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Preparation of a set of arrangements for elementary school orchestra

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF MUSIC

Thesis

PREPARATION OF A SET OF ARRANGEMENTS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ORCHESTRA

by

John H. Davis

(B.M., Boston University, 1950)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Master of Music Education

1953

Approved by

First Reader [signature]

Second Reader Calvin Schraga

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SECTION I

1. Statement of Problem

The following is a quotation from the North Central Division Study,1945, on the general recommendations for needed materials: "That there be made available some materials for beginning books for strings favoring keys (the sharp keys),easy for strings, instead of those easy for wind instruments."(This was taken from the Music Education Source Book, published by the Music Educator's National Conference,i 1947.)

Two years of teaching elementary band and orchestra brought to the attention of the author the need of materials for young orchestras. The problem involved is not a lack of music but rather the right kind to suit young musicians.

In teaching these young students,the fact became evident that the progress of students on various instruments differed. Brass and woodwind players usually progress much faster than string players with the same ability displayed in the first year. This was due to the problem of the instrument and the type of literature available for string use. The methods in general use today are written by Paul Herfurth and Gilbert Miller (While there are many other methods, we shall use these as typical examples). These methods stress sharp keys in the beginning book. Not until book two is there extensive use of flat keys. Yet a survey by the author revealed that the orchestral books written for these same young players are predominantly

in the flat keys. This means that violinists must study longer than woodwind or brass players to participate in orchestra. The wind players learn sharp and flat keys in their first book, the arrangements being aimed at a lack of transfer of keys from string method books to orchestral literature. Written in sharp keys, that are familiar to the young string player, they include an alternate violin part for players with limited study (mainly using open strings, first finger pattern, and simple rhythmic notation).

Another problem of the standard elementary compositions is that of ranges. While the compositions are written usually by wellknown educational composers, yet the ranges of the various instruments are difficult for young players. In Section II of this study, the limitation of ranges for the instruments used has been outlined, ranges which were approved by a group of teachers at the Boston University summer seminar of 1952.

Along with the difficulty of ranges can be included the problem of rhythmic notation. Much of the material found in elementary collections employs use of rhythmic notation not found in the child's early musical training. This means that the teacher either must take valuable time from the group to instruct the individual or else resort to rote teaching. To avoid such a problem, the arranger has included only that rhythmic notation which the student would encounter in his early lesson book experience.

The question arises, Why such limitations on the instru-

ments? How can these works be educational if no problem of rhythm or melody be encountered? Both questions lead to the same answer: There are many problems for the young groups which comes together in its first orchestral experience. If new rhythm patterns and notes be added, these problems are multiplied. This is the reason for the limitations on the various instruments.

As has been seen by the outline, this study deals with three sections of music: (Classic; (2) Modern; and (3)Familiar Favorities. The classic compositions chosen show that there is music available by good composers which is suitable to arrangement for elementary orchestra. The modern music by well-established,first-rank composers is another field to be explored. Although the two included compositions were originally written for piano by Bartok, there is a great deal of suitable material available. The arranger feels that some of these first-rank composers would be happy to have their music made available to the very young. The third grouping of compositions, in the class of favorites, includes pieces which the students know and sing, and yet are not found in other collections.

It is obvious, from a survey of these melodic and rhythmic notation limitations, that the choice in music for arrangement would be difficult. It is one of the main problems to find suitable material with these restrictions, but, if the compositions are to be interesting and worth while, then it becomes necessary to do much investigation to find what is desirable.

SECTION II

1. Limitation of Notation and Instrumentation

A. Rhythmic Limitation:

1. The arrangements for all instruments include only the following rhythmic notation.

   a. No sixteenth notation is used;

B. Instrumental Range Limitations:

1. Strings:

   a. Violins--only first position.

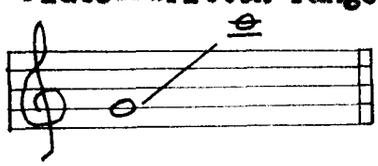
   b. Alternate violins--open strings and the first finger pattern.

   c. Violas--double the alternate violin part. If viola player is more advanced, double first violin part when possible.

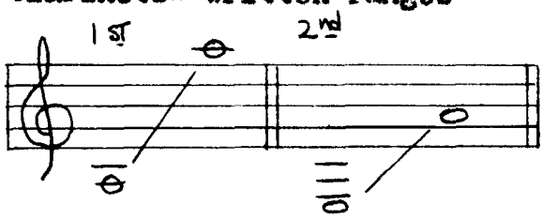
   d. Cellos--first position and extended fingers, plus occasional fourth position(very easy).

2. Woodwind:

   a. Flute--written ranges

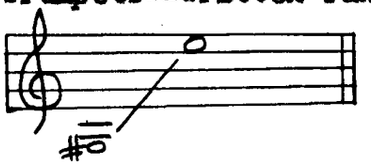


   b. Clarinets--written ranges

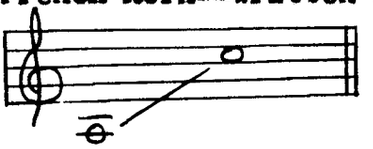


3. Brass:

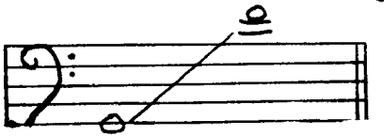
a. Trumpets--written range



b. French horn--written range



c. Trombone--written range



4. Percussion:

a. A part is included, although the arranger feels that the majority of these compositions do not lend themselves to use of percussion.

b. Rolls are included, but, if the parts are used, the student should play as lightly as possible.

Certain instruments are not included, such as bassoons and oboes, since the arranger feels that these instruments are not found in the average elementary orchestra. Nor has he included saxophones, because he feels that they do not blend well with an elementary orchestra; and, in addition, would only defeat the purpose of showing to the student a true orchestral sound.

These arrangements need certain instruments in order to attain a complete harmony, namely, first and second trumpet and clarinet, trombone, first violin, and cello.

SECTION III

Compositions Listed by Title

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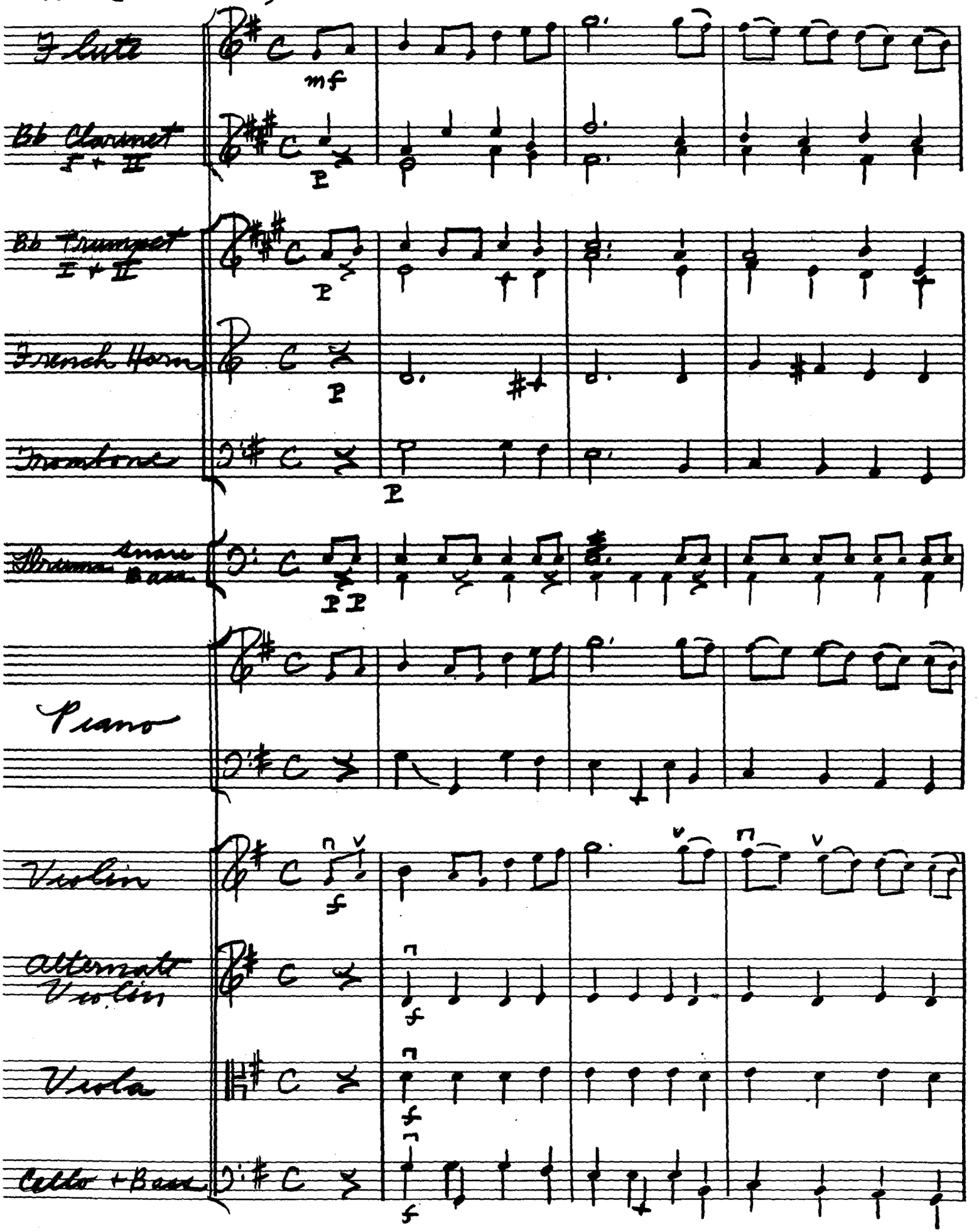
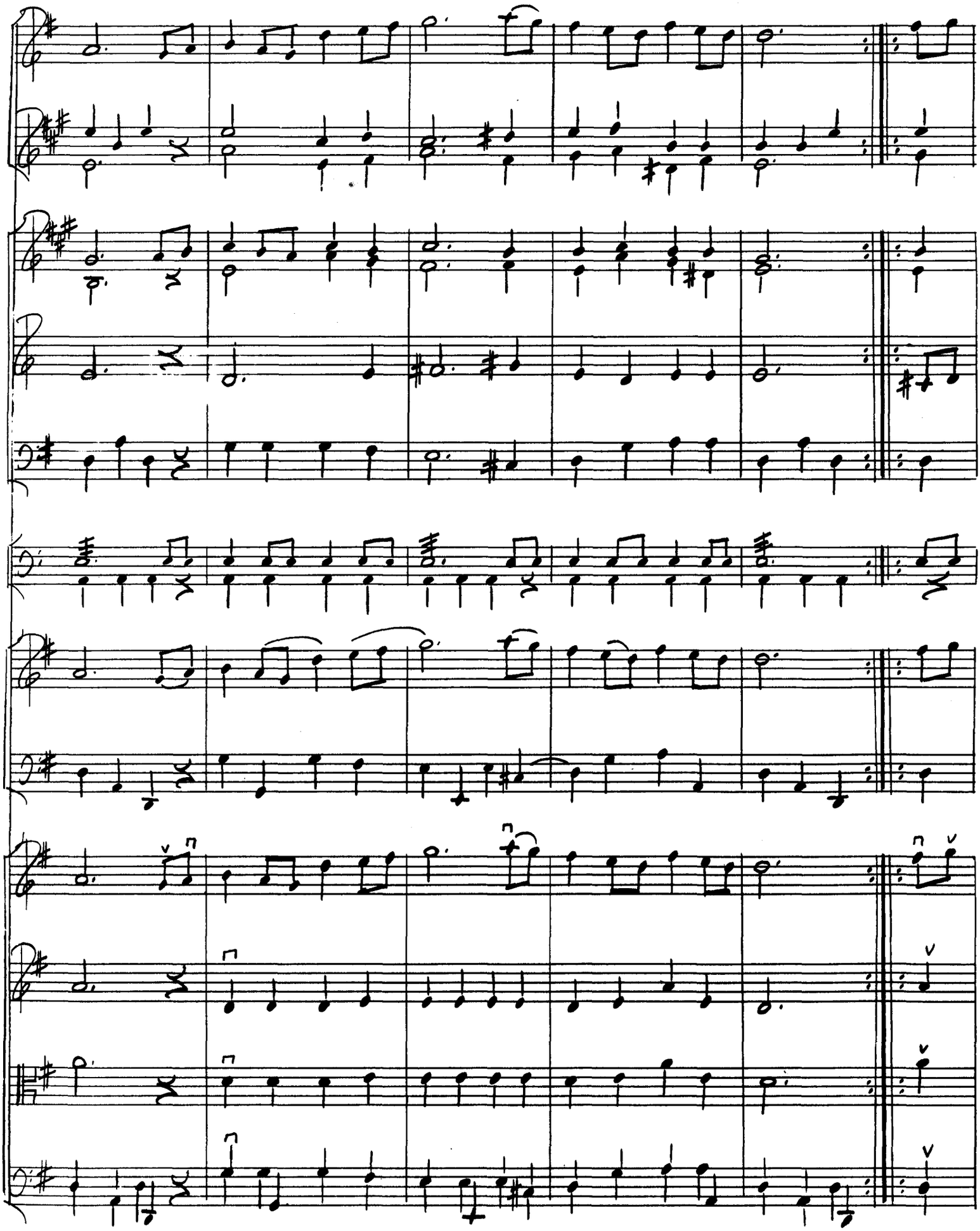
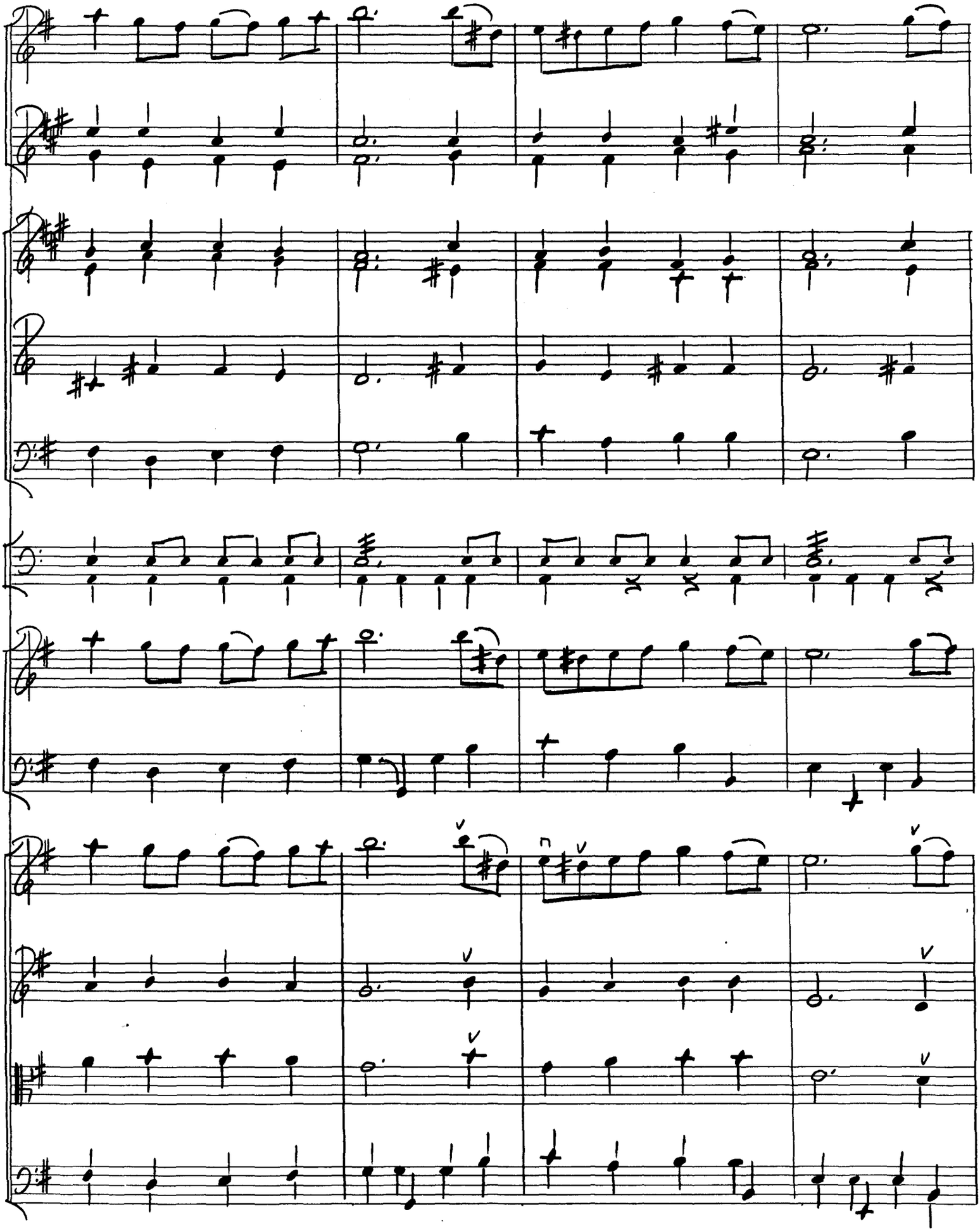
GAVOTTE

