ANCIENT GROOVE MUSIC

Gregorio Allegri

(1582 – 1652)

Symphonia pro chelybus

omnibus numeris absolutissima

Edited by

BEN BYRAM–WIGFIELD

for 2 violins,
viola and violoncello

www.ancientgroove.co.uk

EDITORIAL NOTES

Source: Athanasius Kircher, *Musurgia Universalis* (Rome: Corbellatti, 1650) Tom. 1 (lib. vi) pp. 487–494.

Gregorio Allegri (1582 - 1652) is most famous for his sacred choral music, particularly his *Miserere mei* setting for two choirs. However, his instrumental music is afforded considerable praise in Athanasius Kircher's publication of 1650.

Kircher titles the work as '*Symphonia pro chelybus omnibus numeris absolutissima*' — Sinfonia for strings, most perfect in all its parts. He introduces it as a work 'in which the symphonic art is manifest so exactly that nothing seems able to be added, or taken away.'

Kircher describes (with an illustration) the bass instrument as a violone, a bass of the viol family. As the names suggest, a violone is slightly larger than the modern violoncello, the bass of the violin family. (Though terminology and specification of instruments is often imprecise in this period.)

Scholars today hesitate before describing this work as a 'string quartet', as that label has too great an association with the style and structure of the late 18th century. The 16th century had seen the emergence of a large body of music for viol consorts, mostly repurposed from vocal music, and thus requiring a variety of instruments that matched the range of the vocal lines. The 17th and 18th centuries would produce considerable music for a variety of instrumental ensembles, most of which would require chorded continuo in addition to the written parts, and which were frequently performed by more than one player on the same line. Alongside this practice, some music for trios and quartets was written without the need for a continuo. Allegri's quartet falls into this category, and is one of the earliest examples of music explicitly scored for this functional group of string instruments. It is from consorts of this kind that the formal 'true' string quartet would arise in the latter part of the 18th century, notably in works by Joseph Haydn.

The music is presented in original note values and at original pitch, though the barring is twice as frequent as the source, which also displays some irregularity. Editorial intervention has been kept to the minimum: cautionary accidentals are in brackets; suggested tempi and metric relationships have been offered (though they should be considered nothing more than suggestions).

Original clefs are G2, G2, C2, C4 (though the first system of Kircher's score has an erroneous C4 clef for the viola; the position of the notes suggests C2, which is used for the rest of the work.)

The following alterations to the music have been made:
22, V2: first note is G in source; changed to E.
33, V2: last note in B in source; changed to C.
38, V1: last note is G in source; changed to A.

Instrumental parts are available on request.

Ben Byram-Wigfield
London, 2018

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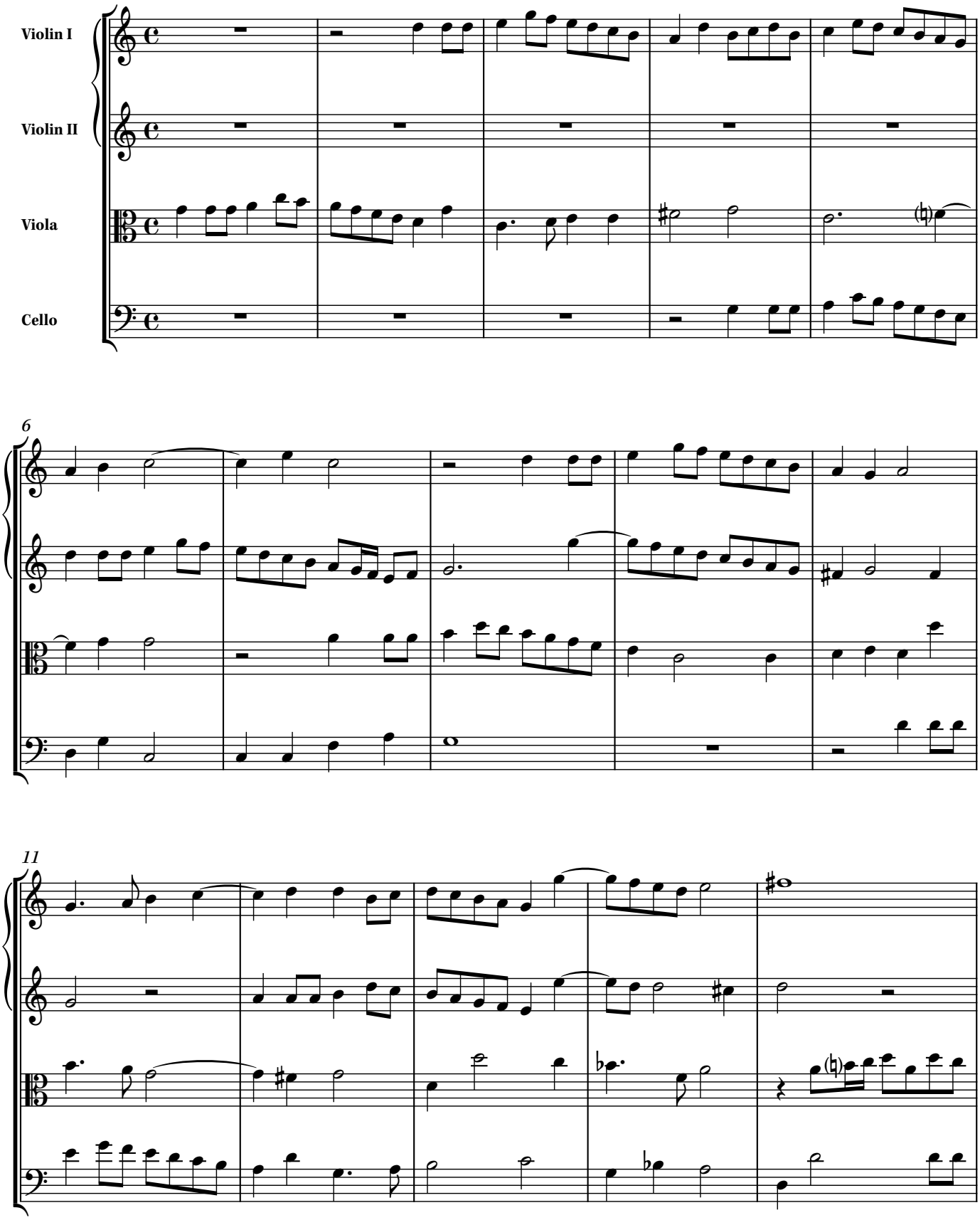
GREGORIO ALLEGRI
(1582 - 1652)

