Florence Price

CLOUDS

for piano solo

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duration circa 5 minutes

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FLORENCE PRICE: *CLOUDS*

FLORENCE B. PRICE (1887-1953) achieved a level of renown that defied all expectations for an African American woman in her day.[1] Having studied at the New England Conservatory from 1903 to 1906, she pursued a career that included teaching at Shorter College (Little Rock) and heading the Music Department at Clark College (Atlanta). After moving to Chicago in 1927 to pursue a better, safer life than anything possible in the virulently racist U.S. South, she immersed herself that city's bustling cultural and educational life, becoming actively involved with the National Association of Negro Musicians and studying music and a variety of subjects at American Conservatory, Chicago Teachers College, Central YMCA College, the Lewis Institute, and the University of Chicago.[2] Today she is celebrated as the first African American woman to have her music performed by a major U.S. orchestra (her First Symphony was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as part of the World's Fair in 1933), but her fame spread far beyond than that, and lasted much longer. The following two decades witnessed performances of her music by at least nine other orchestras, as well as by some of the world's greatest soloists and chamber players. More than a decade after her death her reputation was still so great that the City of Chicago Public Schools named the Florence B. Price Elementary School after her in 1964. That school closed in 2012, but the same building still bears her name: the Florence B. Price Twenty-First Century Academy for Excellence.

And through it all she composed, penning hundreds of compositions of astonishing richness and breadth which gave voice to a musical imagination that would not be stilled despite the limitations that her world would have imposed on her because of her race and her sex. Her reputation has been steadily broadening in recent decades thanks to dedicated and brilliant scholarly work by Rae Linda Brown, Barbara Garvey Jackson, Eileen Southern, Helen Walker-Hill, Samantha Ege, and Douglas Schadle, among others.[3]

But if Price the composer never had to be rediscovered, the same could not be said of her music itself – simply because she published only a small portion of what she wrote. That began to change when her elder daughter, Florence Price Robinson (1917-75) donated a significant body of her music manuscripts and biographical materials to the University of Arkansas Libraries (Fayetteville), and the situation further improved with that library's acquisition of a sizeable "addendum" in the late 1980s. Another major development was the discovery of a sizeable trove of music manuscripts and other

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[1] Although Price is mentioned in many texts that deal with African American composers and women in music, many of these sources repeat the same, rather basic information. The most detailed and authoritative biography currently available is the Introduction to the late Rae Linda Brown's edition of Price's First and Third Symphonies ("Lifting the Veil: The Symphonies of Florence B. Price," in *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and* 3, ed. Rae Linda Brown and Wayne Shirley, Recent Researches in American Music, No. 66 [Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2008], xv-lii). As of this writing there is still no book-length biography, but Brown's drafted biography has been completed by Guthrie P. Ramsey, jr. and is due for release in June 2020 (Rae Linda Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price*, ed. Guthrie P. Ramsey, jr. [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming]).

[2] Brown, "Lifting the Veil," xxiv.

[3] See, for example, Barbara Garvey Jackson: "Florence Price, Composer," *The Black Perspective in Music* 5 (1977), 30–43; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971; 3rd ed., 1997); Rae Linda Brown, "Selected Orchestral Music of Florence B. Price (1888 [sic] – 1953) in the Context of Her Life and Work (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1987); Helen Walker-Hill, "Music by Black Women Composers at the American Music Research Center," *American Music Research Center Journal* 2 (1992): 23-52; Calvert Johnson, "Florence Beatrice Price: Chicago Renaissance Woman," *The American Organist* 34 (2000): 68-76; Scott David Farrah, "Signifyin(g): A semiotic Analysis of Symphonic Works by William Grant Still, William Levi Dawson, and Florence B. Price" (Ph.D. diss, Florida State University, 2007); Samantha Ege, "Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence," *The Kapralova Society Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1-10; Douglas Shadle, "Plus ça change: Florence B. Price In The #Blacklivesmatter Era," *NewMusicBox* 20 February 2019, New Music USA, accessed 21 September 2019, https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/plus-ca-change-florence-b-price-in-the-blacklivesmatter-era/.

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documents in an abandoned house in St. Anne, Illinois, in 2009 – a recovery that eventually met with major media coverage. Florence Price, having already during her lifetime overcome the forcible silencing that was her lot as an African American and a woman in a profoundly racist and sexist world, was now in a position to have her voice heard again.

The present edition owes its existence to the generosity of the heirs of Florence B. Price and the Special Collections division of the University of Arkansas Libraries (Fayetteville), and to G. Schirmer's acquisition of the rights to Price's complete catalog in 2018. Thanks are due also to David Flachs and Peter Martin at G. Schirmer, Inc., and to Price advocate and pianist extraordinaire Lara Downes, who publicly premiered *Clouds* at the New England Conservatory on 1 November 2019 and has recorded it,[4] for her encouragement to pursue these editions. Finally, I thank my family for patience and support unending.

* * *

CLOUDS STANDS AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT of Price's hitherto unpublished works for piano solo – and in some ways one of her most problematic. Its importance derives partly from its scale – its length is comparable to that of the extant *Fantasies nègres* – and partly from the richness of its musical material. Although the work as a whole is unified by the recurrent scalar descent from dominant to tonic, and its associated rhythm, stated at the outset (mm. 1, 27ff., and elsewhere), its stylistic allusions range from a tender meditative style familiar to Price enthusiasts from works such as *Memory Mist* and *Sketches in Sepia*,[5] through intense lyricism reminiscent of the music of Clara and Robert Schumann (mm. 27-36) and turbulent minor-mode chromaticism evocative of Rachmaninoff or Scriabin (mm. 51-60), to post-impressionist idioms that recall Debussy and Ravel. With characteristically clever resourcefulness, Price uses the inherent instability of the post-tonal materials as transitions between tonally stable plateaus:

Section	**A**		**B**		**C**		**A**		**Coda**
Key	D flat	[Unstable]	D flat	[Unstable]	F minor	[Unstable] → V / D flat	D flat	[Unstable]	D flat
Mm.	1-7	8-26	27-36	37-50	51-60	61-72	[1-7]	[8-18]	73-83

The importance of *Clouds* also derives from its engagement with the very freedom of expression that was crucial to mid-twentieth-century music generally, and to societal identity for African Americans and women in particular. Not only does this work bring together in a single coherent composition stylistic idioms that are rarely found together in a single piece, but it does so under the descriptive moniker of *clouds*, which in literature, poetry, and African American art in particular are one of the most potent and ubiquitous symbols of freedom – freedom of movement, freedom of shape and form, freedom of mood, freedom from virtually every restriction that binds humans and other objects. By integrating disparate musical styles, none of which bows to the prejudicial restrictions that Price's world would have placed upon her because of her race and her sex, under a title so powerfully evocative of freedom, Price in *Clouds* asserts her ability to resist – to refuse to let her mind be segregated, her imagination stilled, her genius bowed by others' expectations.

