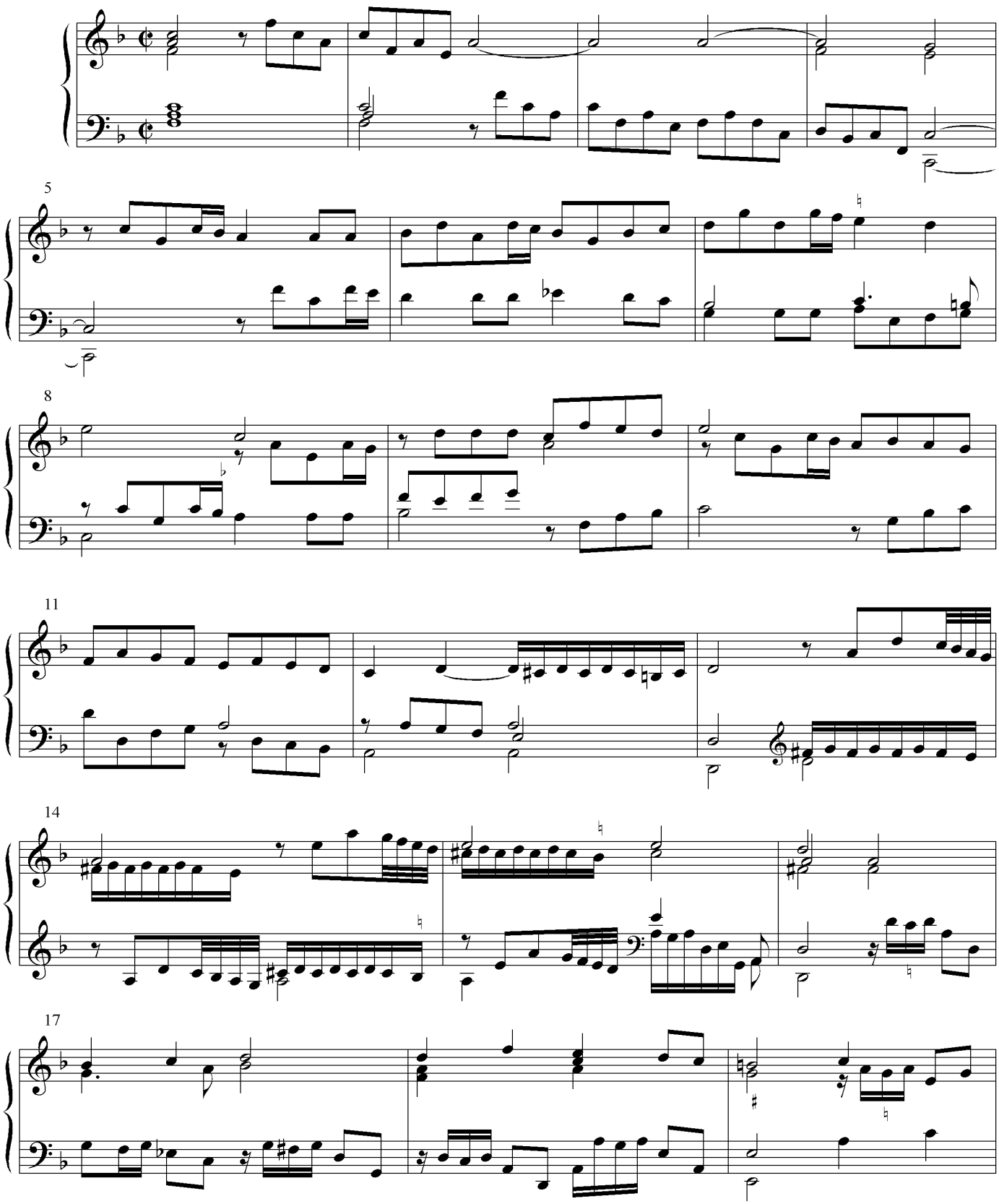
