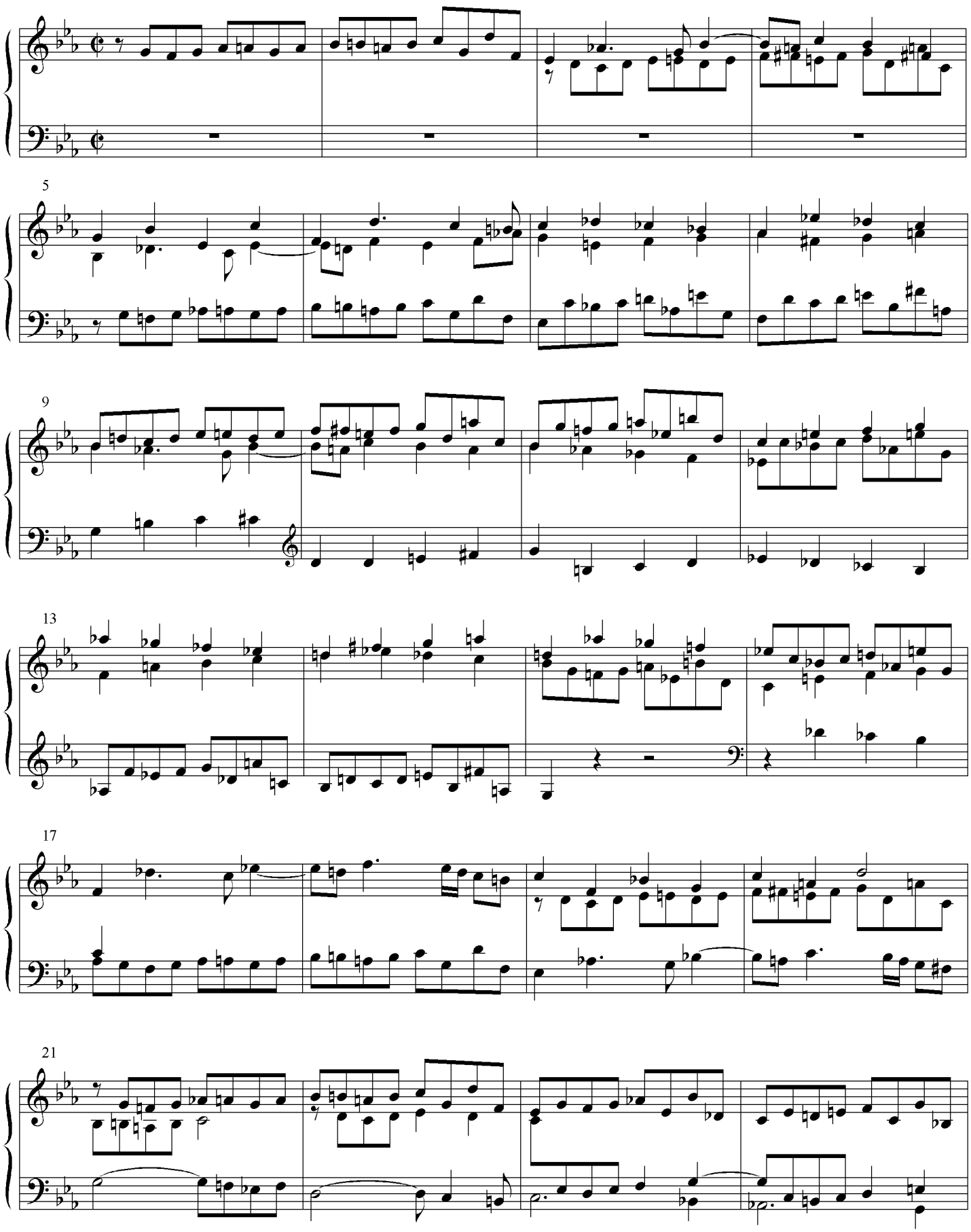
Fuga

J. S. Bach, BWV 906/2*



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