Davis Mell

(1604–1662)

Suite in D minor

For Solo Violin in Scordatura Tuning

Edited by Martin Perkins
from GB-Och Mus. 433.

CK0091

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Davis Mell – Suite in D minor for solo violin in scordatura
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Introduction

English violinist and composer, Davis Mell, was the son of a court violinist Leonard Mell and followed his father's career with his appointment to the violin band in 1626. Mell was one of the few musicians who held a court appointment both before and after the Civil Wars, despite being employed in Cromwell's household from around 1654 to 1658. This seemingly disloyal behaviour may have been overlooked by Charles II by virtue of Mell's standing as the foremost violinist of his generation.

First-hand accounts of the playing and character of Mell and his contemporaries are to be found in the writings of Anthony a Wood, who made several comparisons with the German-born violinist Thomas Baltzar who arrived in England in the late 1650s.[1] Recounting a visit Mell made to Oxford in 1658, Wood writes: 'The company did look upon Mr Mell to have a prodigious hand on the violin, and they thought that no person, as all London did, could goe beyond him. But when Thomas Baltser, an outlander, came to Oxon in the next yeare, they had other thoughts of Mr Mell, who tho he play'd farr sweeter than Baltsar, yet Baltsar's hand was more quick and could run it insensibly to the end of the finger-board.' Further descriptions by Wood include: 'Mr Davis Mell was accounted hitherto the best for the violin in England as I have before told you; but after Baltzar came into England and shew'd his most wonderful parts on that instrument, Mell was not so admired; yet he played sweeter, and was a well bred gentleman and not given to excessive drinking as Baltzar was.'

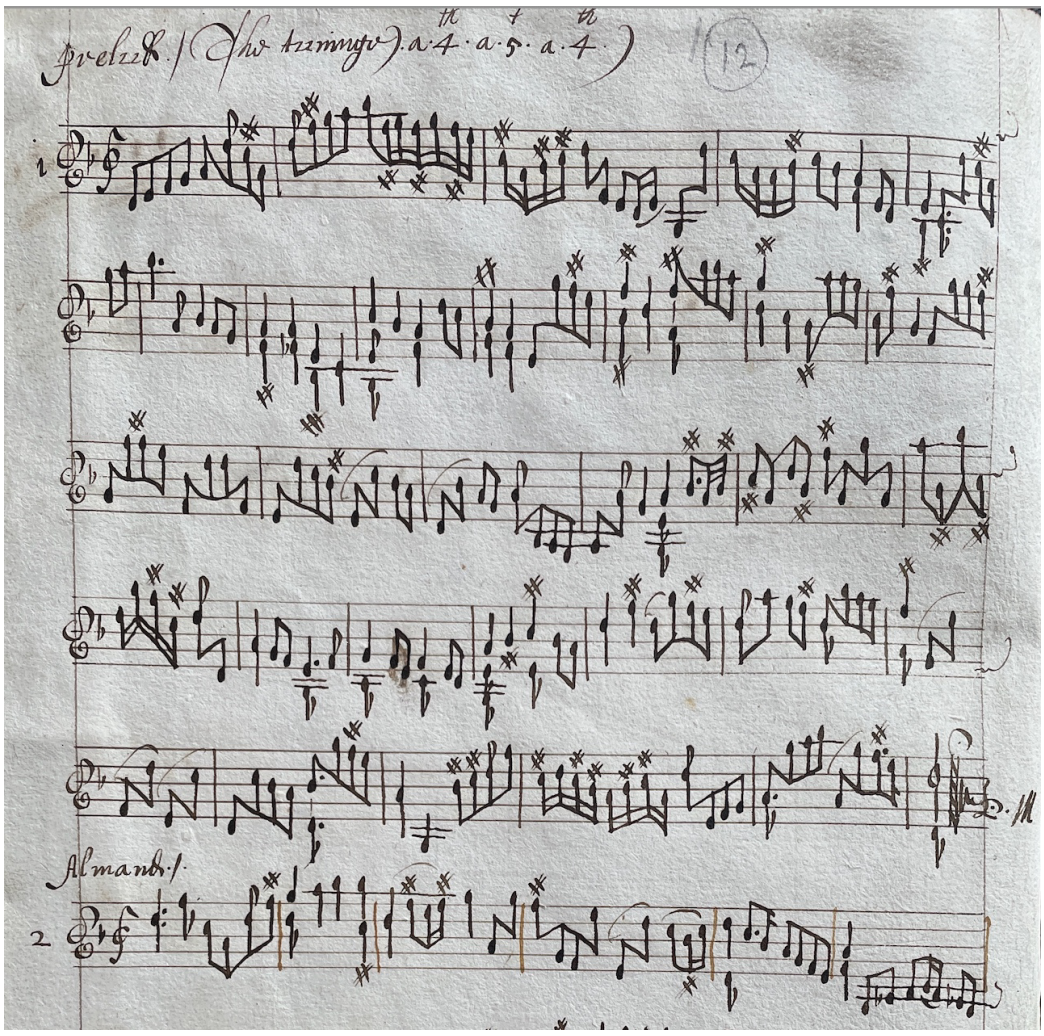
Although this may seem a somewhat damning account of the abilities of home-grown musician, Mell, it shows the influence of continental playing and compositional styles playing out in the concert houses of England. A direct comparison of their music can be made in the music they wrote for unaccompanied violin, particularly the Divisions on 'John Come Kiss me Now', printed on consecutive pages of John Playford's *The Division Violin*, 1684, where it is striking to see the relative technical demands the two composer make on the violin. At the time of its publication Mell had been dead for over 20 years, yet Mell and Baltzar's contributions were printed in six subsequent editions of *The Division Violin* over the next 20 years. A newly-set printing of *The First & Second Division Violin*, issued in the early 1700s by Daniel Wright contained only Mell's version of 'John Come Kiss me Now', which indicates that Baltzar's extravagant style had gone out of favour and that Mell's style was still relevant well after his death; or, more likely, that Mell's version was more playable by the largely amateur musicians the collection was designed for.

