ST. FRANCIS SUITE

by Kevin McChesney

PERFORMANCE NOTES

I've found meaningful and life-changing inspiration in my spiritual walk through the simple and elegant writings of St. Francis of Assisi (1181 or 1182 – 1226). This friar and patron saint found a deep, lasting connection to God through living a life of simplicity and service. He exemplifies the highest ideals of joy in life and fitness for service through prayer, meditation, and an intelligent, rational view of life as the spiritual experience that it is intended to be. His principles are ideas and methods to live by and offer hope through finding a simple, powerful connection with God in our daily living.

In the "St. Francis Suite," I offer a series of scenes that reflect my emotions in responding to this astonishing spiritual mentor's extraordinary words. Just as the music can be related to not one but several of St. Francis' prayers, there are a number of possibilities for performance of this work through several versions:

Handbell Choir alone
Handbell Choir and Chamber Orchestra
Handbell Choir and Flute Choir
Classical Guitar, Handbell Ensemble, and Chamber Orchestra

Here is the list of original works that, in various configurations, make up the St. Francis Suite in its several incarnations:

Fountains of Light
Interlude #1 (“Interlude” for full handbell choir versions)
Interlude #2 (only included in the guitar and handbell ensemble version)
Make Me An Instrument Of Thy Peace
Psalm
Sonnet
Tempest
Toccata #1
Toccata #2
Toccata #3

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The most meaningful of St. Francis' prayers for me personally is widely-known and is titled simply "Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi." It reads (the line numbers are my addition to facilitate these performance notes, connecting line numbers to individual pieces on the following page):

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

(1) Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,
(2) where there is hatred, let me sow love;
(3) where there is injury, pardon;
(4) where there is doubt, faith;
(5) where there is despair, hope;
(6) where there is darkness, light;
(7) where there is sadness, joy.
(8) O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
(9) to be understood, as to understand;
(10) to be loved, as to love.
(11) For it is in giving that we receive,
(12) it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
(13) and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

These lines are sometimes added after line (3) -

(3a) where there is discord, harmony;
(3b) where there is error, truth;

The essential structure of the St. Francis Suite is six movements long, representing lines 2 through 7 of this prayer, but I offer options for extended presentations, adding line (1) and/or lines (3a) and (3b). The tone of each movement is expressive of my thoughts and feelings concerning these lines, and often the juxtaposition of the words (hatred/love, injury/pardon, etc.) are also represented by contrasts in the music.

The selections of the movements in this version of the Suite are detailed on the following page.

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Handbell Choir alone:

(2) **Toccata #1** – 3-7 octaves, Level IV (Jeffers Handbell Supply JHS9352)

(3) **Interlude** – 3-5 octaves, Level II (Sonology Music SM14-01)

(4) **Toccata #2** – 5-7 octaves, Level V (Jeffers Handbell Supply JHS9408)

(5) **Sonnet** – 3-5 octaves, Level III+ (Sonology Music SM14-02)

(6) **Fountains of Light** (originally titled "Fountains") – may be performed by full choir – 3-5 octaves, Level III+ (RingingWord Publications MRW8193) – or quartet/ensemble (STEP (the Solo To Ensemble Project) STEP14-08)

(7) **Toccata #3** – 4-7 octaves, Level V (Sonology Music SM14-03)

Additions for extended version:

(1) **Make Me An Instrument Of Thy Peace** – 3-5 octaves, Level II+ (Jeffers Handbell Supply JHS9296)

(3a) **Tempest** – 4-7 octaves, Level VI (Jeffers Handbell Supply JHS9257)

(3b) **Psalm** – 3-5 octaves, Level III (Jeffers Handbell Supply JHS9332)

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Following are two more texts that the St. Francis Suite may be based on. I've listed the titles that match the texts' individual lines after each line.

The Canticle of the Sun
by Francis of Assisi

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord! All praise is yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing. To you, alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and you give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness. (Toccata #1)

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in the heavens you have made them, precious and beautiful. (Interlude #1)

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which you give your creatures sustenance. (Tempest)

Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure. (Fountains of Light)

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom you brighten the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong. (Toccata #2)

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs. (Sonnet)

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of you; through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, for by you, Most High, they will be crowned. (Psalm or Interlude #2)

Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them. (Toccata #3)

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with great humility.

