TALES FROM THE NORTH,
Book I
by Simo Sakari Aaltonen

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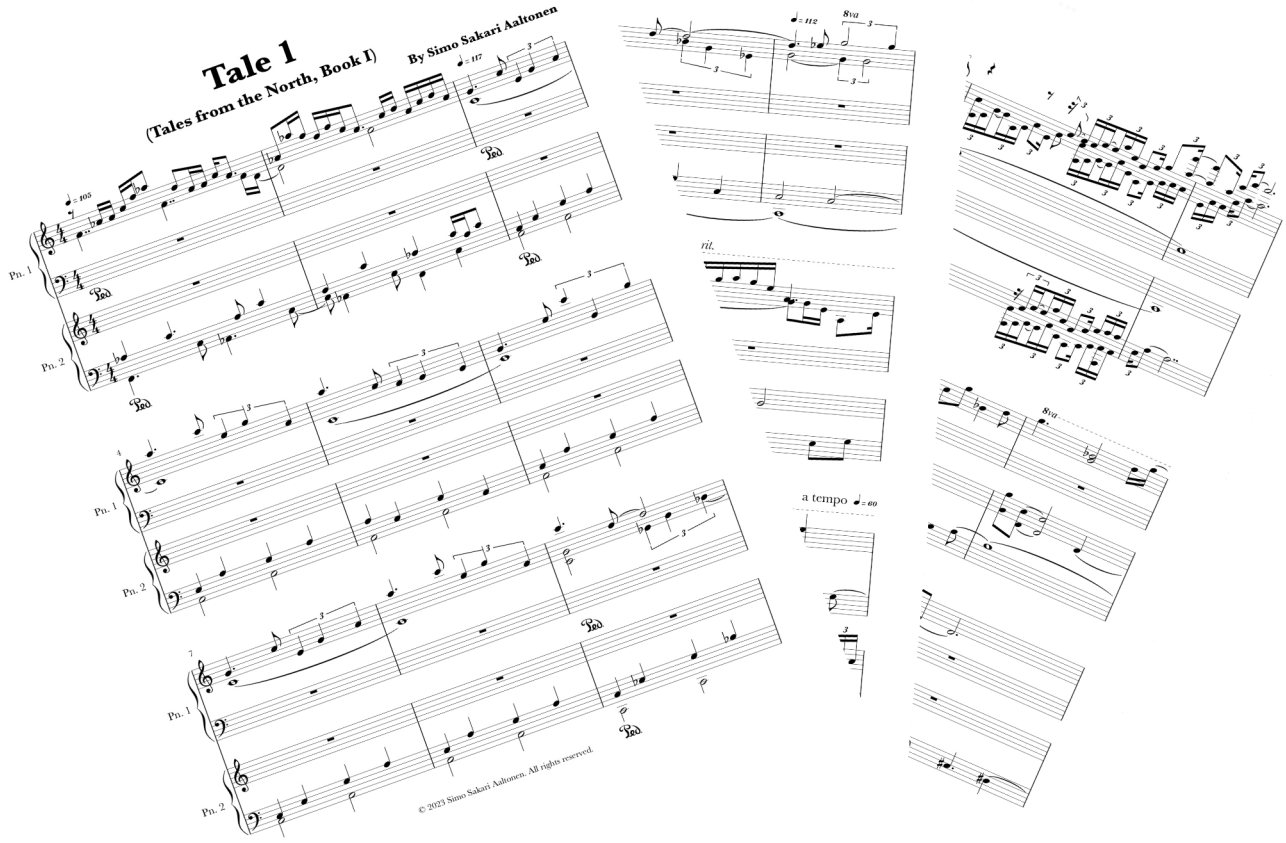

by Simo Sakari Aaltonen

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Dedicated to Pierre Estève,

Michael Shaw, Claudia Christian,

and everyone who has inspired, supported,

or helped me on my musical journey

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About the Author

Introduction

Tales from the North, Book I is a set of 12 pieces for two pianists and pianos. Two things can be seen at once:

• There are no markings for dynamics. I leave all choices about dynamics to the artists performing the pieces, though I believe the music itself suggests certain choices in either many or most places.

• There are no key signatures or key changes indicated. The pieces were composed chord by chord, moment by moment, without seeking to fit into any theoretical framework involving musical keys.

As with written stories by people who, like me, are uninterested in following boundaries of genre and convention, any event and mood can be followed by any other event and mood, as each tale calls for.

The tempo markings need not be followed precisely if different choices seem more natural or fitting to the performers — as long as the end result doesn't involve either undue hurrying or undue tarrying.

I specify this also because the best tempi could depend on the exact

instruments the pieces are played on, due to different sustaining, resonant, and other characteristics.

These markings indicate the exact tempi I used for my own clangorous demonstration renditions released as an album in June 2023. A few words about that, to be clear:

This album is by no means intended as the ultimate versions of these pieces. In fact, I can't overstate this:

I rendered the pieces intentionally in such a way that the result is mechanical and lacking in terms of human touch as well as in terms of an ideally wide dynamic range, which would also embrace the more delicate end.

To take the latter point first: the renditions were created using a virtual piano I feel doesn't sound so good when played softly. (Yet its bold, somewhat dissonant sound, which I felt had an appealing tang, also was an inspiring and integral part of composing these pieces.) In many places, an ideal way to play would be far softer than anything heard on these album renderings.

And regarding the first point, about them being mechanical, they are

that especially because I left the timings absolutely, mathematically precise, which they never would be in a true performance by human beings.

I felt that with these pieces, which I approached strictly as a composer — creating them for others to perform — it would've been inappropriate to artificially emulate a living performance, since that's not what the album is.

In short, I didn't want to pre-empt the beauty that can blossom and emerge only with the genuine human touch of living performers. This means that as I write this, a true world premiere of these pieces has yet to happen.

My crude album was shared mainly for demonstration and reference purposes. Skilled, living, sympathetic performances of the pieces are their real ultimate form.

* * *

These are my first compositions for piano duo. I started work on this set some ten years after starting to learn composing. By then, I was bursting with ideas I had long wanted to put into practice.

I had also come far enough along with my personal musical language that I felt ready to see what would come out of it in this form. I set the following goals and parameters for this set:

• To serve as a daily playing ground where all ideas would be allowed and any experiment would also become part of the finished work.

• I wanted the music to be concise, mostly very exposed and transparent, and often uptempo. It would've been too easy and safe to write slow pieces with plenty of rich, many-noted chords. I decided to go for mostly energetic ideas with a strong forward drive.

• I was interested in making pieces that would be textural and often have several layers working together in various ways, with interlocking rhythms, and building up, note by note, harmonic tapestries by extensive and extended use of pedal. The backgrounds formed in this way are centrally important parts of the pieces. Quite a lot of the time, there are only individual notes happening in succession, and there are only a few unpedaled passages in the whole set of 12.

• The music needed to be genuinely free, which meant that it should even have the freedom to dwell, tread in place, backpedal, fall apart, find its way again, and much more. I've come to feel that an important part of

art is freedom from needing to produce every time something fulfilling any given set of requirements, which would make the result more of a product than art.

• Another aspect of freedom: I sometimes yearn for raucous, brash music, as long as it's also compellingly interesting. I remembered the experience of listening to Philip Glass's *Music in Twelve Parts* many years ago. It was something that couldn't be ignored when it was playing. That kind of thing can be very healthy to experience. Like sandblasting your worries away.

• Over time I've become extremely interested in fragmentation as a creative approach, which can mean, for example, building up greater wholes from fragments that don't necessarily have soft, clear links or segues between them. With a strong artist like David Lynch — as with season 3 of *Twin Peaks* and the film *INLAND EMPIRE*, as just two examples — this kind of approach can add up to an extremely fertile, inspiring, and also cohesive whole, with great amounts of space for the imginations of the people experiencing the work.

• Before even starting, I decided not to try to keep both hands of both players busy at all times. There are many passages where one player

rests, sometimes with the other one playing only with one hand.

• The pieces needed to be open to any and all feelings that are part of being human, from the more obvious ones like happiness and sorrow to even feelings like nausea.

Certain moments in some of the pieces make me feel a little queasy or even nauseous. I asked myself, do I want to leave these moments in, since they might affect others similarly? The answer needed to be yes, of course, I should leave them in.

Not to dwell on this particular feeling, since it's only a brief moment here and there, but it strikes me that nausea is one of the most universal human experiences. Most of us don't remember the earliest instance — though Ray Bradbury said he did remember being born — but likely we all felt some nausea as one of our very first experiences upon entering this outer world from the womb.

I had also pondered about how often the works of David Lynch feature physically uncomfortable things like throwing up. One of his earliest works is the animation *Six Men Getting Sick (Six Times)* from 1967, in which six men indeed throw up repeatedly. Later, in the spectacular third season of *Twin Peaks*, there are two major scenes involving

throwing up, with one of them perhaps the most epic filmed upchucking of all time. (When Mr. C, on the sunbaked mountain road, has an extended conversation with George and Ralph on the car phone.)

In time I came to understand that without these scenes, his work would be lesser, less embracing of the human experience.

So nausea needed to stay in. It's even vital for us to be able to appreciate how fantastic it can feel to simply be in good health.

The bigger point here is that the same applies to all possible feelings: we have and experience them, and any extended set of tales that totally avoided one or more of them would be lesser for the omission.

* * *

Rather than programmatic, these musical tales are intended as evocative. For me, one of the greatest qualities to be found in any type of art is that of firing the imagination. Certain moments in these pieces create certain associations for me, sometimes even visual images, but for another person, the associations might be very different.

In fact, I would love to hear from people about specific associations, impressions, feelings, and so on that they experience while listening, and

at which points.

Rather than sharing my own, which might limit a listener's experience, I'd love to one day be able to compile reactions like this as a kind of associative index to the pieces — what feelings, reactions, and associations listeners have experienced at specific points.

* * *

I might not have chosen to write for piano duo at least yet if I had never come across one particular part of a certain composition played by a very special duo: the last few minutes of Philip Glass's *Four Movements for Two Pianos*, performed live by Katia & Marielle Labèque at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam.

This piece and their performance reaffirmed for me that there still are and always will be new and thrilling things to do in piano music, as well as any other type.

And naturally with two pianists and instruments the scope is even greater.

* * *

About the dates of composition:

I started on 12 November 2022. From that date, I composed 196 bars before arriving on 3 January 2023 at the point where Tale 1 begins.

There are also parts in the preceding music I may share in some form later, but the 3 January date is significant in that from then on, all 12 pieces flowed without a break and in the same order as presented in the set, with each piece fully finished before moving on to the next.

These are the 2023 starting dates for each tale:

Tale 1	3 January
Tale 2	11 January
Tale 3	25 January
Tale 4	5 February
Tale 5	11 February
Tale 6	22 February
Tale 7	27 February
Tale 8	5 March
Tale 9	1 April
Tale 10	9 April
Tale 11	13 April
Tale 12	20 April

And finishing around 30 April 2023. No cuts or alterations were made

afterwards. Then I released the album, described above, on 6 June 2023.

The time since — more than a year — has been spent on perfecting, checking, and in some cases even entirely reworking the sheet music for ideal playability.

To be clear, absolutely no rewriting in terms of the actual compositions has happened, only improvements regarding 1) which pianist plays which notes and on which hand, and 2) the presentation of the music on the page.

In other words, all the notes heard are present exactly the same as on the album.

I hope you may find these tales worth hearing — or telling!

—Simo Sakari Aaltonen, Tampere, 25 July 2024

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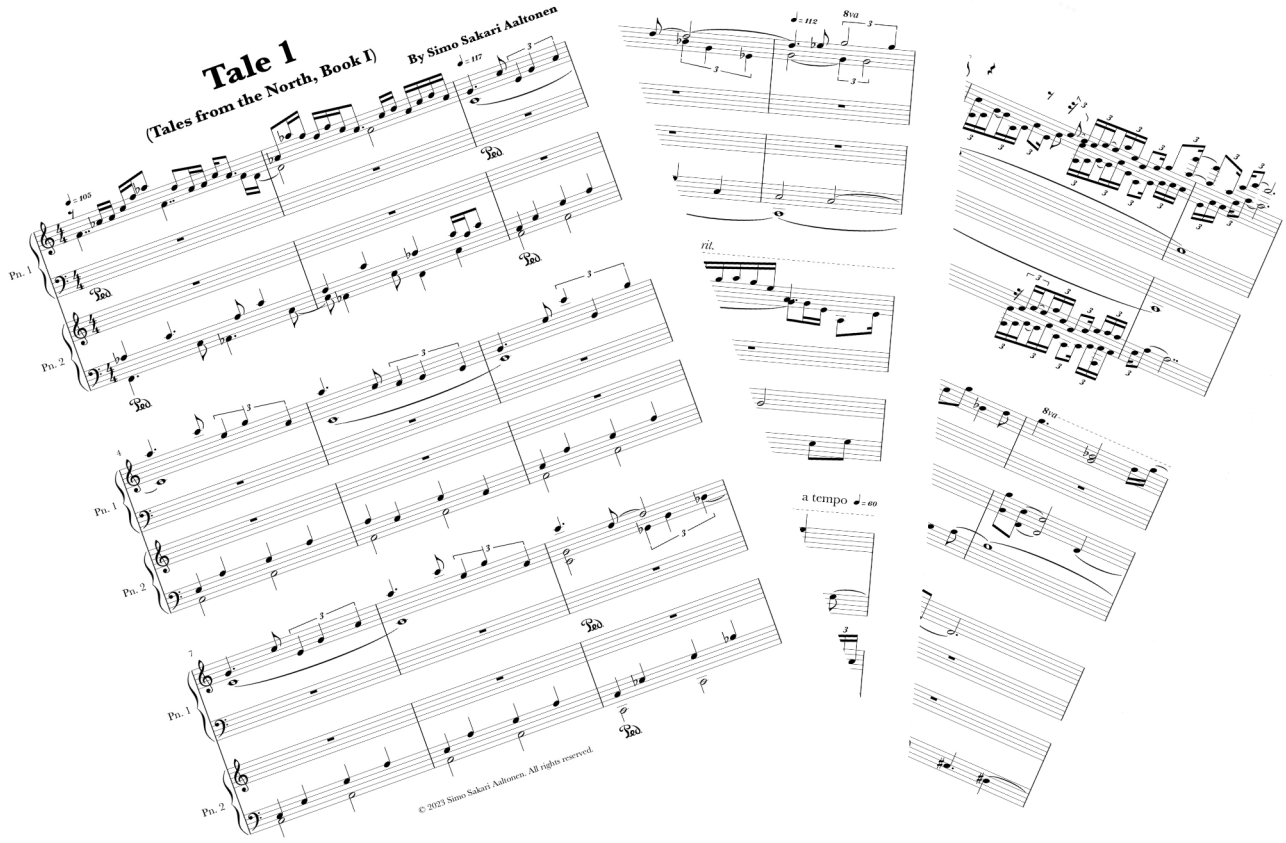

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Tale 1

(Tales from the North, Book I)

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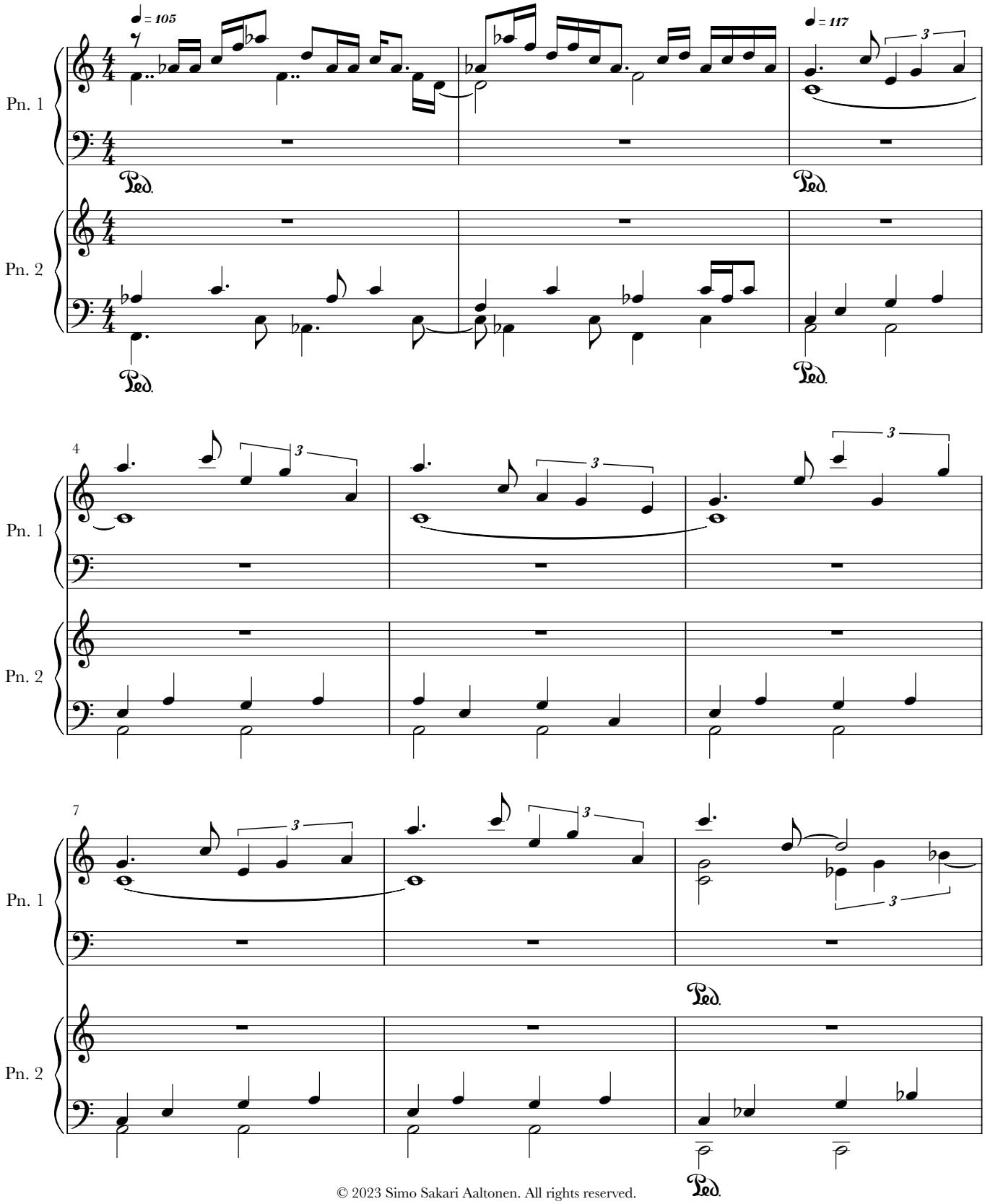

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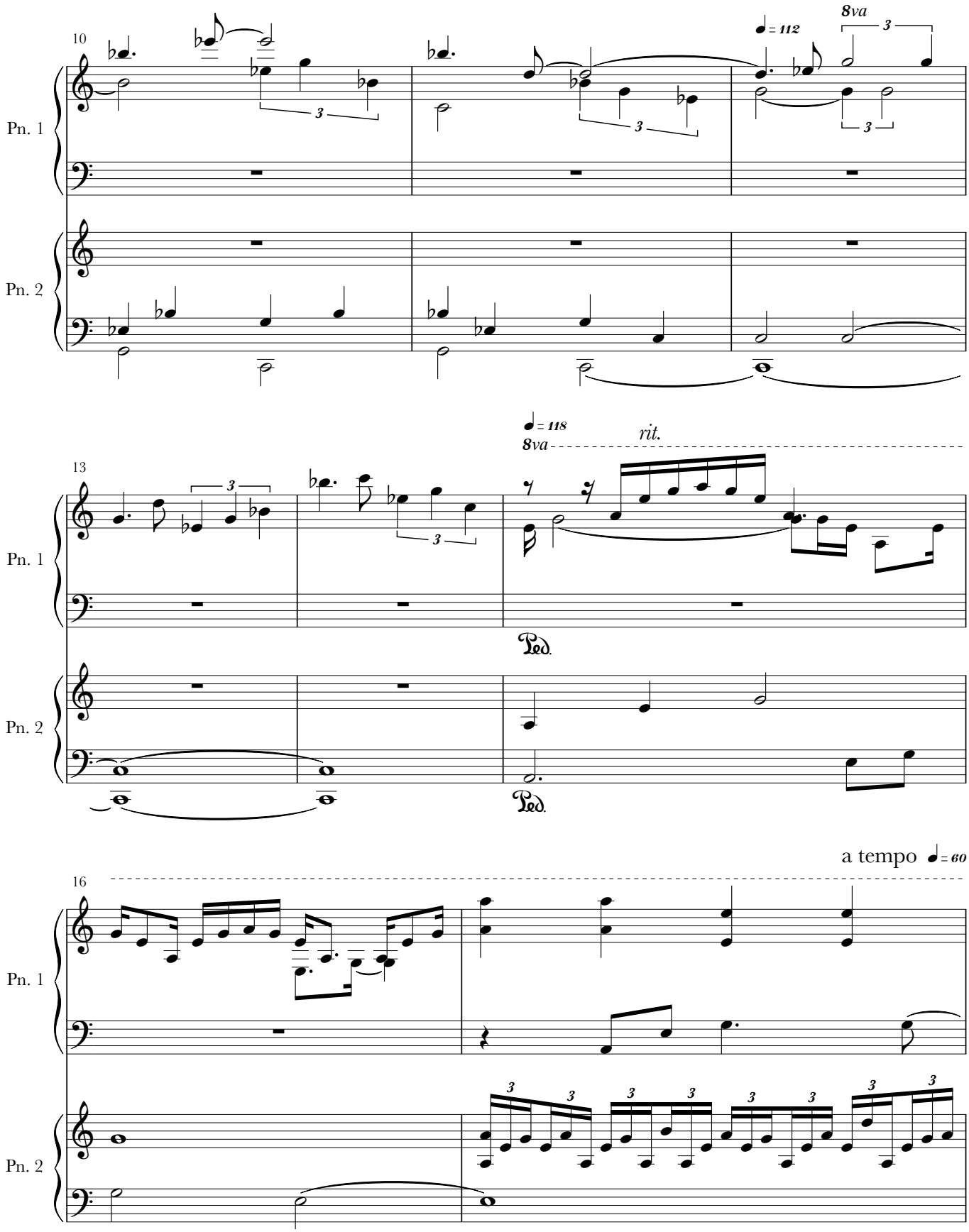

