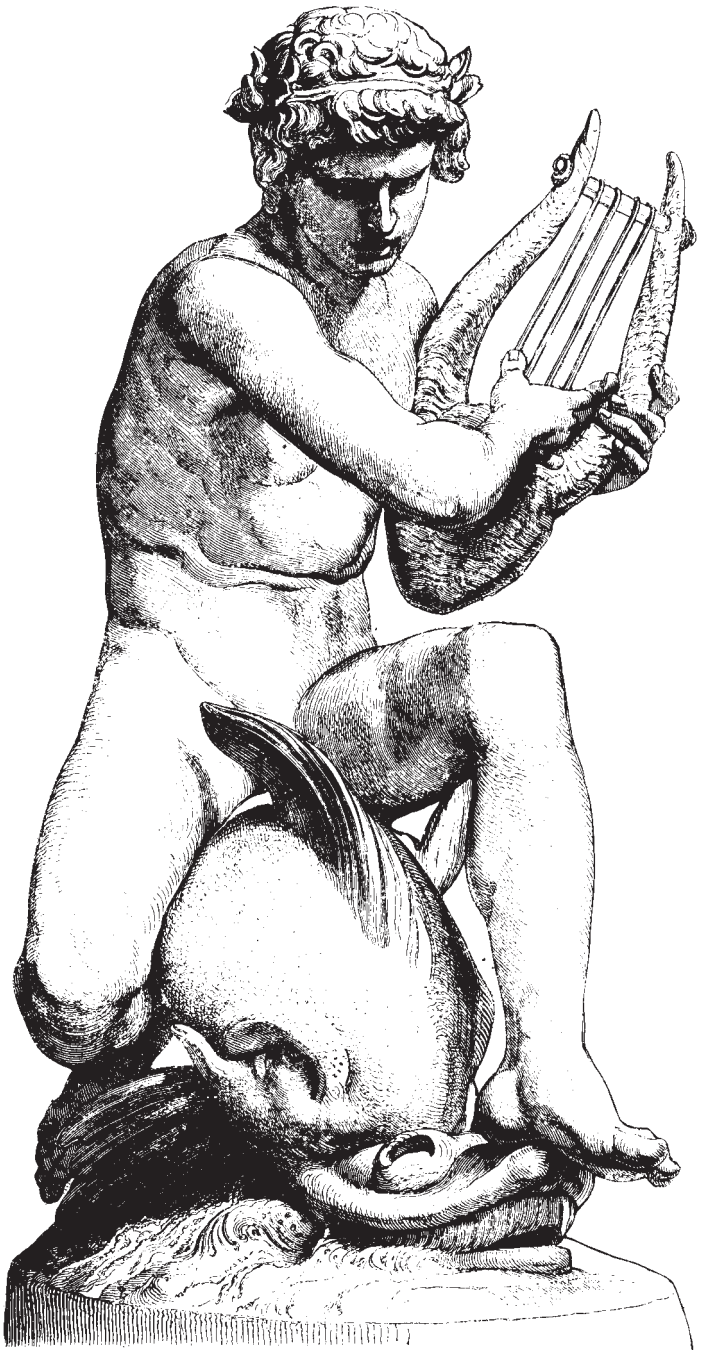
Johann Sebastian Bach



Passacaglia & Fugue in C minor

BWV 582 transposed to E minor for strings

by Alan Bonds

About the work

From Wikipedia: “The Passacaglia and Fugue in C minor (BWV 582) is an organ piece by Johann Sebastian Bach. Presumably composed early in Bach’s career, it is one of his most important and well-known works, and an important influence on 19th and 20th century passacaglias. Robert Schumann described the variations of the passacaglia as “intertwined so ingeniously that one can never cease to be amazed.”

The autograph manuscript of BWV 582 is currently considered lost; the work, as is typical for pieces by Bach and his contemporaries, is known only through a number of copies. There is some evidence that the original was notated in organ tablature. It is not known precisely when Bach composed the work, but the available sources point to the period between 1706 and 1713. It is possible that BWV 582 was composed in Arnstadt soon after Bach’s return from Lübeck (where he may have studied Buxtehude’s ostinato works).

The passacaglia is followed, without break, by a double fugue. The first half of the passacaglia ostinato is used as the first subject; a transformed version of the second half is used as the second subject. Both are heard simultaneously in the beginning of the fugue. A countersubject enters immediately afterwards and is then used throughout the piece. When the three subjects appear simultaneously, they never do so in the same combination of voices twice; this therefore is a permutation fugue, possibly inspired by Johann Adam Reincken’s works.

As the fugue progresses,when Bach ventures into major keys (E♭– relative to C minor – and B♭) and the time between the statements increases from 1–3 bars to 7–13.”

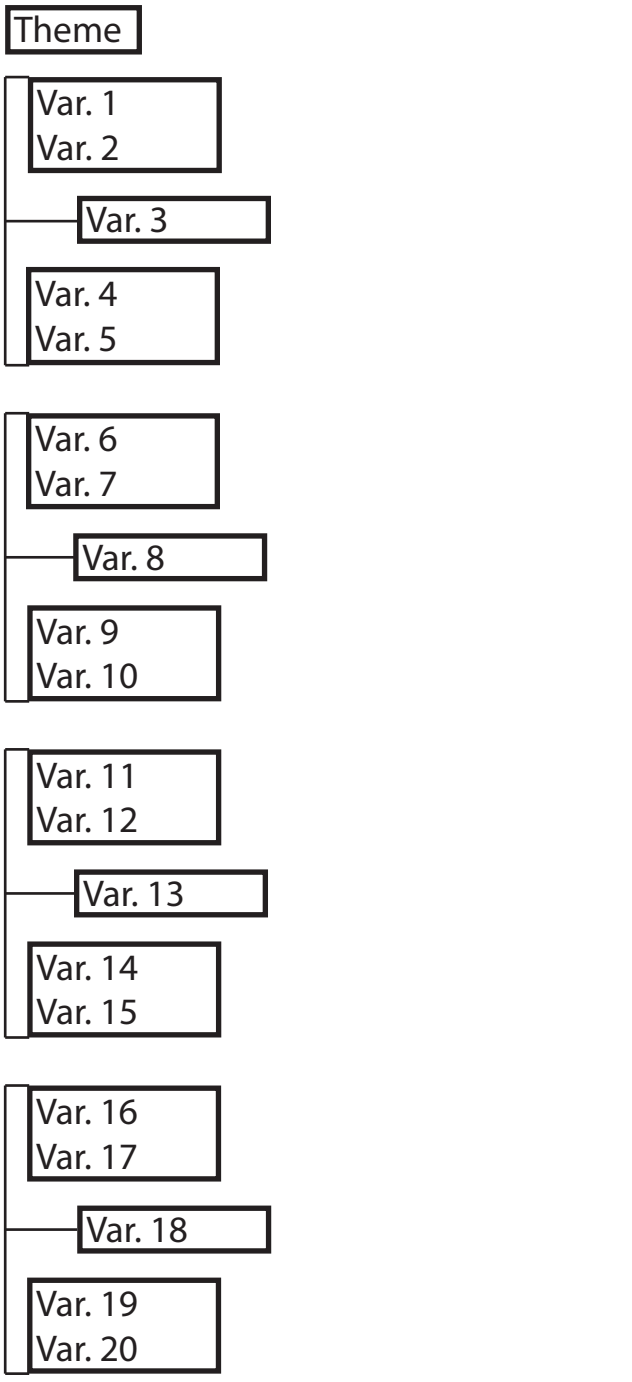
About this arangement for strings

It is not really necessary to justify a transposition to E minor for strings for a variety of reasons:

- Bach did so frequently for many of his works;
- the range of string instruments, especially the Contrabass;
- to not allow it to cadence downwards to the tonic would be tragic, ruining its shape;
- it also suits the range of some of the inner parts;
- it has also been arranged for a variety of ensembles by many eminent arrangers;
- it is a marvellous work which all string players should know.

