Go on, break a hammer!

for Piano

by J. Simon van der Walt

This piece is many things to me

It is an obsession; it is about obsession.

It is an etude for piano; it's a blues.

It's the most annoying piece I have ever written; people come into the room, with expressions of great pain whenever I am practising it; 'What is that you're playing? Do you have to play it so loud? It's driving me mad!'

I hammer it out again and again; it's addictive, each time through I make a small slip, play one 5/8 bar in the B section instead of two, get to the repeat at the end and just have to go round again; my wrists hurt, the hours slip by, my mouth is dry, my bladder is full, but still I keep on going round and round...

Suddenly I become aware of my surroundings again, feel embarrassed, shy; what is that thing you're playing, do you have to play it so loud, it's driving me mad.

It's about being lost & found; I only ever wrote it down in sketch form on one piece of paper; I always knew that I should make a thousand photocopies, because when the day came to write it out properly I just knew I would have lost the original... And I have! And I know I haven't quite got the barring as it used to be, and I never will!

I'll try it through one more time. The confidence builds in waves. Suddenly I know where I am, 5/8 5/8 2/4 5/8, and then I'm at the big change to the Gb/Fb7 (misspelled as F#/E7); louder louder LOUDER BANG! one two three one-two-THREE-four-five what am I doing to this piano! Hell with it! Go on, enjoy yourself; break a hammer!

To the performer

Read the program note; live the program note.

Always play loud, never falter, crotchet = 200 or faster. No pedal.

RH always has the accent; LH fills in the weak beats.

Chord A is neutral, life in balance, neither too much nor too little.
Chord B is always tense, sometimes very. The loudest.
Chord C is expectation, or a song.

The confidence builds in waves.

Play from the start, then round the repeat several times. Perhaps play round until you are positive you have played it once through perfectly, then you are allowed to stop. Perhaps go back to A1 (outside the repeat) and end on this; you can fade out if you like, or just stop at any point.

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by J. Simon van der Walt
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Piano

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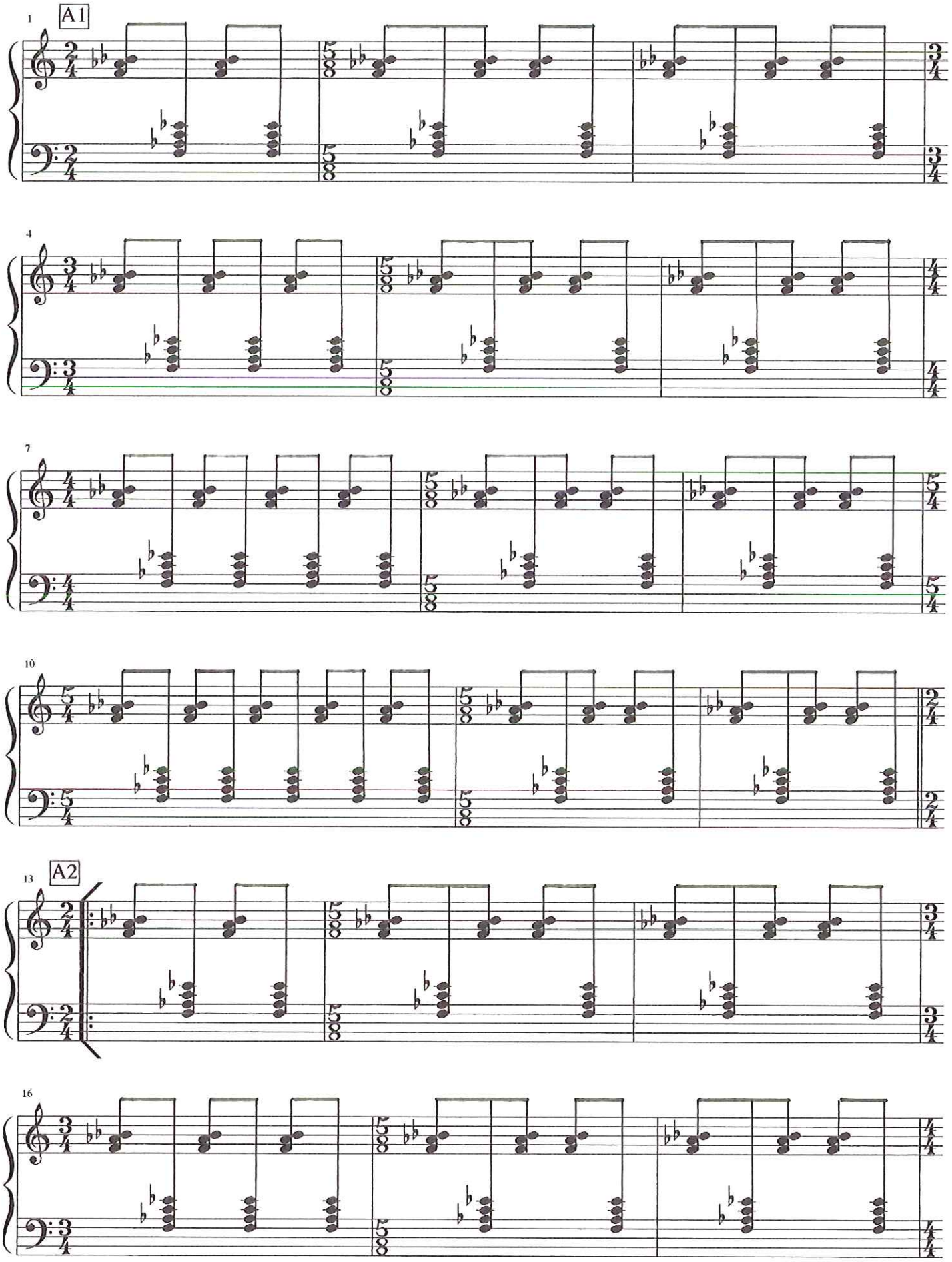

