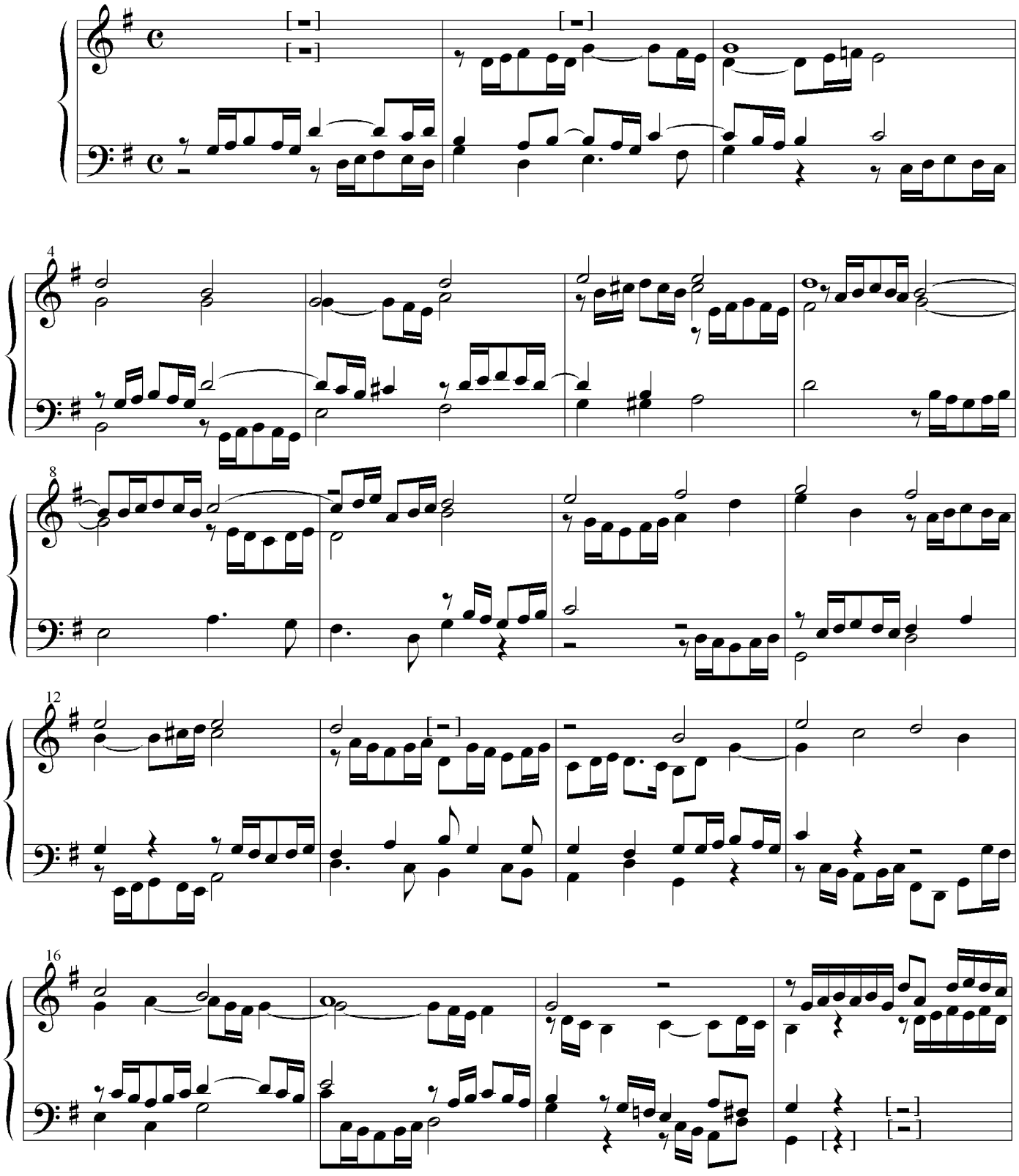
Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern

J. S. Bach, BWV 764 (completion by David Schulenberg)



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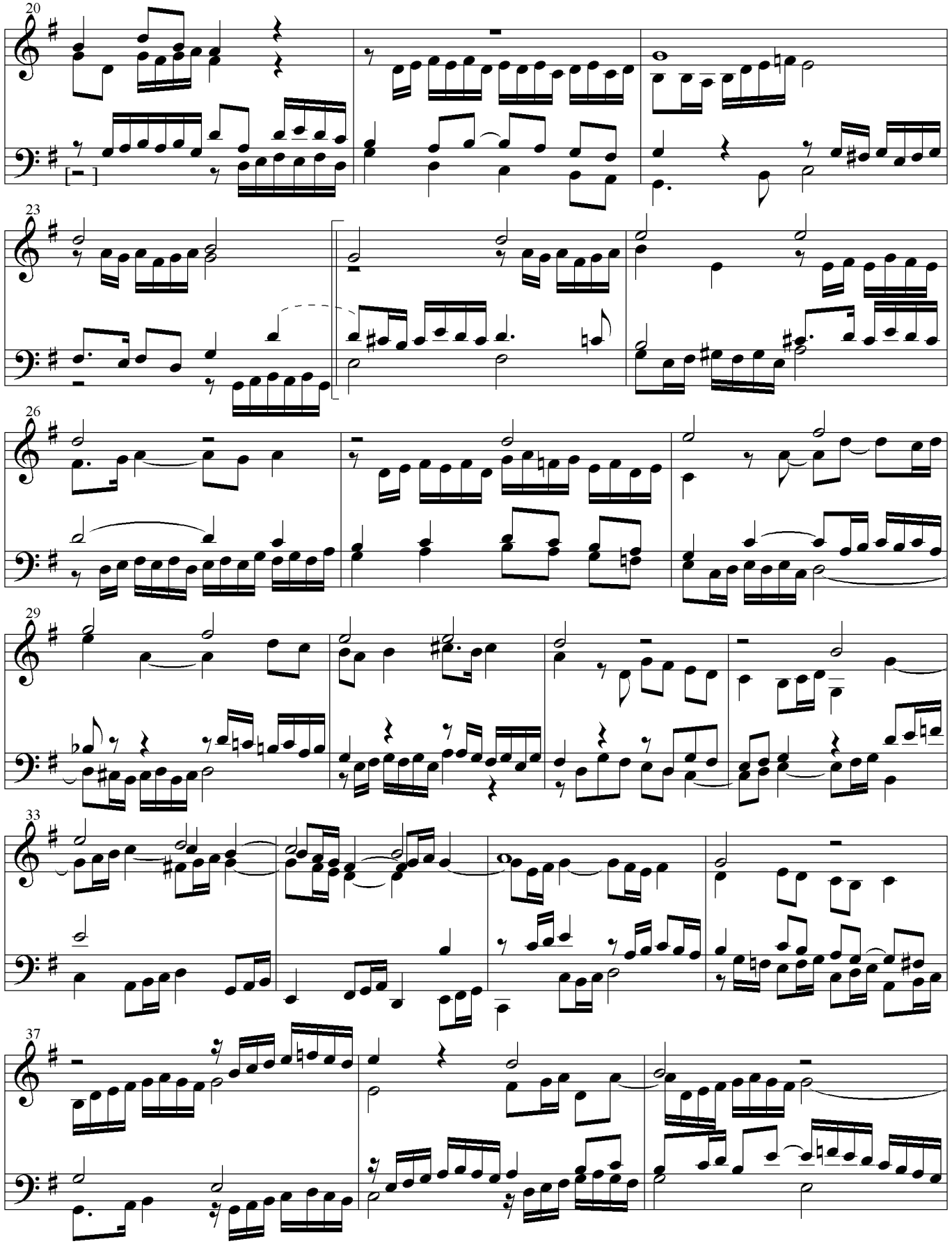
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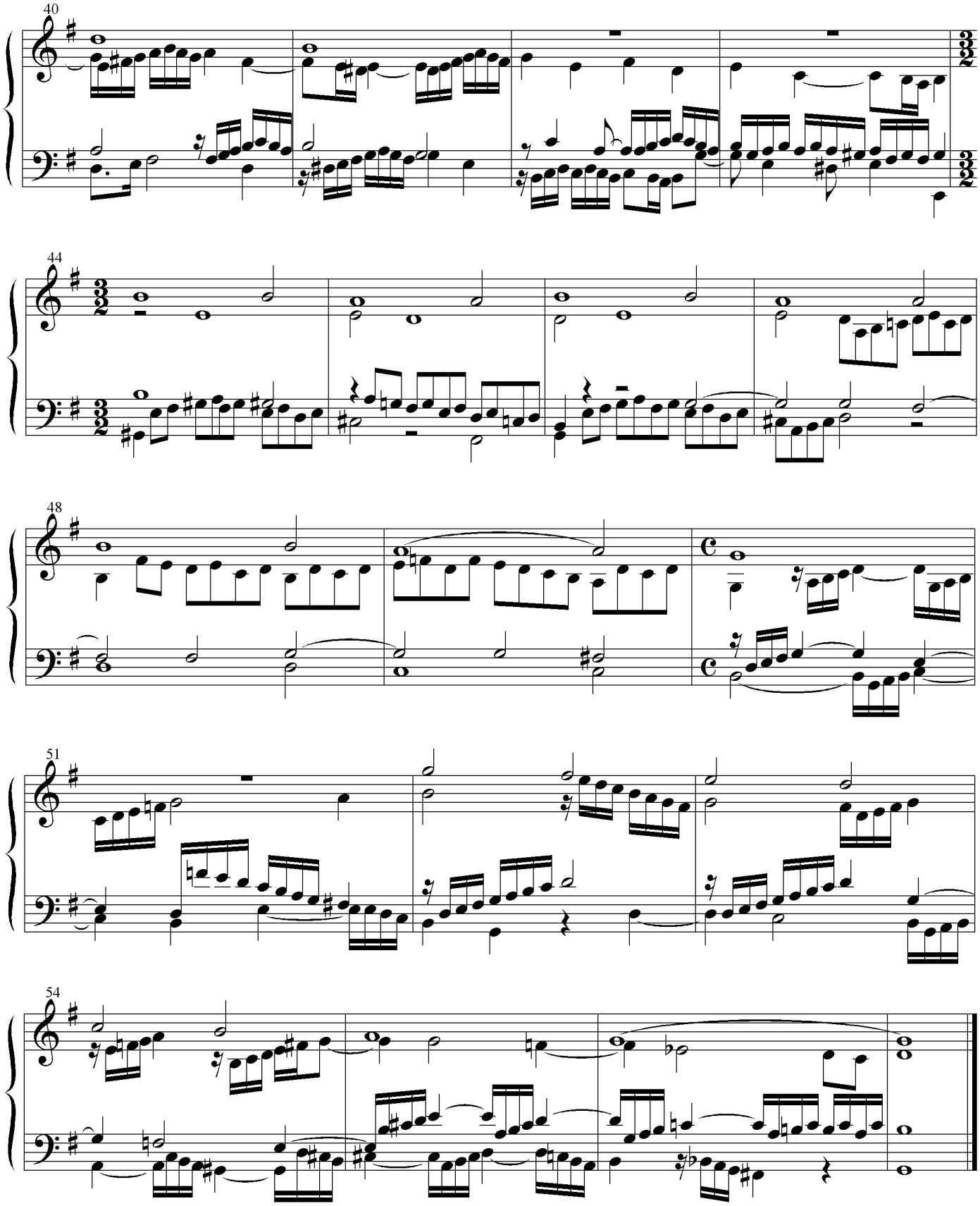
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Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern, BWV 764

This is one of two settings of the famous chorale melody preserved in Bach's autograph score in the manuscript Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Mus. ms. Bach P 488. Although the latter is no longer thought to be “Bach's Earliest Autograph” (as it was described in the article of that title by Russell Stinson, *Musical Quarterly* 71 [1985]: 253-63), it is certainly one of the oldest surviving examples of his musical handwriting, probably dating from his early years at Arnstadt (ca. 1703-5). The first of the two settings, BWV 739, is for organ with pedals and occupies five pages; it is complete. The second setting, BWV 764, breaks off after just three measures written at the top of a second page. This page is nevertheless ruled, like the first, in five systems, and another five are ruled on the reverse, which is the final page of the manuscript. The present version of the piece is based on the assumption that Bach planned a setting that would have more or less filled the three ruled pages. Because of the through-composed, line-by-line nature of both chorale settings in the manuscript, it is unlikely that the extant fragment would have furnished motivic material for the remainder of the composition. The latter is therefore freely composed, following the style of the diverse and sometimes surprising compositions included among the so-called Neumeister chorales, the early eighteenth-century keyboard settings attributed to Bach in the manuscript New Haven, Yale University Library, LM 4708. This version was first drafted in about 1985 and revised in 2005; notation improved 2020.