The cello & bass parts are mostly identical but divisi occasionally.
Some additional slurs have been added using dotted notation.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE PASSACAGLIA & FUGUE IN C MINOR BWV582



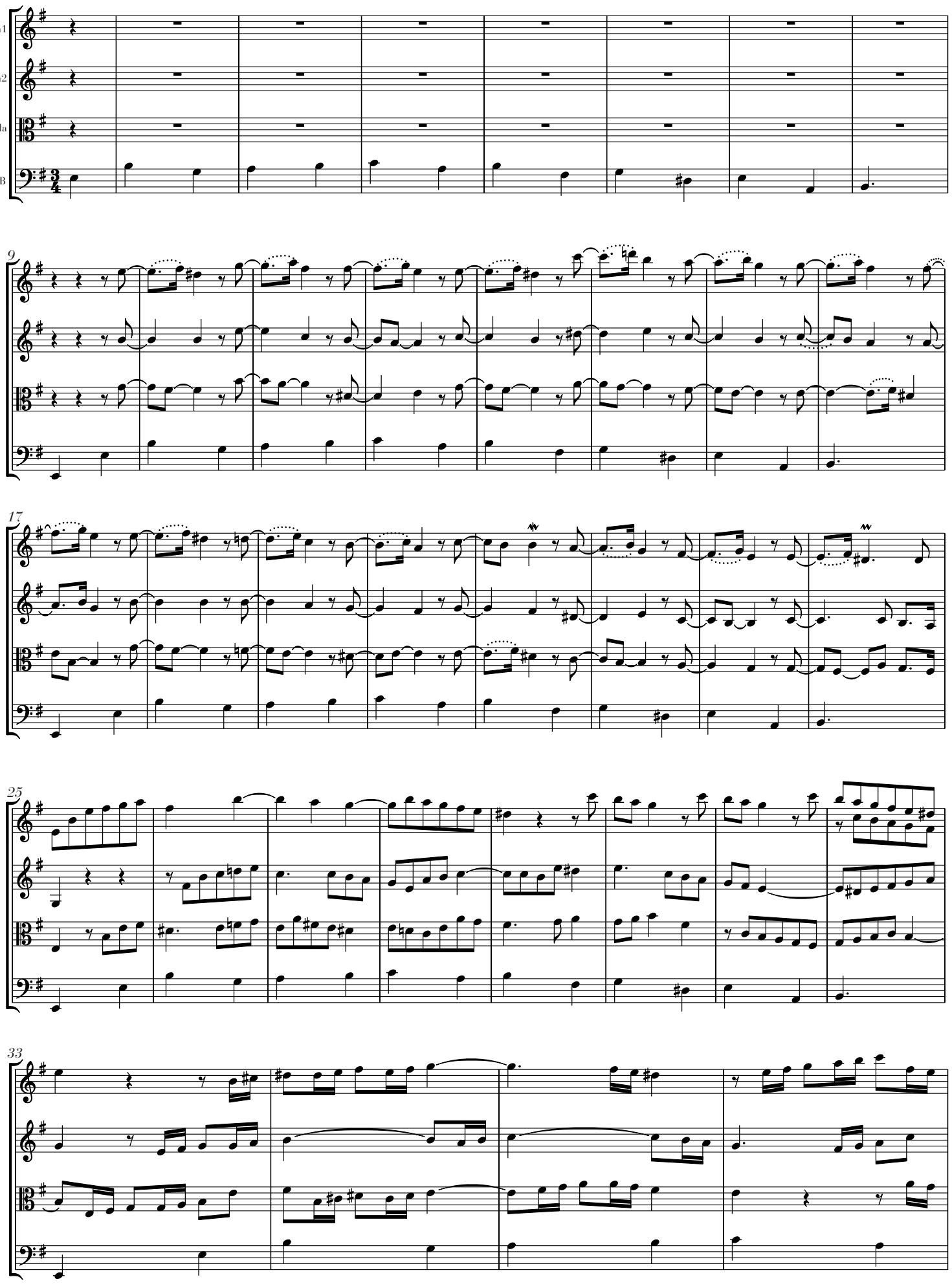
Fugue

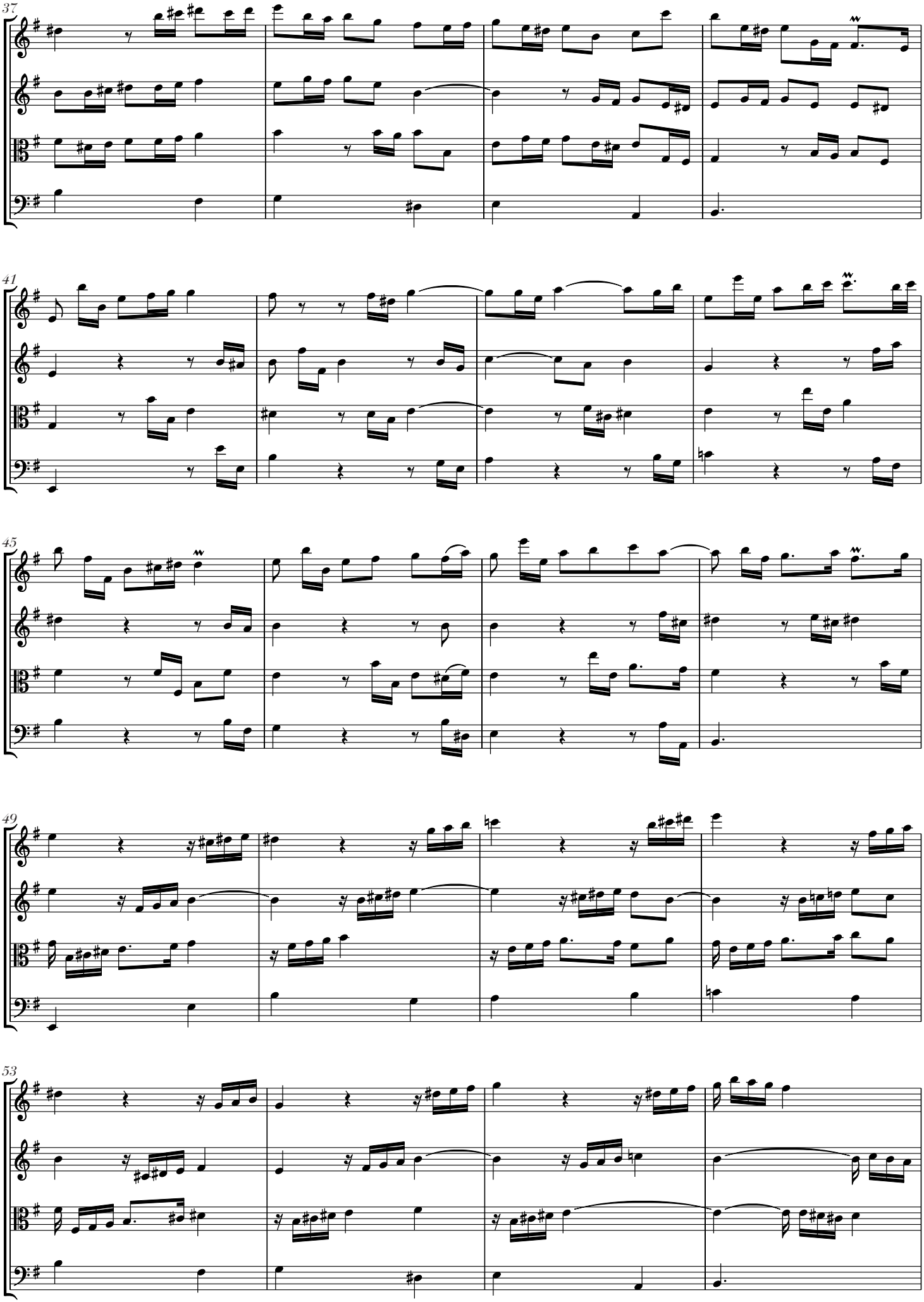
Exposition	C minor
Trio 1	Eb major
Trio 2	Bb major
Trio 3	G minor
Coda	C minor

