THE WITMARK PROGRESSIVE METHOD FOR THE BANJO

Written and Compiled by G. L. LANSING

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THE WITMARK BANJO METHOD.

Holding the Banjo.

THE Banjo should be held as in the accompaning cut. Do not press the rim too close to the body. Rest the little finger firmly on the head, an inch in front of the bridge. Always keep the thumb stiff, never allow it to pass back of the fingers after picking a note. Do not pick the strings up, but straight across, thus avoiding the unpleasant twang so often heard. The left hand should not be cramped, place the neck of the banjo between the thumb and the first finger, never allow the palm to touch the neck in any way. Finger close to the frets and press down firmly whether playing loud or soft. The pupil should practice first to produce a good musical tone and not be too eager to play melodies until a good tone is acquired.

. . . Instructions . . .

The tuning and fingering of the Banjo will be found on pages 9 and 10.

The pupil is advised to follow this method carefully, memorizing the fingering as well as the scales and studies, don't hurry through the exercises, you'll accomplish more and become more efficient by careful study.

The English tuning or notation is included in this work, scales, studies and exercises in the English notation are introduced, these are so marked; unless so marked, all scales, studies and exercises are in the American notation.

The Witmark Banjo Method

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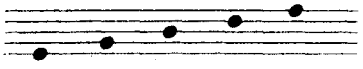
Rudiments.

The Notes.

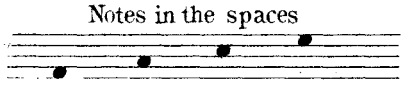
The various musical sounds are represented by signs called "Notes" which are placed upon and between five lines, called a staff or stave. There are seven notes in music, which are named after the first seven letters in the alphabet – A, B, C, D, E, F, G. These notes are repeated according to the compass of the instrument.

The Staff or Stave.

Notes on the lines



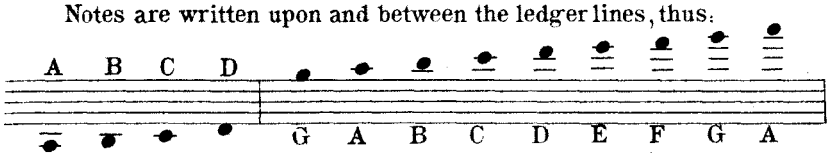
Notes in the spaces



Ledger Lines.

In order to represent higher or lower notes than those written in the staff, short lines, called "Ledger Lines" are added.

Notes are written upon and between the ledger lines, thus:

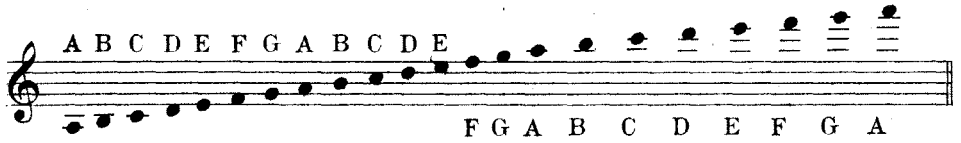


These notes range from the lowest to the highest compass of the Banjo.

The Clef.

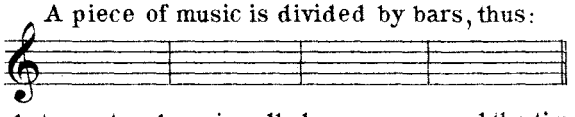
There is but one clef used in music for the Banjo, the G or Treble clef 𝄞

Notes in the G or Treble Clef.



These notes should be memorized for the entire compass of the instrument.

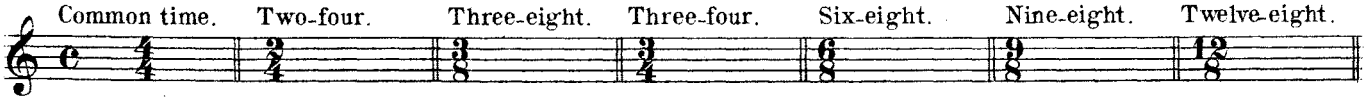
A piece of music is divided by bars, thus:



The space and contents between two bars is called a measure, and the time contained in each measure is marked at the beginning of every piece, or at any change of time which may occur.

Time.

The various degrees and value of the measures are as follows,



These are the degrees of time most commonly used.

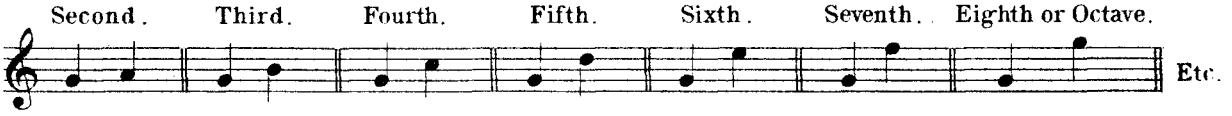
What is an Interval?

An interval is the difference or distance between two sounds.

The smallest interval is called a semi-tone or half-tone.

Each key of the Banjo is a semi-tone from that which is next to it.

Other Intervals are as follows:

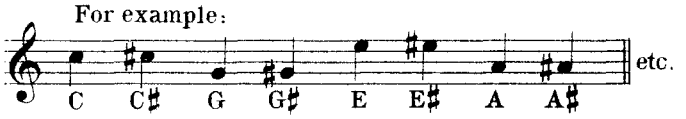


Chromatic Signs.

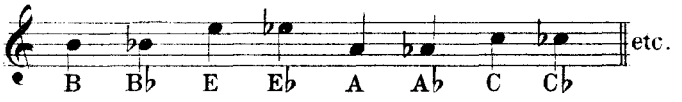
Sharps(♯) Flats(♭) and Naturals(♮)

The ♯(sharp) placed before a note *raises* it one semi or half tone.

For example:

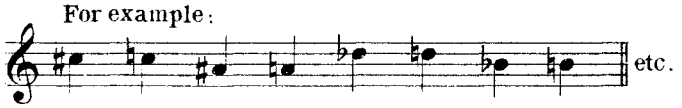


A ♭(flat) placed before a note *lowers* it one semi or half tone. For example:



A ♮(natural) brings a note that has been raised by a sharp or lowered by a flat, to its former place.

For example:

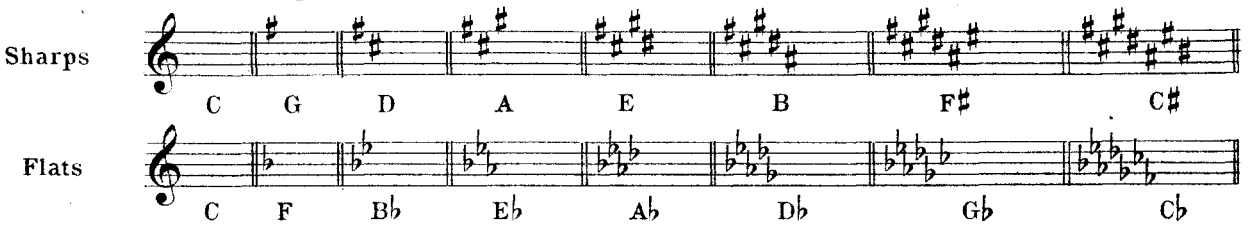


consequently, a natural sometimes raises and sometimes lowers a note.

Accidentals: Are sharps, flats or naturals; that do not belong to a key, and thus may be said to occur accidentally — hence the name; they affect all the notes of the same name in the measure in which they are used.

The Key. (Major)

A key, is the basis of every piece of music and it is either major or minor, and is determined principally by the signature and by the chord on which the composition ends. Each key-note being a fifth *higher* for every additional sharp, or a fifth *lower* for every additional flat. Commencing always with C, which key has neither sharps nor flats.



The Key. (Minor)

Each major key has its relative minor key which is a third lower

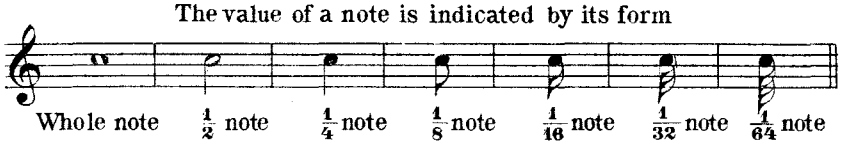
For example: { The relative minor of C is A minor. / The relative minor of G is E minor. etc. etc.

The sharps or flats used to designate the signature affect all the notes of the corresponding name throughout the piece, whether in the staff, above it or below.

The value of the notes.

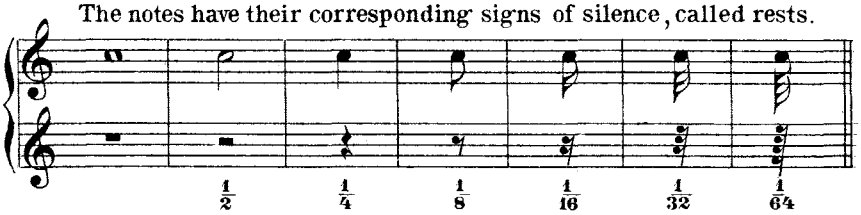
The value of a note is indicated by its form

For example:

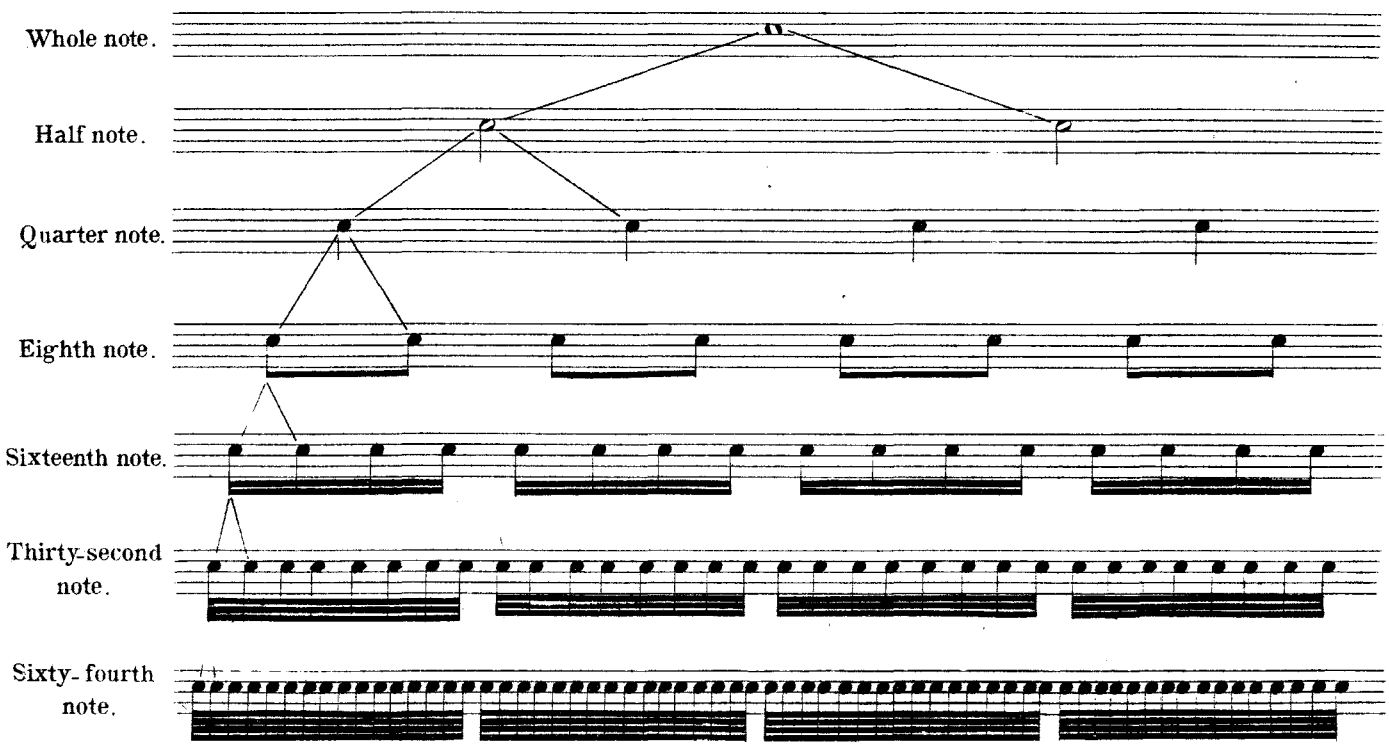


The notes have their corresponding signs of silence, called rests.

For example:



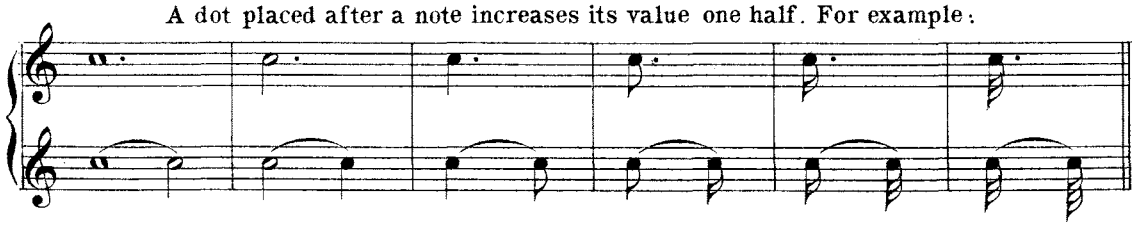
Comparative value of notes.



The Dot.

A dot placed after a note increases its value one half. For example:

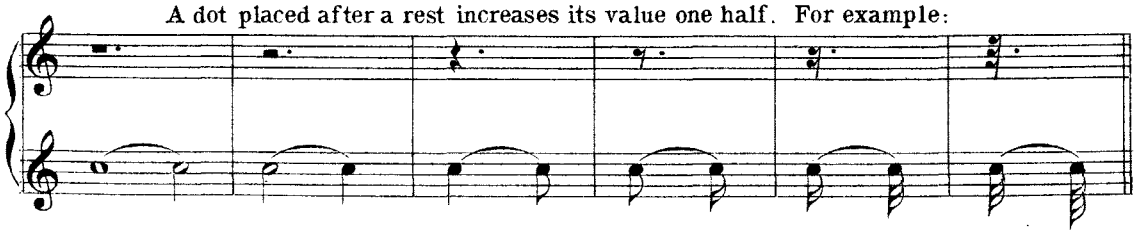
Equal to



Etc.

A dot placed after a rest increases its value one half. For example:

Equal to

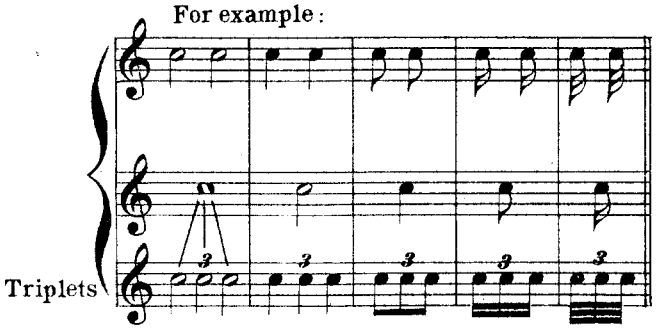


Etc.

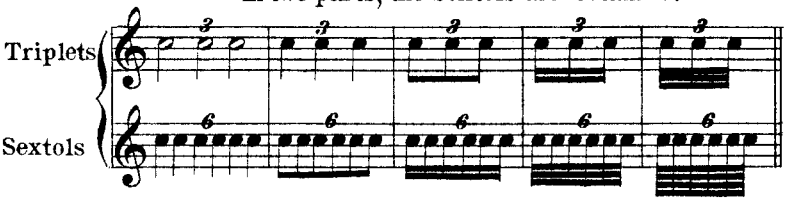
Triplets and Sextols.

Notes can be divided not only in *two* but also in *three* equal parts, which division is called Triplets; therefore a whole note will be equal to one triplet of half notes, a half note equal to one triplet of quarter notes, a quarter note equal to one triplet of eighth notes, &c.

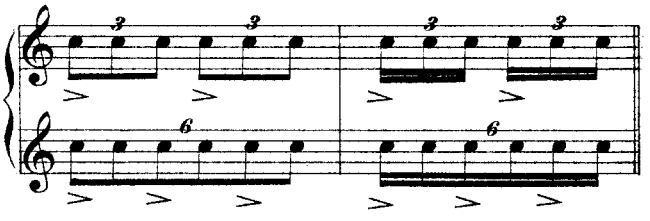
For example:



By dividing each of the three triplets in two parts, the Sextols are obtained.

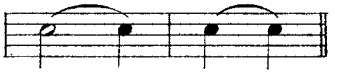


The difference between two groups of triplets and one group of sextols is the following, in the triplet the *first* note of each group has the accent, in the sextol the *first, third* and *fifth* are the accented notes.



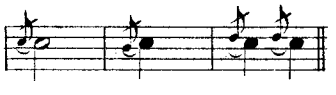
The Tie

When two notes on the same degree are connected by a slur, they are said to be tied, in such cases the first one only is played.



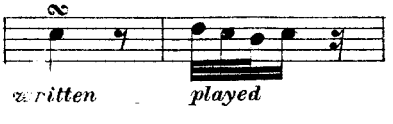
Grace Notes

Small notes called grace notes are often used as embellishments. These take their time from the main note. Those having a line drawn through the stem ♪ are played as quickly as possible.



The Turn

This sign ∞ is sometimes used to indicate the turn,



The pupil should thoroughly learn the rudiments of music, and apply the same diligently in his practice, by so doing his method will be well grounded and much more enjoyment will be obtained.

Dictionary of Musical Terms.

Ad libitum, (*ad lib.*) at will.
Adagio, very slow, expressing grace and dignity.
Andante, slow and distinct.
Andantino, a trifle slower than Andante.
Allegro, quick and lively.
Allegretto, lively, but slower than Allegro.
Animato, with spirit, usually increasing the time.
Agitato, with agitation.
Assai, very; *Allegro assai*, very quick.
Accelerando, (*accel.*) a gradual increase in speed.
A tempo, in time. It indicates that after a temporary change of speed, the original time is to be restored again.
Amoroso, in a soft and tender style.
Con, with; *Con brio*, with brilliancy and spirit.
Calando, gradually diminishing in tone and speed.
Cantabile, in a graceful and singing style.
Capriccioso, capricious and fanciful.
Commodo, easy and quietly.
Con fuoco, with animation and fire.
Crescendo, (*cresc.* <) a gradual increase in tone, louder by degrees.
Con moto, quick, with more than ordinary spirit.
Coda, an addition at the end of a composition.
Da Capo or D.C. means to go back to the beginning.
Dal Segno or D.S. means to go back to sign 𝄋.
Decrescendo, (*decresc.* >) diminishing the force; softer by degrees.
Dolce, soft and sweet.
Diminuendo, (*dim.*) same as decresc., but a little more so.
Furioso, furiously, with ardor.
Finale, the last movement of a composition.
Fine, the end; D.S. al fine, means to go back to sign 𝄋 and finish at *fine*, the end.
Forte, (*f*) loud.
Fortissimo, (*ff*) very loud.
Grave, slow and solemn.
Grazioso, graceful.
Grandioso, with grandeur and dignity.
Giusto, exact time.
Legato, slurred; the smooth connection and binding together of the notes.
Largo, very slow and solemn.
Larghetto, slow and measured time; a little slower than largo
Lento, slow and steady time.
Loco, cancels the *8va* sign; play as written.
L'istesso tempo, in the same time as before
Leggiero, gay and lively.
Moderato, in moderate time.
Molto, much, very, extremely.
Meno, less, slower.
Mosso, movement; *Meno mosso*, a slower movement.
Maestoso, with majesty and grandeur.
Marcato, in a prompt and emphatic style.
Marcia, march time.
Marziale, in a martial, military style.
Morendo, dying out, becoming softer and slower by degrees.
Mezzo-forte, (*mf*) half-forte, rather loud.
Non troppo, not too much.
Presto, extremely quick.
Prestissimo, the climax of presto.
Più, a little faster; *Più mosso*, with increased speed.
Più lento, a little slower.
Poco, a little; *Poco a Poco*, little by little.
Portamento, sustaining the tone, gliding from note to note.
Piano, (*p*) soft; *Pianissimo*, (*pp*) very soft.
Perpendosi, gradually diminishing the sound, until it dies away.
Piacere, at pleasure, in regard to time.
Quasi, in the style of.
Ritardo, ritardanto (*rit.*) a retardation.
Rubato, changing the time from fast to slower, and from slow to faster, alternately.
Rallentando, (*rallo.*) a gradual diminution in the speed.
Religioso, in a solemn religious style.
Rigoroso, in exact and distinct time.
Risoluto, in a decided and determined style.
Rinforzando, (*rf*) with more accent and emphasis.
Ritenuto, a holding back in the time.
Staccato, each note short, distinct and detached.
Stringendo, accelerating the movement by degrees.
Stretto, a considerable increase in the speed.
Scherzando, (*scherz.*) in a light and playful manner.
Semplice, simple, plain and modest.
Strepitoso, in a bold, noisy manner.
Sentimento, with much feeling.
Smorzando, (*smorz.*) diminishing and dying away by degrees.
Sostenuto, sustained and firm.
Sforzando, sforzato, sf., (>) a superior stress or emphasis on one or more particular notes.
Suivez, follow the conductor or soloist.
Segue, means to continue in the same manner.
Swell, (< >) a gradual increase and decrease.
Tempo, means the degree of movement.
Troppo, too much.
Tempo I^mo, the original time of a previous similar strain is taken up again.
Un peu, a little.
Vivace, quick, lively, with much spirit.
Vivacissimo, extremely lively.
Vivo, with life and energy.
Volti subito or V.S. means to turn over.
Vigoroso, with boldness and vigor.
Vite, quick.

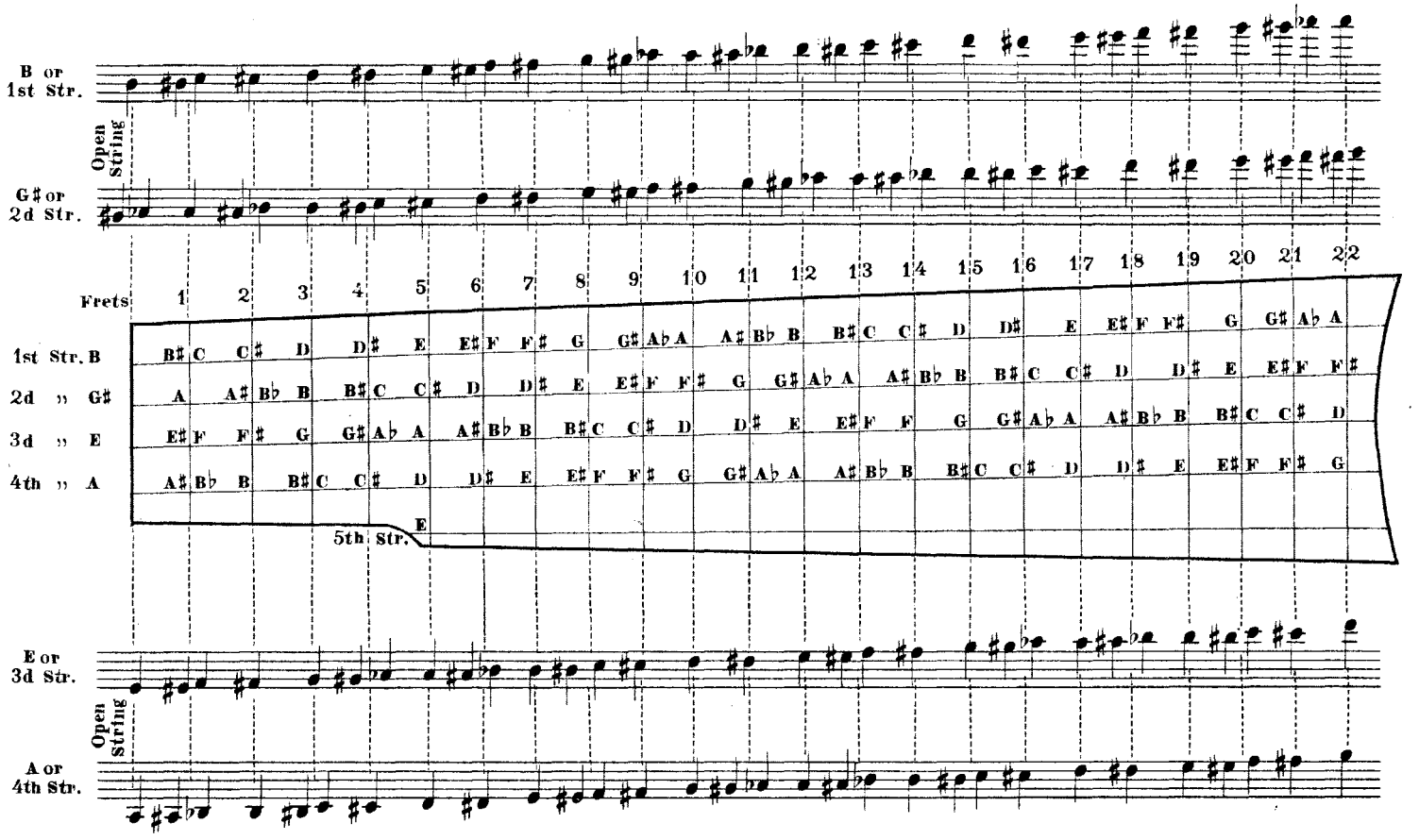
THE WITMARK BANJO METHOD

DIAGRAM OF THE BANJO FINGER-BOARD

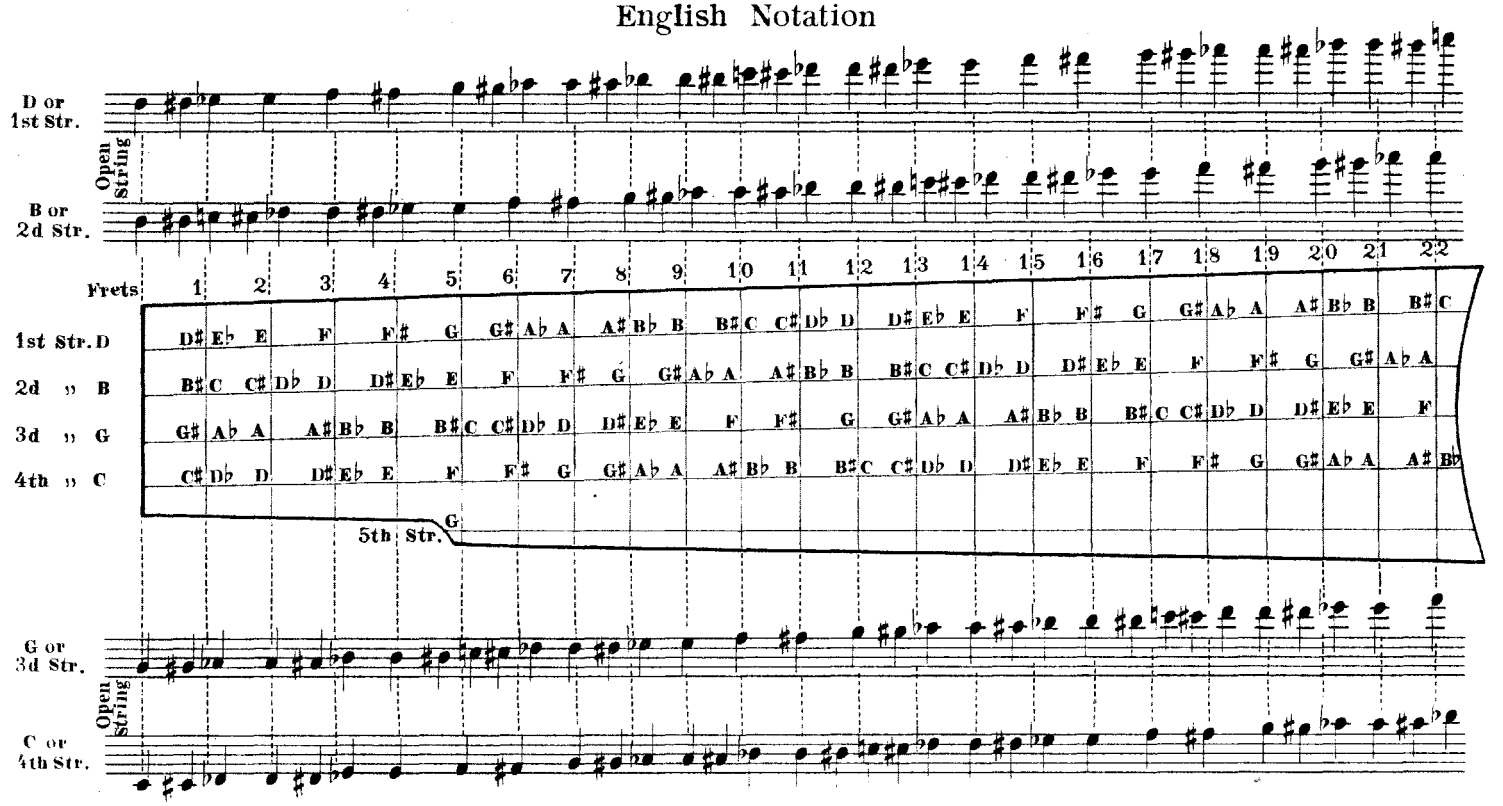
Showing the Chromatic Scale on each String

American and English Notation

American Notation



English Notation



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Tuning the Banjo

Tune 4th String to C on the piano, thus:

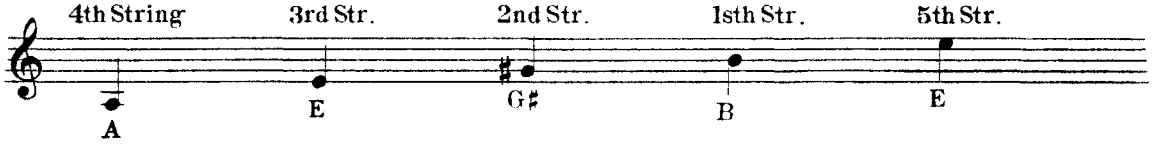
Stop " " at the 7th fret and tune 3rd String in unison

" 3rd " " 4th " " " 2nd " " "

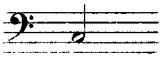
" 2nd " " 3rd " " " 1st " " "

" 1st " " 5th " " " 5th " " "

After the banjo has been tuned as above the open strings are to be read as follows:—



*At the present time the question of raising the reading pitch to C. (where it is actually tuned) is being discussed. Some enterprising publishers are issuing their pieces in both notations there are also a number of teachers who have taken up the C or English notation as it is sometimes called as the writers in England always use it. In consideration of this fact the C notation is herewith given.

Tune 4th String to C on the piano, thus: 

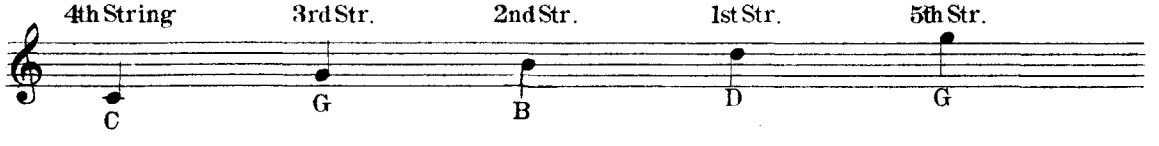
Stop " " at the 7th fret and tune 3rd String in unison

" 3rd " " " 4th " " " 2nd " " "

" 2nd " " " 3rd " " " 1st " " "

" 1st " " " 5th " " " 5th " " "

The open strings when tuned according to the C notation will then read as follows



If the C notation is universally adopted, teachers will have to illustrate the two systems by comparison, thus both notations have been included in this work, also several studies. In pieces marked Elevate Bass String or Tune 4th String to B., The bass string is to be raised one tone higher than usual.