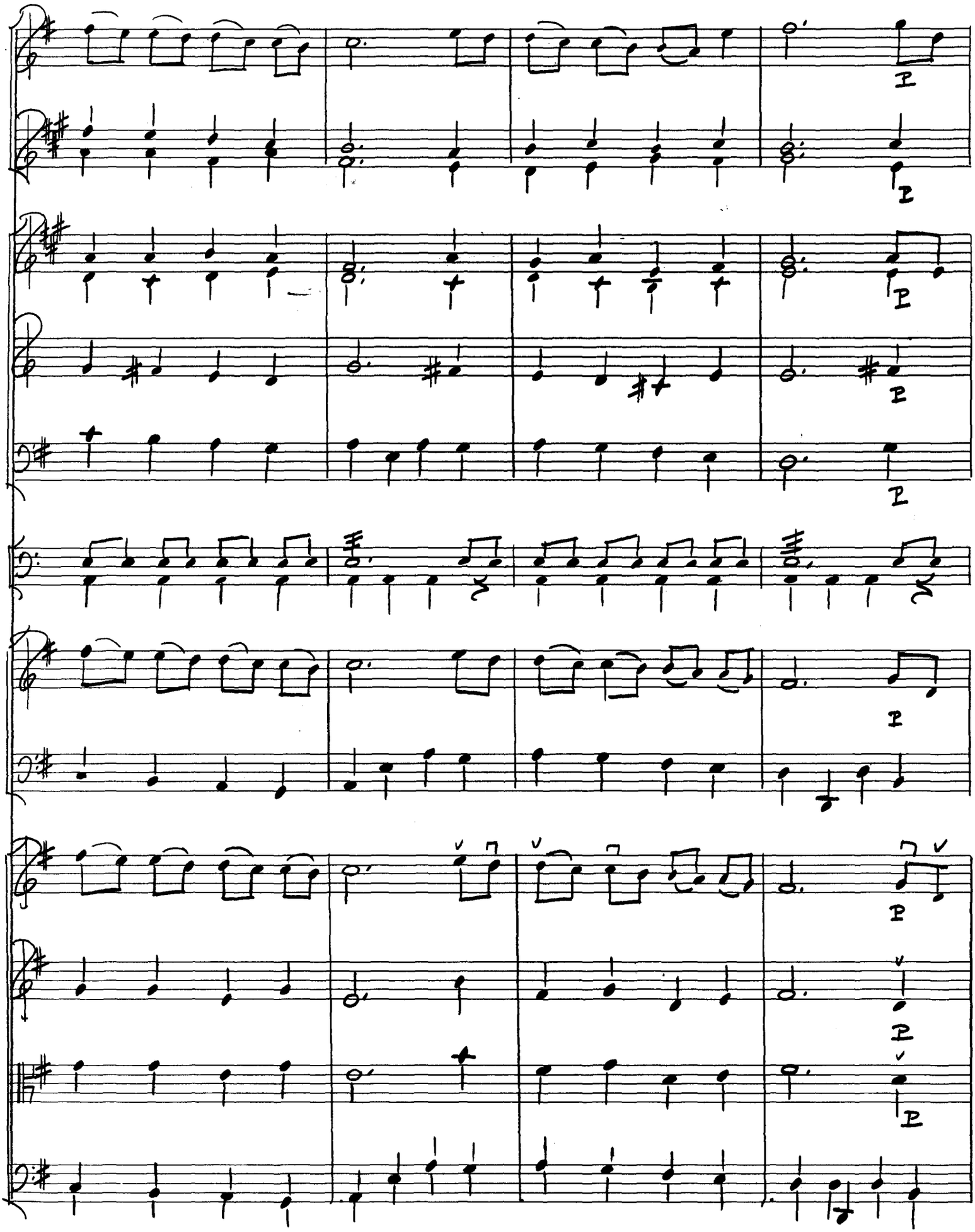
Allegro (♩ = 84)

