Number 1

BOOGIE WOOGIE Piano Styles —No. 1

by SHARON PEASE

THE HISTORY, DEVELOPMENT AND ART OF PLAYING THE BOOGIE WOOGIE STYLE

Shows You How to Use

Boogie Woogie Bass Figures
Boogie Woogie Treble Variations
Walking Bass

Authentic Examples
As Recorded By
Famous Artists
Of Boogie Woogie

No. 1

By Vera LaFranke

in U. S. A.

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Music is a Universal Language

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It means more in our lives than any of us realize and its power would be better understood if for a given period we were to hear NO MUSIC. Never before has music had so large an audience as it has today. The radio is bringing it to hundreds of thousands who are experiencing a source of joy in the opportunity of hearing the most artistic and the more simple IN CONTRAST. This in itself is gradually developing our judgment. The joy of hearing has aroused a curiosity and desire for PERSONAL PERFORMANCE and in the last analysis, the real joy in music comes from within—PERFORMING. Many who have the intense desire to play a musical instrument have discouraged the thought because of the belief that it requires unusual talent to reach a satisfying goal—that it is a long and tedious task. This is not so today, for wide-awake teachers are not adhering to outdated methods but recognize that progressiveness in general has developed a SPEED AGE—an AGE OF RESULTS—ACTION. Modern methods have been written which give students thorough training but in an interesting manner that makes study and practise real fun. The POWER OF MUSIC is yet undeveloped and every one should exercise the opportunities at his command to enrich his life by PLAYING as well as LISTENING.

BOOGIE WOOGIE PIANO STYLES No. 1

By

SHARON PEASE

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INTRODUCTION

It was just "ragtime" back in the post-world war days. Later they called it "jazz." In 1934 "swing" became the thing. Today there is increasing popular interest in the style of music known as "boogie woogie."

Ragtime, jazz, and swing each contributed materially to the progress of American dance music and I feel that boogie woogie, too, is destined for a permanent niche in the music field and that it will leave its mark as a purely American development, not only on dance music but on more serious music as well.

Already numerous "classical" musicians of my acquaintance have accepted boogie woogie. They realize, as do I, that the Negro playing this peculiar style has achieved something actually *creative*. Many see in the simple harmonic structure of boogie woogie, with its unlimited possibilities of variations, the starting point of a much needed trend toward individualized, contrapuntal music, a conclusion to which I also subscribe.

Today, America is boogie woogie conscious. Dance bands throughout the land are featuring it. Dozens of phonograph records are being issued, featuring boogie woogie artists. I have found it a most interesting style myself, and must confess I derive unusual enjoyment playing it.

It is a pleasure to introduce the author of this book, Sharon Pease, who plays, teaches, and writes about the piano. Because of his years of association with leading pianists, his vast knowledge of piano styles, and his natural flare for research and thoroughness, he is probably the best qualified musician today to write a work of this kind.

It is a volume, in my opinion, which should be in the library of every lover of American music.

My own copy always will be handy.

Alec Templeton

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Boogie Woogie and Modern Dance Piano

Each year, a leading music trade paper conducts a poll in which musician readers may vote for the dance musicians whom they consider best on their respective instruments. Recent results, in the piano department, list the players in the order shown in the accompanying list.[1]

Every player and student may favor some pianist who is not included in this list and many would probably rearrange the listing to conform with their personal opinion. However, as it is, it does represent the general concensus and shows the nation's leading dance pianists on that basis.

Each artist named is an individualist with a style quite his own. The process of development in each case would be a story in itself, for therein is represented many hours of practice and the piecing together of numerous ideas from various sources.

An important factor in the general development of piano styles has been the twelve-bar blues. Most piano players have their own version of playing the blues and have worked out many of their favorite ideas while experimenting with new phases of these versions.

During the past few years, the fascinating, rhythmic type of piano playing currently known as "Boogie Woogie" has become increasingly popular among musicians and has also become an important influence in the development of piano styles. A study of the style of the pianists whose names appear in the accompanying list will disclose that many of these players have in their bag of tricks numerous ideas which have been gleaned from boogie woogie.

However, there are few on the entire list who could be classed as "strict" boogie woogie pianists; that is, those who play only boogie woogie or make that style their chief stock in trade.

1. Bob Zurke
2. Jess Stacy
3. Count Basie
4. Teddy Wilson
5. Fletcher Henderson
6. Eddy Duchin
7. Joe Sullivan
8. Earl Hines
9. Fats Waller
10. Duke Ellington
11. Bob Kitsis
12. Mary Lou Williams
13. Albert Ammons
14. Art Tatum
15. Pete Johnson
16. Joe Bushkin
17. Freddie Slack
18. Willie Smith
19. Tommy Linehan
20. Billy Kyle
21. James P. Johnson
22. Milton Raskin
23. Meade Lux Lewis
24. Howard Smith
25. Bill Miller

This would indicate that we might consider boogie woogie one of the "sweets" of music. For example, if you were to eat one-fourth of a rich candy bar, it would taste delicious and would probably leave a desire for more. But were you to eat a half-dozen candy bars at one time, the result would be sickening. There are other "sweets" in music, such as trills and arpeggios. They are fine effects unless overdone, in which event they become most monotonous. In like manner, a piano style, in which the same ideas are repeated too often, becomes tiring to the listener. Therefore, to be a successful and entertaining pianist, one should constantly strive for those two illusive but essential elements of all good music, *variety* and *contrast*.

The purpose of this volume is not to make strict "Boogie Woogie" pianists; rather, to acquaint readers with this interesting phase of piano playing in the hope that it will add variety to their style. The author hopes every pianist will get as much enjoyment out of playing the examples as he did in preparing them.

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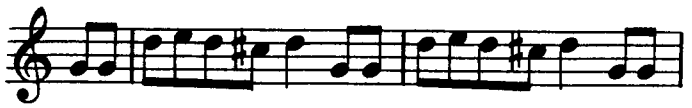
1. *Down Beat*, January 1940.

Origin of Boogie Woogie

To find the origin of boogie woogie (or any other present day music) one must go back to the days of the primitive savage. For just as the art of human speech has developed from grunts and whinings, so music has developed from the howls through which the savage expressed feelings of happiness, pain, sorrow, and hate. Such basic expressions of emotion are to be found in many of the dumb animals; for example, the staccato, joyous bark of the dog upon seeing his master, or his whine of discomfort, or growl of anger.

At the very bottom of the process of musical development are the howls of the savage; shrill, piercing, and with indefinite pitch. The first step beyond this was the achievement of a single musical figure reiterated over and over. Examples of such figures may be found today among the savages inhabiting isolated districts, as yet uninfluenced by the education and culture of civilized people. An example is quoted by a traveler from Tongataboo, the following figure being repeated over and over:[1]



Notice the similarity of this figure to various boogie woogie bass figures appearing later in this book.

A name closely associated with the term "Boogie Woogie" is that of the late Clarence (Pinetop) Smith, an Alabama-born Negro who drifted into Chicago during the summer of 1928. Later that year he made the recording of his composition "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie" (Vocalion #1245) which did much to popularize the style.

While Smith was the creator of this composition, he *did not* create the boogie woogie style. The song-writer, Richard M. Jones, recalls[2] a tall, powerfully built Negro named Stavin Chain, who played boogie in cheap dance halls in and around Donaldsville, at Bayou la Fouche, Louisiana, while workmen were busy constructing the Texas and Pacific railroad in 1904.

Jelly Roll Morton, noted Negro pianist and composer, remembers[3] hearing the boogie style many times as a child, and recalls at that time it was known as "honky-tonk."

Tony Catalano, prominent white trumpet player and veteran of twenty-three seasons on Mississippi River boats, once told the author he heard the boogie in New Orleans when he first visited that city in 1907. During the early years of Tony's career on the boats he employed many colored piano players including Charlie Mills and Fate Marable. He explained, "It was hard to keep white piano players on the job, for in those days part of their duty was doubling on the calliope, and they didn't like the idea of getting wet from the steam it expelled. This didn't bother the colored boys for with it came the opportunity to travel and earn, what was to them, big money. This was one of the ways in which Negro music moved northward."

Pinetop Smith, however, deservedly rates the laurels so many musicians and jazz critics have posthumously bestowed upon him. He made only eight records, all on Vocalion. His piano work on "Pinetop's Boogie Woogie," "Pinetop's Blues," and "Jump Steady Blues," proves definitely that he was master of the boogie style as no other pianist has been until the advent of Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, and Pete Johnson in recent years.

Charles Delaunay, brilliant French writer and scholar, lists Pinetop in his "Hot Discography" as having made several records with a blues-singer named "Lindberg" on the Bluebird label,[4] but this is incorrect, as the "Pinetop" who played with Lindberg on these particular sides is said by Bluebird officials to be Aaron Sparks. The latter sides were recorded in 1936, seven years after Pinetop Smith's death.

Pinetop was the innocent victim of a stray bullet during a brawl in a musty dance hall on Chicago's northwest side. Jack Teagarden, the trombonist; Muggsy Spanier, the trumpeter; Dave Dexter, Associate Editor of *Down Beat* magazine, and I recently visited his grave in Restvale Cemetery, located a few miles southwest of Chicago. During the thirty minutes it required the aged caretaker to locate the wooden stake which designates the weed-strewn grave, he told me that our party was the first to visit it since Pinetop's burial in 1929. There is no monument of marble to mark his resting place. Yet Pinetop has an unseen monument—one beyond the reach of money—his contribution to American music.

Along with Pinetop, several other pianists acquired a boogie technique in the 1920's. Some recorded; some did not. In the group of other noted boogie artists who even today have never received recognition are Cripple Clarence Lofton, Cow-Cow Davenport, Blind LeRoy Garnett, Montana Taylor, Charles Spand, Rufus Perryman, who also is known as "Speckled Red," Will Ezell, Ray Barrow, Bob Call, Everett Johnson, the Yancey Brothers, (Jim and Alonzo,) Hersal Thomas, Jimmy Flowers, Lemuel Fowler, Jimmy Blythe, and Romeo Nelson. Some of these are dead now. Some still are playing boogie woogie. Perhaps the day will soon be here when their talents will be recognized as have those of Lewis, Ammons, and Johnson.

Also deserving mention for their modern boogie work are Cleo Brown, Tommy Linehan, Jack Gardner, Jay McShann, Joe Bushkin, Freddie Slack, Milton Raskin, Mel Henke, Howard Smith, Julia Lee, Bob Laine, Gladys Palmer, Rozelle Claxton, Joshua Altheimer, Floyd Bean, Honey Hill, Fats Waller, Bob Zurke, Joe Sullivan, and Jess Stacy. All in this latter classification are doing well, from a professional standpoint, today.

There are many other musicians who play boogie woogie for their own pleasure. Teddy Wilson, for example, enjoys playing it in the privacy of his home, but makes no attempt to use it commercially.

Pinetop Smith occupies a place in the history of boogie woogie similar to that held by W. C. Handy in the history of the blues. Handy was the first to codify that style and set it down on paper. He is rightfully known as the "Father of the Blues," although he *did not actually create* the style. Like all folk music, neither boogie woogie nor the blues was created by any one individual. Seemingly, both styles developed from the tribal music of the African savage.

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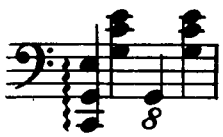
1. Parry, C. Hubert H., *Evolution of the Art of Music*, D. Appleton and Co., N.Y. 1925 Page 49.
2. Spencer, Onah L., "Boogie Woogie....." *Down Beat*, July 1939 Page 22.
3. Martin, Sidney, "How the Boogie....." *Down Beat*, July 1938 Page 5.
4. Delaunay, Charles, *Hot Discography, Hot Jazz*, Paris, 1938 Page 355

Boogie Woogie Versus the Blues

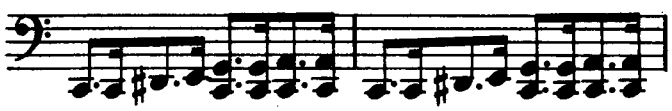
Did air exist before life? Or did life and air begin together? Nobody knows and, furthermore, few care. There are substantial arguments on both sides but why probe deeper? Just rejoice in the fact that both do exist today.

Likewise, there is no particular point in proving that boogie woogie preceded the blues or vice versa. There are, however, many interesting facts to be learned by reviewing the principal factors supporting both sides of the question.

Let us analyze the similarities and differences of boogie woogie and the blues. They are alike in that they are both built on a twelve-bar theme with identical harmonic structure, involving the tonic, sub-dominant, and dominant. They are unalike in the style of bass used. The blues may be played using a variety of bass styles including a modern swing bass as shown below.



The very soul of boogie woogie lies in the constant reiteration of a fast moving bass. Example:



Music is divided into two basic parts, rhythmic and melodic. The rhythmic part is usually monopitch, and represents action such as the dance. It is definitely linked with the pulse. The melodic part has no set regularity of impulse, but has change of pitch such as vocal utterances.[1] Savages combined singing with their daily activities, which involved movement such as dancing, walking, reaping, pounding, and sowing. At this stage of development, savage music leaned more toward the rhythmic than the melodic. This is proved by the fact that at the present time, pure unalloyed rhythmic music is still found in parts of the uncivilized world.[2]

In boogie woogie the rhythm predominates, melody being secondary. Whereas, in the blues the melody is the more important factor. This would indicate that boogie woogie is more closely linked to the drumming of the savages, and preceded the style known as the blues.

To support the theory that the blues preceded boogie woogie, we know that the first slaves were delivered in Virginia in 1619, one year before the Mayflower landed at Plymouth Rock.[3] The music of these first slaves was probably no further advanced than single tone figures such as the one described on page 3. The music of their white masters, while consisting chiefly of religious songs and simple English folk music, involved harmony, the harmonizing of several tones.

Immediately the music of the Negro and the white man began to react upon each other. The slaves readily adapted themselves to our harmonic ideas. They sang the hymns of the white man in their own simple way, reshaping them to conform rhythmically to the structure of their tribal dances. This simple rhythmic treatment in turn reacted upon the white man's musical efforts. They began to imitate the Negro and the new music he was fashioning.

Thus began the Negro influence on our American music which has gradually gained momentum and left its mark on all characteristically American music from the minstrel to jazz and swing.

Folk music is illustrative of the life of the people and expressive of their emotions. In the days before the Civil War, there was a close connection between Negro music, religion, and the supernatural. Many songs voiced the certainty of freedom in a future life. As music is frequently the child of sorrow, it is natural that in many plantation songs, slave life spoke its melancholy. In general the Negro music of this period reflected the feeling of a race in bondage.

With the freeing of the slaves came an emotional change, and hence a change in their music. The rhythms were faster and more excited, and the melodies more carefree. This would indicate that the blues preceded boogie woogie, for the blues express the emotion of sadness and disillusionment, whereas, boogie woogie is expressive of an exuberance of spirit.

Somewhere in the south—in the cotton fields, along the levees, or in the honky tonks—boogie woogie and the blues were born. I have presented the arguments for both sides and you can form your own conclusions as to which is the older. Which came first really doesn't make any difference. The important thing is that both have been vital factors in the development of American songs and dance music.

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1. Parry, C. Hubert H., *Evolution of the Art of Music*, D. Appleton and Co., N.Y. 1925 Page 49.
2. Ibid, page 7.
3. Goldberg, Isaac, *Tin Pan Alley*, Quinn Boden Co., Rahway, N.J., 1930 Page 20.

The Boogie Woogie Trio

The Boogie Woogie Trio, comprised of Meade Lux Lewis and Albert Ammons, both from Chicago, and Pete Johnson from Kansas City, came into existence on the night of December 23, 1938. The three men had journeyed to New York to take part in a concert of Negro music, sponsored by the *New Masses* magazine and arranged by John Hammond, young New York music patron, writer, and critic. Other artists in the All-Negro cast included Count Basie and members of his orchestra, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Joe Turner, Sidney Bechet, James P. Johnson, Mitchell's Christian Singers, and the late Tommy Ladnier. The concert was presented at New York's famous and staid Carnegie Hall and was a smash success.

Lewis, Ammons, and Johnson each in turn played their variations of boogie woogie individually. Then as a climax, three grand pianos were pushed out on the stage, and music history was made when the boys played boogie woogie collectively on three keyboards. The stunt was so successful that it was repeated a few days later at the Brunswick Recording Studios. The results of this three-decker can be heard on Vocalion #4606. It is called "Boogie Woogie Prayer" and is in two parts.

A few nights after the Carnegie Hall Concert, the trio opened an engagement at the smart new Cafe Society, in Greenwich Village, lower Manhattan. Here, the most sophisticated New Yorkers, visiting motion picture stars, and working musicians rubbed elbows, all present for one common purpose—to hear the Boogie Woogie Trio. During this engagement Lewis and Ammons made guest appearances on Benny Goodman's *Camel Caravan* and on the Columbia Broadcasting System's *Saturday Night Swing Club*. Johnson was a guest on *We The People* program and Columbia's *Sunday Night Dance Hour*.

After a successful run of nine months at Cafe Society, the trio moved to the fancy new Panther Room of the Sherman Hotel in Chicago, where they worked for two months before returning to New York.

Meanwhile, recordings on which members of the trio worked became best sellers. The boys were definitely in.

All this has been very gratifying to Hammond, who had tried a similar experiment back in May 1936, when he arranged for Meade to take part in a Rhythm Concert at the Imperial Theater in New York. The audience was made up largely of musicians who accepted with enthusiasm his boogie woogie offerings. Following the concert a job was secured for him at Nick's Tavern. Here too, Meade's work clicked with visiting musicians, but the public—that was a different story. Apparently they were not ready for boogie woogie, and soon Meade was released and returned to Chicago.

Again, as late as June 1938, Hammond had a hand in another experiment. Willard Alexander, then vice-president of Music Corporation of America, found a spot for Pete Johnson and his singing partner, Joe Turner, in New York's Famous Door. Hammond, Alexander, Johnson, and Turner were all due for a disappointment for the date lasted only one week. Again the public was not ready for boogie woogie. Pete and Joe played a week at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, then returned to Kansas City.

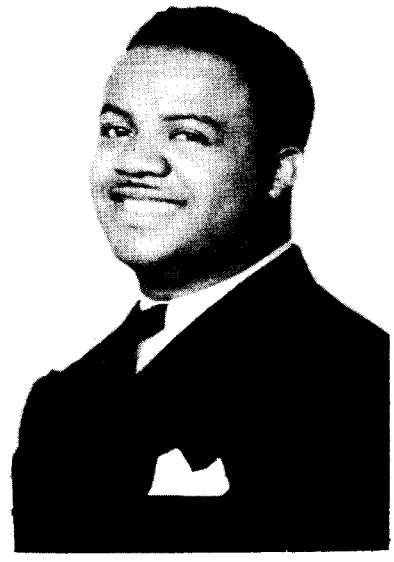
The same public which rejected boogie woogie in 1936 and again in 1938, did an about face and accepted it in 1939, definitely proving that musical opinion changes rapidly. In the meantime, the boys of the Boogie Woogie Trio suffered many hardships and were forced to do all types of work for a livelihood. Nevertheless, they continued as faithful missionaries of this invigorating style.

IMPORTANT

On the following pages will be found biographical sketches of Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, and Mary Lou Williams, four of the leading exponents of the boogie woogie style. There will also be found authentic examples of their creations copied with their permission from phonograph recordings.

It will be interesting to look over these biographies and examples, but to use wisely the material presented, it is well to read carefully the "Suggestions for Practice" (page 14) and to become thoroughly familiar with the examples on pages 15 to 40, before progressing to the more complex works of these artists.

— THE AUTHOR



MEADE LUX LEWIS

The term boogie woogie is virtually synonymous with the name of Meade Lux Lewis, for both owe their existence to each other.

Meade, a rotund and genial Chicagoan, kept the boogie woogie style alive during its darkest days—days when millions of Americans were gliding about sedately on the dance floors to the "sweet" music of the post-swing era.

Meade was born in 1905. He became interested in the piano while in his early teens when he heard a man, who had drifted in from St. Louis and whose name he has forgotten, play a tune called the "Fives." Lewis had no piano of his own so was forced to practice at neighbors, friends, or wherever he could find an instrument. It was this constant search for a piano that was responsible for his meeting with Albert Ammons and the start of their long association. It happened that the Lewis' and Ammons' households moved into the same building, on Prairie Avenue. Meade soon discovered the Ammons' piano and also that Albert, who was two years younger, was equally interested in playing. Together they worked out many ideas in the development of their boogie woogie styles. Later, both profited by a short association with the more experienced Clarence (Pinetop) Smith, who then was tops among Chicago's exponents of the style.

Meade's first professional work was playing house parties. Later he worked at various niteries around Chicago as soloist and with small combinations.

In 1936 Meade cut the solo recording of his composition "Yancey Special" (Decca #819) which was destined to bring him world fame. It was this record that struck the fancy of the boys in Bob Crosby's Orchestra. Dean Kincaide, then a member of the band, copied the number from the record and arranged an orchestration featuring Bob Zurke at the piano. A recording was made and the band started using the tune on broadcasts. Many patrons began asking to hear it — often they didn't know the title, but described it as something "new." Such interest, and the fact that the record was a best seller, was the first indication that the public was ready for boogie woogie.

Today Meade is rated by many critics and musicians as the number one exponent of boogie woogie. Certainly he deserves all the tribute he receives. One can't help but feel that here is an idealist, a scholar of the old "pure jazz" school whose personal integrity and devotion to principle has few equals in American popular music. Through those dark years Meade stuck with his guns and refused to compromise. Now he is collecting dividends.

