Rhythm Pedagogy
for String Orchestras

Fritz Gearhart
University of Oregon

60th Annual Midwest Clinic
Chicago Hilton and Towers

Wednesday, December 20, 2006
1:15–2:15 PM

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I. Theoretical Overview
Moving from the Simple to the Complex Easily

A. Aural introduction of Basic Rhythmic Cells
B. Introduction Through Notation of Basic Rhythmic Cells
C. Expand Basic Cells Immediately Through Relative Note-Value Relationships
D. Present Closely Related Variations and Inverse Ideas
E. Connect Basic Cells to Form Complex Rhythmic Ideas
F. Add Ties to Complex Patterns
G. Show How Dots Evolve from Tied Notes

II. Putting Ideas to Use in the Class Room
Practicing and Drilling

A. Aural Call and Response Practice
B. Using Rhythm Flash Cards for Drill
C. Rhythm Glossary for Notation Drill
D. Using Scales as a Vehicle for Practice
    1. Simple Application (All in Unison)
    2. Simple Echo Pattern
    3. Complex Patterns to Sharpen Ensemble Skills
    4. Interiorization Exercises

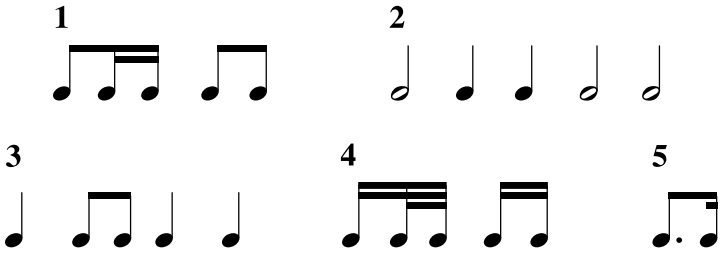
III. Continued Rhythmic Development Through Repertoire
New Materials and Their Application

A. Reading Is the Issue!
    Reading Practice. Forward/Backward
B. Continuous Uninterrupted Flow of Information from Eye to Hands
    Repertoire with Low Complexity but High Requirement for Concentration
    Tic-Tac-Toe Grid
C. Ear or Eye Hypnosis. Scanning Ahead in Music. Looking Ahead for Unexpected Changes.
D. Fighting Aural Familiarity
E. Interiorization Practice in Repertoire
F. Repertoire Study in Relative Note Values
G. Developing Confidence and Independence
    Within the Orchestra and Within the Section
H. Developing a Rhythmic Lesson from Current Repertoire
    1. What Is the Problem? Reading? Interiorization? Understanding?
    2. Make Flash Card Series/Drill
    3. Incorporate into Scale Warm-up
    4. Practice with Various Subdivisions
        a. Different Speed, Different Subdivision
        b. Same Speed, Different Subdivision (feel, inflection)
        c. Interiorization Practice

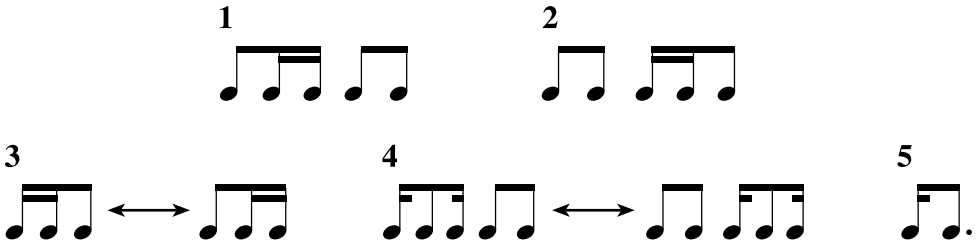
I. Theoretical Overview: *Moving from the Simple to the Complex Easily*

B. Introduction Through Notation of Basic Rhythmic Cells

C. Expand Basic Cells Immediately Through Relative Note-Value Relationships

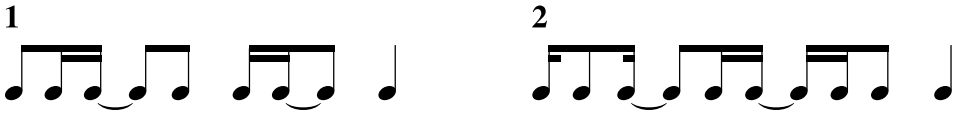


D. Present Closely Related Variations and Inverse Ideas



E. Connect Basic Cells to Form Complex Rhythmic Ideas

F. Add Ties to Complex Patterns



G. Show How Dots Evolve From Tied Notes

Practicing Rhythms in a Group Setting
Ideas to Help Strengthen Skills/Weakness to Watch For

A. Using scales as a vehicle for practice.

Simple application (unison)

Coordination of rhythms and the changing of notes-from easy to difficult

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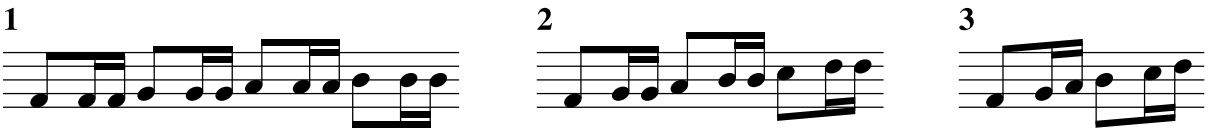
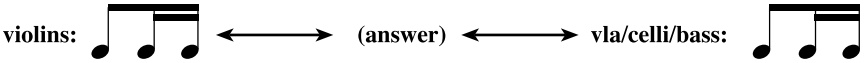


Simple Echo Pattern

Use any rhythm for group "call and response"



B. Reading is the Issue!

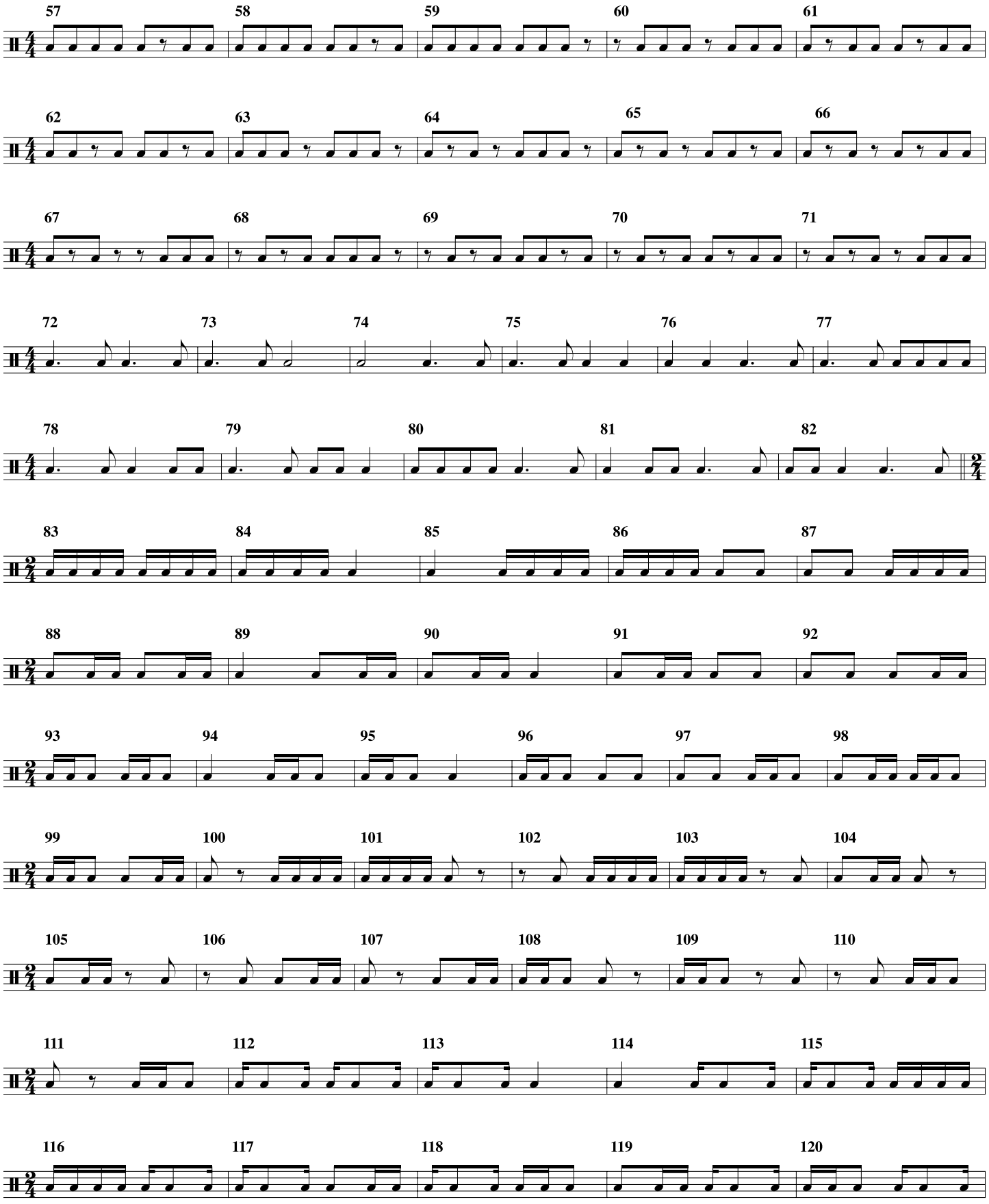
- *In performing and rehearsing pieces, the problem is often the level of reading skills*
- *Rhythms are not difficult, but students make mistakes often because of tracking*
- *Eyes must move forward, always ahead of the note being executed (See Oddities for Reading Practice. Forward/Backward music, cover up music, overhead.)*
- *Concentration!*
- *Continuous uninterrupted flow of information from eye to hands.*

C. Seeing patterns

- *Eye needs to learn to recognize groups and subset*
- *Try drilling with "Flash Cards"*

