Duo Sonata

Opus 5 No. 8

by

Arcangello Corelli

(1653–1713)

Arranged for Alto and Bass Recorders by R.D. Tennent

The *sonata à 2* (duo sonata) form was in vogue in Italy in the late 17th century. A duo sonata is a *duet* (i.e., has two melodic parts), sometimes, but not always, with a *basso continuo* accompaniment. Even if one of the melodic parts is at a low pitch, a duo sonata is not an accompanied *solo*: often the parts imitate each other, and in some movements, or parts of movements, a lower part may be busier than the upper part. And even if there is an accompaniment, a duo sonata is not a *trio* sonata, which should have three *melodic* parts.

The most famous duo sonatas are the twelve Opus 5 sonatas by Arcangelo Corelli, first published in Rome in 1700. The instrumentation was specified as *violino e violone o cembalo*; that is, violin and violoncello, with the option of replacing the latter with a harpsichord. According to music historian Peter Allsop,† it may be the most commercially successful volume of music ever published.

In the 18th century, the duo-sonata form went out of fashion and the Opus 5 works began to be regarded as sonatas for violin with a *basso continuo* accompaniment. This misconception has persisted to the present day, but Dr. Allsop states flatly: "These are *duo* sonatas for violin and violone," and "Corelli's first choice of instrumentation in Opus 5 requires no realized continuo accompaniment." A cello-based *basso continuo* works well enough with a violin (provided the continuo realization is discreet and the cello is sufficiently forward to be a duet partner to the violin), but it may be a different story if another treble instrument is adopted.

Just two years after the initial publication of Opus 5, Walsh & Hare in London published six of the sonatas *"exactly Transpos'd and made fitt for* a flute [i.e., an alto recorder] *and* a bass*."* Today, several editions of Opus 5 sonatas arranged for alto recorder are available. These all have full continuo realizations for keyboard (usually played on a piano) and a cello part *ad libitum*; however, a piano or a cello-based *basso continuo* is not a very felicitous choice as the duet partner for a recorder. The present edition is an arrangement for alto and bass recorders, without accompaniment; this combination respects Corelli's conception of the Opus 5 sonatas as *duets* for instruments from the same family.

R.D.T.

†Peter Allsop: *Arcangelo Corelli: "New Orpheus of our Times,"* Oxford University Press (1999).

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Opus 5 No. 8†

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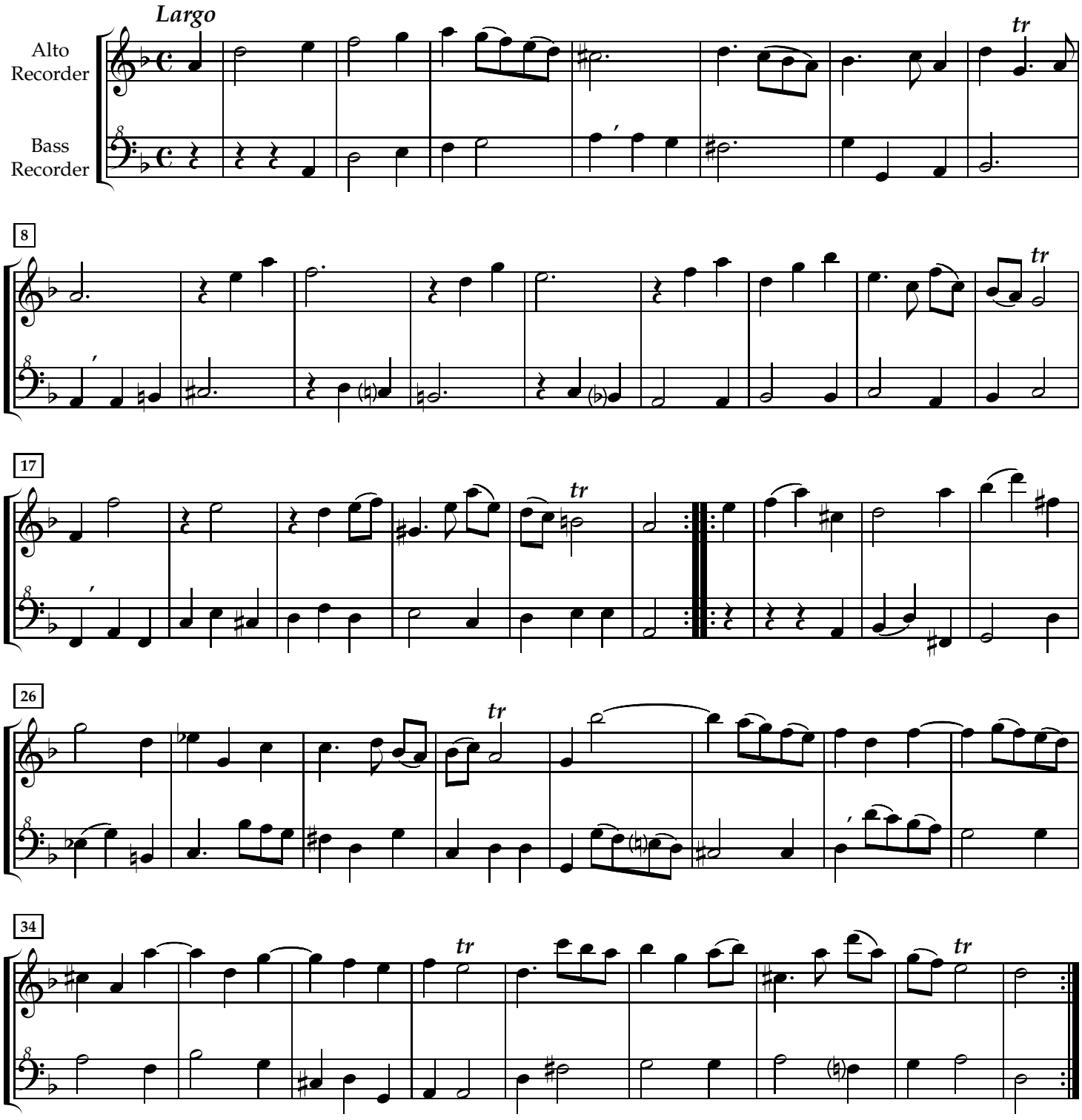
Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713)

