Variations on 'America', Rehearsal S

Transposition Inquisition No. 74

Charles Ives (1874-1954)

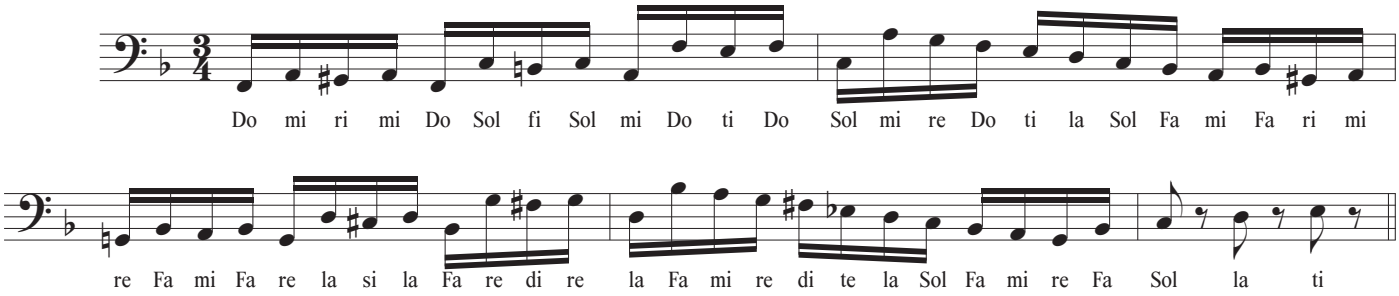
arr. Martorano

About the Composer:

"American composer. His music is marked by an integration of American and European musical traditions, innovations in rhythm, harmony, and form, and an unparalleled ability to evoke the sounds and feelings of American life. He is regarded as the leading American composer of art music of the early 20th century. Ives had an extraordinary working life. After professional training as an organist and composer, he worked in insurance for 30 years, composing in his free time. He used a wide variety of styles, from tonal Romanticism to radical experimentation, even in pieces written during the same period, and in his mature music frequently used multiple styles within a single work as a formal and expressive device. His major works often took years from first sketch to final revisions, and most pieces lay unperformed for decades.

About the Composition:

"Composed in 1891 when Ives was seventeen, it is an arrangement of a traditional tune, known as "America (My Country, Tis of Thee)" (words by Samuel Francis Smith), and was at the time the de facto anthem of the United States. Ives prepared it for a Fourth of July celebration in 1892 at the Methodist church where he was organist in Brewster, New York. He performed it for the first time on February 17, 1892, and made revisions to the work until 1894. Although the piece is considered challenging even by modern concert organists, he spoke of it as being "almost as much fun as playing baseball". It went unpublished until 1949, when the organist E. Power Biggs rediscovered it, and prepared an edition for publication. He incorporated it into his repertoire, and it became a regularly performed piece by American organists. In 1962 it was orchestrated by William Schuman, and premiered in this version by the New York Philharmonic under Andre Kostelanetz in 1964. The Schuman orchestration formed the basis of a wind band version by William E. Rhoads, published in 1968.



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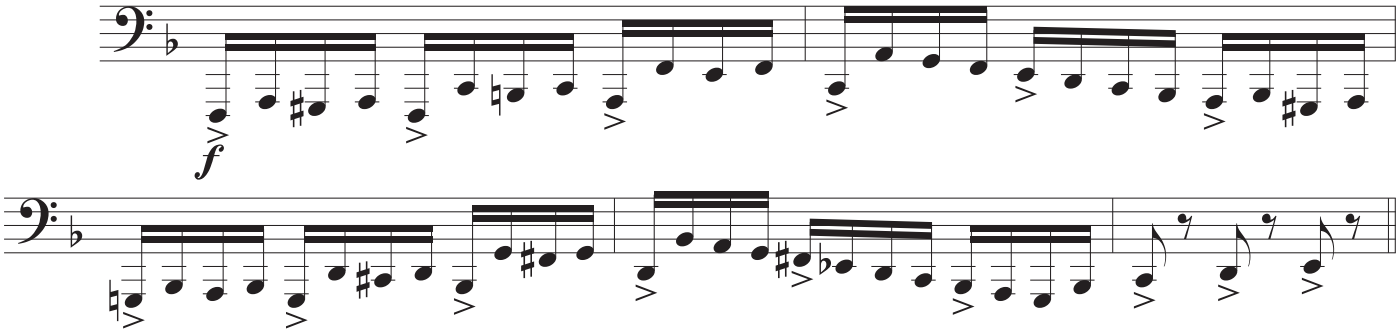