I



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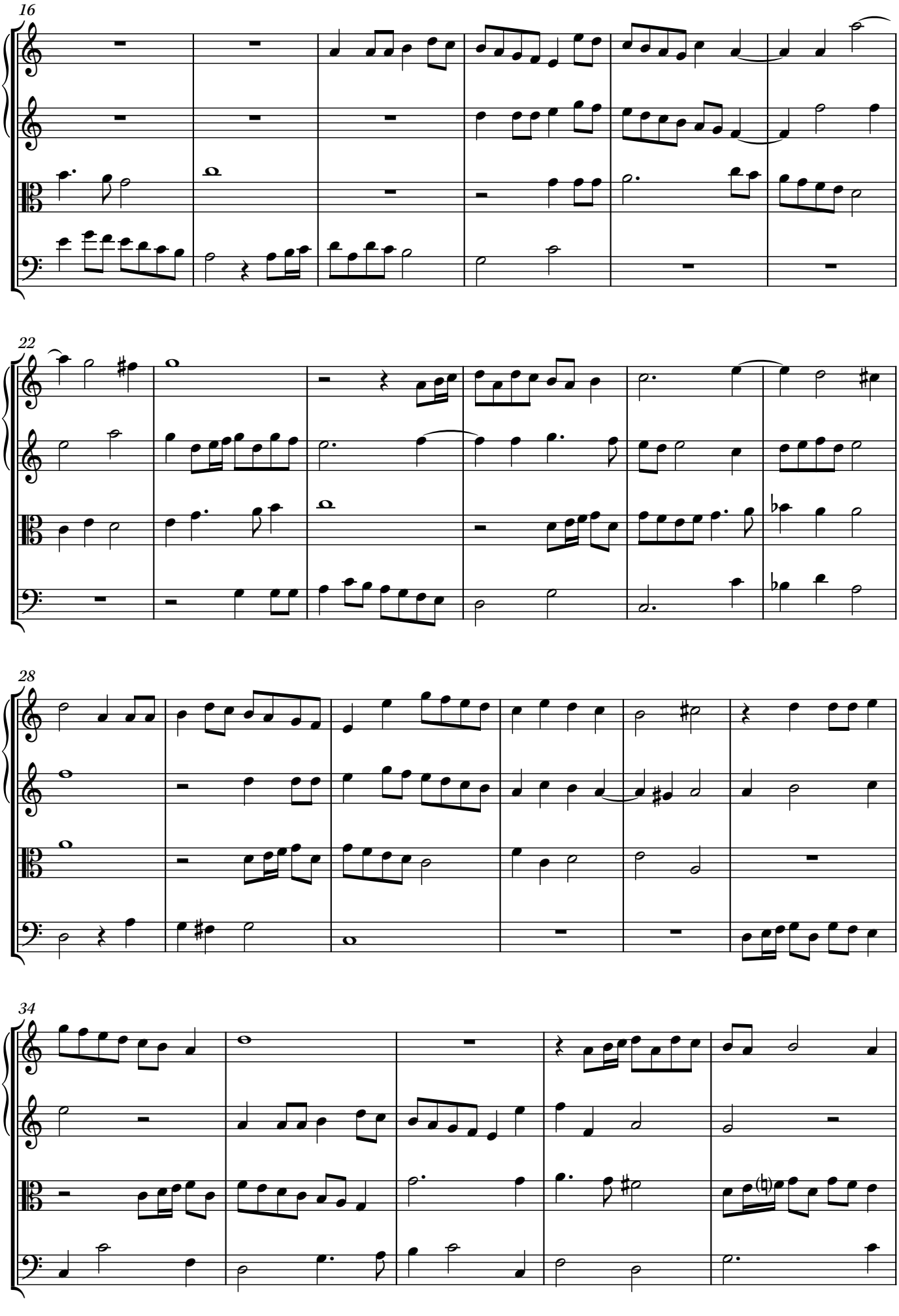