Aside from 'John Come Kiss me Now', Mell's surviving compositions include around 100 works for violin, either unaccompanied or with basso continuo accompaniment. The works for violin using scordatura tuning in GB-Och, Mus.

[1] John D. Shute: *Anthony a Wood and his Manuscript Wood D 19(4) at the Bodleian*, ii (Ph.D. diss., International Institute of Advanced Studies, Clayton, Missouri, 1979).

MSS 433, are among the first examples in England and appear.[2] The present edition presents four movements in D minor from a total of seven in scordatura tuning (the other three being a further Almand, Corant and Jigg in D major, and can therefore be regarded as a separate suite). A score containing both original scordatura and the realisation is given, along with a violin part in scordatura tuning.

Editorial suggestions are indicated in the score: accidental placement has been modernised (from above the note); where an accidental is found wanting, these are added in cue size next to the relevant note; beaming and double-stop indication has been retained from the original. Editorial slurs are indicated using dashed slurs.



Davis Mell: Suite in D minor for Solo Violin in Scordatura Tuning.
GB-Och, Mus. MSS 433, ff. 36r-35r inv.

Martin Perkins, 2026.

[2] For a thorough discussion of scordatura works in England, including the works of Mell and Baltzar, see Hazel Jacqueline Brooks *The Lyre-Way Fiddle: Violin Scordatura in Britain to 1705* (Ph.D. diss., 2023).

Suite in D minor for Solo Violin in Scordatura

Source: Christ Church College, Oxford, MUS 433. f.36r-35v

1. Prelude

Davis Mell (1604–1662)
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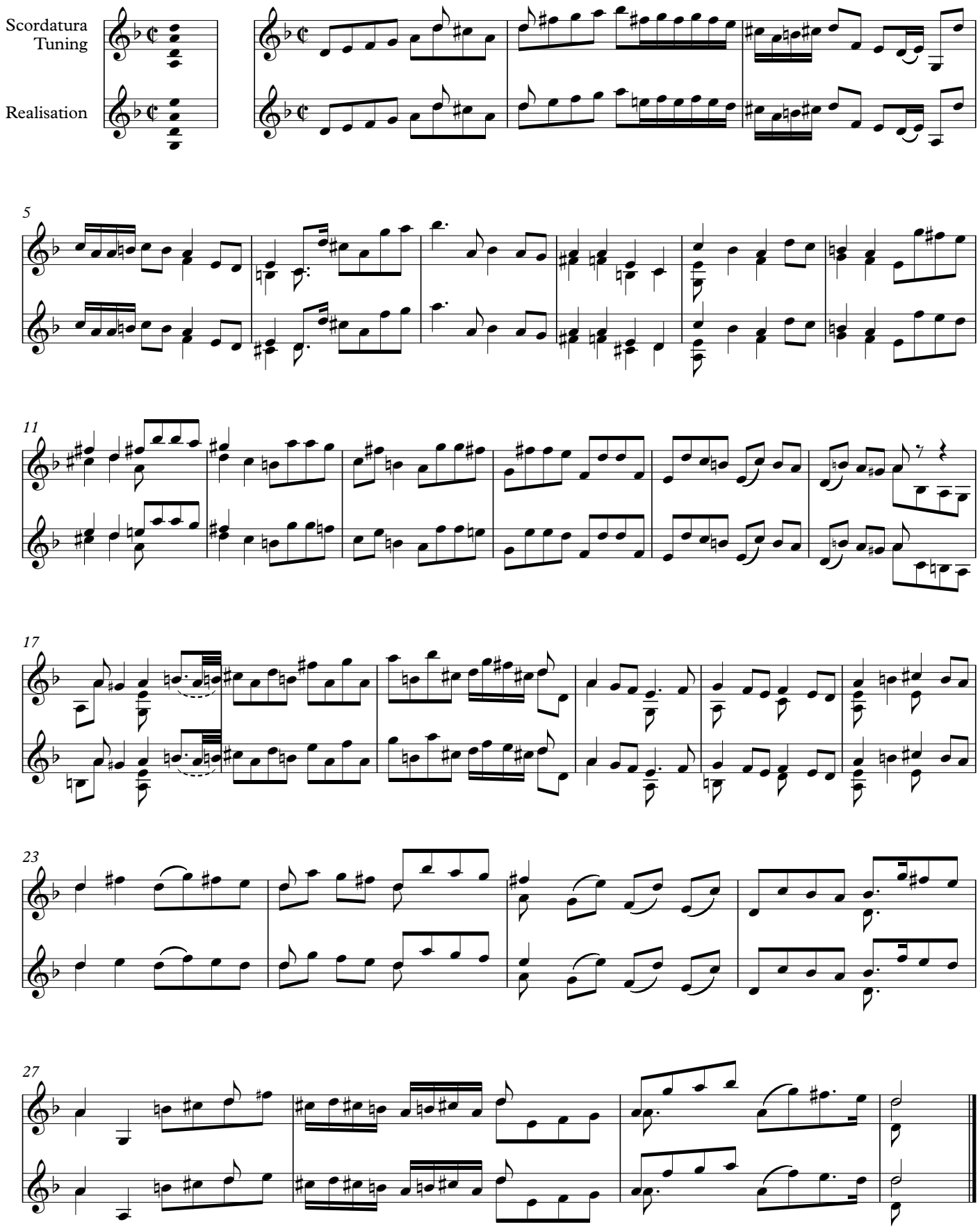
Scordatura Tuning