D. Looking ahead for unexpected changes: "Ear or Eye Hypnosis!" (both B & C)

- *Either because of familiarity or repeating patterns that change unexpectedly*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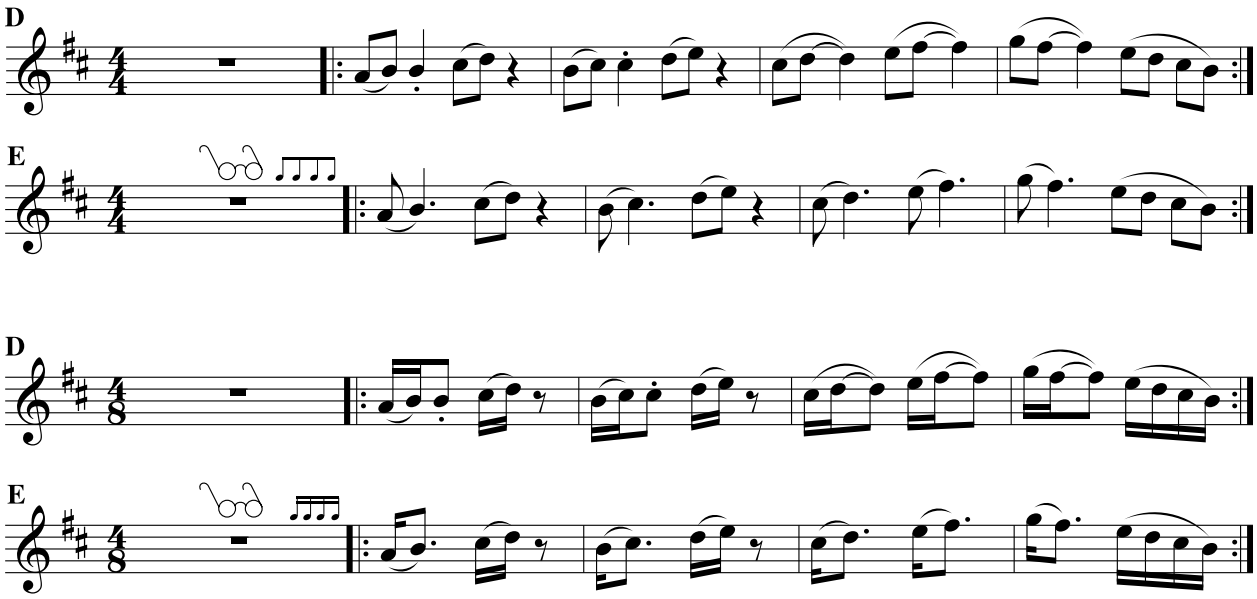
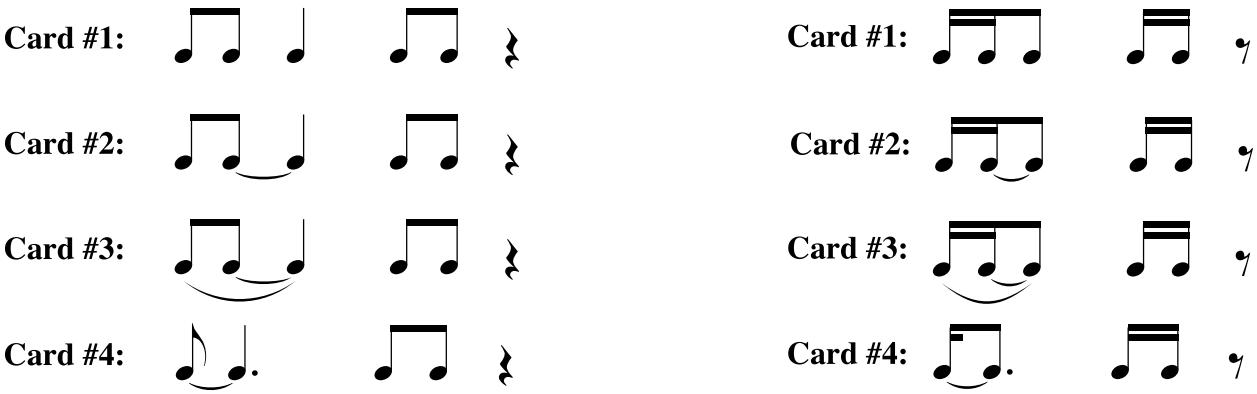
Evolution of the dot

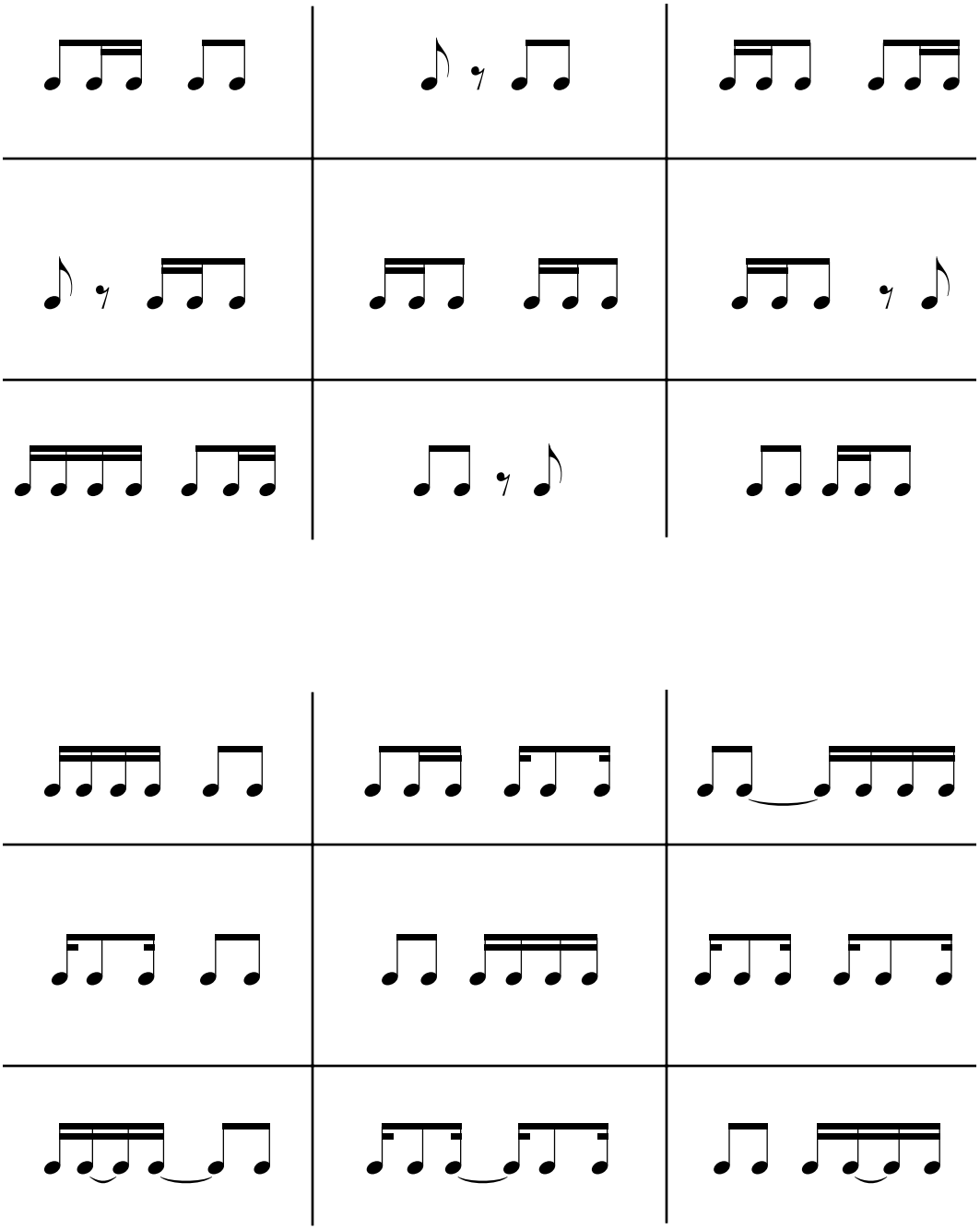
Excerpt from *Treble Clef Sessions* by Livingston Gearhart (Shawnee Press)



This rhythmic explanation could be simplified and presented on flash cards:



Tic-Tac-Toe Grids



Try ♩ = 60

Try ♪ = 120

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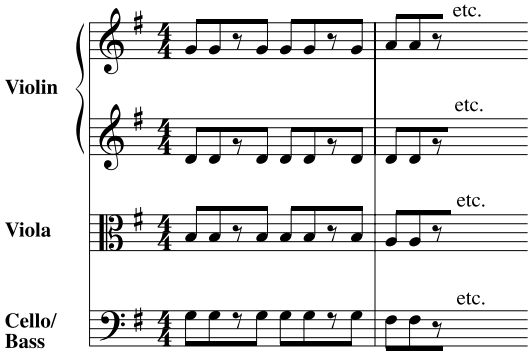
Appendix

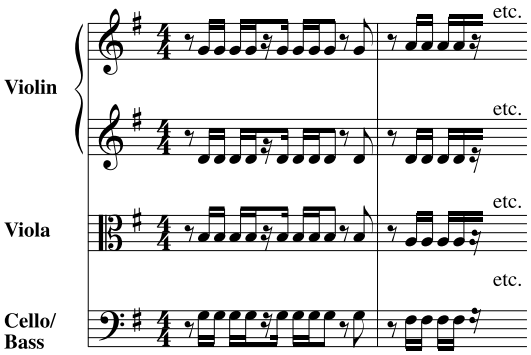
Rehearsal Suggestions for using *Scale Stuff*

Outlined below are several suggestions for group rhythm practice using *Scale Stuff*. These examples are meant as a starting point; the only limitation is one's imagination!