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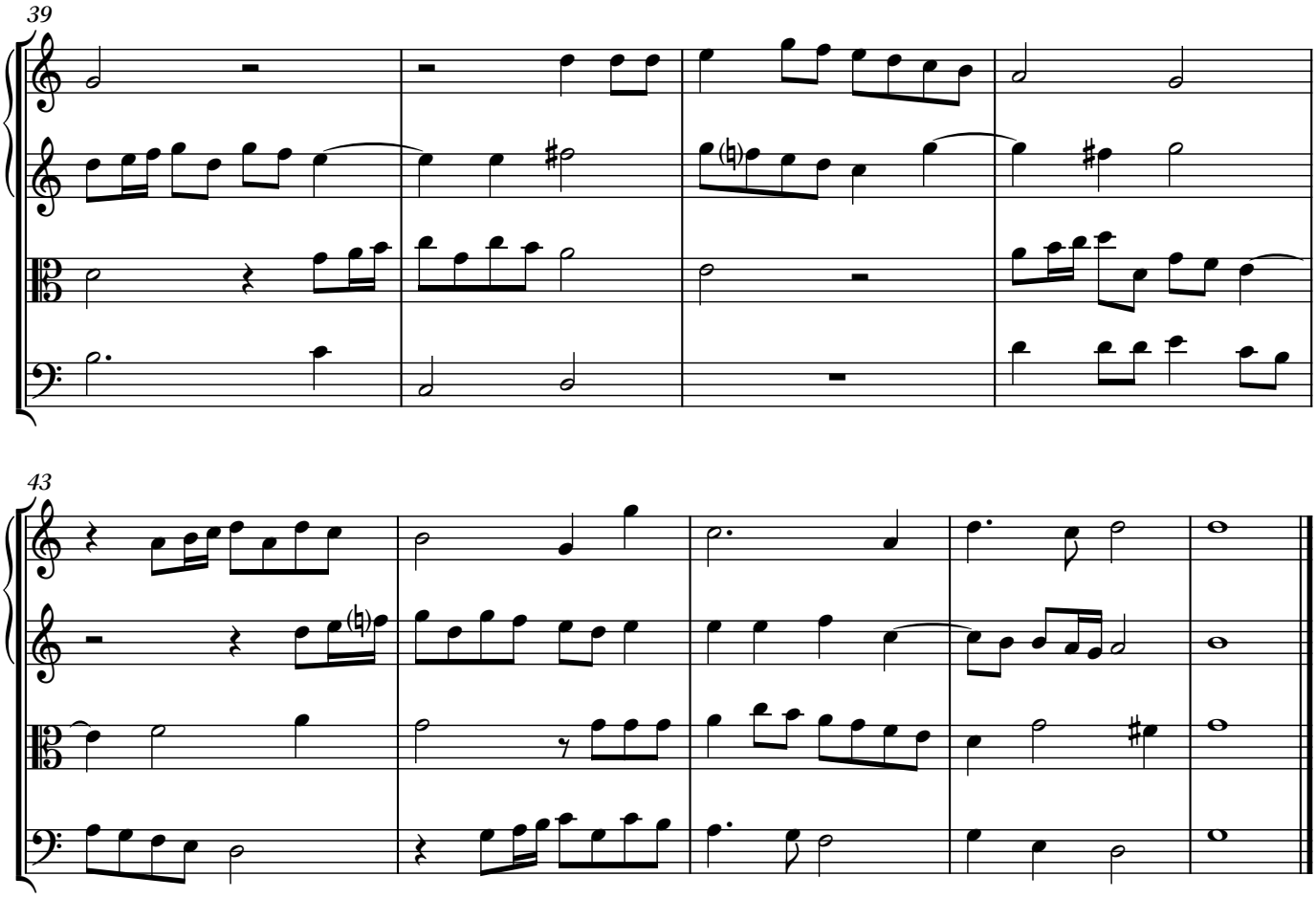

