Georg Rhau

Tricinia

Arranged for treble, tenor and bass viol trio

Dick Yates
December 2024

Introduction

Tackling the transcription of the 1542 publication of *Tricinia* began only after considerable hesitation. Both its scope and its complexity urged caution. The *Tricinia* is a collection of 90 three-part vocal pieces, containing as the subtitle proclaims, "both ancient and modern in the art of the music of the symphonists, Latin, German, Belgian and French that have not been printed before this." The composers whose works have been compiled range over the previous century, although a large number of pieces are not attributed. The majority are sacred pieces with Latin texts, followed by an assortment of both sacred and secular works in German and French and published as typeset part-books when notation was in transition away from the mid-15th century mensural notation while still retaining many of its elements.

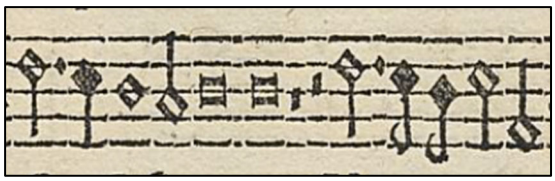
Georg Rhau

The publisher, Georg Rhau (1488-1548), was trained as a composer although all his works have been lost. For a while he was the cantor at St. Thomas Church in Leipzig – the same post that J.S Bach would occupy two hundred years later, but he earned his place in history through the publication of religious tracts, music theory books, and collections to the music of single composers, as well as compilations such as the *Tricinia*. His efforts as a promoter have been seen as crucial to the success of Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. The print shop in Wittenberg produced a very large amount of polyphonic music from about 1538 through 1545, only three years before Rhau's death.

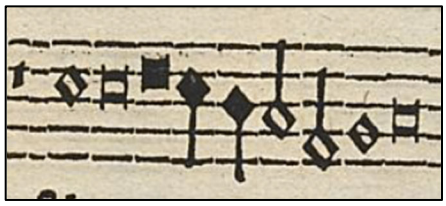
Mensural Notation

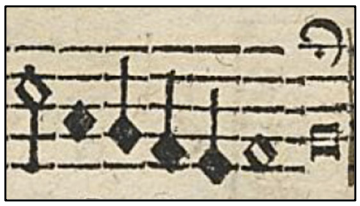
The size of the *Tricinia* – almost 400 pages and, my music scoring software reports, 45,755 notes – was not the most daunting obstacle in this project. The notation itself, with its mix of old mensural elements, requires considerable decoding. This short introduction is no place for an extensive tutorial in mensural notation, and I am certainly not qualified to do that in any case, but a few details will illustrate the difficulties and perhaps embolden others to make similar attempts. A comprehensive resource is Ruth I. DeFord's *Tactus, Mensuration, and Rhythm in Renaissance Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2015) but also the Wikipedia article has very well-organized information. Thankfully, the complex system of proportional meters where, for instance, sometimes two "half notes" equal one "whole note" but other times it takes three, is not used. Although the parts are all without barlines, all but one of the *Tricinia* are in what translates most conveniently as a 2/1 time signature with all notes half the length of the next level of duration, or *imperfectum minor* as it was categorized in the mensural notation system.

Much of the scores use recognizable, if slightly unfamiliar, symbols for notes. So, what we label eighth, quarter, half, whole and double-whole notes are:

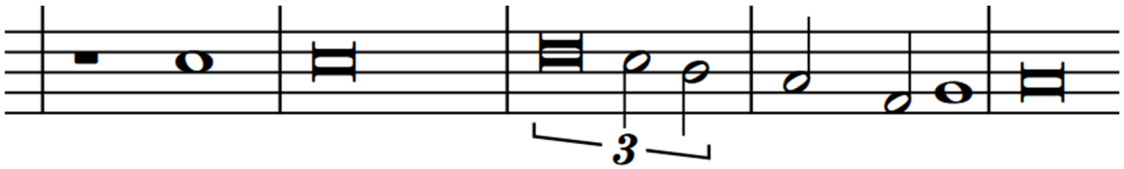


So far, so good. But then pairs or passages of notes with filled-in, black noteheads begin to appear. These are to be played with two-thirds the duration of their white-headed counterparts. This can be confusing when a “quarter-note” looks identical to a filled-in “half note” and the ambiguity can be resolved only by context. For example, what look like two quarter notes in the first figure below are actually two half notes reduced by a third and, in the second figure, the first one is a reduced half note and the following two are regular quarter notes.

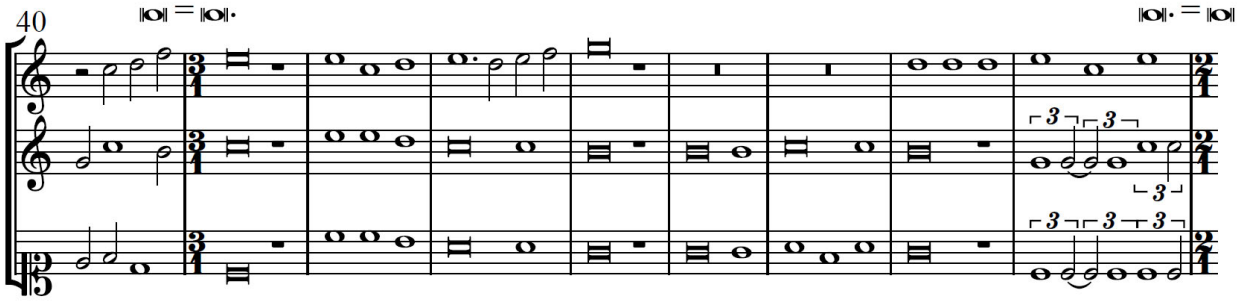




But how do you indicate two-thirds duration in modern notation? Well, that is exactly what we do when we mark notes as triplets. If three half notes are played in the time of two half notes, then the durations are reduced by a third. The first figure above is transcribed as:



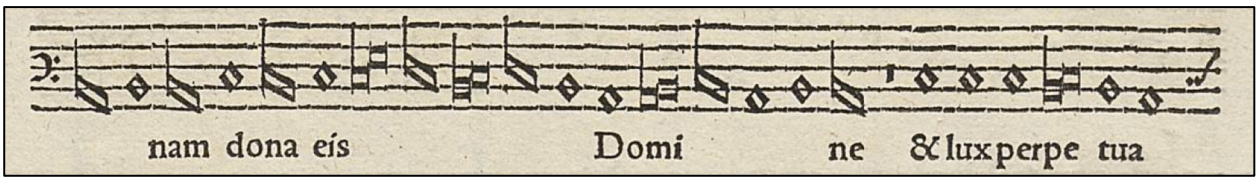
Extended passages where all parts are included in this one-third reduction are less cluttered if an actual meter change with a tempo conversion equation is used:



In the original this is a change from *imperfectum minor* to *perfectum major* (as can be seen in the triplets being necessary within the 3/1 time in the last bar).

Further complications occur with ligatures. These are a wide variety of signs to encode two or more notes into one symbol. This was once a way of showing a lyric syllable extending

over more than one note, but that pattern does not seem to be carried through at all consistently by the mid-16th century. It can result in mysterious lines such as this one:



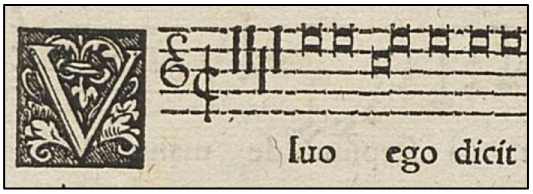
In modern notation this decodes into 34 simple whole notes (and one whole rest)!

Lining Up Parts

Because the music is in separate part books, transcription requires lining up the parts into a full score. Beyond the notation issues, this is the biggest challenge, especially because the music is unbarred, predominantly polyphonic with movement at different times in all parts, there is no proportional spacing by note durations, and staff system lengths are irregular – even broken across main beats. After each part is entered, note-by-note, the parts either end all together … or they don't. When they don't, the source of the error must be pinpointed. The first suspects are my own errors in note entry, misreading or misinterpreting the facsimile, or simply making typing errors. Audio playback is a modern miracle to help narrow down the problem. After ruling out or correcting note entry errors, the search switches to deducing errors in the facsimile, which becomes much more complicated.

The Work Begins

On the first day I did not know if my goal of a complete transcription was even possible, but the way to find out was to begin. Transcribing the first piece looked straightforward. The discant begins with that odd G clef and eight measures of rest followed by mostly long notes.



The tenor and bassus parts look uncomplicated. The parts are then all keyed in and … the discant part finishes way before the other two and sounds entirely discordant. After going over everything numnerous times, double-checking the facsimile and my note entry, reviewing everything I had learned in preparation, and finding no solution, I was stumped. Maybe some of these pieces are just impenetrable. Maybe they all are. I left the first piece and moved on to try another. I felt disappointed but had a faint touch of gratitude that a fatal obstacle came at the beginning rather than far into the project when optimism about making a complete edition would be growing.

As other pieces fell into place, albeit after some struggles, and I gradually developed a trouble-shooting toolkit for pinning down errors, I came back to the first piece. A last-ditch

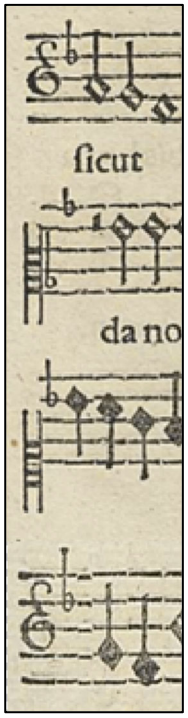
method involved lining up the ends of the parts and then working slowly backwards, moving a few notes at a time in the discant part and then playing them back to ferret out the error. But, step-by-step, this took me all the way back to the beginning of the discant part with no errors found. However, as Sherlock Holmes said, “When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” And so the answer to the mystery was that the first line, of the first part, of the first of 90 pieces began with eight bars of rest when there should have been eleven!

And only 89 to go. Those 89 were each their own adventure, although some flew by with only one pass of note entry and audio checking, and more so in the second half as I learned about my own tendencies for error and the types of Rhau’s errors to be alert for.

Notation Idiosyncrasies and Errors

Music is famously difficult to proofread. The music publisher Matanya Ophee often wrote that “Any music edition with no errors is entirely an accident.” Rhau’s *Tricinia* is no exception to this dictum as it has a considerable number of errors. Some are easily detected, especially with modern music scoring software’s ability to play back passages instantly. Single notes on the wrong line or space stand out and can be corrected. Others, such as missing or incorrect rests, as in the first piece, or wrong clefs, are often harder to pin down and resolve.

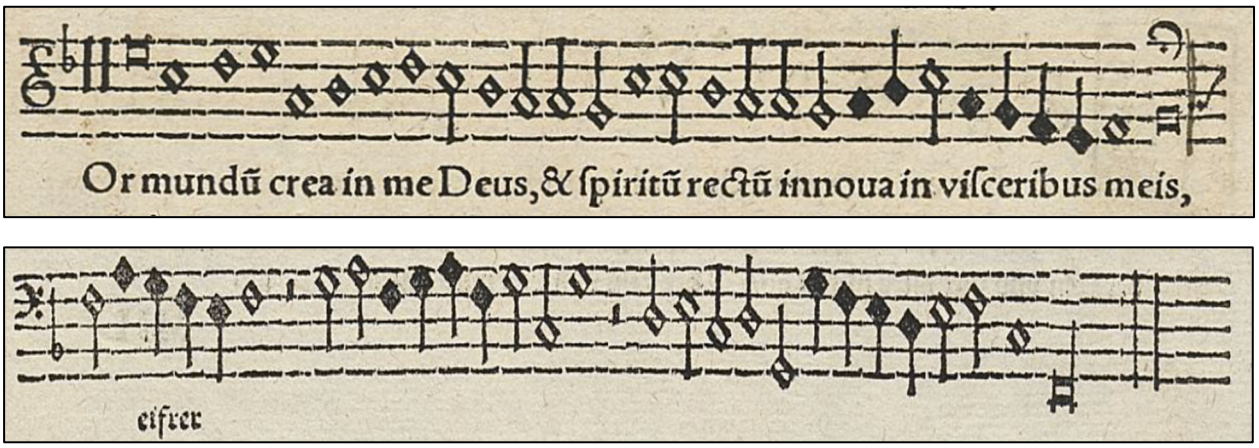
There are a couple of aspects of Rhau’s use of clefs that are puzzling and sometimes an obstacle. As was common in that era, he uses moveable clefs. Modern musicians are familiar with at least a couple of moveable C clefs, sometimes for whole parts such as for altos and tenors, but also for clef changes to minimize the number of leger lines needed, as in cello parts.



But Rhau also employs moveable F clefs, particularly one that puts the F on the middle line of the staff, and a moveable G clef with the G on the middle line rather than on the next-to-lowest line as in our common treble clef. Although my music scoring software includes a large assortment of common, uncommon and archaic clefs, that particular G clef is not included and I have not previously seen it before in period facsimiles. The workaround is to use a C clef on the bottom staff line which makes that middle line a G. The puzzle is that Rhau also uses this clef at times, and in one mind-bending place switches from one to the other *even though they convey exactly the same information*. [See the excerpt on the left. Remember that these are successive lines of one part.]

His clef changes never appear within a staff system where they can be easily spotted and accommodated when reading a part but, instead, occur only at the beginning of systems where it is quite easy to overlook a change.

Parenthetically, as a practical matter, it seems that it would be quite difficult to sing these from part books. A complication I have not mentioned and which is, thankfully, not an issue for instrumentalists, is the interpretation of the lyrics' underlayment. How would you match syllables to notes in these two examples?



If singers are sight-reading from these part books and someone gets off the beat, how does the trio restart when there are no markers of any kind: no bar numbers, barlines, rehearsal marks, or uniform system lengths? There is simply no way to indicate a particular place in a score and say "Let's restart here." How would a vocal trio detect and resolve the timing errors that I found? In 1542, eager to try out their freshly purchased part books of the *Tricinia,* how would they work out the solution to the error in the very first piece when the discant singer starts three bars too early? From my naïve perch 500 years later, and not being a singer, it seems frankly impossible. I welcome any enlightenment or, better yet, a demonstration by those better informed than I about this puzzle.

This Edition

The collection is for voices in many different combinations. The part books are labeled discant, tenor and bassus although those labels are not always accurate, or even close, as to the ranges of some pieces. Many are in the ranges of alto, tenor and bass and so sit quite naturally and without adjustment on treble, tenor and bass viols. Others were more problematic, such as #29 for three tenors. I wanted to have complete editions for each possible combination of viols. The bassus parts are mostly in the higher end of the range, so one possibility was bass-tenor-tenor, but the low tessitura from the necessary transpositions of a fourth or fifth downward just sounded too muddy and obscured the counterpoint.

The overall goal was to have practical, readable, playing scores. I settled on two editions, one for treble, tenor and bass, and one for treble, tenor and tenor. Transposition was

inevitable to accommodate the actual ranges of some parts. Constraints I set on alternate key choice were:

- Sixth string on the treble is never used.
- No parts extend at the top end beyond the fifth fret.
- Keys are restricted to those commonly used at the time and found elsewhere in the collection. These are key signatures with no flats, one flat, or two flats, although I could not avoid a couple of one-sharp key signatures to stay within the first two constraints.

Even within these constraints, some pieces require more of a "stretch" than others. A chart of the part ranges for the entire collection is included at the end to help in sorting through and matching music to the particular combination of instruments and players that you have.

Musica Ficta

Music in this time period often did not include in the printed score or parts, notes that would lie outside of the *musica recta* of the ancient hexachords. We are told that singers and instrumentalists were trained to recognize where inflections of notes were needed and to add them in performance. Although practices and theories varied across the composers and time period covered by the *Tricinia*, these added inflections are almost always the adding of a sharp to make what we now call a leading tone. *Ficta* were also required to avoid the interval of an augmented fourth, but these are needed much less often. Rhau's edition includes none of these alterations, and in fact I do not think that a sharp sign appears anywhere in the entire collection. I have followed his lead and left these decisions to the players. It should be noted that, despite differences or ambuiguity in theory and practice about some *ficta*, sources from the time are consistent calling for the final step to a cadence to be by a semitone, whether by flatting a descending note or, more commonly, sharping and ascending one. See Robert Toft's *Aural Images of Lost Traditions: Sharps and Flats in the Sixteenth Century* (University of Toronto Press, 1992) for more than you could possibly want to know about this topic.

Dick Yates
December 2024

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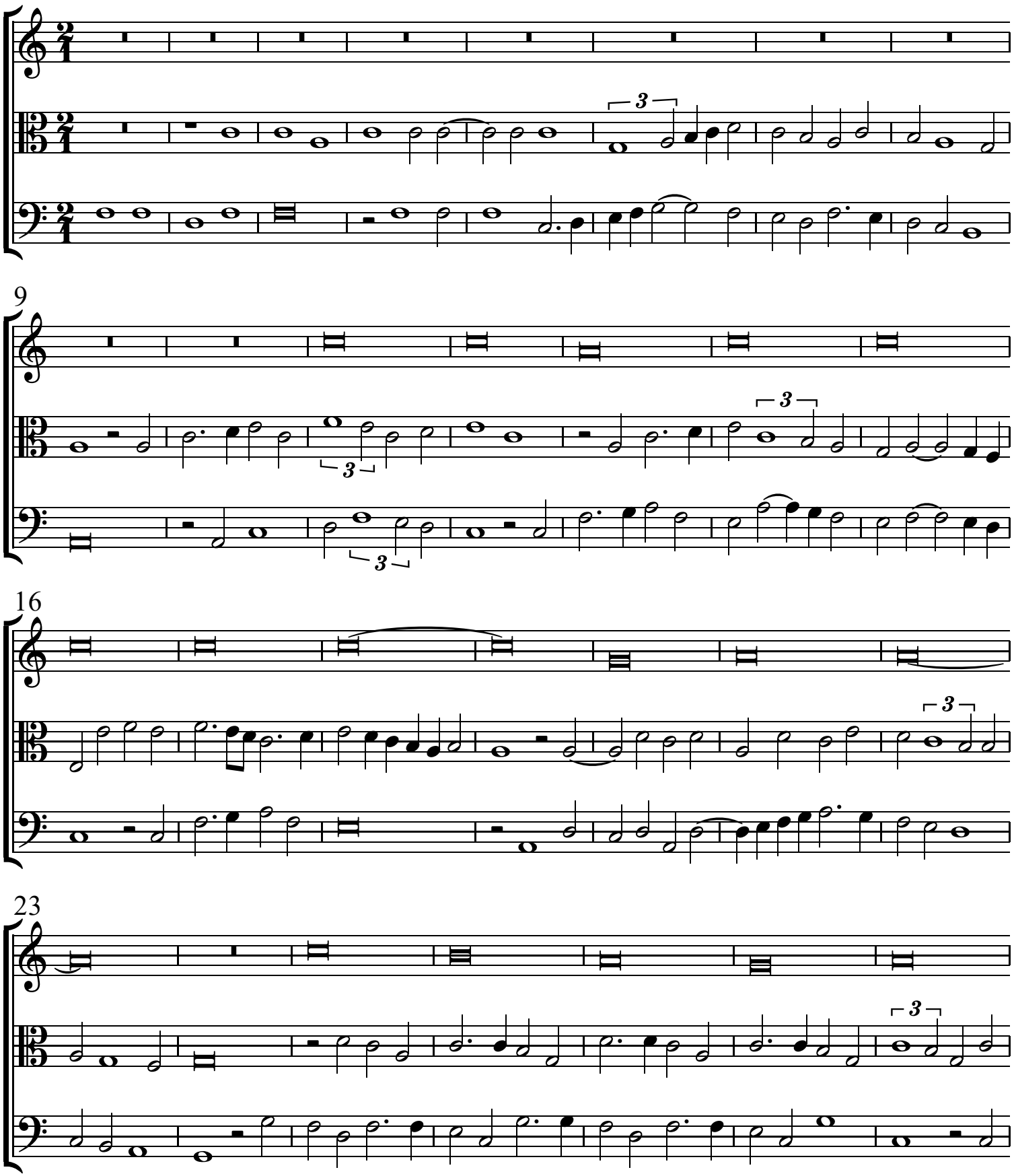
1. Vivo ego dicit Dominus

Johann Walter (1496-1570)



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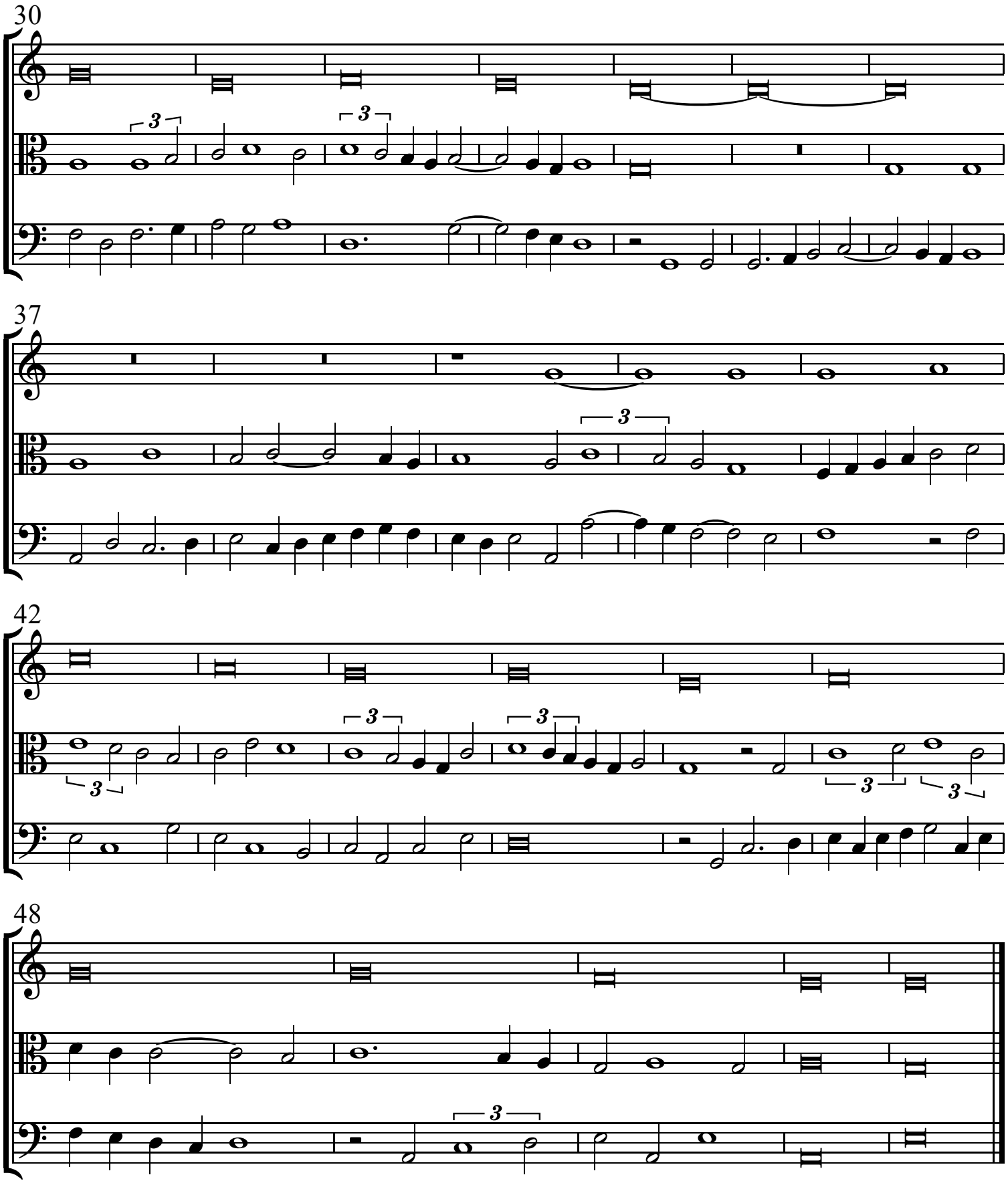
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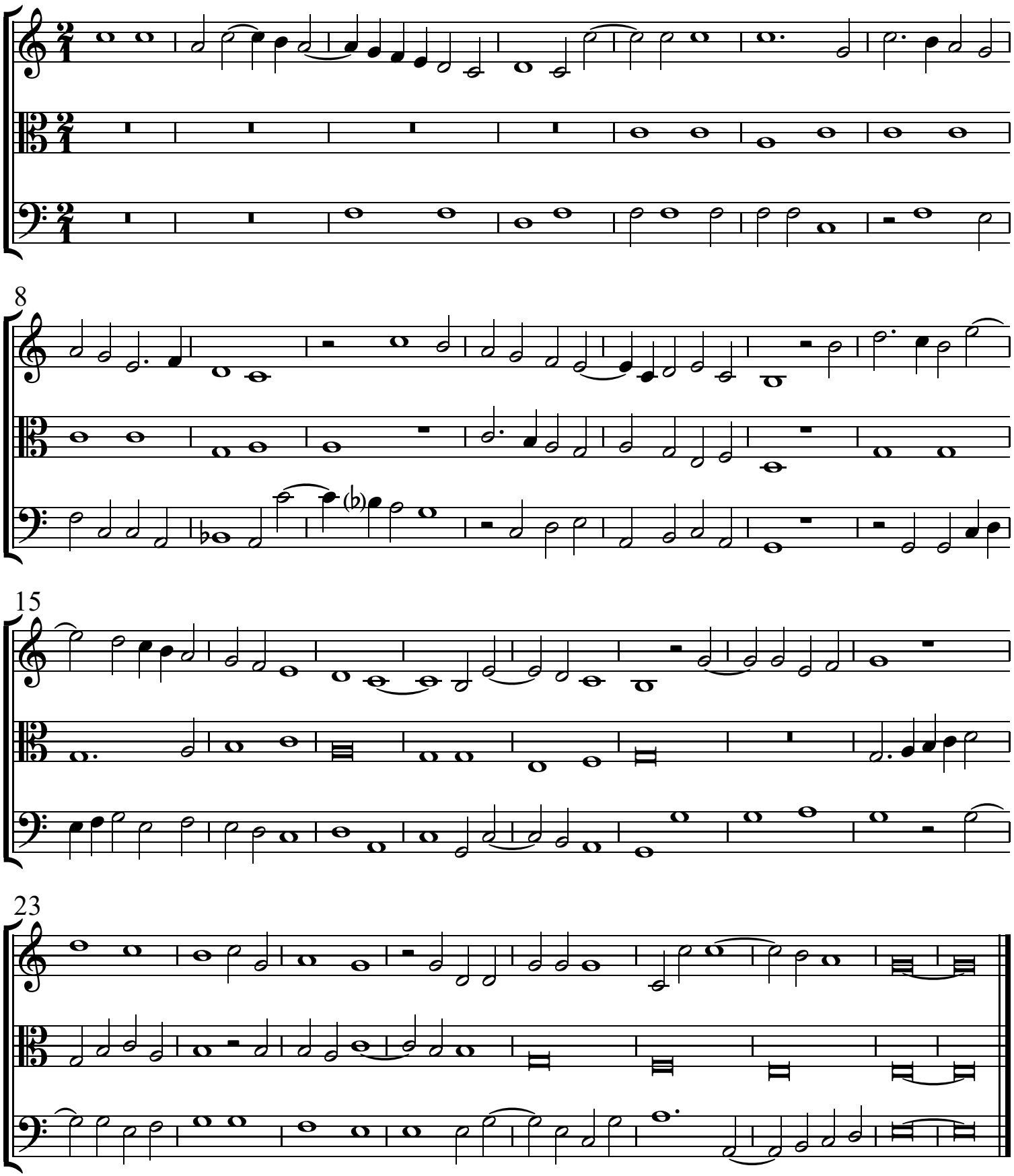
2. Vivo ego dicit Dominus

Lorenz Lemlin (1495-1549)



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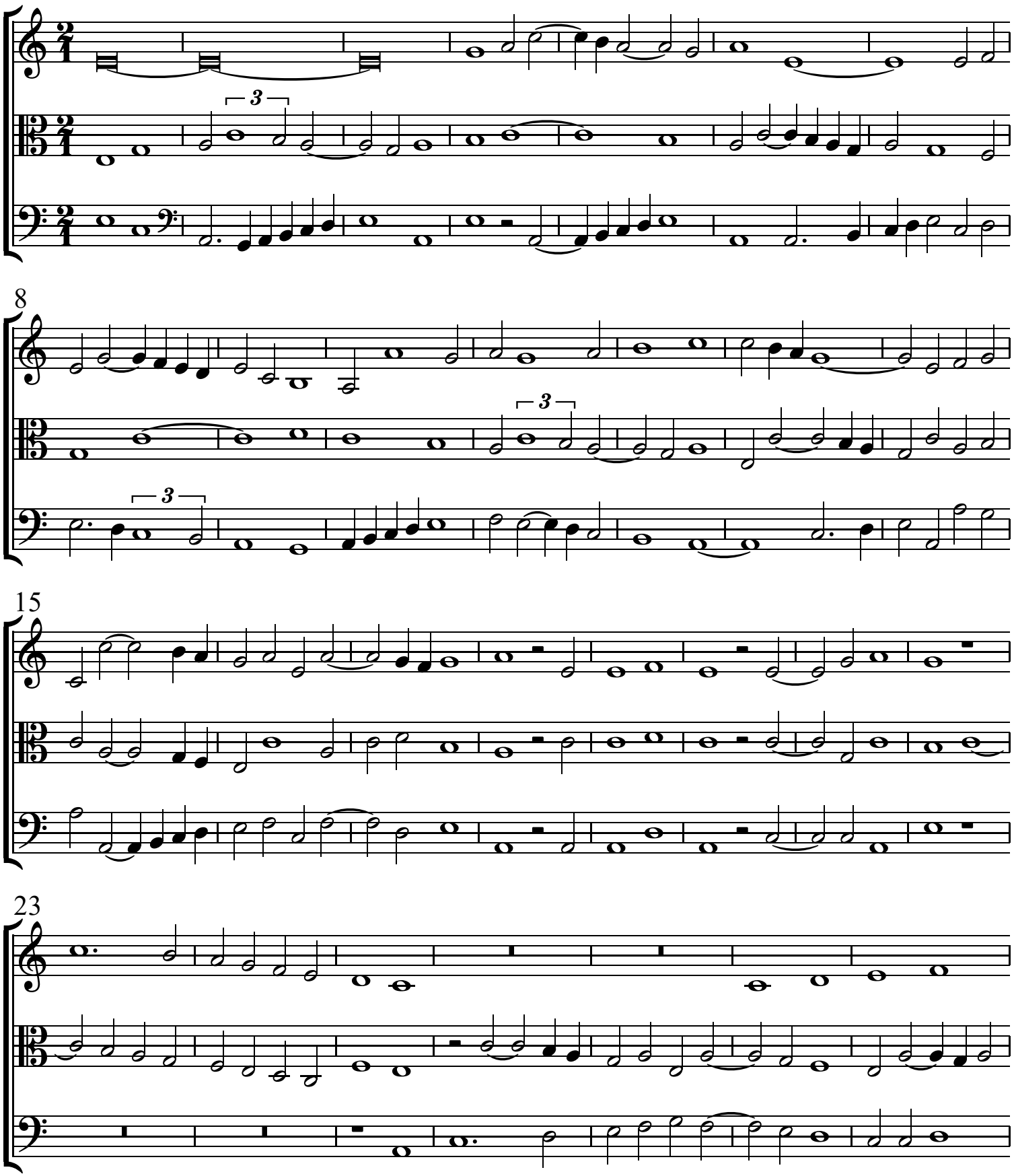
3. Si bona suscepimus de manu Domini

Domini Hugo Carler (?-?)



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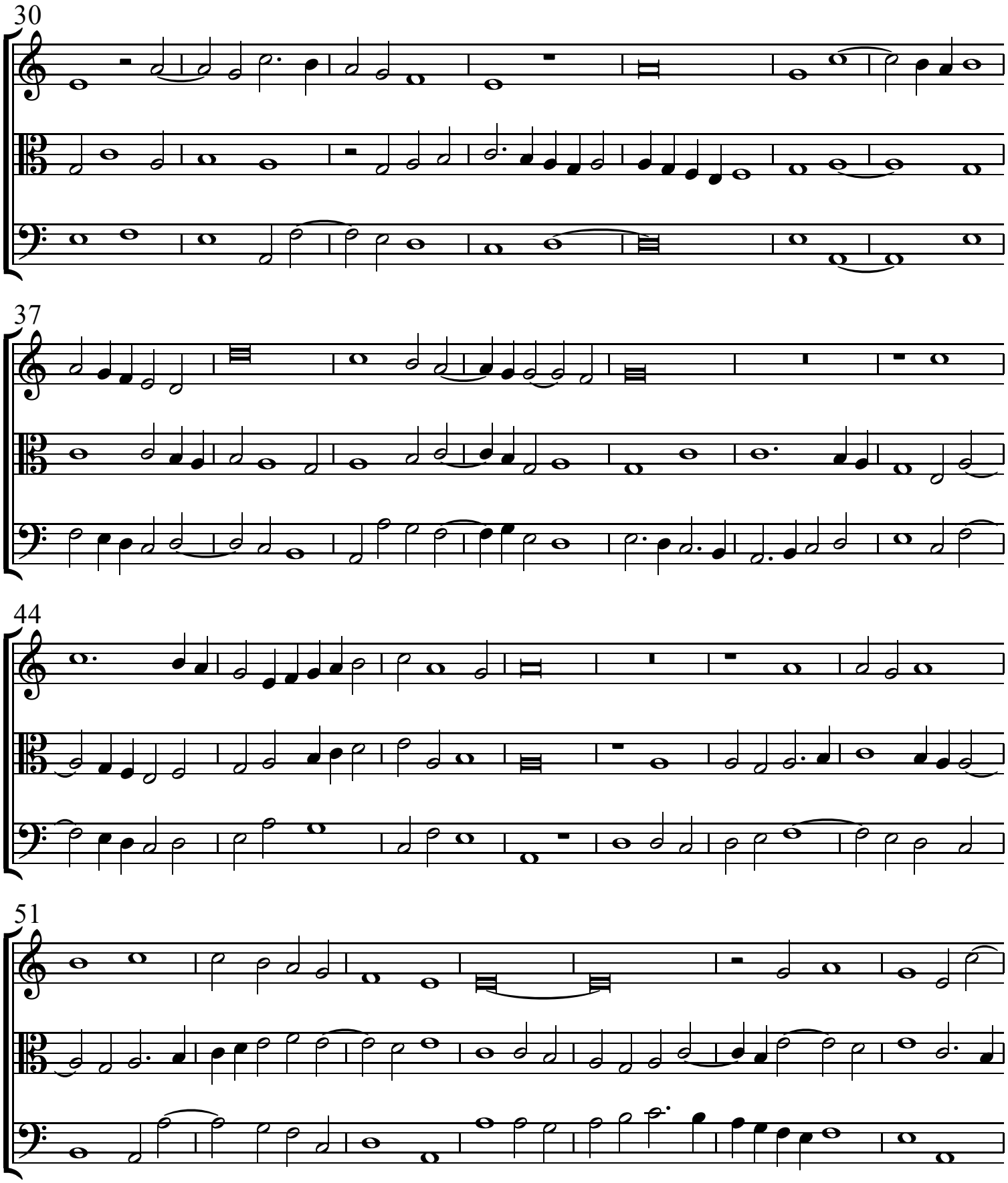
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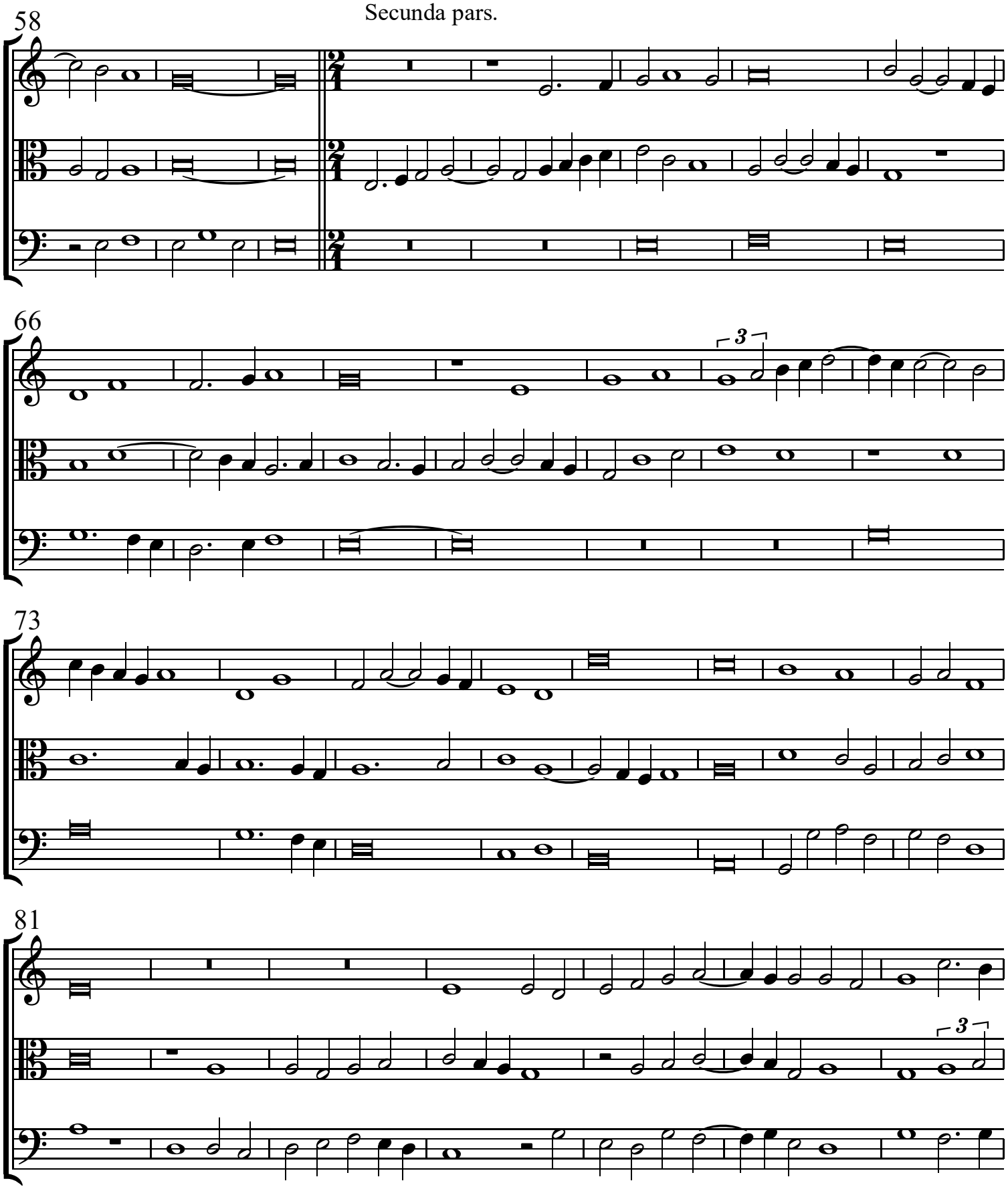
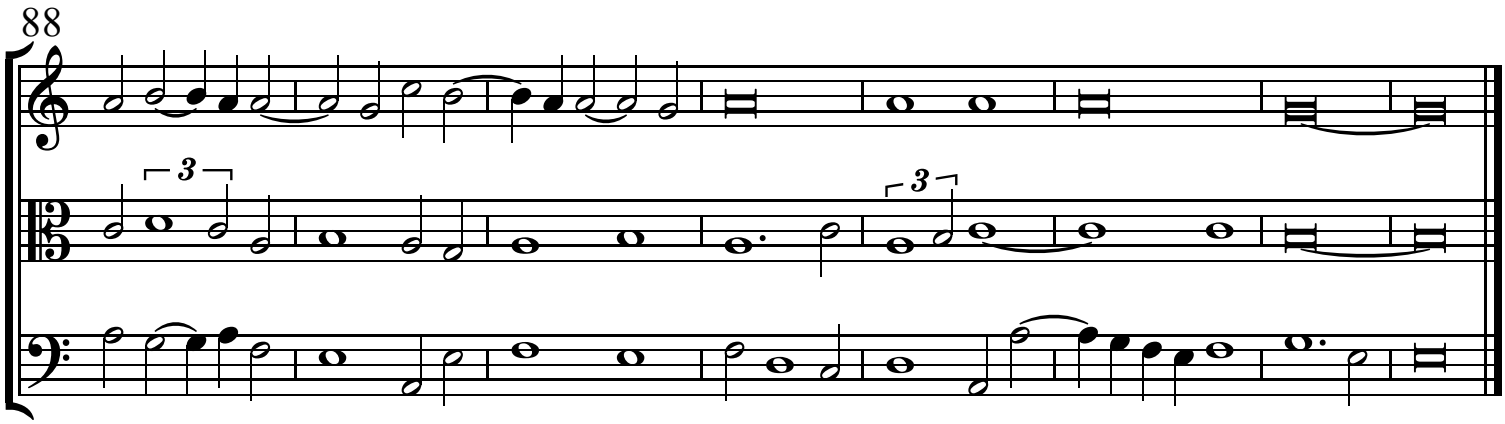
Secunda pars.

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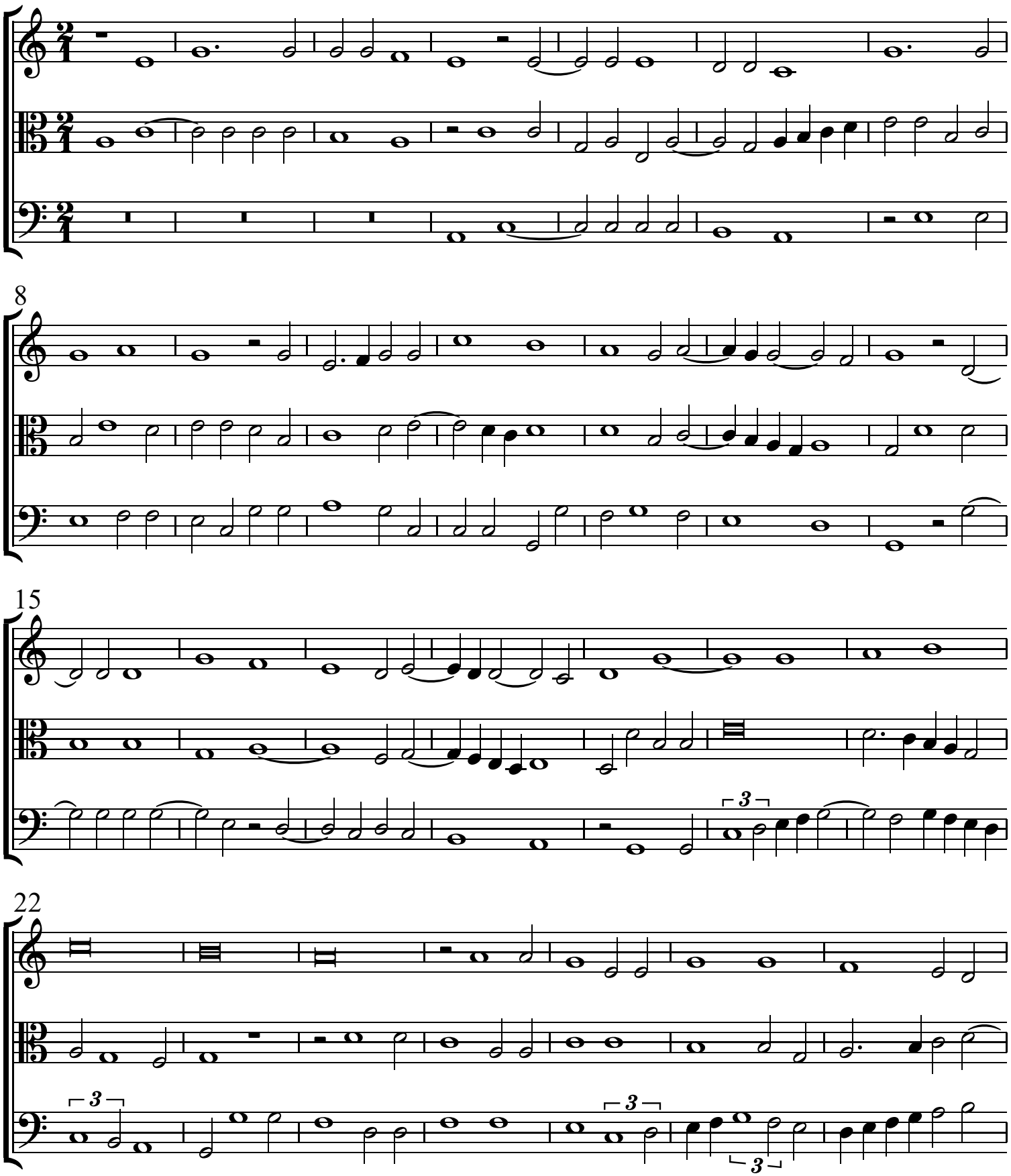
4. In Domino confido

Thomas Stolzer (c. 1480-1526)



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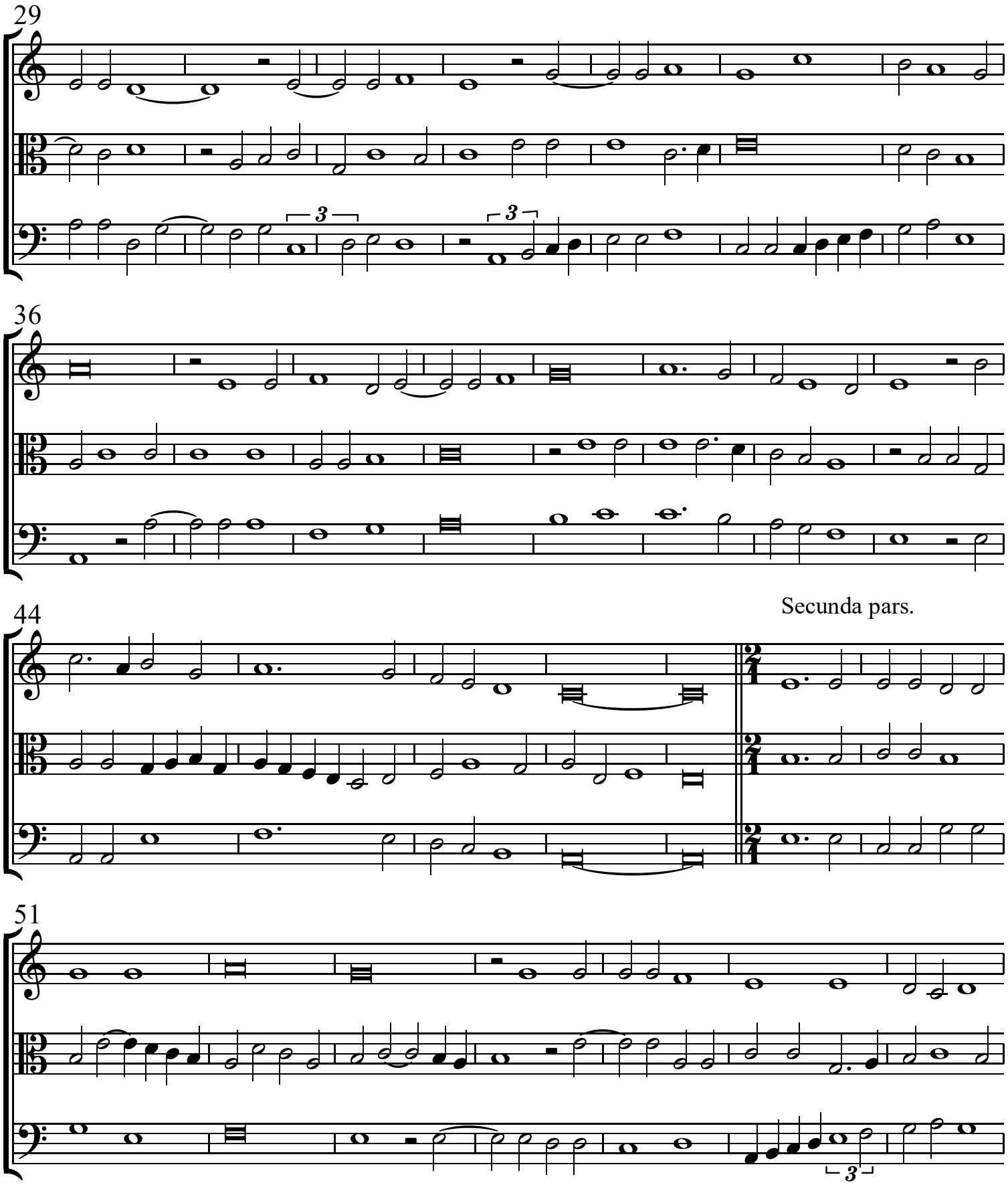
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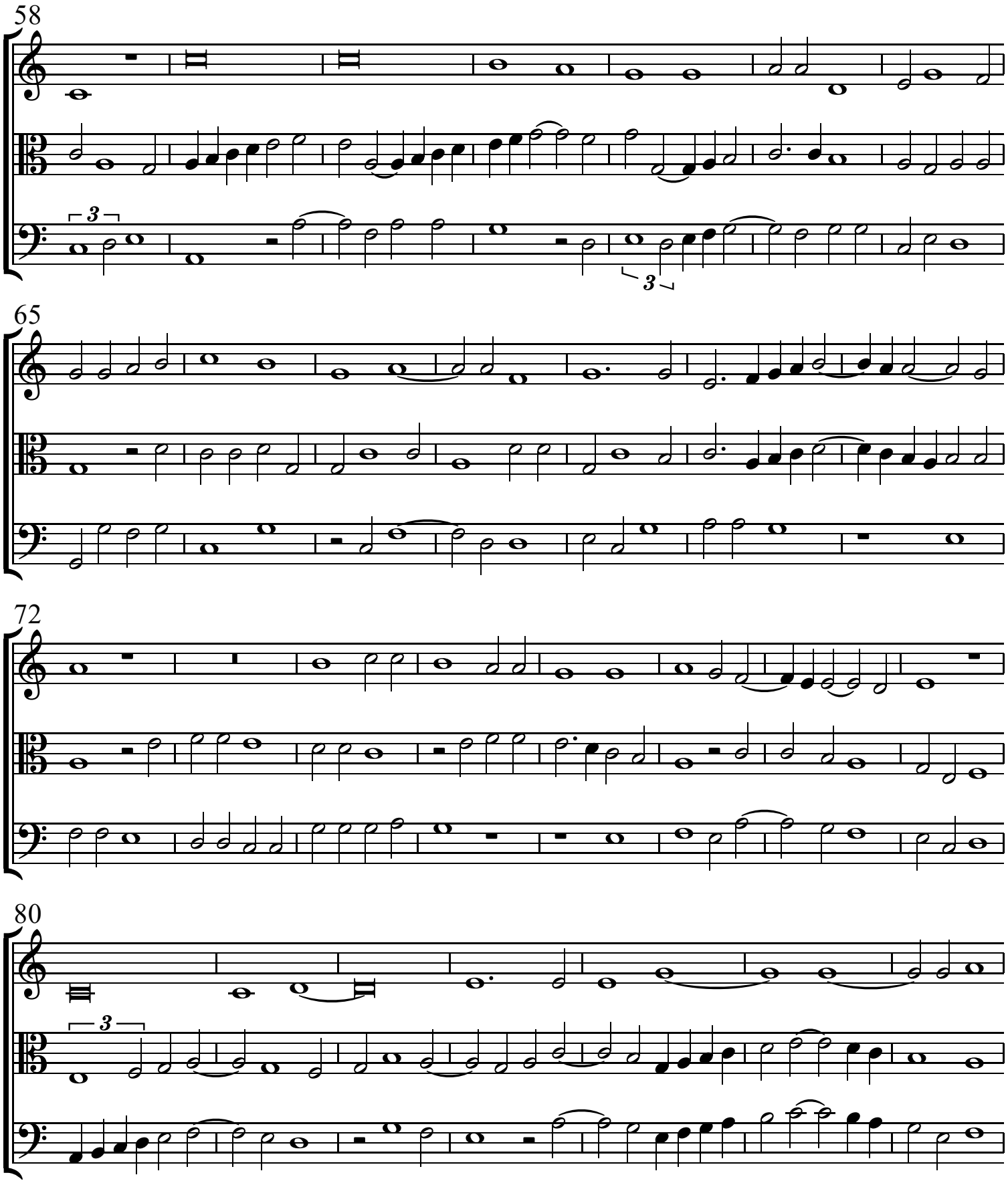
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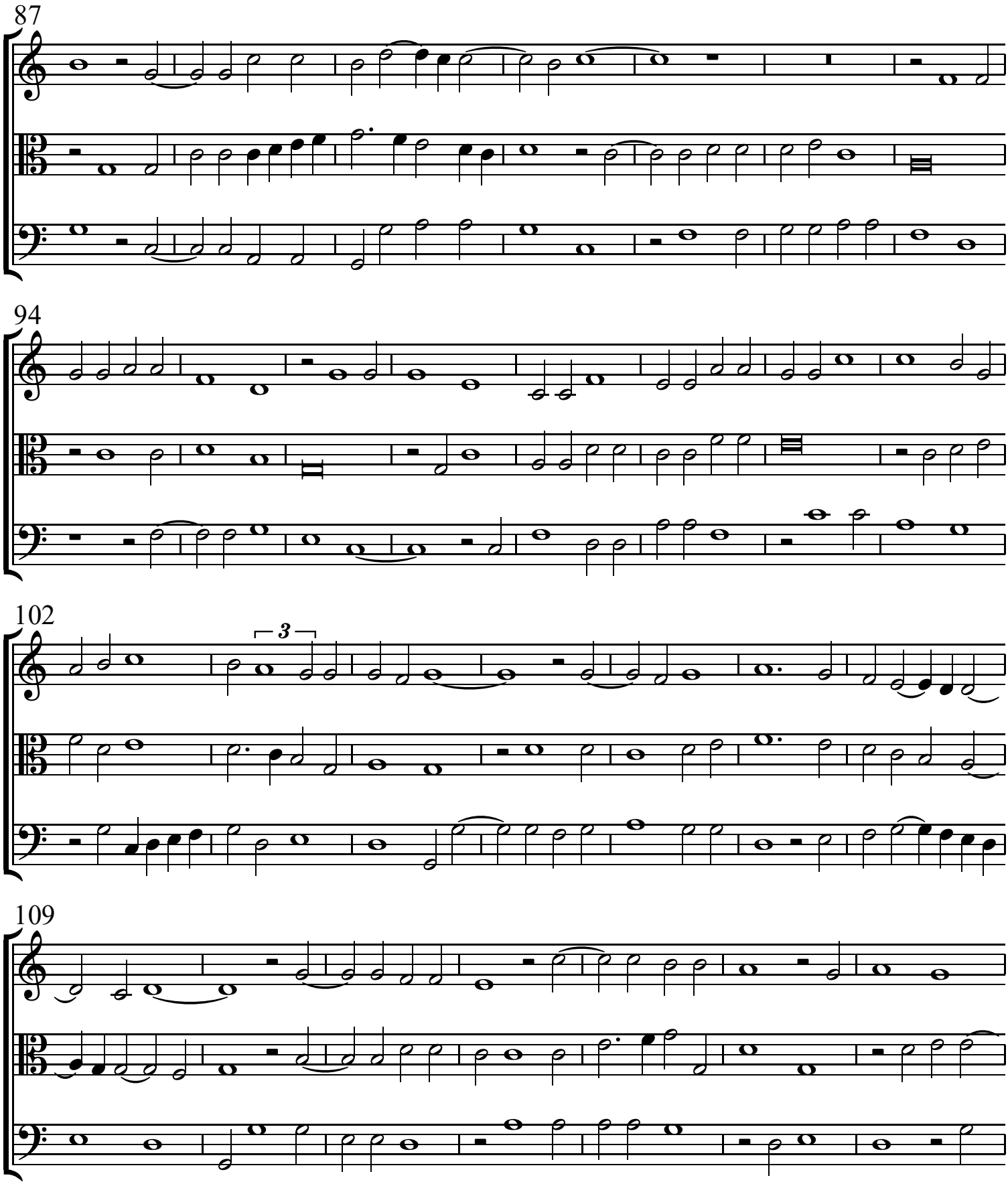
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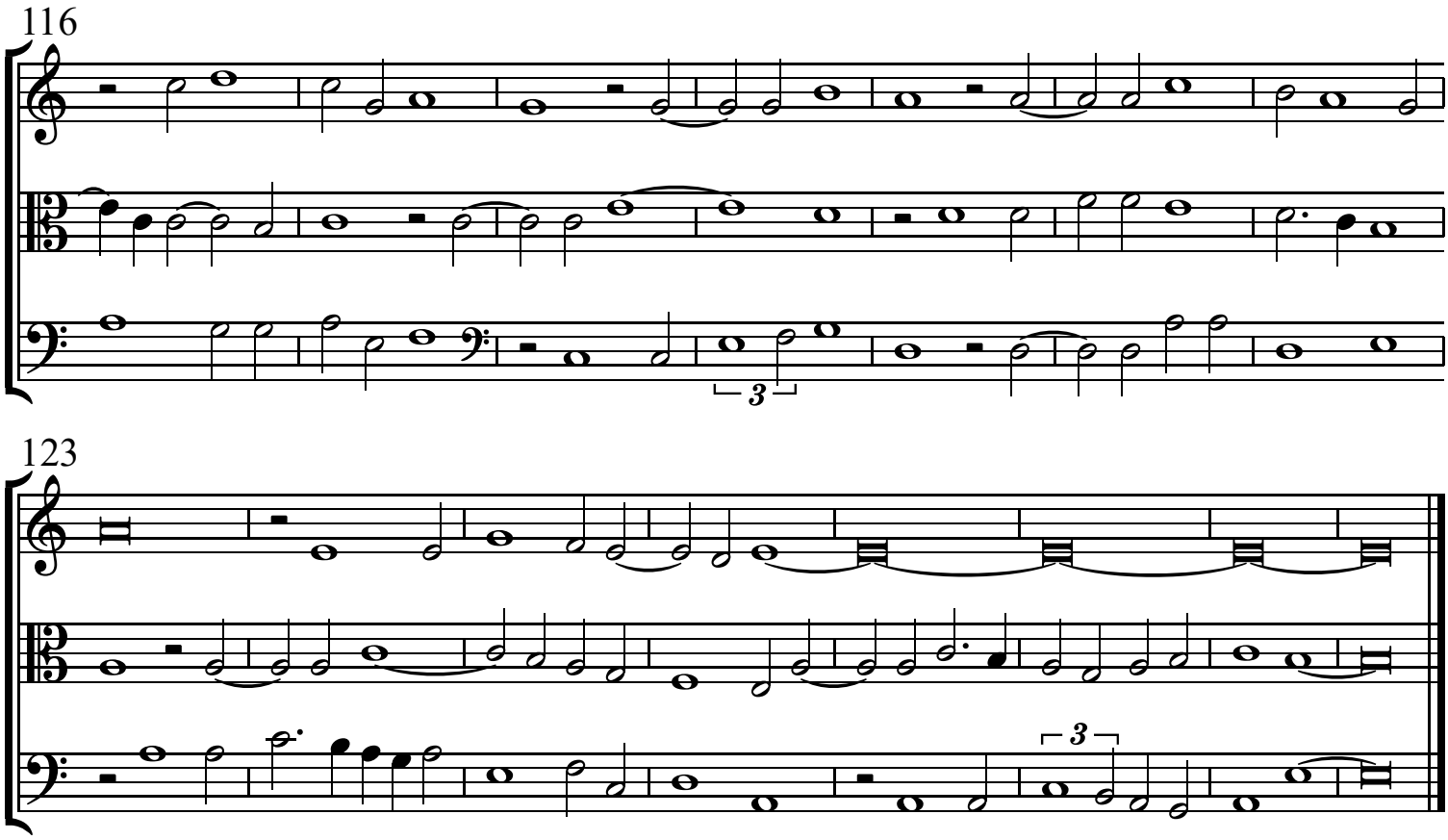
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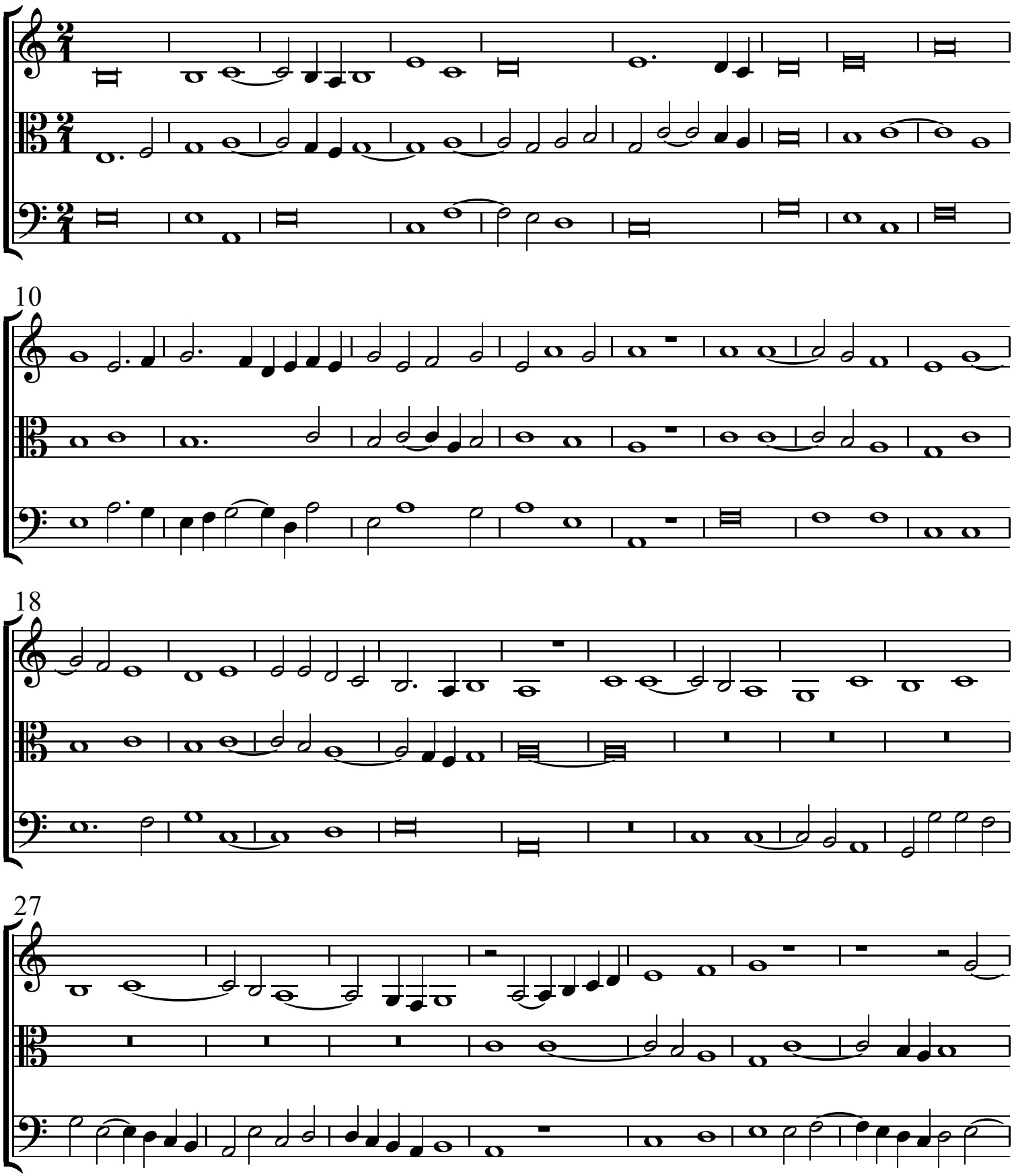
5. Beati omnes qui timent Dominum

Jacotin (fl. 1500-1550)



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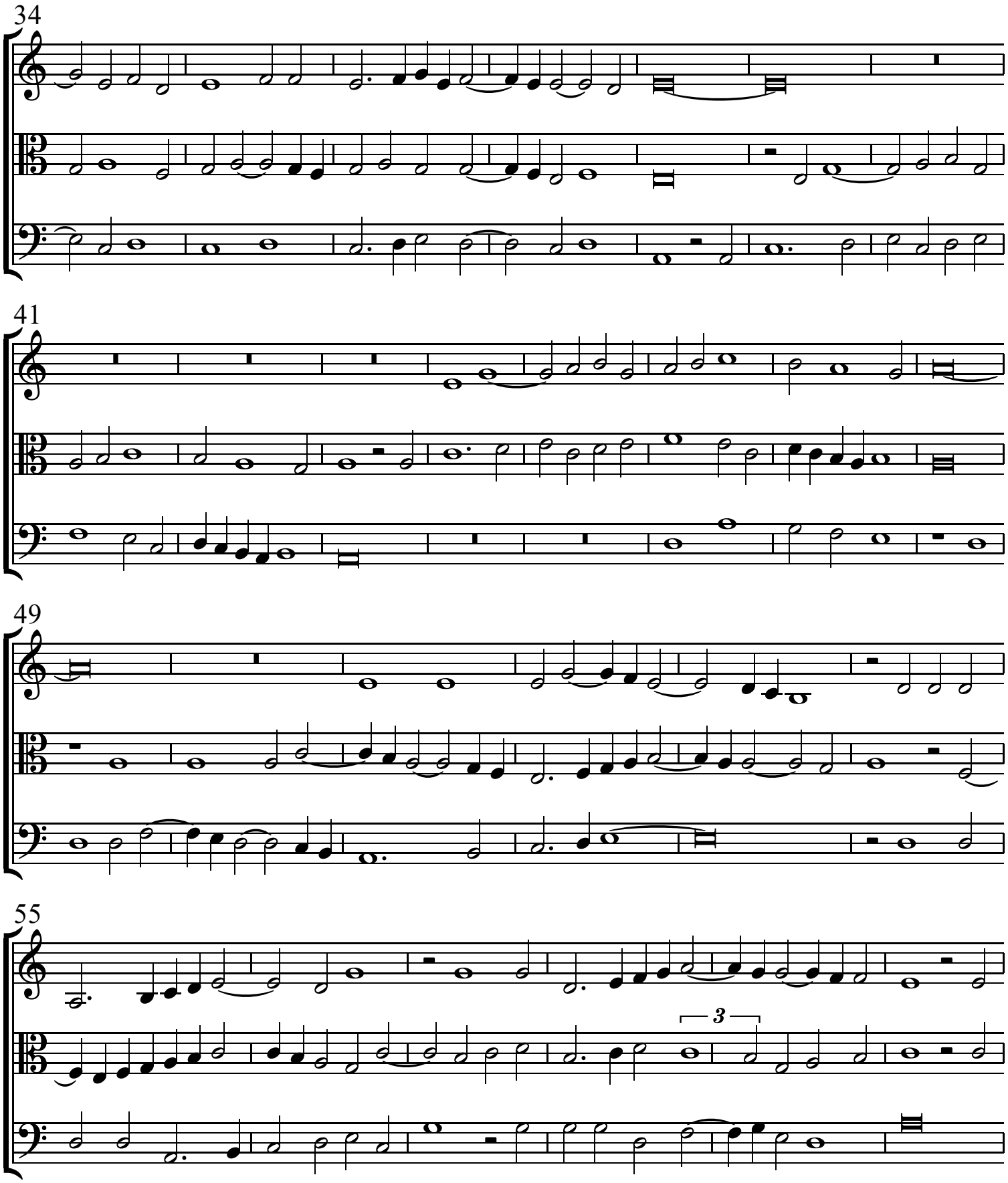
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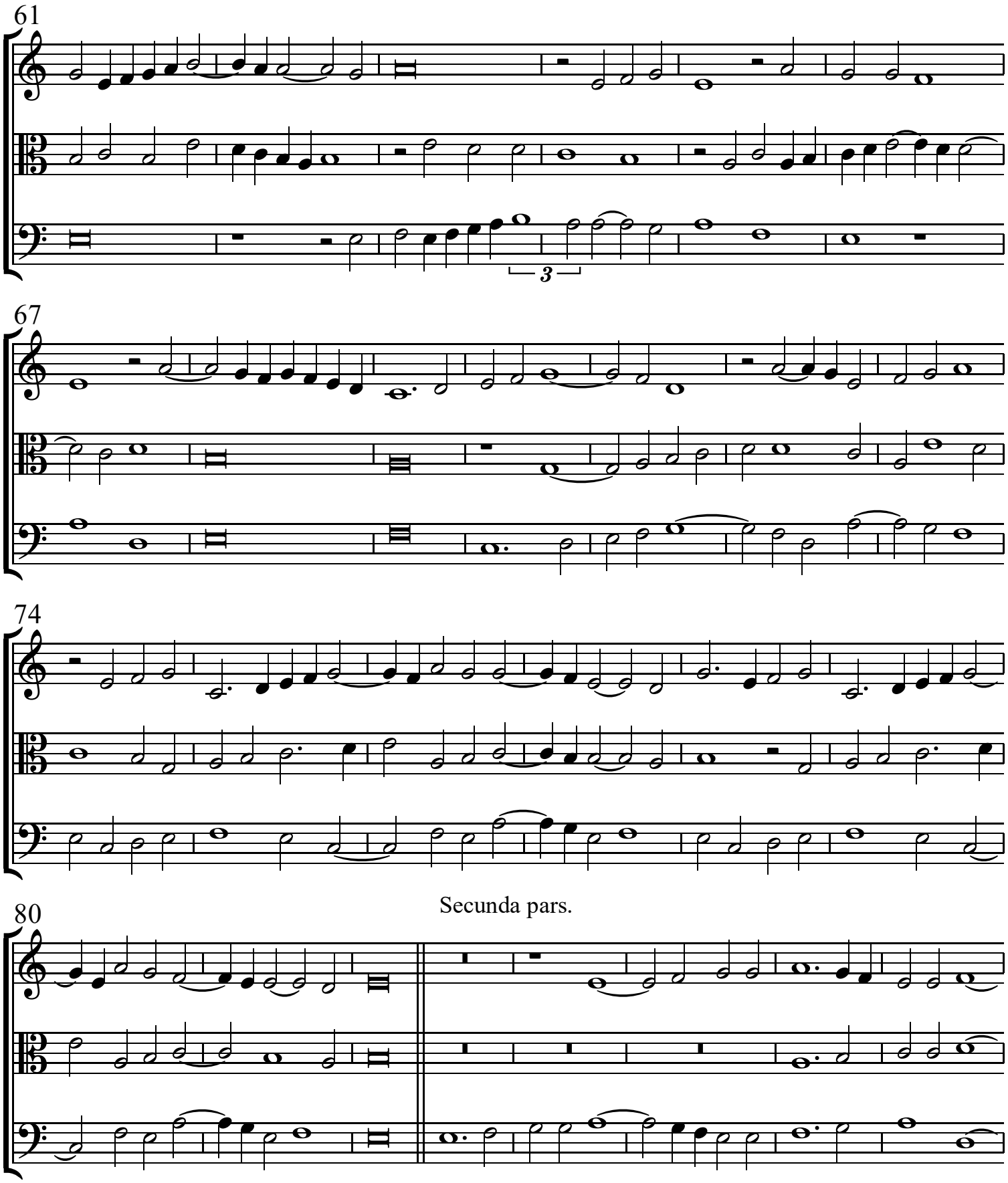
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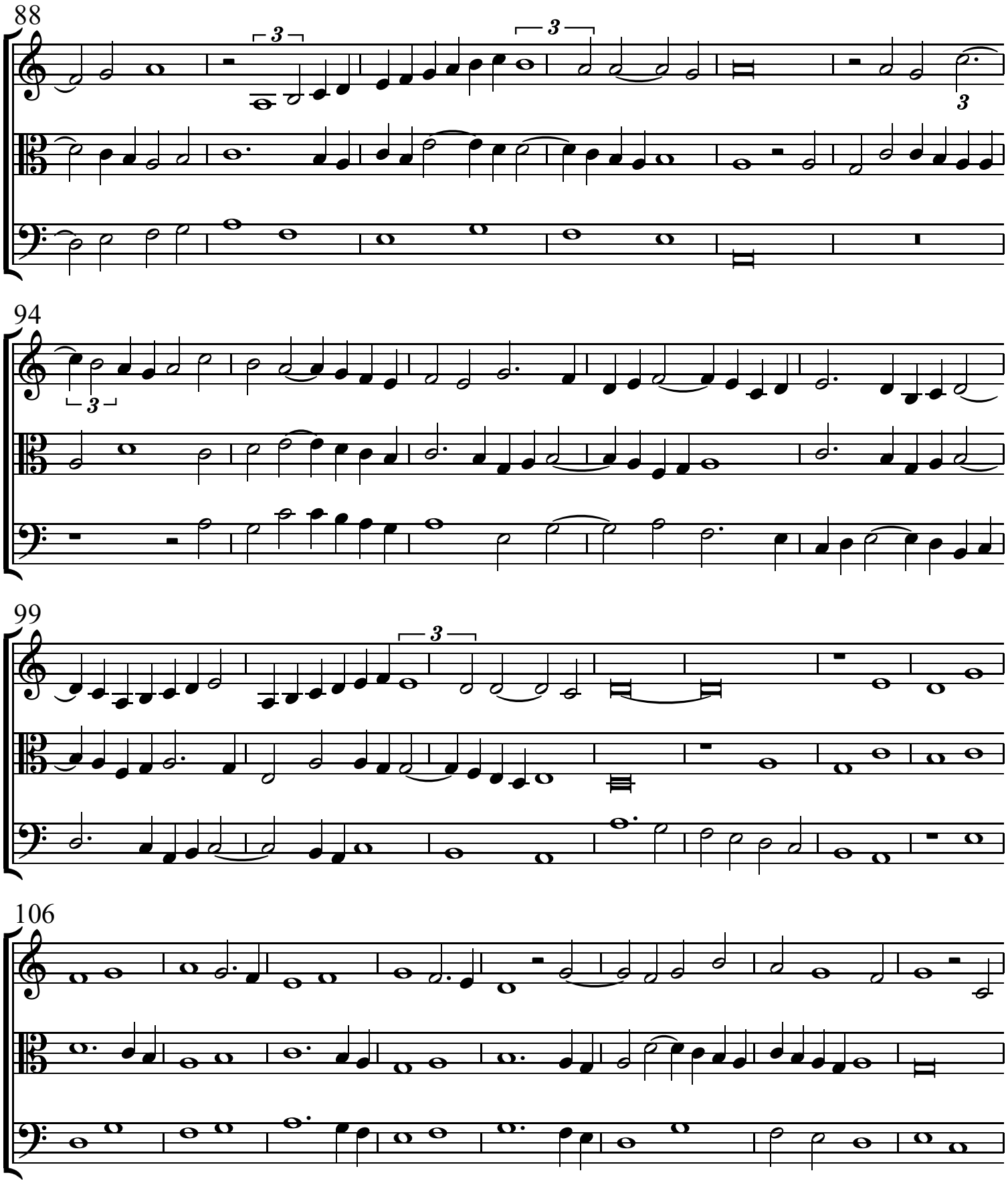
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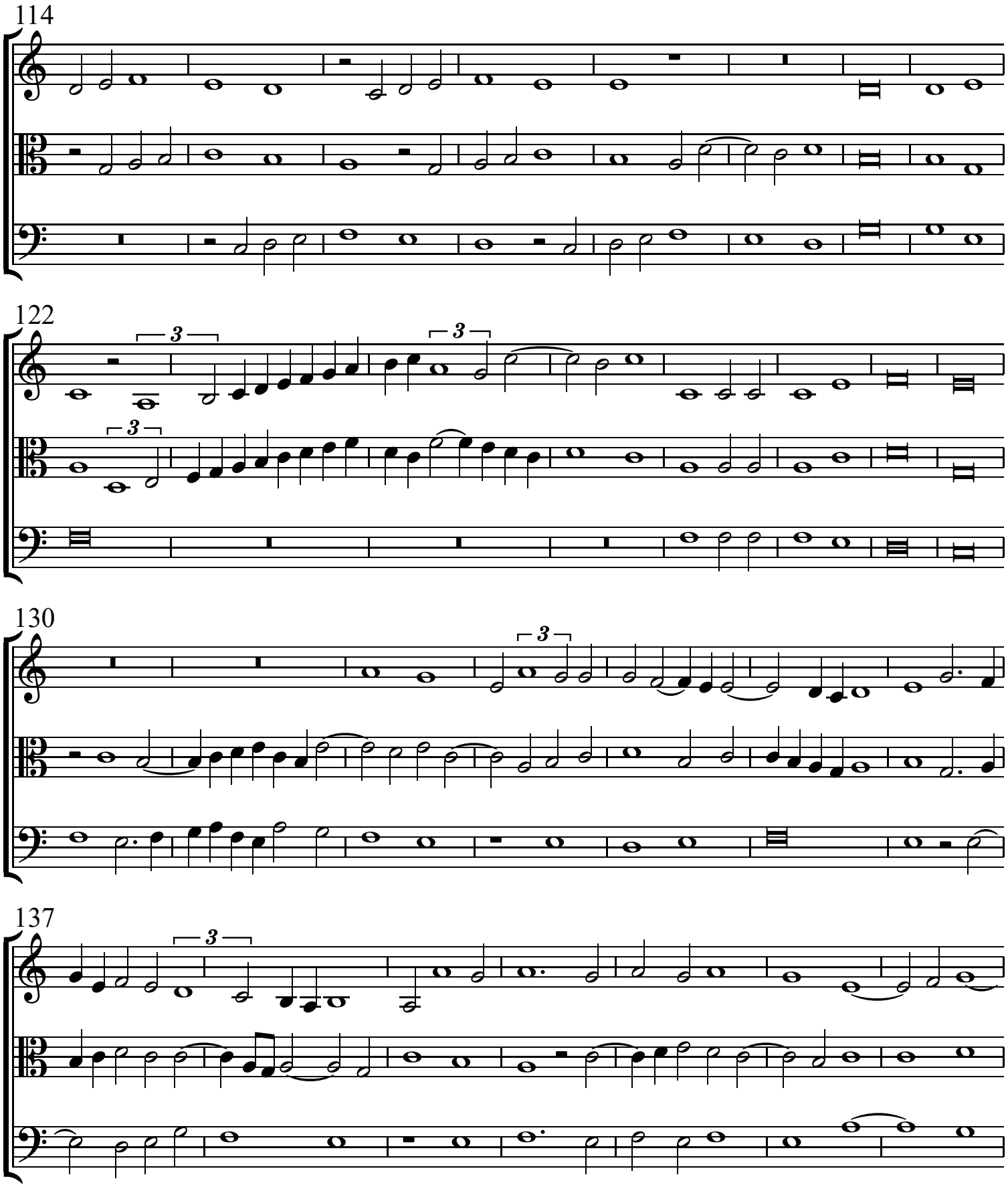
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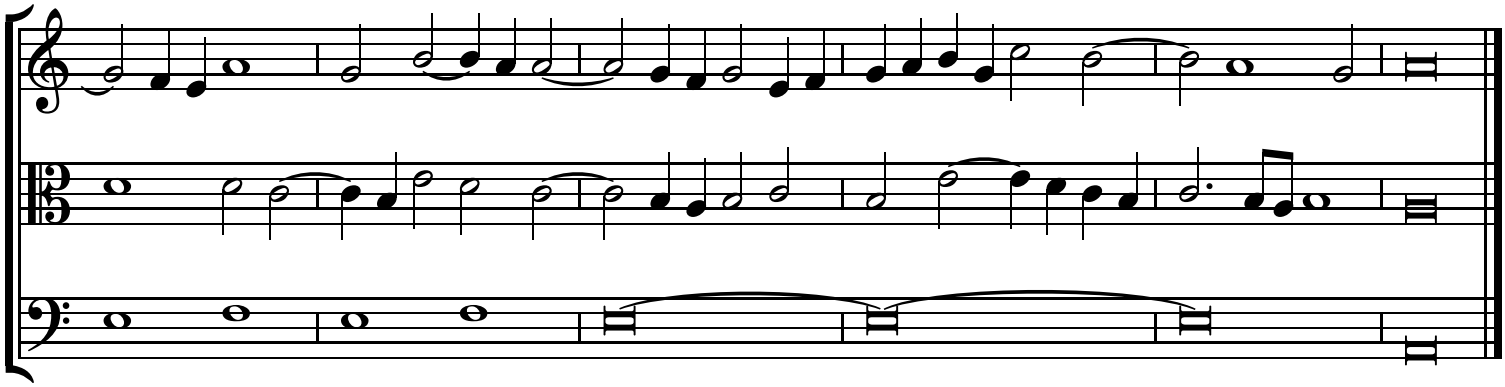
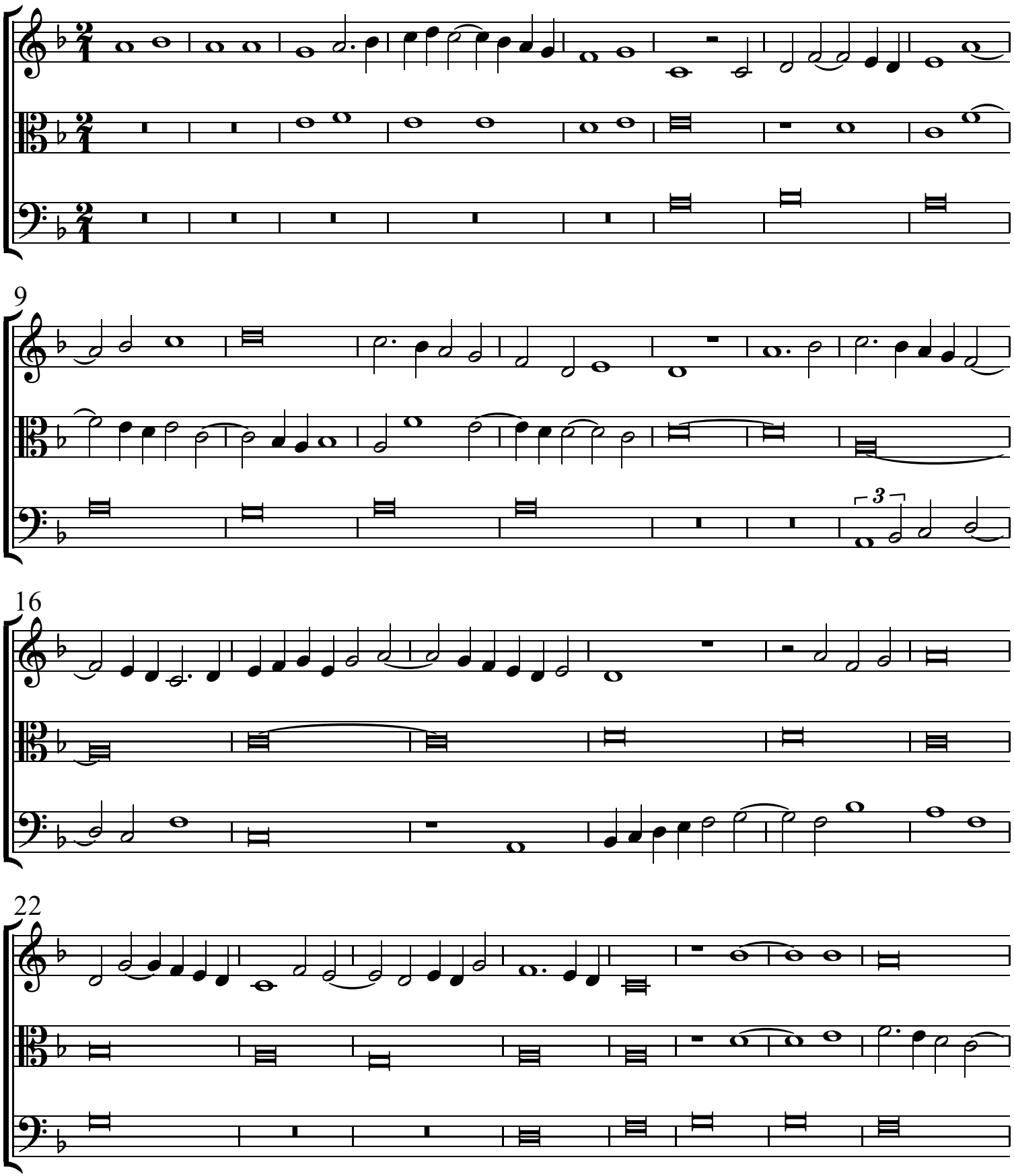


6. Tota pulchra es amica mea

Sixtus Dietrich (c. 1493-1548)



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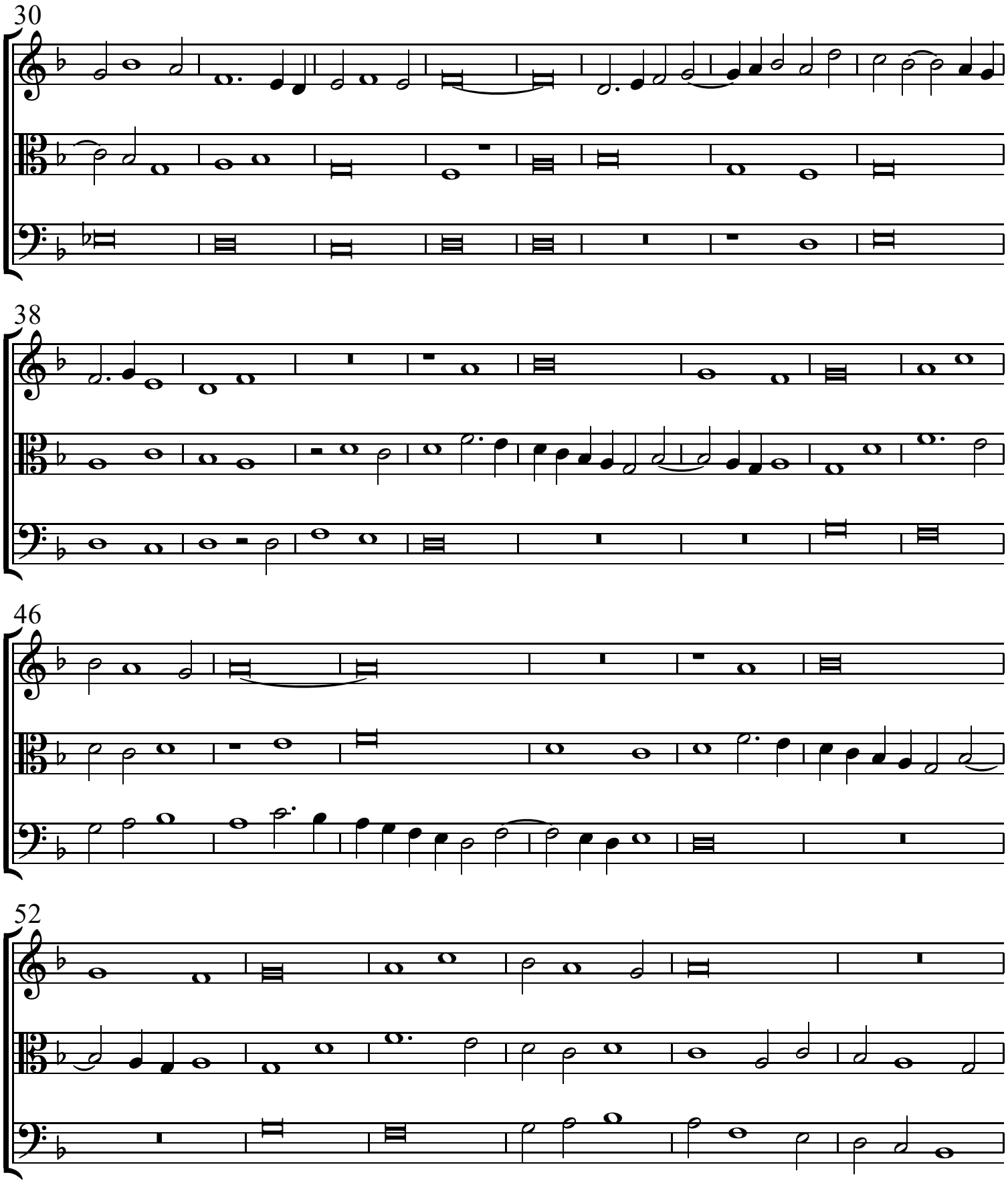
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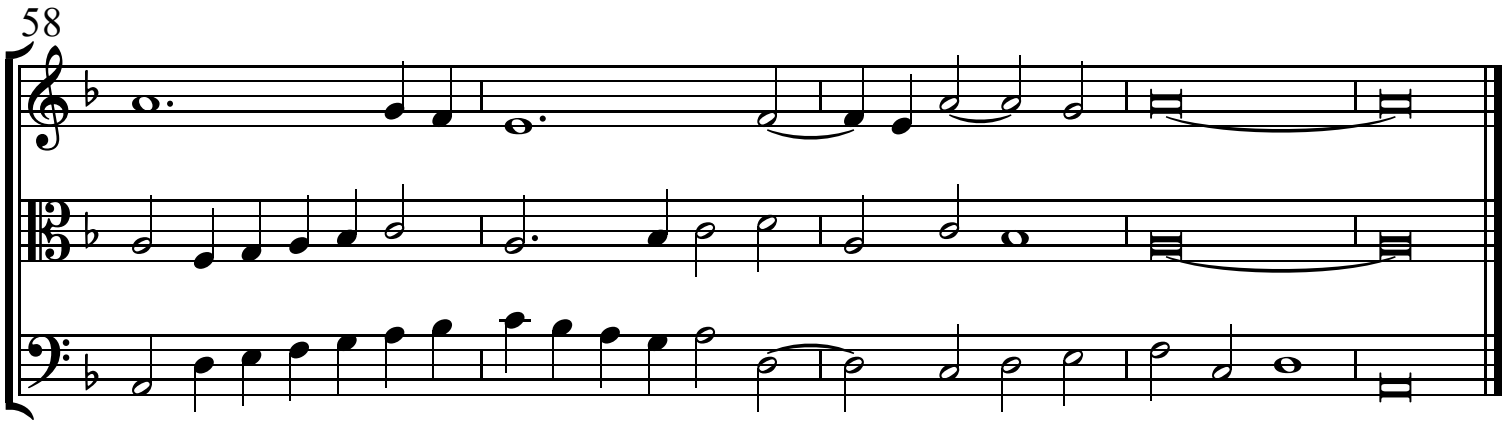
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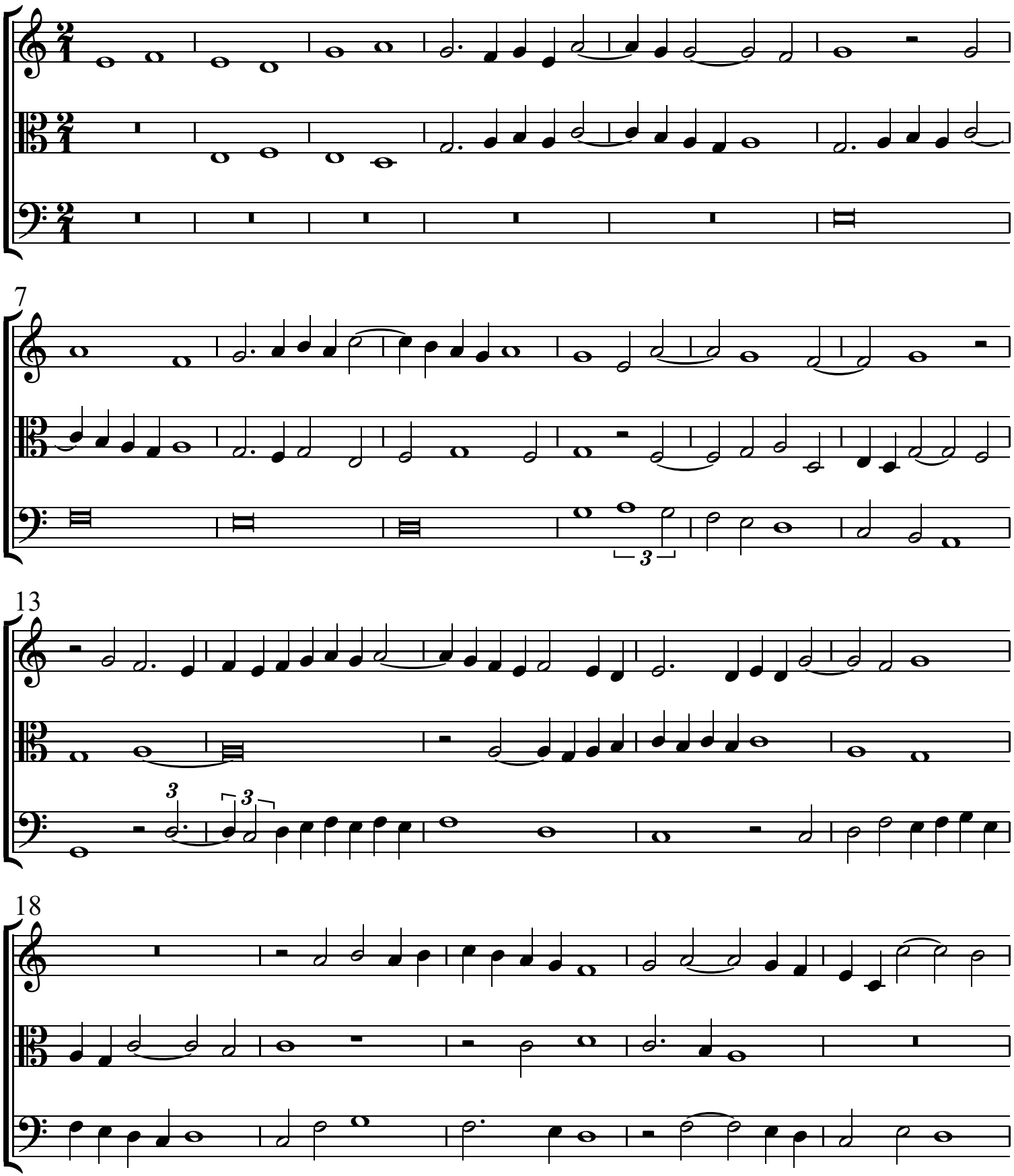
7. Ecce quem vates vetustis

Sixtus Dietrich (c. 1493-1548)



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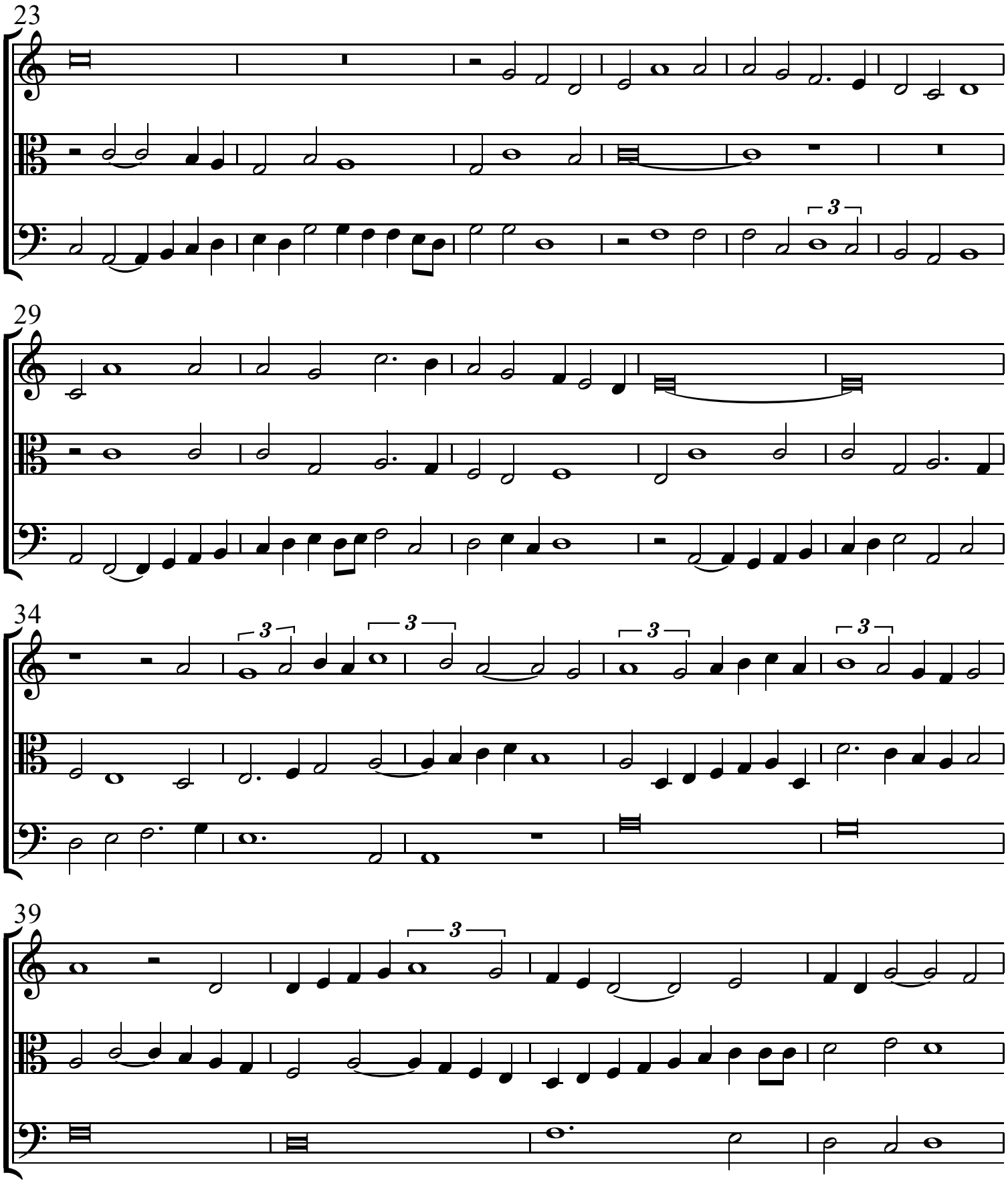
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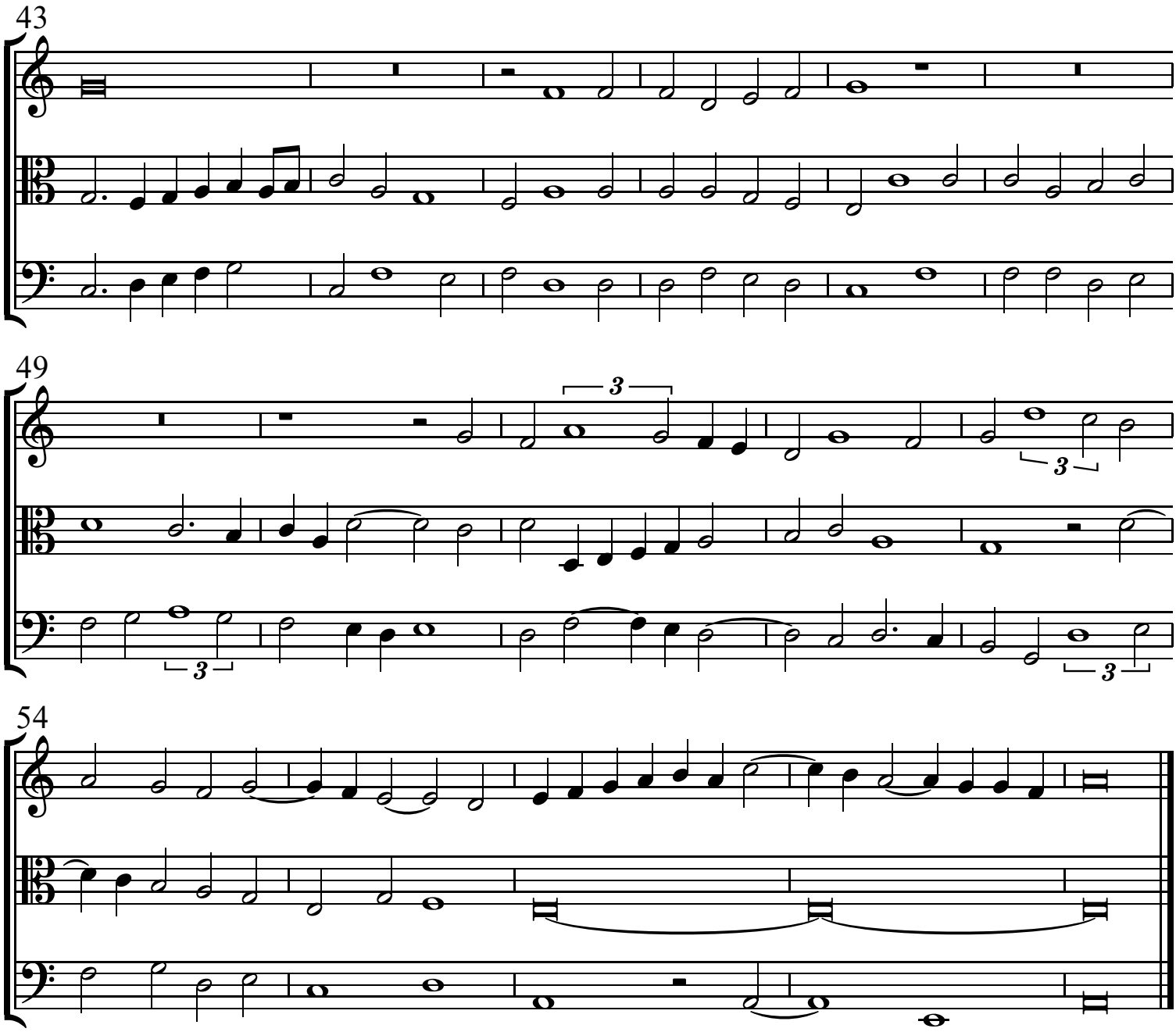
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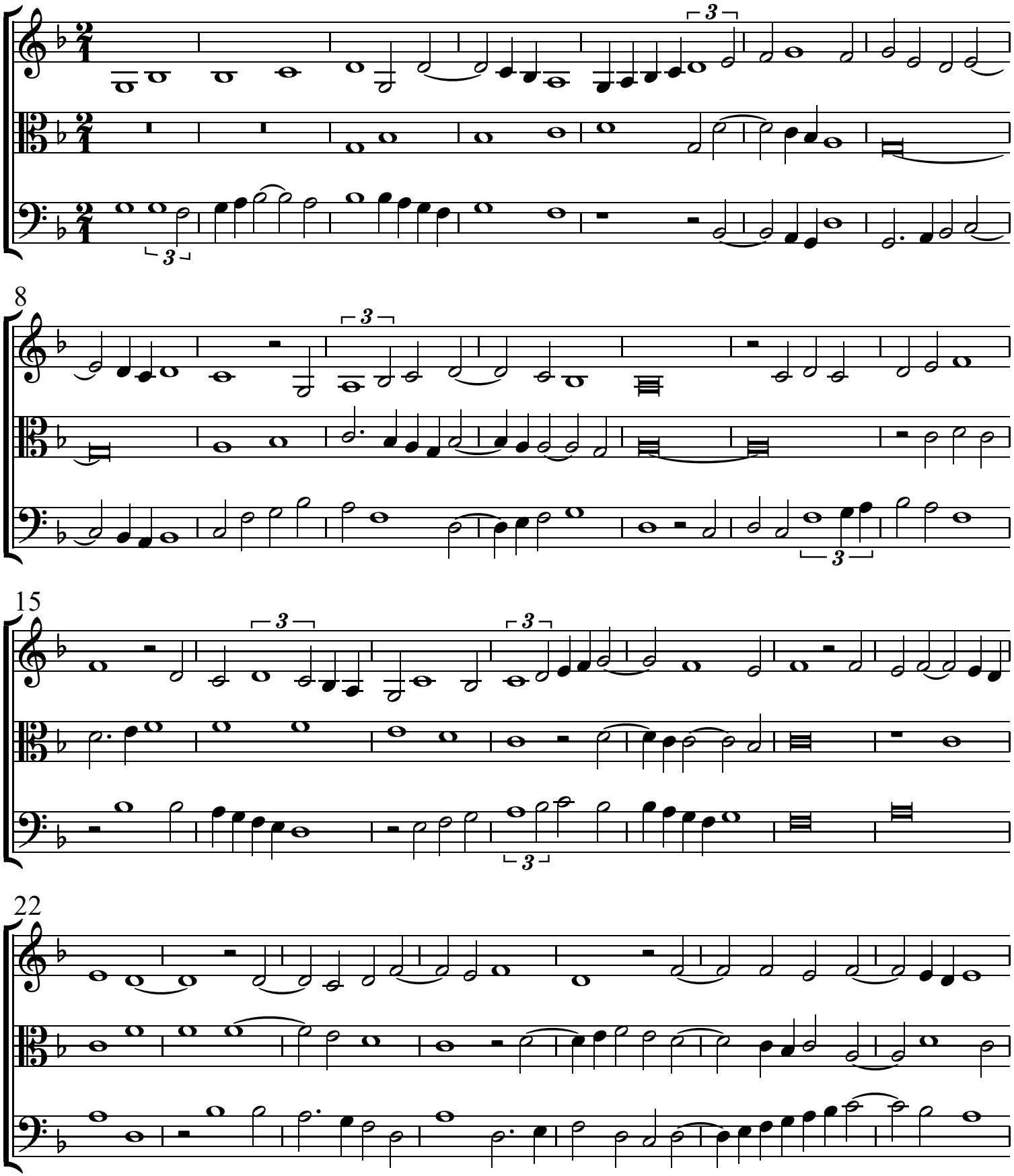
8. A solis ortus cardine

Adam Rener (c. 1485-c.1520)



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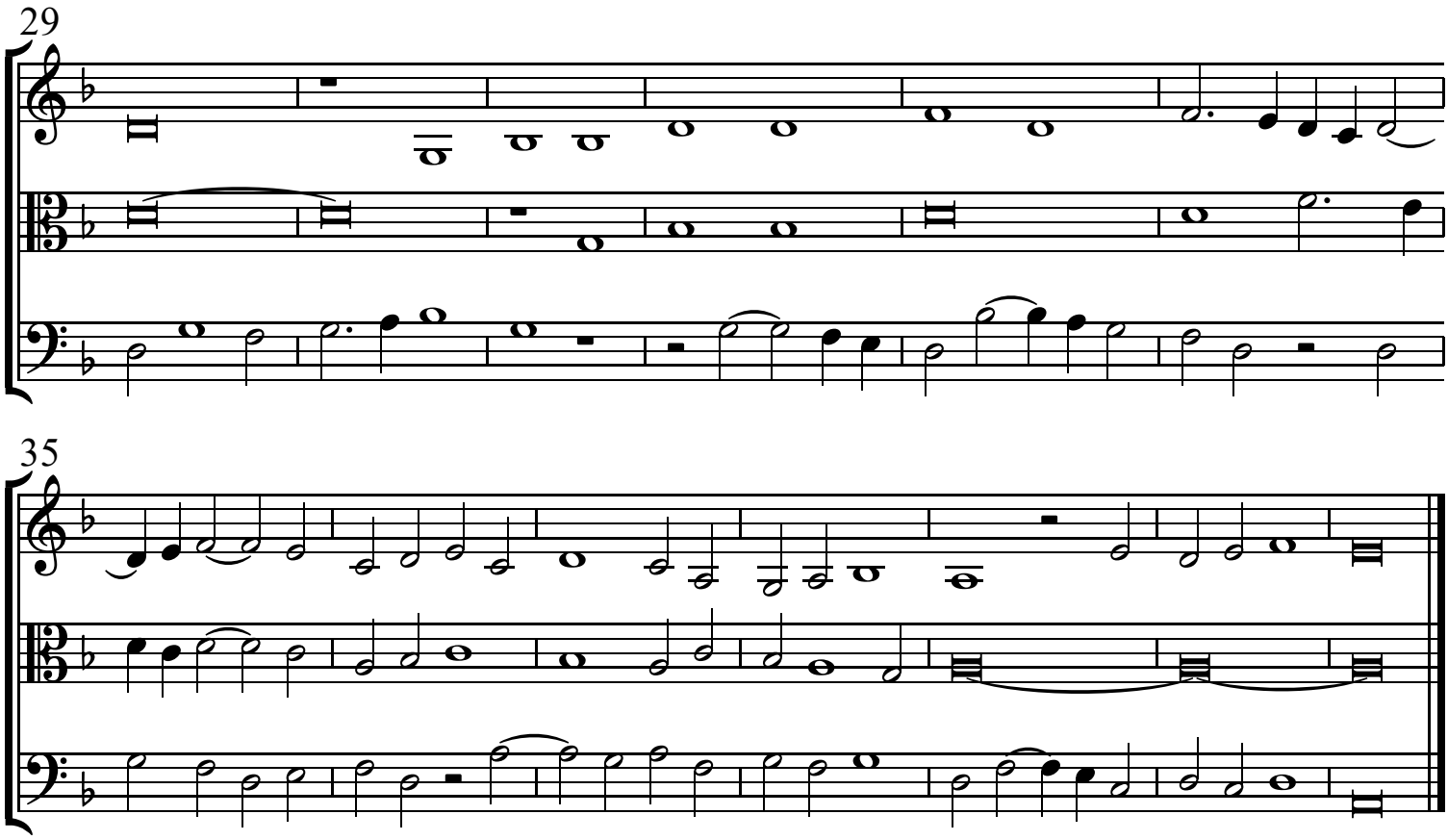
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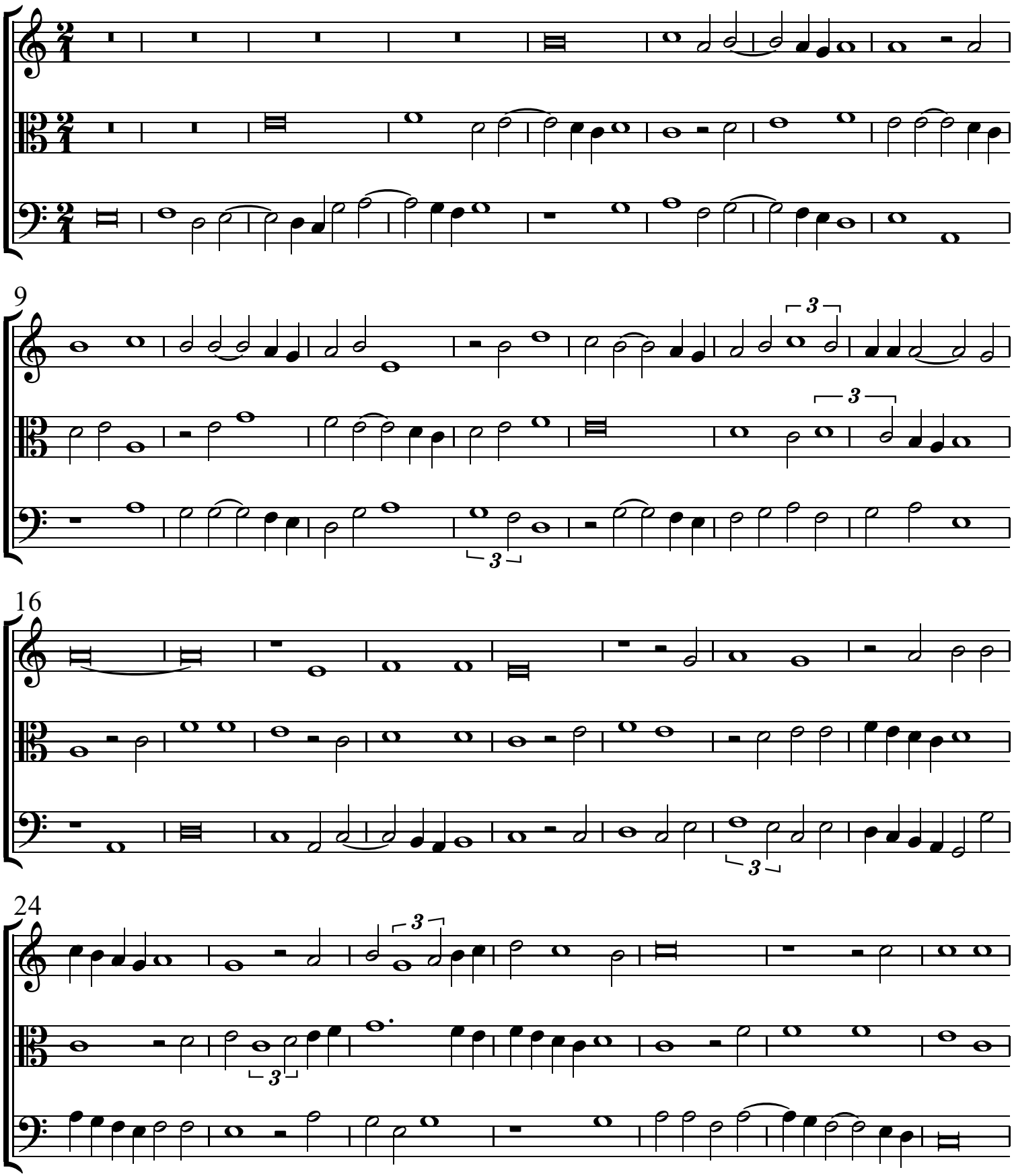
9. Nos debemus gratias agere

