LBMP–009

GASPARD LE ROUX

PIECES DE CLAVESSIN

VOLUME 1: THE SOLO HARPSICHORD PIECES

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IN SEARCH OF GASPARD LE ROUX
AN ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT RESEARCH

One of the most enigmatic composers of the *Grand Siècle*, Gaspard Le Roux, published his only volume of music in 1705. Its 88 pages contain seven suites, alongside arrangements for two harpsichords and trios for unspecified instruments. It was published by the composer and sold from Henri Foucault's shop 'a L'entrée de la rüe Saint honnoré A la Regle D'Or'.[1] Henry de Baussen engraved the plates, as he had for Lebègue, Campra and Lully, and the music was sold for the sum of ten *livres* 'en blanc' and eleven *livres* ten *sous* 'relié'.[2] It is unknown when the music was written, how many copies found their way into circulation, or how they were received. However, it made its way at least as far as Germany, since Johann Gottfried Walther is known to have copied a portion of its contents.[3] He also mentioned the volume in his *Musicalisches Lexicon* (1732, 189; 535), citing a bootleg edition that was produced by the Amsterdam publisher Estienne Roger in *c* 1708. Printed in two volumes, the second contained the realised *contreparties* and the second harpsichord part of the duet for two harpsichords.[4] Of both imprints, only three complete copies are known to remain. Two are of the original 1705 edition, which are housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris and the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Richard Fitzwilliam, 7th Viscount Fitzwilliam purchased the only remaining full copy of the Amsterdam version in 1769. He was an avid harpsichordist who had once been a student of Jacques Duphly and his copy now resides in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. A copy of the second harpsichord part may be found in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek.[5]

Le Roux has been the subject of some research over the past century, but despite this, little is known of his life. Although he lived in Paris after the late 1680s, documentation concerning his activities is scant to the extent that it has led several commentators to question whether or not he even existed. Suggestions range from his name being a nom de plume for someone of noble birth who wished to hide his 'crown or title' to his being a son of the composer Jean Henry D'Anglebert (Rousset, 1995). Harpsichordist Pascal Tuffery 2016, 26-9) discusses the possibility that Le Roux might have been Michel-Richard Delalande, who was chosen by Louis XIV as harpsichord teacher for the daughters of his then chief mistress, Madame de Montespan. French musicologist André Tessier produced two papers in the early 1920s, which were the initial forays into Le Roux's life and music (1922, 168-74; 1924, 230-246). The first of these is bibliographical in nature and focusses on the Paris and Amsterdam editions, while the other is more biographical and attempts to put the music into a wider context. A brief entry by Pierre Hardouin in *Revue de Musicologie* (1956, 62-67) was followed by Albert Fuller's 1956 (pub. 1959) edition, which was the first and, until now, only modern edition of the harpsichord suites. After Fuller, Bruce Gustafson provided *The New Grove* article on Le Roux, and more recently John McKean (2011a; b), as a PhD candidate at Cambridge University, turned his attention to the composer in two published studies: the first considers bibliographical aspects of extant source material while the second looks at contexts and performance traditions relating to the duets.

Trying to establish a chronology for Le Roux's life is desirable and although more recent studies have been vague in assigning a year of birth, they concur that he died in 1707. This is based on Pierre Hardouin's research (1956, 62-67), which reported that a public notary, Toussaint Bellanger, received an inventory of the estate of a Gaspard Leroux on 17 June 1707. Hardouin's suggestion that the composer's death occurred shortly before has been widely acknowledged, as the similarity between the names is too close to ignore. However, subsequent attempts to verify this have proved unsuccessful as Bellanger's *répertoires* contain no references to Gaspard Leroux. This is because Hardouin mistook Bellanger for the notary Alexandre Lefèvre, who was active in 'Rue Saint-Martin, au coin de la rue Aubri-le-Boucher' from 1703 to 1706. Between 1707 and 1710 his premises were situated 'au coin de la rue Neuve-Saint-Merri', after which he acquired Bellanger's practice on Rue Saint-Honoré (Limon, 1992, 371; 331). It is easy to see how this confused Hardouin, but his findings are misleading since the name Lefèvre recorded was Gaspard Roux.[6] Although that might appear circumstantial and of little use, it needs investigating to decide whether Roux's name was either recorded in error or the product of a yet to be standardised orthography.

Lefèvre's *répertoires* show that Roux used his services on several occasions when paid *constitutions de rentes* by the town of Paris. These were essentially annuities that were

[1] Le Roux (1705). Since Le Roux applied for the *Privilège du Roy*, it is certain he bore the costs of engraving and printing, and Foucault's only involvement was in providing a premises for sales. Unusually, the title page makes no mention that the music could be purchased 'chez l'auteur'. The cost of obtaining a privilege for an octavo imprint was 60 *livres* per edition for up to 1,500 copies. See: Brenet (1907), 411.

[2] 'En blanc' signifies that the music was sold as single sheets. The 'relié' price was handwritten on the title page of the BnF copy and indicates the cost of a bound copy.

[3] D-B Mus. ms. Bach P 801.

[4] Subsequent to Walther, Le Roux is mentioned in a number of late 17th- and 18th-century German lexicons, each of which appear to rely on Walther for their information. Roger's edition was to remain available until c.1744.

[5] F-Pn VM7-1858; US-Wc M22.L6; GB-Cfm MU.MS.360; D-B Slg. Thulemeier, 258,1: this was previously housed in the Gymnase de Joachimsthal in Berlin and was thought to have been lost during World War II.