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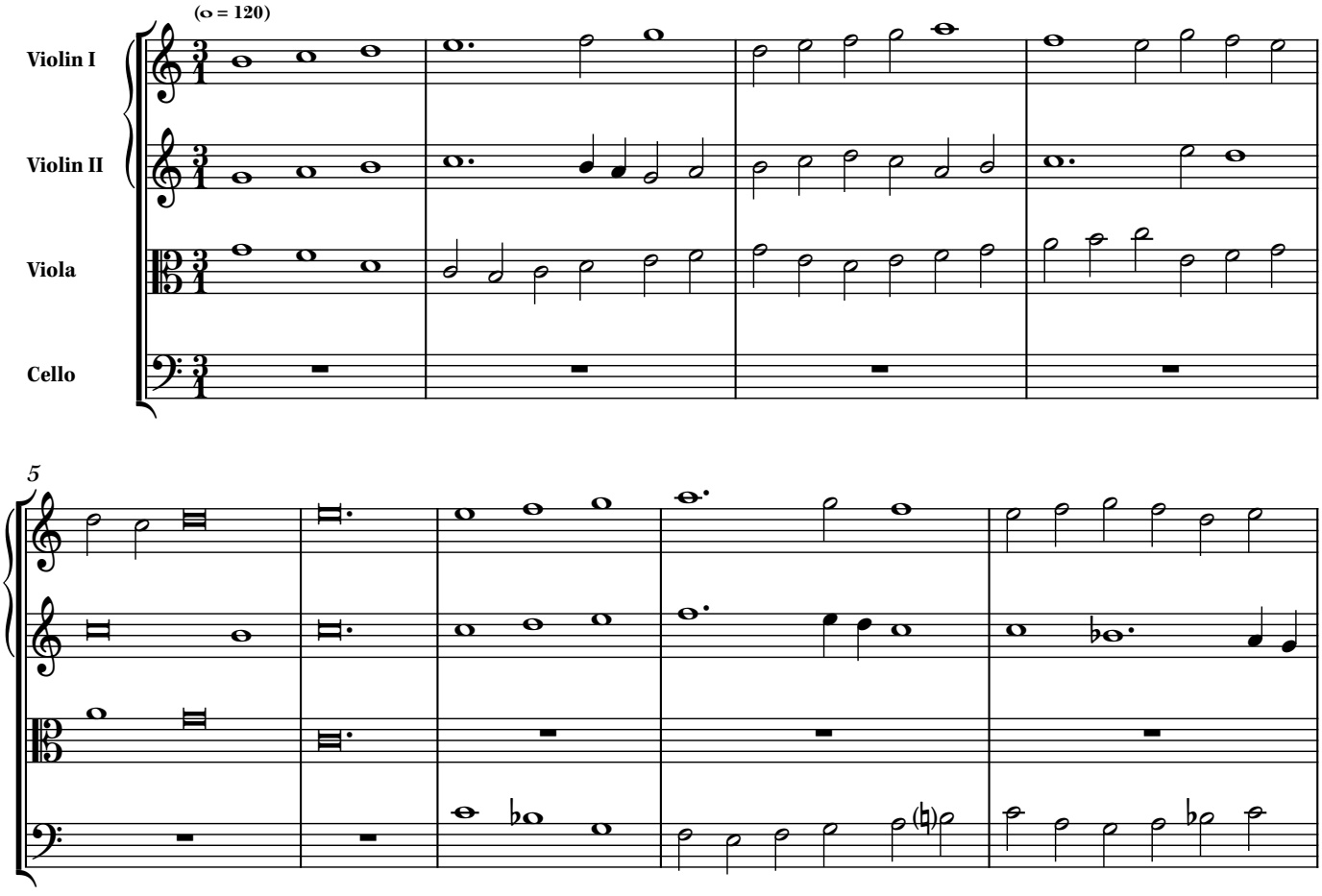