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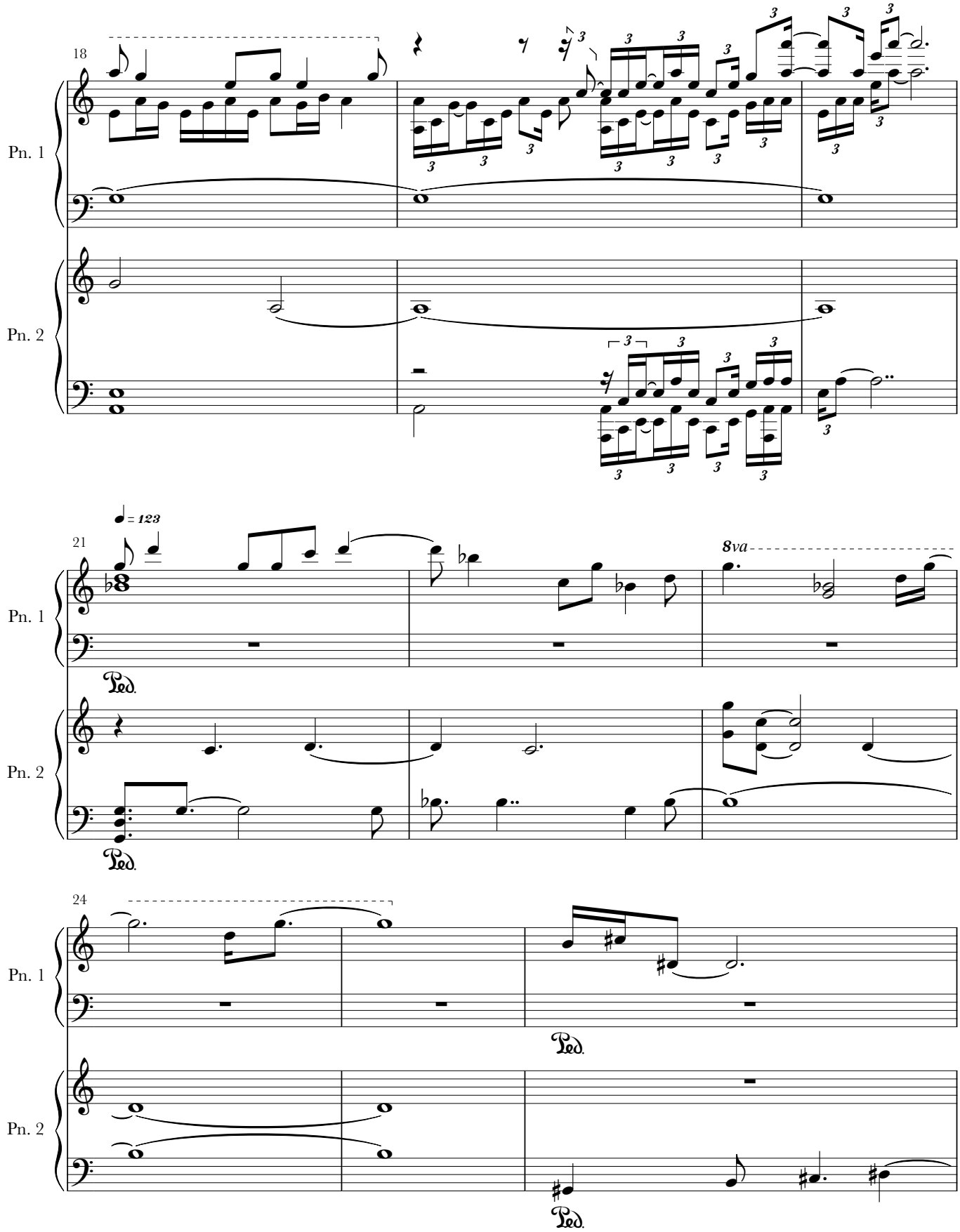

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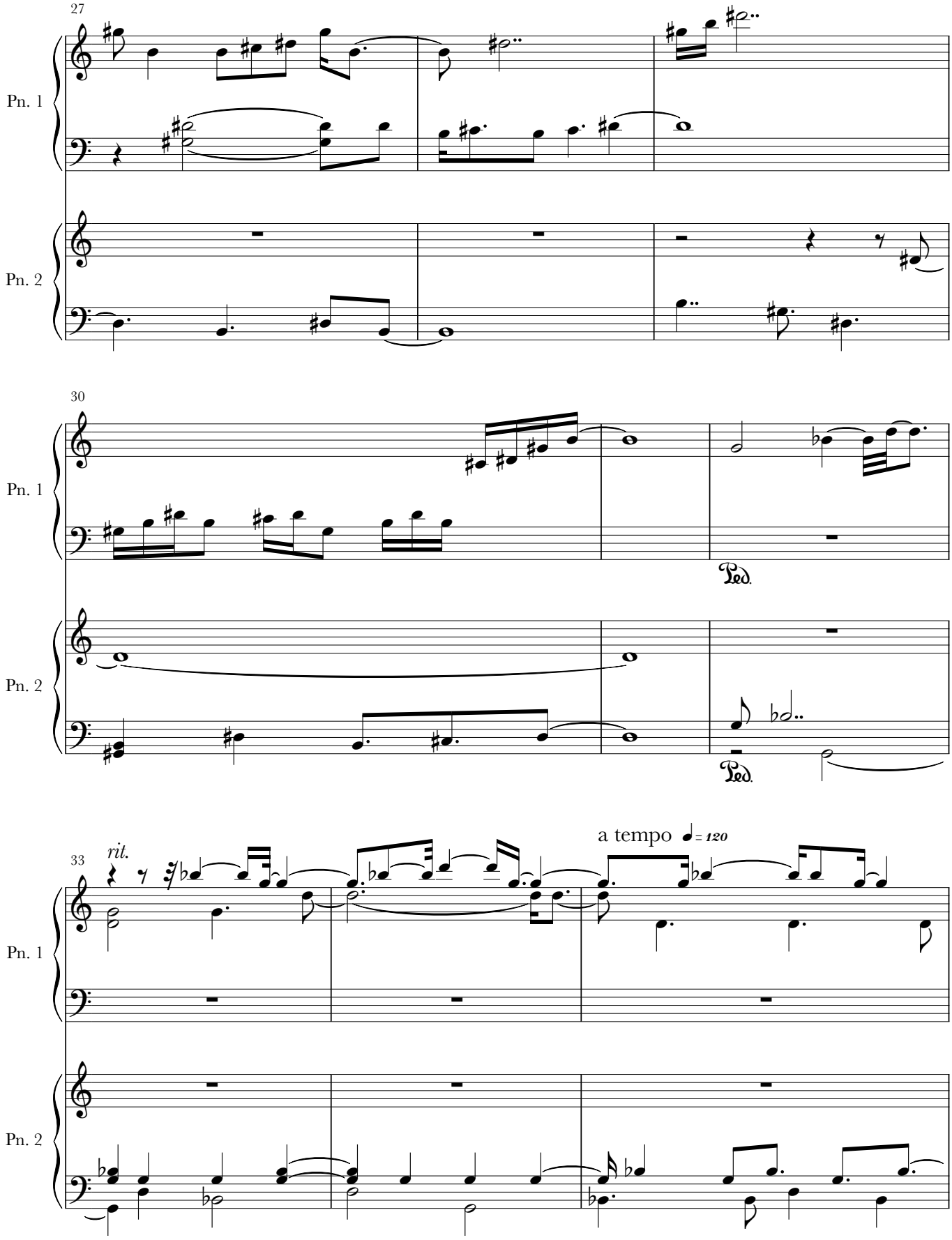

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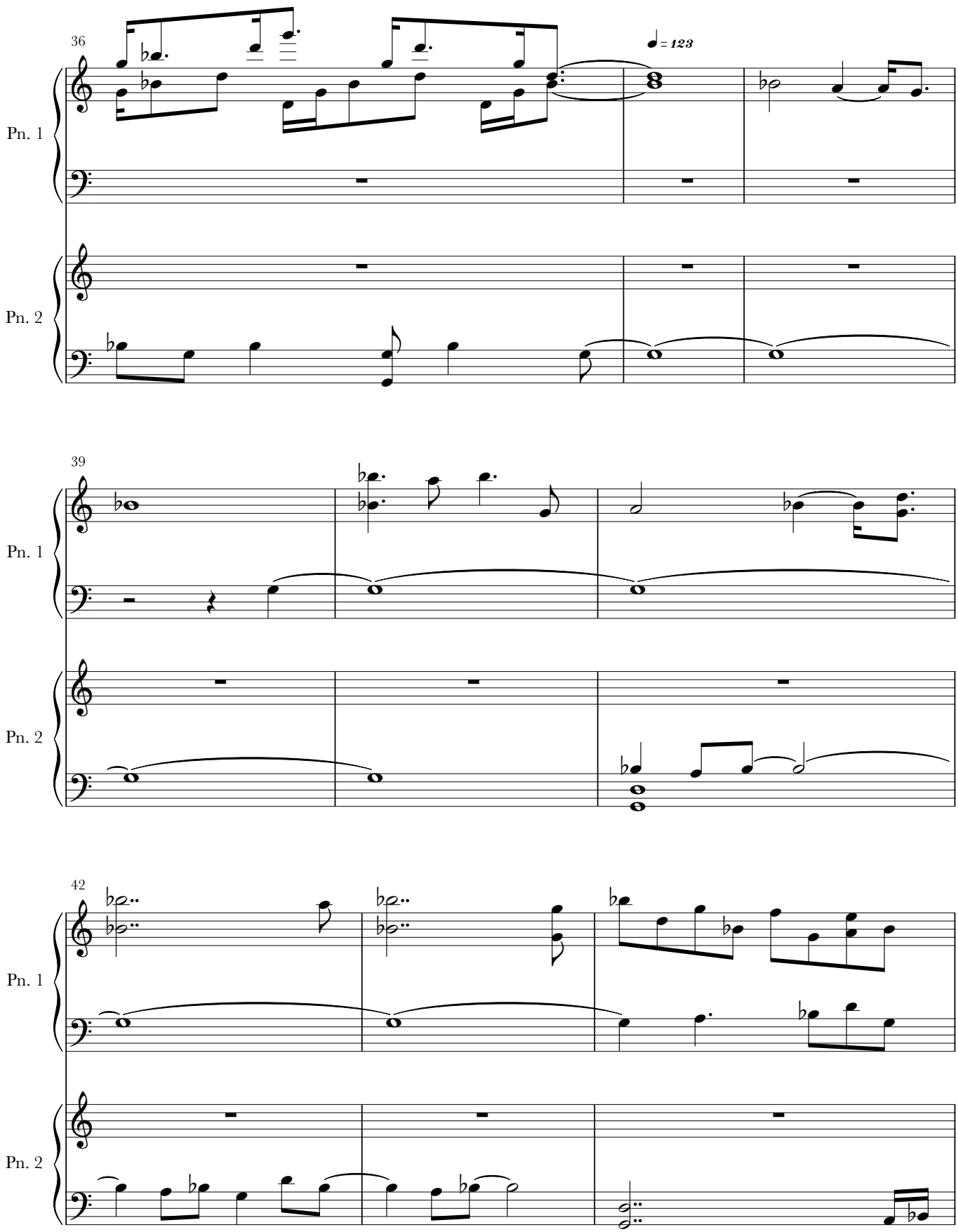

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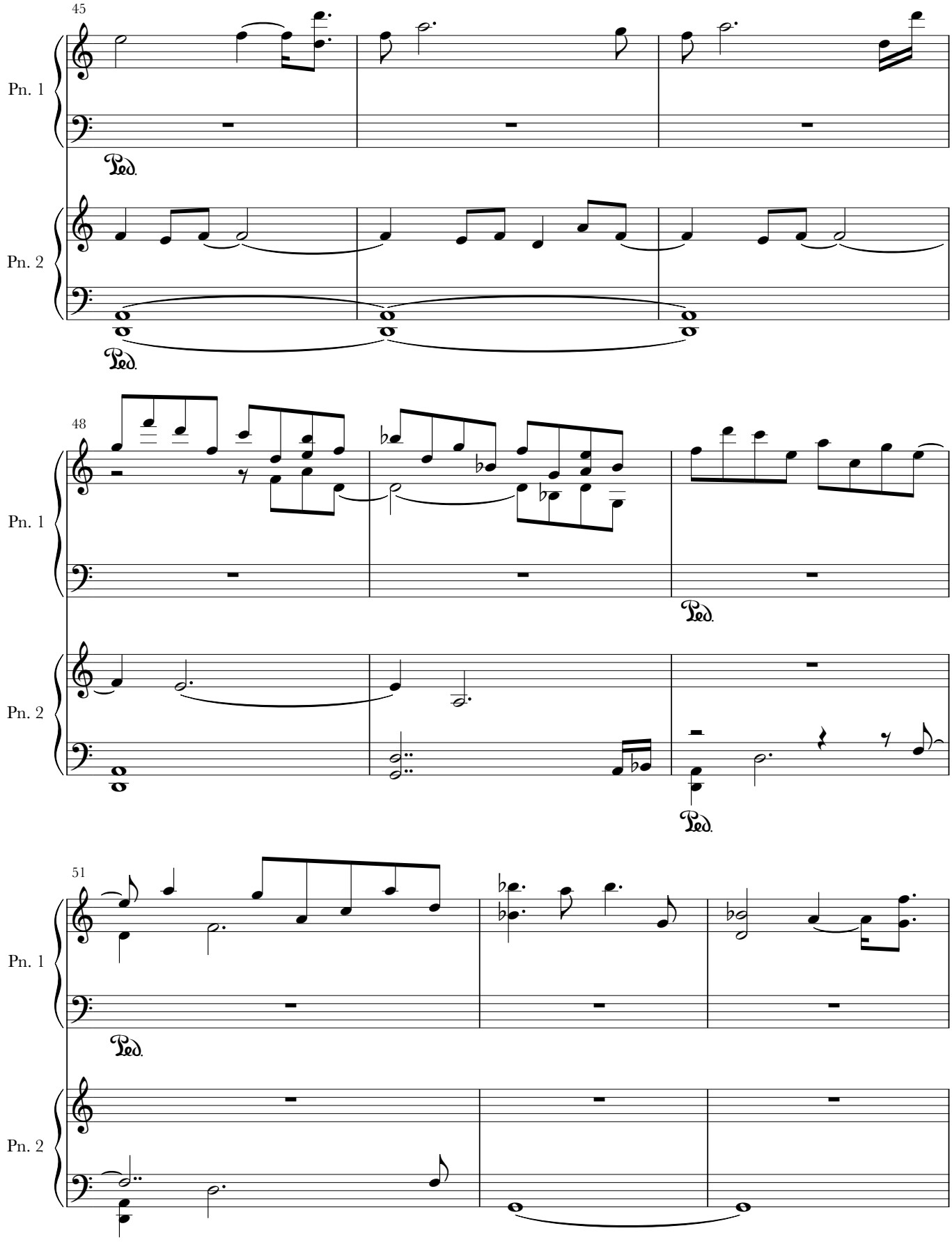

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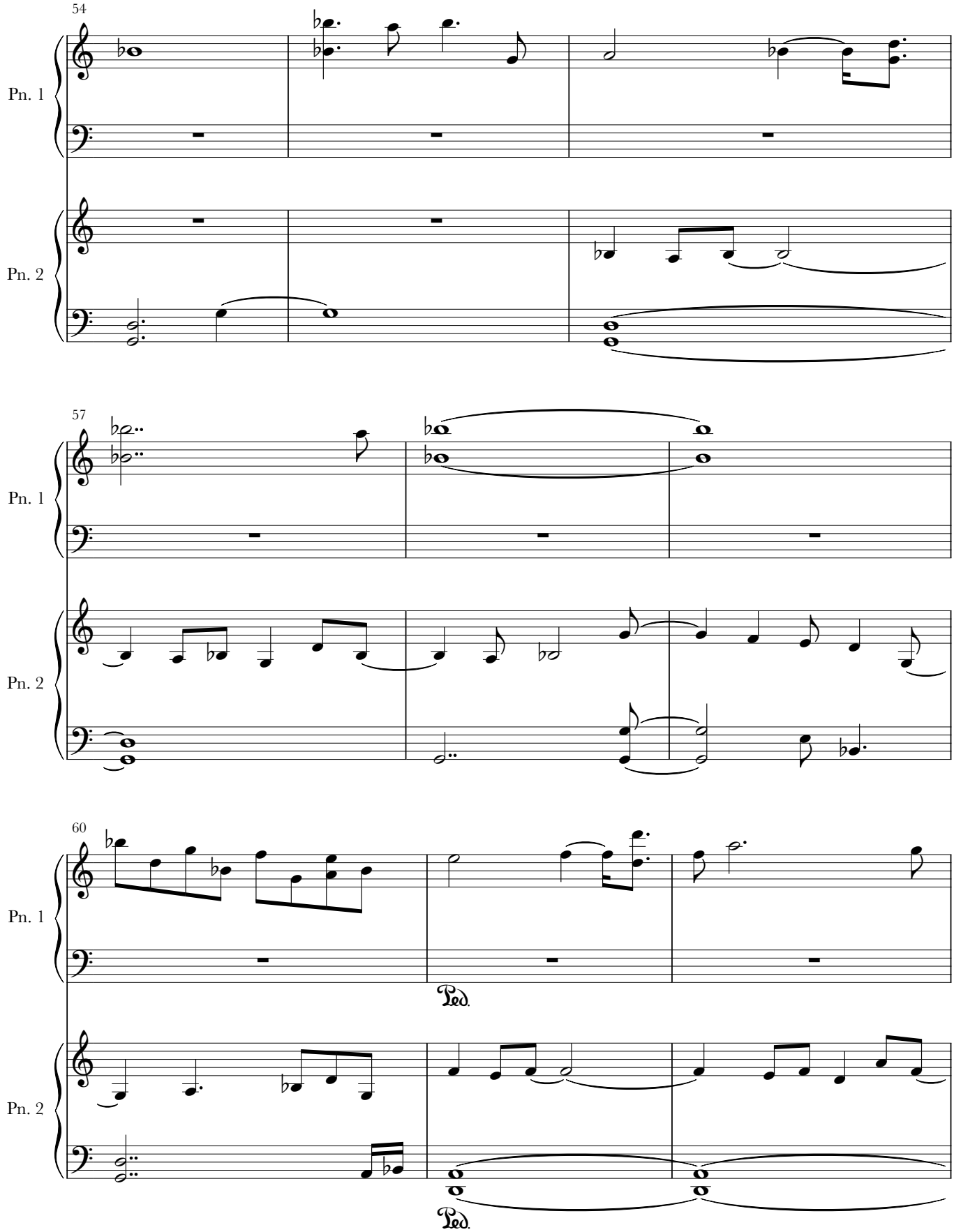

