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TRANSCRIBING ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF LARGE CHORAL WORKS FOR THE ORGAN

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North Texas State University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

By

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Denton, Texas

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ii

Chapter

I. GENERAL PROBLEMS OF TRANSCRIBING ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENTS FOR THE ORGAN 1

II. PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN TRANSCRIBING SELECTED CHORUSES OF BACH, BRAHMS, VERDI, AND HONEGGER 11

Chorus No. 33 from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*
Chorus No. 67 from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*
Chorus No. 6 from Brahms's *German Requiem*
"Dies Irae" (1st section) from Verdi's *Requiem Mass*
"David's Death" from Honegger's *King David*

III. ORGAN TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SELECTED CHORUSES OF BACH, BRAHMS, VERDI AND HONEGGER 32

Chorus No. 33 from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*
Chorus No. 67 from Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*
Chorus No. 6 from Brahms's *German Requiem*
"Dies Irae" (1st section) from Verdi's *Requiem Mass*
"David's Death" from Honegger's *King David*

BIBLIOGRAPHY 82

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure — Page

1. Messiah, "O Thou that tellest," Schirmer edition 3
2. Messiah, "O Thou that tellest," Concordia edition 3
3. Messiah, "His yoke is easy," Schirmer edition 4
4. Messiah, "His yoke is easy," Concordia edition 4
5. Messiah, "Lift up your heads," Schirmer edition 5
6. Messiah, "Lift up your heads," Concordia edition 5
7. Elijah, "Call Him louder," Wiener edition . . . 6
8. Elijah, "Call Him louder," Schirmer edition . . 7
9. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition 11
10. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 12
11. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition 12
12. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 13
13. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 13
14. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition 14
15. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 15

16. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition 15

17. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 16

18. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition 16

19. St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription 17

20. St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Eulenburg edition 18

21. St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Organ Transcription 18

22. St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Eulenburg edition 18

23. St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Organ Transcription 19

24. German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition 20

25. German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription . . . 20

26. German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition 21

27. German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription . . . 21

28. German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition 22

29. German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription . . . 22

30. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 23

31. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 24

32. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 24

33. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 25

34. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 25

35. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 26

36. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 26

37. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 27

38. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 27

39. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 28

40. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition 28

41. Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription . . . 29

42. King David, "David's Death," Organ Transcription 29

43. King David, "David's Death," Foetisch edition . 30

44. King David, "David's Death," Foetisch edition . 30

45. King David, "David's Death," Organ Transcription 31

CHAPTER I

GENERAL PROBLEMS OF TRANSCRIBING ORCHESTRAL ACCOMPANIMENTS FOR THE ORGAN

The art of transcribing orchestral accompaniments for organ is one of the most difficult problems which organists must face. Although a few will become professional recitalists, most organists will at one time or other have a church position and be required to play oratorios and other large choral compositions which were originally scored for orchestra. Several of the most popular of these works (Handel's Messiah, Saint-Saëns's Christmas Oratorio, Fauré's Requiem) have already been arranged for organ, but the majority are available only in piano reductions. The main body of the paper deals with this latter group of works, for it is here that the most urgent problems exist. However, some of the organ arrangements now available need considerable revision because they try to imitate the whole orchestra and are virtually impossible to play. Therefore, some preliminary comments on already existing transcriptions seem necessary.

Since Handel's Messiah is probably performed more often than any other large choral work, two of the most popular editions are discussed here in some detail. The two editions

used are the Concordia edition, arranged by Richard T. Gore, and the Schirmer edition, arranged by Warren Hutton and Mary Lou Robinson. The arrangers of both editions have tried to make the organ arrangement as simple as possible and still retain the original style of the composer. In the introduction of the Concordia edition Gore writes, "In preparing this organ reduction I have three objectives: to remain as faithful as possible to the music as Handel performed it, to translate the orchestral writing into the idiom of the organ, to produce a score playable by organists of average attainments."[1] Although the score may "remain as faithful as possible to the music as Handel intended it" it is questionable whether it can be played by organists of "average attainments."

The Schirmer edition, on the other hand, is far less difficult to play, is much more logical, and produces the same general effect. It does not contain nearly so many difficult pedal passages as does the Concordia edition, and many pieces are arranged for manuals only.

The following examples (Figures 1 and 2) are taken from the alto solo "O Thou that tellest good tidings."

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[1]Richard T. Gore, editor, Handel's Messiah (St. Louis, 1959), Introductory Note.

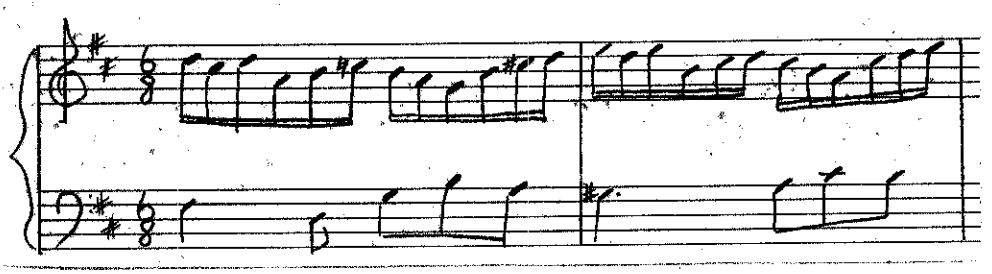

Fig. 1--Messiah, "O Thou that tellest good tidings," Schirmer edition, p. 29.

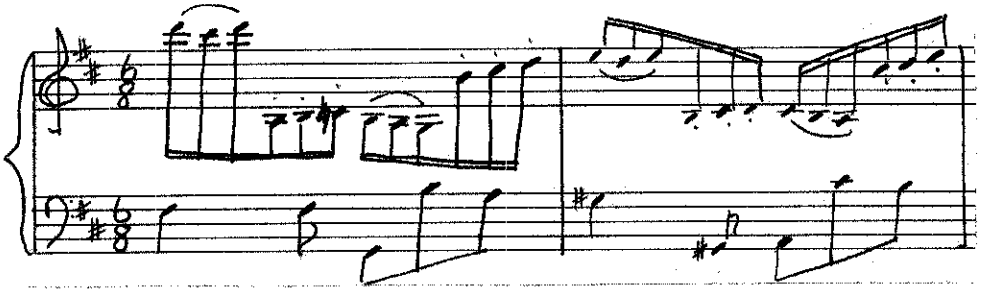

Fig. 2--Messiah, "O Thou that tellest good tidings," Concordia edition, p. 41.

The example shown above from the Concordia edition contains extremely large intervals which are very difficult to play on the organ when taken at a rapid tempo. The same passage in the Schirmer edition produces a similar effect but is much easier to play. The same notes are used but many have been transposed up or down an octave to make the score more practical to play.

The following examples (Figures 3 and 4) are taken from the chorus "His yoke is easy."

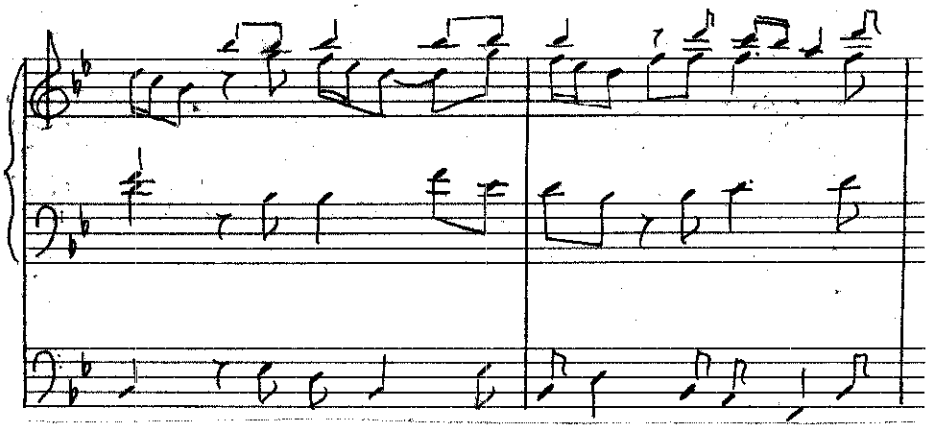

Fig. 3--Messiah, "His yoke is easy," Schirmer edition, p. 69.

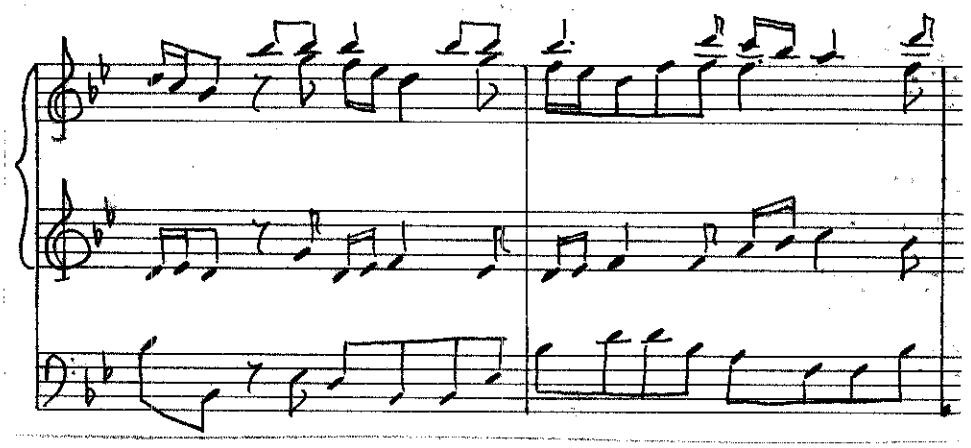

Fig. 4--Messiah, "His yoke is easy," Concordia edition, p. 92.

Many of the bass notes have been transposed down an octave in the Schirmer edition, making the pedal part much easier to play. Throughout this chorus and most of the other choruses the pedal part is frequently too high in the Concordia edition to be played with ease. The manual parts are much more complicated in the Concordia edition and much more difficult to play.

Many passages which are written very simply in the Schirmer edition are clumsy and difficult to read in the

Concordia edition. The following example (Figure 5) from "Lift up your heads" is very easy to read and play from the Schirmer edition.

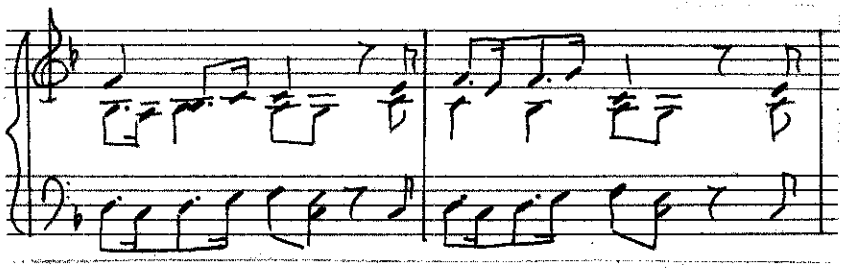

Fig. 5--Messiah, "Lift up your heads," Schirmer edition, p. 103.

The same example from the Concordia edition (Figure 6) is difficult both to read and to play.

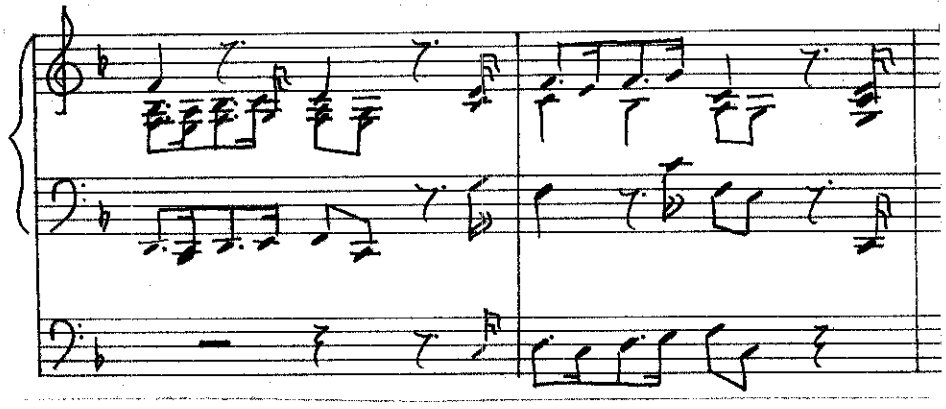

Fig. 6--Messiah, "Lift up your heads," Concordia edition, p. 131.

The insertion of the pedal for one measure contributes nothing useful and makes the passage considerably more difficult to play.

Although many other examples could be cited, the ones discussed here are representative of the two scores. Even

the Schirmer edition, though much more practical to play than the Concordia edition, contains some passages which are unnecessarily difficult to play.

Since only a few large choral works have been arranged for organ, the organist will usually play from a piano reduction. Before attempting to play a piano arrangement on the organ, the organist should become thoroughly familiar with the orchestral score. Most piano arrangements contain only the string parts of the orchestral score and are therefore misleading, because many important parts in the other sections of the orchestra are omitted. In "Call Him louder" from Mendelssohn's Elijah the strings have a rapid scale passage while the wind instruments sustain chords (Figure 7).

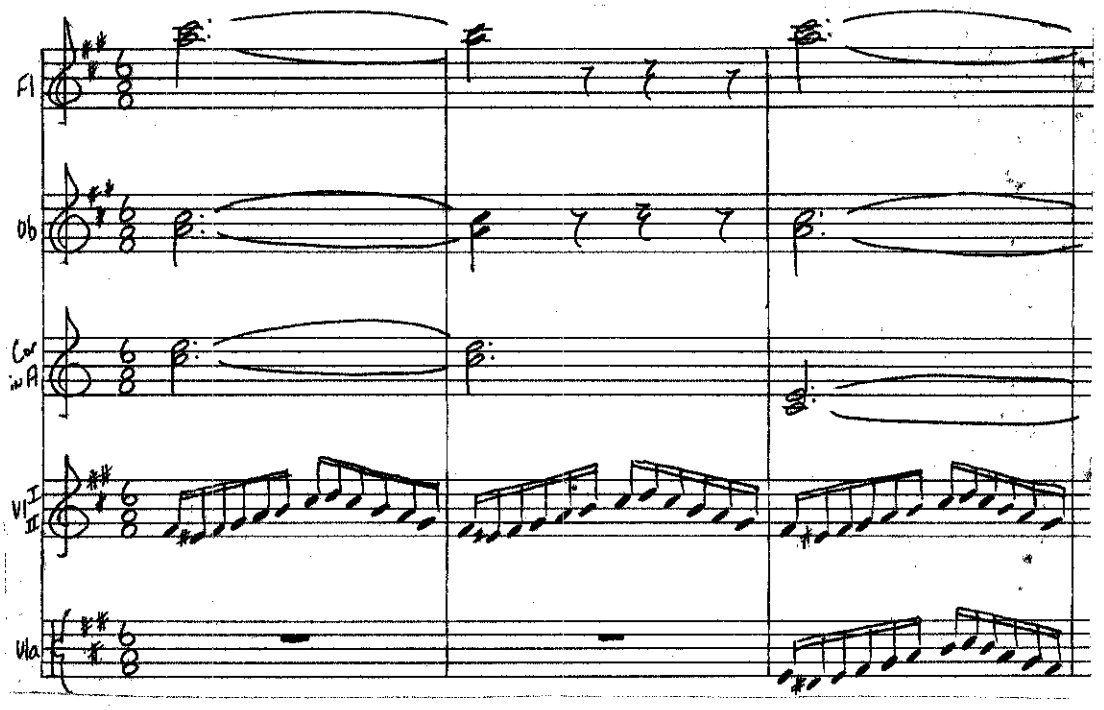

Fig. 7--Elijah, "Call Him louder," Wiener Philarmonisches Verlag edition, p. 167.

The piano score (Figure 8) contains only the string parts, completely omitting the harmony.

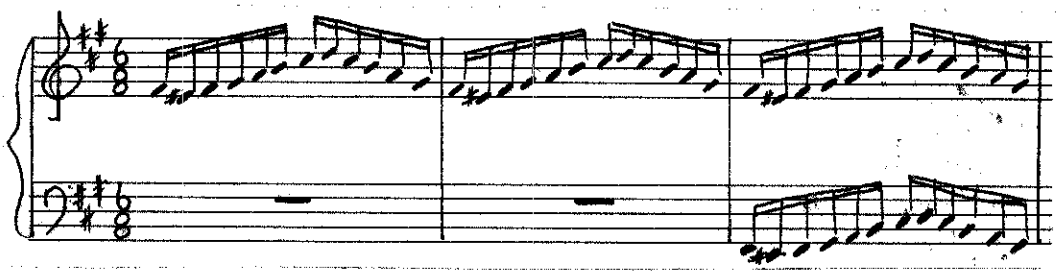

Fig. 8--Elijah, "Call Him louder," Schirmer edition, p. 70.

One solution would be for the right hand to sustain the woodwind chords while the left hand plays the string parts.

Piano arrangements often contain many rapid scale and arpeggio passages which, when played on stringed instruments, are relatively easy, but on the organ are impossible. Piano reductions frequently double the bass line, a practice which is completely unnecessary on the organ. Since most piano arrangements are both inaccurate and too difficult to play on the organ, the organist should always consult the orchestral score as a guide in deciding what to play and what to leave out.

There are many important differences between the organ and the orchestra which need to be considered when transcribing for organ. A number of special effects which can be produced with relative ease by certain families of instruments in the orchestra are impossible to duplicate with much success on the organ. One of the most important of

these is the string tremolo which is used to produce agitation and tension. Because of the nature of the organ, with its relatively slow-speaking pipes, this effect usually sounds clumsy and awkward when attempted on the organ. Another effect which is impossible to reproduce is the string pizzicato. The tympani roll cannot be produced on the organ, although it can usually be imitated in the pedal.

While the foundation of the orchestra is the string section, the foundation of the organ is the diapason chorus. The string stops on the organ are used sparingly for solos and rather quiet passages. Since the diapason tone serves as a foundation of the organ, it usually assumes the same role as that of the strings in the orchestra. For solo passages, the oboe, clarinet, and other soft reeds may be used. The more brilliant chorus reeds should be used sparingly for special effects, fanfares, and certain solos (Handel's Messiah, "The trumpet shall sound").

The following table from one authority on organ accompaniment shows a comparison of the instruments in the orchestra and their equivalent in the organ.[2]

violins and violas	diapason, geigens, dulcianas
cellos and basses	violone, geigen
flutes	flutes
oboes	orchestral oboes
clarinets	clarinet
bassoons	16' orchestral reed, clarinet, choir reed
horns	soft 8' flute coupled to oboe
trumpets and trombones	trumpet and trombone
tympani	open wood 16' in pedal

[2]Marmaduke P. Conway, Church Organ Accompaniment (New York, 1952), p. 52.

Mixtures may be used in loud, exciting choruses such as "Have lightnings and thunders" from Bach's St. Matthew Passion. They also provide brilliance to slow, chordal pieces, as in the opening of the overture to Handel's Messiah.

The crescendo pedal is very useful in passages which require quick changes from pianissimo to fortissimo. One of the best examples of this will be seen in Figure 13. The staccato chords need to be played fortissimo while the rest of the passage is pianissimo. This effect can be produced very well by using the crescendo pedal.

The organ should not be a mere imitation of the orchestra but should function as a substitute. Even though a large organ may have stops comparable to the instruments of the orchestra, the full organ will never have the variety of sounds or the versatility of the full orchestra.

As a substitute for the orchestra the organ has a number of advantages over the piano. The piano is limited to one basic tone color while a large organ contains a great variety of color possibilities. Another big advantage of the organ is that the bass part can be played with the feet, leaving both hands free to play the other parts. In the orchestra the cello and bass usually play the same part an octave apart. These same pitches can be produced on the organ by playing the lower part while using stops of different pitches. On the piano the left hand usually plays the bass part in octaves and the right hand plays the very high part, so that there is actually no middle part in the

accompaniment. On the organ the left hand is free to provide the middle harmony.

Rapid scale passages of thirds and sixths for one hand are very difficult, if not impossible, when played on the organ. Usually these passages can be divided between the hands if the bass part is not too difficult for the pedals to play. If, however, the left hand must play harmony parts, it is usually best to play only the top note of the passage with the right hand. Because the organ has no damper pedal to sustain sound, arpeggios on the organ are very unartistic when played with both hands. The effect is much better when a chord is sustained with the left hand and the arpeggio is played with the right hand. Although the tremolo sounds very awkward when played with both hands, it can produce desirable tension and excitement if the soprano and bass notes are sustained and only the middle voices are repeated.

Most of the preceding suggestions for arranging for organ have been rather specific; the following suggestions are of a more general nature. An organ arrangement should not contain every note of the original accompaniment but should preserve the spirit and style of the composer. Passages which are awkward may be rewritten. Since the organ contains stops of different pitches, the texture can usually be thinner than on the piano, but the "middle" harmony should be filled in. Unimportant details may be omitted so that the arrangement is as simple as possible while still preserving the style of the piece.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN TRANSCRIBING SELECTED CHORUSES OF BACH, BRAHMS, VERDI, AND HONEGGER

Chapter One dealt primarily with general problems of transcribing orchestral accompaniments for organ. The second chapter deals with the specific problems encountered in the transcribing of the choruses reproduced in the third chapter of this paper.

Chorus No. 33 from Bach's St. Matthew Passion

The duet and chorus (no. 33) from Bach's St. Matthew Passion is divided into two sections, the first being a duet for soprano and alto. The second section is written for double chorus and double orchestra. The duet begins with the following introduction (Figure 9):

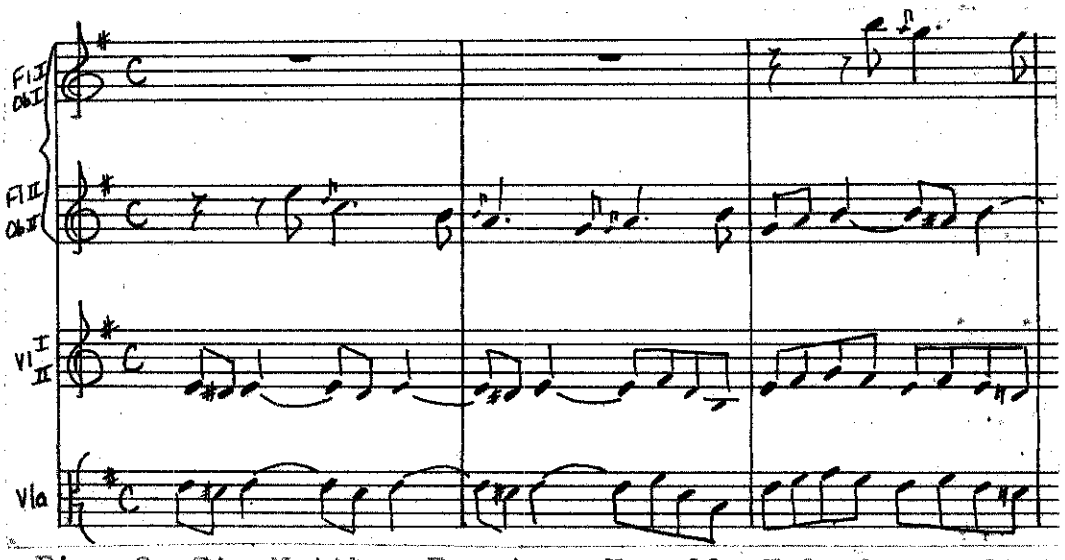

Fig. 9--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition, p. 106.

This section can be adapted to the organ rather easily by playing the woodwind parts with the right hand while the left hand is playing the string parts on another manual with contrasting registration. The beginning of the organ arrangement is shown below (Figure 10).

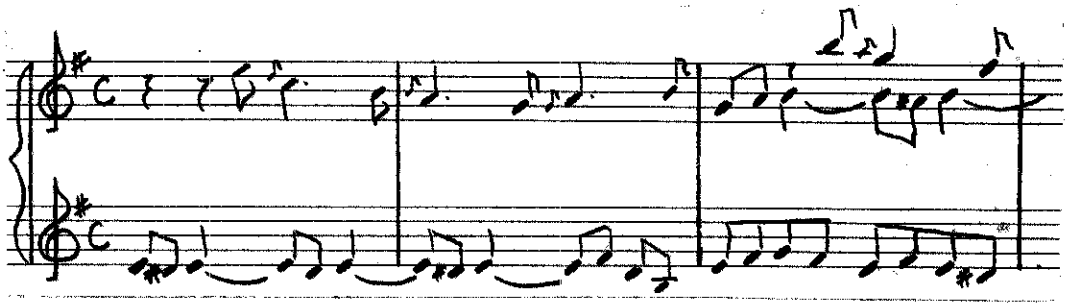

Fig. 10--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 1-3.

In measure fourteen (Figure 11) there is a skip of a ninth from F down to E in the oboe part.

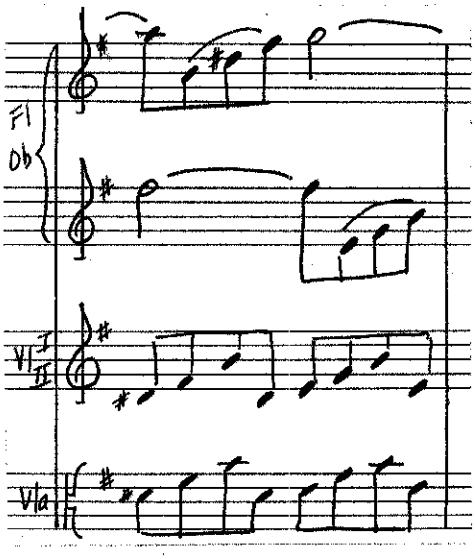

Fig. 11--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition, p. 107.

Since the right hand in the organ arrangement (Figure 12) is already sustaining a G, the E has to be transposed an octave higher to avoid an interval which would be too large to play. This is only one of the many instances where notes have to be transposed to make them playable on the organ.

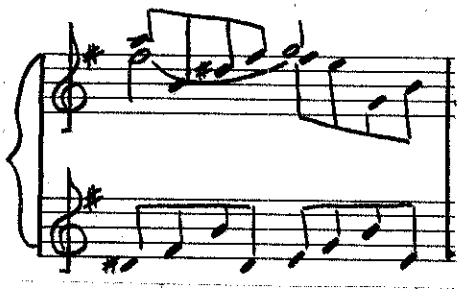

Fig. 12--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 14.

In measures 21 and 22, where the chorus sings, "Leave Him, bind Him not," the left hand can play the staccato chords on a different manual with louder registration, or the crescendo pedal can be used to imitate the entrance of the double orchestra (Figure 13). Similar occurrences are in measures 39-40 and 43-44.

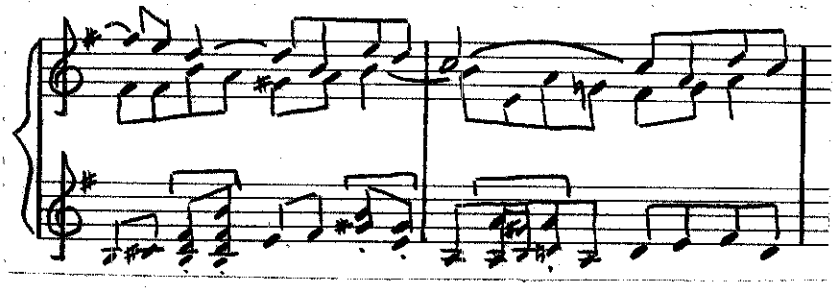

Fig. 13--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 21-22.

The chorus is much faster and considerably more difficult to arrange for organ than the duet. Beginning with measure 81 there are three completely different ideas in the orchestral accompaniment: the 16th-note runs in the continuo, the rapidly repeated notes in the strings, and the chords in the woodwinds (Figure 14).

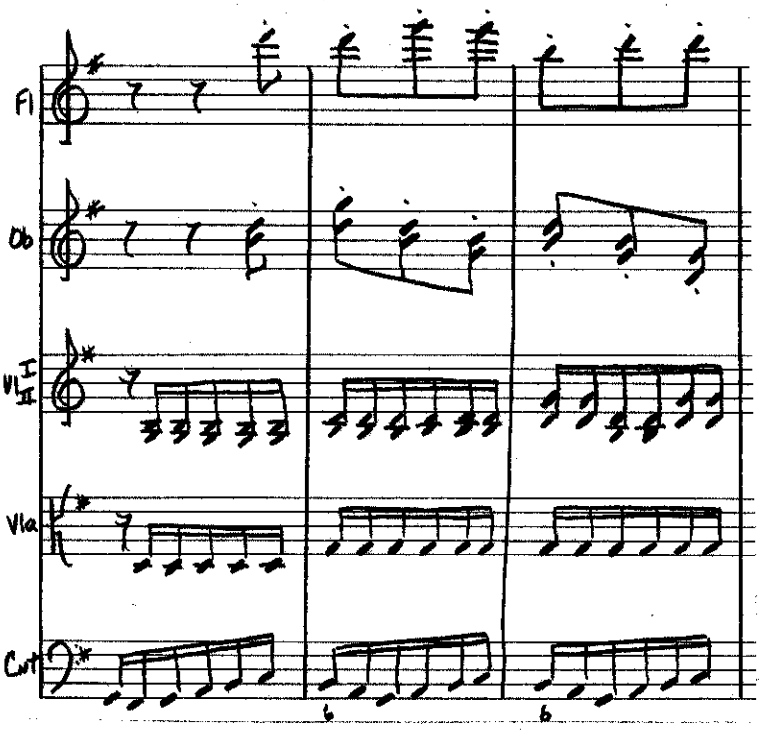

Fig. 14--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition, p. 115.

Since the continuo part is much too fast to be played on the pedals, a compromise must be made. One solution (Figure 15) assigns the woodwind part to the right hand and the continuo part, transposed an octave higher, to the left hand. The pedal will play every other note in the continuo part. Thus the pedal will serve as a foundation, the left hand will furnish the movement, and the right hand will play the harmony.

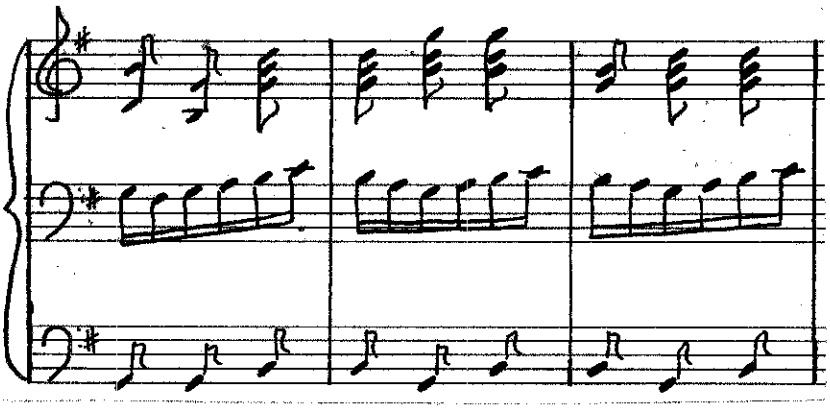

Fig. 15--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 81-83.

Beginning with measure 105, the orchestral accompaniment presents several new problems. The woodwinds of the first orchestra sustain chords while the strings have repeated 16th-note figures. At the same time, the continuo has a running passage and the woodwinds of the second orchestra have 16th-note passages (Figure 16).

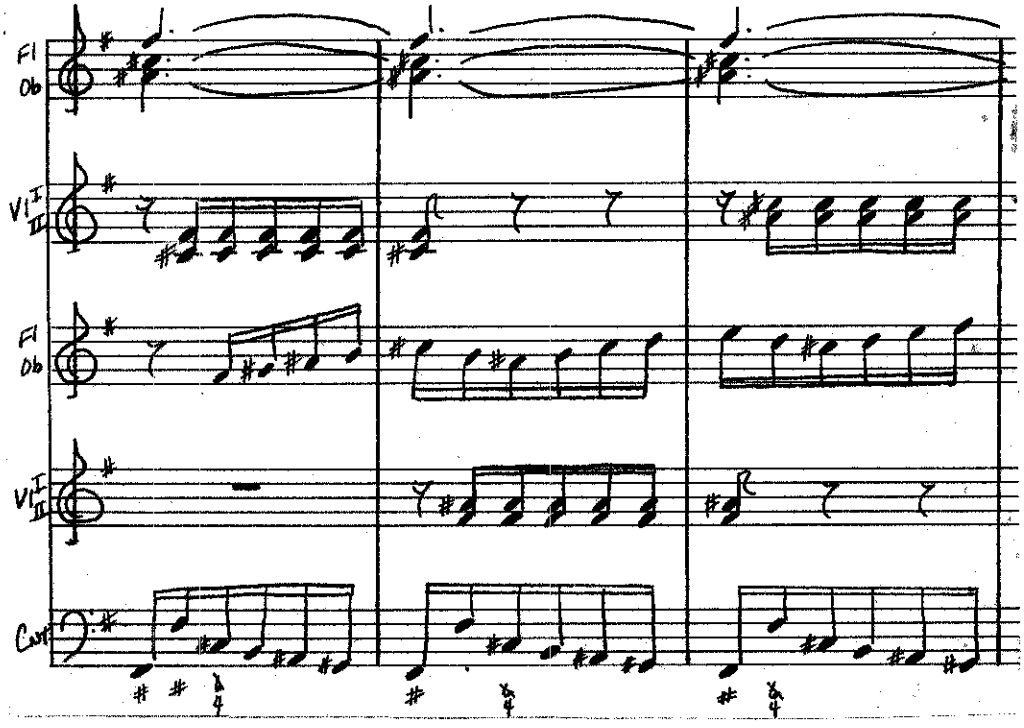

Fig. 16--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition, p. 118.