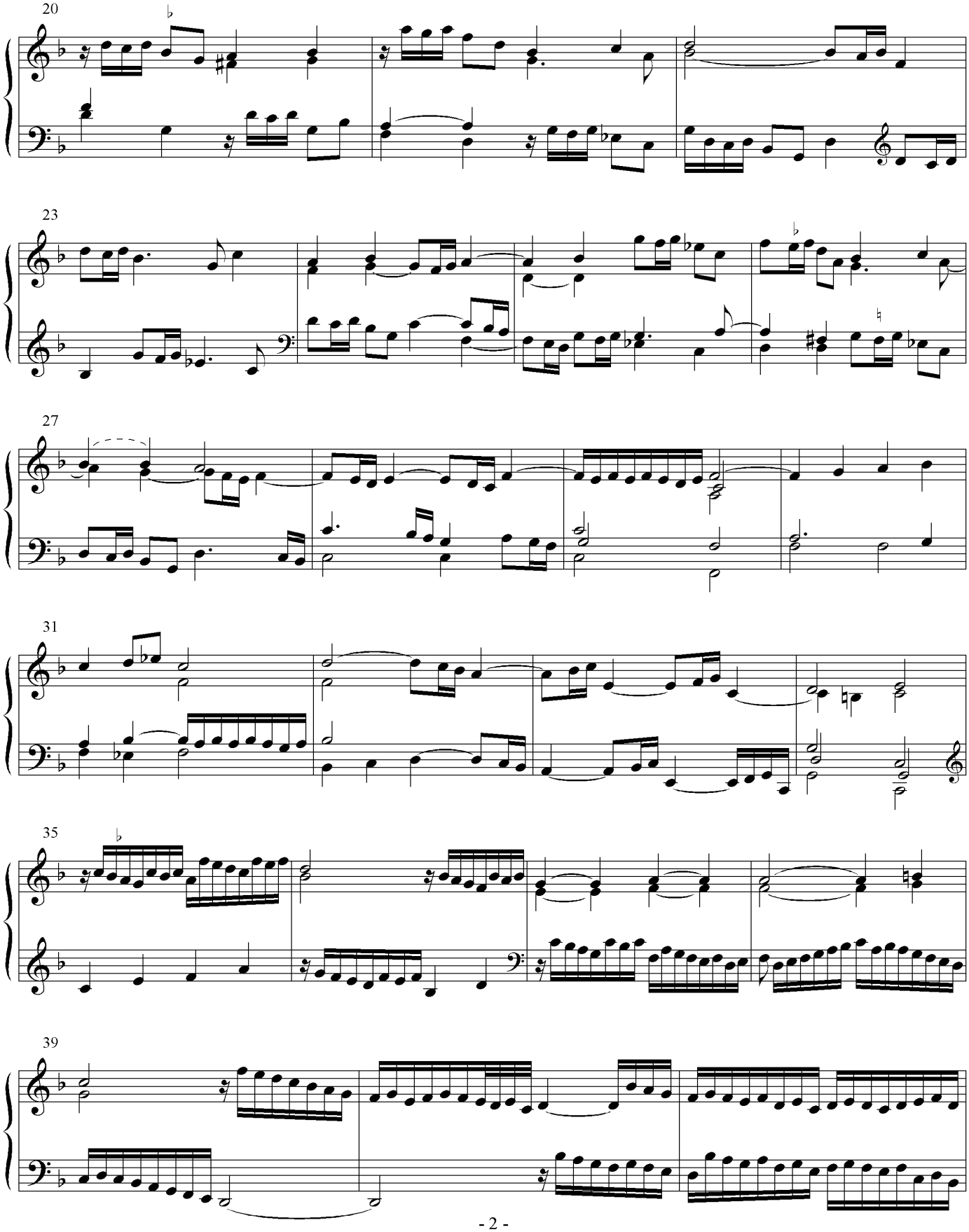
Toccata di Roma sexti toni