Passacaglia & Fugue

BWV582

J. S. Bach

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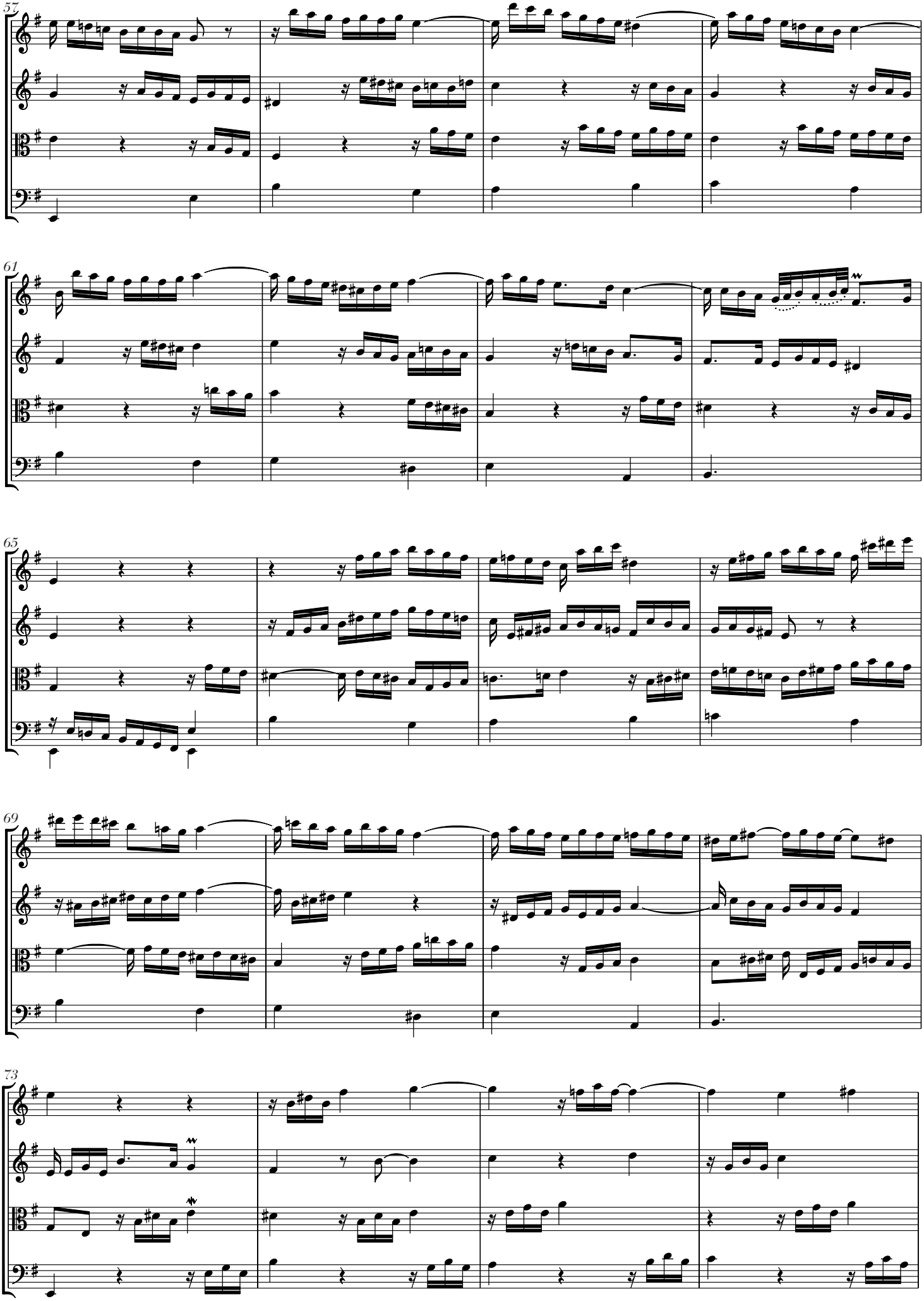
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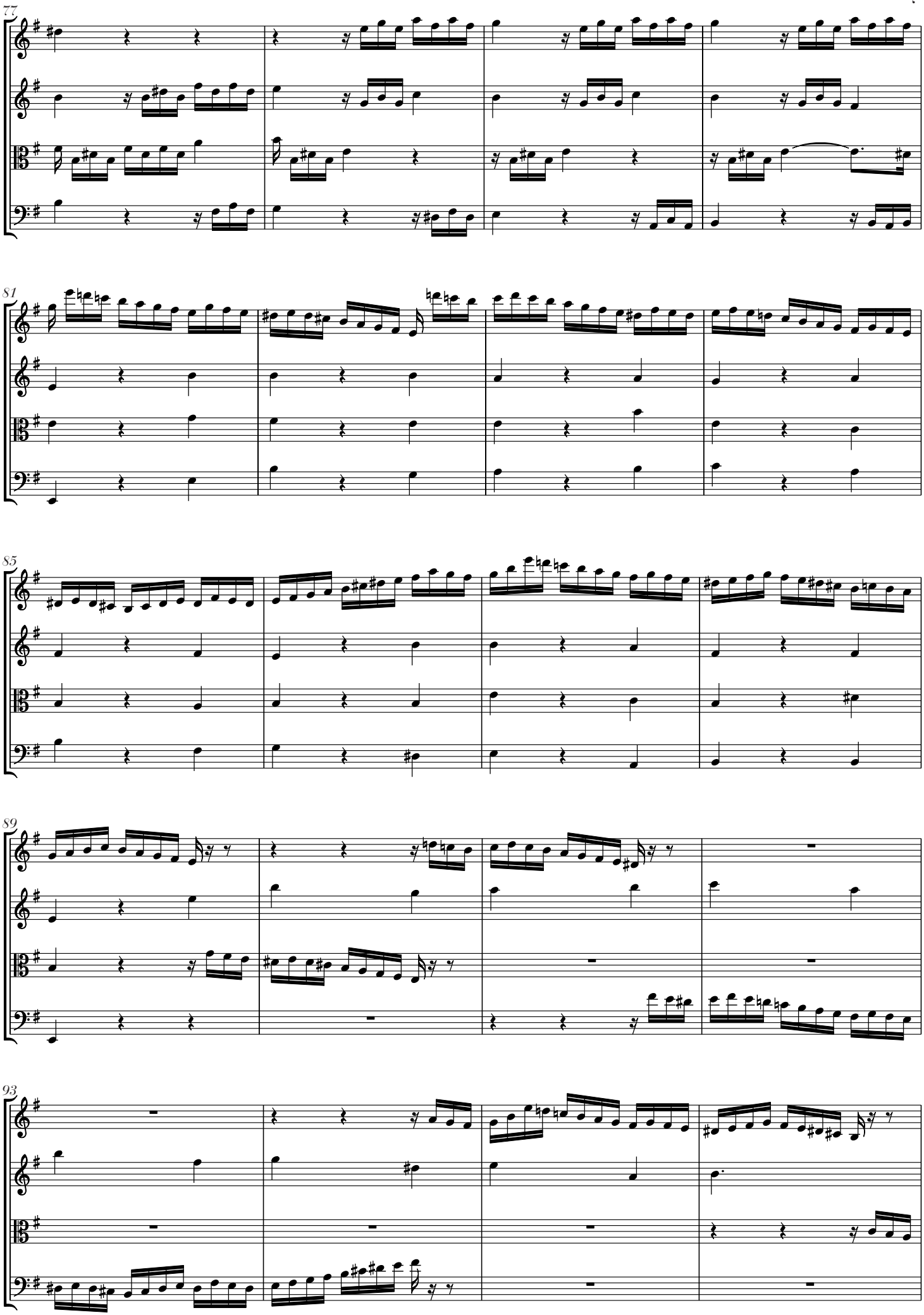
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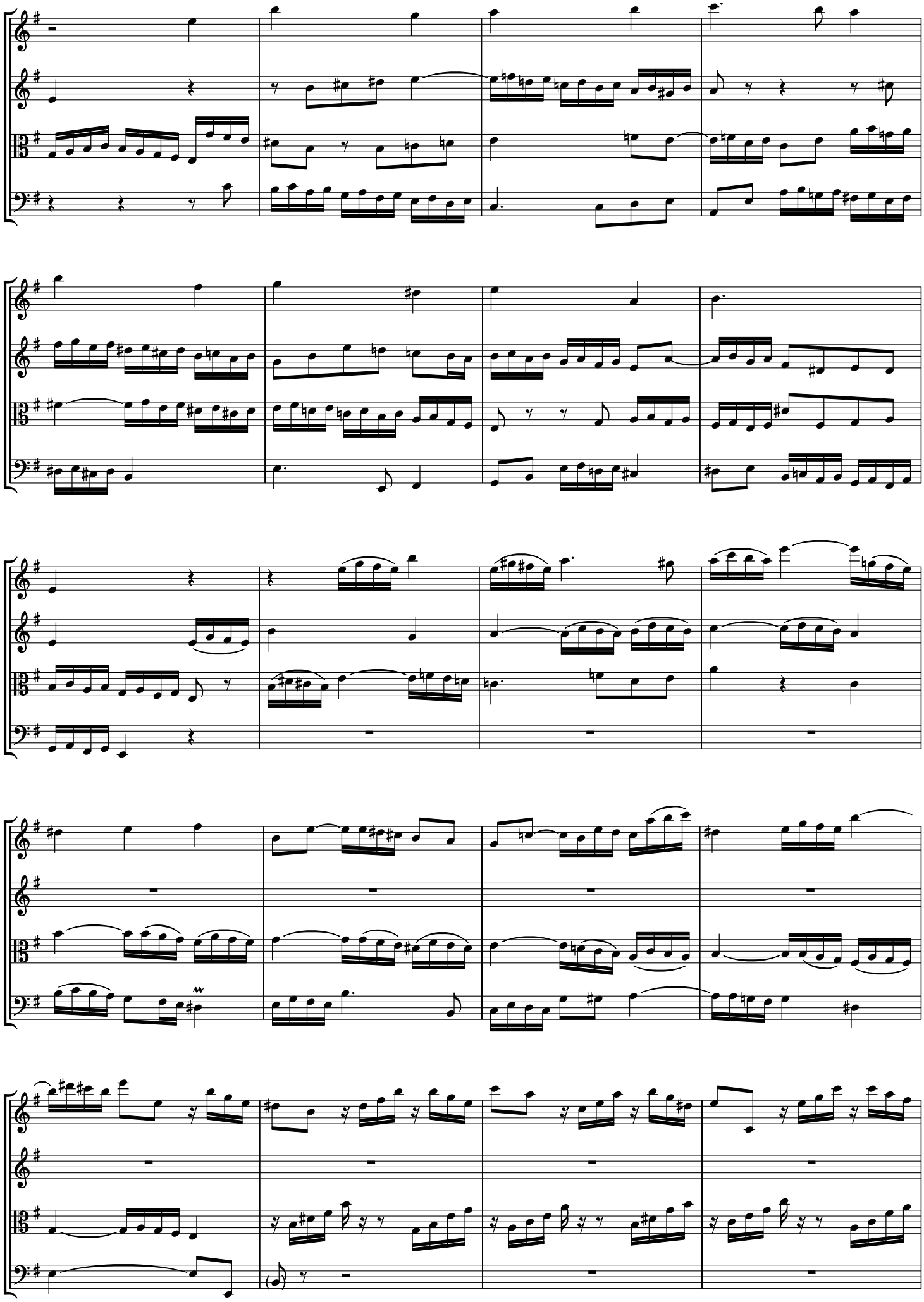

