without defect, the violist must be just as able as the second violinist.[20]

Originally violas were very large, often eighteen and one-half to nineteen inches in body length. Between 1660 and 1700 the small viola with a body length of fourteen and one-half to fifteen and one-half inches was more popular, probably because violinists also played the viola and found the larger one uncomfortable and disturbing to their violin technique. Scarcily any violas were produced from 1700 to 1750; there were enough violas in existence to satisfy the few demands for them.[21]

The developments of the violin and bow during that time were also made on the viola. The older and larger violas were reduced in size in order to be more manageable. This small, easy-to-handle, nasal sounding viola was used until the turn of the 20th century when Lionel Tertis designed a larger, better sounding viola measuring about sixteen to sixteen and one-half inches. With the development of the string quartet the viola became an instrument of individual quality and importance. Experiments with the viola as an individual voice at first resulted only in its being a "filler" for the missing continuo, sometimes doubling the bass line, sometimes in thirds or sixths with the second

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[20] Quantz, p 237

[21] Hill, p 100.

violin, but rarely in a solo line. With the later quartets of Haydn and Mozart, written in the 1780's, the viola participated equally with the other voices in the string quartet.

PLAYING COMBINATIONS OF THE TIME

By the end of the 17th century two types of sonatas existed: the sonata da chiesa with four serious movements essentially in contrapuntal style which was well suited to performance in the church; the sonata da camera with four or more movements which was a set of dances usually in homphonic style. During the course of time non-dance like movements such as the overture or prelude were written in the chiesa type, and dance like movements found their way into the camera type. Thus it became more difficult to differentiate between the two types of sonatas, and the old terms were dropped in favor of the general name, sonata, or sonata a tre. The first half of eighteenth century chamber music was essentially devoted to these two forms.

The sonata was a composition for one solo instrument and continuo. The trio sonata was written for two treble instruments, such as two violins, two flutes, or combinations of violin and wind, and figured bass. In addition to the keyboard realization, an instrument such as gamba, cello, or bassoon was required to reinforce the bass line; thus the trio sonata was a composition for four players. This was the practice in performing all sonatas in the Baroque, except the sonatas senza continuo which were for solo instrument alone.

Toward the middle of the 18th century, when the Baroque was in its last years and the new pre-Classic era was beginning, the solo sonata

was becoming more popular than the trio sonata.[22] At the same time new forms appeared which represent the beginning of the Rococo. Among them were the divertimento and the string quartet, forms which resulted in several new performing media with and without keyboard instruments.

The practice arose in the mid-18th century of honoring one's friends and/or lovers by engaging musicians to play music under their windows. Serenade, nocturne, divertimento, and cassation were the names given to these compositions. They were all light in character, as their names imply, and were performed by a few string and/or wind players with usually one or two performers on each part.[23] Movements in these pieces varied from two to four. Early ones derived from the three movement sinfonia; it is the later four movement divertimento which influenced the symphony and the string quartet.

Divertimenti, (a general name which includes also the other types mentioned above), were considered both chamber music and orchestral music, and as such could be played by small orchestras or by quartets or quintets.[24] It is easy to see how this simple, two, three, or four-movement framework could be expanded, deepened in content, and developed into the Classic symphony and quartet.

Antecedents of the string quartet have been ascribed as early as 1715. Alessandro Scarlatti wrote several sonata a quattro for due violini, violetta, e violoncello senza cembalo. The fourth sonata of

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[22]Ulrich, p 92.

[23]Ulrich, p 122.

[24]Ulrich, p 123.

Handel's Opus 5 (1738) contains a viola part which has been added to the two violins and bass and would seem to have the effect of a string quartet.[25] These isolated works, however, have no connection with the developments which were taking place in pre-Classic music, and as such cannot be regarded as true string quartets.

The string quartet developed from the divertimento. In fact, the early quartets of both Haydn and Mozart are divertimenti, and therefore could be played either by a small orchestra or by a quartet. After the continuo was discarded in chamber music and the viola was added to the second violin assuming an accompaniement role in the treble-dominated quartet of the Rococo, it was not long before talented composers realized the possibilities of this combination of stringed instruments and developed true quartet style.

After the keyboard instrument disappeared as a continuo support in chamber music, it assumed a new and important role as a solo instrument. First the harpsichord, then the newly invented piano received composers' attention in completely written out keyboard sonatas. Later, strings were re-introduced in combination with the keyboard in chamber music, but the time in a subordinate role. In these sonatas the strings accompanied the violin doubling the upper part of the keyboard, and the cello the lower part. Still later, violin and cello parts (and occasionally viola) were written to enhance the keyboard and were different from the outer parts. These "obligato" parts were the forerunners of the piano trio and piano quartet of the Classic period.

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[25] Ulrich, p 101.

THE FIGURED BASS OF THE TIME

The continuo dominated almost all compositions since the early 17th century. It was the foundation of all music in the Baroque and it enjoyed a long life. The figured bass was interpreted by the keyboard player who added the necessary chords above the symbols and improvised when necessary. It was a language familiar to all musicians of the time; composers knew it, performers knew a right and a wrong way to interpret it and were educated from the very beginning of their musical careers to it.

With the advent of the Rococo, the use of music for entertainment and participation by amateurs resulted in the decline of the continuo. The galant style, with its characteristic predominant upper part, forced the bass line and inner parts to fill in the harmonies. Possibly because the composer distrusted the ability of amateurs to realize the figured bass, all parts were written out. Chords below the solo line were complete, and all harmonic changes were indicated in the lower instruments. Consequently the continuo became unnecessary and the figured bass symbols disappeared. This occurred first in the orchestral music of the Viennese and Mannheim Schools, and later in chamber music. It is difficult to determine the exact date when this occurred; figures were still indicated in Rococo music, even when the harmonies above it were fully written out and complete.

CHAPTER III

CONSIDERATION OF THE QUARTETS

ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENTS REGARDING STYLE, FORM, STRUCTURAL FEATURES, USE AND RANGE OF INSTRUMENTS, AND TEXTURE.

The quartets under consideration are Opus 8 number 4 in D Major, Opus 12 number 6 in G Major, and Opus 15 number 2 in C Major.

According to Helm, Opus 8 was written in 1768, Opus 12 in 1774, and Opus 15 in 1781. He also states that Opus 8 are "real quartets in contrast to sonatas for three instruments and continuo."[1] Abel called the cello part "obligato," thus establishing a bass line free from continuo support. It is interesting to note, however, that while Opus 8 has no figured bass, both the later quartets are supplied with figures. It must be remembered that Abel came under direct influence of J. C. Bach in London, and Bach used a figured bass in his Opus 11 quintets (published in 1776) for flute, oboe, violin, viola, and cello.[2] The harmony of both Opus 12 and Opus 15 is complete without continuo support; therefore, a satisfactory performance is quite possible without keyboard accompaniment. Figures are not supplied when the cello has a solo line, except

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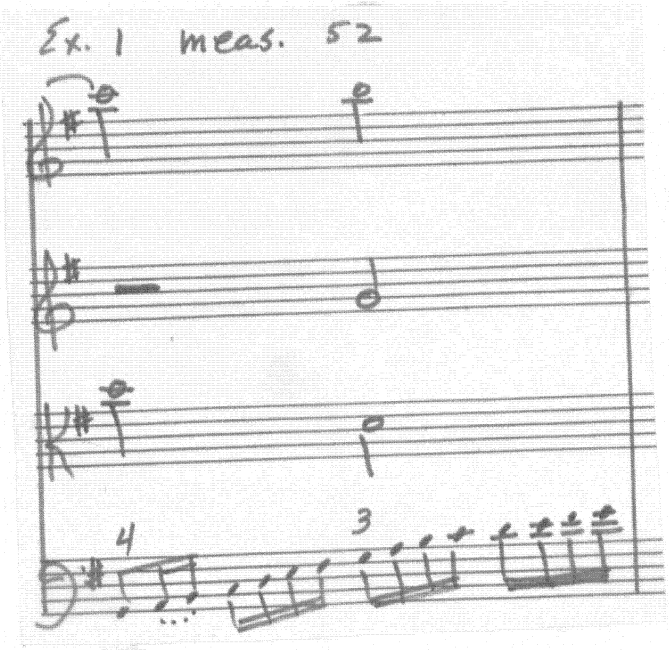
[1] Helm, p 63.

[2] Ulrich, p 153.

in one case in Opus 12, measure 52.

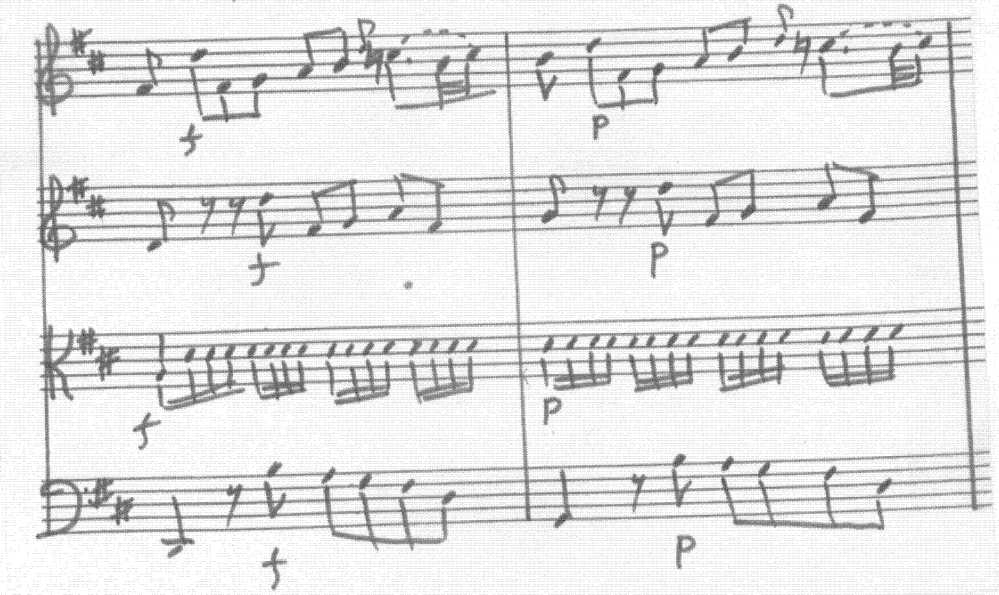


All the quartets have three movements in order of fast-slow-fast. Opus 15 is the only quartet which has a contrasting key for the middle movement; Opus 8 and 12 with movements in the same key throughout, resemble the form of the baroque suite.

The first movements, marked un poco allegro, allegro, and allegretto respectively, are all bipartite, with both sections repeated. Development sections are very limited; in fact, Opus 8 has no development section or recapitulation in the sense of sonata-form, and therefore

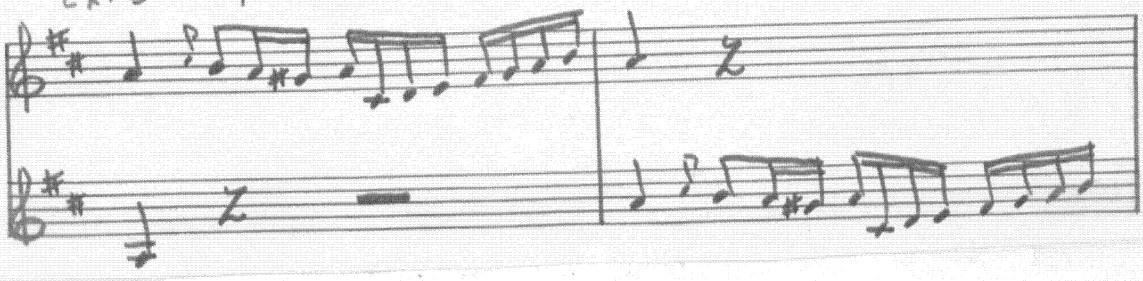
is more in the baroque style. Contrasts are confined to echo effects

Ex. 2 op. 8 meas. 33-34



and to dialogue between the first and second violins or first violin and cello. Themes are stated first by one instrument and repeated exactly by another.

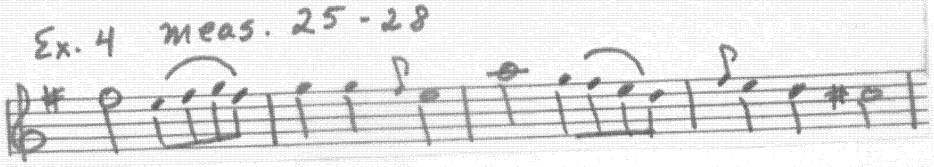
Ex. 3 Opus 8 meas. 13-14



Opus 15 has a small development section of twenty measures (m. 25-45), in which there are bits of imitation and short modulations to related

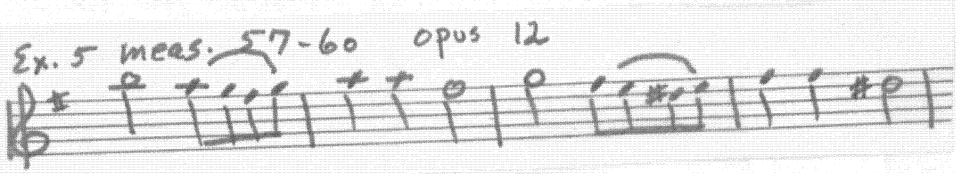
keys. Opus 12 has a contrasting theme

Ex. 4 meas. 25-28



which is somewhat developed,

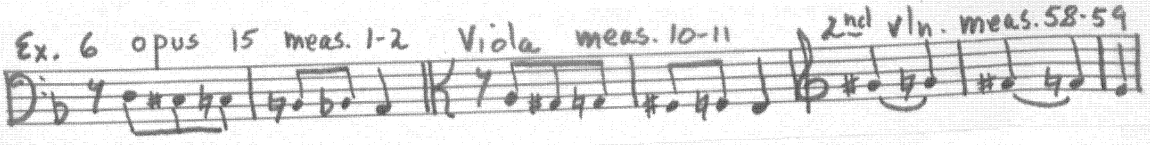
Ex. 5 meas. 57-60 opus 12



and makes possible a longer development section of thirty six measures (m. 38-70). This is still very simple and short.

Of the second movements, marked andante, sicilisno, and andante, only Opus 15 is more expaneded. The first two quartets are simple ABA form and are very short (thirty nine and forty seven measures respectively) with the melody predominantly in the first violin. Opus 15 deserves more discussion primarily because of its length of ninety one measures, its contrasting key of F major, and its method of composition. It is a dialogue between the first violin and cello, with soaring melodies in the cello. Both tenor and alto clef are necessary for the high notes used in the cello. A descending chromatic line

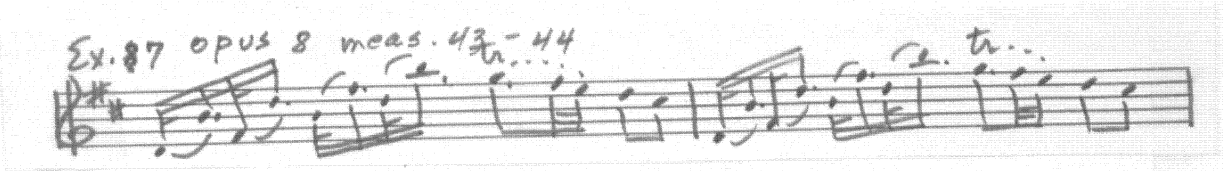
Ex. 6 opus 15 meas. 1-2 Viola meas. 10-11 2nd vln. meas. 58-59



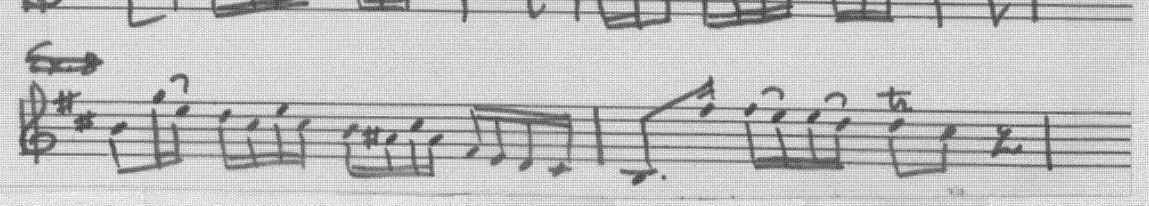
appears throughout in different voices and inversion (the viola (m. 10) 2nd vln. m. 38). There are modulations to 'a' minor and 'd' minor in addition to the usual dominant and subdominant.

The third movements, allegro assai, allegretto, and allegro non-troppo, are rondo-like. Opus 8 has a scherzo theme which is treated fugually between all voices. Short, fragmented themes are tossed back and forth between the violins, and occasionally the viola participates. There is a double bar; a second section of development (m. 67-97) and recapitulation gives the impression of sonata-rondo form in miniature. Thus the most backward looking first movement has the most advanced last movement. Both Opus 12 and Opus 15 have the form ABACA, with the C section in each one in the parallel minor.

The texture of the quartets ranges from purely homophonic to contrapuntal. Steady musical progress can be seen in the quartets. Opus 8 is primarily homophonic. Contrasts are confined to echo effects and to dialogue between first and second violins, or first violin and cello. There is much imitation of whole sections, pairing of instruments, soloistic passages for the first violin - all concertante elements which remind one of a Vivaldi concerto rather than a Haydn quartet:

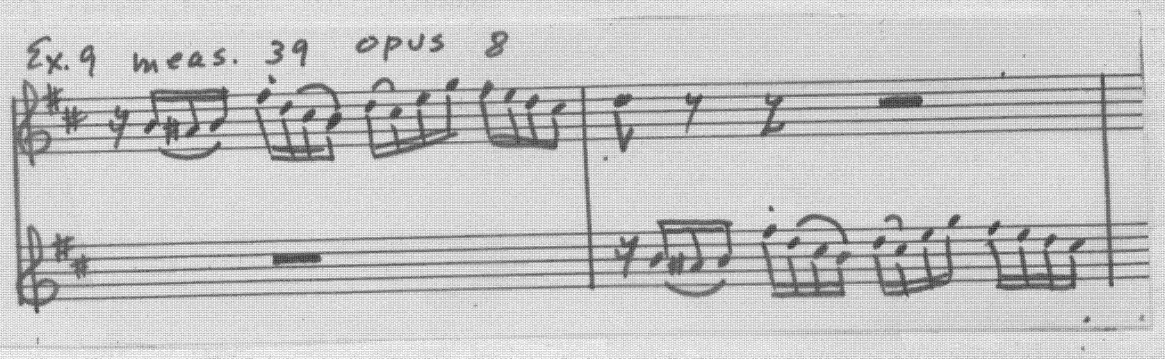


Ex. 8 opus 8 meas. 35-38



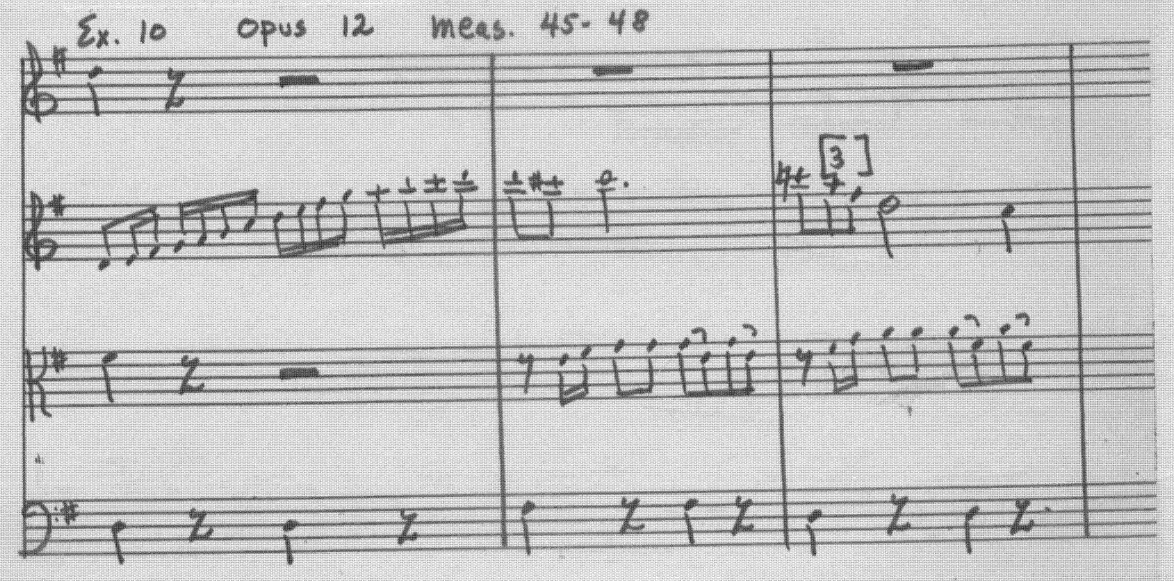
Alternating passages between the violins also occur.

Ex. 9 meas. 39 opus 8



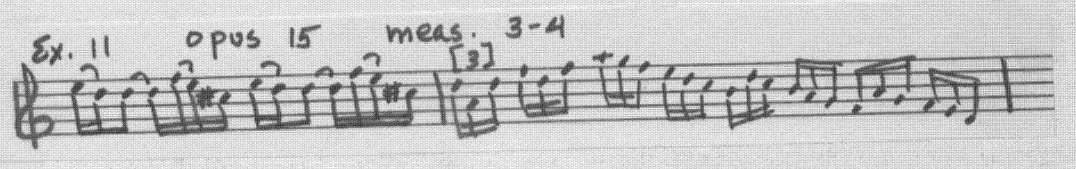
One of Abel's favorite structural devices can be seen in Opus 12. In Opus 12 homophonic and polyphonic elements begin to be combined, and the first real thematic development, based on breaking up of phrases and contrapuntal development of fragments can be seen. Here too the thematic material is more evenly divided among the four instruments, resulting in a truer quartet style.

Ex. 10 Opus 12 meas. 45-48

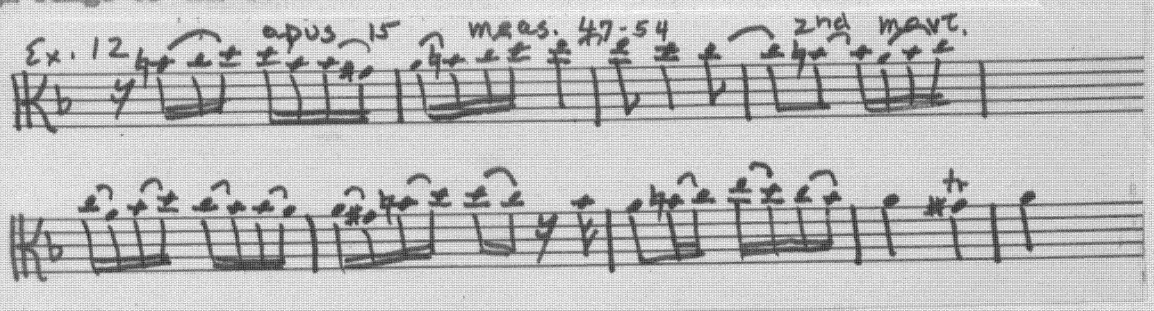


This three measure phrase is then repeated in the first and second violin while the viola plays the scale passage. Use of themes and phrases in different voices varies the texture while still retaining the older baroque device of pairing voices. Opus 15 is the most contrapuntal of all of the quartets. In this quartet the cello plays a very prominent solo role, with the result that all four instruments are treated equally, and true quartet style is very much in evidence.

Thematic variation is limited and often prosaic. Combinations of sixteenth-note figures with sixteenth-note triplets is a common device.



In all of the quartets under consideration, the cello has a prominent part. Tenor and sometimes alto clef are necessary for the high range of the cello.



The cello is the only instrument to receive virtuoso-like treatment. The viola has a very subordinate position throughout, never going above the range of the first position. The first violin receives only mild virtuoso treatment in comparison with the cello. The highest note on the violin part is 'e', and the passage work is not so difficult

technically as some Vivaldi concerti. It seems that in order to balance the quartets Abel would have raised the other voices to correspond with the high cello part, but this is not the case. The fact that he was a gambist might explain his use of the cello in such a virtuoso manner; in fact, he may have had the gamba in mind with its six strings tuned higher than the cello. It is also possible that he played these parts on his gamba.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

During the course of musical history there frequently occurs a composer who makes his influence known during his lifetime, but who, after death, is recorded somewhere in the annals of music history and is forgotten through the intervening centuries. So it is with Carl Friedrich Abel. The quantity of his works is certainly not impressive, and his compositions are not very imaginative. As a performer Abel was the last of the great gambists; after his death the gamba became obsolete. To be a musician in the 18th century was to be both composer and performer. Had he lived in a later era Abel would perhaps have been considered an outstanding performer, which would have been sufficient to insure his reputation as a musician of high caliber.

The quartets that were examined were the best of the collection of eighteen, and at best they still cannot compare with what was being written during his lifetime by others. By 1768, the date of Opus 8, Haydn had already established the four movement form of the string quartet and was to write his Opus 9 only one year later. Although Mozart had begun quartet composition in 1770, he wrote his famous Haydn quartets between 1782 and 1785, not long after Abel's Opus 15 which were published in 1781.

Although Abel's quartets are not musically the best, they are still worthy of consideration. From the standpoint of style they represent good examples of pre-Classic composition, and students of chamber music might well study them as an introduction to string quartet literature. Since Haydn and Mozart are usually throught of as the representatives of eighteenth century quartets, the student of chamber music is rarely exposed to other composers of the time. Developments leading to the culmination of Classic string quartet literature have also been neglected. It is hoped that Abel's quartets will be a worth addition to chamber music literature.

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Quartet IV - Opus 8

two Violins, a tenor, and Violoncello

Obligato with a thorough bass for

the Harpsichord.

Orchestrated by Carol Cohan

Appendix to "The study of pre-

classic string writing" as evidenced

in three Quartets by Carl

Friedrich Abel. Opus 8-12-15

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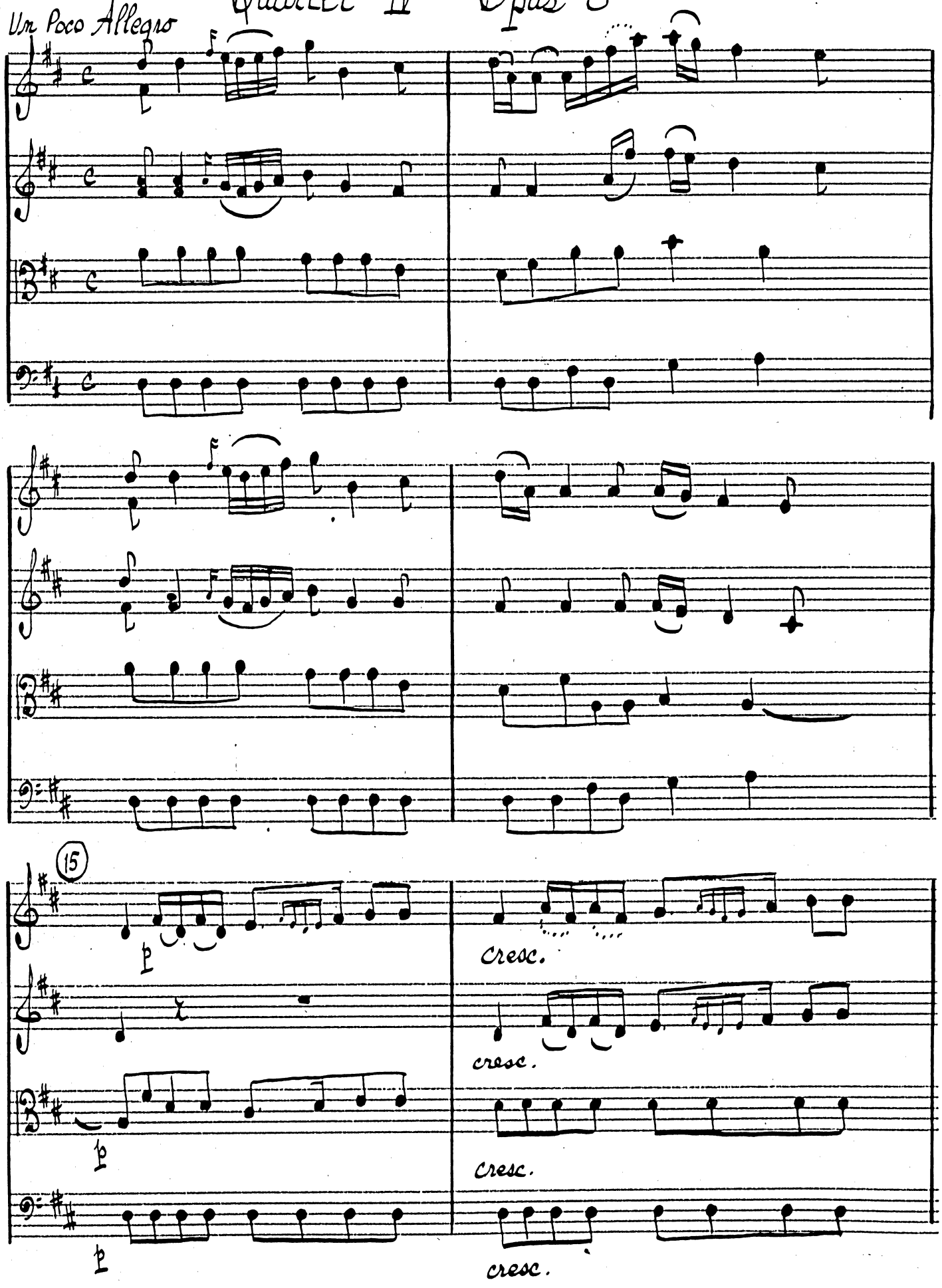

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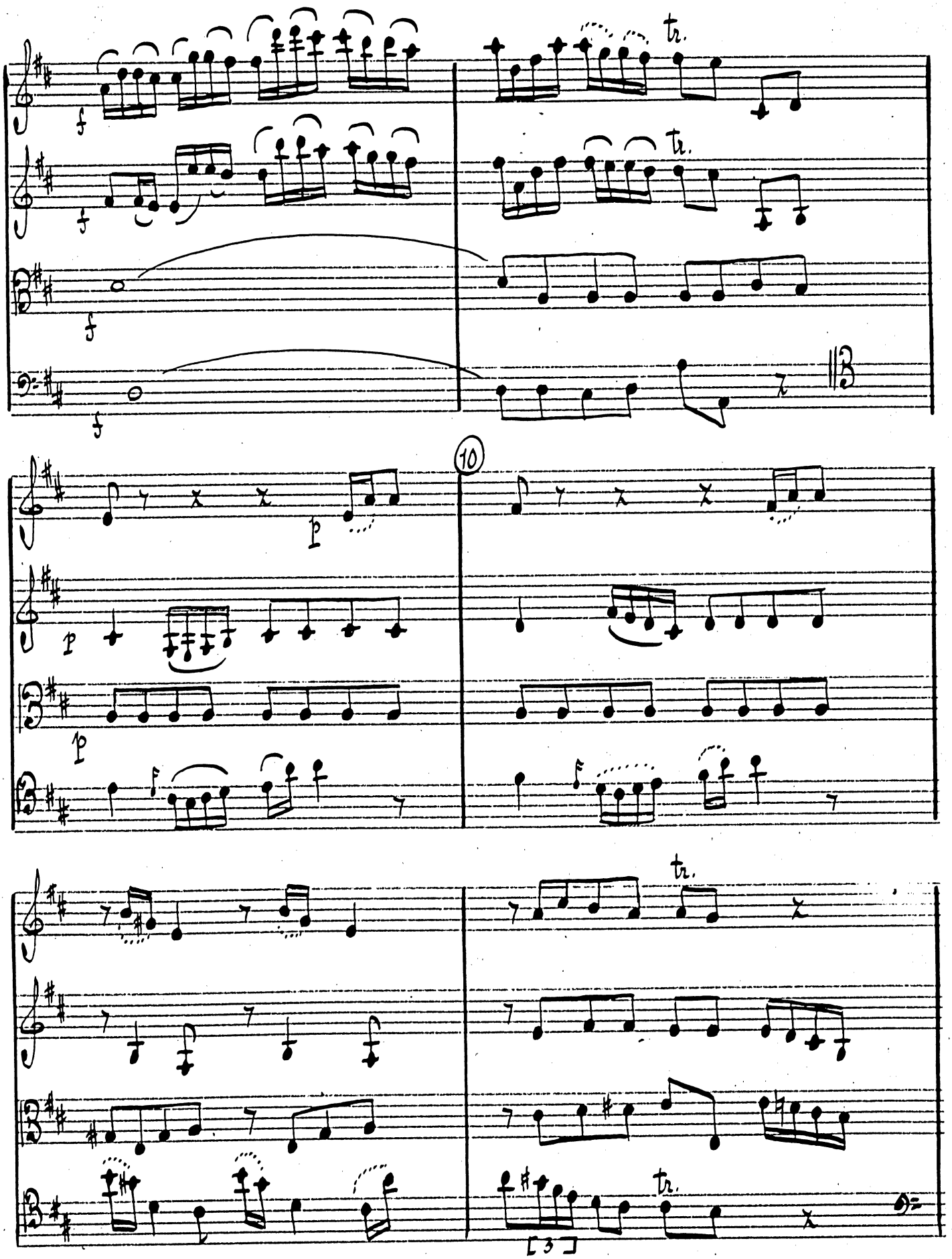

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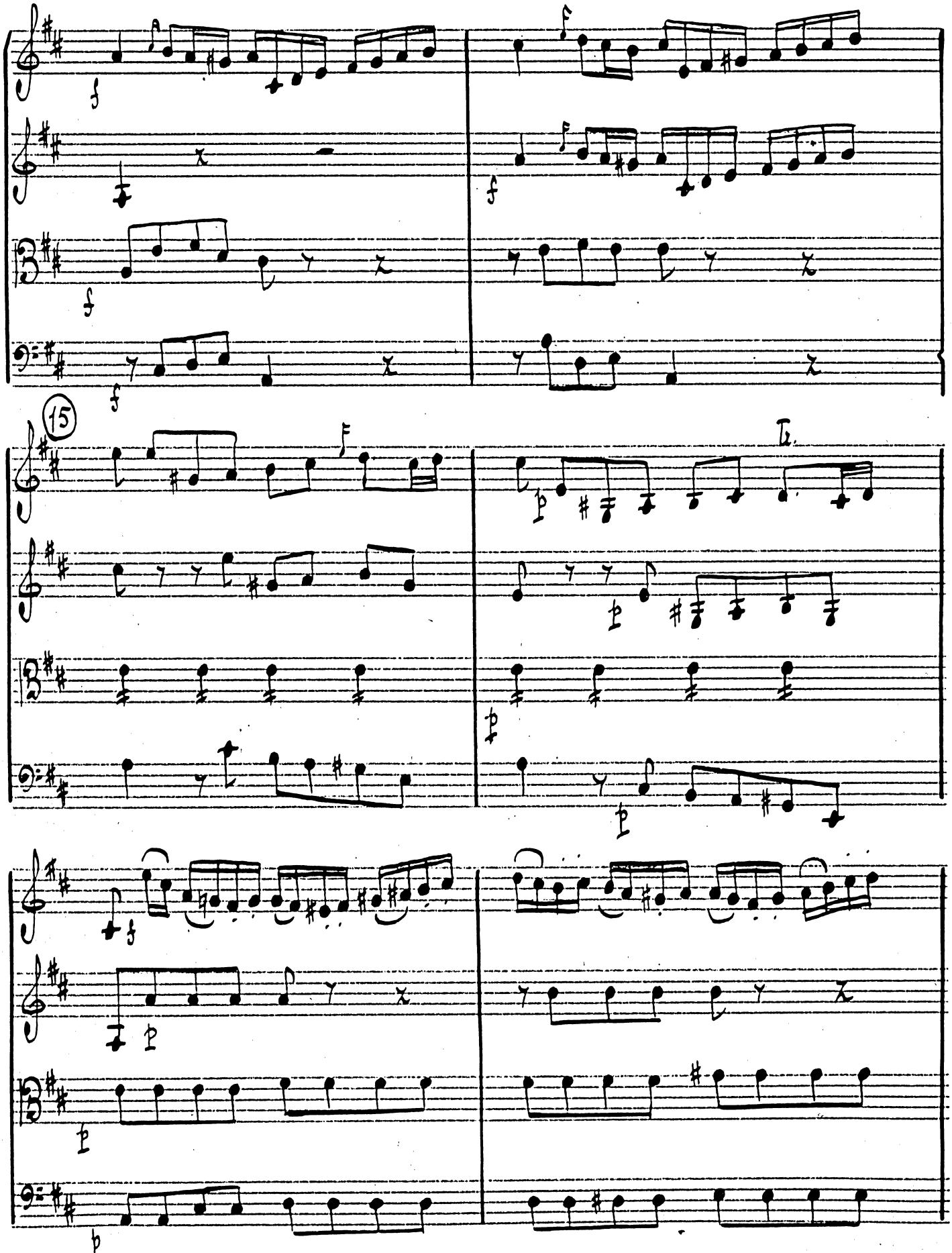

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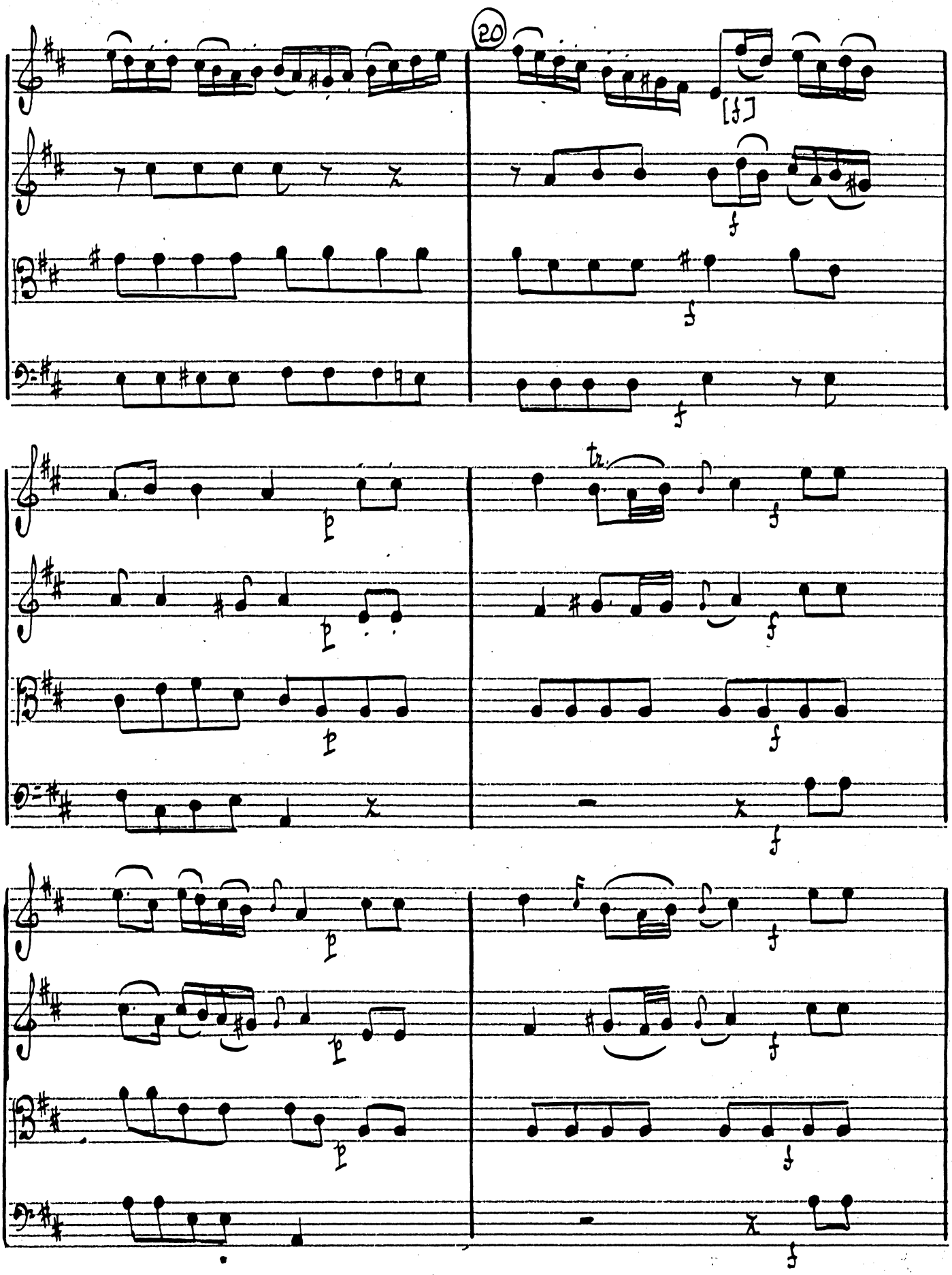