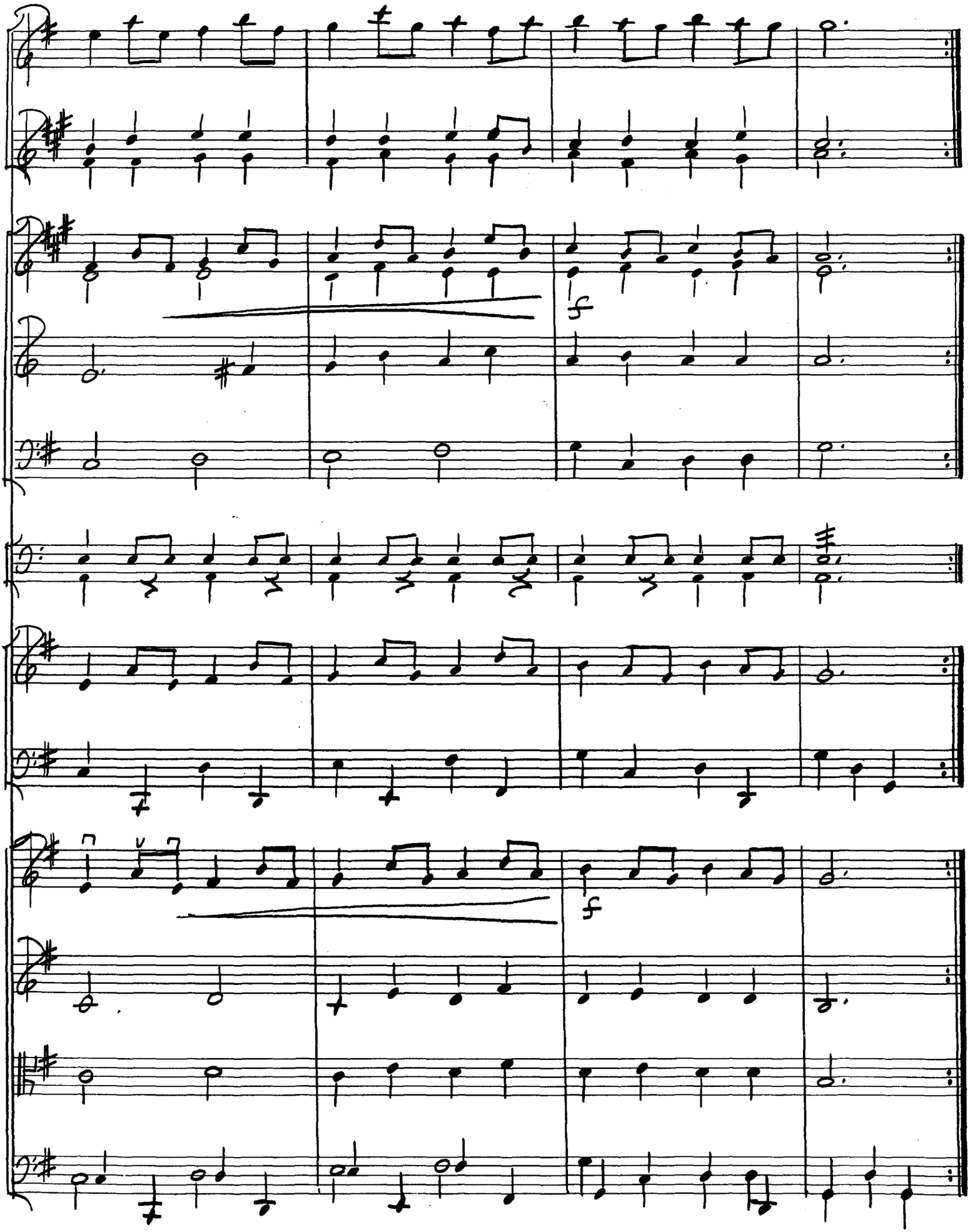
G. H. Handel







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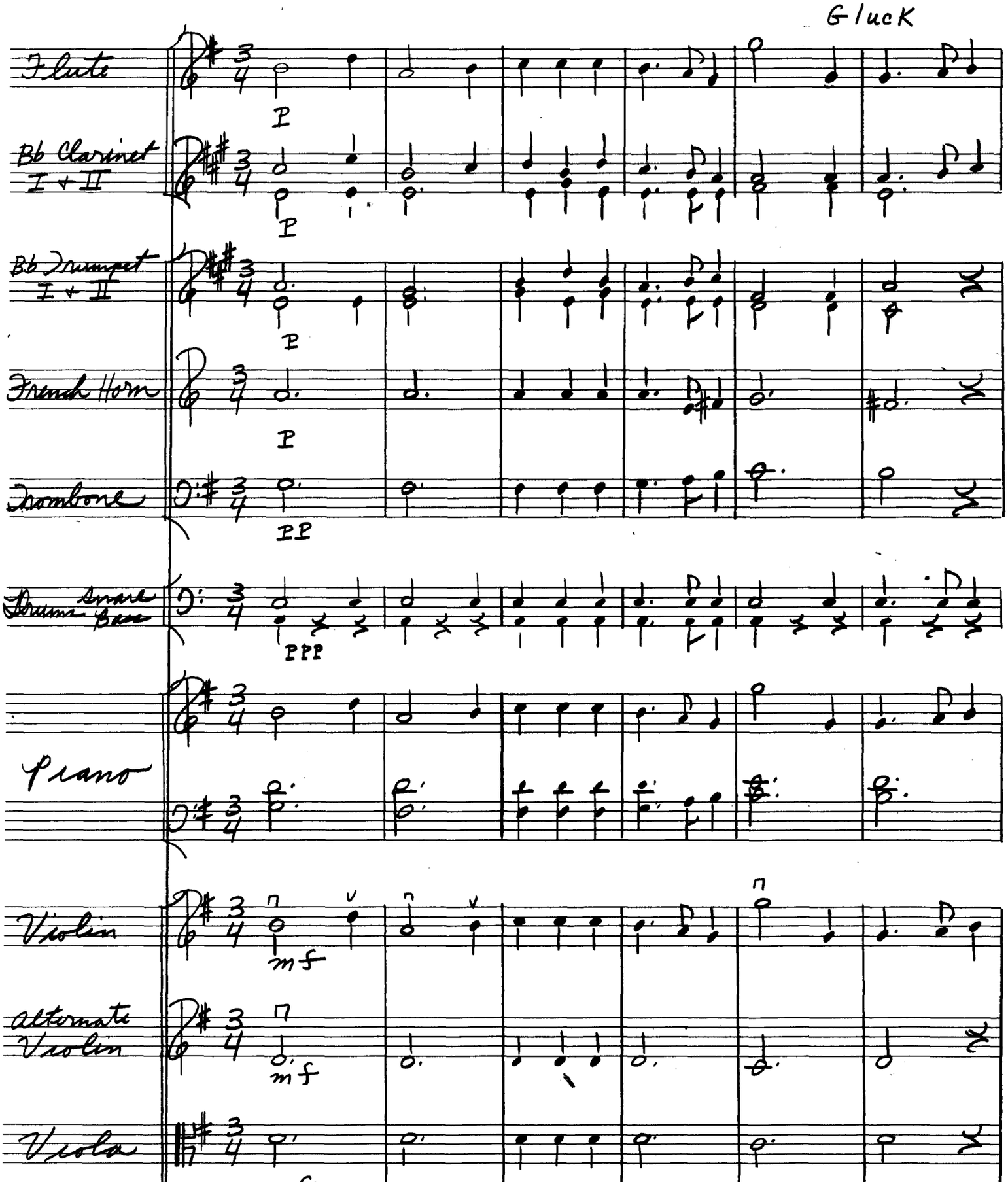
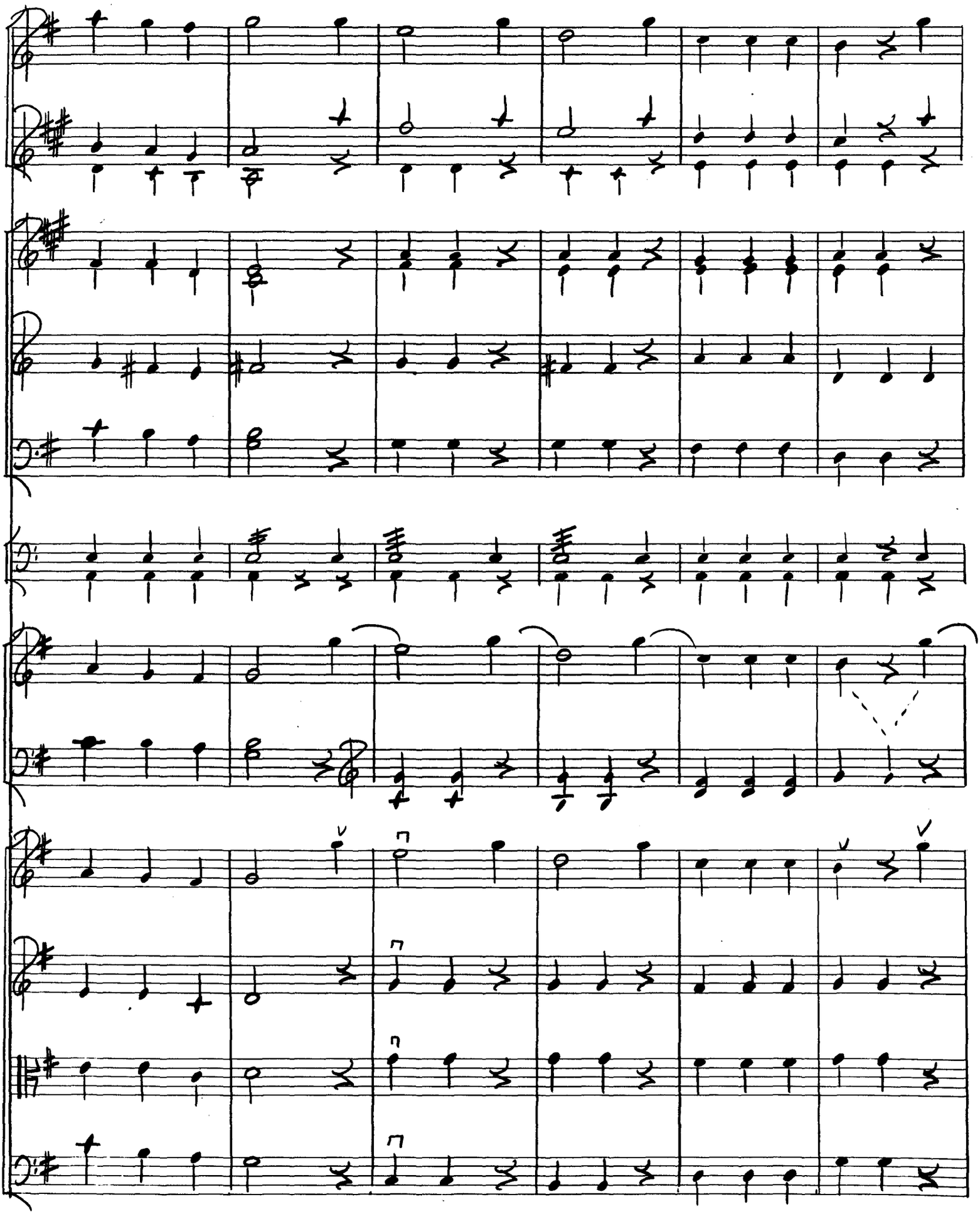
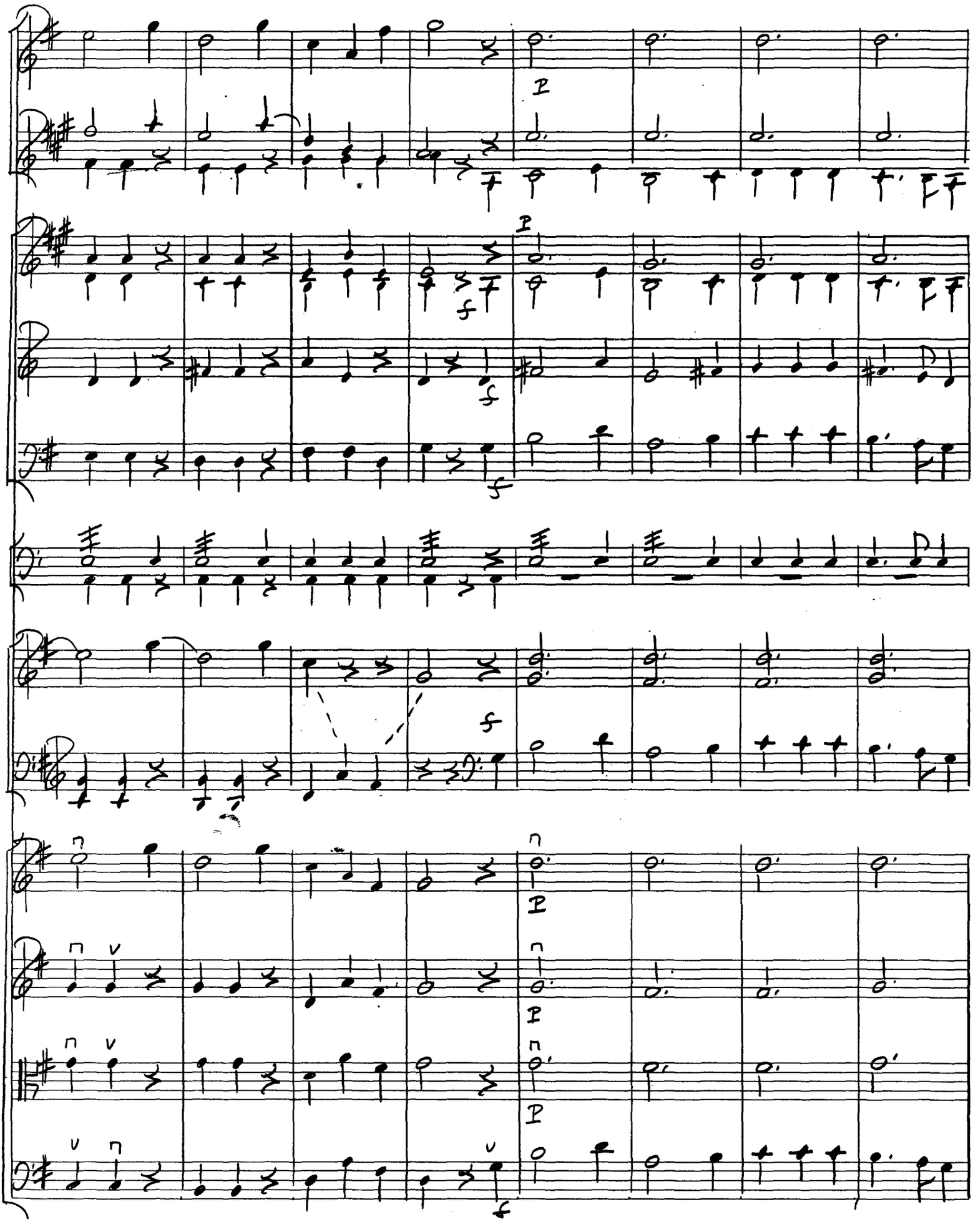
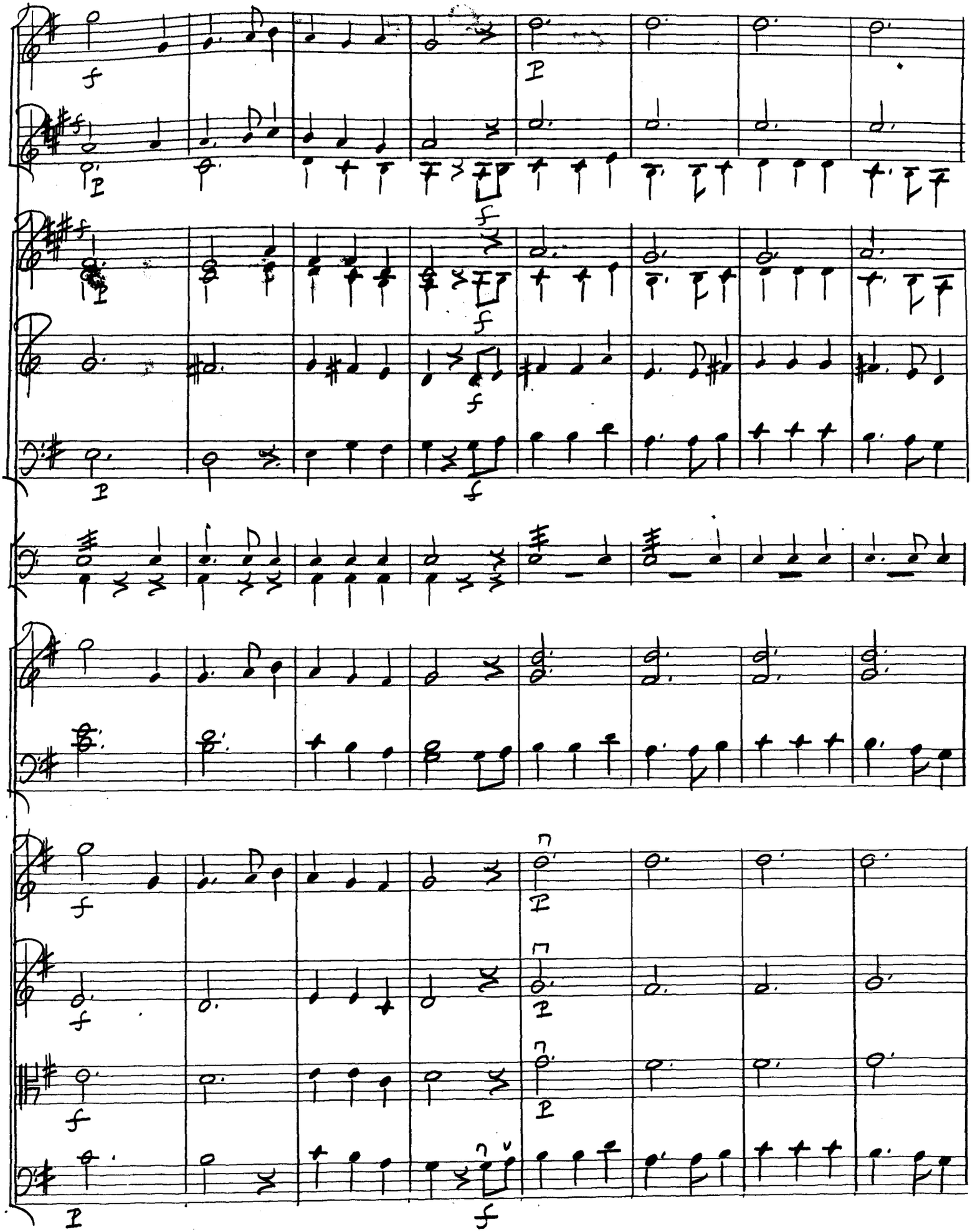
CAPRICE from "ALCESTE"

