Performing the Benedetto Marcello Solo Sonatas

Affekt and The Italian Style

Solutions for Essential Ornaments

Gracing

Tips for Embellishing

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Recordings of all six Marcello sonatas are available at: www.odu.edu/~jhall.

BENEDETTO MARCELLO hailed from a wealthy Venetian family and held posts in several regional governments. He was not a professional musician but he often composed music for weekly *academies.* These social gatherings of the nobility featured poetry, music, oratory and debate. Admired throughout Europe, Marcello's music was freely transcribed and arranged by JS Bach, Rossini, Bizet, Verdi and a host of others. In his sacred vocal works Marcello displays a profound religious devotion but also he shows a sharp wit and sense of humor in his comic satires. Highly expressive, he is masterful at communicating mood through melodic manipulation, sometimes even using abnormal notation to convey mental drama. While these sonatas were published late in his life, they were probably composed much earlier. Originally conceived for cello, they translate effectively to other instruments.

The Italian Style

Italian musical style ruled through the 17th and into the 18th centuries. Marcello's sonatas epitomize that style. Slow movements, Grave, Largo, and Adagio are conceived as songs. (Italians typically regarded Adagio as slower than Largo.) Fast movements, Andante and Allegro, are conceived as dances. Consider these points as you plan your performance tempos.

Affekt is a Baroque term that describes the emotional effect music has on audiences. Composers and performers sought to generate *Affekt,* to express passionate emotions and sensibilities ranging from profound to comic. *Affekt* is at the heart of the Italian style. The Baroque *Doctrine of Affections* taught that each movement should aim to generate one specific emotion or *Affekt*.

Few directions or extra symbols are given in Italian scores but it is part of the style to freely embellish the music using improvised ornaments and passage work. Performers of the Italian style improvised embellishments to help generate *Affekt.* This practice is critical to the style even though there is little in Italian scores to indicate how to create *Affekt*. Below are some guidelines to help you produce *Affekt*.

The Italian style features two kinds of melodic embellishments: ***Essential Ornaments*** and ***Graces***. The following ornamental gestures are particularly used in Italian performance practice. It is not necessary to know the names and history of these ornaments, just become familiar with how they sound and how they are used. Choices of exactly how and when to use them depend on the *Affekt* you seek. Some of the examples below are taken from Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation in Baroque and Post-Baroque Music.* New York: Princeton University Press, 1978.

Essential Ornaments

The Trillo

Cadential Trills

The Groppo or Groppetto
The Fast Trill
The Mordent
The Inverted Mordent

Compound Trills (Ornaments with Trills)