Realisation



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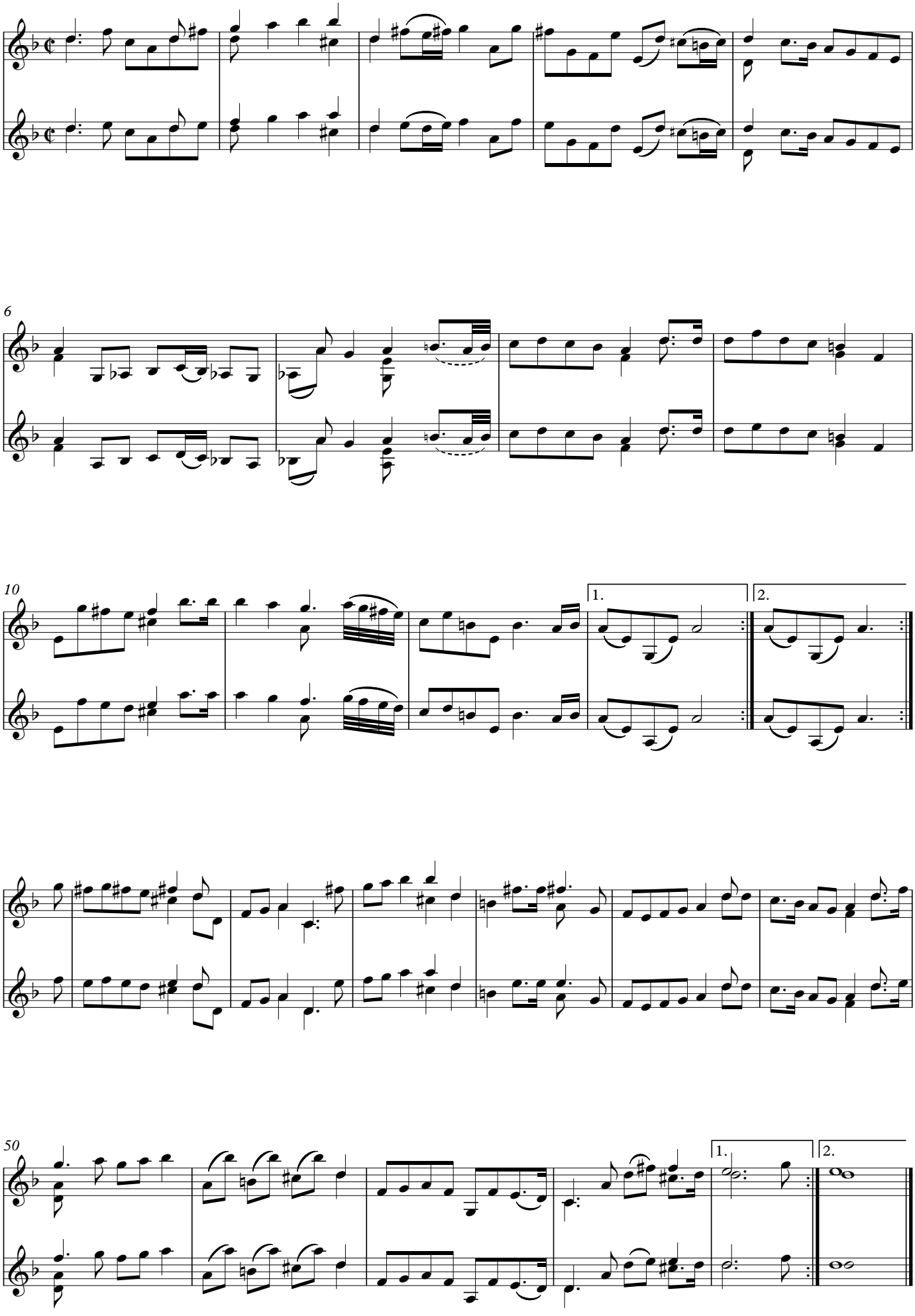
2. Almand



