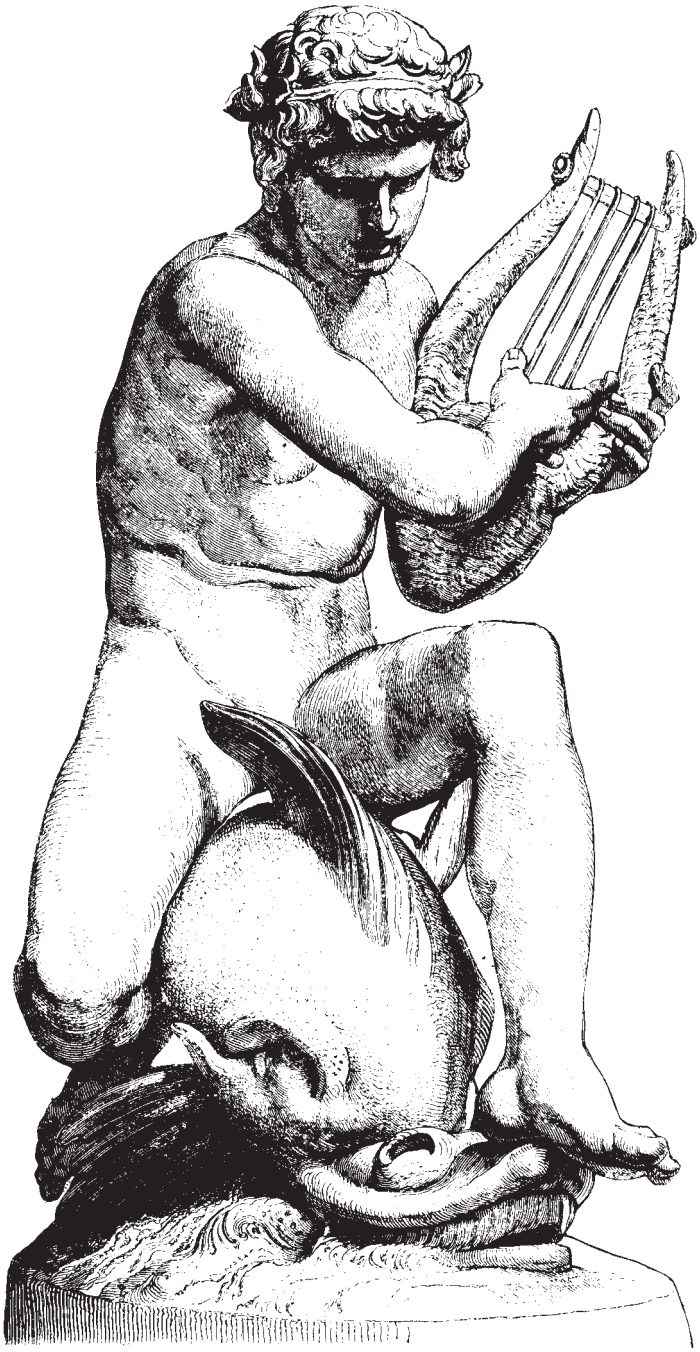
Johann Sebastian Bach



Prelude & Fugue BWV 550 in G major for Organ (2 Manuals & Bass)

arranged for 5-part String Orchestra

Complete parts

edited by Alan Bonds

from notes for the superb recording of the Prelude & Fugue for the Netherlands Bach Society by Matthias Havinga on the Müller organ in Haarlem.

There is also an accompanying video by Havinga about the work - essential listening!

“Preludio Pedaliter

This piece requires pedal and in no small measure!

In some of the earliest sources for this exuberant Prelude and fugue, the first part is described as a “praeludio in G-dur con pedal” or a “praeludio pedaliter”. In itself, there is nothing unusual about the use of pedals (the ‘keys’ of the organ operated by the feet) in an organ piece in Bach’s day. So at first sight, the description appears to be just a useful eighteenth-century indication (NB: can only be played on an organ with pedals!). But twelve bars into the piece, there is an *aha-erlebnis* (an “aha-experiece”); you hear a long, lively pedal solo, which not only requires more than a second-rate village organist, but also more than a second-rate village organ. The range of the solo covers more than two octaves (from low C to high D), which was definitely not the norm at the time! The organ of the Cathedral of Saint Bavo, in Haarlem, has a pedal with this range. It has two ‘pedal towers’, with pipes measuring almost 11 metres in length. So it was logical that organist Matthias Havinga should choose this instrument on which to play the piece.

In the rest of the piece, both in the prelude and the fugue, the feet play a role equal to the hands. The pedal is used to its full capacity throughout the piece. There is even one note that is higher than the highest note of the solo. The theme of the fugue is as exuberant as that of the prelude, and is based on similar motifs. With no over-complicated excursions to far-flung keys, the fugue proceeds towards its ending like a lively Baroque perpetuum mobile. And just before the ending, the feet (with the hands in their wake) go one last time from low to high and back again over the pedals. Pedaliter indeed – point taken!

Organ

This recording was made on the famous Müller organ in the Great or St. Bavo Church, in Haarlem. It is a very special instrument from 1738. Both Georg Friedrich Händel and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart travelled to Haarlem to play this organ! Händel was particularly delighted by the unusual Vox Humana register. The organ has over 5000 pipes, divided over 64 registers, with three manuals and a pedal.”

EDITOR'S NOTES

This Prelude & Fugue transcribes well for strings. The individual voices may have even greater clarity and identity than on the organ.

The Cb. part occasionally descends to C2 and an *ossia* has been suggested. This bass line could benefit from being doubled on Vc2 for extra clarity.

A couple of notes in the Viola part have been transposed.

I have actually done a transposition to A major, but G major is far more idiomatic for strings.

The words *alla breve e staccato* (bar 82) signifies a complete change in rhythmic 'feel' and articulation for the fugue. It should be light and springy in the bow, otherwise the fabulous counterpoint will not sound as it deserves.

Alan Bonds
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Perth, Western Australia
March 2024

