Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:
Le Premier Jour de bonheur

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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D.F.E. Auber (1870). Photograph by Nadar

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INTRODUCTION

Le Premier Jour de bonheur, an *opéra-comique* in three acts, was first performed at the Opéra-Comique (Deuxième Salle Favart) on 15 February 1868. It was the 86-year-old Auber's second-last opera: *Rêve d'amour* followed a year later. Eugène Scribe had died in 1861, and Auber chose Adolphe-Philippe Dennery (actually Adolphe Philippe) and Eugène Cormon (Pierre-Etienne Piestre), as his collaborators for his last two operas. The subject of *Le Premier Jour de bonheur* was borrowed from a comedy by Souques called *Le Chevalier de Canolle* given at the Odéon on 17 May 1816. The play was turned into an *opéra-comique* in 1836 by Sophie Gay (née Nichault de Lavalette), with music by Hippolyte-Honoré-Joseph Court de Fontmichel. For Auber's version, Dennery and Cormon shifted the action from France during the period of the Fronde to Pondichéry in India, during the siege of the city by the French during the Anglo-French Colonial Wars (1746-63).

For Gaston de Maillepré, an officer serving in the French army, every happy event is marred by some misfortune. He tells the Indian priestess Djelma that he has fallen in love, but with an unknown woman whom he saw twice in London before the War, as her carriage went by. An English girl, Hélène, and her craven fiancée Sir John Littlepool arrive, having been apprehended as spies while on their way to the English garrison at Madras. Gaston recognizes in Hélène his mysterious lady; she is in fact the daughter of the governor of Madras. Gaston releases Hélène, but keeps Littlepool as a hostage. In act 2 Gaston comes to Madras under a flag of truce to see Hélène, but she rebuffs him. He is taken prisoner by the English. A dispatch arrives that Littlepool has been accused of sketching the French fortifications and will be shot at dawn as a spy. As a measure of retaliation, Gaston is chosen to be shot the next day. Hélène takes pity on him and confesses her love for him. Gaston's joy at this helps him to forget his despair over his imminent fate.

Act 3. The day dawns for Gaston's execution. Suddenly Sir John, supposed by all to be dead, appears having been exonerated. The French have released him, but have warned him that they will come after him unless Gaston is returned alive. Hélène rejects Gaston when Littlepool arrives, but Gaston refuses to leave without her. The impressionable Sir John, in fear for his life, relinquishes all claims to Hélène, now believing that Hélène has chosen Gaston simply to save his life, and is reconciled to their union. Gaston's first day of happiness has at last arrived.

The libretto was constructed with skill, but the givens of the situation lack enough power and simplicity to sustain interest. The score contains lovely pieces. The overture presents an overall contrast between the Indian elements of the story (the graceful Ballad of the Djinns) and the French colonial ones (a bellicose march full of military swagger and dance themes from the act 2 ball, no. 7). Within this there is a secondary juxtaposing of the Indian and European heroines, Djelma and Hélène. It opens with the soldiers' chorus of greeting to their commander from the beginning of the act 1 finale (basically a waltz in D major), and after a short cello introduction, moves into the opposing *Andante con moto* (another waltz, this time in B-flat major)—the *mélodie* for Djelma in act 2 "Ah! voici la nuit sous l'ombre des bois", in praise of the mild Indian summer night.

The following *Allegro* in 2/4 presents the extrovert dance refrain "Ecoutez ce

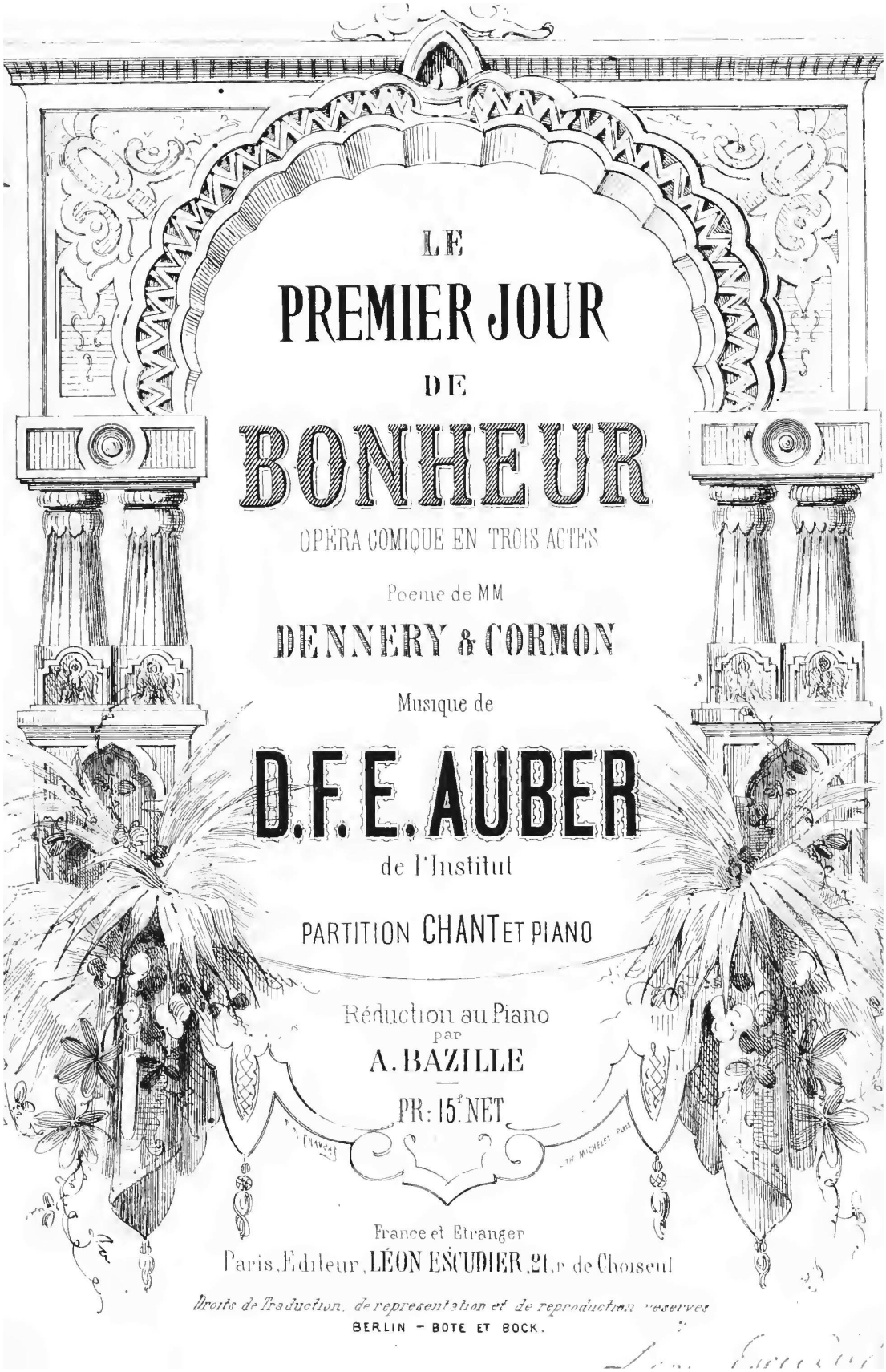
joyeux refrain" from Hélène's *chanson* (also in D major) in act 2. This moves into the conclusion of the overture, based on the chorus "Dans les fêtes et le bruit, jeunes têtes le temps fuit" from the same ball scene. The two opposing waltz themes with tempo and key changes dominate the first part of the overture, while the second part is shaped by the galop-like themes in the main key. This thematic opposition deviates from the plan followed in most of Auber's other overtures in that there are no transposed repetitions of formal sections, and the keys of the quoted themes are retained throughout.

Act 1 is remarkable for its introduction, skilfully disposed and varied, the beautiful tenor romance "J'ai vu s'ecrouler ma fortune", and the brilliant finale. Act 2 contains a song for Hélène ("Susann', causons un p'tit moment!"), the duettino for Hélène and the young Djelma ("Un époux chez vous"), the famous *Air des Djinns*, and a festive chorus at the governor's banquet, beginning as a brindisi in waltz form for Gaston and forming the basis of the finale. The Ballad of the Djinns won great success. It is accompanied by only two chords, the perfect and the dominant seventh over a tonic pedal held by the horns, the whole handled with exquisite taste. There is also a male-voice trio and a duet for Gaston and Hélène. This act also contains one of Auber's rare uses of the polonaise, despite this being one of the dominant dance forms of the first quarter of the 19th century ("Partir avec le jour"). In act 3 there is a beautiful nocturne again for two female voices ("Ô nuit, une heure encore"), the syllabique rondo for Littlepool, and Gaston's poetic and touching *stances* ("Ce nom qui me rapelle"), harmonized with rare delicacy.

The characteristic lyricism of Auber's late style is much in evidence in this work. But unlike the preceding works, an air of longing and sadness blows through this score. This is apparent in Djelma's *mélodie* ("Notre Dieu notre père") and Gaston's romance in act 1, and in the nocturne for Djelma and Hélène in act 3. Djelma's aria ("Ah! Voici la nuit") in act 2 became very popular, a *mélodie vapreuse* (as Benoit Jouvin described it). Auber, confident of its effect, used it in the middle section of the overture. Gaston's romance (reaching c``) contains the words of the title set as the leading melody of the opera. The introduction is also subjected to a refined elaboration.

Le Premier Jour de bonheur was the only significant work of the last decade of Auber's life, and indeed his last great success. The cast was very accomplished, consisting of: Joseph-Amédée-Victor Capoul (Gaston de Maillepré); Marie Cabel (Hélène); Charles-Louis Sainte-Foy (Littlepool); Mlle Marie-Rose (Djelma); Léon Melchissédec (De Mailly, a French officer); Victor Prilleux (Bergerac, a French officer); and Bernard (the governor of Madras).

Between 1867-70 there were 167 performances in Paris, and in this period it surpassed even Thomas's *Mignon* (1866). The reprise of 1873, however, was cut short after only 8 performances. Further productions in French were in 1869 in Brussels and Ghent. The work was given in the German translation of Ernst Pasqué in Munich and Leipzig (1868), Vienna (1874), Brünn (1876) and Berlin (1881). There was also a Hungarian adaptation in Budapest (1868). For the Italian edition, special recitatives (composed by "E.M.") were added. The libretto was set as a *zarzuela* by Fernandez Caballero (*El primer dia feliz* 1872).