Simple Application

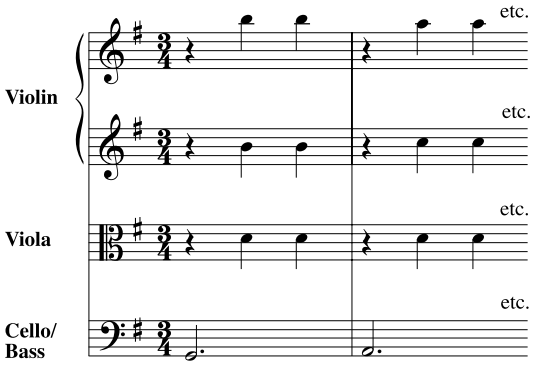


Example using Rhythm #46 (see Glossary). *Uses Scale Stuff 1.*

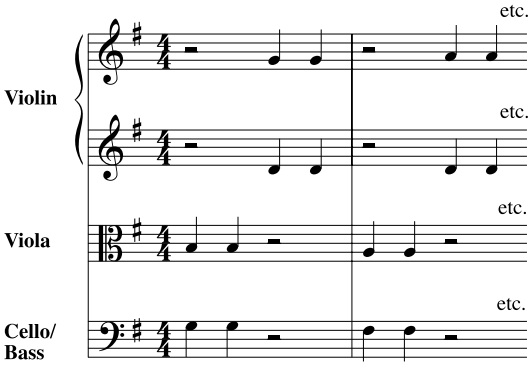


Example using rhythm from *Mississippi Hot Dog Agony*, bar 13.

Applications to Sharpen Ensemble Skills

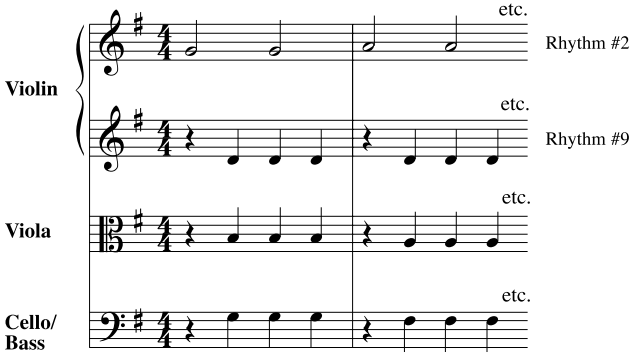


Make up a simple waltz pattern. This works well with complete scale playing long notes. *Uses Scale Stuff IV.*

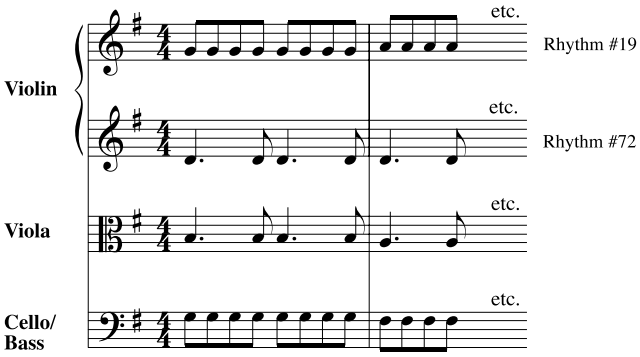


Good preparation for *Rhythm Antics*, uses Rhythms #13 and #14. *Uses Scale Stuff I.*

Application to Practice Interiorizing Rhythm



Simple ensemble skills. Try without conducting. Make ensemble play using only their ears. *Uses Scale Stuff I.*



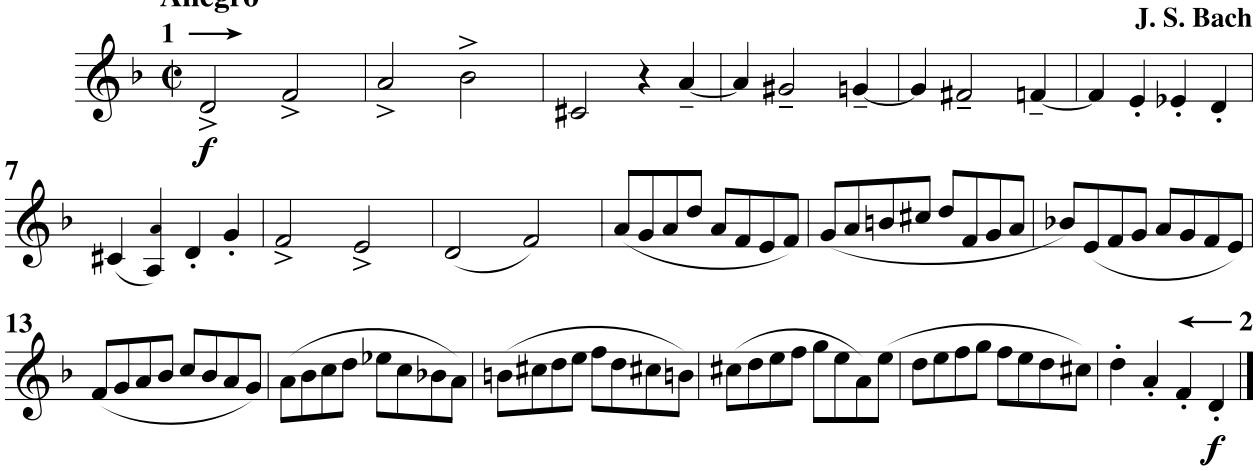
Violin 2 and Viola must listen to 1sts and celli to keep ensemble ready. *Uses Scale Stuff I.*

Two forward-backward reading examples
from Livingston Gearhart's *Duet Sessions* (Shawnee Press)

Canon
from the "Musical Offering"

Second player starts at the end and reads backwards.

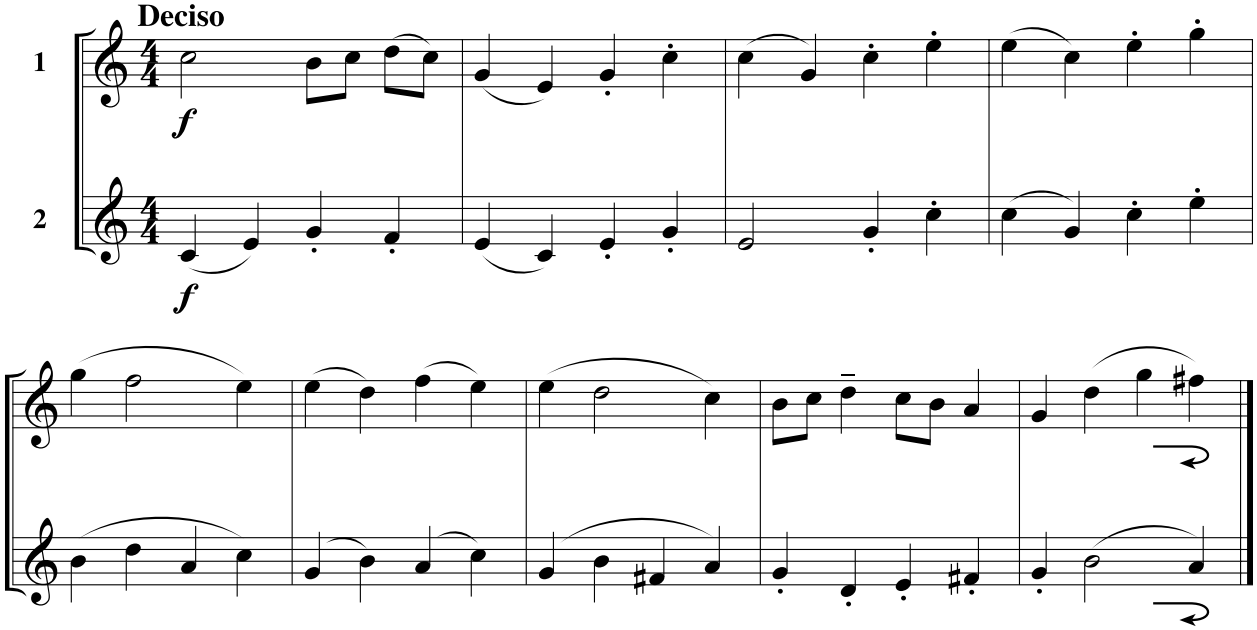
Allegro **J. S. Bach**



Reversible Duet

Play to the end, and without a rhythmic break, read backwards to the beginning.
Be sure to repeat the final note on the way back.

Deciso **Al Rovescio**



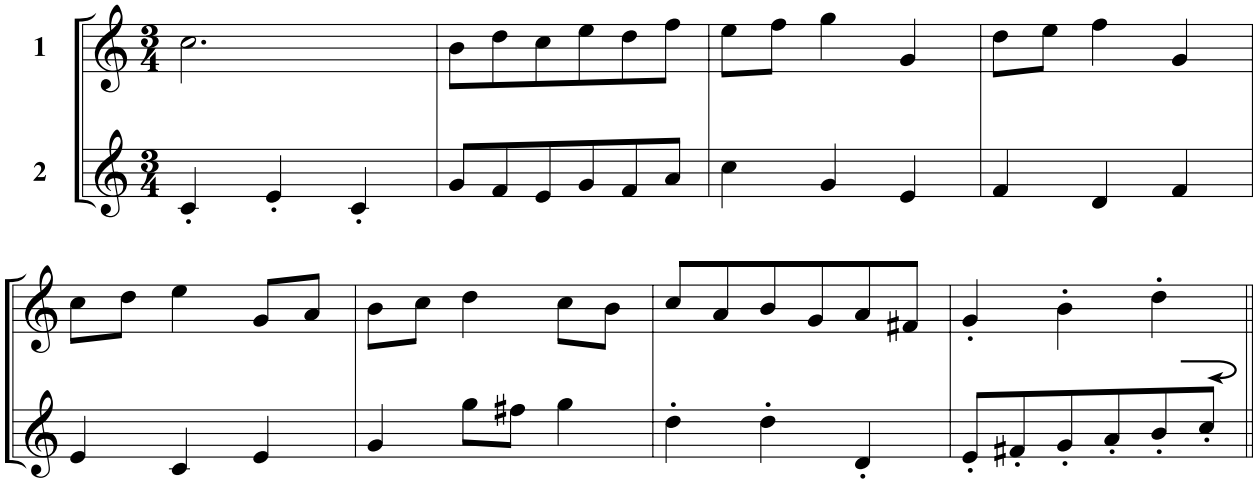
Forward/Backward Reading Examples
from *Clarinet Sessions* and *Treble Clef Sessions* by Livingston Gearhart (Shawnee Press)

