Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
La Fiancée du roi de Garbe

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D. F. E. Auber. A photograph from the last years

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INTRODUCTION

La Fiancée du roi de Garbe, an opéra-comique in three acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe and Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges, was premiered at the Opéra-Comique (Deuxième salle Favart) on 11 January 1864. The subject is borrowed from a story by Boccaccio, which had been turned into a short erotic tale in verse by La Fontaine. It has an oriental setting; 'Garbe' is an Arabic word for the West, suggesting that this may originally have been an Arab tale before being taken up by Boccaccio. The 'King of the West' could refer to the King of Moorish Spain, or of the Algarve, or possibly even of Morocco. In the libretto it has an unidentified Iberian character.

In La Fontaine's tale, Alaciel, the daughter of Zaïr, the sultan of Alexandria, is to marry the King of Garbe. Alaciel sets out to sea on her journey accompanied by Hispal, a young noble who is in love with her. They are attacked by pirates, jump overboard, and are washed up on a desert shore. Hispal becomes Alaciel's lover. This is only the beginning of her adventures. The young princess acquires seven more lovers—in La Fontaine's words she "passes through the hands of eight men"— before finally reaching her destination, where there is a happy ending, and the King of Garbe accepts her as a virgin: "Veuve de huit galants, il la prit pour pucelle".

Scribe and Saint-Georges adapted this *conte* to the mores of the time, and the exigencies of the stage. It becomes a picaresque tale built around Alaciel's journey from Garbe, where she marries the king (in act 1), through various adventures to her home to Egypt (in act 2), and back to Garbe (in act 3), attended all the while by the king's dashing nephew Don Alvar, with his entourage of the royal barber Figurina, and his cupbearer Truxillo. The pirates, and various characters from Arabic folklore (the imam and the hermit), feature in the central desert act, while the outer two are set in the Occidental royal court of Garbe.

This was the last collaboration between Auber and Scribe, terminated, after the death of the latter, by Saint-Georges. Auber left Scribe and Saint-Georges to fight the literary battle about the libretto, the notoriously difficult challenge of arranging a famous *conte* for the lyric stage. The work was treated by both authors and musician in the manner of an operetta, apart from the fourth tableau, the scene of the pirates, which has the dramatic character of an operatic finale.

The overture opens with the theme of the finale. In act 1, the first tableau contains Figurina's opening aria ("Voici la barbière"), a duet for King Bobolin and his barber ("Dépêchons nous!"), the couplets for the page Raphael ("Ah! Le charmant pays!"), the romance of Don Alvar ("Tiens, regarde ce divin portrait! Tout bas je puis te dire") and the quartet that follows ("J'entends que l'on publie en chaque carrefour"). The tenor romance written for Don Alvar, with its veiled and coloured accompaniment, with the murmuring bows of the strings, seems like a rustle of wings. The second tableau depicts the marriage of Alaciel, and is remarkable for its sprightly conclusion "Allons, bravons les dangers". Figurina's aside in the first finale: "Notre roi se marie?" enthused the public.

Act 2 of *La Fiancée du roi de Garbe* shows Saint-Georges trying to bring in various elements from the source, resulting in scenes that are badly integrated. The composer, on the other hand, derived positive inspiration from some of the characters. He was especially taken by Alaciel and her companion, in their tent set up in the

desert for them by Don Alvar. He set this scene to music with his familiar spirit, youthfulness of melody and finesse of harmony. He provided a *nocturne* in B-flat major, a trio sung by Alvar, Figurina and Alaciel ("Allons! Dormons"), Alvar's ravishing serenade ("Ô reine de beauté") that is expanded into both trio and septet, and the lovely *chanson* for two sopranos (Alaciel and Figurina) ("Va, brise chérie, dans notre patrie"). The *nocturne* is in the style proper to a musician—a reverie, a poem totally Oriental in feel. In the trio, Auber produced the most admirable page of his score. Act 2 of the opera, the most feeble part of the libretto, comes across musically as the best section of the score.

Act 3 contains the scene of the pages (chorus "Voltigeons, compagnons, Et rions et chantons!"), Truxillo's *couplets* ("Grâce, pardon, pour cette fois!") and Figurina's aria ("Non, je n'y croisais pas, si ce maudit érin...Ah! Que de dangers en voyage!").

The cast were: Victor Prilleux (Bobolin, the King of Garbe); Valérie Tual (Alaciel); Léon Achard (Don Alvar); Alexandrine Cico (Figurina); Charles-Louis Sainte-Foy (Truxillo); Davoust (the Sultan of Egypt); Charles-Amable Bataille (Kouli-Rouka, a Malay pirate); Charles-Francois Duvernoy (Hatchi-Bounan, an imam); Elias Nathan (Ali-Caphar, a hermit); and Zoé Bélia and Augusta Colas (Raphael and Paer, pages of the king). The opera did not endure beyond a first flush of enthusiasm. It was in the repertoire for one year, l864, and numbered 33 performances.

Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges

LA FIANCÉE DU ROI DE GARBE

PAROLES DE

E. SCRIBE ET DE SAINT-GEORGES

MUSIQUE DE

D. F. E. AUBER

Personnages.	Acteurs.
Babolin Ier, Roi de Garbe.	MM. PRILLEUX.
Don Alvar, son neveu.	ACHARD.
Figarina, sa barbière.	Mlle CICO.
Truxillo, son échanson	MM. SAINTE-FOY.
Le Soudan d'Égypte	DAVOUST.
Alaciel, sa fille.	Mlle TUAL.
Zaïda, confidente d'Alaciel	Mme DECROIX.
Kouli-Rouka, corsaire Malais	MM. BATAILLE.
Hatchi-Boussan, iman	DUVERNOY.
Ali-Caphar, anachorète	NATHAN.
Raphaël, page de Babolin.	Mlle BÉLIA.
Paër, autre page	Mme COLAS.
Femmes esclaves.	
Cour de Babolin Ier.	
Cour du Soudan d'Égypte.	
Corsaires.	
Pages du Roi de Garbe.	

AVIS. — Vu les traités internationaux, les auteurs et les éditeurs de cette partition se réservent le droit de représentations, réimpressions et traductions à l'étranger.

Paris — Imp. Pontevin, rue Hautefeuille, 2 et 4.

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LA

FIANCÉE DU ROI DE GARBE

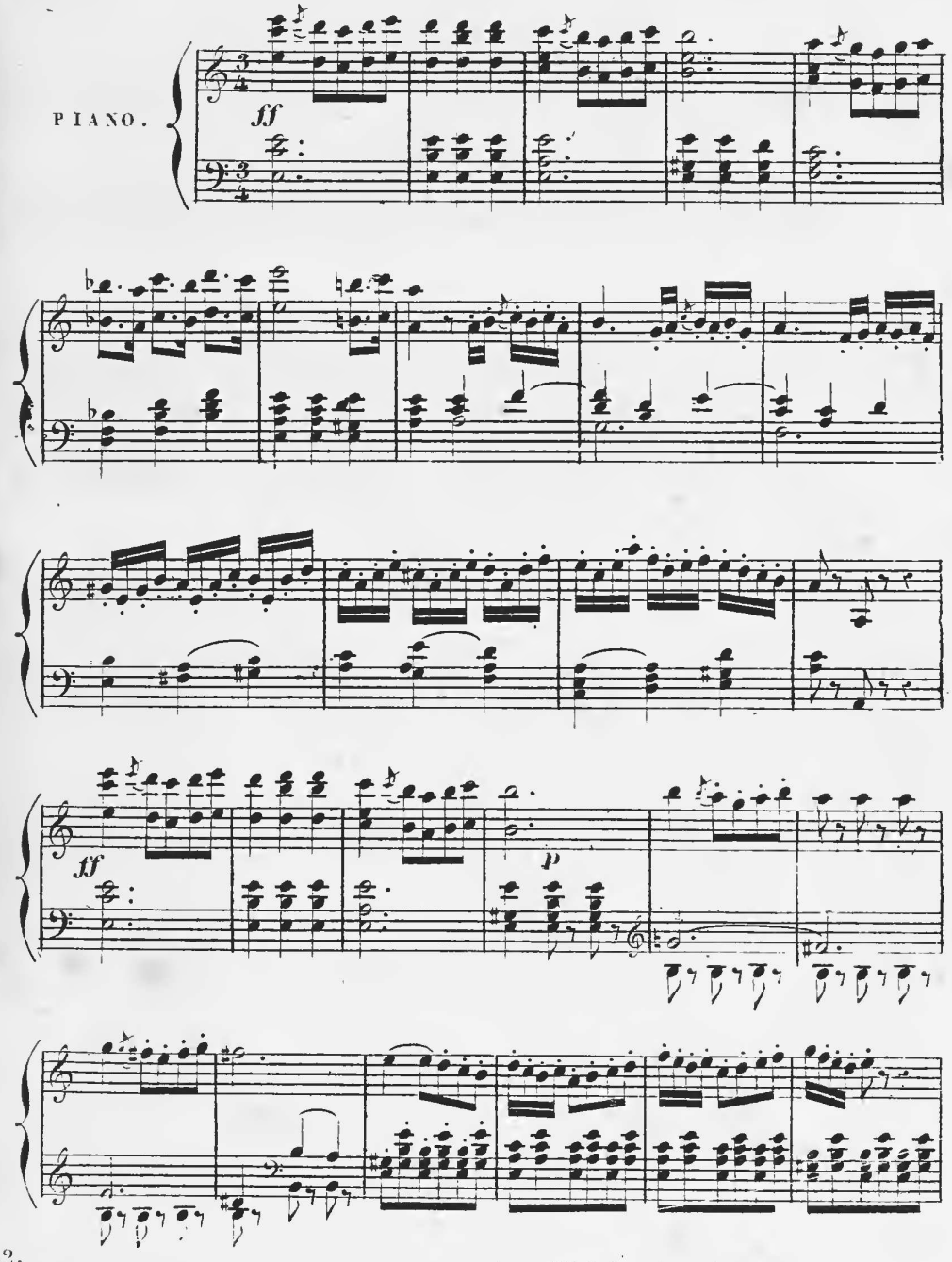
Opéra Comique en 3 Actes et 6 Tableaux.