This is solved in the organ arrangement (Figure 17) by sustaining a chord in the right hand, playing the notes which come on the main beats with the pedals, and letting the left hand play the continuo run plus repeated sixteenth notes.

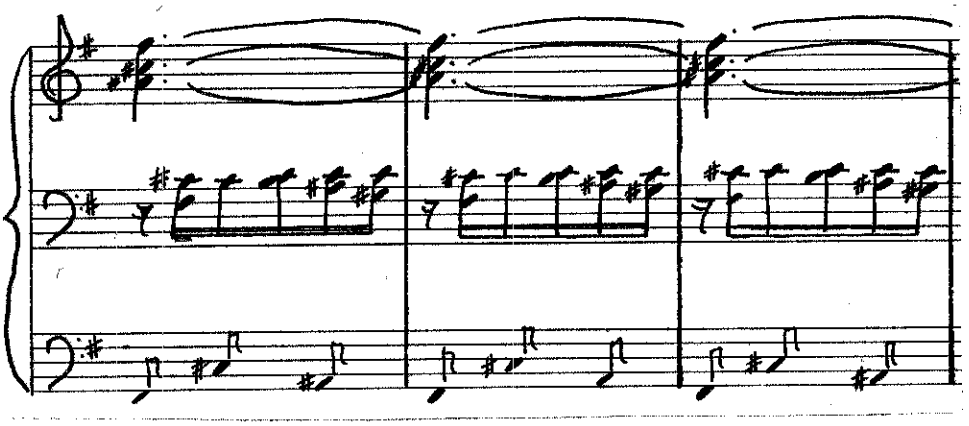

Fig. 17--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 105-107.

The last important problem begins in measure 121. In the original score (Figure 18) the strings in each orchestra alternate between playing arpeggios and repeated notes.

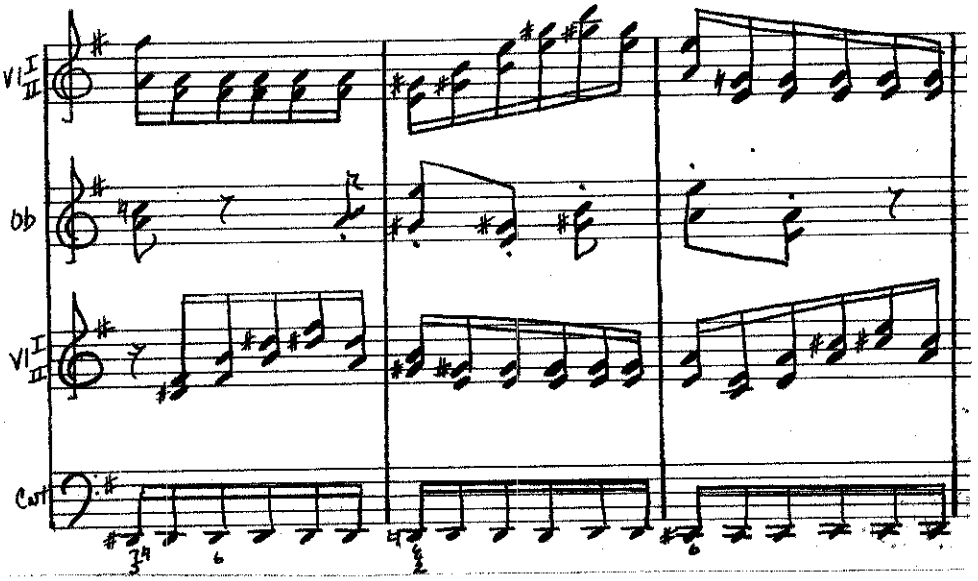

Fig. 18--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Eulenburg edition, p. 121.

In the organ transcription (Figure 19) arpeggios are played continuously in the right hand. The pedal can sustain the D# in the continuo since motion is furnished by the chords in the left hand and arpeggios in the right.

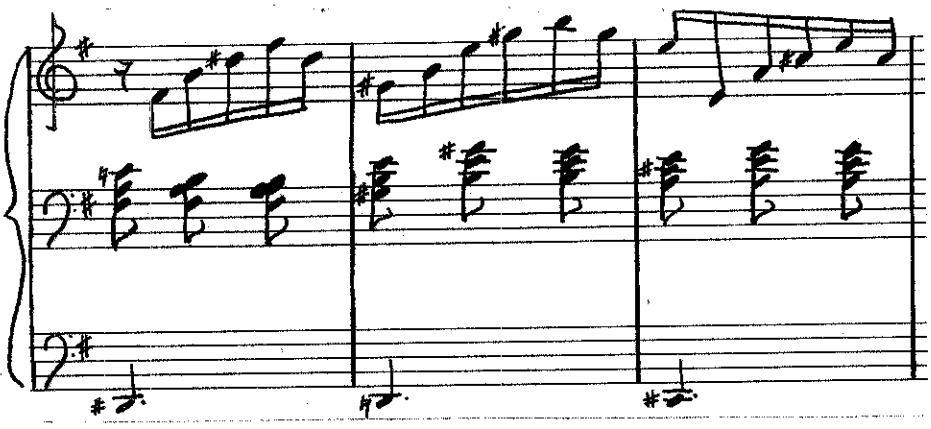

Fig. 19--St. Matthew Passion, No. 33, Organ Transcription, meas. 121-123.

Chorus No. 67 from Bach's St. Matthew Passion

This chorus contains a number of specific problems, the solutions to which can be used to formulate some general rules for transcription.

Because of the rapid tempo of the chorus, the continuo part has to be simplified so that it can be played with the pedals. Since there is much movement in the upper parts, some of the repeated notes in the continuo (Figure 20) can be tied together and some of the sixteenth notes can be eliminated altogether. In addition, many of the octave skips in the continuo can be eliminated by playing only the lower note (Figure 21).

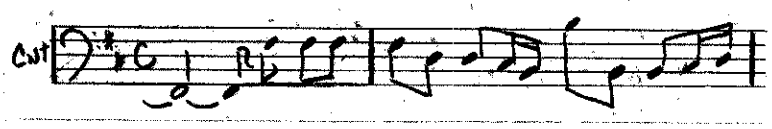

Fig. 20--St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Eulenburg edition, p. 258.

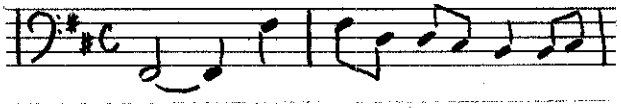

Fig. 21--St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Organ Transcription, meas. 1-2.

In measure 9 of the orchestral score (Figure 22) the flute sustains an F# while the oboe has a moving part ending with the same F# on the fourth beat.

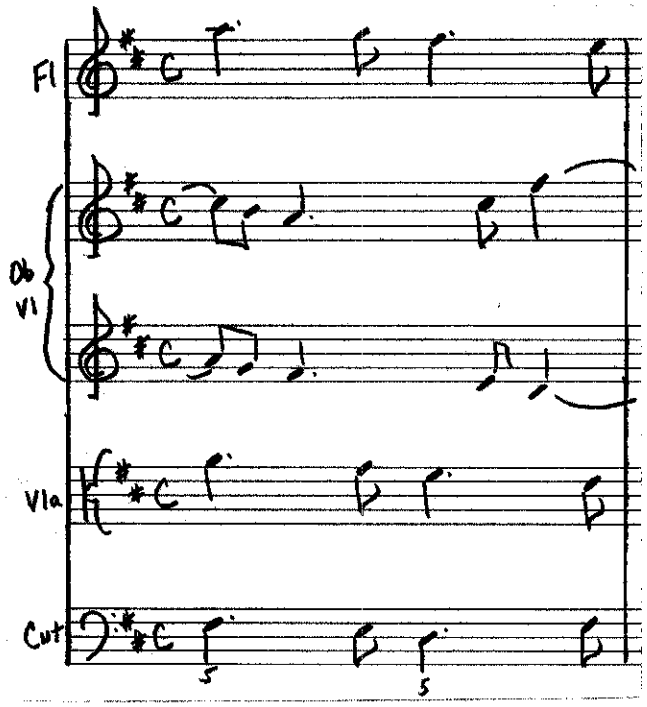

Fig. 22--St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Eulenburg edition, p. 261.

A decision has to be made as to which is more important, the sustained note in the flute part or the moving part in the oboe. As shown in the following example (Figure 23), the voice leading is much better when the moving part is given priority.

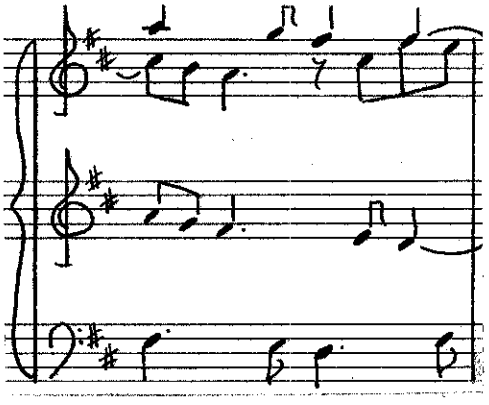

Fig. 23--St. Matthew Passion, No. 67, Organ Transcription, meas. 37.

Chorus No. 6 from Brahms's German Requiem

The first major problem in arranging "Here on earth have we no continuing place" from Brahms's German Requiem begins in measure 76 (Figure 24). Here the wind instruments sustain a chord while the strings play a two-and-a-half-octave run which begins lower than most of the wind instruments and reaches a climax nearly an octave higher than the flute part.

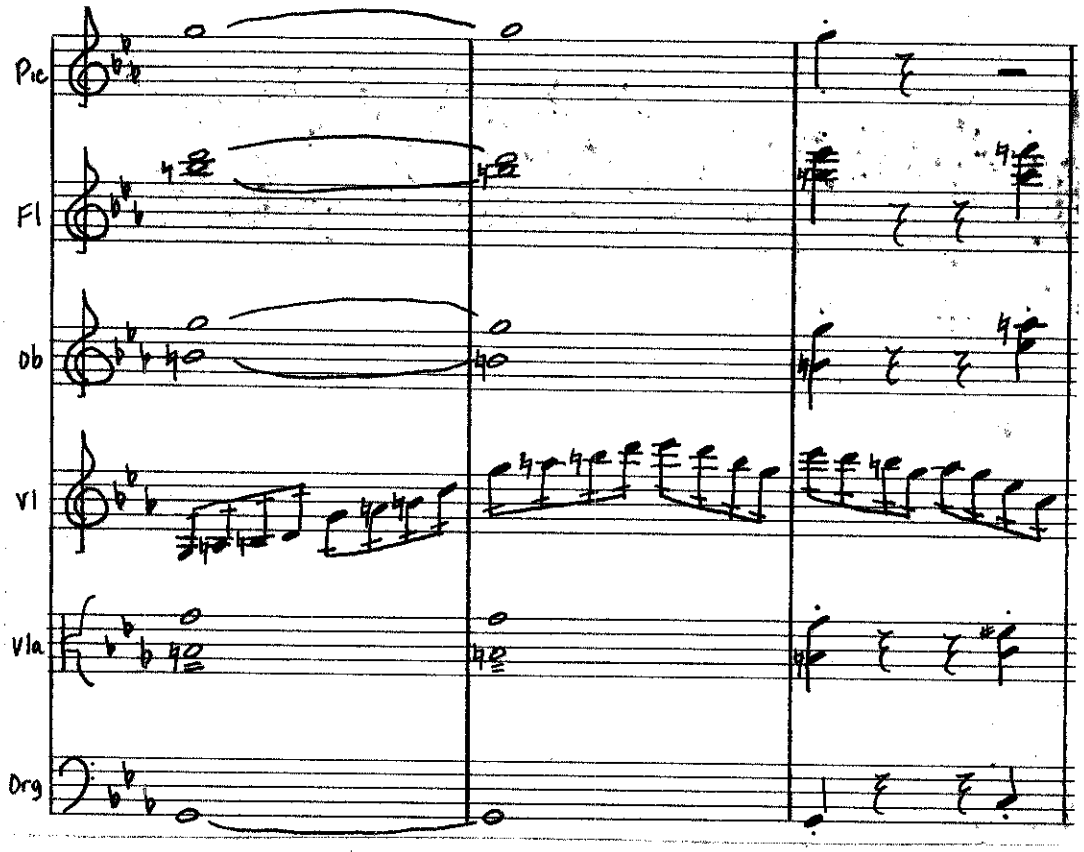

Fig. 24--German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition, p. 202.

In order to duplicate the wide pitch range of the strings on the organ, the left hand begins the run while the right hand sustains a chord. On the third beat of the measure, the left hand sustains the chord while the right hand continues the ascending passage (Figure 25).

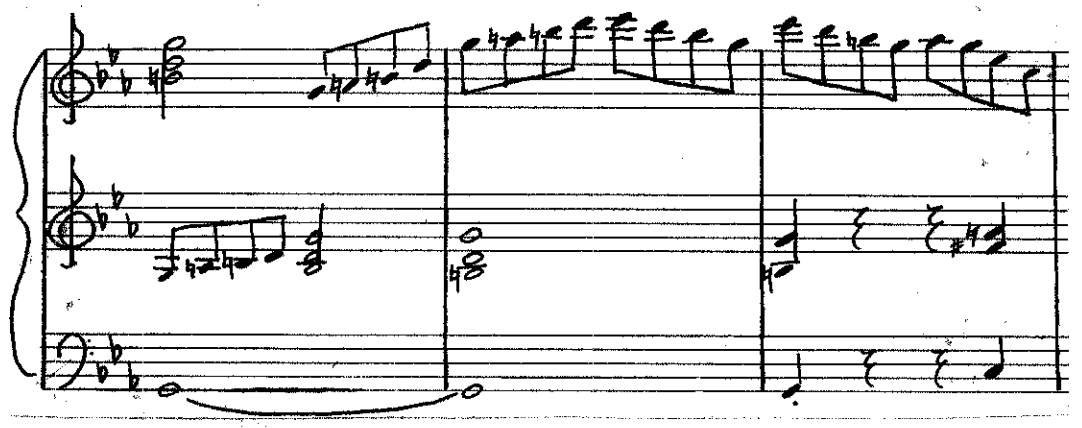

Fig. 25--German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription, meas. 76-78.

Beginning with measure 82 (Figures 26 and 27) the left hand plays the violin and viola part while the more important notes in the bass are played in the pedals. The right hand furnishes the harmony of the wind instruments.

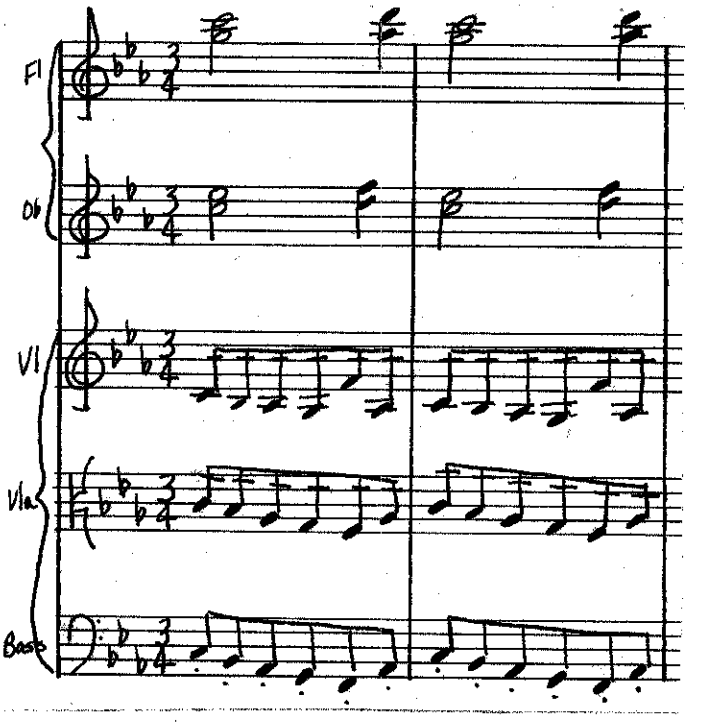

Fig. 26--German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition, p. 204.

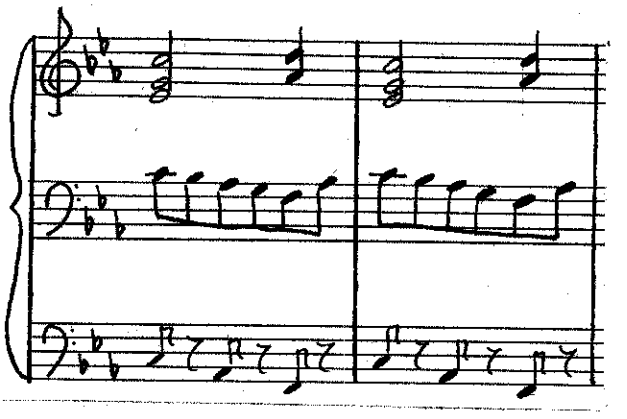

Fig. 27--German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription, meas. 82-83.

The string section in measure 161 (Figure 28) plays the following:

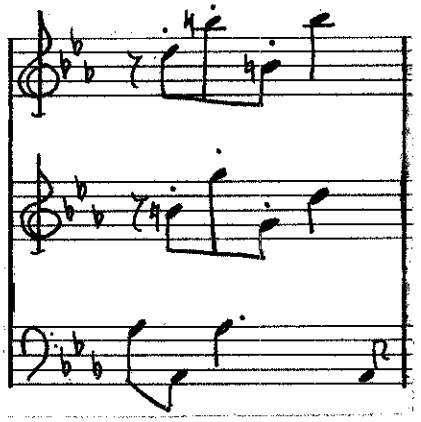

Fig. 28--German Requiem, No. 6, Eulenburg edition, p. 217.

Since the wind part is also important, this section must be rewritten so that it can be played in one hand. The organ transcription (Figure 29) shows how the string part can be adapted to provide the same rhythmic and harmonic effect while remaining reasonably simple to play. Although the effect of the large skips in the string part is lost, this is a necessary compromise.

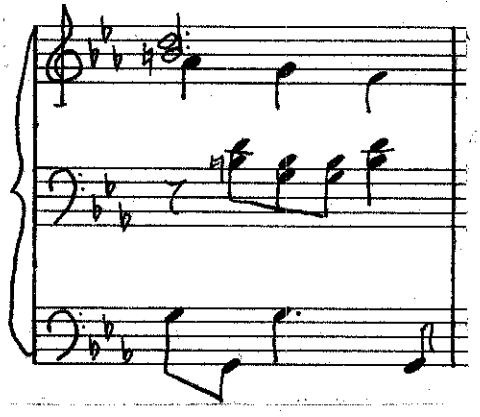

Fig. 29--German Requiem, No. 6, Organ Transcription, meas. 161.

Although this chorus contains many other problems, the preceding ones are the most important. The problems which are not discussed here are similar to those which are discussed in other choruses in this chapter.

"Dies Irae" (1st section) from Verdi's Requiem Mass

The first section of the "Dies Irae" from Verdi's Requiem presents many problems in arrangement because of the large orchestra and the extremely rapid tempo. The bass part must be simplified in many places in order to be played in the pedals, and many of the upper parts must be rewritten. An example of this is shown in Figure 30, where all the instruments in the orchestra are trilling except the second oboe and clarinet which have the same part as the soprano.

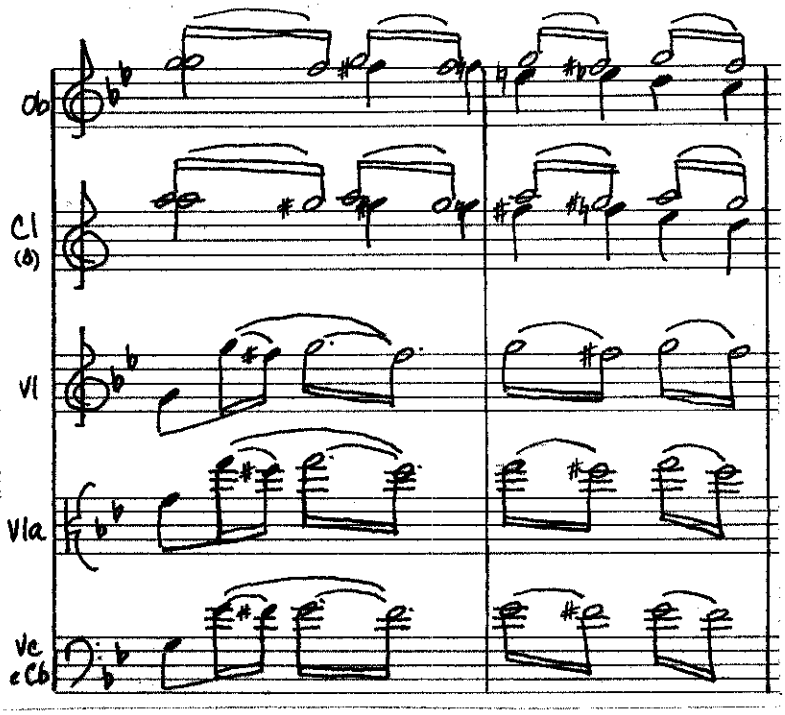

Fig. 30--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 22.

Though the effect in the orchestra is brilliant and exciting, the continuous trilling on the organ would be monotonous. A better solution is to sustain the bass note, trill with the left hand, and play the oboe and clarinet parts with the right hand (Figure 31).

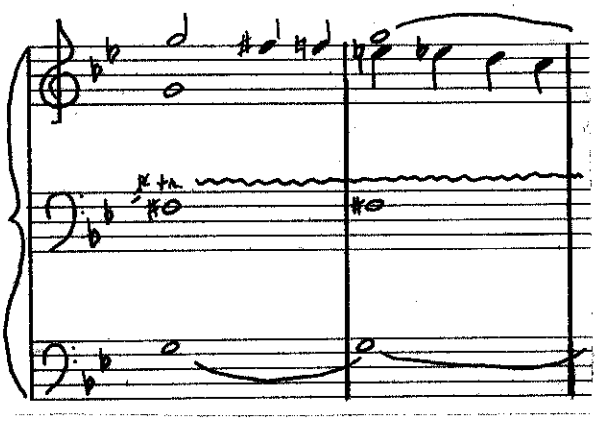

Fig. 31--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 5-6.

In measures 11 and 12 (Figure 32) a bass drum part is interpolated between the chords of the full orchestra.

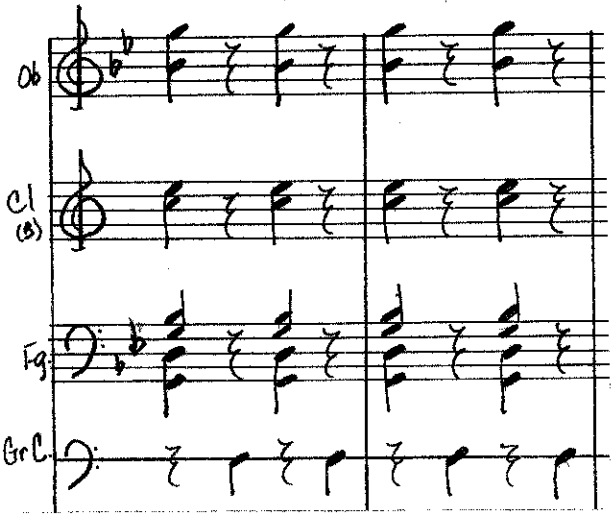

Fig. 32--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 24.

Although the rhythmic force of this part cannot be duplicated on the organ, the bass note of the chord can be played in place of the drum note to provide similar rhythmic motion (Figure 33).

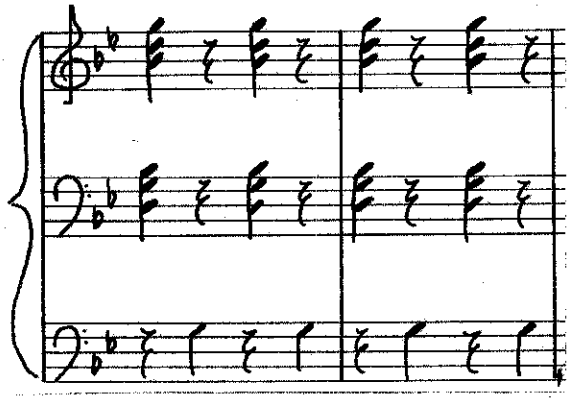

Fig. 33--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 11.

The violins and violas have a syncopated rhythm in measure 31, while the woodwinds have chords in regular rhythm (Figure 34).

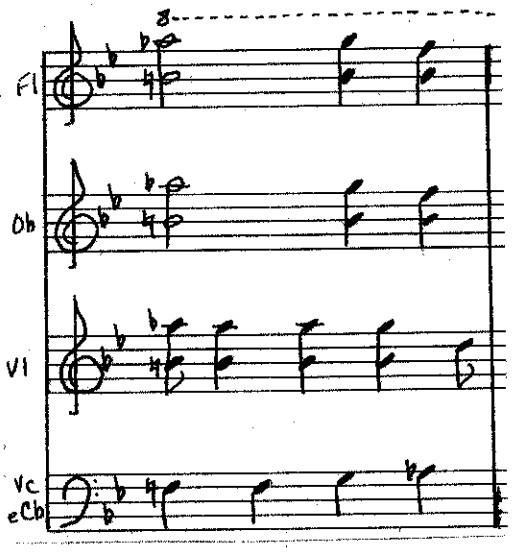

Fig. 34--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 29.

Although the rhythm in the two parts is different, the notes are identical. To get the effect of syncopation on the organ one of the parts must be transposed. The syncopated part is, therefore, transposed lower while the other part appears in its original position (Figure 35).

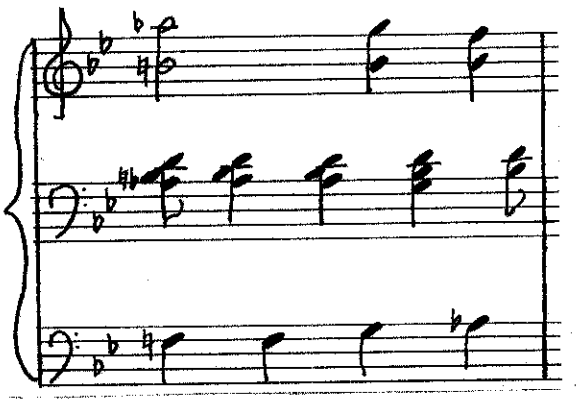

Fig. 35--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 31.

The 16th-note passage in measure 37 (Figure 36) contains many repeated notes which can be played very rapidly by the strings with relative ease. Organ pipes, however, do not have time to speak clearly at such tremendous speeds.

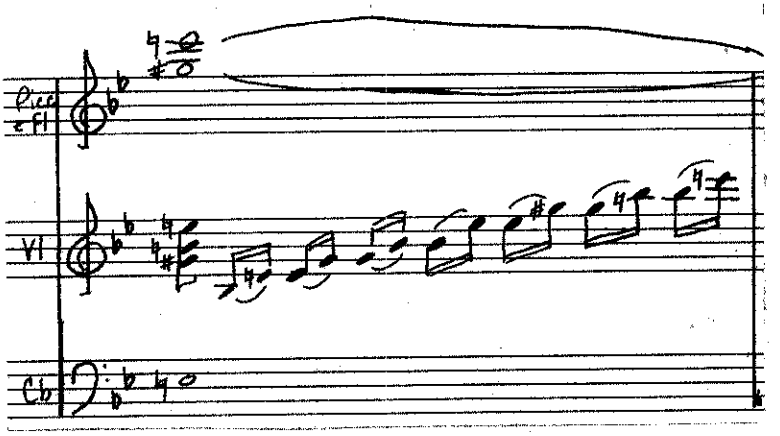

Fig. 36--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 31.

This passage can be rewritten in eighth notes (Figure 37) so that the arpeggios are still present but the repeated notes are eliminated.

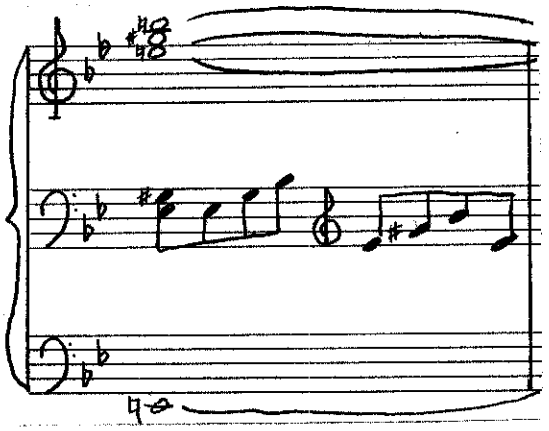

Fig. 37--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 37.

For twenty-three measures, beginning in measure 46 (Figure 38), there is a string tremolo while the woodwind section alternates between scale passages and chords.

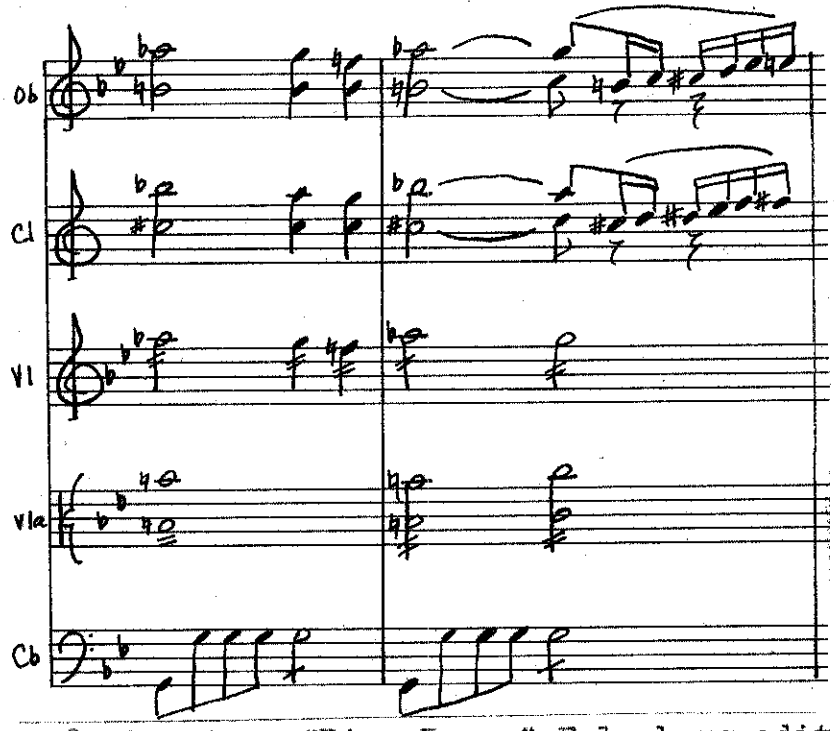

Fig. 38--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 34.

An attempt to repeat the bass note in the pedal would be futile; the bass notes should be sustained and played as half notes. The repeated eighth-note chords in the left hand will act as a substitute for the string tremolo (Figure 39).

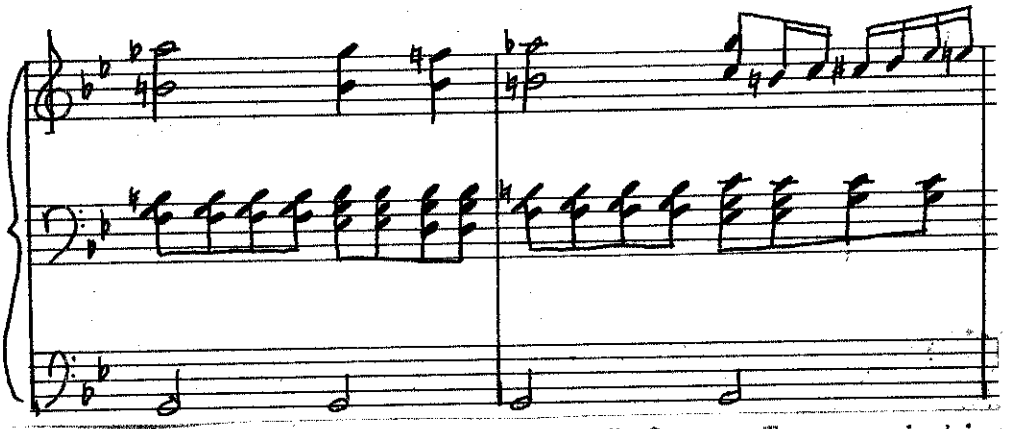

Fig. 39--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 46-47.

The 16th-note motive in measure 74 alternates between the violin and cello (Figure 40).