1. Preludio

Largo



†Original key E minor.

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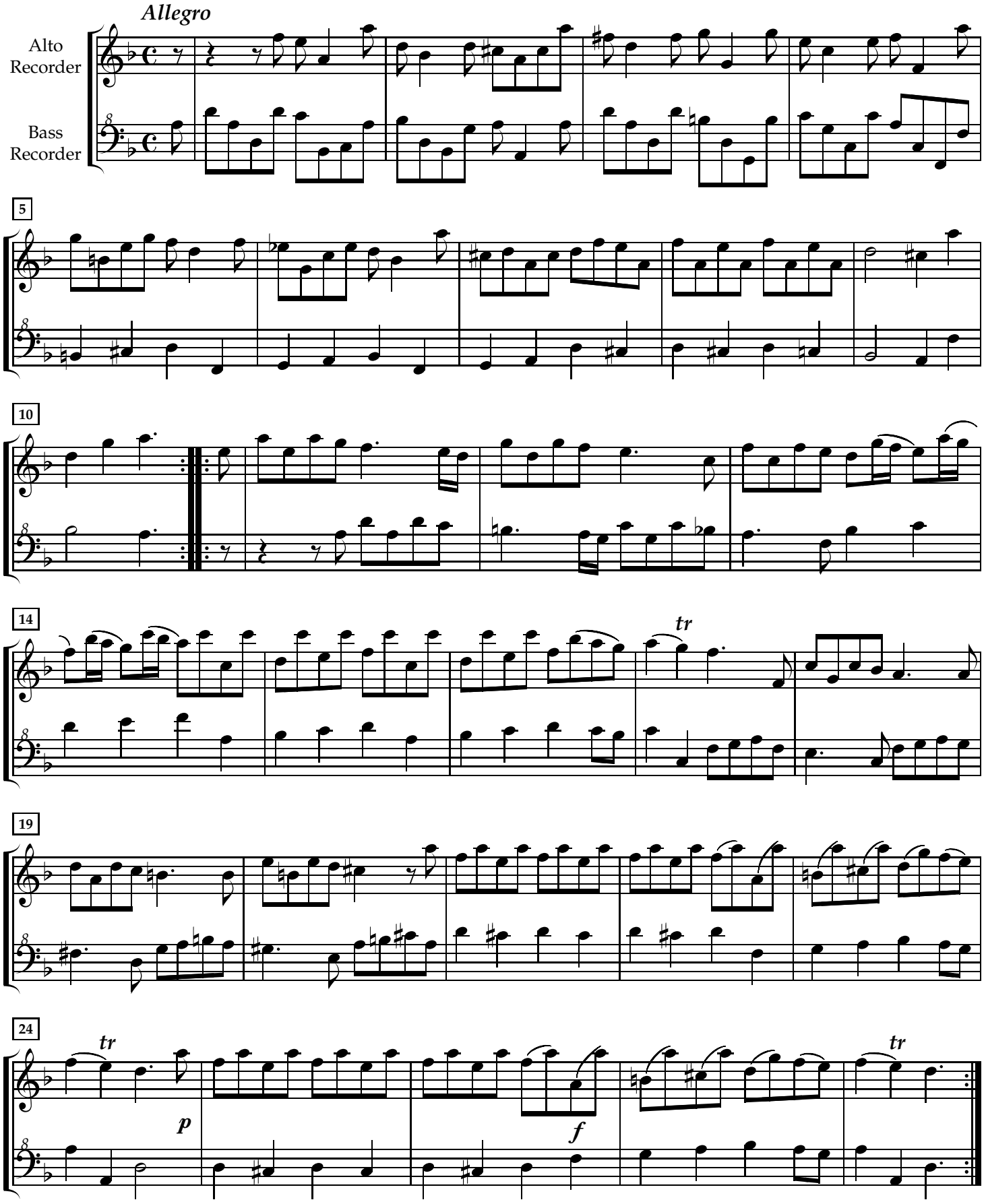
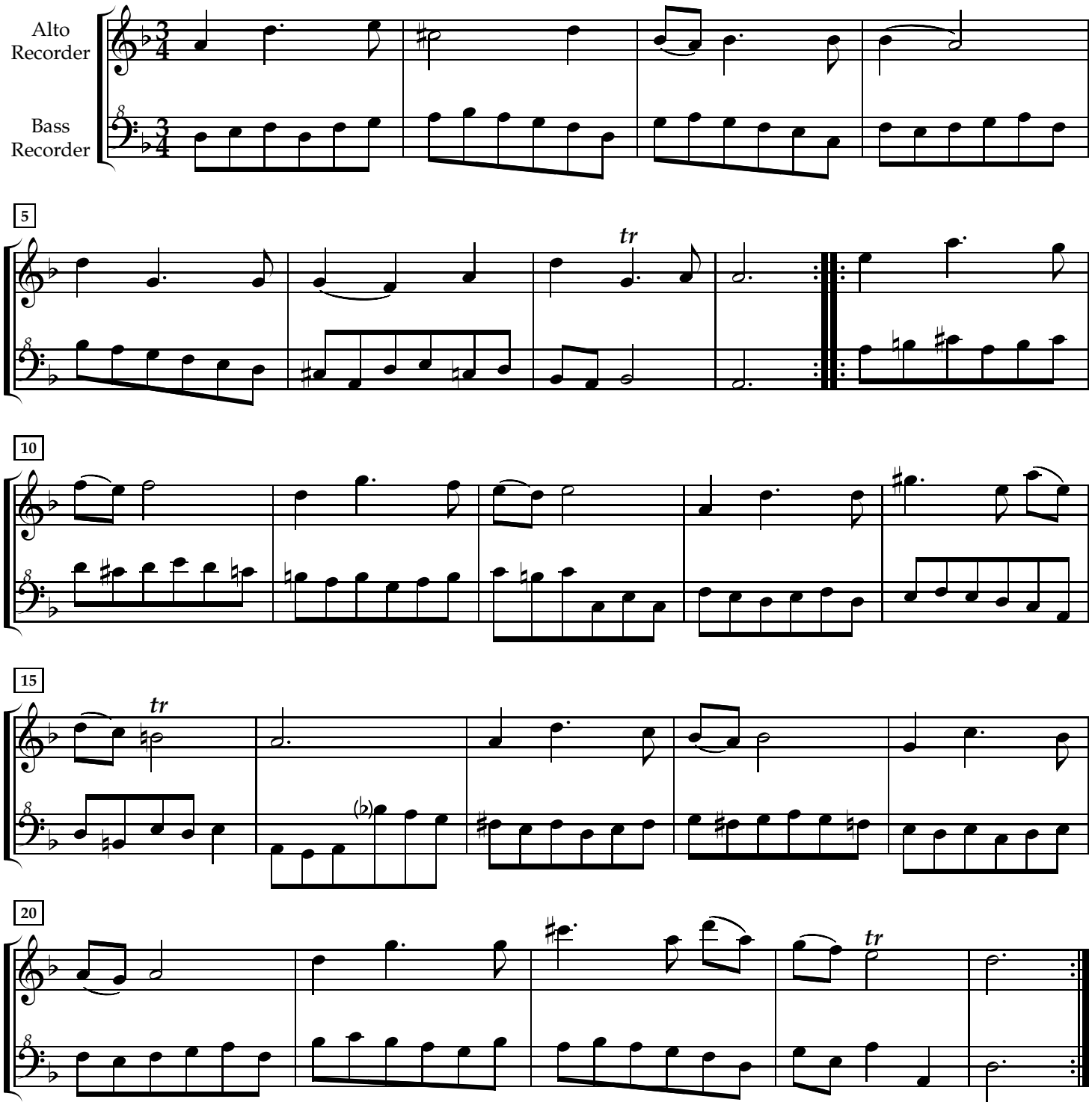
2. Allemanda