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[4] Florence B. Price, *Meditations (Meditation, Clouds, Sketches in Sepia, Remembrance),* performed by Lara Downes, Flipside Records FL0018 (2020).

[5] Florence B. Price, *Memory Mist* (New York: G. Schirmer, 2019); Price, *Sketches in Sepia* (New York: G. Schirmer, 2020).

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About This Edition

Two autographs survive for *Clouds*, both held in the Special Collections division of the University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The manuscripts are undated, but judging from the handwriting they may be tentatively assigned to the mid- or later 1940s. Source AS 1 (MC 988a Box 17, folder 13) serves as the copy-text for this edition, while Source AS 2 (MC 988b Box 4A, folder 7), which clearly pre-dates AS 1, was consulted for clarifications. Both autographs contain extensive revisions. Both omit a time signature and tempo at the beginning of the work. (A time signature of ¾ is implied, and an initial tempo of *andante* seems reasonable.) For convenience, Price's *da capo* is written out; the *da capo* measure numbers are those of the original statement of that material with *bis* ("second time") added (e.g., "10 bis"). The location of the original sign to cut to the *fine* is indicated by [⌽] in this edition, and the measure numbers of the *fine* continue from those just before the *da capo*.

Critical Notes: The remarks below identify measure number, right or left hand as applicable (RH or LH), beat (by a slash), and note within the beat (as applicable) by a period. Thus, "52: LH /2.5" refers to the fifth note in beat 2 of m. 52 in the left hand. Meas. 19: LH /4 lower notehead ambiguous in AS 1 (could be B flat) – clarified from AS 2, where it is an unambiguous A flat; 22: LH /3 slur from grace notes to principal note lacking in AS 1 (adopted from AS 2); 24: /3-4 fermatas lacking in AS 1 (adopted from AS 2); 44: *più mosso* added later, in blue pencil -- not in AS 2 at all; 52: LH /2.5 notated as quarter note rather than eighth note in both AS 1 and AS 2 (flag omitted).

-- John Michael Cooper
Denton, Texas, 29 November 2019

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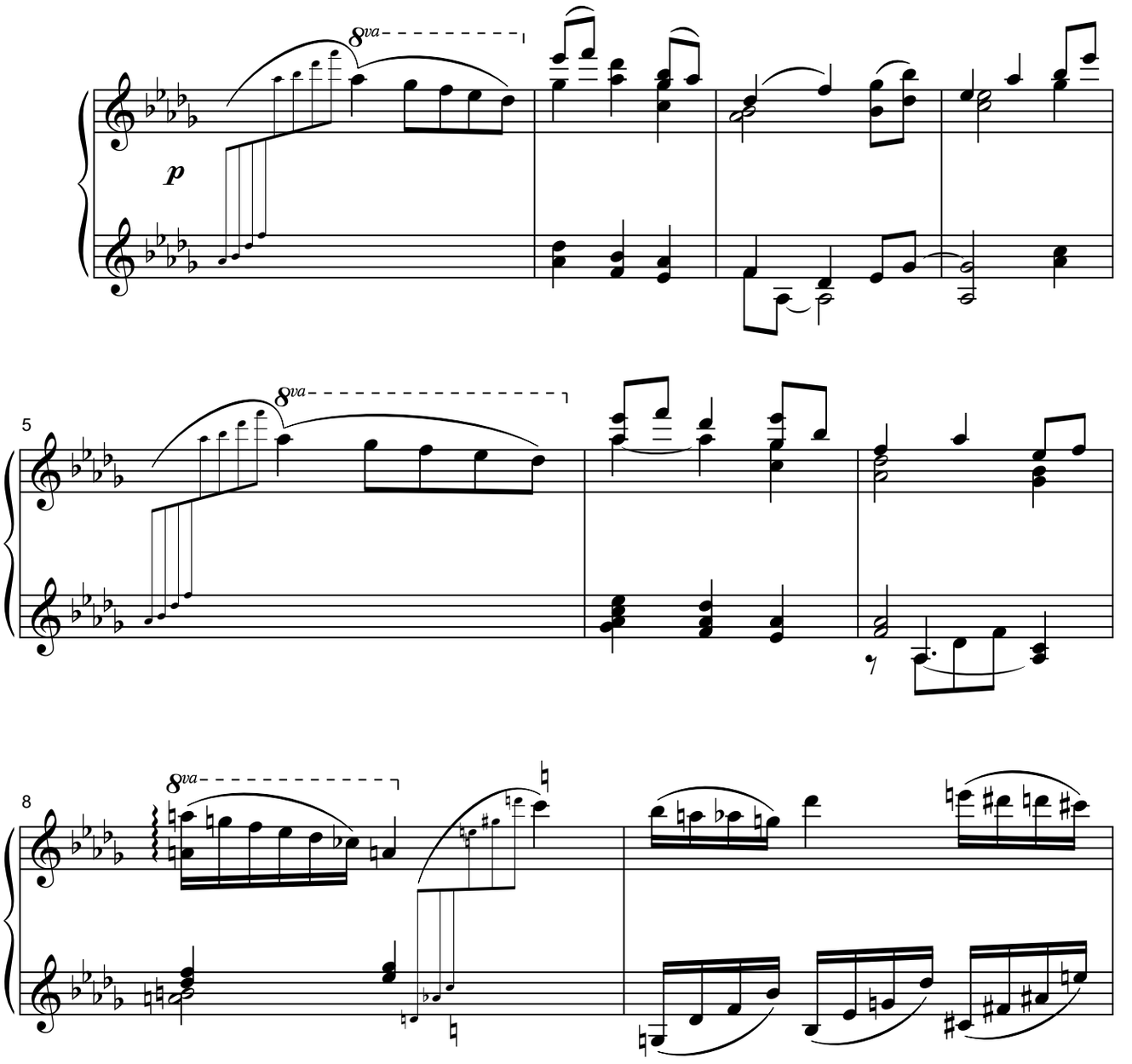
CLOUDS