[6] F-Pan MC / ET / CXXI, fol. 175v., 17 June 1707.

developed during the seventeenth century to bypass the Church's disapproval of usury. Records indicate that they had been paid to Roux regularly since 1704. Before that, Lefèvre's predecessor Gabriel Raveneau noted that Roux received similar payments dating as far back as 1694. In June 1696 and August two years later he gave Roux the title 'le sr'. Another entry in September 1696 contains the additional words 'bourgeois de Paris'.[7] As a notary Raveneau was rather exceptional since he recorded the qualities and occupations of his customers, and it is possible to discern that social hierarchies were an important aspect of his recordkeeping. The application of 'le sr' and 'bourgeois de Paris' reflects these distinctions, suggesting Roux had sufficient means to live off his income, perhaps as a *rentier*. Two other entries in Lefèvre's *répertoires*, however, indicate that his client and Gaspard Le Roux were not the same. This is because Le Roux also used Lefèvre's services in May 1702 and August 1706 when receiving annuities, a fact Hardouin overlooked.[8] The likelihood that Lefèvre might have made a simple error once is plausible, but to do so several times while being correct on others is less so. It is also unlikely that Raveneau would have made the error at all, given the strict etiquette demonstrated in his minutes. It must be, therefore, that Gaspard Roux 'bourgeois de Paris' was not the harpsichordist and that Hardouin was wrong. Since there are no records of Le Roux receiving annuities after 5 August 1706, which is the last time he is mentioned in any known source, we might conjecture that he died soon after.

The vagaries surrounding Le Roux's date of birth rely heavily on Tessier's research, which suggests somewhere around 1660. His findings are based on a questionable connection that was provided by Jules Écorcheville in an edition of the *c* 1660 Kassel Manuscript (1906, 5), where Le Roux's name is linked to several of its composers.[9] McKean (2011b, 38) believes an earlier date of birth is probable and suggests that 1650 (or even 1640) is more likely. He bases his theory on the relative ages at which composers died during the *Grand Siècle*. However, it is necessary to be circumspect about this since, by ignoring too many variables, his method becomes flawed. McKean, though, follows an intriguing line of thought, which he uses not only to provide further weight to his hypothesis, but also to account for Le Roux's whereabouts before his first recorded appearance on the Paris scene in 1690. This concerns the discovery of the name Le Roux in a manuscript housed in the Newberry Library, Chicago.[10]

The manuscript is a fair copy of a motet, *Lauda Jerusalem Dominum*, written by 'Le Roux presbiter Argentomensis', which McKean translates as 'Le Roux, ecclesiastic of Strasbourg'.[11] He finds stylistic similarities with three works attributed to Gaspard that are found in a volume of 61 motets compiled by Sébastien de Brossard. Housed in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, they form a small part of an extensive collection of books, manuscripts and printed music that Brossard amassed during a 50-year career as a priest, composer and church musician. According to the Bibliothèque nationale catalogue, the motets were copied between 1670 and 1699.[12] Brossard, who is best known as the author of the 1703 *Dictionaire de Musique*, had been a priest and later *Maître de la Chapelle* at Strasbourg Cathedral between 1687 and 1698. McKean argues that if all four motets are by the same composer, then it is possible Le Roux had also been employed at Strasbourg, where he and Brossard might have been acquainted. McKean reasons that the Strasbourg link supports his theory regarding Le Roux's date of birth. Although that would provide a credible explanation of the composer's whereabouts before he arrived in Paris, McKean confused *Argentomensis* with *Argentoratum*, the former being the Latin name of the city of Argentan in Normandy. While that appears to eliminate a geographical connection between Le Roux 'presbyter' and Strasbourg, it does not necessarily preclude Gaspard from being the motet's author. Nor does it rule out the possibility that he composed the works attributed to him by Brossard. Indeed, the first motet seems to affirm Gaspard's authorship through a unique biographical inscription contained in its top margin. It reads:

> Author. D. Le Roux. This was a famous master of the harpsichord and excellent musician [This m]otet is entirely different from the one by Danielis on the same text.[13]

The attribution, though, is puzzling. The D suggests an abbreviation of *Dominus*, which might be a substitution for *Monsieur*, but could also indicate that its composer was a priest.[14] That would provide a connection between the Newberry and Brossard

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[7] Ibid., 124. Raveneau's *répertoires* may be found in F-Pan MC / ET / CXXI / 192, 194, 196, 202, 209: 1st February 1694, 29 November 1694, 14 June 1696, 7 September 1696, 5 July 1697, 12 August 1698. Lefèvre's are found in F-Pan MC / RE / CXIII / 6: 25 April, 1704, 22 February 1706 and 8 February 1707. No payment seems to have been made in 1705. Entries in Bellanger's *répertoires* may be found in F-Pan MC / RE / CCIII / 4, fos. 315v.-330r.

[8] F-Pan MC / RE / CXIII / 6: 8 May 1702 and 5 August 1706.

[9] D-Kl Ms. Mus. Fol. 61.

[10] US-Cn MS 5105; the library catalogue dates the manuscript as 1690 to 1707, relying on the dates during which Le Roux is thought to have flourished.

[11] *Psalmum illum centesimum quadragesimum septimum musice composuit Le Roux presbiter Argentomensis*; McKean (2011b), 7.

[12] F-Pn VM1-1175. The motets attributed to Le Roux are: *Thuris odor volet ad auras* (fol. 161r.), *Beati qui habitant in domo* (fol. 167v.) and *Alma redemptoris mater* (fol. 169v.). Although Brossard added page numbers, there are several non-sequiturs in their arrangement and it is more accurate to cite folios. They have been added to each recto side and date from more modern times. The page numbers appear as 337, 348 and 352.

[13] '[L]'Autore. D. Le Roux. | C'estoit un celebre maitre de | clavessin et excellent musicien | Ce motet est tout different de celuy de Danielis sur les memes paroles.'

[14] 'Dominus' is used quite often in contemporary manuscripts in place of Monsieur; e.g. F-Pn VM1-1178: 'Autore D. Homet discipulo D. Bernier'; VM1-945, 1: 'Communicavit D. Hartwich Zisich

manuscripts, and not only adds weight to McKean's thesis that Le Roux was responsible for all four motets, but also to his additional conjecture that much of the composer's professional life involved church music (2011b, 9). However, the Newberry motet has little in common with those copied by Brossard. A more substantial work, it is scored for five voices and obbligato strings, and its antiphonal homophony and restricted chromaticism is representative of a tradition found in the *grands motets* of Michel-Richard Delalande and Marc-Antoine Charpentier. Conversely, the composer of the Brossard motets shows a more refined hand and their intimate textures, Italianate influences and richer contrapuntal writing contrast with the Newberry manuscript to the extent that, apart from a common attribution, any other connection is impossible to establish.