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Prayer Before the Crucifix

"Most High, Glorious God, (Toccata #1)
enlighten the darkness of my mind, (Interlude #1)
give me right faith, (Toccata #2)
a firm hope and perfect charity, (Sonnet)
sense and knowledge (Fountains of Light)
so that I may always and in all things act according to Your Holy Will. Amen. (Toccata #3)

alternate wording –

Most High, Glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart,
and give me correct faith,
sure hope and perfect charity,
with understanding and knowledge, Lord,
so that I may fulfill your holy and true command,
Amen.

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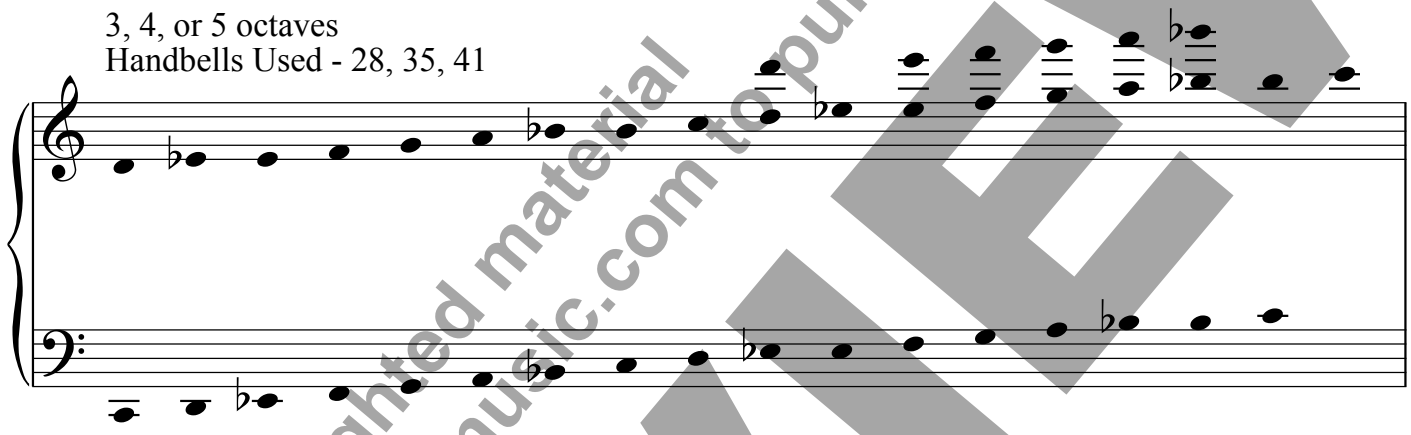
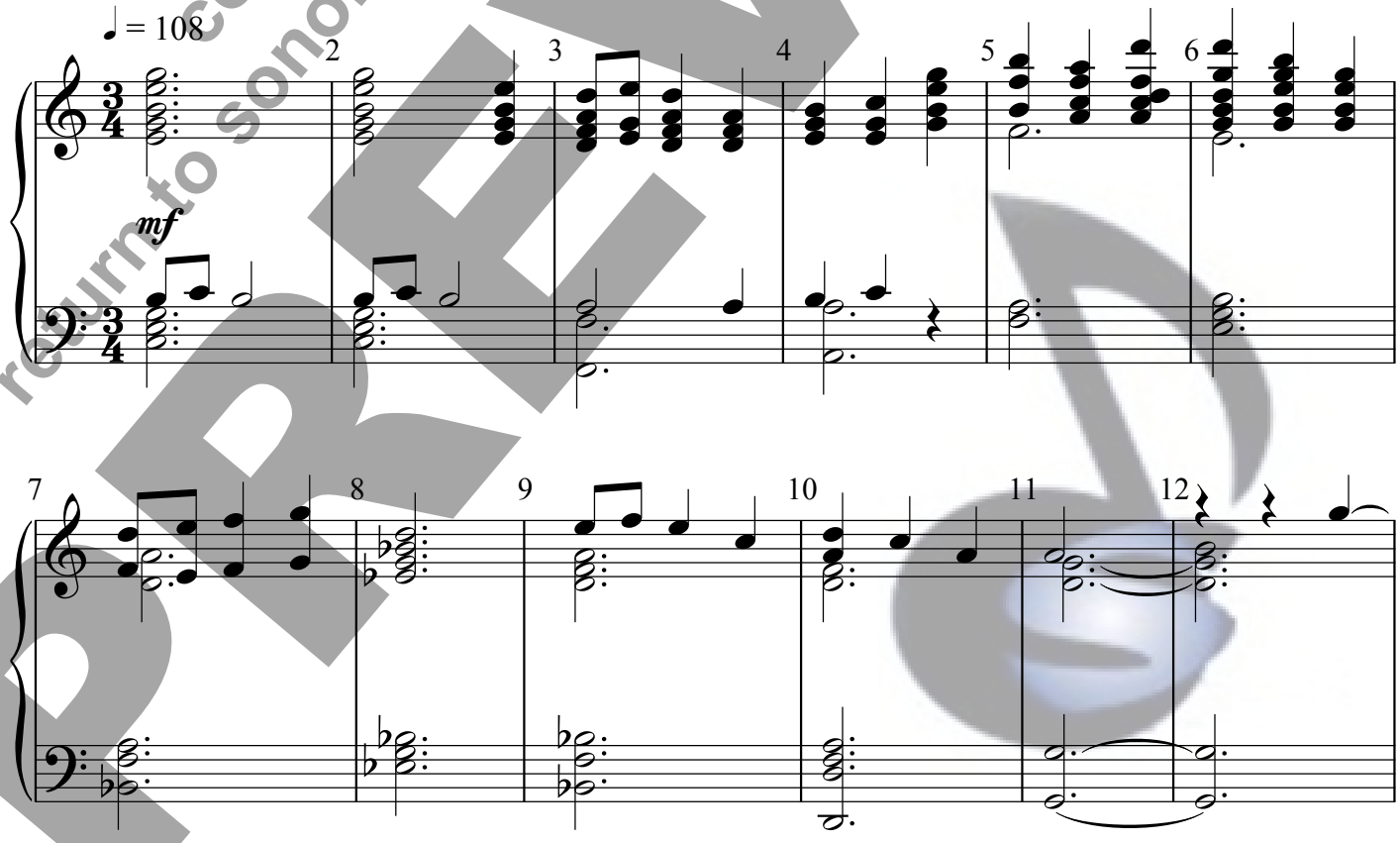
Interlude