Florence B. Price (1887 - 1953)

edited by John Michael Cooper



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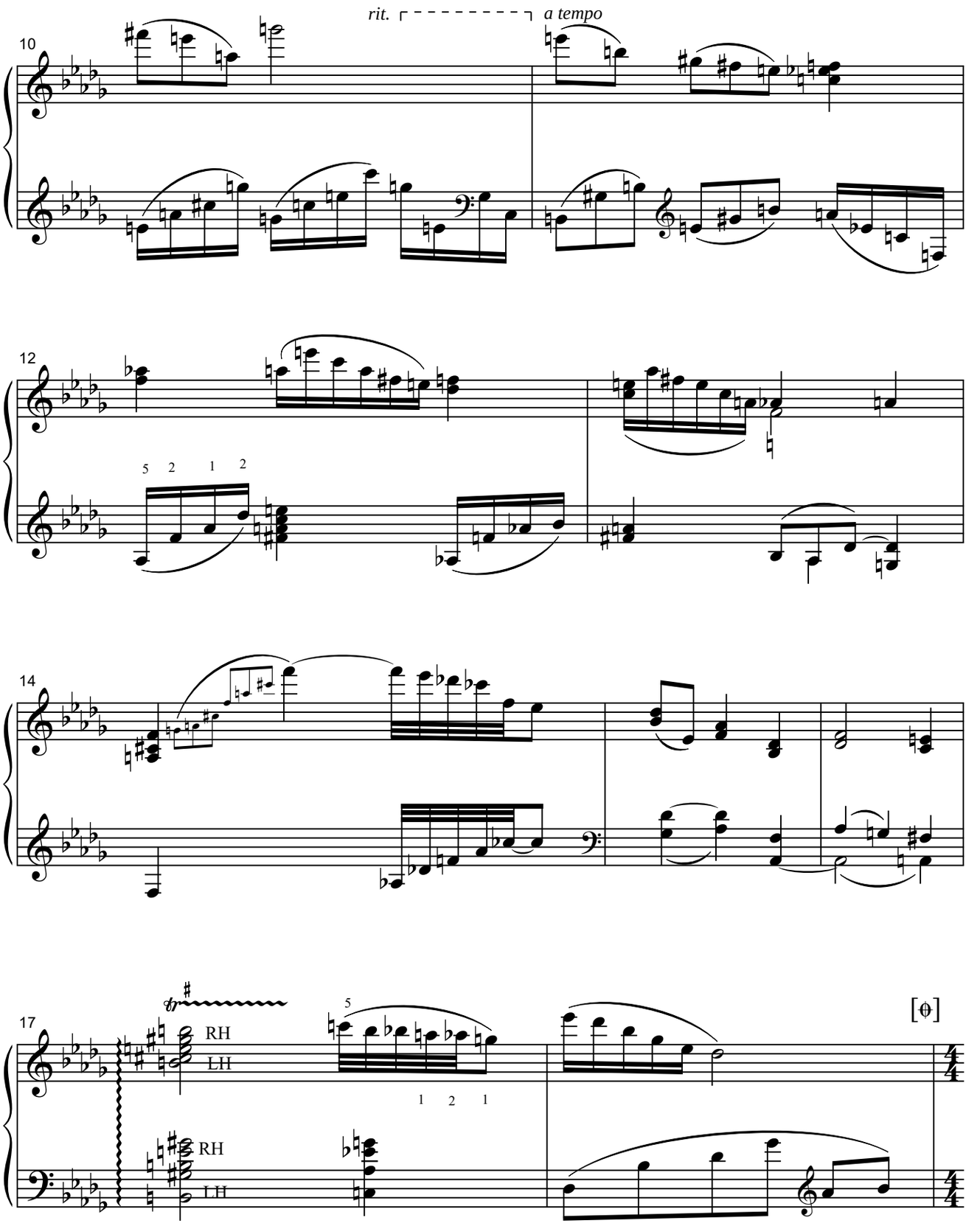

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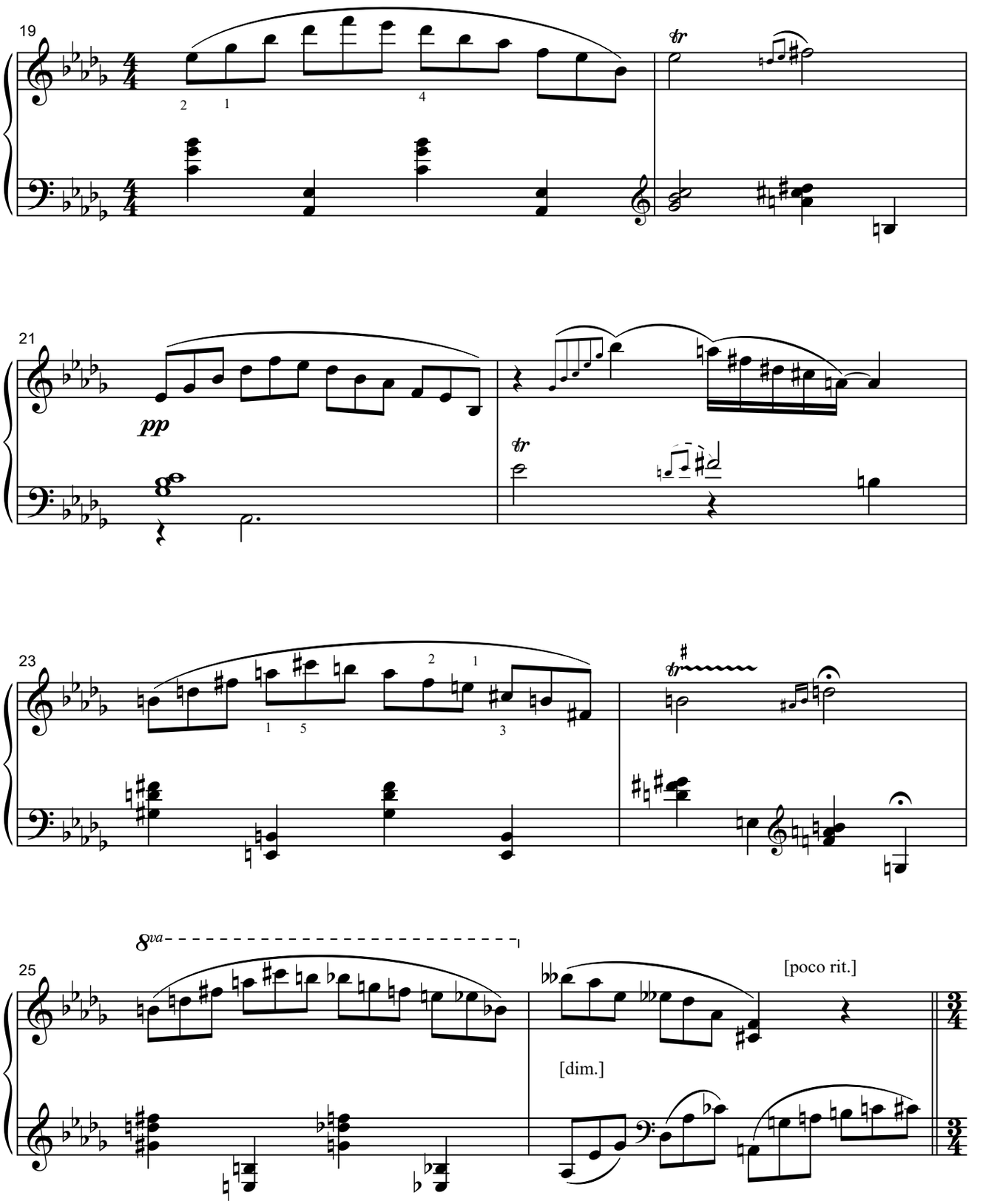