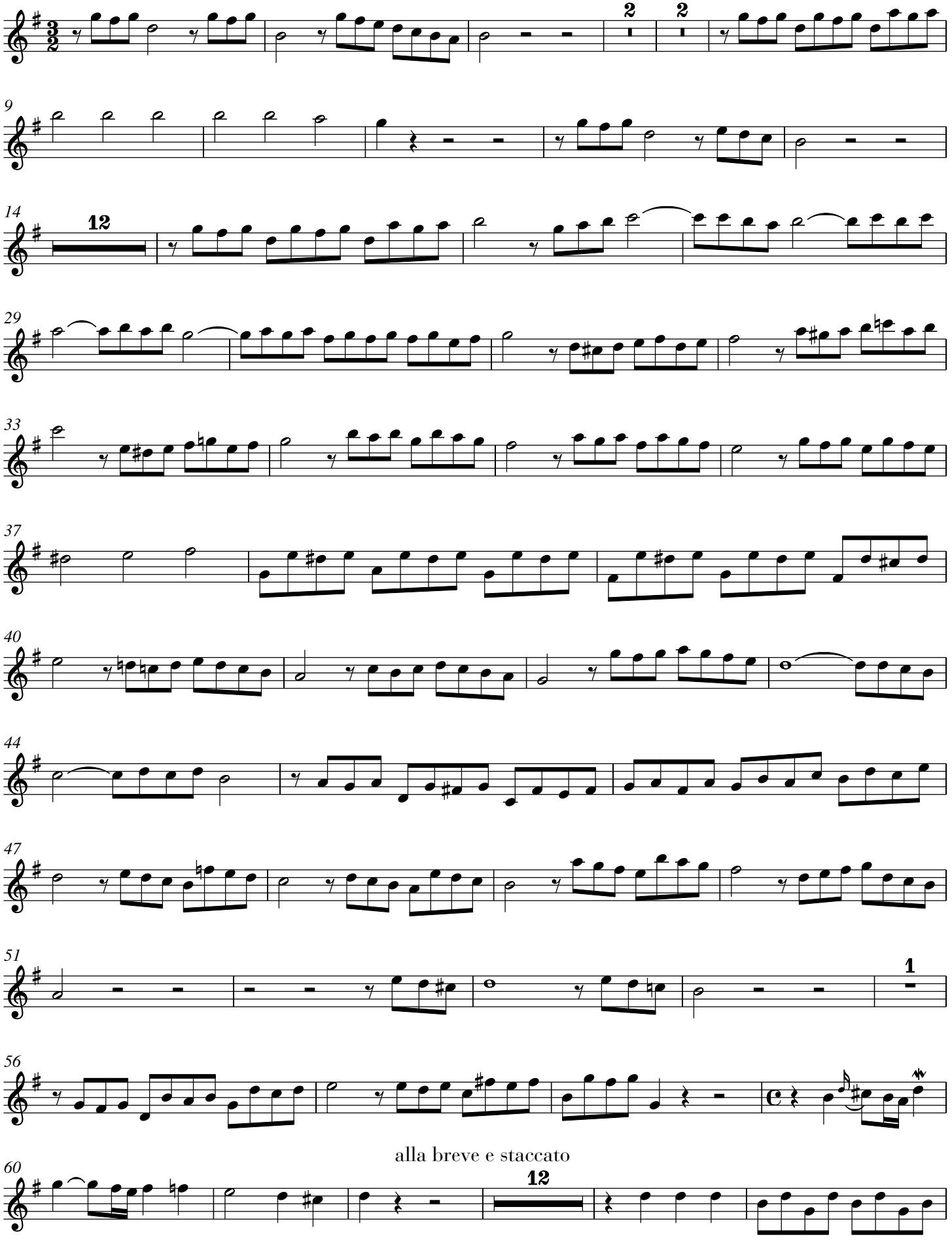
Praeludium & Fugue in G maj.

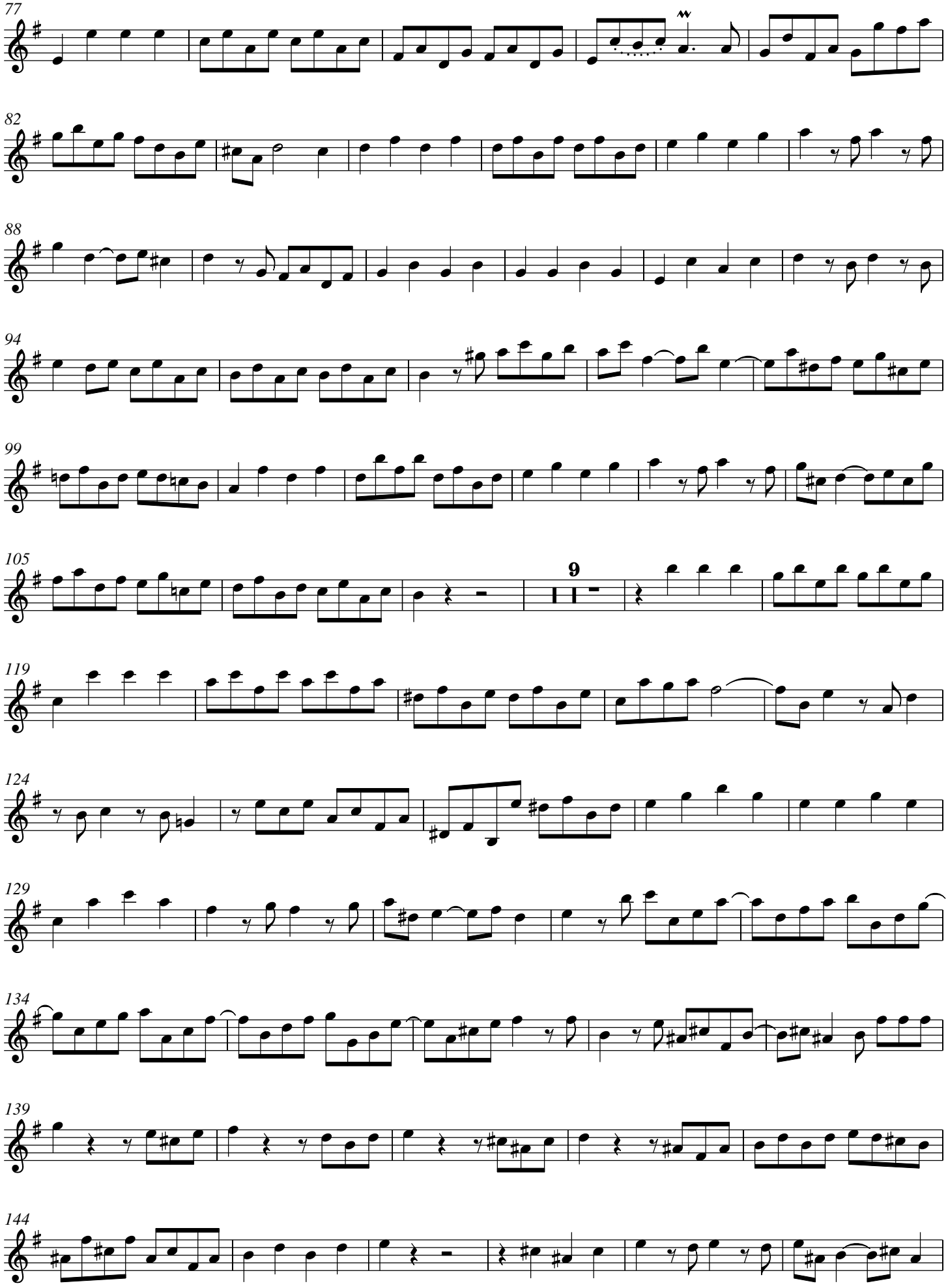
BWV 550

J.S. Bach

Transcribed for 5-part string orchestra
by Alan Bonds (2024)