Paroles
de **E. SCRIBE** et de **St. GEORGES.**

Musique
de **D. F. E. AUBER.**

(126 = ♩) **All.o maestoso.** OUVERTURE.

PIANO.



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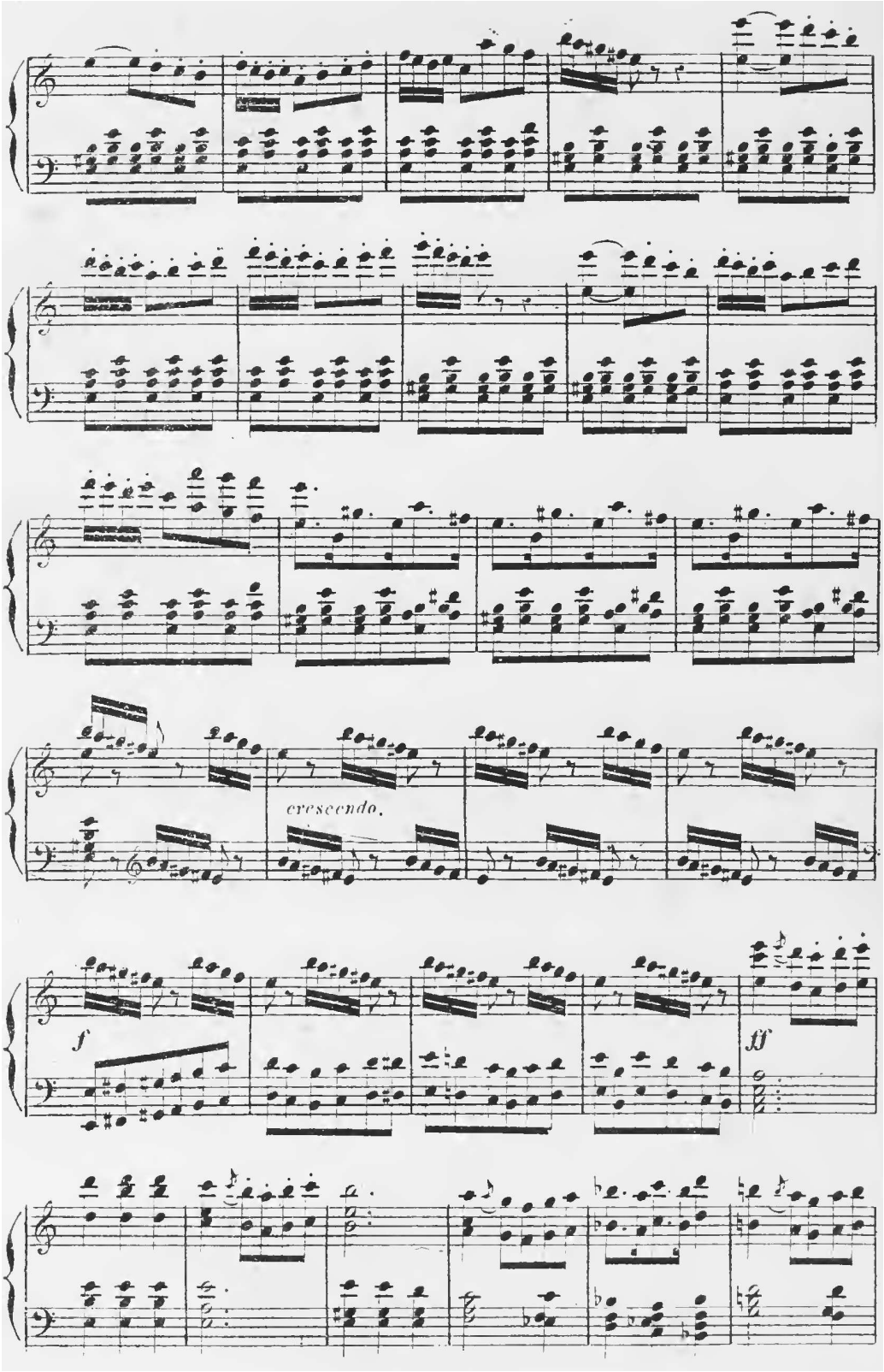
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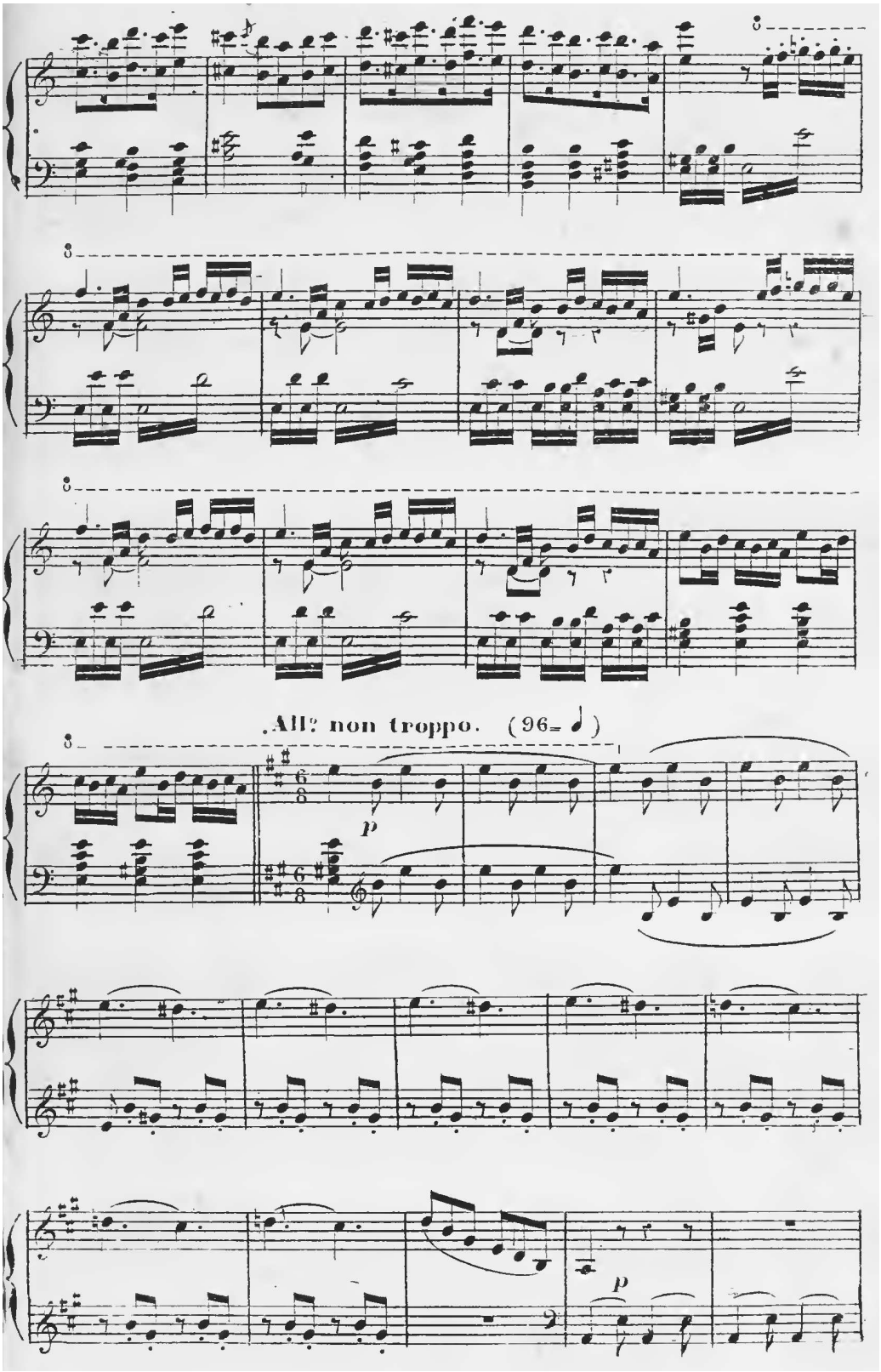
All.o non troppo. (96= ♩)
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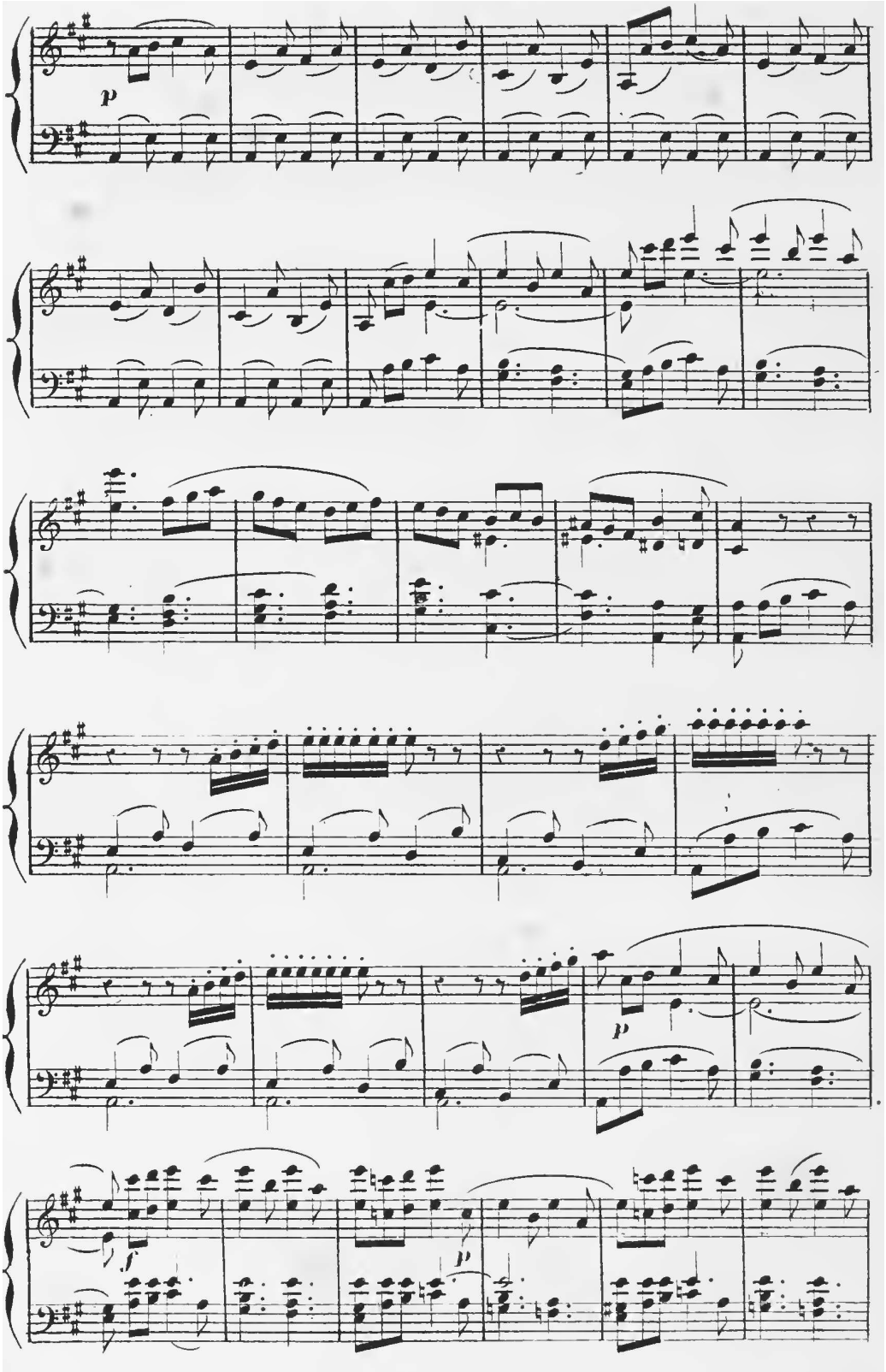
