AFRICAN PIANISM

A Contribution to Africology Music 1986 - 2020

Selected Compositions

By

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson

Celebrating the African Identity in Modern Musical Compositions

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Noyam
PUBLISHERS
Accra, Ghana

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Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
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ISMN 979-0-9008043-1-0
DOI: 10.38159/npub.eb20605

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On African Pianism

I choose to blend in my works the concept of Sankofaism and the reality of my Eurocentric Education. I return to my source for clarity and strength grounded with functionality as my FOCUS. In this regard, I am still able to Articulate, Perform and Share Elements of my African Worldview with the world through Music.

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I dedicate this book to my first music teacher who grounded me in musical essence

My father

The late Victor Emmanuel Okpoti Manieson

[Co- founder, Providence School Ltd]

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Acknowledgements

While many have been instrumental in shaping my orientation and embracing African Pianism as an Art Form in concert halls, and also as an artistic tool worthy of *Academic Scrutiny*, I wish to acknowledge the following:

- Mrs. Doreen Thomas Manieson [Impresario]
- Osofo Kwesi Atta [Life Coach/Pastoral Care Specialist/ Spiritual Leader/ Educator]
- Prof Andrews Agyemfra Tettey [Research Associate, Univ. Ghana]
- David Robinson III [Music Educationist]
- National Academy of Music, Ghana –Class of 1986
- Mr. Solomon Eshun [Notation transcriber]
- Mr. Evans Agyekum [Notation transcriber]
- Mr. Makafui Kwame [Sound programmer /engineer]
- Mr. Mark Nii Lomo Lomotey [Choreographer]
- Mus. Students of Univ. of Education, Winneba [2010- 2012]

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Foreword

I am Afrikan not because I was born in Afrika. I am Afrikan because Afrika was born in me. And so it is for most Black Afrikans whether on the continent or in the diaspora. The oppressors of the world have tried with every ounce of energy and every wit of intellect to destroy Afrikans and steal the most precious treasures of the motherland. No matter the horrific evils or oppressive conditions, like words of the great Mama Maya Angelou, "And Still We Rise!"

However, we are aware that we do not rise, unscarred and unaffected. Injected into many of our veins has been the vaccines of oppression from the tormenter whose evility sought to destroy us. That vaccine of oppression caused some of us to dislike ourselves, reject our culture, disrespect our elders, devalue our wealth and dishonor our ancestors and the world they built for us. Many began to believe everything Western and white was right.

There have been many who have worked aggressively to get this vaccine of oppression out of their system—to honor, value and bring attention to the rich wealth of the Afrikan culture. Meeting Ɔbenfo Victor Kwamina Kunim Manieson at the Providence Missionary Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, I knew I had found such a valued Afrikan. He was, as Dr. Derise Tolliver Atta (Professor Emeritus, DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA) so often professes, "Unapologetically, Unashamedly, Unabashedly Afrikan." Whether at the church, in musical performances or in the piano room at my home, he was always thinking, conversing about, or composing the Afrikan in the conversation or the music. I watched him challenge choirs, students, educators and pastors to value and honor the Afrikan cultural perspective. Not only did he challenge, he modeled the broad acceptability of such in his compositions and performances. These performances were often lauded with thunderous applause and overwhelming appreciation. I watched very young piano students become enthusiastic about piano lessons often asking for more work than he assigned. More than teaching piano skills, he empowered them to believe in themselves and honor their culture. I am aware that my daughter's interest in piano waned after his return to Ghana, because she could not seem to find another teacher like "Mr. Victor," as he is so affectionately called by the young piano students. Primarily, these students struggled to find other teachers who both believed in their ability and ignited their Afrikan spirits.

Seeing these works of art re-ignited my spirit afresh as if I had returned to Callanwalde Fine Arts Center sitting in the audience on that 15th day of June in 1995 hearing these amazing master pieces of "Afrikan Pianism" and experiencing Ɔbenfo Manieson and his students in exemplary performance. I am excited that they are finally in print and the story is told to inspire other musicians, educators and professionals to be unapologetically Afrikan.

My excitement about Ɔbenfo Manieson is that he begins his theories and theses of music and education from the theories and lessons of his father and grandfather. Any other culture's theories or theses should have to be measured against those of Afrikan cultural educators, elders and ancestors. If we are going to be strong warriors against oppressors, effective healers of Afrikan peoples and powerful builders of Afrikan Nations, we must be Afrikan first, inside and out. The lenses we wear to see life clearly must be Afrikan lenses. The thoughts we think must come first through the Afrikan mind. The emotions we feel must come through the Afrikan heart. The Most High Spirit that we

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worship must have an Afrikan face. Otherwise, we are deceiving ourselves and playing games about liberation and freedom.

"African Pianism" is taking this liberated step in the world of music, and more specifically with the instrument of the piano. This work seems to be part of the healing process in the world of music. It is set on a mission to rid the body of music from the injected vaccines of oppression pumped into the veins of the culture for centuries. Ɔbenfo Manieson is reaching into the soil of the root herbs of Afrikan sound to restore healing to the cultural music body. He seems to have as a goal the ridding of the body Nation the injected oppression while filling the body with the herbal sounds to restore a strong immune system for the Afrikan Nation against any sounds engaging adversely to its health. These works remind us that Afrika is the birthplace and home of symbolic imagery and rhythm. To begin to authenticate rhythm, sound, music or imagery from any other cultural context is an affront to the ancestors and a "slap in the face" to the Loving Creation Spirits who blessed the Nation. Ɔbenfo Victor Kwamina Kunim Manieson is more like the Tsofatsɛ or Odumsini helping to clear the veins of the poisons injected by the colonial oppressors and infuse the body music with the healing that will strengthen the immune system and fortify the Nation to its strength, courage, purpose and vision. "African Pianism" is a set herbs offered to further this healing work.

Ɔsôfo Kwesi Atta,
Former Director - Clinical Pastoral Education,
Advocate Health Care,
Chicago - United States of America.

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Preface

Simple practical pianistic structures and motifs that exemplify Africanity are manifested in my works included in this book. I intentionally call it African Pianism not as a statement of rhetoric; but as title noting that the essence of African culture has permeated the world in unique artistic expressions and interpretations.

The collections presented in African Pianism further articulate what African Studies, African American Studies, Africana Studies, and ultimately Africology seeks to achieve. In my view, the consciousness that drives Africology is a phenomenon that at best demands for the validity, acceptance, preservation, promotion, and recognition of Africans as humans - subjects and not objects (Asante 1999), and also whose alignments with Divinity are echoed by nature. By Africology I mean the interdisciplinary academic discipline that studies the history, arts and culture of African people around the world.

Most piano pieces in our institutions of higher learning and churches in Ghana are by Western composers. It has been so for many decades and admittedly so since the arrival of the pianoforte on the shores of Africa. Over the years, the Non-Western cultures that embraced the piano have been faced with the standard repertoire of Western classics and desire for Non-Western (African) classics that could also be nurtured and developed through the lenses of African focus. While some Western-trained African musicians wrestle with Validating African Centered Pedagogy, the little practice of its evolvement within and outside academia has proven its relevance. For instance in the late 1970s when I was a student at Presbyterian Boys Secondary School - Legon, my music teacher Mr. Nathan Bampoe Damptey played both Western classical pieces and African Pianism. This intrigued me. Also, at Achimota School, Mr. Kenneth Kafui Avotri did a similar thing particularly with pedagogical pieces. Both music masters took interest in my unique passion in music then as a student. Their interest in my work continued during my years of study. Quite recently in 2017/18, they celebrated my works.

Though the impact of some of our African centered musicians are obviously making strides, a coded attitude still vibrates through Ghana's academia that needs to be confronted. This attitude regards the lack of validation of African Pianism as a practice in our music departments. It saddens me and reminds me of a question the late Prof. Nketia once asked me. "What are you doing besides performing Africa centered piano works"? Functionality was good, but I must also document and mentor others. He drew my attention to how Dr. Ephraim Amu, Dr. N. Z. Nayo, Dr Aikim Euba, Hugh Masekela and others who fought so hard over decades to showcase the African creative contributions to the world.

While Western classical pieces have had positive impact in many ways on the landscape of music departments of our Universities, they should not be the ones used as an exclusive yardstick in determining who is a good pianist or organist in our society. It is no secret that 'Africanizing' Western melodies will raise eyebrows in even traditional Ghanaian settings as well as in Ghana's academic circles. Likewise, it must be noted that the practice will remain in some circles as an Art.

Honoring intellectual property - Human Ingenuity, Academic Honesty, Copyright -helps devise healthy and proper approaches that values and respects the rights of the composer and, by extension, the Art Form. Western classical Art music's distinct classification will be maintained. For the afore mentioned reasons, I propose that it is critically important that the study of piano as a percussive instrument have as its intentional focus the African cultural musical modes, African rhythmic acuity

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and unique African interpretations as valid examination and exploration for the student. The piano lends itself easily to most African composers and pianists who have these innate African instincts to give birth to African cultural musical patterns. Hence, as a consortium of diverse indigenous modalities, motifs and instruments with cultural related cosmologies, these musical creations become capsulated. Within the limitation of languages, they become best expressed as African Pianism. This designation is thus set. References can be made and designations will continually be confronted to upgrade its content and proficiency for sustained recognition. To assume that piano pieces by Western composers in some particular constructs should be the only accepted creative potential and possibility limits the potential abilities of the piano as a tool and denies us all the rich diversity of Art Music constructs that could emerge. For me, with respect to African Pianism, a cultural imperative is that it is a phenomenon that would be used to promote cross cultured synthesis with the piano as the main tool promoting different areas of interactions. For instance, as I learned to appreciate Western classical music with an open mind, the desire was ignited in me to write something 'African'. A challenge then came as to whether or not I could play a piano piece that could be perceived as African, Oriental or Eastern European. With a 'yes' answer, I knew it could be written and composed. Appreciating the works and those of other contributors such as Emeritus Professor J. H. Nketia's article on 'The Juncture of the Social and the Musical," I gain insight into understanding this line of thought.

Cultural orientations and its applications must be of progressive proficiency levels when crafting songs for the promotion of Art Music as a contribution to global piano literacy. This is why there are many thought reflective and provoking questions that confirm my understanding that education must by necessity propel me to be useful to my environment and my existence. African Pianism: A contribution to Africology Volume I, is not only for the corridors of Academia. It is a friendly invitation to all who desire to get a feel of bi-musicality through the lenses of a Ghanaian on a distinct musical journey.

In June 1986, I presented Adawora Fantasy and Aharabata Variations to a panel of examiners at the National Academy of Music [now the Music Department of the University of Education, Winneba - Ghana] as partial fulfillment for my award of Diploma in Music. In fact, the pieces were the background music of a mini musical I had written — "Heritage Afrique." Truth need to be told; the pieces were received with mixed feelings yet VERY LOVED. This irony disturbed me. If I had just written some hymns with Germanic or Scottish harmonic styles, the applaud would have been heavenly! I also realized later that if I had written my piano pieces in traditional Western style perhaps along the lines of Mozart's or Beethoven's Sonatina or Sonata, or Bach's fugal style or any of the styles I had previously done to pass Music grade level examinations, I would have received THUNDOROUS APPLAUSE. While all the Western exposures on campus could be considered necessary, I also knew some international pianist whose works were nationalistic in character incorporate cultural elements. Some mentionable few are Stravinsky, Chopin, Tchaikovsky. I also knew some Jazz and Negro spirituals pieces (not at the Academy) from the manifestation of African music from the United States of America. Of particular interest to me at that time was the centrality of what made the Blues and the Negro Spirituals. Their constructs resonated in me, feelings beyond the appreciation of Western classical music. This development of being able to appreciate Western Art Forms and Black Diaspora Music also resonated, evoked and ignited what my spirit identified as the Unique Heritage of Africa which I decided I must pursue. Western Art Forms have become familiar yet their interpretations did not align with mine except when I composed to pass examinations.

Validating my musicality came from hearing Duke Ellington's Symphonic Band, Oscar Petersons piano works, Mahalia Jackson's Singing, The Fisk Jubilee Singers and many others. The one that confirmed my Innate Instinctive Impulse was the classic song "LIFT EVERY VOICE AND

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SING" written initially as poem by James Weldon Johnson in 1900 and set to music by brother John Rosamond Johnson in 1905. All these crystalized a thought demanding a search for my identity as an African and projecting a necessity to value my culture.

As a fresh college instructor in 1986 at the very college from which I graduated, National Academy of Music and also the acting Music Director of The Hour of Visitation Choir and Evangelistic Association (Accra Branch), I resolved to saturate myself with elements of Traditional African Music and Black American Music in addition to the offerings of the Academy. I must clarify here that my quest to play differently did not start here but rather the experiences gathered from what was considered standard repertoire, the exposure of what sounded different/weird but accepted in other cultures and the functionality required of me to survive as a choir director confirmed to me that my interpretations were ON TARGET! So in 1988 I purposed to nurture what I have coined as CLASSICAL AFRIQUE (African Pianism).

I often wonder why most piano instructors/coaches in our Ghanaian tertiary institutions (then 1980s and even now 2020) do not boldly embrace African Pianism and demand from its execution the same passion they do for other Art Forms. Sufficient foundational works have been explored and grounded about my concern. The level of consciousness, awareness and application to sustain functioning practices which should saturate and translate into concert performances is not encouraging. Until we challenge ourselves, the African essence that should permeate our compositions will become extinct.

In the early 1990s while in the USA, I continued experimenting with my gifts in composing, teaching and performing. However, between 1993 to 1997, I found myself in Atlanta and attended many recitals, concerts and Gospel choir performances that humbled me and confirmed my convictions. At Clark Atlanta University, I often saw and heard Professor Mark Boozer play some complex eclectic piano pieces. I also made time to listen to the notable English Language Professor Ojeda Penn of Atlanta Technical College who was also a Jazz Pianist. John Robertson on piano at Dante's down the Hatch (underground) confused me the most but the Innate Instinctive Impulse from Ghana kept resurfacing. At Providence Missionary Baptist Church (on Larkin street and later Benjamin. E. Mays street), I played the piano as a church musician. The church had a very rich musical heritage. Because it was in close proximity to Atlanta University, Morris Brown College, Spellman College and Morehouse College, many of the lecturers, professors and students who appreciated black centered composition songs and interpretations visited us. I learned a lot there and studied a lot of the choral compositions by Wendell Whallum. My colleague musician David Robinson III at PMBC had so much enthusiasm in music that his positive energy infected me. Because David was also a music educationist, he was able to explain things better musically for me, and thus, became my mentor. With a lot of creative nurturing going on, I decided to give a concert at Callanwolde Fine Arts Center on 15th June 1995. It was dubbed Classical Afrique. The audience was a mixture of colleagues from the Doctor of Arts in Humanities programme CAU, East Cobb Middle School teachers, parishioners from Providence Missionary Baptist Church and my students. Their attentiveness, encouragement and general appreciation for my Art Form validated my belief in African Pianism. My desire to create something African, draw inspiration from existing folk songs, enchanted by distinctive traditional harmonic constructs and/or boldly drawing from contemporary exploration of harmony with respect to distinctive peculiarities (e.g. Text–Tone relationships, Black American Gospel harmonic progressions). I determined that Africa also has something to offer. Numerous performances of my works in Ghana, Nigeria and the USA, continue to shape my orientation. Quite a number of students and audiences demand copies of my works.

Each piece/composition in this book comes with notes describing how it was birthed and with basic details to aid interpretation. My innate instinct, primitive impulse and tacit knowledge forbid me

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to accept that the piano only embraces Western Cultural Musical Constructs. I see the piano as a multi-ethnic/cross-cultural/multifaceted fertilized embodiment which comes through the annals of the West in search of its family members. As a Ghanaian, I choose to express myself in my Musical Cultural Mode. Also, I embrace the hybrid nature it offers in the songs that emerge as symbolic of our mutual need to co-exist in our Common Humanity. The piano yet sends signals to me through its "cosmic relevance" and might be, like other instruments, a diplomatic agent in bridging cultures. For example, I wonder sometimes what the African Xylophone has in common with the pianoforte.

I conclude this preface by stating that, while standard repertoire of Western classical piano music maintains its distinction, I offer the works here through the lenses of Africa as one responding and contributing to Africology. To refuse publishing African Pianism: A Contribution to Africology will be synonymous to denying my students - former, present and future - and the world, the creative potential field of cultural enriched piano literature. It would be a detriment to my existence.

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NOTE 1: Africa Pianism: Adawora Fantasy

Adawora Fantasy was composed in 1986 and presented as part of a set of compositions (long essay) in partial fulfillment of my award of Diploma in Music at the National Academy of Music under the auspices of the University of Cape Coast. The piece attempts to capture the essence of the Adowa Ensemble - an Akan dancing and drumming style popular amongst all Ghanaian. As a young pianist with special interest in African aesthetics phenomenon evoked through traditional instruments, I was so fascinated by the communicative possibilities and the dimensions involved at different levels/ layers of their instrumentation and the general way it engages its functionaries.

My understanding of the Adowa Ensemble then was simply as follows:

> *The instruments served as discursive voices and as an entity extended at different levels modes of communicative signals to the dancer.*
>
> *In response, the movement and gestures of the dancer(s) also served as channels of expressions to the audience.*
>
> *The different levels of understanding amongst the audience, send appreciation remarks and gestures confirming an artistry with diverse channels of communication. This I believe is a very positive and healthy reactionary loop worth celebrating.*

The simultaneous levels and channels of communication beautifully interwoven continue to intrigue me even now. This happens because anytime Adawora is performed, its aesthetic sensibilities awake in me a compelling essence. So since I cannot contain myself to do the adowa dance or play the master drum very well, I chose to compose Adawora Fantasy – i.e. play my Adowa around the world on the piano while I dance in my head.

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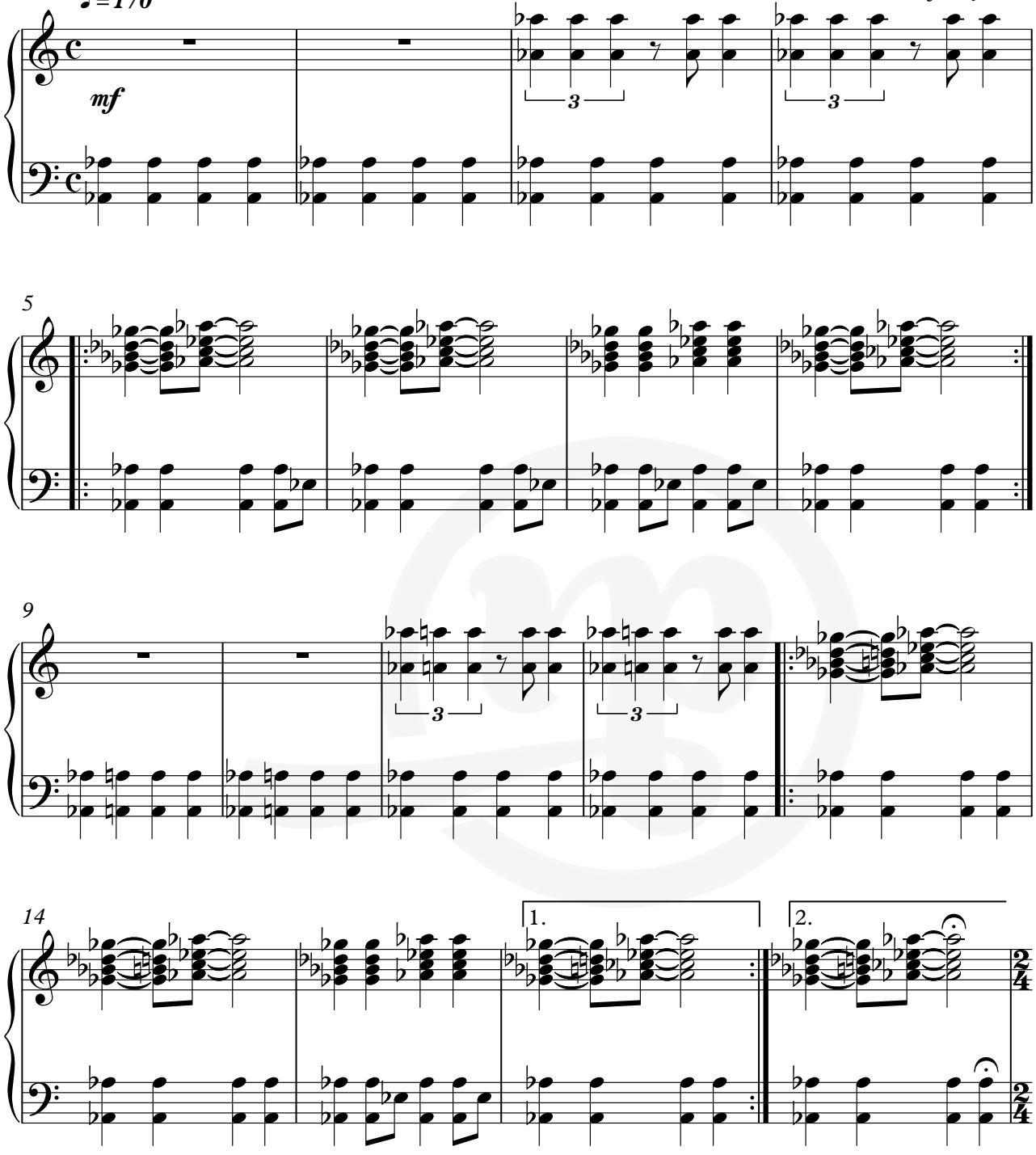
Adawora Fantasy

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
National Academy of Music
Winneba - Ghana
June, 1986



V.S.

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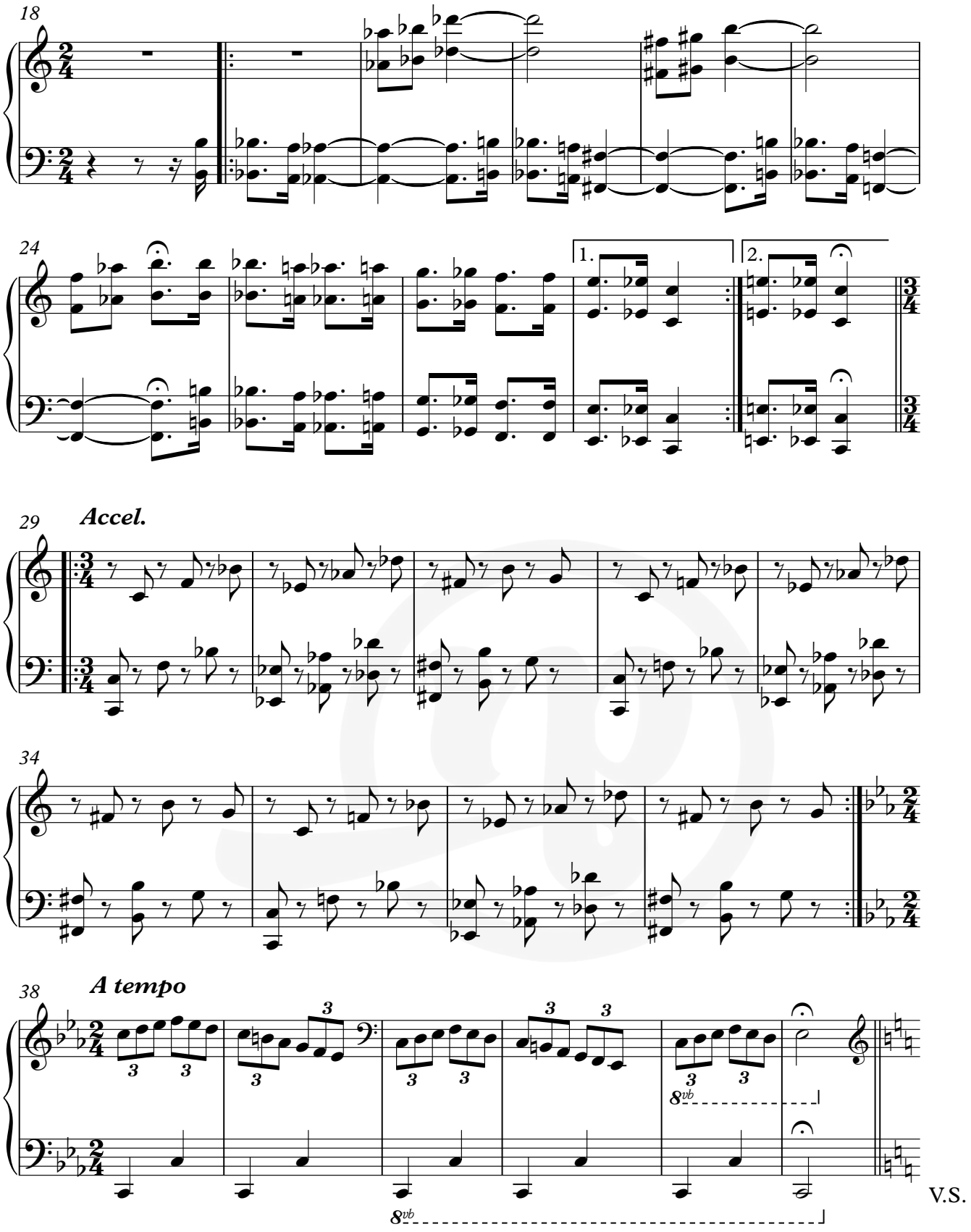

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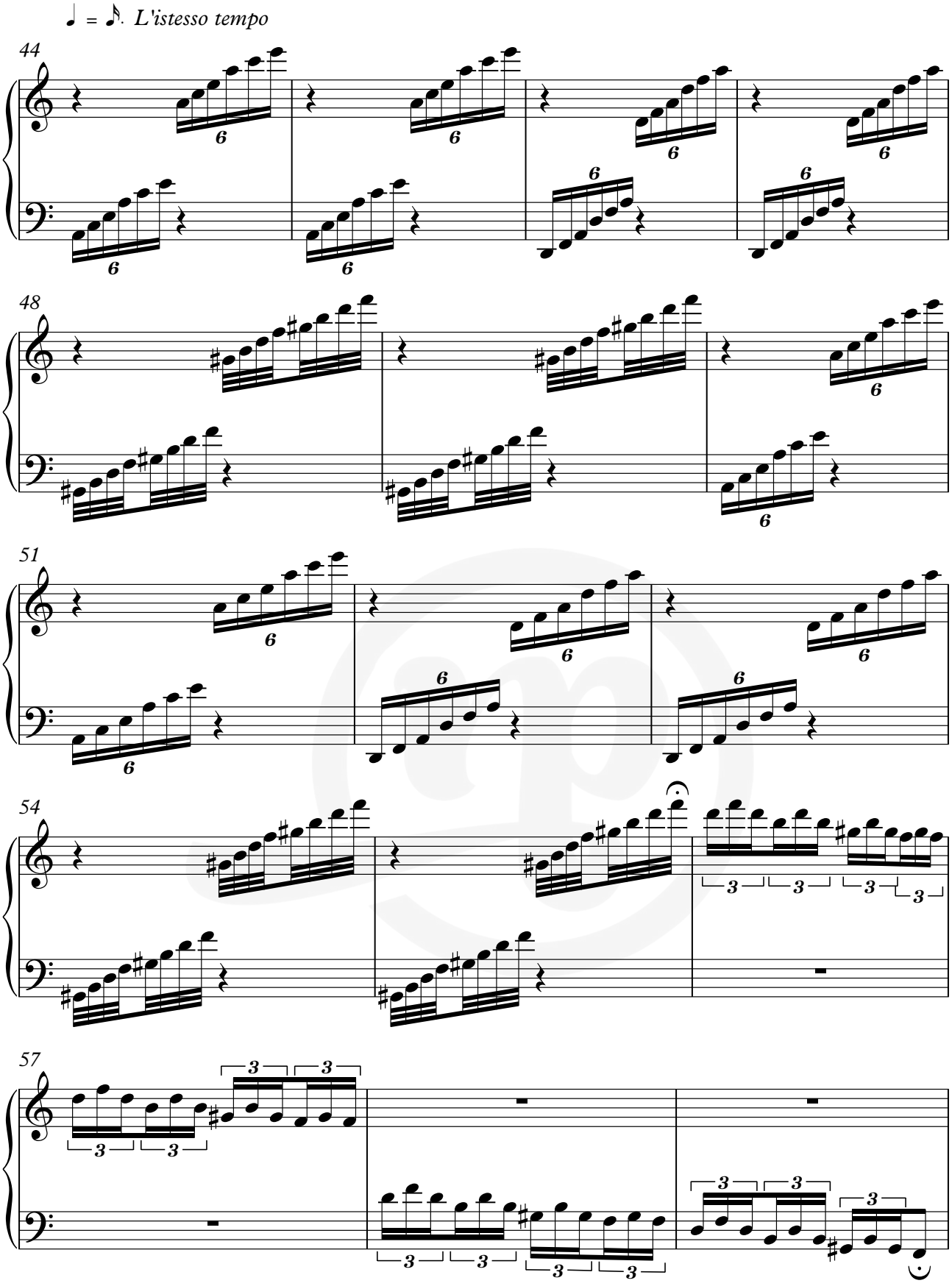

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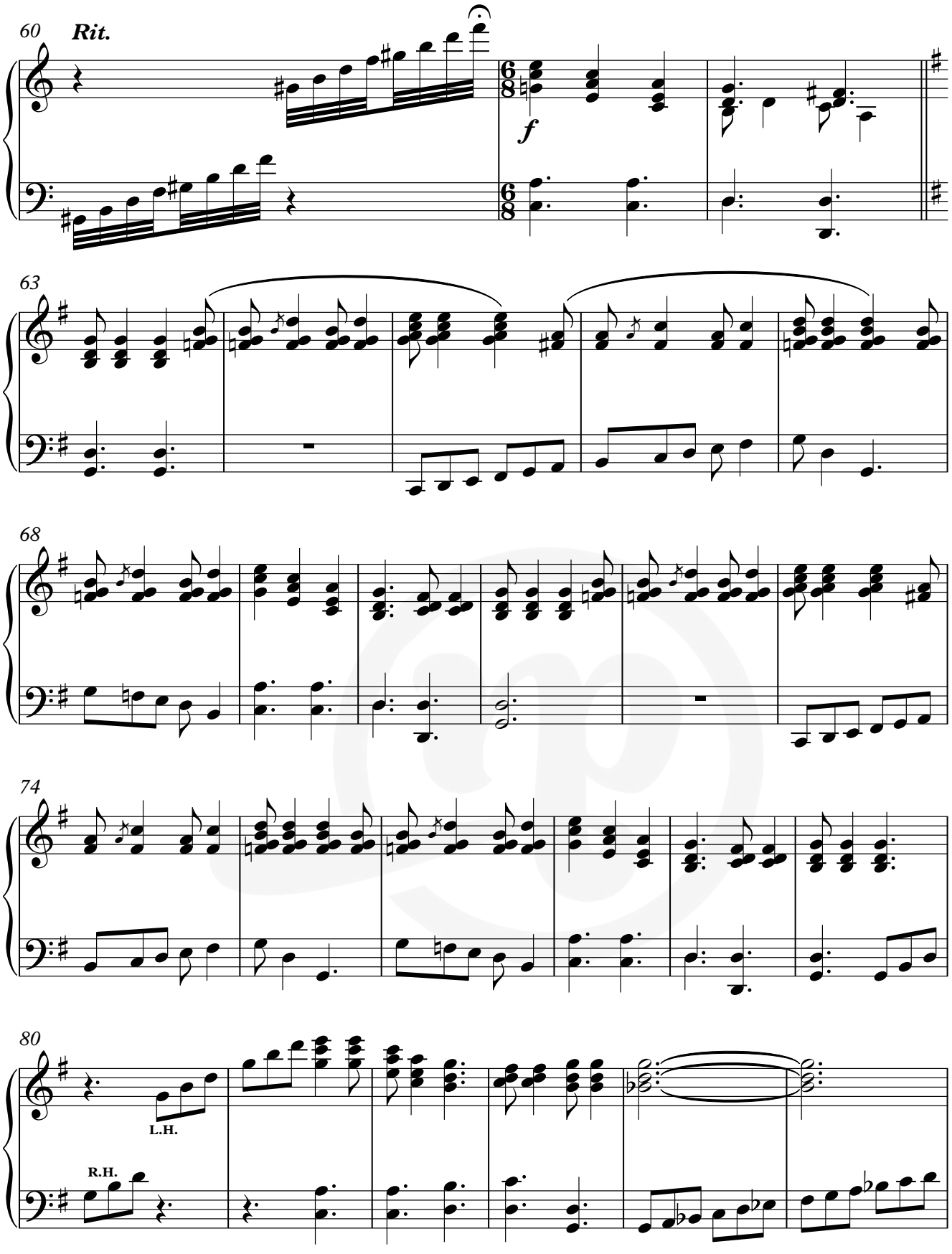

