GEORG MUFFAT

Passacaglia from Sonata No. 5
"Armonico Tributo" (1682)
for Strings & Continuo

Transcribed & Edited by Alan Bonds

Georg Muffat (1645-1704)

Georg Muffat was born at the very end of the turbulent and destructive 30 Years War. He was a member of the school of composers based in the myriad of kingdoms in South Germany/Austria who were eagerly learning from the French style of Lully and the new Italian style of Corelli. Muffat was a student of Lully's in Paris for six years under whom he mastered the French courtly suite.

He then became organist at Strasbourg Cathedral. He then became music director for the Bishop of Salzburg during which time he paid long visits to Vienna and Rome and fell under the spell of Corelli.

Later at Passau he published the first of his Concerti Grossi, commencing with his *Armonico tributo* (1682) of which this Passacaglia was the last movement of his 5th *Sonate di camera*.

The *Armonico tributo* Sonatas da Camera

The sonatas are in 5 part texture, favoured by Lully and later Albinoni. In effect they are trio sonatas with the two viola parts comprising a continuo realization. In the Preface, Muffat suggest they can be played one to a part or by full orchestra (*concert grosso durchaus*). He then goes on to suggest they could be played by a concertino group and a tutti group, clearly marking S and T for solo and tutti sections typical of the Concert Grosso.

In his excellent and exhaustive study (The Baroque Concerto, Faber 1961) A.J.B. Hutchings summarizes the Preface to Muffat's *Florilegium* publication (1695):

'While in Rome I conceived the idea of studying the Italian style of organ and clavecin playing under Pasquini. I heard with wonder some of A. Corelli's concertos splendidly performed by a large ensemble. . . Noticinf the rich variety of sounds with which his sort of work is filled I set to imitating it, and am beholden to Corelli himself for several useful observations on the way to obtain the right effects, and for kindly giving my works his approval. I was the first, after my return from France, to bring the style of Lully's ballets to Germany, and now after my return from Italy I bring these first essays in a new texture. . . '

Hutchings then asks the question: 'Why did he labour in four languages to give examples of the size and constitution of bands which *could* play his concertos?' He translates Muffat as saying: 'If you have a great number of players you may add several clavecins, theorbos, harps, regals or similar instruments. . . You should use the three best players in the trio or concertino and limit their accompaniment to a single harpsichord or theorbo.'

He goes on to say that 'the ensemble cannot possibly sound majestic without a double bass, and that the trio of double reeds, two oboes and a bassoon, may in some movements replace or echo the string concertino, especially in airs and galanteries.

Clearly these Sonata/Concertos are very varied and multi-purposed, representing the fusion of the French dance and the newly emerging Italian concerto.

The Passacaglia

The terms Chaconne and Passacaglia were used synomimusly and indiscrimately in the 17th & 18th centuries. They describe a 'kind of continuous set of variations, in a moderately slow triple time with a slow harmonic rhythm, changing generally with the measure.' (Apel, Harvard Dictionary)

In this case the characteristic rhythm heard throughout (the dotted rhythm commencing on the agogic 2nd beat and overlapping to the 1st beat of the next measure) suggests the chaconne and bears a distinct similarity to Bach's later monumental Chaconne from the D minor Partita for solo violin. The rhythm bears little similarity to Bach's C minor organ passacaglia, which commences on the upbeat. Both however overlap the measure to produce the continuos variations.

This edition

My version is based on the original ms, now readily available on ISMLP, and the version by Marion Bolognani (Rome, 2011) also available on ISMLP. The original block-printed edition is full of errors and inconsistencies typical of music publishing of the time. Bolognani has corrected many of them but many remain.

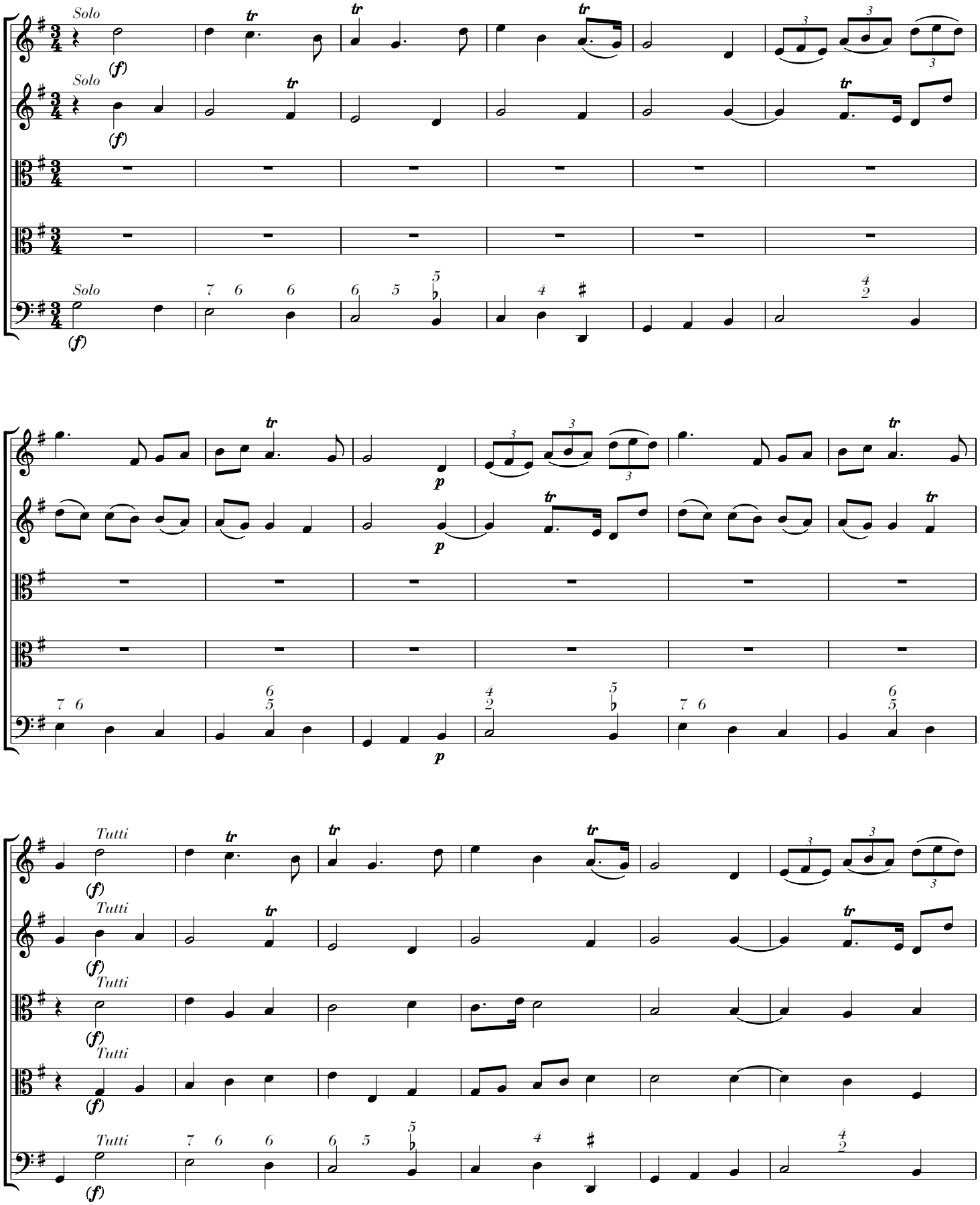
I have chosen to 'modernize' the notation to 3/4 for players uncomfortable with 3/2.

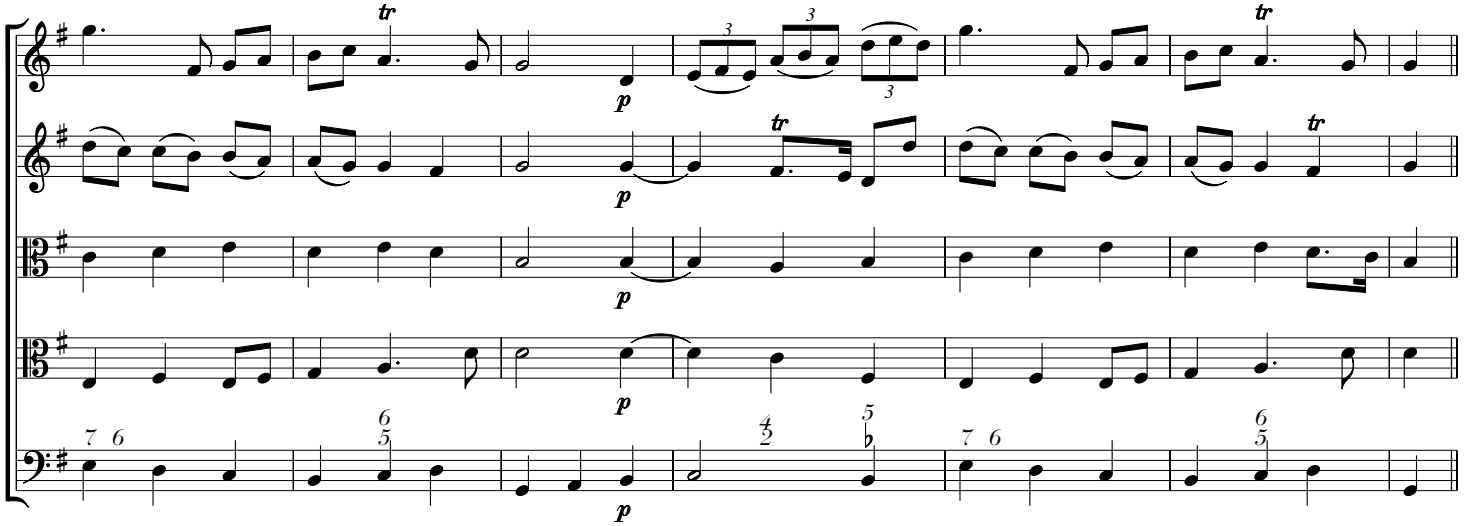
The figured bass is often deficient and my rough-and-ready realization is very basic.