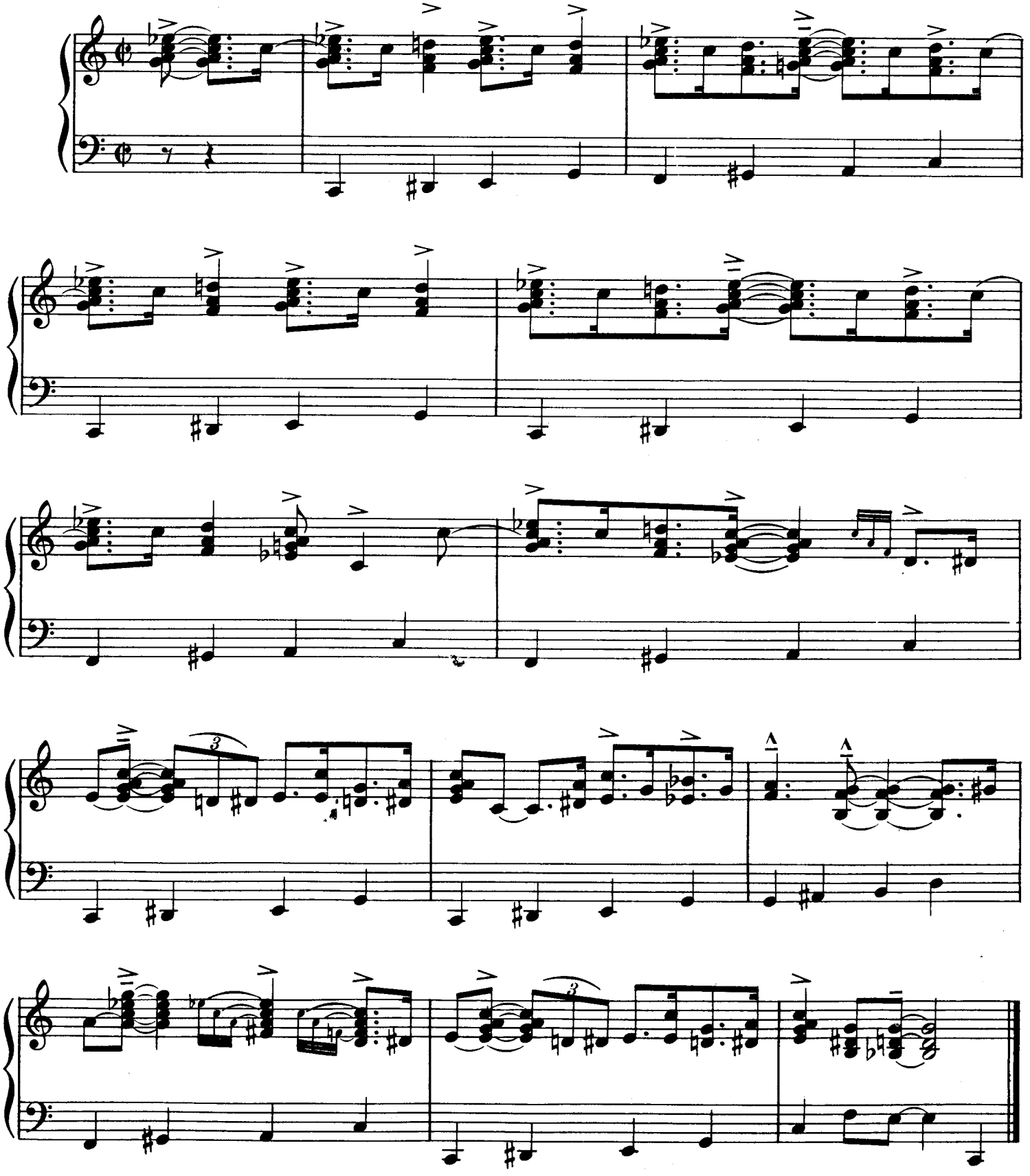
On the opposite page is a chorus of Meade's "Bear Cat Crawl" as he plays it. The bass figure is one of the simplest of his large repertoire and should be taken at a tempo slightly faster than the more complicated figures.

Other of Meade's compositions include "Honky Tonk Train," "Whistlin' Blues," and "Solitude Blues."

Bear Cat Crawl

By Meade Lux Lewis

As played by the Composer on Vocalion Record No. 4608.



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ALBERT AMMONS

The second member of the Boogie Woogie Trio is Albert Ammons. As previously mentioned, Albert has long been associated with Meade Lux Lewis and they worked out many of their ideas together. It is only natural that their styles should be somewhat alike, yet, despite the general similarity, there are subtle differences. These differences result largely from the manner in which they strike the keys. In contrast to Meade's lighter, artistic touch, Albert strikes the keys solidly with every ounce of strength in his powerful body. The results are rhythm in capital letters. While it is this pounding, stirring rhythmic effect that has made him the favorite boogie woogie pianist of many musicians, he is not typed to that style alone. He also plays solid, clean, tenth bass with plenty of modern treble.

Ammons is a native of Chicago. He was born there in 1907 and says, "I just seemed to love music from the first day I can remember." He learned his first pieces on a player piano, by playing rolls over and over and marking the keys with a pencil. He soon discovered that he possessed a good "ear" for music and was successful in copying some ideas from "Hersal Blues" and "Suitcase Blues," piano solos recorded by Hersal Thomas, (Okeh. #8227).

Ammons, like Lewis and many other of today's ace Negro pianists, earned his first professional money playing house parties. His first job as an orchestra pianist was with Willie Barbee's Serenaders, when Barbee decided to forsake the piano and front the band. Albert learned a great deal during the year he was with this unit, for Barbee who was one of the pioneers of the swing type bass, spent many hours teaching him.

Next came three years with Louis P. Banks and his Chesterfield Orchestra, during which time they worked a theater tour and various Chicago south side cafes, including Pleasure Inn, the Big House, and Club Eldorado.

The Banks' Orchestra folded in 1934. During the four years that preceded the Carnegie Hall Concert, Albert played solo piano and worked with small combinations in many south side niteries. For a time he had a small band of his own and played engagements at Pevan's 29 Club, Club De Lisa, and the It Club.

Through these years he acquired a following among musicians that accompanied him from place to place. Of course he did his best work when these musicians, who really appreciated his efforts, were present. I recall one occasion in particular when Gil Rodin, Bob Haggart, Bill Depew, and Bob Zurke, then all members of Bob Crosby's orchestra, and I visited Albert at the It Club. He was in a rare groove that morning, playing with such exuberance of spirit that the piano rocked, literally, and the entire room "rocked" figuratively.

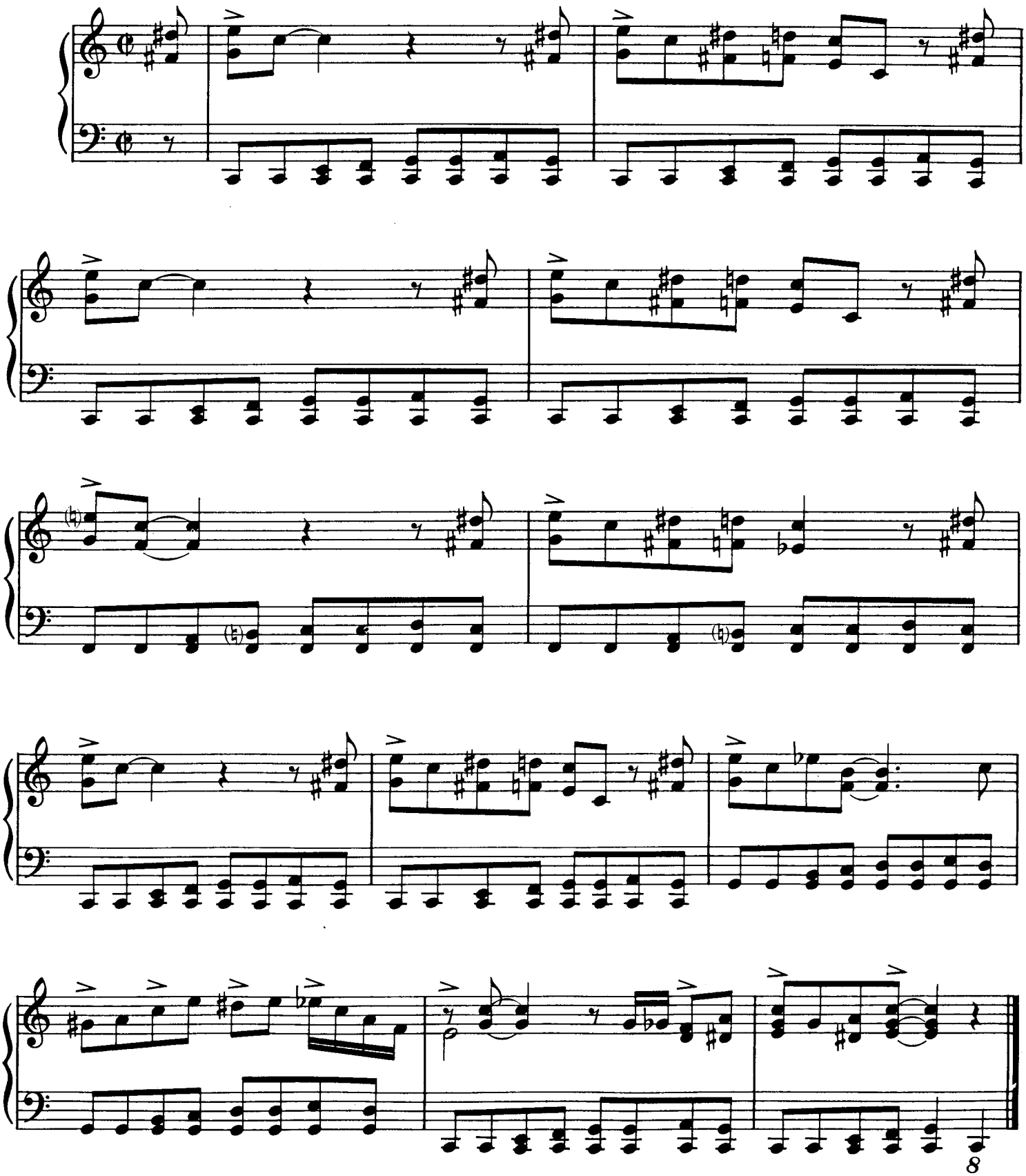
It was during this period that "Albert Ammons and his Rhythm Kings" cut four sides for Decca. The personnel for this date was Israel Crosby, bass; Jimmy Hoskins, drums; Ike Perkins, guitar; Guy Kelly, trumpet; and Dalbert Bright, alto and clarinet. Included in these sides was Ammons' famous "Boogie Woogie Stomp" (Decca #749).

More recently in New York, Albert recorded for Blue Note and Vocalion. On the opposite page is a chorus of his composition "Shout For Joy" as recorded on Vocalion #4608, an excellent example of his solid boogie style. Note that the bass is played in straight eighth notes. Albert plays the majority of his boogie selections in this fashion but occasionally uses dotted eighths and sixteenths, usually these exceptions are in slower tempos.

Shout For Joy

By Albert Ammons

As played by the Composer on Vocalion Record No.4608.



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PETE JOHNSON

Pete Johnson is the least publicized of the Boogie Woogie Trio. In ability, however, he ranks with the best of today's great boogie woogie artists. Like Ammons, he not only plays good boogie with a seemingly inexhaustible wealth of ideas, but does an equally efficient job on blues and swing tunes. Though Pete has only recently found a spot in the limelight of national music circles, it was a different story back in his home town where he played nightly in a smoke-filled, dimly lighted room. That was on Kansas City's colorful Twelfth Street, where Andy Kirk, Count Basie, Bennie Moten, Cab Calloway and a host of other jazz immortals got their first push to fame. It was in the Sunset Club where members of his own race and a few white musicians went nightly to eat ribs, chittlings, crawfish, and greens, and drink from huge half-gallon jugs of beer while they listened to Pete pound out boogie woogie.

Johnson was a hard worker — not that the three dollars a night pay plus what he could get in the kitty was conducive to such, but Pete loves music — especially the boogie style. Often discouraged, he would order a jigger of gin, gulp it down, and then settle down before a badly scarred upright piano for some fancy keyboard work.

With both hands pumping the keys and his right foot beating a solid tatoo on the floor, it was not unusual for Pete to play fifty consecutive choruses of the boogie, each becoming more involved with complex ideas. His style is more like Ammons' than Lewis' for it stresses rhythm. Anytime from the tenth chorus on, enthusiastic members of the Sunset audience might be heard to shout, "Roll 'em Pete — let 'em jump for joy." Thus Johnson found a name for his composition "Roll 'Em Pete," a chorus of which will be found on the next page.

Pete had as an assistant a good looking young Negro named Joe Turner, whose backwoodsy blues shouting is still regarded by many as tops in America today. Together, Pete and Joe became famous throughout the Kansas City area, so famous that on a visit to audition Count Basie, Willard Alexander, (then manager of Benny Goodman), and John Hammond were advised to "dig the doings of Pete and Joe." They did — and both were impressed. Nor did they forget, for together they secured the previously mentioned New York 1938 date for Pete and Joe. It was Hammond who later arranged for them to take part in the Carnegie Hall Concert.

Pete comes by his love for music quite naturally — his uncle, Charles Johnson, was a prominent musician. Pete's teachers included Stacey La Guardia, "Slamfoot" Brown, Nello Edgar, and Lewis "Good-Booty" Johnson. Most of them played in the post-World War days at a disreputable spot on Kansas City's Independence Avenue called the "Backbiters' Club." It was here that Pete got his early training.

He banged around playing house parties and odd jobs for a decade preceding his work at the Sunset.

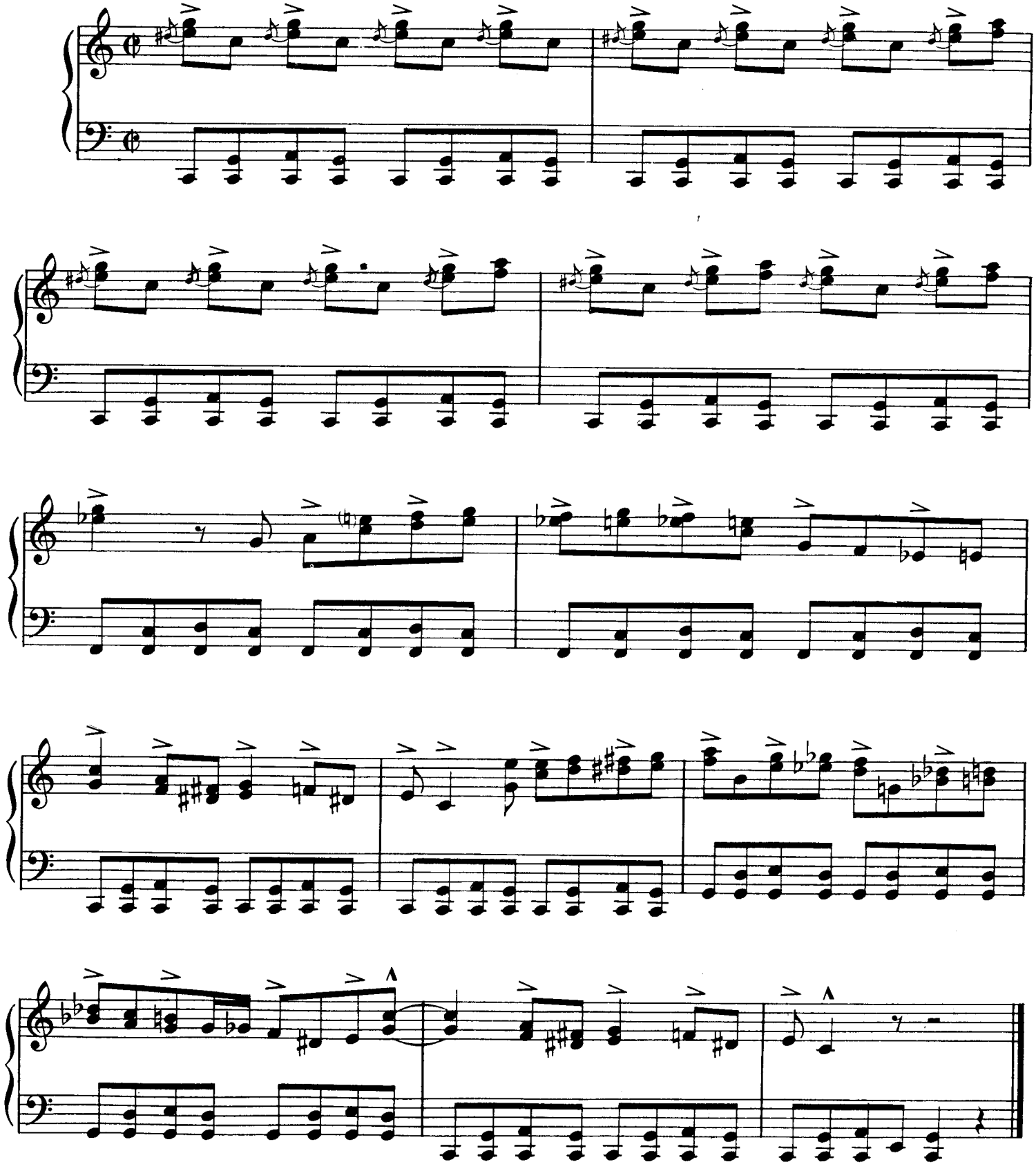
Like Lewis and Ammons, Johnson is a favorite among musicians. Duke Ellington as far back as 1937 called Pete "My favorite keyboard artist." In addition to his recording work with the Boogie Woogie Trio and Joe Turner, Pete has made several discs with the Harry James' Trio. He also cut a series of solo sides for a private company, Solo Art, in New York.

Stolid, quiet, and humble, Pete still can't figure why he's getting paid so much for doing the thing he likes most.

Roll 'Em Pete

By Pete Johnson

As played by the Composer on Vocalion Record No. 4607.



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MARY LOU WILLIAMS

Mary Lou Williams is a virtual newcomer in the boogie woogie field, for she first began playing the style in 1936. Fortified with a thorough musical schooling, fine technique, and ten years' experience in dance music, she mastered the style in a hurry. Now she not only plays boogie woogie like a veteran but through application of her wide knowledge of harmony, has augmented the style with some of the artistic little tricks that have long made her blues style a favorite among musicians.

She began the study of piano when five years old. That was in Pittsburgh, where she was born in 1910, and which she still considers her home town. At seven she was considered a child prodigy and her presence was in great demand for public appearances, including concerts at the University of Pittsburgh. Gifted with a remarkable ear, she amazed audiences with her ability to play, from memory, complete symphony scores as well as hit songs of the moment.

Mary Lou thought she would never play again when her arm was broken in three places, the result of a severe fall. After two settings the fractures healed perfectly and she again resumed musical studies which continued until her graduation from high school as an honor student.

Vaudeville called her and she joined the act of Seymour and Jeanette as pianist. During a tour of the Keith Orpheum circuit she married John Williams, saxophonist with the act. They left the theater in 1927 to form a dance orchestra in Memphis. Andy Kirk, who had taken over T. Holder's band, heard them play and took them to New York to work a Brunswick recording date. Mary Lou with her solid style of piano playing, had many good laughs at the expense of the music critics who did not detect that a woman was at the keyboard on those early Kirk recordings. In 1931 both Mary Lou and John joined the band as regular members.

Kirk's Clouds of Joy had smooth sailing from then on. The organization made its headquarters in Kansas City, and Mary Lou often got together with Pete Johnson for double piano sessions.

Mary Lou has consistently contributed a great deal to the success of Kirk's band, not only through her work as a featured soloist but by her contribution of many fine swing arrangements.

She has also scored arrangements for Benny Goodman, Bob Crosby, Louis Armstrong, Casa Loma, Gene Krupa, and Red Norvo. It is no secret that more than one big name leader, including Goodman, have made her attractive offers to become full time arranger. She has rejected them all, preferring to free lance.

As a composer she also has gained wide recognition, some of her best known compositions being "Roll 'Em," "Camel Hop," "Little Joe From Chicago," "Froggy Bottom," "Walkin' and Swingin'," and also "Toadie Toddle" and "Ghost of Love," both written in collaboration with the author.

Mary Lou is quiet, unaffected, and modest. As an outstanding feminine leader of her race, she is idolized by thousands of colored girl pianists throughout the nation. She answers their musical questions personally by letter.

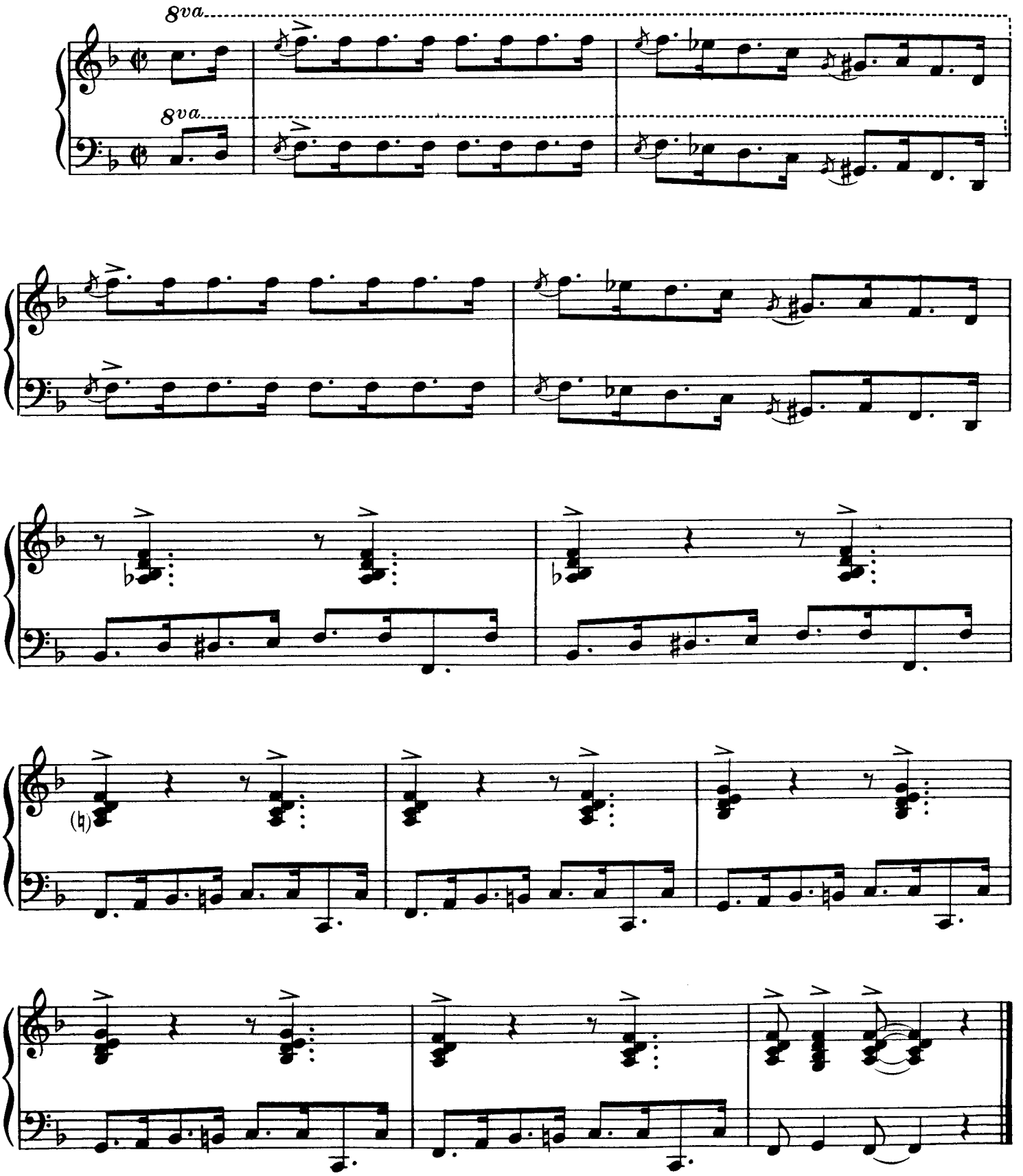
On the opposite page is an example of Mary Lou's boogie woogie style in her composition "Overhand."