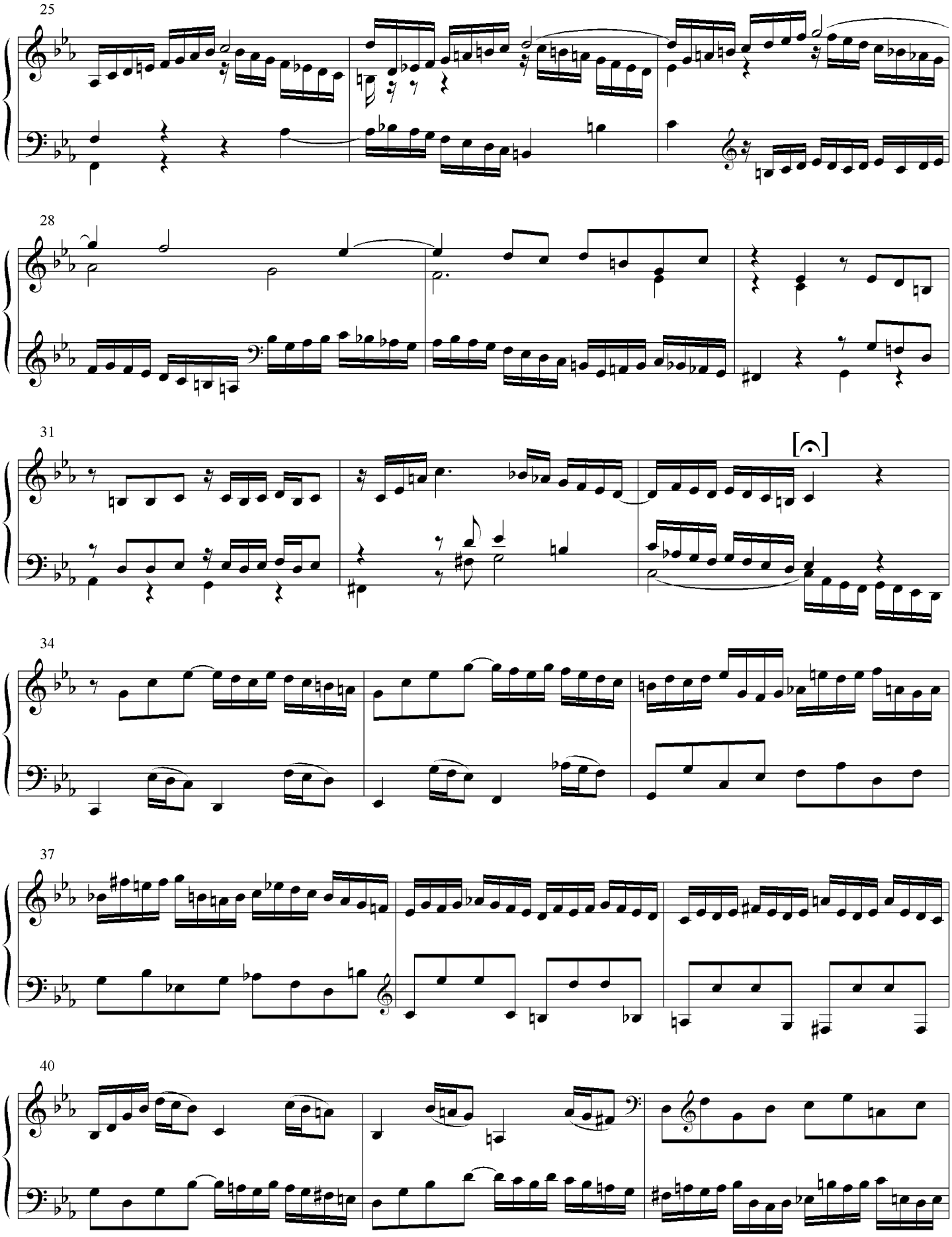
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