Alan Bonds
Perth, Western Australia, 2016
abonds@swiftdsl.com.au

Passacaglia

1. Grave

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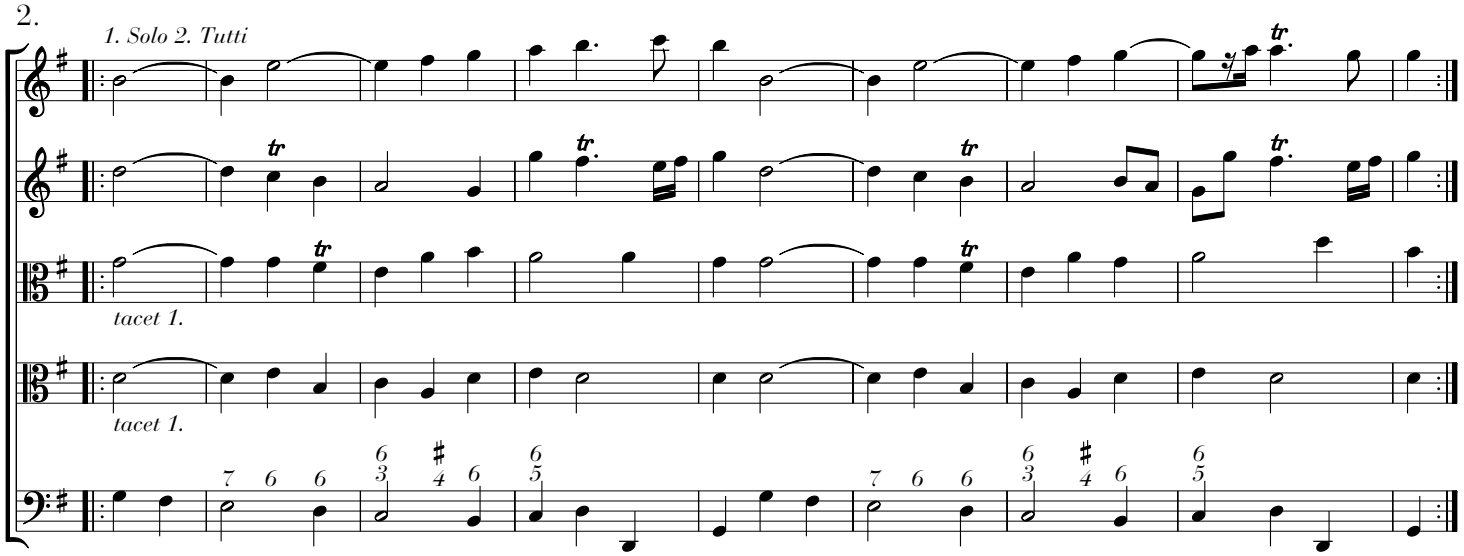
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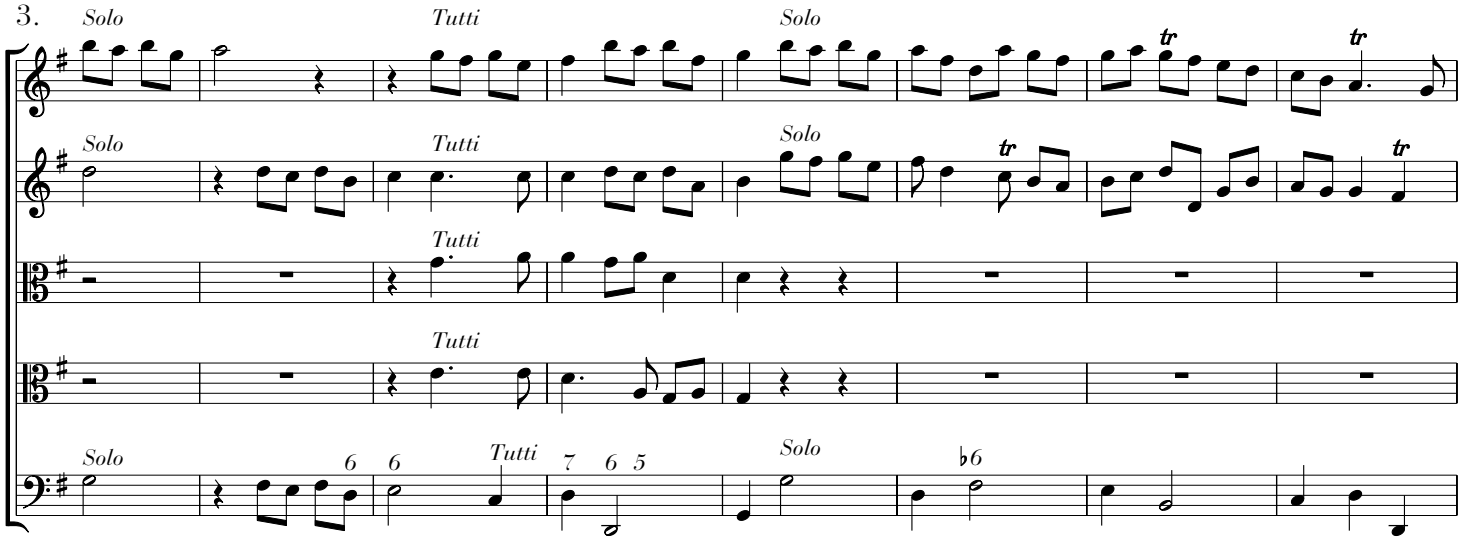
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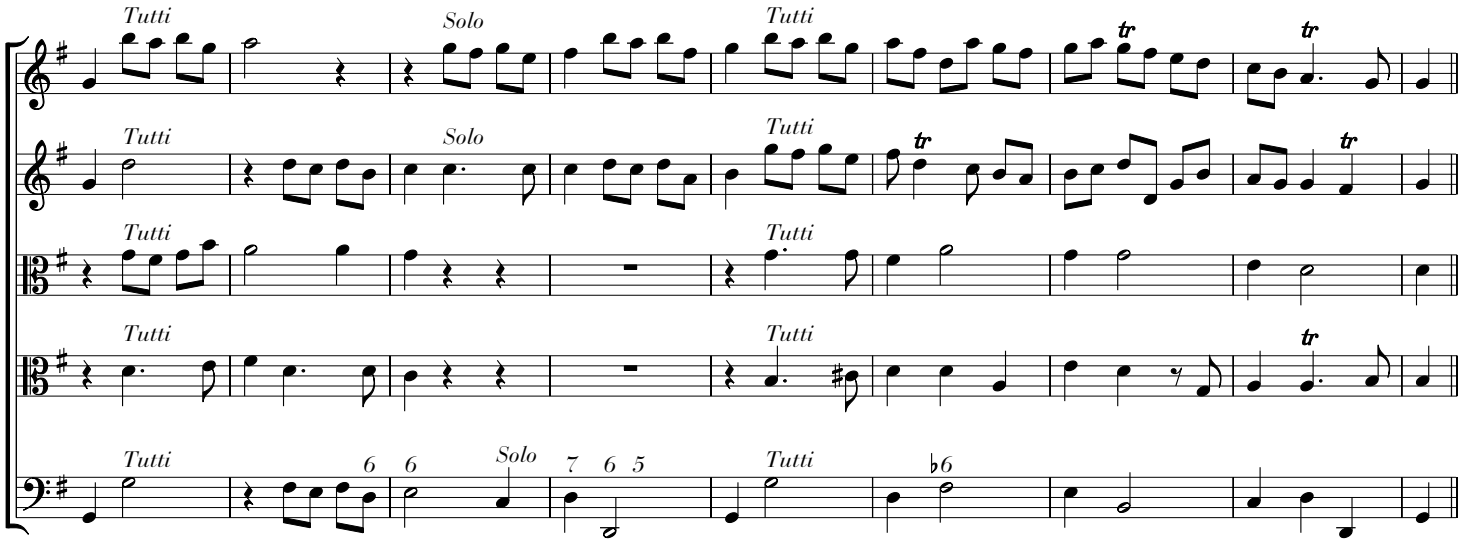
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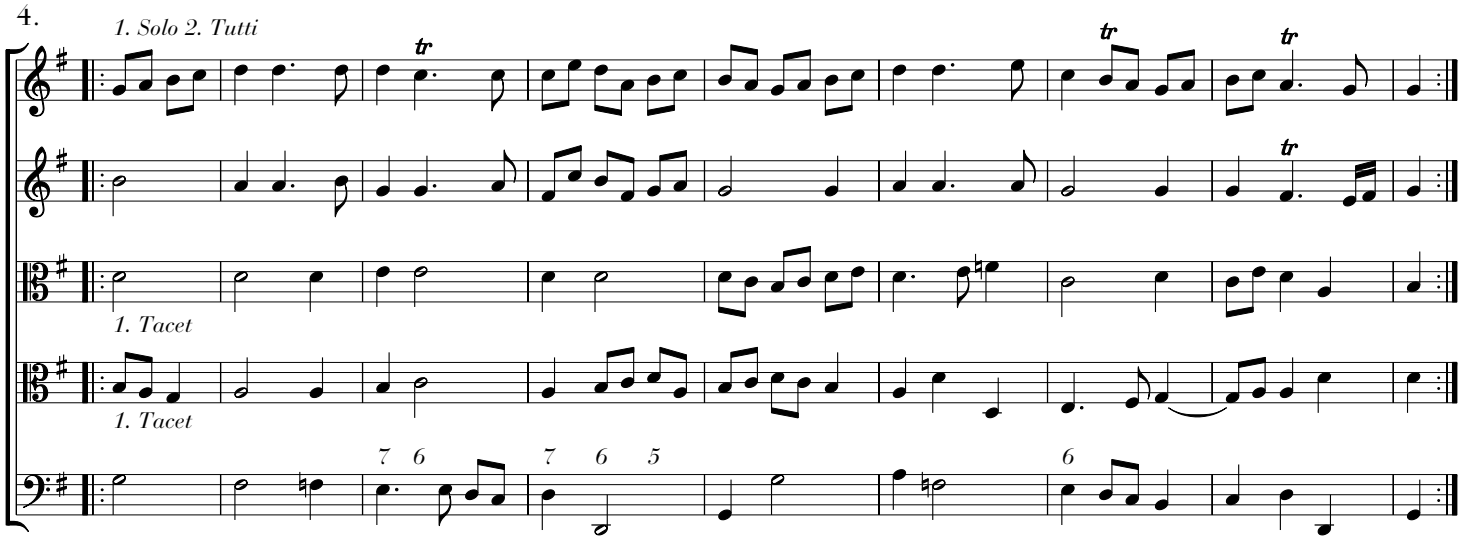
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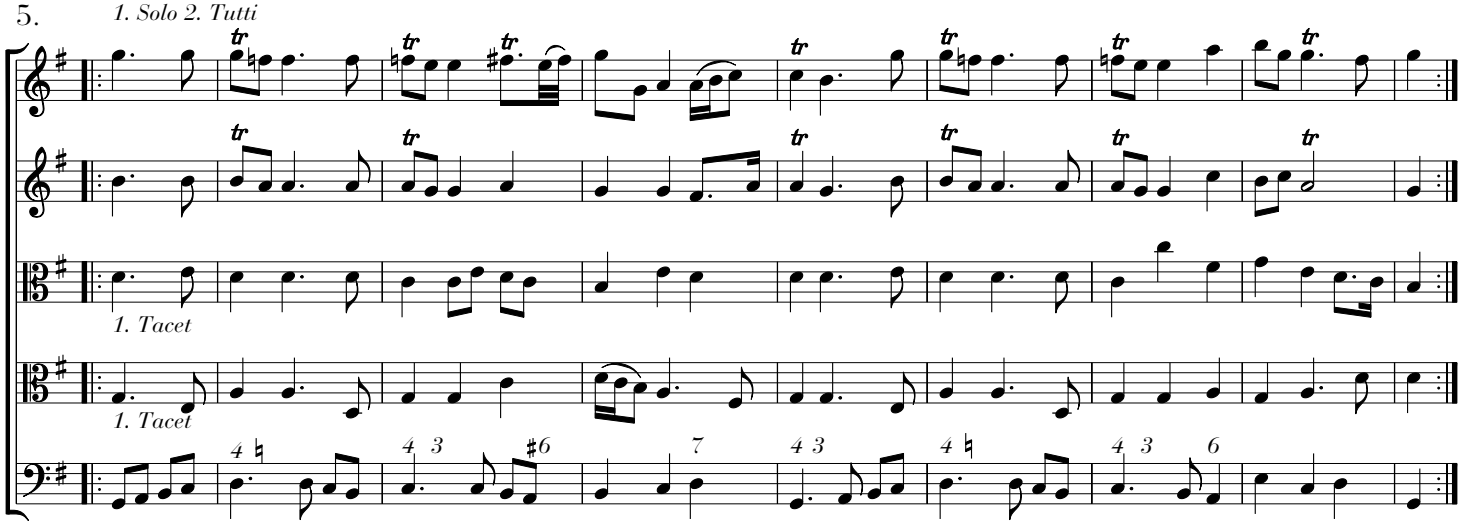