Pierre de la Rue (c.1452-1518)



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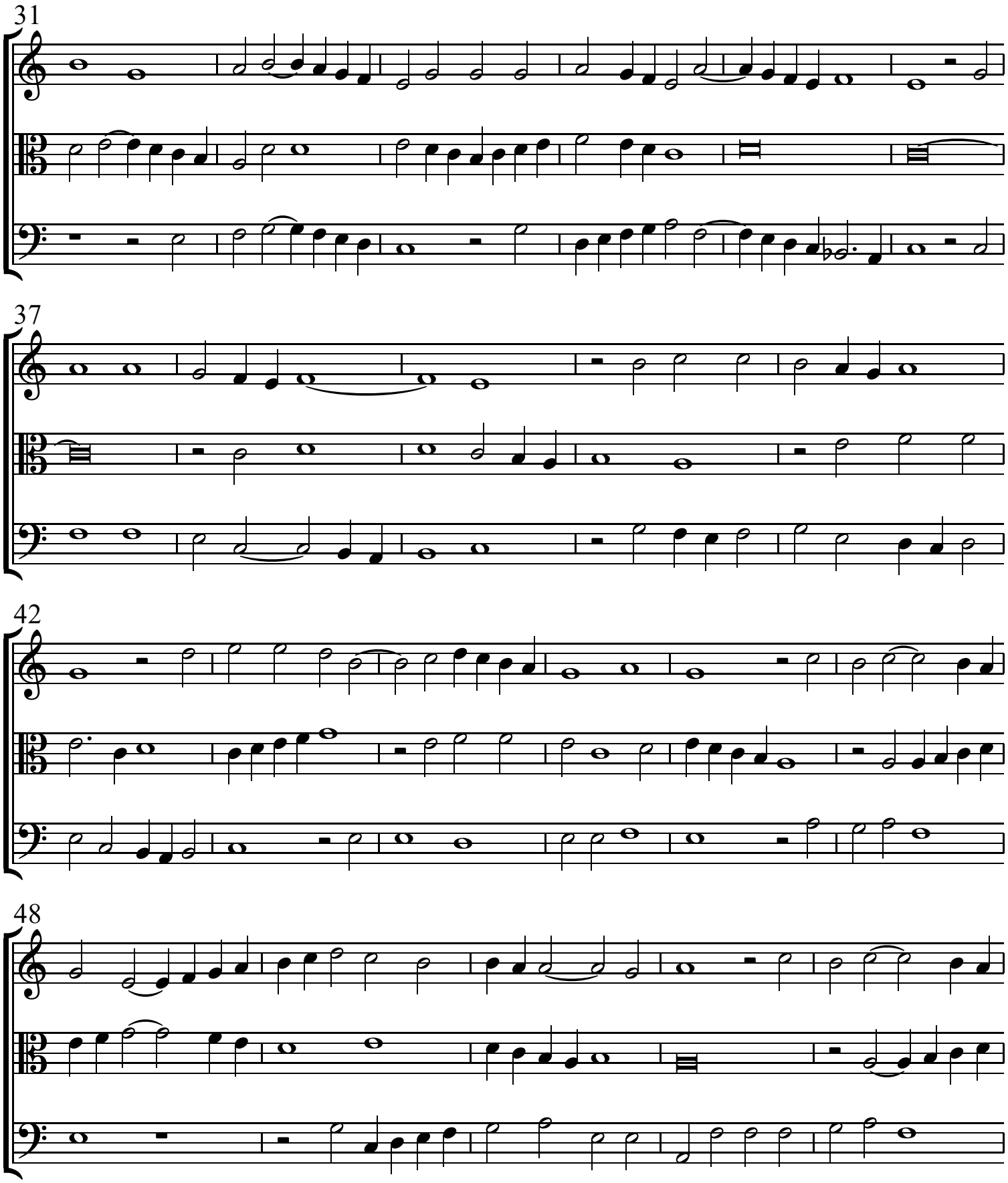
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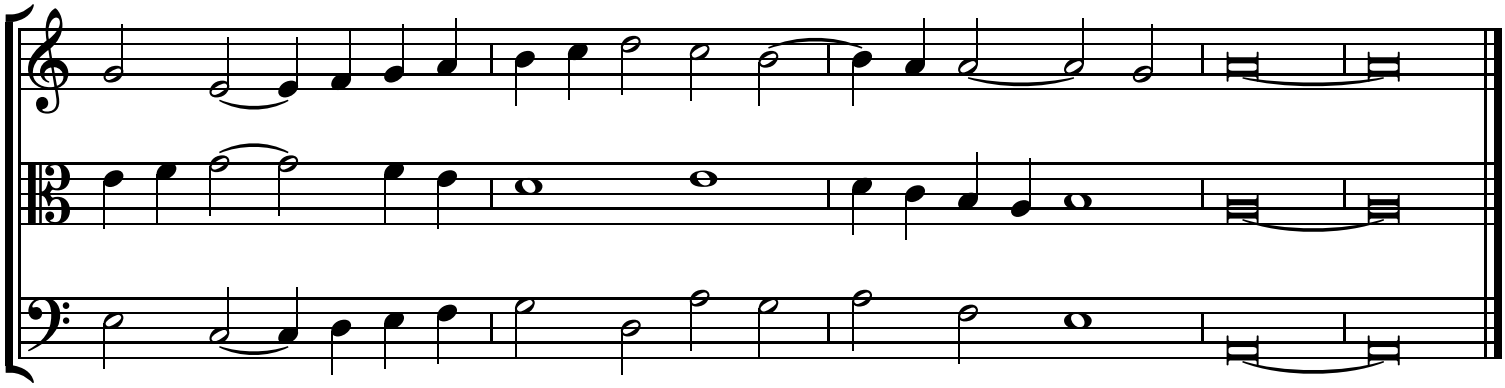
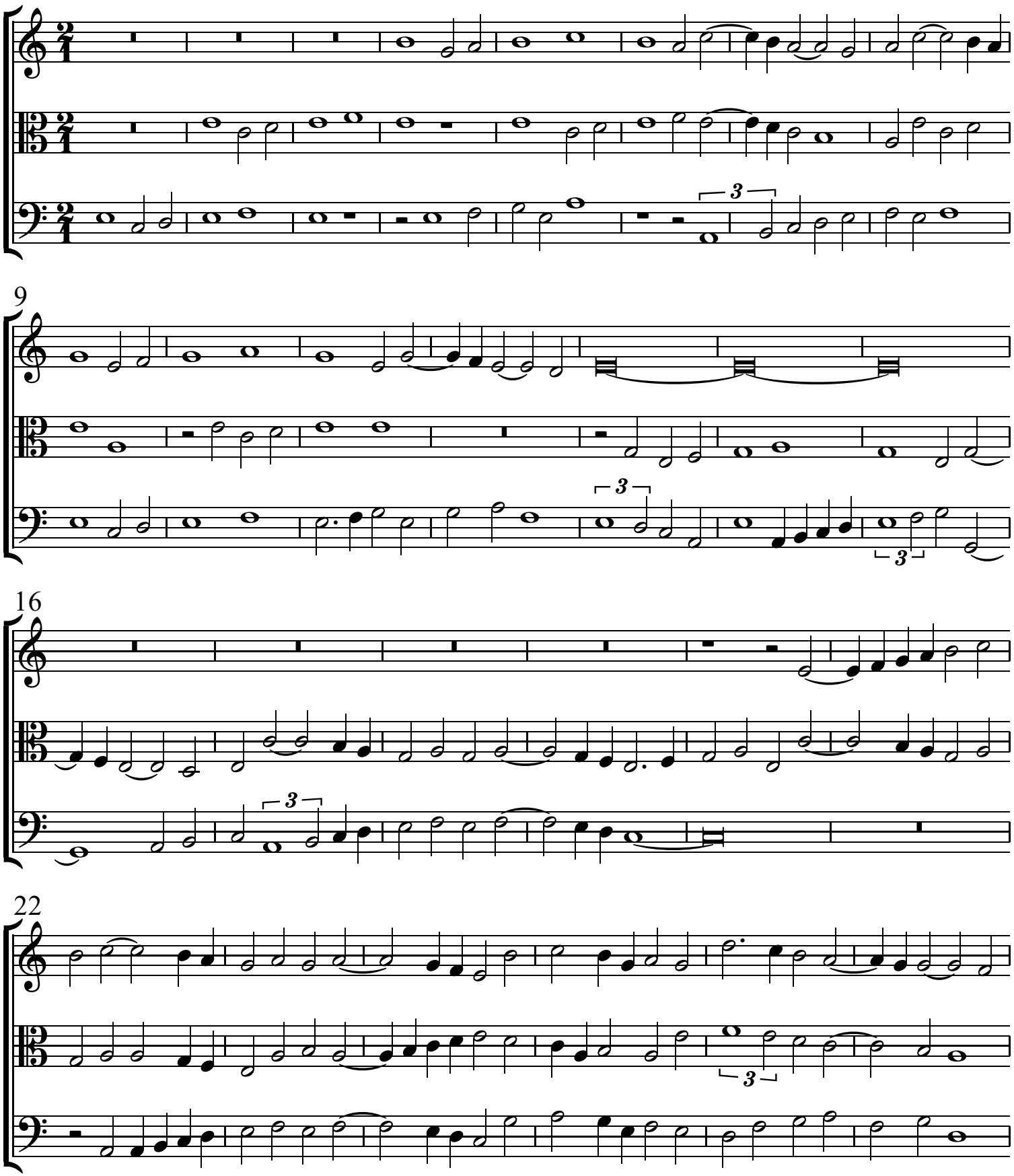


10. Dominus prope est nihil solliciti sitis

Sixtus Dietrich (c. 1493-1548)



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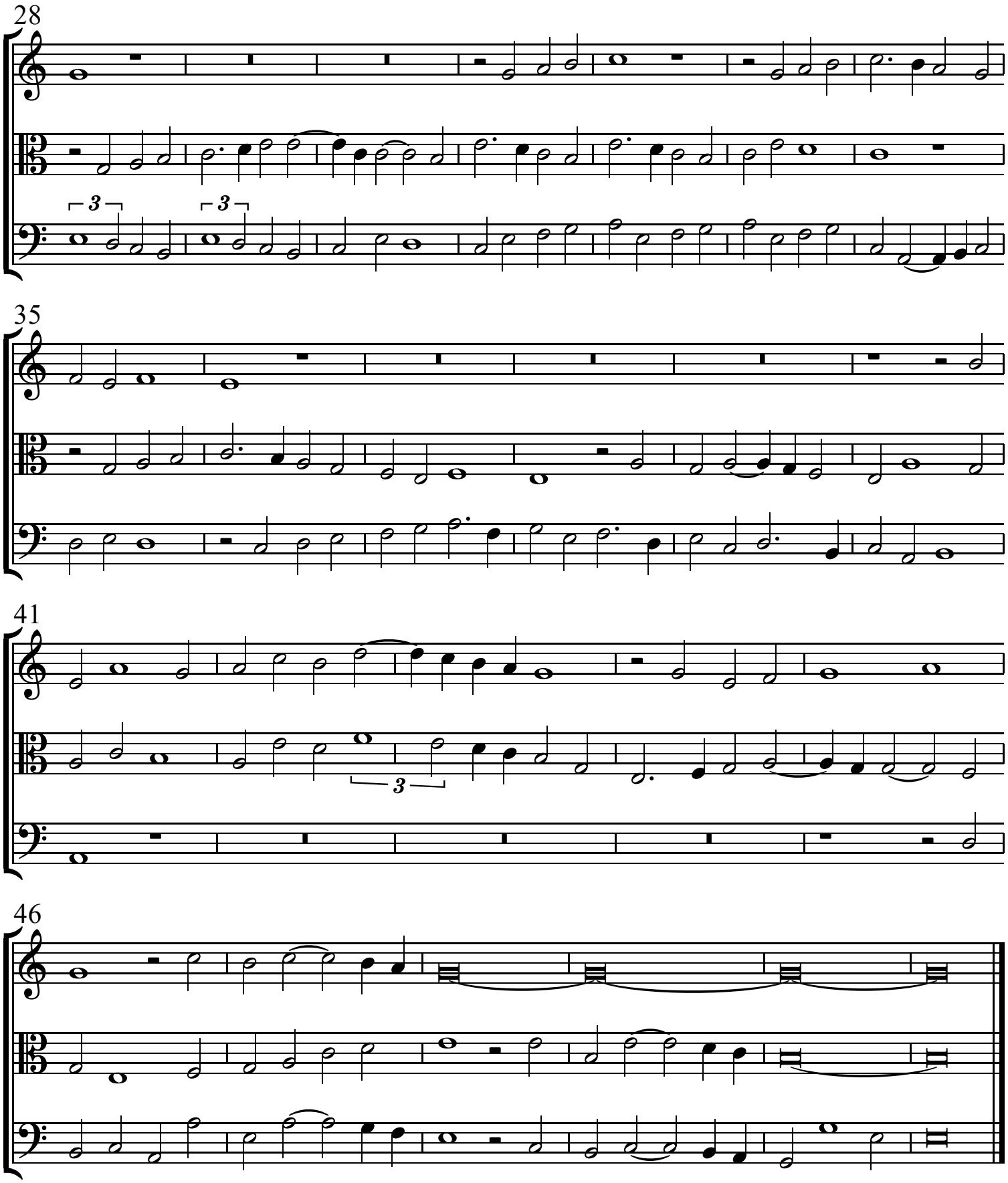
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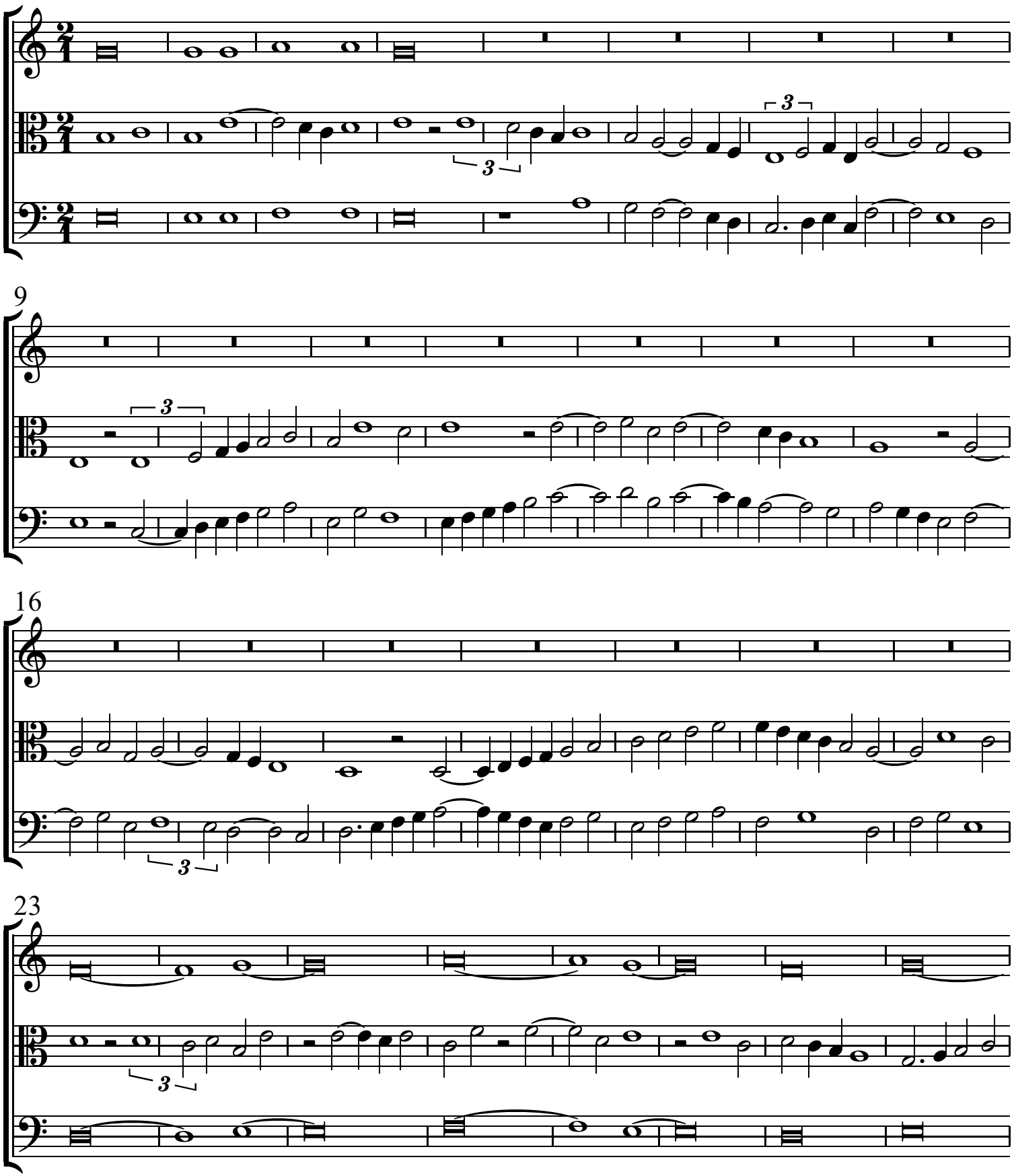
11. Sensus carnis mors est

Matthaeus Pipelare (c. 1450-c.1515)



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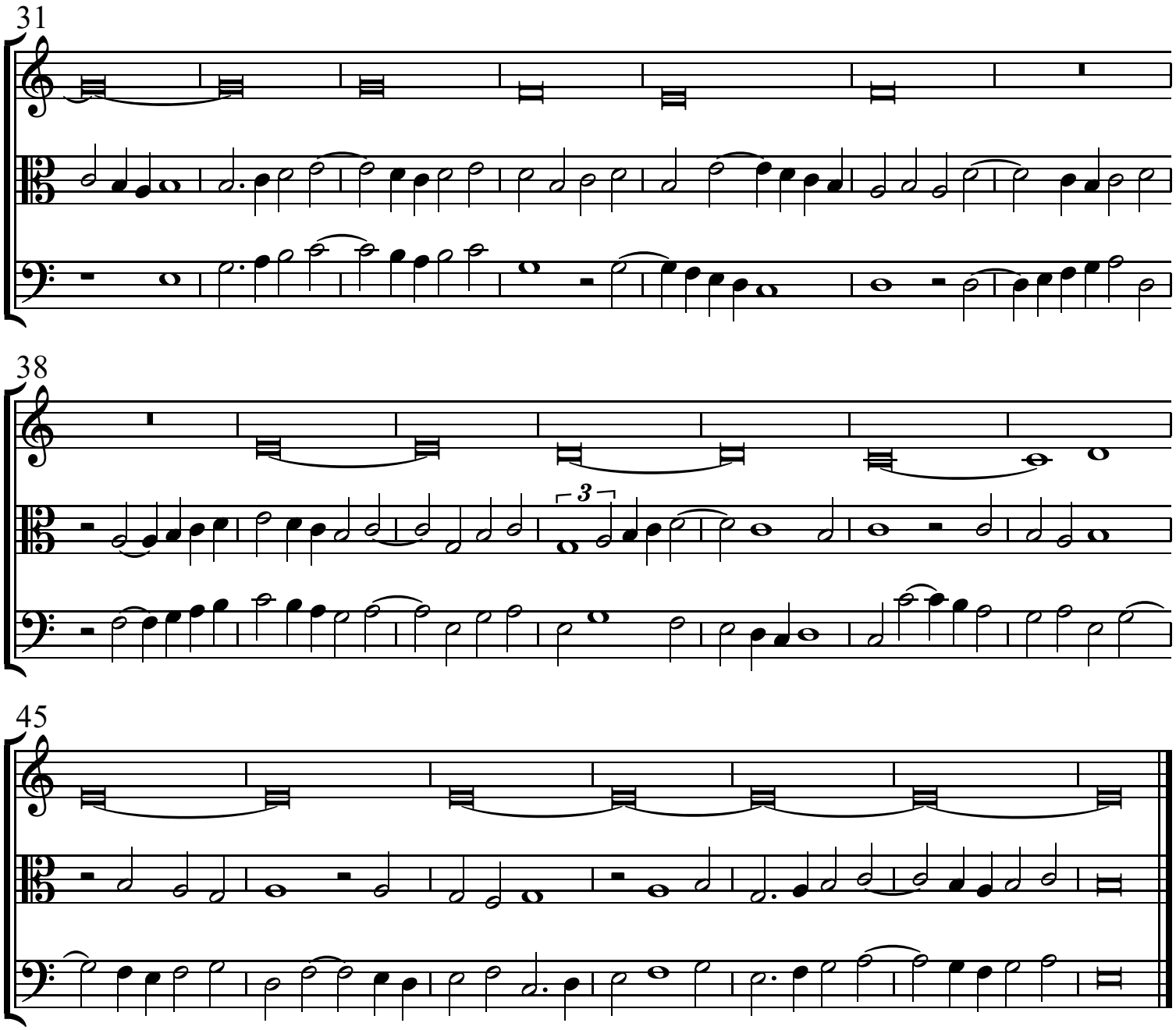
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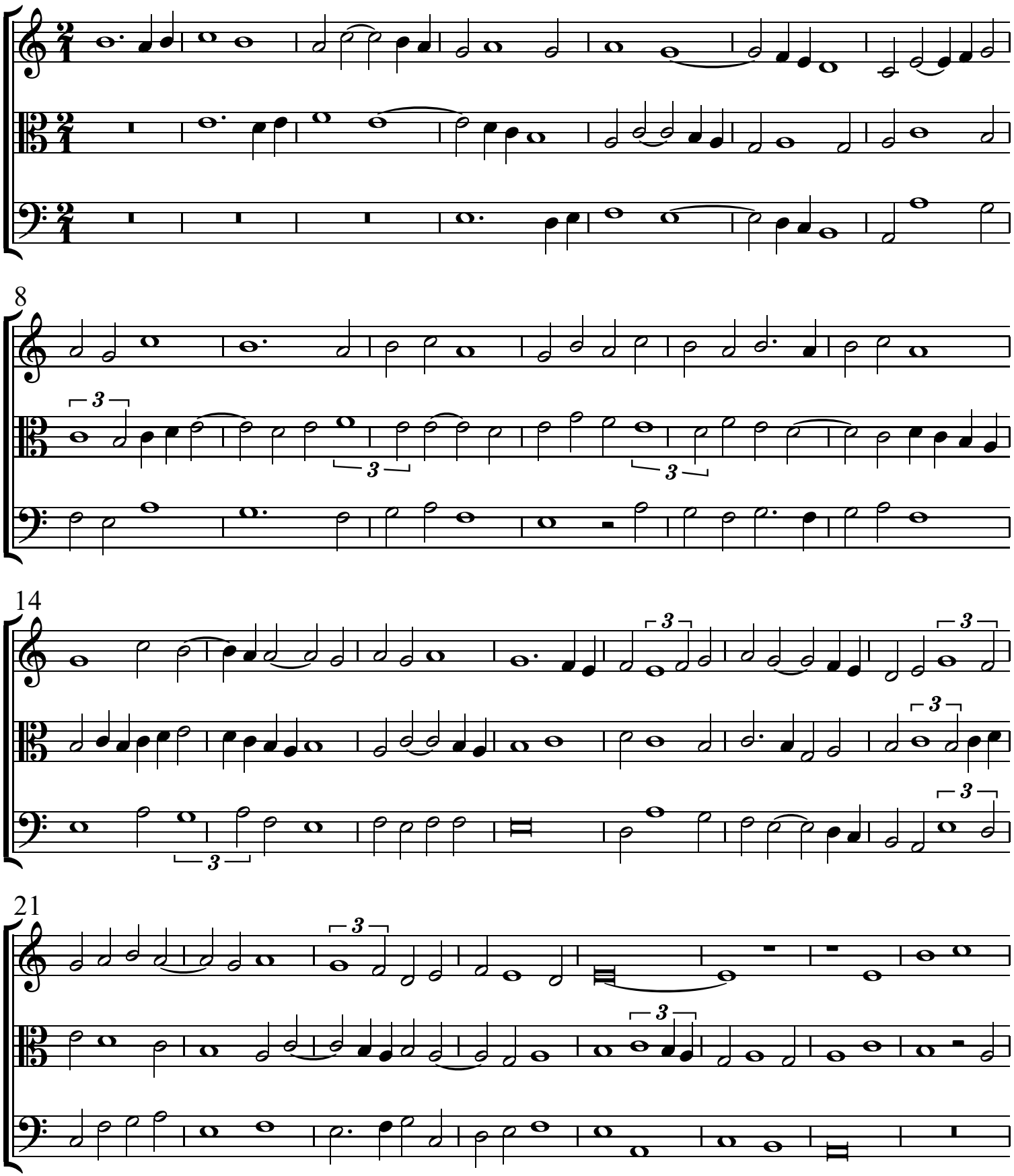
12. Rogamus vos fratres

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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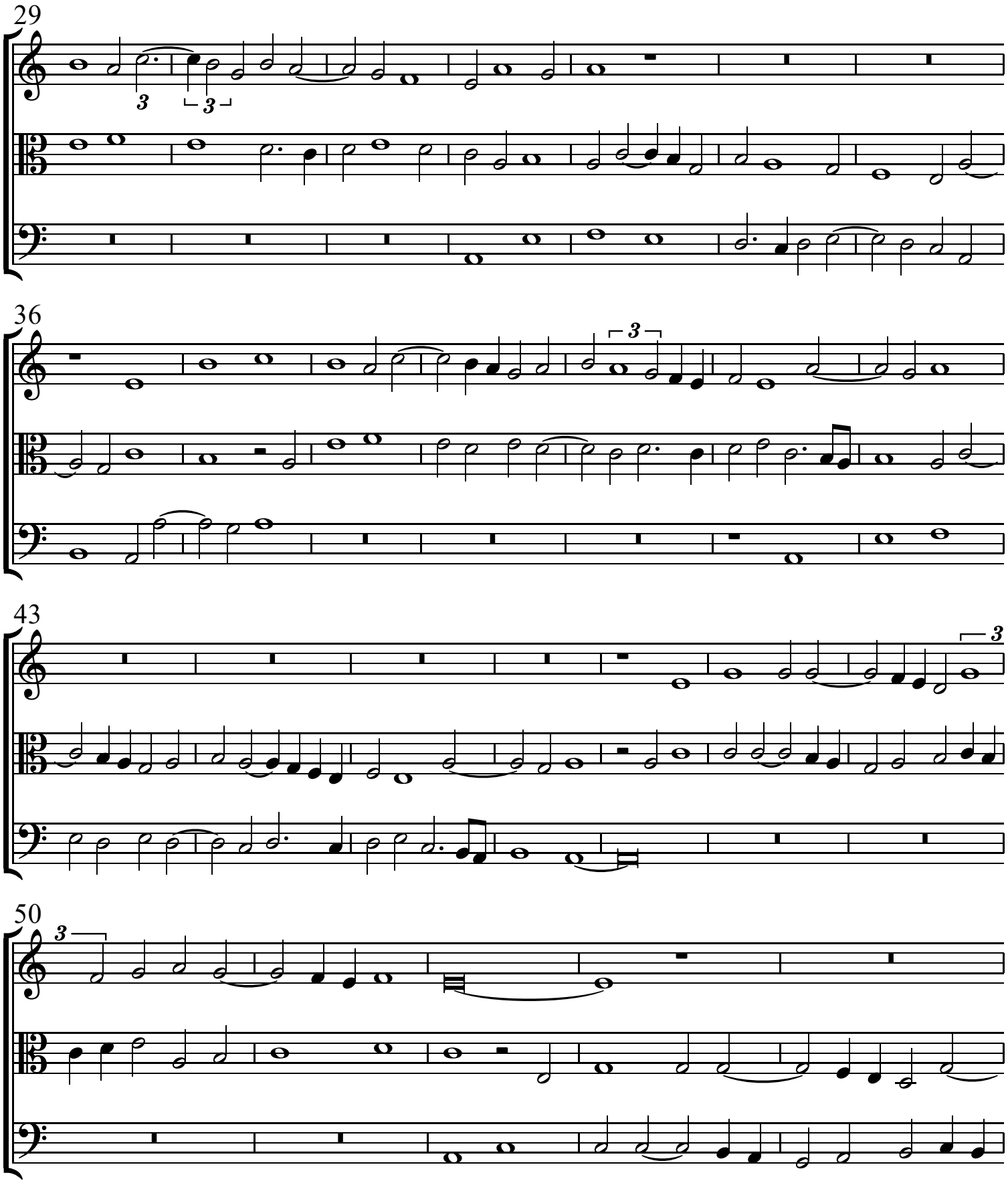
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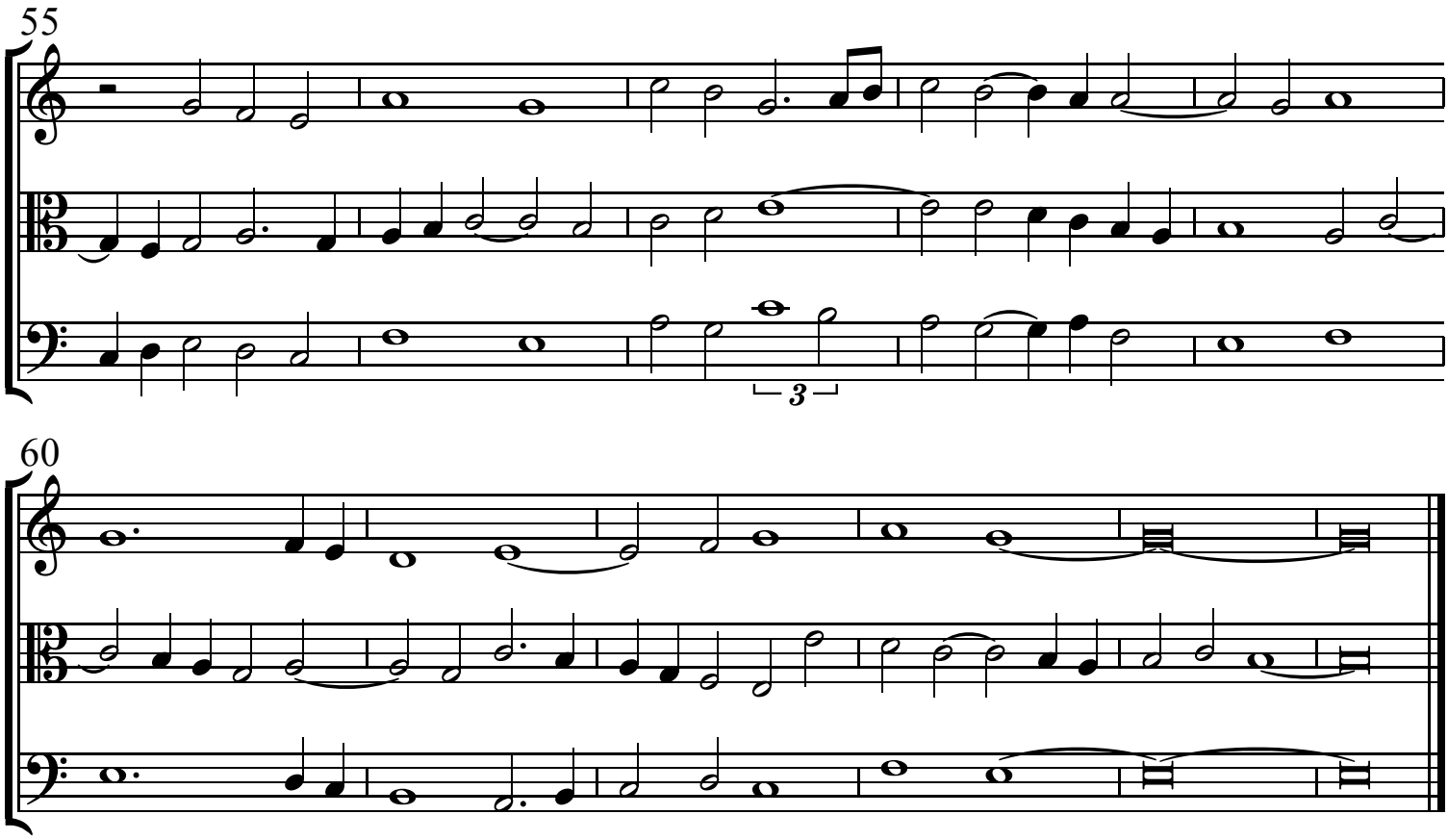
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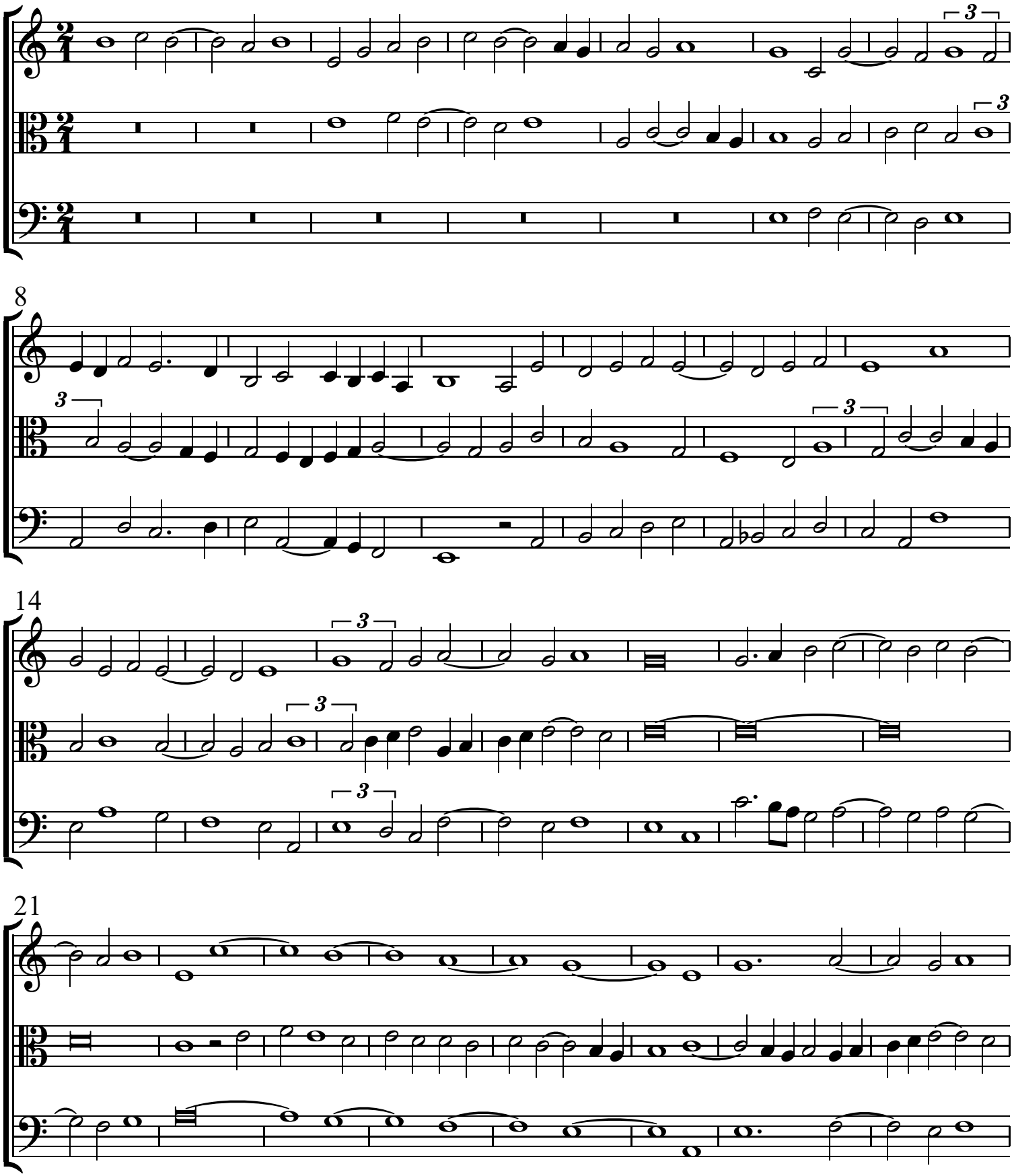
13. Omnia probate et quod bonum est tenete

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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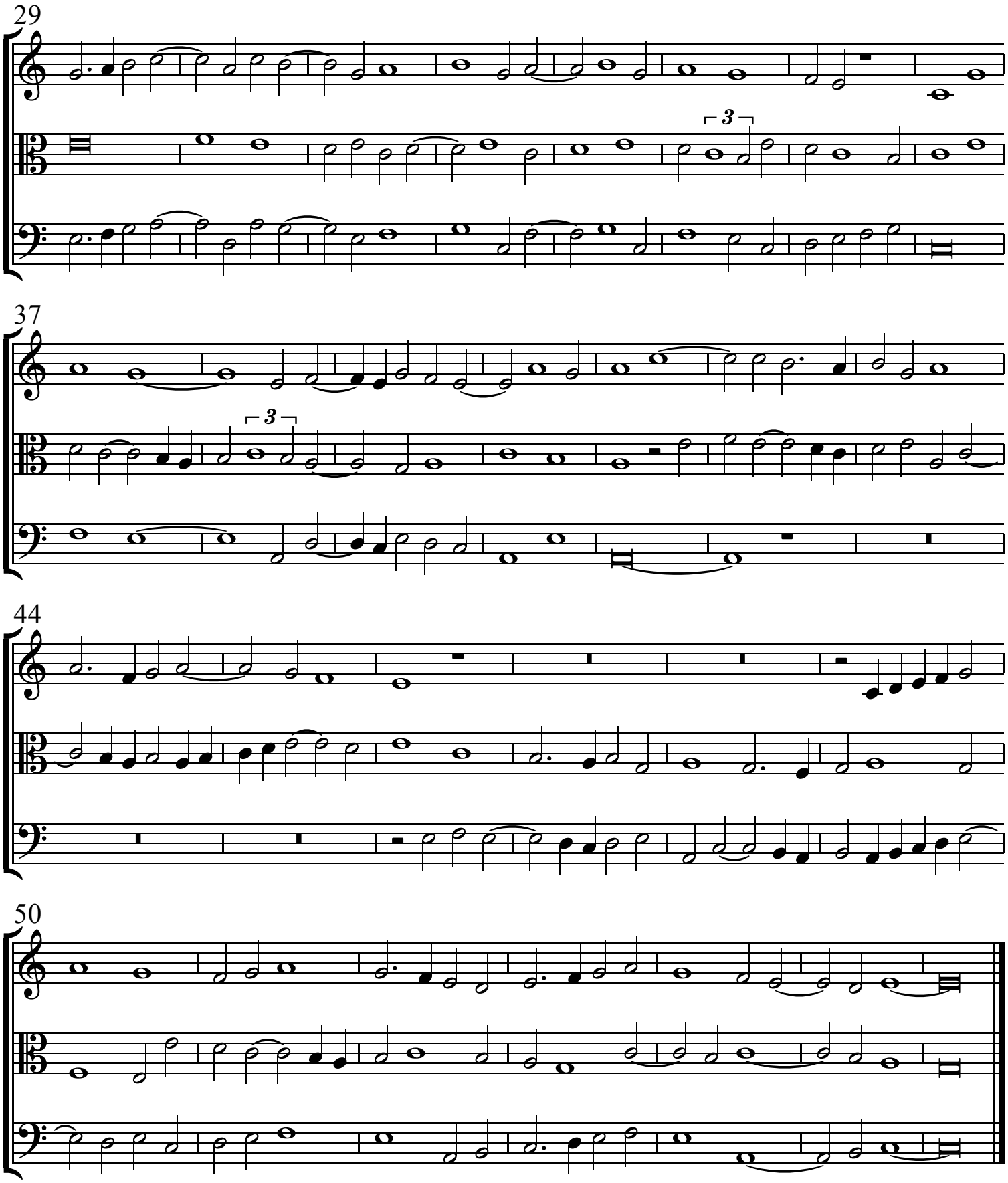
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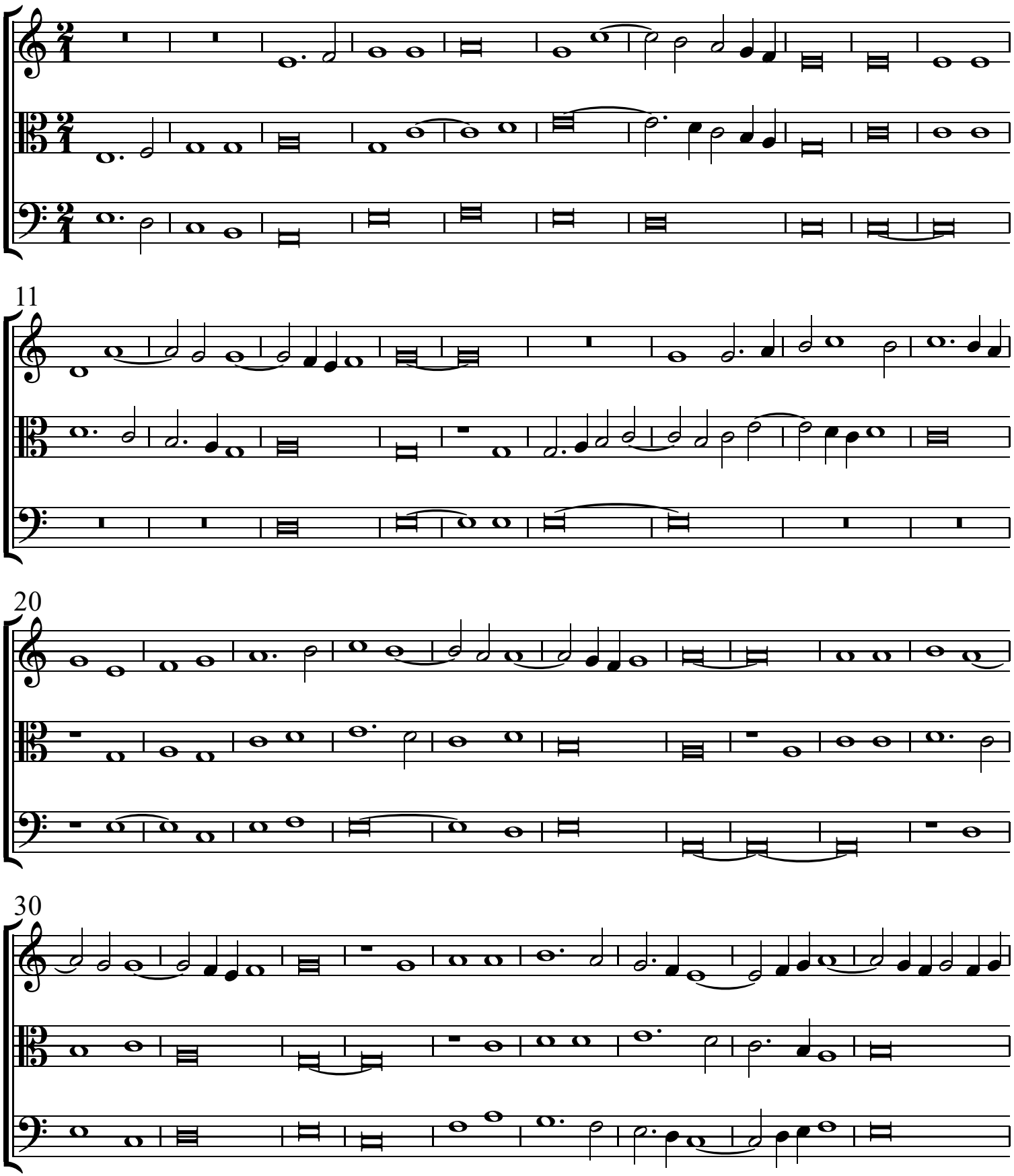
14. O vos omnes

Loyset Compère (c. 1445-1518)



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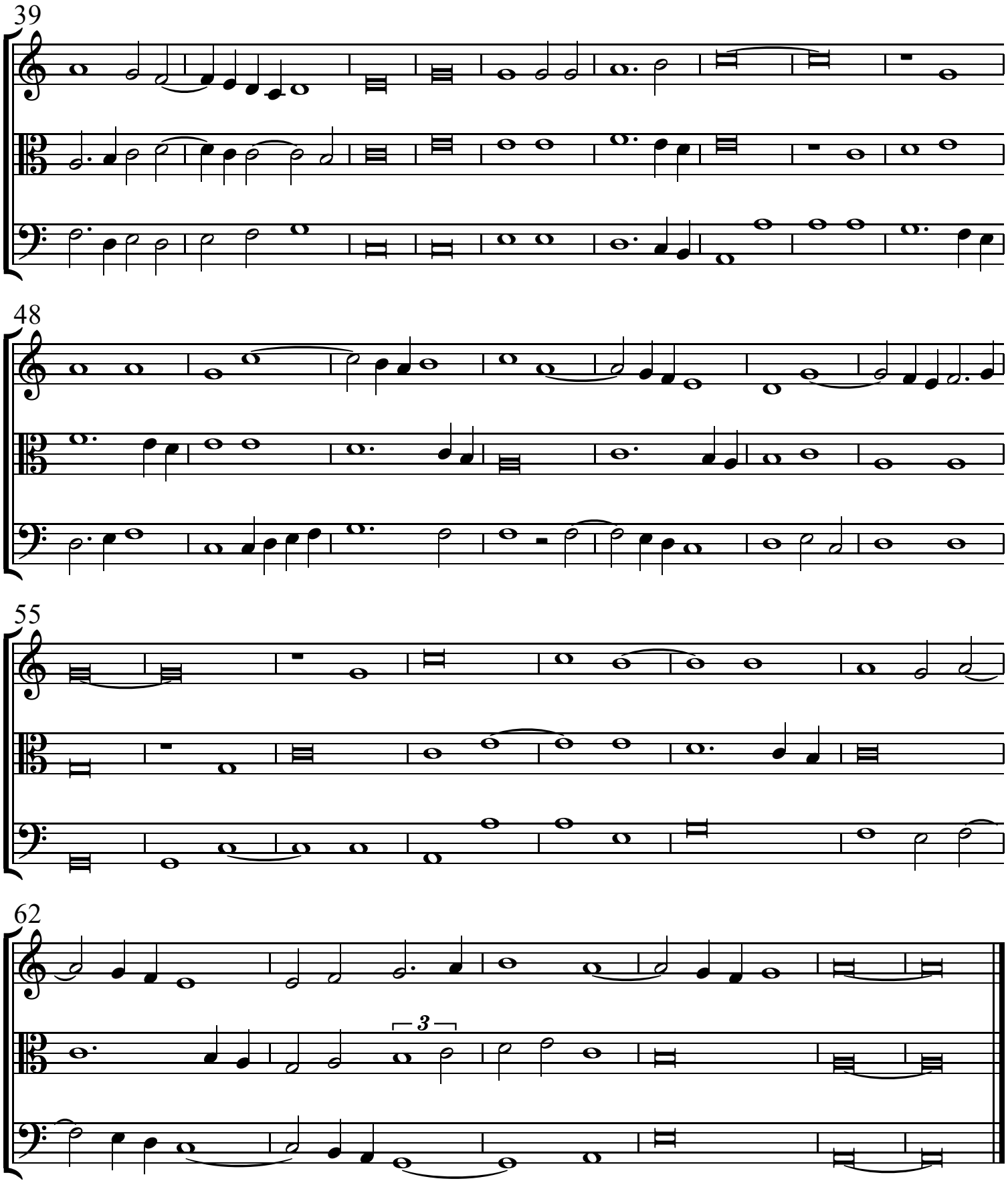
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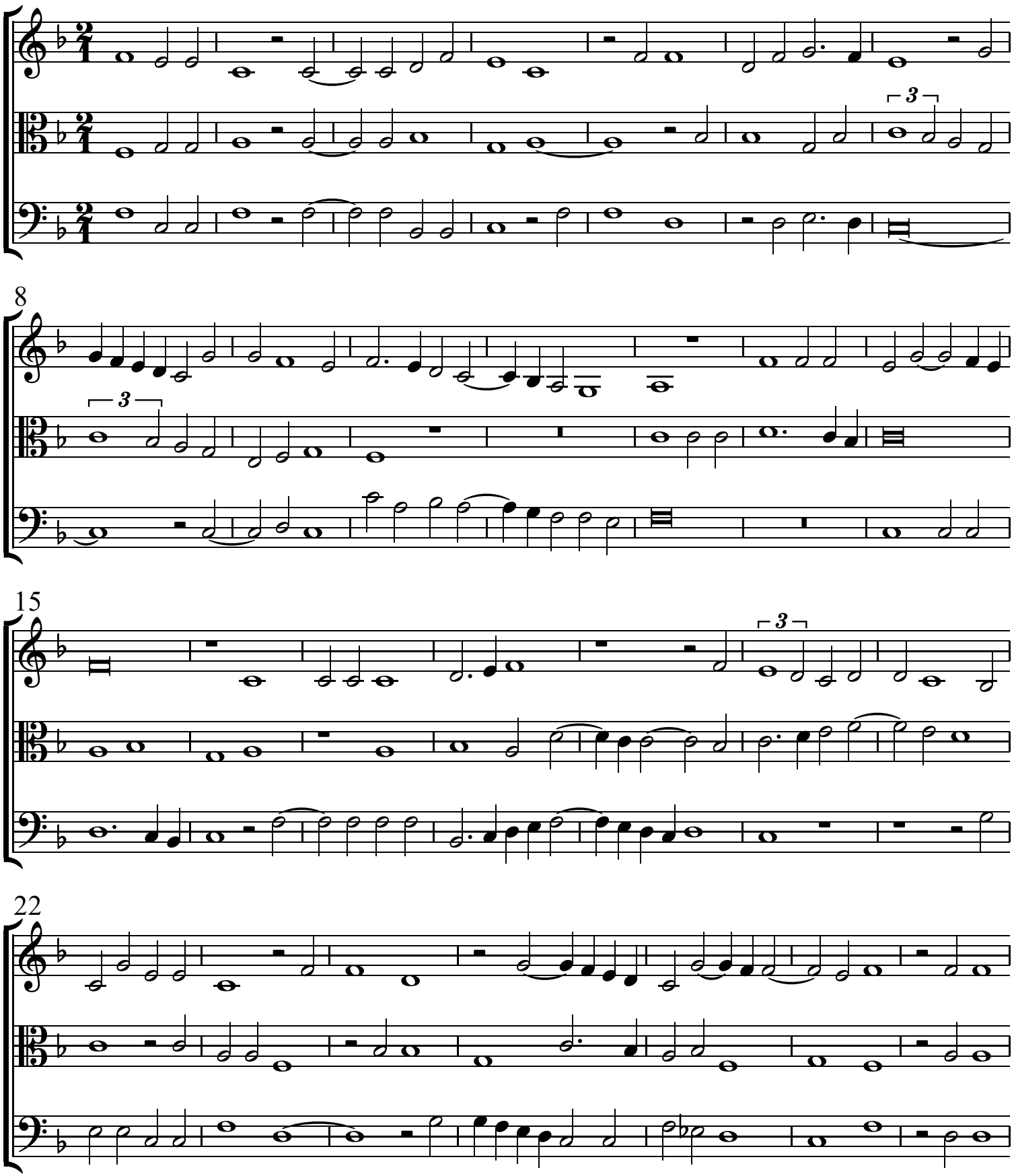
15. Illumina oculos meos

Anonymous



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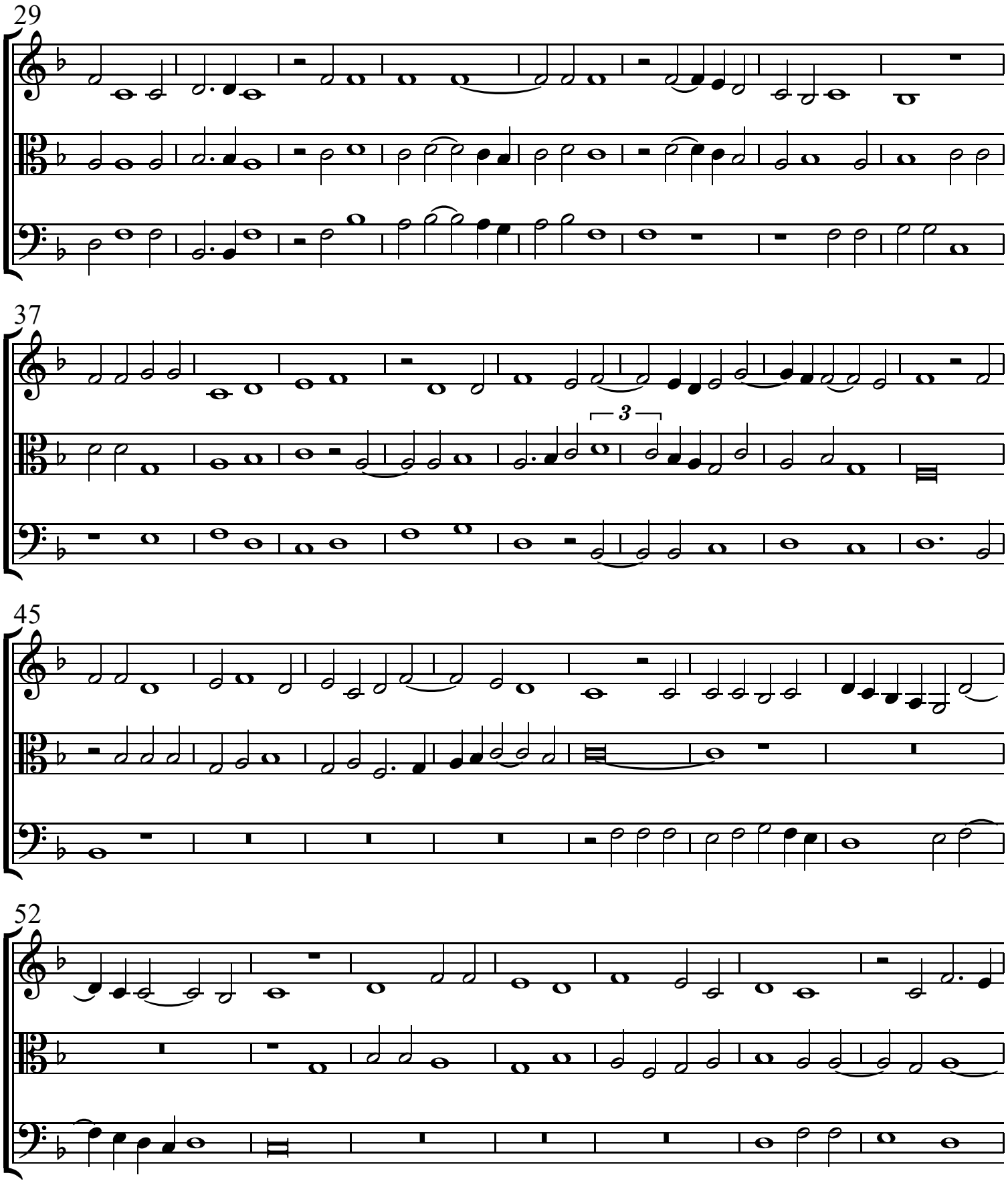
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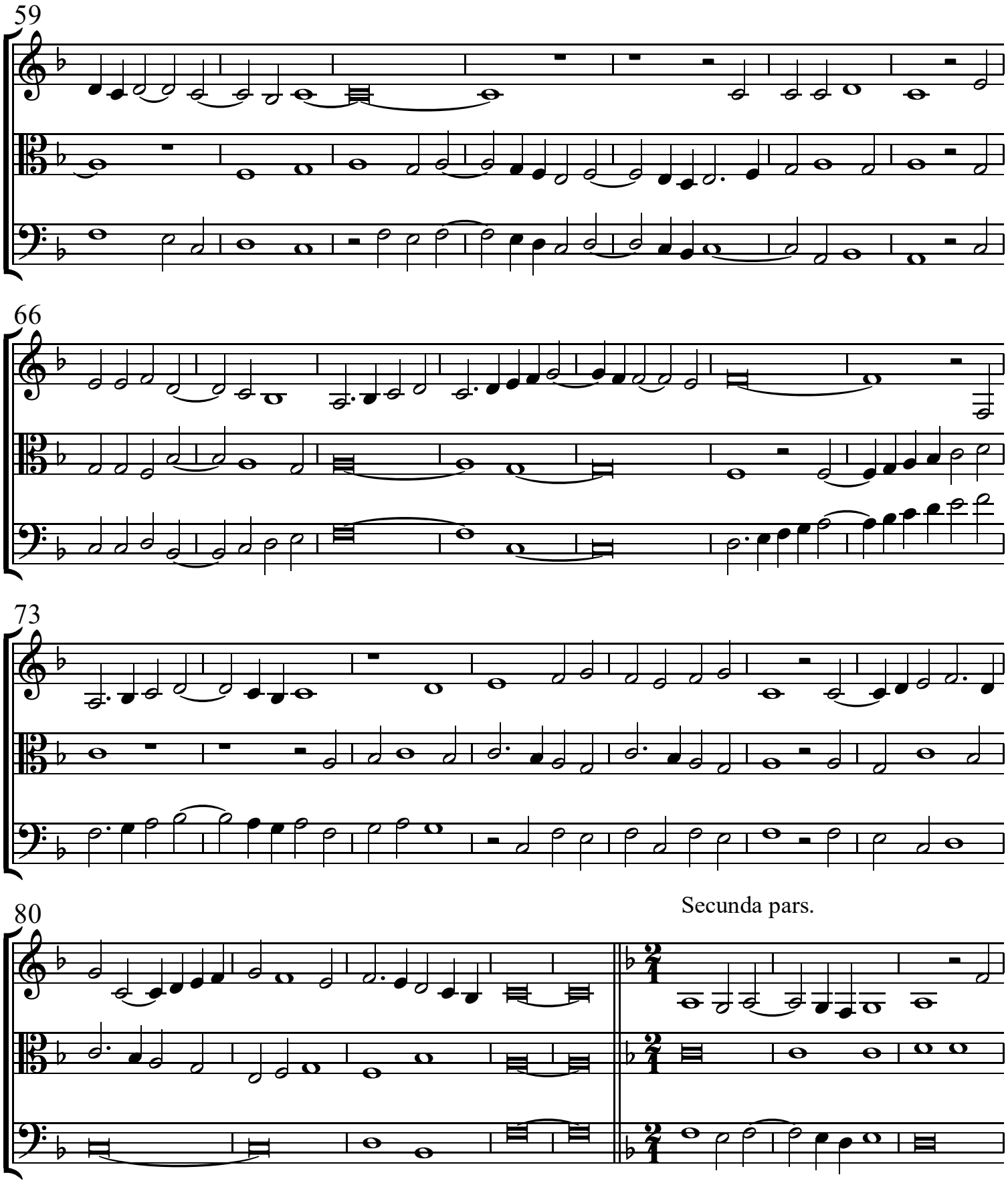
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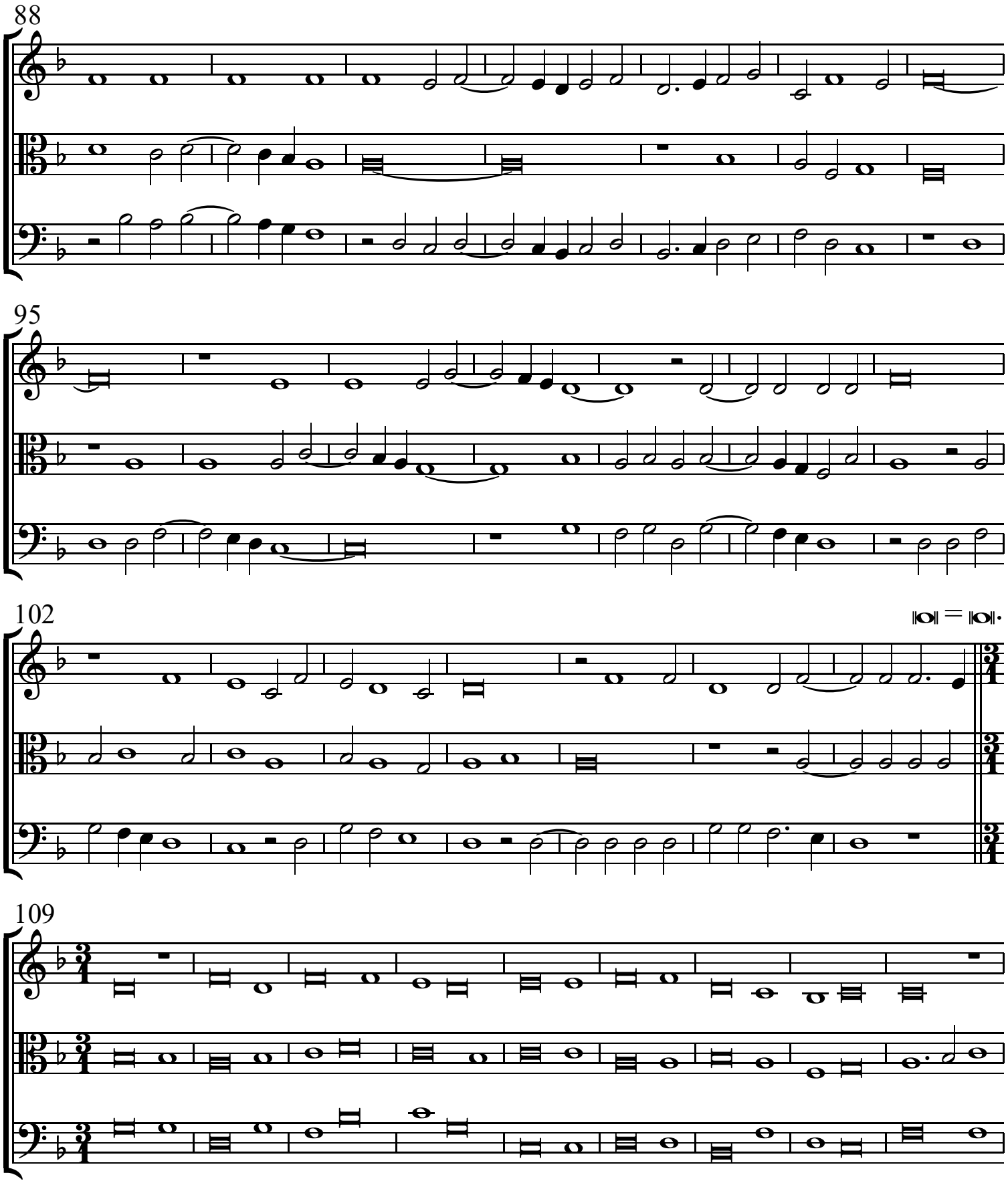
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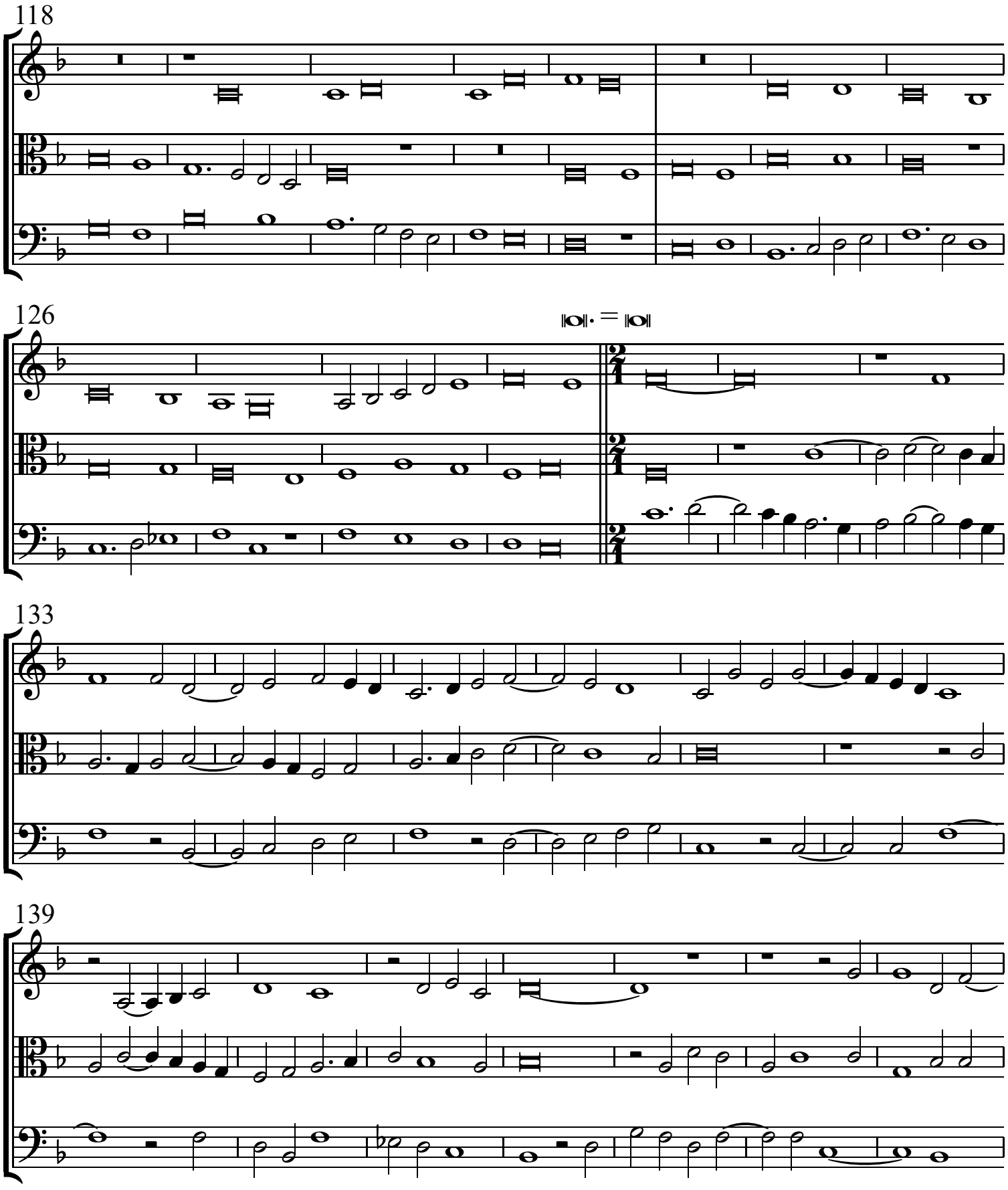
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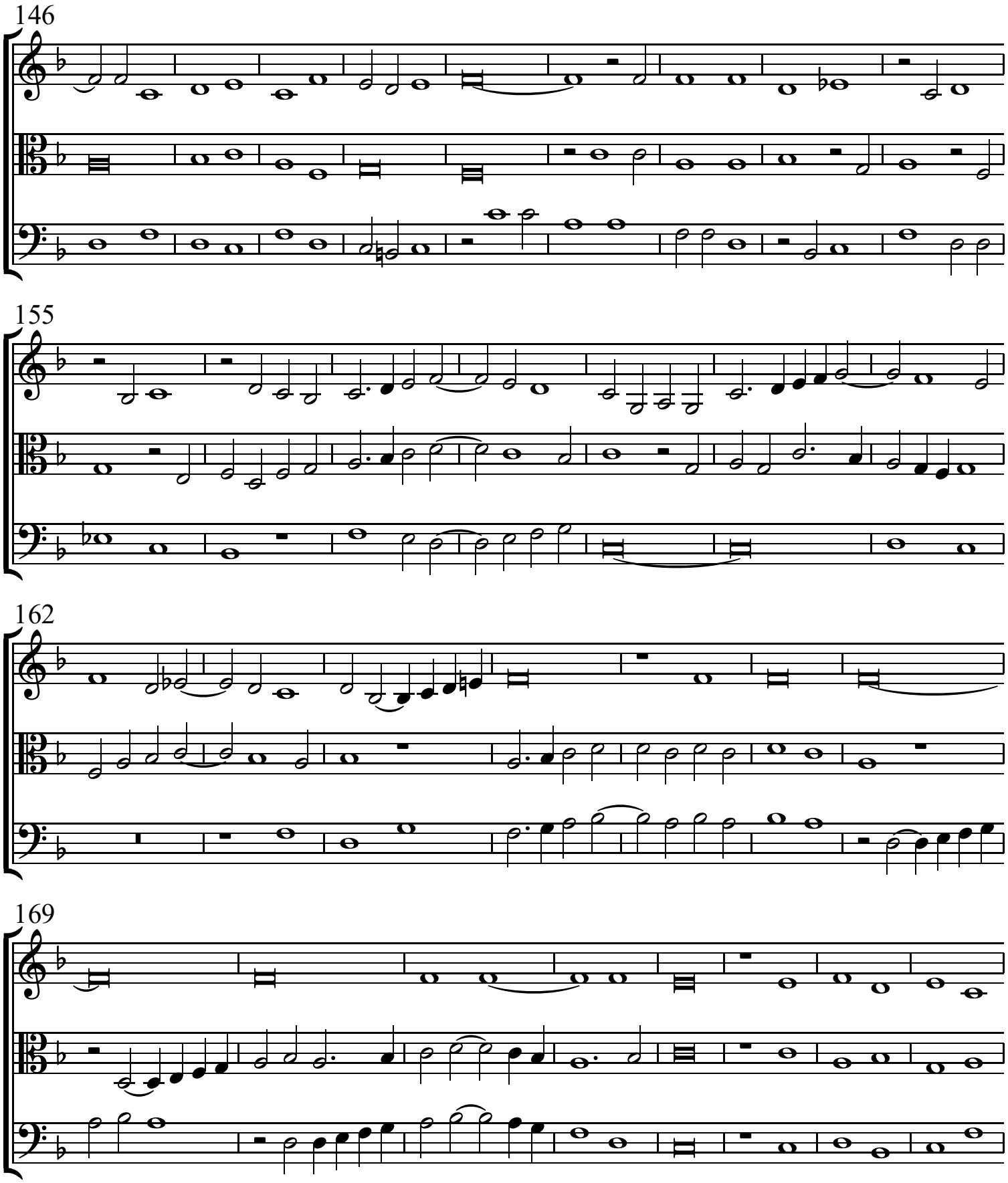
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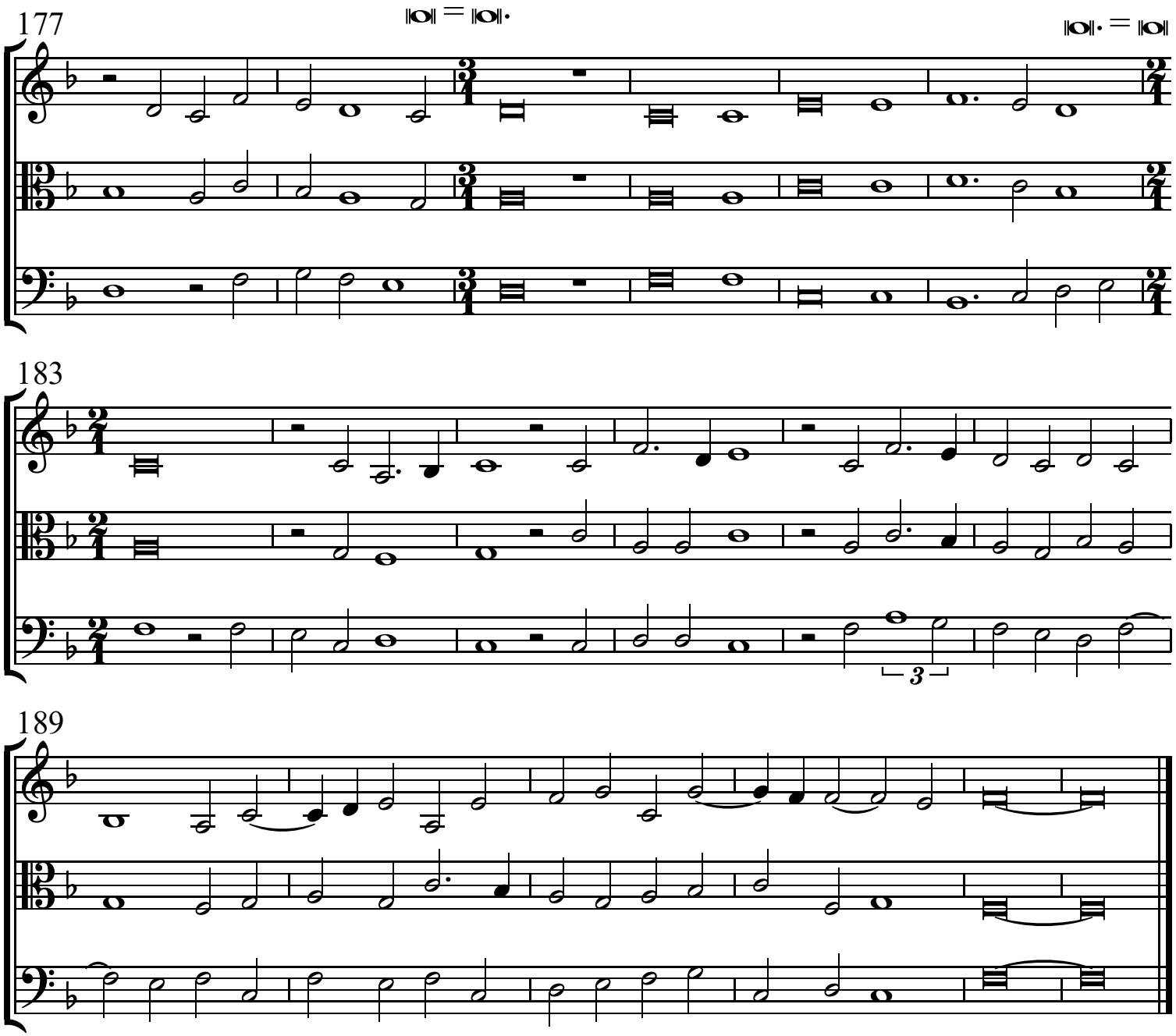
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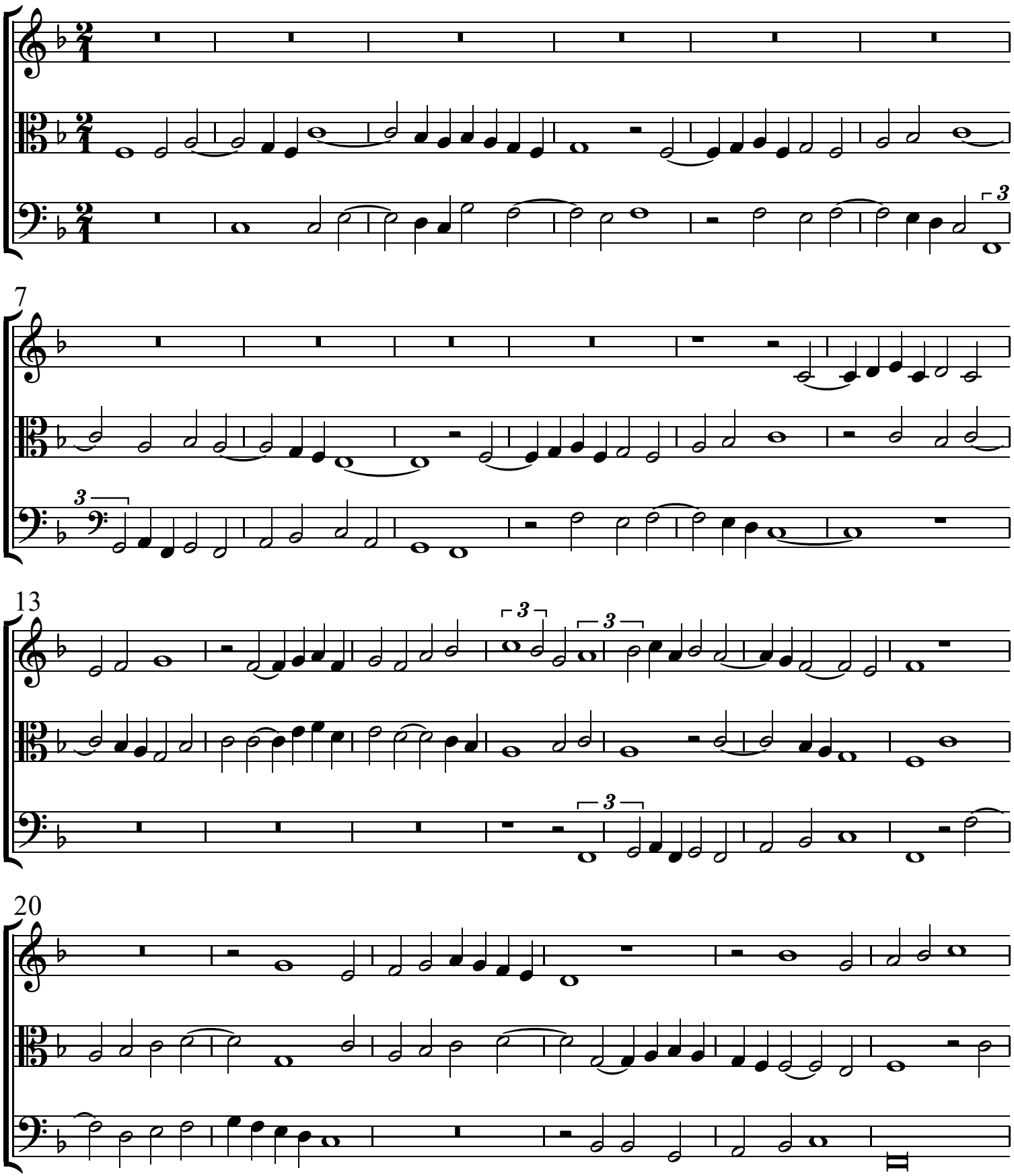
16. Omnes peccaverunt et egent gloria Dei

Pierre de la Rue (c.1452-1518)



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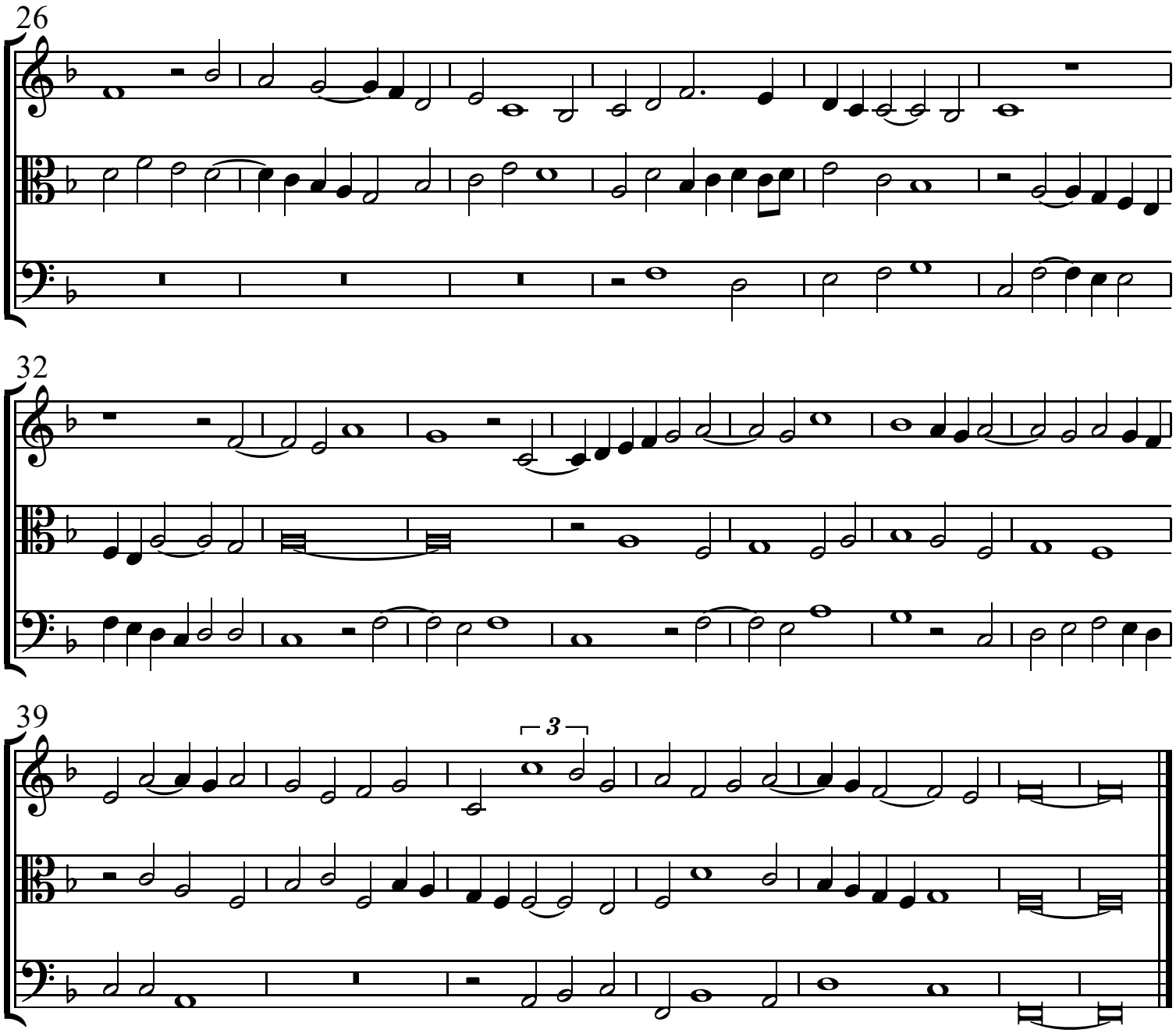
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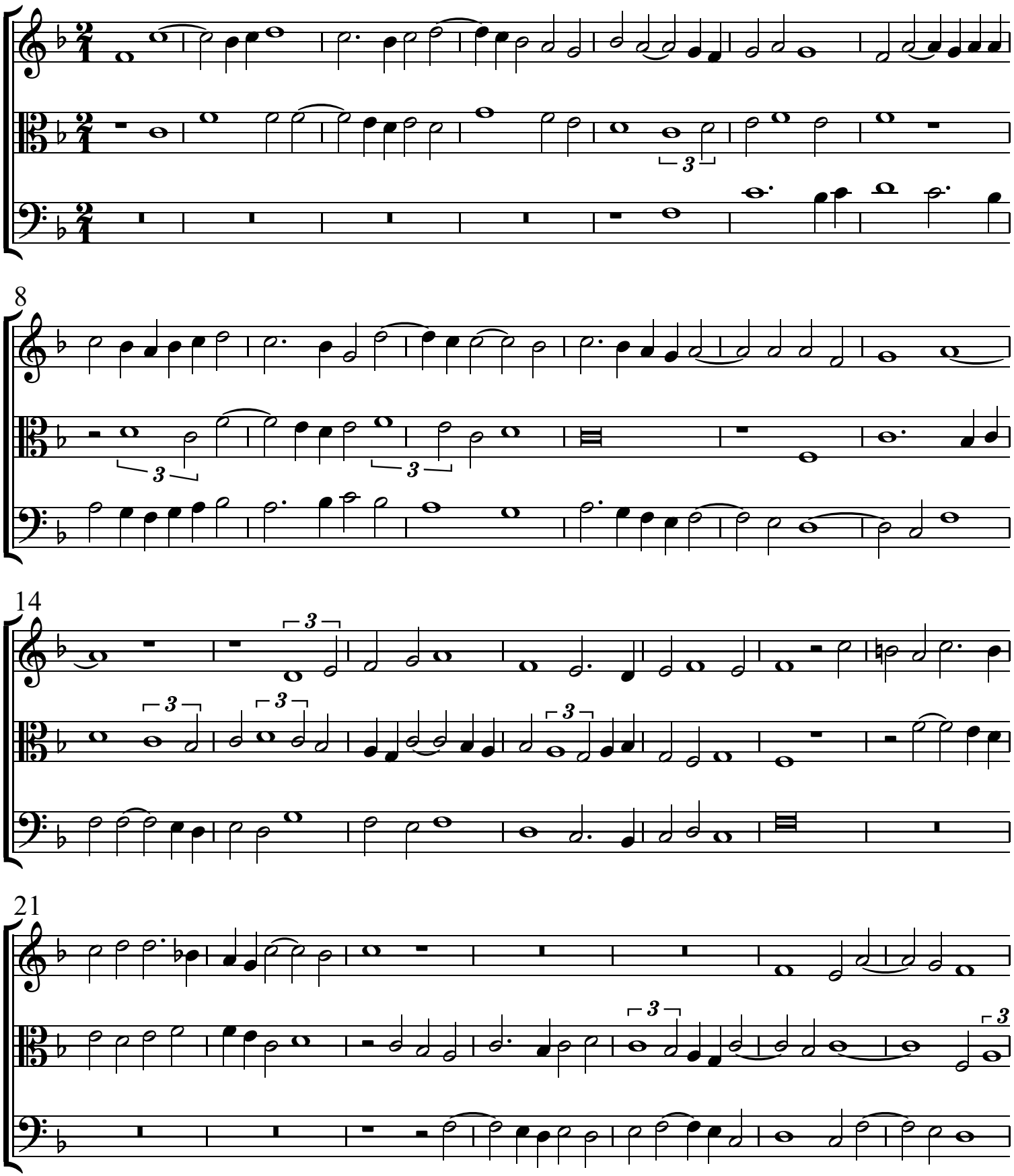
17. Oportuit Christum pat

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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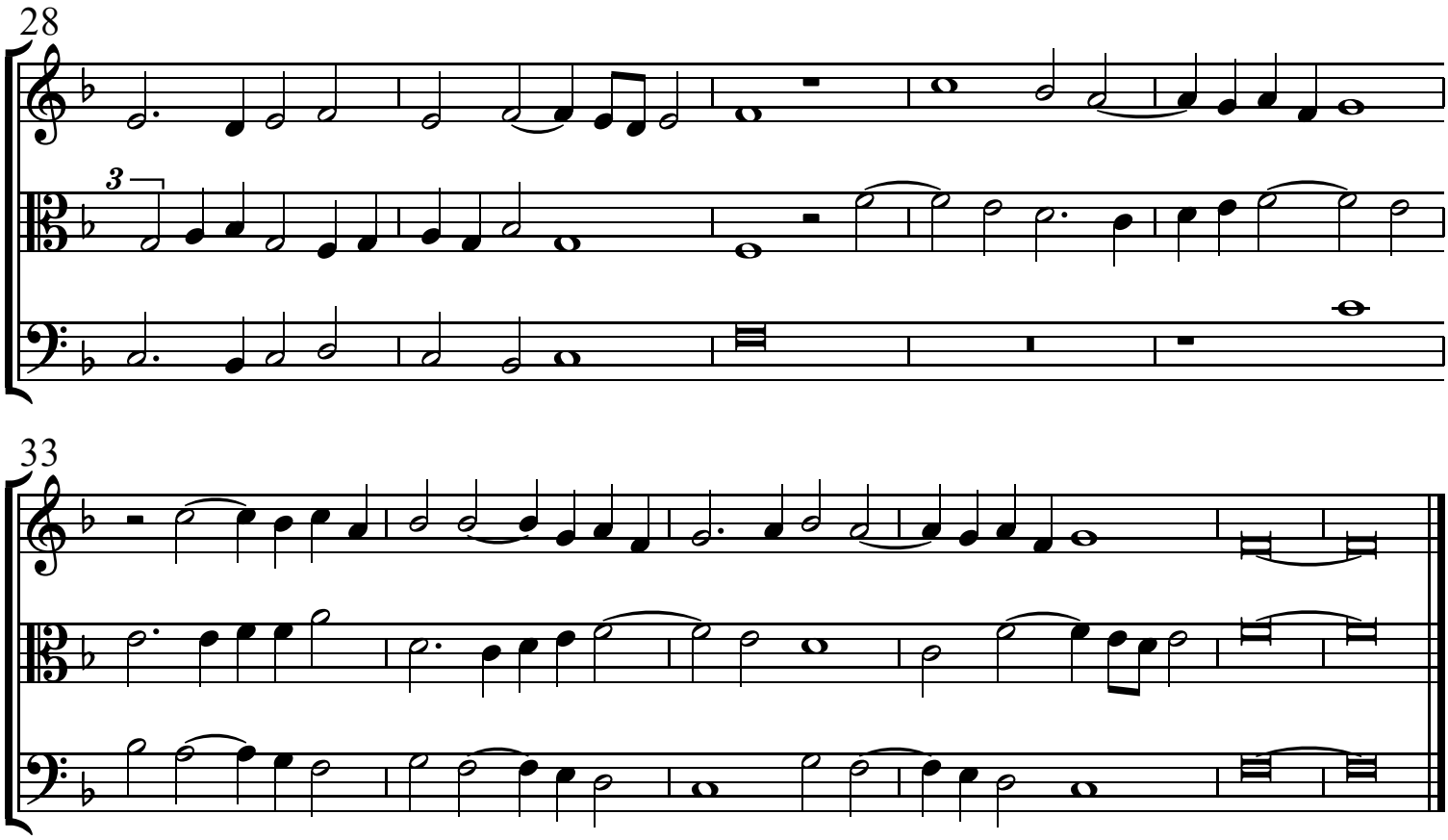
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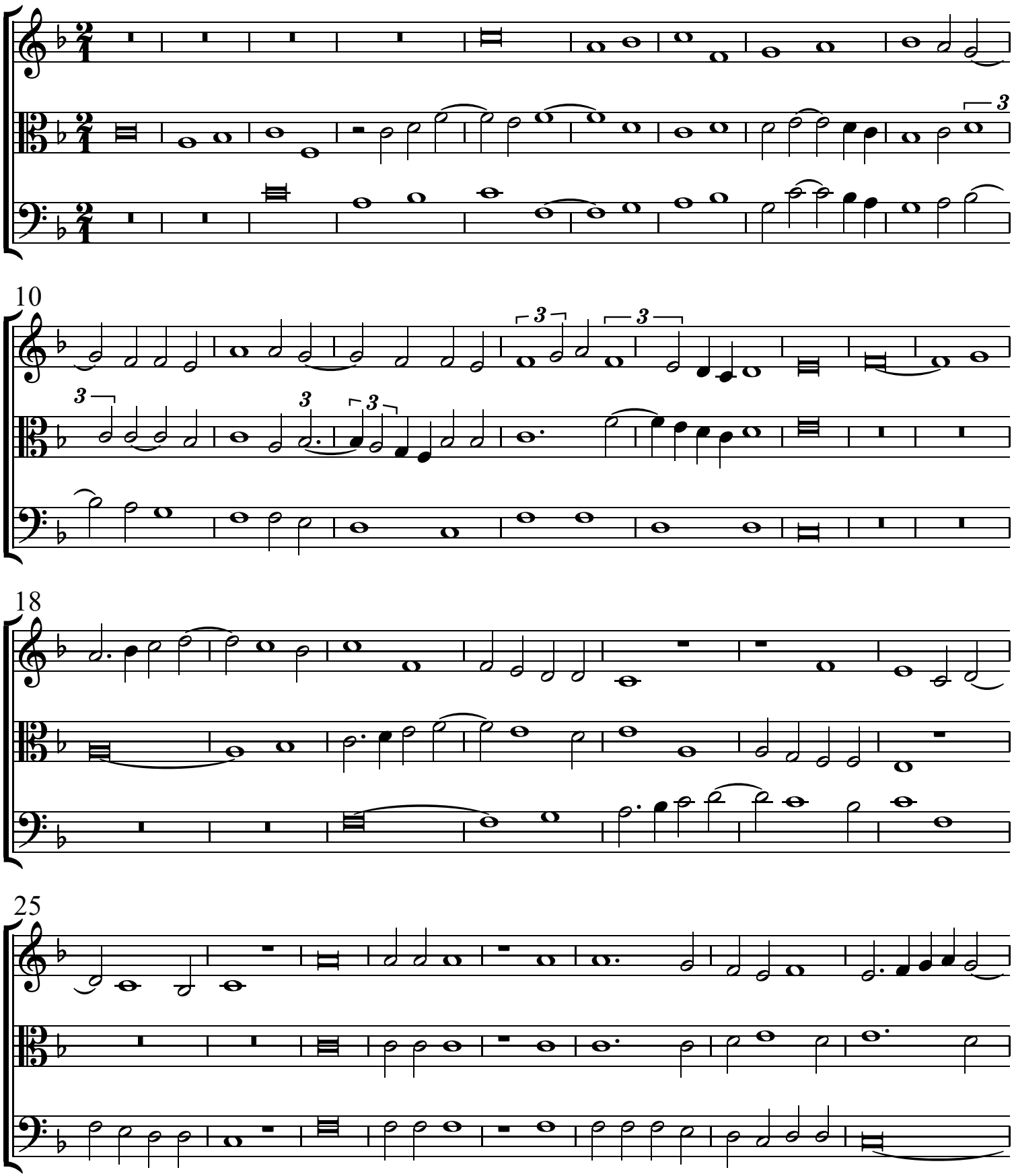
18. Cor mundum crea in me Deus

Anonymous



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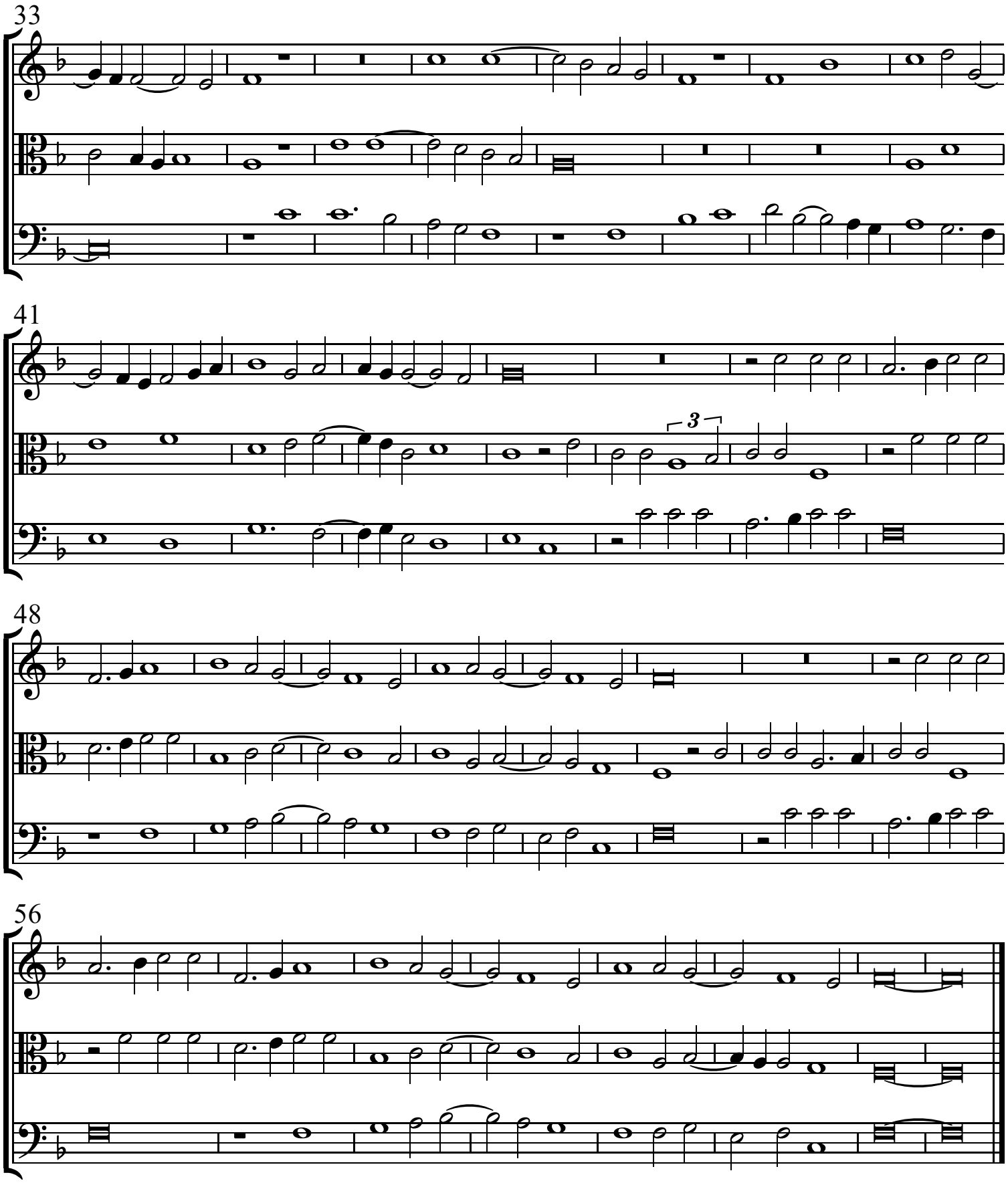
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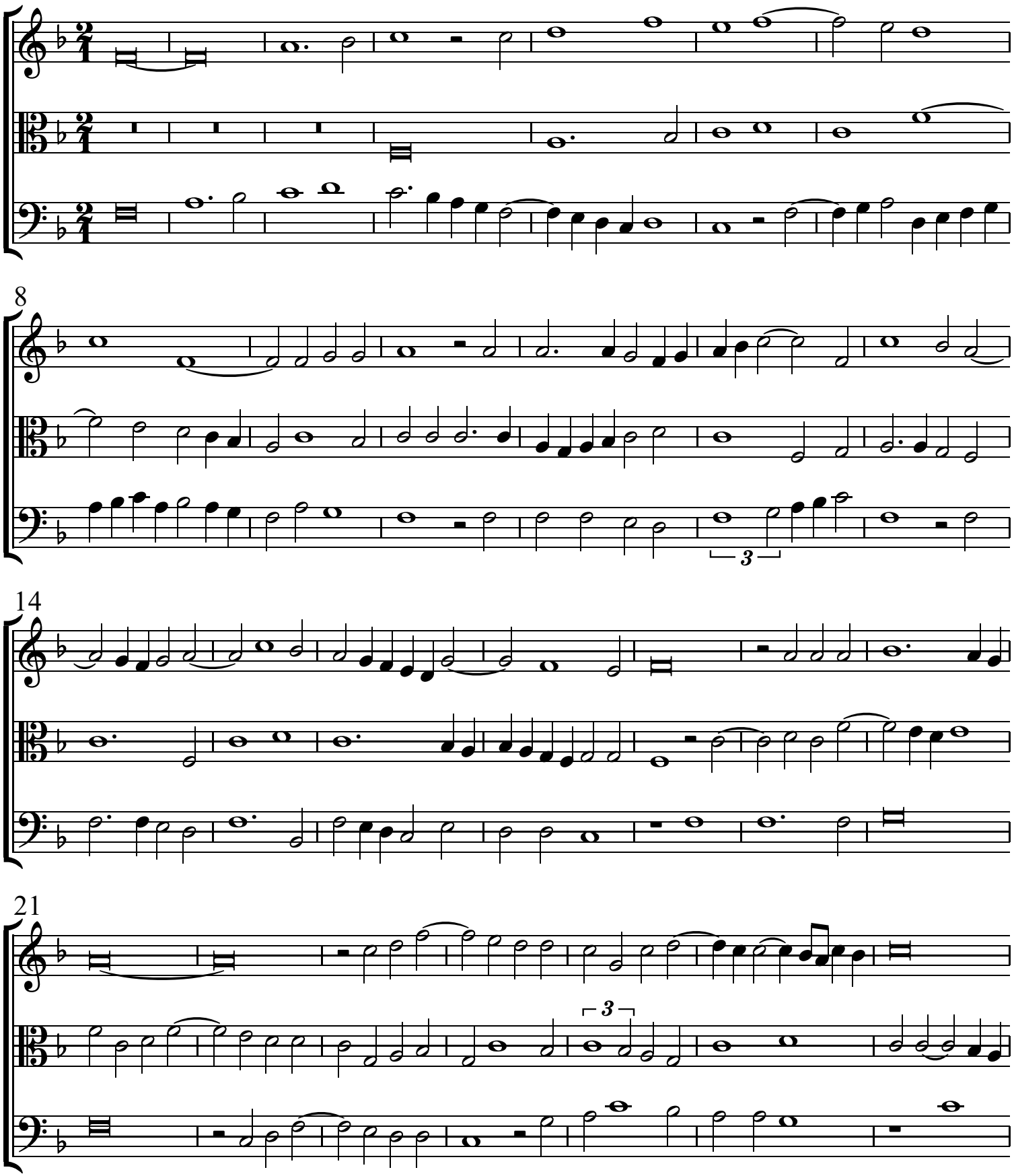
56

19. Omne quod dat mihi pater

Anonymous



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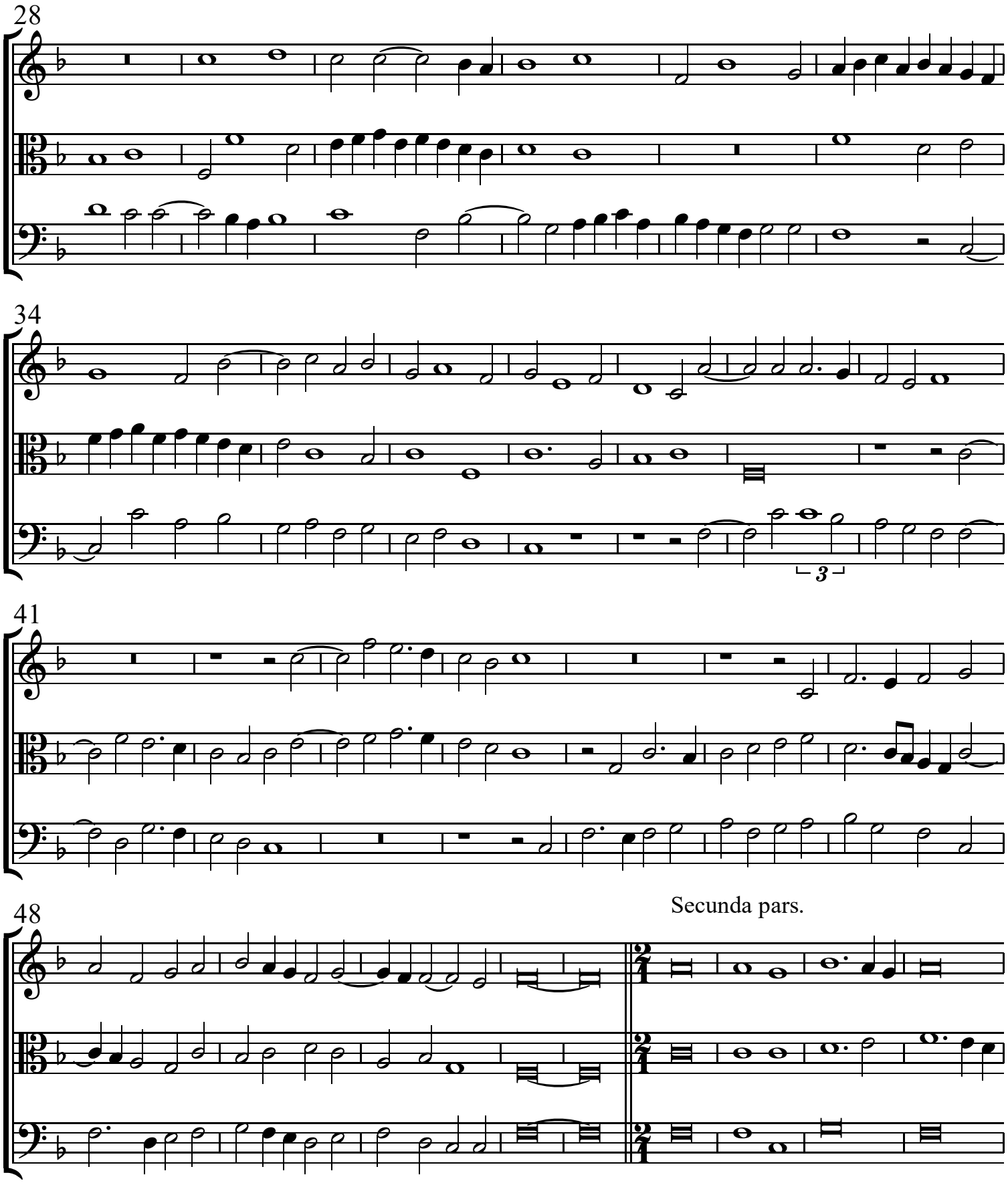
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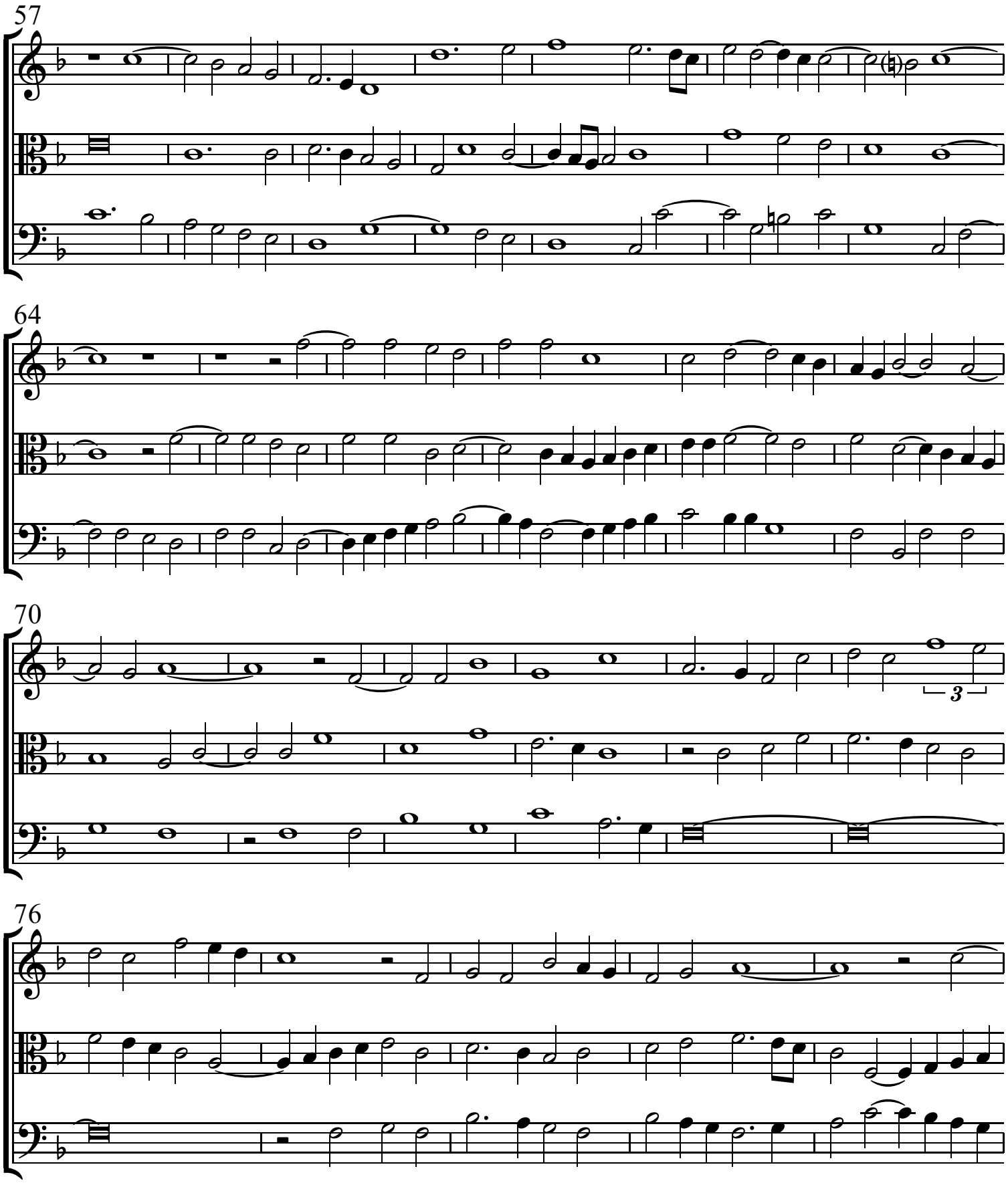
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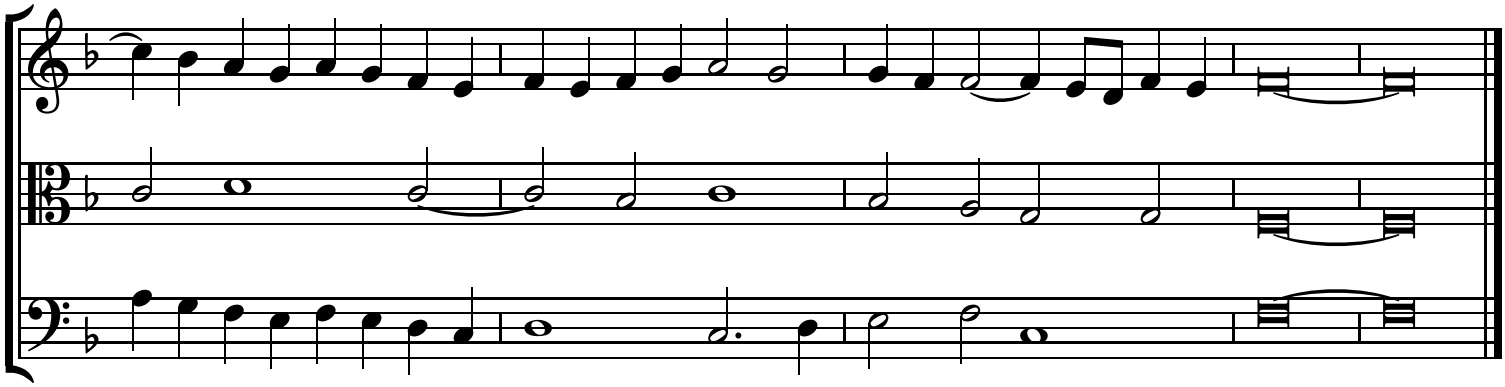
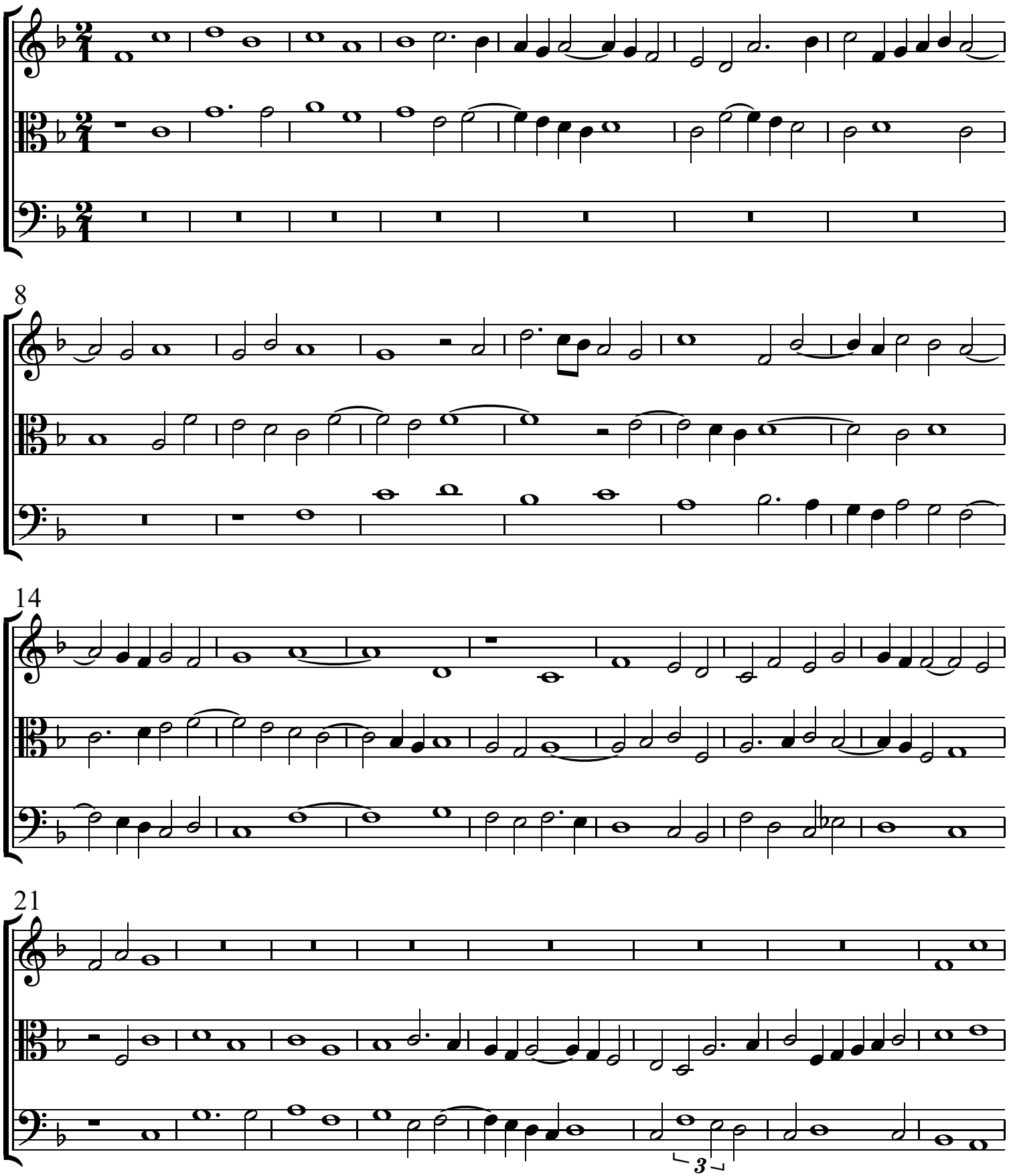