Overhand

(New Froggy Bottom)

By Mary Lou Williams

As played by the Composer on Decca Record No. 781.



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Because of the vast number of possible combinations, boogie woogie bass figures can be created in almost unlimited numbers. Exponents of the style usually have several "standard" figures in addition to some of their own invention.

Because of the more simplified fingering, boogie woogie is usually played in the keys wherein the least number of black keys are encountered (C, G, and F). For this reason I have written all the following examples in the key of C.

For those who haven't had a great deal of experience in playing boogie woogie, it might be well to remember that the left hand should become so automatic that it operates without conscious thought, thus leaving the mind free to create right hand patterns. This can best be attained by practicing with the left hand alone, beginning at slow tempo and gradually increasing the speed.

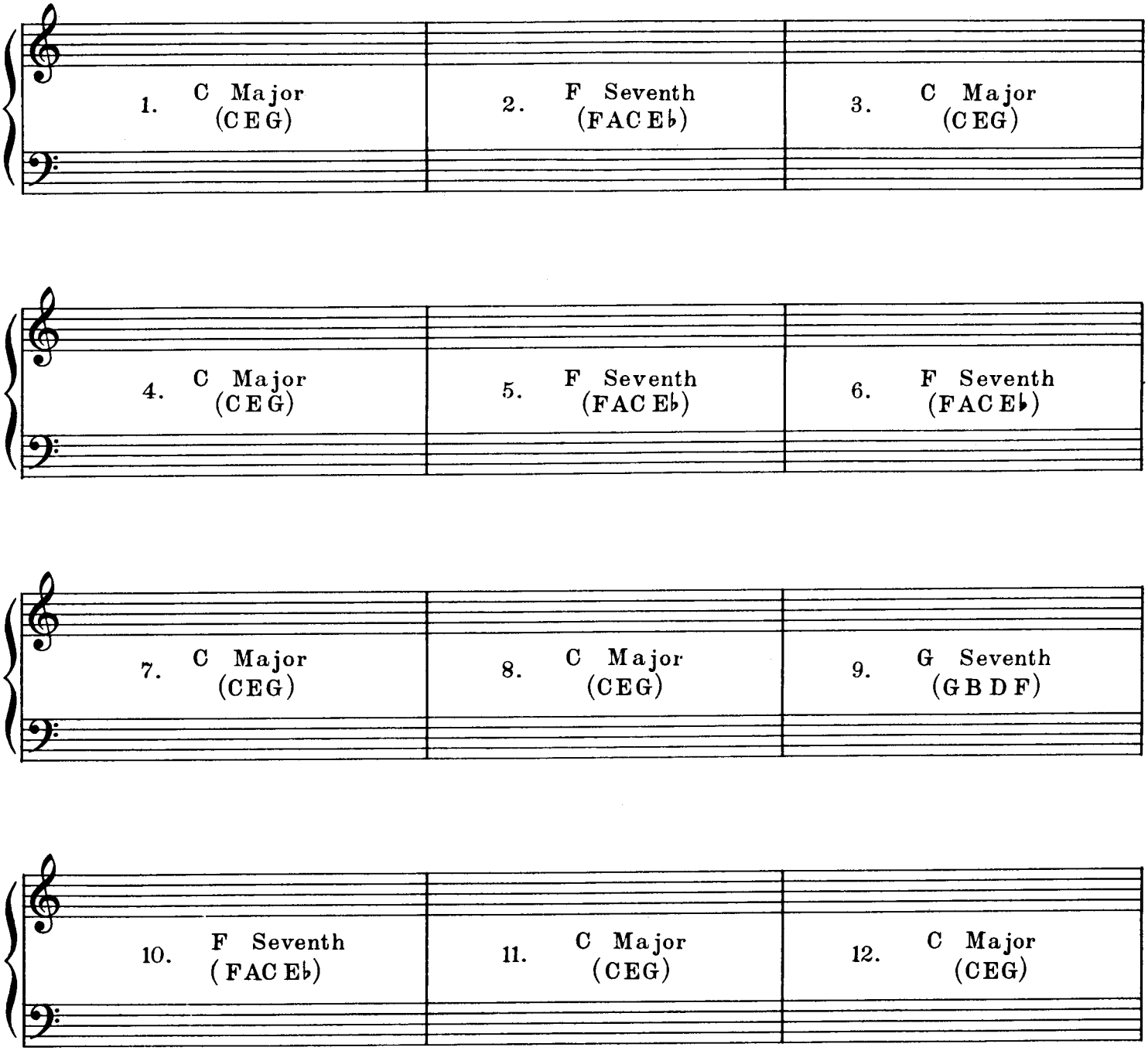
In the following examples, I have purposely simplified the treble part to provide adequate development of the left hand, yet insuring a degree of practice in the division of thought needed to play more complex patterns. As mentioned before, these examples make excellent preparatory exercises, and should be thoroughly mastered before progressing to the examples of Meade Lux Lewis, Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, and Mary Lou Williams.

After mastering the Lewis, Ammons, Johnson, and Williams compositions and noting carefully the structure of the treble patterns therein, repeat these same examples applying some of the treble ideas of these artists. At this point you should also begin experimenting with treble ideas of your own. When these ideas start developing, you are in for some good "kicks."

The majority of boogie woogie pianists prefer to play the bass figures in dotted eighth and sixteenth notes; therefore, I have written the examples in this fashion. However, some prefer the use of straight eighth notes, especially in the faster tempos. This is entirely a matter of taste, as either is correct. By experimenting at various tempos, you can determine the effect you like best.

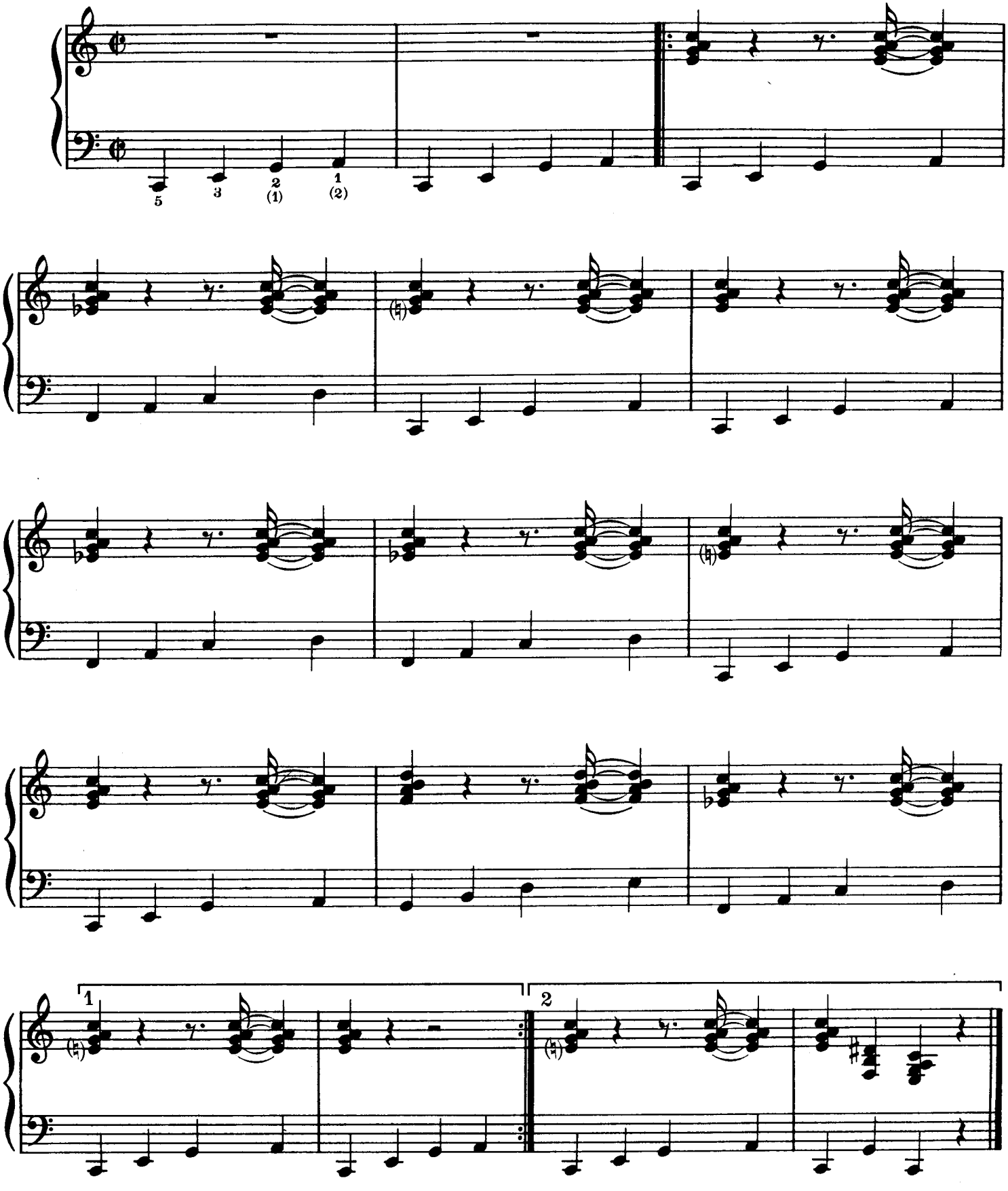
The damper pedal should not be used in playing boogie woogie.

Basic Form of Boogie Woogie



While the above represents the basic form, innumerable changes may be made in harmonic structure. To any of the C major chords may be added the sixth (A), the minor seventh (B♭), or the 9th (D). An addition of all three gives the effect of a thirteenth chord. F ninth and G ninth chords are often used to replace the F seventh and G seventh chords. The F seventh harmony in the second measure is sometimes changed to C major or C seventh to permit the use of a two measure C "lick" in measures one and two. For the same reason the F seventh chord in measure ten may be changed to G seventh to correspond with measure nine.

STYLE No. 1



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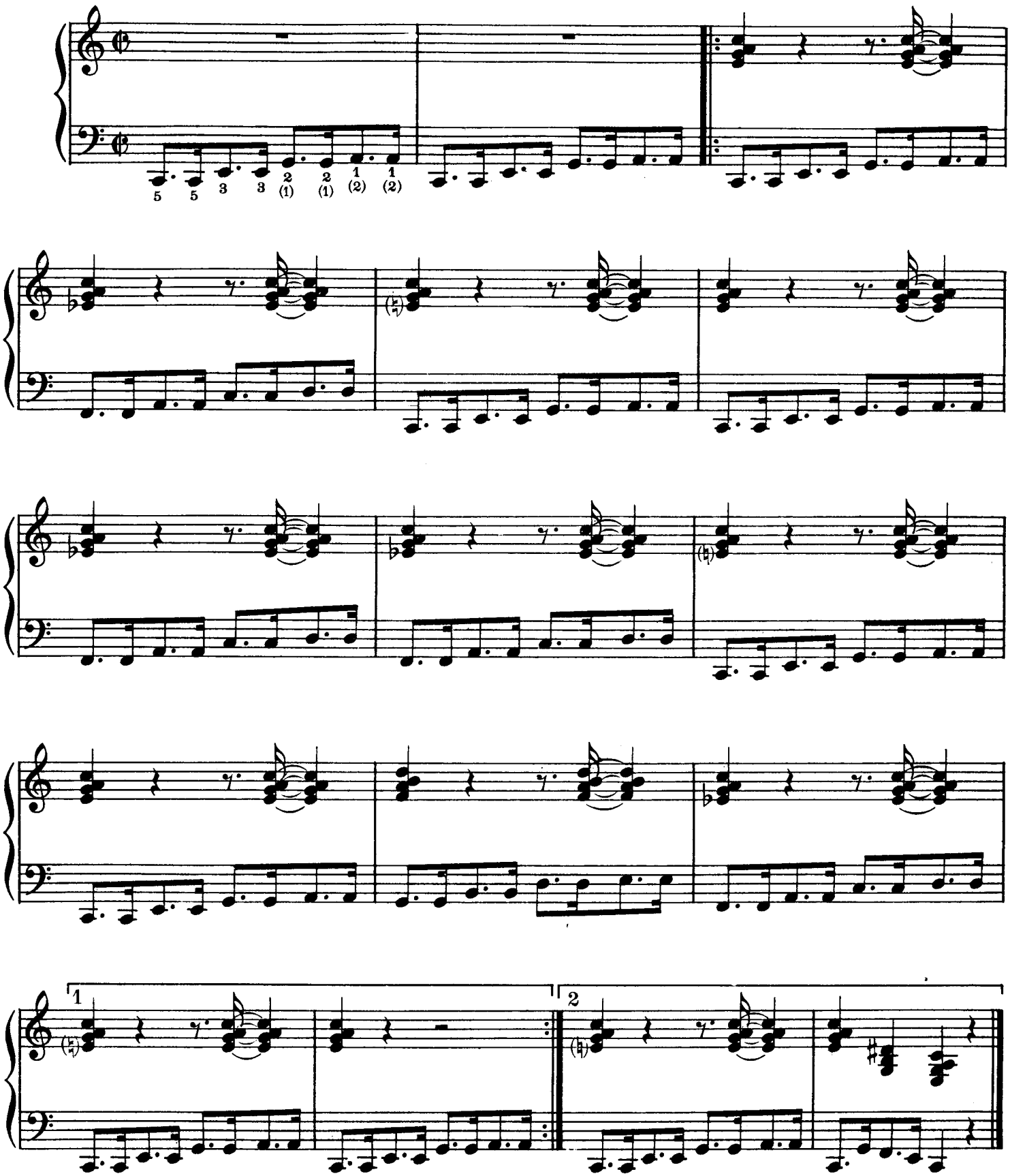

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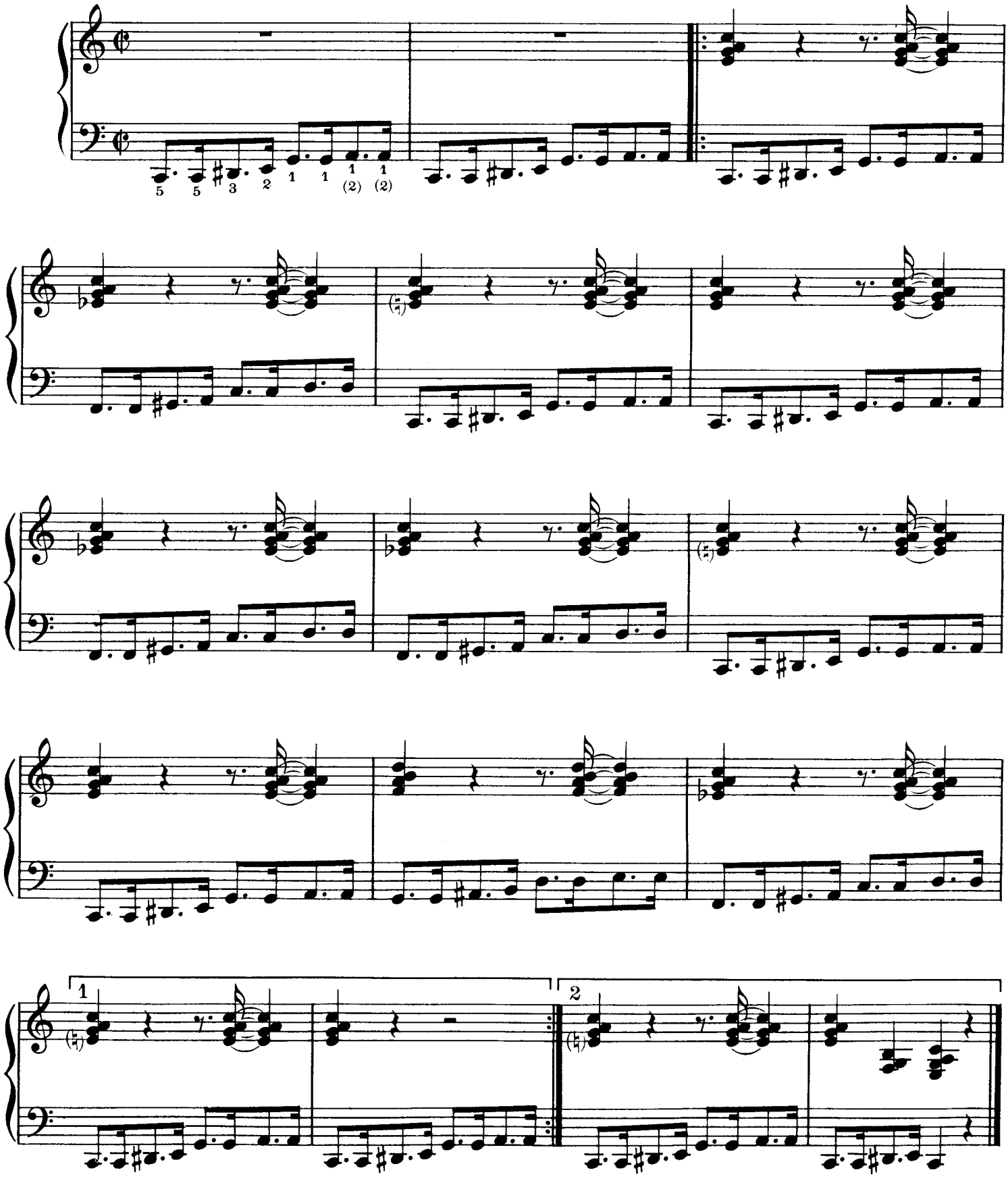

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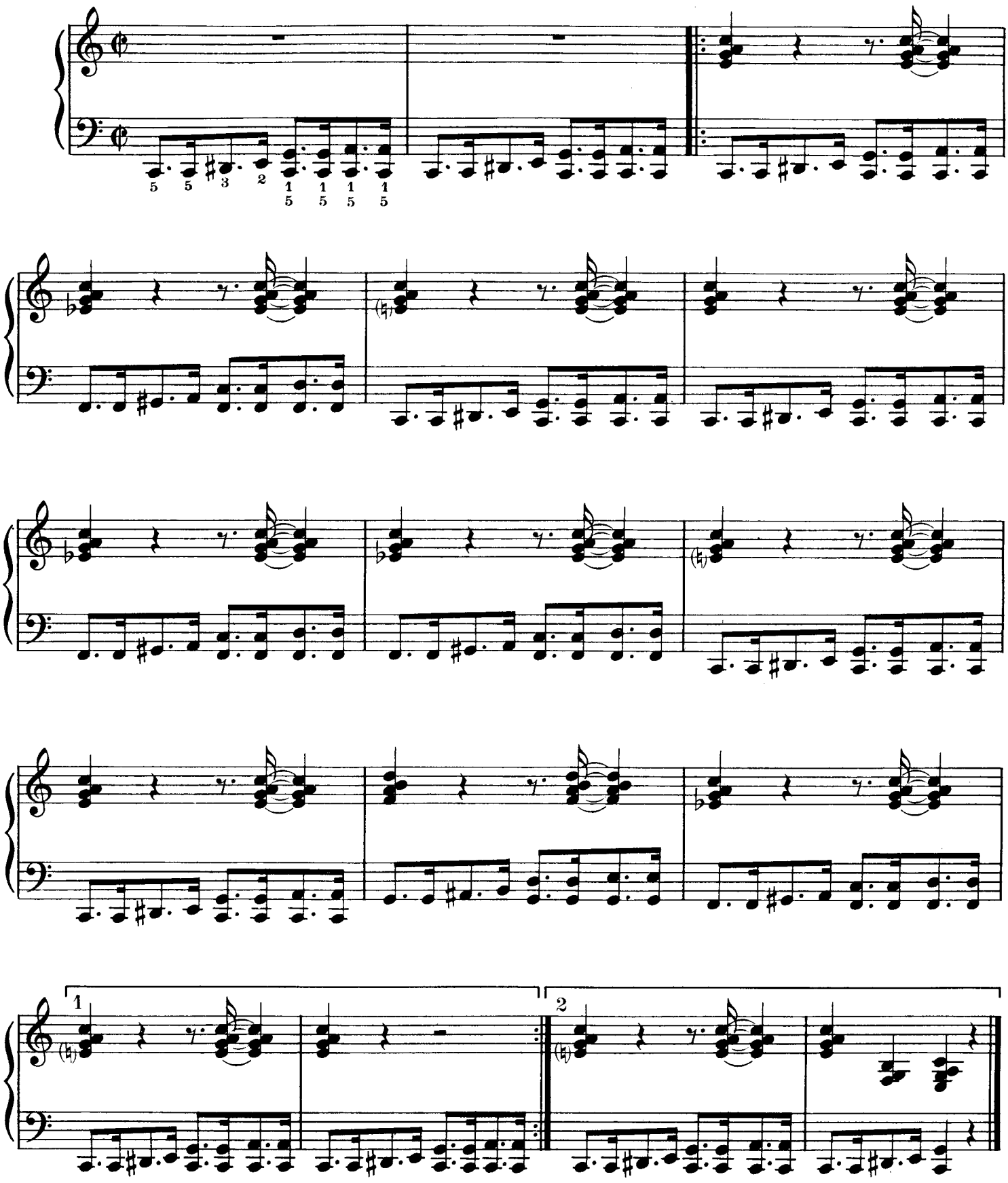