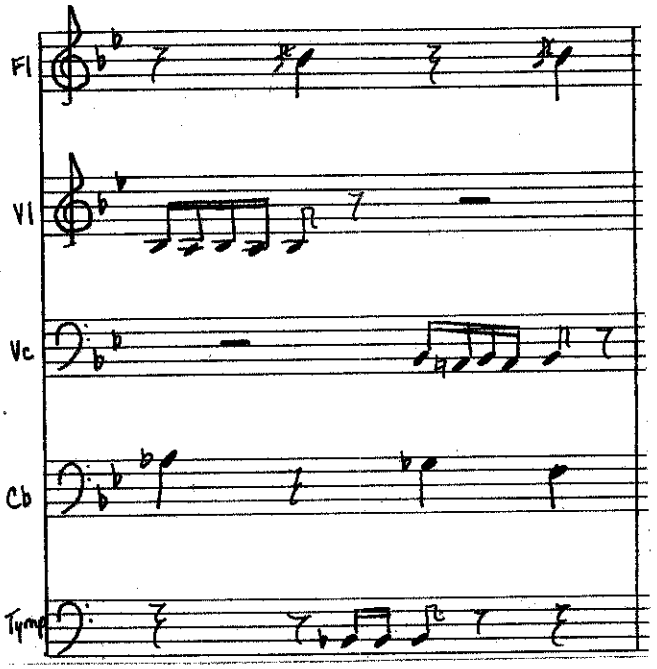

Fig. 40--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Eulenburg edition, p. 39.

The left hand plays both parts in the organ score and also acts as a substitute for the tympani part by playing its part an octave higher and in slower notes (Figure 41).

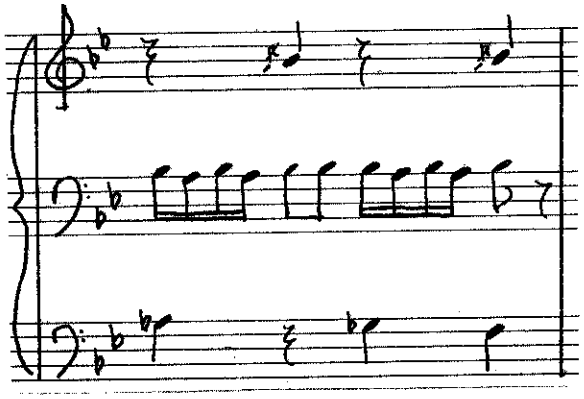

Fig. 41--Requiem, "Dies Irae," Organ Transcription, meas. 74.

"David's Death" from Honegger's King David

The last chorus of Honegger's King David, "David's Death," begins with a very slow introduction which is easily adapted to the organ. The flute solo beginning in measure 6 (Figure 42) is played with a flute stop on one manual, and the accompaniment on another manual, creating an effect similar to that of the orchestra.

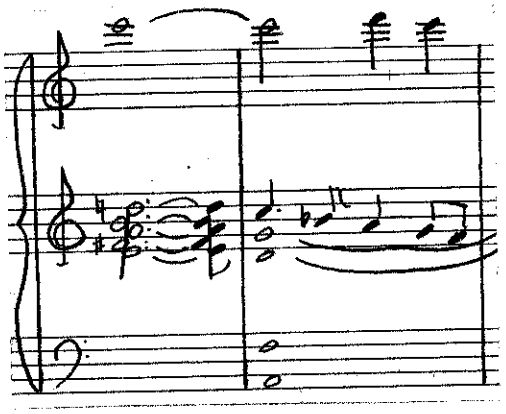

Fig. 42--King David, "David's Death," Organ Transcription, meas. 6.

Beginning with measure 26 (Figure 43), the orchestra score contains an organ part which may be used even if there is no other accompaniment.

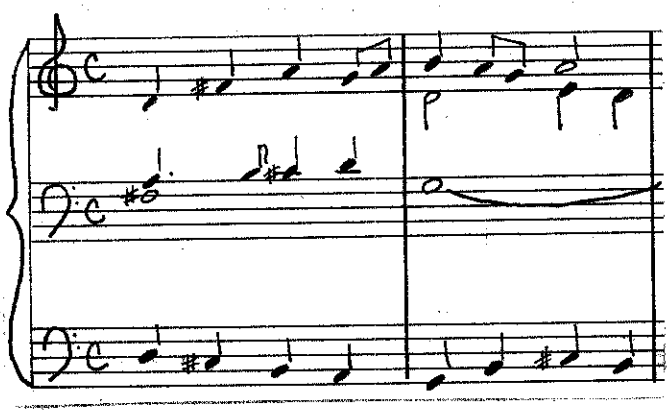

Fig. 43--King David, "David's Death," Foetisch edition, meas. 26.

An important melodic line introduced by the horn appears in measure 38 (Figure 44).

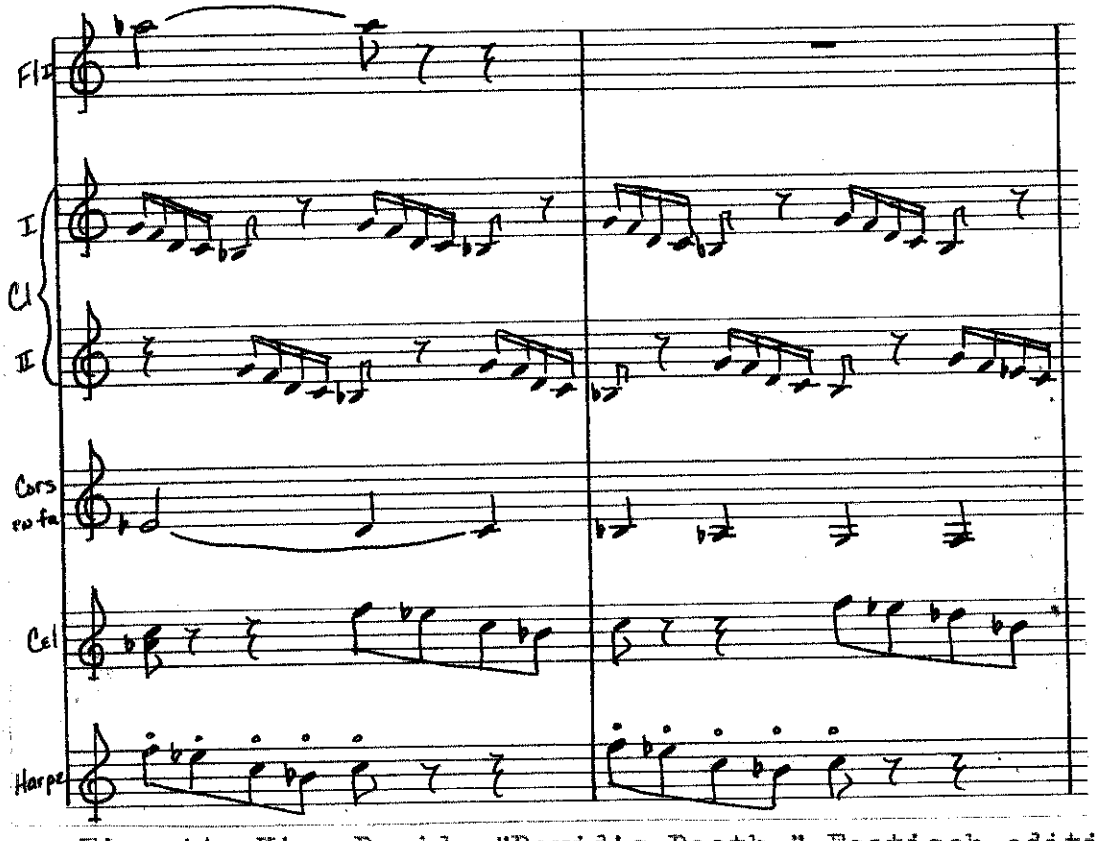

Fig. 44--King David, "David's Death," Foetisch edition, p. 233.

To bring out this melody on the organ it is necessary to play this part with the pedals using only an 8' stop, since both hands are needed to play other parts (Figure 45).

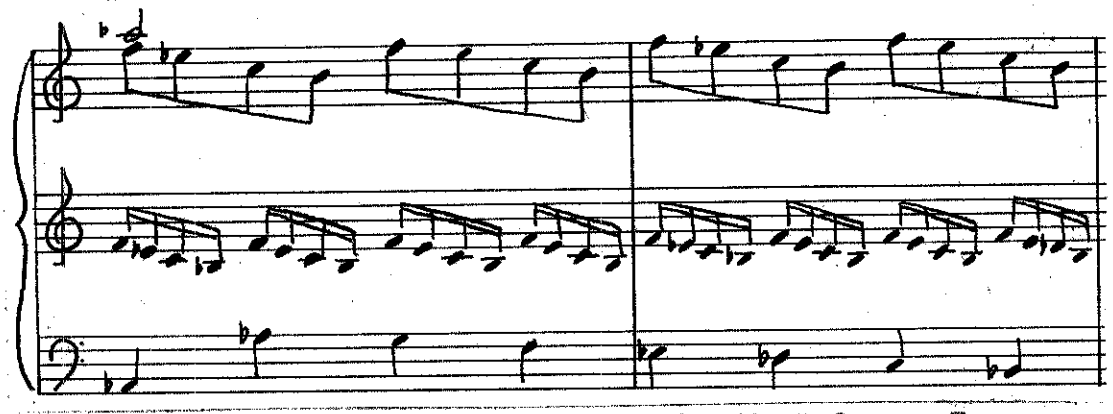

Fig. 45--King David, "David's Death," Organ Transcription, meas. 38.

With the conclusion of this chorus, most of the problems that arise in transcribing for the organ have been discussed. Although many difficult problems in transcribing occur in other accompaniments, they are similar to the ones discussed here and can be solved in a similar manner.

An organ accompaniment can be a very effective substitute for the orchestral accompaniment if the arrangement is idiomatic to the organ. In Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Leonard Borwick writes: "The object of arrangement is to make that which was written in one musical language, intelligible in another."[3] An organ transcription written with this concept in mind can, ideally, remain reasonably faithful to the composer's wishes, and yet be idiomatic and playable.

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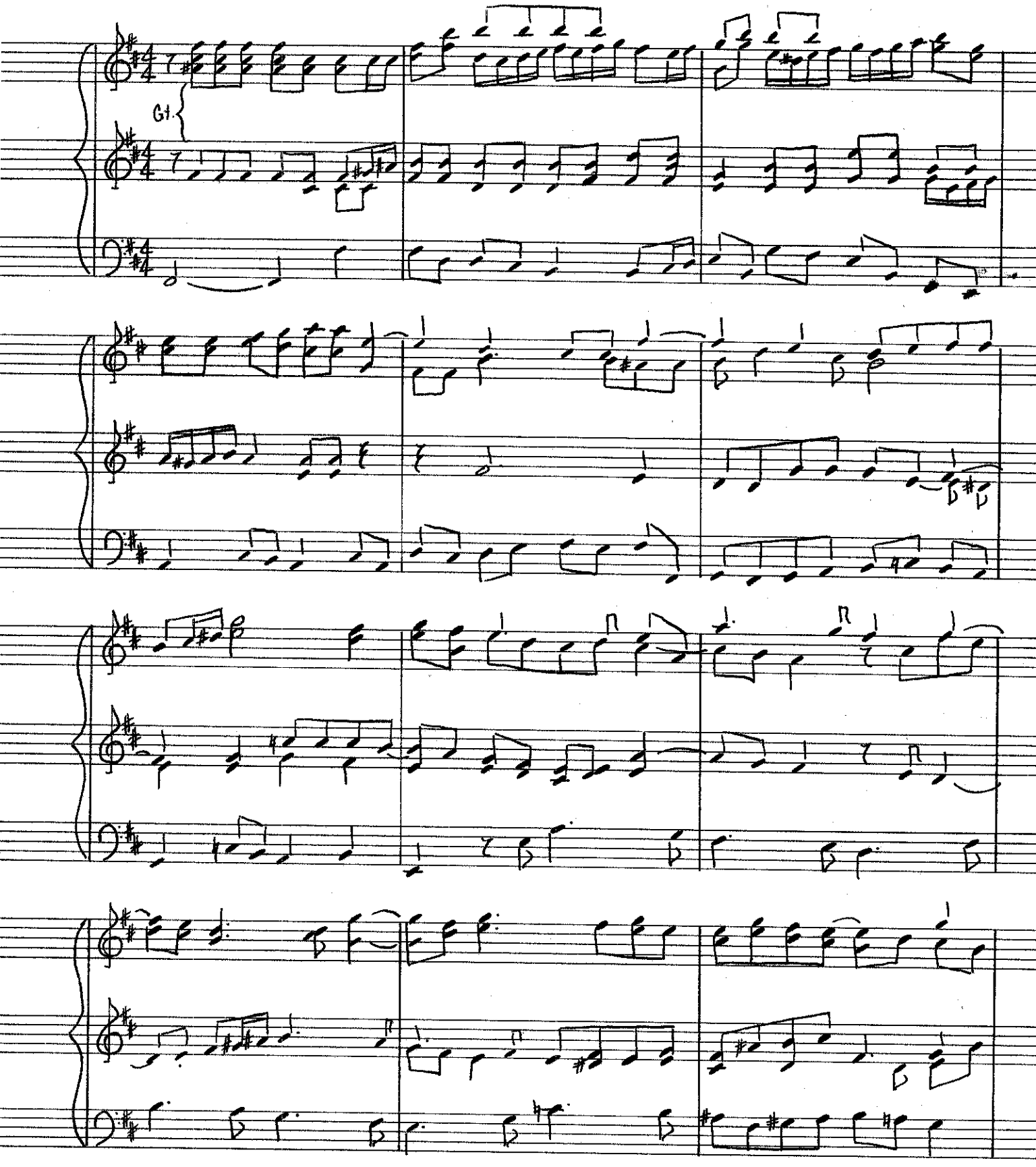
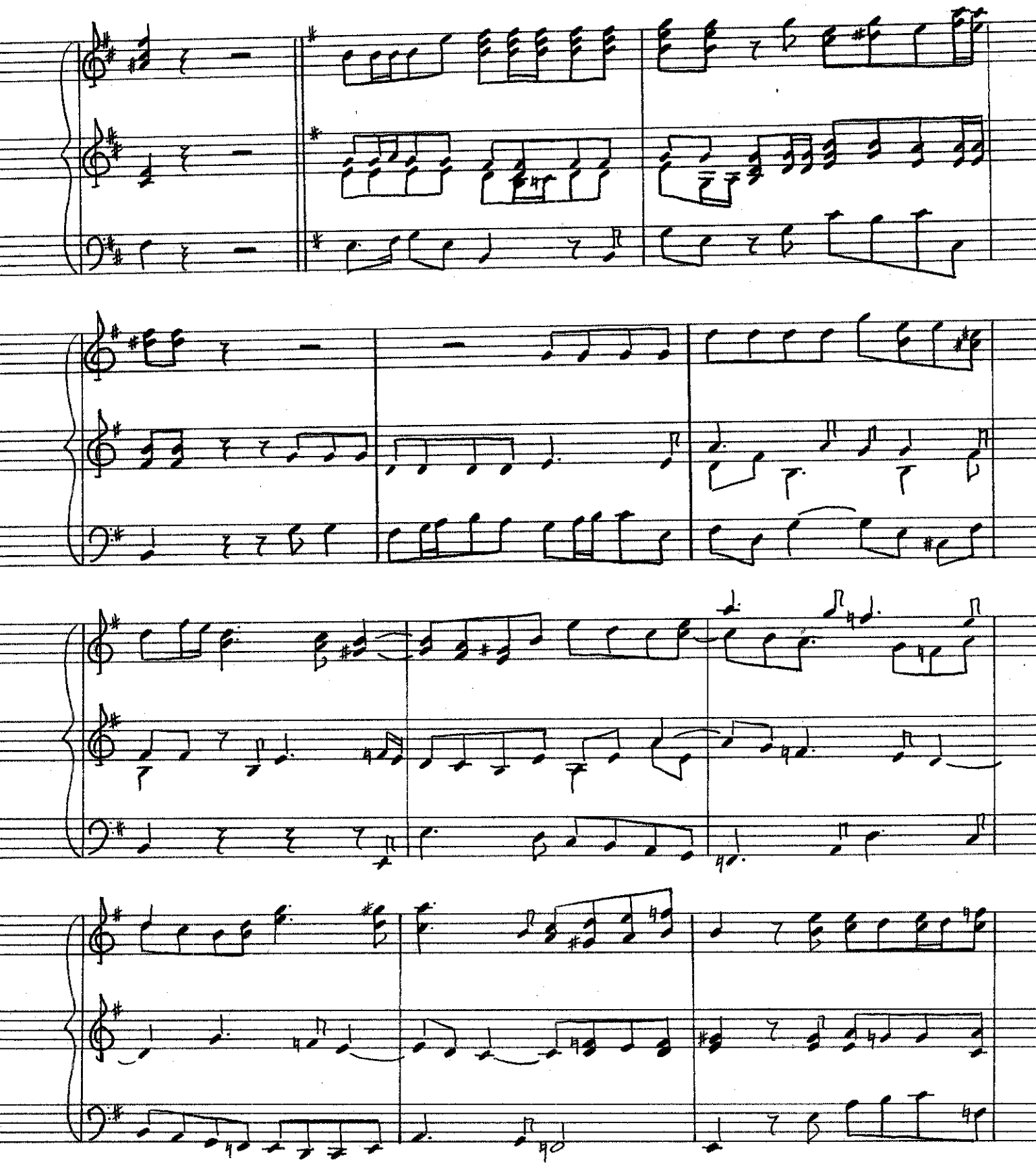
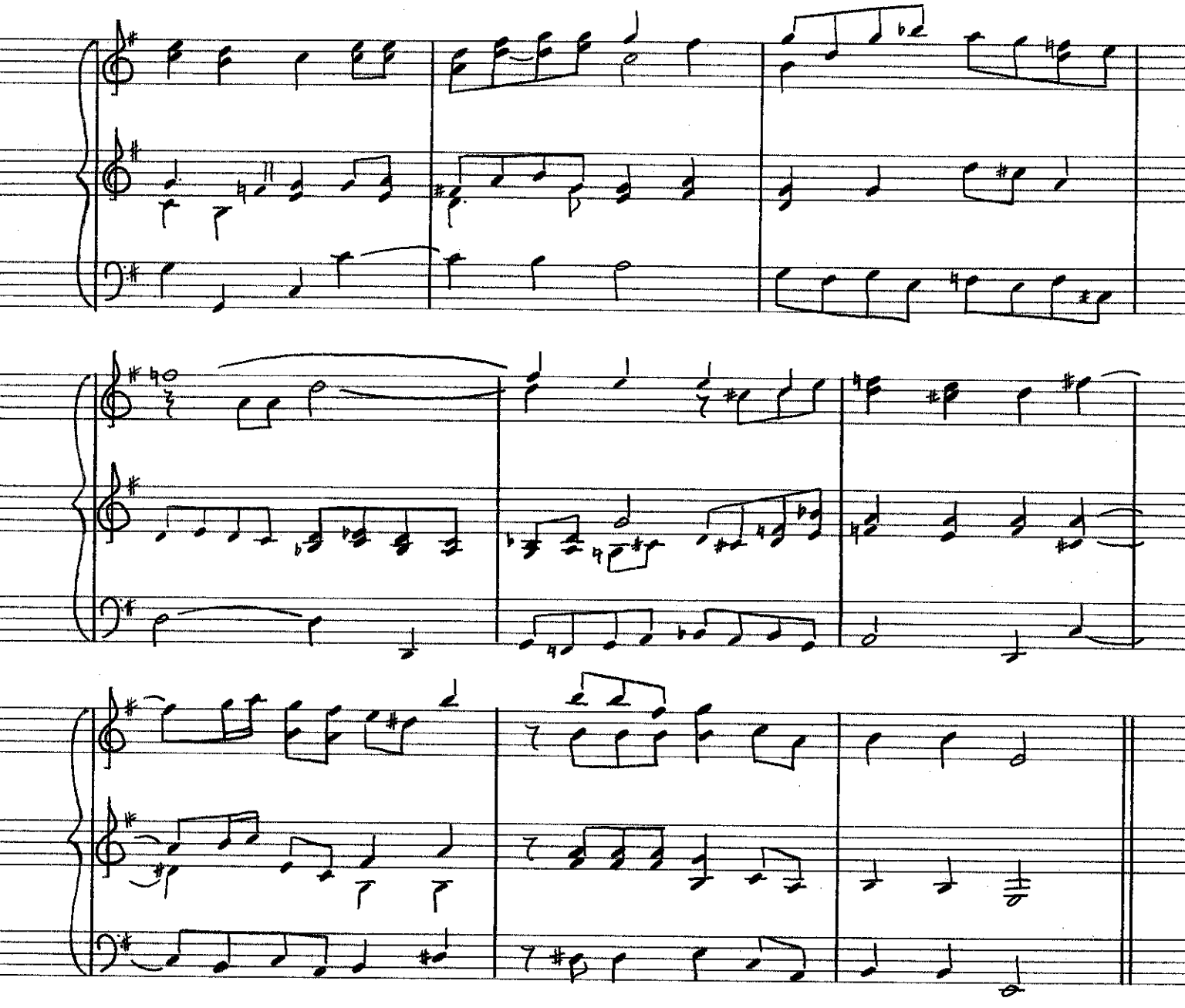
[3]Leonard Borwick, Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians (New York, 1954), p. 223.

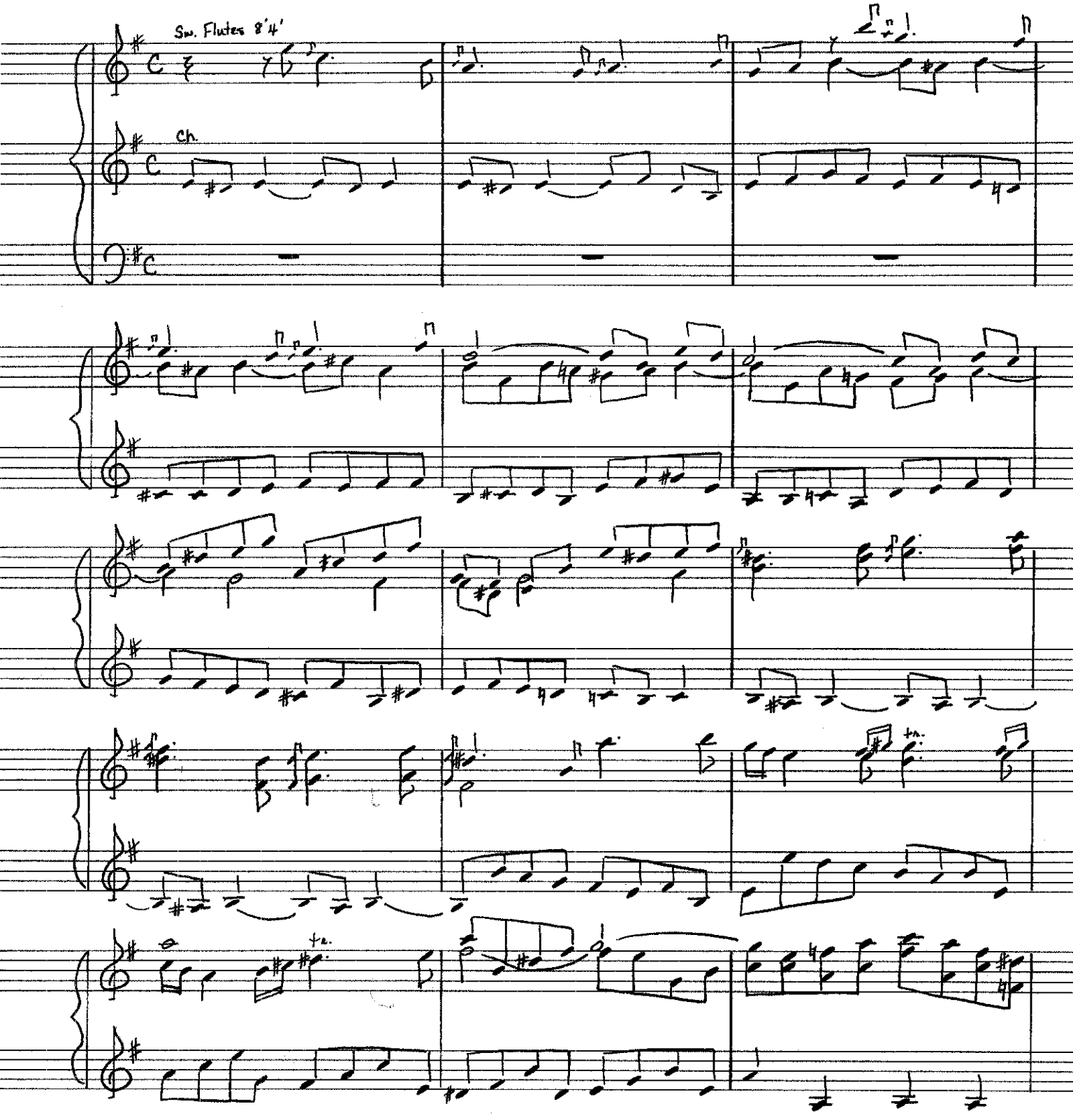
CHAPTER III

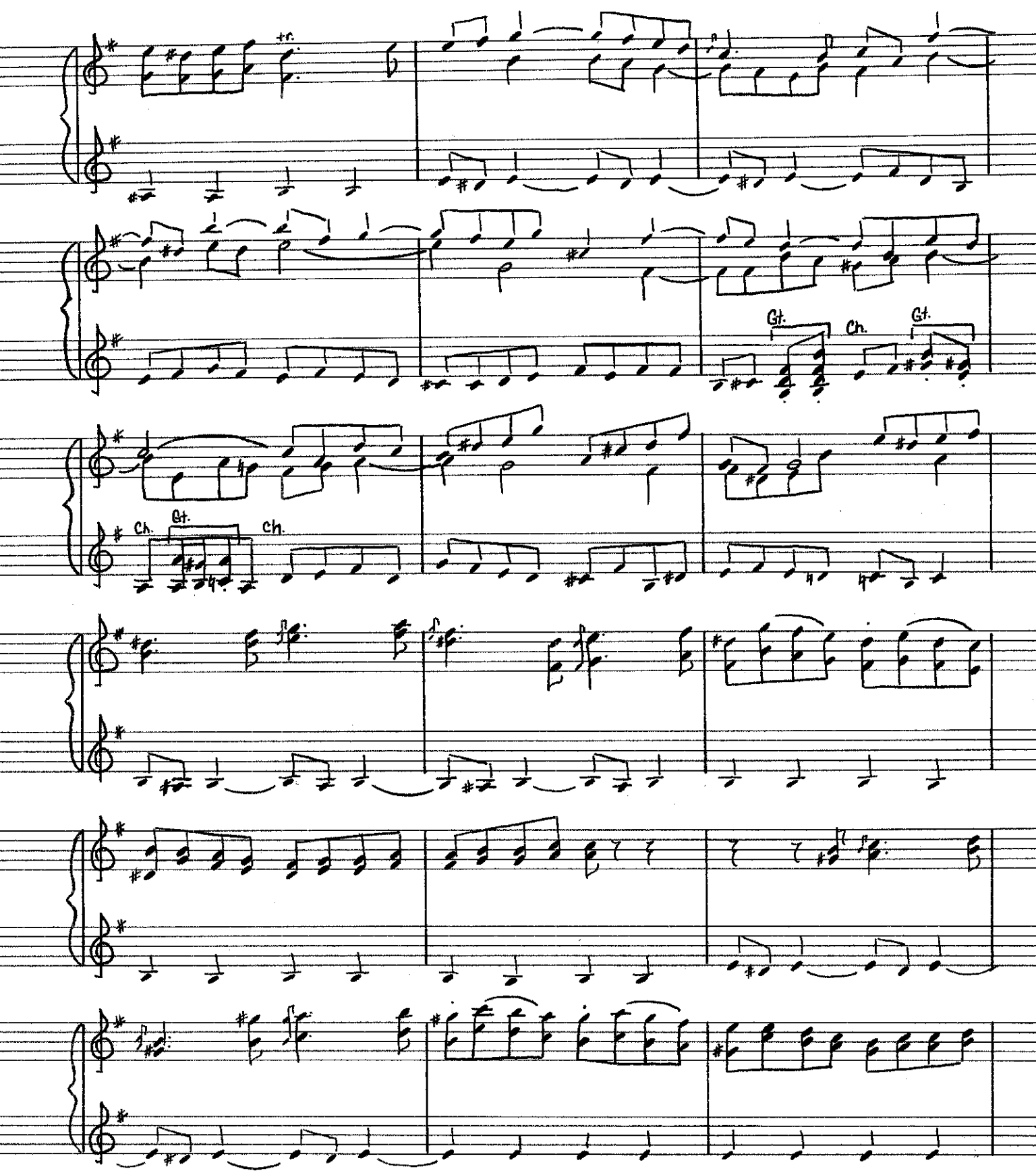
Chorus No. 33 from Bach's St. Matthew Passion