MinueTeuniM

Play as usual to the double bar; then read backwards to the beginning

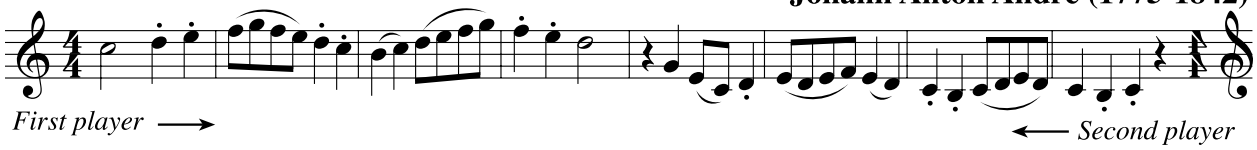
Al Rovescio

Moderato



Another Contrariwise Duet

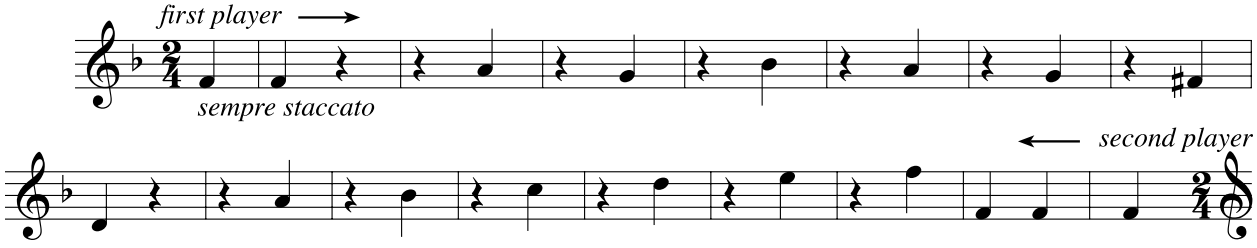
Johann Anton André (1775-1842)



