Nicola Matteis

(d. 1713)

Divisions on *La Folia*

For Violin and Basso Continuo

Edited by Martin Perkins
from GB-Ob MS. Mus. Sch. C.61.

CK0090

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Nicola Matteis – Divisions on 'La Folia'
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Introduction

Born in Naples, Nicola Matteis spent most of his life in England, arriving around 1670 and active until his death in 1713. There are few details about his life; much of what is known is comes from Roger North's manuscript, *The Musicall Grammarian*, compiled 1726-8. It is from North that the legend of Matteis' journey to England is first recounted: 'his circumstances were low, and it was say'd that he travelled thro' Germany on foot with his violin under a full coat at his back'. North's assessment of Matteis was that he responsible for the general shift in musical style from French to Italian by his own playing and composition and by inspiring scholars to seek tuition from Italian masters:

> The poor man [Matteis] as a gratefull legacy to the English nation, left with them a generall savour for the Itallian manner of harmony, and after him the French was wholly layd aside, and nothing in towne had a relish without a spice of Itally. And the masters here began to imitate them, wittness Mr H Purcell in his noble set of sonnatas, which however clog'd with somewhat of an English vein, for which they are unworthily despised, are very artificiall and good musick. But that which contributed much to an establishment of the Italian manner here, was the travelling of divers yong gentlemen into Italy, and after having learnt of the best violin masters, particularly Corelli, [they] returned with flourishing hands; and for their delicate contour of graces in the slow parts, and the stoccata, and spirit in other kinds of movements, they were admired and imitated. But even this humour of learning in Italy is moderne, and sprang out of an ambition inspired by the musick of old Nichola. I doe not remember to have heard of any gentleman that traveled with such designe or brought home the Italian manner, before he was settled in England, and gave them their cue.

Matteis published four books of violin 'Ayres' (1676, 1679 and 1685), a handful of songs and an important treatise on the five-string guitar, an instrument on which he was also a master. A prominent feature of his violin compositions is the use of ground bass. Whilst this form was popular with seventeenth-century English viol composers such as Christopher Simpson, it was rarely used as the basis of violin pieces until Matteis' Ayres. Perhaps it was Matteis' expansion of the violin's possibilities through extended double stops that aligned the instrument more with the viol and therefore with the numerous division works. One might expect that Matteis was one of the contributors to *The Division Violin*, published in 1684 by John Playford, but he is neither listed in the contents, nor do the unattributed grounds display any of his characteristic style. These stylistic features are revealed in John Evelyn's observation on hearing Matteis play at a private concert in November 1674:

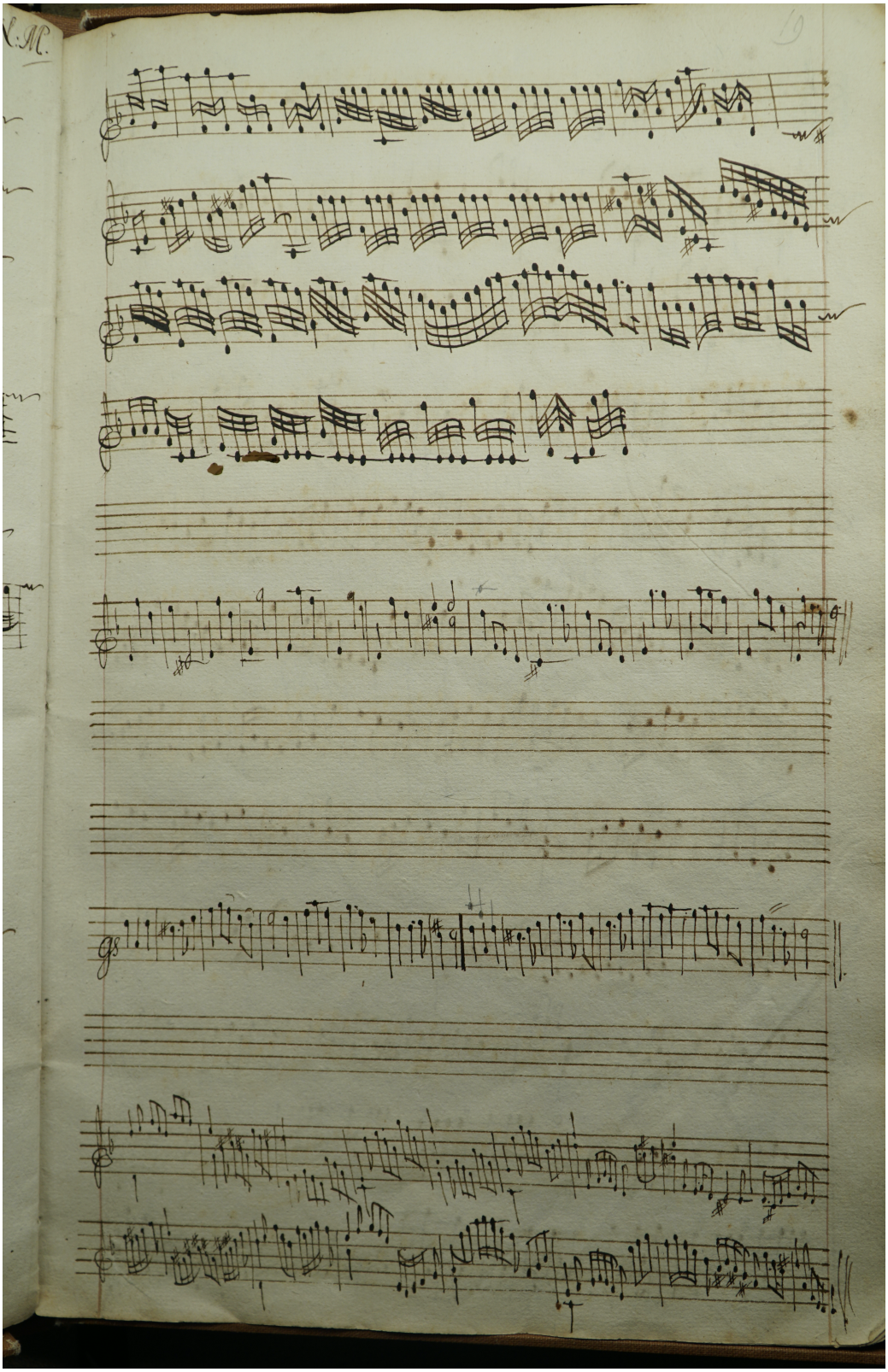
> I heard that stupendious Violin Signor *Nicholao* (with other rare Musitians) whom certainly never mortal man Exceeded on that instrument: he had a stroak so sweete, & made it speake like the Voice of a man; & when he pleased, like a Consort of severall Instruments: he did

> wonders upon a Note: was an excellent composer also … nothing approch'd the *Violin* in *Nicholas* hand: he seem'd to be *spirtato'd* & plaied such ravishing things on a ground as astonish'd us all.

The Source

The present set of divisions on the *La Folia* ground bass is found in the collection of music assembled for the Oxford Music School *c* 1688-1700 by the professor of music Edward Lowe. The manuscript Mus. Sch. C.61. held at the Bodleian Library contains a variety of instrumental works including grounds, division, sonatas and other consort music, by Blow, Corelli, Finger, Jenkins, Lully, Matteis, Henry Purcell, Christopher Simpson, and Francis Withy. The copyist was Francis Withy himself (*c*1645–1727), a singing-man at Christ Church, Oxford, and one of the assistants to Edward Lowe, and these is some evidence that he was the composer.

The music for this set of divisions starts on page 16 of the manuscript. Each section is numbered (with the opening statement labelled 1, and subsequent variations labelled 2 onwards) and conclude with a double bar line in each case. The first four staves are presented with the ground bass underneath which is discontinued from the fifth stave onwards (after bar 37 in the edition, midway through section 3). The music for variation 5 continues to page 17; at the bottom of which is a single stave containing the music for the ground bass in bass clef. The music continues overleaf to page 18, with the first variation in compound triple time (section 10, bar 145 in the edition). This page bears the inscription 'N.M.' in the top right-hand corner, which led some authors to assume this page is the start of a new piece, despite section numbers carrying on from the previous page. The ending of the work is unclear: on page 19 the music stops in the 4th system, in the middle of the penultimate bar of section 13. This edition presents a conjectural ending to the section, indicated in cue-size notes. The remaining music on page 19 was written with a different pen (or ink) using only four of the remaining eight staves and appears to be in sketch form (see image overleaf). The edition presents this fragmentary material as sections 14-16, starting from bar 207. There is a slight stylistic shift in this material, and it is not clear if it represents a new setting of La Folia, or if it is still the work of Matteis. The change to compound triple time in section 16, bar 241, is too early if it were the third variation of a new work starting in section 14, bar 209. Of all Matteis' ground bass compositions, only the Ground in D minor for three violins published in his fourth book of *Ayres for the Violin*, *c*1685, uses compound rhythms as a variation technique, and this section is toward the end of the piece, as it is in examples in *The Division Violin*, 1684, and the two sets of divisions by Withy himself on pages 8-11 of the manuscript. As it is also rare to find two separated compound rhythm sections (the first being section 10, bar 145), it is likely that sections 14-16 are either Withy's own composition or sections copied from a different work altogether.