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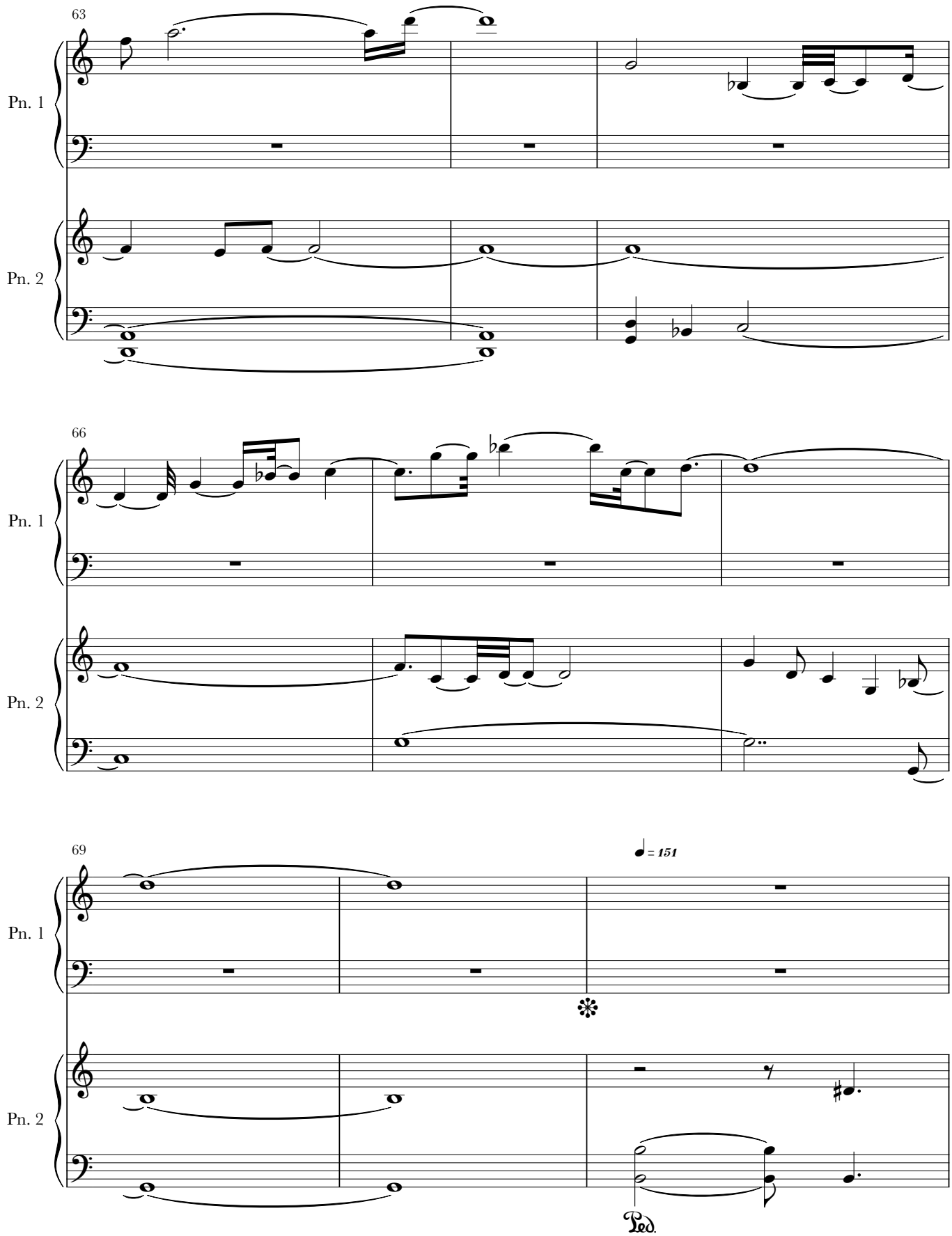

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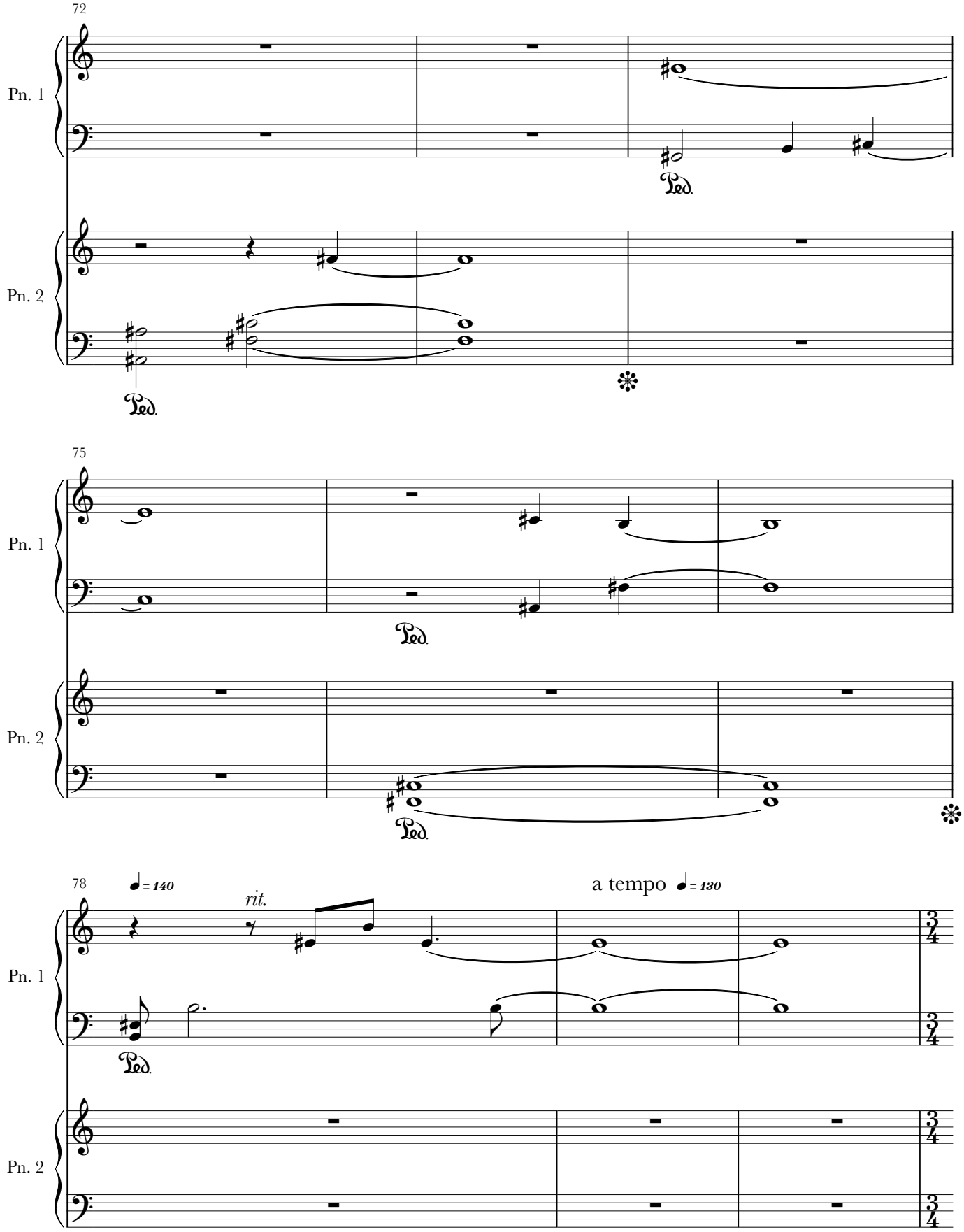

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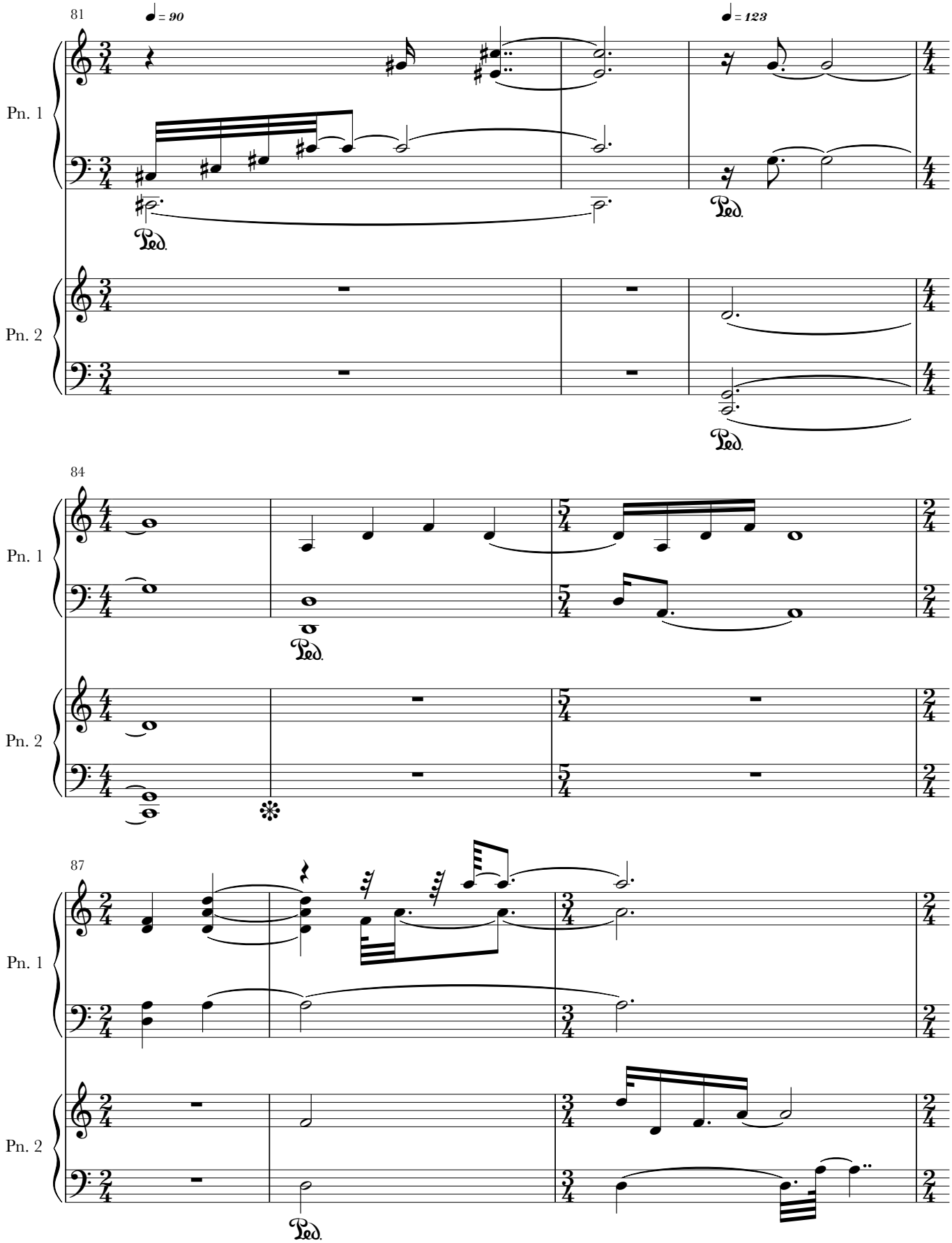

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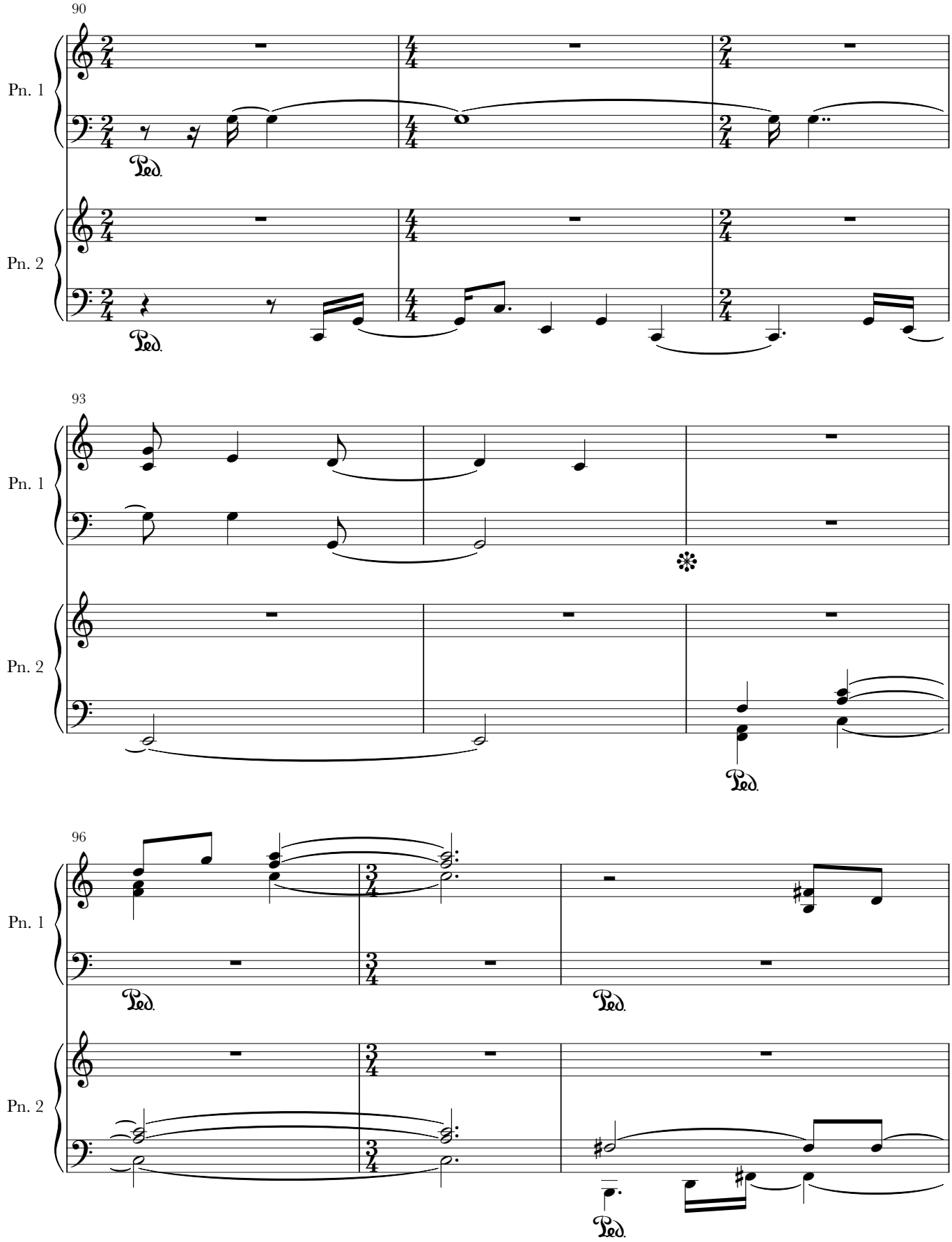

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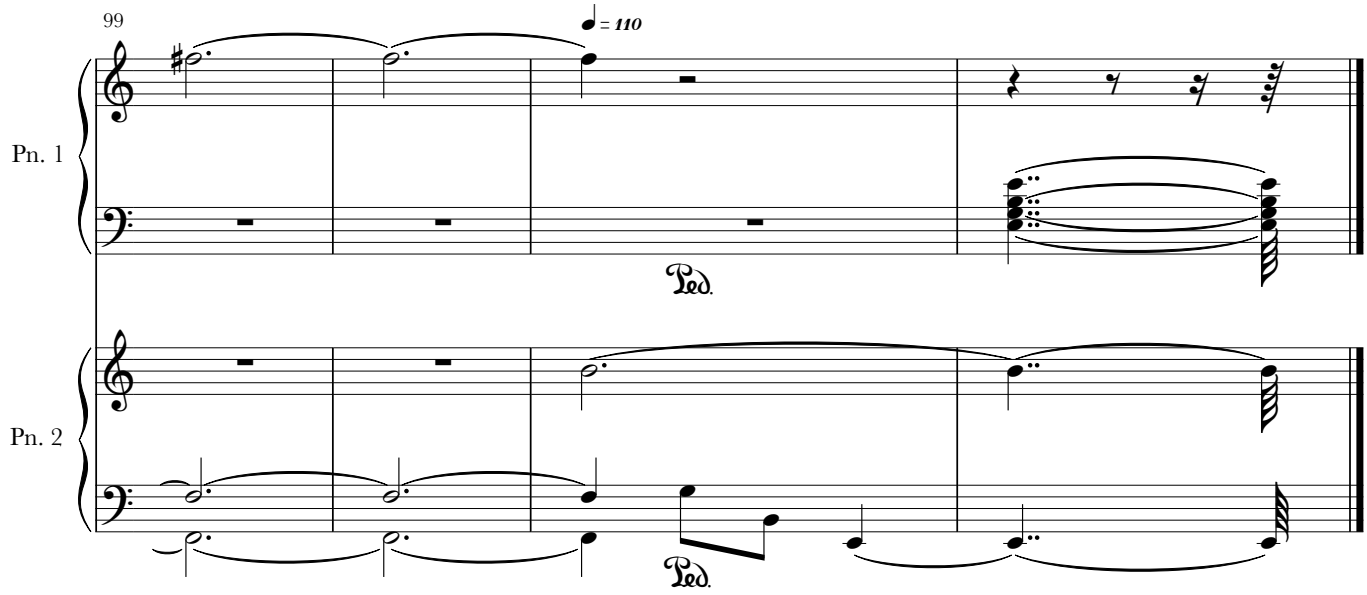

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Tale 2

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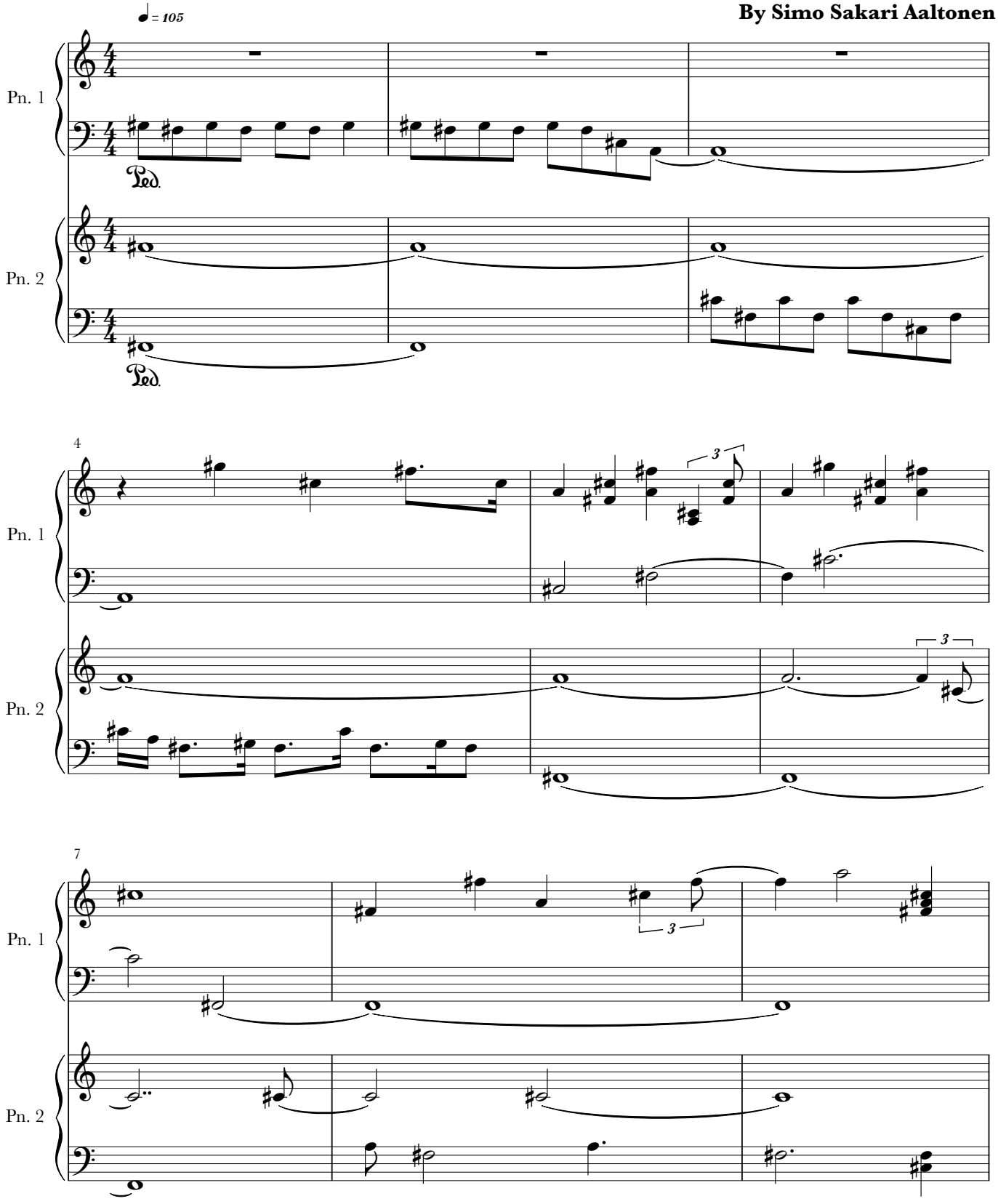