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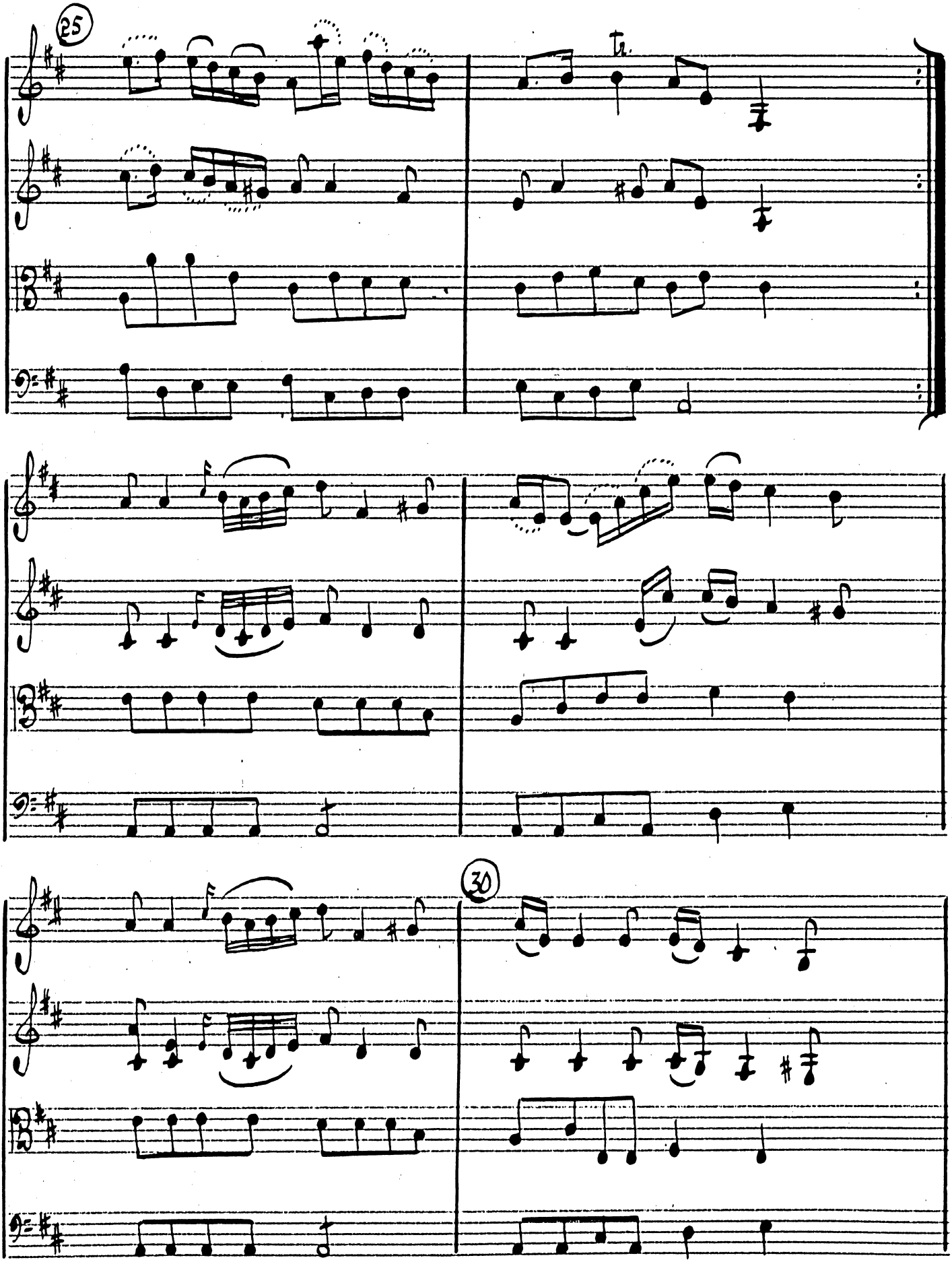

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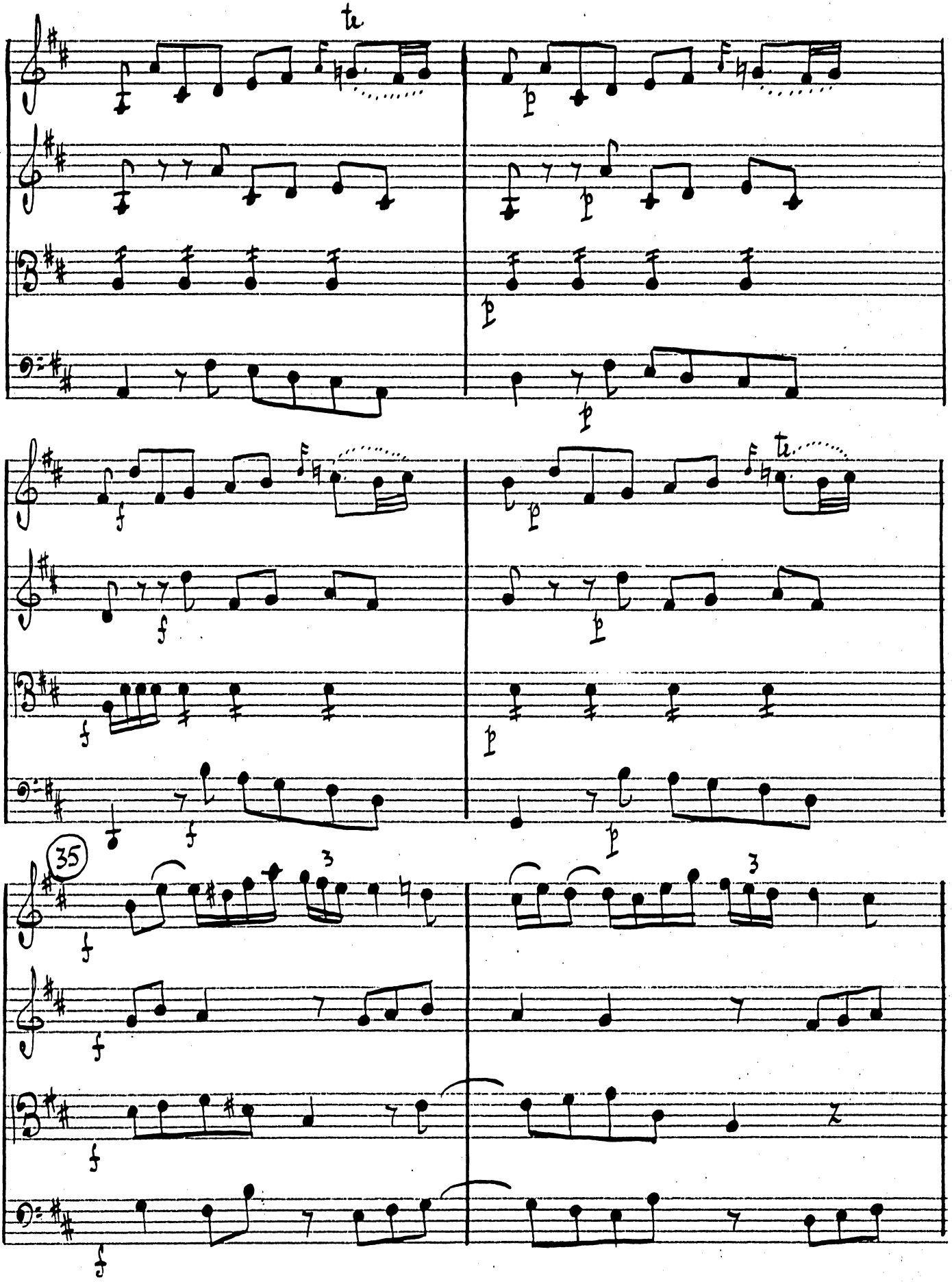

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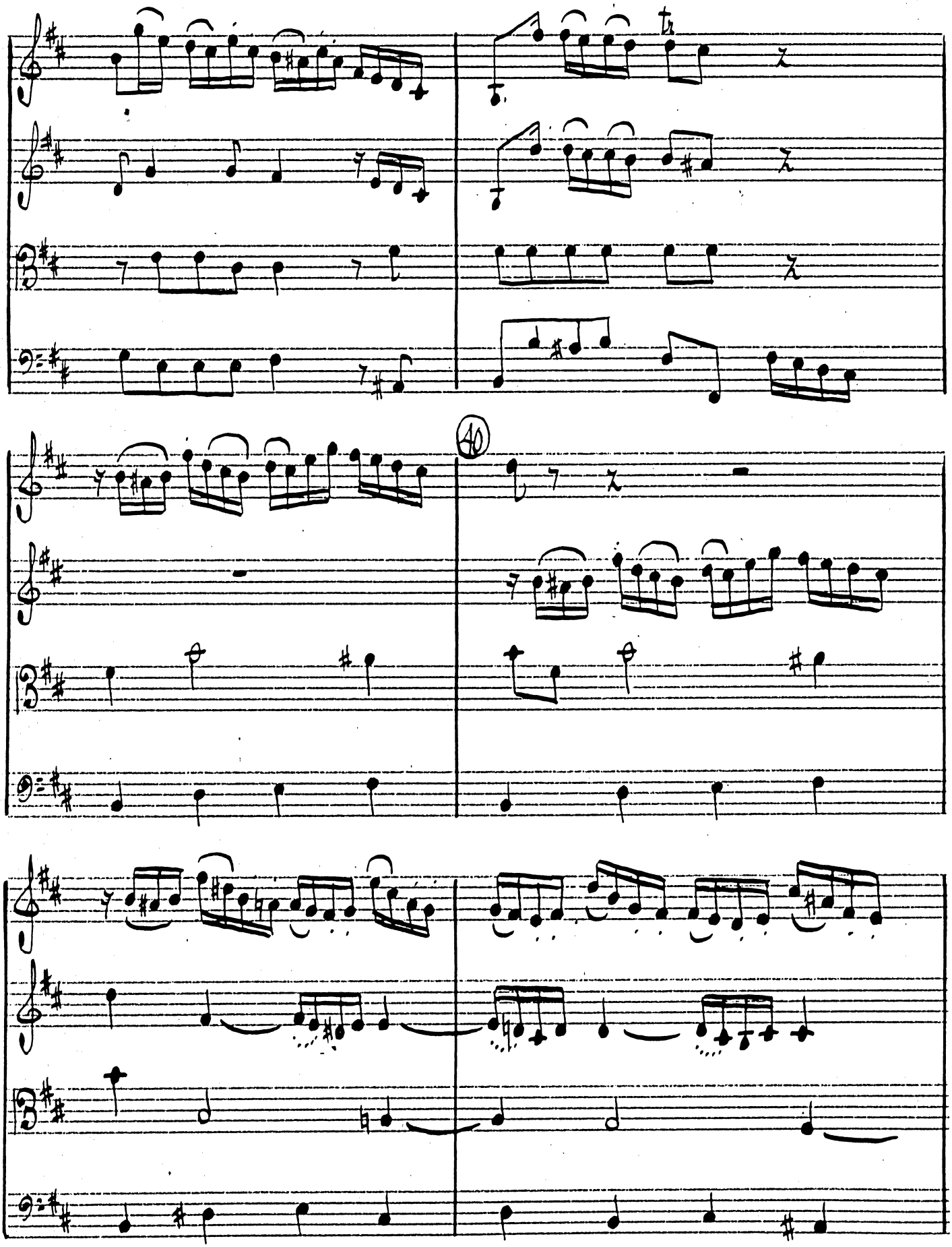

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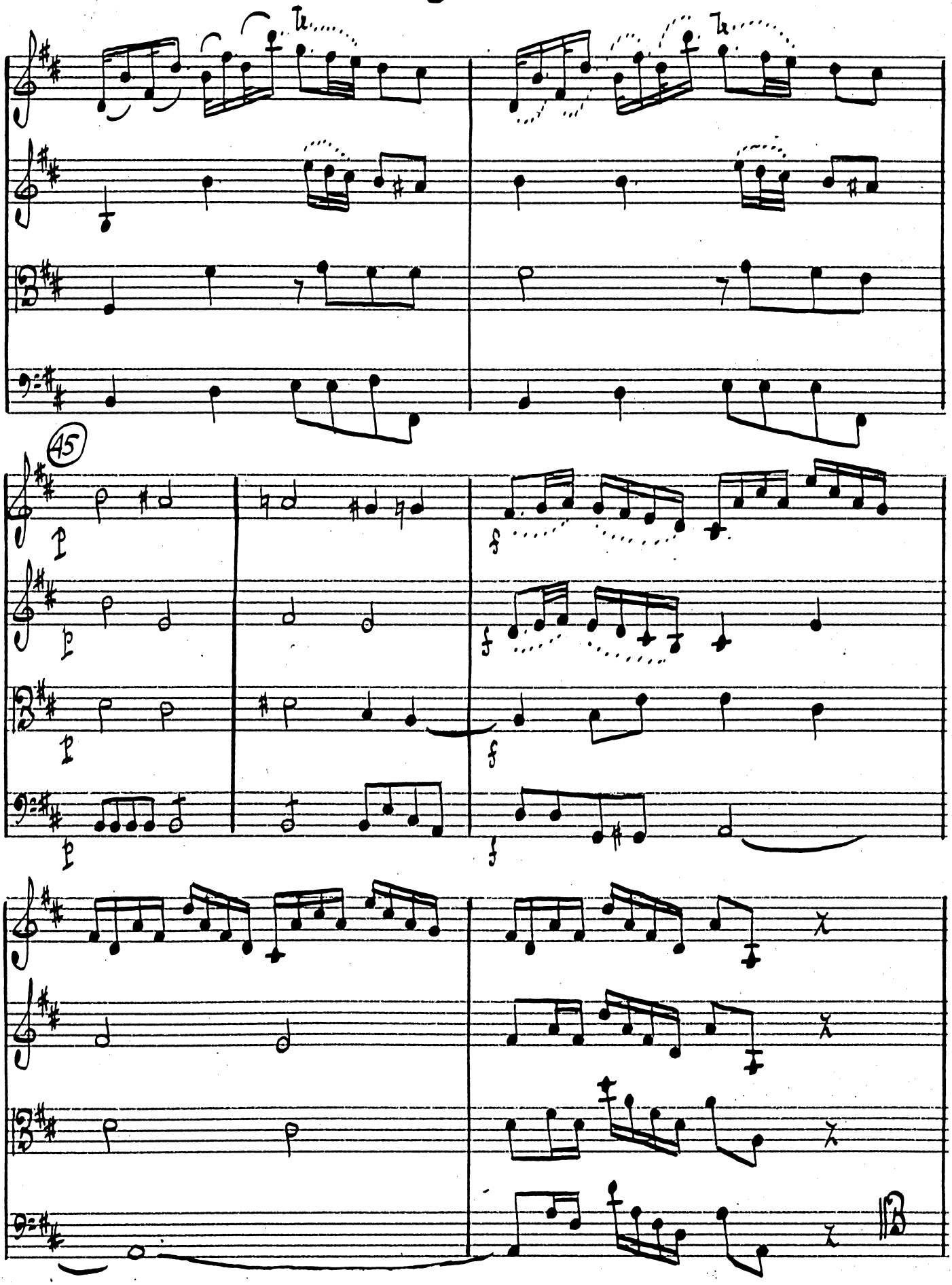

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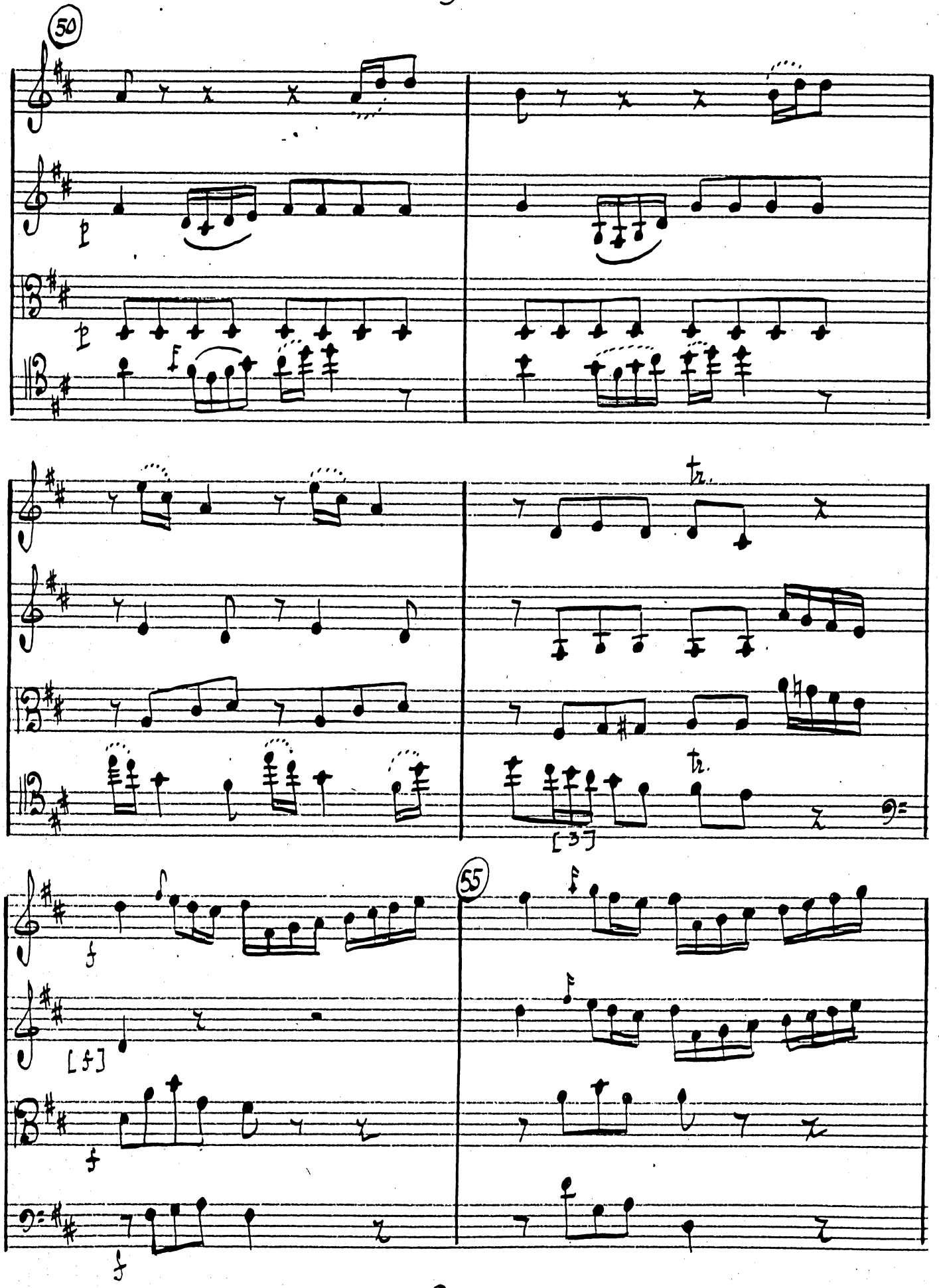

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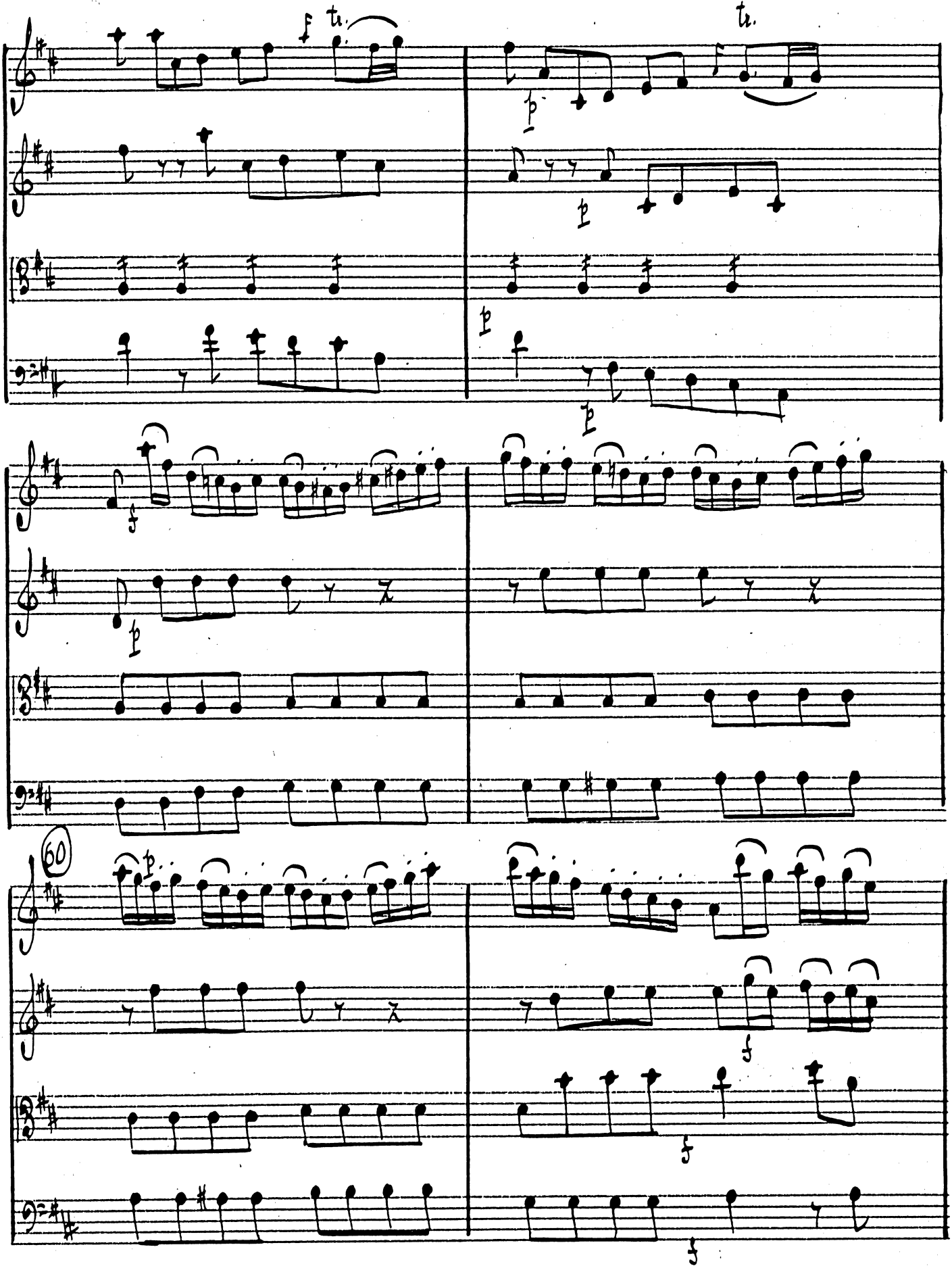

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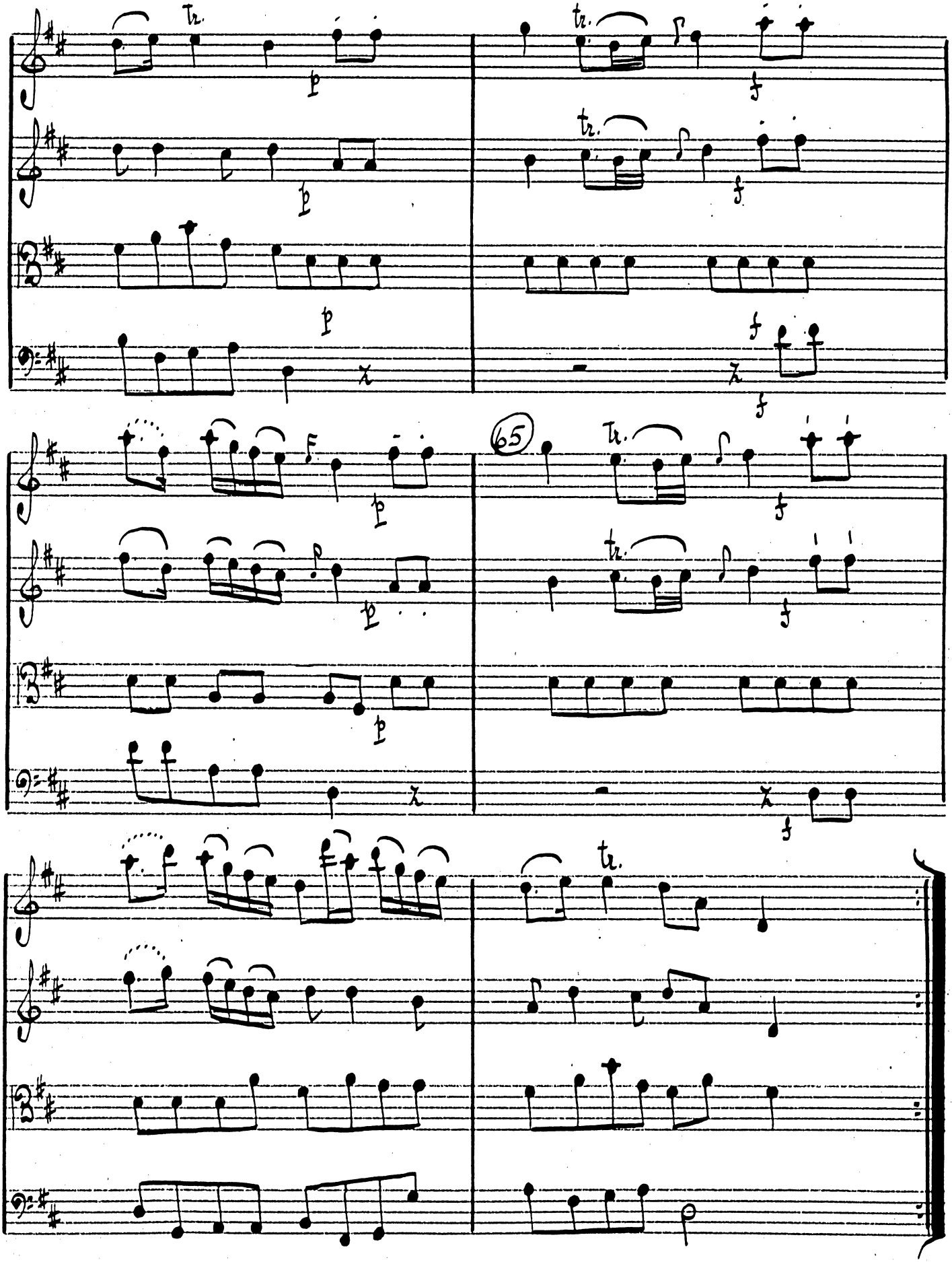

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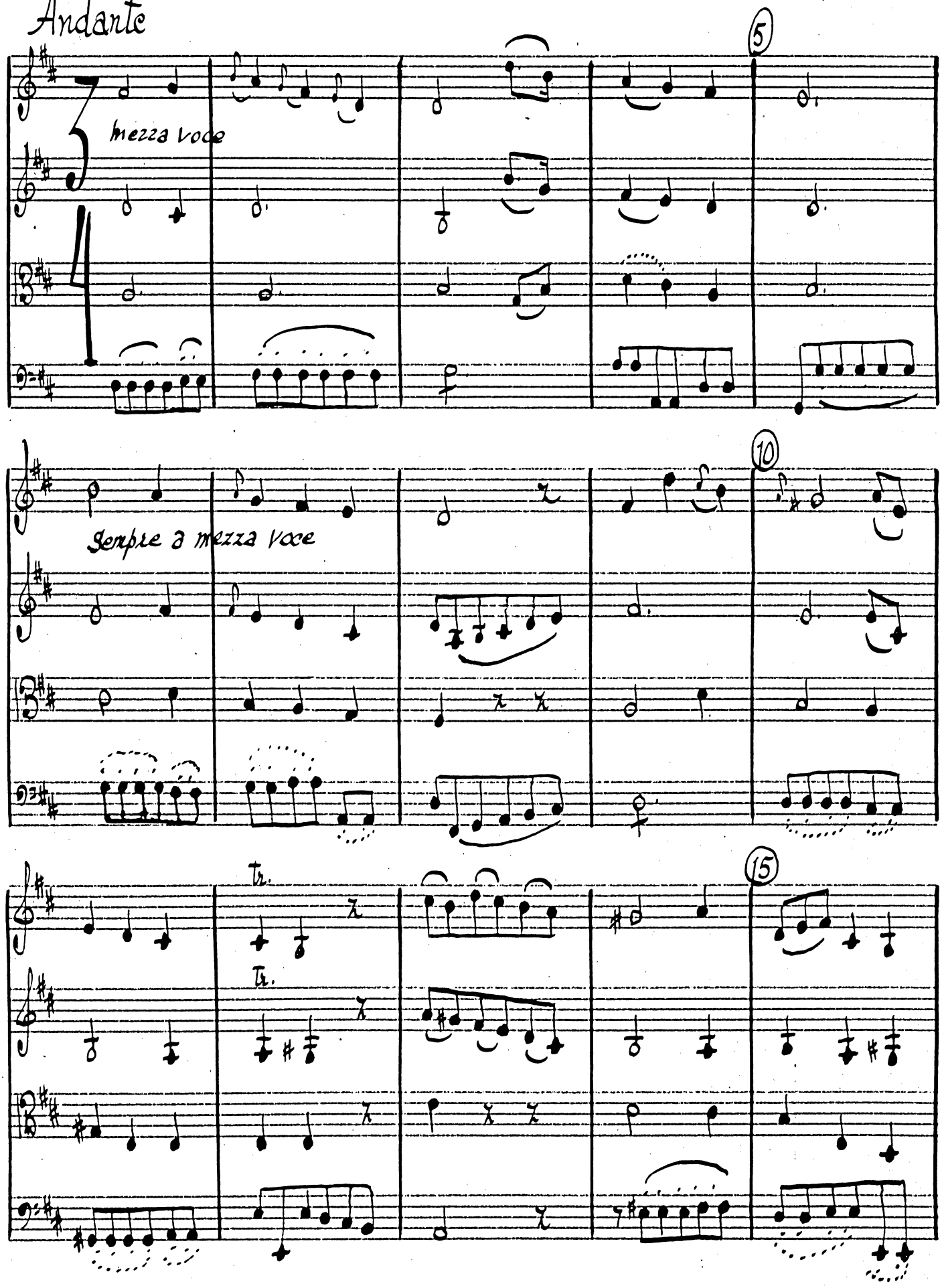

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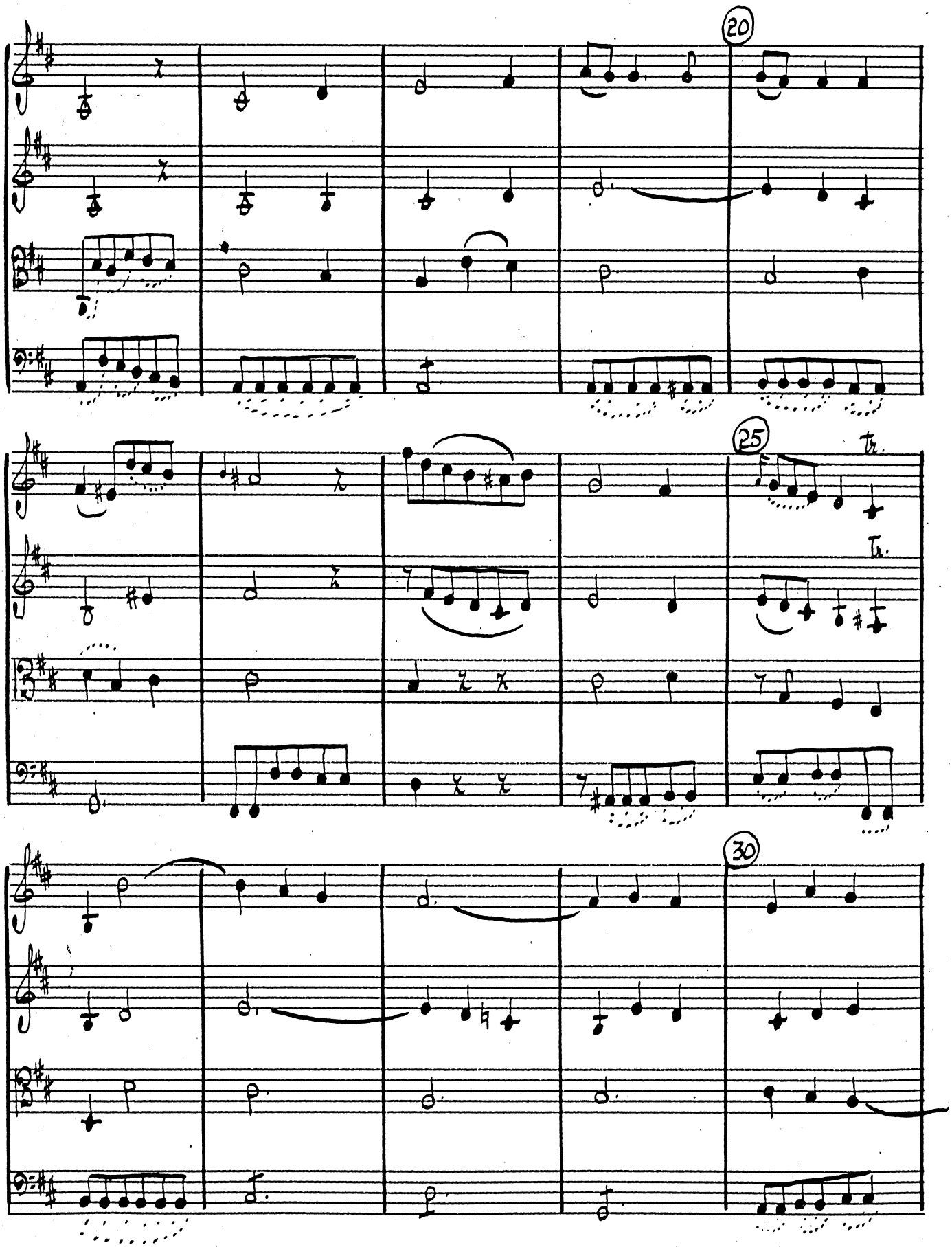

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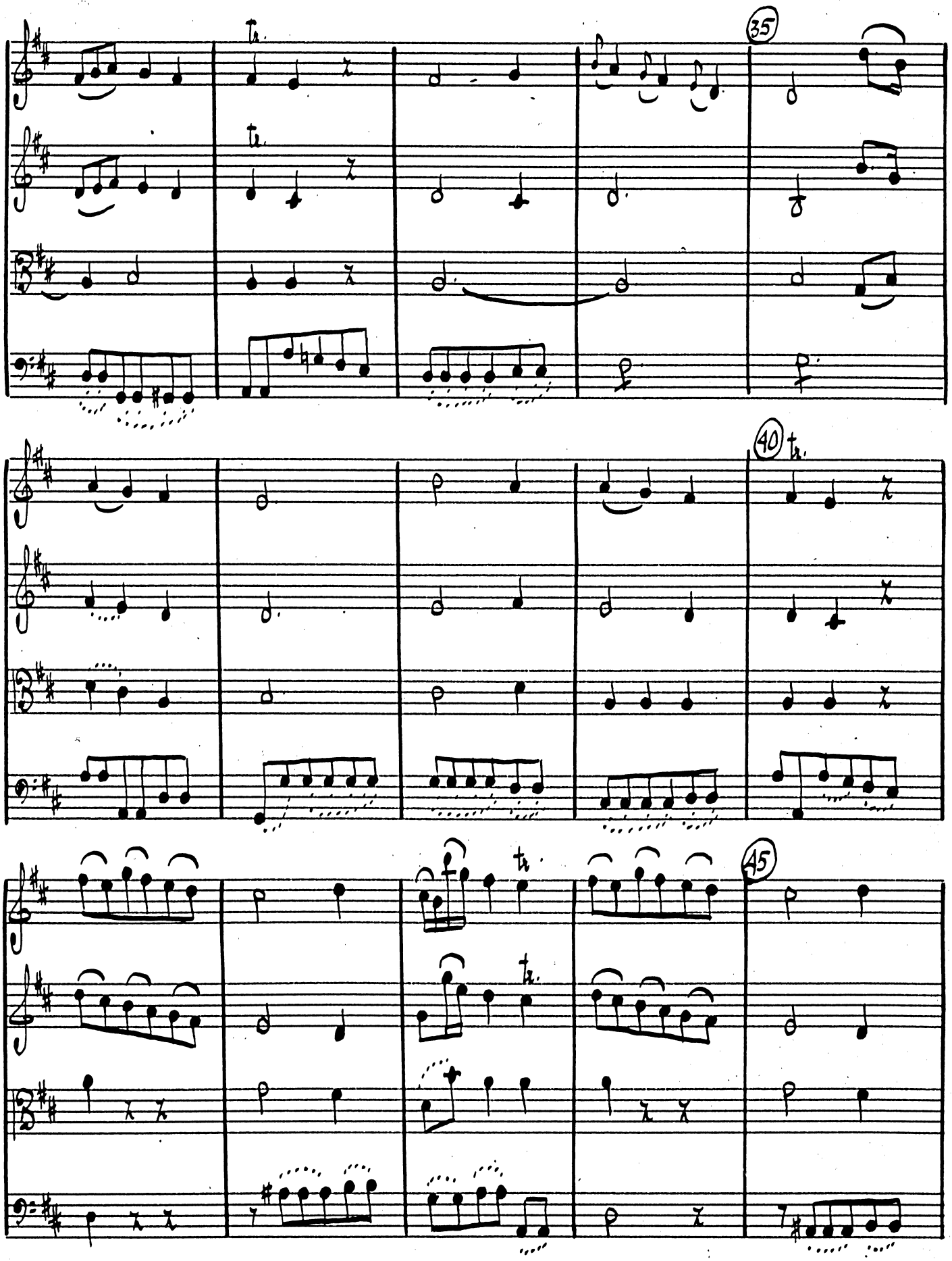