LE

PREMIER JOUR

DE

BONHEUR

OPÉRA COMIQUE EN TROIS ACTES

Poeme de MM

DENNERY & CORMON

Musique de

D.F.E. AUBER

de l'Institut

PARTITION CHANT ET PIANO

Réduction au Piano
par
A. BAZILLE

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BERLIN – BOTE ET BOCK.

LE PREMIER JOUR DE BONHEUR

PERSONNAGES.	ACTEURS.	VOIX.
HELENE	Mme MARIE CABEL	1re Chanteuse.
DJELMA	Mlle MARIE ROZE	1ère Dugazon.
GASTON de MAILLEPRE	Mr CAPOUL	1er Ténor.
Sir JOHN LITTLEPOL	Mr Ste FOY	1er Comique.
De MAILLY	Mr MELCHISSEDEC	Baryton.
BERGERAC	Mr PRILLEUX	Basse comique.
Le Gouverneur de Madras	Mr BERNARD	Basse.

AC

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La mise en scène exacte de cet ouvrage, réglée par Mr E. Mocker, est rédigée et publiée, par Mr Palianti.

L.E. 2884. Paris, Imp. D. Michelet, 6 rue du Hazard

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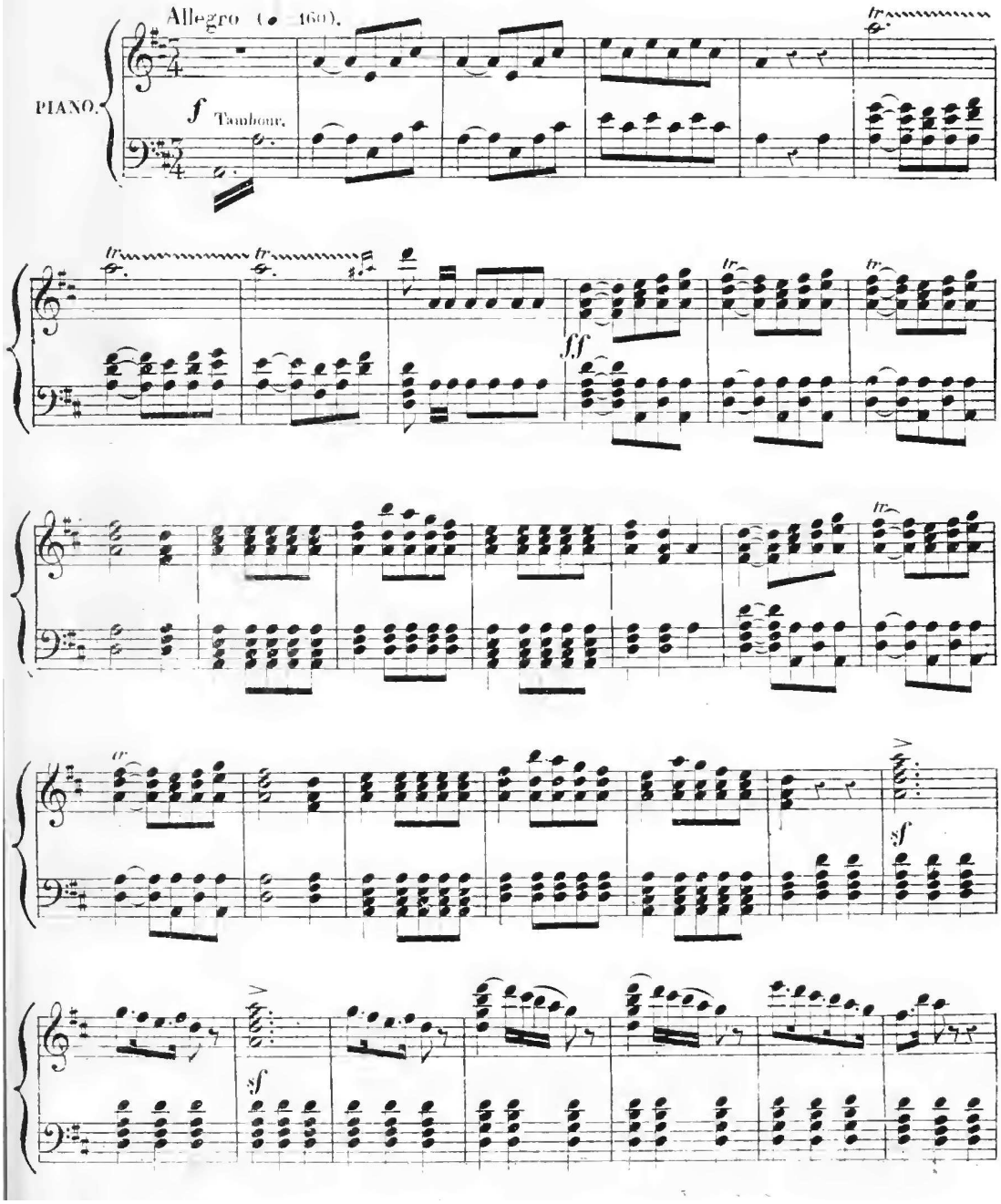
OPÉRA-COMIQUE

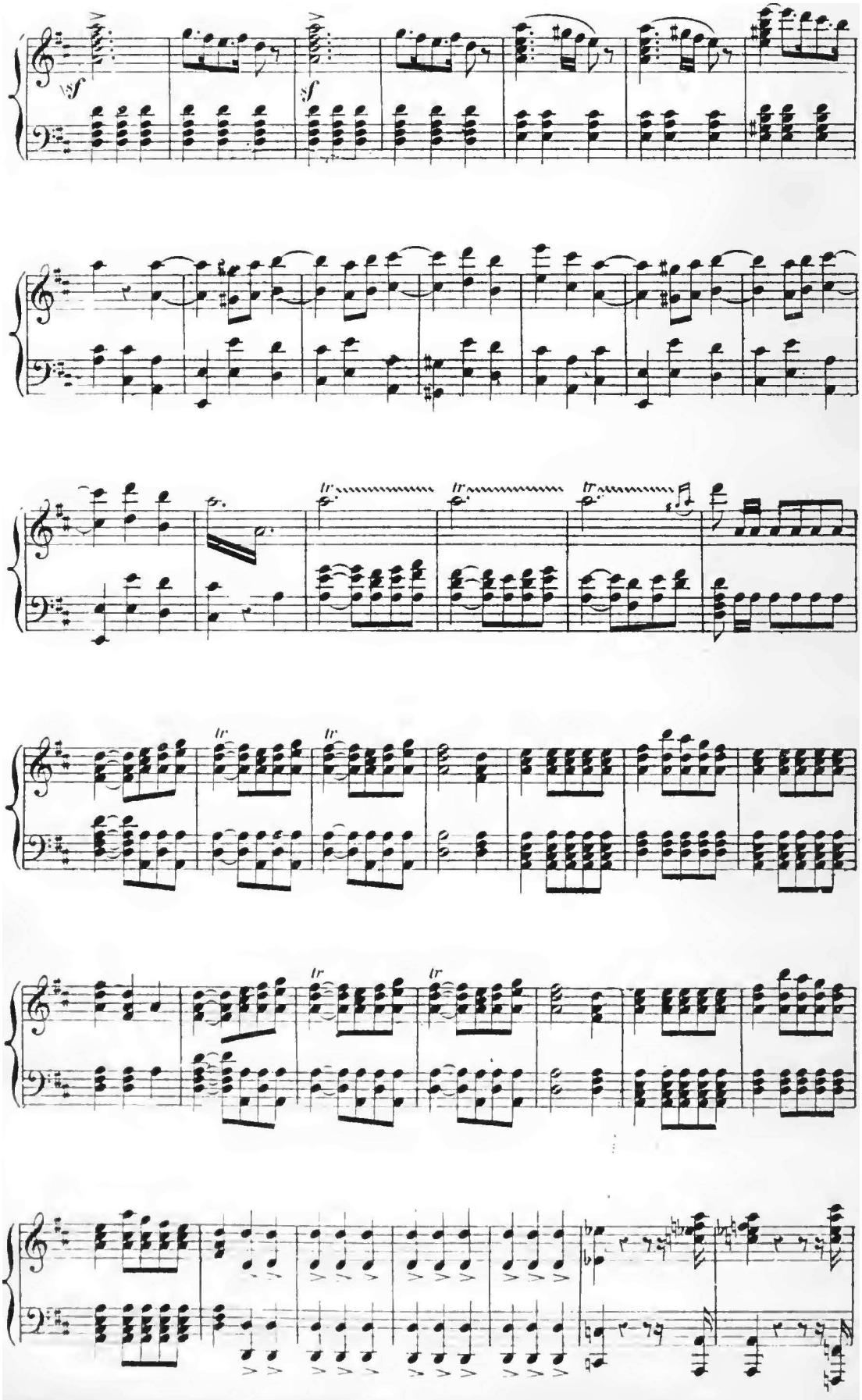
EN TROIS ACTES.

Musique de

D. F. E. AUBER.

OUVERTURE.