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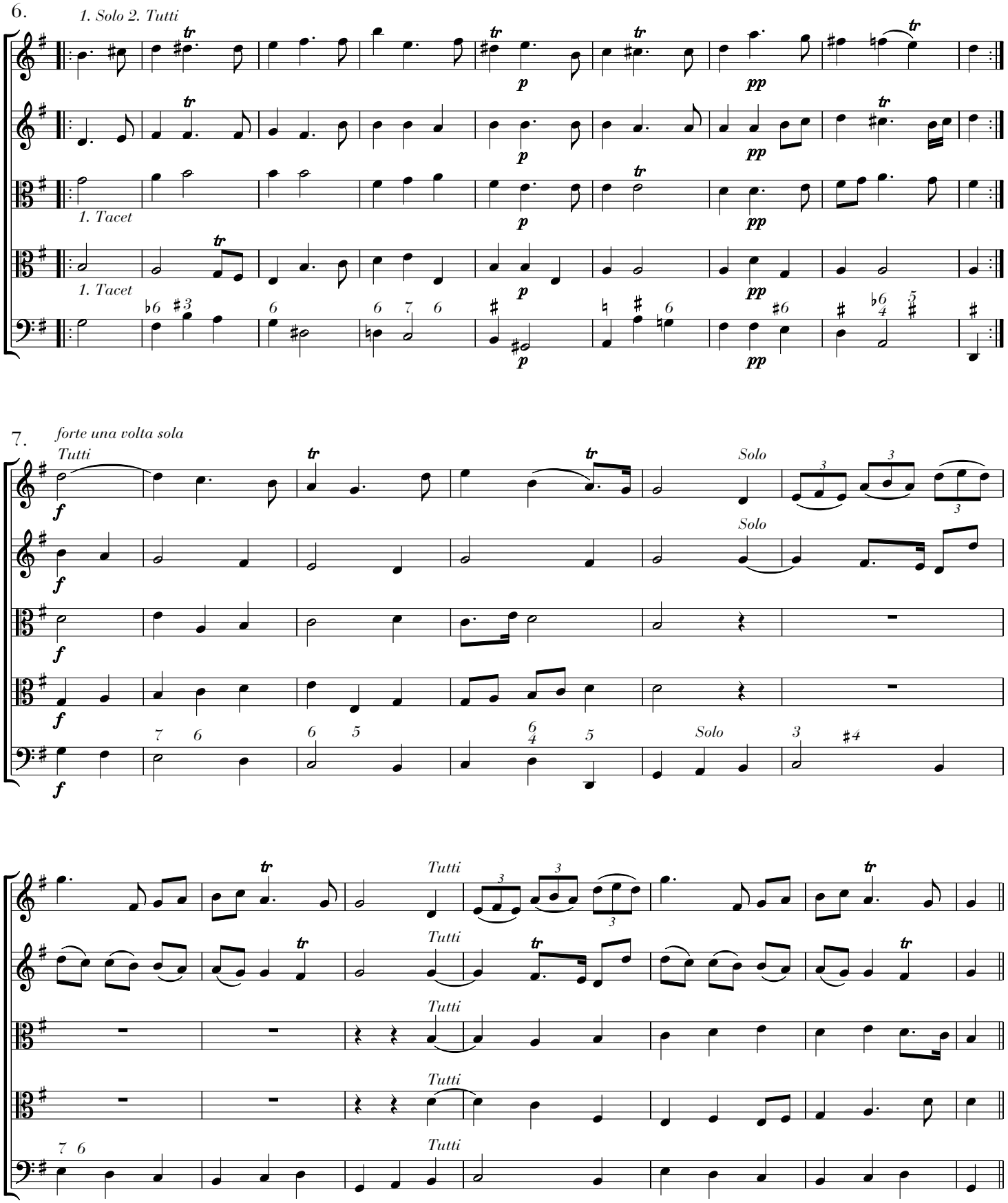
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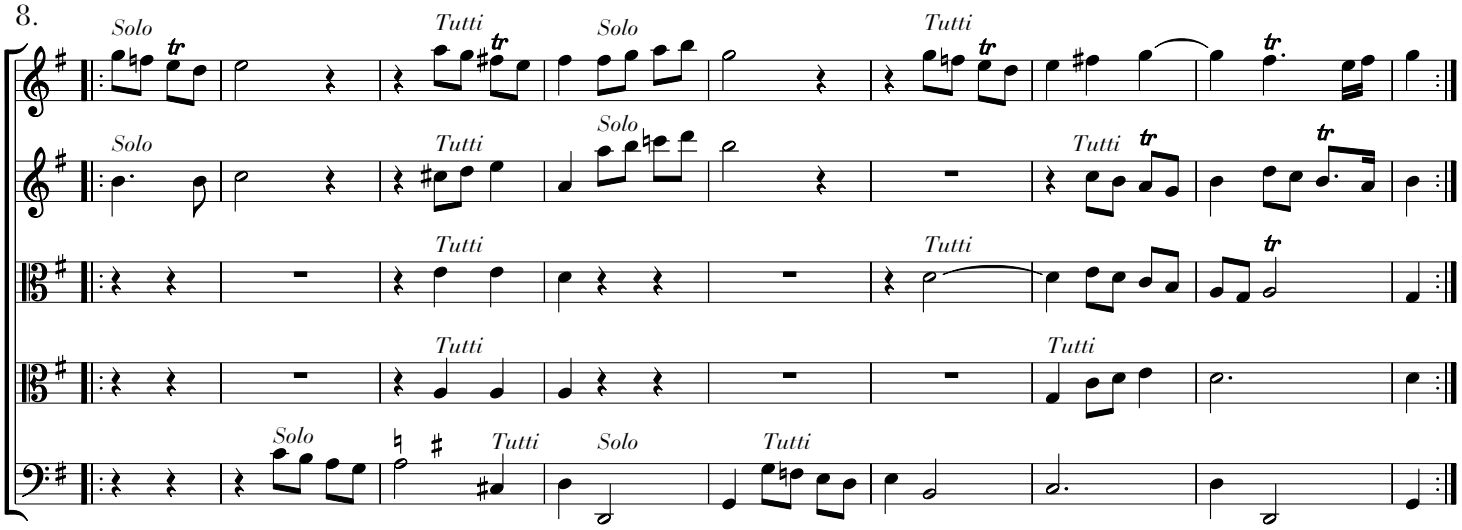
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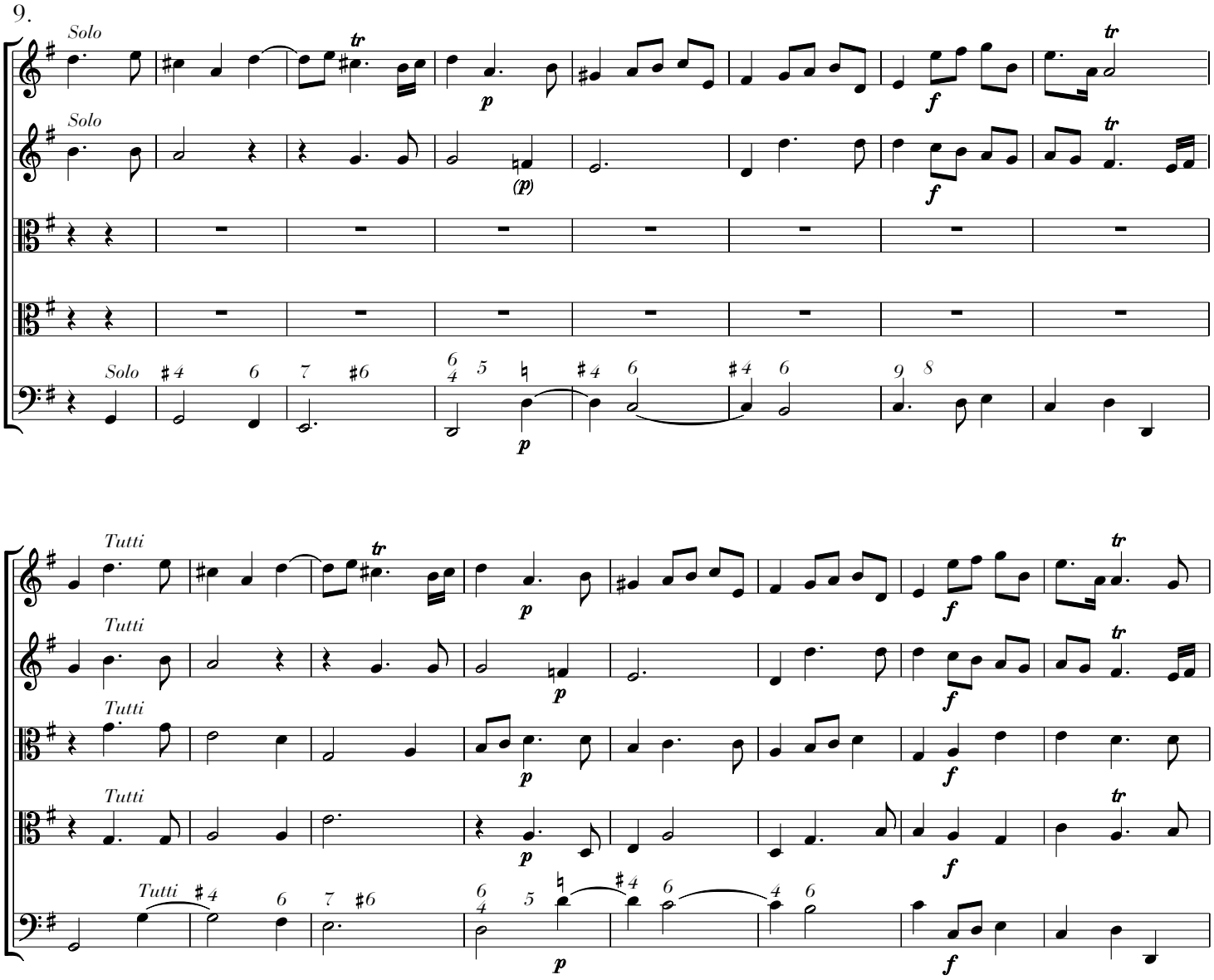
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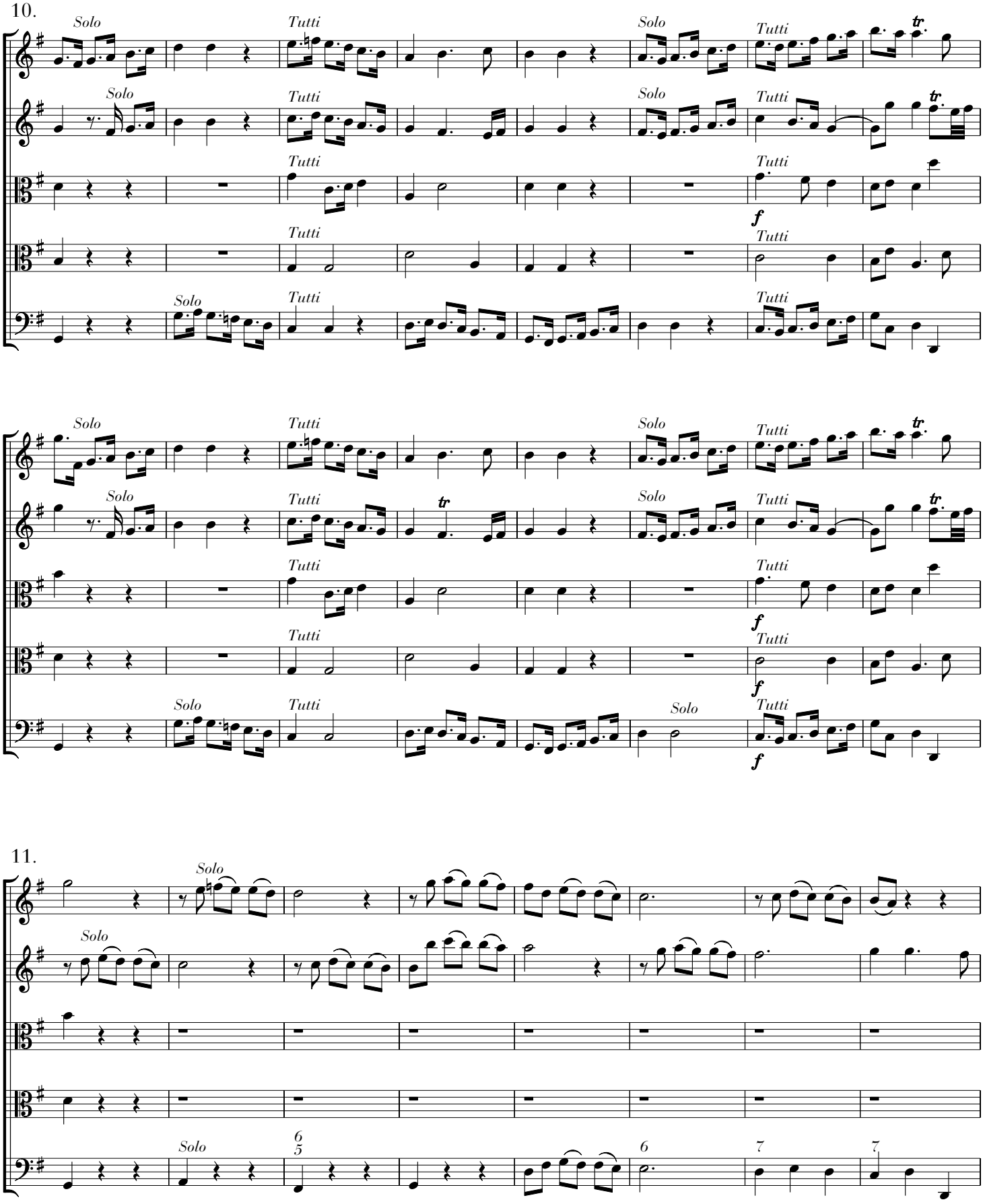
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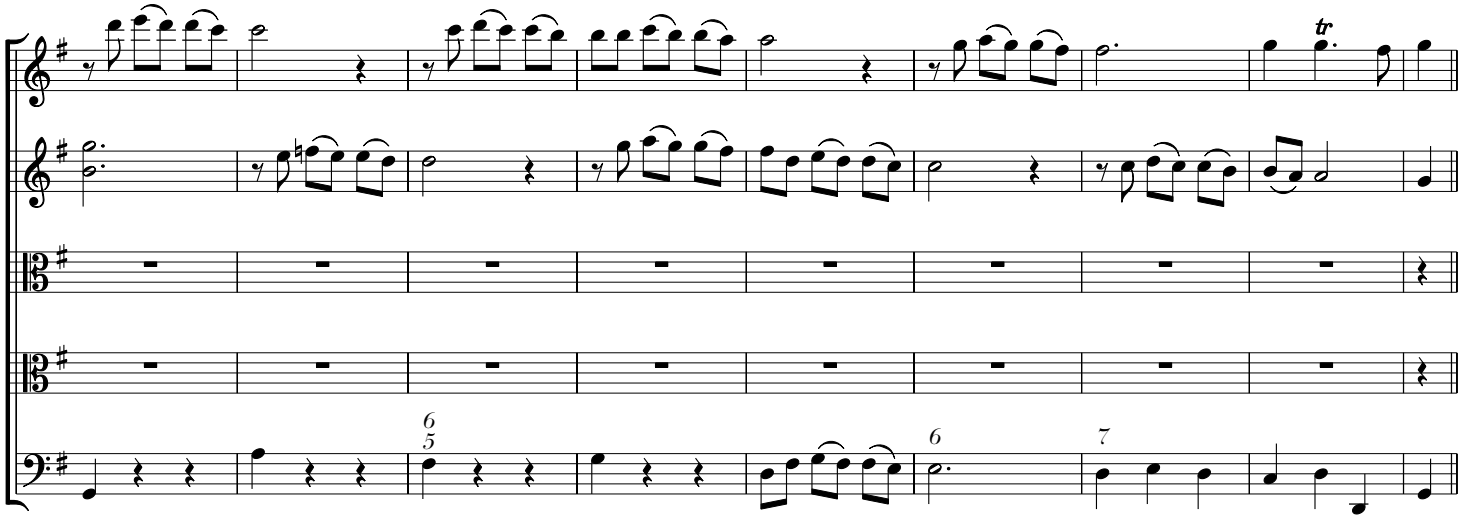