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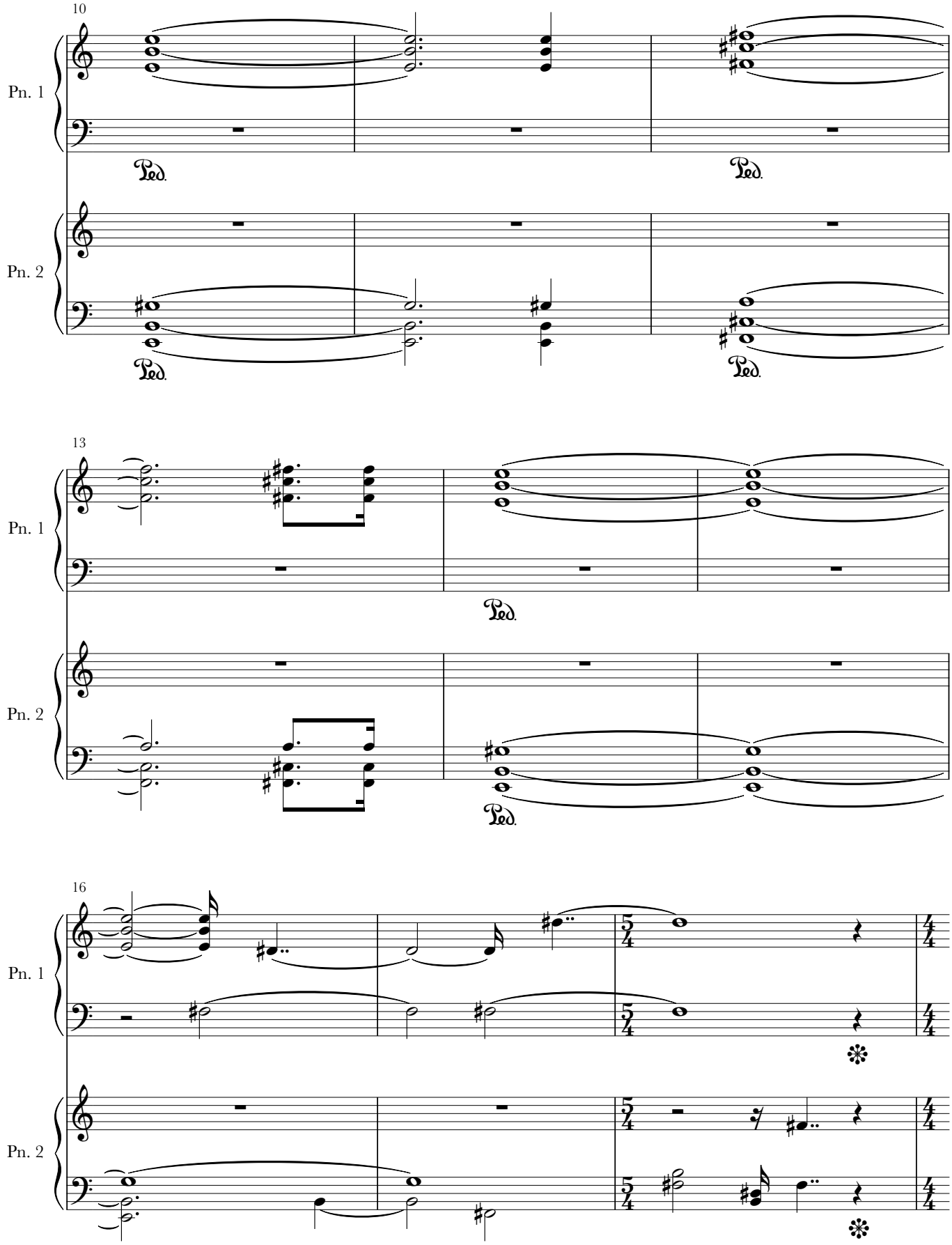

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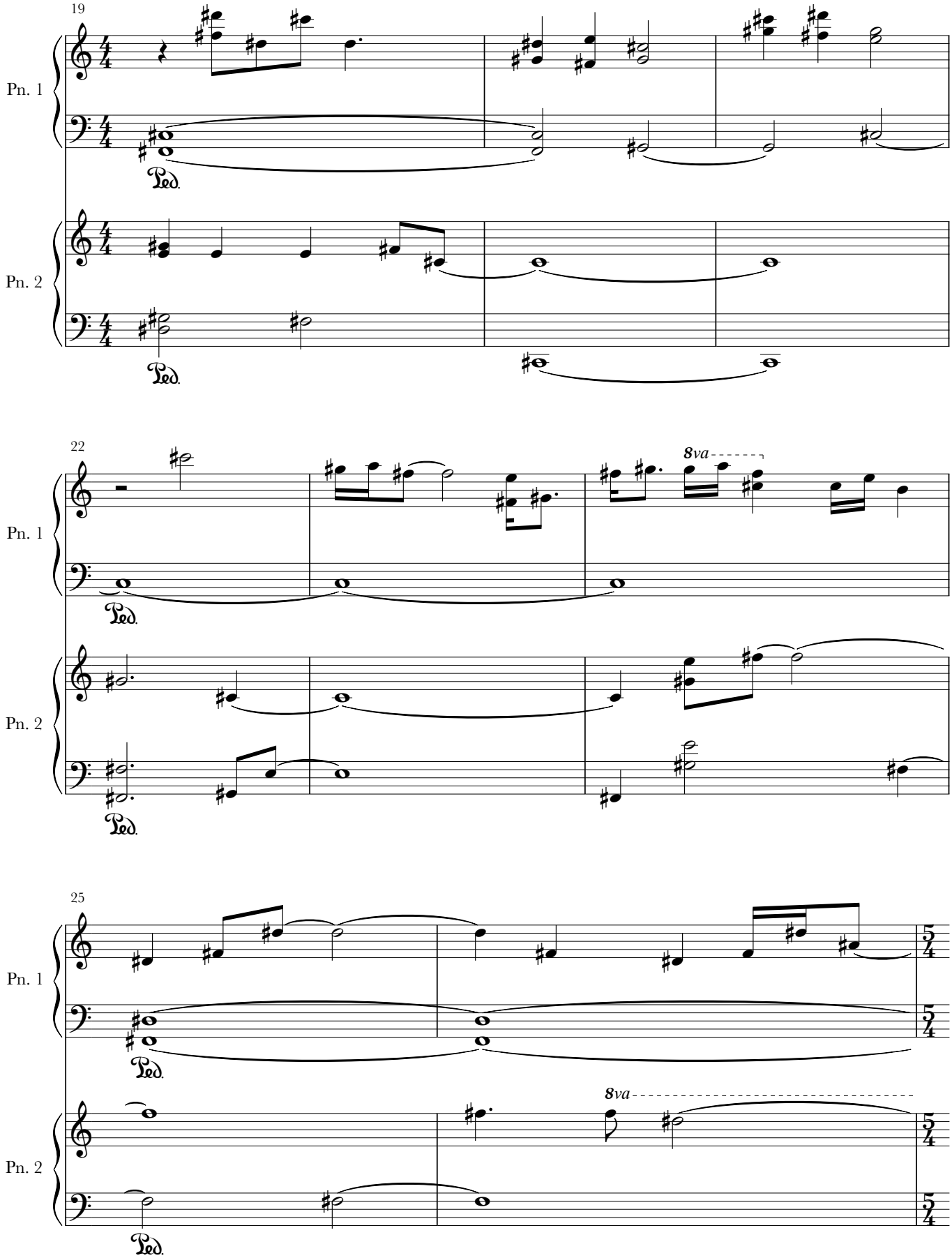

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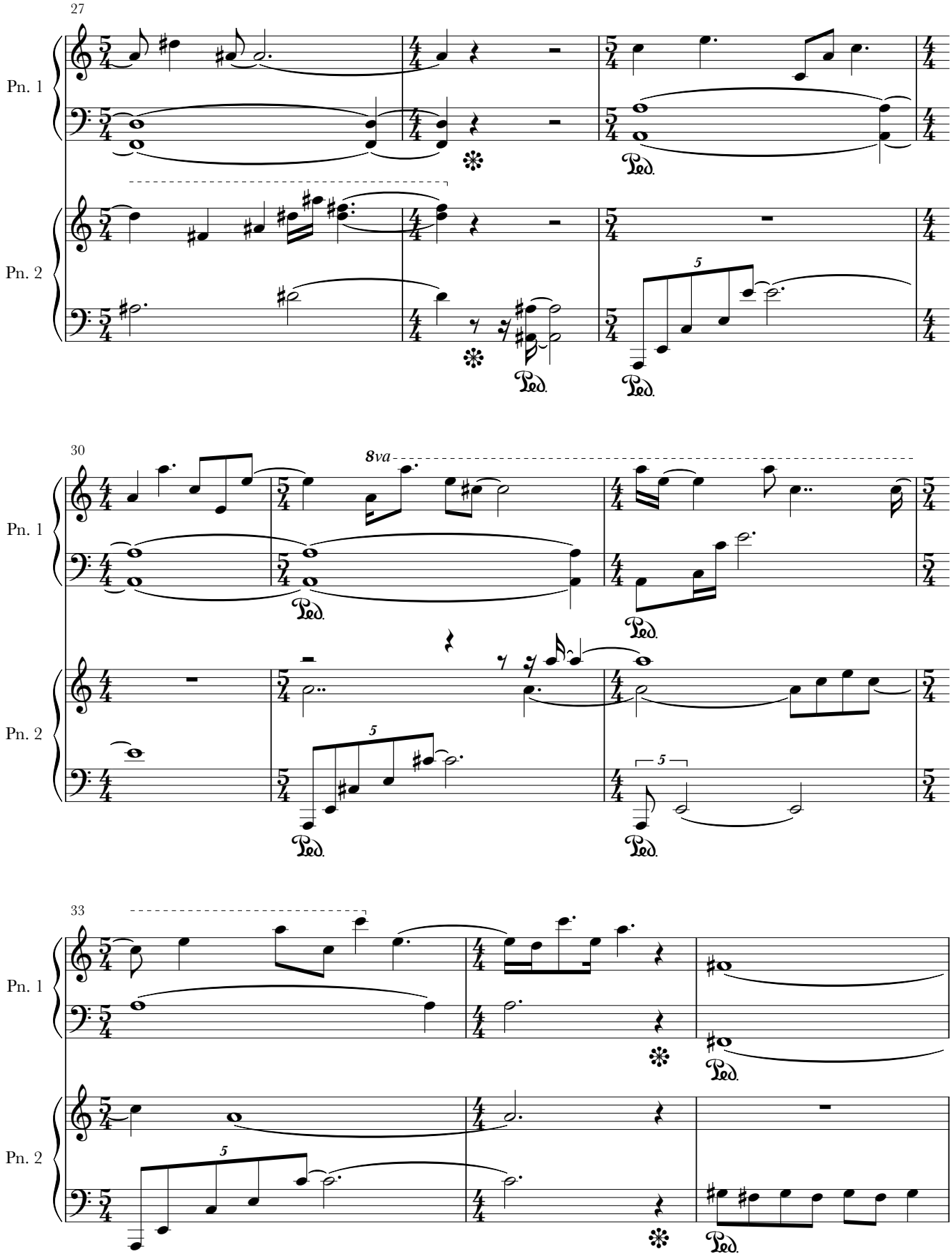

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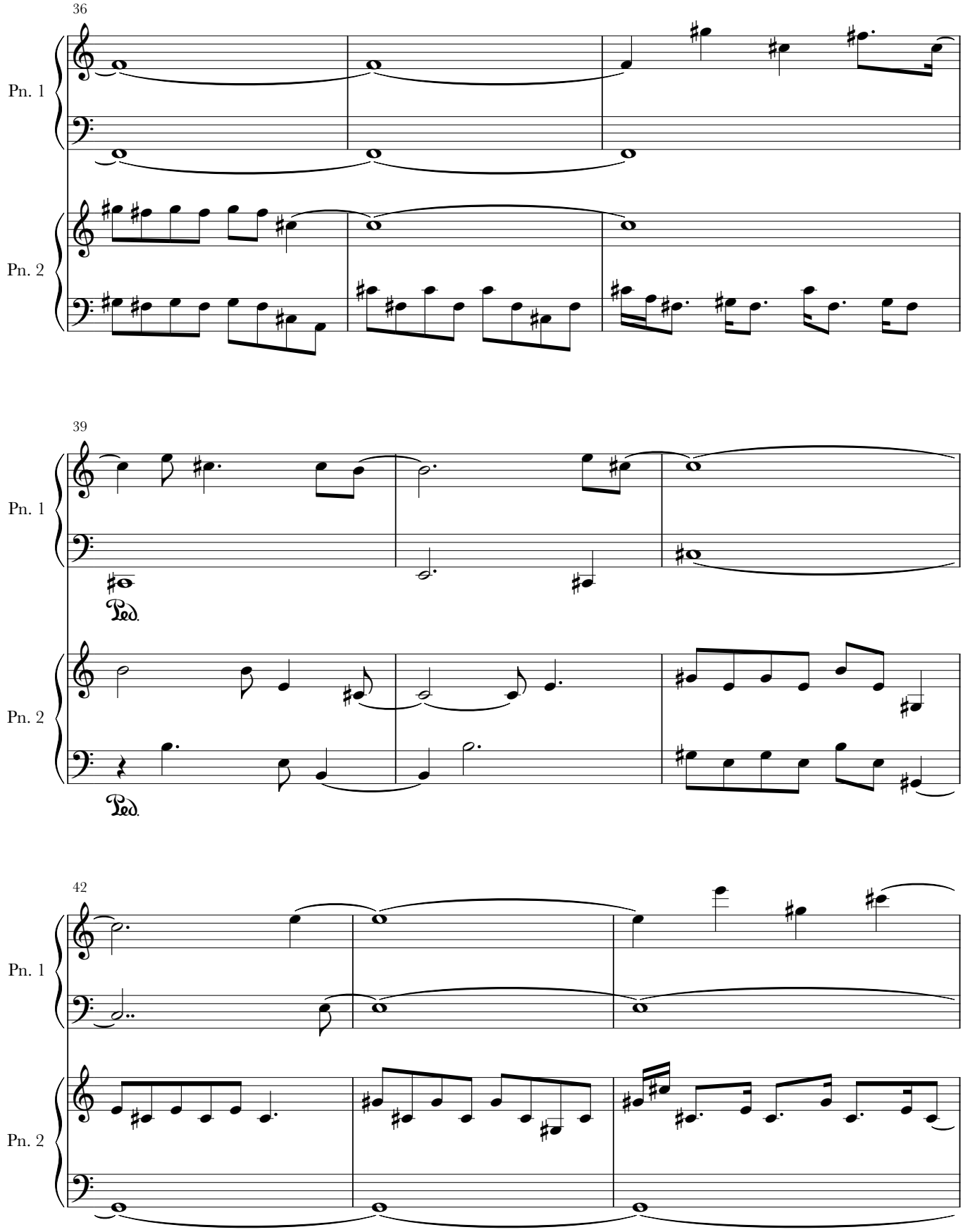

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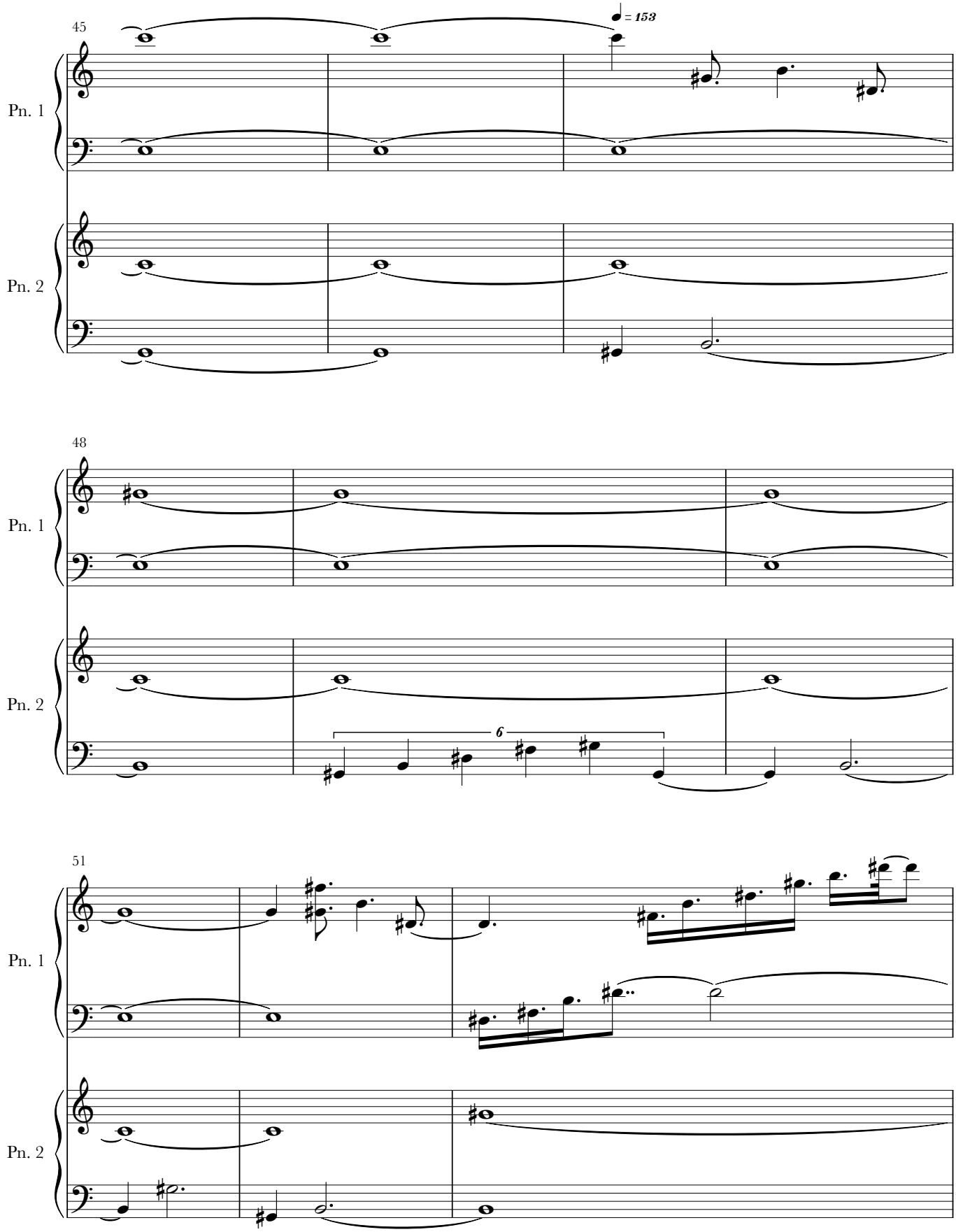

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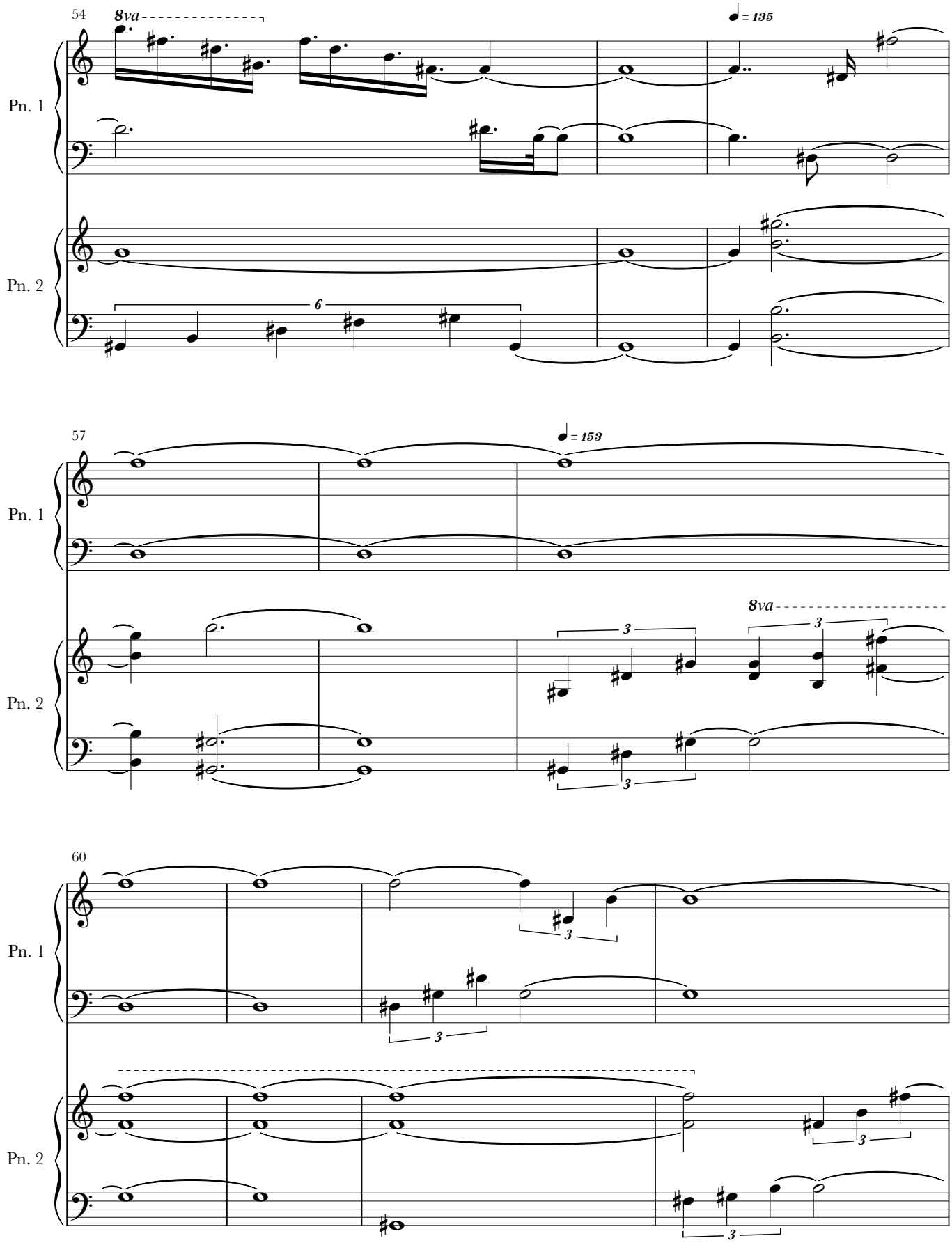