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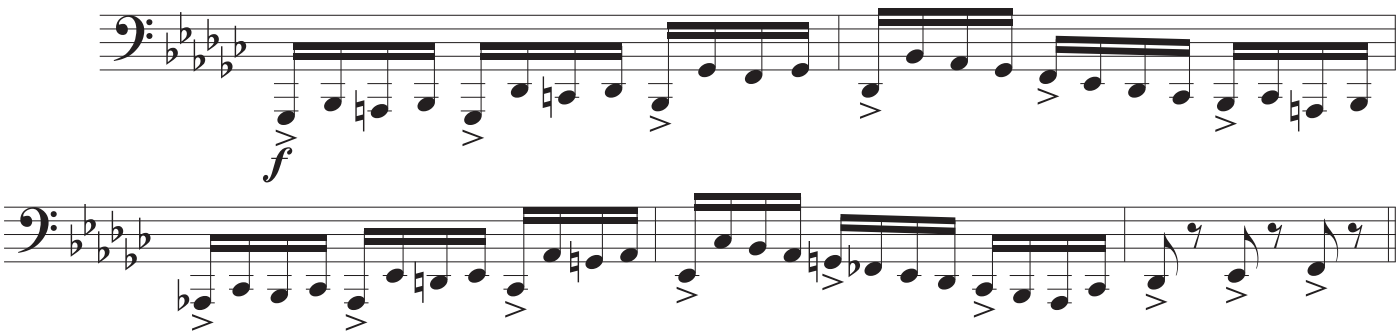

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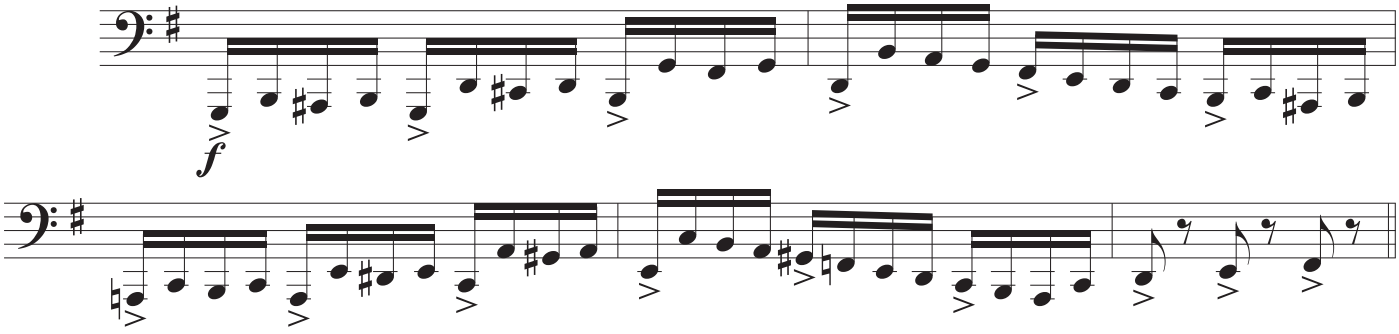