Mus. Sch. C.61. p. 19

Editorial Procedure

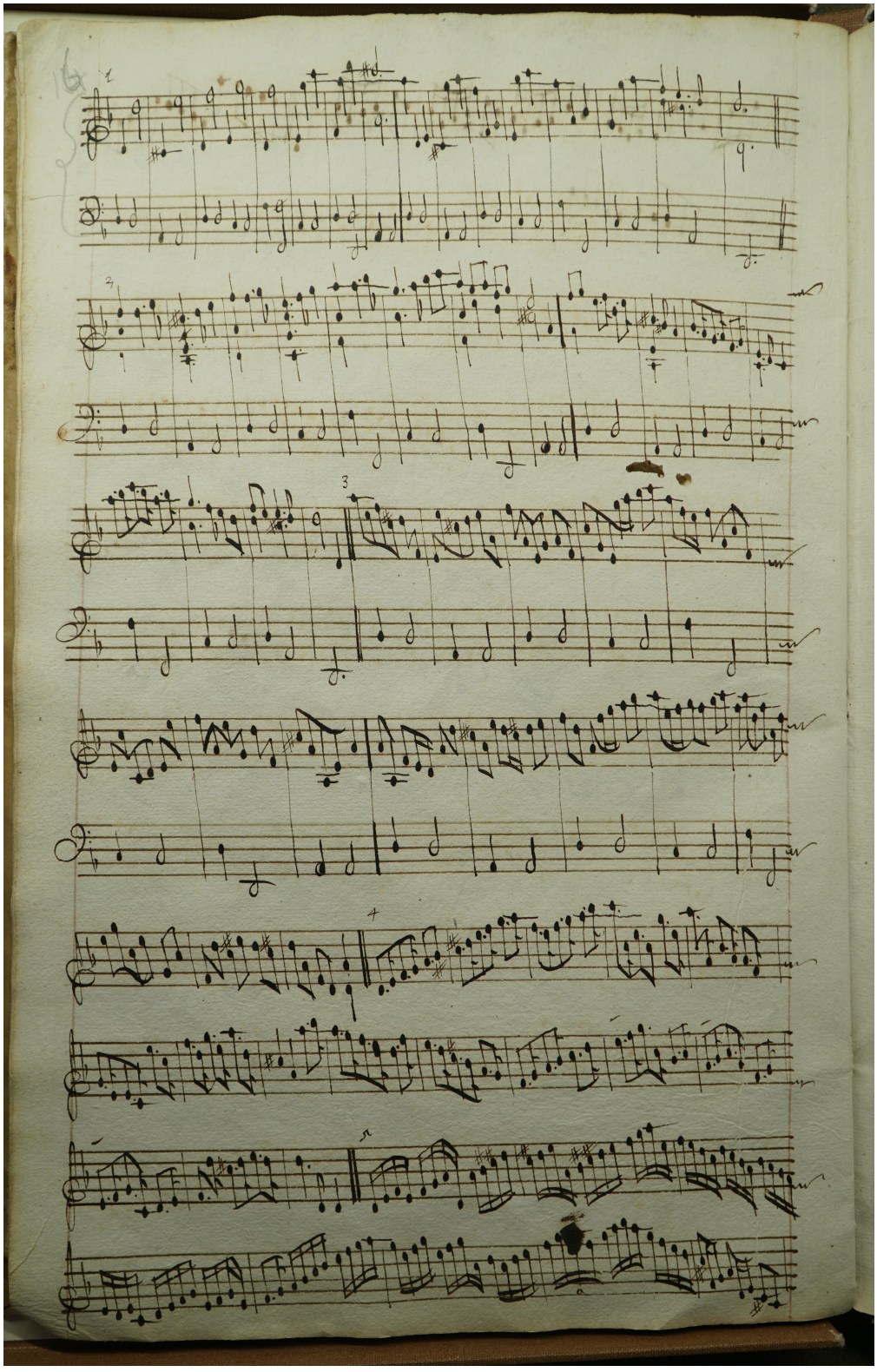
In the edition beaming of the original has been retained. All accidentals found wanting are indicated in cue size, with suggestions needed to iron out augmented intervals placed over the affected note. Ornamentation symbols are sparse in the manuscript source. In the present work, there are three instances of small, single oblique strokes used in bars 60-62, and one double stroke in bar 239. These are all notated as double strokes in the edition (as are those found in Matteis's *Ayres for the Violin*) meaning a shake, or trill:

Basso continuo figures are editorial.

Critical Commentary

Bar	Part	Position in Bar	Comment
1			Time signature wanting.
5		1:	d'
	BC	2:	f, crossed through
7	BC	2:	d, crossed through
18	vn	1:	g' crossed through within the chord
23	vn	1:	c'' in chord, corrected to d''
57	vn	4:	d'' corrected to e''
142	vn	5:	f''
146	vn	4-6:	f'', d'', f''
164	vn	10:	f'' in addition to a''
175		8-11:	semiquavers.
185	vn	3:	b-flat
246	vn	2:	e''

Martin Perkins, 2026.



Mus. Sch. C.61. p. 16

Divisions on 'La Folia' for Violin and Basso Continuo

GB-Ob MS. Mus. Sch. C. 61. pp. 16-19.

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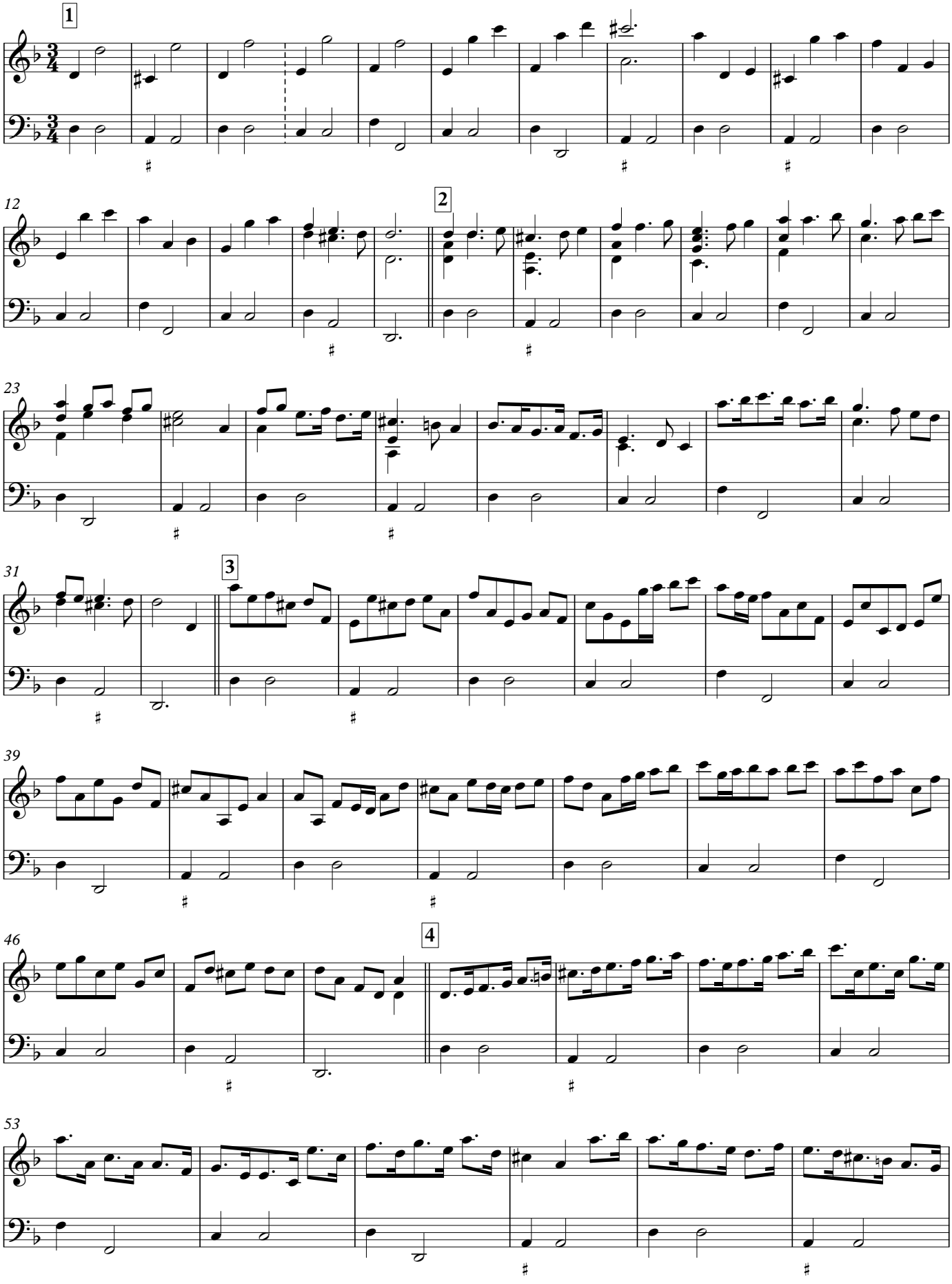

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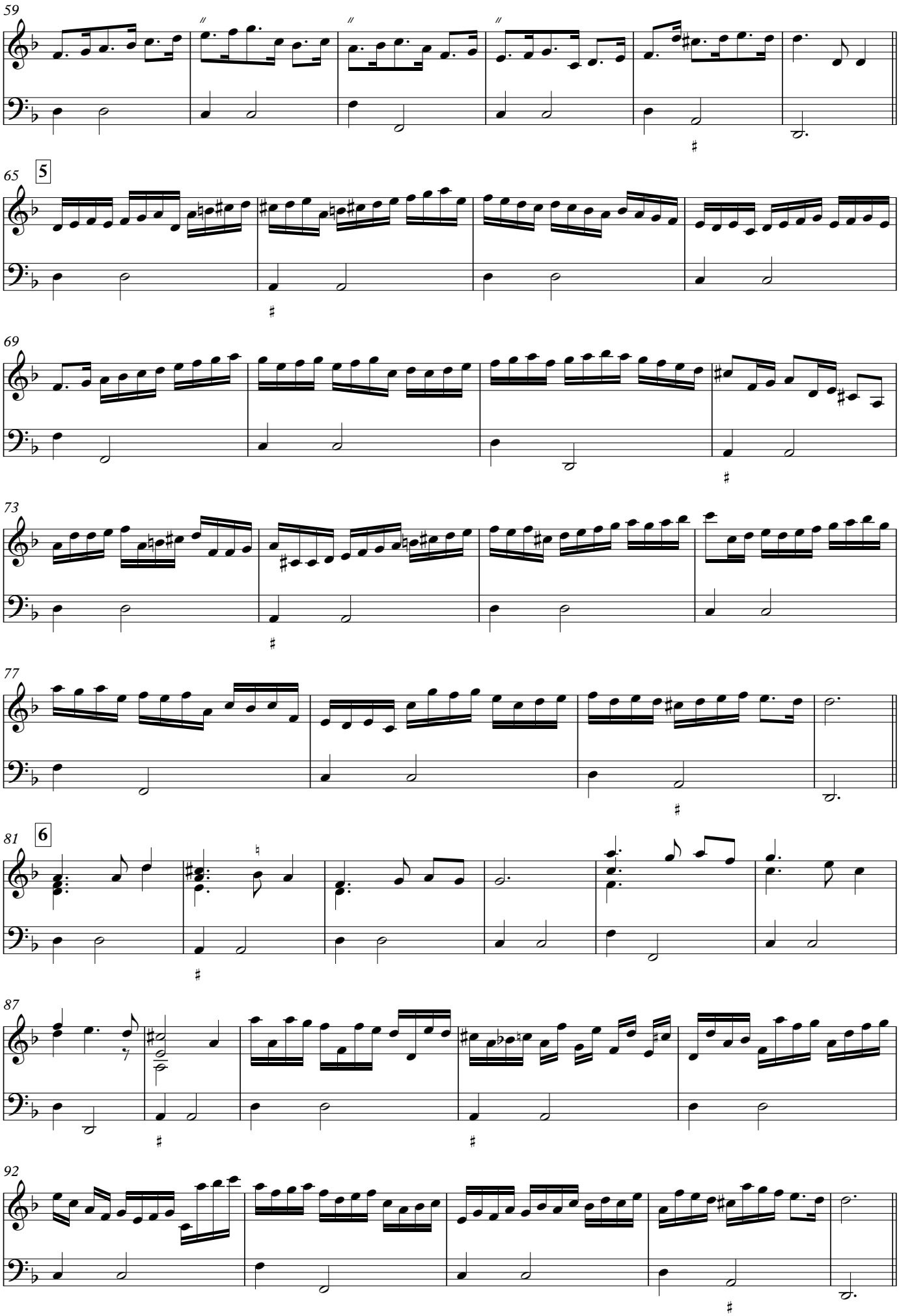

