dawning (redux)

as in *to dawn* (verb)...

as in the cosmic dawn...

For accordion.

Preferably played in a dark or dim setting (e.g. with the least light needed by the performer).

michael winter with bastien pouillès
(berlin, de; 2022)

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metaphor (which could be used as a program note)

This piece was written in consideration of the general metaphor of dawning. As in... *to dawn* (verb). As in... the cosmic dawn: during which primordial elements coalesced to form the first stars—and thus first light—of the universe followed by a continual cycle of renewal as elements from the death of one generation of stars fuse and give birth to the next generation of stars. The piece begins with a prelude/introduction. Patterns and motives slowly arise out of a rhythmically nebulous texture built on a four note pitch gamut. A series of interpolations/modulations follows. Patterns continually evolve into one another by a process in which measures from the current pattern are slowly replaced by measures from the successive pattern. Rhythmic and melodic repetitions serve an exploration in timbral heterogeneity by exploiting an idiosyncracy of the accordion where each note can sound in one of three ways: strictly from the left reed bank, strictly from the right bank, or both simultaneously. The piece concludes with a relative spare coda that lays bare the atomic elements and fundamental essence of the piece. The timbral exploration is reduced to just one pitch class such that listener has the possibility to hear distinct timbral combinations for extended periods of time.

notation

The piece is notated in a quasi-tabular form where each line represents one of four notes played by the right and left hand (upper and lower staves, respectively). The pitches corresponding to each line from bottom to top are: *a*, *b*, *d*, and *e* within one octave (starting from the *a* below middle *c*). The number between the staves indicates the number of 16th notes in the measure.

The notation is designed to show precisely when a finger depresses and releases a key. A semitie extending to the right of a note at the beginning of a measure indicates that the note should be held to at least the end of the measure regardless of whether the measure contains any rests. A semitie extending to the left of a note at the beginning of the successive measure indicates that the tone should continue to sound without break. Rests only apply to those notes that do not have a semitie to the right at the beginning of the measure. As such, there are several measures that contain rests, but actually have a chord that sounds throughout the measure.

tempo

The piece should be played at a comfortably fast tempo (around 120 to 150 beats per minute for an 8th note). The first section of the piece up until measure 155 is a sort of prelude/introduction where rhythms can be interpreted relatively freely at a slower tempo.

dynamics

Throughout the piece, the performer executes a long crescendo until the coda / final section of the piece. The introduction should start as soft as possible such that the sound arises out of the electronic accompaniment. By measure 155, the accordion should be clearly heard but still at a low dynamic relative to the peak dynamic of the instrument. The crescendo should then continue to the final measure of the piece prior to the coda, at which point, the accordion should be sounding as loud as possible.

registration and amplification for distinction between the left hand and right hand

The fullest registers should be selected for both keyboards (three voices: bassoon, flute, piccolo). Each reed bank should be amplified individually and panned to the corresponding left and right speaker in a stereo field. Though somewhat artificial, the amplification serves to extenuate a separation between the two hands and corresponding reed banks.

coda

The ending of the piece is an extended coda exploring timbral possibilities of a low *e*. For example, on a classical accordion, with two button keyboards, the right hand should comfortably be able to play three octaves of an *e* from the lowest *e* and the left hand should be able to play a low *e* in at least two octaves.

The notated coda provided at the end of the score should serve as a template, but variations can be explored. There are two rhythmic motives which are subsets and permutations of the low *e*: a five note pattern and a two note pattern, each followed by a sustained note or chord. The five note pattern should occur more frequently than the two note pattern. Notes in they rhythmic motive should be significantly slurred or held until the sustained note / chord. If a note in the rhythmic motive matches a note in the following chord, the tone can be held from the rhythmic motive so long as at least one tone from the sustained chord is (re-)articulated after the rhythmic motive. If it is a single sustained note, then it must be (re-)articulated.

During the sustains, the listener should hear as many distinct timbres as possible. With three octaves in the right hand and two octaves in the left, there are $5^2 - 1 = 31$ timbres / key combinations. All combinations up to three note are provided below, but any of the 31 are possible. Occasionally, a sustain should last for an extended period of time relative to other sustains (e.g., on the order of 15 to 30 seconds for longer sustains compared to 3 to 10 seconds for shorter sustains). There should be at least 5 longer sustains, during which, each of the individual 5 notes (i.e., the timbre that results from only one key being depressed) sound for an extended period of time. The coda should last at least 5 minutes ending abruptly without a sustain on the last note / chord.

