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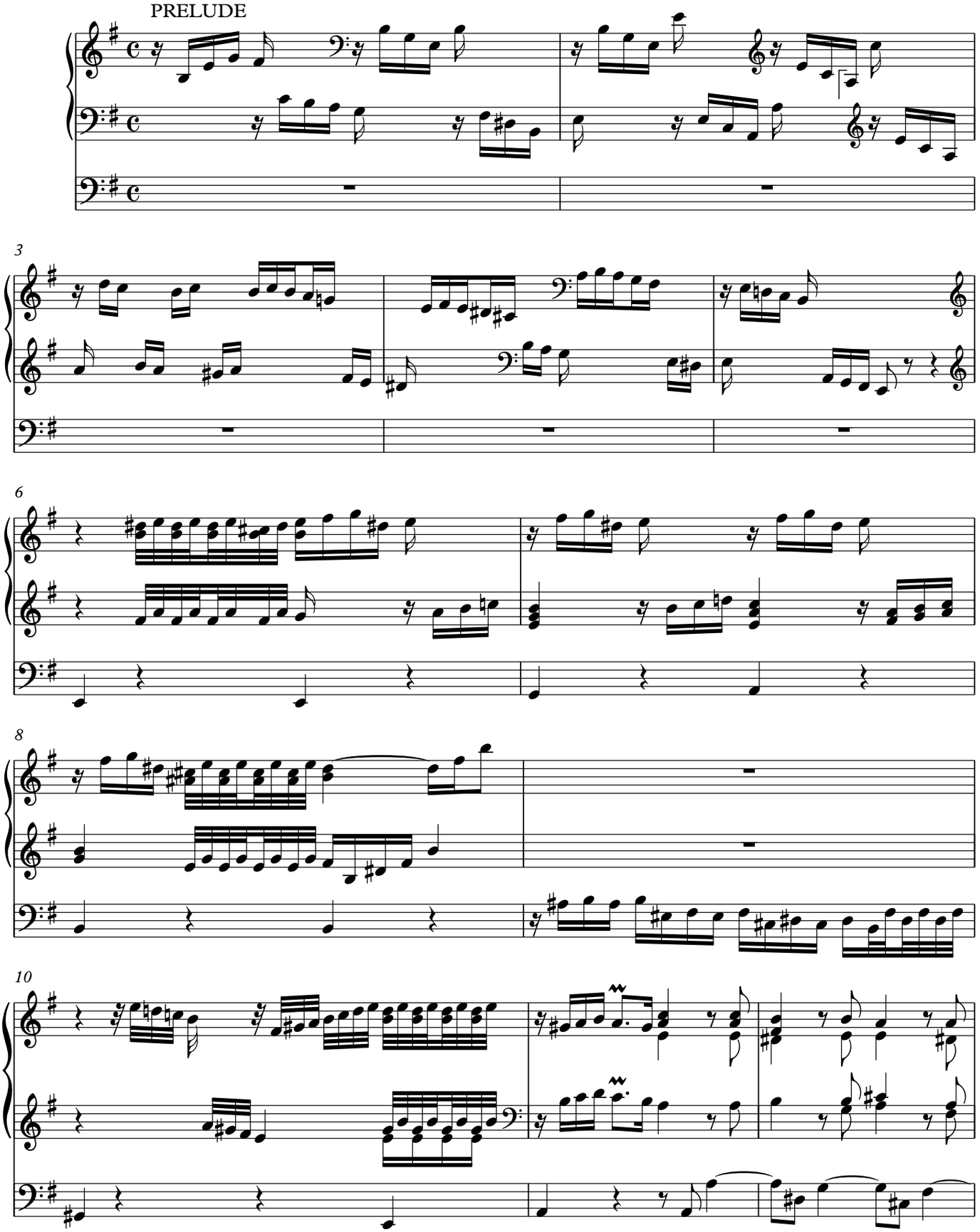