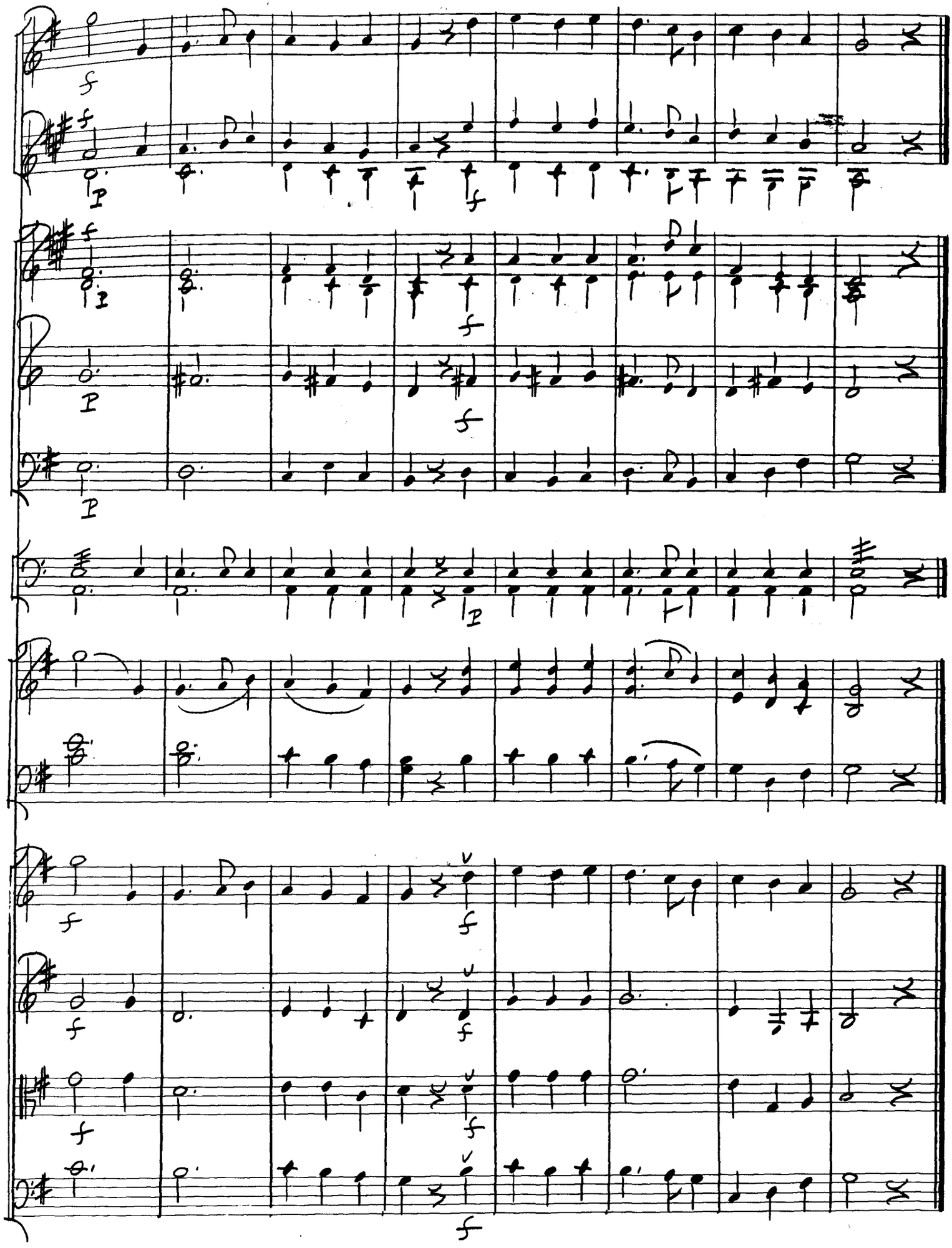
Gluck











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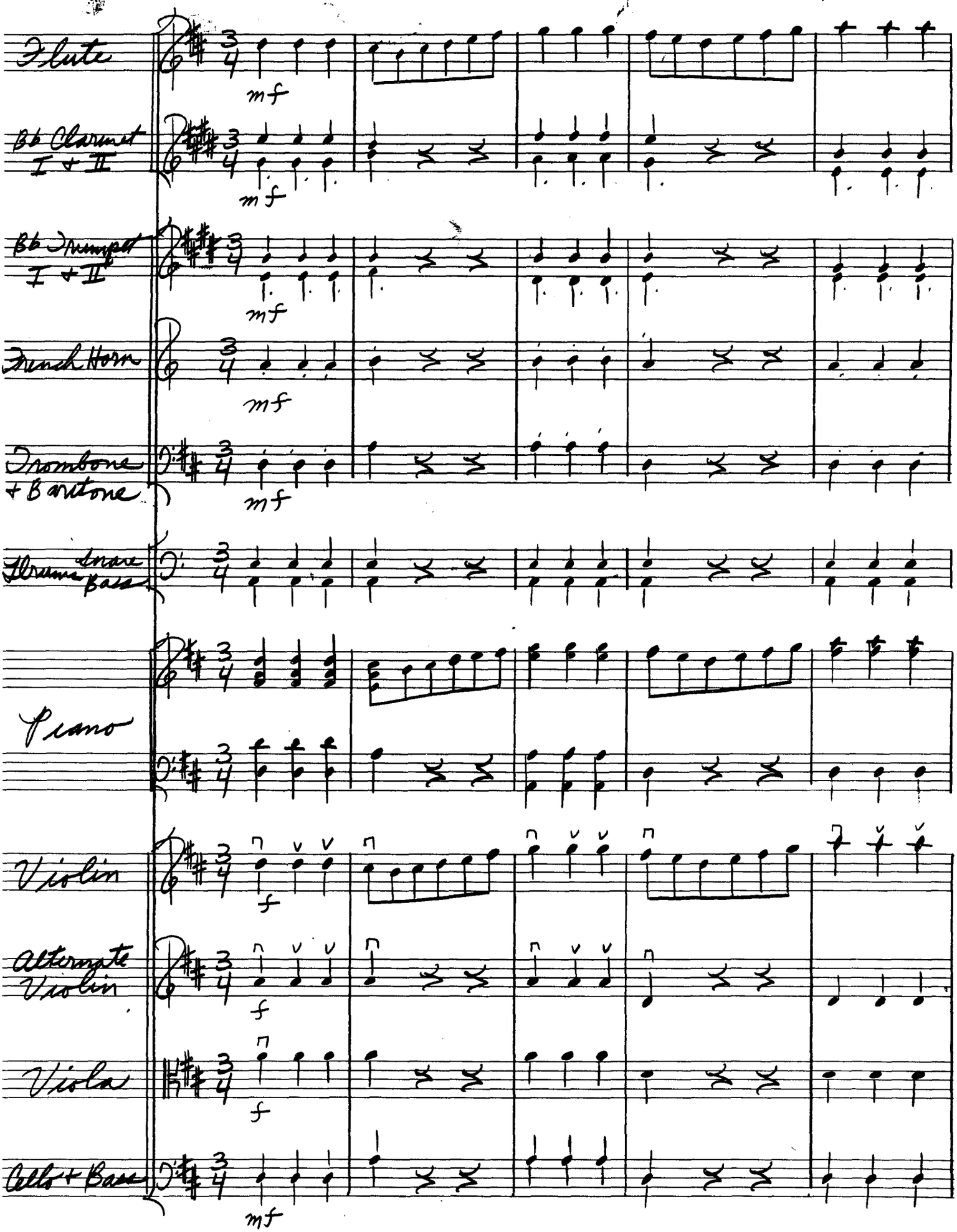
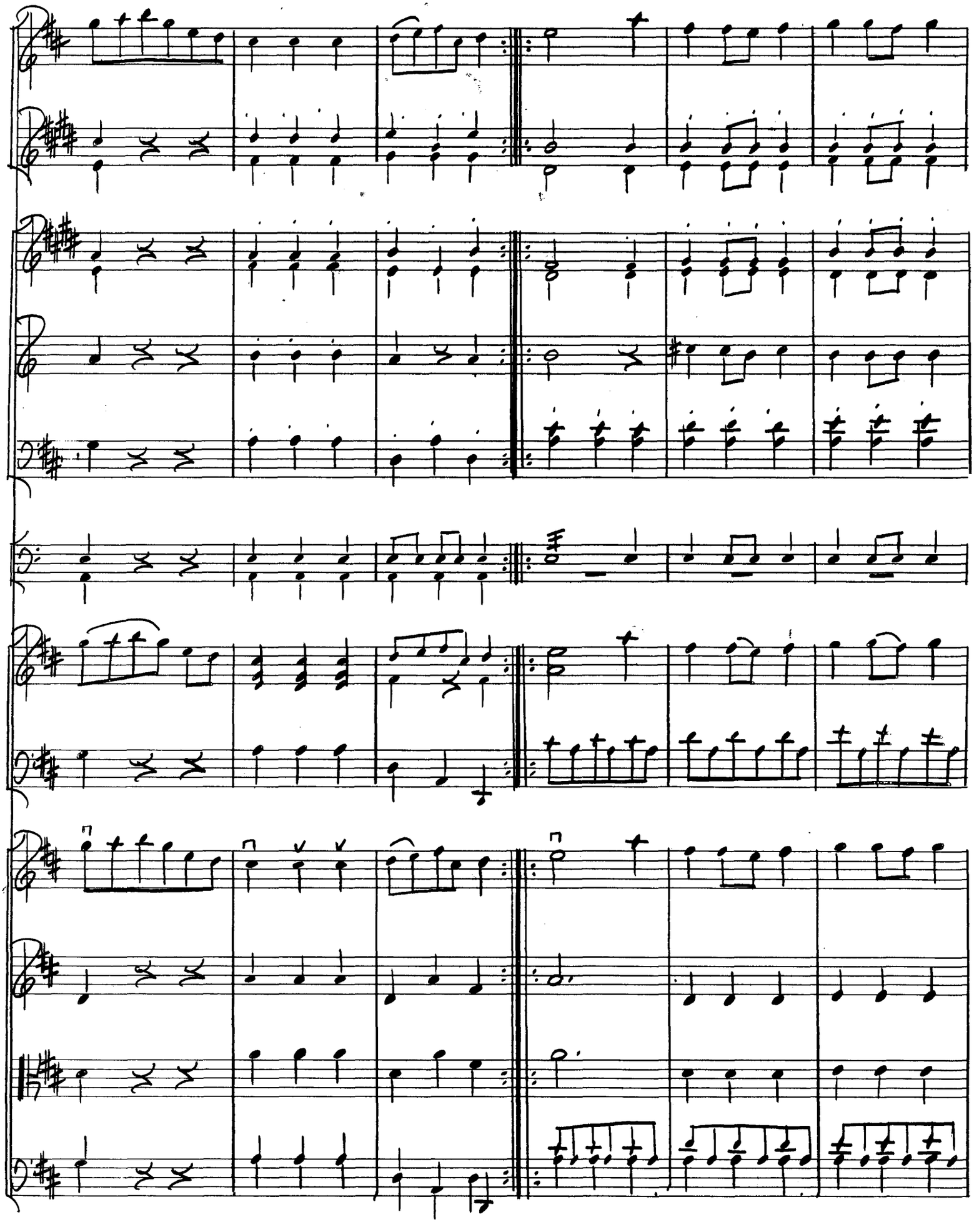
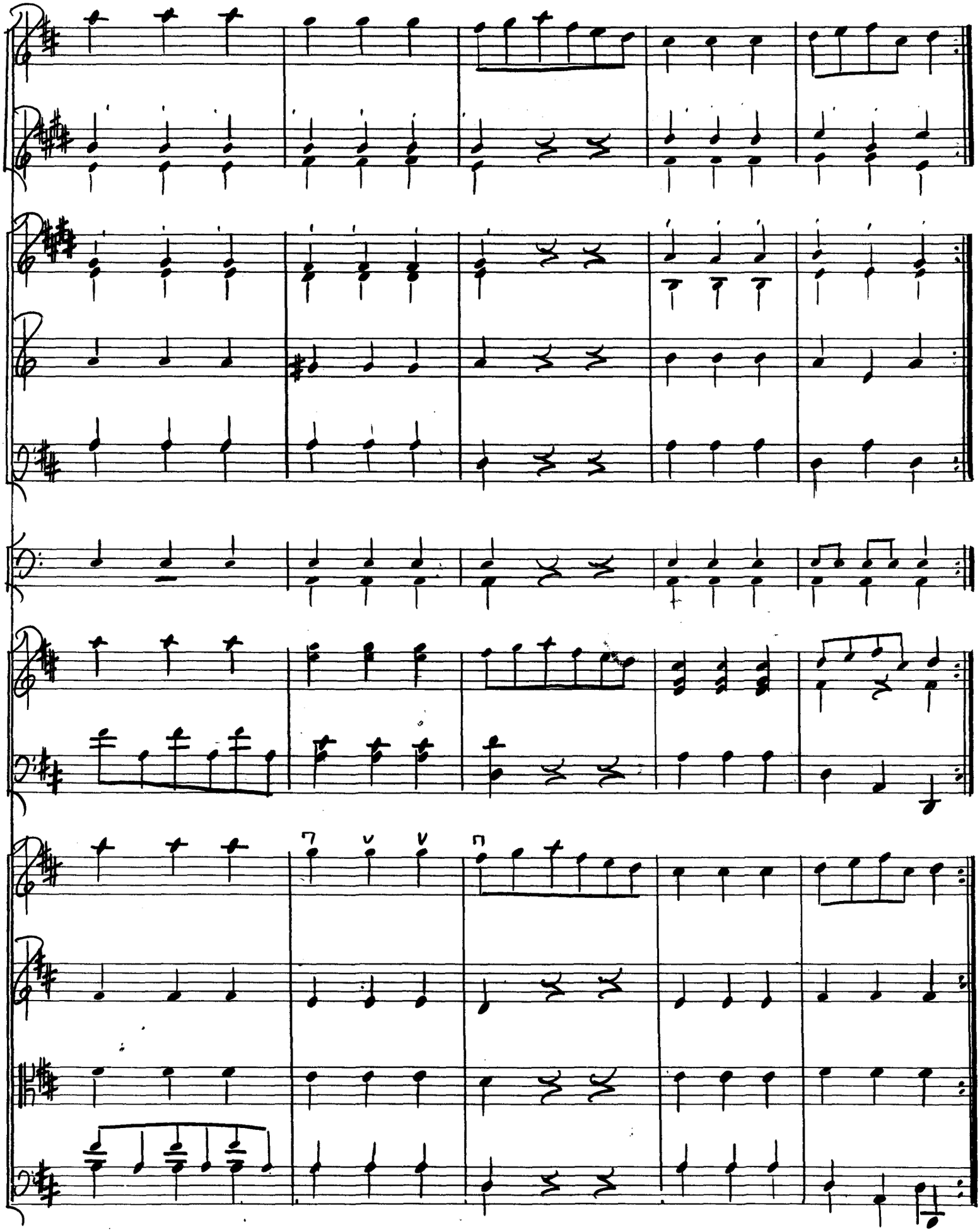
GERMAN DANCE

Haydn



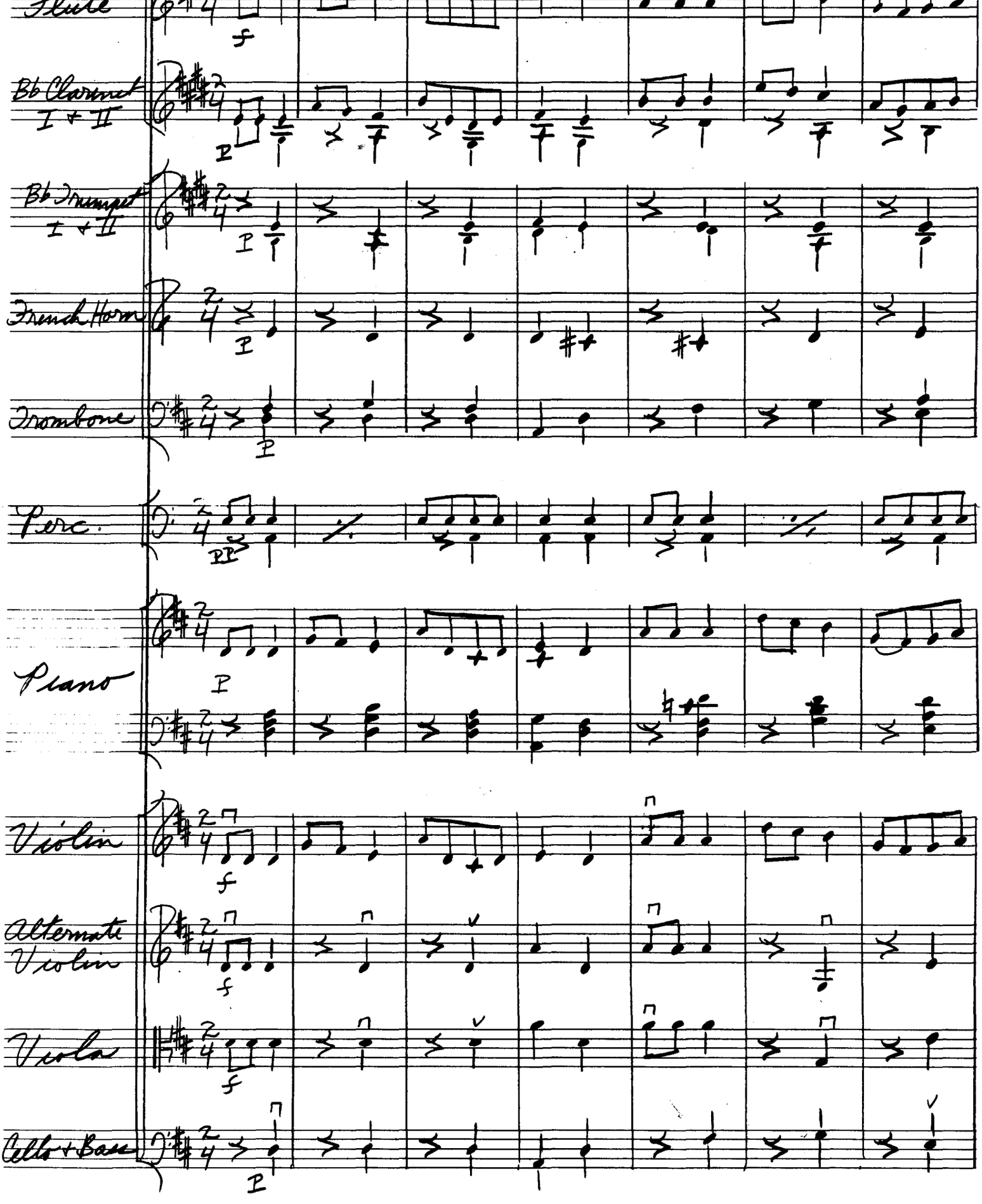


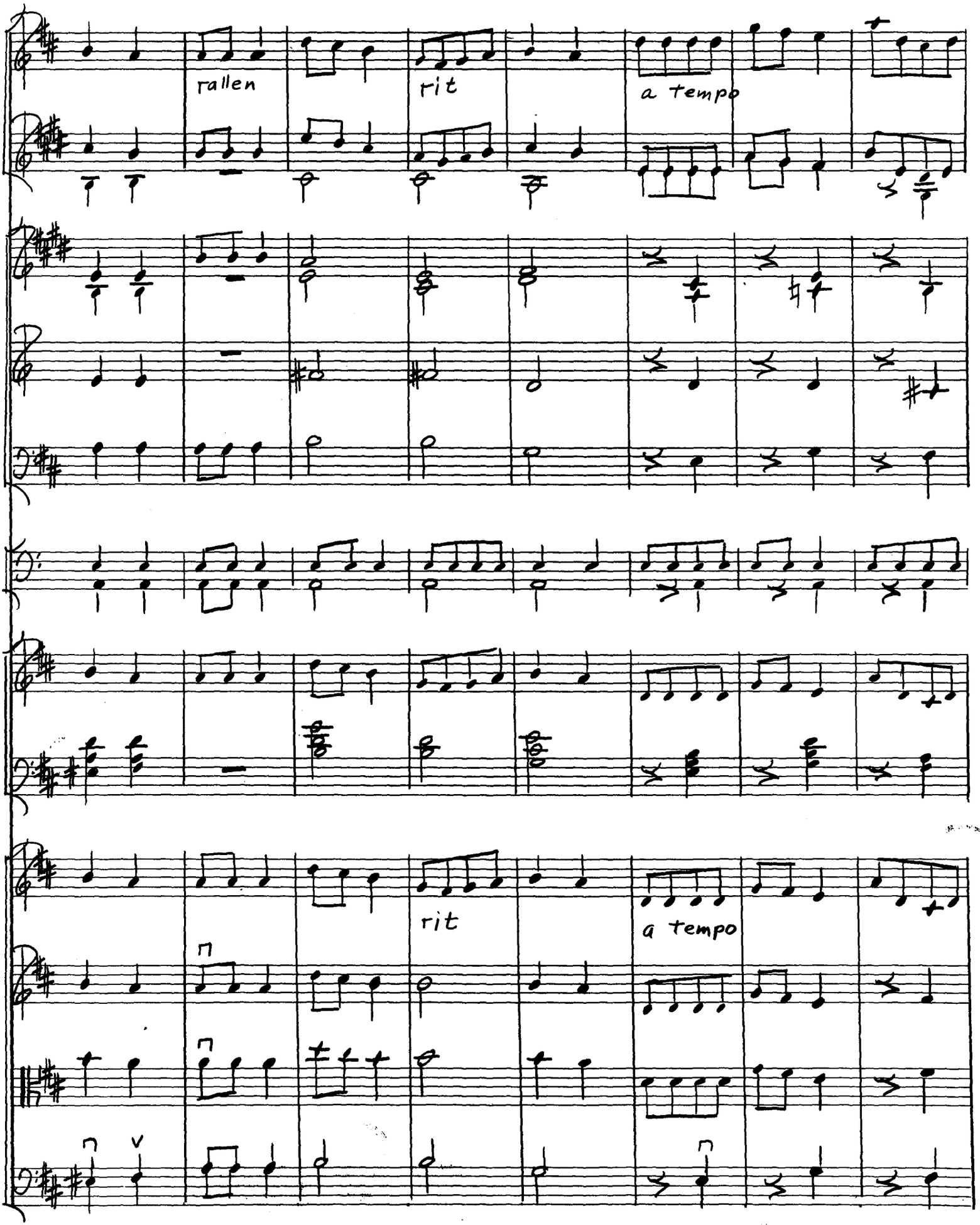


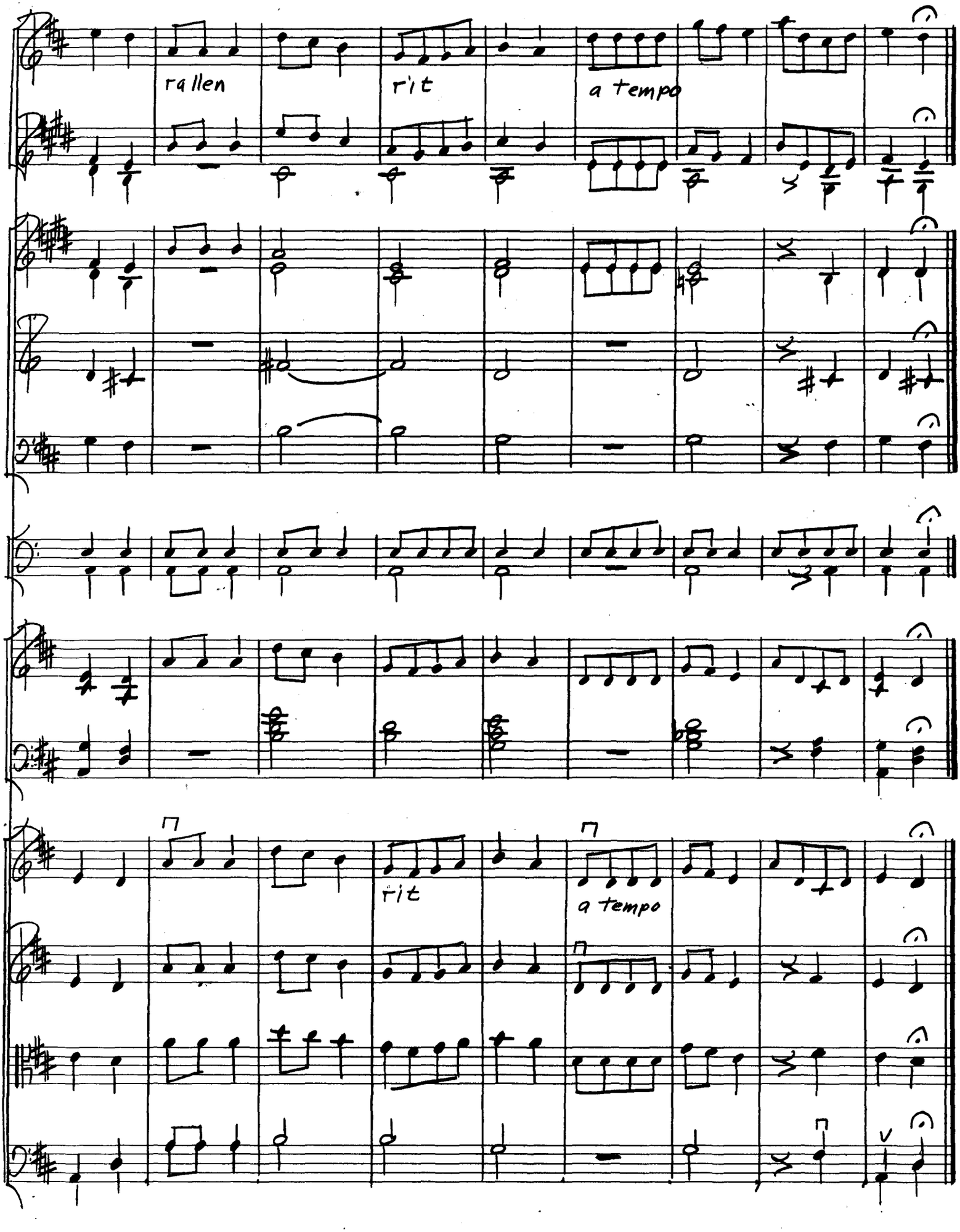
"PIÈCE 15"