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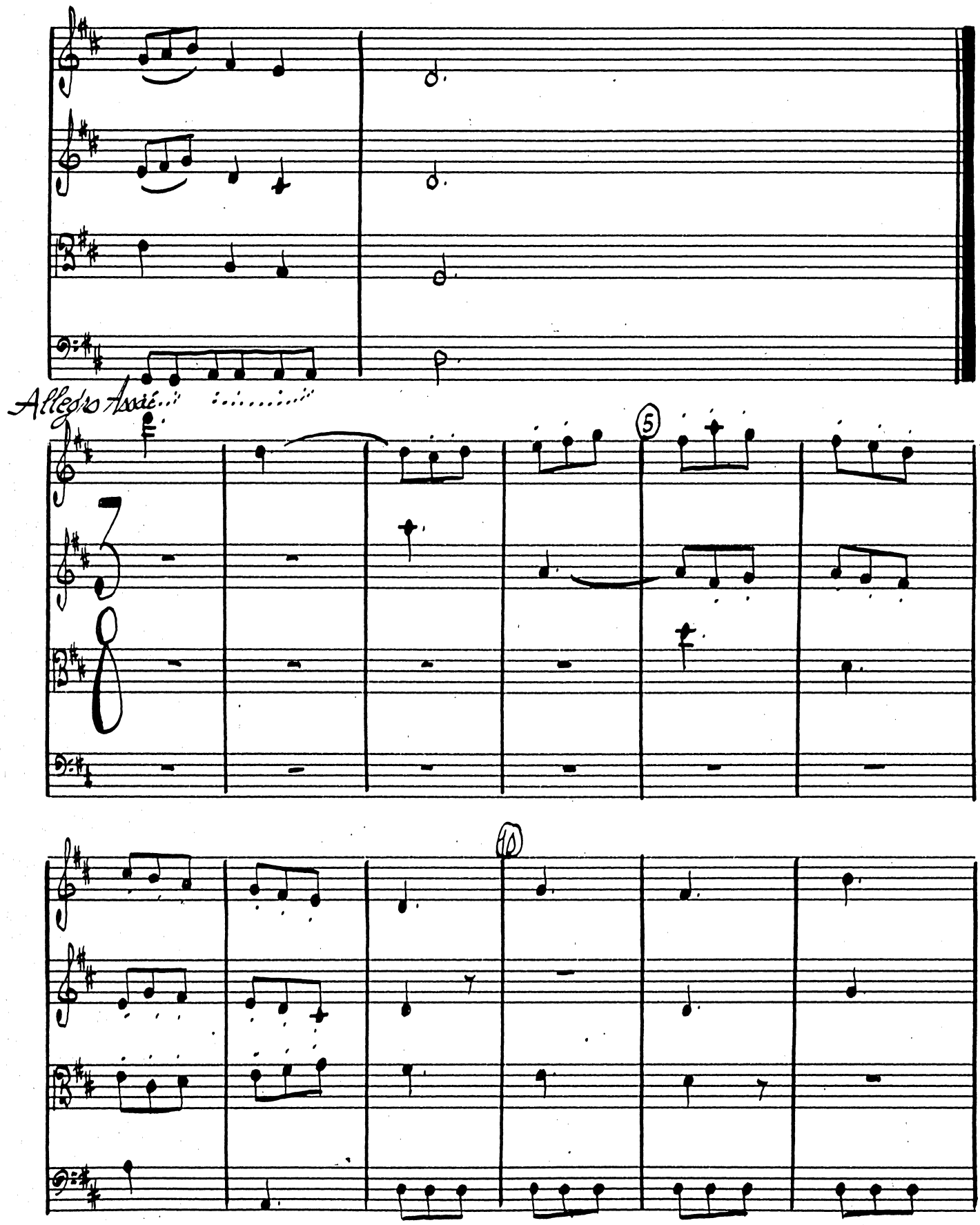

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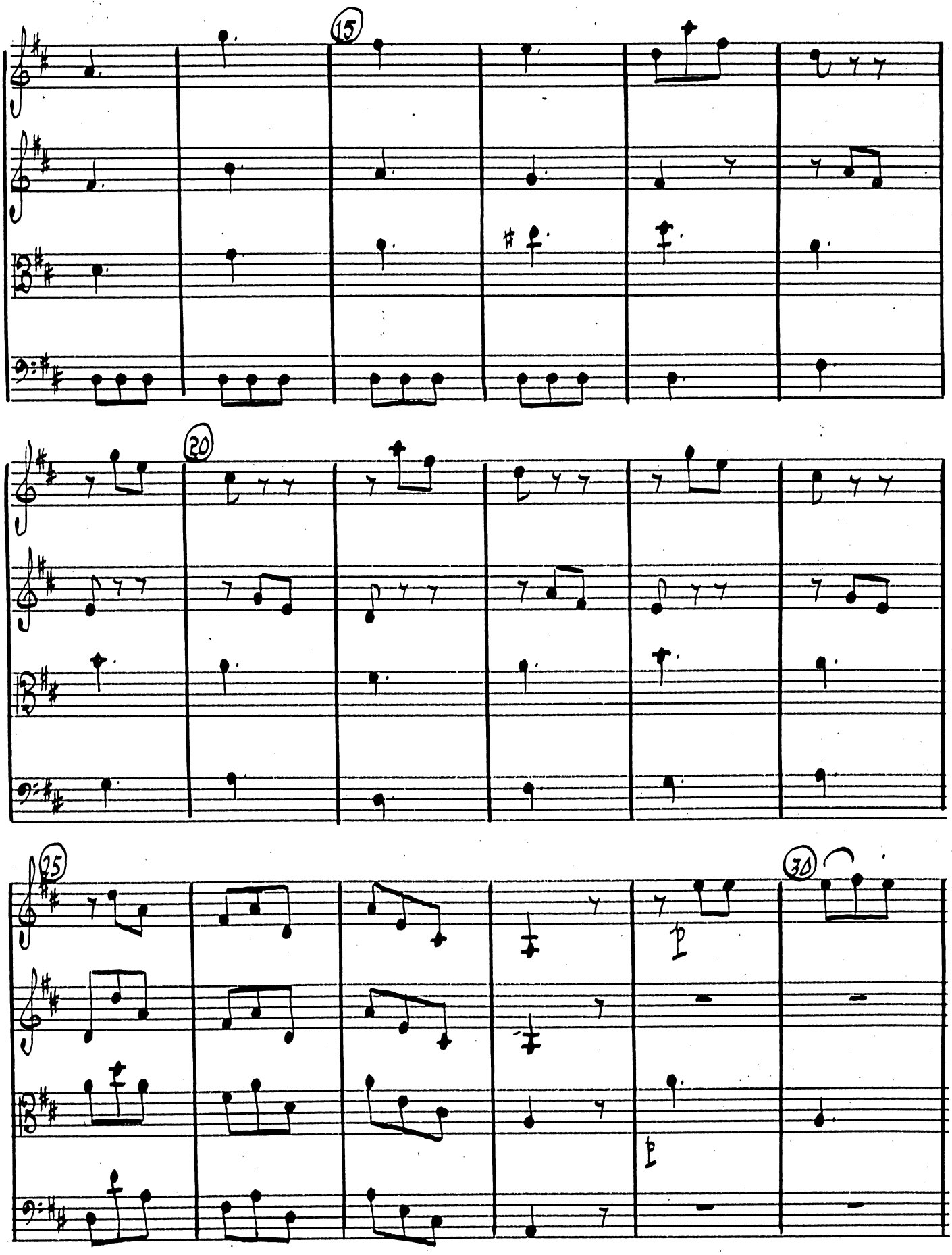

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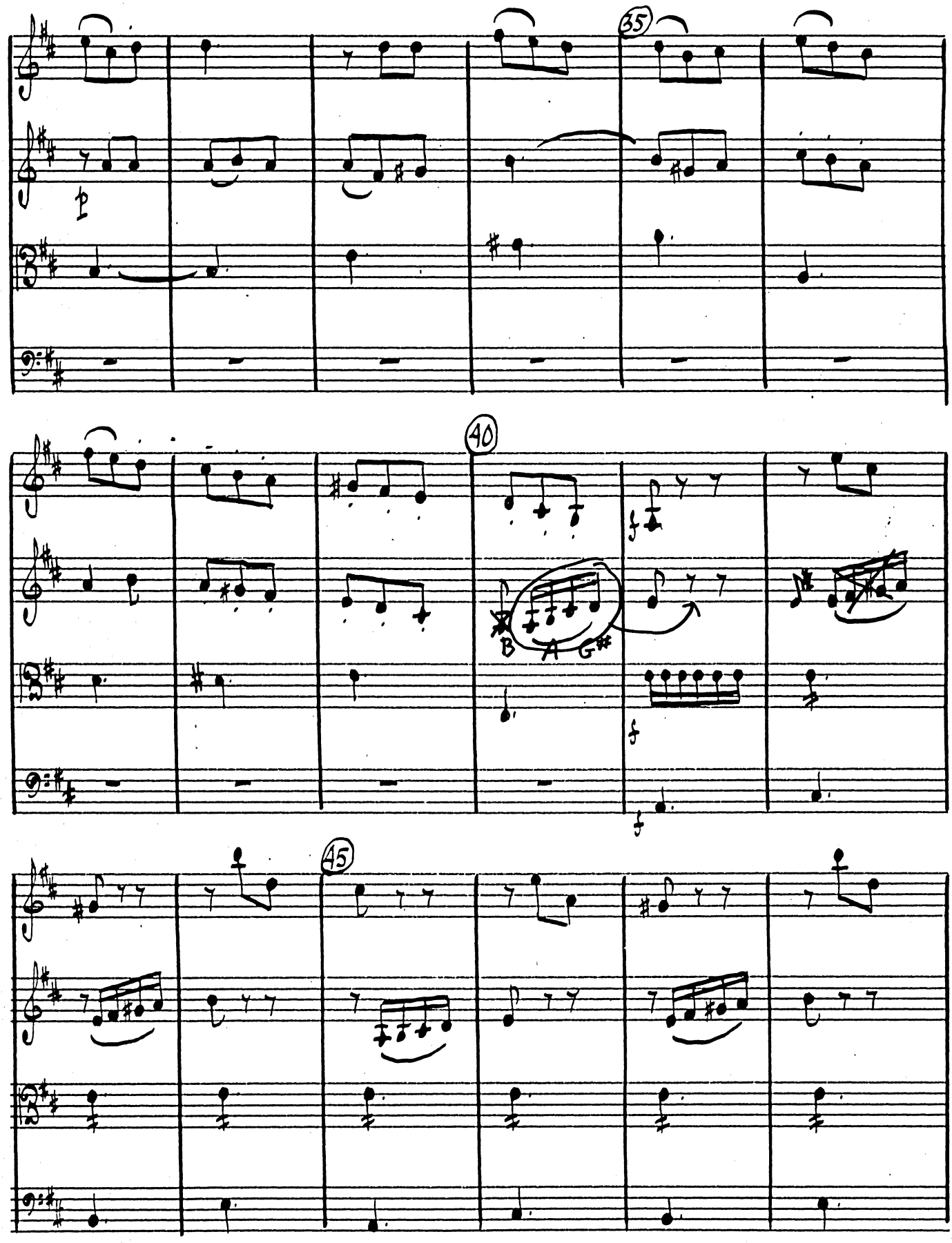

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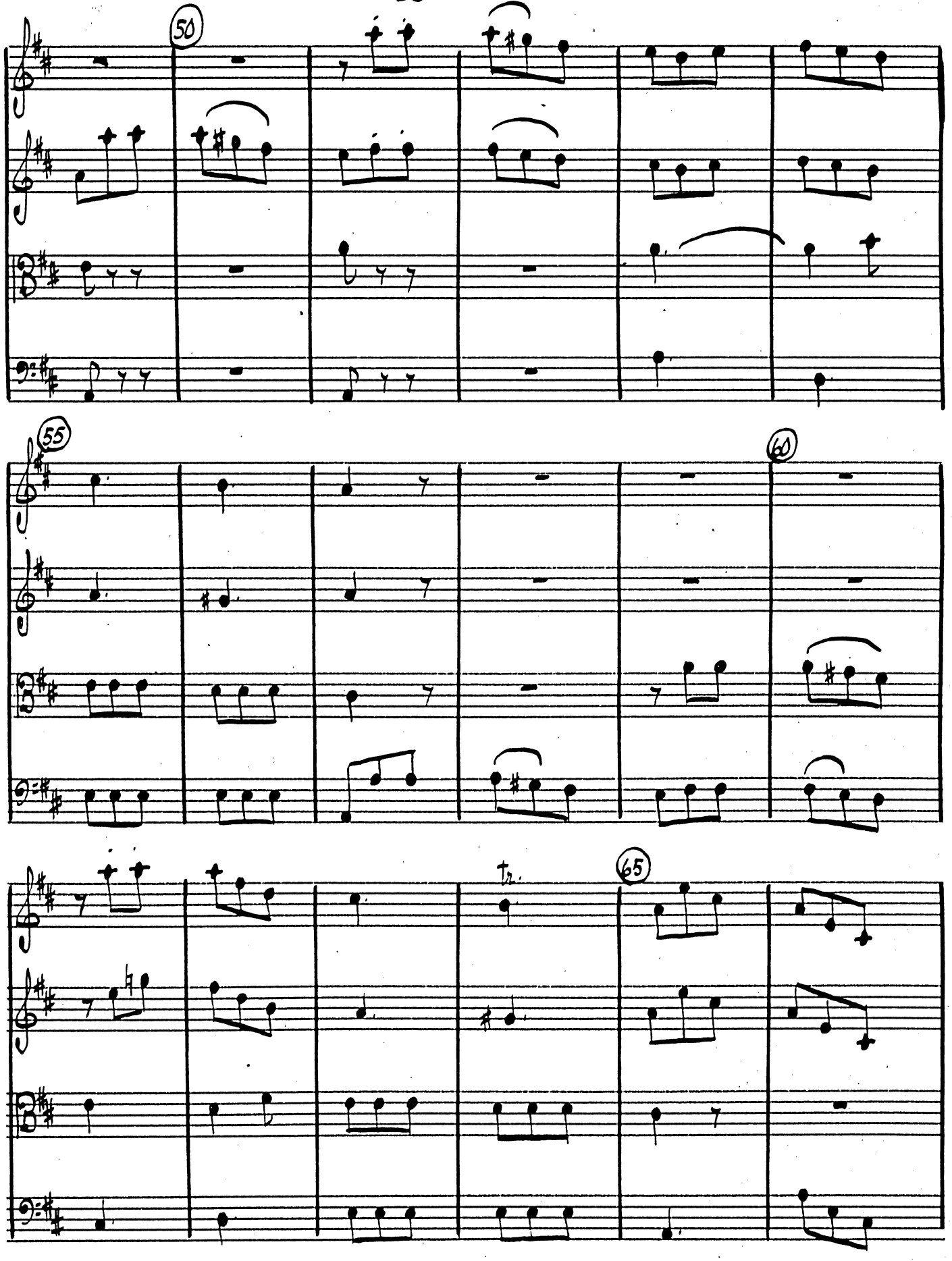

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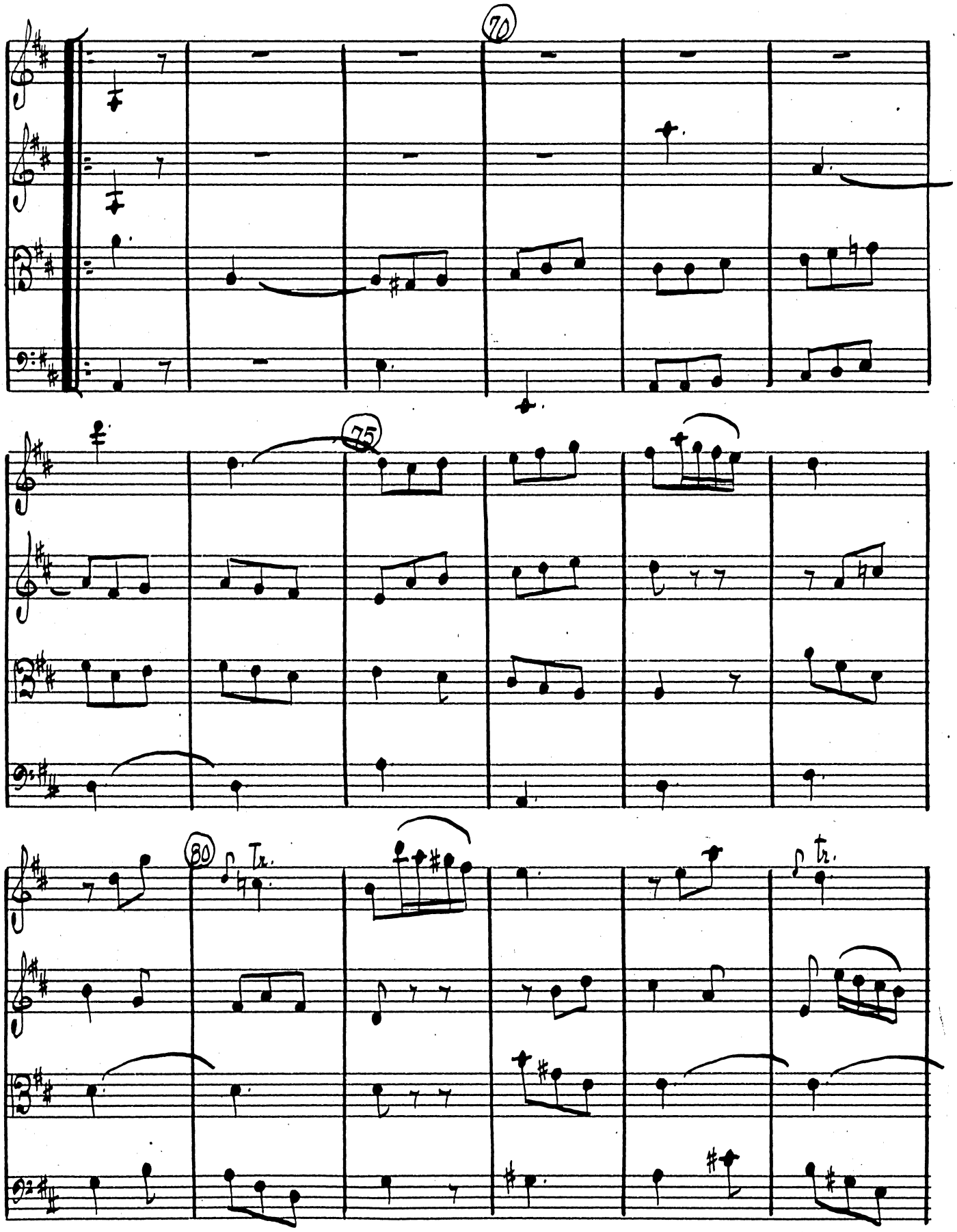

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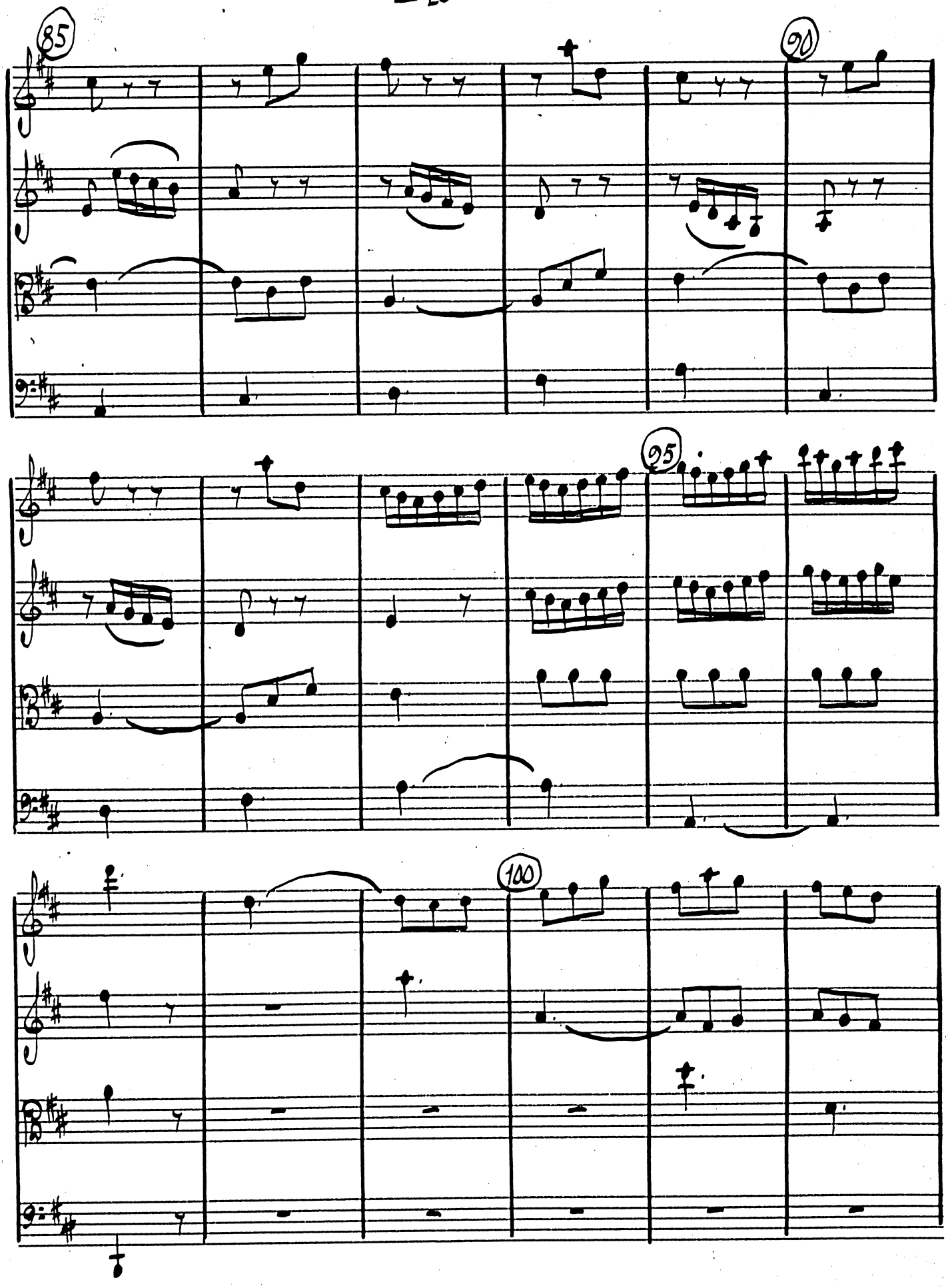

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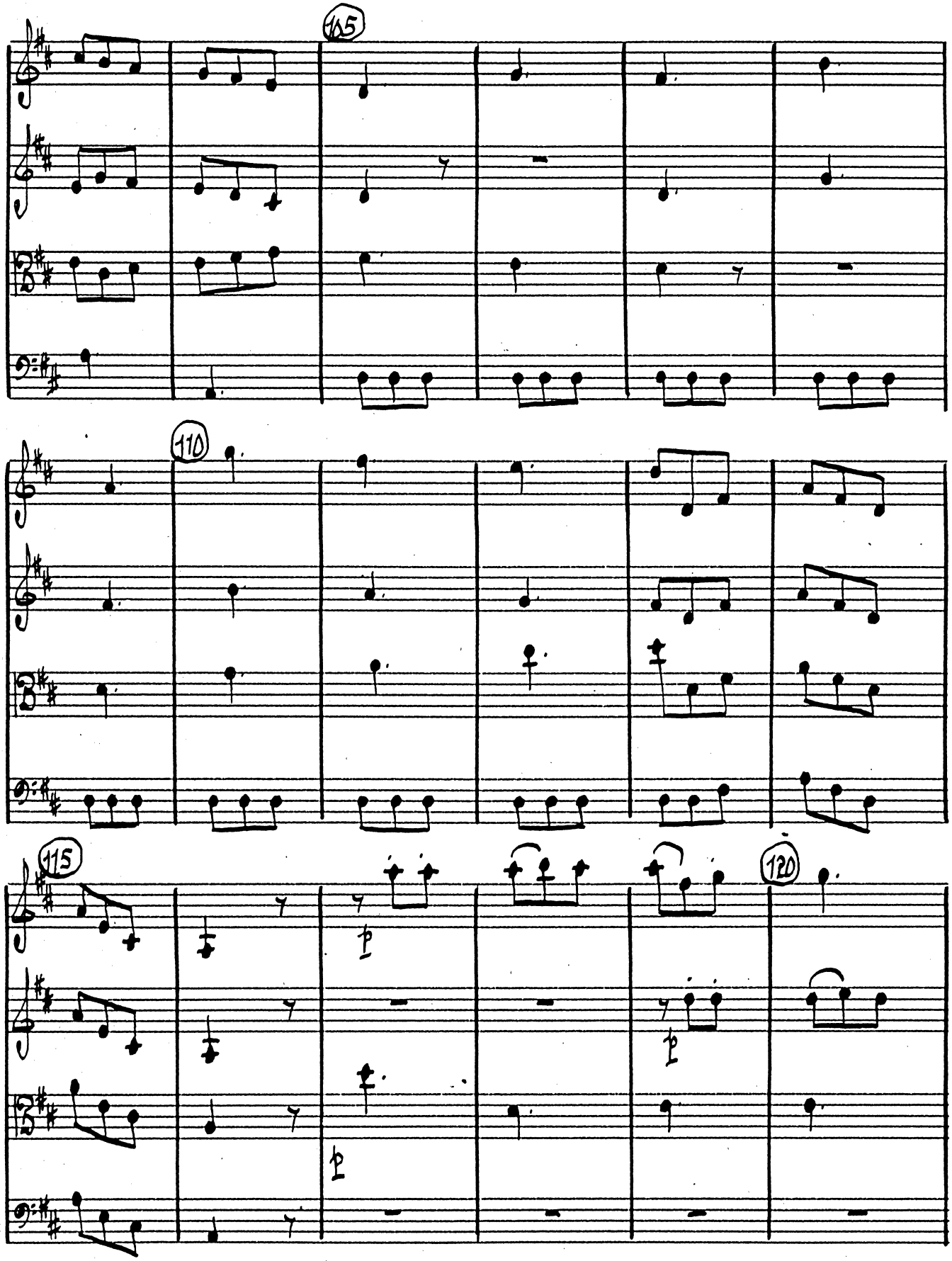

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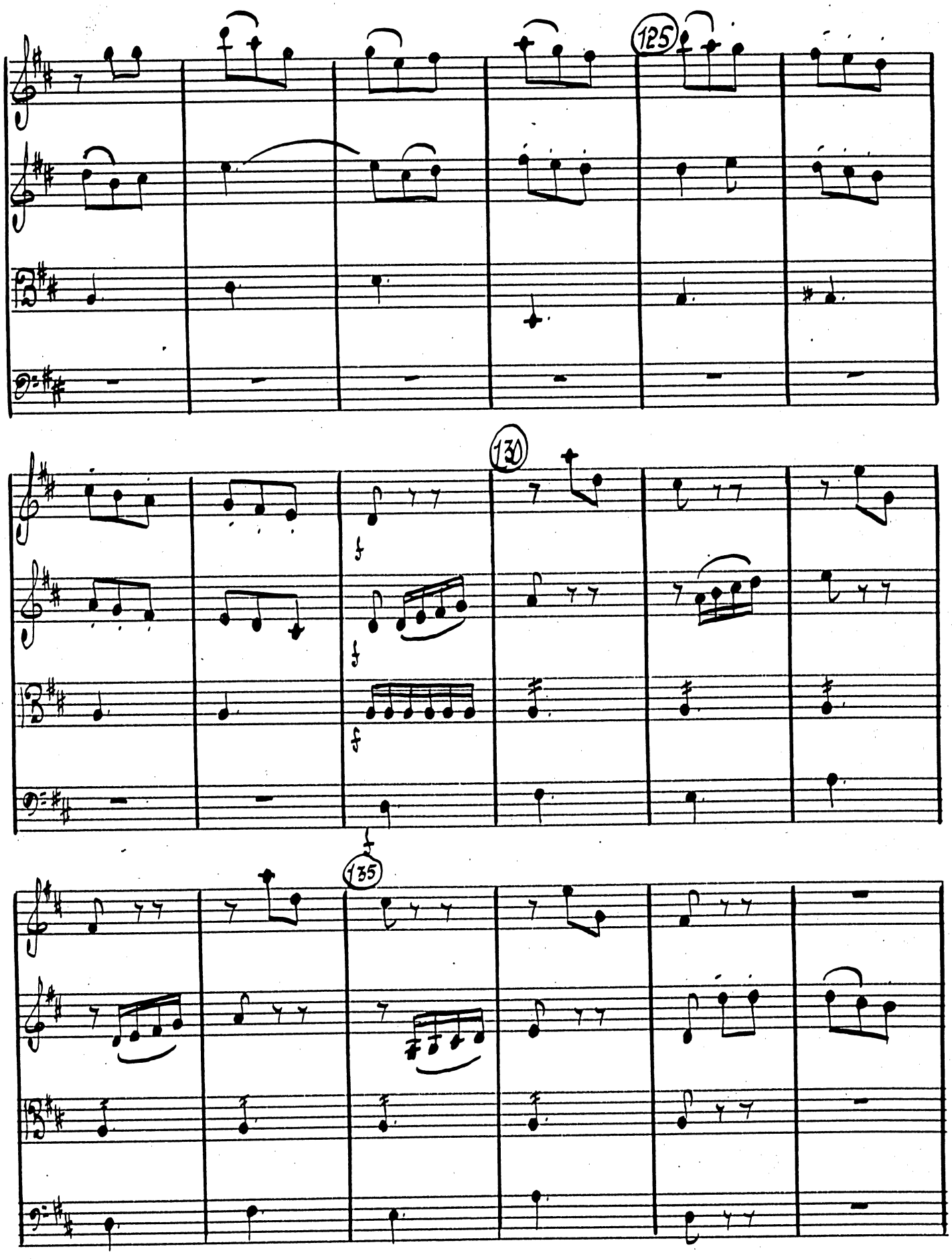

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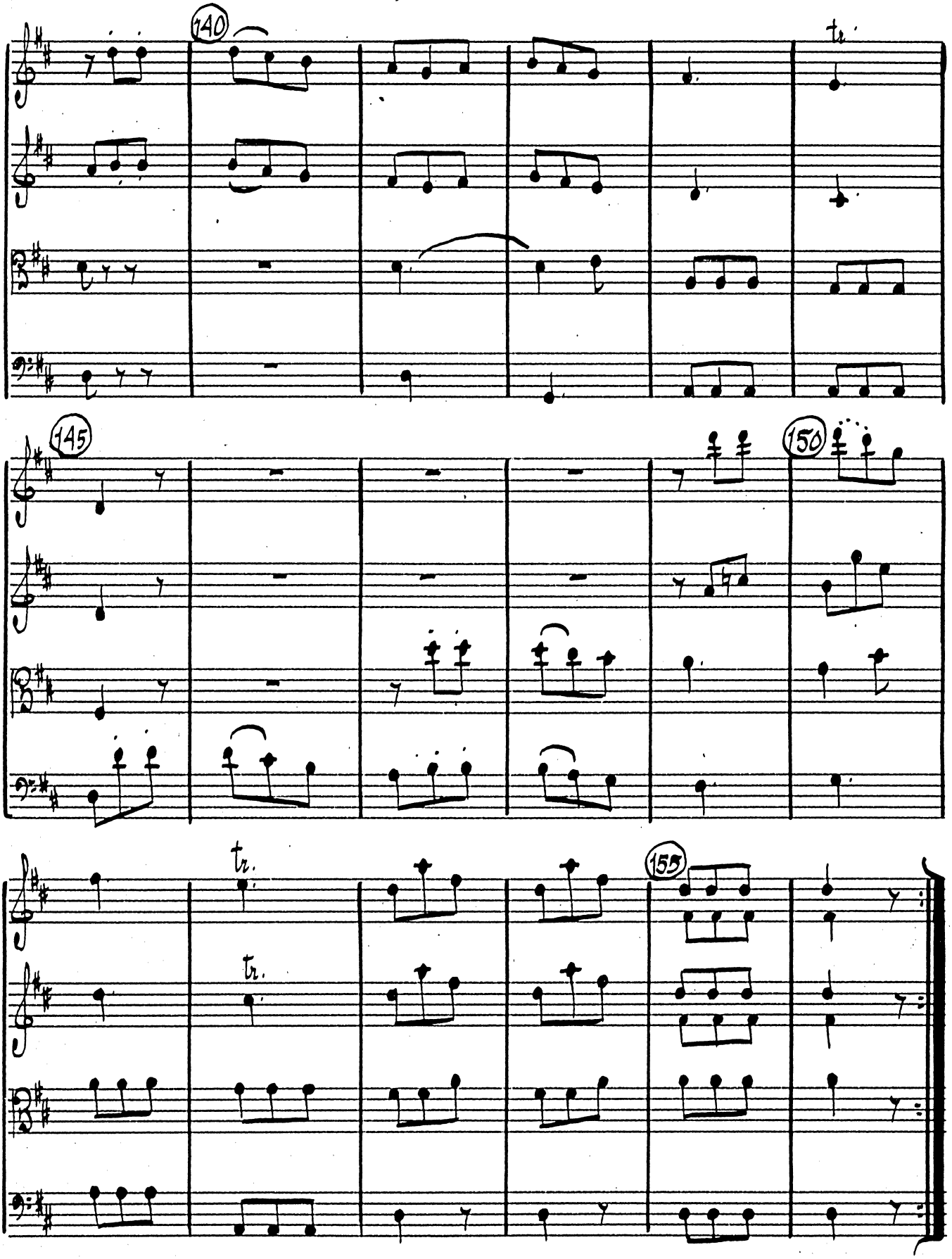

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Quartet VI — Opus 12

Two Violins, a tenor, and Violoncello

Obligato with a thorough bass for

the Harpsichord.

Orchestrated by Carol Cohan

Appendix to "The study of pre-classic string writing" as evidenced in three Quartets by Carl Friedrich Abel. Opus 8-12-15

MAESTRO

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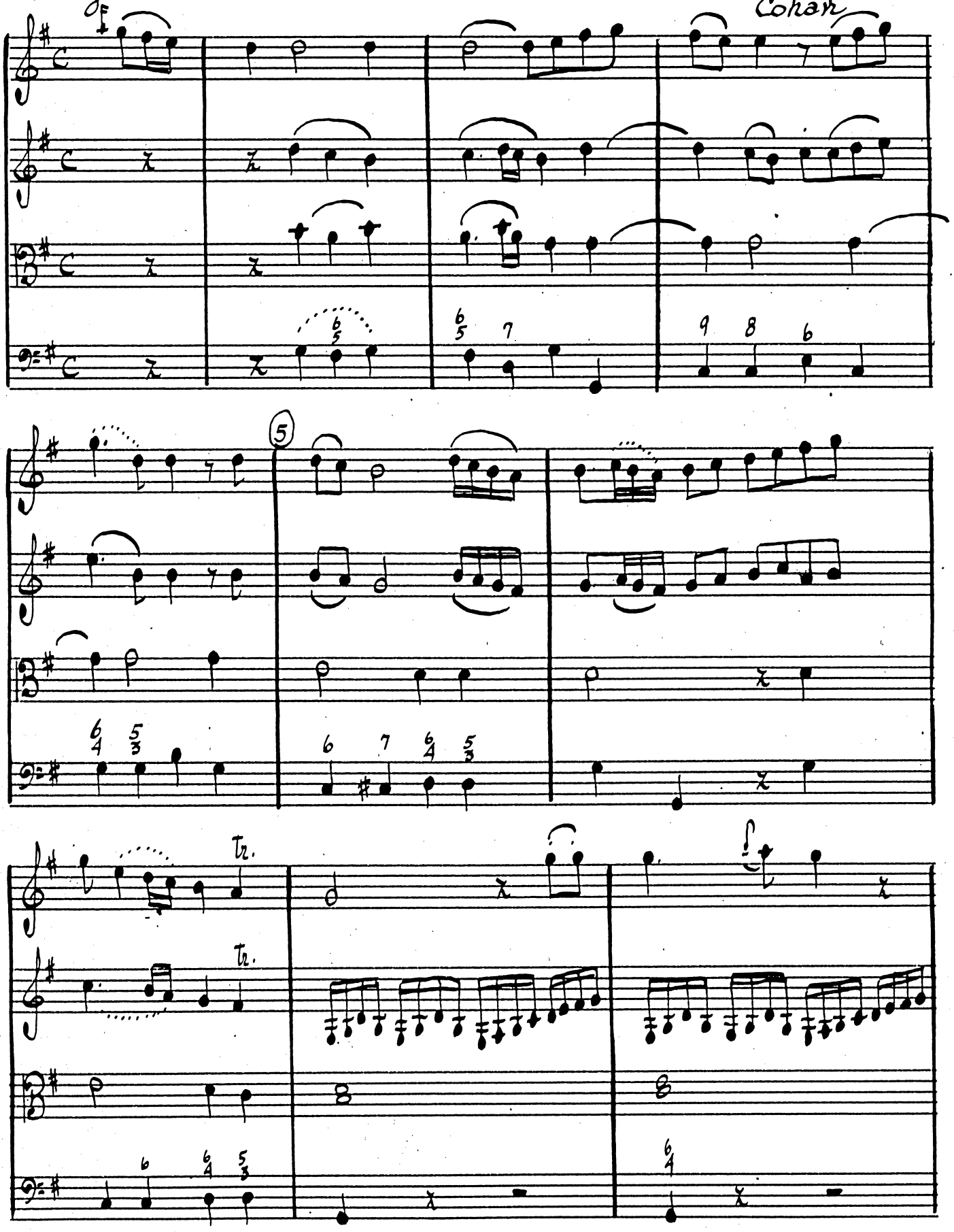
315 E 42 ST N.Y. 17 U.S.A.