Girolamo Frescobaldi (?)

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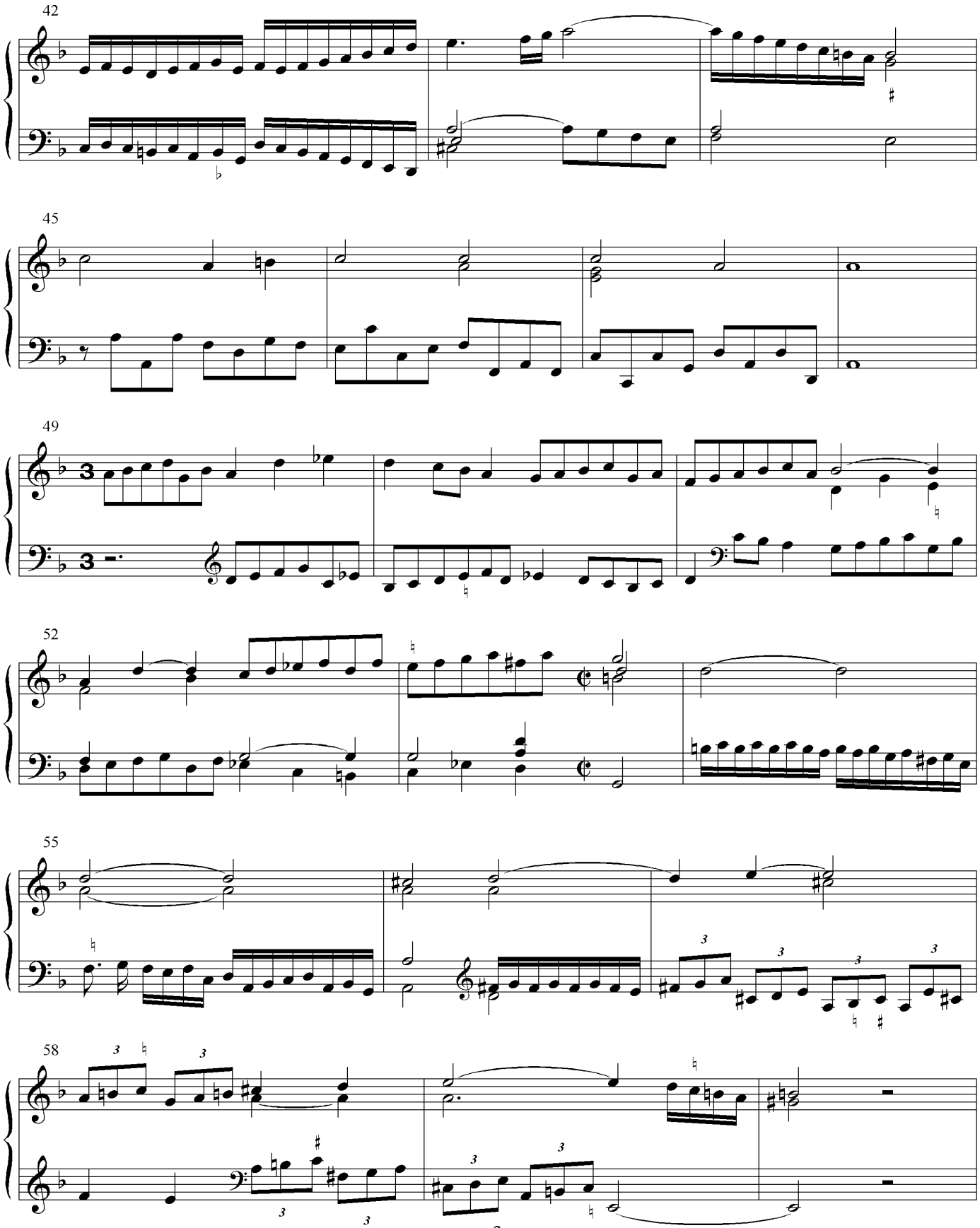