Allegro Moderato ♩= 112

Bartók




rallen
rit
a tempo
rit
a tempo


rallen
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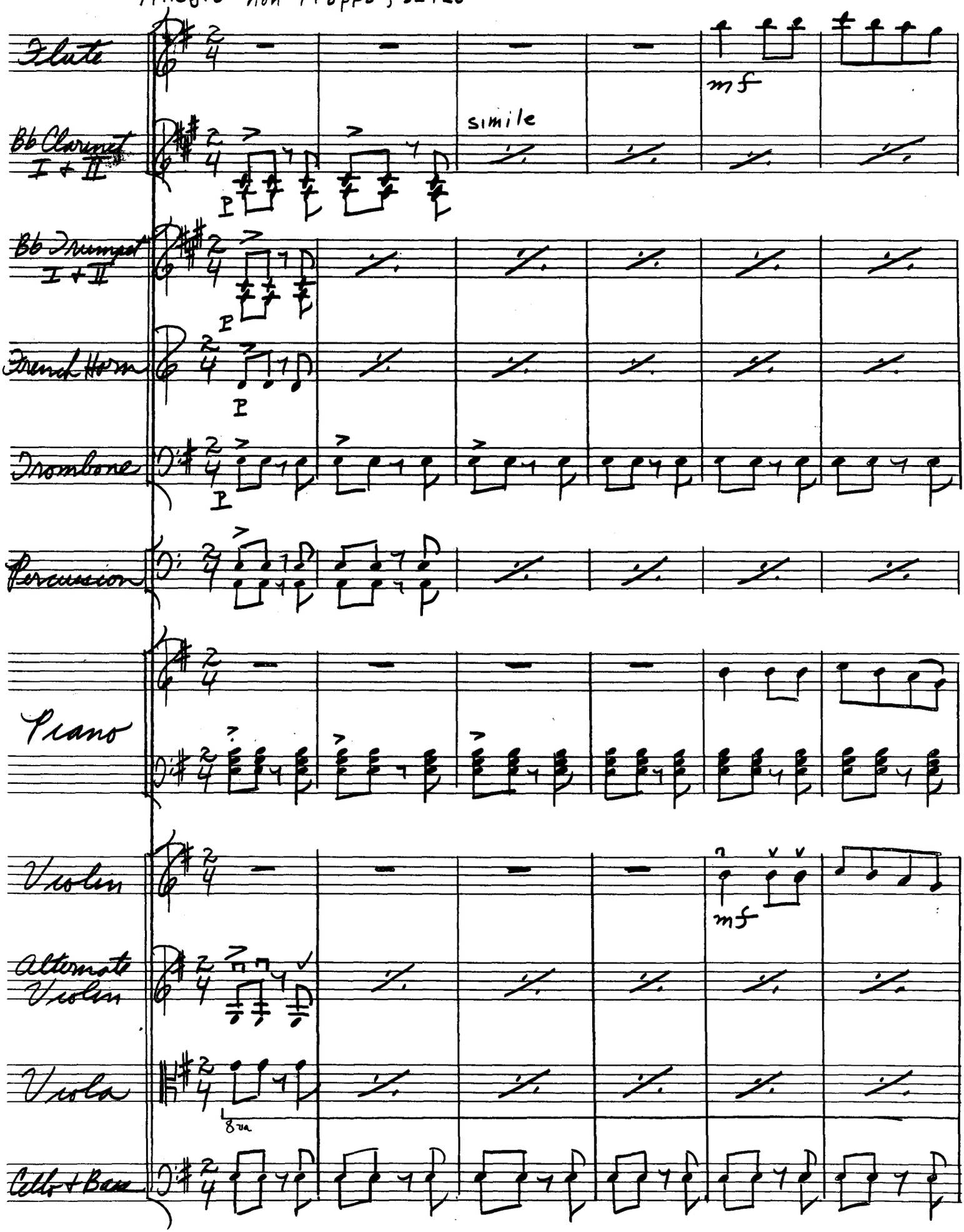
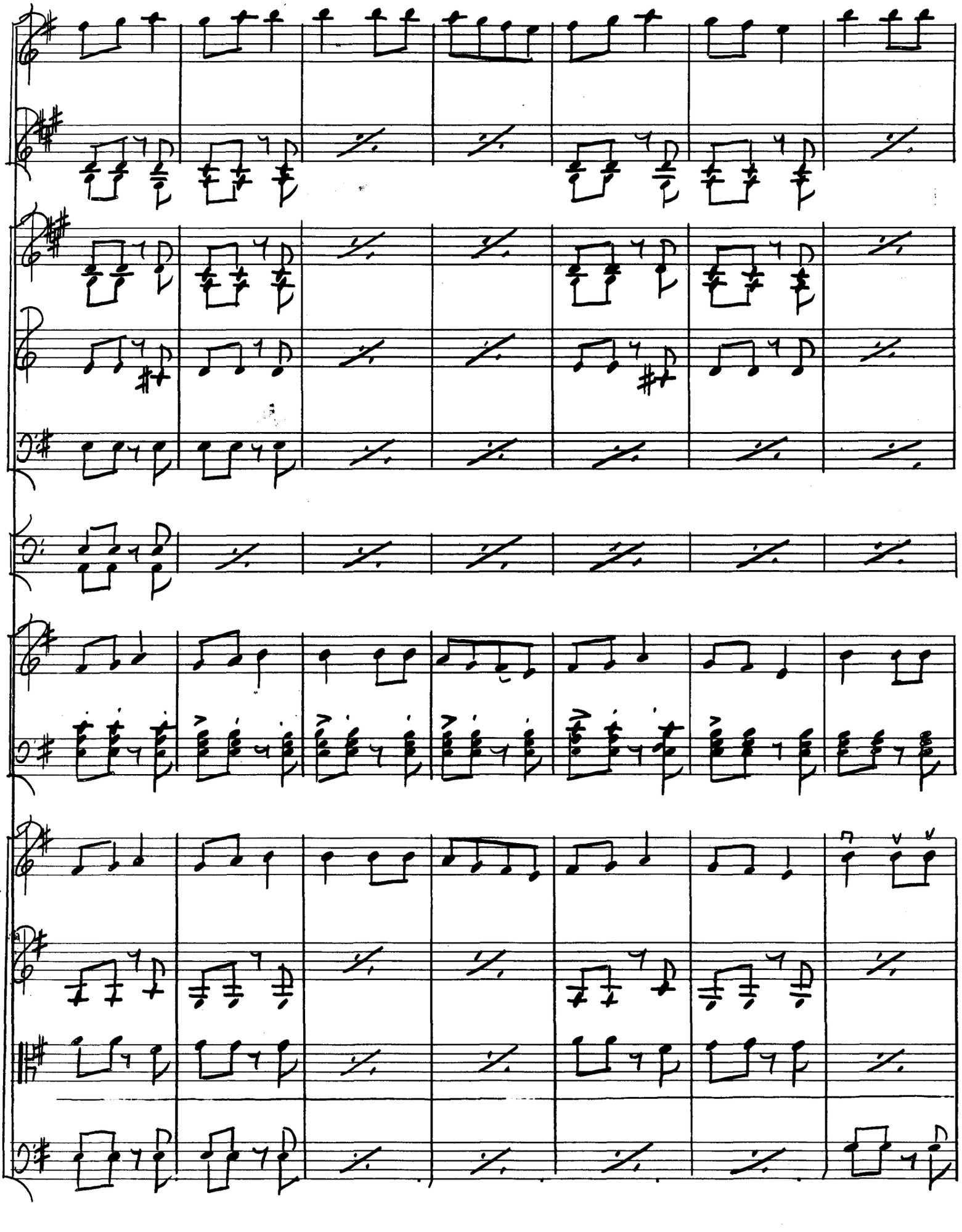
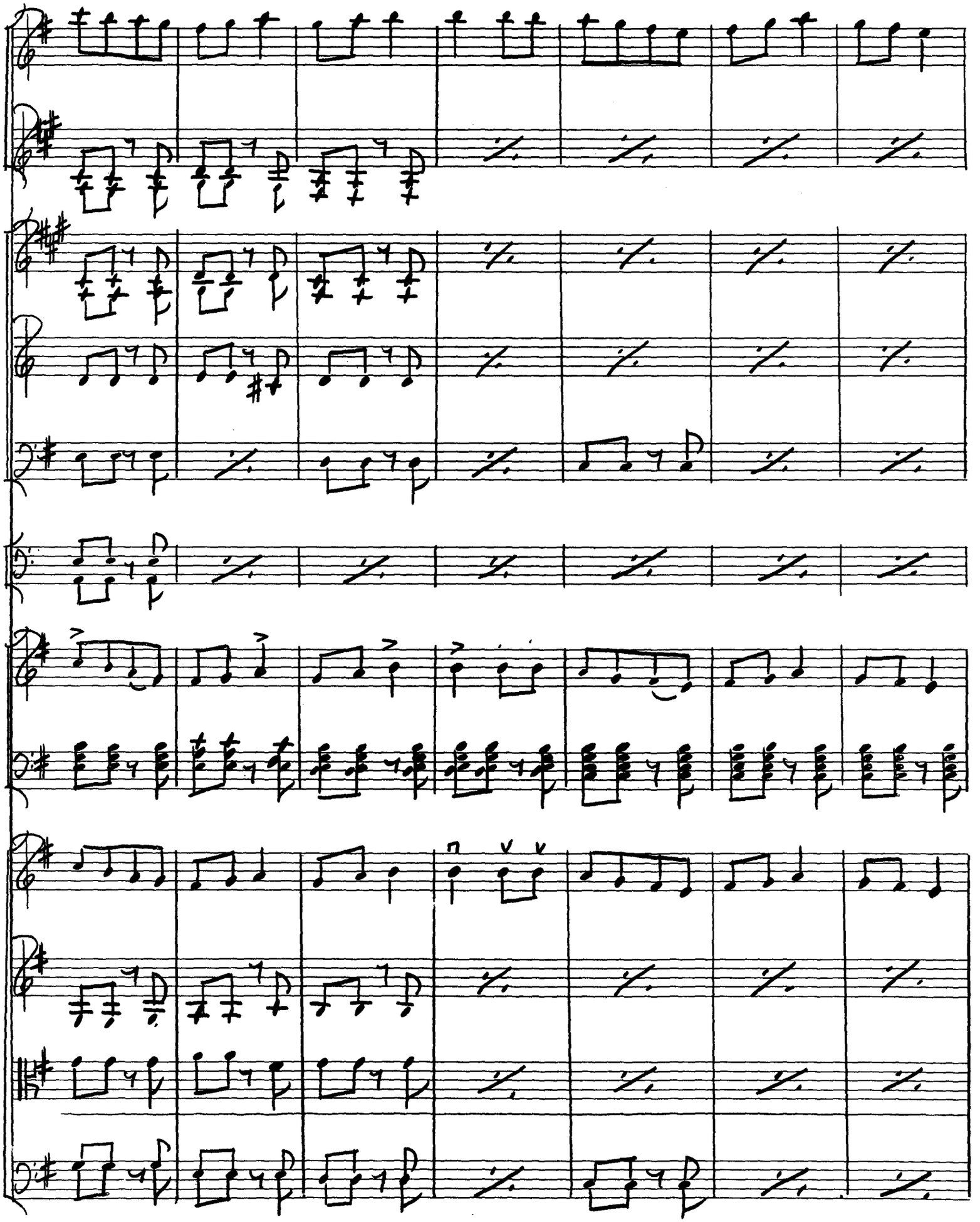
No. 8 DANCE