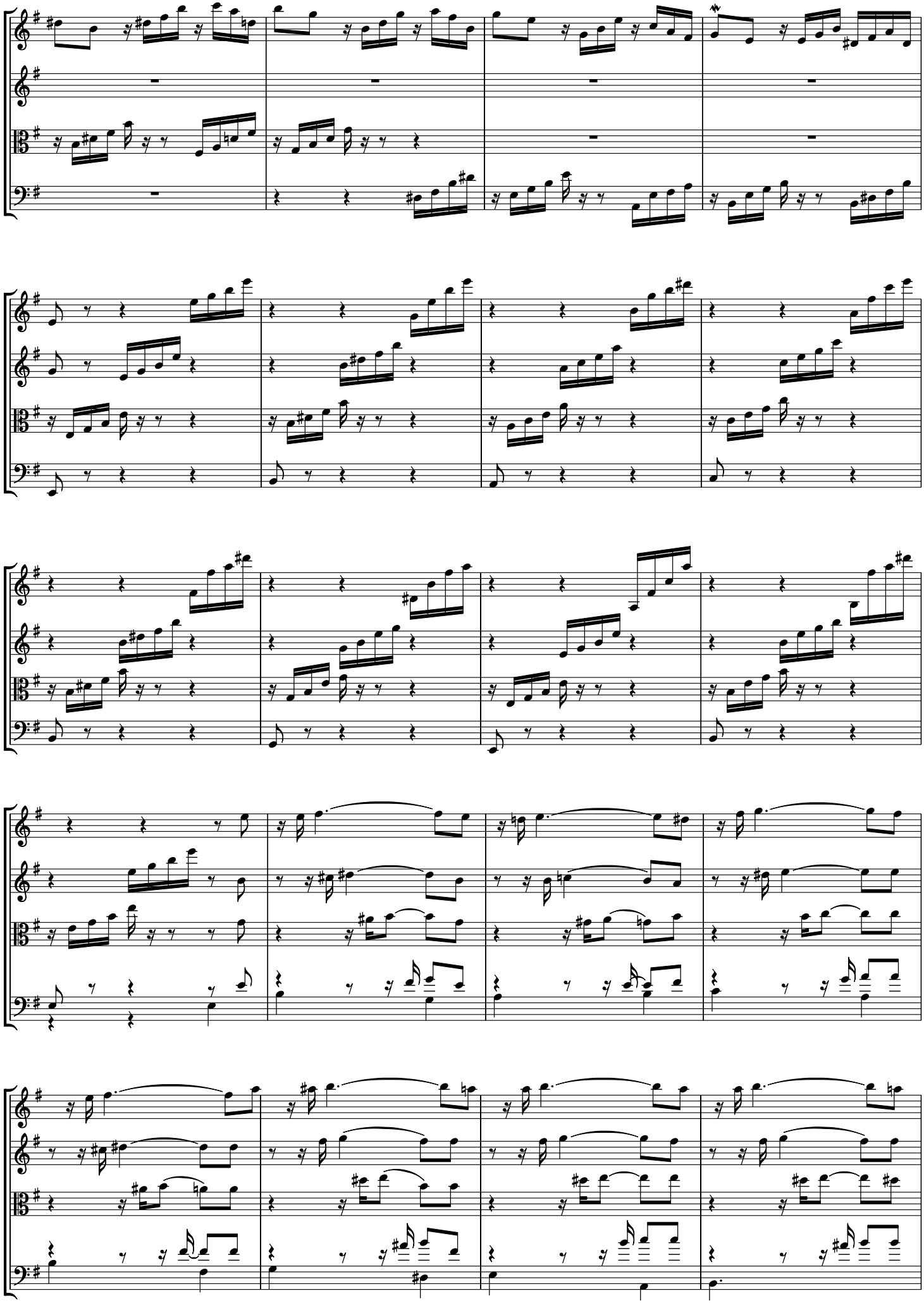

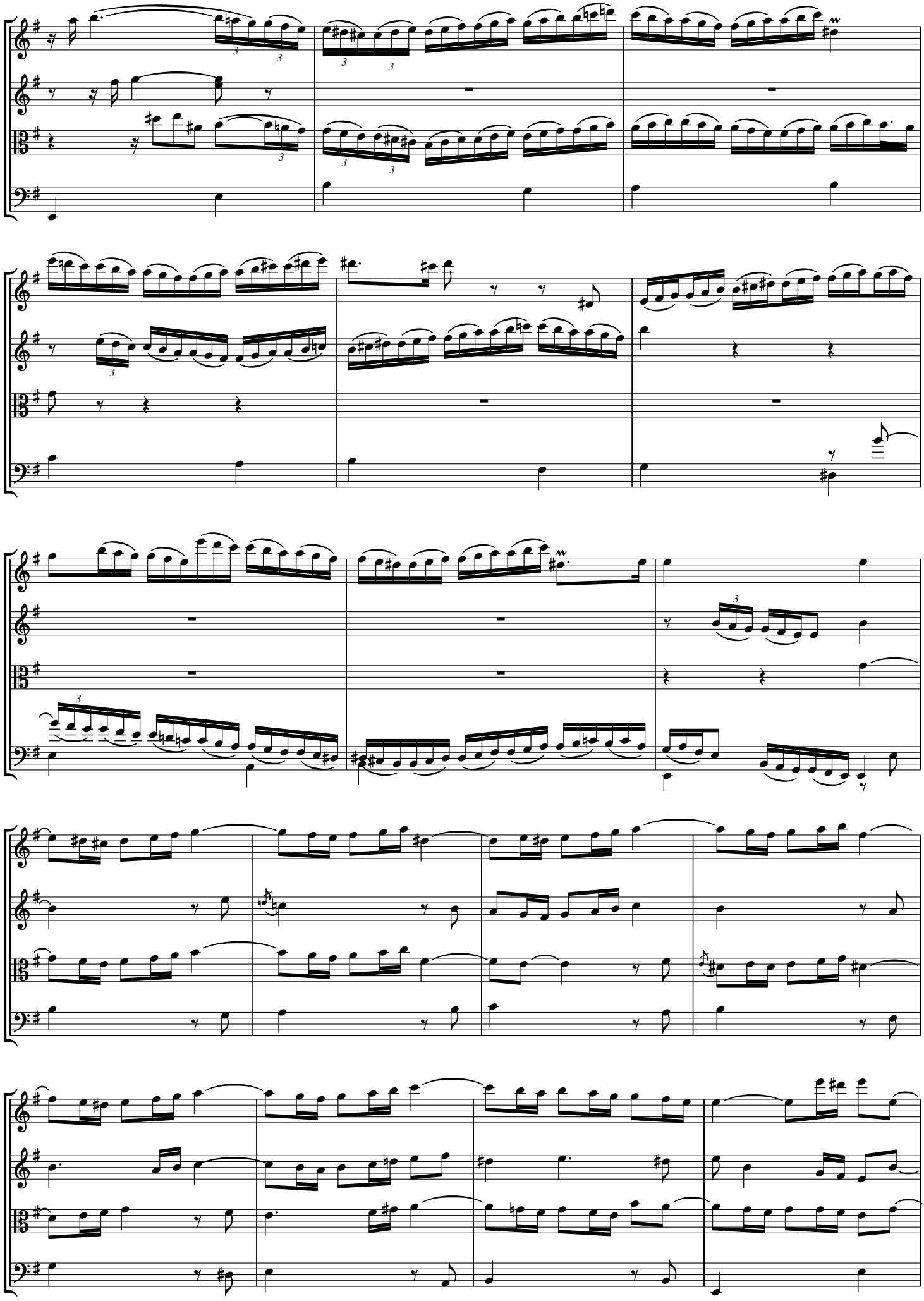

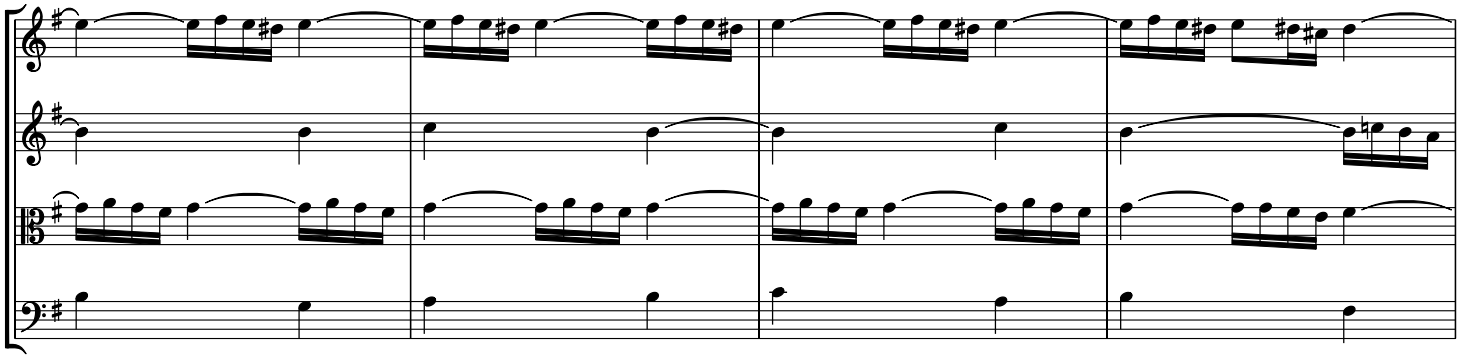