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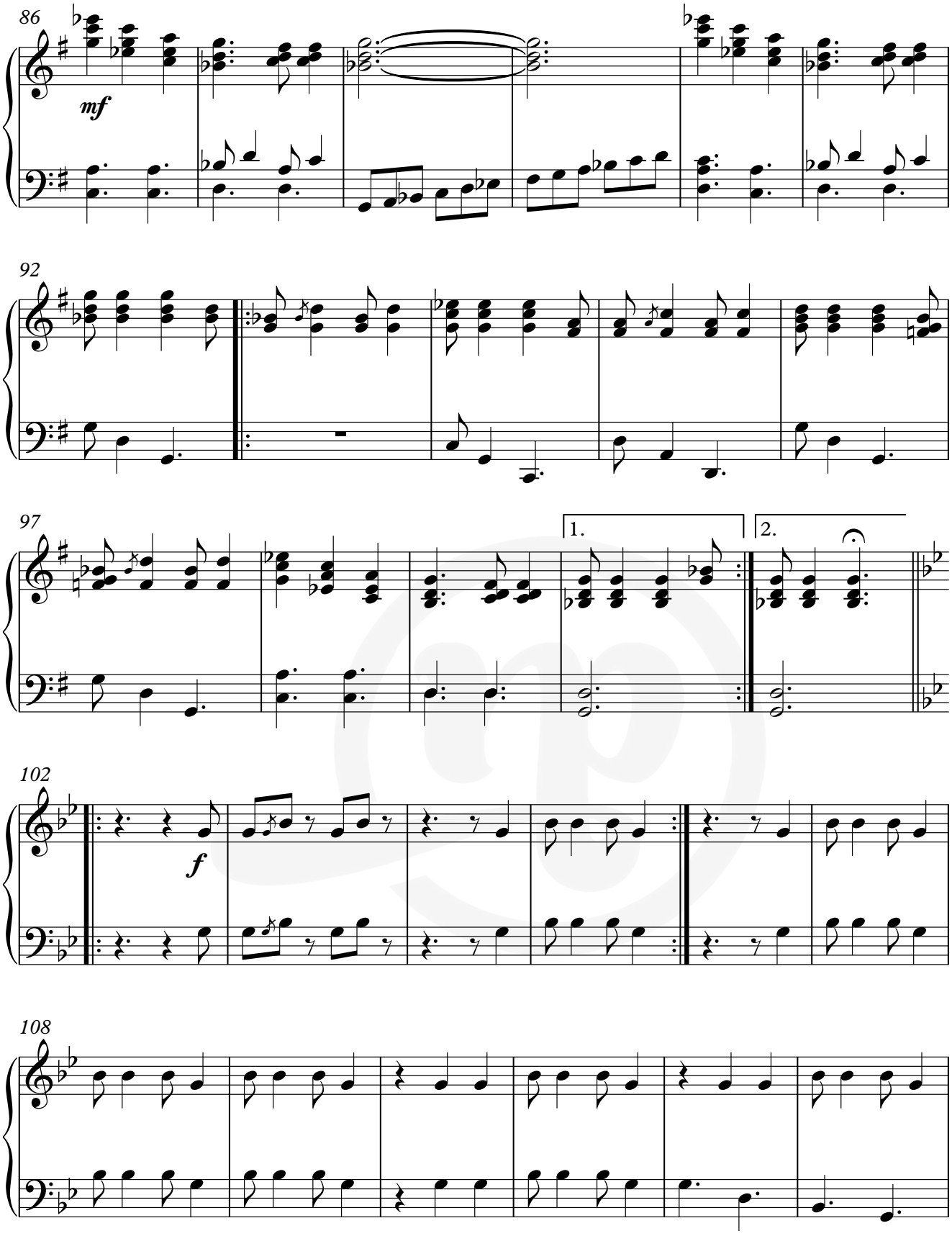

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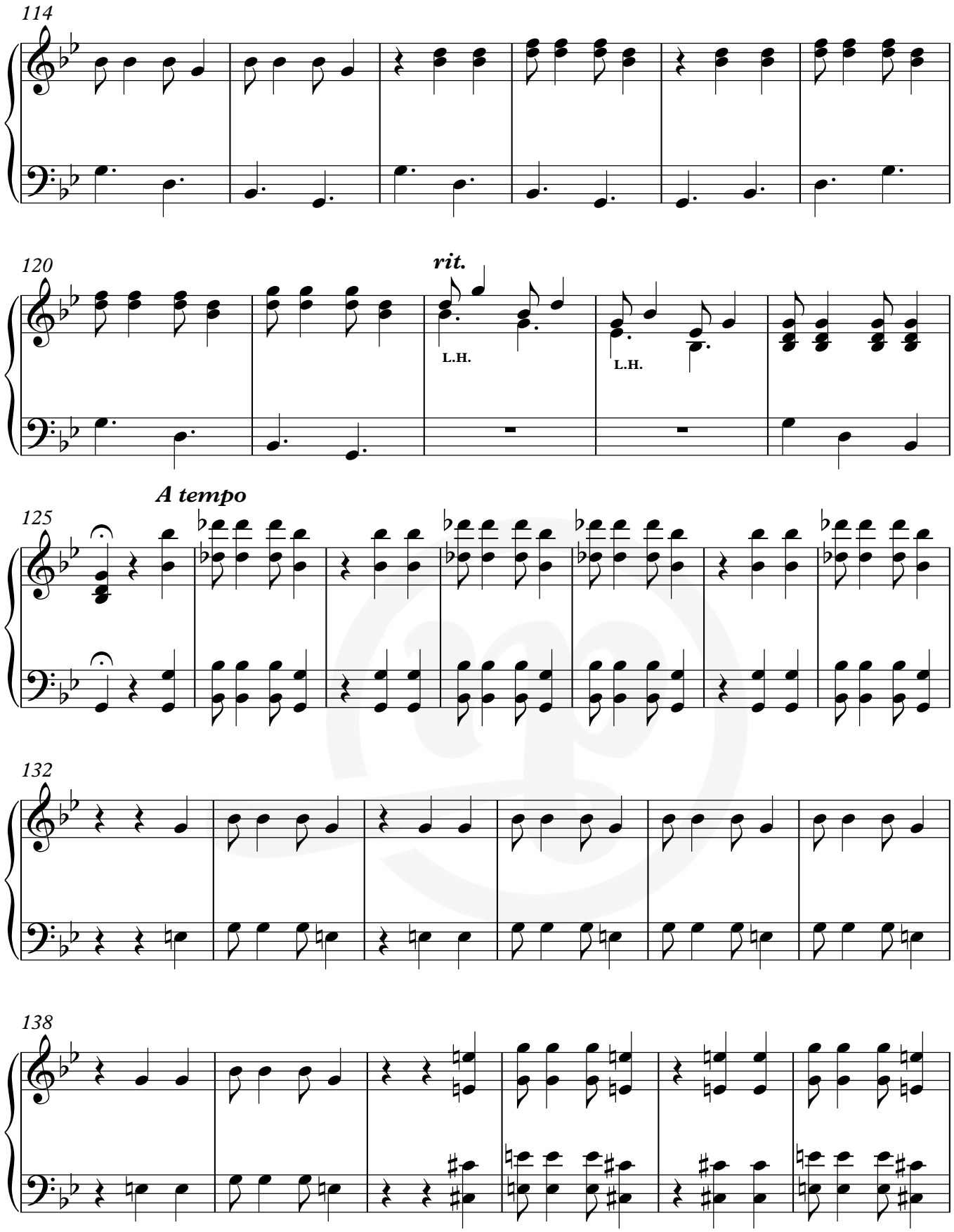

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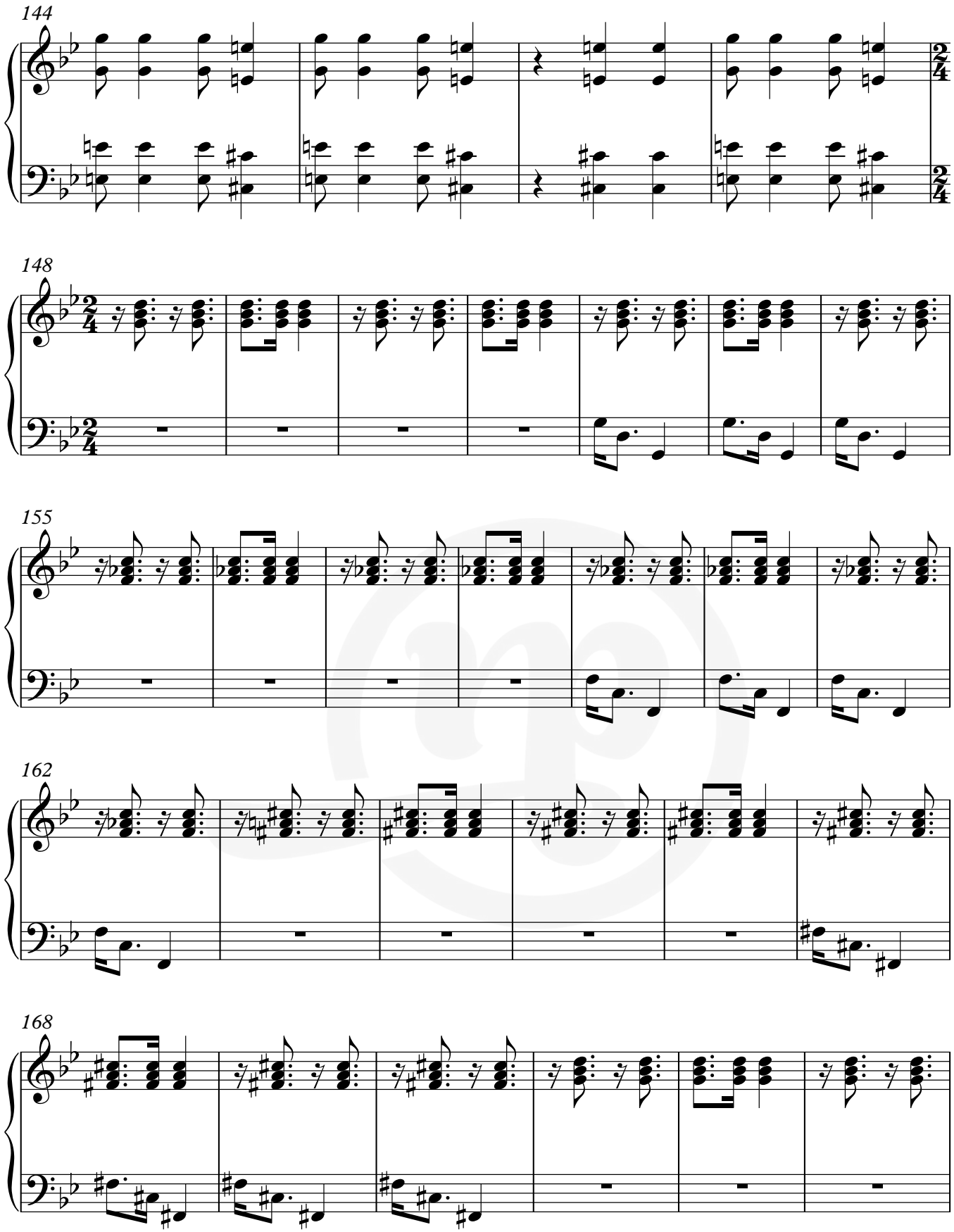

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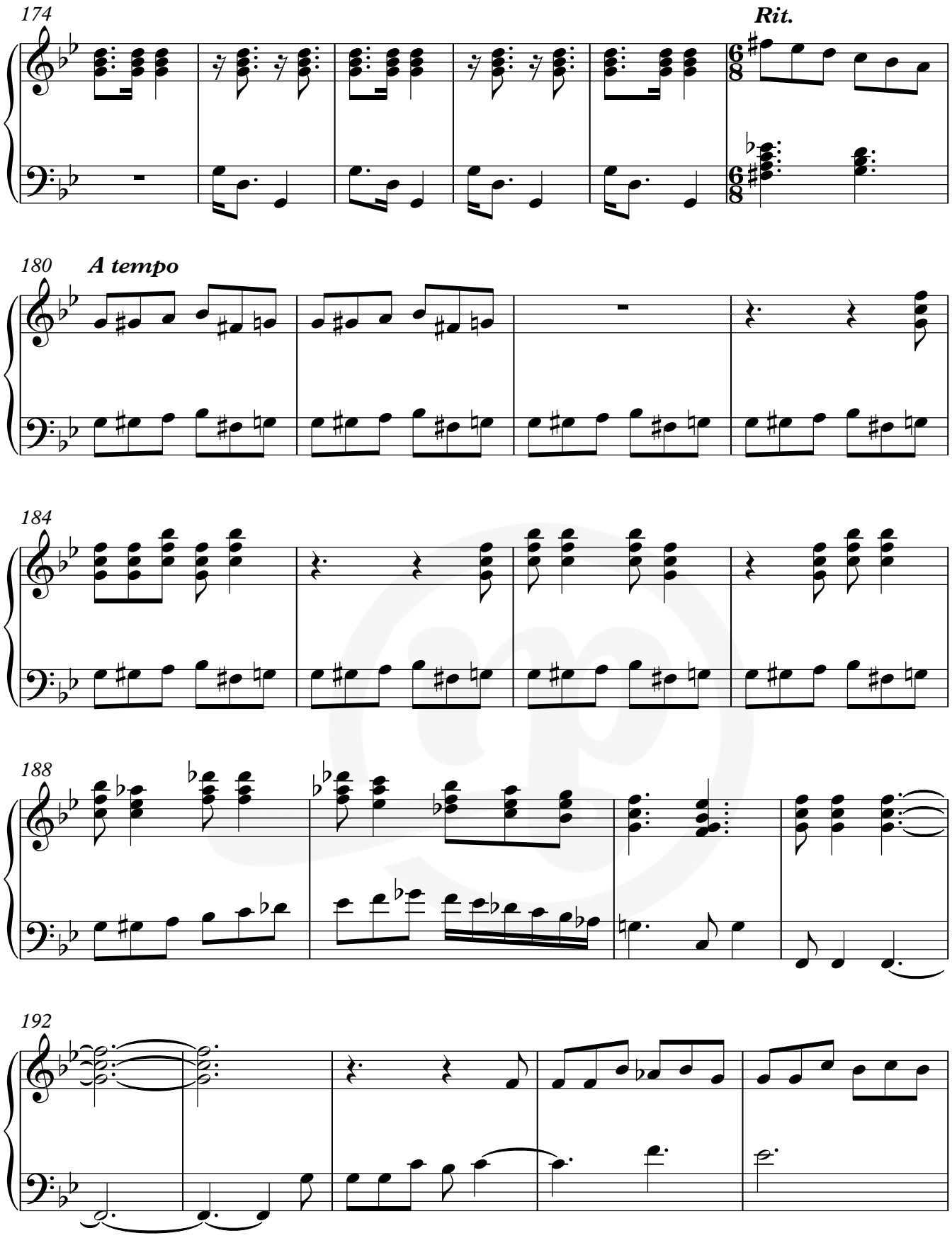

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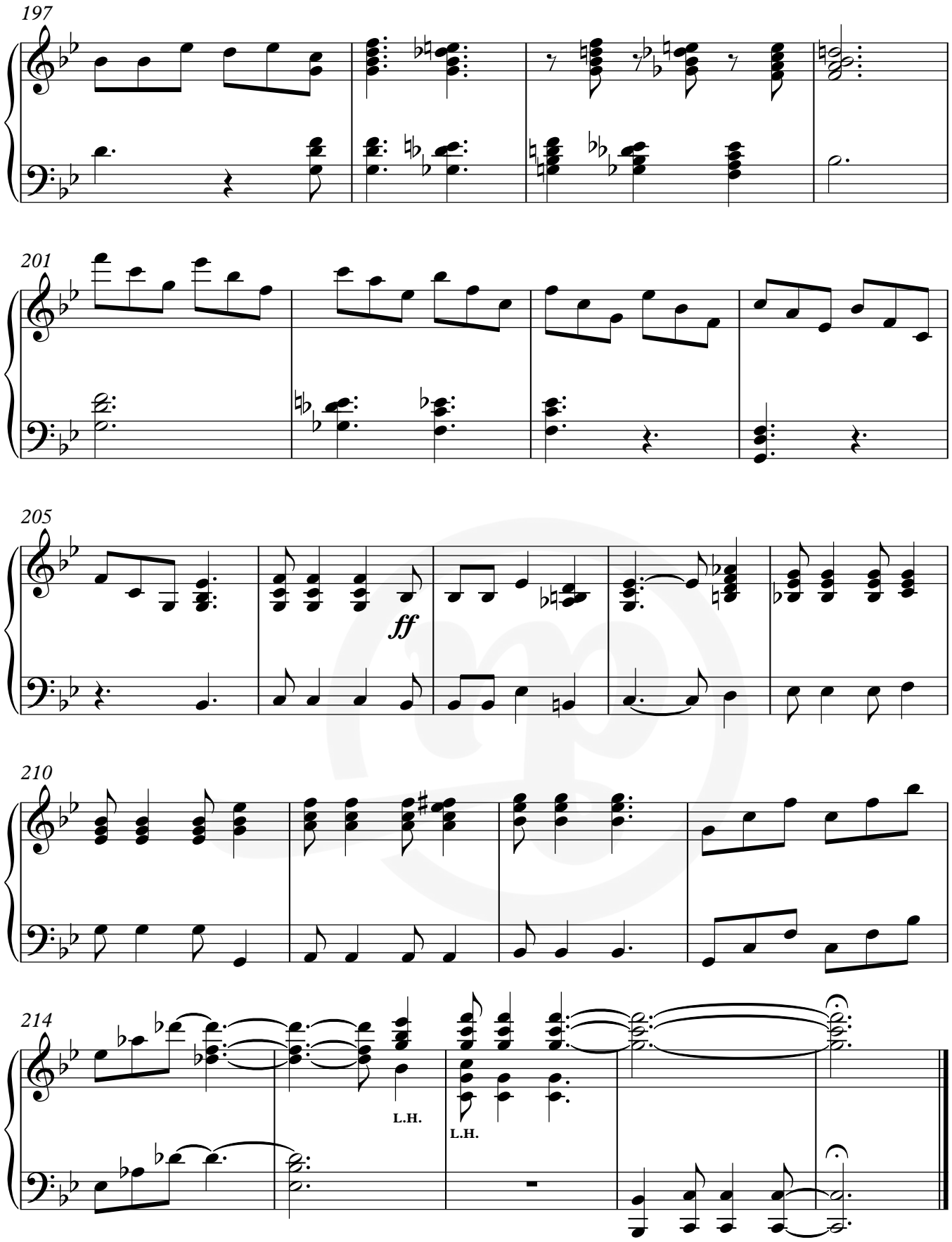

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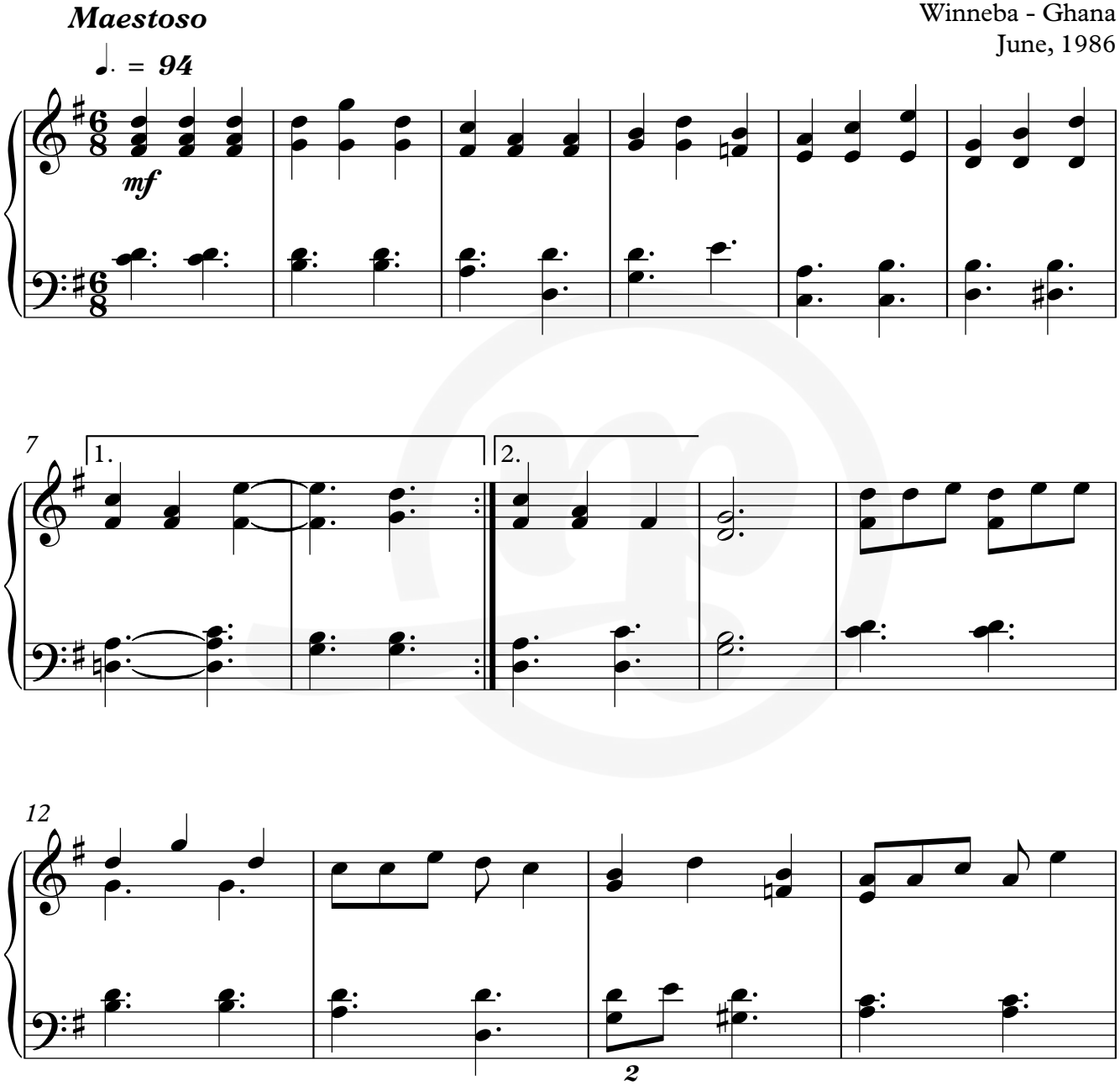
Adawora Fantasy
to
Aharabata Variations
(An Optional Transitional Passage)

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
National Academy of Music
Winneba - Ghana
June, 1986



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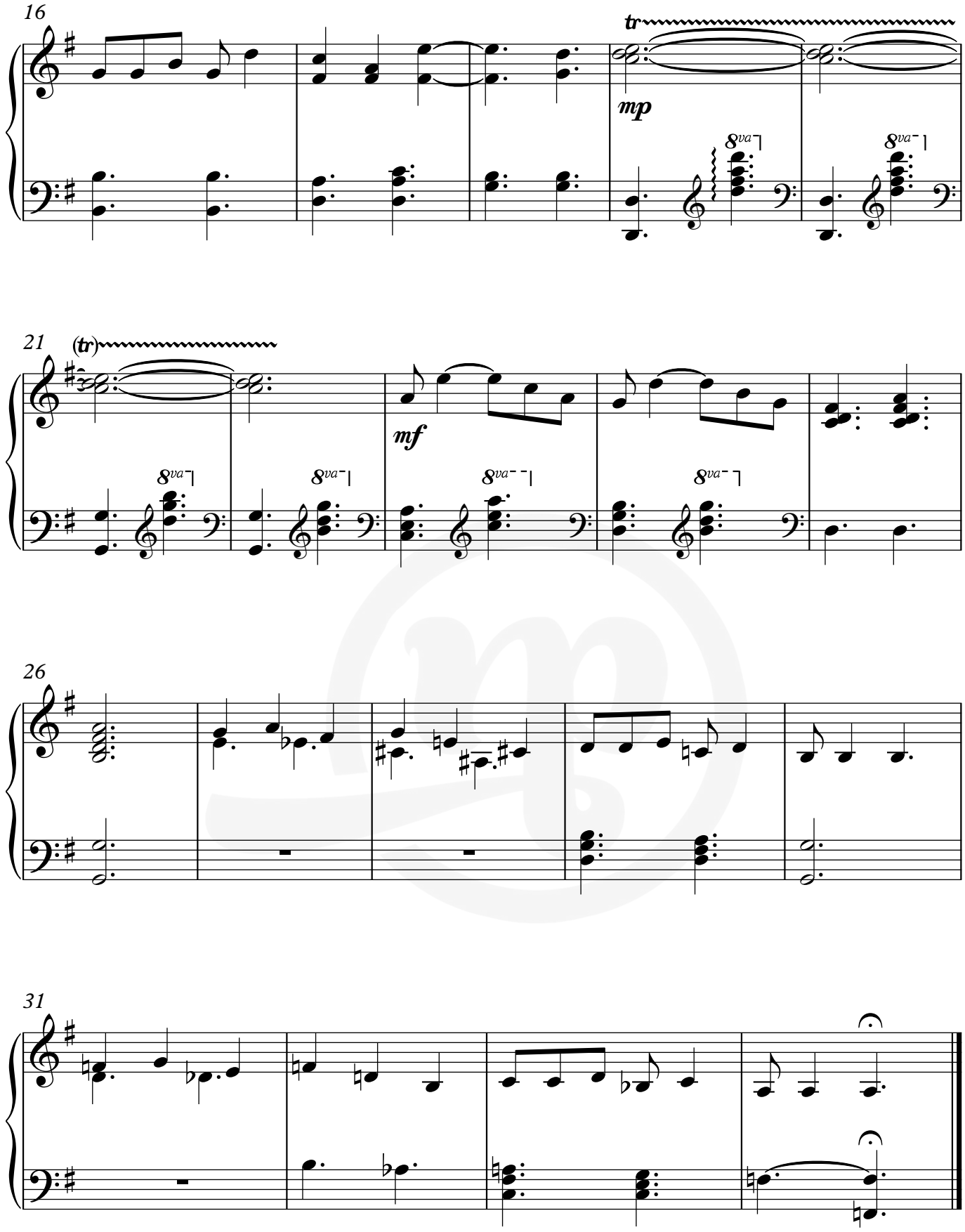

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NOTE 3: African Pianism: Aharabata Variations

Aharabata Variations was composed in 1986 and presented as part of a set of compositions (long essay) in partial fulfillment for my award of Diploma in Music at the National Academy of Music under the auspices of the University Of Cape Coast. Aharabata is the Ga word for January. As a young adult, I had so many expectations for every New Year - the cross over from the old year, promises of parents, my desire to grow and be free to visit other parts of Ghana on my own. I likened the process to the one that the harmattan season goes through in January. With the variations, I created this simple melody. The melody and harmonies are sounds influenced by songs I heard my late grandfather sing in our village of Abokobi. This kind of orientation happens to many who grow up in musical families especially in the days when technology was not as prevalent as now. Abokobi is a village - now a town - where Basel Missionaries settled for years. It sits below the Aburi Mountains and Akuapem hills. For a very long time, the Presbyterian Church was the only church in Abokobi. And we were members of the church. That church introduced me to music to music through my father and grandfather

In the opening theme of Aharabata Variation, I crafted my melody like a hymn harmonizing it the way the Manieson family in Abokobi would treat any simple melody when singing. What I wished we would have had during family gatherings was some African instruments to accompany our songs. I create a melody in measures/ bars one (1) through 16. Thus, I create a situation in bars 83 -136 where I super imposed a simple African rhythm with the right hand over the wonderful harmonies in the left hand. This treatment is deliberate. It is to prove that two musical cultures can co-exist. It was also to affirm my premise then with some of my peers and even instructors of how African rhythmic patterns with Western ones could generate a hybrid depicting the Africans' accommodating spirit.

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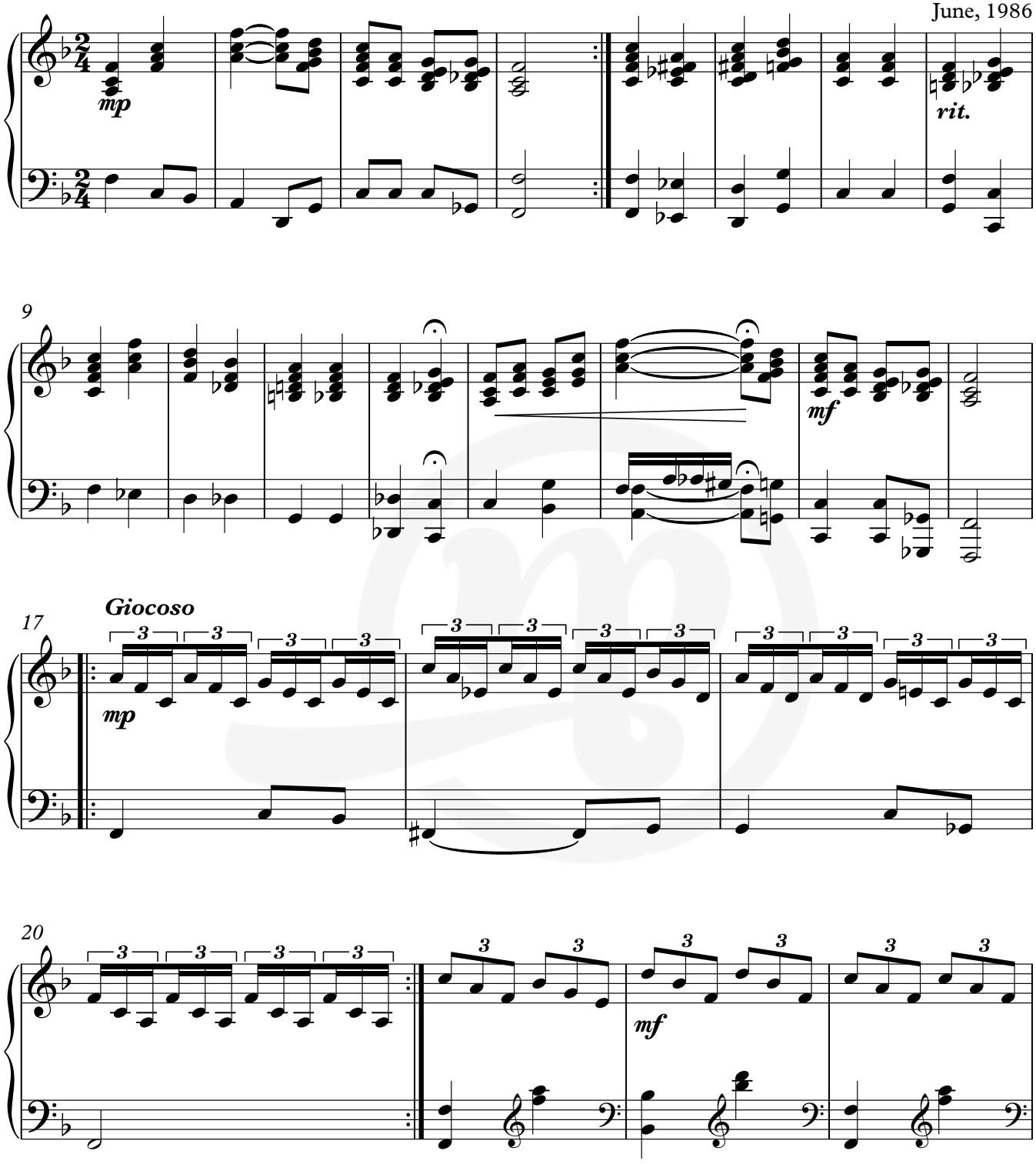
Aharabata Variations

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
National Academy of Music
Winneba - Ghana
June, 1986



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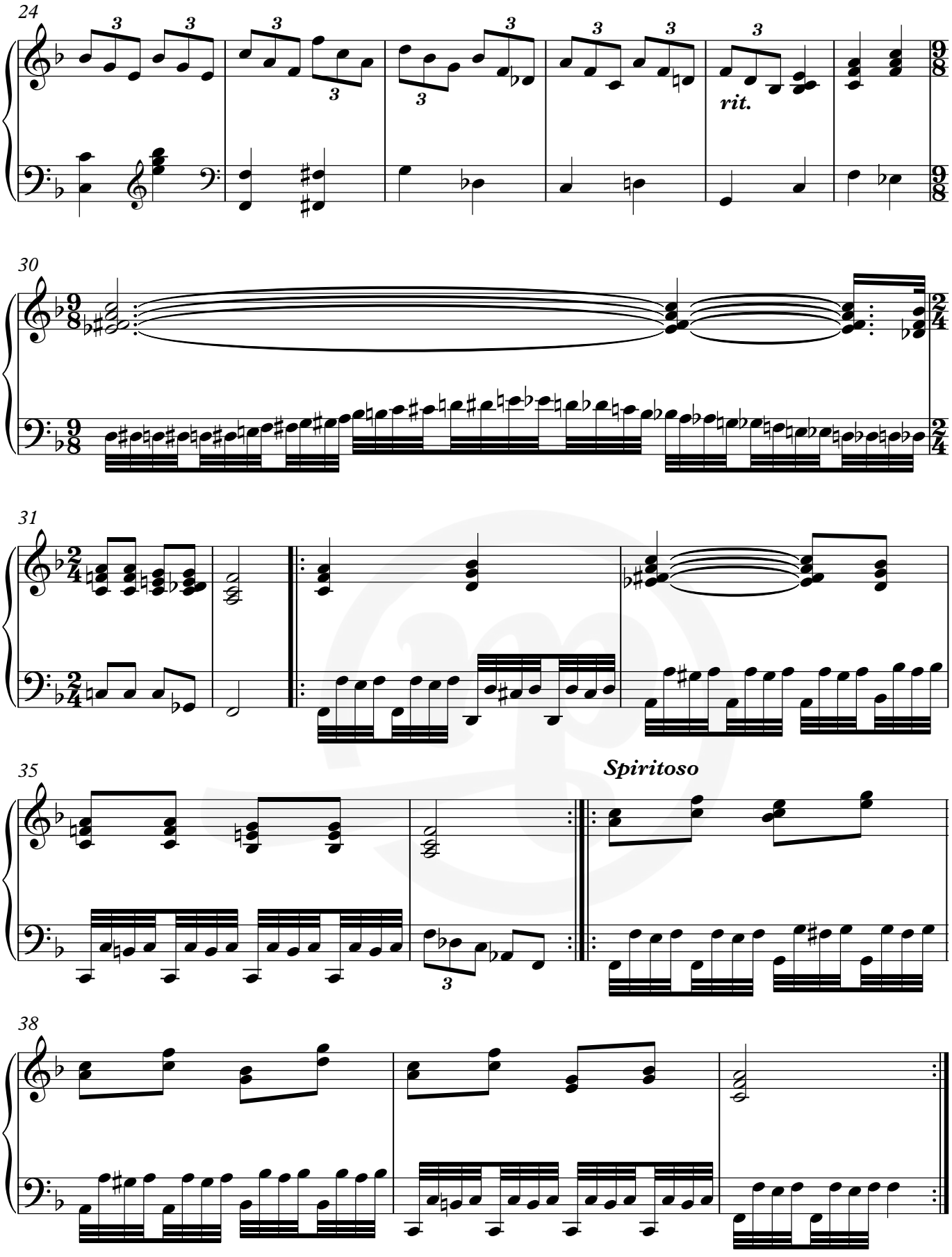