Quartet VI - Opus 12

C.F. Abel
Scored by Carol Cohan

Allegro



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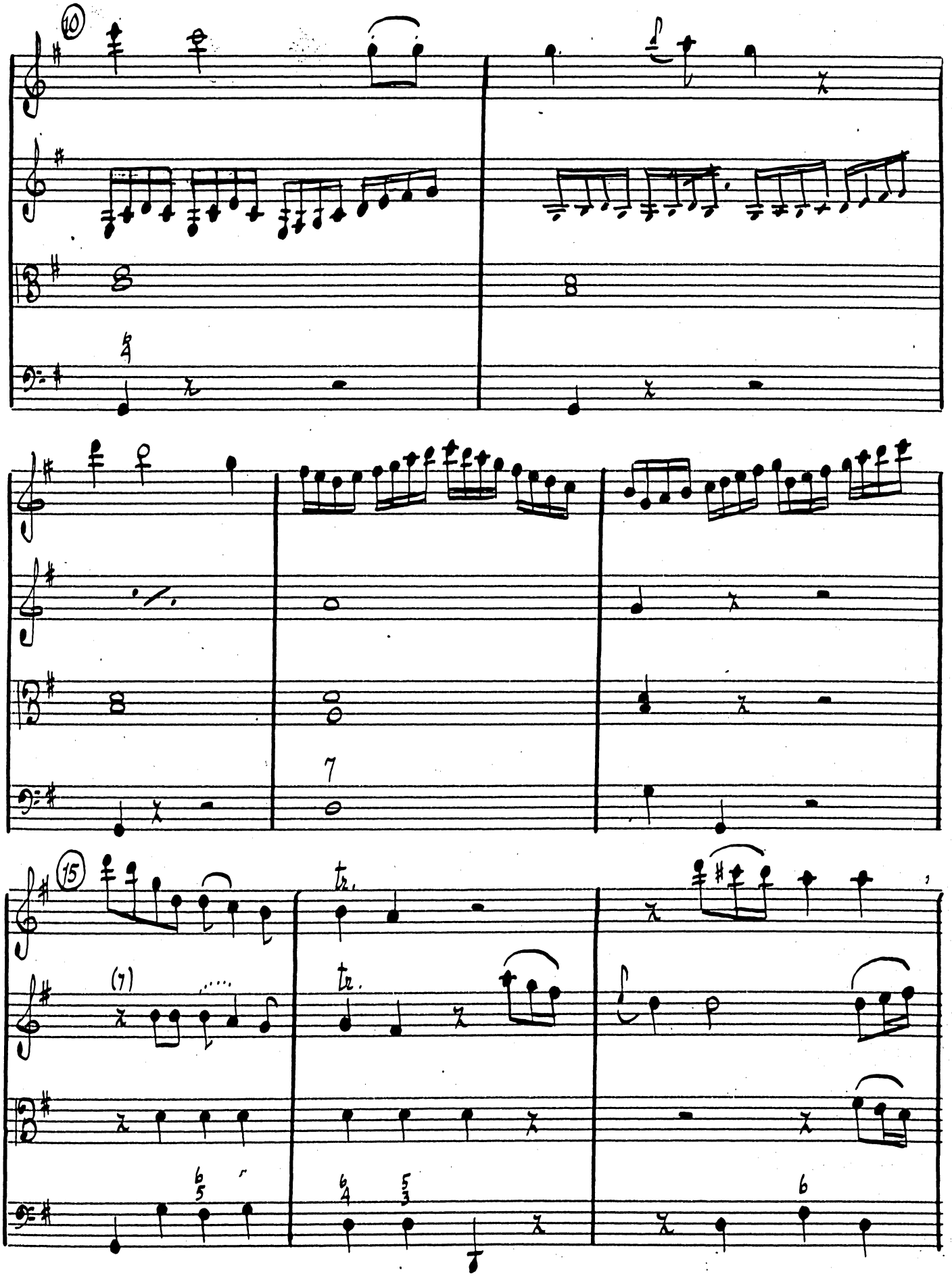

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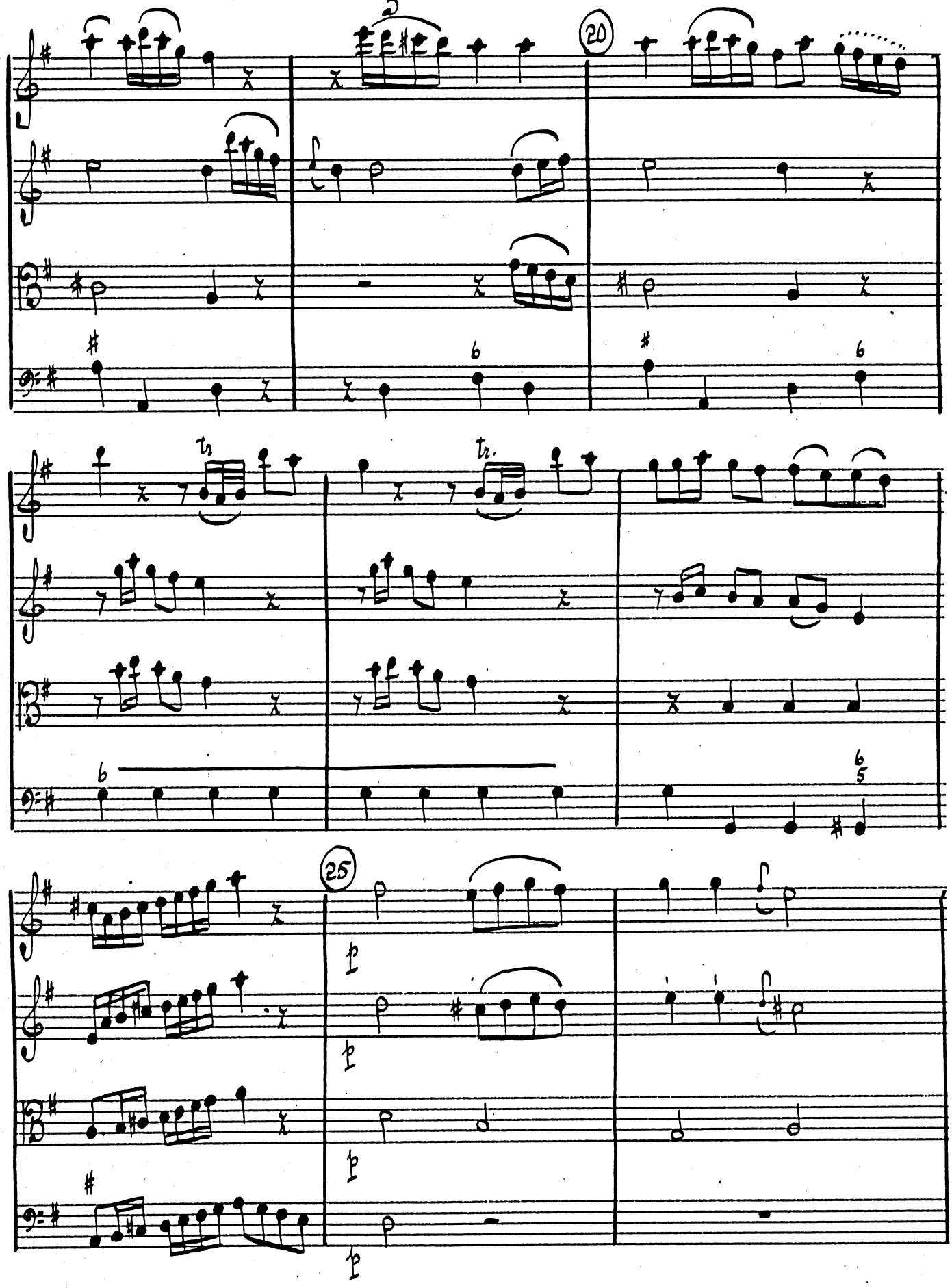

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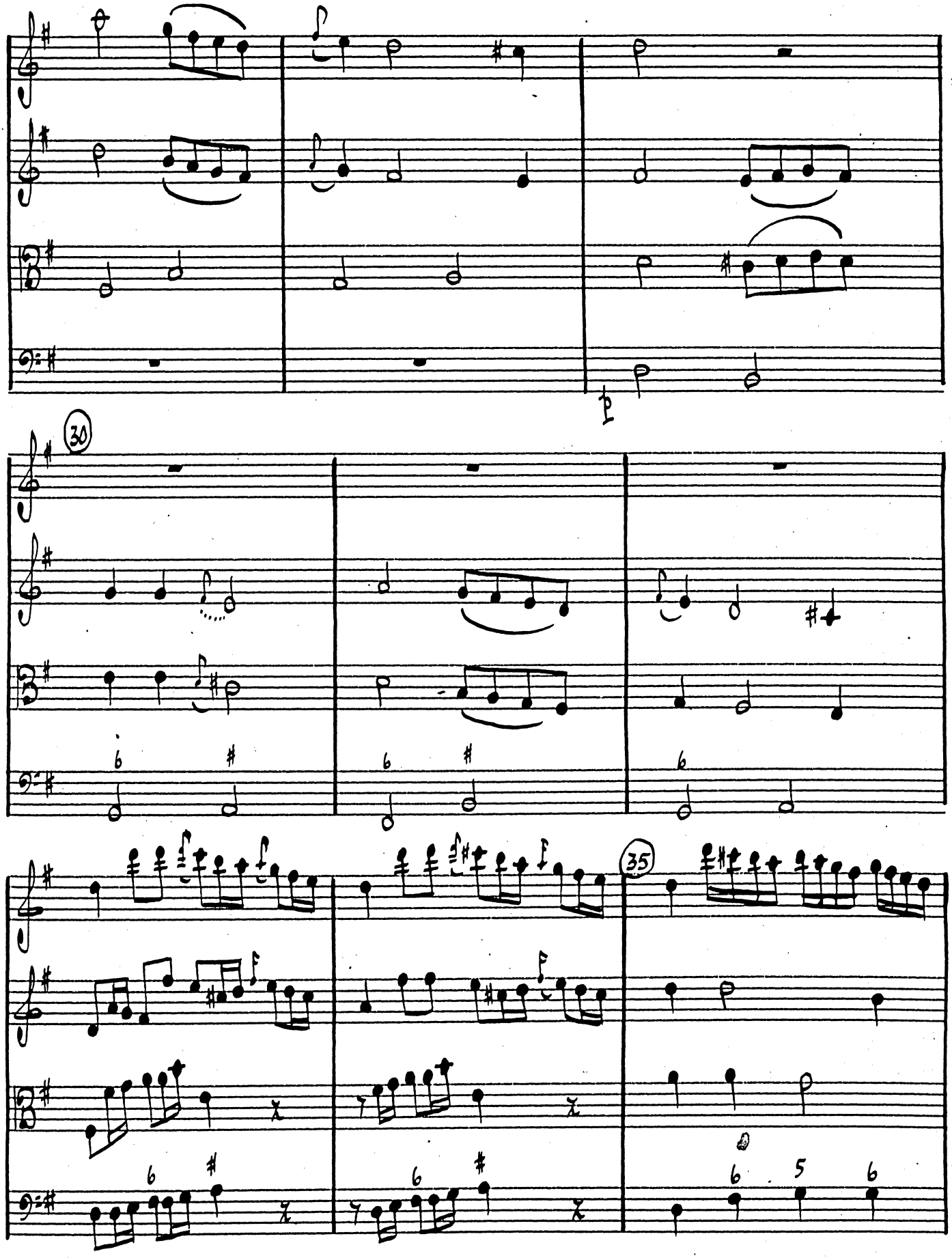

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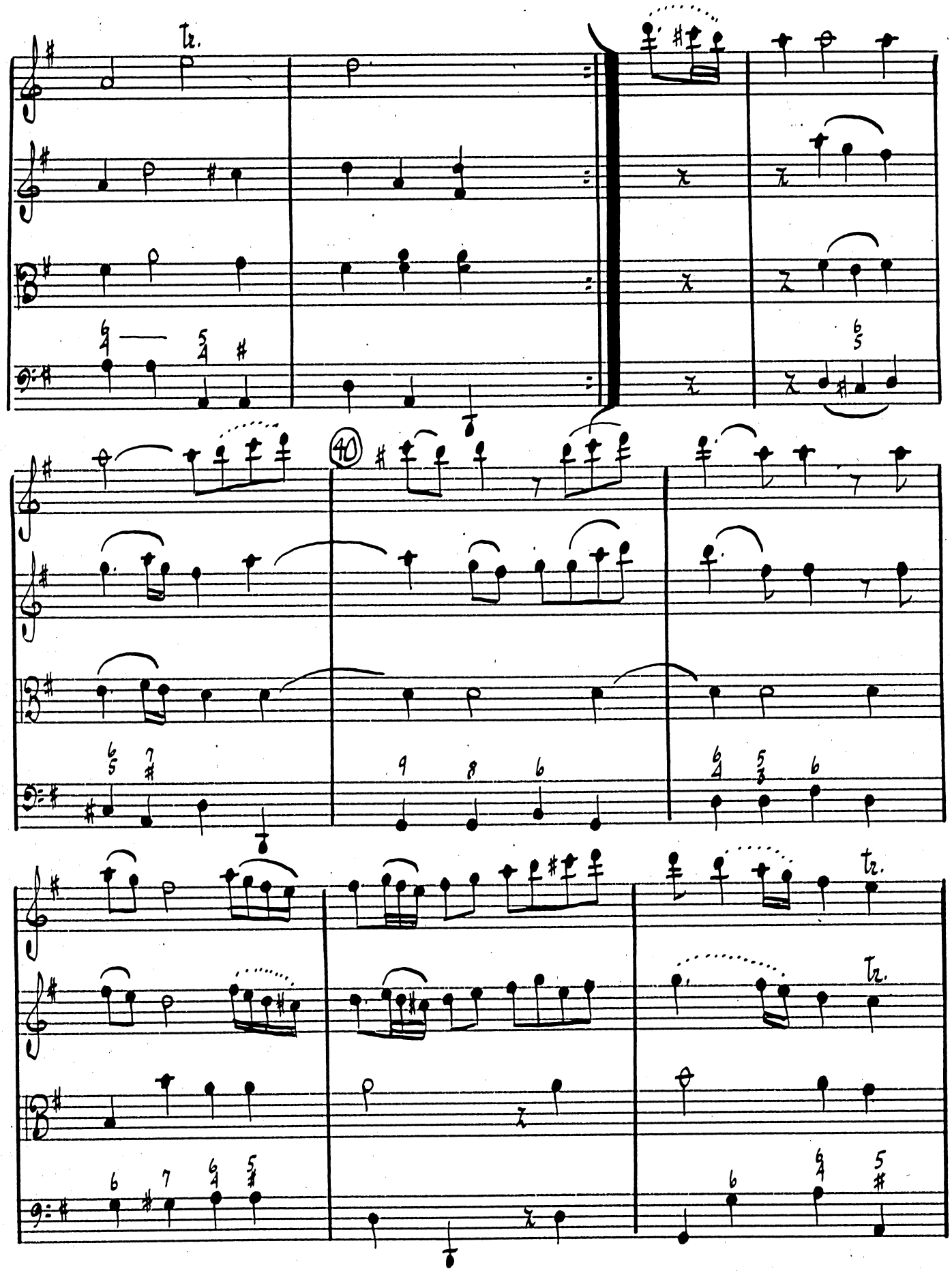

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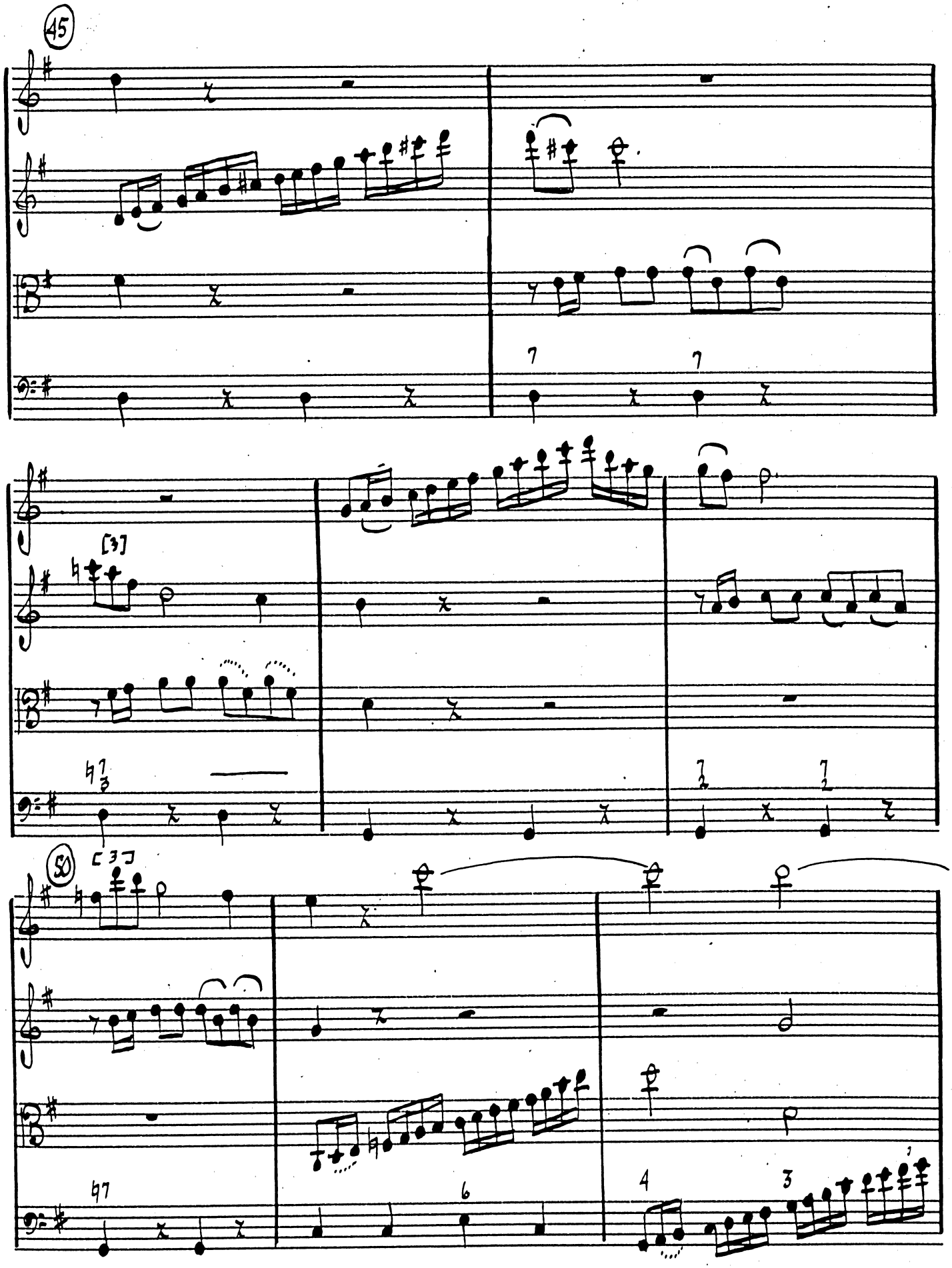

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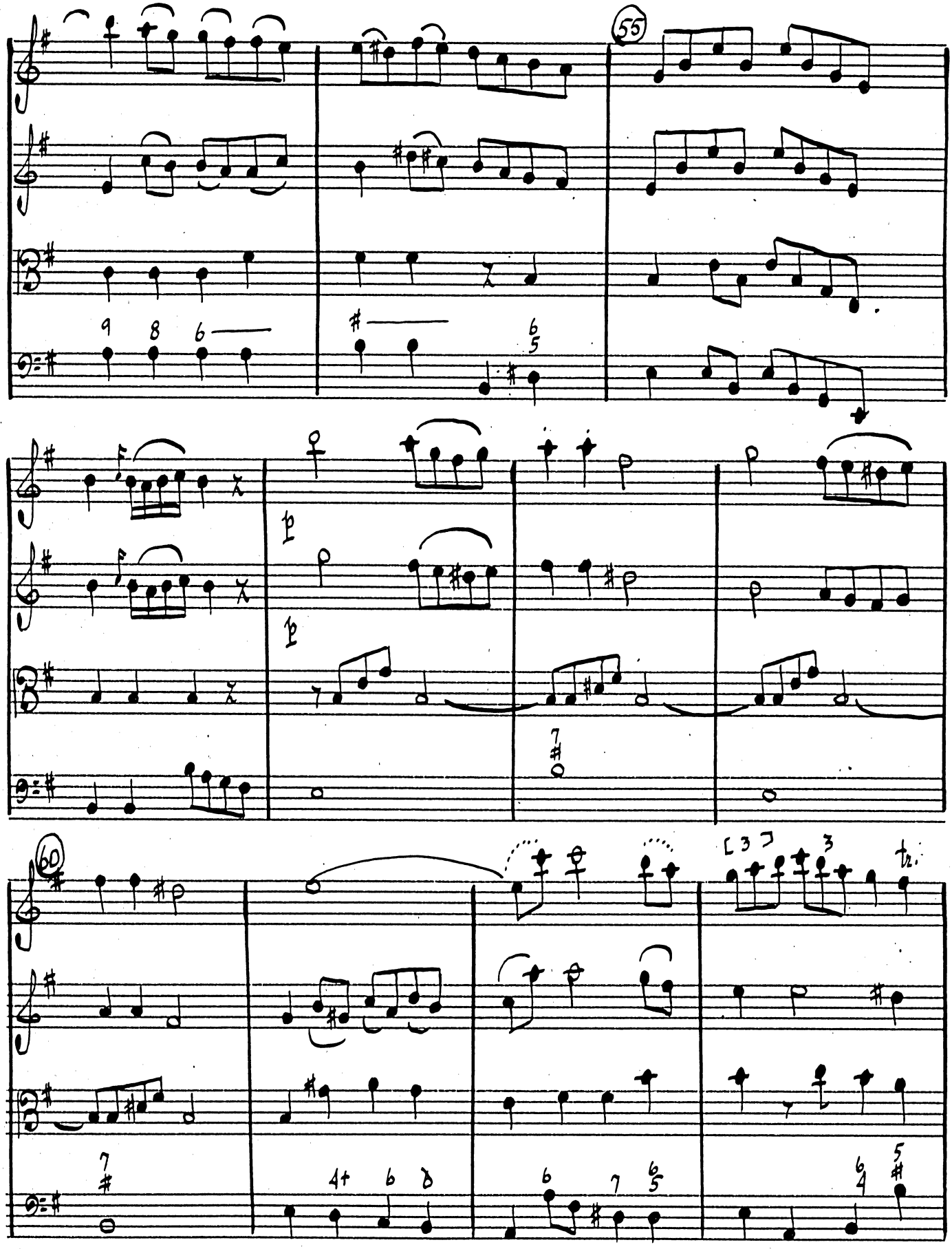

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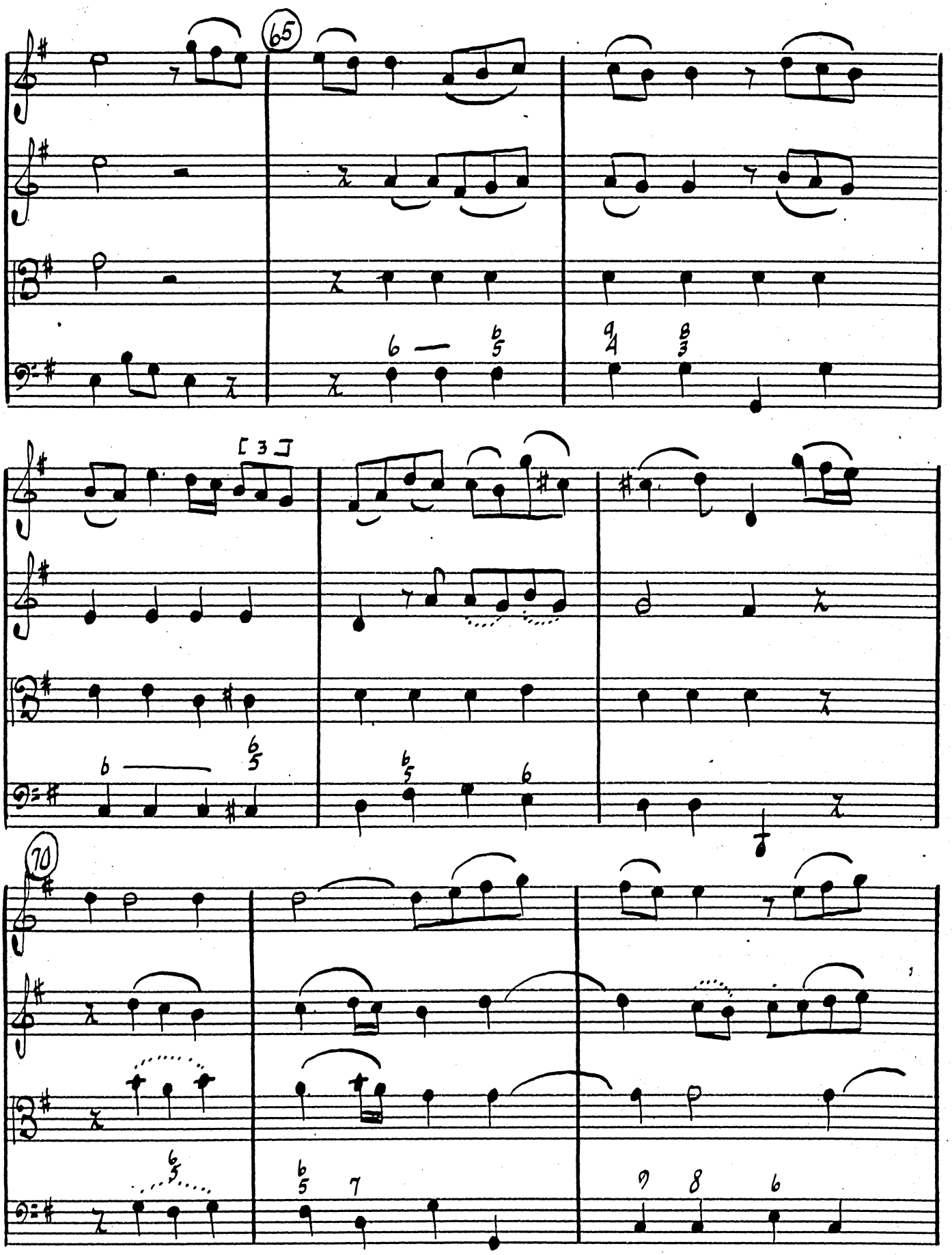

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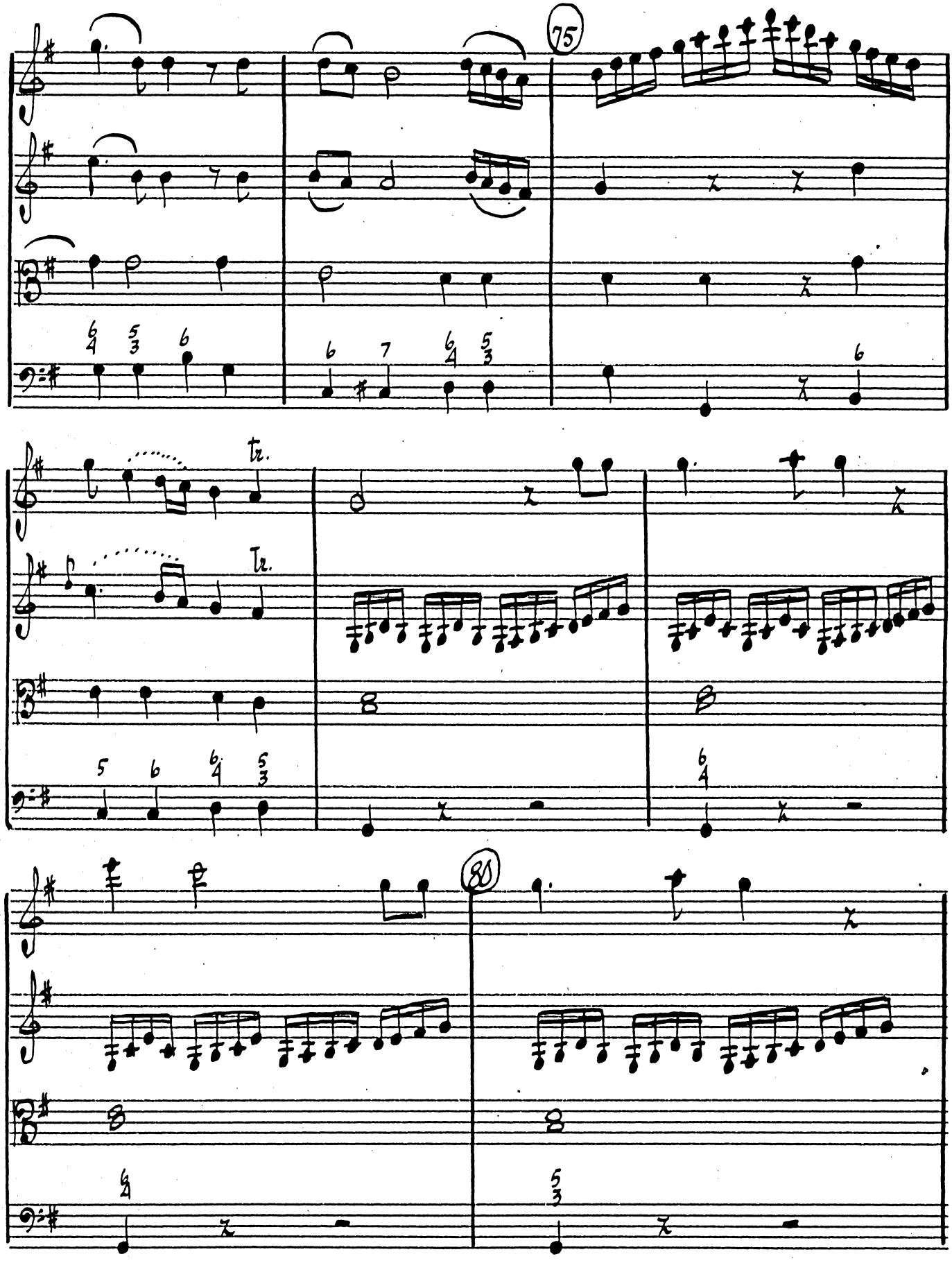

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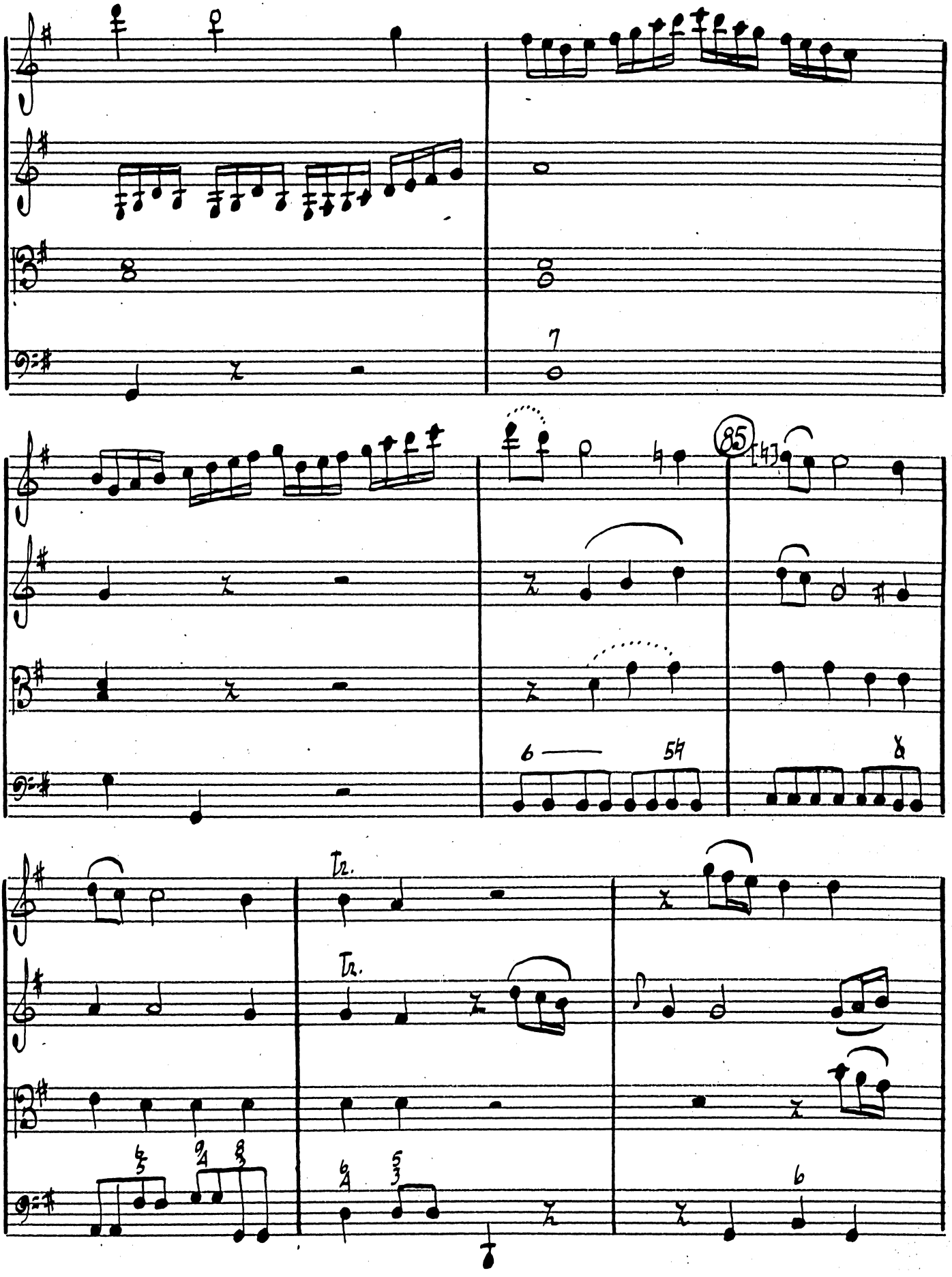

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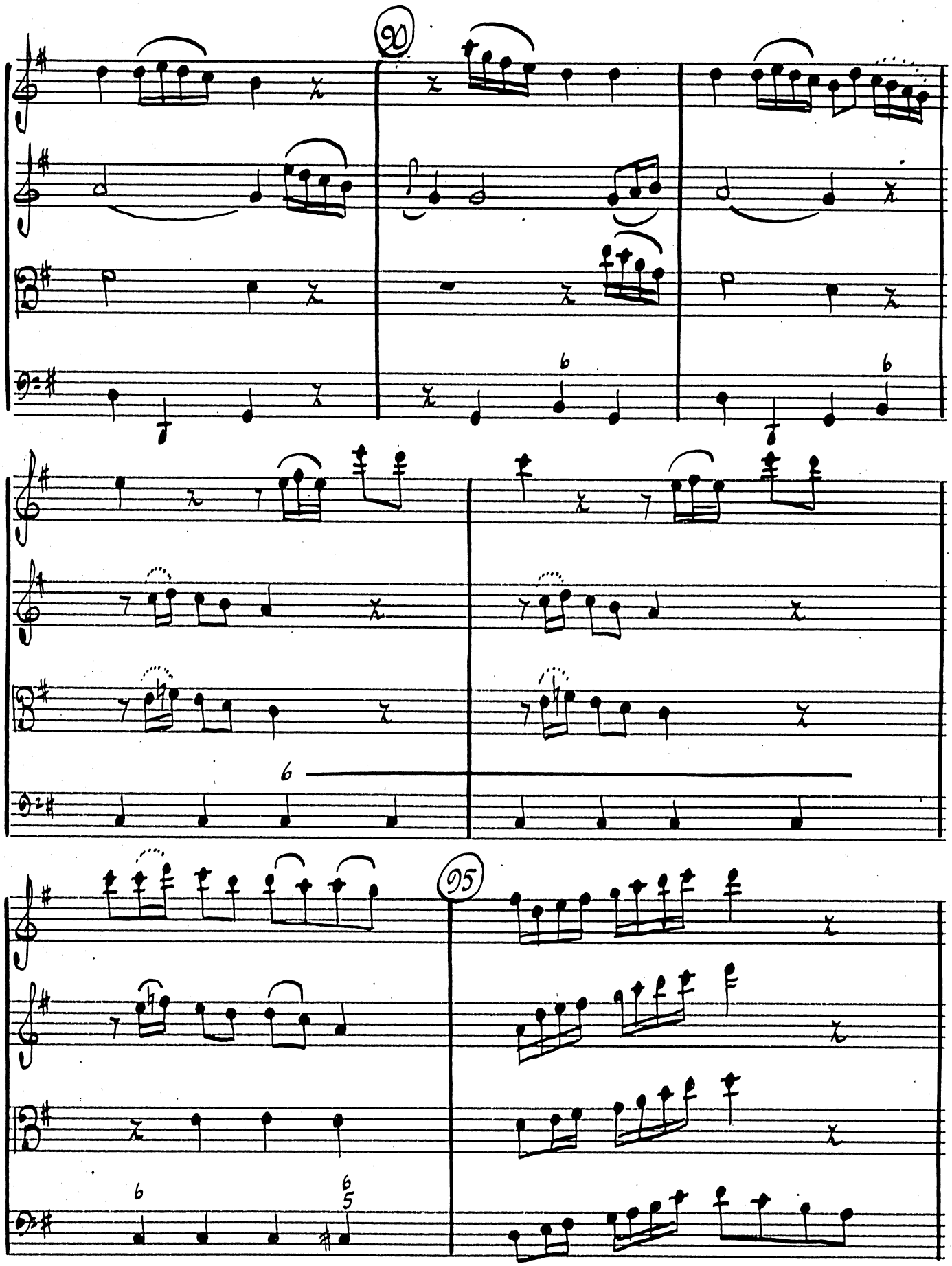

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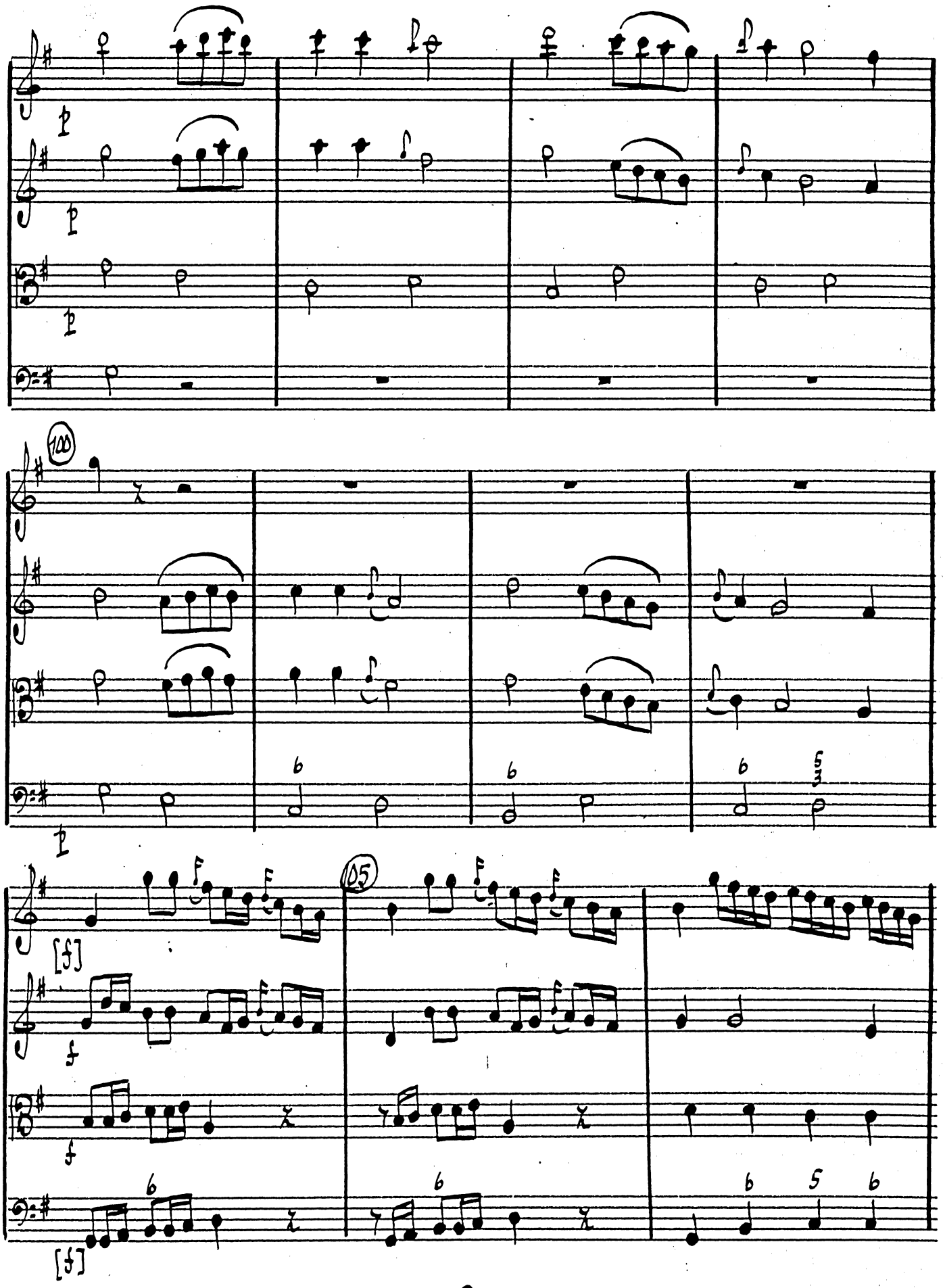