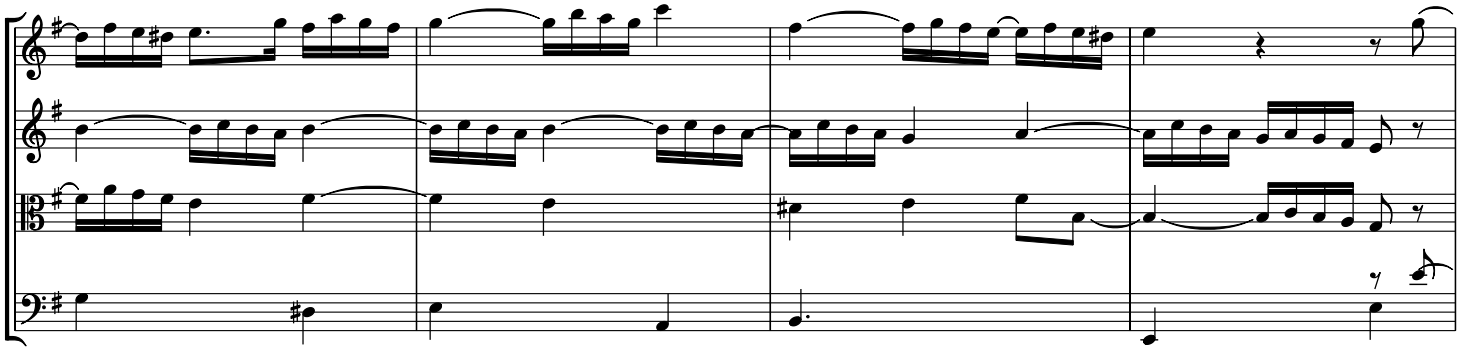

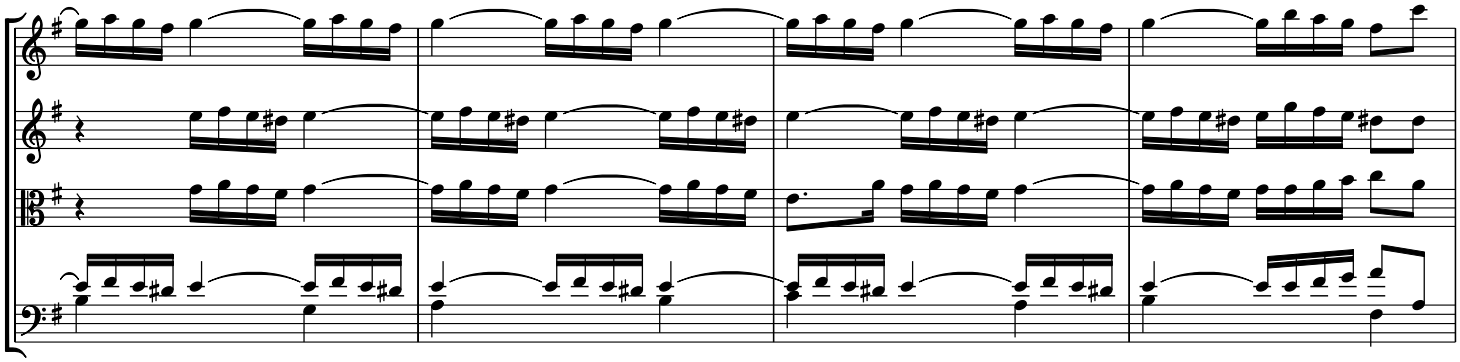