electronic accompaniment

The electronic accompaniment consists of bandpass filtered brown noise with random impulses (clicks). The electronics should start to sound before the performance and could sound as the audience is entering the performance space. The electronics should slowly and subtly fade out a few minutes after measure 155 once the accordion has reached a point in the crescendo that it is a relatively full sound. Below is code written in SuperCollider that generates the accompaniment.

```
{Out.ar([0, 1], Mix.ar(BPF.ar(BrownNoise.ar(0.15), 28.midicps, 0.5)) + Dust.ar(50, 0.035))}.play
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genesis of the piece

The original concept of the piece as a whole was in the form of a performance-installation with a visual component consisting of a large ferrocell (visually representing an artificial star). A ferrocell consists of a mixture of ferrofluid with some kind of penetrant such as mineral oil bound between plexiglass or glass panes. The ferrofluid mixture between the two plates should be a very thin (on the order of nanometers). When a magnet is applied to the panes, the fluid reflects light in relationship to the magnetic field.

For the premiere performance, a prototype of the visual component of the installation was created by tiling several smaller ferrocells (each approximately 30 by 30 centimeters). A set of magnets were rotated mechanically by dc motors. The cells were illuminated by spotlights on the installation.

To create an effective ferrocell on a large scale, several challenges must be overcome. Primarily, the area behind the ferrocell must be extremely black in order to provide enough contrast to see the light refraction from the light source. Sufficient contrast in the prototype was not achieved as the motors were mounted directly behind the ferrocell on a back plate that reflected too much light from the light source. A solution would be an extremely light absorbing black paint or mounting the motors in such a way that the depth of