Playing the Church Organ

SAMPLE

Turning Pianists into Organists

✦ Noel Jones, AAGO ✦

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Once upon a time,
the organ was very difficult to master.
Today, things are quite different.

To play the organ you had to know and understand how to set the stops, the voices, so that they sounded good together.

Prior to 1970, very few organs had special buttons, called pistons, that you could push to play preset sounds.

My grandparents had a house with a coal furnace in the basement.
It needed to be tended each night so that it would burn all night,
then in the morning, it had to be stoked with coal to get through the day,
and then tended that evening for the next night's heat.

Today that house has an electric furnace.
You set the thermostat and walk away.
The difficulty has been removed.

Today, organs built since 1970 almost always have stop settings that may be preset.
The difficulty has been removed.

This eliminated the main hurdle to beginners, knowing what voices to choose.

In this book we help you learn to choose stops, learn to set pistons, and give you music to play on them.

You already know how to play a keyboard.

Today, the rest is easy.

Noel Jones, AAGO

PS: AS far as playing the pedals, you'll be surprised to find out that many people use them because it make playing easier. But you'll be even more surprised that you do not have to play the pedals unless you want to.

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Organ Music

Catholic Organist's Quarterly Series

Hymns

A Catholic Organist's Guide to Playing Hymns

A Catholic Organist's Book of Hymns

Last Page

Setting the stops for this book on your organ.

Play the piano.

Play this piece on the piano.

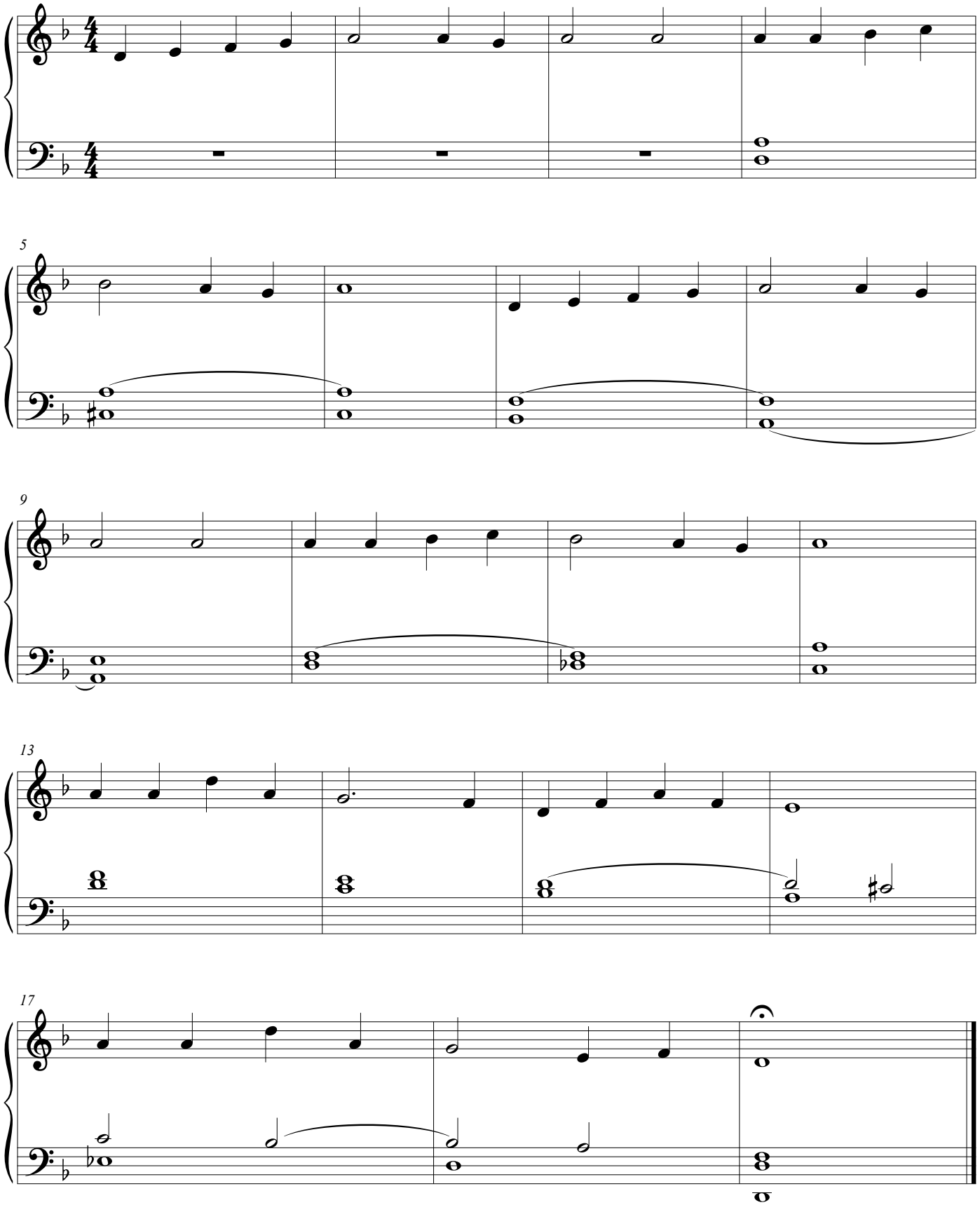
Become familiar with it.

Then we will explore playing it on the organ.

Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century



Play the organ, step one.

But don't turn it on yet.

Playing the organ without it being turned on is often taught in France.

Today this will introduce you to the touch of the organ you are going to play.

Play both hands on the lower keyboard, then move the right hand to the upper and play, then swap left and right and play, then play with both hands on the upper.

LEFT HAND	RIGHT HAND
Lower	Lower
Lower	Upper
Upper	Lower
Upper	Upper

One of the very good things about this is that you get to feel when both hands are working together.

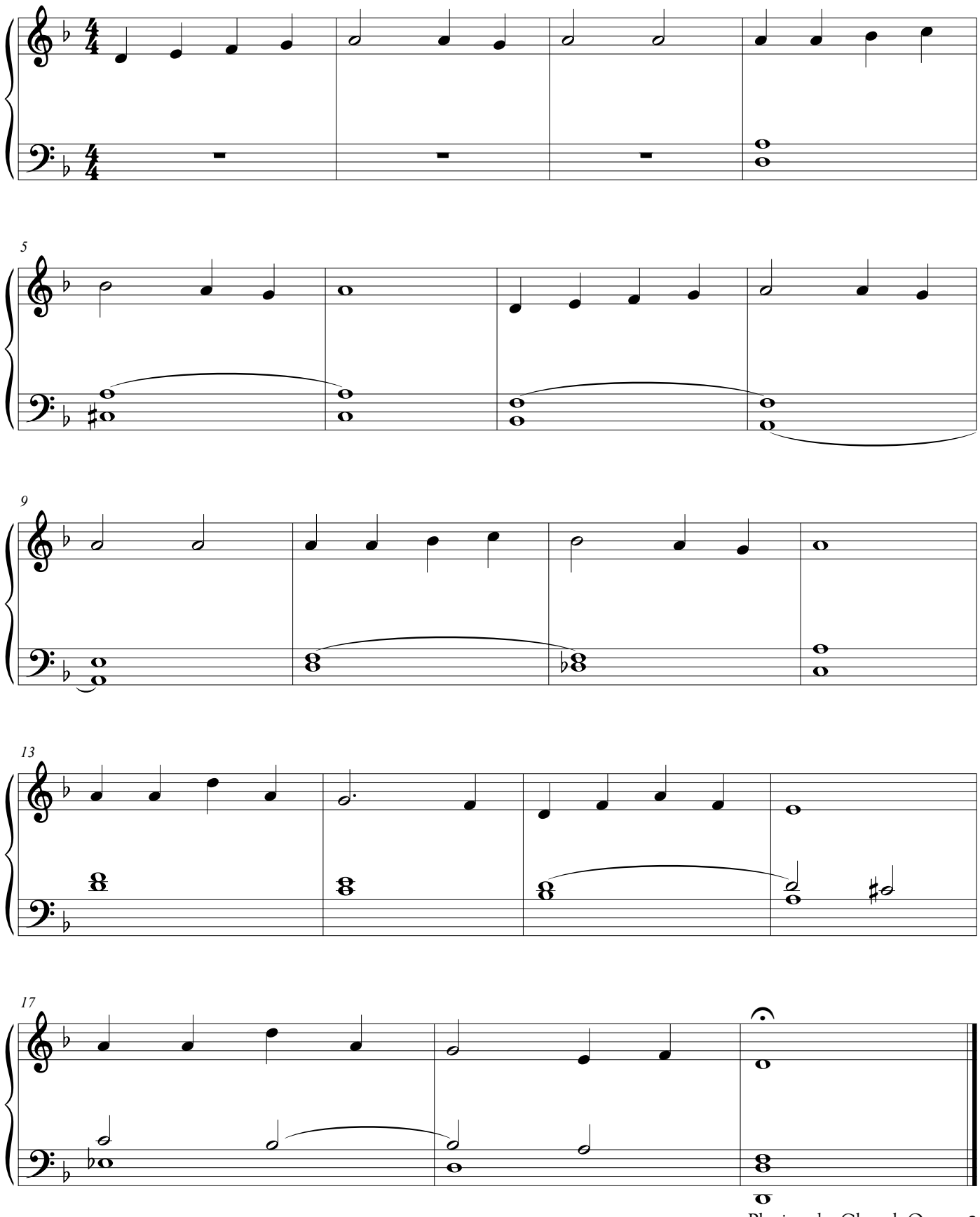
Once you are comfortable playing the silent organ, move on to the next page.