from the "St. Francis Suite"
3-5 Octaves
Level II

Kevin McChesney



3 octave choirs omit notes in ( ).



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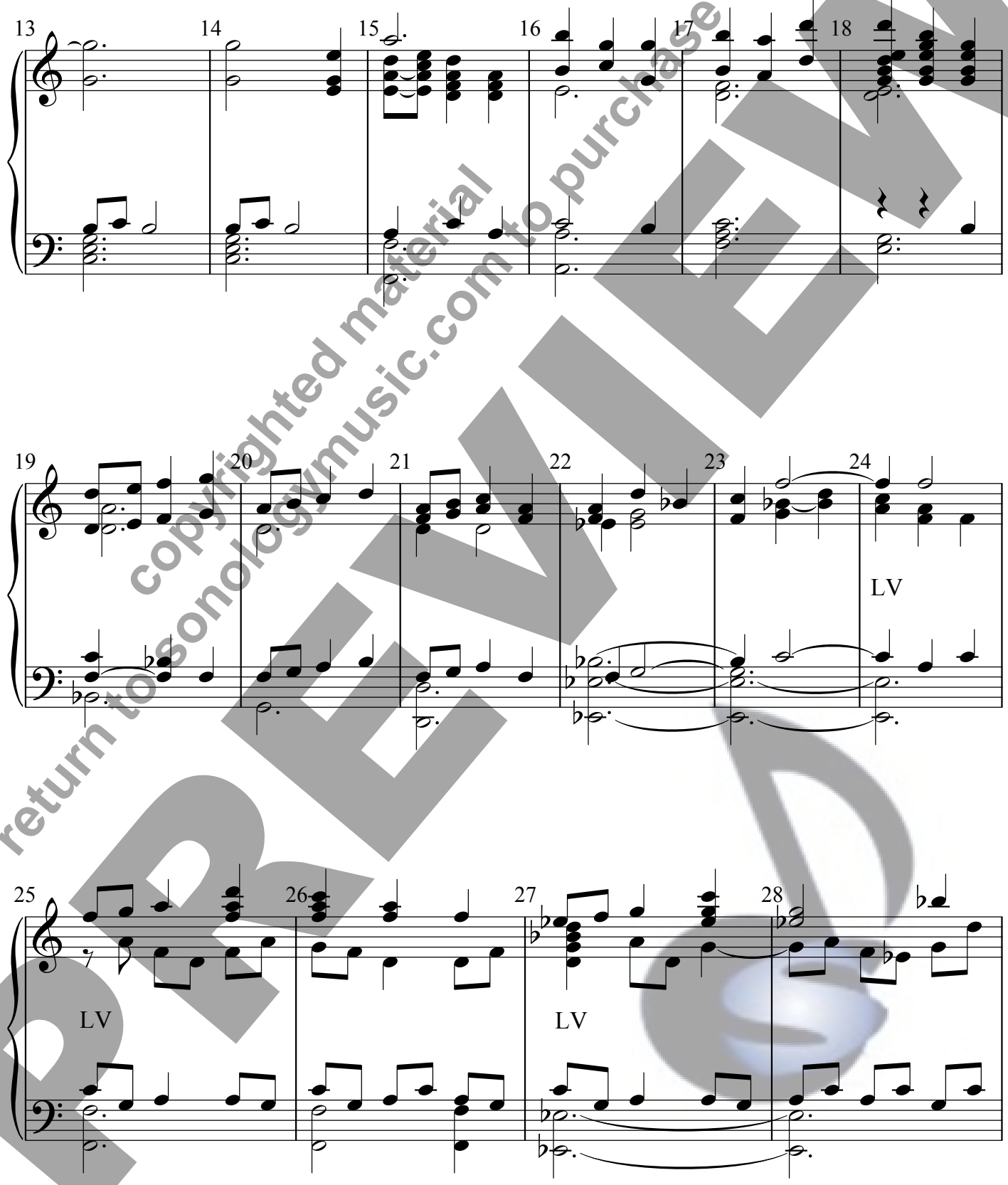