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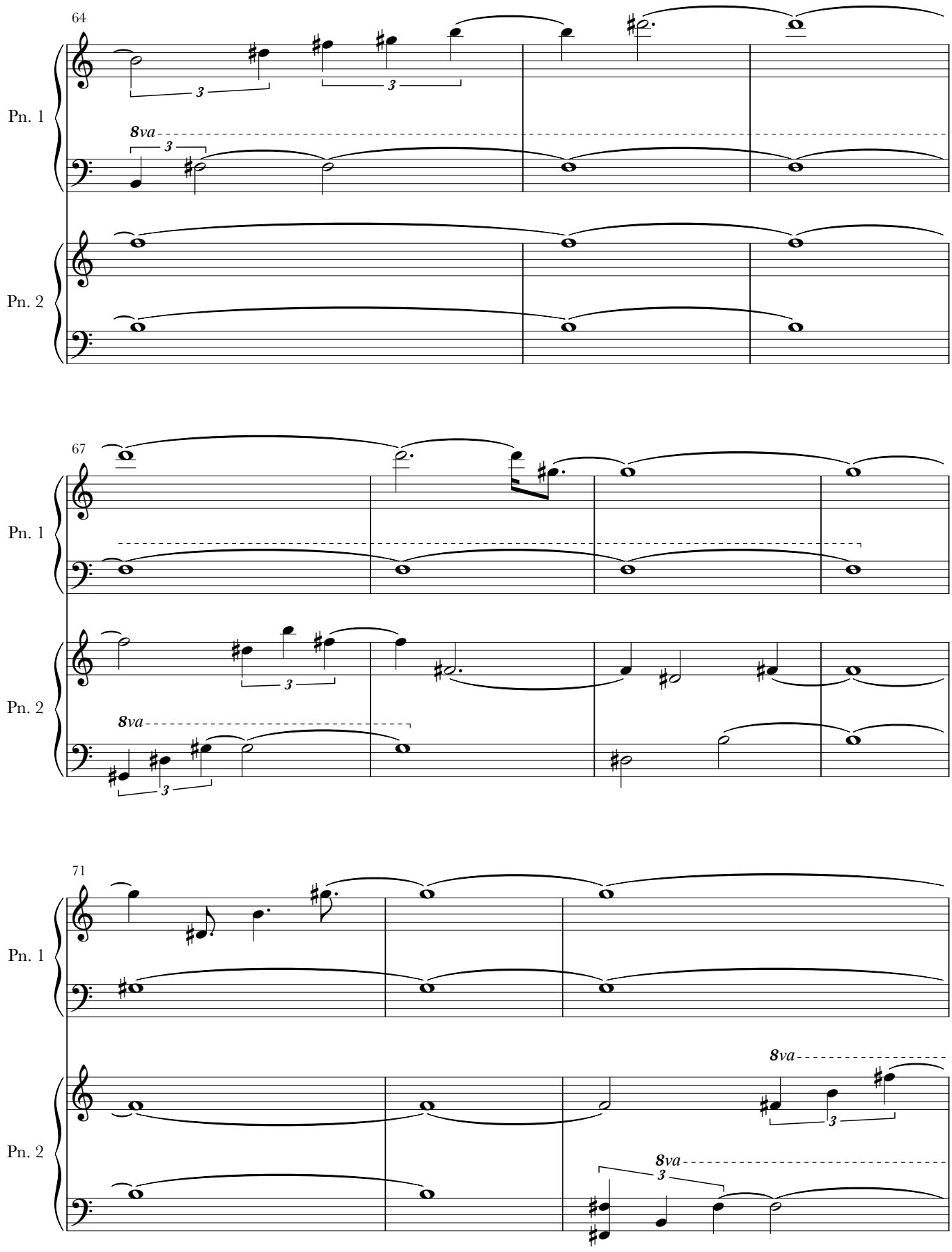

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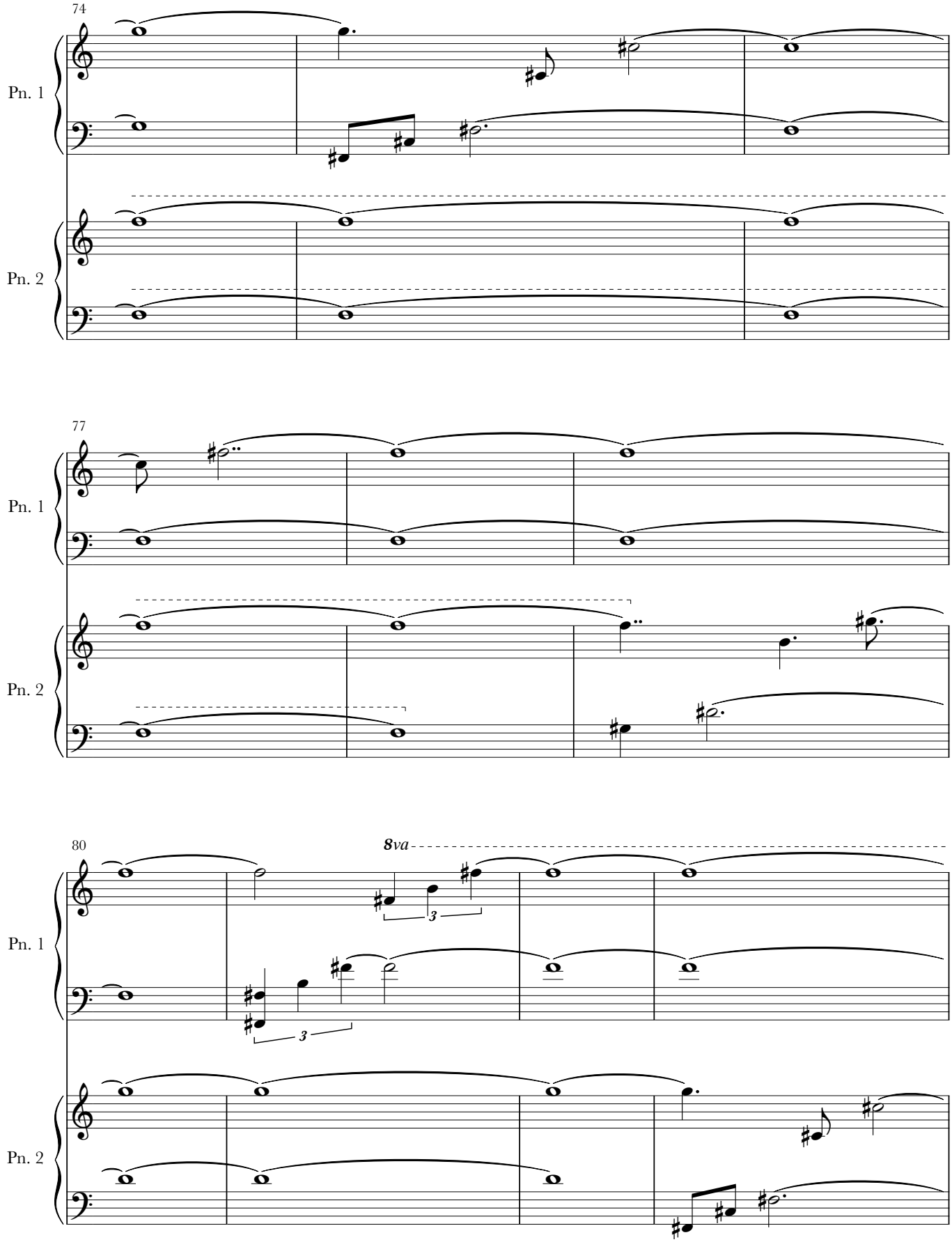

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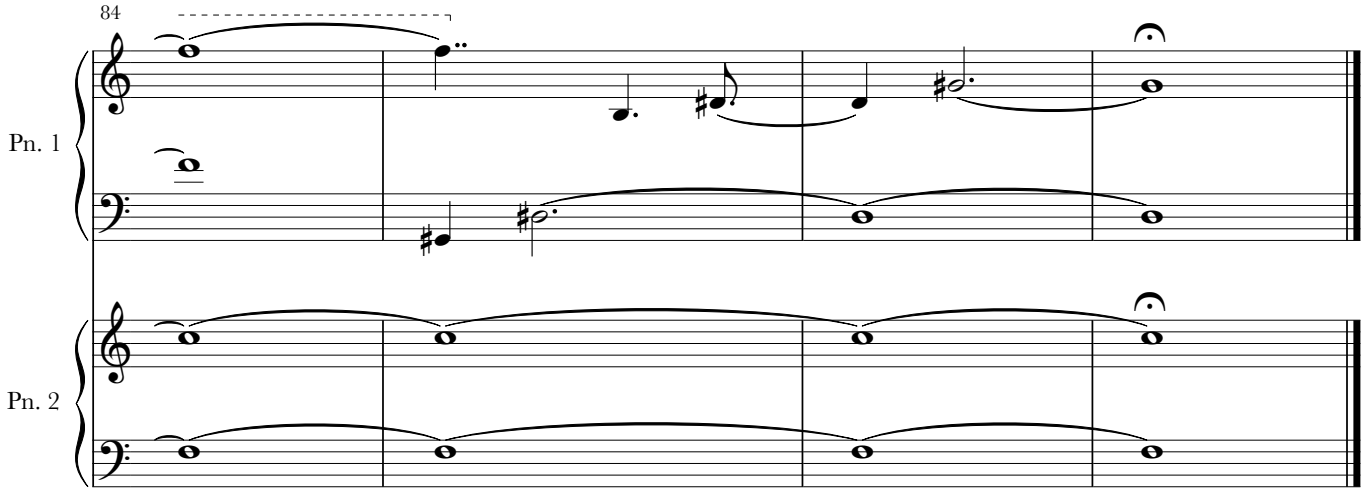

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Tale 3

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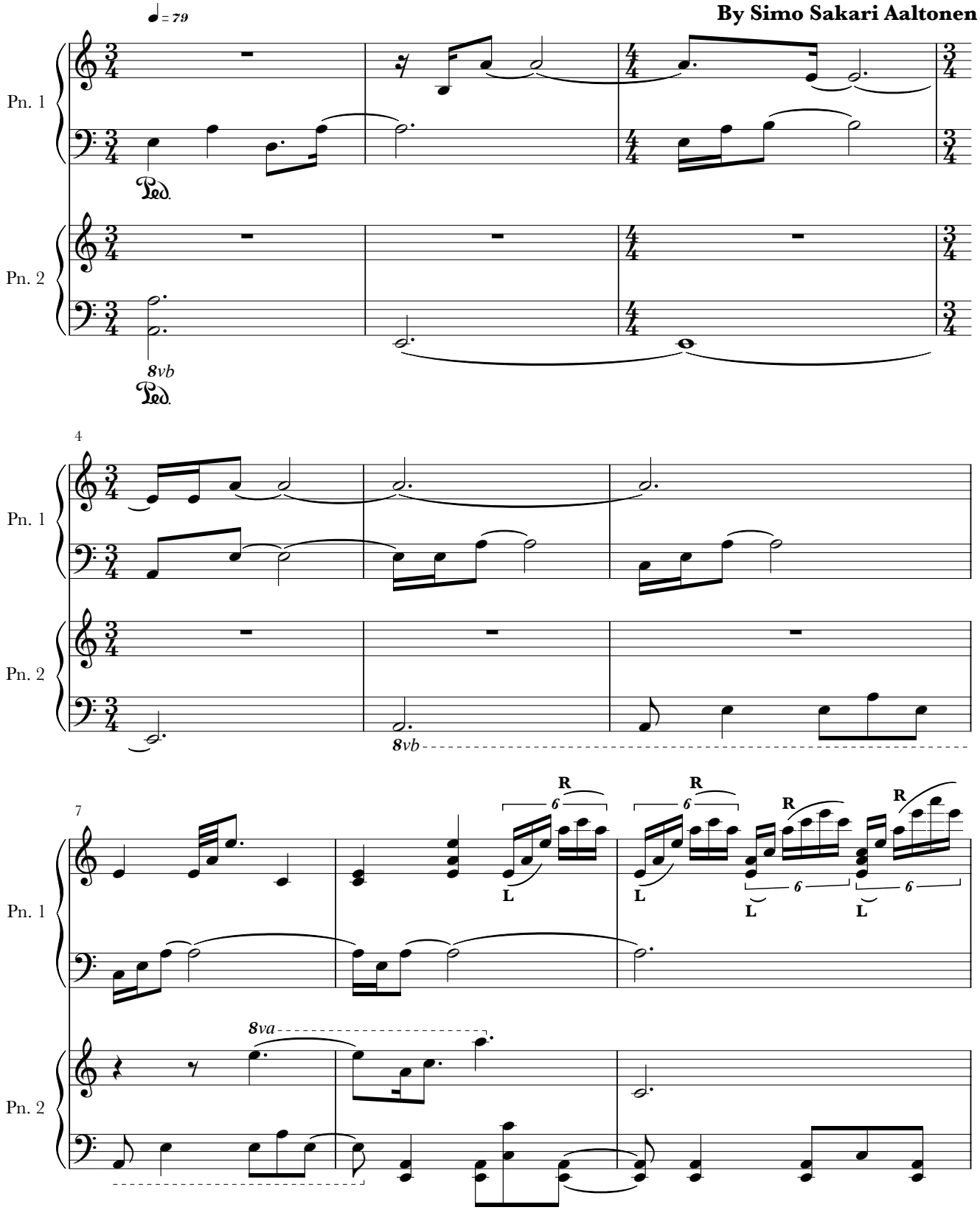

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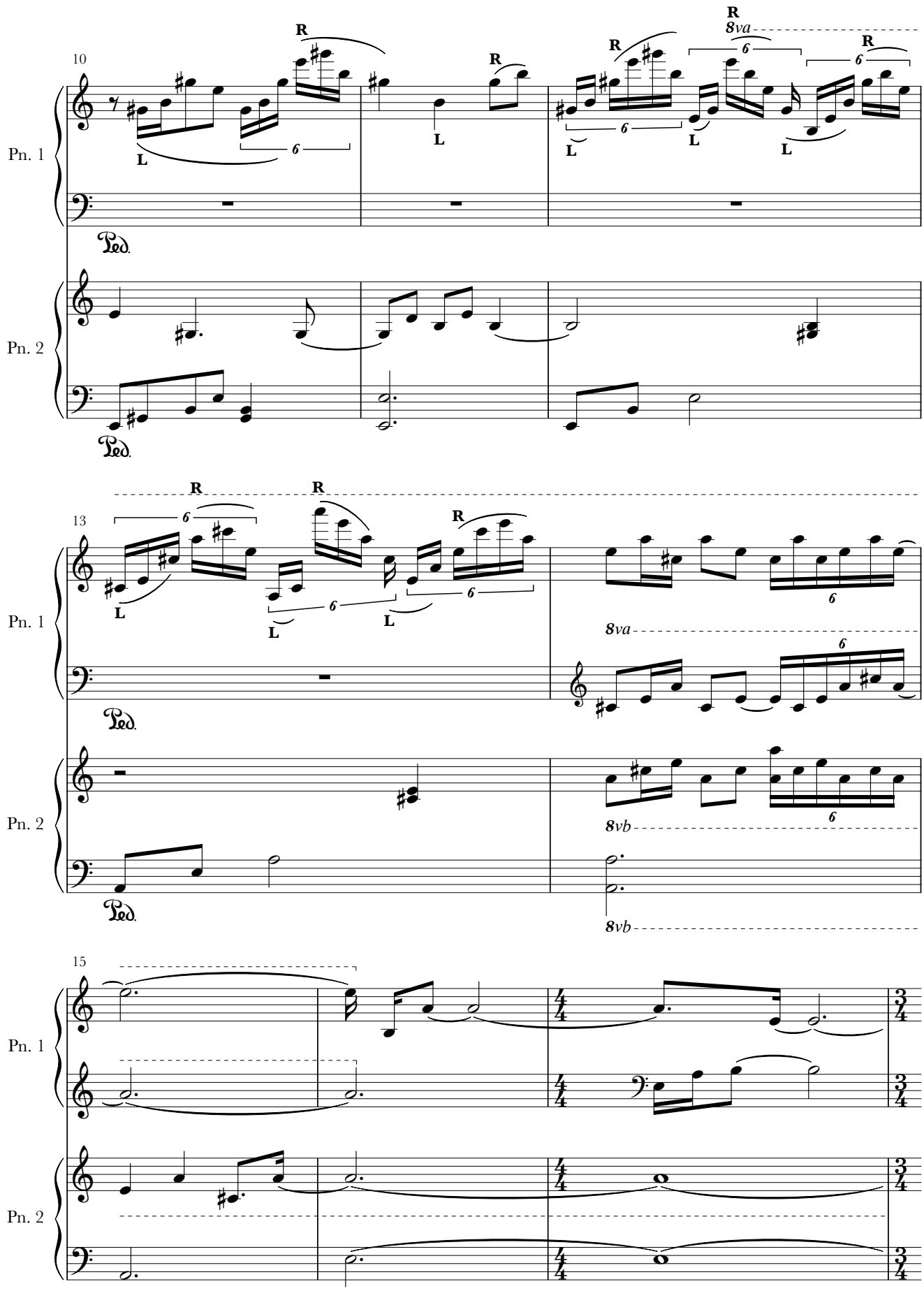

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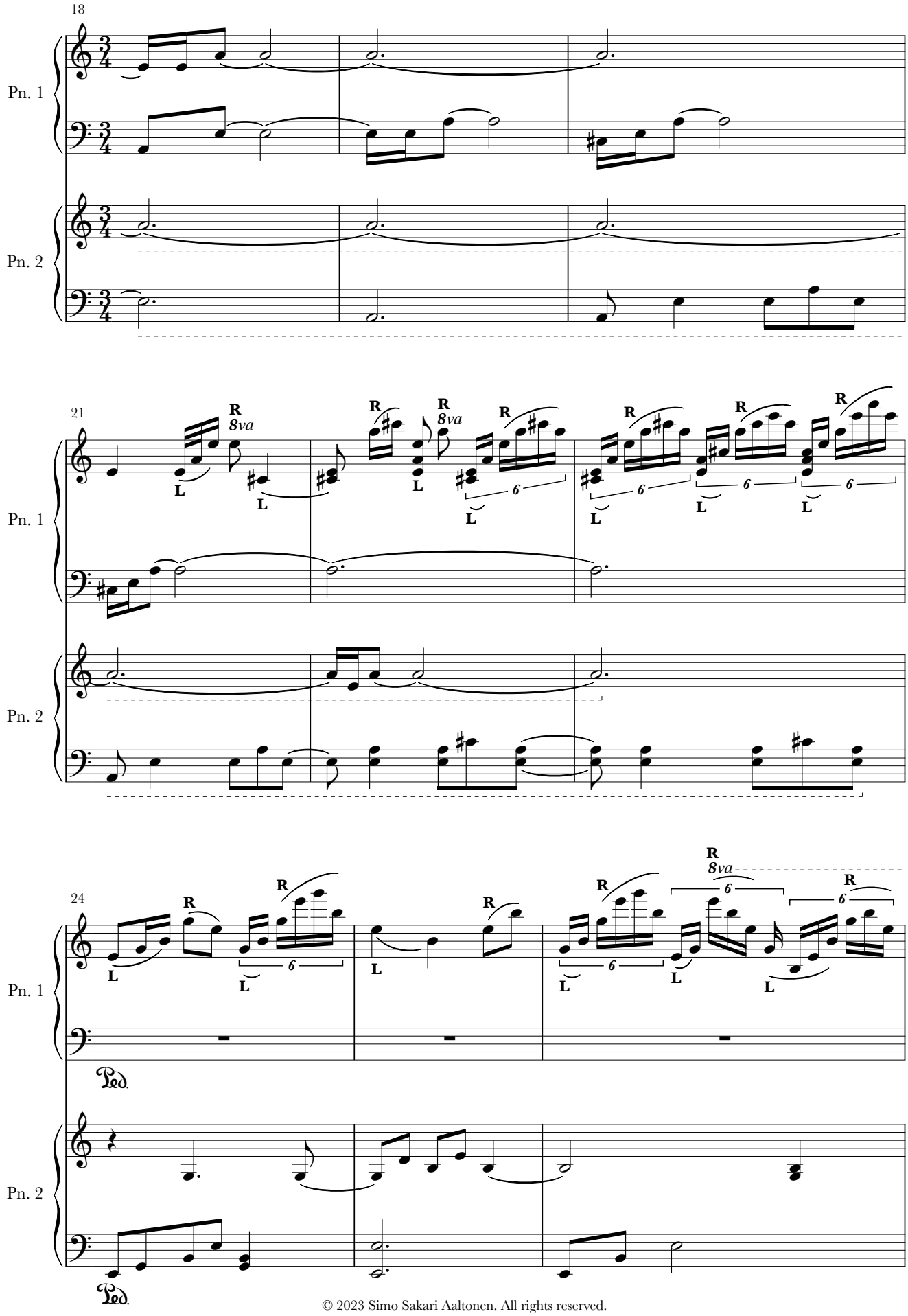