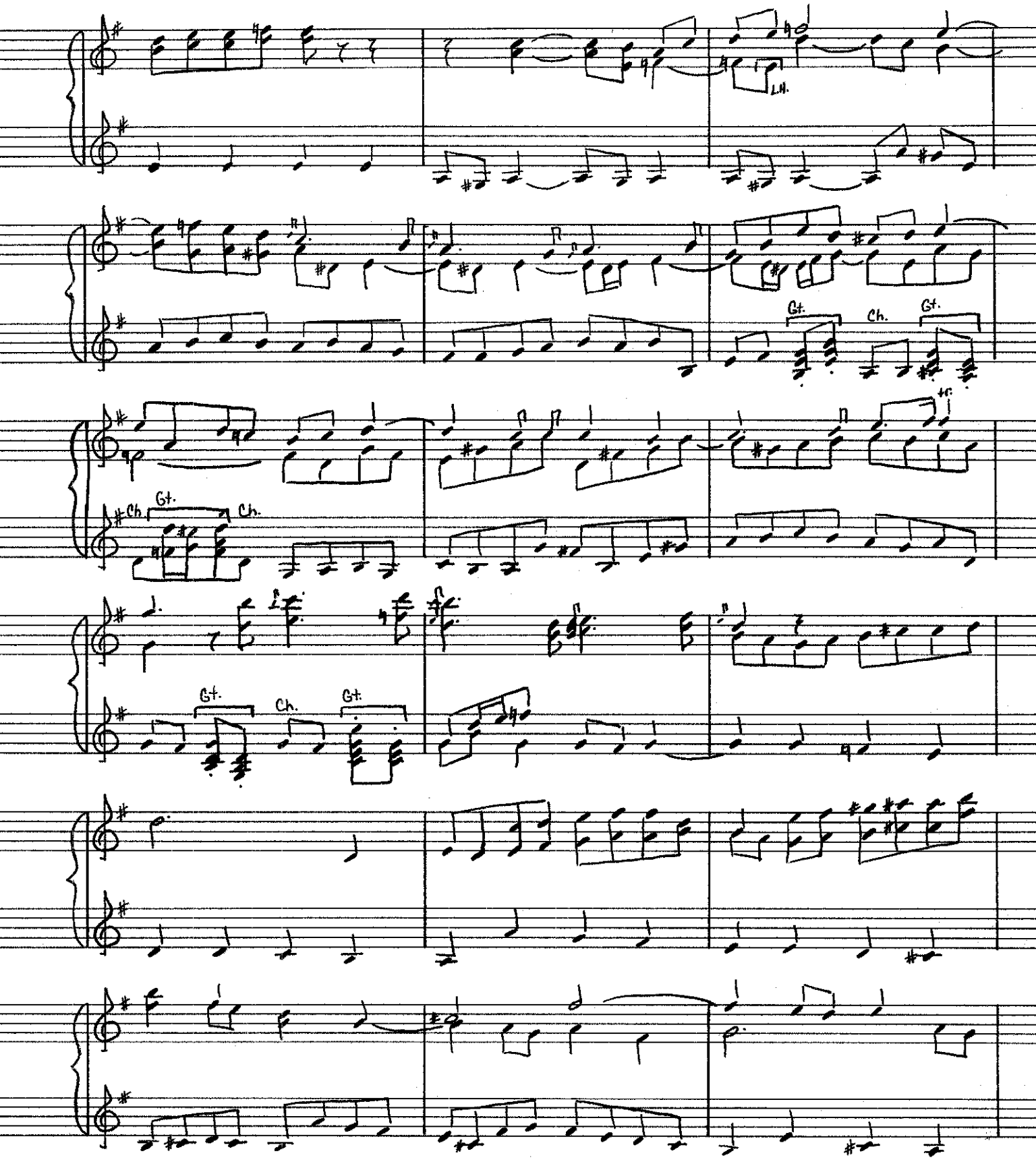


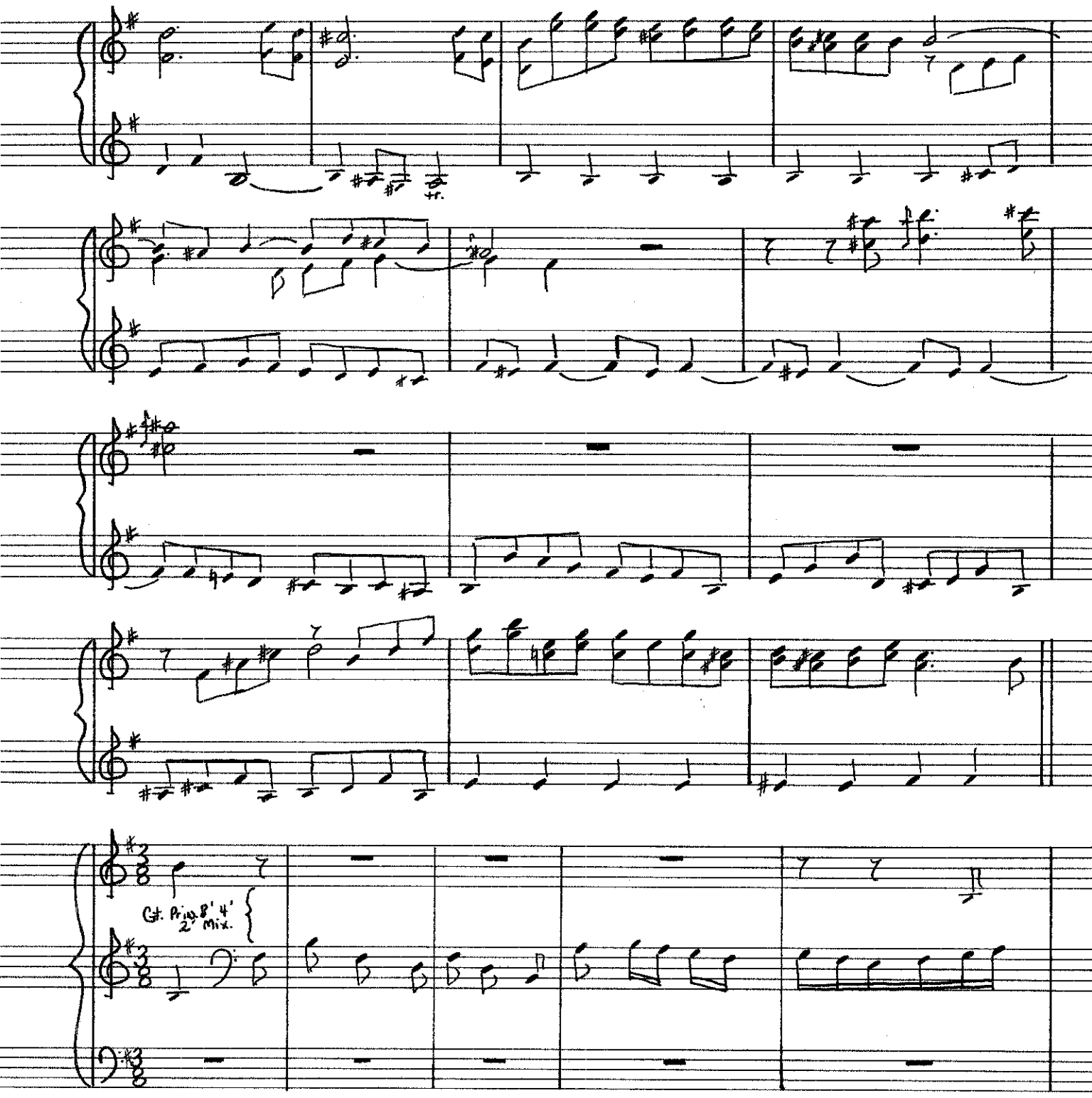


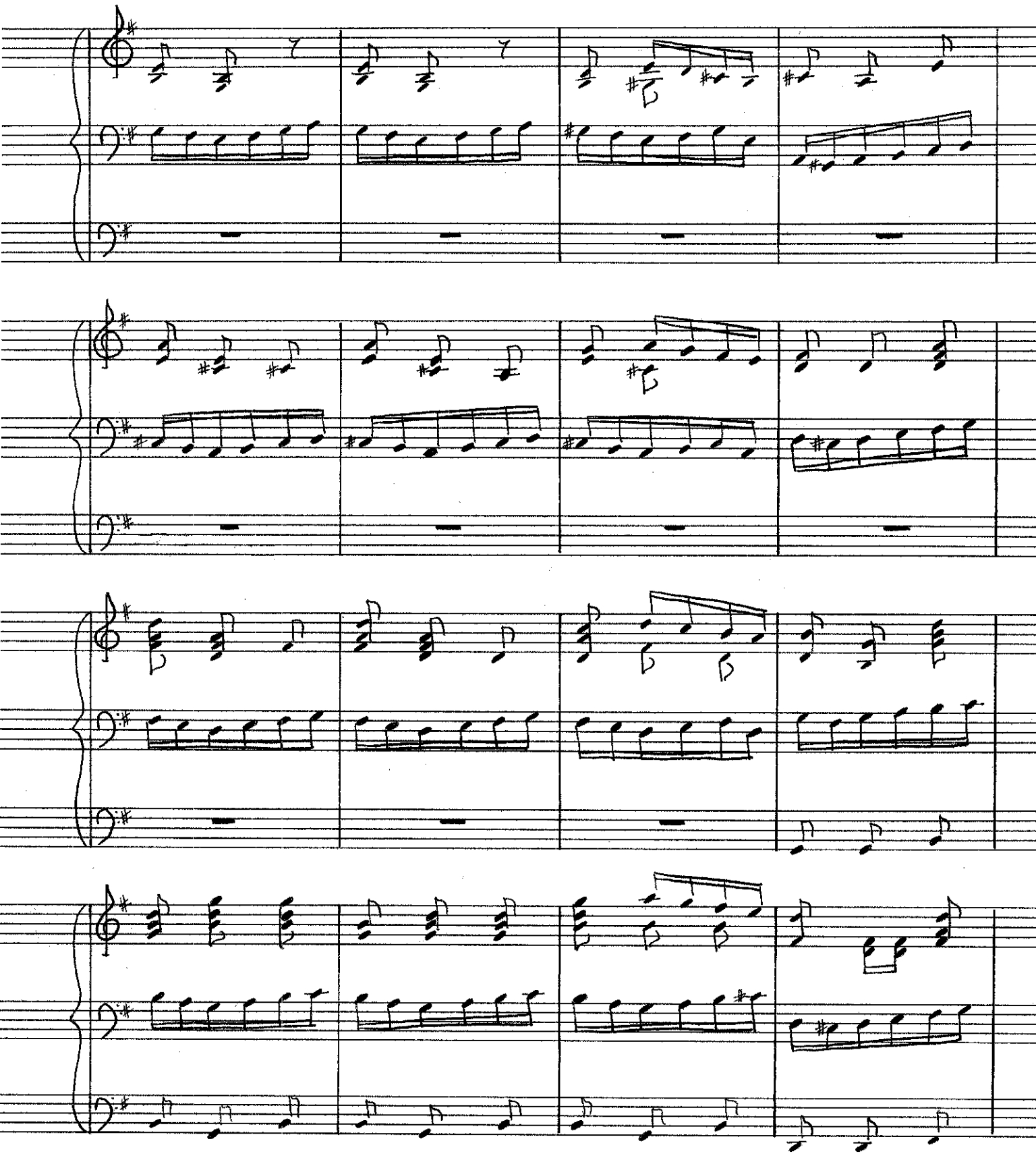


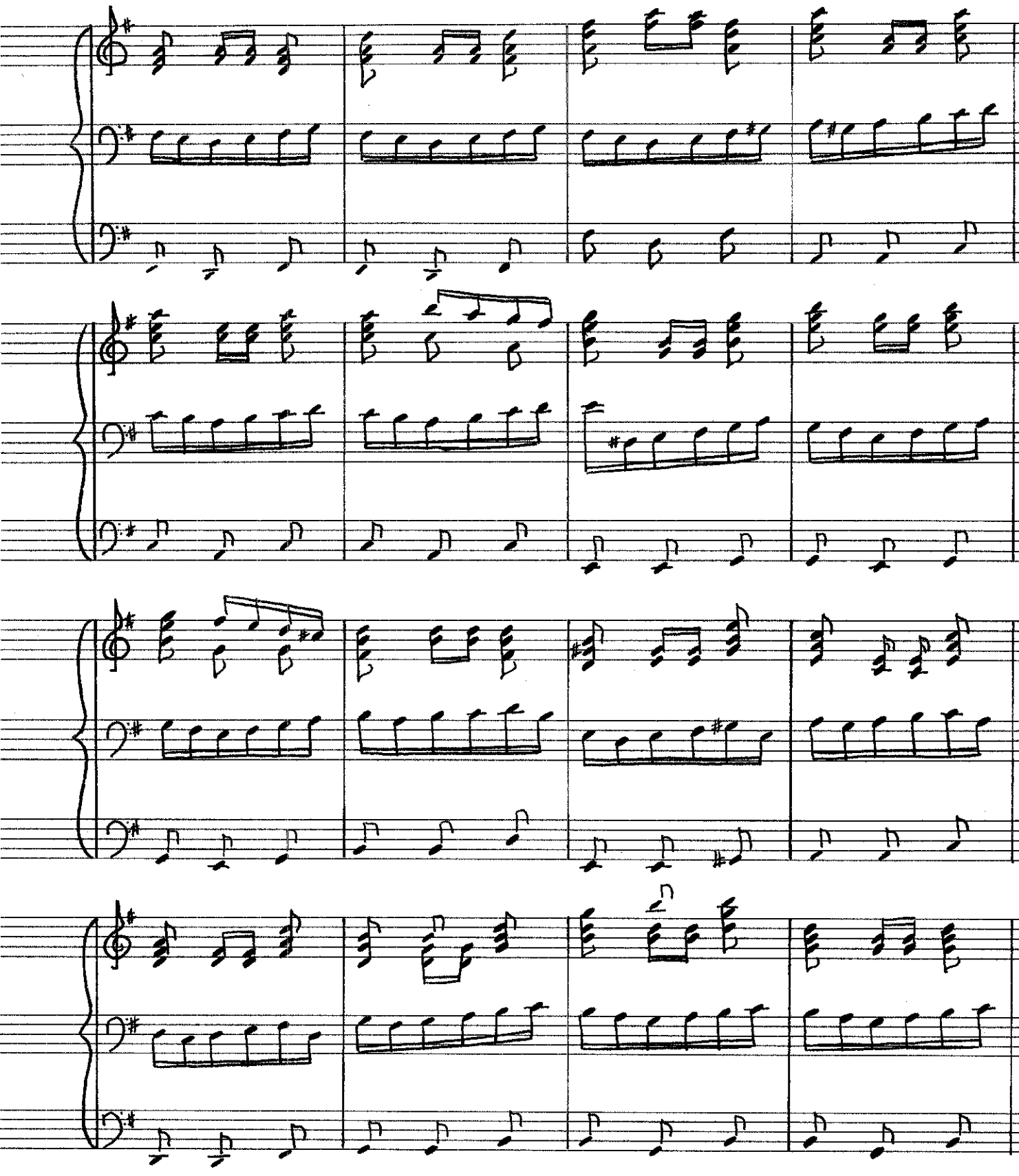

Sw. Flutes 8'4'
Ch.

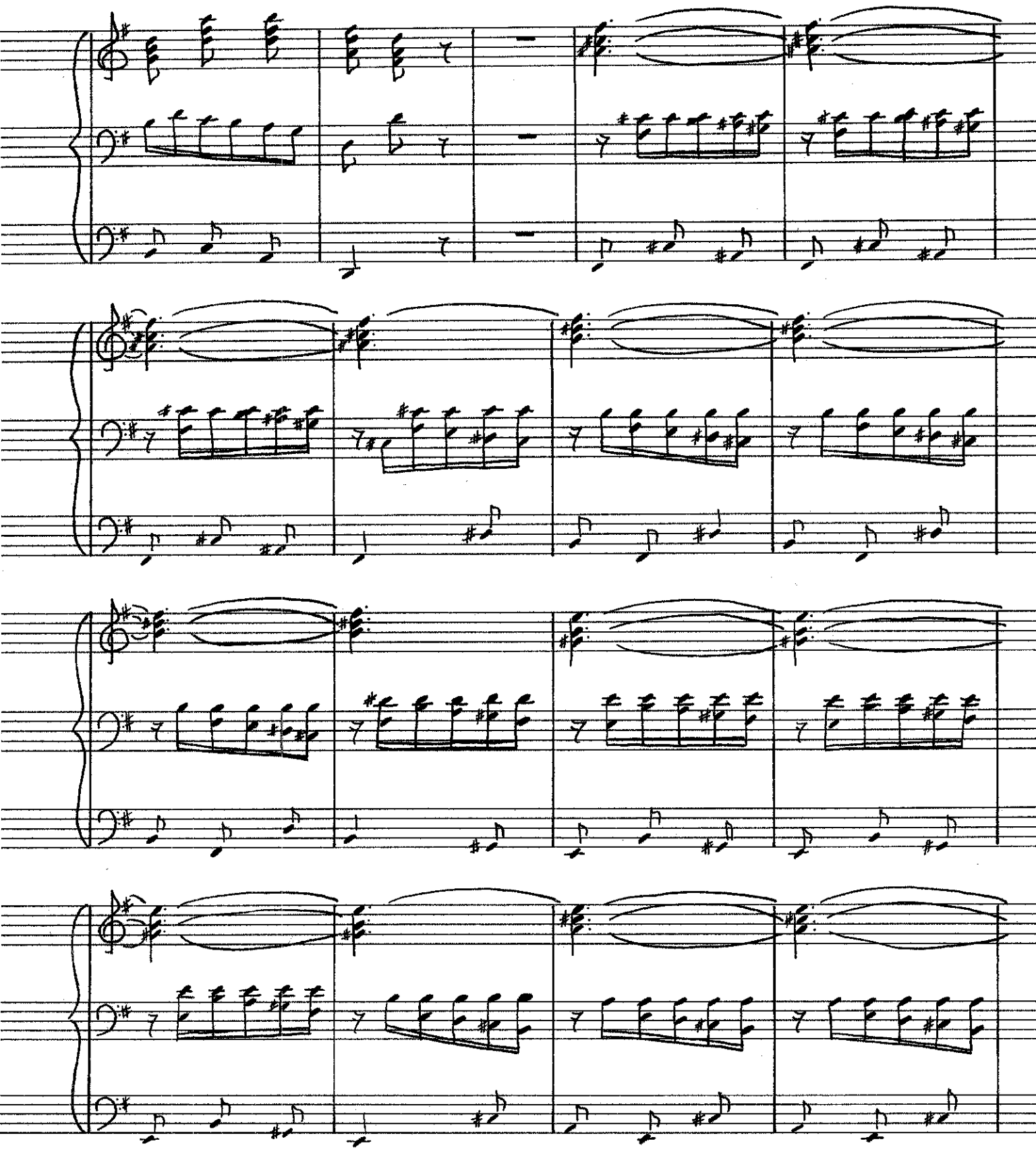

tr.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.
Ch.

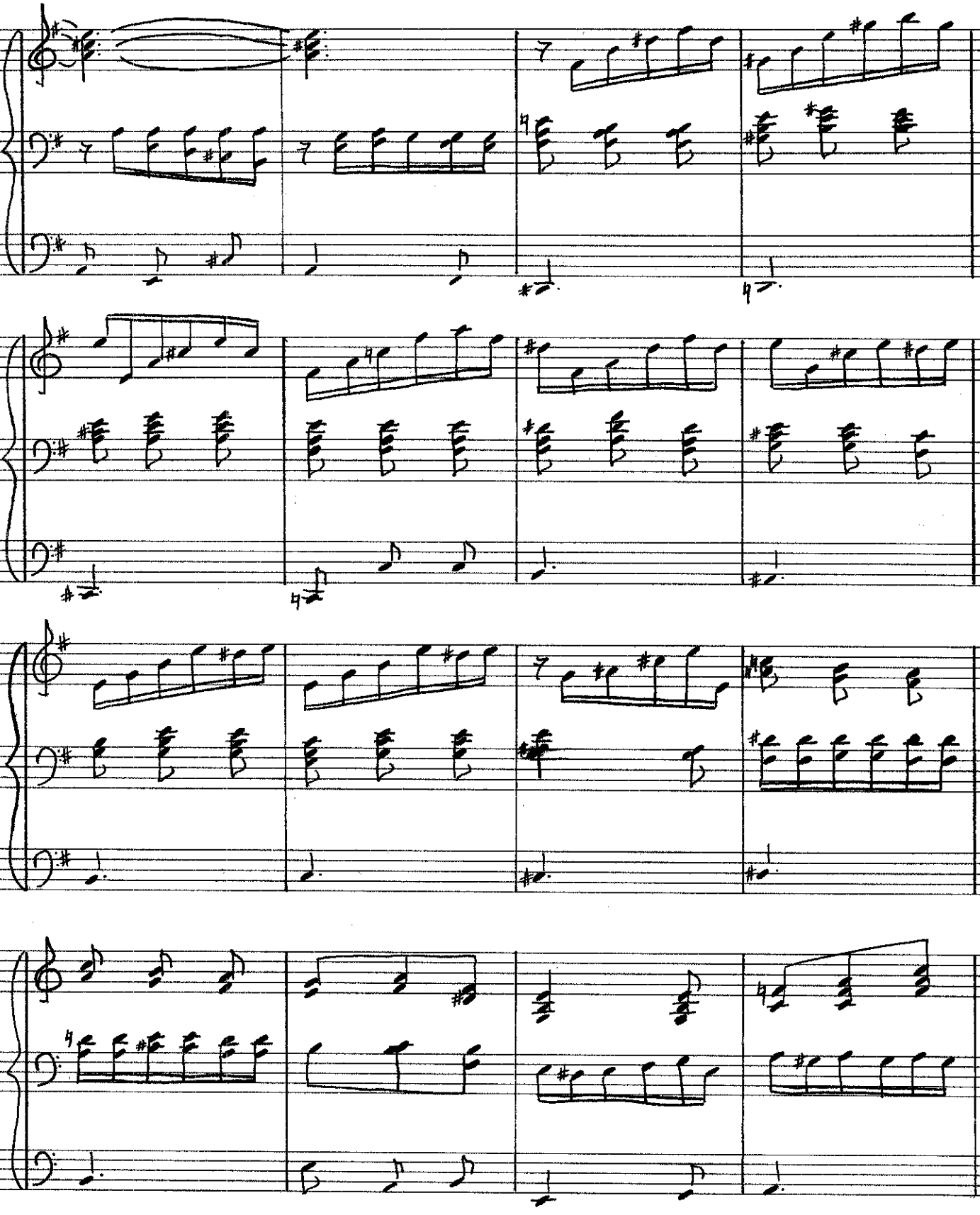

L.H.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.
Gt.
Ch.
Gt.

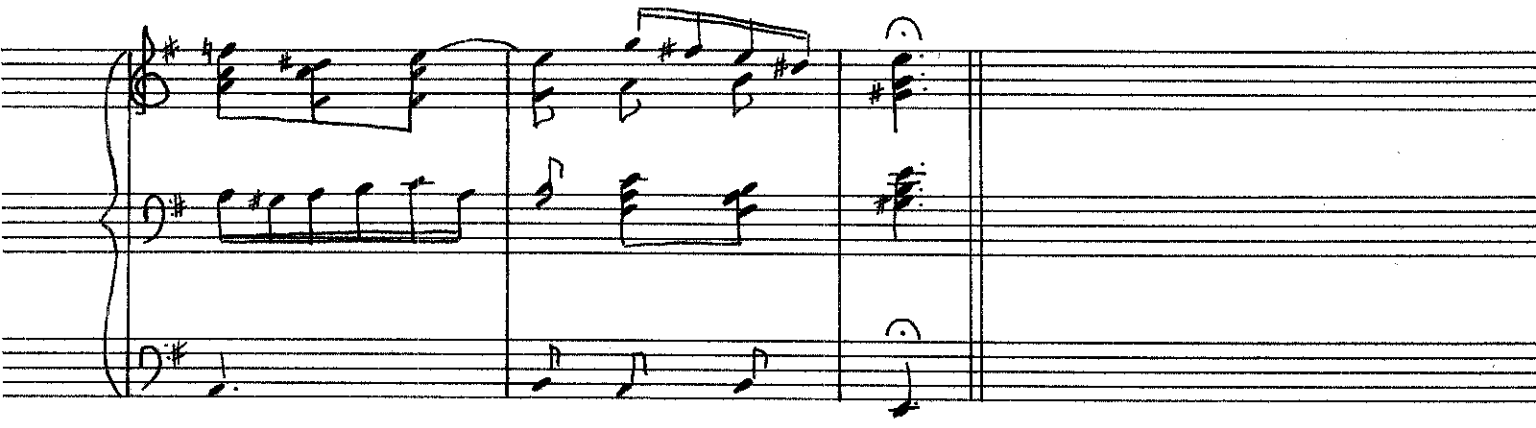

Gt. Prin. 8' 4'
2' Mix.