20. Clamabat Jesus in templo docens

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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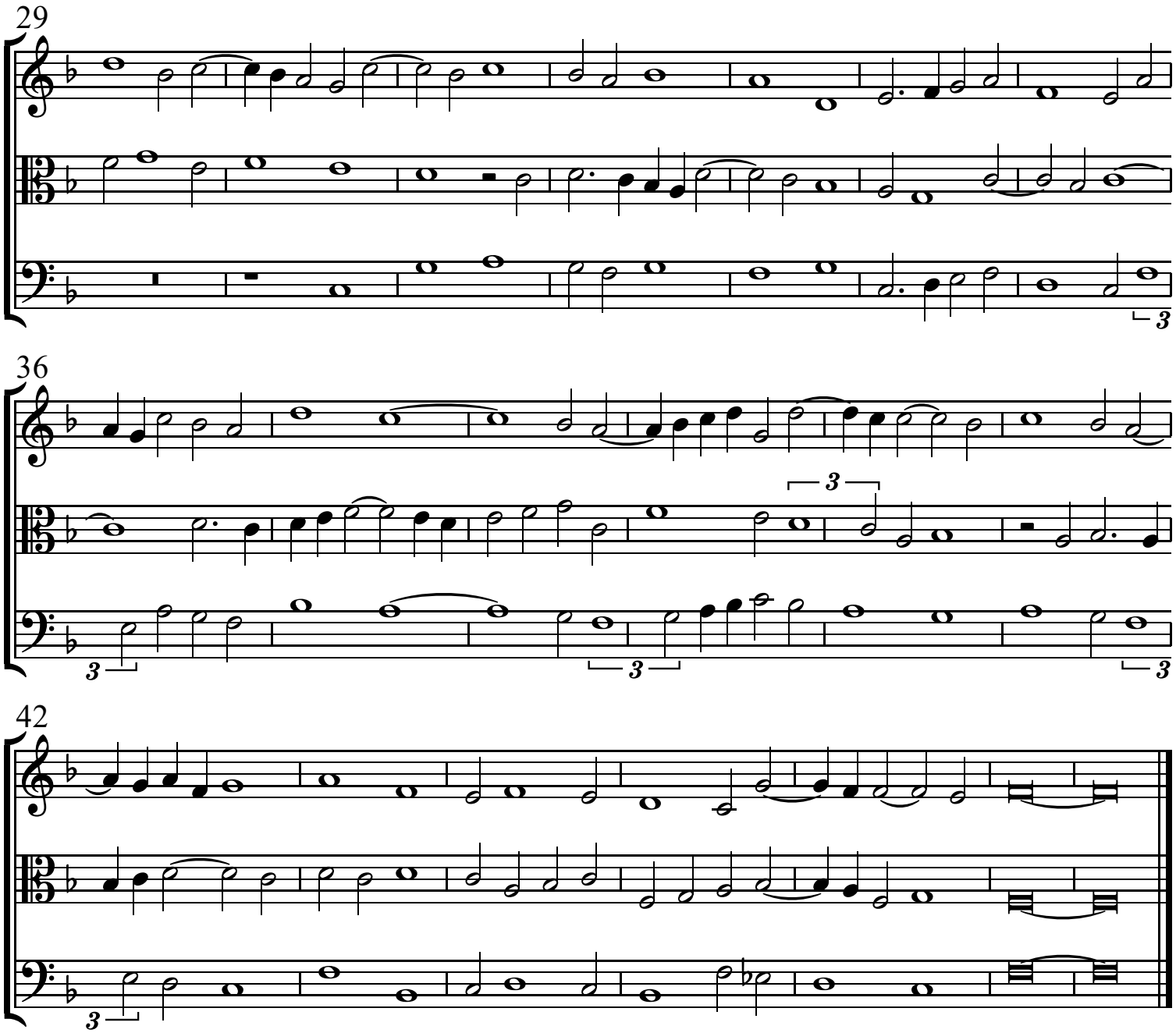
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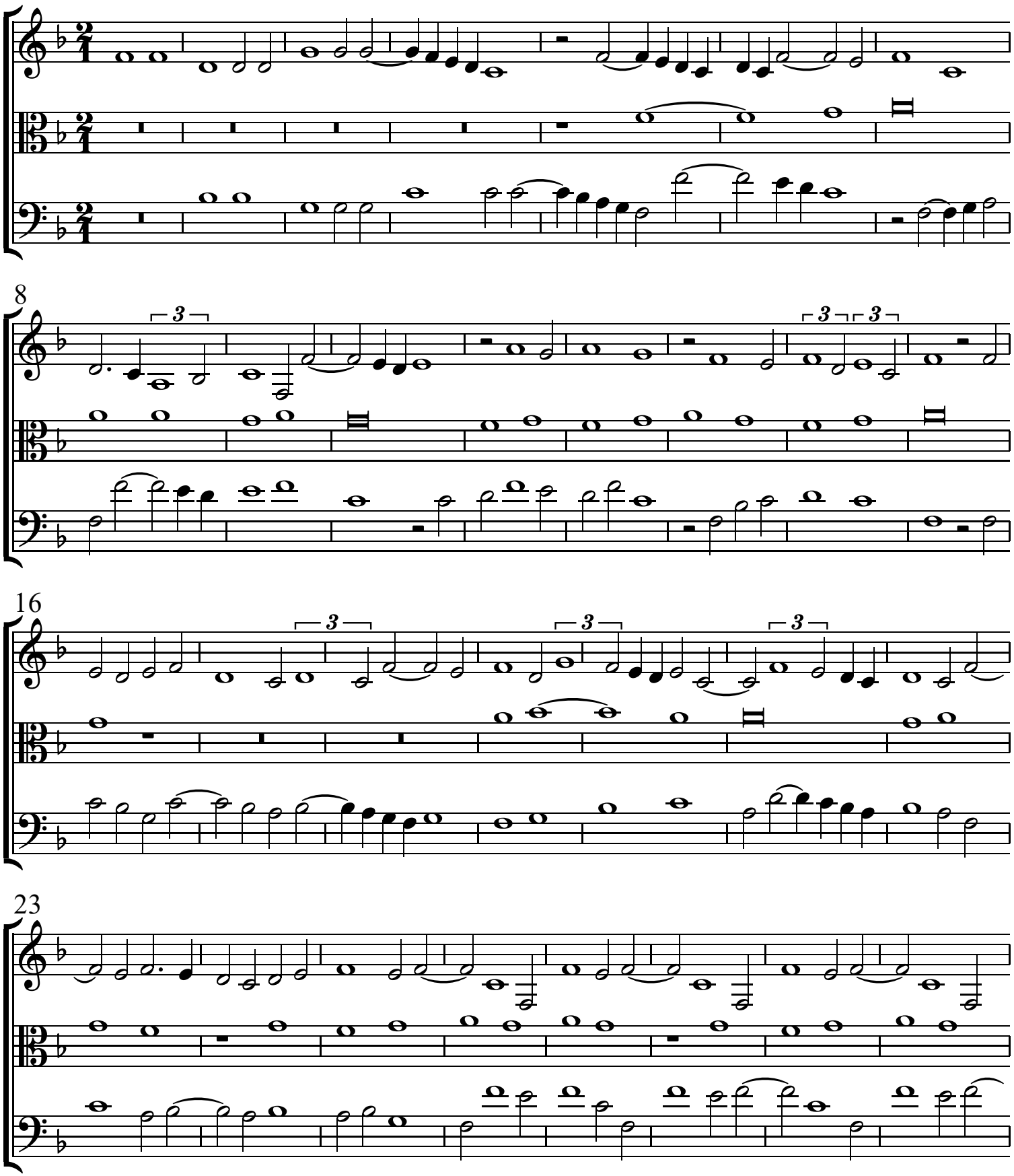
21. Pater noster qui es in coelis

Anonymous



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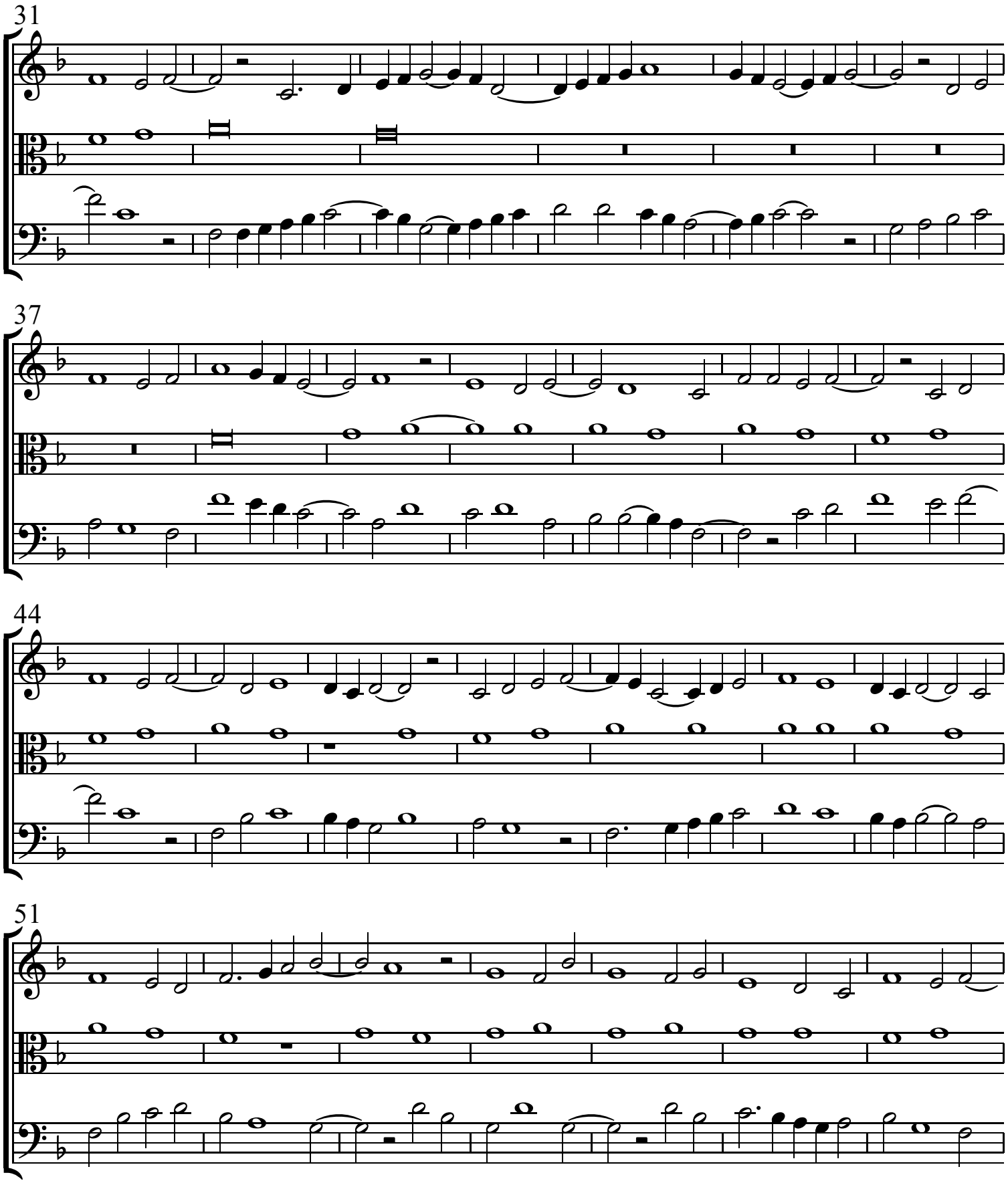
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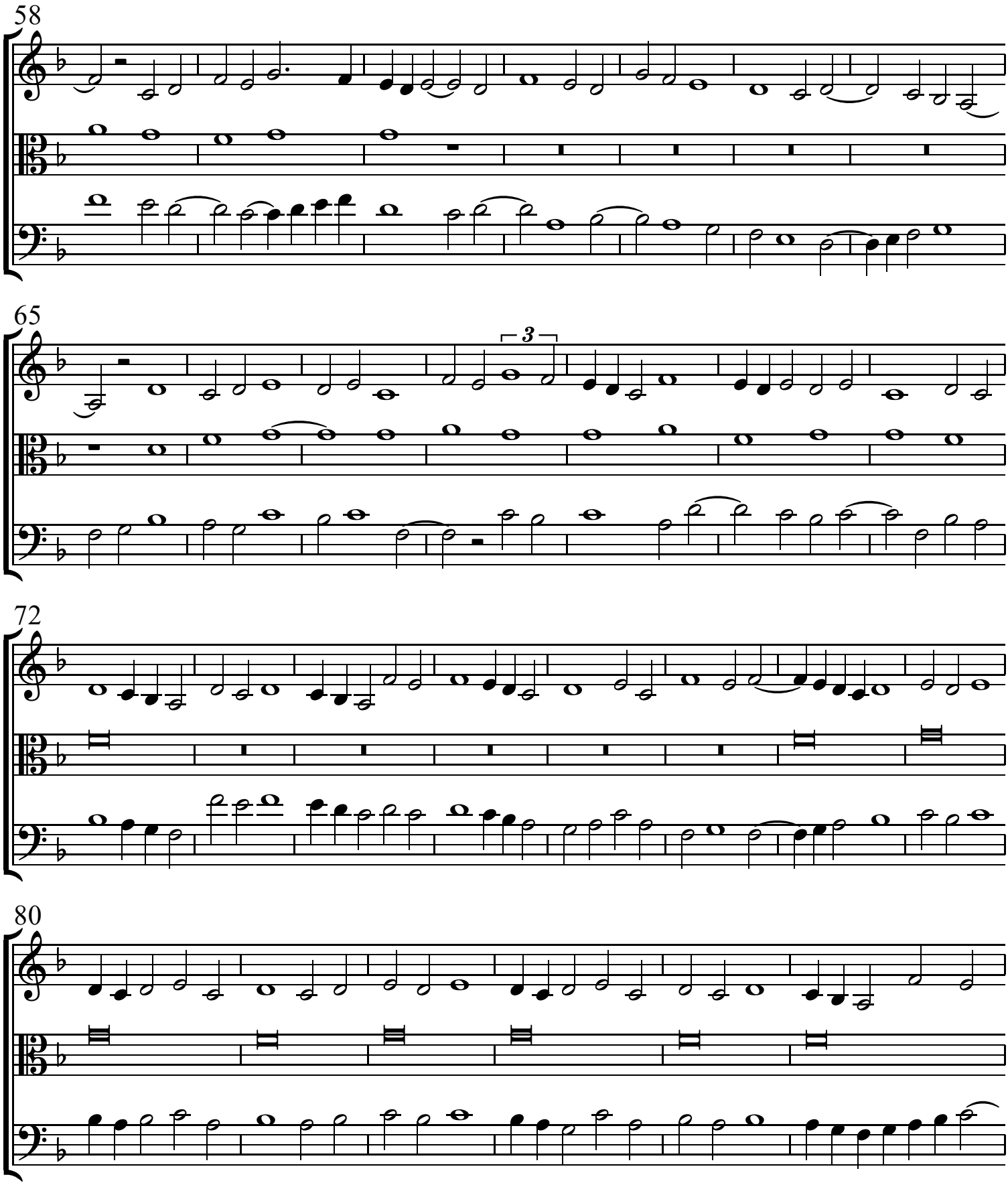
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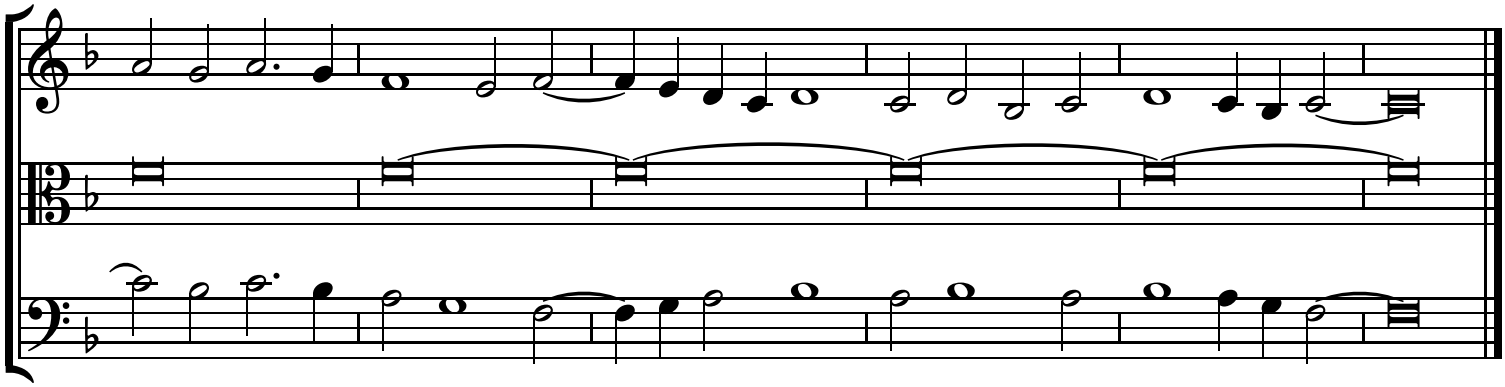
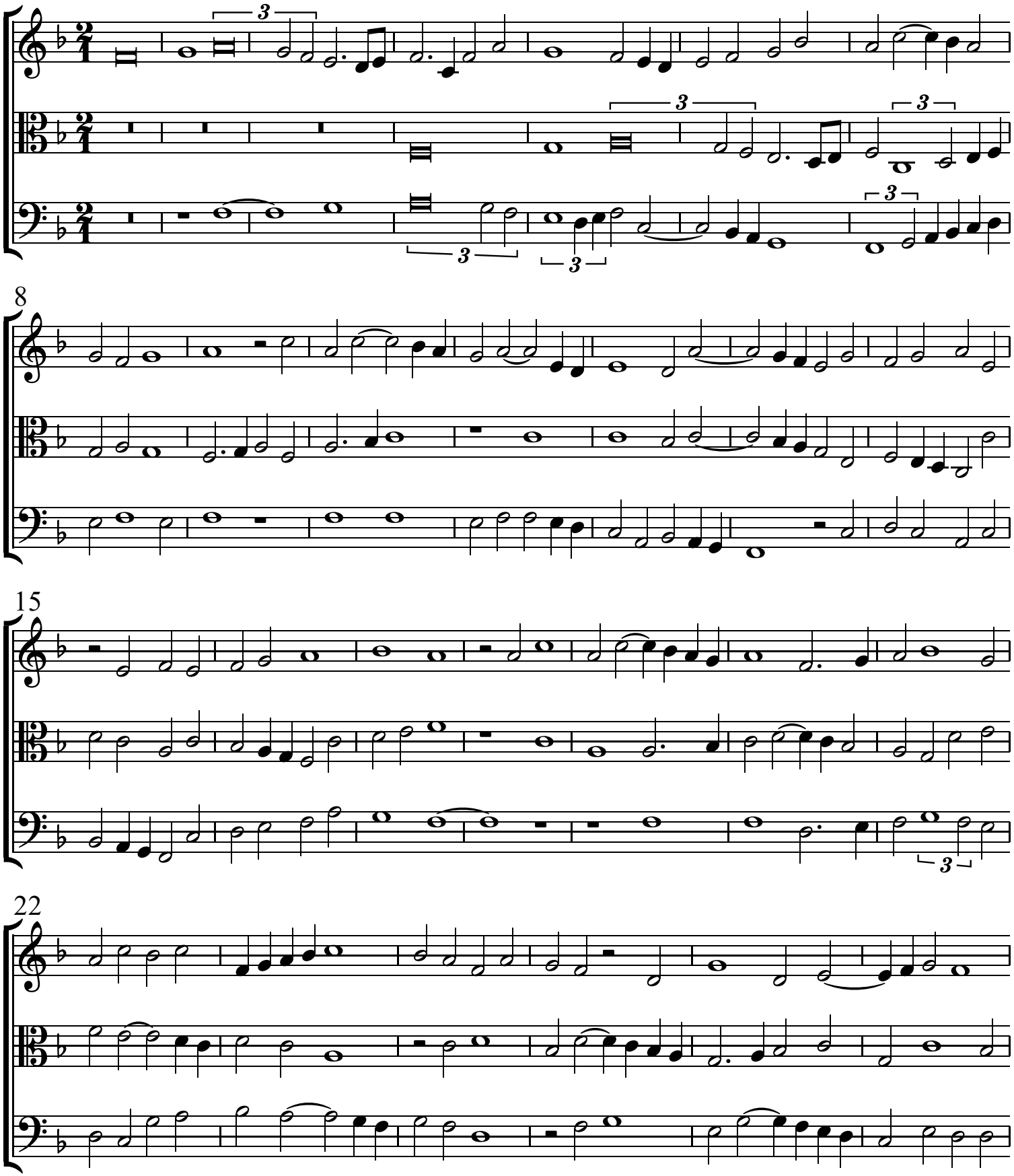


22. Confitebor tibi Domine rex

Johann Walter (1496-1570)



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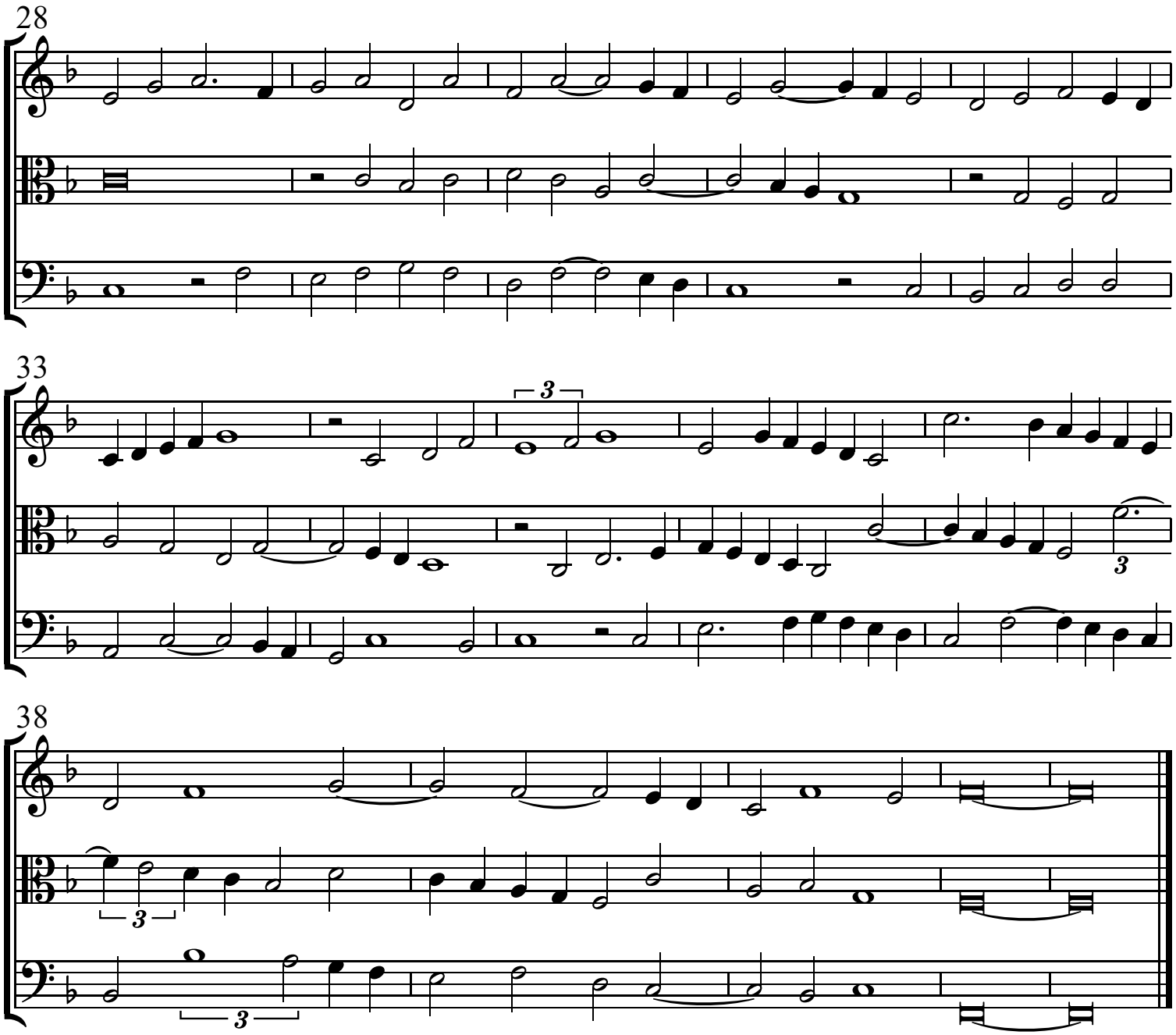
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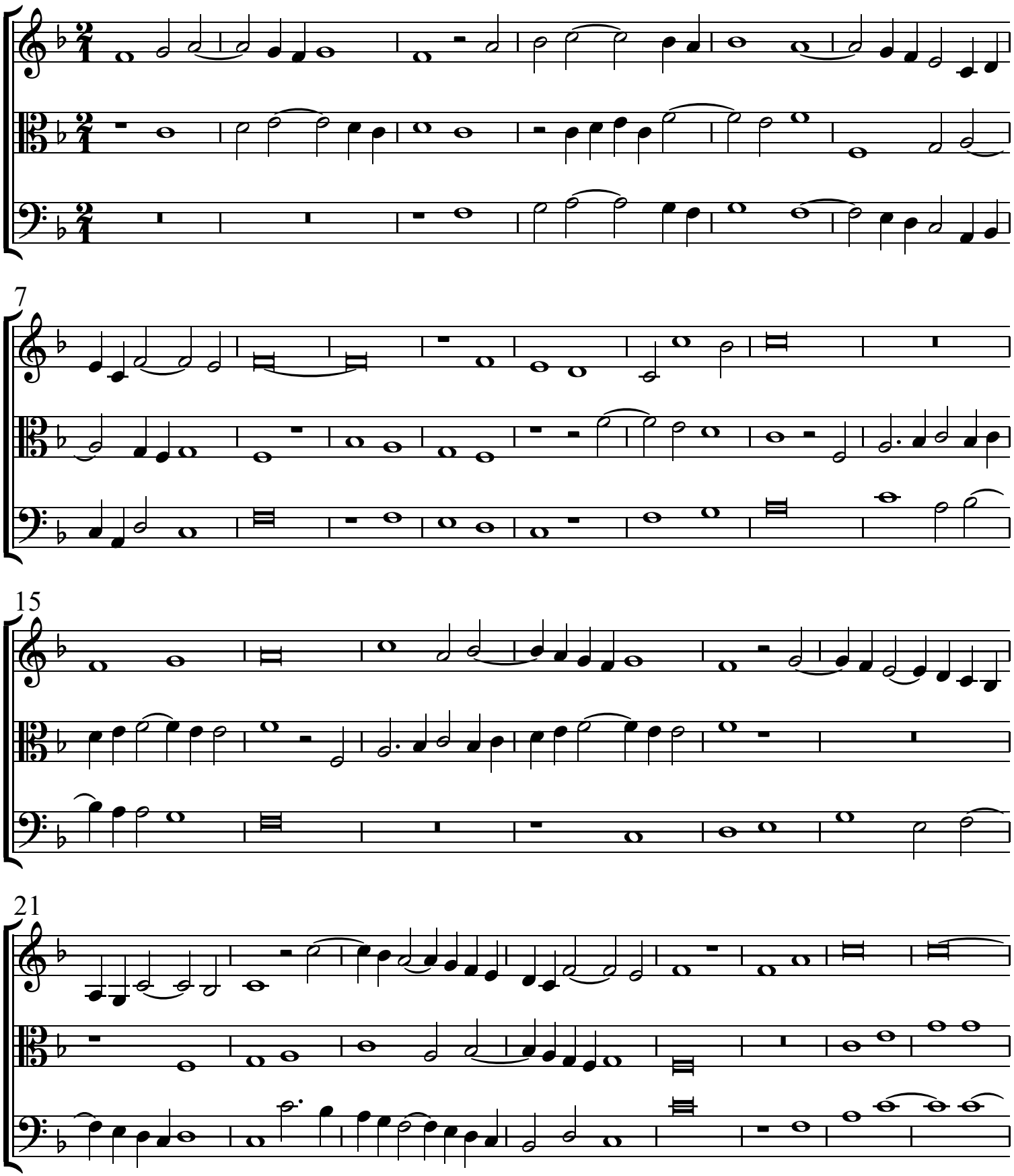
33
38

23. Quomodo miseretur pater filiorum

Arnold von Bruck (c. 1500-1554)



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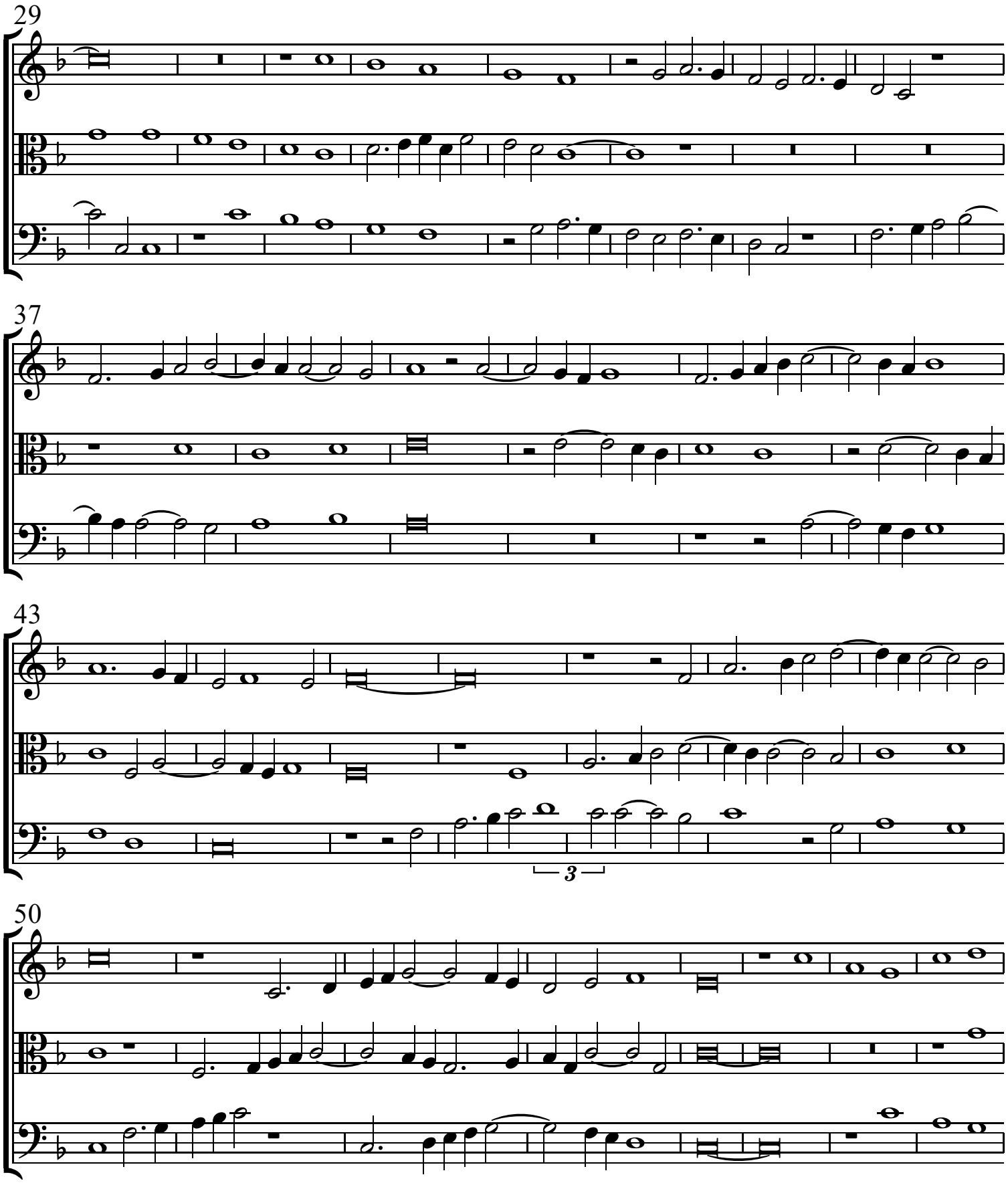
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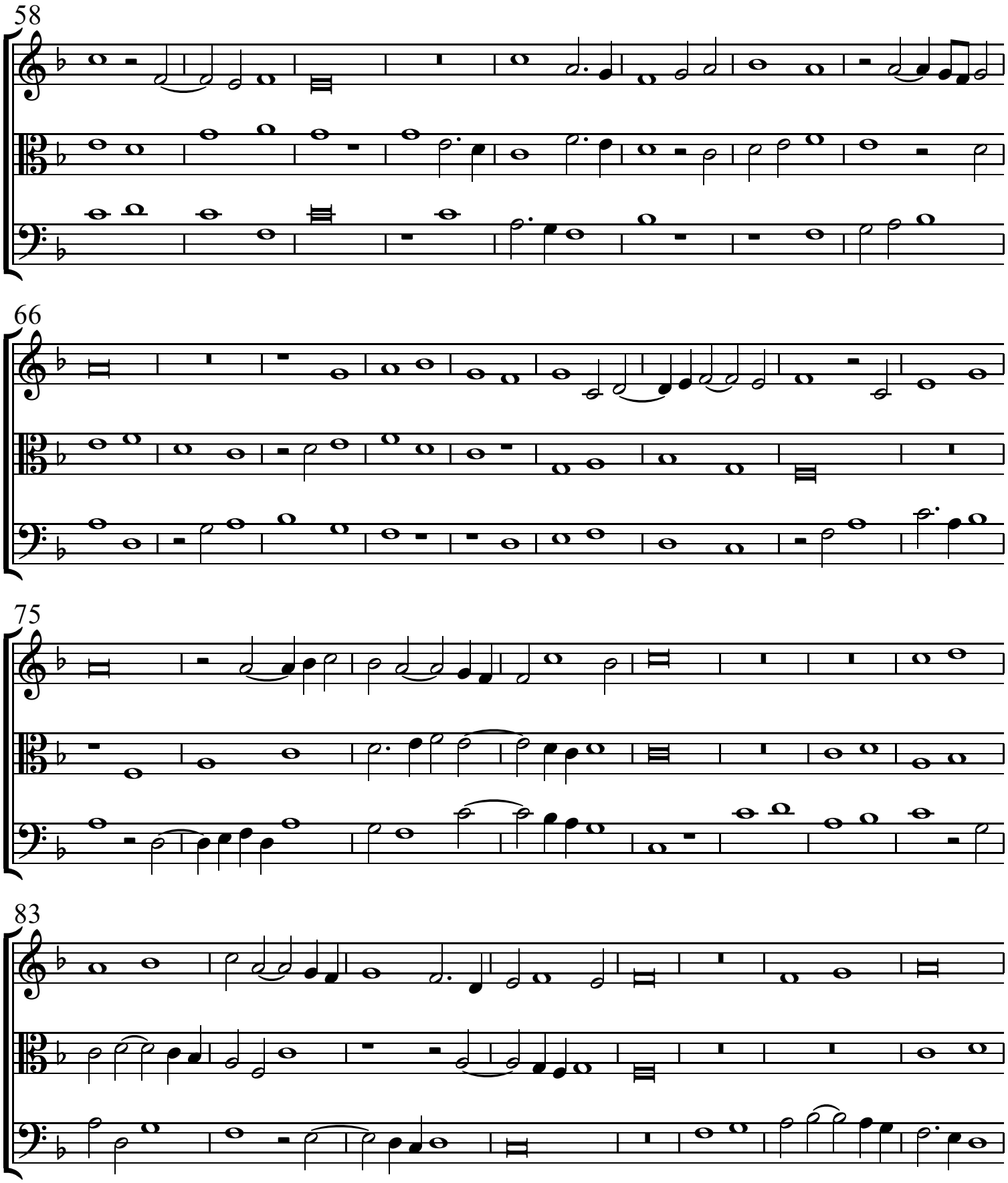
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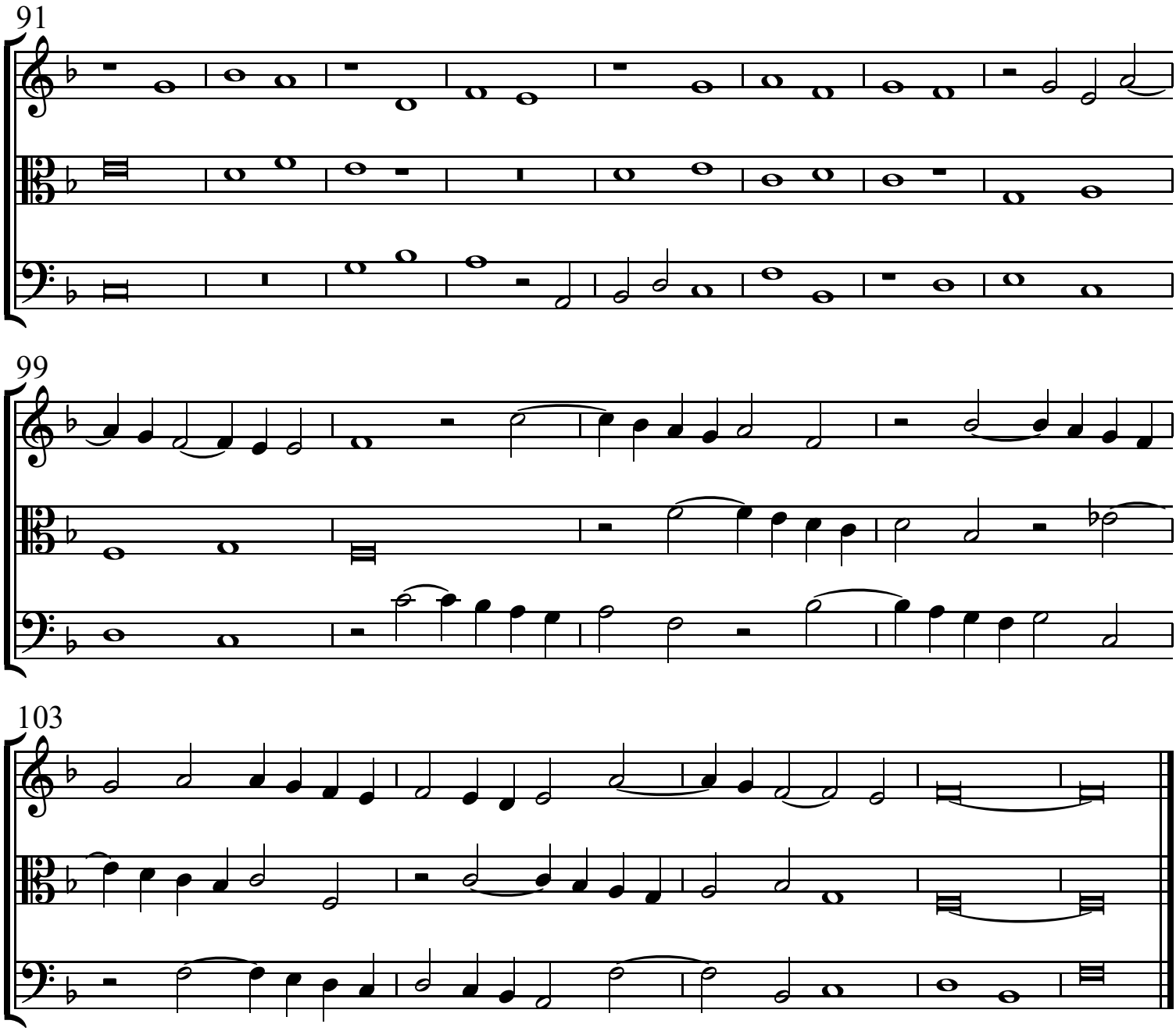
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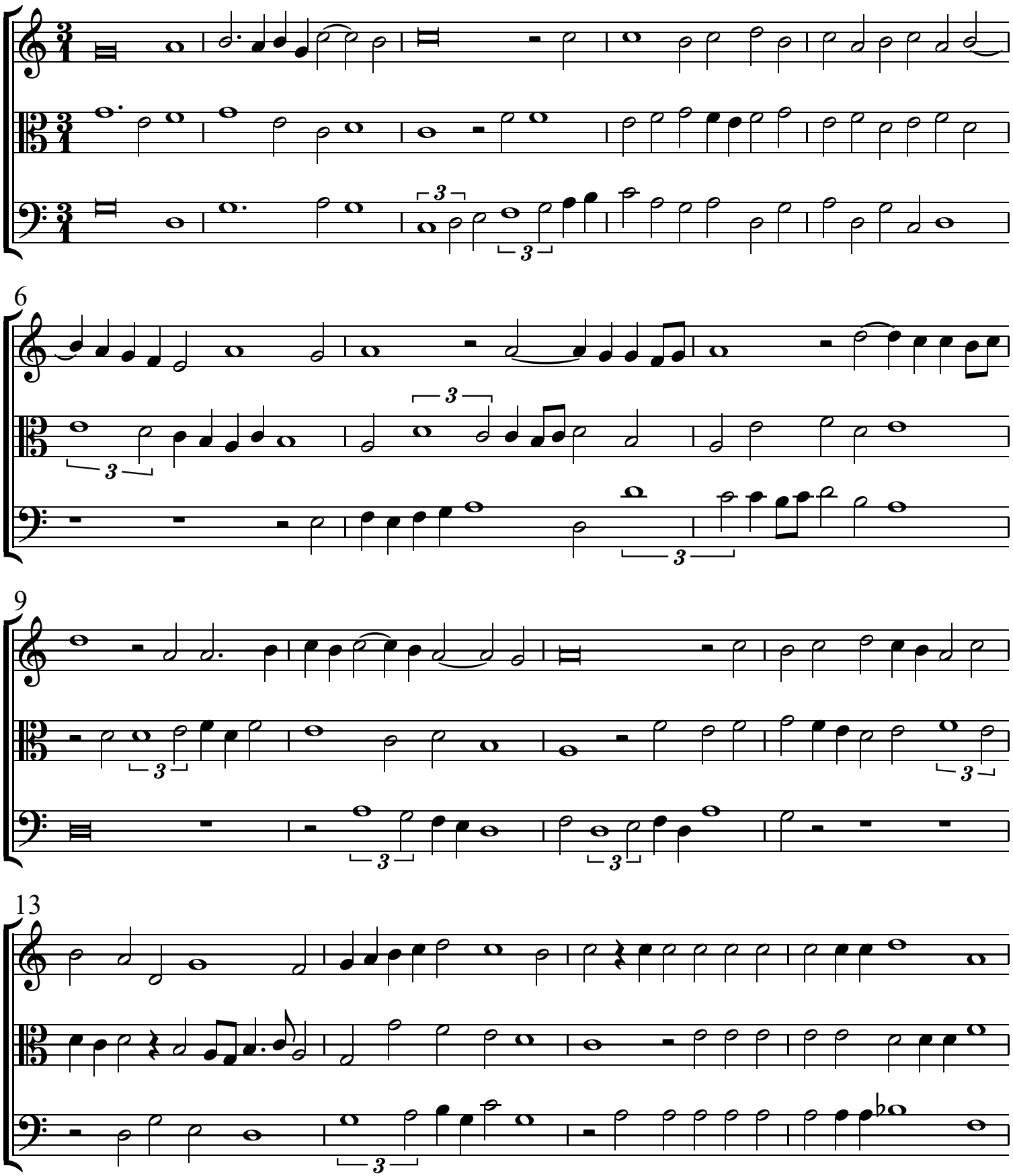
99
103

24. Quid retribuam tibi Leo

Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450-1517)



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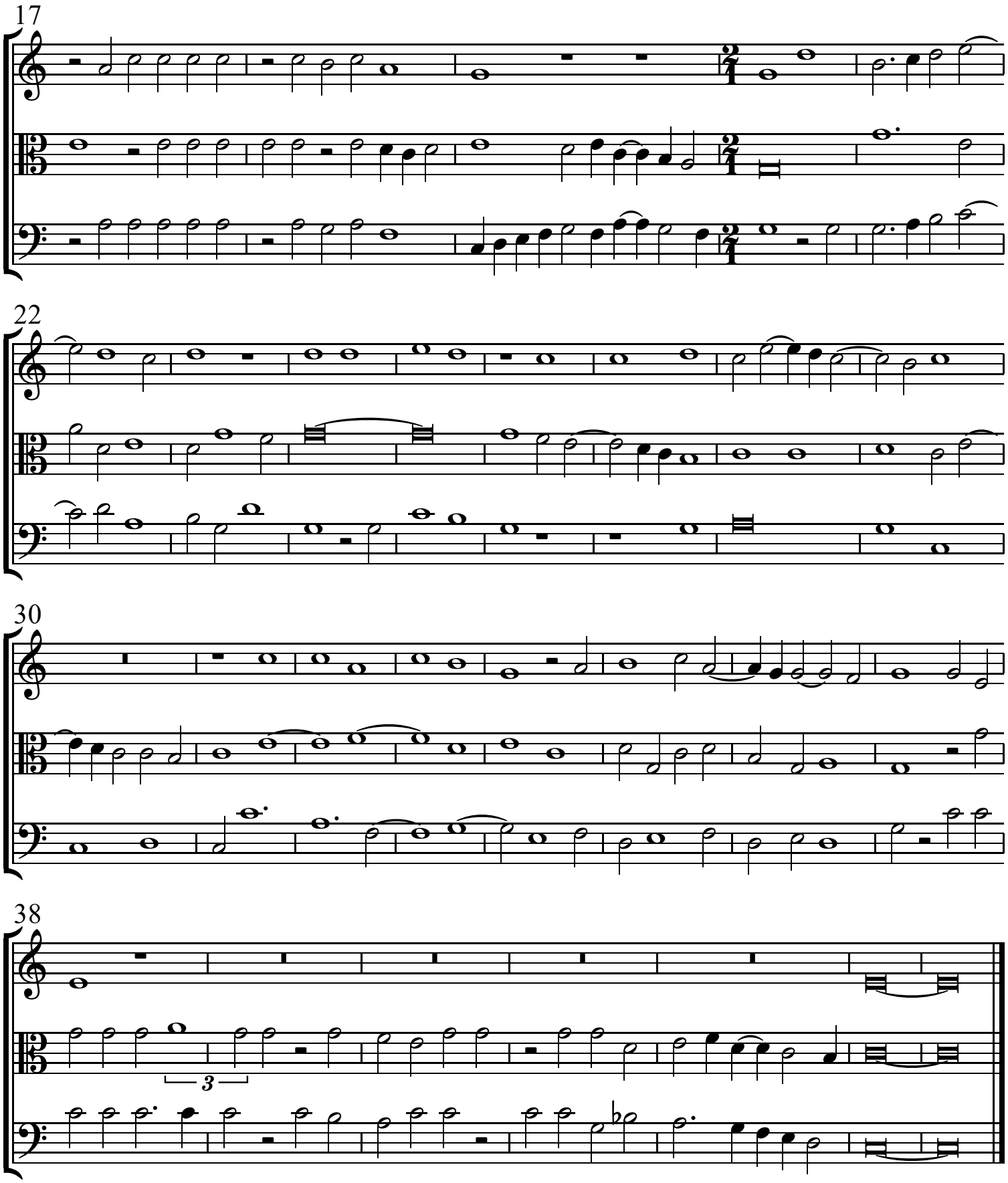
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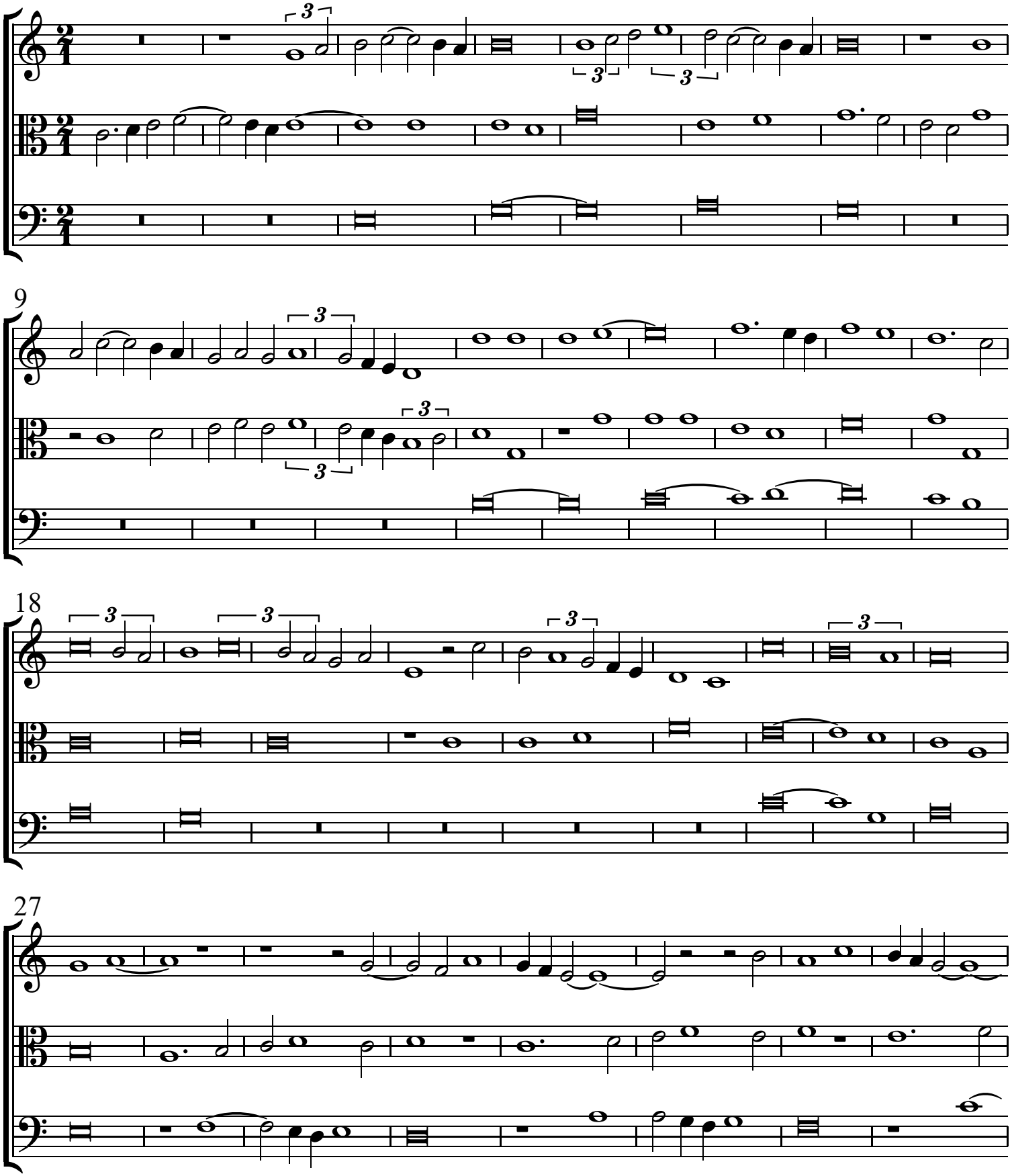
22
30
38
3

25. In pace in idipsum dormiam

Alexander Agricola (c. 1446-1506)



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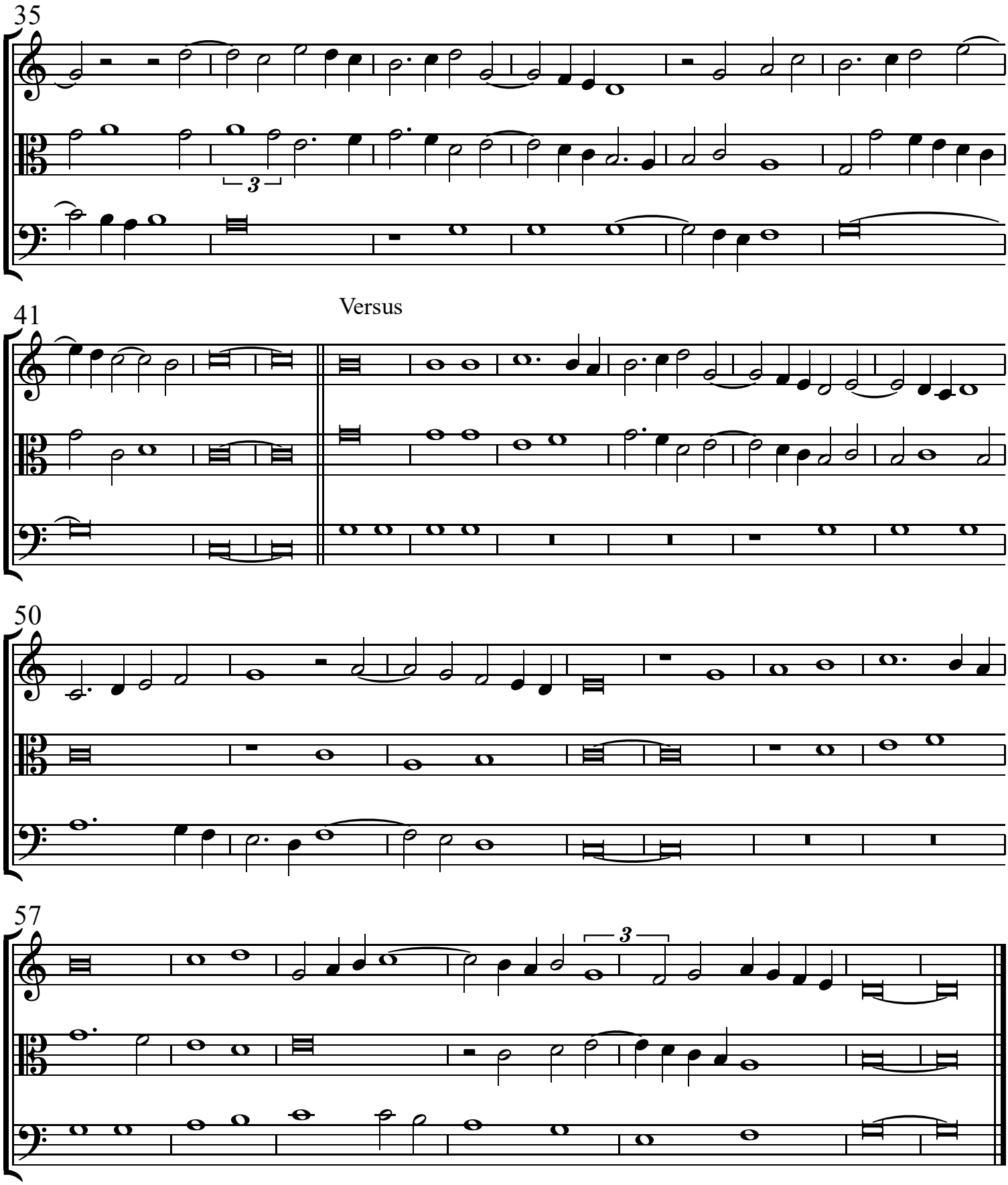
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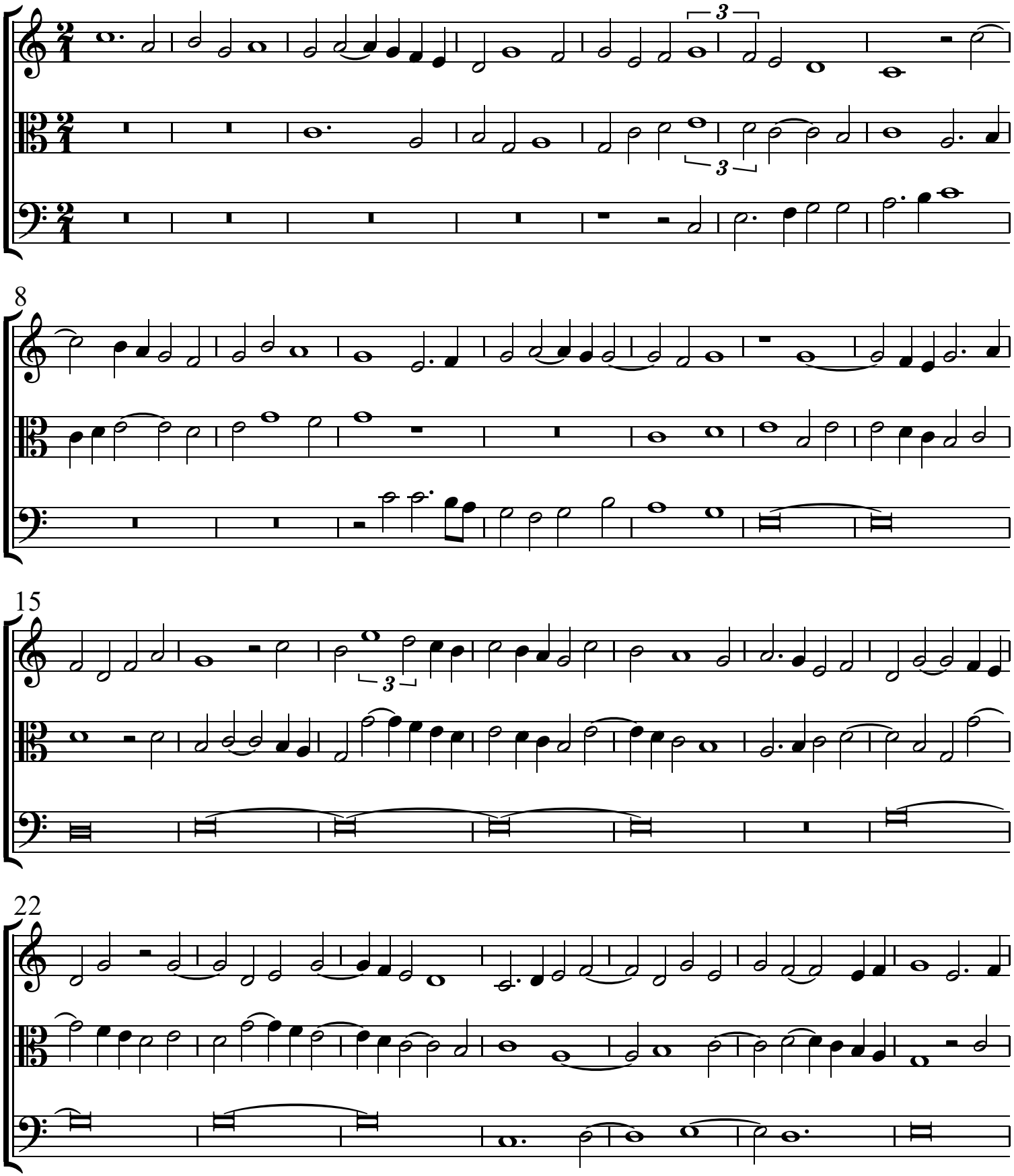
3
41
Versus
50
57
3

26. Ego sum Dominus Deus tuus

Jacob Obrecht (1457-1505)



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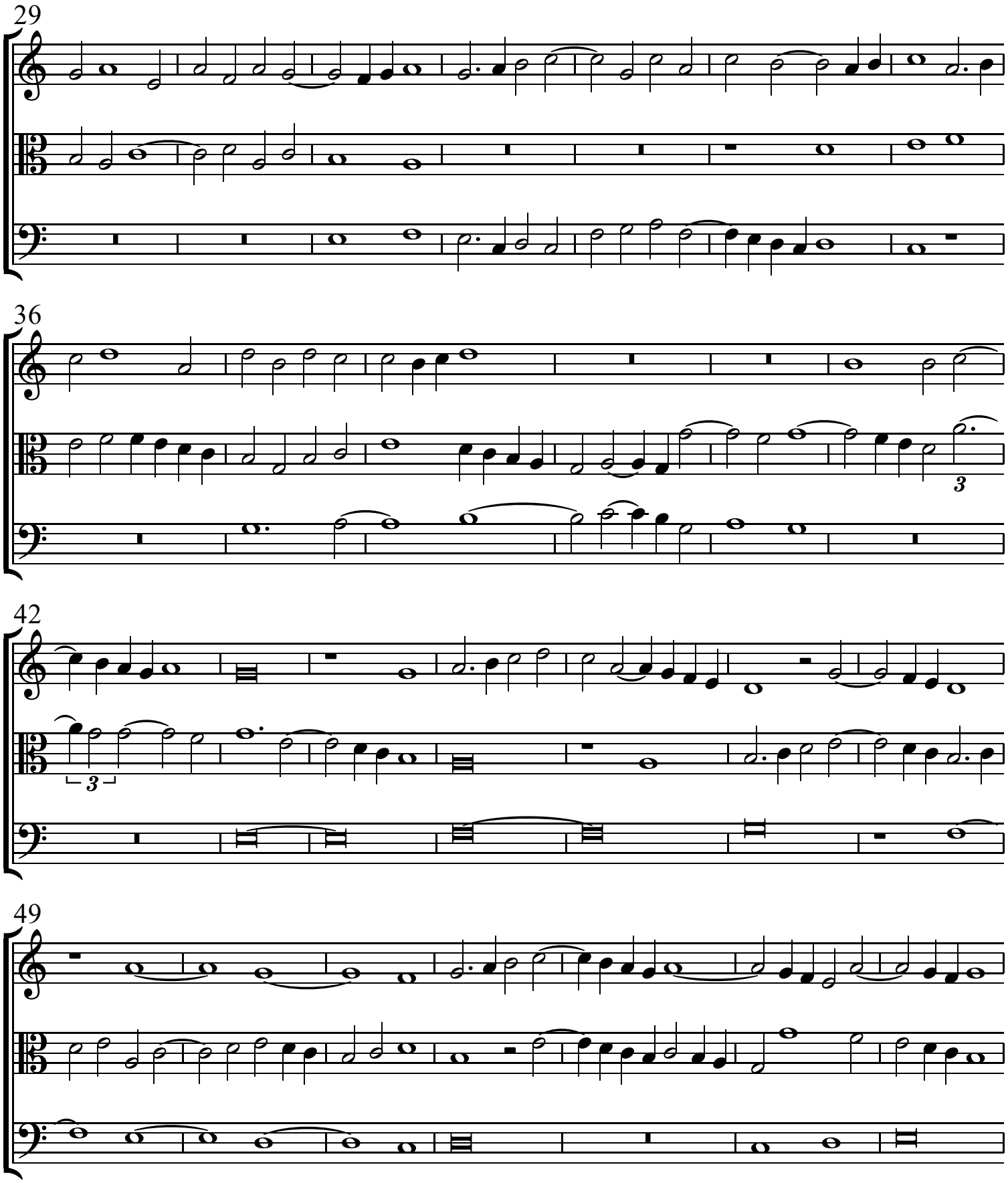
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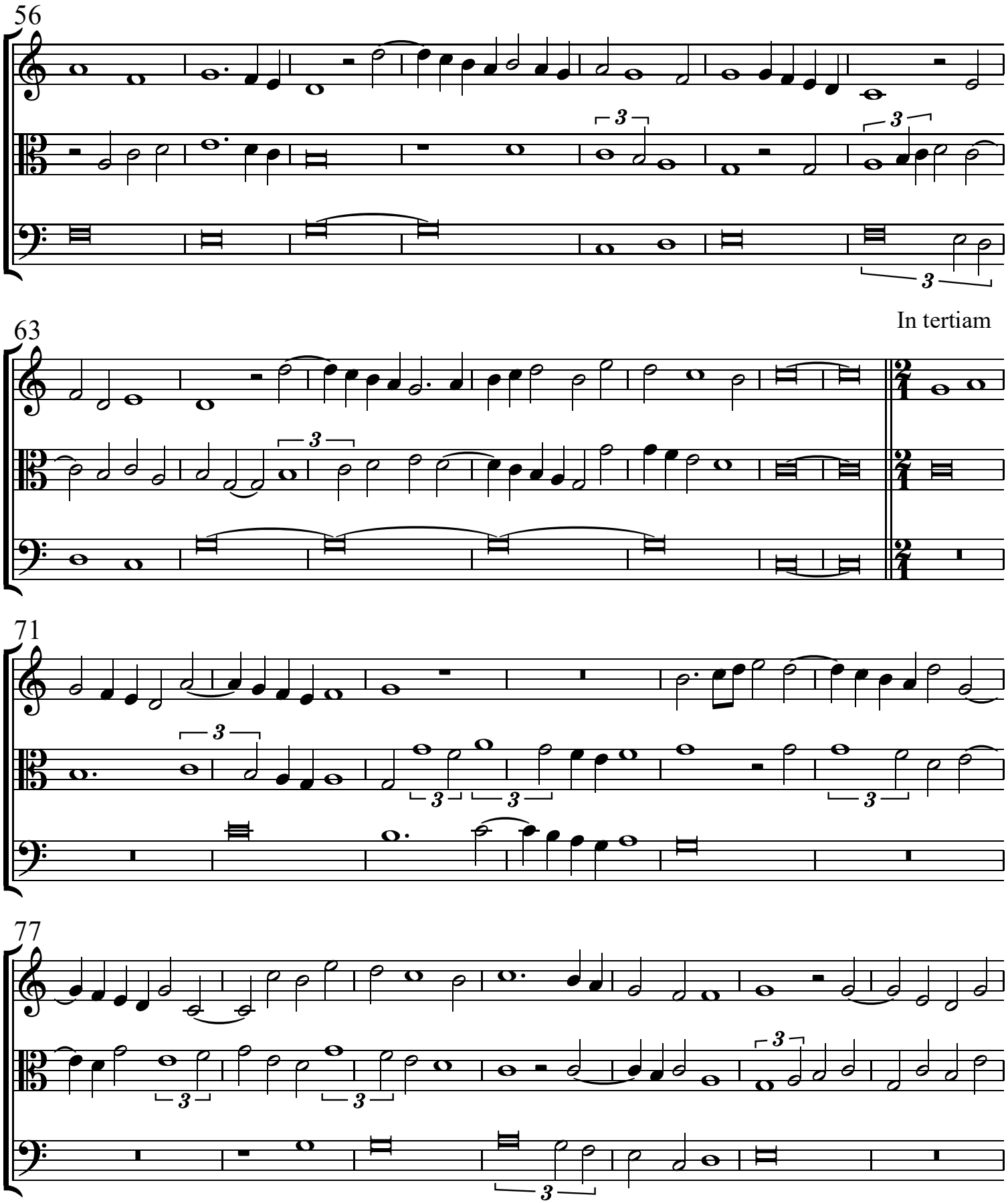
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63
In tertiam
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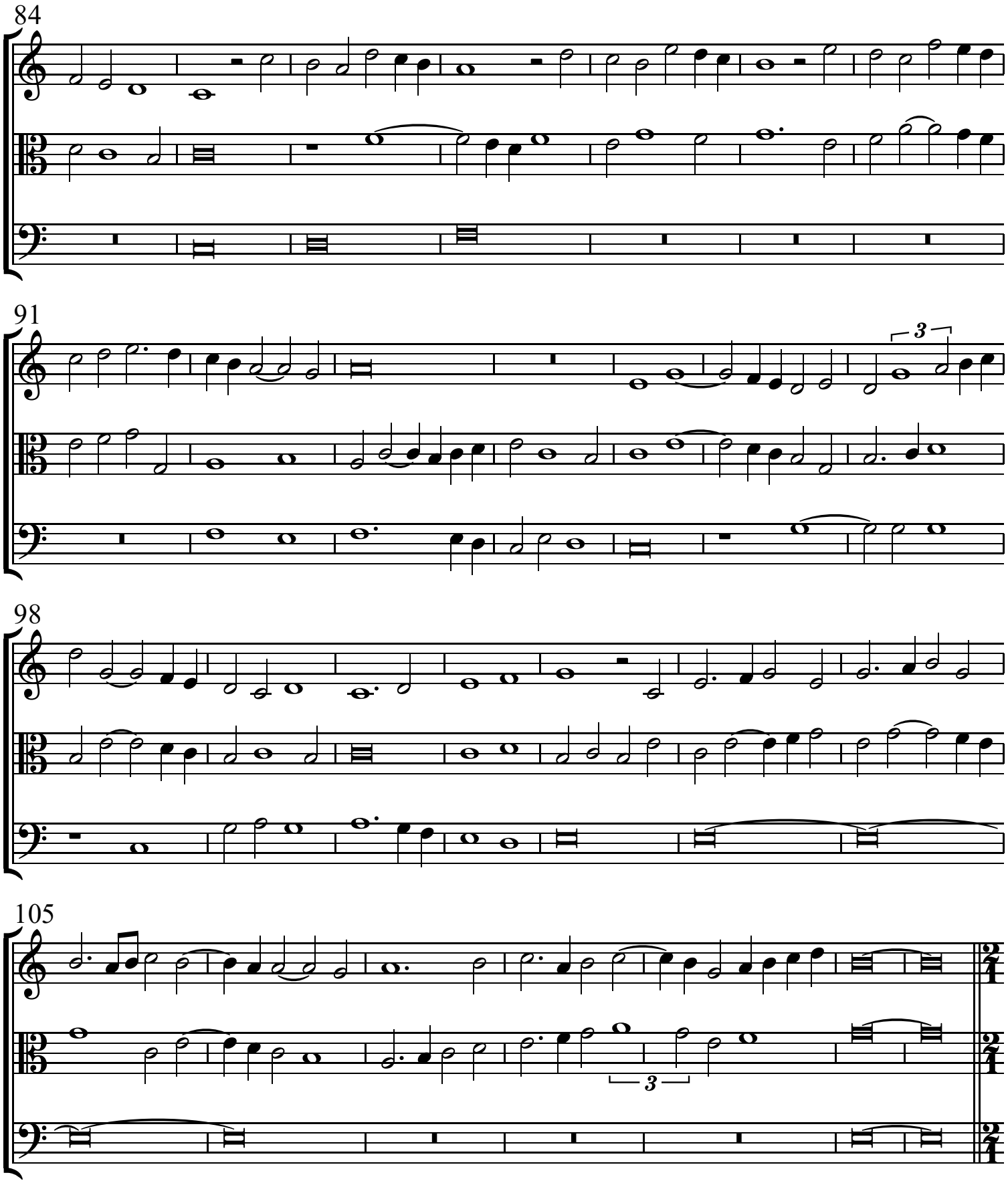
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Et faciens misericor

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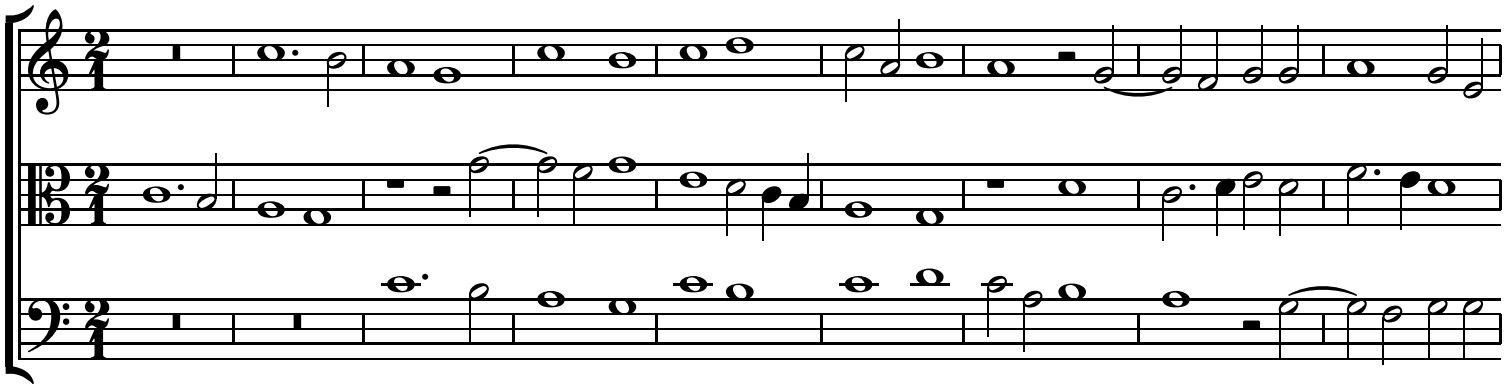

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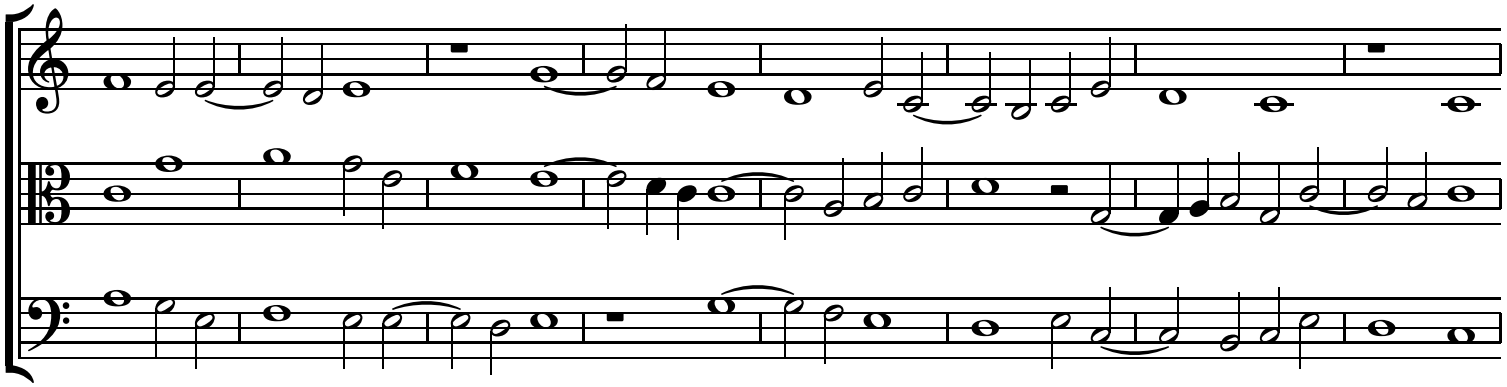

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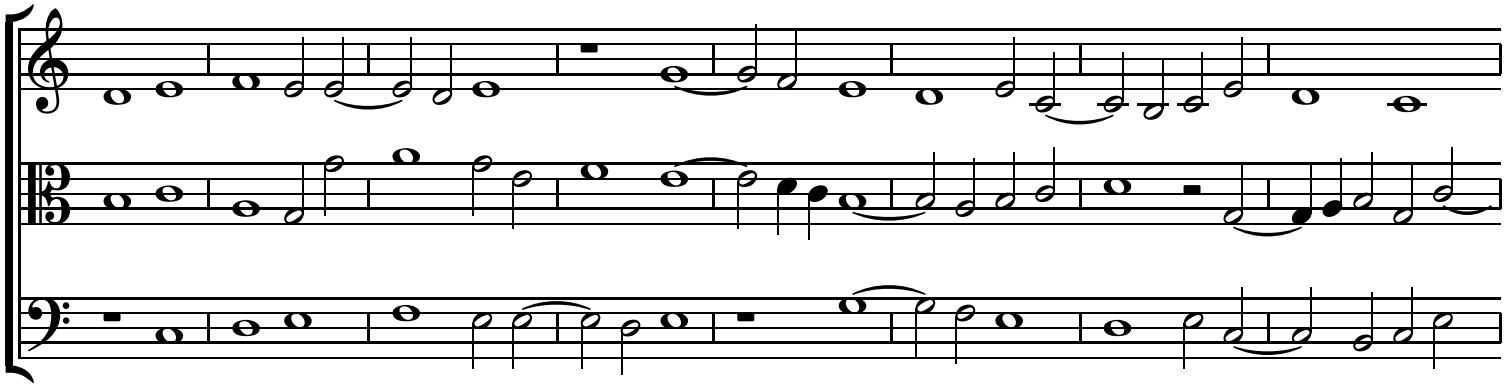

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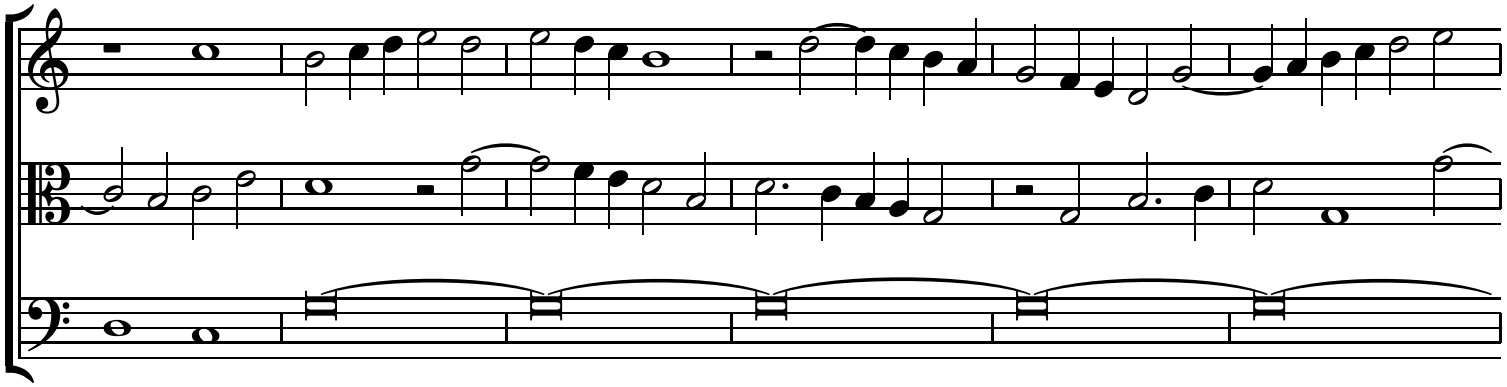

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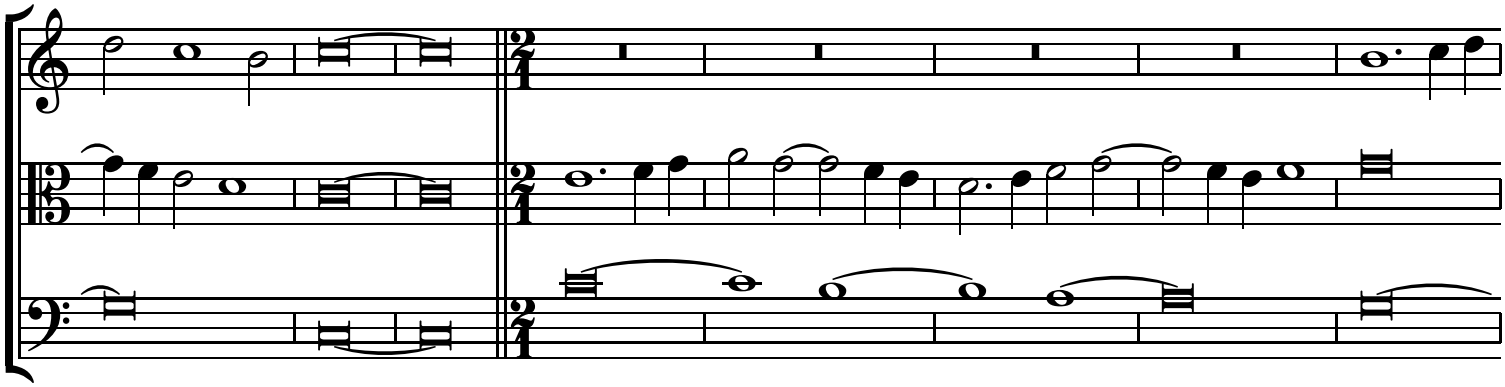

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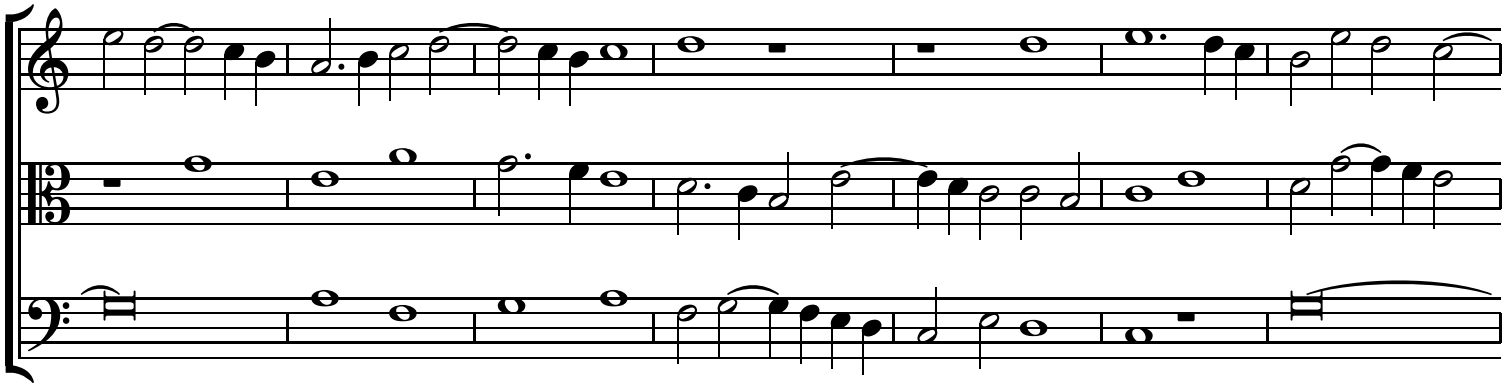

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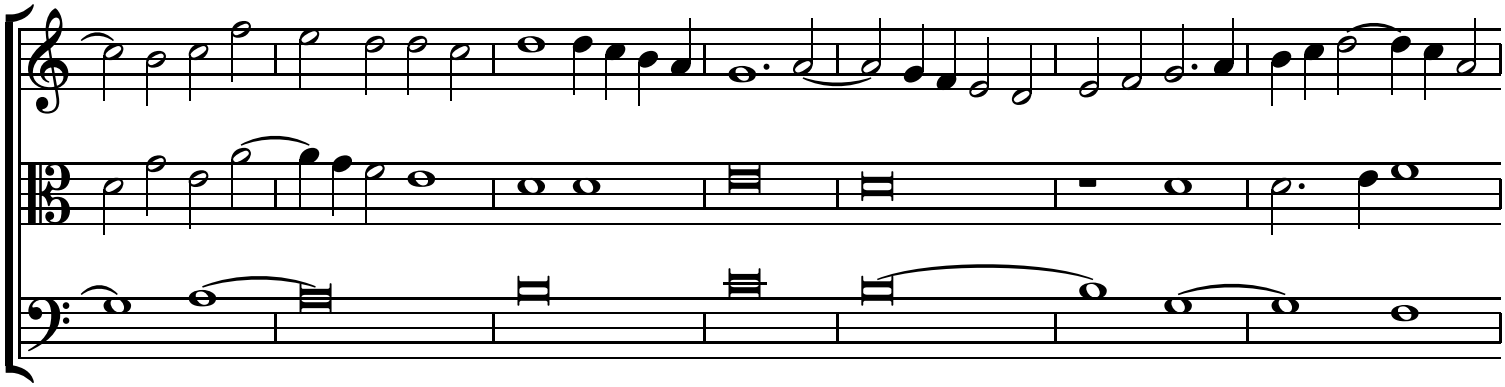

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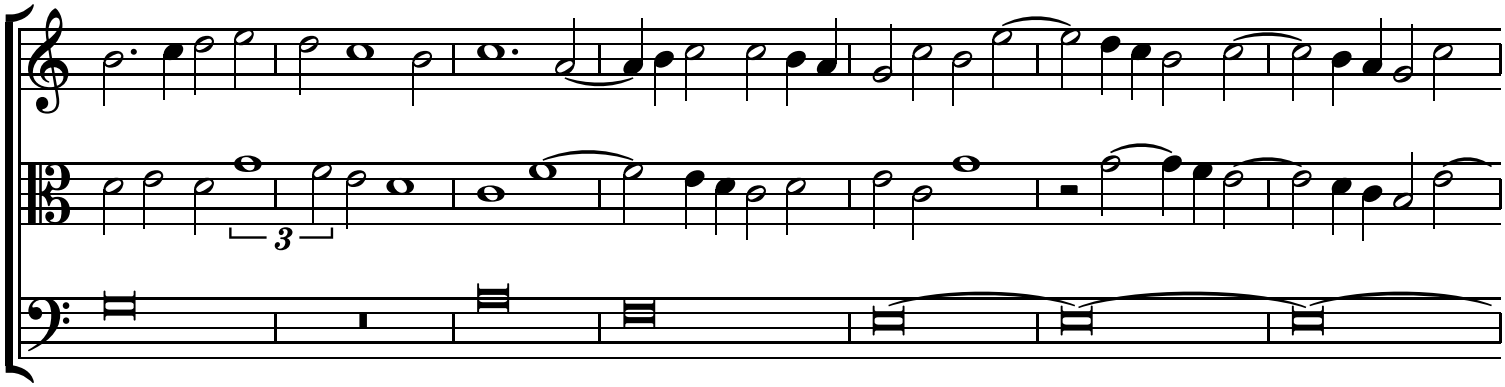

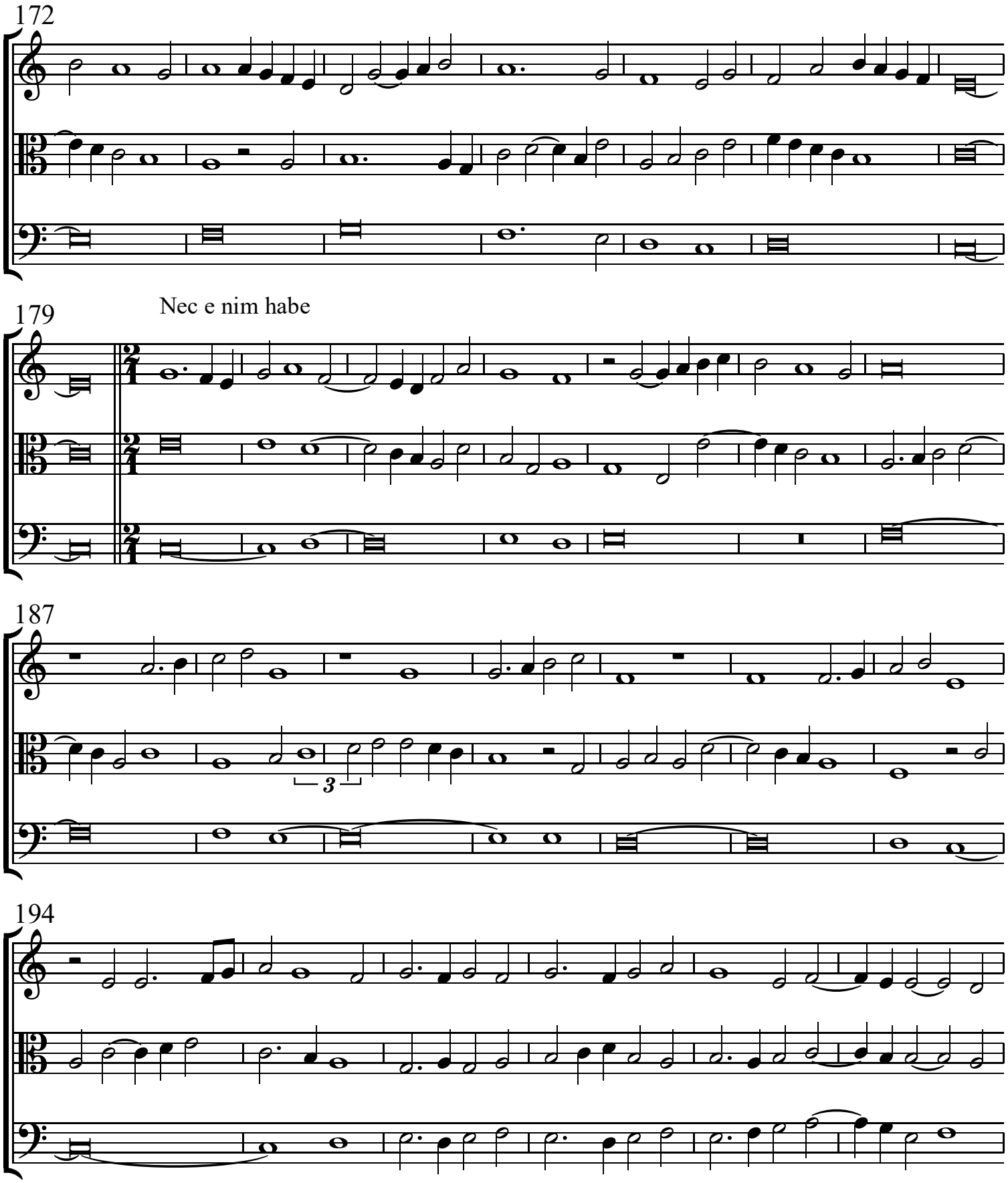
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179
Nec e nim habe
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3
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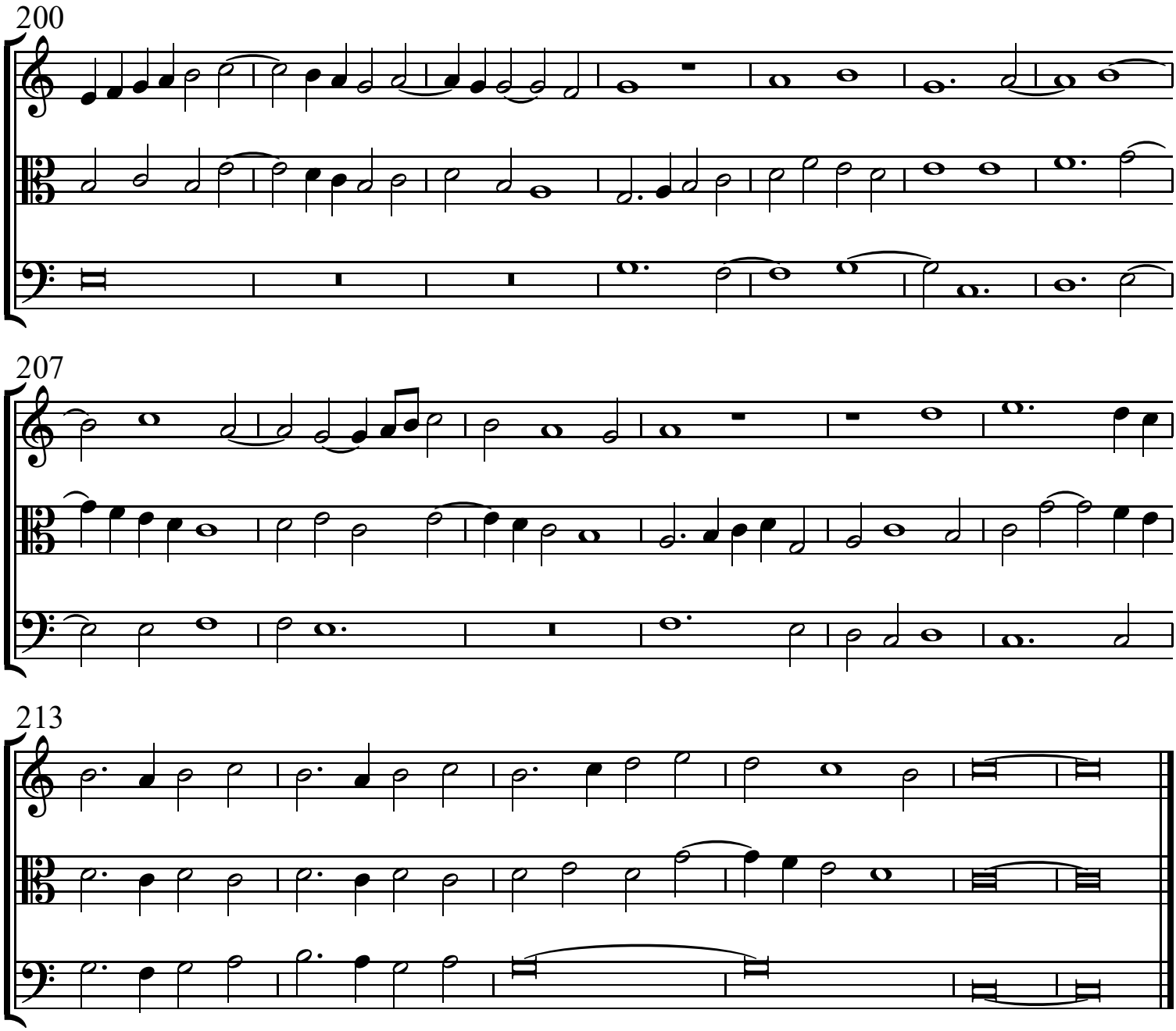
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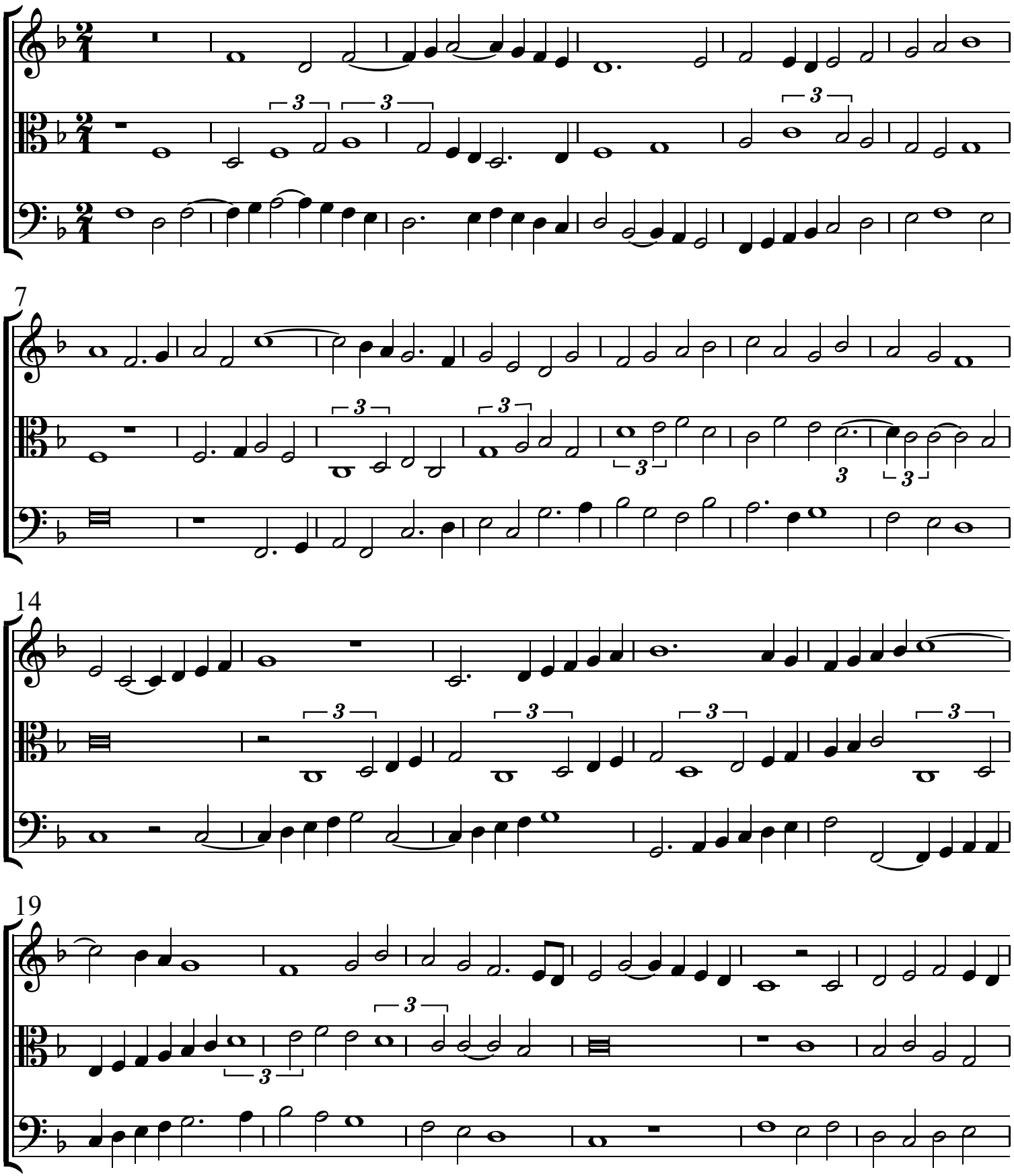
213

27. Pars mea Dominus

Johann Walter (1496-1570)



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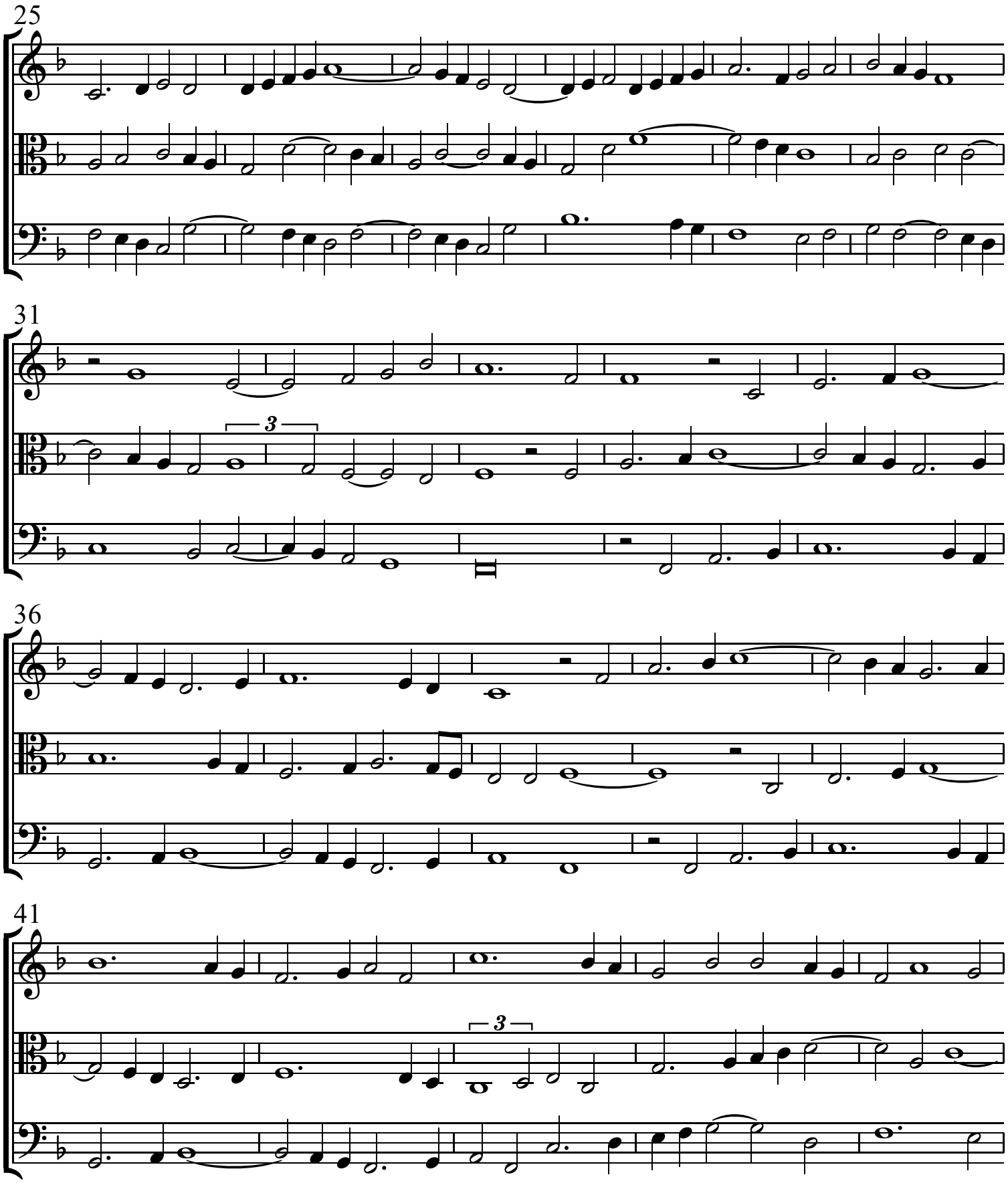
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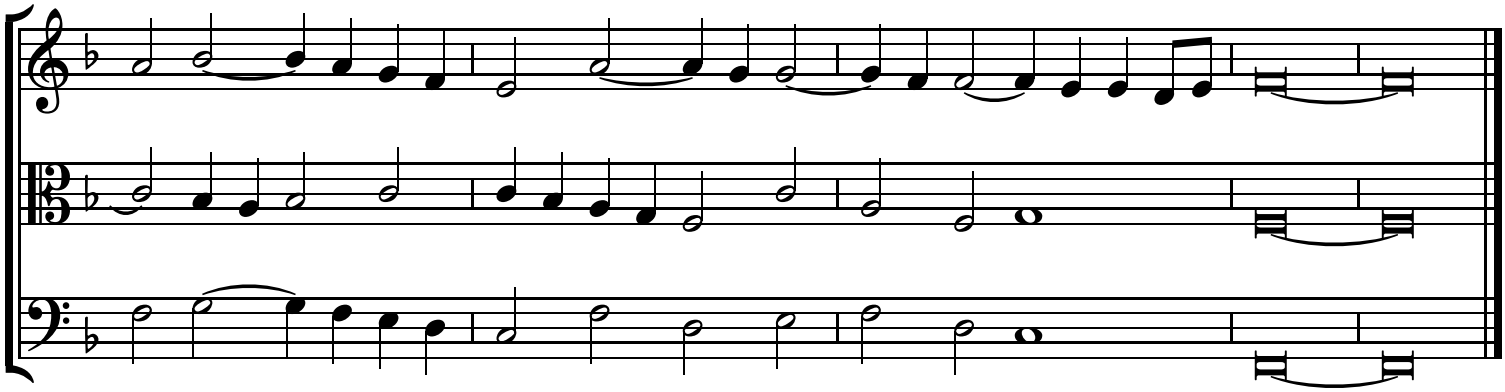
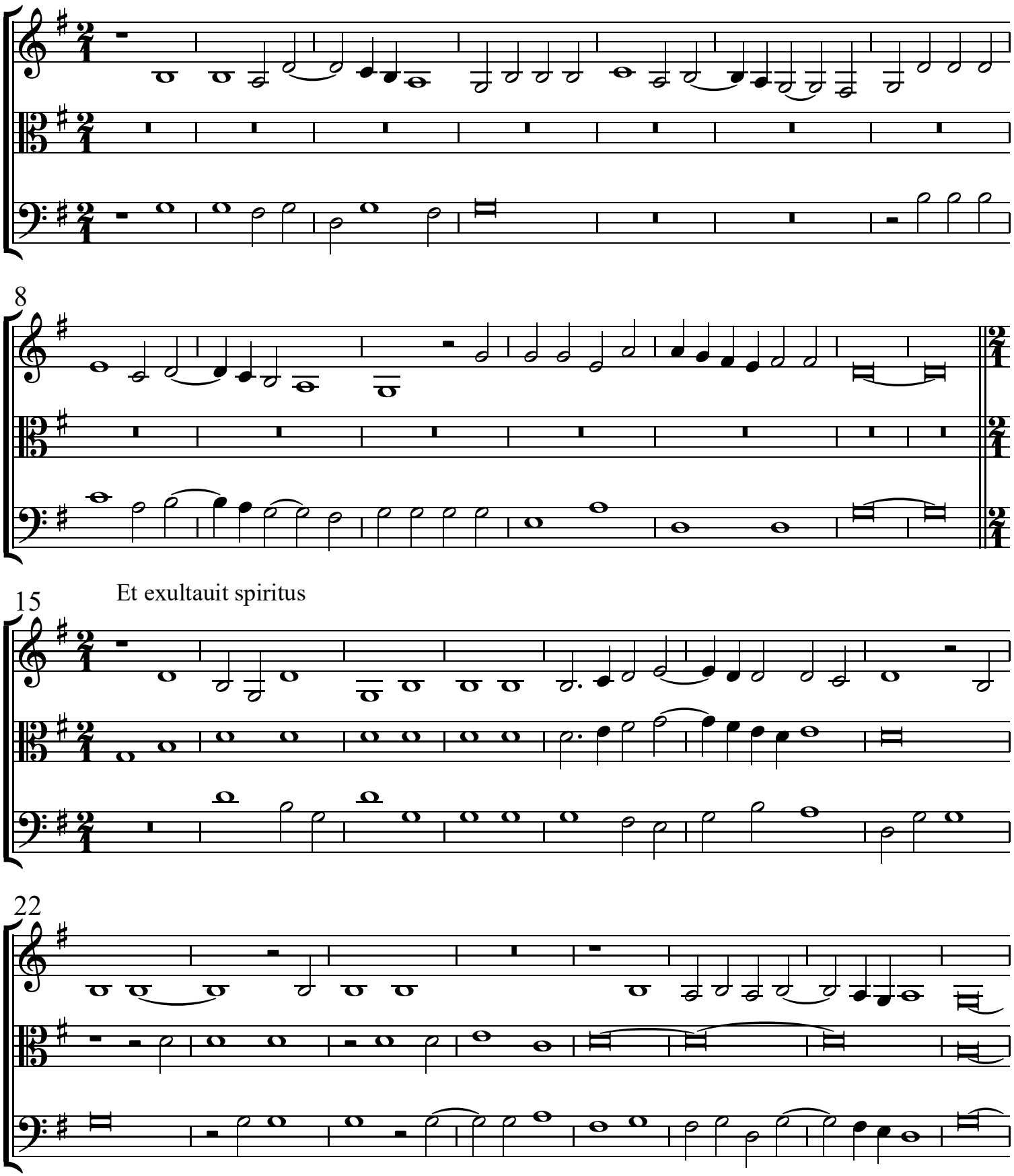


28. Magnificat quinti toni

Georg Forster (c. 1510-1568)



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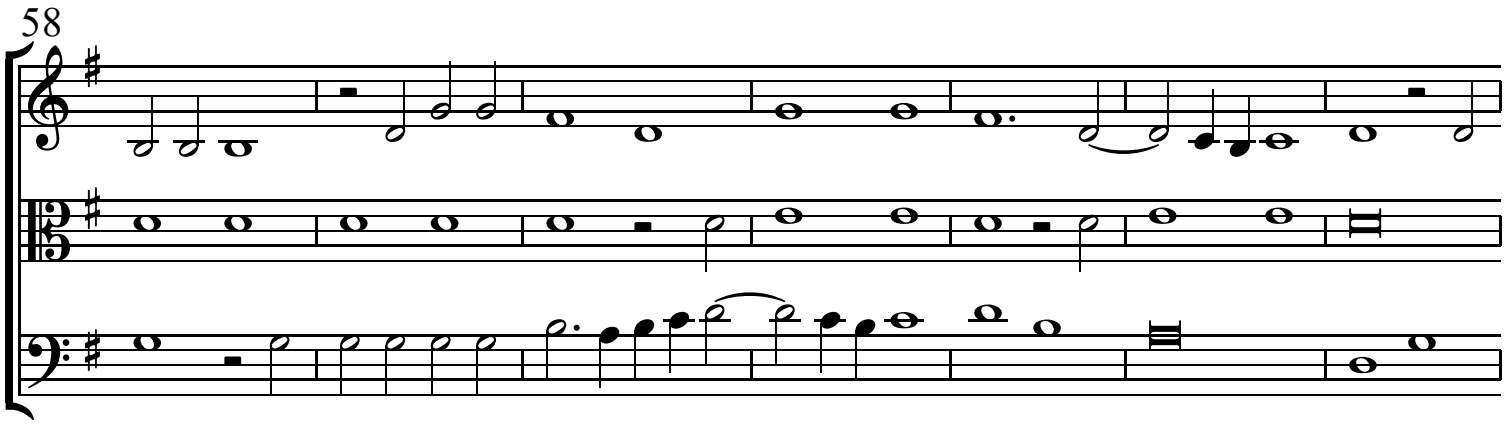
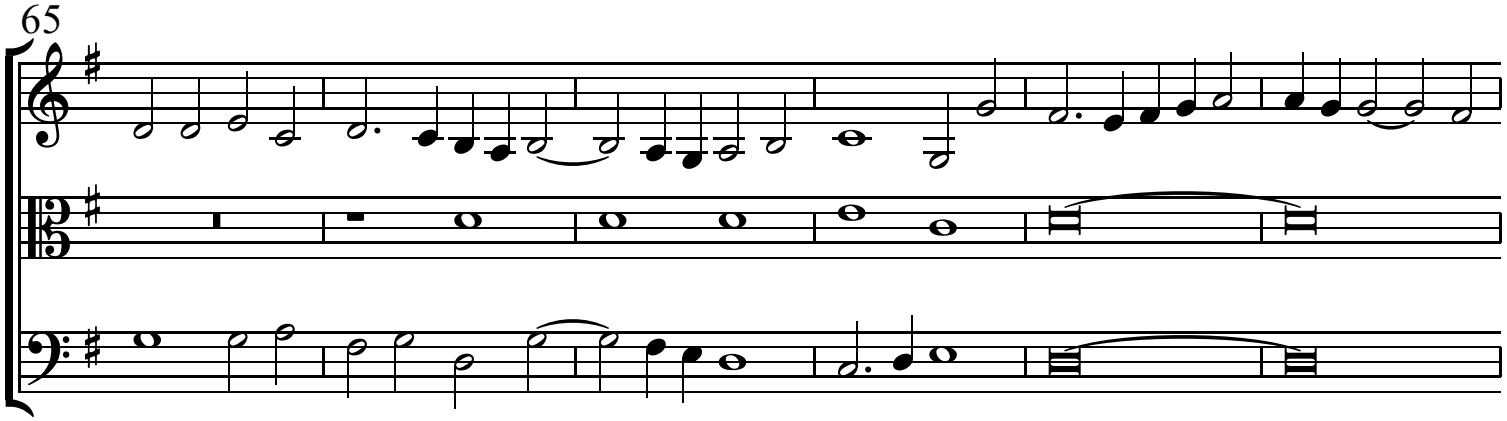
30 Quia respexit

37

44 Quia fecit

51





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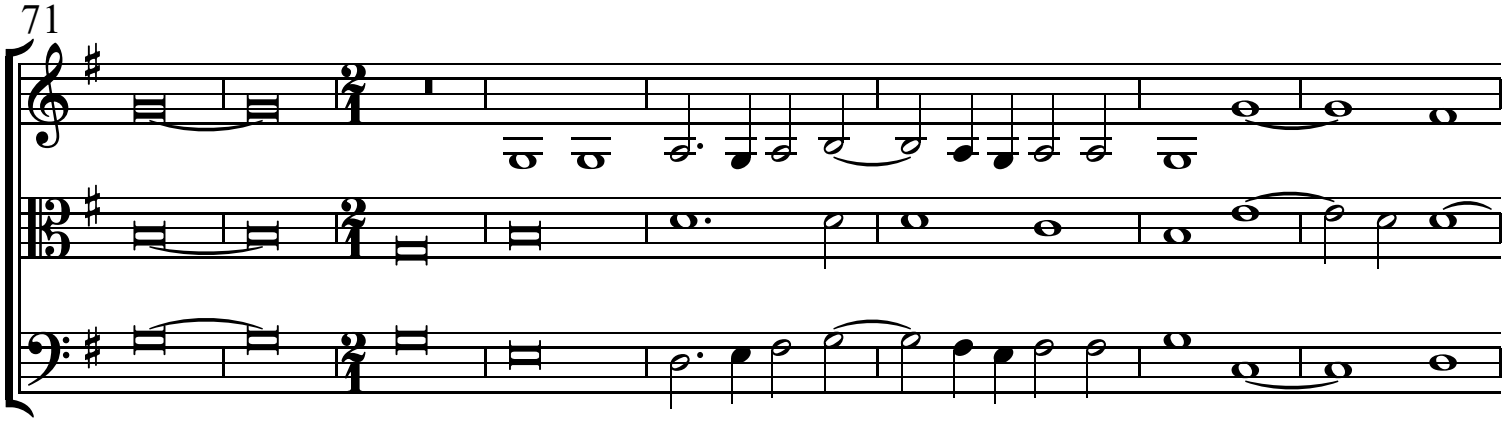