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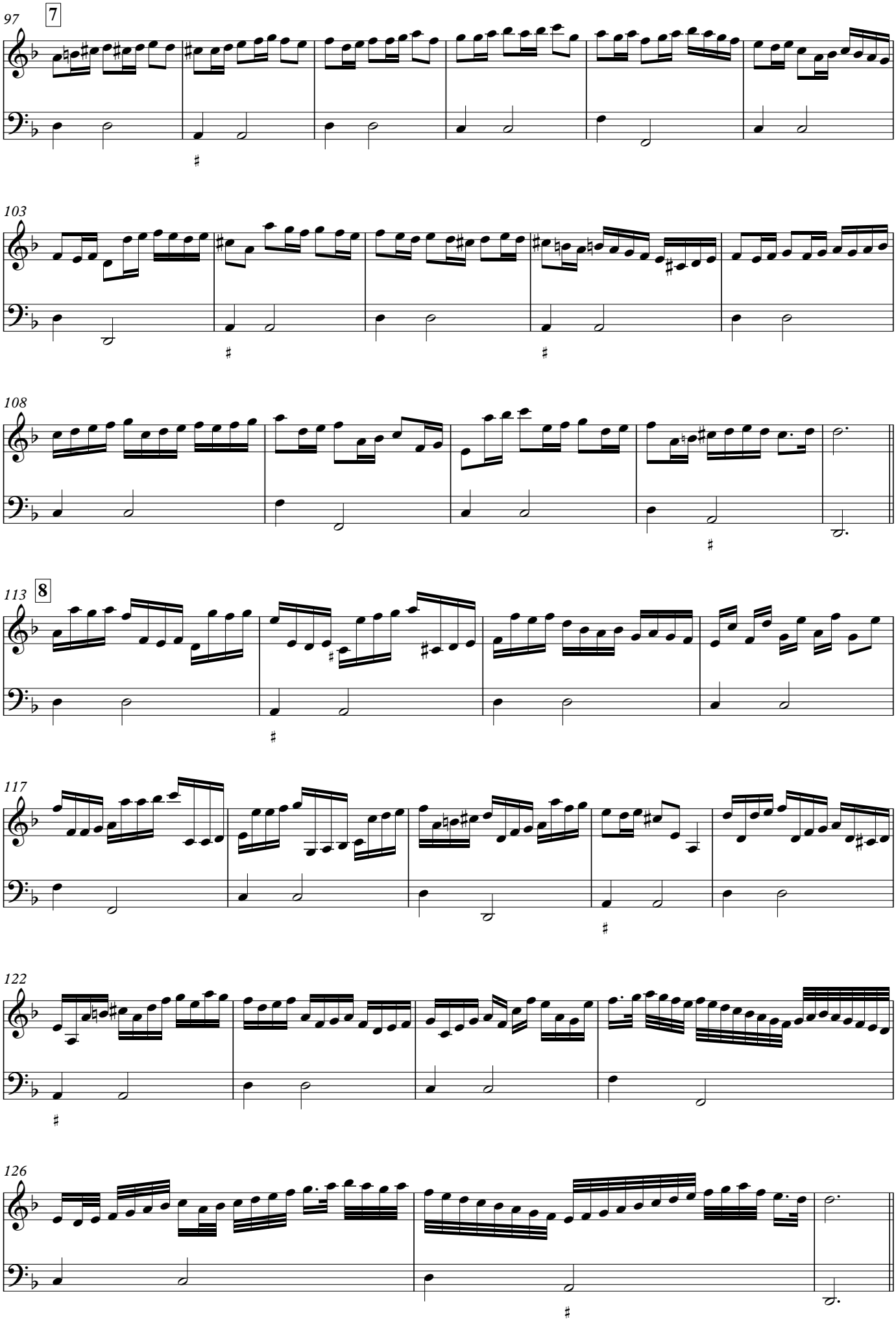

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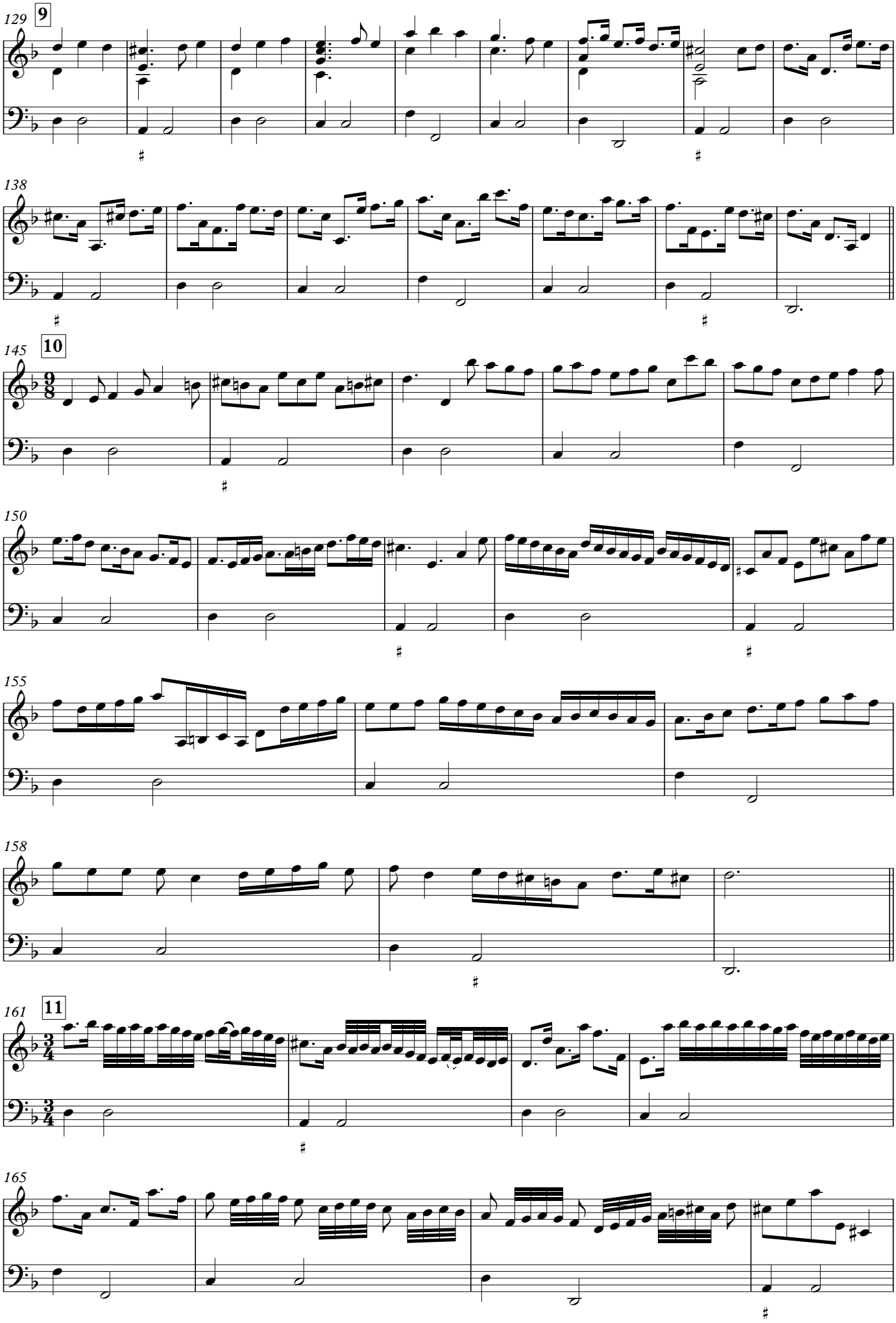