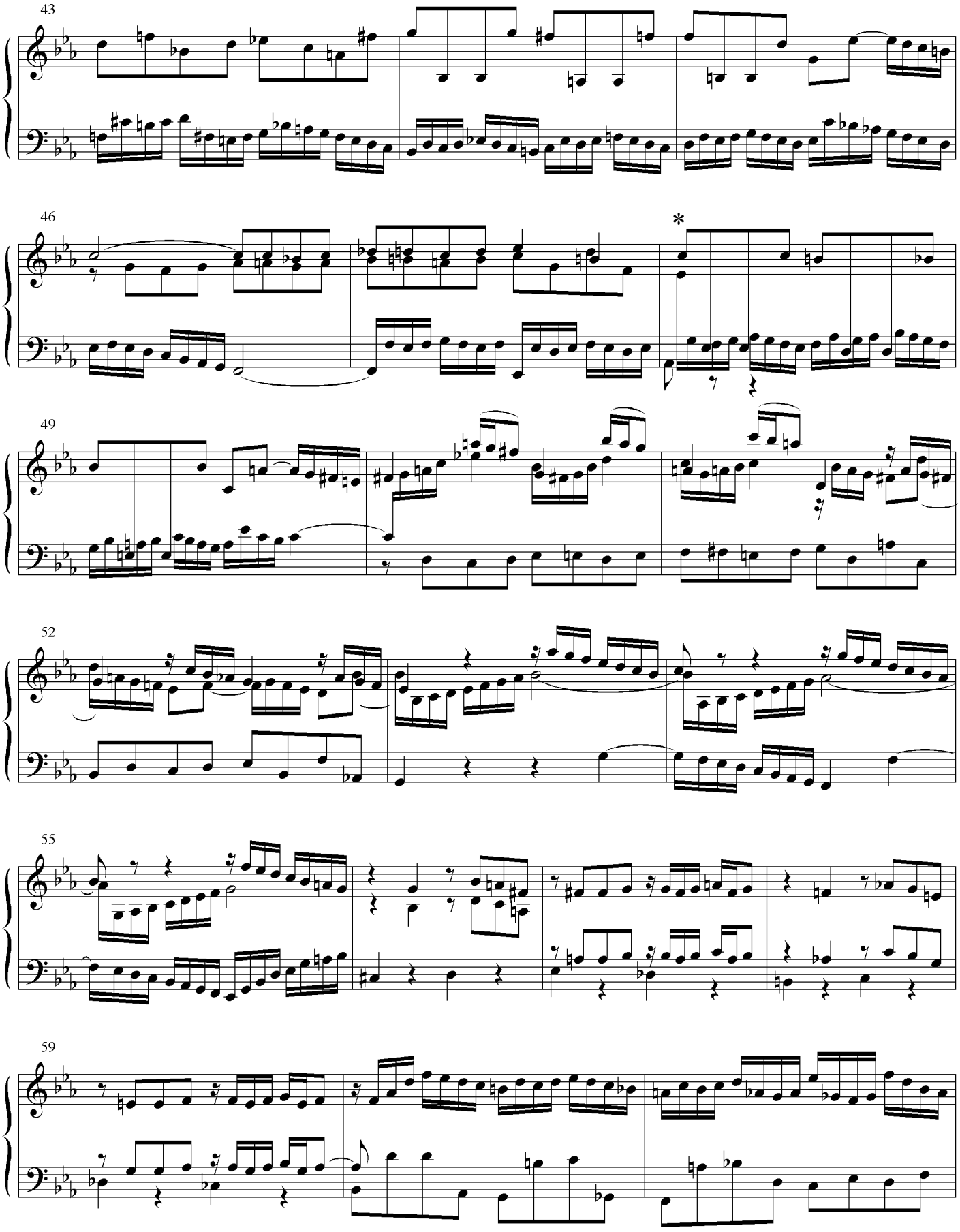
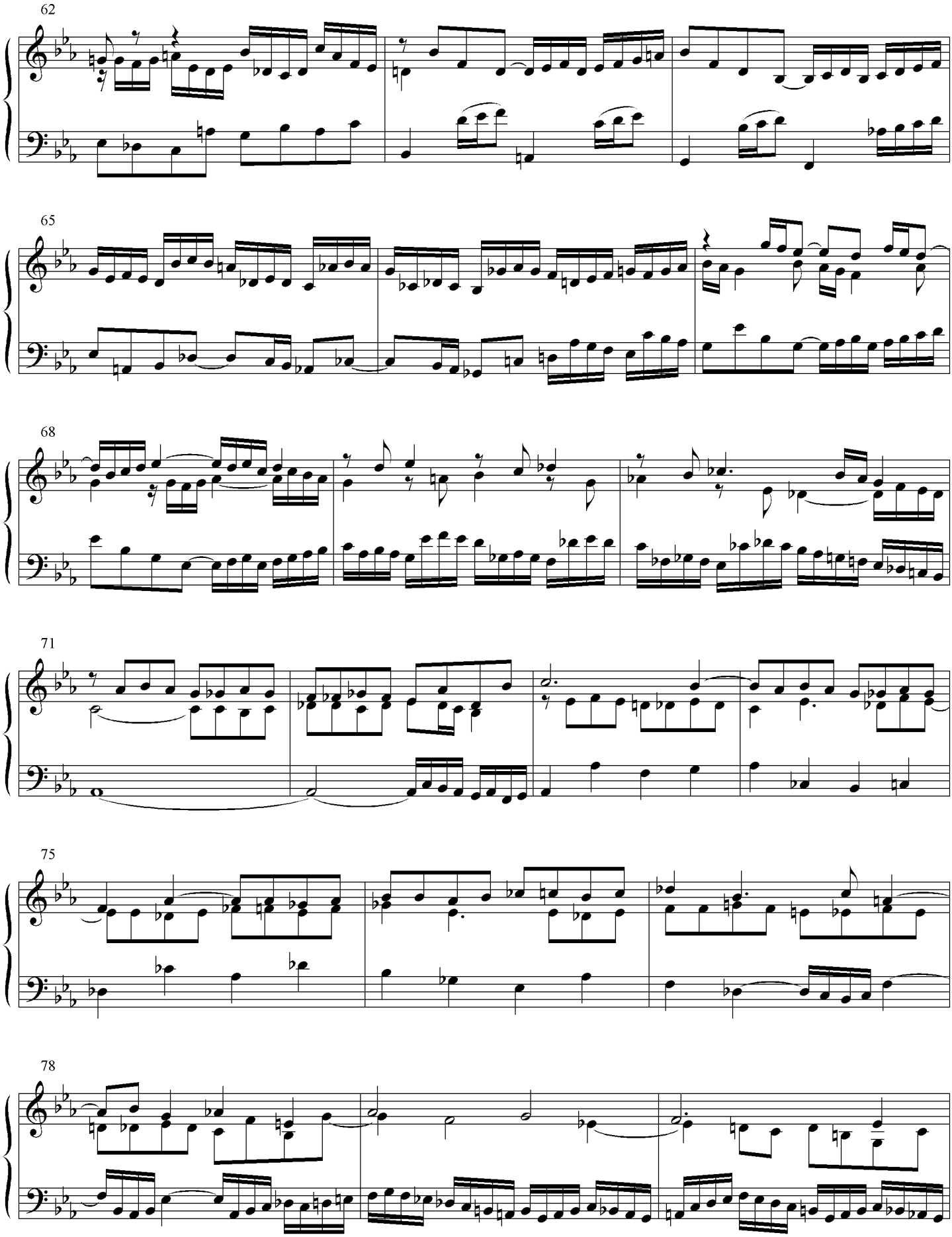