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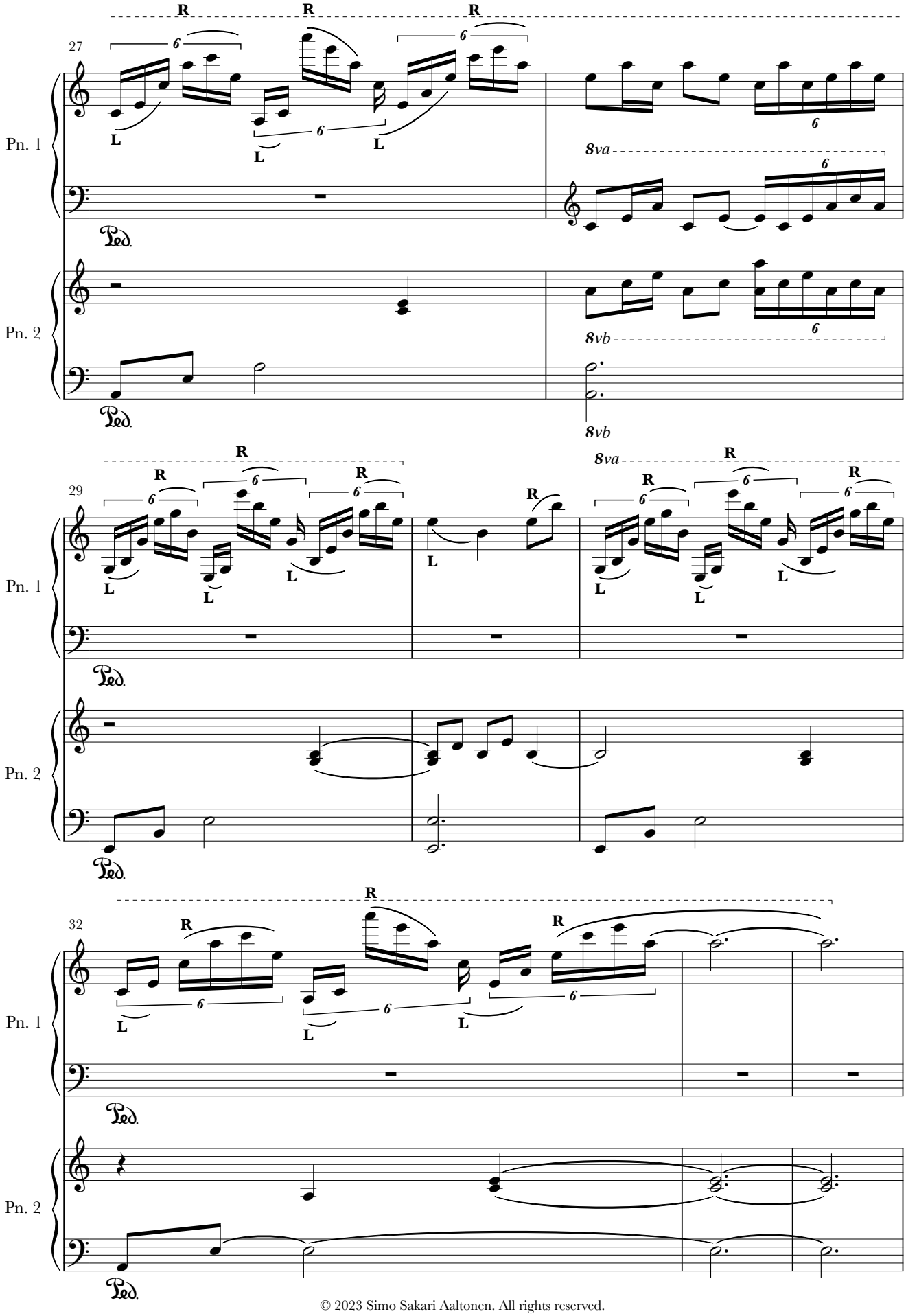

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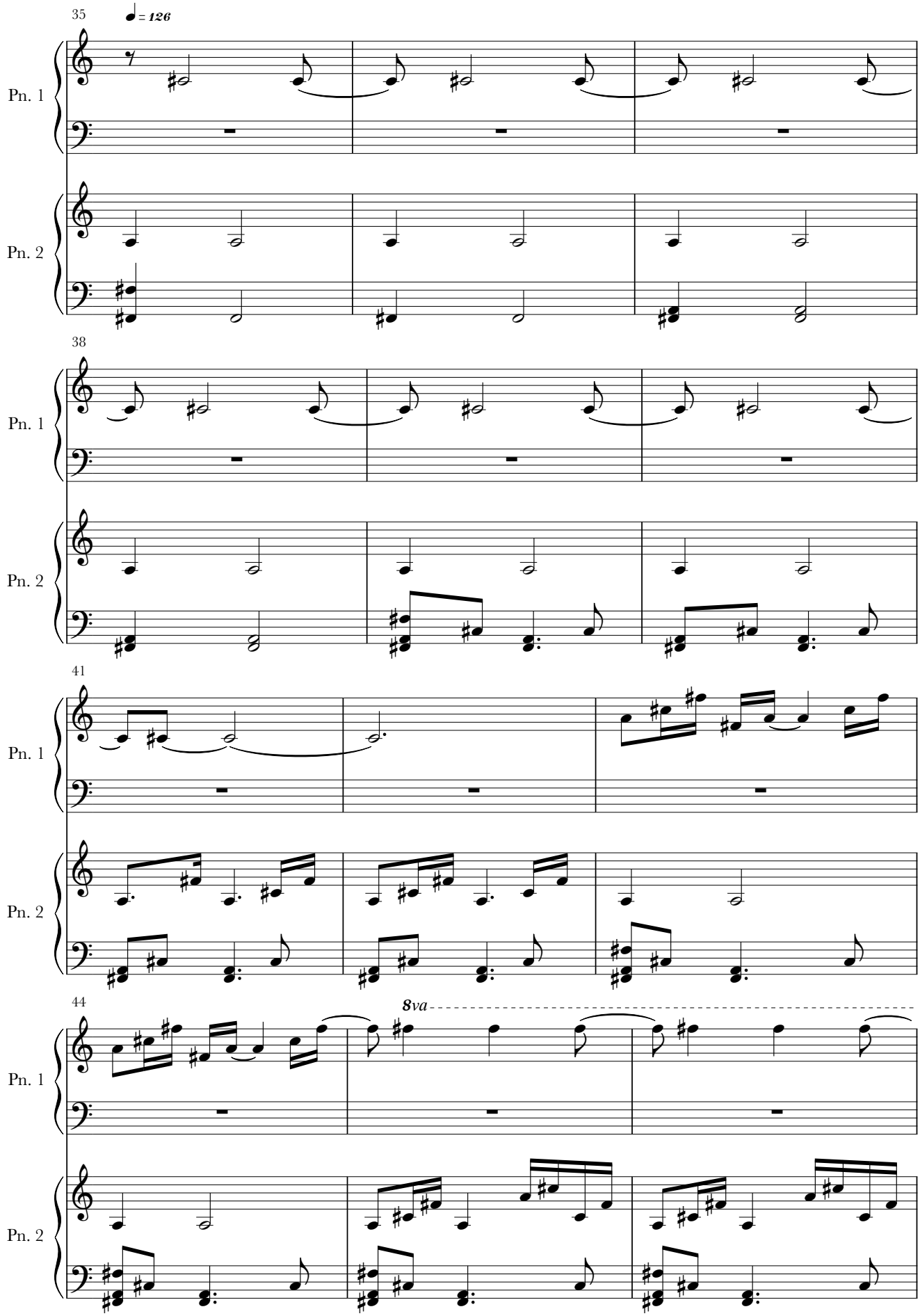

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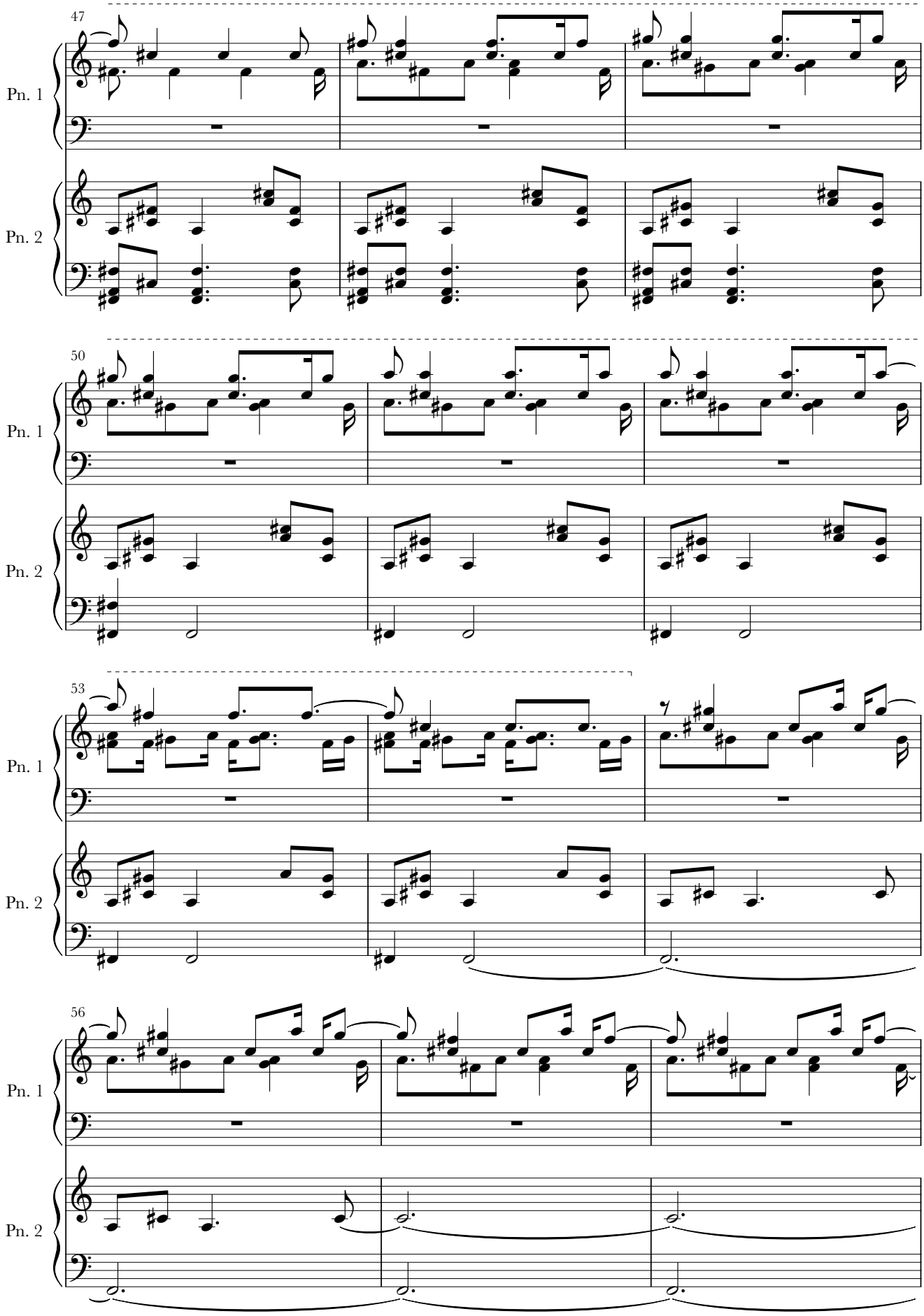

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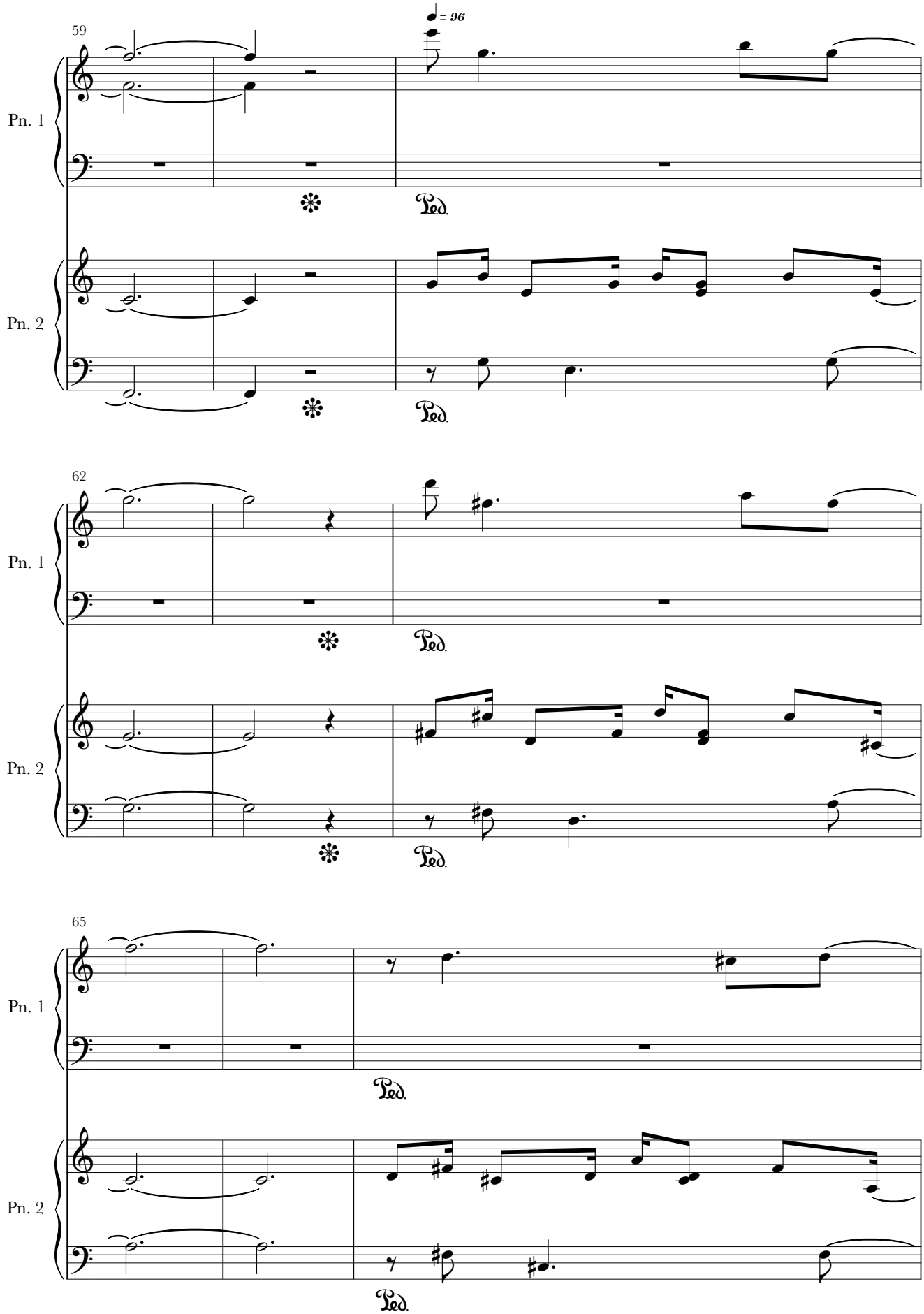

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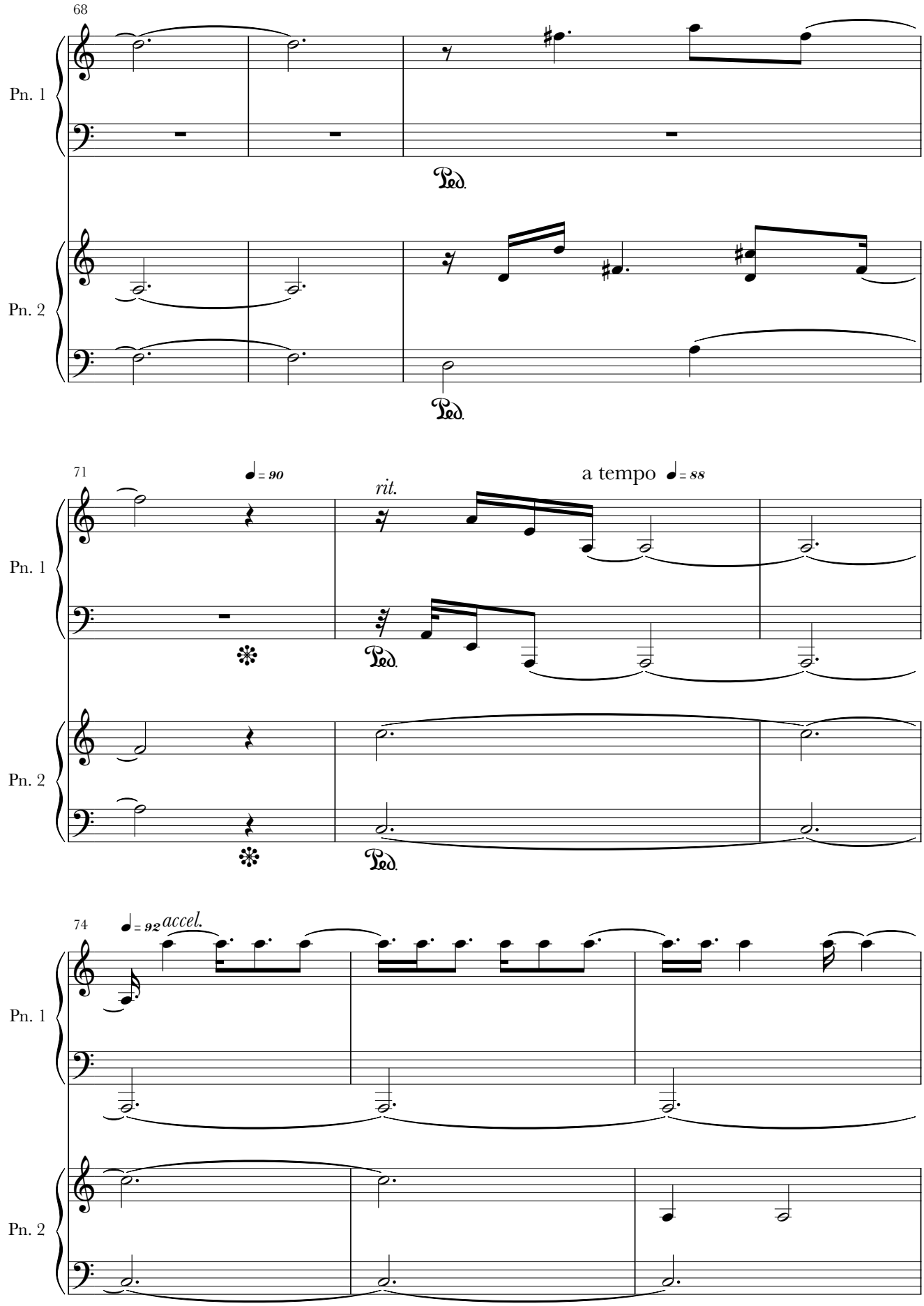