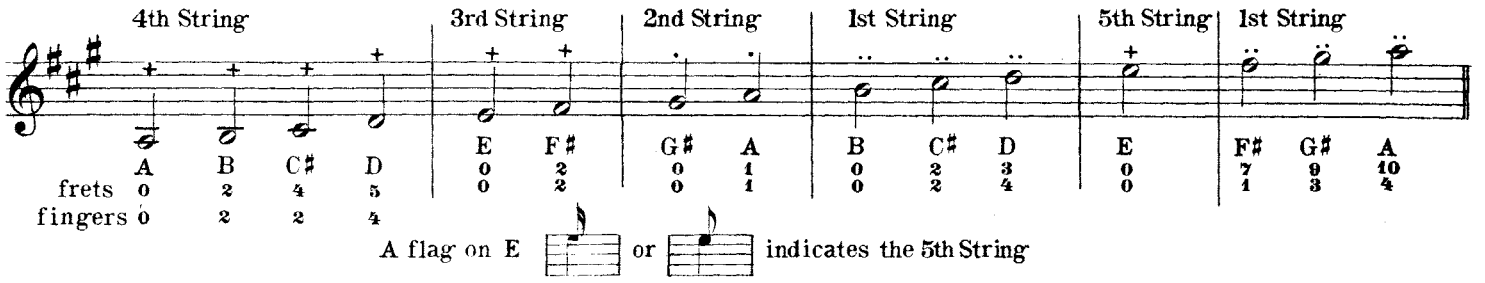
* The A notation was adopted originally when the banjo was strung with heavy strings, and was then tuned to A. As banjos are of different sizes, necessitating different pitches, we in America have up to date left the reading as it was originally.

Signs for Fingering

Right Hand, + indicates thumb	Left Hand, 1 indicates 1st finger
" " · " 1st finger	" " 2 " 2nd "
" " .. " 2nd "	" " 3 " 3rd "
" " ... " 3rd "	" " 4 " 4th "

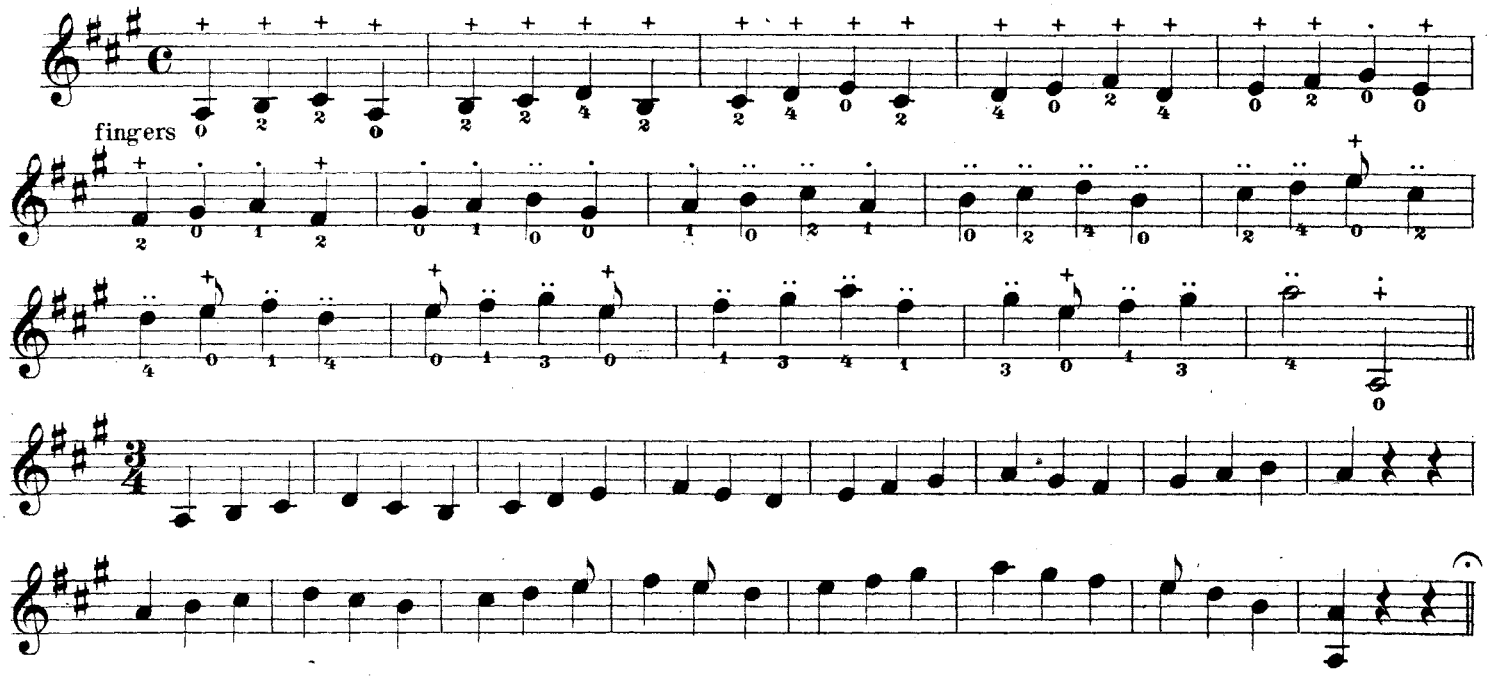
The 3rd finger of the Right Hand is only used in chords of 4 notes

Scale of A major. (*Natural Key of Banjo*)

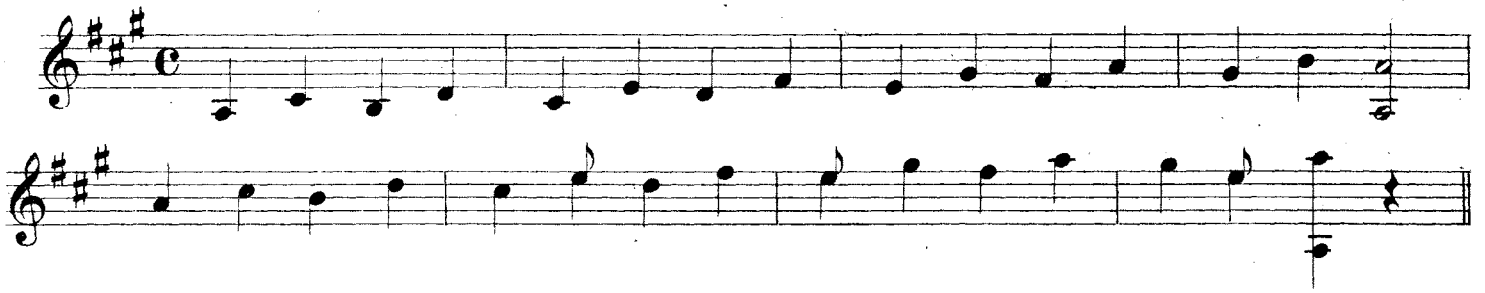


A flag on E or indicates the 5th String

Scale Exercises



Exercises in Thirds

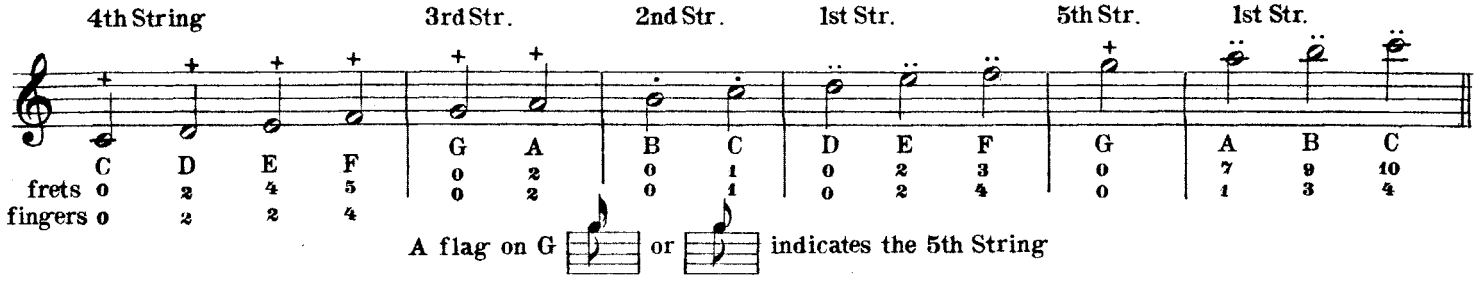


The above exercises must be fingered as indicated in the scale

Signs for Fingering. (*English Notation*)

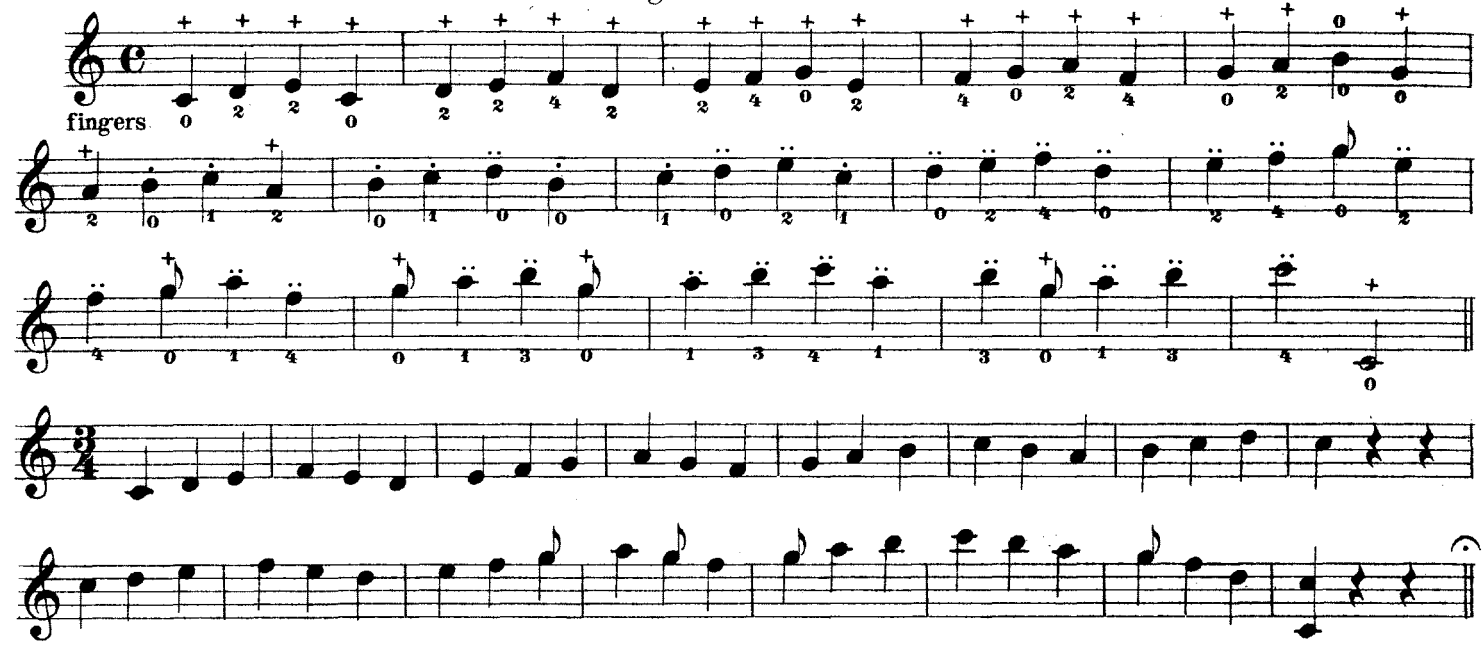
Right Hand, + indicates thumb					Left Hand, 1 indicates 1st finger				
"	"	·	"	1st finger	"	"	2	"	2nd "
"	"	··	"	2nd "	"	"	3	"	3rd "
"	"	···	"	3rd "	"	"	4	"	4th "

Scale in C major. (*Natural Key*)



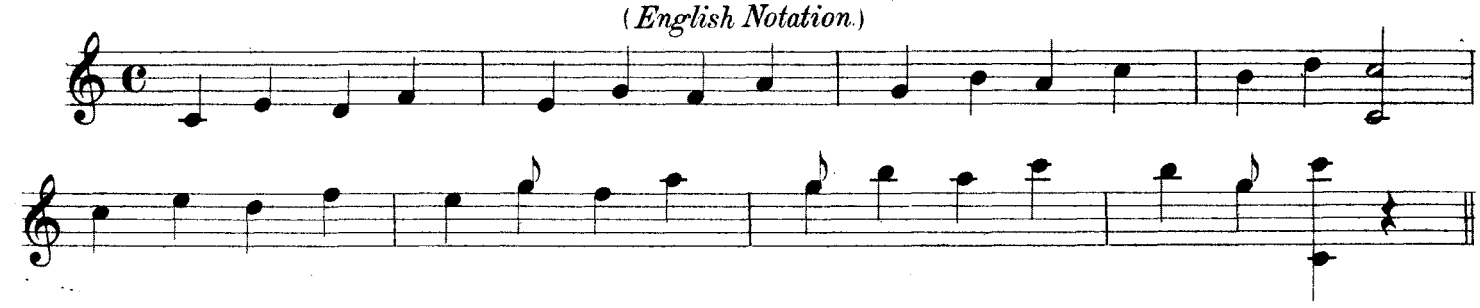
Scale Exercises

(*English Notation*)



Exercises in Thirds

(*English Notation*)

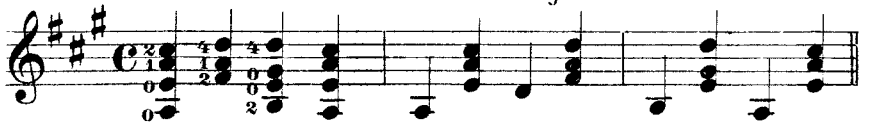


The above exercises must be fingered as indicated in the scale.

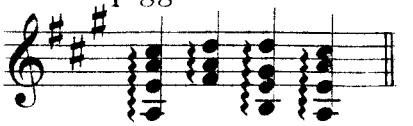
Exercise in Chords

When a number of notes are written on one stem they are to be played together. These are called chords. Care should be taken not to play them broken unless they are written so.

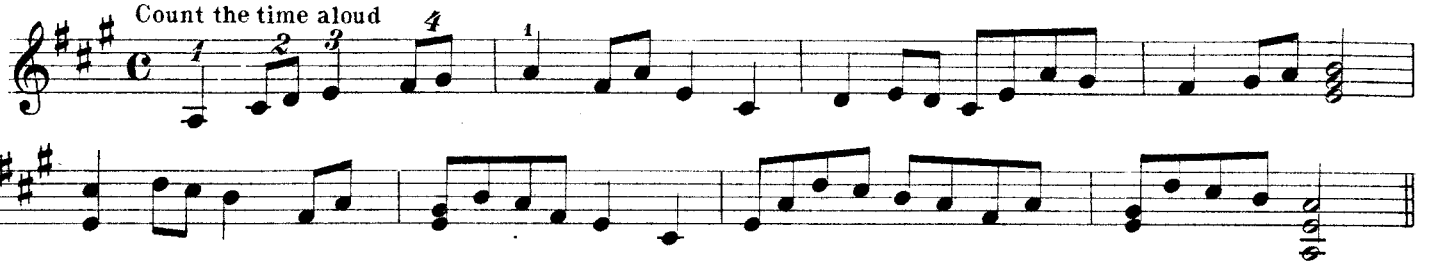
Chords in A major



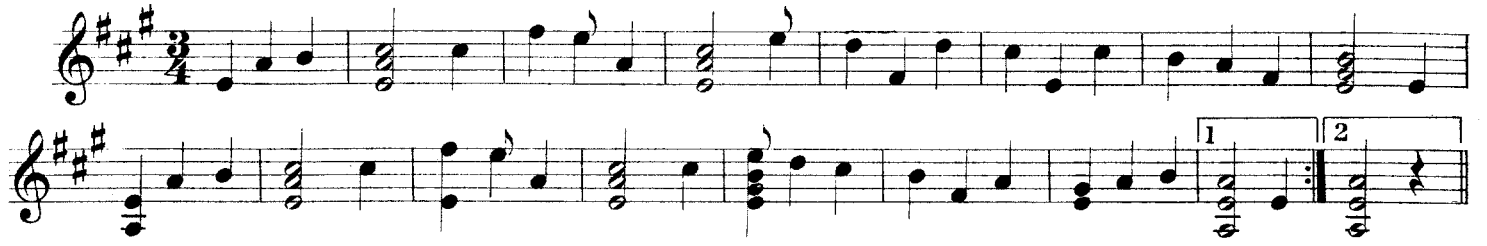
Arpeggio or broken chords



Melodious Exercises



Waltz

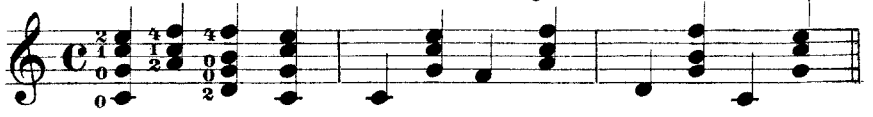


English Notation.

Exercise in Chords

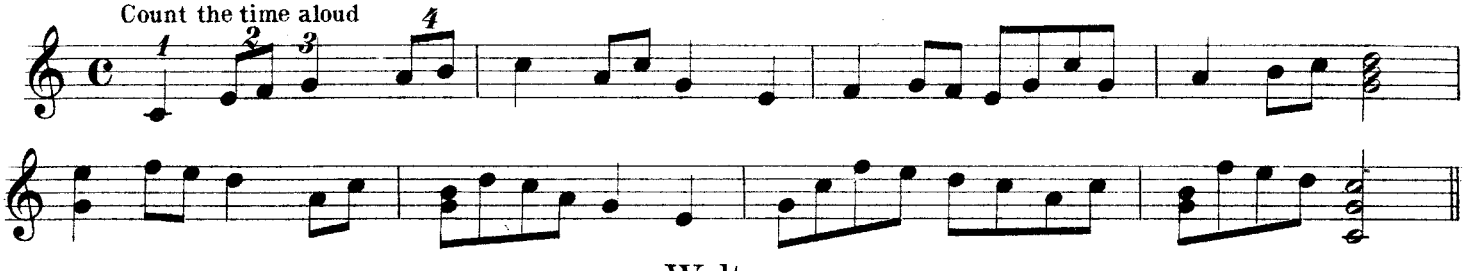
When a number of notes are written on one stem they are to be played together. These are called chords. Care should be taken not to play them broken unless they are written so.

Chords in C major

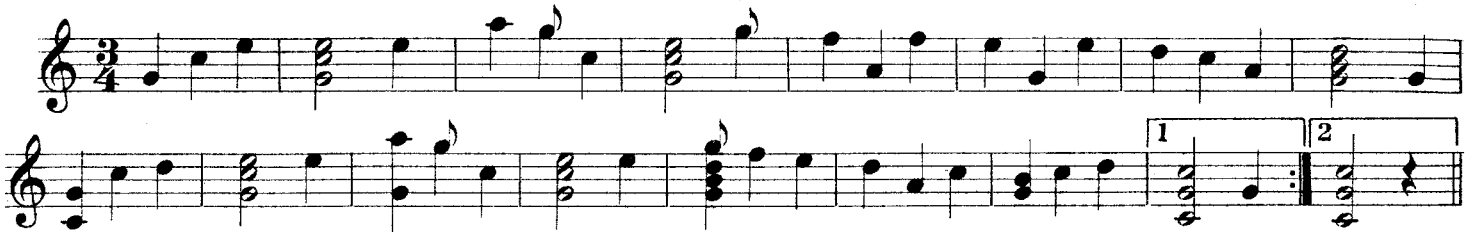


Arpeggio or broken chords

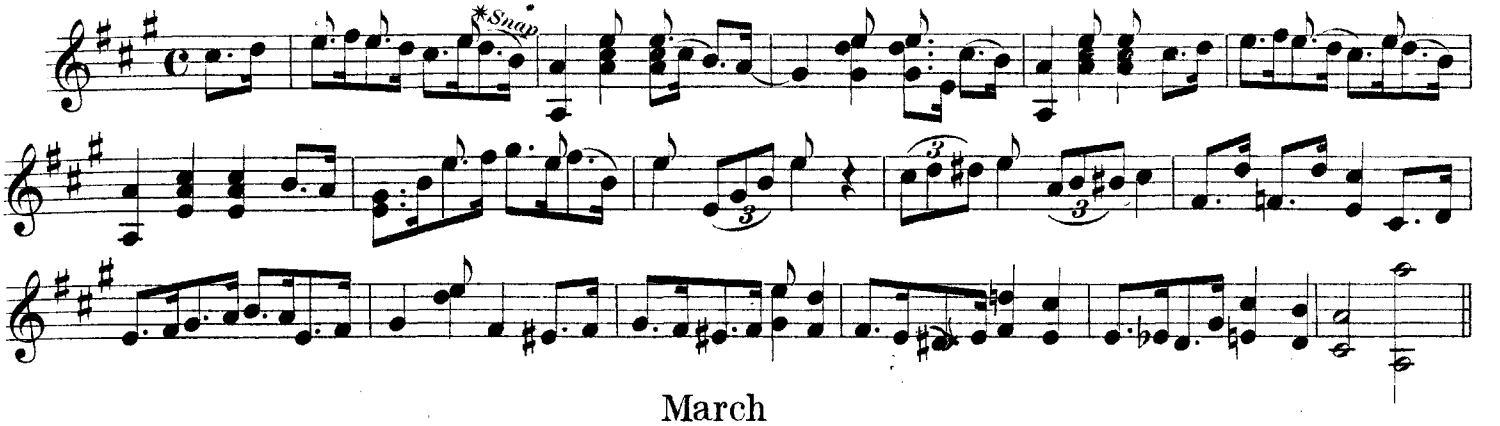
Melodious Exercises



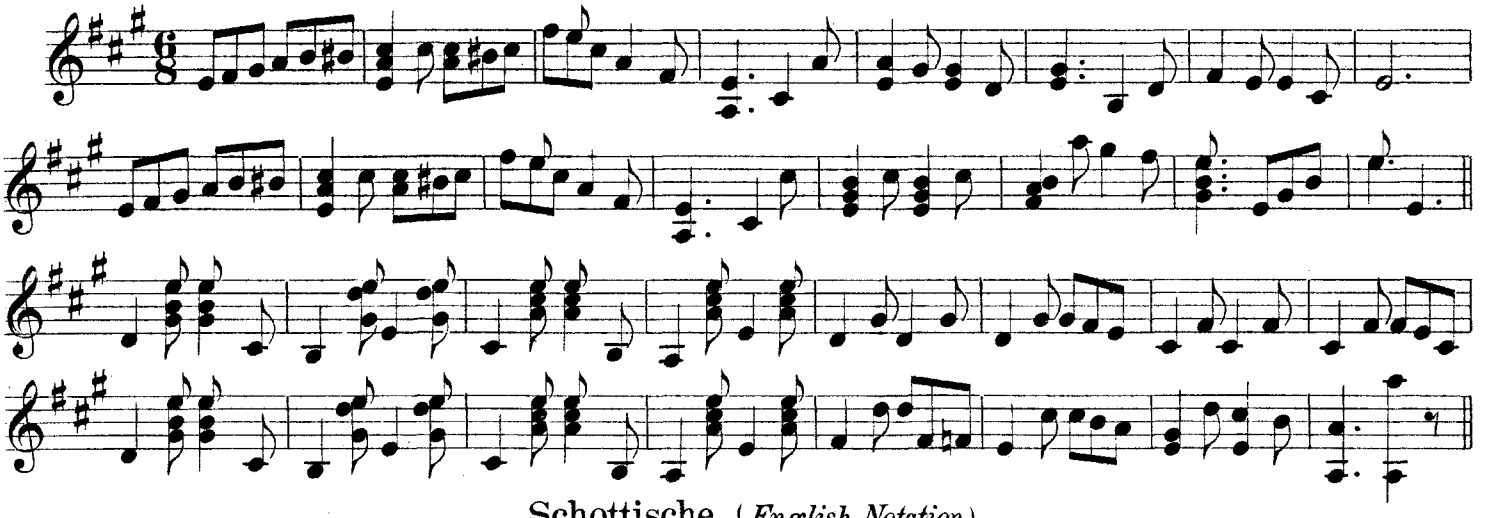
Waltz



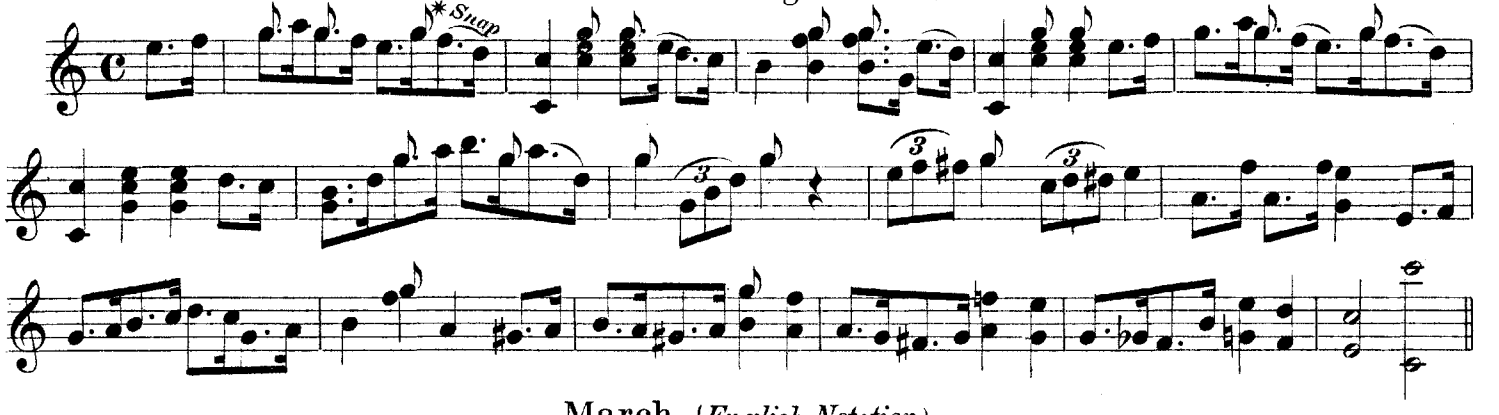
Schottische



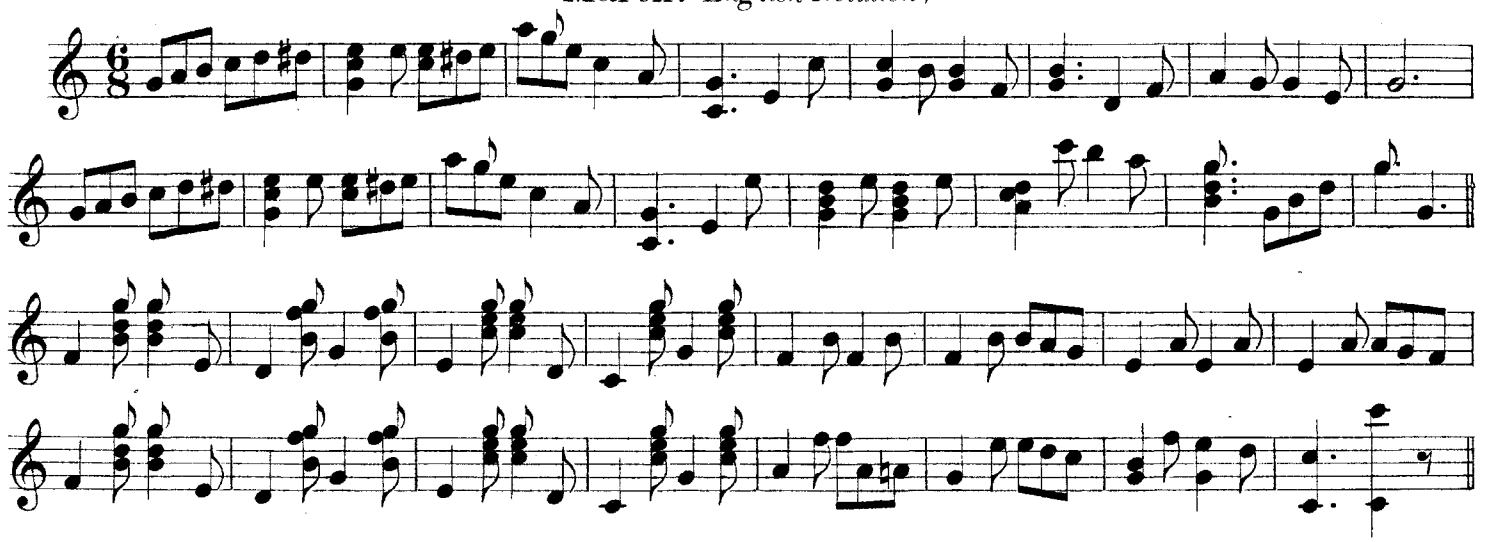
March



Schottische. (*English Notation*)



March. (*English Notation*)



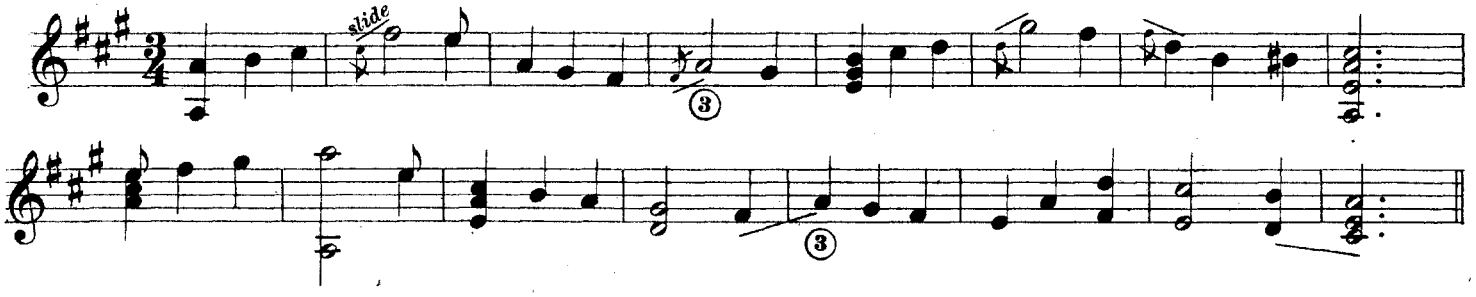
* The snap is executed by pulling the string instead of picking it. It is written as a slur ⌒

The Slide

A very effective movement called the slide is often used in passing up or down on any given string. When a slide eminates from a grace note, the grace note only is picked and the note at the end of the slide is *not to be picked* but allowed to vibrate.

When a slide begins with a common or large note it is to be picked at the beginning and at the end of the slide. The slide is indicated by a line, thus ⟋ or ⟍

Examples

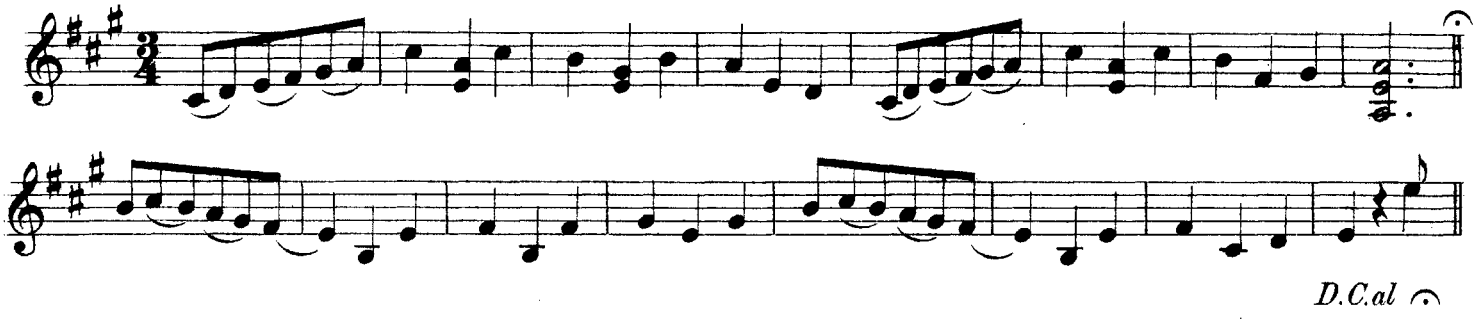


A figure enclosed in a circle ③ indicates the string on which that note is to be played.

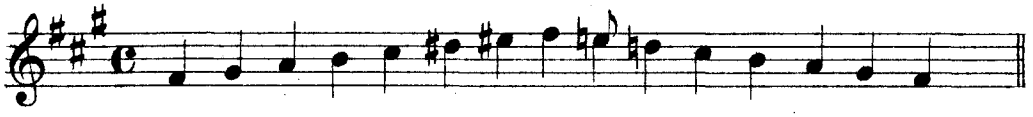
The Slur

The slur, written ⌒ is executed in two ways. If written in an ascending passage the second note note is made by letting the finger fall like a hammer on the string. In descending the second note is made by pulling the string.