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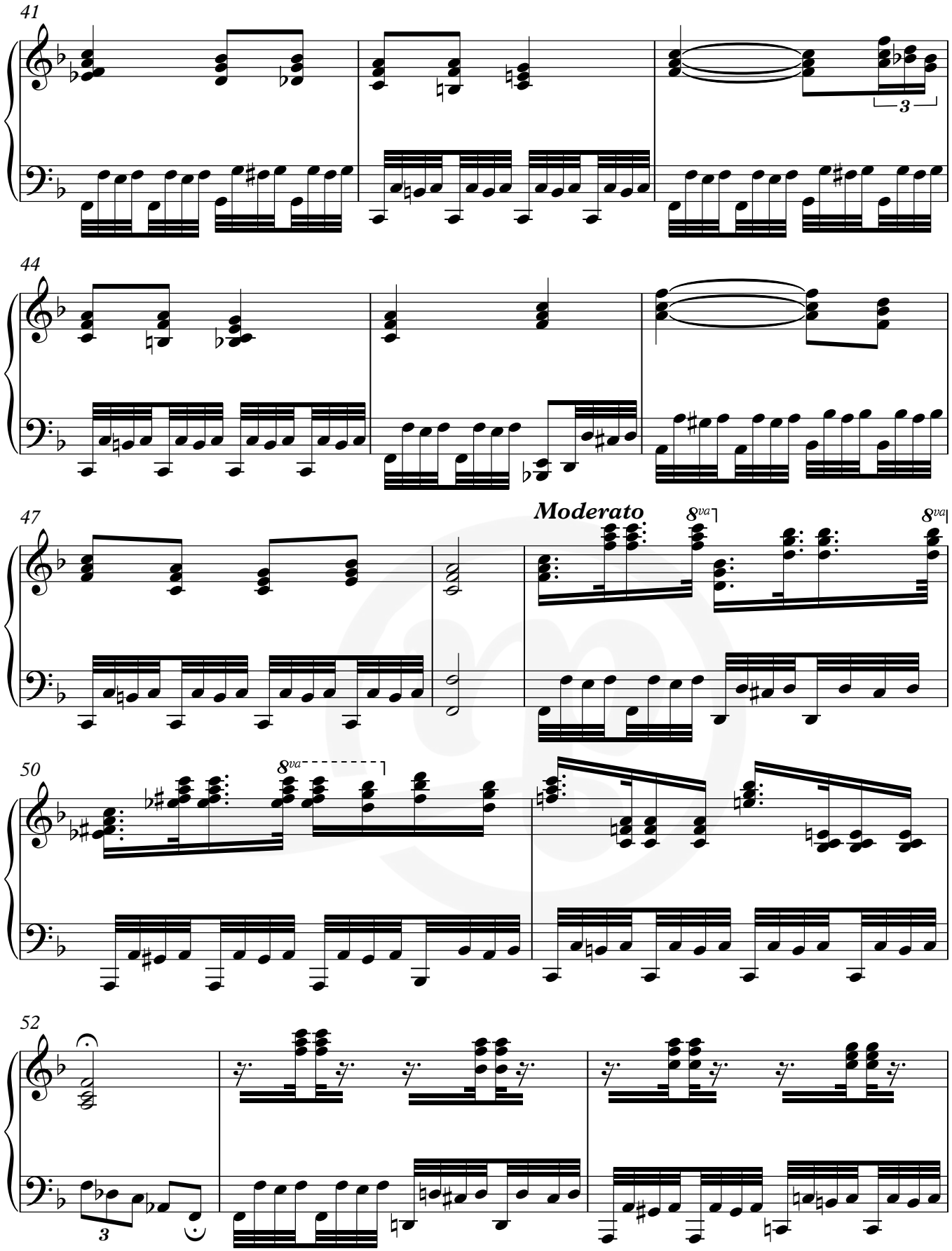

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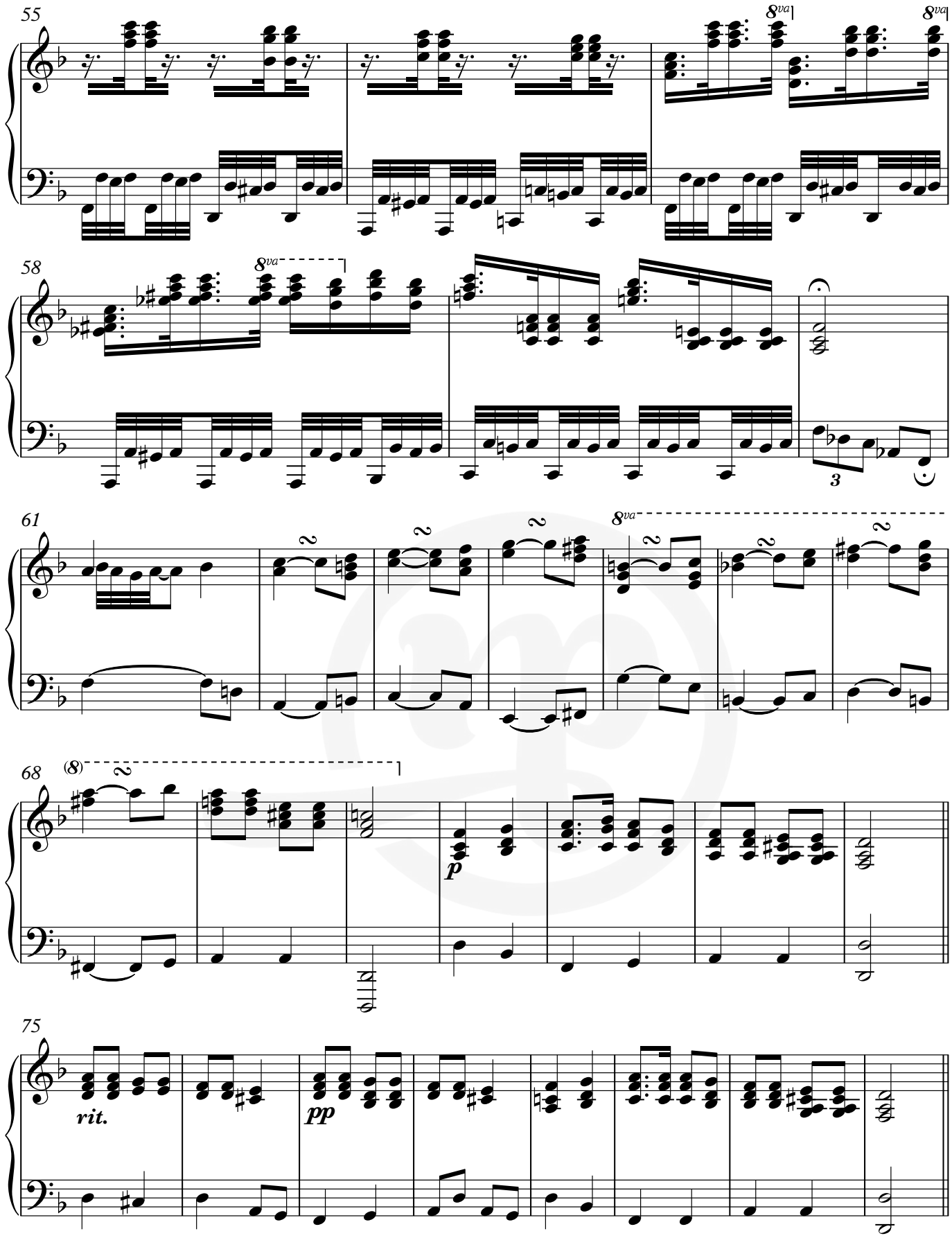

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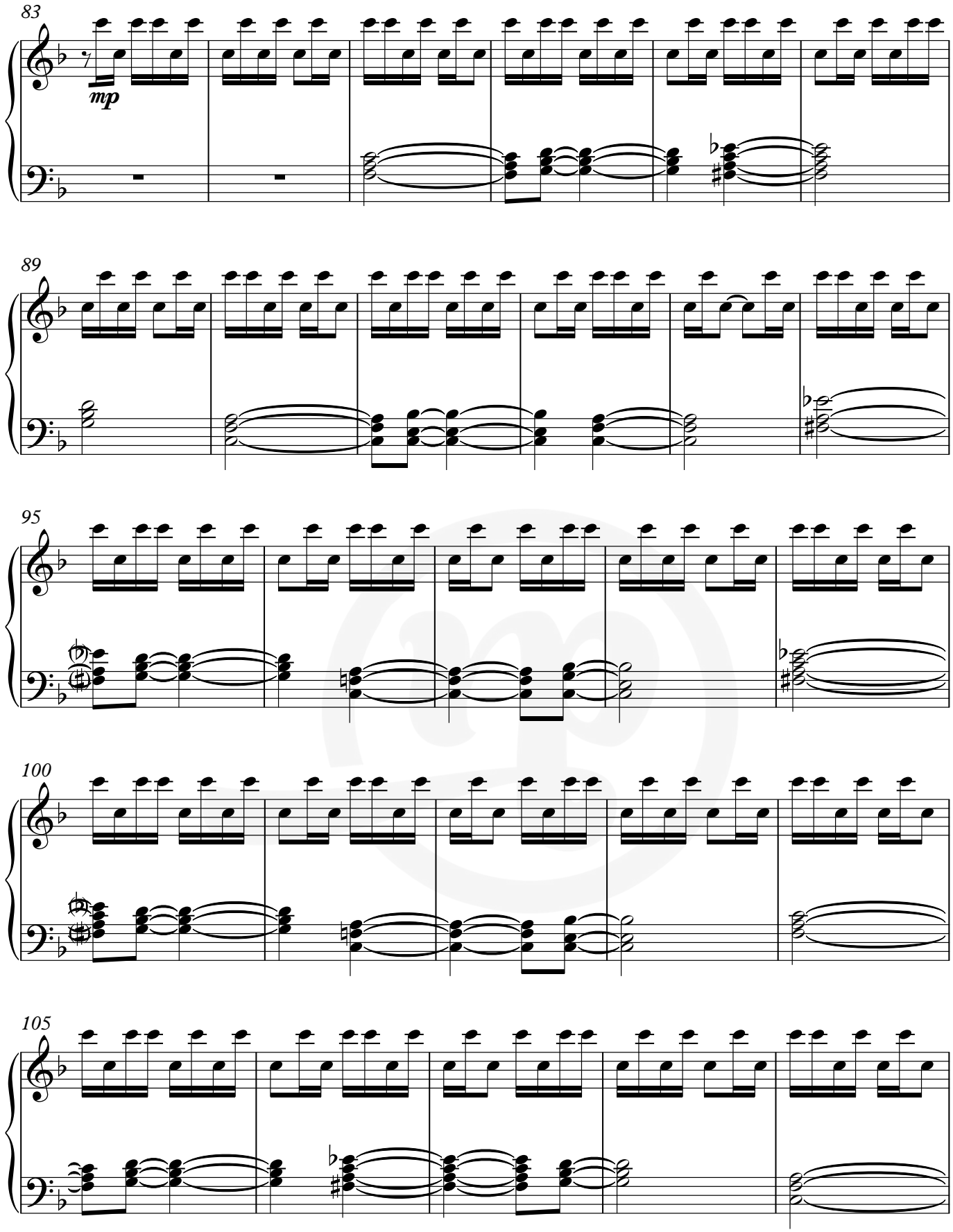

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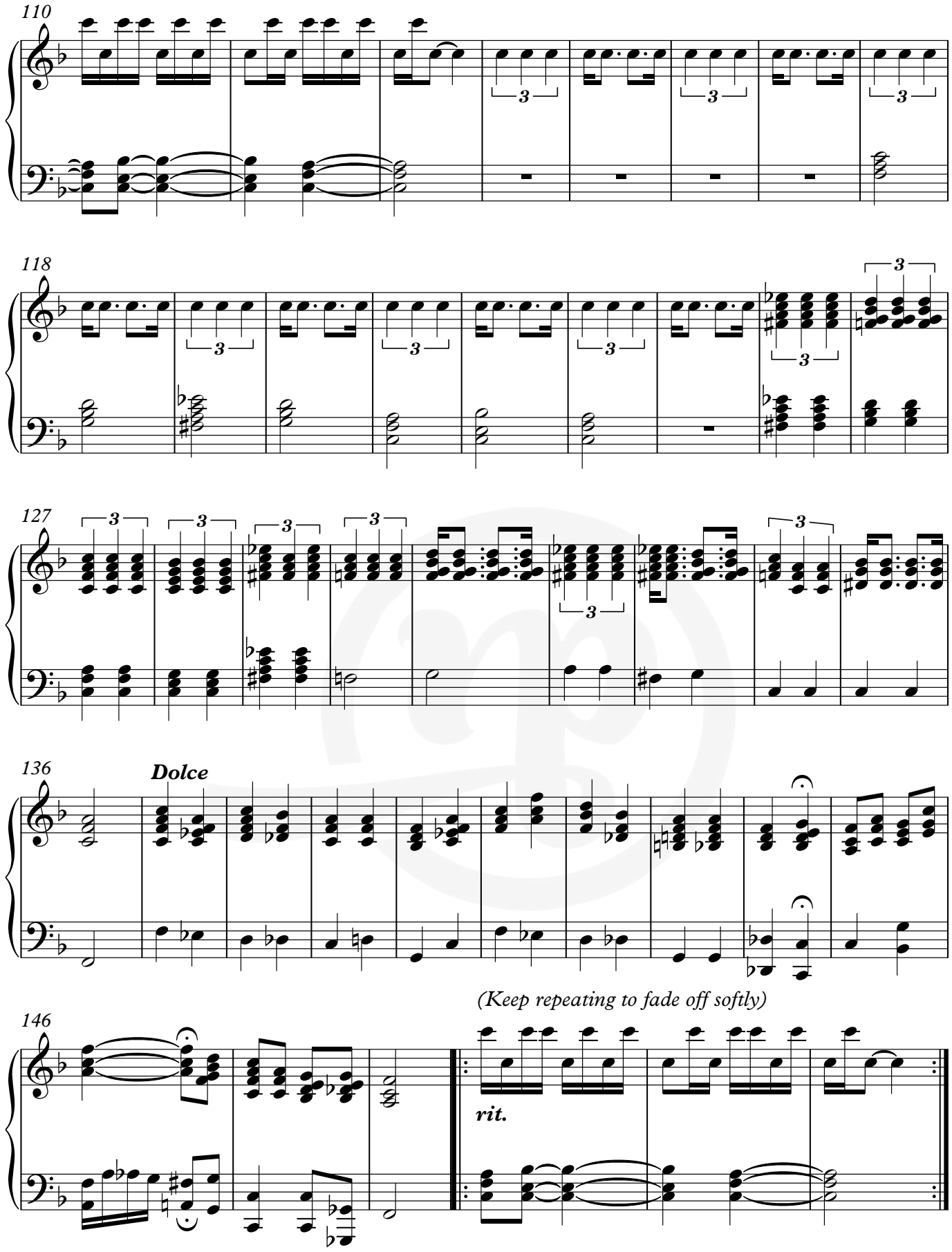

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4

NOTE 4: African Pianism: Afrikoko

With a drive in search of a link or a continuum reflecting African elements in my piano works, I created Afrikoko in one of the church halls of Christ United Presbyterian Church in San Diego. Rev. George Walker Smith, the pastor had taken interest in me as a son. We often discussed the history of Africa, African Americans, the role of the Black Church in America along with other topics of conversation.

Having invited me to a meeting with the Catfish Club, I became interested and played something on the piano that linked my Africanity with their African-Americaness. These serious professional Blacks met every Friday afternoon to deal with issues affecting the African American Community. The meeting always took place at CUPC. So my thoughts really wondered, pondered and wandered. Do I play block chords? Should I entreat them to a classical piece? Could I perfectly play the blues? Will I be embraced if I played some elementary Jazz and a Negro Spiritual or do I create something unique that sounds familiar yet incorporate a mixture of compositional constructs that will demand the attention of these guys who were well vested in music appreciation? I had to make a decision in a split of a second because the listening skills of most Americans when it comes to music is quite impressive. They were so adept that I dare not mess around. All these thoughts, I conjured in my head. With the Providential Grace I had in instantaneous improvisation, I walked to the piano after a brief speech and extemporized the theme in my head. Then there came An APPLAUSE!

During the coffee break I did the same, and another applause ensued. Were they just being nice? Some could hardly believe that I had just come from Africa. After the meeting came handshakes and interactions.

Of significant importance were three personalities whose handshakes confirmed my experiment of the musical ingenuity of African musicians - Dr. Walley Porter , Dean of San Diego Community College, Continuing Education Department; Dr. Robert Mathews – President, San Diego Community College; and Dr. Stevens, husband of Delores Steven, Minister of Music of Christ United Presbyterian Church. In short, I was blessed to be the youth choir pianist for Copco for five years (5) prior to moving to Atlanta, Georgia.

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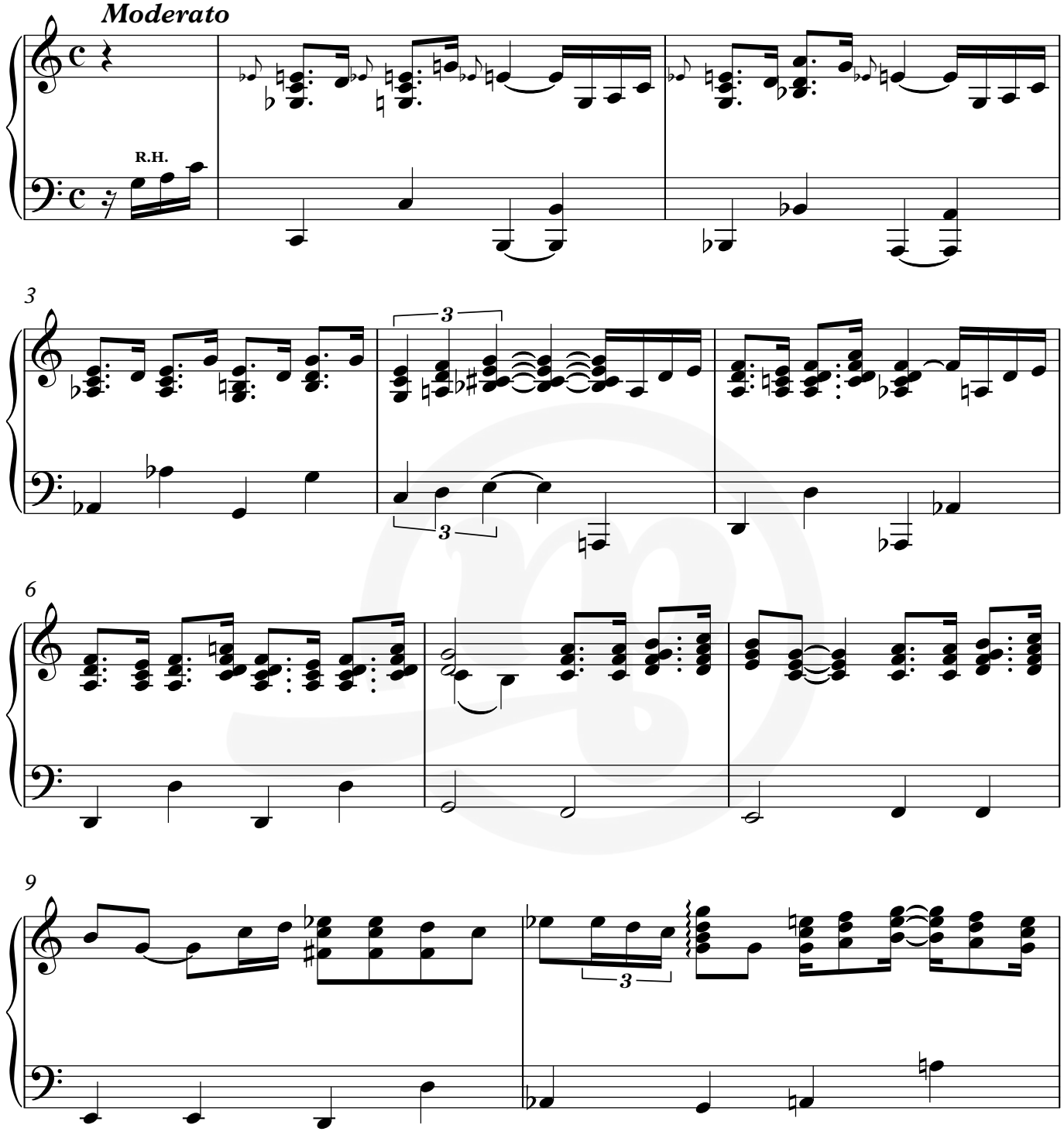
Afrikoko

Dedicated to:
Rev. Smith - Christ United Presbyterian Church
And The Catfish Club, San Diego

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
San Diego, California
August, 1989



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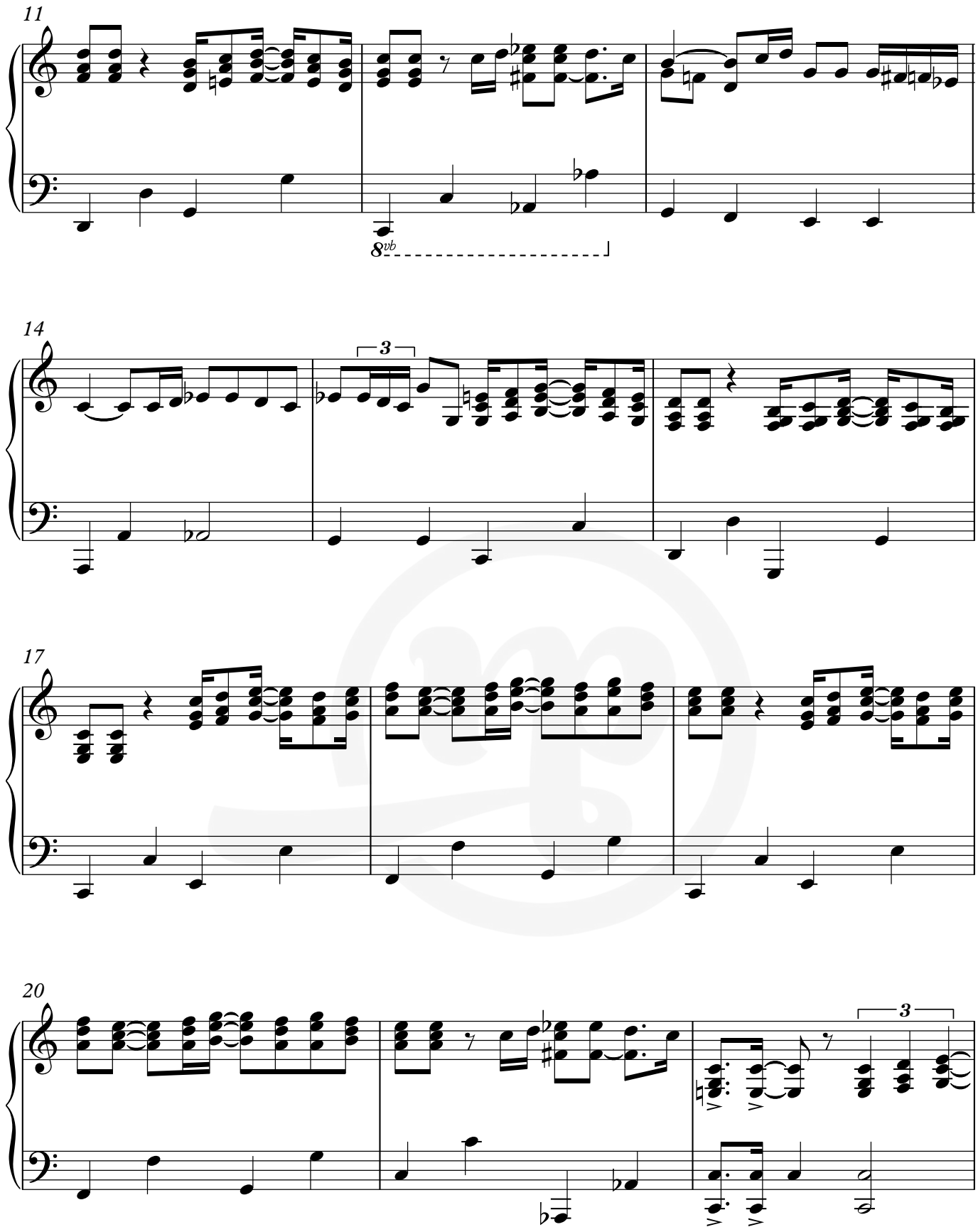

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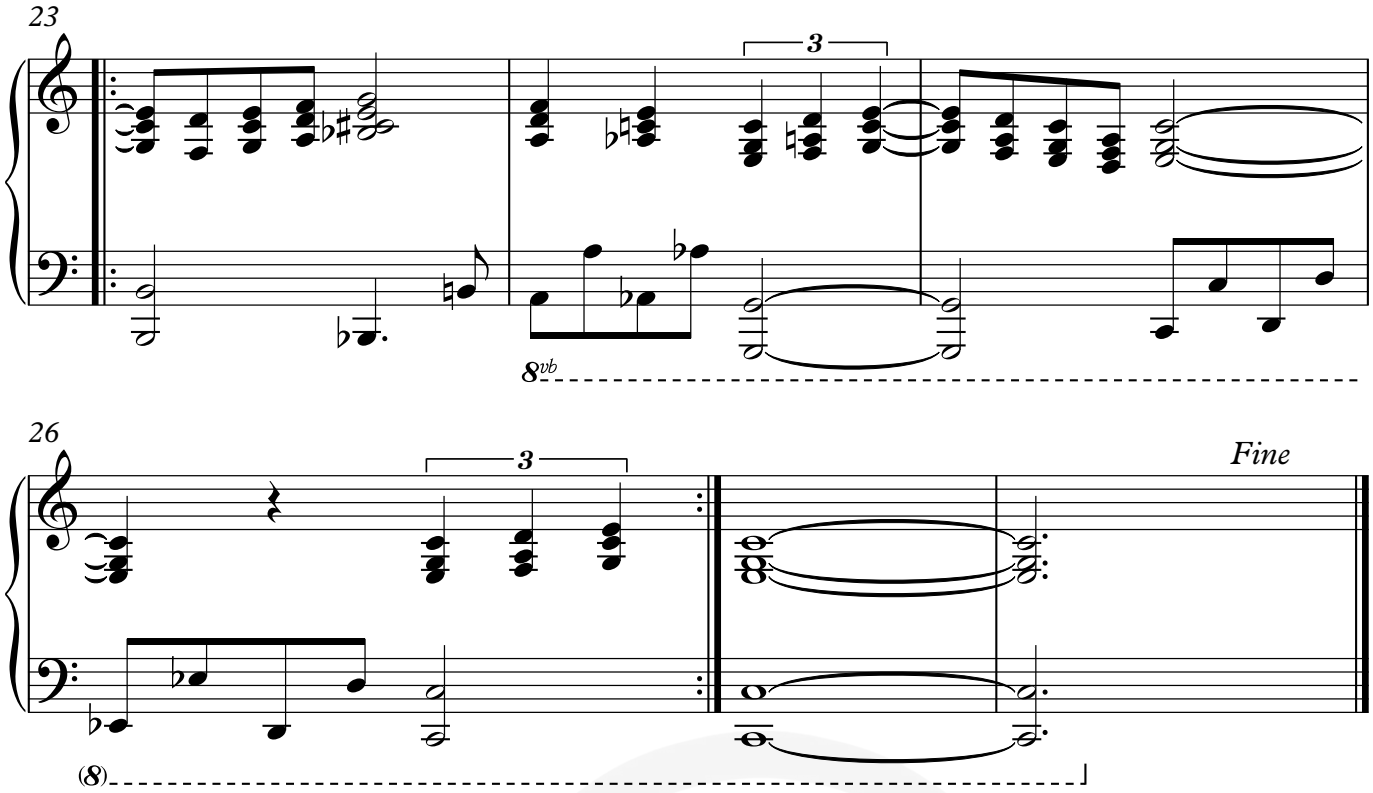

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5

NOTE 5: African Pianism: And My Conscience Speaketh

Is it possible to be honest to oneself and to others in this life if one wants to be accepted as successful? The obvious answer that often comes out is a resounding, "YES!" However, life has some twists and turns that meanders through "unfavorable" terrains and requires the self to truly examine commitment to self in healthy ways that validates contentment and fulfillment with no regrets.

I found myself in the mid1990s reflecting on diverse conversations I had with professional and non-professional individuals whom I had met representing different cultures, religions, convalescent homes, industry, academia and other settings, I wondered why the guilt of regrets seemed to weigh most of them down regardless of how successful they were or had been in society. This disturbed me a lot. I equally examined myself, honestly.

I realized the demands of life have a way of trapping us through religion, money, social status /fame, power, and other pressures of life which cause us to easily escape into charismatic illusions, psyched up by evasive motivational rantings and its allies. In following this path, we are only able to present ourselves as to the expectations and demands of others. Sometimes, if not often, it is to the detriment of our soul's inspiration and purpose. Hence, The Art of Pretense speedily become a specialty – a specialized character to transform one's conscience for the sake of survival. However, because such character is not in alignment with our identities, we become gullible to the environment of our time, to other people's expectations, and even the insatiable desires of self.

How does one center oneself to be conscientious and celebrate the challenges he/she encounters as elements crystallizing towards a purposed predestined end? How does one even enforce one's predestined purpose into one's reality? To find meaning and contentment in one's circumstance and purpose in life while also working towards a sense of fulfillment that places no guilt or regrets is easier said than done. In the beginning, religious and political propaganda alone will take years to unravel. The fake news conjured and psychologically packaged becomes the truth and the truth becomes the espoused fake news.

However, whether early or late in one's life, the awareness of one's essence needs to echo and express itself without any compromise to celebrate the primitive impulse coded within. There is an anchored-self needed, an orientation that requires constant pruning and refueling to sustain focus.

Where is your conscience seated, and what is it saying?

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POEM

AND MY CONSCIENCE SPEAKETH

And my Conscience Speaketh,
It Speaketh
And my Conscience Speaketh,
It Speaketh
It Speaketh
And my Conscience Speaketh,
Yea, yea, yea
I've got to make decisions
Oh yea – I've got to make a good one.
Do you think I don't deserve to search my heart?
If you don't believe,
Come on and show me a way
Show me a constructive way and give me a chance.
Give me a chance to search my heart—
And find a good way.
But don't criticize if you don't want to hear my story.
Be a solution, don't be a problem
And my Conscience Speaketh,
It Speaketh
And my Conscience Speaketh,
It Speaketh
It Speaketh
And my Conscience Speaketh,

And my conscience speaketh, it speaketh
I'm gonna follow my heart, and do my BEST
I am not done until I have done my best
My Conscience Speaketh
My Conscience Speaketh
ooOOh, I have found myself, myself, my-self !