**On a three keyboard organ play the LOWER keyboard part on the middle keyboard.*

Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century



Play the organ, step two.

But don't turn it on yet for one more page

Play this on silent organ again.

Begin, as marked on the first measure, on the bottom (or middle), GREAT, keyboard.

At measure 13, raise your right hand and move into playing position with your index finger over the A.

Finish playing the piece with your hands playing on two different keyboards.

Exercise

Practice playing measures 12 and 13 until you have them memorized.

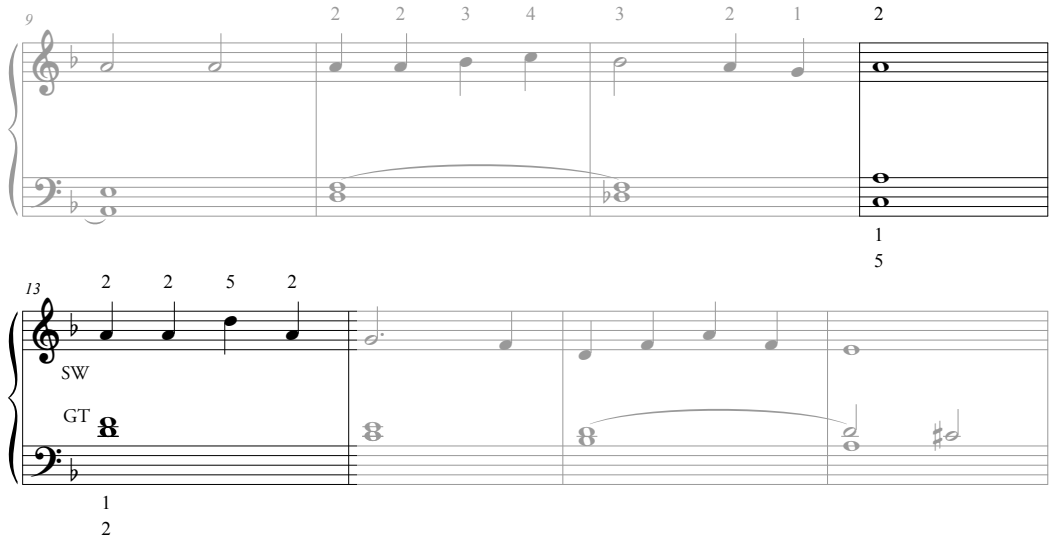
You are memorizing three things:

The notes that you are playing.

Moving the Right Hand to a higher keyboard playing the same note with the same finger.

Lifting and Moving the Left Hand up on the same keyboard to new position.

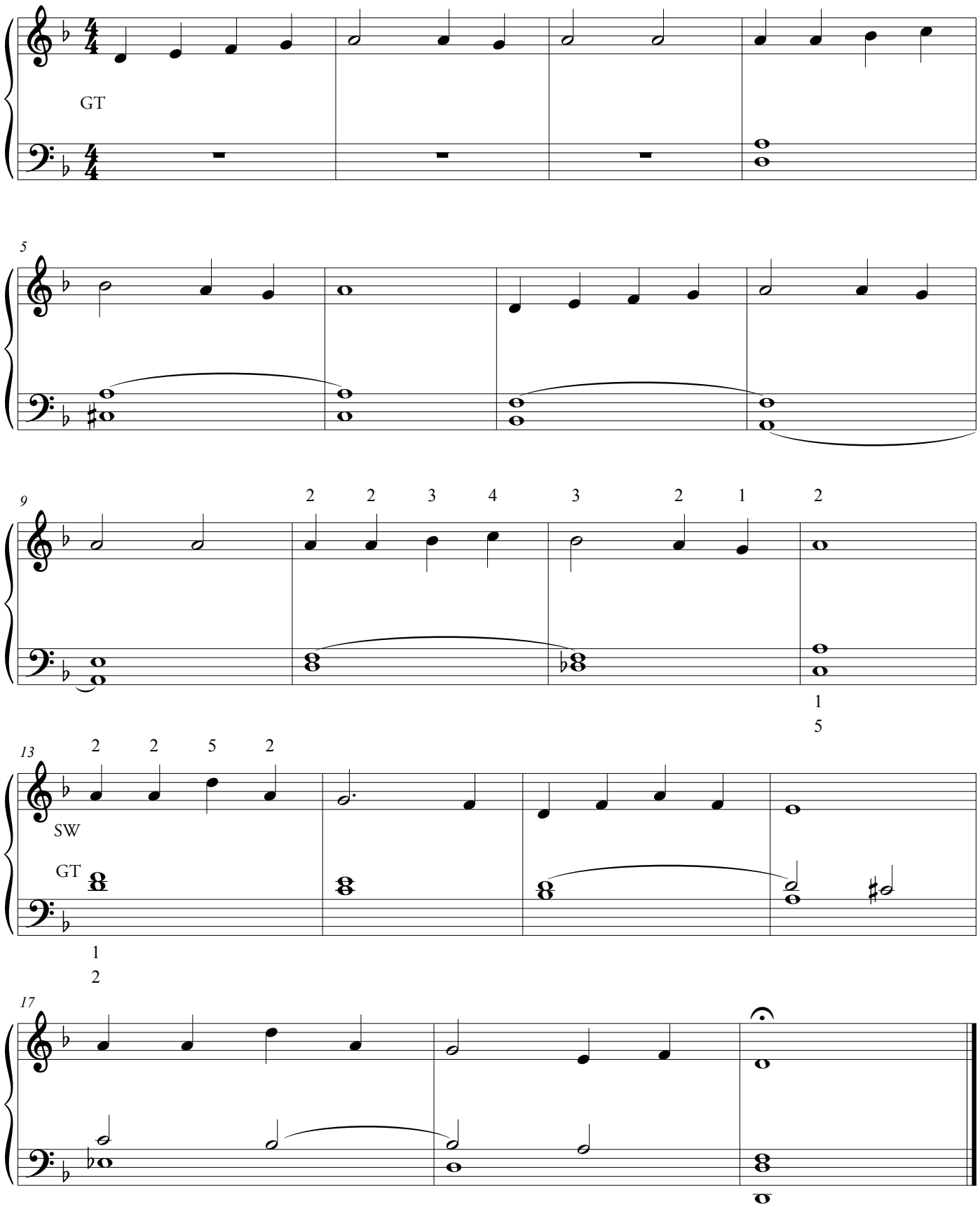
Once you can play this 5 times with eyes closed, turn to the next page



Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century



① Choose Your Stop Combination

① appears in the music as the suggested stop combination choice.

① stands for the preset piston that we've set up for you on your instrument, or that you have set based on our recommendations for your organ.

At the end of this book is a full explanation of getting the information you need to set the pistons or choose the stops by hand.

After you have the stops set, play through the piece, just as you practiced it on silent organ.