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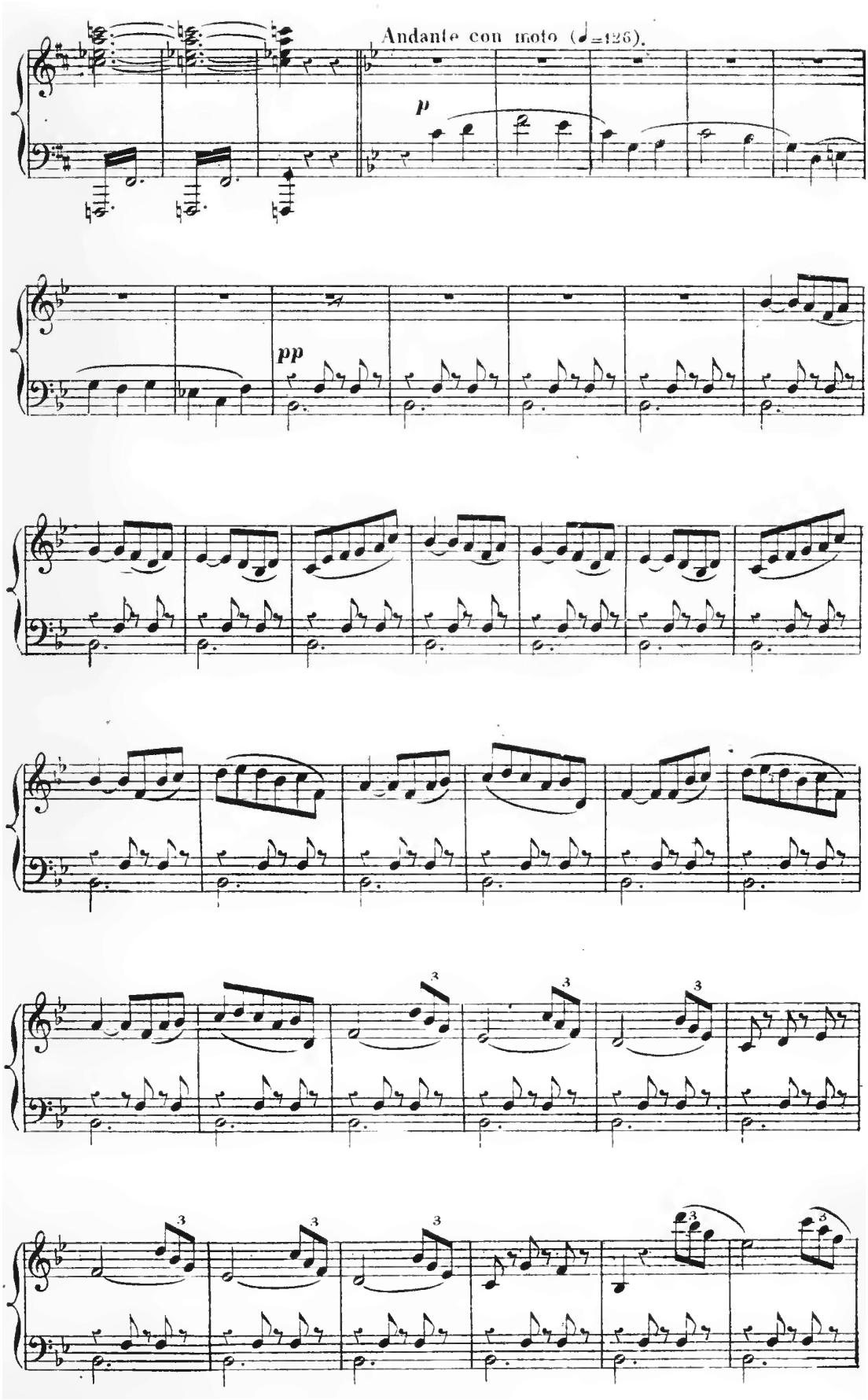
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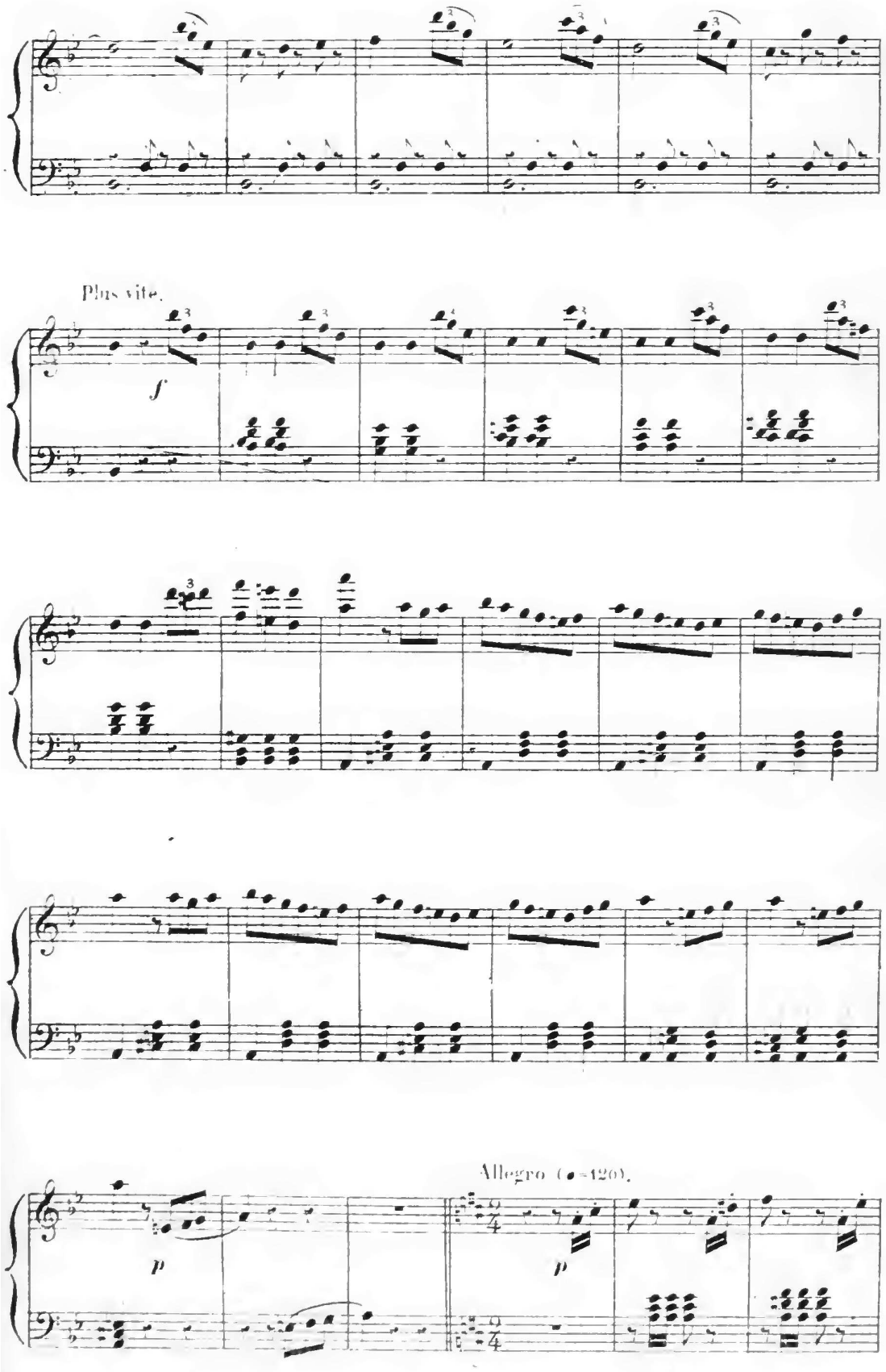
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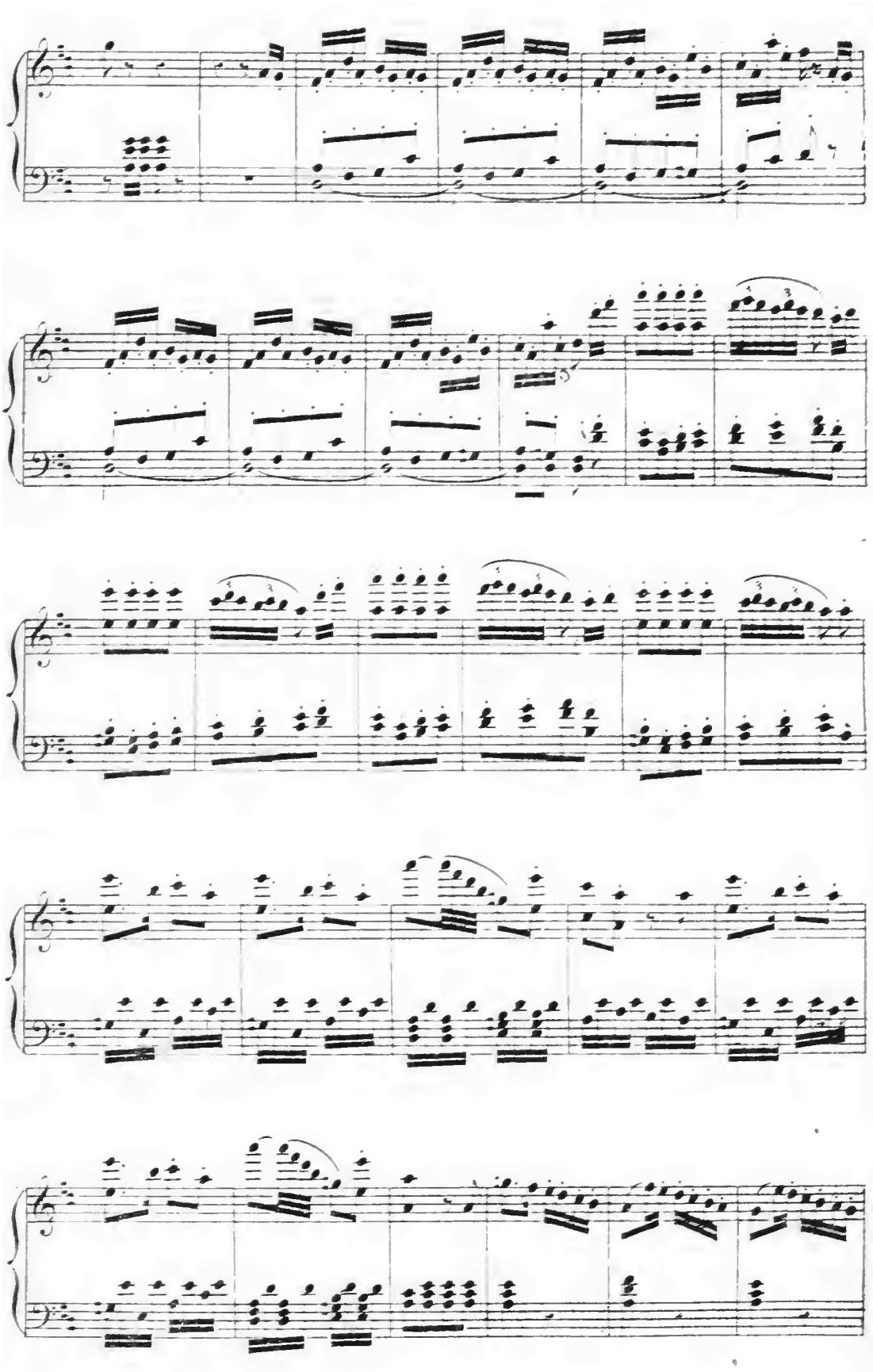