Equally puzzling is the 'maitre de clavessin' inscription, since the use of the imperfect tense (*estoit* being an older variant of *était*) suggests the composer was deceased. That would be true, had the motets been copied after 1706, but such a late date is improbable. The bulk of Brossard's library was acquired during his Strasbourg years and although eight of the manuscript's composers lived into the 18th century, the majority of its known works date from before 1700. This leaves four that might have a later provenance: François Couperin's *Venite exultemus Domino* was not published until 1726 but exists in two earlier versions of which the principal is found at Versailles and is thought to date from between 1700 and 1706; Nicolas Bernier published *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua* in 1703; and two works by Jacques-François Lochon, *Jam quaero sapere* and *Thuris odor volet* were printed by Christophe Ballard in 1701.[15] Of these, none exactly matches Brossard's copy: Couperin's *élévation* shows significant rhythmic and pitch deviations from its Versailles version, and similar disparities appear in Bernier's motet. Lochon's manuscripts also differ from their published forms, with variances in continuo lines, time signatures and tempo directions. They also contain material that is absent from the printed versions, suggesting that Brossard's sources were unrevised copies that predated the 1701 publication by a number of years.[16] Moreover, that the Brossard manuscript lacks works that could only have been written after 1698 is further evidence an earlier provenance and makes it probable that the motets were copied during his time at Strasbourg.

This serves only to deepen the riddle of the 'maitre de clavessin' inscription, which cannot have been written before Le Roux died. However, a plausible explanation is provided through a palaeographical analysis of the volume's contents. The motets were copied by four different scribes of which one was clearly Brossard since the hand matches other examples we know to be autograph.[17] His contributions are few and his hurried and inaccurate style contrasts greatly with that of the more precise Scribe X, who was responsible not only for Le Roux's motets, but also more than half the volume's other works.[18]

Several motets indicate that Brossard and Scribe X were jointly engaged in copying the manuscripts since they either share the same folio, or Scribe X completes work begun by Brossard.[19] An intriguing aspect of their collaboration is that Scribe X omitted attributions for 24 of his 35 contributions, including Le Roux's motets, which Brossard added at a later point. This was not an error on Scribe X's part. Since he provided composers' names elsewhere, the remainder were probably anonymous to him. It is reasonable to suggest, though, that Brossard's knowledge was similarly impaired and that some of his attributions are little other than educated guesses that were subsequently revised. This is demonstrated by the first of a group of five motets for *Saint-Sacrement* where the name 'Clerembaut' was appended twice in Brossard's hand.[20] Initially, it was written in a somewhat tentative script, as if Brossard was making a suggestion; the second, however, is larger, more authoritative and placed prominently in the upper margin. The same process was applied to Le Roux's works, with an initial attribution confirmed at a later point, and it was at this time that the biographical inscription appears to have been added.[21]

These were two of a considerable number of emendations made to the volume and since the holographic style and ink pigmentation contain no variances, they must date from a similar point. In turn, they match entries in a document that Brossard prepared between October 1724 and April 1725, after he began correspondence with the Royal Librarian, l'abbé Jean-Paul Bignon, regarding his desire to donate his 'cabinet' to Louis XV.[22] Although Brossard wished his collection to be preserved in one piece after his death, he was approaching 70 and hoped to exchange his canonry at Meaux for a position at the Royal Library. If that were to be impossible, he asked that a small 'gratification' in the form of a pension be provided to help support a niece from 'one of the best and most ancient families in the kingdom'.[23] During the course of their exchange, which was ultimately to involve Cardinal de Bissy of Meaux, Brossard was required to provide

scripsit S B an. 1695'; VM1-861, 'Ex bibl. Dni Ballard'.

[15] F-Pc RES 1680; F-V MS Musicale 59; Bernier (1703), 203; Lochon (1701), 18 and 44. There are no significant differences between the Couperin manuscripts, suggesting that they were copied from the same source.

[16] Cf. F-Pn VM1-1175 fos. 3r. and 8r.; Lochon (1701), 22-23 and 48.

[17] For example, F-Pn VM7-1477 (4), *Sonata 4.a*.

[18] Brossard contributed four motets; Scribe X, 35; Scribe Y, one; Scribe Z, 21.

[19] For example, Giovanni Vincentini's *Paravit in mensa sua* (fol. 129r.) was completed by Scribe X.

[20] This is the only known source of these motets and they have been catalogued as C.164-7. If they are by Clérambault, they represent some of his earliest pieces. None appears in his five published books of motets (c.1742-60).