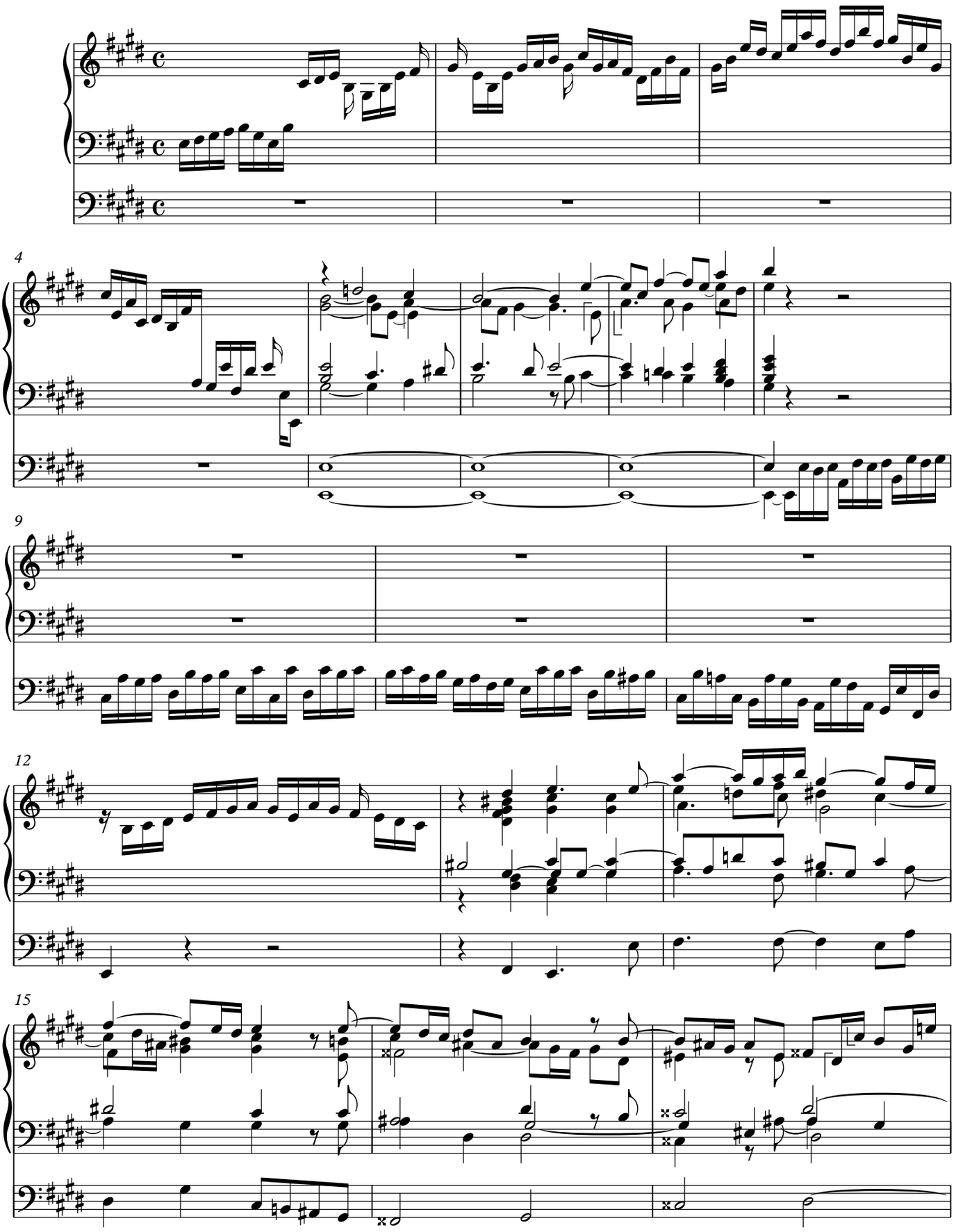
1. Prelude and Fugue in E minor