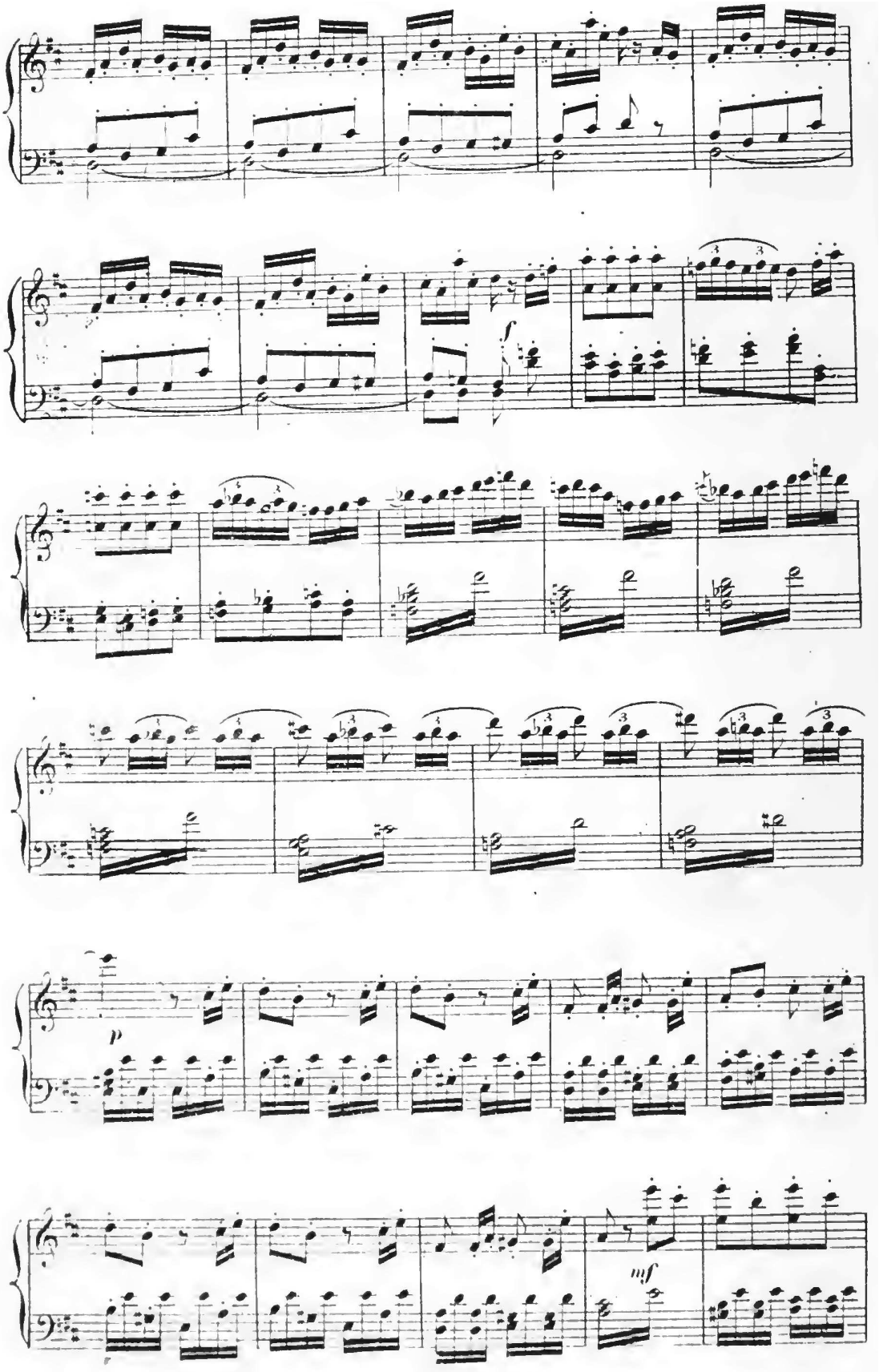
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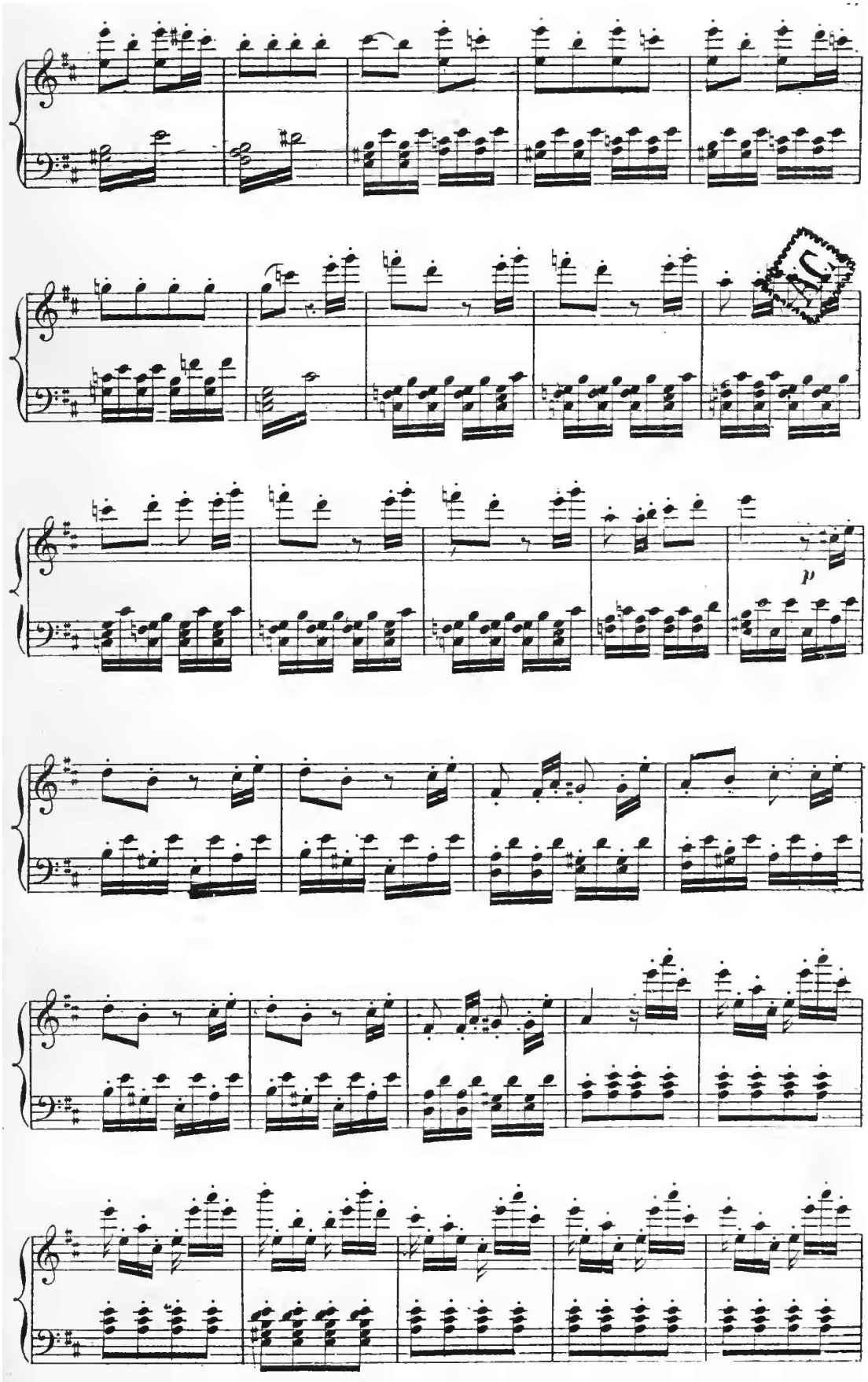
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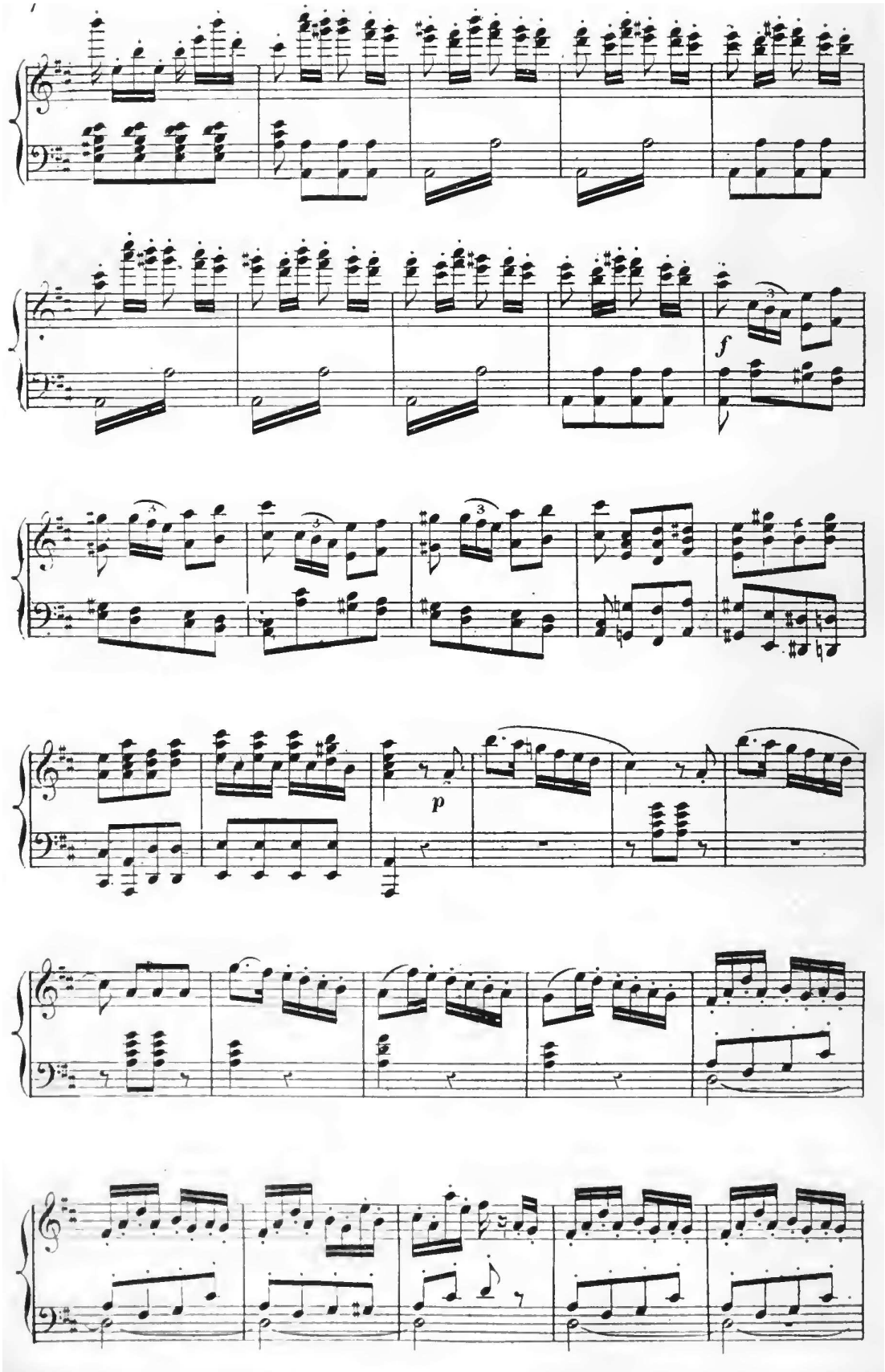
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