Praeludium

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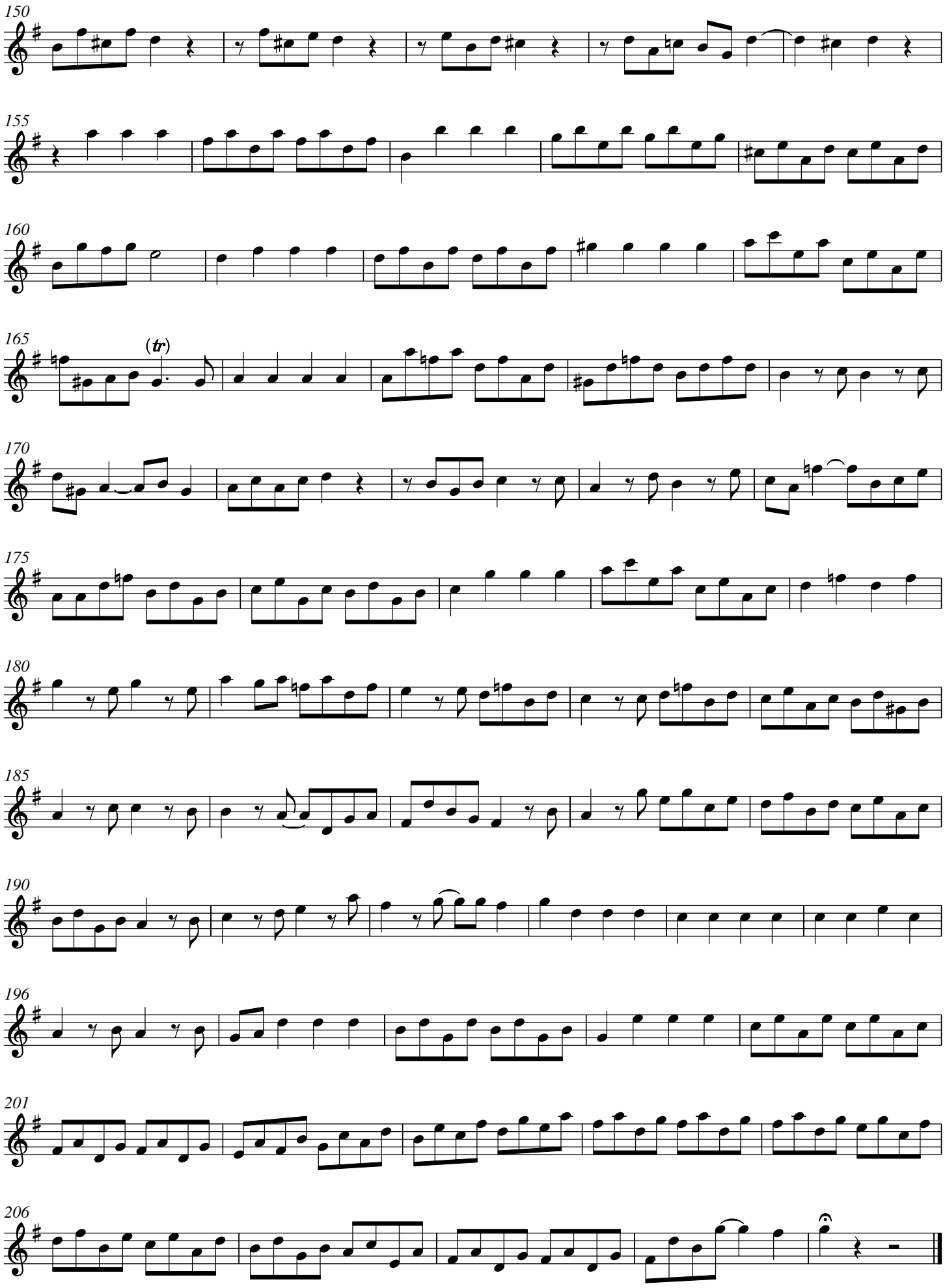
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BWV 550