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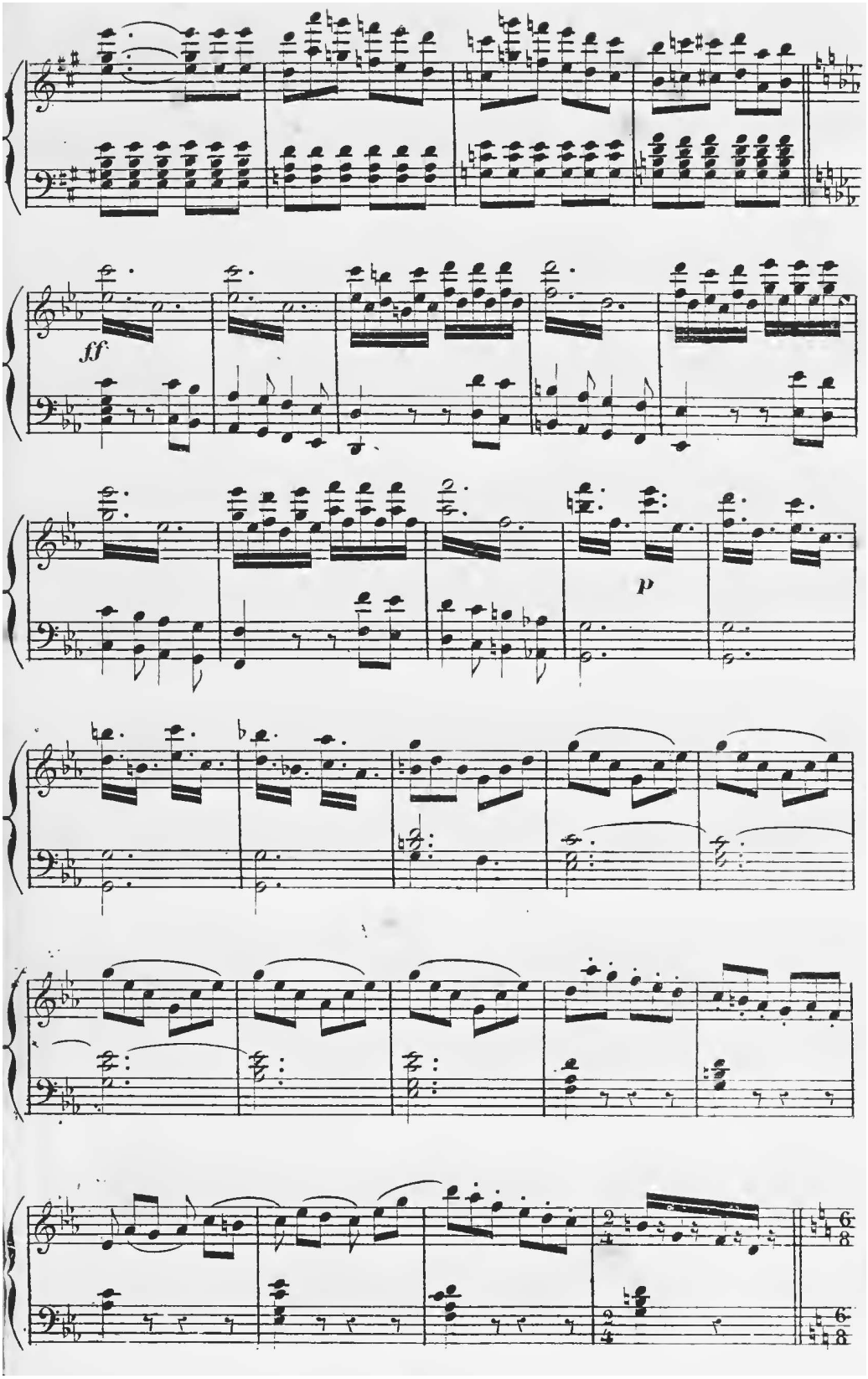
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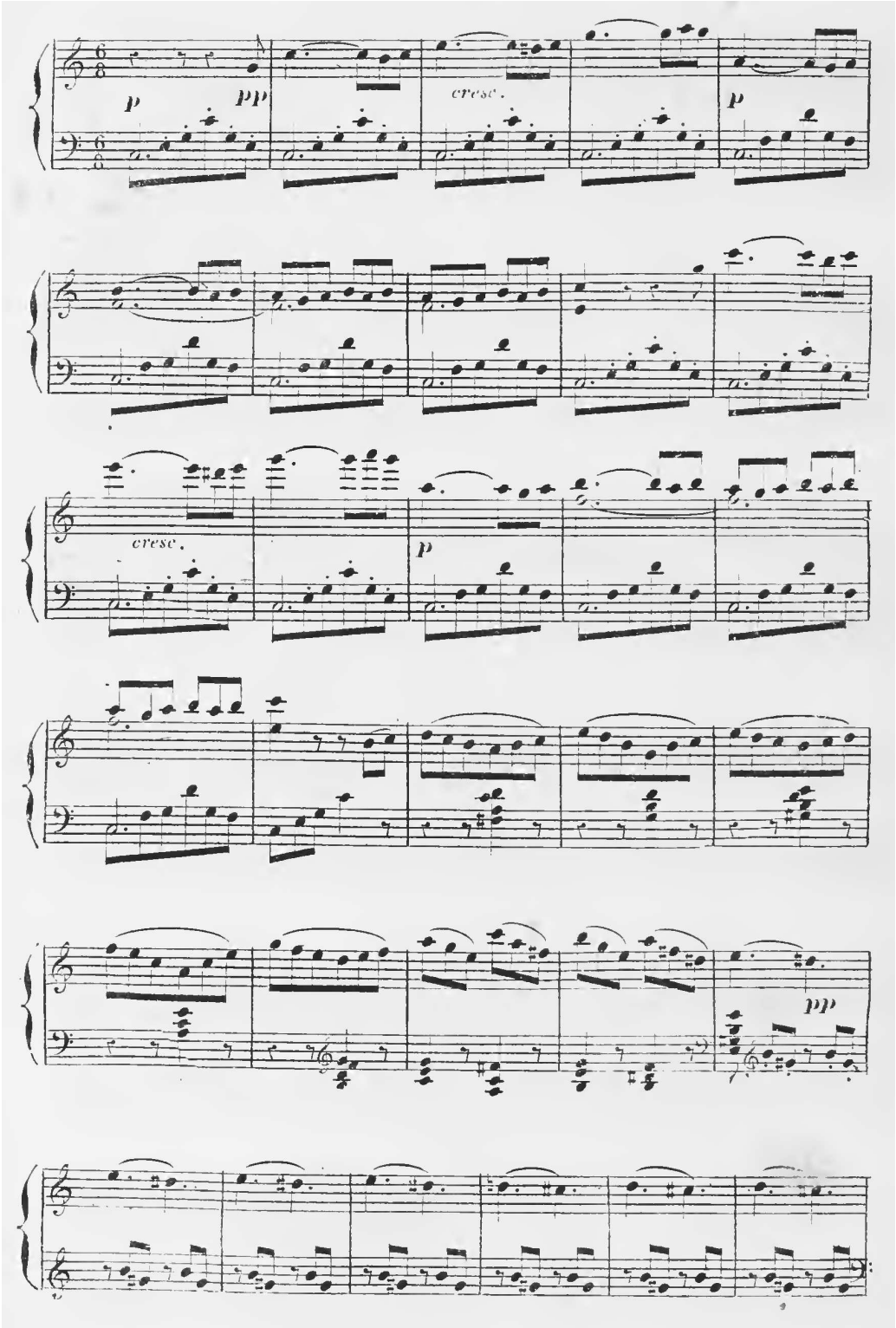
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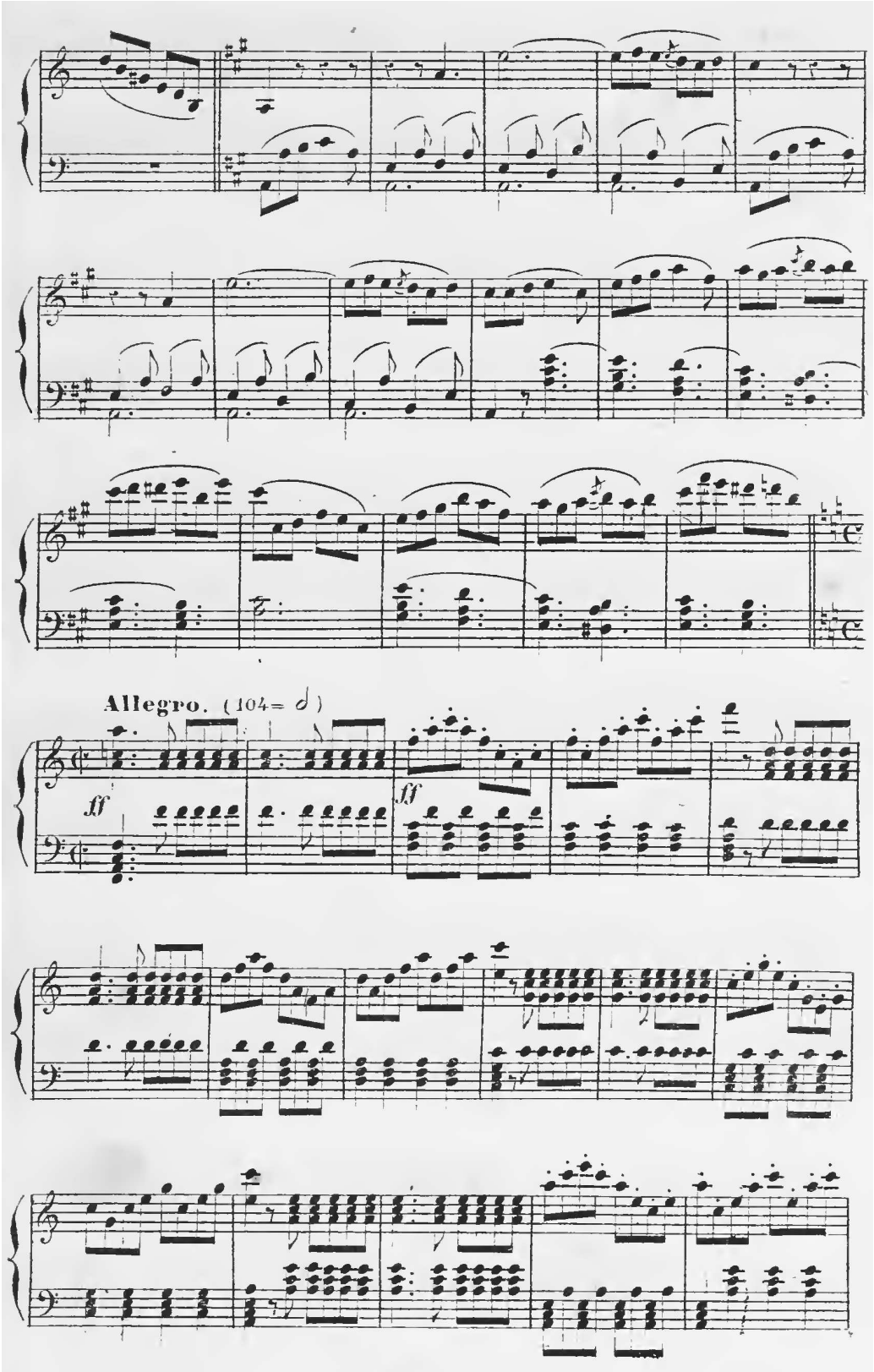
Allegro. (104= 𝅗𝅥)
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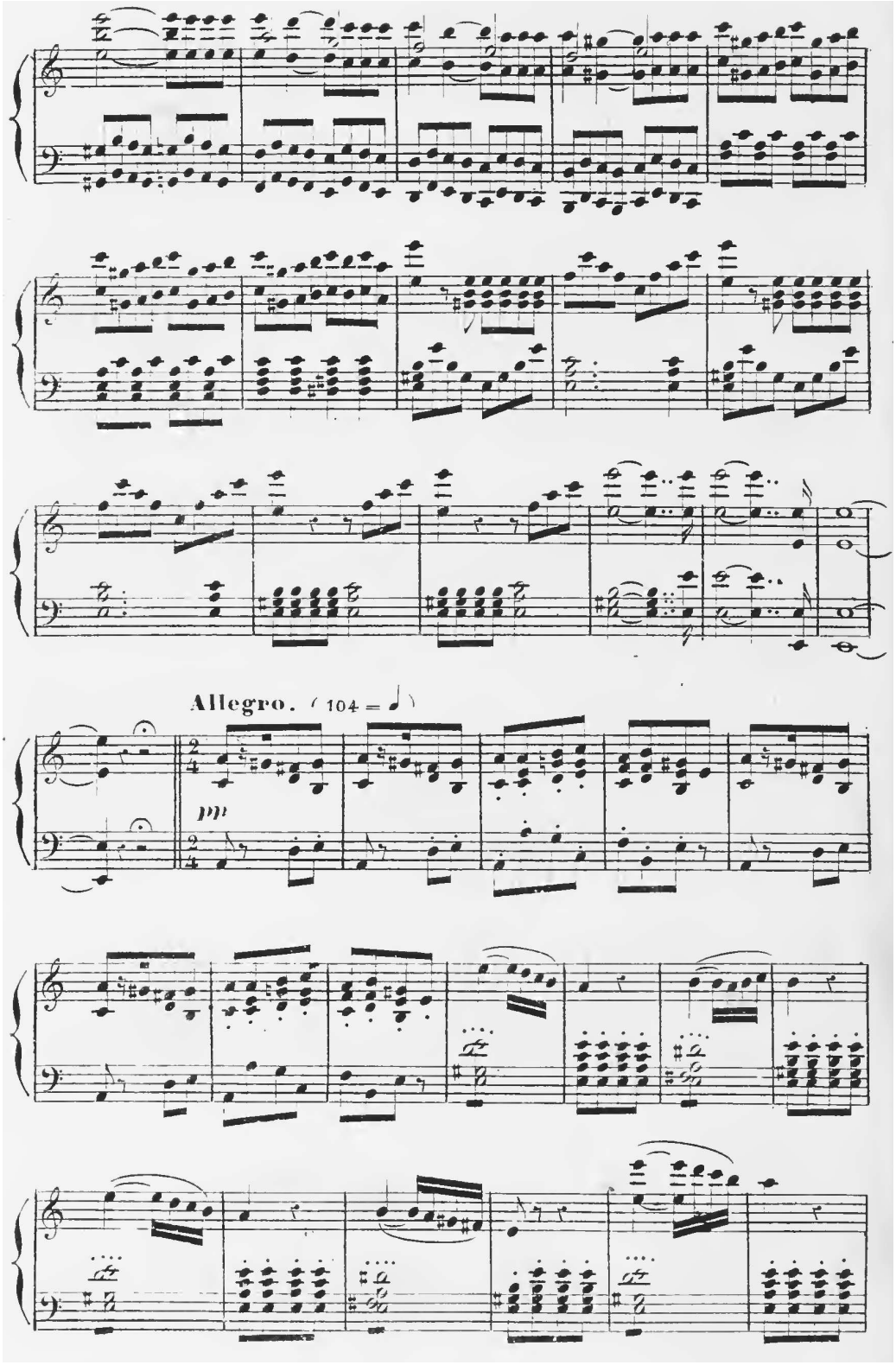