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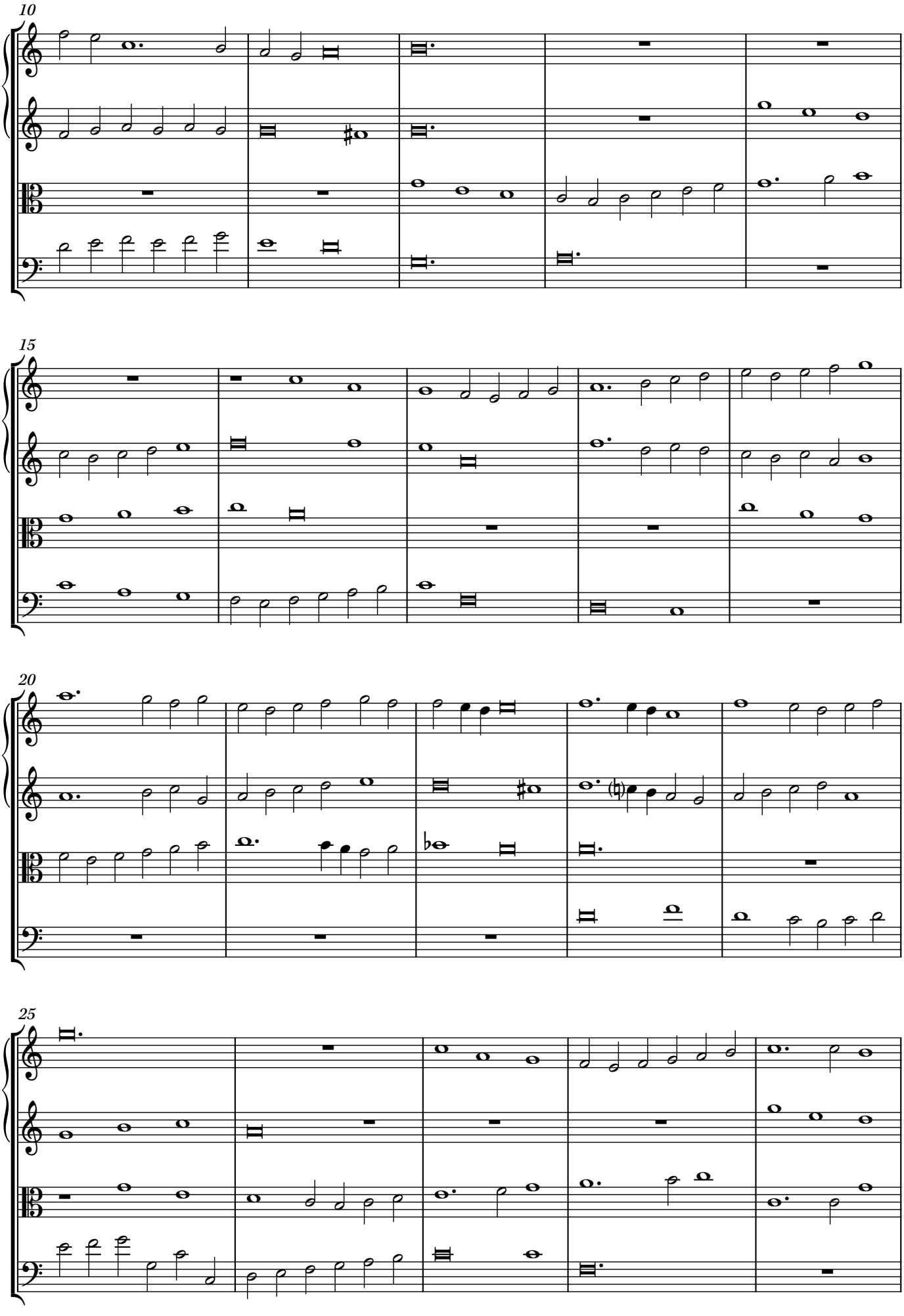