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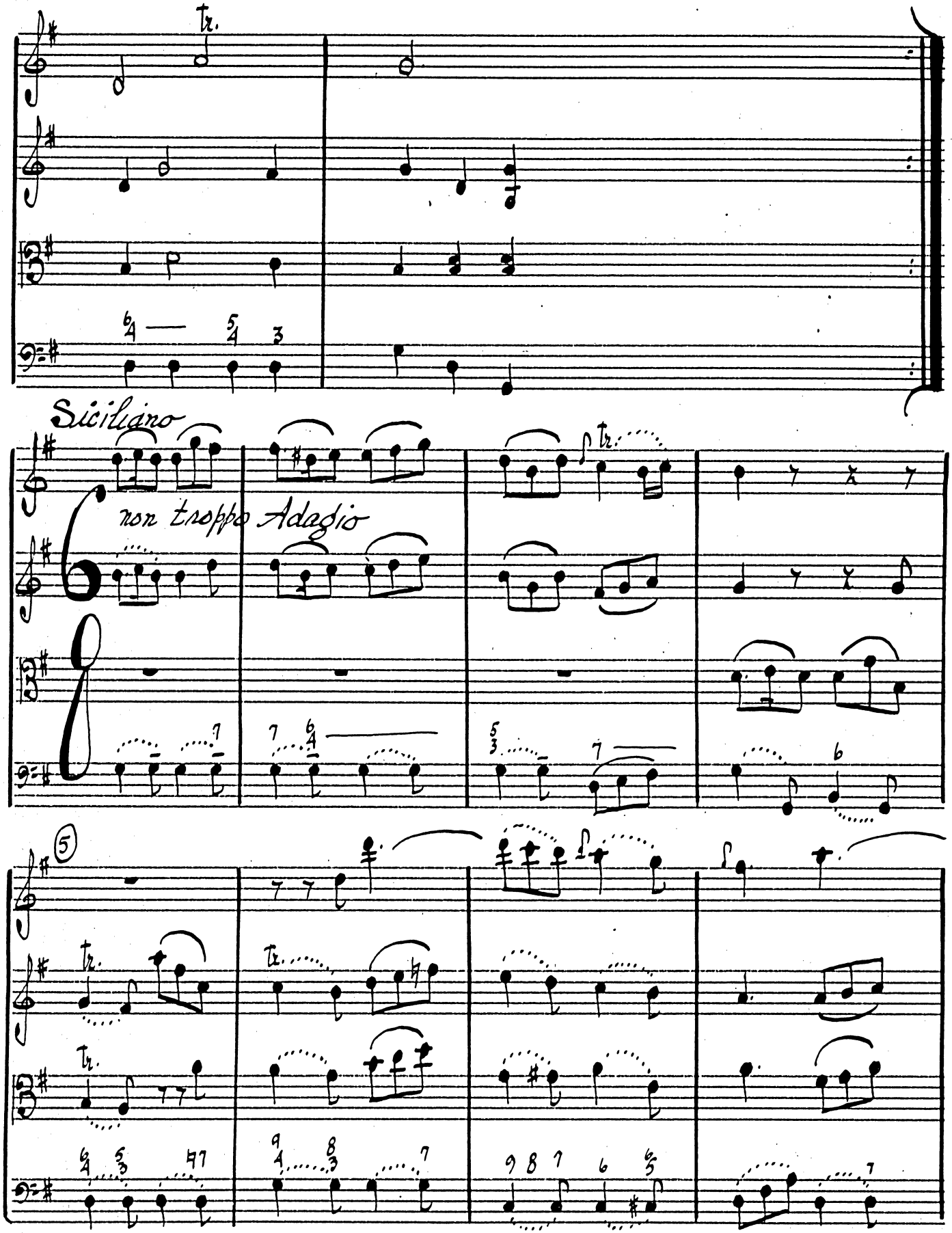

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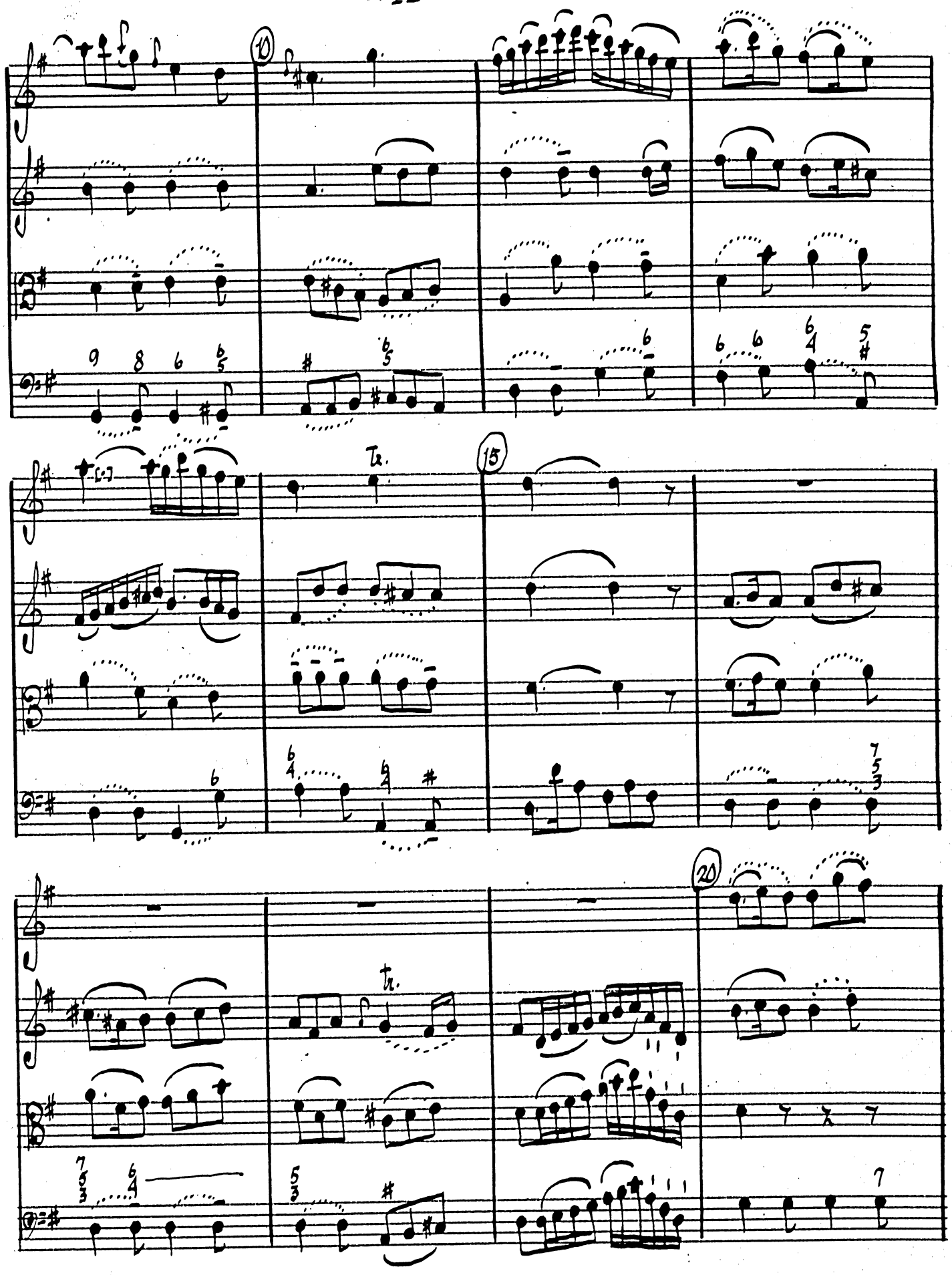

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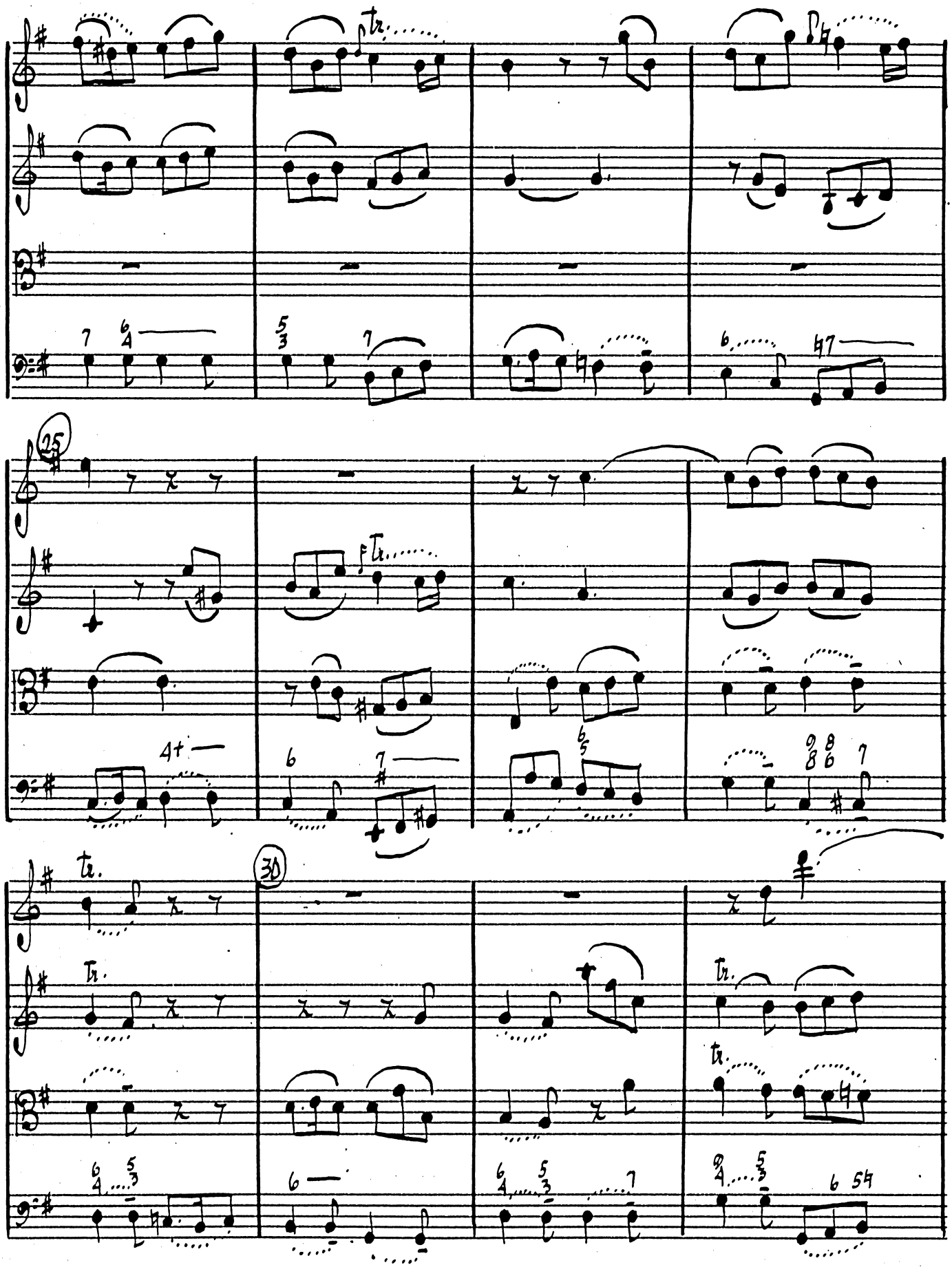

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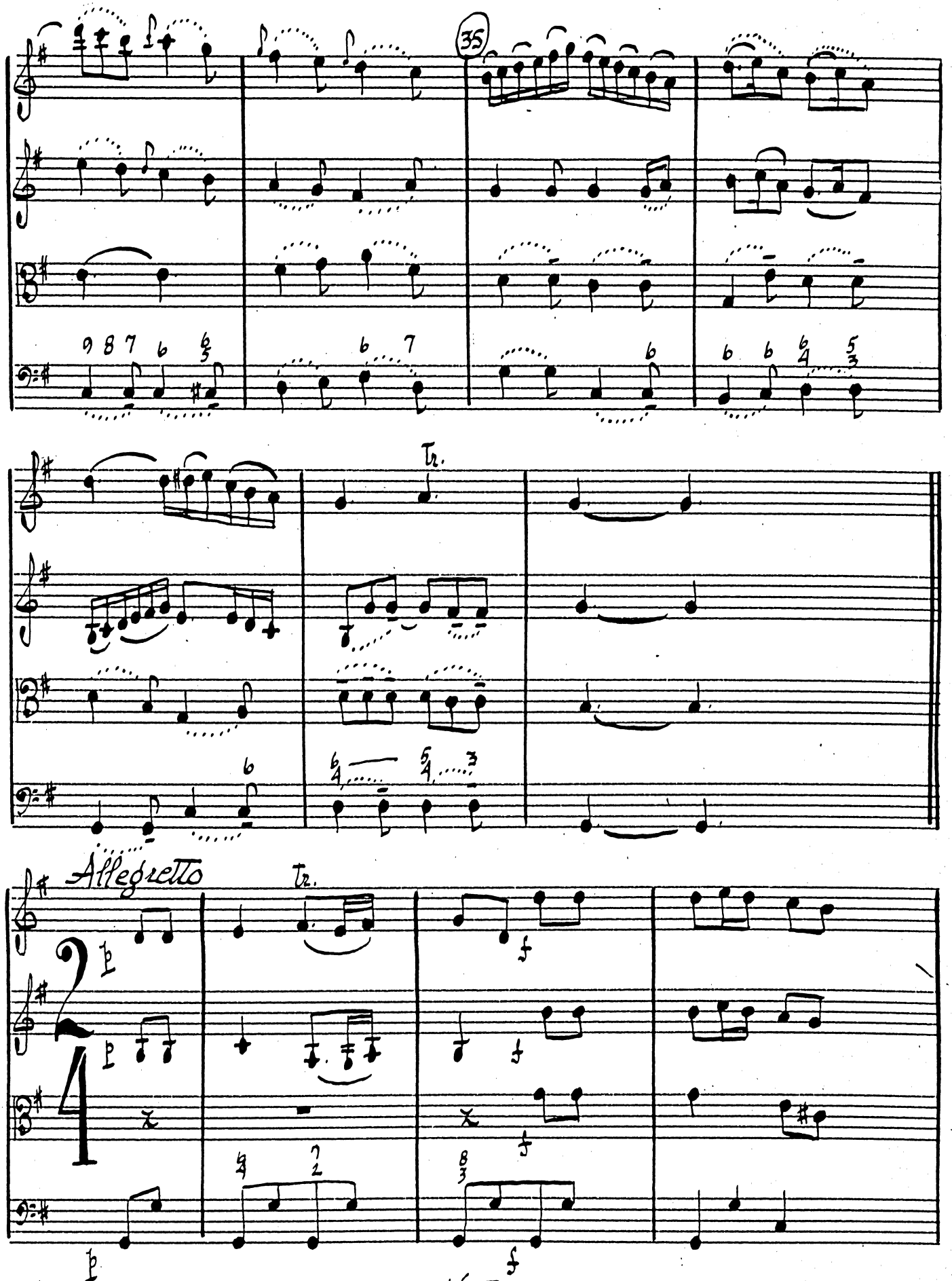

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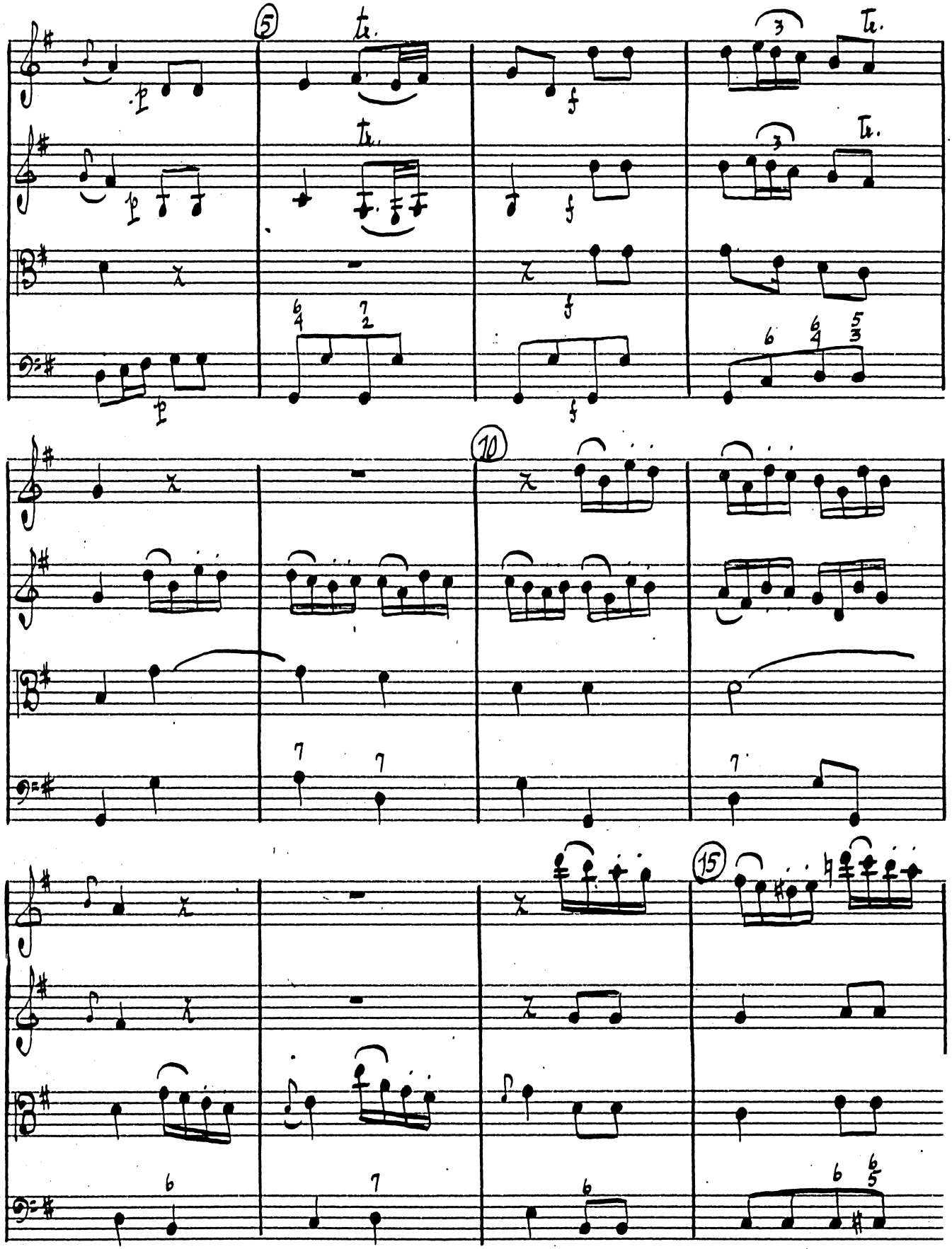

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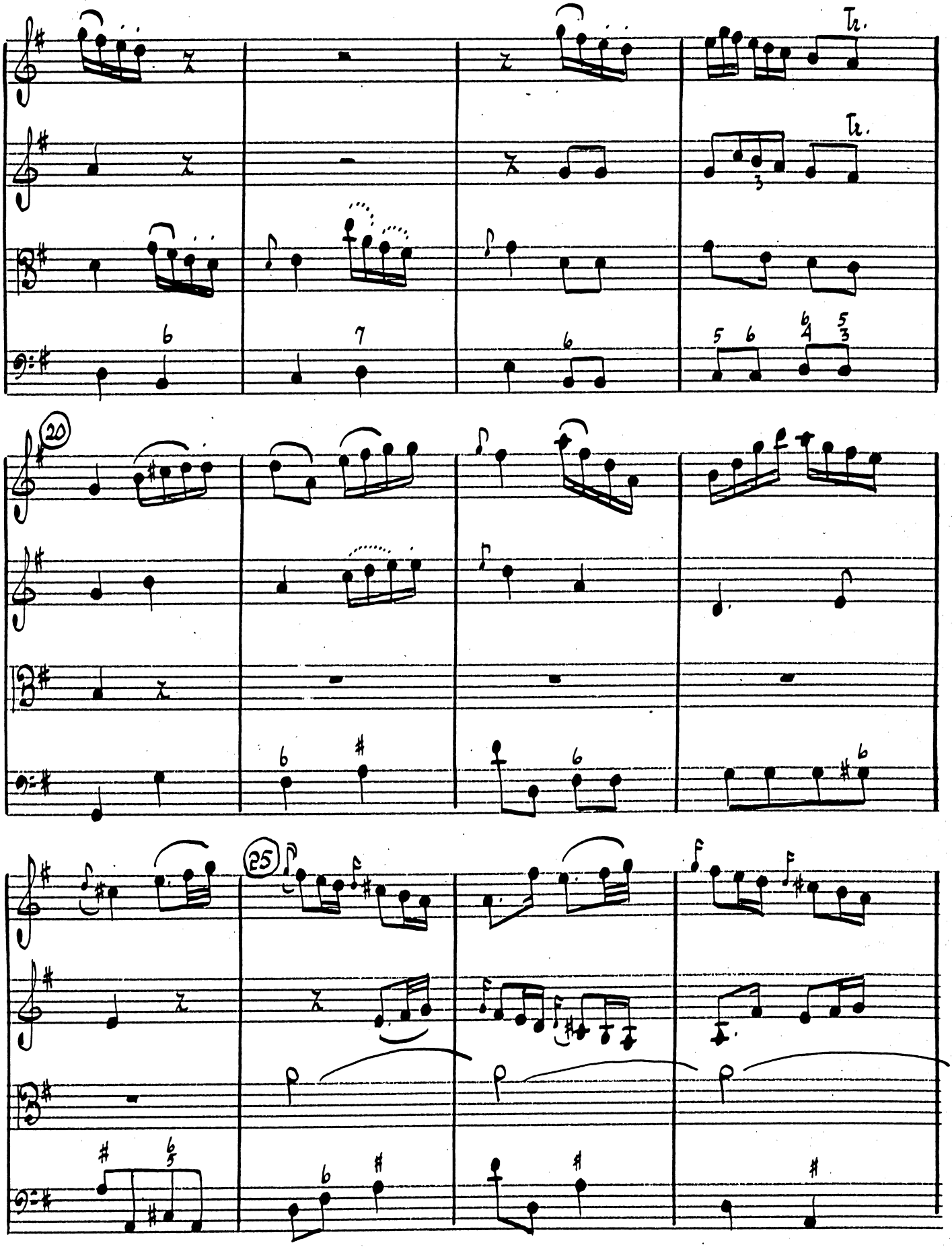

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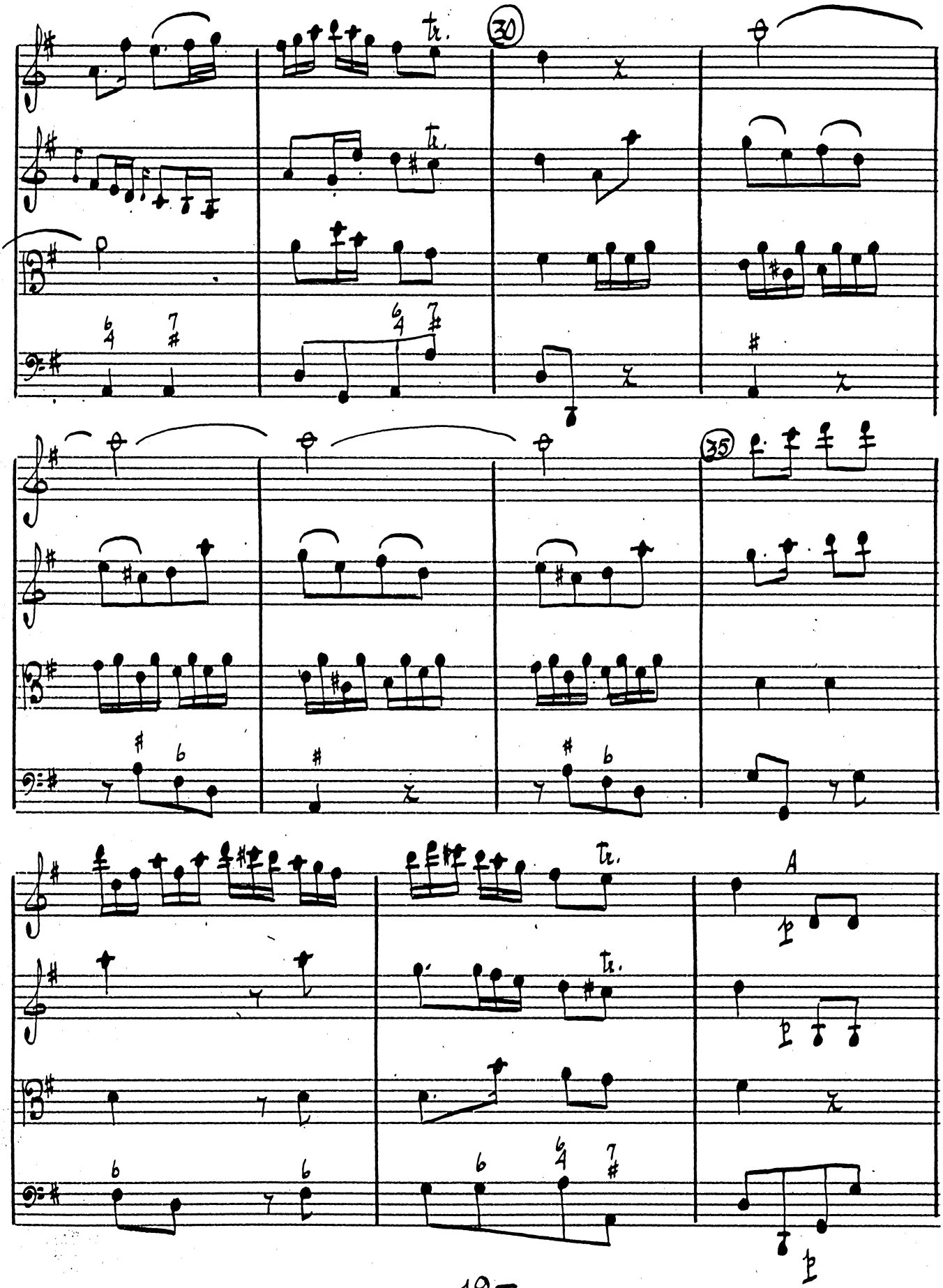

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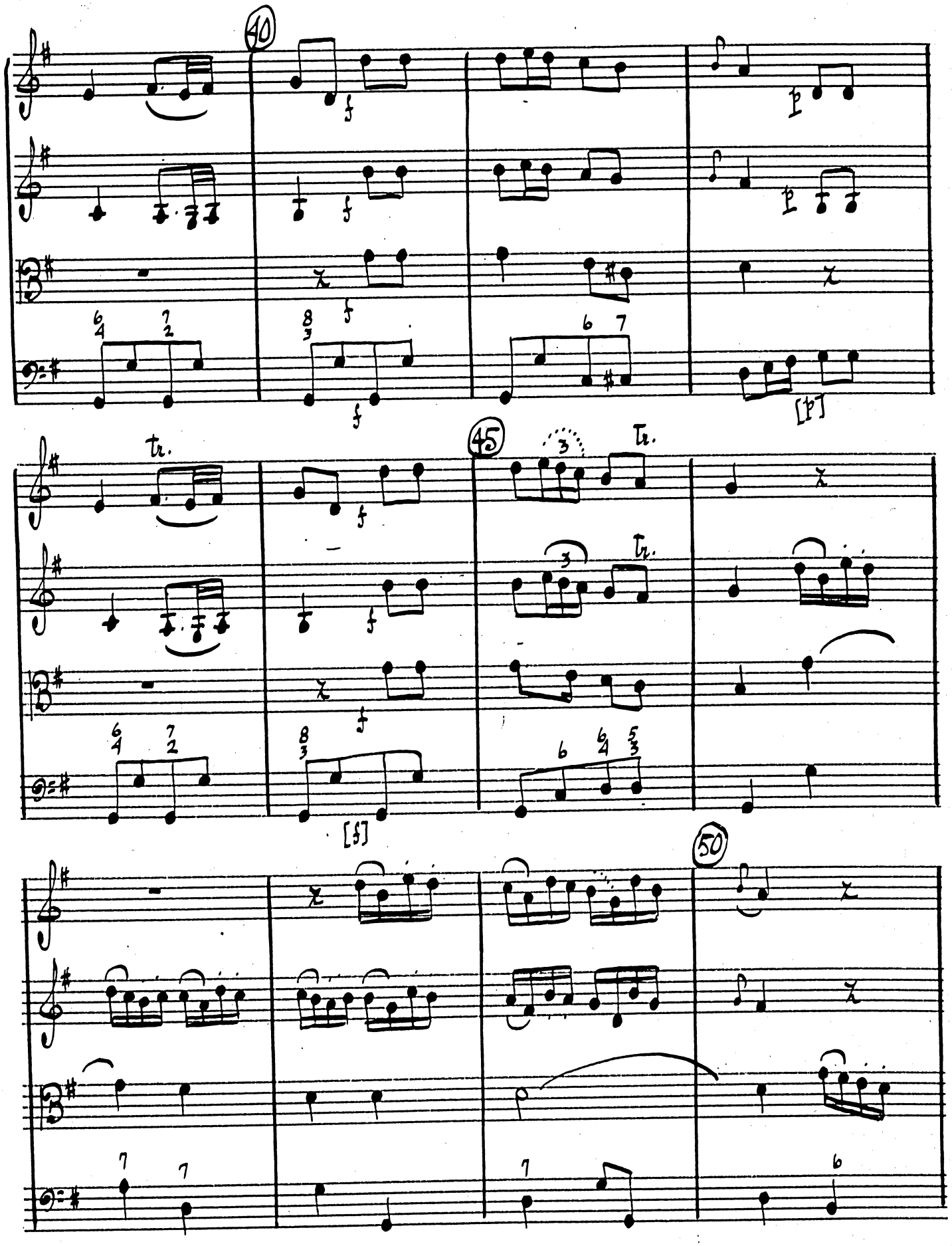

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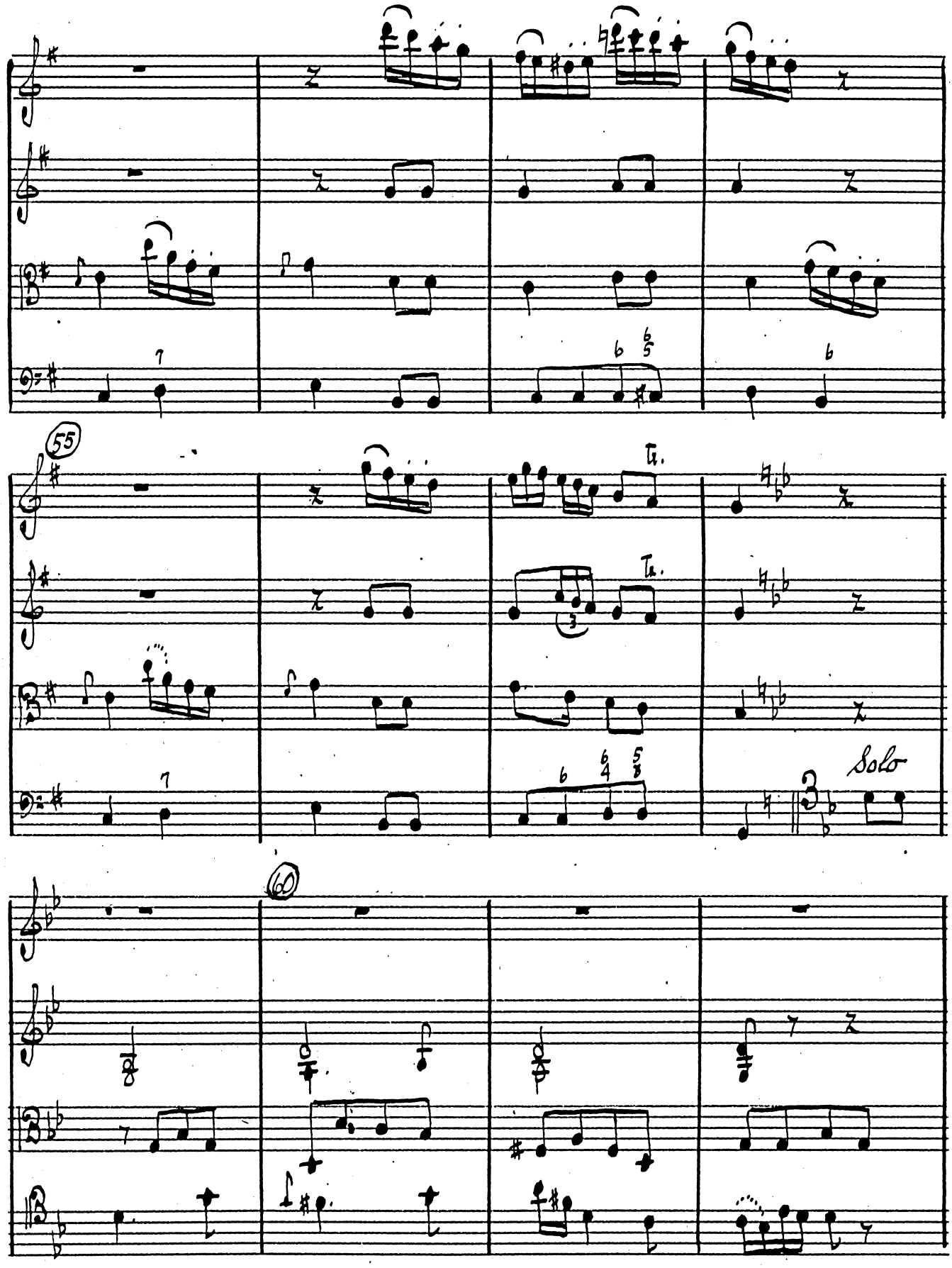

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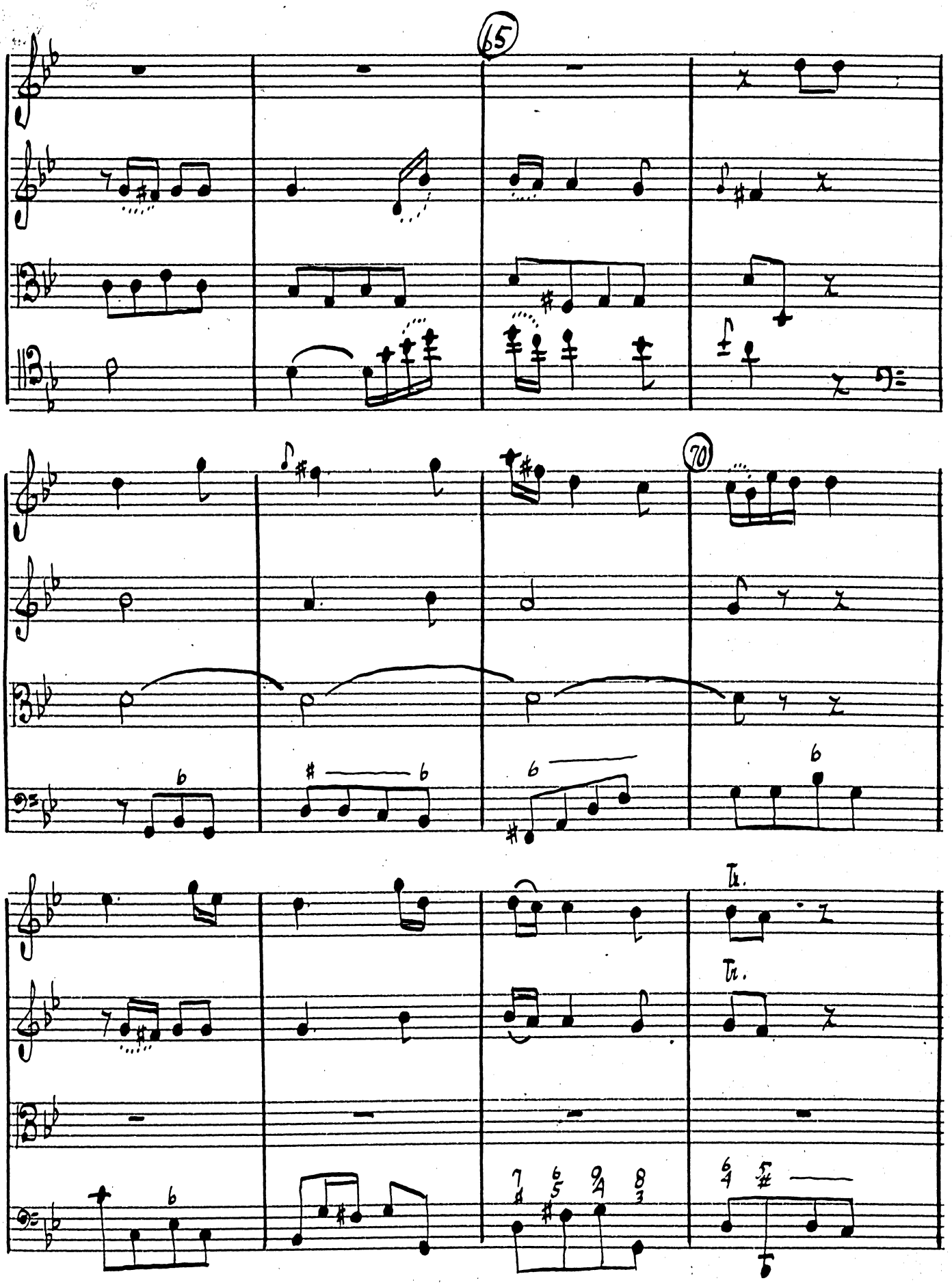