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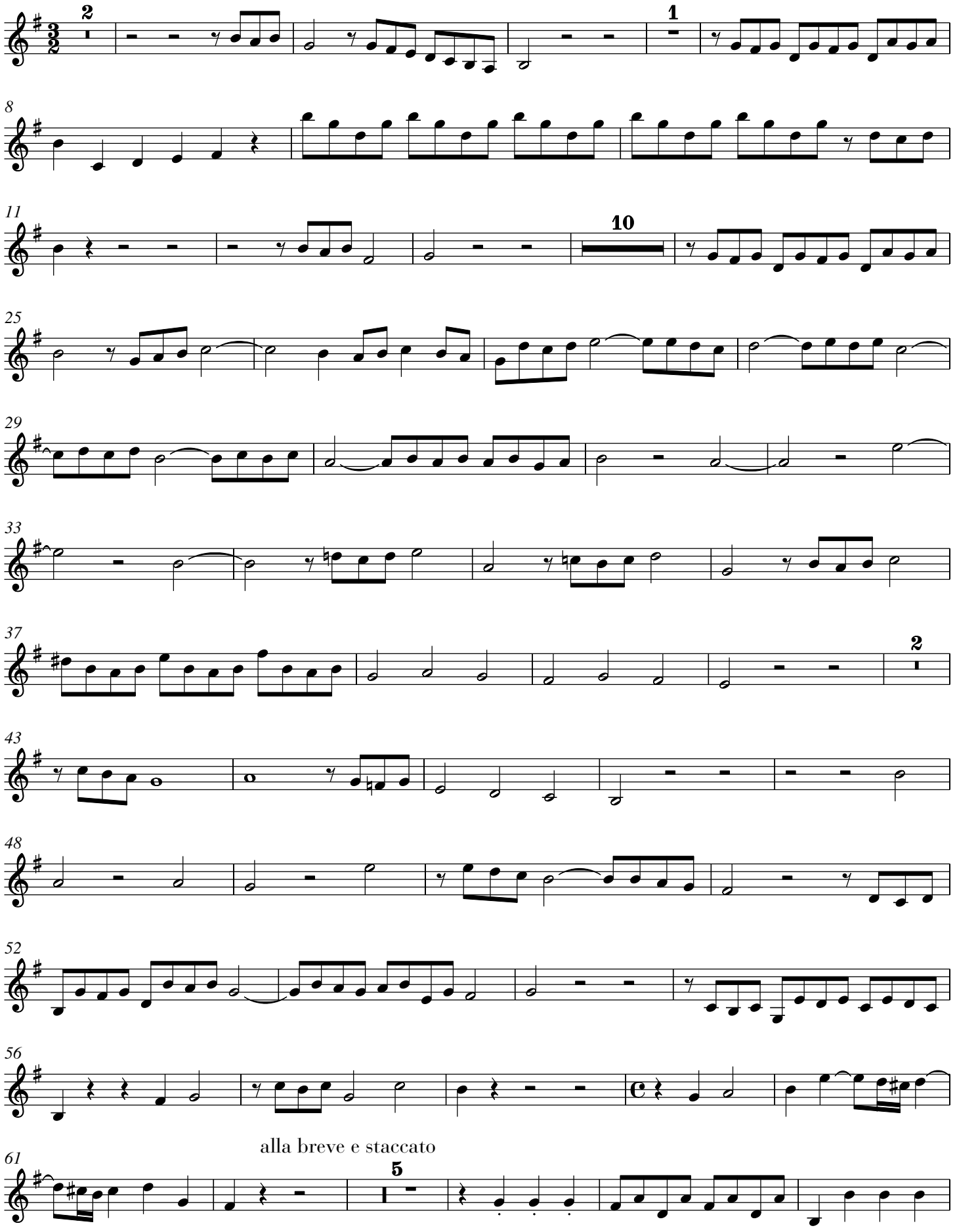
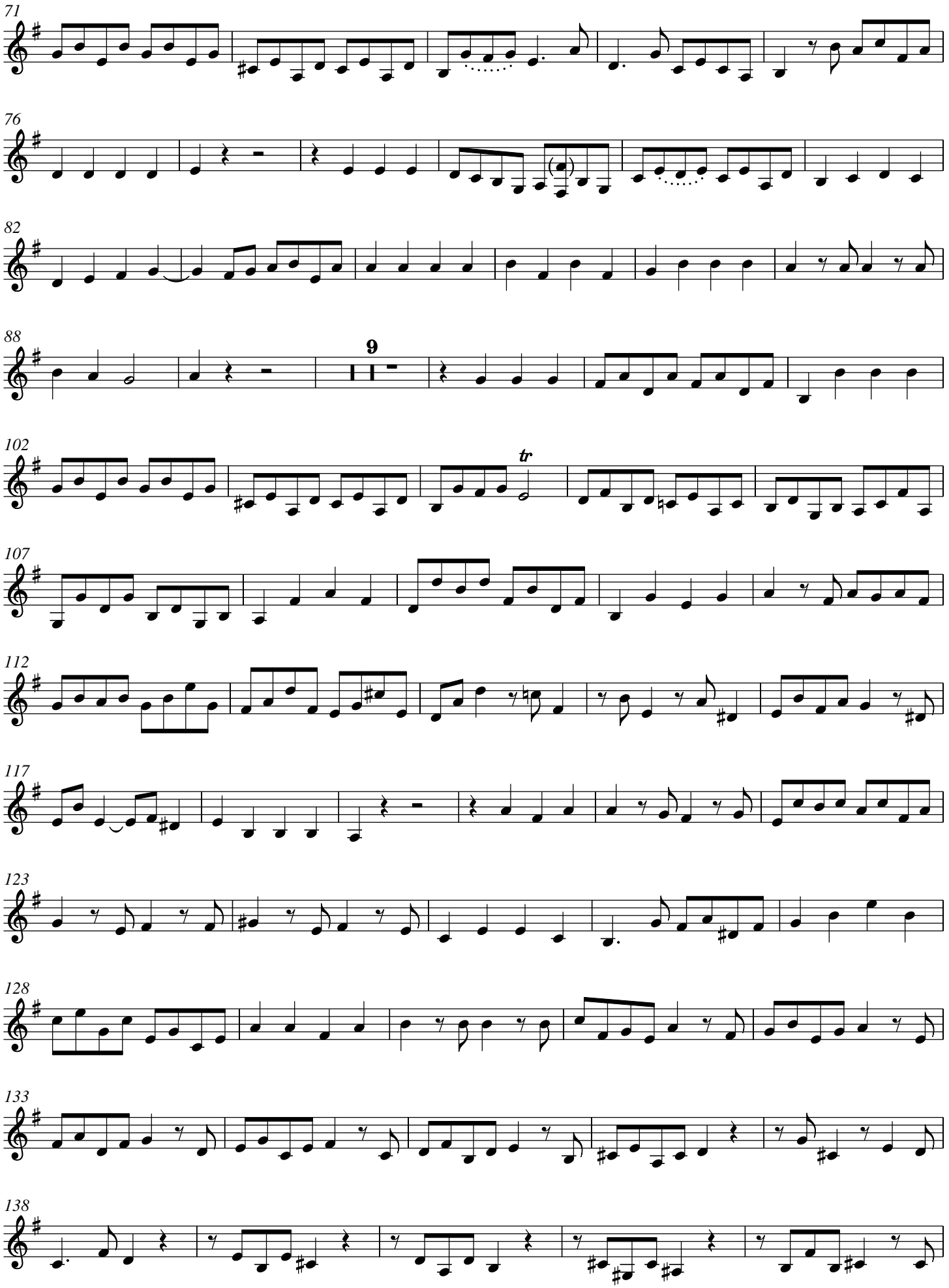
J.S. Bach