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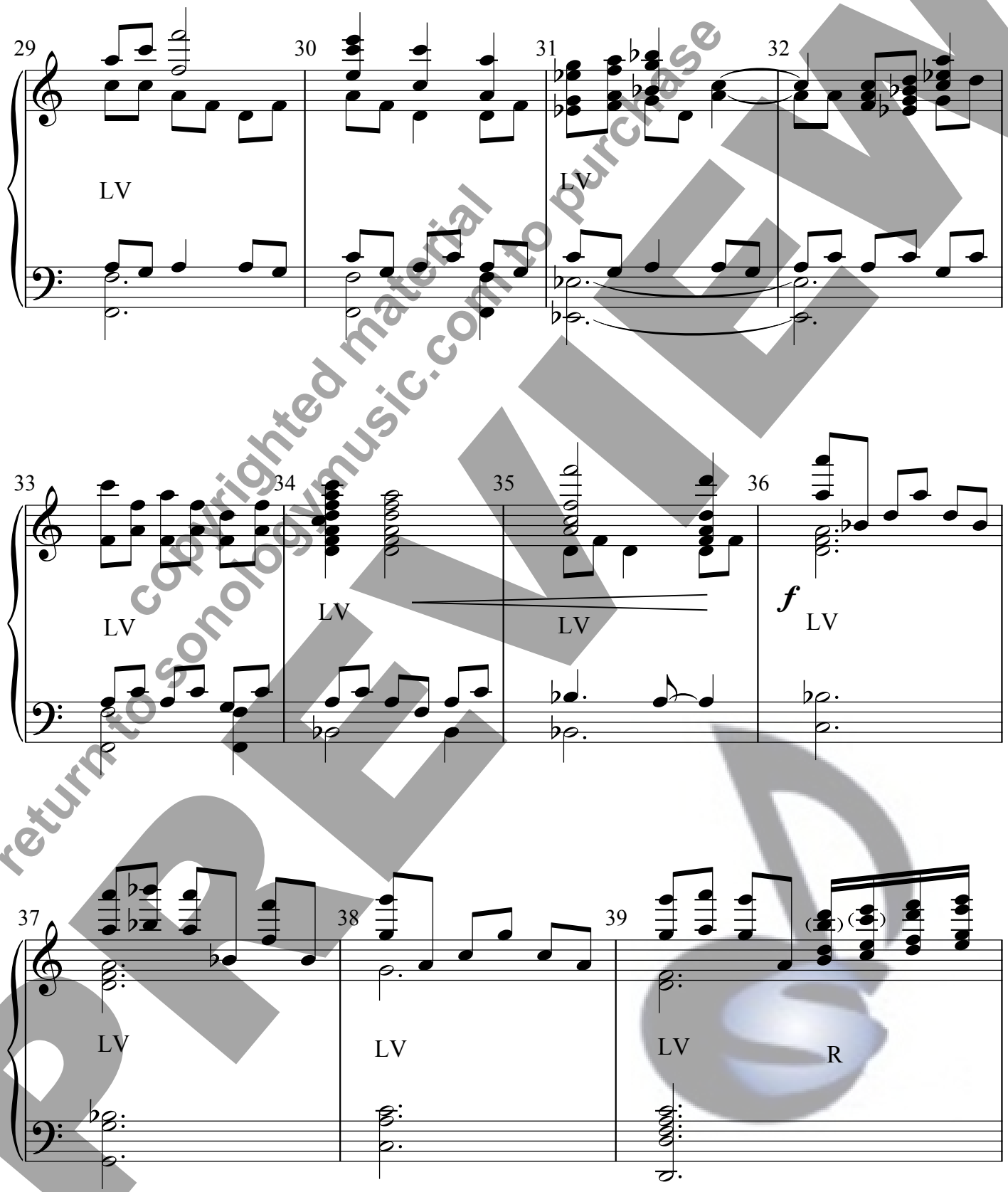