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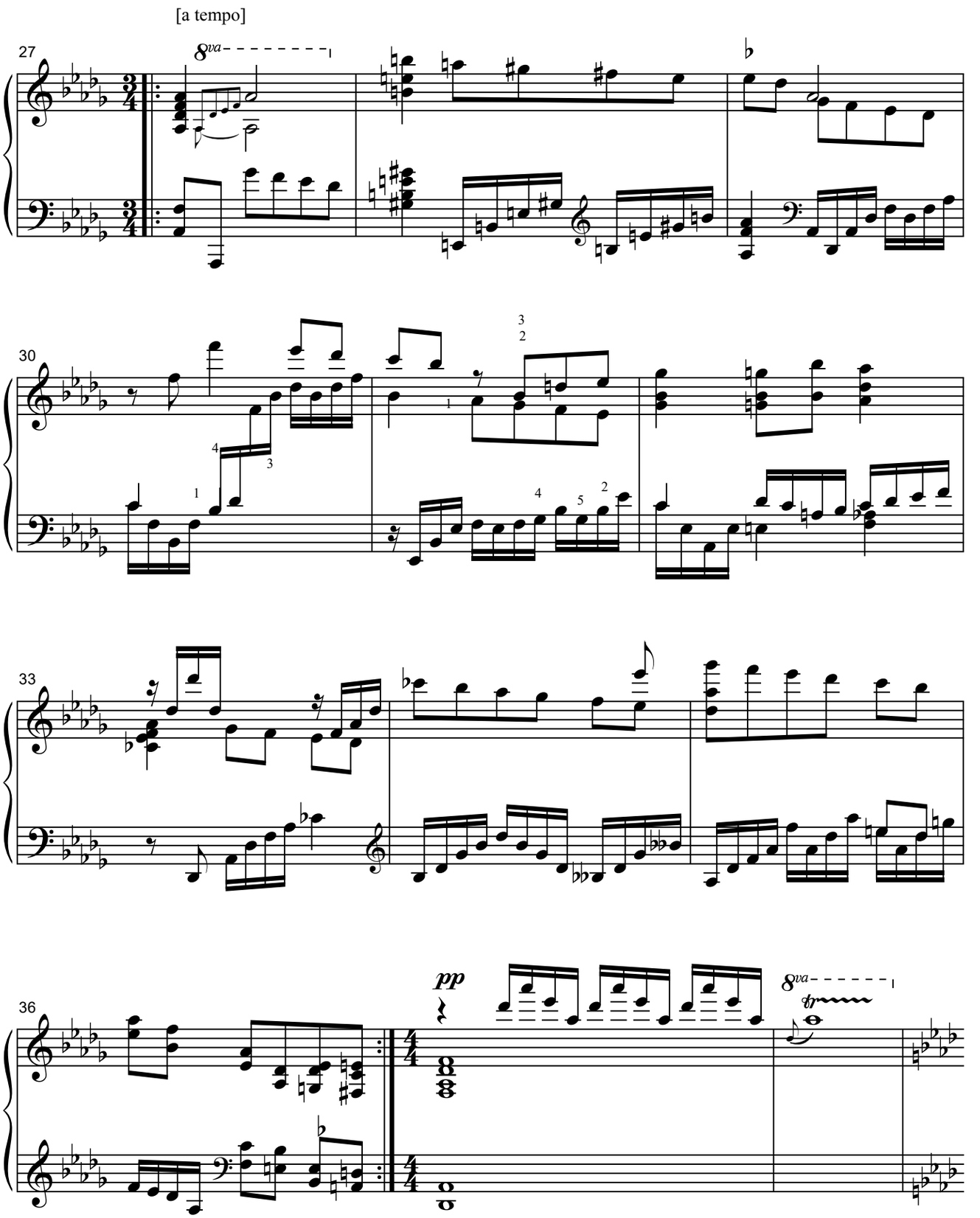