the box has an extent that any light shining from within or onto the installation would fade to blackness and not be reflected back to the viewer in any way. Or simply by making a smaller version that is then projected.

As it was always intended that the accordion piece could also be played without the visual accompaniment, we revised the title from *dawning* to *dawning (redux)* to indicate that the accordion piece, when played without the visual installation, is a reduced form of a larger installation-performance. In the future, we aim to create a large-scale performance-installation of the piece that overcomes the shortcomings of the original prototype of the visual installation by using stronger magnets, providing more contrast for the ferrocells, and potentially accompanying or replacing the larger ferrocell with several smaller ferrocells that also have mechanized spinning magnets. In the format, we envision that the audience can walk through the space and closely observe the individual ferrocells. Occasionally, the exhibition would be intervened by the music.

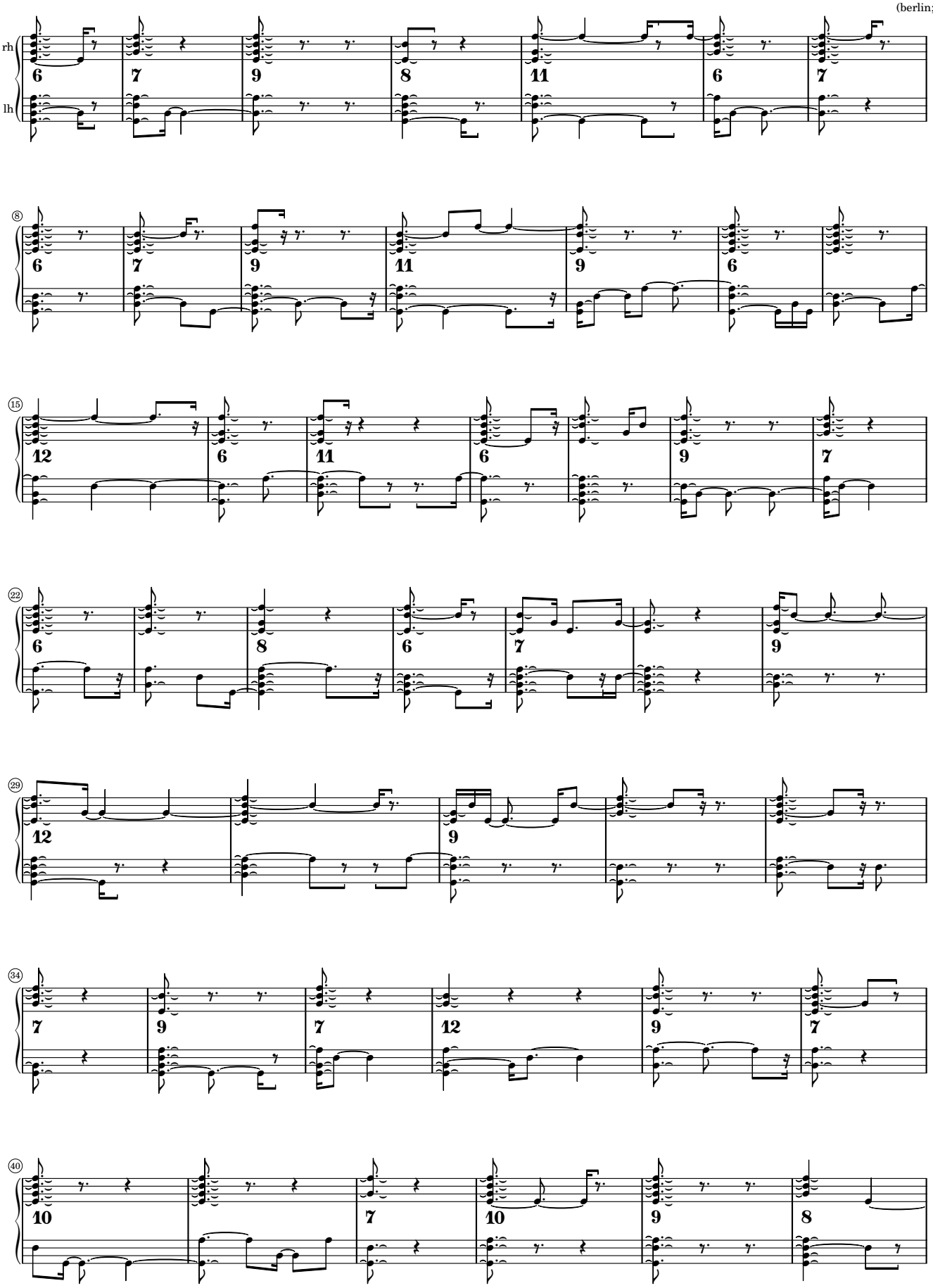
acknowledgements

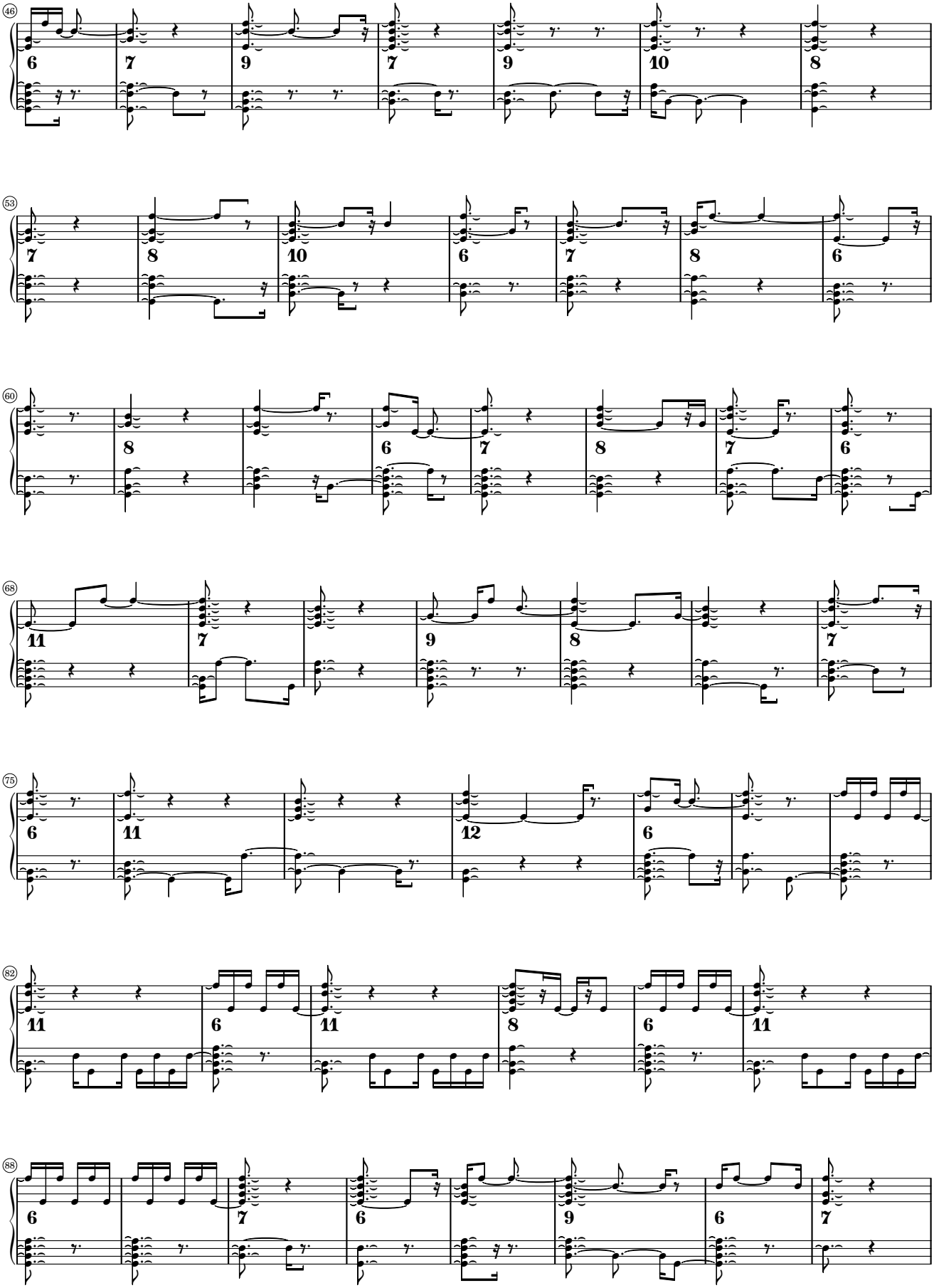
Bastien Pouillès and Lucie Nezri were essential to the completion of the piece. The coda was co-composed with Bastien and the score was finalized with Lucie's generous help.