The Turn-trill
The Slide-trill
The Mordent-trill
The Italian double trill

Graces

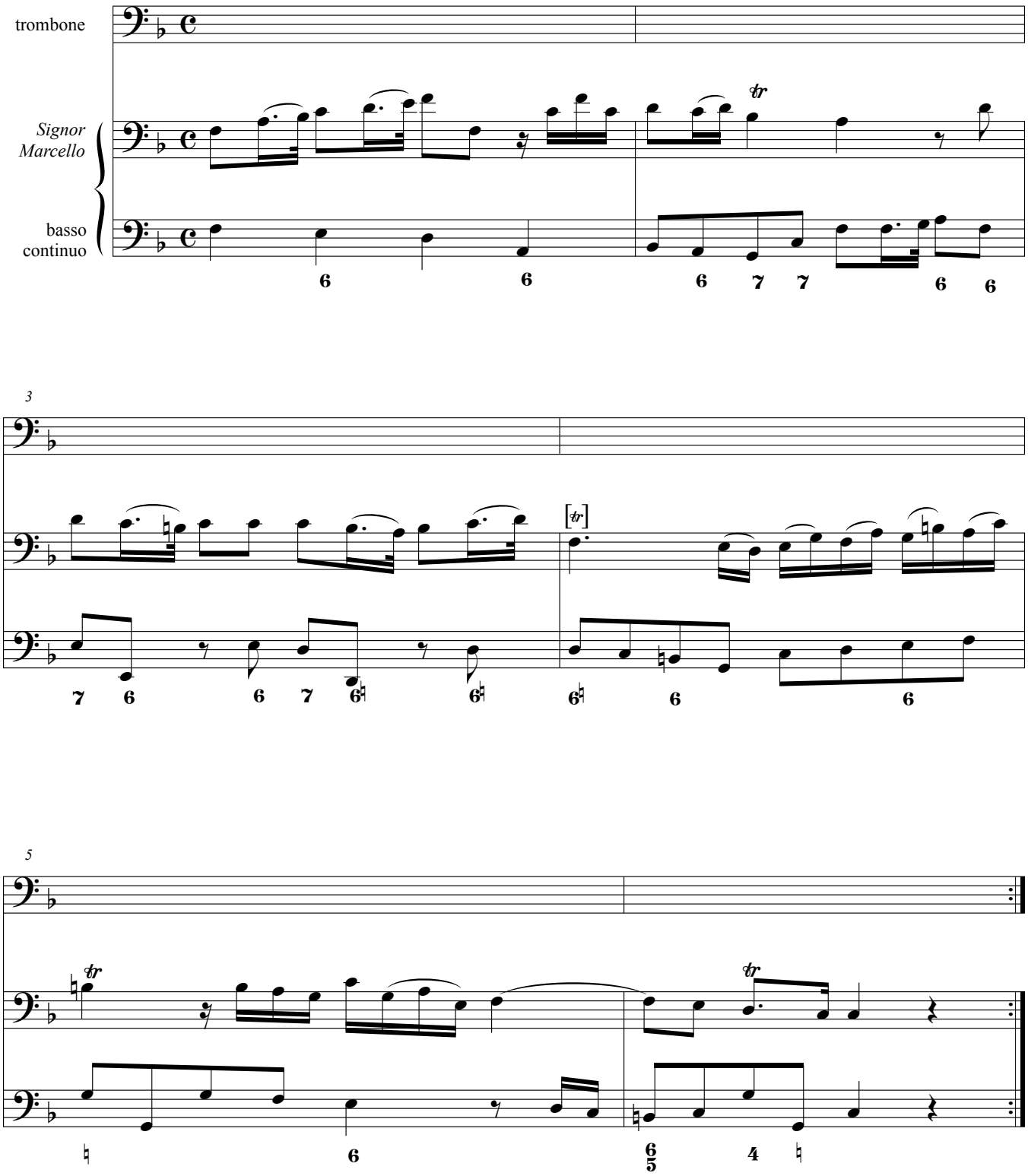
The Vorschlag
The Anticipation
The Appoggiatura
The Slide
The Turn
The Arpeggio
Broken Arpeggios
Stepwise movement – Scales
The Notes Inégales – Uneven Notes
Passagi (Passage Work)
The Cadenza
The Vibrato

Sonata 1

Published in Amsterdam as Opus 1, in London as Opus 2, 1732

Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739)
Edition by Mike Hall
Keyboard realization by Rebecca Bell

Largo



Dashed lines suggest passages that may be played by keyboard to provide rest for soloist.