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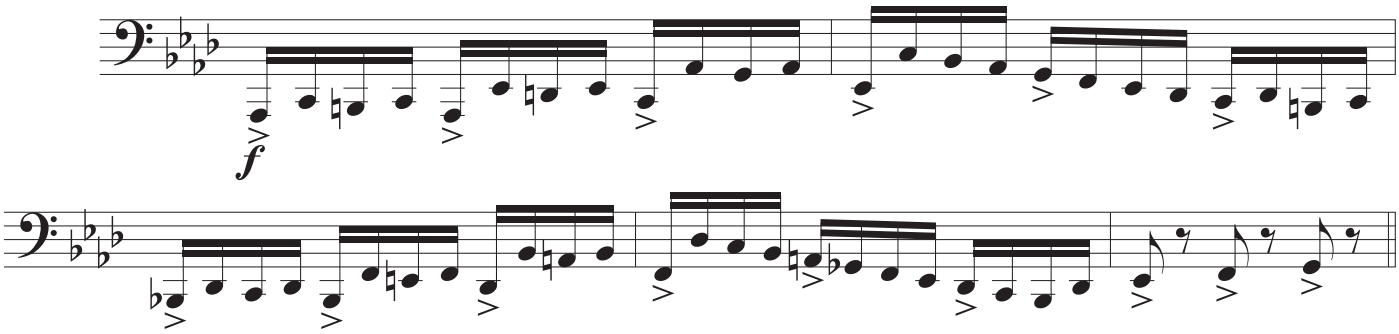