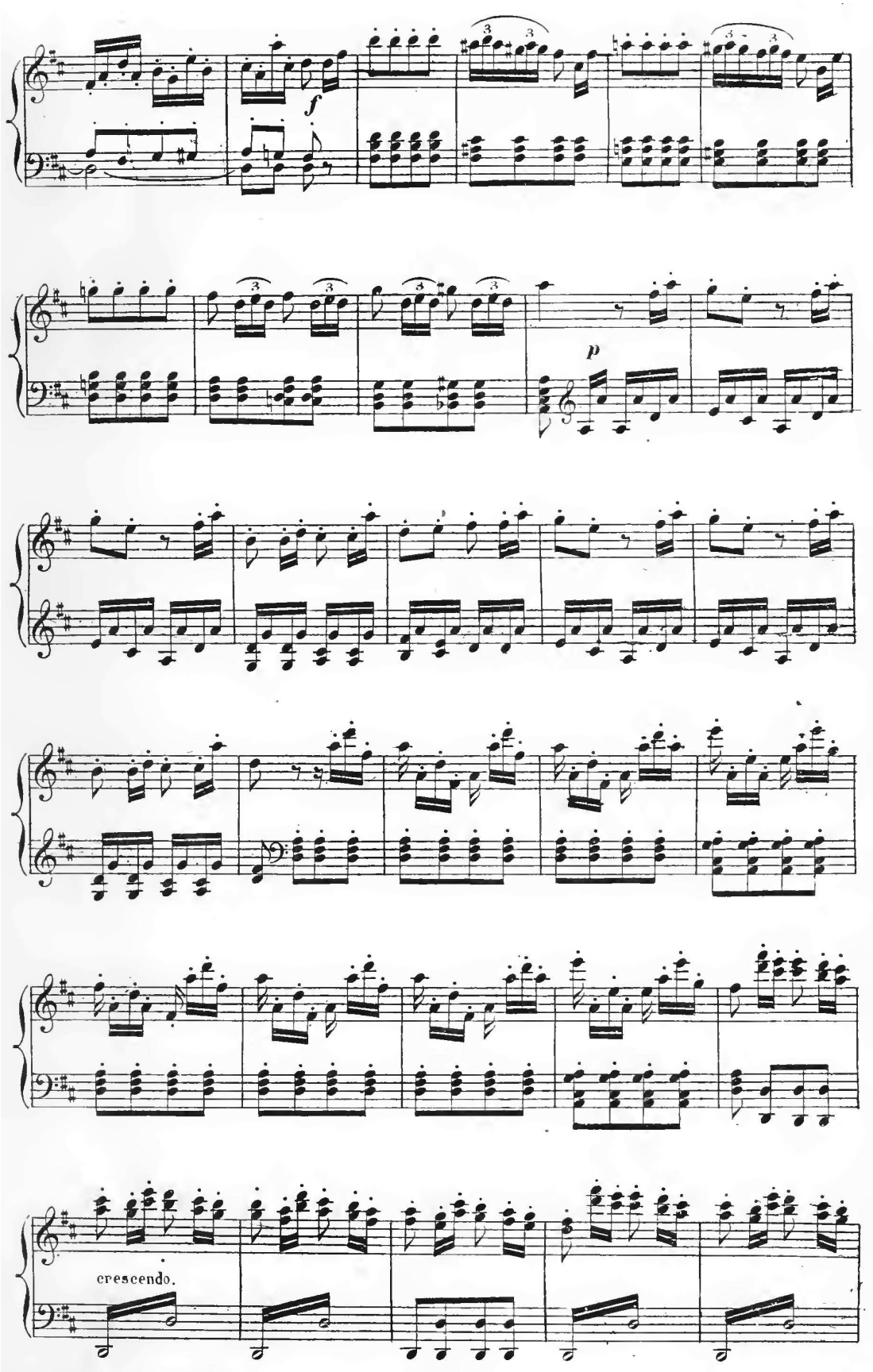
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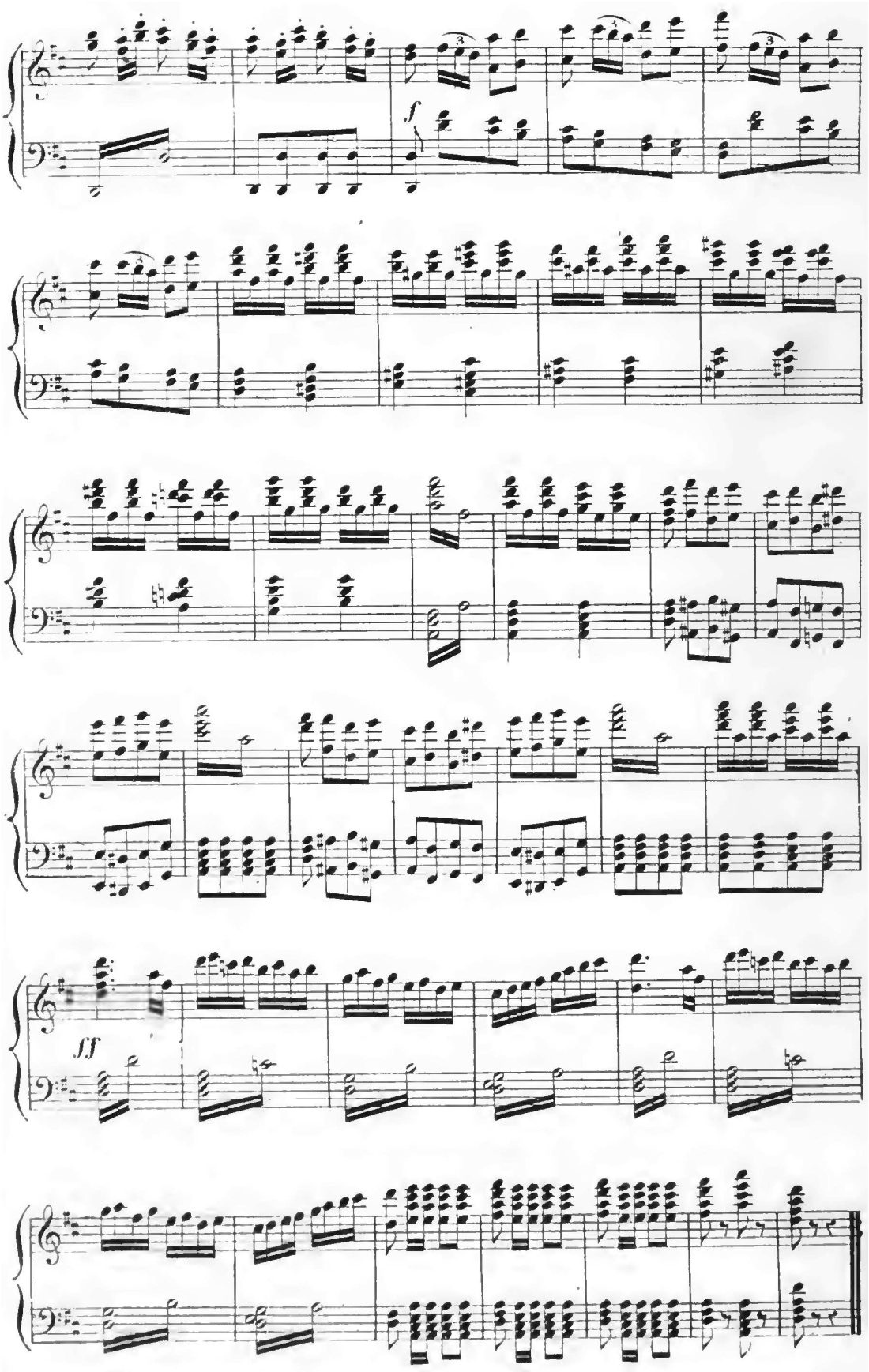
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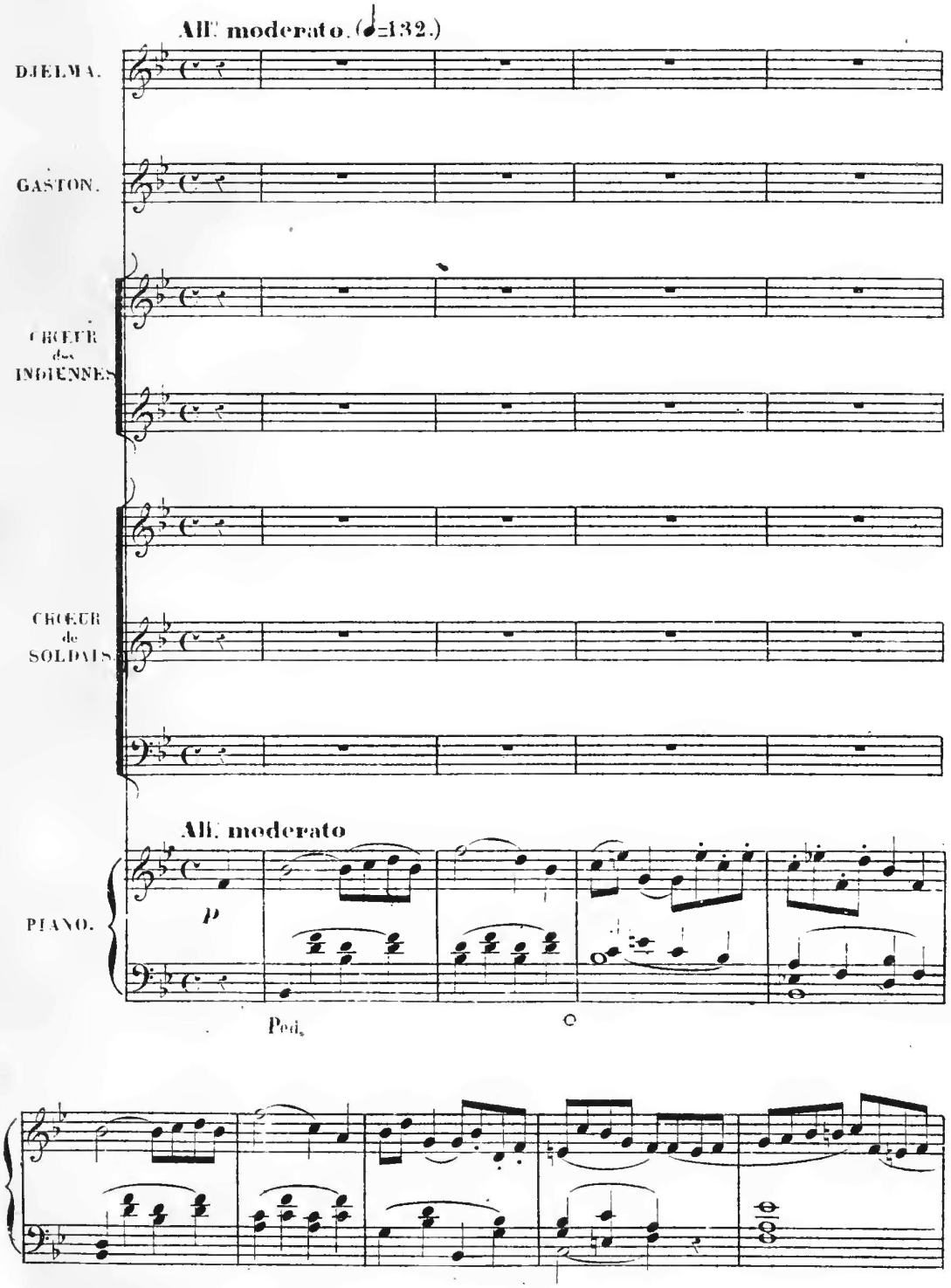
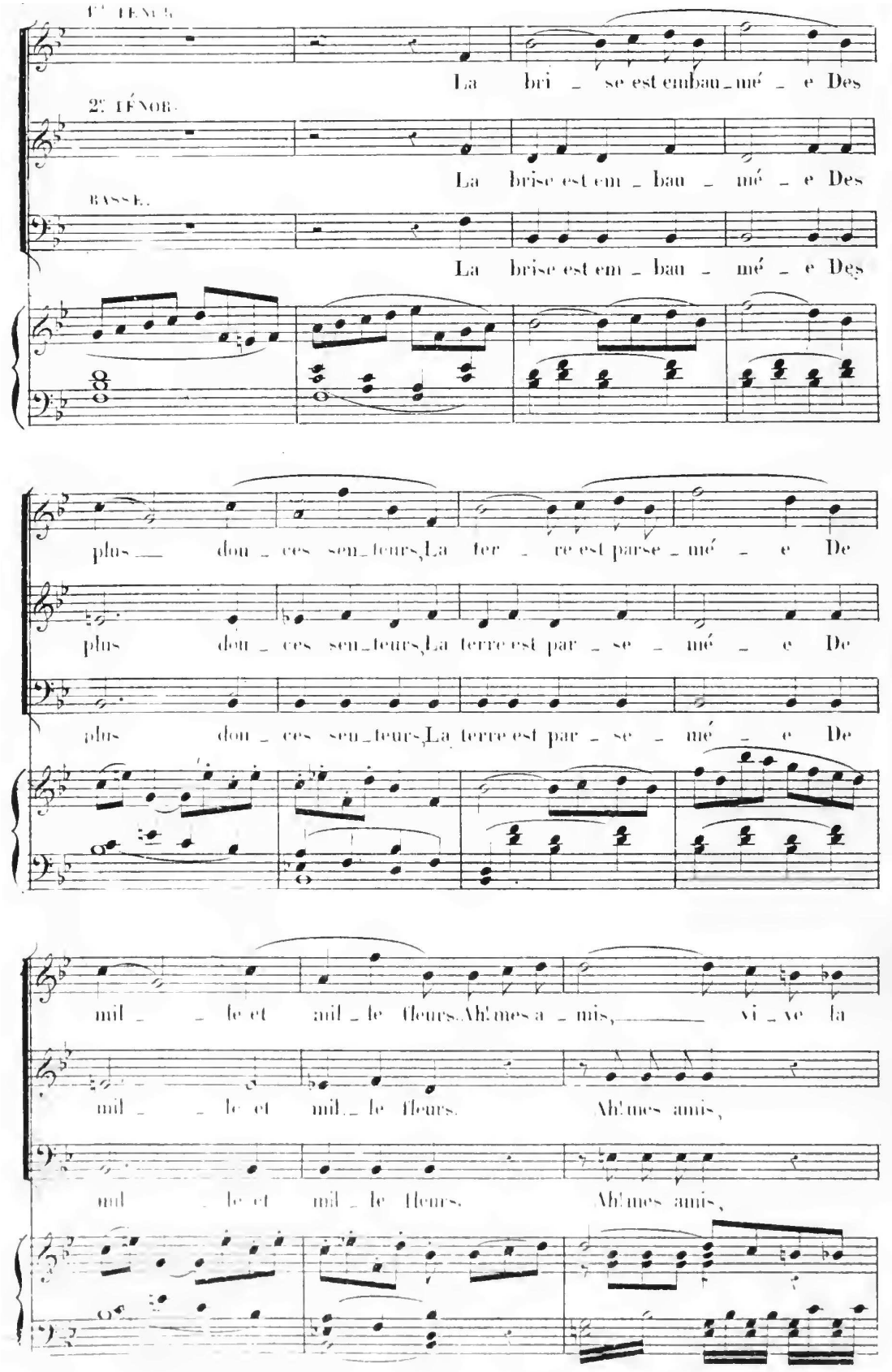
N.° 1.