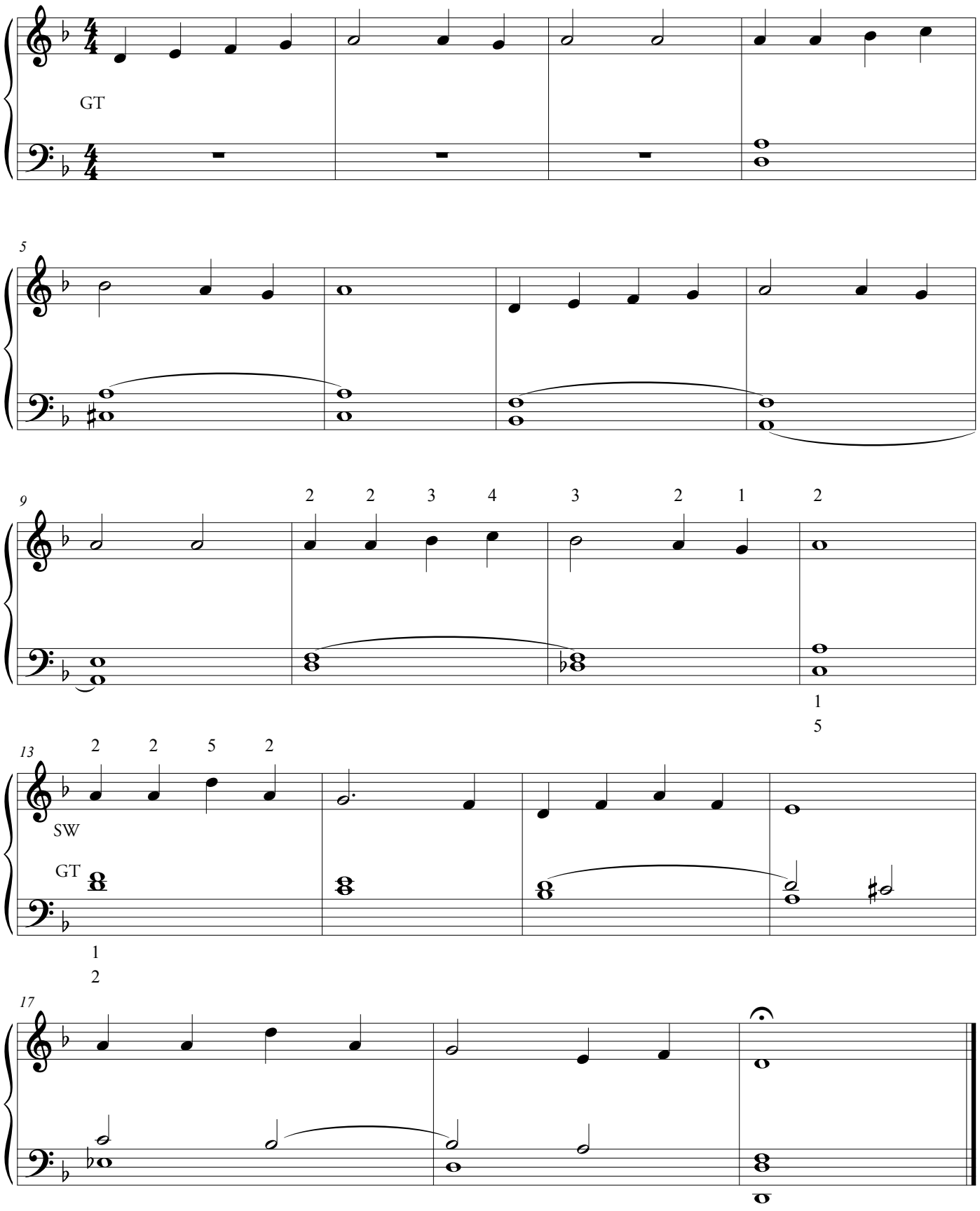
Note that on

①

Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century



How to Play Louder and Softer.

Look down, under the keyboards, where your feet are.

The organ should have one or more volume pedals that you may rest your feet on.

Move the bench until you can reach these comfortably.

The pedals should be labeled, telling us which keyboard they affect.

These are used to set the volume level when you begin.

They also may be used to provide musical expression while playing.

Play the piece now, increasing the volume on the Great on measure 9. Then soften on measure 12.

Move from that pedal to the Swell pedal.

Increase and decrease the sound of the oboe as indicated

If you have third pedal on the two keyboard organ, that's a crescendo pedal.

It adds stops, and takes them off. It was very useful before organs had preset pistons.

It is always the last pedal to the right.

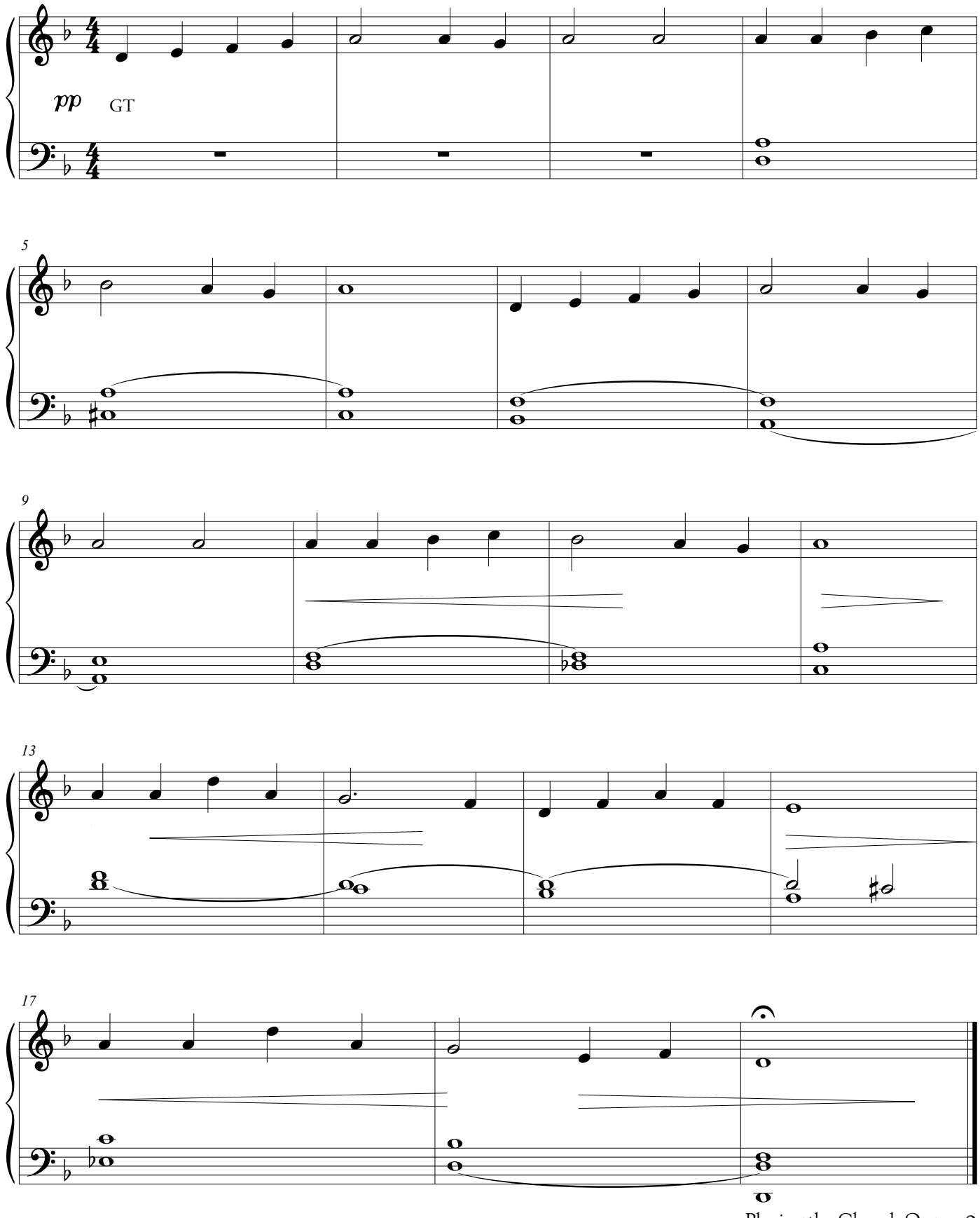
①

Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century

Slow with Rubato



⑧ Why pianists enjoy playing the organ.

Press piston ⑧ and play the piece.

At measure 13, move your right hand to the upper keyboard.

After you've played it, continue reading below.

The piano is a lovely instrument.

The organ contains many lovely instruments.

Organ builders create an "organ orchestra" when they design an organ.

It's like building a choir.

Most organ stops, "voices", blend together like voices in a well-trained choir.

Some also have a sound quality that lets them "sing solos".

This Oboe is such a double-duty stop.

A few organ stops are only played as solo stops. They are like divas, whose voices do not blend well.

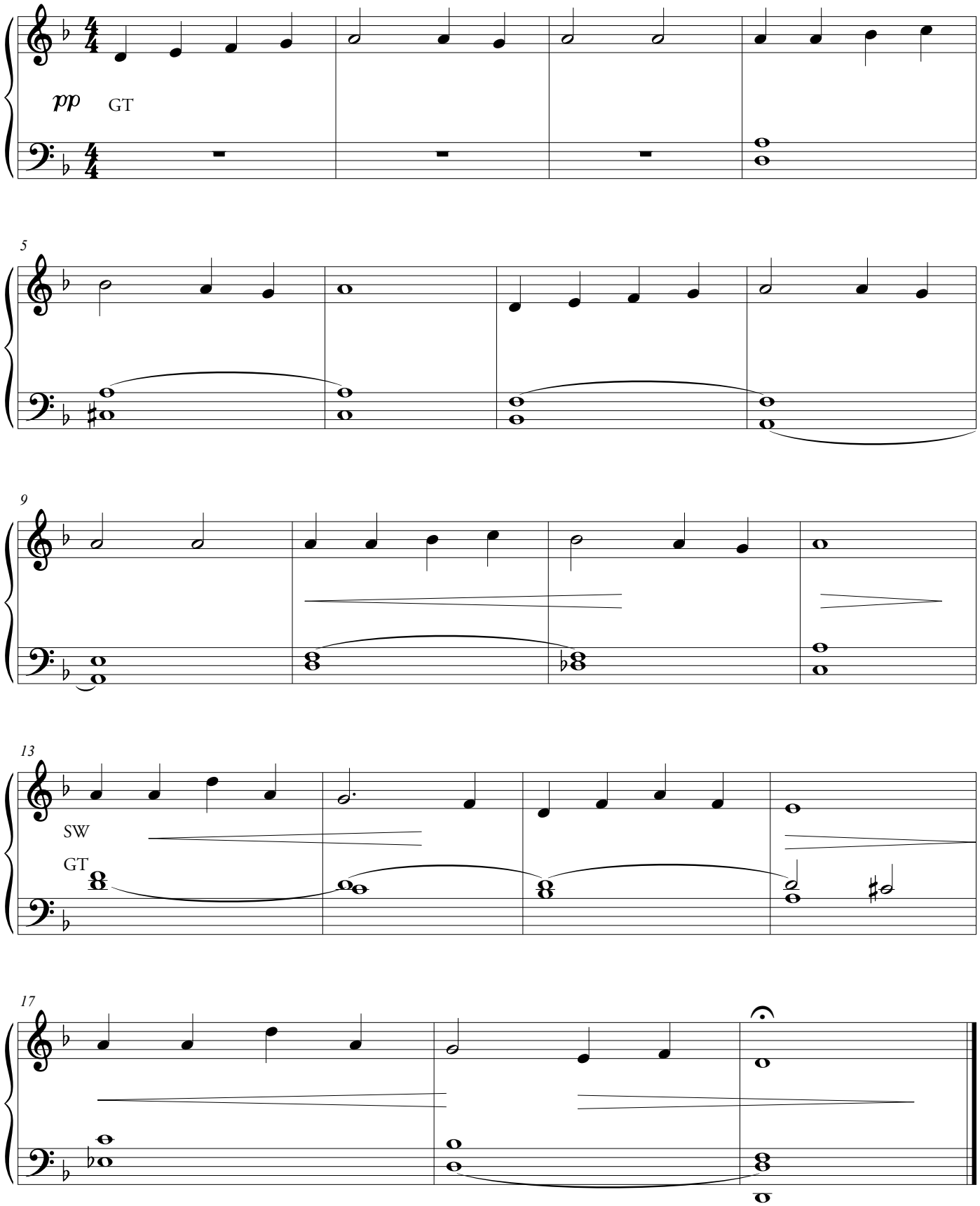
As we work though the 10 preset stop settings, you will find that 1-7 are like Choirs, 8 features a Double-Duty stop and 9 & 10 are Divas.