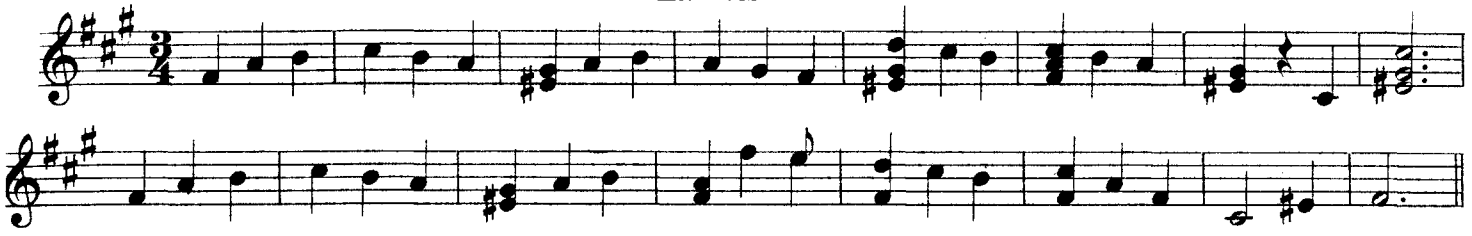
Examples



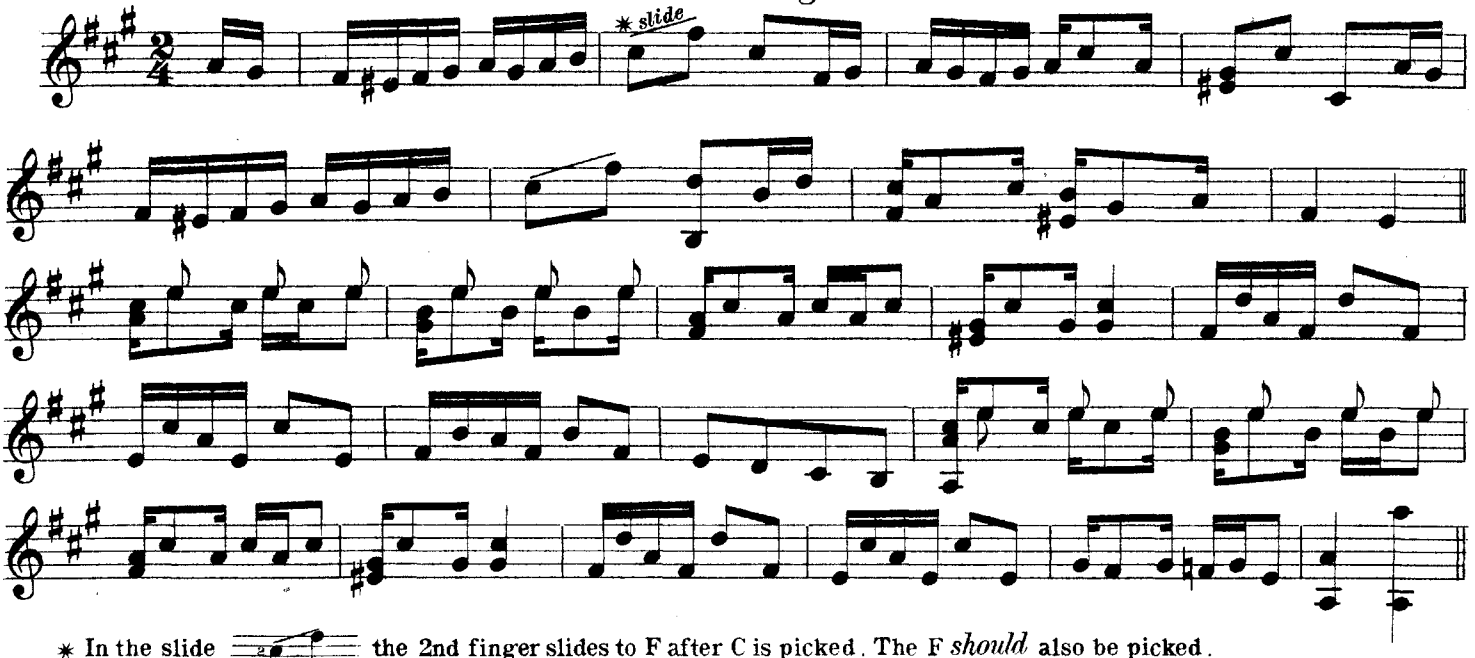
Scale in F♯ minor
(Relative of A major)

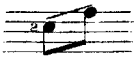


Exercise

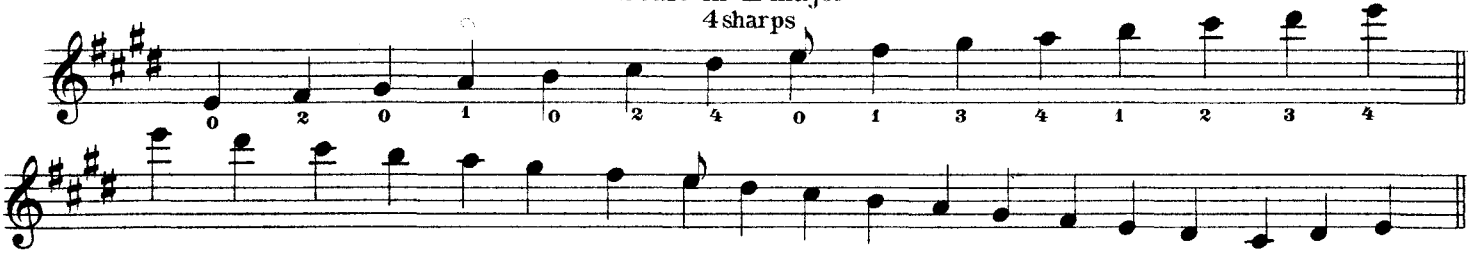


Old time Jig

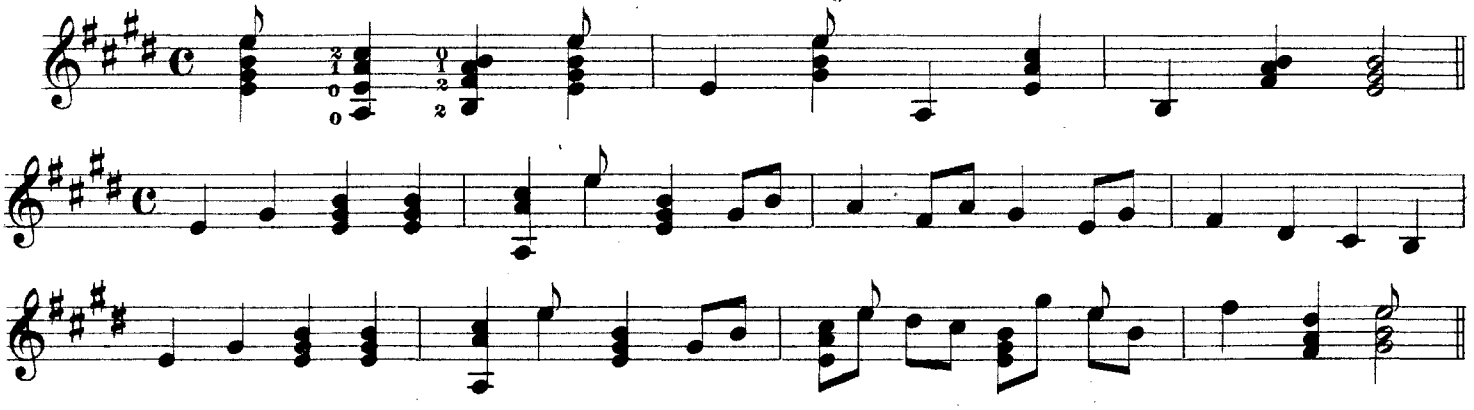


* In the slide  the 2nd finger slides to F after C is picked. The F *should* also be picked.

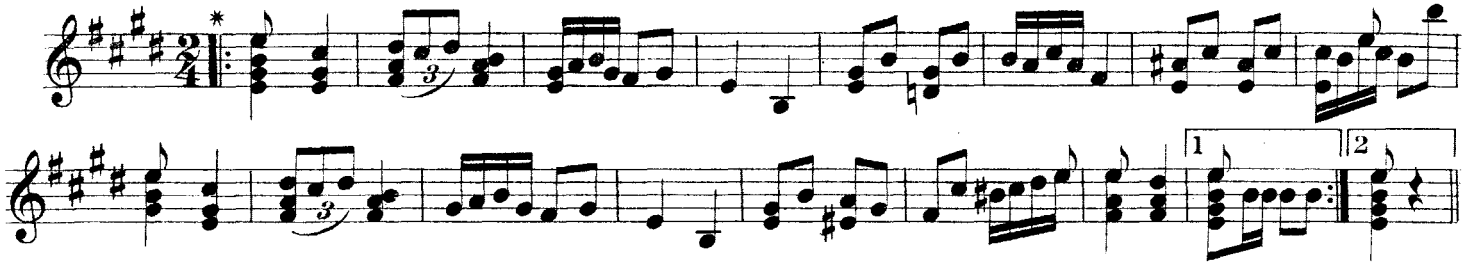
Scale in E major
4 sharps



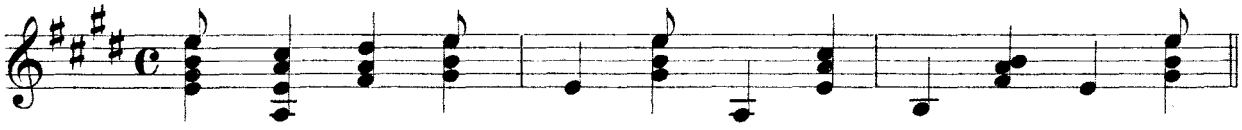
Chords in E major



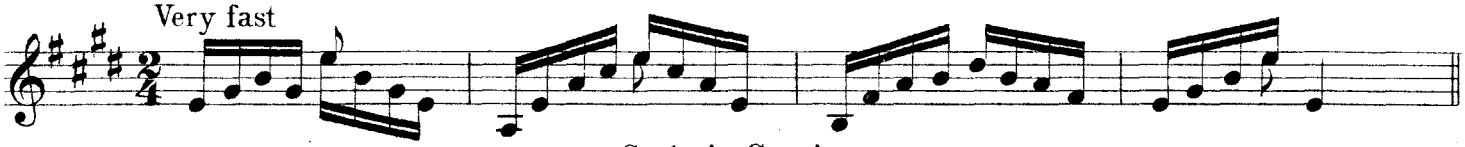
Melody. (March)



Chords in E major

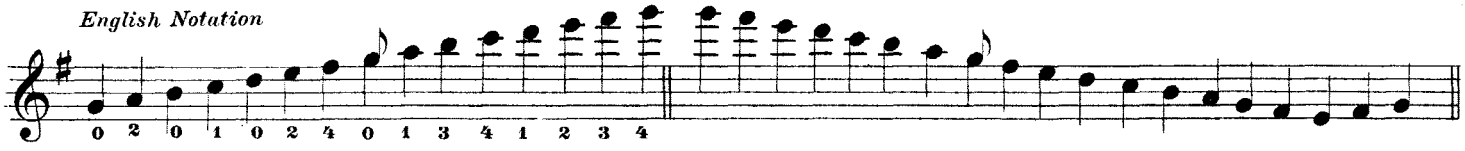


Very fast

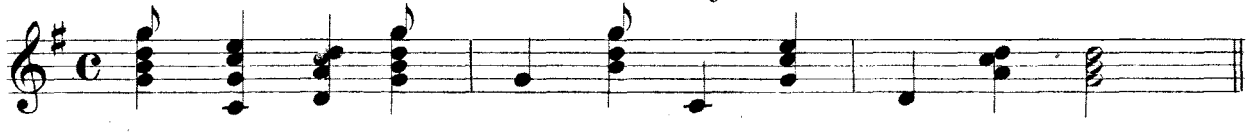


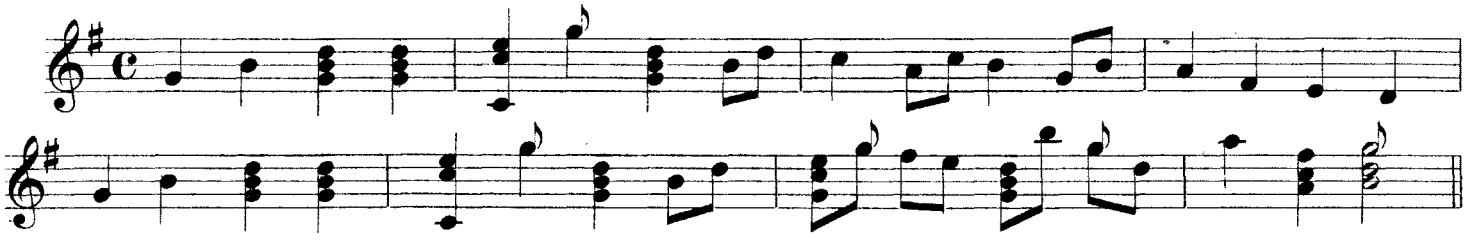
Scale in G major
(1 sharp)

English Notation



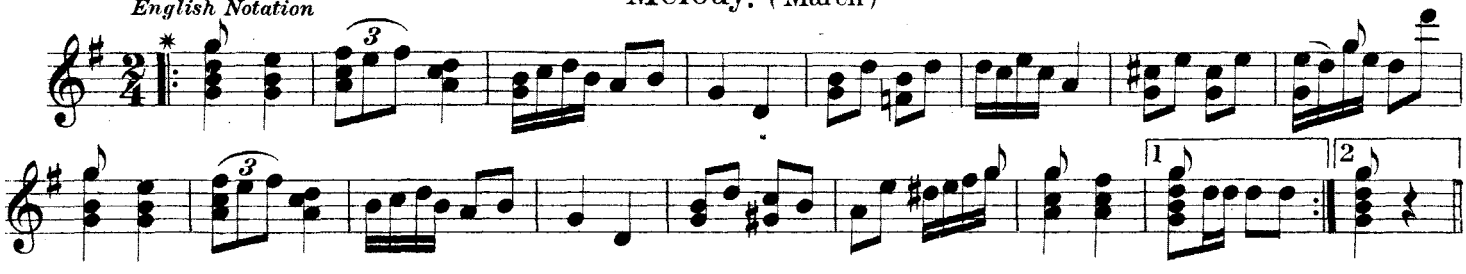
Chords in G major



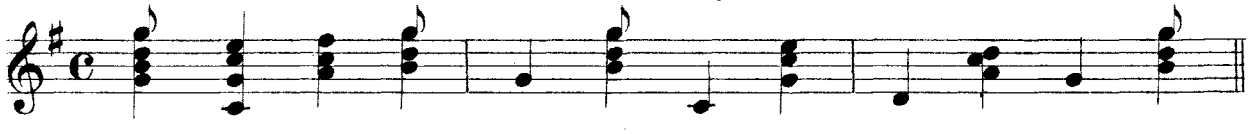


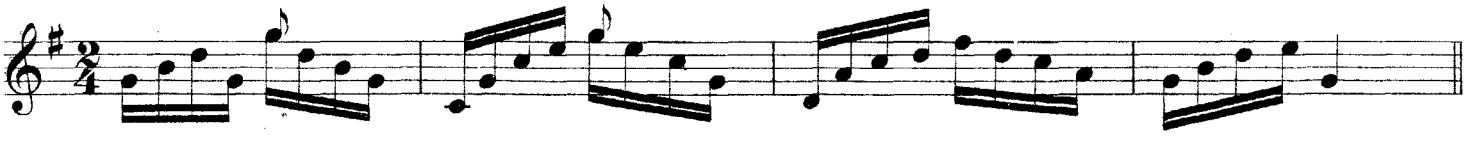
Melody. (March)

English Notation



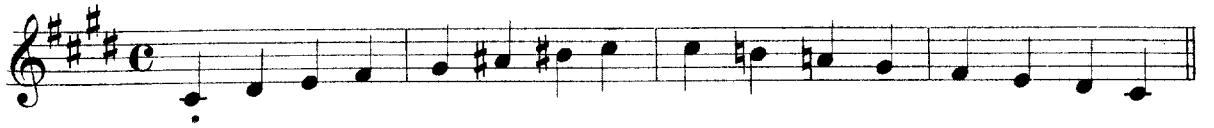
Chords in G major



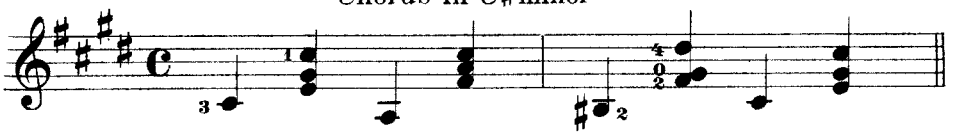


* Dots placed at the end of a strain mean that the strain is to be repeated.

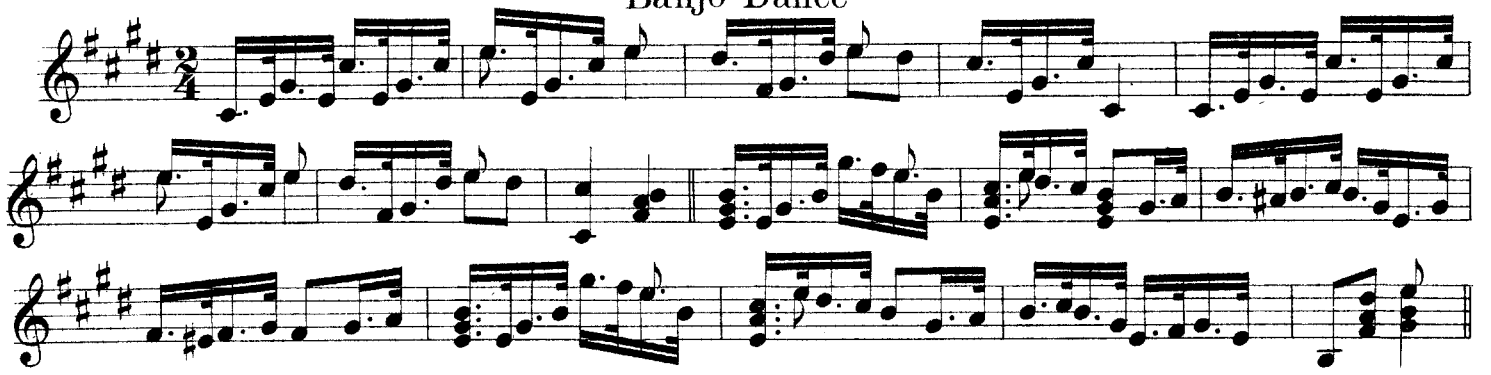
Scale in C♯ minor
(Relative of E major)



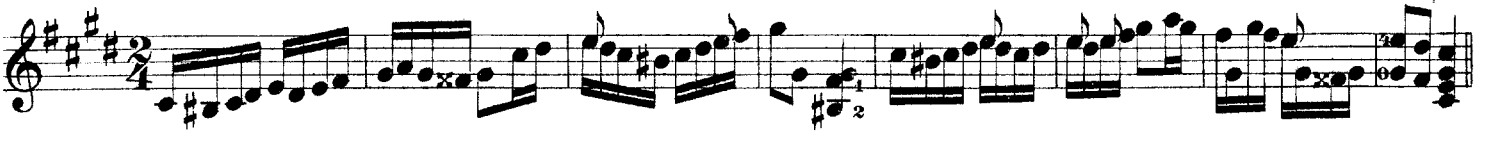
Chords in C♯ minor



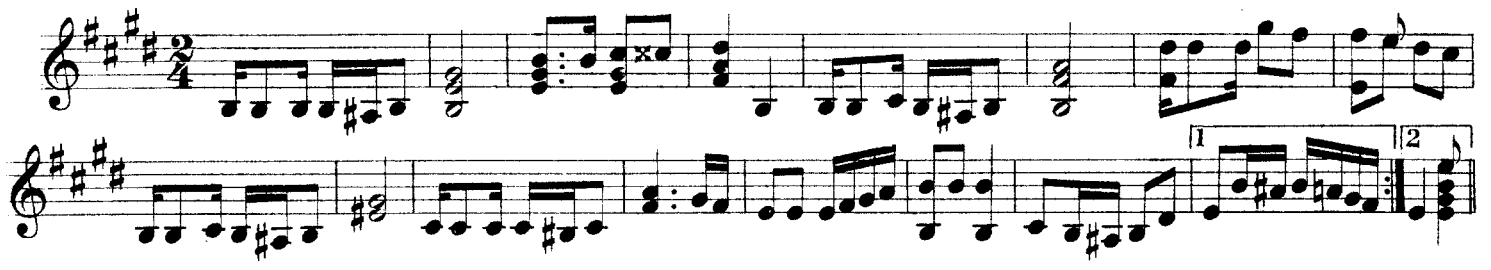
Banjo Dance



Etude

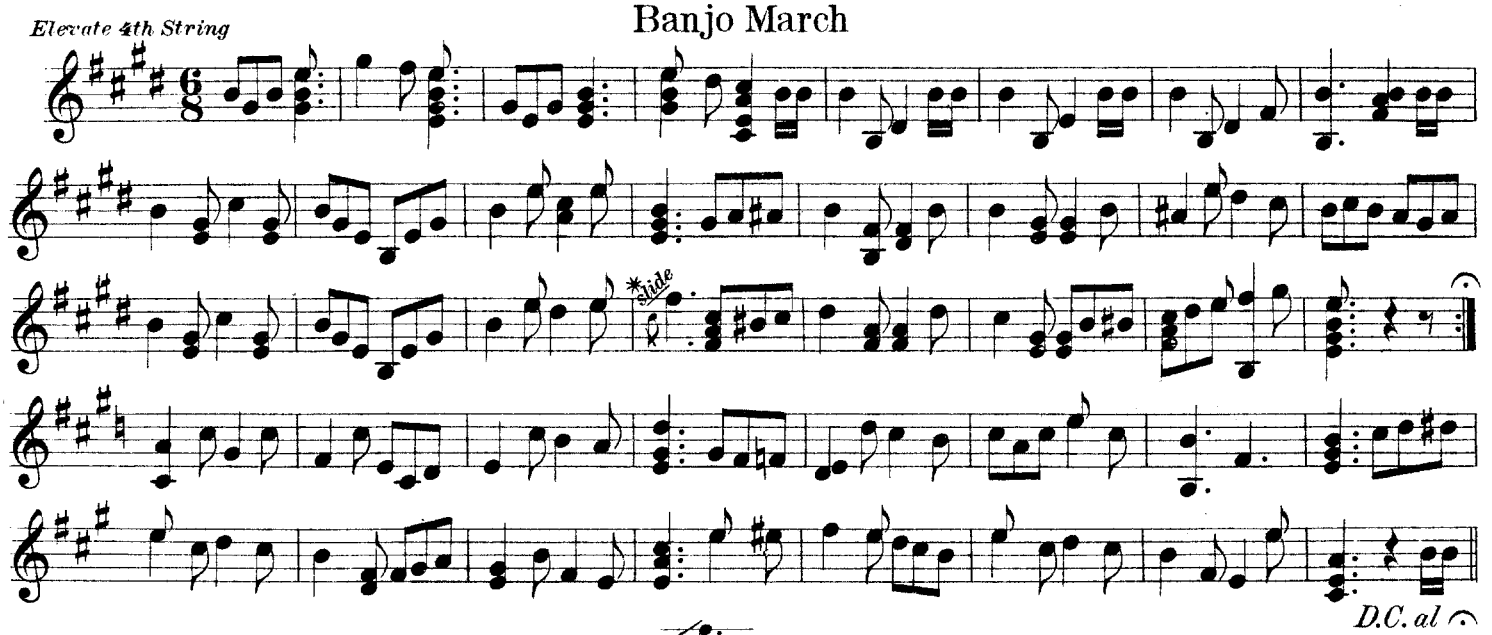


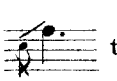
Melody № 2 (Characteristic)



Banjo March

Elevate 4th String

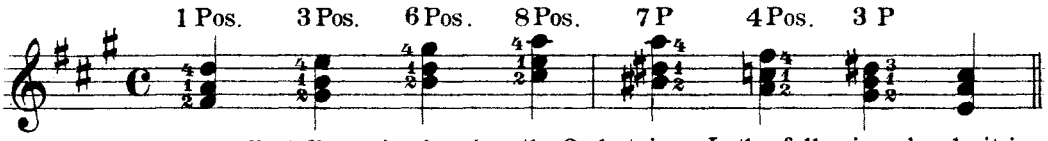


* In the slide  the C only is picked

The Positions

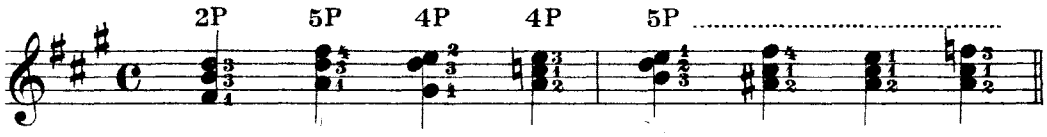
Every fret on the banjo is termed a position. When the first finger is at the first fret it is called the first position. When the first finger is at the 2nd fret it is in the 2nd Pos. and so on. In writing the positions, the fret at which the first finger is located determines the position mark.

Examples.



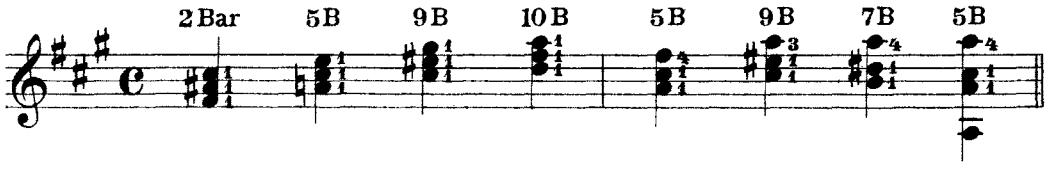
In each of the above chords, the first finger is placed on the 2nd string. In the following chords it is placed on different strings. The pupil should remember that it makes no difference which string the first finger falls on, as the position mark simply indicates the *fret.*

Examples.



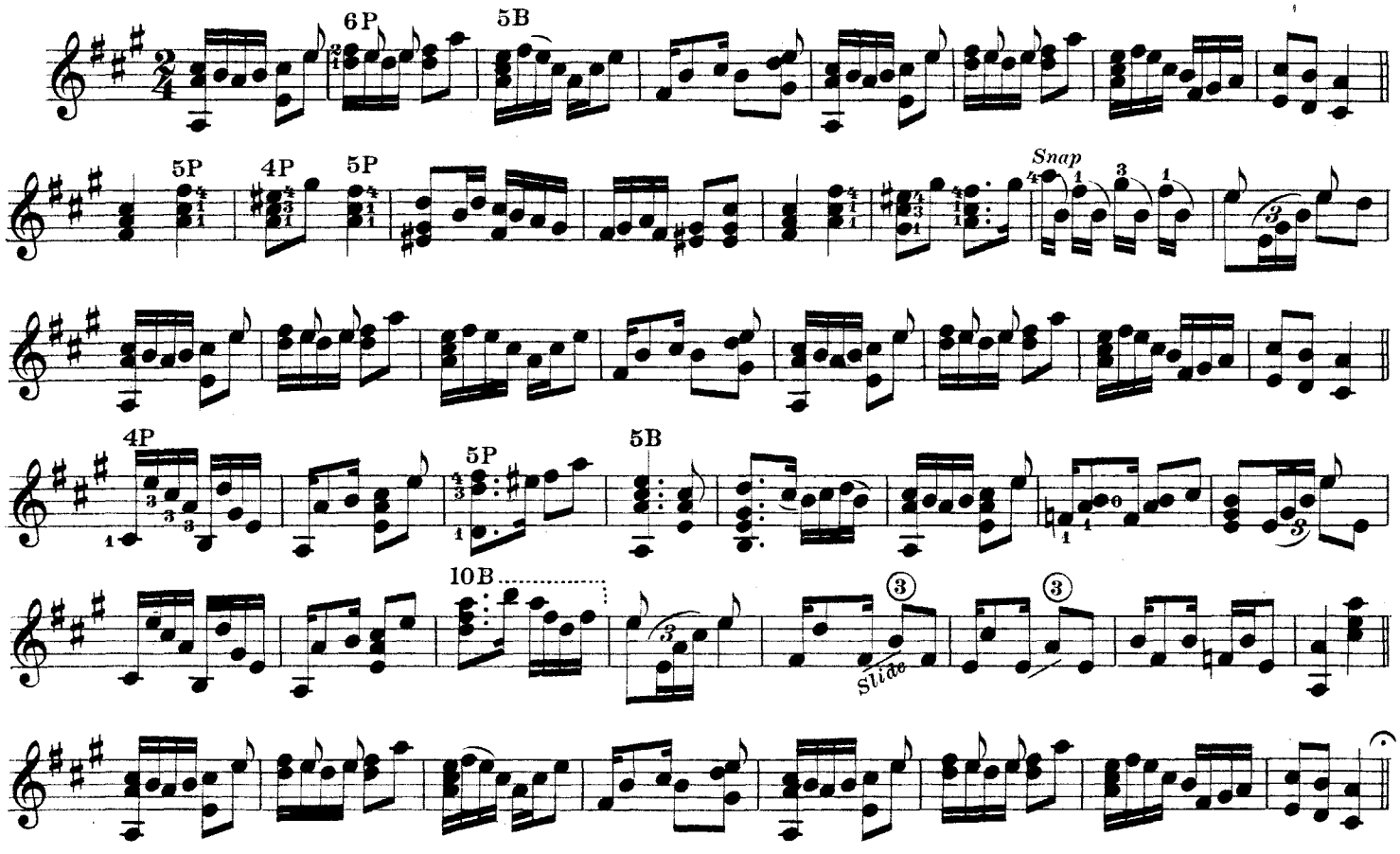
The term Bar. or Barre is often used when the first finger only is placed across two or more strings. It is also sometimes written when one other finger is added to the bar.

Examples.



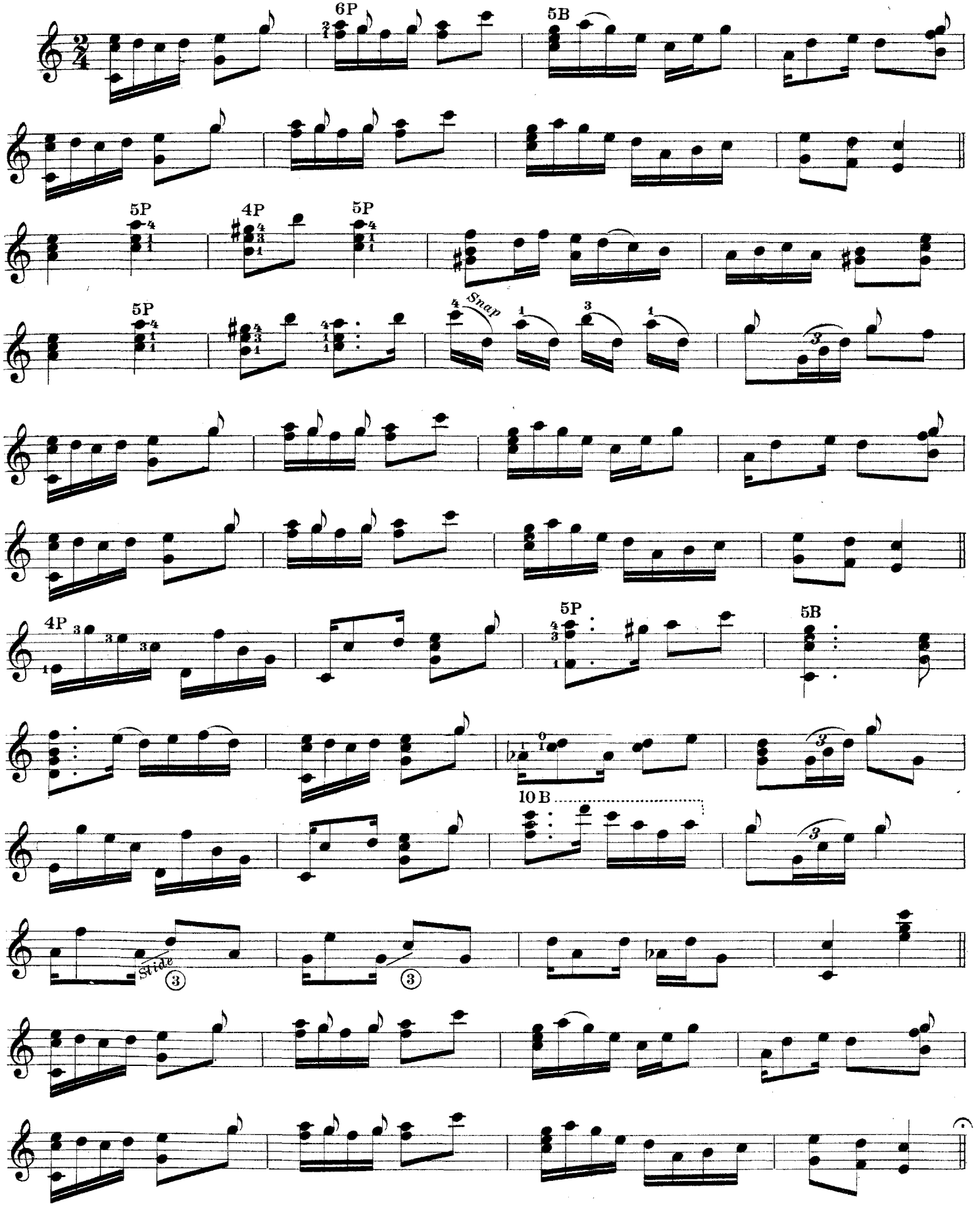
Some of the older writers use the term "Pos. Bar." when one or more fingers are added to the first, but it is now seldom given.