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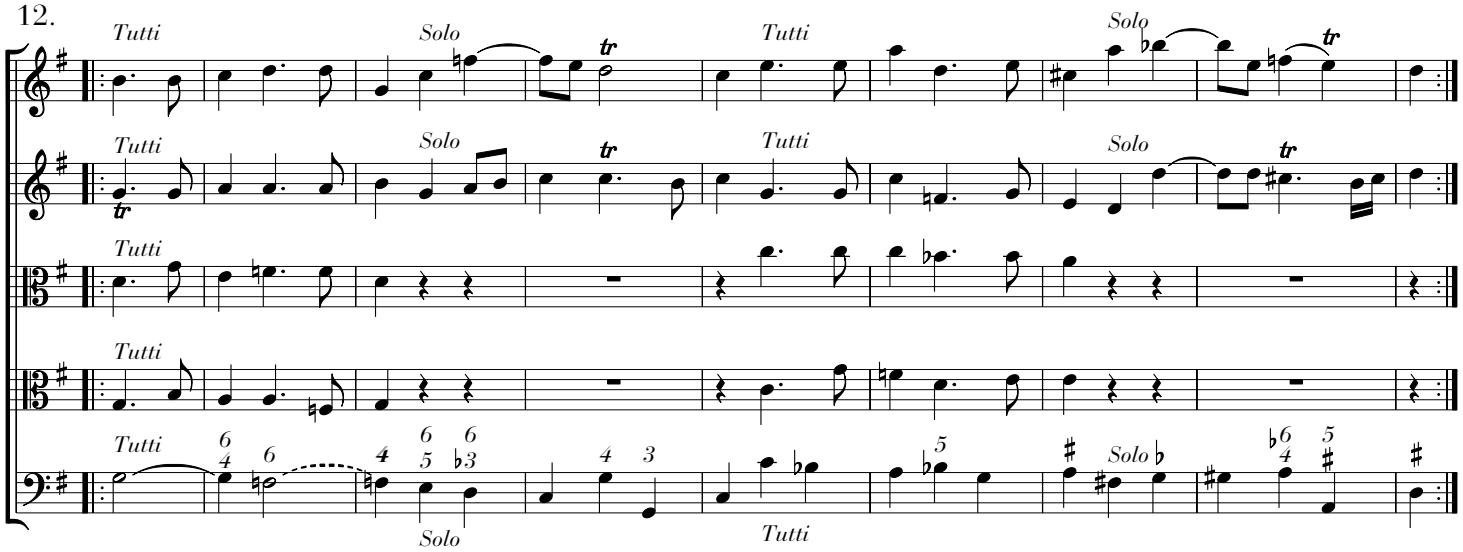
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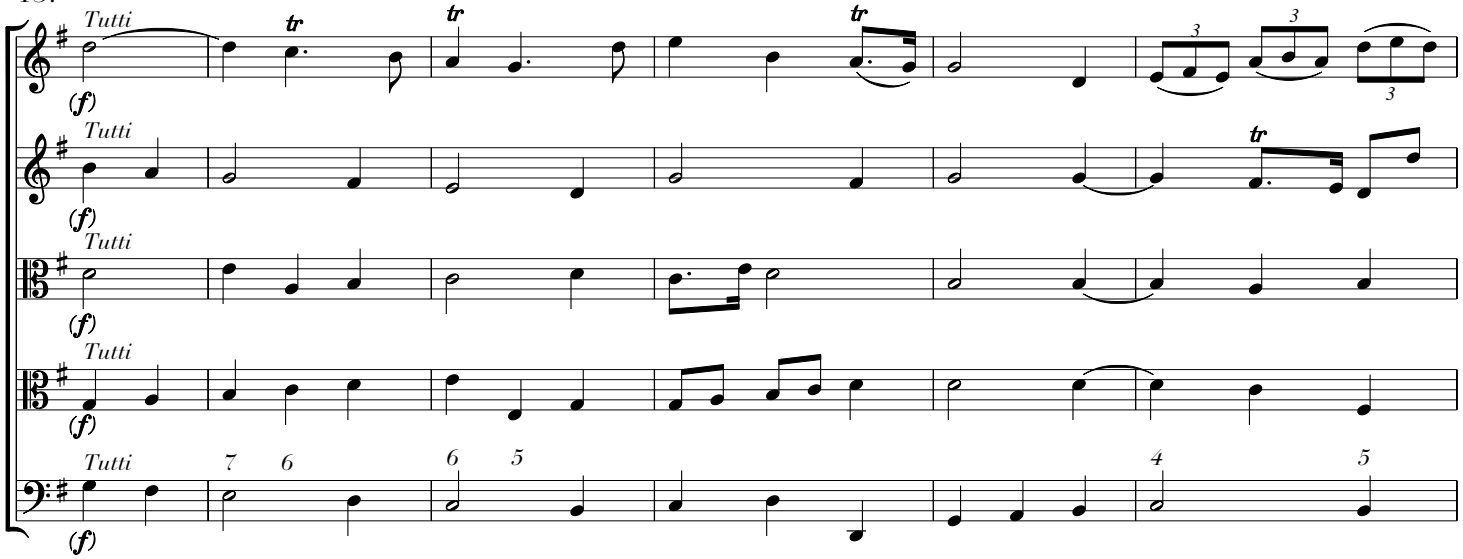
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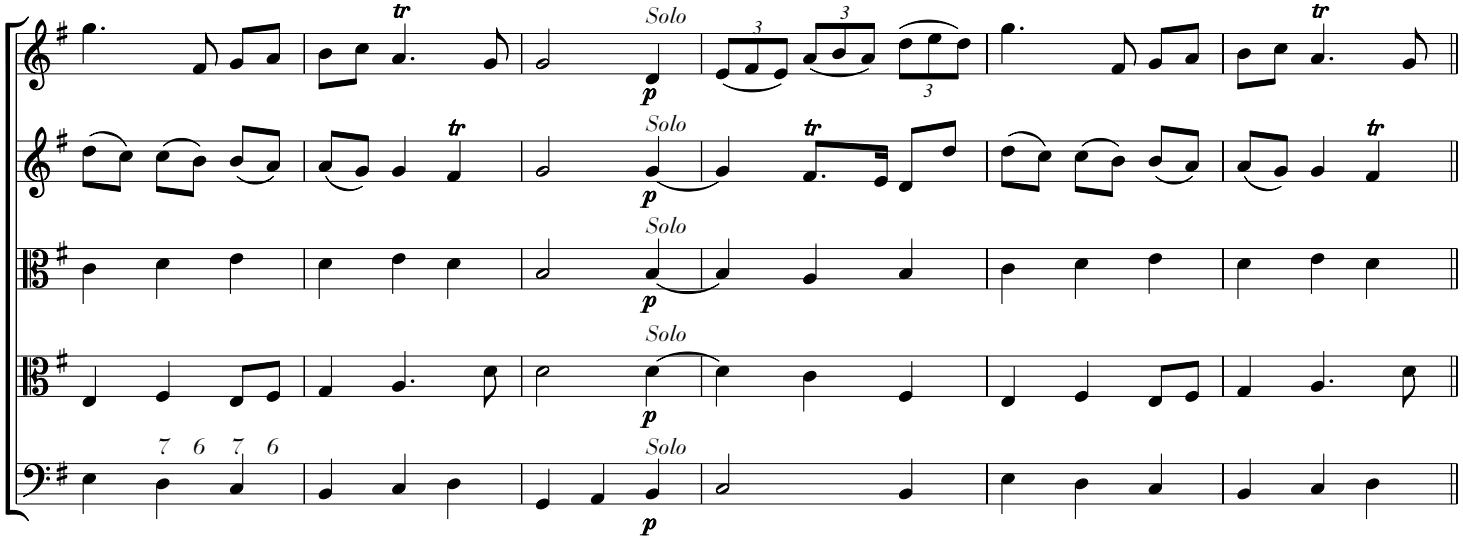