Praeludium

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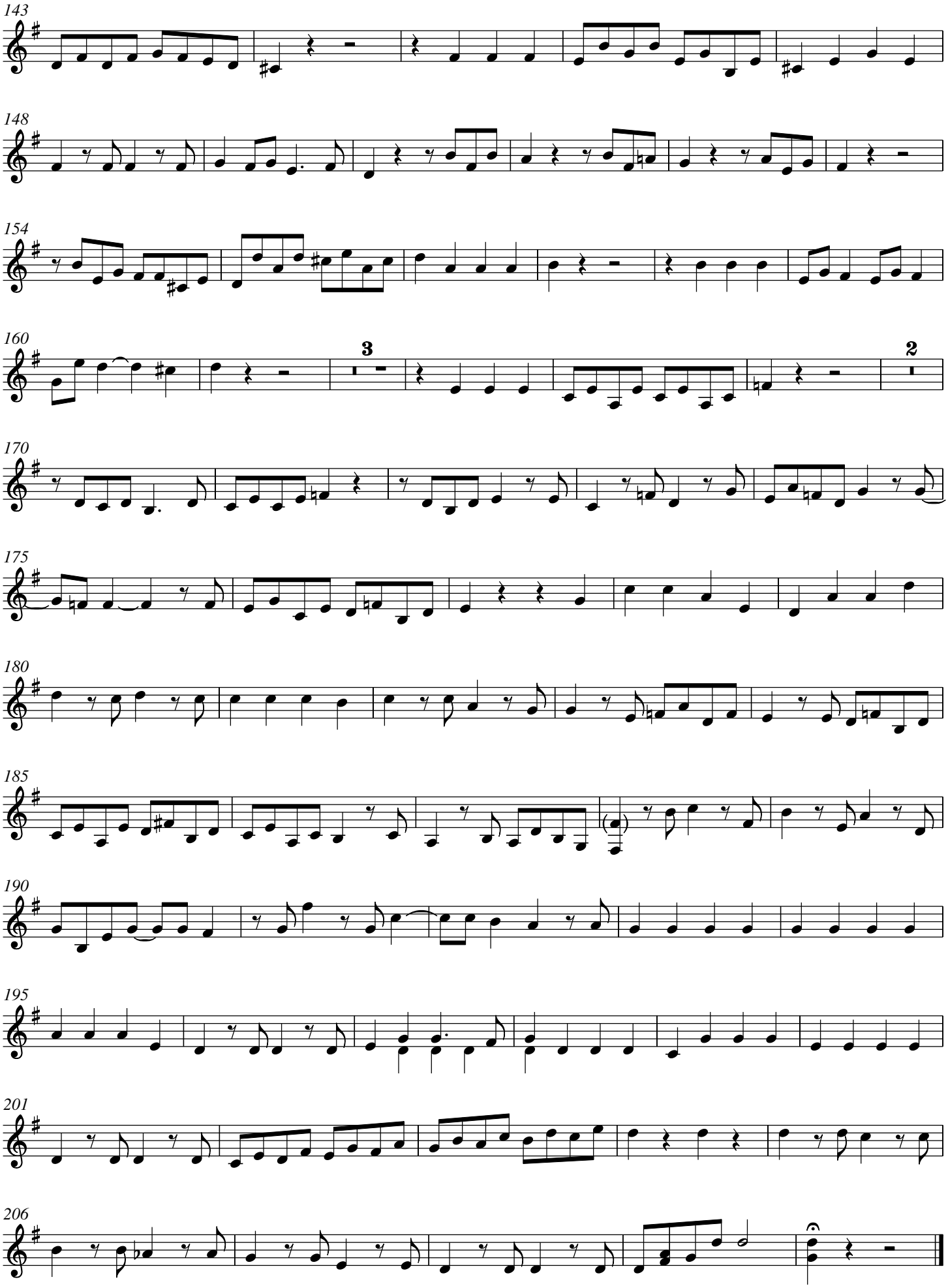
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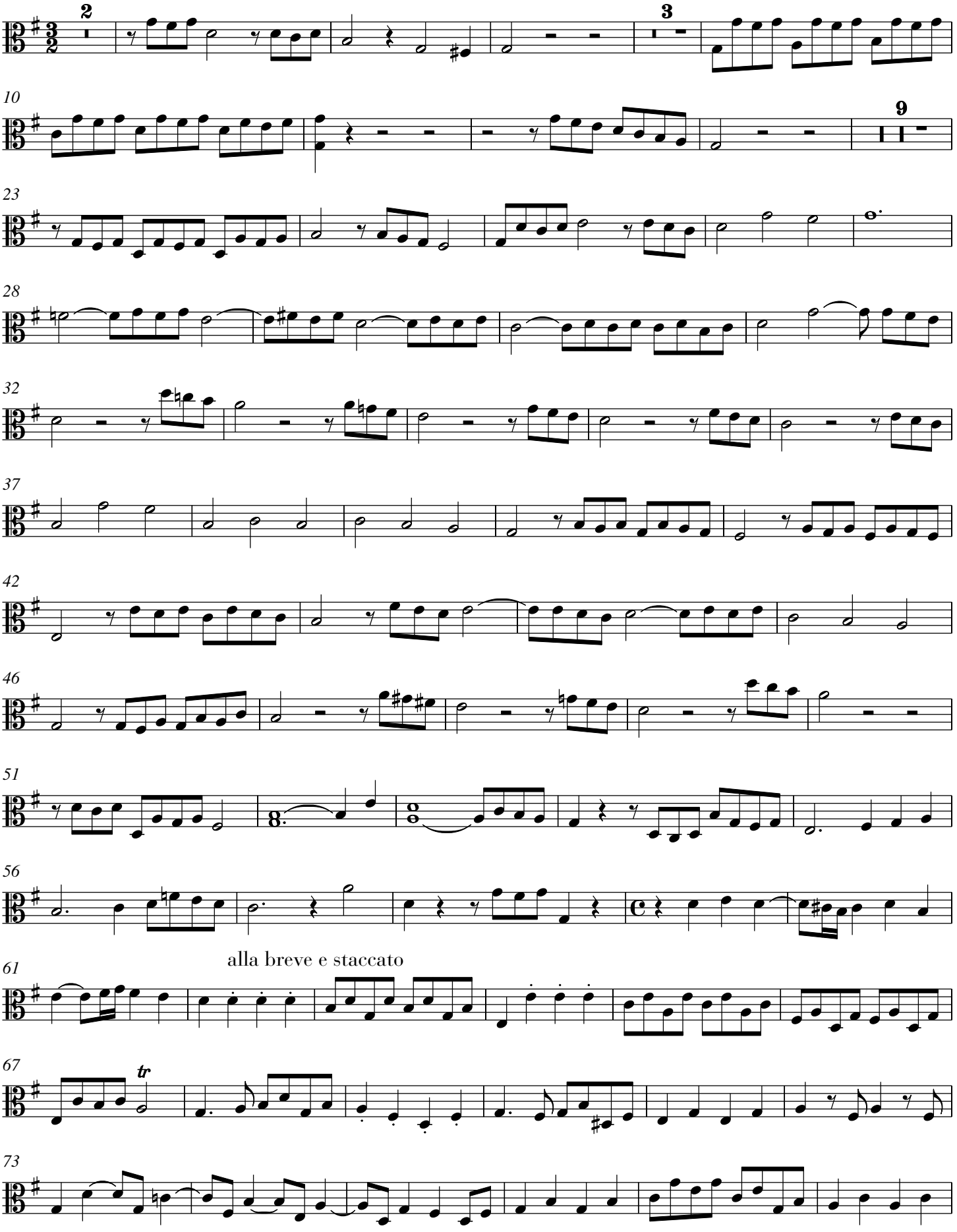

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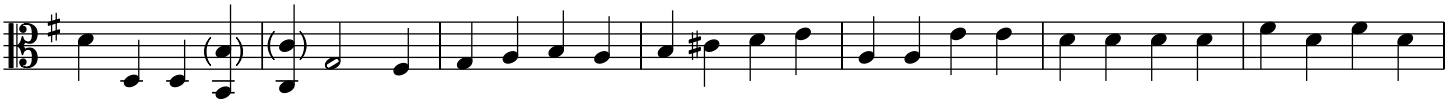

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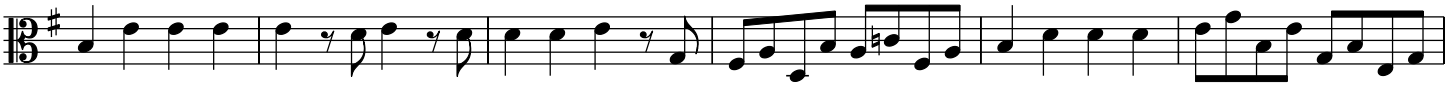

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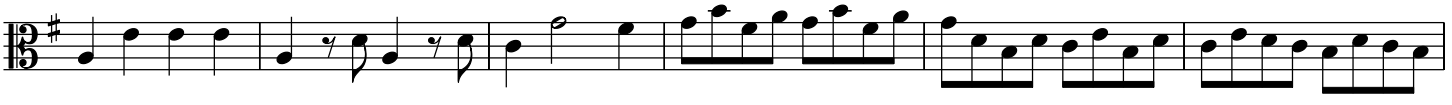