Banjo Caprice



Banjo Caprice

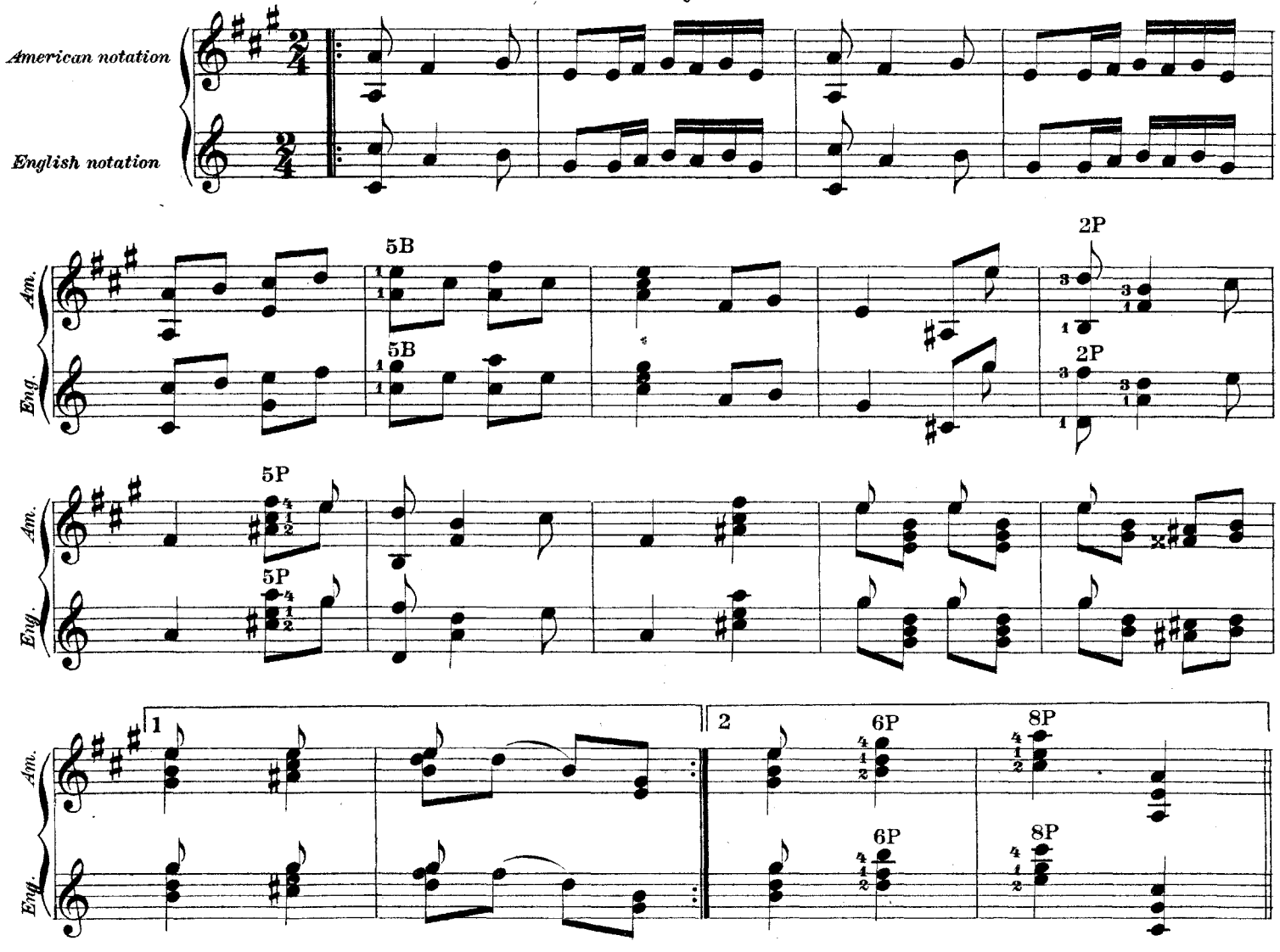
(English Notation)



Exercise

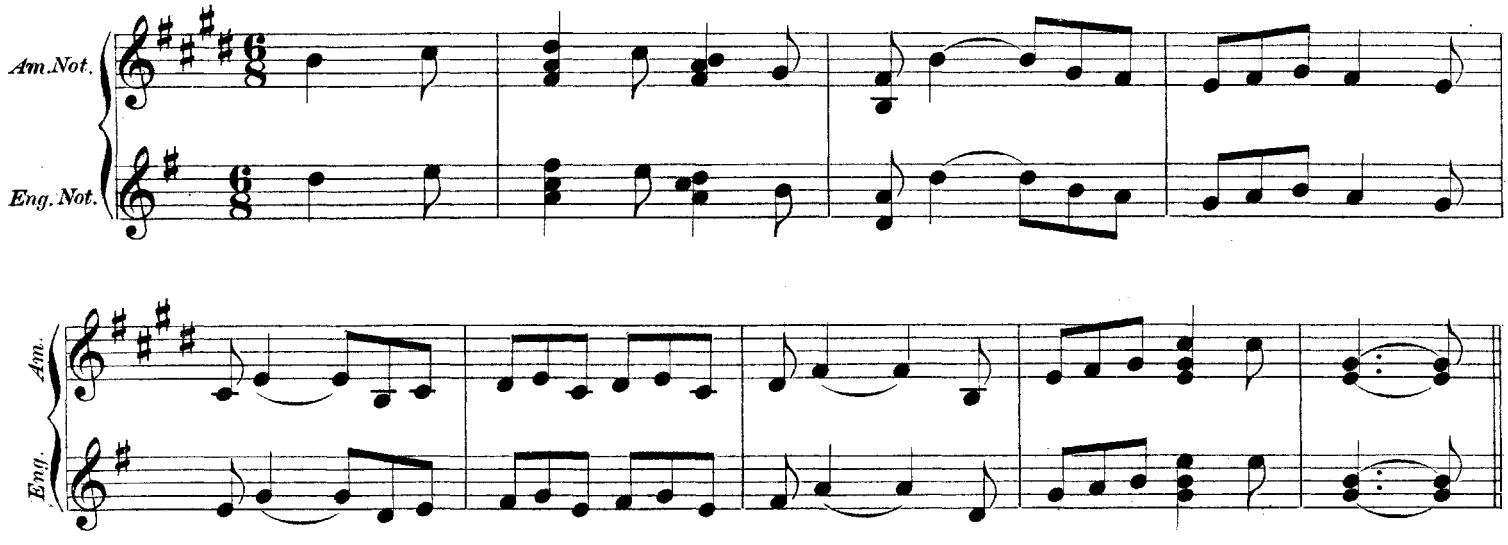
Showing the Witmark System of both notations.

Melody

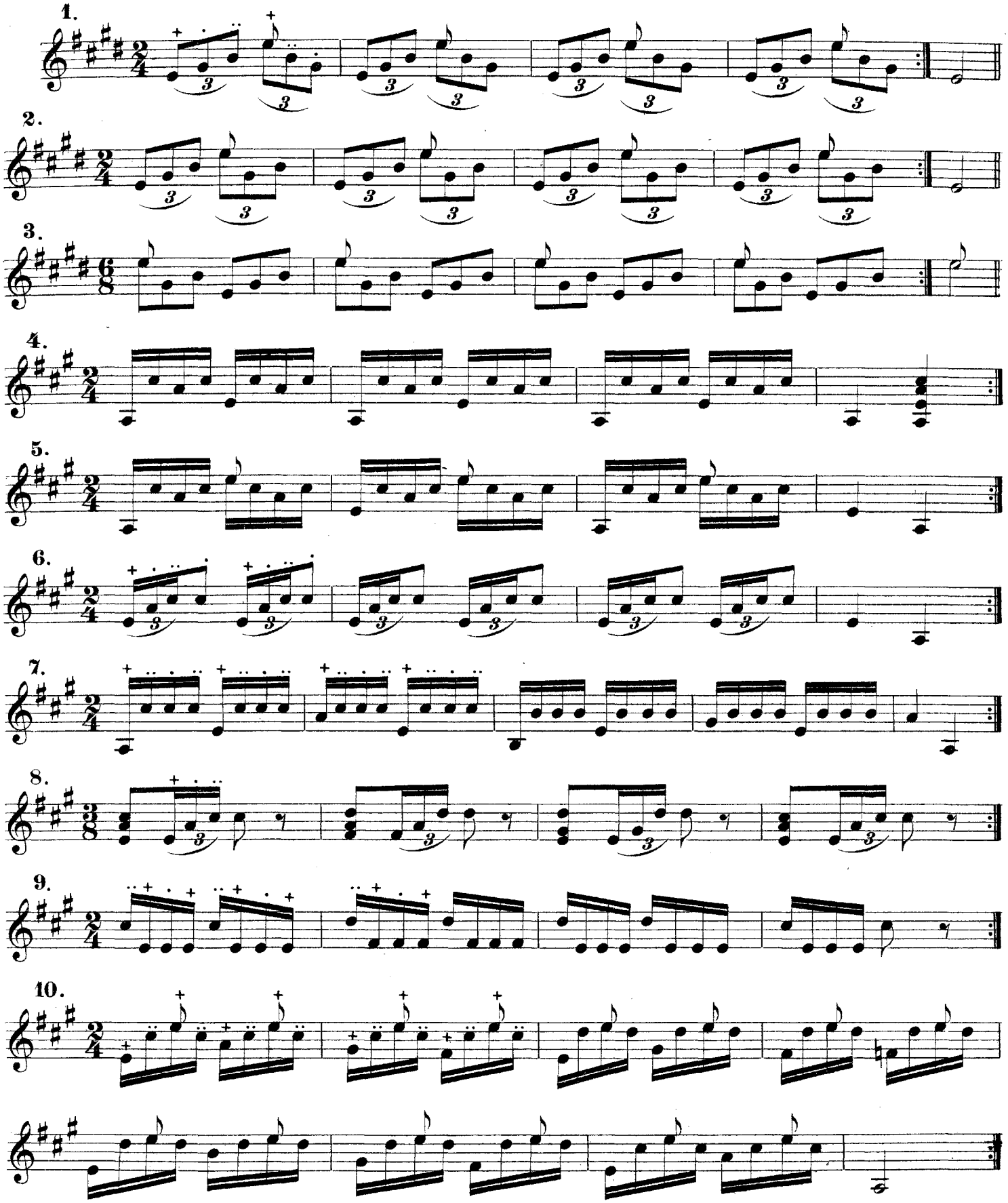


Melody

TWO STEP



Exercises for Right Hand *

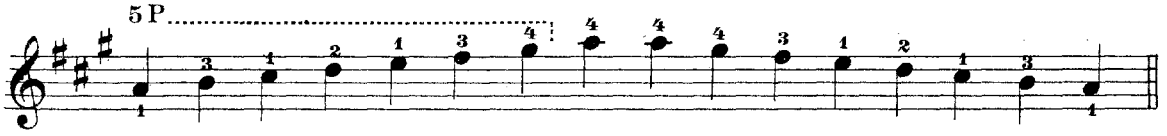


* Slowly at first, to obtain a good even tone. Repeat each exercise several times, until able to play rapidly.

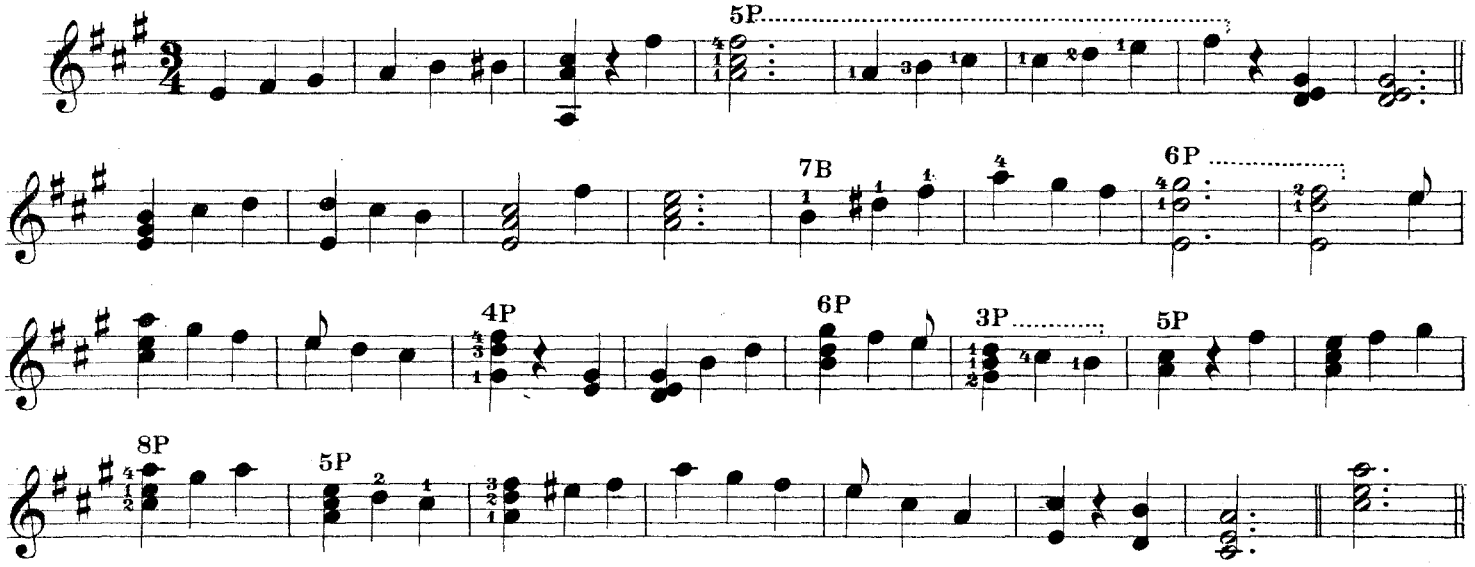
Fingering in Positions

It is often necessary to play scale runs while holding down a bar or position, in order to facilitate execution. The following exercises are arranged in that way.

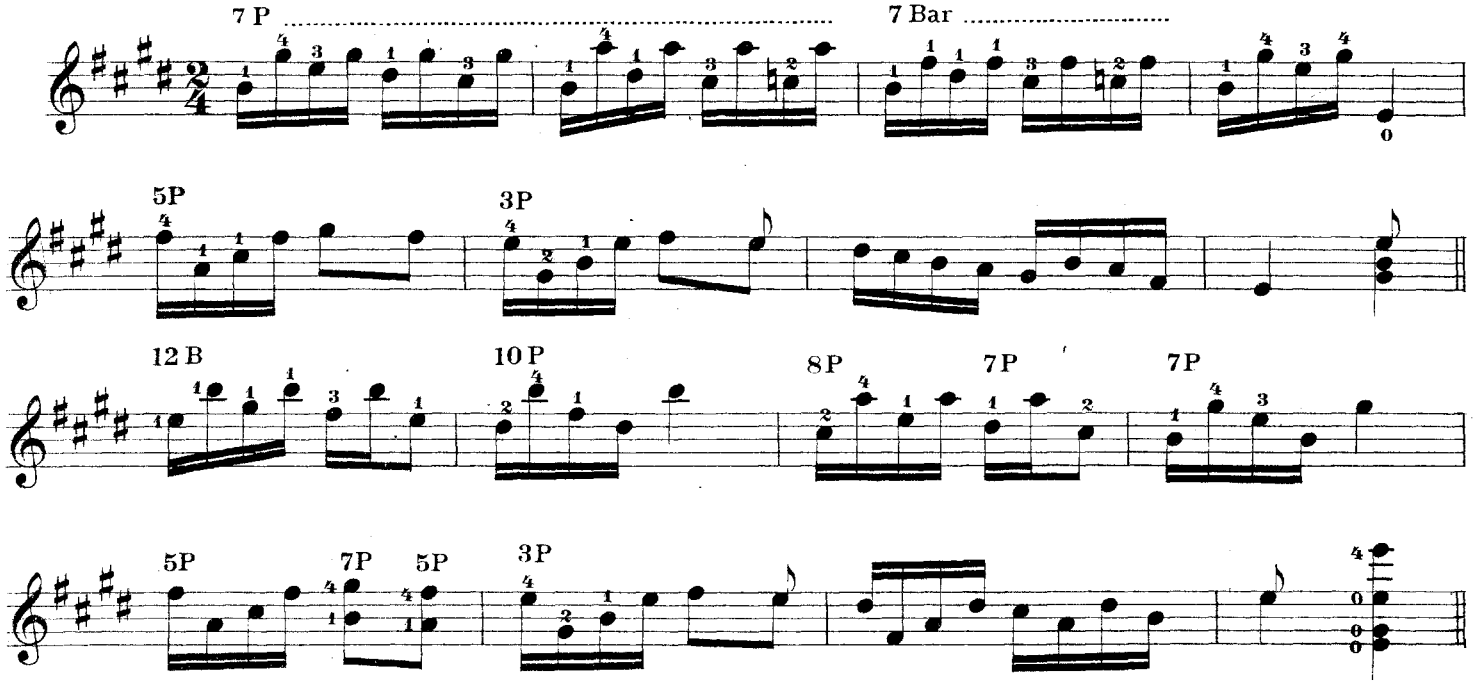
Scale of A in 5th Pos. *



Melody

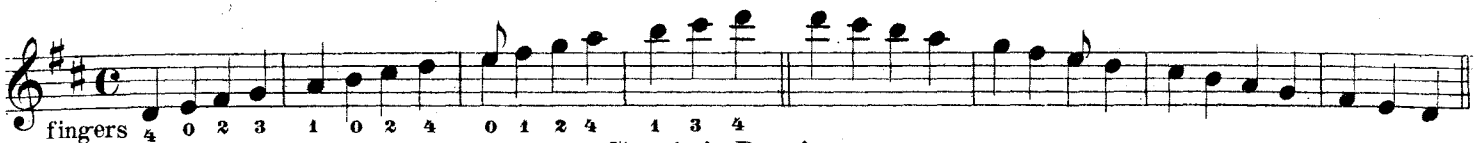


Exercise in E, in Positions

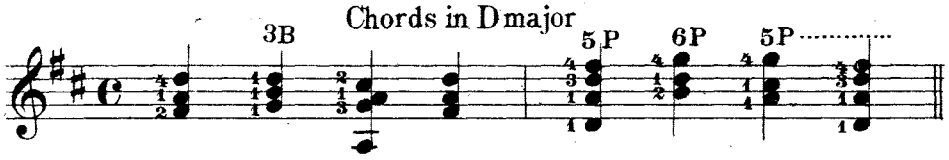


* Leave the Position for upper A.

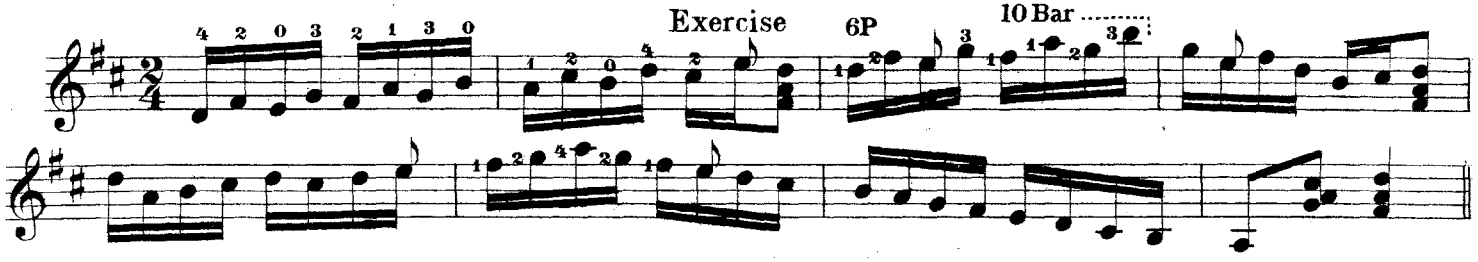
Scale in D major



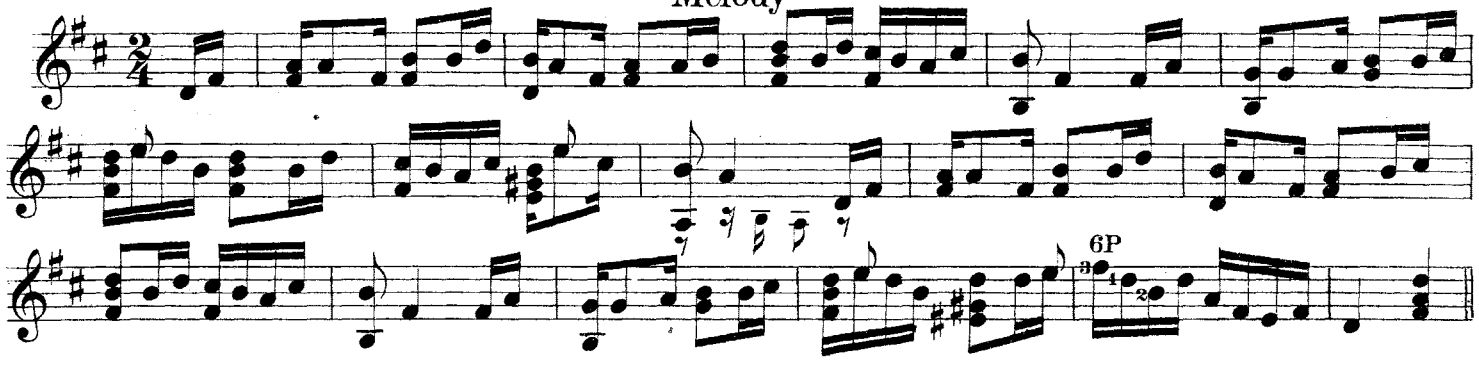
Chords in D major



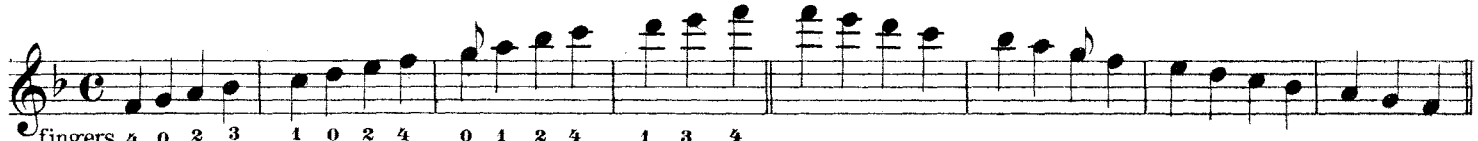
Exercise



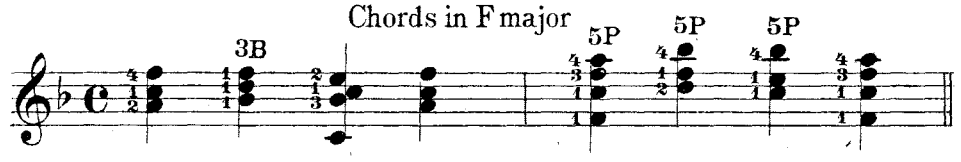
Melody



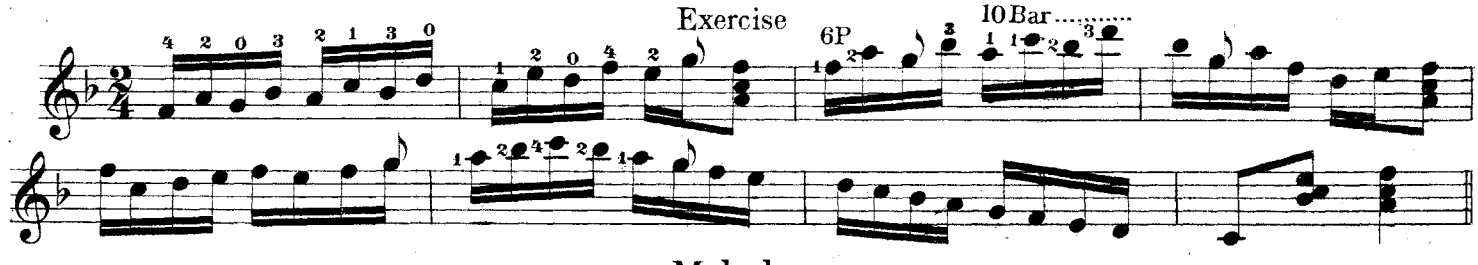
Scale in F major. (*English Notation*)



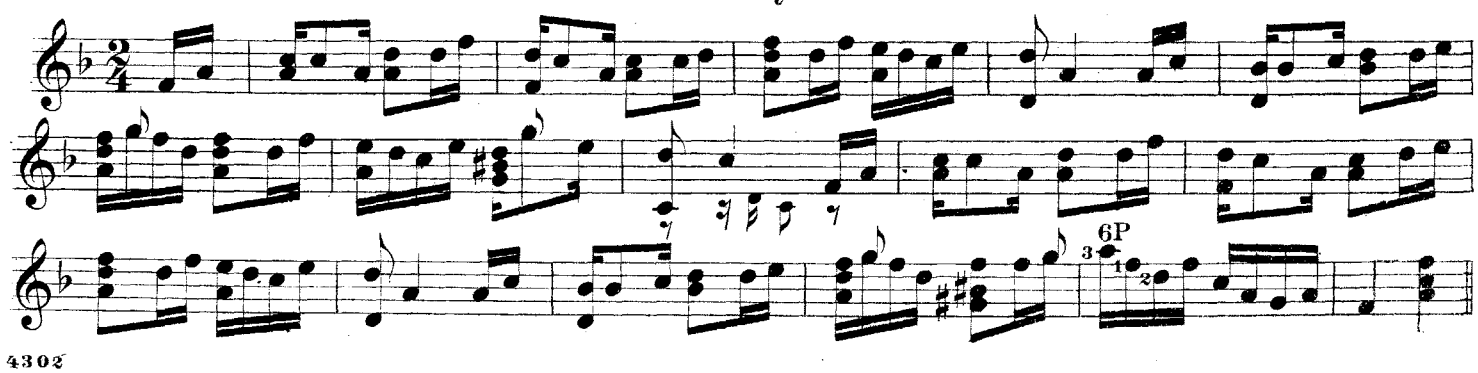
Chords in F major



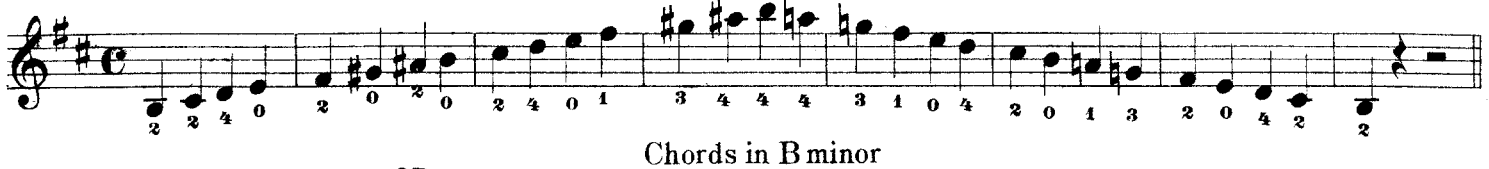
Exercise



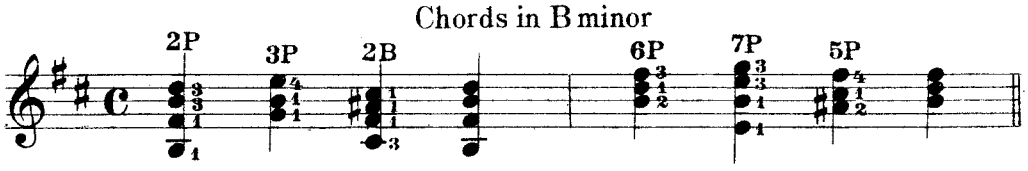
Melody



Scale in B minor
(Relative of D major)

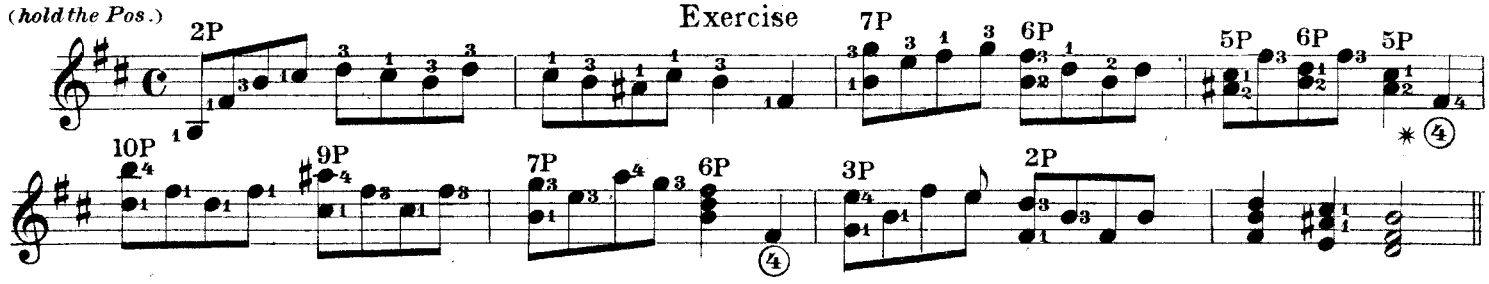


Chords in B minor

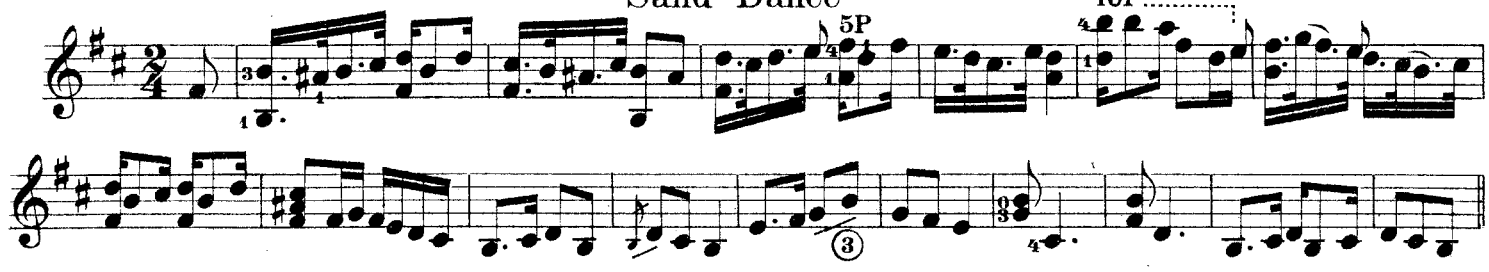


Exercise

(hold the Pos.)