*Reconstruction begins here.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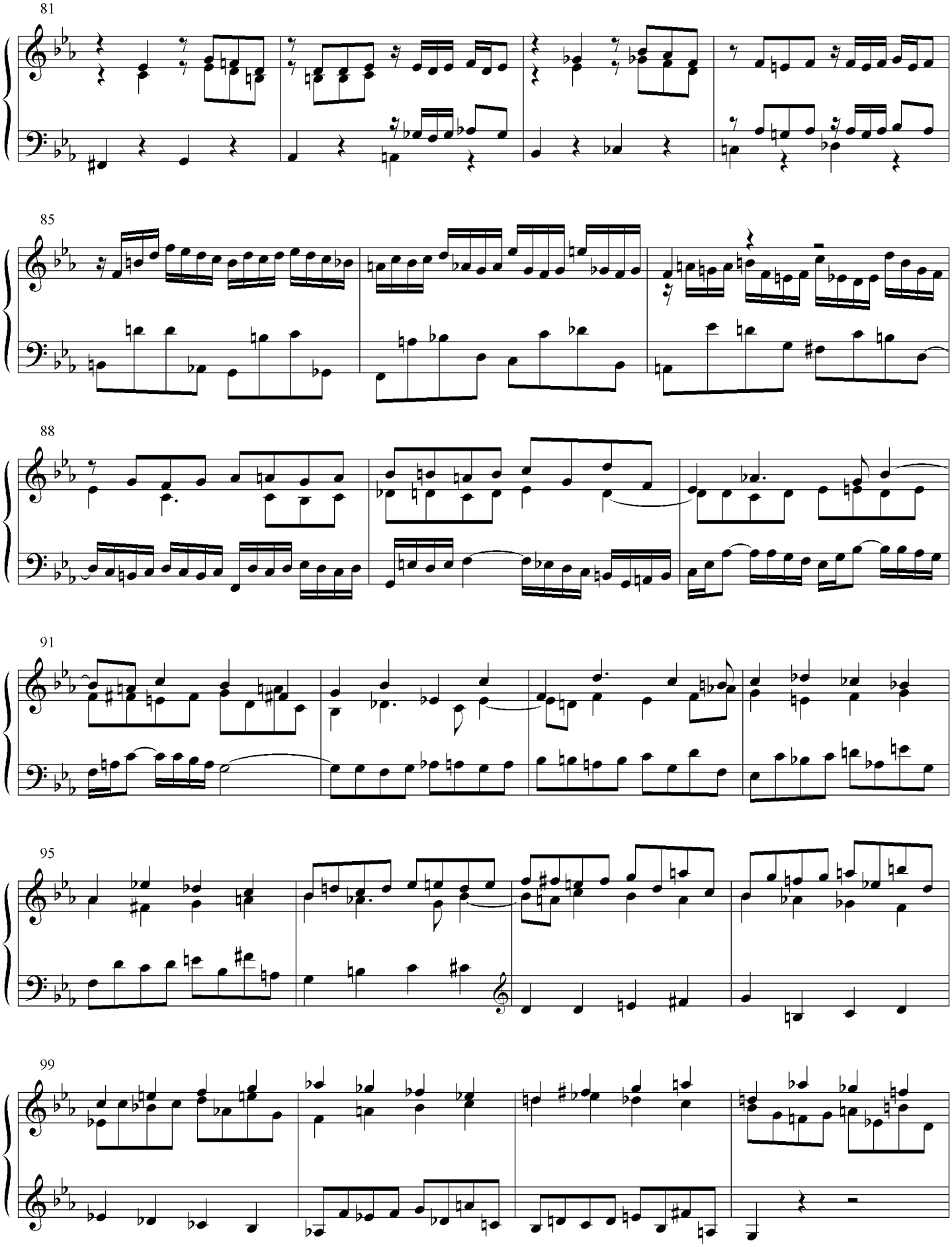
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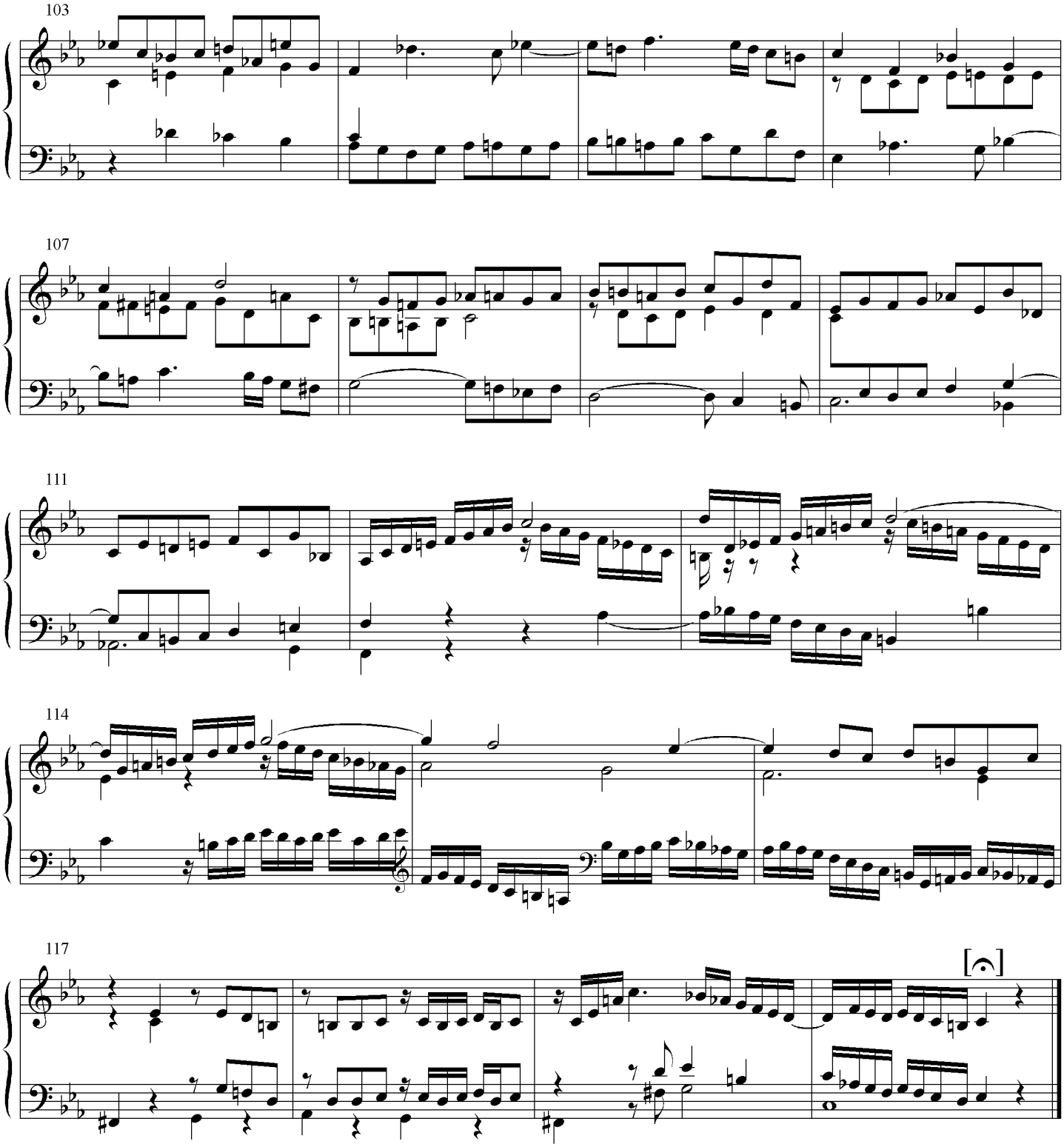
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Bach's C-minor fugue BWV 906/2 is preserved in a single independent source, the autograph manuscript Dresden, Landesbibliothek, Mus. 2405-T-52. There it follows the fantasia BWV 906/1, which is also preserved in a second autograph owned by the Bethlehem Bach Choir (housed at Lehigh University). Why Bach failed to complete the fugue is unknown, although it is curious that this is not the only fugue fragment in which he quoted his own name; the motive B(flat)-A-C-H (B-natural), which serves (in transposed form) as countersubject, also appears in the incomplete *Fuga a 3 soggetti* from the *Art of Fugue.*