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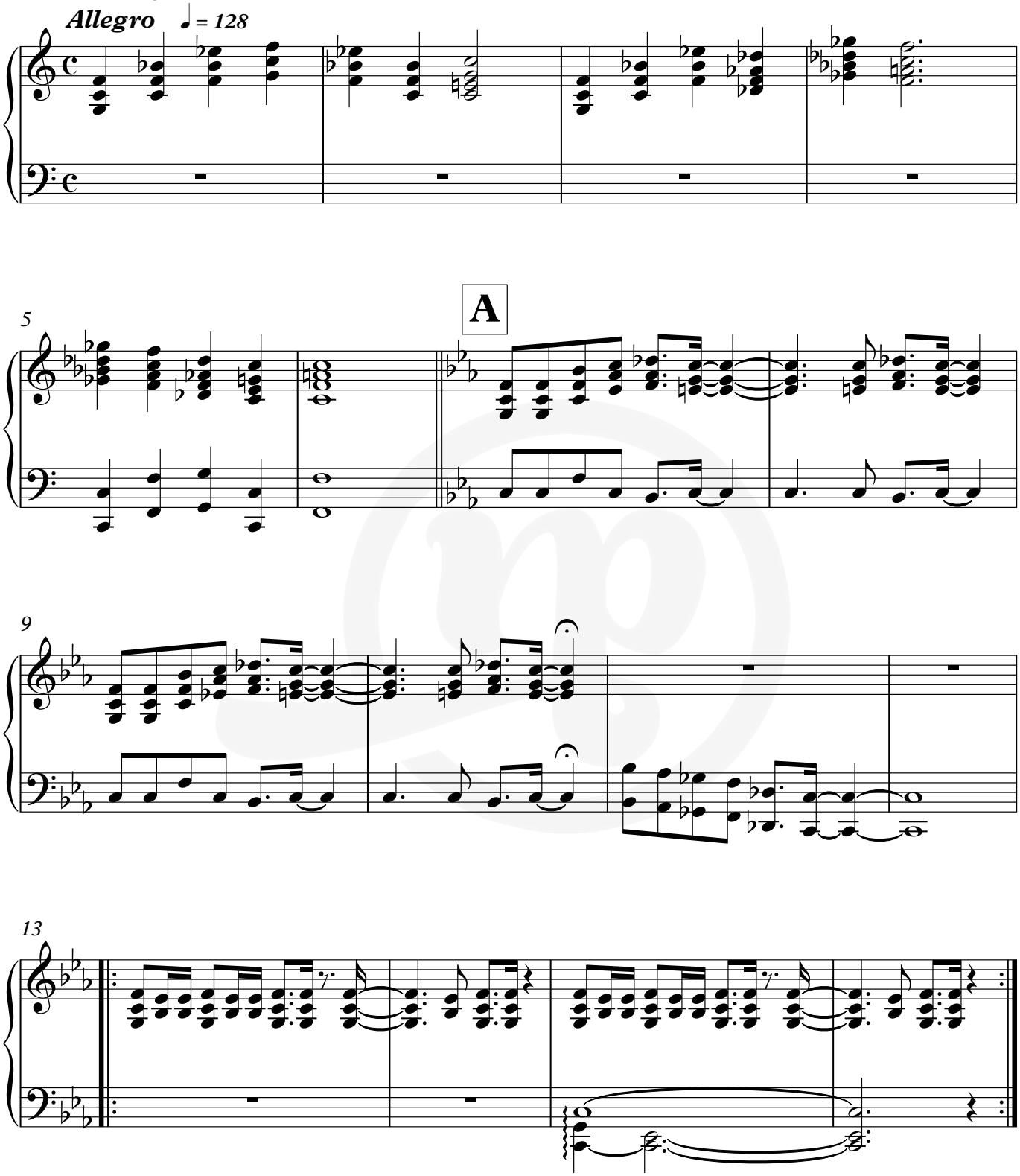
And My Conscience Speaketh

Dedicated to:
Osofo Kwesi Atta
Providence Missionary Baptist Church
Atlanta, Georgia

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, Atlanta
Classical Afrique Concert
June 5, 1995



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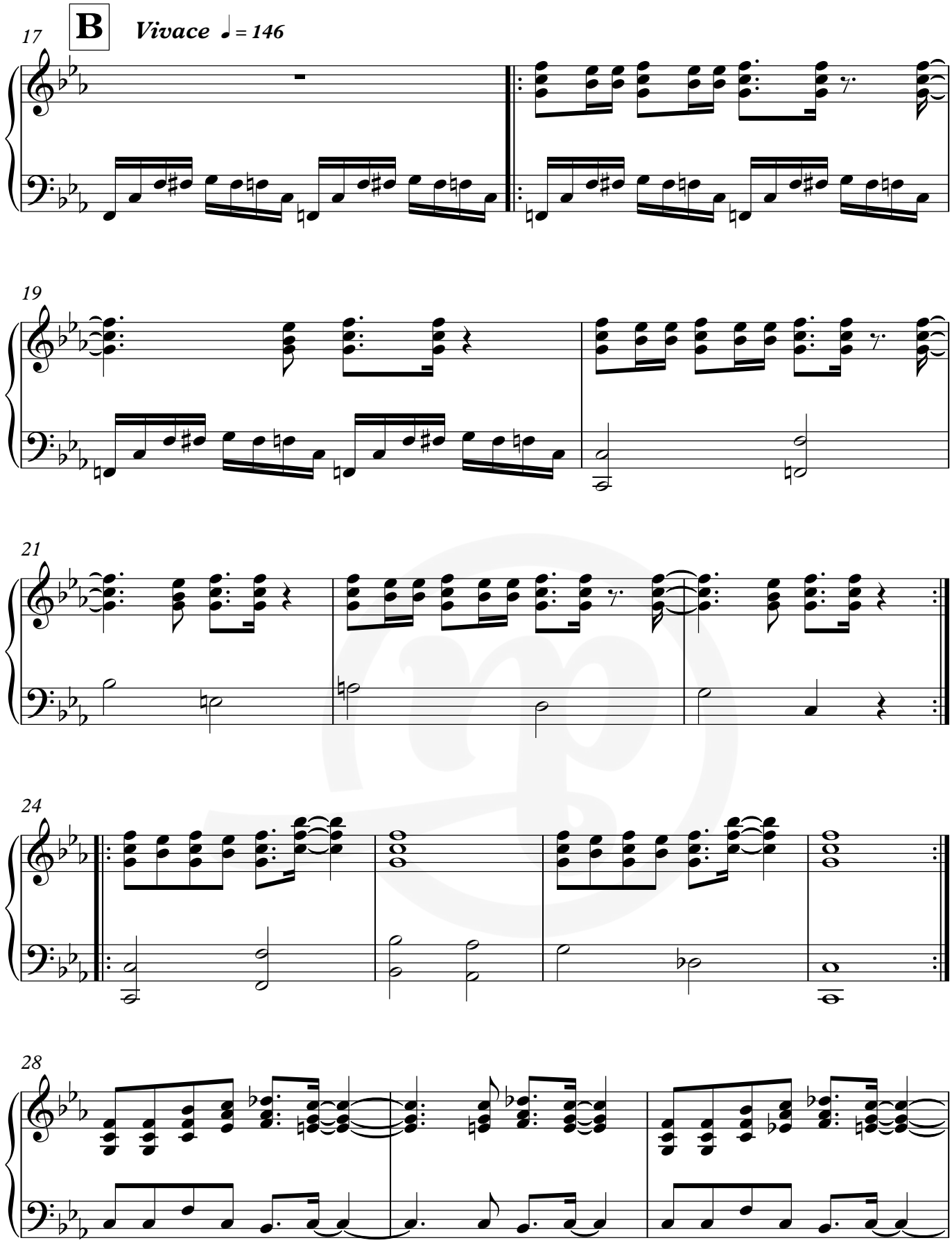

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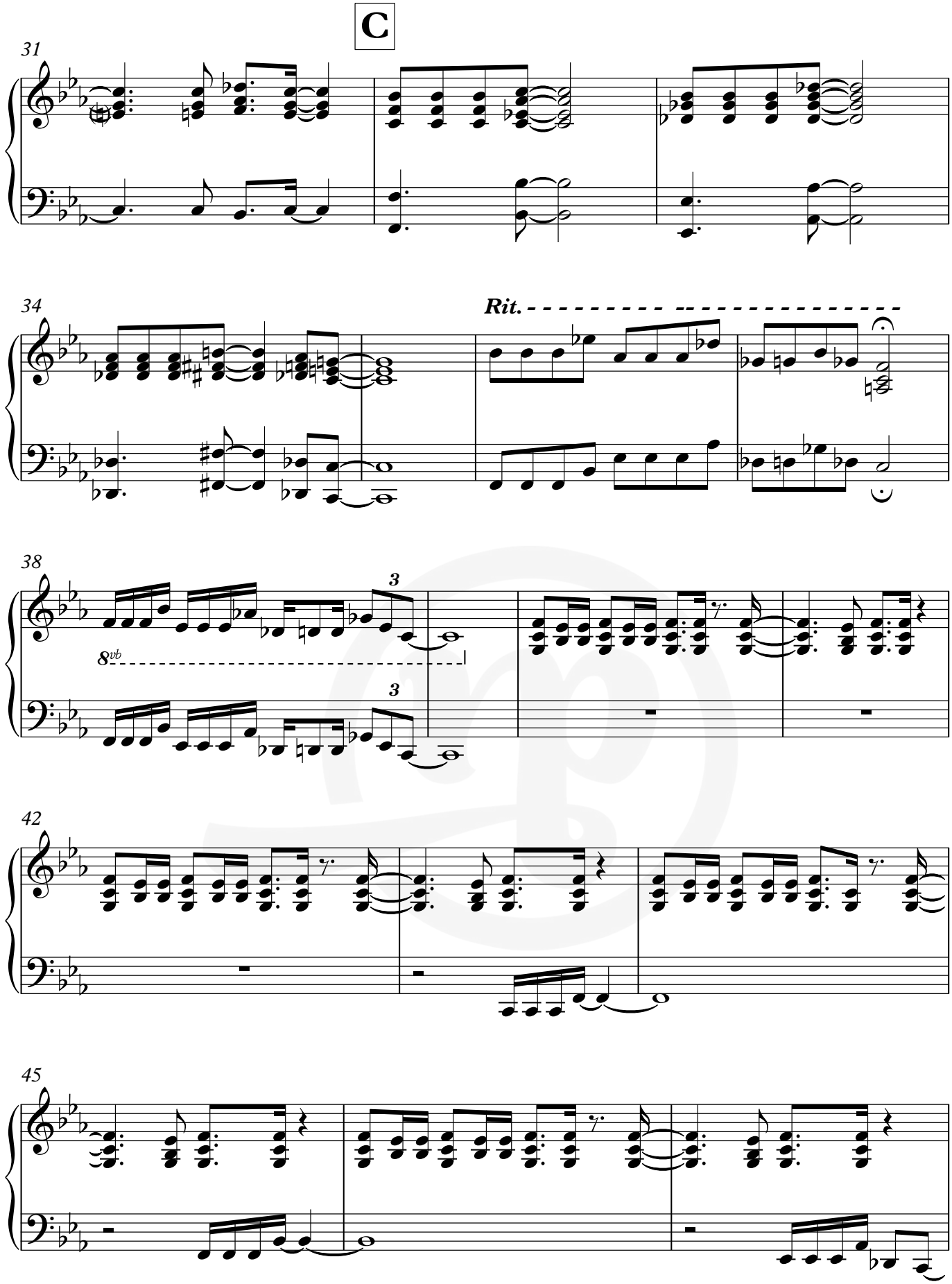

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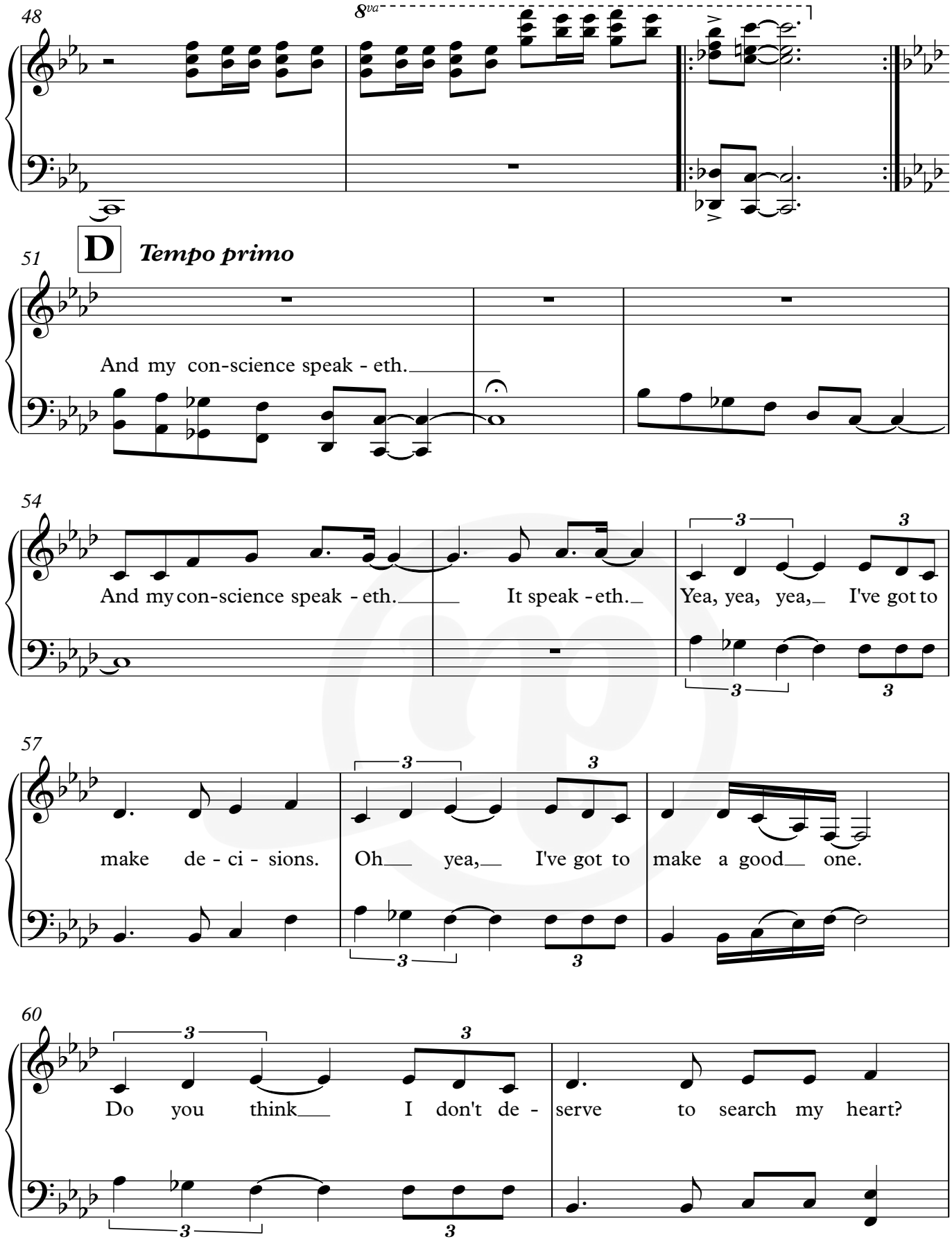

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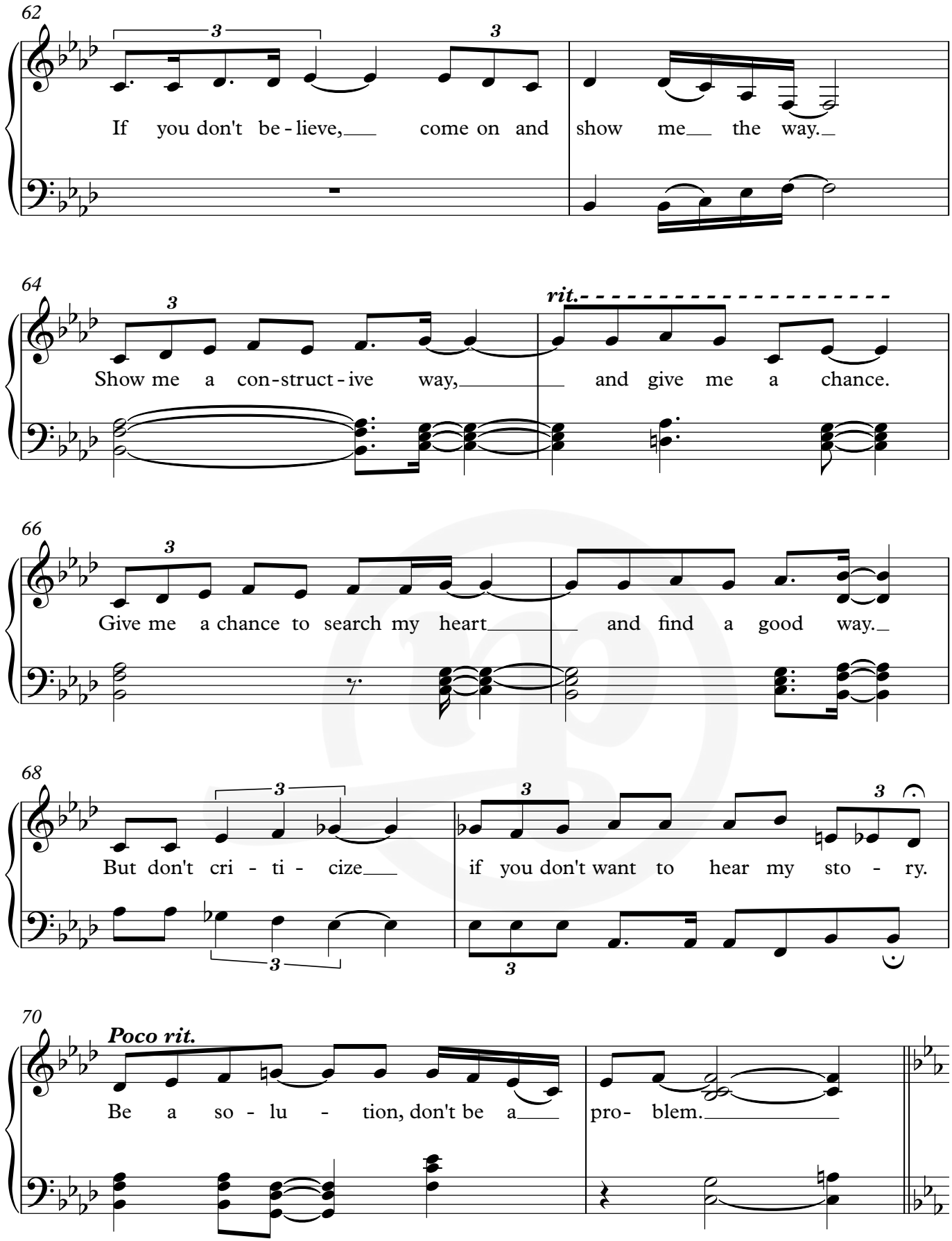

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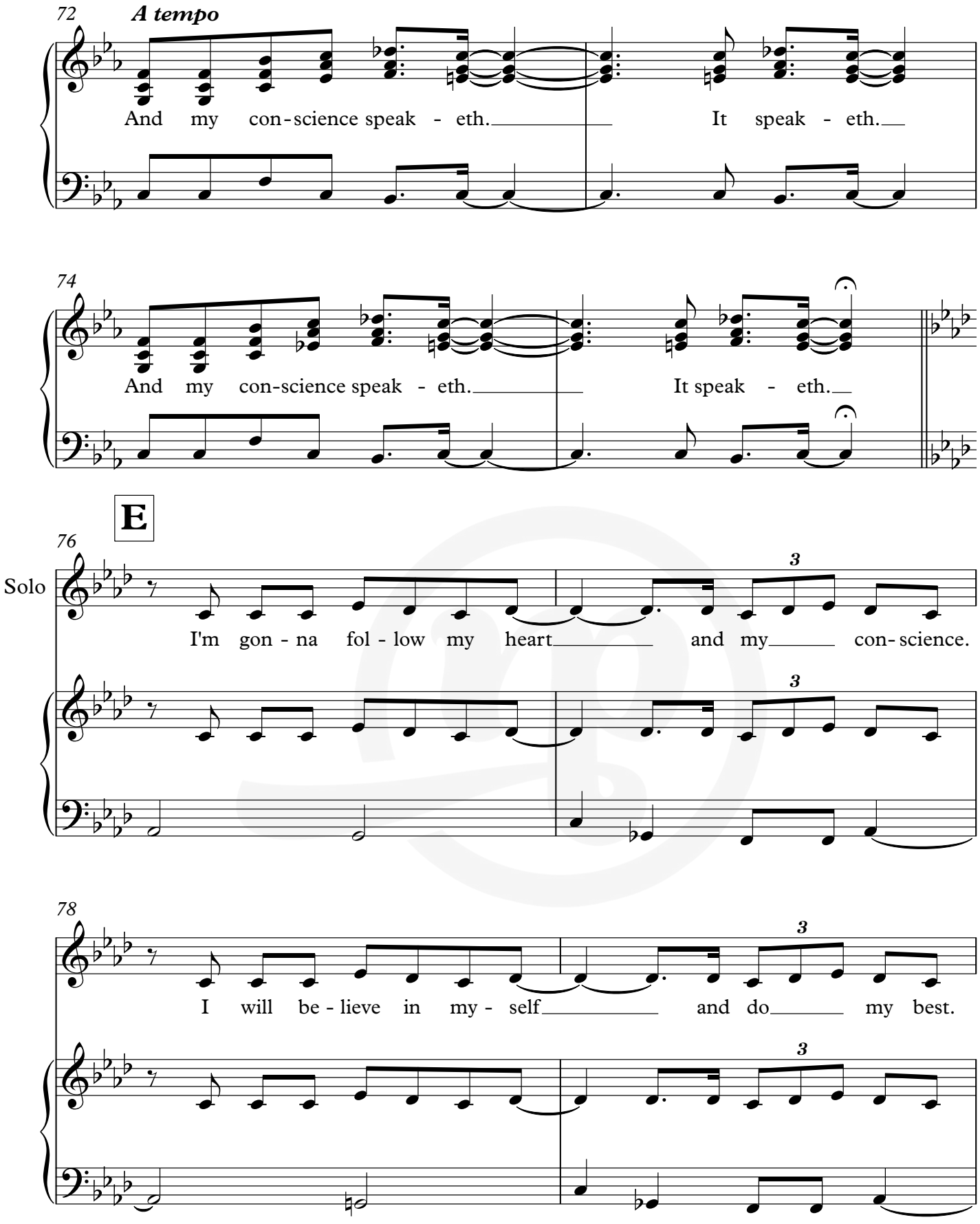

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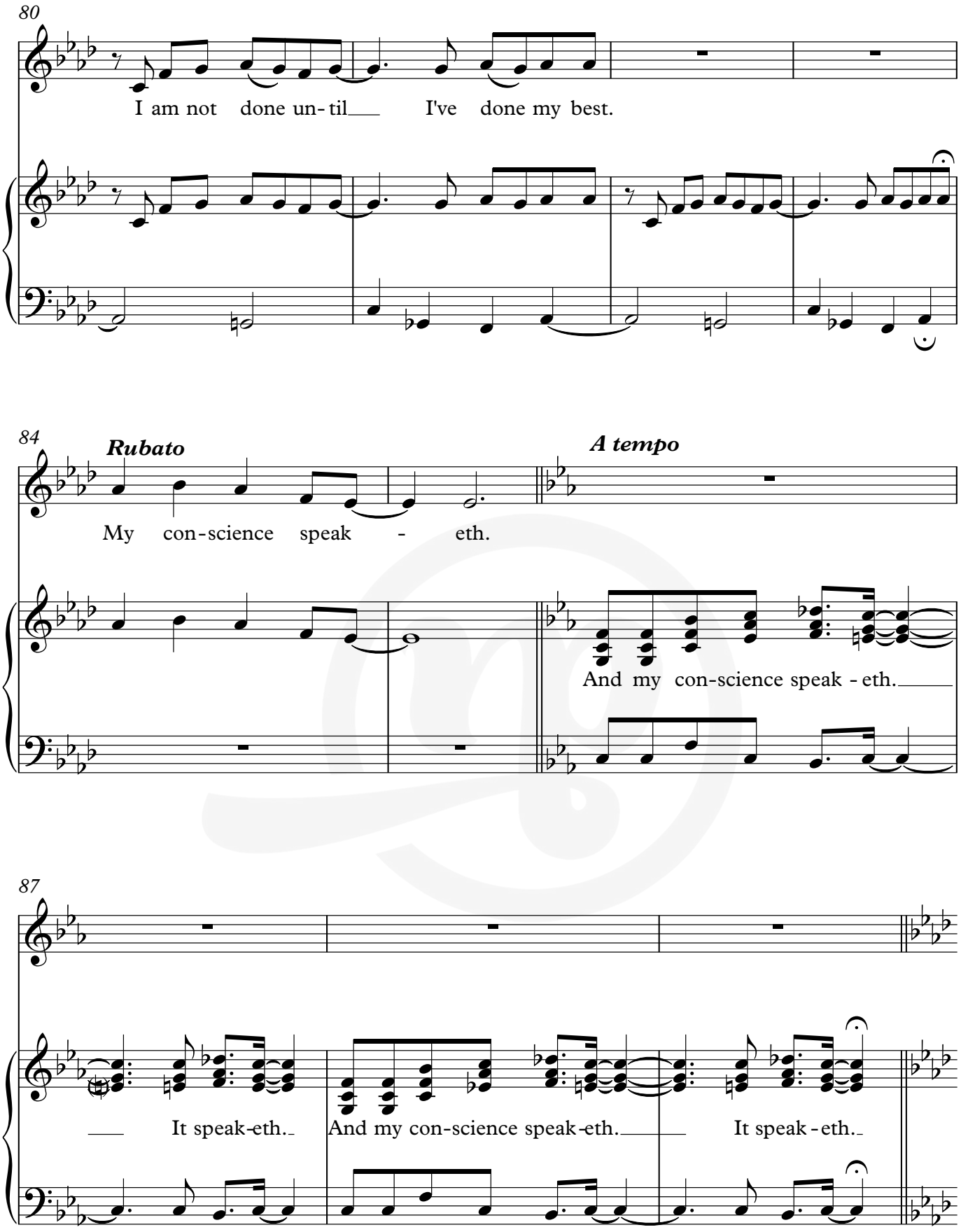

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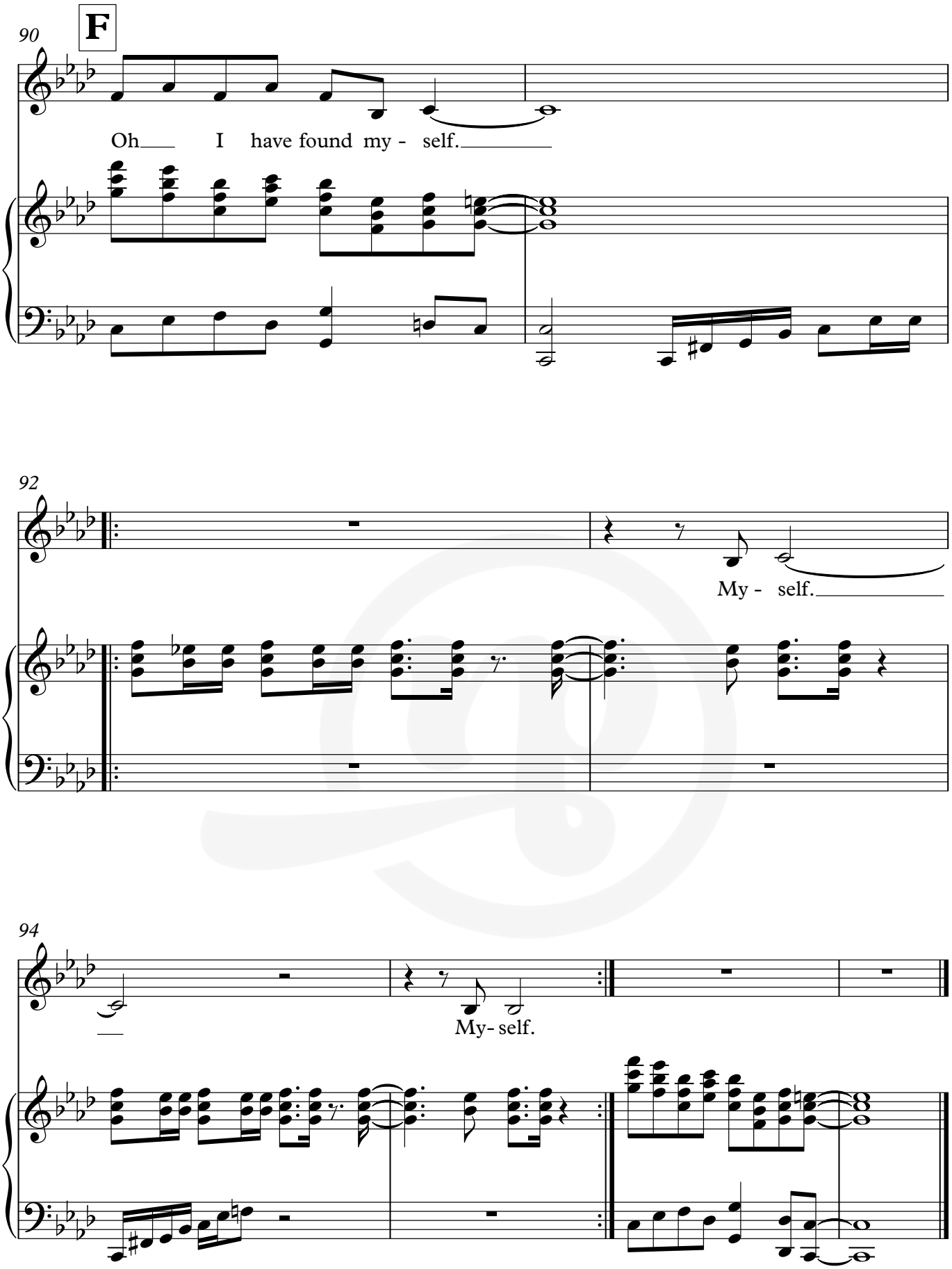

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NOTE: 6 African Pianism: Senyorita

The setting is in Central America where Spanish is widely spoken by the Natives, Spanish settlers and transplanted Africans. All have co-existed. While Senyorita means Lady in Spanish, in this particular piece it represents a sophisticated second generation lady of African descent. Her mind travels over three generations--her grandparents who never left Africa, her parents who were forcibly transplanted to Central America and her life. It reflects on a phenomenon that both baffles and excites her. Her focus is on what I term "The Permeating African Aesthetics Essence" that revives and redefines itself every generation particularly through the expressive Arts regardless of where children of African descent find themselves. This vital force overwhelms Senyorita. With this particular song ringing in her, she sees through her mind's eye distinctly the African flair interpreted in the dance of three generations. To her this resilient spirit force meanders through the generation of her family--first her grandparents, secondly her parents and lastly herself. This spirit force serves as the validation to her roots of somewhere in West Africa.

This thought/dream is guided by 'Spanish –like melody' characterized by syncopated African rhythms which keep recurring several times to subliminally reinforce itself and register a different generation. One ought to just liken this piece to a song that transcends three generations with its core essence sustained with interpretation relative to time and place.

Senyorita's legacy of recreating herself is established as such:

1. Seeing and understanding how her grandparents expressed in dance their culture(an awareness of significance connected to their roots)
2. Admitting and understanding how the impact of the Trans-Atlantic Holocaust and settlement in Central America shaped her parent's orientation. Hence, it was not just a different generation. It was a Trans–cultural one.
3. Her generation's culture–characterized by an inherited and imposed culture and show as she expresses her life in dance.