1. Let All Mortal Flesh

Picardy

French, 17th Century

Slow with Rubato



① Organ Céleste Stops

The pitch of a note on the organ remains steady when playing.

Eventually we will explore Vibrato, as you hear when a violinist plays.

If two organ pipes are just slightly out of tune, you will hear a slow, steady beat. This makes a lovely sound, as you will find when you play the Communion Interlude.

Before we begin, let's find the Swell to Great coupler.

You will be turning it on just before you play the third time through.

As you begin you hear a soft stop or stops, possibly a Céleste on the Great.

Once you finish this first time through lift your hands and move them both to the Swell.

Now you are playing a String Céleste on the Swell.

At the end lift your hands, put on the Swell to Great coupler.

Then play on the Great.

Now you are playing the stops you just played on the Swell, and the Great stops, together.

If you have both Great and Swell expression pedals, you may use them like this on this last time through:

Make the Great louder and softer from measures 6 through 9.

Then do the same with the Swell from measure 10 till the end.

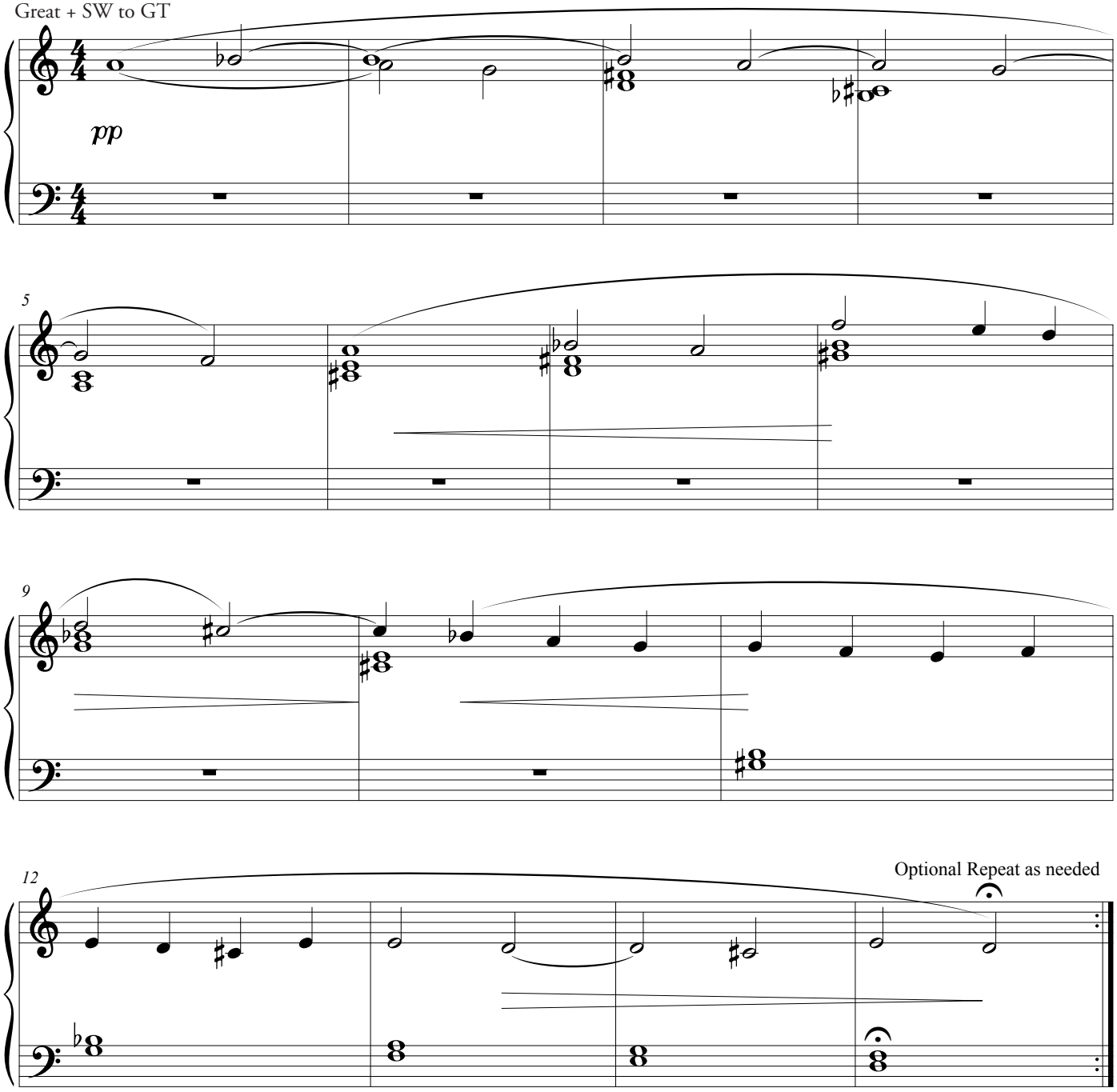
The organ has a lot of tones colors to choose from, but also the power to sing out through long notes.

①

2. Communion Interlude

Great
Swell
Great + SW to GT

Noel Jones



② Foundation Stops 8', 4'

To change the stops using a piston, you just press a different piston.
This piston is set for Foundation Stops 8', 4'

The Sound of the Stops

Flues, stops whose sounds are created similarly to that of a whistle, dominate stoplists. And, to make things confusing, flute stops and diapasons and strings are all flue stops. Flue refers to the windway the air travels through.

The diameter of a flue pipe determines its tone quality:

Thin	Medium	Wide
Strings	Diapasons	Flute

Foundation settings blend these stops together, here at pitch levels 8' and 4'. Foundation stops are most every stop, with the exception of reeds, which we cover a bit later in this book.

When you play an 8' stop it sounds at the same pitch as a piano.

With your finger on the same key, add a 4' stop, which sounds the octave above, without having to stretch your hand. A 2' stop adds the octave above that one.

Using these Stops

For playing hymns and accompanying the choir, use Pistons 2 through 5. They were developed for that, as well as for playing much of the organ music ever written, as you will see on coming pages.

Finger Technique

There are two kinds of notes to play on the organ. Those which are connected to each other, and those which are separated from each other with little bits of silence.

If you do not have access to an organ all the time for practicing, play pieces at the piano without using the sustain pedal. Connect all notes in a hymn, like the one on the opposite page. The second time through, lift your hands and fingers off the keyboard at the end of each line (adding silence by shortening notes a bit - remember, all notes are either connected, or, separated with silence.)