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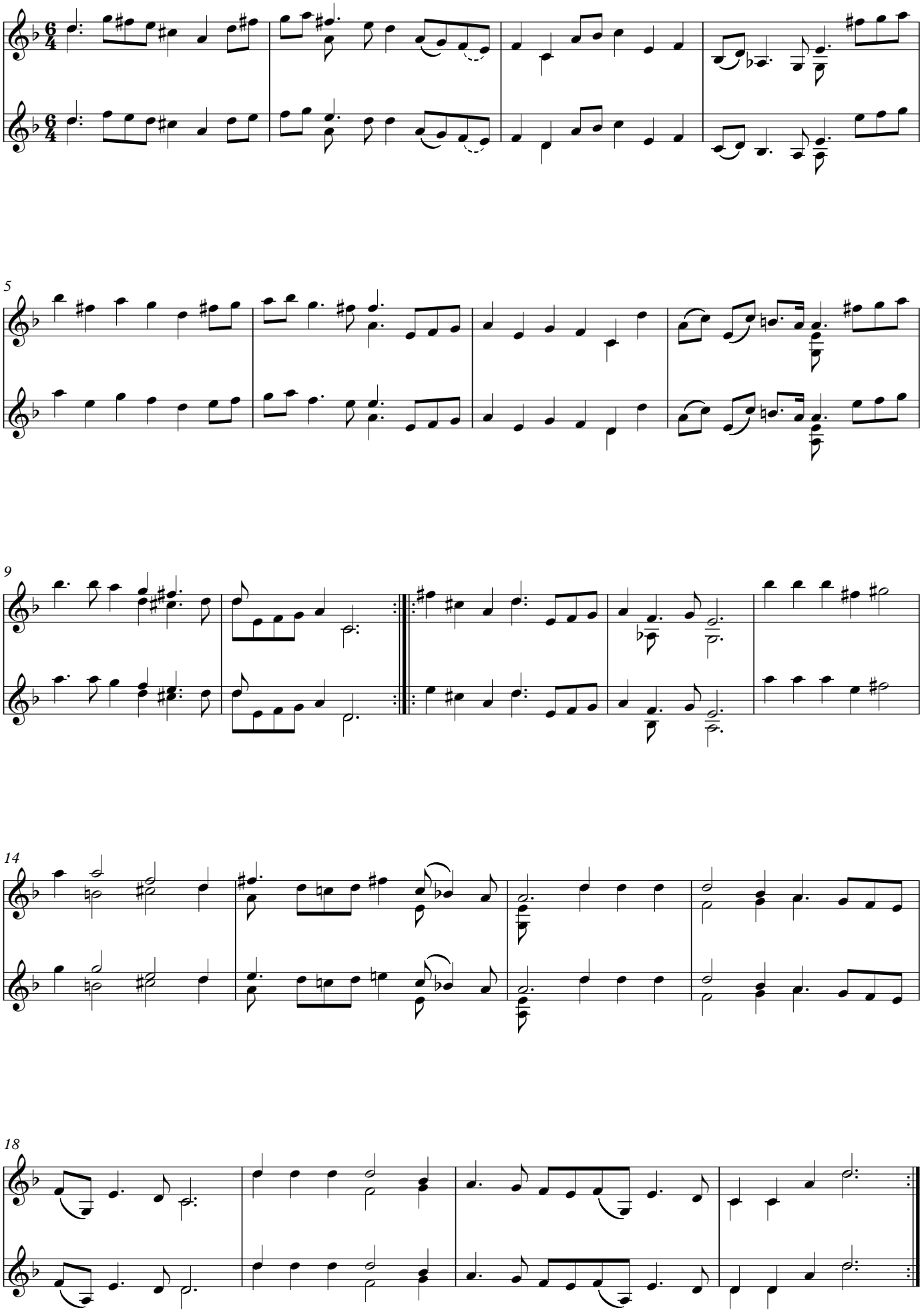
3. Corant