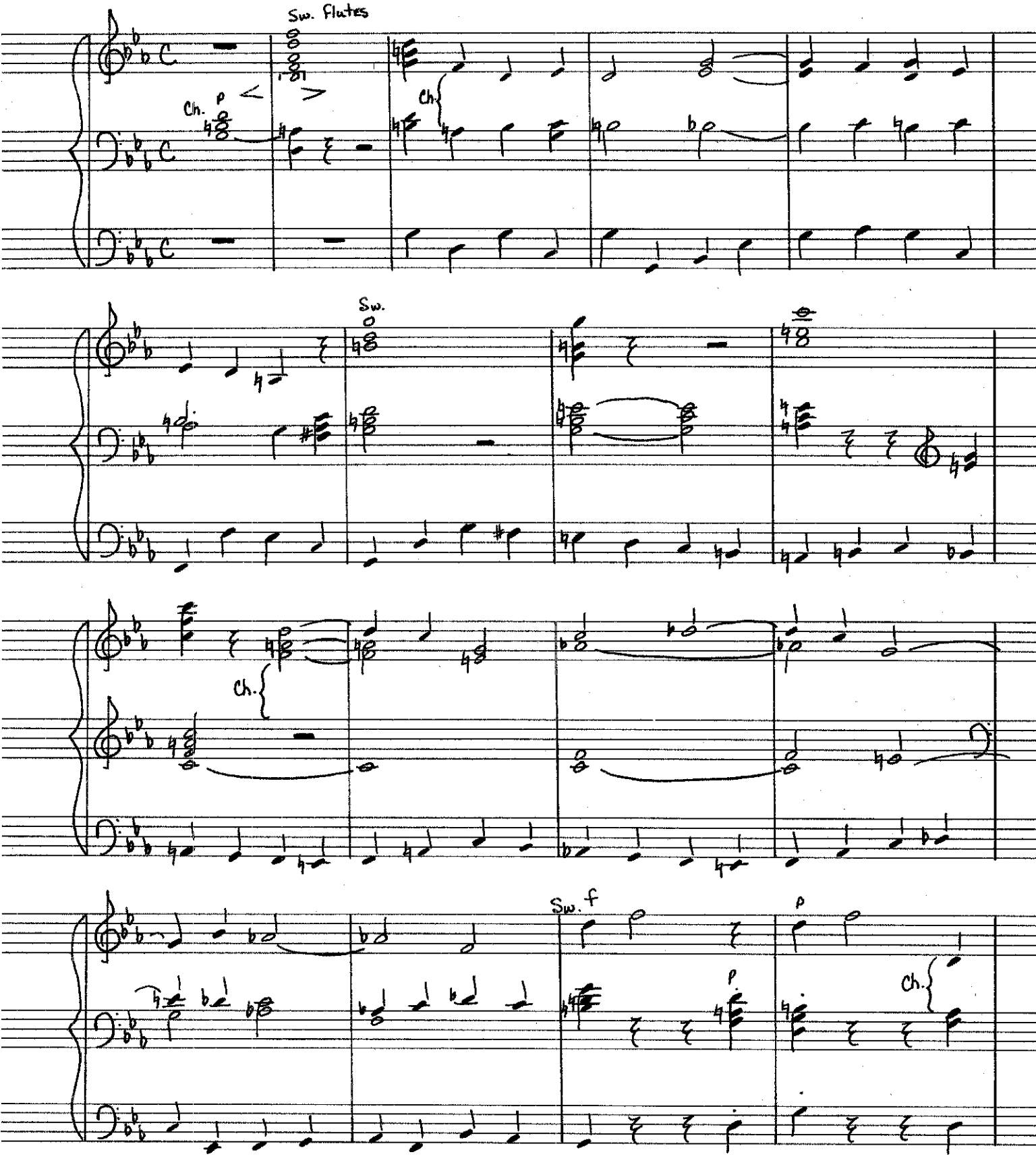











Sw. Flutes
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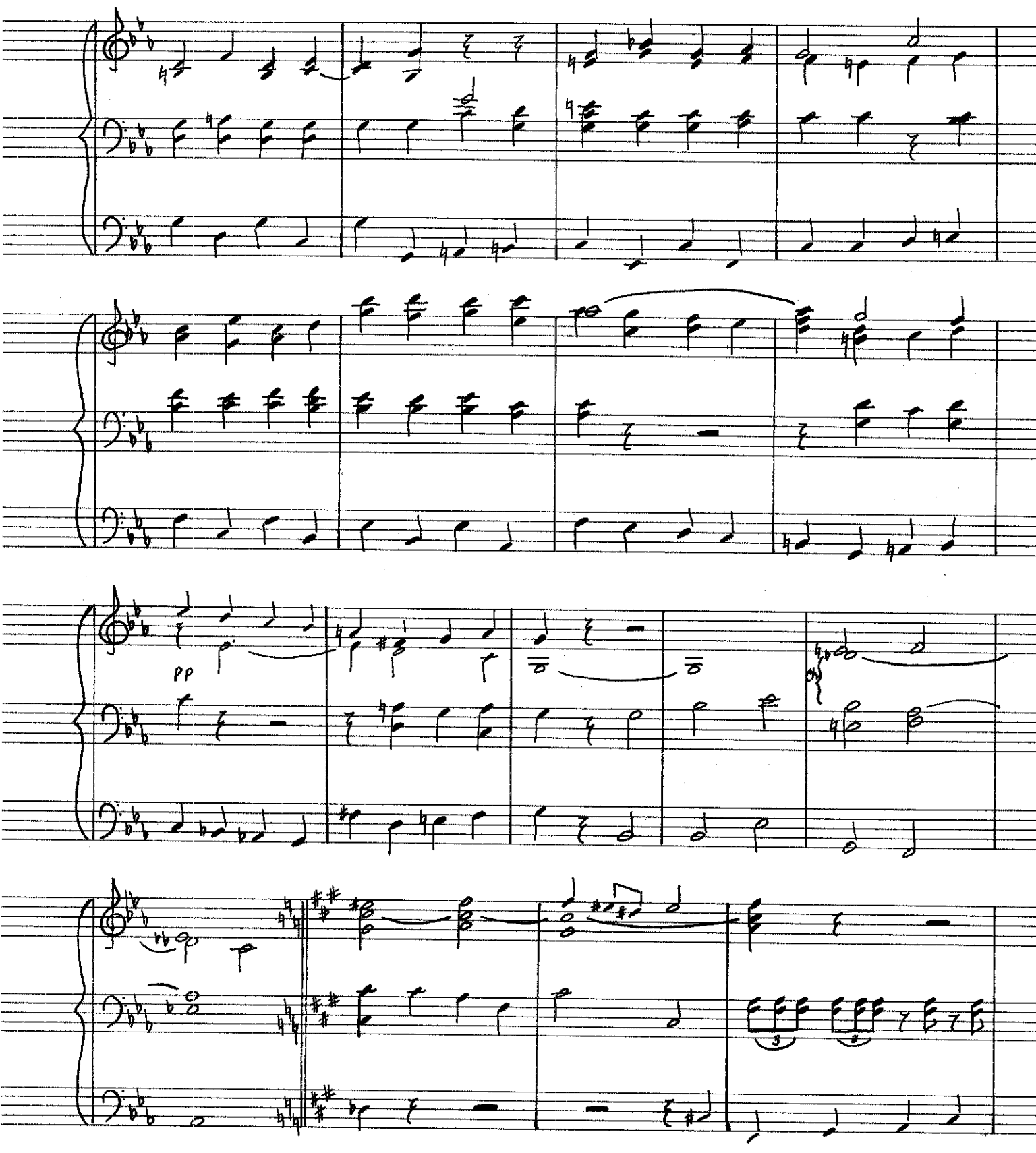
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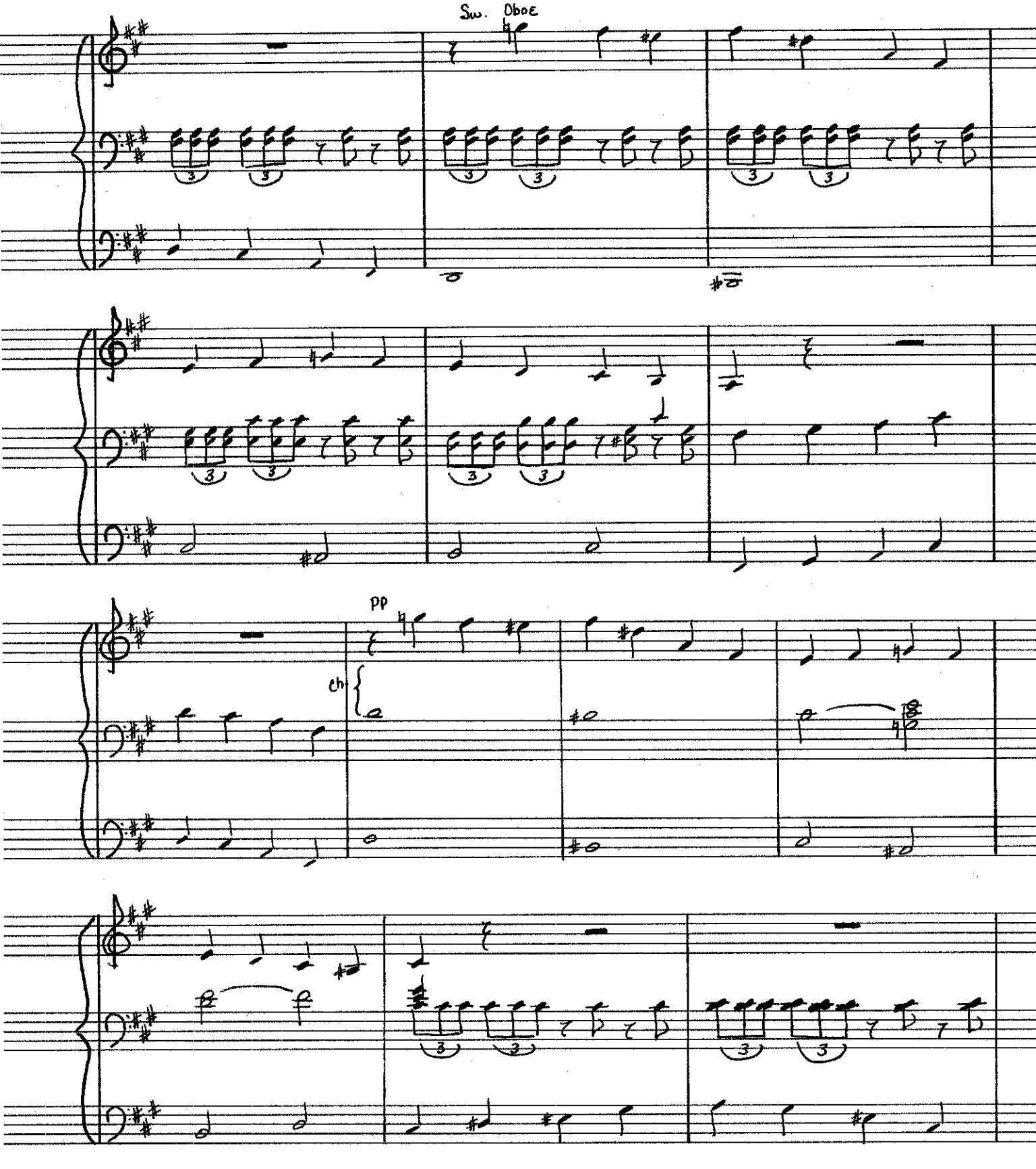
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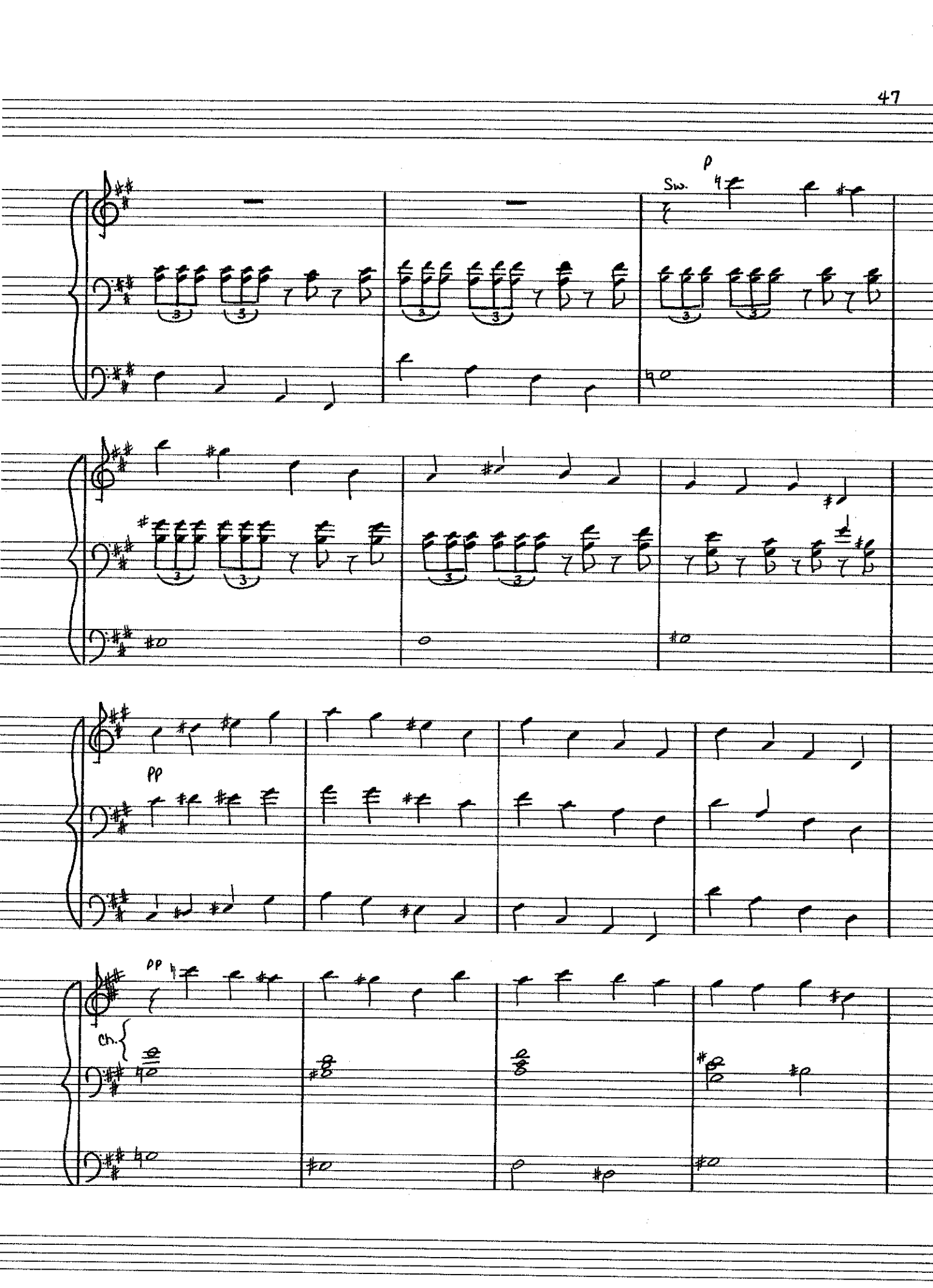
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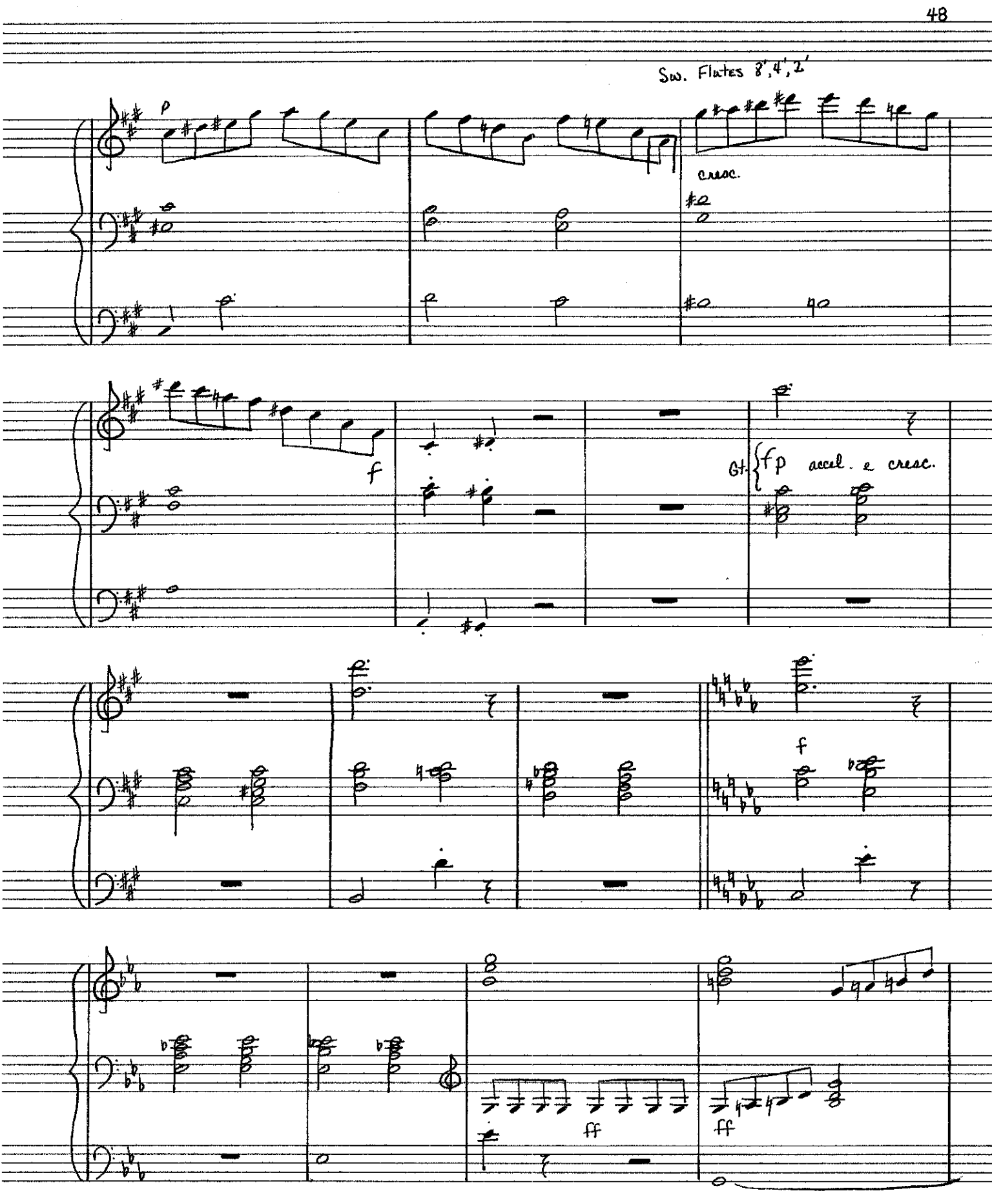
Sw. Flutes 8', 4', 2'
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cresc.
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Gt.
fp accel. e cresc.
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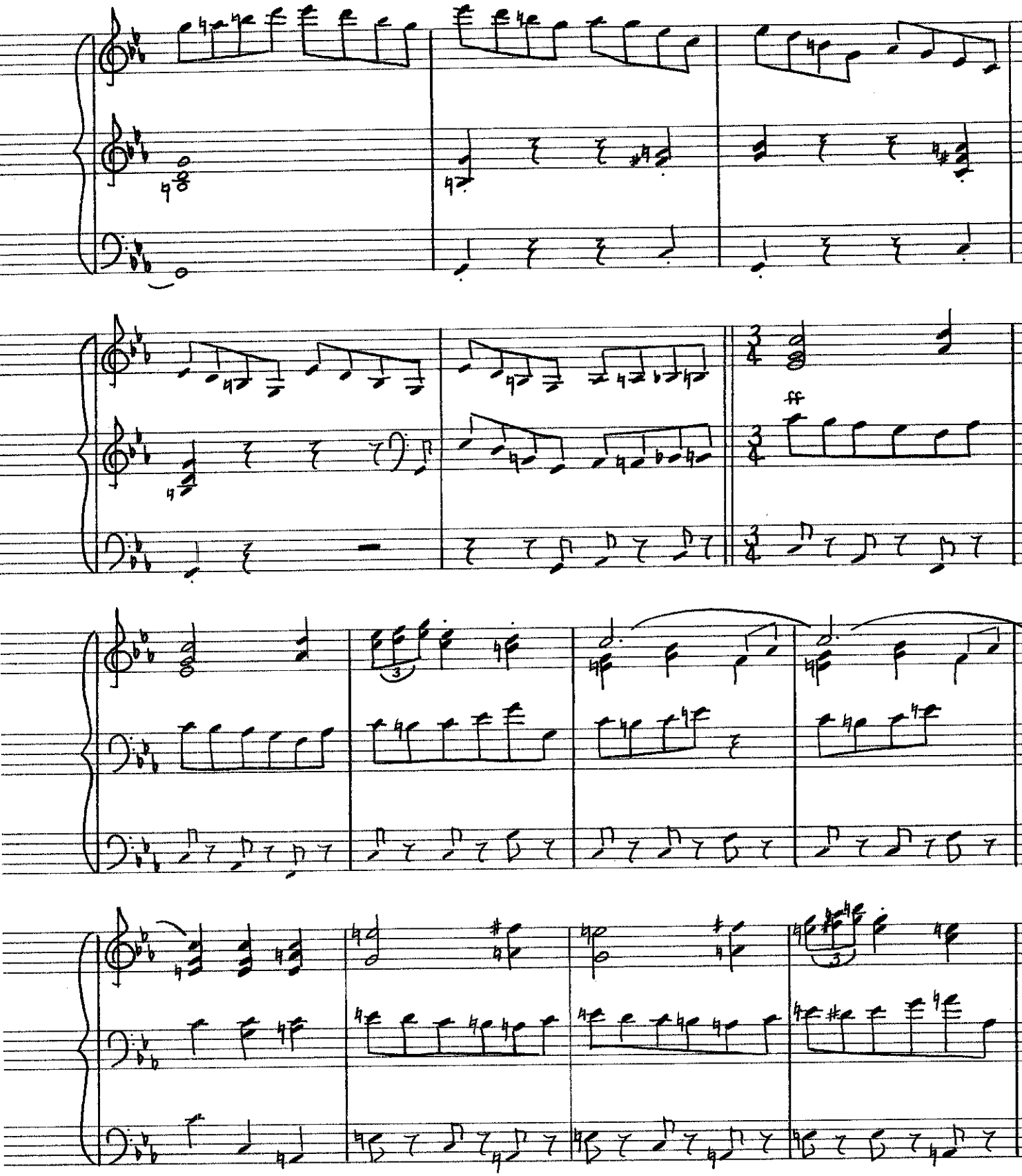
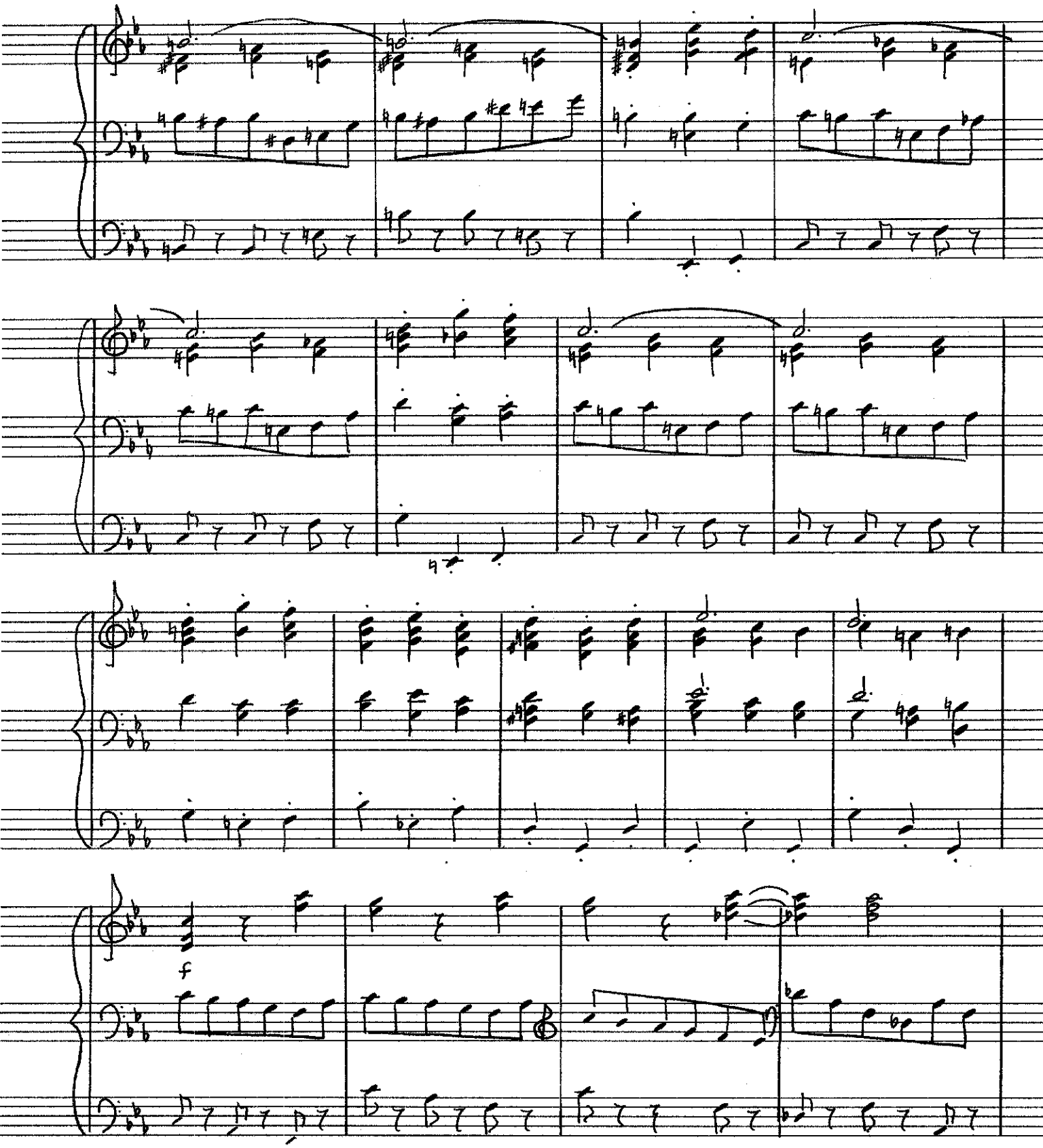
ff
ff

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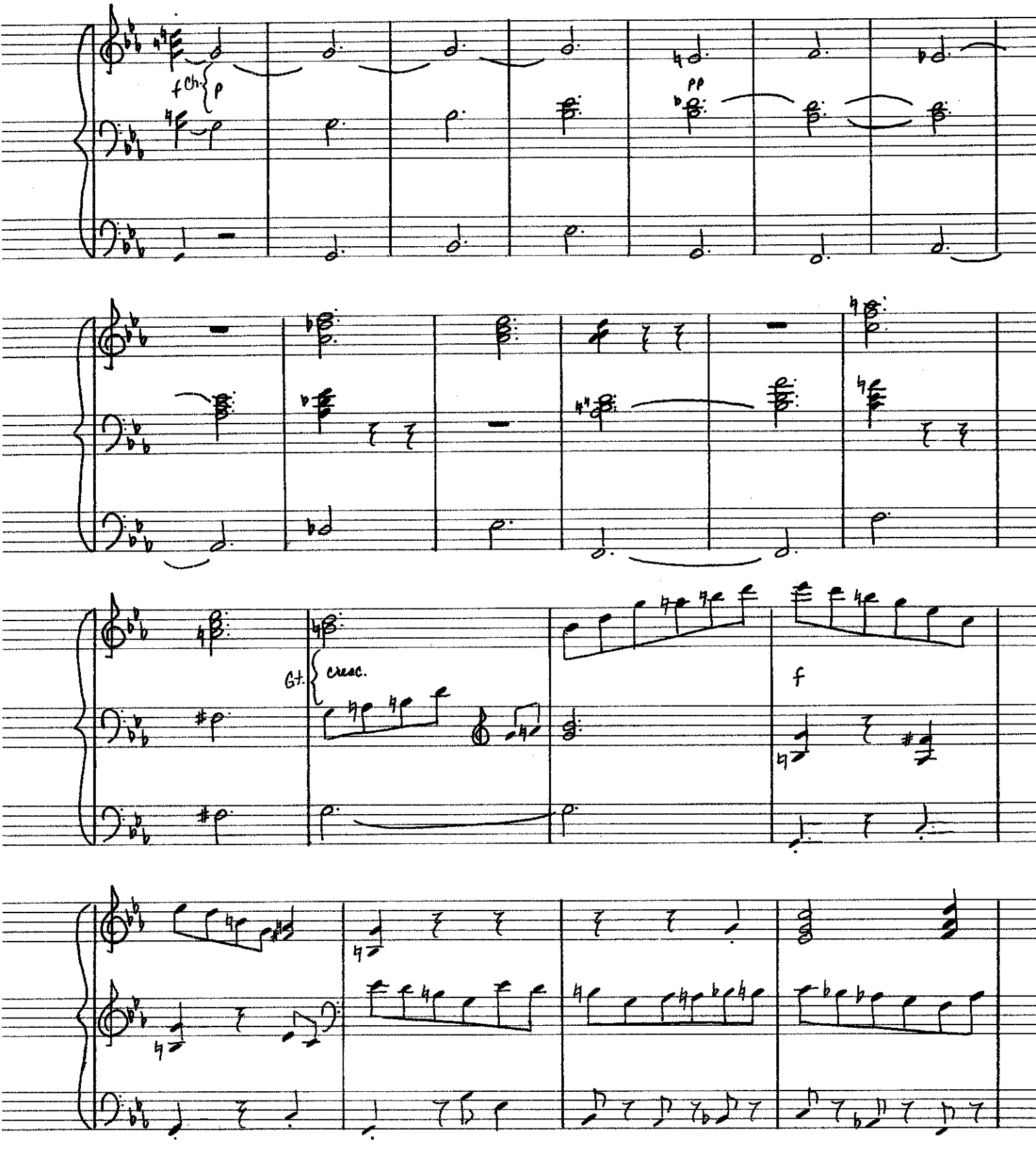
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p
pp
Gt.
cresc.
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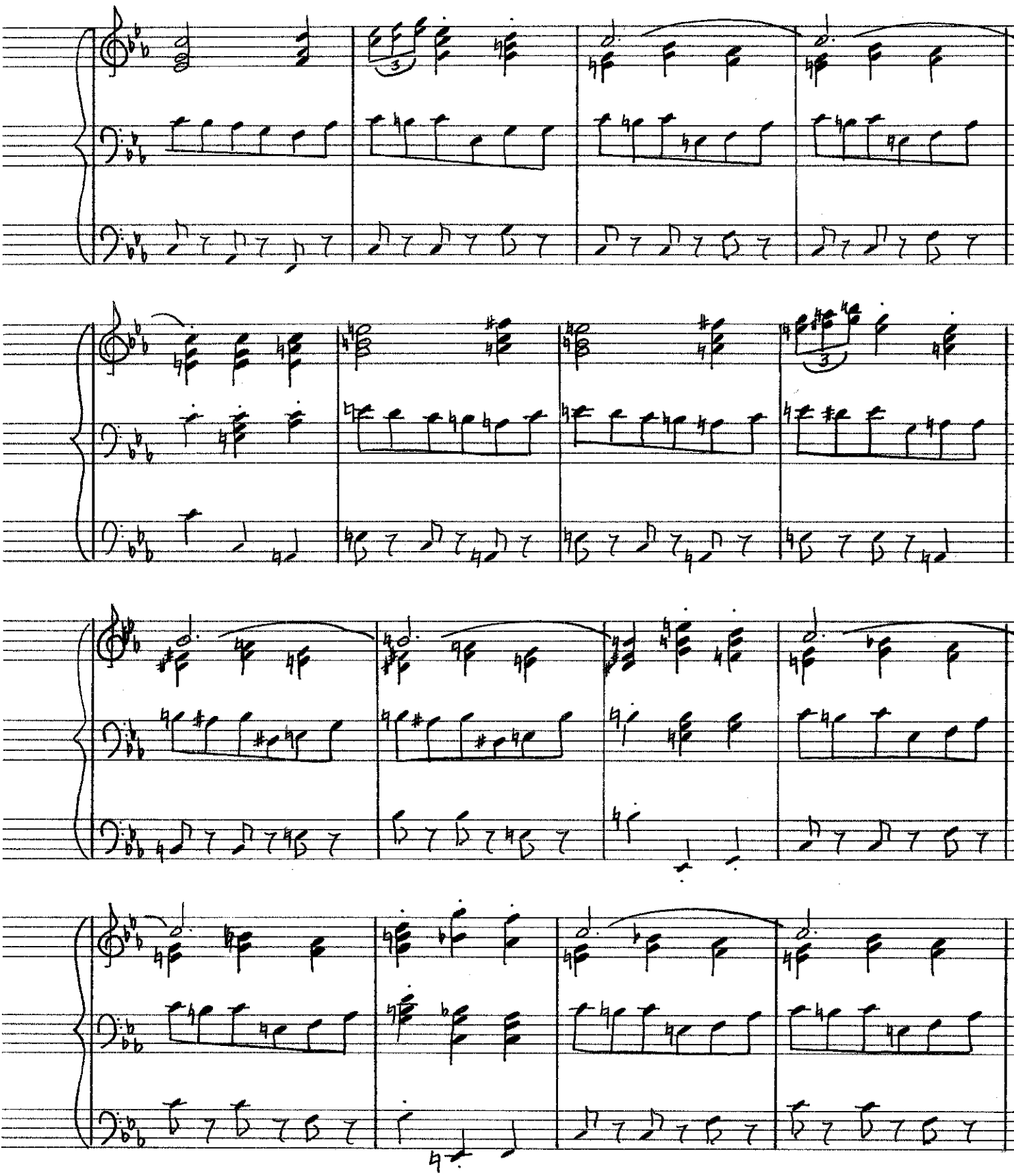