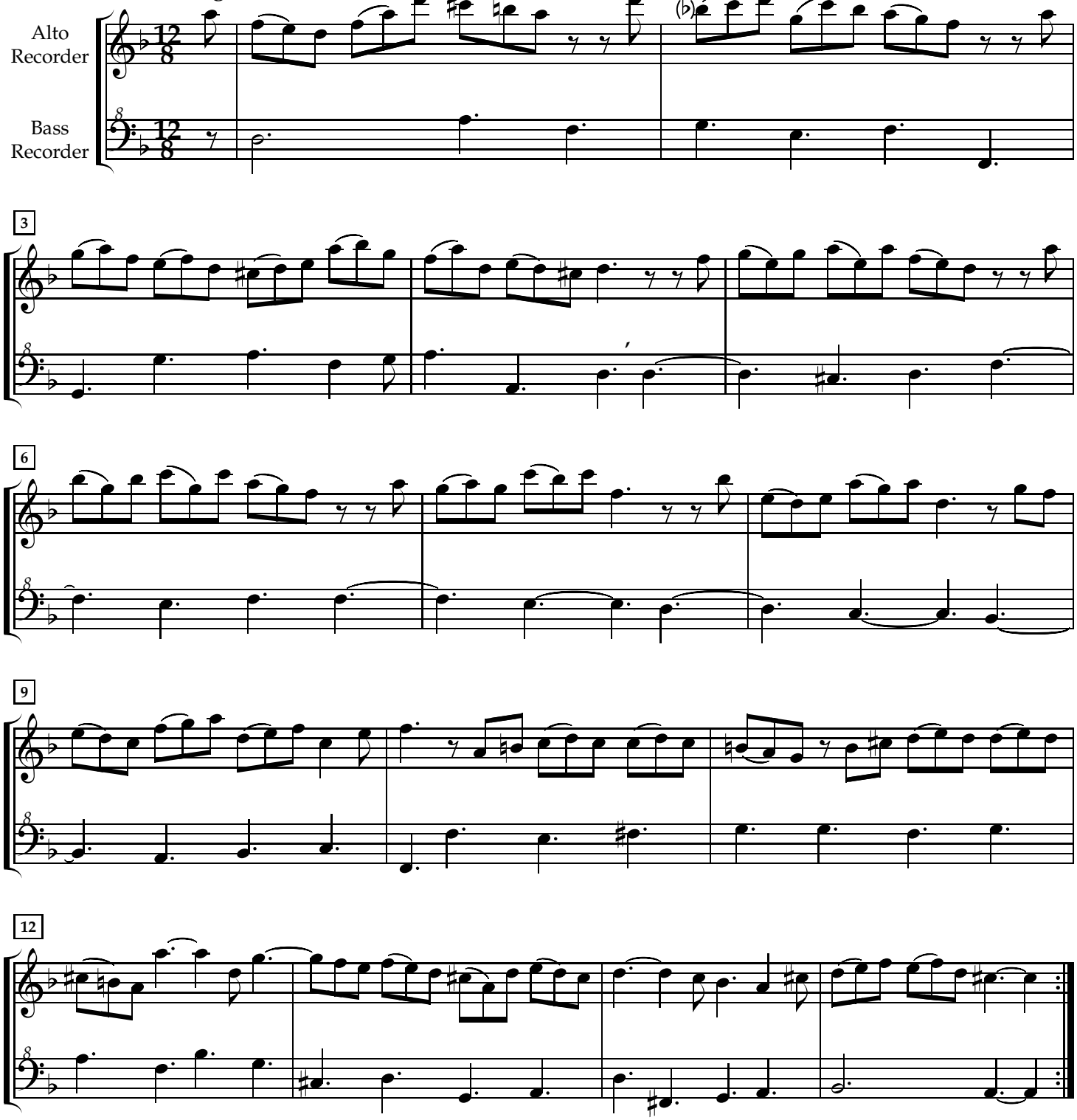
3. Sarabanda

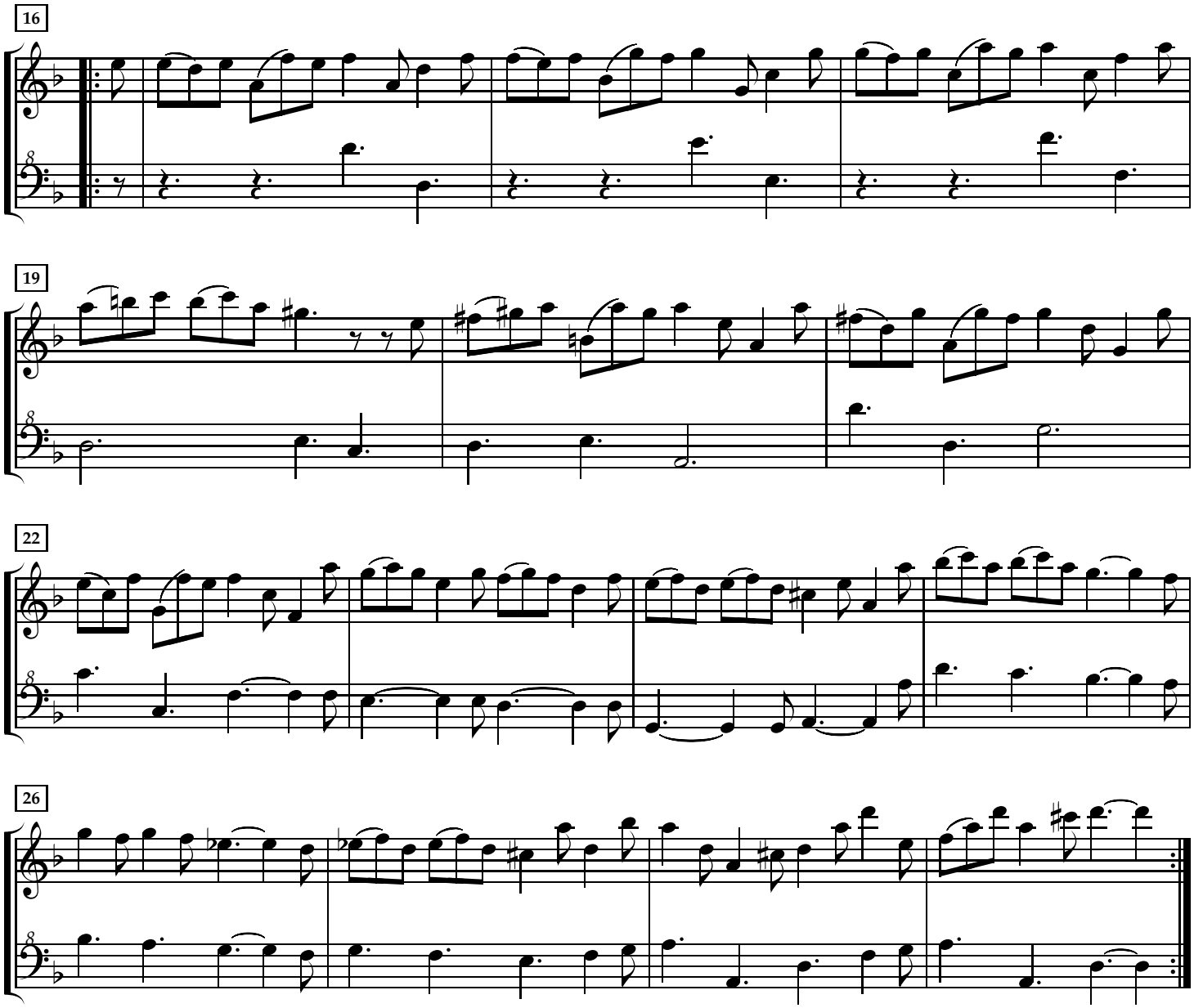
Largo



4. Giga

Allegro

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