version generated: 2023.01.03

dawning (redux)

michael winter with bastien pouillès
(berlin; 2022)

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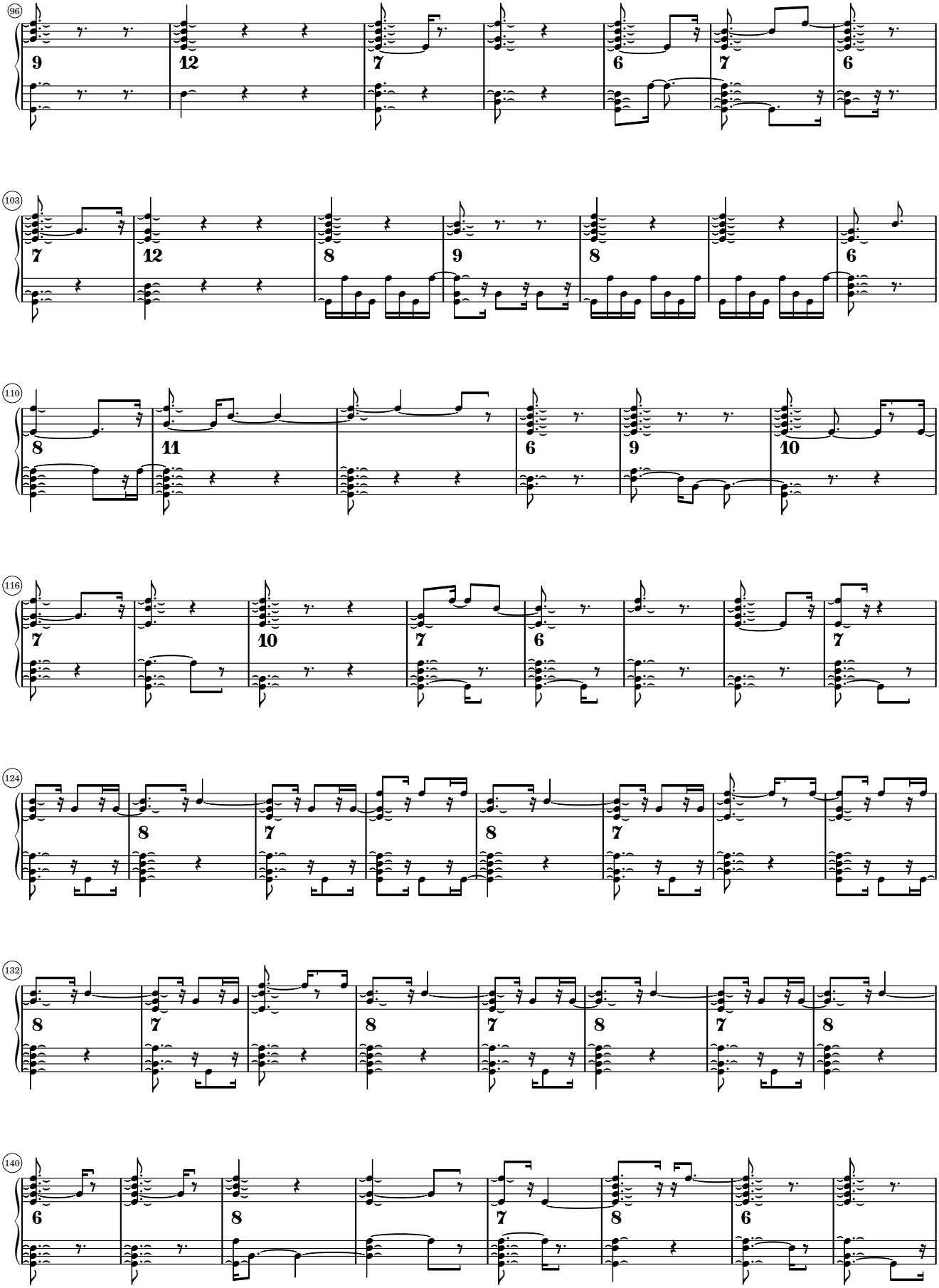
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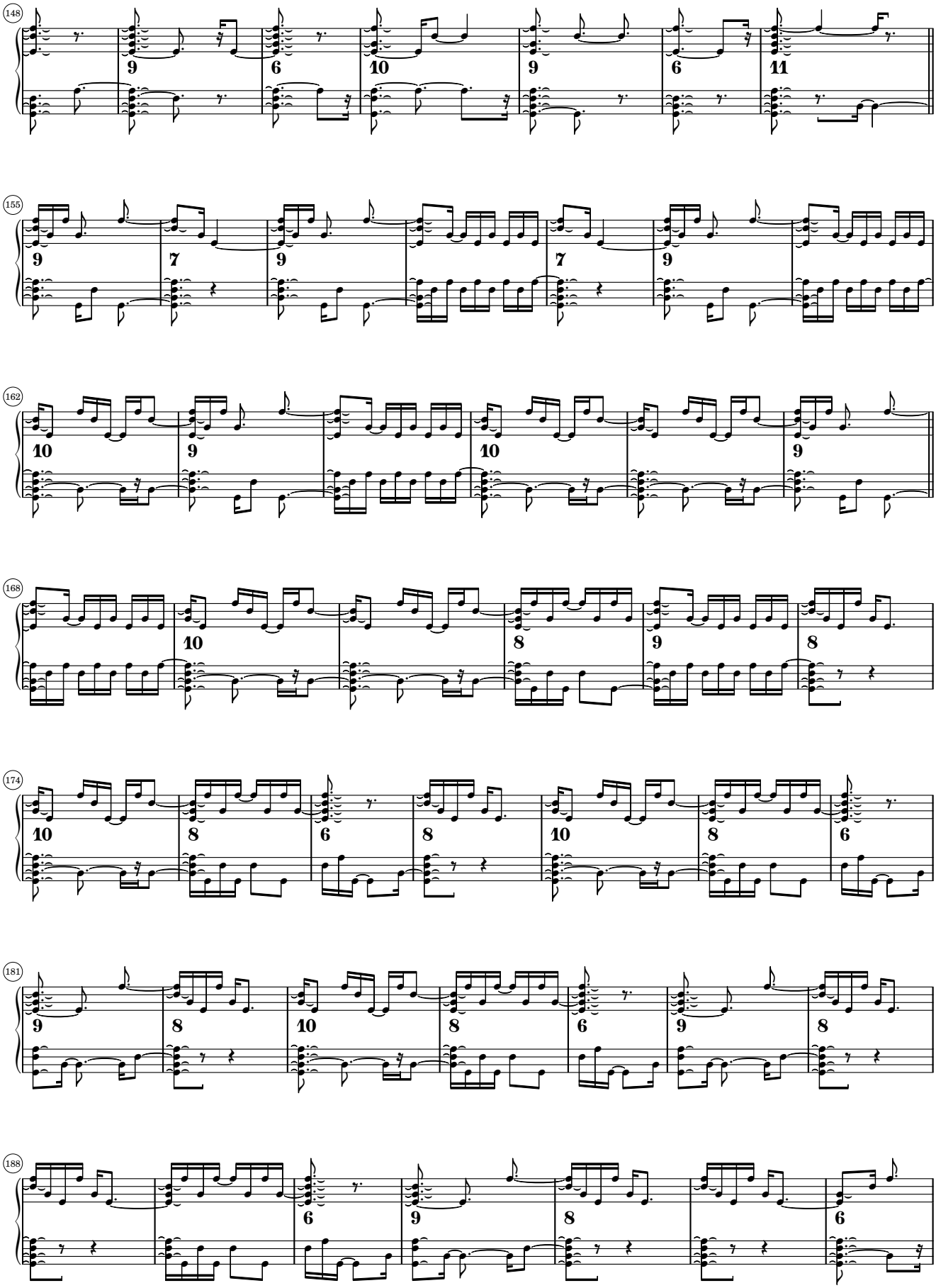
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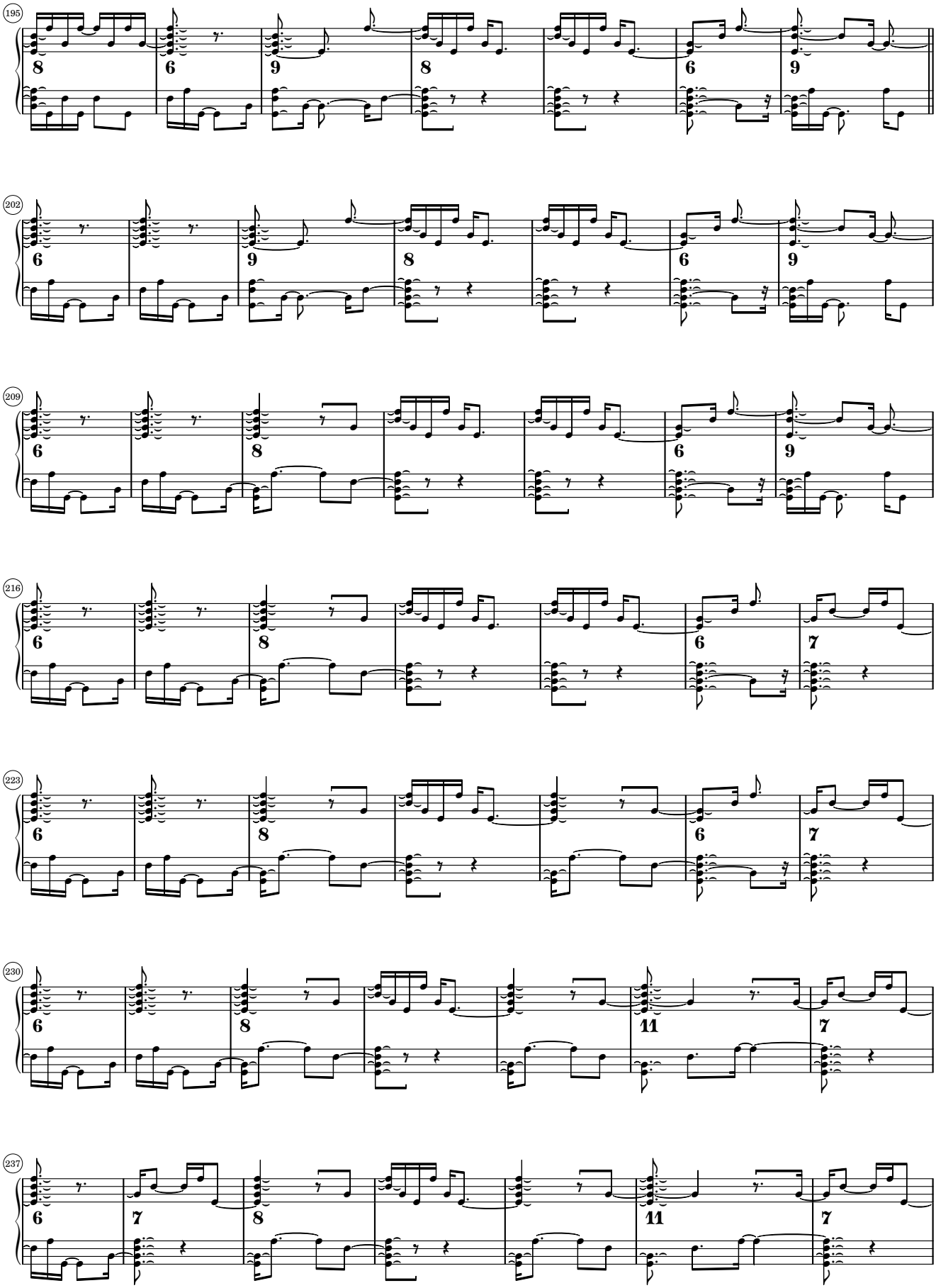
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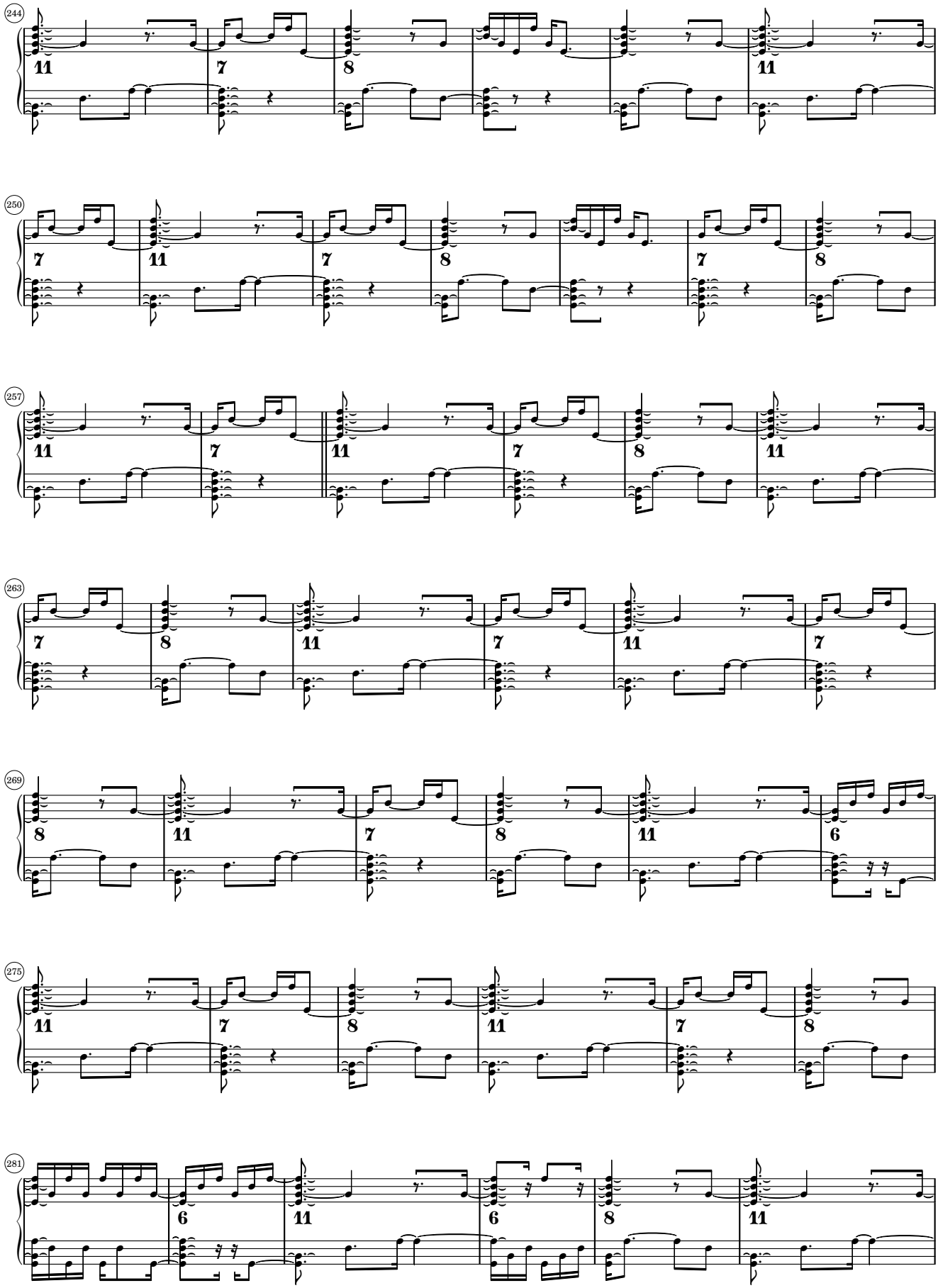
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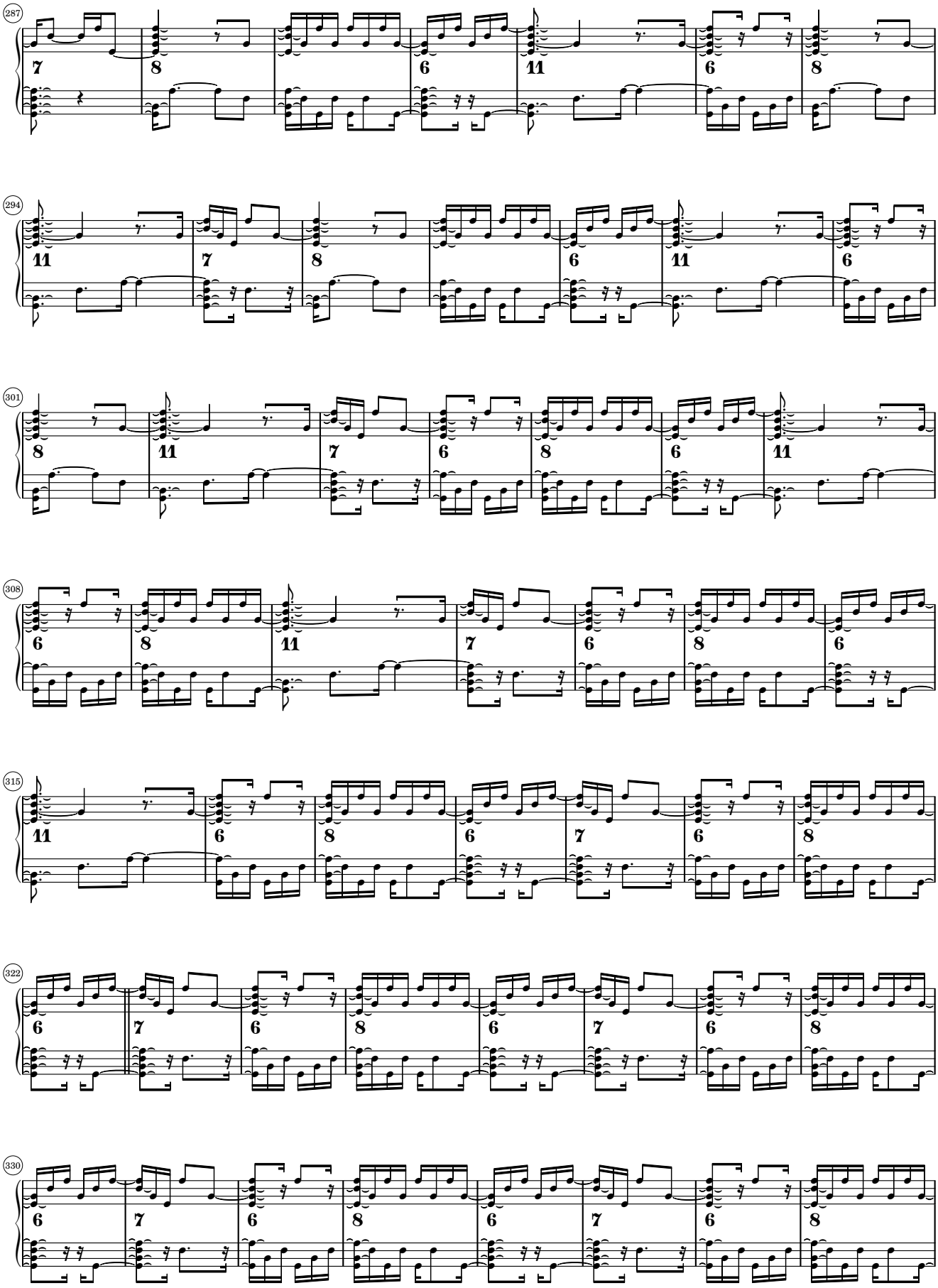
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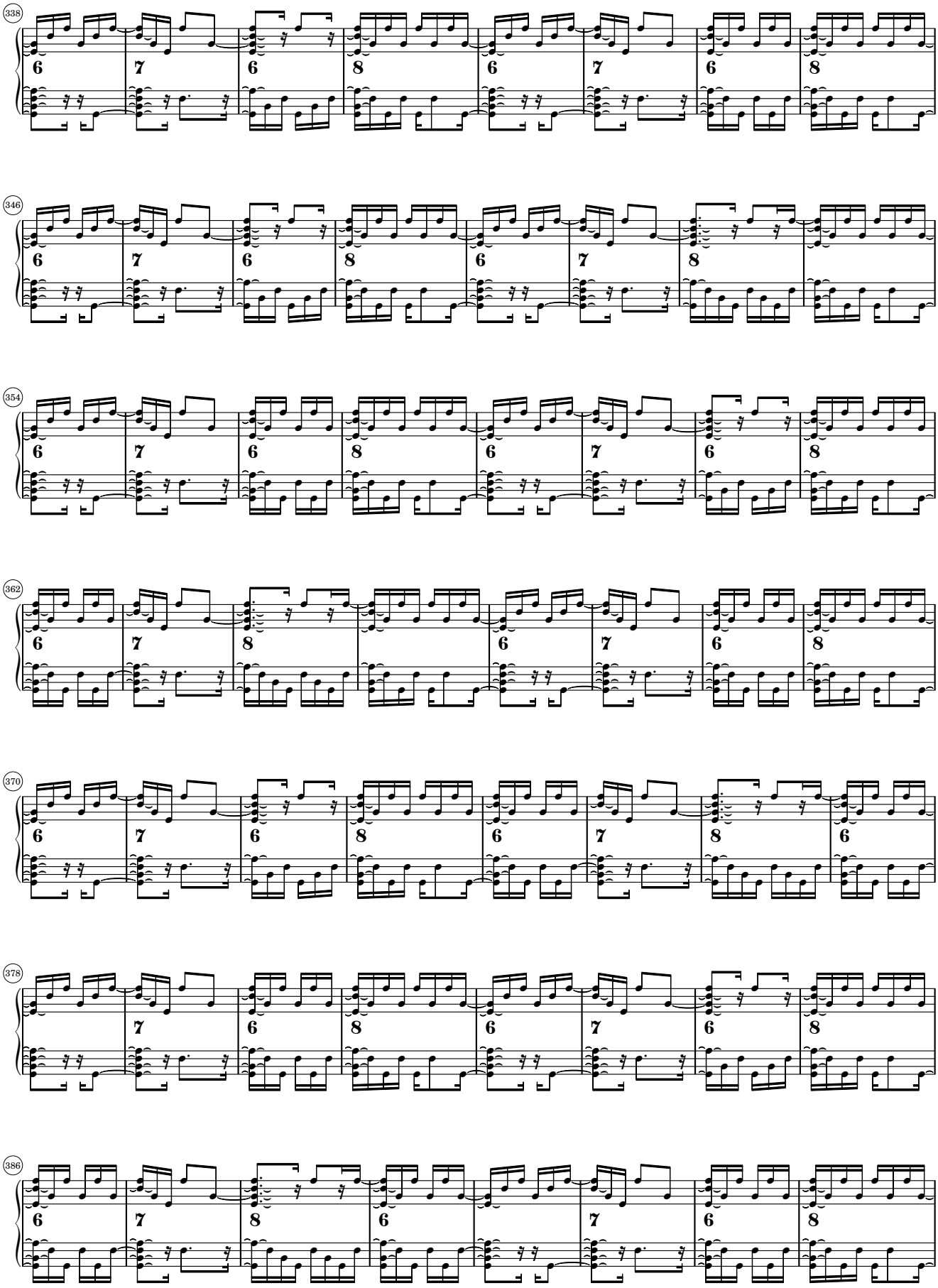