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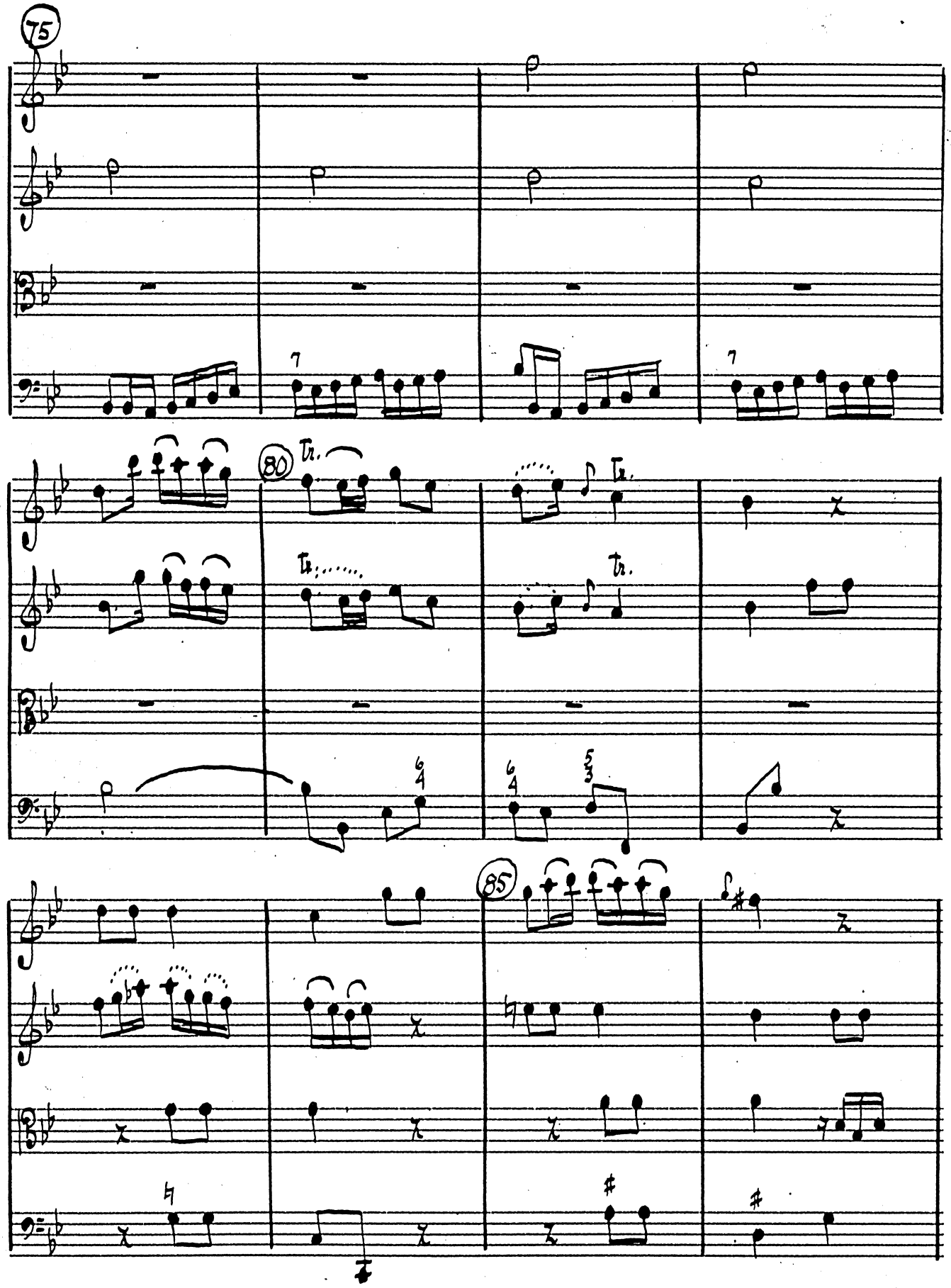

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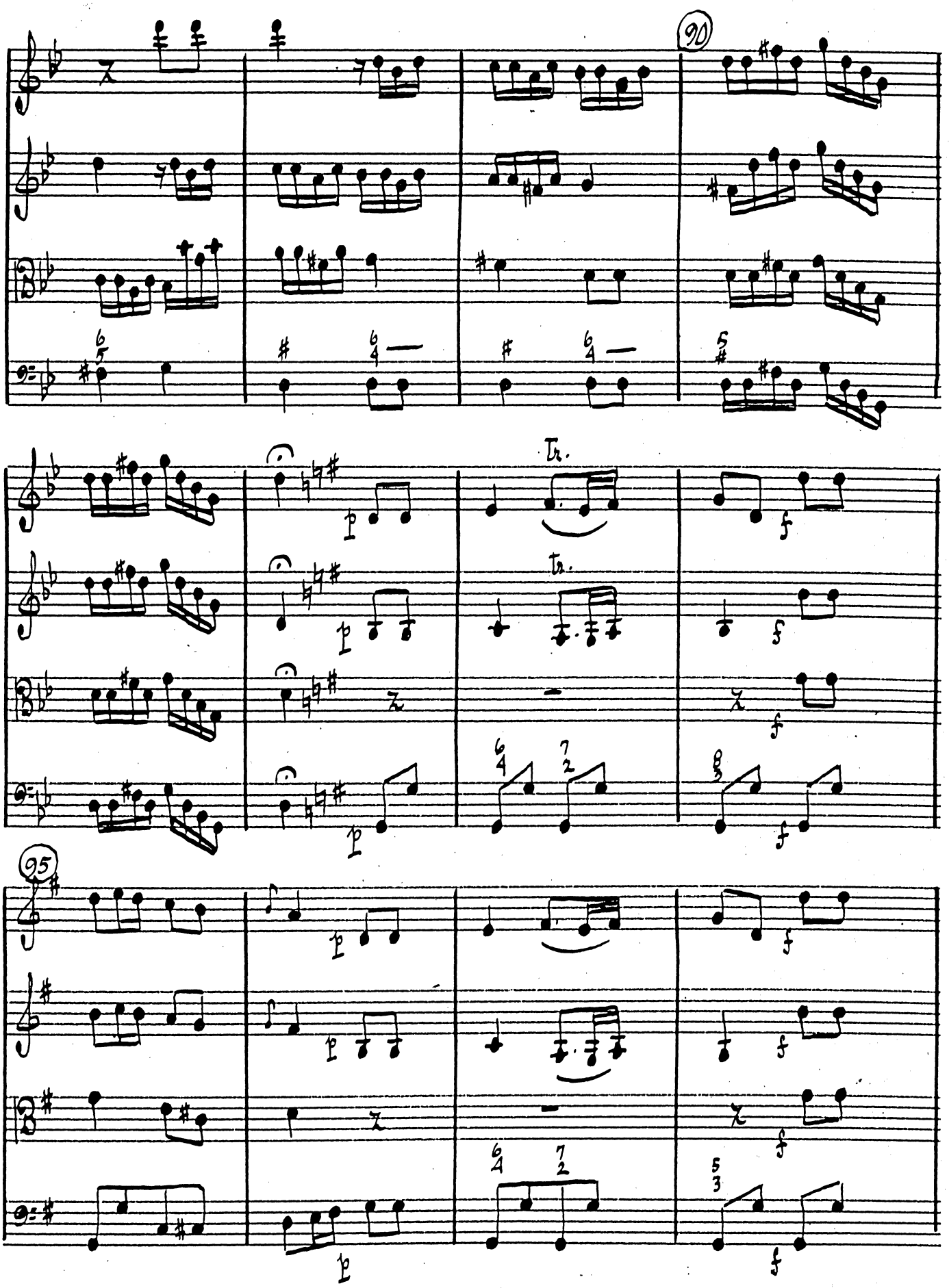

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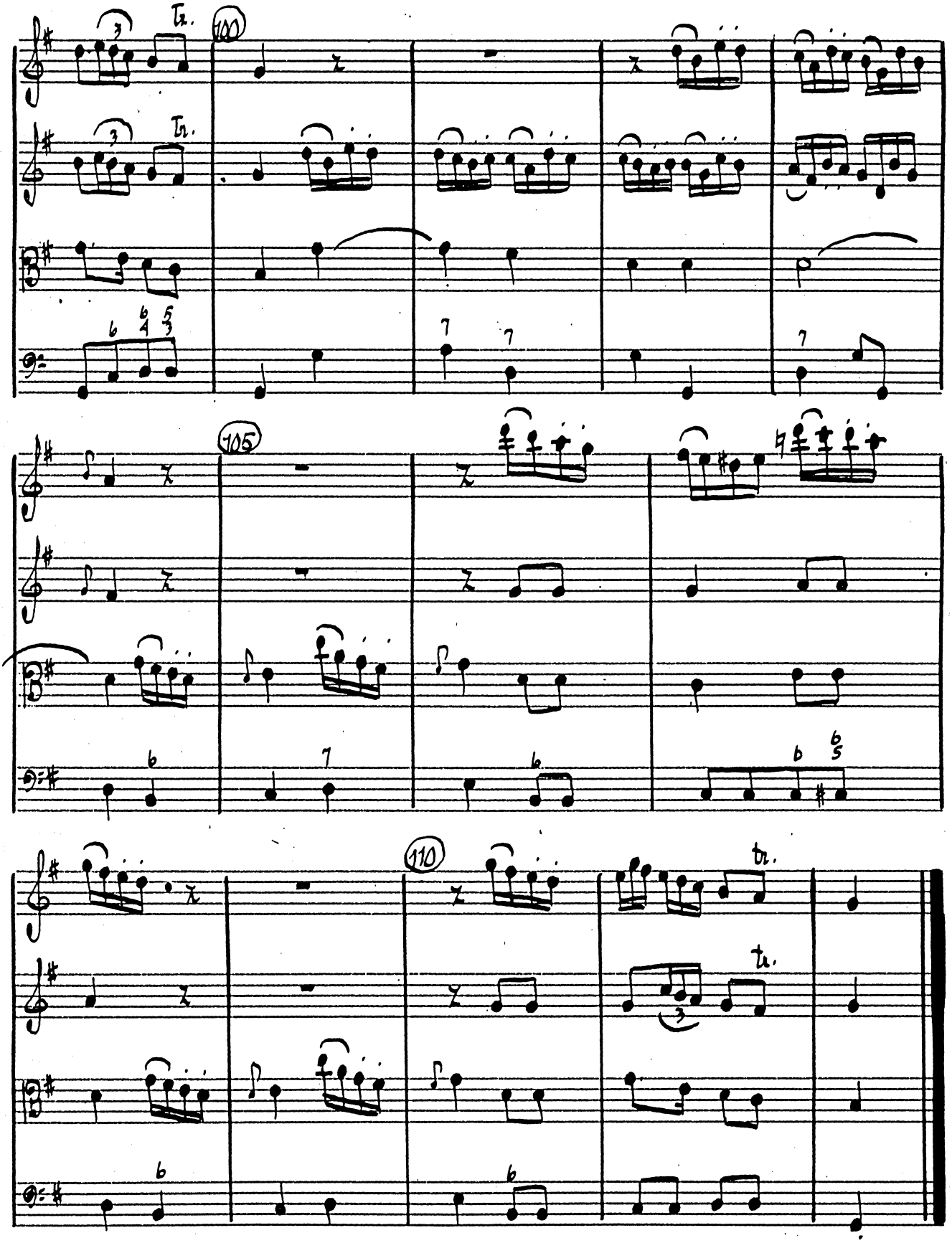

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Quartetto — C.F. Abel Op. 15-No. II

two Violins, a tenor, and Violoncello

Obligato with a thorough bass for the

Harpsichord.

Scored by Carol Cohan

Apperdix to "The study of pre-classic string writing" as evidenced in three Quartets by Carl Friedrich Abel. Opus 8-12-15

JAESTRO

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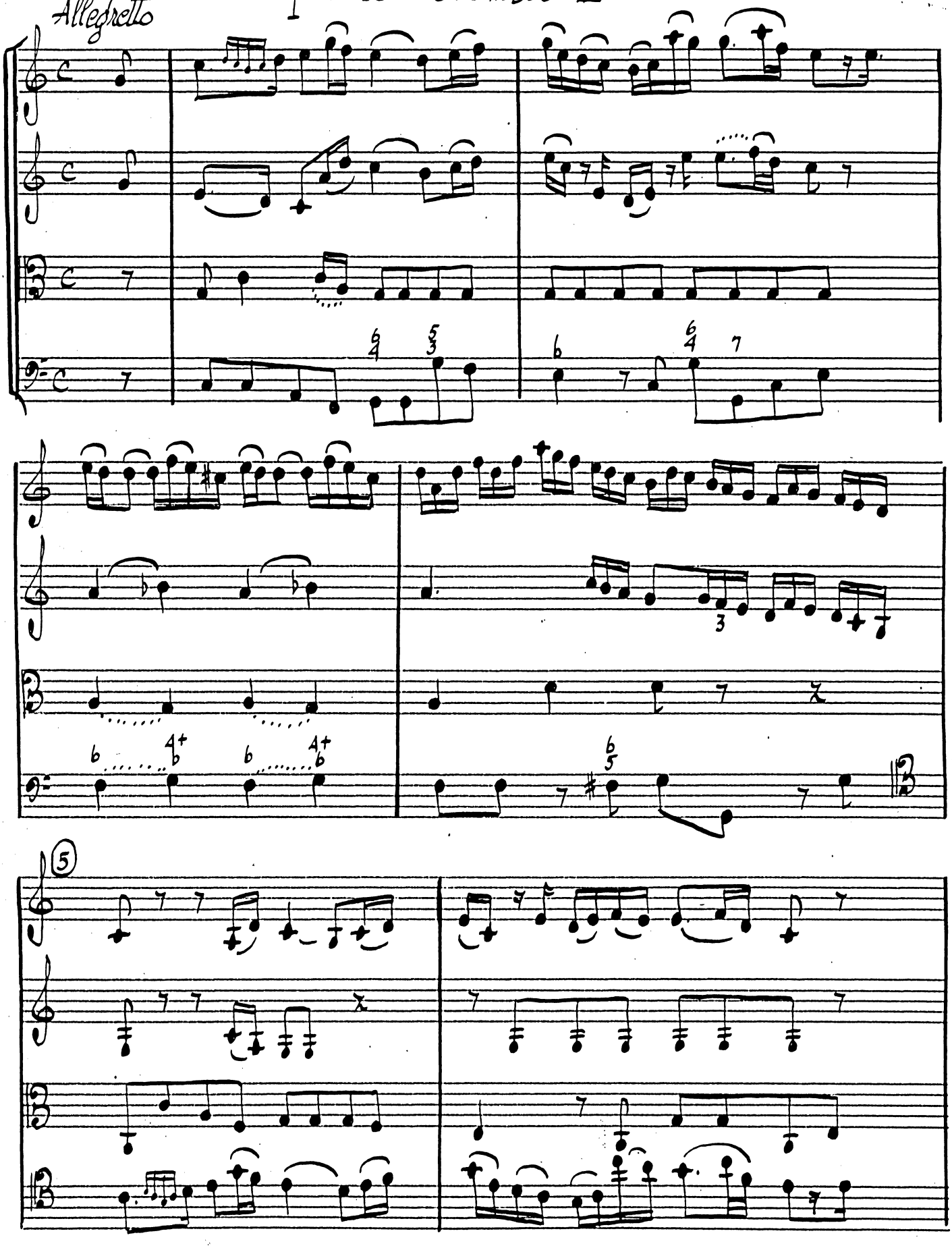
Quartetto
Opus 15 - Number II

C.F. Abel
scored by: C. Cohan

Allegretto



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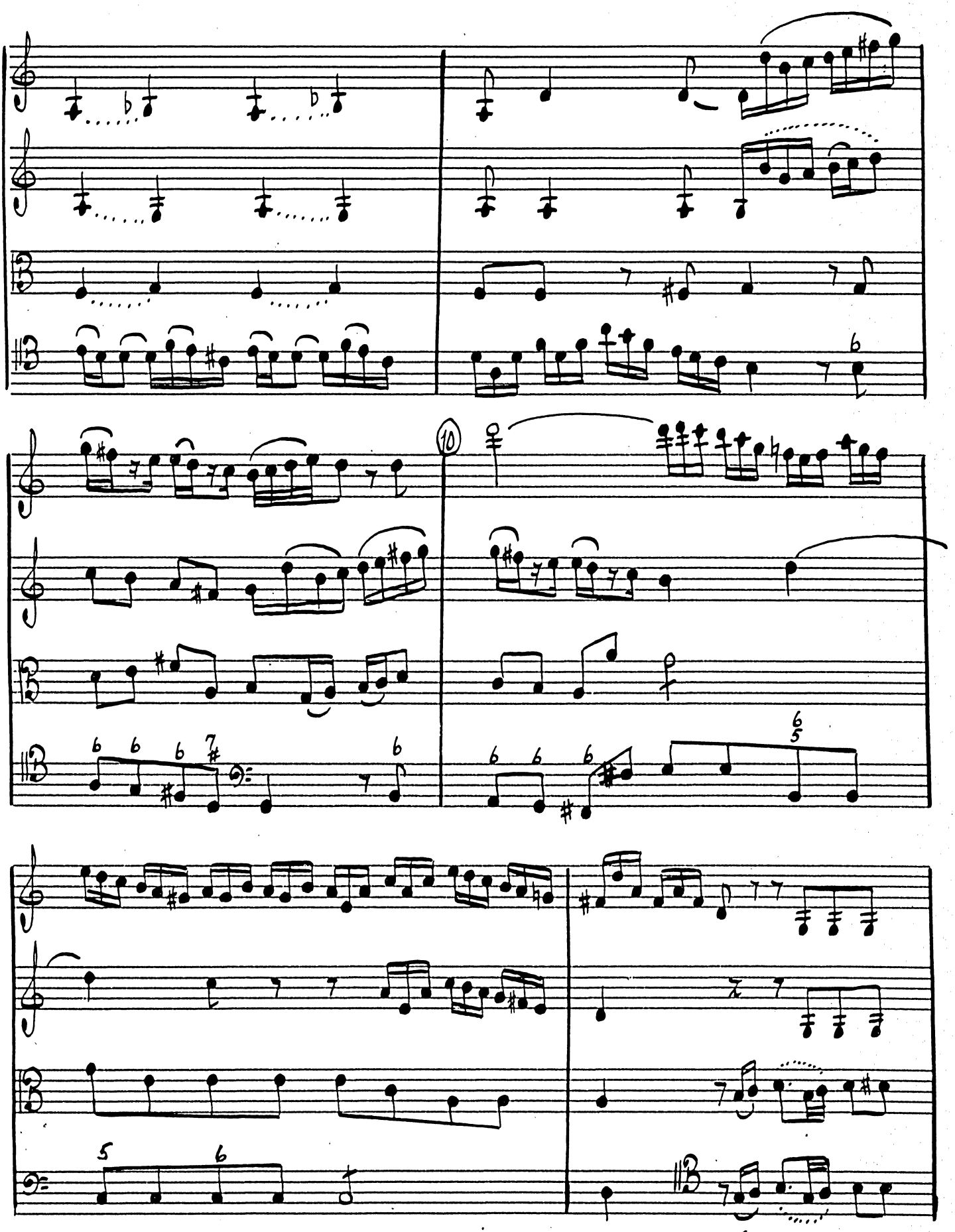

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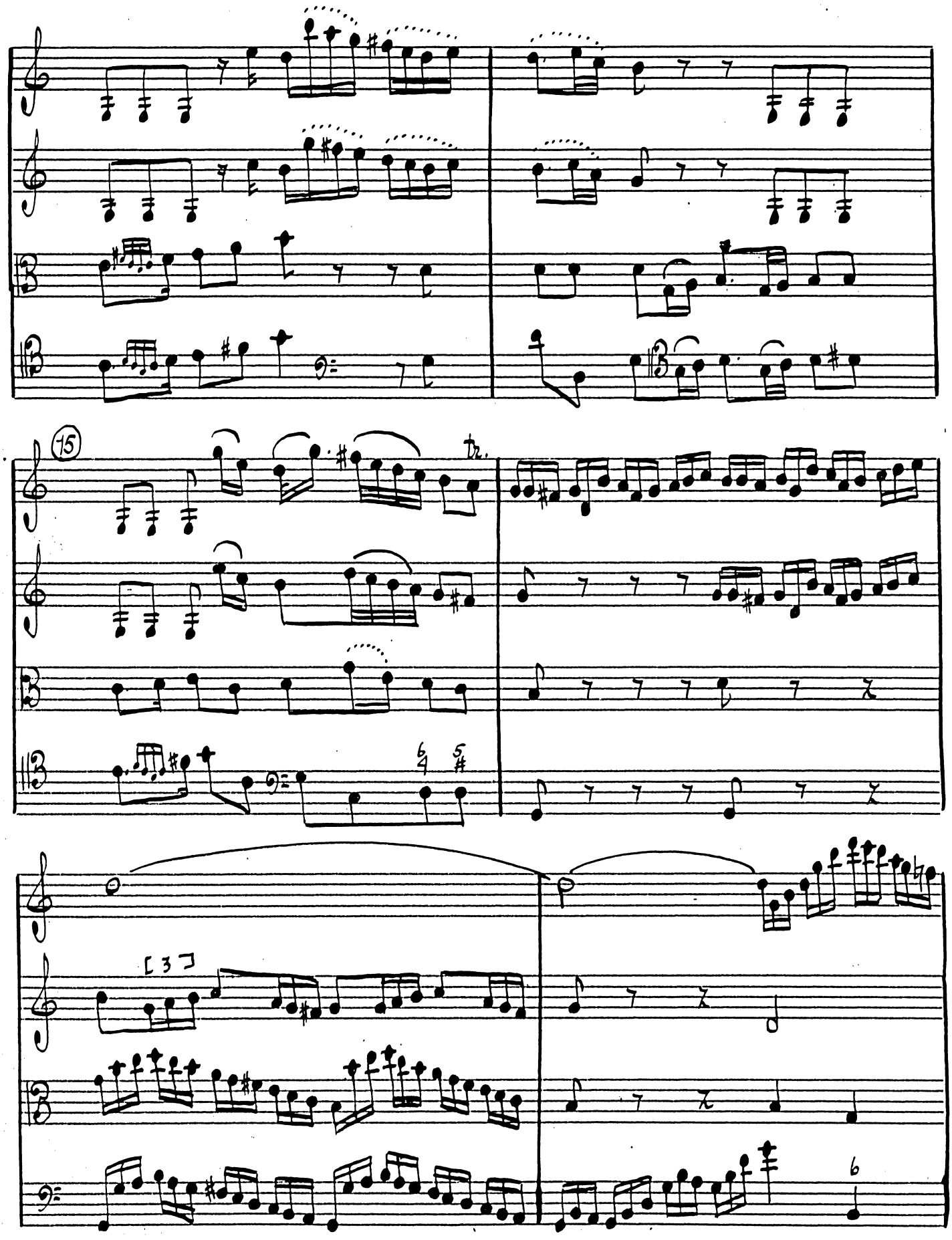

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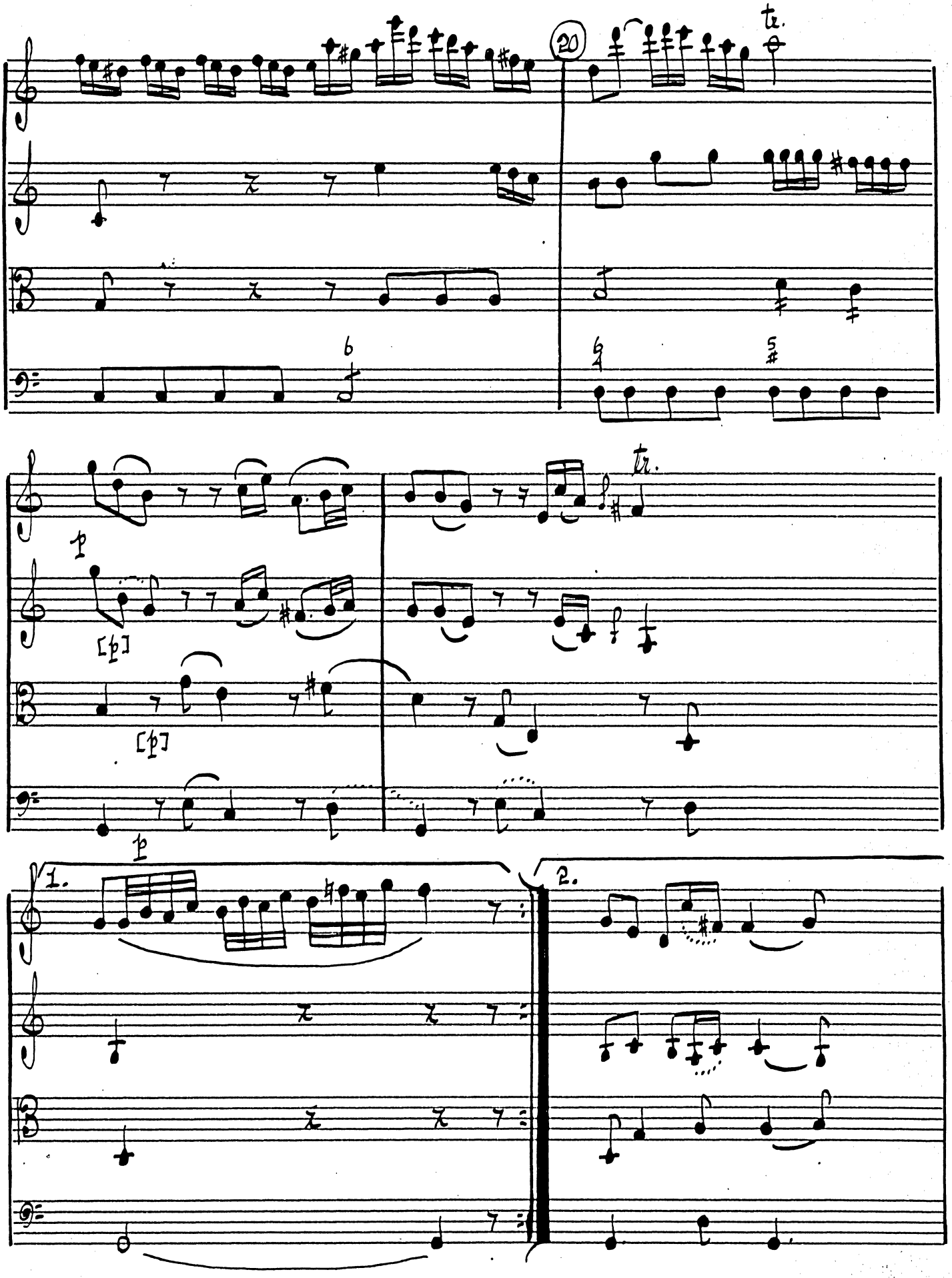

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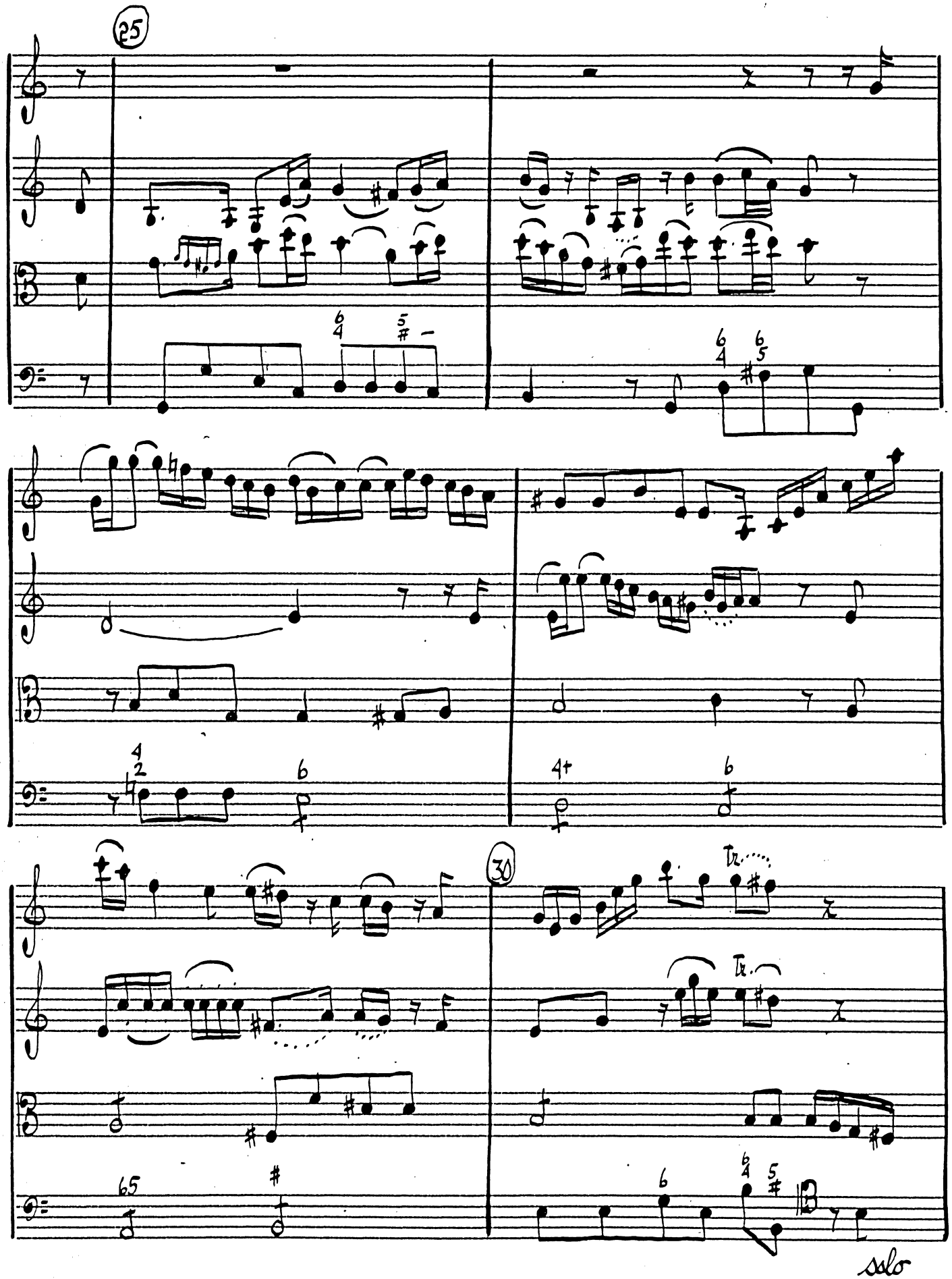

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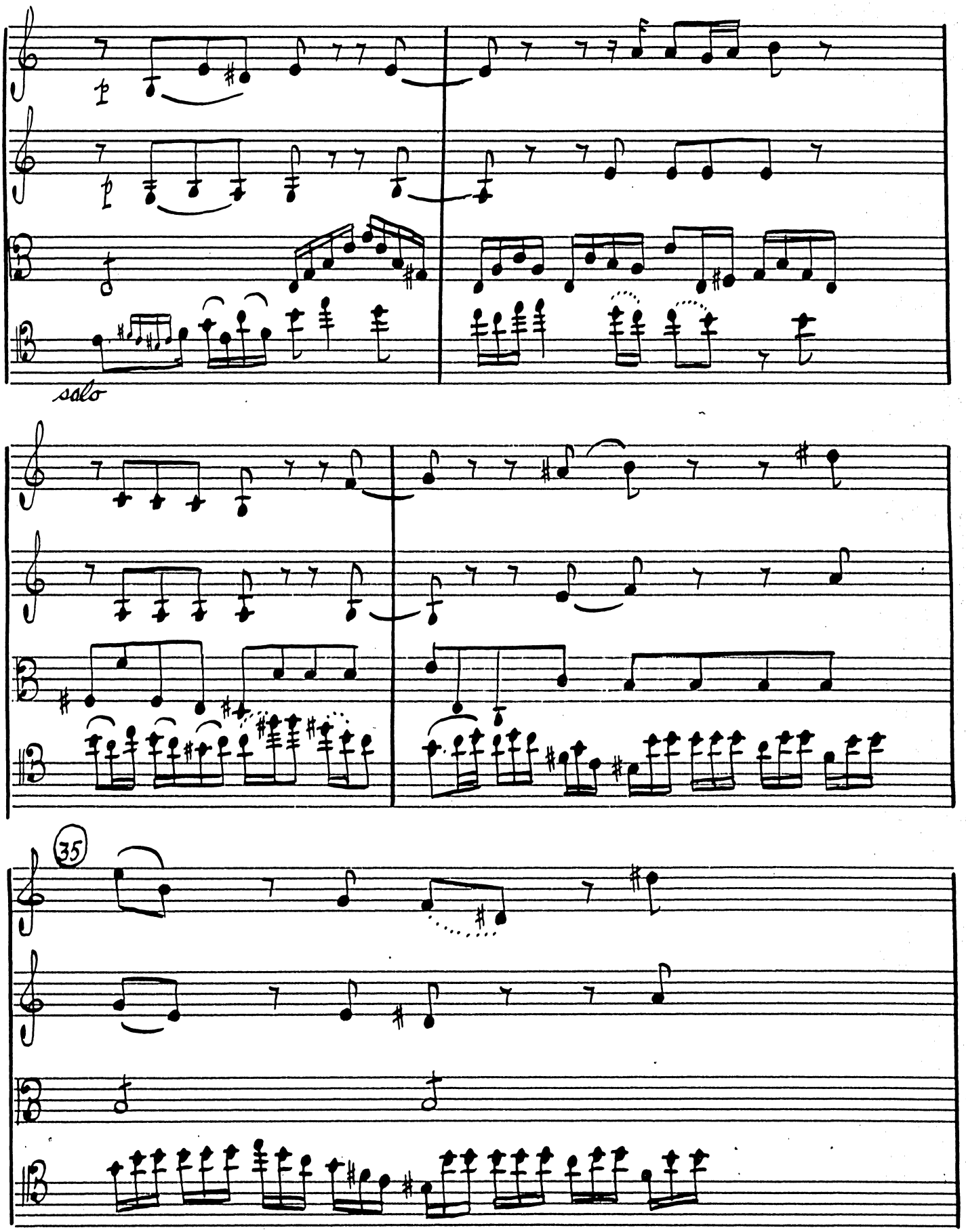

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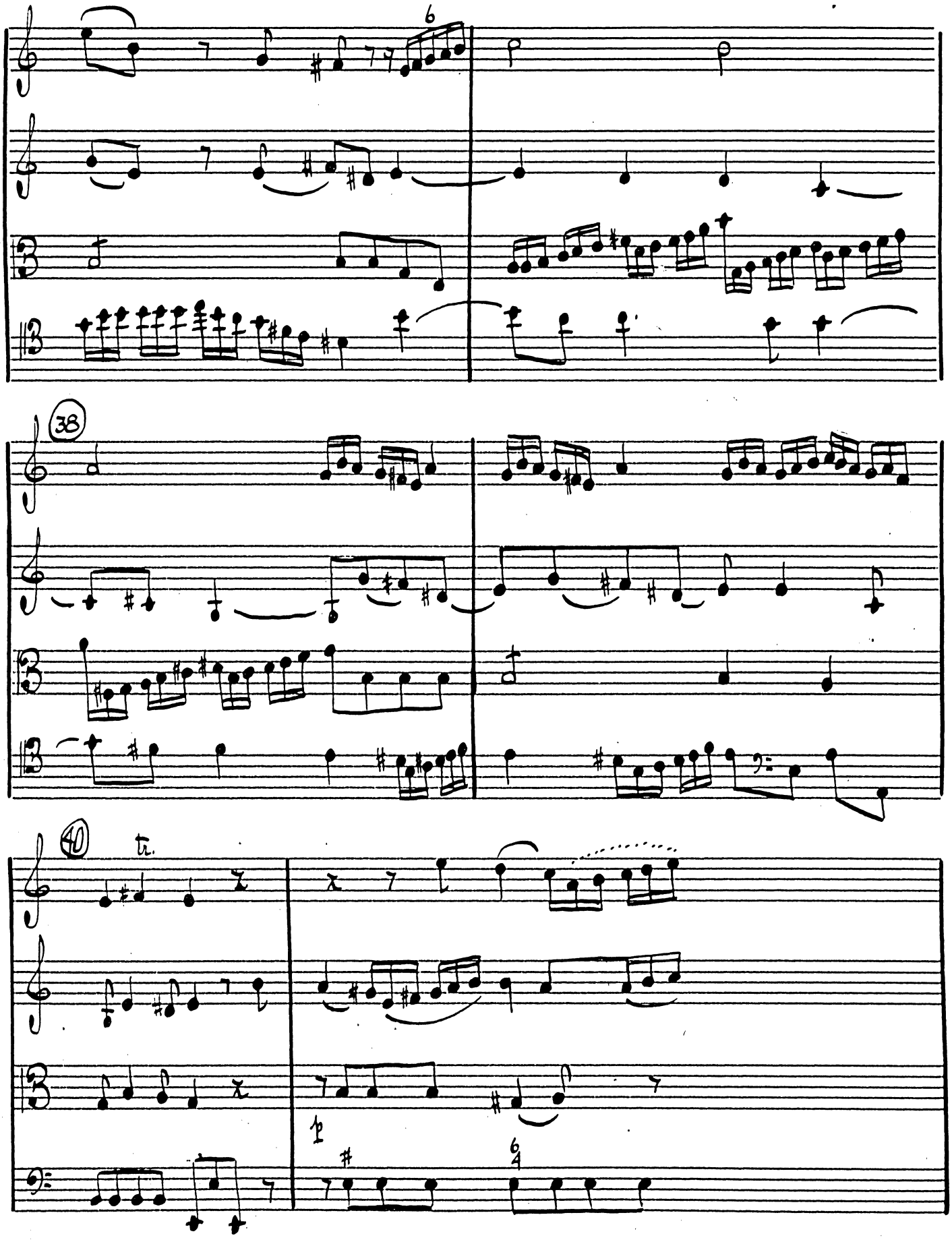