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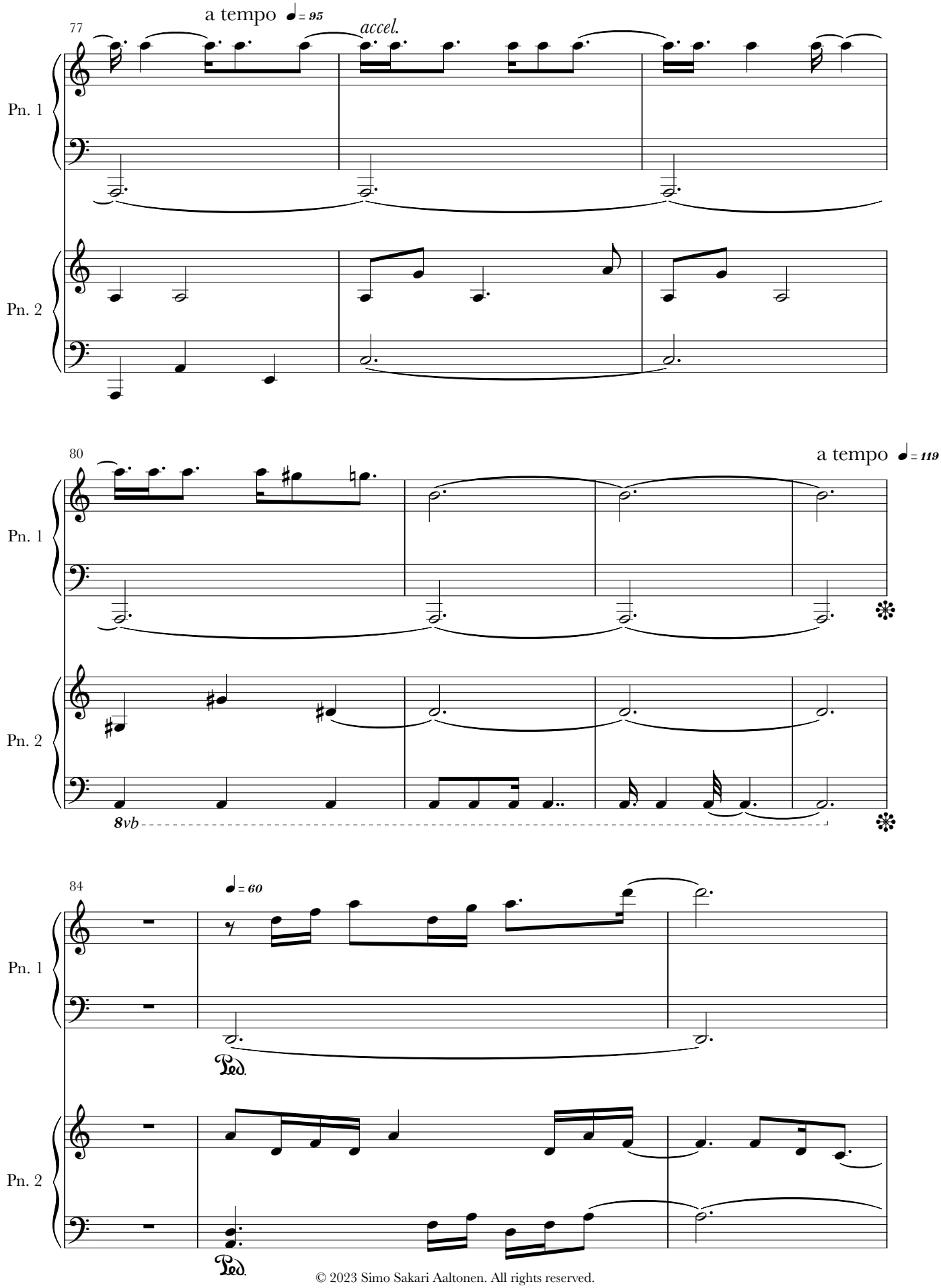

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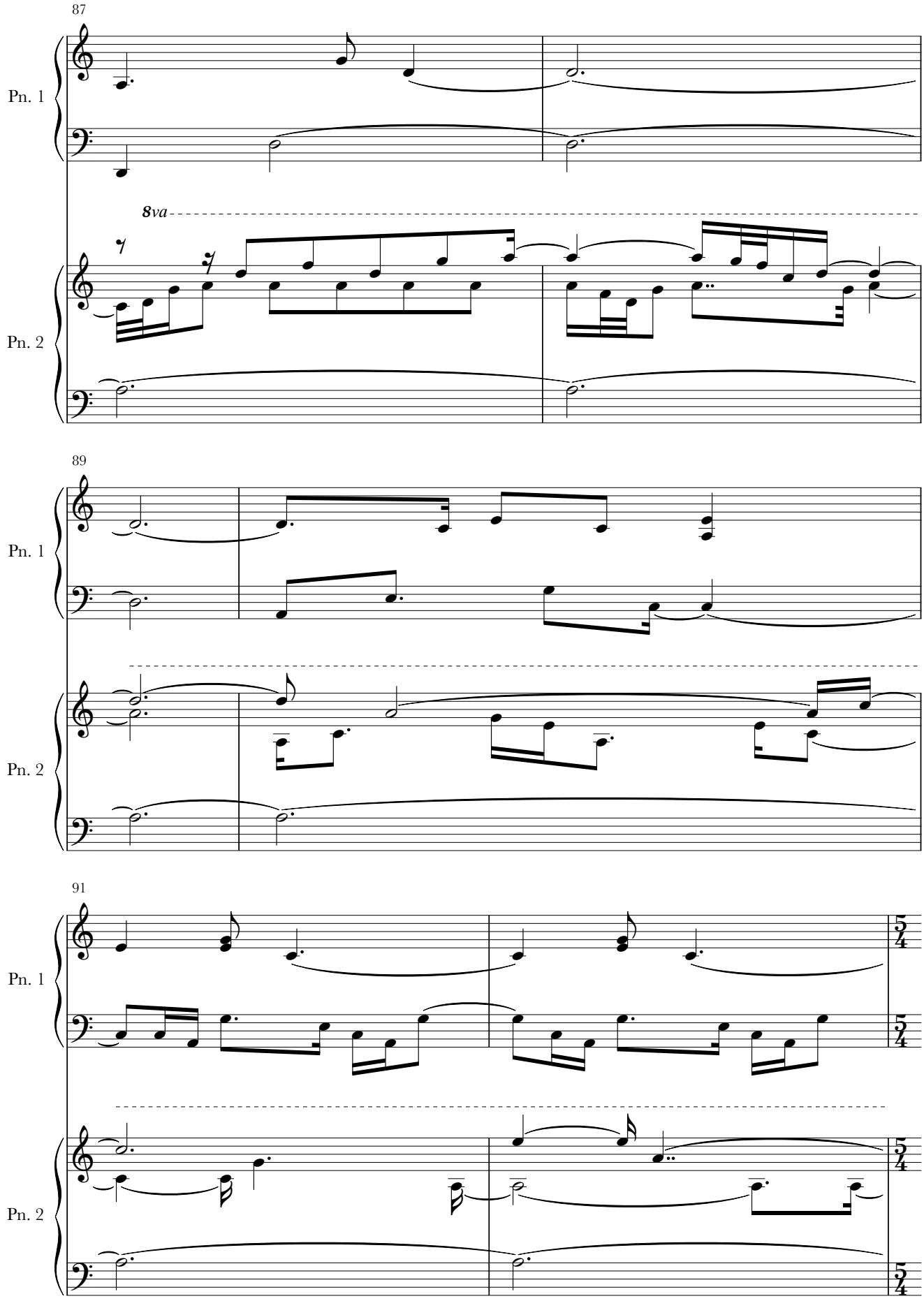

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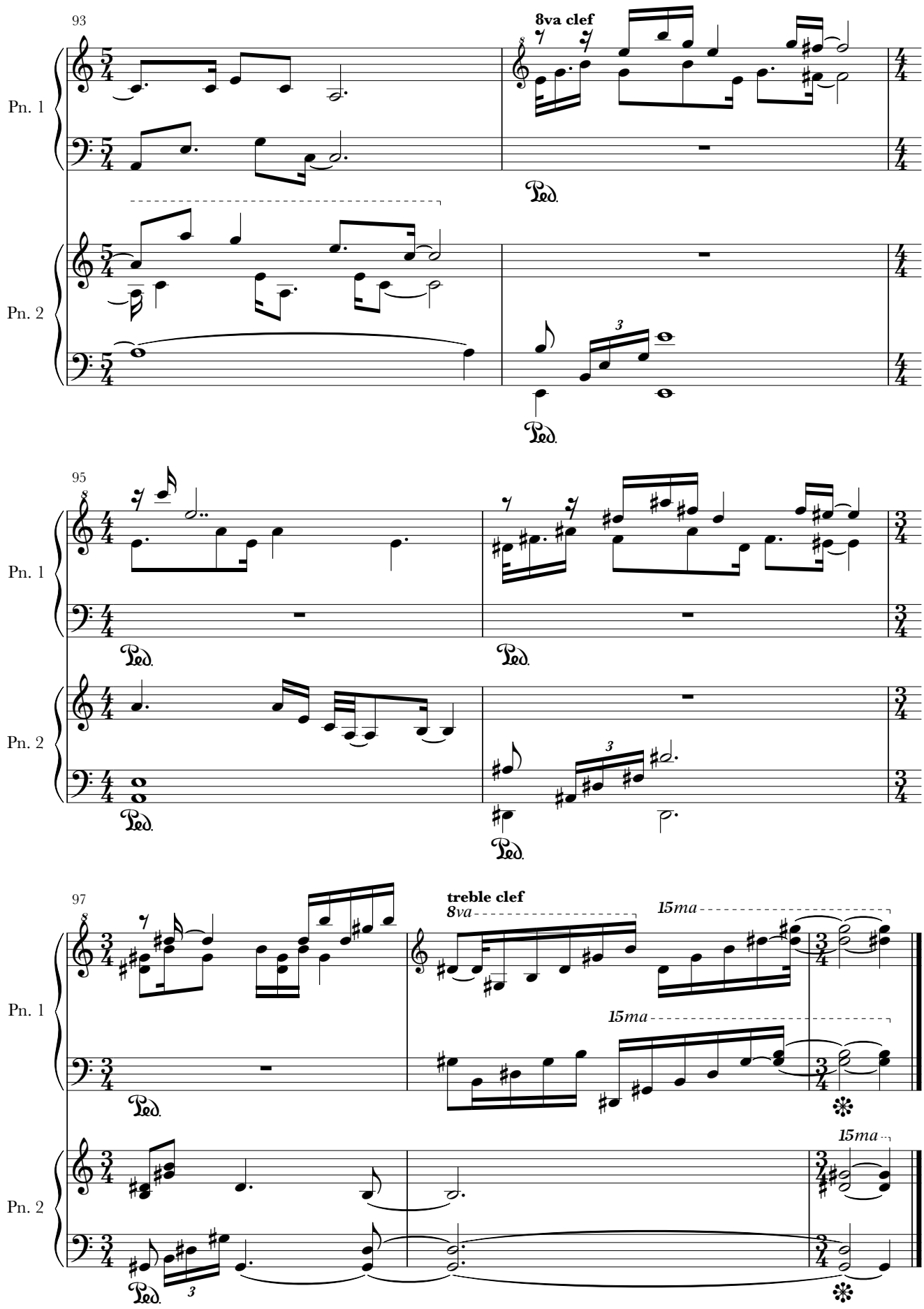

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR (2026)

SIMO SAKARI AALTONEN

—WRITER & COMPOSER—

simosakariaaltonen.com

Finnish writer, composer, filmmaker, visual artist, podcaster. Has lived in Finland, Iceland, Paris, and the UK.

BOOKS

Art & Love *(series, 2020–)*
At Dawn: Early Short Stories *(2022,* Large Print Edition *2024)*
The Better Patreon *(series, 2026–)*
An Iceland Symphony, Op. 1: A Theatrical Symphony for All Ages *(sheet music, 2021,* 2nd Edition *2024)*
Land of Youth & Beauty: Early Poems *(2022,* Large Print Edition *2024)*
Solid Gold: David Lynch — 90 Concise Chapters on Him and His World *(2026)*
Tales from the North, Book I *(sheet music, 2024)*
What Now with Simo *(series, 2020–)*
You Never Know What You'll See in the Haunted Garden *(limited series, 2019–)*

MUSIC

Early Music Archive *(2023 album)*
"In the Fog, Deep" *(2024 single)*
"Land of Youth & Beauty" *(2023 single)*
Passages Dark and Light *(2022 album)*
Passages Dark and Light II *(2024 album)*
Tales from the North, Book I *(2023 album)*
"That Dark, Dark Night" *(2024 single)*
The 13th Tale *(2024 album)*

Official site: simosakariaaltonen.com
Patreon: patreon.com/TheBetterPatreon
Bandcamp: simosakariaaltonen.bandcamp.com
Podcast hosting site: rss.com/podcasts/simo
YouTube: www.youtube.com/@SimoSakariAaltonen

The Better Patreon is my private Patreon and creative online home launched on 3 April 2025.

It provides to all members a regular stream of features on a weekly 3-day cycle (Monday to Wednesday):

A weekly, fully laid out and illustrated PDF newsletter, a Creative Journal, a David Lynch Series (a book in the making), short stories, poetry, diverse short writings, full Northern Exposure *rewatch posts, Monday Midnight Movies, special features about all aspects of creativity, glimpses behind the scenes, early access to all my future works before they're published or released elsewhere, and a lot more to come.*

patreon.com/TheBetterPatreon

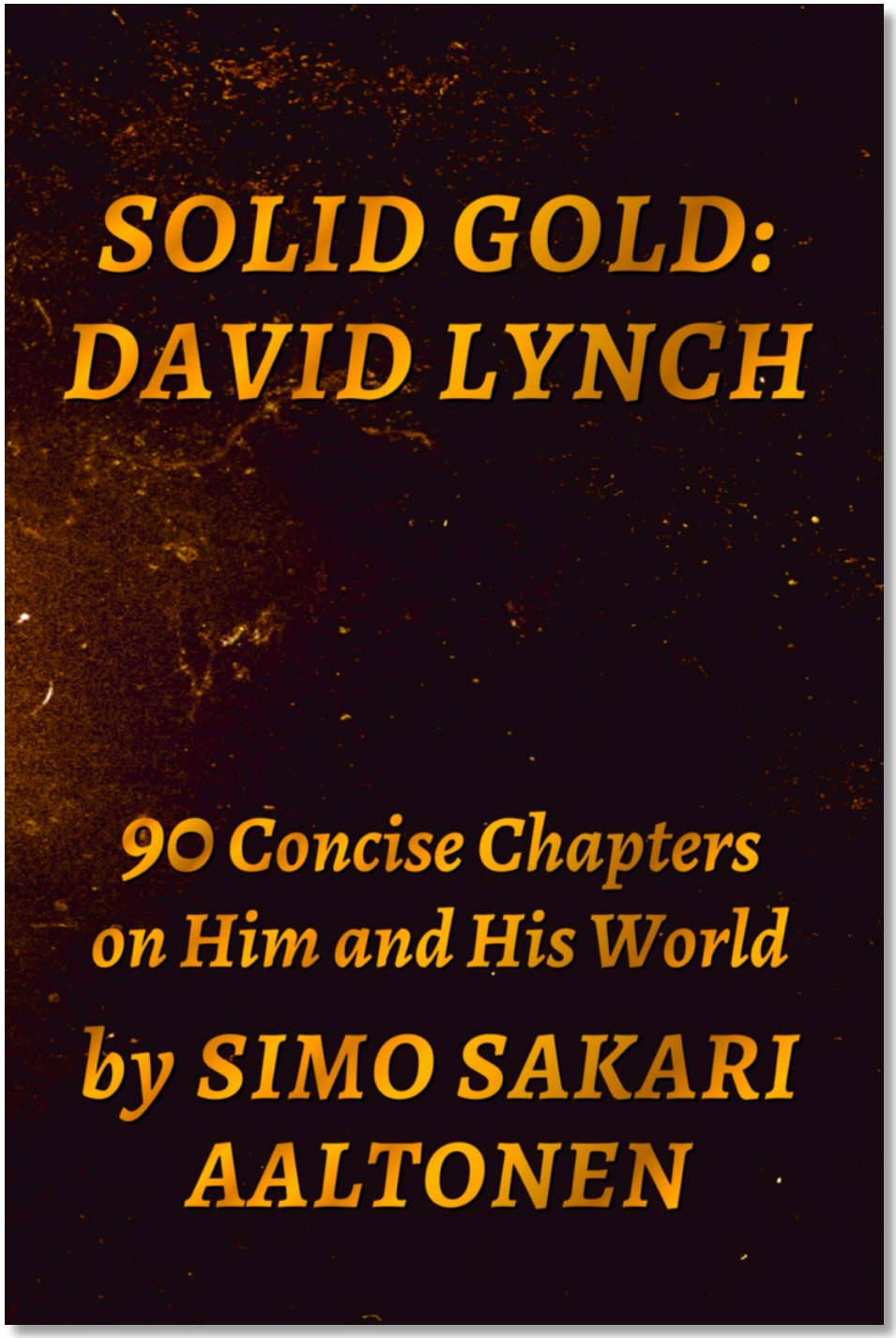
Creative
Methods

UPDATES & INSPIRATIONS

DAVID LYNCH
SERIES

The Better Patreon is both a website and a book series, with the former launched in April 2025 and the latter in March 2026. These books will collect between two covers all the written and visual content month by month, making this a true and unique

alternative way of experiencing this Patreon. Note: by purchasing any volume directly from The Better Patreon Shop you also receive the File Vault of all the multimedia items not possible to include in a book.



A kaleidoscopic, appreciative dive into the world of David Lynch via 90 chapters examining as many key facets of his life and works.

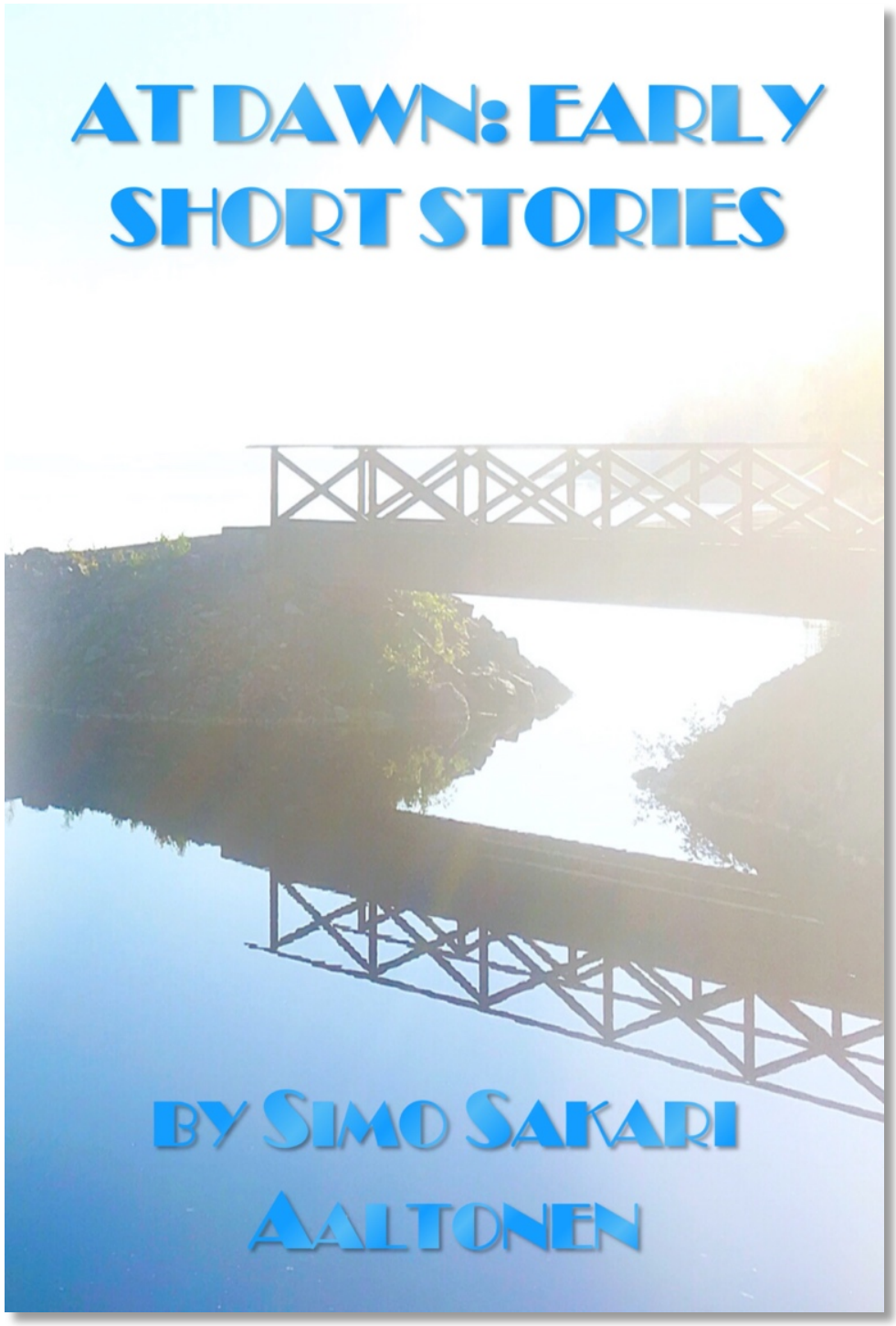
This is the first book I ever wrote fully during the existence of my Patreon, members of which were able to follow the process week by week as I posted three new chapters every Monday over a period of 30 weeks from late 2025 to early 2026.

David Lynch is one of my favourite artists in all the many fields he created in. From first seeing Twin Peaks *in my teens to immensely rewarding and inspiring delvings in later years, my life — and this world — would clearly be immeasurably poorer had he never existed and created.*

The approach I selected grew out of the one I had adopted for my Art & Love *series. This is a book about David Lynch for readers from all over the world and for all time.*

Creating is the coolest thing that we can do.