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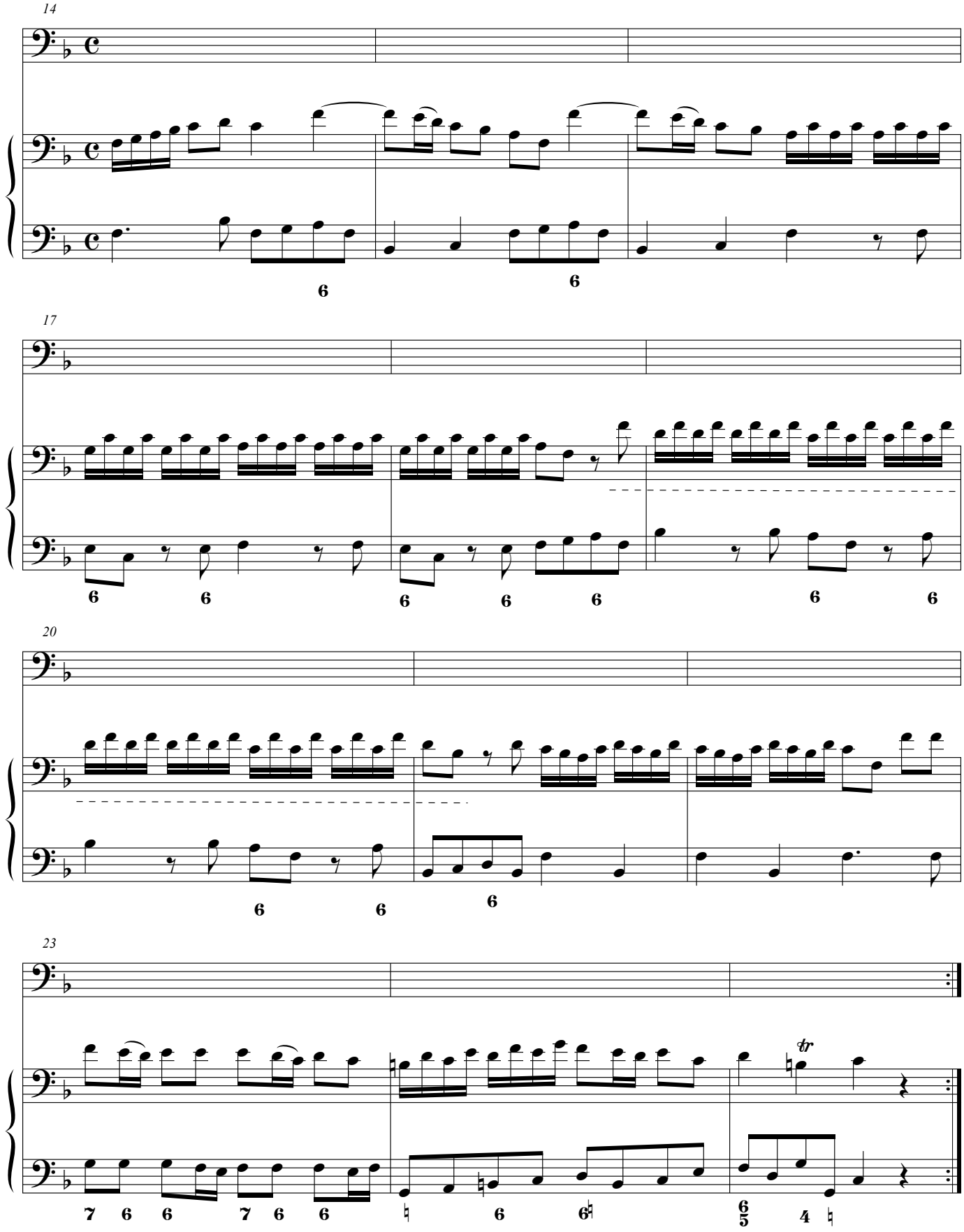
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Largo

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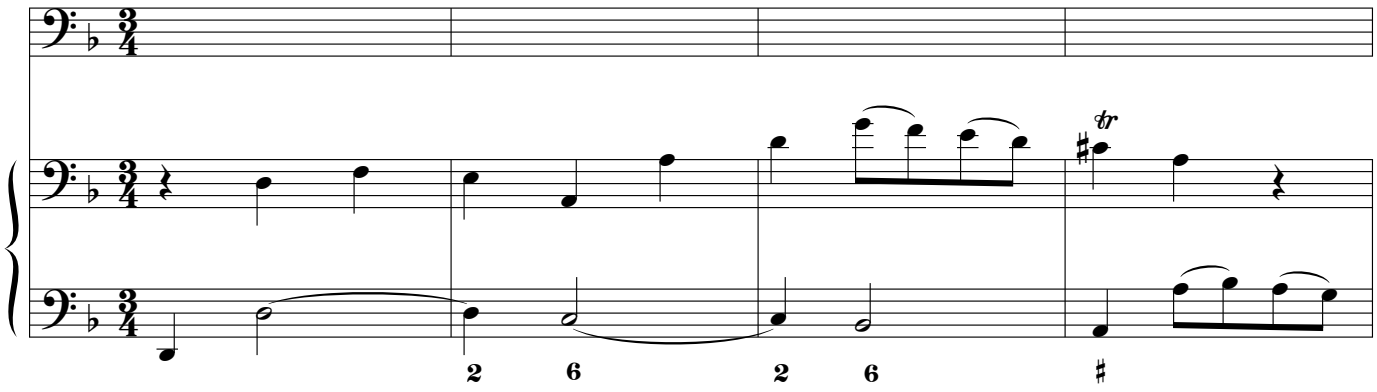