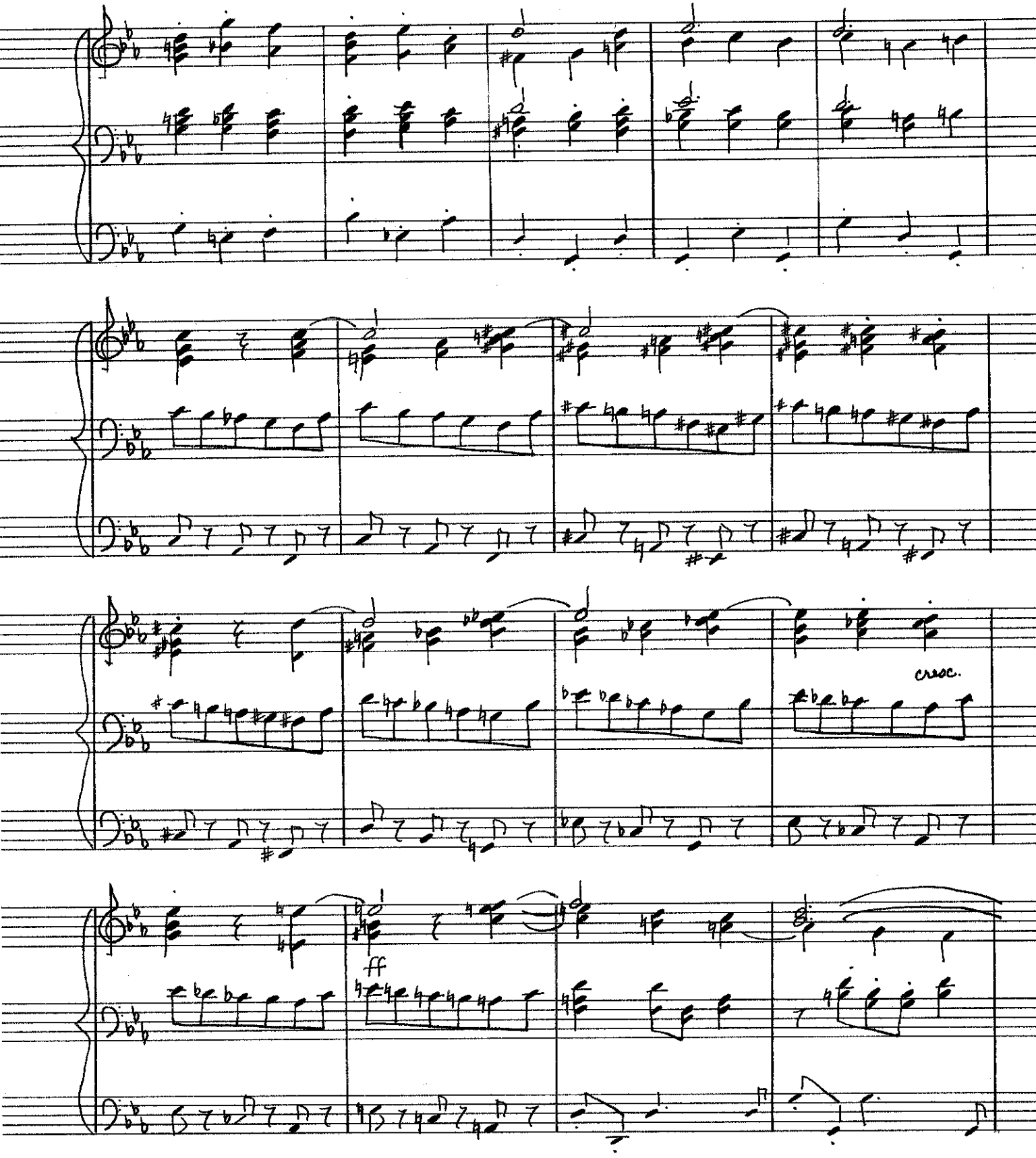
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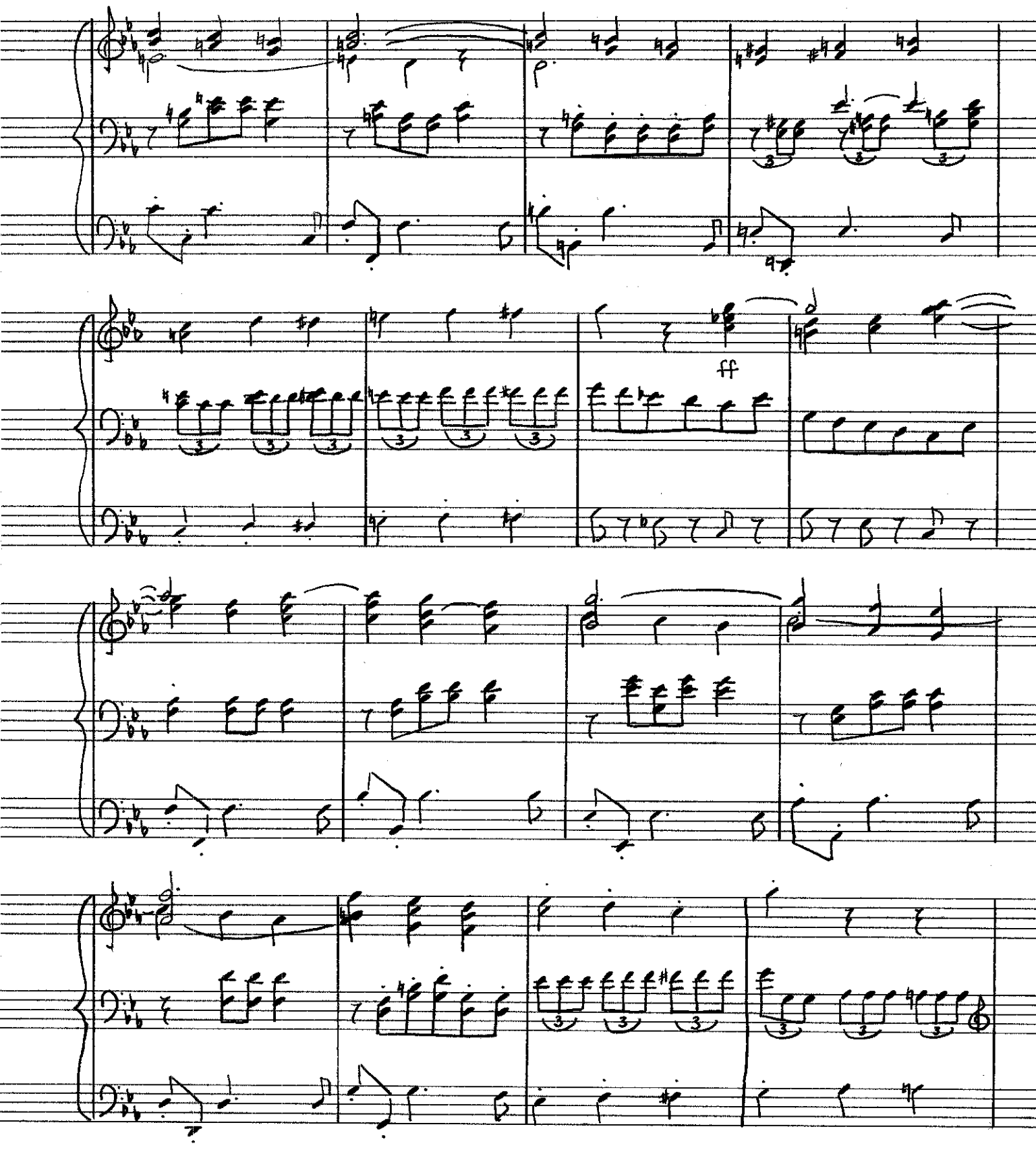
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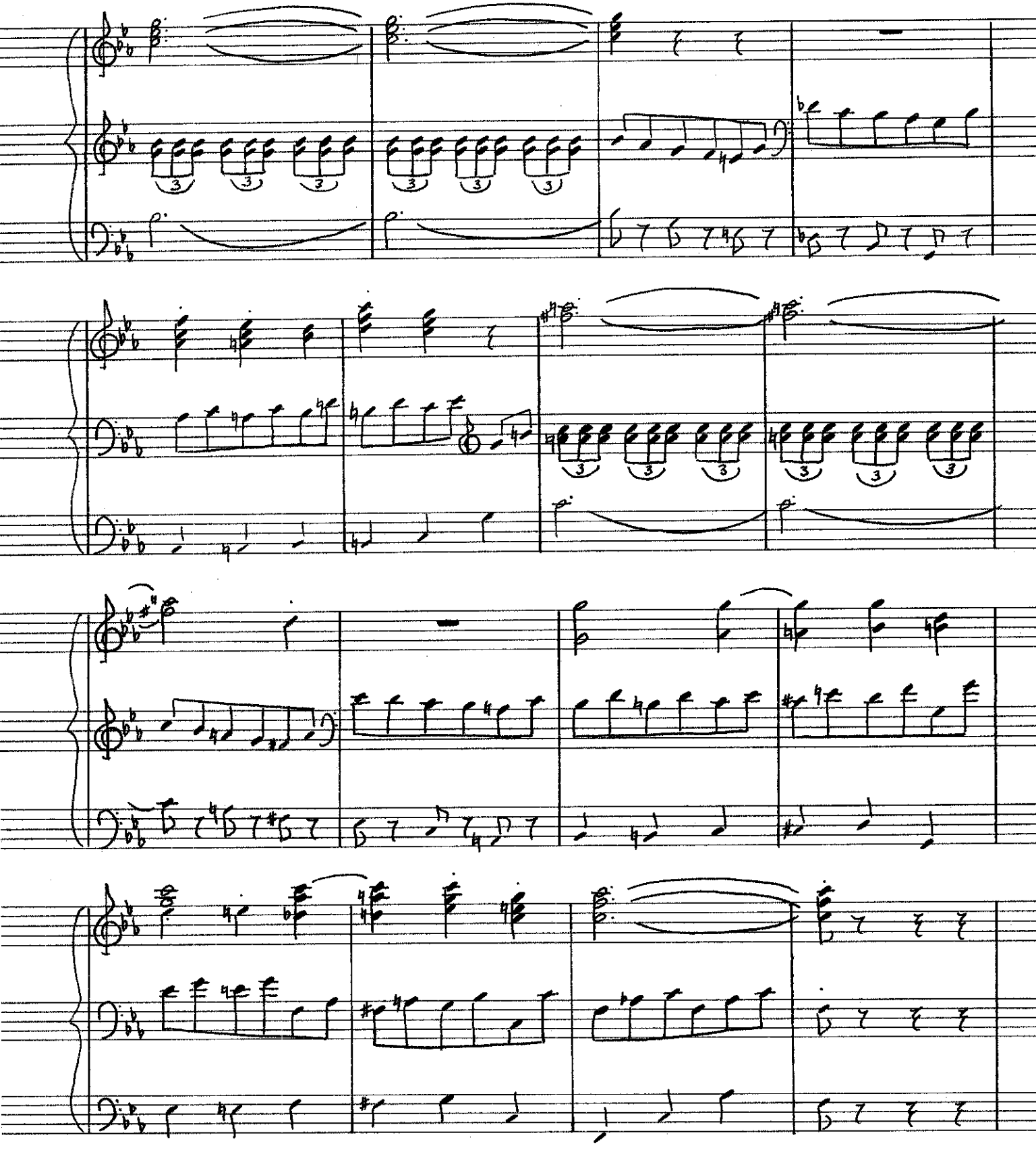
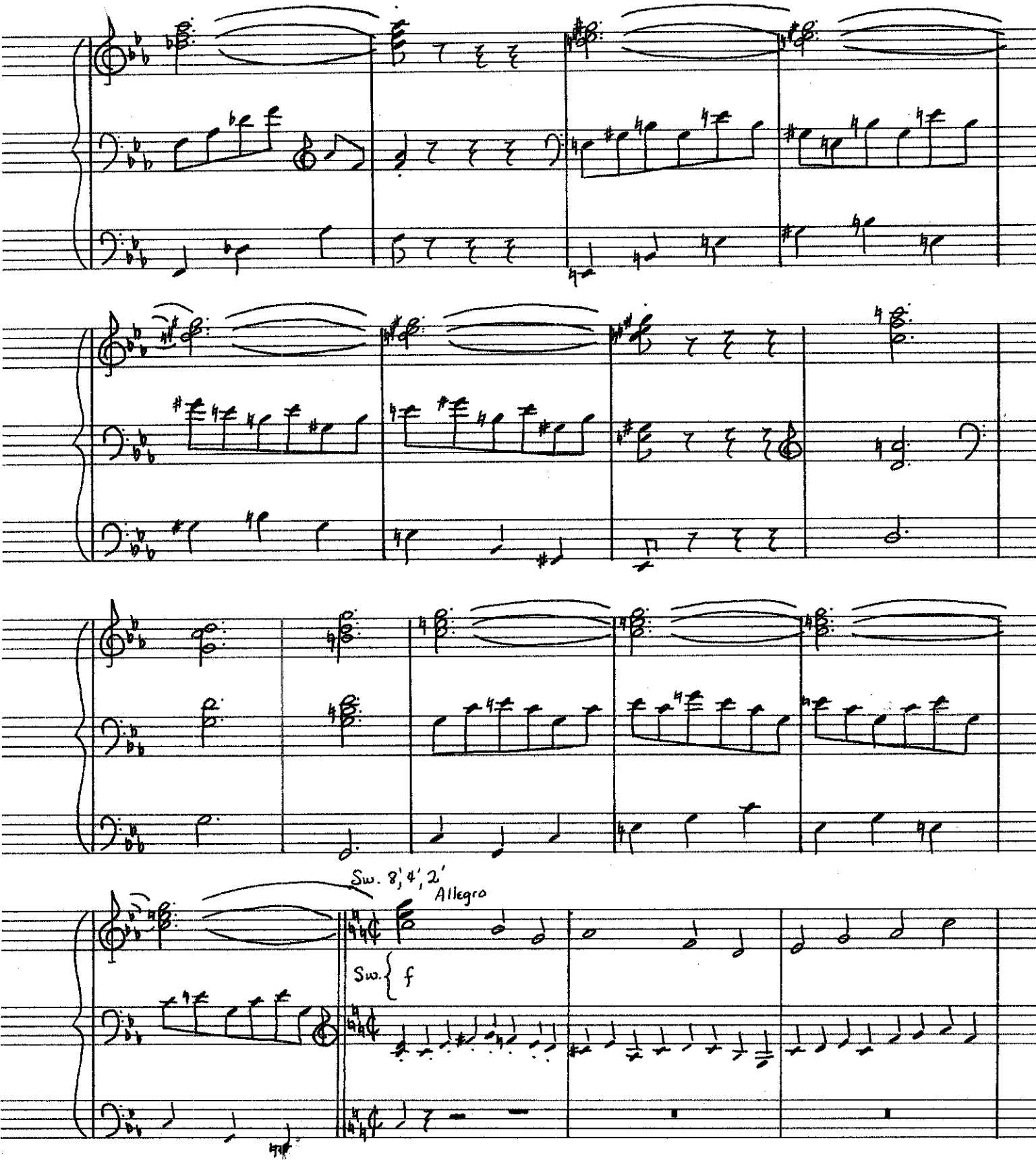
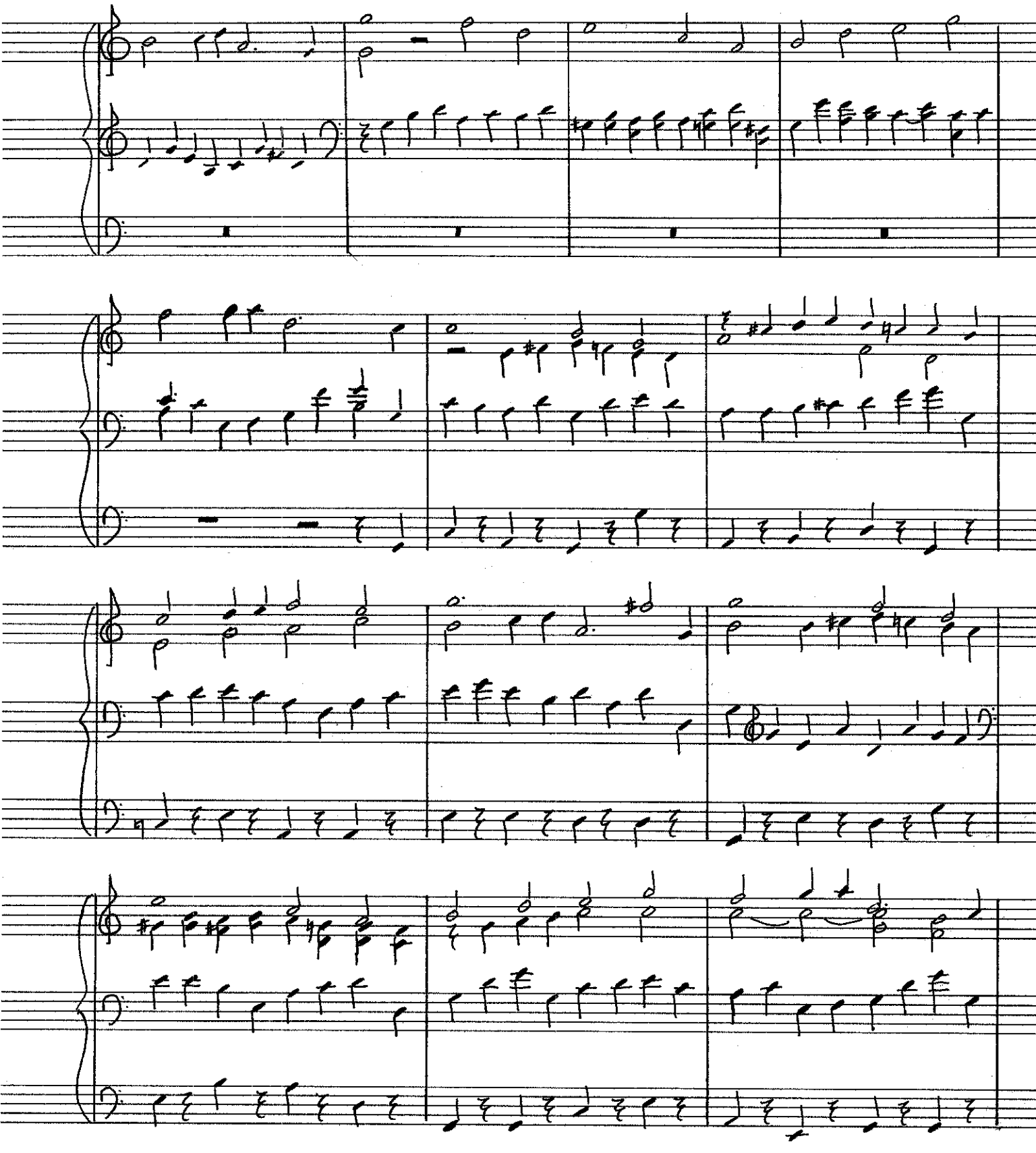
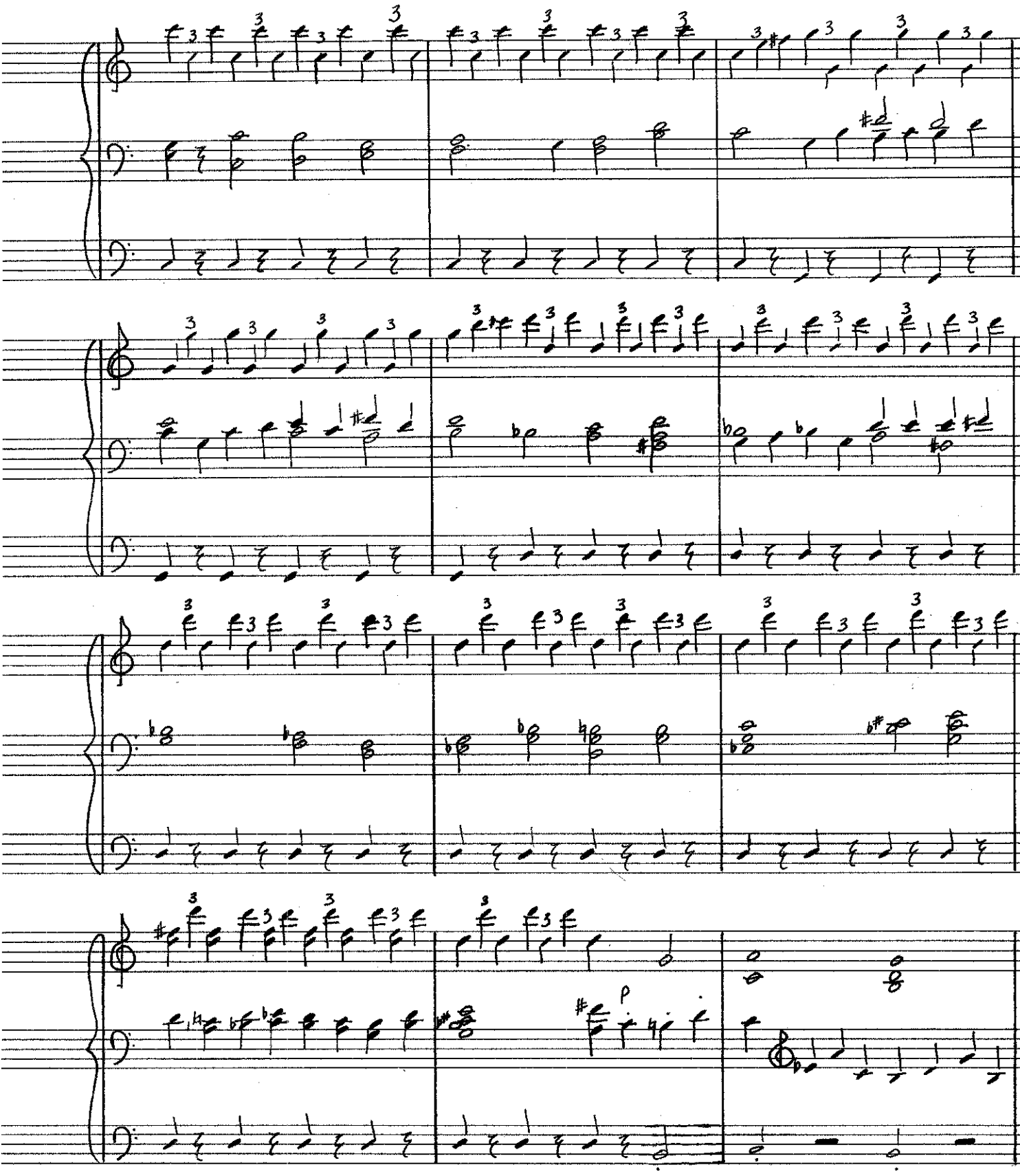



Sw. 8', 4', 2'
Allegro
Sw.
f

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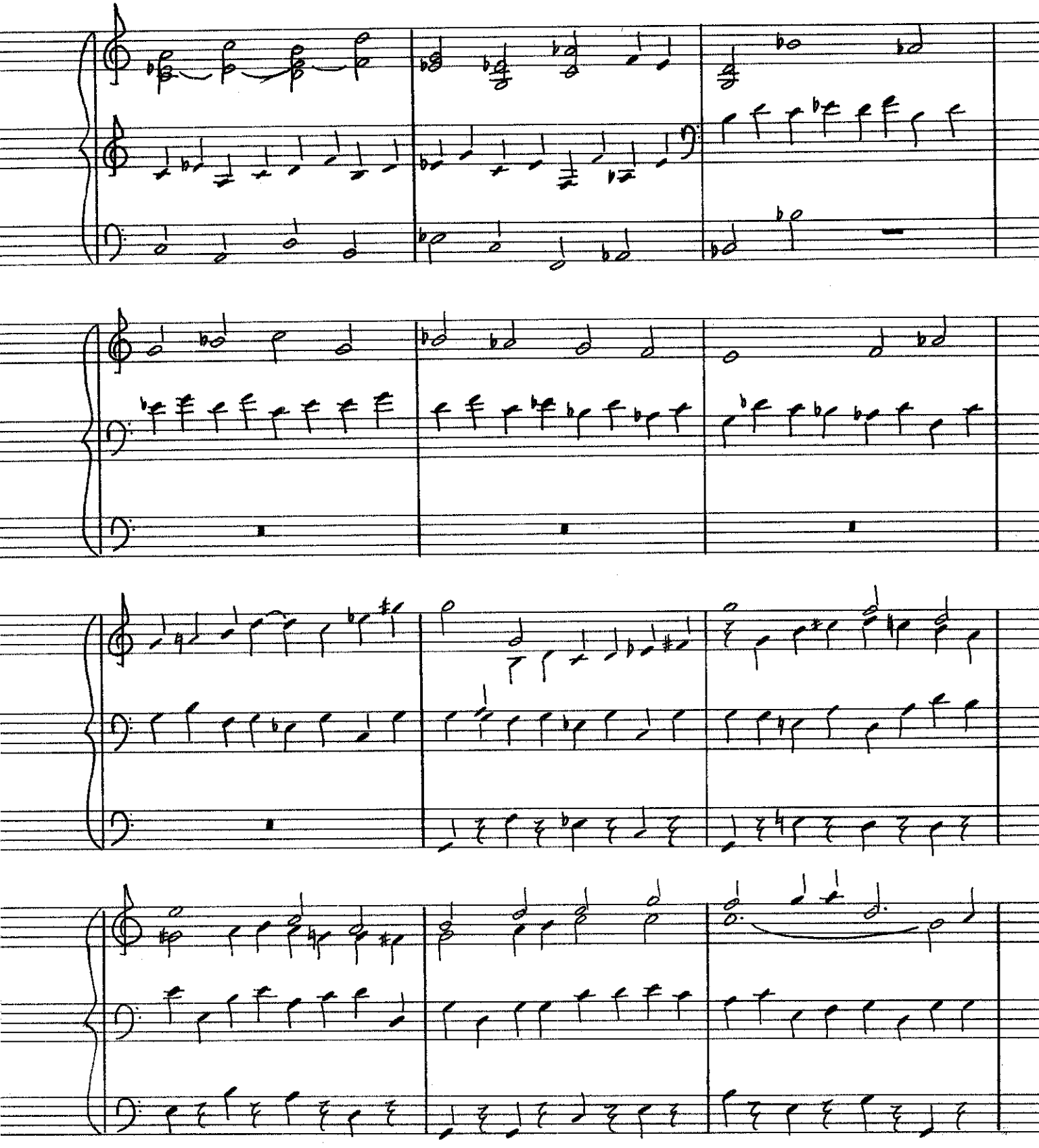

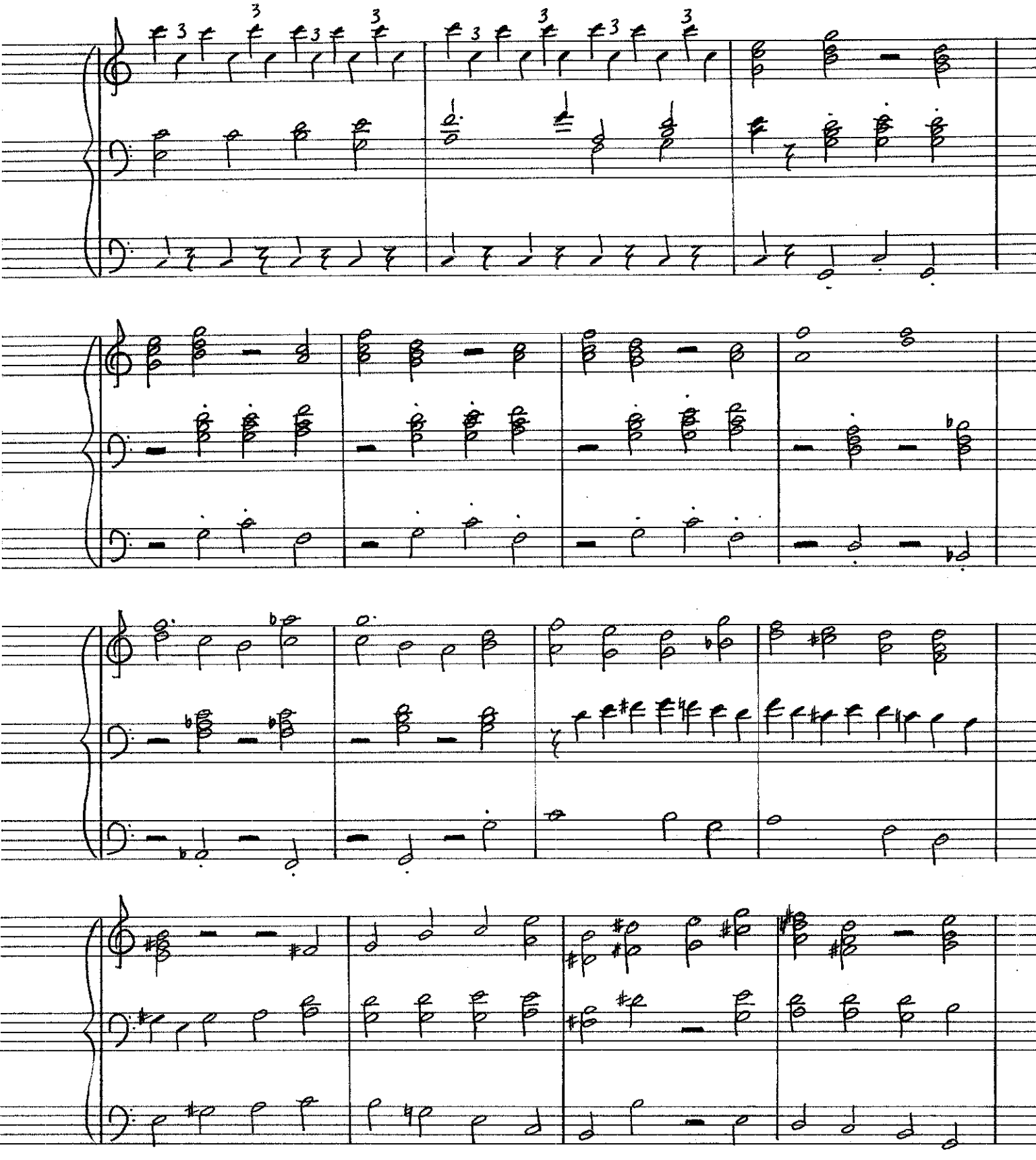

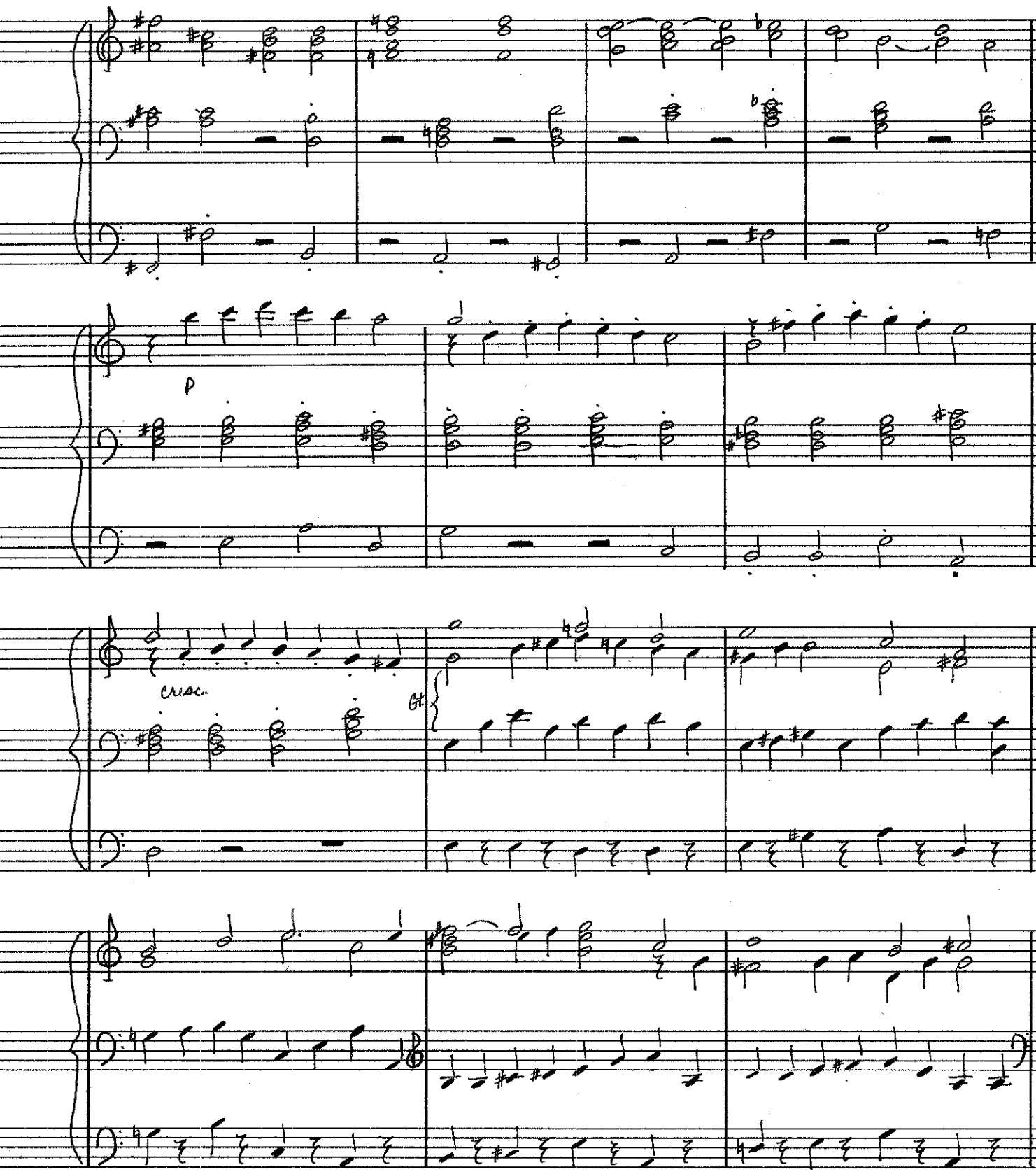
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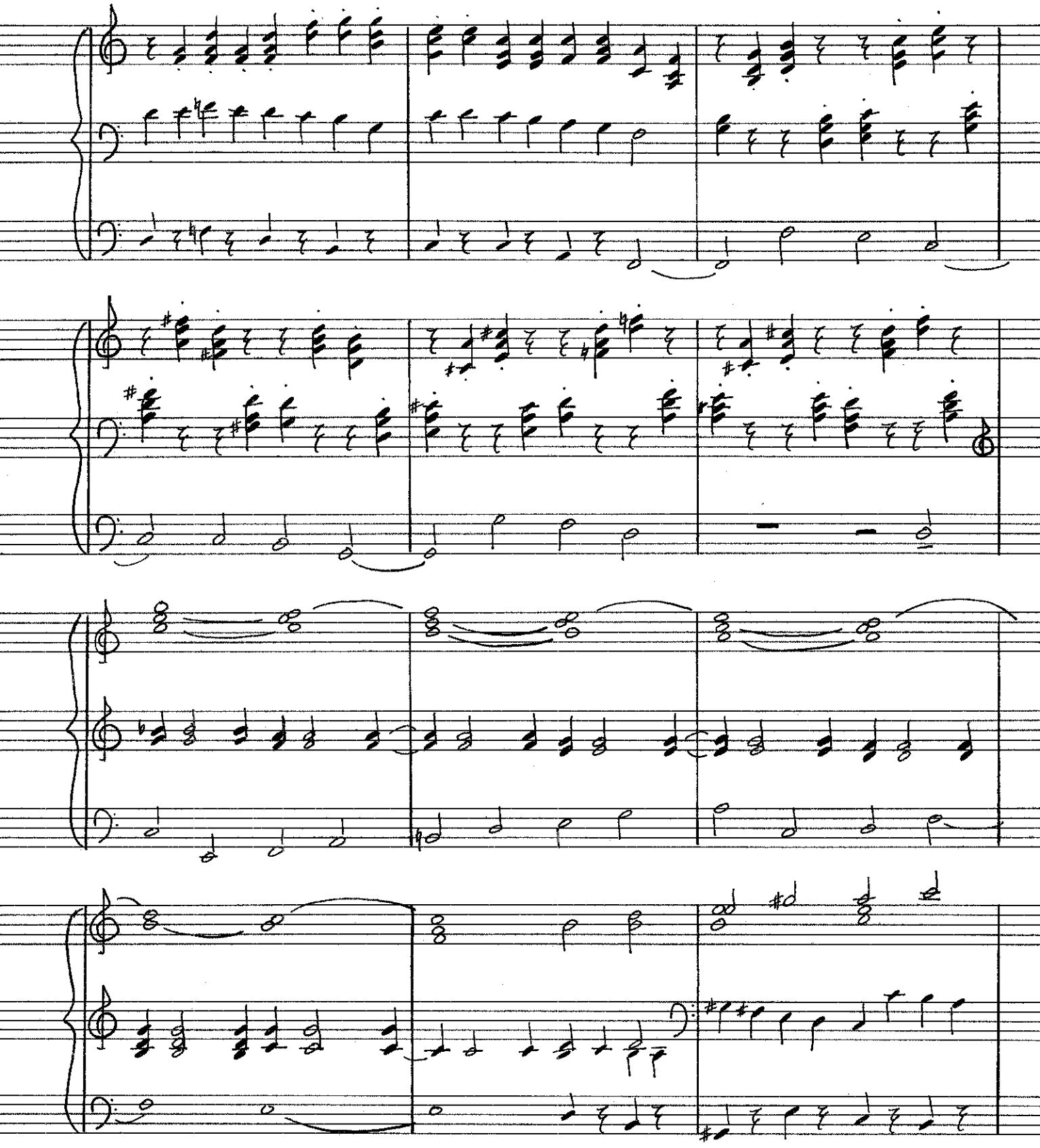
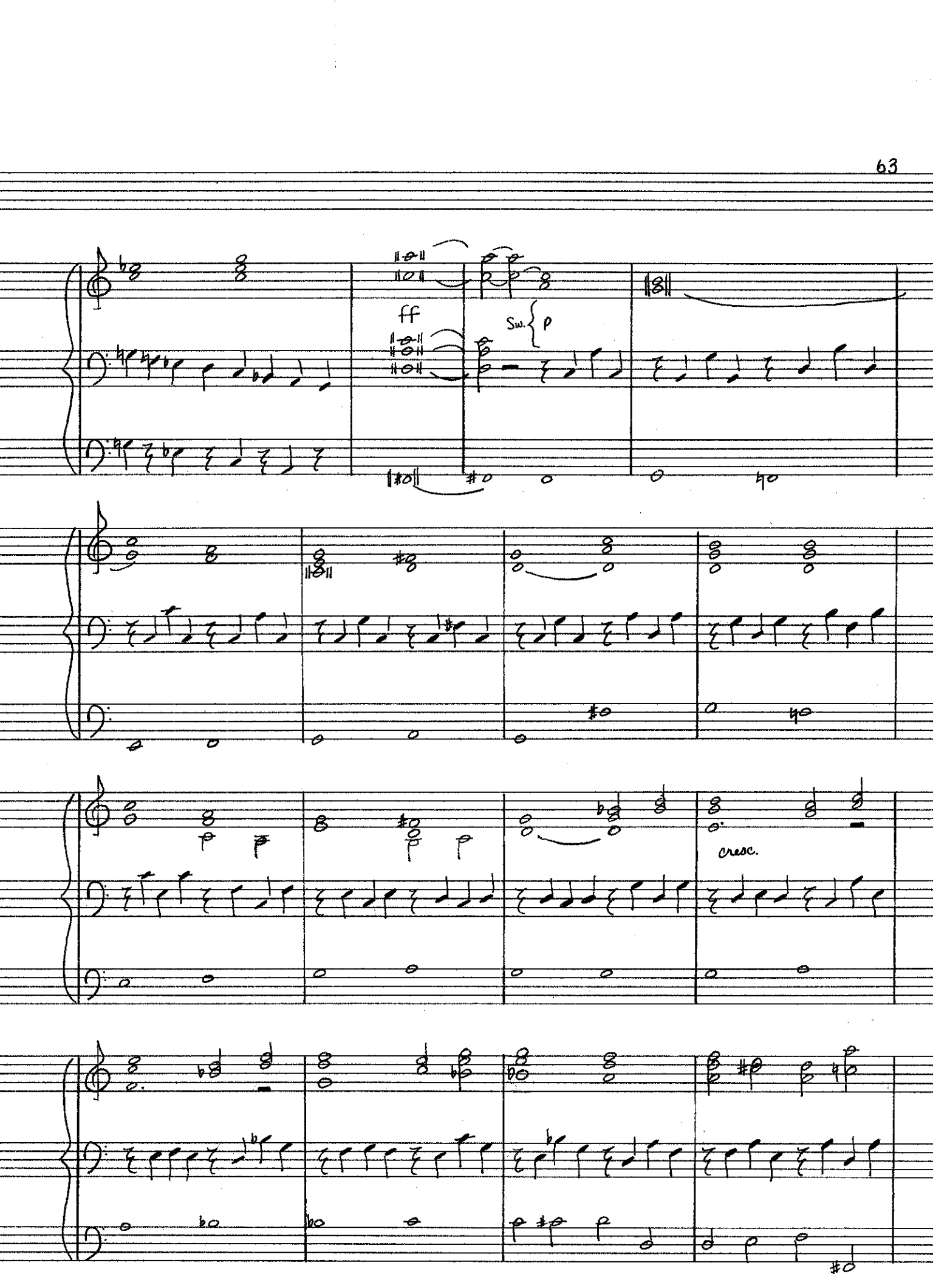
Gt.