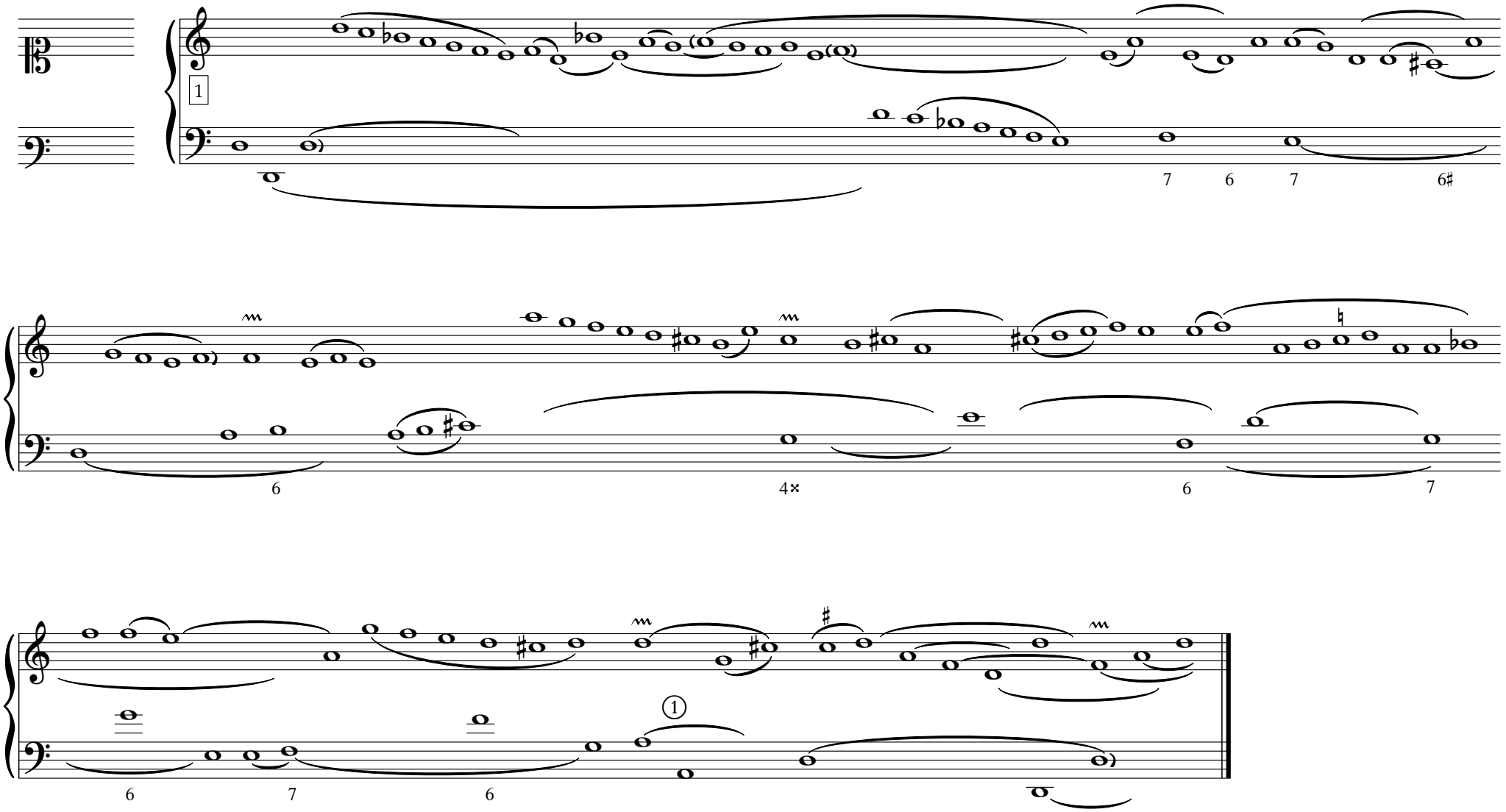
[21] Something similar occurred with Bernier's motets, on 214r. and 225v.

[22] The circumstances surrounding the donation and its related correspondence may be found in Lebeau (1950, 77-93).

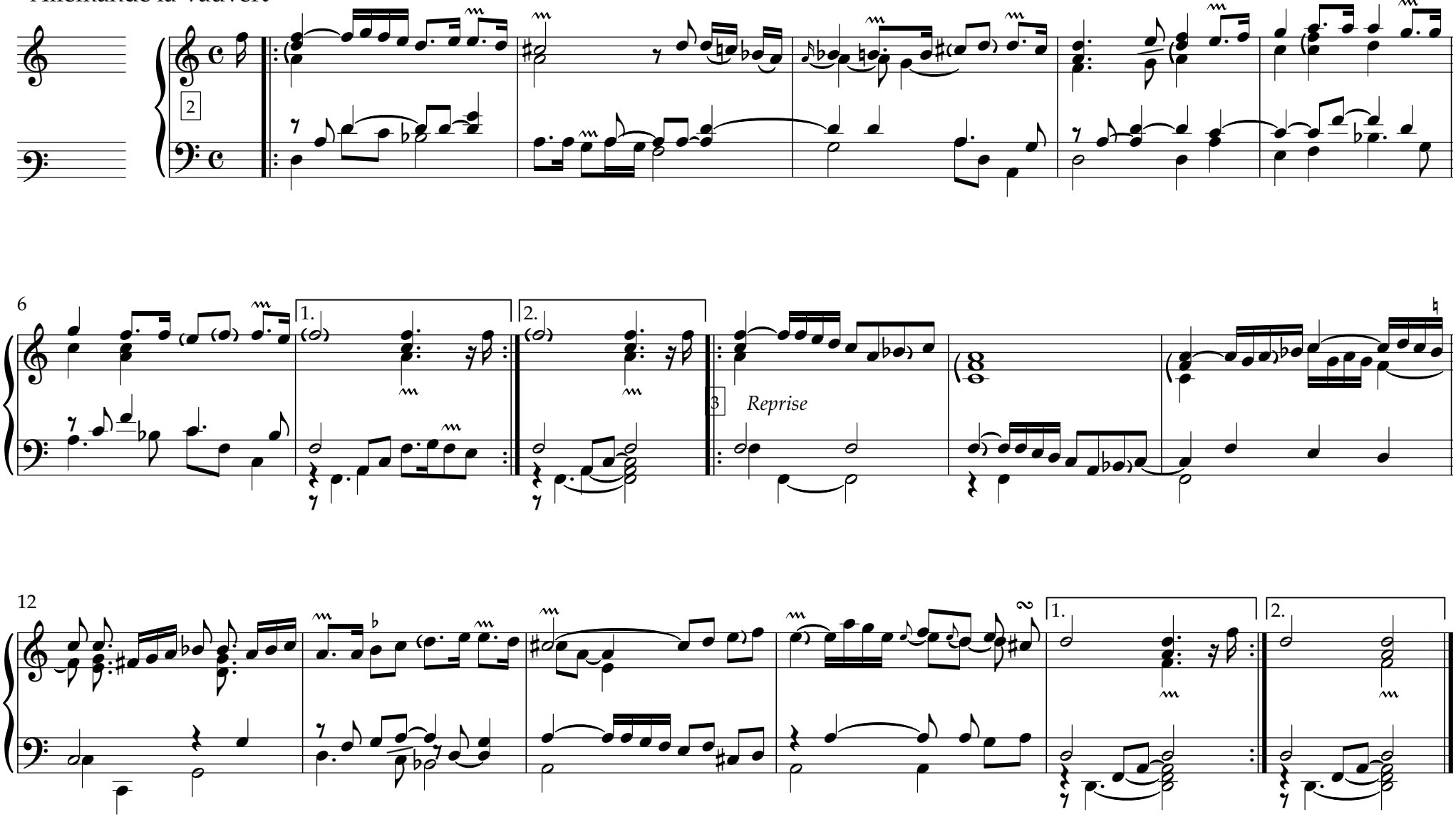
[23] Ibid., 92: 'Au reste ce n'est pas pour moy principallement que je demande cette gratification … j'ay une niece avec moy, qui est (j'ose bien le dire) d'une des meîlleures et des plus anciennes familles