BWV 533



3. Prelude in E major

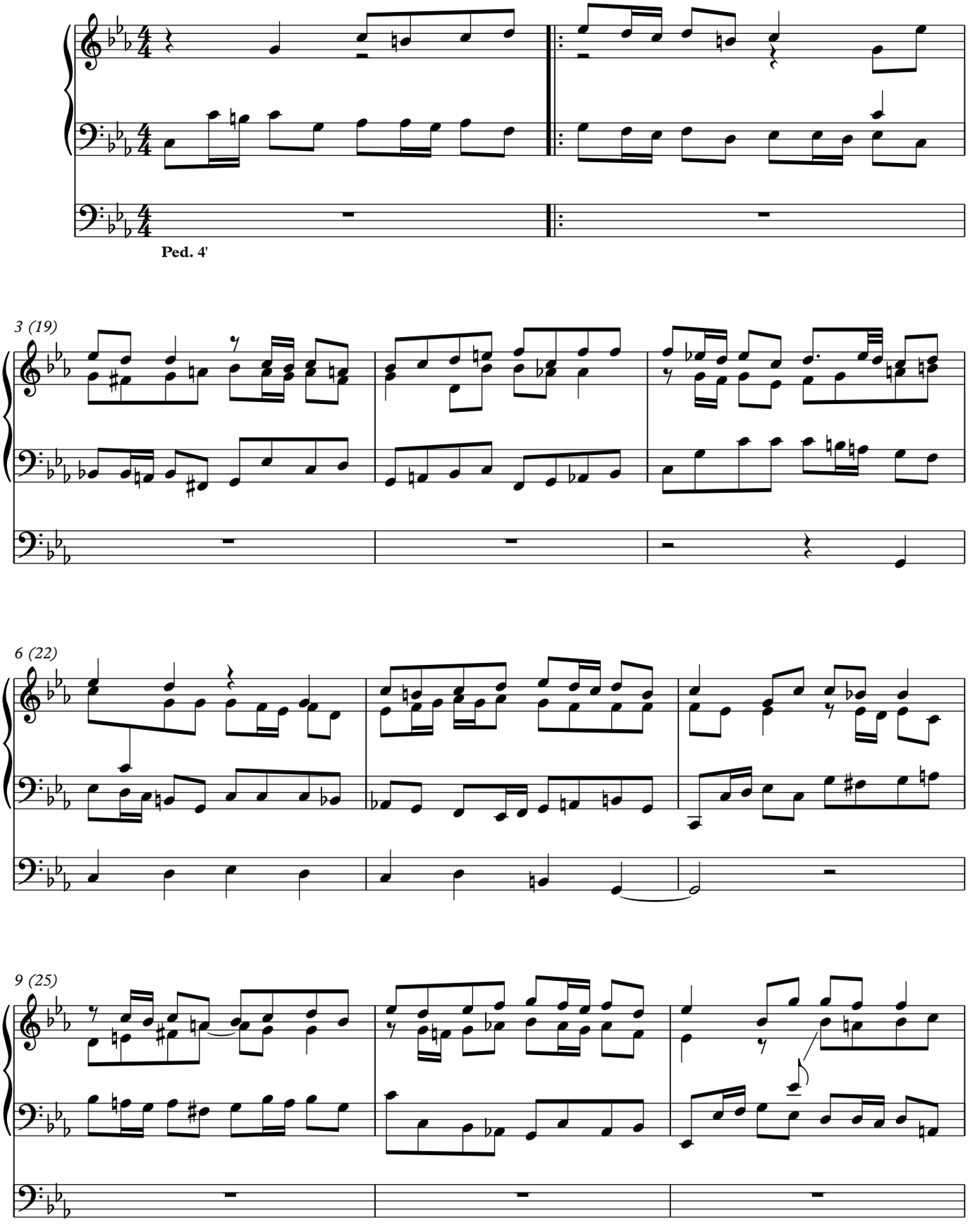
BWV 566



8. Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten

(Whoever surrenders control to God alone)