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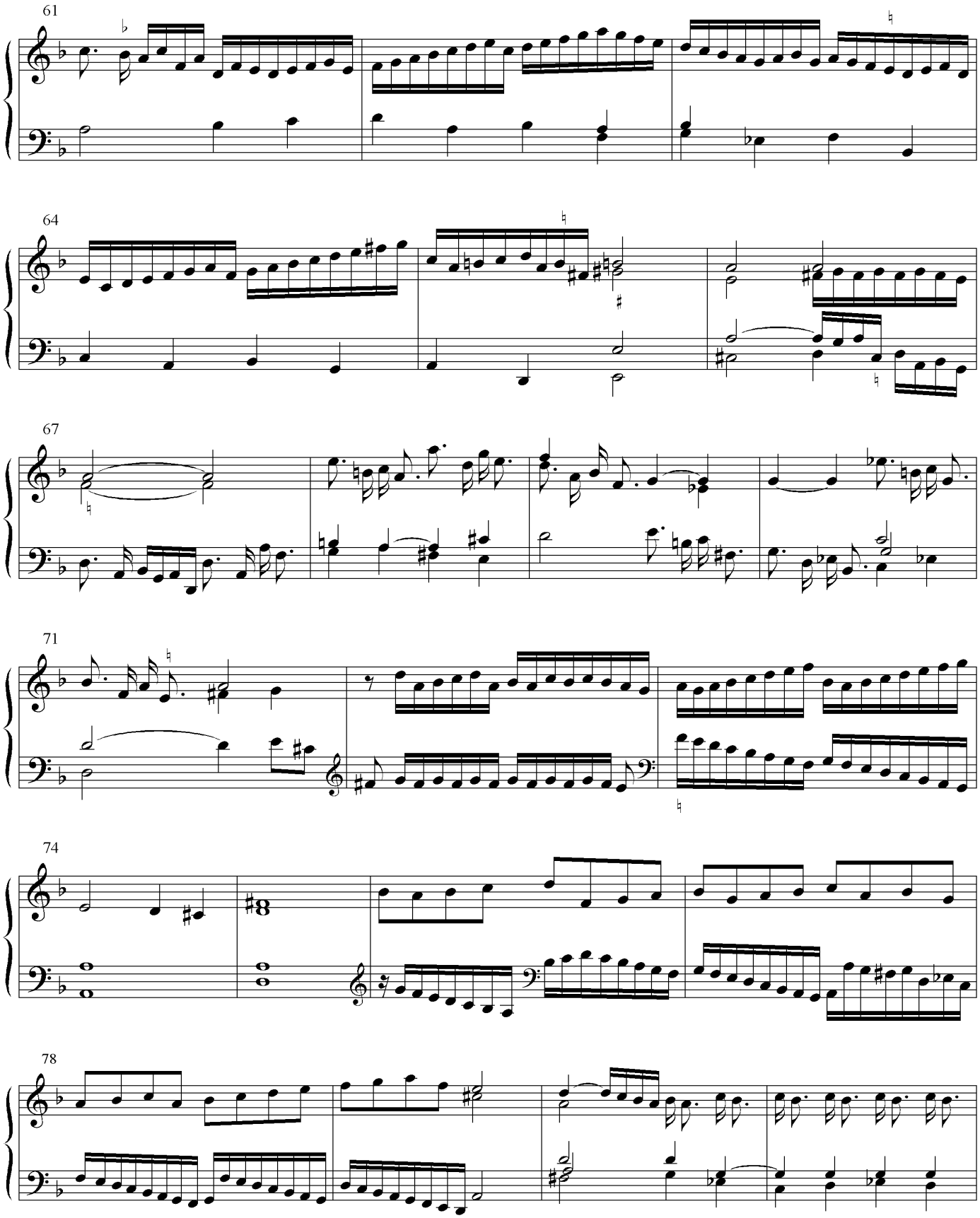
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