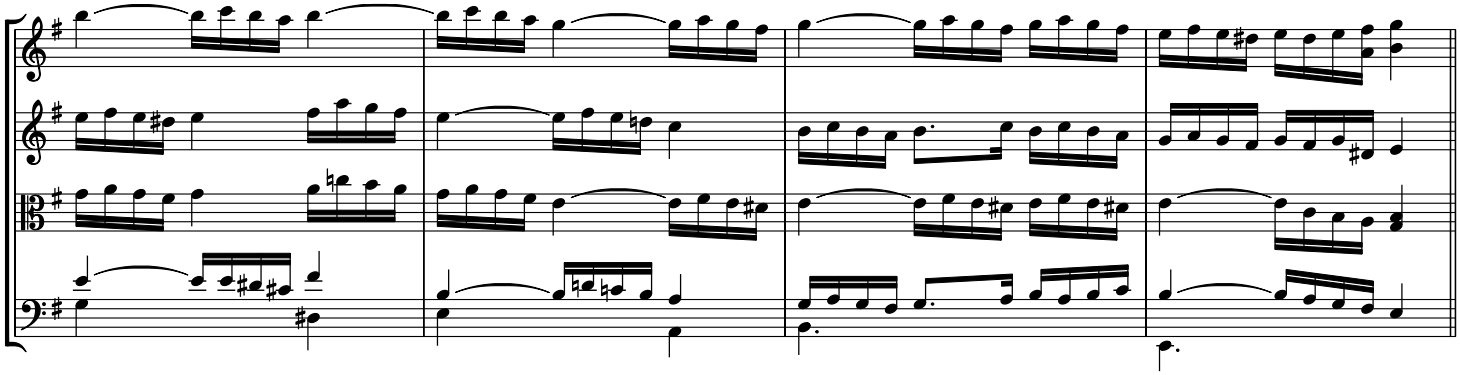
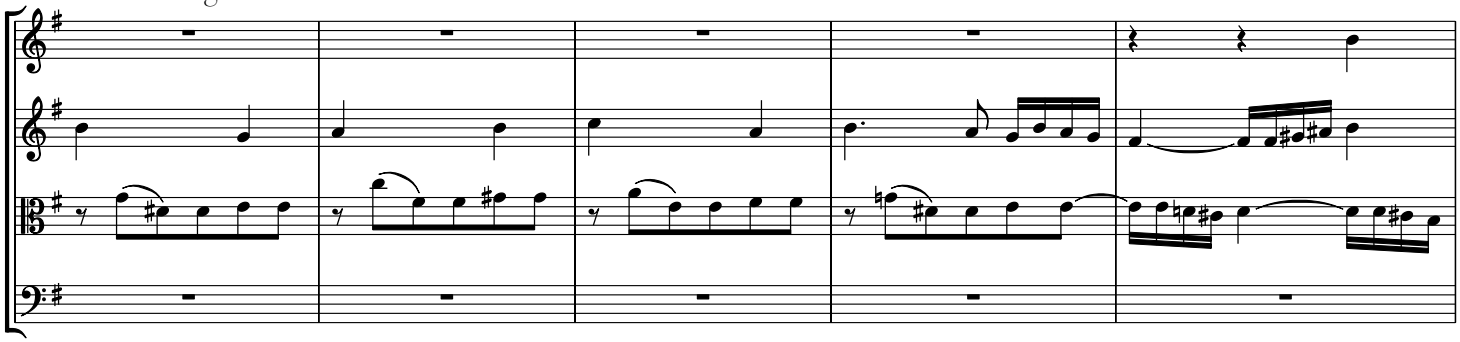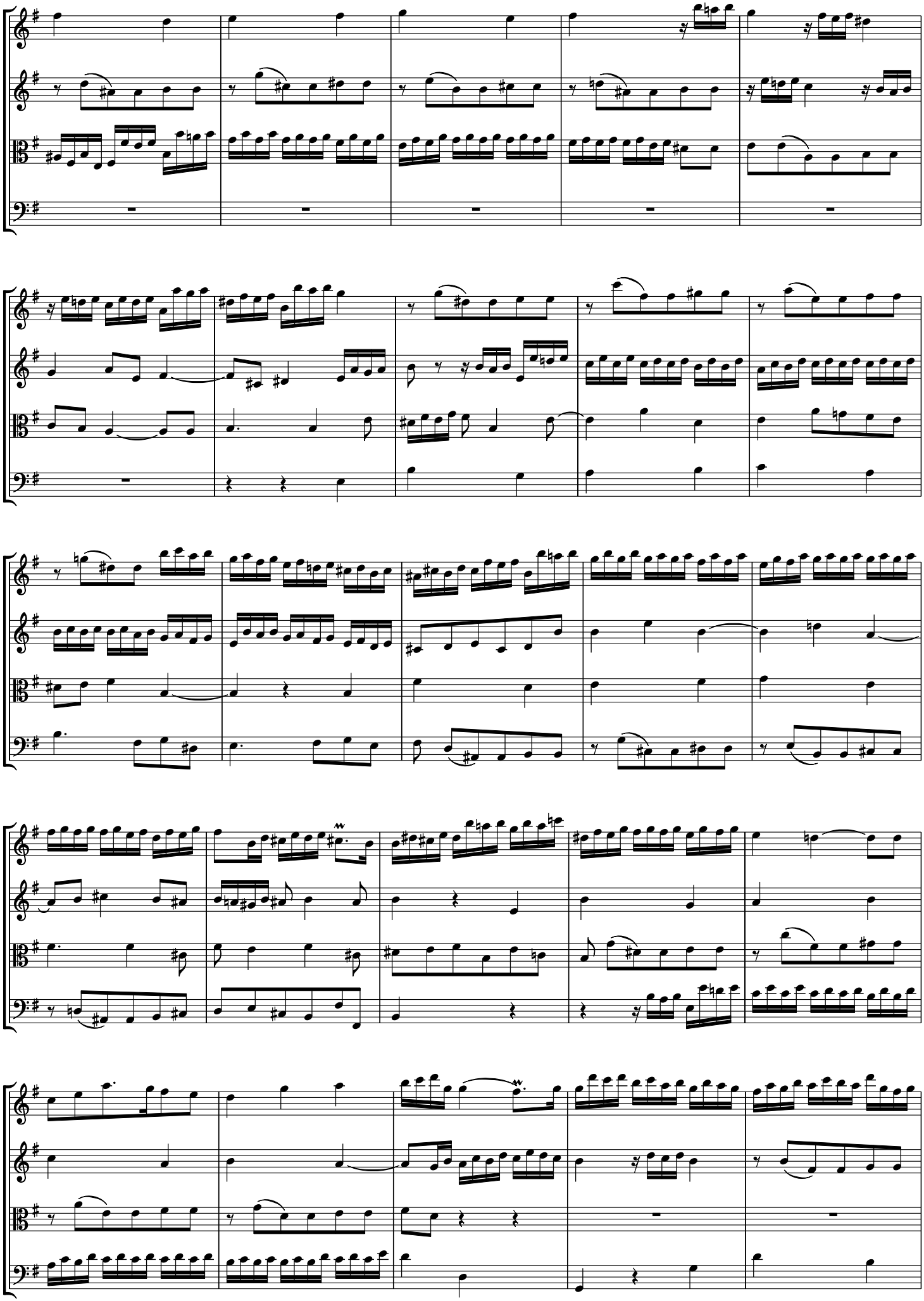