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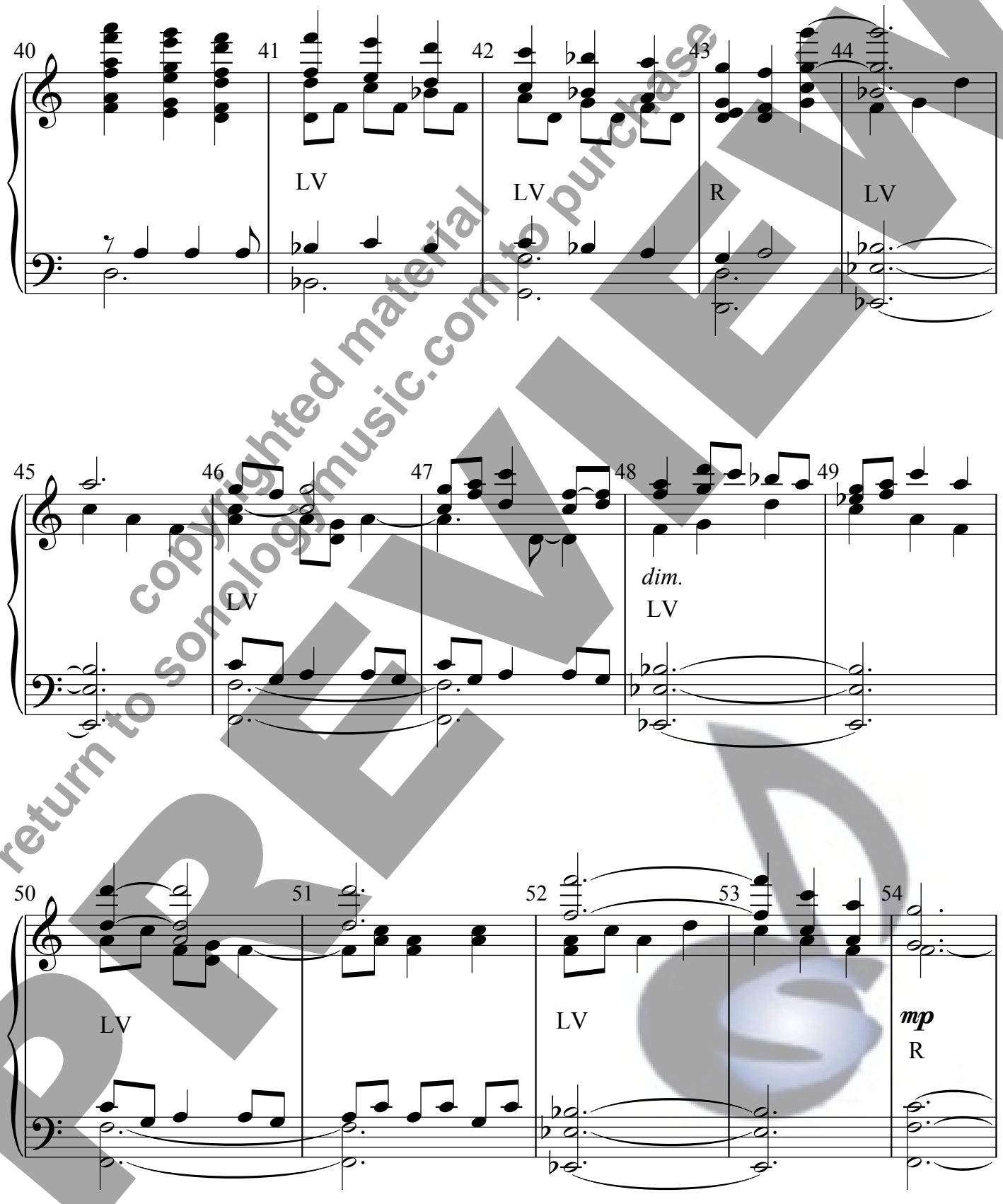