Suite I

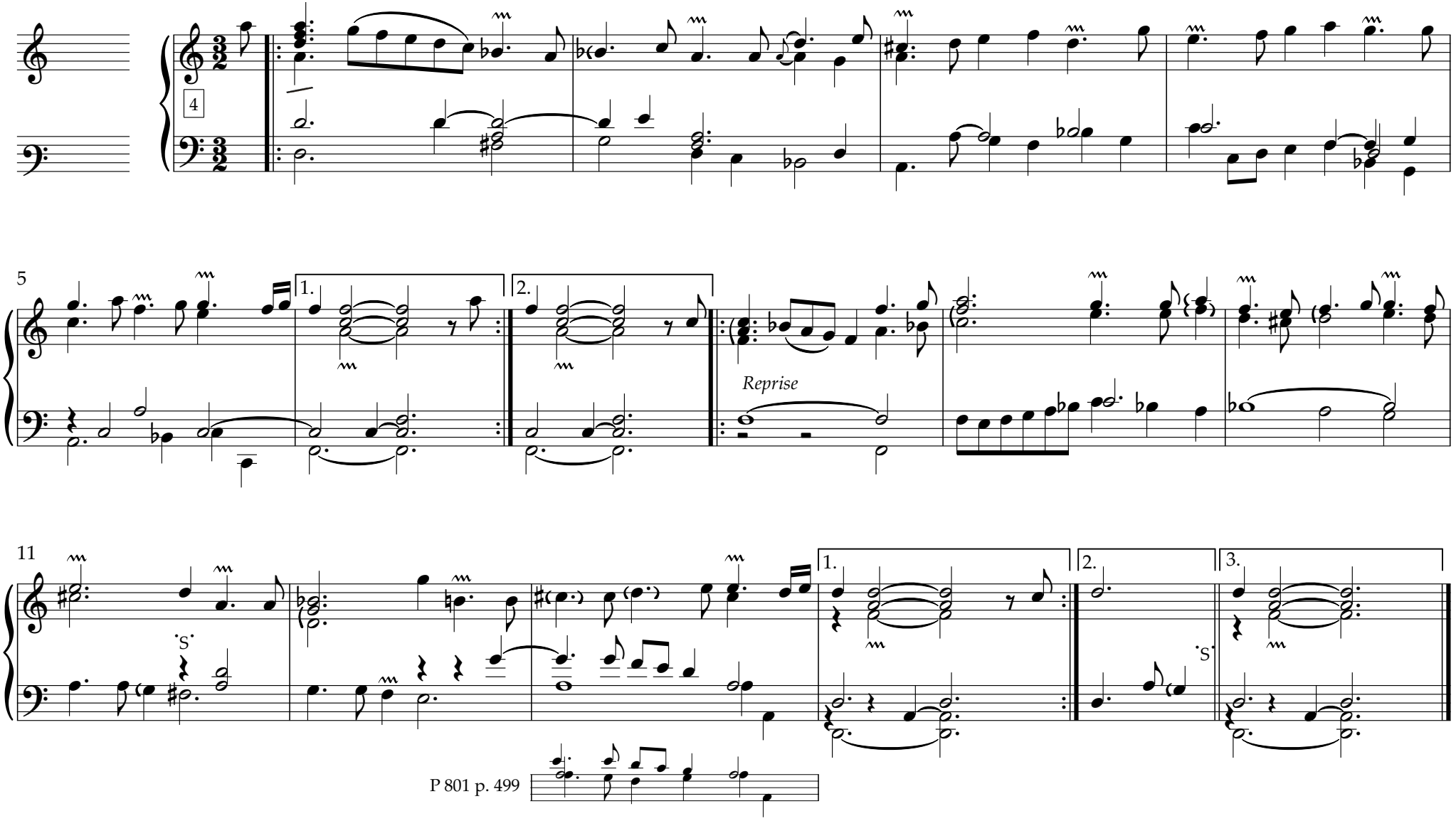
Prelude