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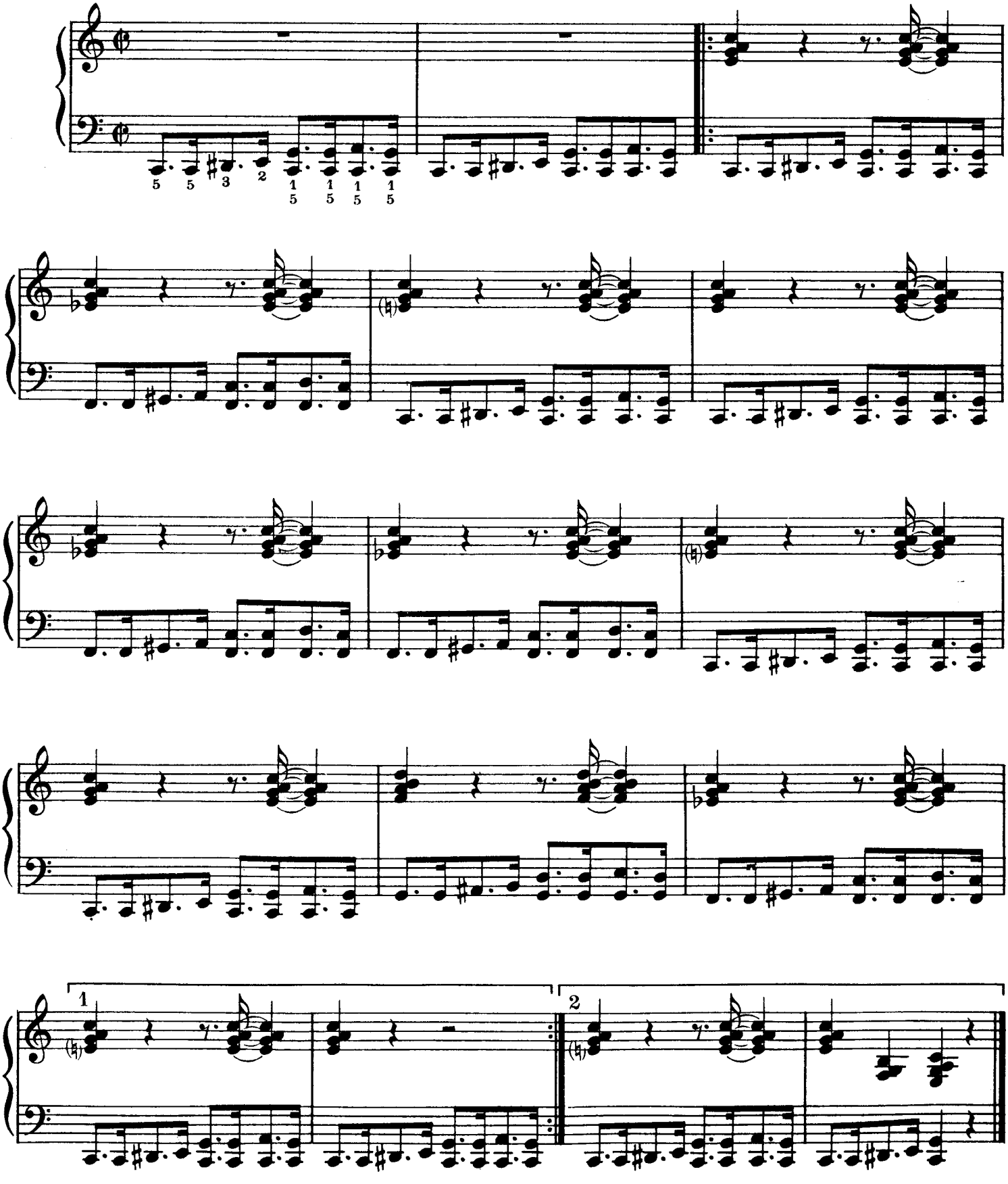

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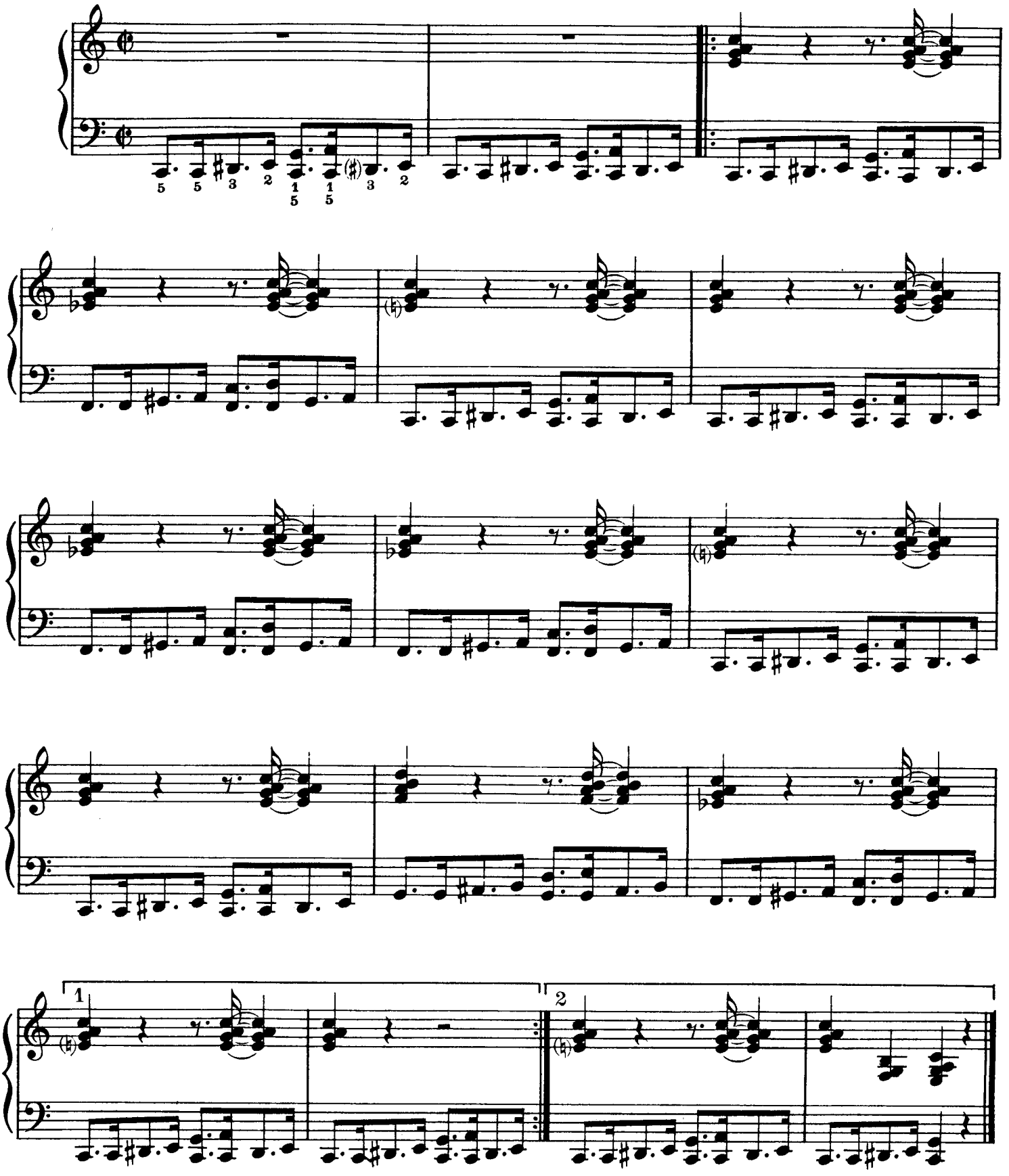

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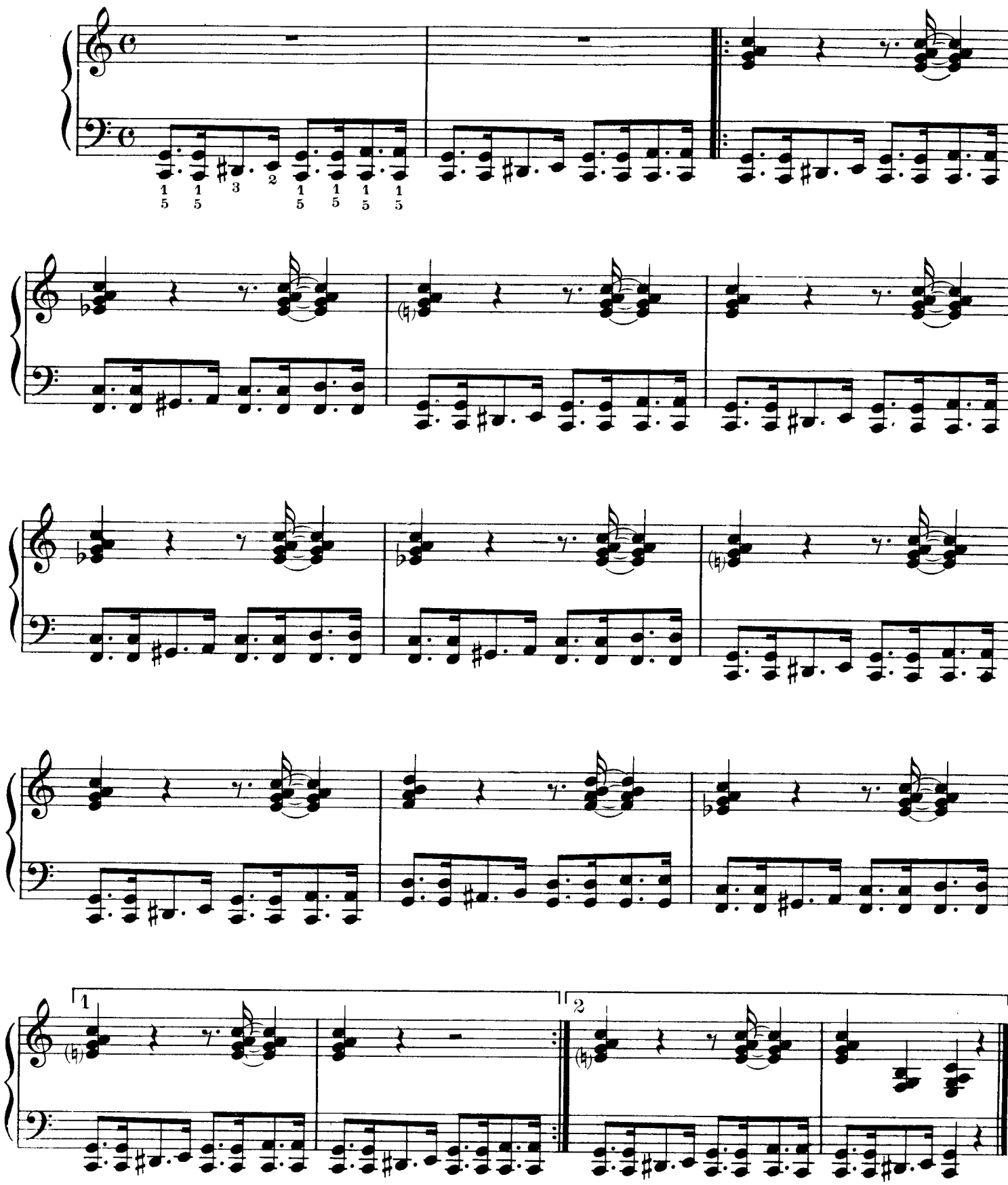

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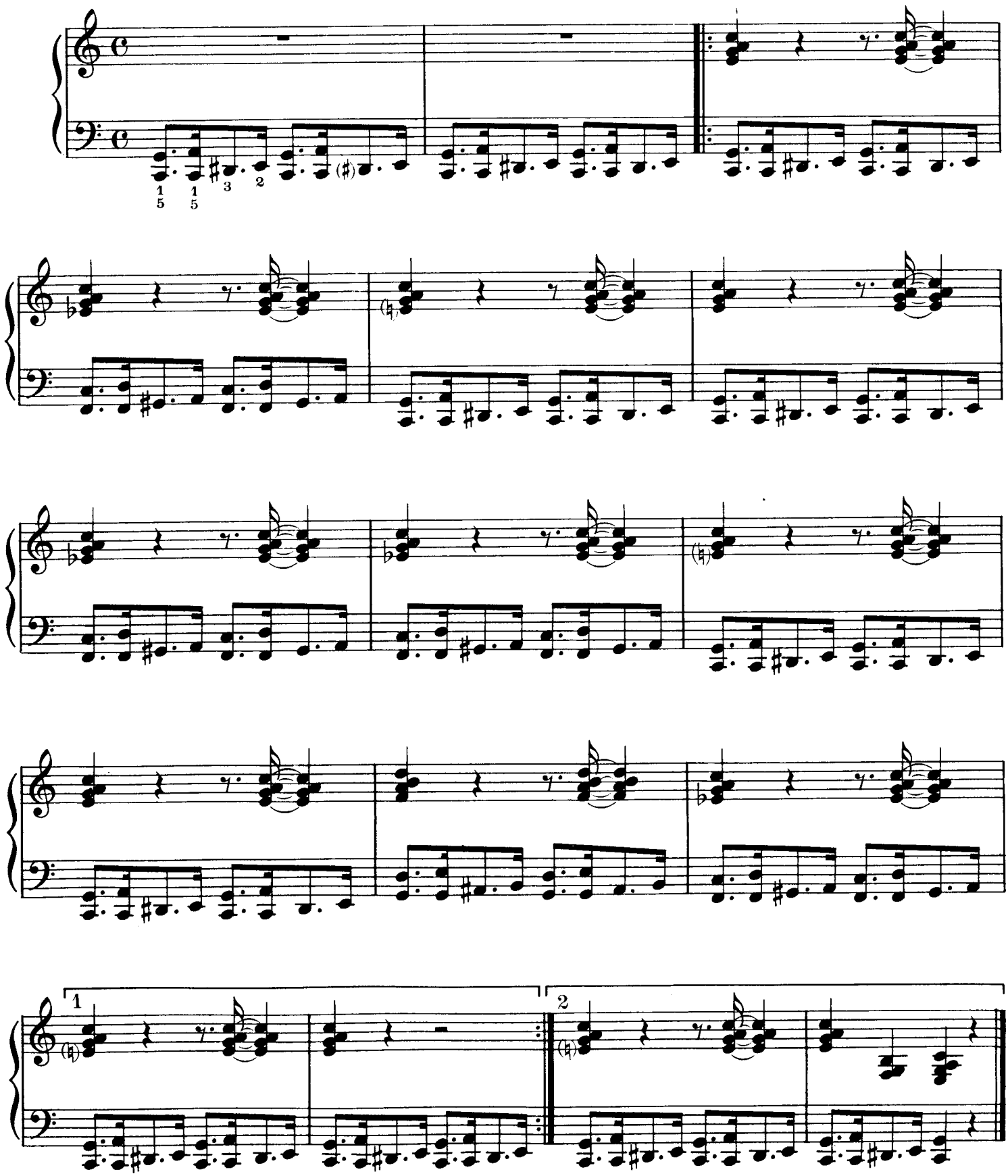

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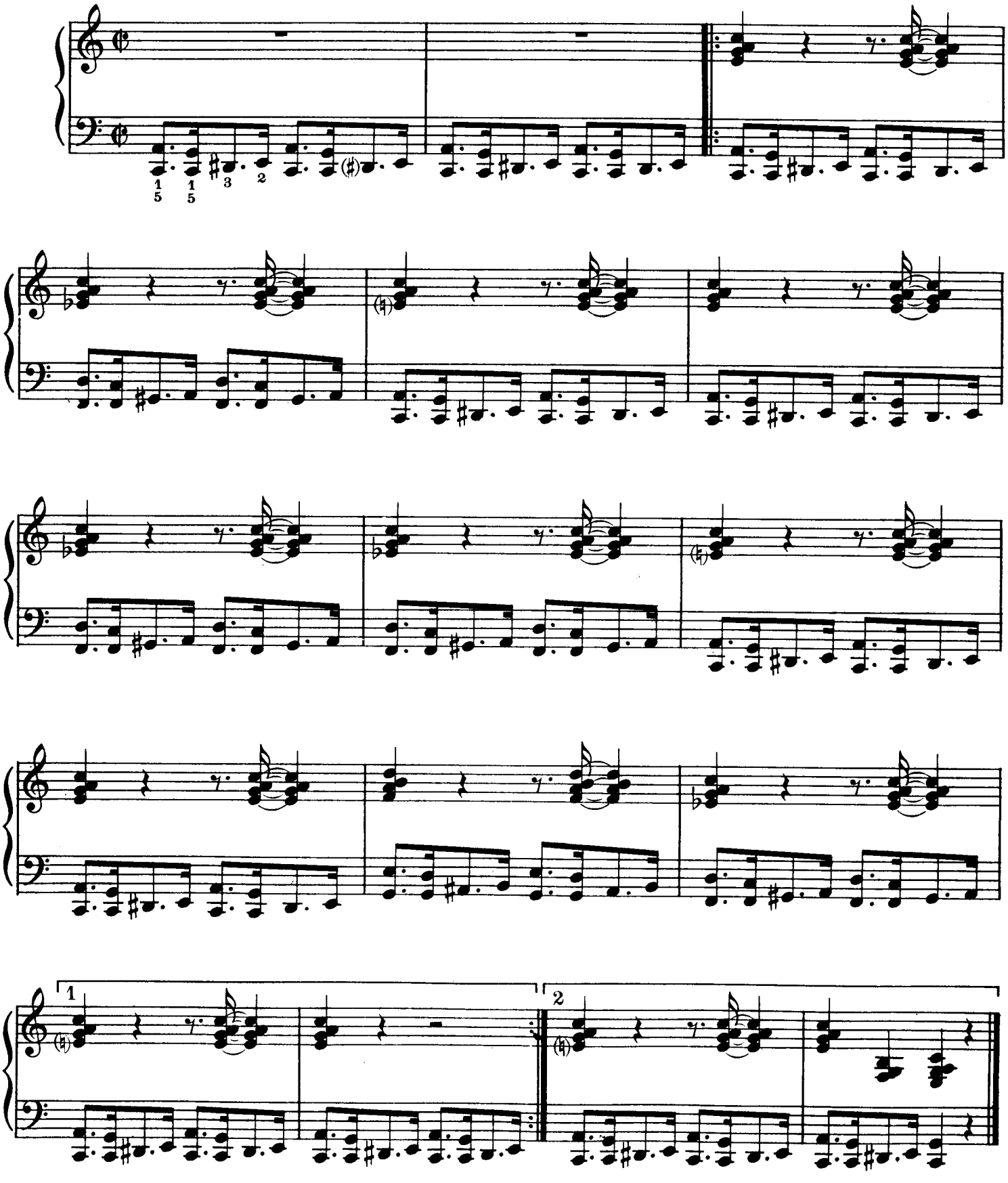

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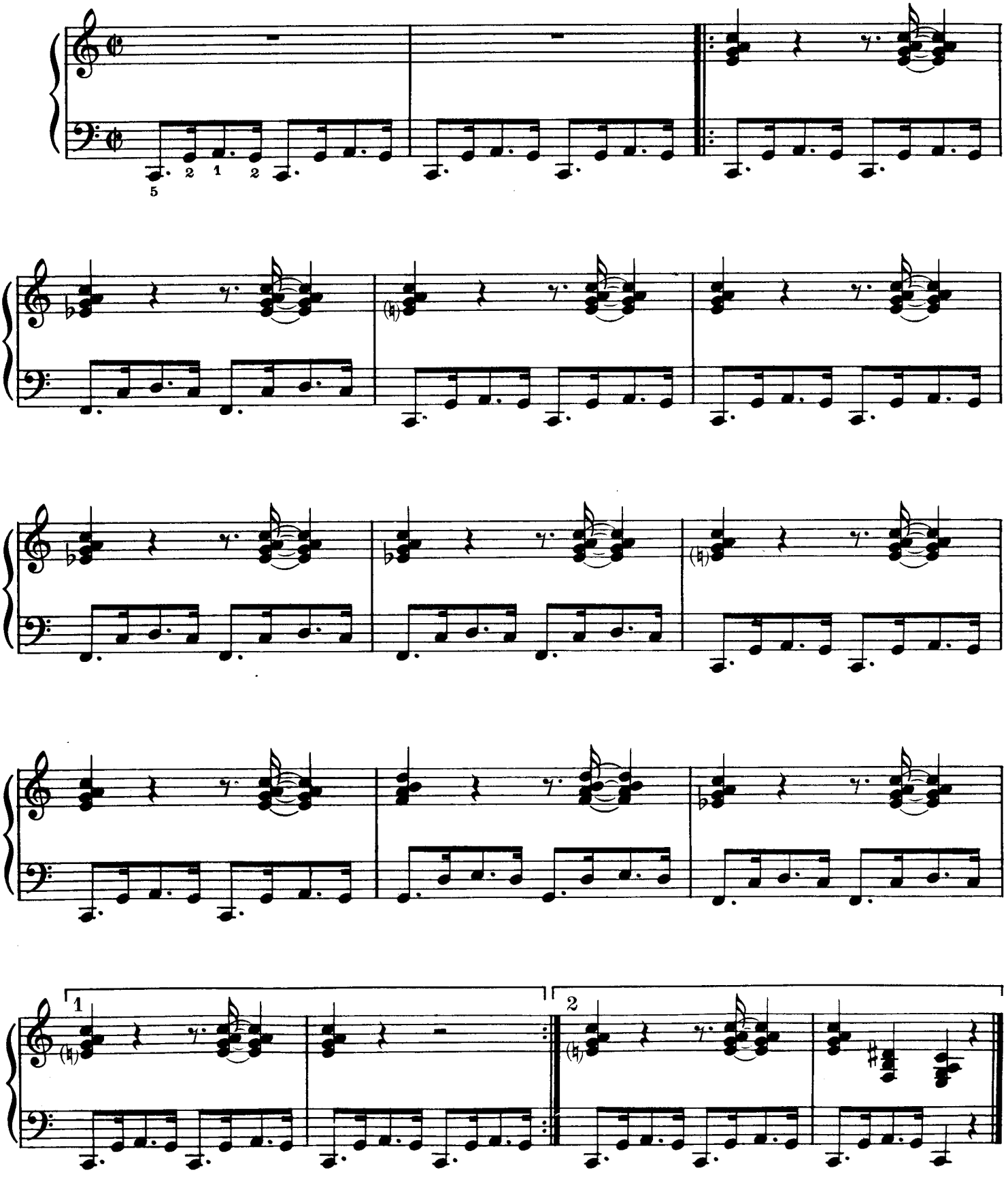