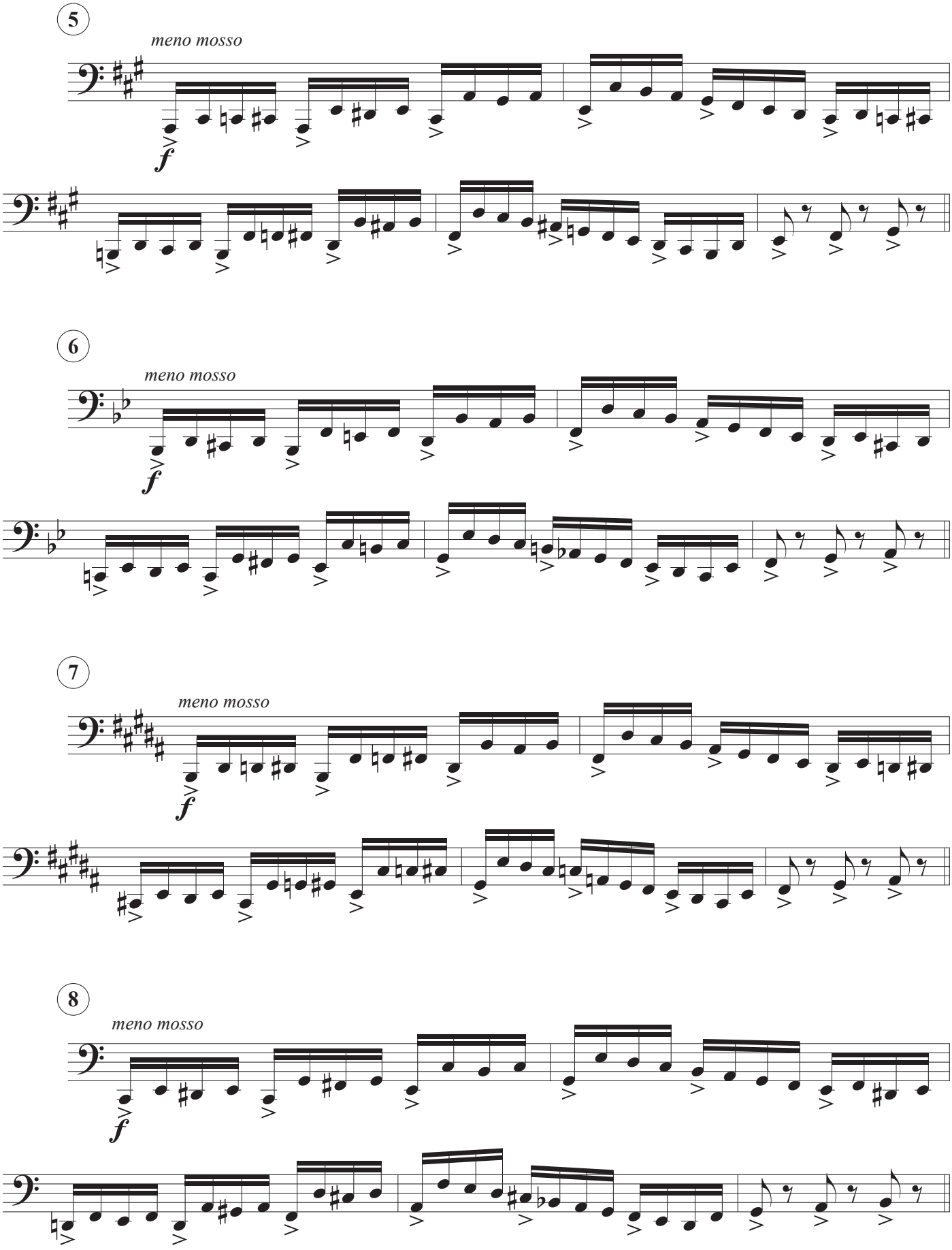
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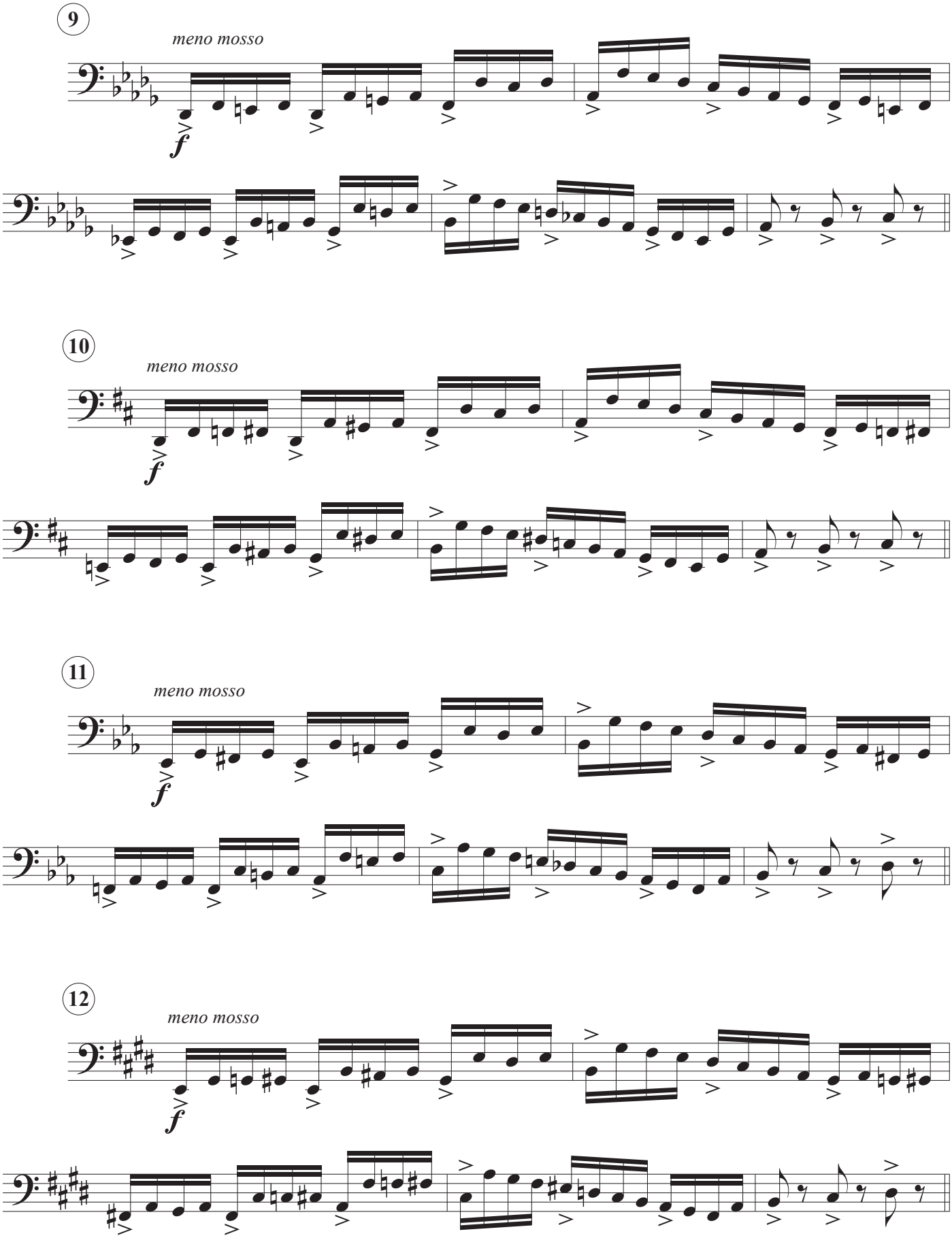