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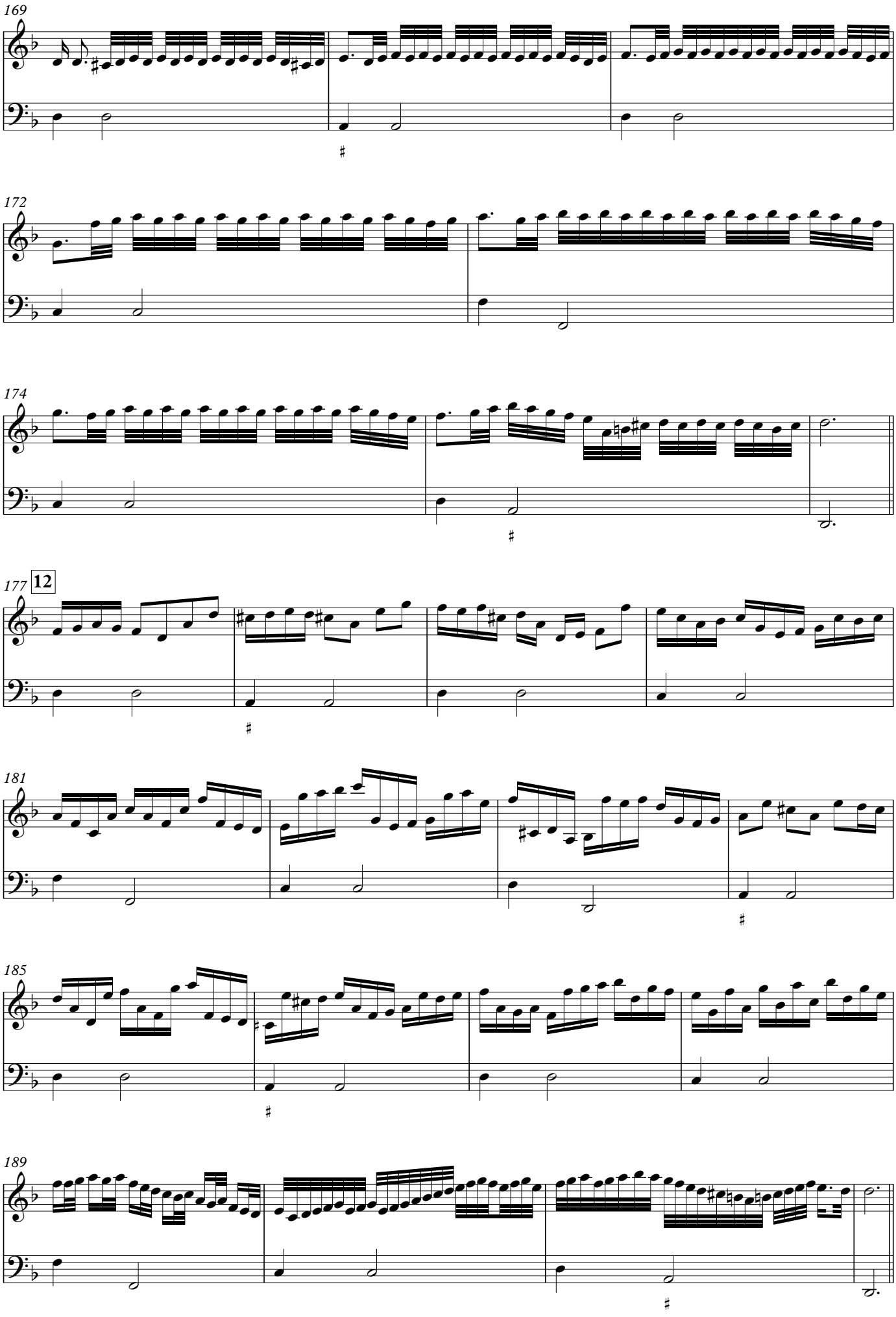

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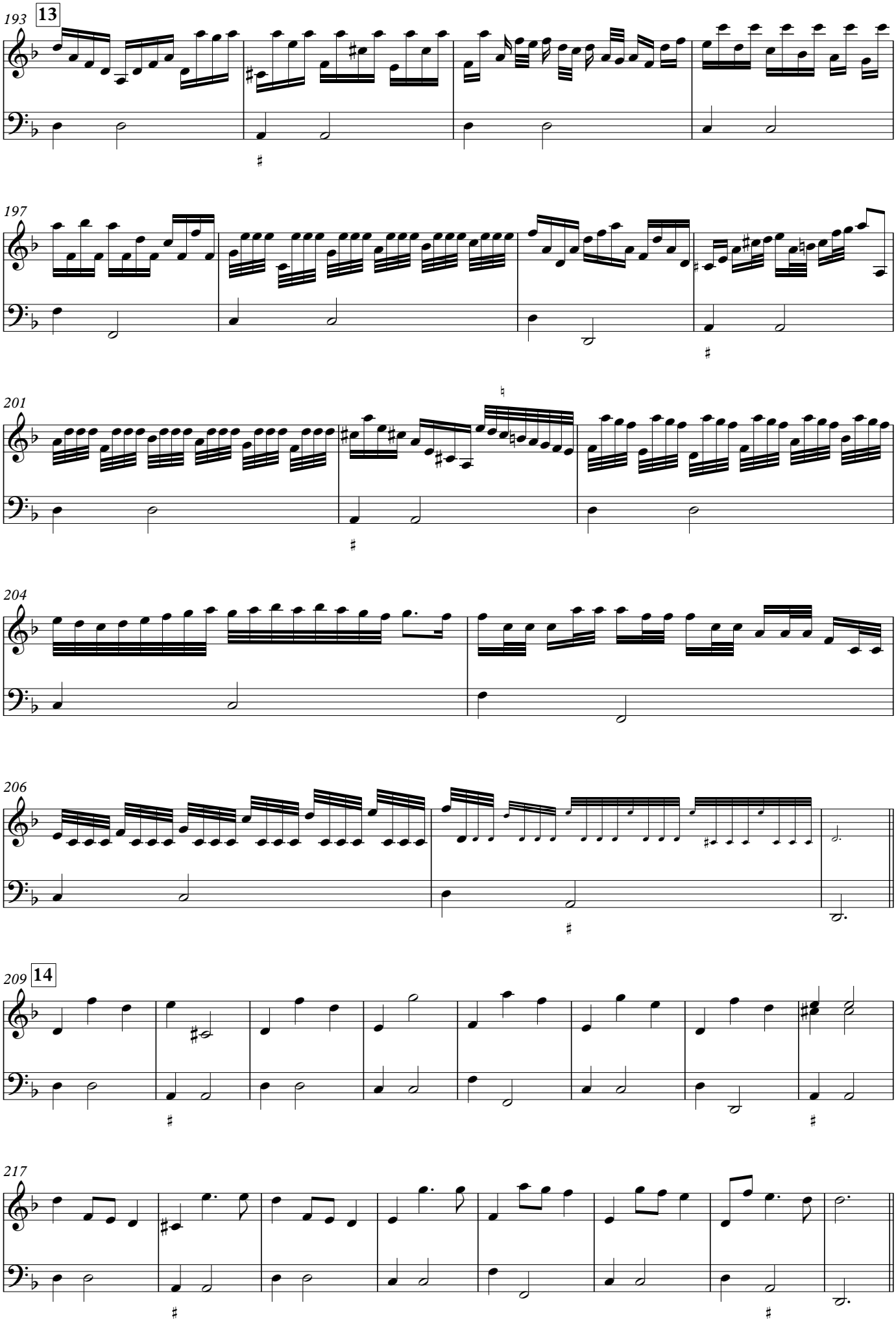

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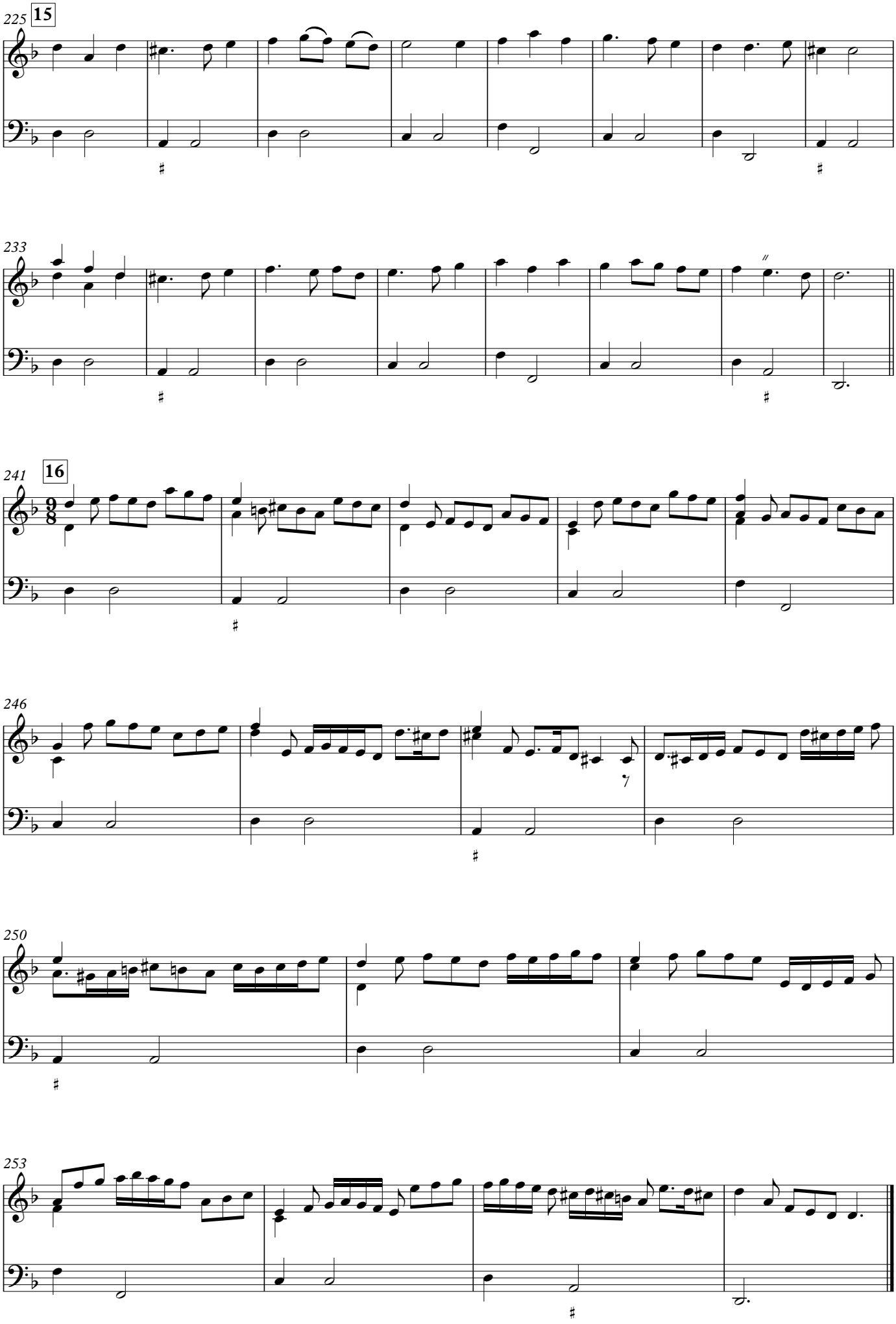