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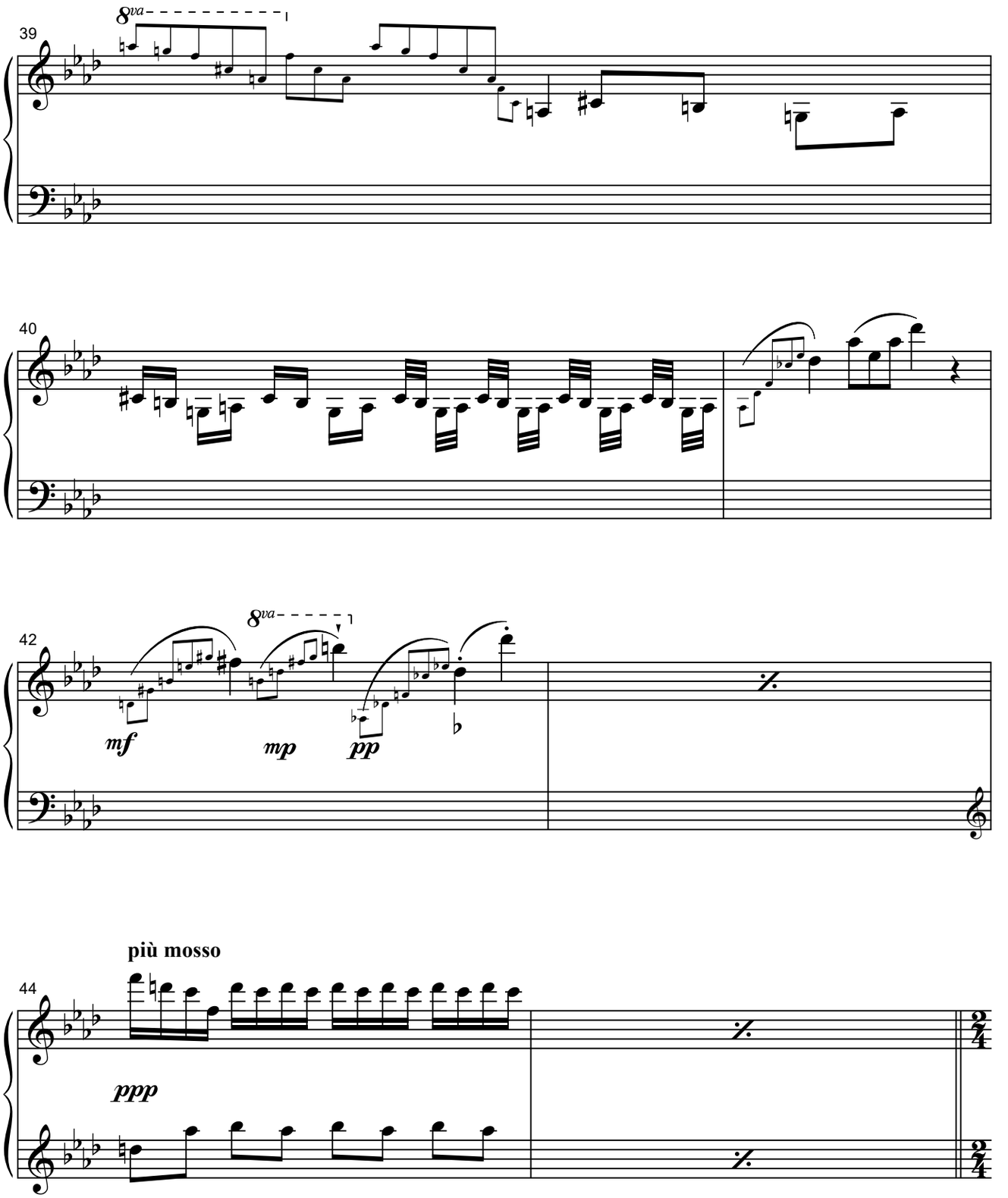

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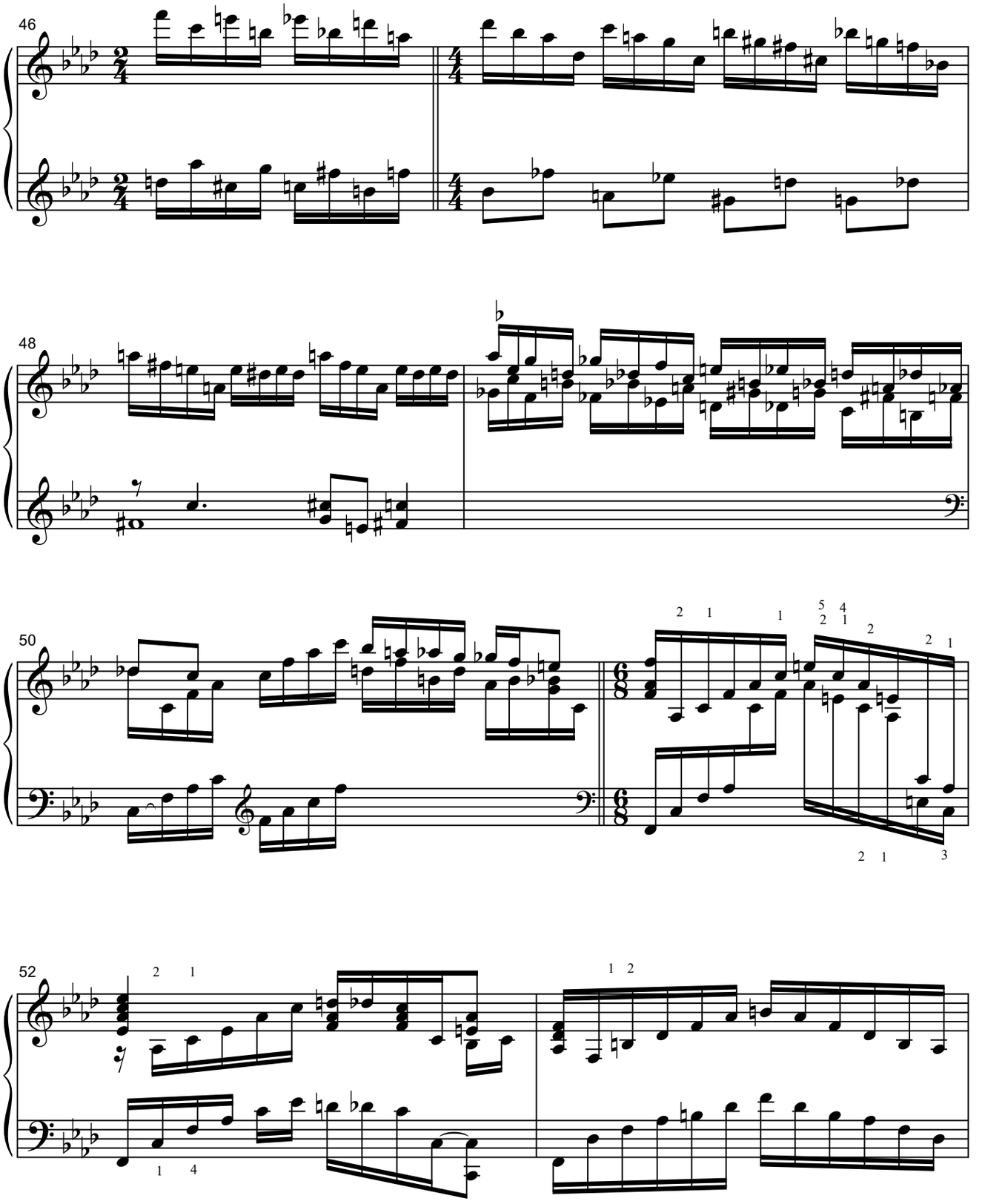