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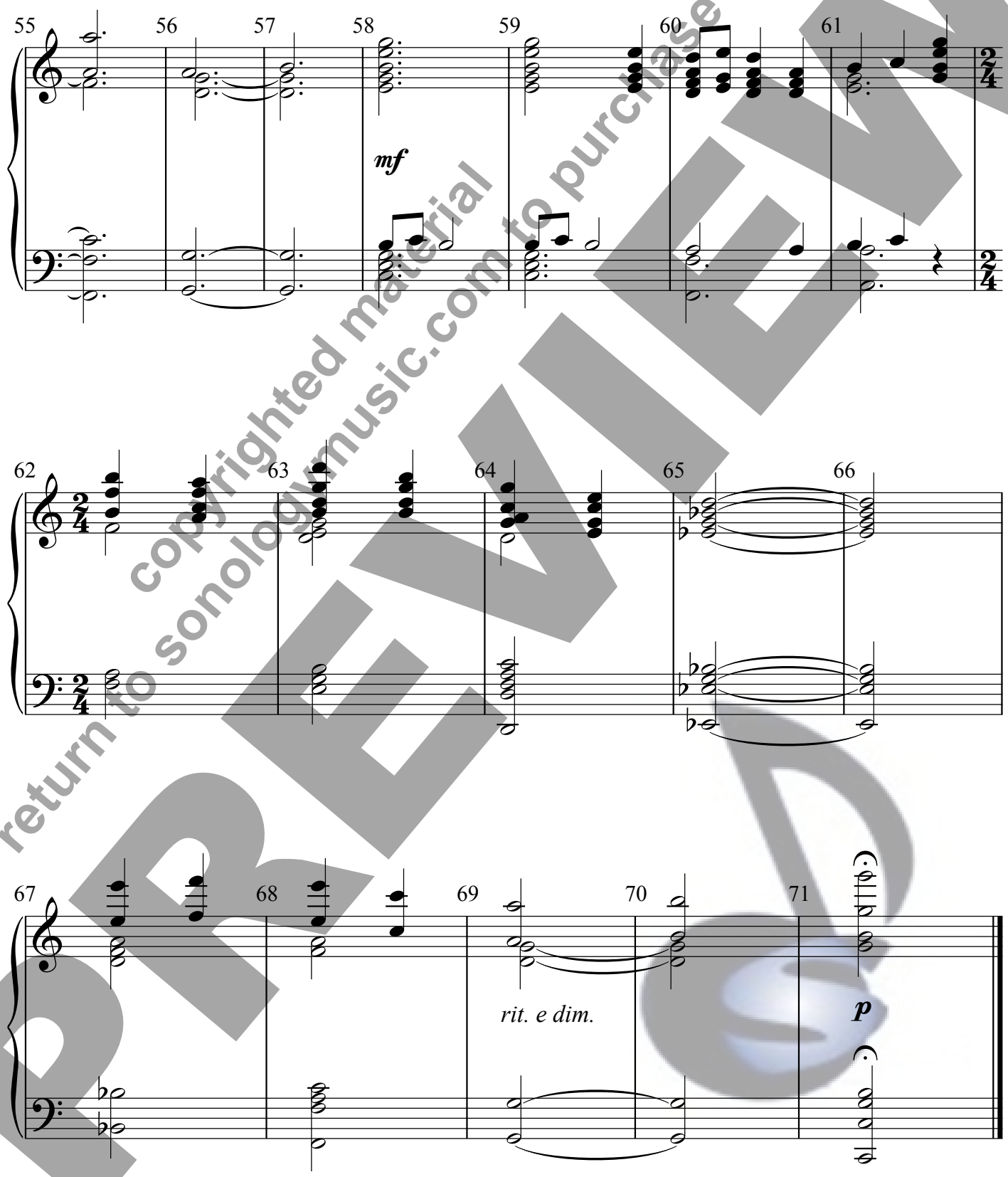

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