Backhand

Both start together

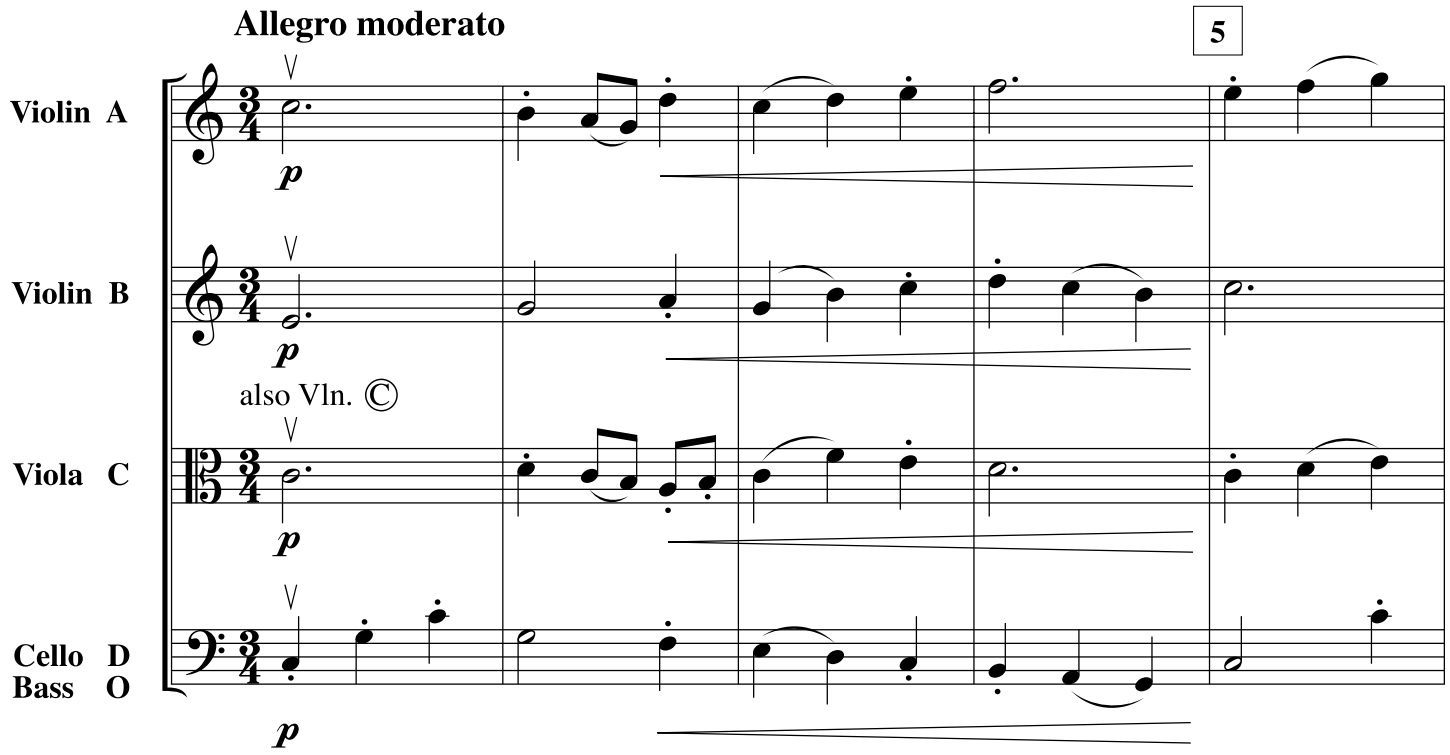
Fast 2

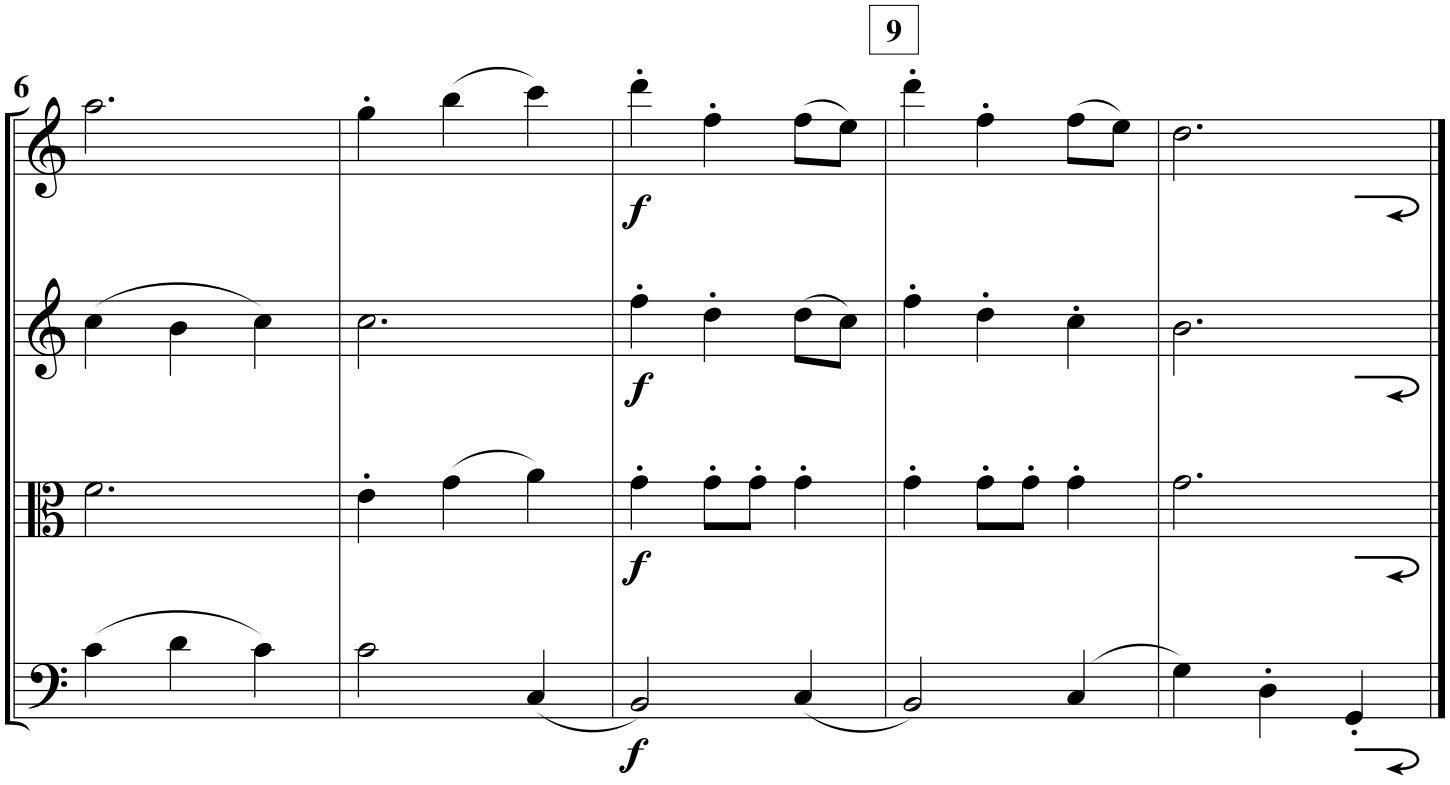


9. SINFONIA ECONOMICA

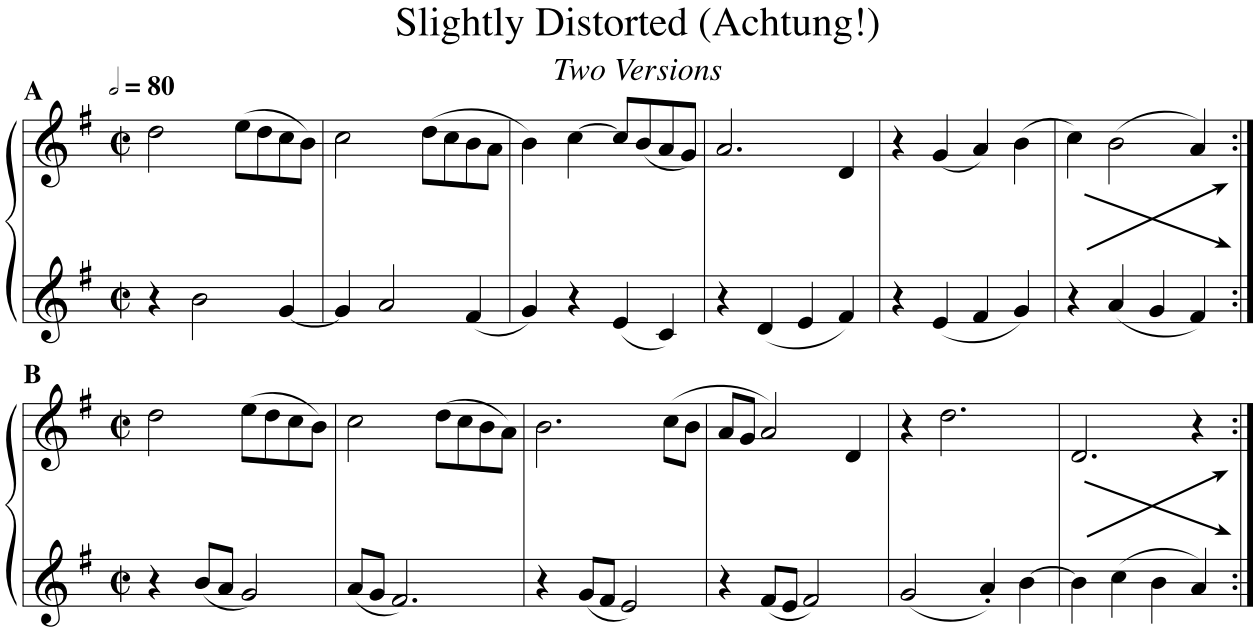
after **Haydn**

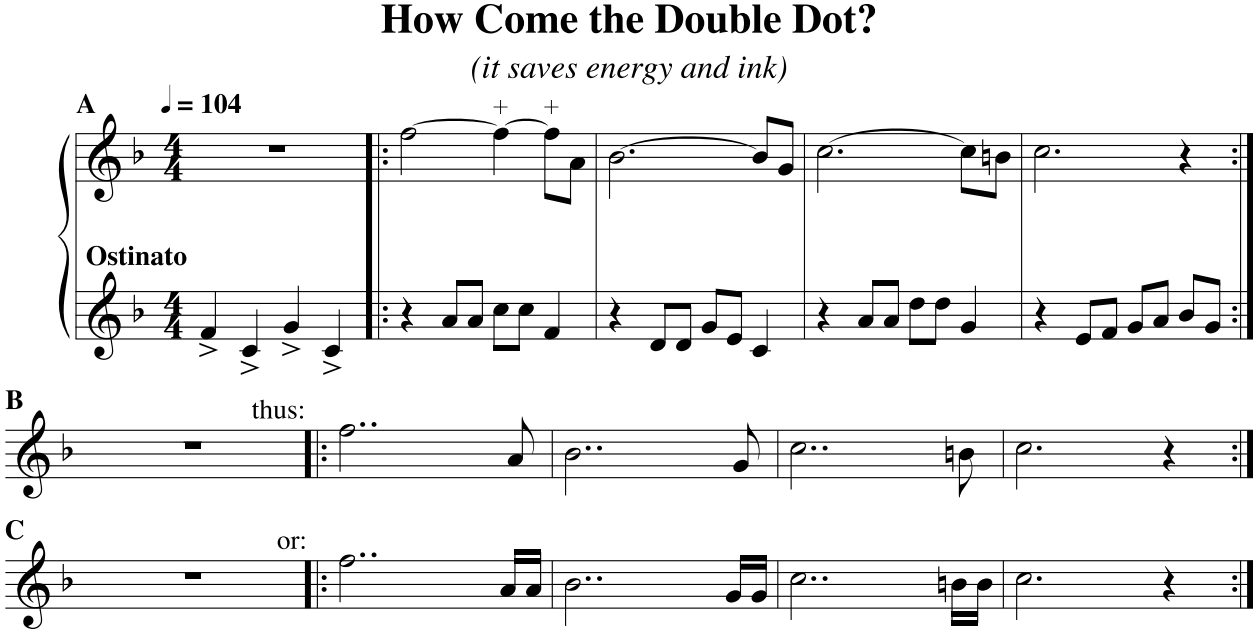
Cover 4 parts - A, B, C, D. Optional Violin© can replace Viola C. Read to the double bar and then read from right to left, i.e., from the end to the beginning, which is now the end. Following the first tryout, there was a spontaneous explosion of laughter and "Let's play it again."





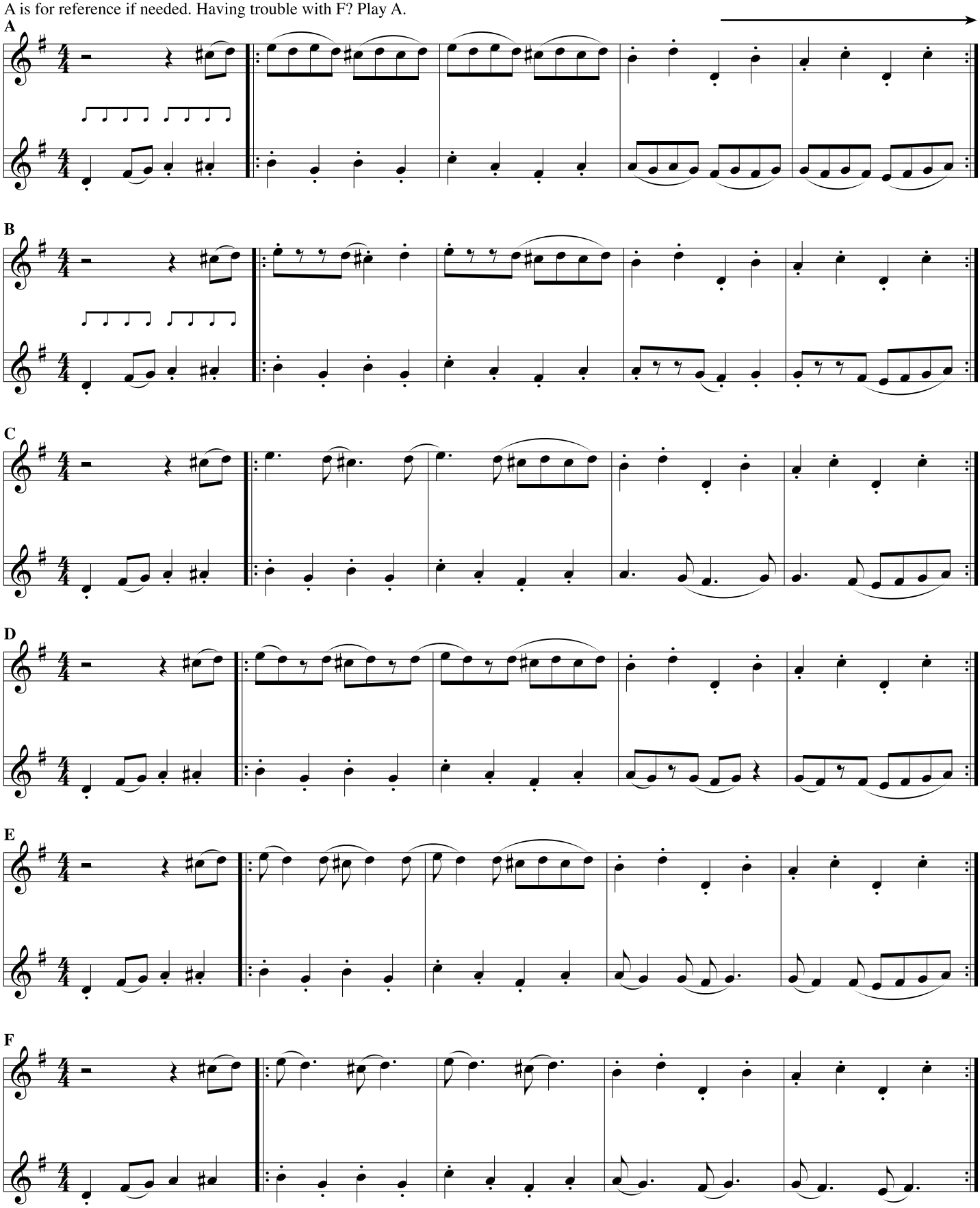
Excerpts from *Treble Clef Sessions* by Livingston Gearhart (Shawnee Press)