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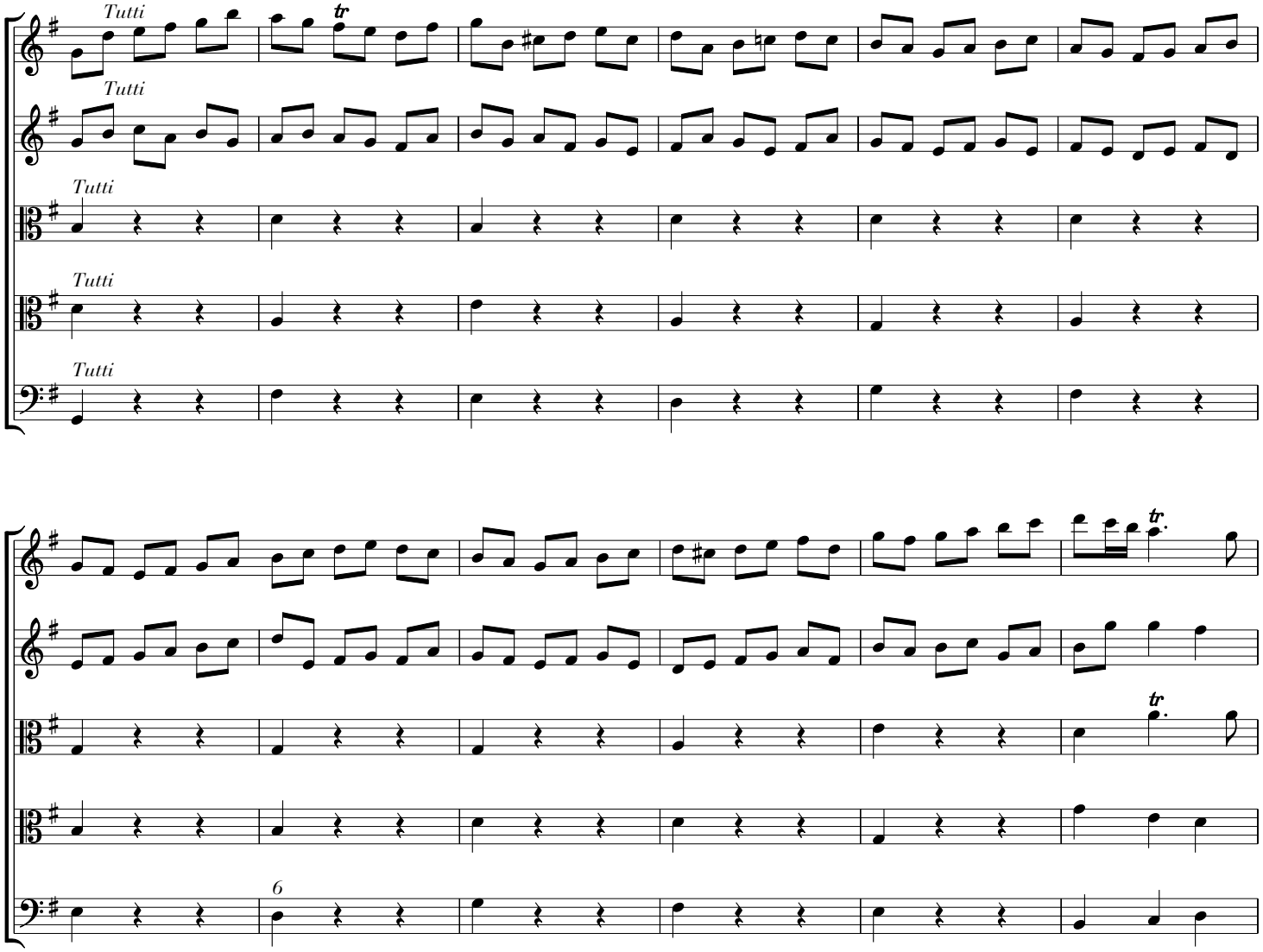

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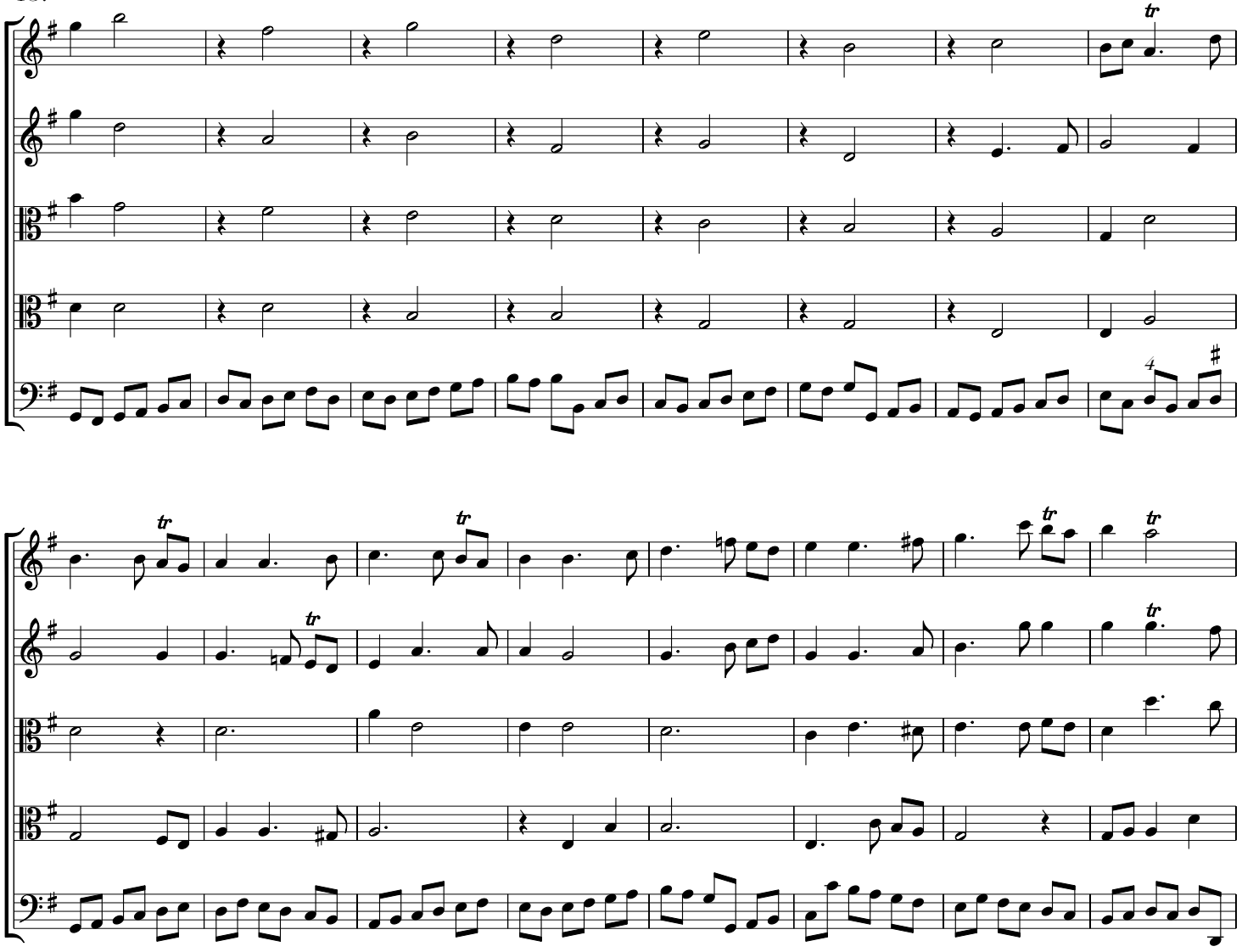

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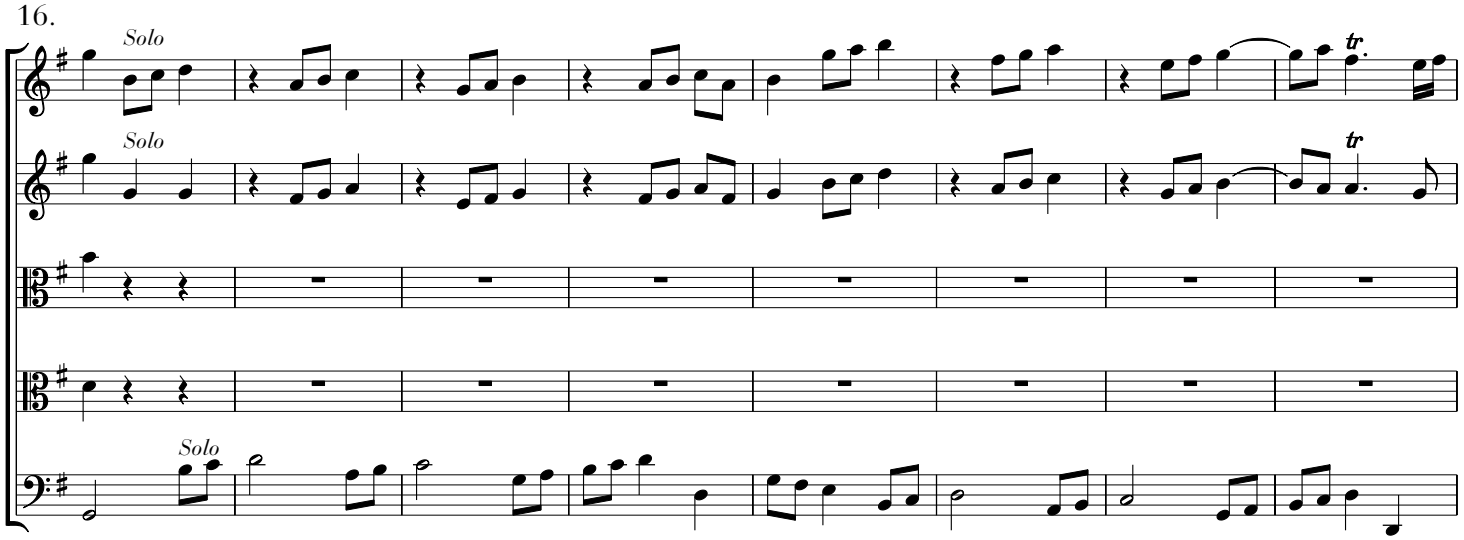