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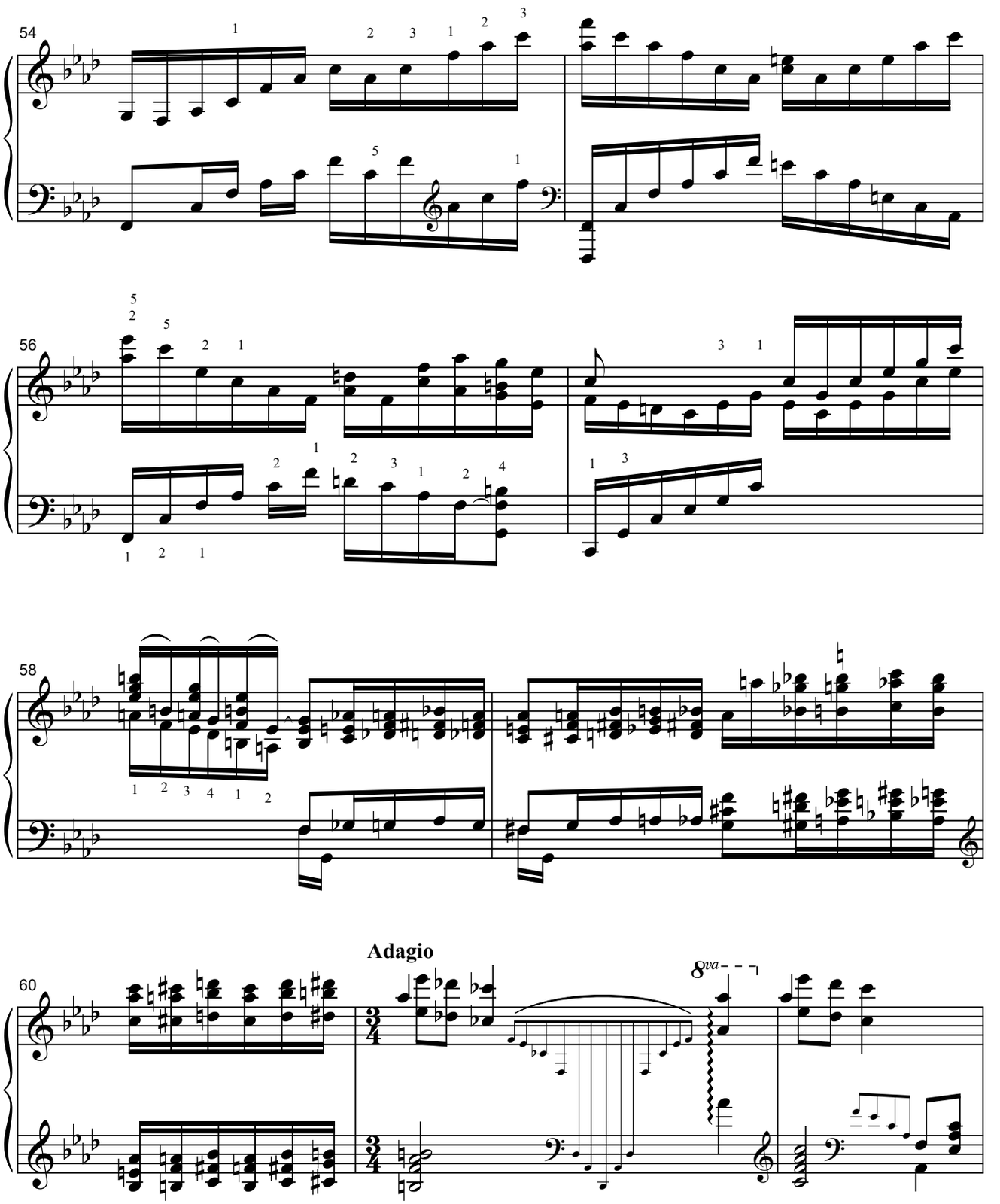

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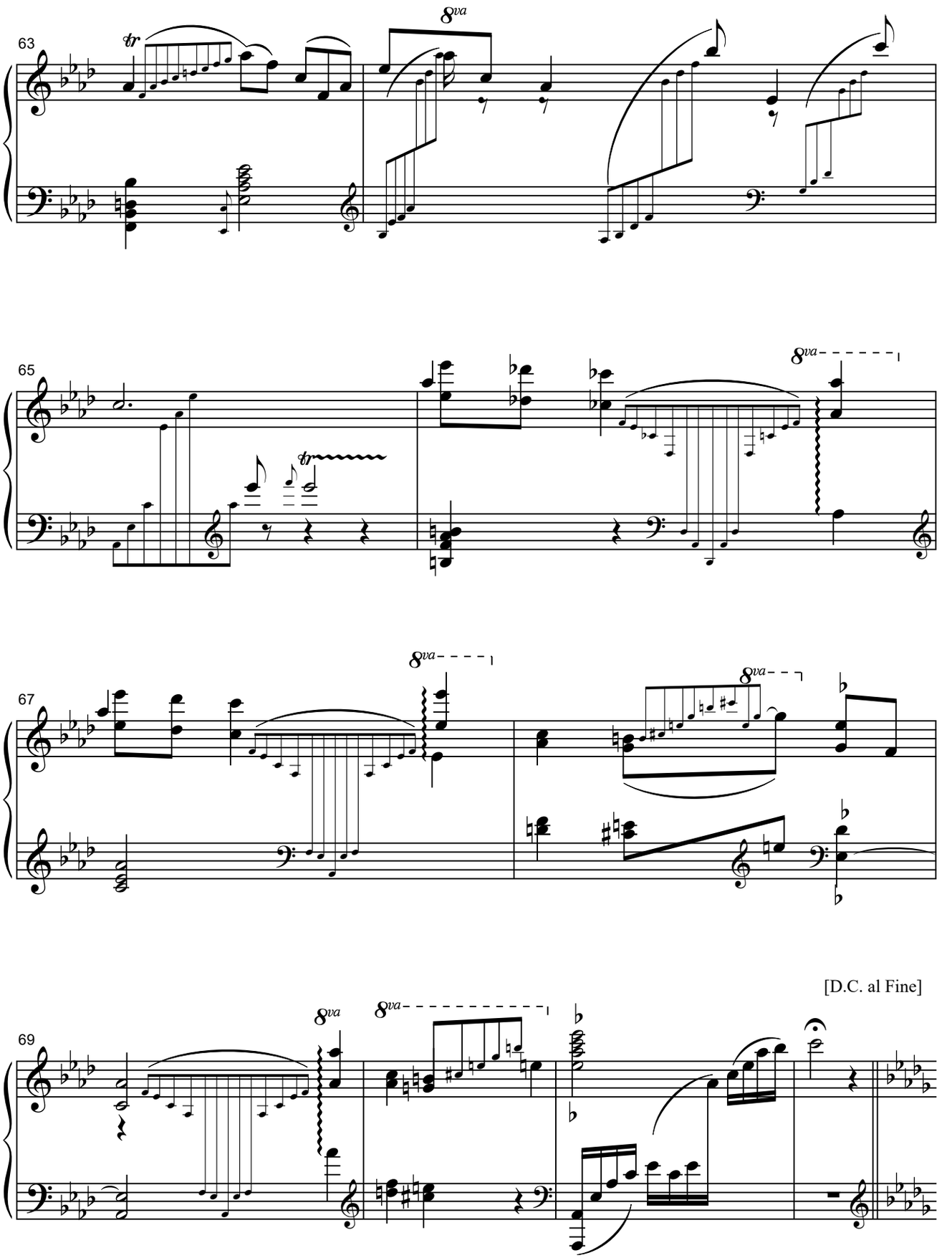