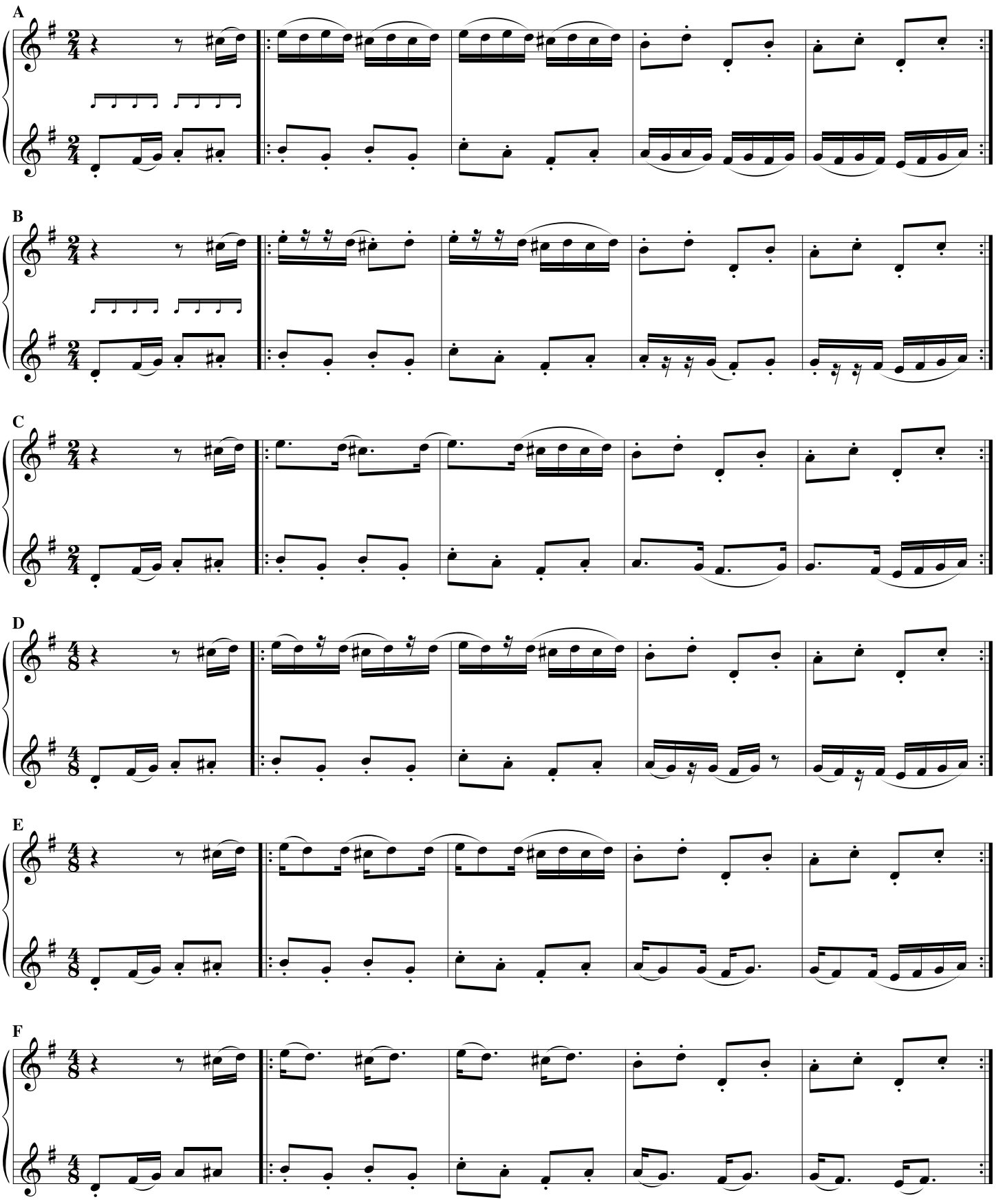
Rosetta Stone I

A is for reference if needed. Having trouble with F? Play A.



Rosetta Stone II

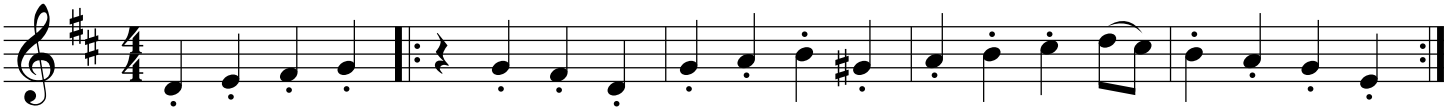
A is for reference if needed. Having trouble with D? Play A.



Challenge I

How many steps can you skip?

Ostinato



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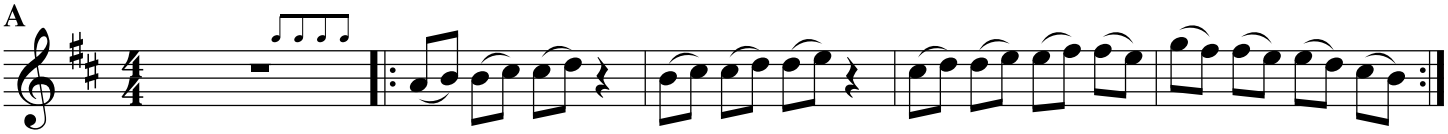

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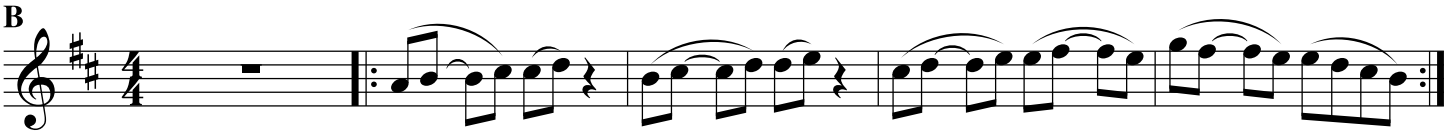

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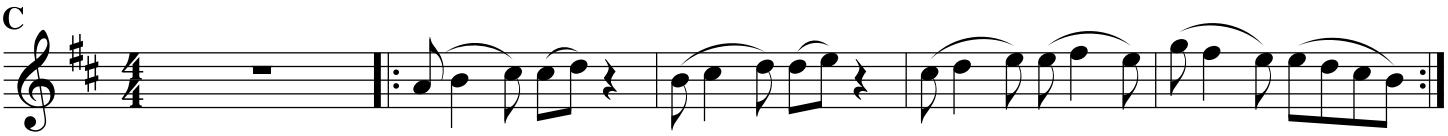

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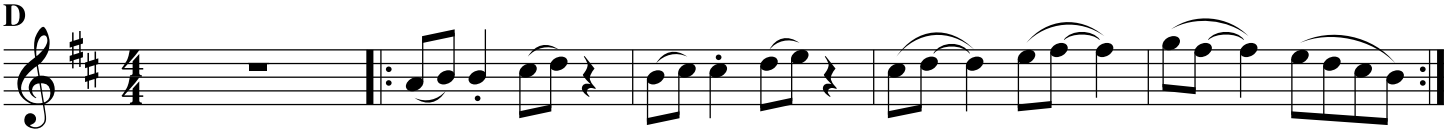

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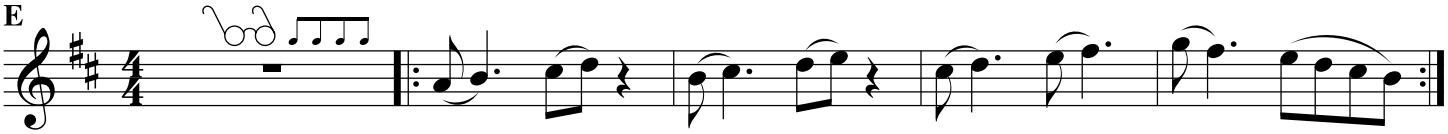

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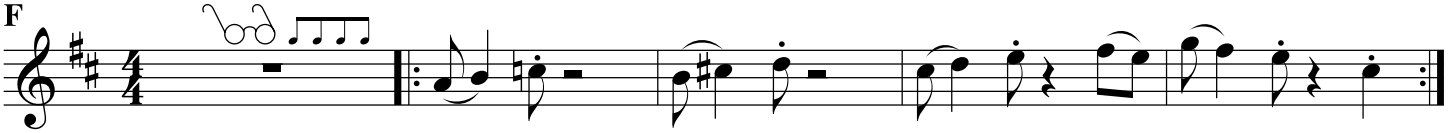