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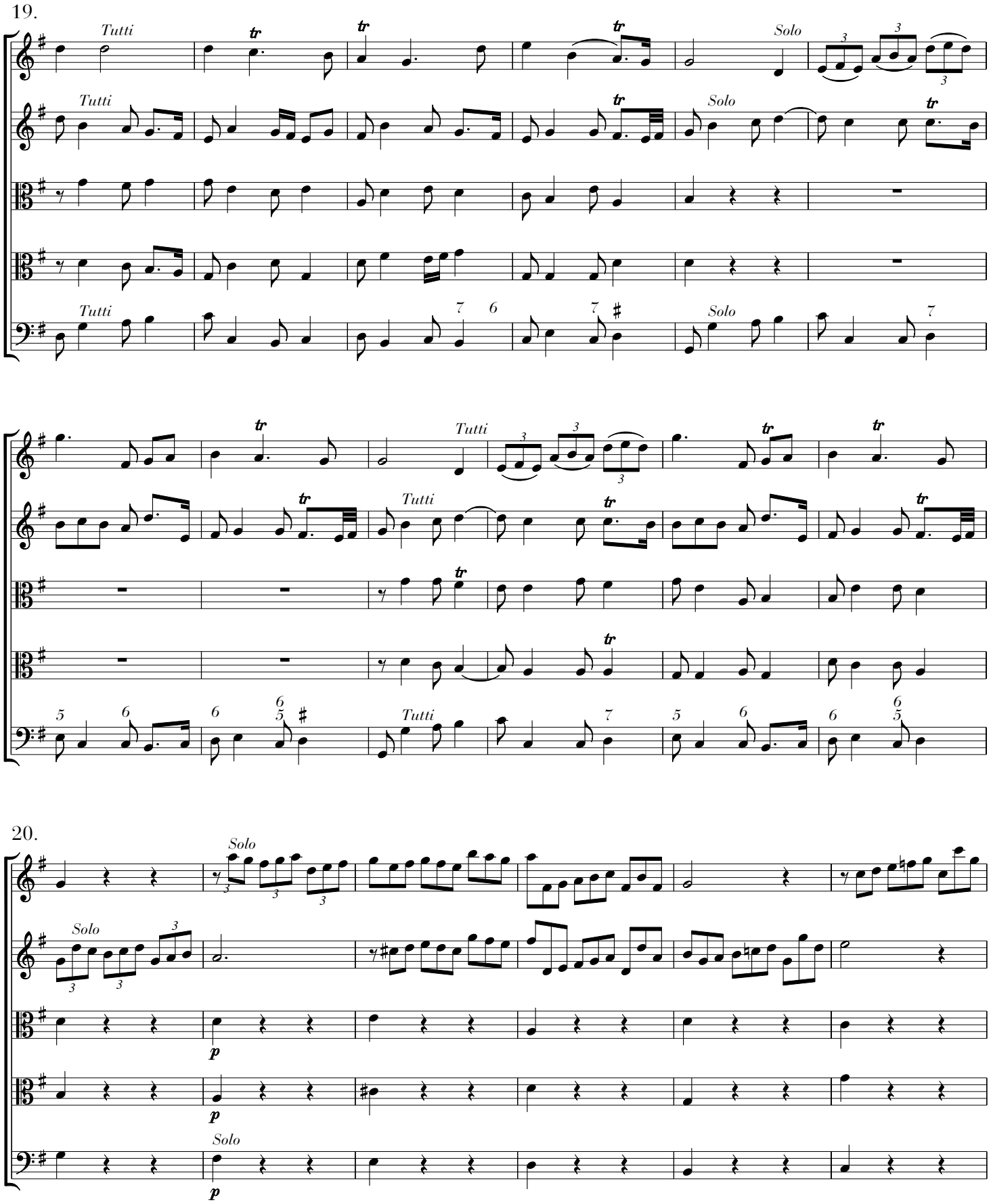
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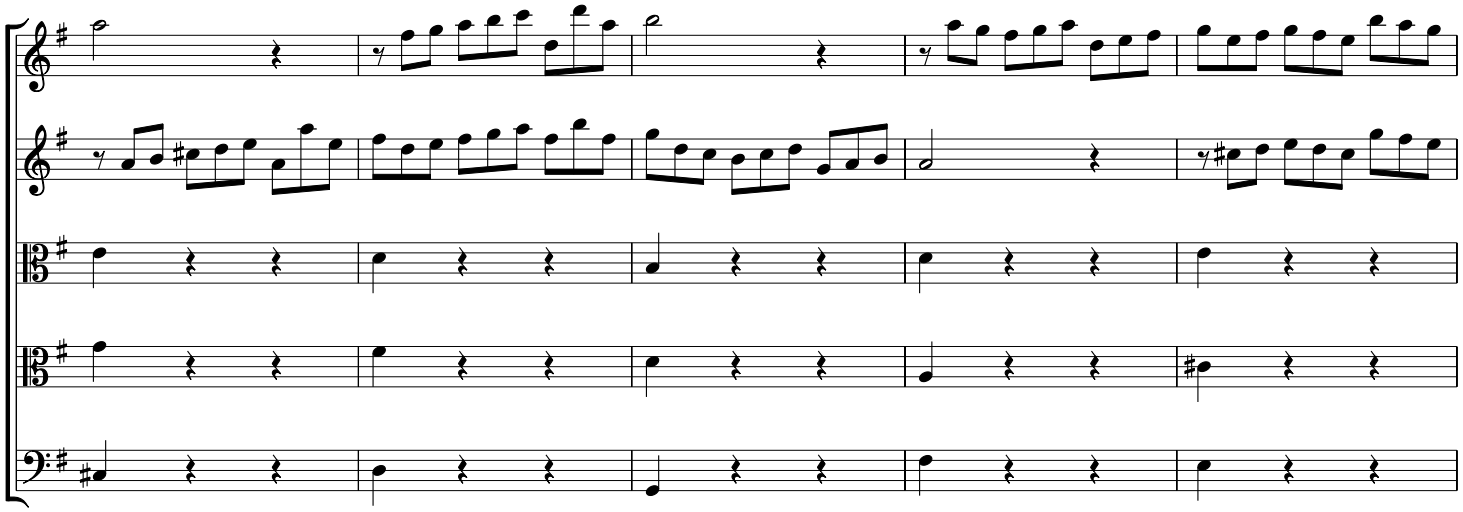

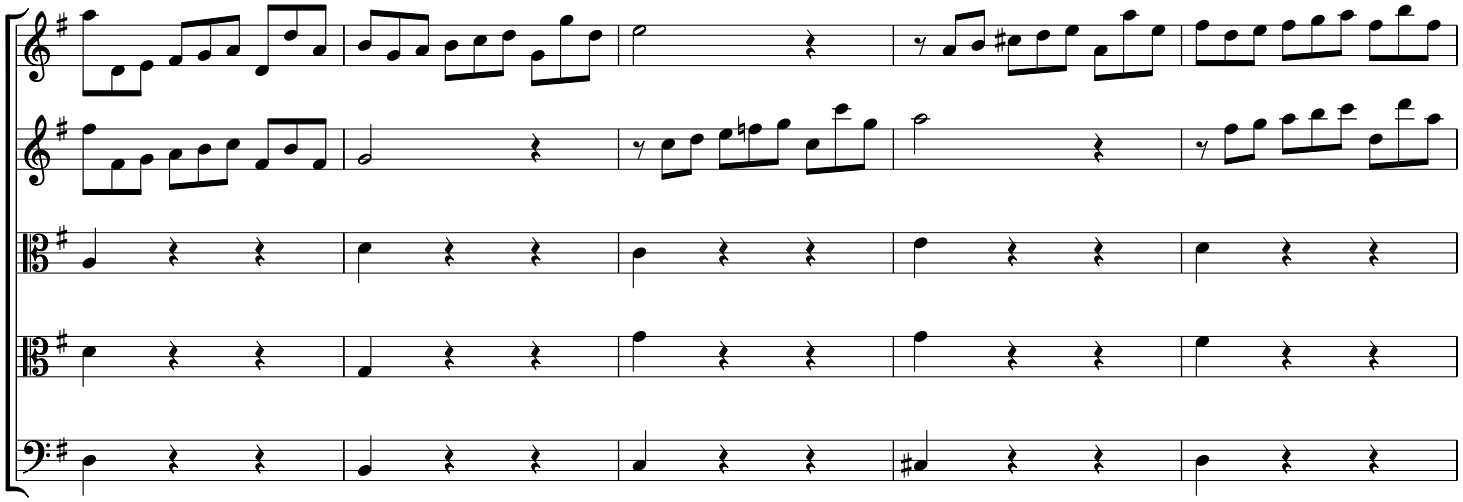

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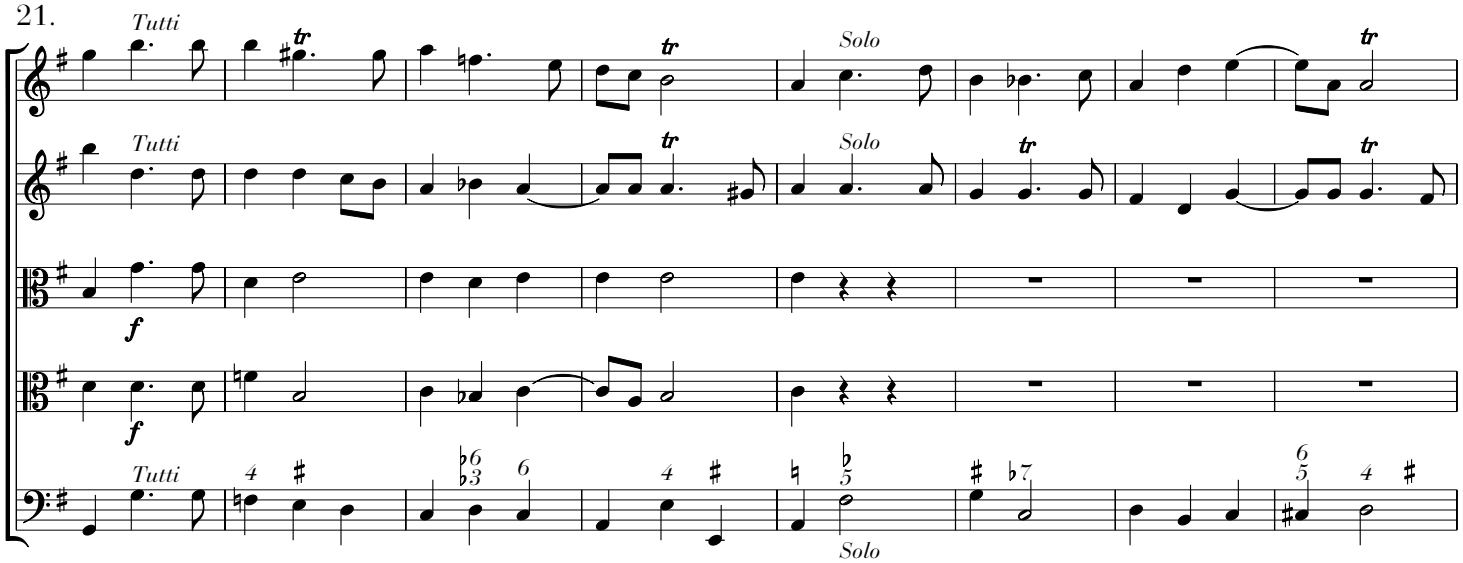