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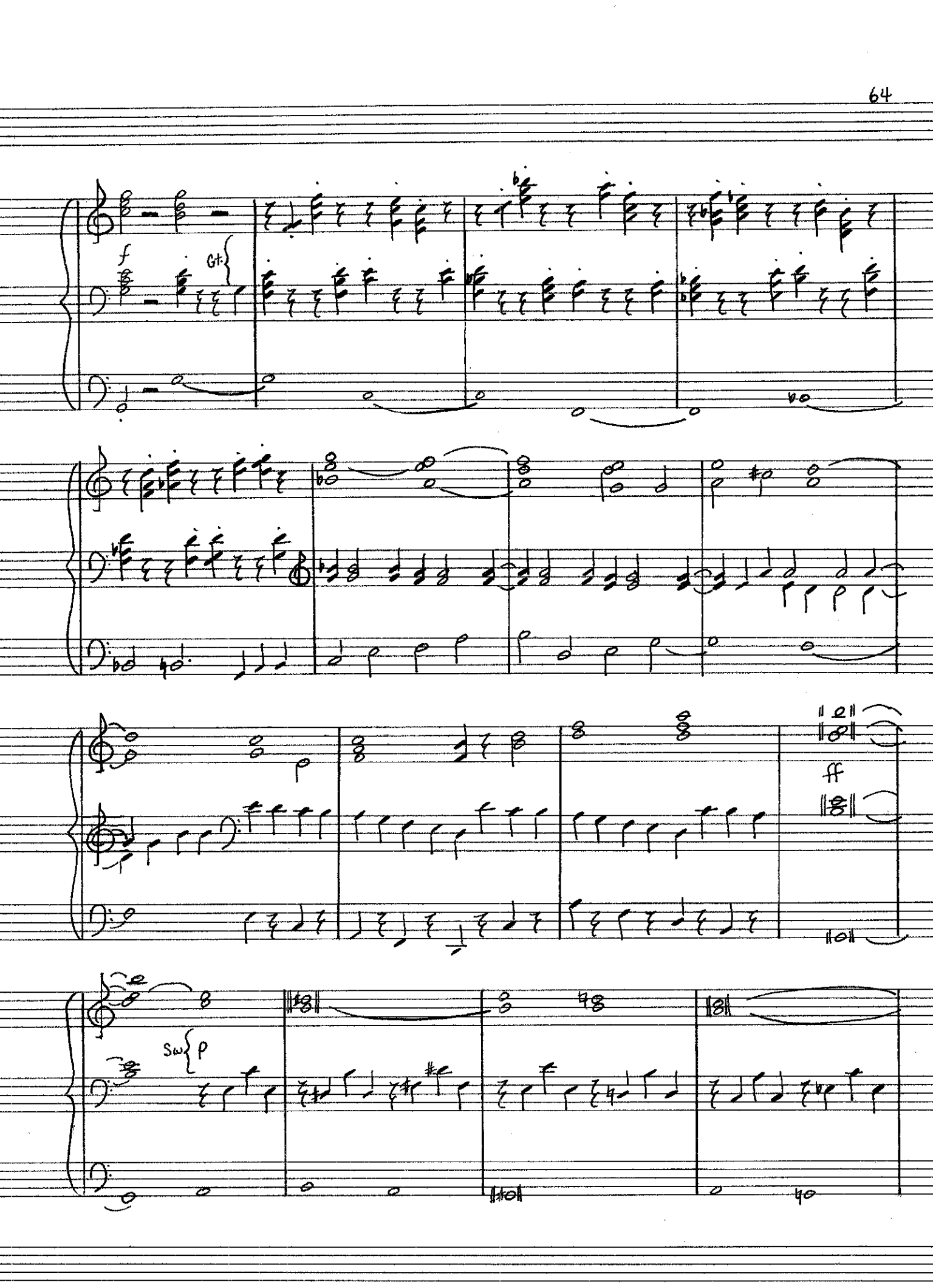
cresc.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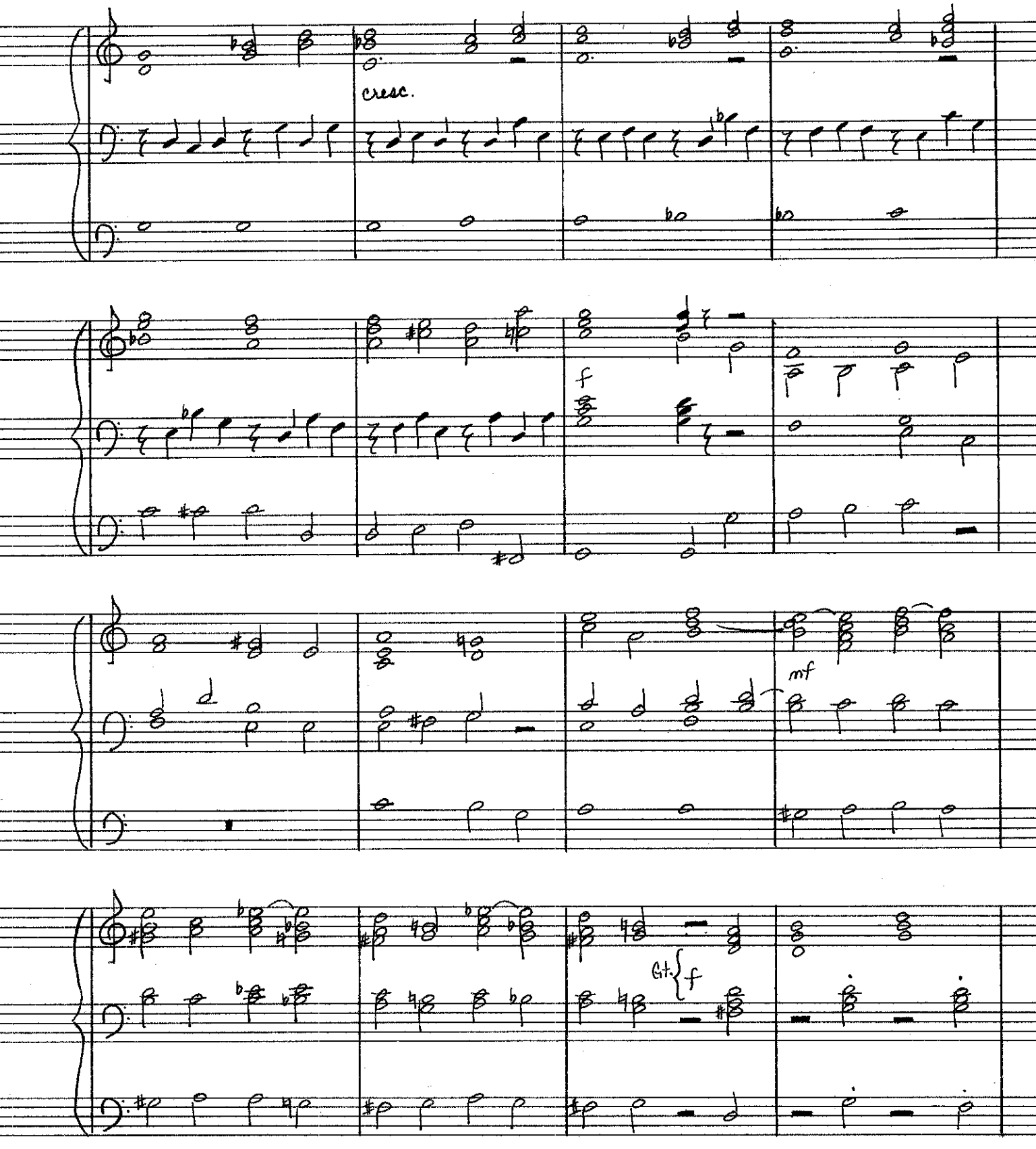
Gt.
ff
Sw
p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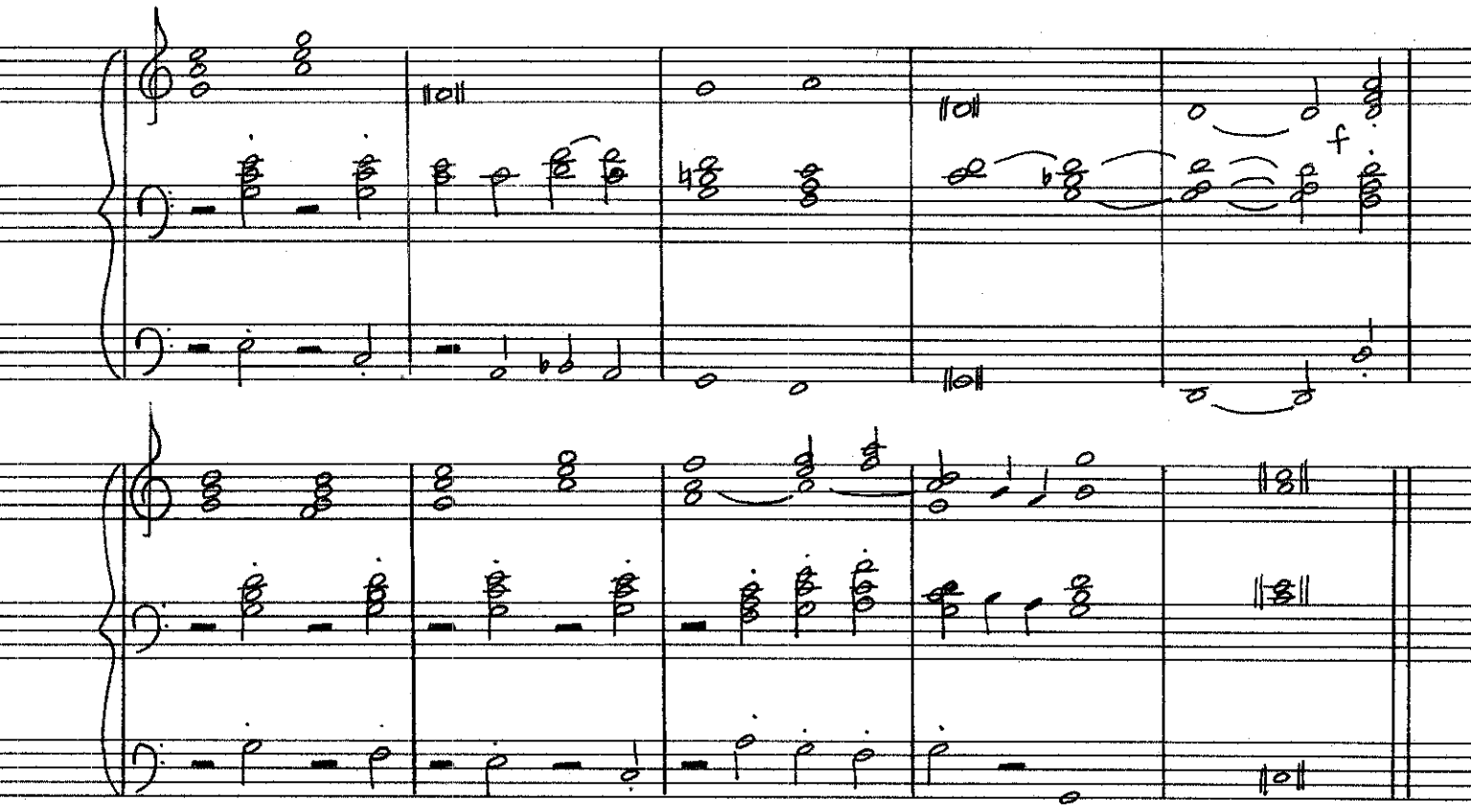
f
mf
Gt.
f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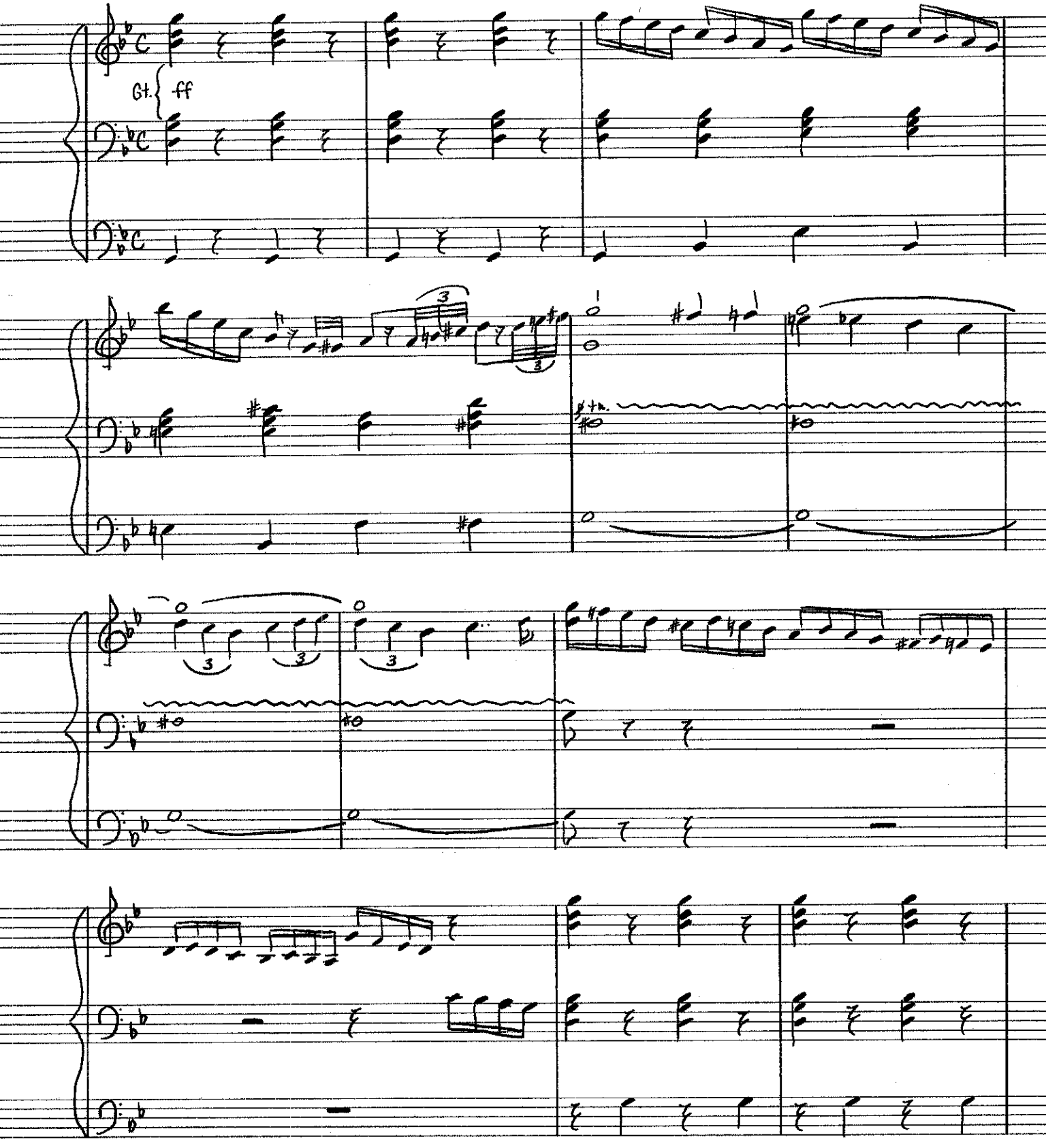
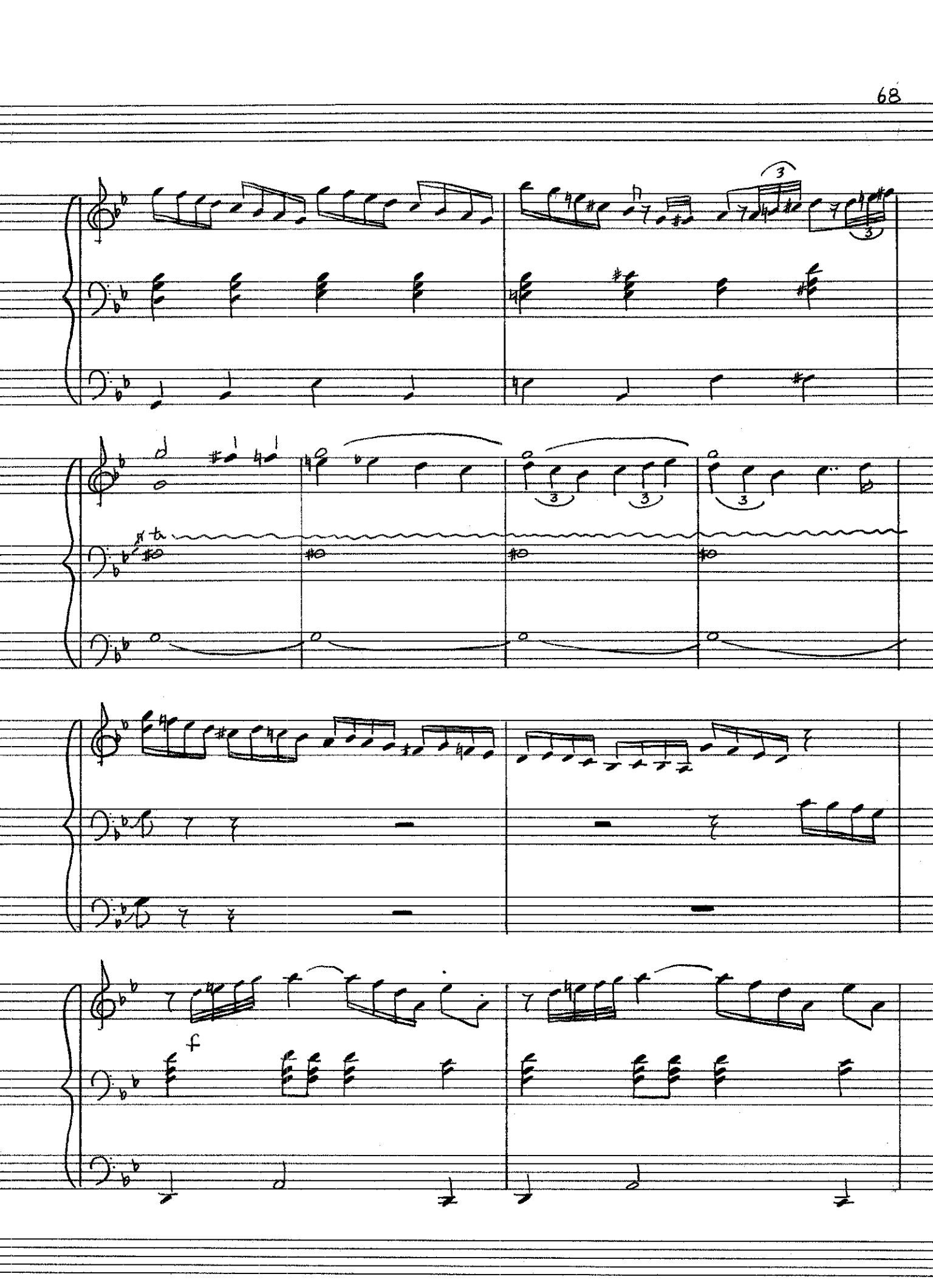
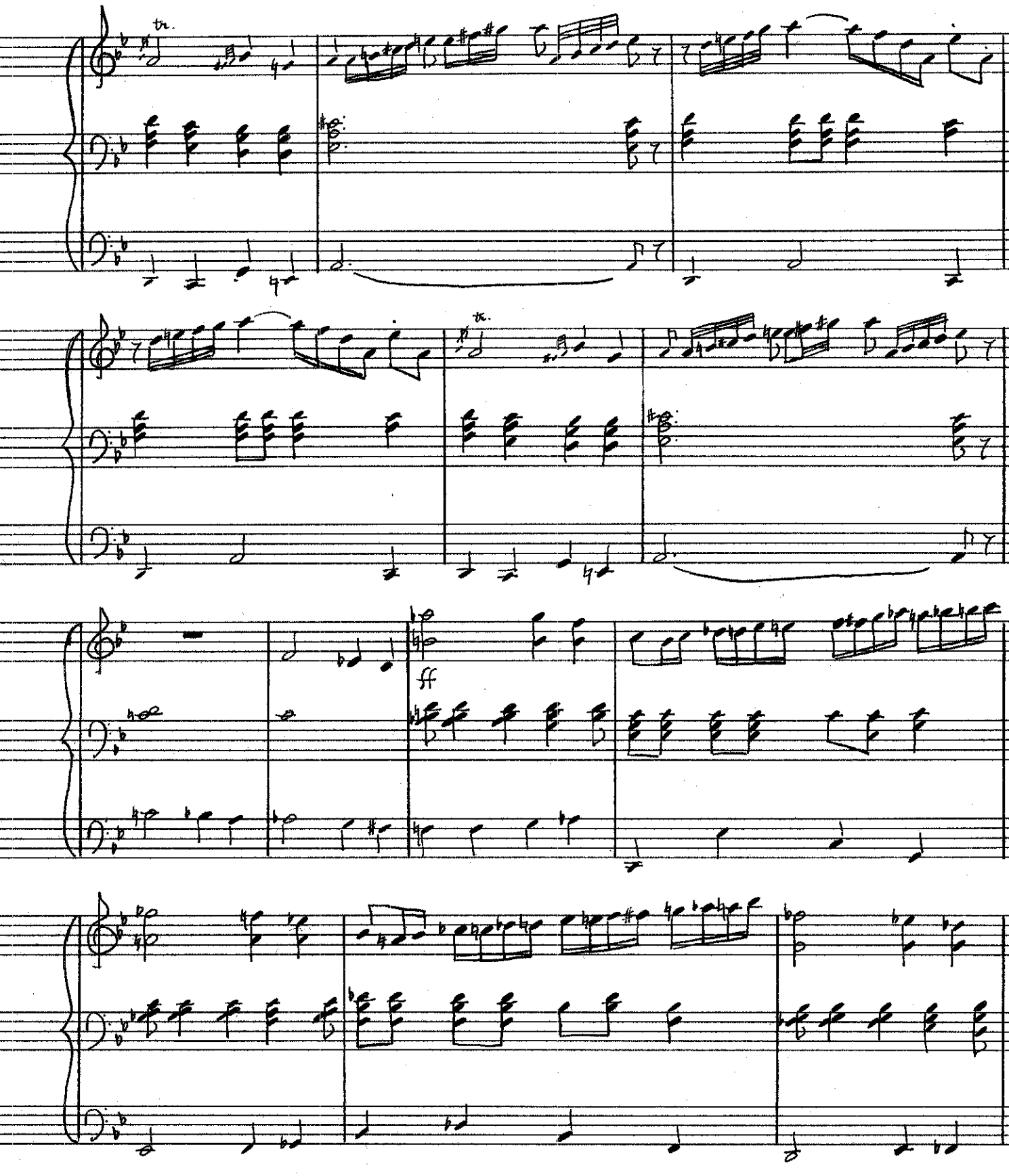
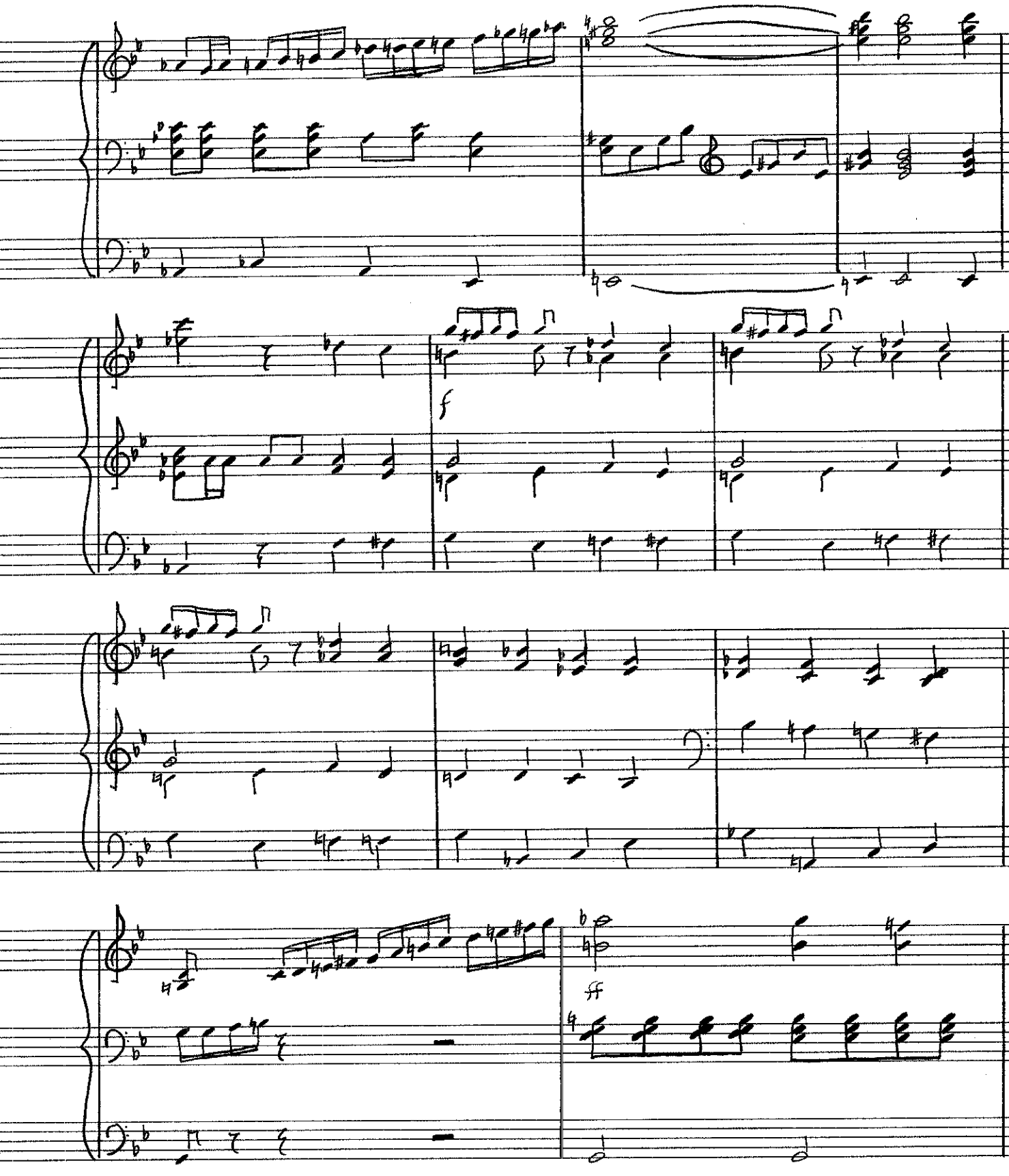
"Dies Irae" from Verdi's Requiem Mass






tr.
tr.
ff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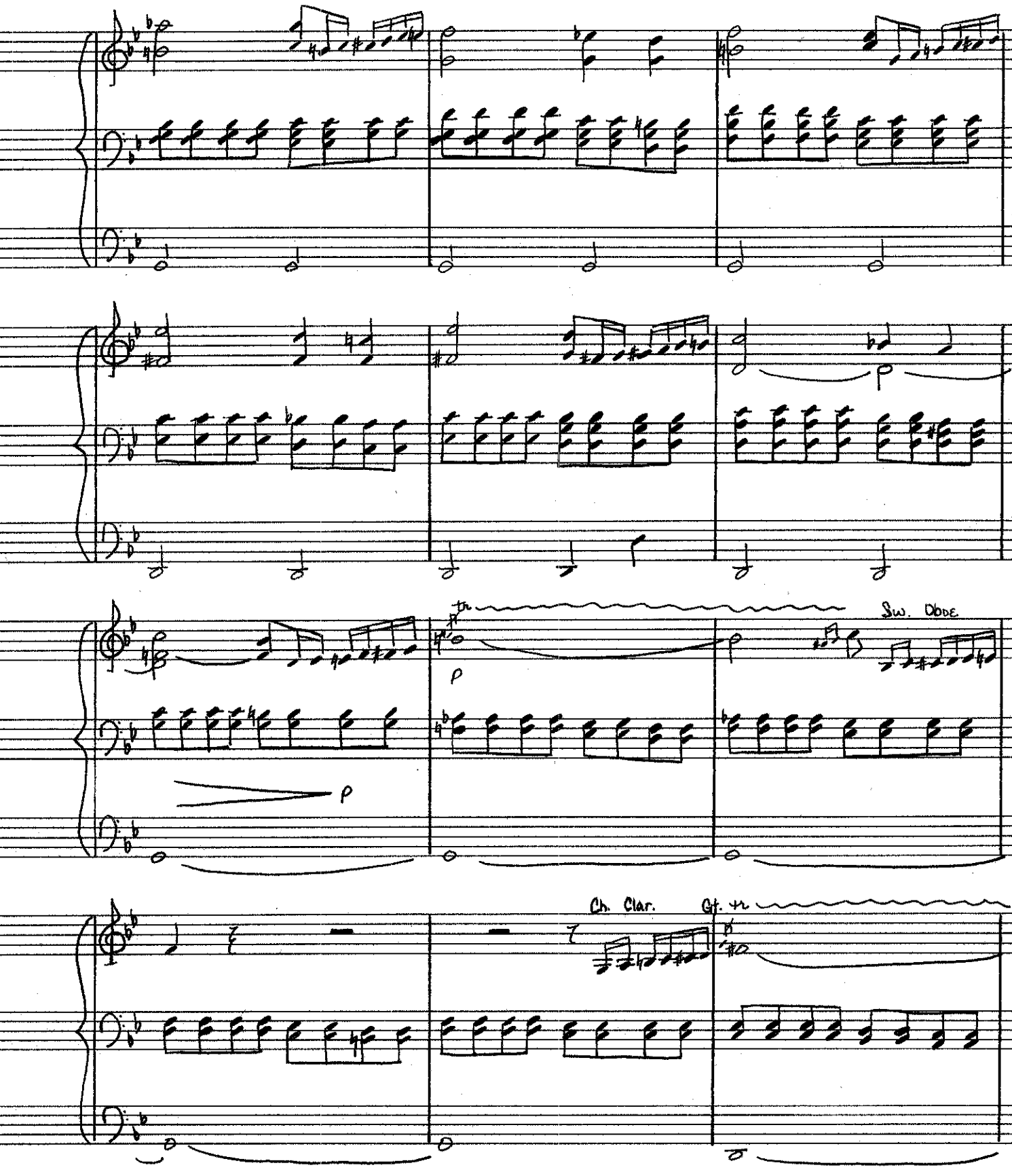
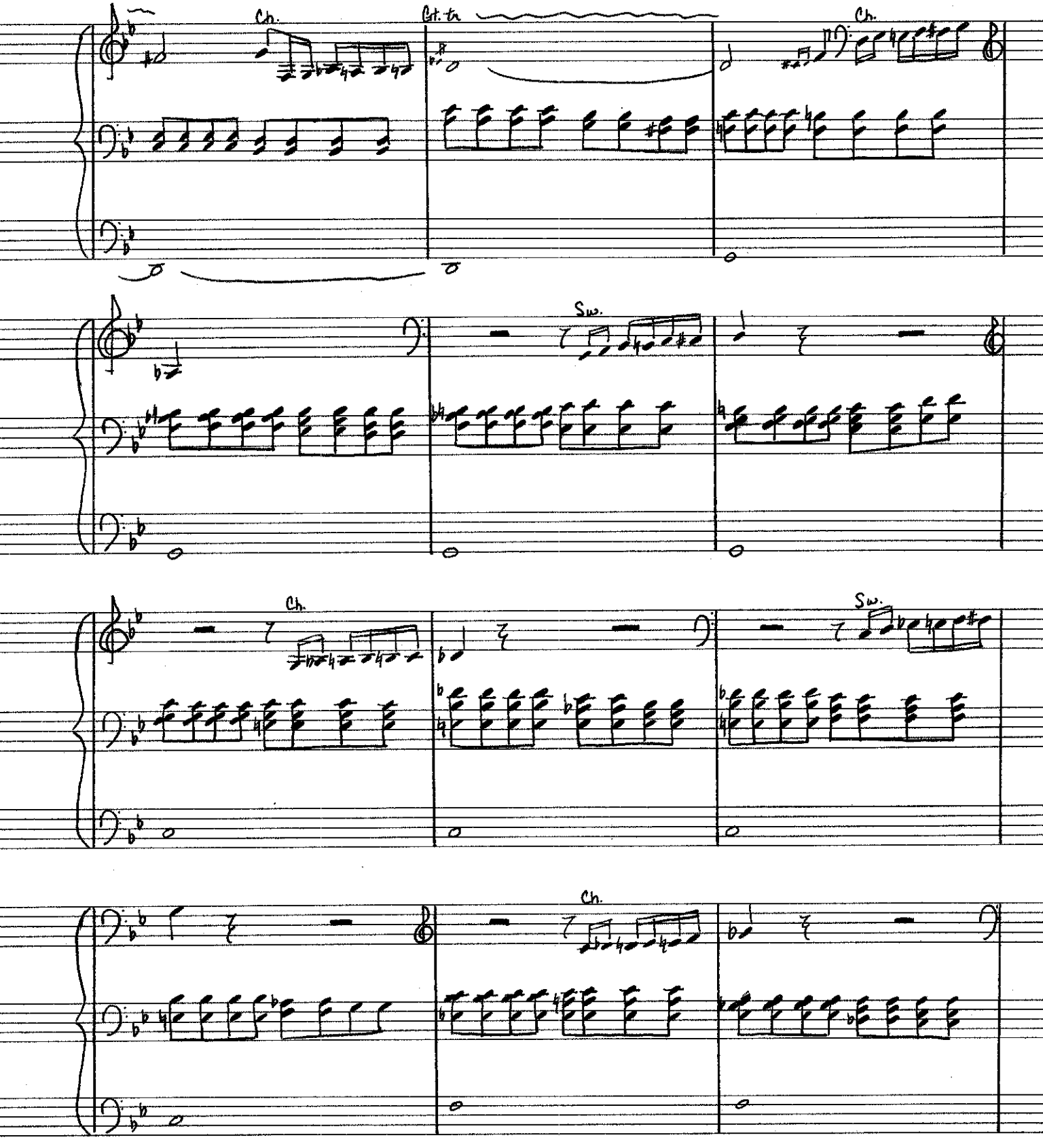
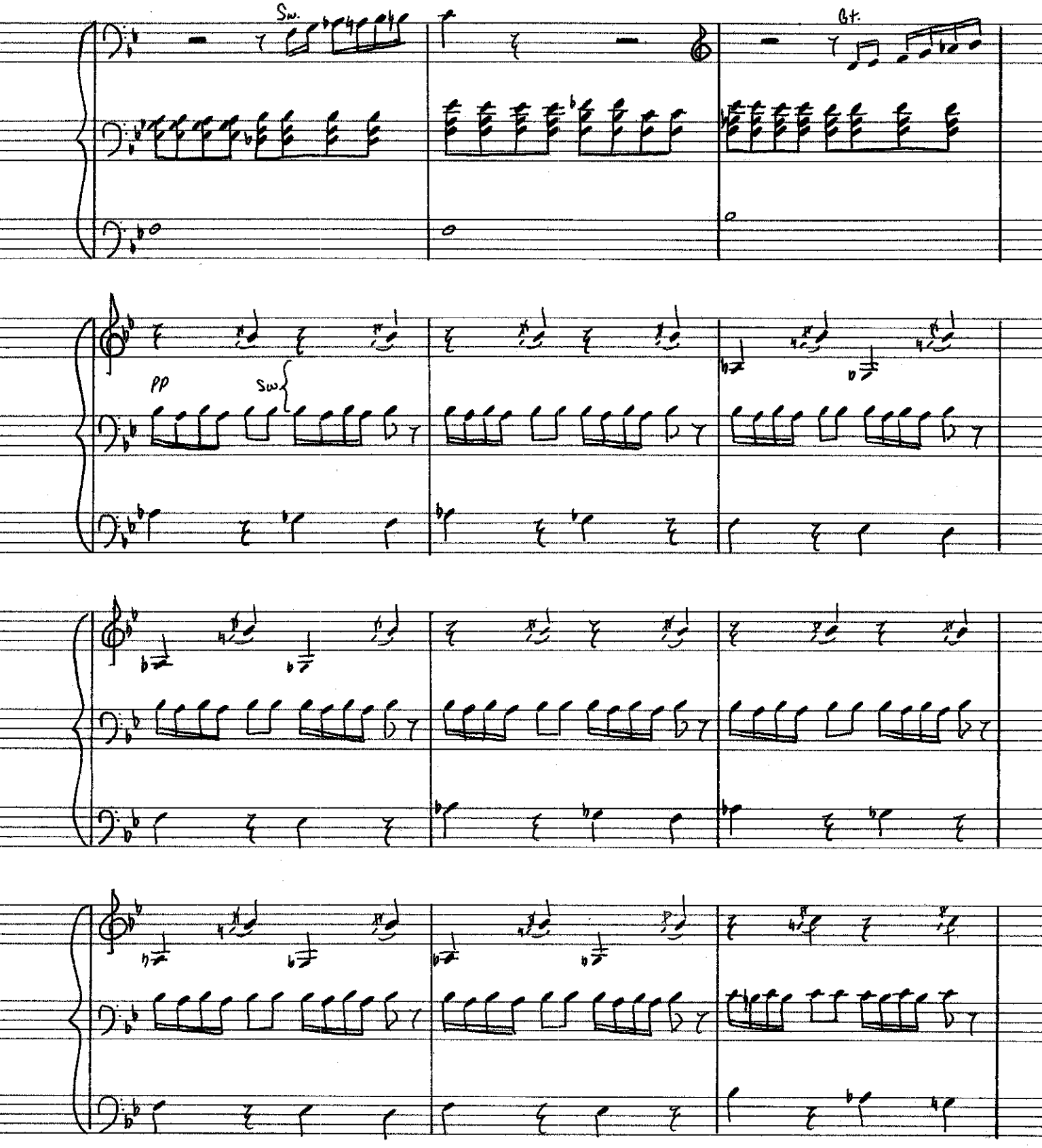
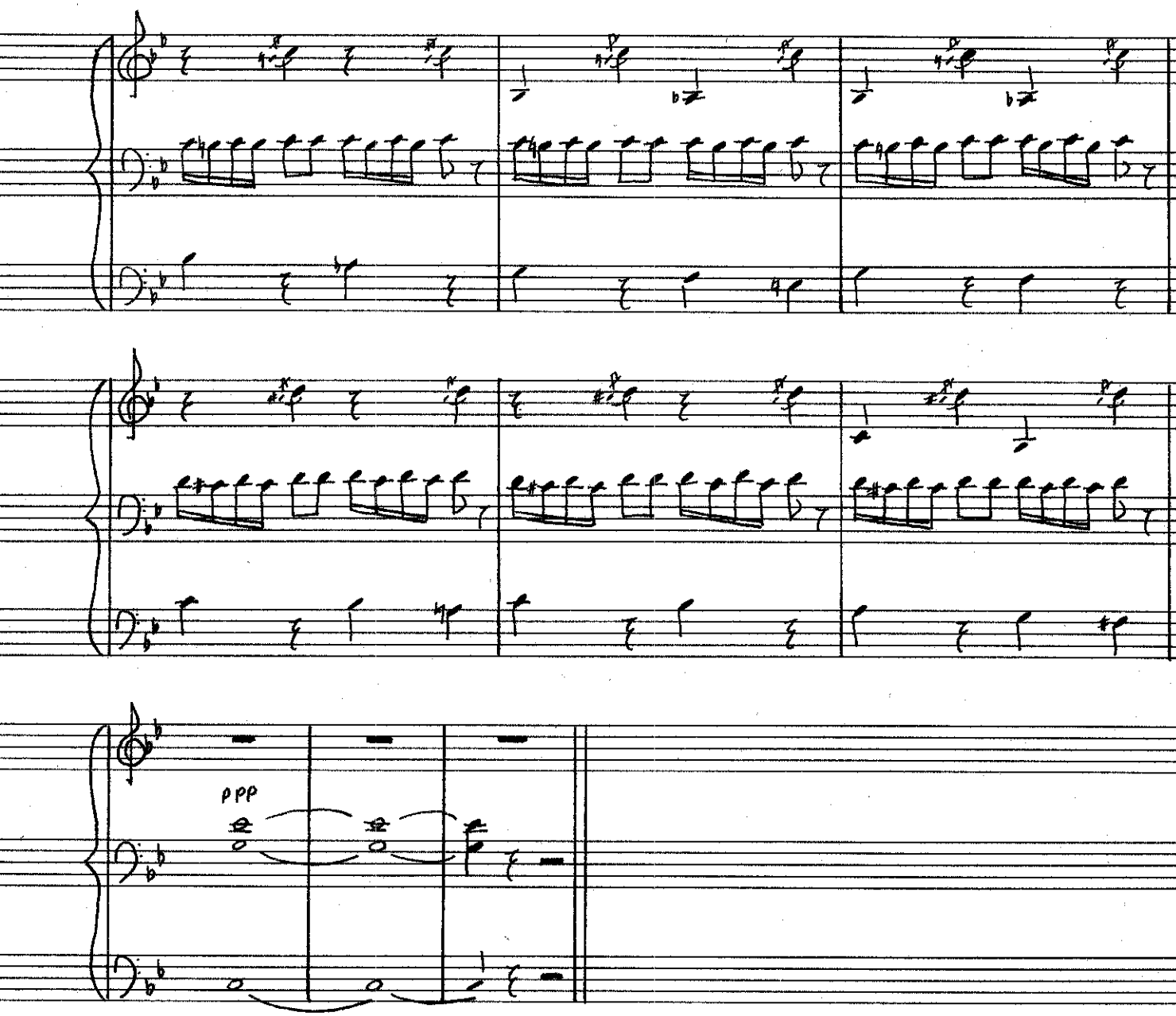