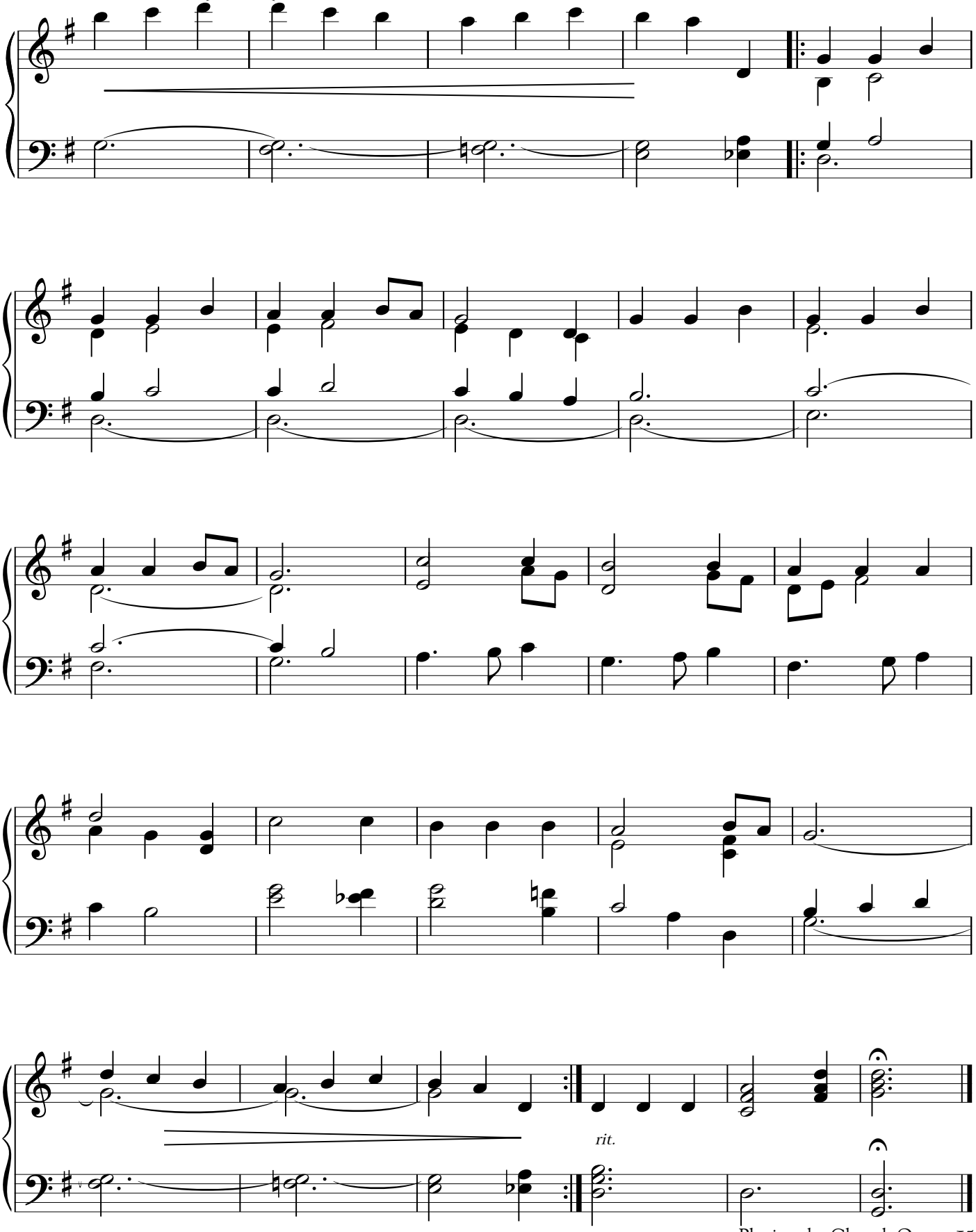
Remember playing softly on the piano, by pulling your hands back towards your body? Works great at the organ, too. Imagine you are pulling the sound out of the organ. Playing with heavy hands, or by "thumping," is a waste of energy and does not produce a flowing sound from the organ.

3. Immaculate Mary

LOURDES HYMN

Noel Jones, Arr.

Traditional French Processional



Using a BASS coupler.

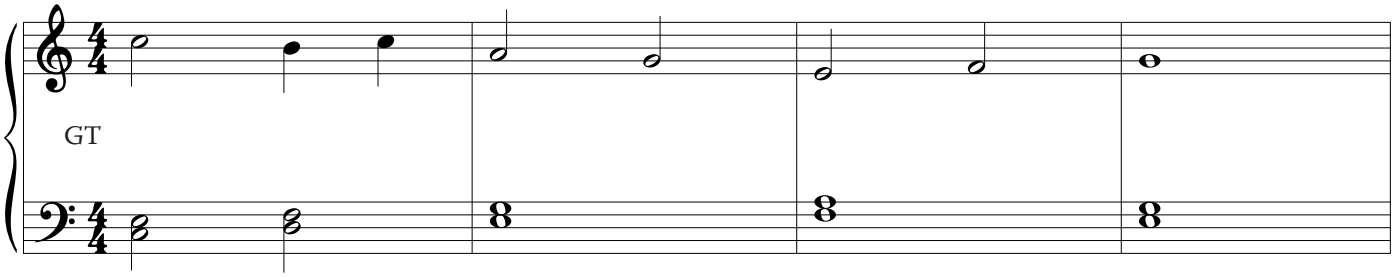
The pedal stops on the organ provide a strong foundation, without thickening the upper voices that you play. For many years, though, these special BASS couplers have appeared on organs, so you can have the bass sound, without having to playing the pedals. This provides fullness to the sound of the organ, especially for hymn singing.

Using piston ②, play the 4 measures below on the Great.

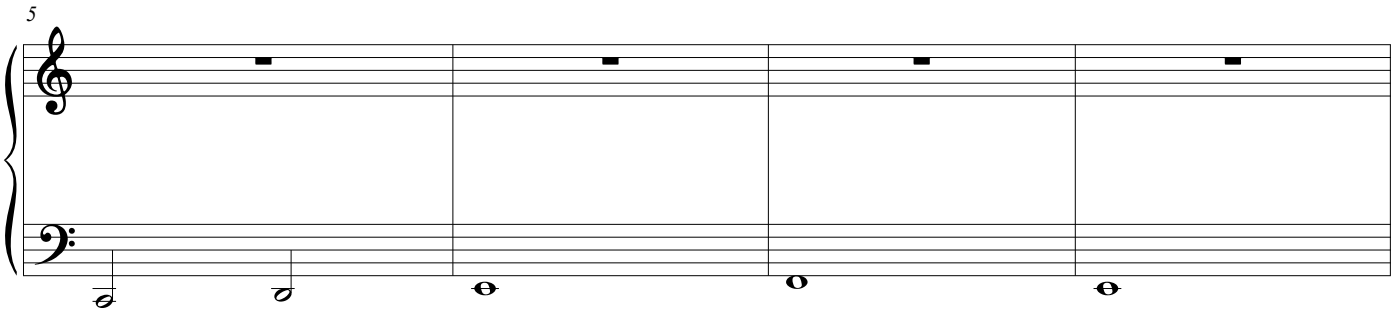
Then turn off (cancel) all the stops except those in the pedal division.

Find and add the BASS coupler.

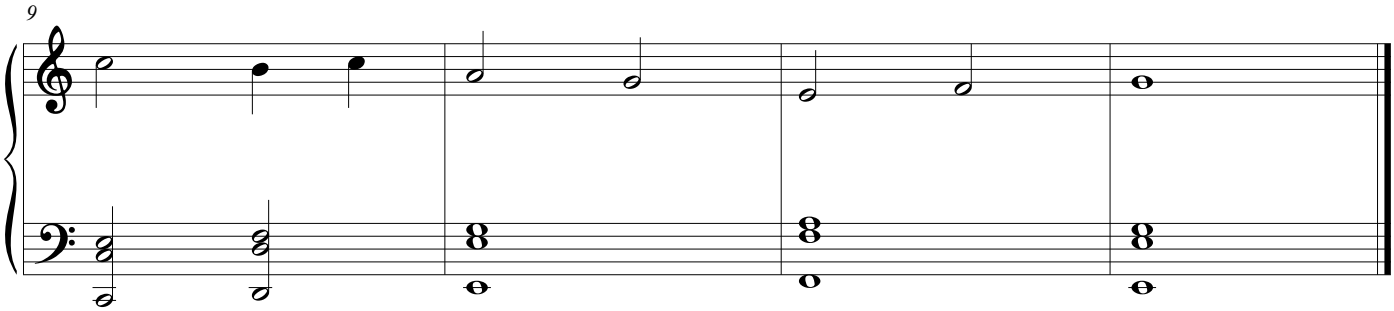
Play these measures again.



And this is what you hear when you play the keyboard:



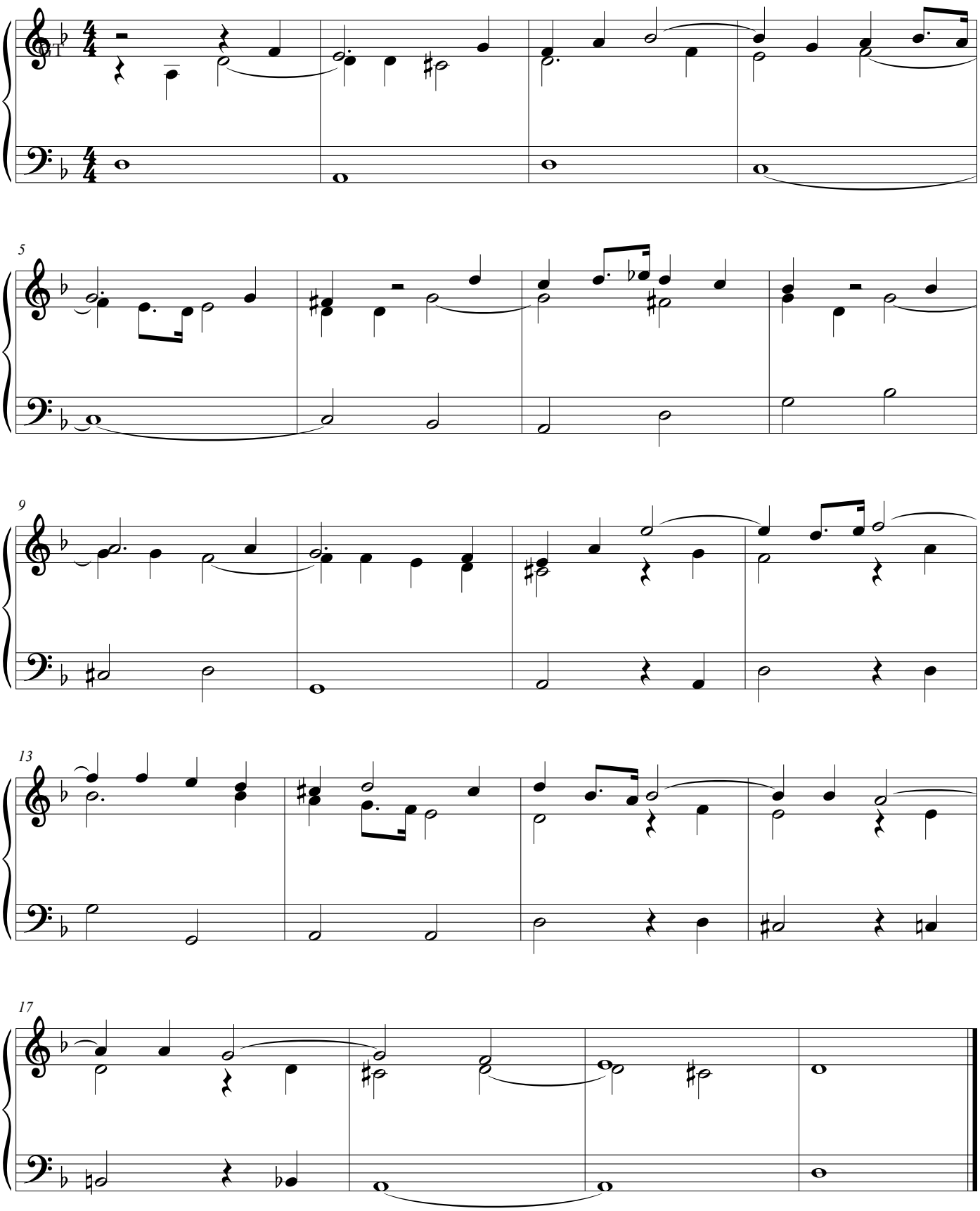
Now, press ② again, add the BASS coupler, play the four measures at the top of the page, and you will hear this:



Music in this book that works with the BASS coupler has a large b on the page.

4· Voluntary

Johann Gottfried Walther

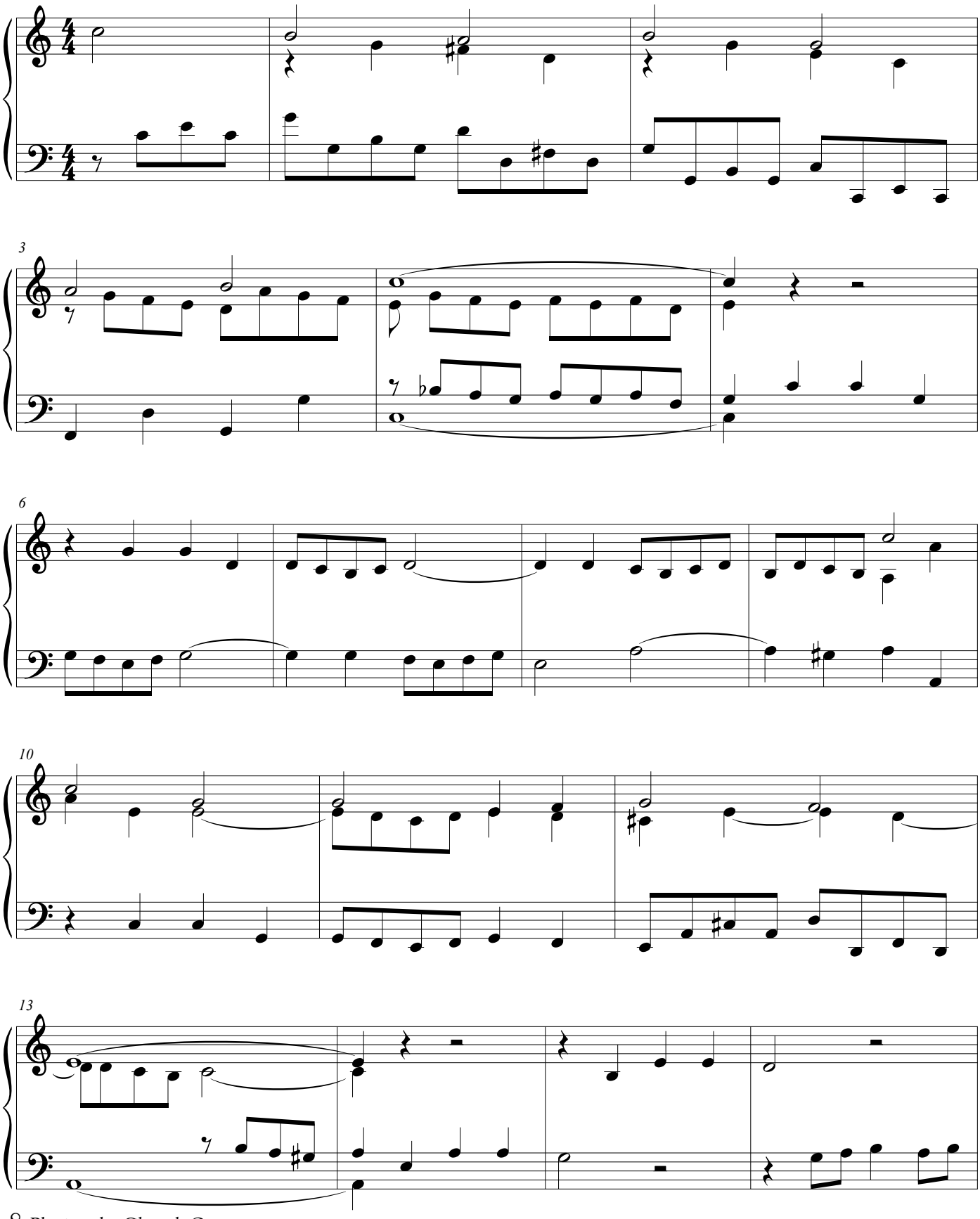


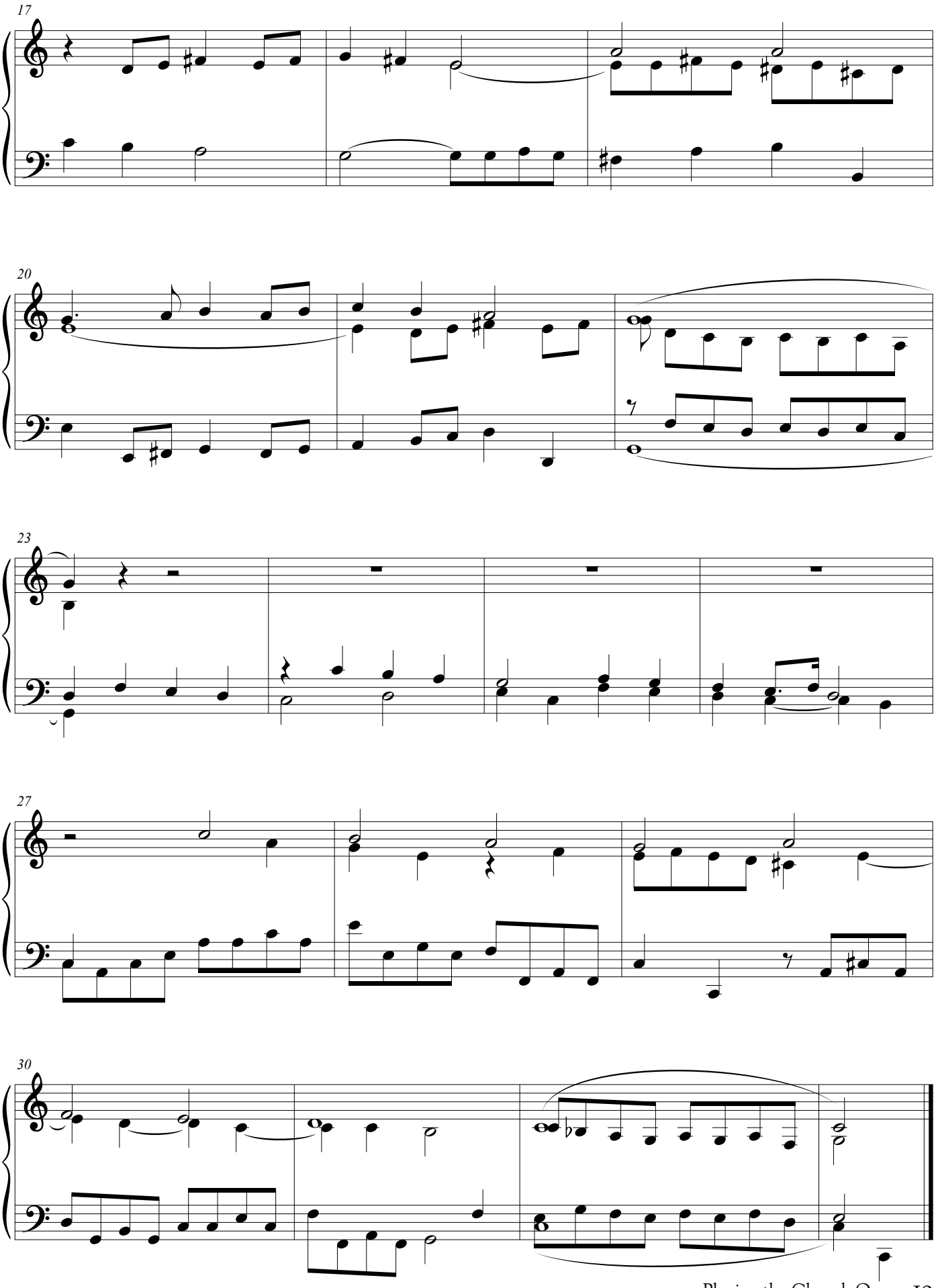
②

5. From Heaven on High

Von Himmel Hoch

Johann Gottfried Walther




17
20
23
27
30

③ Foundation Stops 8’, 4’, 2’

The Sound of the Stops

The addition of 2’ stops makes the sound of your playing cleaner, and brighter.