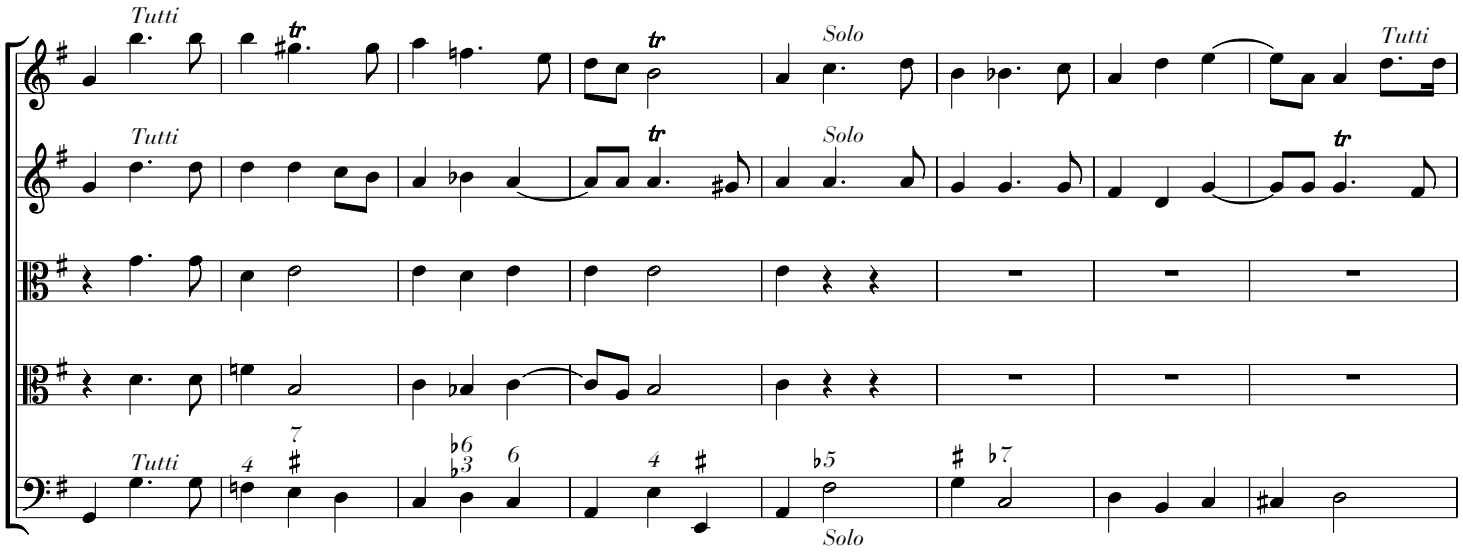
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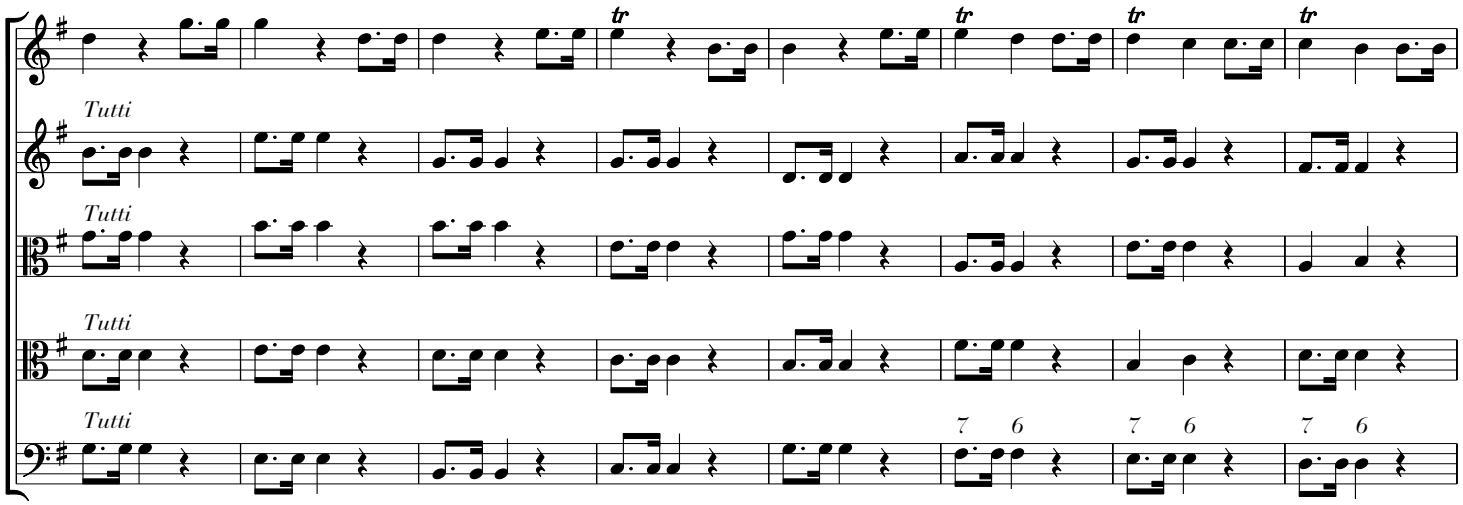
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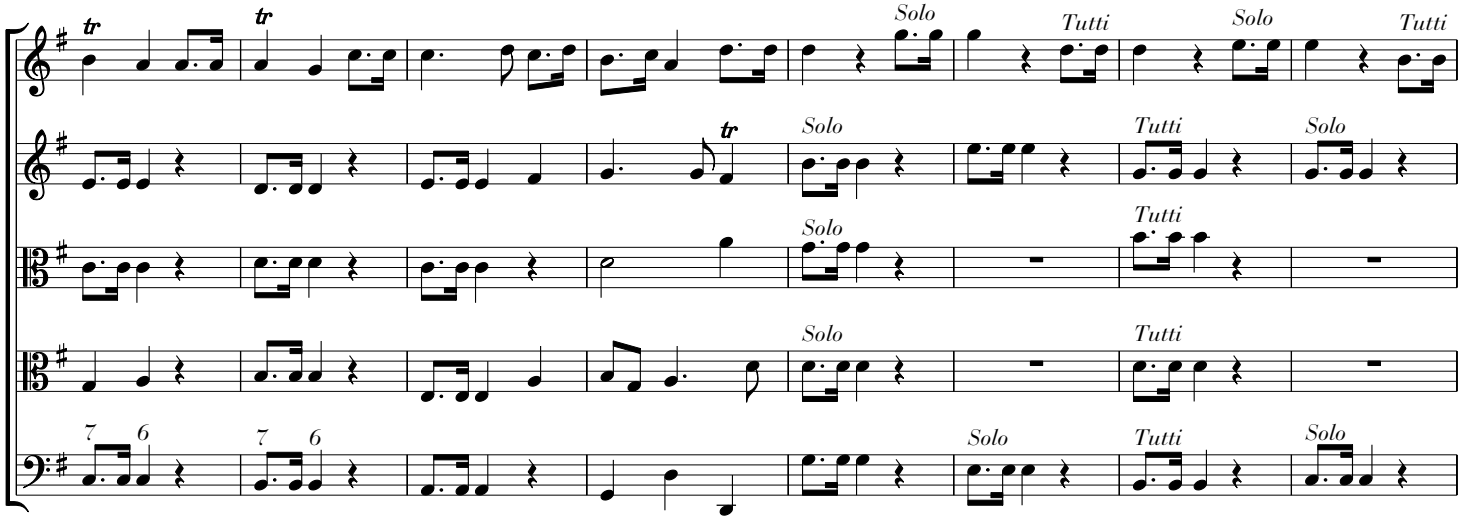
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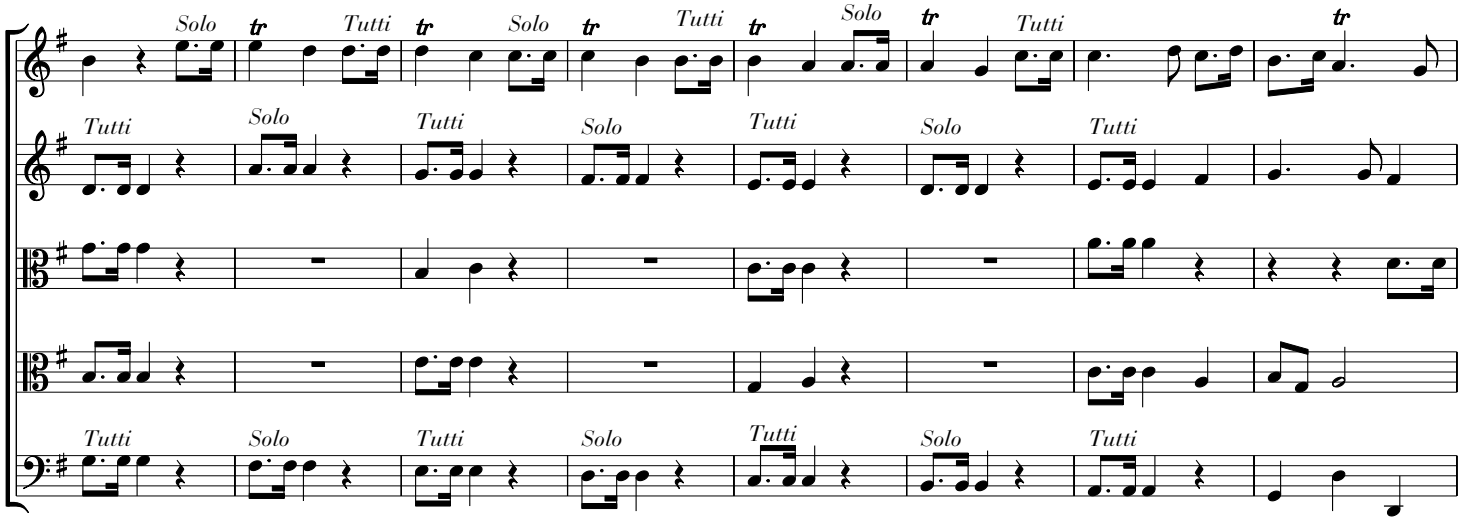
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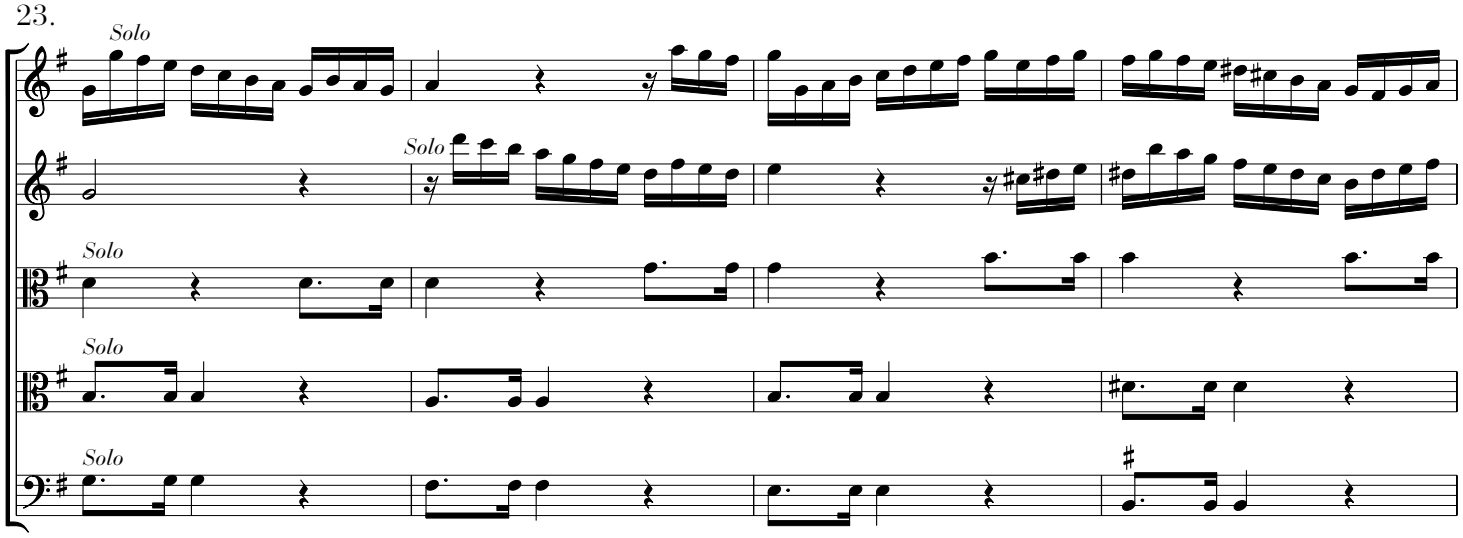