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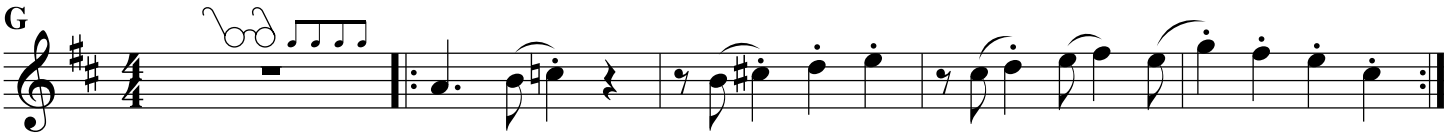
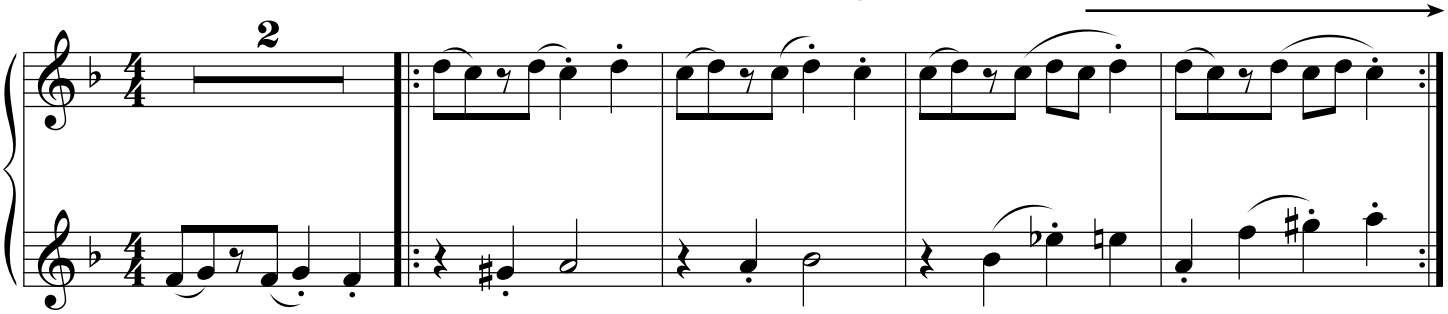
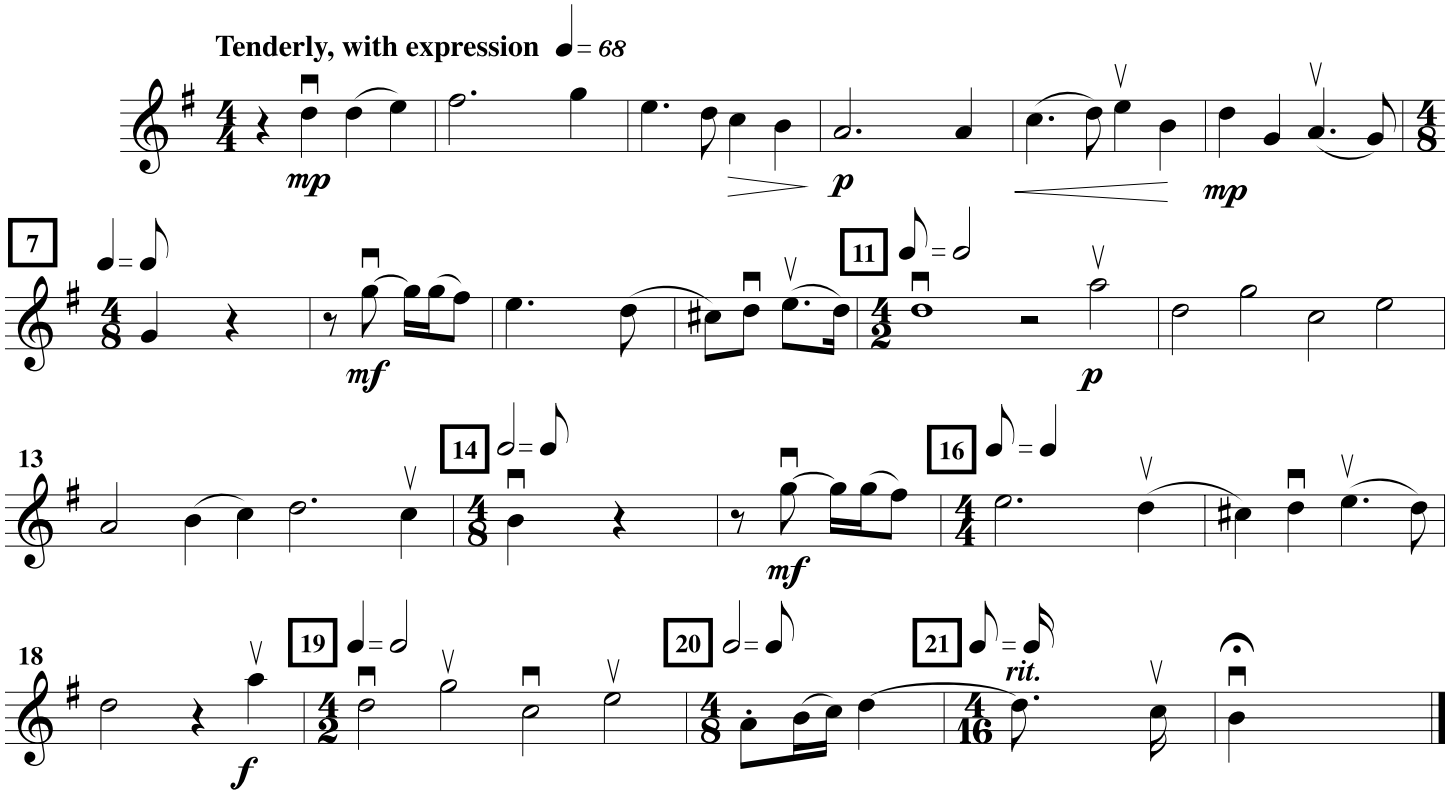


Two Note Tango

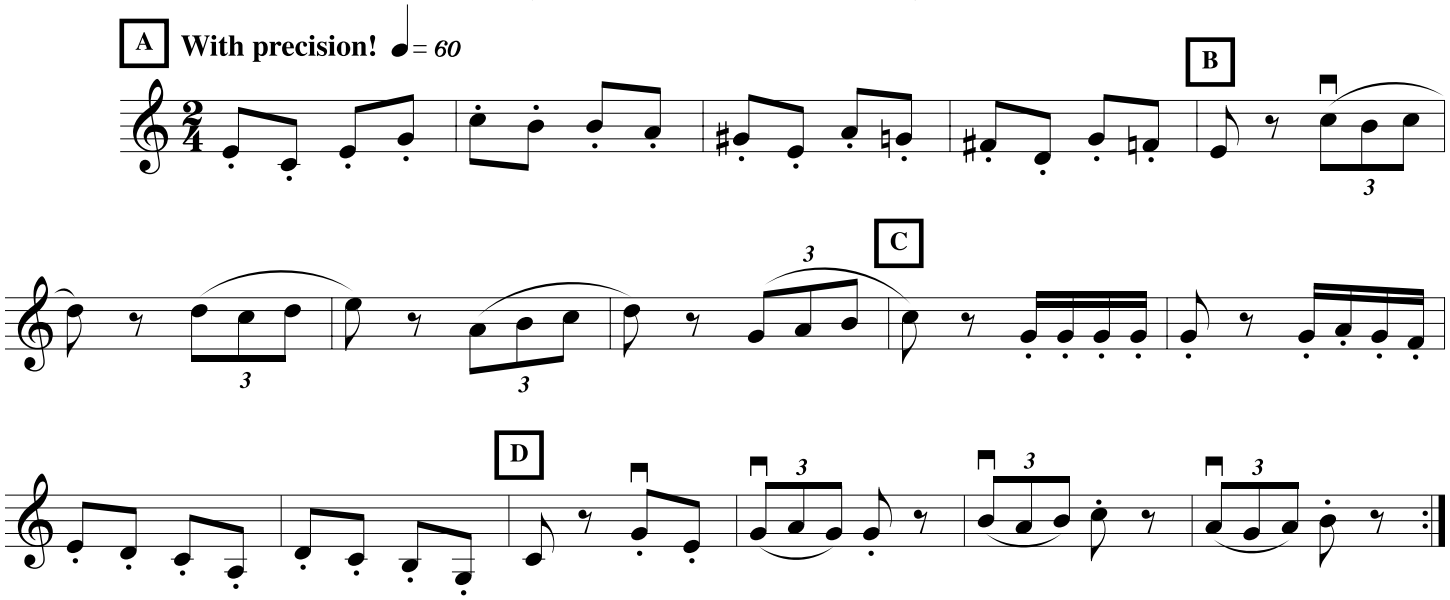


11. Madrigal Madness

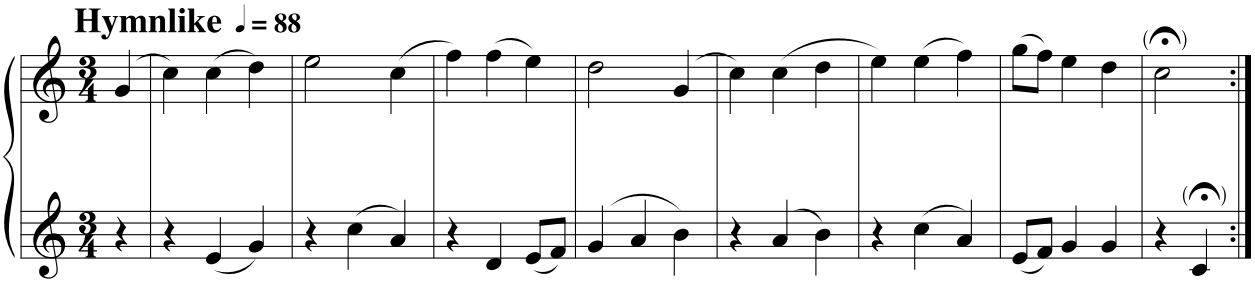


12. Cross Rhythms

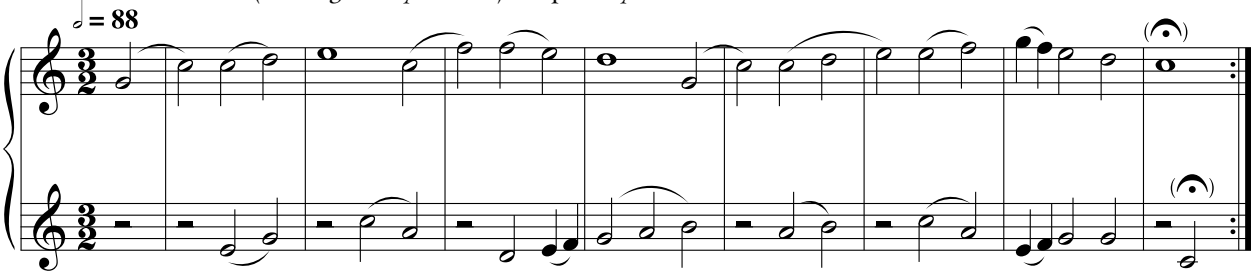
Variation I
(A "round" at four bars)



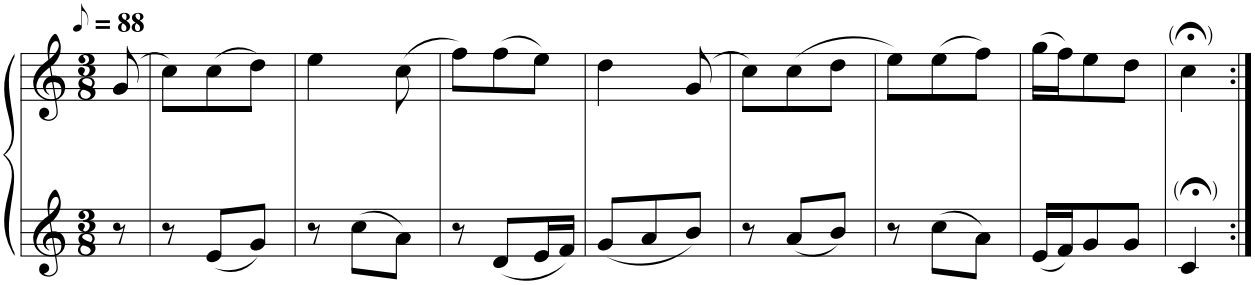
Any Kind of Note Can Get One Beat



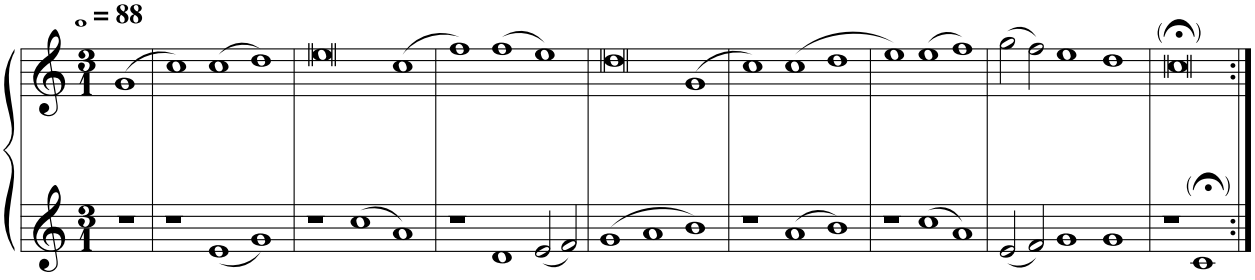
Bach and Hindemith (among many others) frequently write in $\frac{3}{2}$