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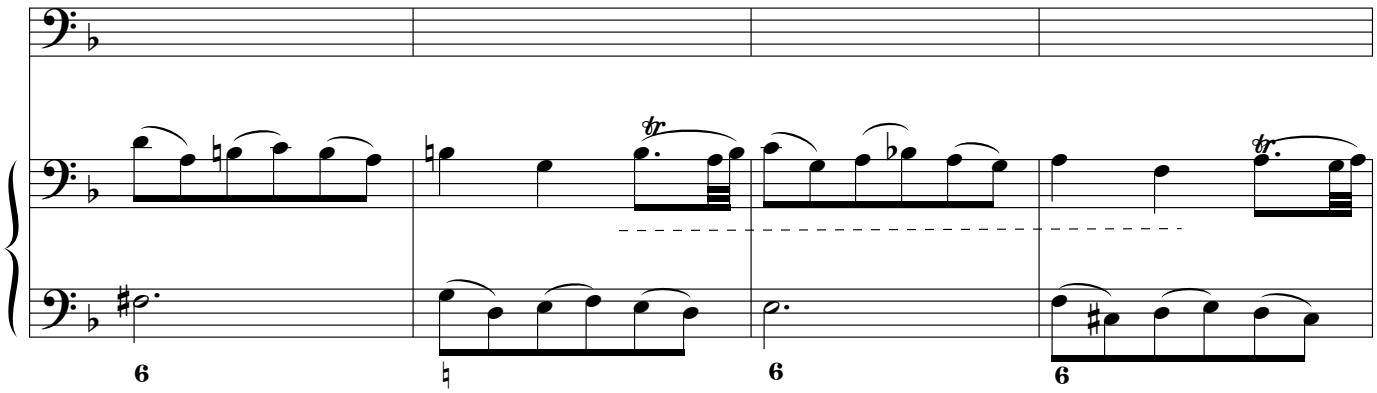

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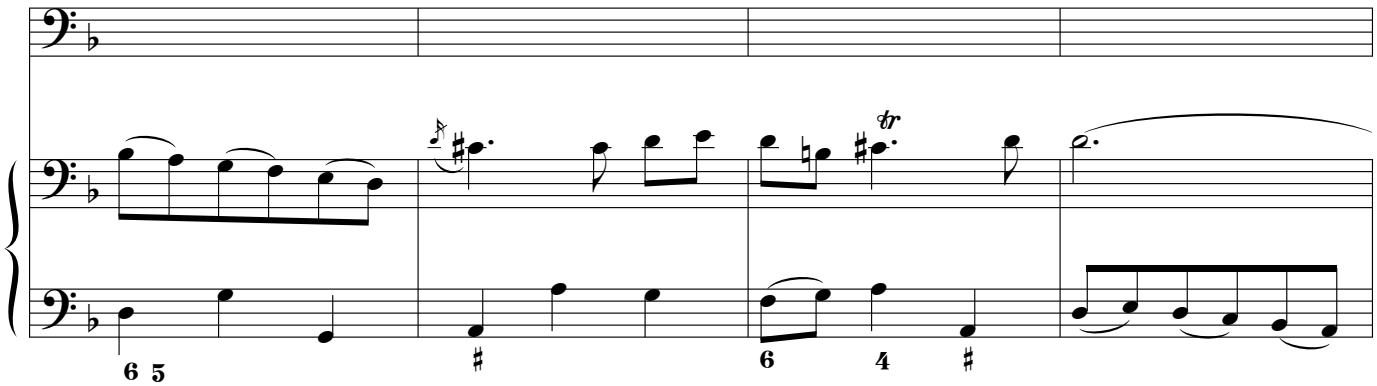

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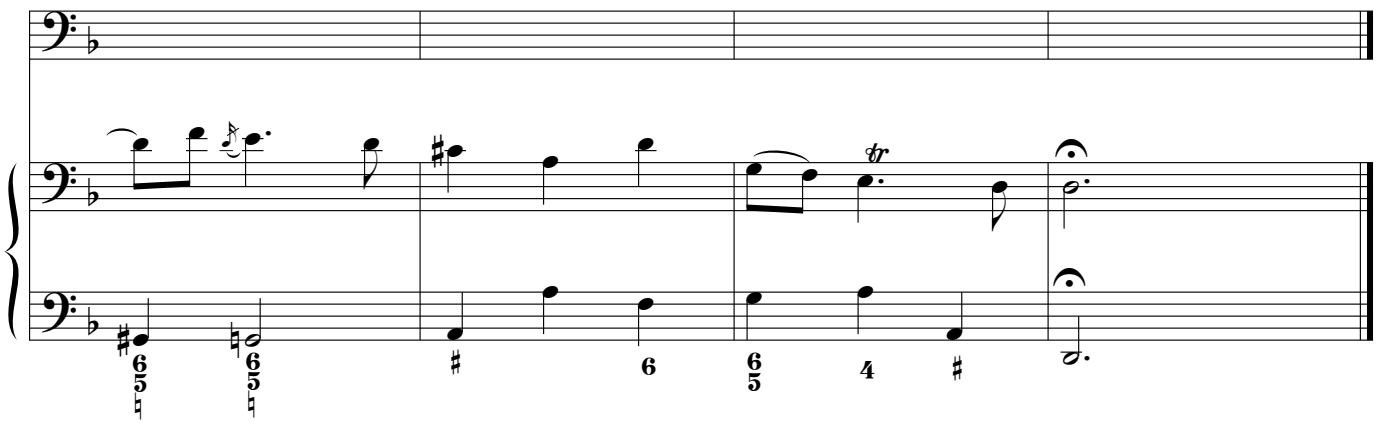