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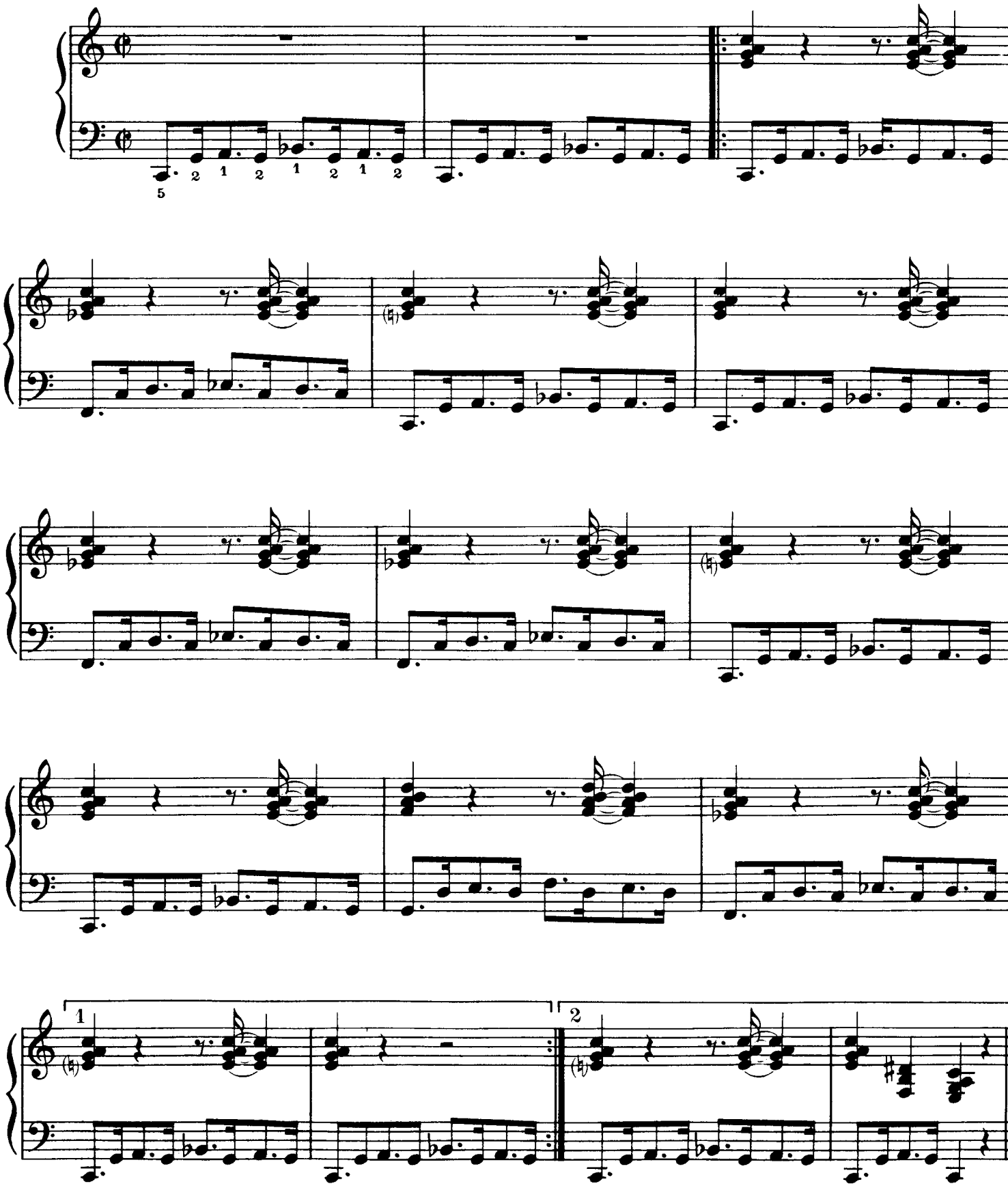

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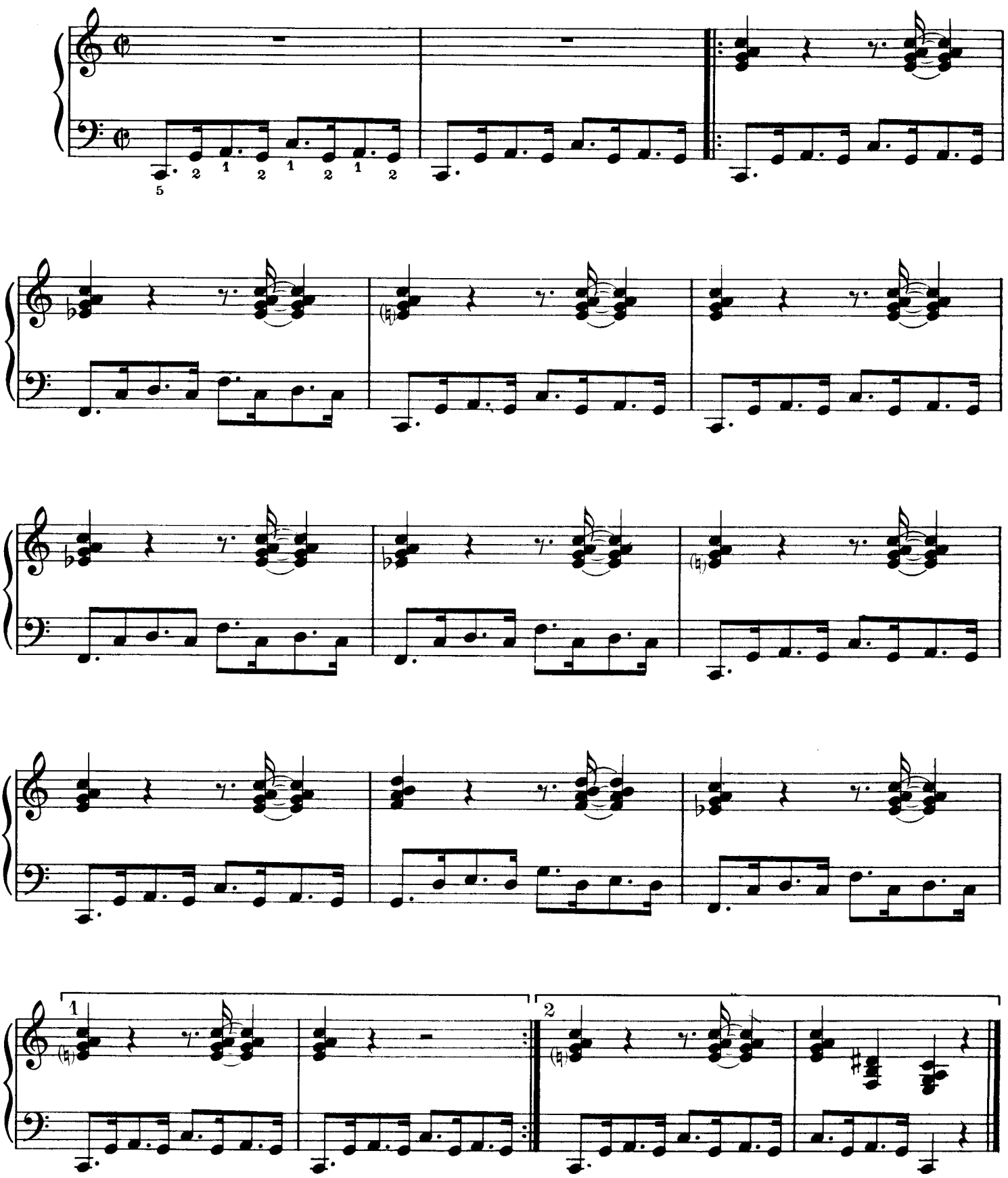

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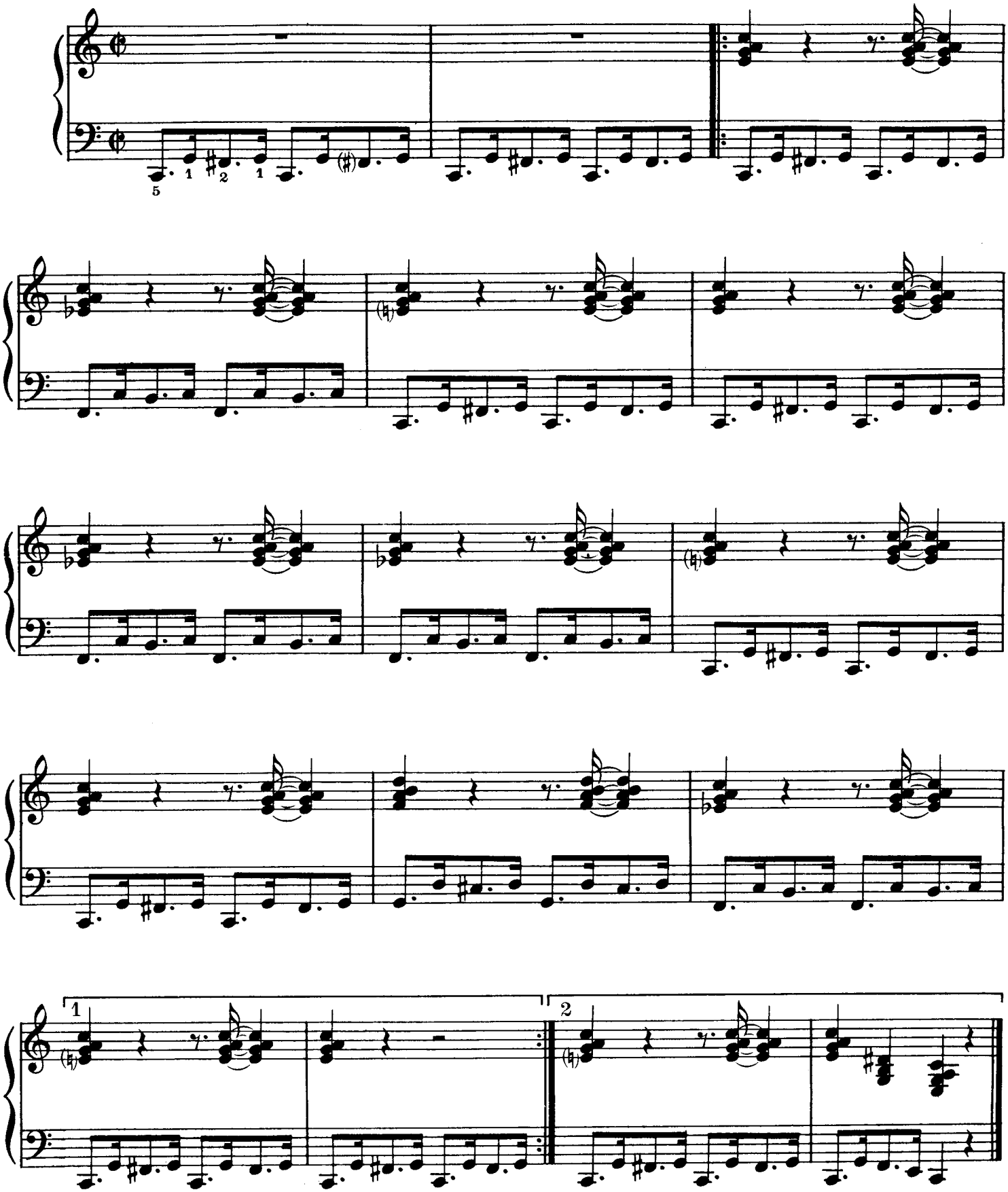

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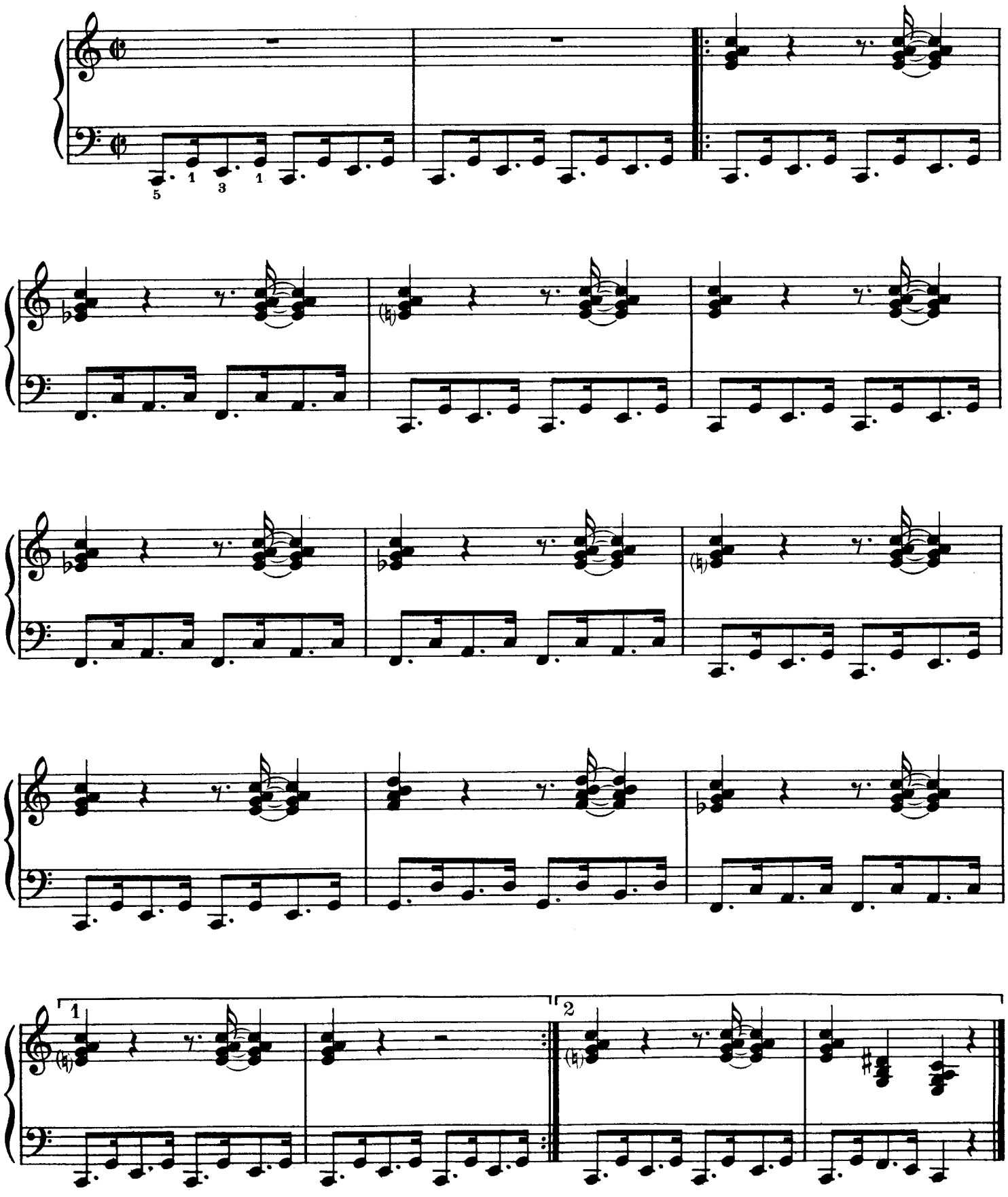

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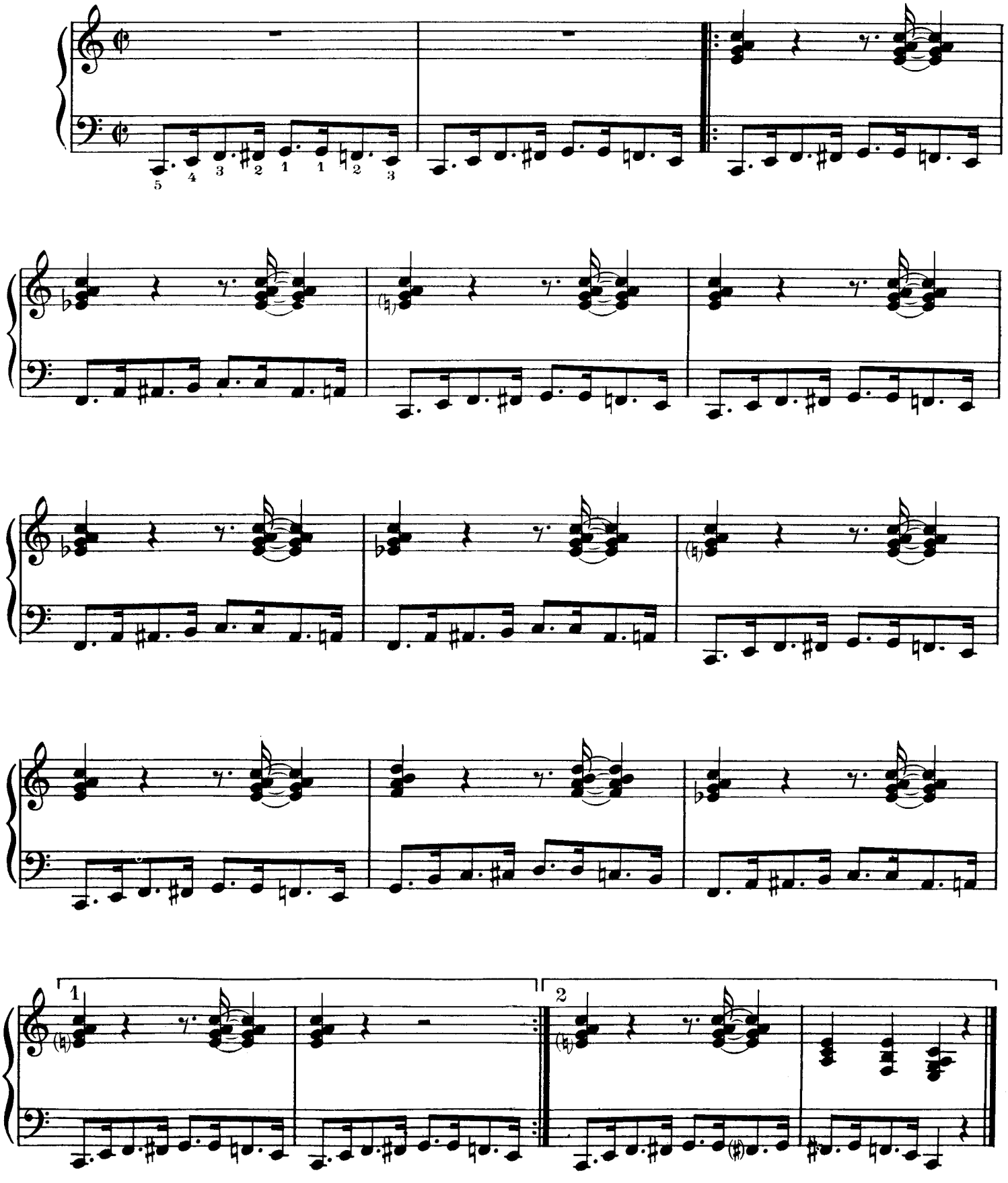

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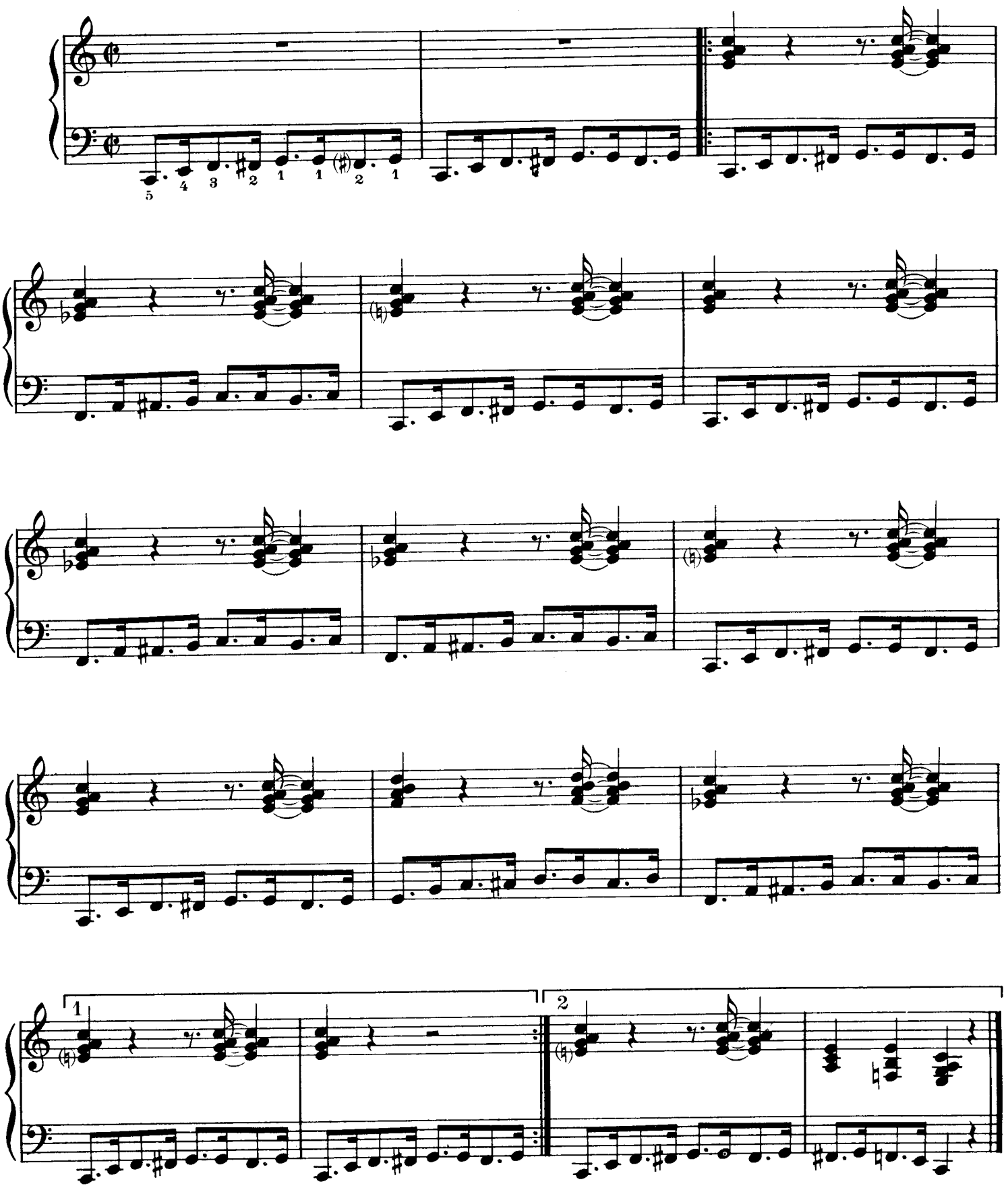