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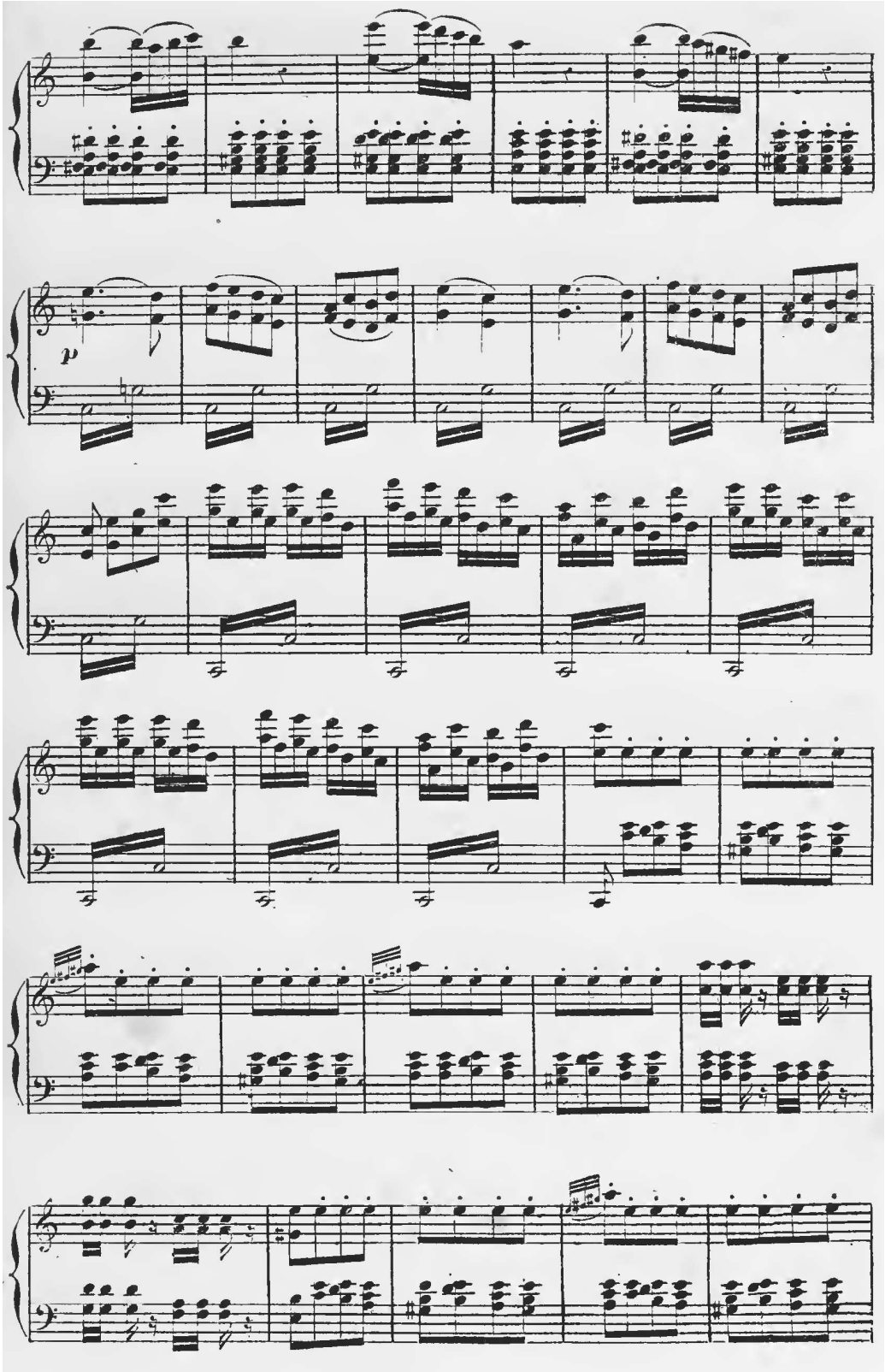
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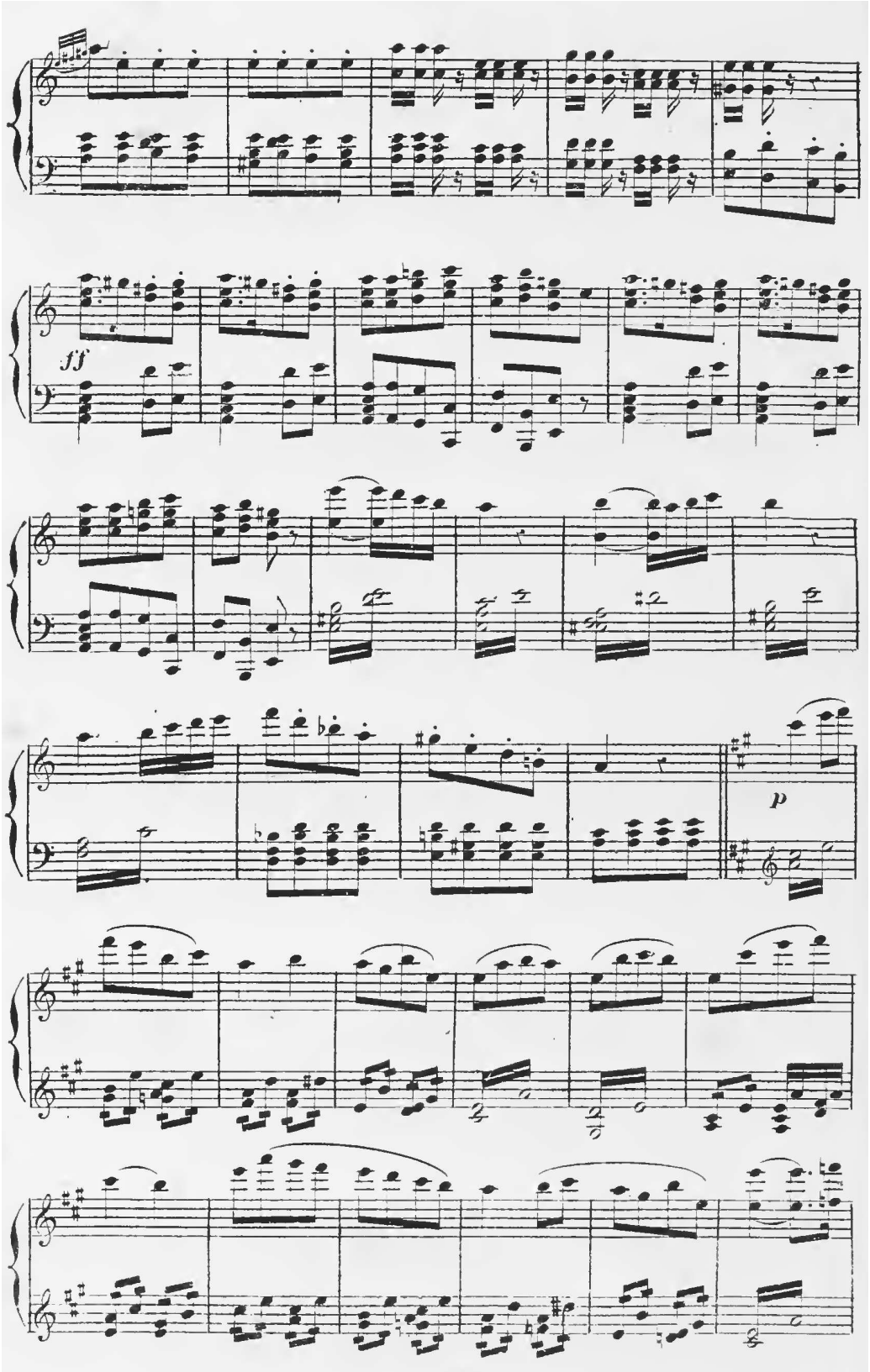
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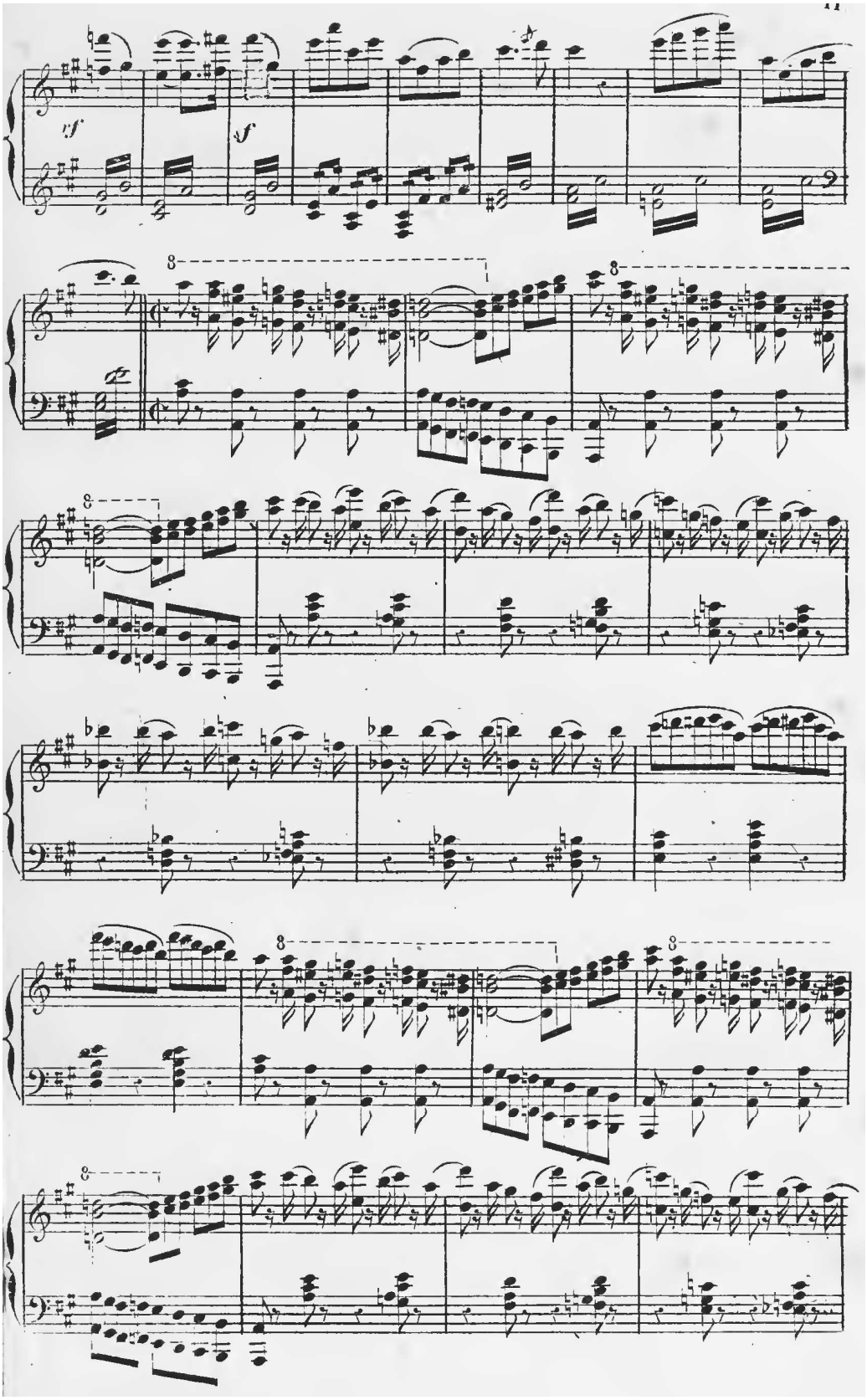
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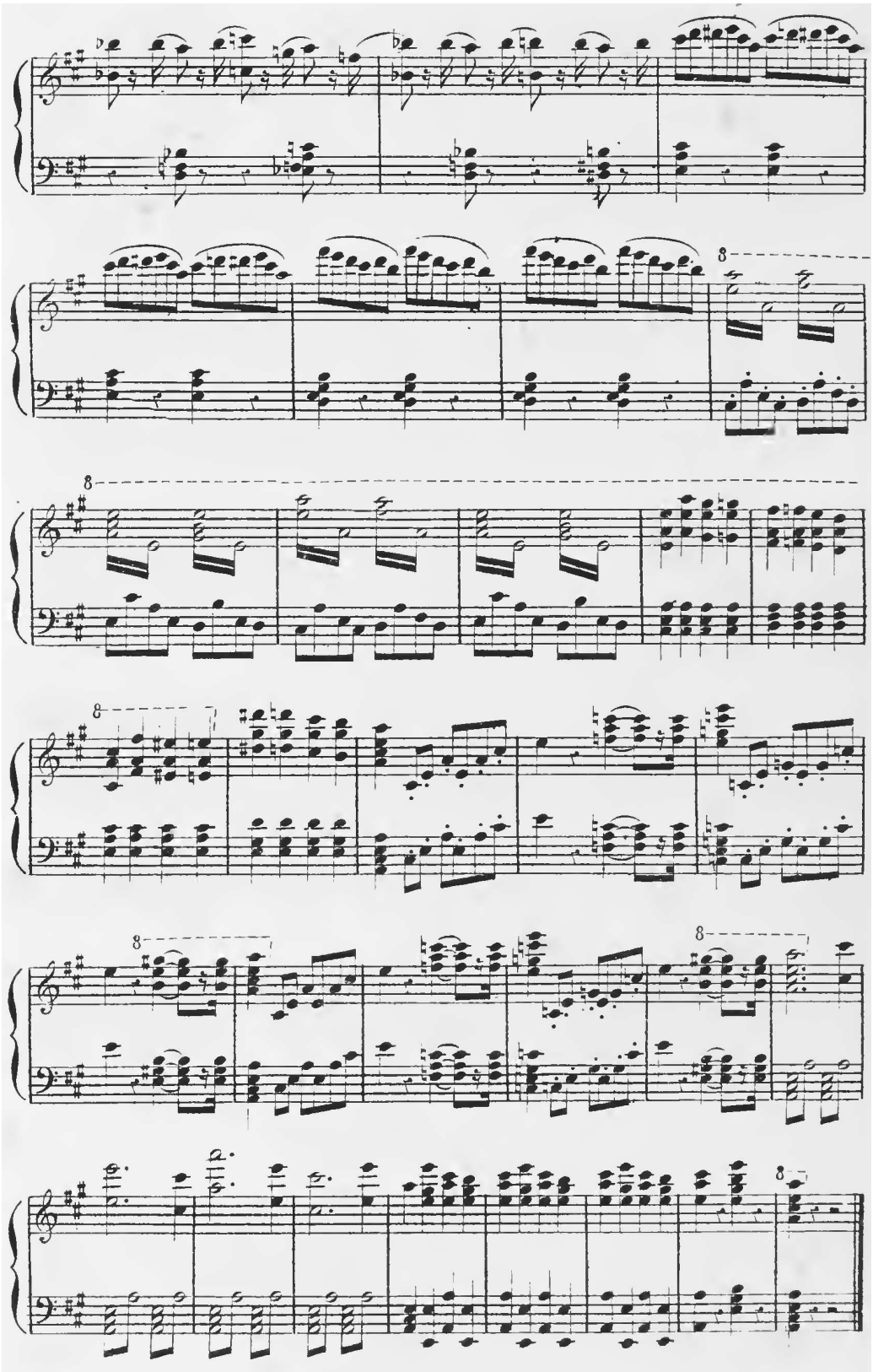
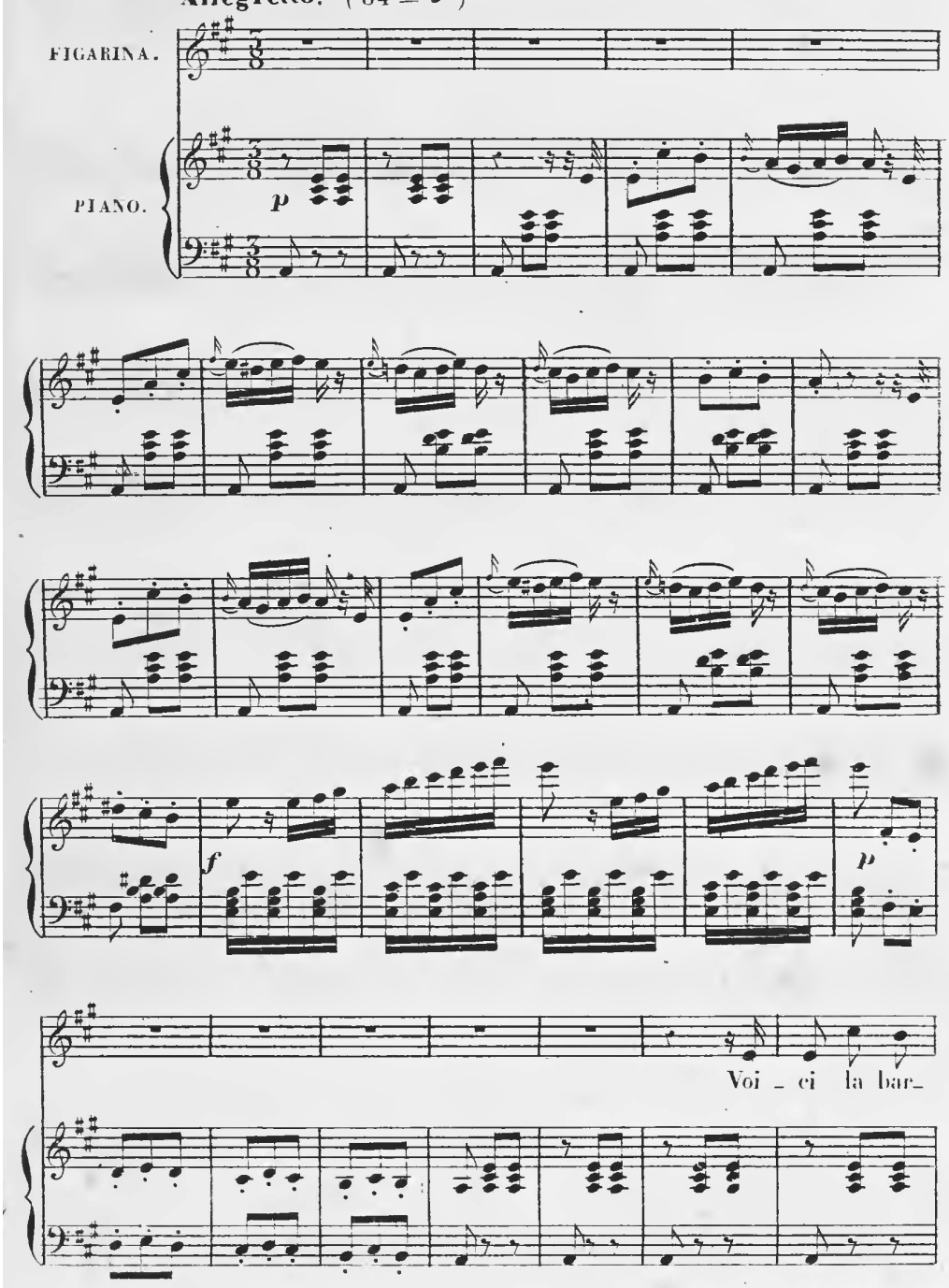
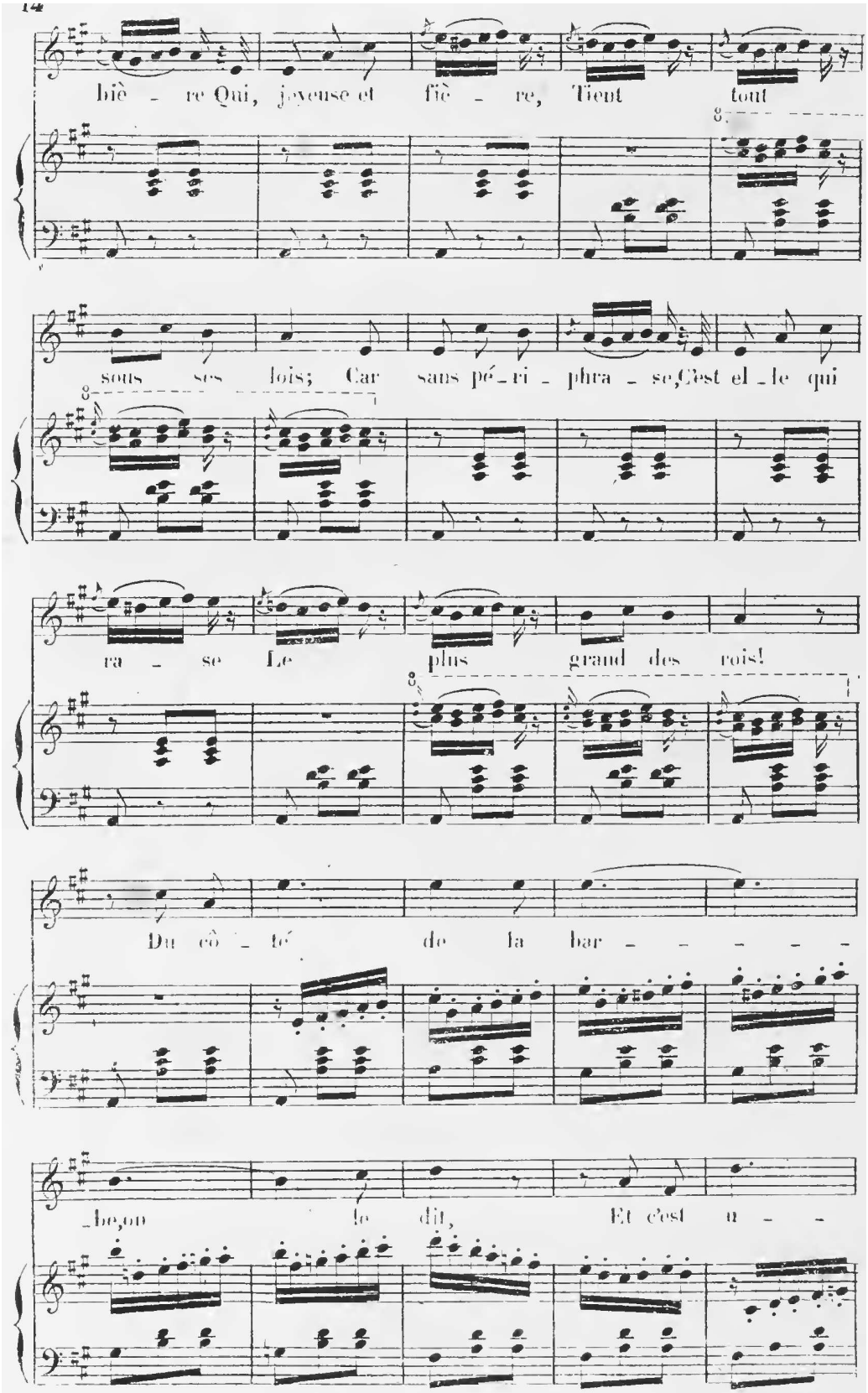