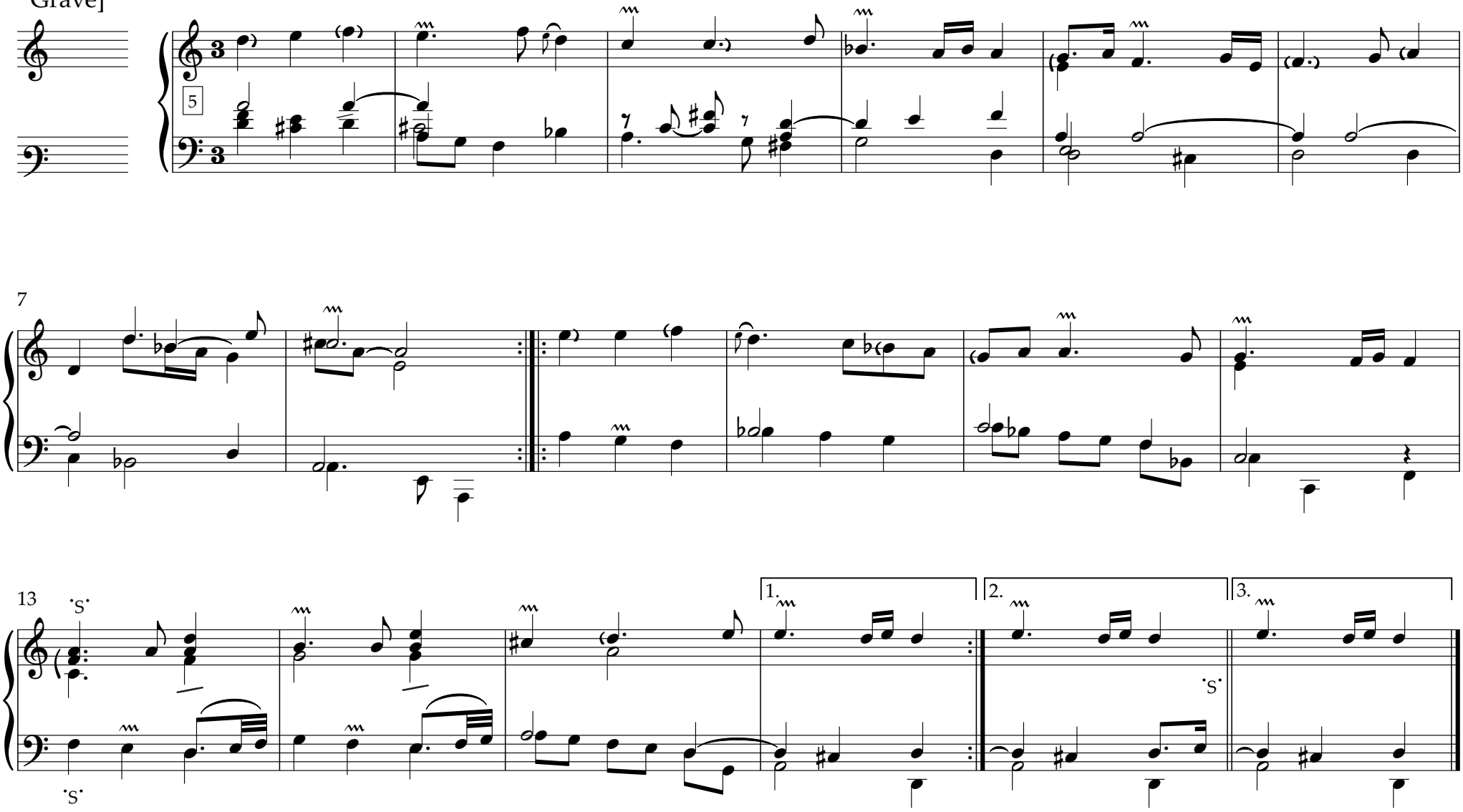
Allemande la Vauvert



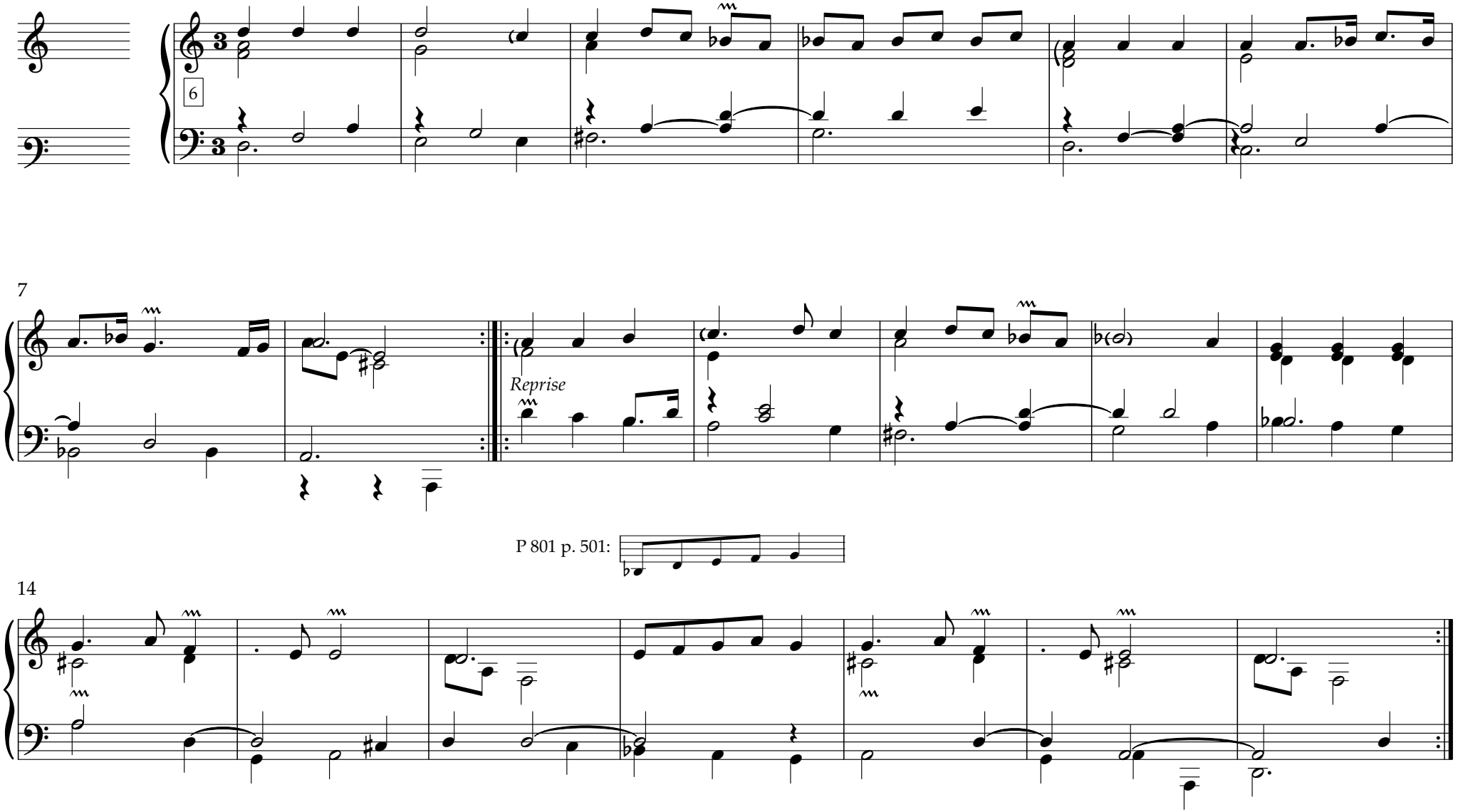