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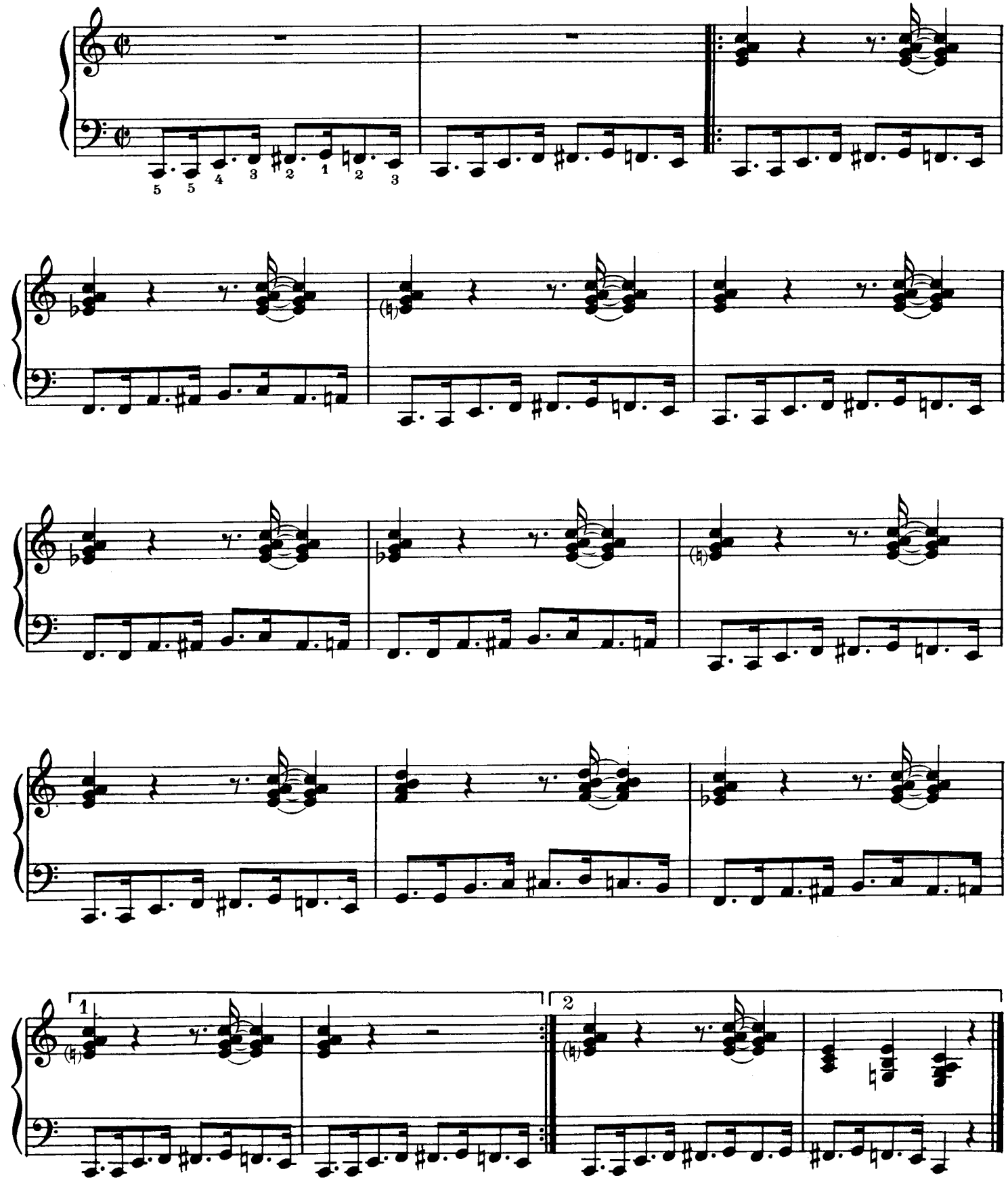

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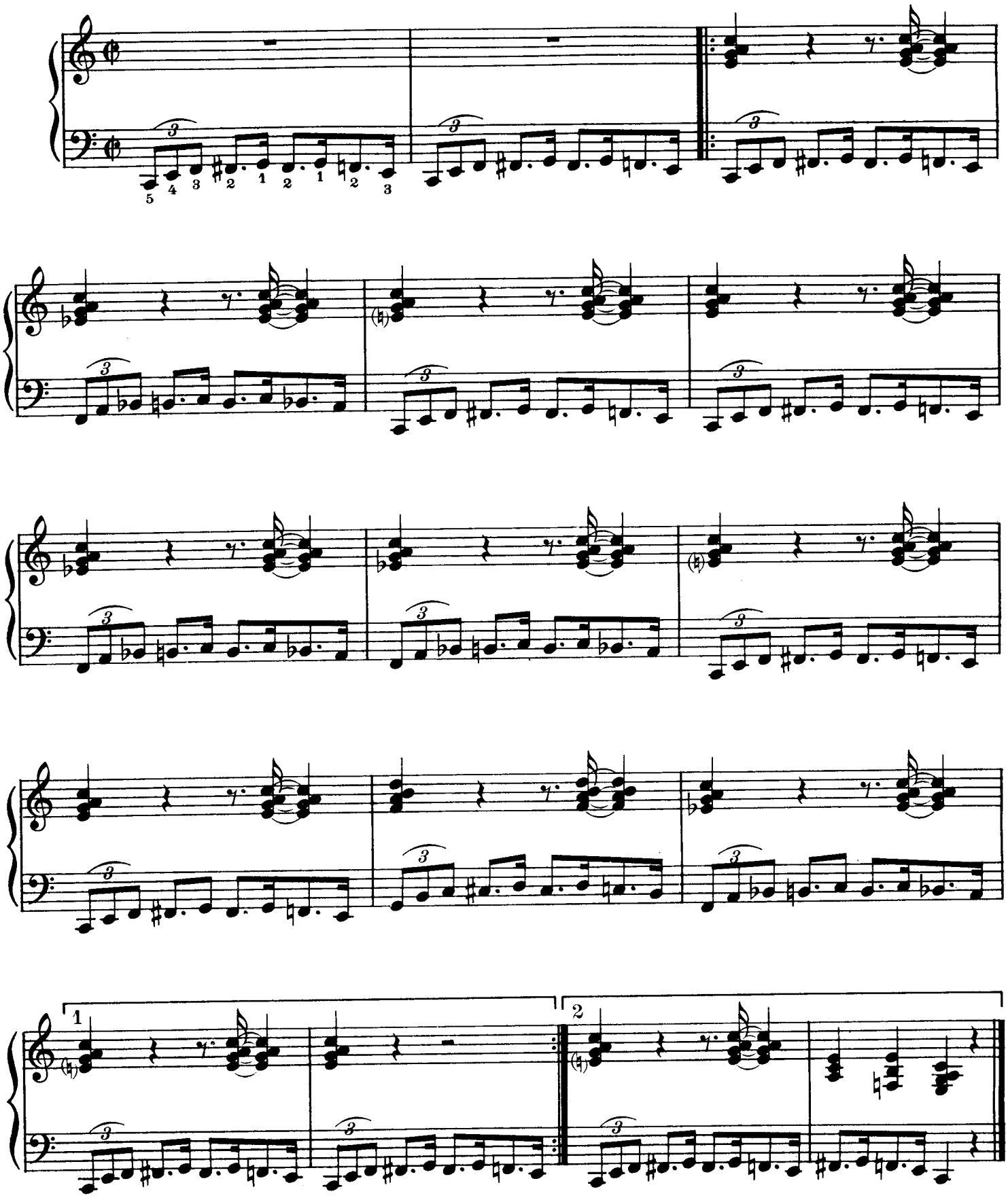

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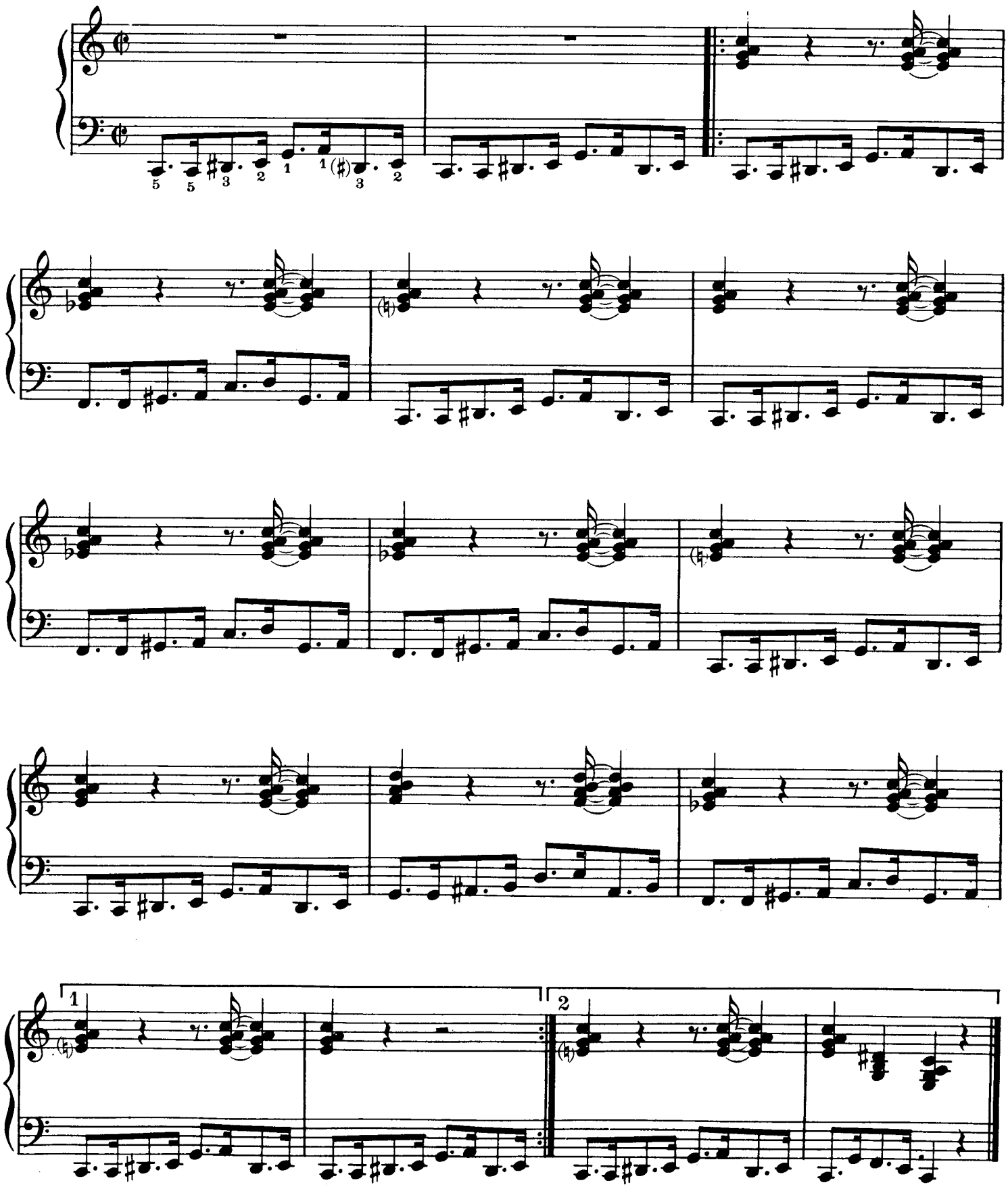

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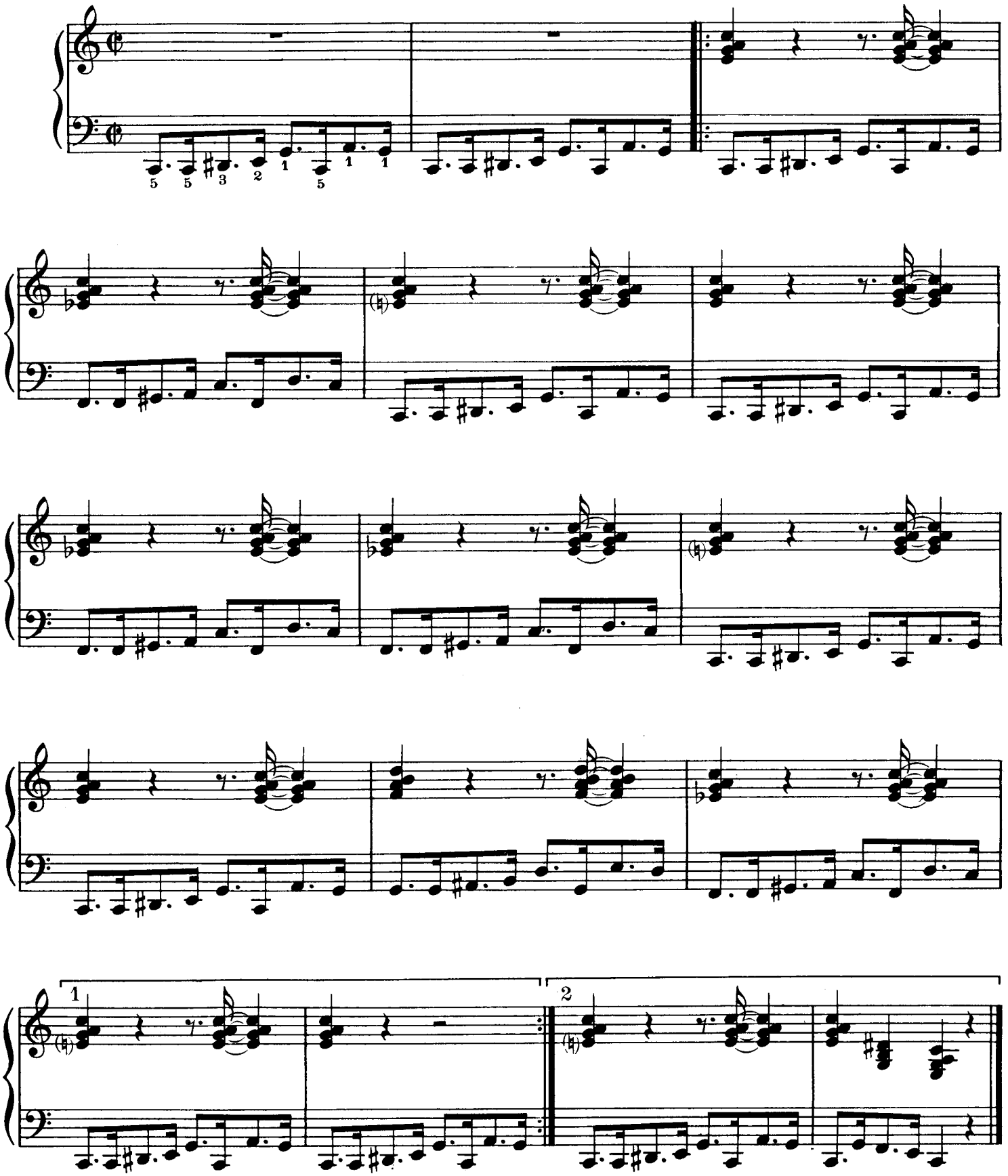

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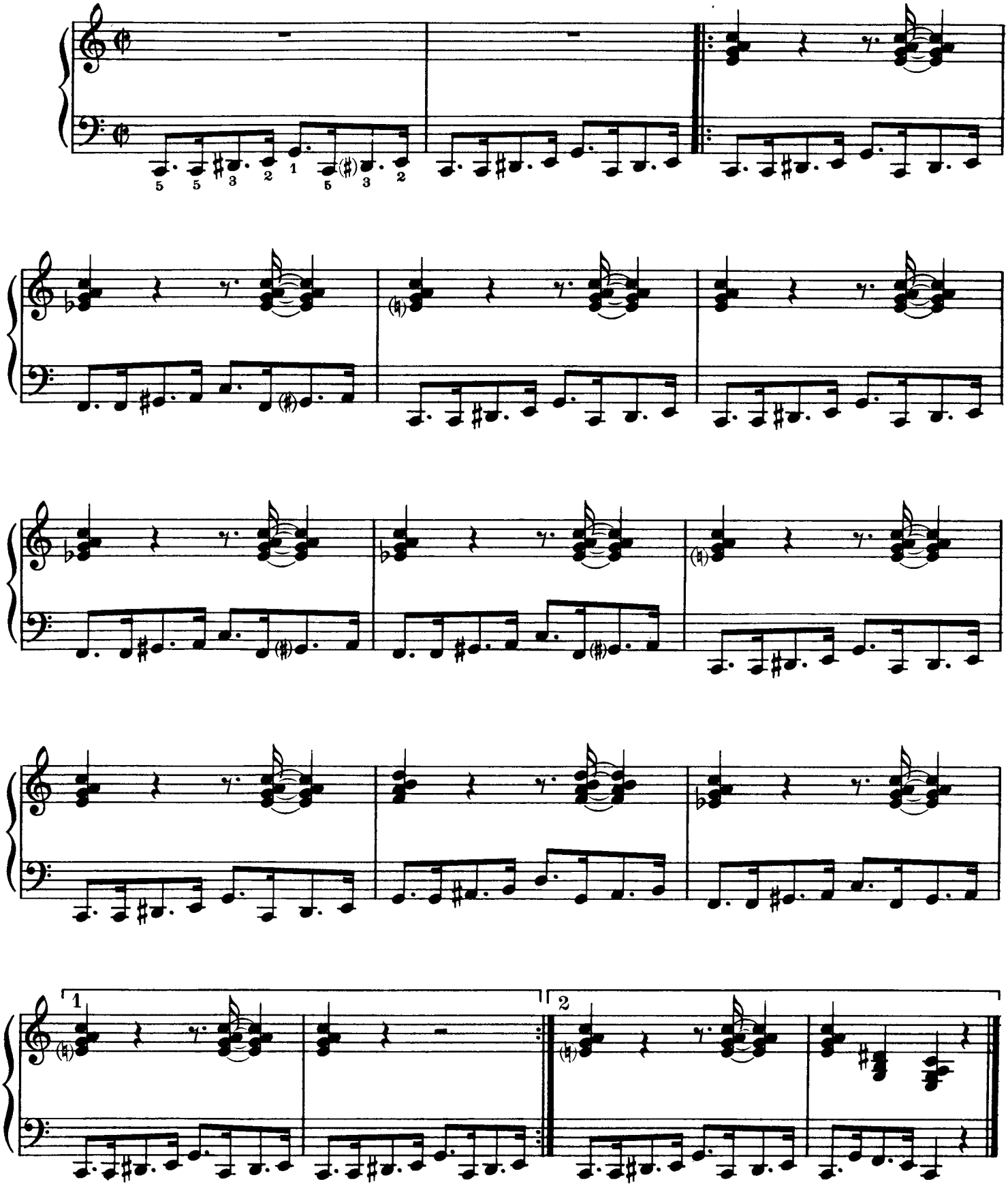

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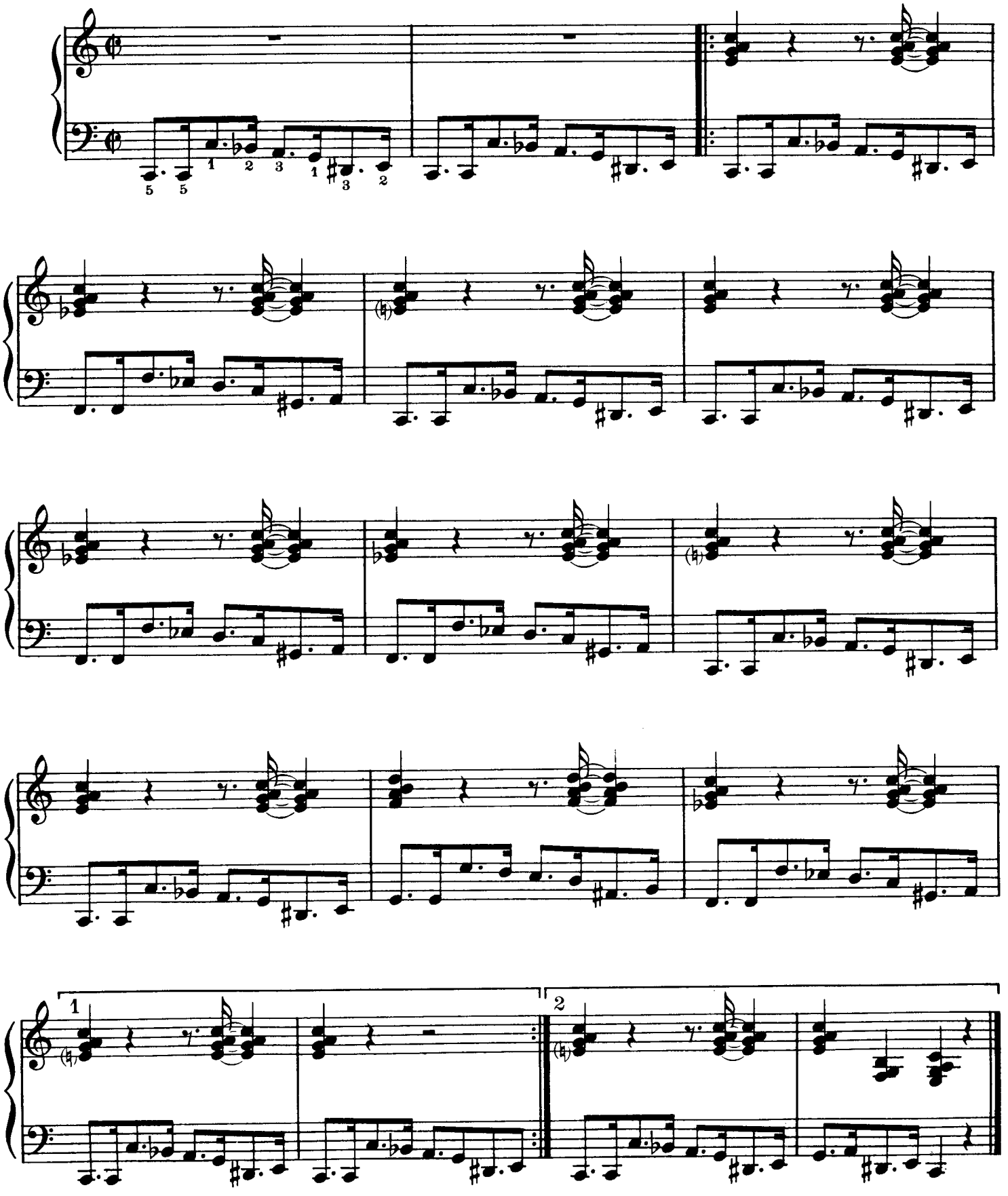

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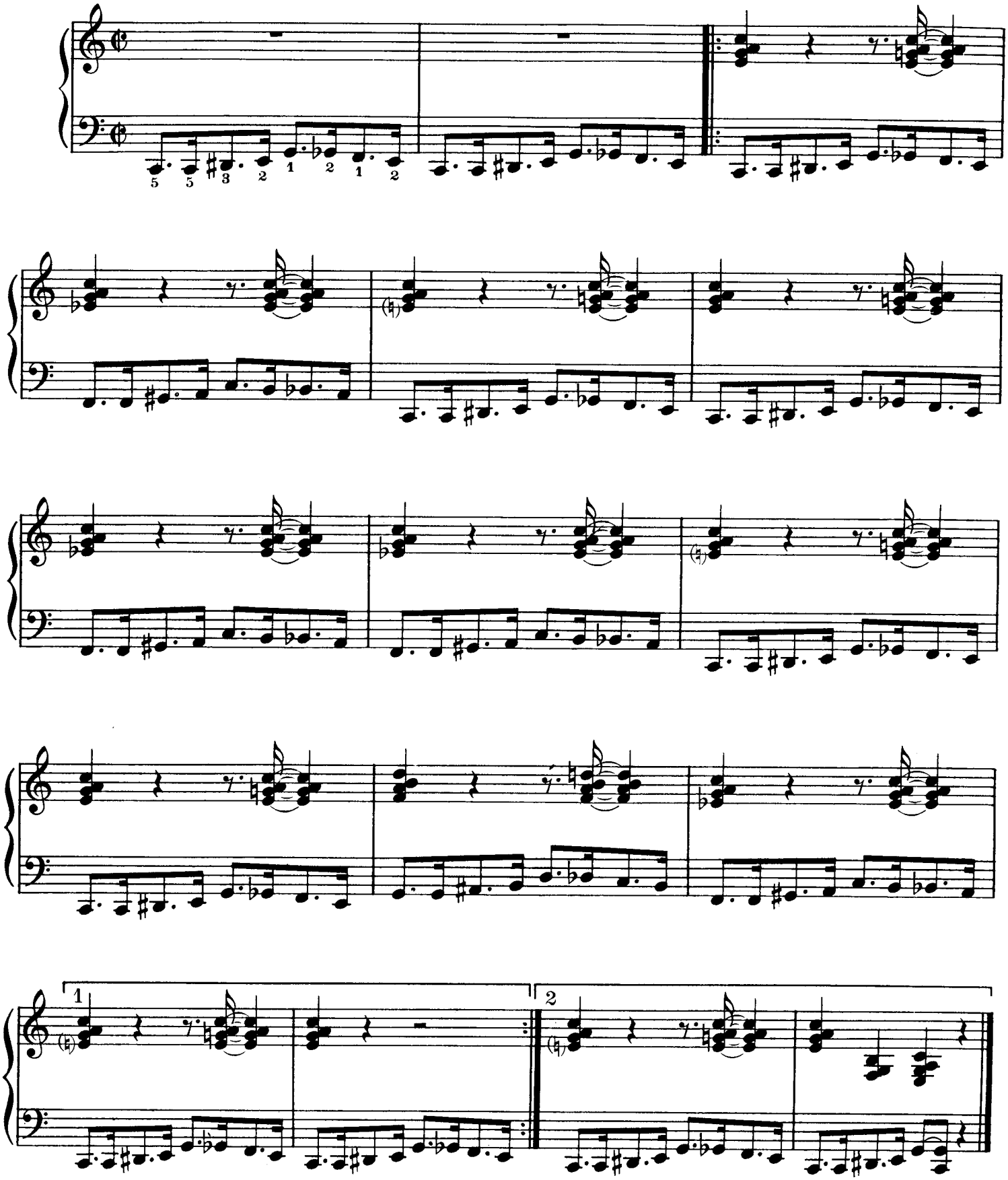