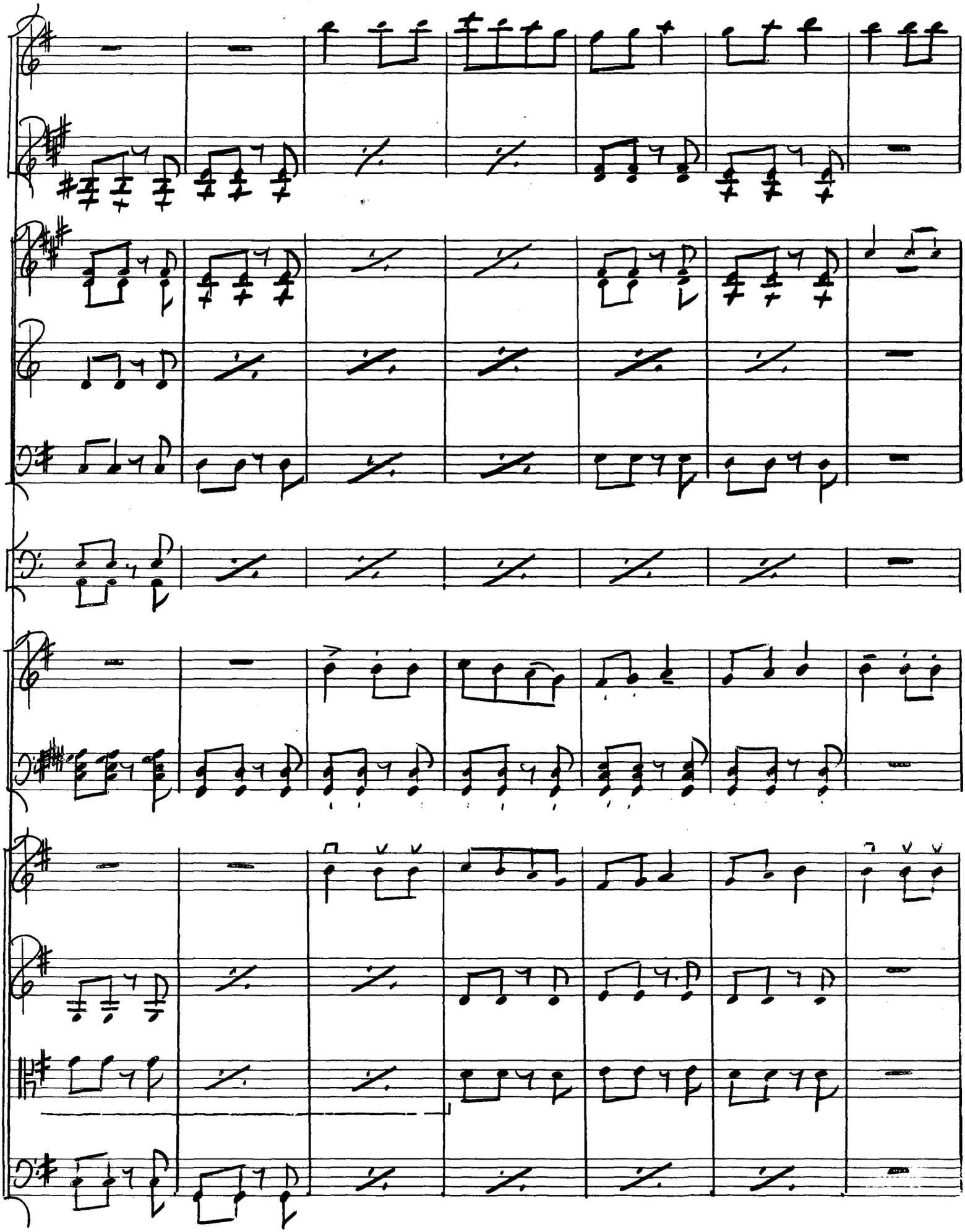
Allegro non troppo, ♩=120

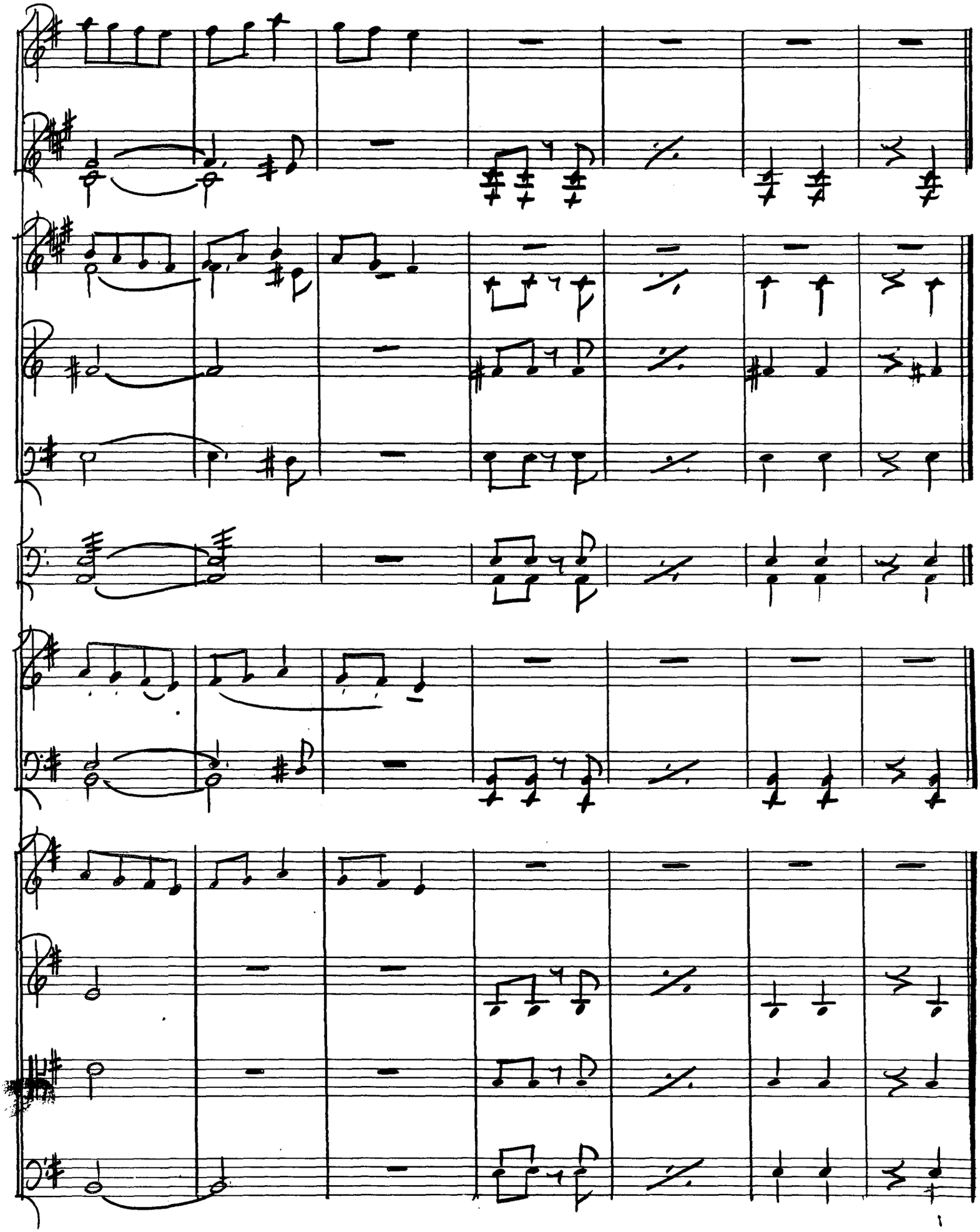
Bartók





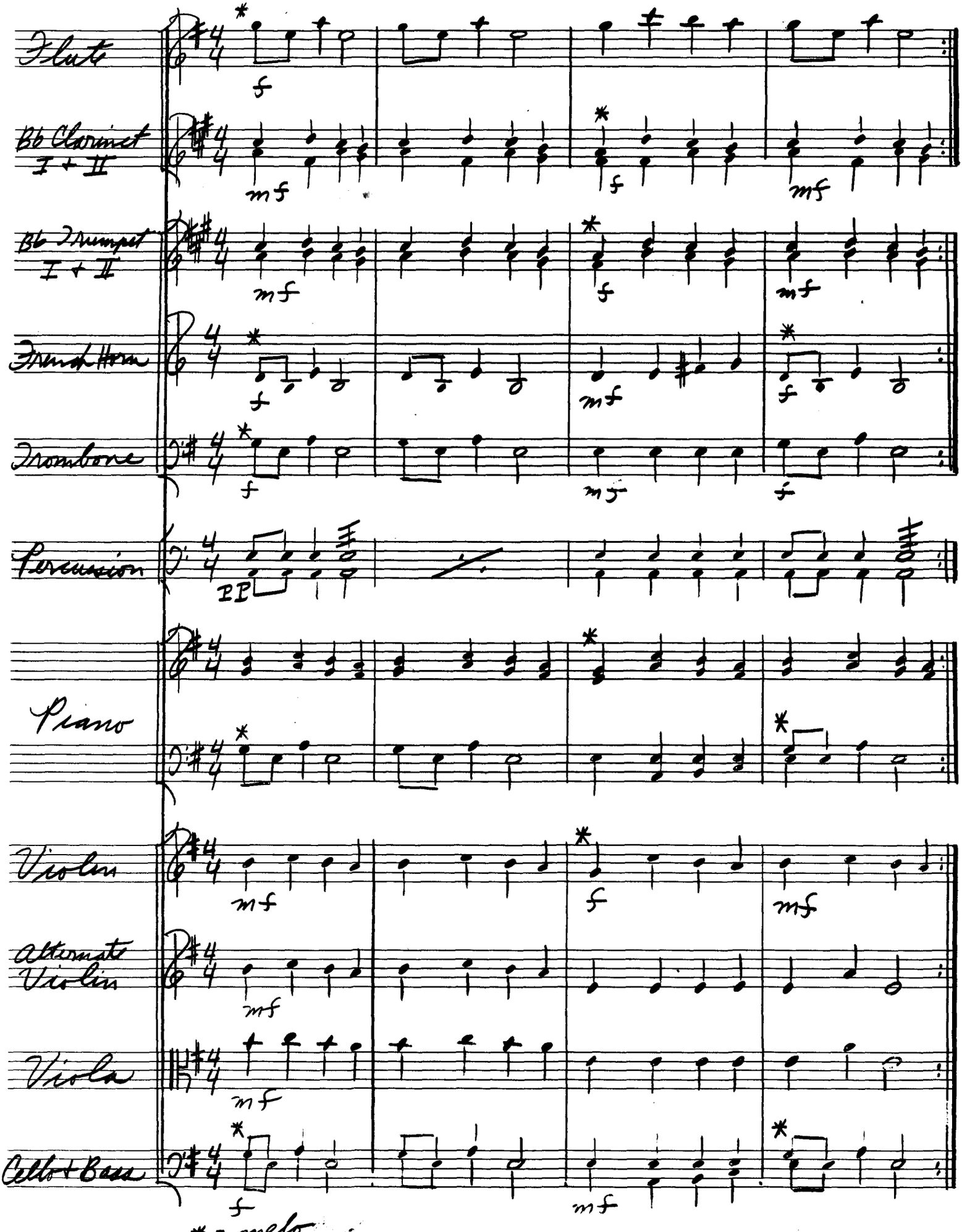


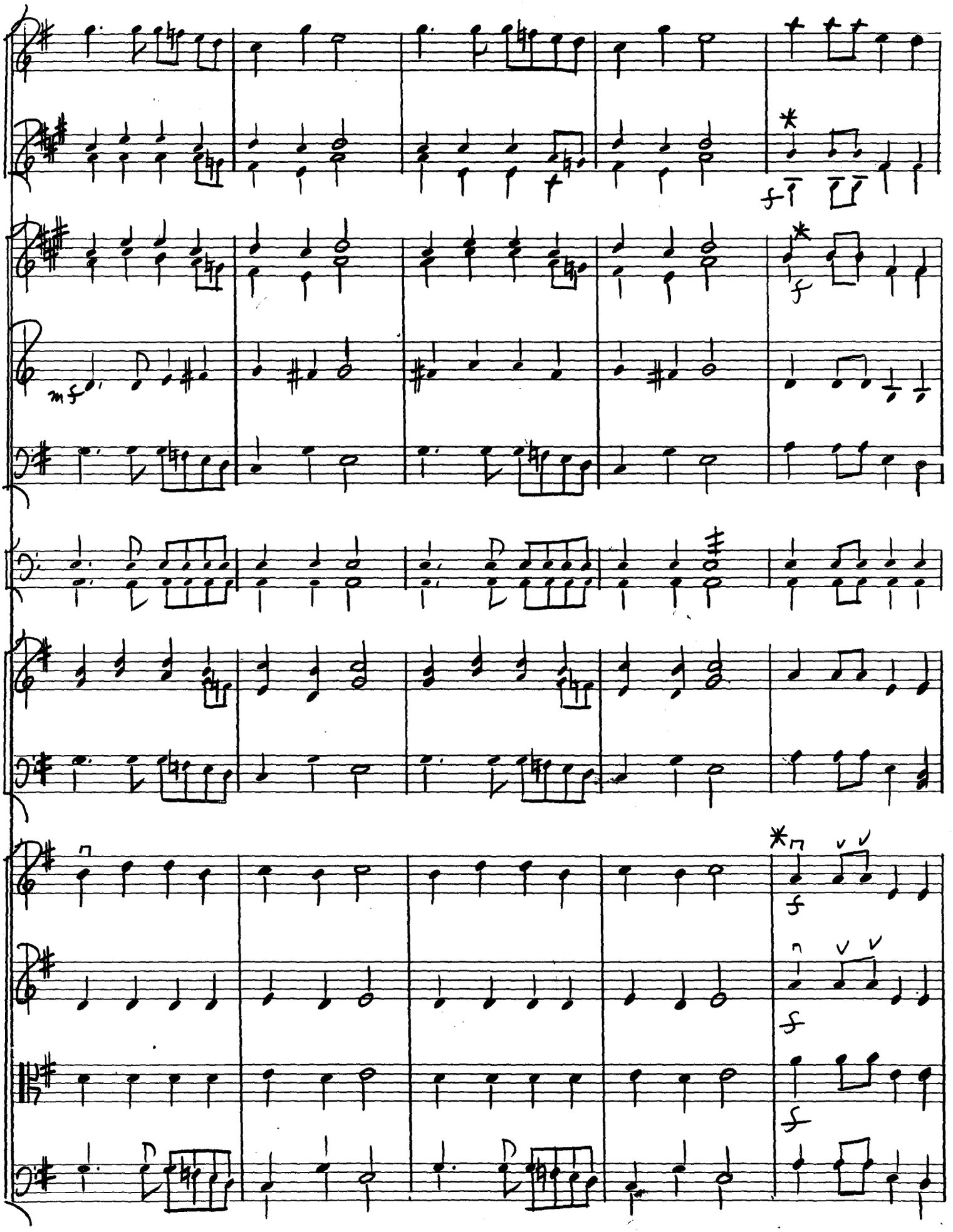




VOLGA BOAT SONG

"Russian Folk Song"





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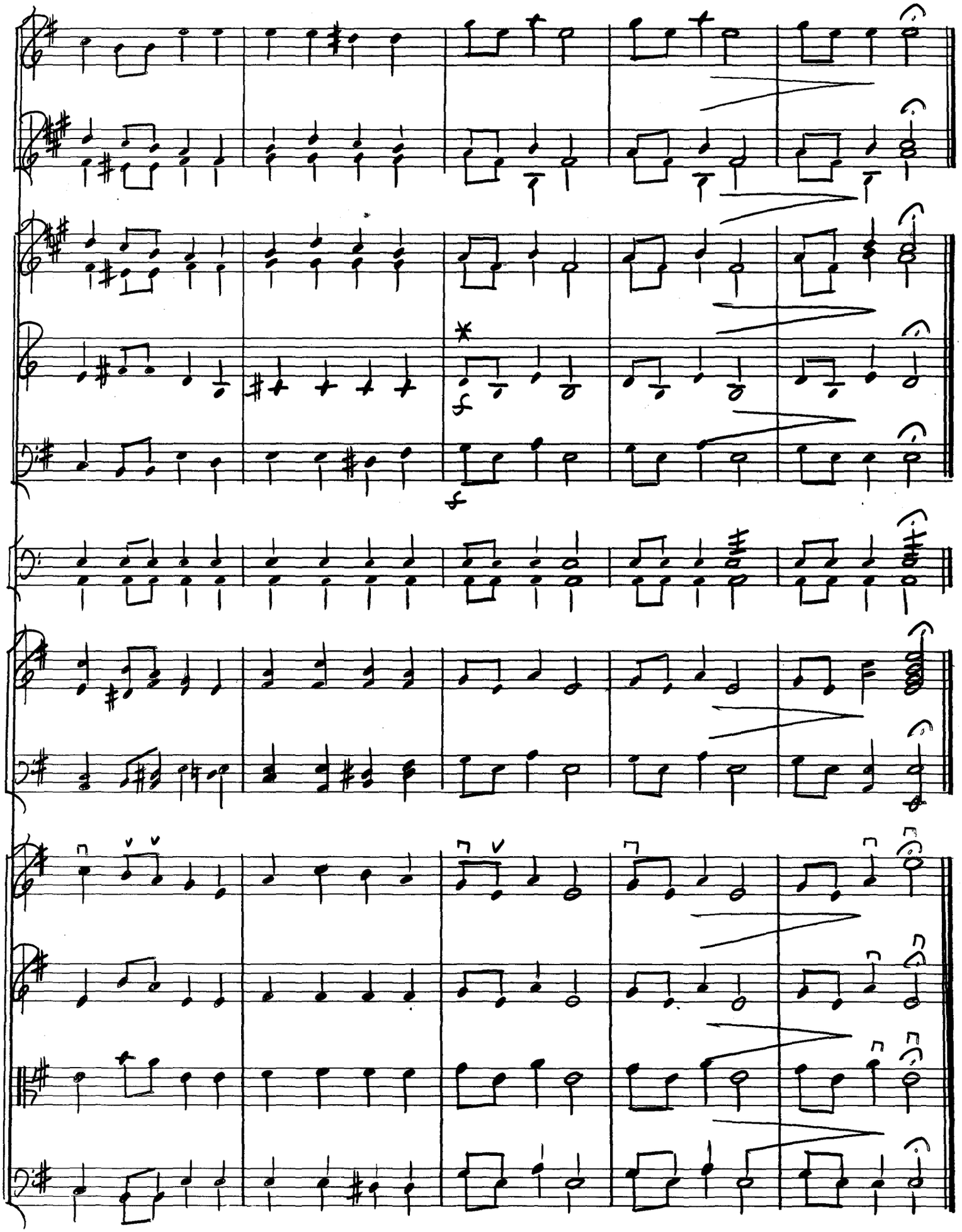