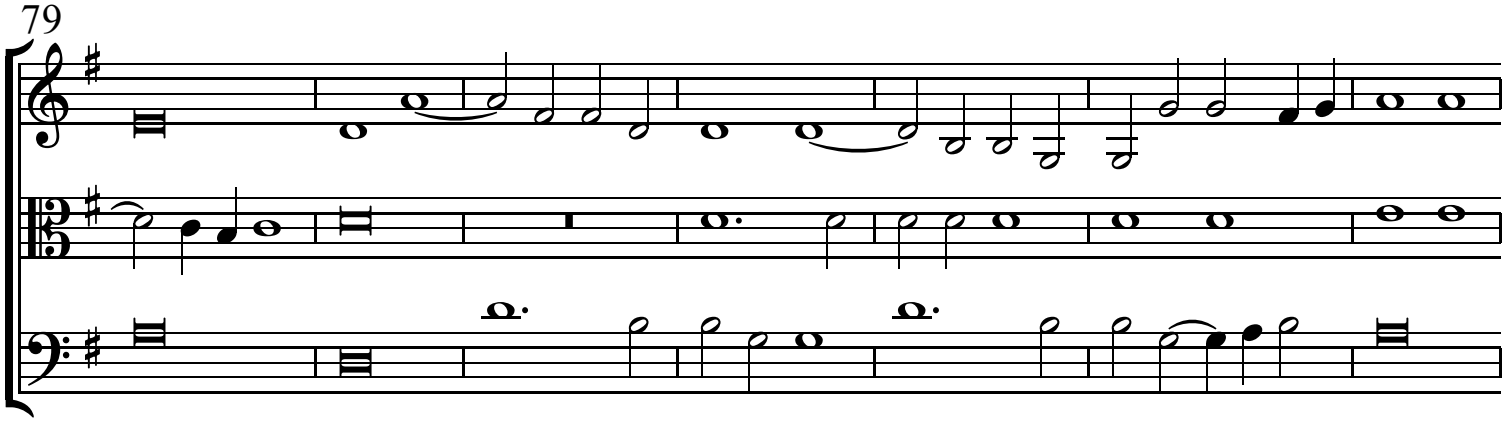

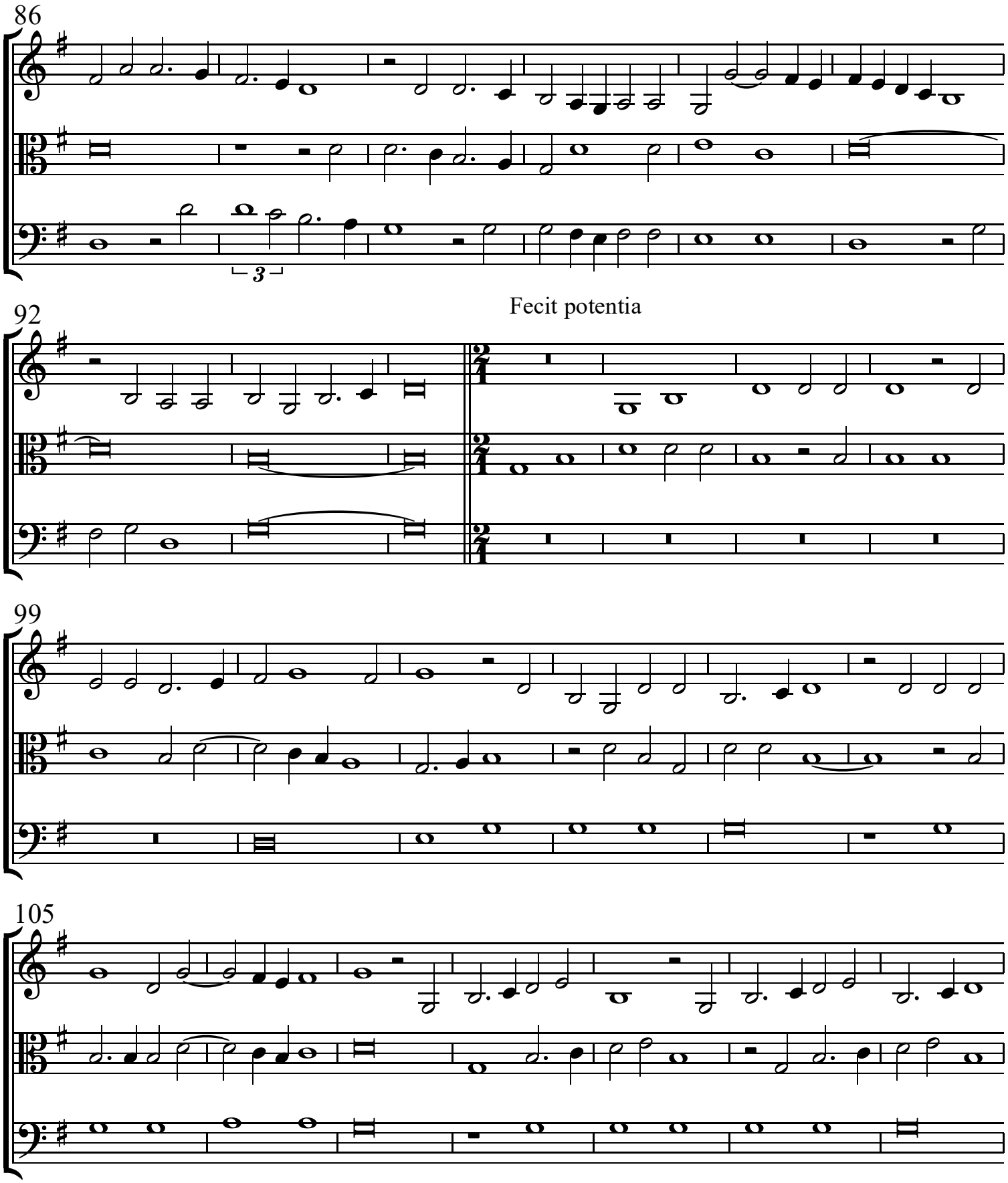
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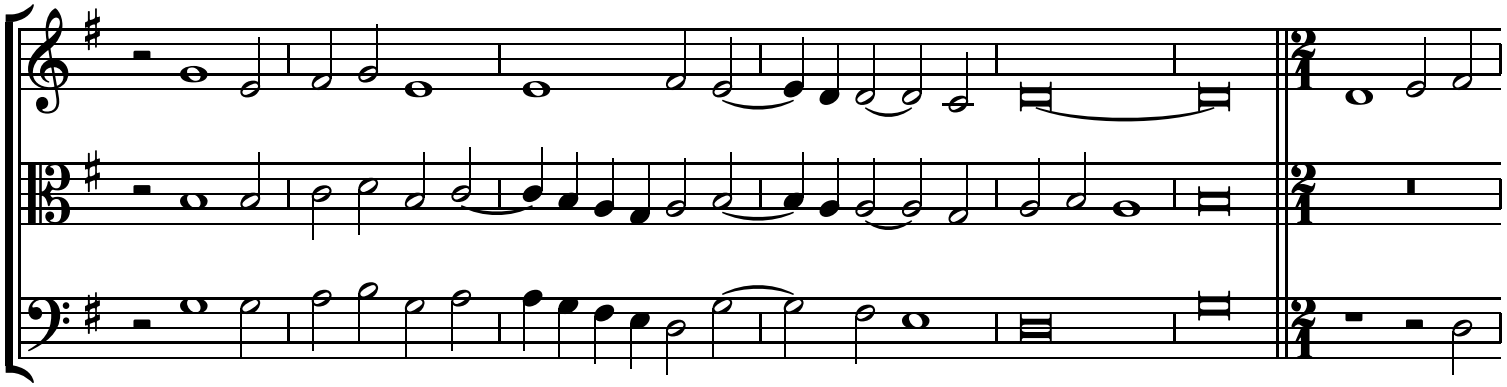
92
Fecit potentia
99
105

Deposuit potentes

112



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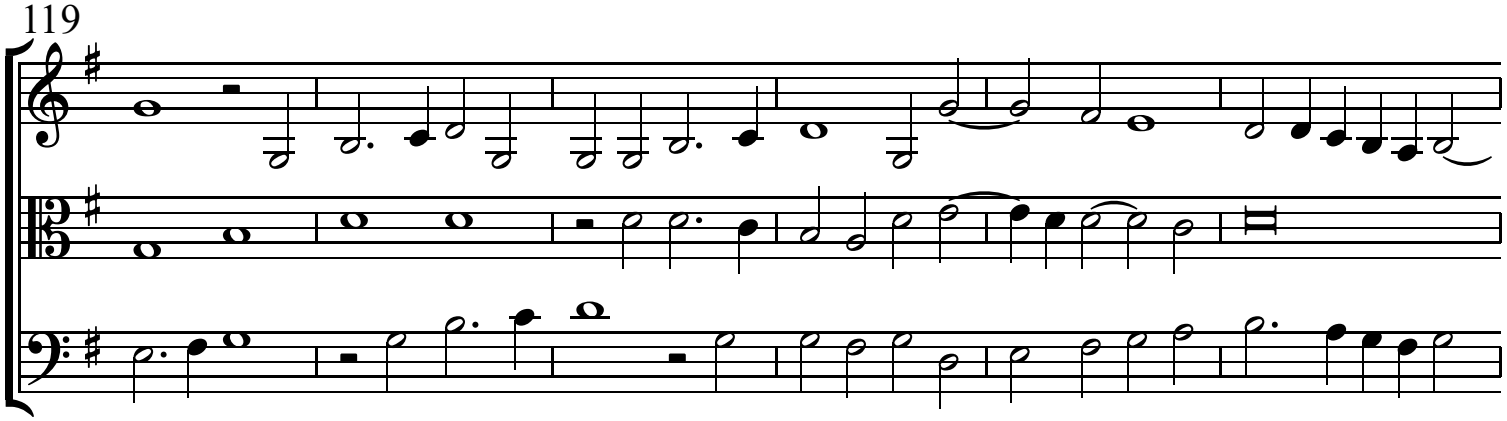

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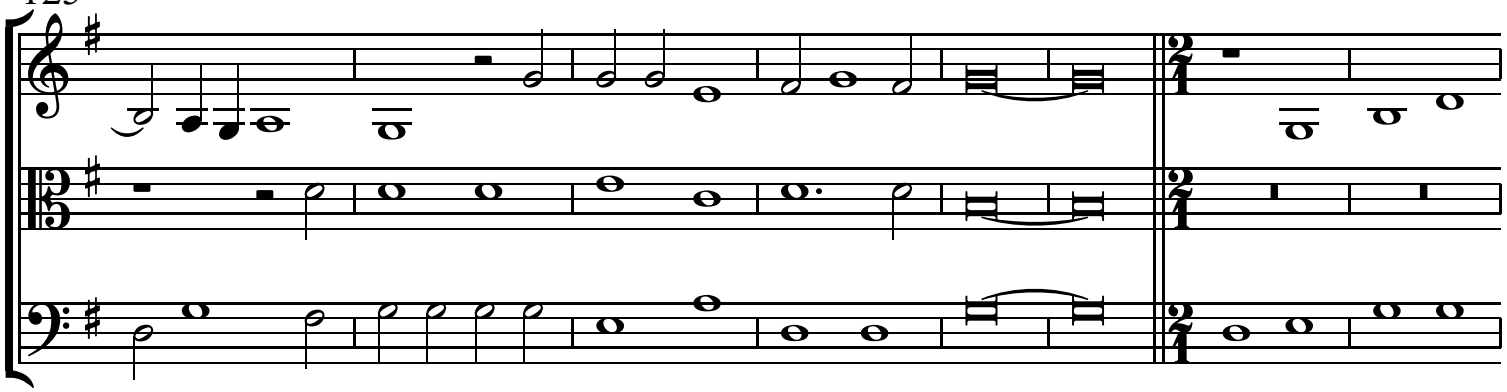

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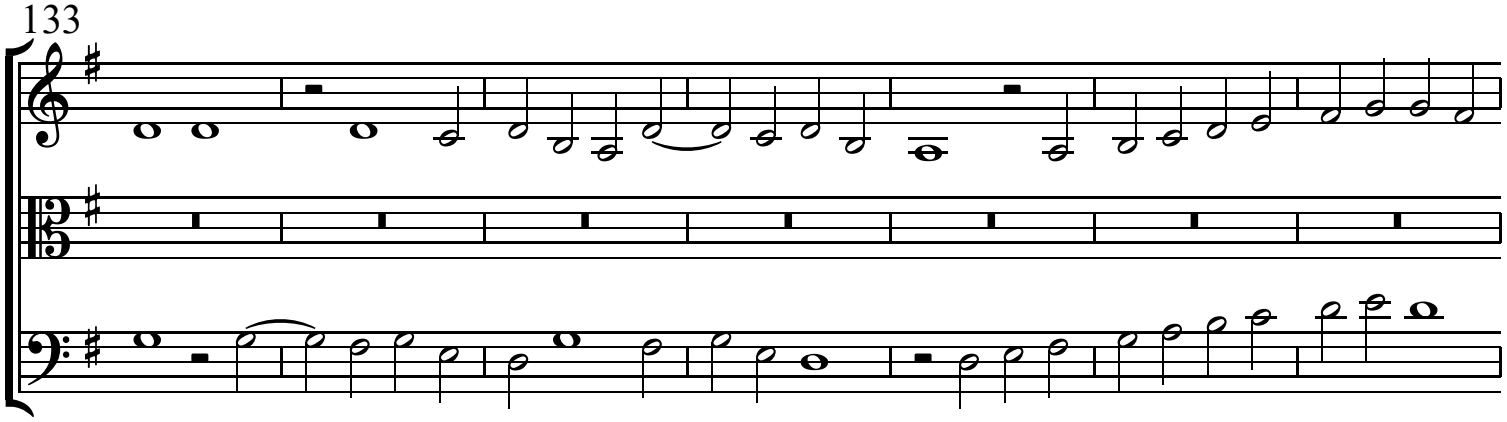

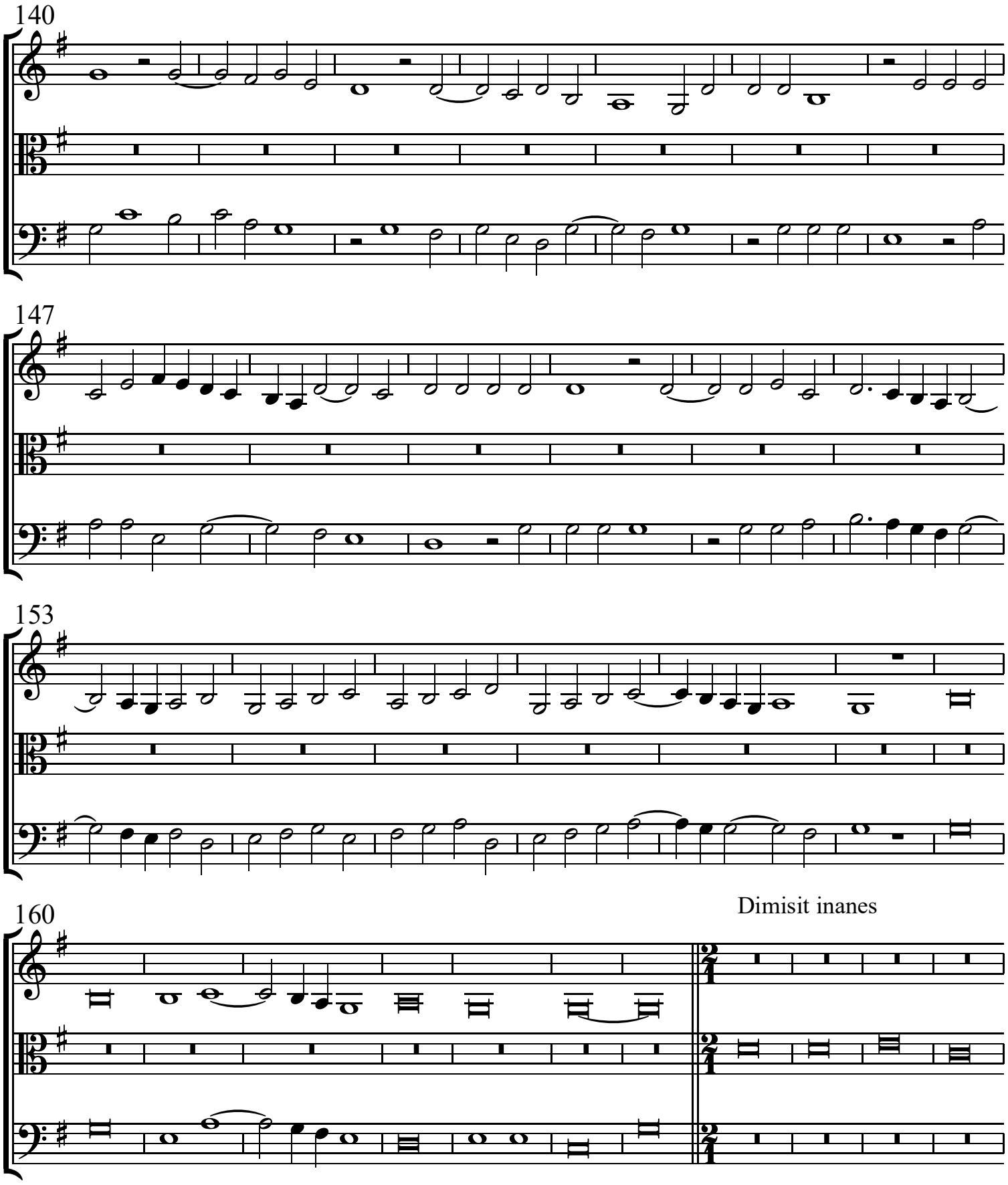
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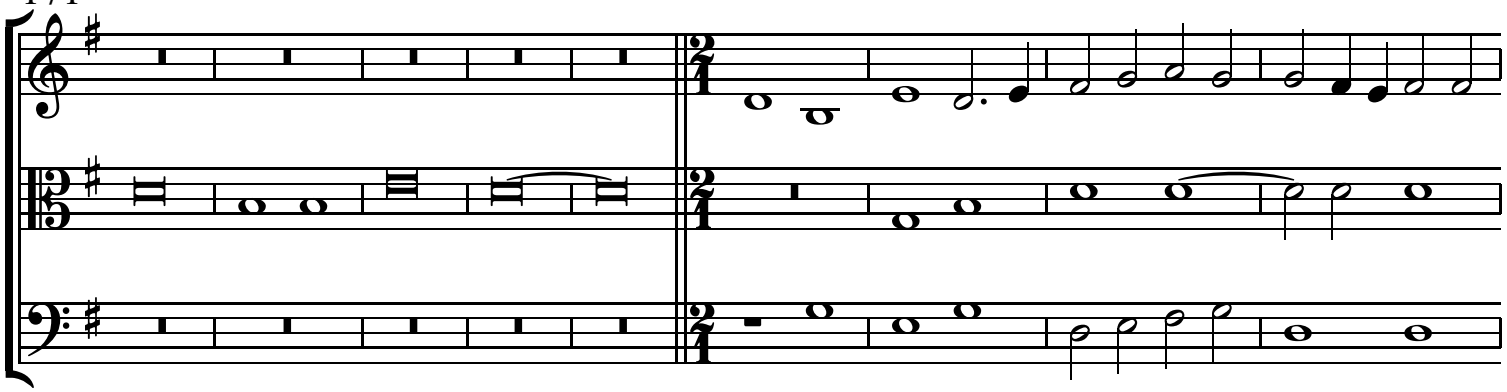
Dimisit inanes

171

Suscepit Israel



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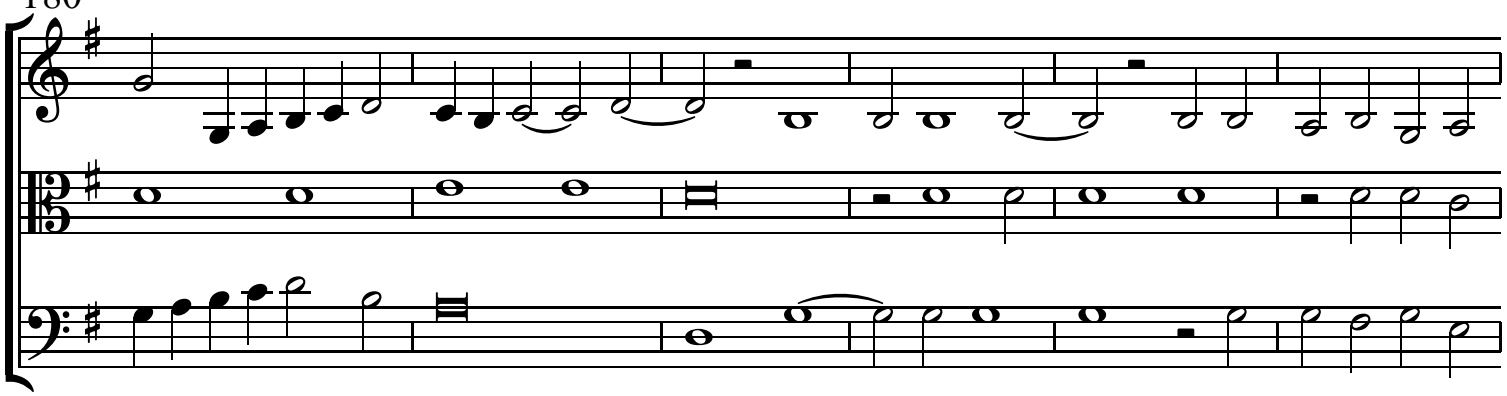

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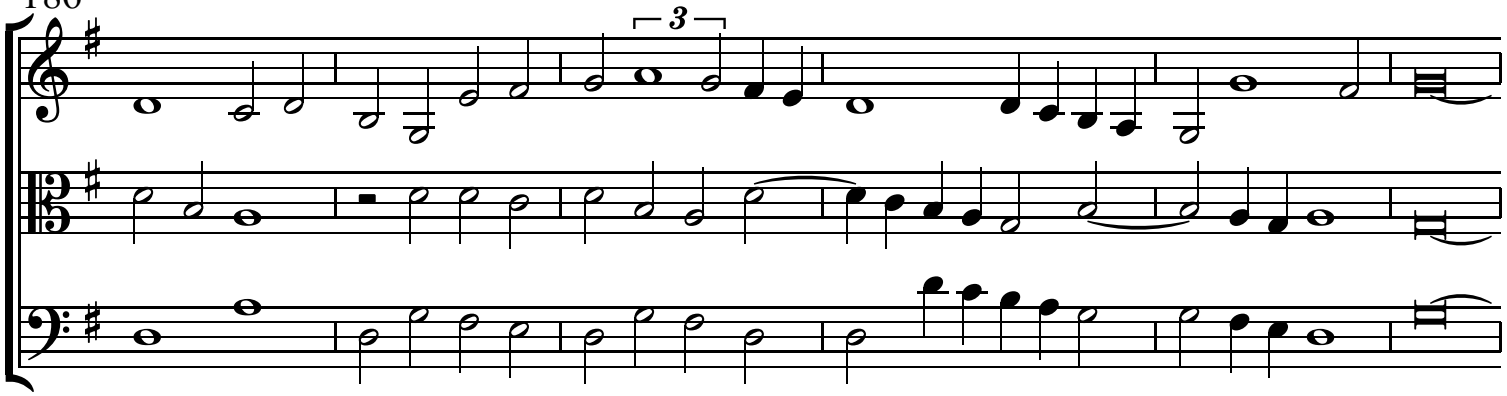

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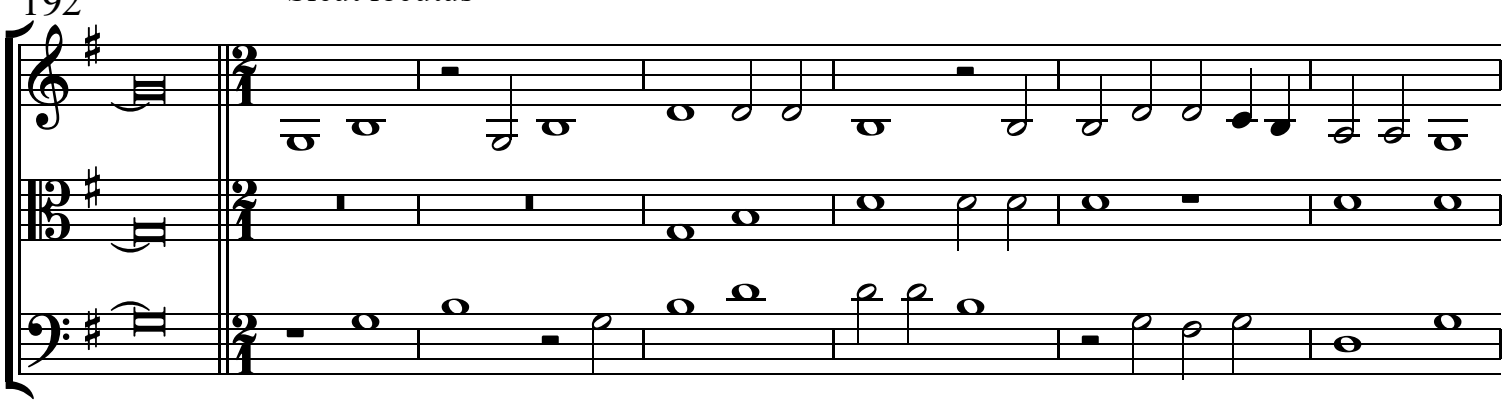
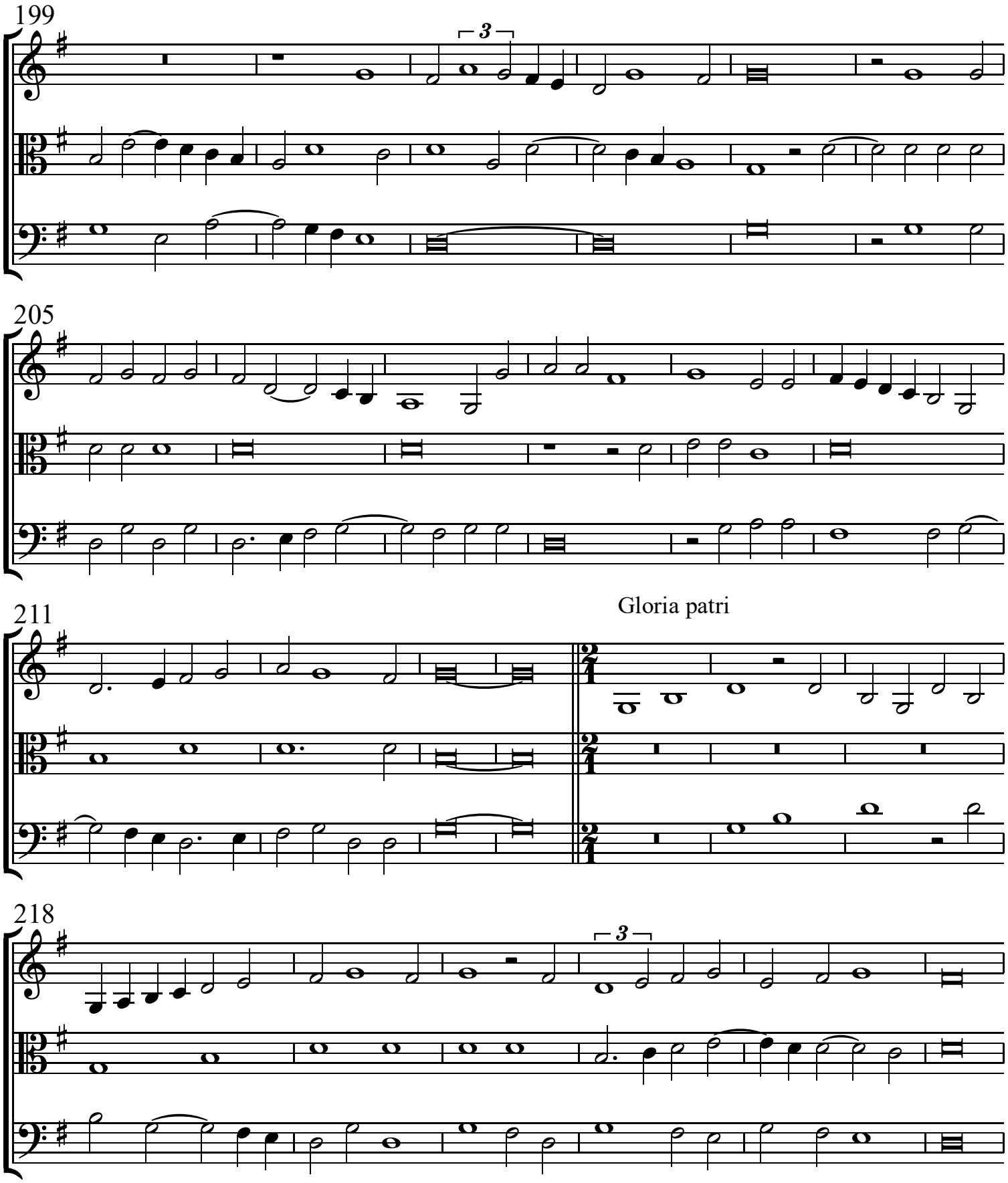
Sicut locutus

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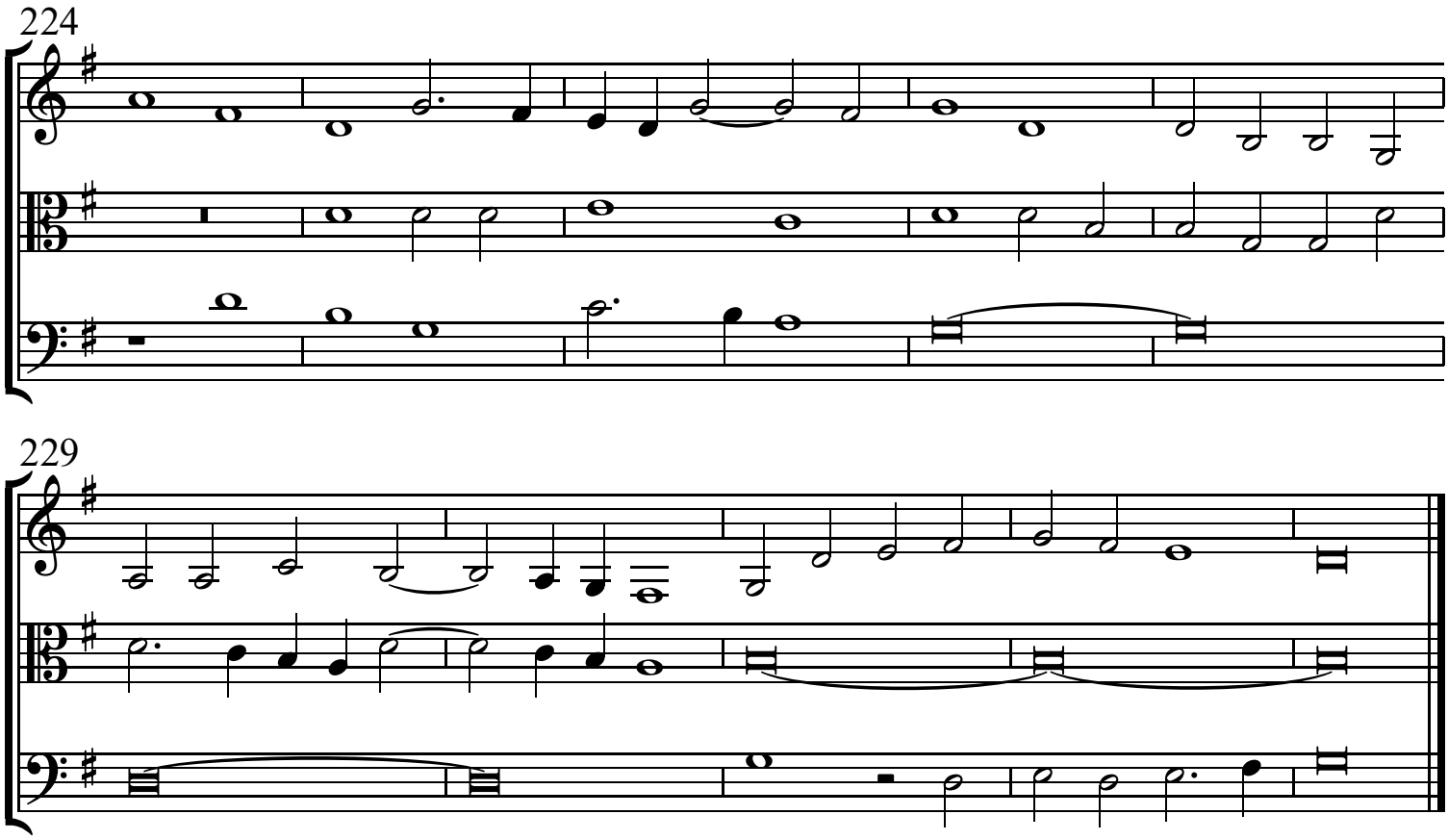
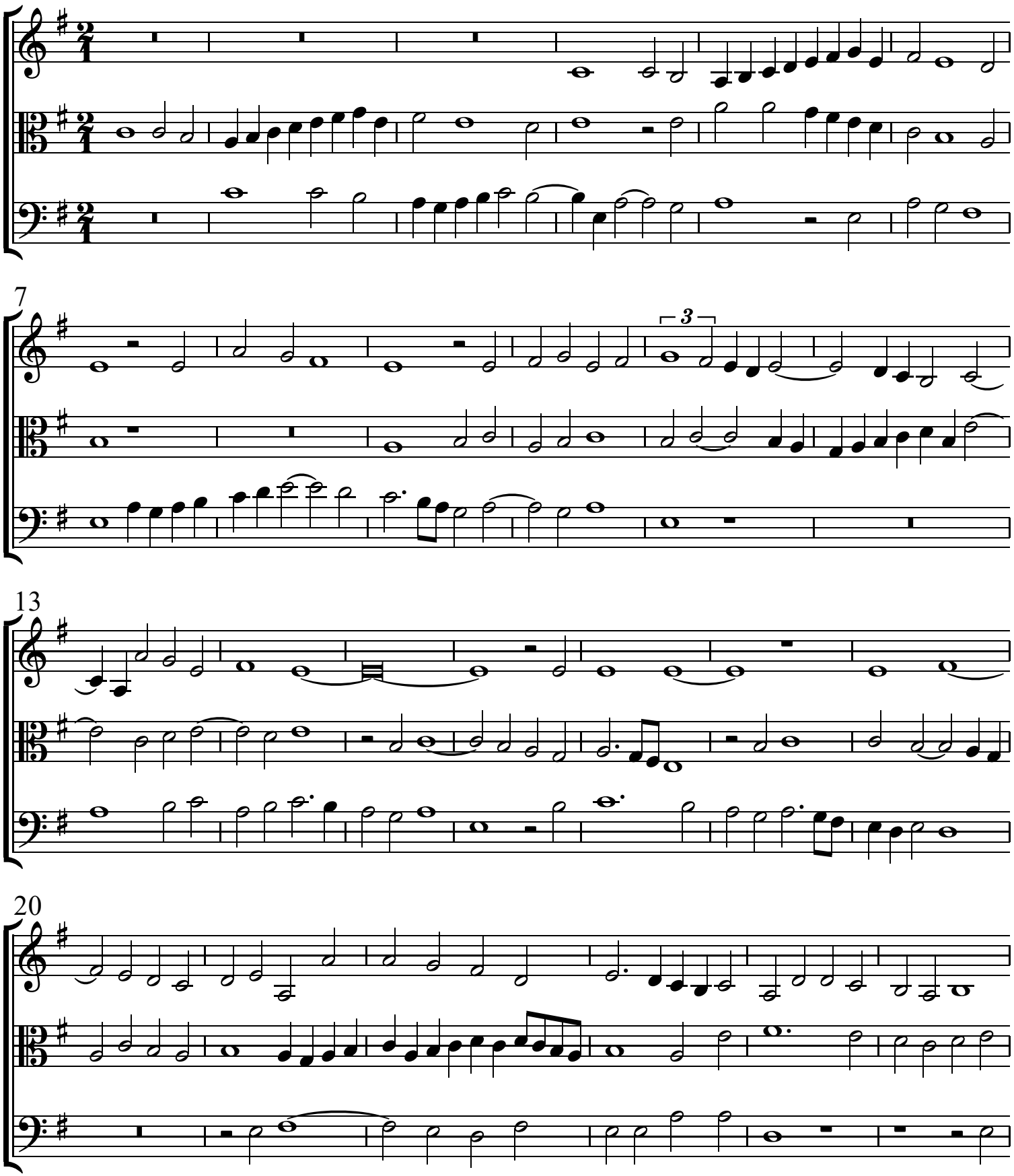
3
205
211
Gloria patri
218
3


224
229

29. Magnificat primi toni

Jhan Billon (fl. 1534-56)



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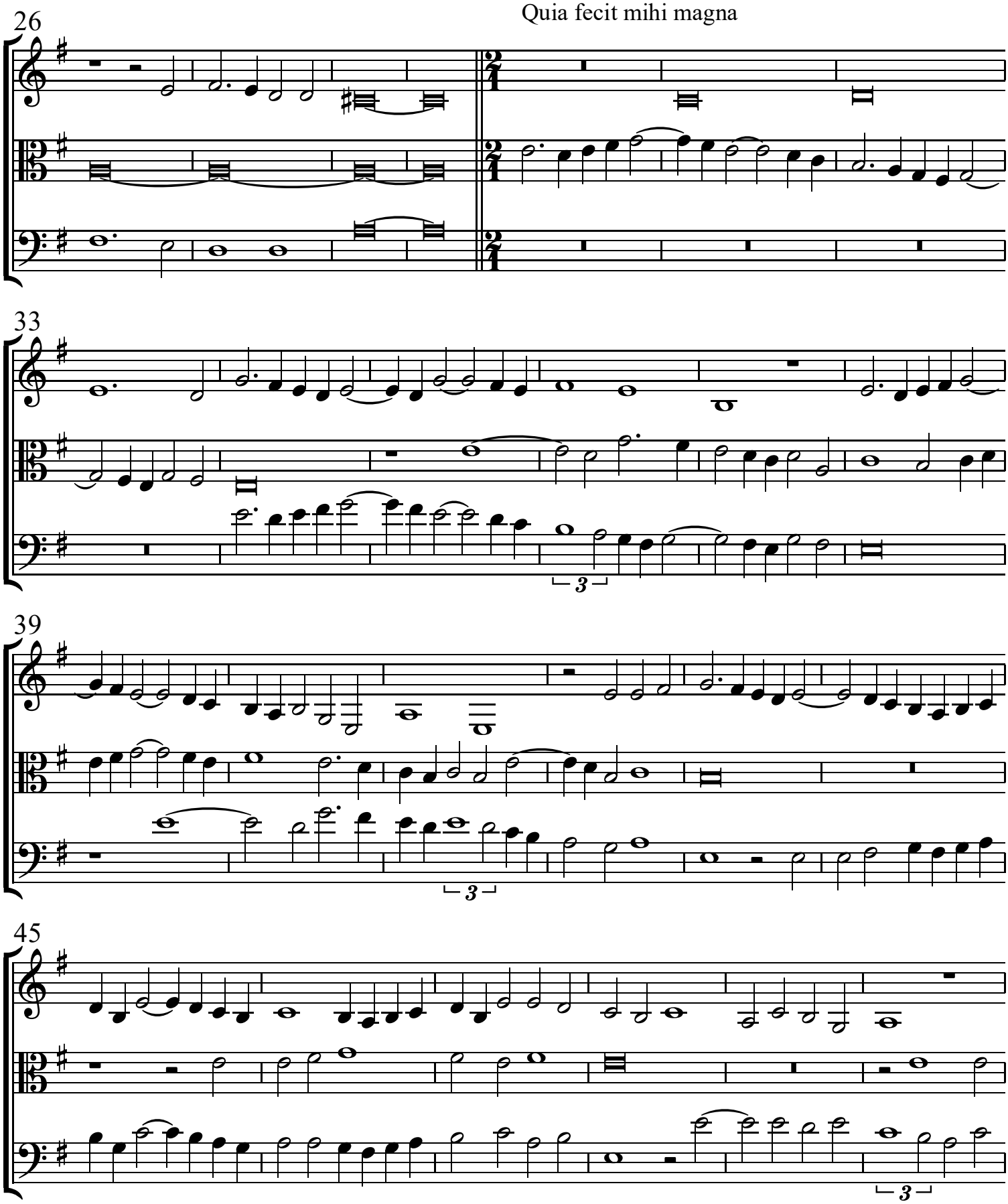
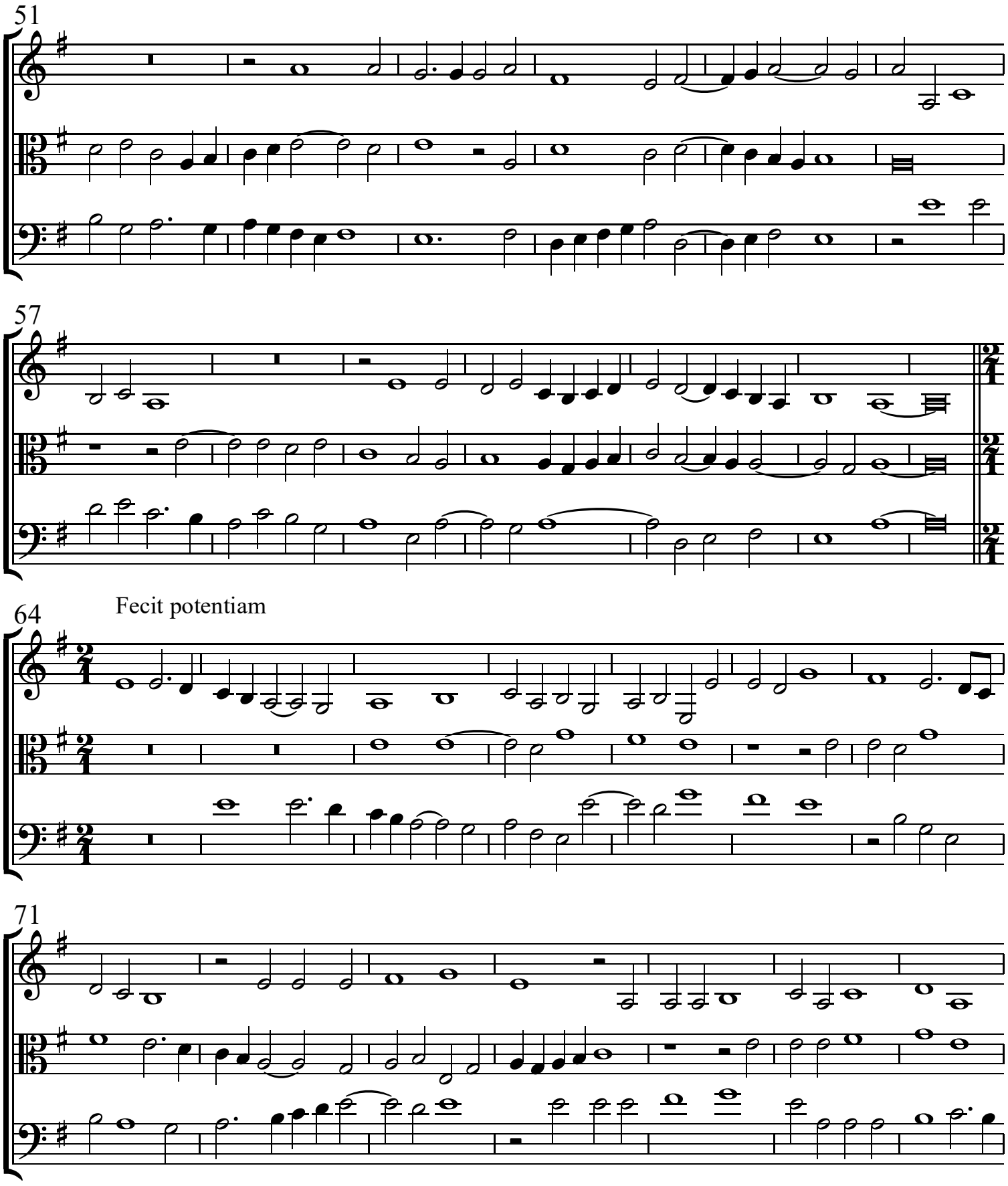
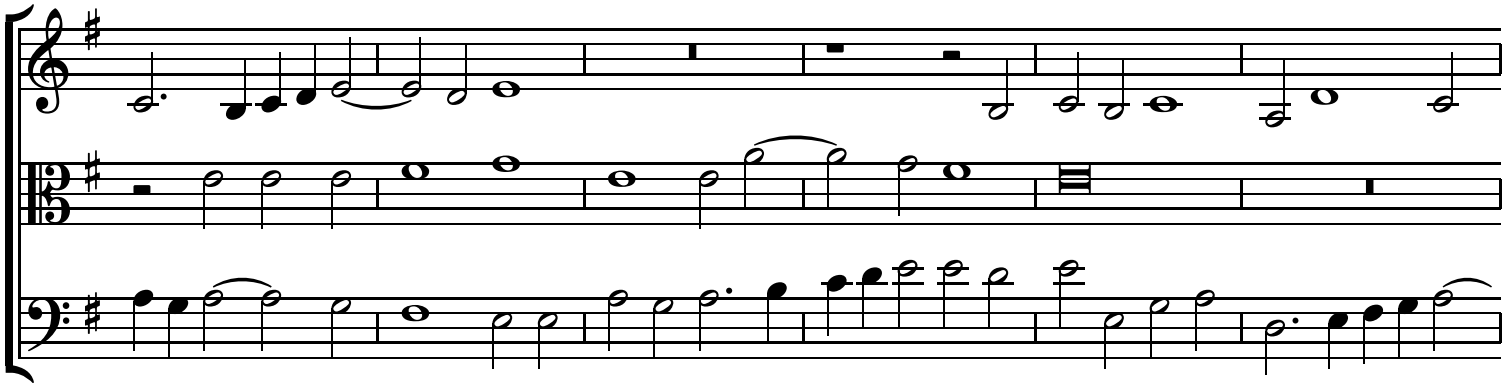
Quia fecit mihi magna




51
57
64
Fecit potentiam
71

78



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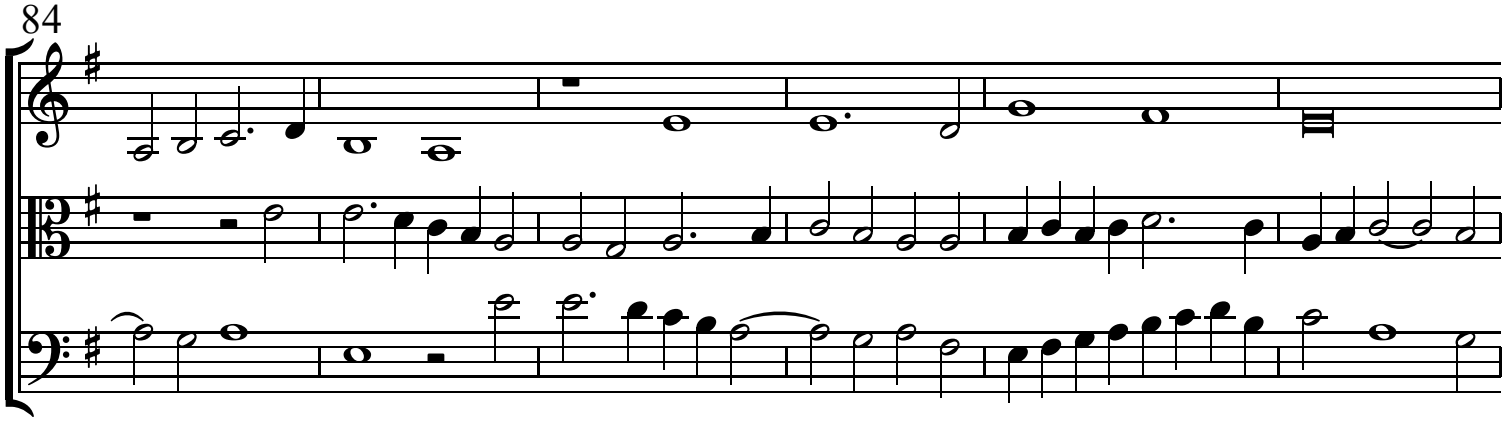

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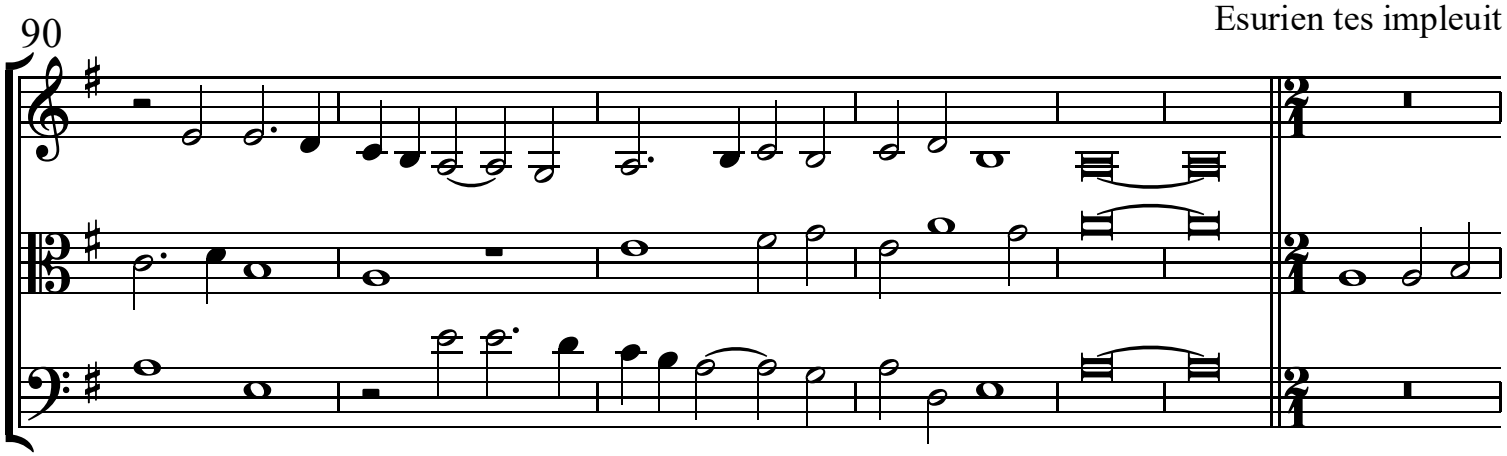

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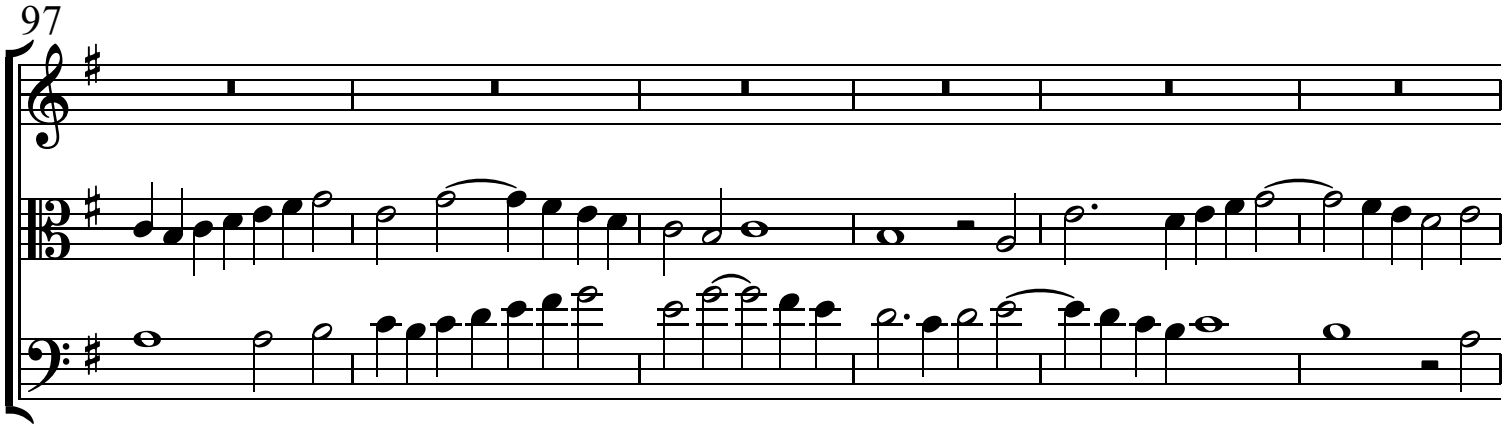

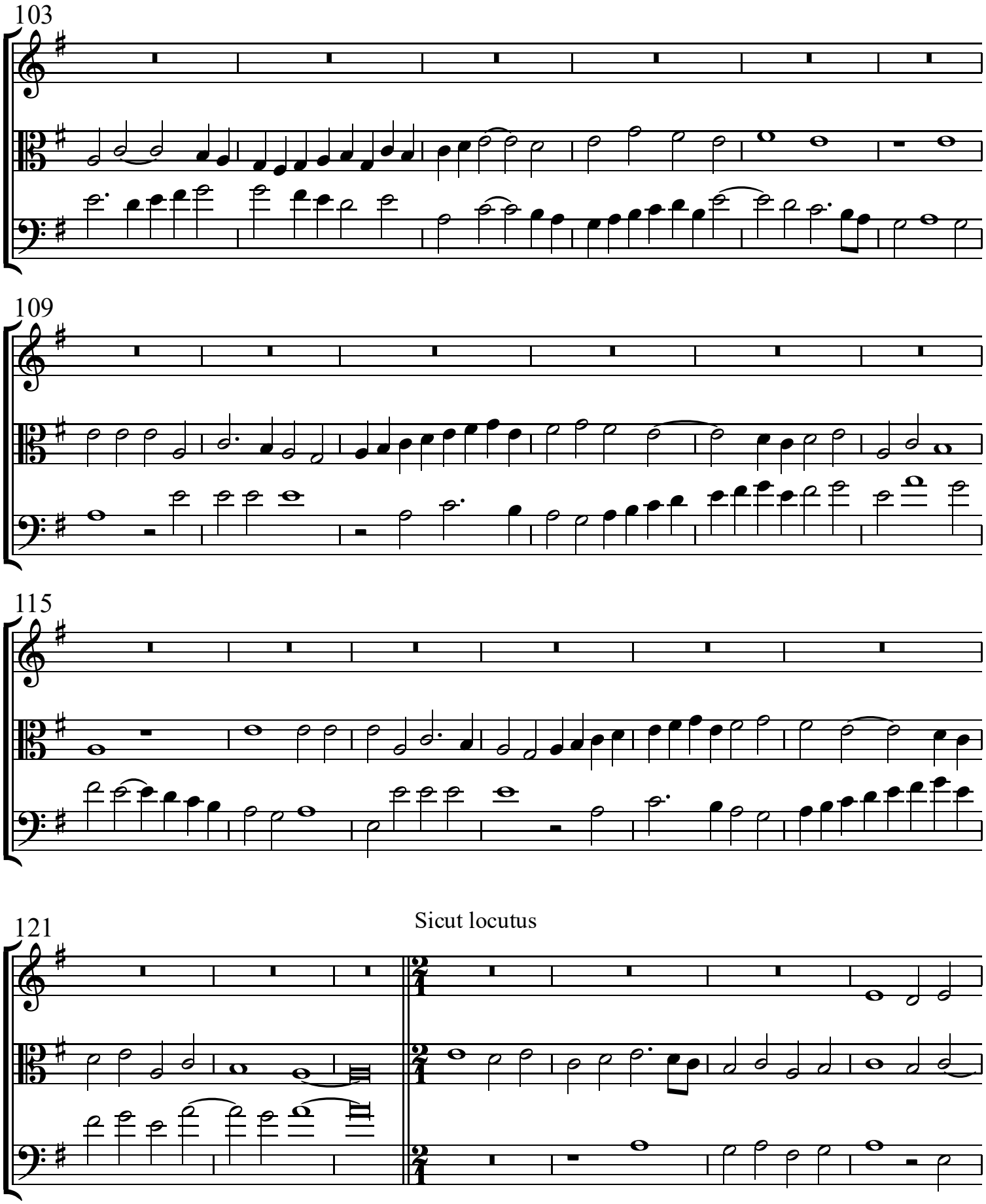
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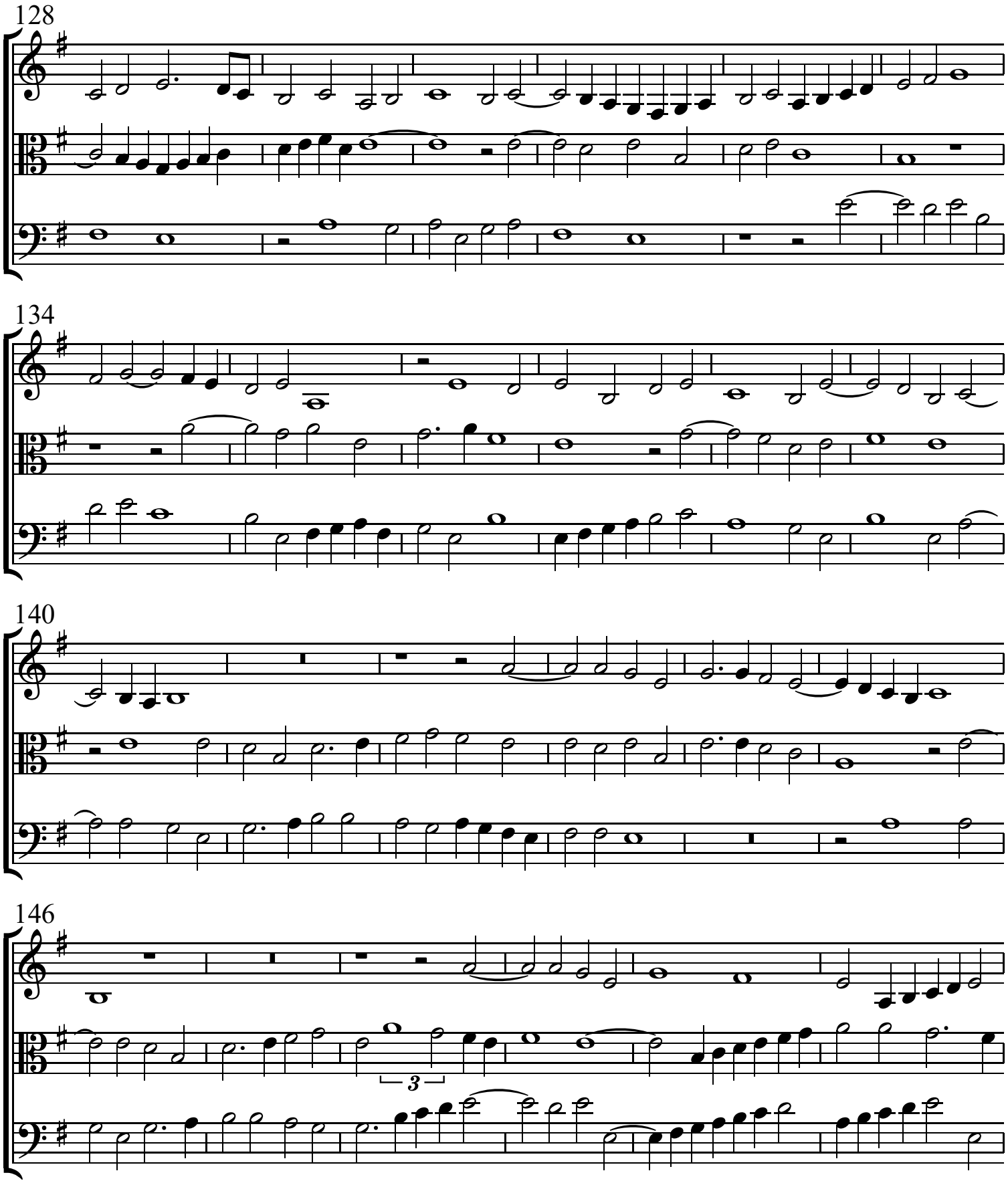
109
115
121
Sicut locutus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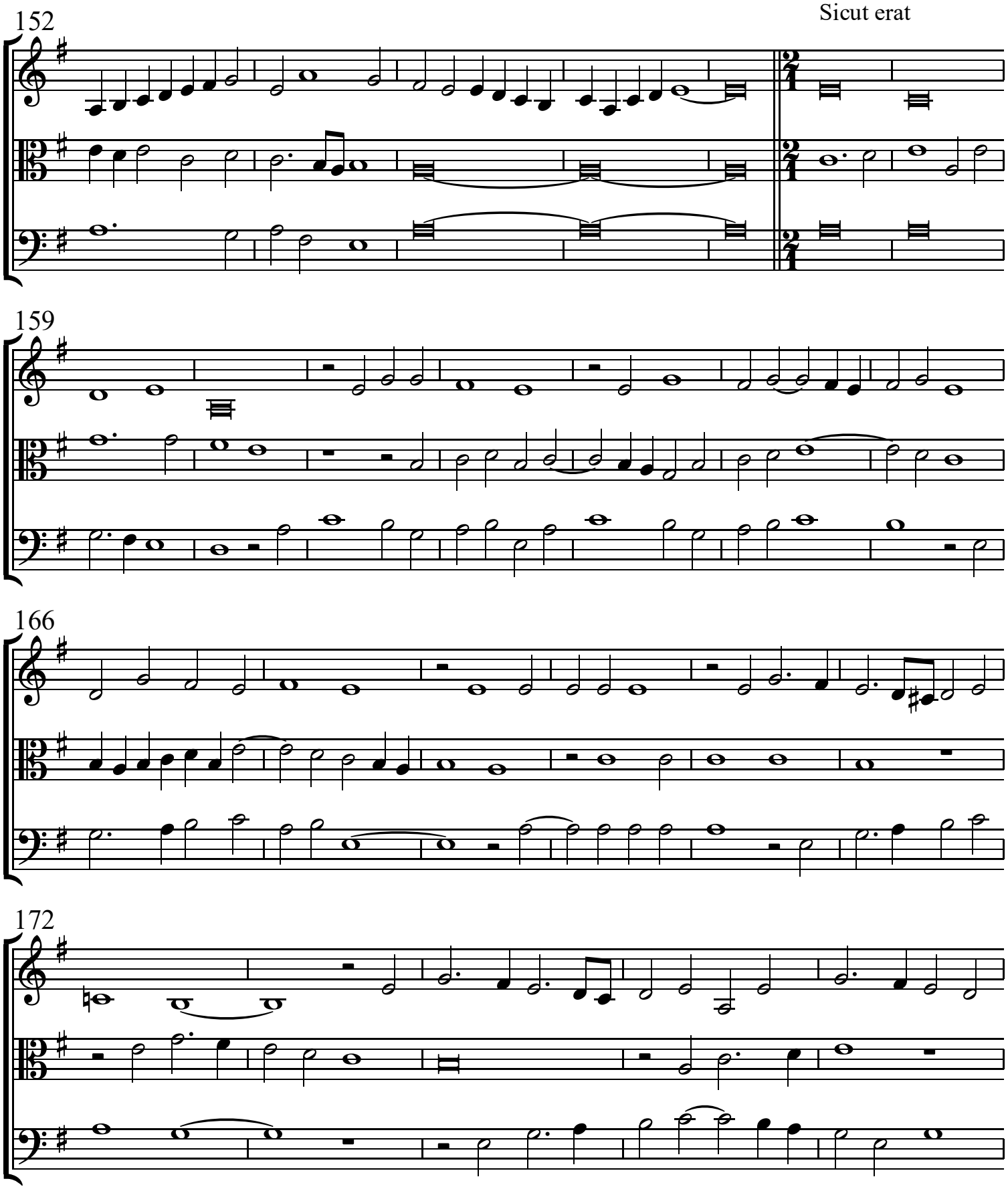
Sicut erat
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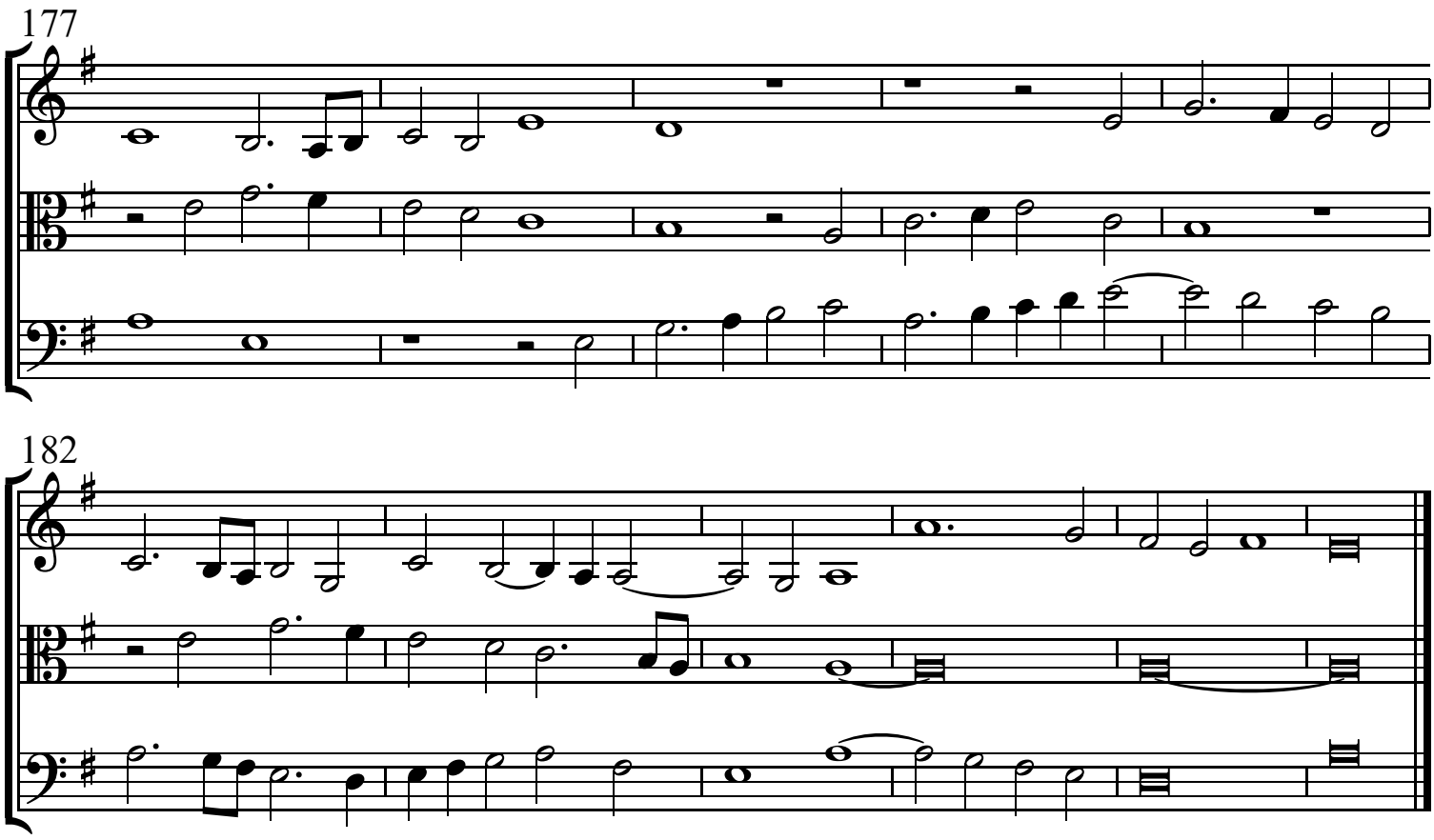
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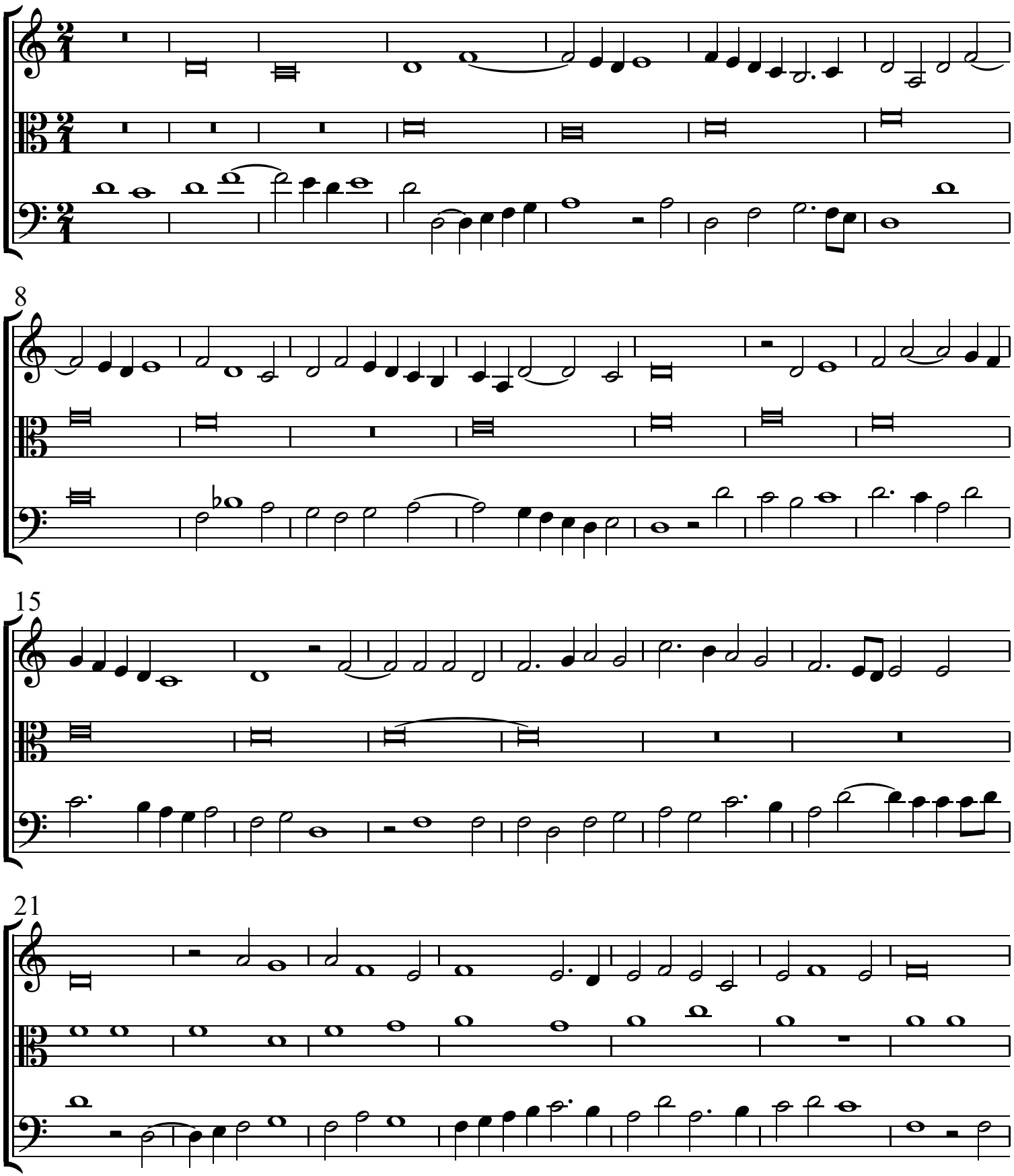
30. Da pacem Domine in diebus nostris

Anonymous



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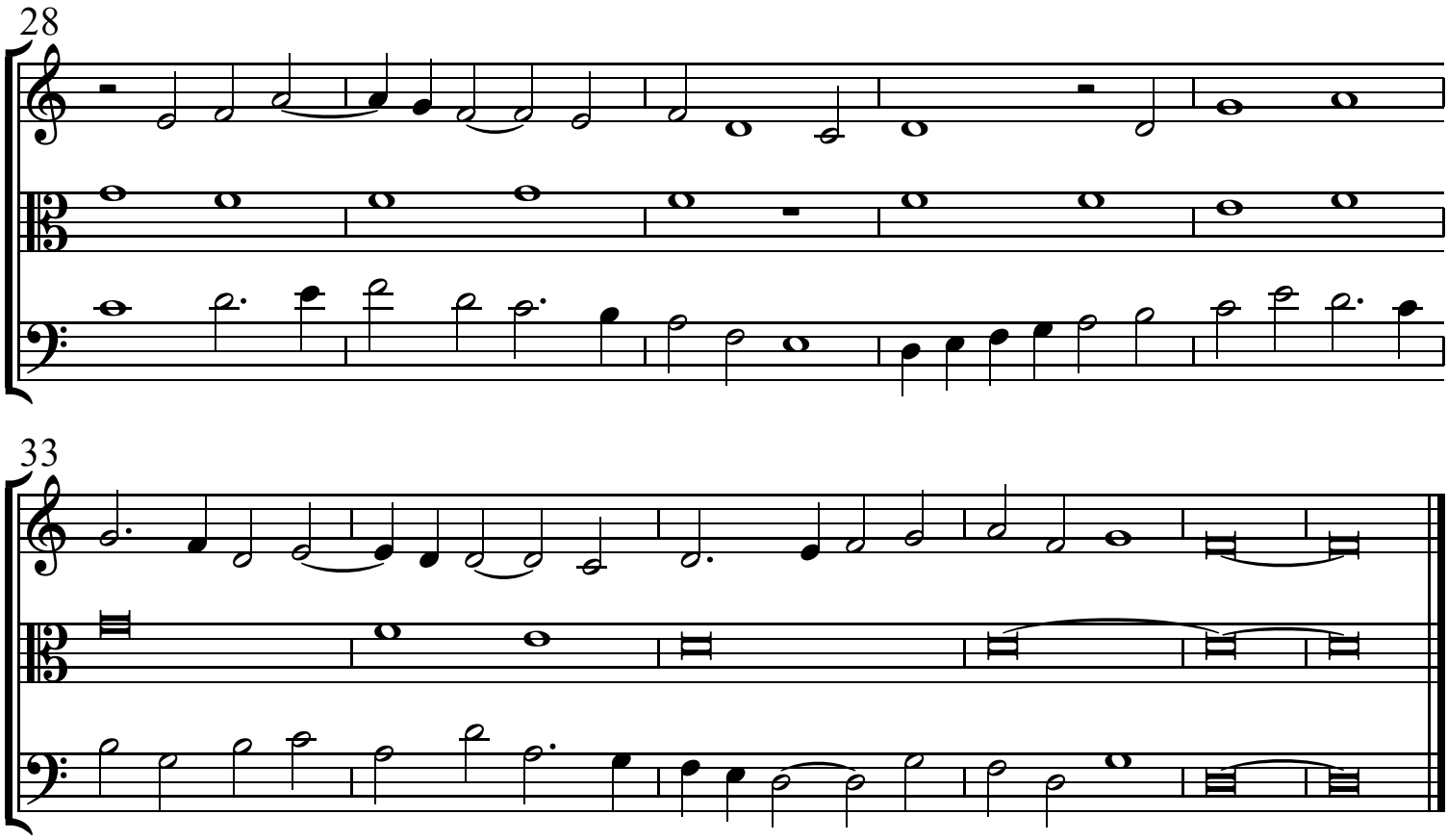
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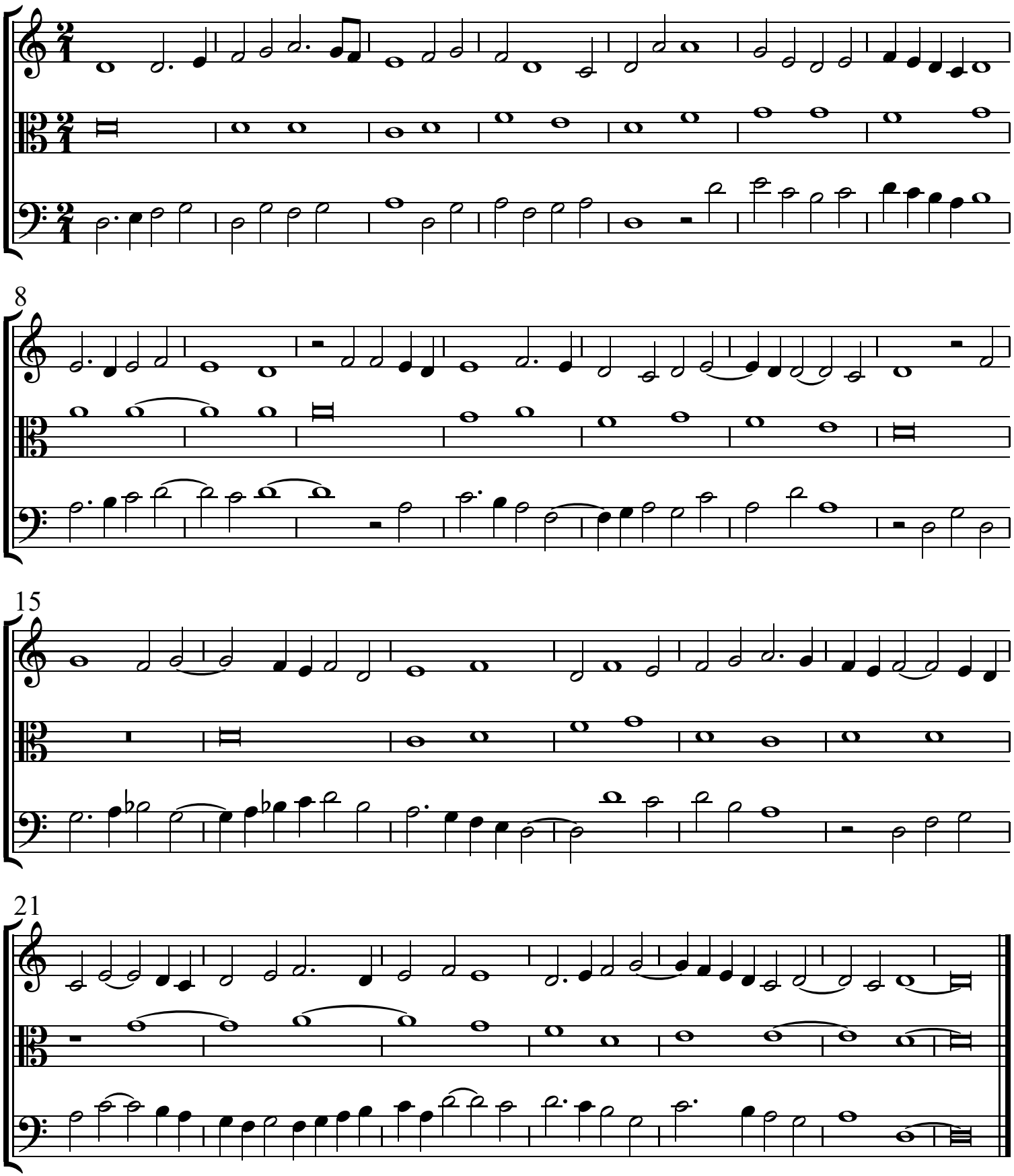
31. Verley uns frieden gnediglich Herr Gott

Anonymous



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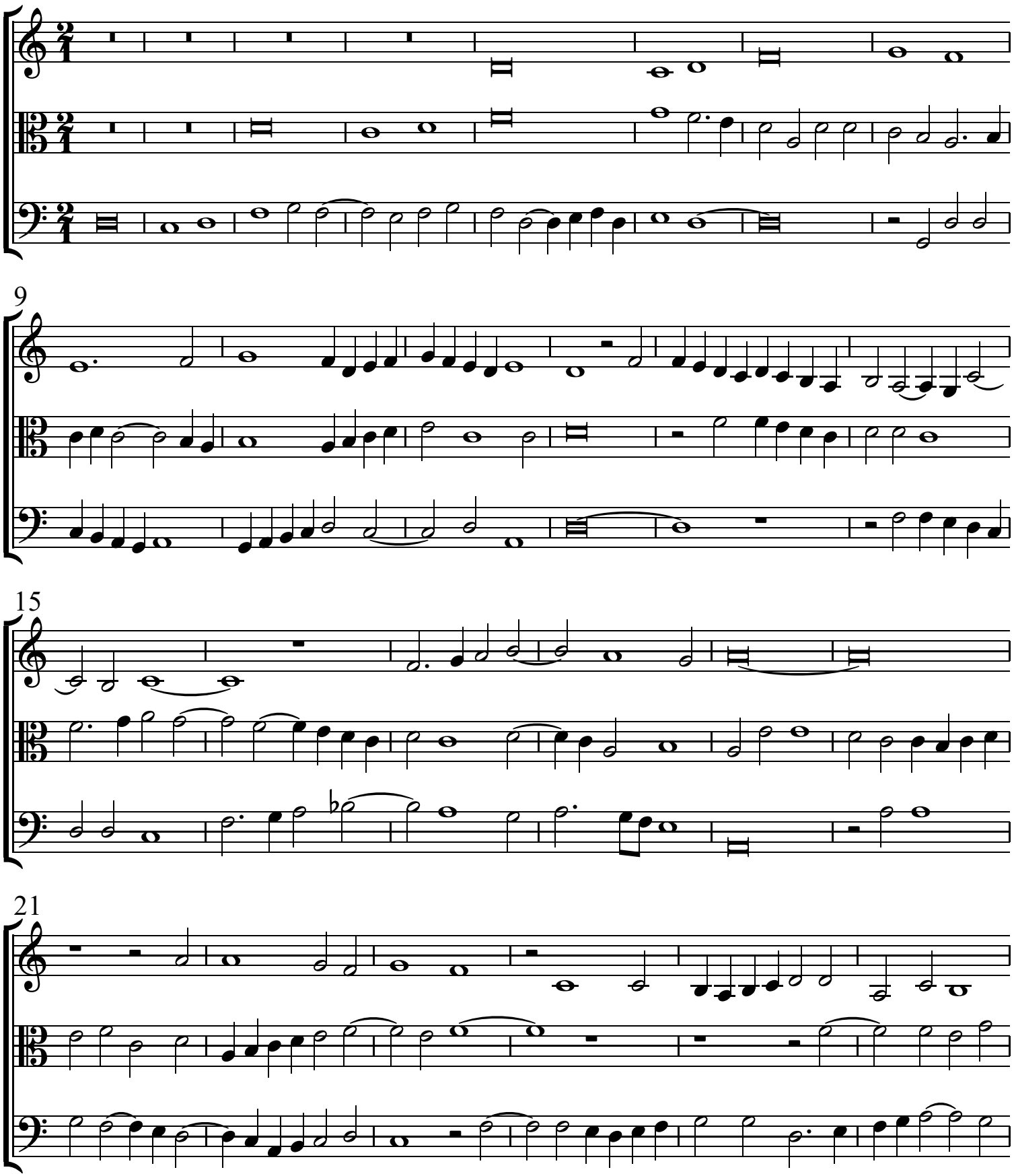
32. Da pacem Domine

Claudin de Sermisy (c. 1490-1562)



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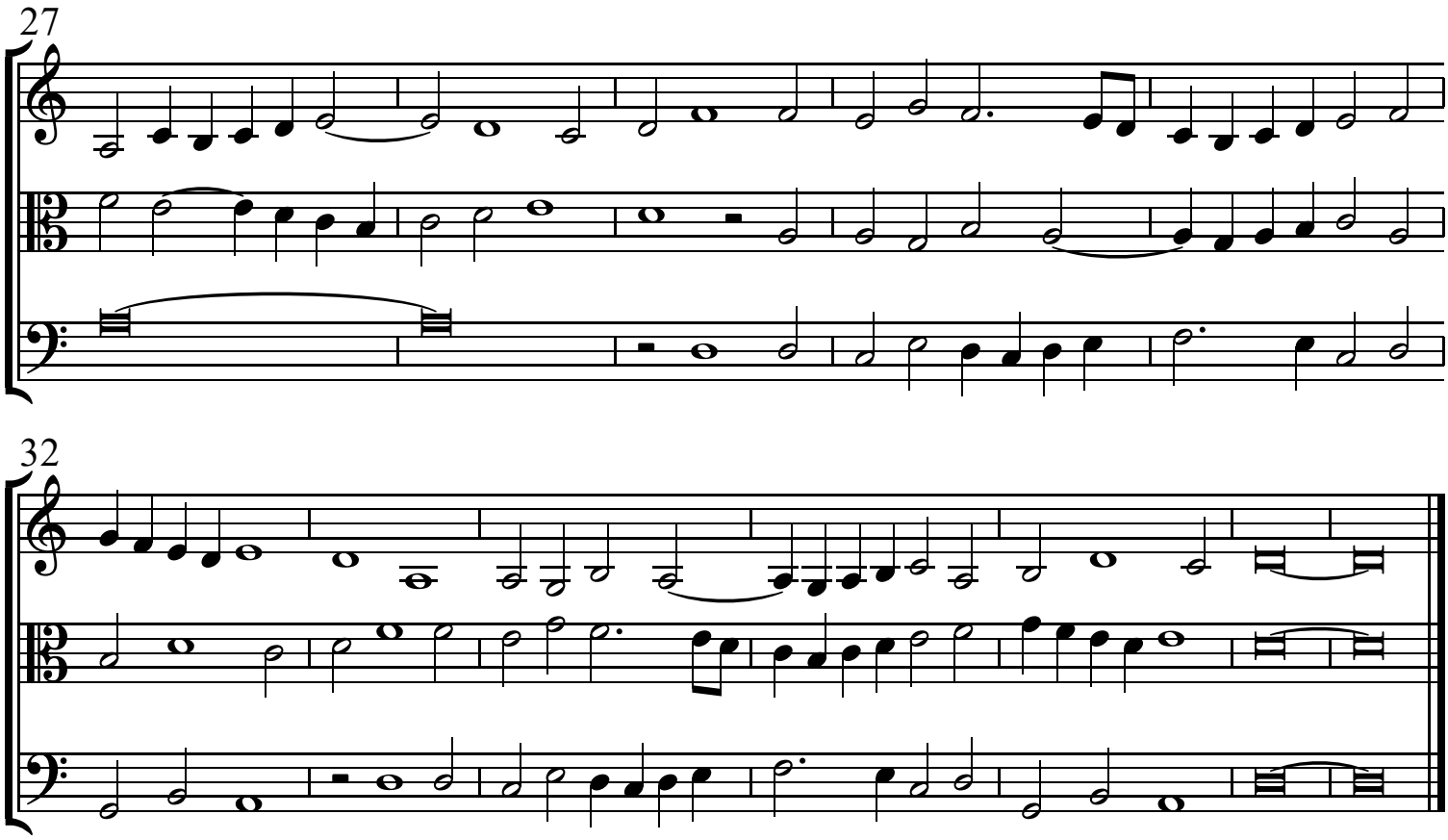
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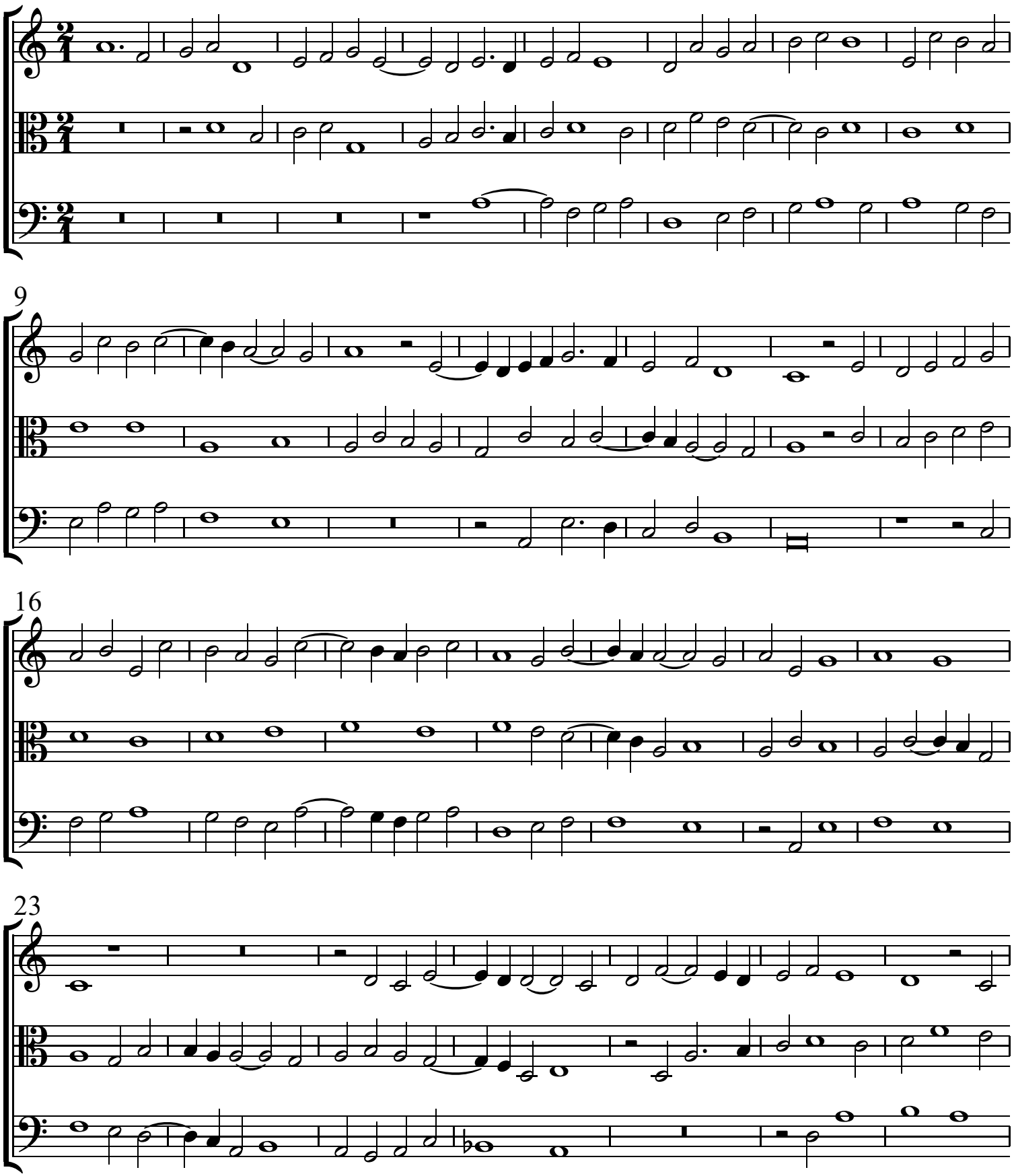
33. Si in praeceptis meis

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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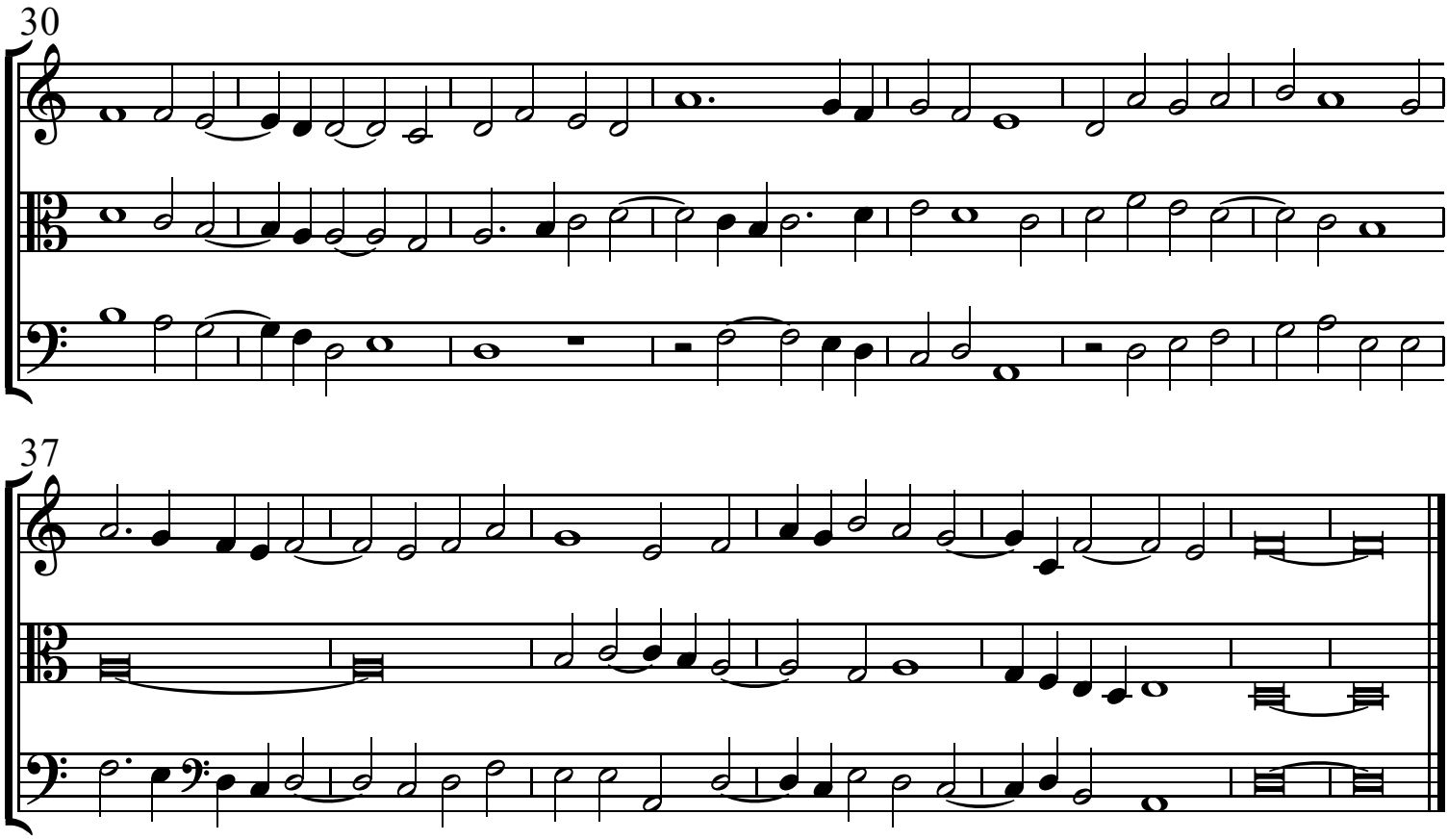
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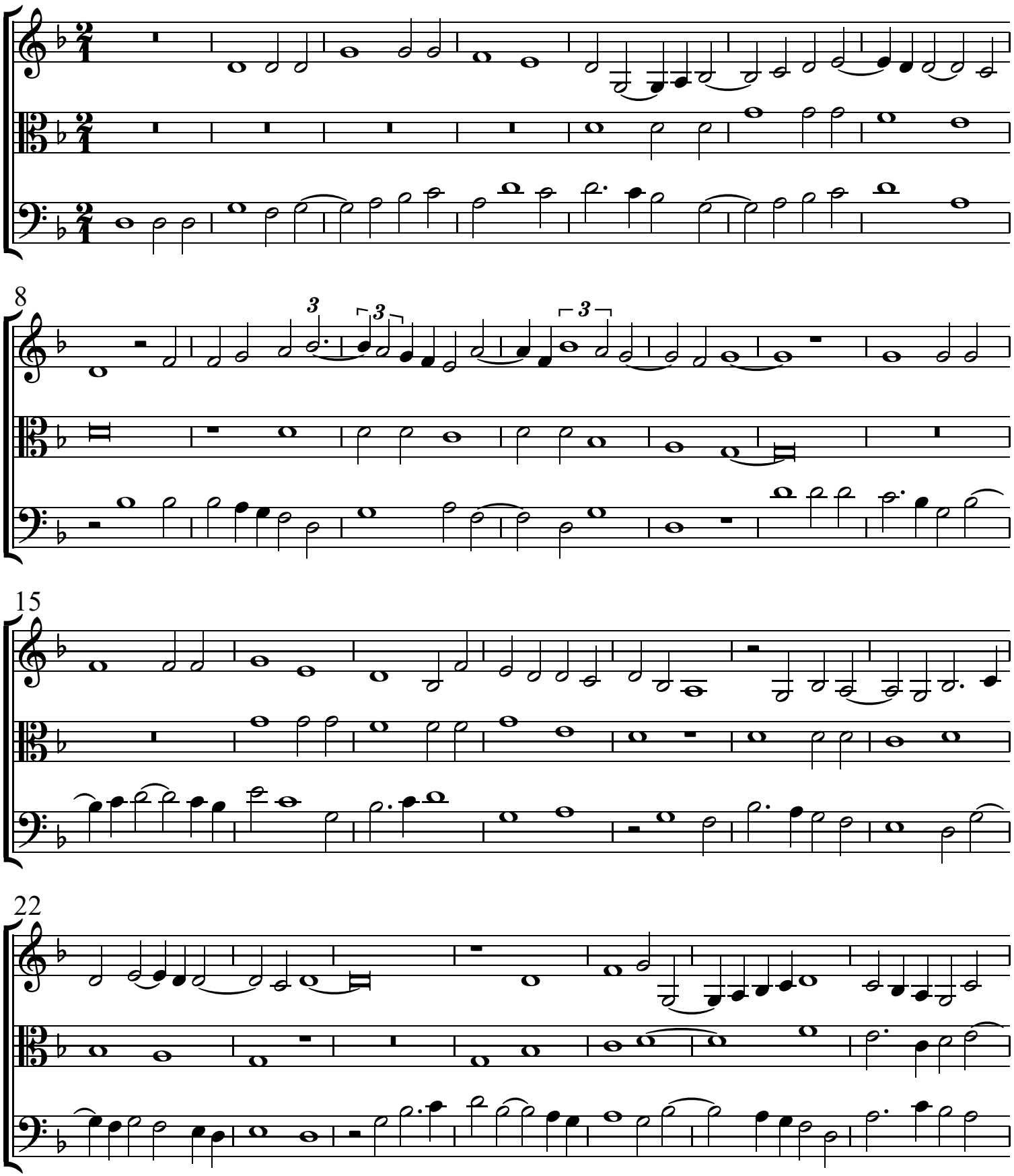
34. Dominus soluit compeditos

Anonymous



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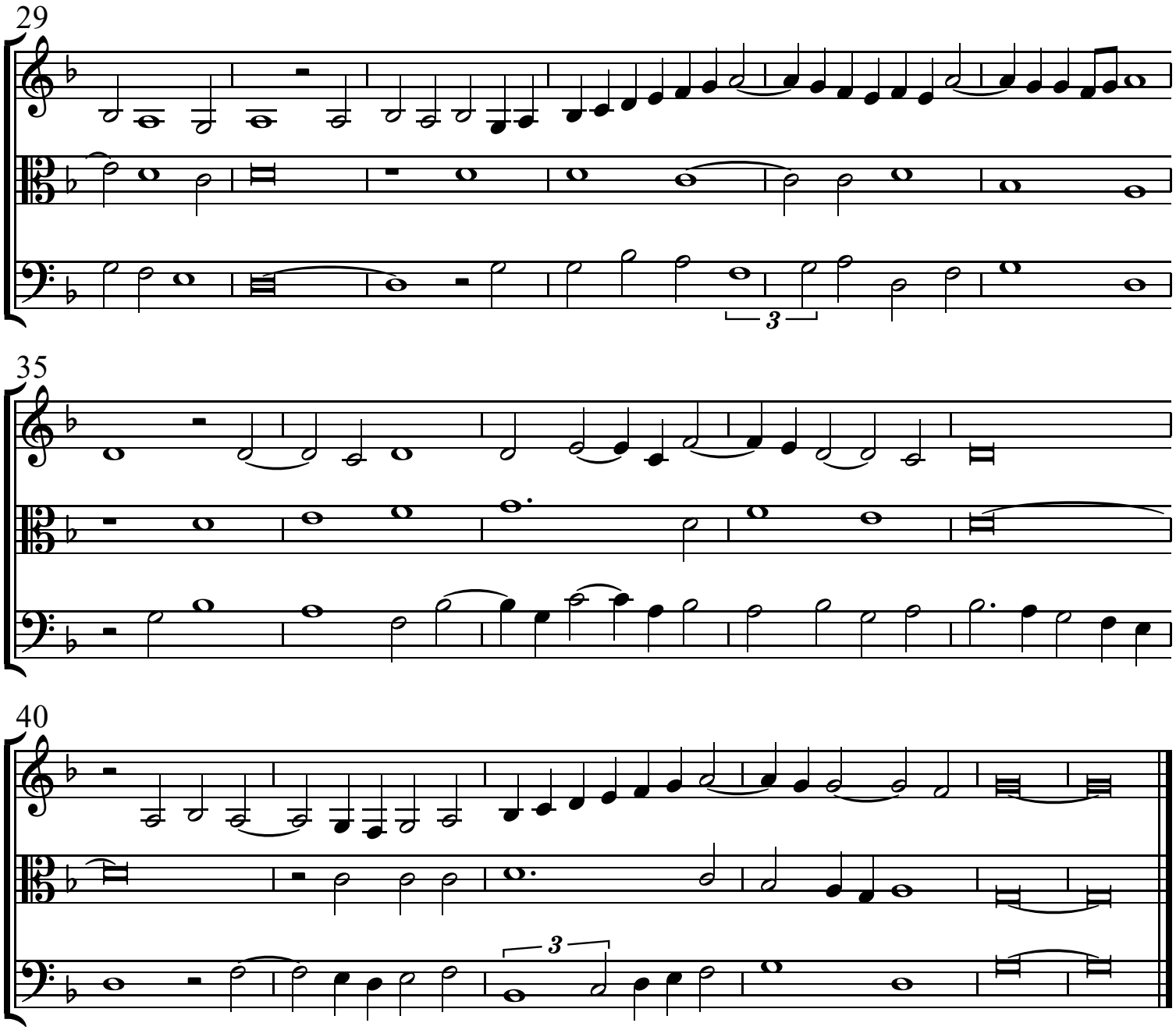
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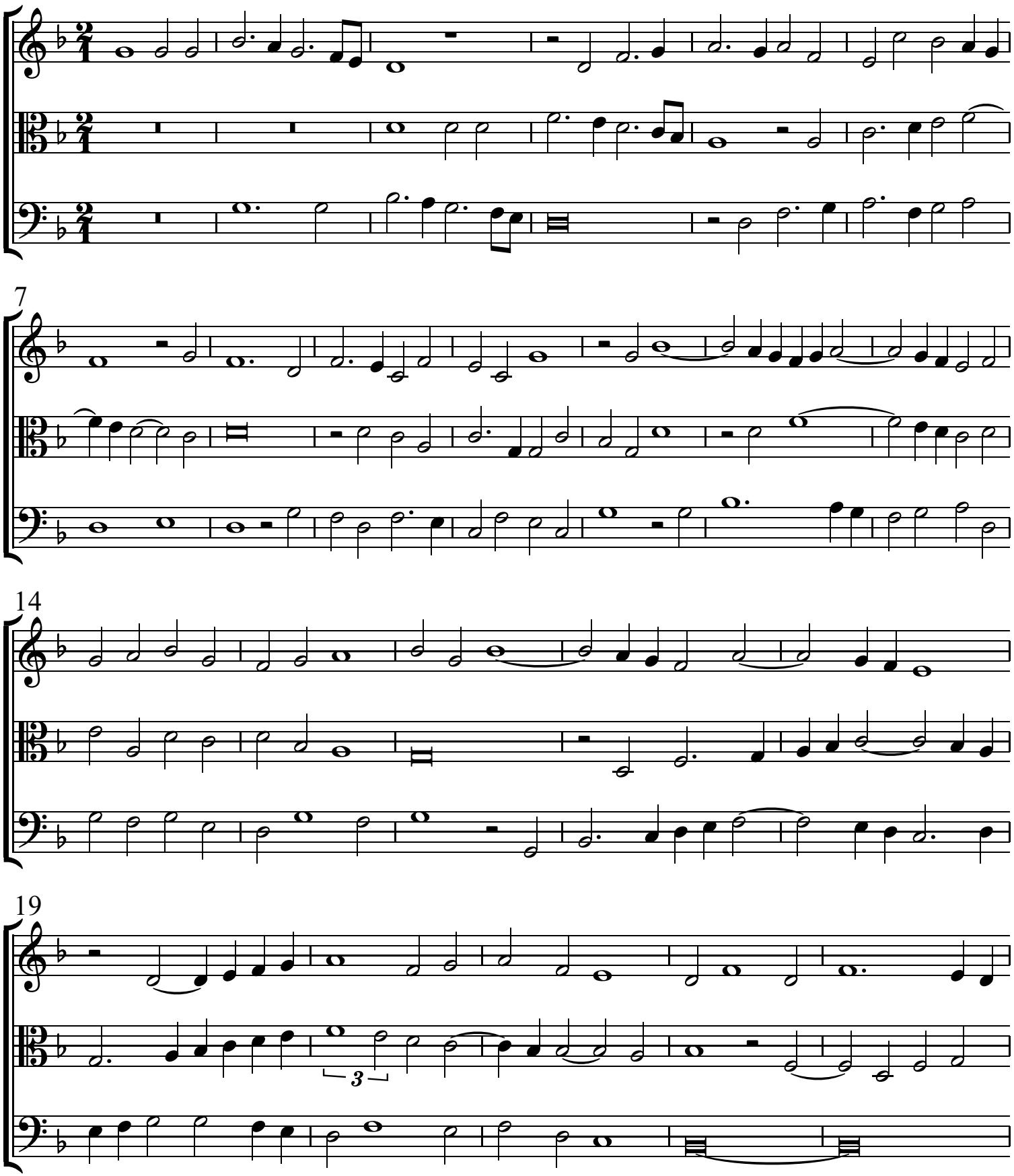
3

35. Bonum est viro cum portaverit jugum

Johann Walter (1496-1570)



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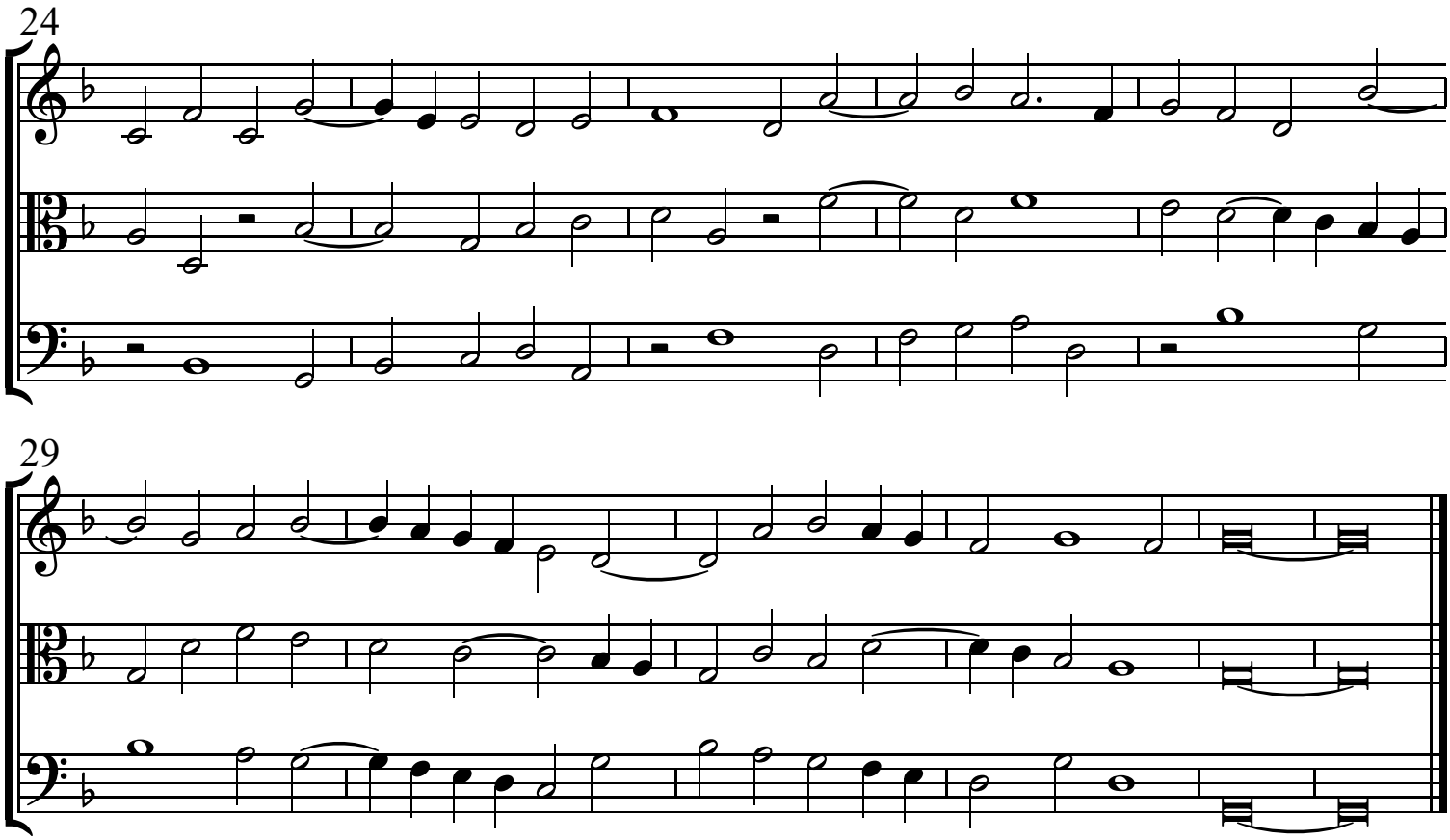
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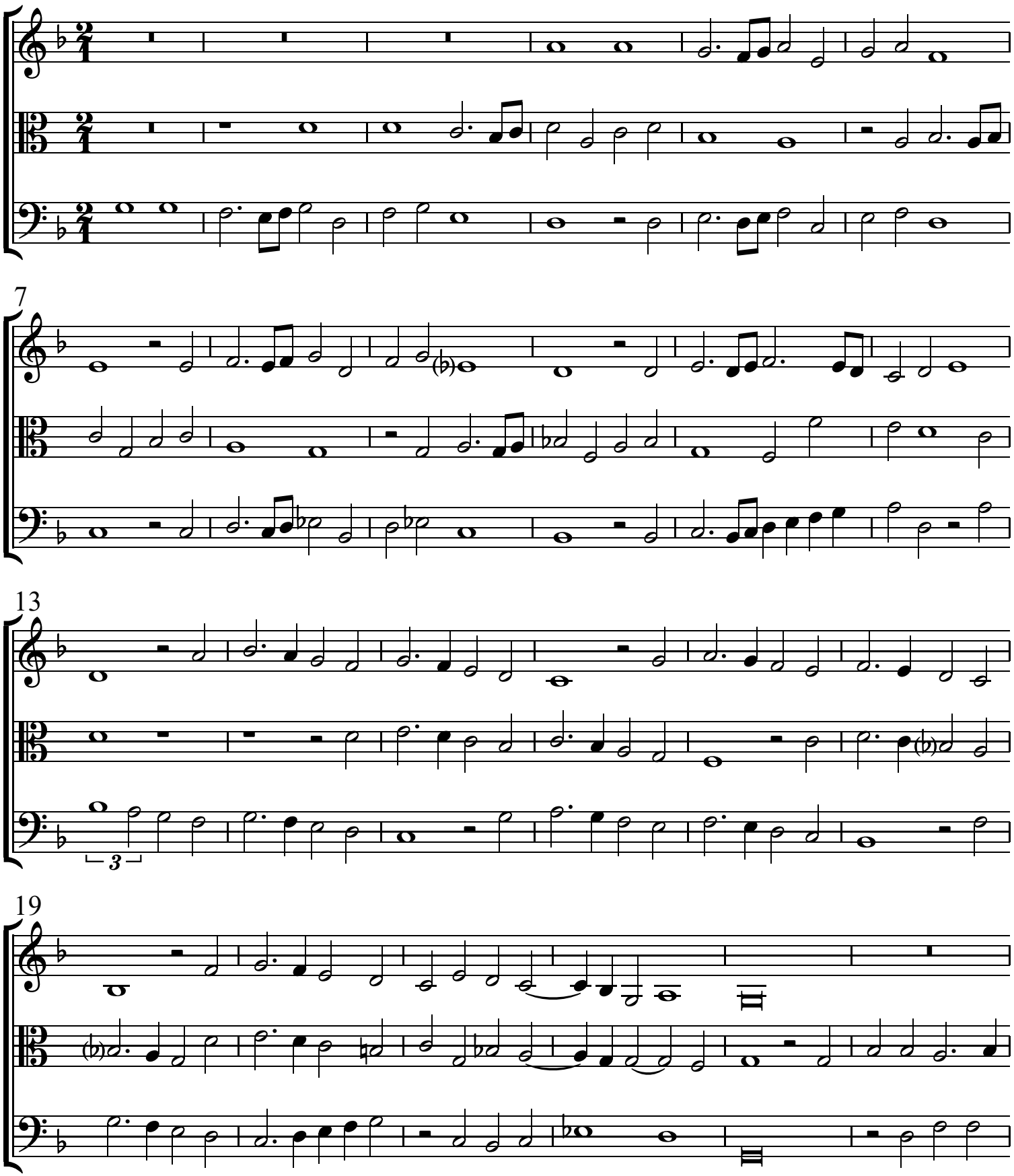
36. Tota scriptura divinitus

Johannes Ghiselin (fl. 1455–1511)



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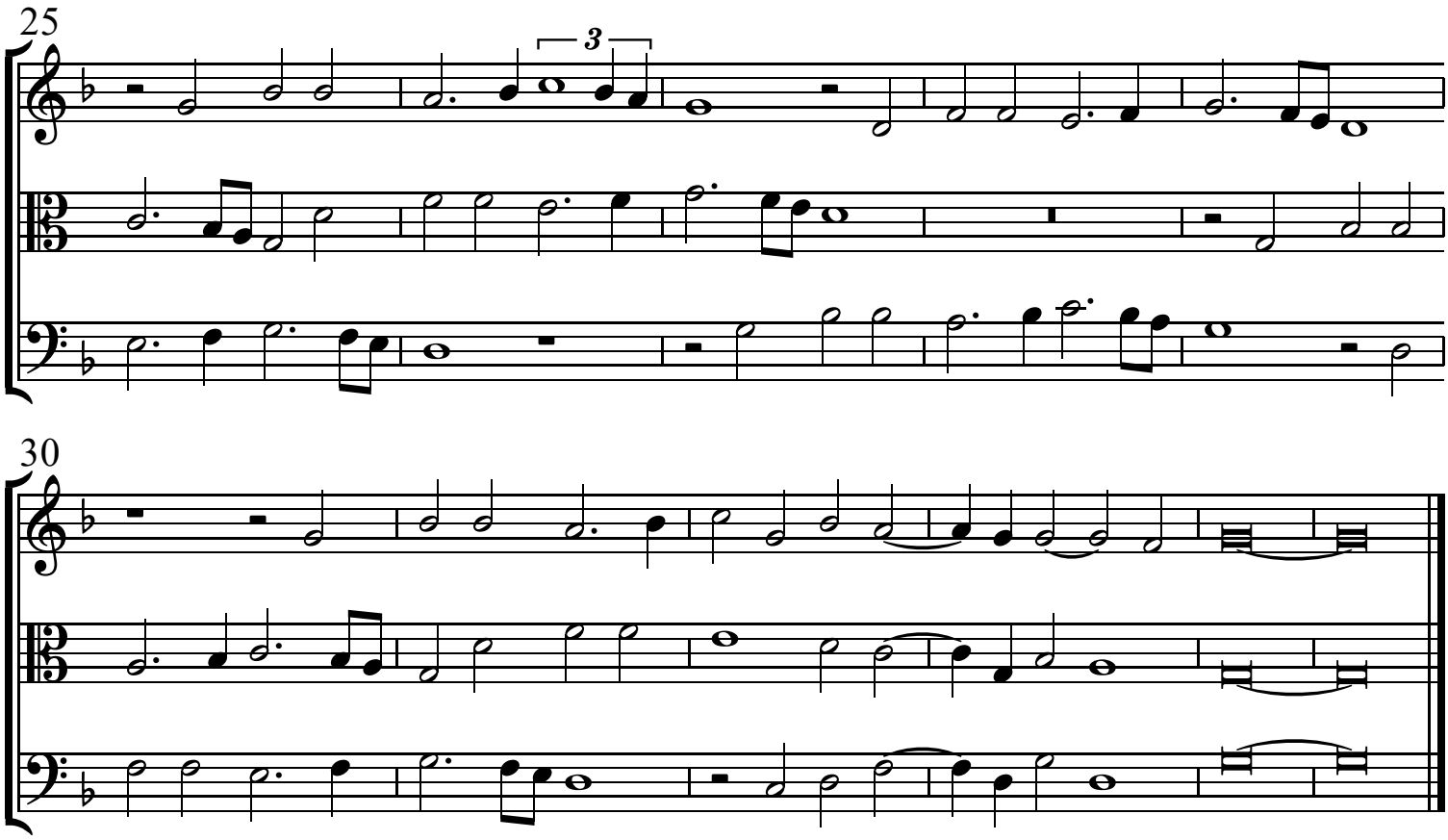
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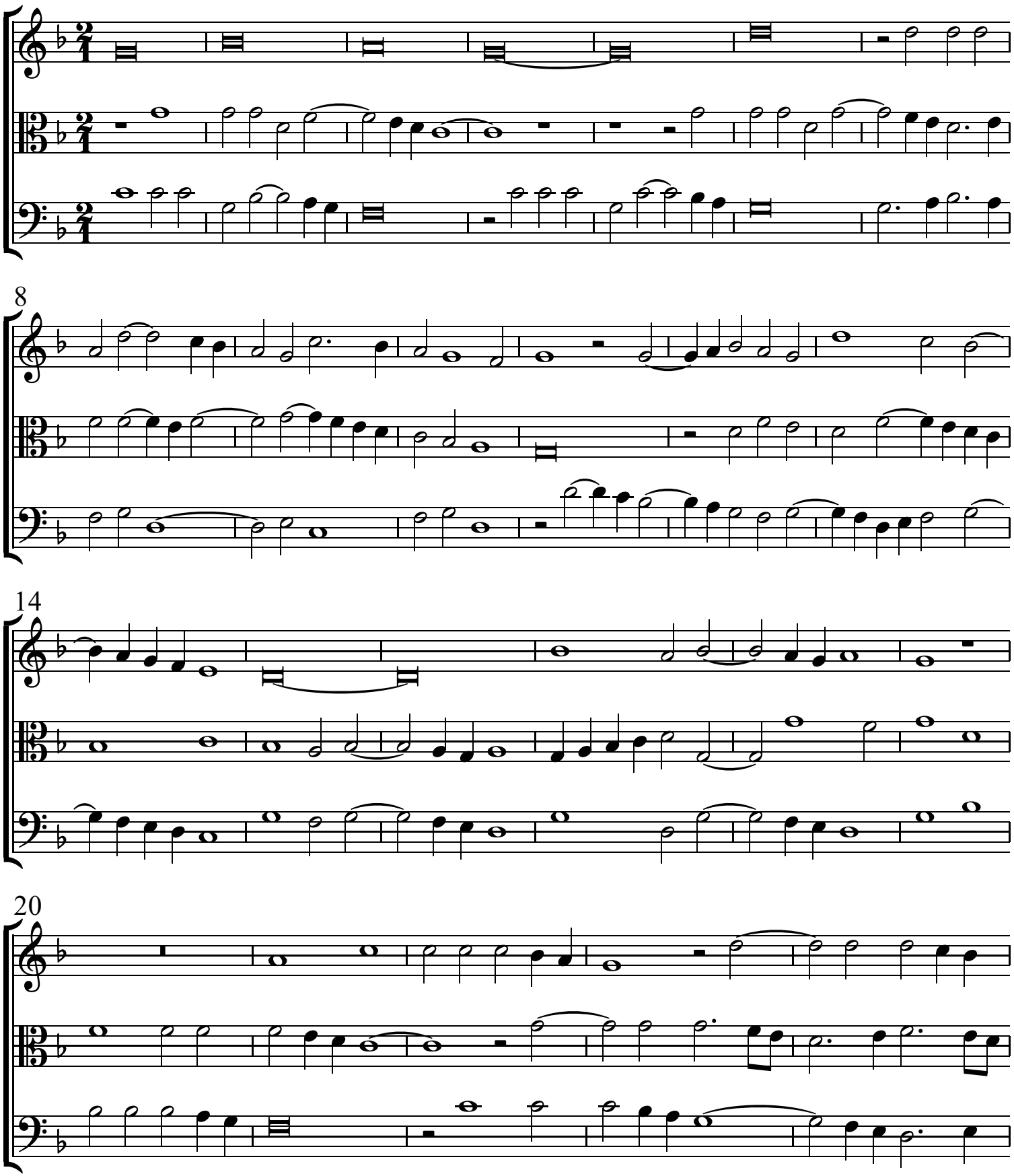
37. Qui diligitis Dominum

Noel Bauldeweyn (c. 1480- after 1513)



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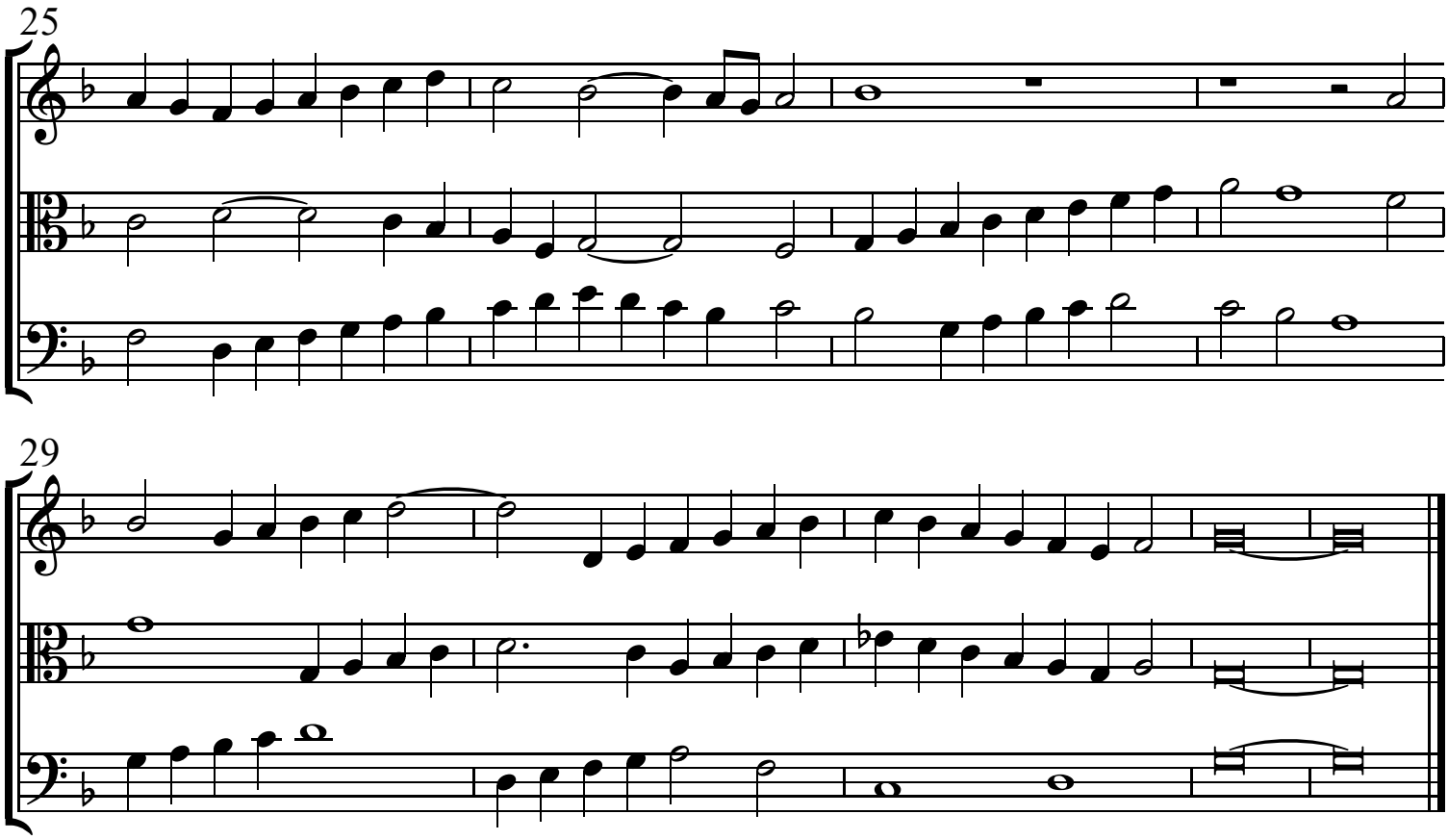
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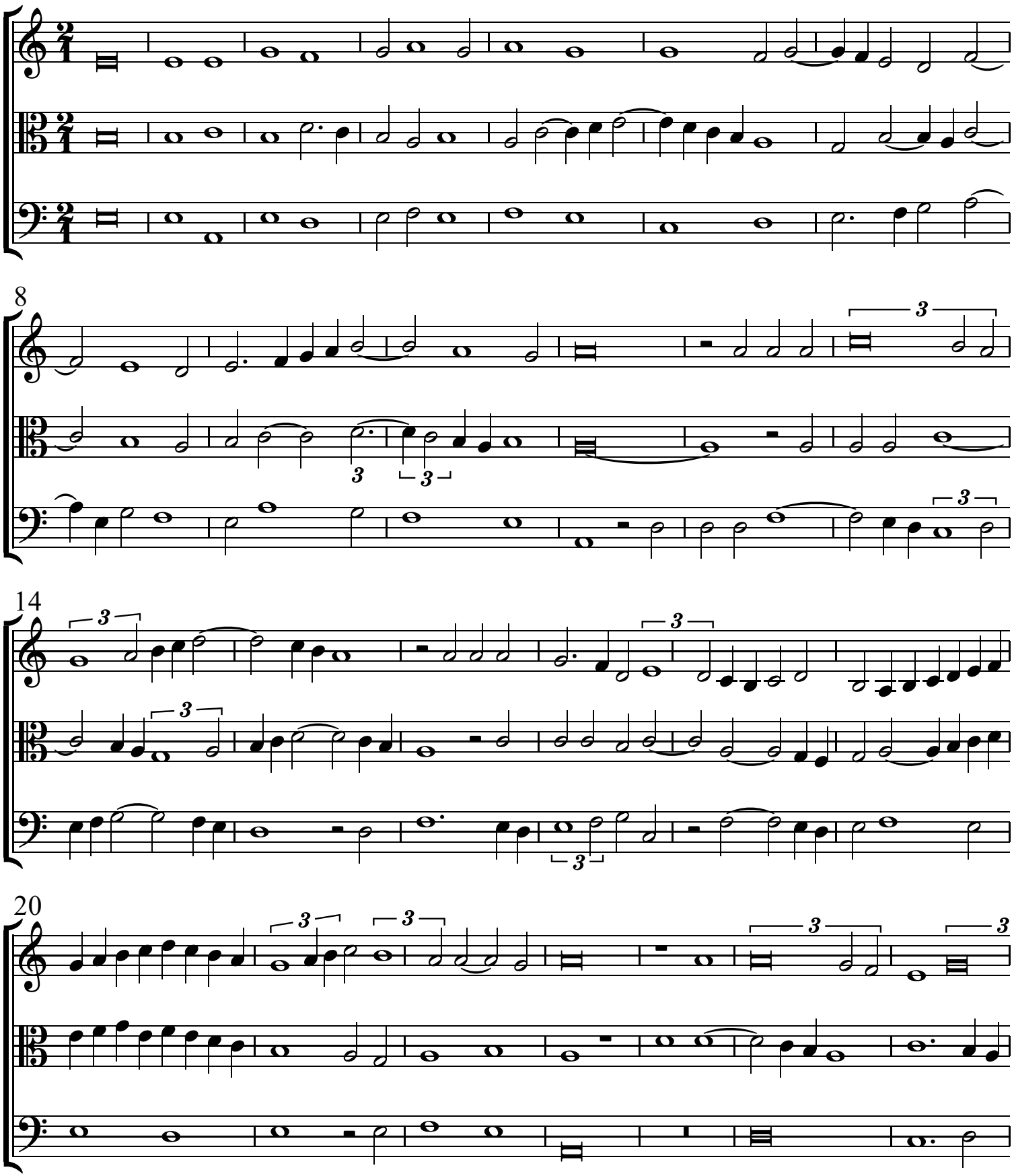
38. Confortamini in Domino

Hilaire Penet (1501- ?)