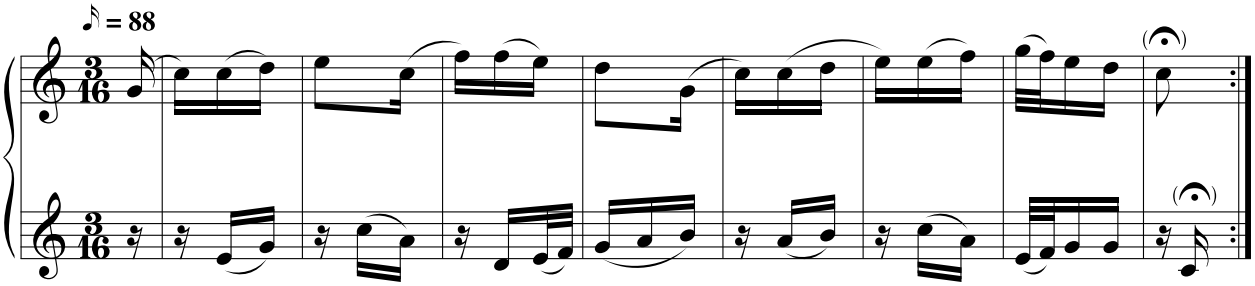
Entirely common with all composers



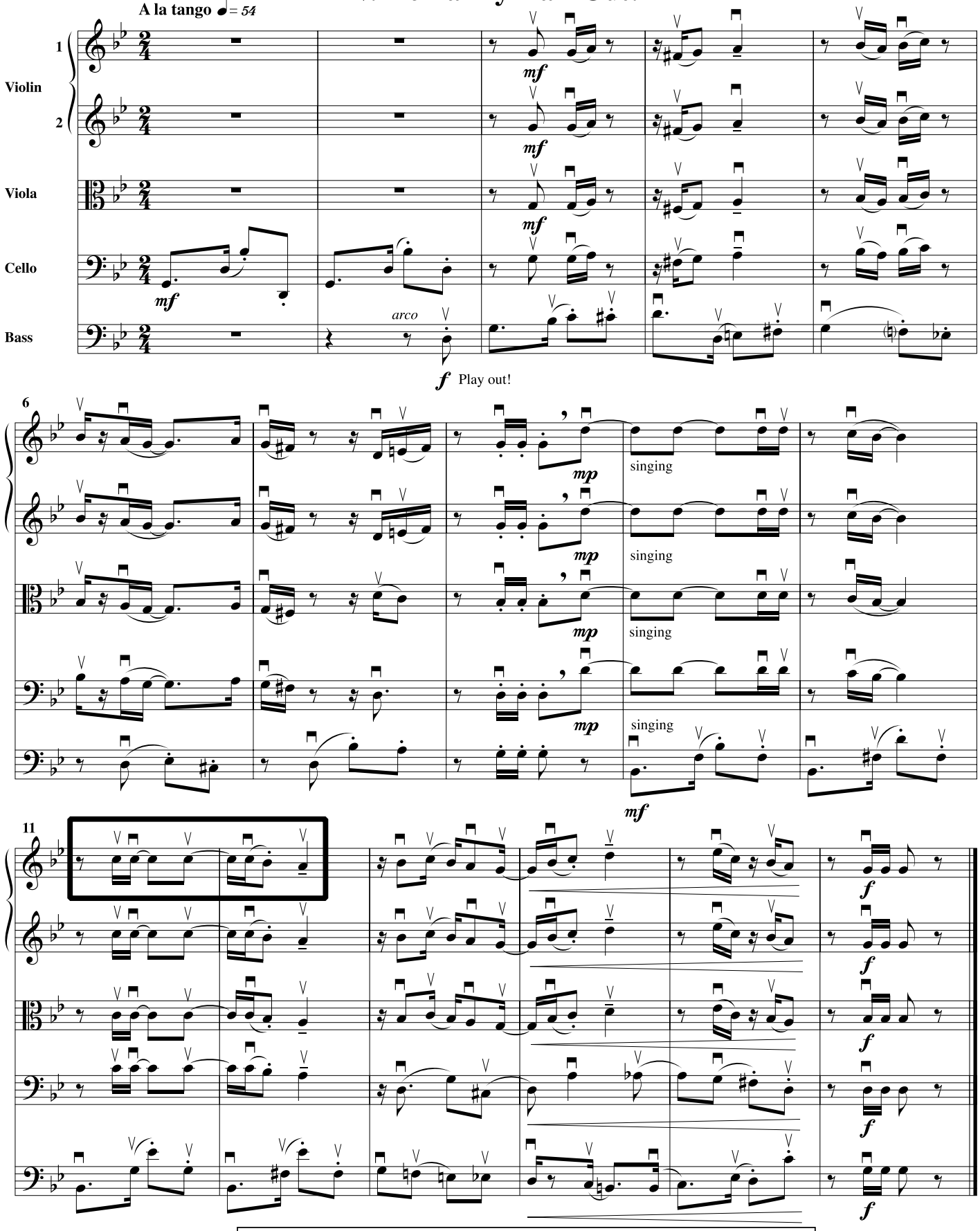
Many thousands of compositions were written in this language, in early days.



Beethoven chose this meter for one of his slowest Adagios.



IV. Terra My Hair Out!

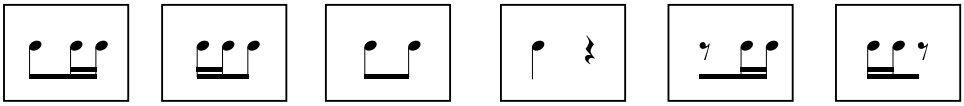


In difficult measures, such as 13-14, try having outside players leave out ties, then have the inside players try it. This way, each stand can begin to feel the subdivision within the tie.

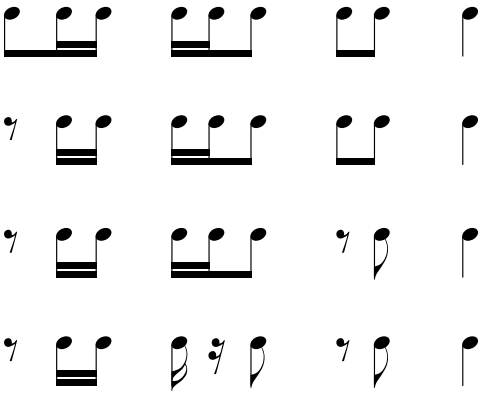
Developing a Rhythmic Lesson from Current Literature

1. What is the issue of difficulty? (Ex. 1: Ties, Interiorization.)

2. Developing flash card series. (Take cells from a difficult passage.)

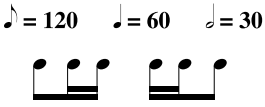


3. Drill in "train car" series. (Suggest: Mix order of cells. Develop series replacing notes with rests.)

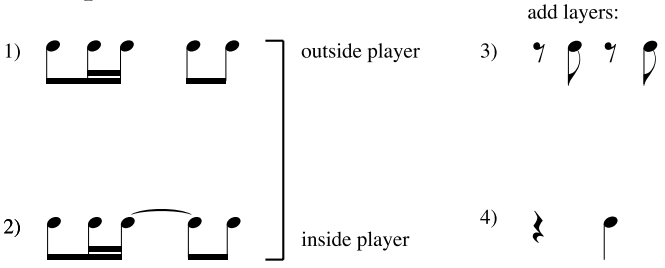


4. Play with different subdivisions. Different tempi. (Also use relative values.)

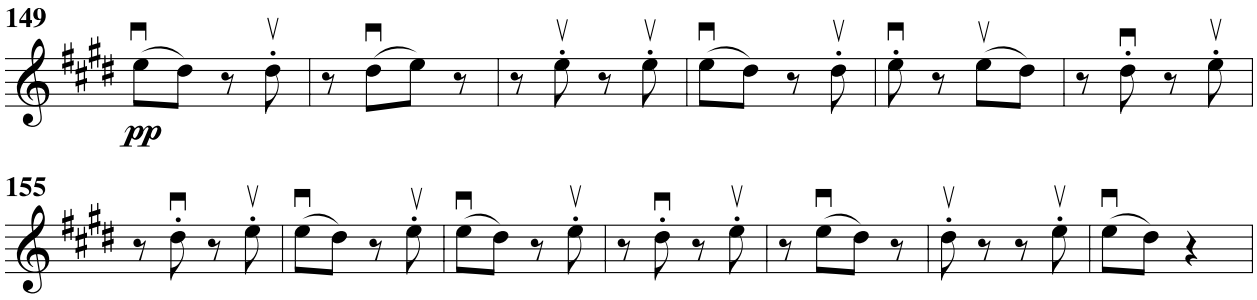
5. Play with different subdivisions. Same tempi. *Inflection*.



6. Scale practice and interiorization.



Dvorak *Serenade*: Excerpt from the last movement (Violin 1)



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