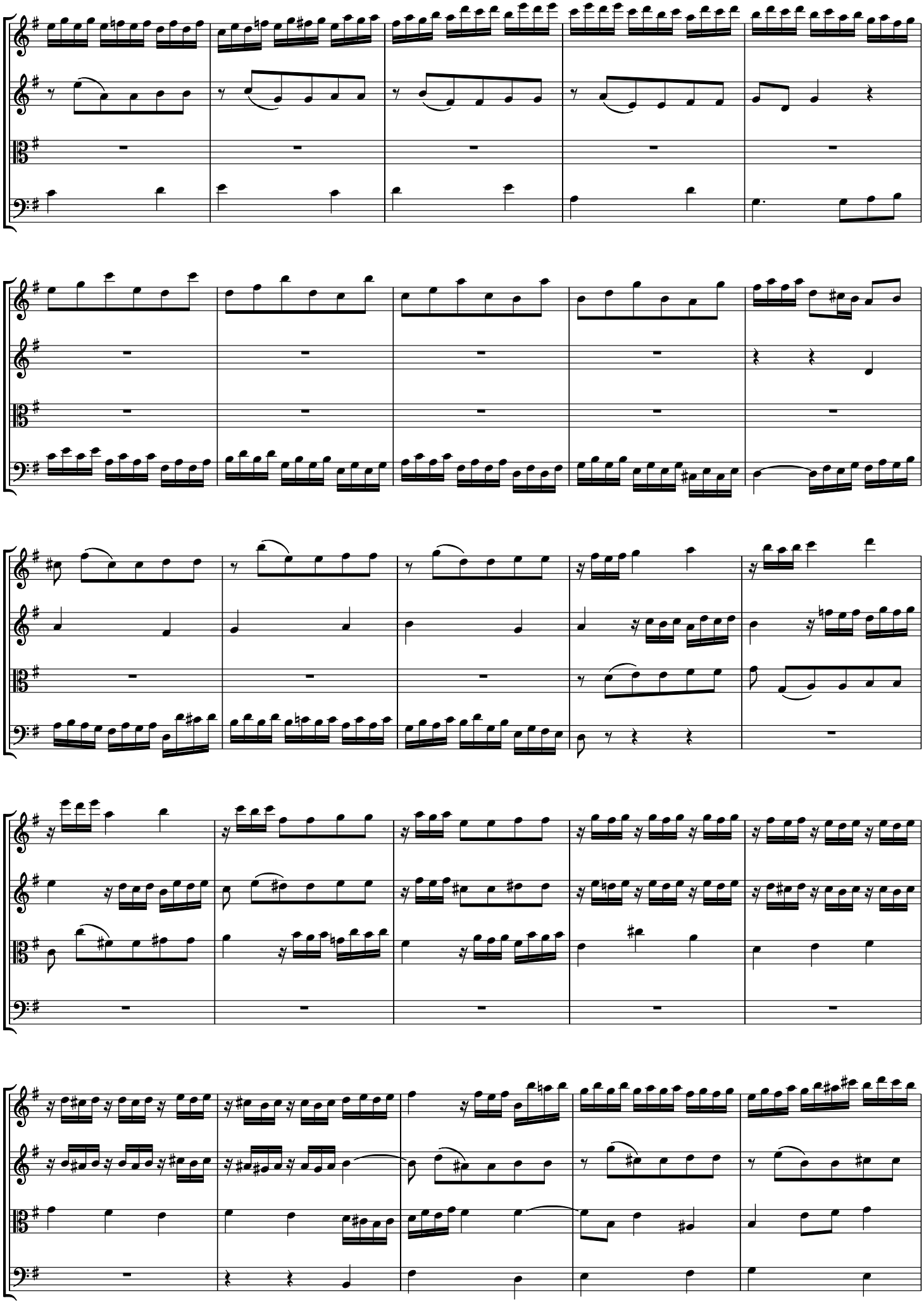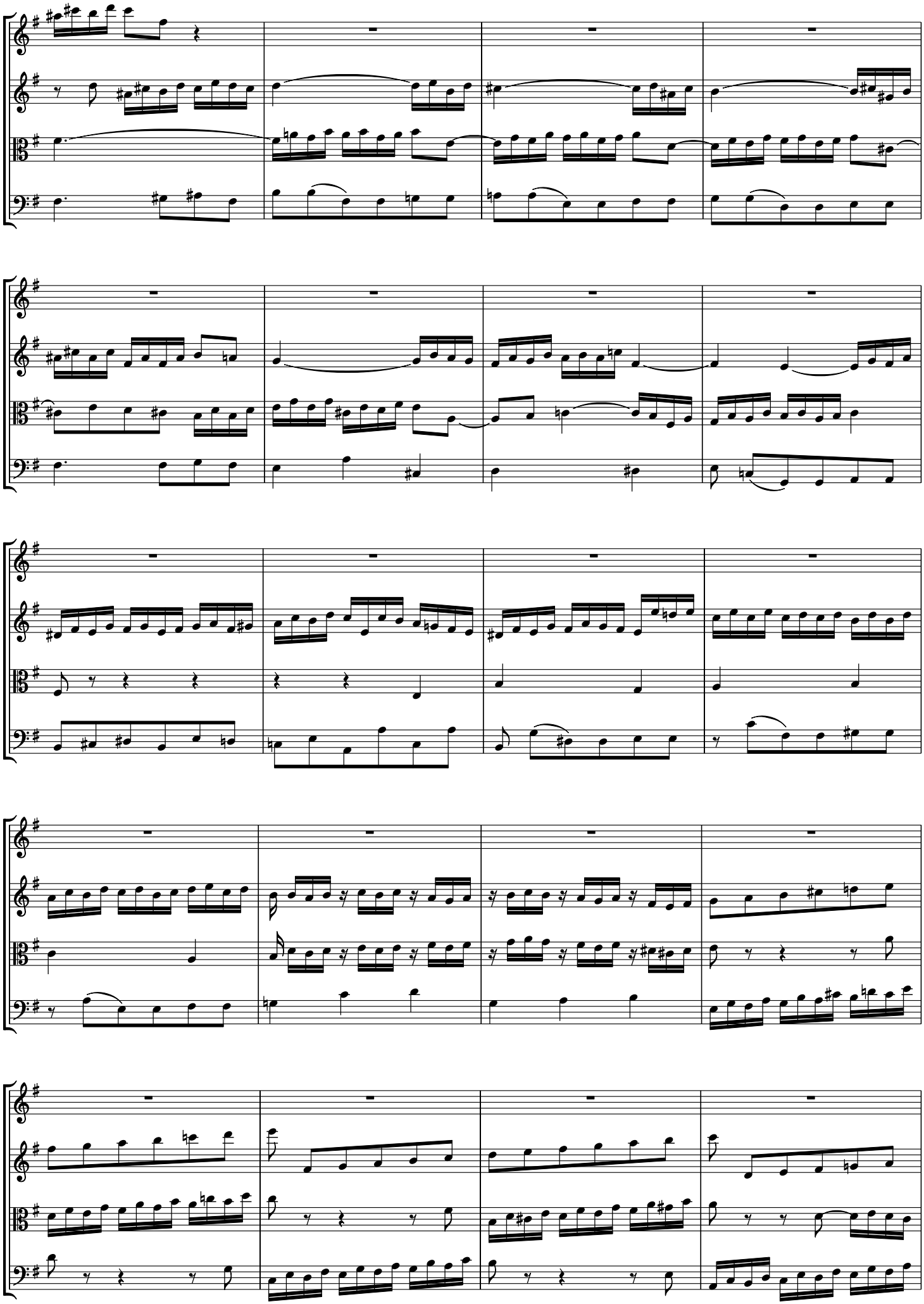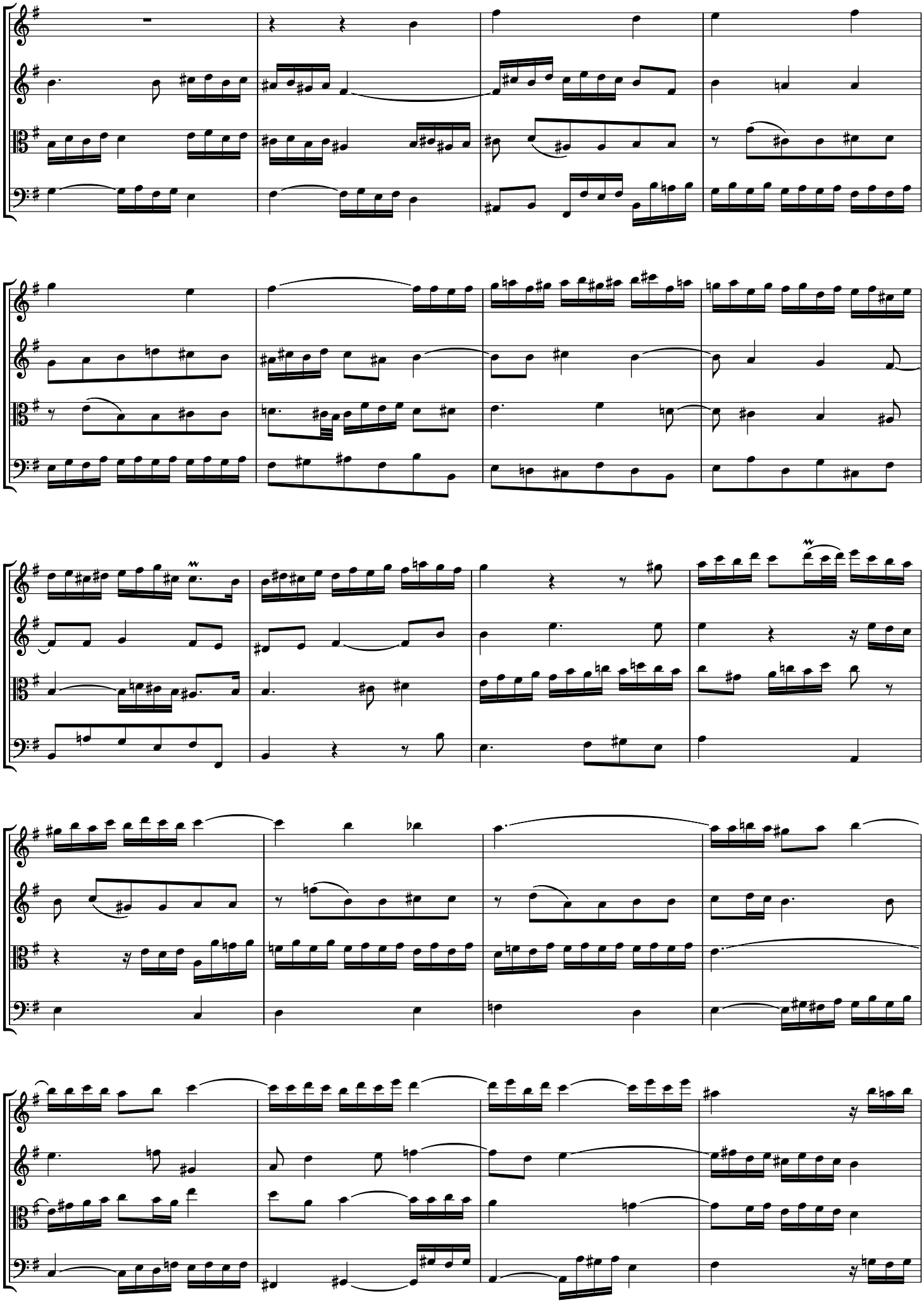