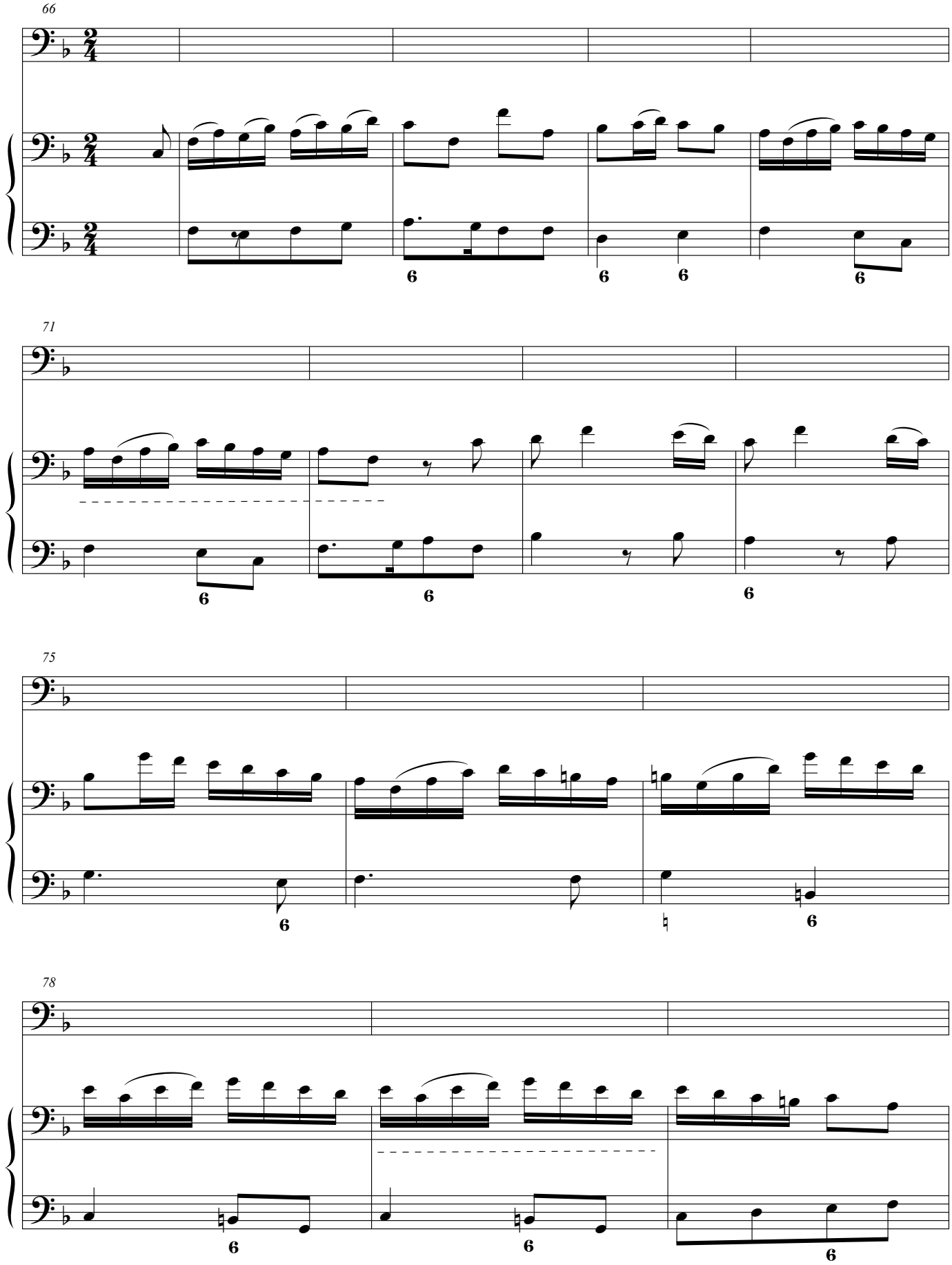
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