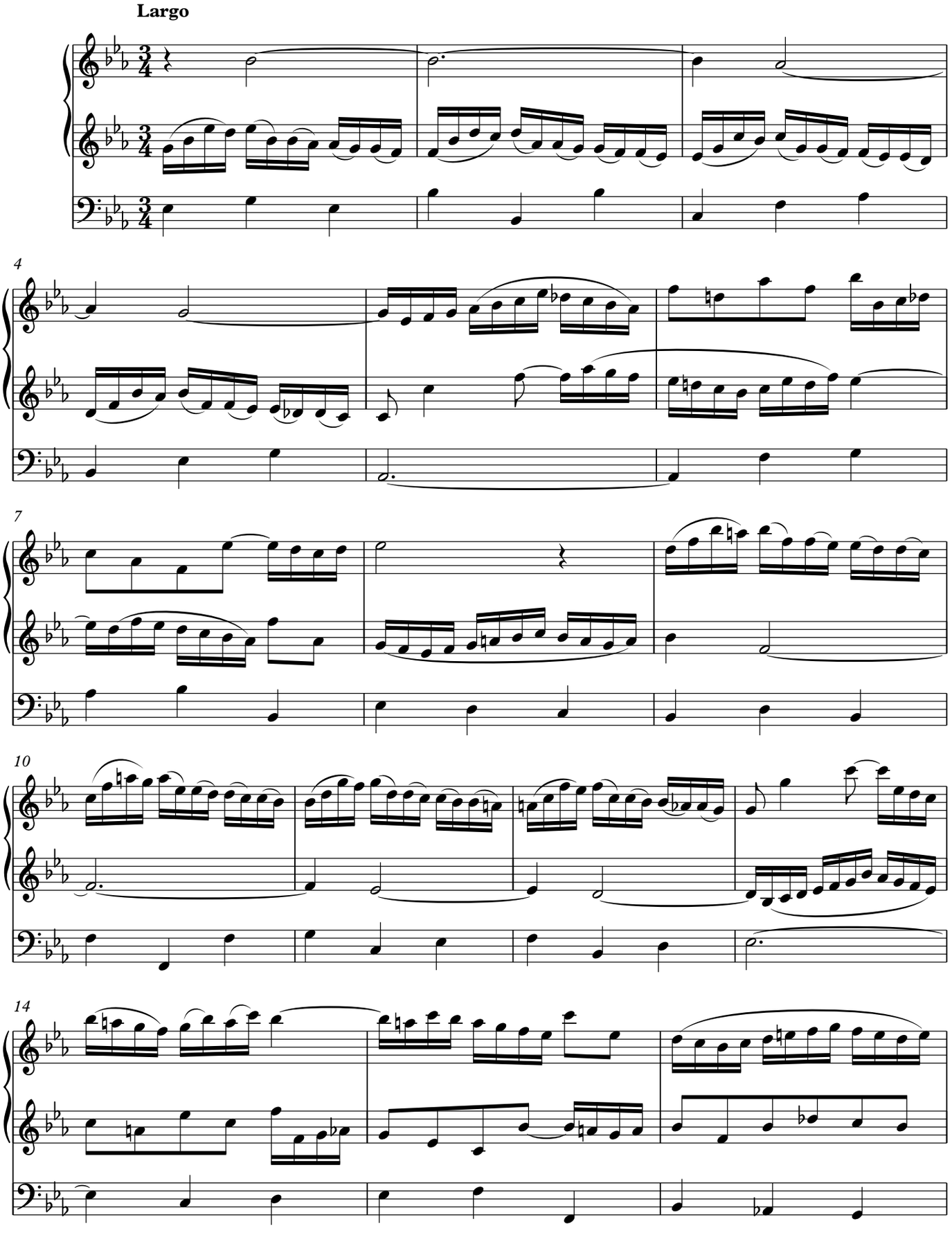
BWV 647



12. Largo

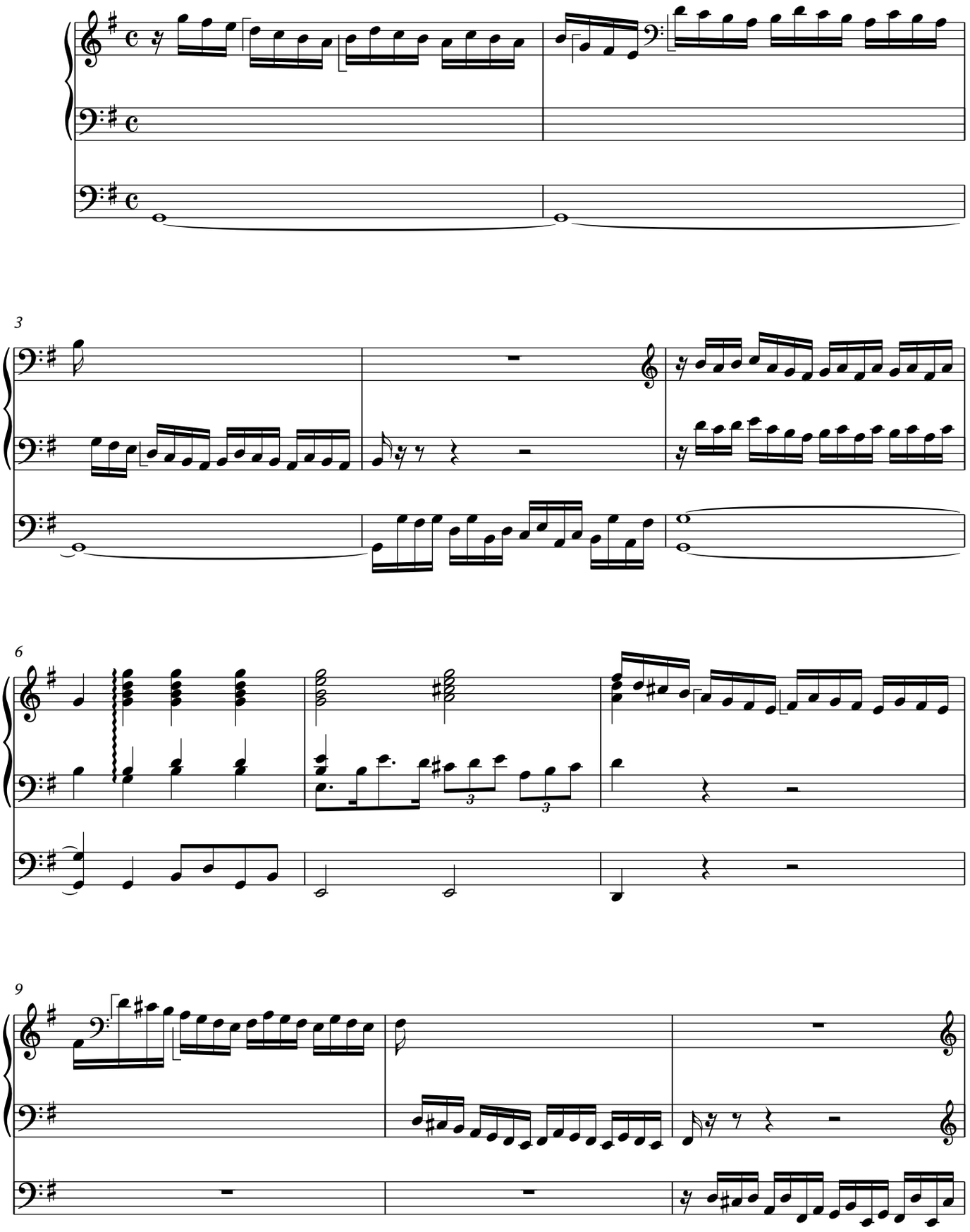
2nd movement of Sonata No. 2 in C minor

BWV 526



14. Prelude in G major

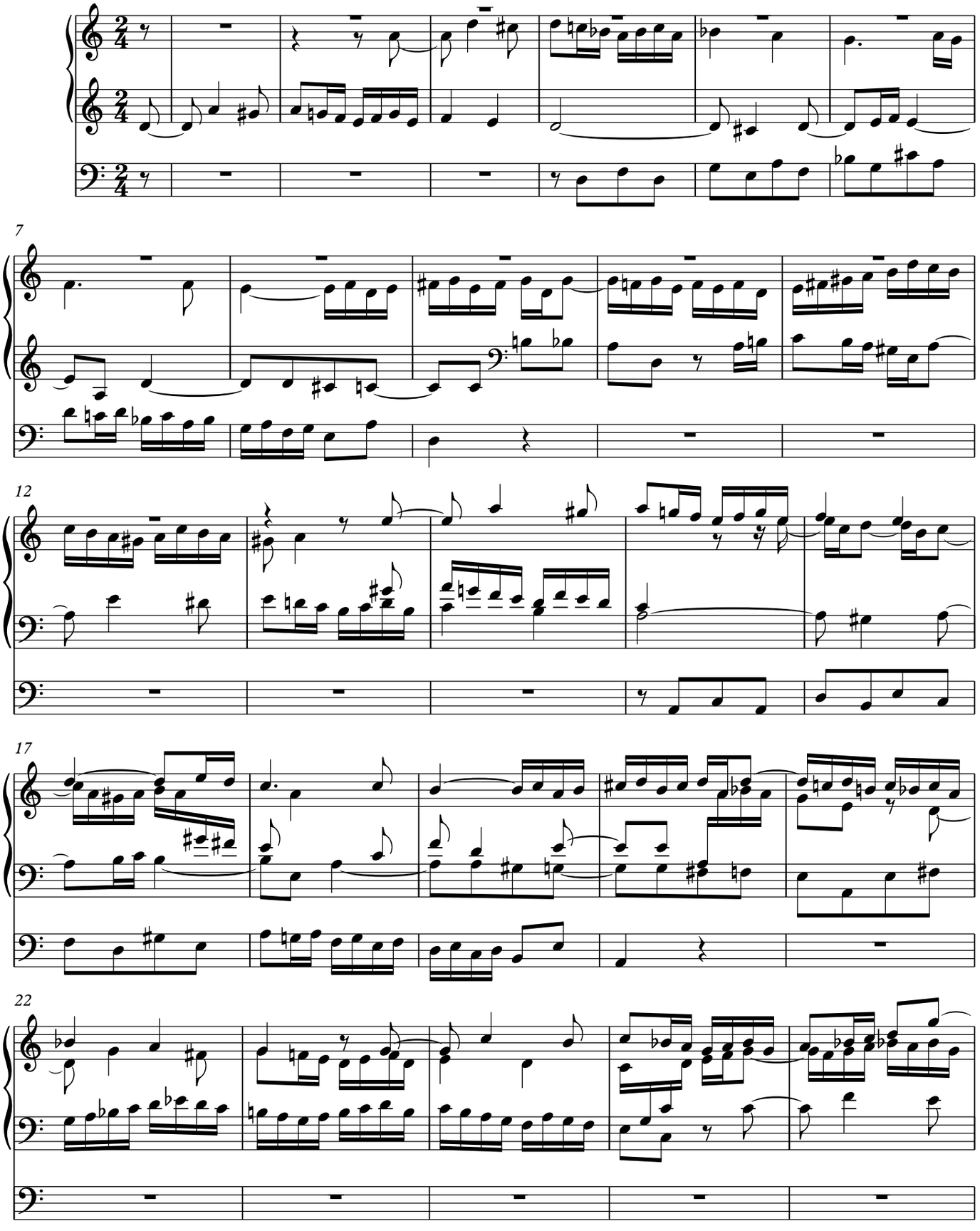
BWV 568



15. Wir glauben all an einen Gott

(We all believe in one God)
in organo pleno

BWV 680

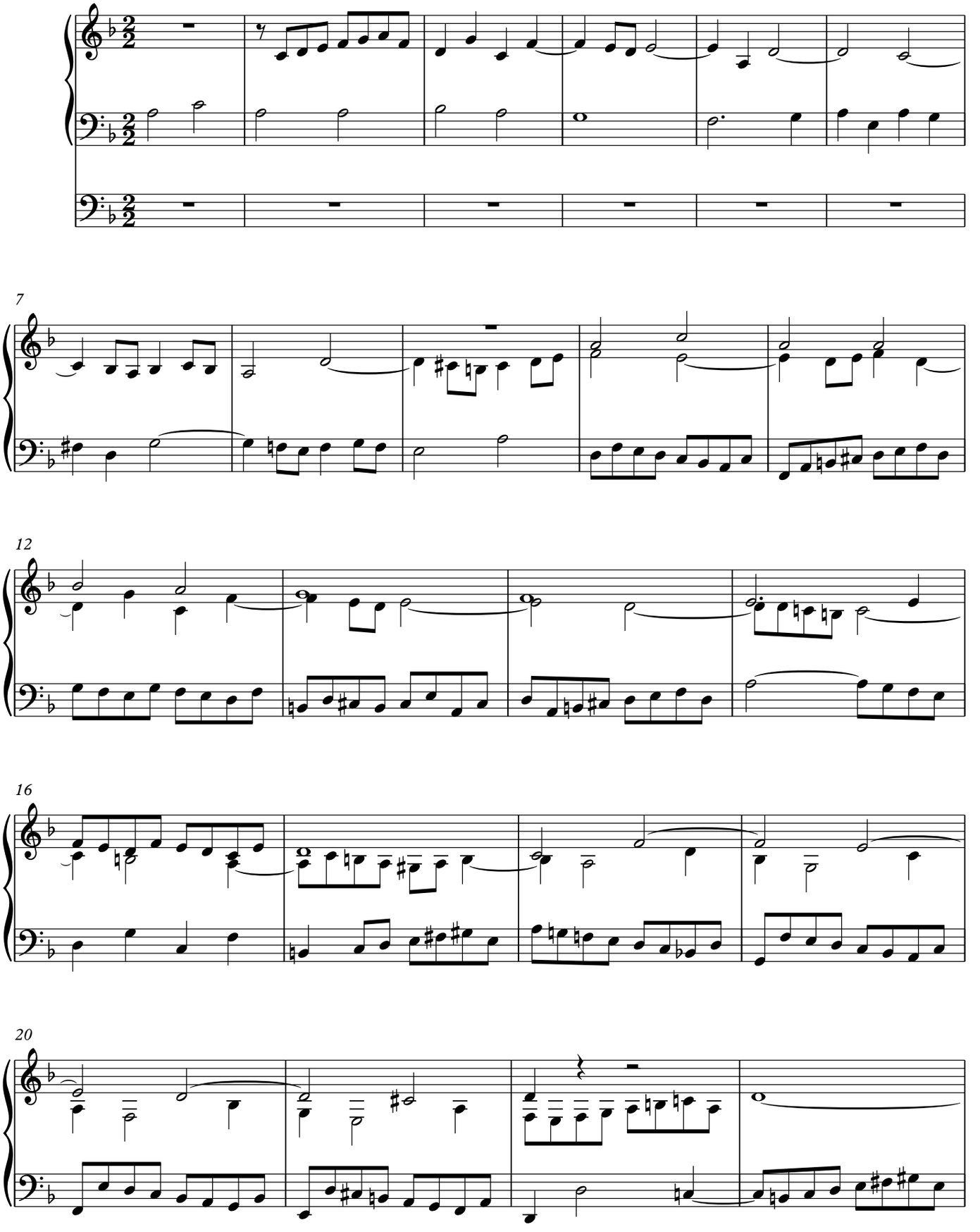


18. Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn

(My soul exalts the Lord)

Fugue on the Magnificat; pro organo pleno con pedale

BWV 733