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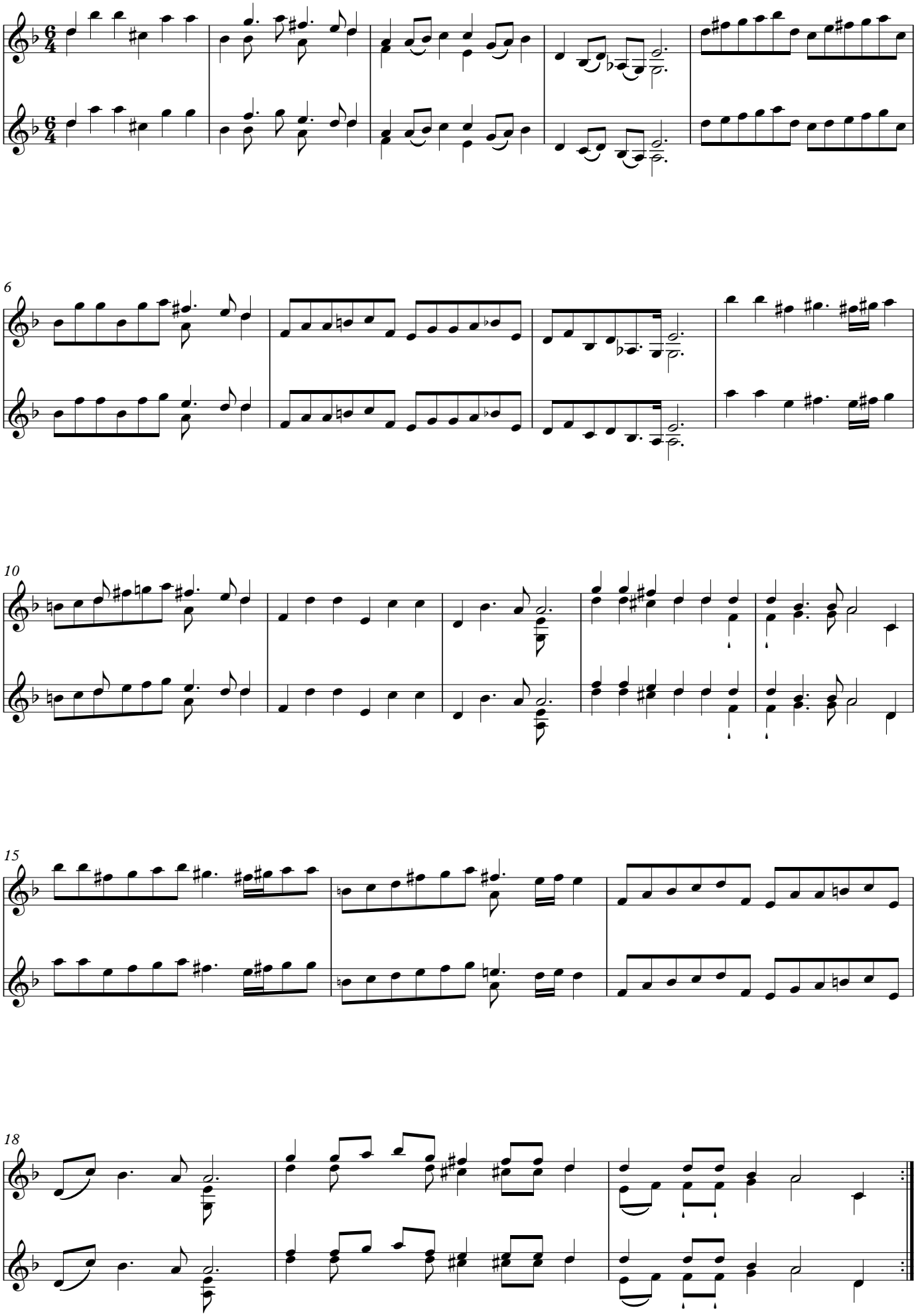
4. Saraband