INTRODUCTION - MÉLODIE - MADRIGAL.




1er TÉNOR.
La bri _ se est embau _ mé _ e Des
2e TÉNOR.
La brise est em _ bau _ mé _ e Des
BASSE.
La brise est em _ bau _ mé _ e Des
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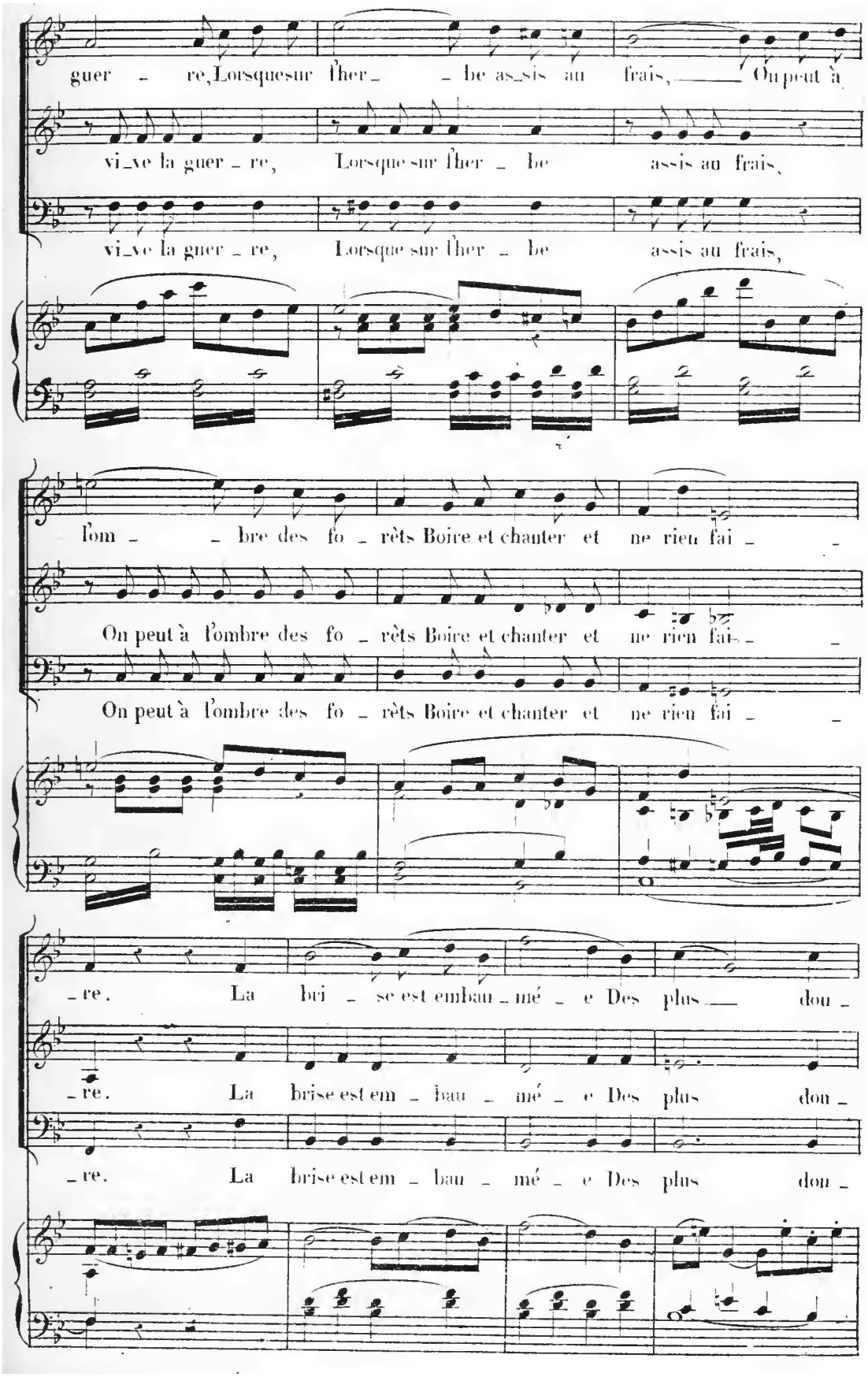
plus dou _ ces sen _ teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e De
plus dou _ ces sen _ teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e De
mil _ _ le et ail _ le fleurs. Ah! mes a _ mis, vi _ ve la
mil _ _ le et mil _ le fleurs. Ah! mes amis,
mil _ le et mil _ le fleurs. Ah! mes amis,