This not only helps keep a congregation from dragging as it sings hymns, but also help singers who might be a bit under pitch, to hear better and sing in tune.

There is something free and clear about playing piston 3. It is lighter sounding than piston 2 because of the addition of 2’ stops. For every key you press, you actually play three octaves, something that would take two hands on the piano. It’s a sound that fits almost any hymn, and has a lot of clarity. Of course, if you were playing three octaves at the same time on the piano, each octave would have to balance the other two, something the player controls by how hard the key is pressed. On the organ, the balance between octaves, between stops, is not controlled by the player. Most stops are balanced, by the builder, to the main 8’ Diapason family stop on the Great, each stop helping to build a solid, cohesive sound.

Using these Stops

When playing hymns your hands are almost always on the same manual, because hymns move forward not by tempo but by the rhythm of the harmonies. Each phrase progresses to its cadence, with the final cadence at the end of the verse. These cleaner, brighter, 2’ stops carry the sound of the hymn into the farthest corners of the room.

Playing Pedals

Organists play pedals for two reasons.

1. Much organ music in written in four parts - meaning four melodies being played against each other. This piece begins in two parts, a third part enters at m. 5, the fourth in the soprano at m. 7. This means four of your ten fingers are holding keys down at almost all times during the pieces and your other 6 fingers are preparing to play new notes as needed.

Being able to play notes on the pedals can help free up and untangle fingers.

2. Acoustically, low frequency instruments with large bodies are needed to support the upper frequencies that organ plays, just as a symphony orchestra has string basses. If those basses played up into the range of the range violins, the sound overall would be very thick and unbalanced.

And that is exactly why organs have pedalboards, to be able to underpin the sound of the organ.

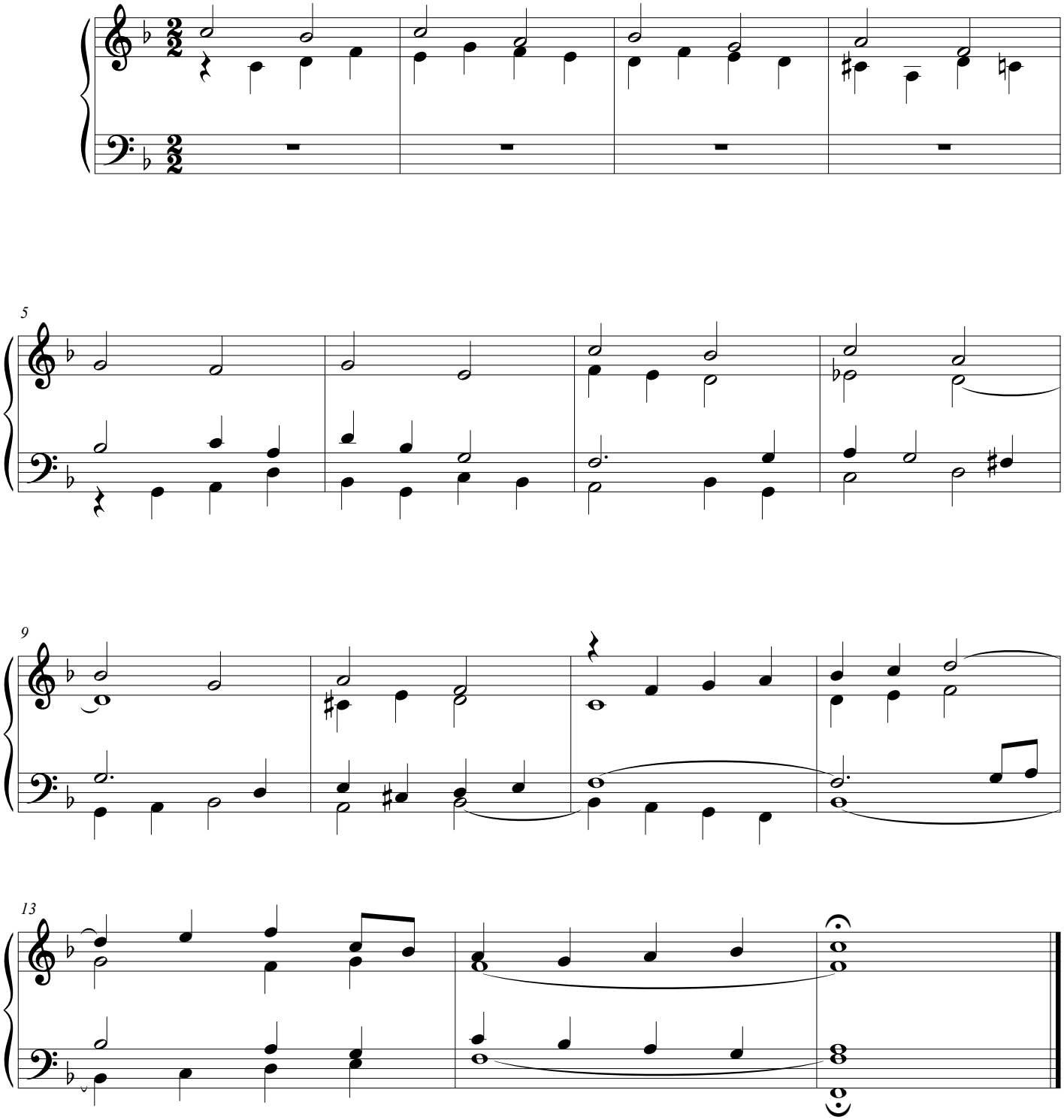
When playing this piece you may choose only to play the last note in the last measure in the pedals. That will work. You may also choose to add the Bass Coupler be pressing it just after the first beat you play in measure 5 and before you play the G in the left hand. This prevents the Bb from playing and gets the Bass coupler active before the G is played - so that first pedal pitch that is heard is on that G.