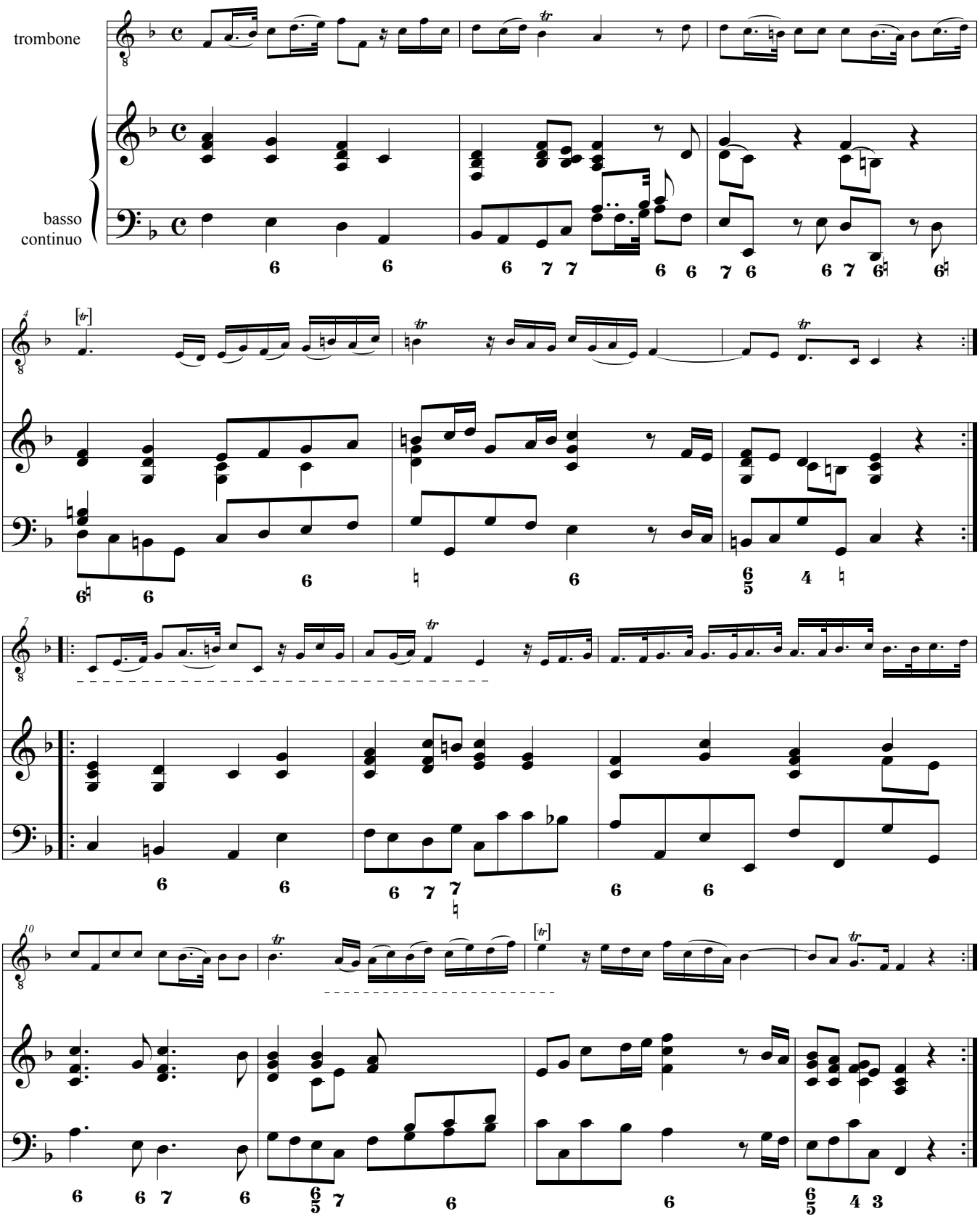

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