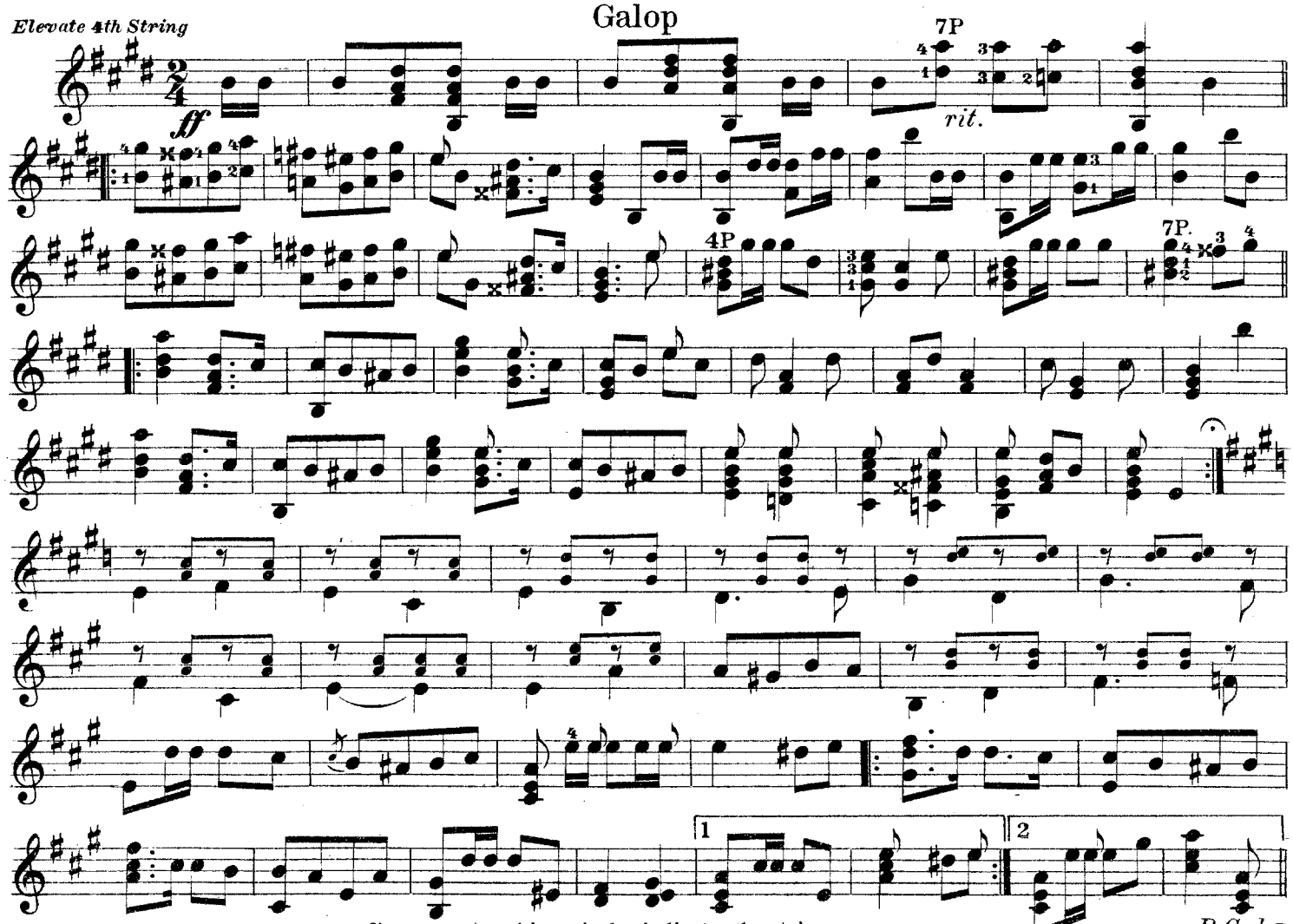


Sand Dance



Galop

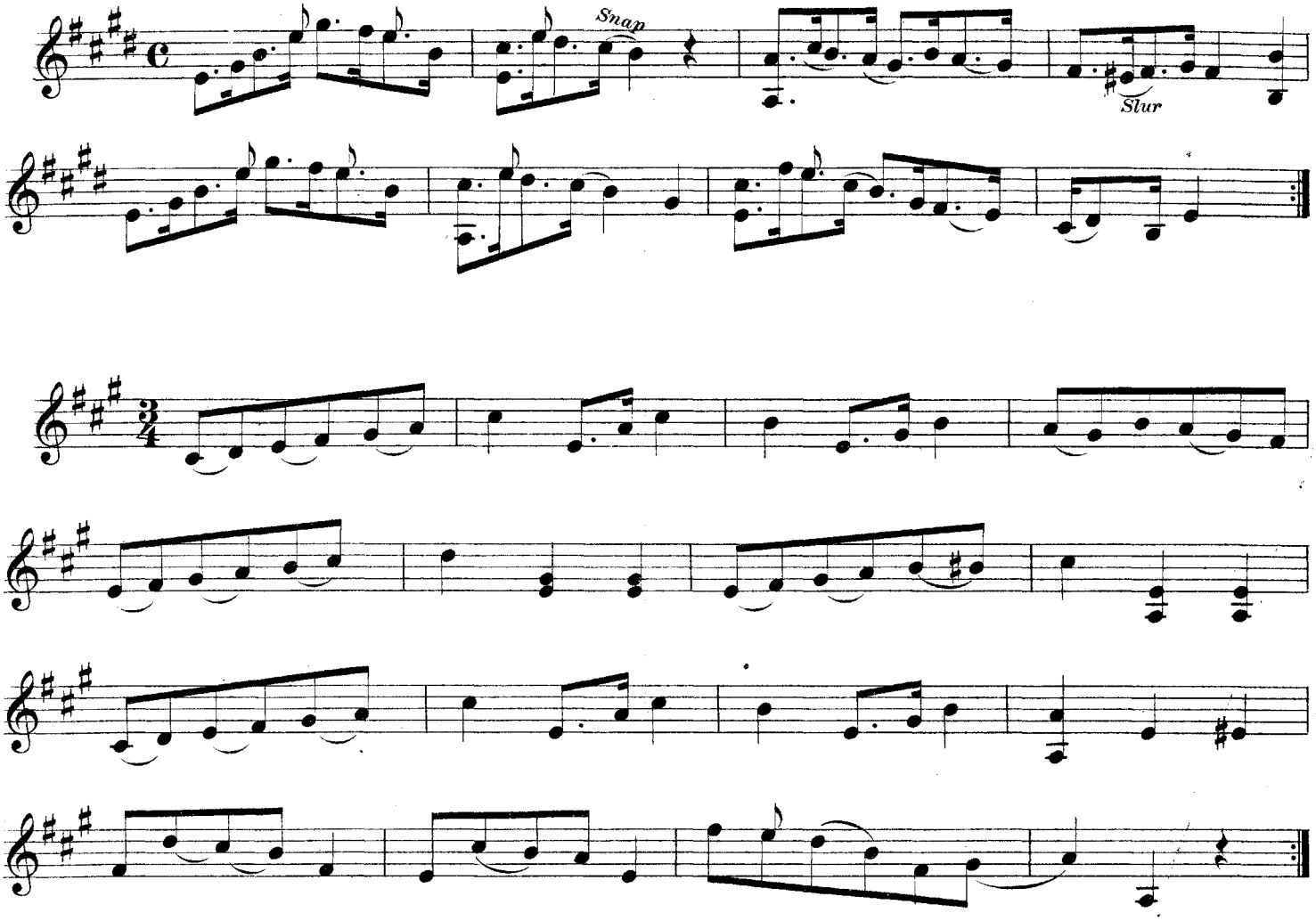
Elevate 4th String



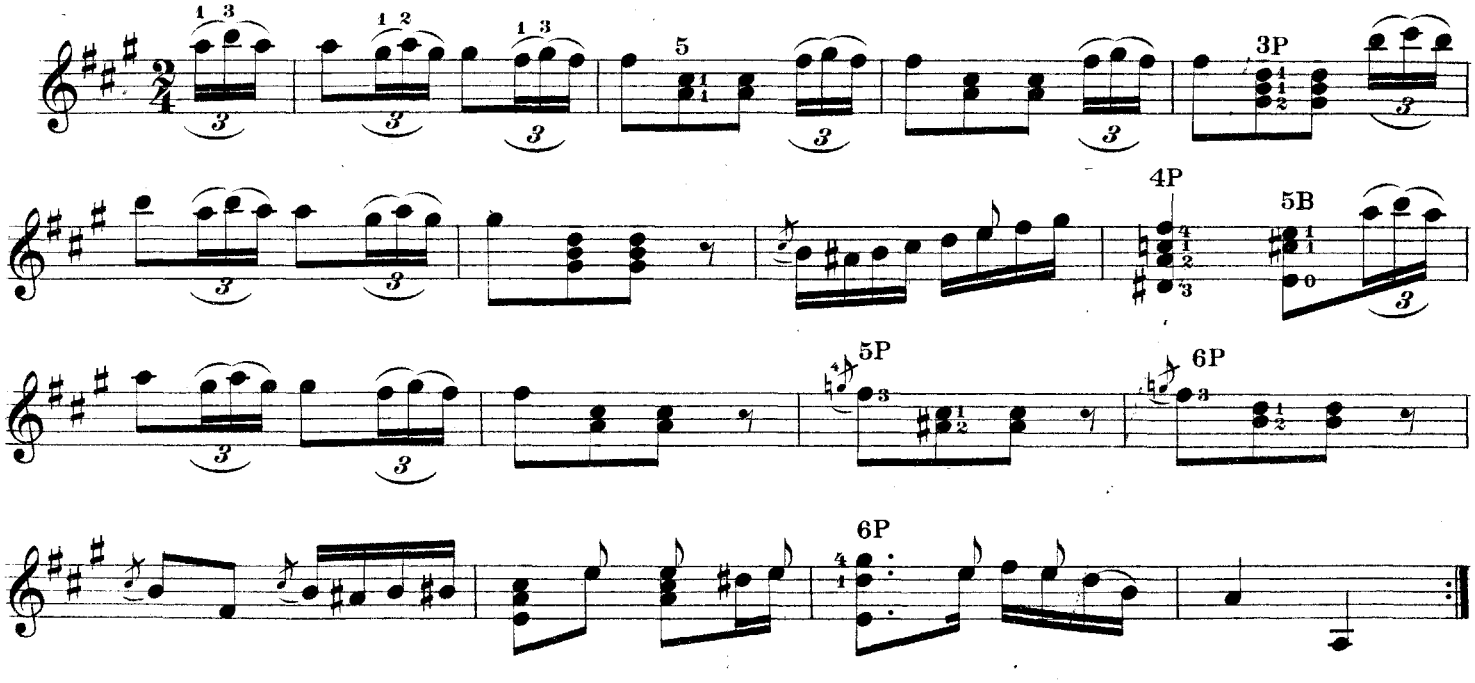
✳ a figure enclosed in a circle, indicates the string

D.C. al ⌒

Studies in Slurring and Snapping.



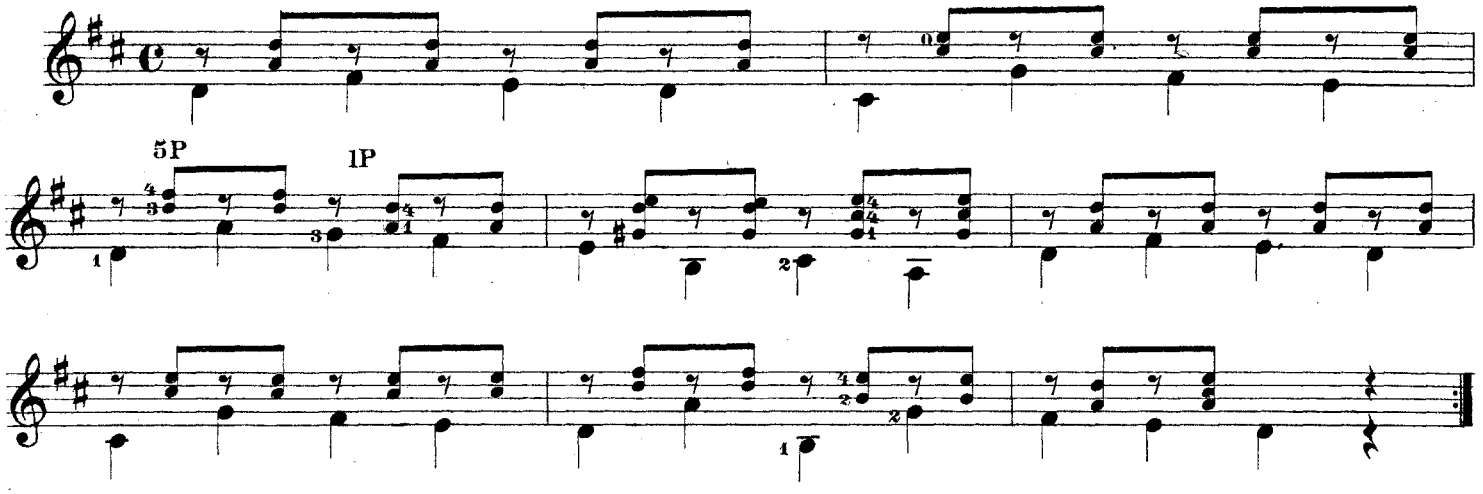
Polka



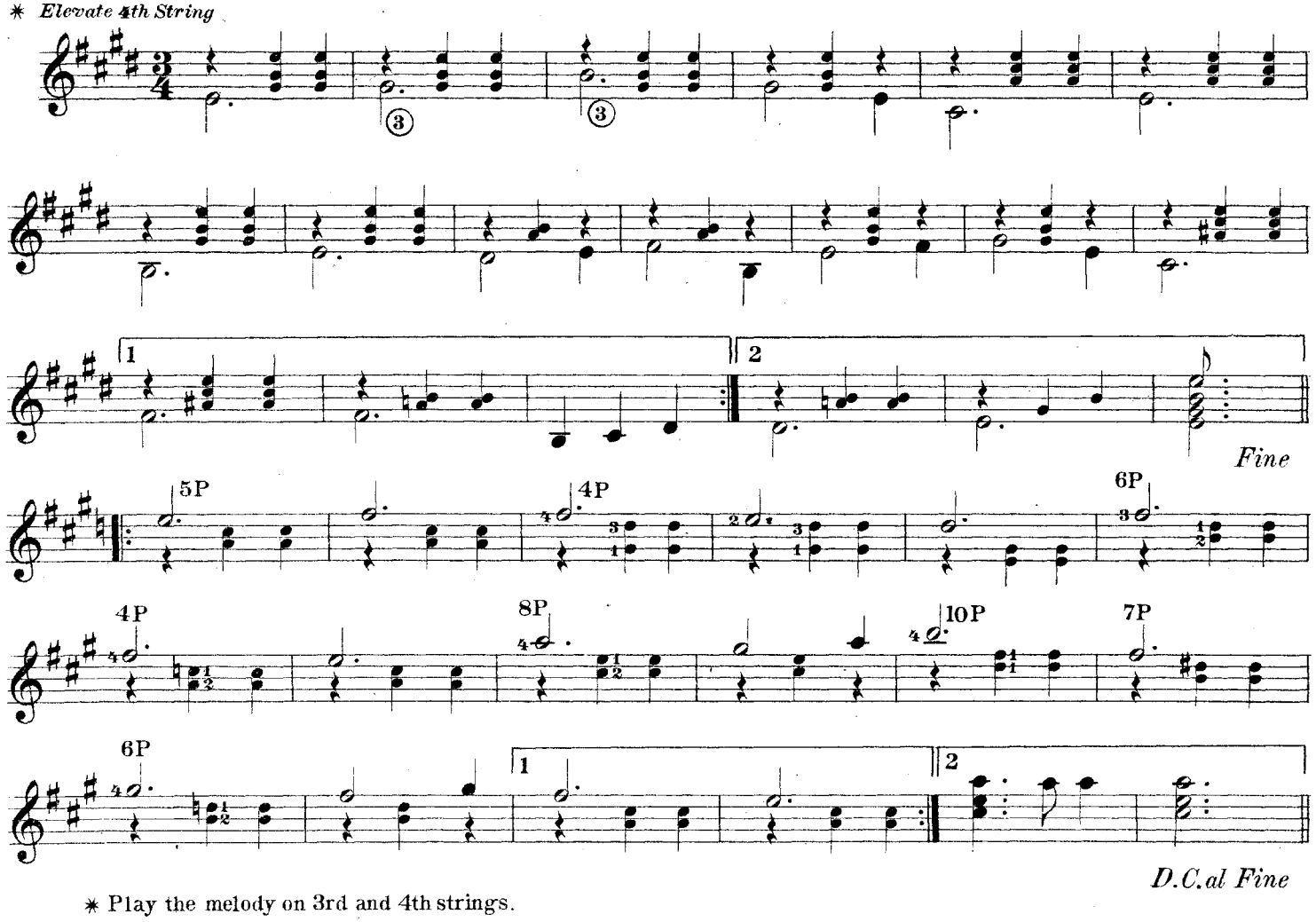
Studies in Two Parts

It is often necessary to write two parts as in the following exercises. Particular attention should be given to the accent, play the small notes softly.

Etude



Serenade — Waltz

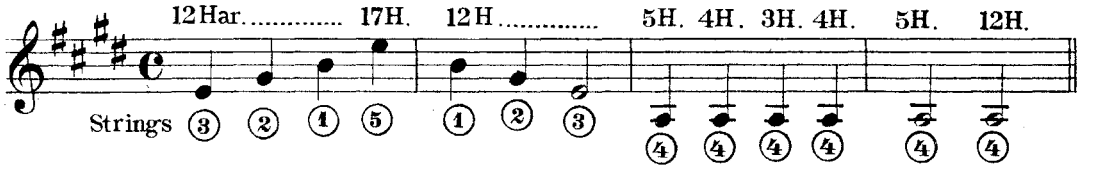


* Play the melody on 3rd and 4th strings.

Harmonics

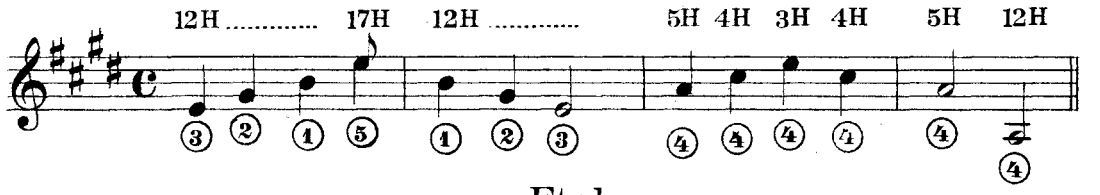
The Harmonic tones on the banjo are found at the 3rd, 4th, 5th, 7th, 12th, 16th and 19th frets on the four regular strings, and on the 17th fret of the 5th string. They are made by laying a finger (usually the 3rd) over the fret designated. Do not press down, but lay the finger lightly on the strings and pick firmly. The left hand should be raised immediately after picking the harmonic.

Exercise.

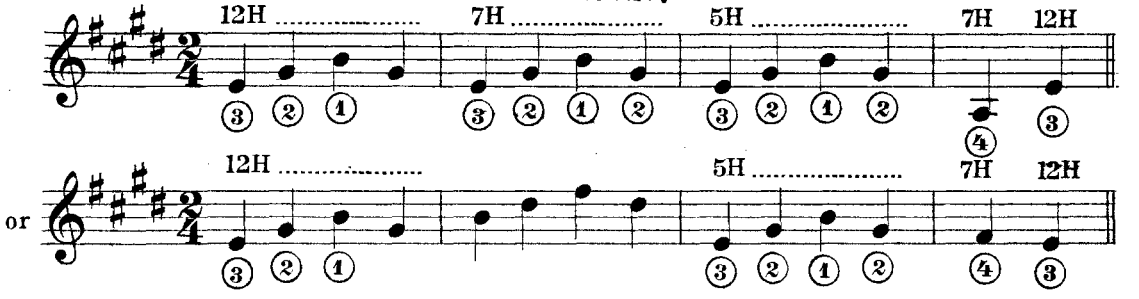


Some writers indicate the notes in harmonics on open strings for all notes at the 12th fret and write all others as though they were the regular tones produced.

The following arrangement of the above exercise will illustrate it.



Etude.

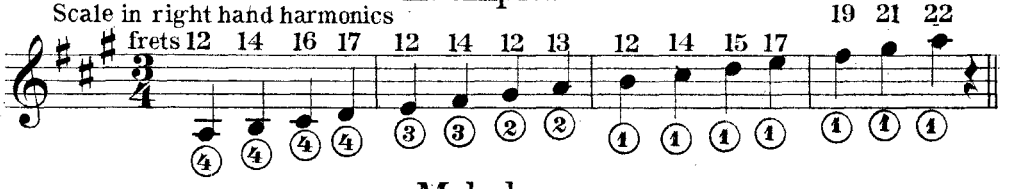


Right Hand Harmonics

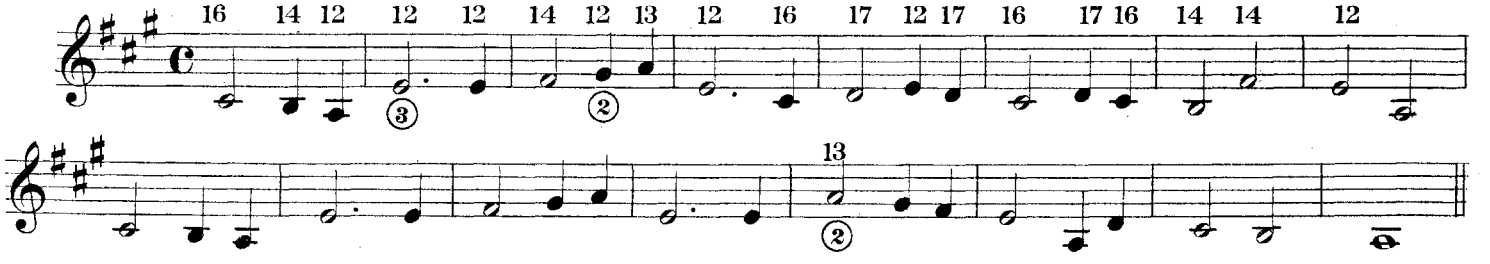
When right hand harmonics are well executed the effect is very fine. To do this well requires much patient practice.

The 1st finger of Right hand should be arched so that the point lays on the string at the required fret, the string being picked with the thumb underneath. Form the harmonic as far away from the 12th fret as the note required is from the nut, for instance if A is desired, simply lay the tip of 1st finger over 4th string at 12th fret, and pick the string with the thumb. If B is desired, finger it with the left hand as usual and form the harmonic at the 14th fret.

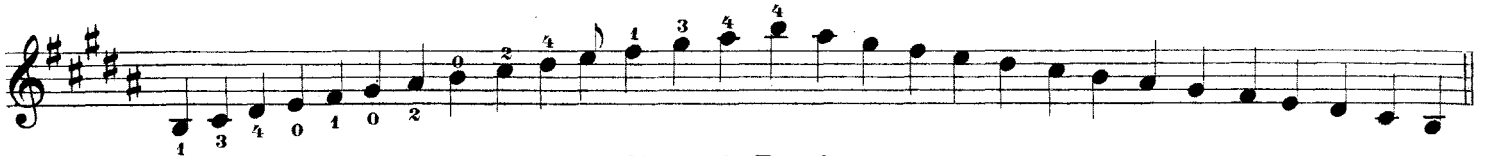
Examples



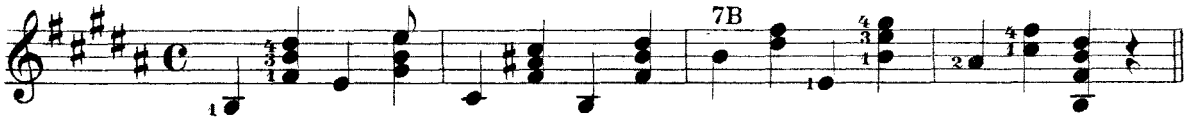
Melody



Scale in B major

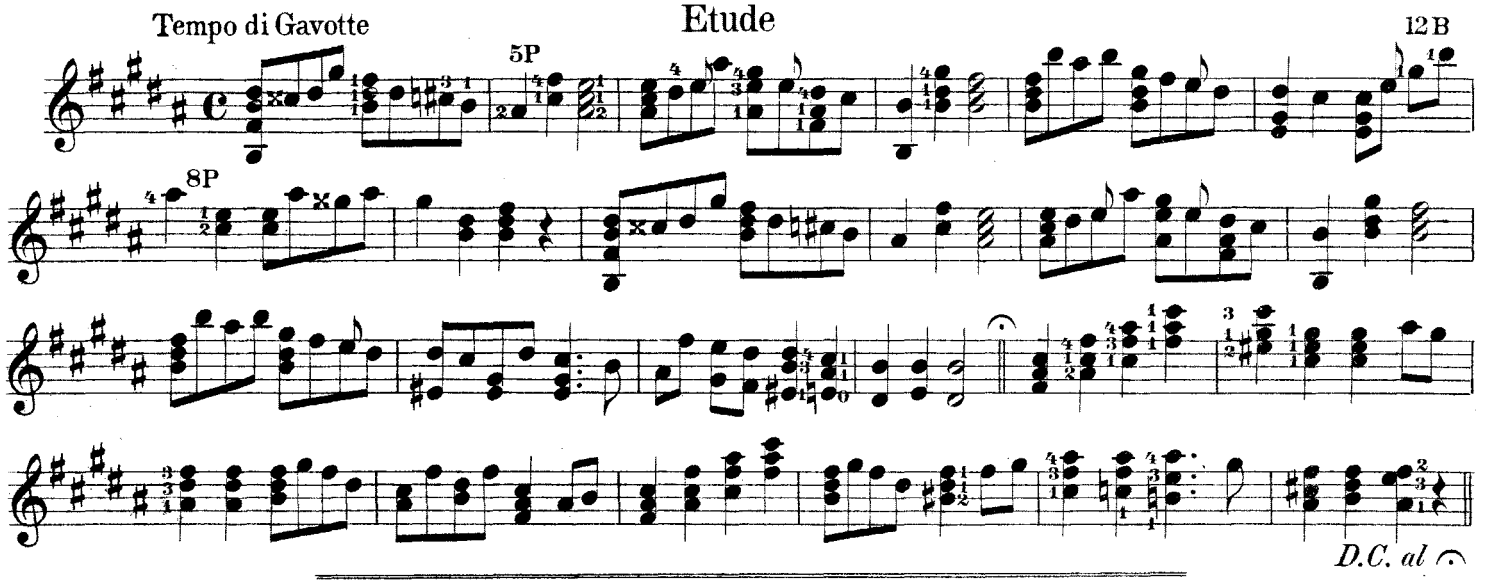


Chords in B major



Etude

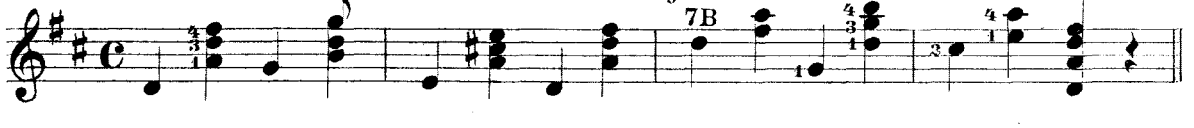
Tempo di Gavotte



Scale in D major

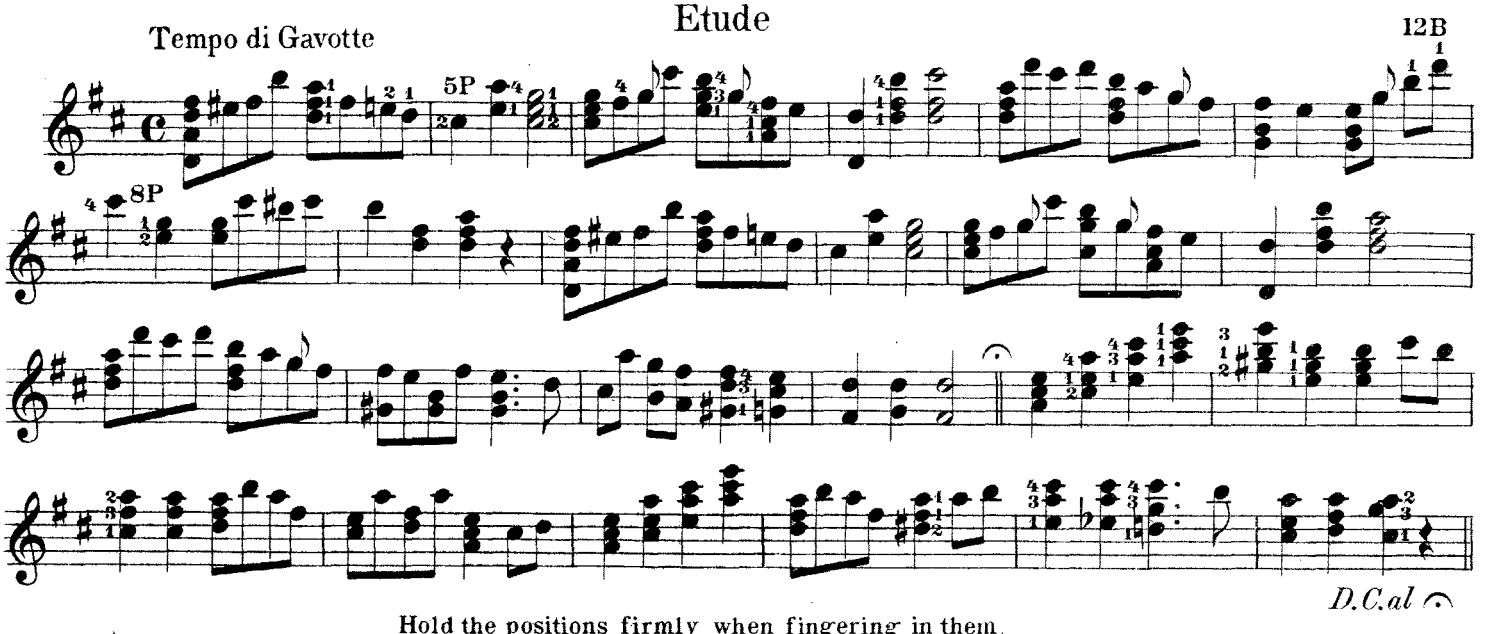
English Notation

Chords in D major



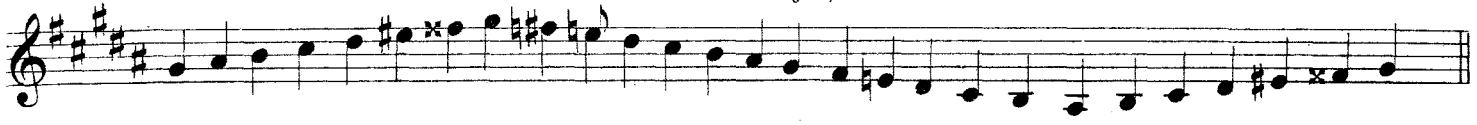
Etude

Tempo di Gavotte

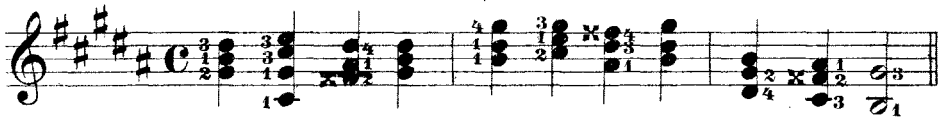


Hold the positions firmly when fingering in them.