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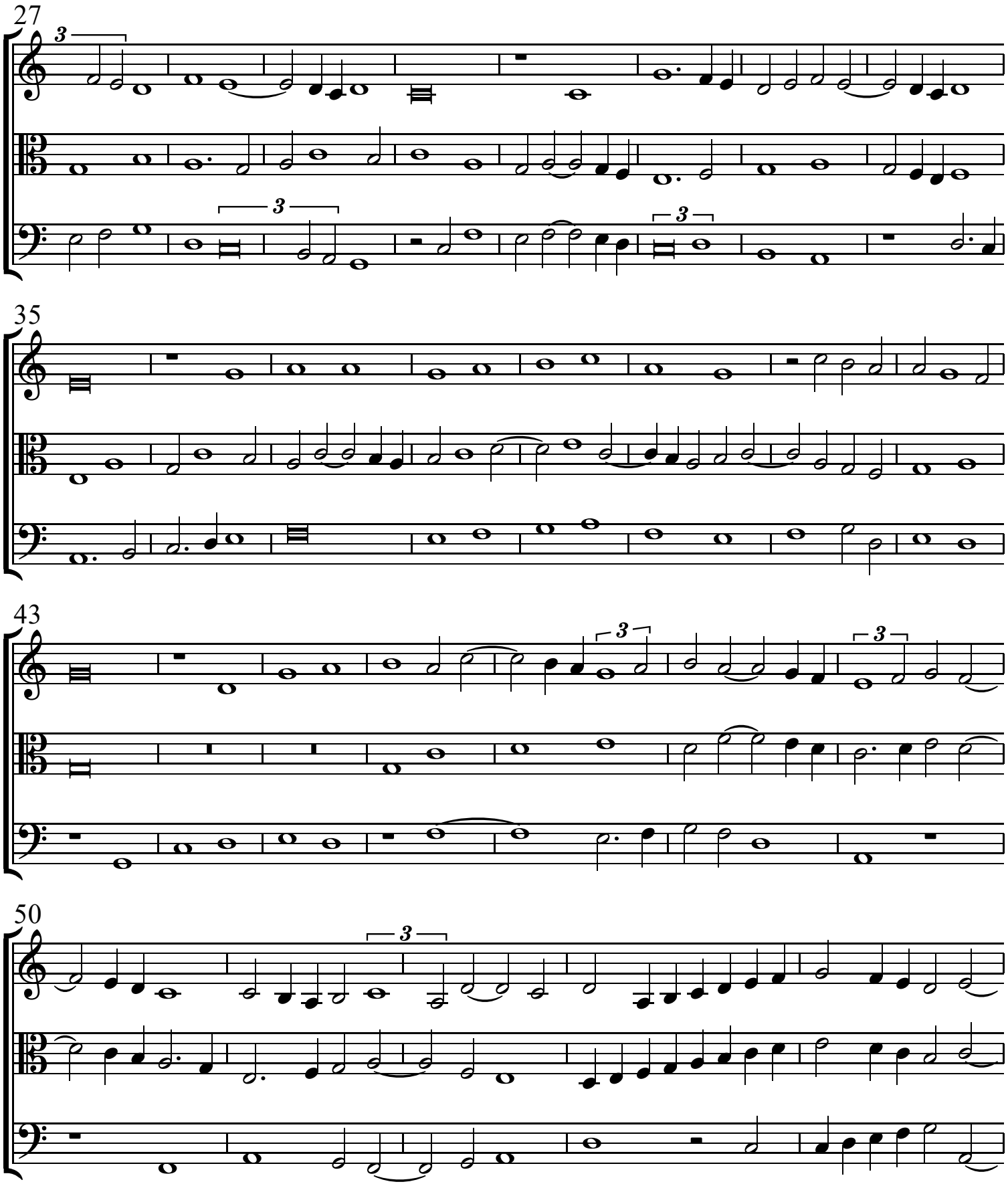
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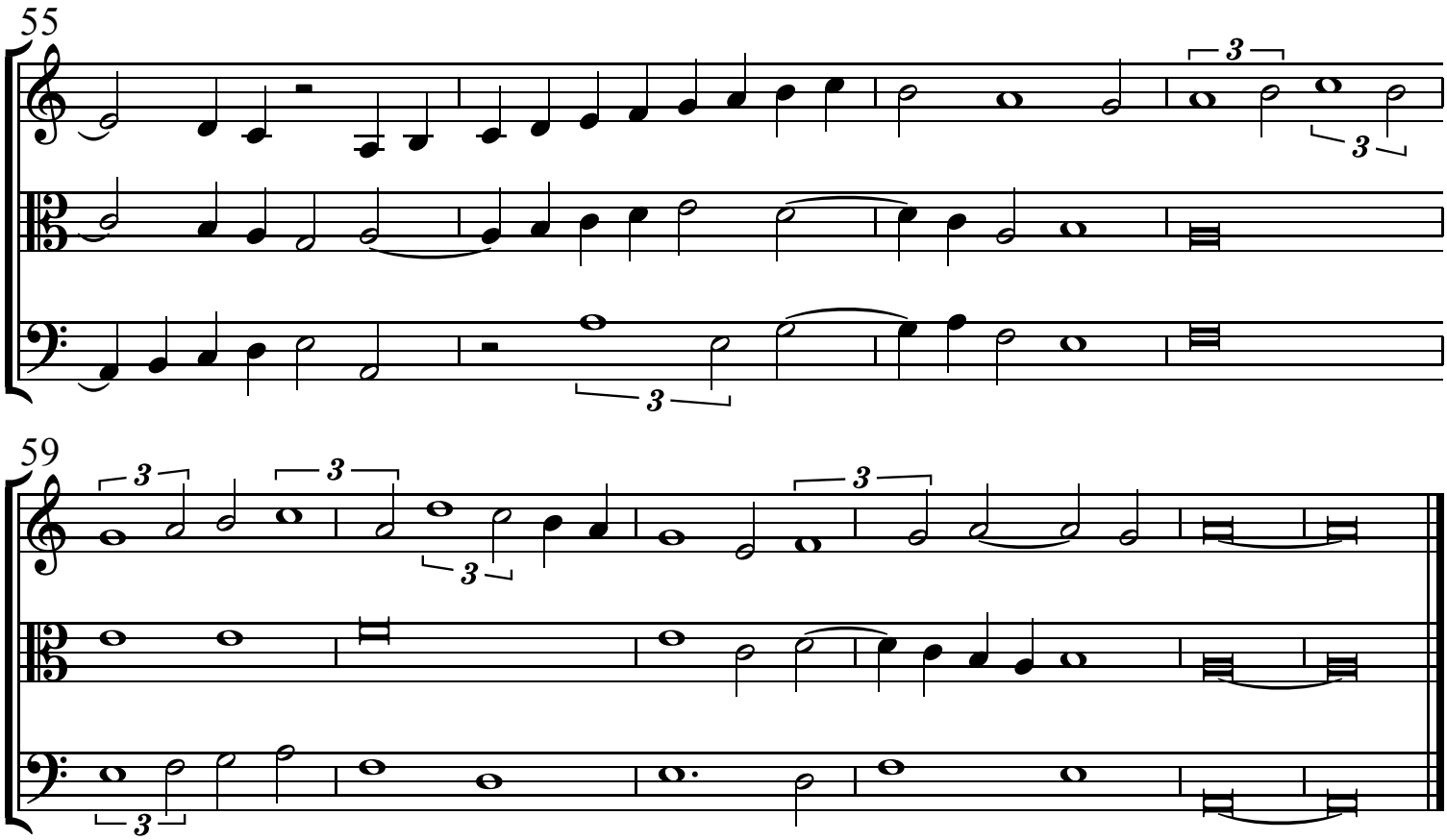
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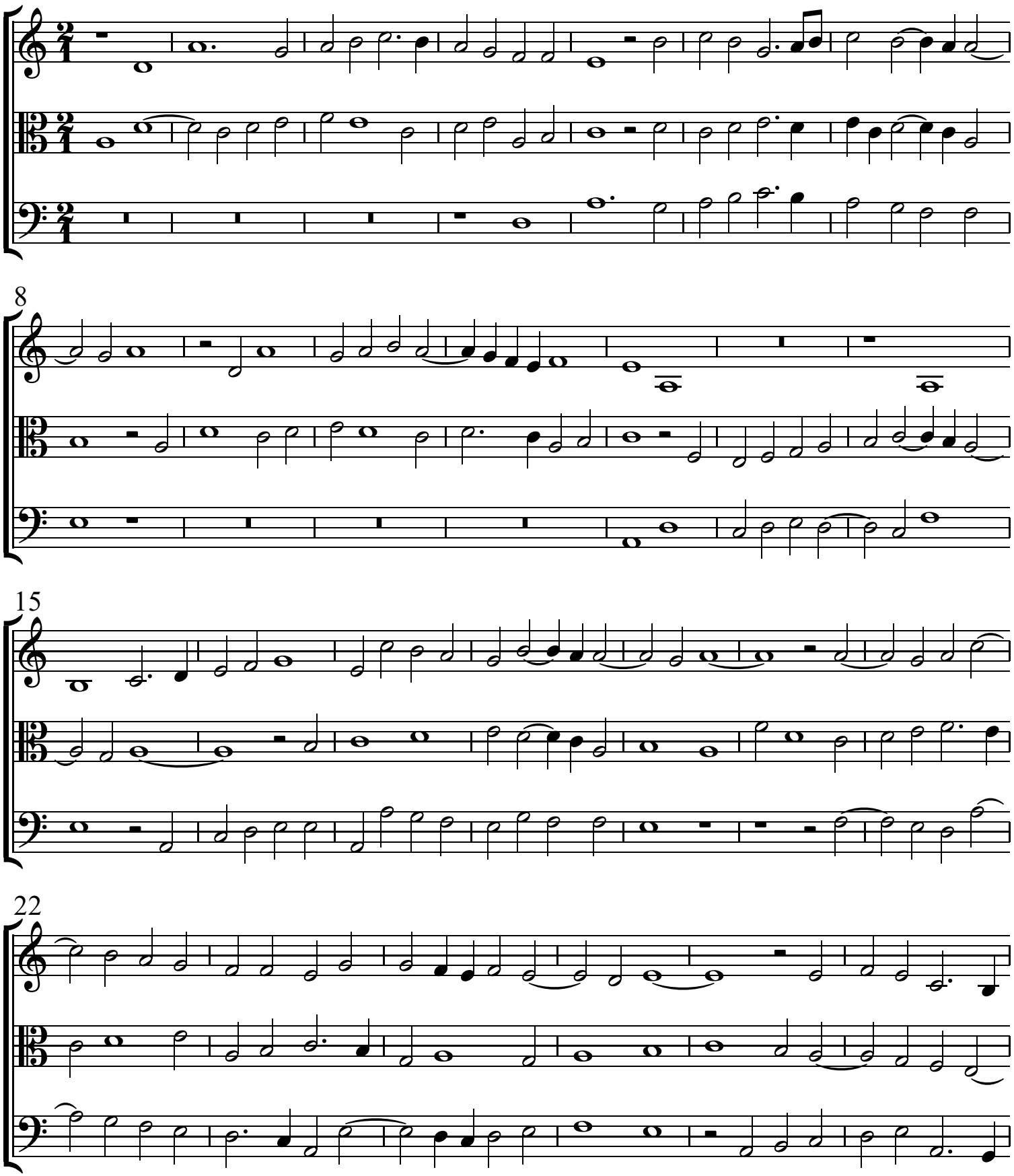
39. Omni custodia serva cor tuum

Benedictus Ducis (c. 1492-1544)



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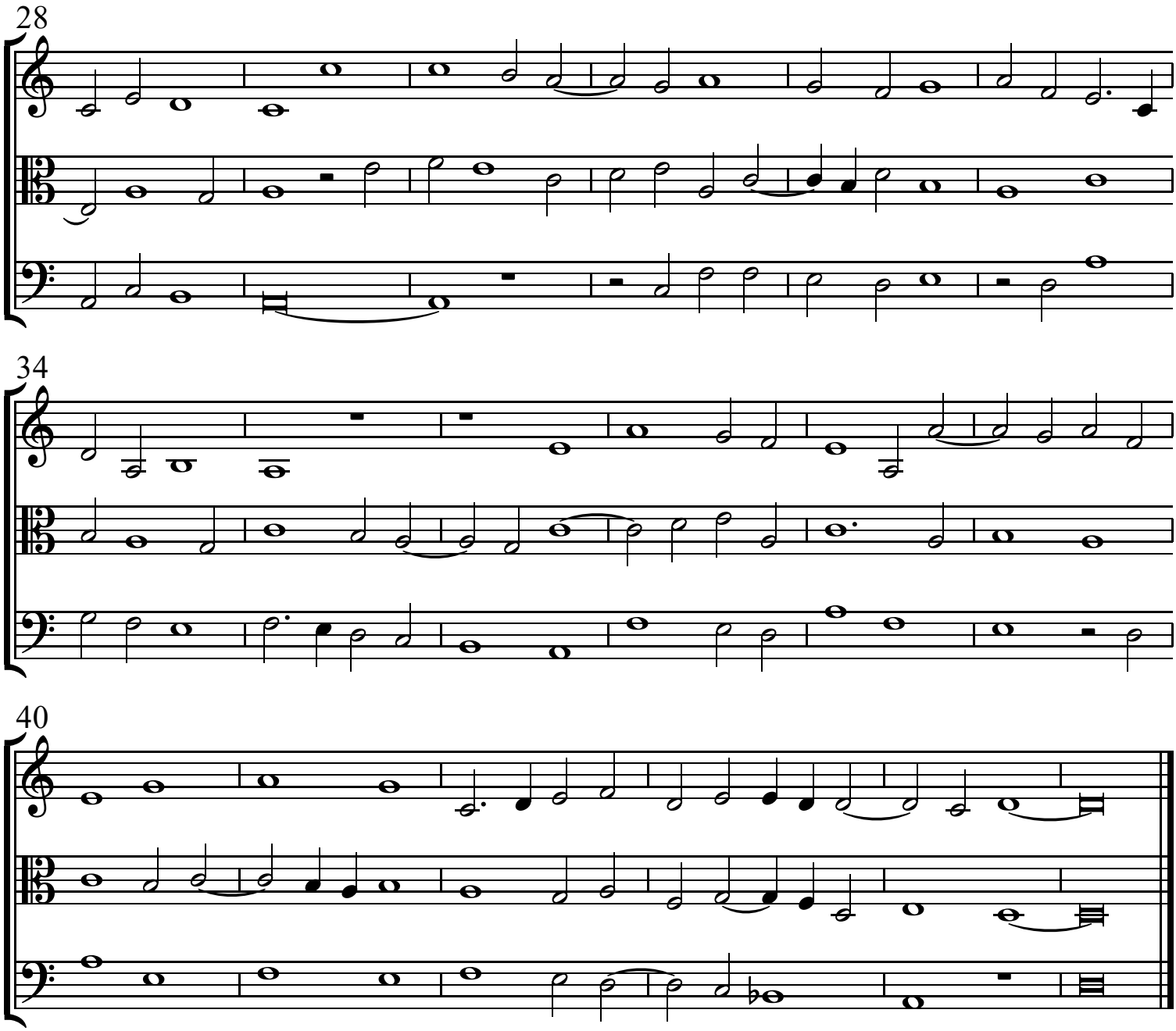
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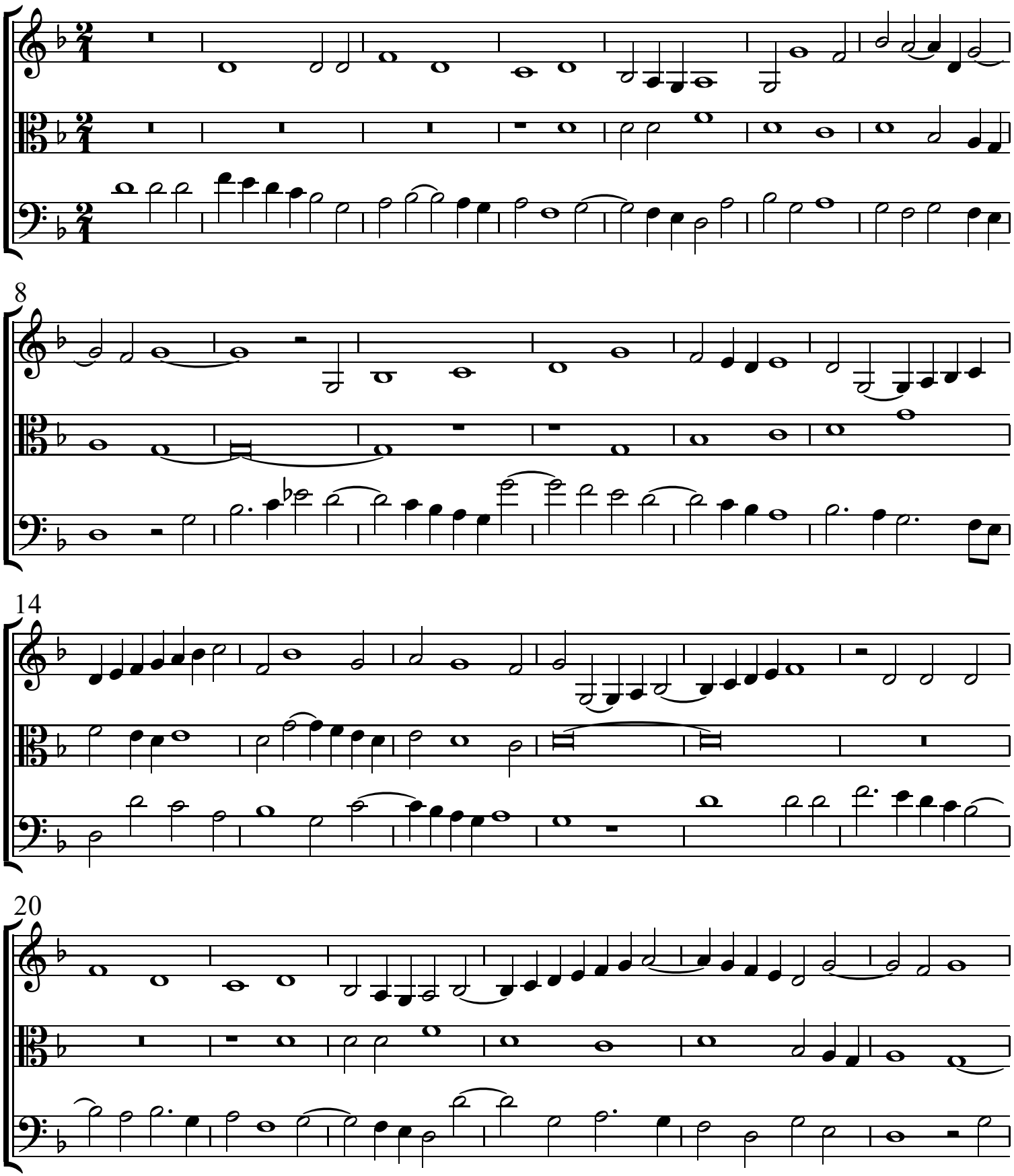
40

40. Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur

Anonymous



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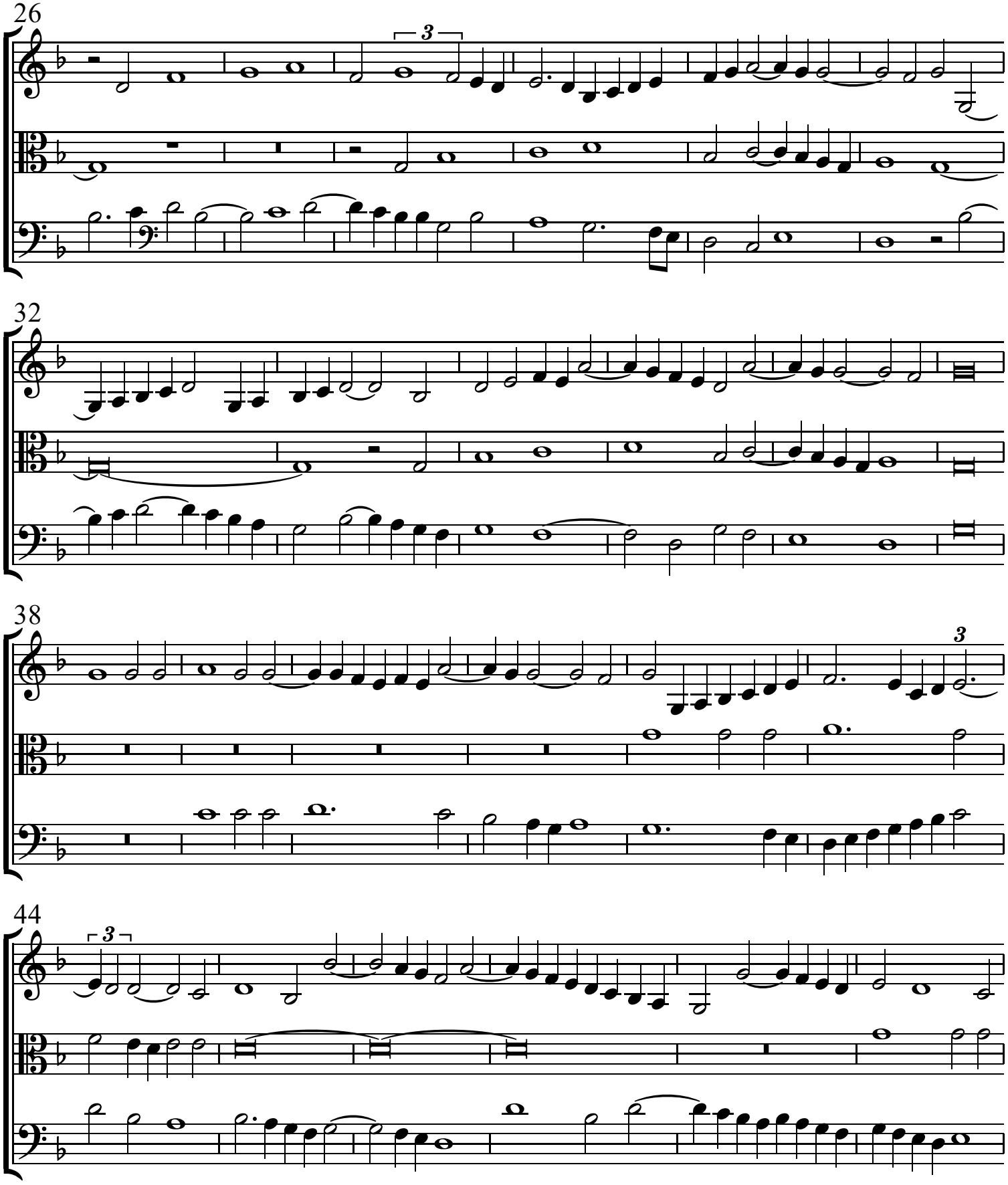
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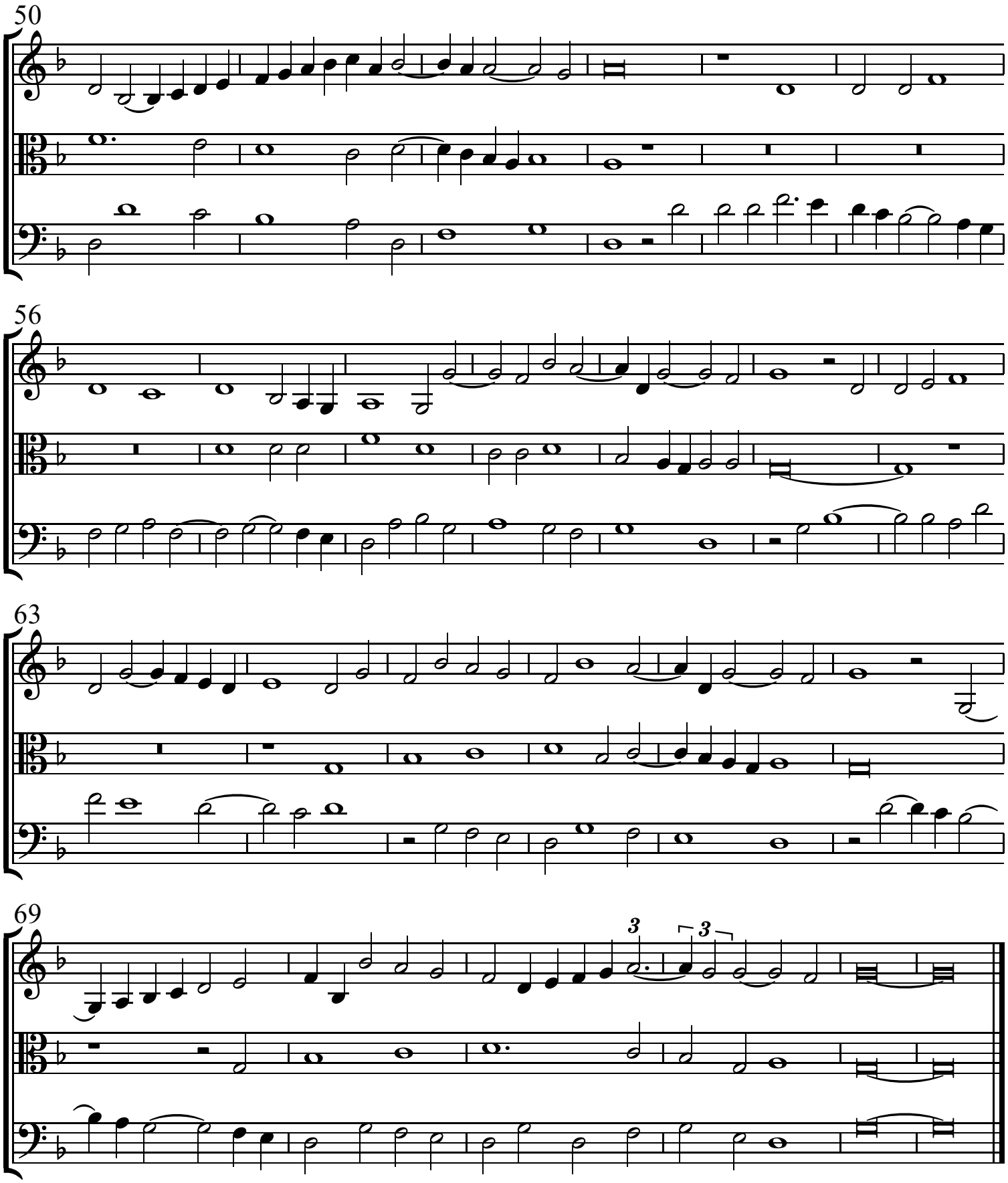
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3
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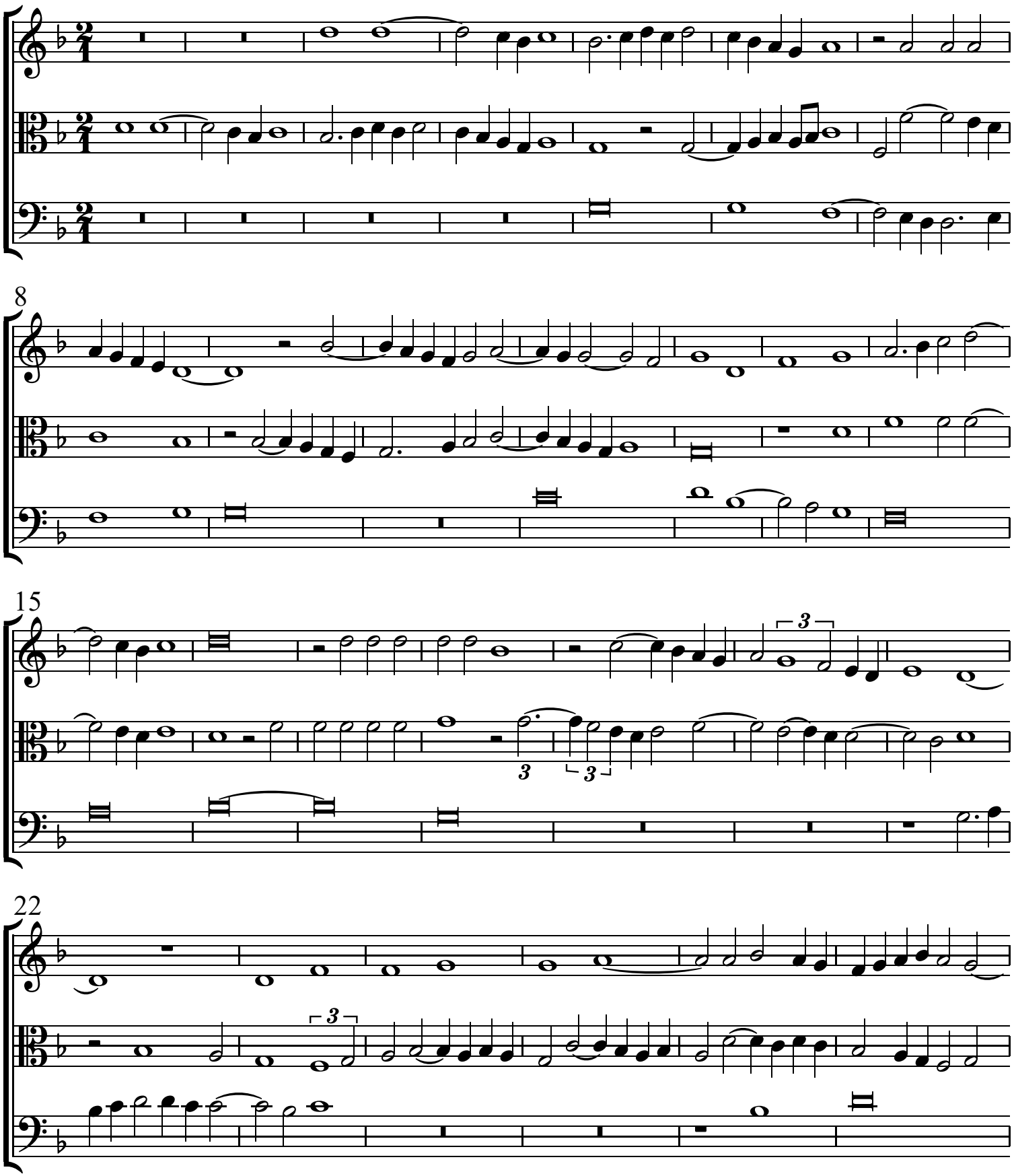
41. O Domine libera me

Loyset Compère (c. 1445-1518)



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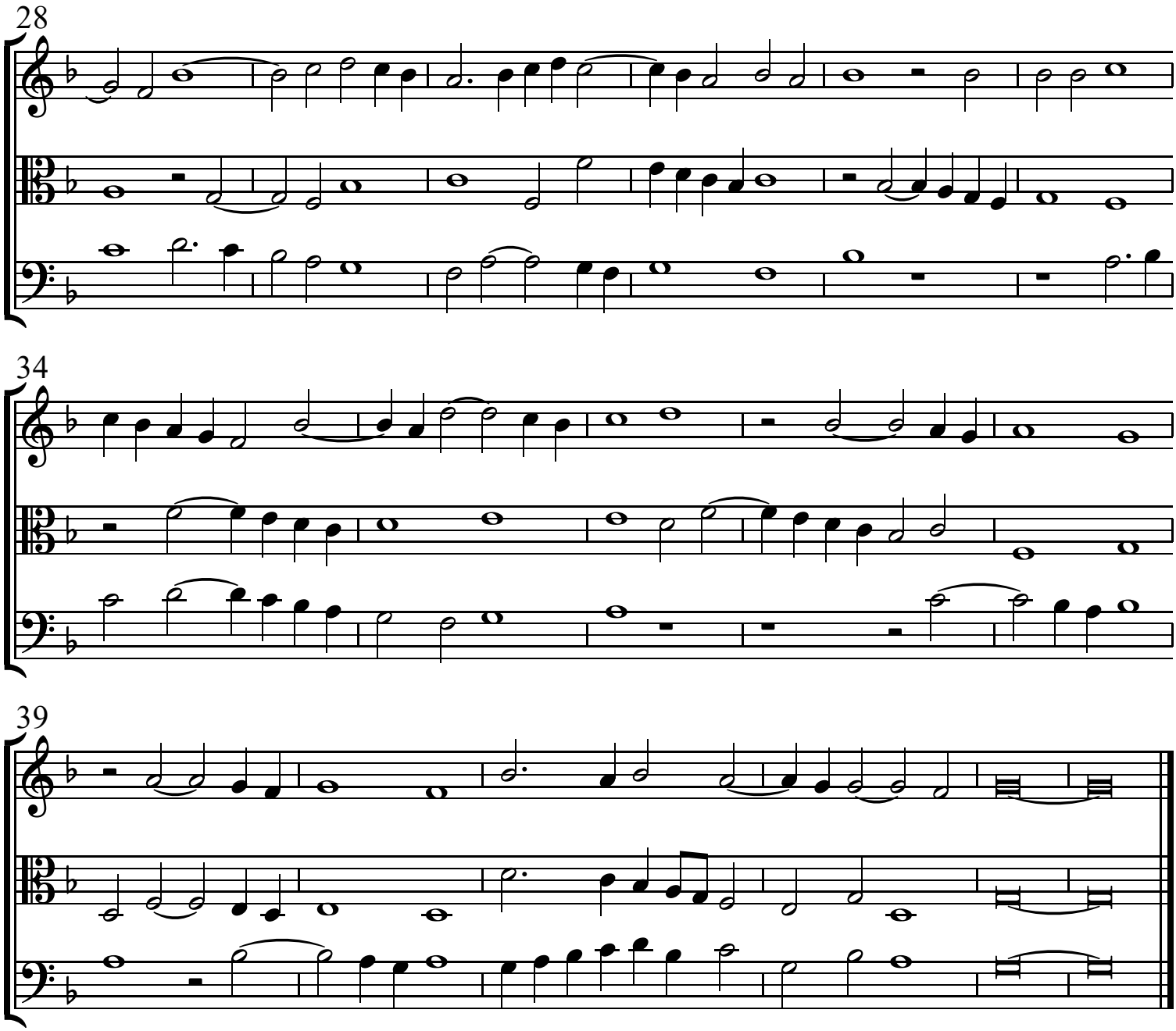
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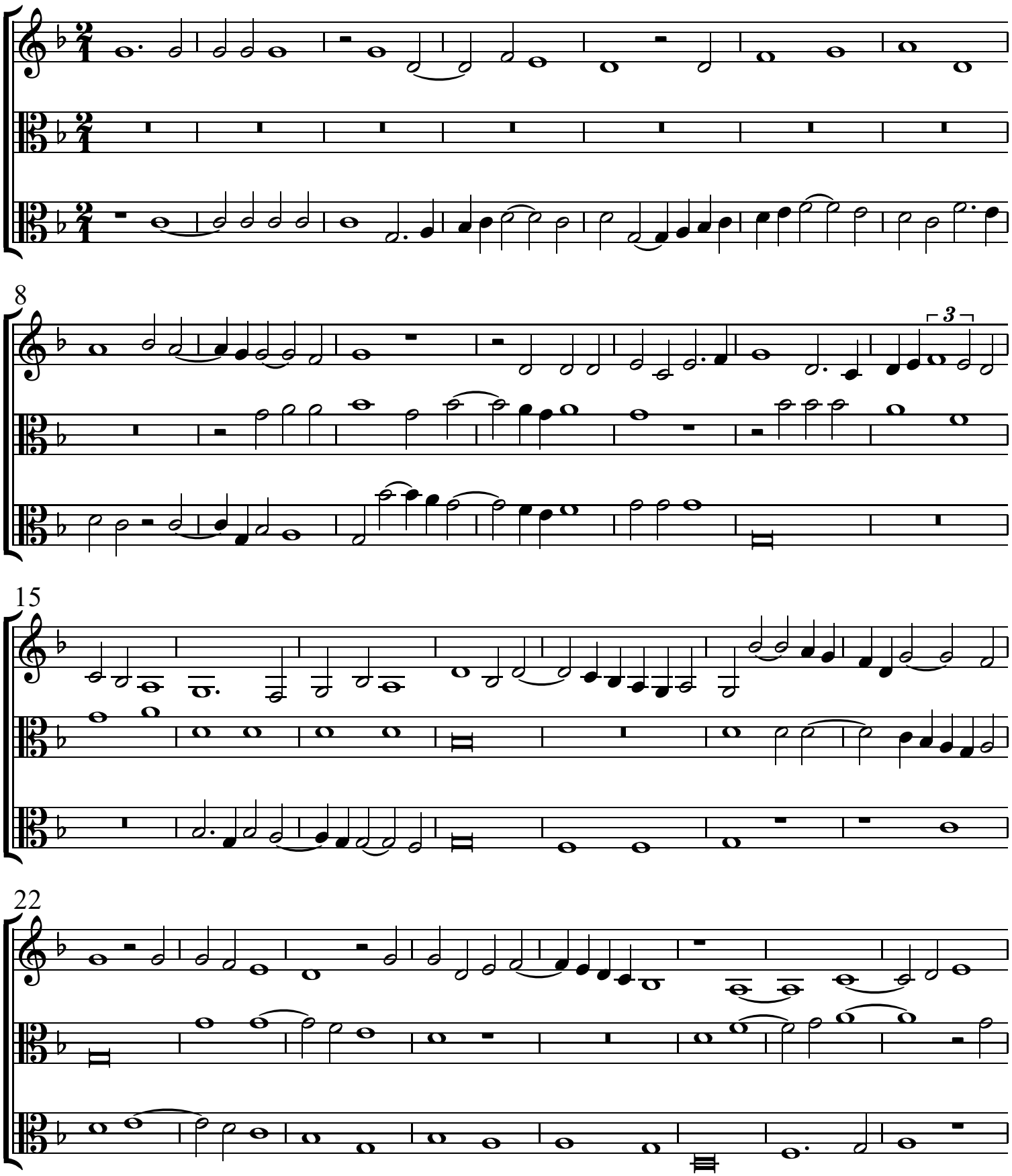
42. In principio erat verbum

Francesco de Layolle (1492-c. 1540)



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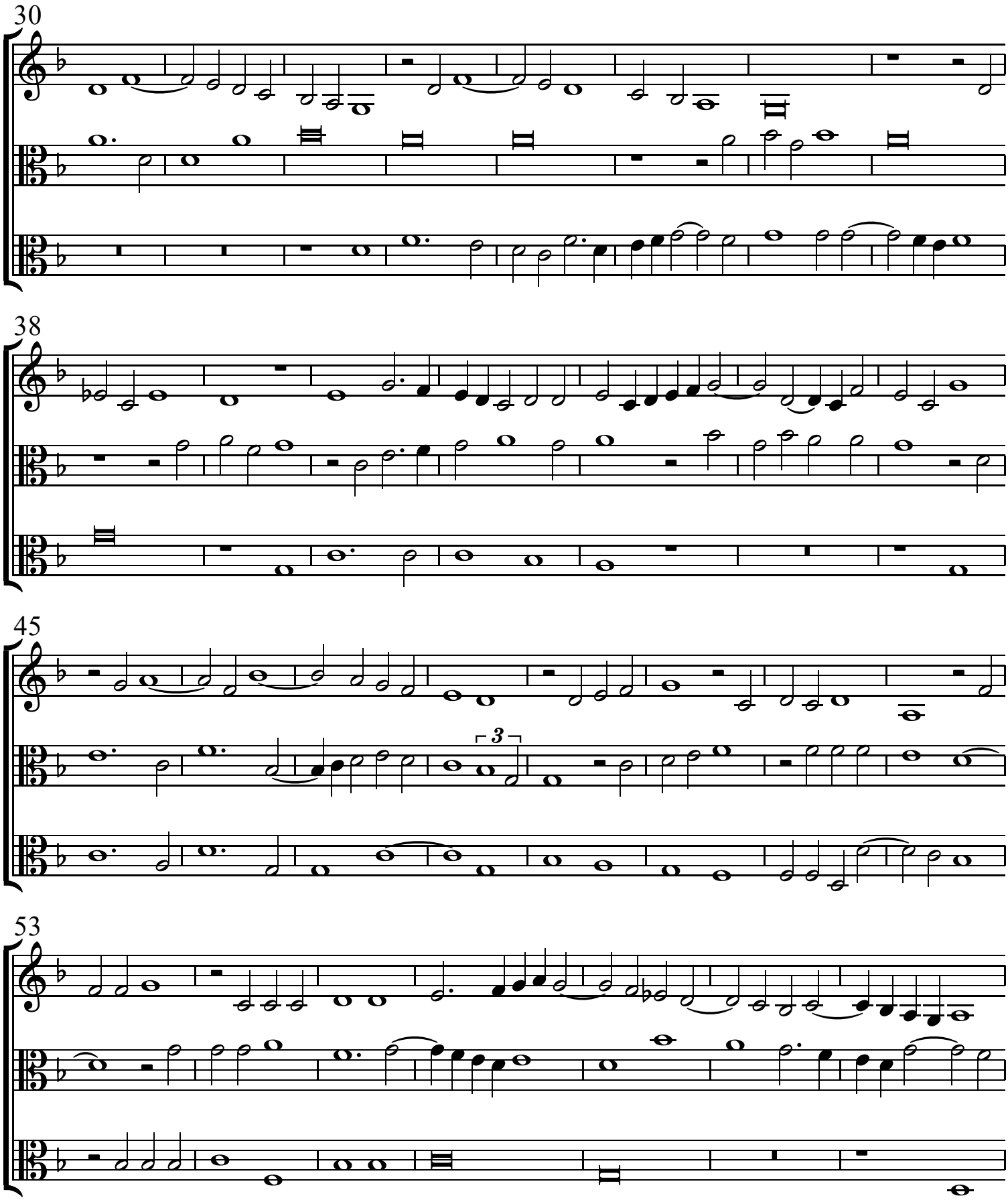
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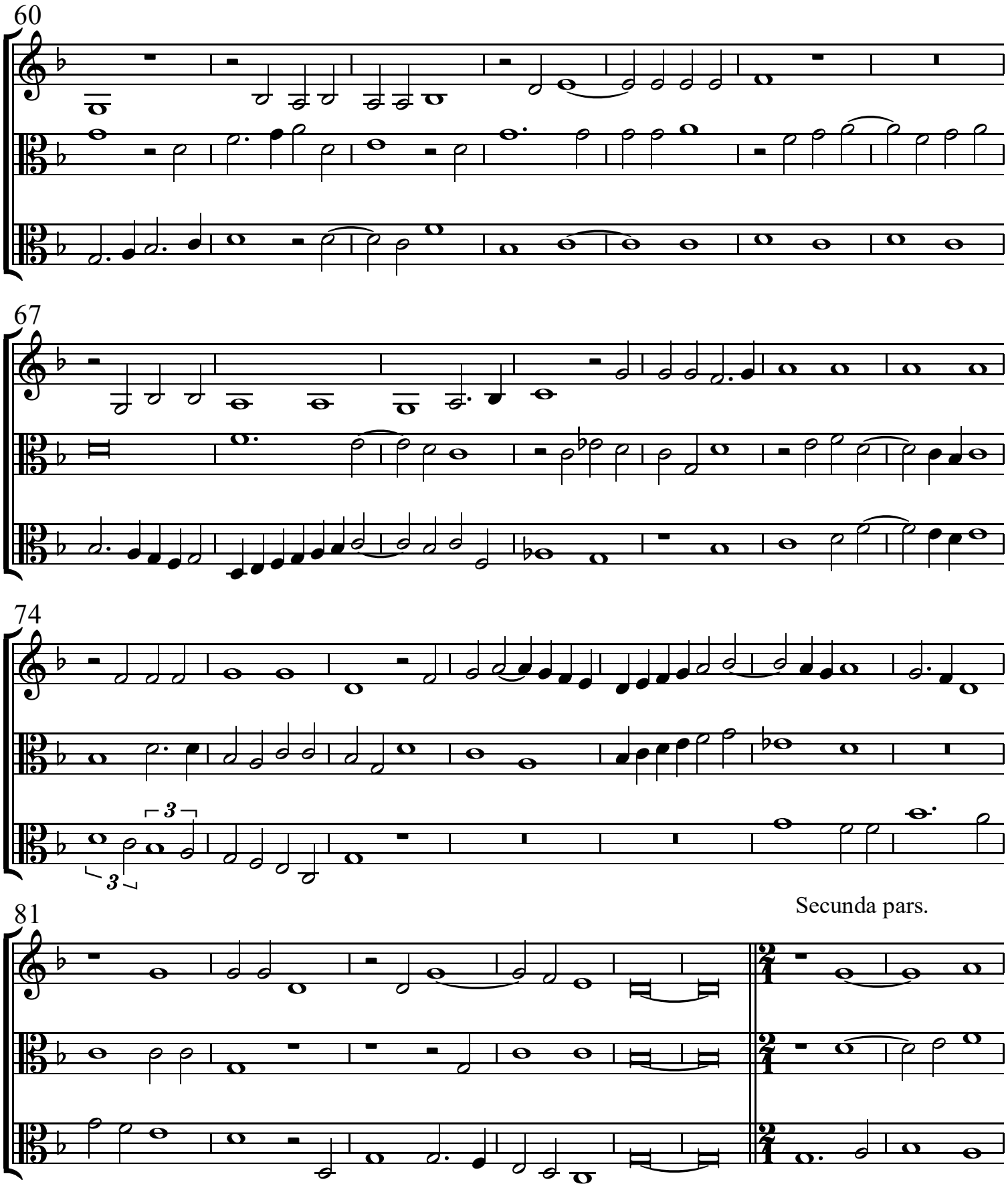
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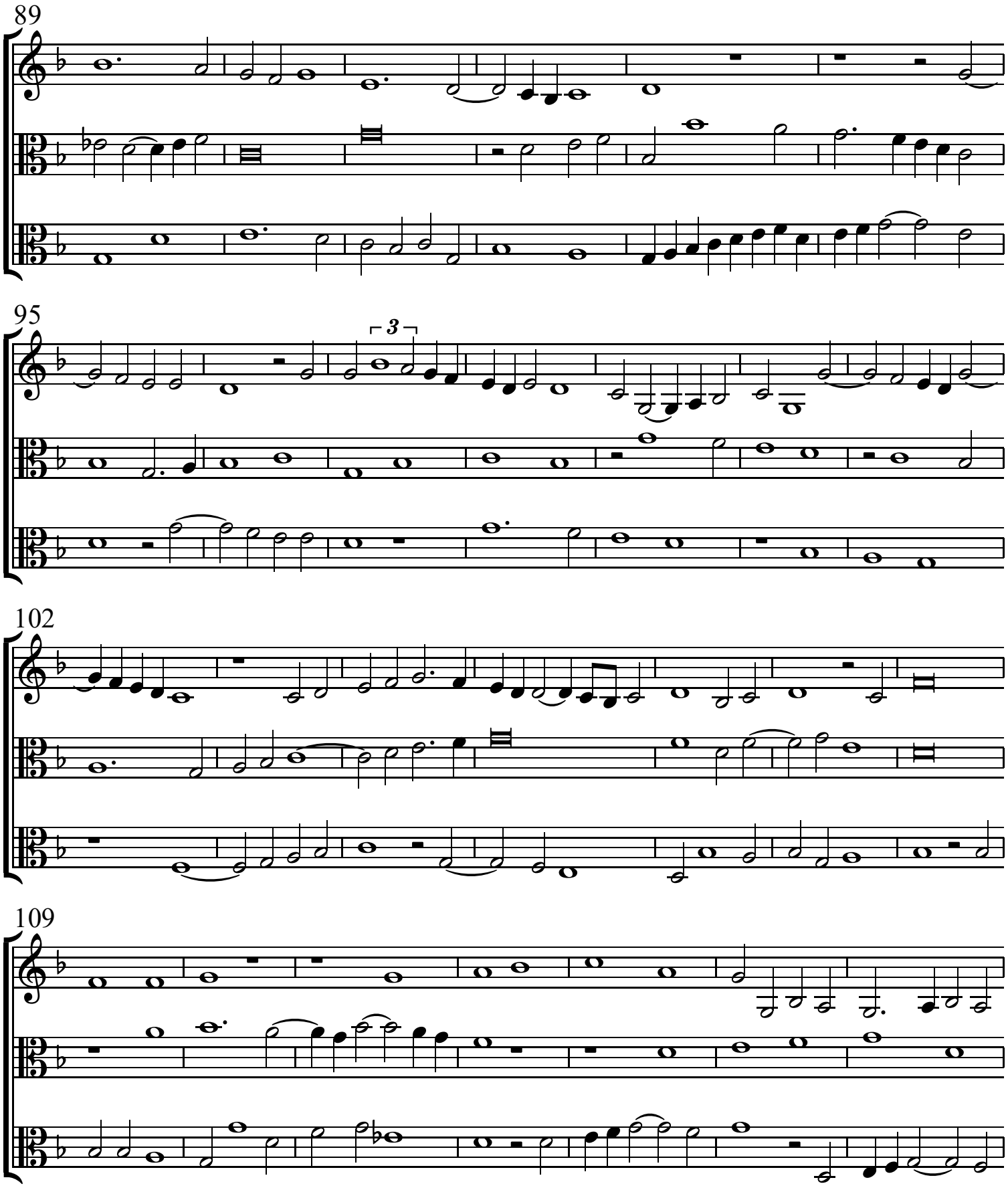
Secunda pars.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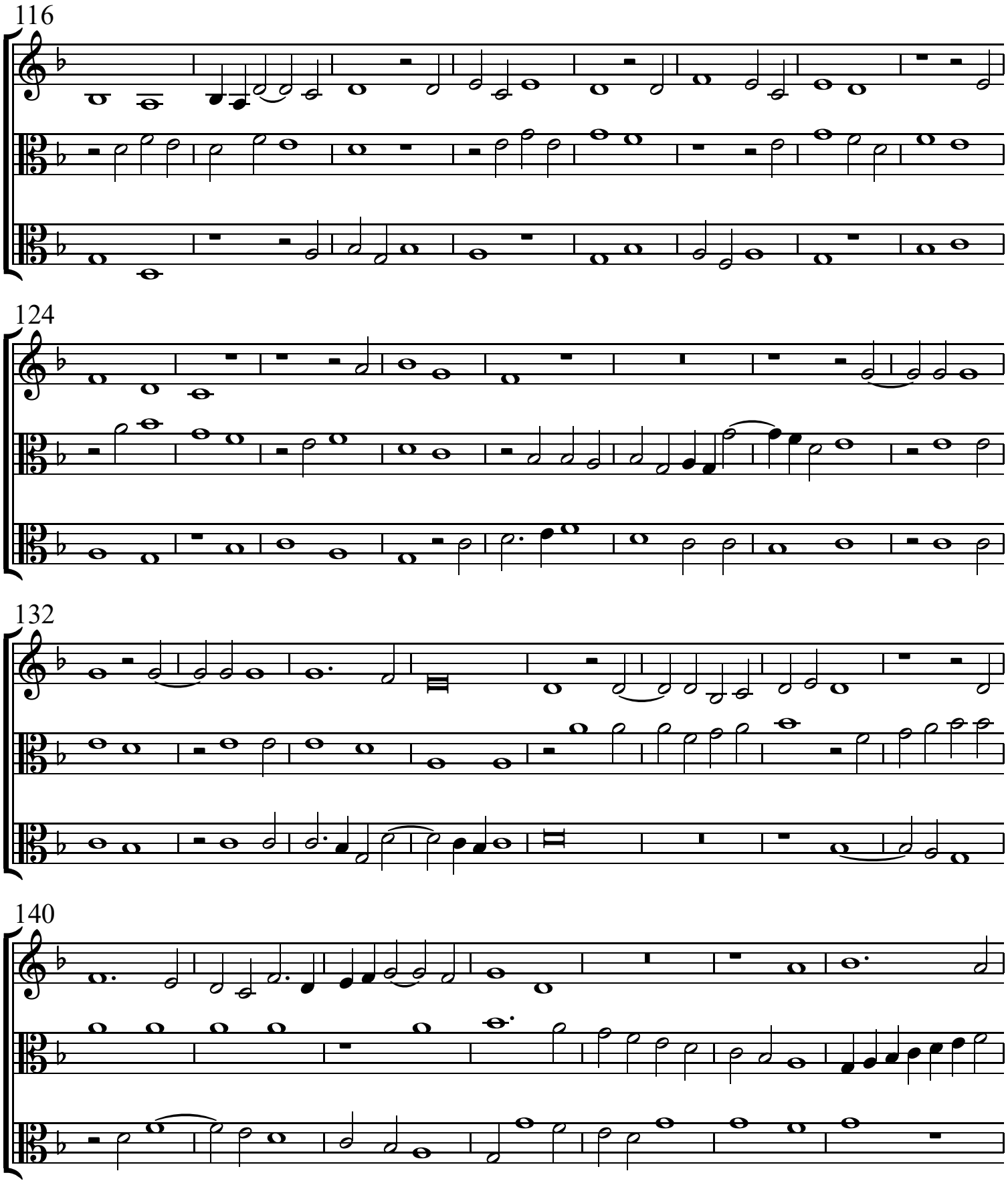
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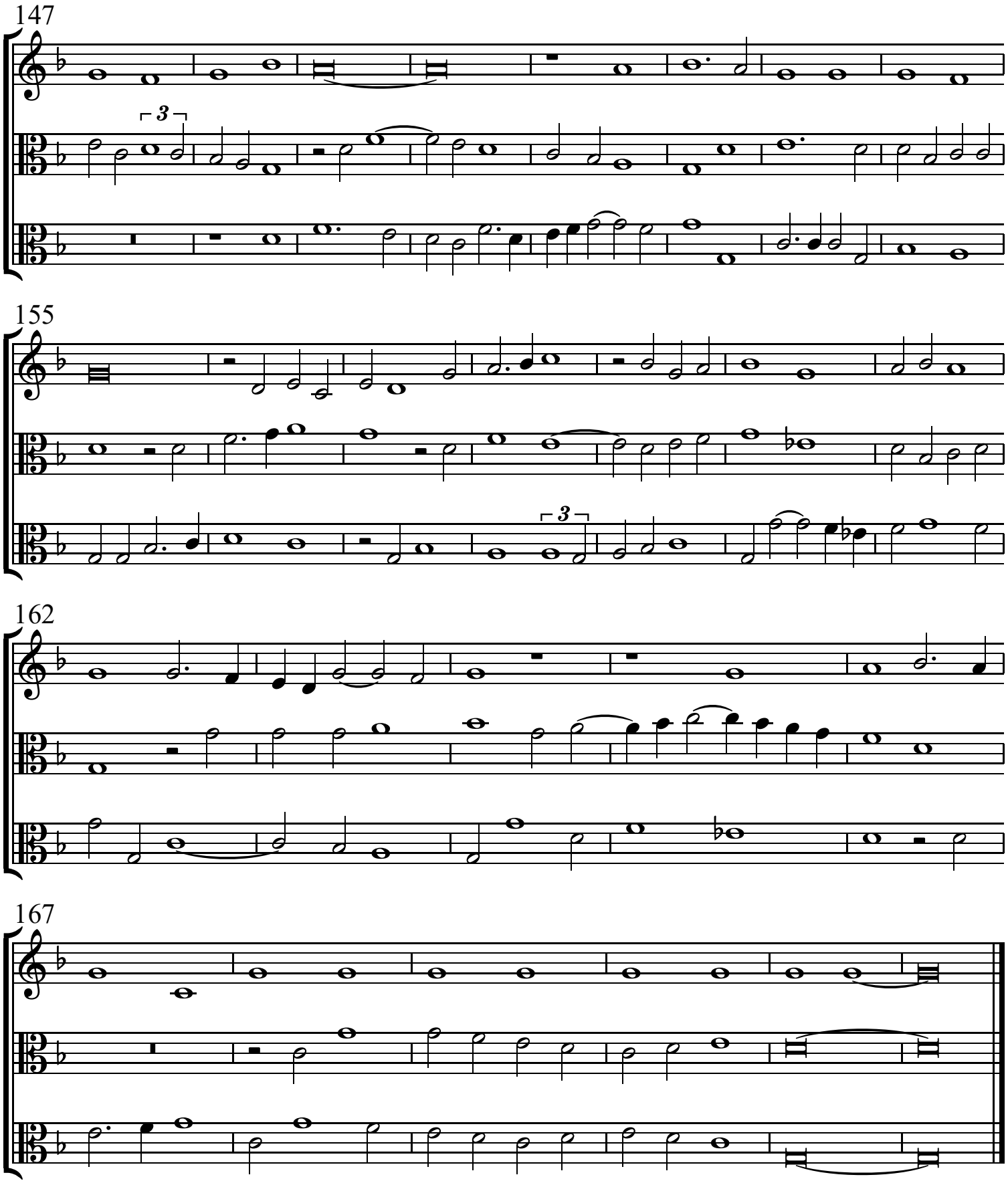
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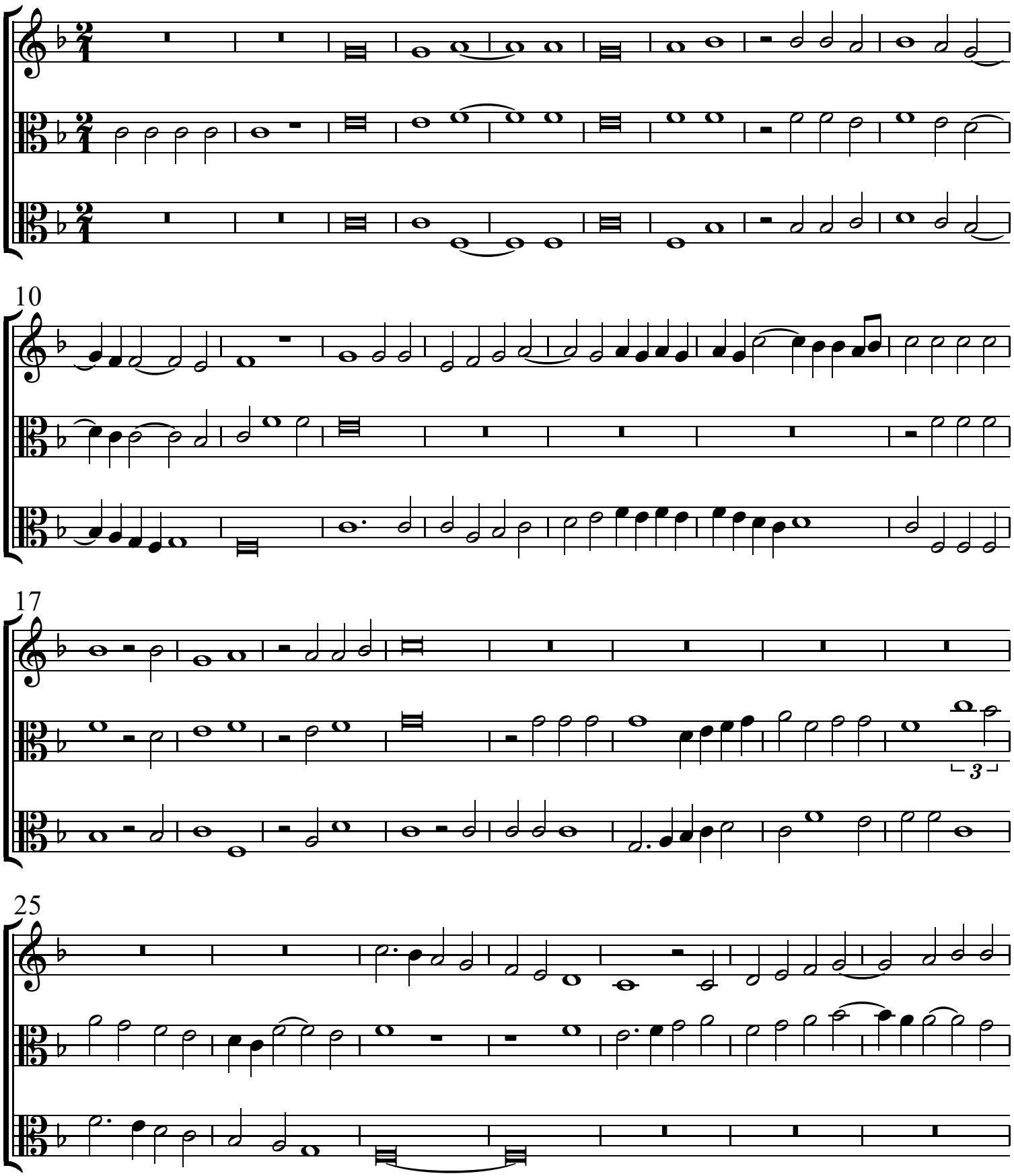
43. Benedicite Deus gustate et videte

Anonymous



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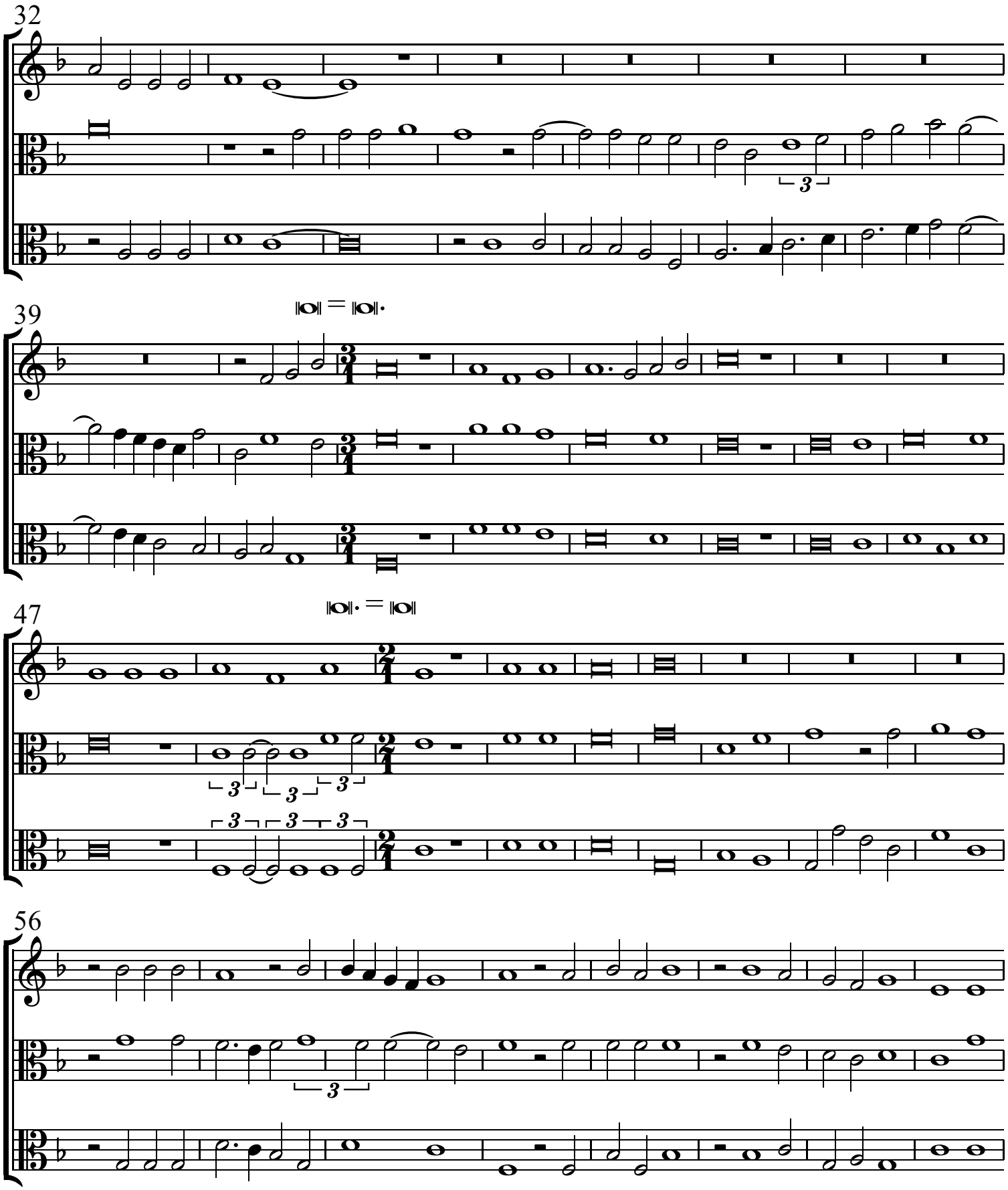
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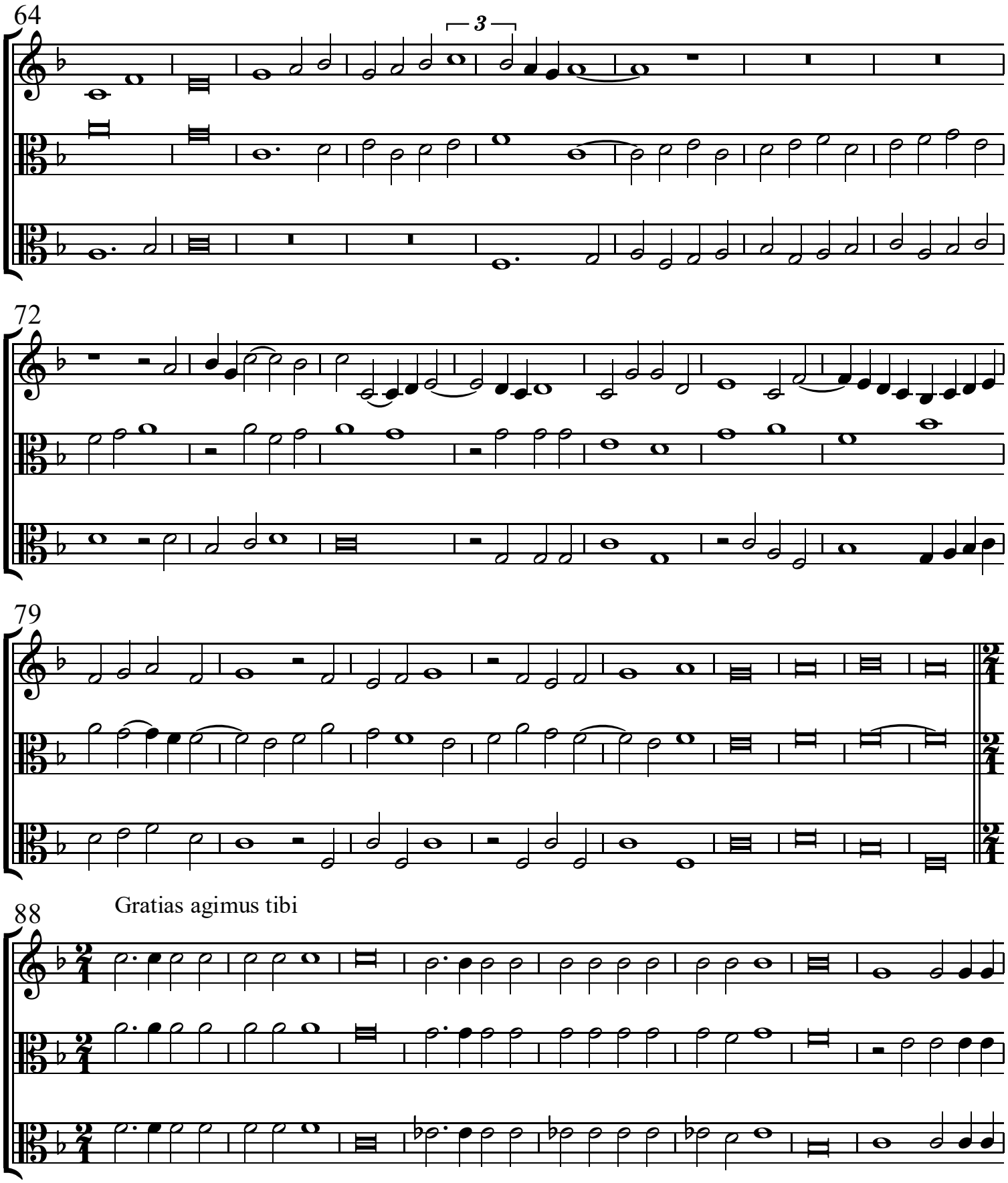
64
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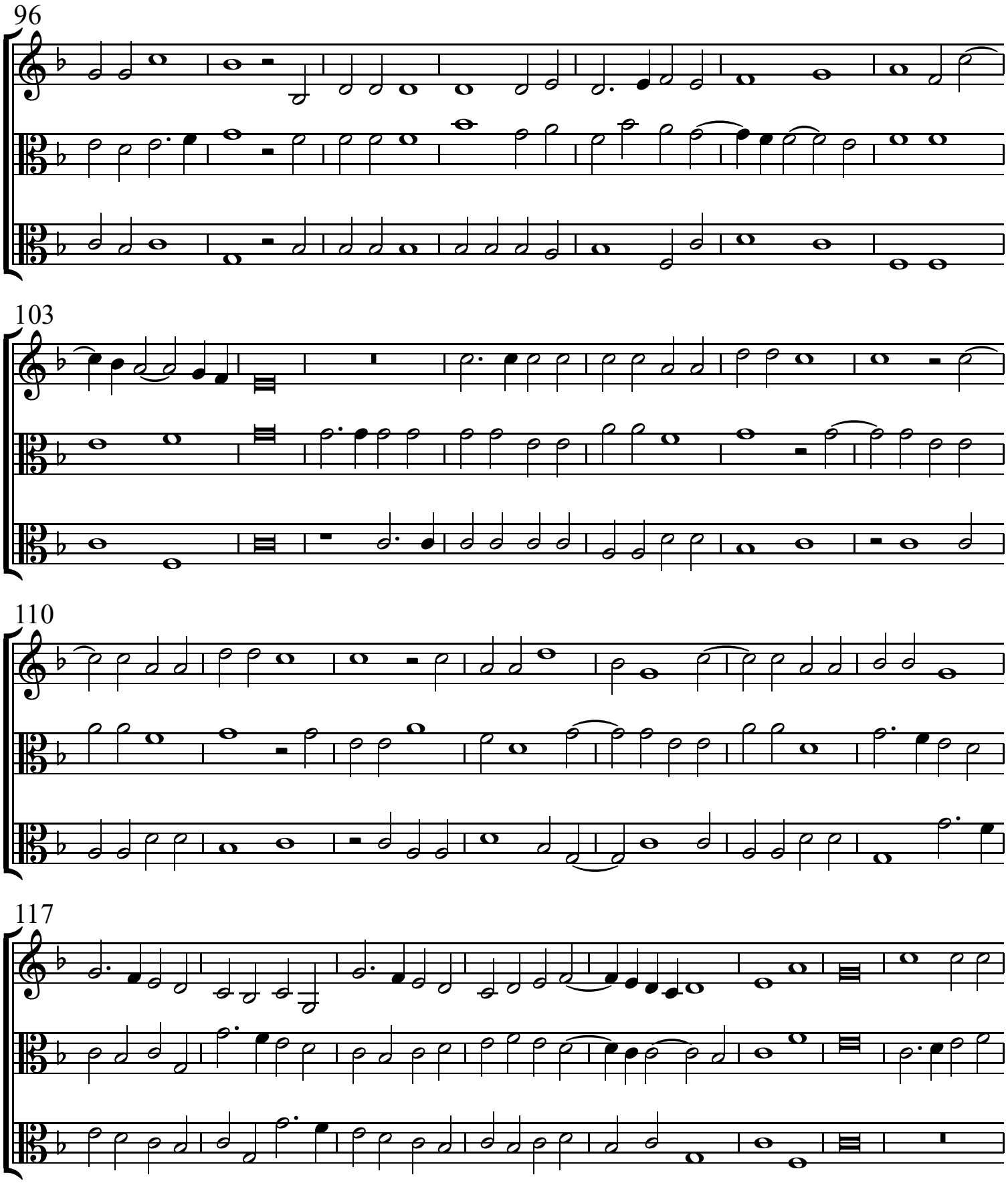
72
79
88
Gratias agimus tibi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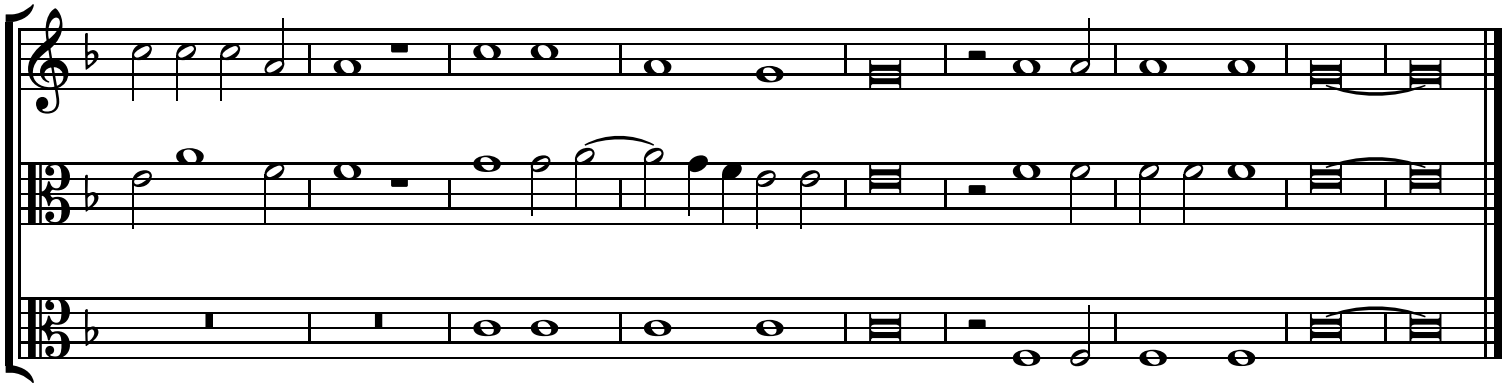
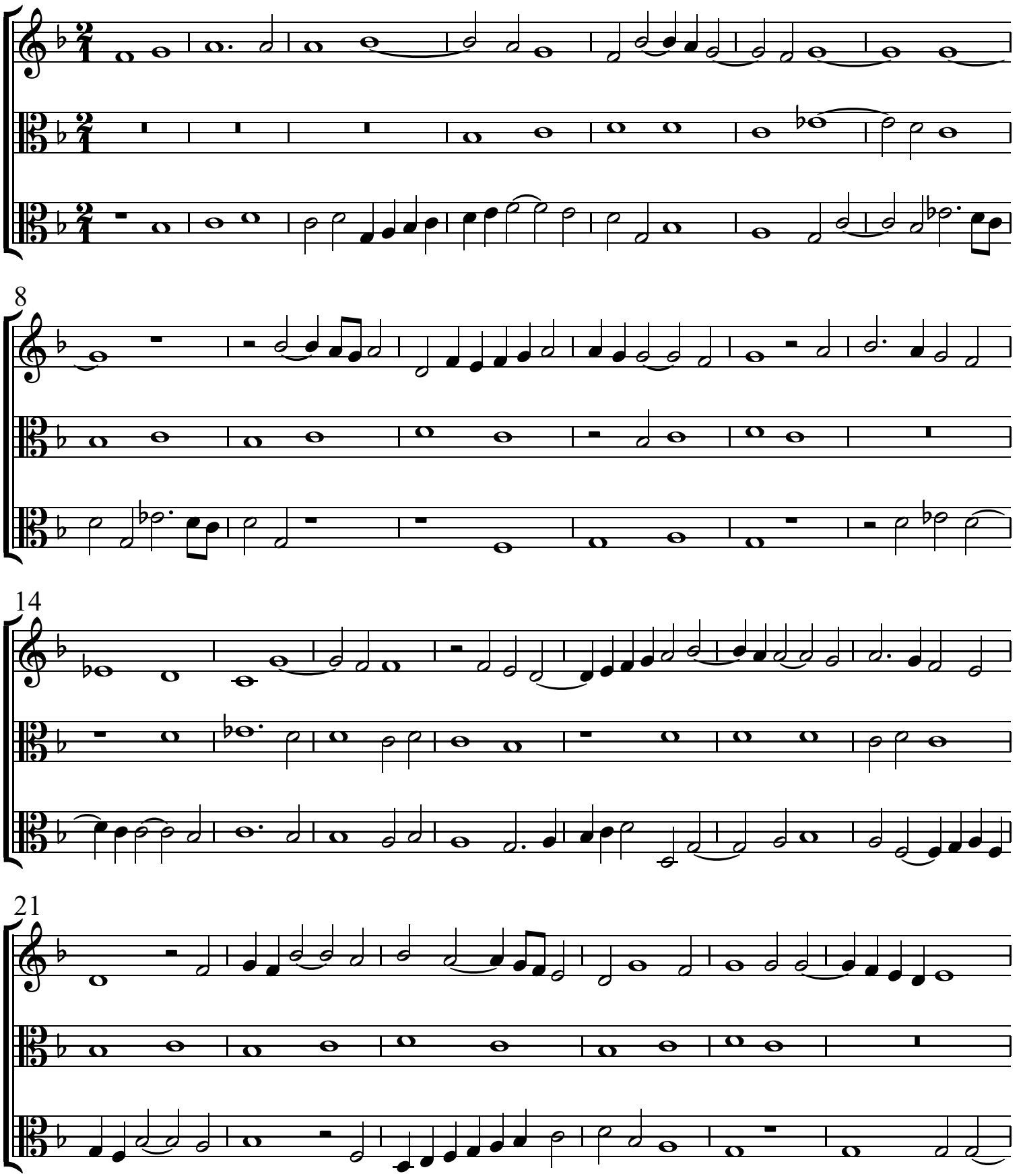


44. Pater noster qui es in coelis

Francesco de Layolle (1492-c. 1540)



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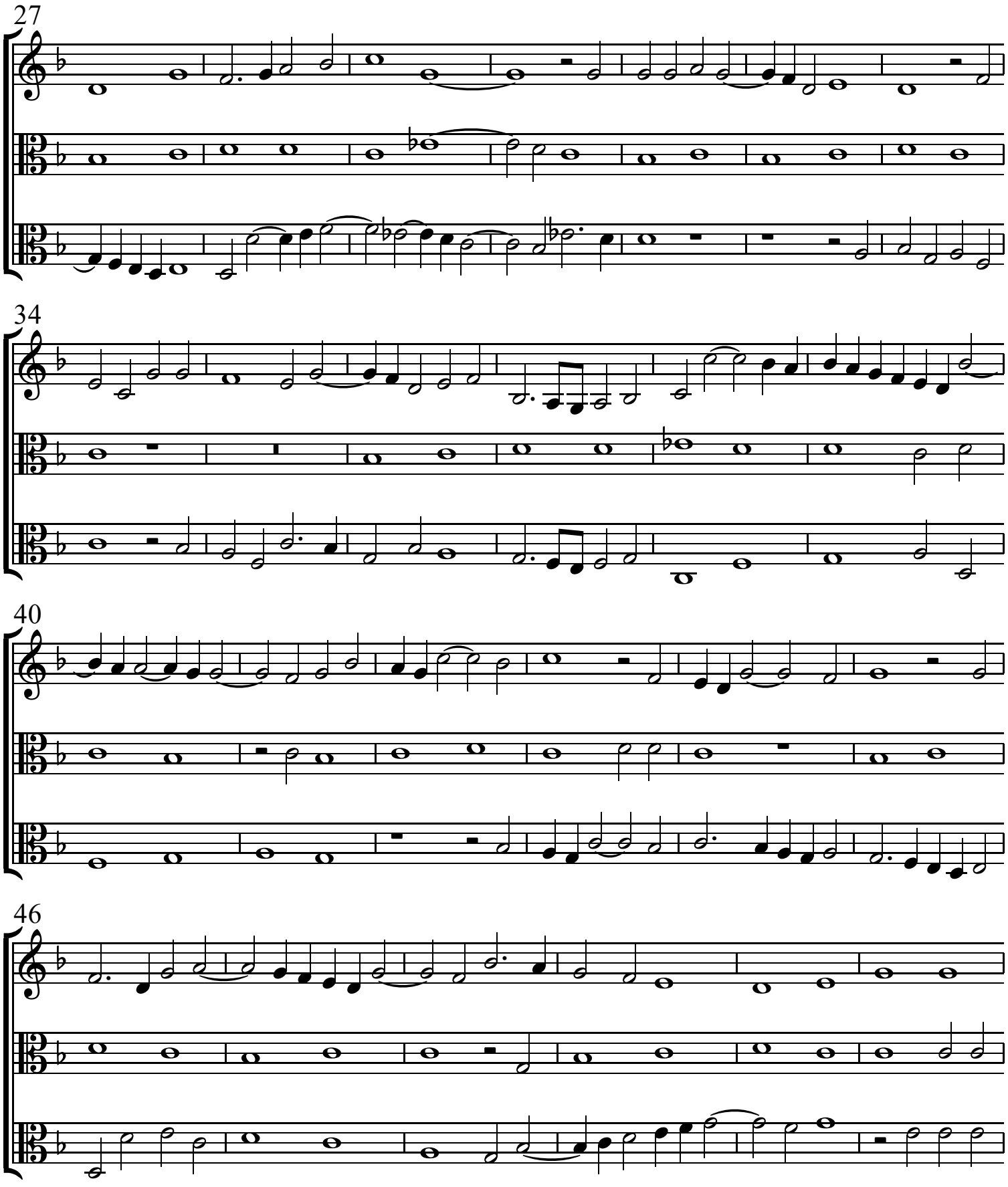
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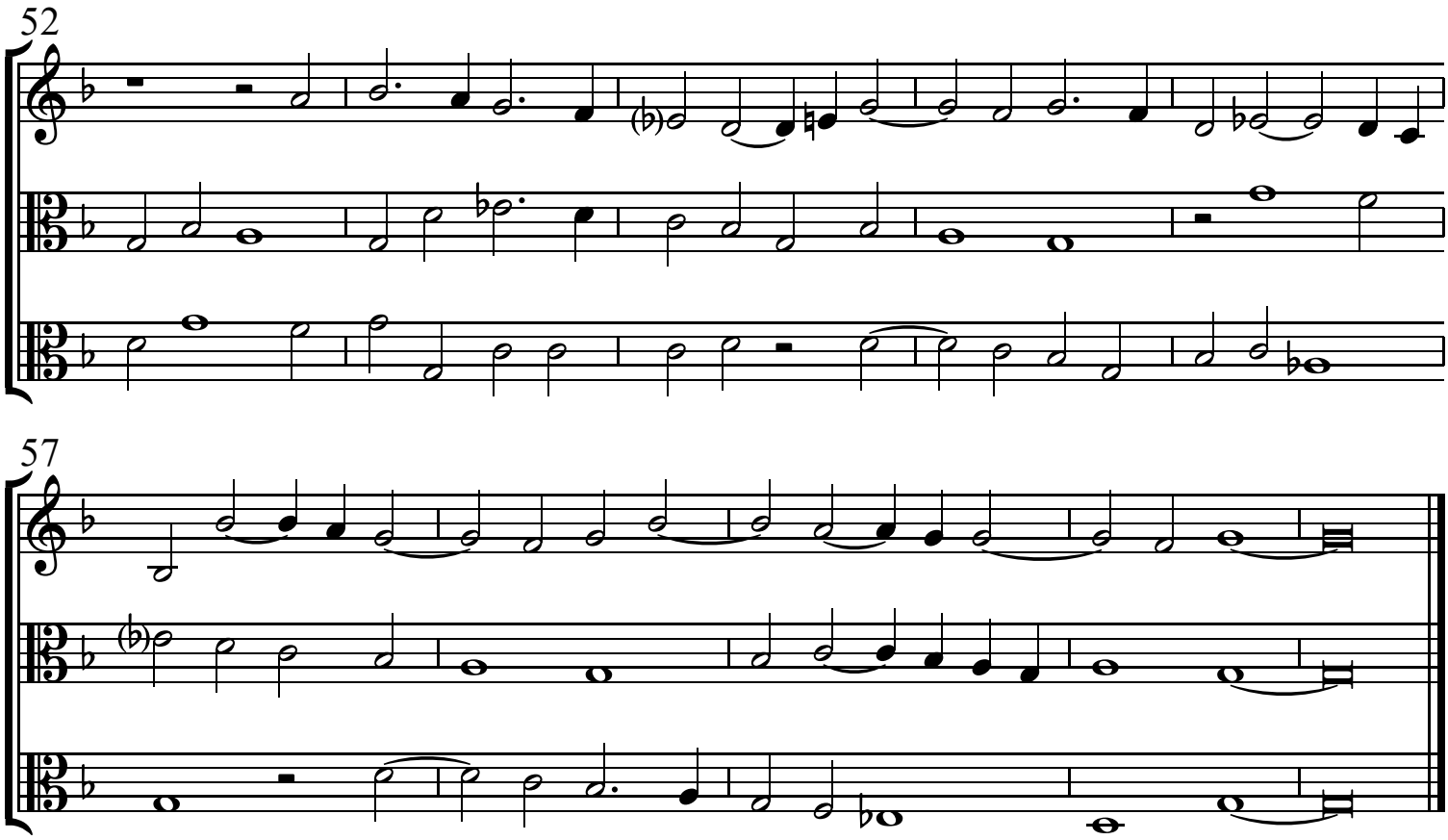
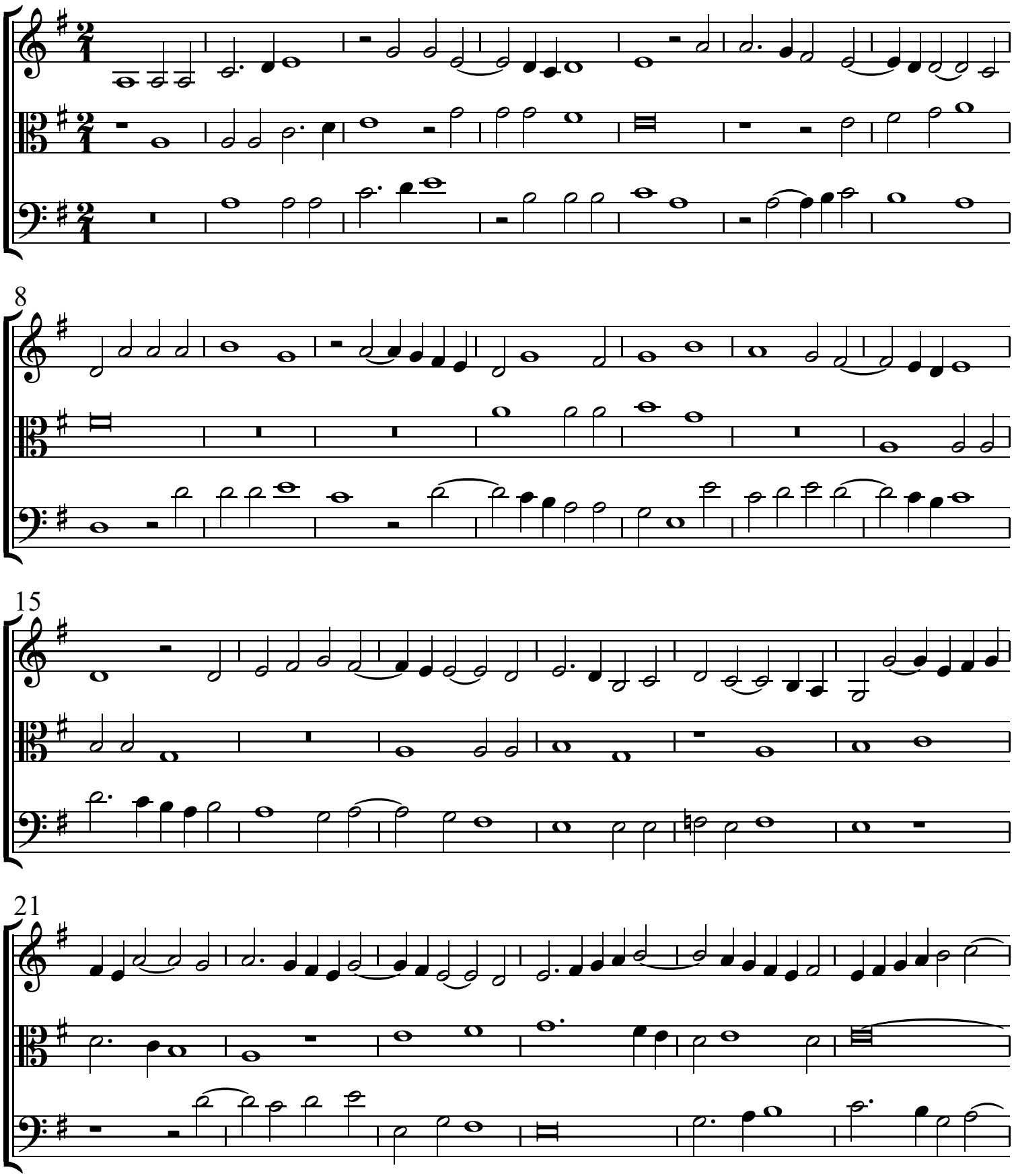

52
57

45. Ave Maria

Francesco de Layolle (1492-c. 1540)



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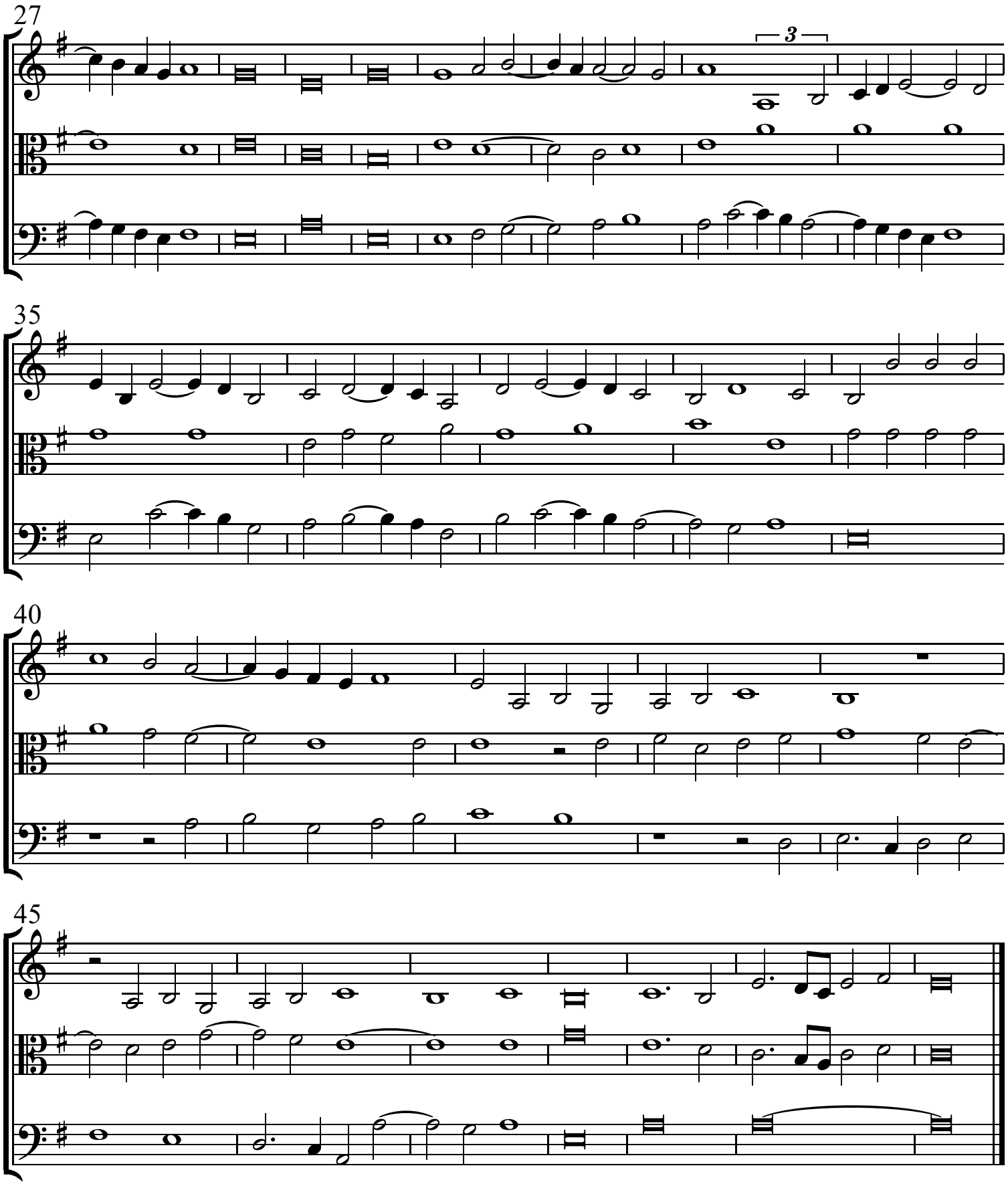
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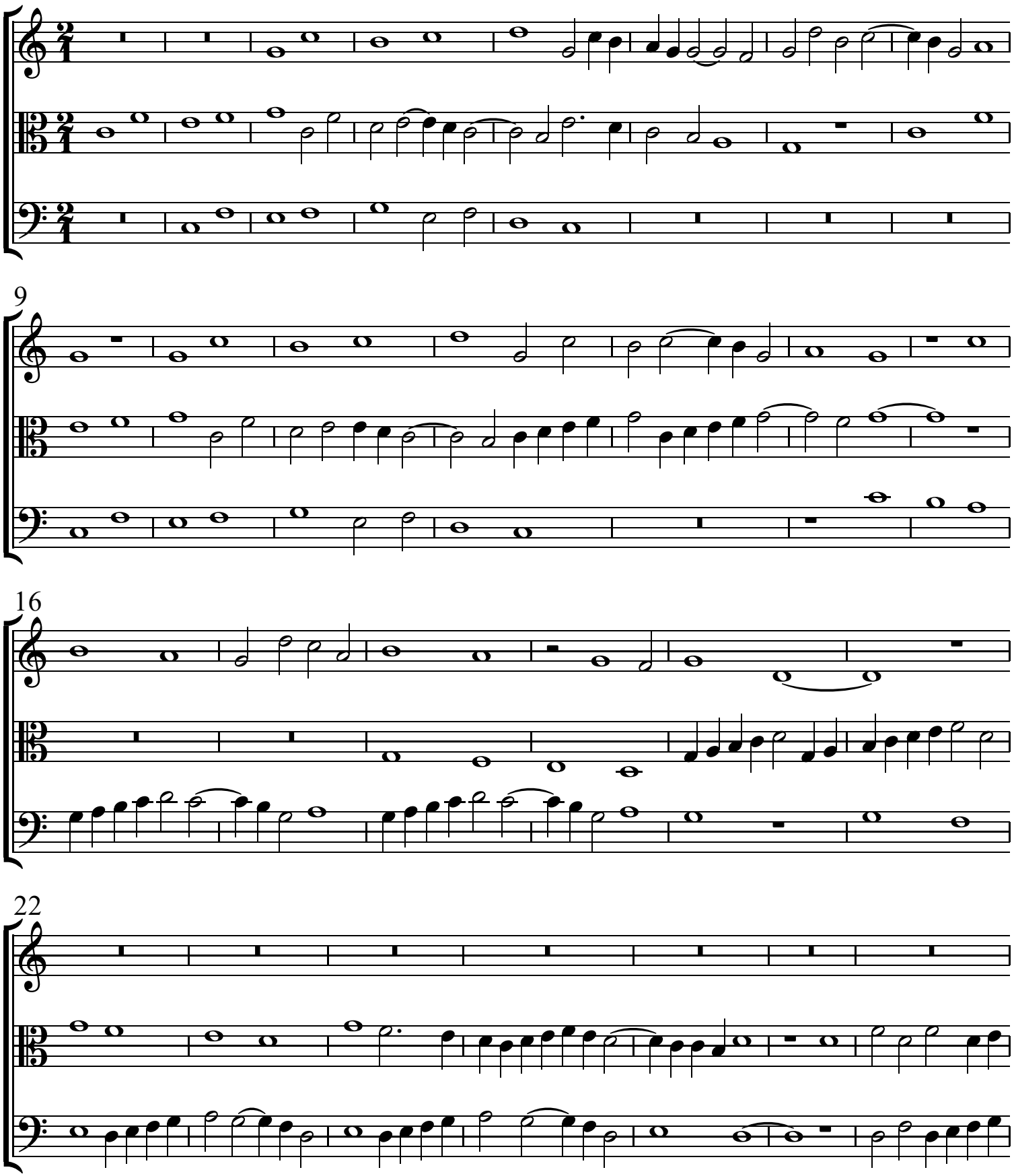
46. O summe rerum conditor

Jean Lebrun (?-?)



