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Edexcel A Level Syllabus – Analysis

Sweelinck: Pavana Lachrimae

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Jan Pieterzoon Sweelinck (1562-1621).

Biographical notes:

Born in the Netherlands, where he remained all his life, Sweelinck became one of the most influential keyboard and vocal composers of his generation. He was appointed to replace his father as organist of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, a post to which his son succeeded held on Sweelinck's death. In addition, his paternal grandfather and uncles were organists; thus, a Sweelinck musical dynasty, comparable with that of the Bach or Couperin families, held the post uninterrupted from 1564 through to 1652. During his life, Sweelinck never left the low countries, or went away from Amsterdam for more than a few days at a time, when his absences were almost exclusively in conjunction with his position at the Oude Kerk. The longest journey he made was in 1604 to Antwerp, where he purchased a harpsichord from the firm of Ruckers. He died in 1621, after 44 years service to the church, and was survived by six children, only one of whom was a musician. Apart from a few pieces for lute, almost all of Sweelinck's instrumental output is for keyboard and these display a thorough knowledge of mainstream musical styles prevalent at the time. In particular, his music is similar to that of the English virginalist school, in particular the music of Peter Philips and John Bull, both of who were amongst his acquaintances.

1. Stylistic characteristics.

Style is marked by 2 different techniques:

i. Contrapuntal elaboration of thematic material
ii. Use of idiomatic figuration

As is the case with other composers, Sweelinck's counterpoint is rooted in 16th-century vocal genres such as the motet or the madrigal. Devices found in Sweelinck's own vocal works, such as free imitation, strict imitation, imitation by augmentation or diminution or the combination of theme and countersubjects written in invertible counterpoint etc., also appear in his instrumental music. There is an element of melodic liberty, perhaps because of the absence of text, alongside frequently-occurring sequential passagework.

Unlike his counterpoint, Sweelinck's figuration is of a purely instrumental origin, so its provenance is less easy to determine. There is an evident debt to the English virginalist school that is found in those works based on English models in particular. There is also the influence of Spanish and Italian composers (Antonio de Cabezon visited the Low Counties twice). However, the English influence appears to be the most important. He chose to adopt aspects of the English style, which can be seen clearly in contrast to his innate musical personality. It is not surprising therefore, that Sweelinck modelled some of his works on specific English models. Of importance to this are the Paduana Lachrimae and the Pavan Phillipi.

2. Dance Settings

Pavana (Paduana) Lachrimae is a colorirt, that is a interpolation of, rather than a composition based on, Dowland's song 'Flow my teares' (see Extract 33). Consisting mainly of a reworking of each verse of the Dowland song, the genre is not restricted to Sweelinck alone; keyboard music had not, by the early 17th century, found an autonomous voice. Thus, vocal and instrumental models were used as the basis of keyboard composition much in the same way that keyboard transcriptions of orchestral music was a common phenomenon during the 19th century.

The opening employs a modicum of restraint, quoting Dowland's melody whereas the second, although keeping to the harmonic framework of the verse, is to all intents and purposes a variation employing Sweelinck's usual display of figuration that only alludes always to the melodic line of the Dowland model, using the devices of free melodic counterpoint and imitation. Rather than being separate from the text, ornaments are integral and an important aspect of the texture.

The following outlines the harmonic scheme for both the Dowland original and the Sweelinck 'variant'.

bar	***Dowland 1&2***	**Sweelinck verse 1 & 2**		***Dowland 3 & 4***	**Sweelinck verse 3 & 4**		***Dowland 5 & 6***	**Sweelinck verse 5 & 6**	
1	a	a	a	C	C	C	E	E	E
2	a	a	a	C	a/C	C	E	E	E
3	F	F	F	d	d7	d/G	E	E/a	E/a
4	E	E	E	C	C/E	C/e	E	E	E
5	a	a	a	a/E	C/a/E	a/E	a	a	a
6	C	C	C	d/A	a/d/C#dim	a/d/A	G/C/d/E	G/C/F/d	G/C/F/d
7	d	b/d7/b7	d	d	d	d	C/e	E	E
8	E	E	E	F	F	F	a	C/G	C/G
9	a	a/F#dim	a	a	a	a	G/E	C/a	C/a
10	G/E	G/E	G/E	c	C/G	C/G	a	E	E
11	d	d	d	G/d	G/d	G/d	G	a/C	a/C
12	E/C	E/C	E/C	d	d	d	E/C	G/F/d	G/F/d
13	d	b/d7/b7	b/d	a/E	a/E	a/E	d/b	E/C	E/C
14	E	E	E	a/d	d	a/d	E	b/d/b/d	b/d/b/d
15	A	A	A	E	E	E	A	E	E
16	A	A	A	E	E	E	A	A	A
17								A	A

Description

Section 1 (Flow my teares). A full statement of the theme that is highly decorated. The approach is polyphonic and might as well be for a consort of viols as a keyboard. This is a literal reworking of the Dowland the melody is in the soprano line.

Section 2. (Downe vain lights). Based on the harmonies of the theme but melodically there are differences. Diminutions of the melody in quavers and semiquavers are treated imitatively, alternating between parts. Fragments of the melodic line are also included.

Section 3 (Never may my woes). Again a more polyphonic approach, based on the third verse of the song. Here, the melodic writing is different, but it still quotes the Dowland. Note the manner in which Sweelinck uses figuration to modulate from d minor mode to C major mode, an elaboration of Dowland's original chordal approach.