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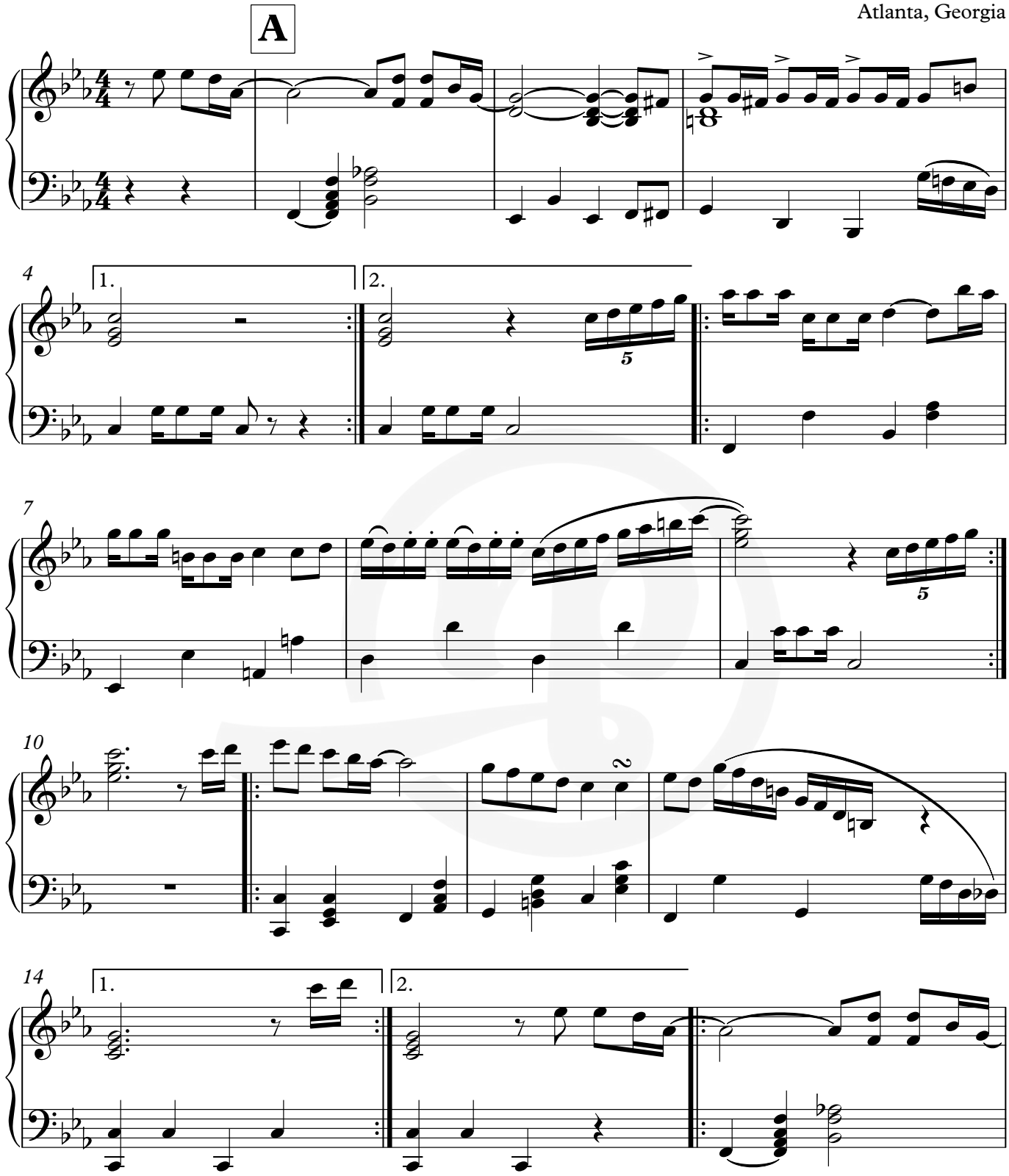
Señorita

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
December, 1995
Atlanta, Georgia



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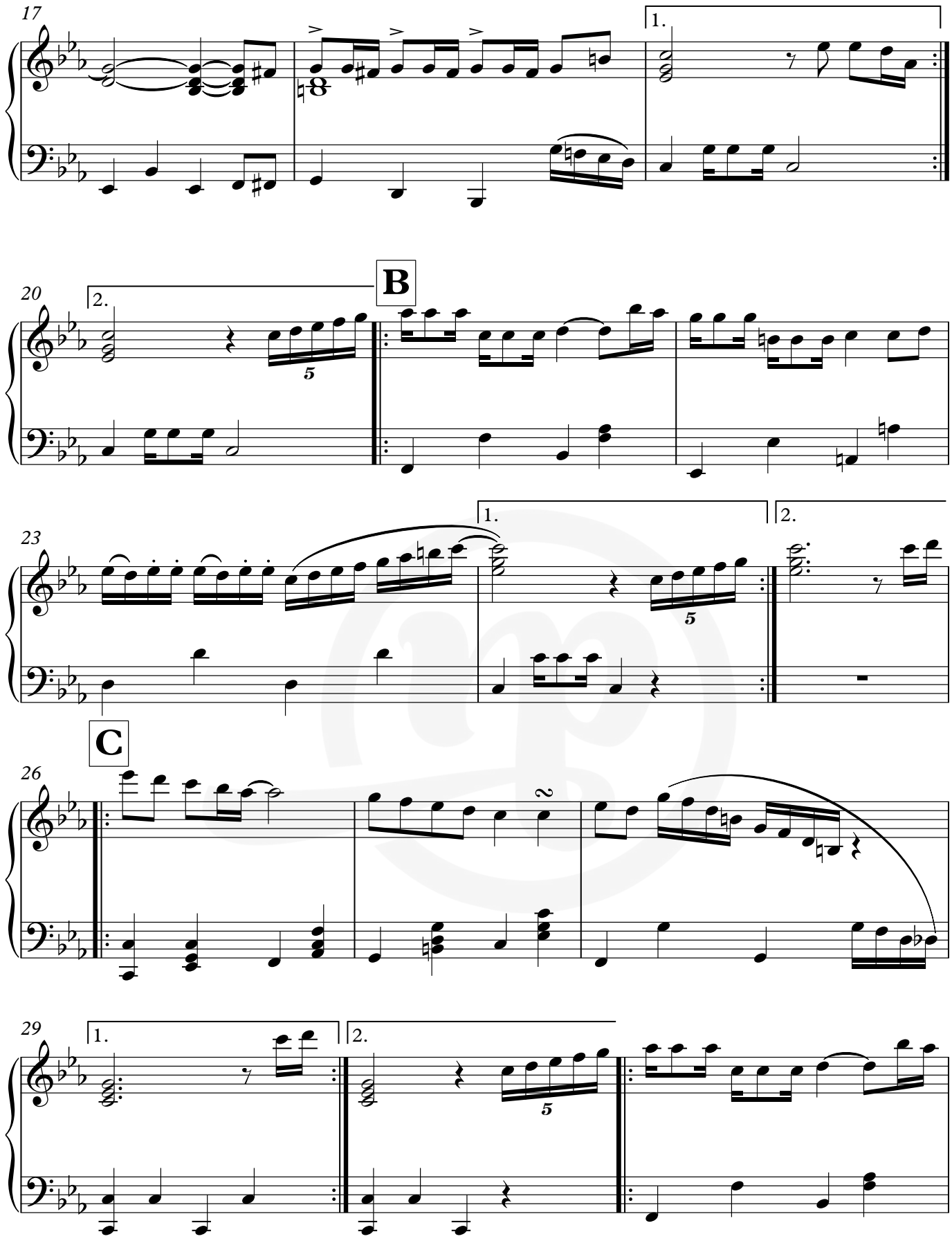

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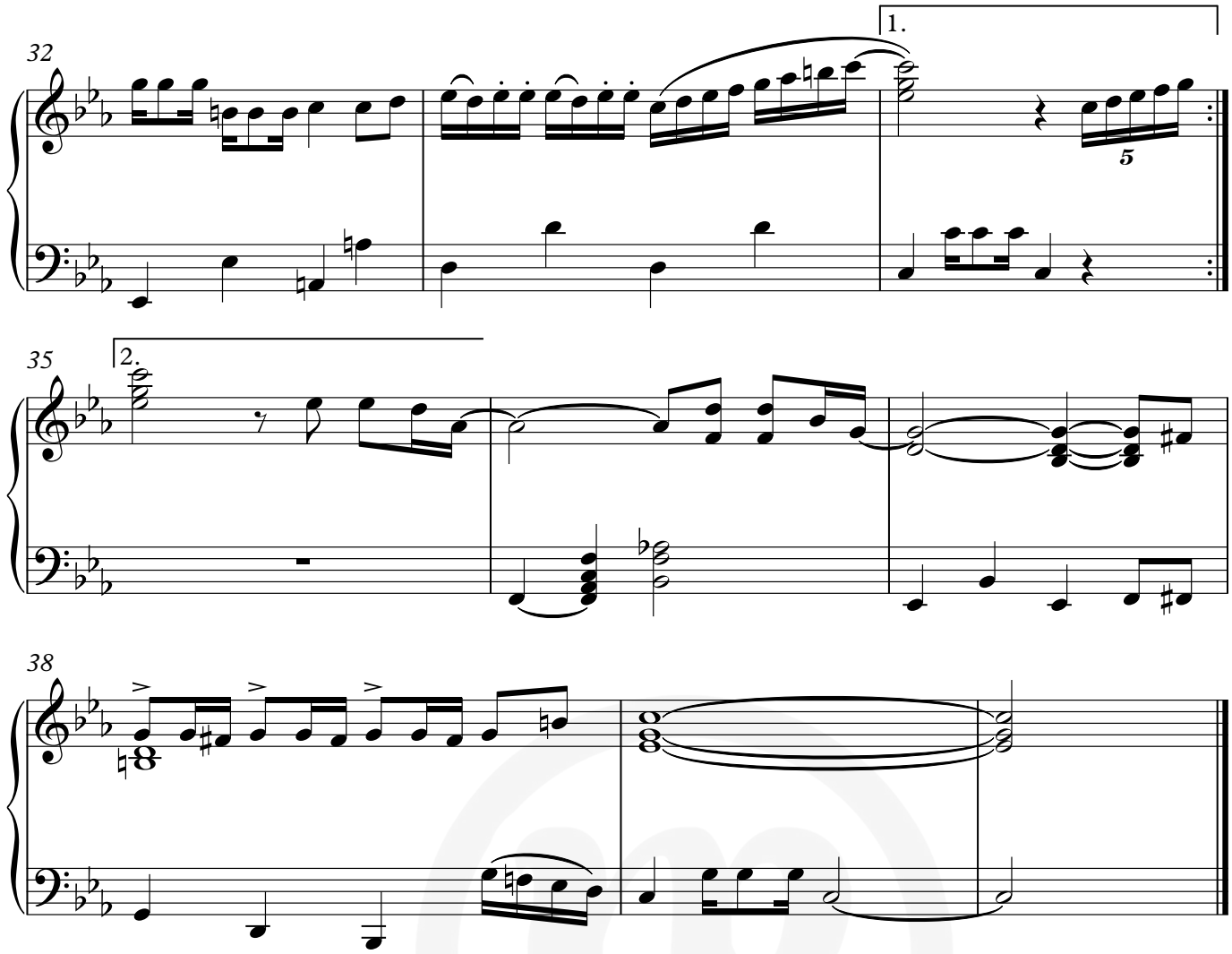

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7

NOTE 7: African Pianism: My Solicitude for Being

We often tread paths that we believe will rightly serve our aims and aspirations. However, some circumstances in life have ways that shape, redirect and re-align our purpose with our destiny. 1995 was a year I worked so hard to validate myself in Atlanta as a scholar and performer. Yet, I was confronted with a situation that shook my foundations, professionally. I lost my jobs and could not afford to continue with my studies.

The Reverend Dr. C.T. Vivian sensing something was wrong approached me. As a mentor, he helped me to confront the issues. He encouraged me to remain grounded in my faith and focused on my aspirations. He further asked that I reflect on a question that I thought was very ridiculous at the time, "Why must you always look for a job instead of jobs chasing you? Think of who you are, what you have and what you can do to compel jobs to chase you. And, in the context of Ghanaian Culture, welcome it; give it water to drink; and, enquire of its purpose." This thinking paralleled that of my mother. Yet, I was quite uncertain with the "THE HOW TO".

Also, the Rev. Dr. Gerald Durley, pastor of Providence Missionary Baptist Church at the time when I had become the Minster of Music, admonished me to compile all my compositions and do somet hing with them. What I needed then in my opinion was a good job to help me pay for my classes in the Doctor of Arts in Humanities programme at Atlanta University and not these hard knocks/ lessons in the school of life. I now have come to appreciate the experience.

Between the months of March and early June when I had my concert titled Classical Afrique, I developed an interesting habit. Twice a week I would deliberately walk through the AU campus and greet colleagues, drive to and also walk through the corridors of Providence Missionary Baptist Church to greet colleagues and further drive to Callanwolde Fine Arts Center and do the same. This routine and ritual was necessary for me to validate myself as a scholar and performer with special interest in ministry. Also, it was necessary to discover what actually could sustain me. At each of these facilities, I sought to find out how well I was regarding my faith in Christ and whether professional jobs, educational status, social and economic prominence defined me. Beyond that, I sought to discover whether the anchored and content self could withstand the pressures of societal places that make some people subscribe to pretense.

It was in this dilemma that I sat behind the piano at Callanwolde and composed this piece. I practised it often at PMBC, because that was one place I reflectively sought refuge. Osofo Kwesi Atta, formerly Rev. Calvin Banks, often heard this piece and loved it. He was intrigued by the piece and advised that I should not give up. Subsequently, he recited my poem "And My Conscience Speaketh" in my concert in June 2015. Mrs. Thadria Garma of Callanwolde Fine Arts Center was instrumental in organizinng the performance hall at Callanwolde for me, because she equally felt my compositions deserved an audience.

On 15th June 1995, the works in this book, with the exception of "Voices of Our Ancestors, Baba Oluwa and Supplication from Yoruba land", were performed in a concert entitled Classical Afrique. Colleagues from East Cobb Middle School, Atlanta University, Providence Missionary Baptist Church, Ghana Community Church of Atlanta and patrons of Callanwolde Fine Arts Center were the primary audience.

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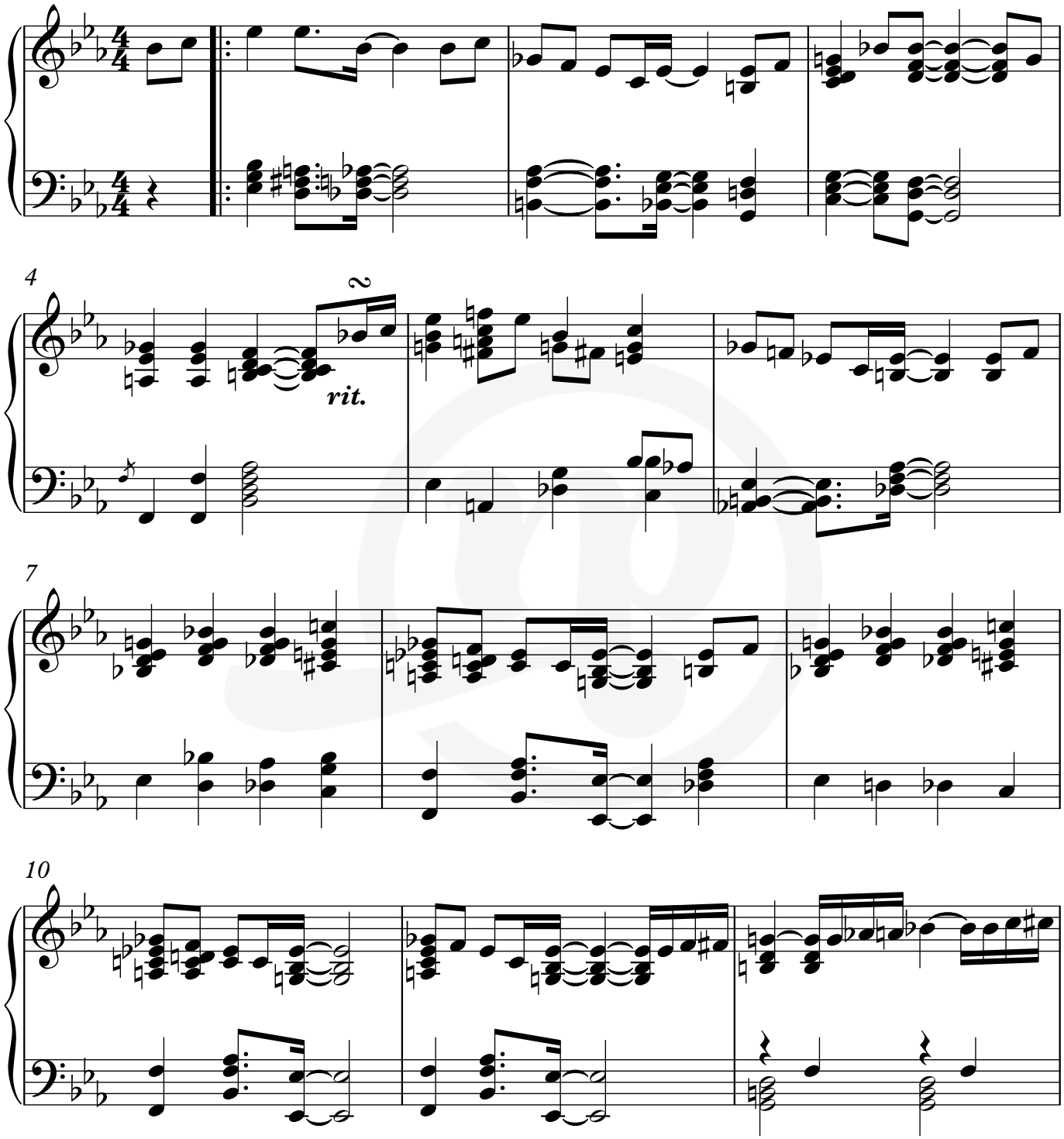
My Solicitude For Being

(Care For My Existence)

Dedicated to
Callanwolde Fine Arts Centre,
Atlanta-Georgia
July 1995

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
Originally composed
June 1995



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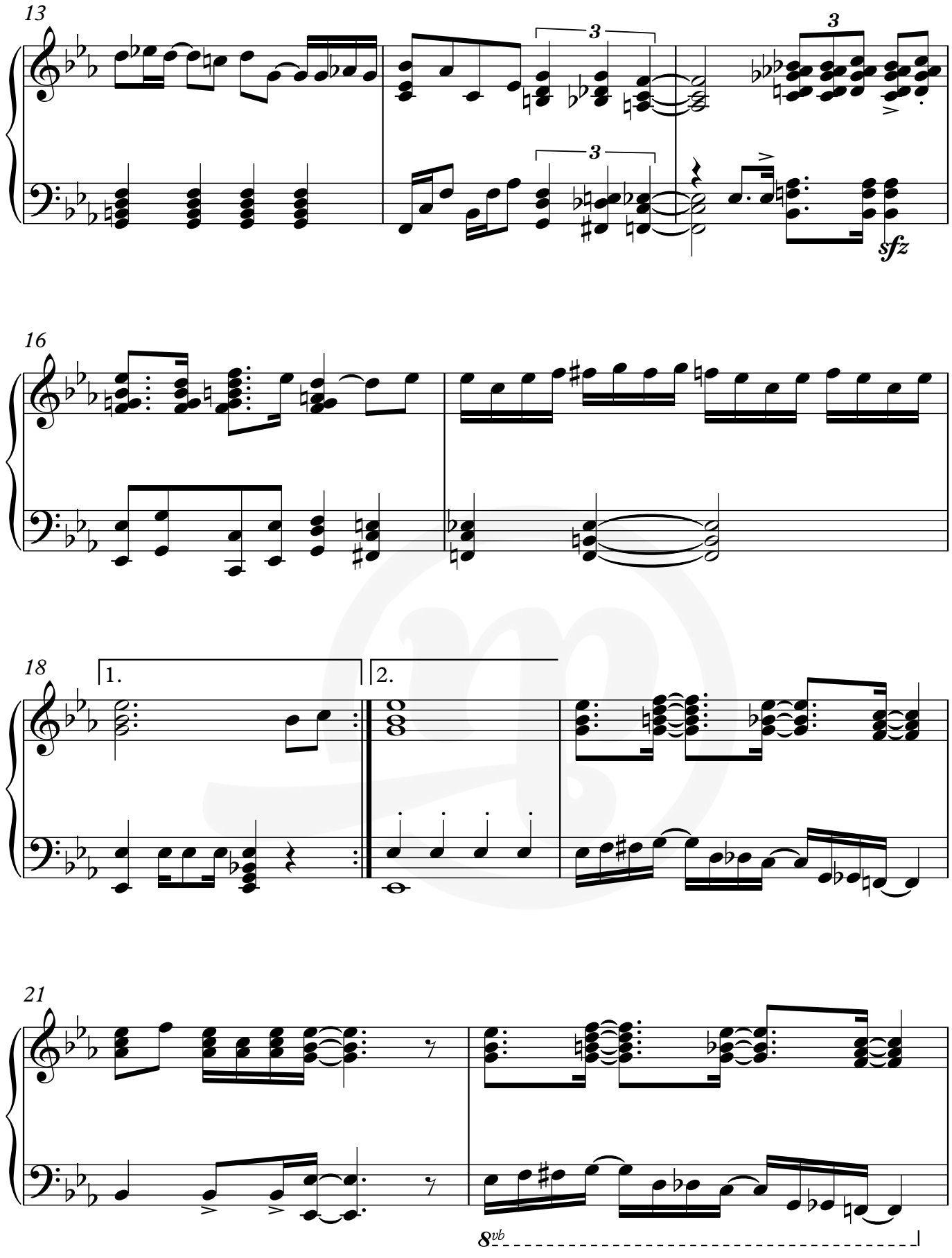

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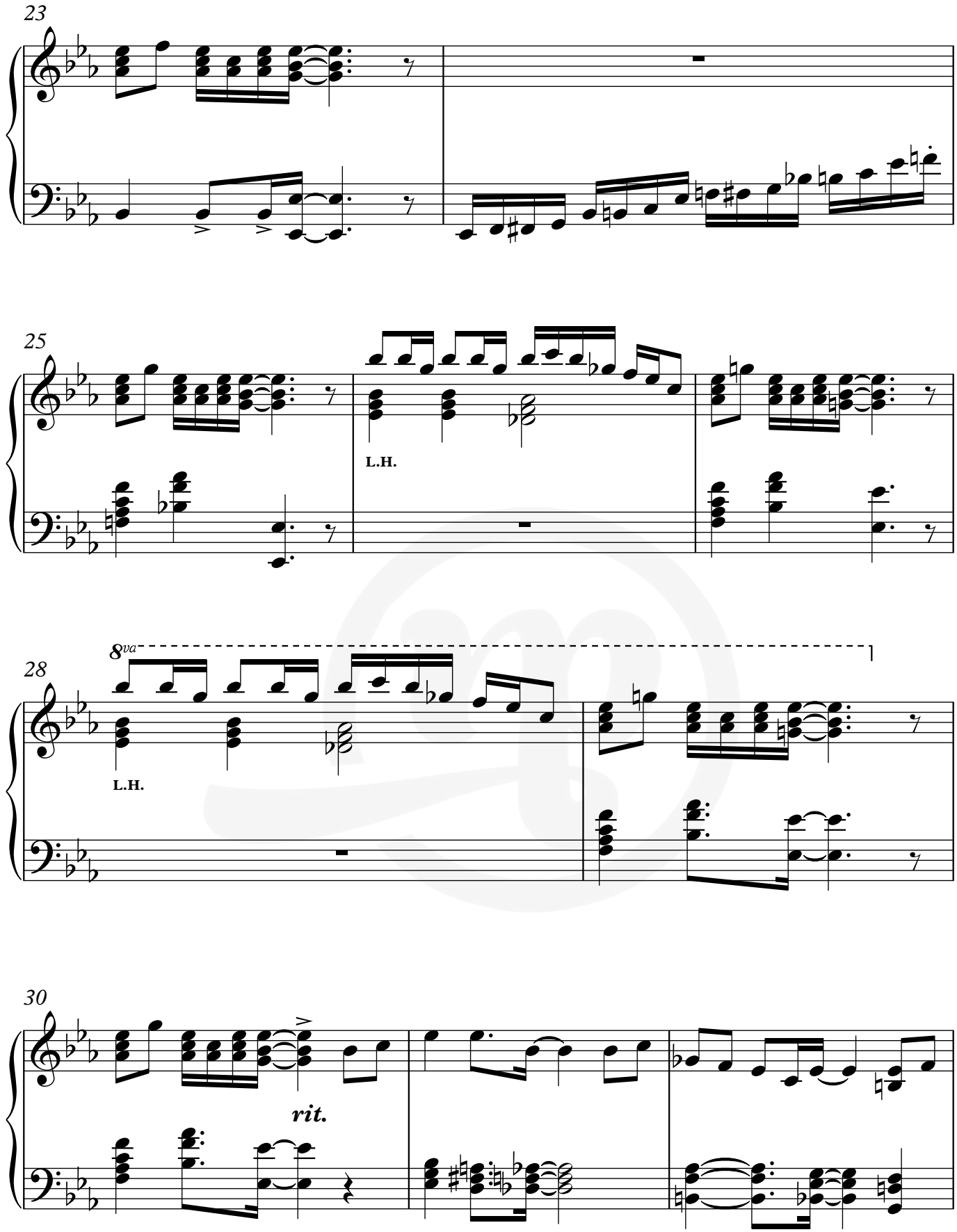

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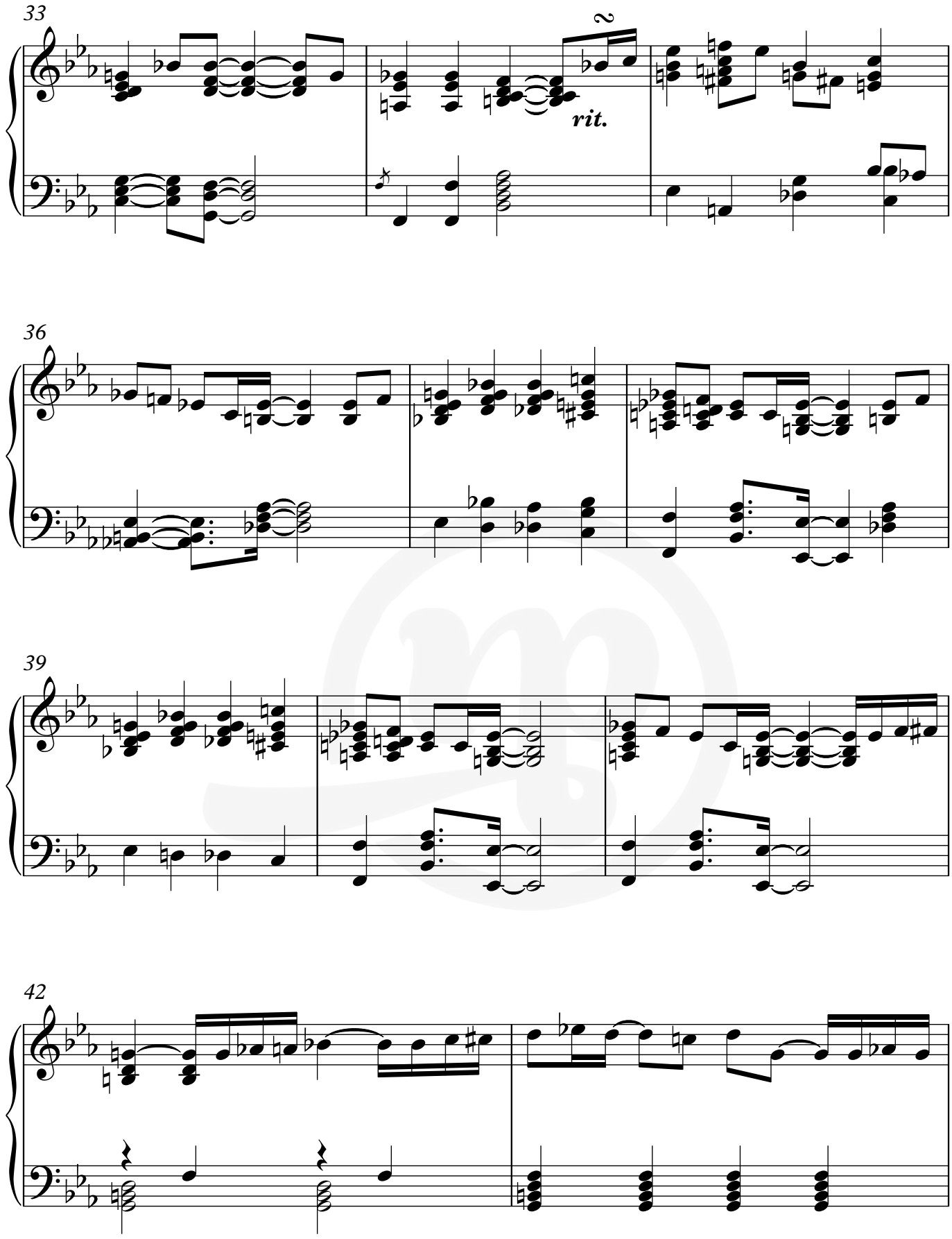

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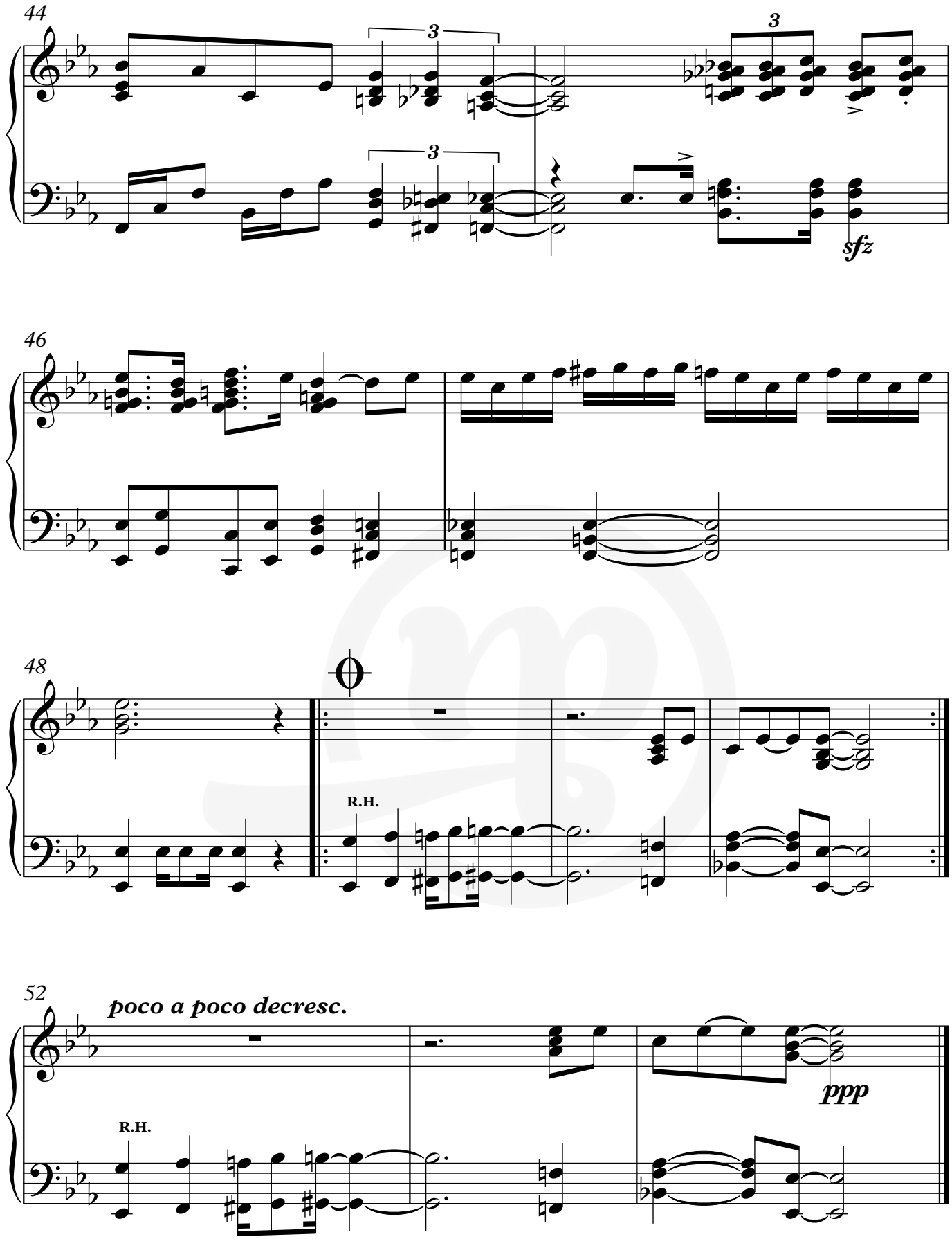

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NOTE 8: African Pianism: Together in Spirit
[Submitted by Solomon Eshun to Victor Manieson]

Like an engine with many parts working simultaneously in harmony, we owe our perpetual existence to our interdependence. When there is unity of thought and purpose between families, friends, country men, foreigners as in the enjoyment and appreciation of music, it is aptly termed as "Together in Spirit".

Just as the harmony of laws in physics is essential in maintaining a finely tuned universe, so is the unity of the spirit of humanity essential for the maintenance of a finely tuned co-existence. Such is aptly termed as "Together in Spirit". I composed the music and asked Solomon Eshun to write what the title meant to him as he transcribed the notes.

A finely tuned co-existence gives much room for diversity and variety just as a wonderful piece may contain a variety of notes and diversified dynamics. Thus, when all diversities and varieties are united in the pursuit of the common goal of a peaceful and purposeful finely tuned co-existence, it is aptly termed, "Together in Spirit".