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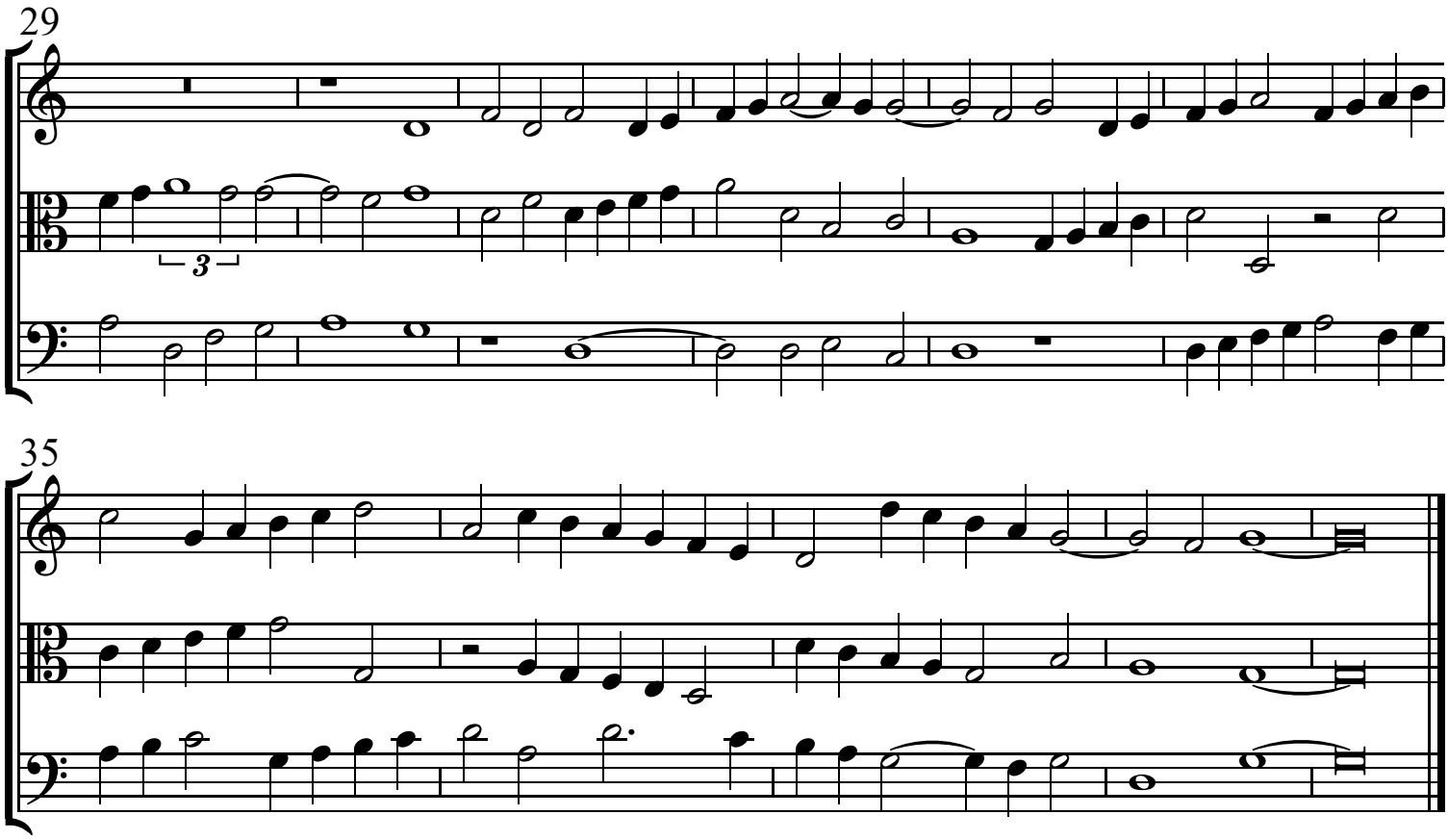
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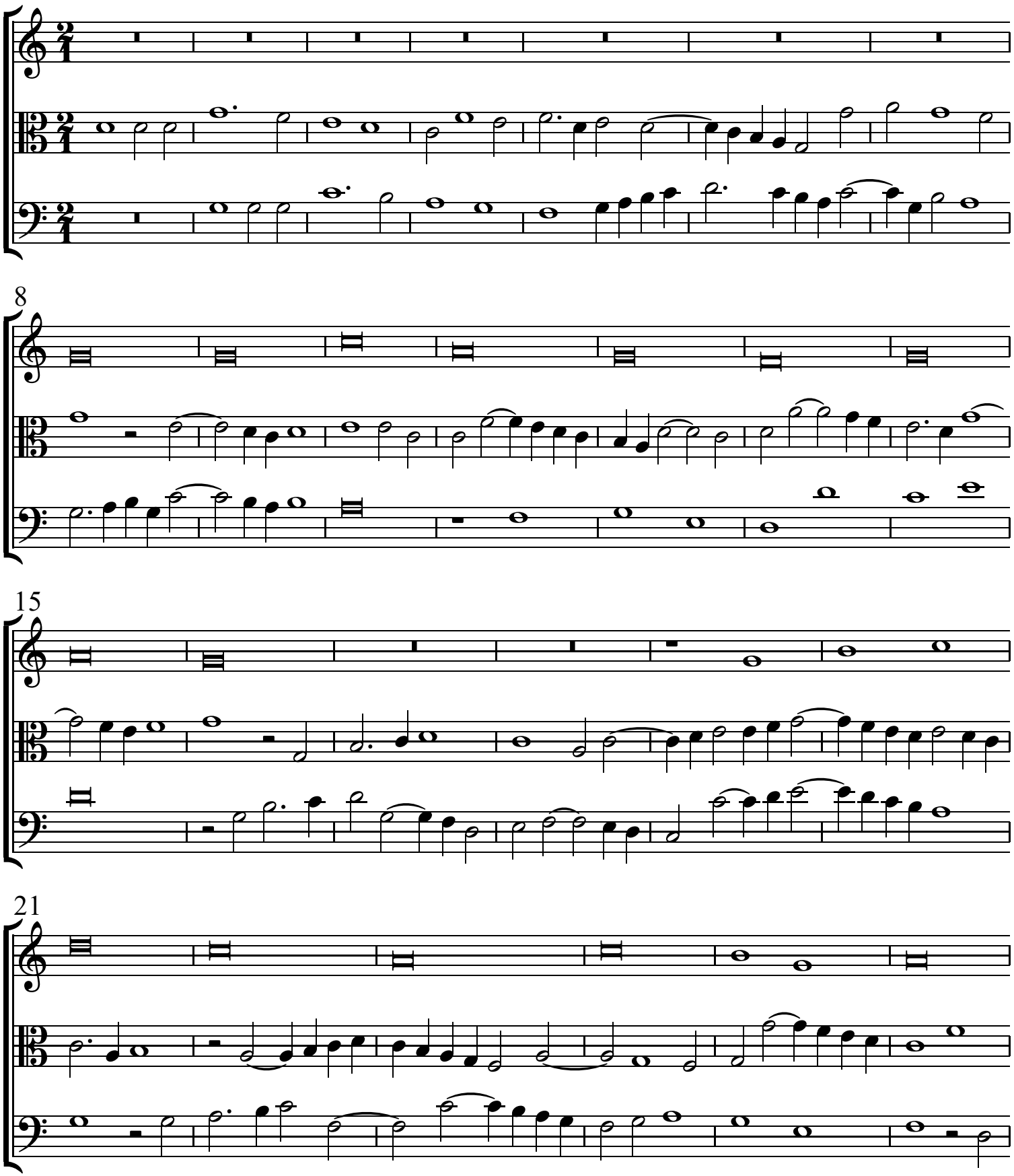
47. Tristitia vestra vertetur in gaudium

Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537)



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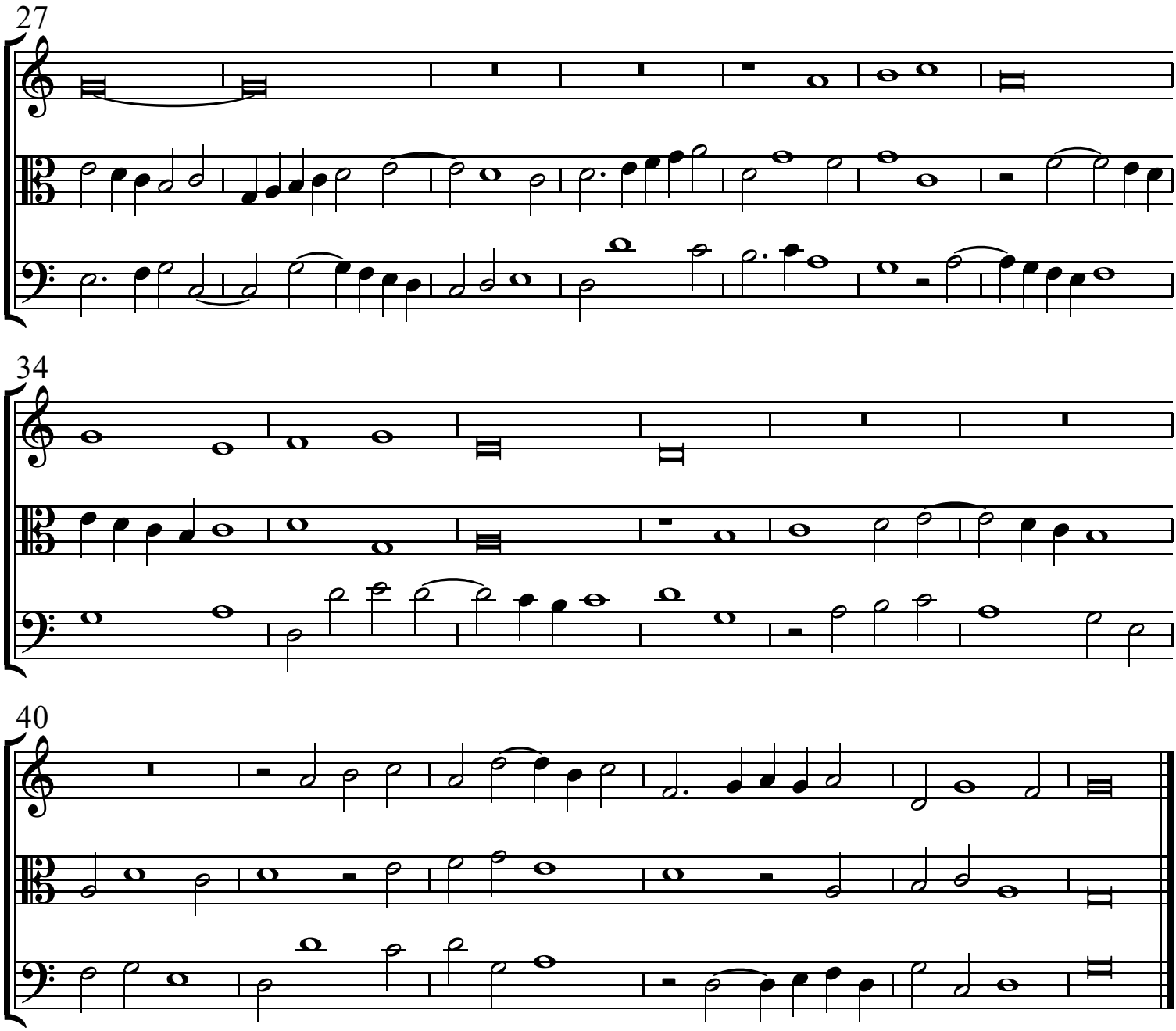
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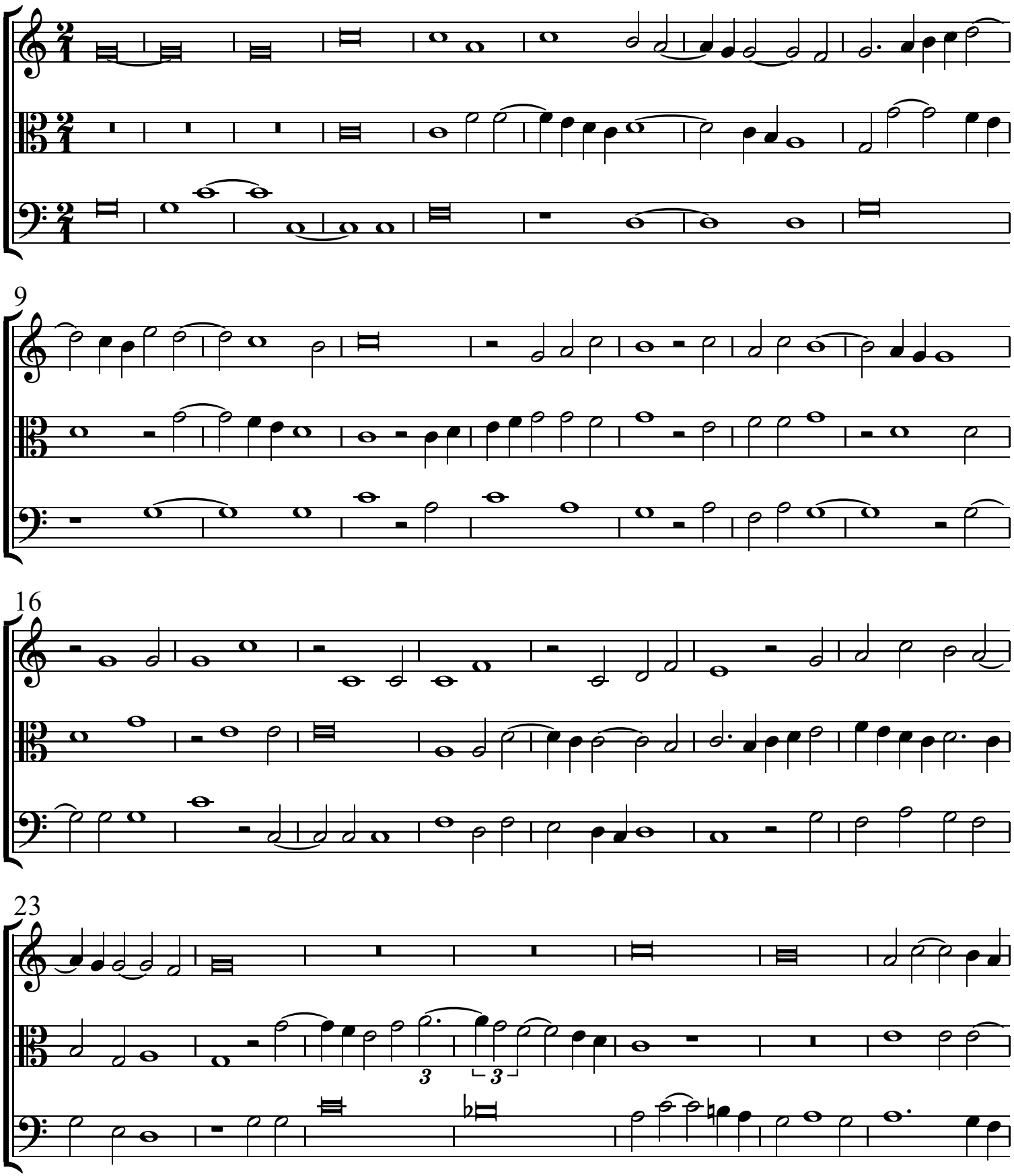
48. Nigra sum sed formosa

Anonymous



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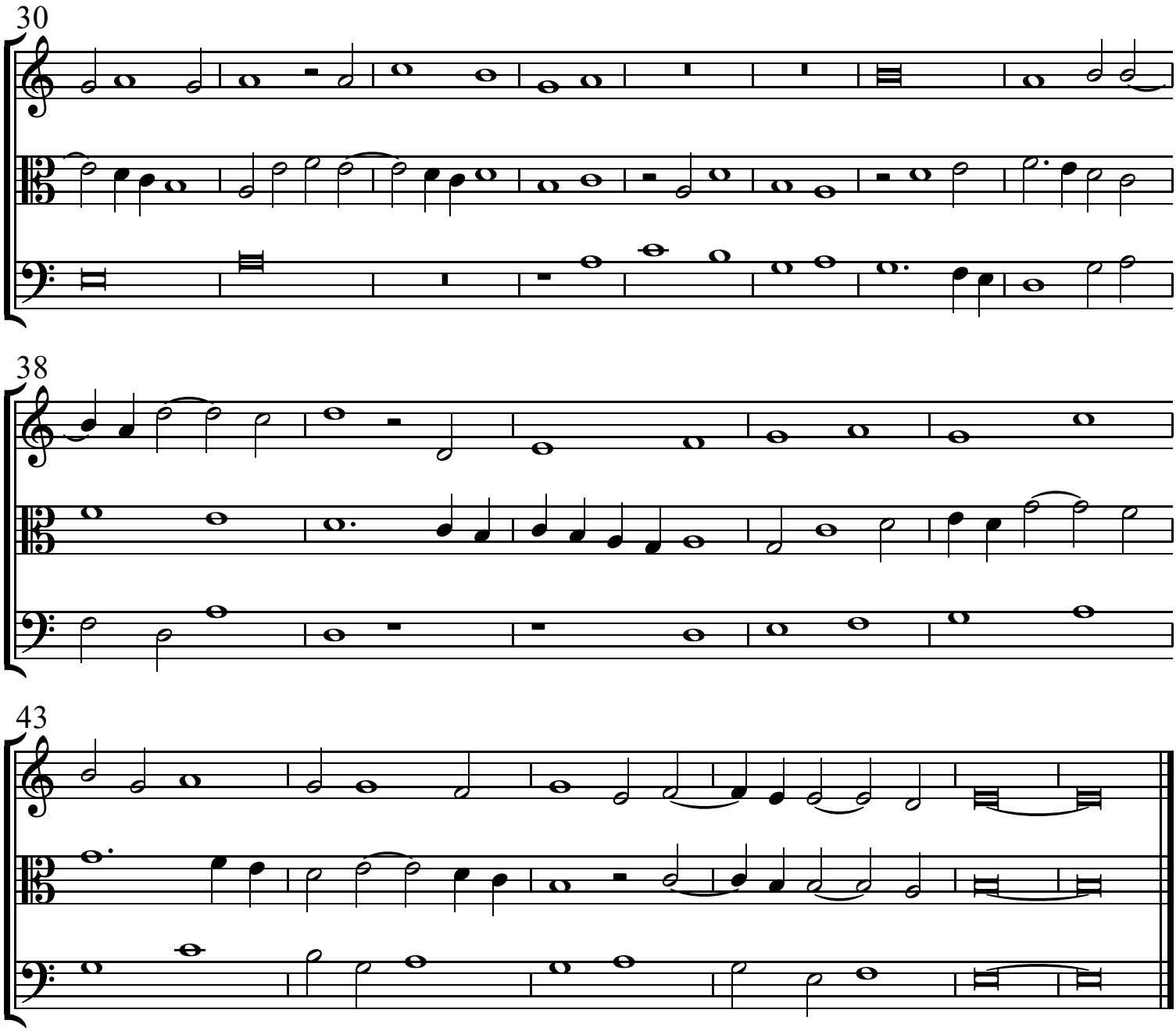
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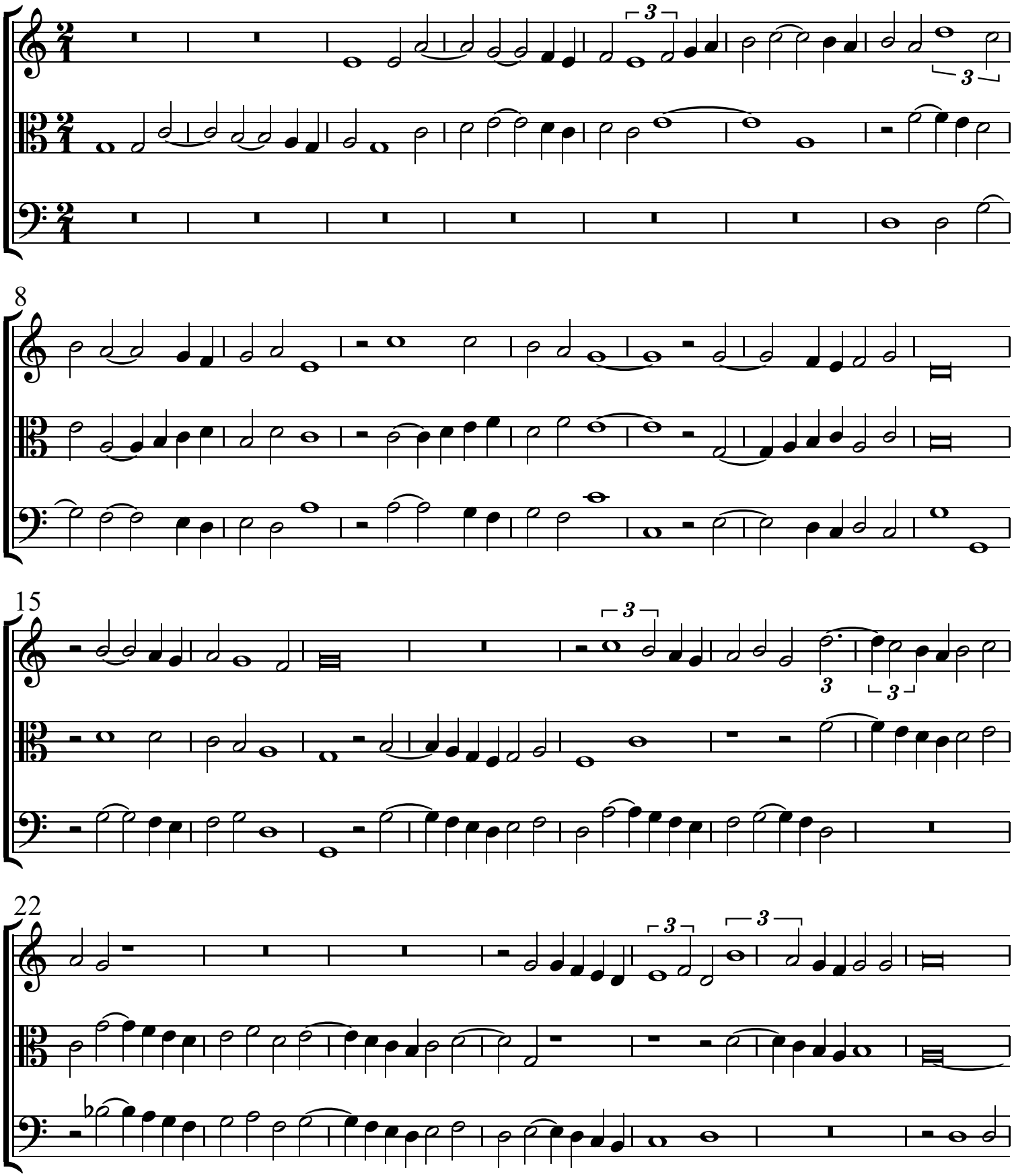
49. Si esurierit inimicus tuus

Pierre de la Rue (c.1452-1518)



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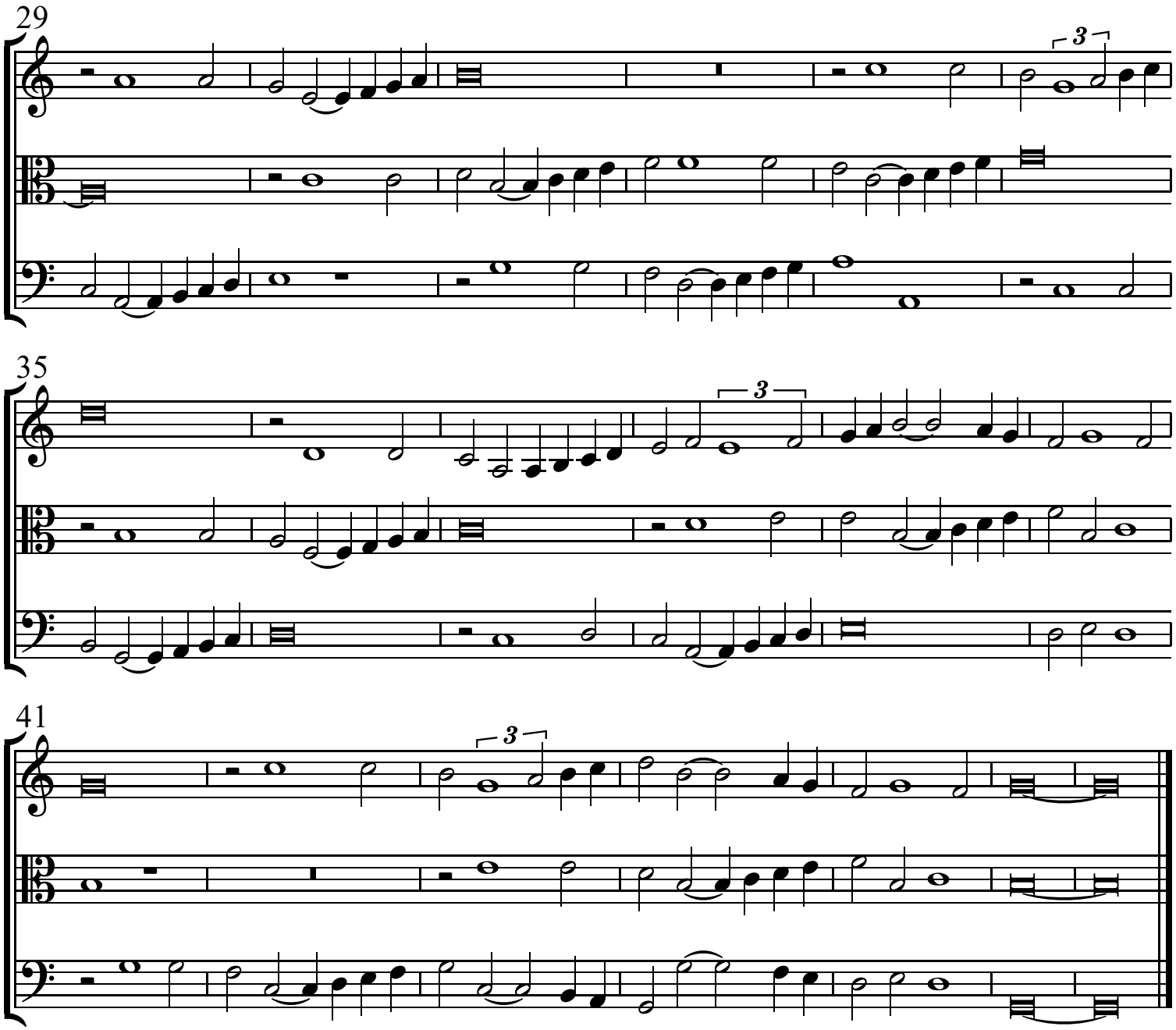
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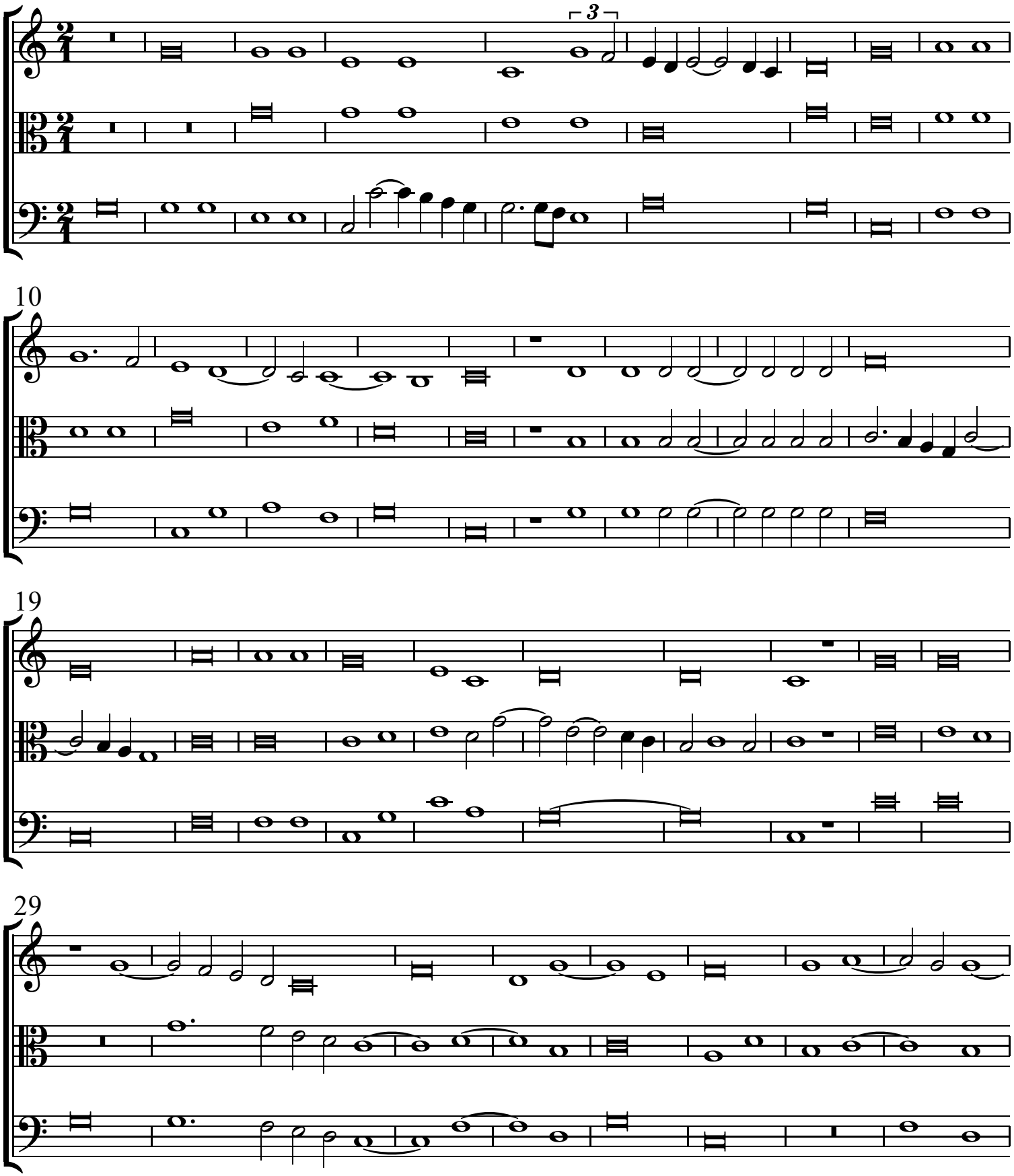
50. Dulces exuviae

Anonymous



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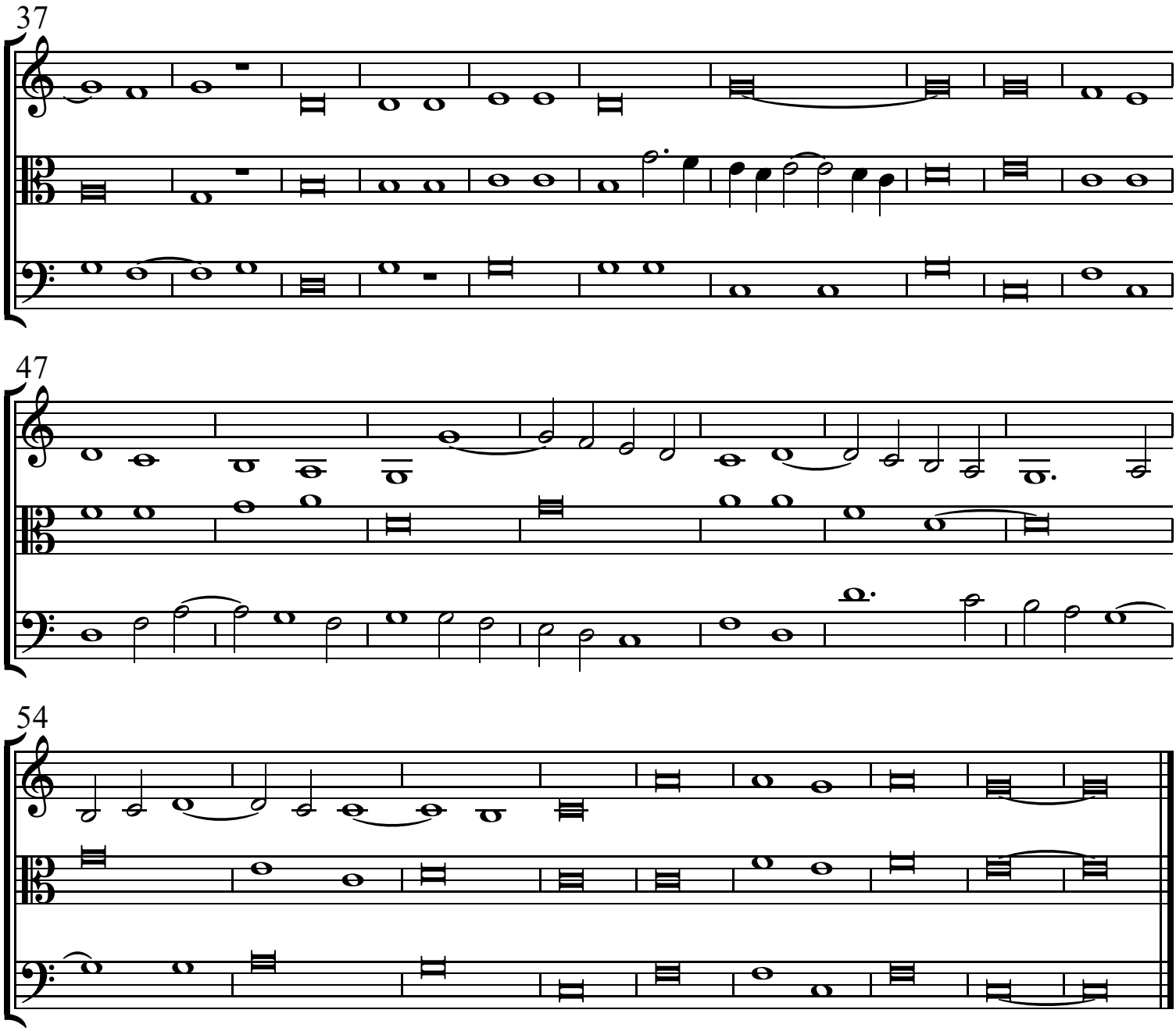
37
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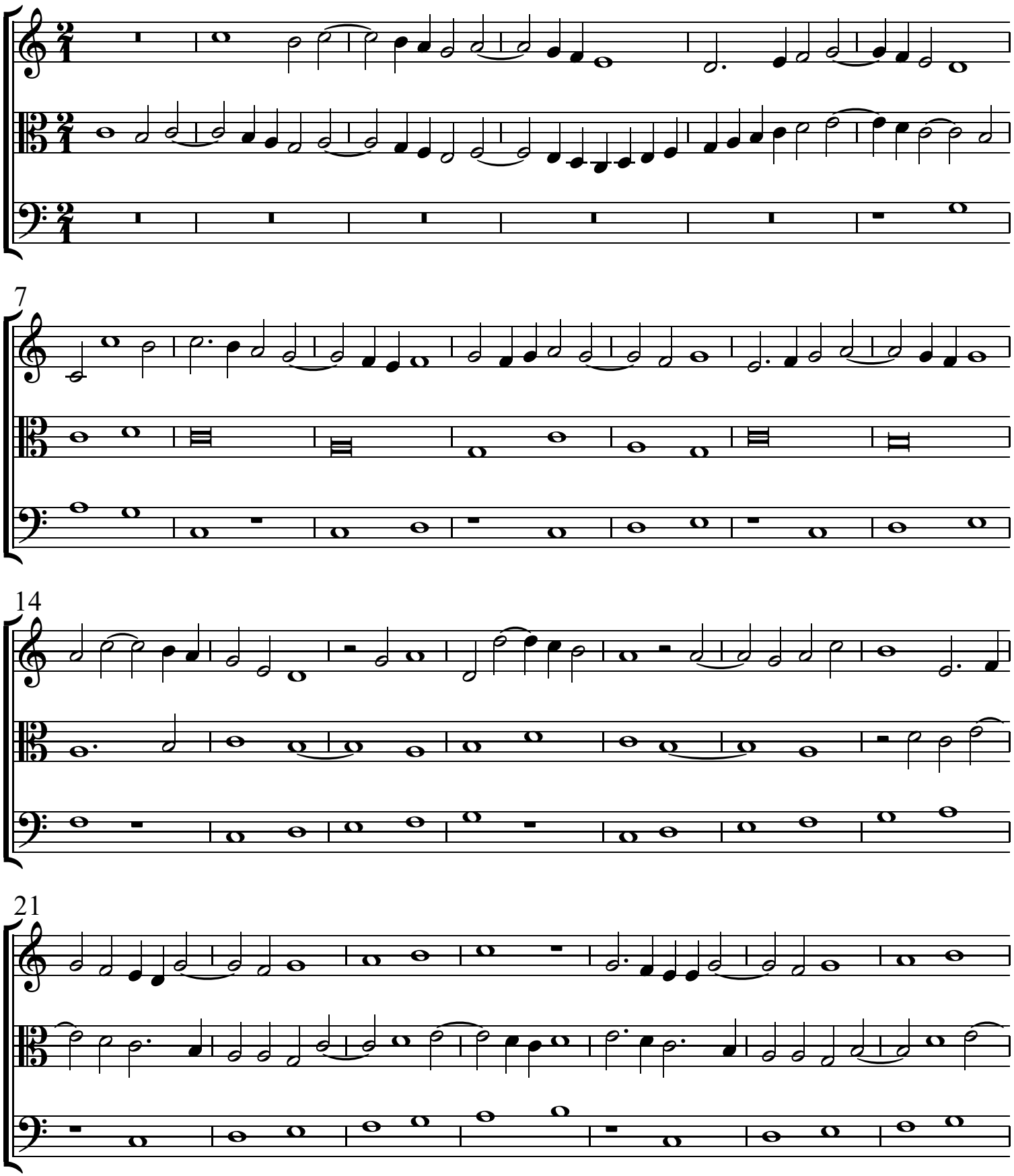
54

51. Exercitium sex vocum Muiscalium

Anonymous



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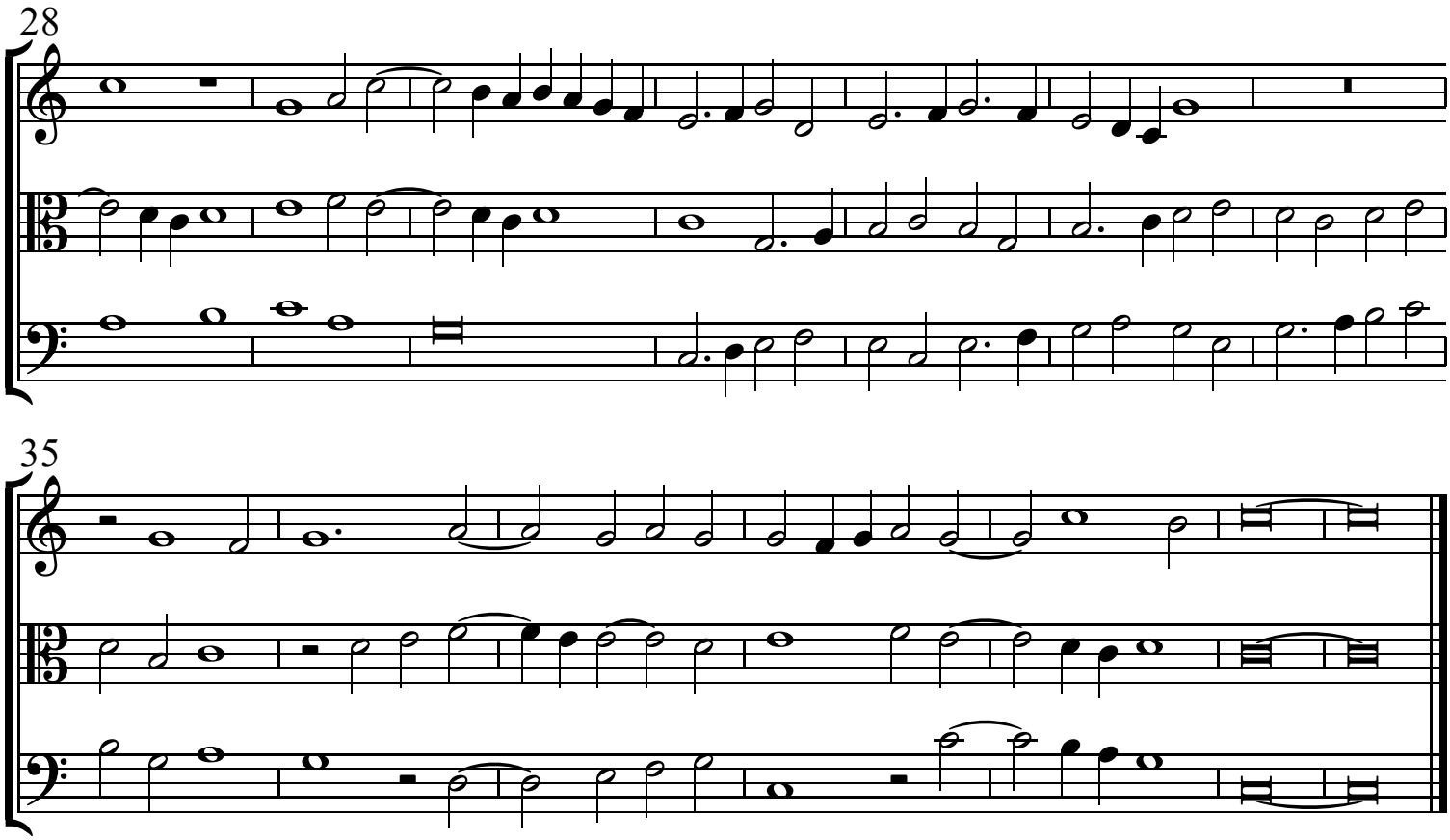
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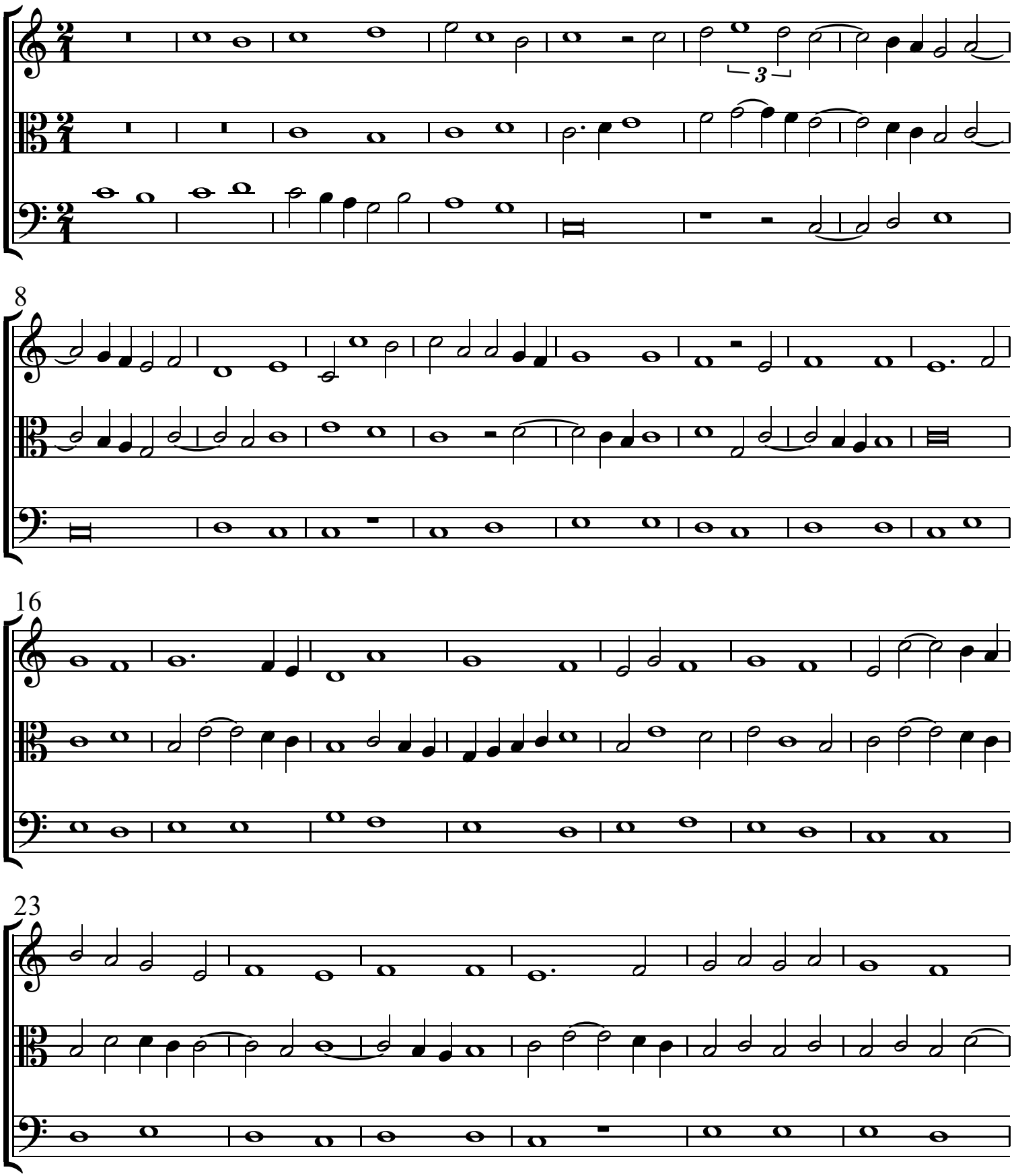
52. Requiem aeternam

Anonymous



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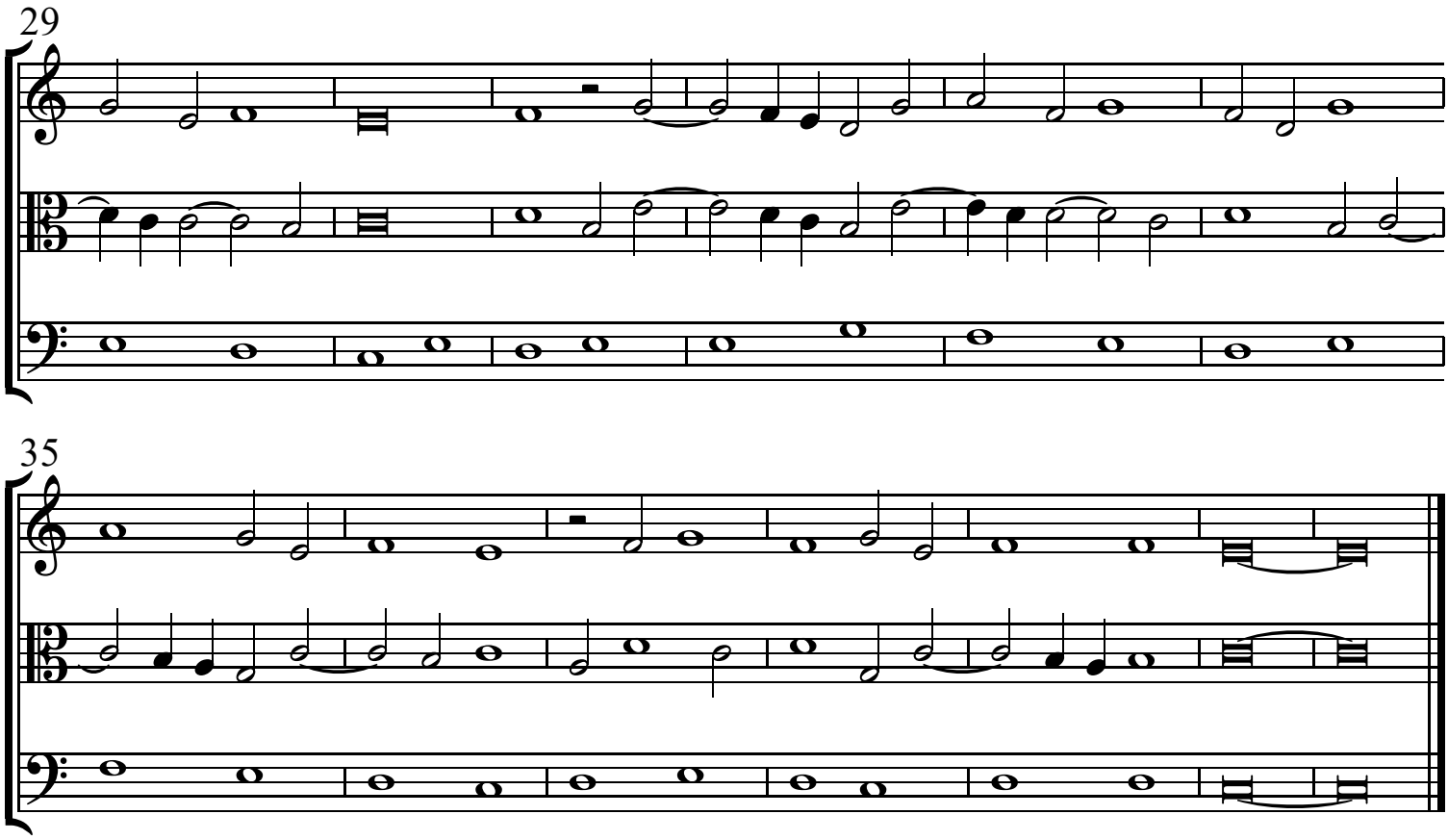
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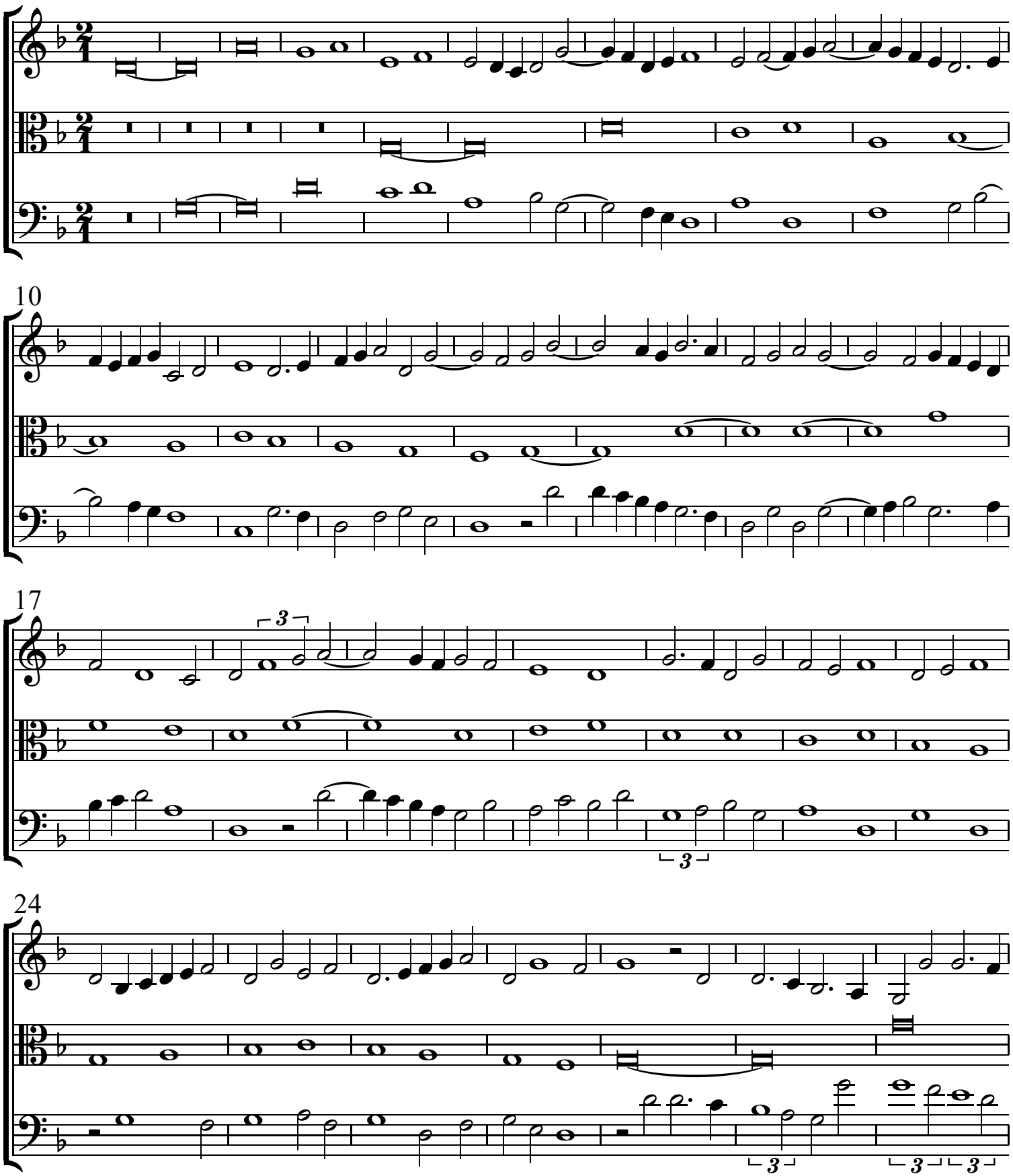
53. Wir gleuben all an einen Gott

Thielman Ungewitter (?-?)



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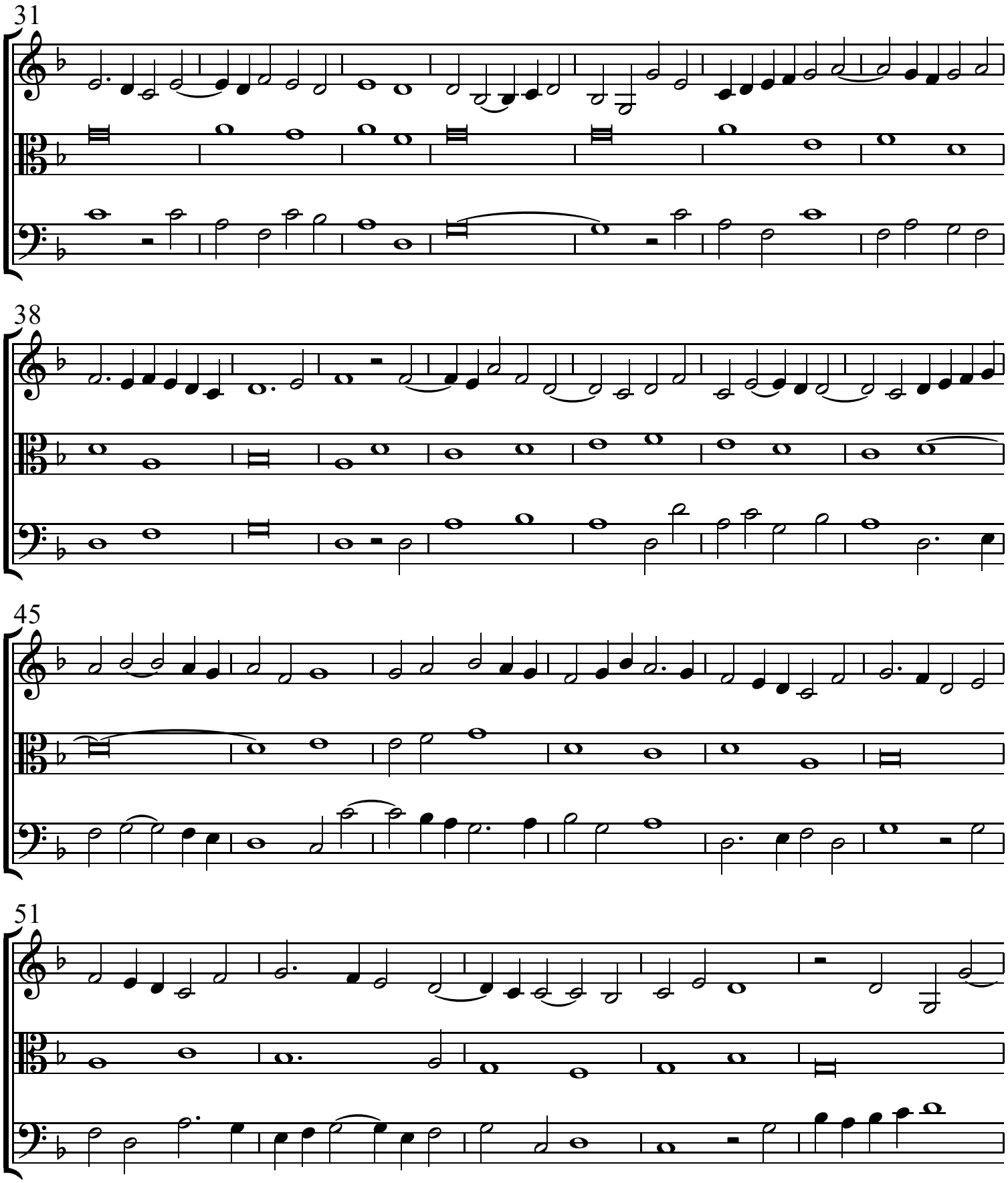
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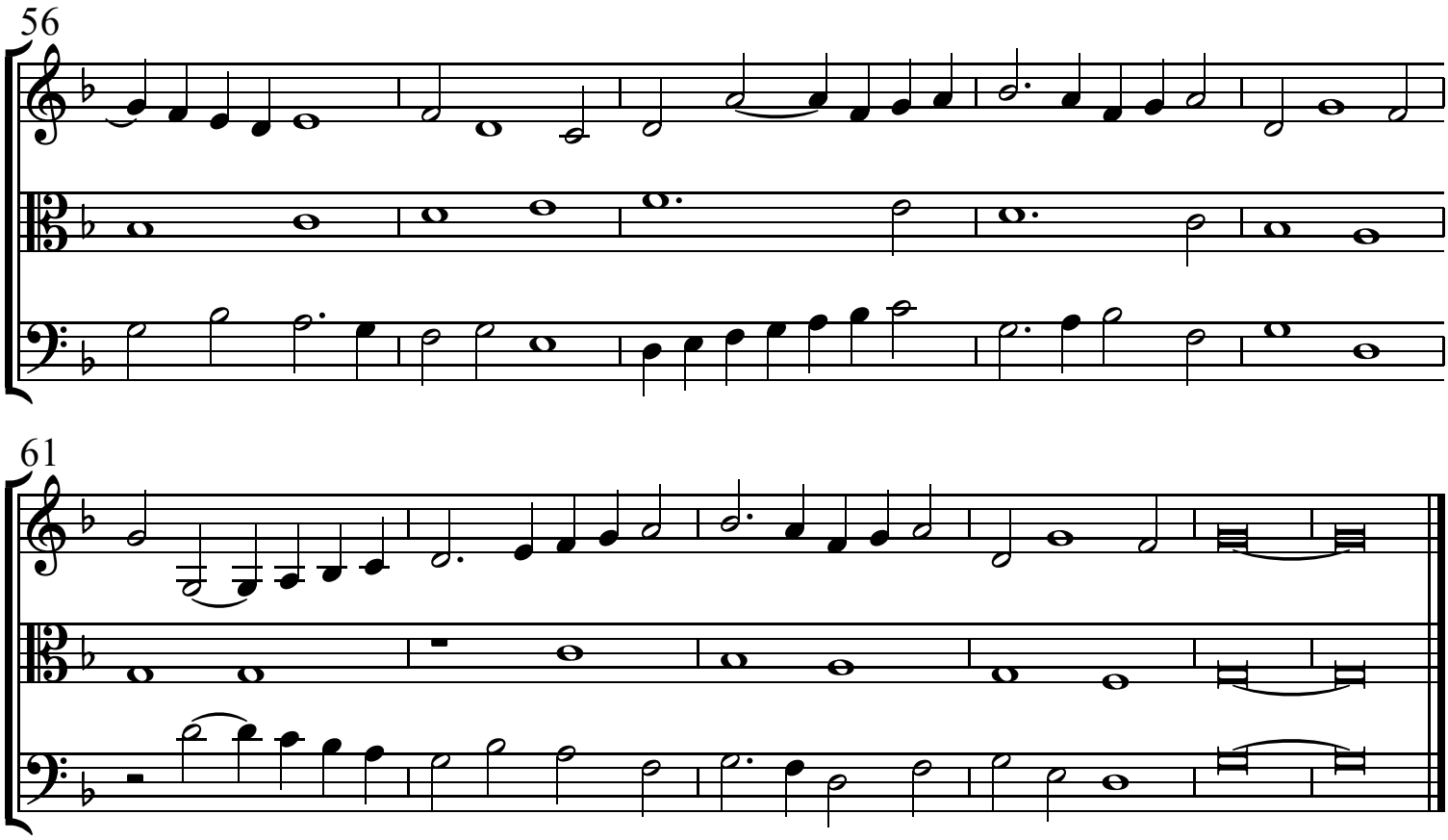
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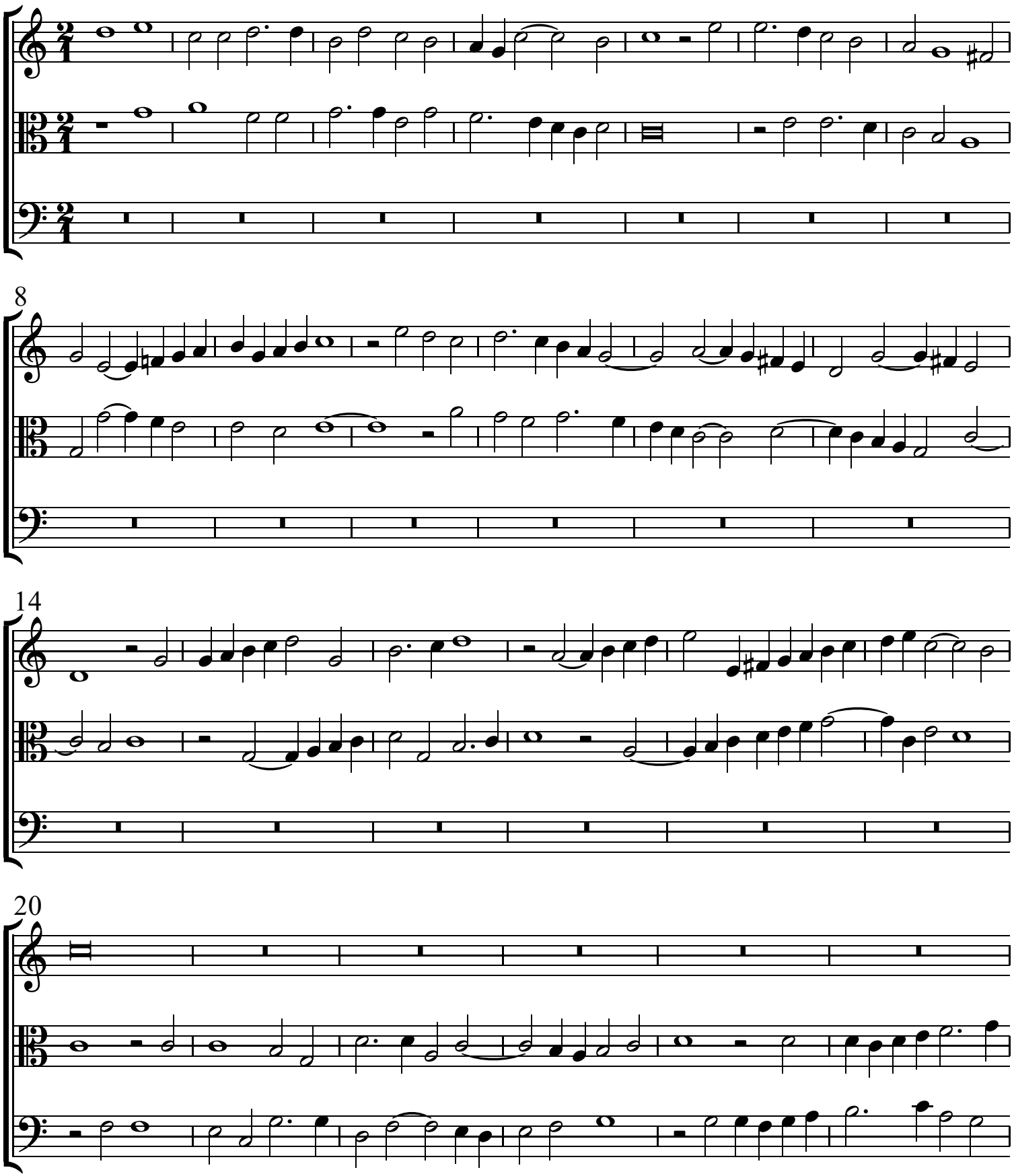
54. Der gottlose frewet dem gerechten

Thomas Stolzer (c. 1480-1526)



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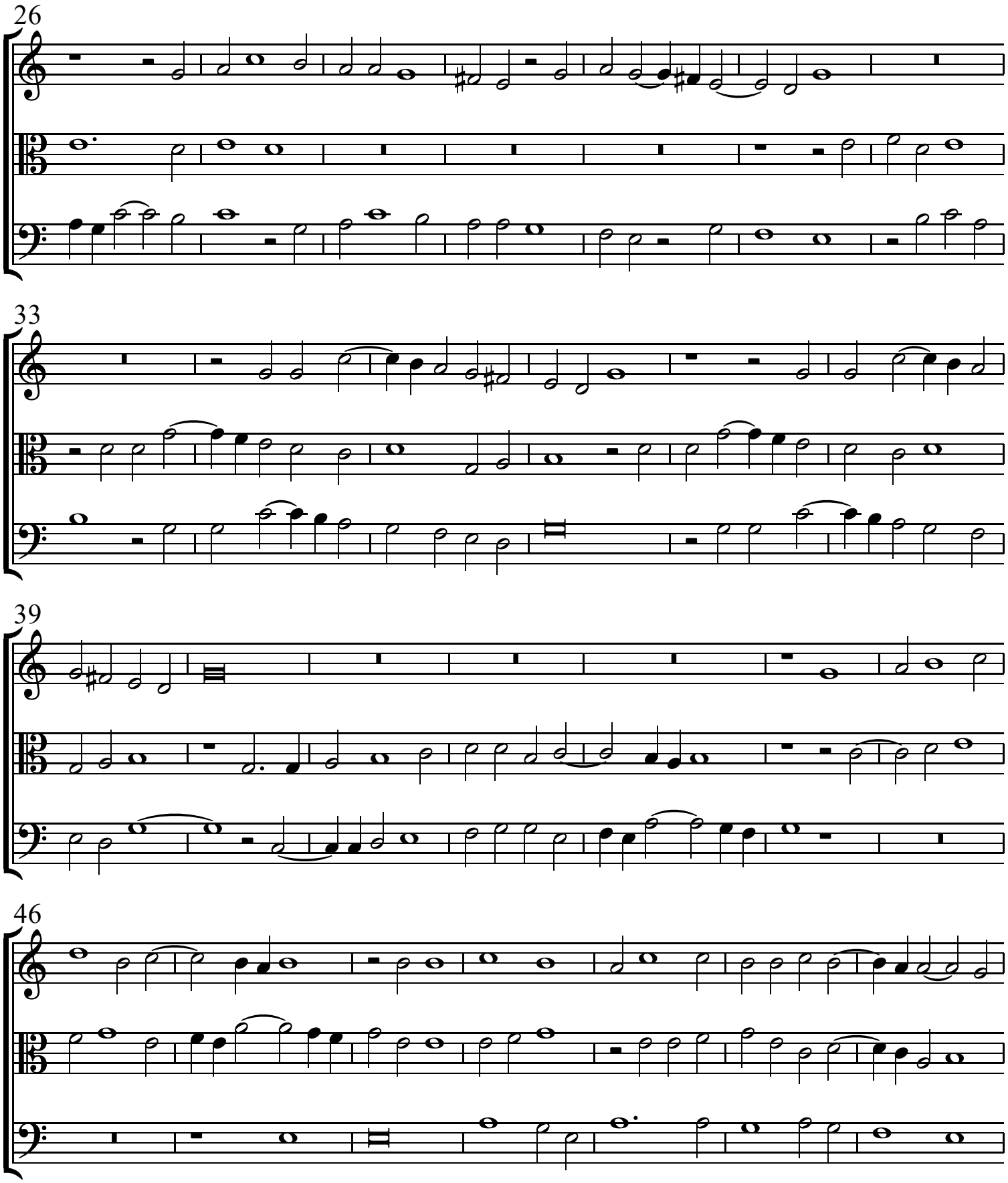
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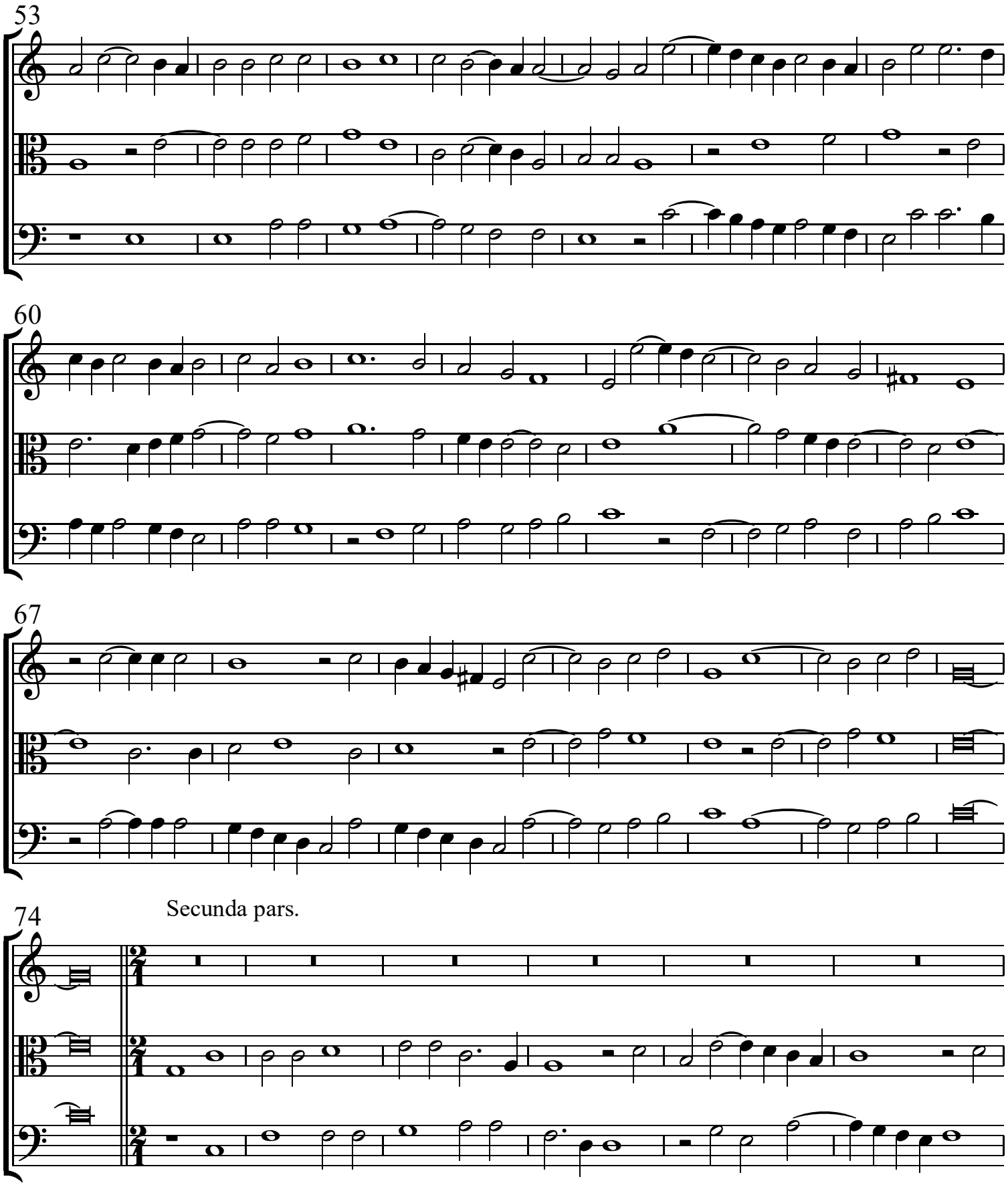
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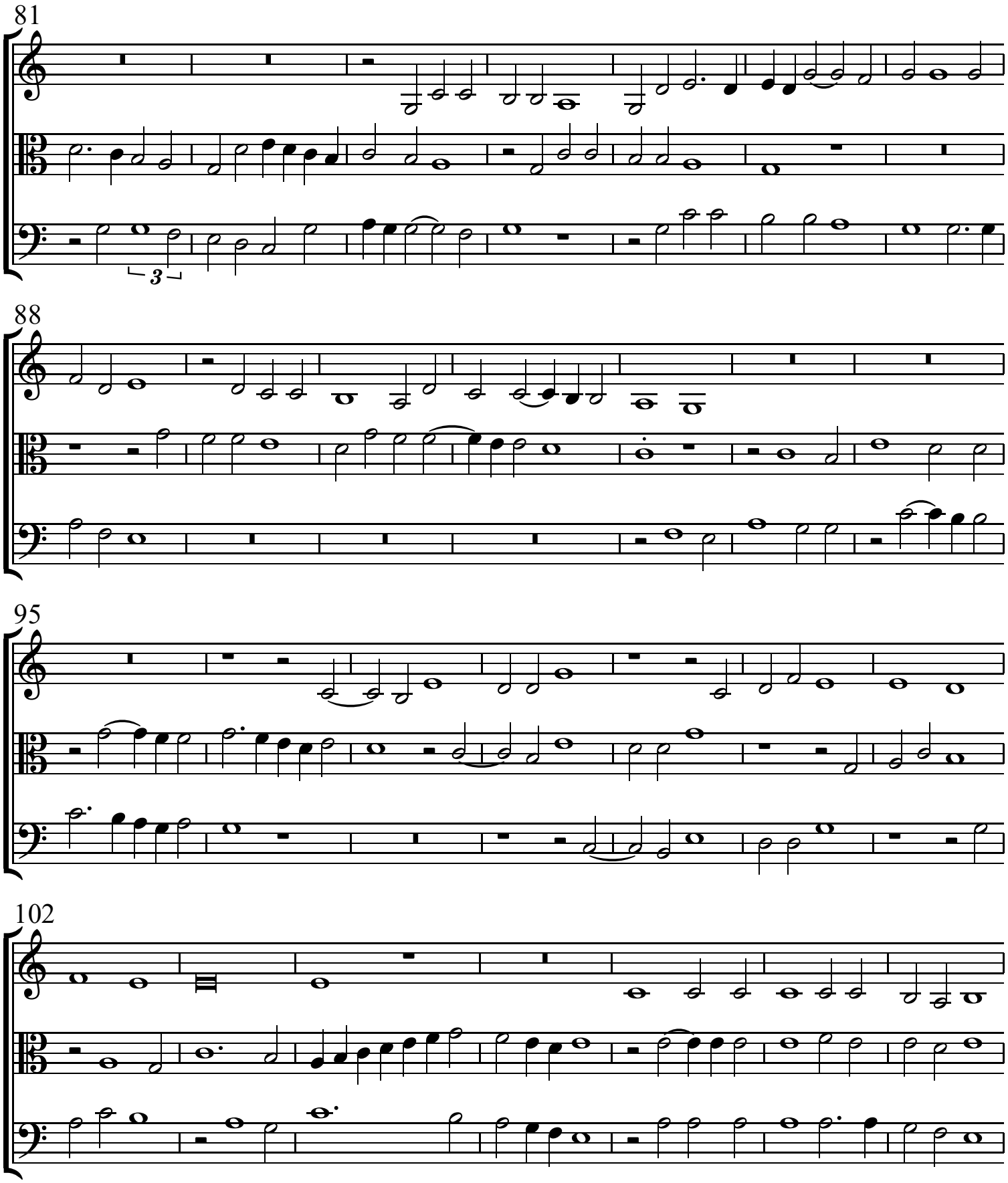
67
74
Secunda pars.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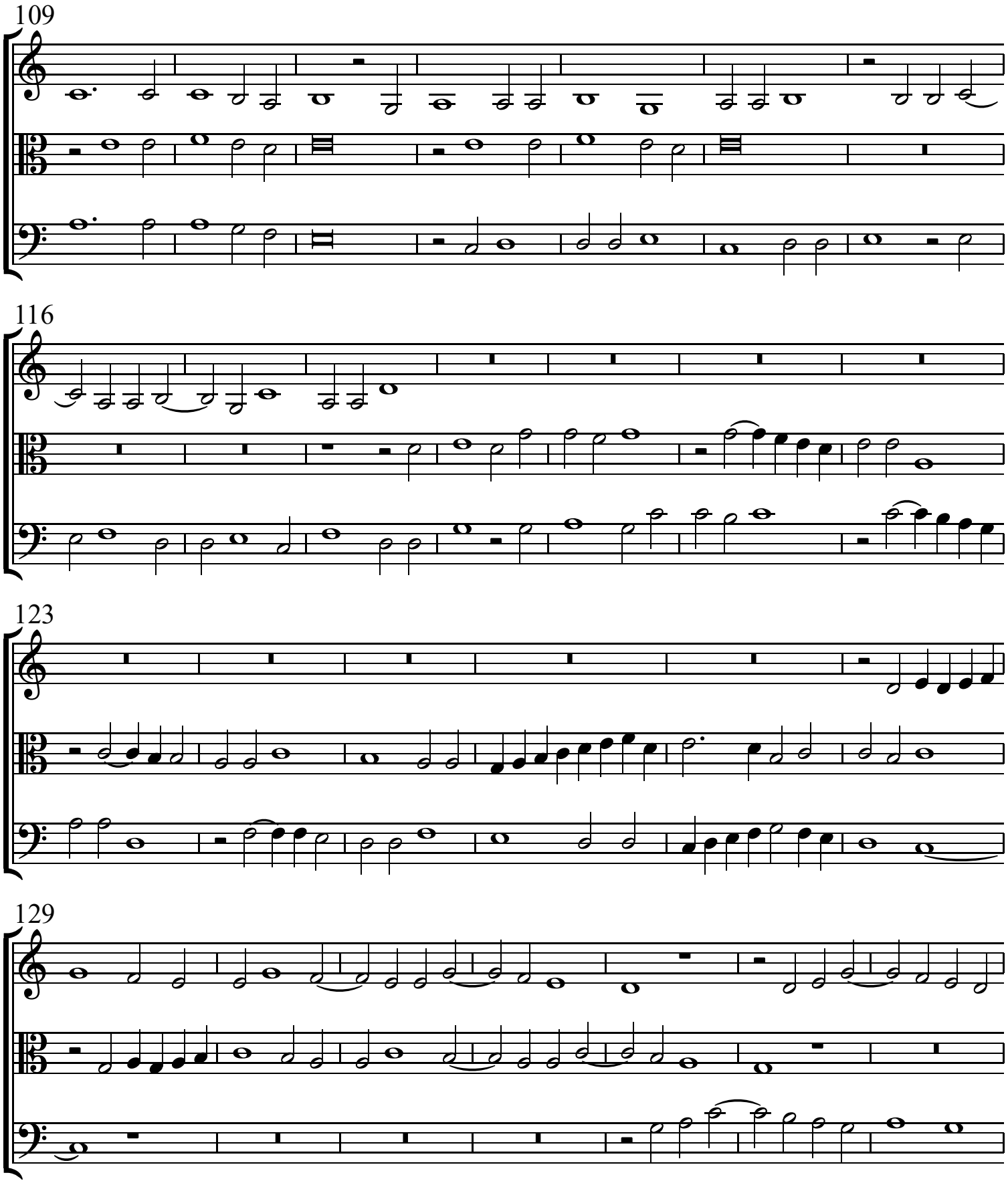
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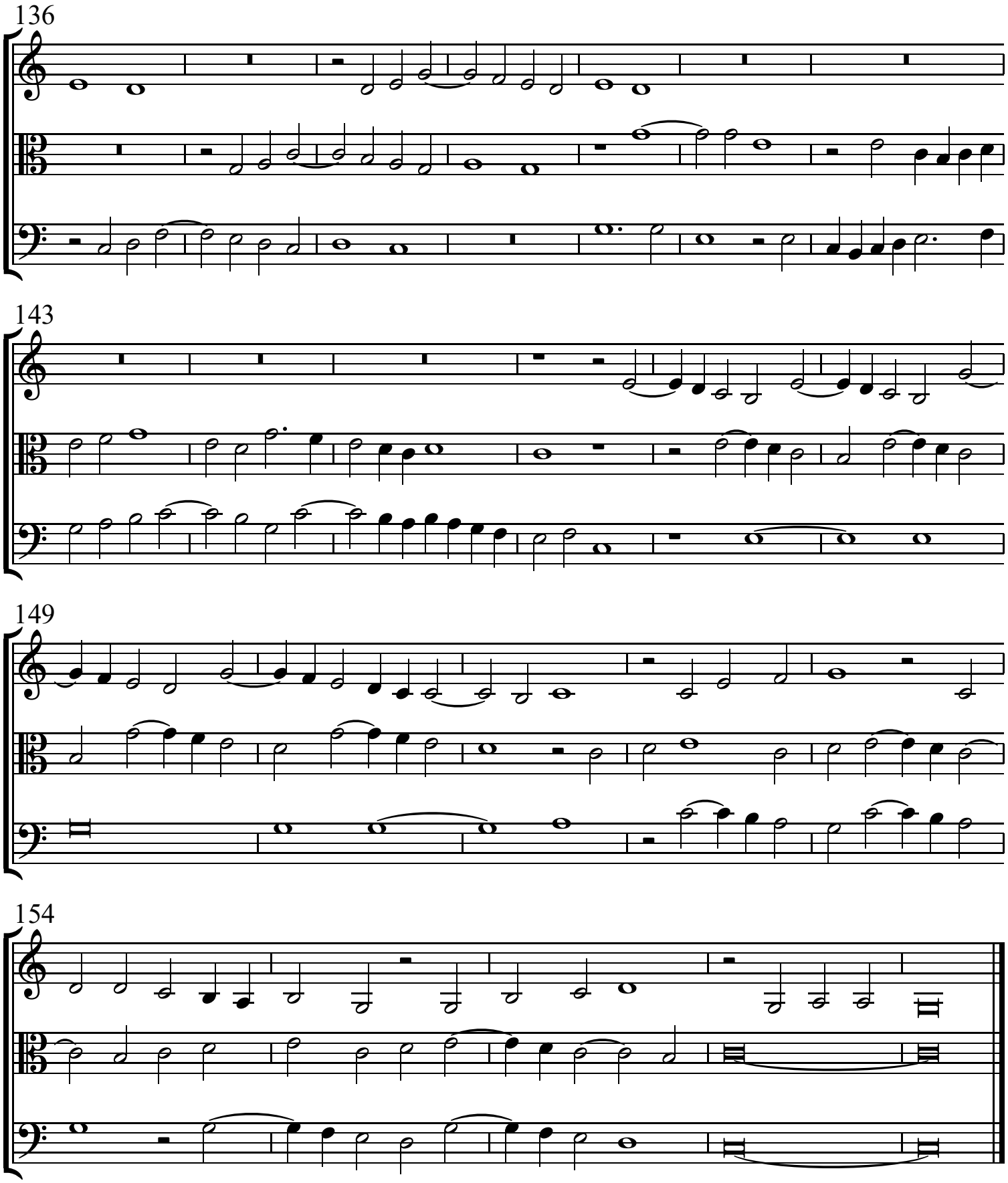
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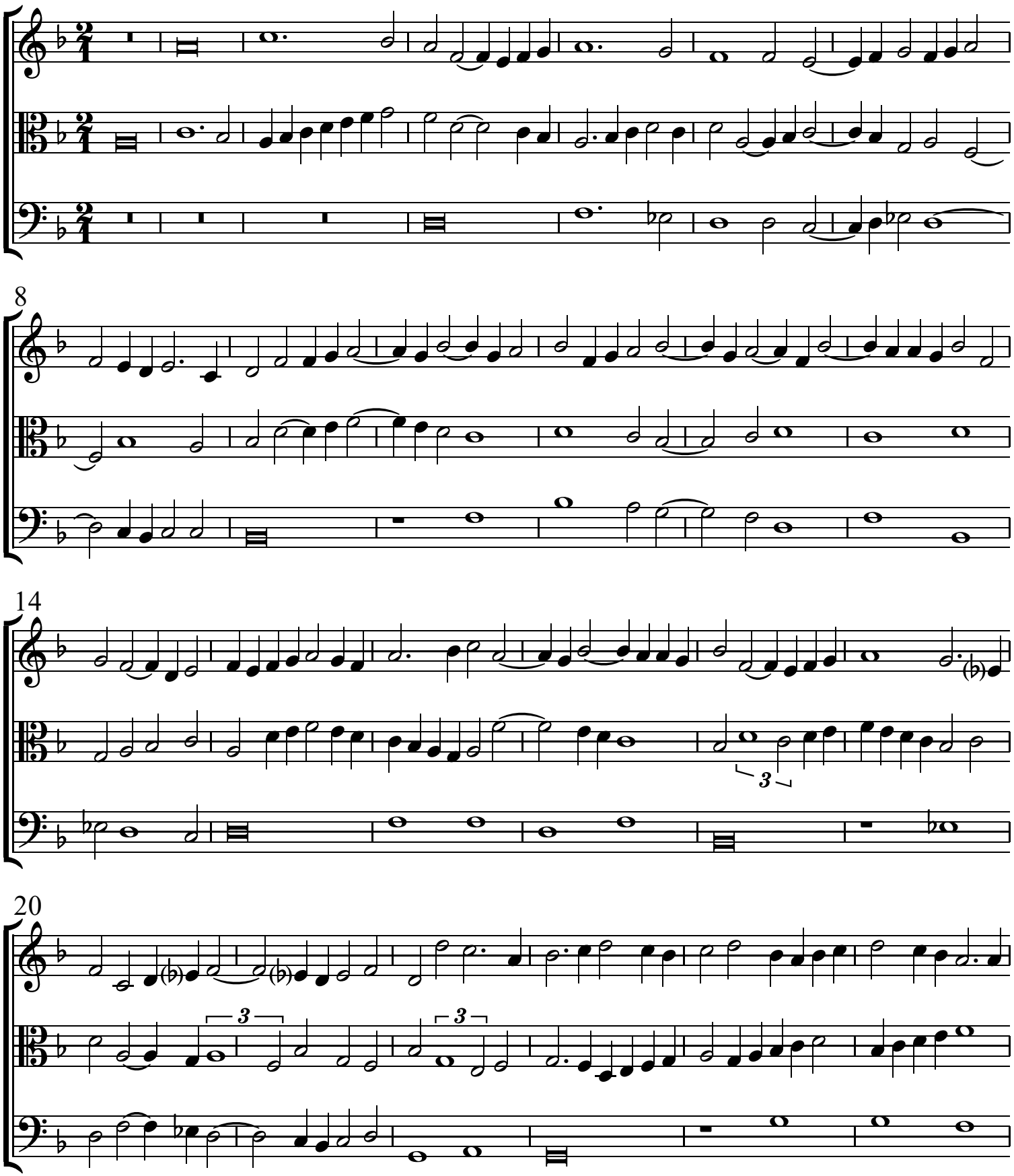
143
149
154

55. Ach hülff mich leid

Anonymous



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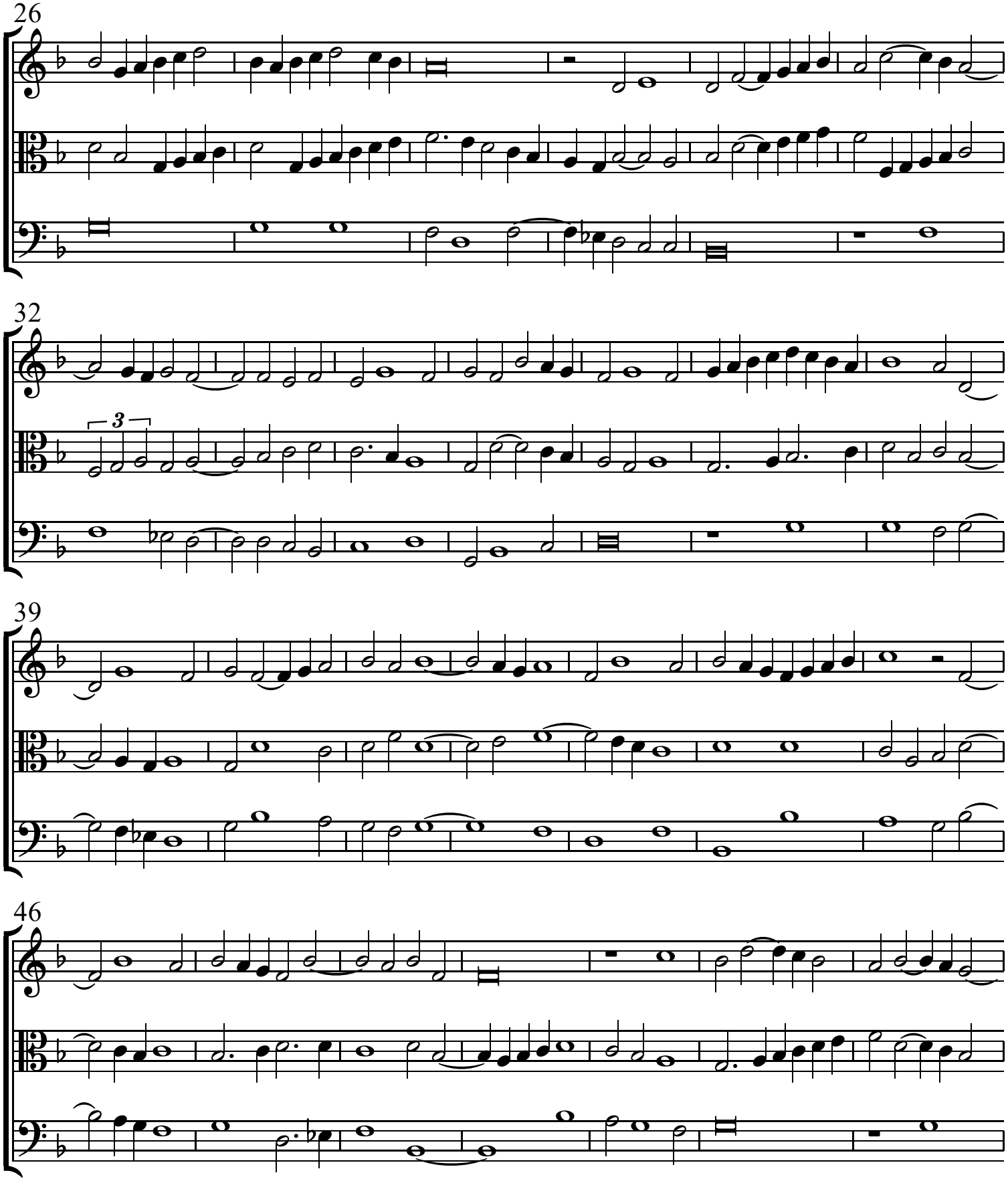
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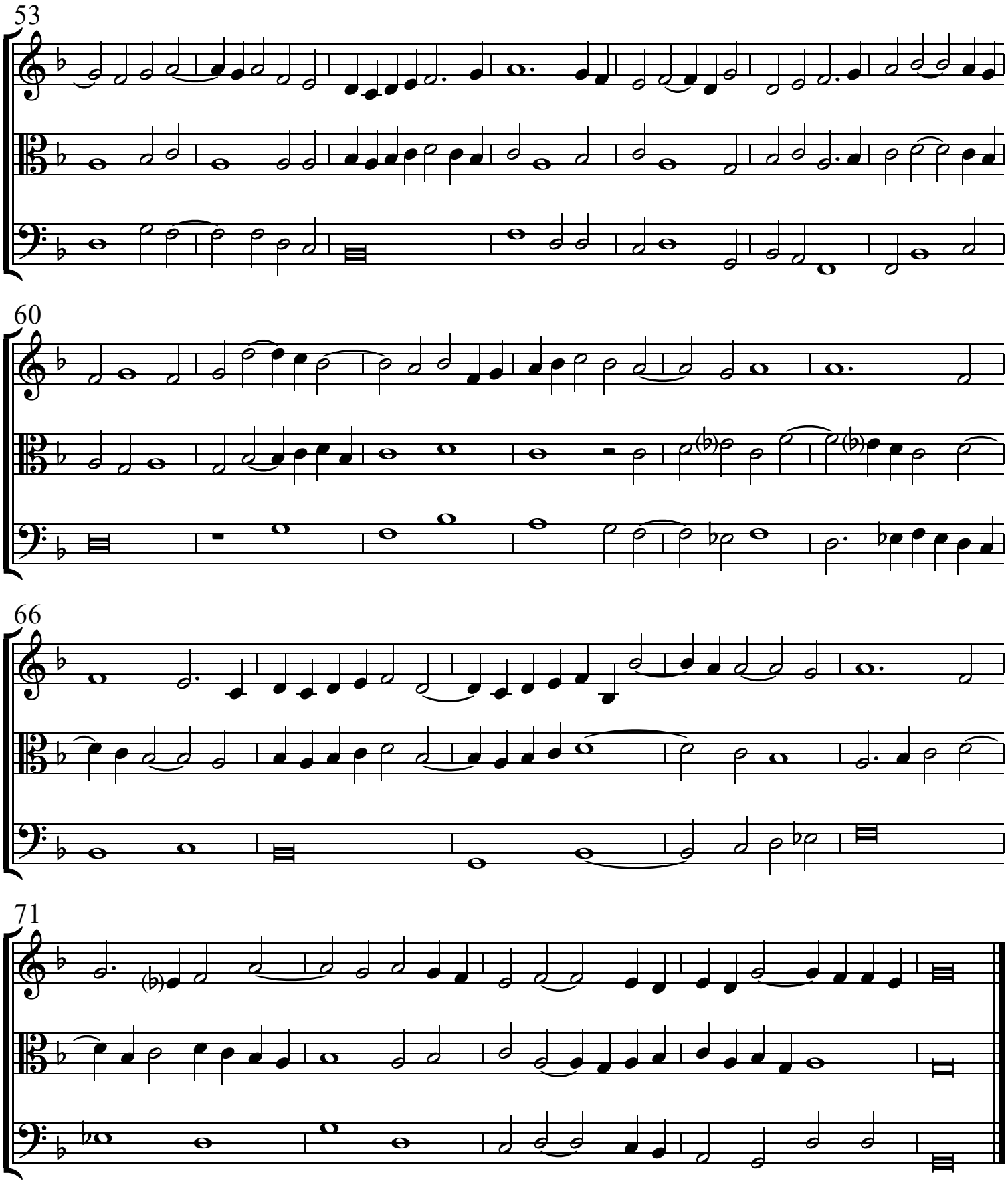
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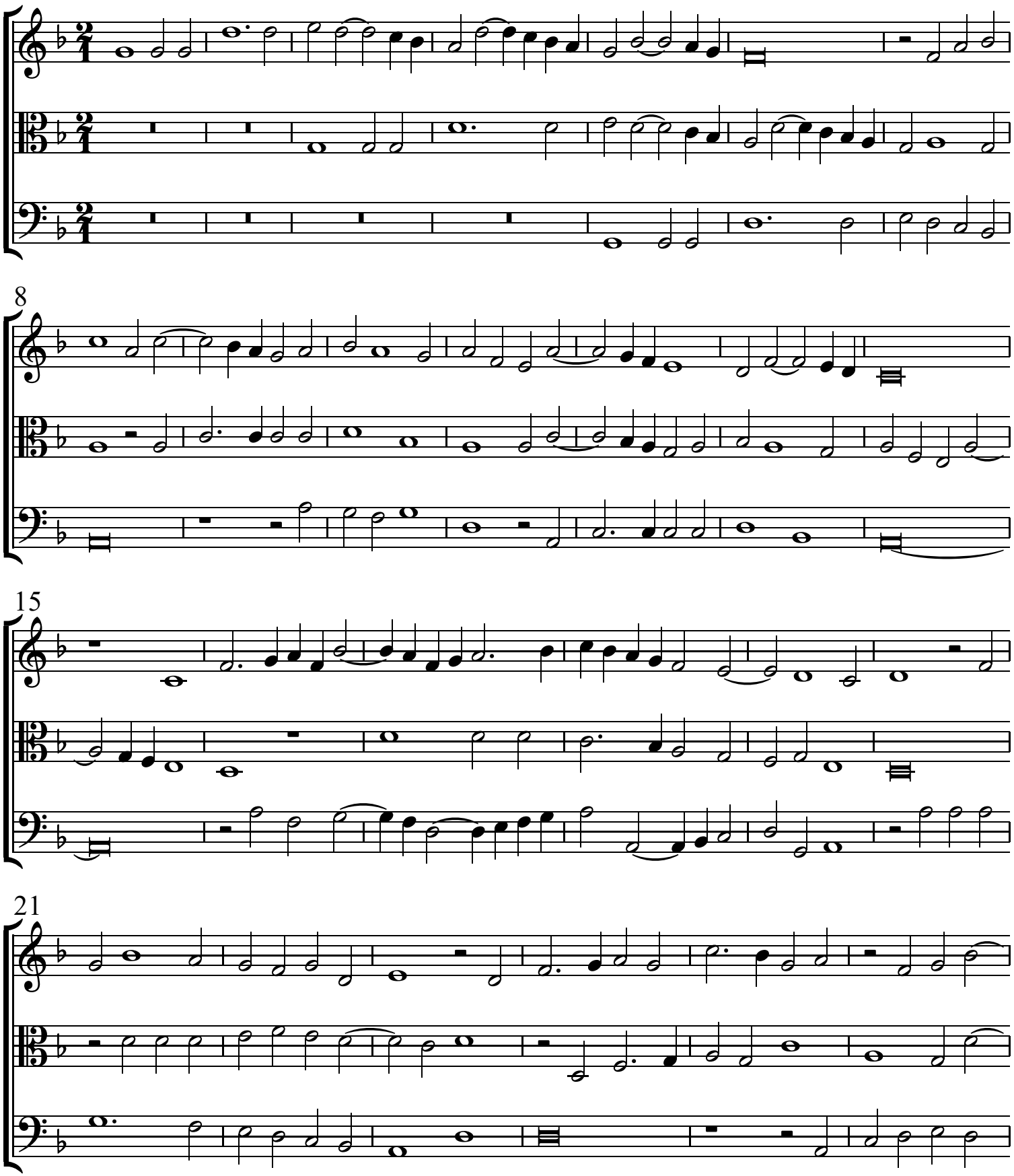
71

56. Erst weis ich was die liebe ist

Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537)



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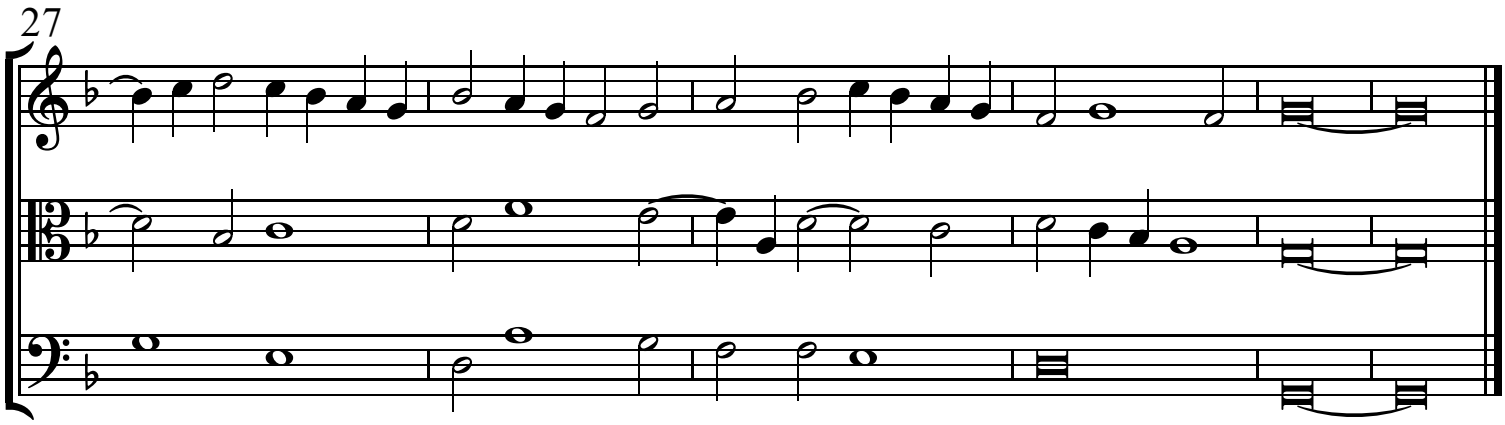
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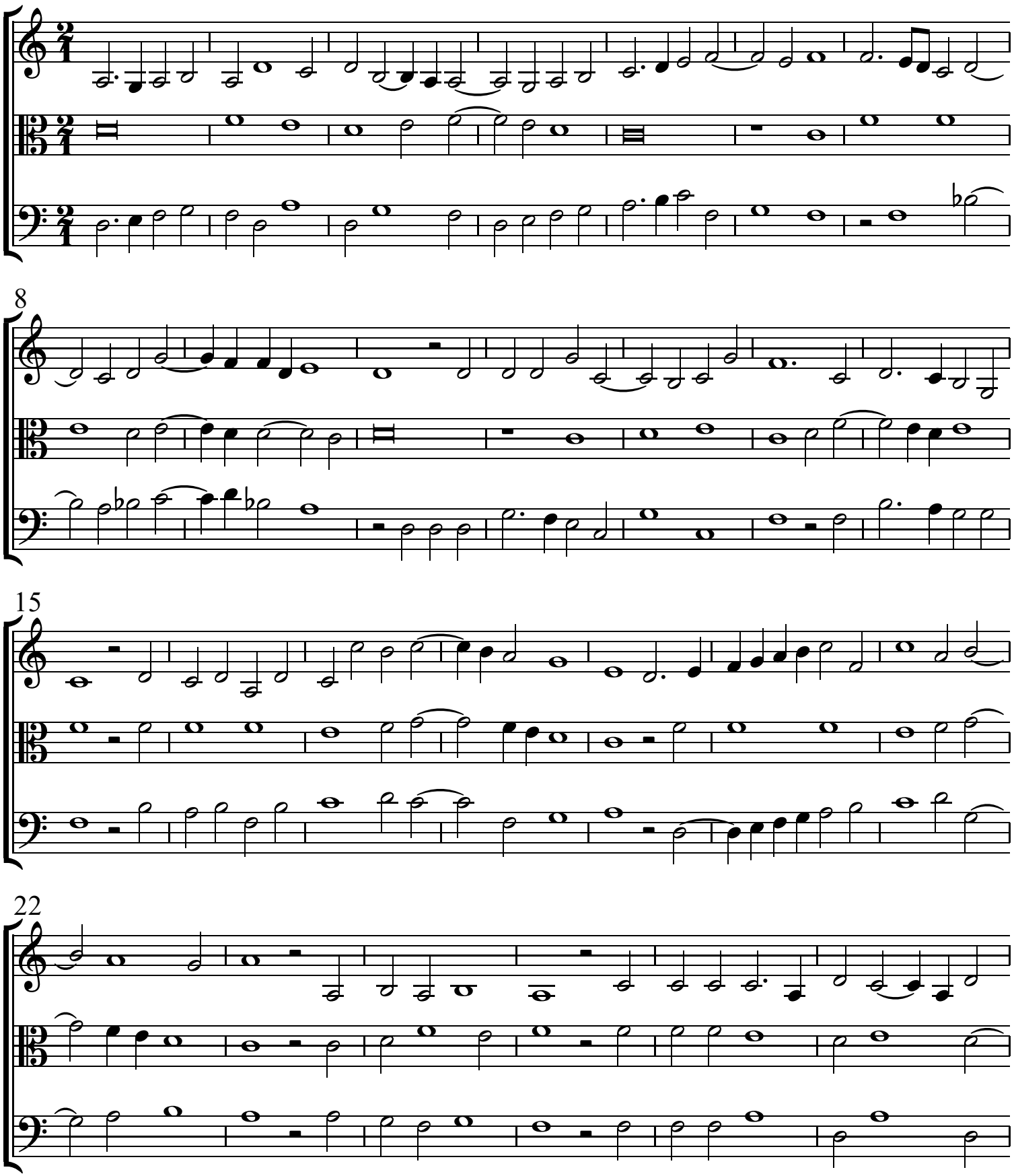
57. Wer alle schrifft durch M. gemacht

Thomas Sporer (c.1490-1534)



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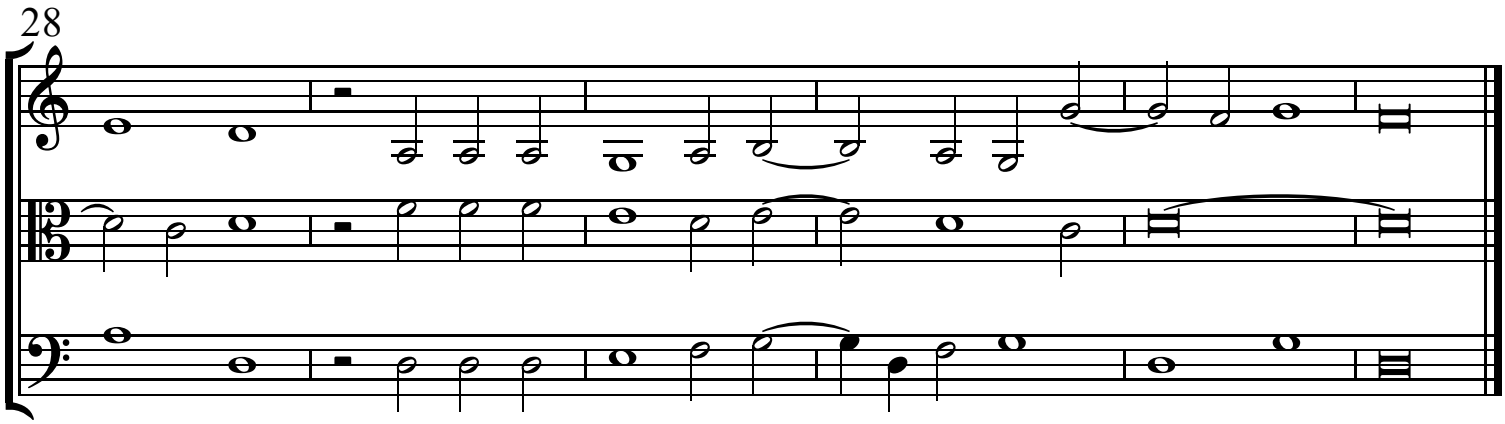
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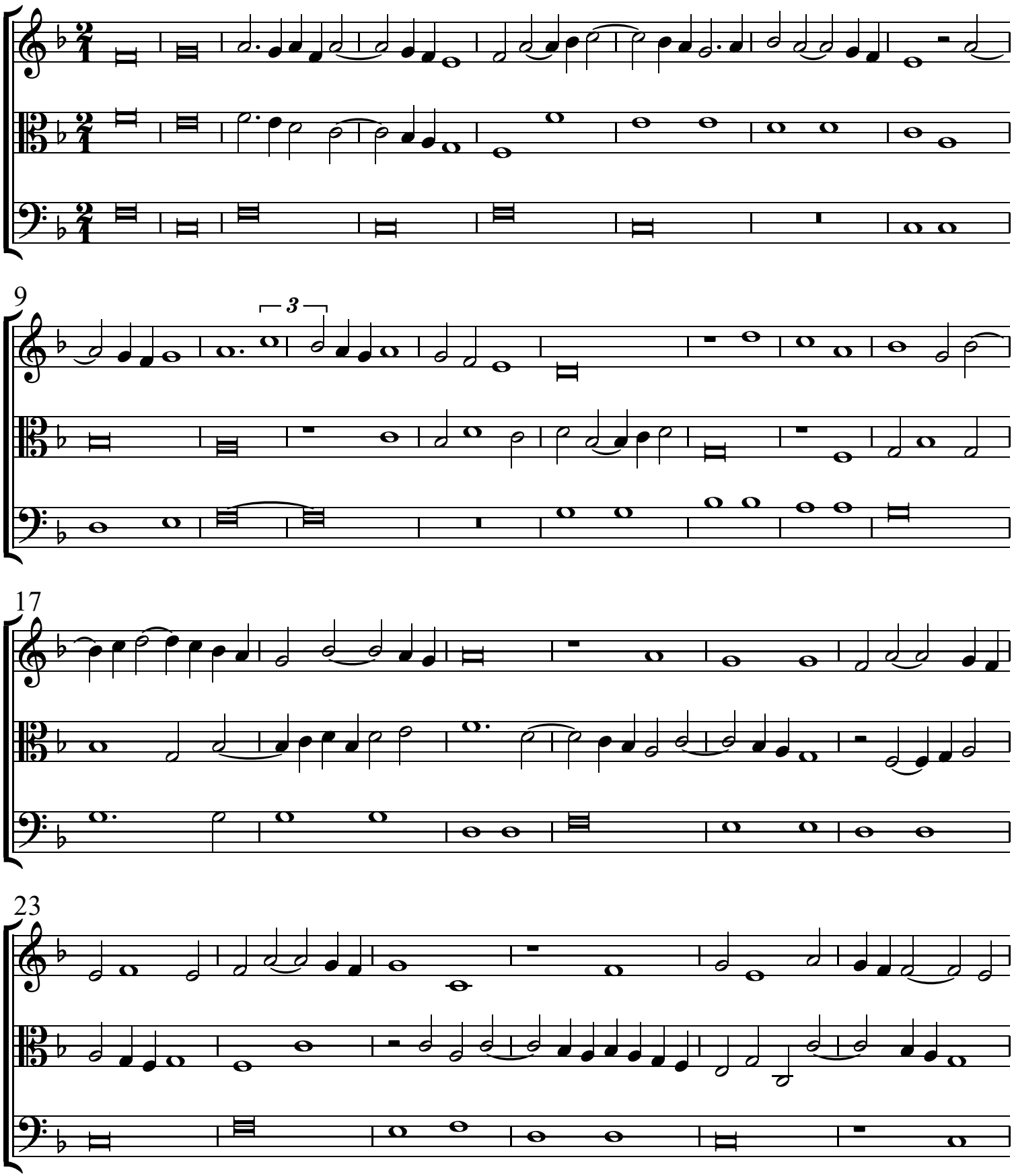
58. Greyner zanner eifrer

Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537)