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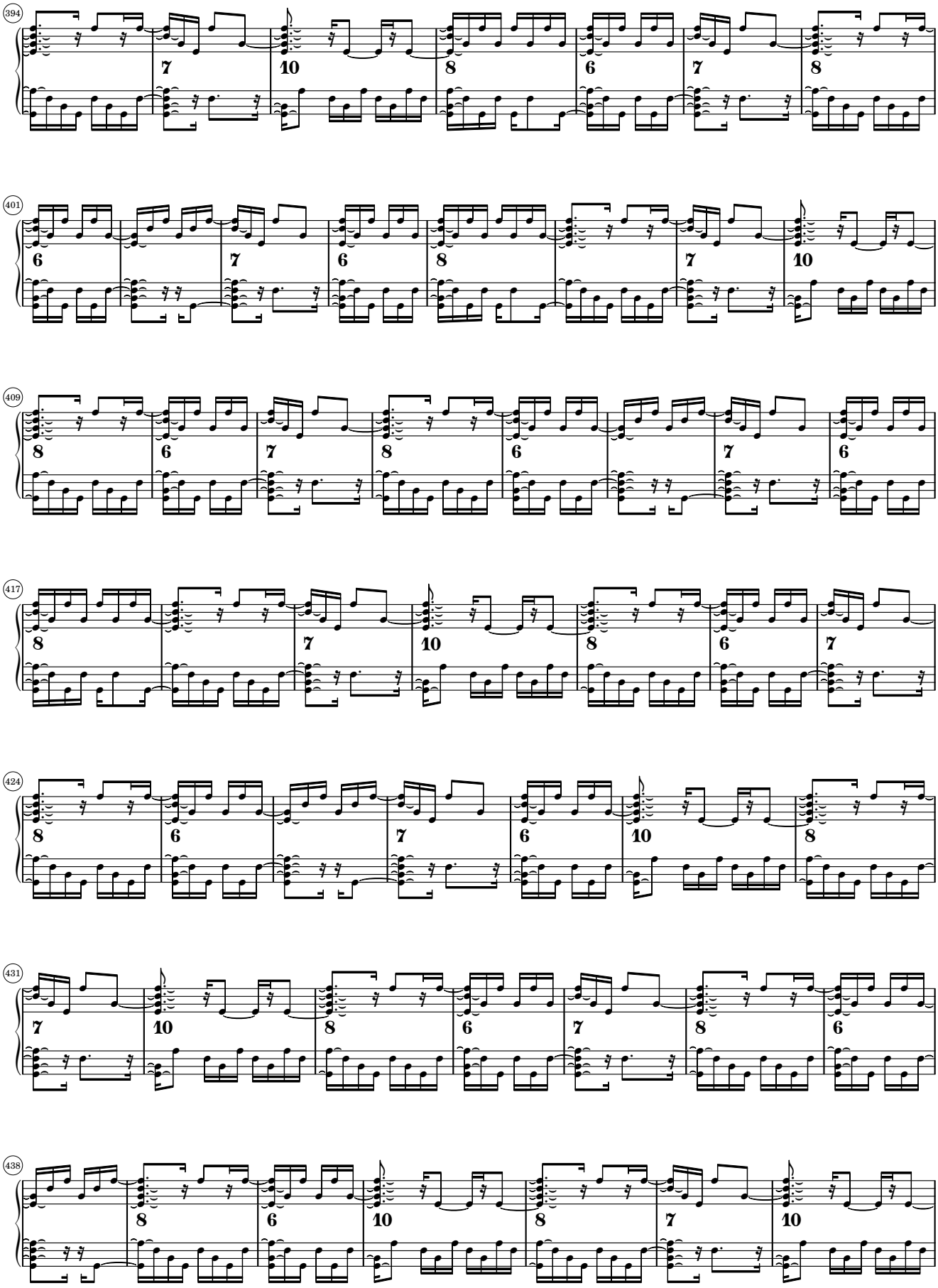
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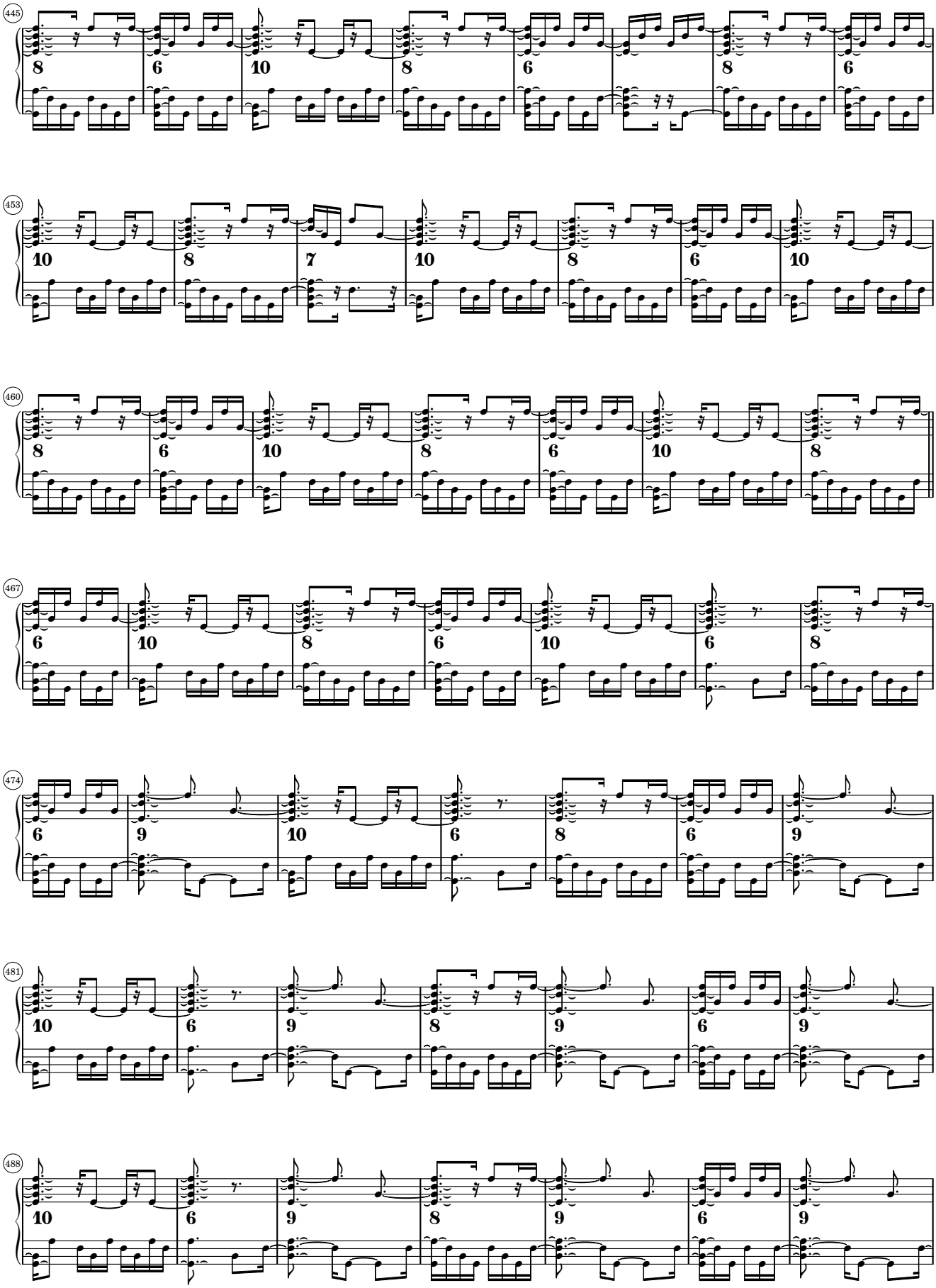
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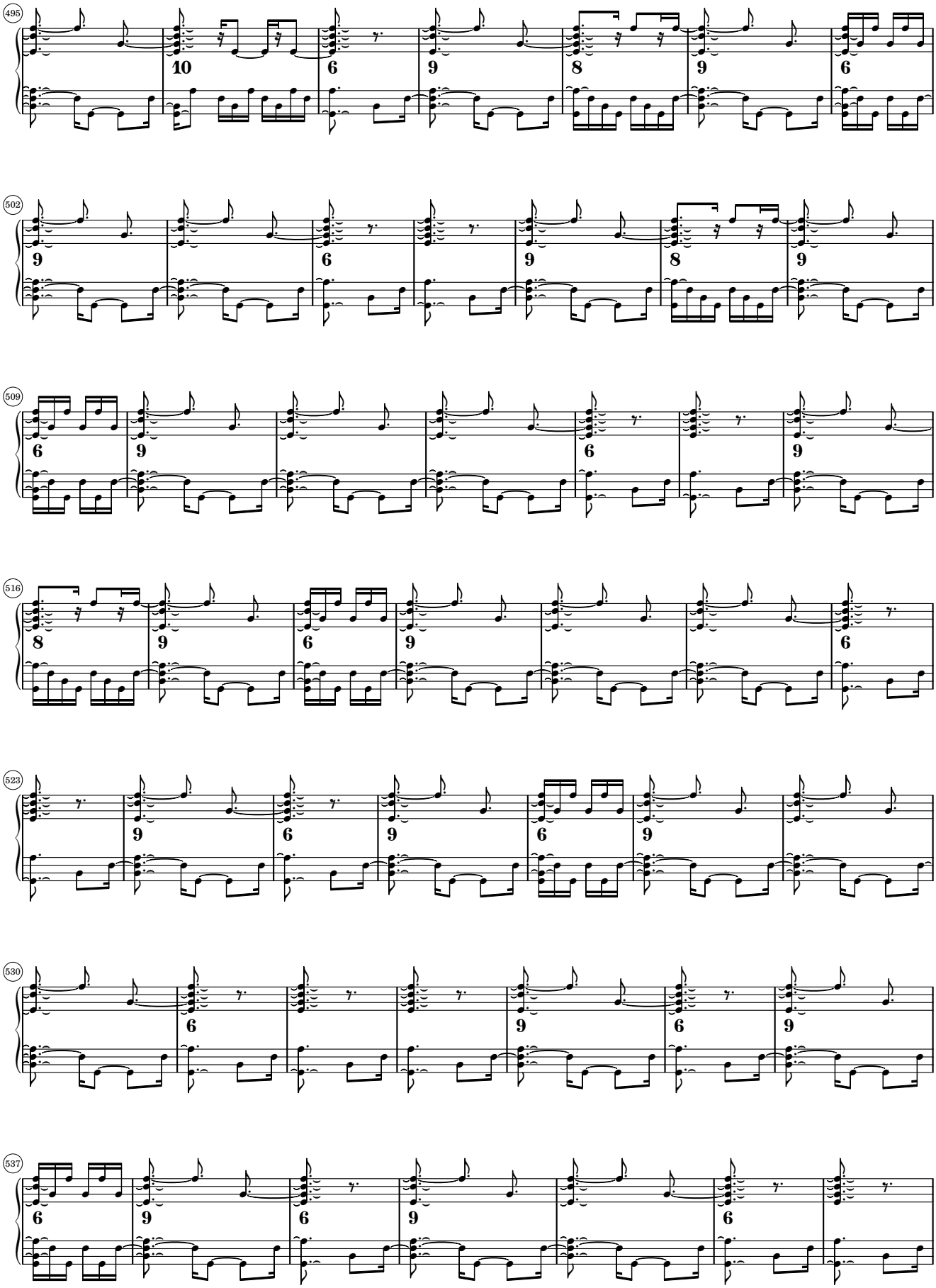
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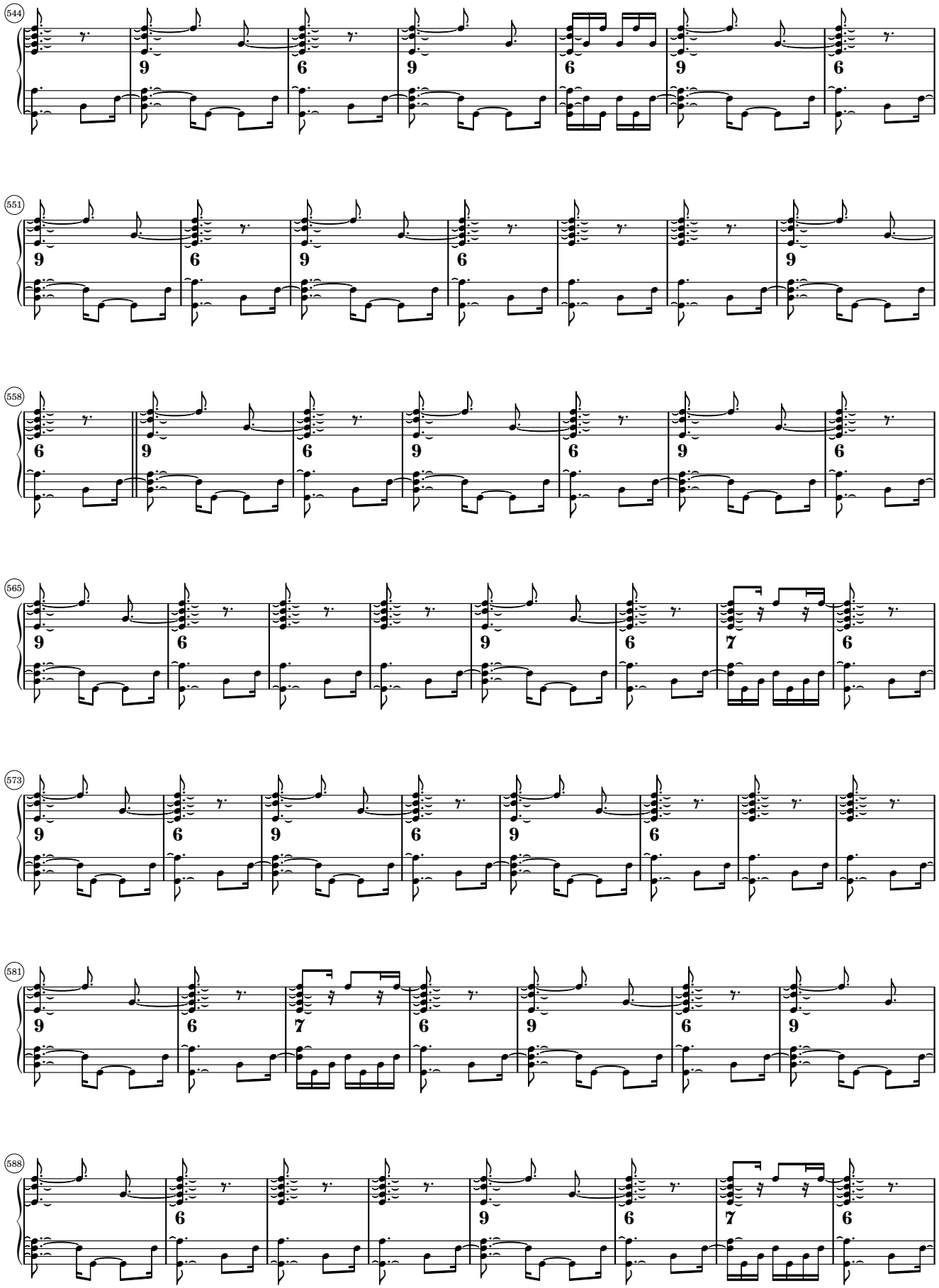
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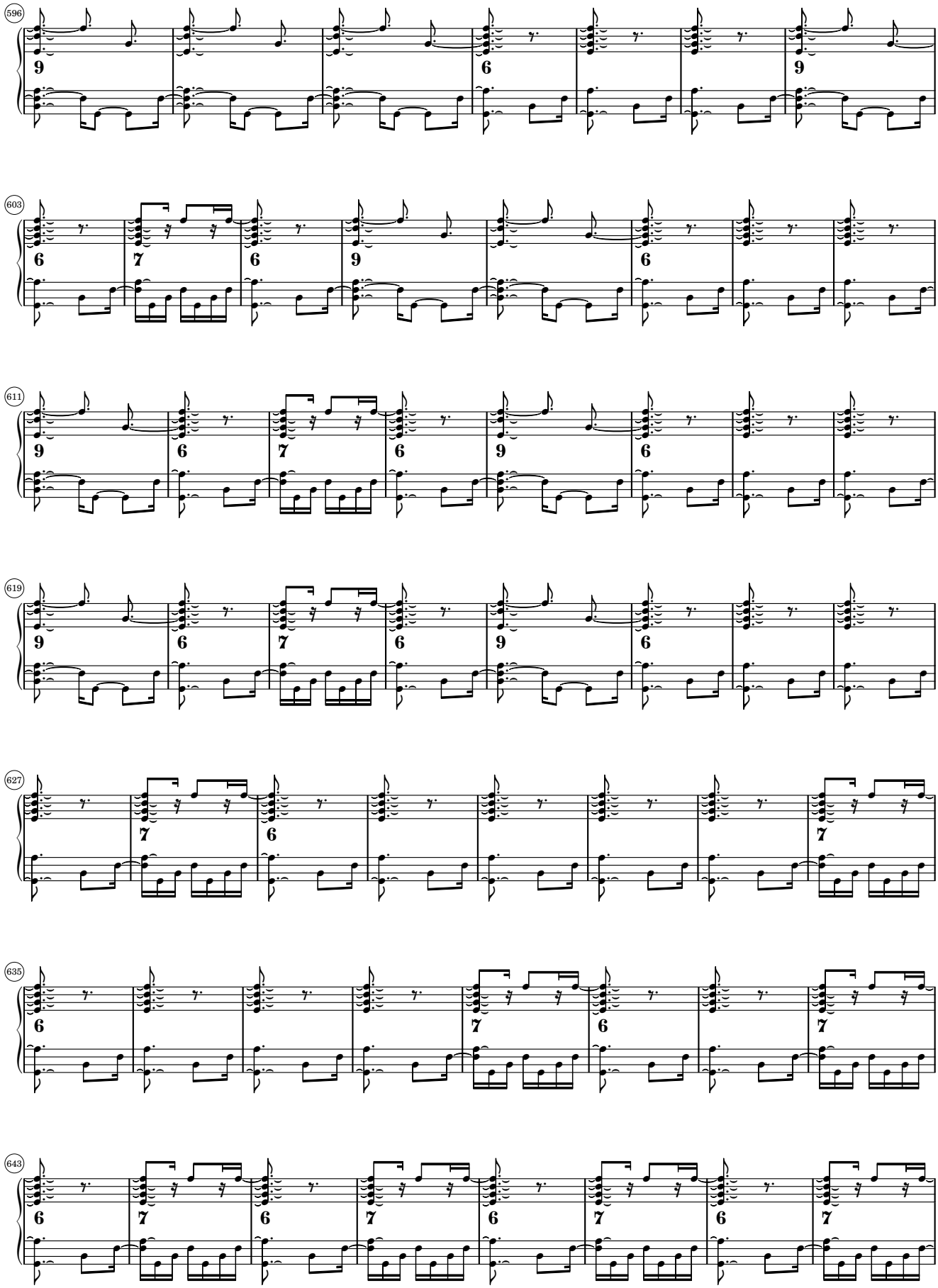
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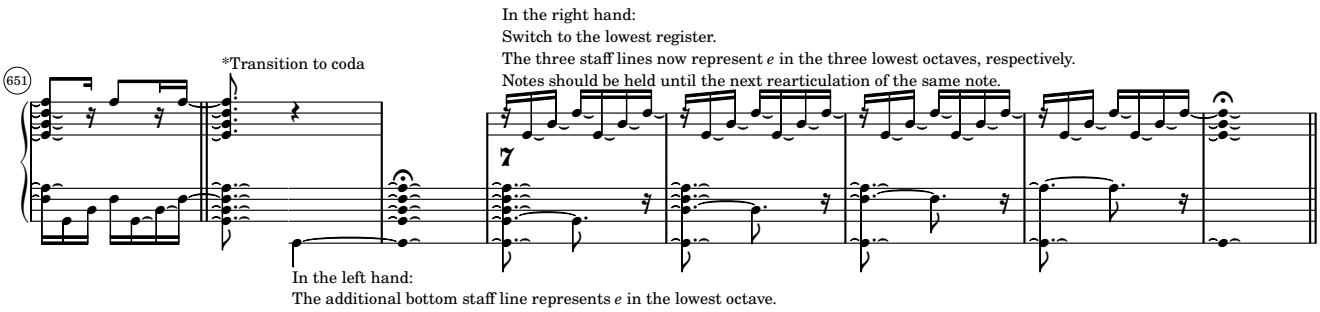
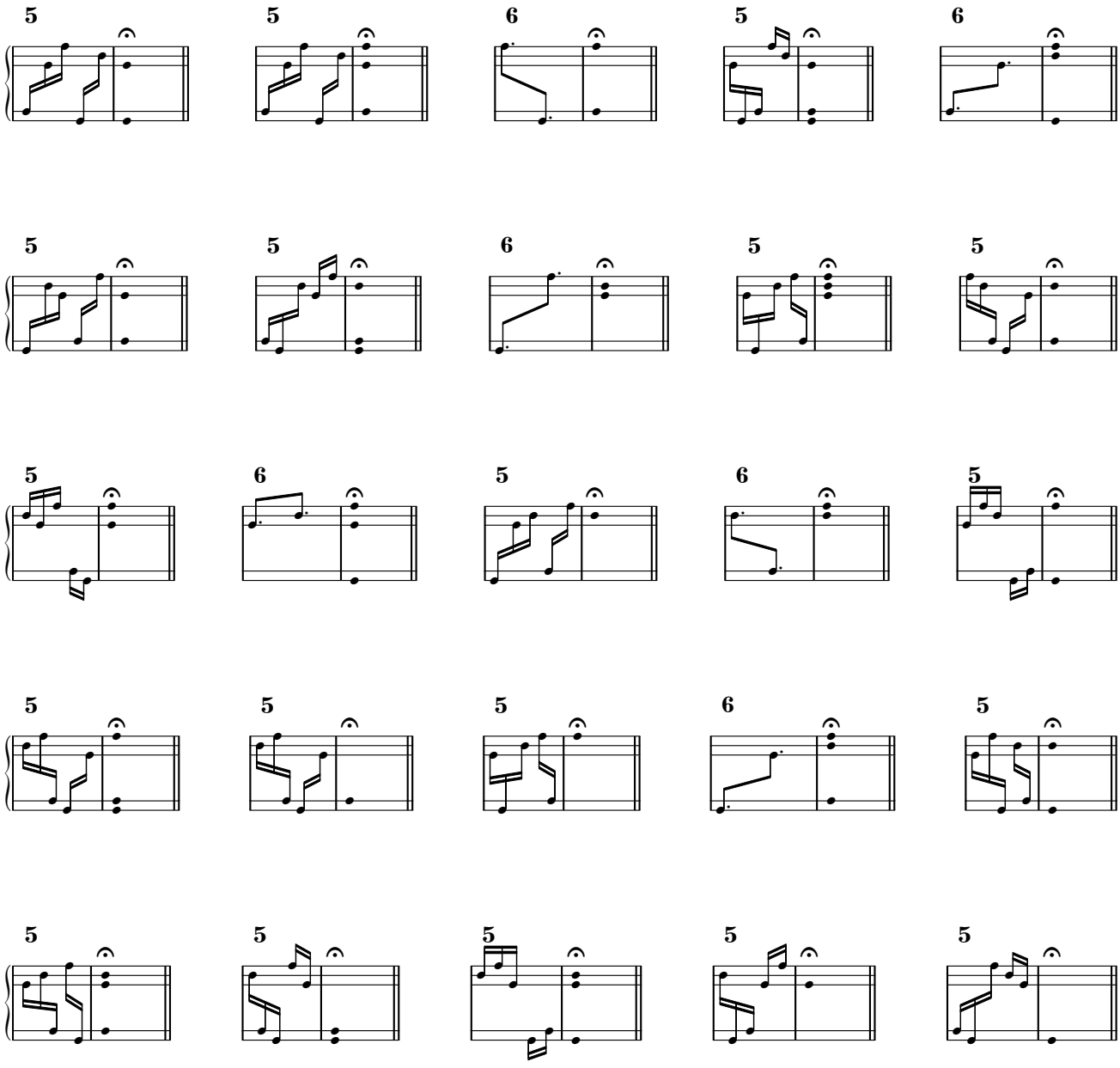
example coda
(please refer to the detailed instructions provided at the beginning of the score)