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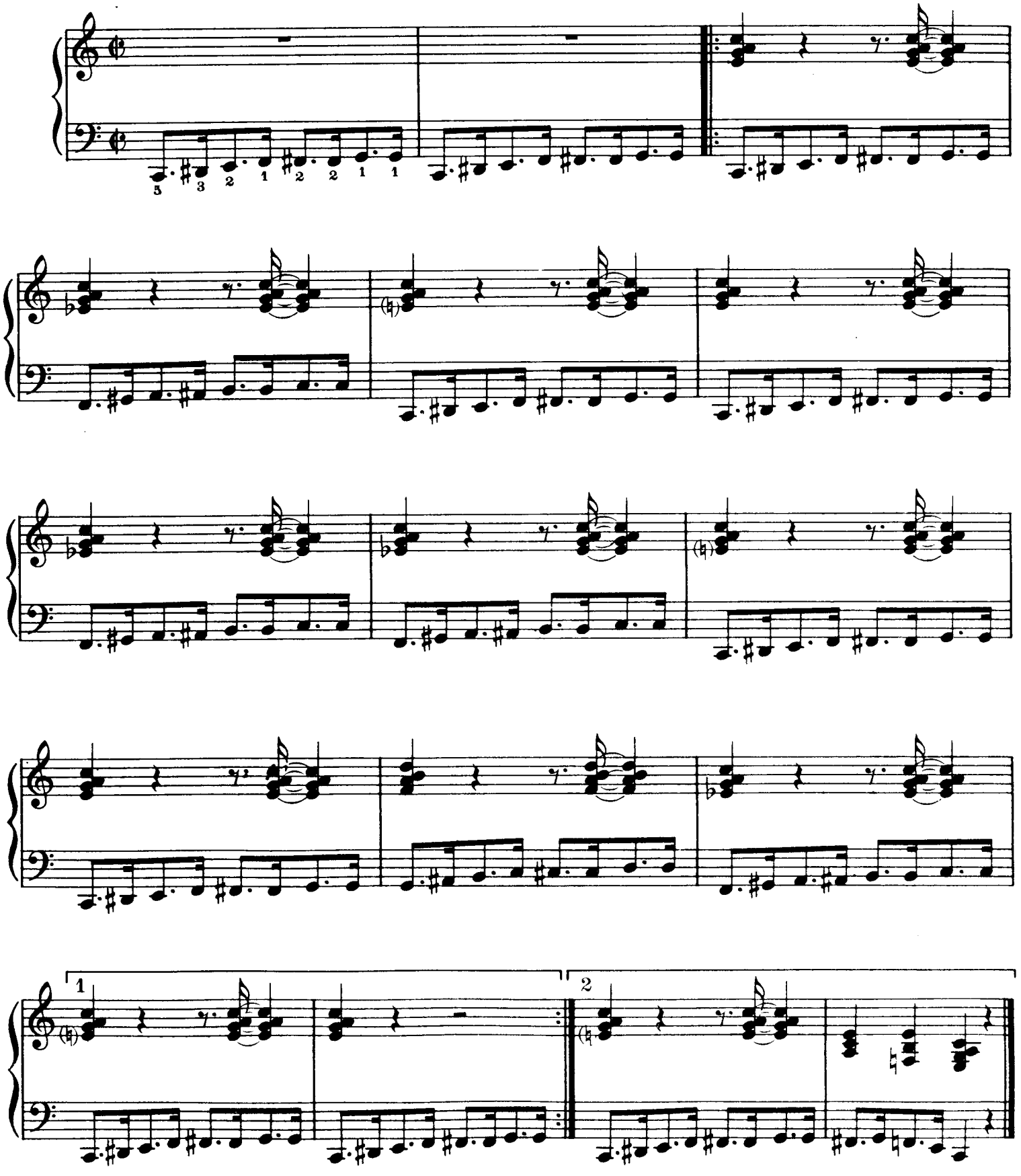

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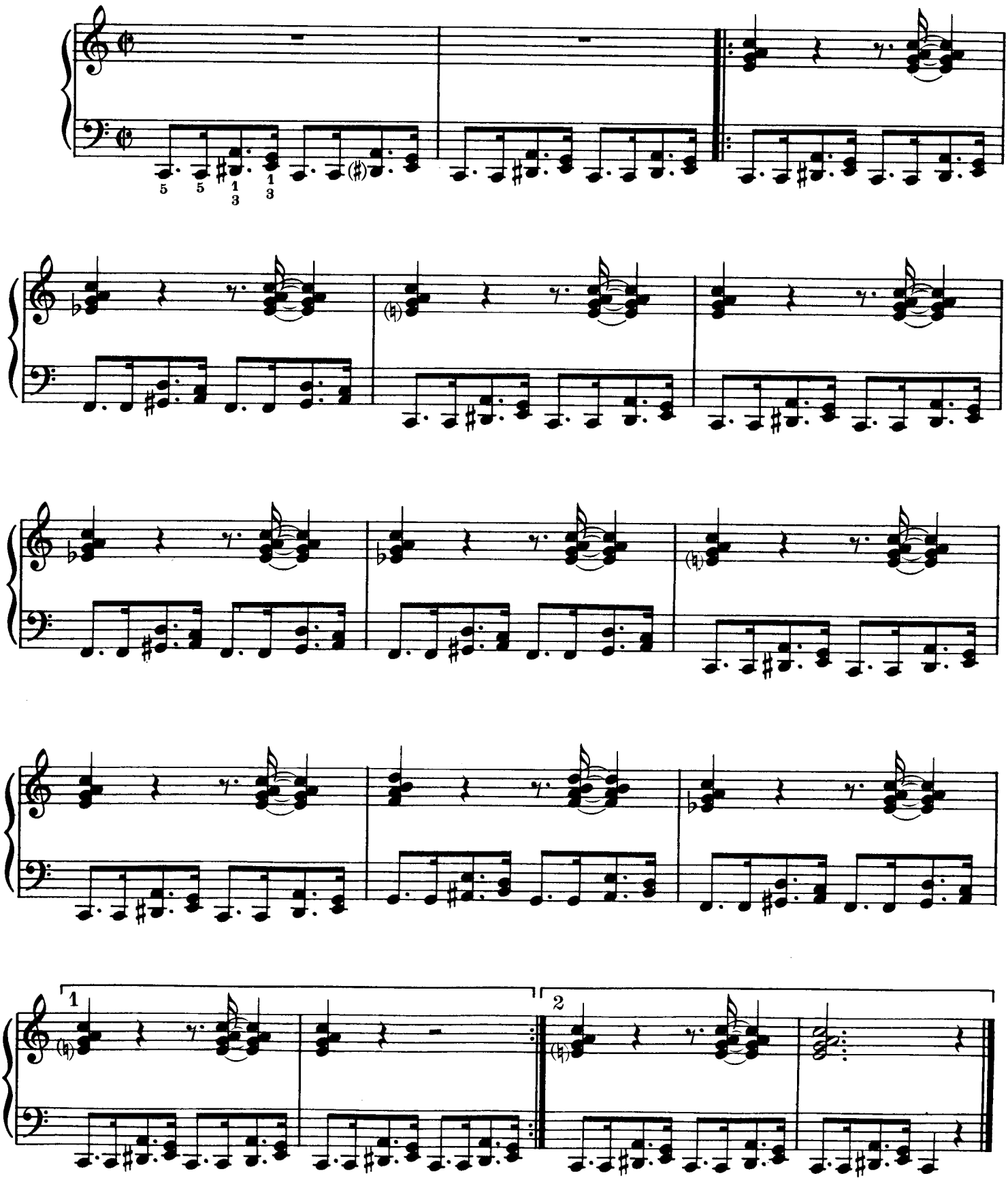


Walking Bass
(The Missing Link)

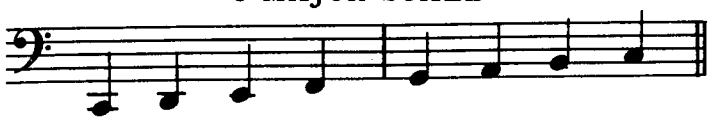
"Walking bass" might well be called the missing link between boogie woogie and the blues. Many instances could be cited wherein this style of bass has been used. Deserving of special mention are Joe Sullivan's compositions, "Just Strolling" and "Gin Mill Blues," recorded by the composer on Decca No. 600 and Commodore No. 31-32, and by the Bob Crosby Orchestra (Bob Zurke at the piano) on Decca No. 1670 and No. 1170. Fats Waller has used the style on many of his recordings including his "Alligator Crawl," Bluebird No. 10098. Mary Lou Williams employed it in the Andy Kirk Orchestra's recording of her composition "Little Joe from Chicago," Decca No. 1710.

Because of the simplified fingering involved, walking bass is applicable to all chords and all keys.

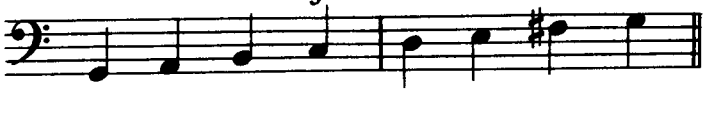
All of the exercises following should also be practiced one octave lower than written.

PREPARATORY EXERCISES

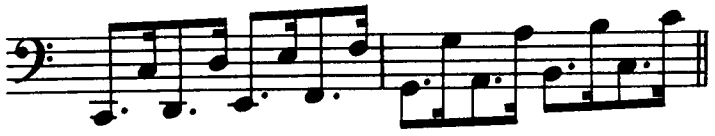
C MAJOR SCALE



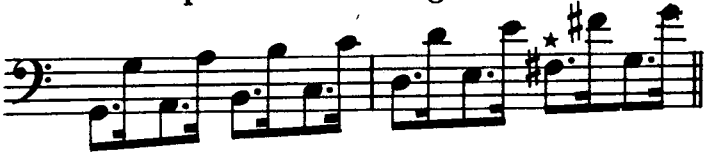
G MAJOR SCALE



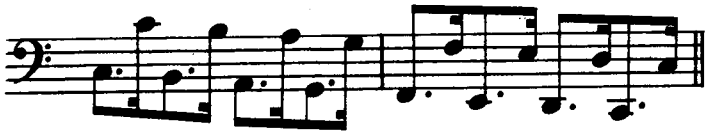
Upward in walking bass



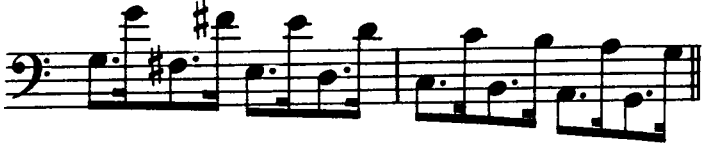
Upward in walking bass



Downward in walking bass

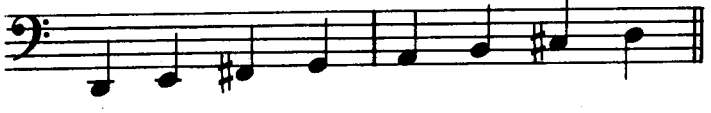


Downward in walking bass

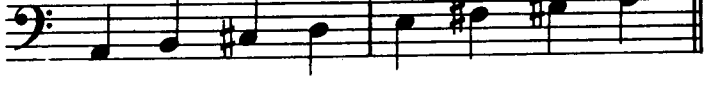


In a like manner work out the walking bass for the following major scales.

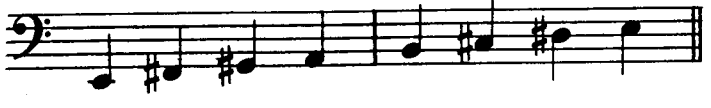
D MAJOR



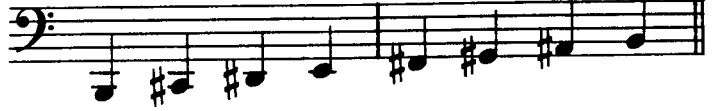
A MAJOR



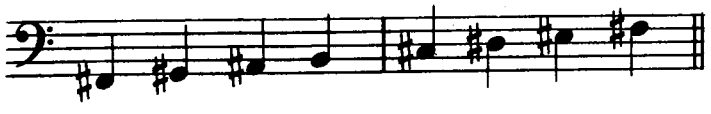
E MAJOR



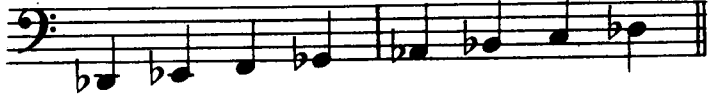
B MAJOR



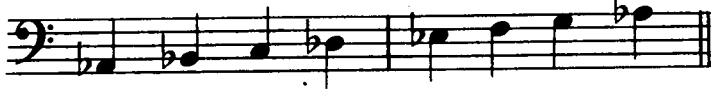
F♯ (G♭) MAJOR



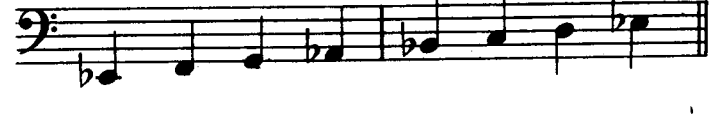
D♭ MAJOR



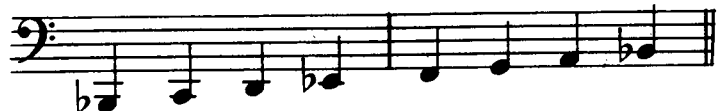
A♭ MAJOR



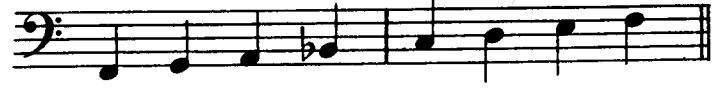
E♭ MAJOR



B♭ MAJOR

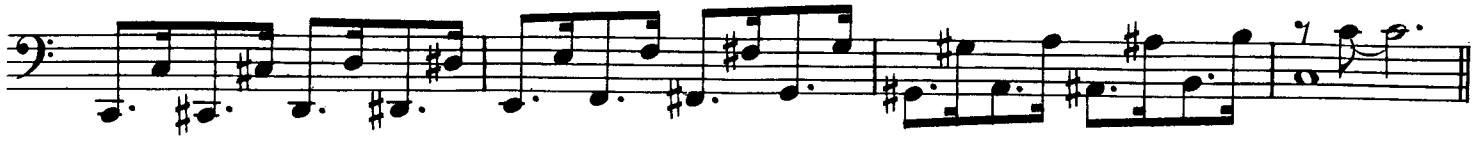


F MAJOR

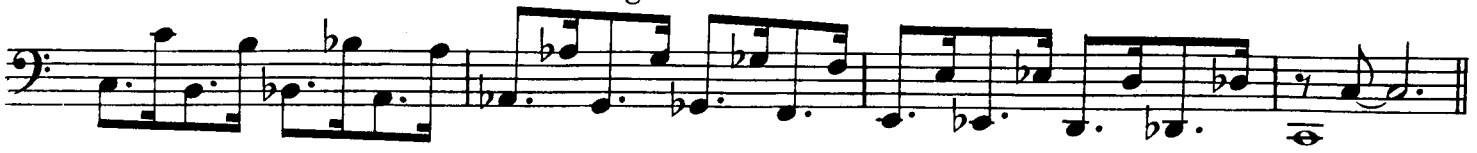


★ The majority of pianists prefer to use the fourth finger on the lower note of octaves which occur on the black keys.

Chromatic scale upward in walking bass.



Chromatic scale downward in walking bass.

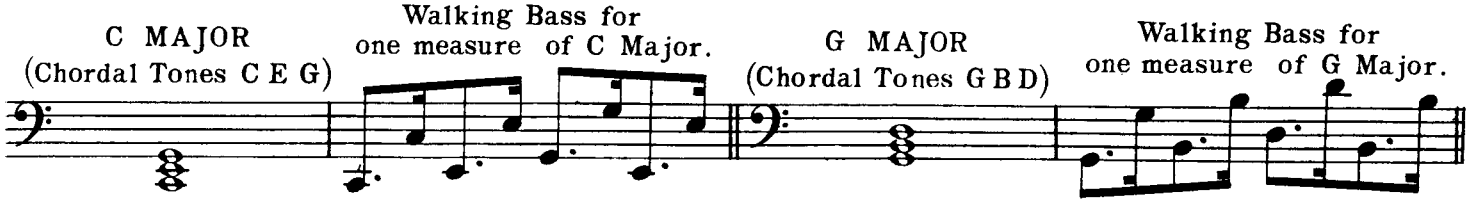


C MAJOR
(Chordal Tones C E G)

Walking Bass for
one measure of C Major.

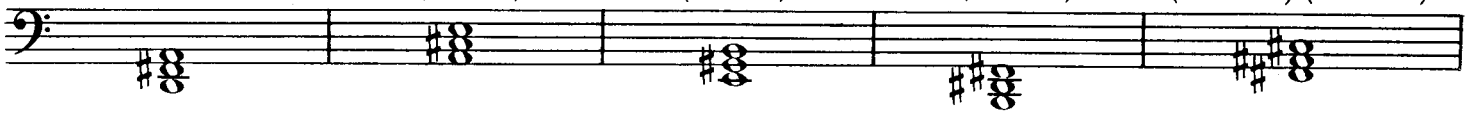
G MAJOR
(Chordal Tones G B D)

Walking Bass for
one measure of G Major.

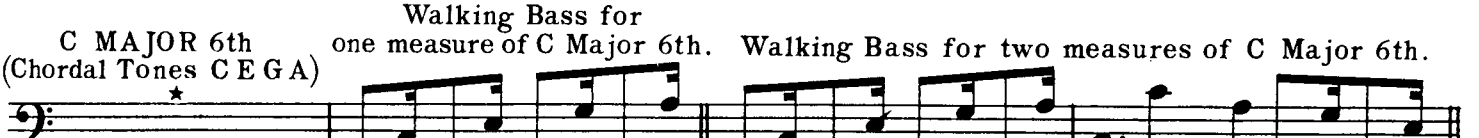


In a like manner work out the walking bass for one measure of each of the following major chords.

D MAJOR (D F♯ A)
A MAJOR (A C♯ E)
E MAJOR (E G♯ B)
B MAJOR (B D♯ F♯)
F♯ (G♭) MAJOR (F♯ A♯ C♯) (G♭ B♭ D♭)



D♭ MAJOR (D♭ F A♭)
A♭ MAJOR (A♭ C E♭)
E♭ MAJOR (E♭ G B♭)
B♭ MAJOR (B♭ D F)
F MAJOR (F A C)



C MAJOR 6th
(Chordal Tones C E G A)

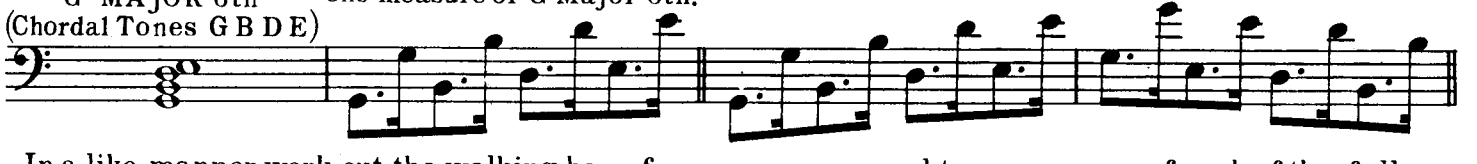
Walking Bass for
one measure of C Major 6th.

Walking Bass for two measures of C Major 6th.

G MAJOR 6th
(Chordal Tones G B D E)

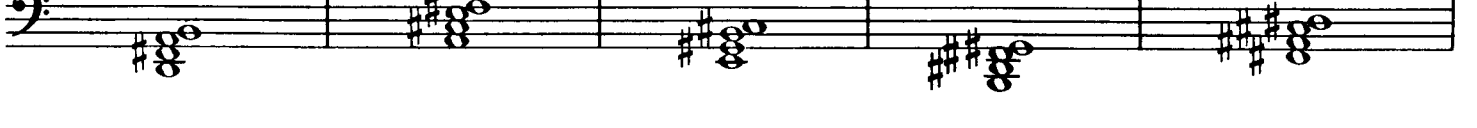
Walking Bass for
one measure of G Major 6th.

Walking Bass for two measures of G Major 6th.

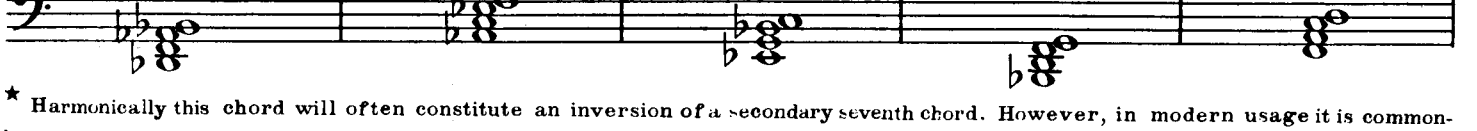


In a like manner work out the walking bass for one measure and two measures of each of the following Major 6th chords.