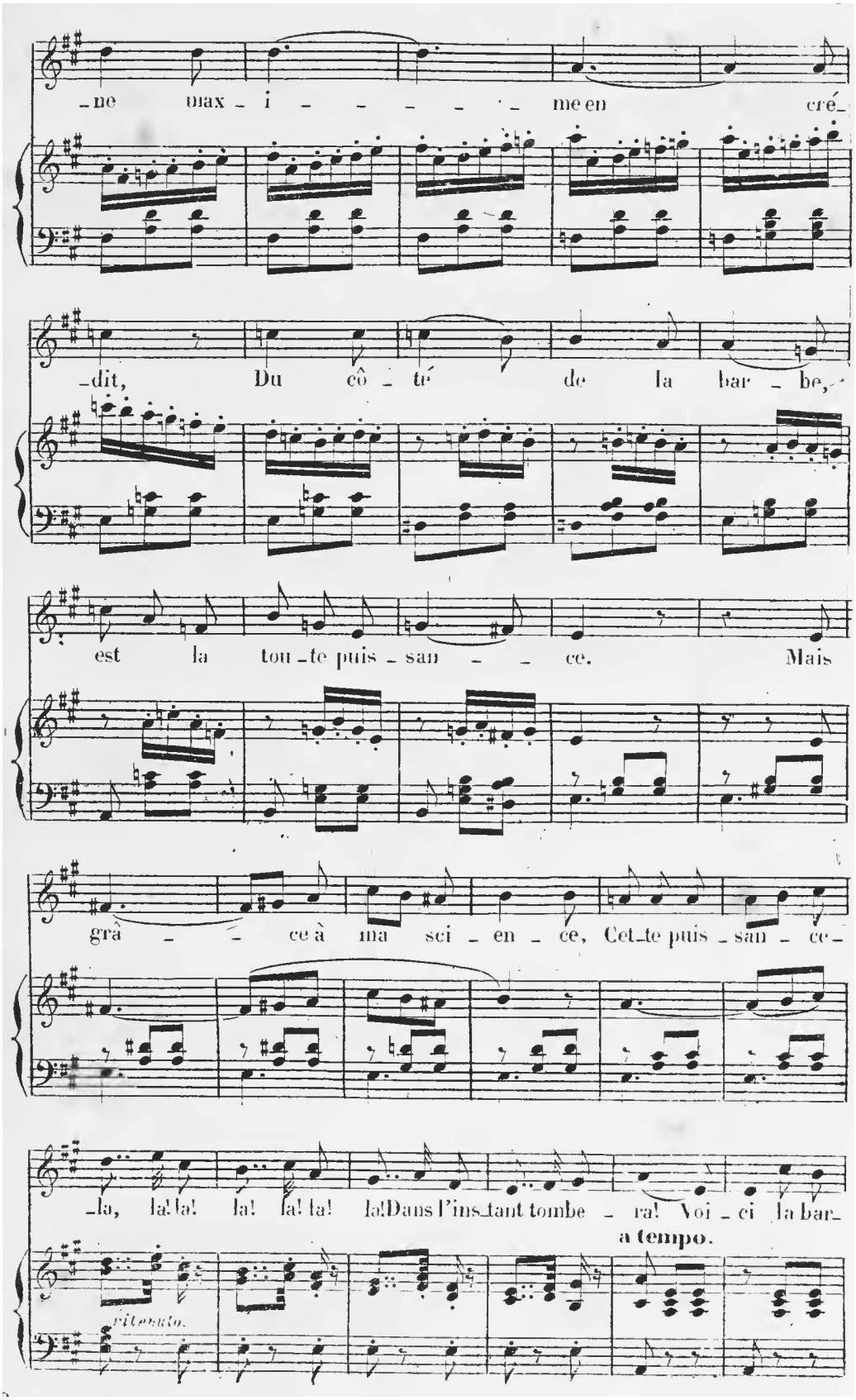
Eh c'est elle qui est capable,... comment cela?..