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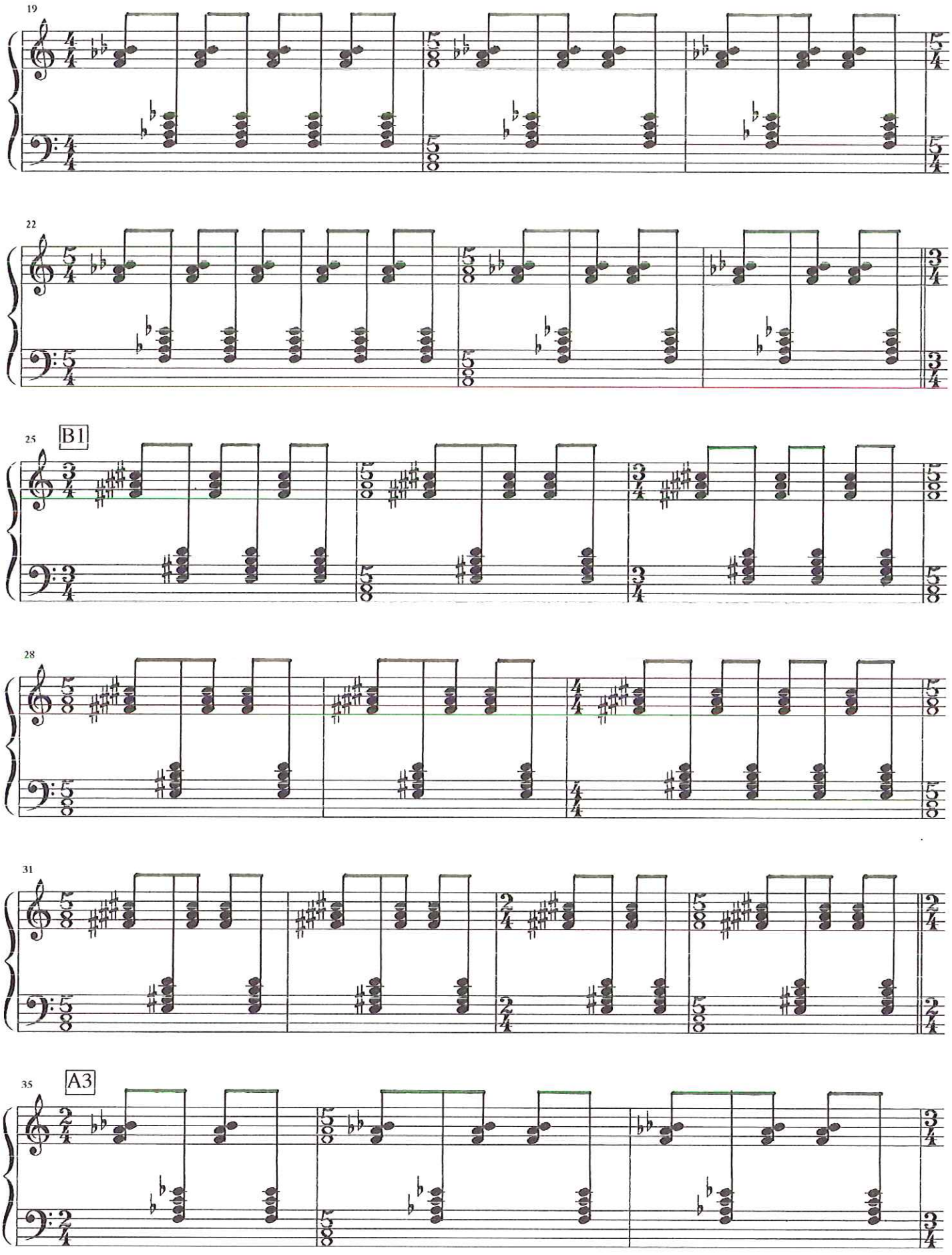