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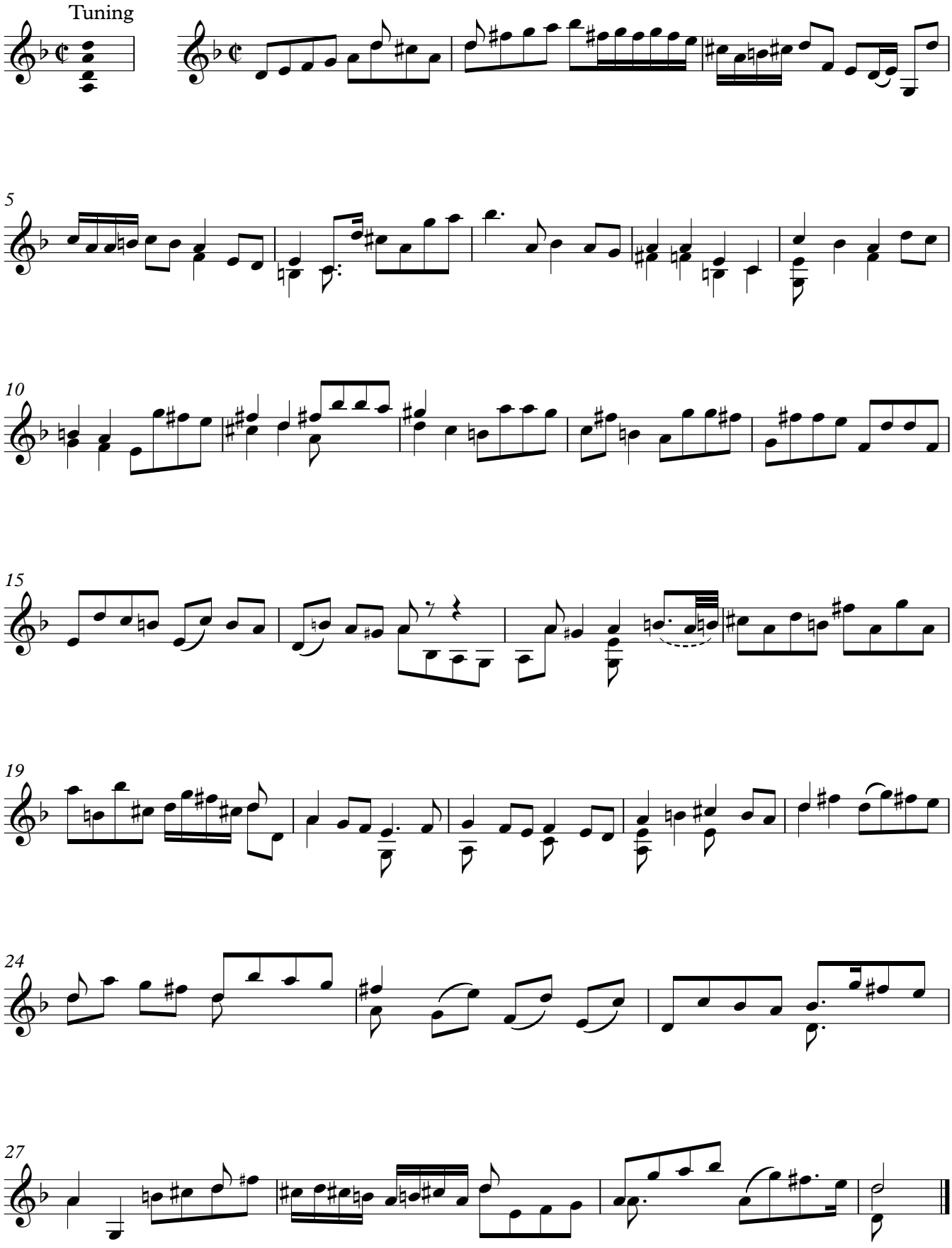