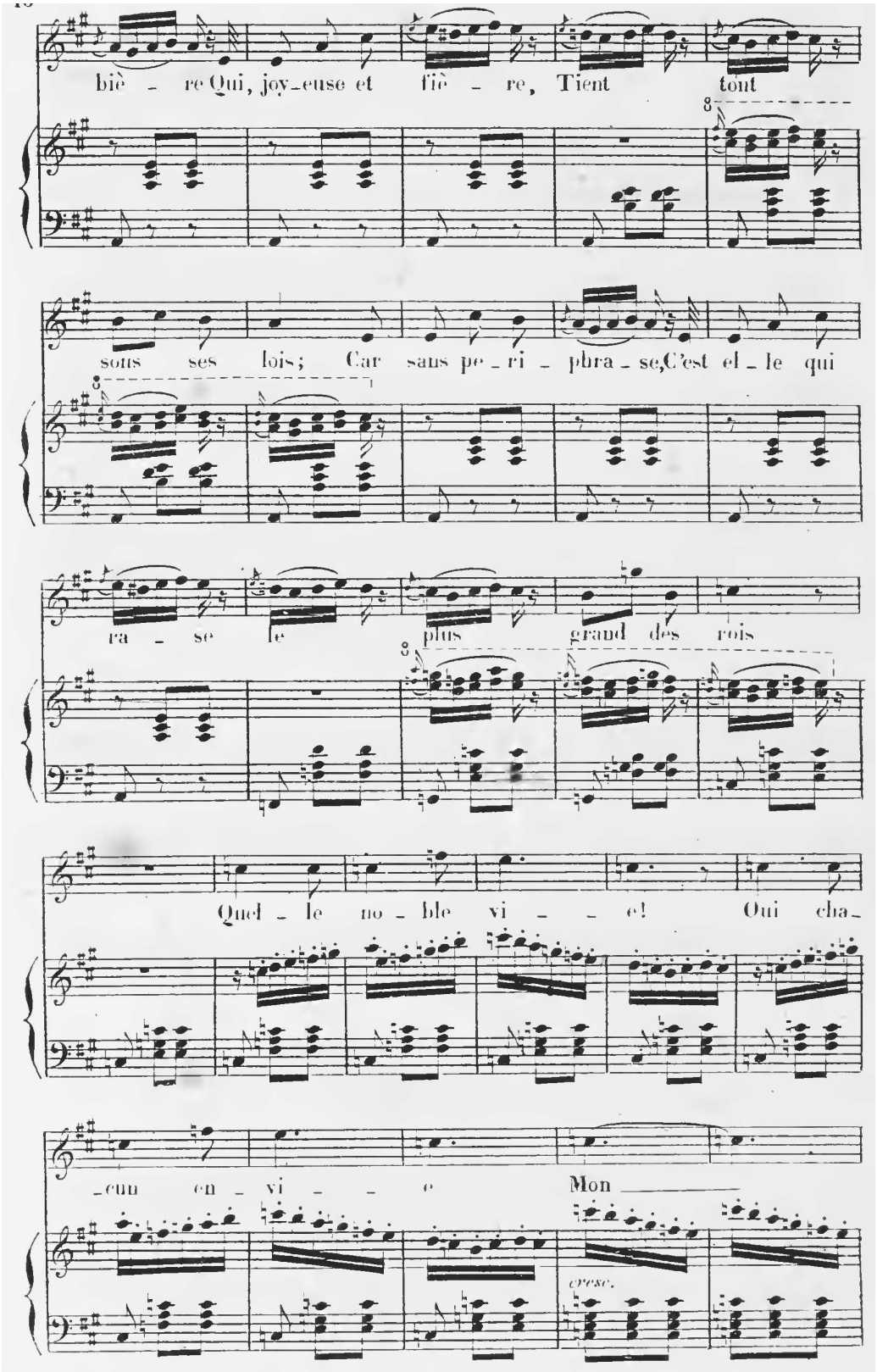
N°1.