Notes on the Pieces

Russell Stinson

1. Prelude and Fugue in E minor, BWV 533

Known to English speakers as the 'Cathedral' Prelude and Fugue, perhaps because Felix Mendelssohn performed it so often at St Paul's Cathedral, this popular work may represent Bach's initial attempt at the entirely separate prelude and fugue. The highly sectionalized prelude alternates between passagework in the manner of Buxtehude (see especially the 'trilled chords' in bars 6, 8, 10, and 28) and homophonic writing. A good example of the latter is provided by the repeated diminished-seventh chords in bars 18–27, which serve to accompany a new four-note motive presented in crotchets. This material unfolds over a series of phrases lasting only four beats and starting on the second beat of the bar, a pattern that continues to the end of the movement. The last of these phrases, which begins with dramatic semiquaver tenths in the pedals, is extended by a repeat of its cadence, as in certain of Bach's early church cantatas.

Surely not by accident, the same rhythm that ends the prelude occurs twice in succession to begin the fugue subject, whose second bar is likewise repetitive. Here we may be witnessing one of Bach's first fugues to end not with free figuration but, more organically, with a statement of the subject. Other features worth noting are the number of times the subject is stated in the opening exposition (five, in what is essentially a four-voice work) and the modulatory statement in bars 24–5 (A minor to B minor). The music conveys a sense of both majesty and melancholy.