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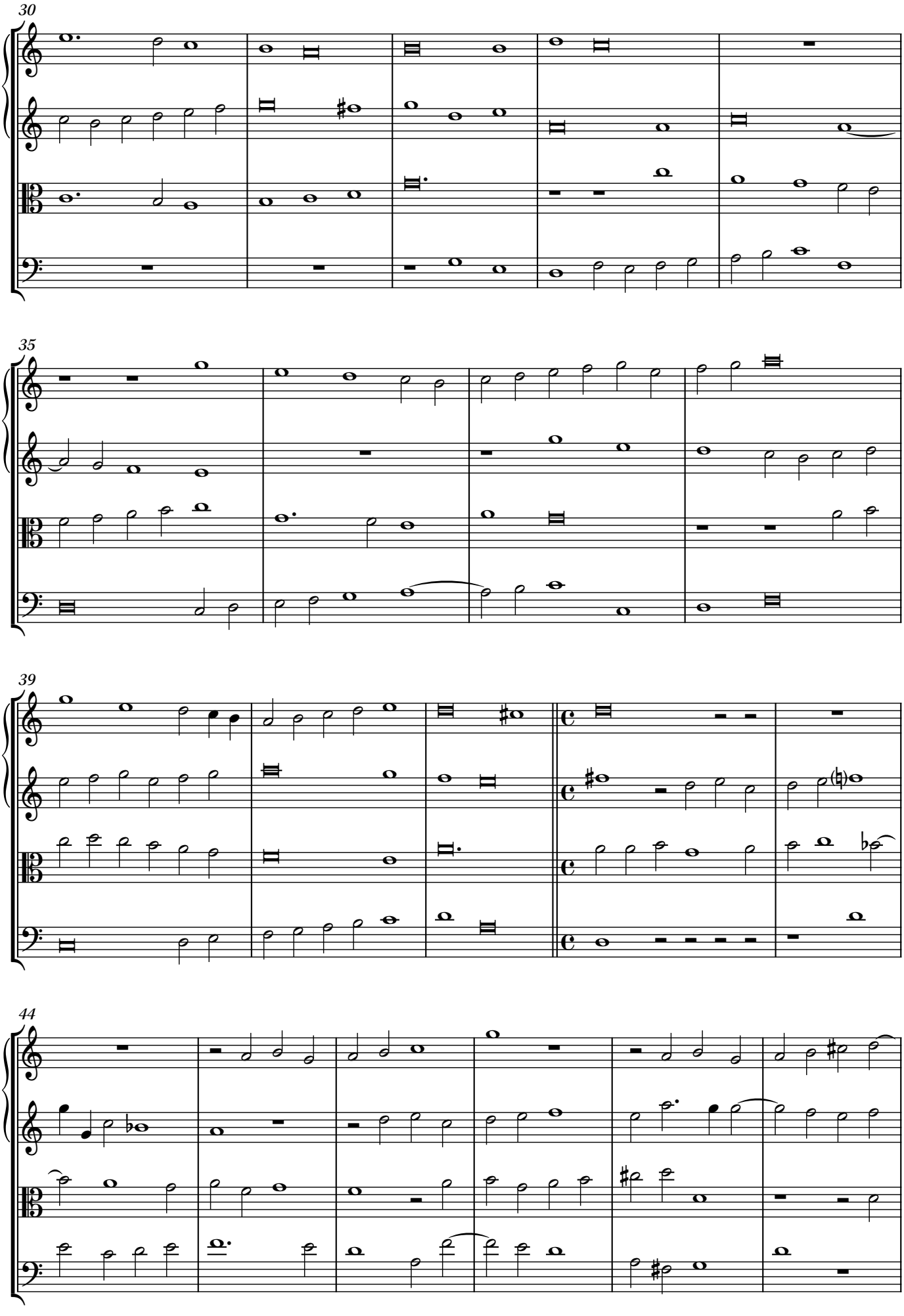

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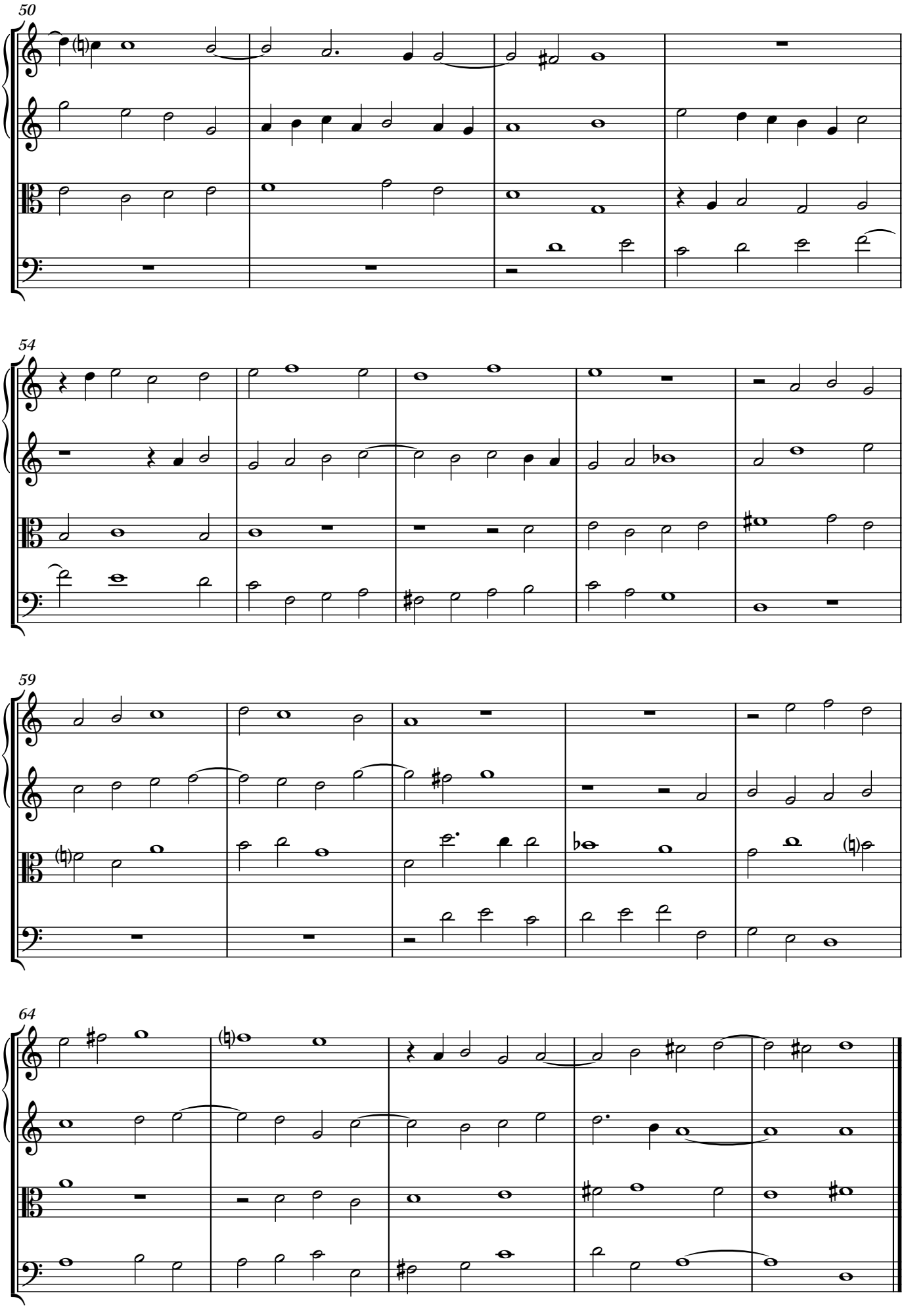