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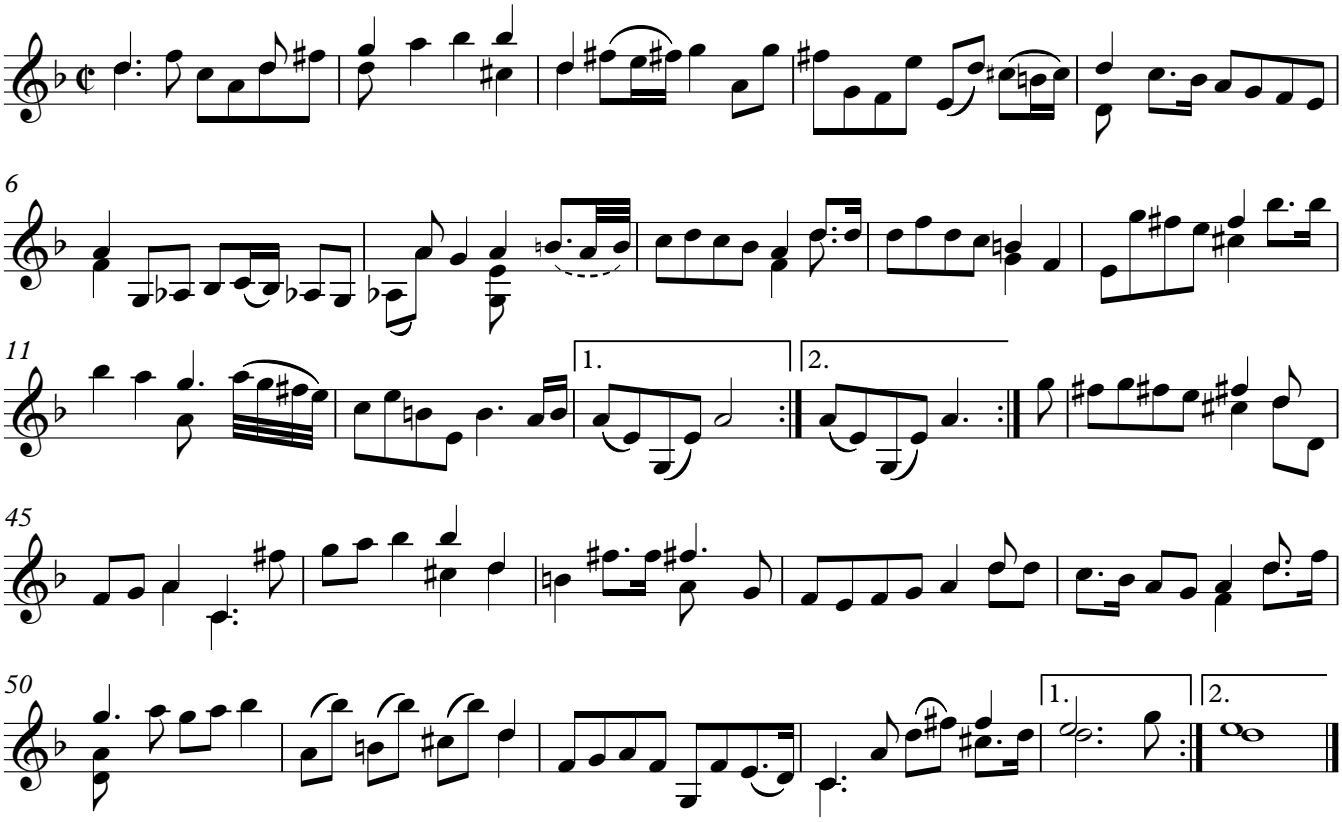
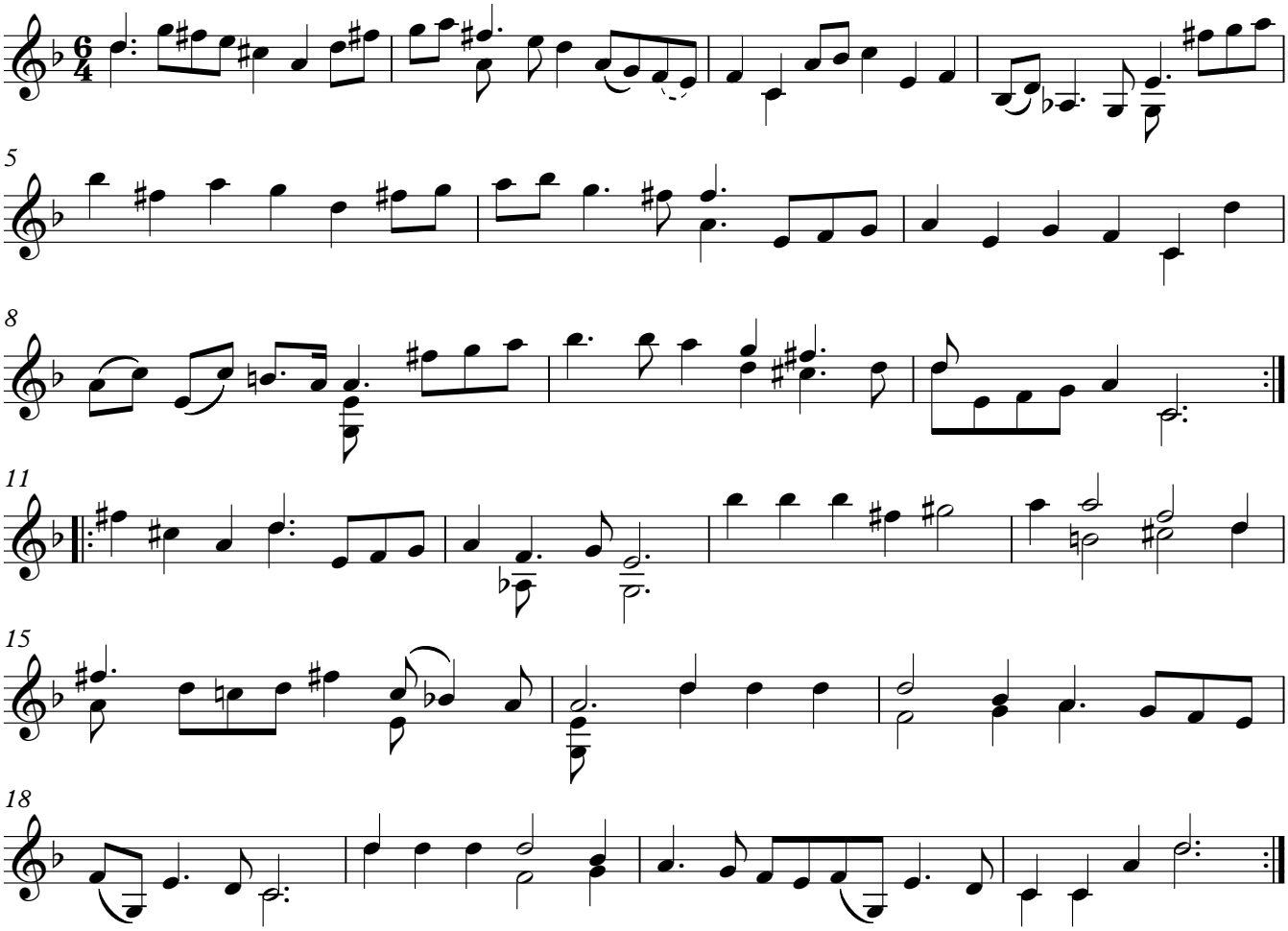