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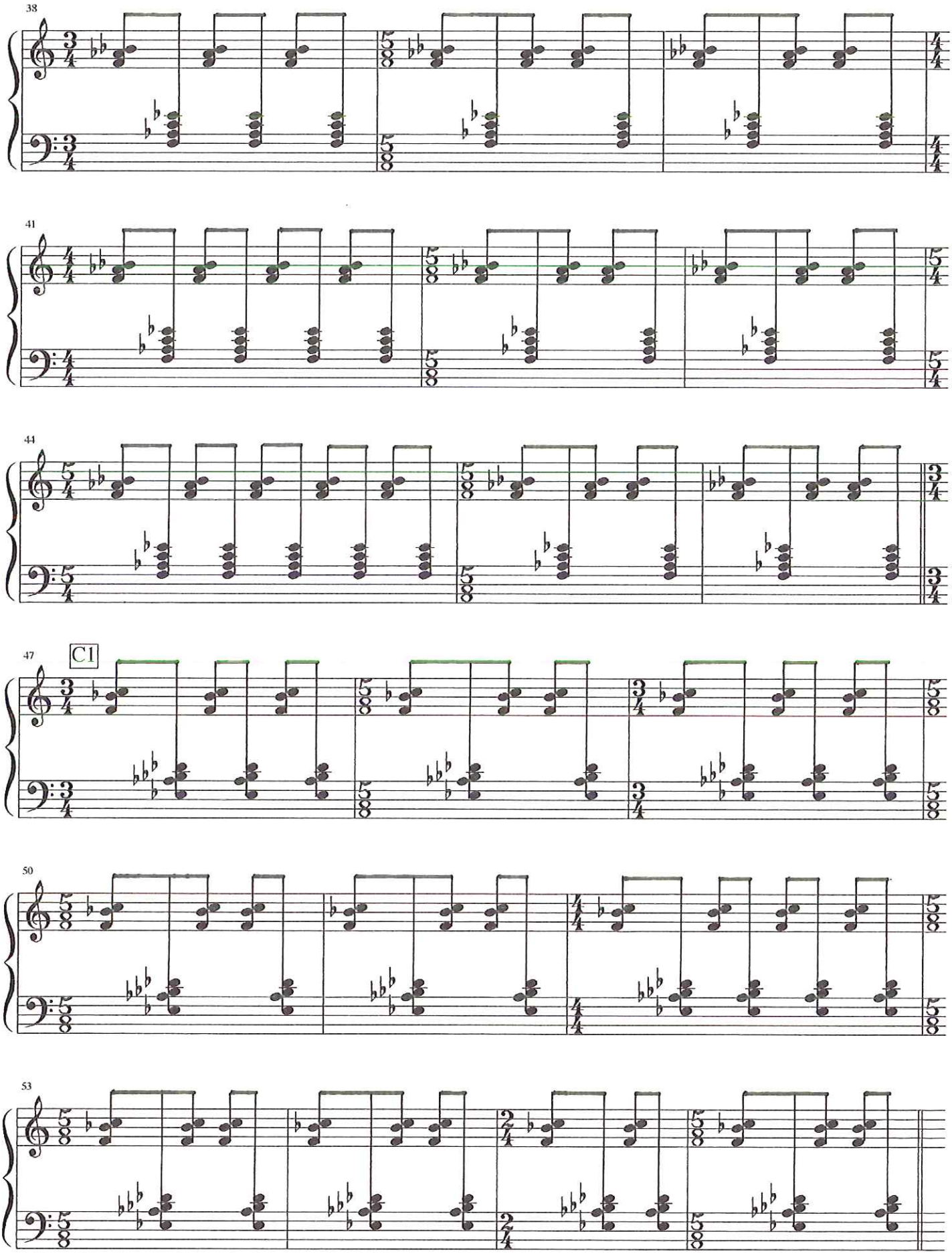