Courante



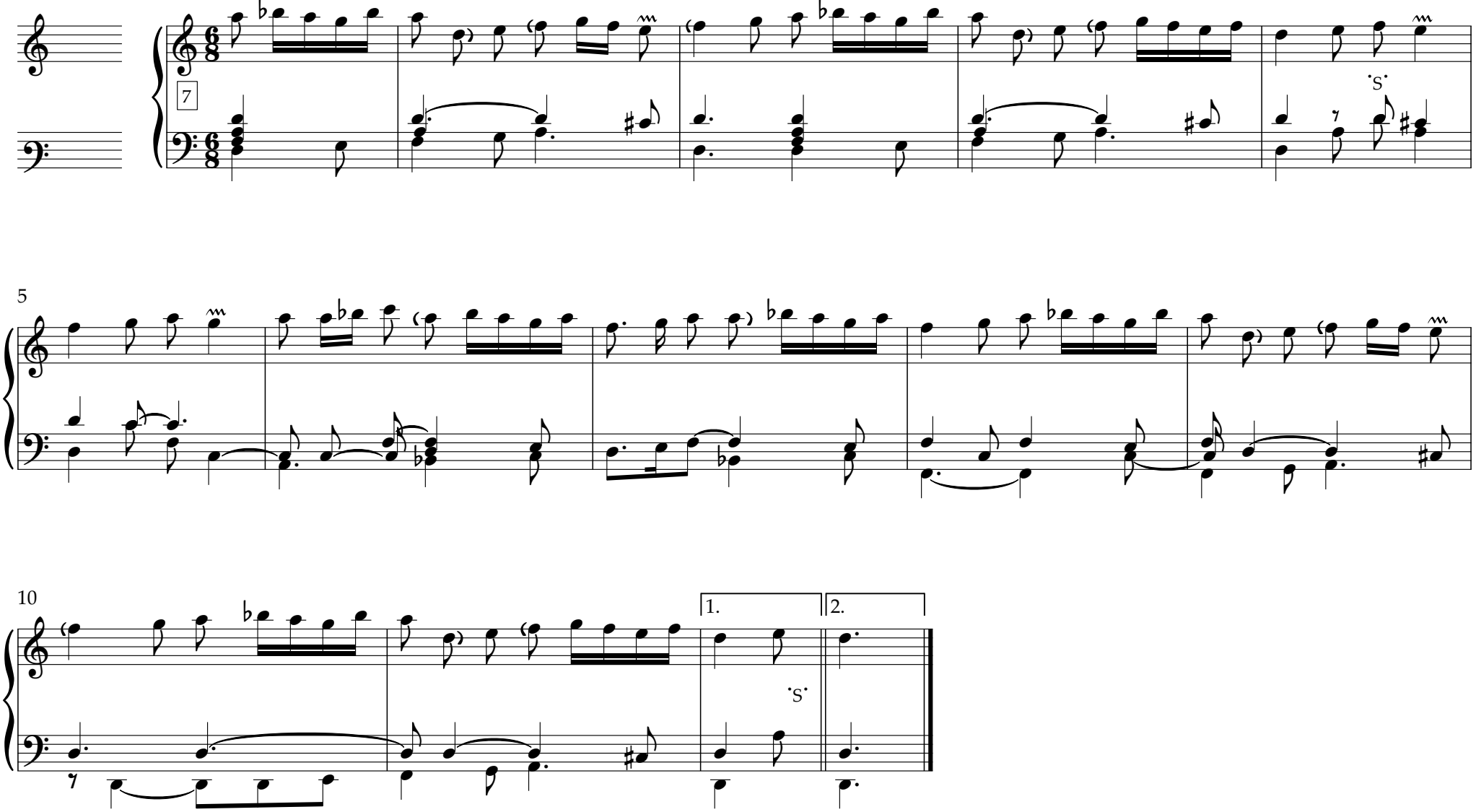
[Sarabande
Grave]