guer - re, Lorsque sur l'her - be as_sis au frais, On peut à
vi_ve la guer - re, Lorsque sur l'her - be assis au frais,
vi_ve la guer - re, Lorsque sur l'her - be assis au frais,
l'om - bre des fo - rêts Boire et chanter et ne rien fai -
On peut à l'ombre des fo - rêts Boire et chanter et ne rien fai -
On peut à l'ombre des fo - rêts Boire et chanter et ne rien fai -
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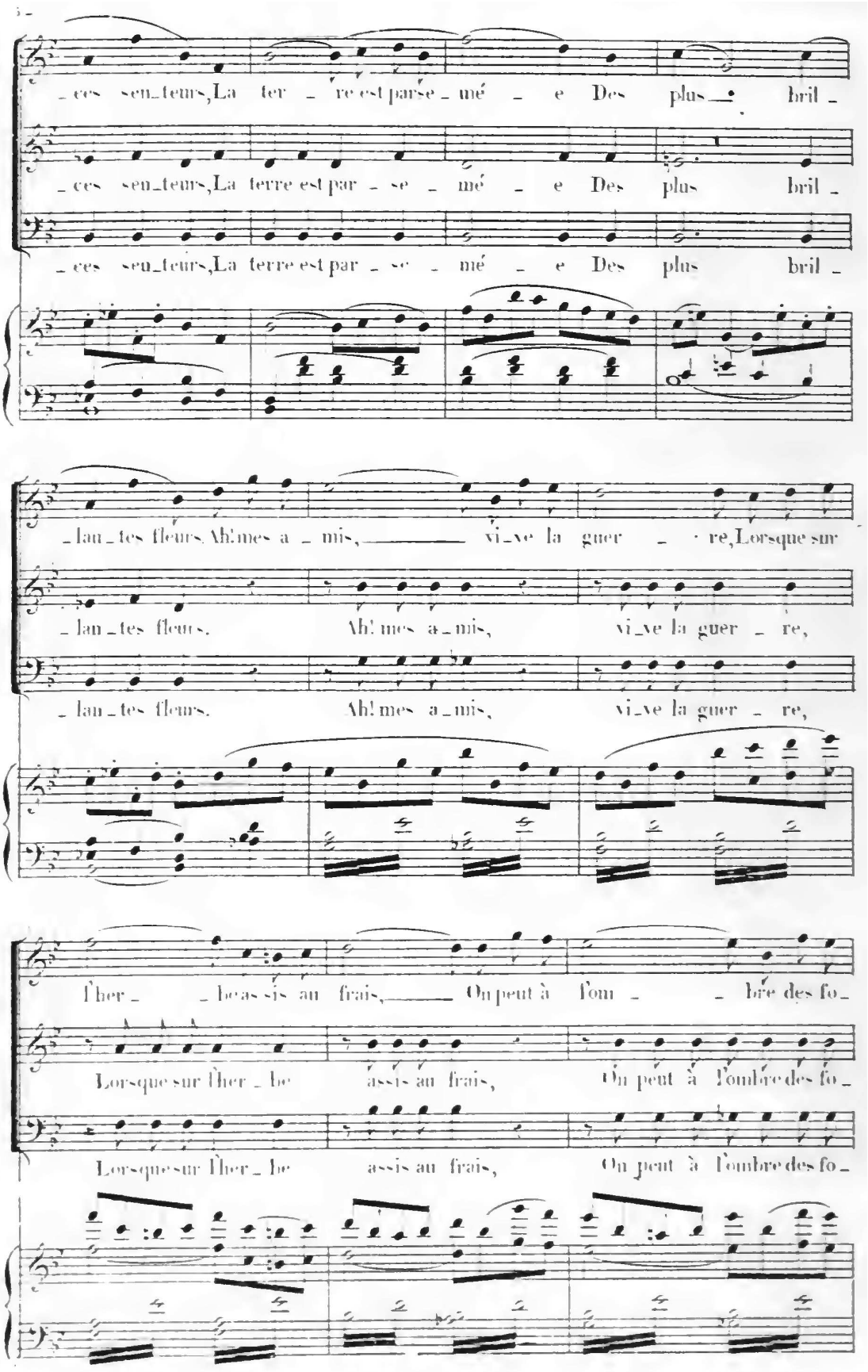
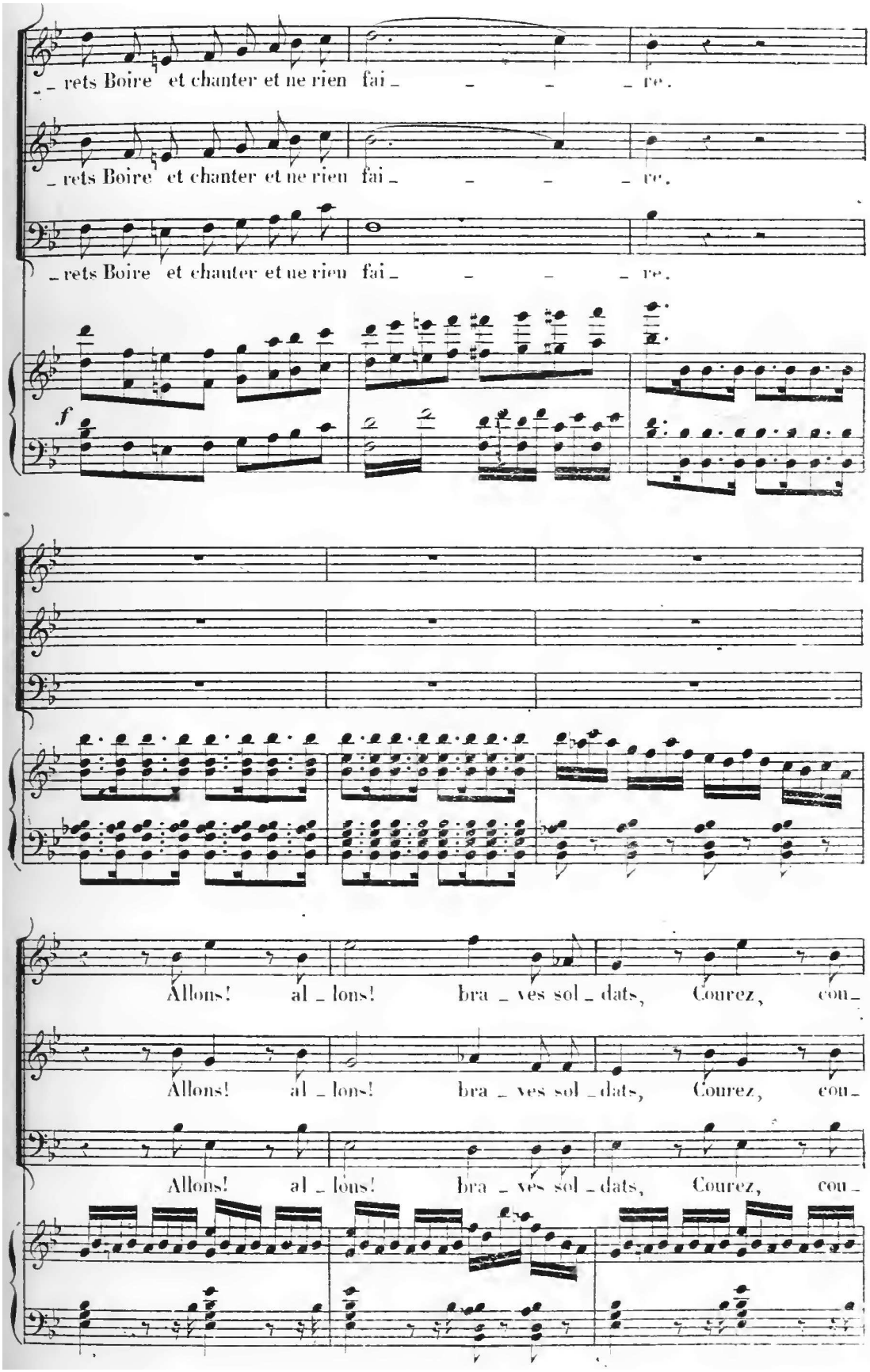
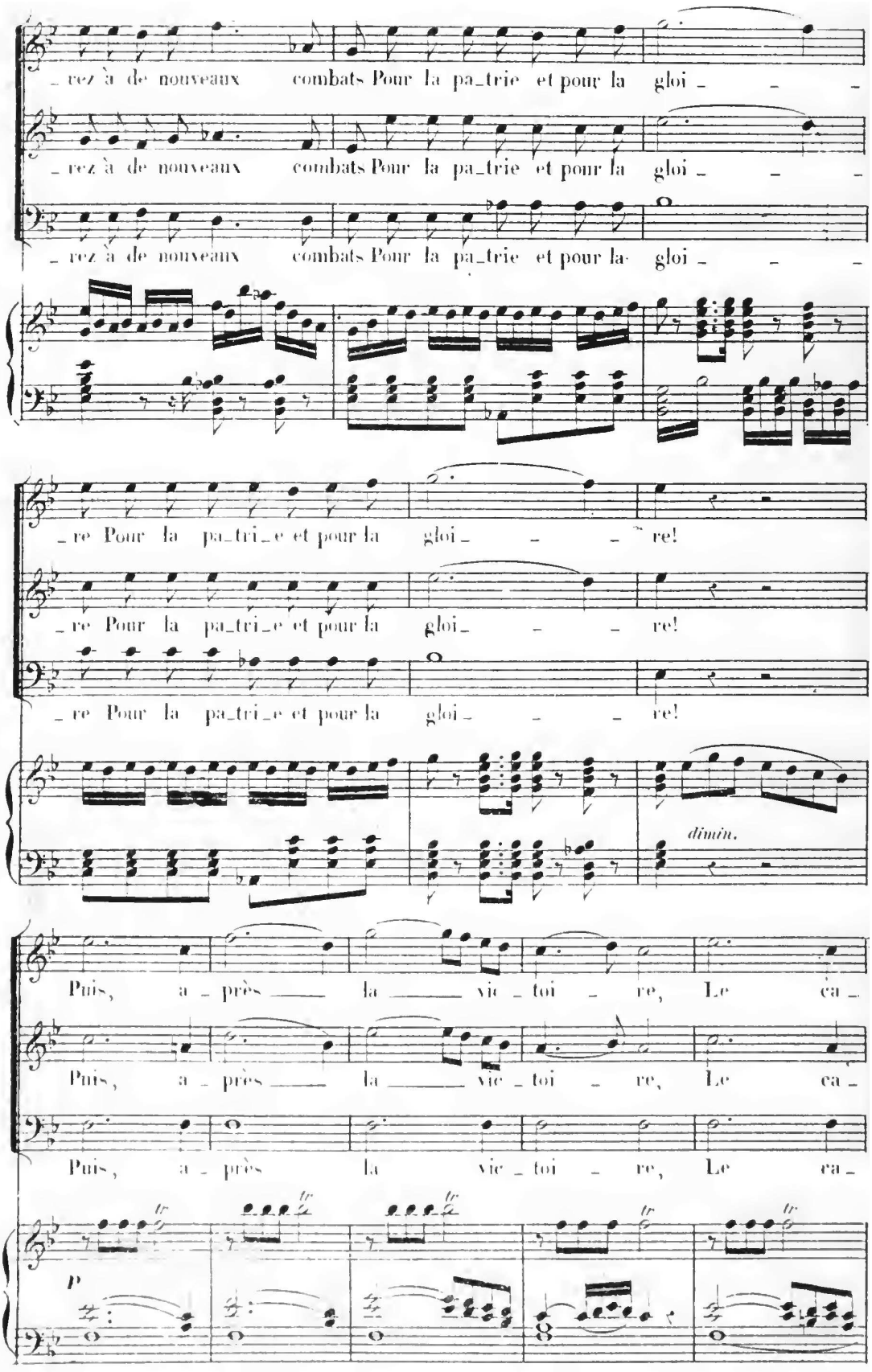