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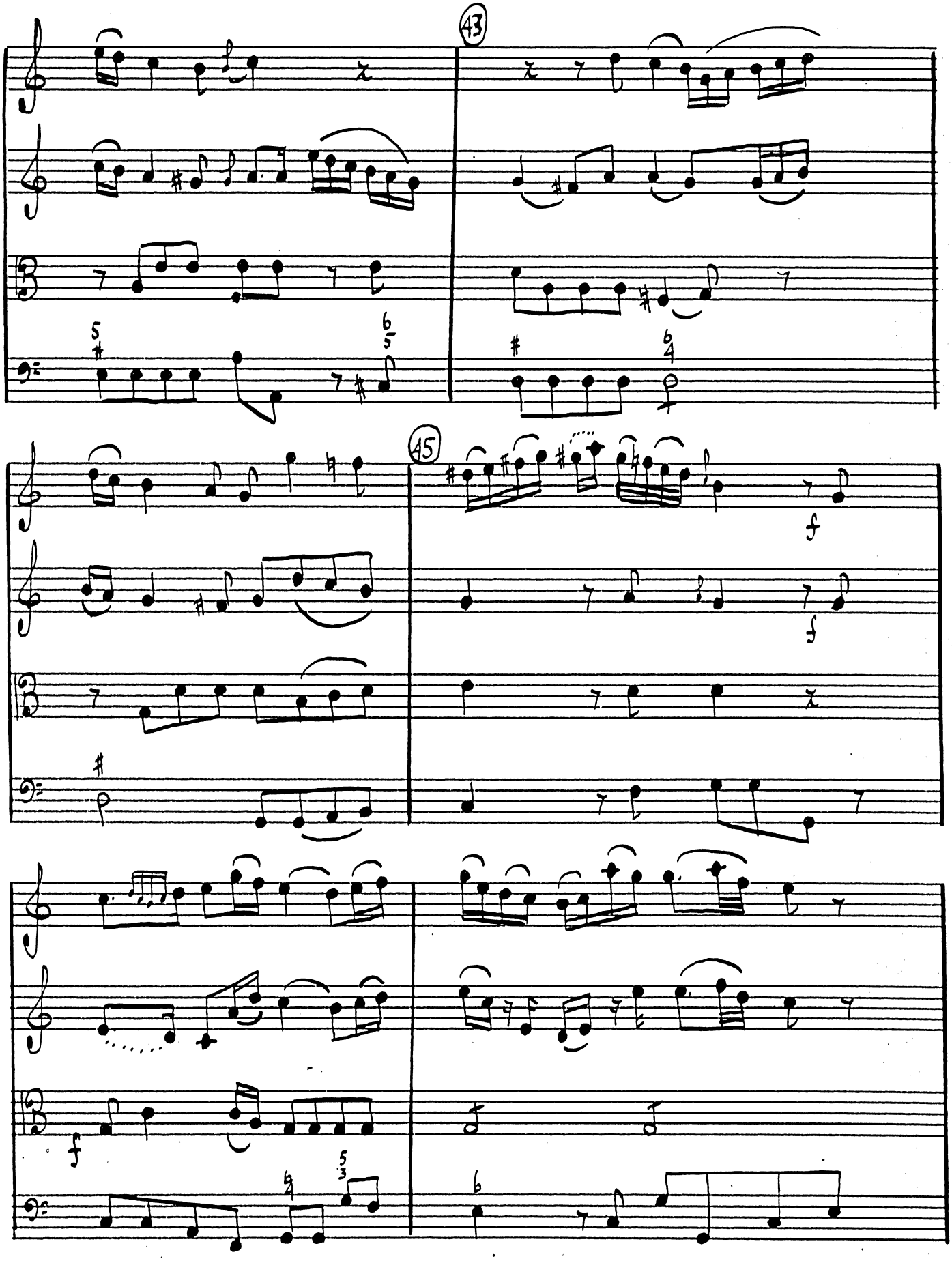

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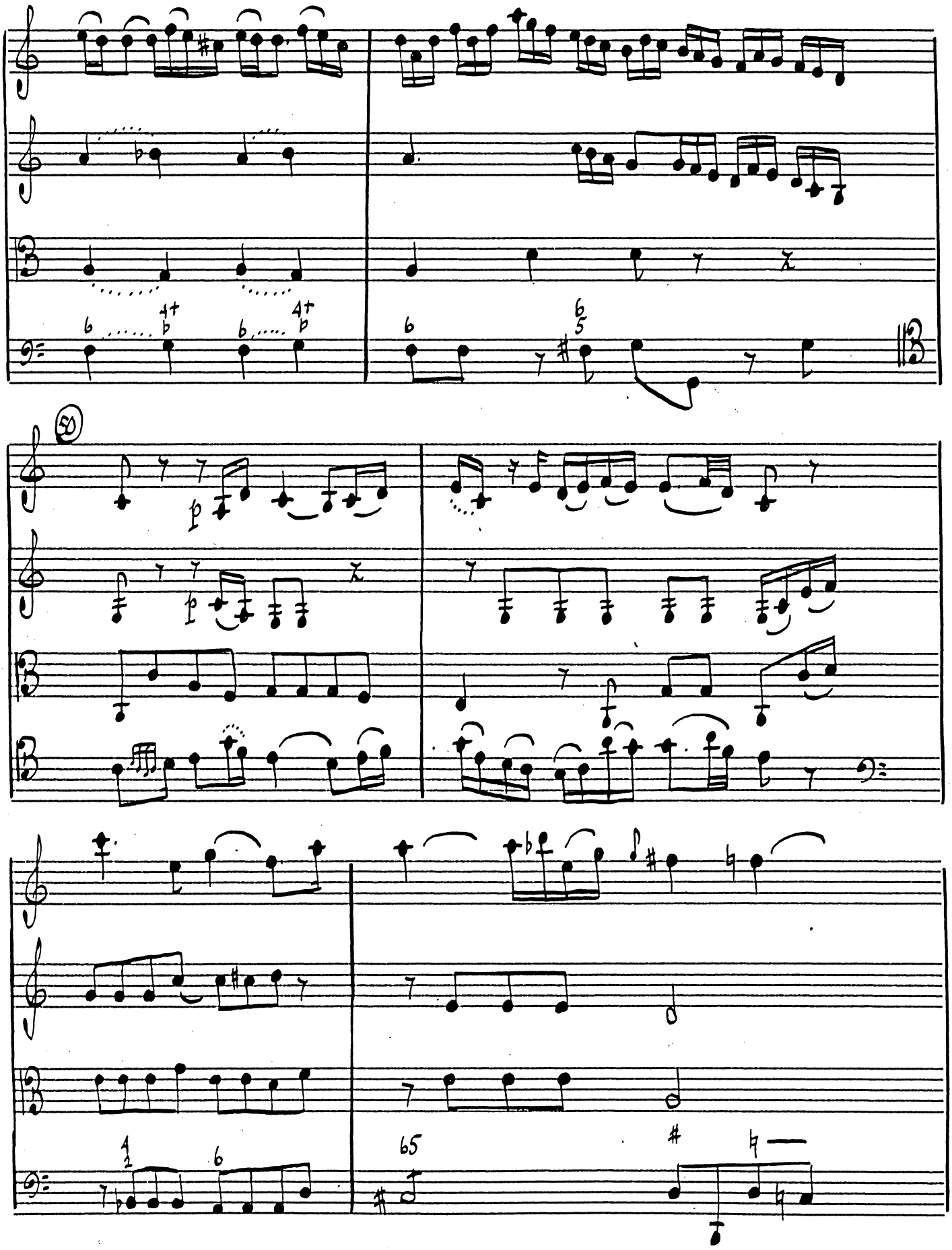

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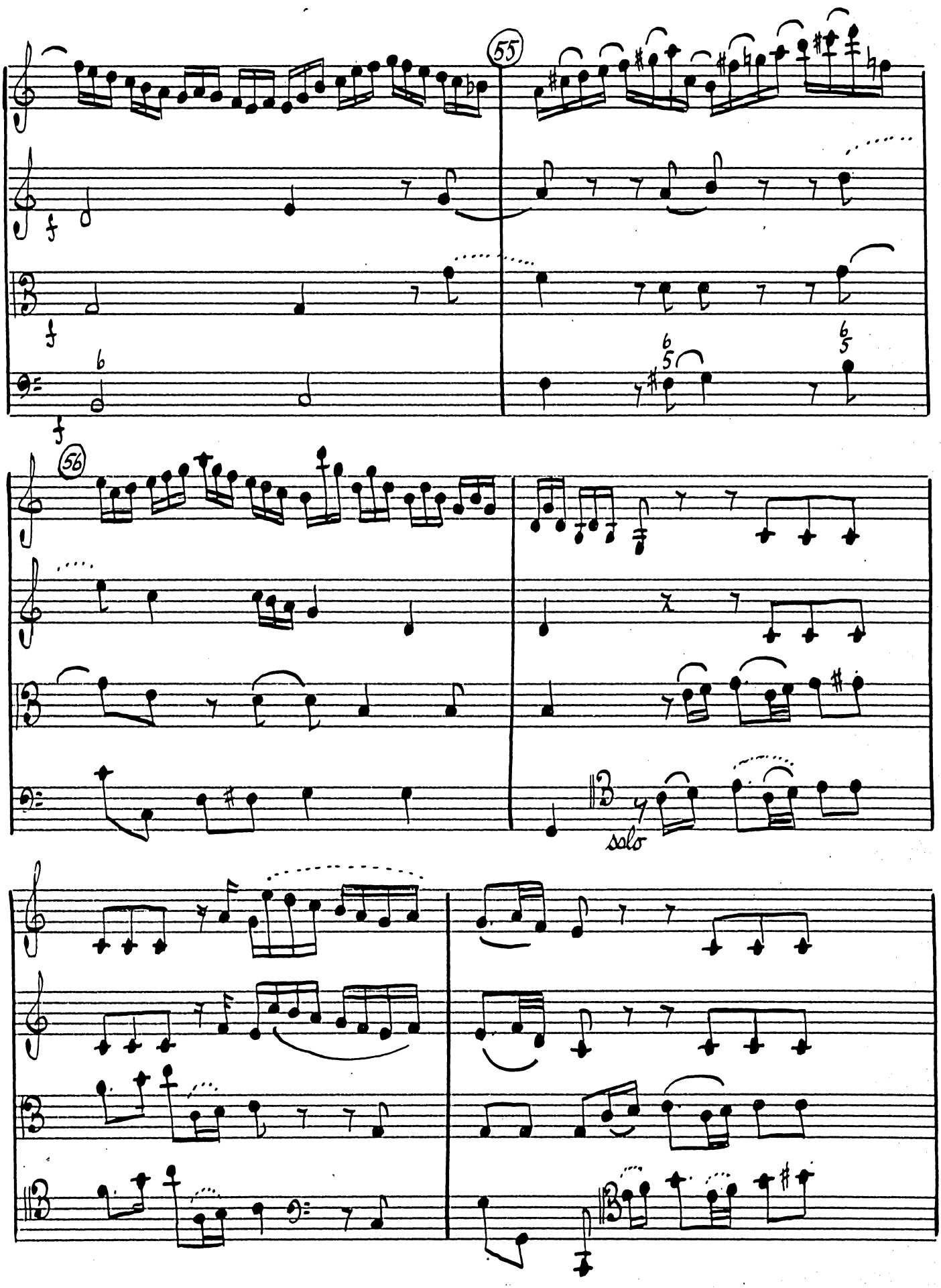

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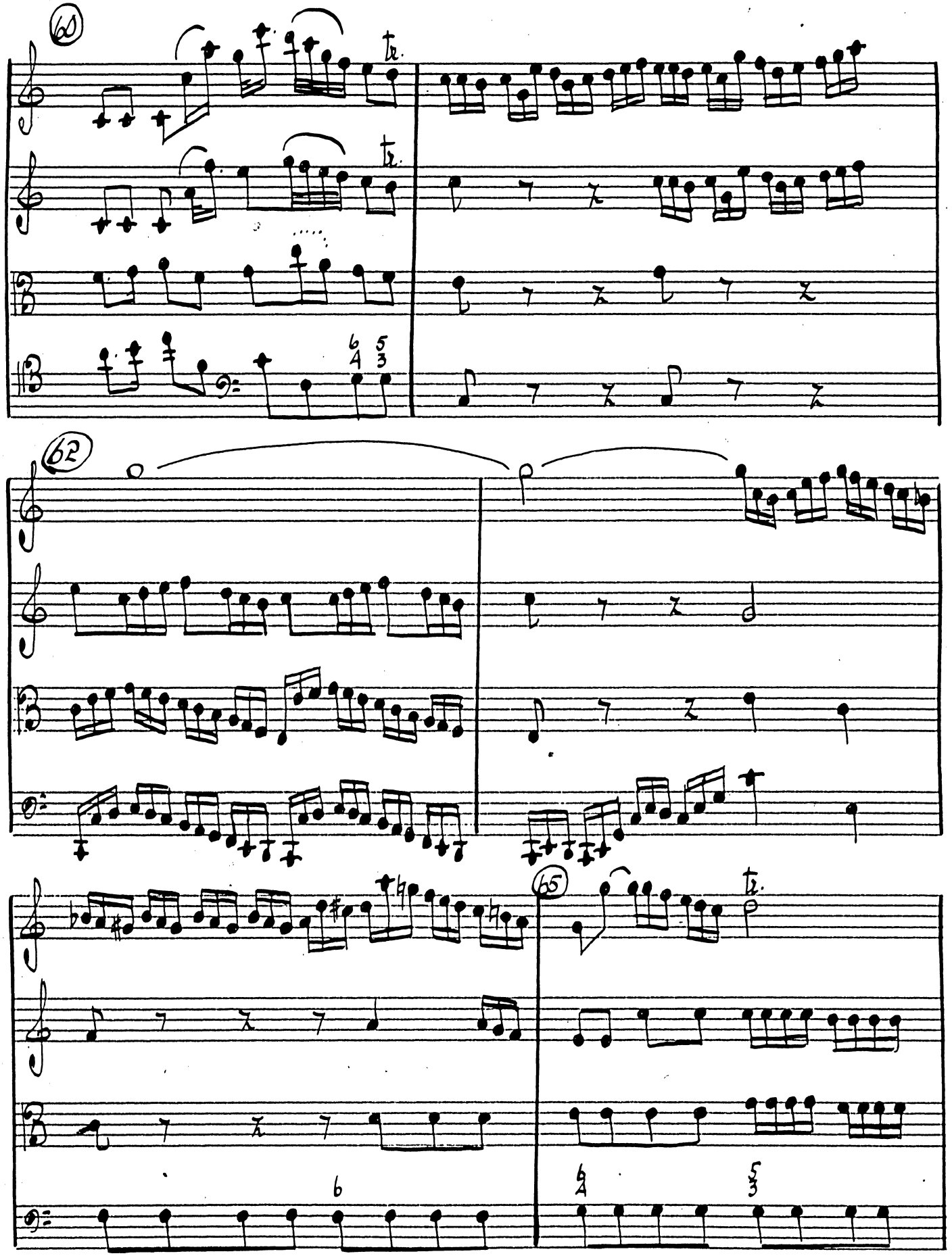

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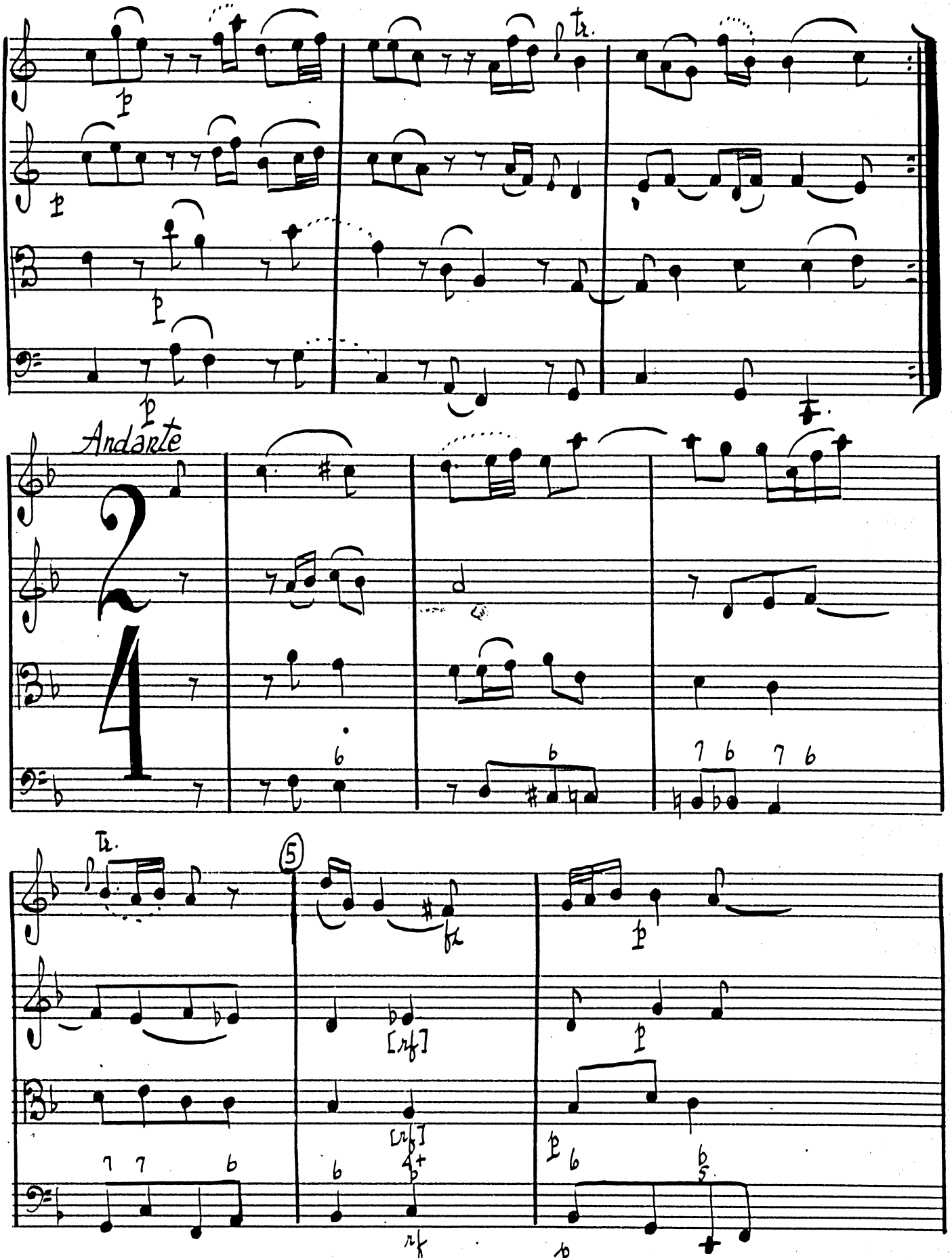

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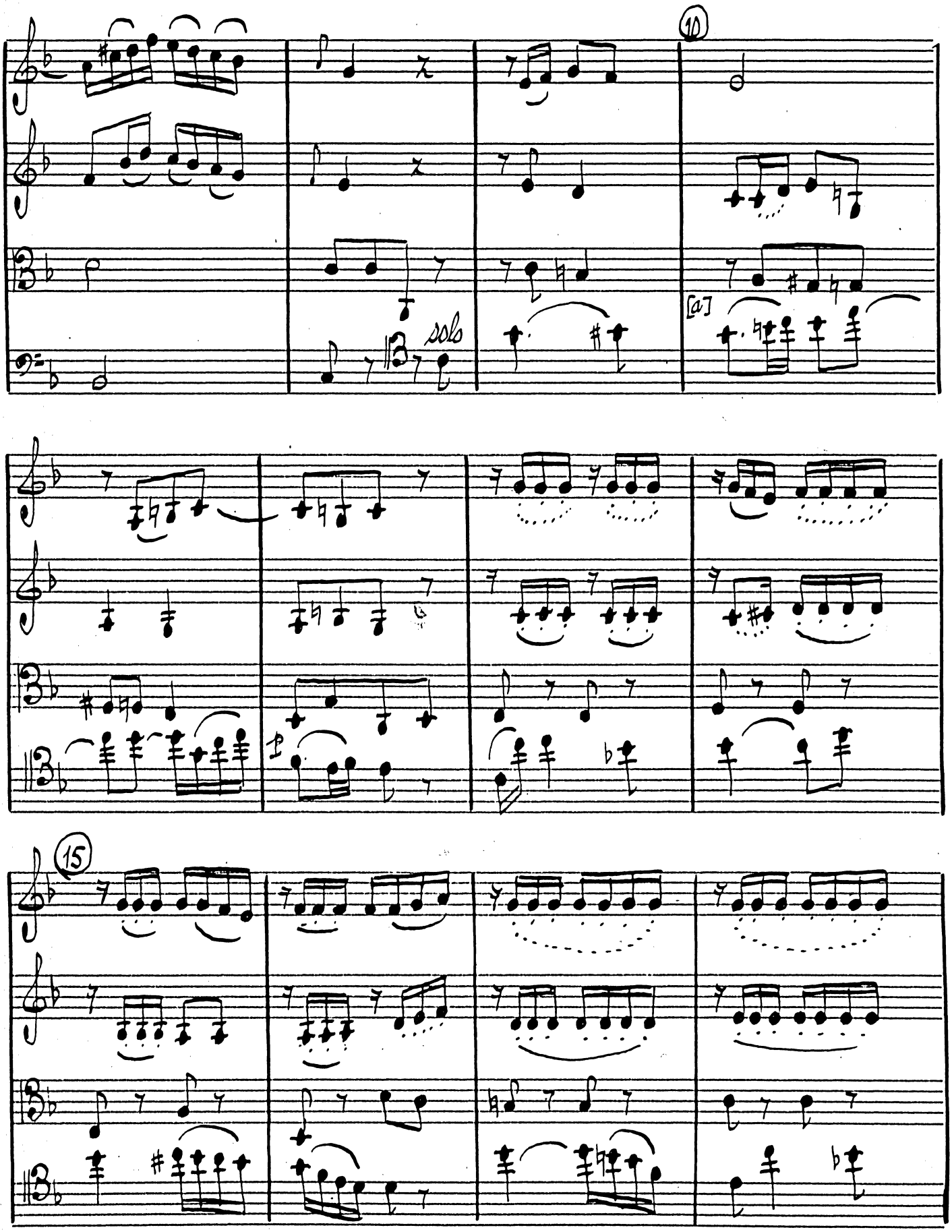

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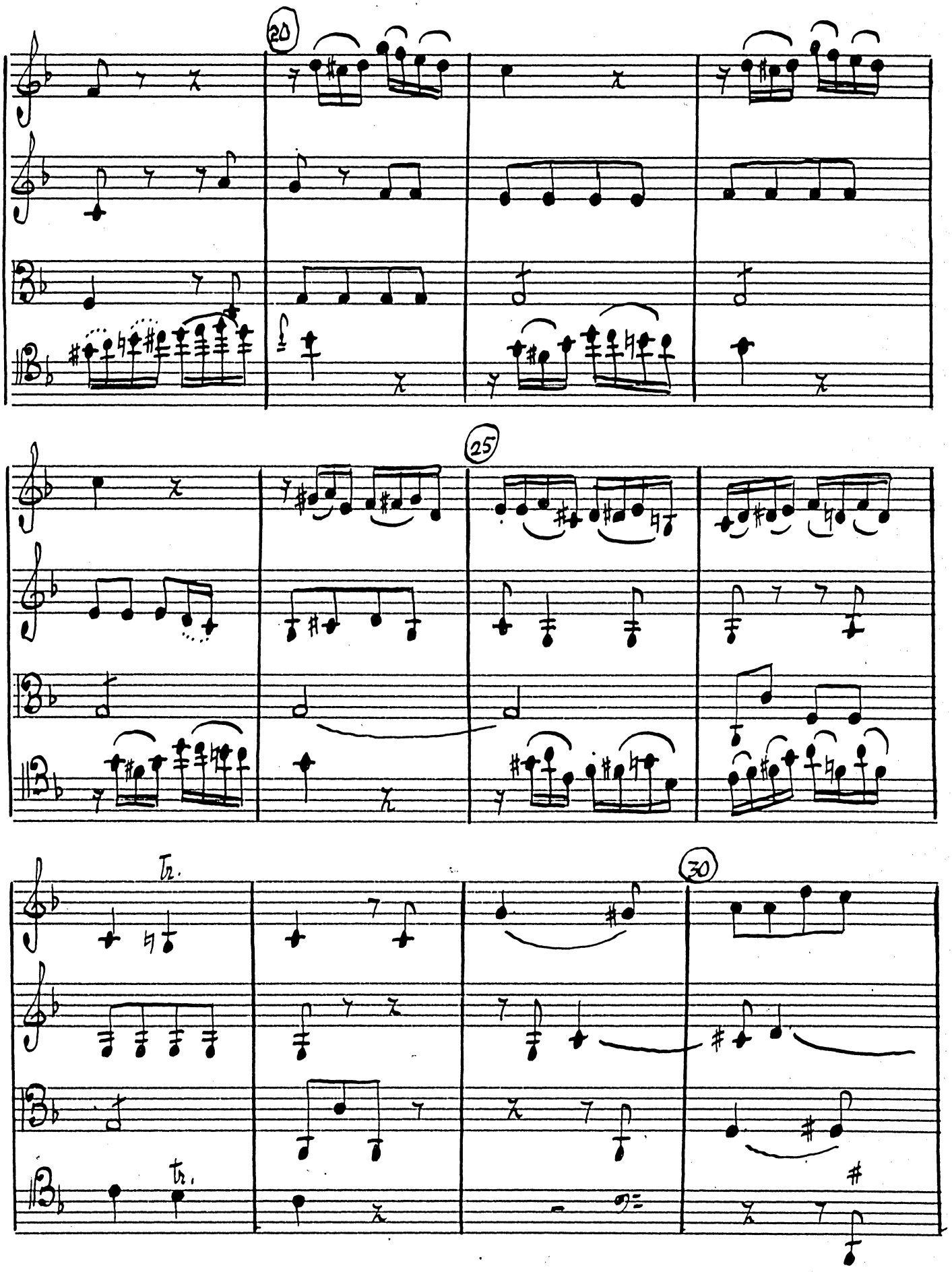

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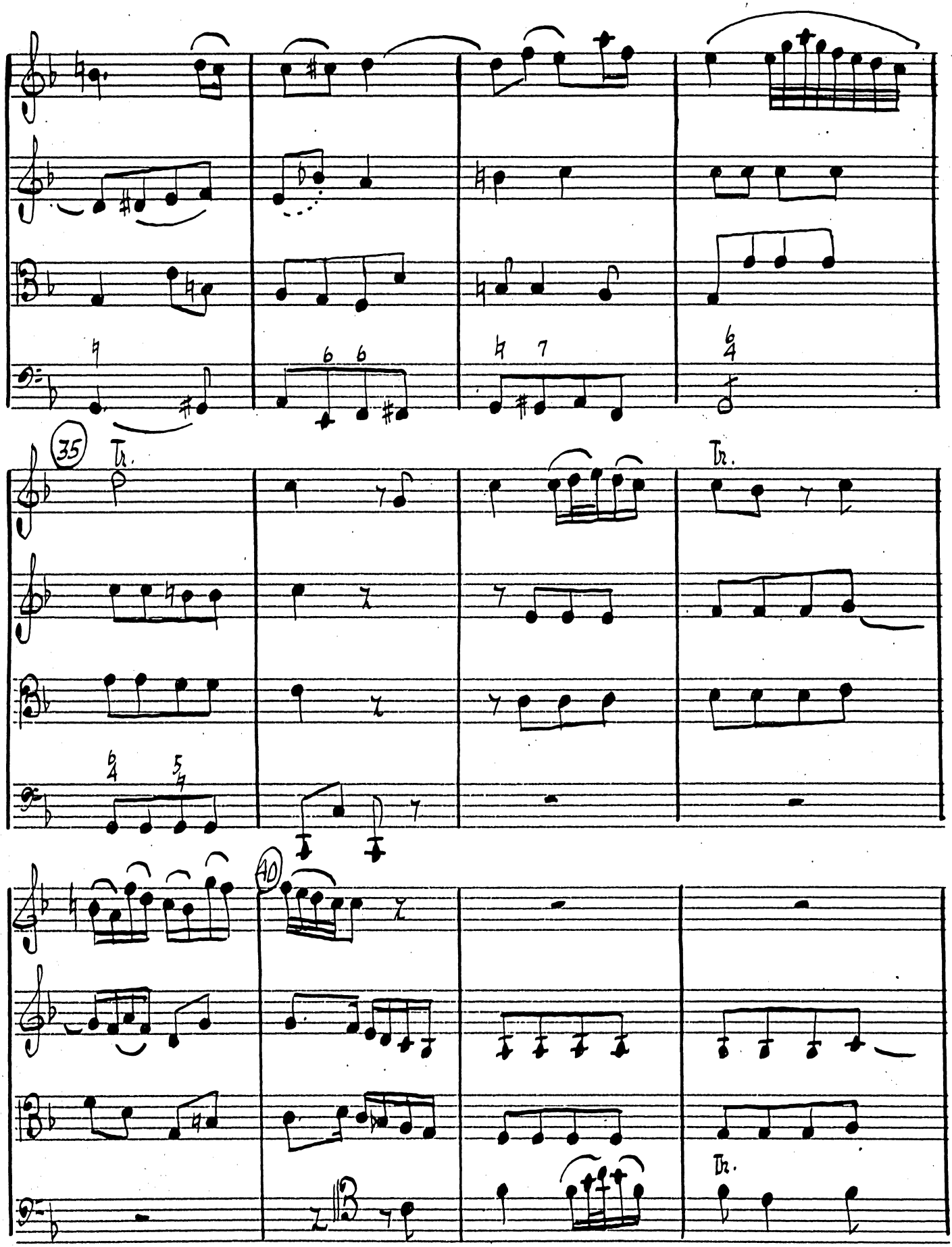

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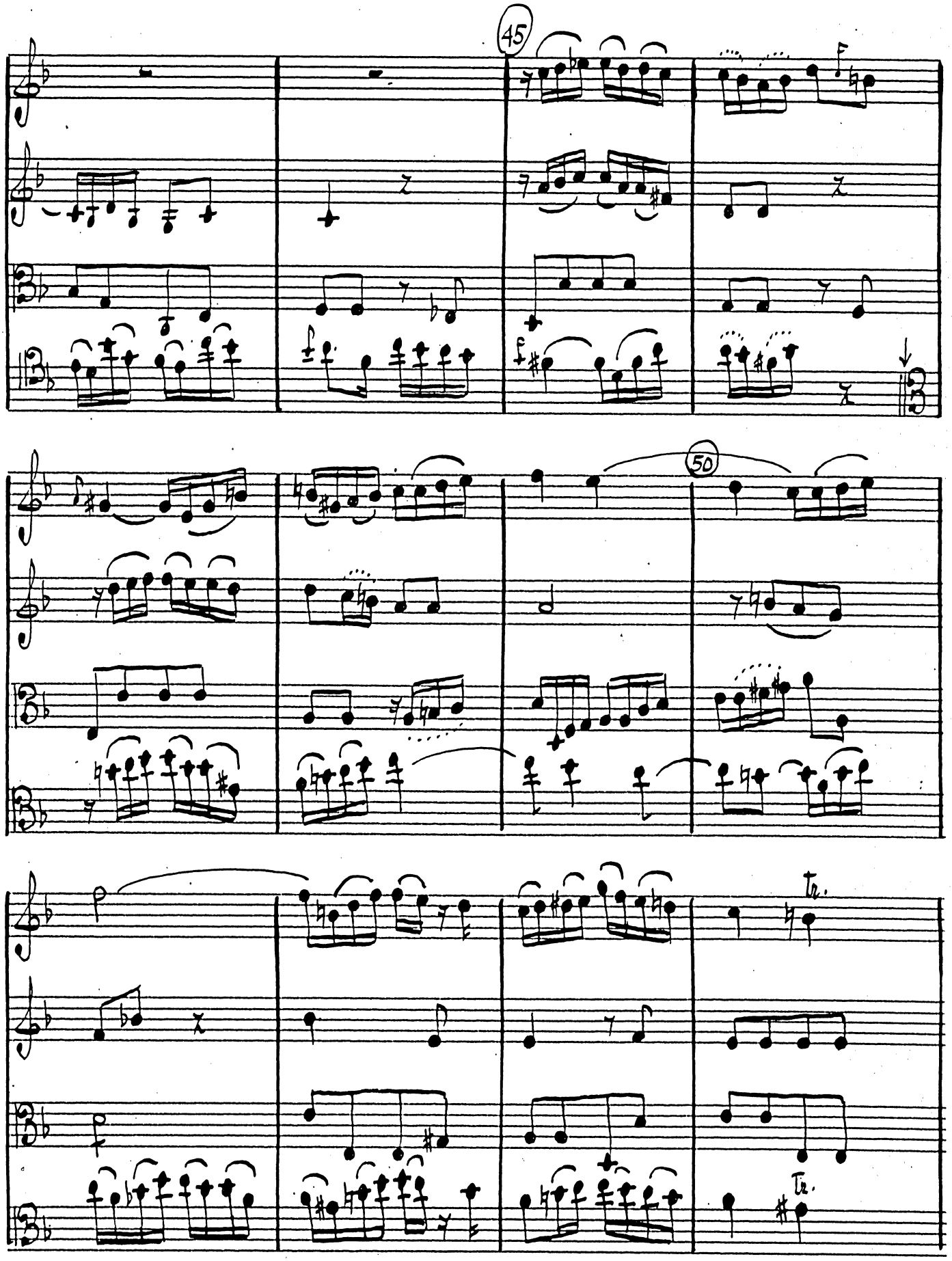

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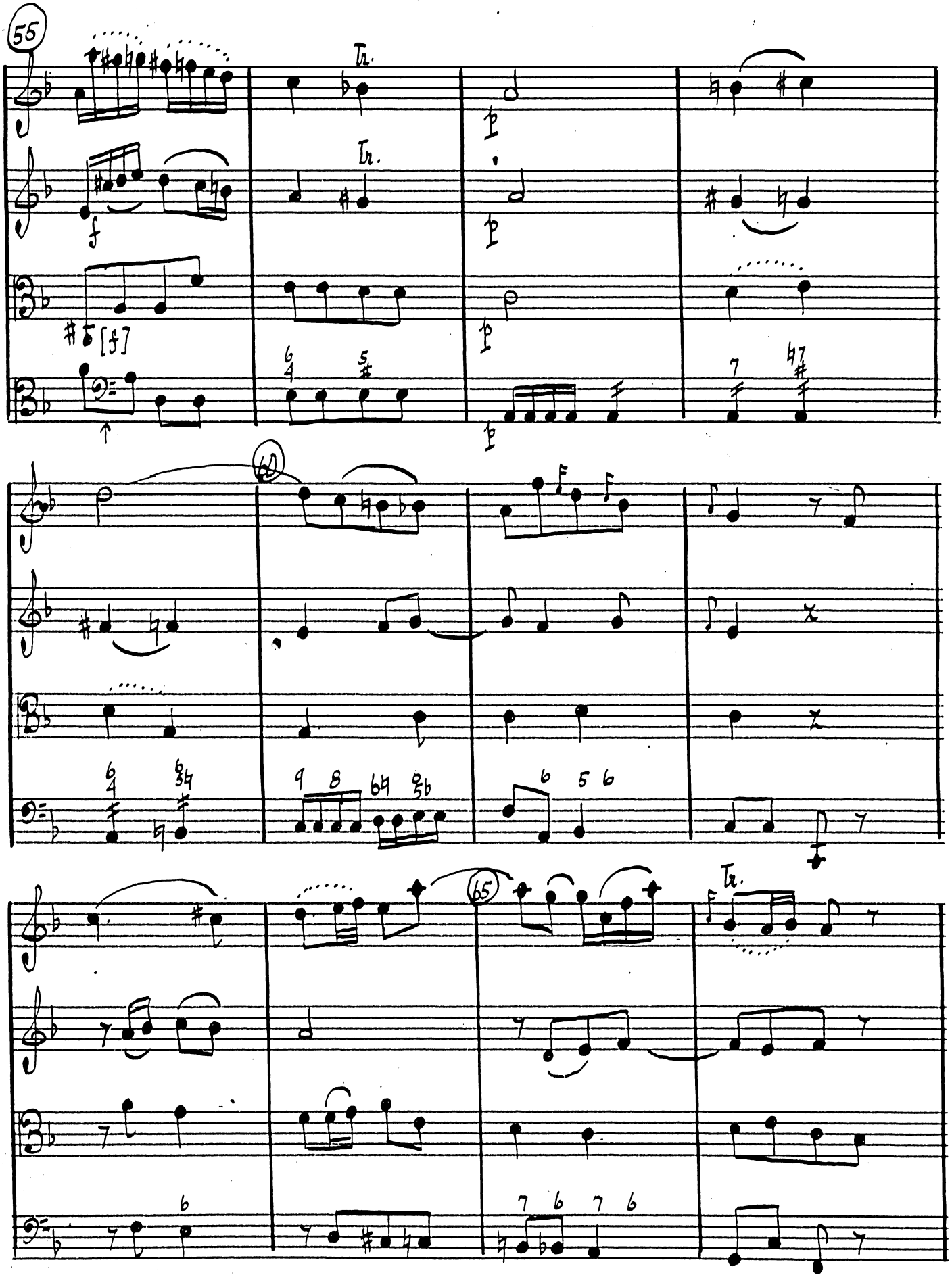

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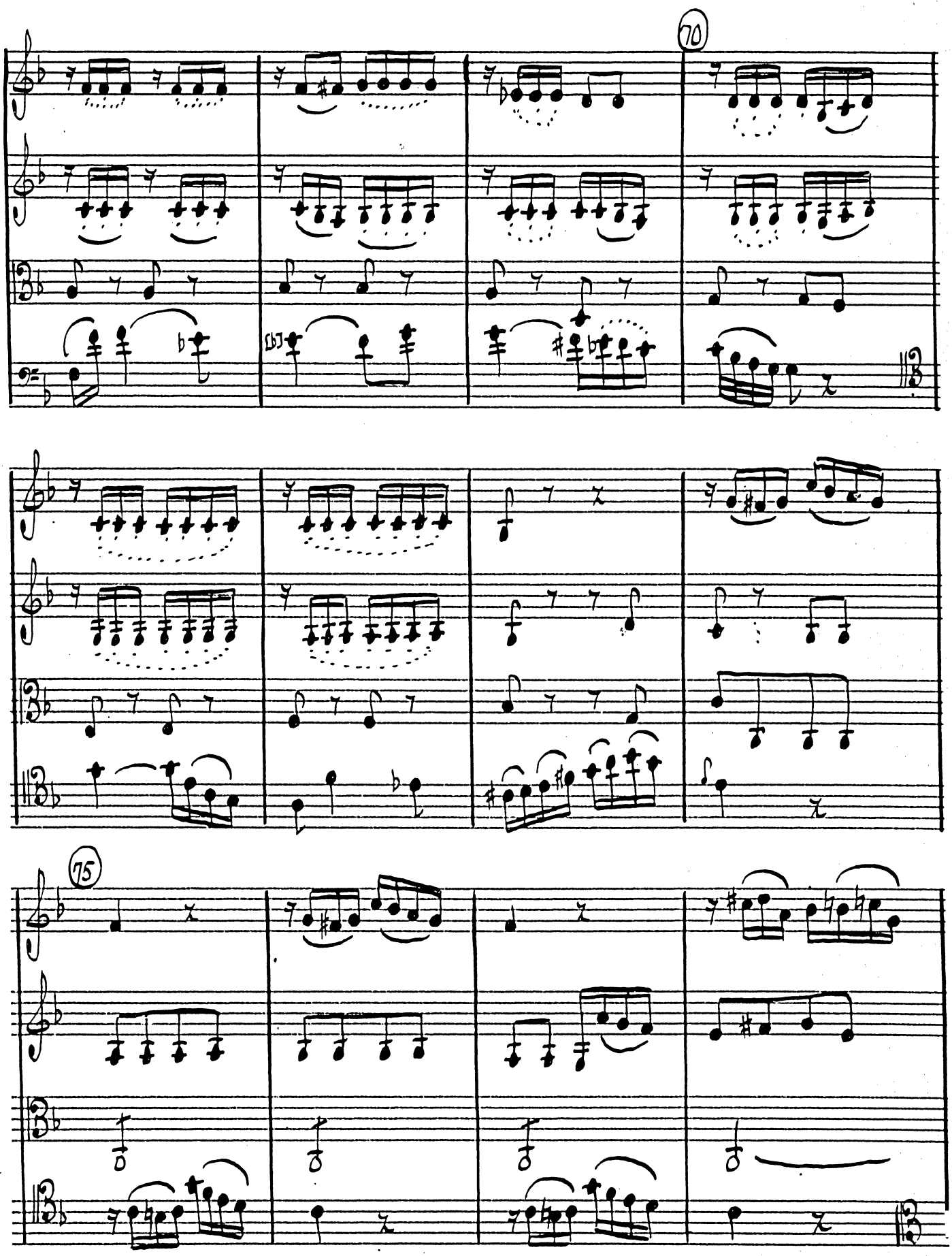