Whether Bach really left either fugue incomplete or simply failed to finish writing out a fair-copy score of either is impossible to know. Small alterations in the autograph of the present work, probably made while Bach was writing it out, suggest that he was making corrections as he drew toward the end of the extant fragment. It is possible that he stopped work after concluding that the composition required more substantial revision than could be carried out in the course of preparing the existing manuscript. Yet he does not appear to have decided to abandon the fugue completely, for in that case he might have destroyed the score.

In any case, the work is worth studying and playing on account of its extraordinary chromaticism, reminiscent of that in several movements from part 2 of the *Well-Tempered Clavier,* which probably is roughly contemporary (from the years around 1740). The crossing of the hands, which begins in the episode just prior to where the manuscript breaks off, clearly reflects the use of the same technique in the preceding fantasia. Bach certainly would have developed it here in the same systematic way, both hands eventually employing the device.

A provisional solution to the problem of how to complete the fragment, which ends with m. 47, is to return at that point to m. 3 and repeat from there through m. 33 (or to the downbeat of m. 34). The resulting "Dal Segno" form, suggested by previous editors, superficially resembles that of several other fugues by Bach (notably the "Wedge" fugue in E minor for organ, BWV 548/2). But the proportions differ, those works having a much larger "B" section in relation to the outer "A" sections. Nor is there any indication (such as a fermata) that m. 33 or m. 34 is to serve as the "Fine" or end of the piece. Indeed, although m. 33 clearly marks an important structural division, the cadence leading up to that point is not entirely satisfactory as a conclusion for the work.

Nevertheless the present reconstruction accepts the idea of a Dal Segno ending as the only one that allows a completion of the fugue using music that is actually by Bach. Moreover, nearly all the intervening material of this version, that is, the latter portion of the "B" section (mm. 48-87) is limited to reworkings of music present in the extant fragment:

mm. 48-9 = mm. 44-5 transposed, with exchange of parts

mm. 50-1 combine the original subject with the new idea introduced at m. 34 (bass)

mm. 53-5 derive from mm. 25-7

mm. 56-7 are a transposed restatement of mm. 30-1, repeated and again transposed in mm. 58-9

mm. 60-1 are a transposed restatement of mm. 38-9

mm. 63-6 invert the material of mm. 40-3 and are then repeated, transposed and with parts exchanged, in mm. 67-70

mm. 71-8 develop the original subject in stretto and inversion

mm. 79-82 are a transposed restatement of mm. 28-31, of which the last two measures are again restated in mm. 83-4

mm. 85-7 derive from mm. 38-9

mm. 88-91 restate mm. 1-4 with new counterpoint

A slightly different version of the present reconstruction appeared in chapter 9 of my book *The Keyboard Music of J. S. Bach* (1992, 2006), which contains further discussion.