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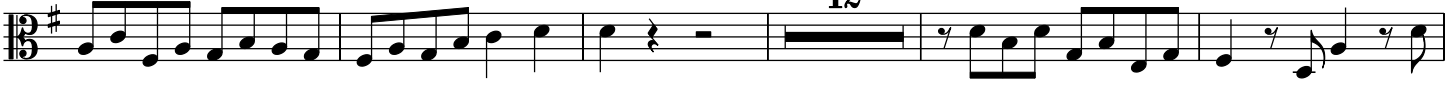

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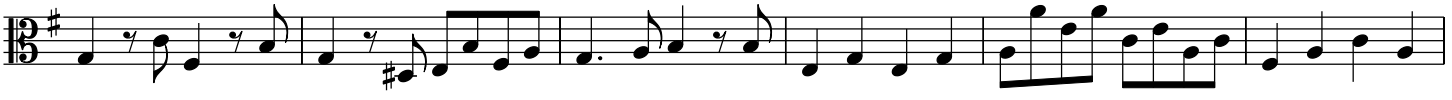

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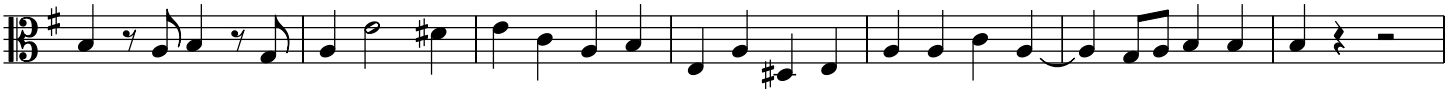

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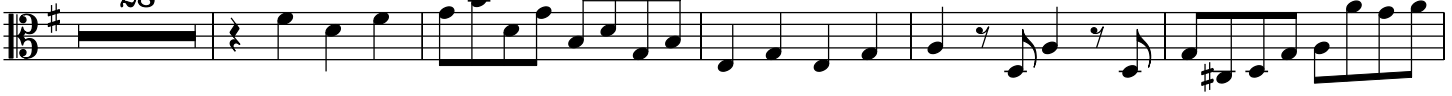

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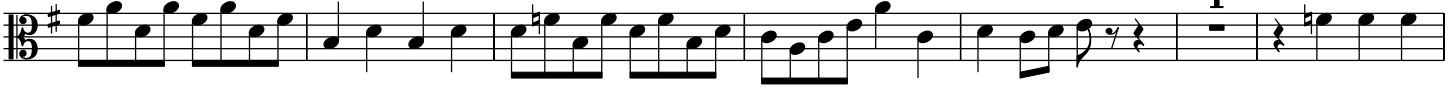

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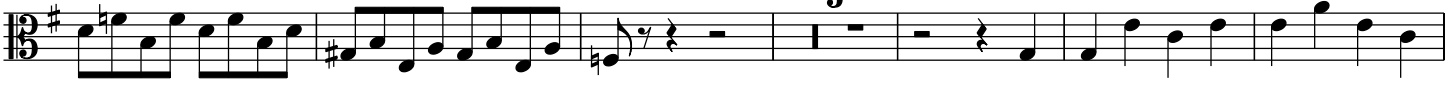

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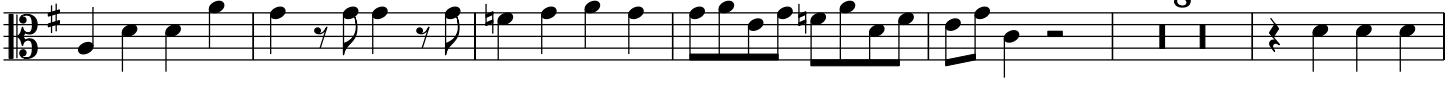

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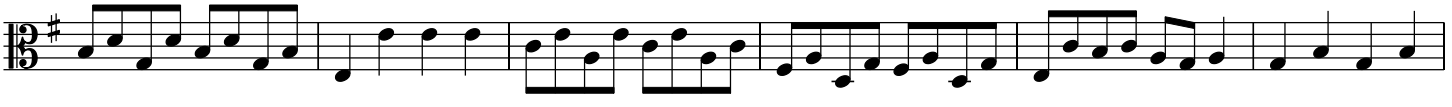

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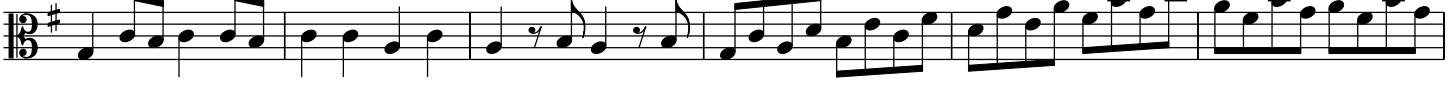

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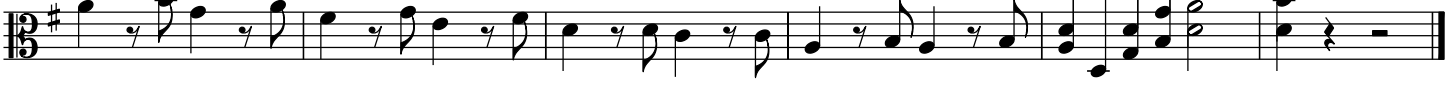

Praeludium & Fugue in G maj.