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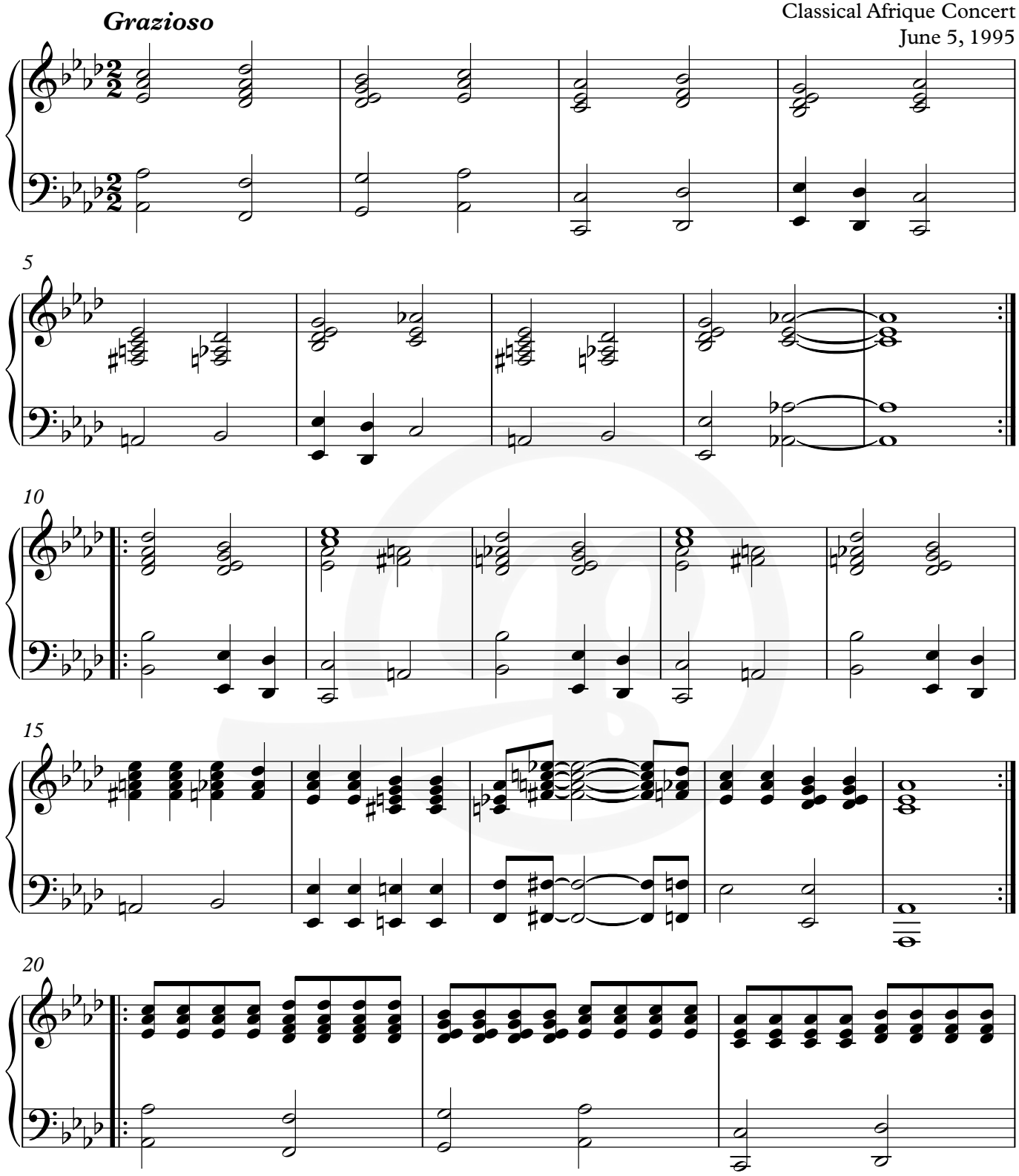
Together In Spirit

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
Callanwolde Fine Arts Center, Atlanta
Classical Afrique Concert
June 5, 1995



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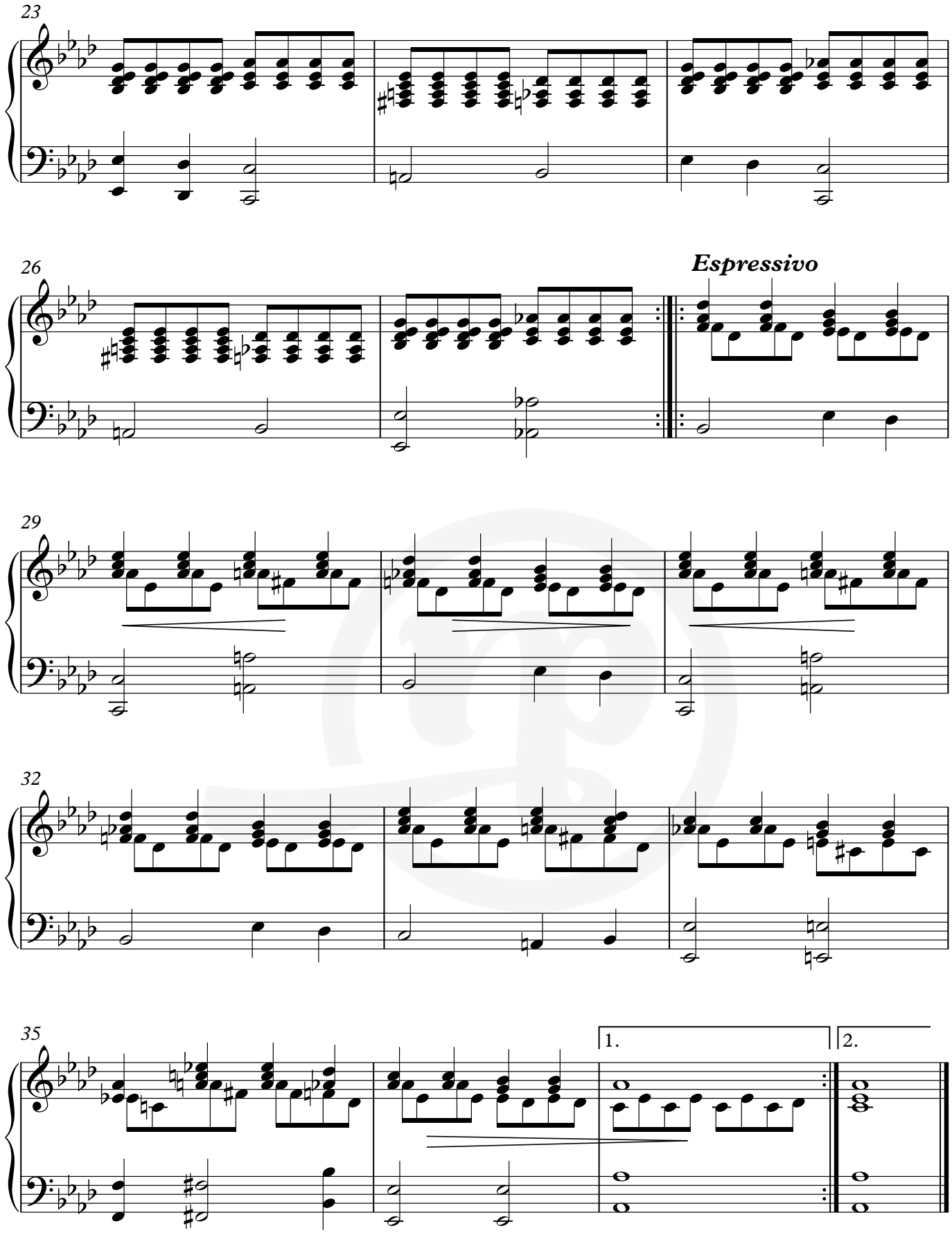

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NOTE 9: African Pianism: Voices of Our Ancestors

Written on the campus of Atlanta University, this work embraces and confronts a period in history when Africa's children went through excruciating pain. As the song unfolds, the piece reveals the Non-oral communication that existed in the midst of the pandemonium that characterized how our ancestors were forcibly transported to Europe and the Americas. These ancestors came to the realization that, in spite of the different backgrounds, a form of communication initiated by God and presented through collective consciousness indeed existed as they transcended their bodies.

Nature witnessed God creating humanity. Since I believe God will not plan or create to defeat His purpose, God together with nature will always respond to the plight of any people who cry for help when in excruciating and painful experiences. There was communication! My belief is that there was a communication amongst those wrongly called slaves on the eve of their departure from the shores of Ghana. They were not slaves; they were first and foremost Africans who were captured, enslaved and tortured. There was collective consciousness where each person, particularly those in tune with the land and communities from which they were forcibly taken, heard in their heads and spirits subliminal sounds and messages from their respective villages or towns.

Subsequently, they sought to find the meaning of their circumstances through gestures and movements with each other. Though oral culture was a barrier as a result of the different cultures and languages they represented, their spirits connected with each other in a language we often lack adequate vocabulary to describe - via the metaphysical properties of sound which energized them, consciously and unconsciously. In this regard, they recreated their spiritual selves. This unabated energy and emotion is represented by the recurring rhythmic pattern in the left hand, especially as represented in bars 1-8.

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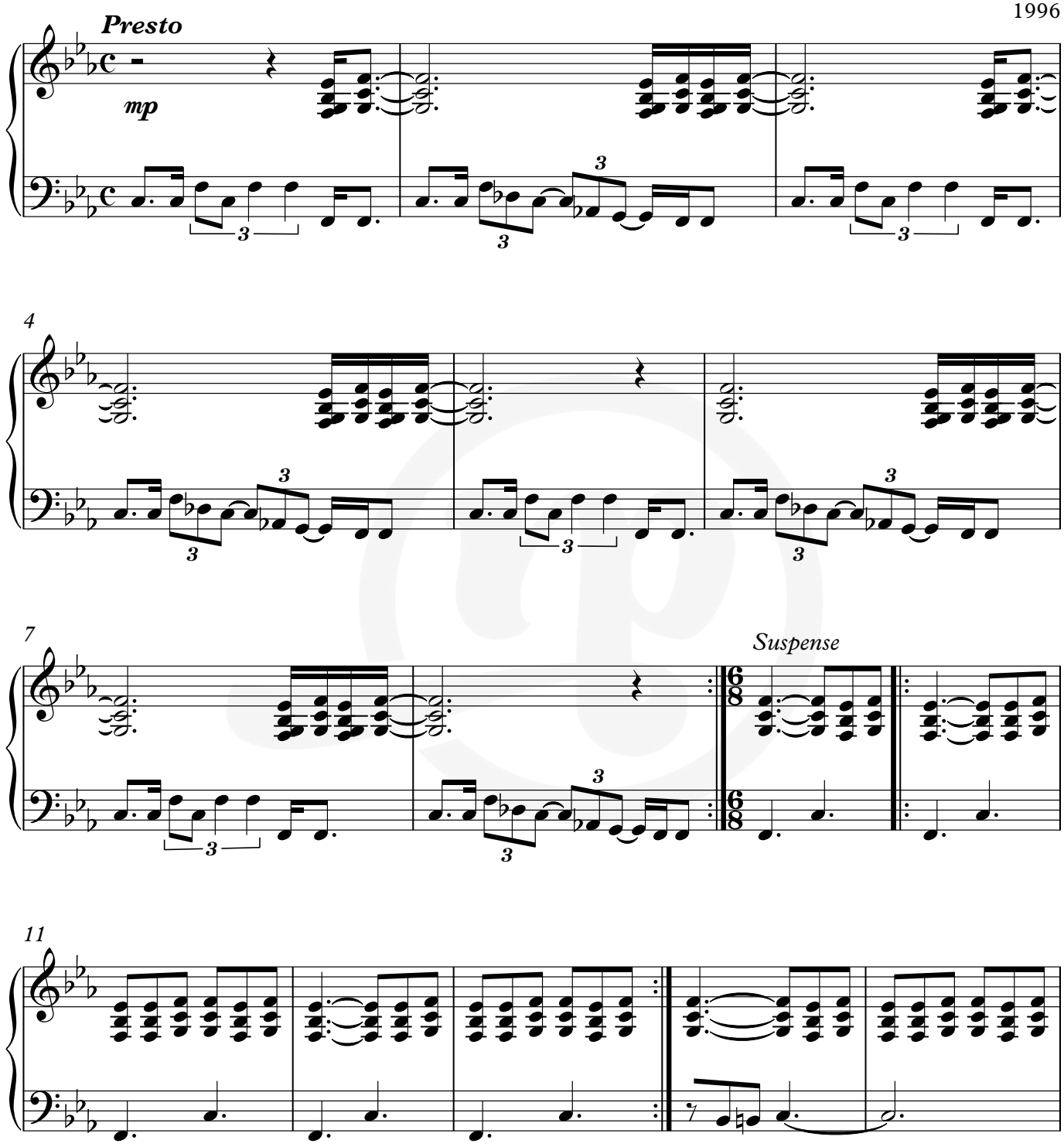
Voices of Our Ancestors

Dedicated to:
Doctor of Arts In Humanities Seminar
"Crossings: Transatlantic Intersections
And the African Musical Heritage"

Victor Nii Sowa Manieson
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
1996



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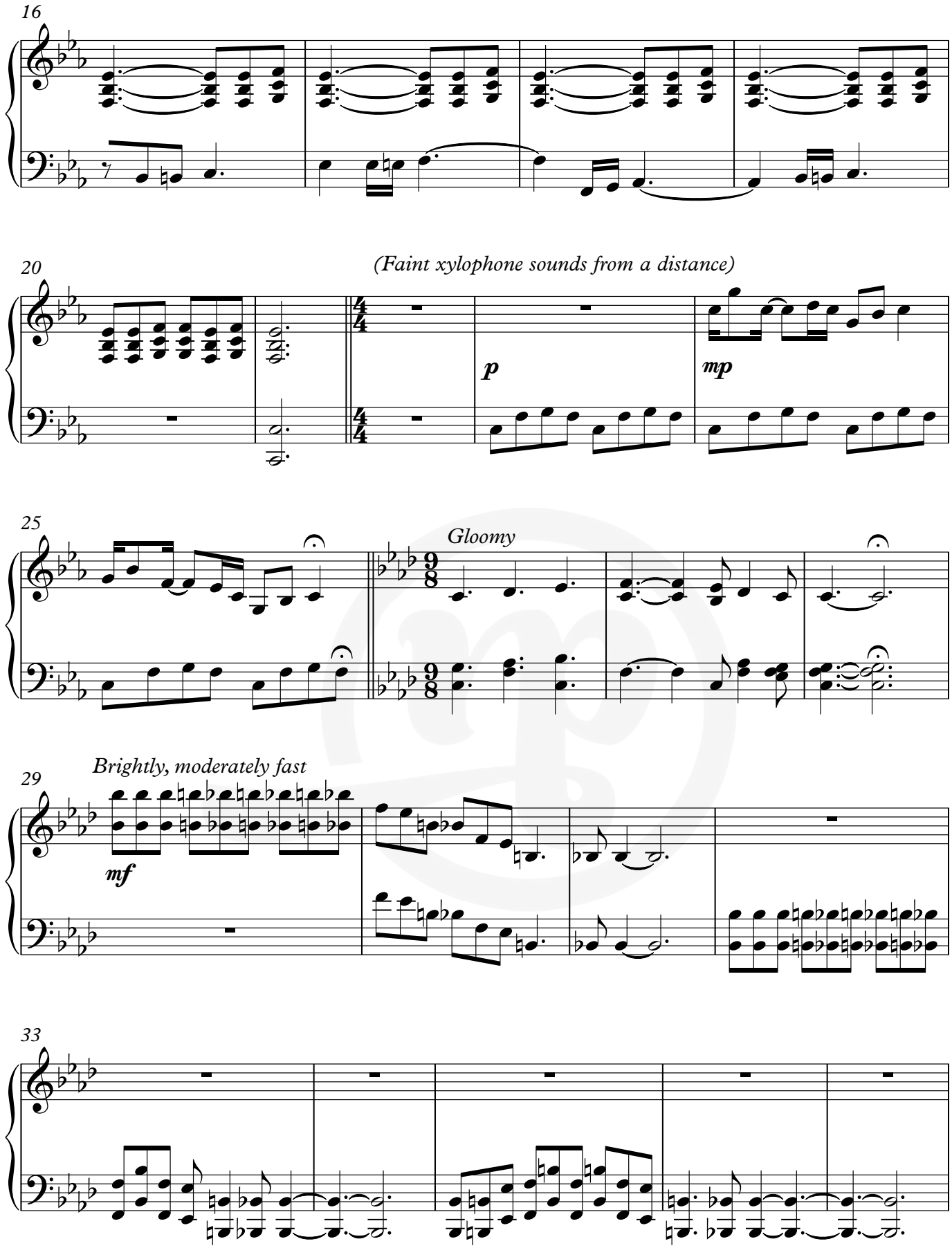

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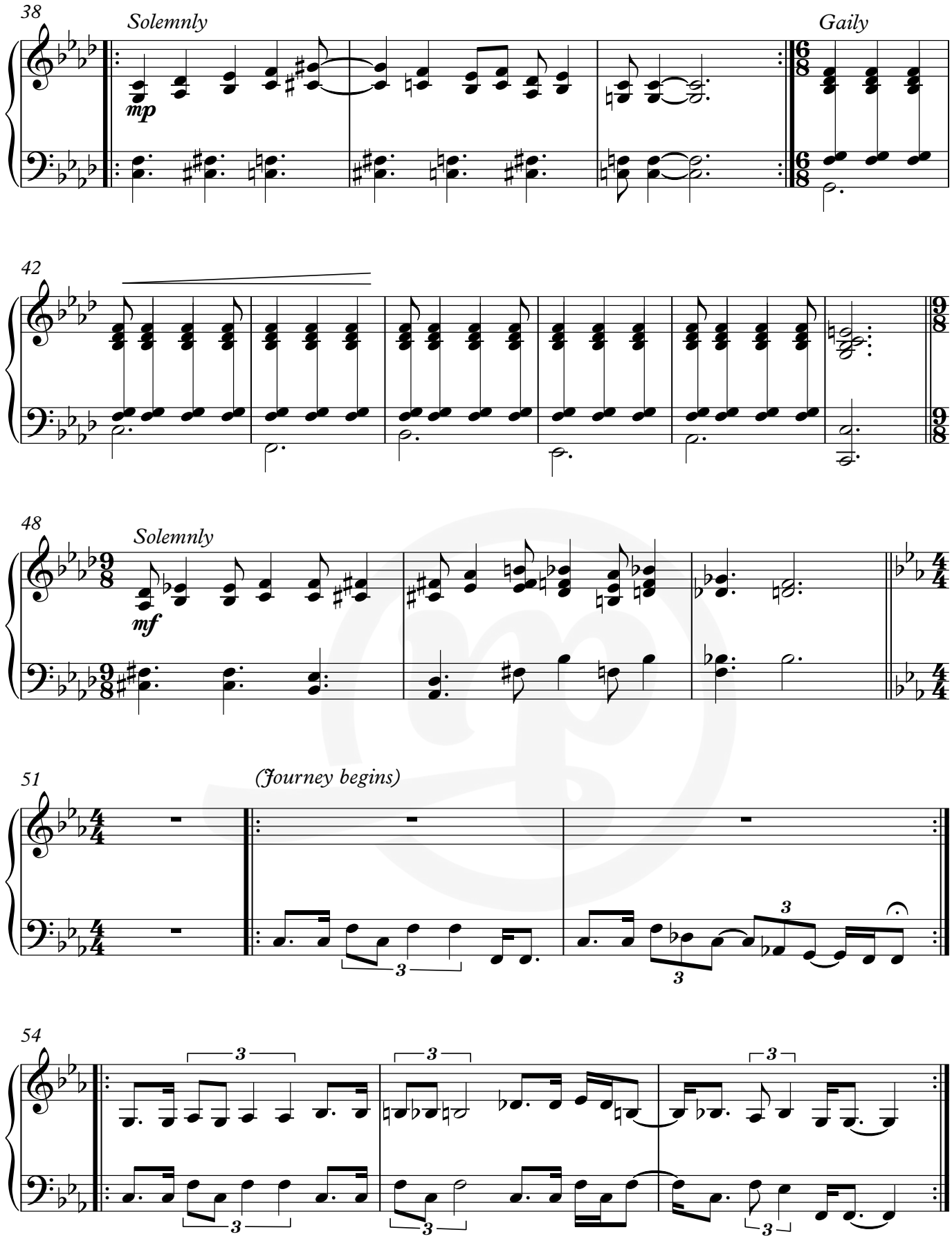

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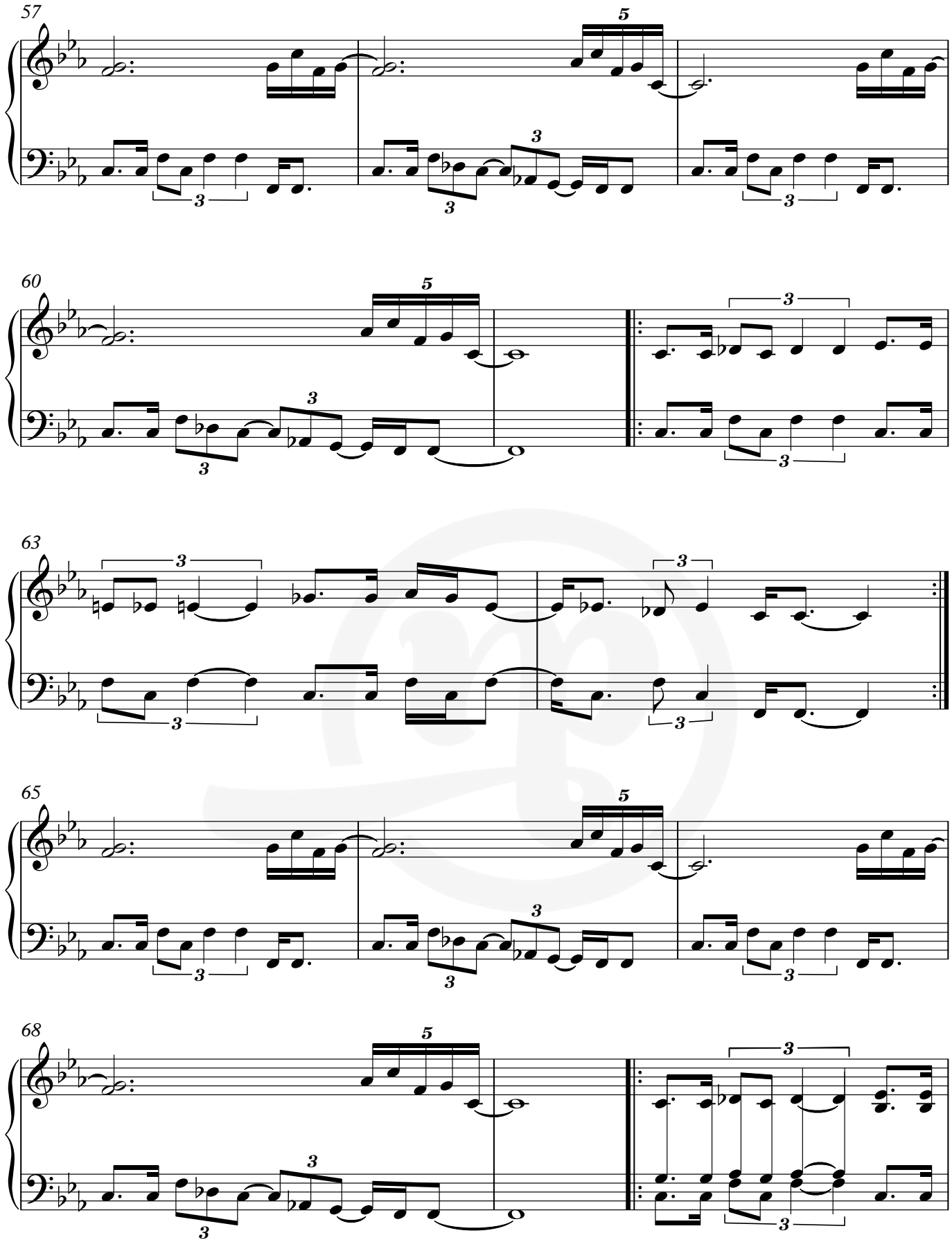

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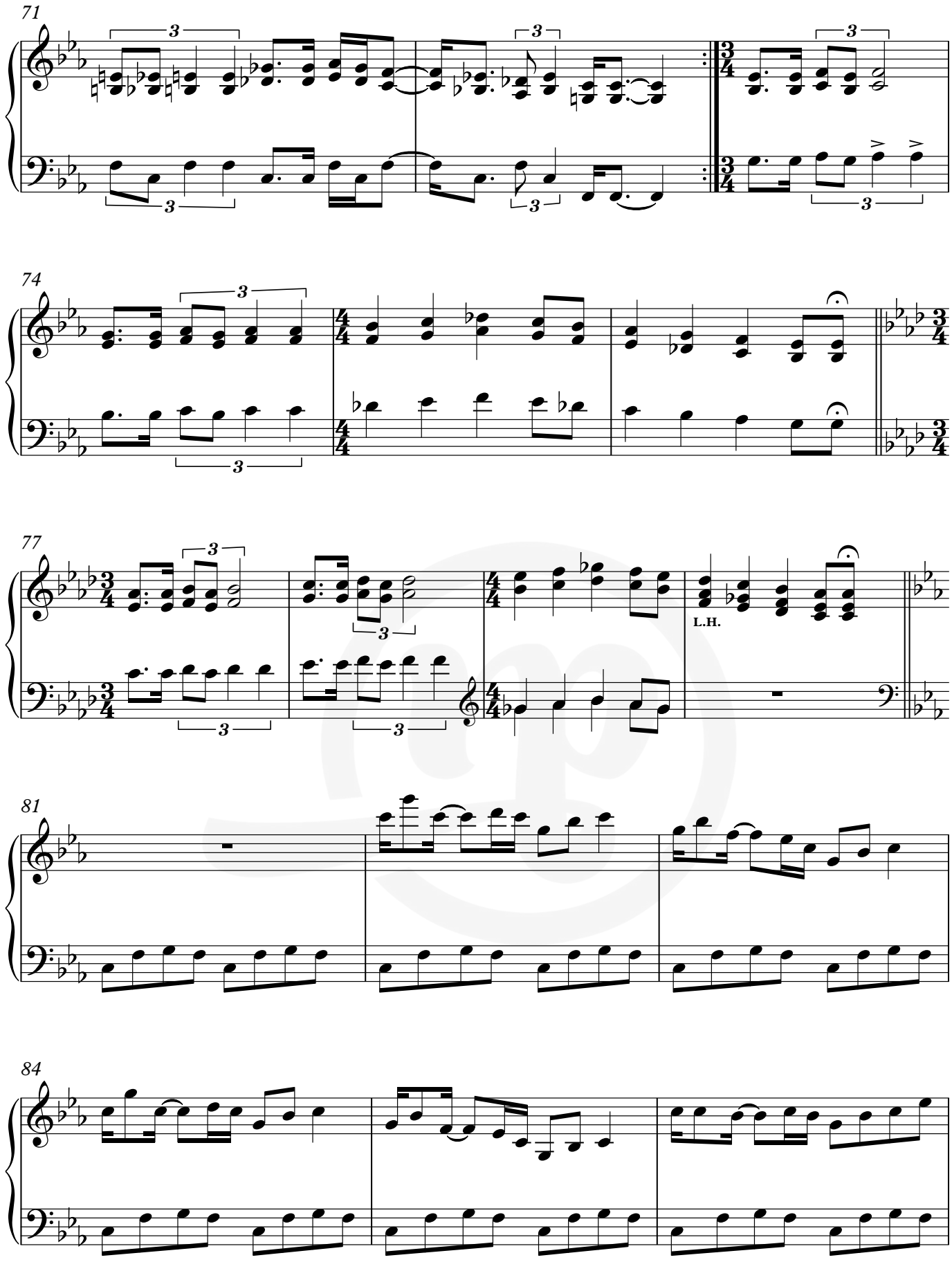

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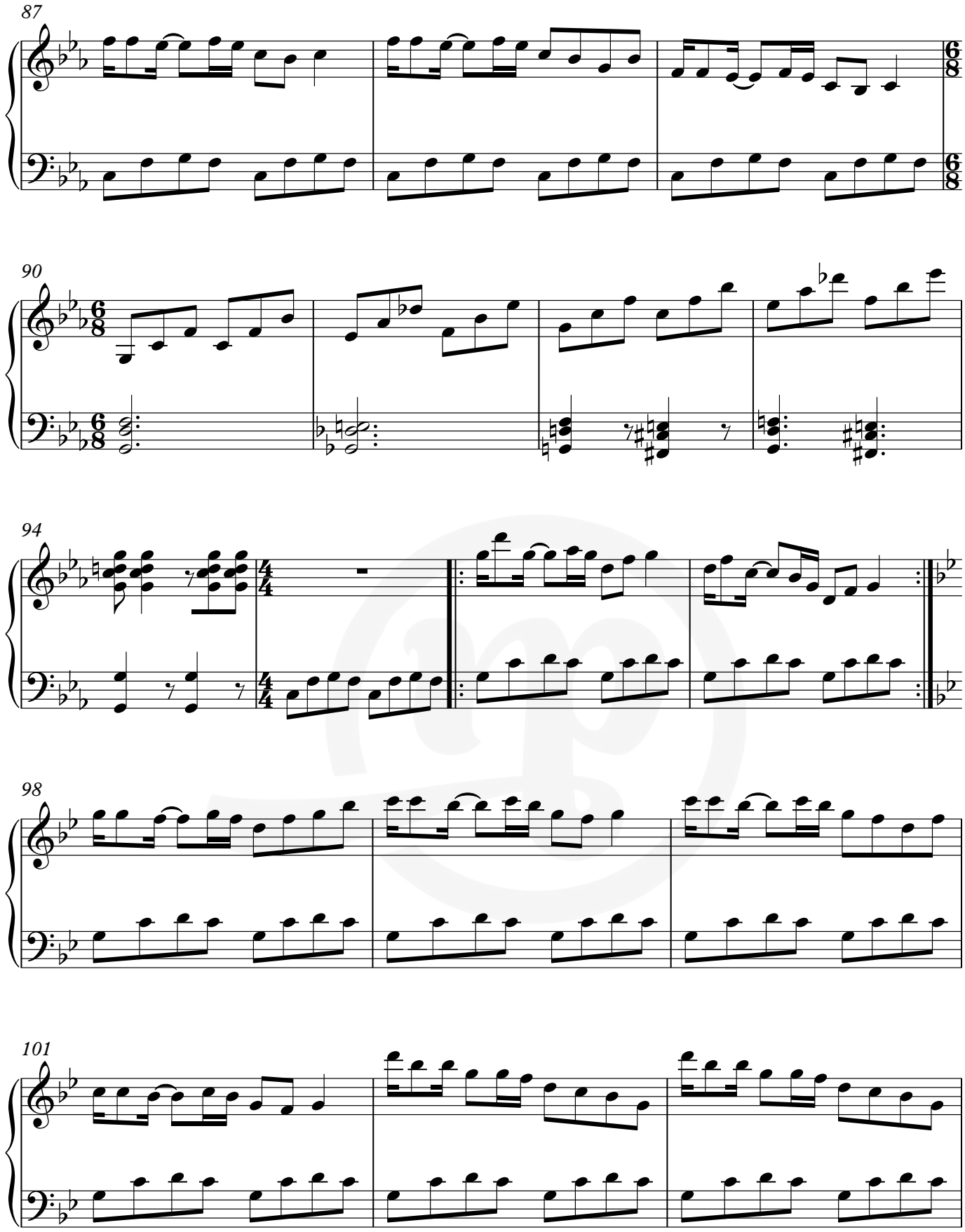

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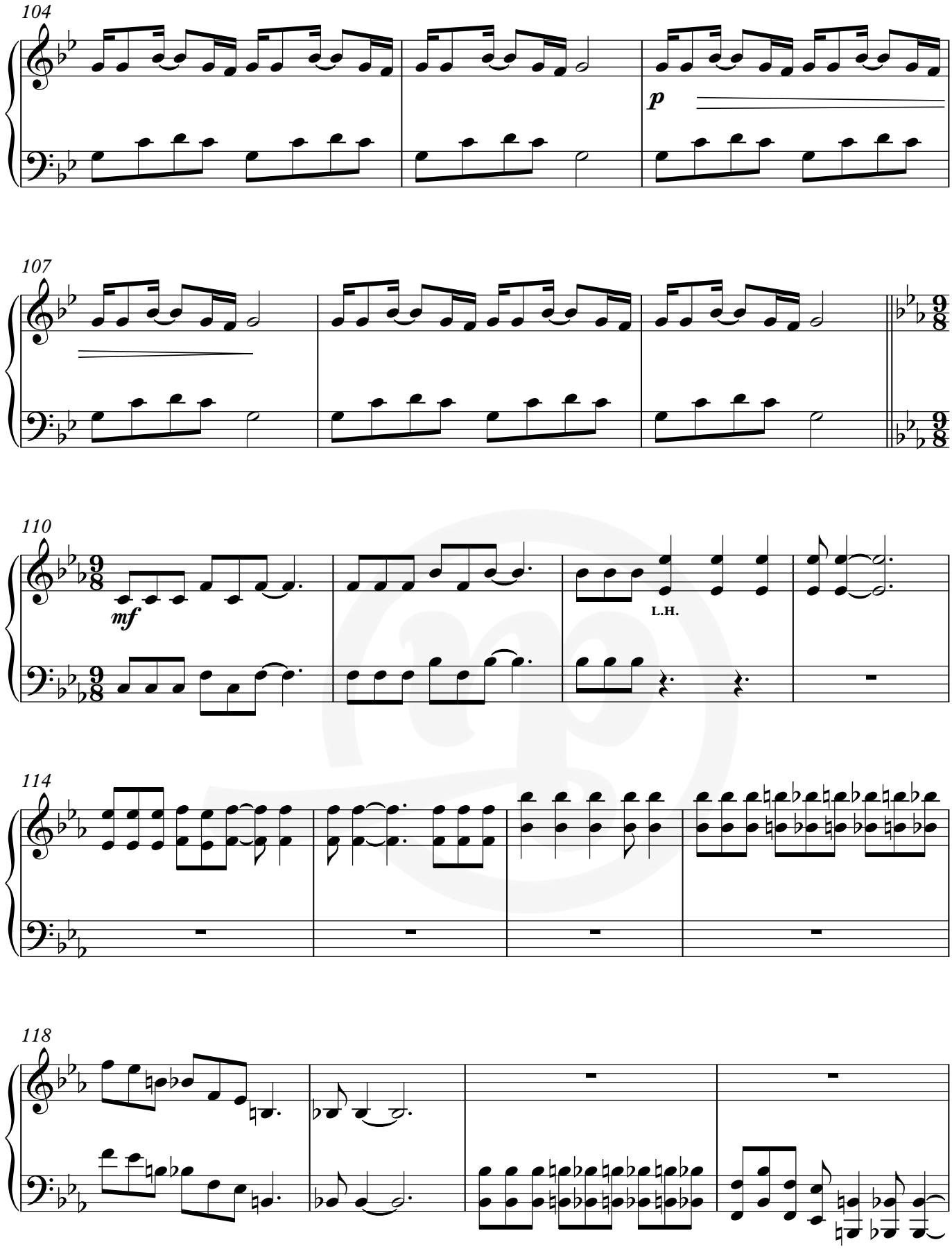