—David Lynch



This book collects my short stories so far. Written over a period of many years, they explore many fields:

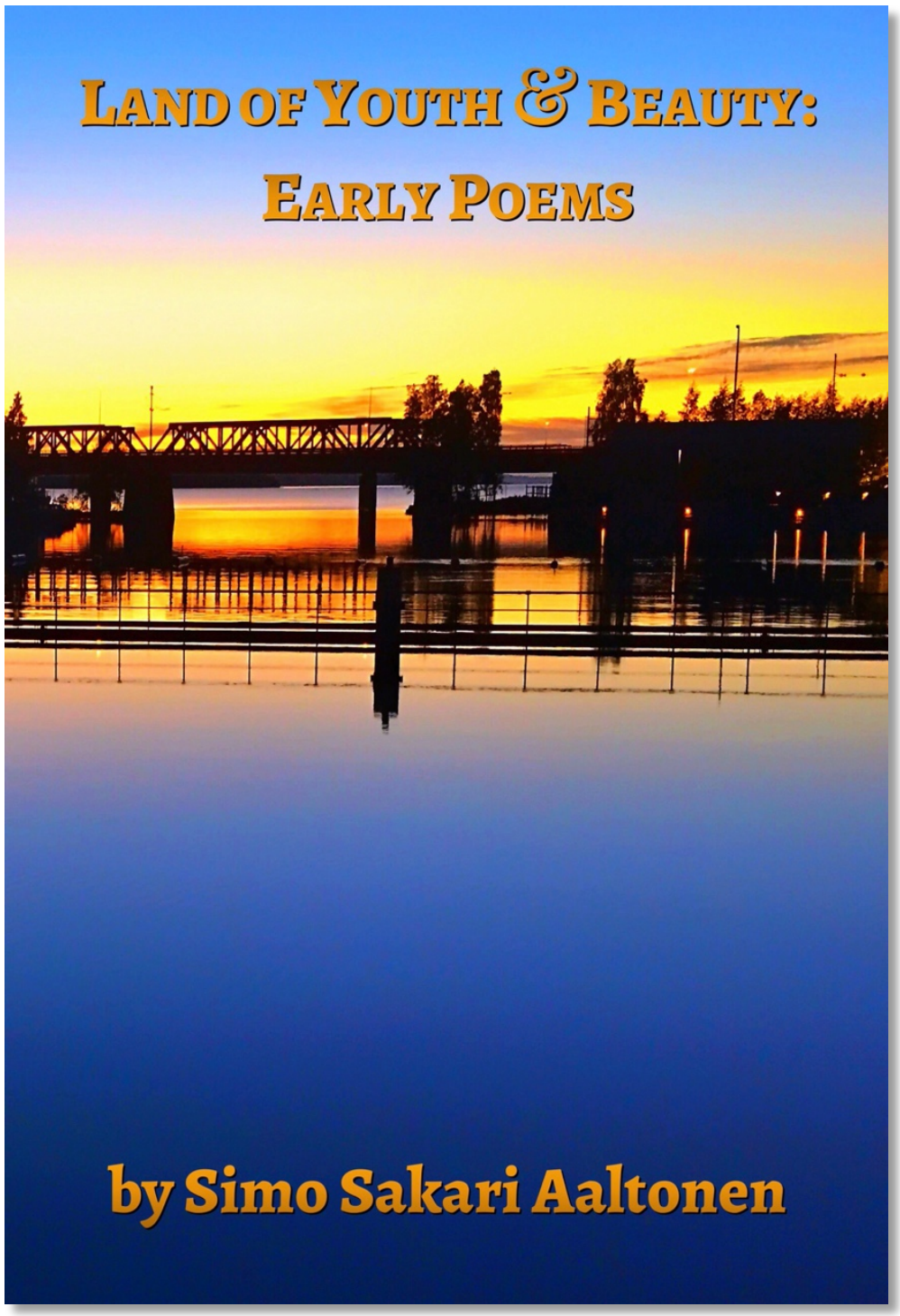
Prose poetry, youthful night adventure, introspective science fiction, philosophical horror, chaptered dream exploration, humorous biographical detective fiction, seafaring sequel to one of a very young H. P. Lovecraft's stories, fragments…

This is the earliest harvest of my short fiction writing, from the dawn of my life. The stories were written when I was still looking for my most special things and the truest desires of my secret heart.

Having since found them, my future writings will mostly be very different. So while some of the stories in this collection feature strands I may develop further in those future stories, others will be the only ones of their kind I'll ever write.

But now, my fellow dreamer, it's dawn. The world is young again…

— Also available in a *Large Print Edition* —



This book collects my poems so far. Written over more than two decades, they explore life in all its hues, dark and light and the rainbow in between:

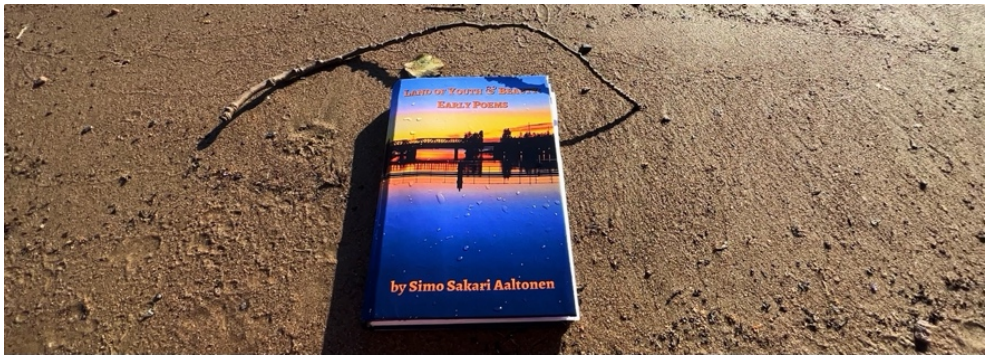
A marionette's dream, a pair of sonnets, a bayou tragedy, whirling donuts, nocturnes and nightmares, encounters in the dark and in sunlit moments…

Above and through all of it shimmers the greatest thing of all: the Land of Youth & Beauty — the magic theatre we enter when we love and feel truly loved.

"This happened when the world was young and love could never die, when the skies flamed every morning and it rained every night…"

— Also available in a *Large Print Edition* —

Land of Youth & Beauty: Early Poems — Lake Presentation



A short film (12:36) viewable on my official YouTube artist channel and my official site. The soundtrack was later released as my first single, "Land of Youth & Beauty".

FILM

My early filmed works (2015–) are featured on my YouTube channel, presented on my Patreon, and embedded on my official site.

With few exceptions, these short works were conceived and executed entirely by me: writing, directing, cinematography, lighting, music, sound recording and engineering, featured art, editing, occasional acting, and everything else needed.

I look forward to working with actors in the future with my coming works in this field. You can find my full credits and these works listed on IMDb. I also actively continue with my screenwriting.

simosakariaaltonen.com
patreon.com/TheBetterPatreon
youtube.com/@SimoSakariAaltonen

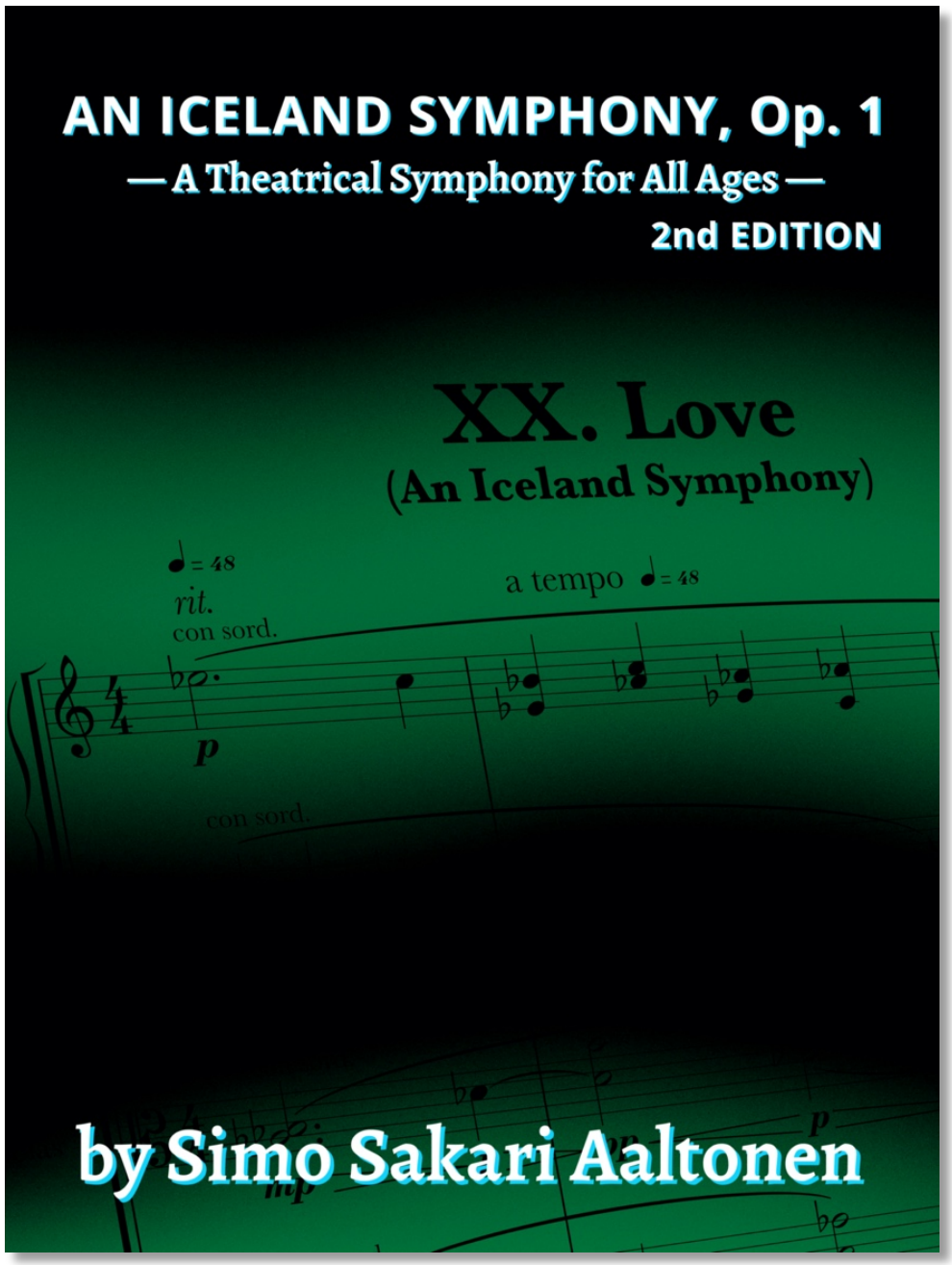
MUSIC

From the bleakest dark to the brightest light, my music explores the full range of human experience. Behind it strives a soul hoping to reach likeminded others out there.

You can buy all my released music from my Patreon Shop or Bandcamp — where you can also read the detailed sleeve notes — and you can find it on numerous download and streaming platforms.

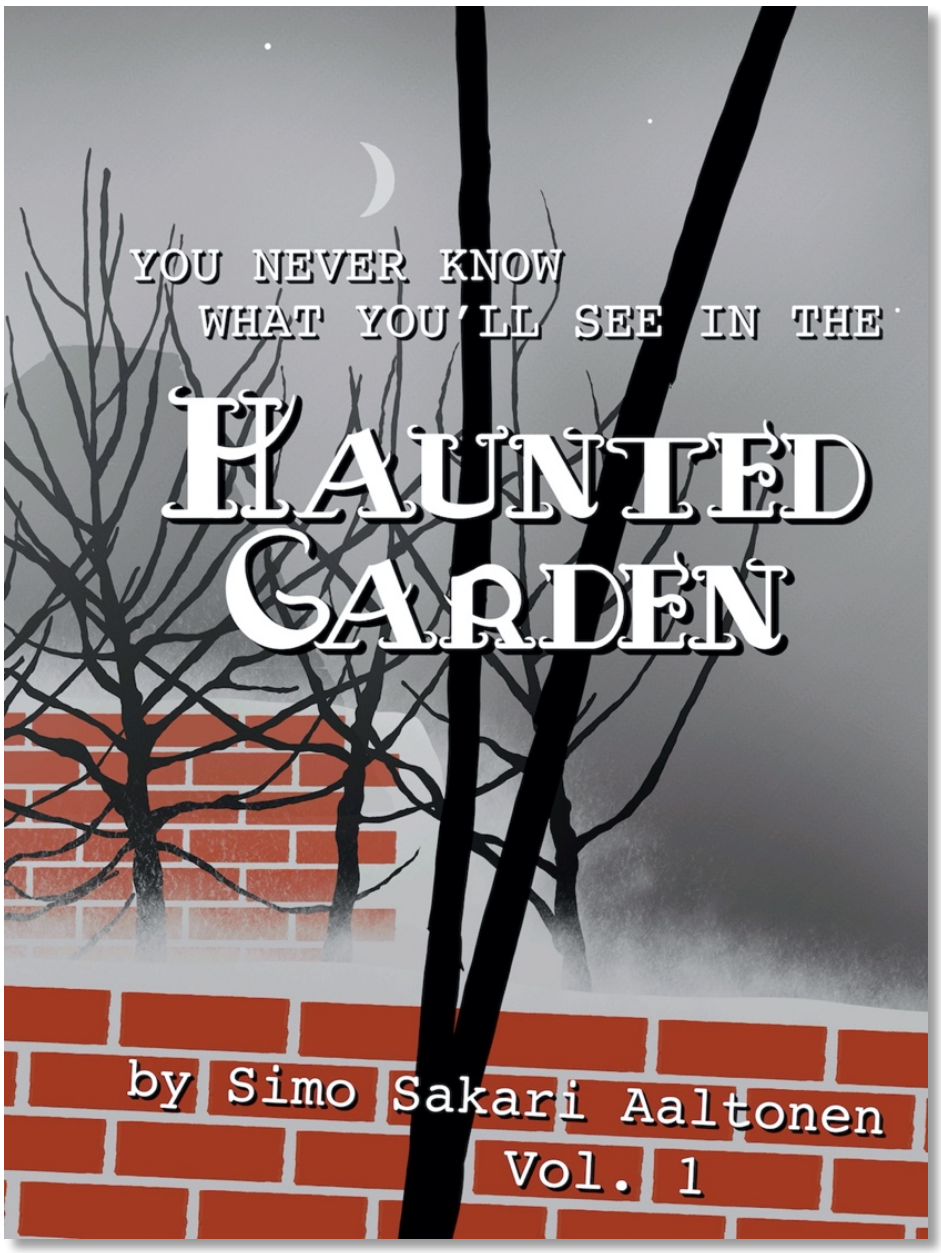
patreon.com/TheBetterPatreon

simosakariaaltonen.bandcamp.com

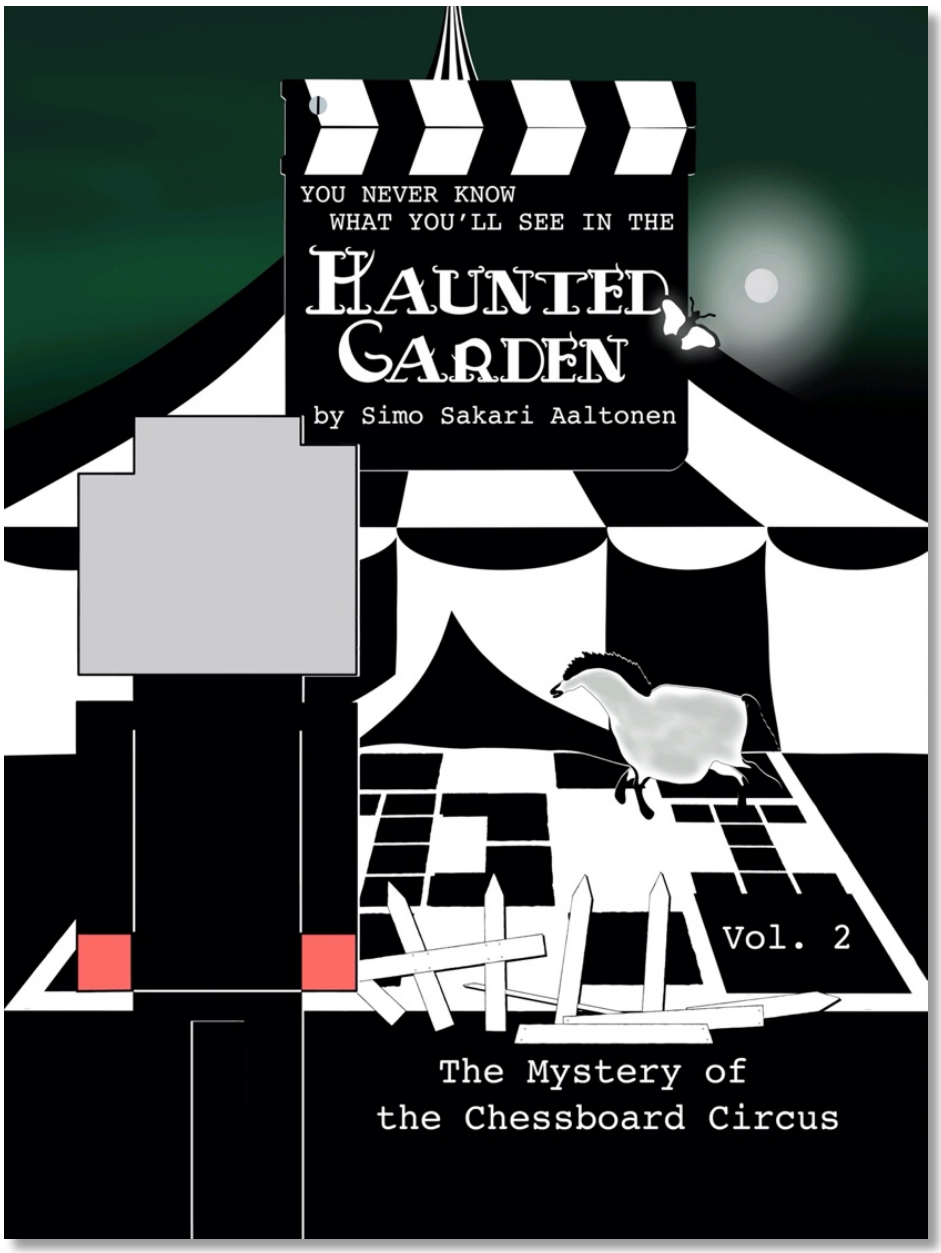


An Iceland Symphony *is a musical composition of 21 sections involving theatrical elements. Its performance calls for musicians of all ages from the youngest to the oldest. This book includes the full sheet music complete with performance instructions.*

Tales from the North, Book I *is a set of 12 piano duets for two pianists and pianos. The pieces cover a wide range of moods, styles, and approaches using the composer's timeless musical language. 130 pages with a 10-page introduction.*



You Never Know What You'll See in the Haunted Garden *is a 3-part graphic novel featuring Rex the former game actor, Pregnant Horse of the Lascaux caves, and Alannah the butterfly.* Vol. 1 *introduces us to the mysterious Haunted Garden in Iceland with a series of visions.*



Vol. 2: The Mystery of the Chessboard Circus *involves our heroes in an adventure where the visions find form in a series of events. And as with the first volume, clues to the future already await discovery in this, our second journey into the dream world known as the Haunted Garden.* Vol. 3…*?*

This 2020–2025 podcast used to be my central outlet for thoughts, feelings, passing fancies, memories, dreams, appreciations, and more.

Maybe a better metaphor would be a flickering campfire after a long day out in the wild — or in the inner wild. Or perhaps a random book with a flashlight under the blanket in a beautiful summer cottage, somewhere in eternity.

I recorded every episode extemporaneously, transcribed them afterwards, and eventually collected each season into these printed volumes. Part journal, part memoir, part musings on art and life, part strange humour, and part me reaching out to other souls out there.

Every edition brings every word of each season onto the printed page, for reading or leafing through at your own pace. This also makes the podcast available in its entirety to everyone with any hearing loss.

Unedited, unexpurgated, and with an introduction, a table-of-contents summary in the style of old books, and a varying number of footnotes in every volume.

—Simo

Diverse short writings about art, life, love, creativity, dreams, and more. Each volume features 124 concise chapters, perfect either for leafing through or taking in many at a time.

As a further embodiment of the things discussed on these pages, Vol. 2 *evolves the series in an even freer direction. It also includes a number of extra chapters at the back, unseen since the author removed them from a website called Medium.*

Tales from the North, Book I is a set of 12 piano duets for two pianists and pianos. The pieces cover a wide range of moods, styles, and approaches using the composer's timeless musical language.

Simo Sakari Aaltonen is a Finnish writer, composer, filmmaker, and podcaster. *Tales from the North, Book I* is his first set of compositions for piano duo.