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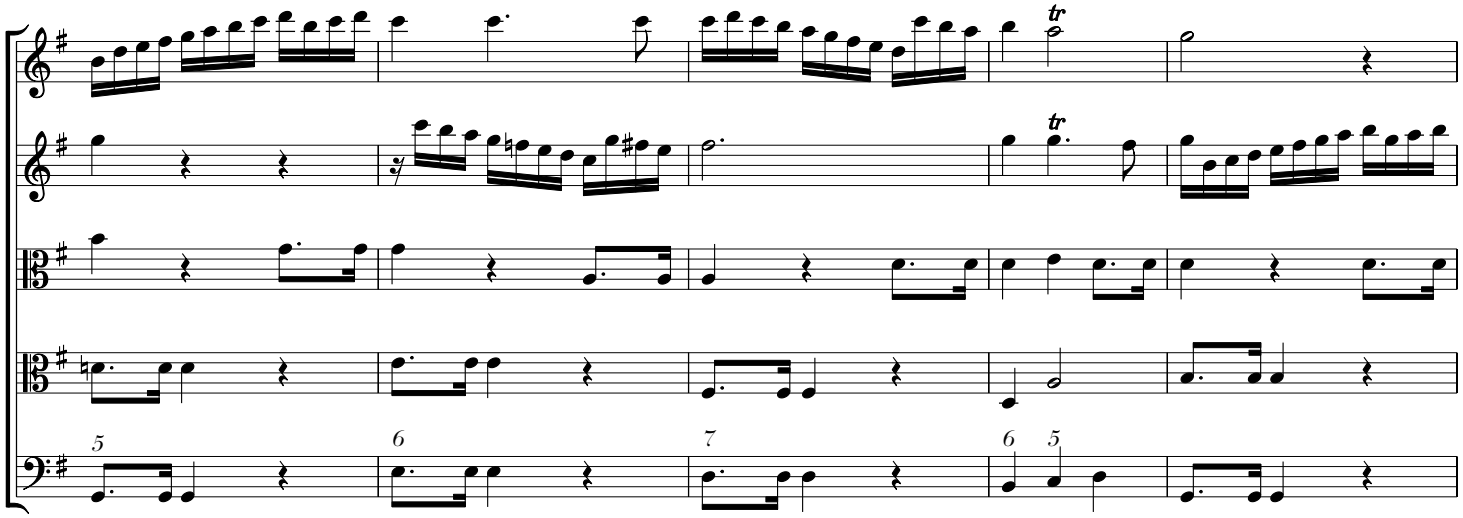
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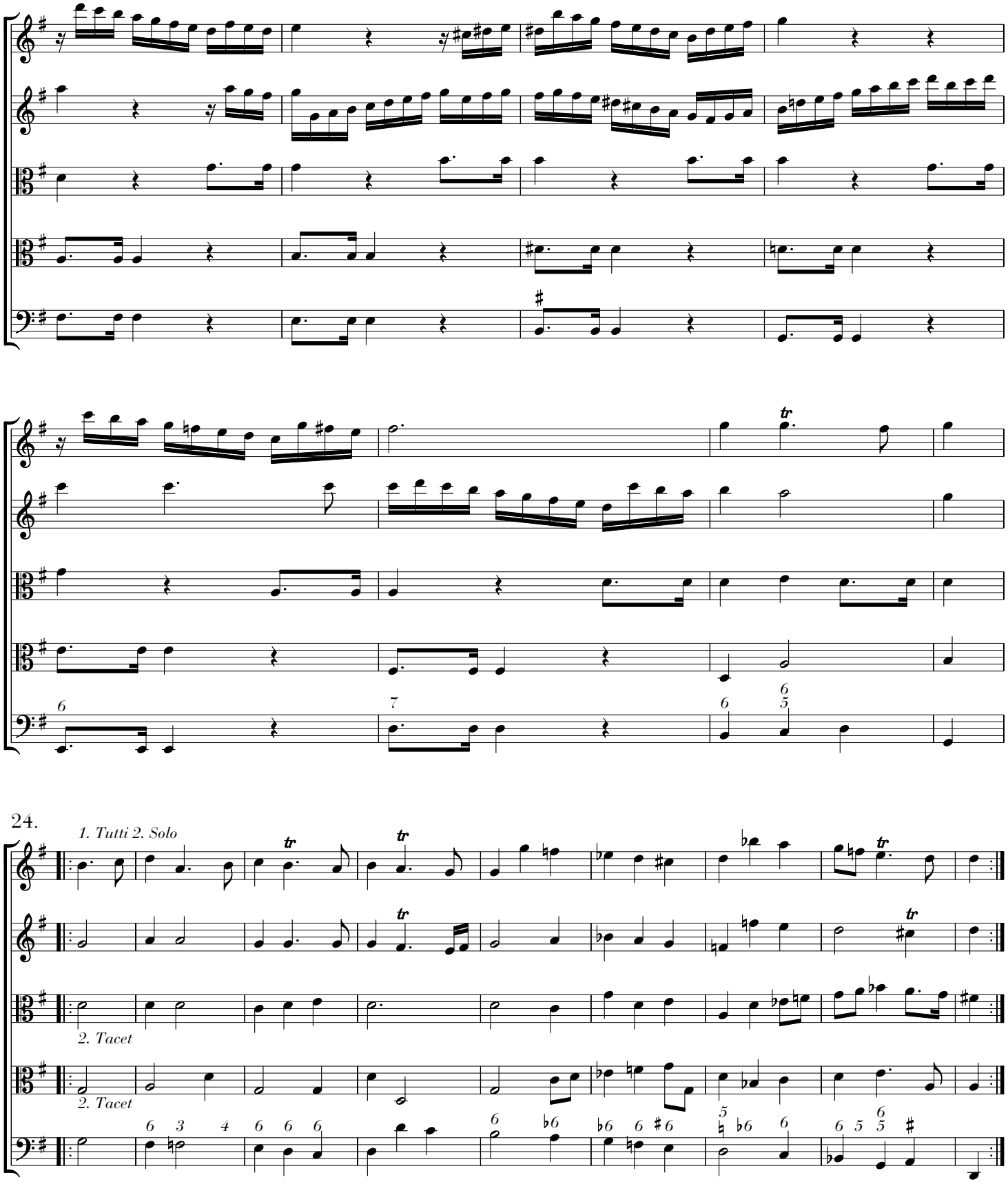
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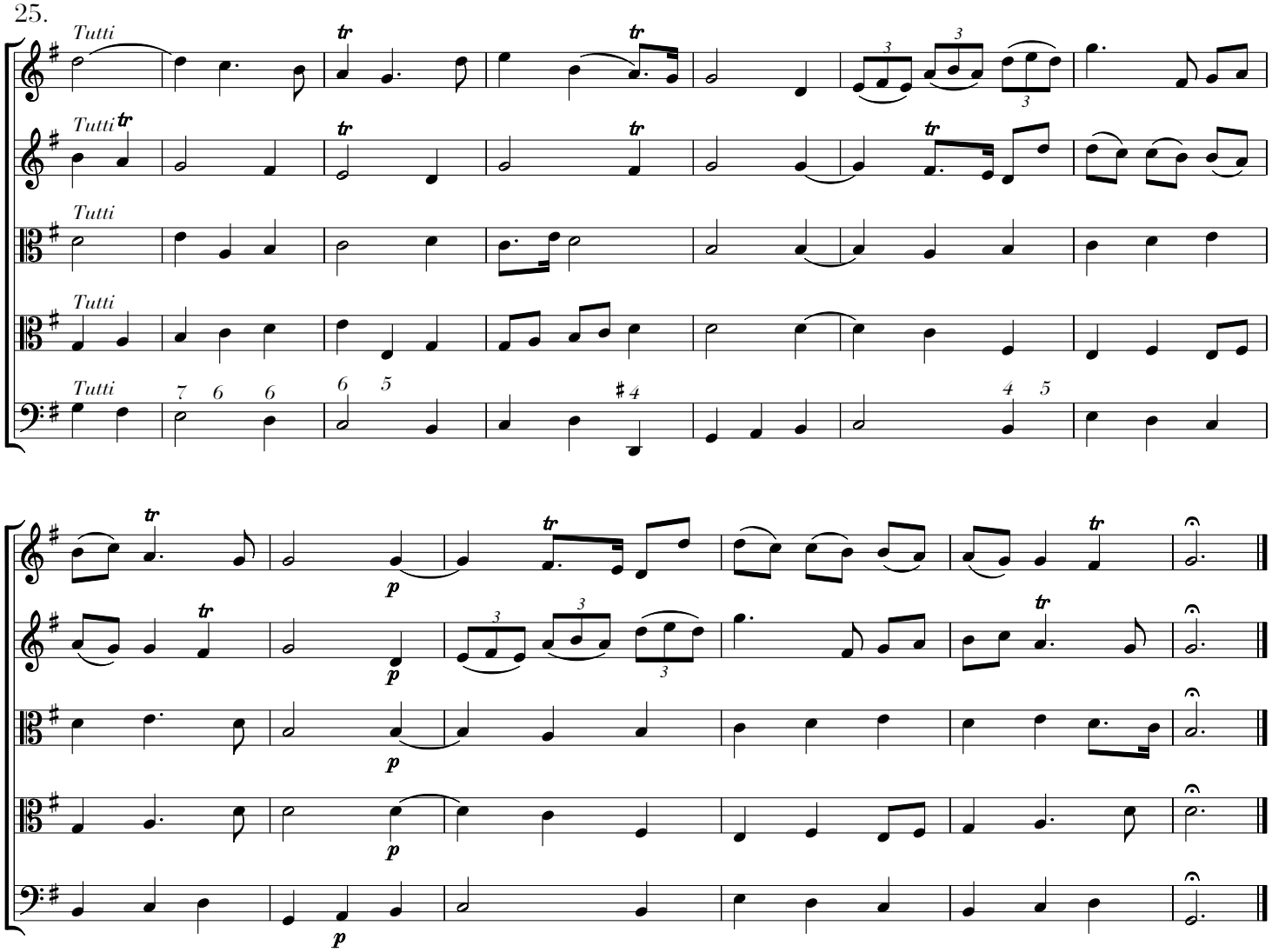
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