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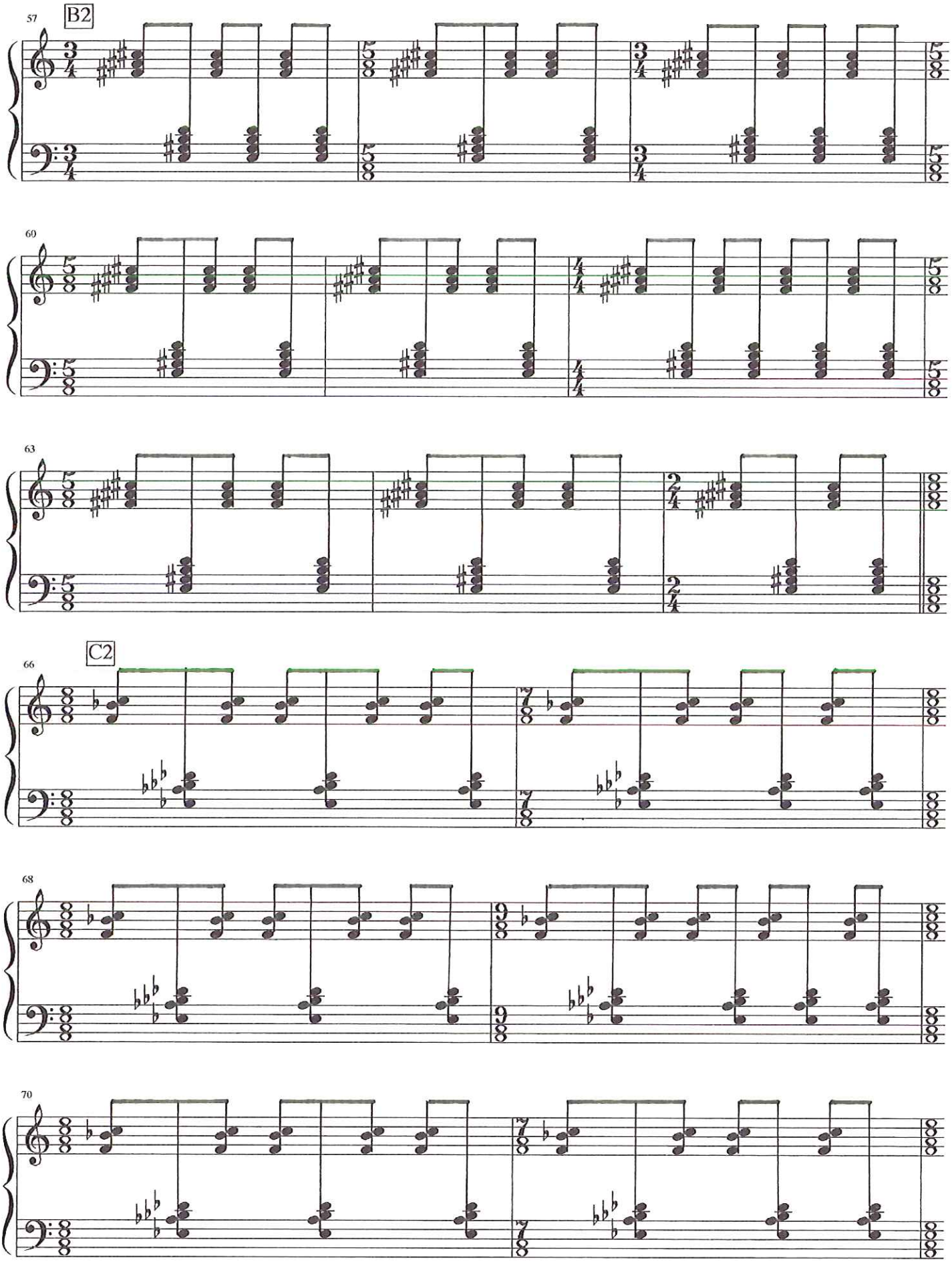
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