D MAJOR 6th (D F♯ A B)
A MAJOR 6th (A C♯ E F♯)
E MAJOR 6th (E G♯ B C♯)
B MAJOR 6th (B D♯ F♯ G♯)
F♯ (G♭) MAJOR 6th (F♯ A♯ C♯ D♯) (G♭ B♭ D♭ E♭)



D♭ MAJOR 6th (D♭ F A♭ B♭)
A♭ MAJOR 6th (A♭ C E♭ F)
E♭ MAJOR 6th (E♭ G B♭ C)
B♭ MAJOR 6th (B♭ D F G)
F MAJOR 6th (F A C D)



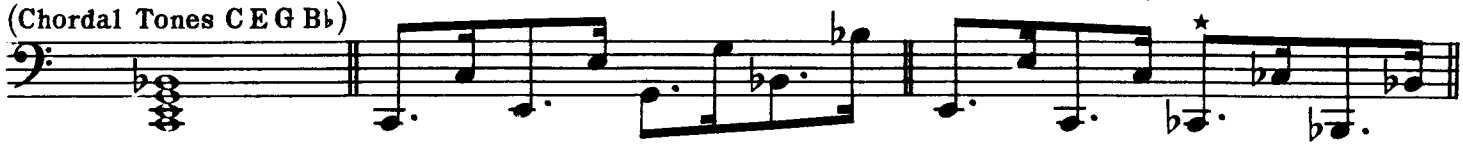
★ Harmonically this chord will often constitute an inversion of a secondary seventh chord. However, in modern usage it is commonly referred to as a major chord with the added sixth.

Walking Bass for one measure of C 7th

C 7th
(Chordal Tones C E G B♭)

Style No. 1

Style No. 2

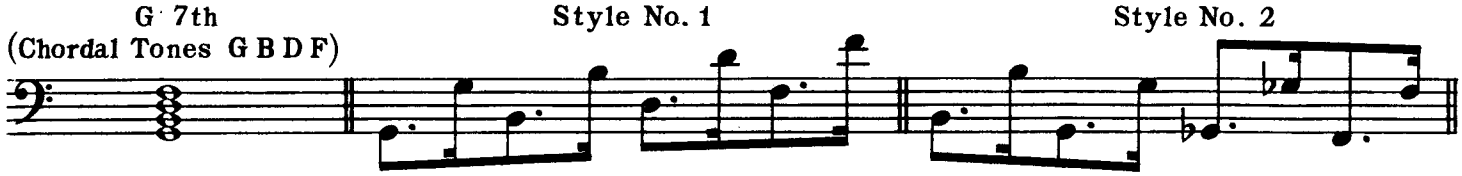


Walking Bass for one measure of G 7th

G 7th
(Chordal Tones G B D F)

Style No. 1

Style No. 2



In a like manner work out the walking bass for one measure of each of the following chords, Style No.1 and Style No. 2.

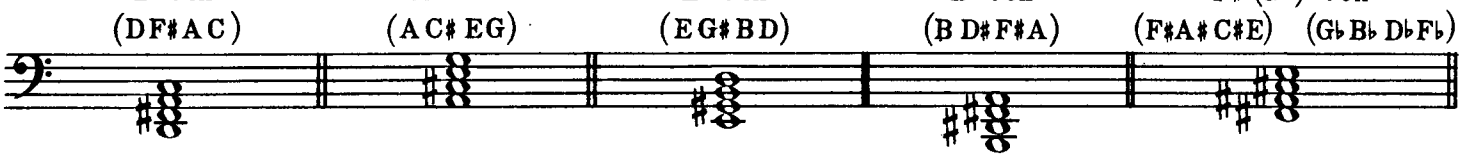
D 7th (D F♯ A C)

A 7th (A C♯ E G)

E 7th (E G♯ B D)

B 7th (B D♯ F♯ A)

F♯ (G♭) 7th (F♯ A♯ C♯ E) (G♭ B♭ D♭ F♭)



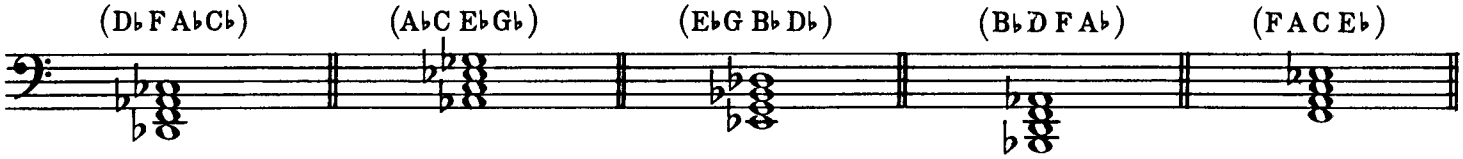
D♭ 7th (D♭ F A♭ C♭)

A♭ 7th (A♭ C E♭ G♭)

E♭ 7th (E♭ G B♭ D♭)

B♭ 7th (B♭ D F A♭)

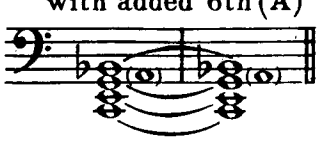
F 7th (F A C E♭)



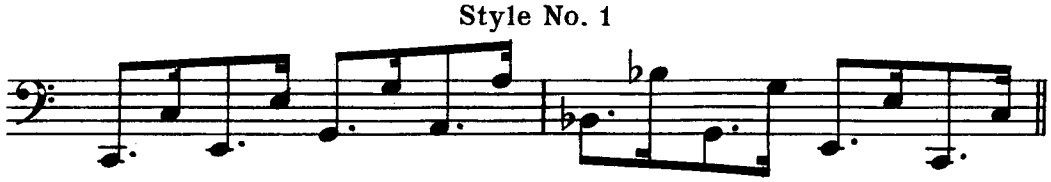
In playing the walking bass for two measures of a 7th chord, the 6th is usually included in either the upward or downward walk, or both.

Walking Bass for two measures of C 7th

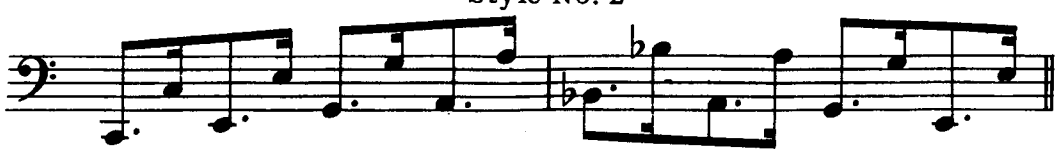
C 7th (C E G B♭)
with added 6th (A)



Style No. 1



Style No. 2

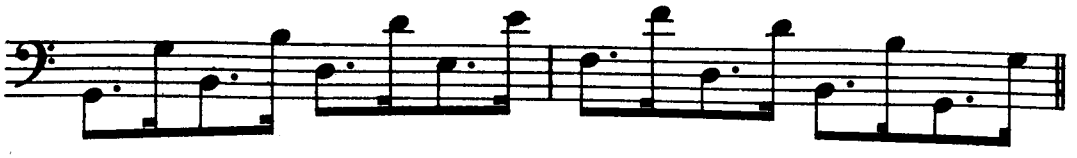


★ Note the use of chromatics for better voice progression.

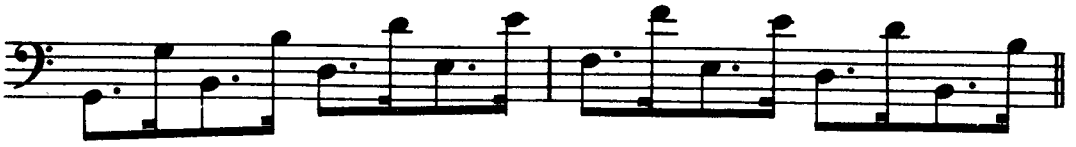
G 7th (GBDF)
with added 6th (E)

Walking Bass for two measures of G 7th

Style No. 1



Style No. 2



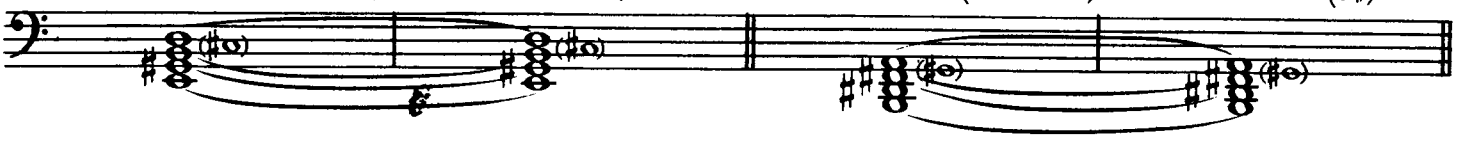
In a like manner work out the walking bass for each of the following chords.
Style No. 1 and Style No. 2

D 7th (D F ♯A C) with added 6th (B)

A 7th (AC♯EG) with added 6th (F♯)

E 7th (EG♯B D) with added 6th (C♯)

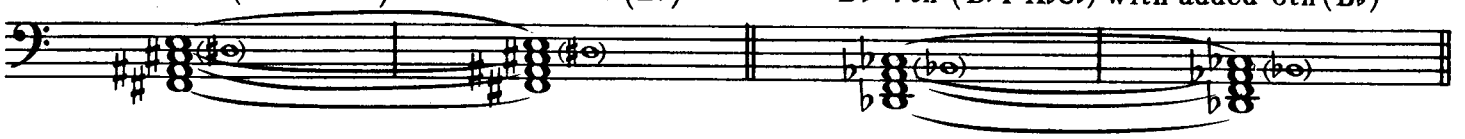
B 7th (BD♯F♯A) with added 6th (G♯)



F♯ 7th (F♯A♯C♯E) with added 6th (D♯)

G♭ 7th (G♭B♭D♭F♭) with added 6th (E♭)

D♭ 7th (D♭F A♭C♭) with added 6th (B♭)

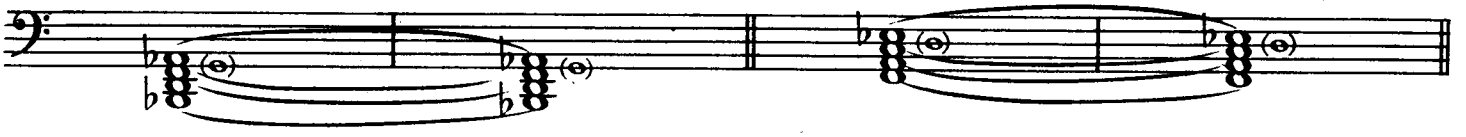


A♭ 7th (A♭CE♭G♭) with added 6th (F)

E♭ 7th (E♭G B♭ D♭) with added 6th (C)

B♭ 7th (B♭D F A♭) with added 6th (G)

F 7th (F A C E♭) with added 6th (D)



With a knowledge of chord "spelling" the skill acquired through these exercises will enable the player to use walking bass on minor, altered, augmented, and diminished chords.

Application of Walking Bass

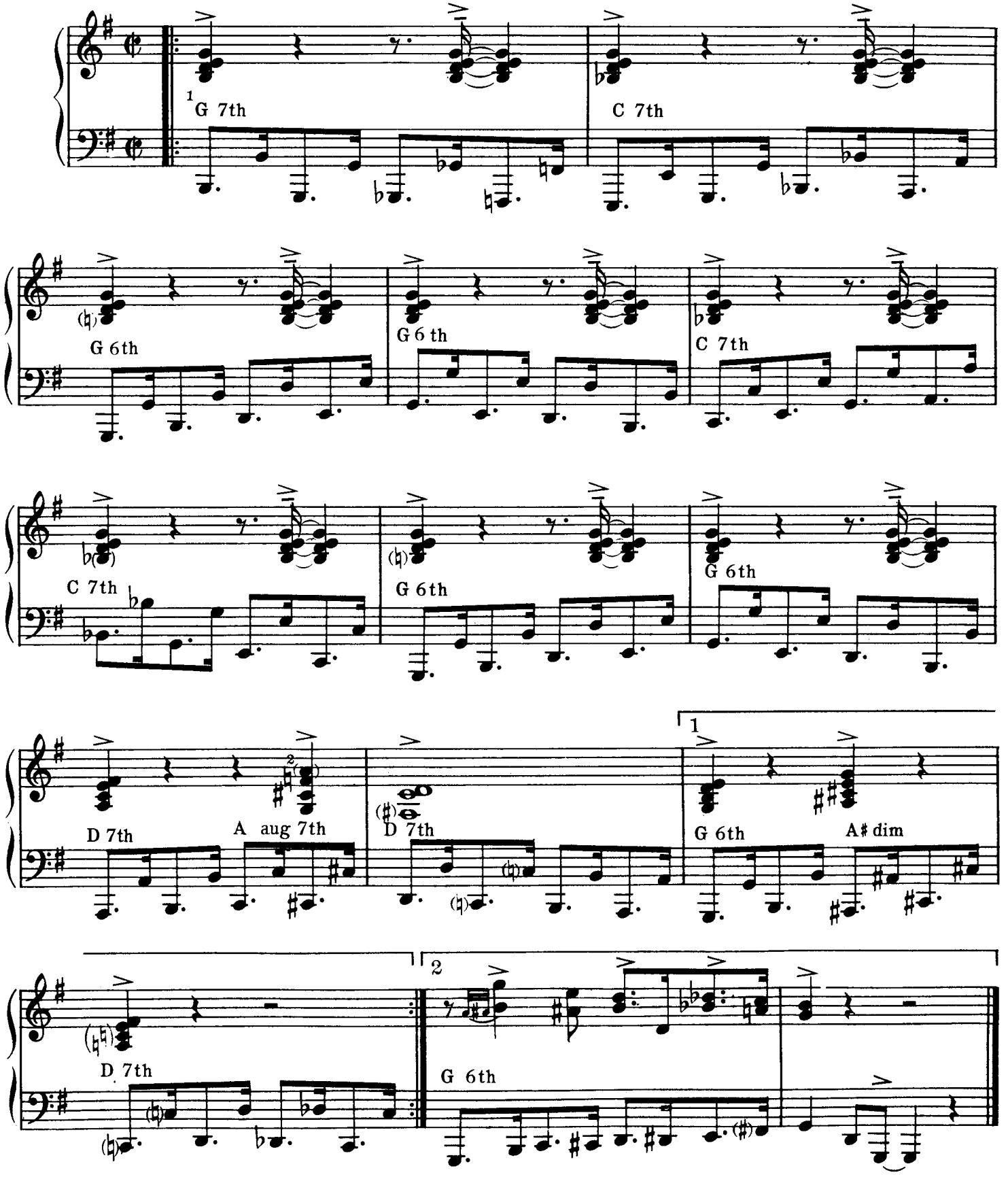
Definite rules for the application of walking bass would be impractical. This style, like boogie woogie, was developed by self taught musicians who depended entirely upon their "ears."

On the following pages are examples of applied walking bass. A perusal of these examples will reveal the object which is to weave upward and downward through the notes of the chord, using chromatics and passing tones to improve voicing. The style is very flexible and the "bass walks" may be done in many different ways. Avoid long jumps and, like those who developed the style, make the bass melody pleasing to the ear.

Application of walking bass to a twelve measure theme from the Composition,

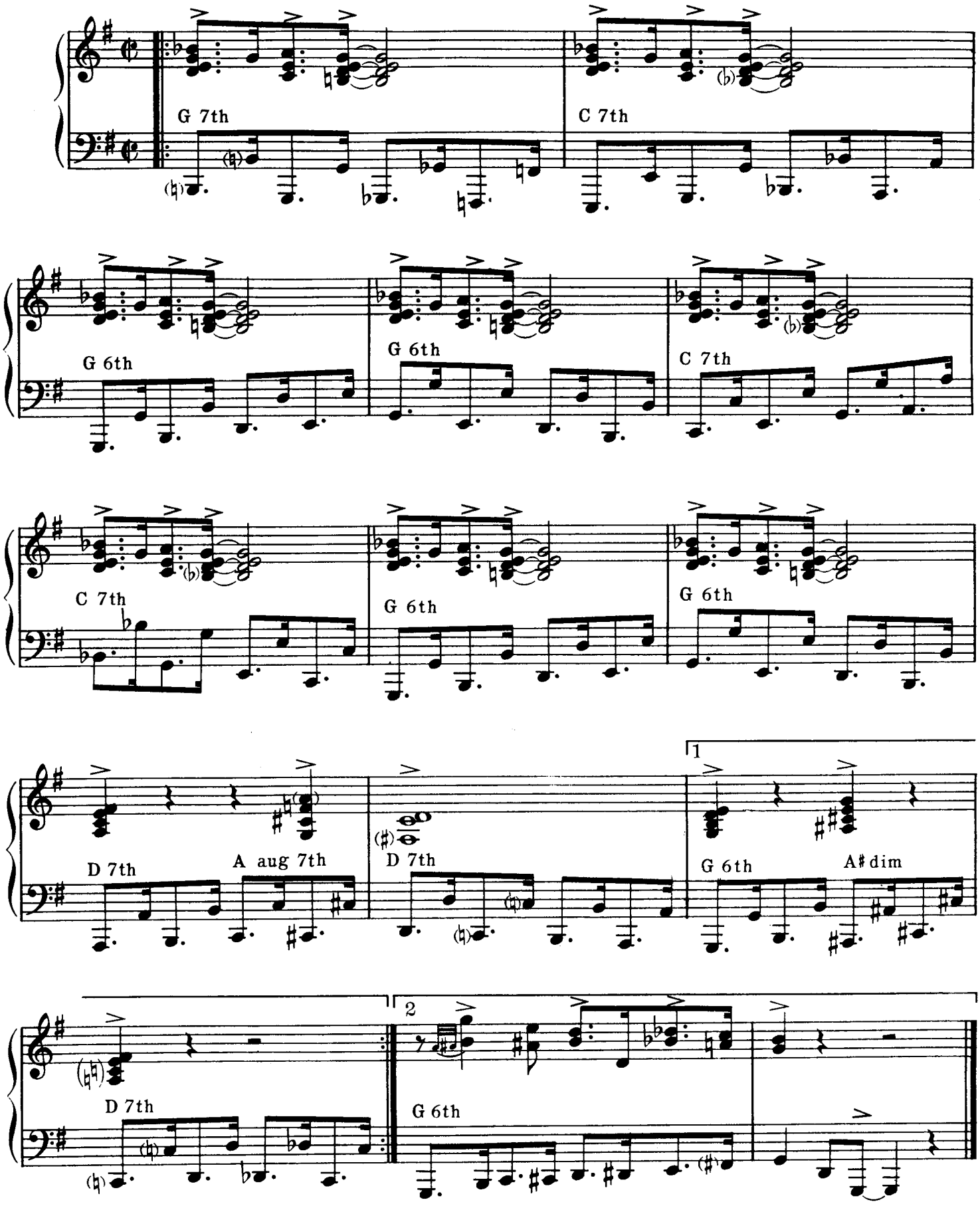
FLINGING A WHING-DING

By Sharon Pease

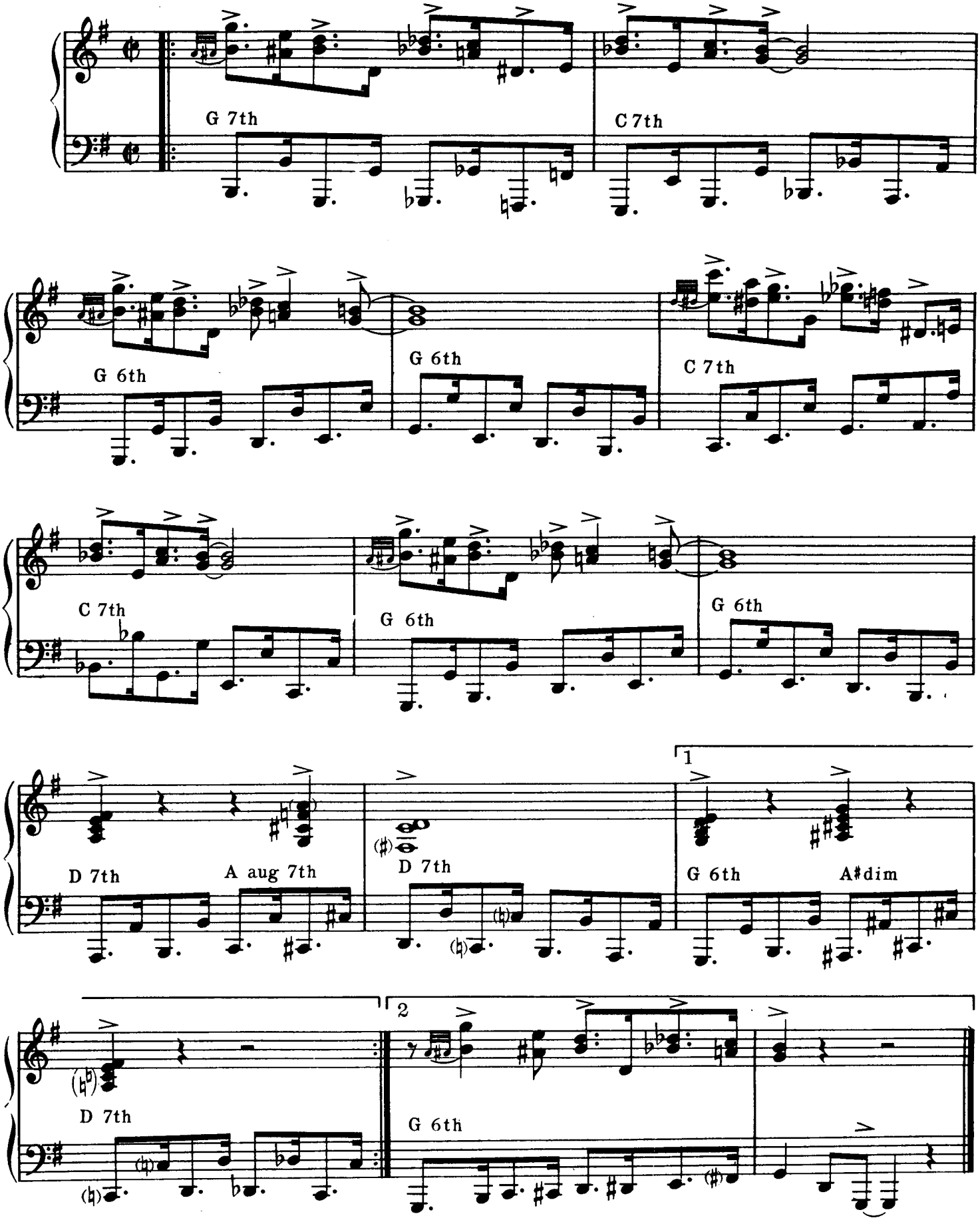


1. Symbol marking denotes the chord on which walking bass is built.
2. Players with small hands may omit top note.

Further development of the treble by use of a "lick" throughout the first eight measures.



Introducing the Dixieland "Lilt



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