③

6. Prelude to Ecce Panis Angelorum

This is the bread of angels

Johann Diebold, 1842-1929



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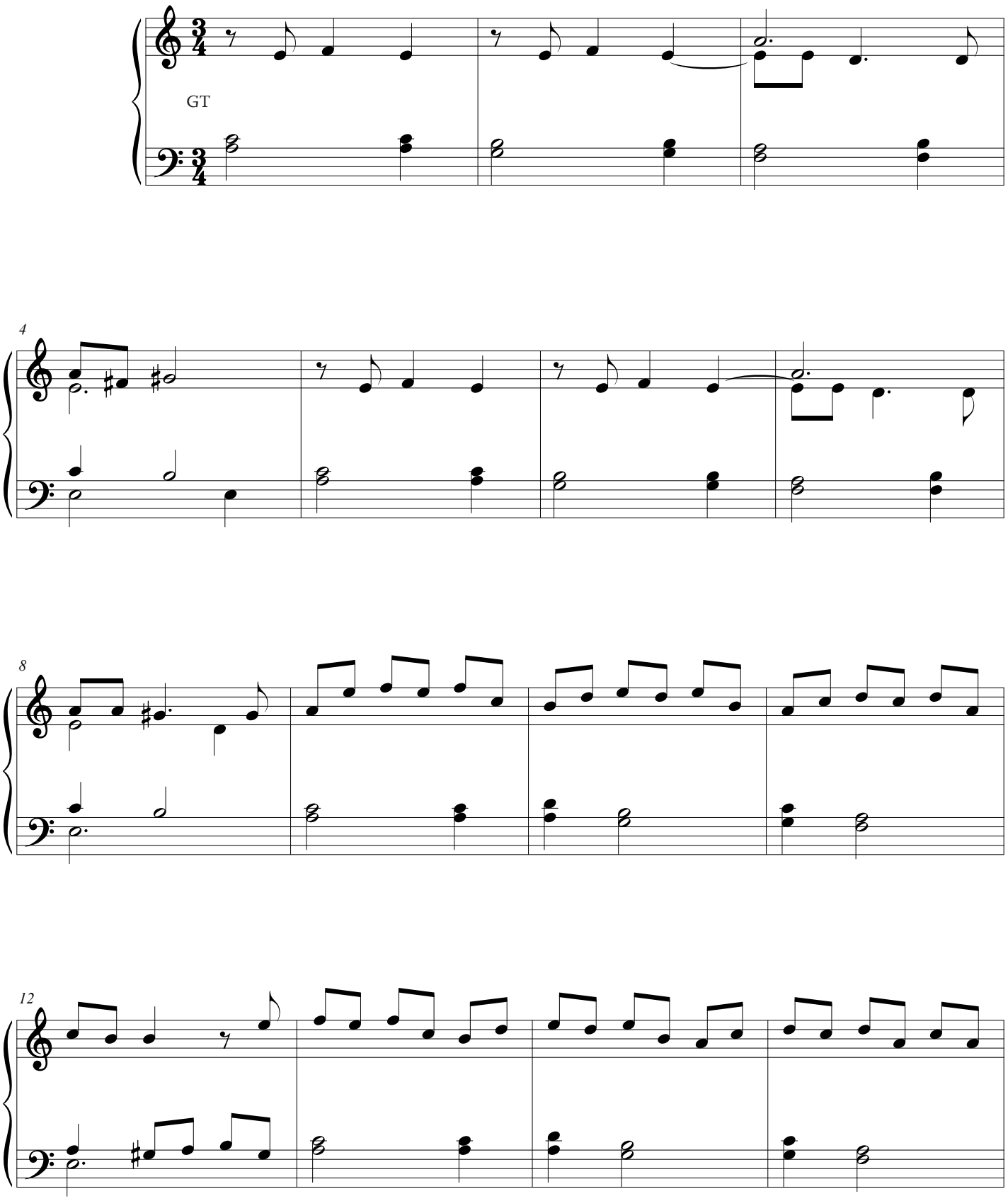
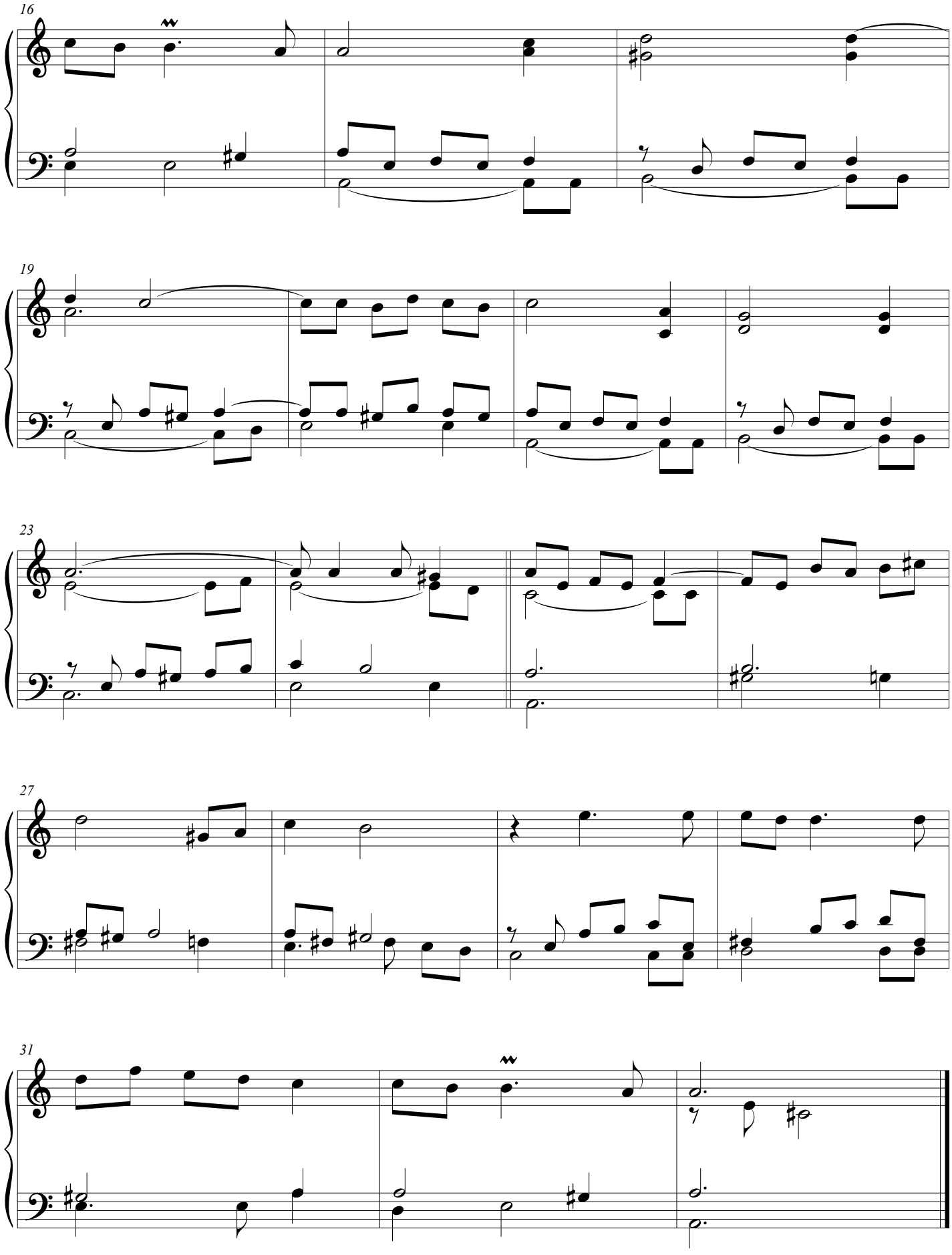
7. Chaccone

Johann Kaspar Ferdinand Fischer

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19
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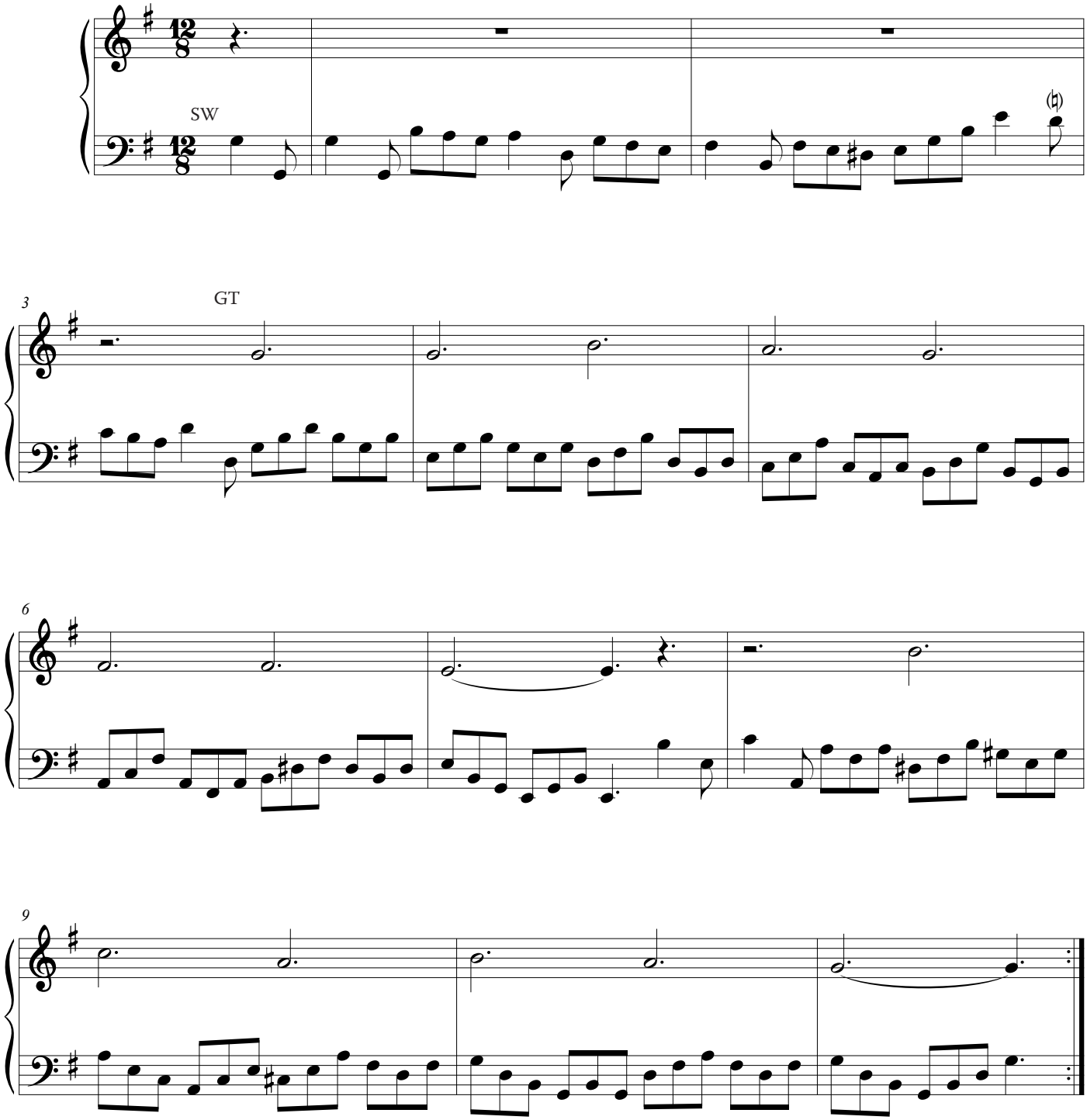
③

8. Christ, God's Only Son

Herr Christ der einig' Gottes Sohn

Georg Phillip Telemann

Pistons 2-7 may be used to play a strong melody on the GT while accompanying on the SW.