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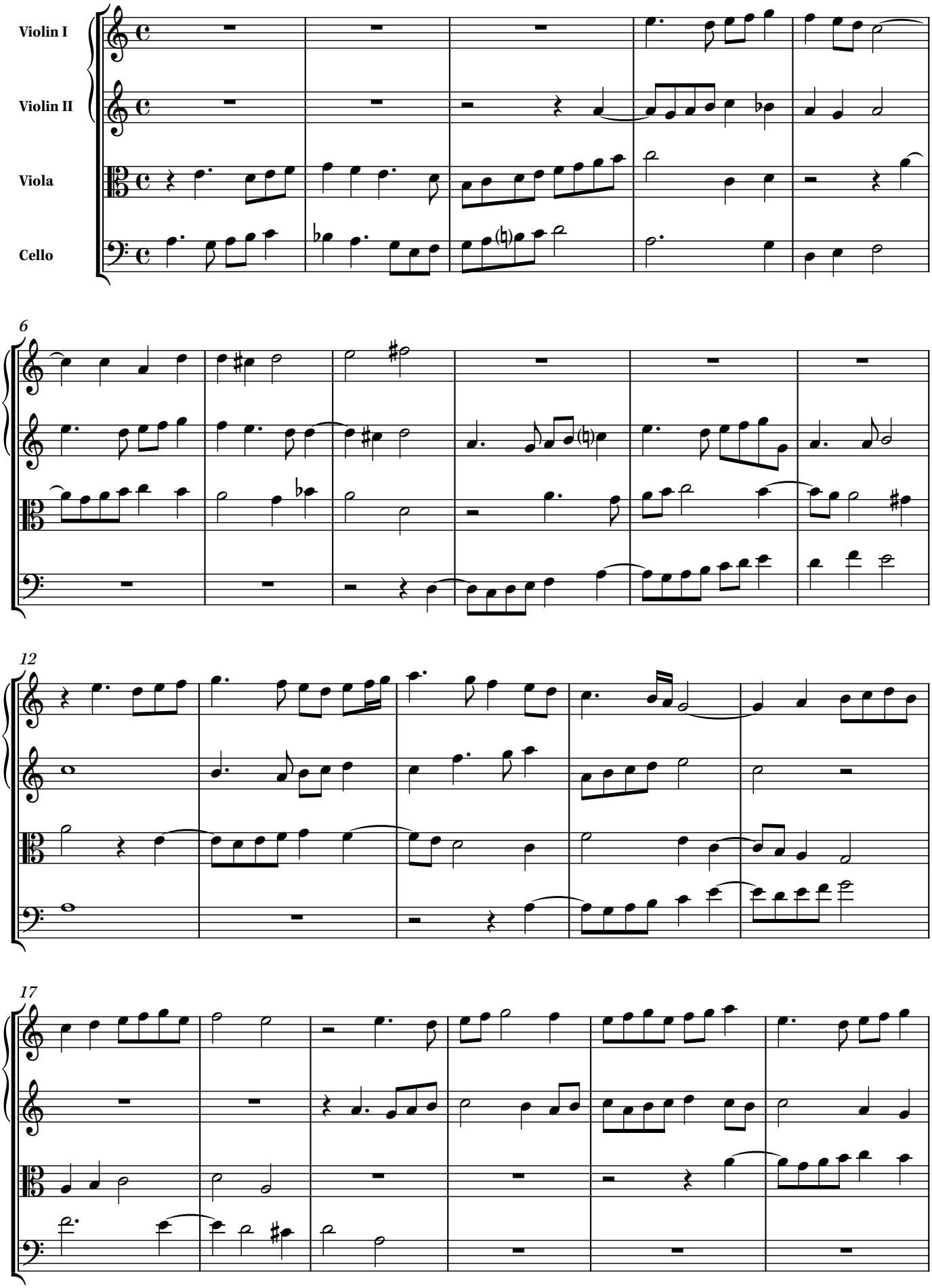
III