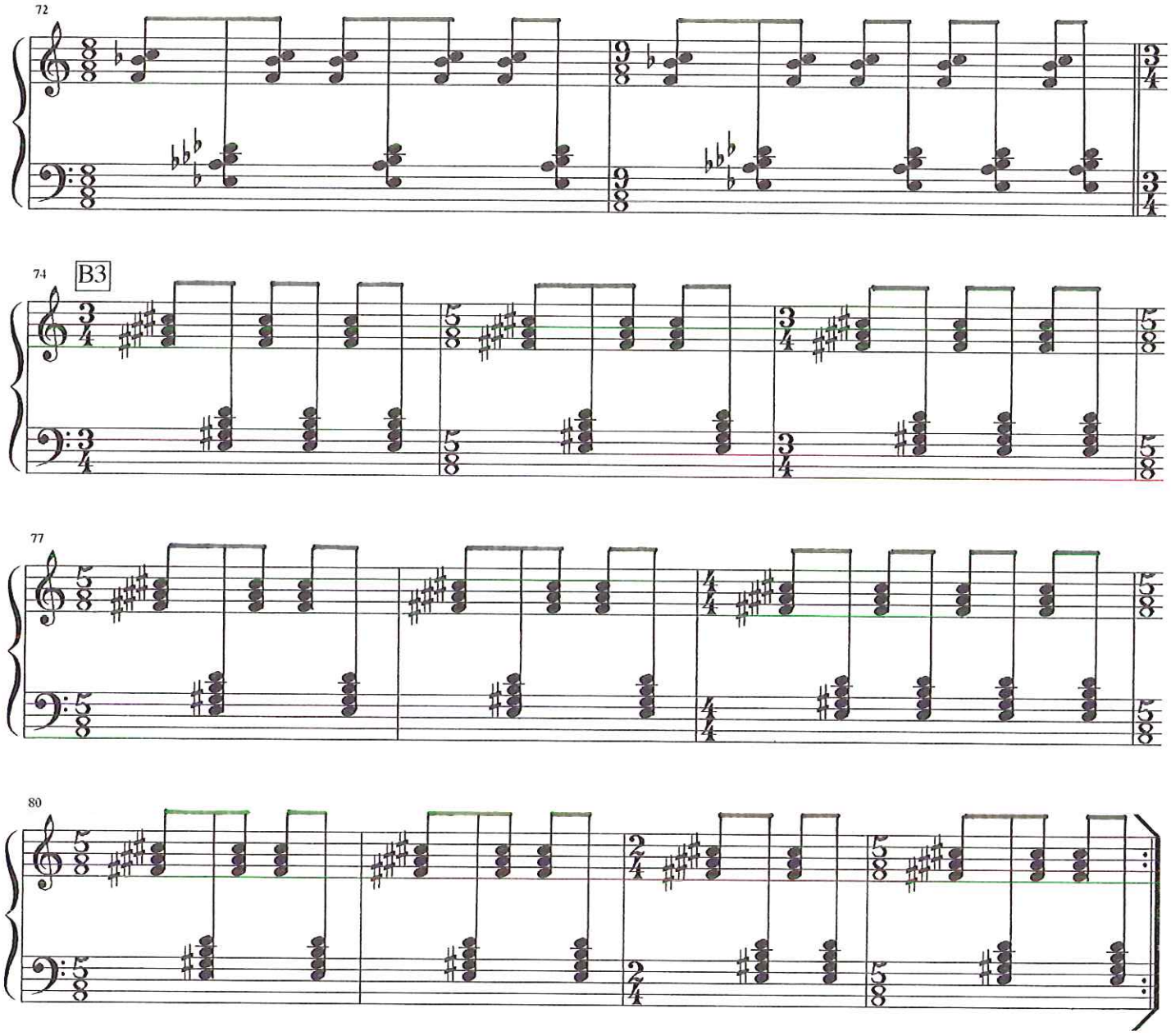
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