Scale in G♯ minor
(Relative of B major)

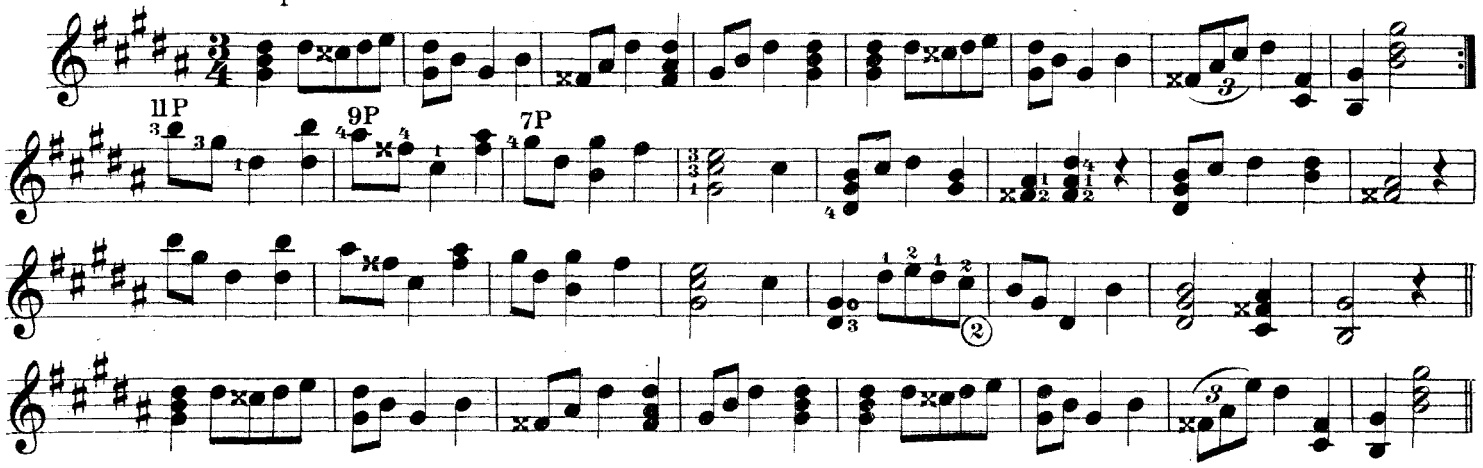


Chords in G♯ minor



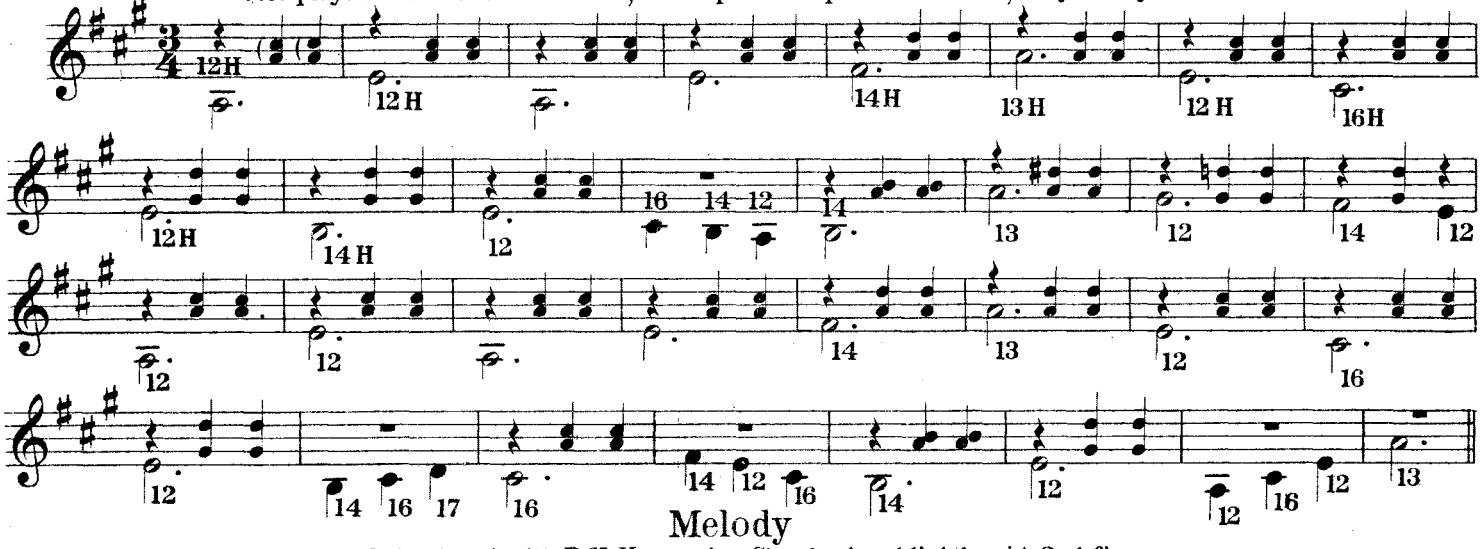
Etude

Tempo di Valse



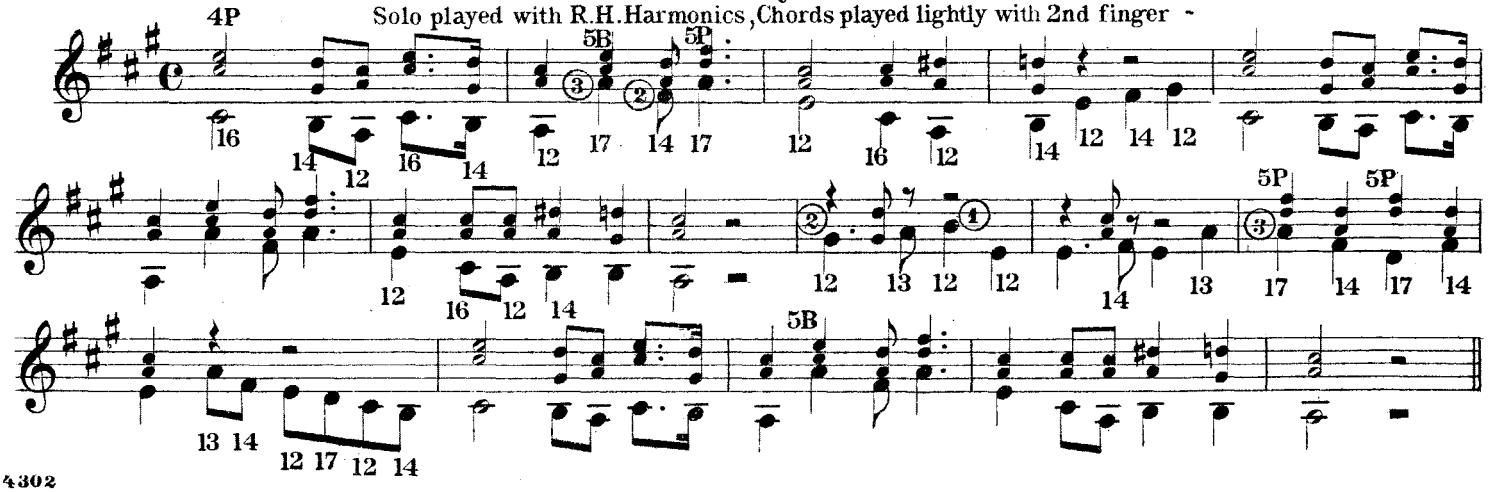
Waltz

Solo played with R.H. Harmonics, Accompaniment picked as usual, very softly

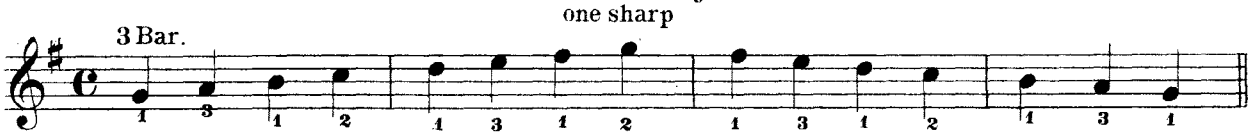


Melody

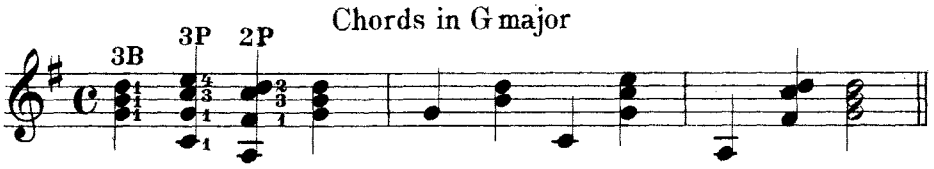
Solo played with R.H. Harmonics, Chords played lightly with 2nd finger



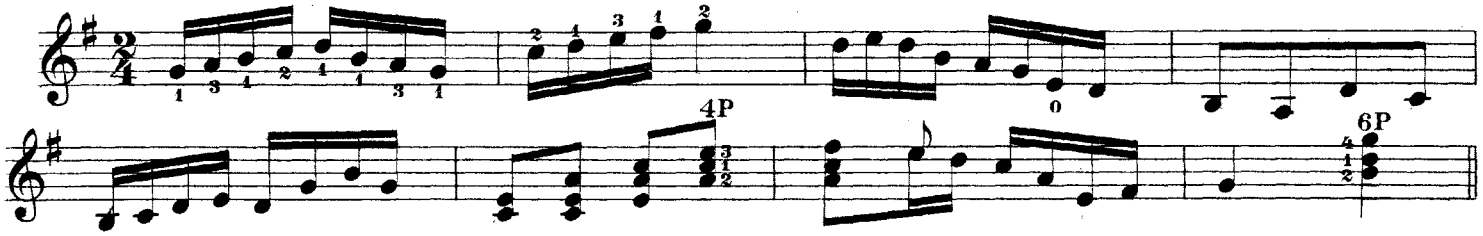
Scale in G major
one sharp



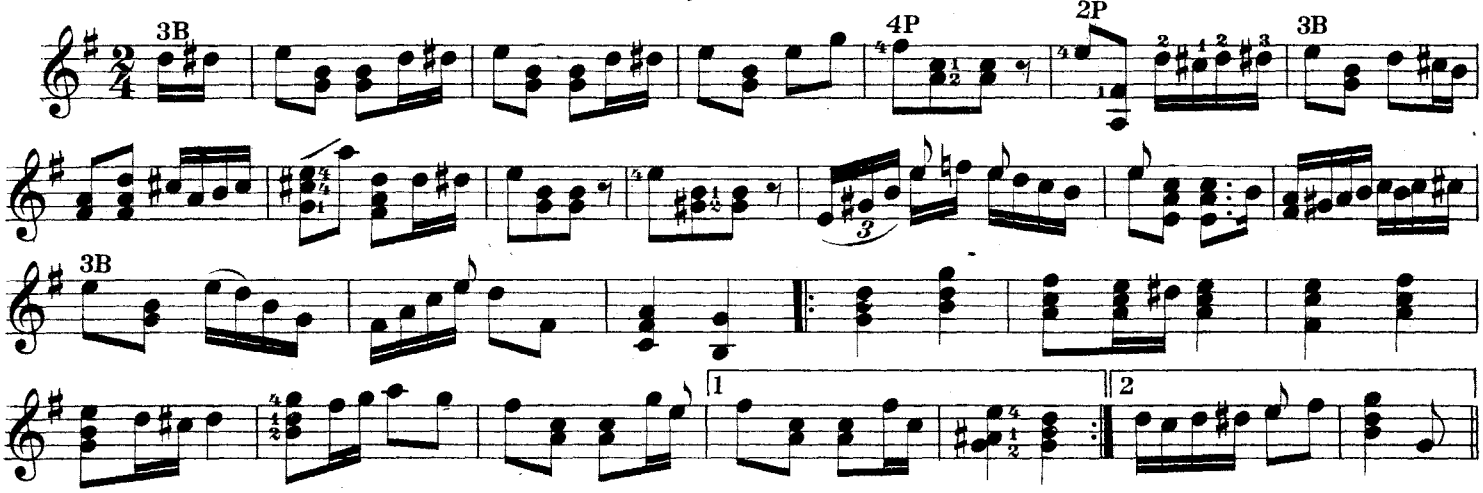
Chords in G major



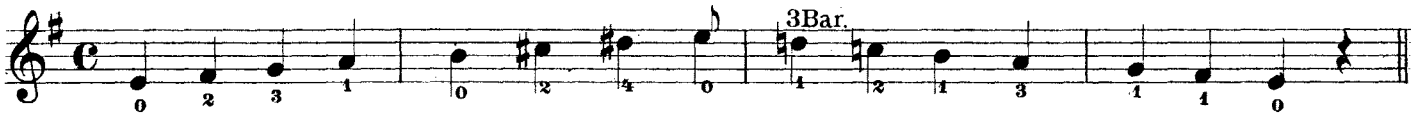
Exercise



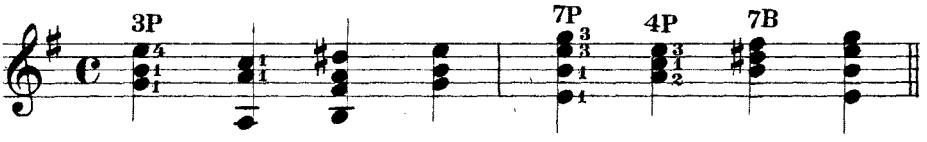
Melody in G major



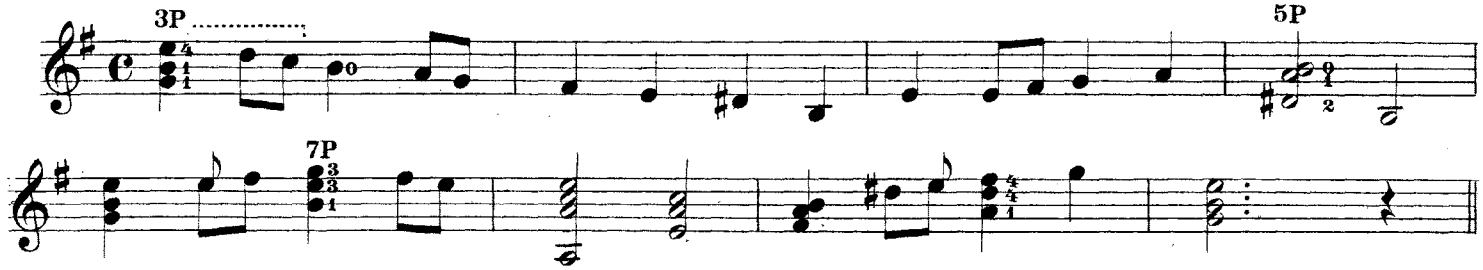
Scale in E minor
(Relative of G major)



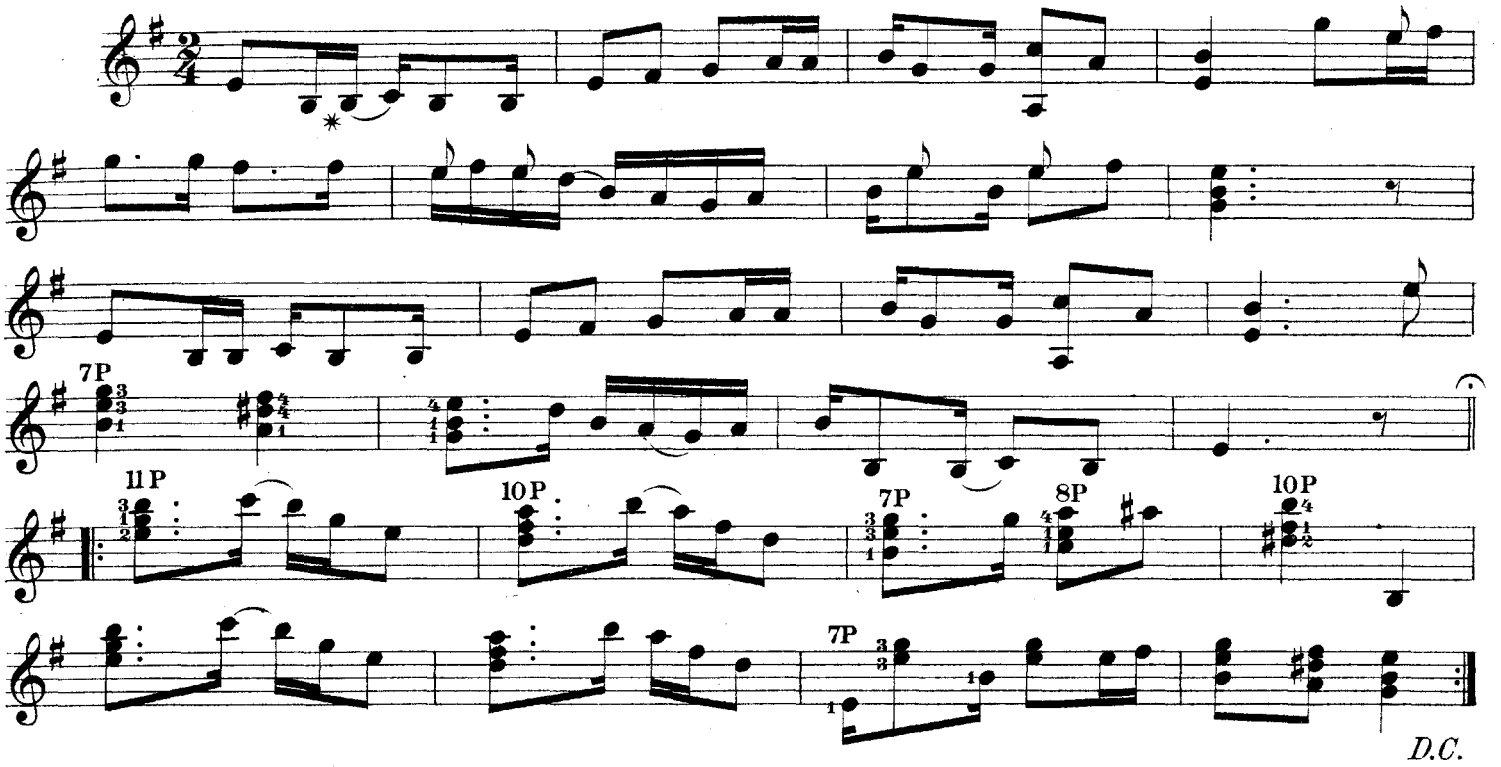
Chords in E minor



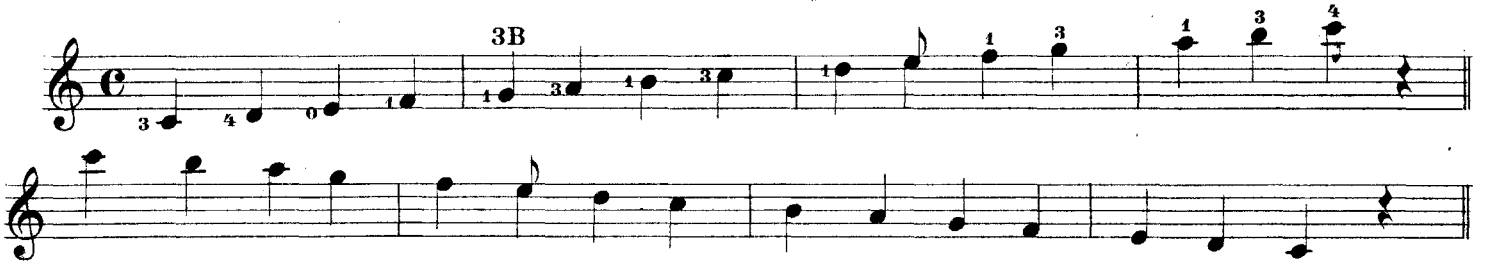
Exercise



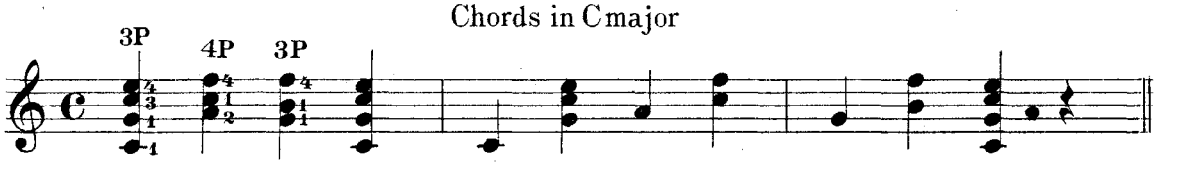
Banjo Skit



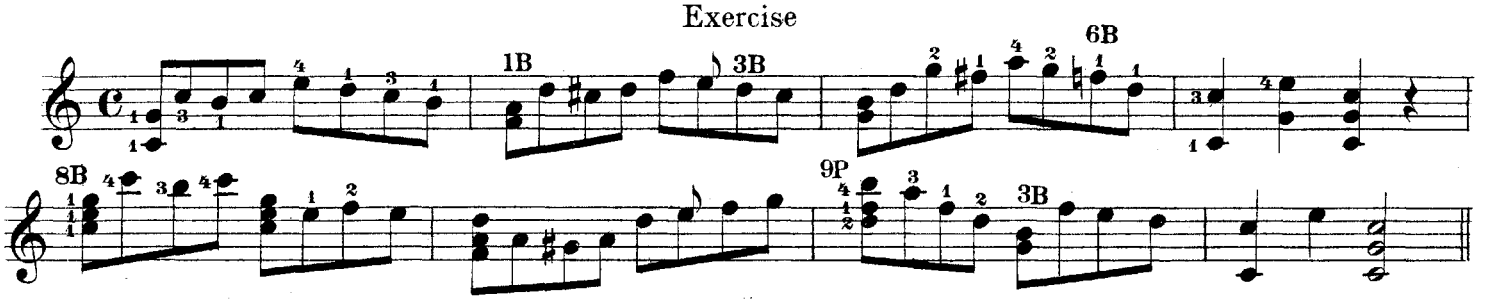
The Scale in C major



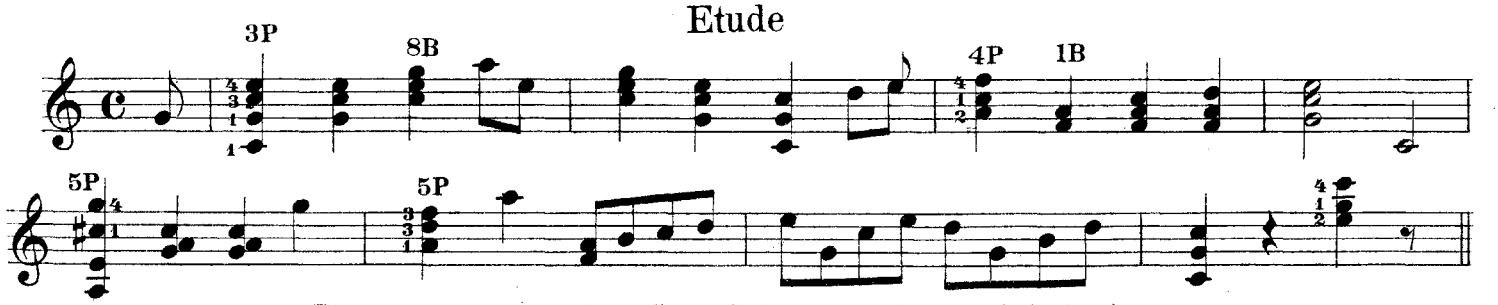
Chords in C major



Exercise



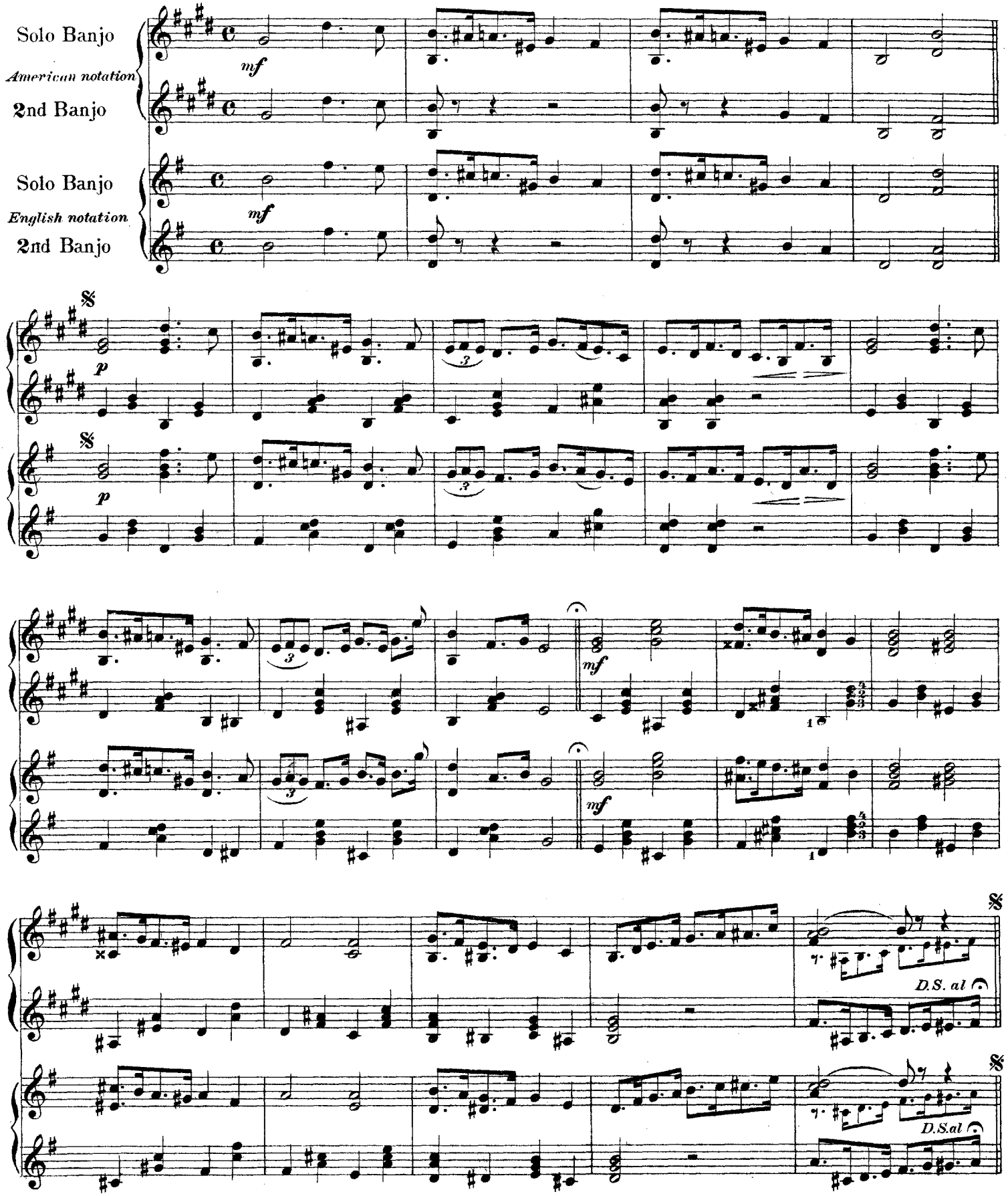
Etude



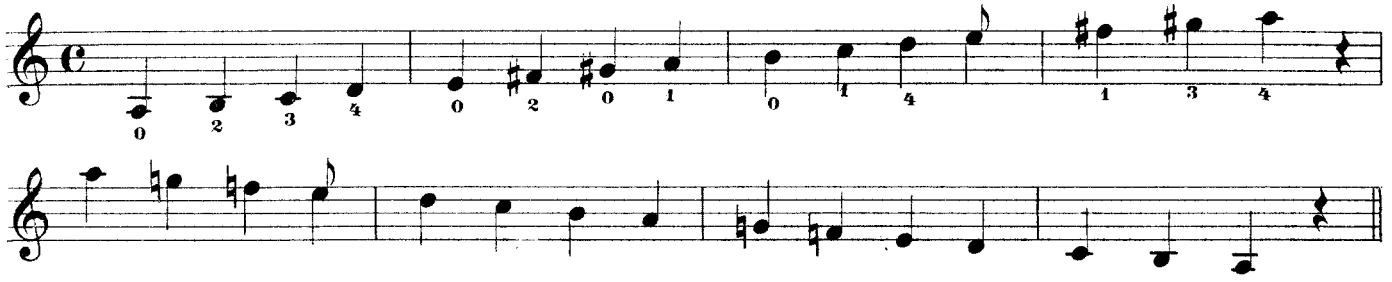
* The slur is made by letting a finger fall on the note instead of picking it.

Melody

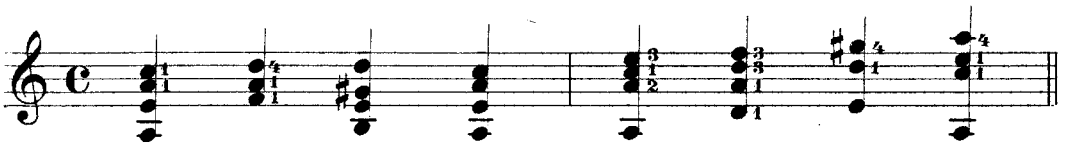
Showing the Witmark System of both notations for Duetts.



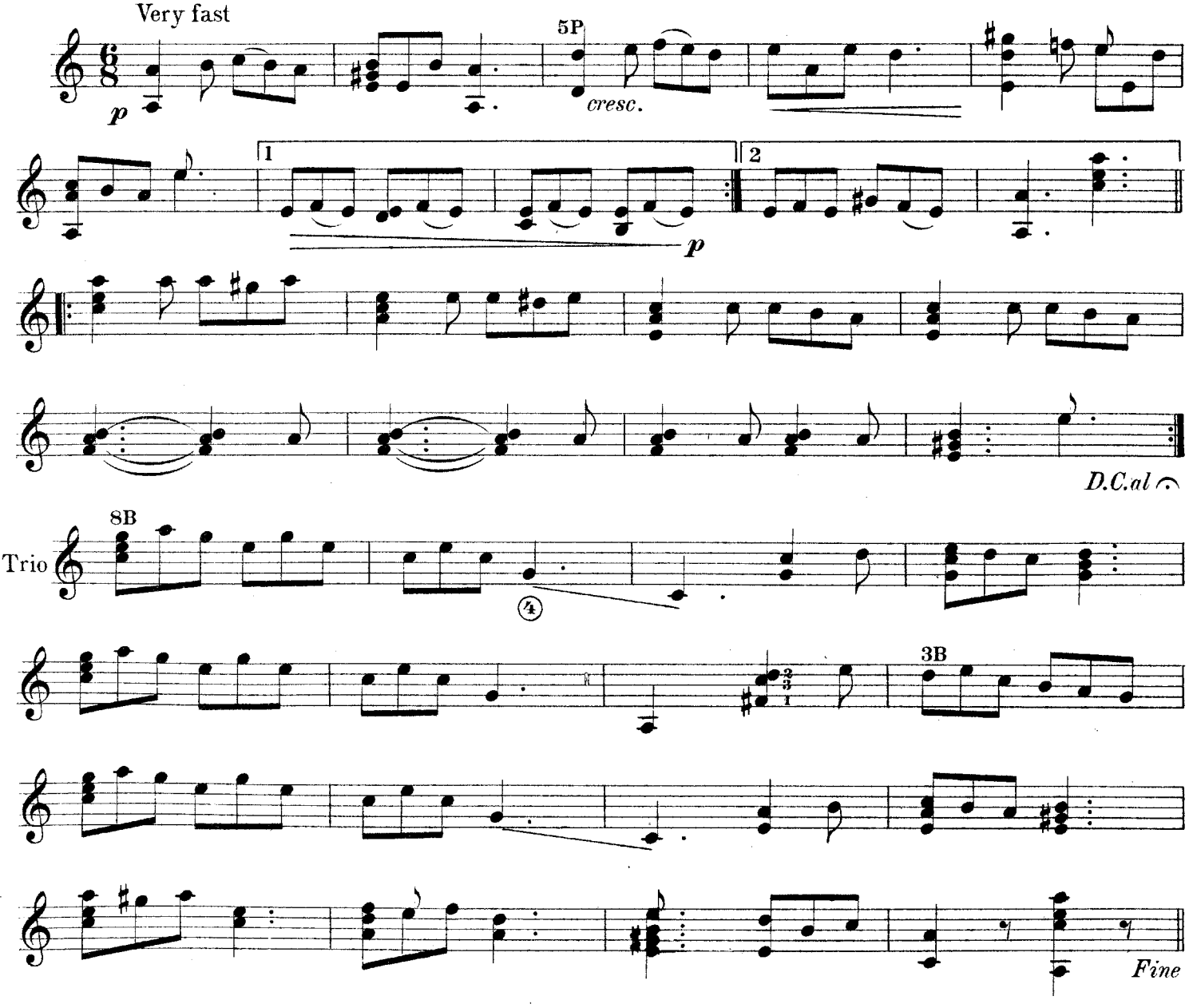
Scale in A minor
(Relative of C major)



Chords in A minor



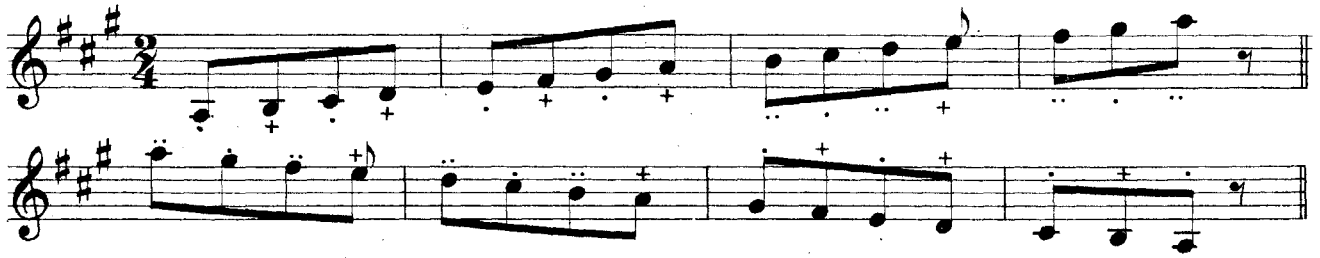
Tarantelle



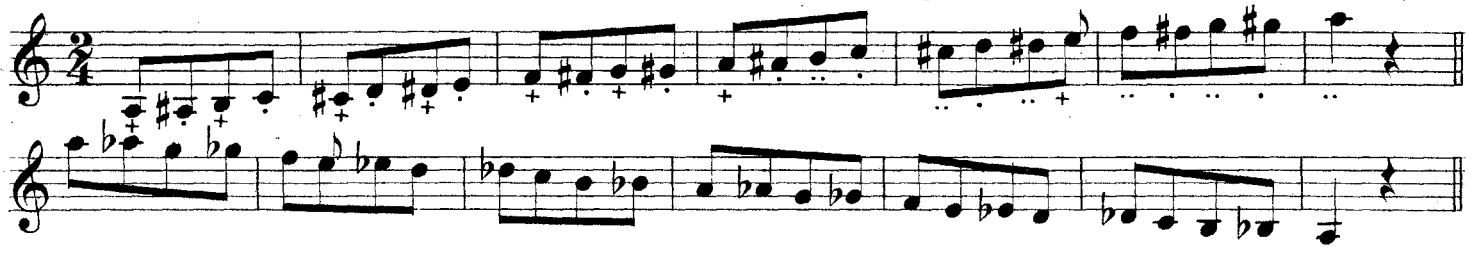
Alternate Fingering.