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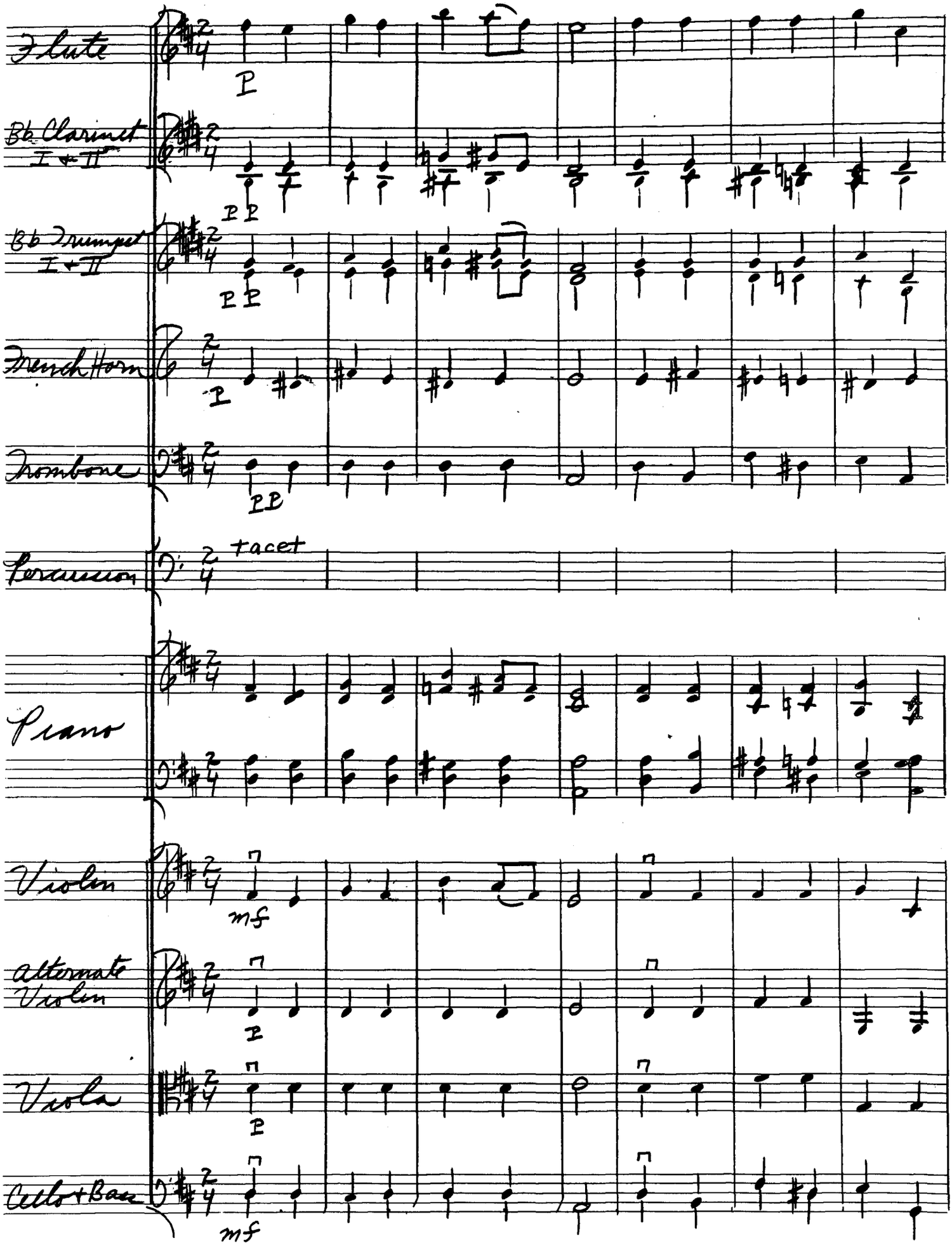
SOFTLY NOW THE LIGHT OF DAY

Carl Maria Von Weber



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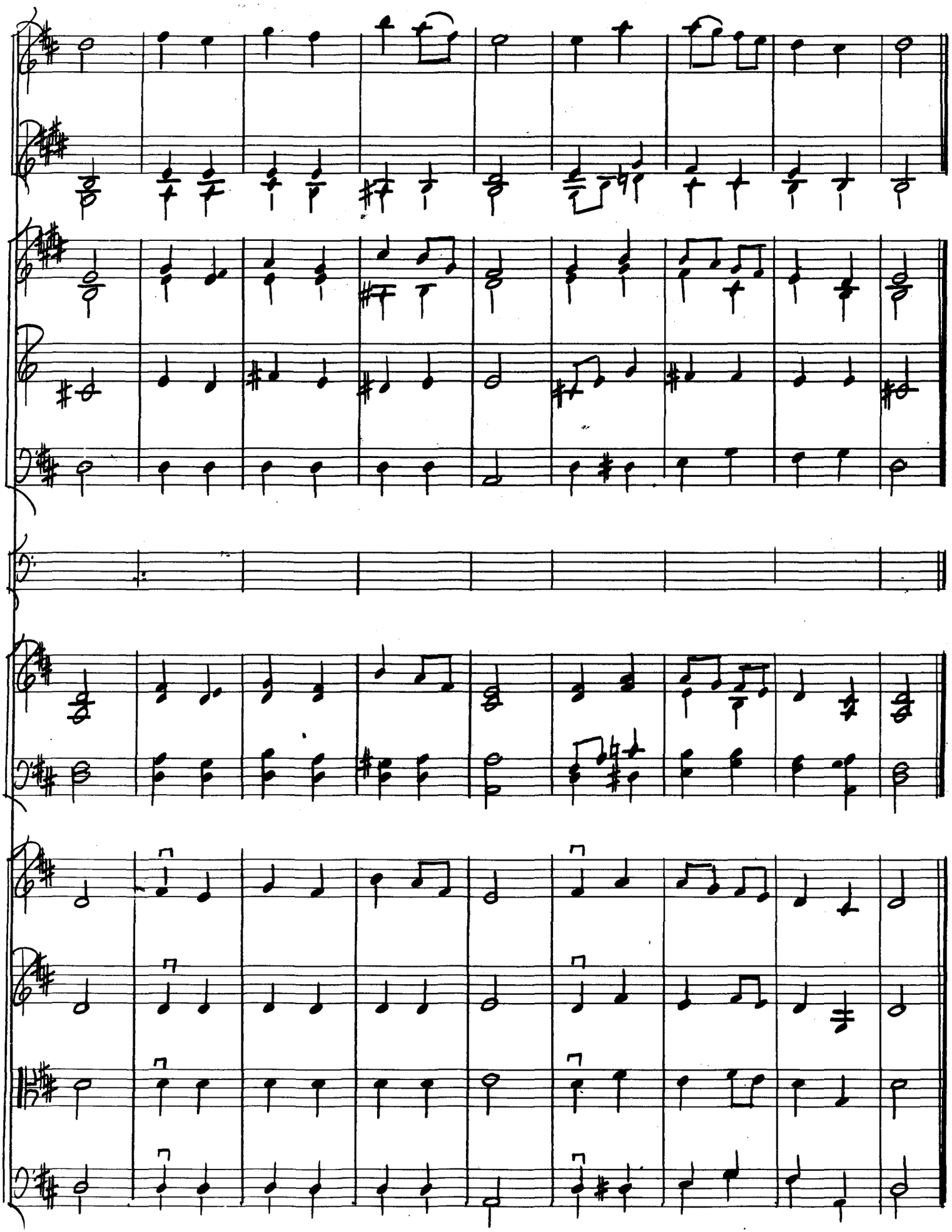

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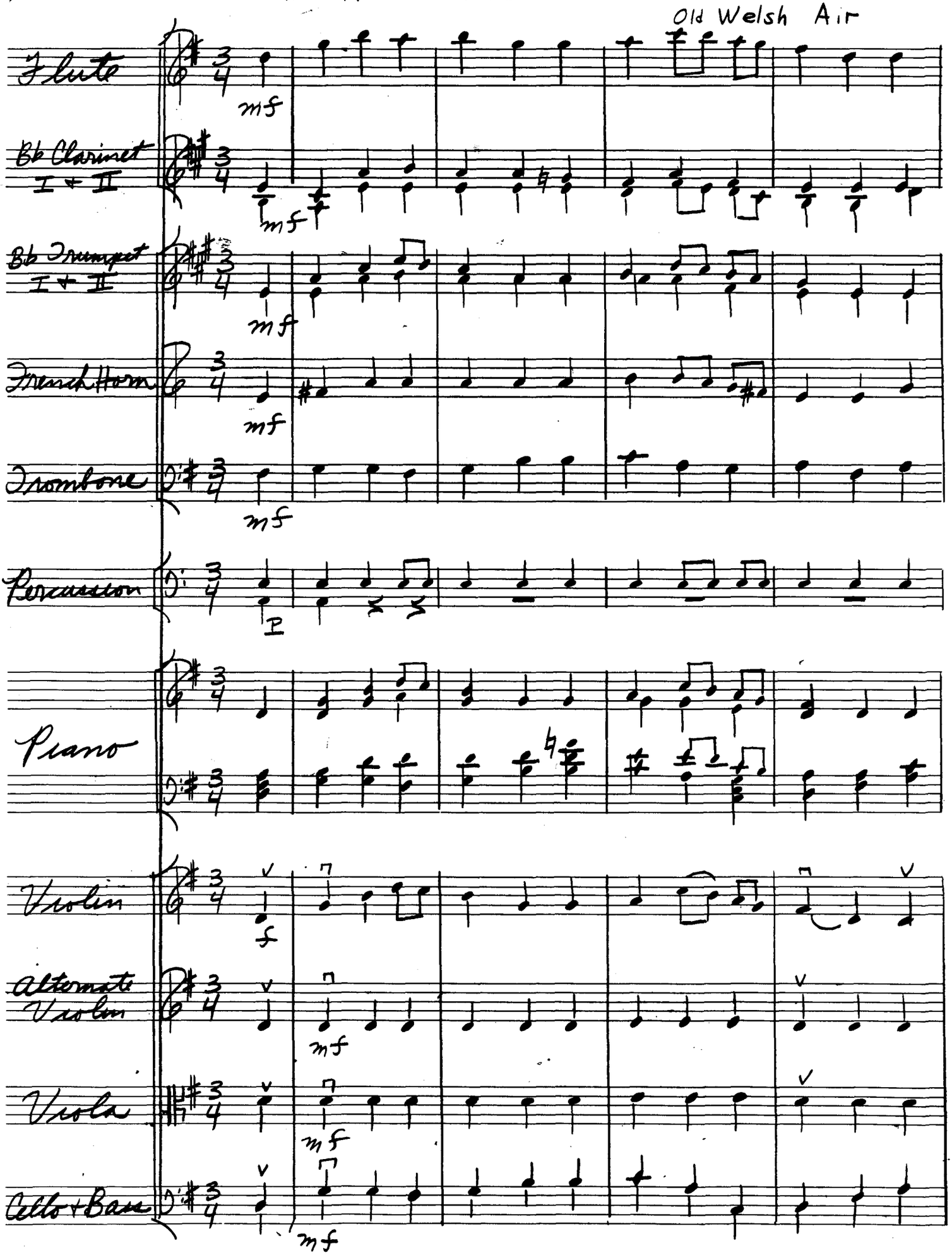
THE ASH GROVE

Old Welsh Air



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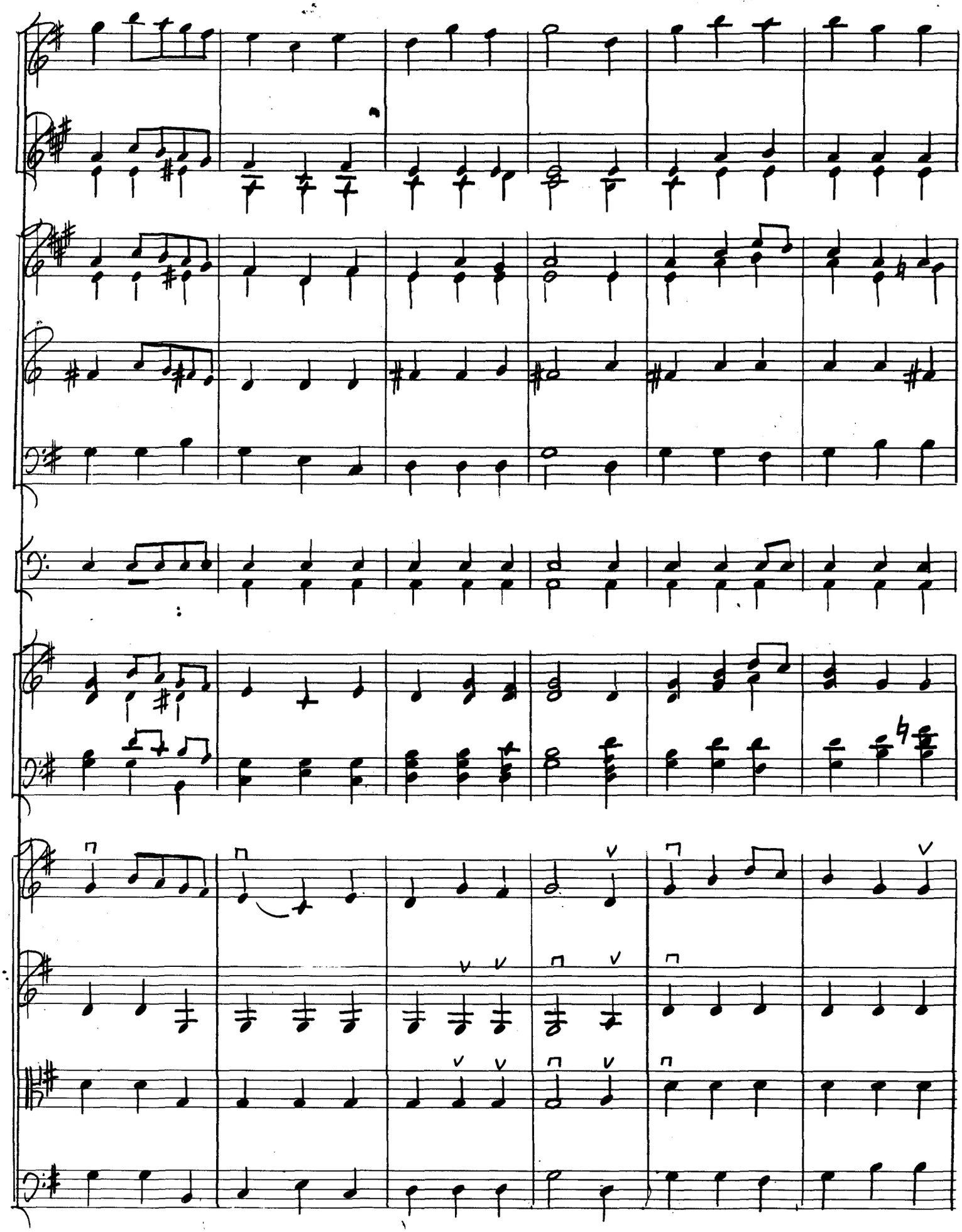