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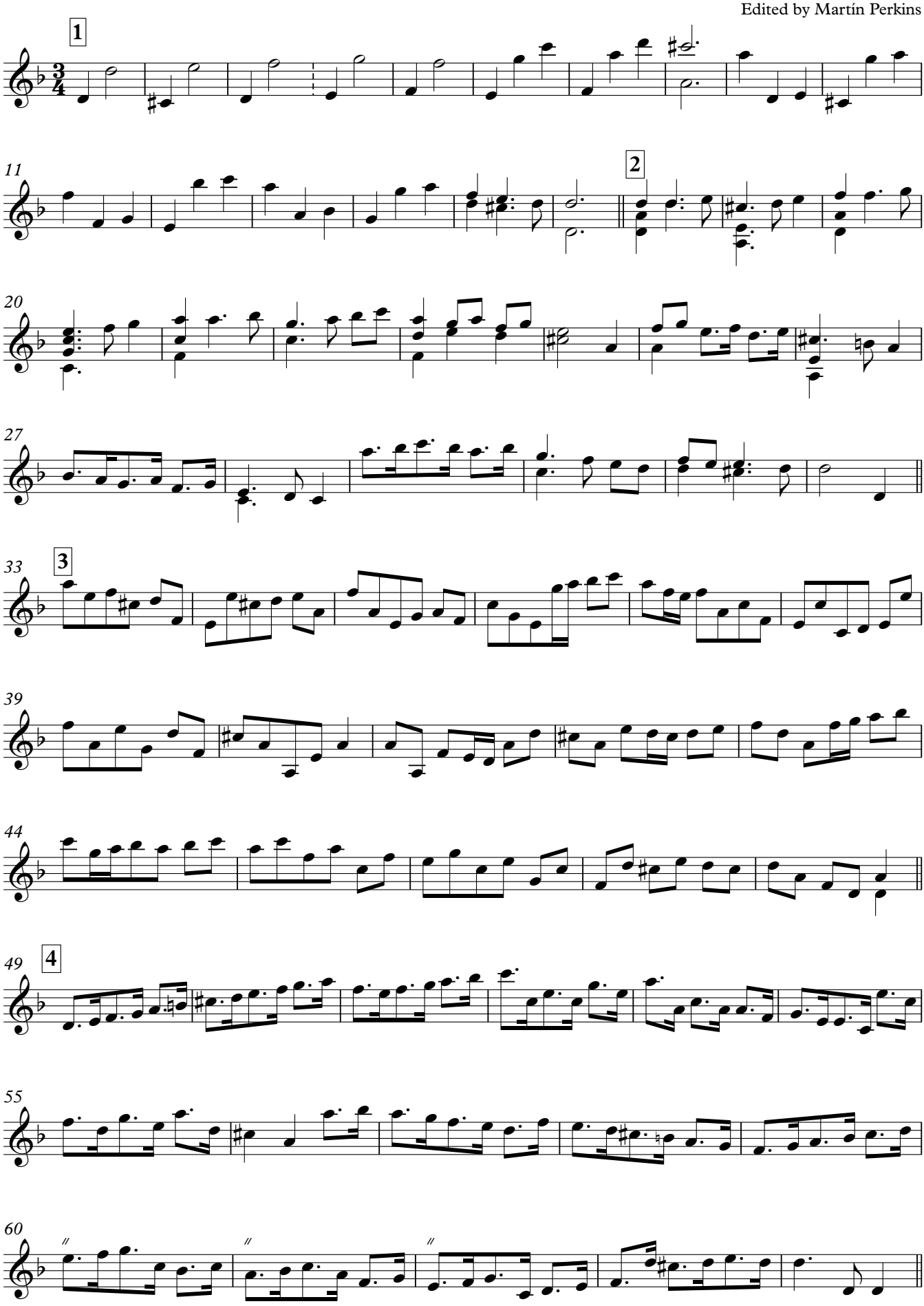

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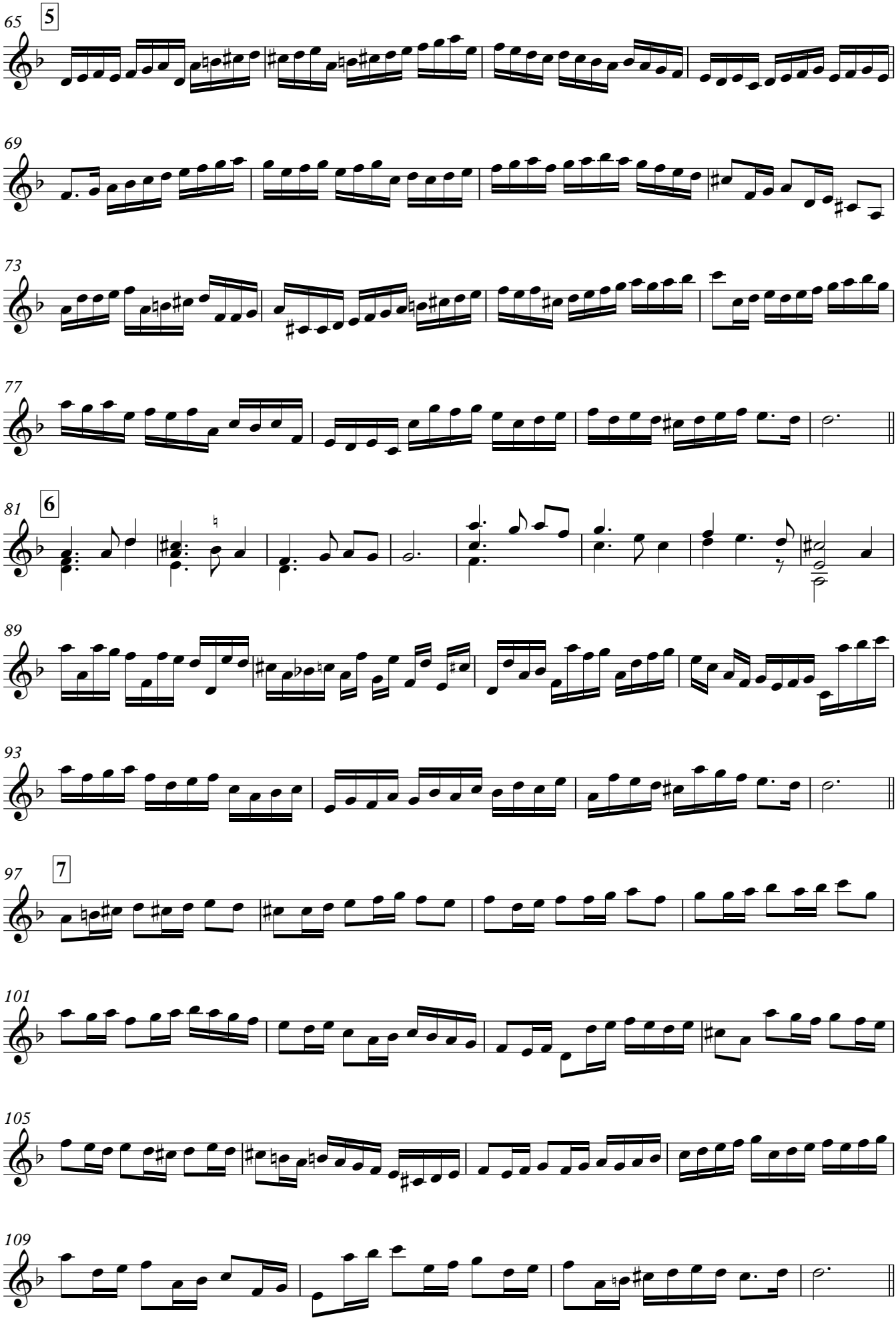