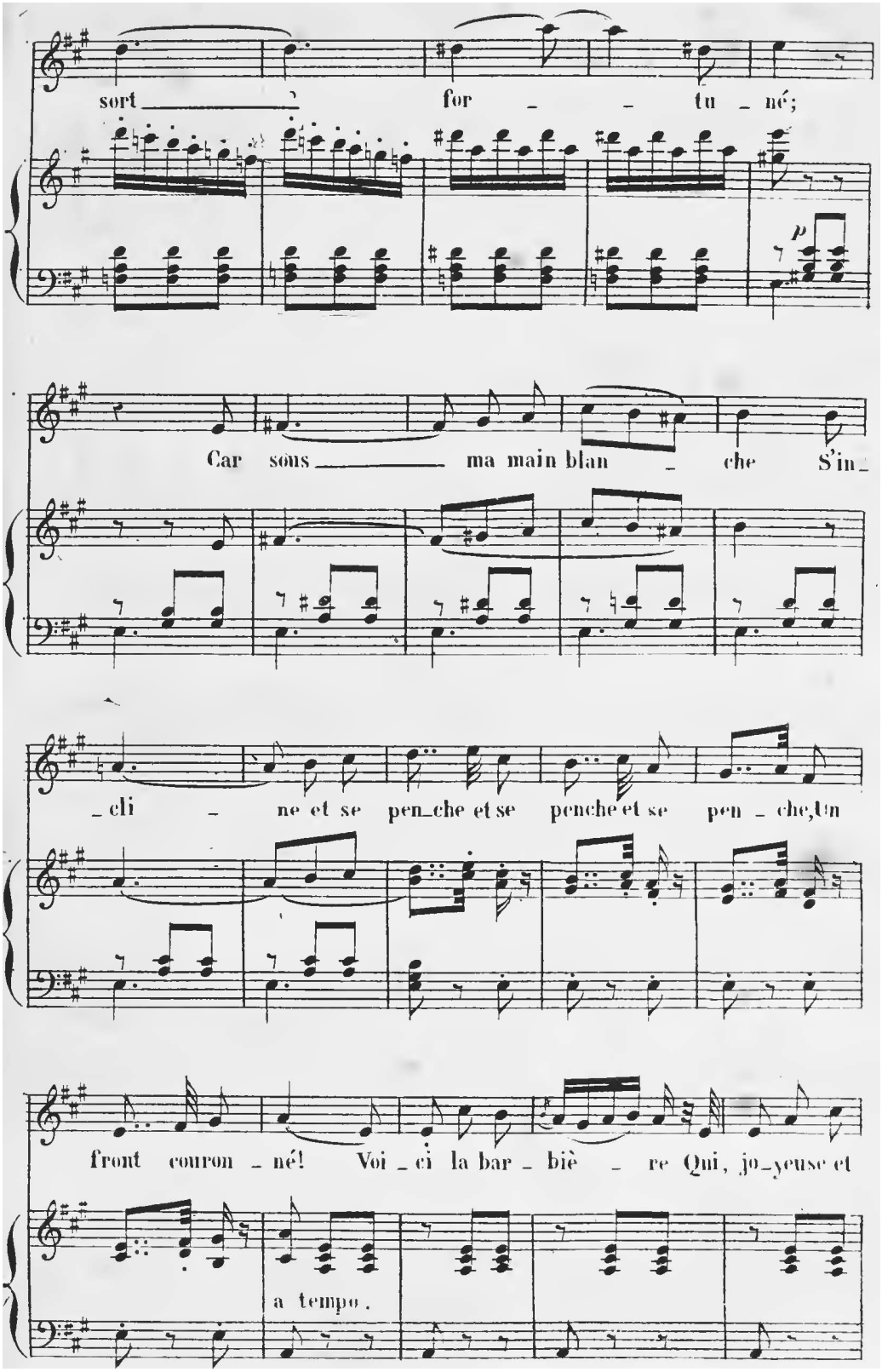
AIR.