3. Corant



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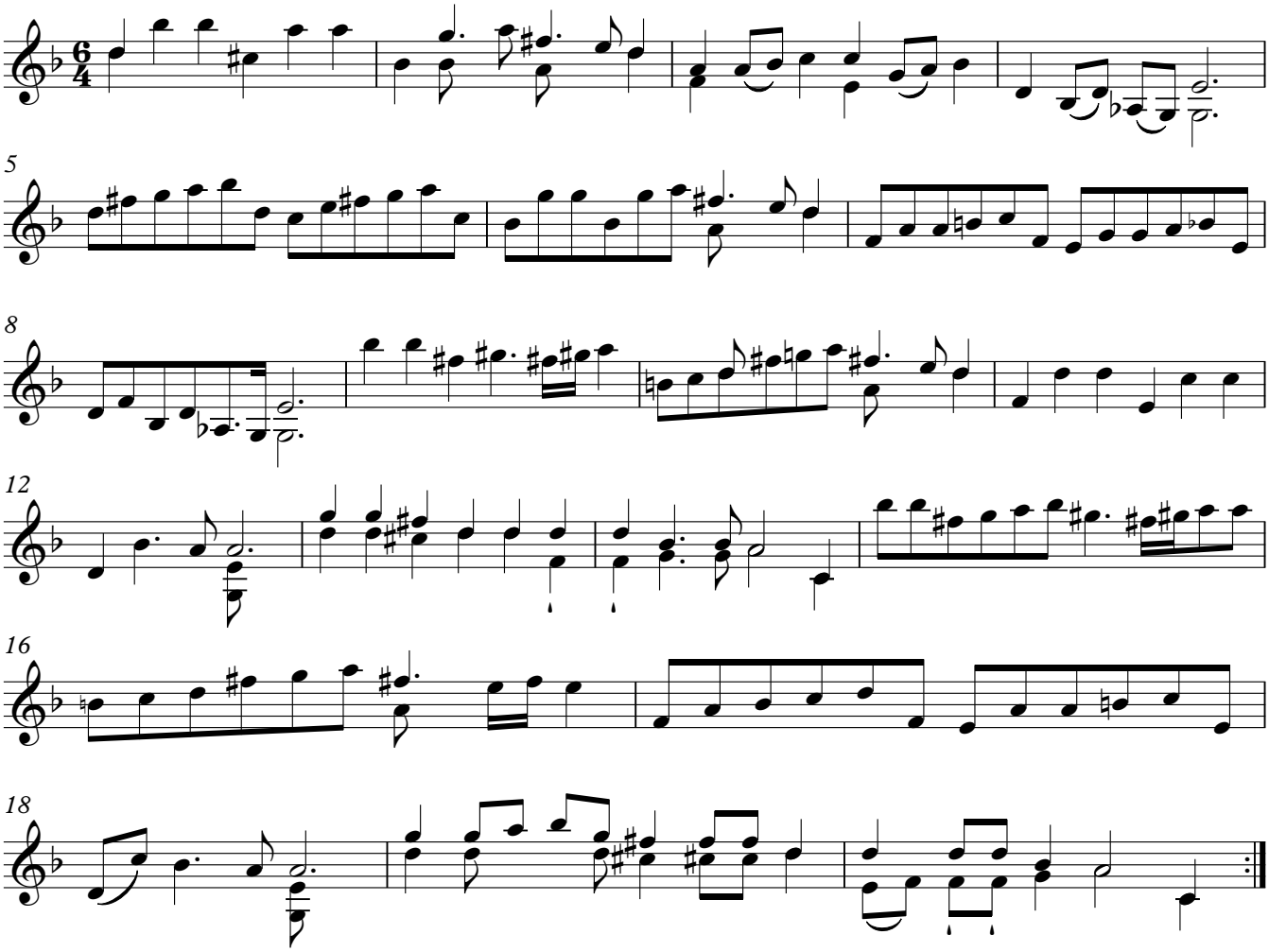

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