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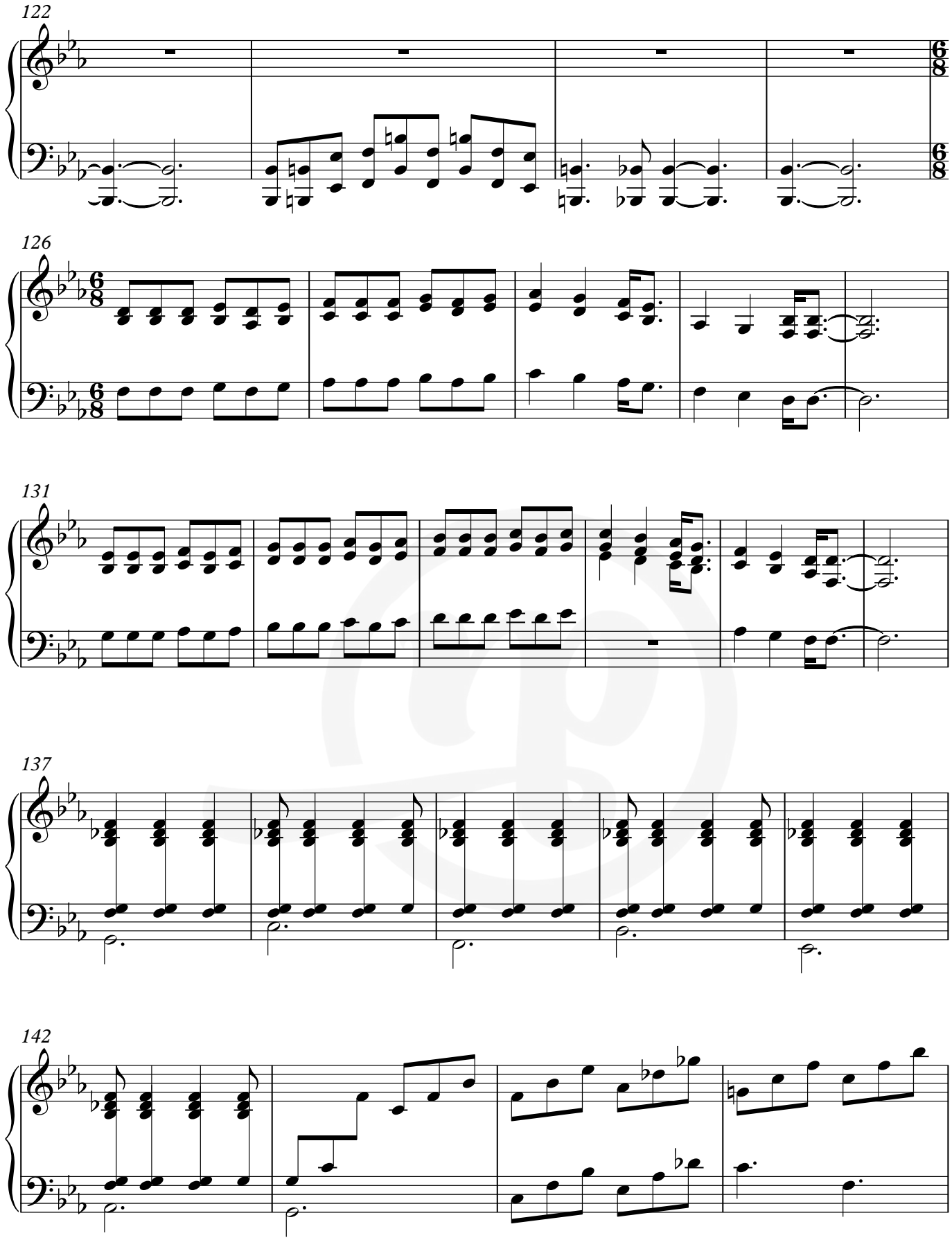

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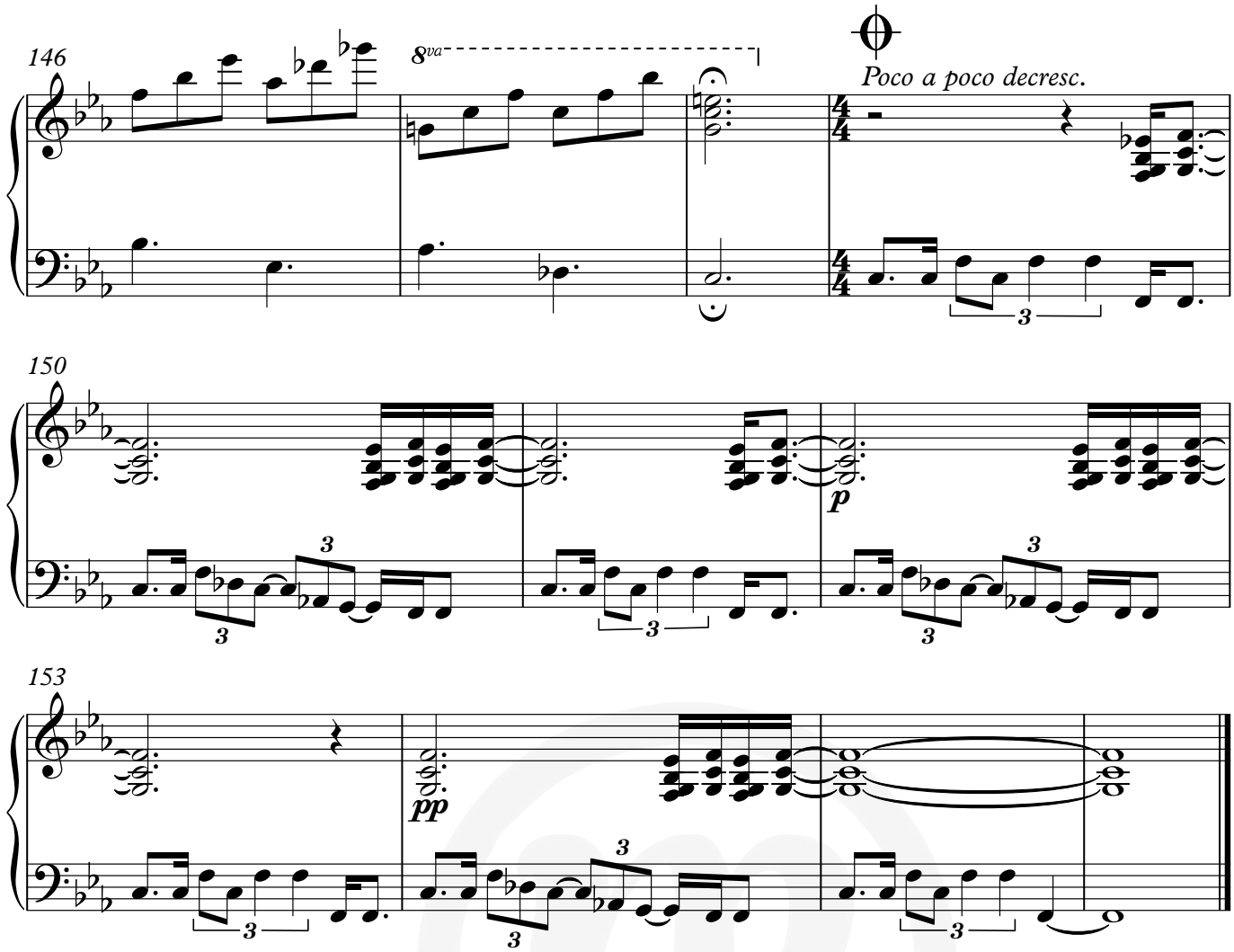

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NOTES 10: African Pianism: Baba Oluwa – Sha Anu Fun Wa (O Lord Our God,

Your Mercy Endures Forever/Have Mercy)

This piece is an exciting, energizing and challenging composition that helped me appreciate my God given mandate as a song writer, teacher and performer whose Apostolic flagship requires sensitivity whatever assignment the Holy Spirit gives. While I am not a native Yoruba speaker, this song has often been pressed on my spirit to compose in Yoruba. This African Essence Phenomenon is real yet we often frown on it before we even attempt to explain. INSPIRATION DOES HAPPEN!

There was an activity that prompted such perception or desire to write this piece. I was in Rev. Newlove Kojo Annan's office at the Wisconsin International University College in Ghana when a call came in. Basically Rev Newlove Annan was to coordinate some musicians for a performance because a notable Operatic Soloist of Nigerian descent was coming from Europe to perform. Rev Newlove requested we both compose something. He decided to write a Christmas song in the Twi language. Looking at me, he insisted that I also write. In his words he said "I wish I could commission you to write". I immediately said, "Don't worry, I strongly feel something Yoruba. Rev Newlove's eyes grew big. Well, whatever made me say Yoruba did not frighten me but rather challenged me. I purposed to pray and enquire of what essence and/or character the song should be. I decided that YORUBA will be my POINT OF CONTACT to all Nigerians.

So I decided to compose in solidarity to all Nigerians. Peace in the West African Sub-Region can translate to peace in Africa. Baba Oluwa - Sha anu fun wa was the title of which I settled. It means, "O God our father, your mercy endures forever; have mercy!" It was written within two weeks through the instrumentation of the Holy Spirit. When Rev. Annan heard the song for the first time, he recommended it for voice major and piano accompanists in our Universities. Unfortunately, the piece was not selected for the Christmas concert. However, glory be to God that the composition is a masterpiece that represents Africanity. I appreciate Rev. Newlove Kojo Annan's description of the work as: ***A 21ST CENTURY EXPRESSION OF CREATIVE MUSIC ESSAY IN SOLO AND PIANO.***

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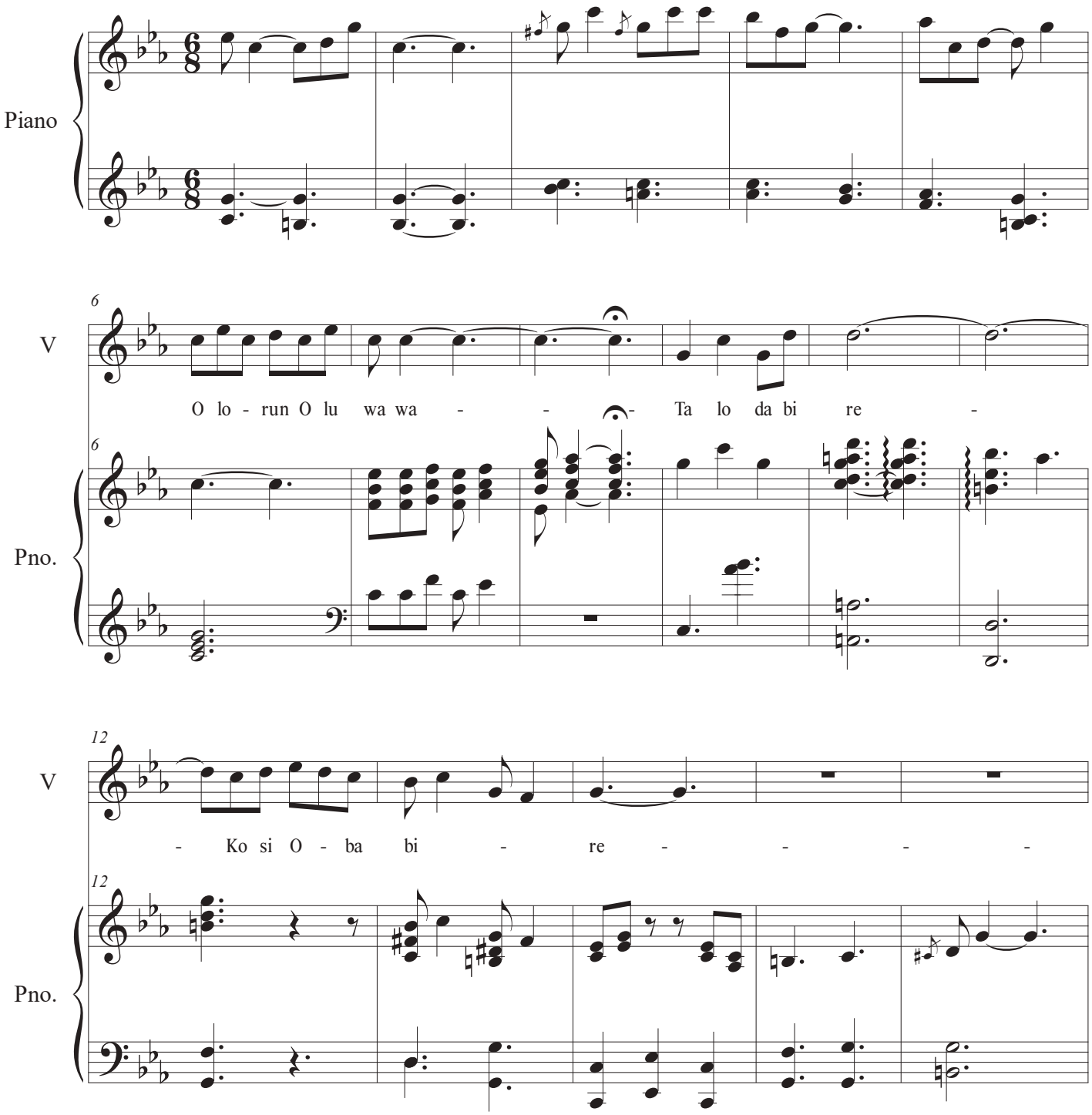
BABA OLUWA - SHA ANU FUN WA

Victor Manison

9th Nov. 2018



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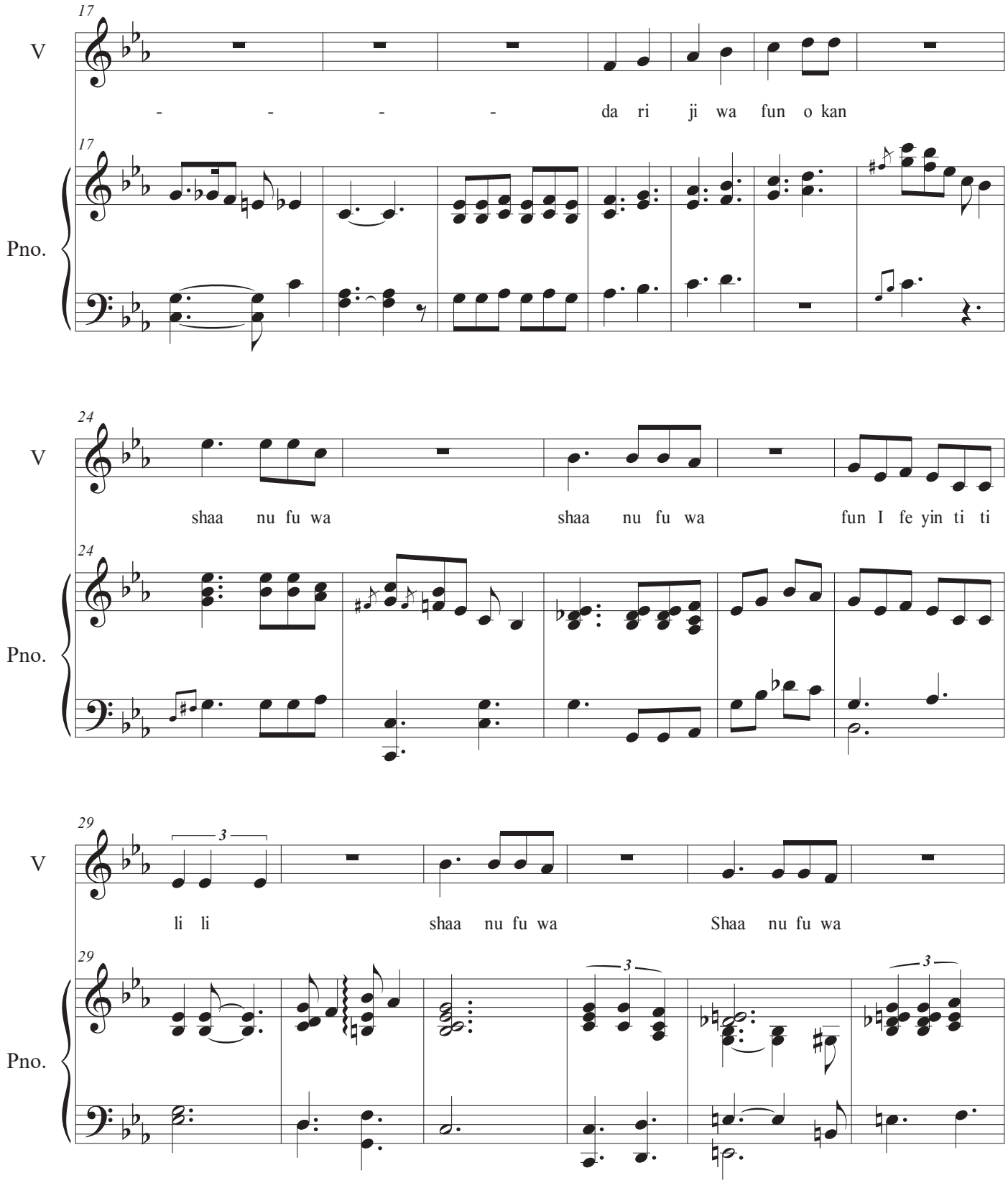

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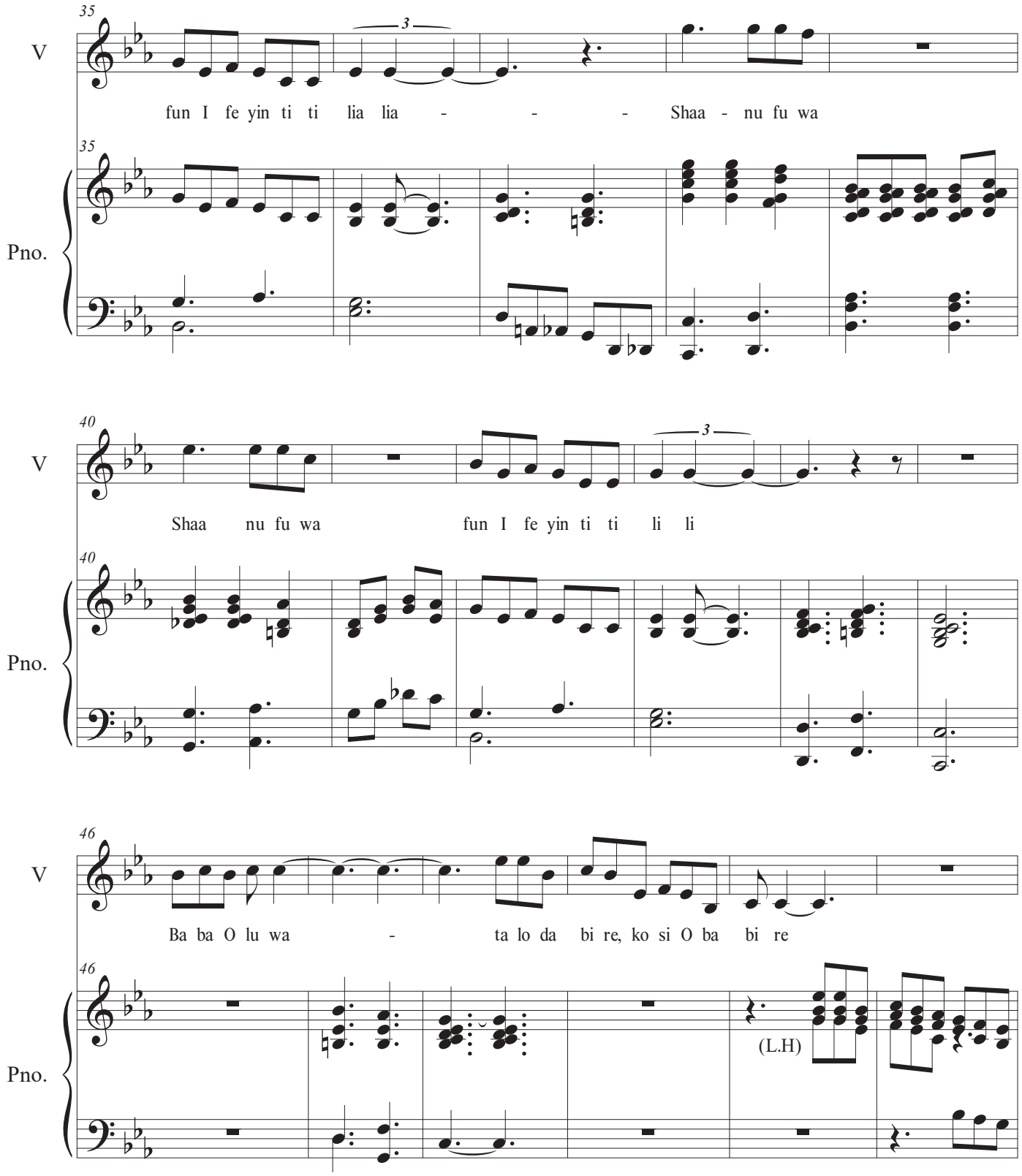

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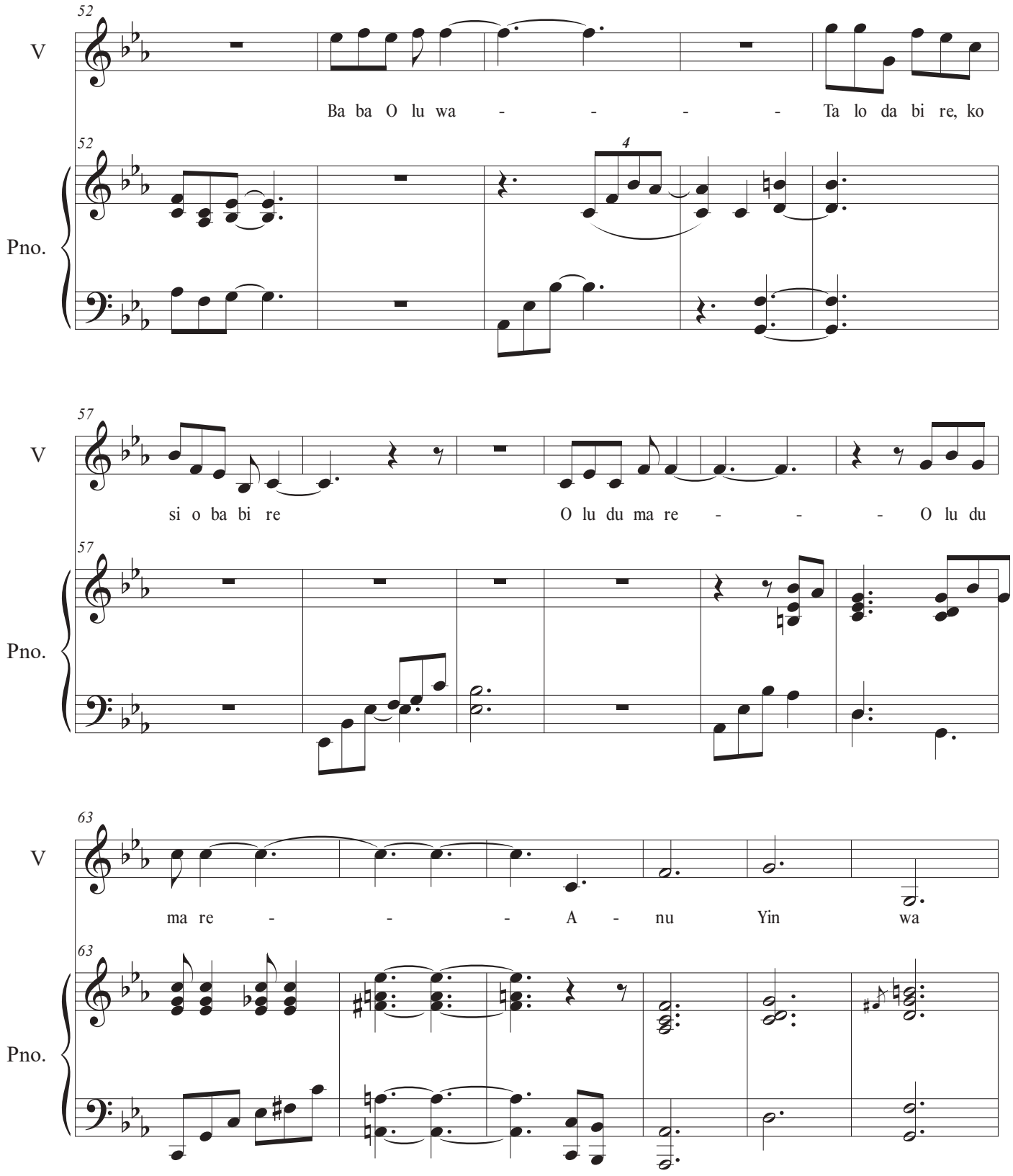

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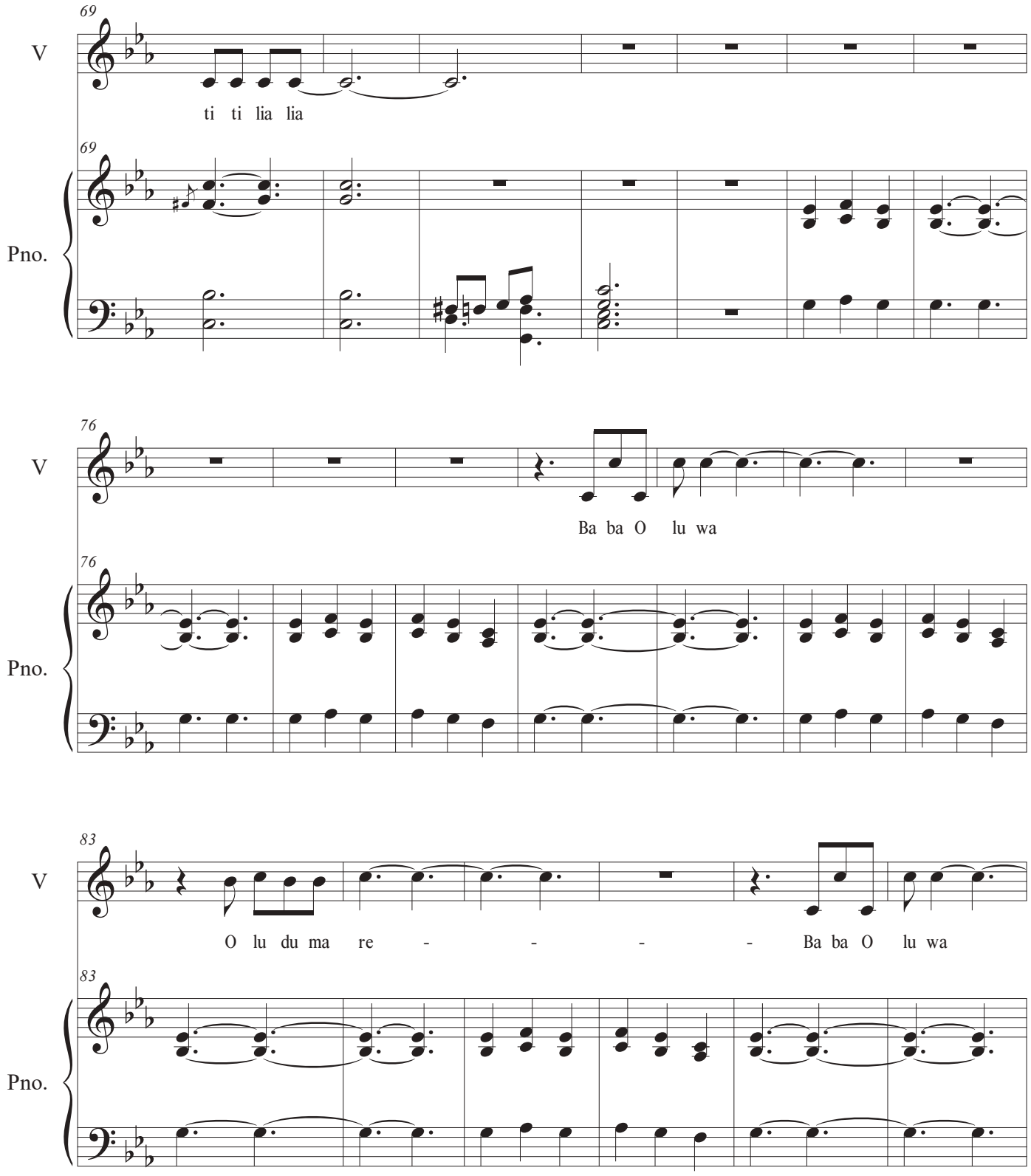

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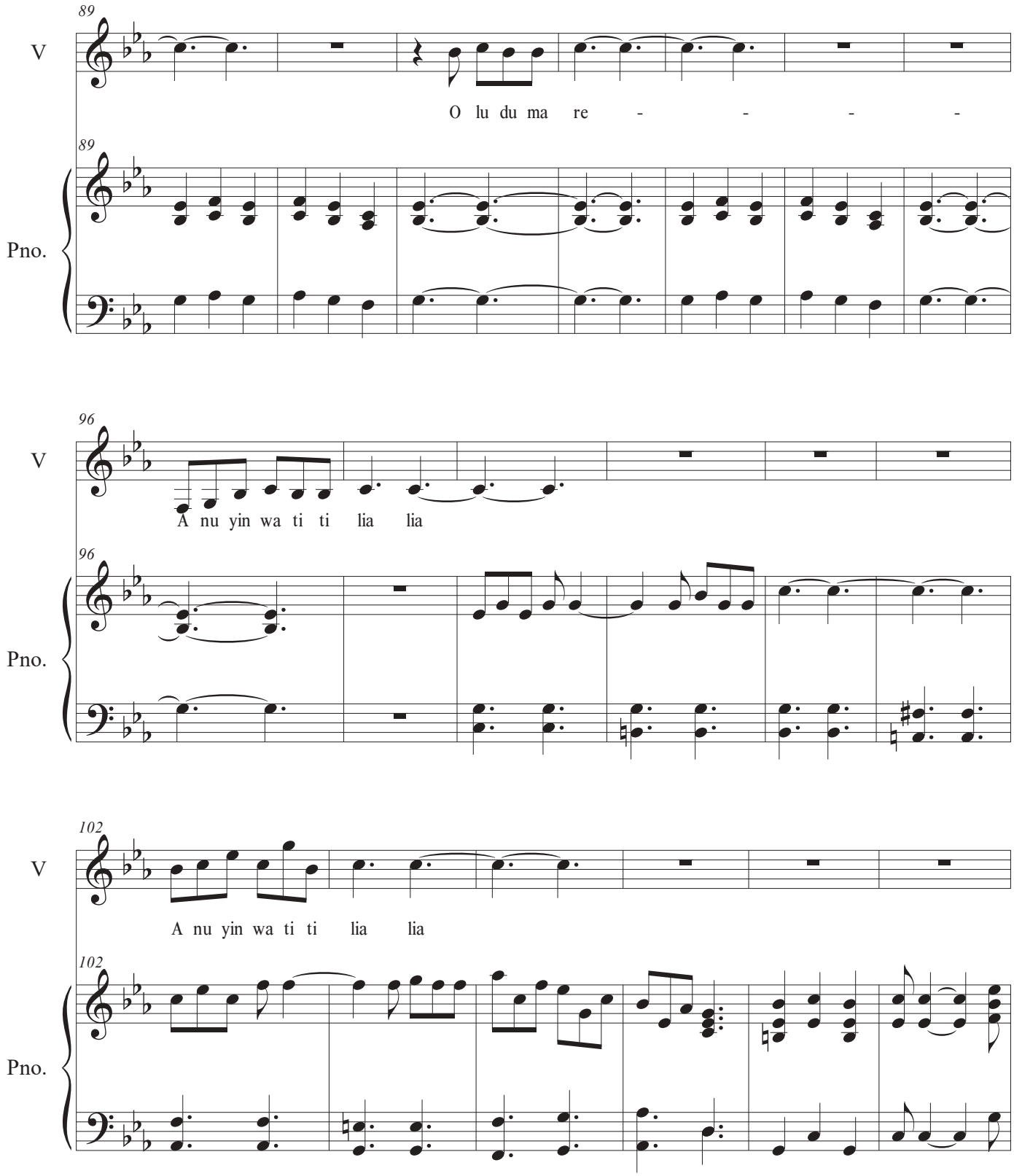