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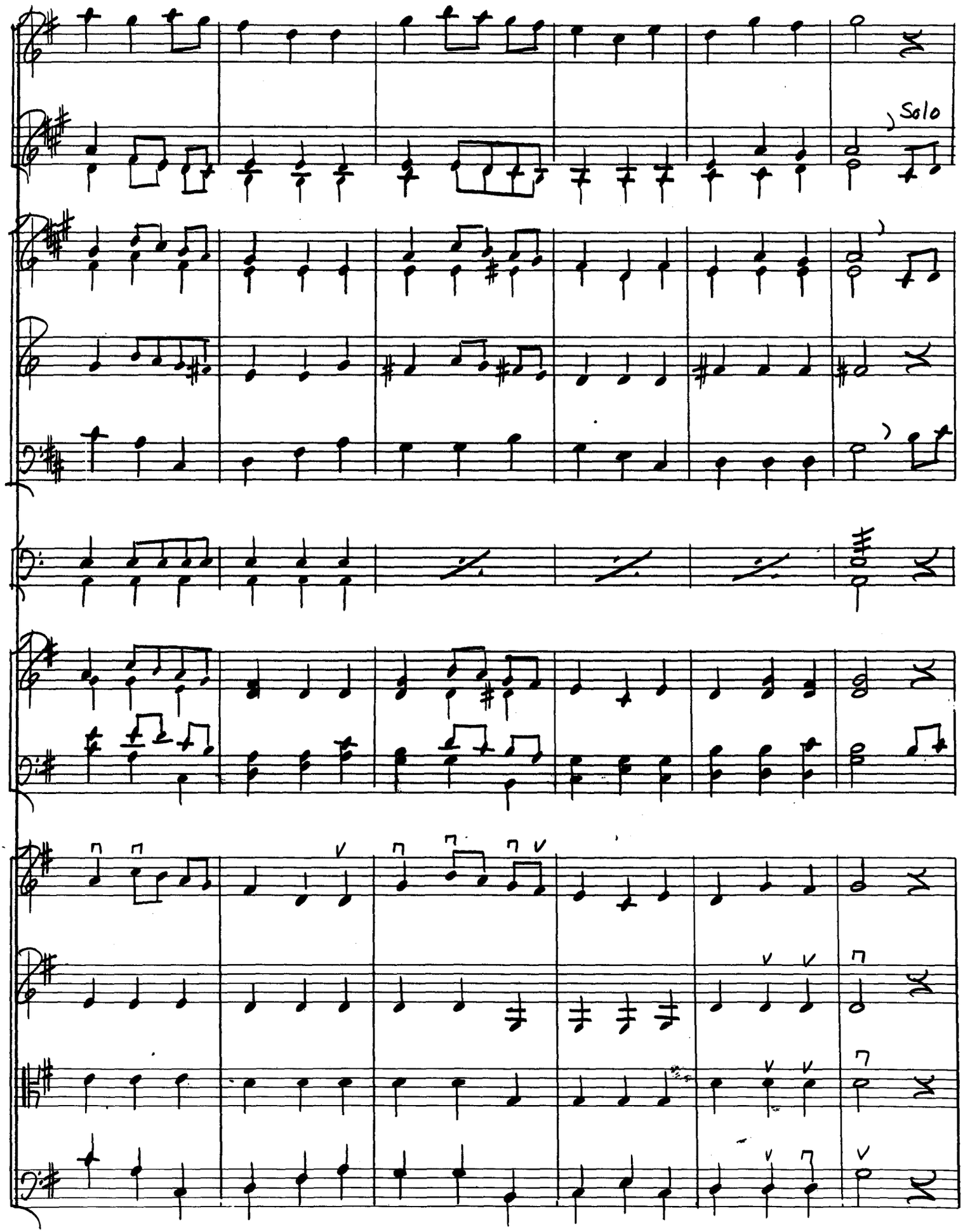

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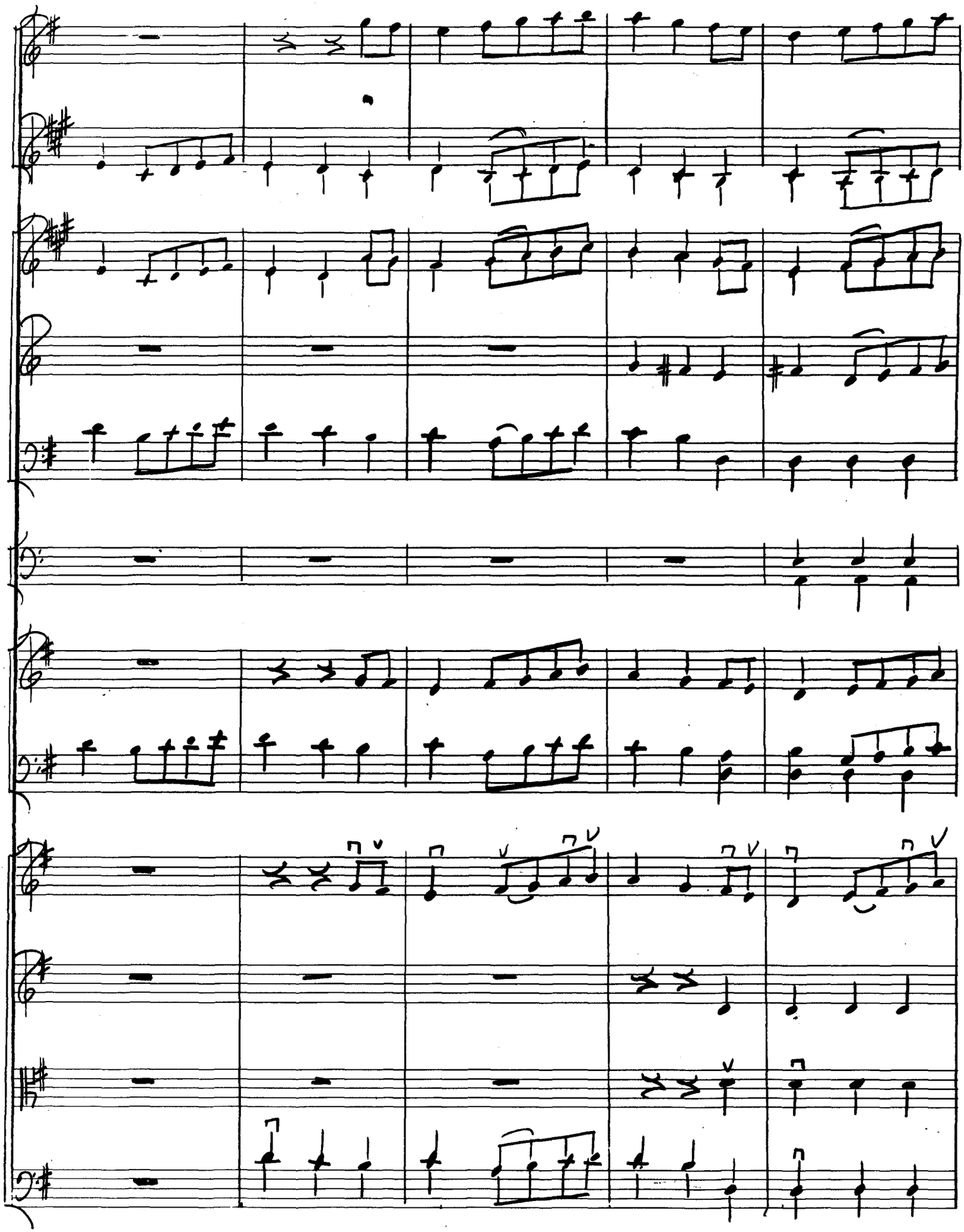

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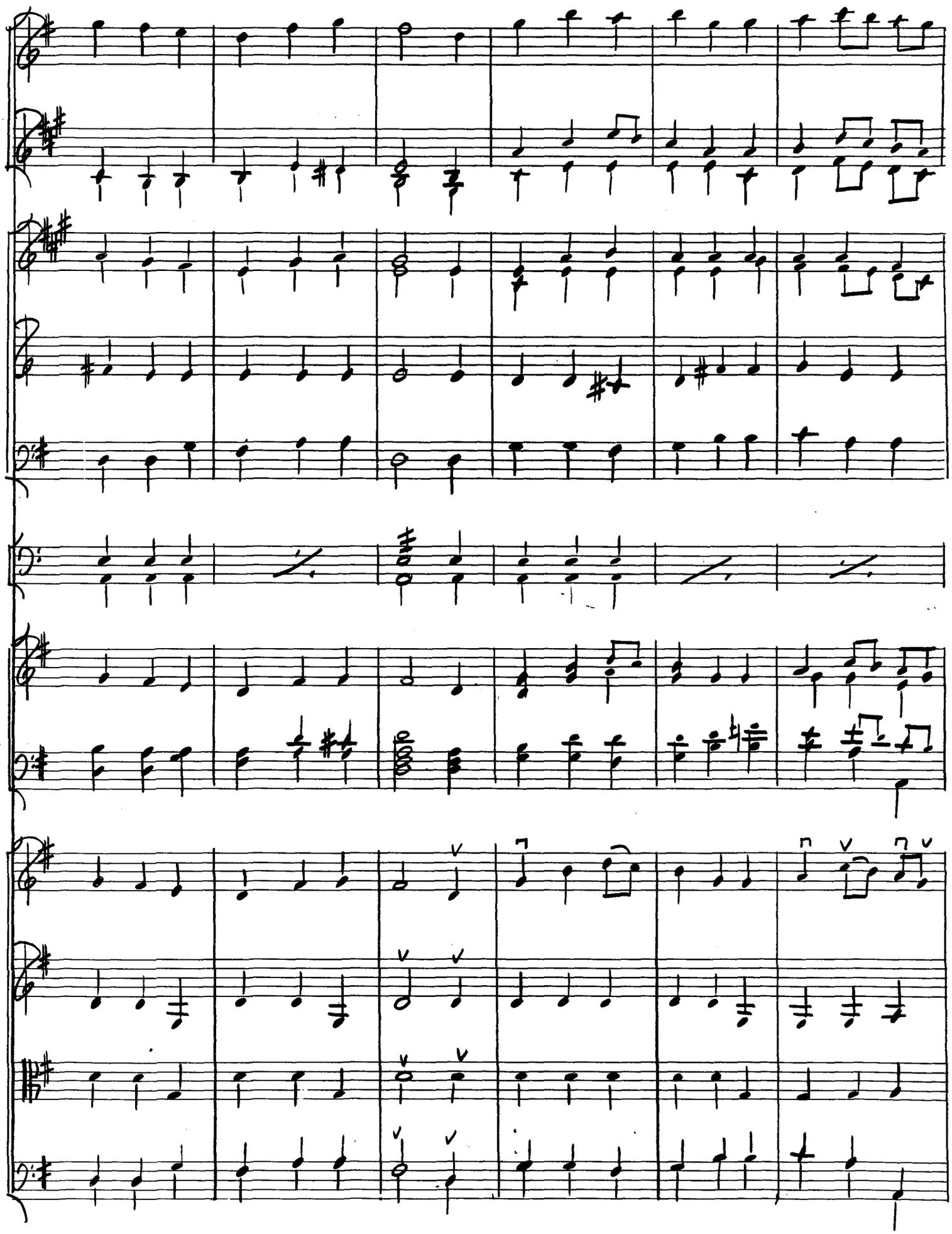

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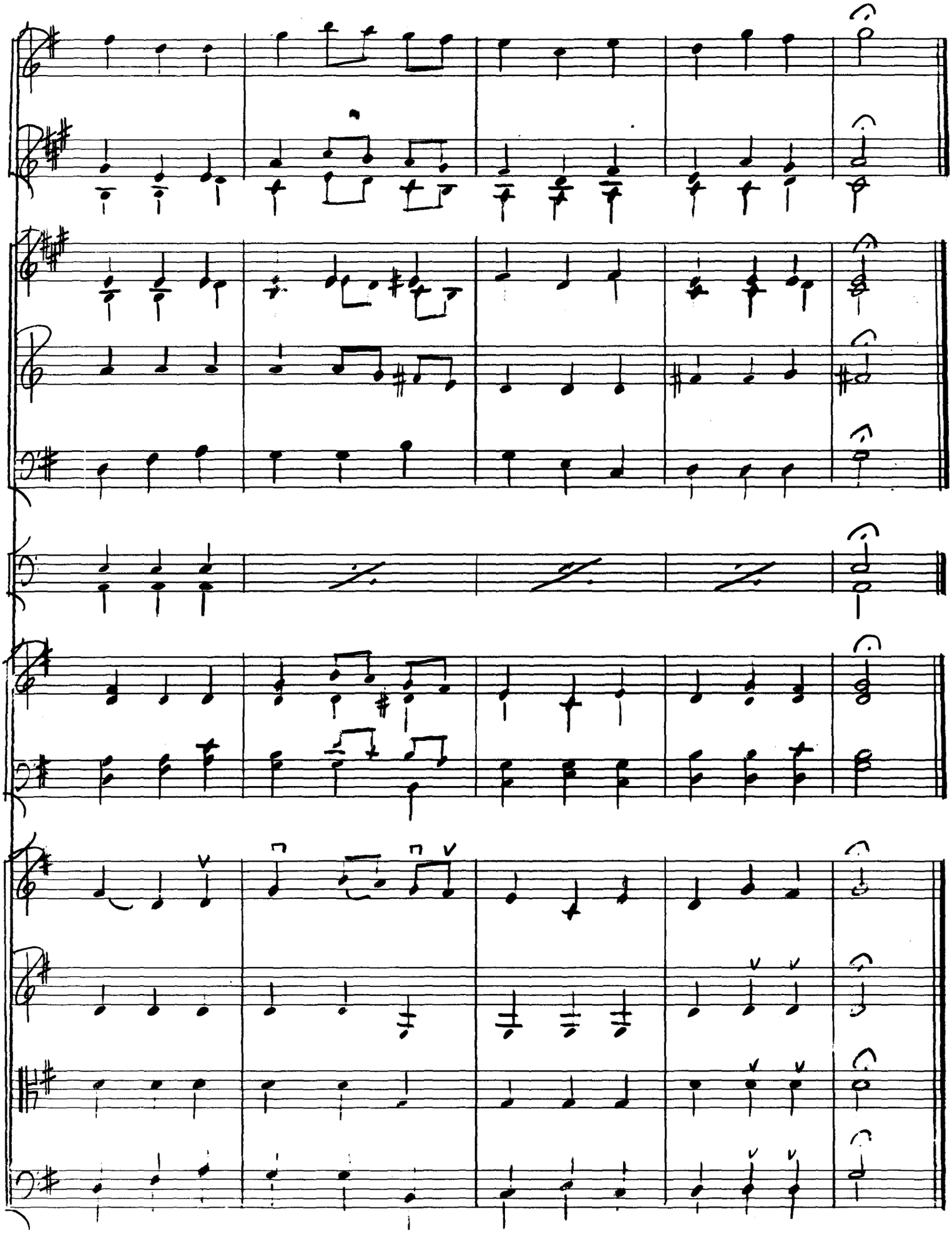

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SECTION IV

Conclusions

The first four arrangements in the list of Compositions included in this study, were rehearsed, played at a concert, and recorded, by the pupils of Norwood School, Birmingham, Alabama.

Because of the easy alternate violin parts, the teacher at Norwood School was able to include in the orchestra all but the very beginning string students. The sharp keys made it possible for those students who had not completed their first lesson book to play the regular violin part. It was found that the brass and woodwind players had little difficulty with the sharp keys, and enjoyed the challenge of learning some new fingerings and positions. Moreover, the range limitations tended to improve the sound of the woodwind and brass parts, since the students did not have to strain for high notes.

The Norwood teacher did not have to stop and explain rhythms because the notation used was familiar to the students. Thus the full rehearsal time was free to devote to the problems of learning new notes, ensemble and intonation, rather than to learning new rhythms—one of the problems encountered when using the standard elementary collections.

It was found that the intonation problems in the strings

were increased when the classic dances were taken up to tempo, inasmuch as the students had difficulty in playing these pieces in tempo. The author feels that the pieces best suited for young musicians are those which are somewhat slow in style, such as "The Ash Grove," rather than "Gavotte" or "German Dance."

In working out these arrangements, it was found that the best-sounding pieces have complete chorded structure. An example might be the "Piece No.15" by Bartok, a piano composition which has a solid harmonic structure resulting in a full and complete arrangement.