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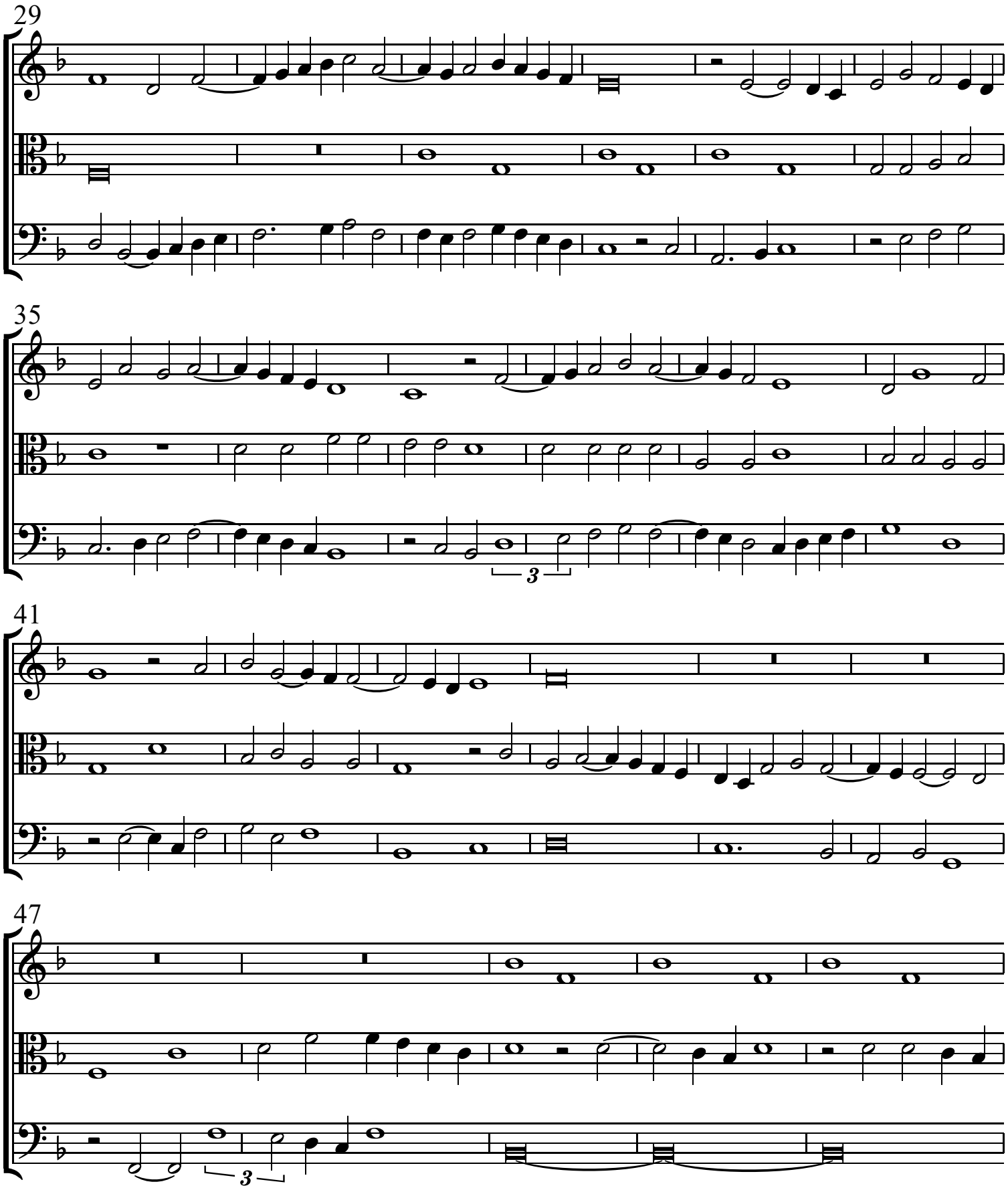
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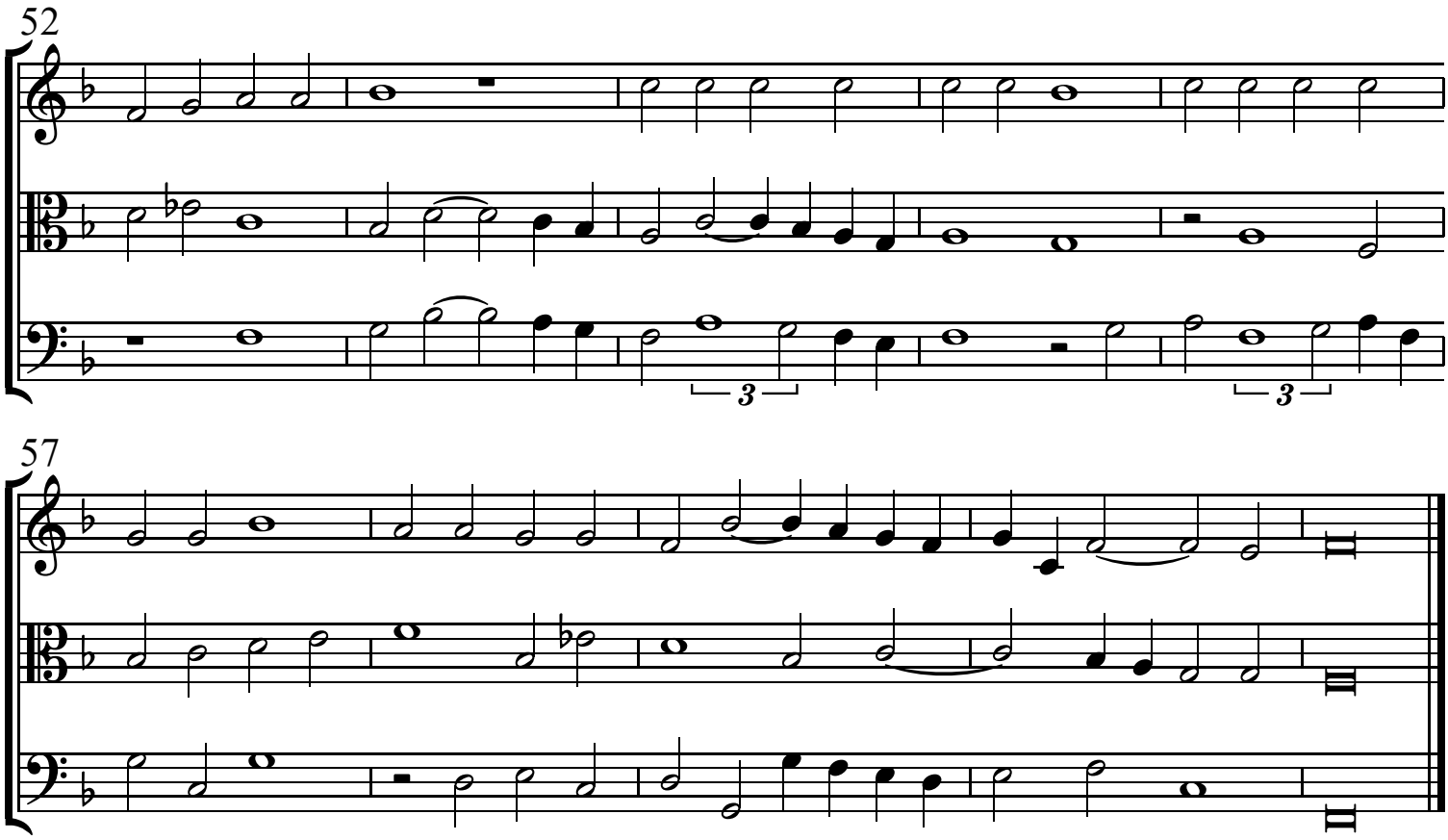
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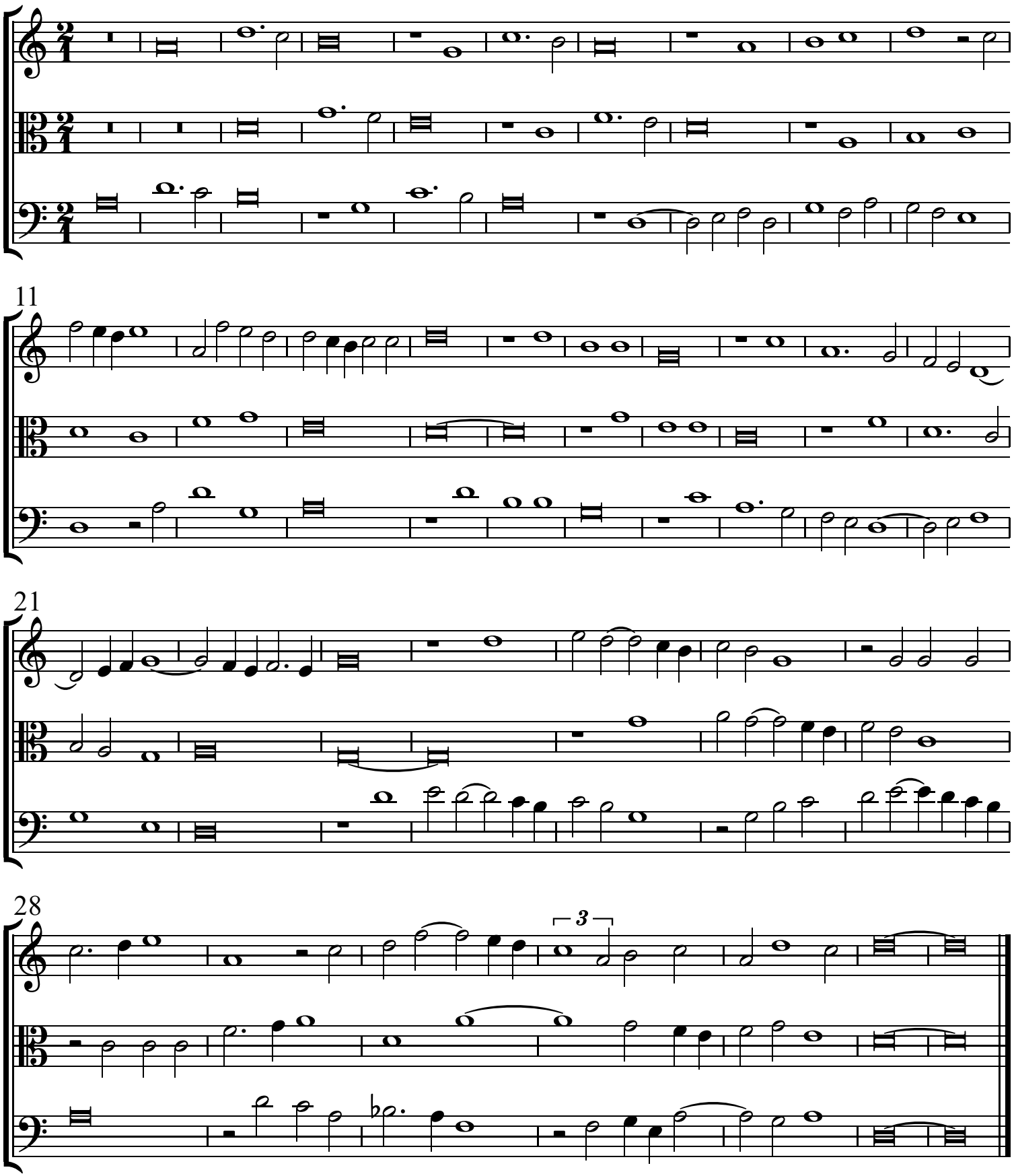
57

59. Hertz mut und gir

Paul Hofhaimer (1459-1537)



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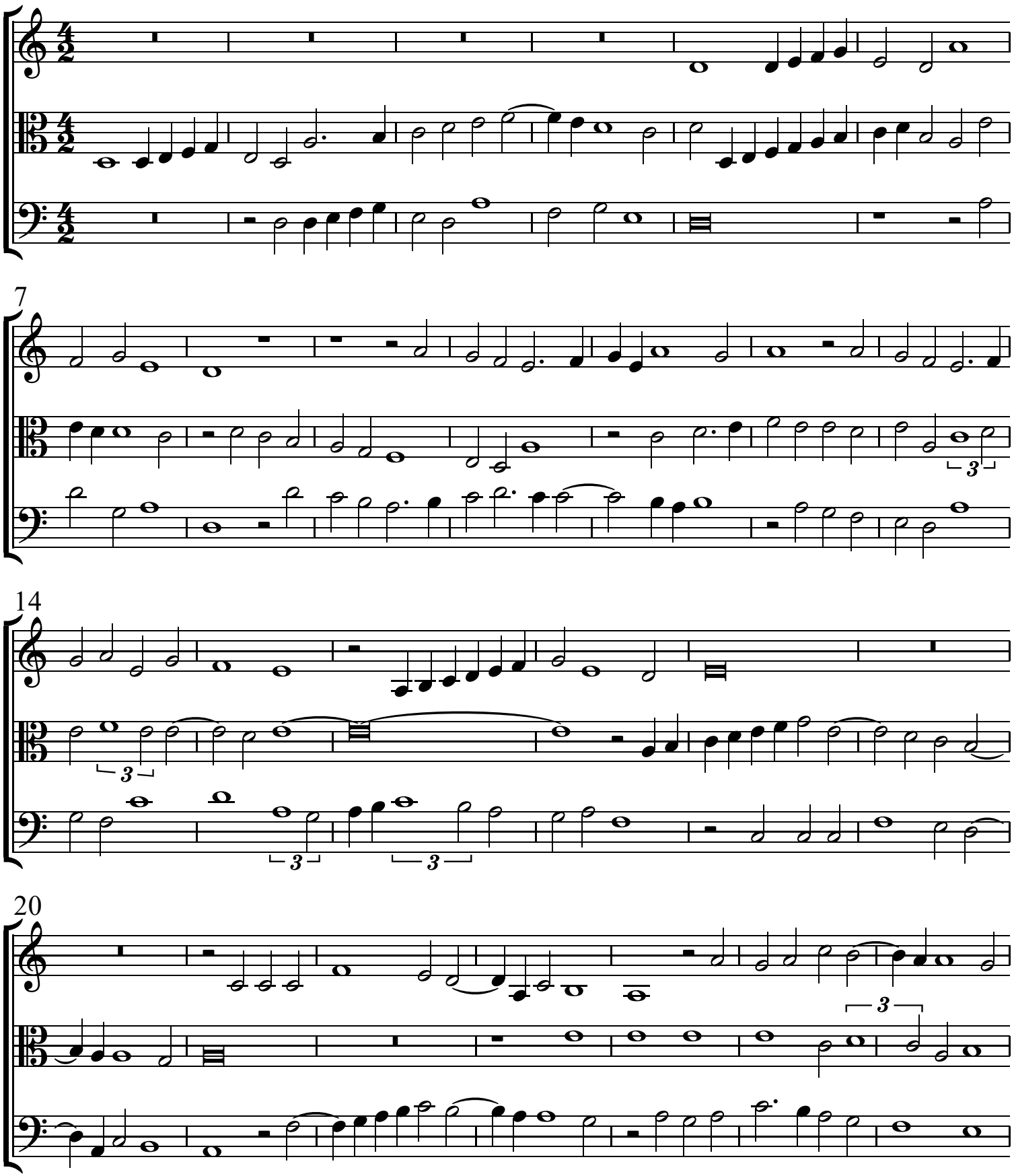
60. Min syn trueren duchten

Anonymous



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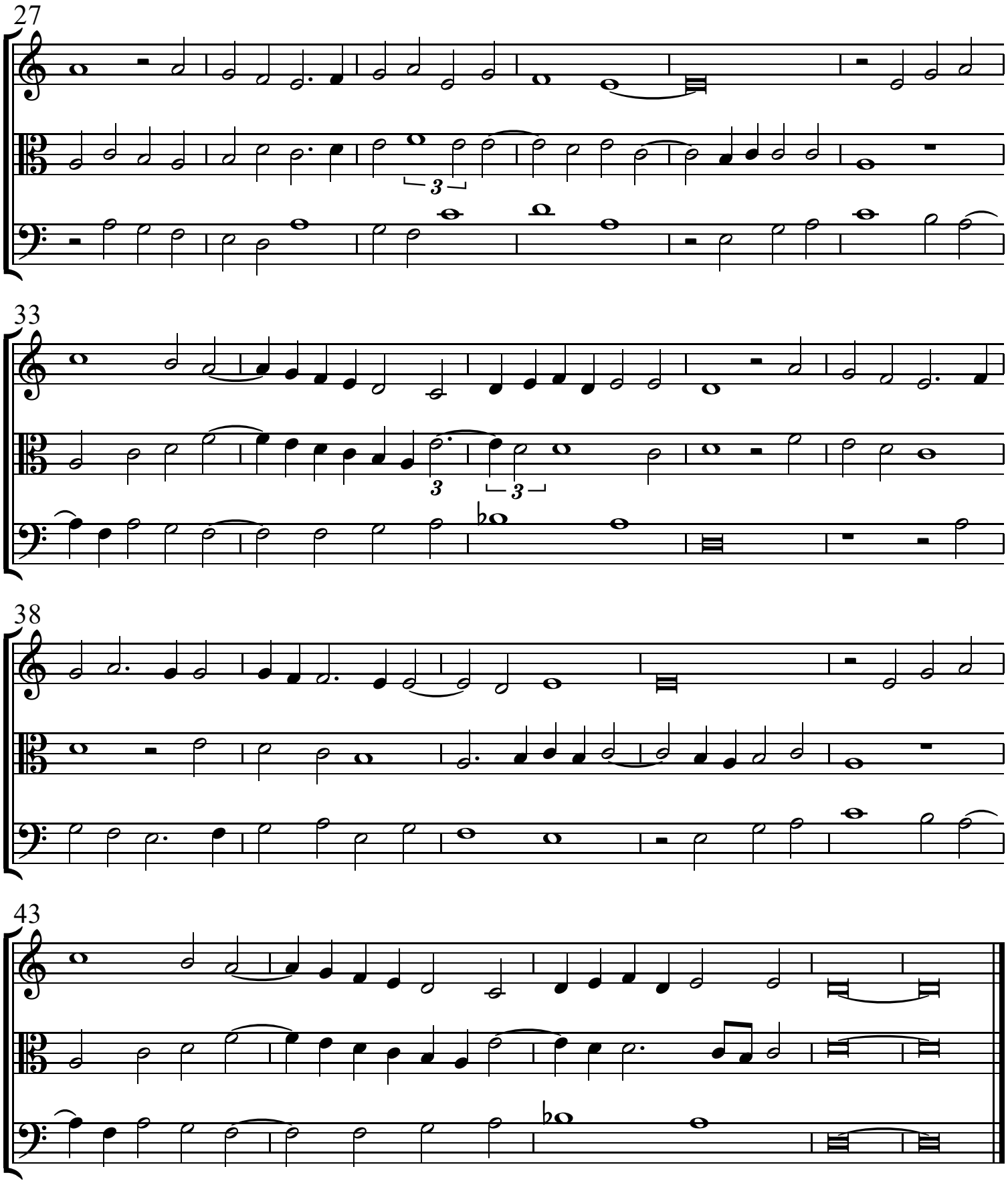
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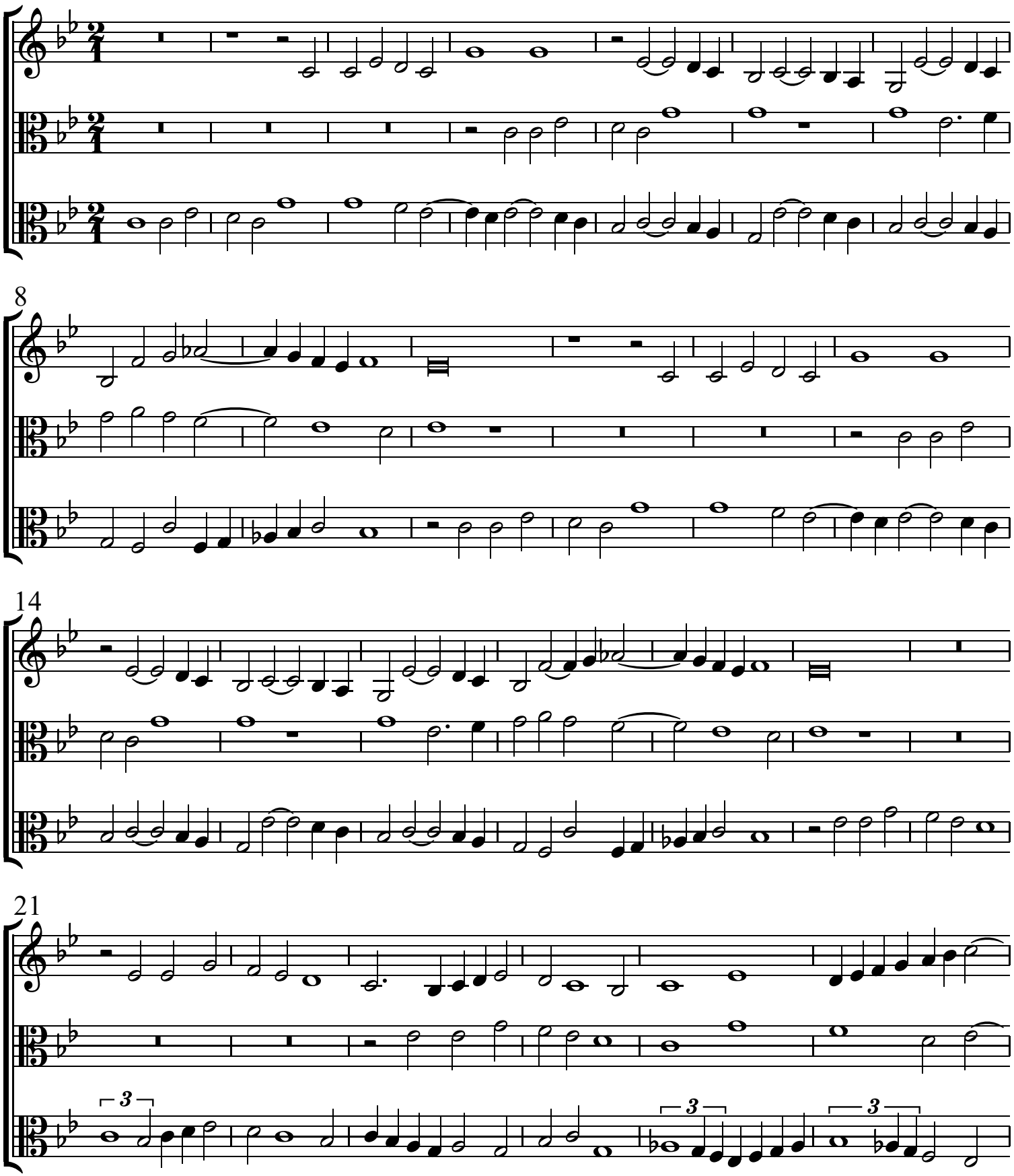
61. Rick God wien sal ich clagen

Anonymous



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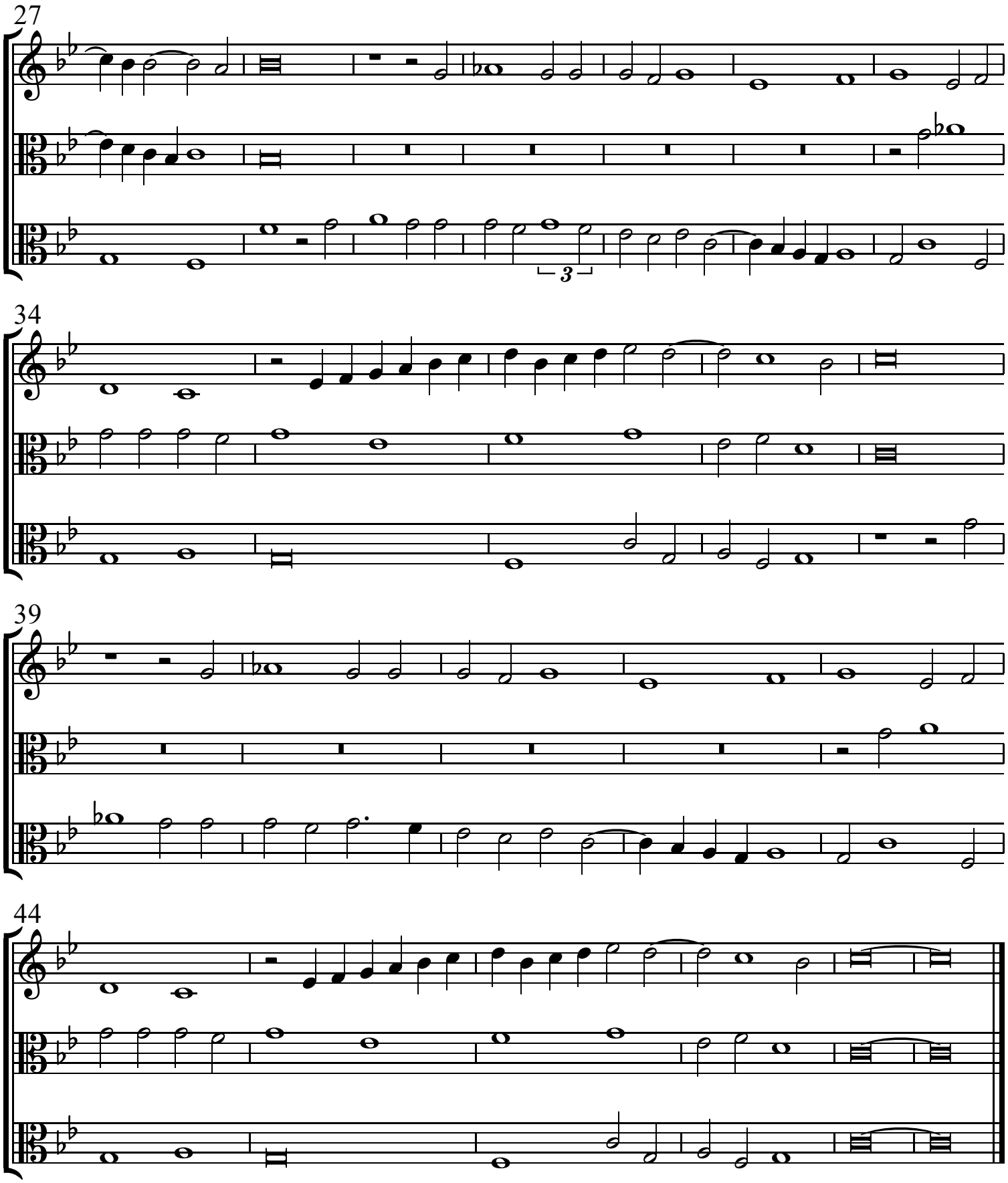
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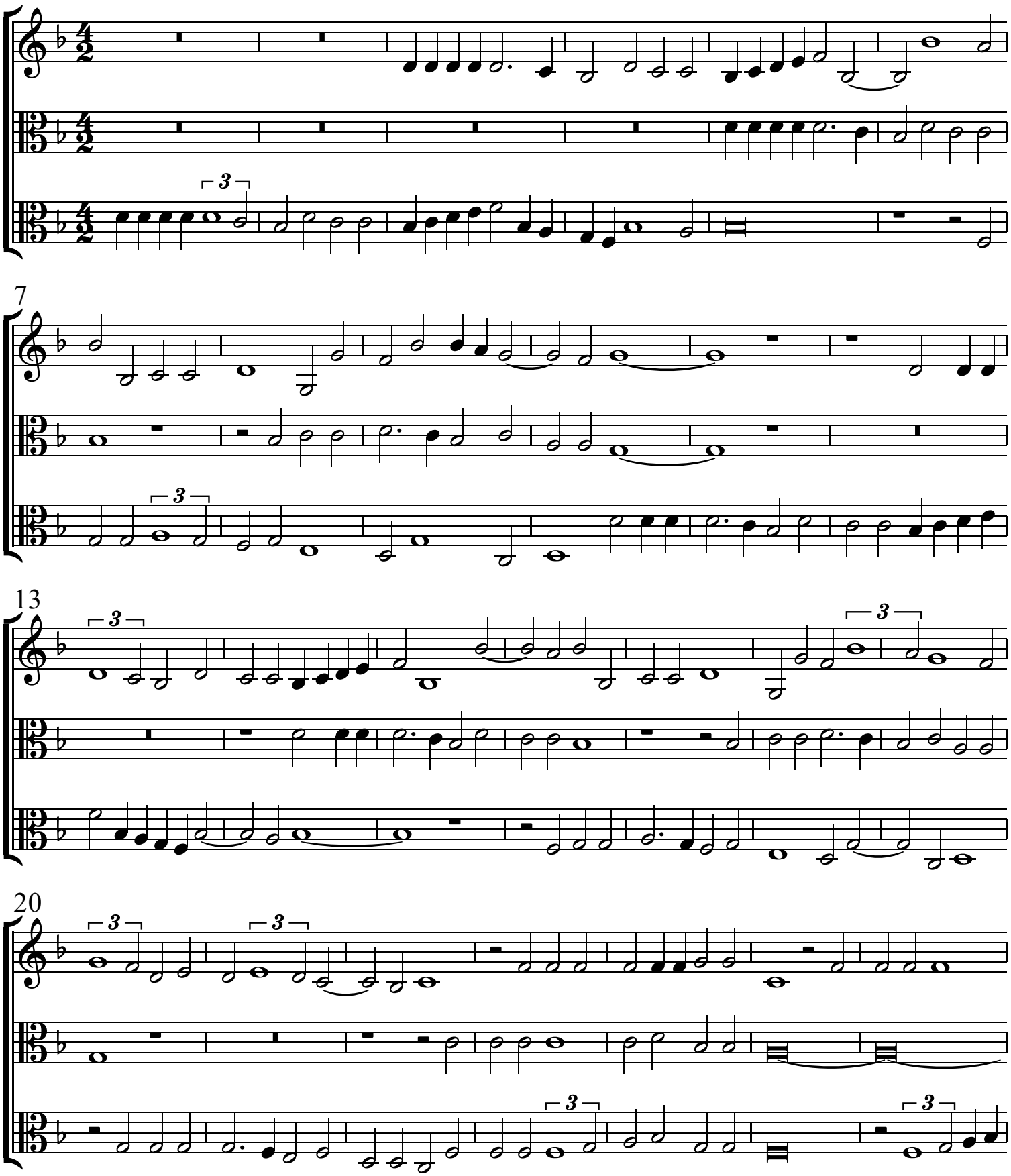
62. Alle myn gepeis

Anonymous



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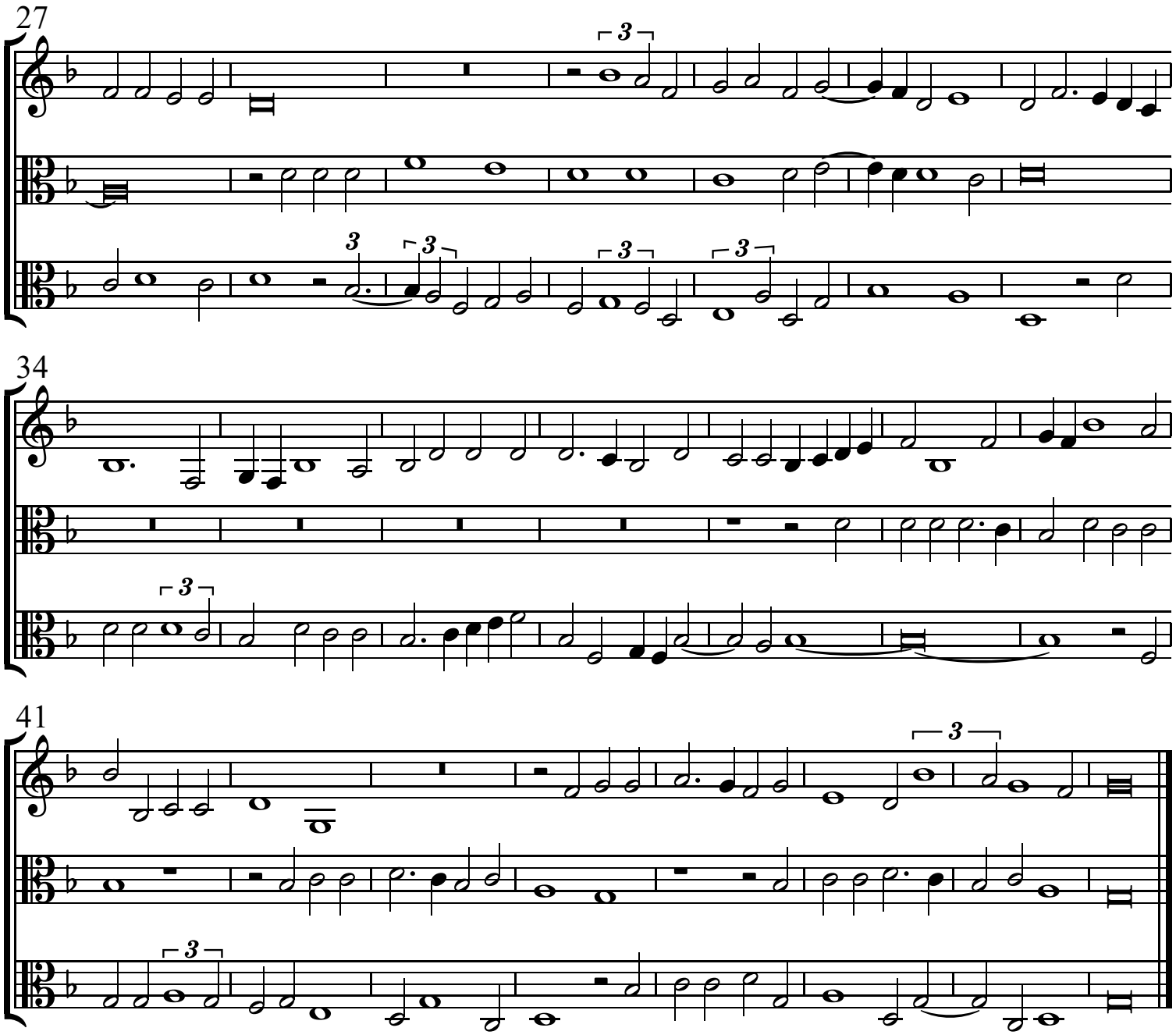
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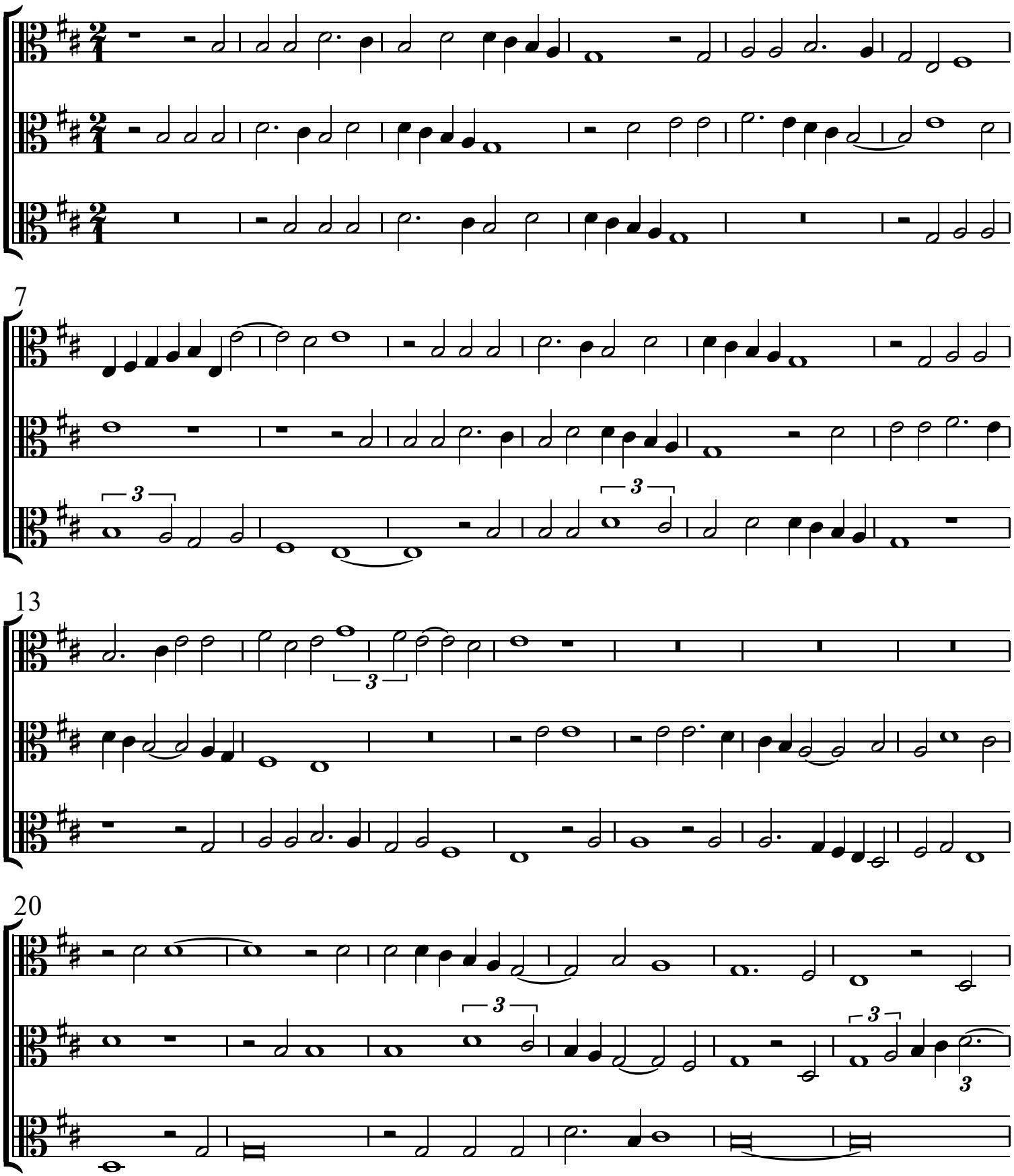
63. Troest my schoen

Anonymous



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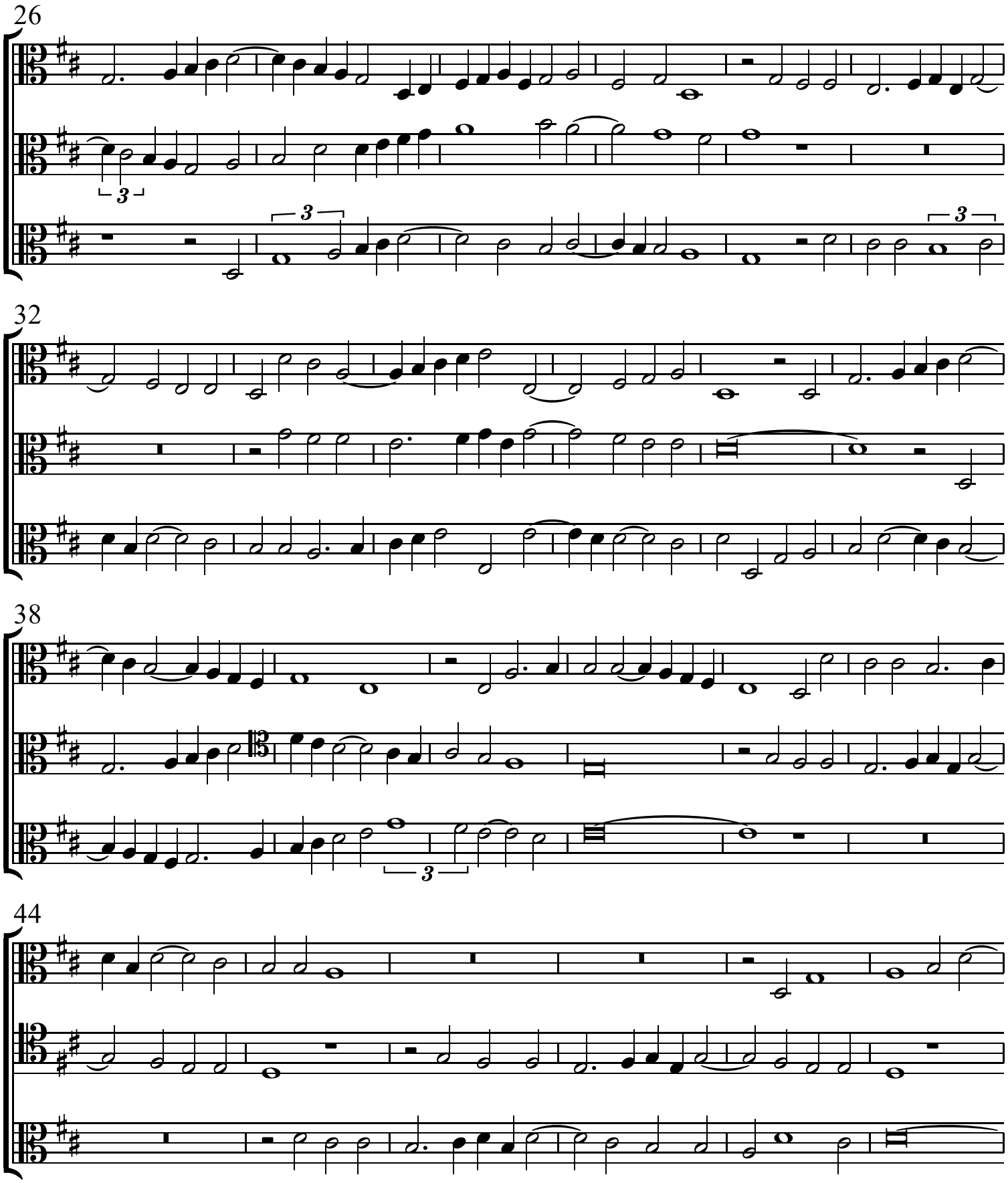
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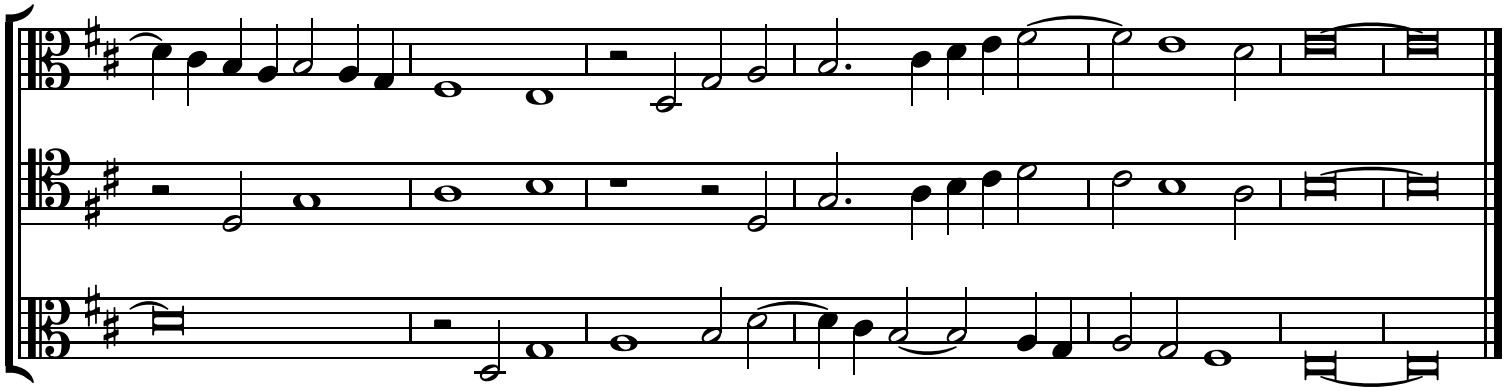
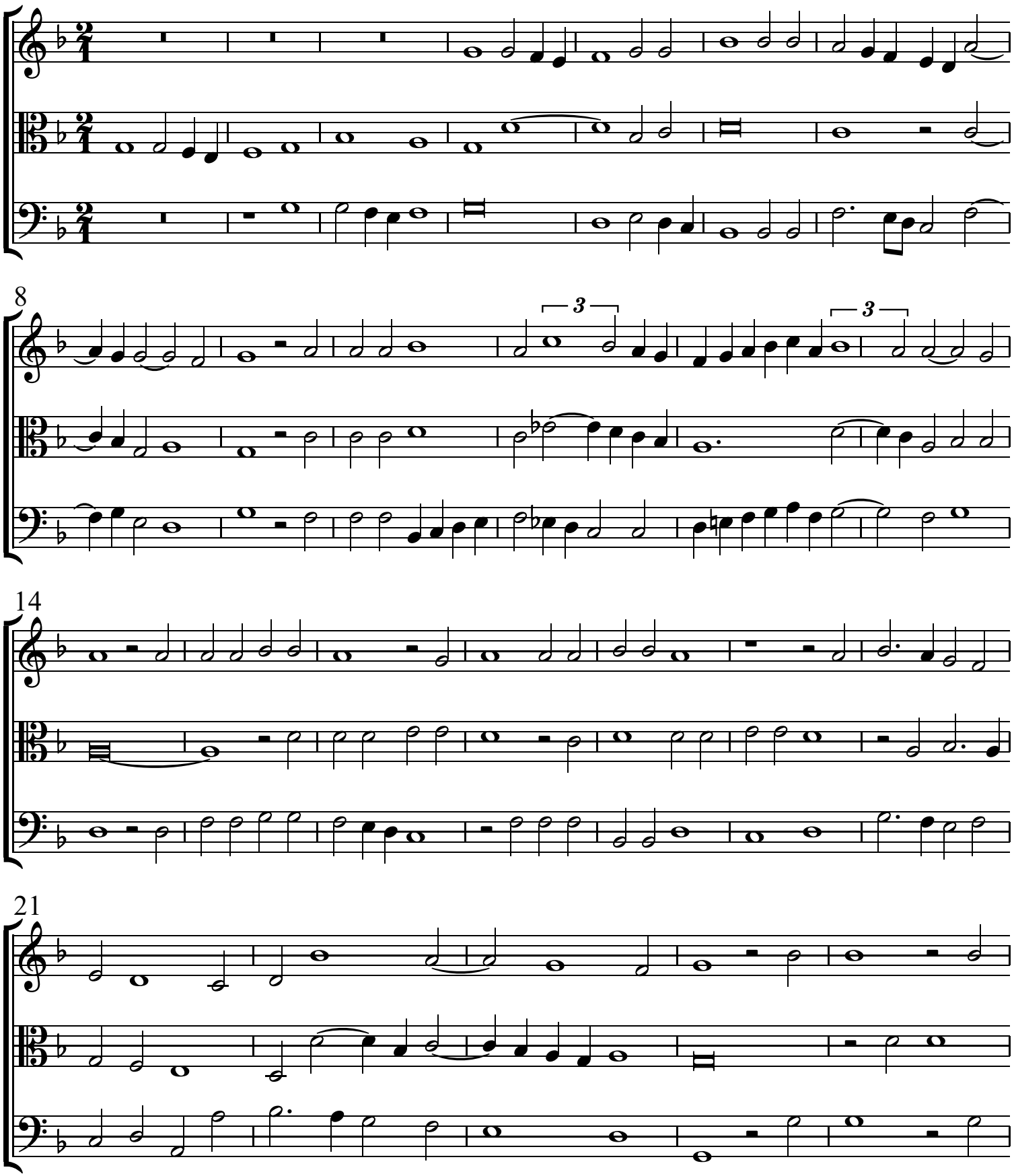


64. Ic trure en ic ben van minnen

Anonymous



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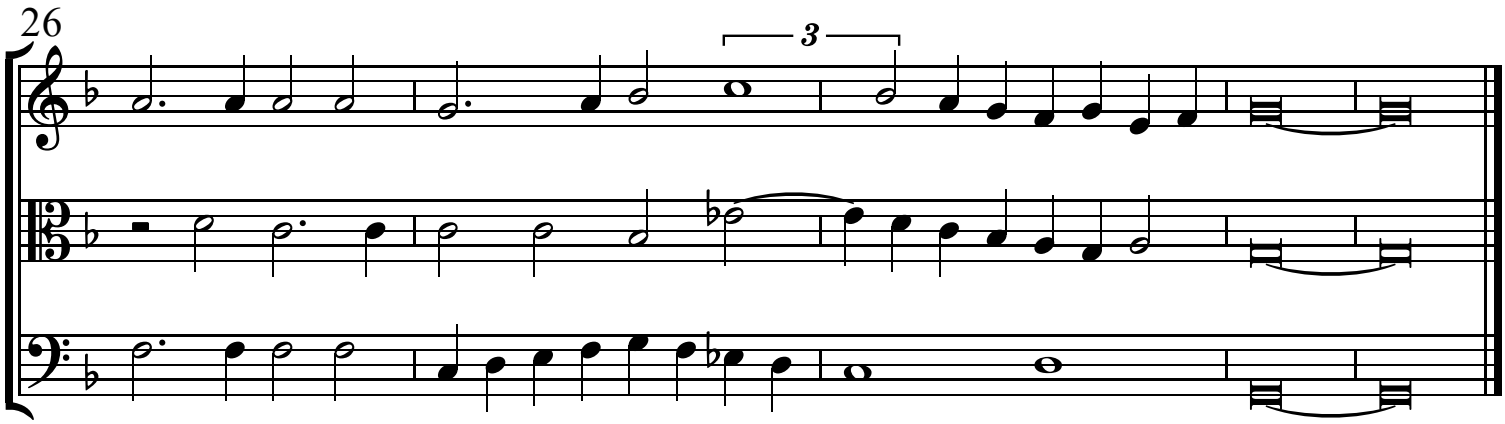
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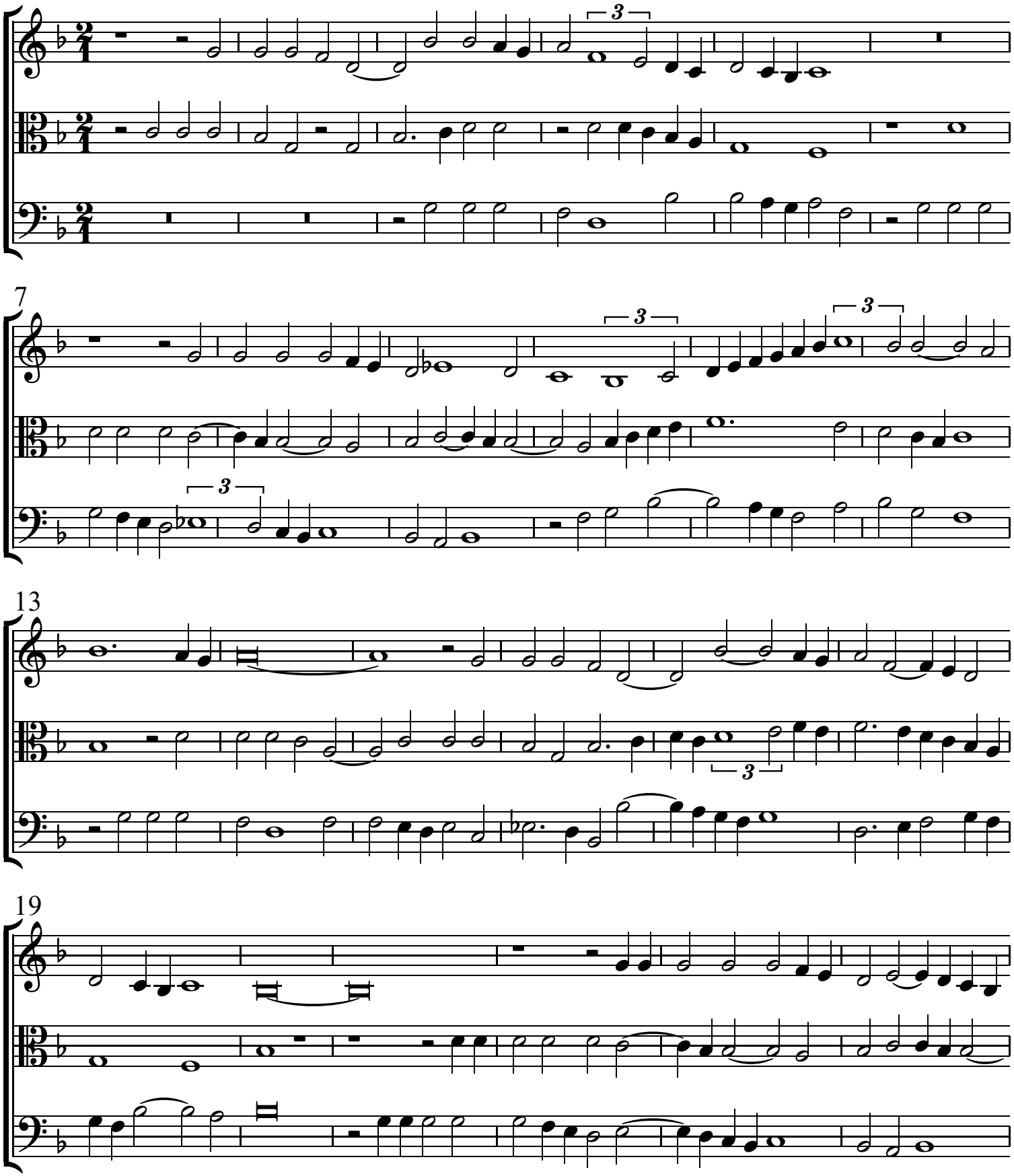
65. Al myn vies sinnen

Anonymous



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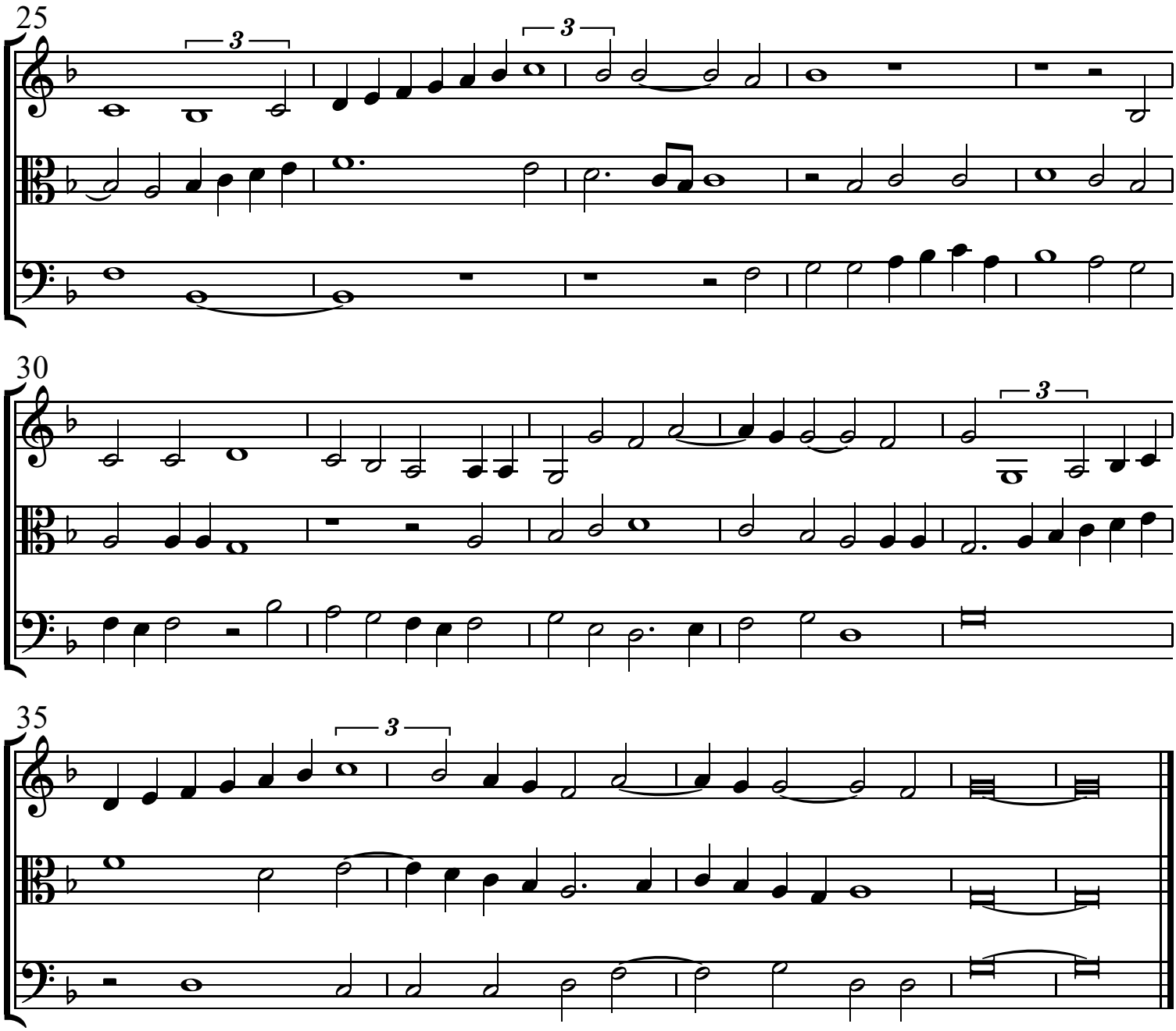
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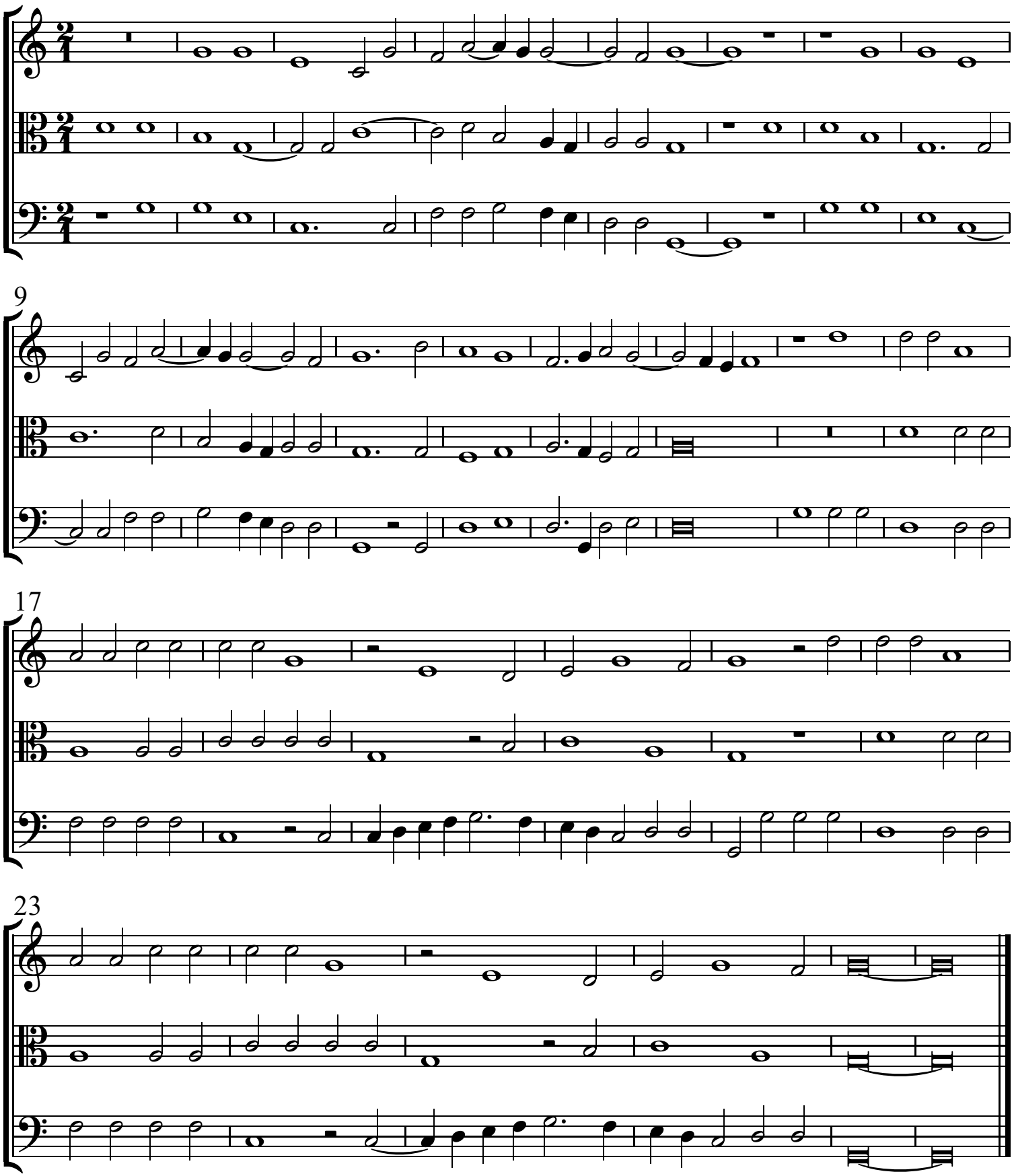
66. Gentilz gallans confreres du rasin

Anonymous



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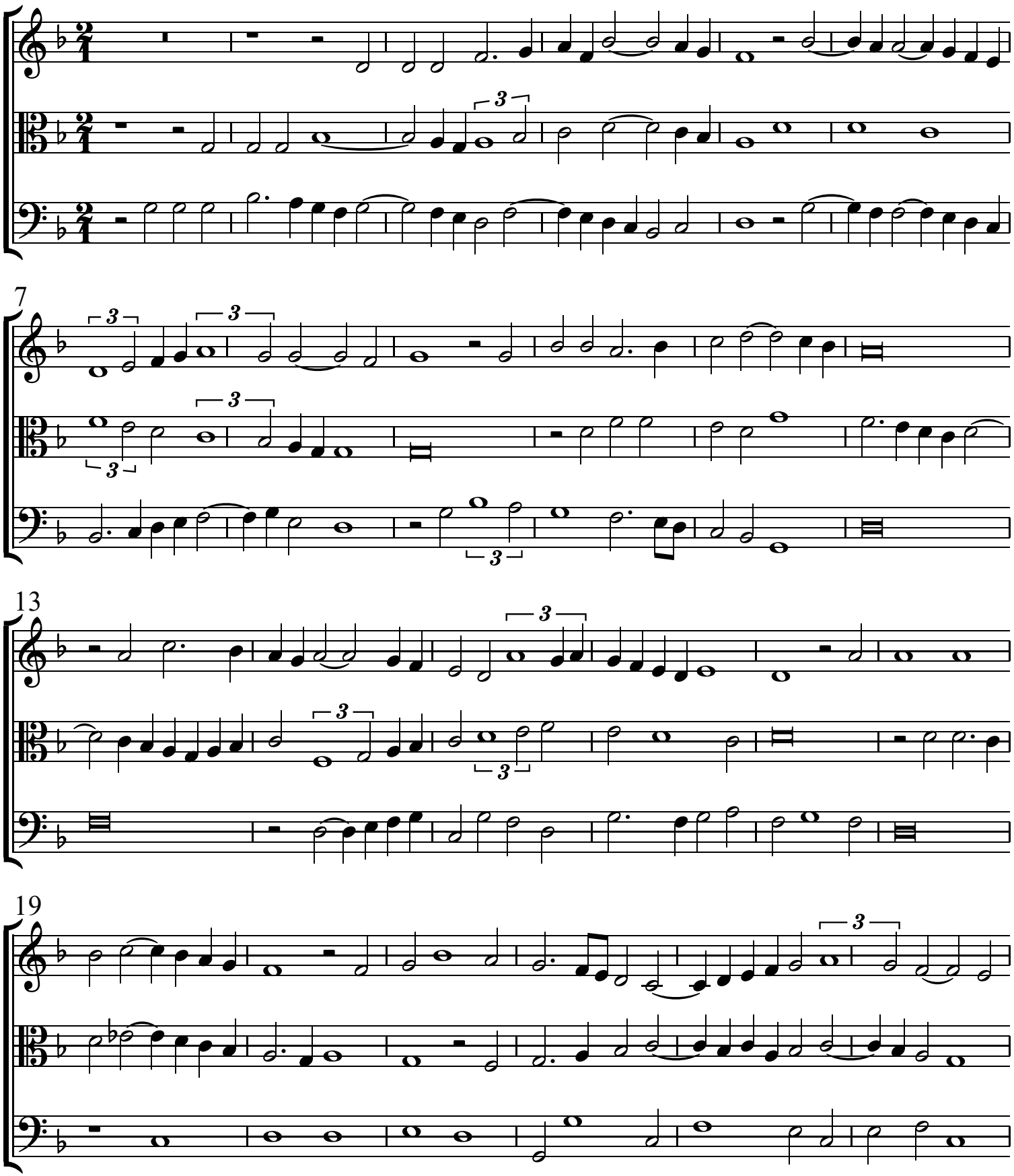
67. Tant est gentil plaisant et gracieulx

Clément Janequin (c. 1485-1558)



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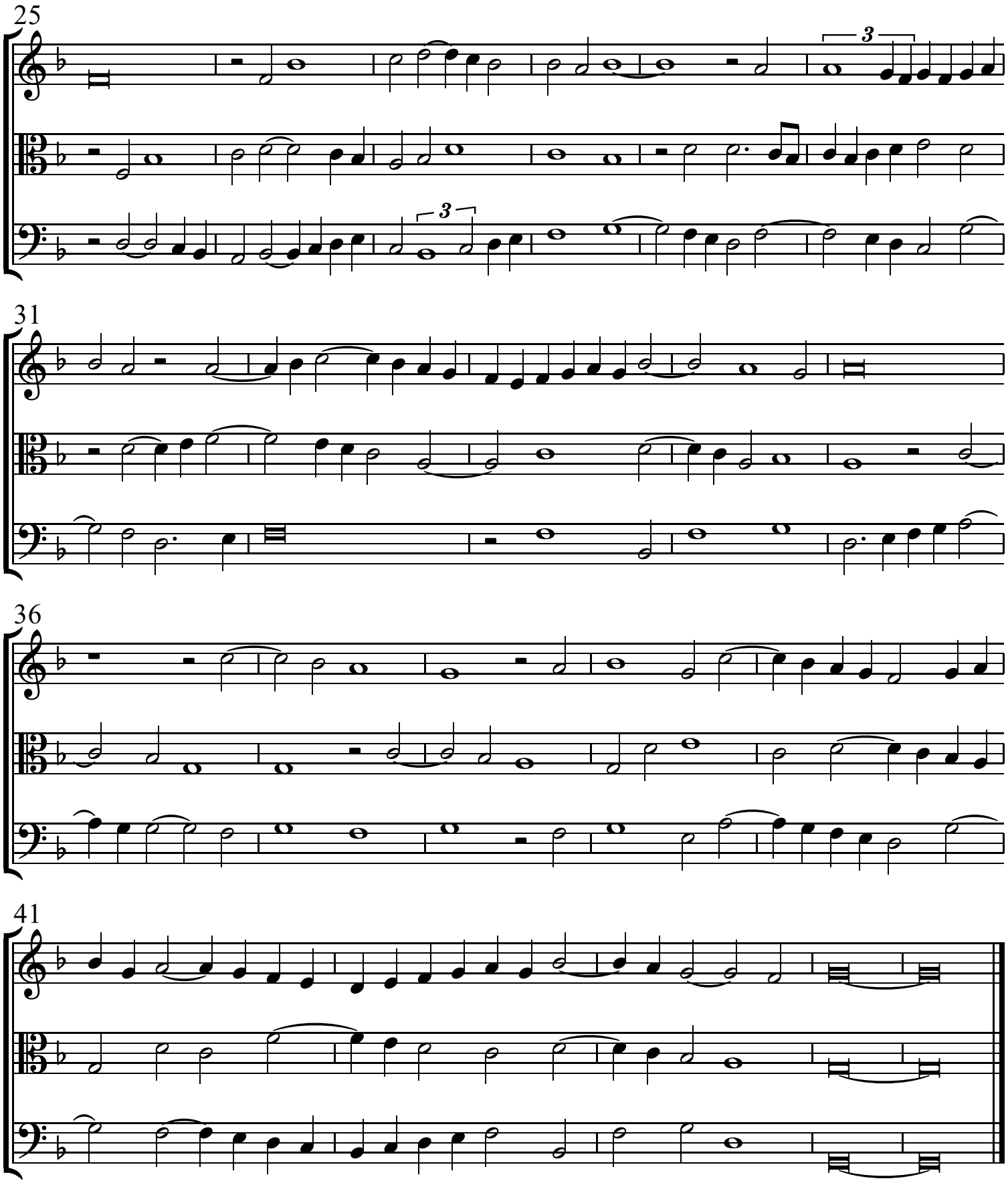
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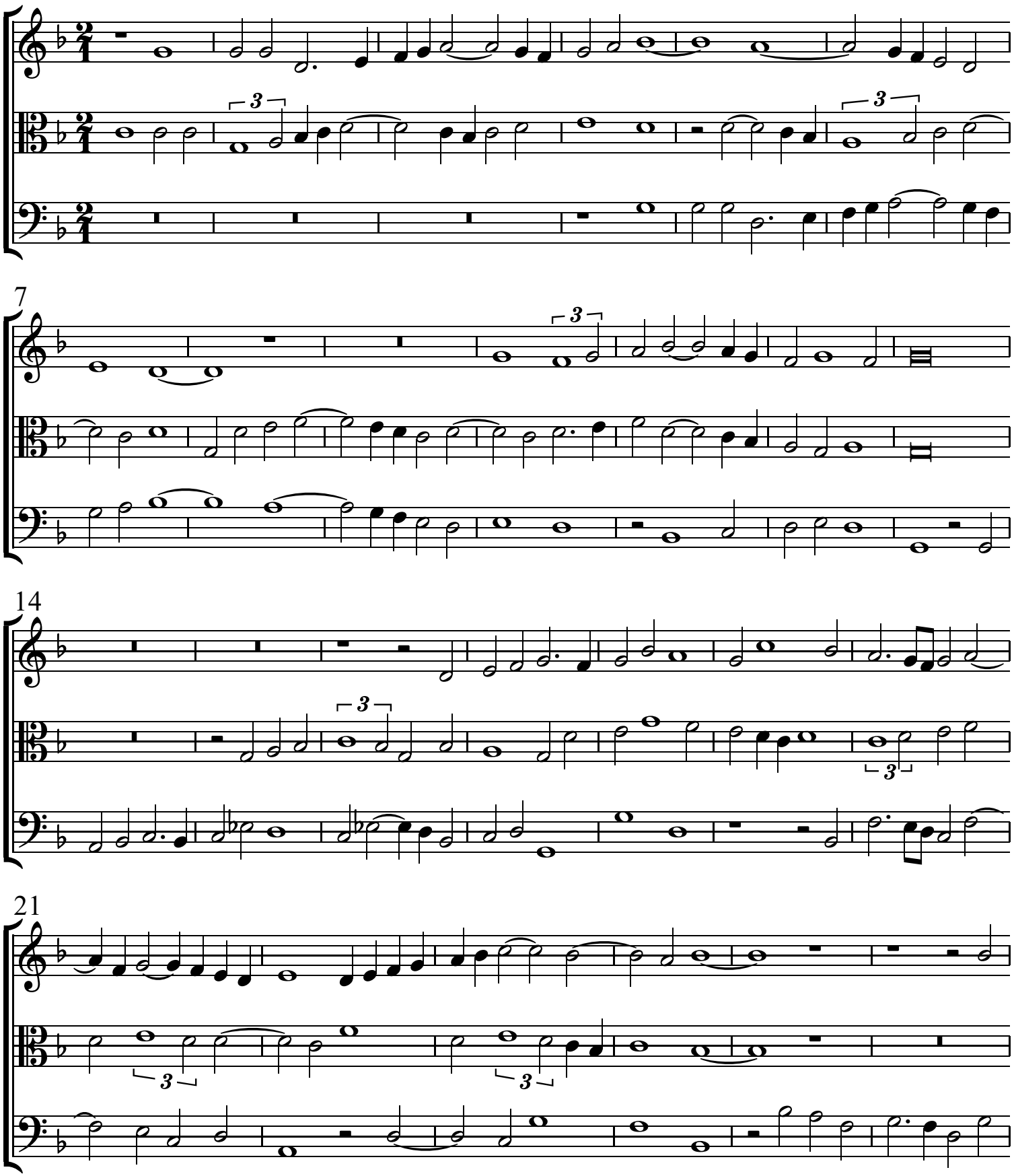
68. Content de peu en voyant

Anonymous



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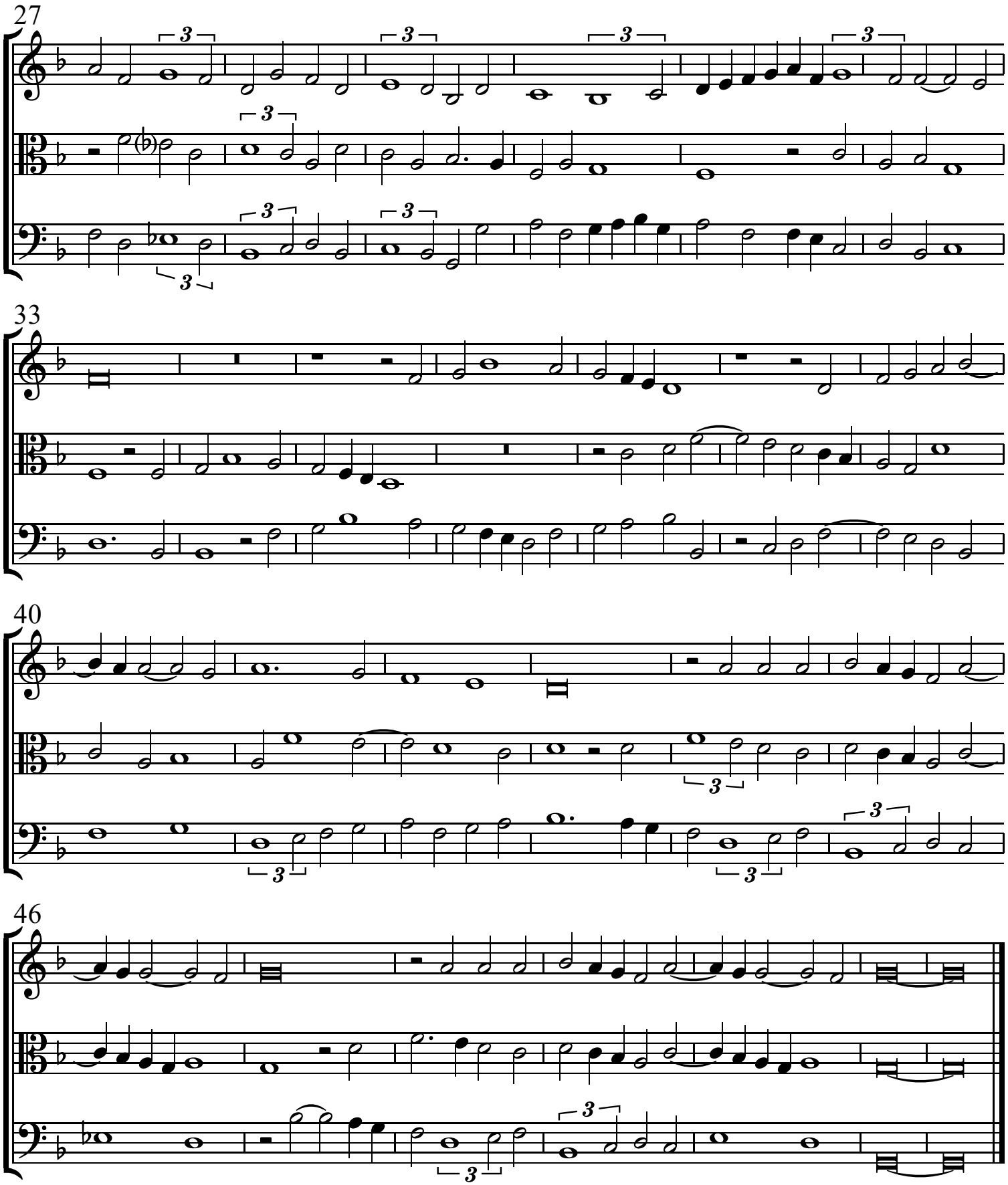
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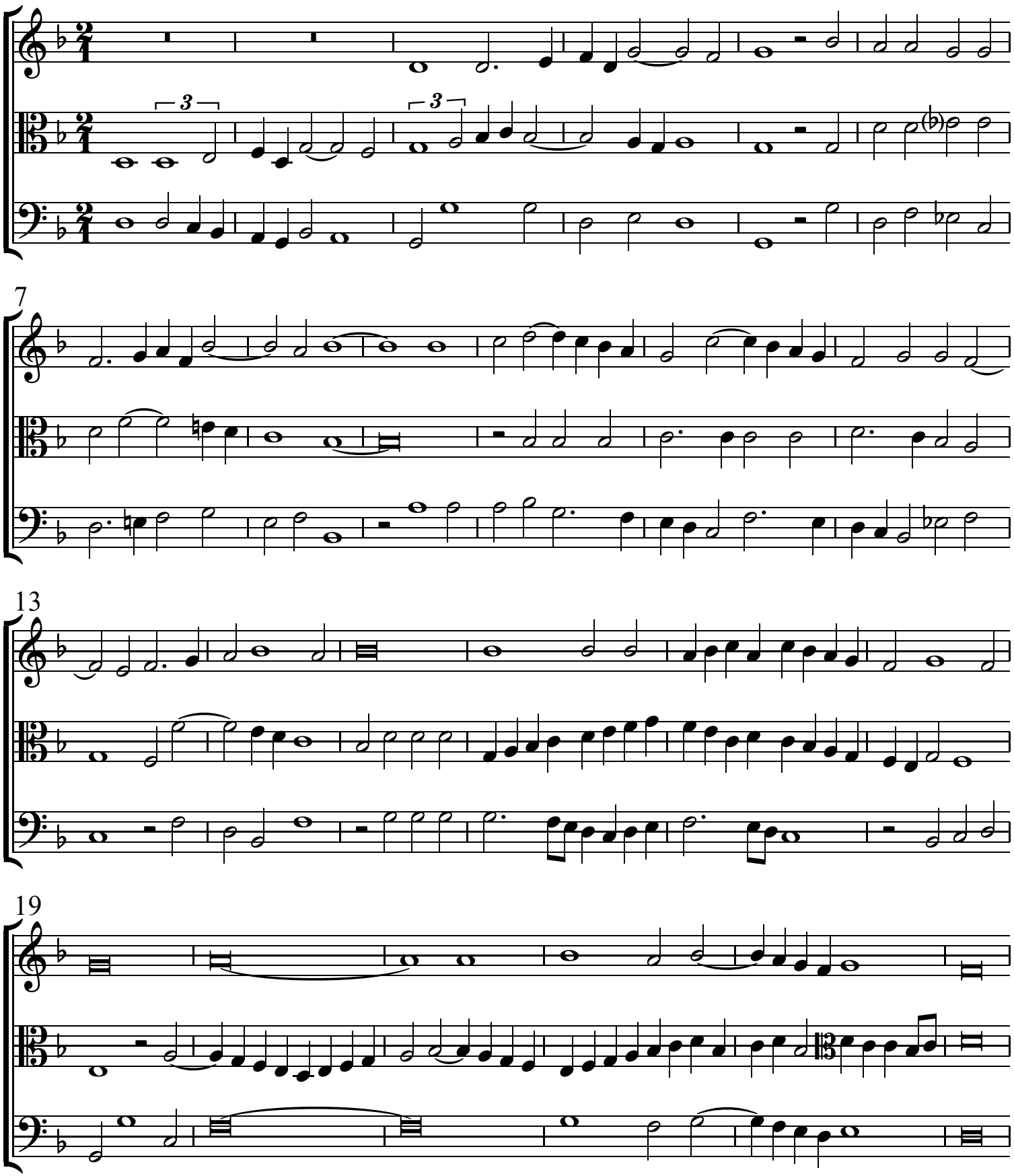
69. A tous jamais d'ung voloir

Anonymous



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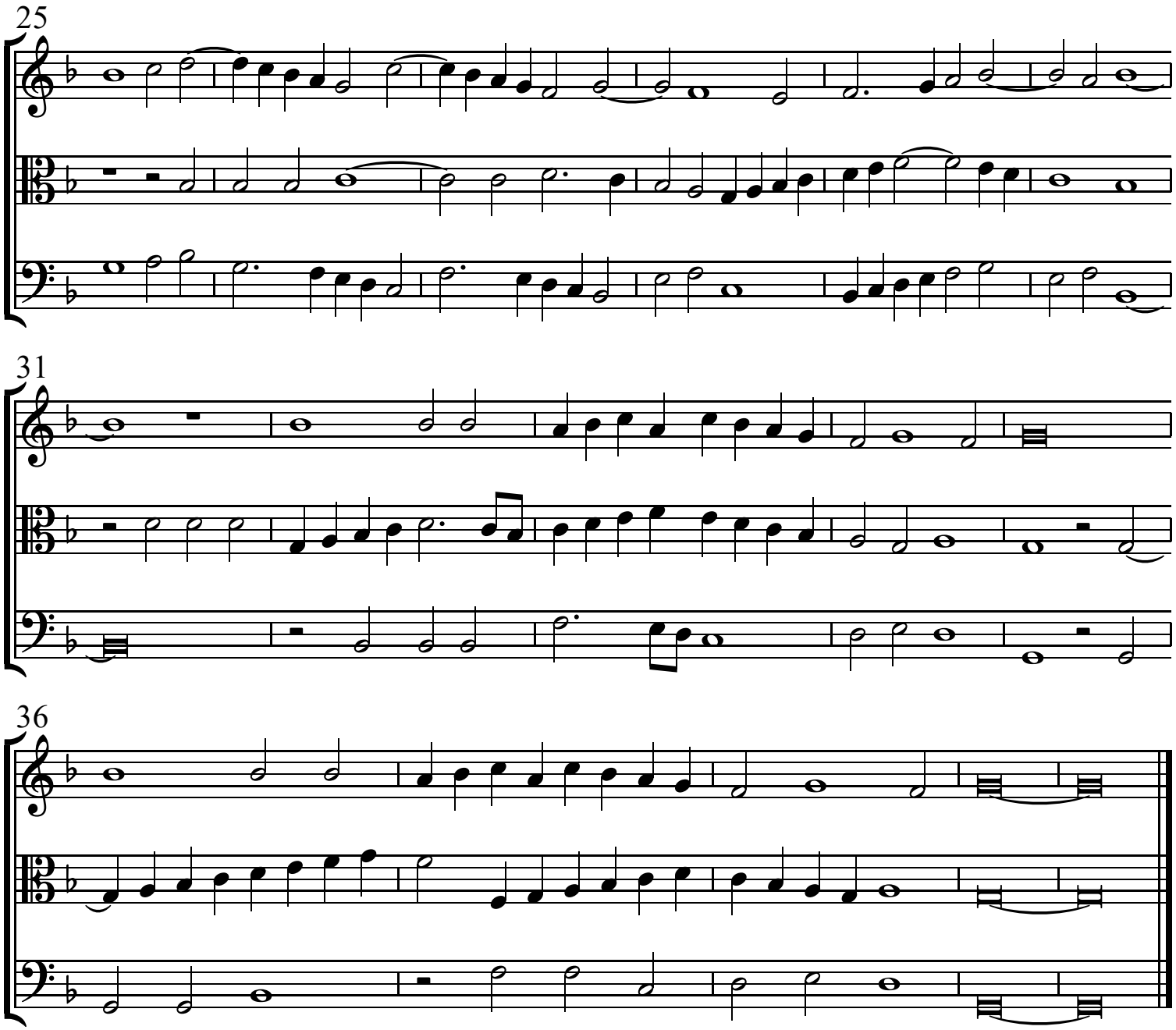
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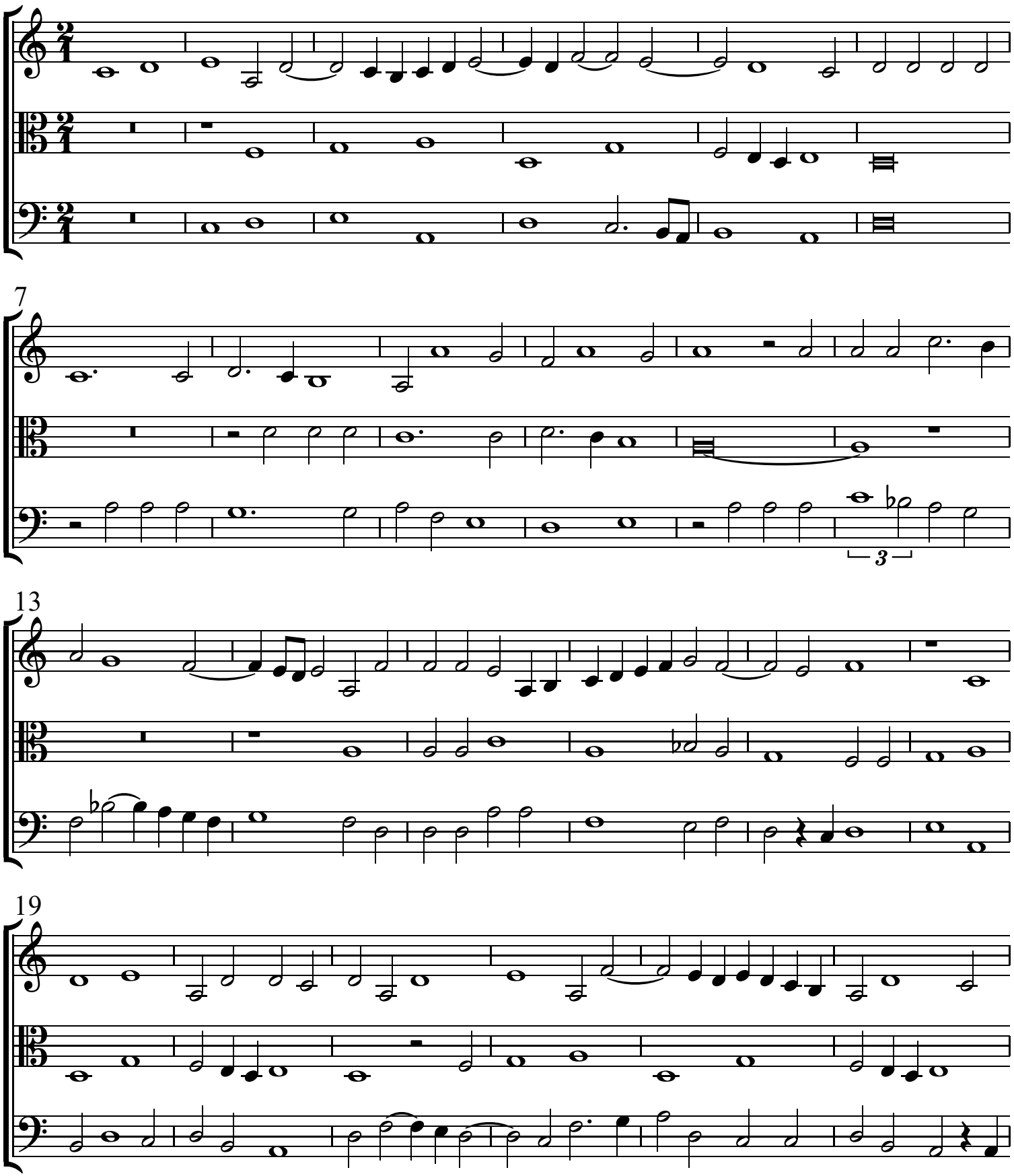
70. Mon petit cueur ne pas a moy

Anonymous



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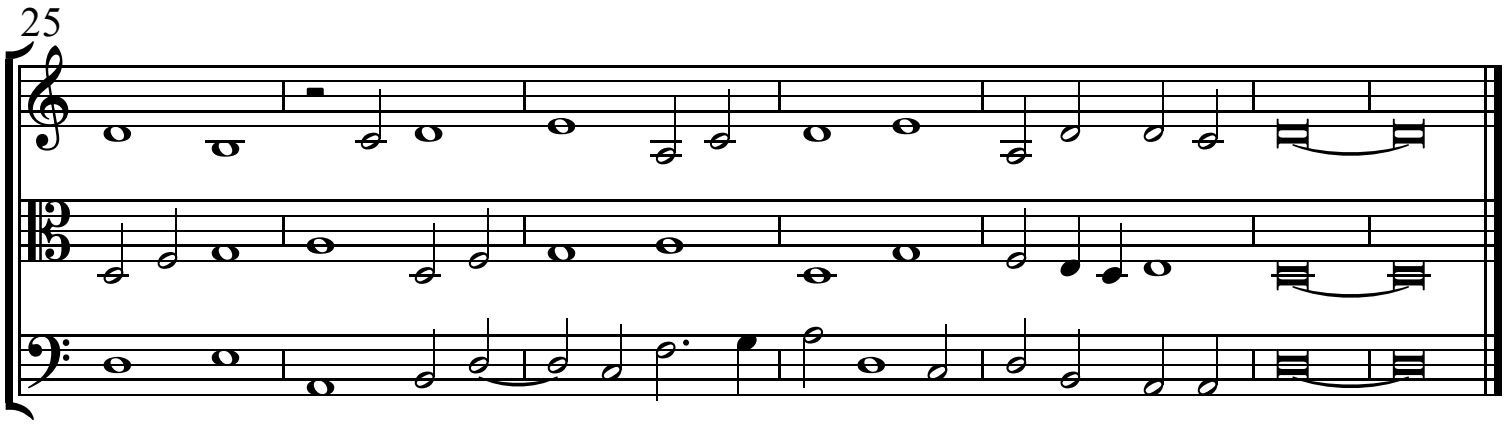
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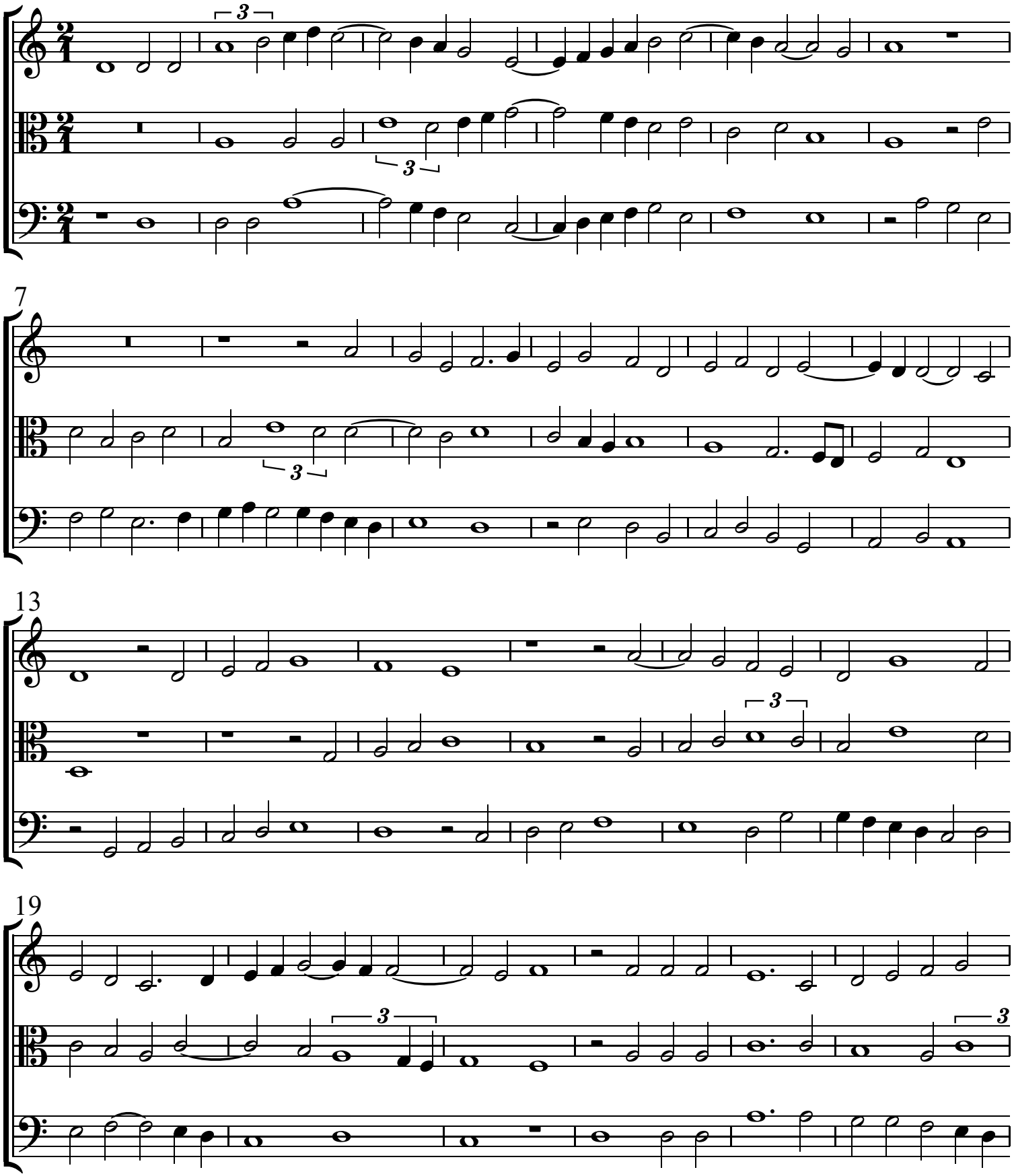
71. J’ay trop loué amour et sa noblesse

Anonymous



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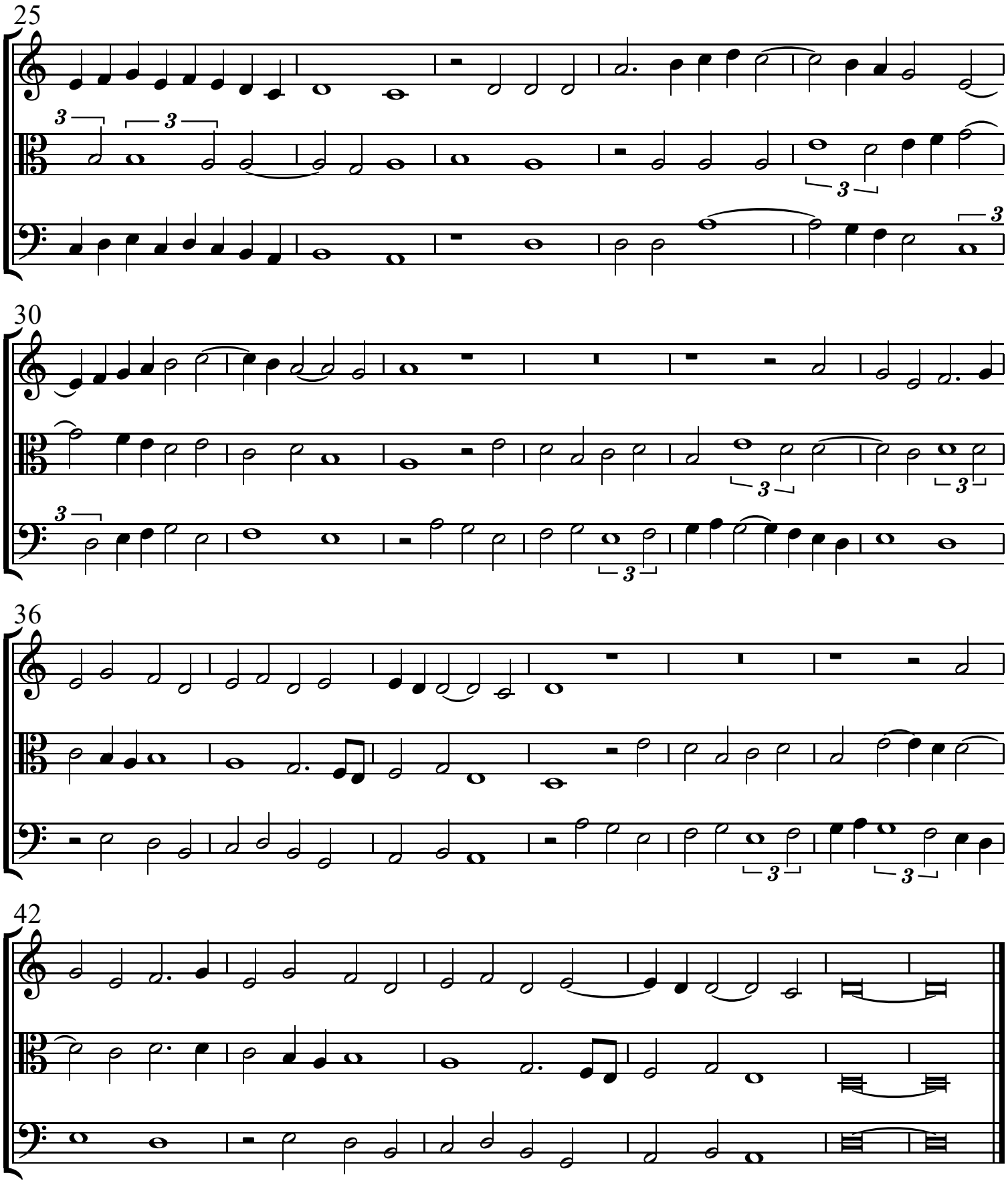
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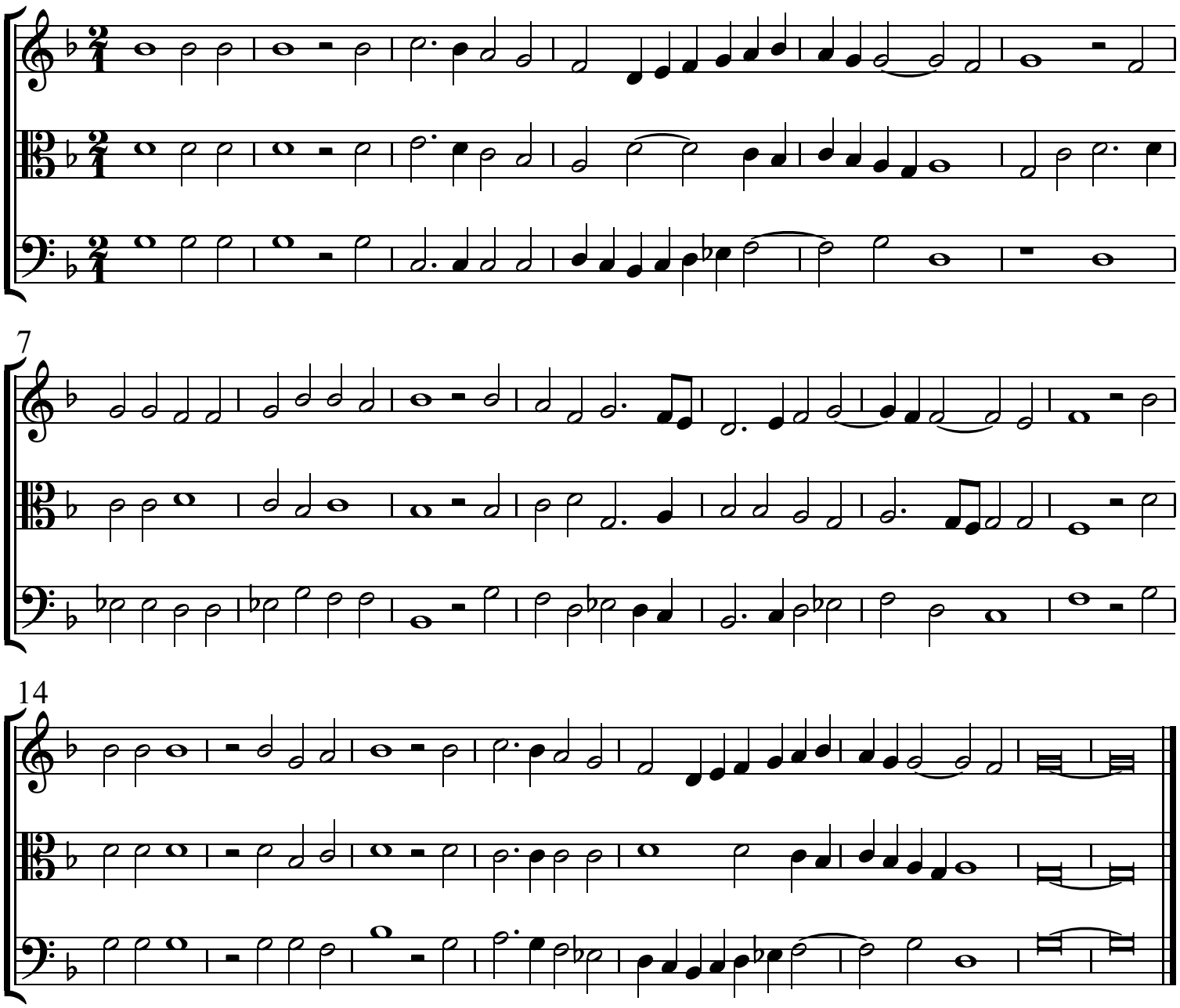
72. J’ay esperé ce qui point

Anonymous



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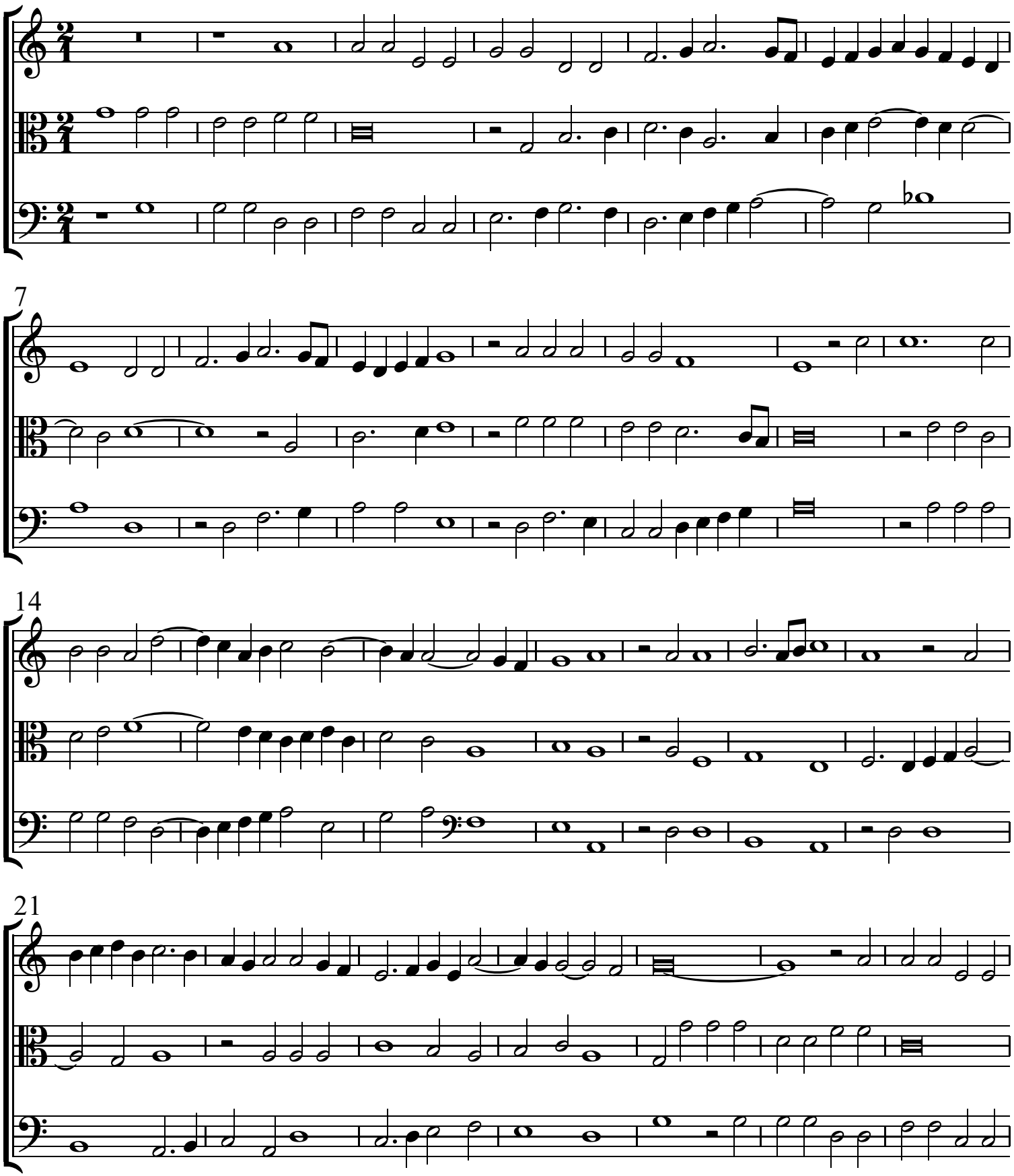
73. Si j’ay erré et fait piteuse queste

Anonymous



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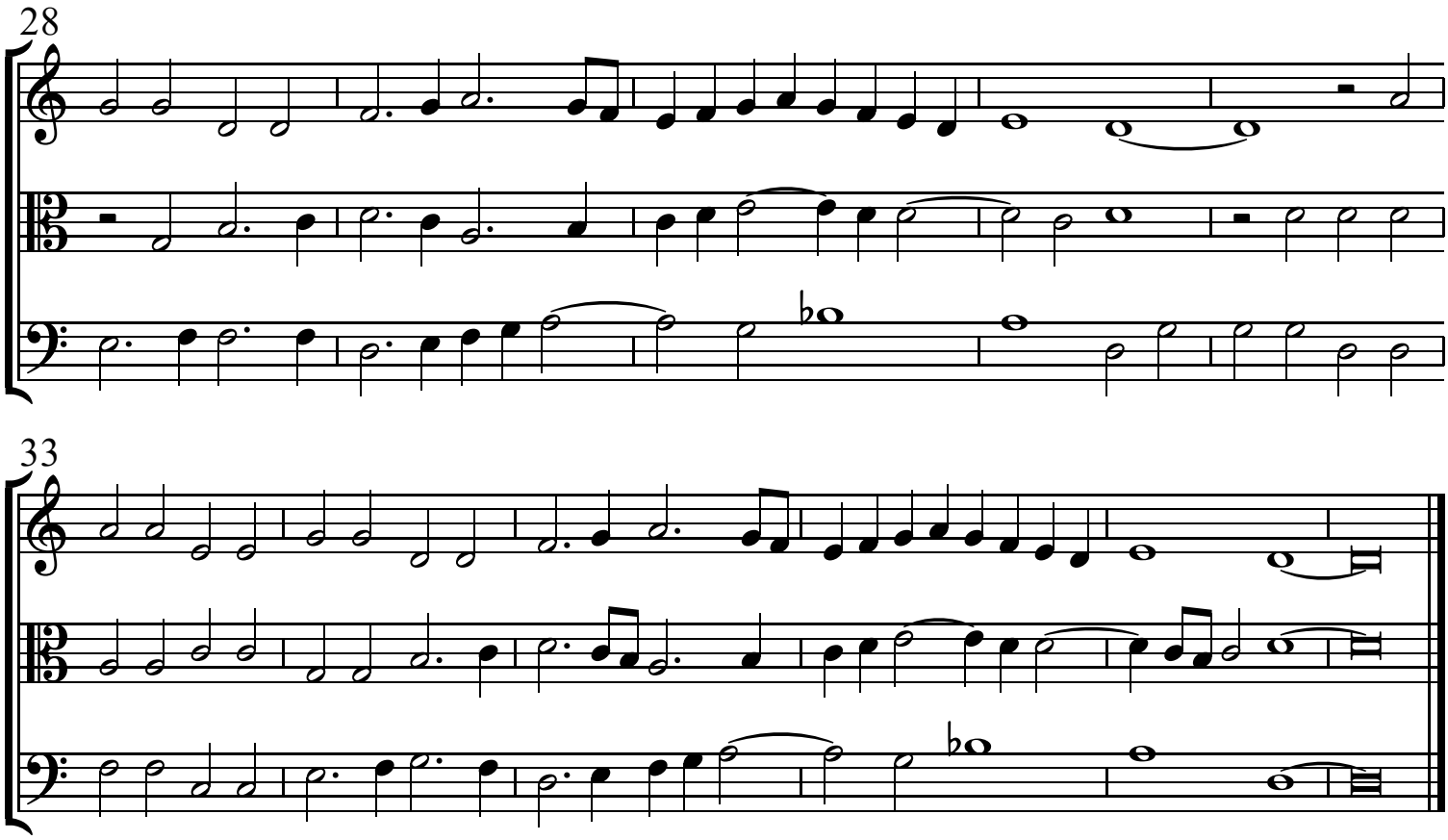
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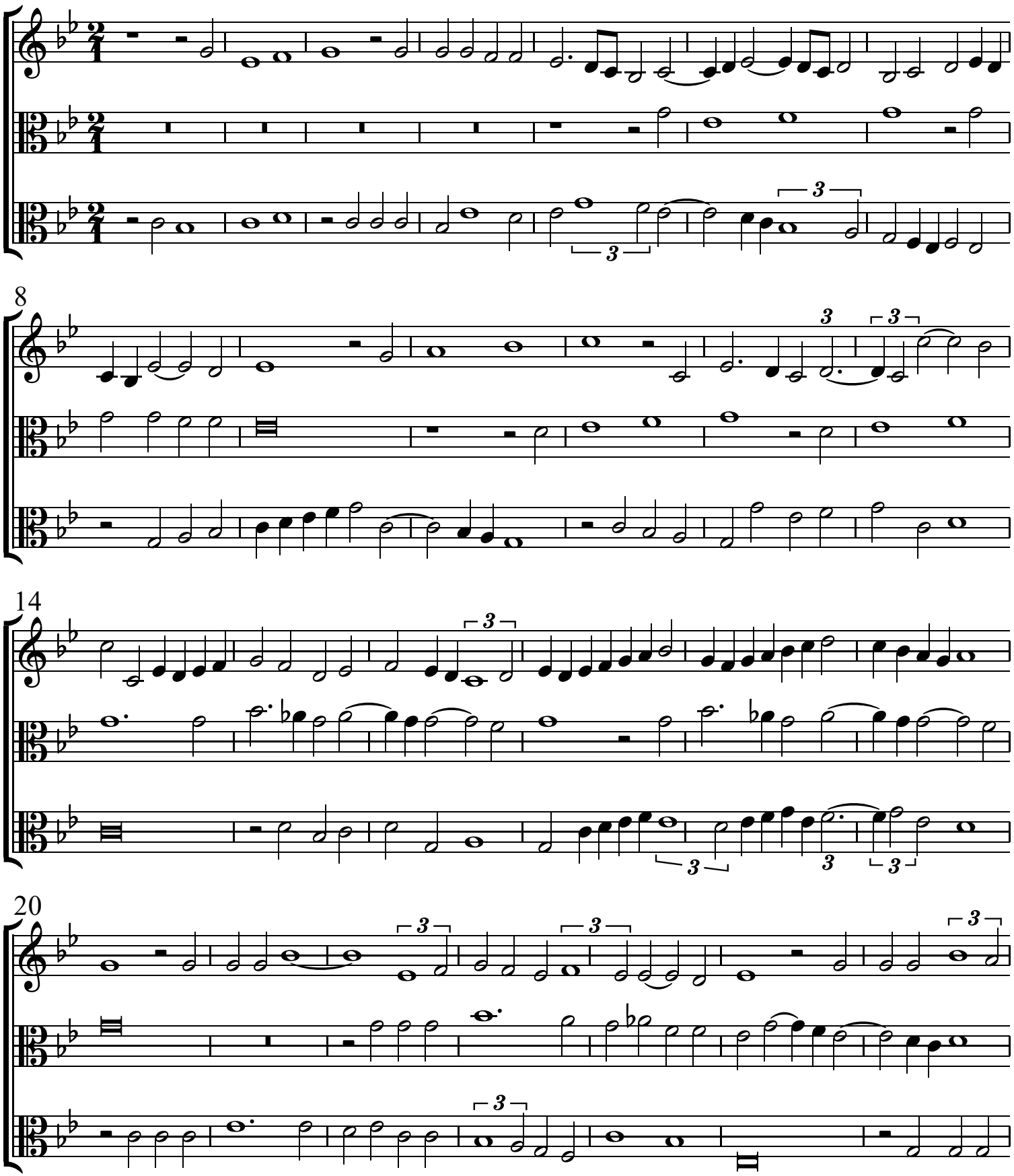
74. Qui la dira la peine de mon cueur

Adrian Willaert (c. 1490-1562)



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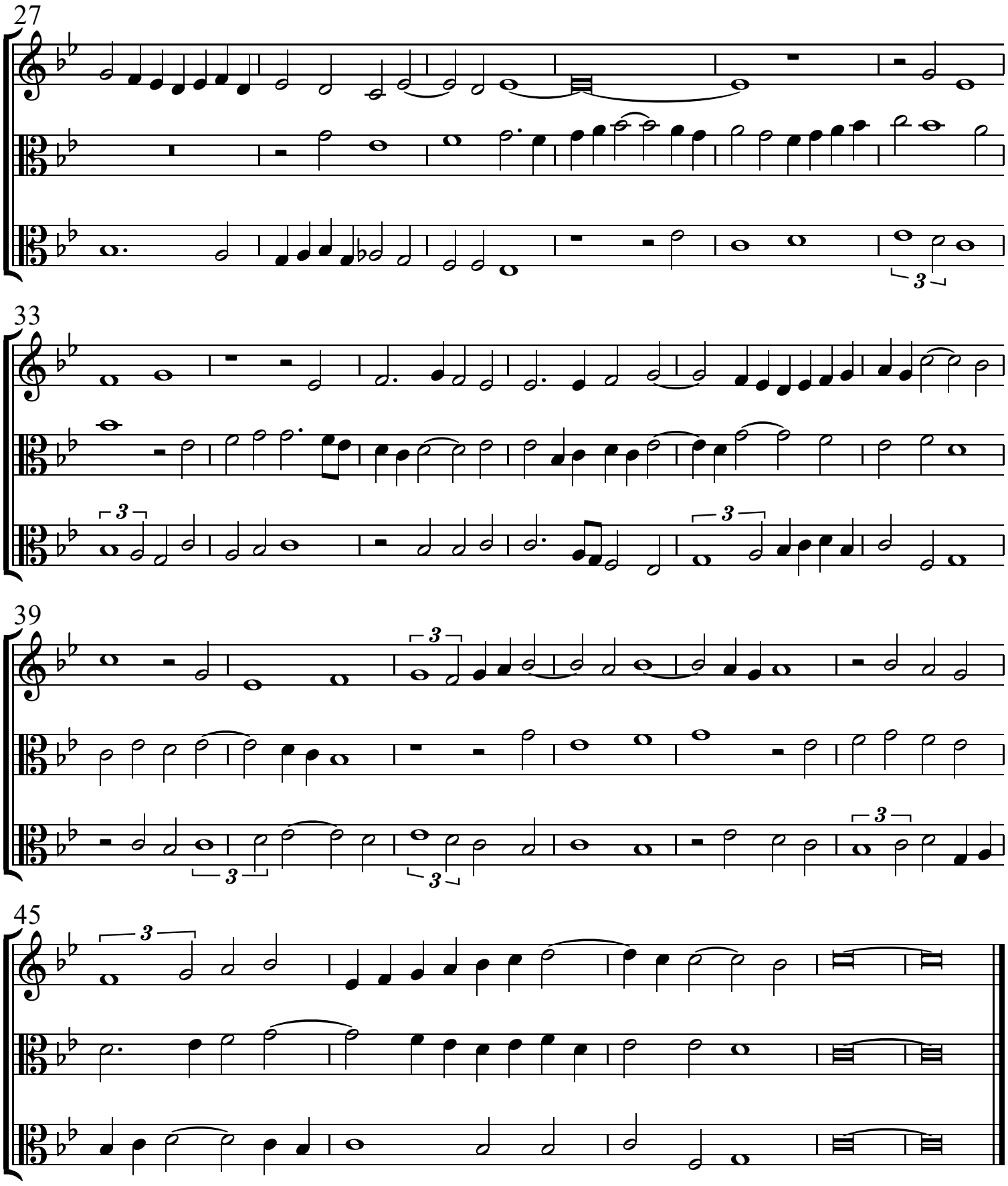
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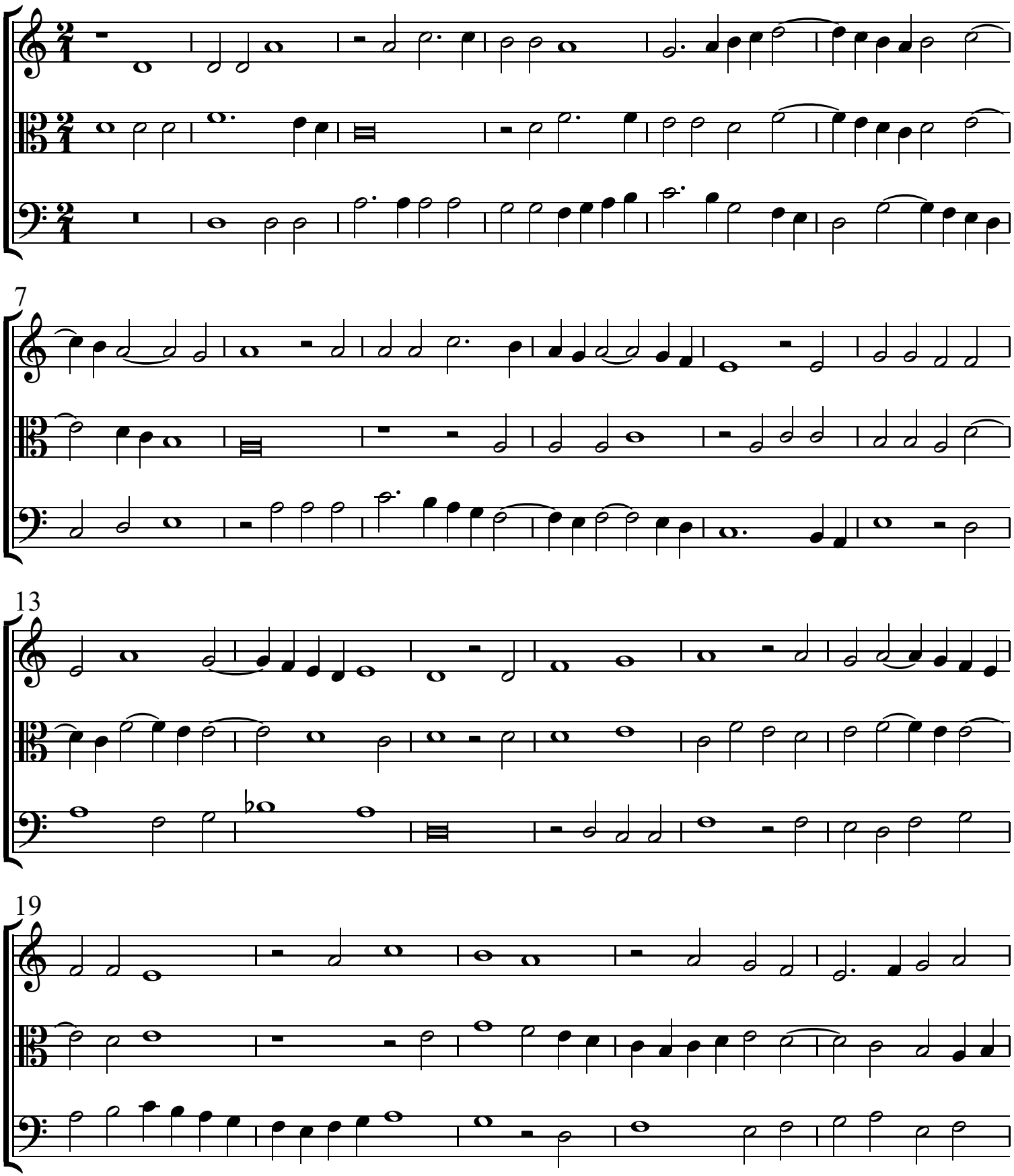
75. On ne fait plus si on ne les commande