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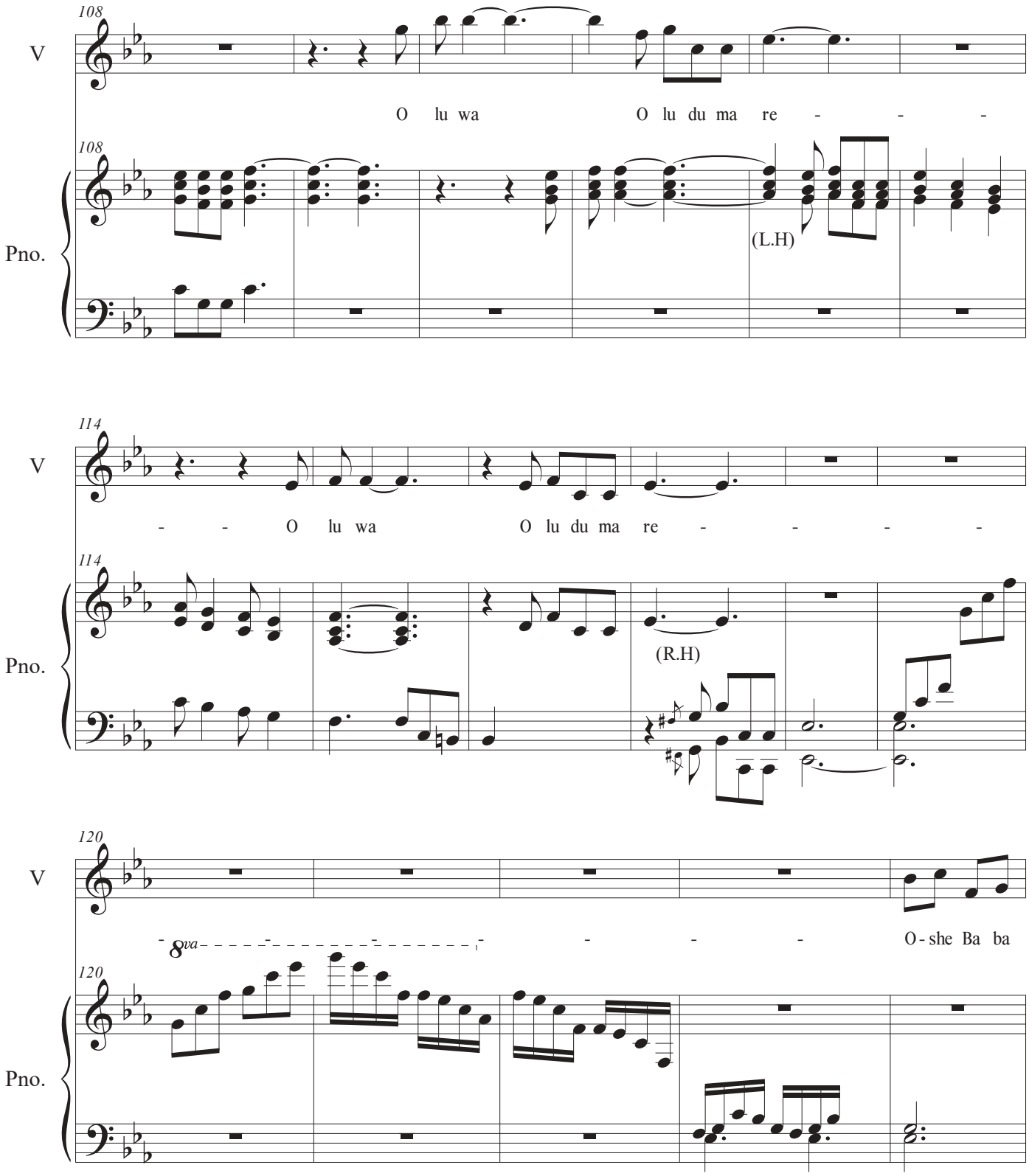

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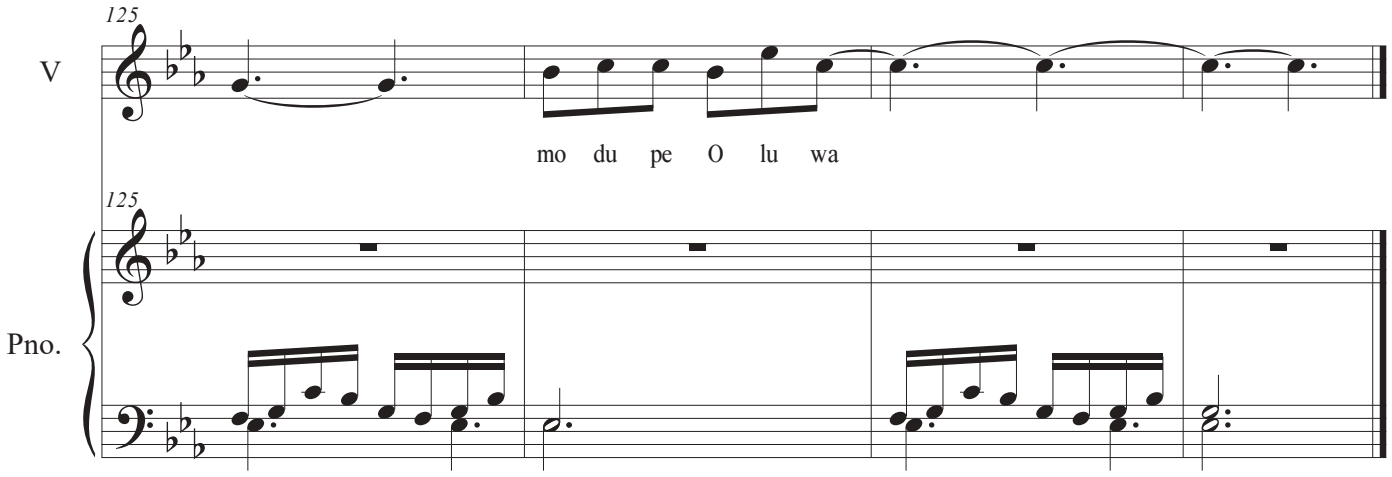

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NOTE 11: Supplication from Yoruba Land

This piece was written during the Easter of 2008 in Victoria Island -Nigeria. It employs the piano, trumpet, chorus and poetry to evoke the Divine Essence as I perceived in Yoruba land during a trip to Victoria Island.

Mr. Chika Nkenga, the C.E.O of Recare Hair Products, had invited my wife as a consultant to do a workshop on the use and application of products for a modelling performance(show). There were a lot of models who were being instructed on the range of products and their application, particularly why the brand was best for the hair of Africans. What fascinated me most was how a diverse group of ethnicities focused as a team towards a performance; how they admitted during the sharing knowledge period that some foreign products were breaking their hair; and how my wife suggested treatments. I realized that though a clique of a sort was present, they all seemed to be praying for the training, and understood the application of this friendly African product. Intermittently, I left to my wife's office and practised on the keyboard I had brought along from Ghana.

On the second day my spirit became restless until a thought struck. How do these models, their families or the different ethnic groups they represent address God? What are their concerns in life besides making some Nairas by doing modelling? In what frequencies will their thoughts and prayers flow in if there was a common prayer for Nigeria on behalf of Africa? This restlessness seemed funny but it kept resurfacing as a wrestle. Was modelling their preferred work besides what most of them were studying at University of Lagos (UNILAG) or was it a career path? The wrestle continued.

There was a summation of a permeating content in their prayers; what would it be? At this juncture, I felt my CREATIVE SPIRIT IN ACTION - unfamiliar melodic motifs started dropping. The land on which I was, demanded I wrote a song. Not just a song but also a poem to aid the melody. This felt weird and almost crazy. My wife realized I was restless. But I also knew, and still know that familiar test or challenge does not birth testimony for the child of God. So I prayed and went back again to the keyboard.

As I started crafting the melody on the keyboard - piano sound with strings combination; a trumpet line interfered. I focused on the piano piece and poetic content. To my surprise some of the models started coming around - it was their lunch time. The music was calling them. They enquire arbitrarily what indigenous piece it was until my wife told them I was composing. With each phrase I felt a part of a prayer that could punctuate and I tried it on the models. Thus 'Supplication from Yoruba Land' was born. Subsequent days during our stay engaged my attention on the song; one would think I was crazy as I worked on a poetic content via the Yoruba language.

'Supplication from Yoruba Land' addresses the vocabulary we use in referring to the Supreme Being - God Almighty. By so doing it raises how we should address God. Should we address God as male or female? Obaatanpa Nyame - Good Mother God by the Akan; or as Ataa Naa Nyogme - Father Mother God by the Ga. I told Mr. Chika Nkenga that I would include the work in my impending African Pianism Concert in Accra. On Saturday, October 11th 2008, I gave a concert at the British

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Council in Accra. Chika's wife and baby boy, his sister and also his niece were present from Lagos. My desire to revisit 'Supplication from Yoruba Land' became so strong at the beginning of the year 2020. I needed to recapture and re-examine the aesthetic essence. So in mid-March 2020, I requested that Mr. Ishmael Twum Odoom, an English Lecturer, song writer and Yoruba language admirer should help me find someone to translate the poem from Yoruba into English again. The issue of how reciting a text could interfere with aesthetically captivating performance was another test. Brother Ishmael got a colleague of his, Mrs. Temitope Seun Ray- Odekeye to translate and recite.

The following is my response to Ishmael upon listening to the audio tape of the recital. " God bless you so much director Ishmael. Although I cannot even say a phrase of the above in my normal senses, it is exactly about what I perceived Easter 2008 on Victoria Island at the Recare office where my wife's students played along especially with the 1st two lines of each verse. I was in tears because that experience confirmed for me THE PENTECOST PHENOMENON- when those gathered heard in their own language. I treasure the SACRED TRUST that God has in using us instruments. I didn't fully understand the process but I trusted my intuition/ discerning spirit to put you to task on this project without any consideration of what would emerge. I revere and 'fear' God even as I listen to the lyrics now. Aesthetically, I am appreciating a language I cannot speak but capturing the Divine Essence. I sincerely thank you for your instrumentation in a process that is guided by the HOLY SPIRIT to bring healing to a people I 'don't even know.'"

Sonia Abena Oluwafemi Gyasi has also done the English recital on audio. Indeed, God is with us. Thank you.

POEM

YORUBA	**ENGLISH**
1. Oluwa wa ati olorun wa Iwo ti kii sabo ti kii sako Sibe sibe die ninu wa pe o ni baba Awa Kan na pe o ni iya, abiamo agboja gboro gboro Oba ti kii yipada Ninu titobi re ni a farahan Nje a le ma pe o ni olorun baba-mama	Our Lord and Our God You who are genderless Yet some of us call you Father And some of us call you Mother You metaphase not But in your uniqueness we emerge. May we sometimes call you Father -Mother God?
2. Oluwa wa ati olorun wa Awa right ara wa gege bi abajade ise ologo owo re A le wa ni orisiirisii ara wa, sibe sibe eda eniyan Kan ni wa Ise apinfuni re fun orile ede afrika sabi eni pe ko ni idaniloju Sugbon o busi gbogbo awon orile ede Sibe sibe bawo ni a o ba se pe o?	Our Lord and Our God We find ourselves as the resultant Of your splendid handiwork. We find our different selves Yet, one humanity Your mission for Africa seems uncertain But you've blessed all nation's And yet, how may we call you?

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3. Oluwa wa ati olorun wa Bawo ni ase le di ara agbara iseda re? Ati paapa to ara wa Bawo ni a sele sunmo yin Bawo ni a sele koju yin Onise ti nto ise aworan re ni daradara. Sibe a ko ni awon oro asoye ti o pe lati se alaye oruko ti a ma fifun Emi to o wa leyin titobi agbaye olola yii Fun ohun ti a mo ati pe ti a le jeri si On pese fun alailera okan wa	Our Lord and Our God How may we plug into your Creative Energy And even conduct ourselves How may we approach and address you? All creation suggest a master designer Whose artistry is well orchestrated. Yet we lack adequate vocabulary to explain What name we give

SUPPLICATION from Yorubaland is dedicated to Chika Nkenga, Victoria Island, Nigeria. Easter 2008

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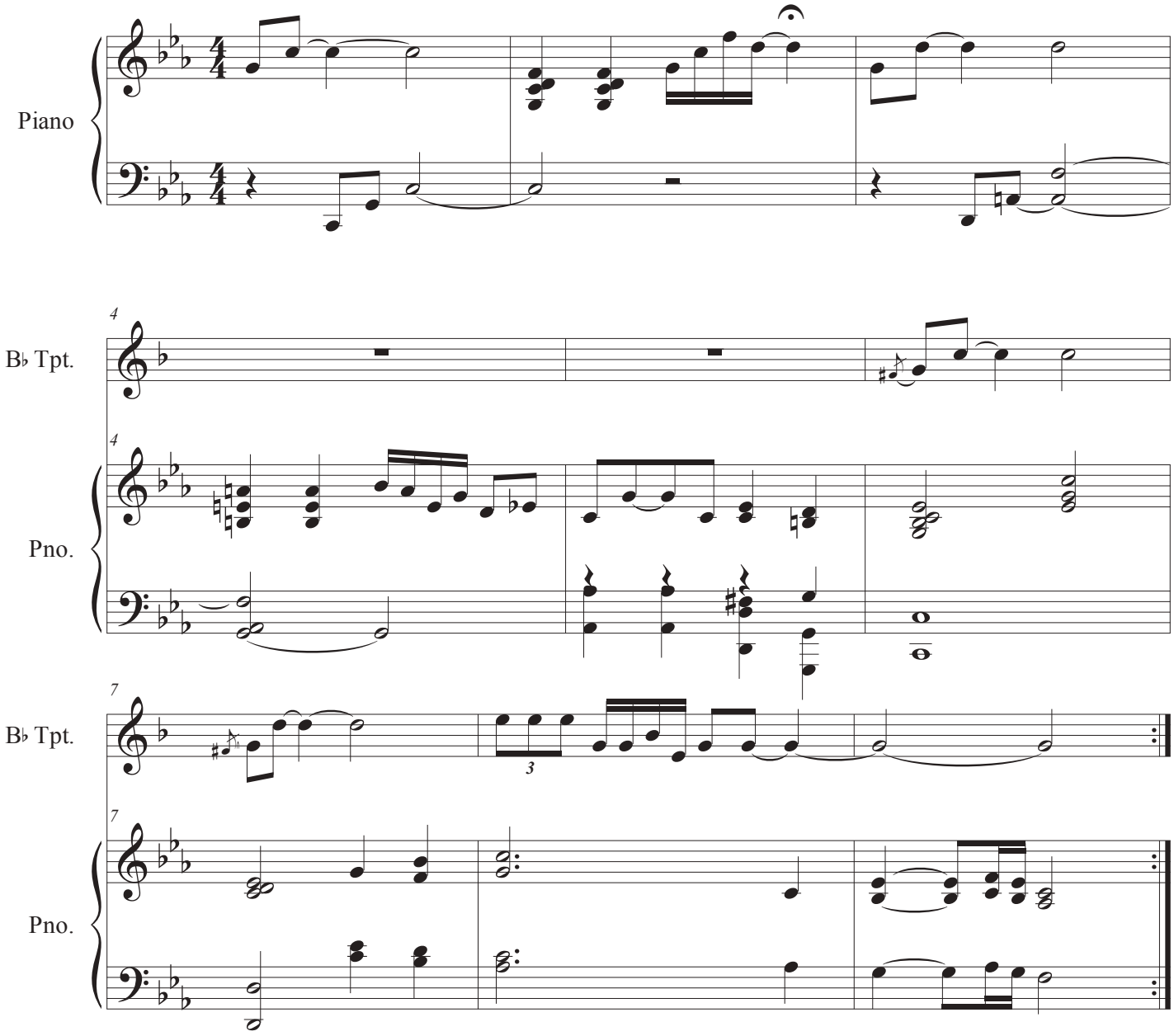
SUPPLICATION FROM YORUBA LAND

Victor Manieson
2008



NOTE:
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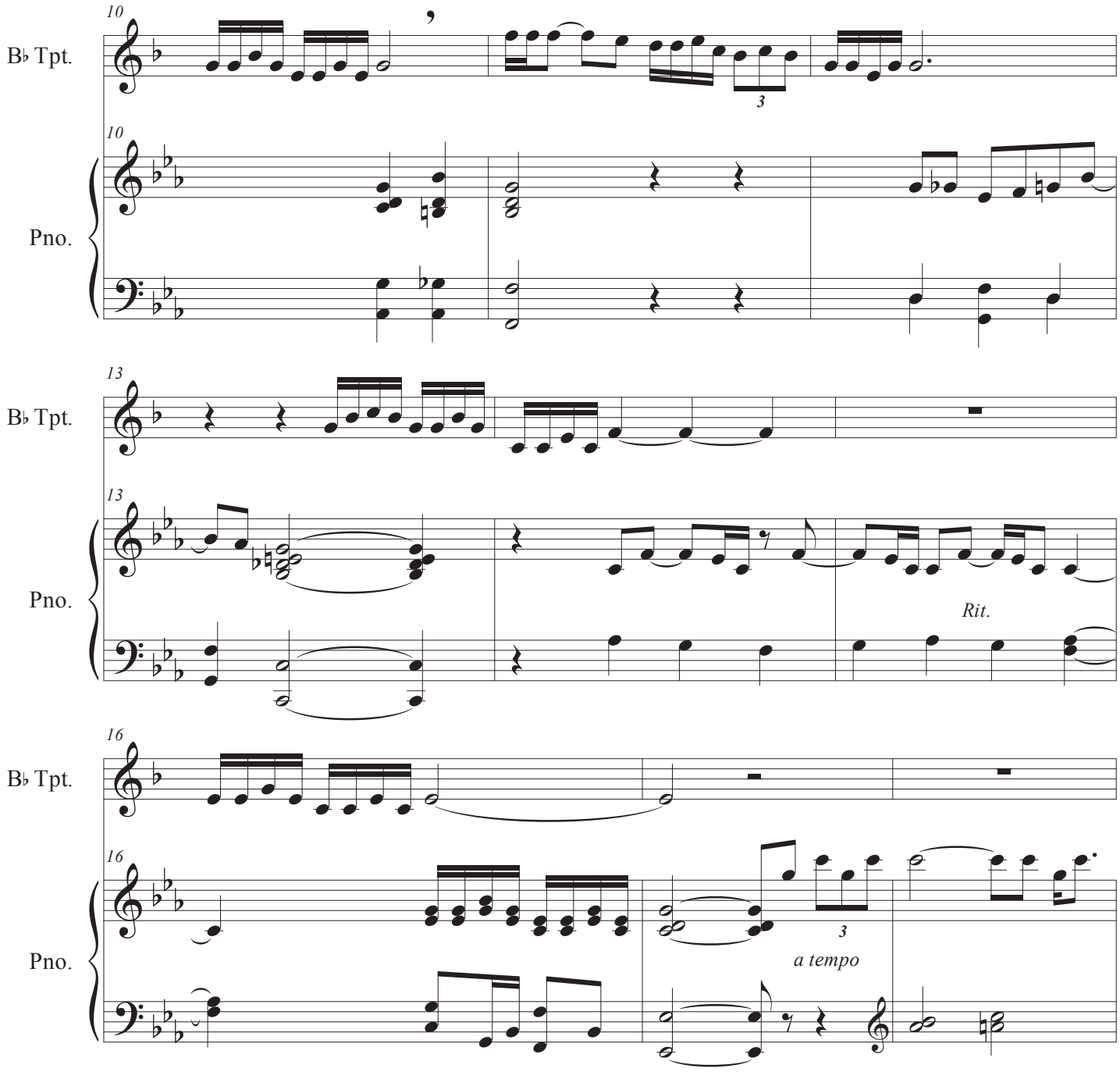

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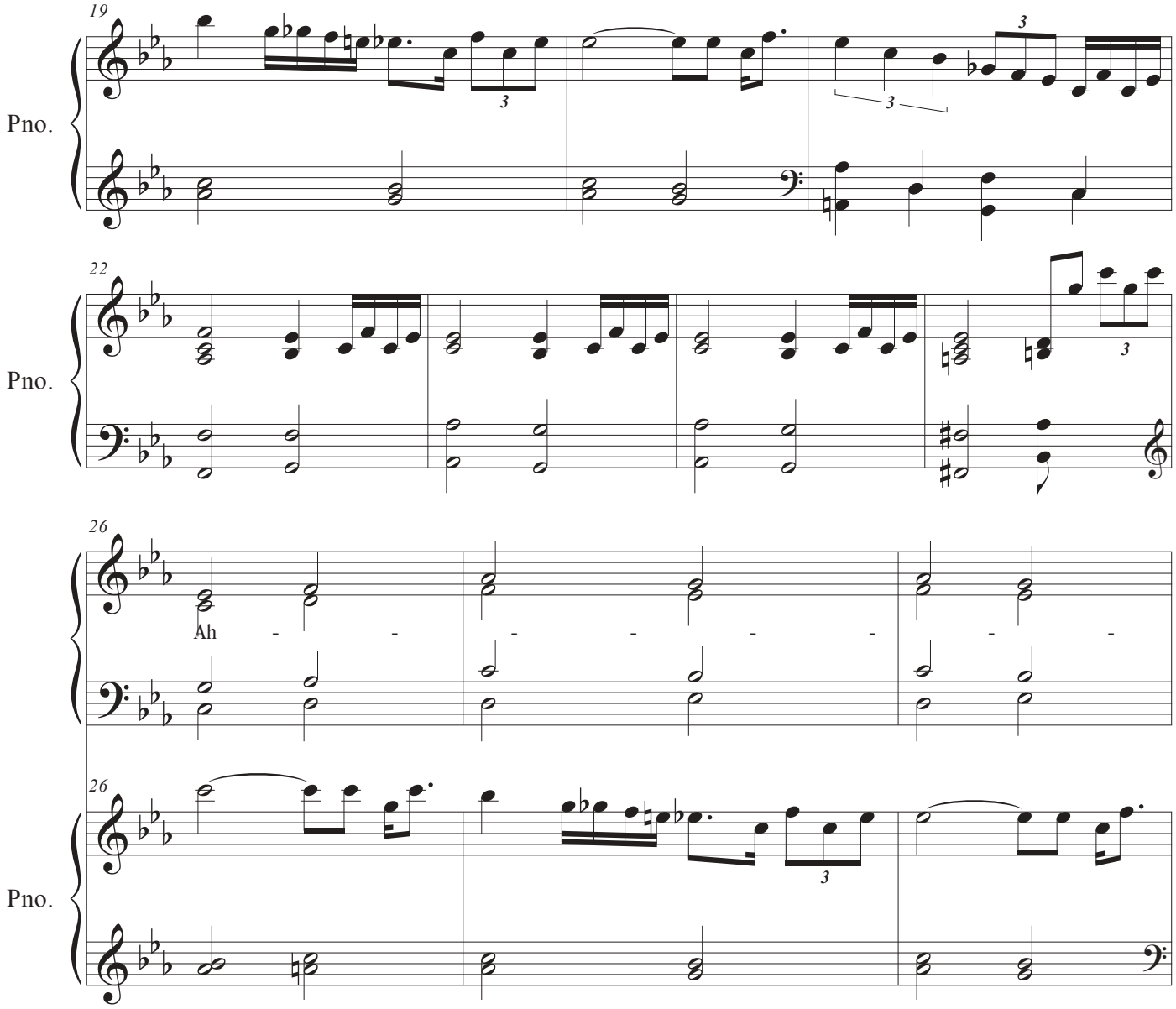

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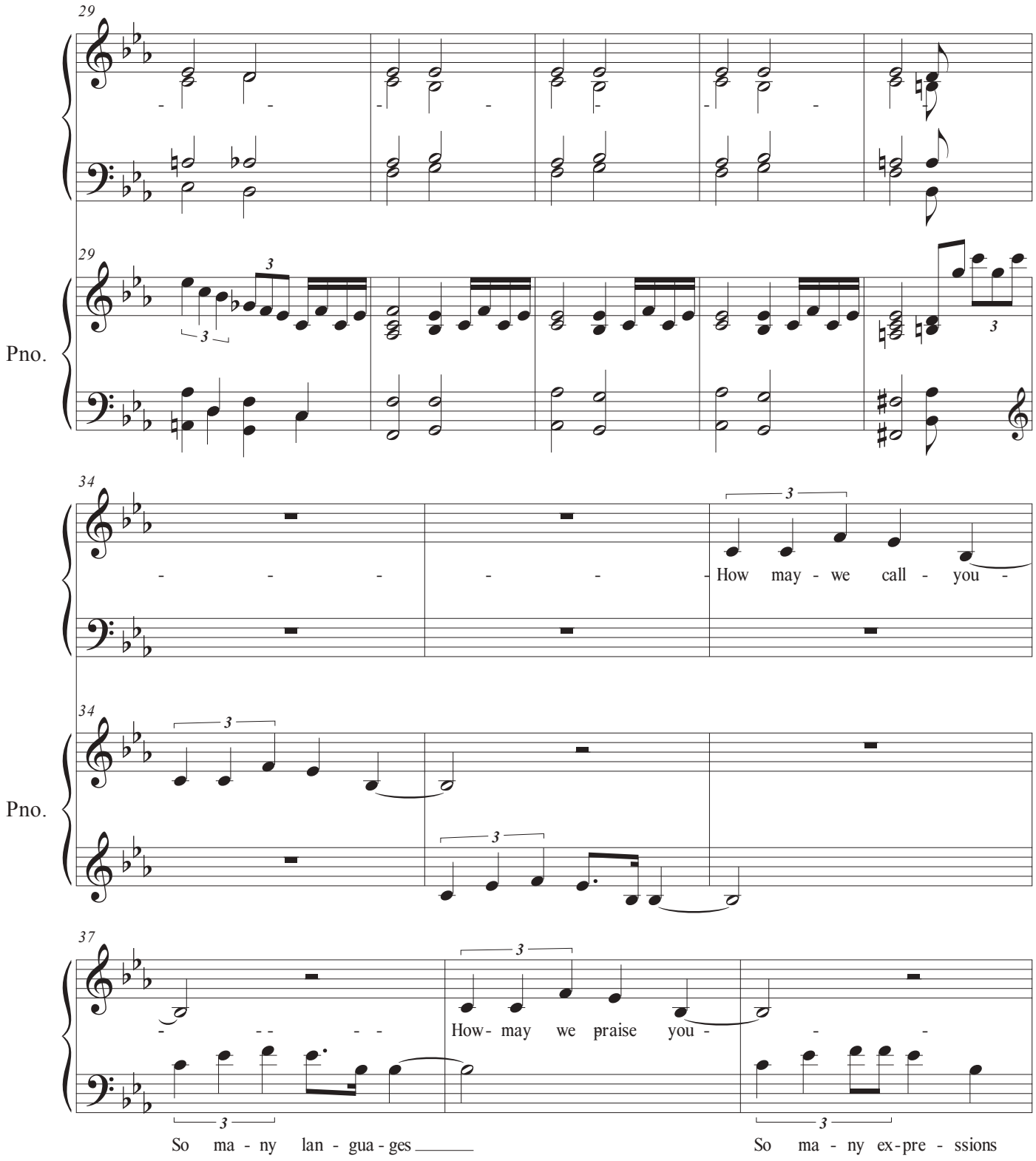

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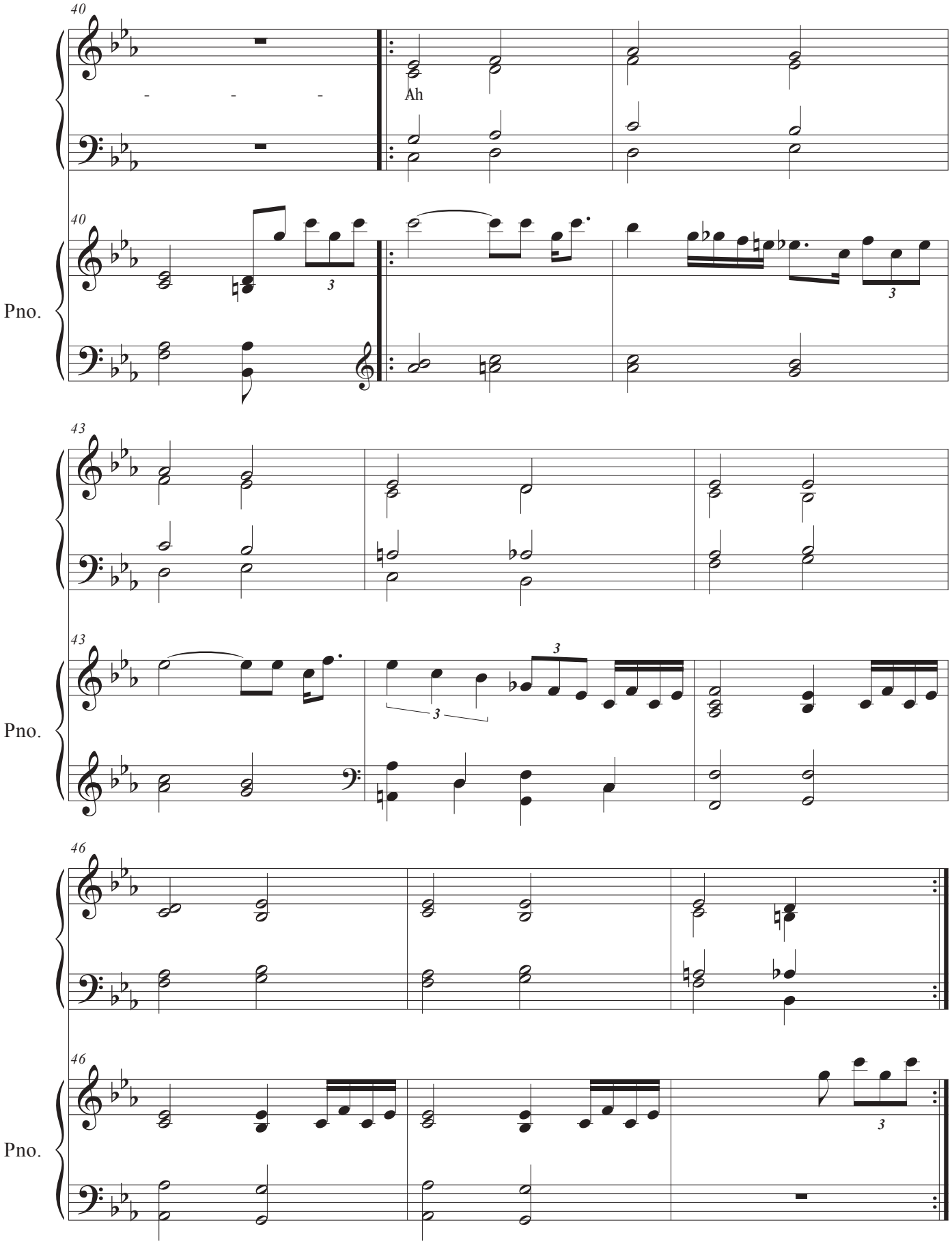

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Epilogue

In African Pianism, I have exhibited my Africannes through my knowledge system of selected works. These works were presented at the Pan African Society of Musical Arts Educators Sub-Regional Conference Department of Music Education, University of Education – Winneba 6th – 10th December 2010.

The question is, how does one become an African Pianism practitioner consciously or unconsciously? I would state here that in most cases, it is seriously by a conscious effort. However, in other cases, the elements of Africanity keep haunting one's self. It interferes with western orientation, and in a subtle way, enrolls one into African Centered Pedagogy. This phenomenon is an evolutionary one and demands of its practitioners a commitment similar to a marriage. Once married to African Pianism, one continues to explore and interpret African motifs till death.

African rhythms, motifs or idioms have been used in piano compositions since the western pianoforte arrived on Africa's shores. In 1970, Nigeria's Professor Akin Euba coined the term African Pianism in an essay entitled, "Traditional Elements as the Basis of New African Art Music." He also encouraged cross–cultural synthesis. Ghana's Emeritus Professor J.H.K. Nketia provided further insight in his statement, "African Pianism refers to a style of piano music which derives its characteristic idioms from the procedures of African percussion music as exemplified in bell patterns, drumming, xylophone, mbira, goje, kora, abentia mbensuon, and other African music"(African Pianism:Twelve Pedagogical Pieces, preface). I draw from the collective consciousness of my elders both continental and in the diaspora, especially Kwabena Nketia, Akin Euba, Atukwei–Okai, Maya Angelou, Molefi Kete Asante, Marimba Ani, Oscar Peterson, Duke Ellington and Scot Joplin. Through them, I have arrived at my own African Pianism. The task of the Piano in African Pianism is to locate the heartbeat of African rhythms as manifested within and outside Africa and, in response through this medium, express and articulate the meaning of African cultural circumstances. In addition, I prefer to evoke the power of poetry, chorus and dance to bring into context my themes. This book has validated my belief in the Traditional African Dialectic which recognizes that everything is contextual and all things are capable of transformation.

My story continues with the following books and more: ACCELERATED KEYBOARD MUSICIANSHIP: A Developmental Workbook for Musicians. This book draws from over thirty years of experience as an instructor/coach pianist, composer and performer in academic, religious and social settings.

GHANA: God is Still with Us: Six Patriotic Choral Anthems and other Songs in ASTB and also Solo & Chorus. The songs and lyrical contents are crafted to promote understanding and appreciation for Ghana by using the choir as one of the potent platforms to listeners appreciate and promote what we have in Ghana.

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ABOUT AUTHOR

Mr Victor Nii Sowa Manieson is a Music Educationist by profession and has taught all academic levels in Ghana and USA.He is a product of the former National Academy of Music (now the music department of University of Education, Winneba), San Diego State University, United States International University (San Diego Campus), and Clark Atlanta University where he took some doctoral classes in humanities.

Mr. Manieson's teaching preference is grounded in facilitating understanding to all learners. Most recently, Lincoln Community School in Ghana for 9 years (An American IB school) and also as an Adjunct lecturer from the University of Education, Winneba (2010-2013). He is married to Doreen Mansa Manieson, they have two children. They are the founders of Manieson Christian Academy.

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