BWV 550

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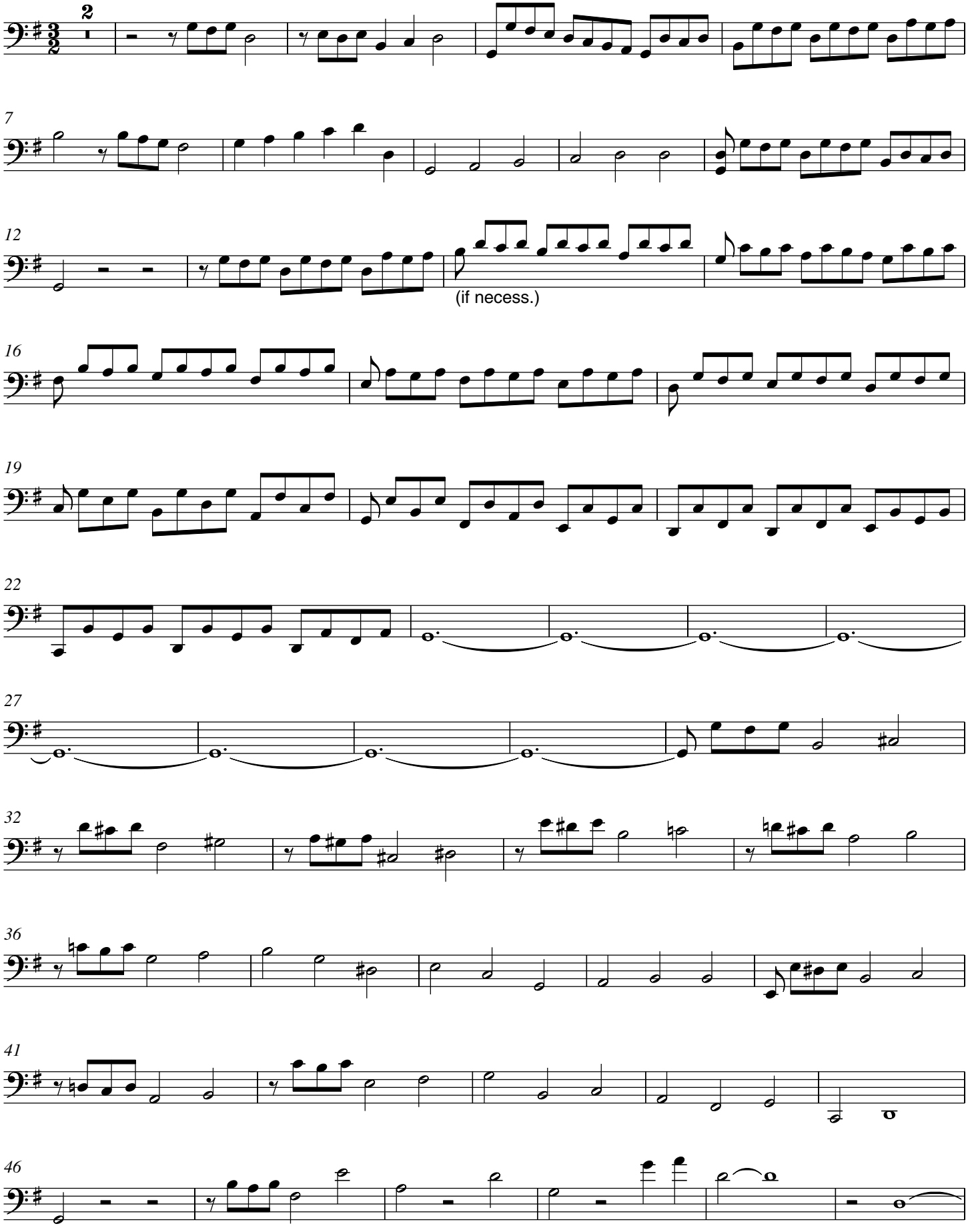
Praeludium



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alla breve e staccato

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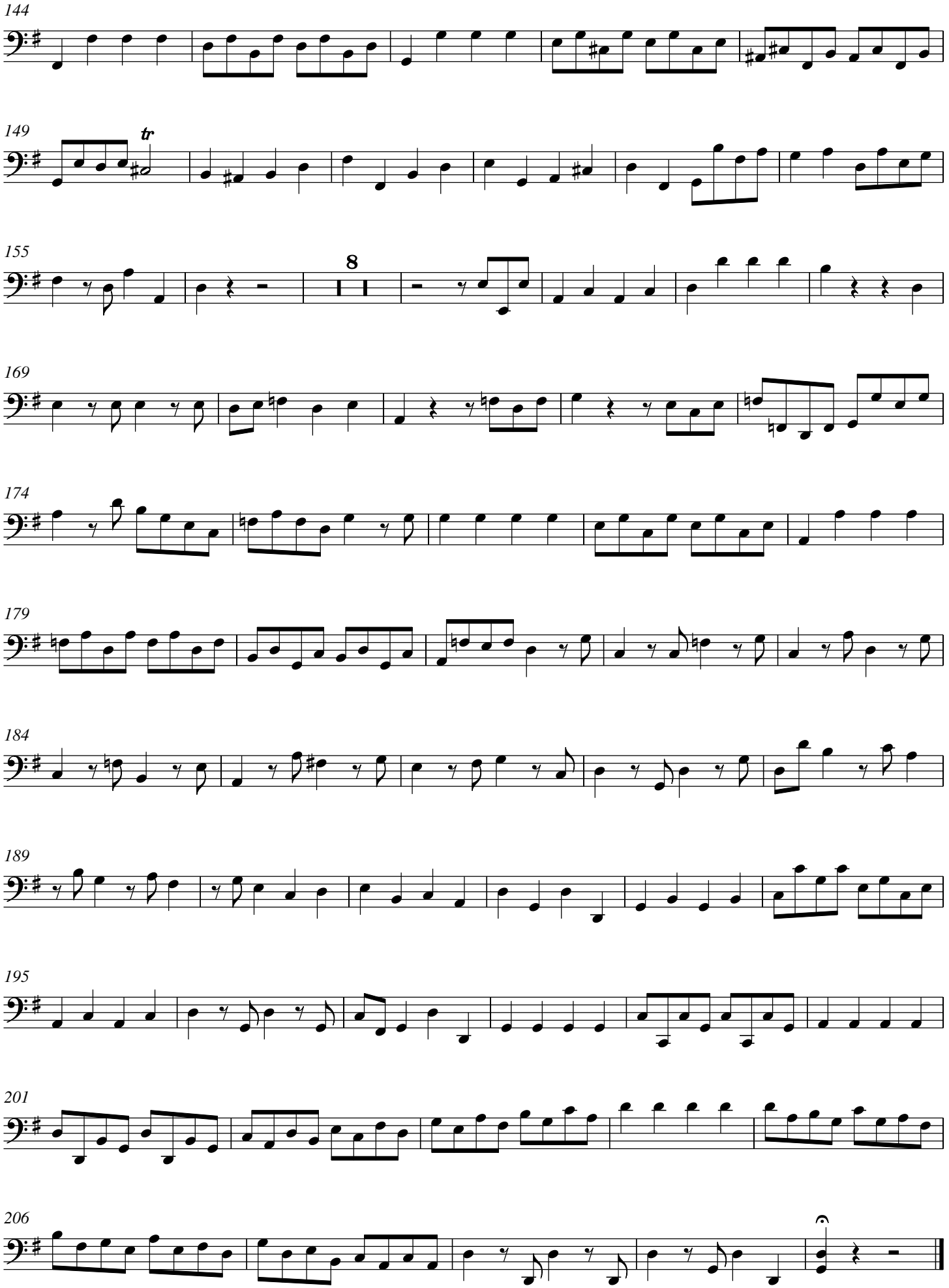