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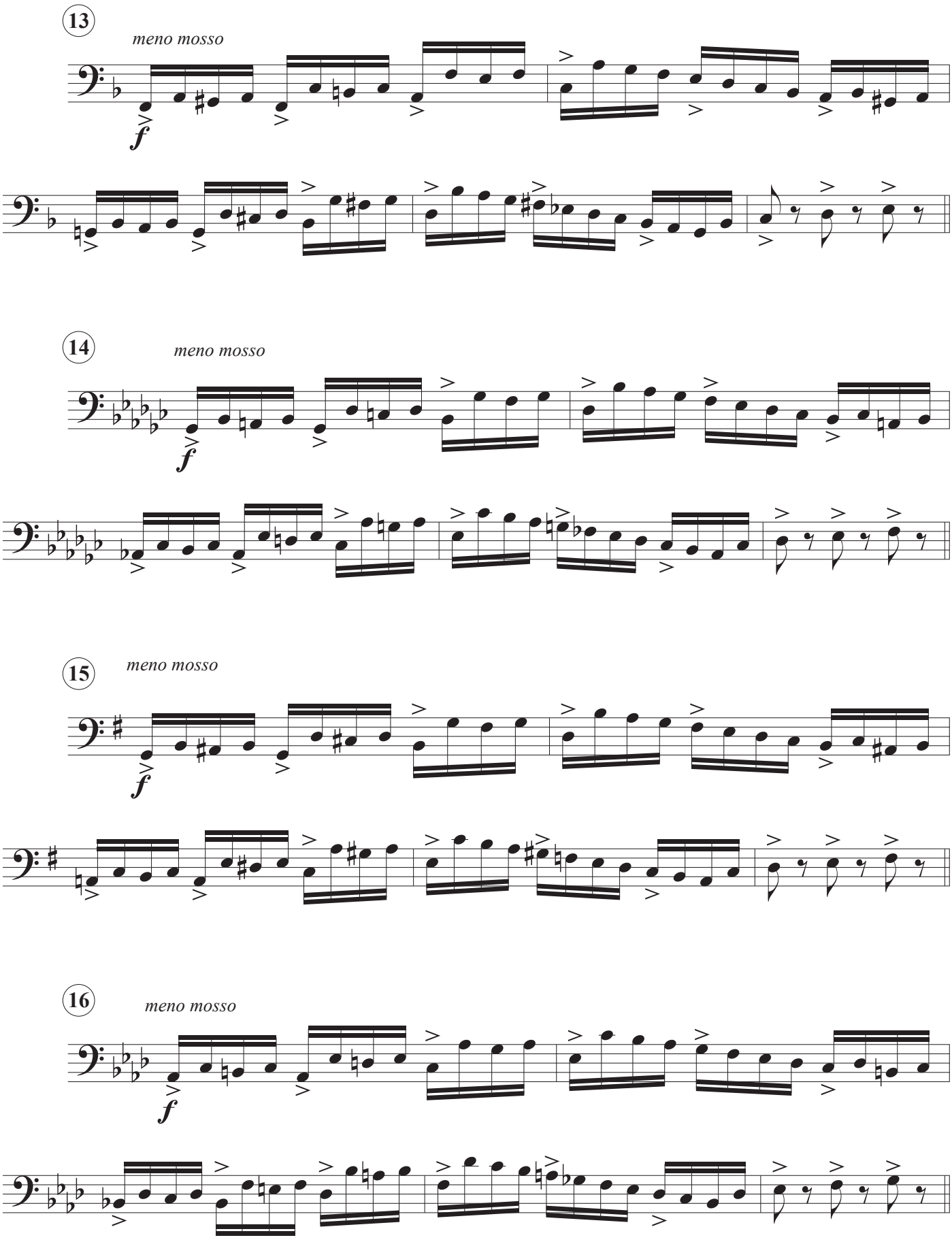
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