Anonymous



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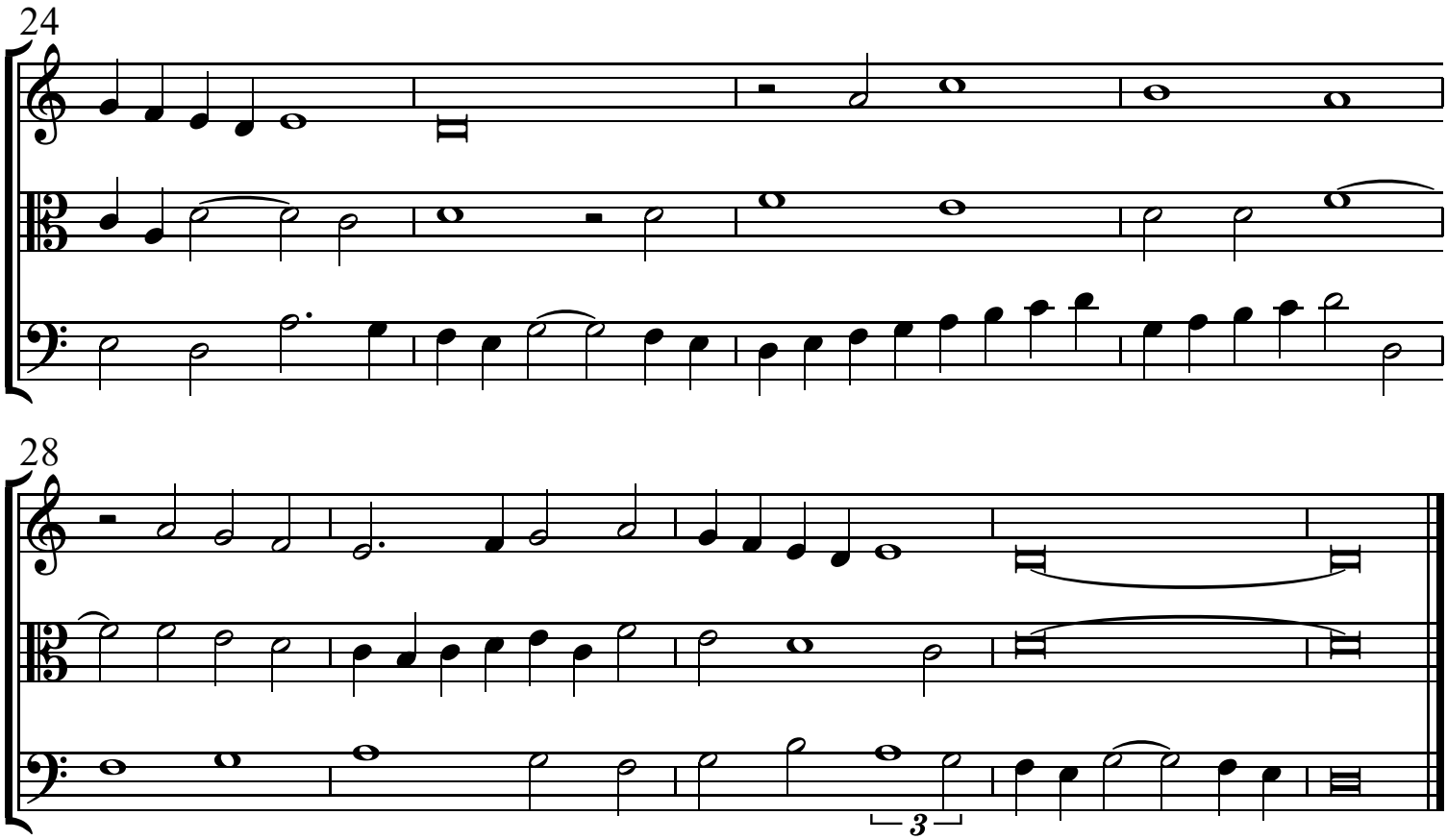
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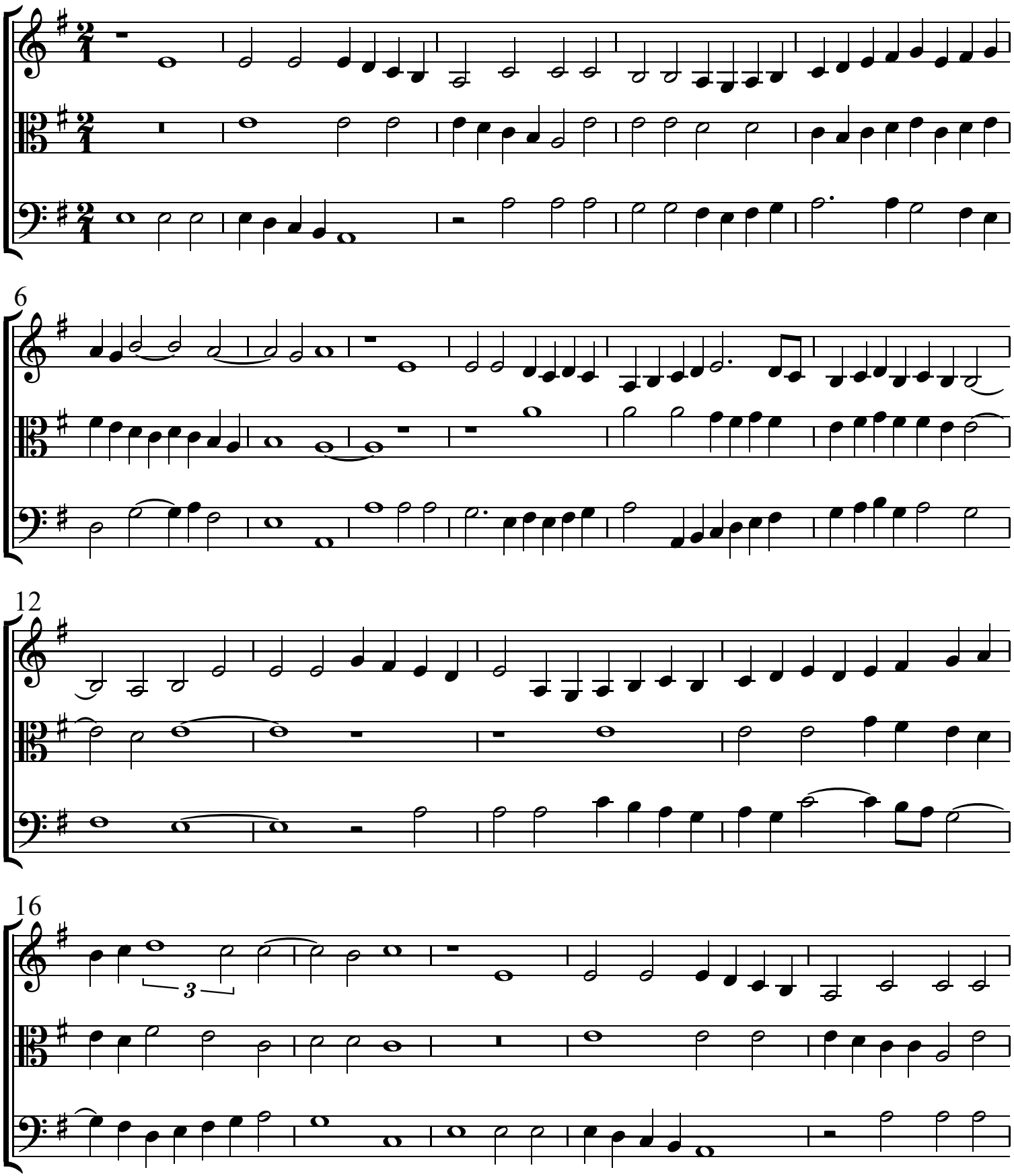
76. Que t’ai ge fait deplaisante fortune

Anonymous



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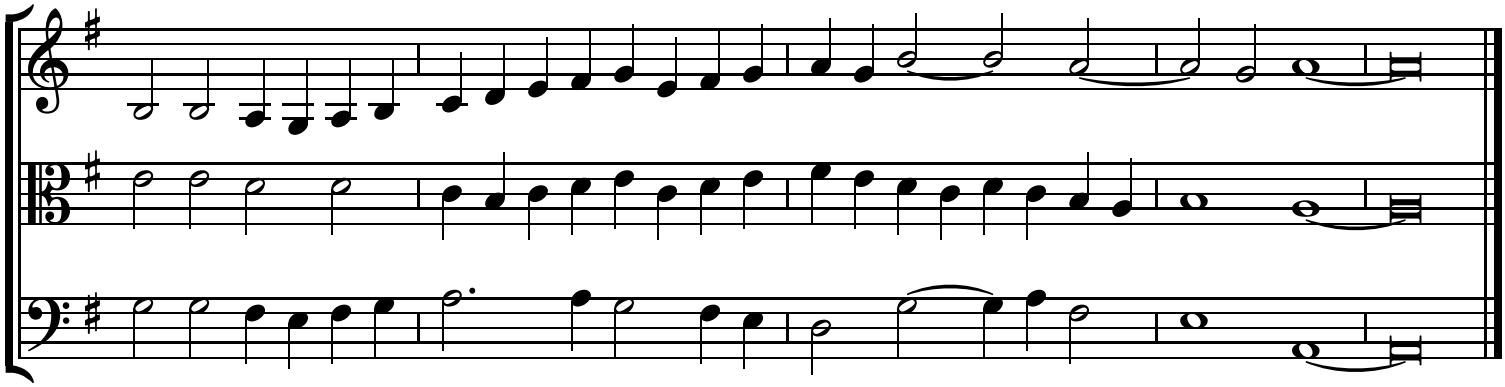
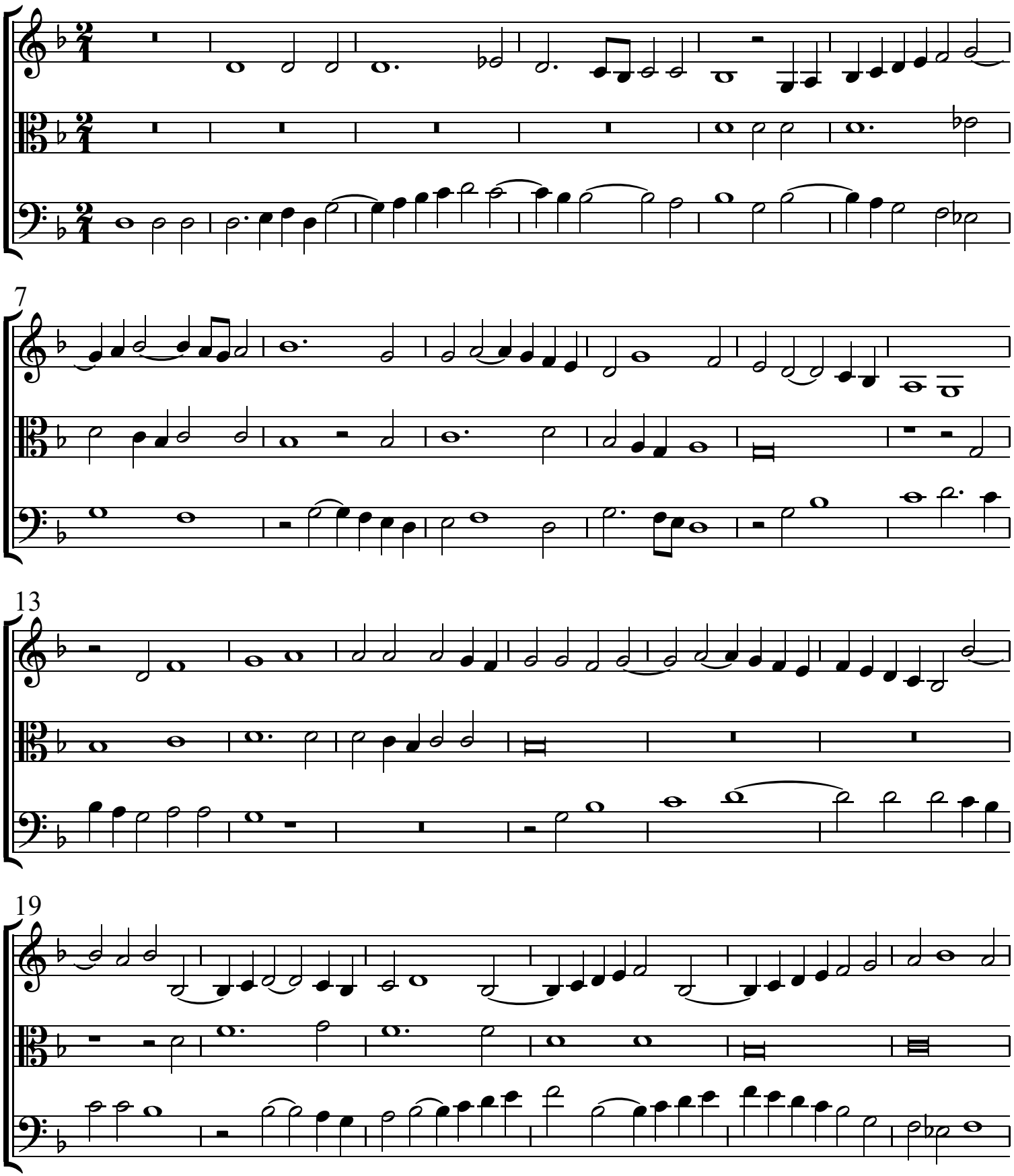


77. Le grant desir d'aymer mi tient

Jean Mouton (c. 1459-1522)



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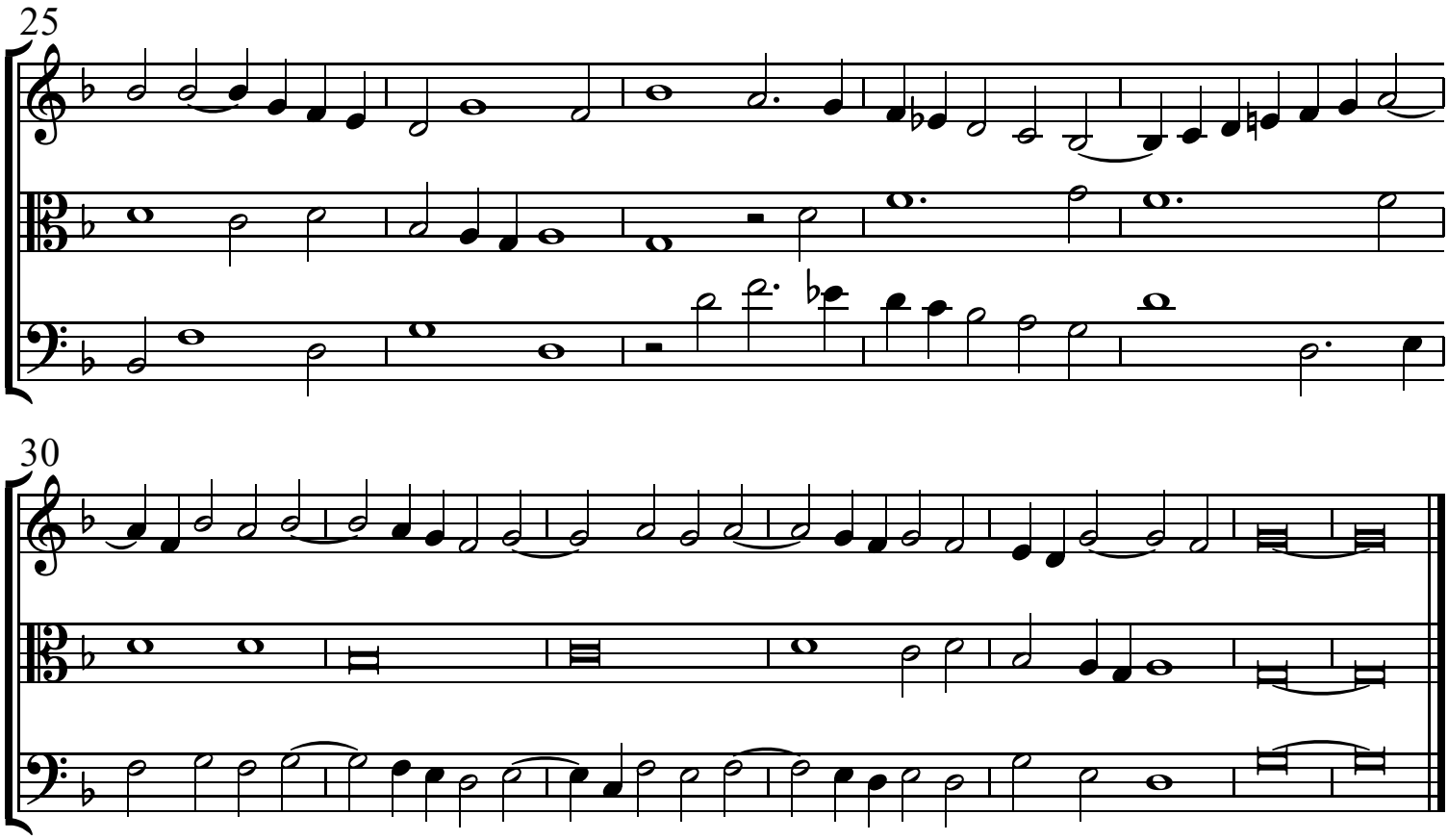
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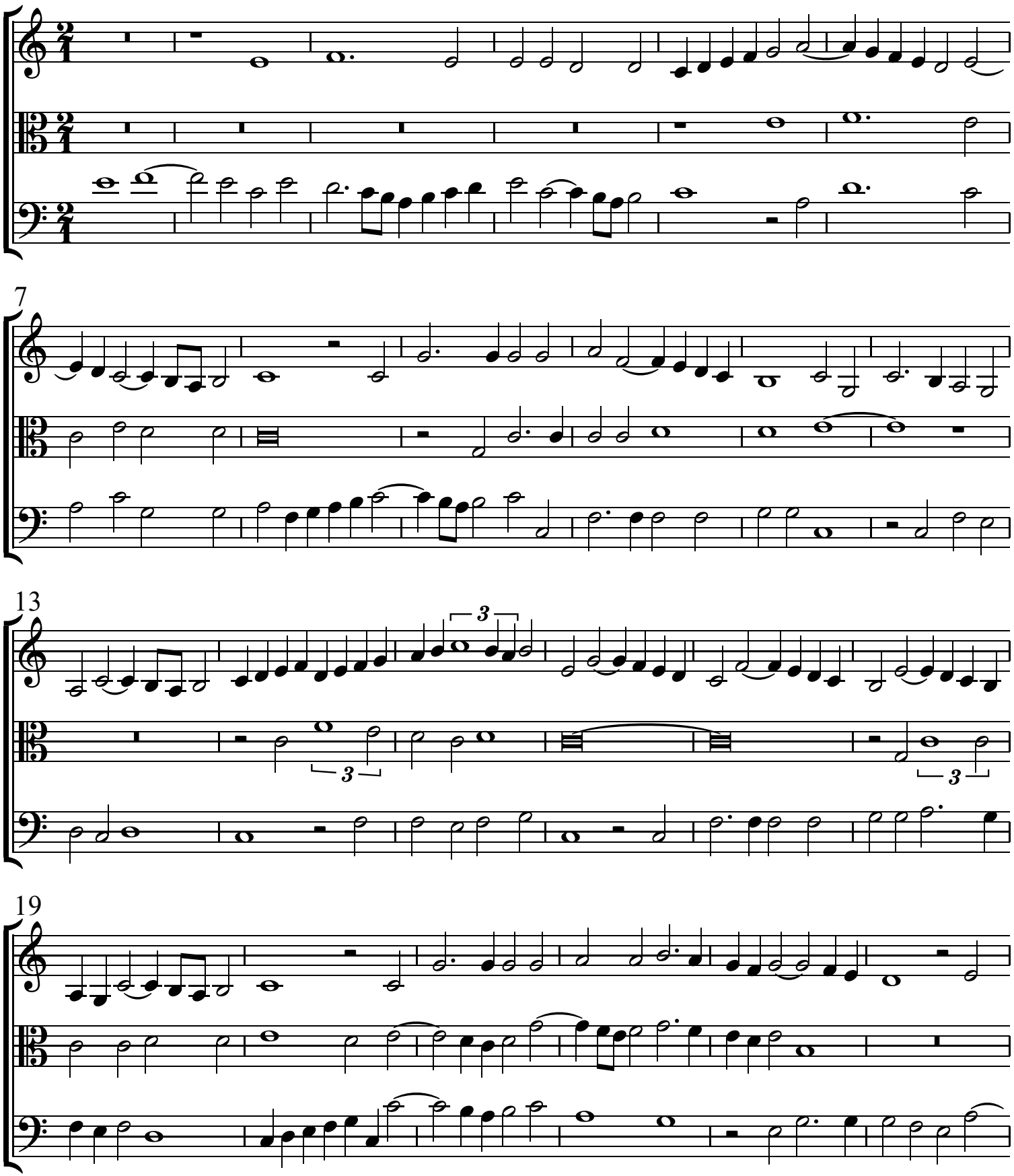
78. N’aymes jamais ces gens de court

Pierre Moulu (1484?-c. 1550)



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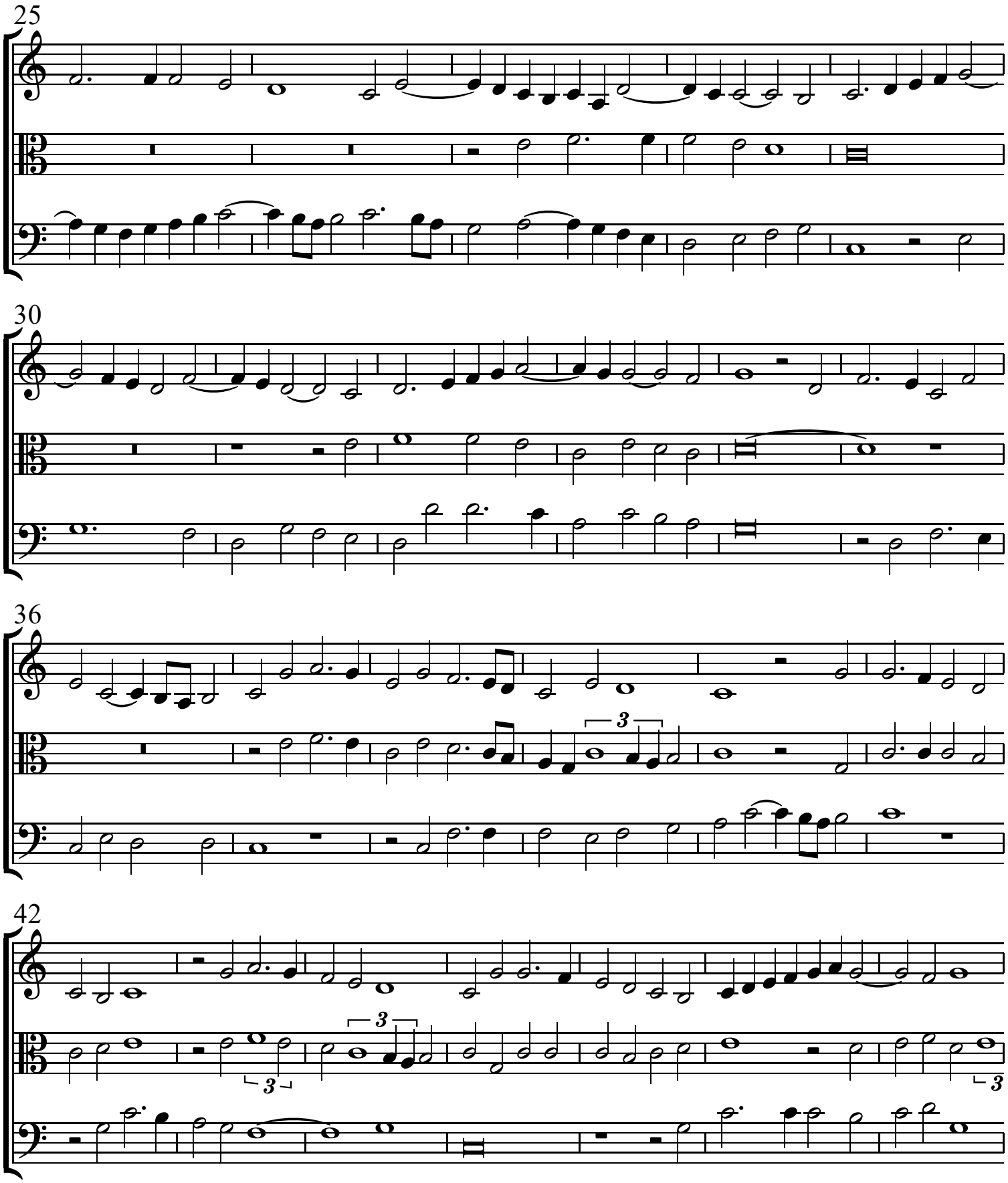
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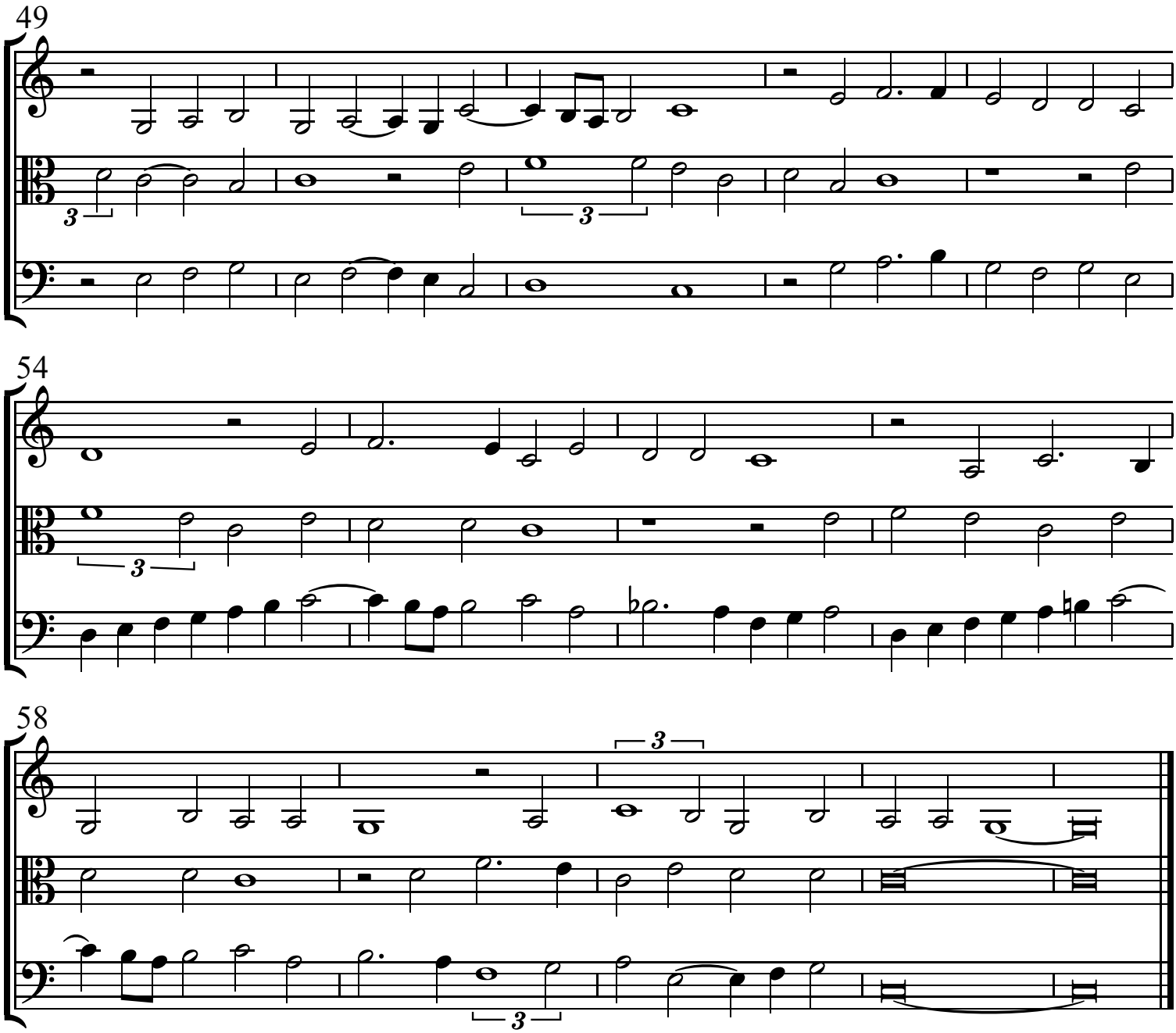
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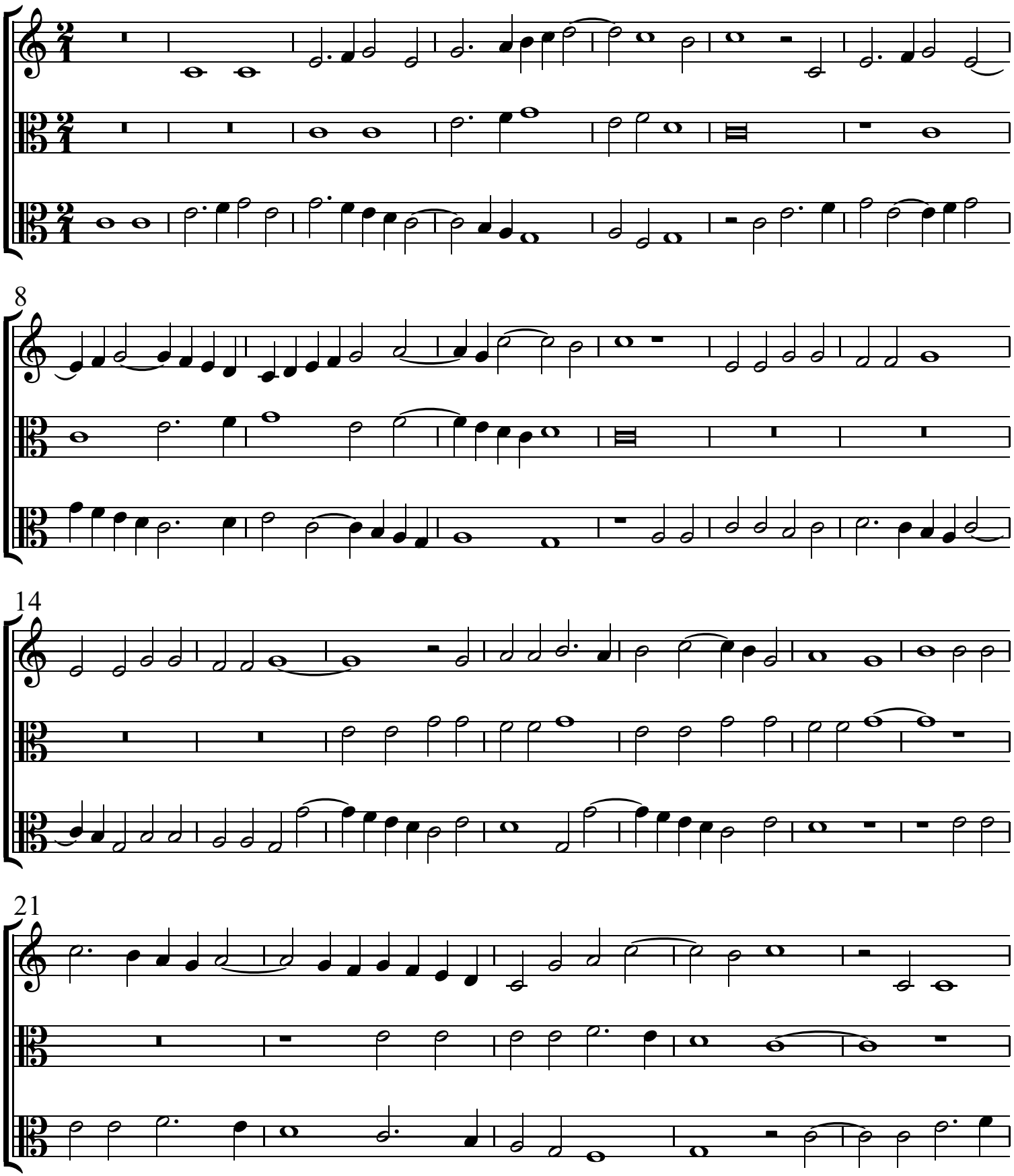
58

79. Tru tru trut avant, il fault boire

Jean Richafort (c. 1480-c. 1547)



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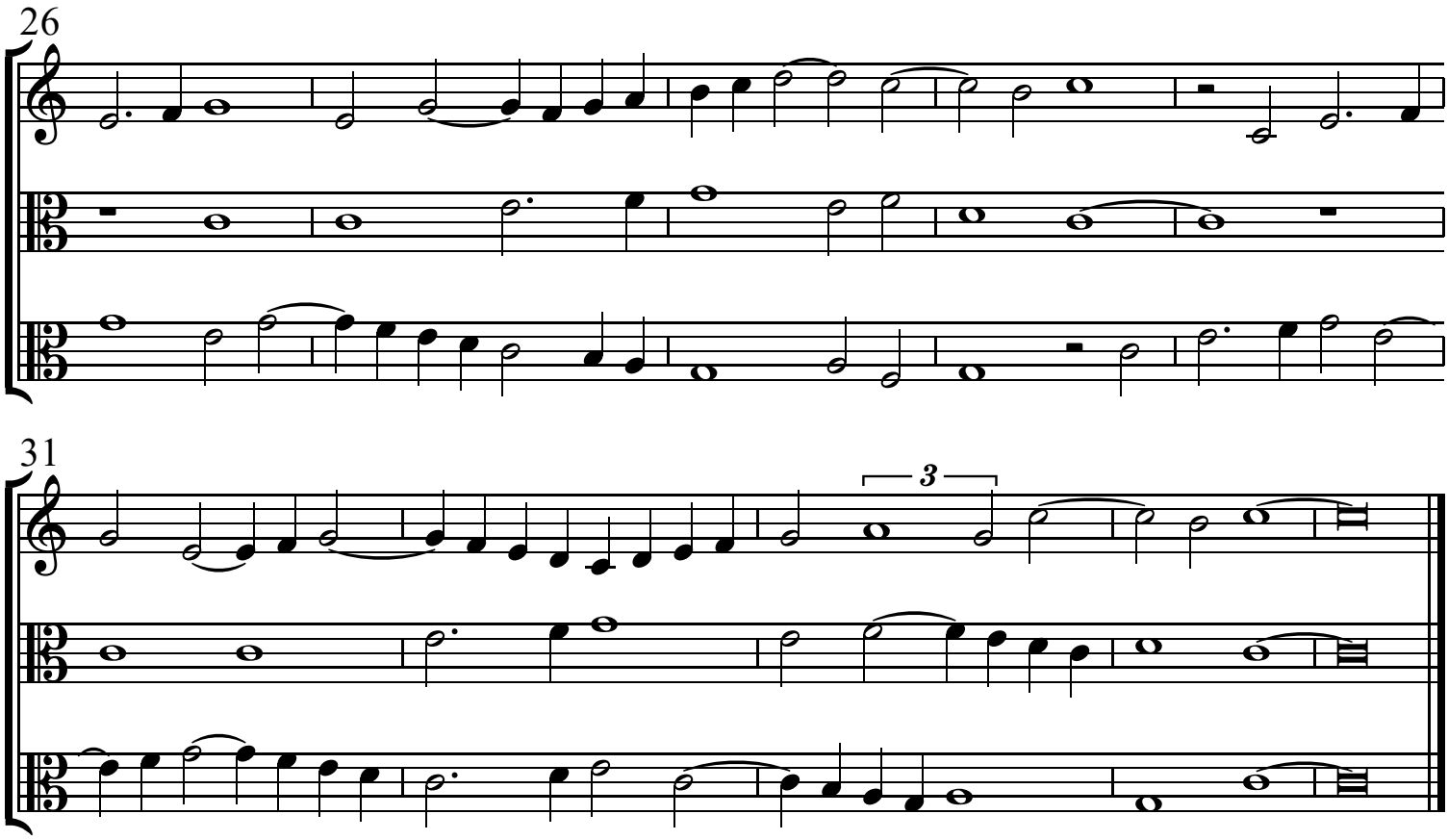
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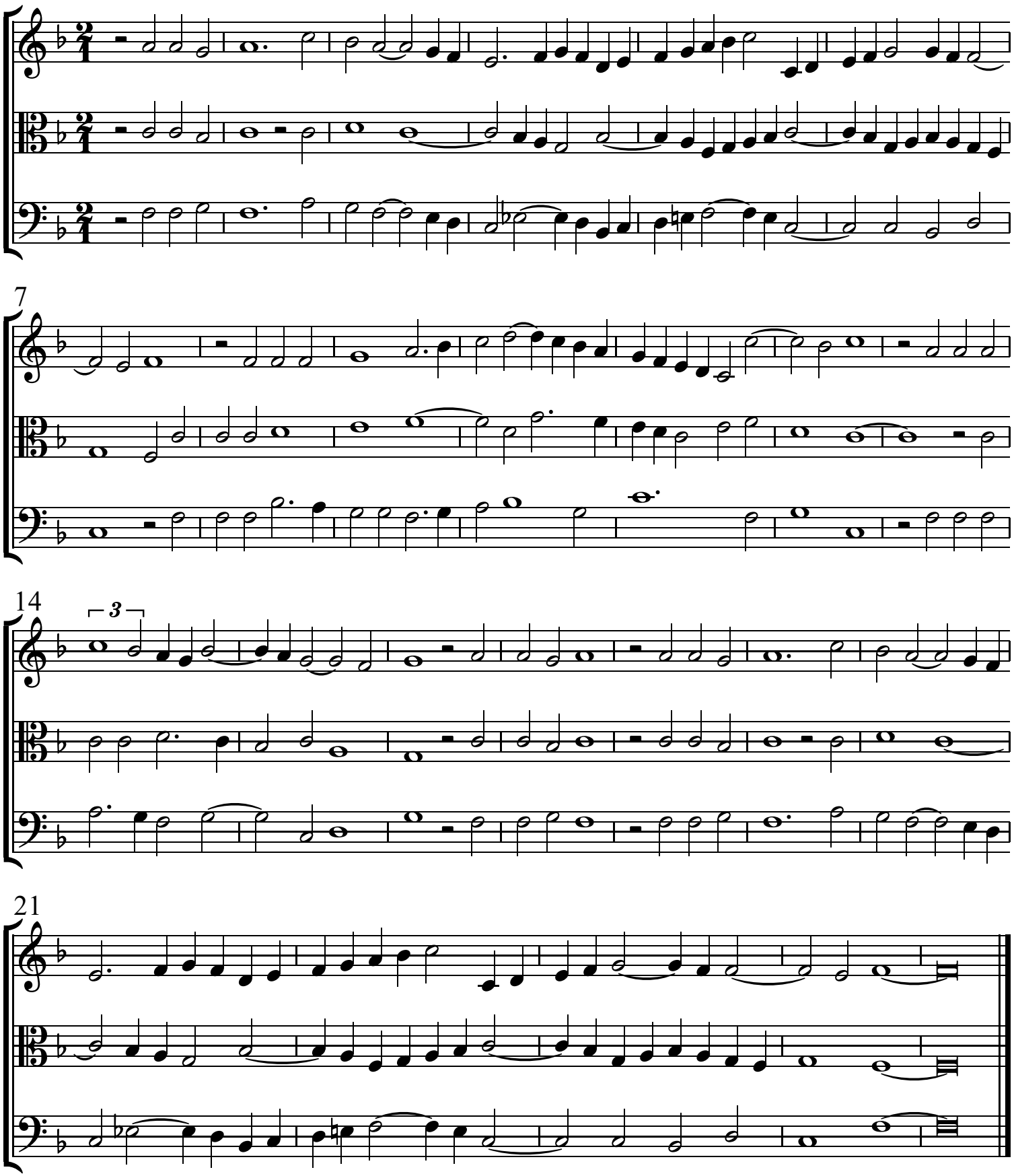
80. Amy souffre que je vous ayme

Pierre Moulu (1484?-c. 1550)



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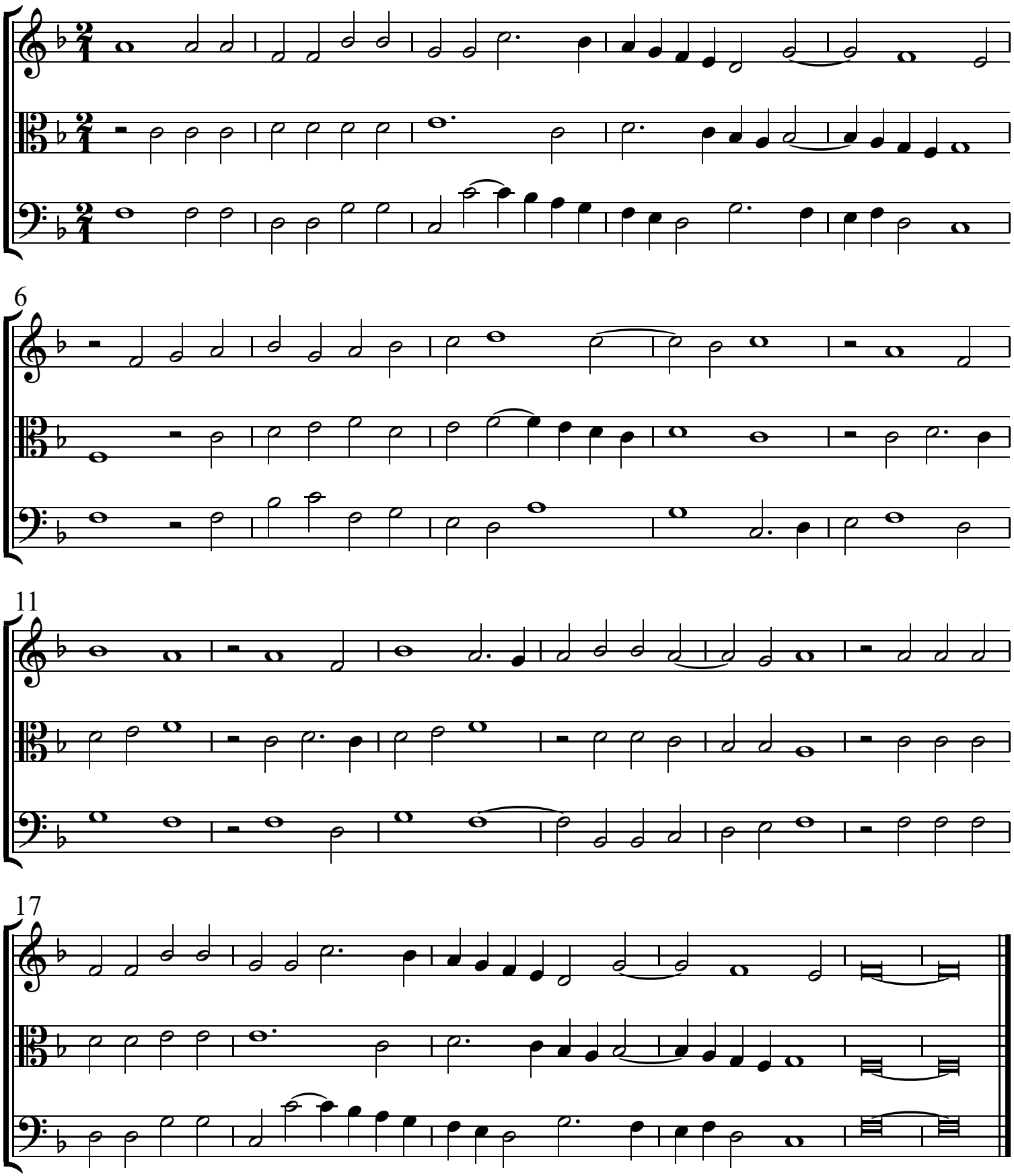
81. J’ay trop aymé vrayement

Anonymous



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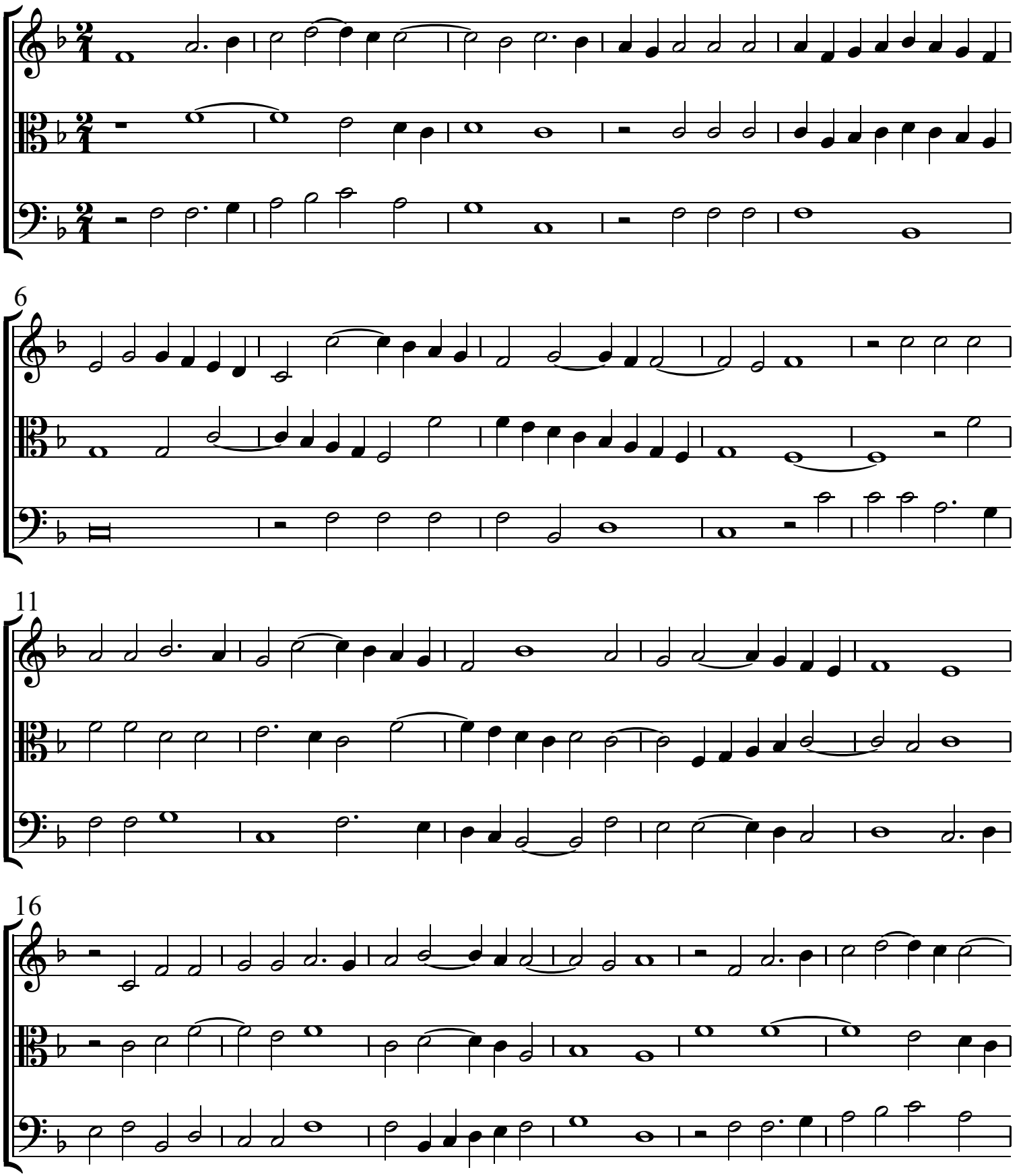
82. Ces facheux sotz

Anonymous



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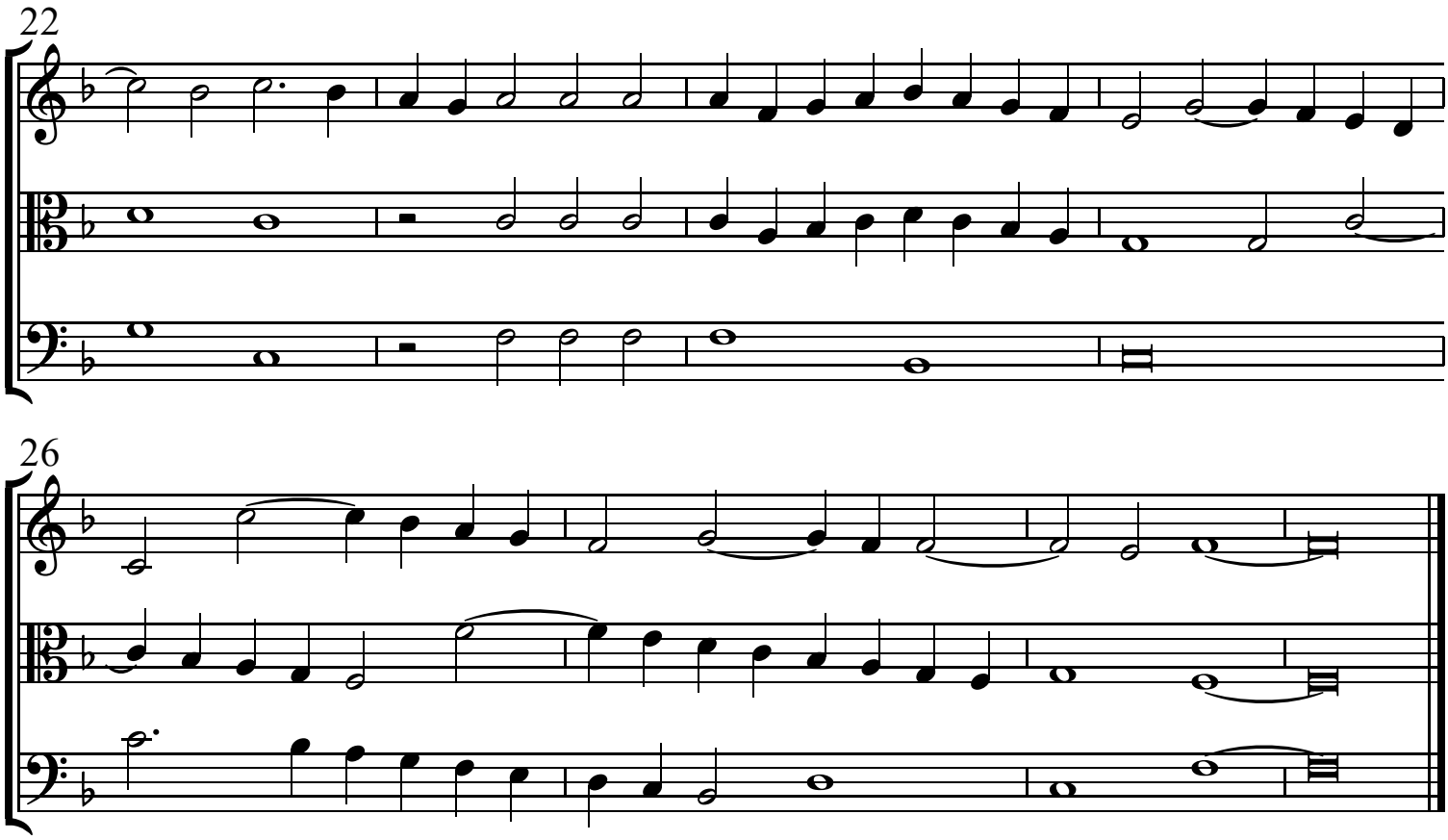
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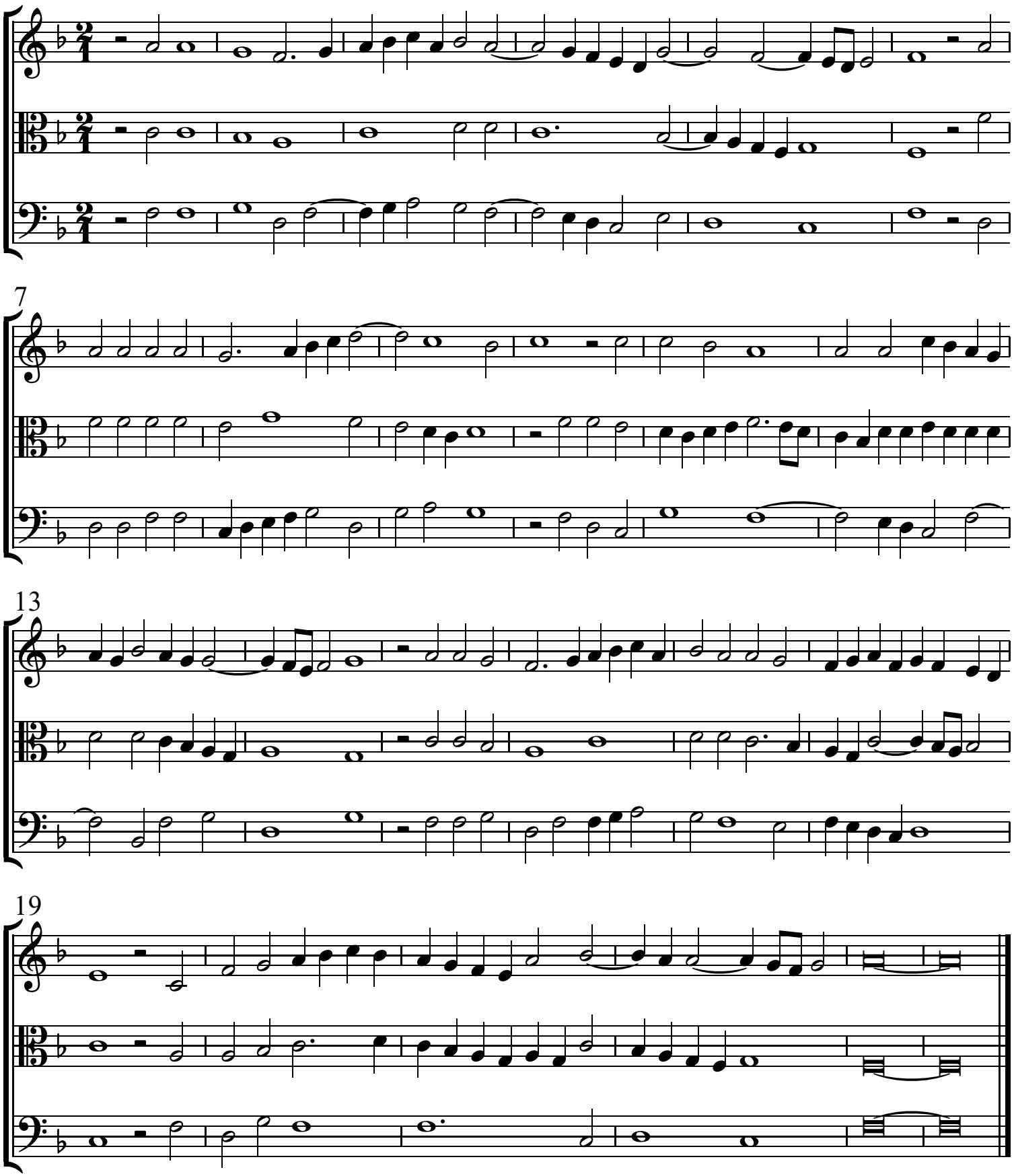
83. Adieu amours de vous suis las

Anonymous



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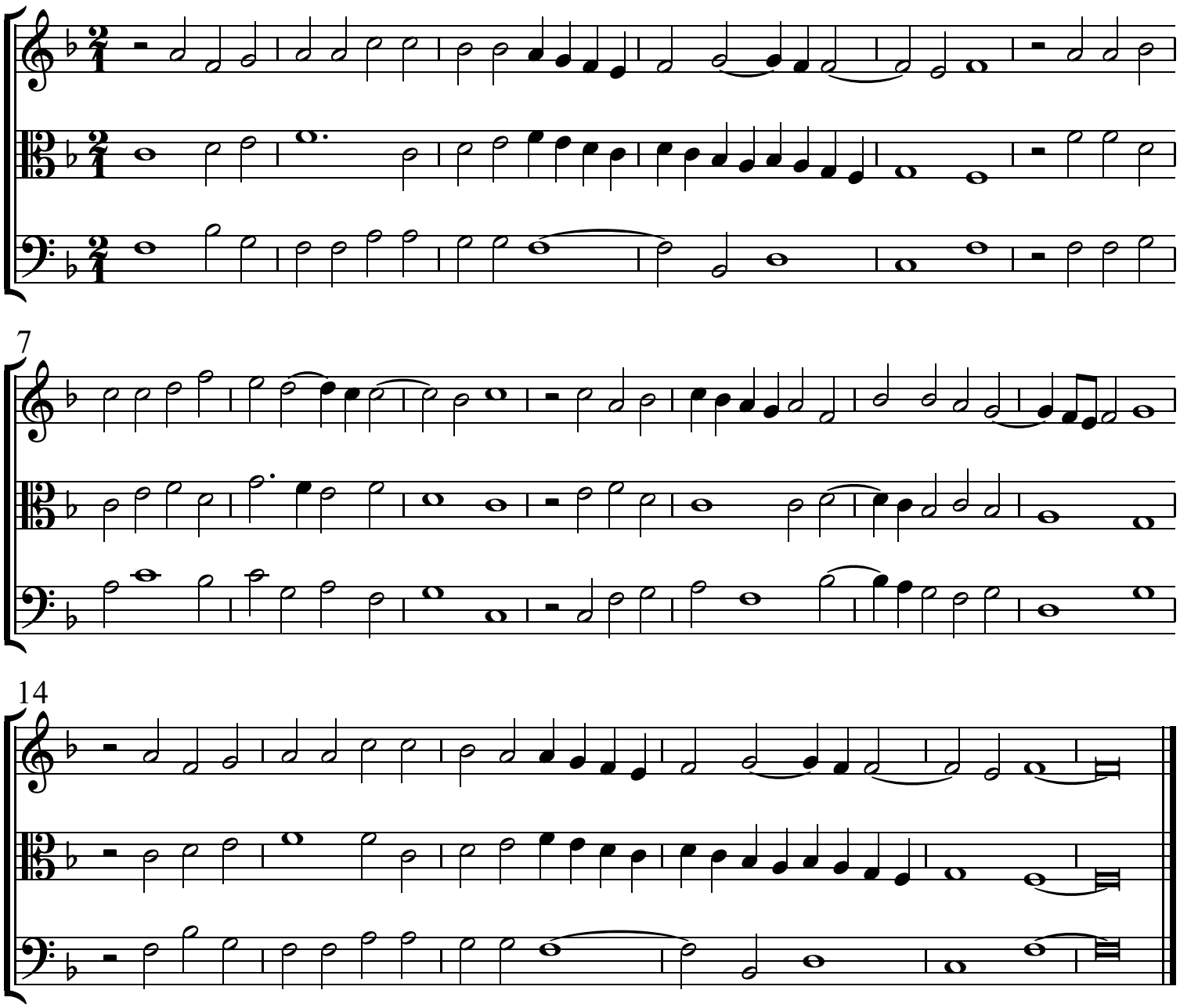
84. Si par souffrir on peult vaincre fortune

Anonymous



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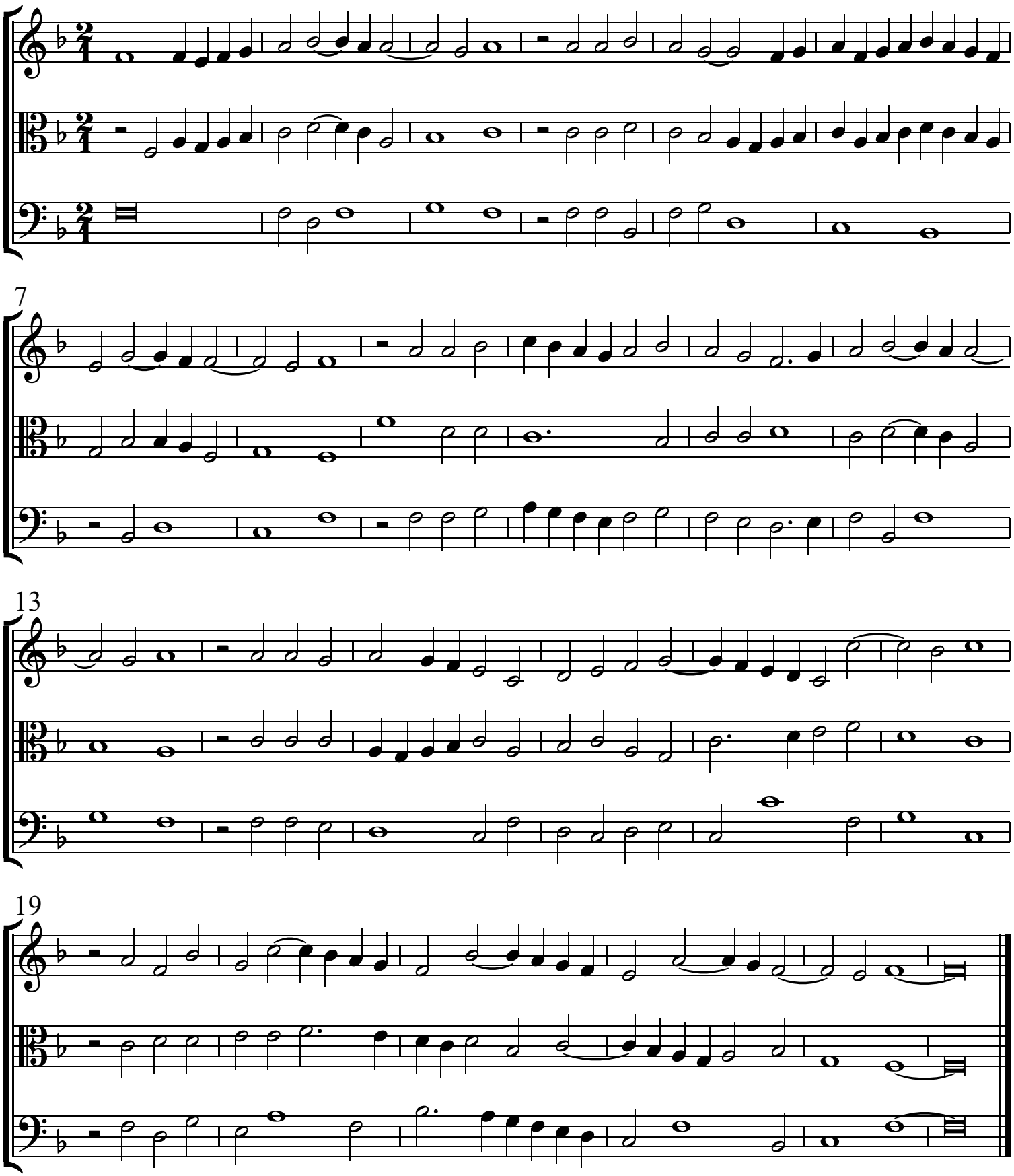
85. Amour vault trop

Anonymous



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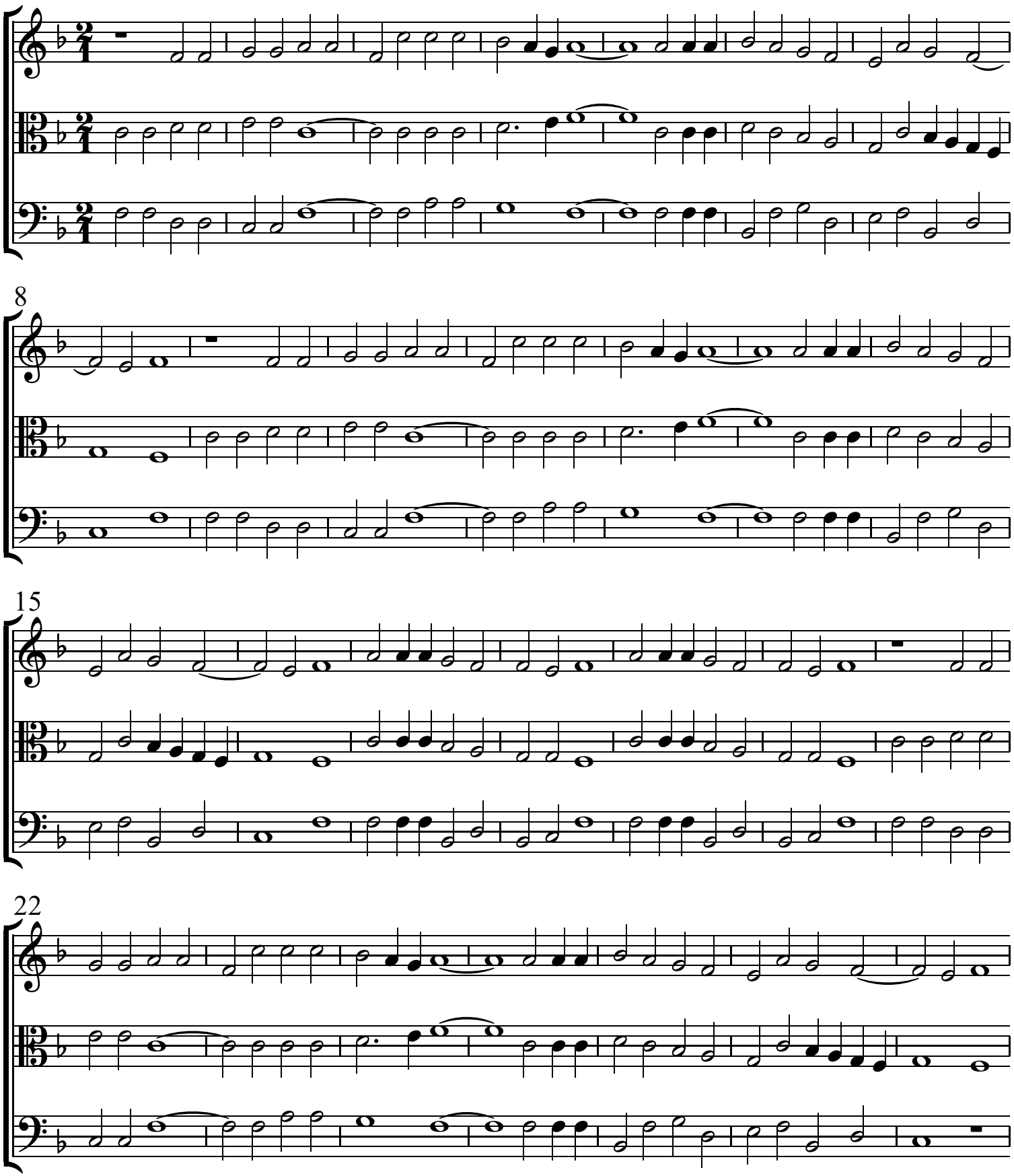
86. Jamais n’aymeray masson

Jean Mouton (c. 1459-1522)



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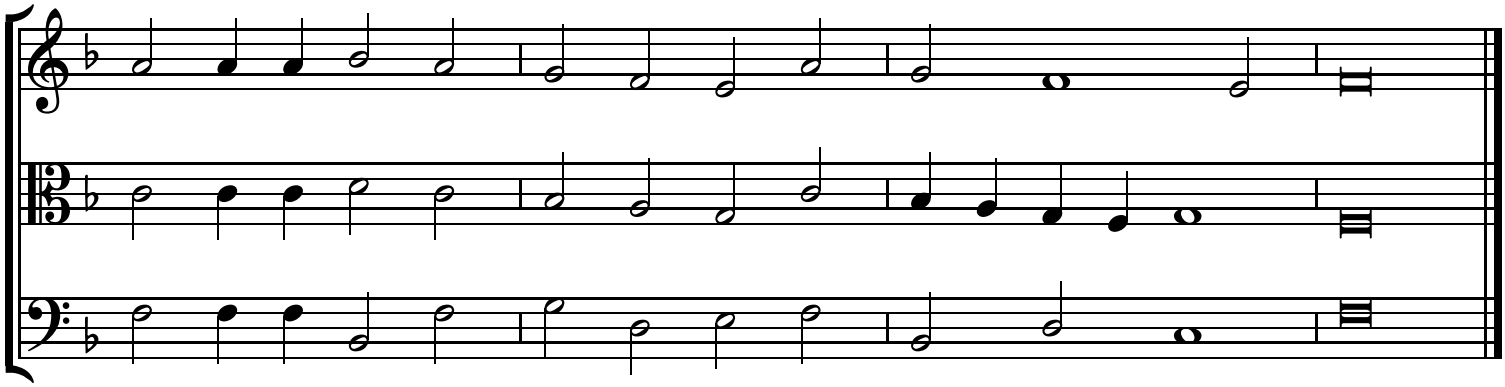
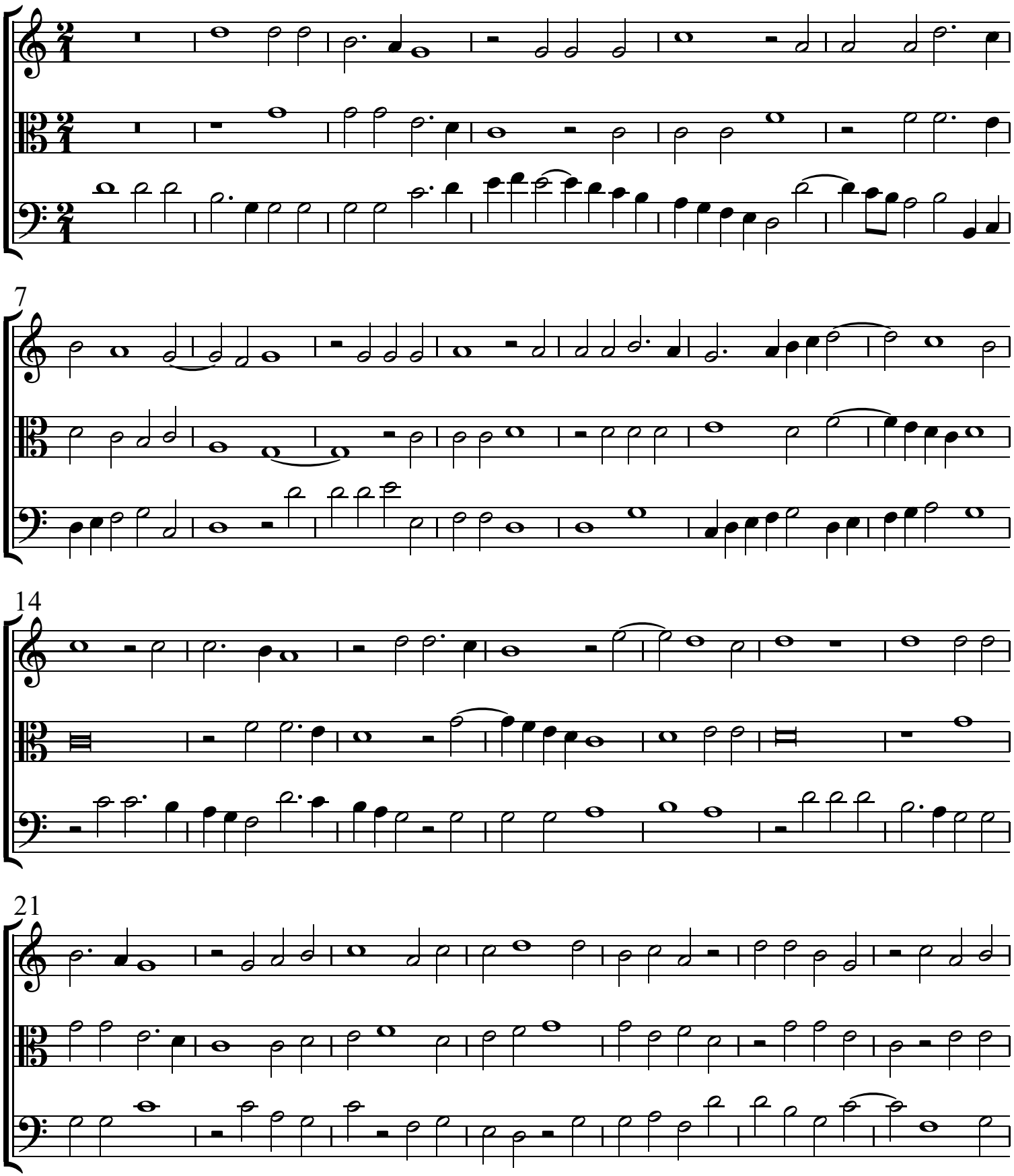


87. Quant je vous doys je transir

Josquin des Prez (c. 1450 ?-1521)



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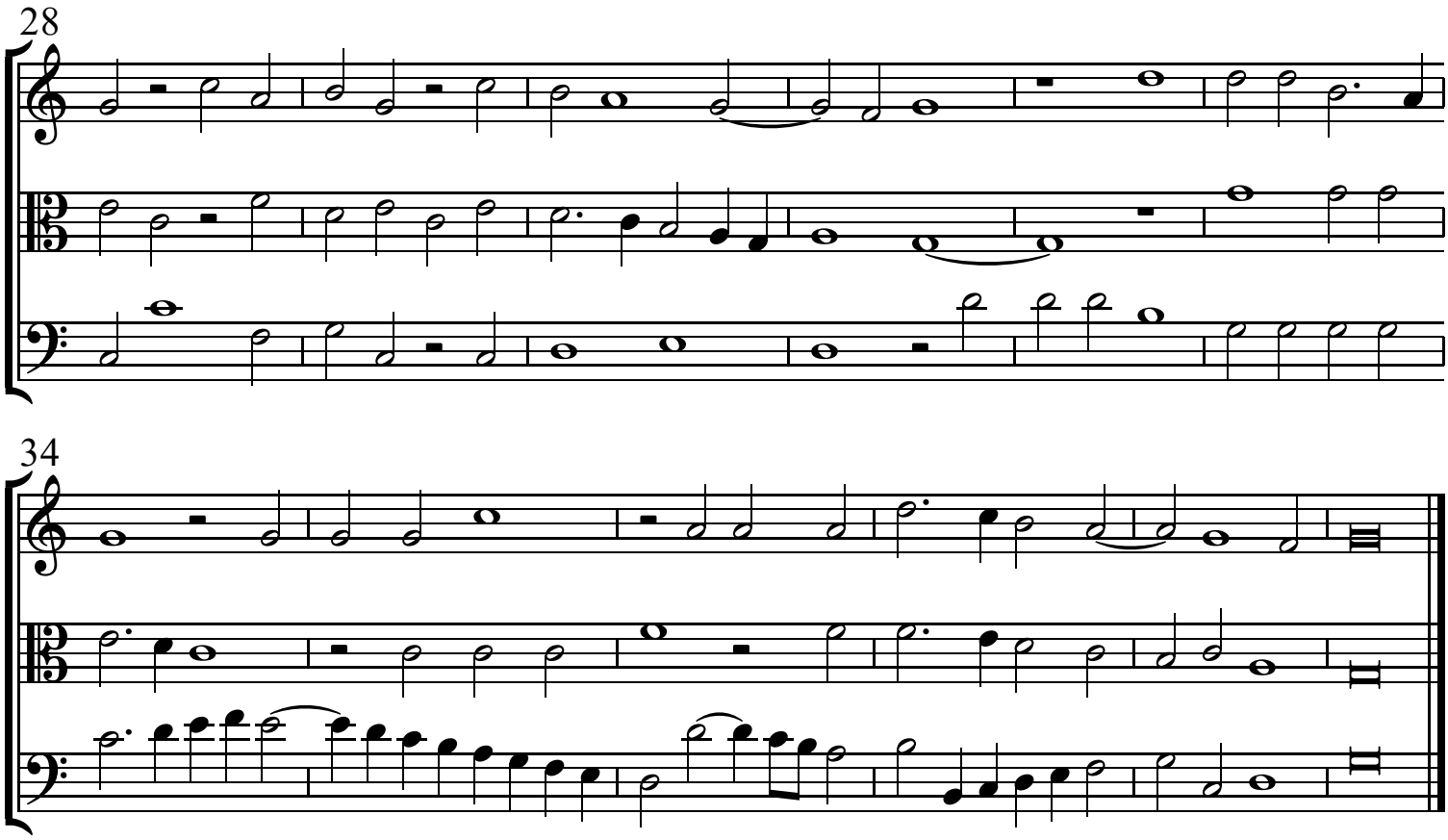
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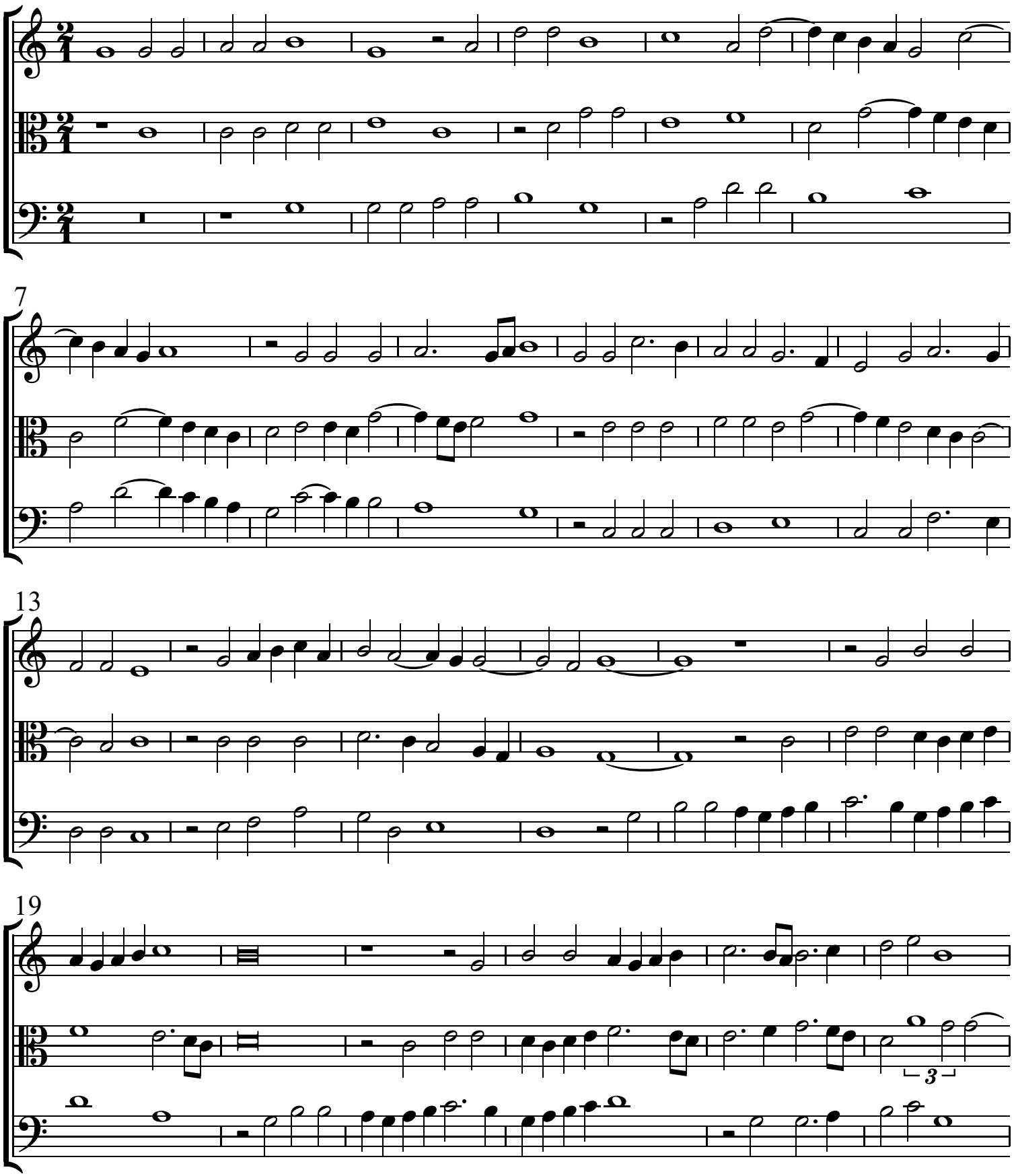
88. Vive la Marguarite

Anonymous



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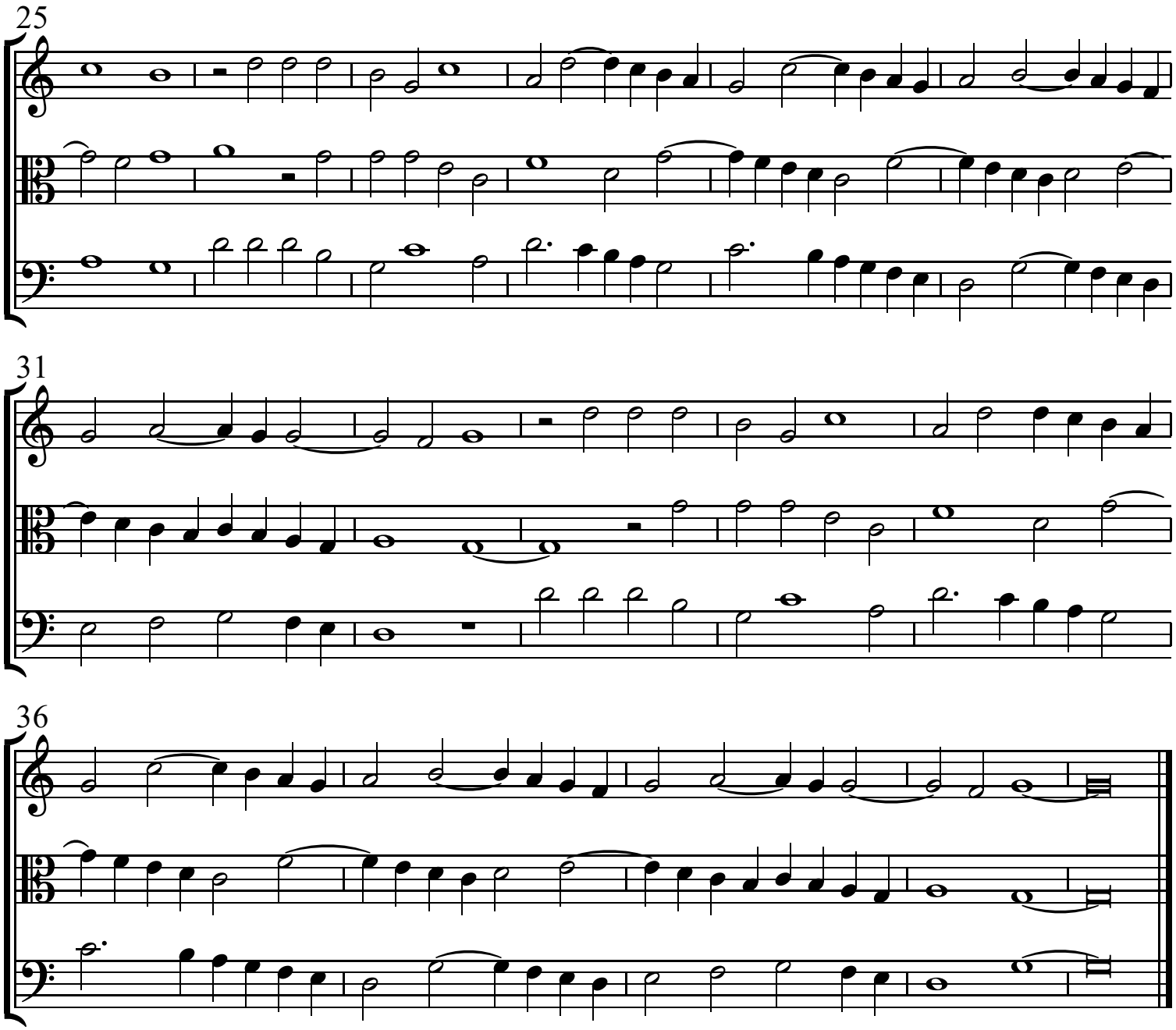
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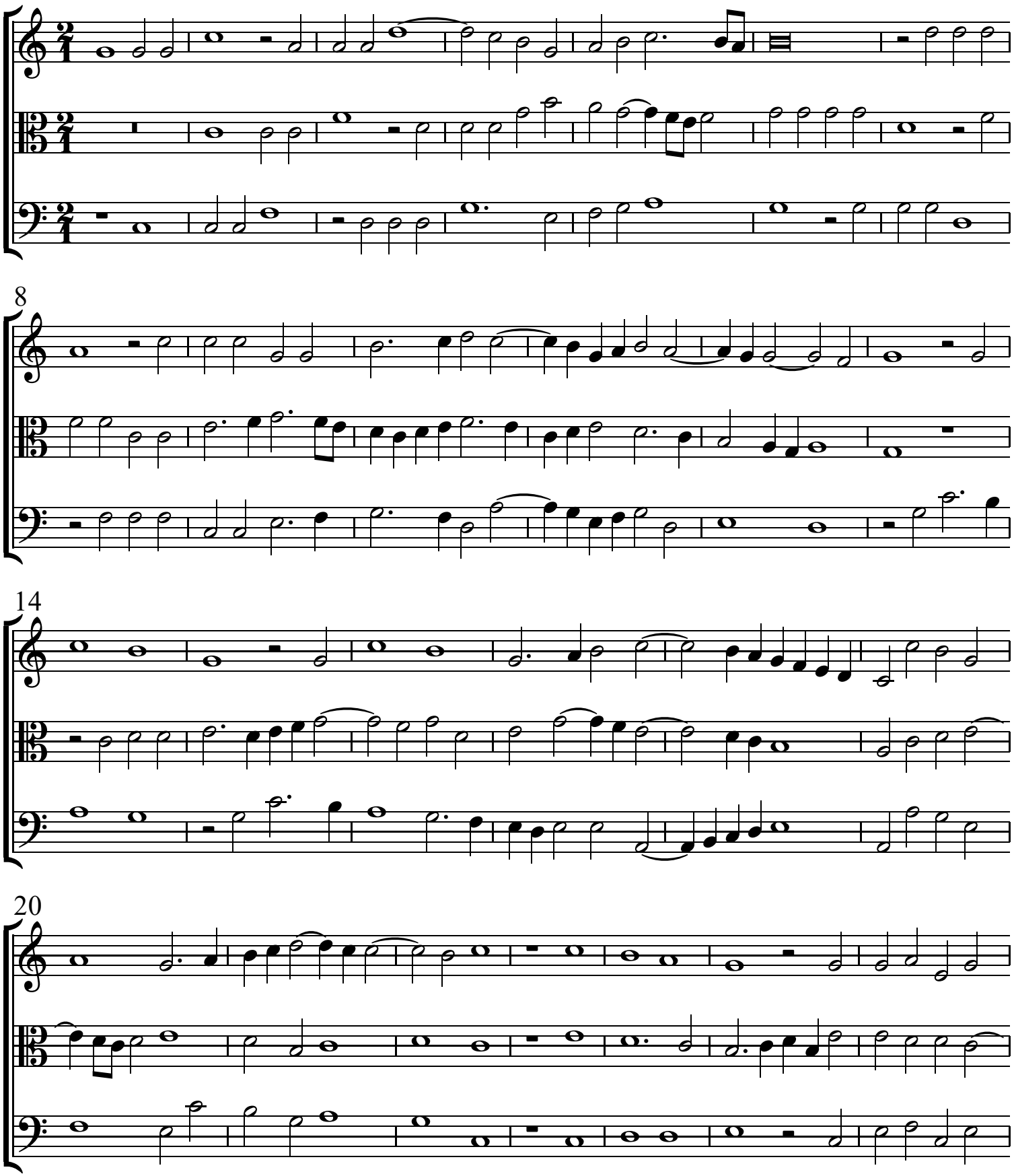
89. C’est grand erreur

Anonymous



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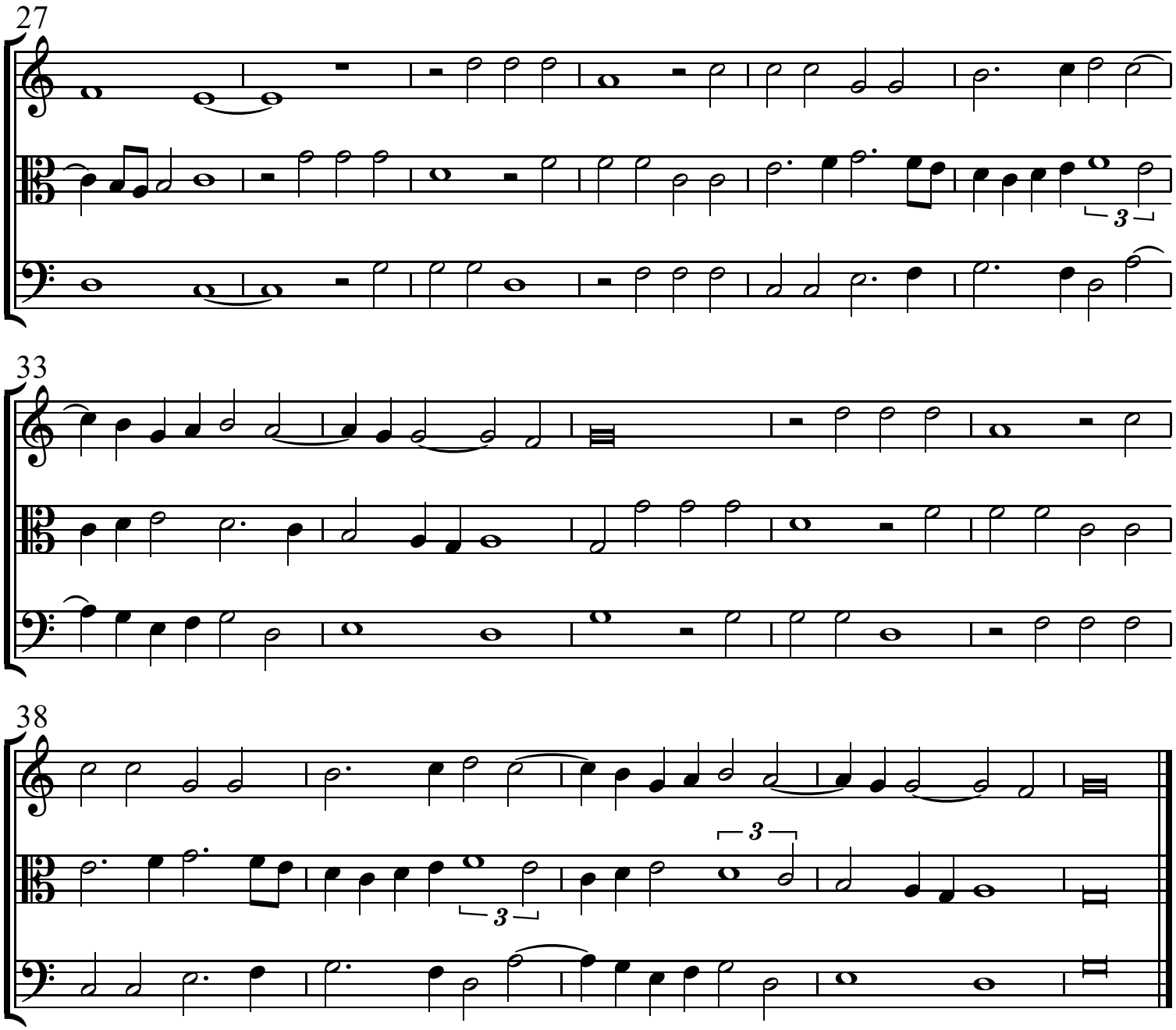
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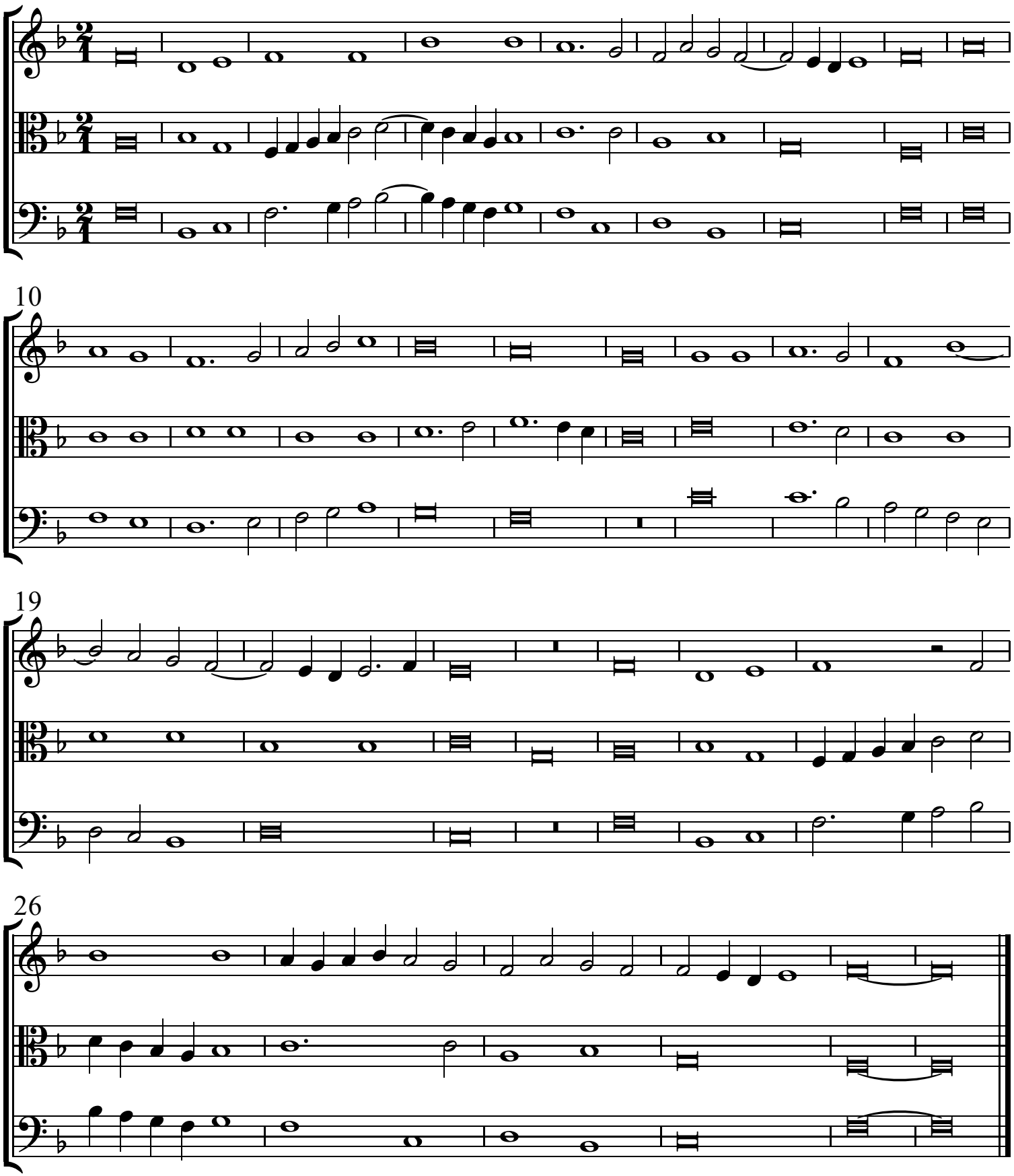
90. Fortune laisse moy la vie

Anonymous



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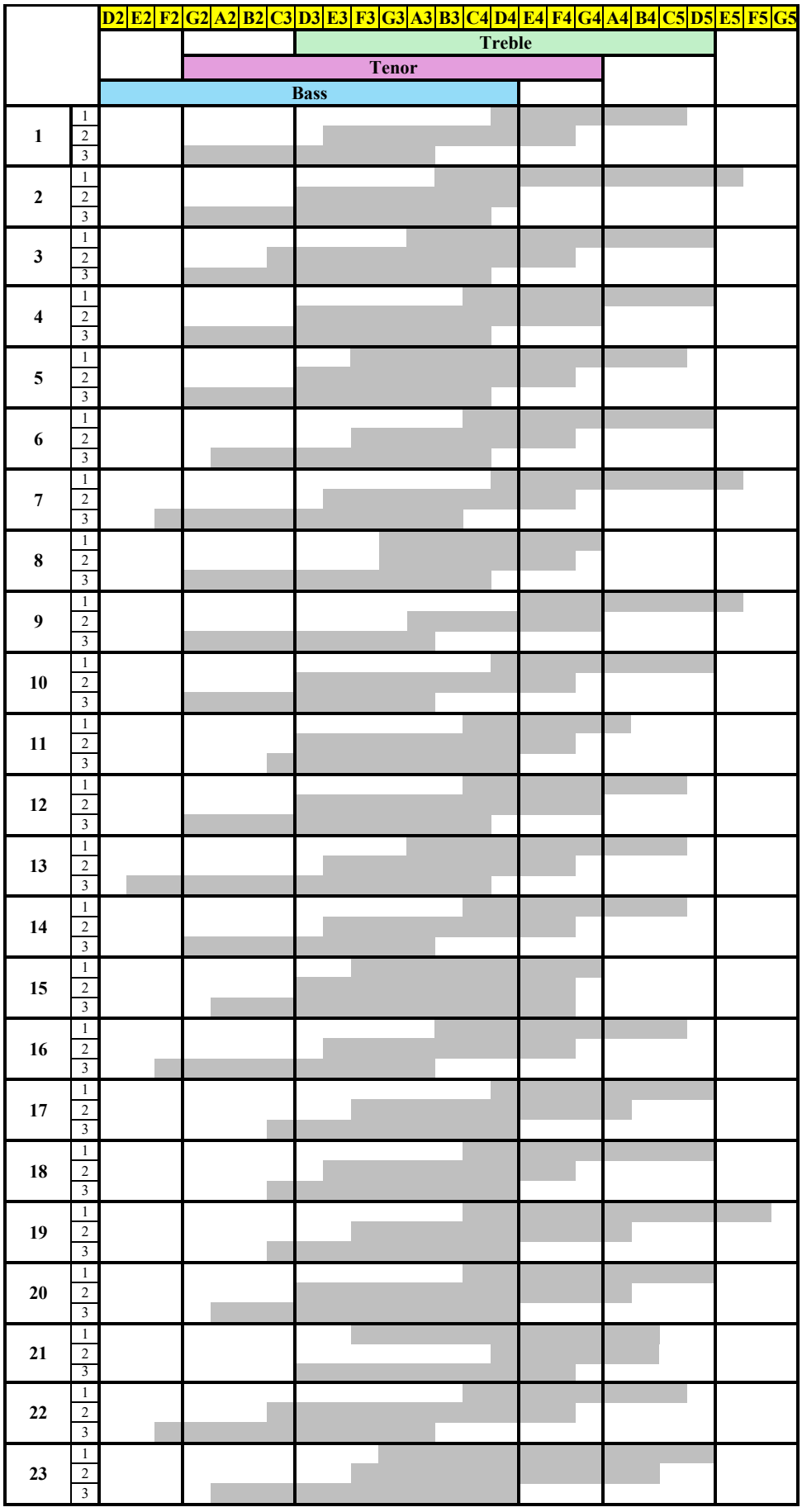
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Tenor
Bass
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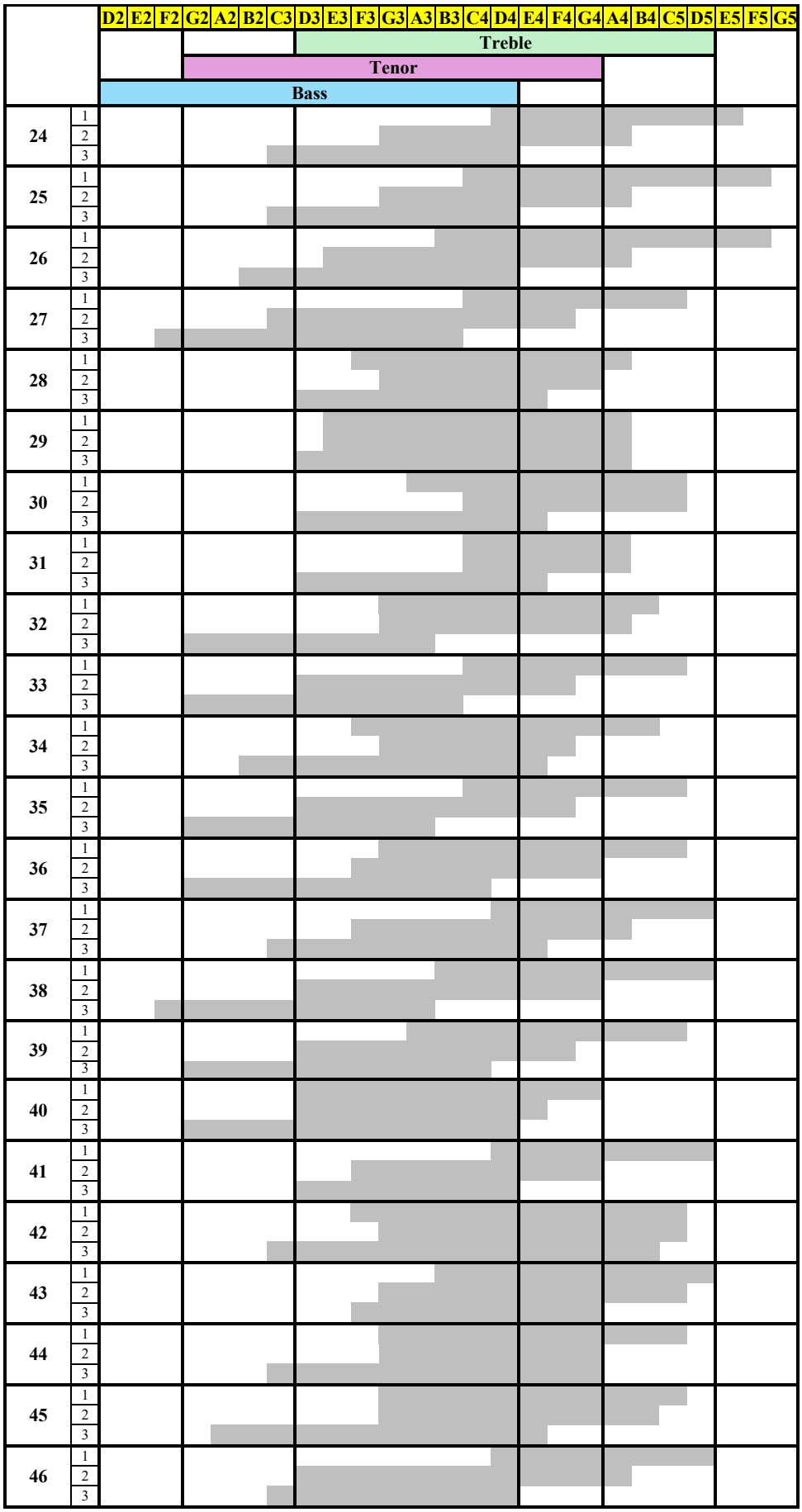
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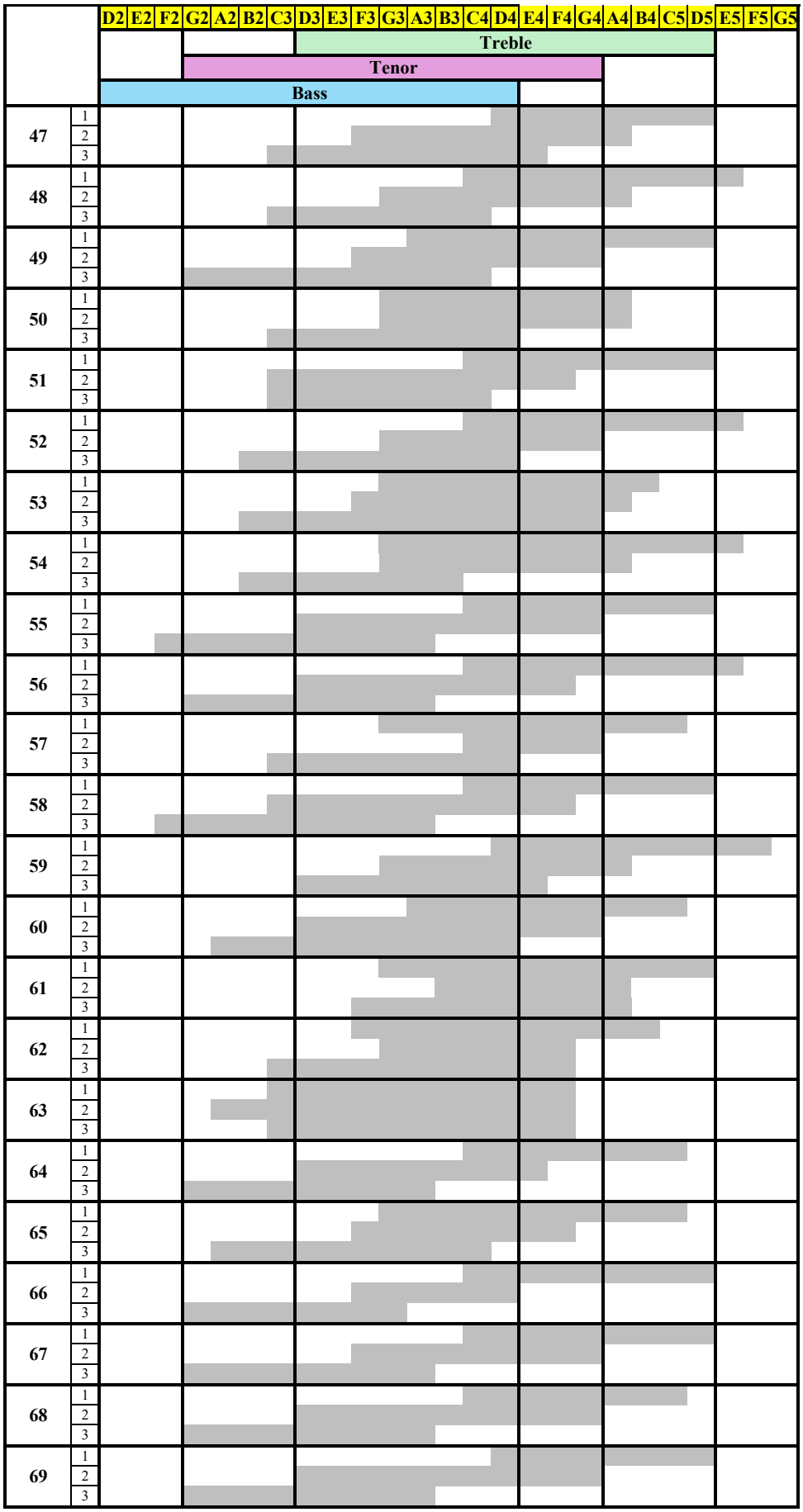
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Bass
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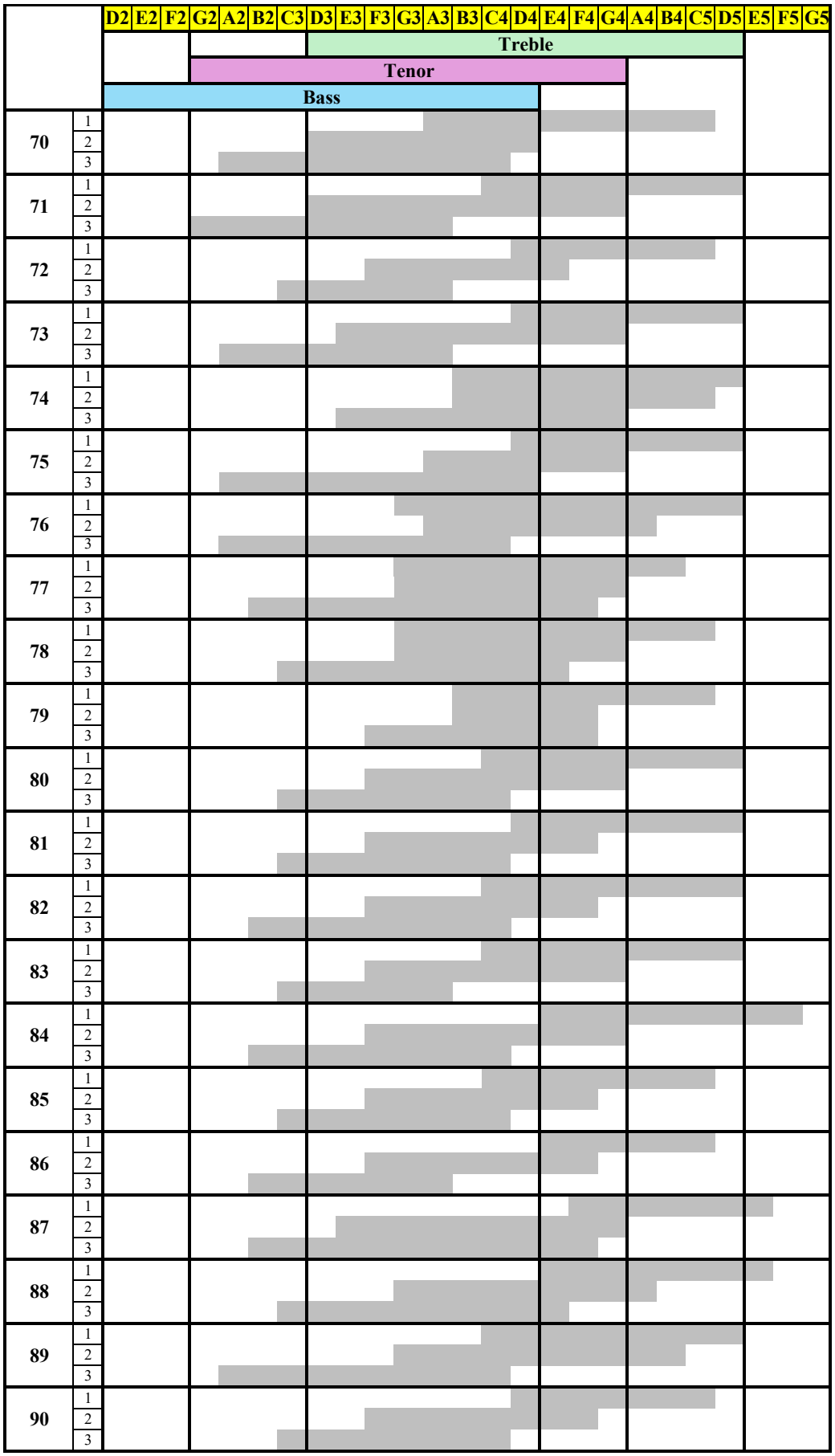
D2 E2 F2 G2 A2 B2 C3 D3 E3 F3 G3 A3 B3 C4 D4 E4 F4 G4 A4 B4 C5 D5 E5 F5 G5
Treble
Tenor
Bass
70 71 72 73 74 75 76 77 78 79 80 81 82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89 90
1 2 3