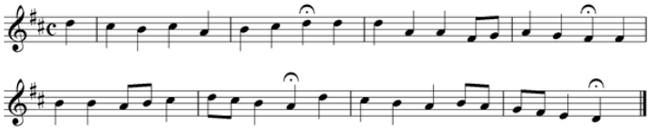
2. Prelude and Fugue in C minor, BWV 549

Like the previous piece, this youthful essay commences with a rhapsodic solo, but on the pedals, complete with mordents, a protracted sequence (bars 3–4), and a modulation to the relative major key (bar 6). Except for the brusque chords in bars 20 and 24 and the surprising triplets in bar 21, the semiquaver motion of the pedal solo continues until the end of the prelude. The fugue subject is rather lengthy for one lacking in long sequences. Similar to a folksong, it lasts for four bars and can be harmonized mostly with just the tonic and dominant chords. As in BWV 533, five statements of the subject appear in the opening exposition of what is ostensibly a fugue in four voices, but more anomalous is the delay of the first pedal statement until bar 40—the last statement of the subject altogether—at which point the hands switch to chopped chords. Definitely the climax of the movement, this passage leads to similarly wrought material in bars 43–7 and 50–2.

3. Prelude in E major, BWV 566

Known by various titles ('Prelude and Fugue', 'Toccata and Fugue', and simply 'Toccata') and transmitted in both E major (presumably the original key) and C major, the piece catalogued as BWV 566 constitutes an early attempt by Bach at the multi-sectional North German *praeludium pedaliter*. Given here is the first of the four sections that comprise this work. As in the preceding two pieces, the opening gesture is a brilliant solo (for the hands), followed by a chordal passage encompassing as many as nine notes at a time. A challenging pedal solo follows, and then more densely textured material (see, for example, the ten-note chord on the second beat of bar 13) that culminates in a rapid dialogue between the hands and feet (bars 28–31). Apropos of all the thick chords, consider C. P. E. Bach's account of how his father conducted organ examinations: 'The first thing he would do in trying an organ was this: he would say, in jest, "Above all I must know whether the organ has good lungs", and, to find out, he would draw out every speaking stop, and play in the fullest possible texture. At this the organ builder would often grow pale with fright.'

4. Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her, BWV 606



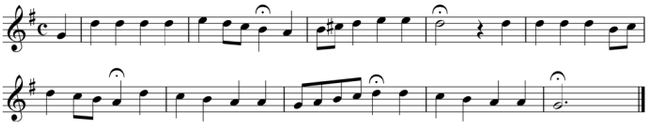
Vom Himmel hoch, da komm ich her.
Ich bring euch gute neue Mär,
Der guten Mär bring ich so viel,
Davon ich singen und sagen will.

I have come down from heaven above,
Bringing you good news,
I bring so much good news,
I want to sing and tell of it.

Martin Luther, 1535

This masterful arrangement of Luther's Christmas hymn comes from Bach's *Orgelbüchlein*, and the piece is on the whole quite representative of that collection: the chorale tune sounds continuously in the soprano voice; four-part texture is strictly maintained; and the inner voices derive from the same motive, in this instance the four-note figure known as the *suspirans*. For the sake of constant semiquaver motion the motive also appears several times in the soprano. As in all of his organ settings of this melody—and for whatever reasons—Bach chose to begin and end each phrase, in effect, with a minim on the first or third beat, and with crotchets elsewhere, when it would have been in accordance with the iambic tetrameter of the chorale text to use only crotchets and to begin each phrase on the fourth beat. Thus this miniature could have been even more compact, by two bars.

5. Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich, BWV 609



Lobt Gott, ihr Christen, allzugleich,
In seinem höchsten Thron,
Der heut schleusst auf sein Himmelreich
Und schenkt uns seinen Sohn.

Praise God, you Christians, all together,
Praise him who sits on the highest throne,
Who now unlocks his heavenly kingdom,
And sends his son to us as a gift.

Nicolaus Herman, 1560

Also from the *Orgelbüchlein*, this Christmas chorale is cut from the same cloth as the previous work, from the semiquaver motion in the inner parts to the walking bass line. Remarkably, the latter