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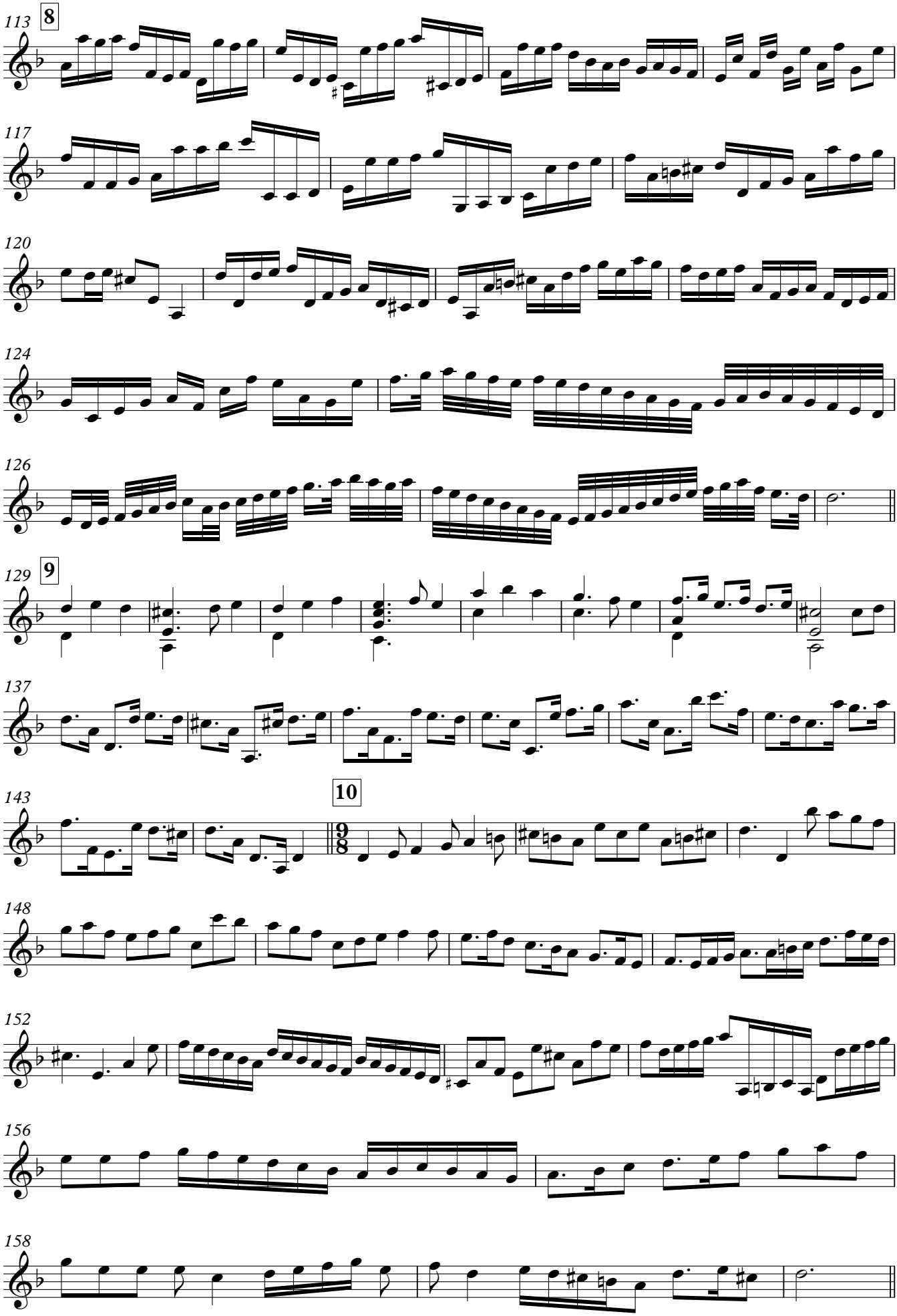

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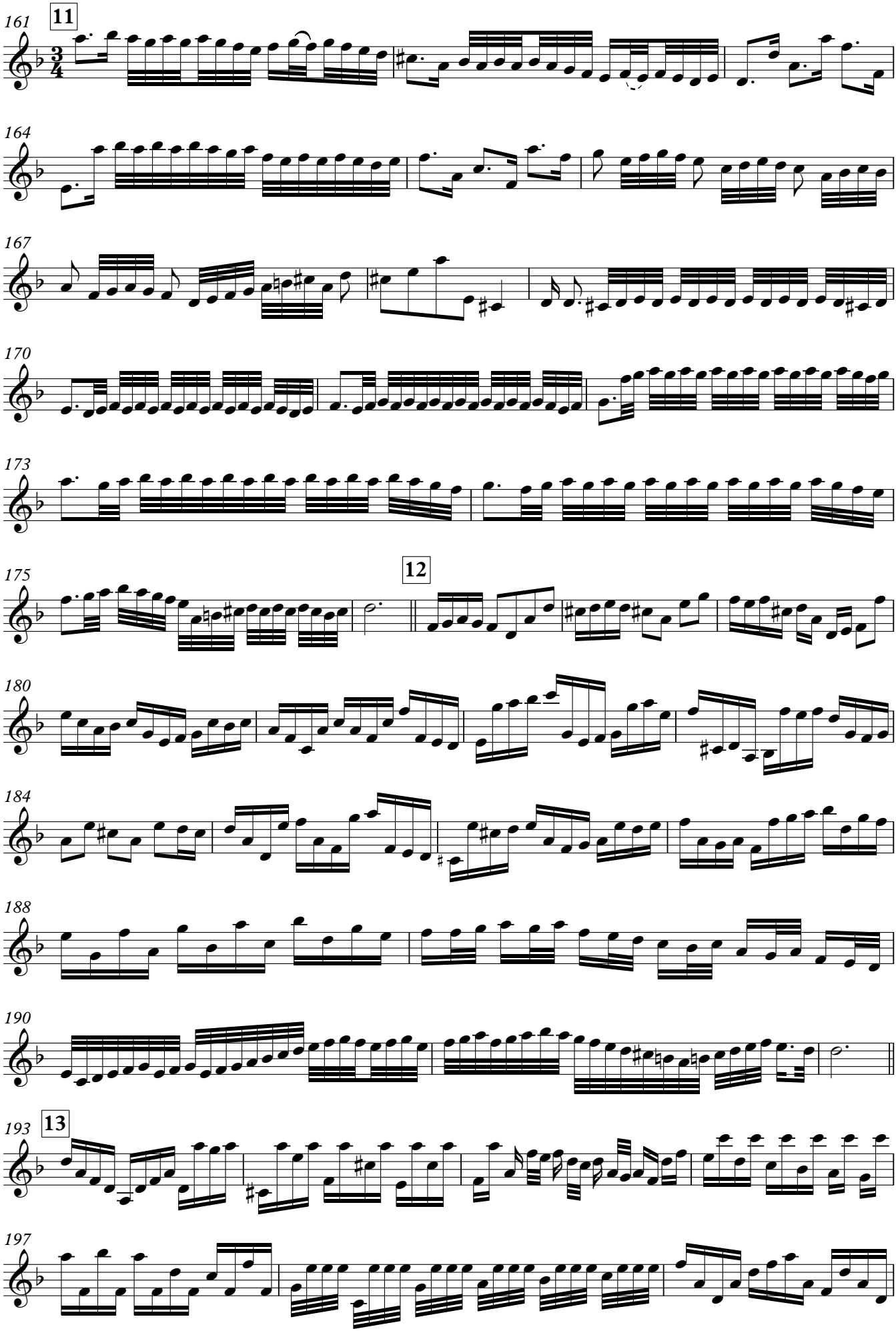

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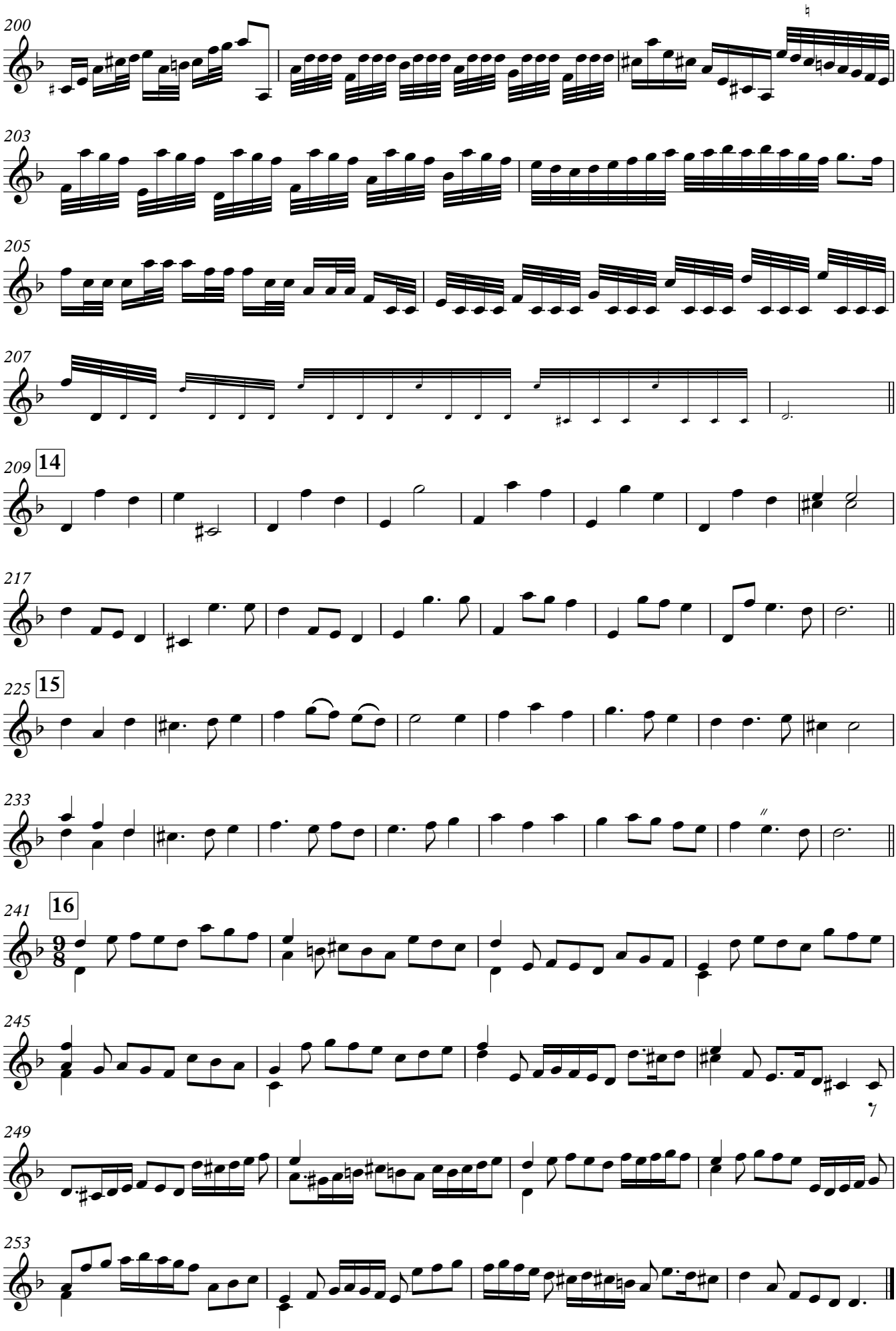

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[Basso Continuo]

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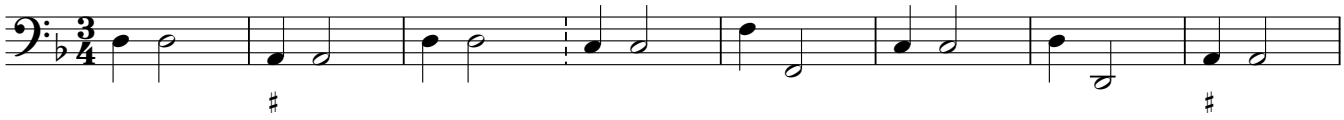