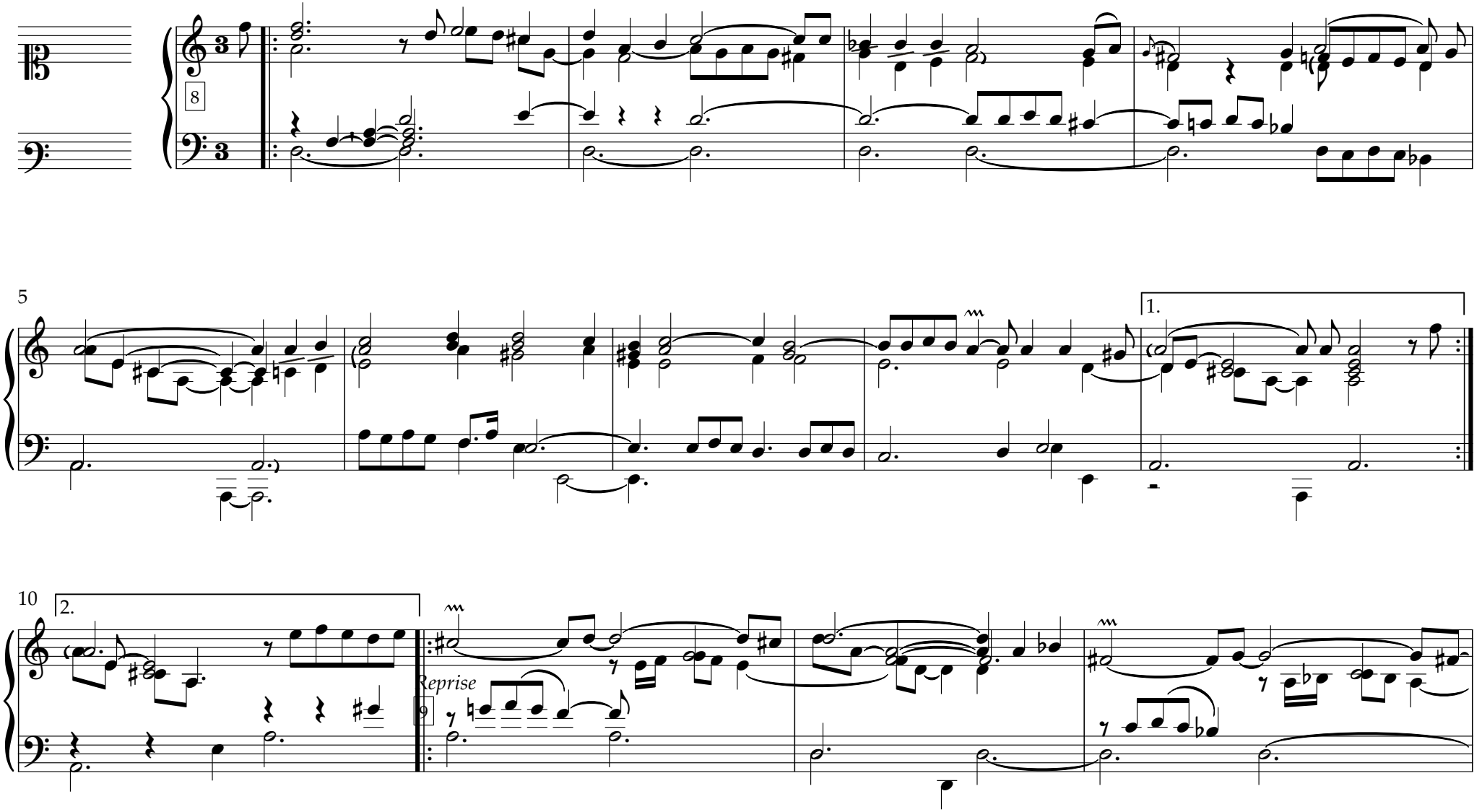
Menuet

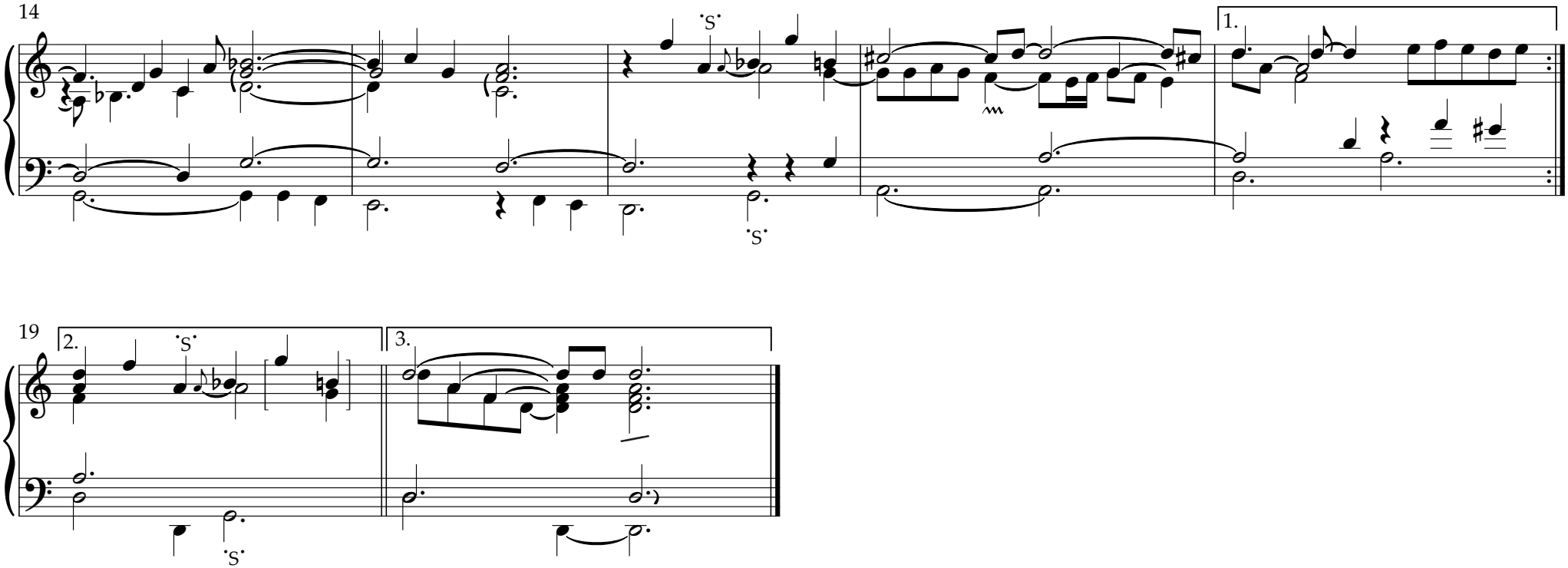


Passepied



Courante luthée

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