It is necessary in rapid passages to alternate with the thumb and 1st finger on the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Strings, and with the 1st and 2nd fingers on the 1st string. The pupil should bear in mind the fact that the above *does not apply* to slow passages or bass solos, unless the said solos are rapid, as the tones are not even enough except when the movement is fast. For this reason I have reserved this subject until now. In order to get the best effect, the right hand should be placed almost parallel with the bridge, thereby allowing the 1st and 2nd fingers to fall easily on the first string. The main object is to avoid crossing fingers, therefore some runs will start with the 1st finger and others with the thumb.

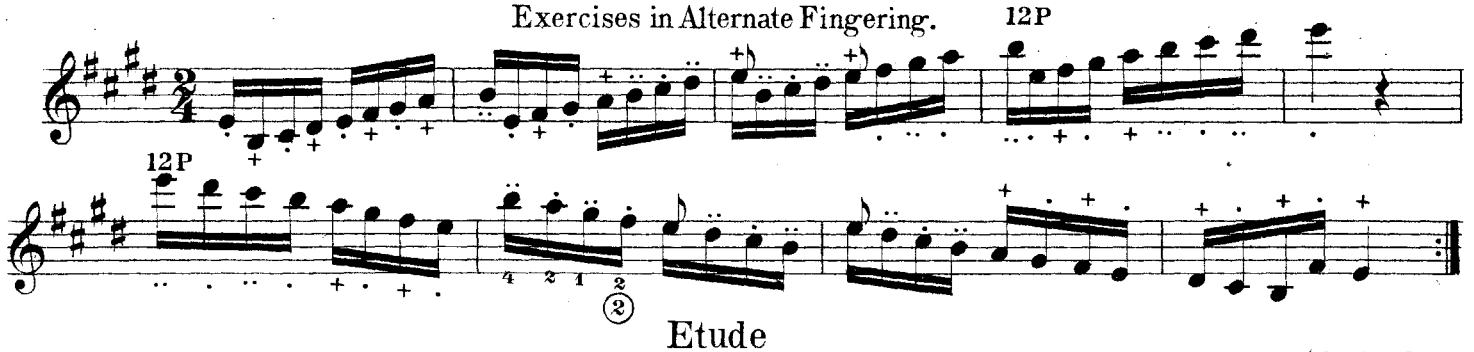
The Scale in A with alternate fingering.



The Chromatic Scale with alternate fingering.

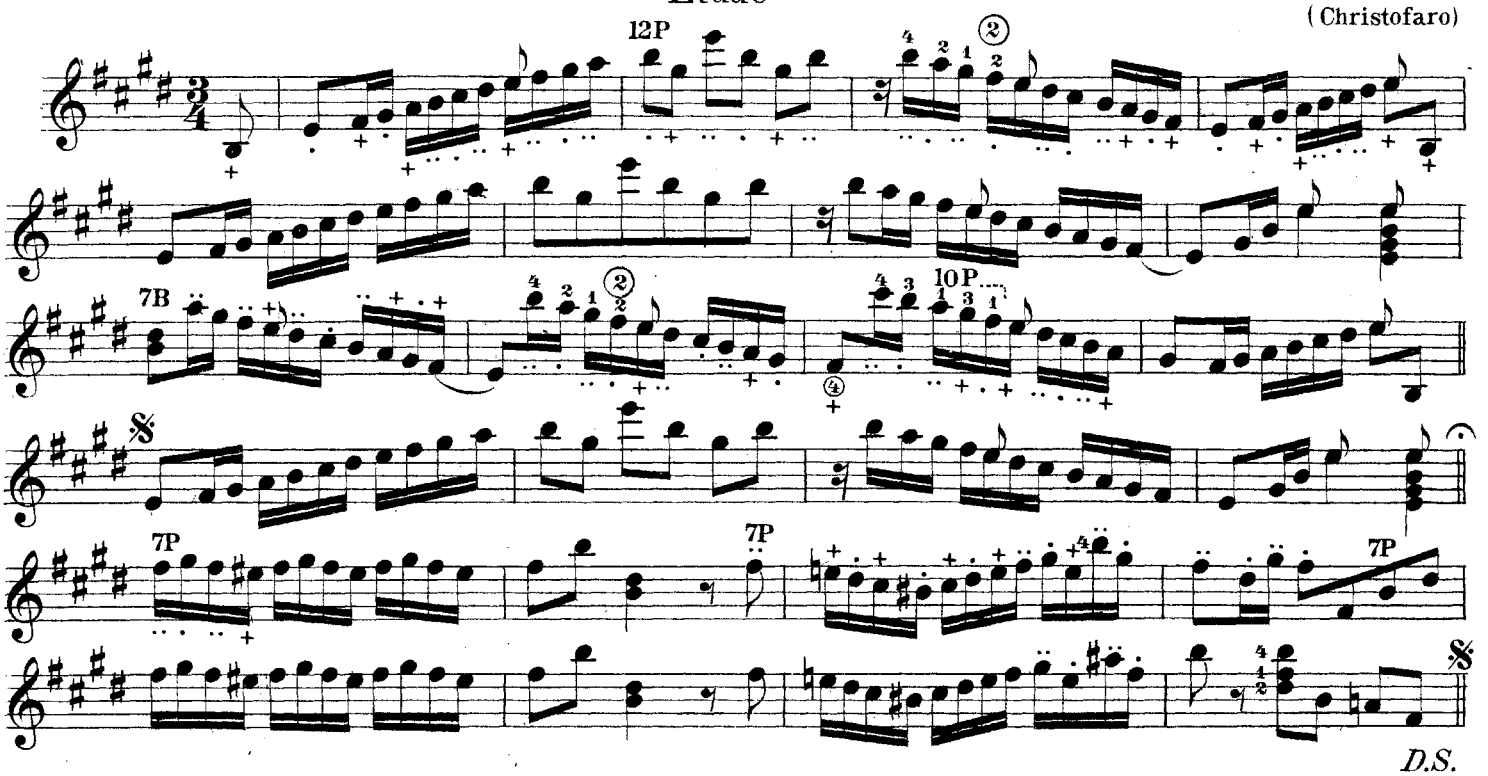


Exercises in Alternate Fingering.

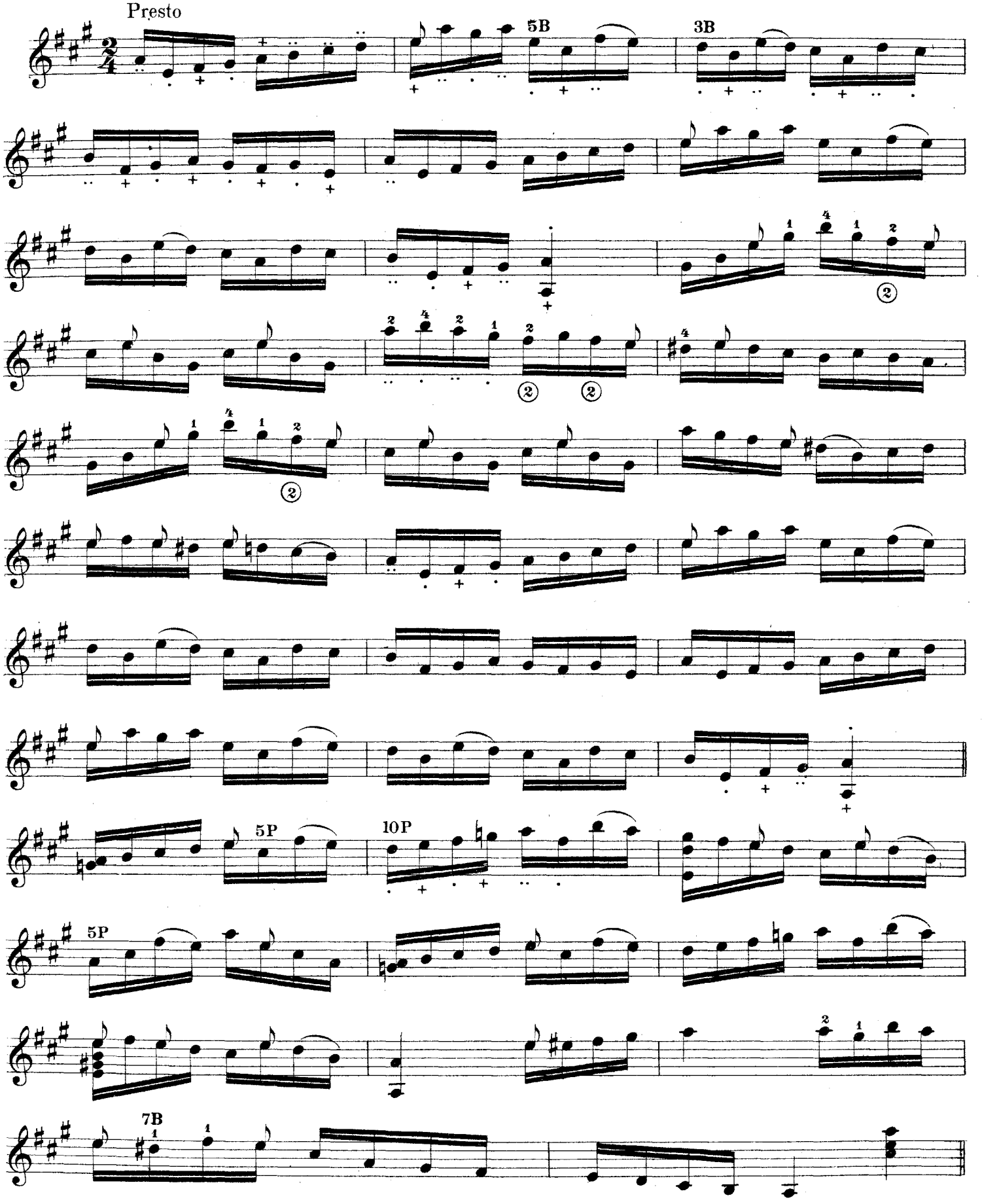


Etude

(Christofaro)

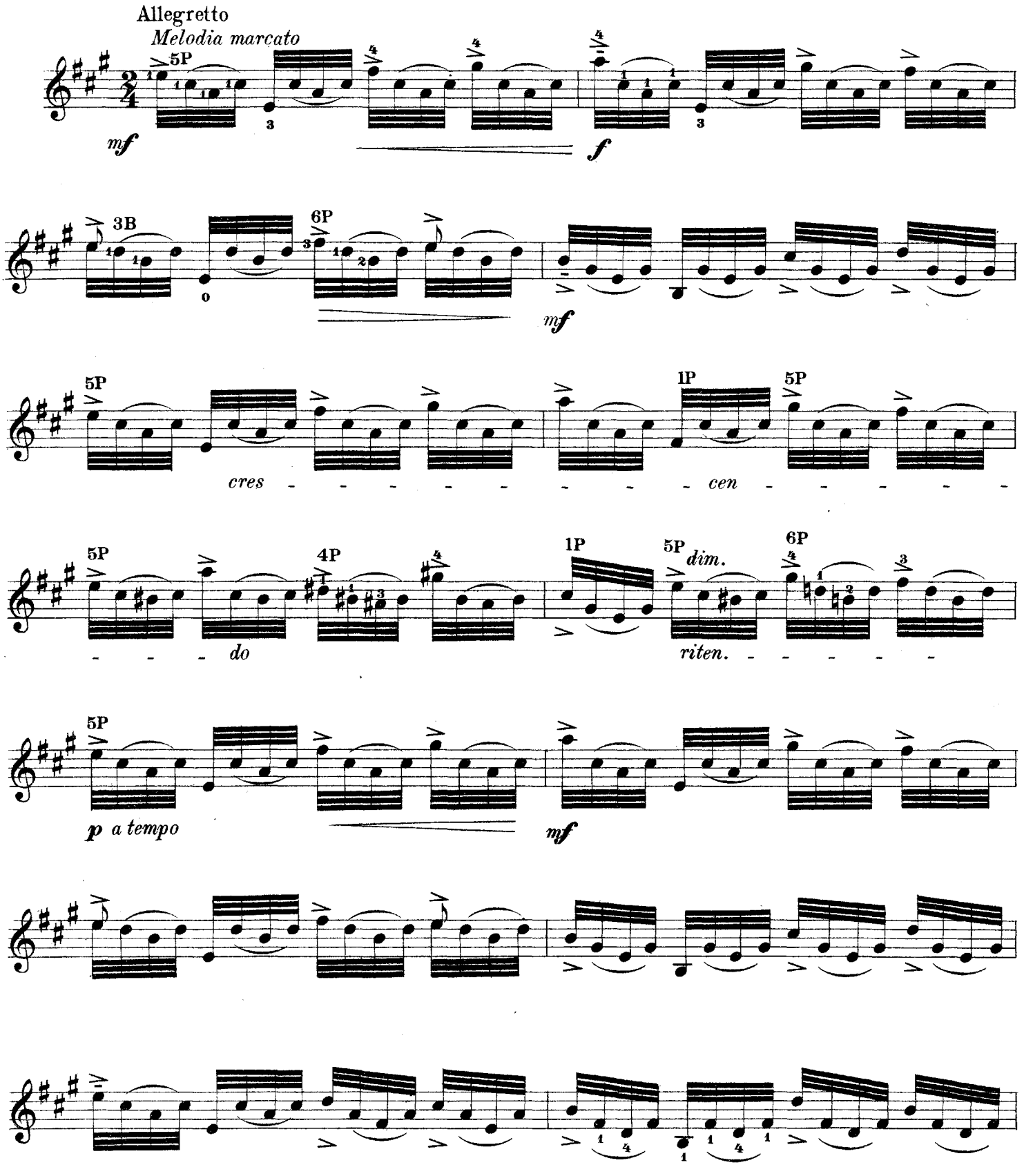


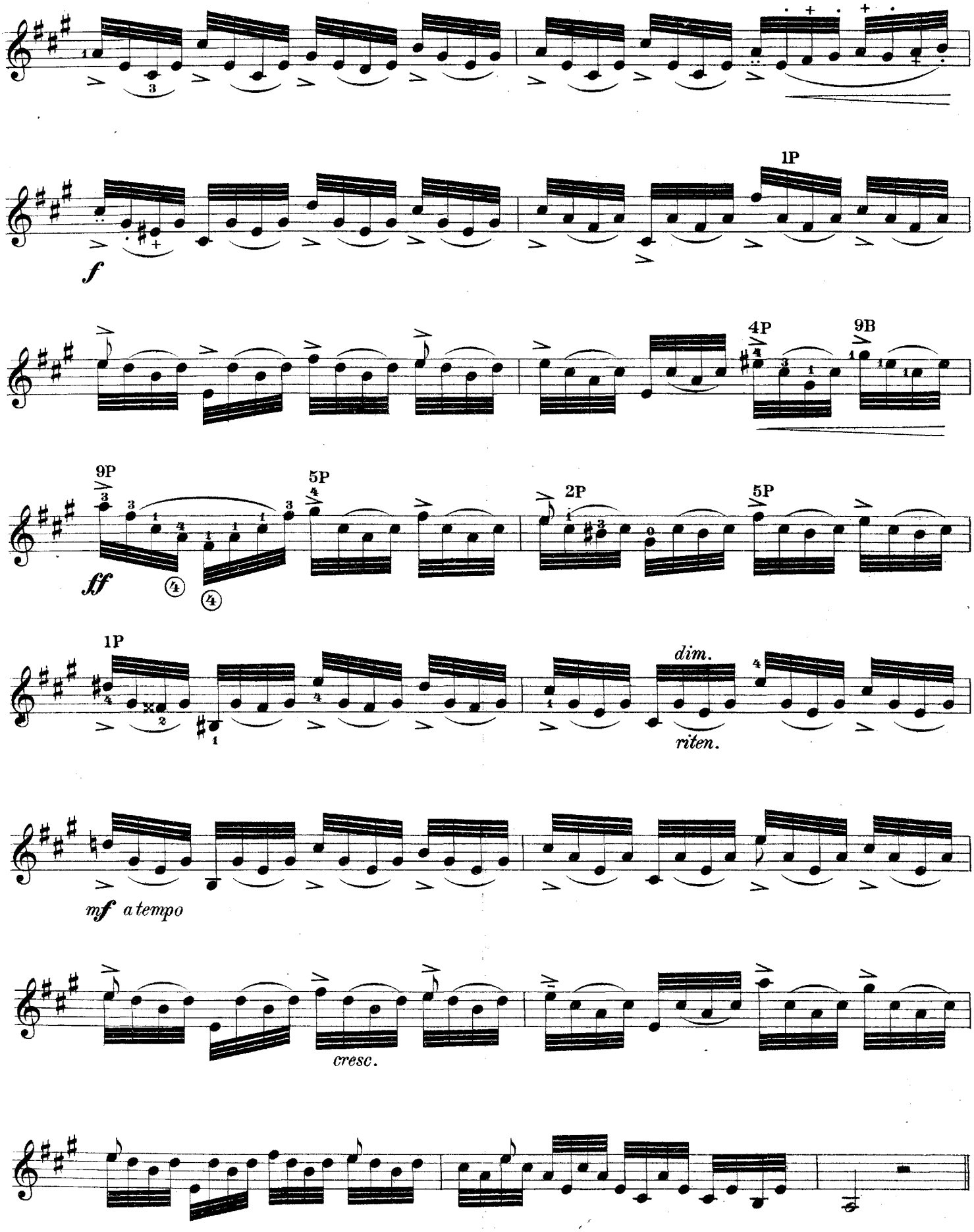
Exercise for Finger Developement



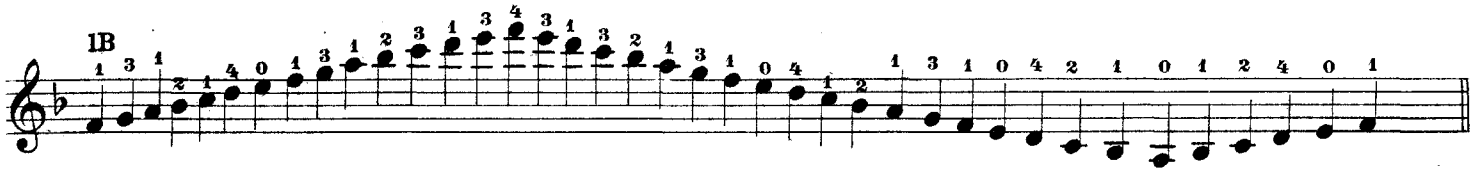
Etude for Accentuation.

(Hofmann)

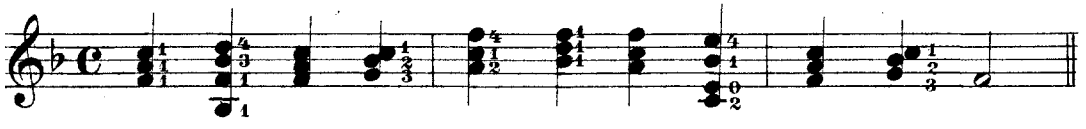



1P
f
4P
9B
9P
5P
2P
5P
ff
1P
dim.
riten.
mf a tempo
cresc.

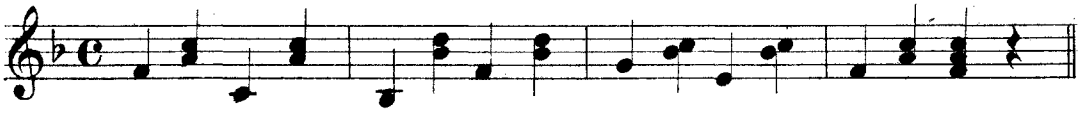
Scale in F major



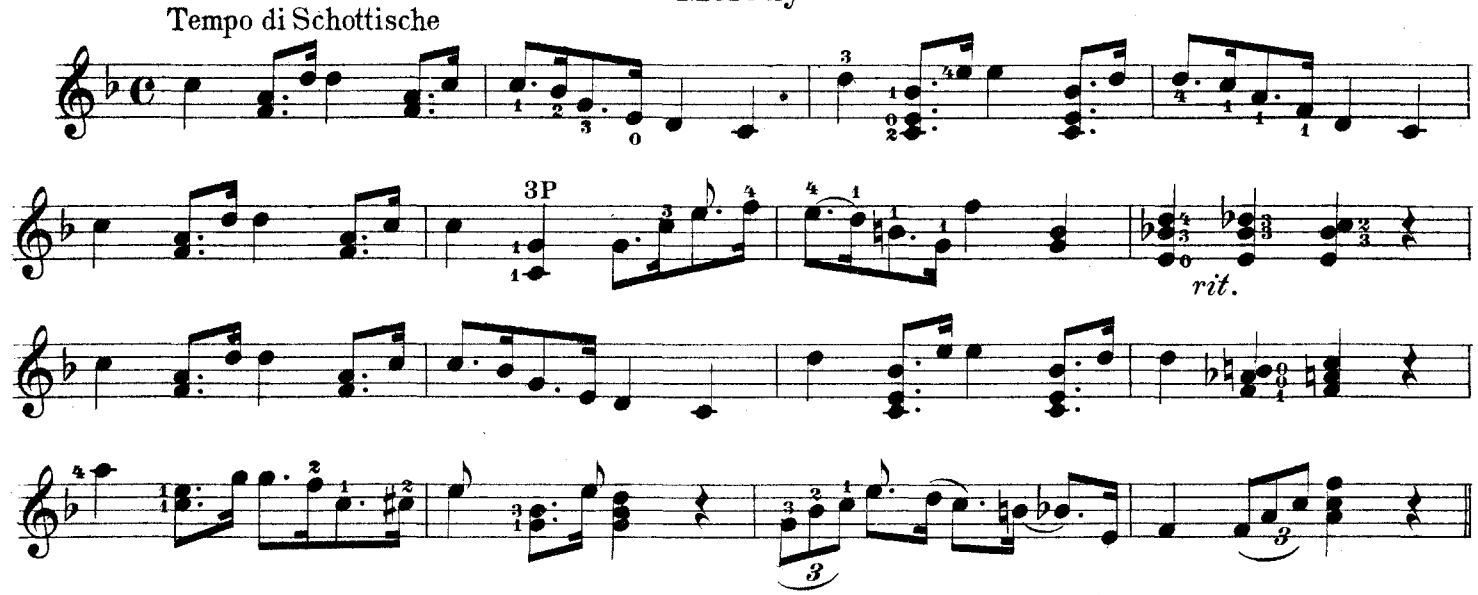
Chords in F major



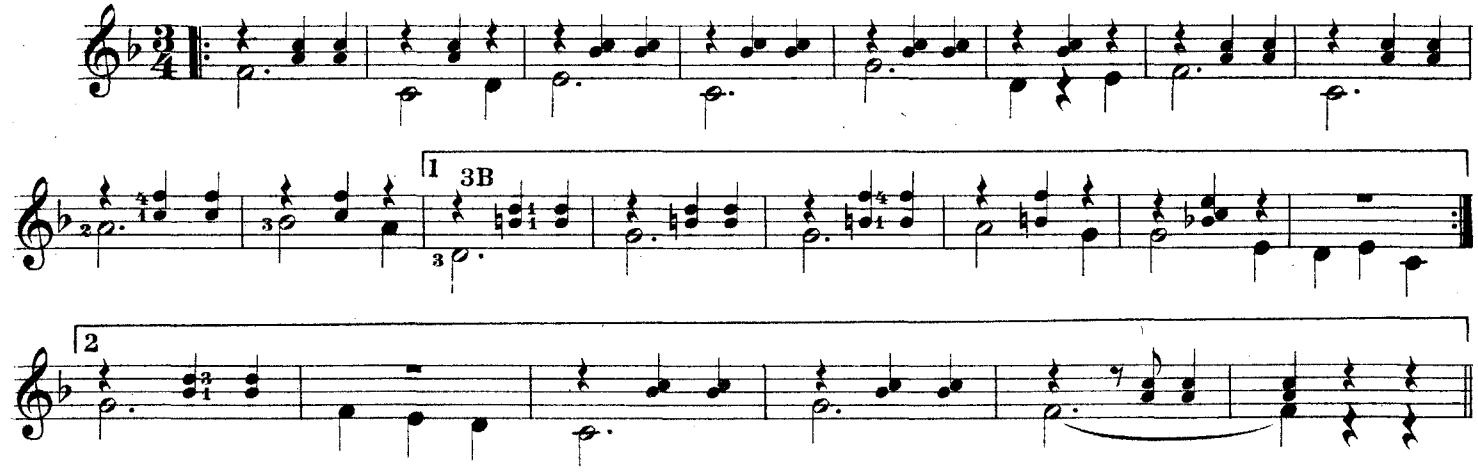
Exercise



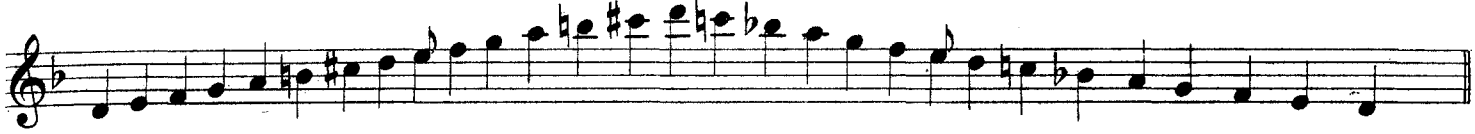
Melody



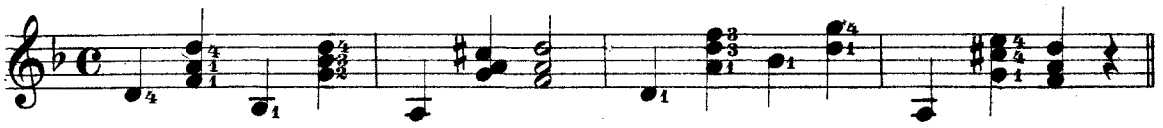
Waltz



Scale in D minor
(Relative of F major)