Section 4 (From the highest spire). A variation of the fourth verse of the song, and therefore of the previous section. Entries are imitative and note how the alto entry in bar 50 is altered tonally to allow its entry in C major. The bass diminutions are atypical of Sweelinck's style, retrospective and reminiscent of the bass diminutions of other composers such as Dalla Casa, etc., popular on the Continent during the last days of the Renaissance. Of interest is the canonic dovetailing that precedes the final elaborate bars of free figurational writing before the E major cadence.

Section 5 (Hark you shadows). This and the following section are the only places where Sweelinck moves away from the original harmonic scheme. He also increases the section's length by one bar to incorporate an extended cadence. Again the soprano alludes to the original but this is soon lost to an imitative section that reiterates briefly the melody of bar 12 before continuing.

Section 6 (Hark you shadows). This is a variation on the previous section and is harmonically the same. Again the figuration alludes to Dowland's melodic line but is presented in a virtuosic display that is typical of variation sets of the early baroque.

Extension - Pavana Philipi (see attached manuscript)

Another transformation of an existing composition, turning it into a composition of his own. Peter Philips (1561-1628), on whose work the piece is based, was an English composer and organist who fled England for the continent due to him being a Roman Catholic. He visited Sweelinck in Amsterdam in 1593.

This piece is different from the Paduana Lachrimae in that Sweelinck is working from an instrumental rather than vocal model, and as a restatement the style is very different - Philips writing is idiomatic for the virginals, that is a melody with chordal support whereas Sweelinck reshapes his piece into a strict, 4-part contrapuntal setting, allowing for its performance on any keyboard instrument. Sweelinck retains the traditional AA' BB' CC' structure, adding more elaborate divisions for the repeats A' B' and C'. After the

initial interpolation, Sweelinck adds a second, more ornamented version (that still follows the scheme of the original but repeated more elaborately) in the manner of a double (to use the French nomenclature).

Other Genres

3. Fantasias

The classification of keyboard music into genres might appear to be an easy task and in the case of dance movements, underlying rhythmic characteristics ad proportional relationships allow for such recognition. Fugal types are not easy to classify, however, since in early 16th-century music, the nomenclature of 'fugue' does not conform to its loose practice.

A polyphonic imitative genre is generally referred to as a ricercar, whereas monothematic pieces of the same kind are more often called fantasias. We have seen how the term applies to English models, that is a mixture (either separately or in combination) of chordal, scalic and contrapuntal passagework through the Byrd examples of last week. In Sweelinck's music, however, the term 'fantasia' takes on a new distinction since he synthesises the two sub-genres of monothematic and polythematic writing.

Early examples of polythematic, motet-like ricercars are those of Giovanni Cavazzoni (1543); the first monothematic piece is found in Jacob Bus's Ricercari … da cantare e sonare (1547). Composers of the second half of the 16th-century cultivated these types alongside each other, but since most were published posthumously, it is possible to suggest an earlier provenance. Therefore chronology is difficult to establish.

Andrea Gabrieli appears to have been the first to establish the use of a countersubject to a principal ricercar theme, developing this (to an extent) often by inversion.

Sweelinck may have known Gabrieli's organ works since they were published between 1560 and 1575. Similarly, he must have known the works of some of his English contemporaries through his acquaintance with Bull and Philips.

Sweelinck's fantasias are built on a single theme that remains unchanged throughout a work, except for proportional treatment and the occasional inversion. Of the eleven authenticated works, eight display similar characteristics, namely

> [i] the application of various countersubjects to the theme, ranging in number from 3 to 12.
> [ii] the presentation of the theme with extensive figurational passages which may conceal motifs from previously presented melodic material.
> [iii] the overall form is in 3 sections with proportions that usually correspond to the ratio of 2:1:1 (there are exceptions). (This tripartite format is usually revealed through analysis rather than performance.)

An abstract definition may be given as

Section 1

Imitative exposition of the theme (T) combined with the primary countersubject (CS1) during the second entry and possibly another one (CS2) during the third entry. Theme and countersubjects are written in invertible counterpoint. In a second fugal exposition the theme is combined with a new countersubject, etc. One exposition treats the theme in stretto.

Section 2

The theme is exposed in two-fold augmentation and set against a new countersubject, a figurational melody or both. This may be followed by a similar procedure applied to the theme in four-fold augmentation. Between expositions there is at least one episode where a new countersubject is treated in stretto before being joined to the theme.

Section 3

The theme appears in two-fold diminution, as a fugal exposition or in stretto. The elaboration of the theme in halved note-values is followed by its four-fold and possibly 8-fold diminution. In the last case the theme merges rhythmically with the figuration that prevails in the previous section, thus assuming the character of a toccata. No new countersubjects are applied to the theme, but towards the end this might appear in its original form.

All 8 fantasias have their own characteristics, but this scheme is applicable to any of them.

Chromatic Fantasia - principal theme of a descending scale of 5 semitones covering a fourth and preceded by a canzona-like dactylic presentation of its initial note. This occurs no less than 50 times integrally and 5 times incompletely, that is with 2 or more semitones missing. There is not one literal repeat of the theme, this is combined with seven countersubjects, four of which are maintained for 51, 46, 22 and 25 bars respectively.