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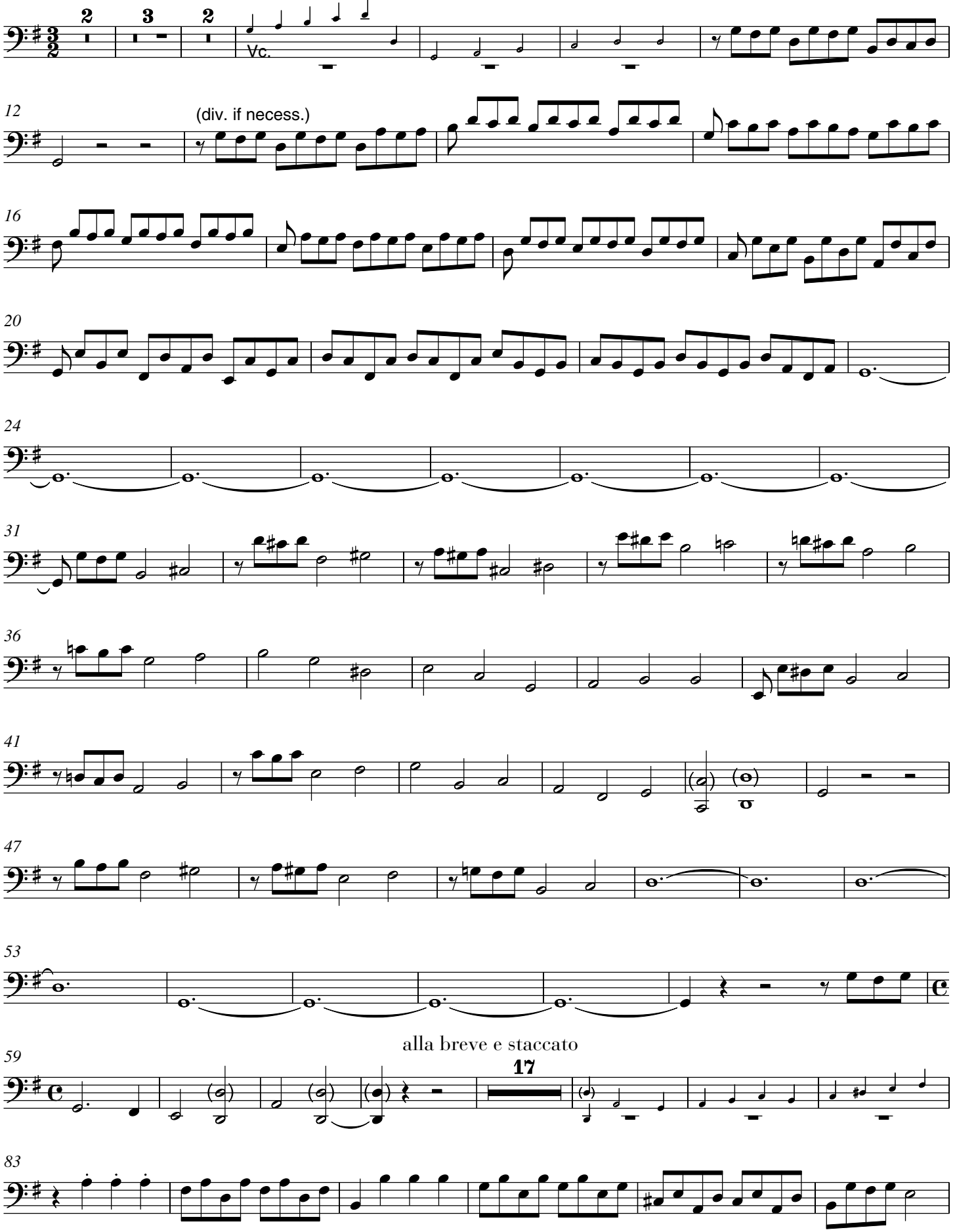

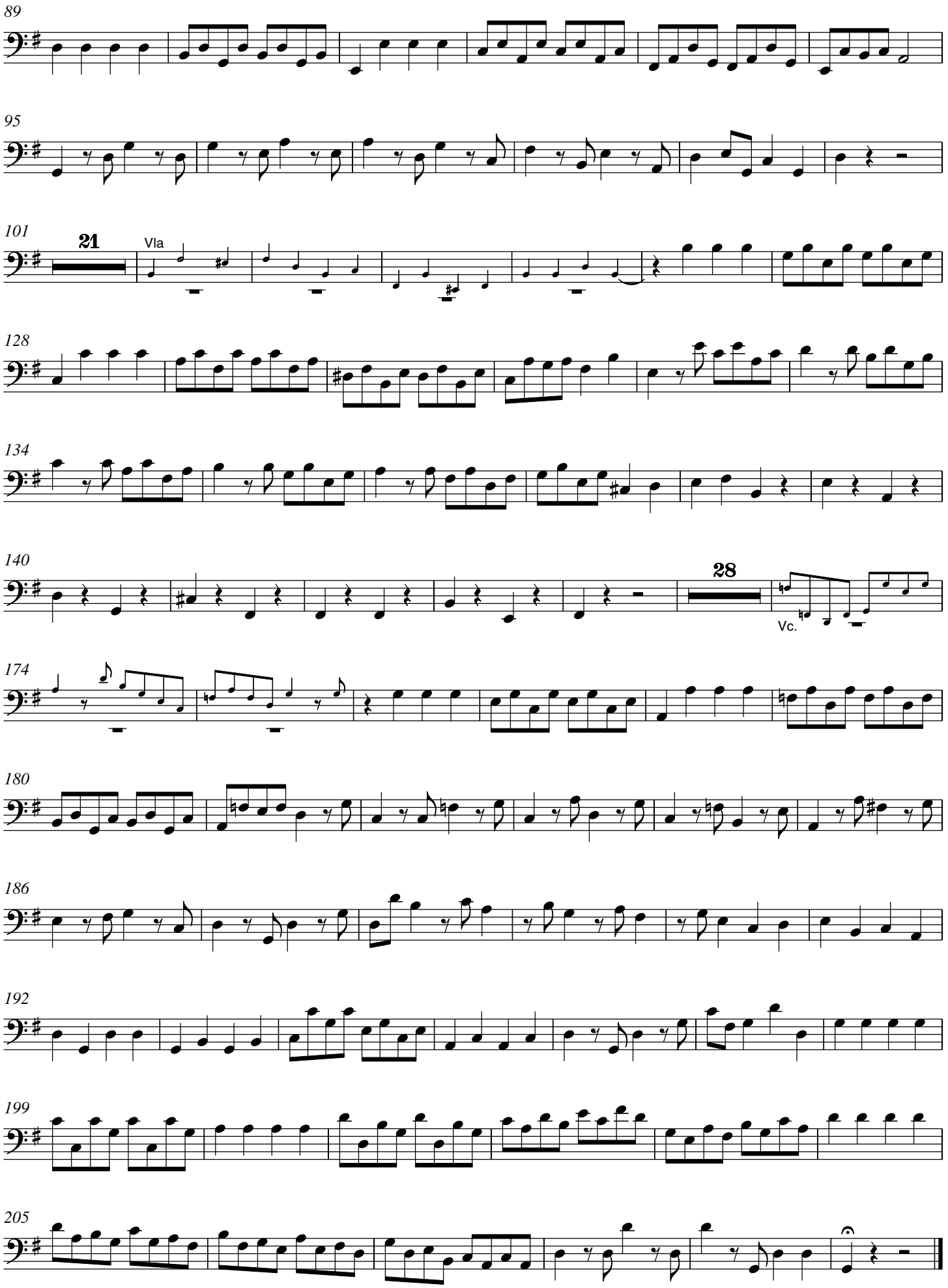
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