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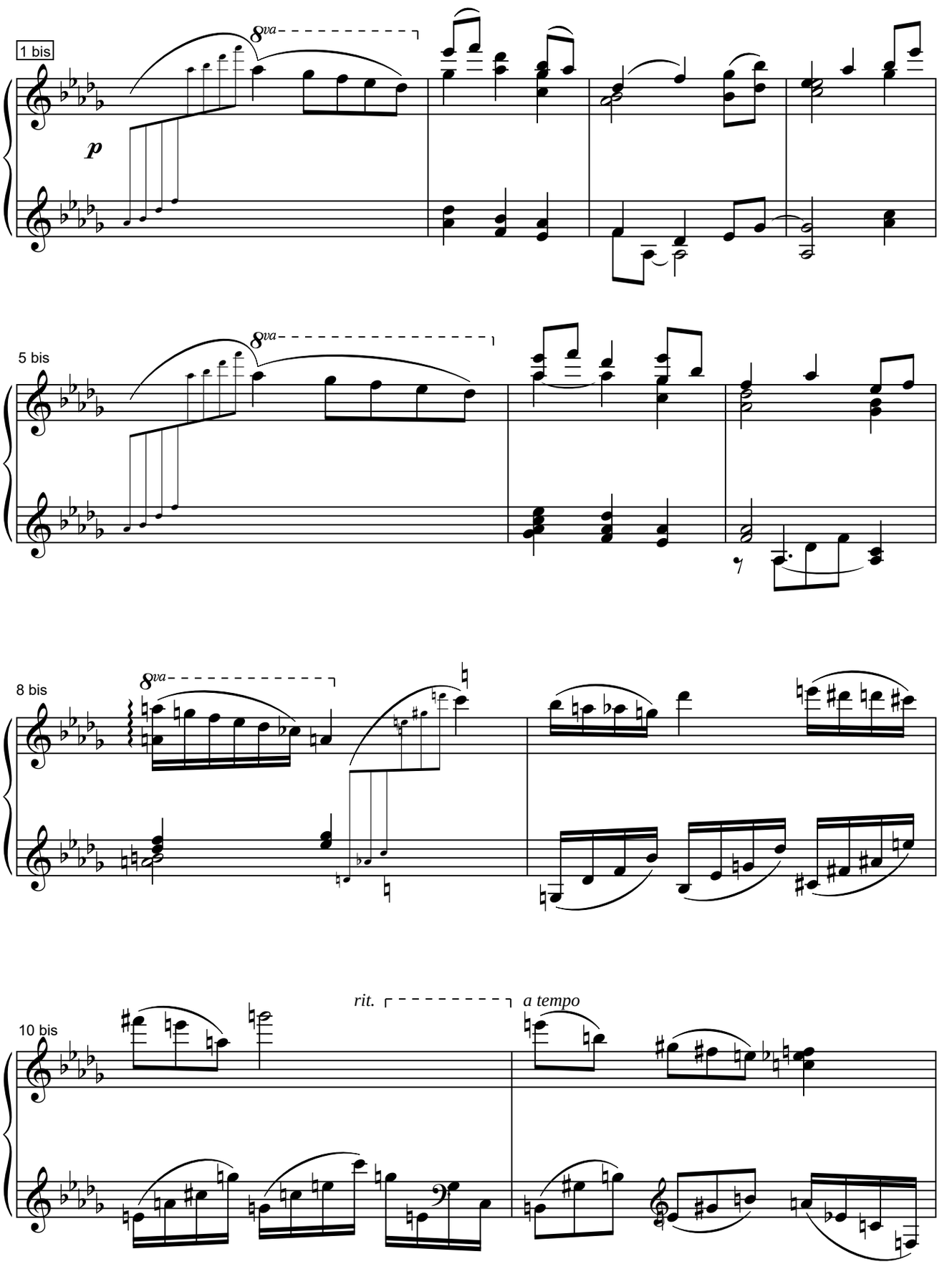