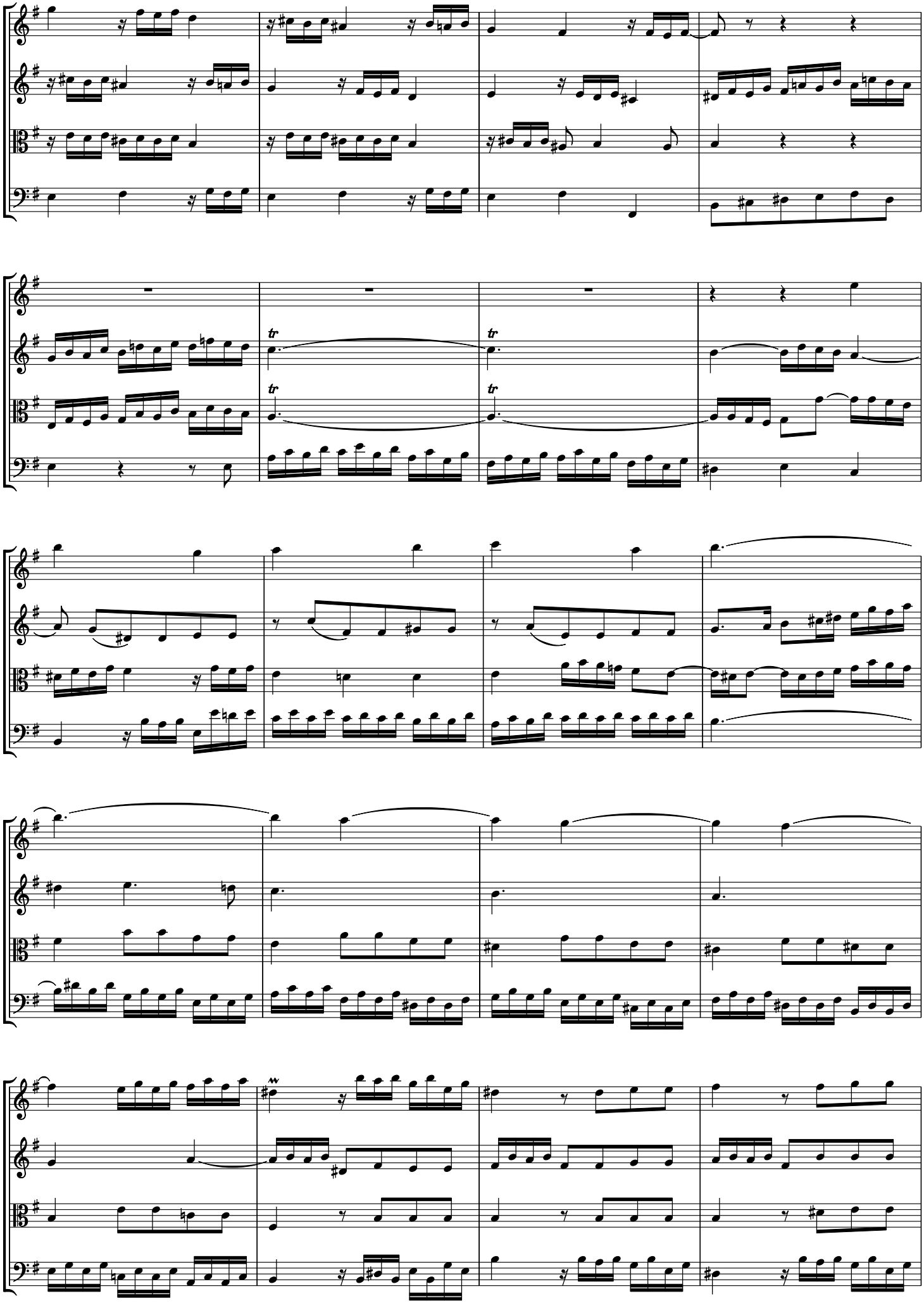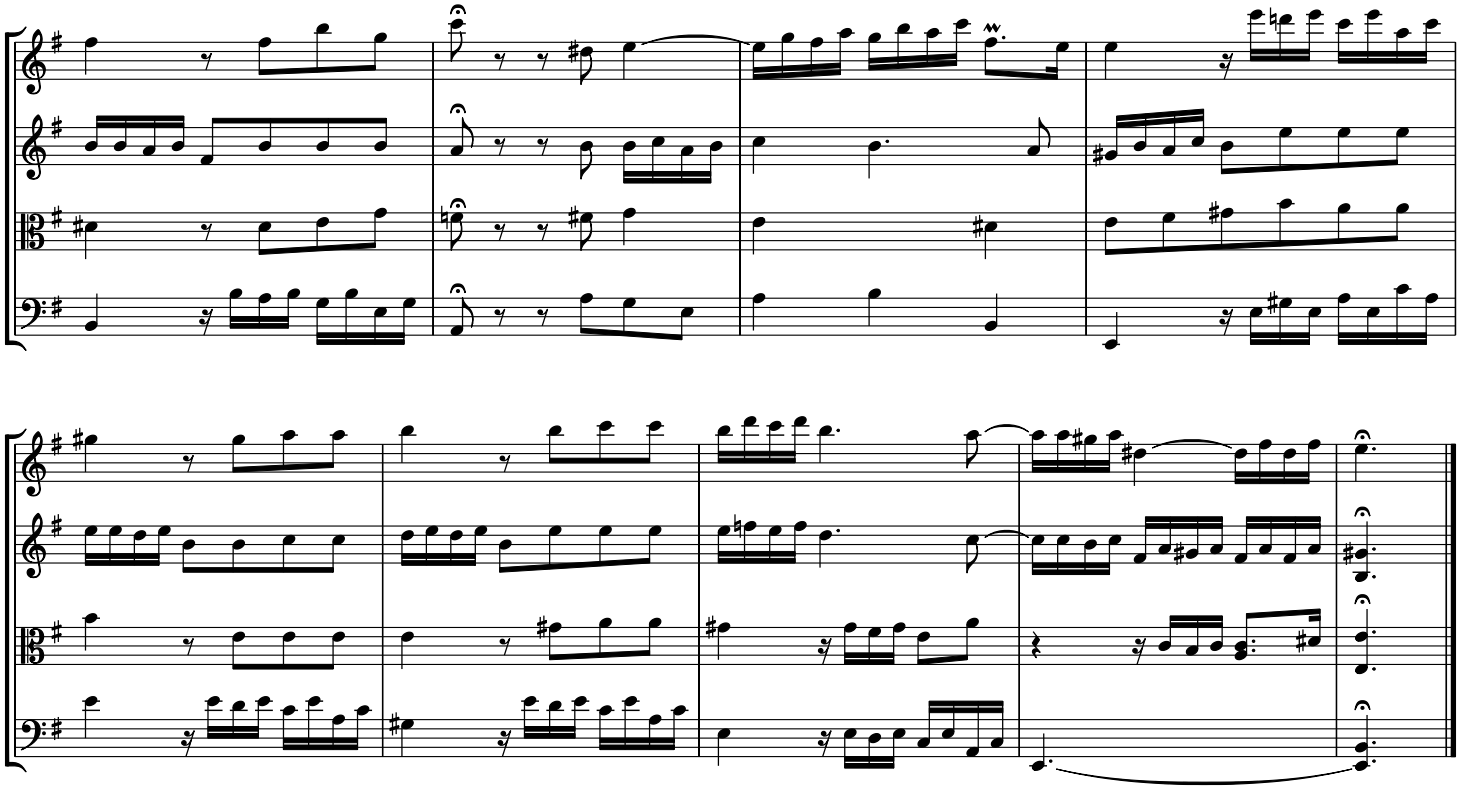
Thema fugatum