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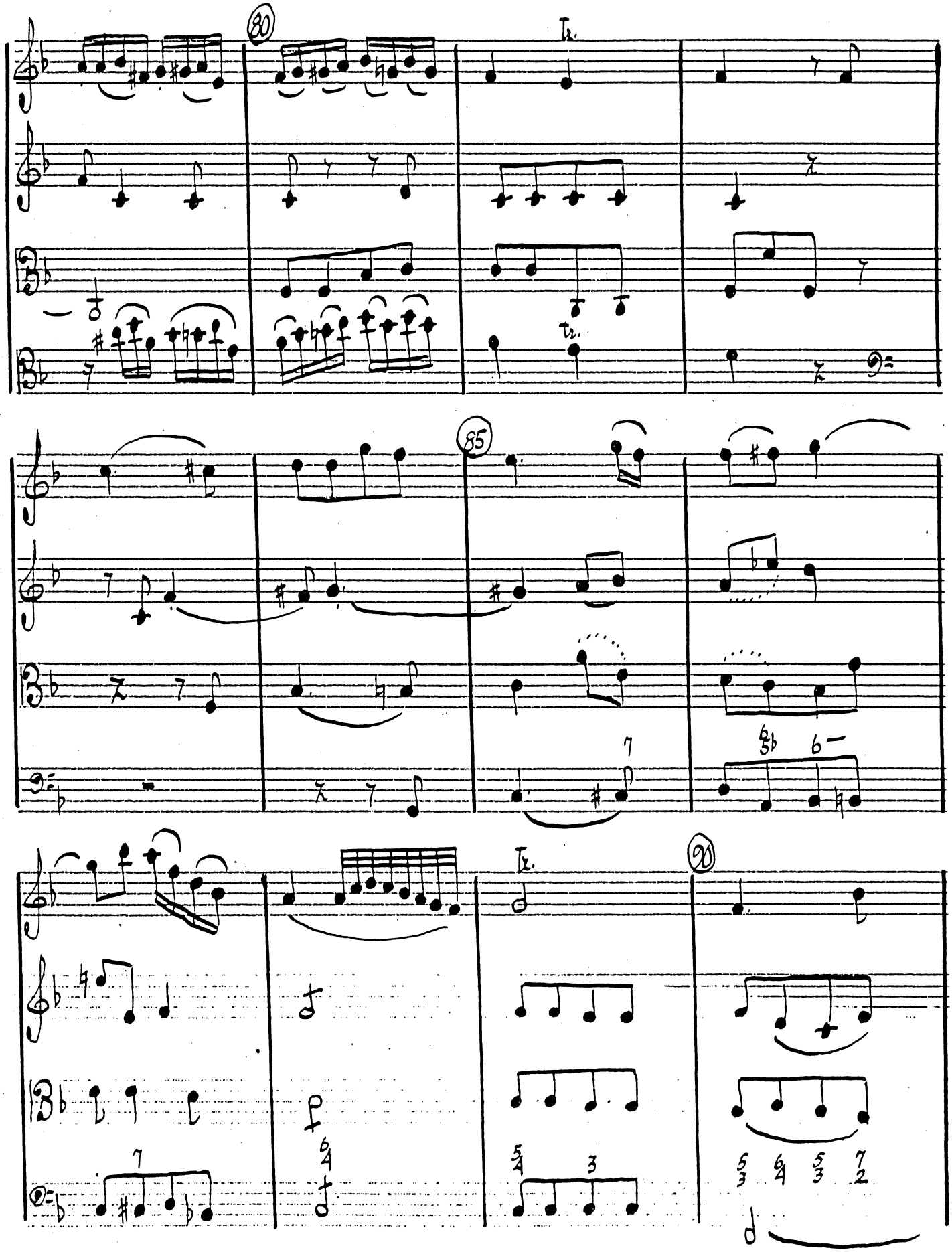
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tr.
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85
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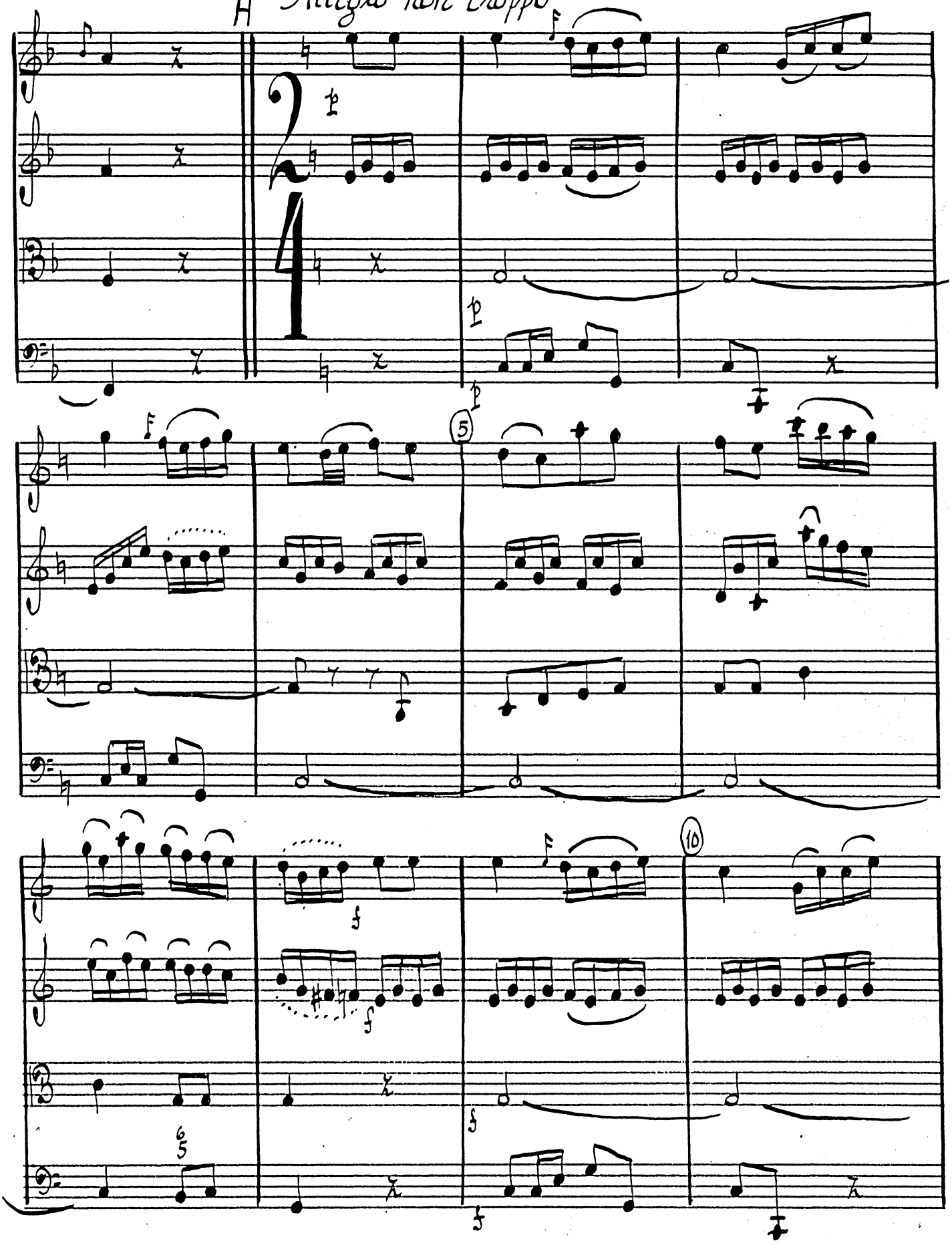
90

A Allegro non troppo



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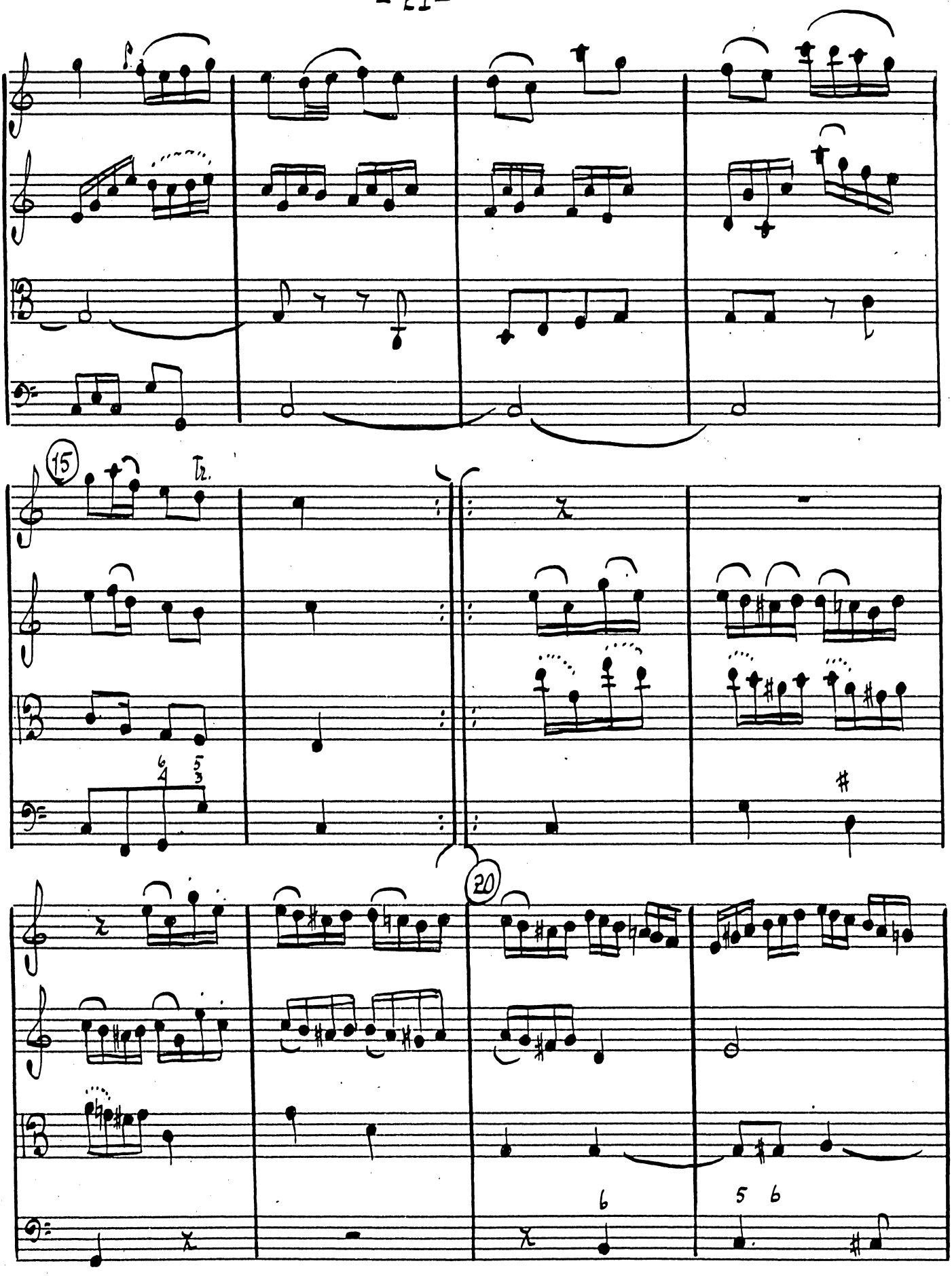

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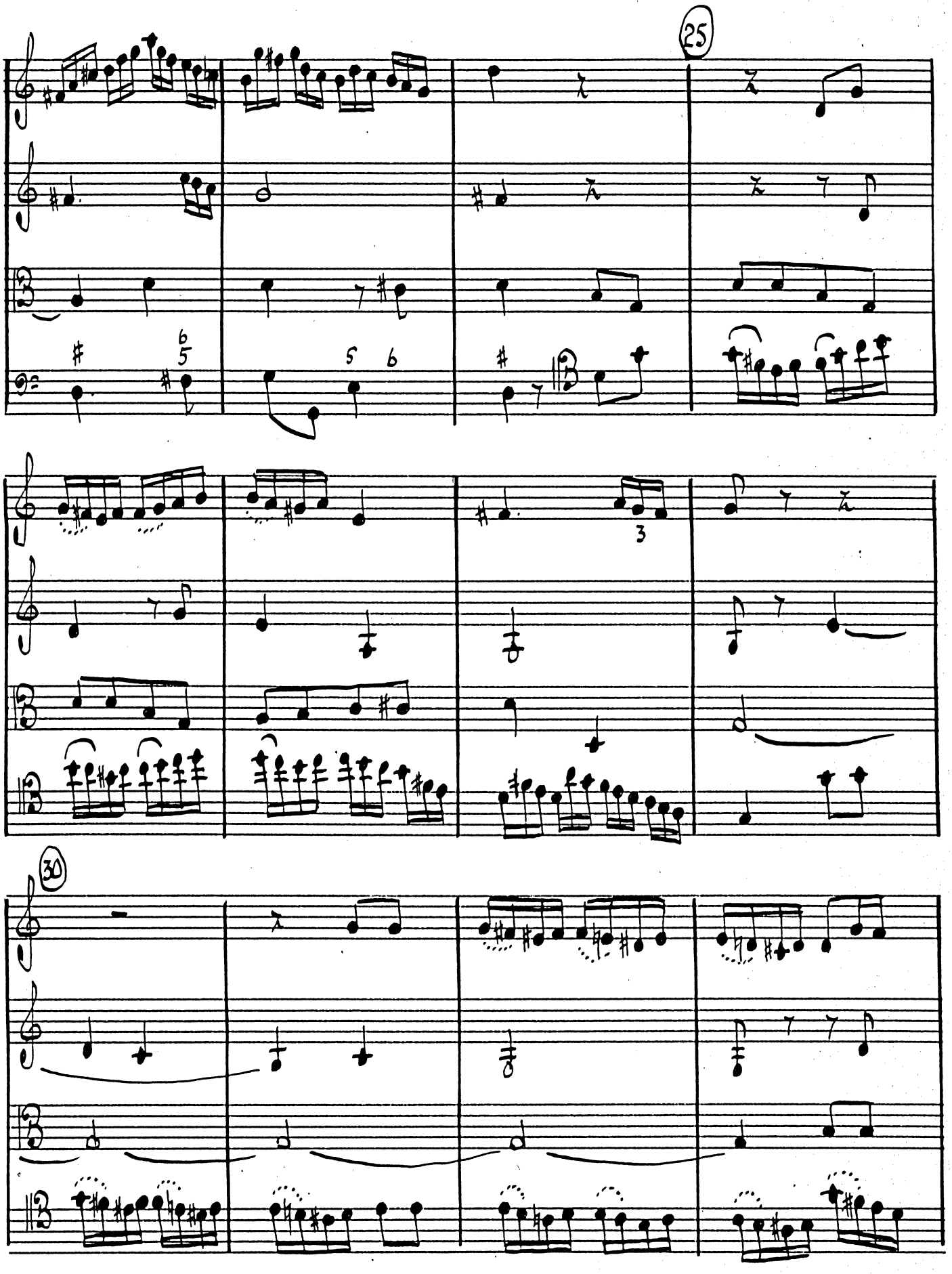

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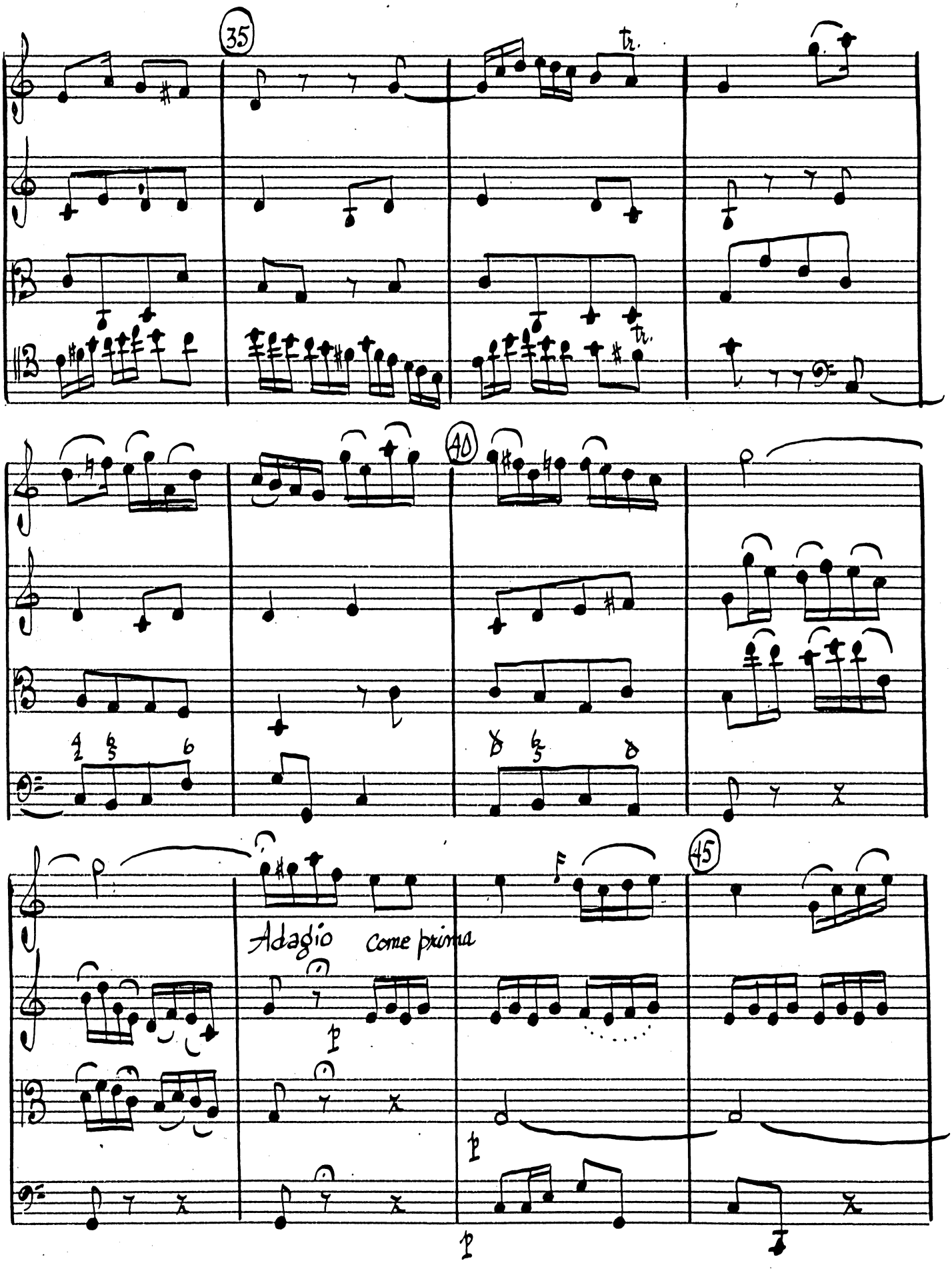

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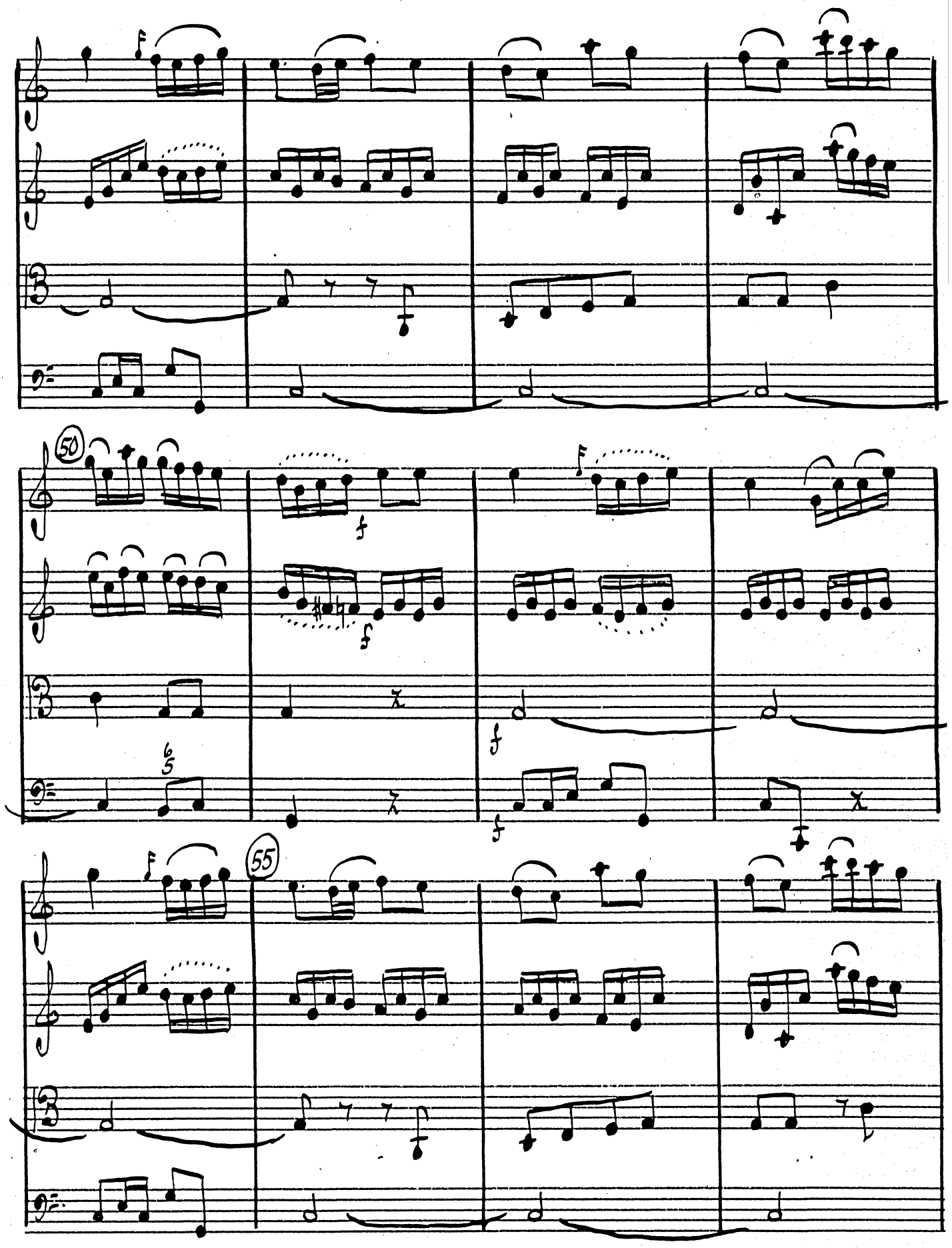

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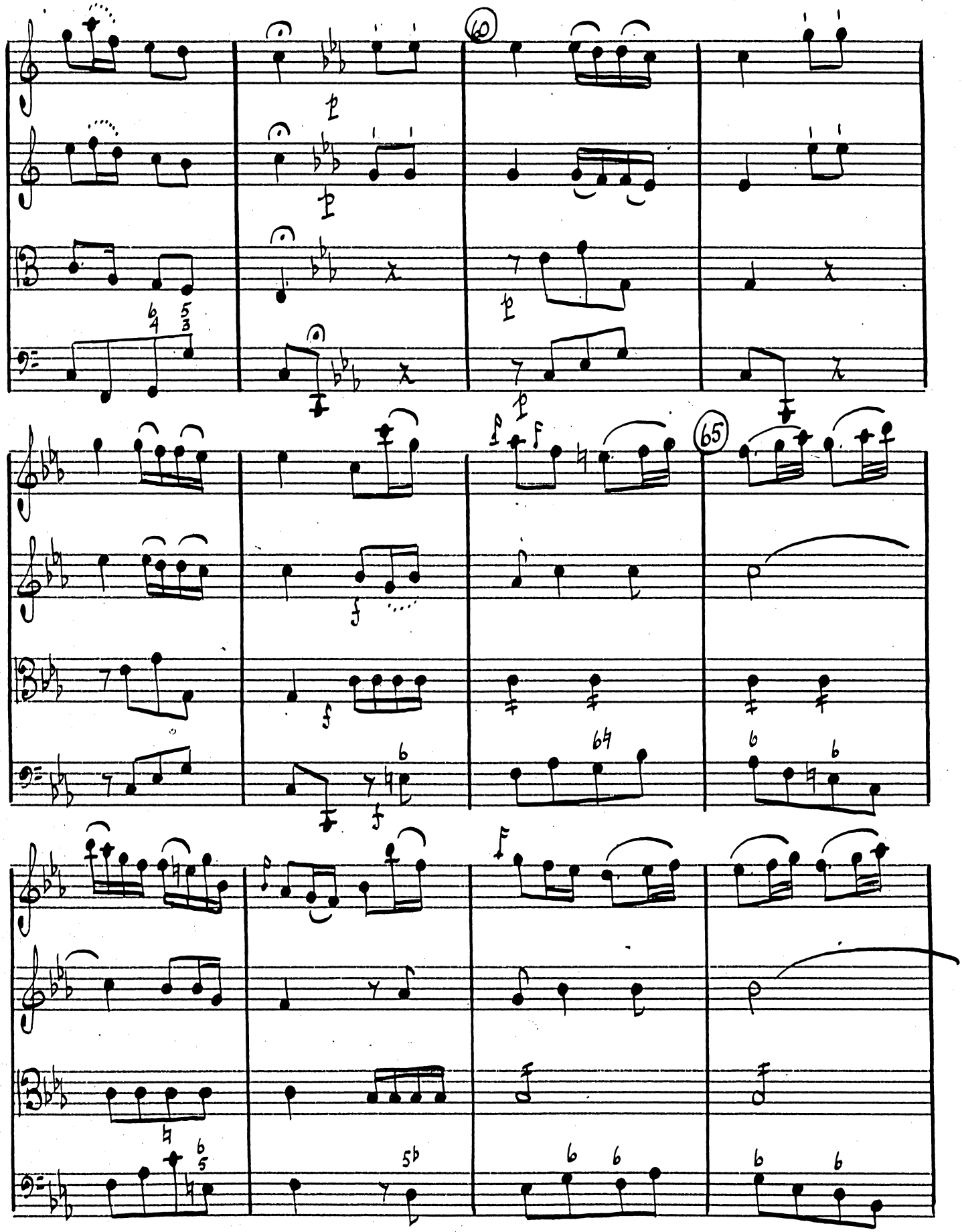

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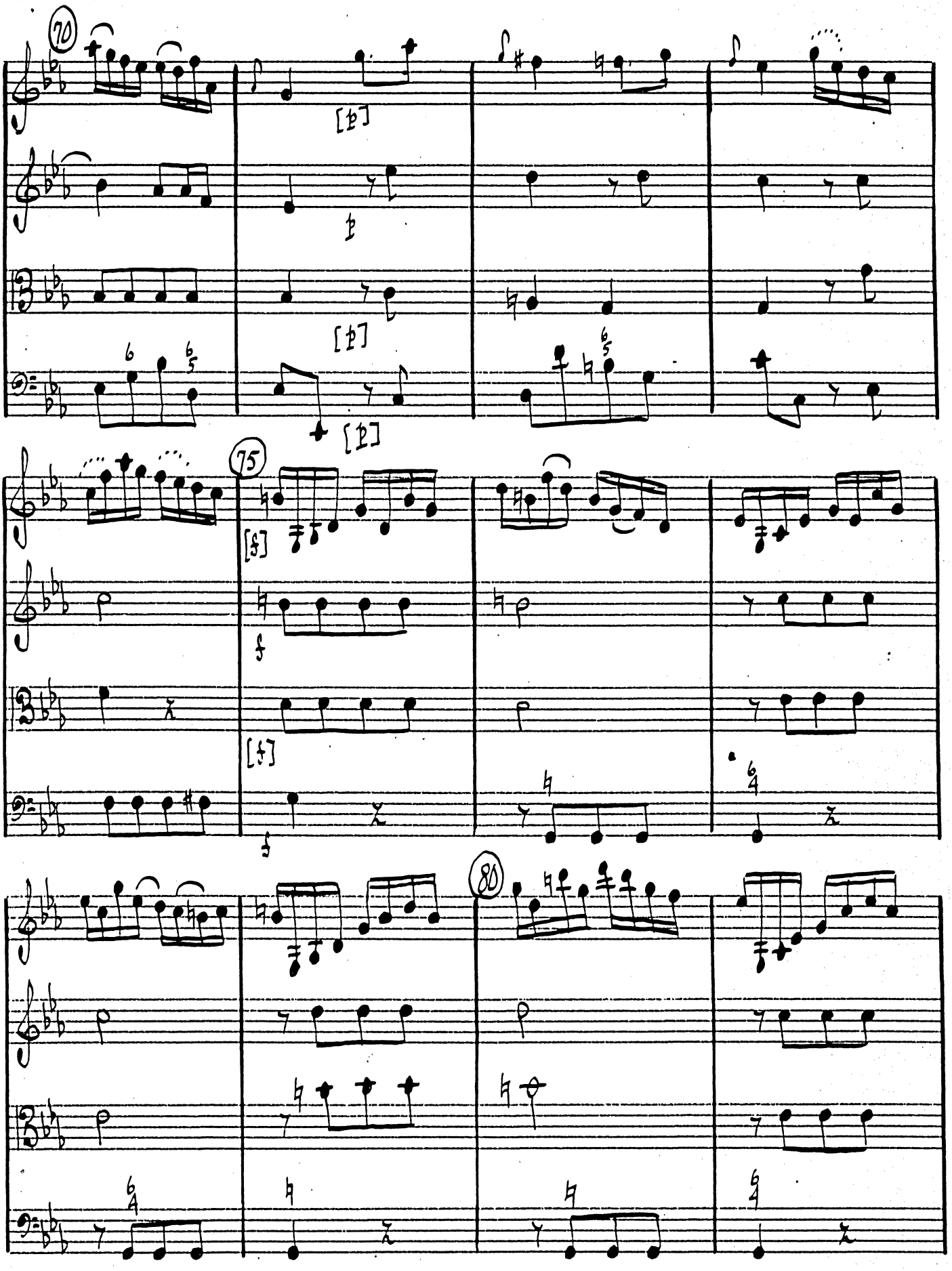

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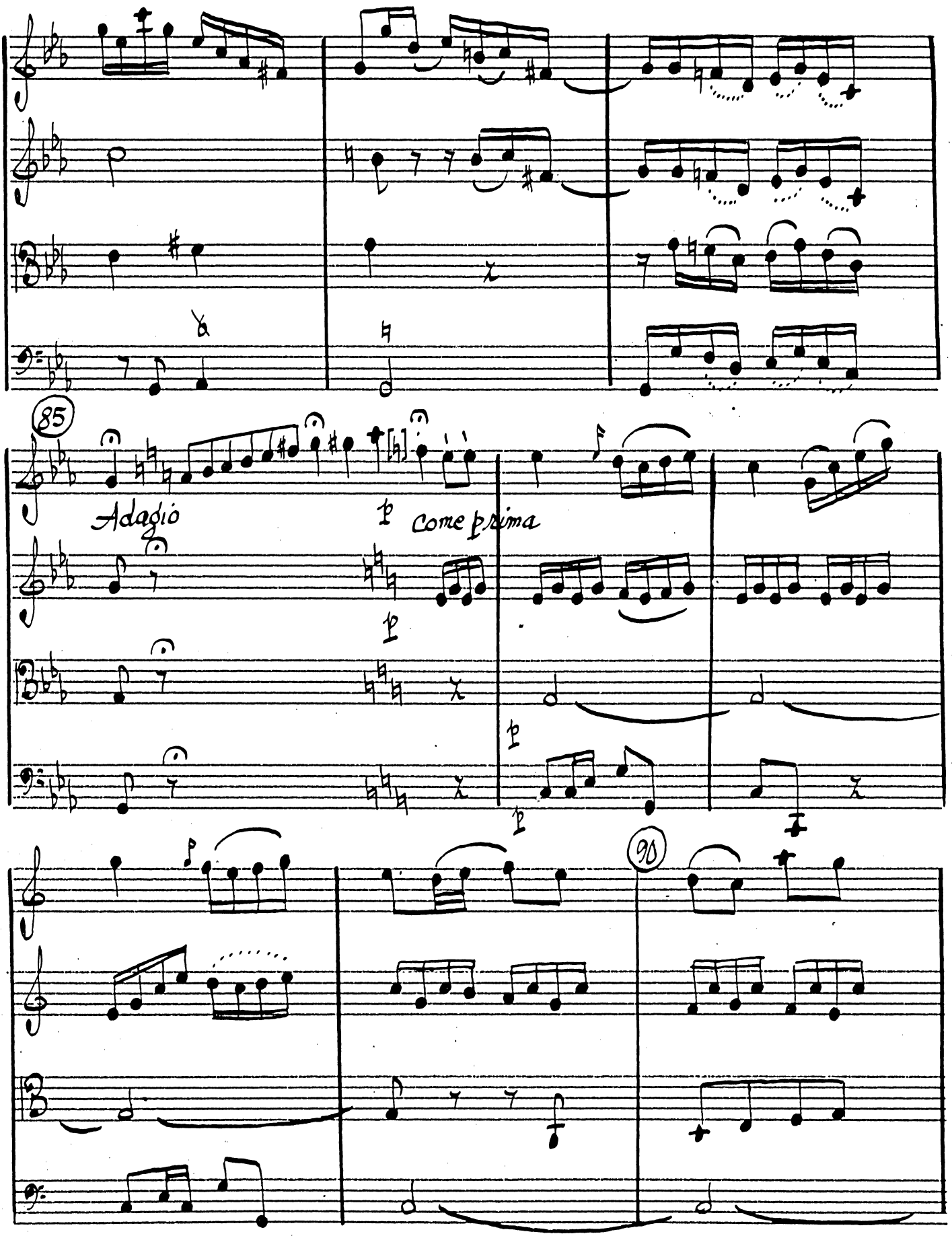

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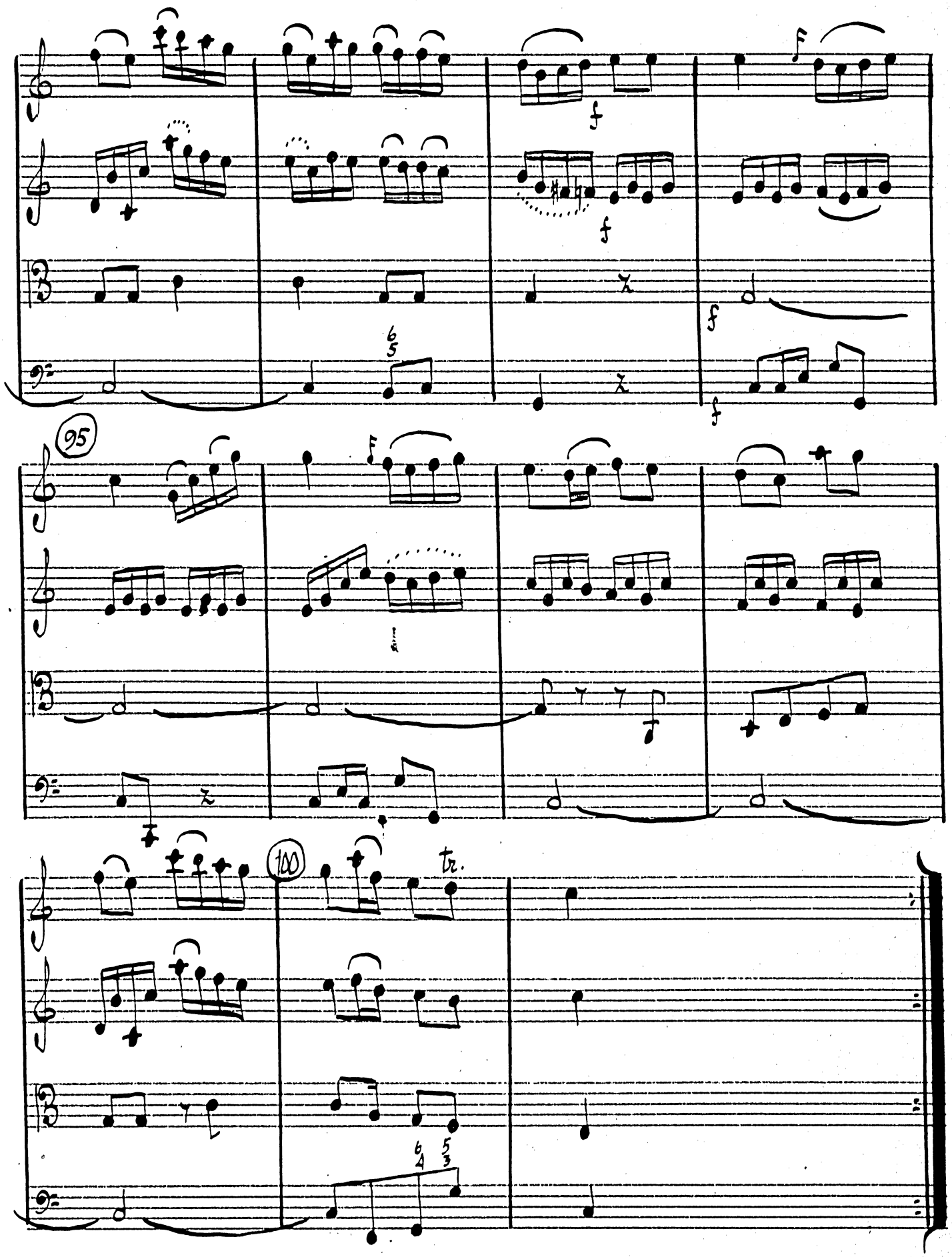

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