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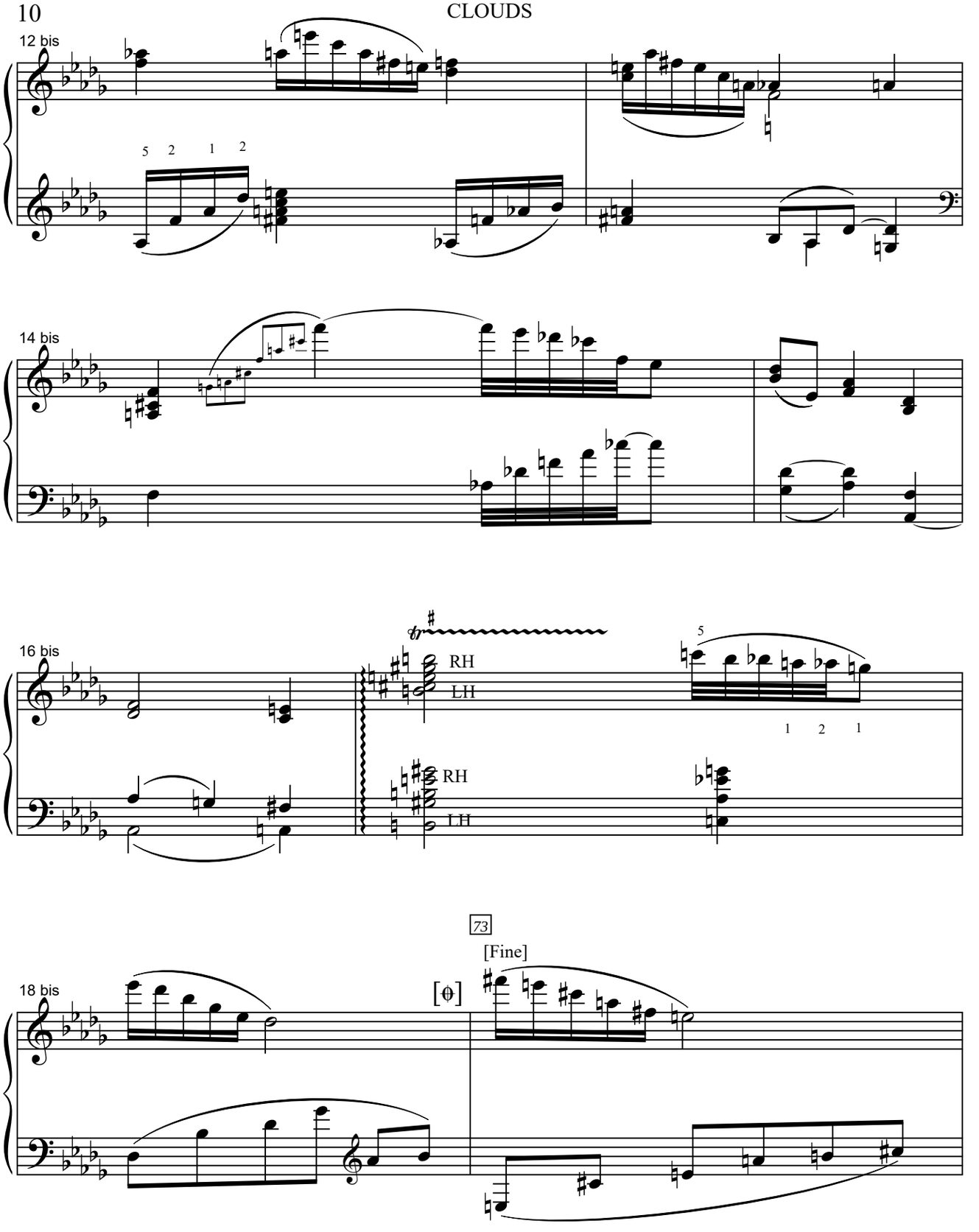

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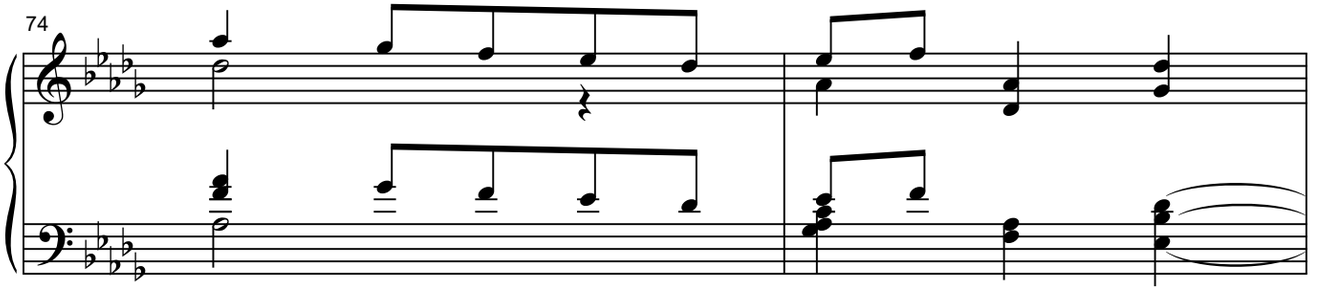

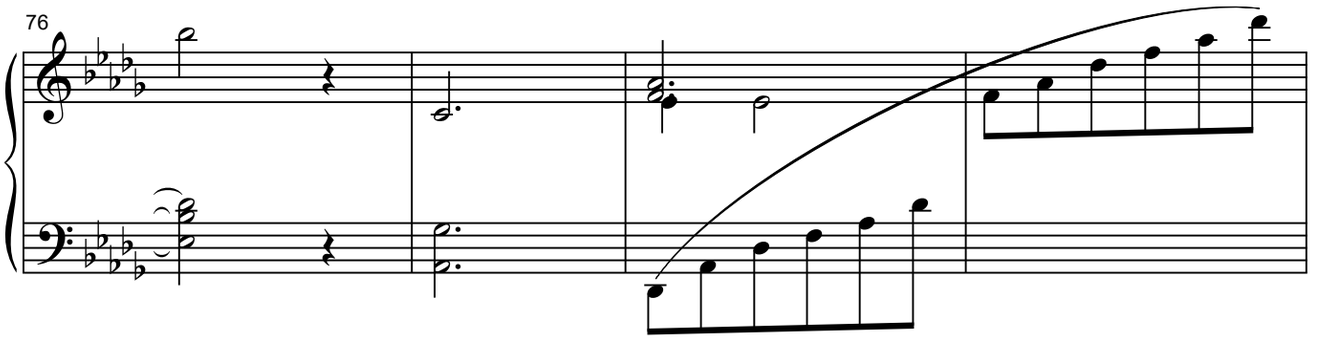

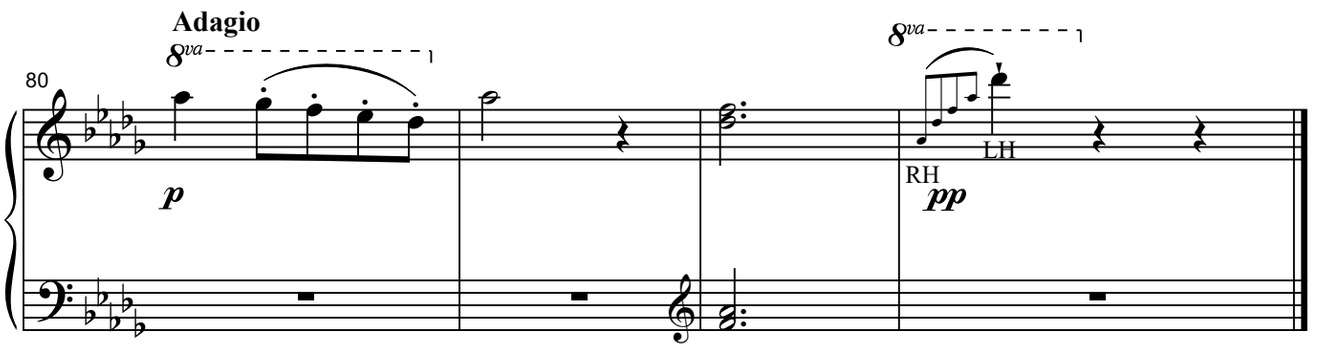

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