4. Echo fantasias

Briefly - 4 echo fantasias that are loosely related to the monothematic fantasia, but here the resemblance goes no further than the division into three sections:

The tripartite delineation is more marked here than in the fugal fantasias, sections end on cadences without melodic overlap - there is a lack theme as a unifying technique.

> i. Predominantly polyphonic, consisting of several consecutive melodies that are treated imitatively or canonically or in two or more voices.

Occasionally a free voice that imitates the melody is added to the texture. Towards the end, short motifs, repeated at various intervals, announce the succeeding echo.
ii. Motifs are answered by echoes, either at pitch or an octave lower. Harmonic changes occur on the last note of the echo.
iii. Toccata-like and includes the use of motifs repeated at the lower octave or at other intervals.

5. Toccatas

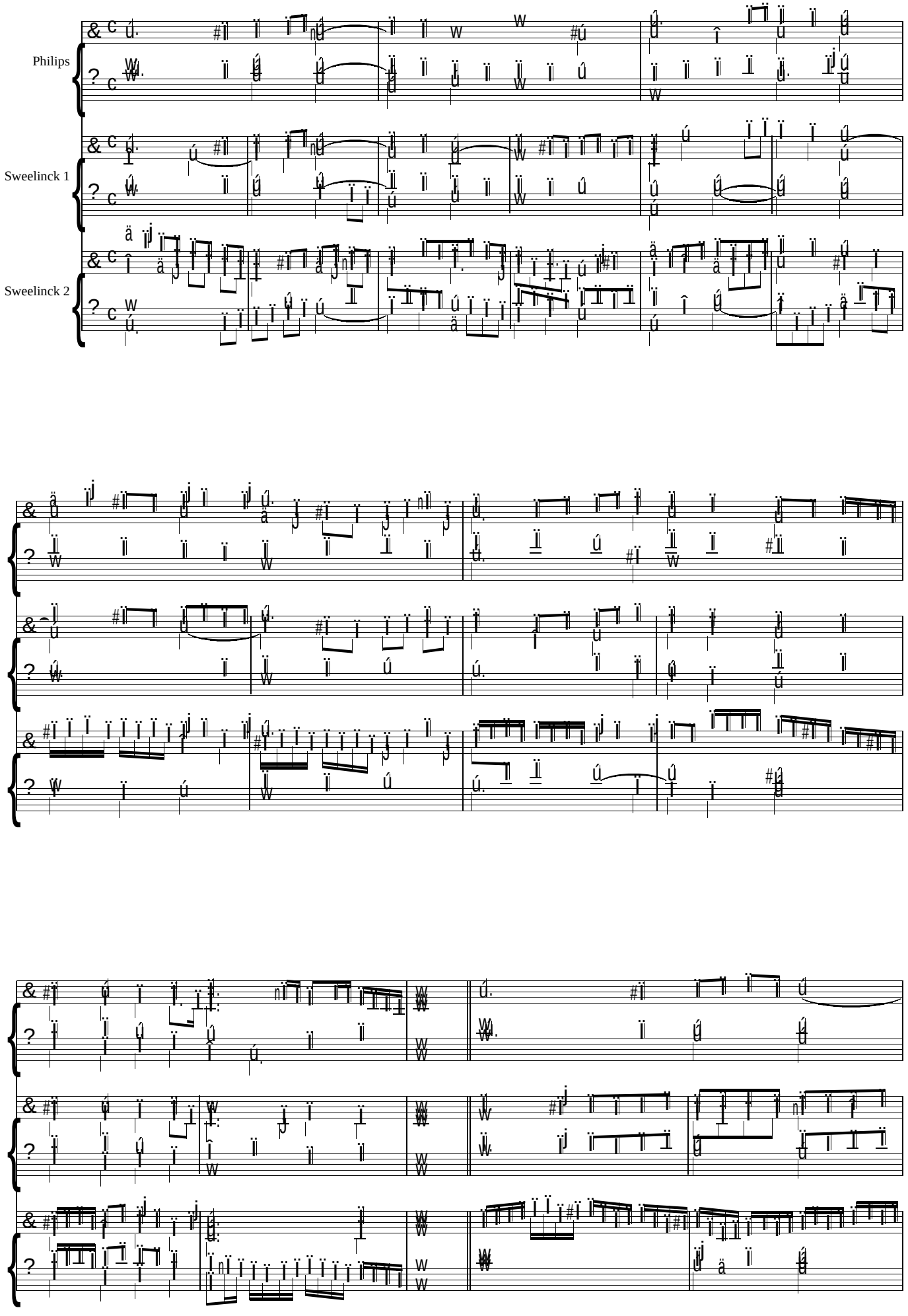
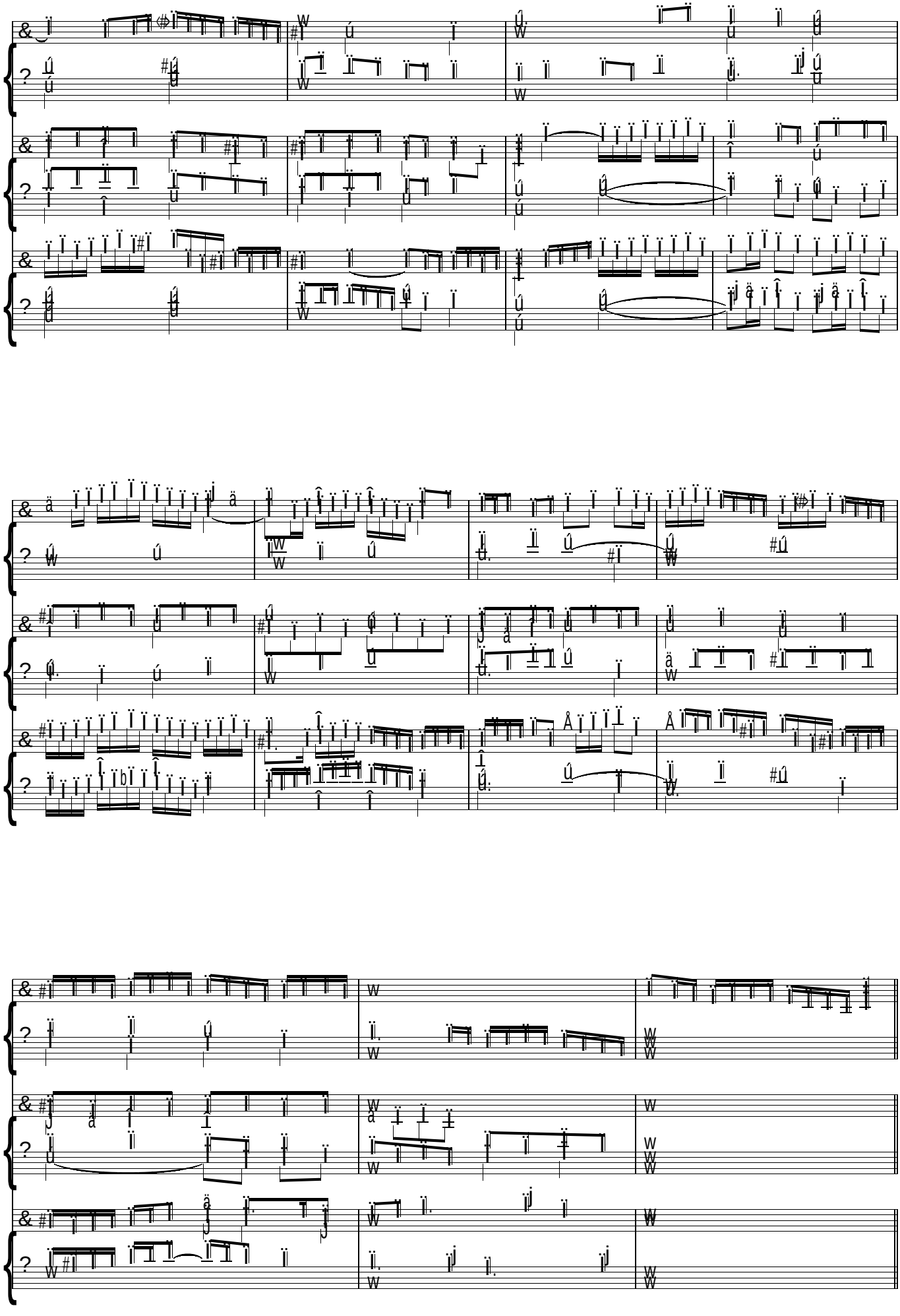
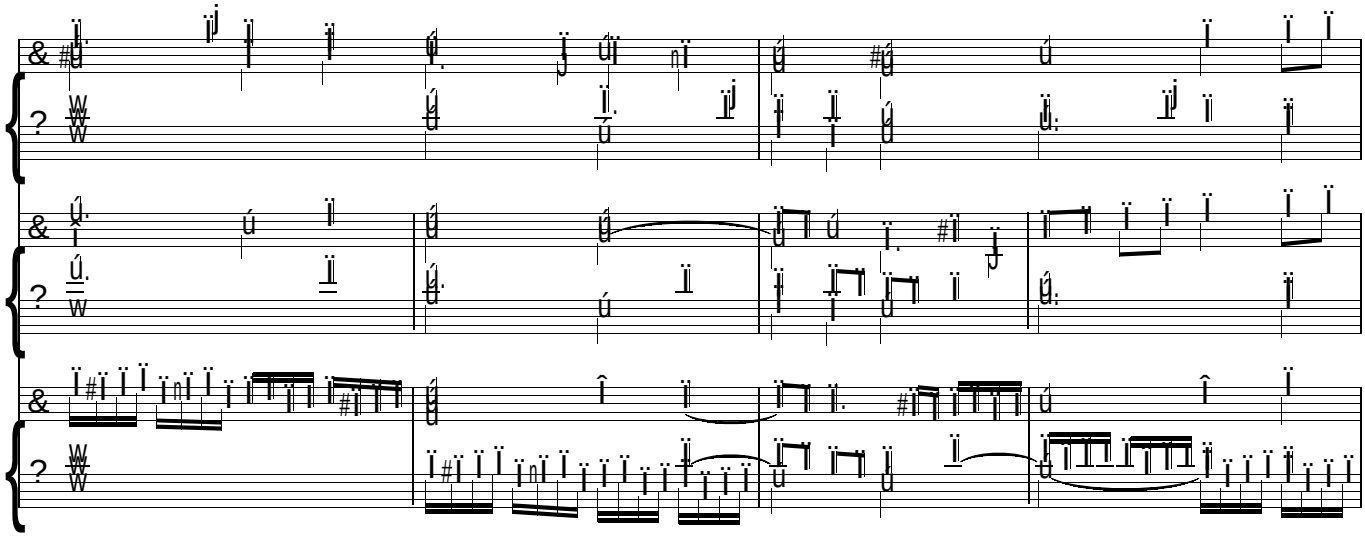
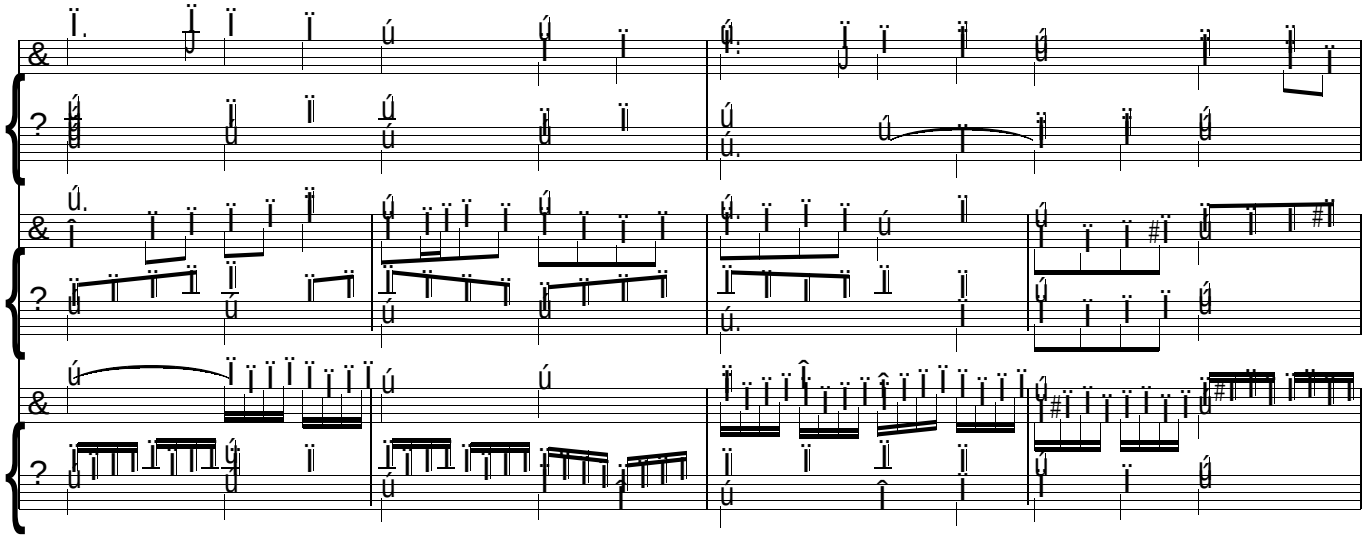
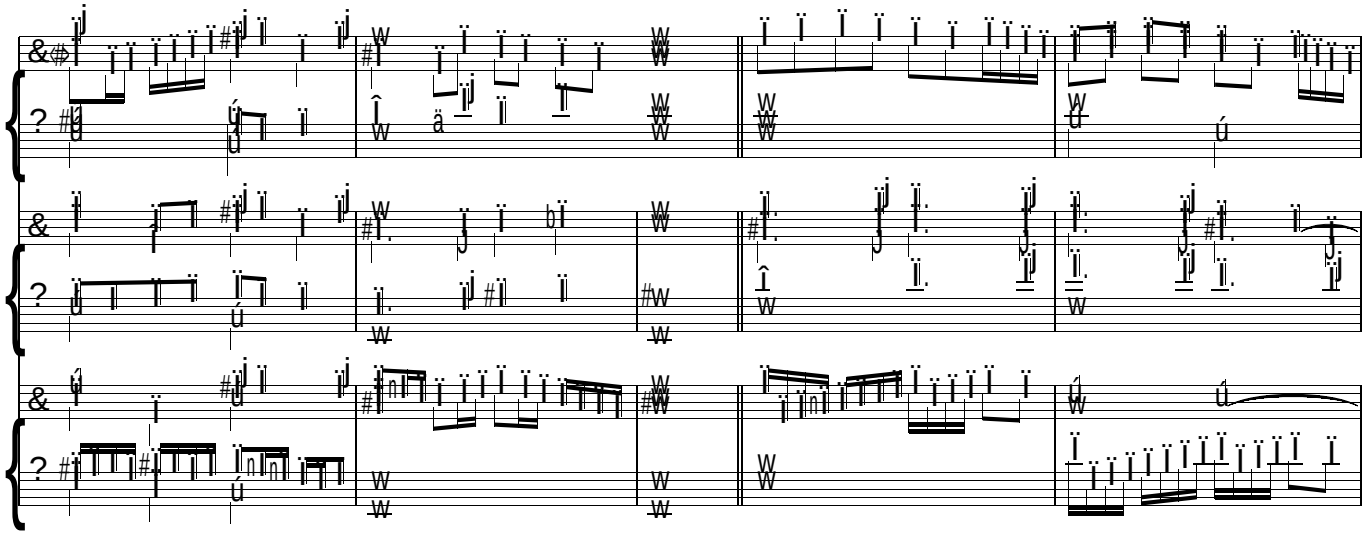