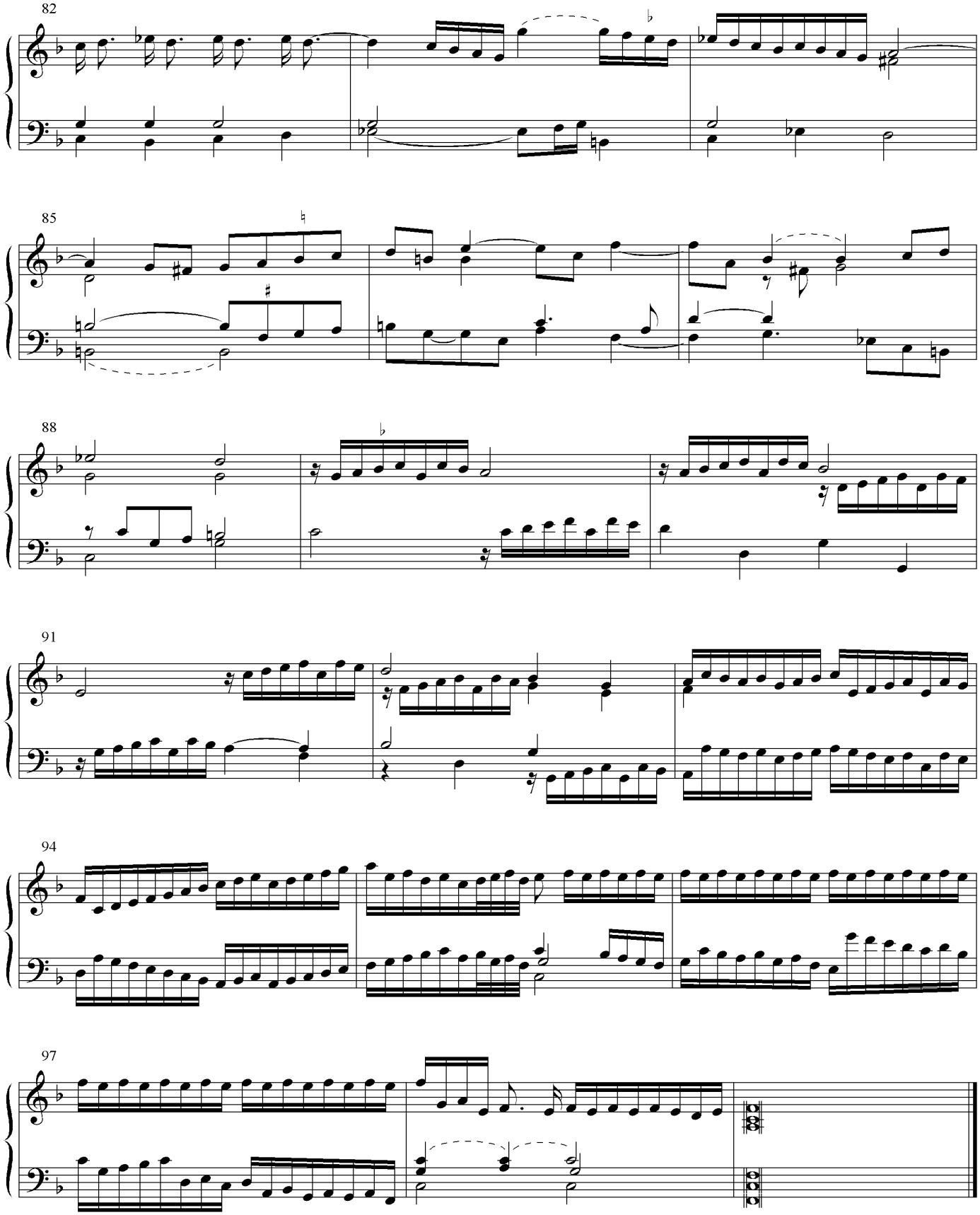
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Frescobaldi (?): Toccata di Roma sexti toni