p
Sw. Oboe
p
Ch. Clar.
Gt.


Ch.
Ct. tr
Ch.
Sw.
Ch.
Sw.
Ch.


Sw.
Gt.
pp
Sw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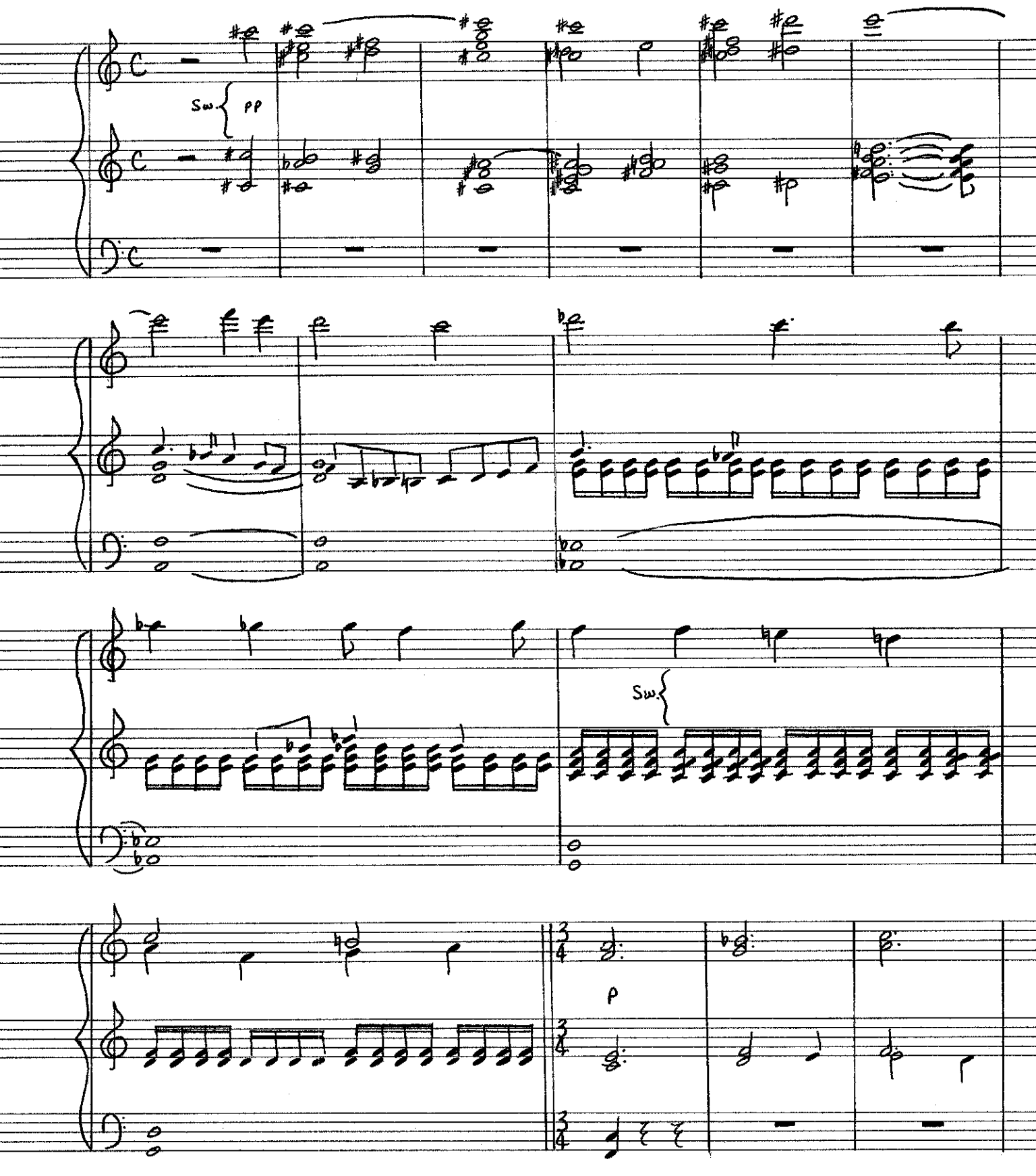
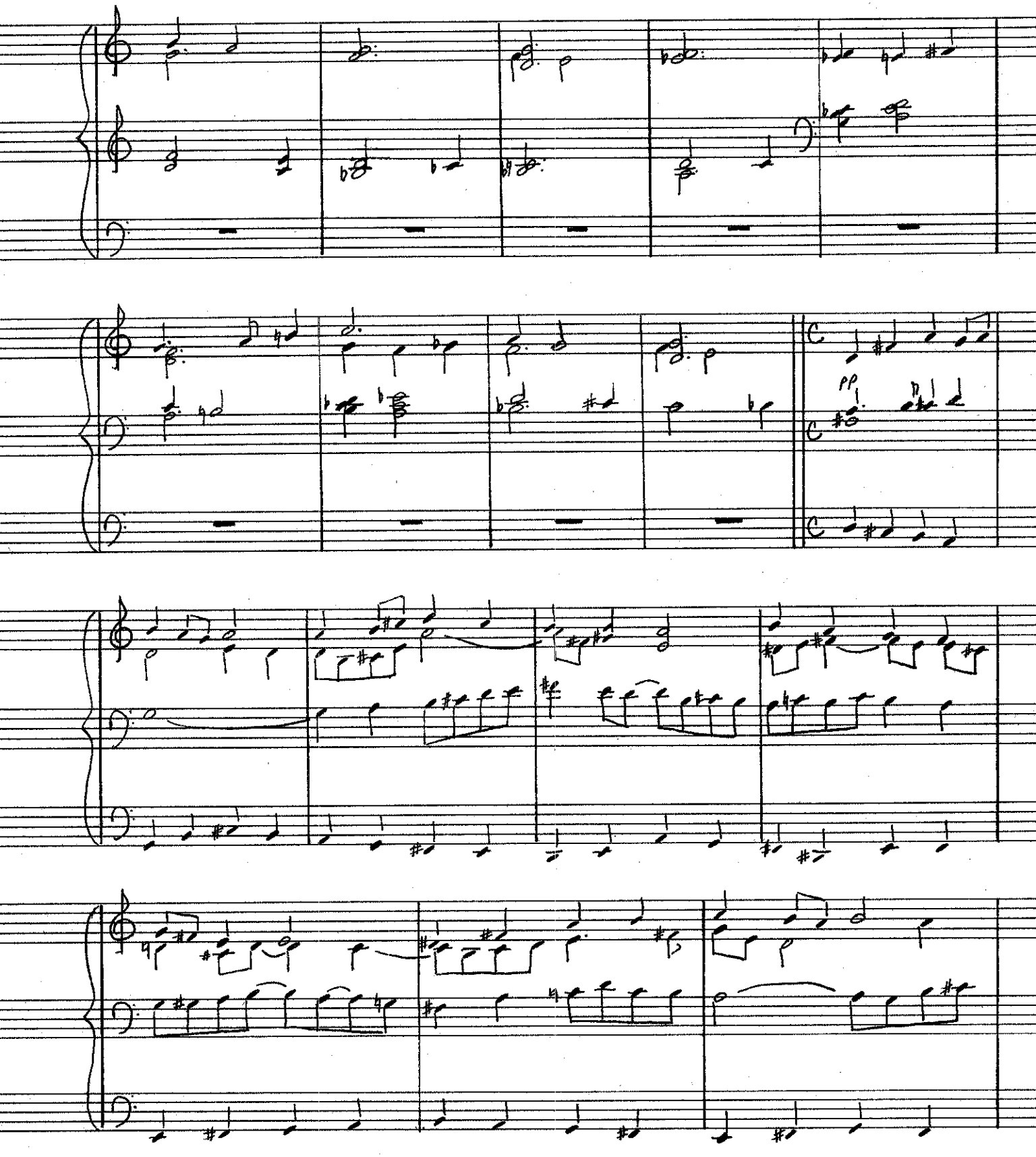

Sw.
pp
Sw.
p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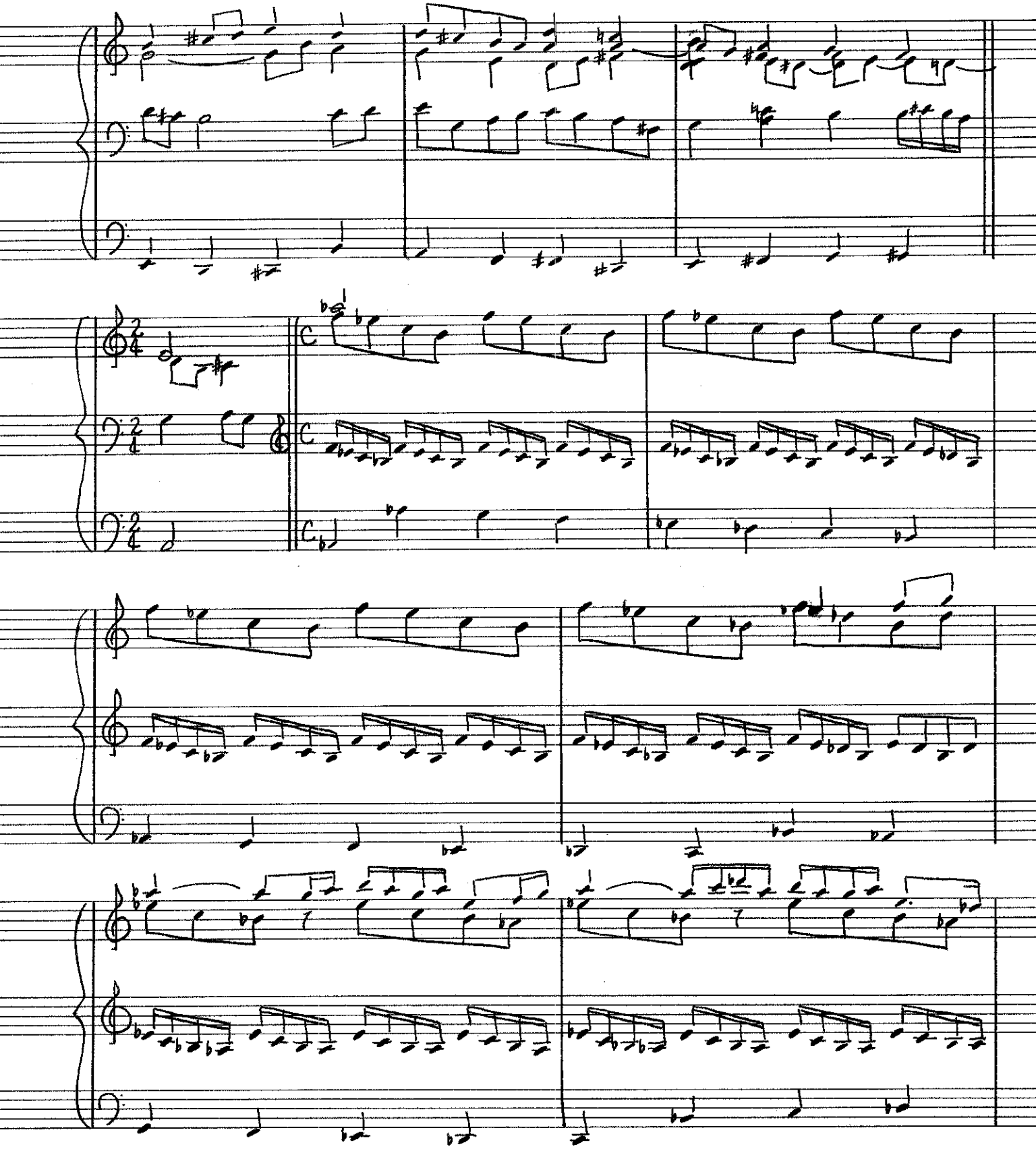
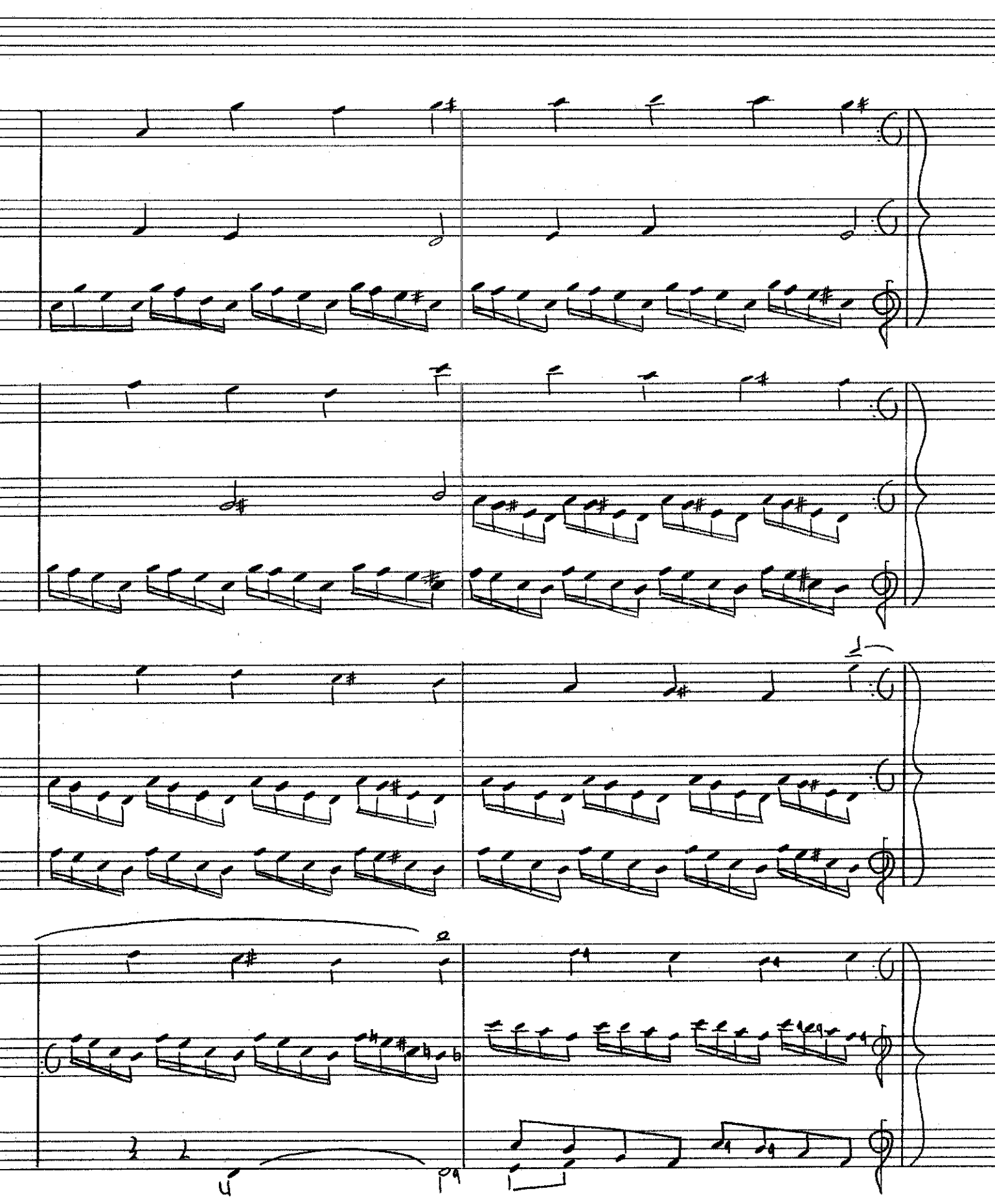
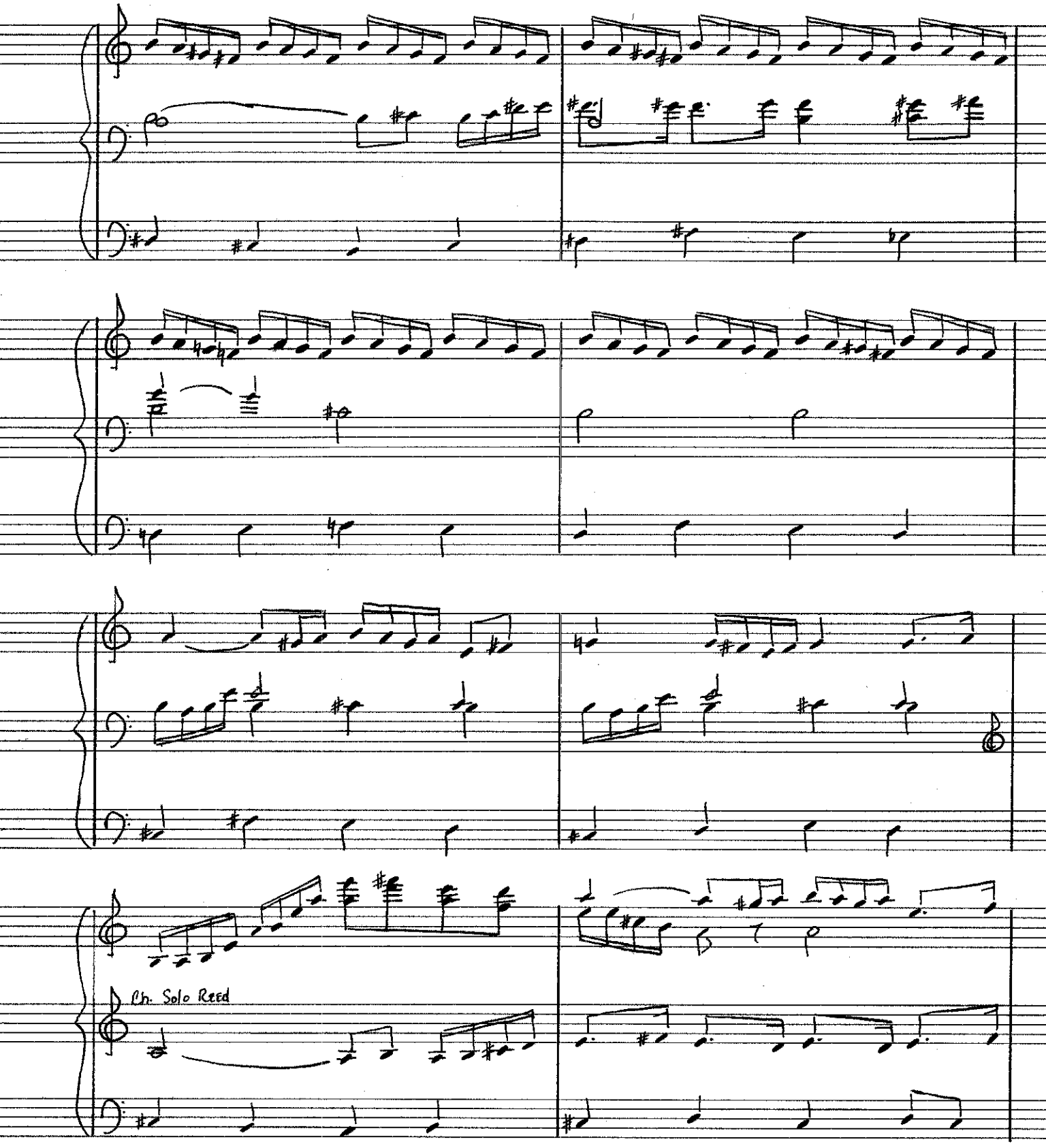
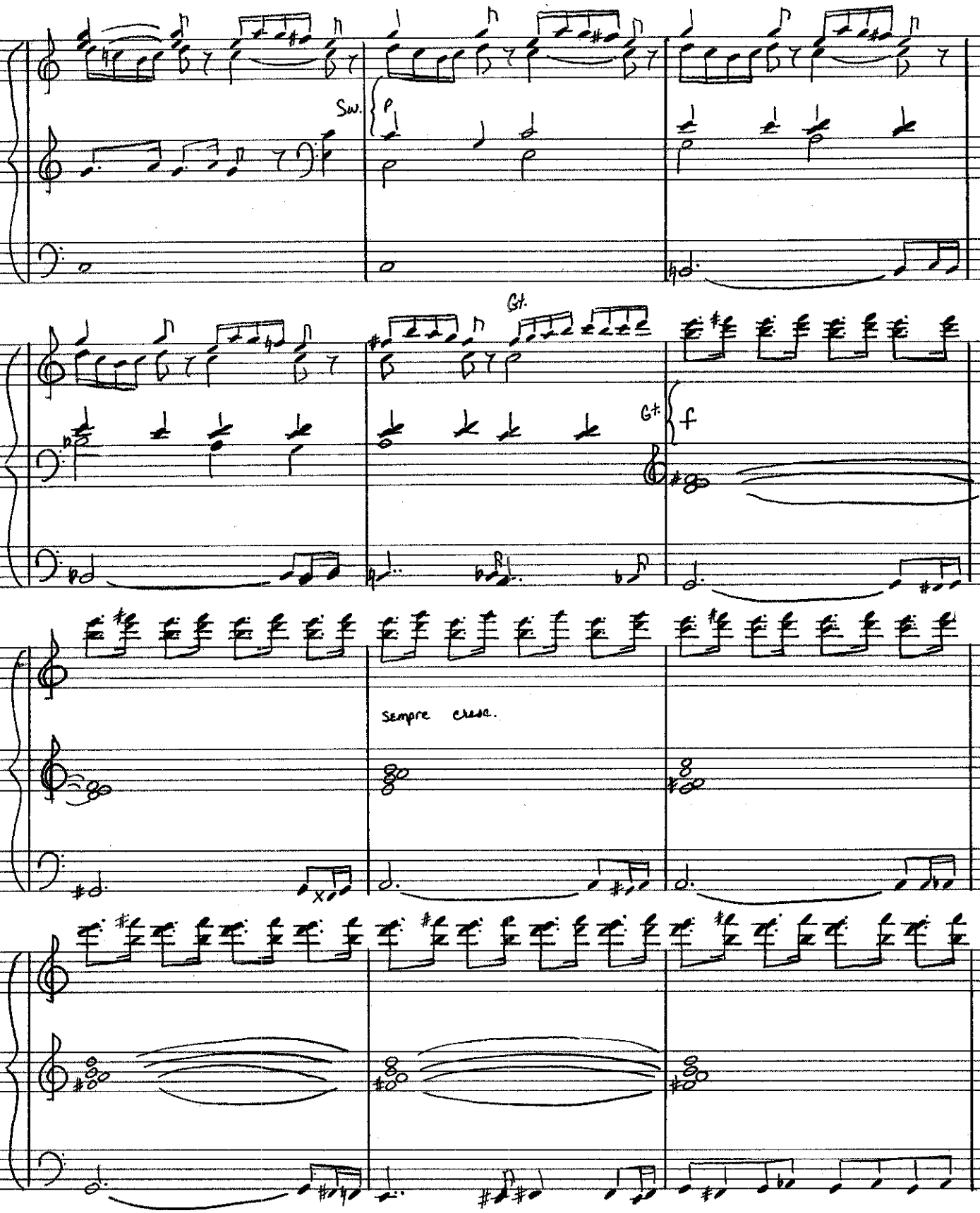
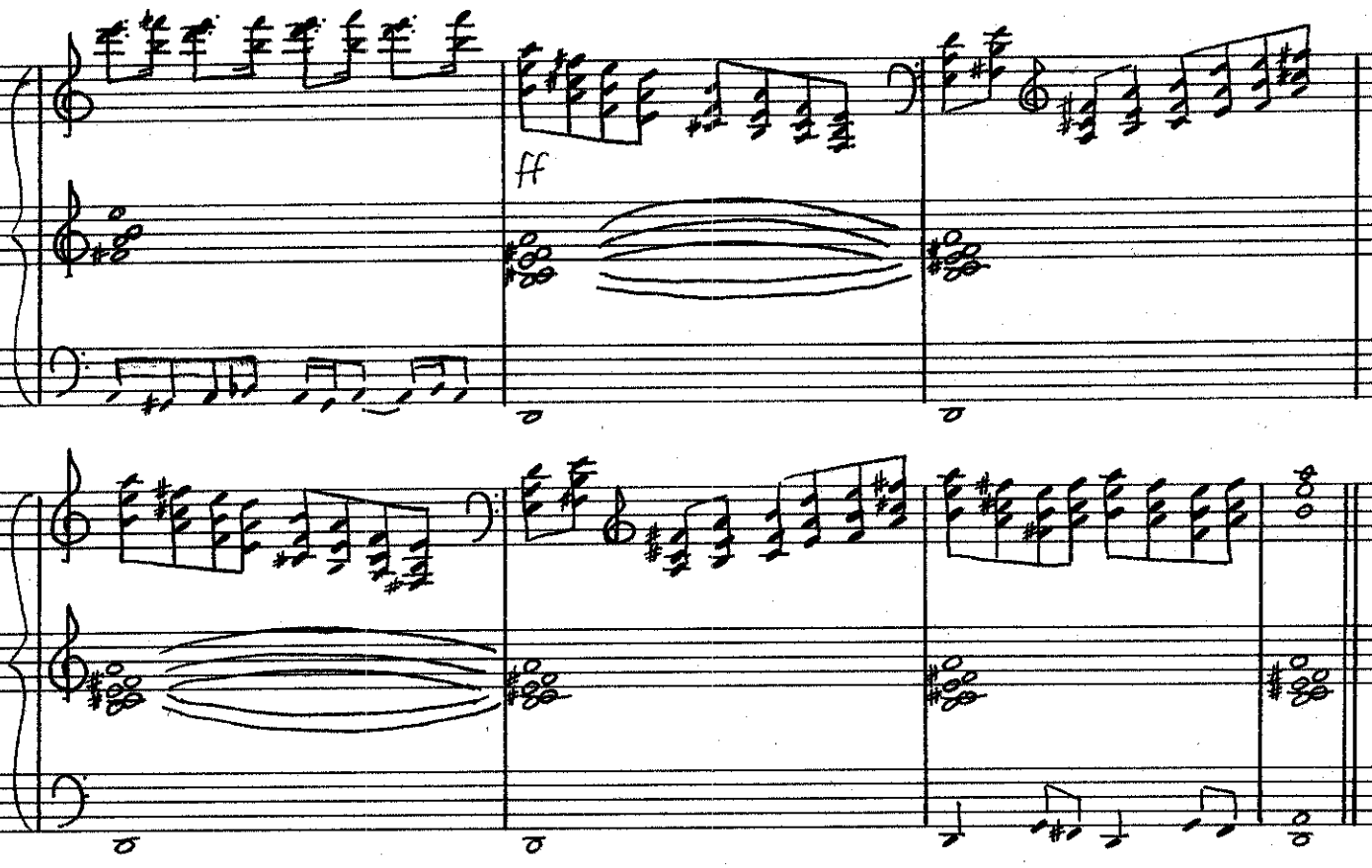





Ch. Solo Reed


Sw.
p
Gt.
Gt.
f
sempre cresc.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