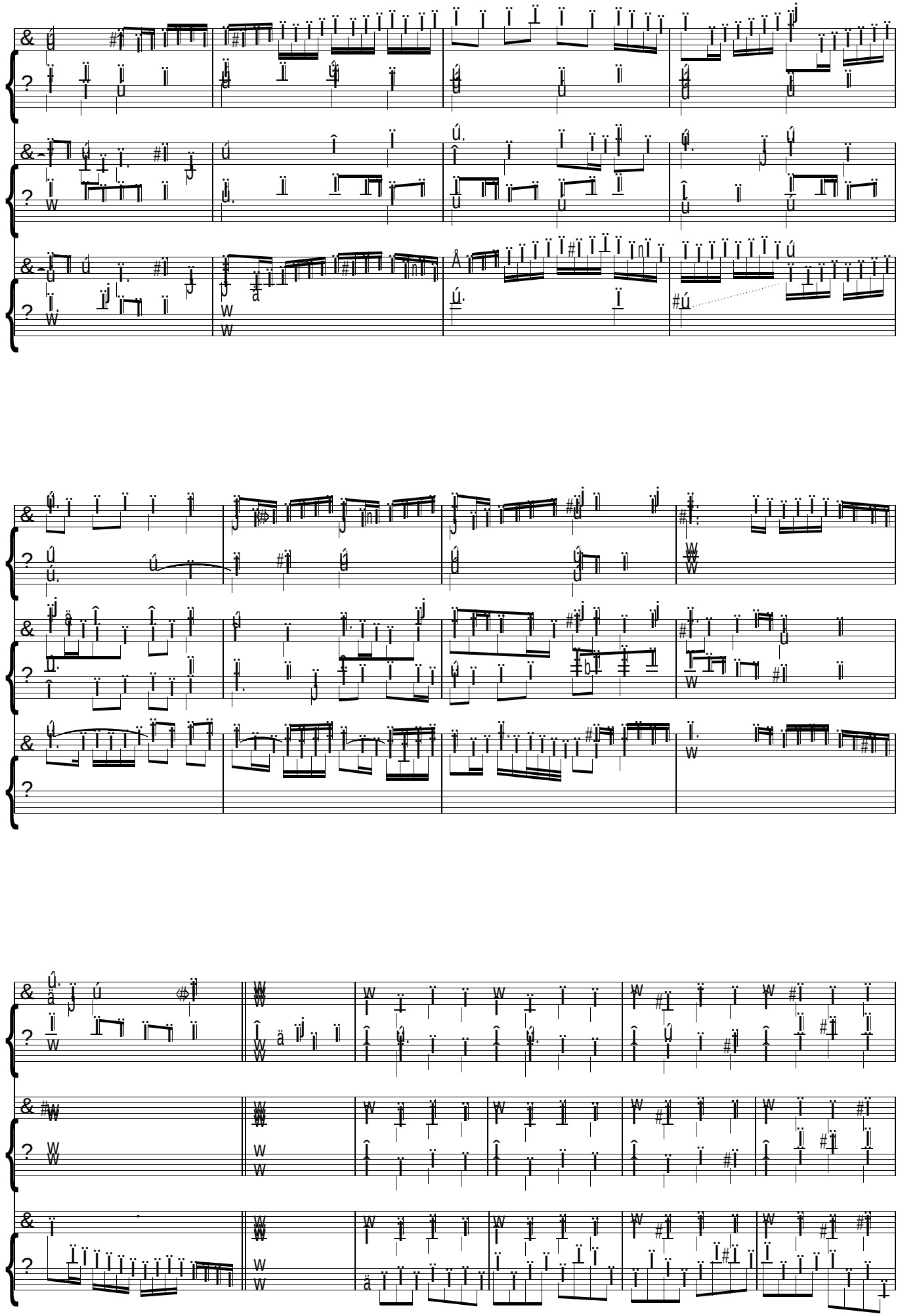
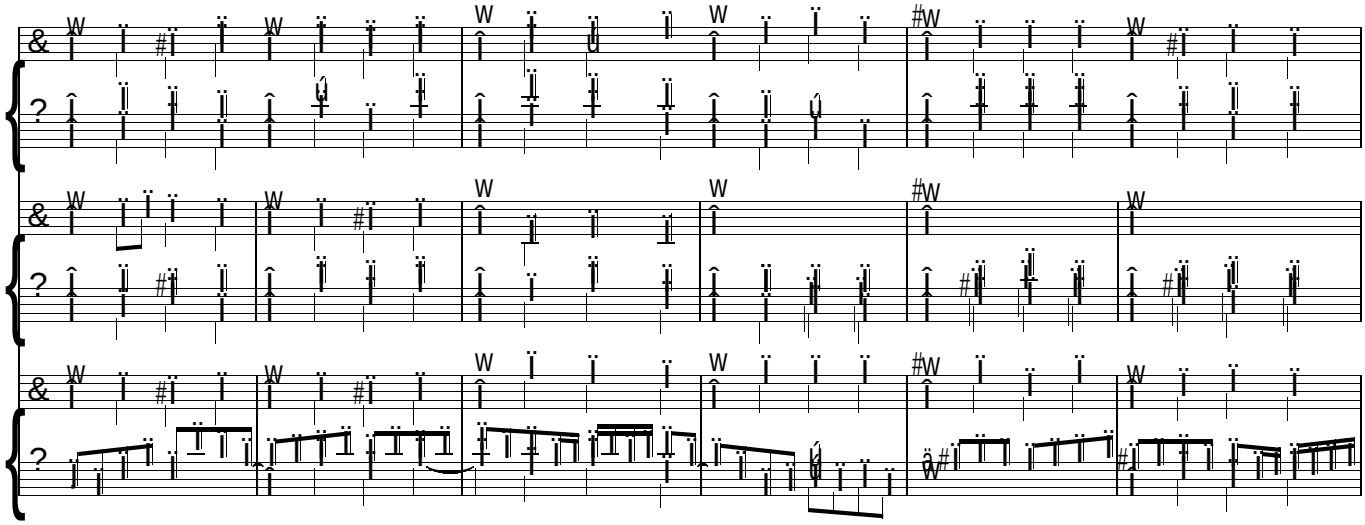
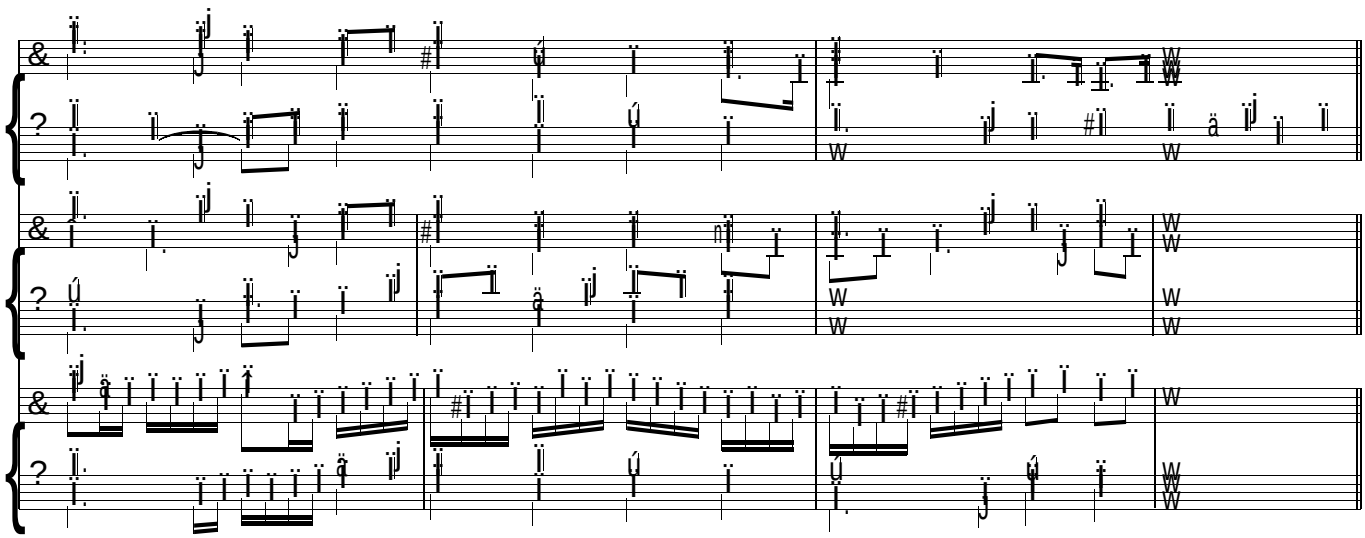
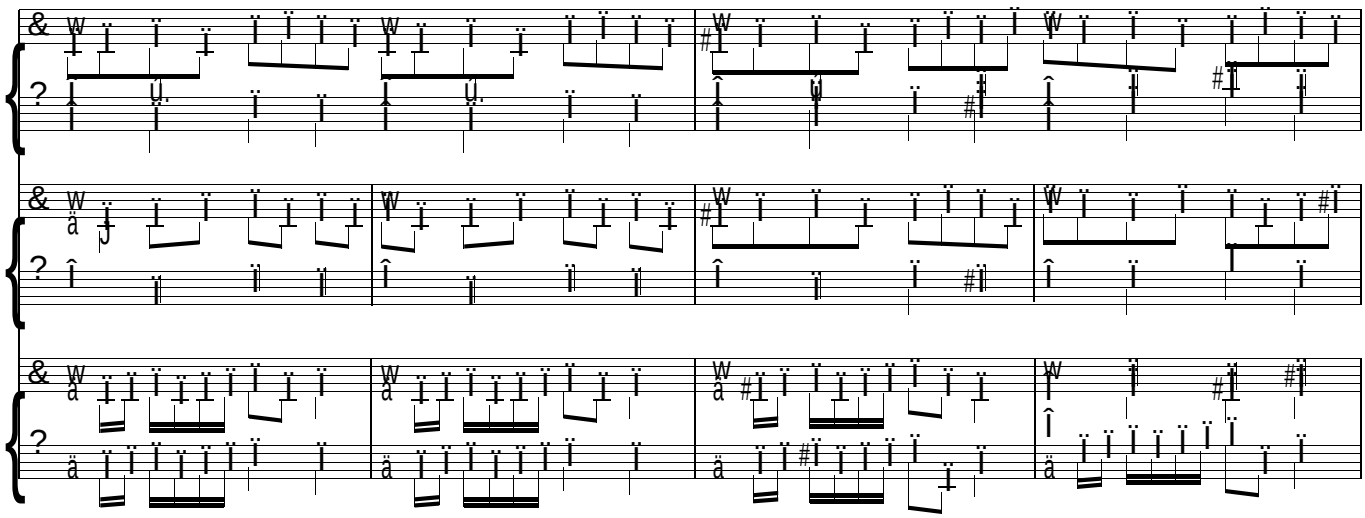
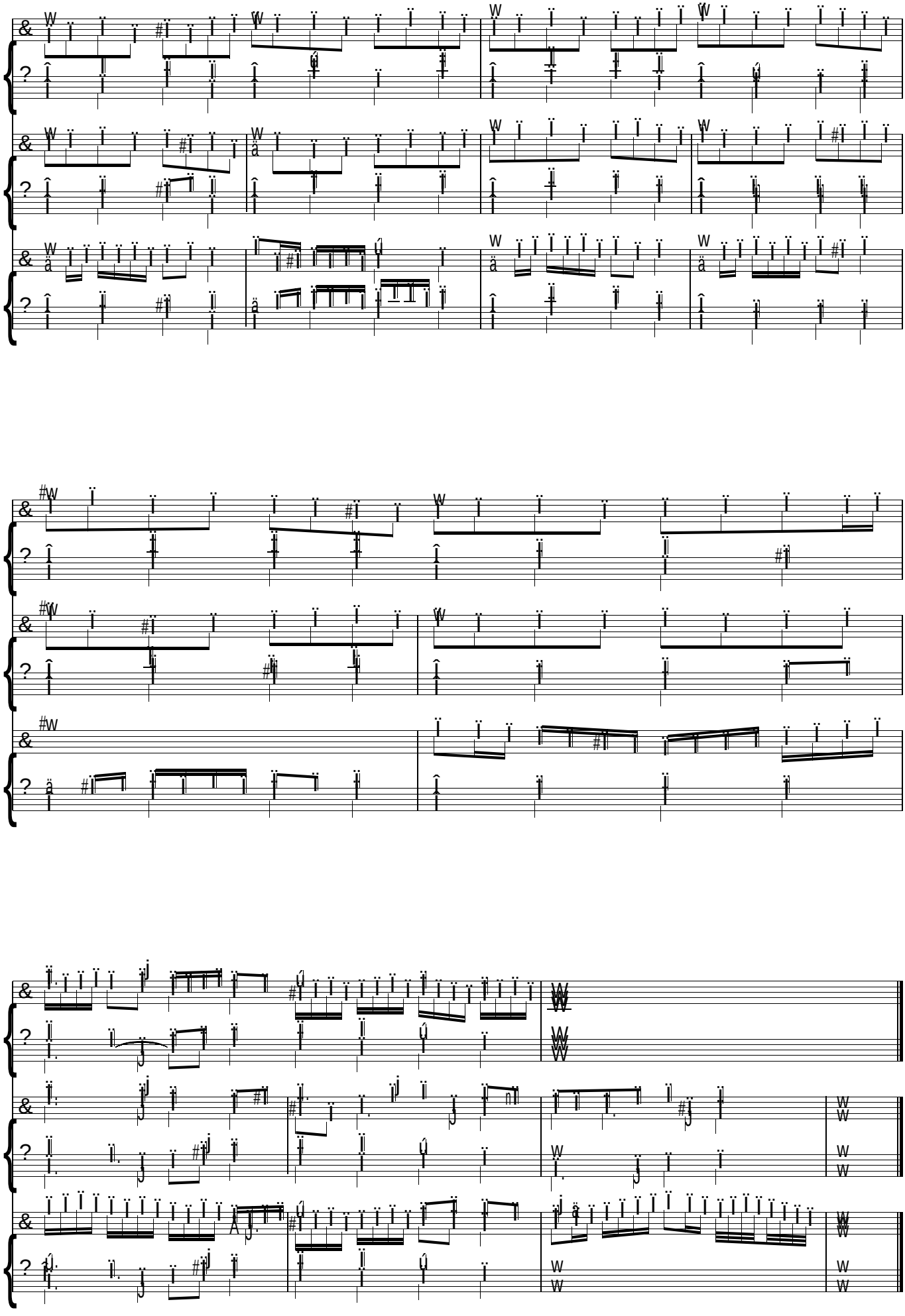
Quite a few of Sweelinck's keyboard works were intended as studies for his pupils - for example, the *Praeludium* shows the employment of the harmonic or contrapuntal suspension. This device occurs no less than 92 times in 95 bars. The 12 toccatas belong to a distinct genre that serve the technical ends of keyboard playing in a calculated display of virtuosic