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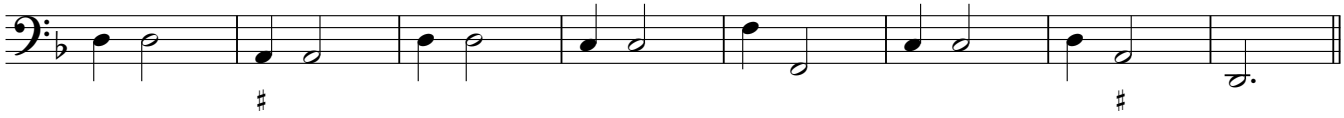

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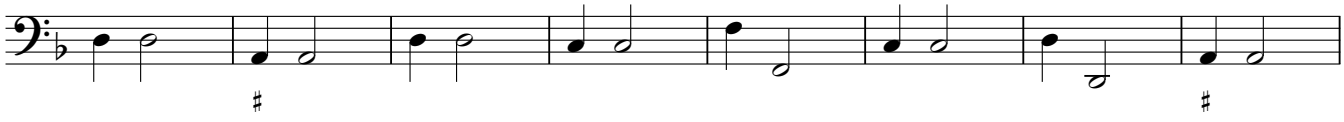

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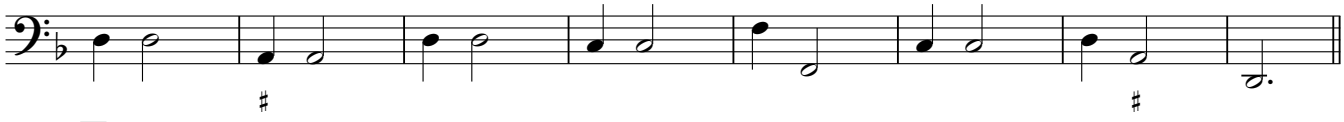

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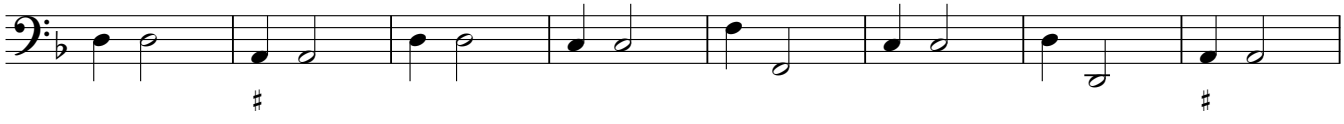

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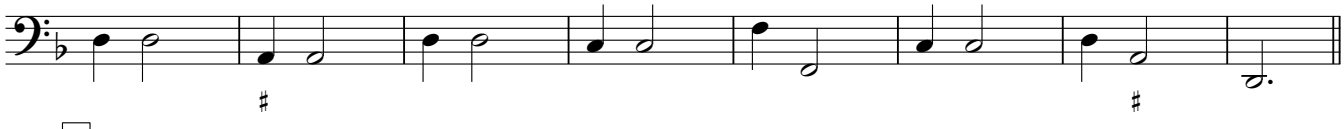

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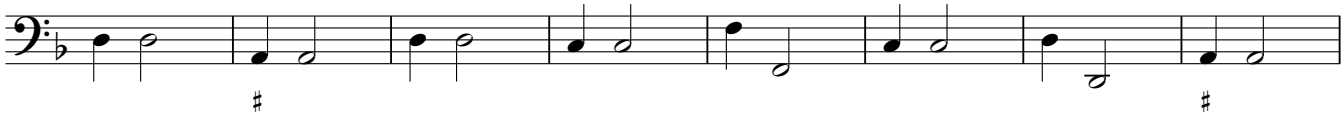

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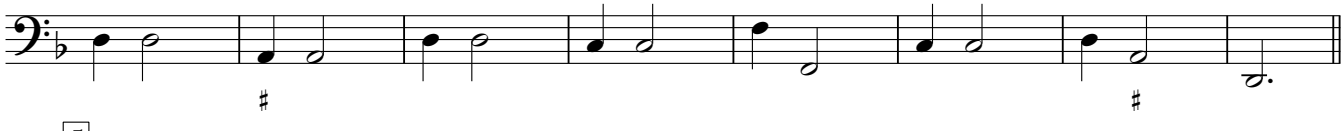

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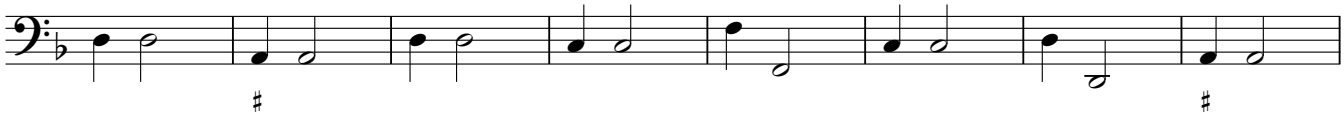

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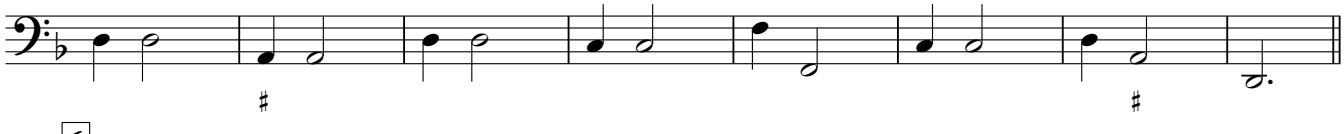

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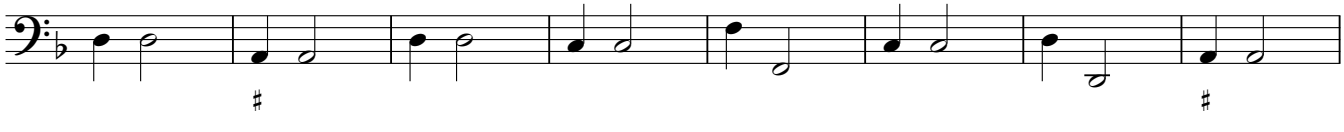

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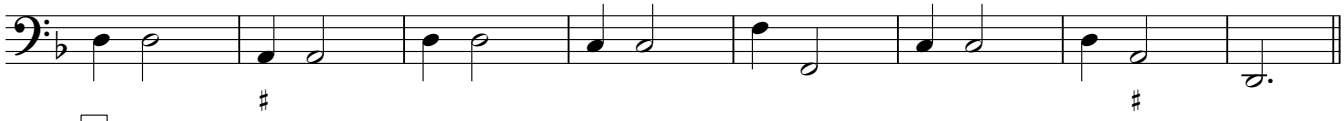

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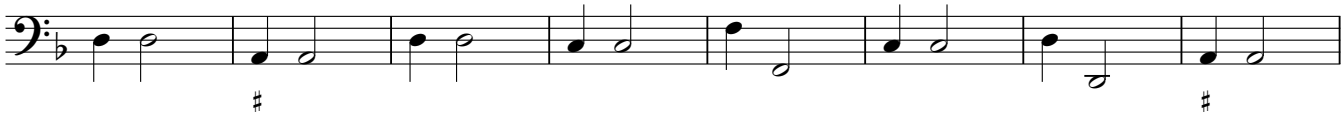

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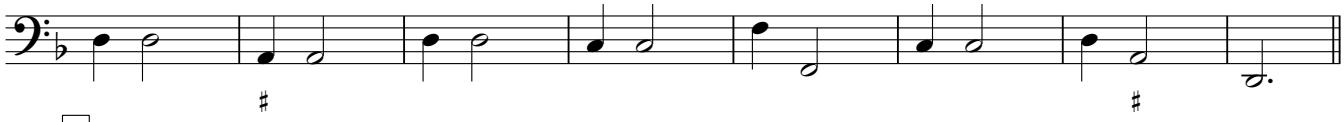

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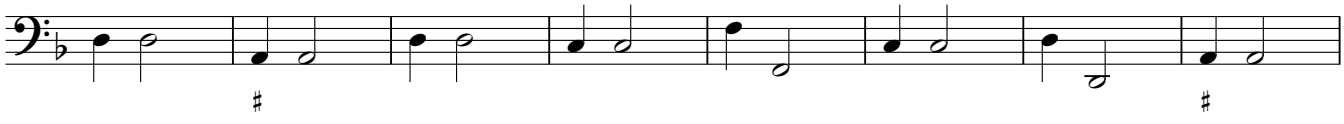

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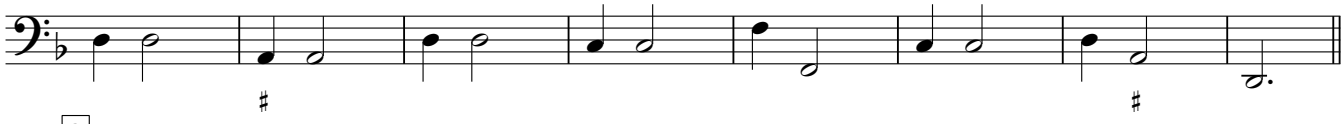

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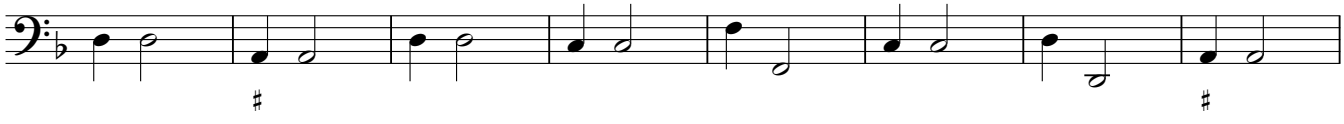