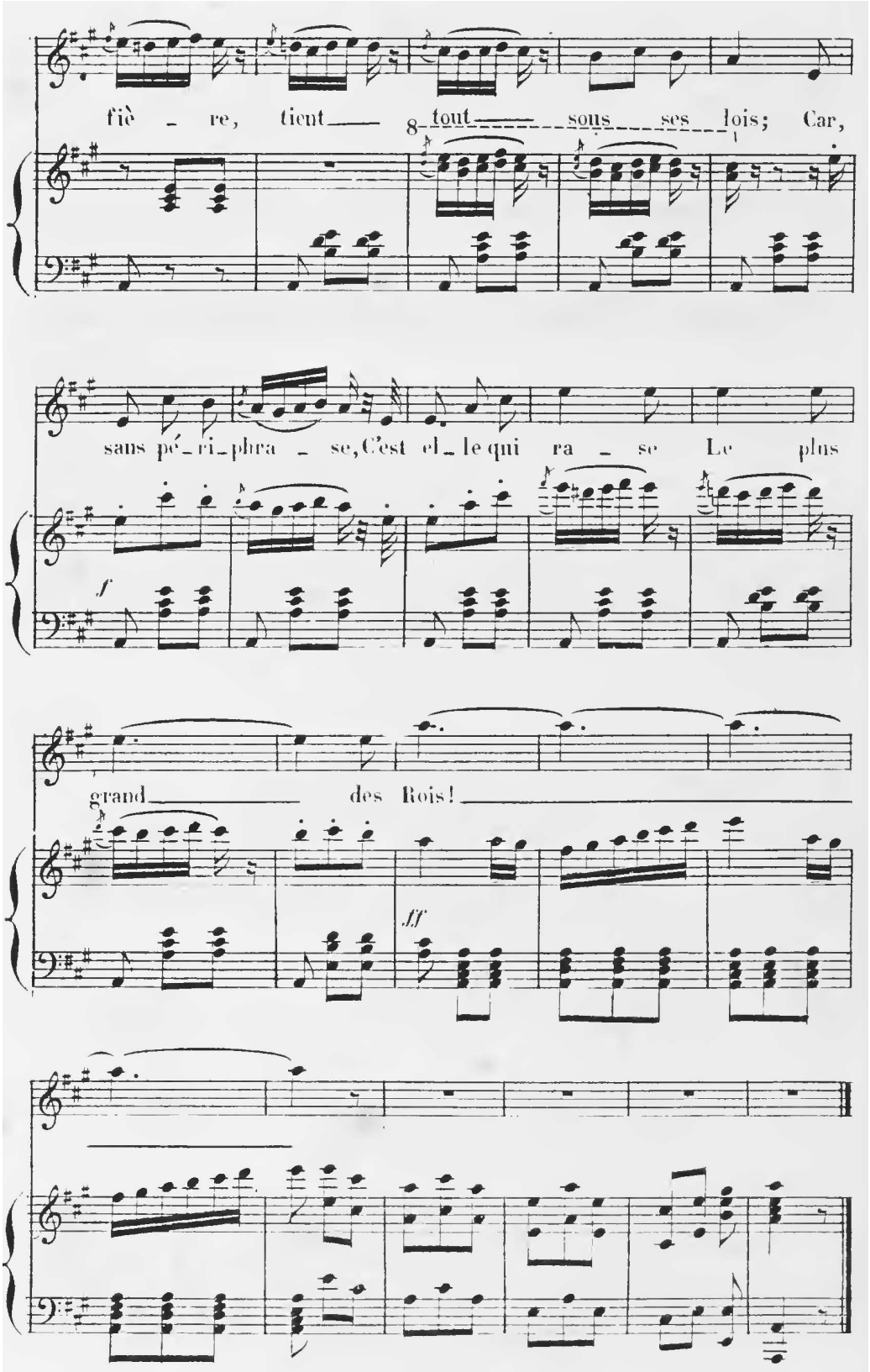



14
hiè - re Qui, joyeuse et fiè - re, Tient tout
sous ses lois; Car sans pé-ri - phra - se, C'est el - le qui
ra - se Le plus grand des rois!
Du côt - té de la bar - - - - -
-be, on le dit, Et c'est u - -


-ne max - i - - - - - me en cré-
-dit, Du cô - té de la bar - be,
est la tou-te puis-san - - ce. Mais
grâ - - ce à ma sci - en - ce, Cet-te puis-san - ce-
-la, la! la! la! la! la! la! Dans l'ins-tant tombe - ra! Voi - ci la bar-
a tempo.
ritenuto.


biè - re Qui, joy-euse et fiè - re, Tient tout
sous ses lois; Car sans pe-ri - phra-se, C'est el-le qui
ra - se le plus grand des rois
Quel - le no - ble vi - - e! Oui cha-
-cun en - vi - - e Mon
cresc.


sort for tu né;
p
Car sous ma main blan che S'in
cli ne et se pen che et se penche et se pen che, Un
front couron né! Voi ci la bar biè re Qui, jo yeuse et
a tempo.


fiè - re, tient tout sous ses lois; Car,
sans pé-ri-phra - se, C'est el-le qui ra - se Le plus
f
grand des Rois!
ff