_ces seu_teurs, La ter _ re est par se _ mé _ e Des plus bril _
_ces seu_teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e Des plus bril _
_ces seu_teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e Des plus bril _
_lan_tes fleurs. Ah! mes a _ mis, vi_ve la guer _ re, Lorsque sur
_lan_tes fleurs. Ah! mes a_mis, vi_ve la guer _ re,
_lan_tes fleurs. Ah! mes a_mis, vi_ve la guer _ re,
l'her _ be assis au frais, On peut à l'om _ bre des fo_
Lorsque sur l'her _ be assis au frais, On peut à l'ombre des fo_
Lorsque sur l'her _ be assis au frais, On peut à l'ombre des fo_


rets Boire et chanter et ne rien fai re.
rets Boire et chanter et ne rien fai re.
rets Boire et chanter et ne rien fai re.
f
Allons! al lons! bra ves sol dats, Courez, cou
Allons! al lons! bra ves sol dats, Courez, cou
Allons! al lons! bra ves sol dats, Courez, cou


_rez à de nouveaux combats Pour la pa_trie et pour la gloi_ _ _
_rez à de nouveaux combats Pour la pa_trie et pour la gloi_ _ _
_rez à de nouveaux combats Pour la pa_trie et pour la gloi_ _ _
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_re Pour la pa_tri_e et pour la gloi_ _ _ re!
_re Pour la pa_tri_e et pour la gloi_ _ _ re!
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Puis, a_près la vic_toi_re, Le ca_
Puis, a_près la vic_toi_re, Le ca_
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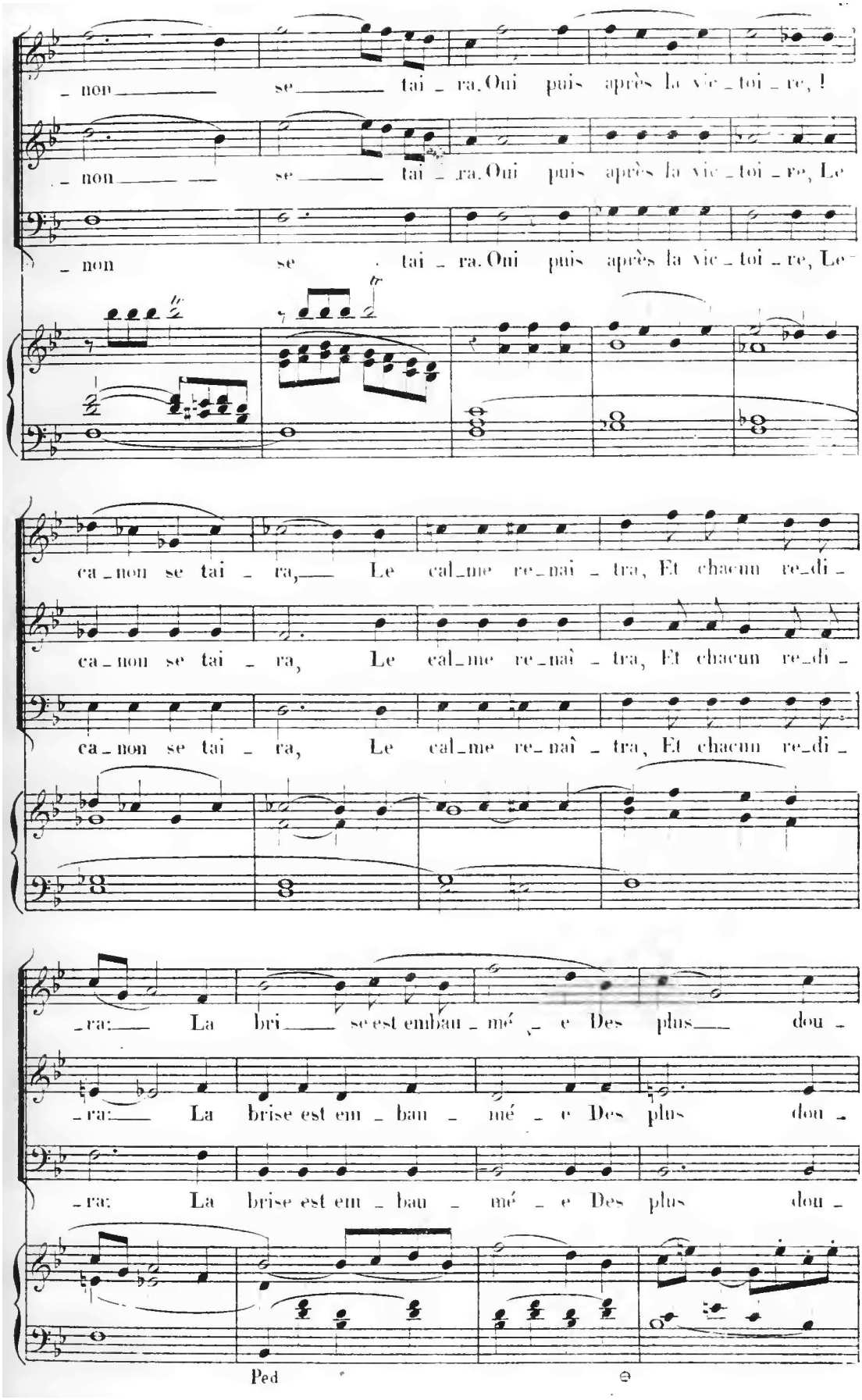
non se tai - ra. Oui puis après la vic - toi - re, !
non se tai - ra. Oui puis après la vic - toi - re, Le
non se tai - ra. Oui puis après la vic - toi - re, Le
ca - non se tai - ra, Le cal - me re - nai - tra, Et chacun re - di -
ca - non se tai - ra, Le cal - me re - naî - tra, Et chacun re - di -
ca - non se tai - ra, Le cal - me re - naî - tra, Et chacun re - di -
- ra: La bri - se est embau - mé - e Des plus dou -
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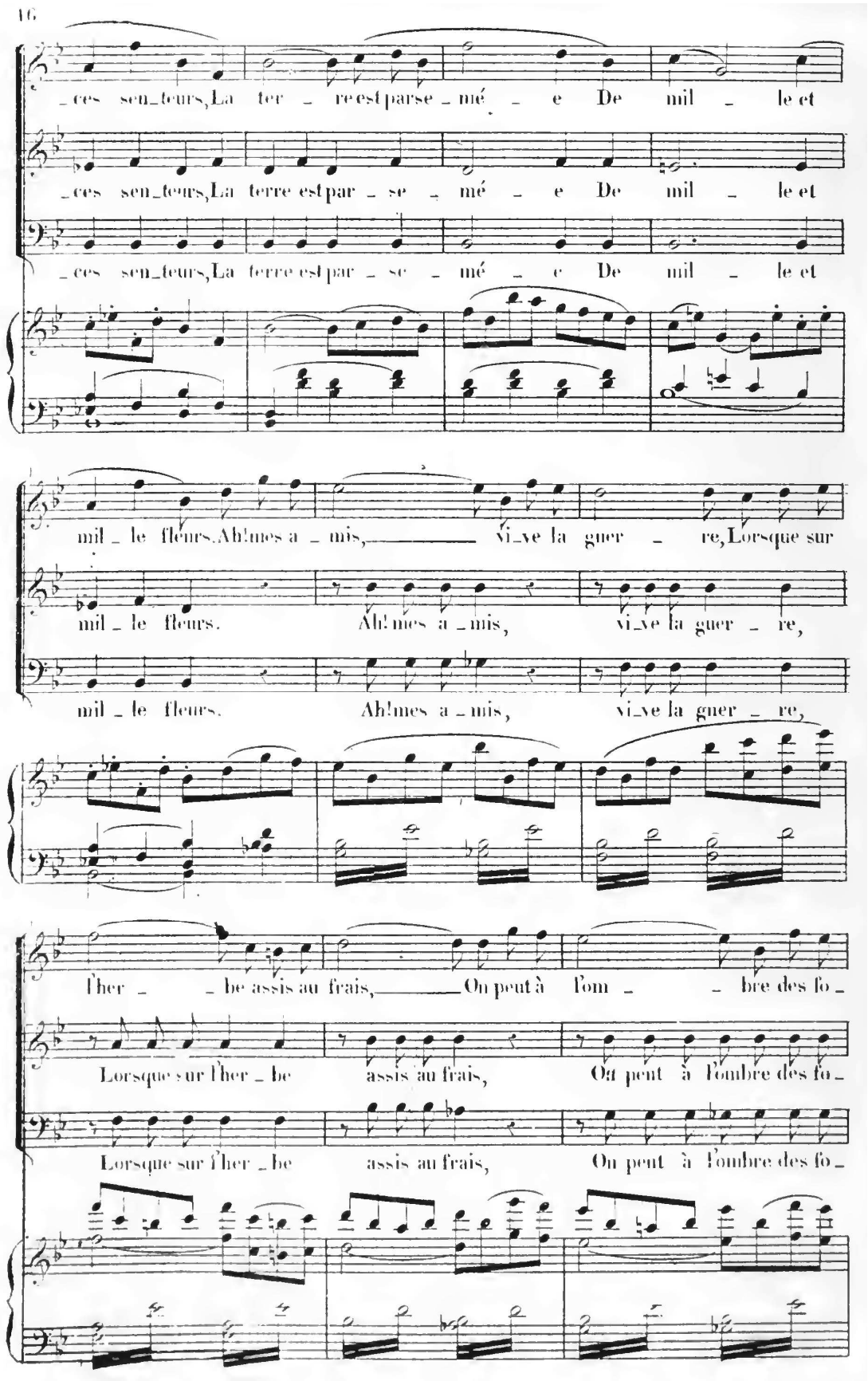
16
_ces sen_teurs, La ter _ re est par se _ mé _ e De mil _ le et
_ces sen_teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e De mil _ le et
_ces sen_teurs, La terre est par _ se _ mé _ e De mil _ le et
mil _ le fleurs. Ah! mes a _ mis, vi_ve la guer _ re, Lorsque sur
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l'her _ _ be assis au frais, On peut à l'om _ _ bre des fo _
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