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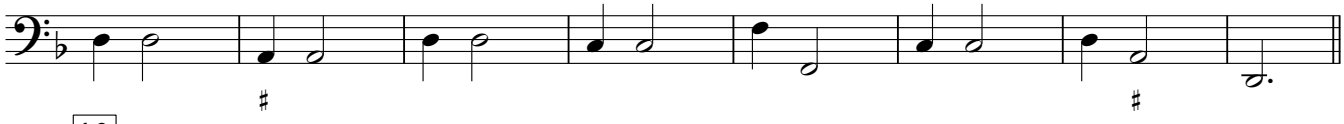

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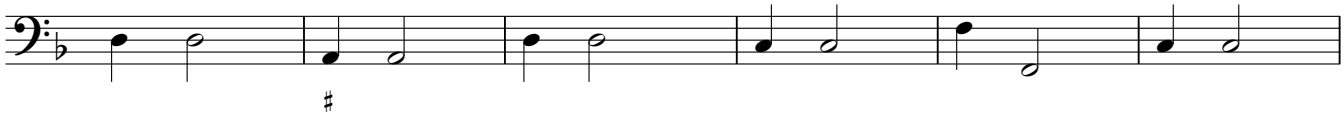

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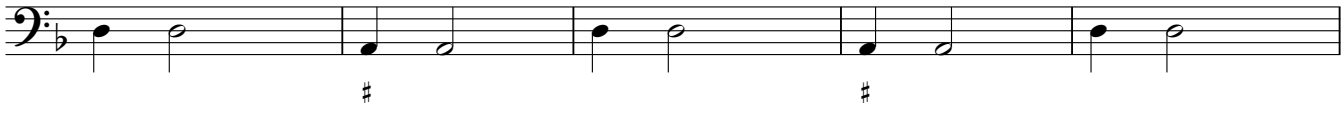

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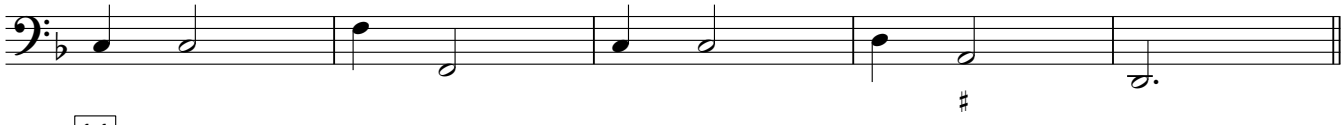

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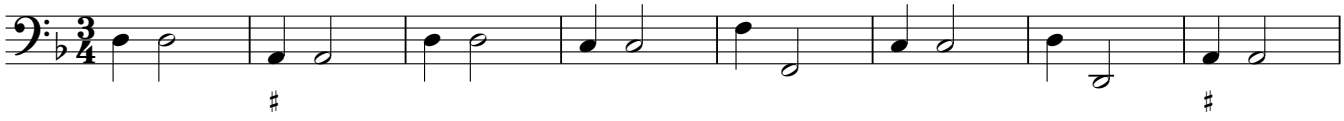

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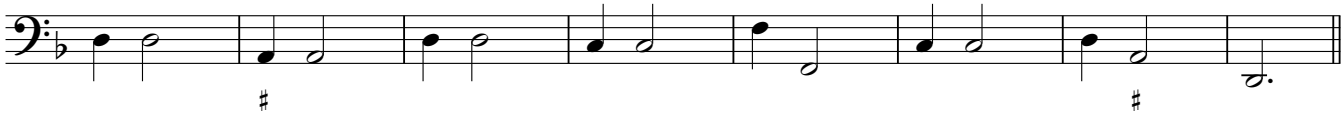

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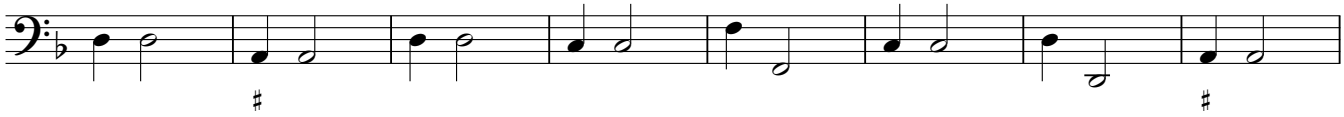
177 **12**



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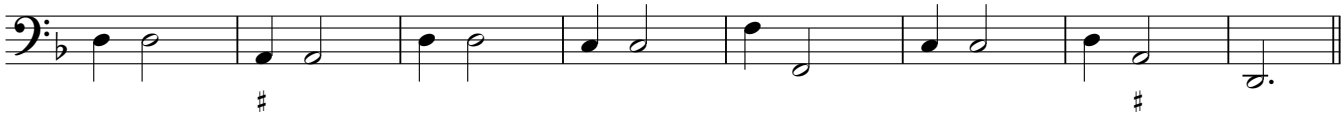

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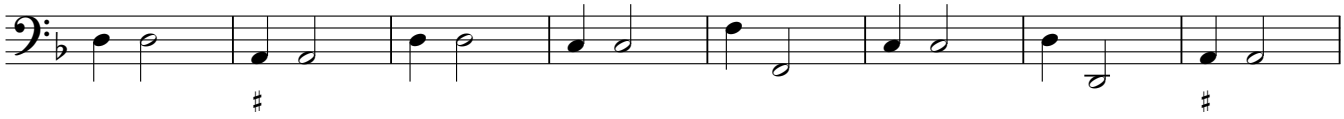

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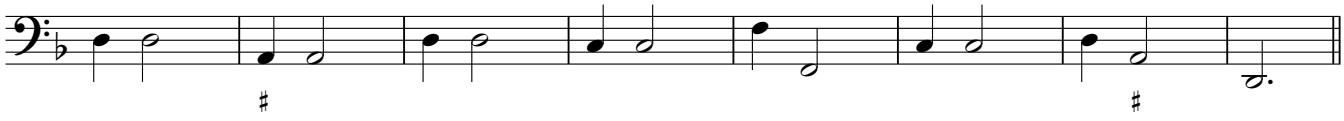

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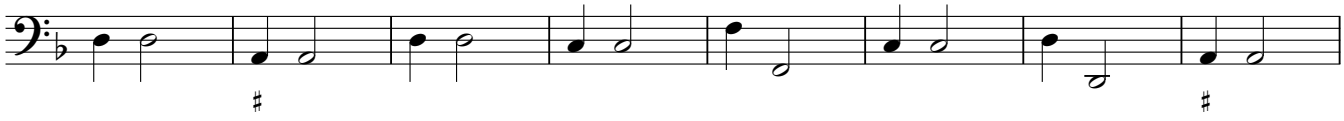

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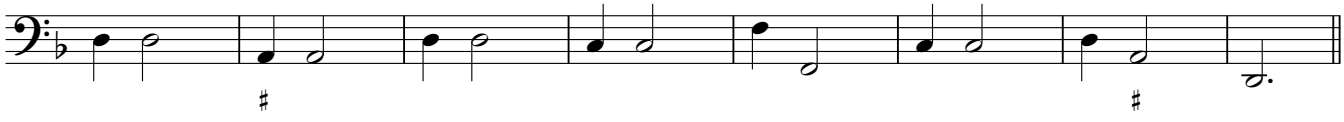

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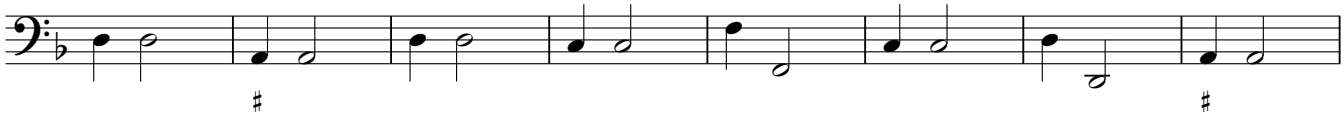

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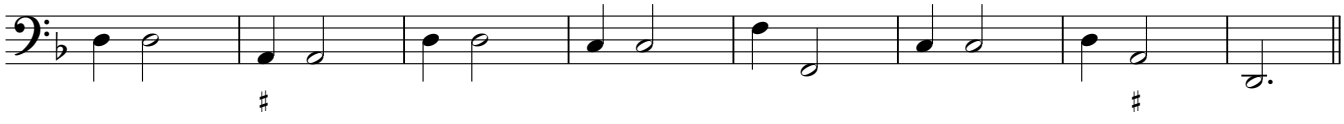

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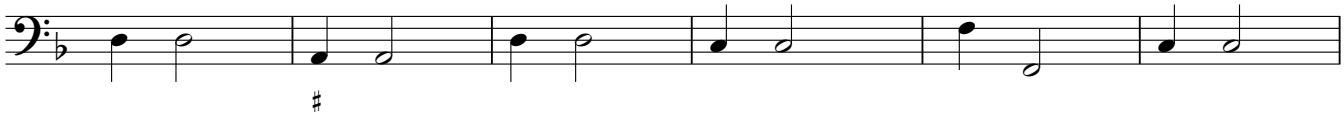

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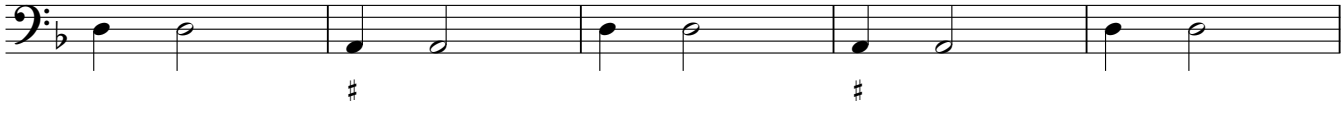

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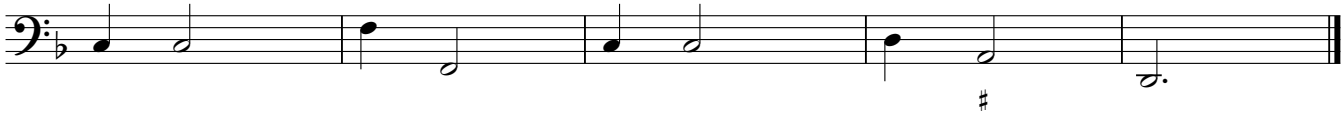

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