This little-known work is preserved in a single source, London, British Library, Additional MS 23623. There it bears an attribution to "Hieronimo Ferrabosco," but the name does not occur among the many members of the Ferrabosco family, none of whom is known to have been a significant composer of keyboard music or to have worked in Rome at a time when a work such as this might have been composed. The name has been plausibly explained as an error for Frescobaldi, although until recently the style of this piece was thought to make this unlikely.[1] It is tentatively included as his in the online Frescobaldi thematic catalog, where it is listed as F. 15.50.

The only previous publication of the work is in a facsimile of the source edited by Alexander Silbiger, who makes a case there for Frescobaldi's authorship.[2] The manuscript, which is evidently of Netherlandish origin, is known chiefly as a source for keyboard music by John Bull, although many of the pieces have problematical texts and attributions. How this and a handful of other Italian pieces in the manuscript reached the copyist is unknown. Equally uncertain is the identity of the copyist, who has been named as Guglielmus à Messaus, an Antwerp musician, on a rather tenuous basis.[3]

The original notation on six-line staves (typical of Dutch but not Italian keyboard sources of the time) has been converted to modern five-line staves. The edition follows the original division of notes between the staves, which reflects their assignment to the two hands. The edition also follows original beaming of note values as well as the frequent use of tied quarters in place of halves and tied halves in place of whole notes. An exception is made in groups of small note values, which the copyist tends to beam together throughout a measure—even over several measures, drawing beams beneath or above bar lines, where passages continue for more than a measure. The edition instead beams these notes in groups containing no more than the equivalent of a half note (Frescobaldi's usual practice was to omit beams entirely for groups of eighths, and to group no more than eight sixteenths together). The source includes regular bar lines after every semibreve except at the ends of systems, where they have been tacetly added. Accidentals in the edition follow modern conventions and are not repeated within a bar, but all accidentals *added* to the score appear above or below the notes to which the editor believes they should apply.

The original notation is clear and contains only a few obvious errors, apart from the apparent omission of many essential accidentals, which are added above or below the notes. Some of these editorial accidentals are uncertain, such as those on G added in mm. 19, 44, and 65. One passage appears to have been copied a third too high, exceeding the usual upper limit of the keyboard range for pieces in the manuscript (a′). The edition emends this and other readings as listed below.

The editor retains some skepticism with regard to the attribution. Although similar in a general way to other works that have been attributed to Frescobaldi, including the toccatas found at the end of the manuscript Chigi 25, this toccata seems to jump even more frequently between passages of different types, and the texture is occasionally even thinner, as in mm. 45–48, where some filling out of the harmony appears to be necessary.

Because the piece survive in a single source, the following list of variants merely indicates points at which the edition differs from the manuscript.

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1 For a recent discussion, see "What Is a Composer? Problems of Attribution in Keyboard Music from the Circle of Philips and Sweelinck," in *Networks of Music and Culture: A Collection of Essays in Celebration of Peter Philips's 450th Anniversary*, ed. David J. Smith and Rachelle Taylor (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 113–55 (cited: 120–22). The editor's performance is online here.

2 *London, British Library, MS Add. 23623*, ed. Alexander Silbiger, 17th-Century Keyboard Music: Sources Central to the Keyboard Art of the Baroque, vol. 18 (New York: Garland, 1987), ix–x.

3 See Silbiger, viii.

m.	comment
50	r.h., last note: b-flat′ (closer to the original point of imitation, but clashes with l.h.)
51	r.h., first chord: also f′ (quarter)
83	r.h., last five notes a third higher (no tie or accidental)
86	r.h.: sharp on c″
97	l.h., fourth note from end, B [flat] not A
98	l.h., second chord f/a (third lower, no ties)

David Schulenberg
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