patterns such as scales, triadic motifs, trills and quickly repeated notes. These often alternate between the right and the left hand. Indications of fingering display the pedagogical aspects of the pieces. Similarly, there are a few easy toccatas that suggest their intention was for amateurs.

No specific model can be traced, although they clearly show the influences of the Venetian organists such as Andrea Gabrieli (but not Merulo, whose style foreshadows Frescobaldi) whose style is rationally organised in a rather staid and unrelenting manner. Instead of mechanical scales, Sweelinck employs elaborate figuration and distinct motivic development that emanates from preceding material and treats these sequentially. Like the fantasias, the toccatas have an inner organisation, something that is lost in performance where a feeling of spontaneity prevails.

The opening bars are chordal, but contain hidden imitations and intermediate fugal ricercar-like sections occur in three of the works. They are based on variants of a single theme and are treated in stretto.

Sweelinck employs various devices to enhance continuity, including the 'reverberation' of the ricercar theme during the initial bars of a subsequent virtuoso section; the opposite procedure, with the figuration already beginning during the final cadence of the ricercar section.

Typical of the style is the fanfare treatment of motifs; the use of intervals of, for instance a fifth, presented in various ways, and melodic elements that conflict with the metre.

Relationships between consecutive melodic elements also occurs that give the toccata a unified feel and coherent approach.

Pavana Philipi