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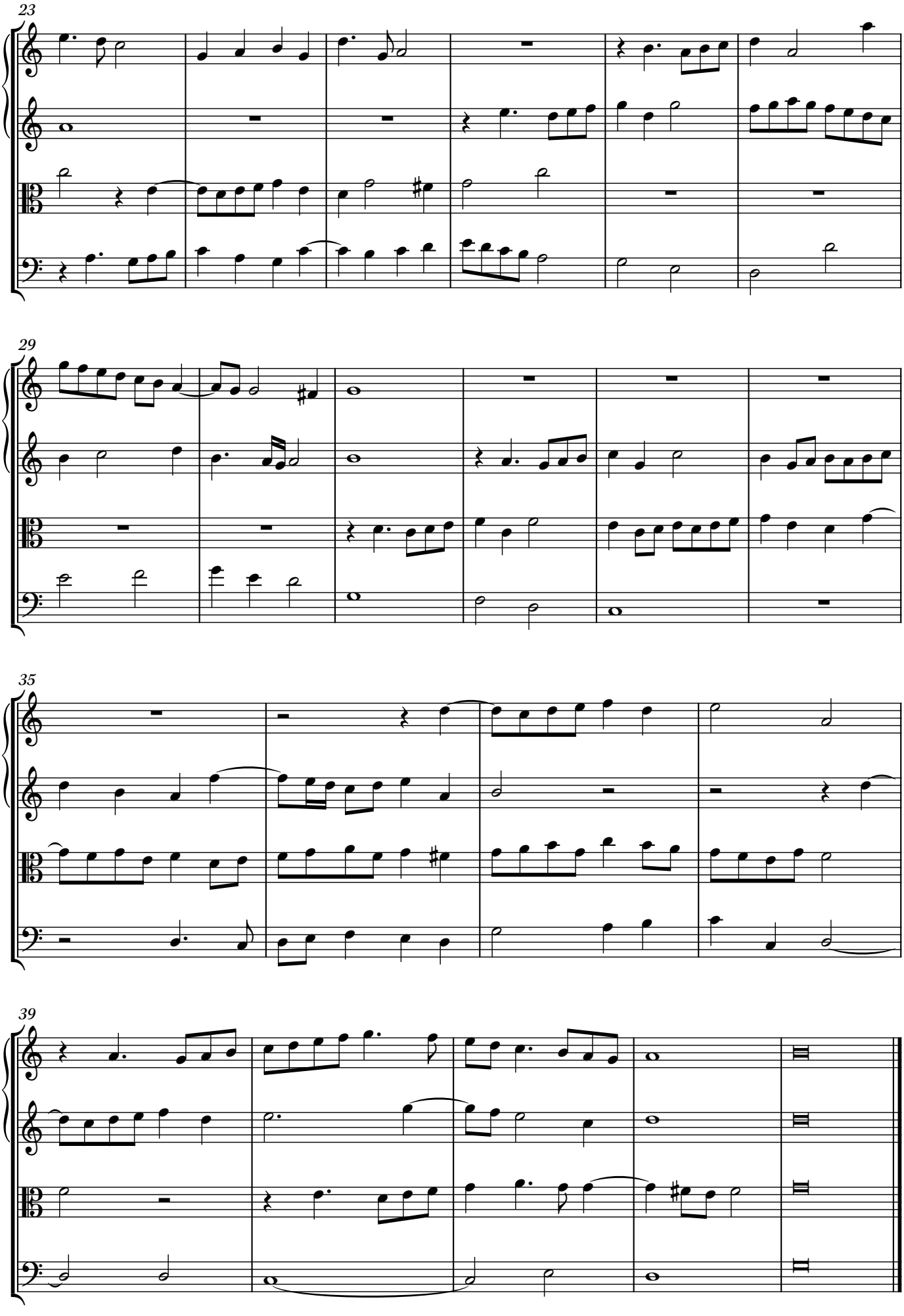

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