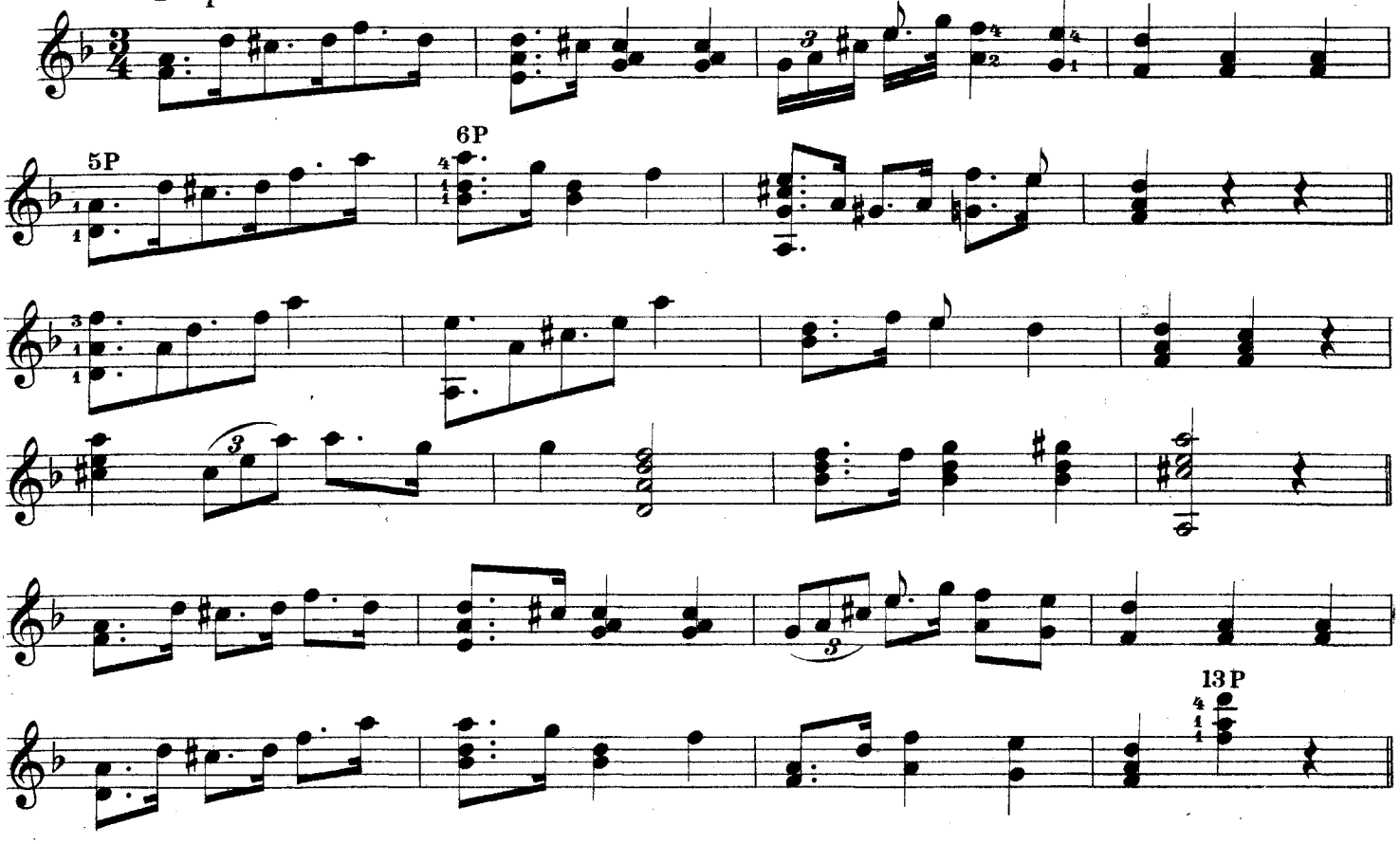


Chords in D minor

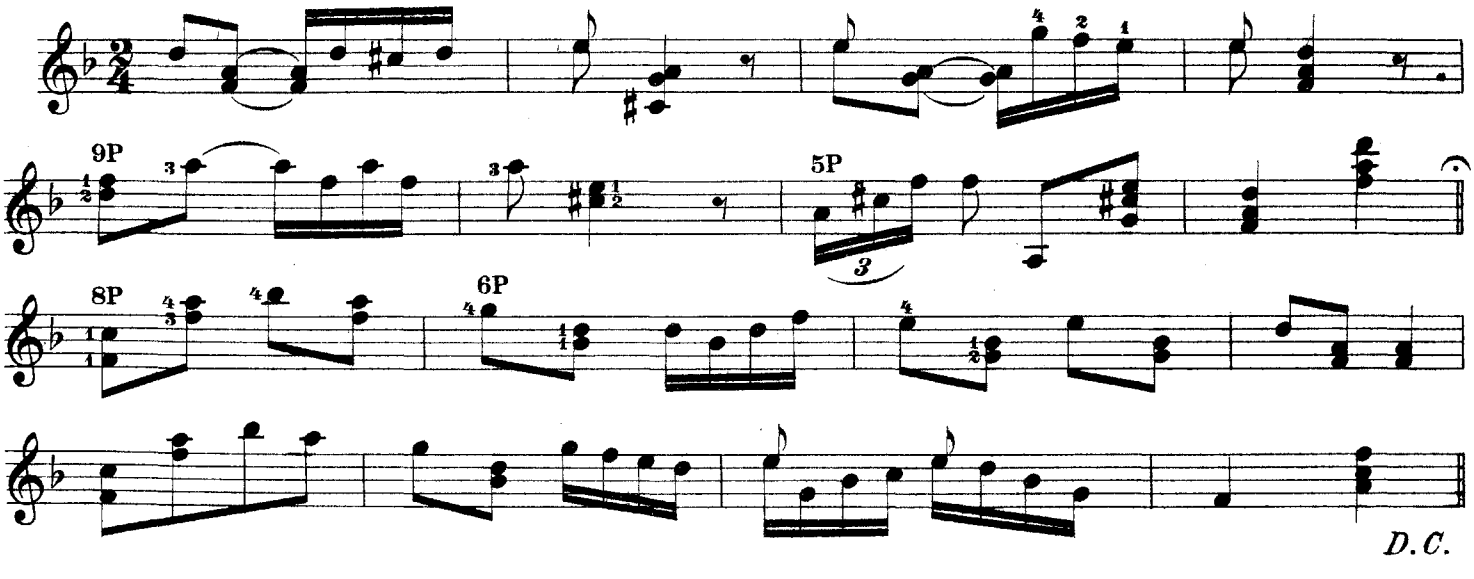


Melody

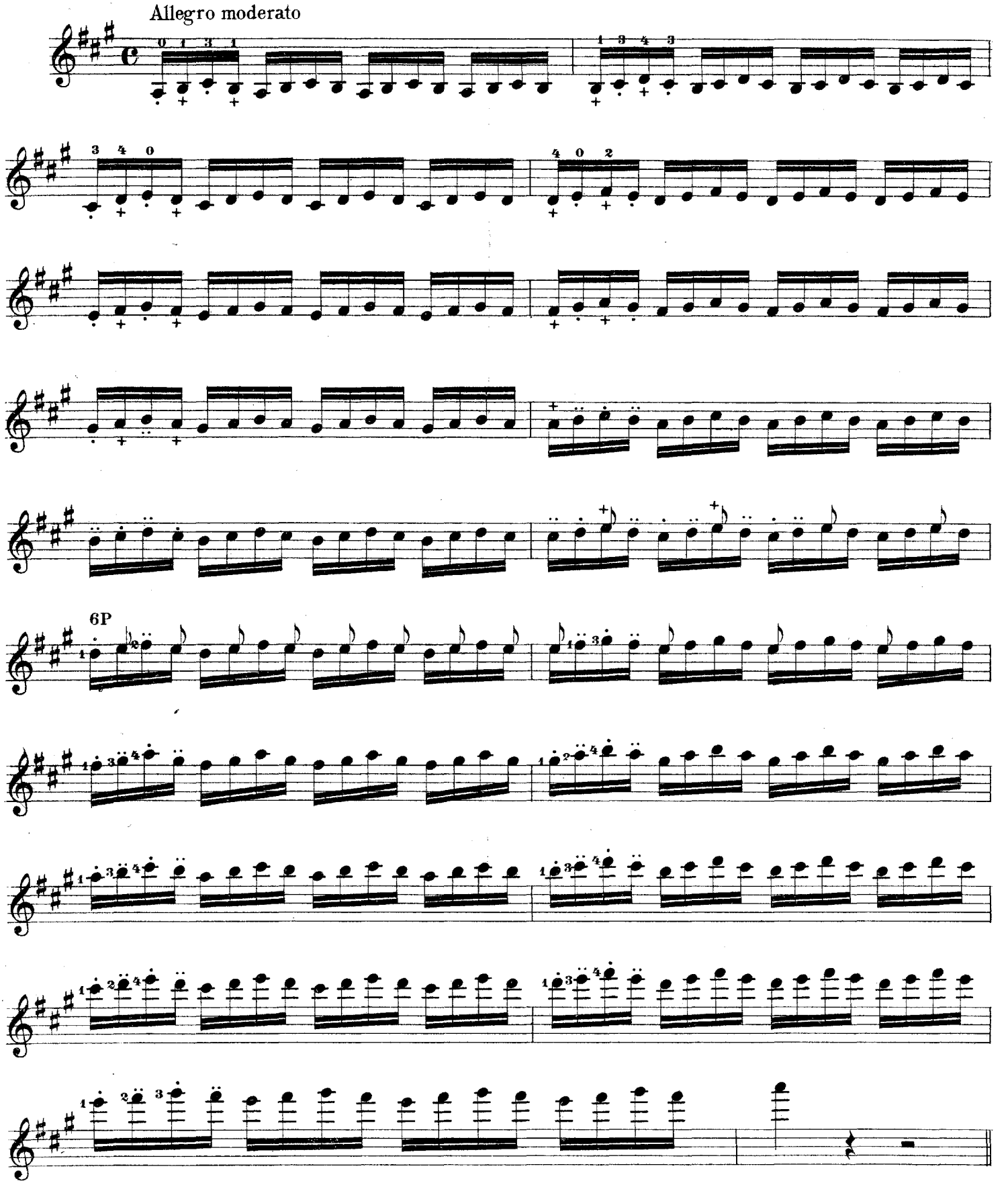
Tempo di Mazurka



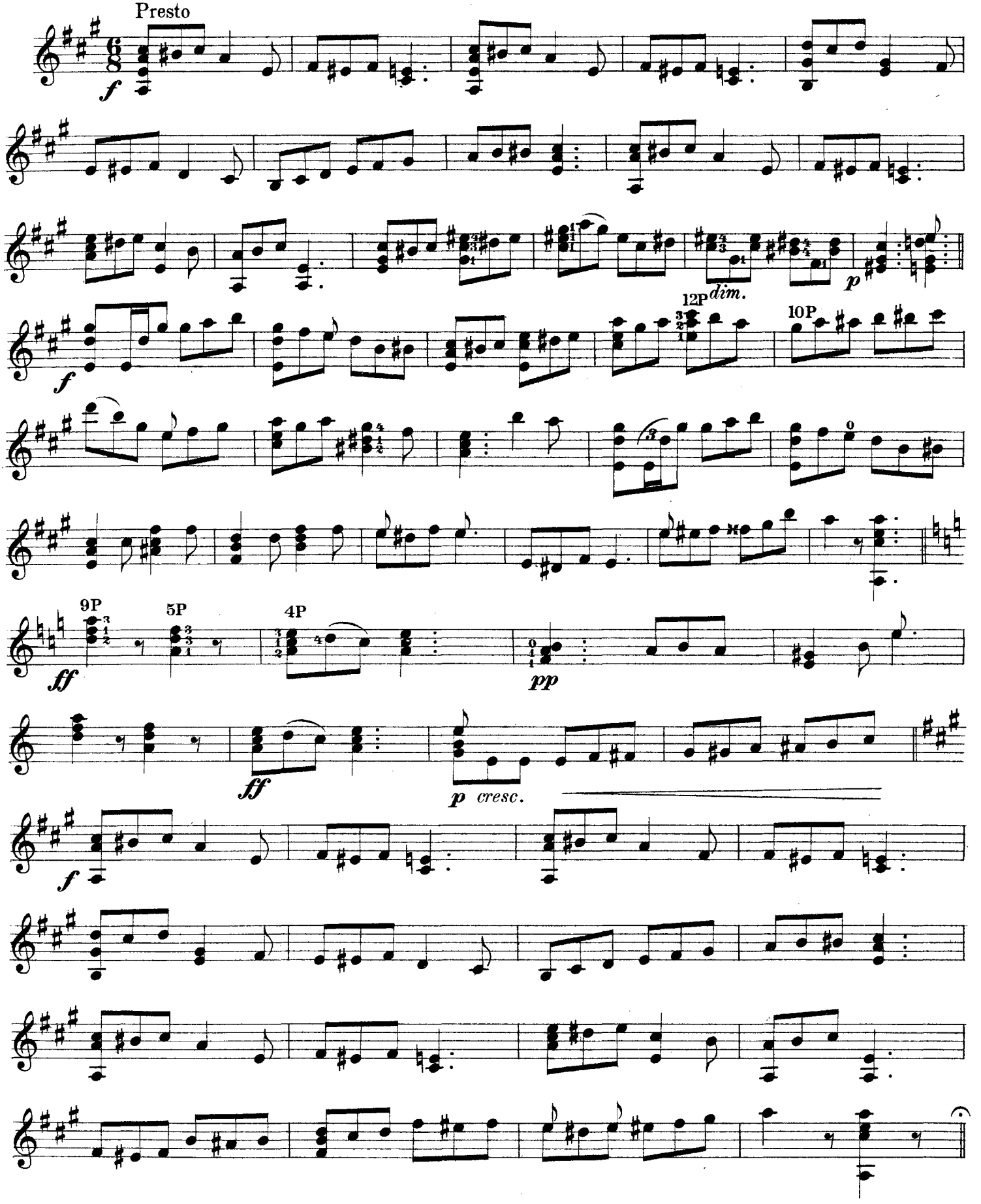
Caprice



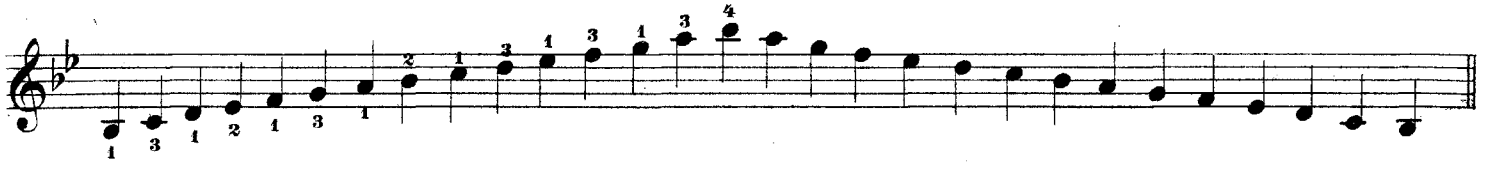
Exercise for producing smooth and even tones



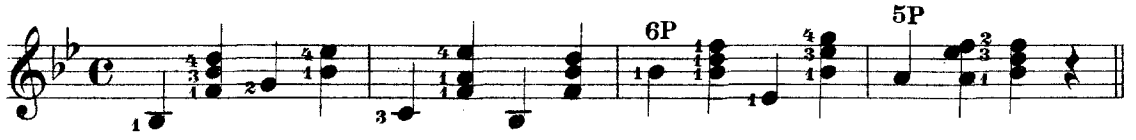
Tarantelle



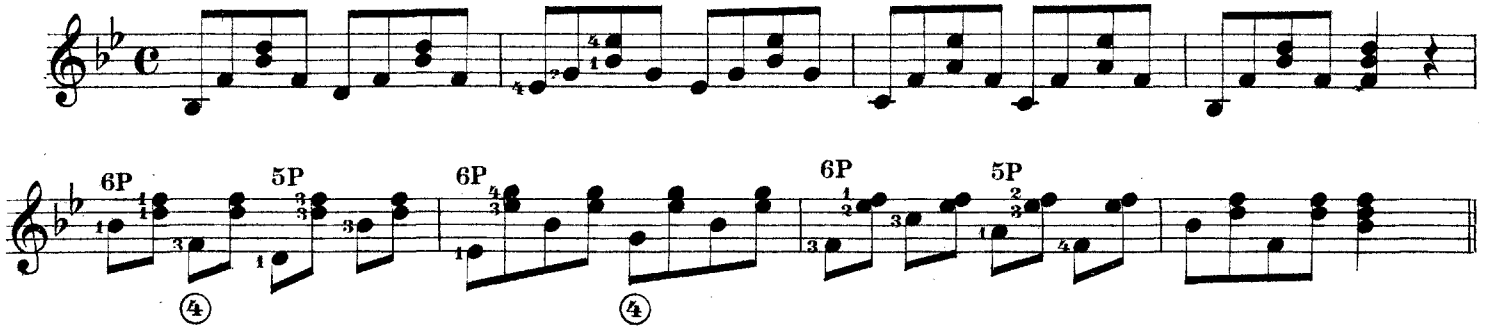
Scale in B♭ major



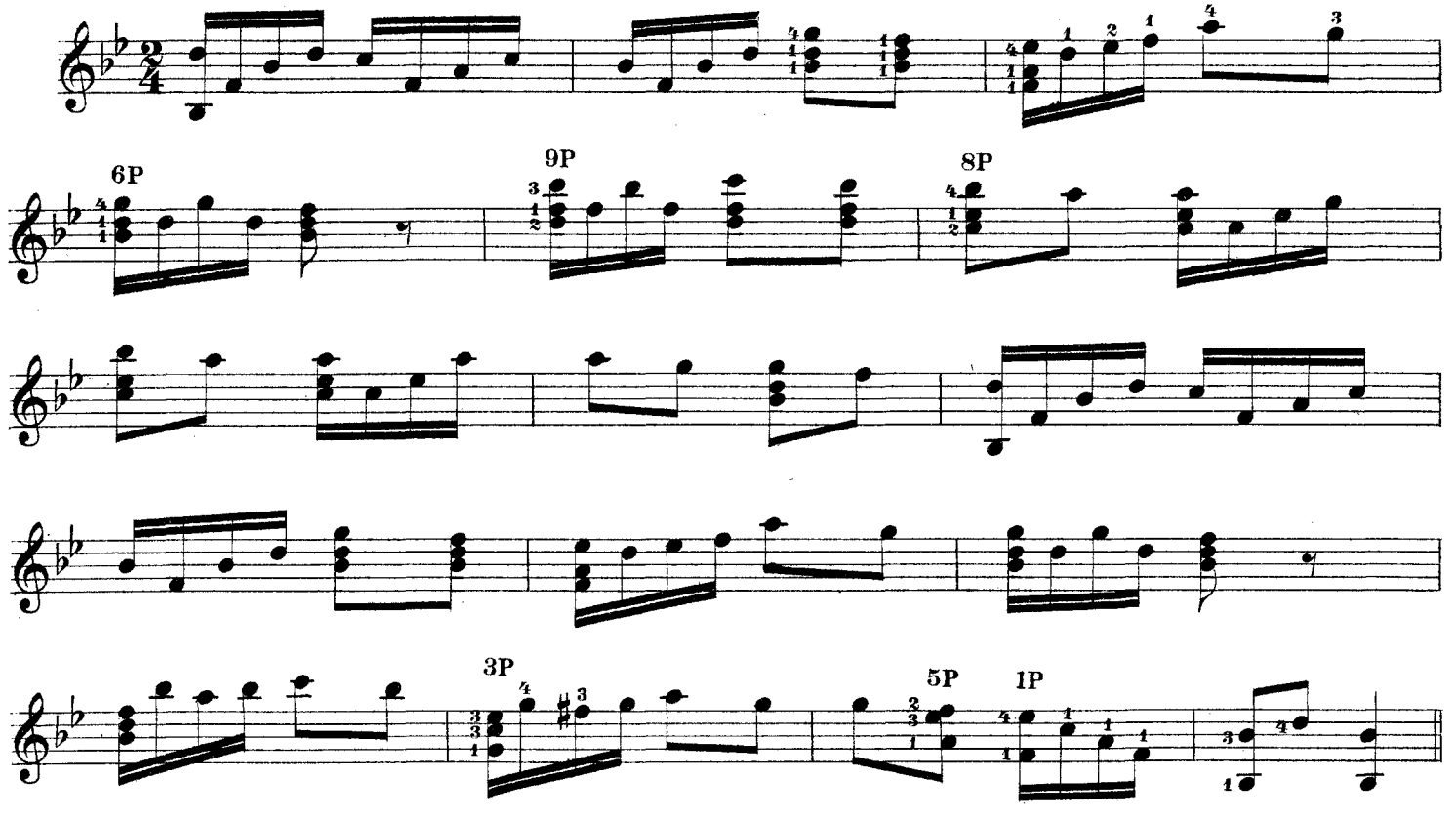
Chords in B♭ major



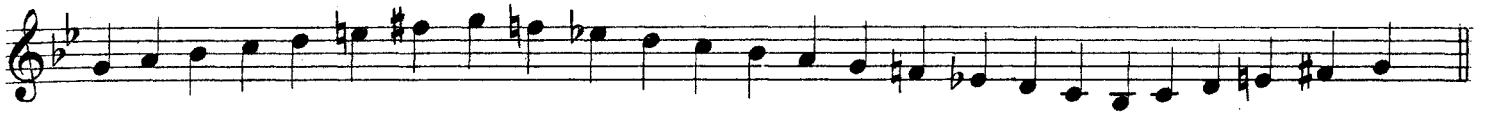
Accompaniment Exercise



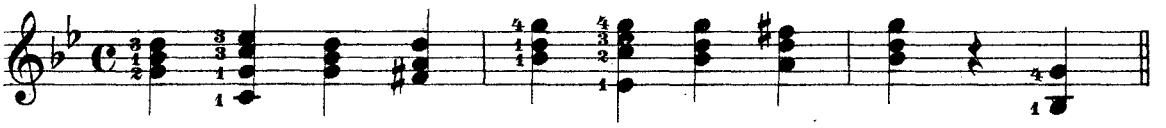
Polka



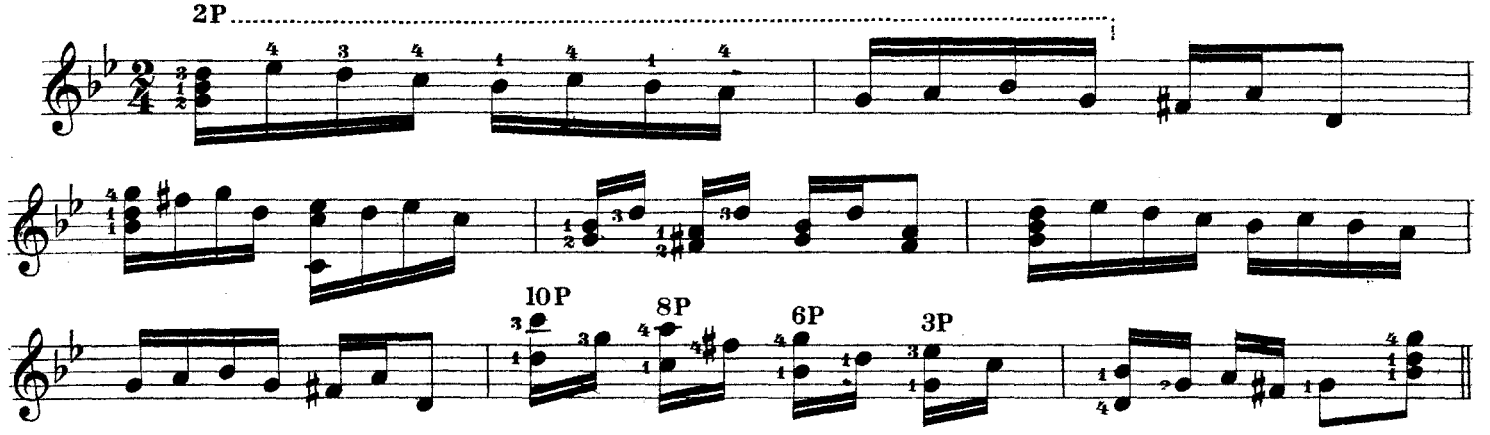
Scale in G minor
(Relative of B♭ major)



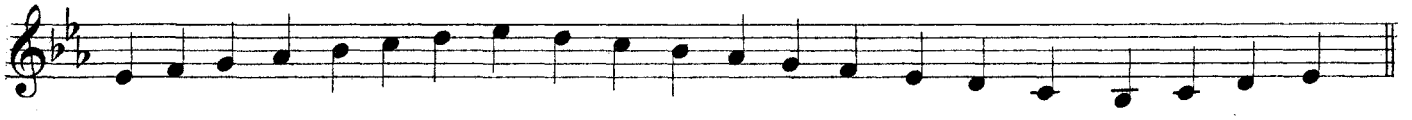
Chords in G minor



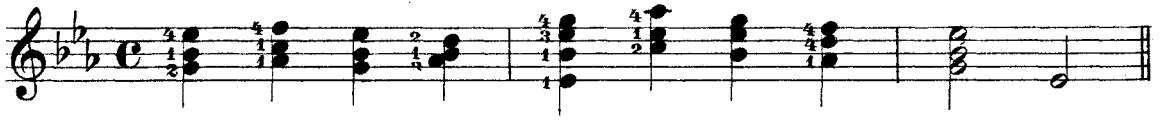
Exercise



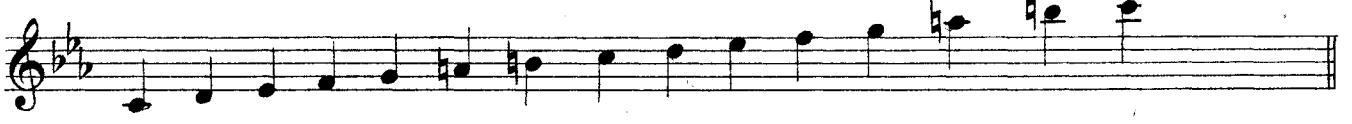
Scale in E♭ major



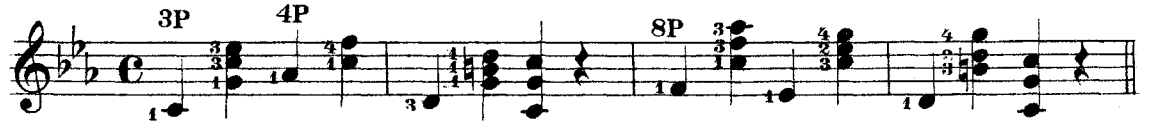
Chords in E♭ major



Scale in C minor
(Relative of E♭ major)

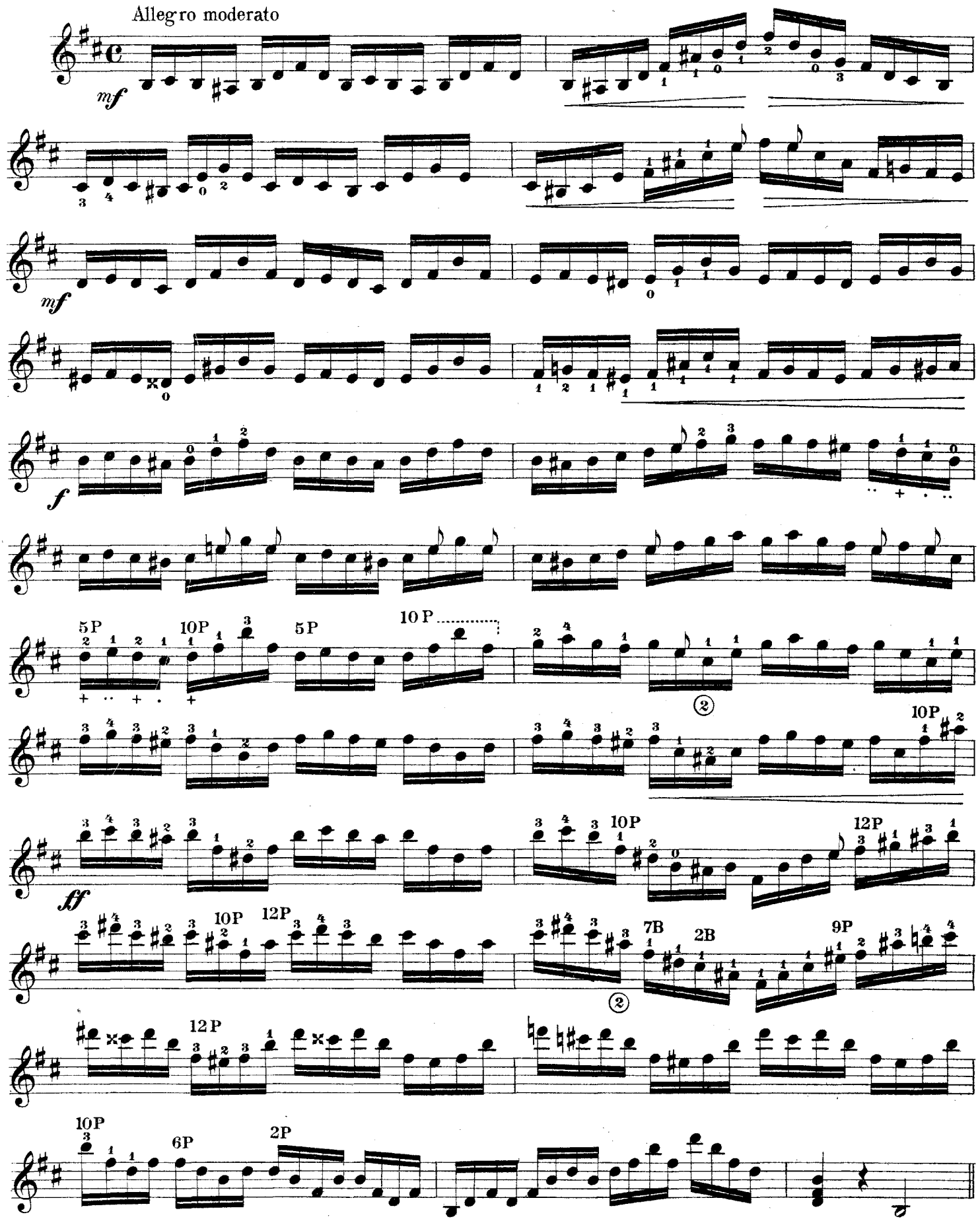


Chords in C minor



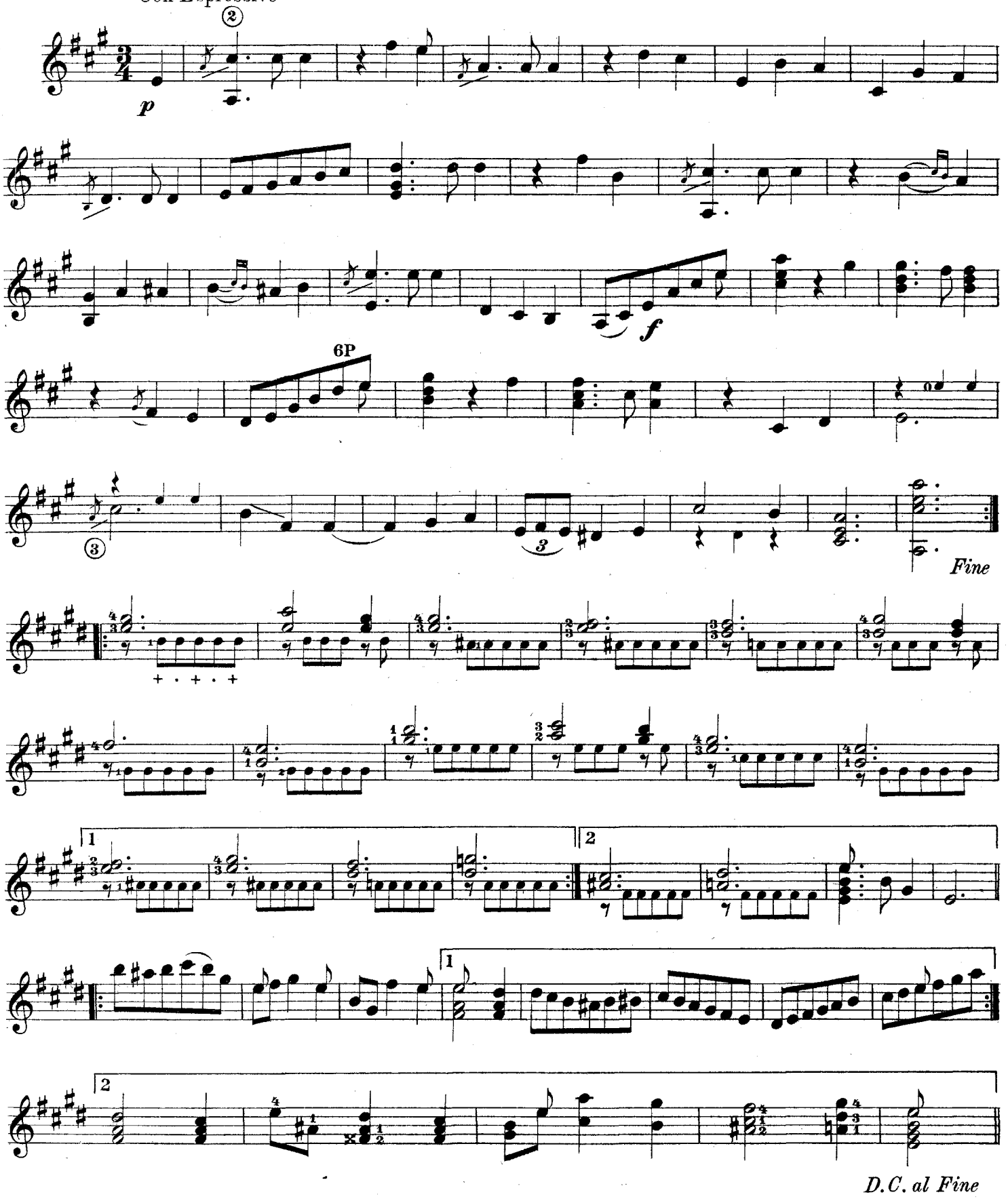
Exercise for Shifting Positions

(Hofmann)

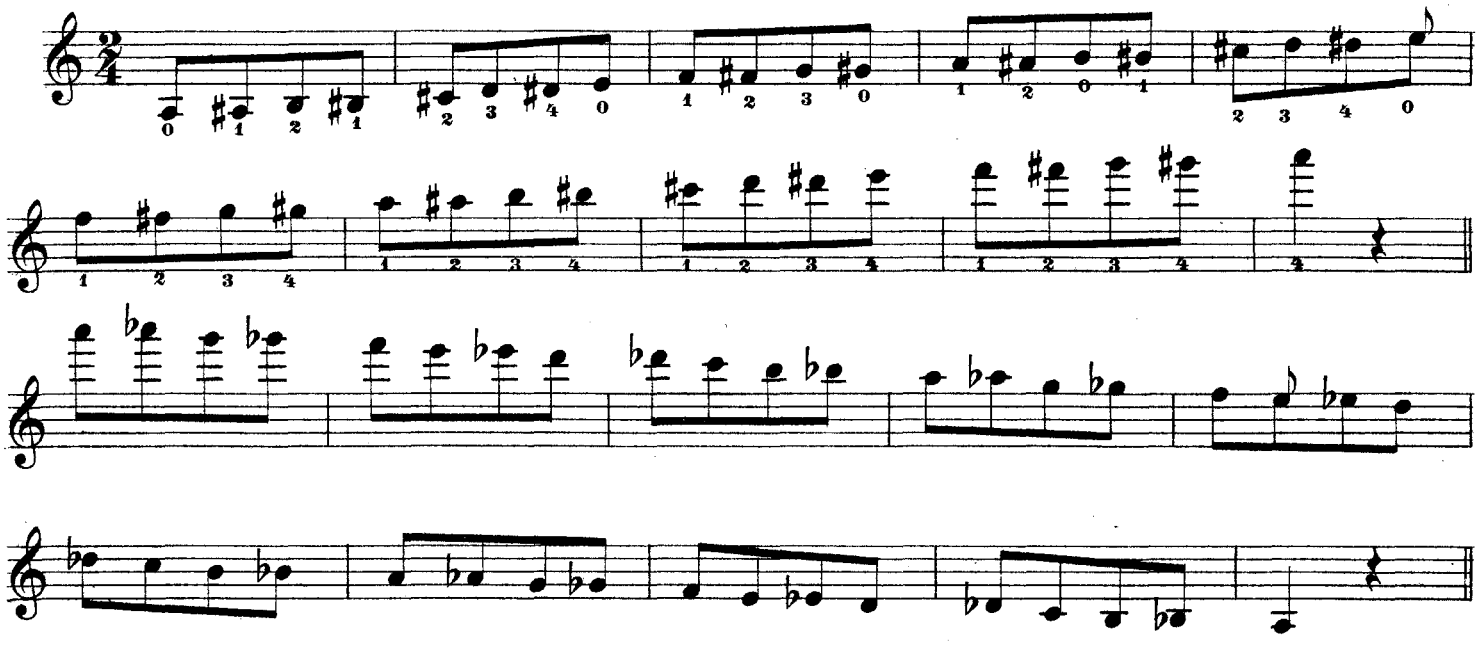


Waltz

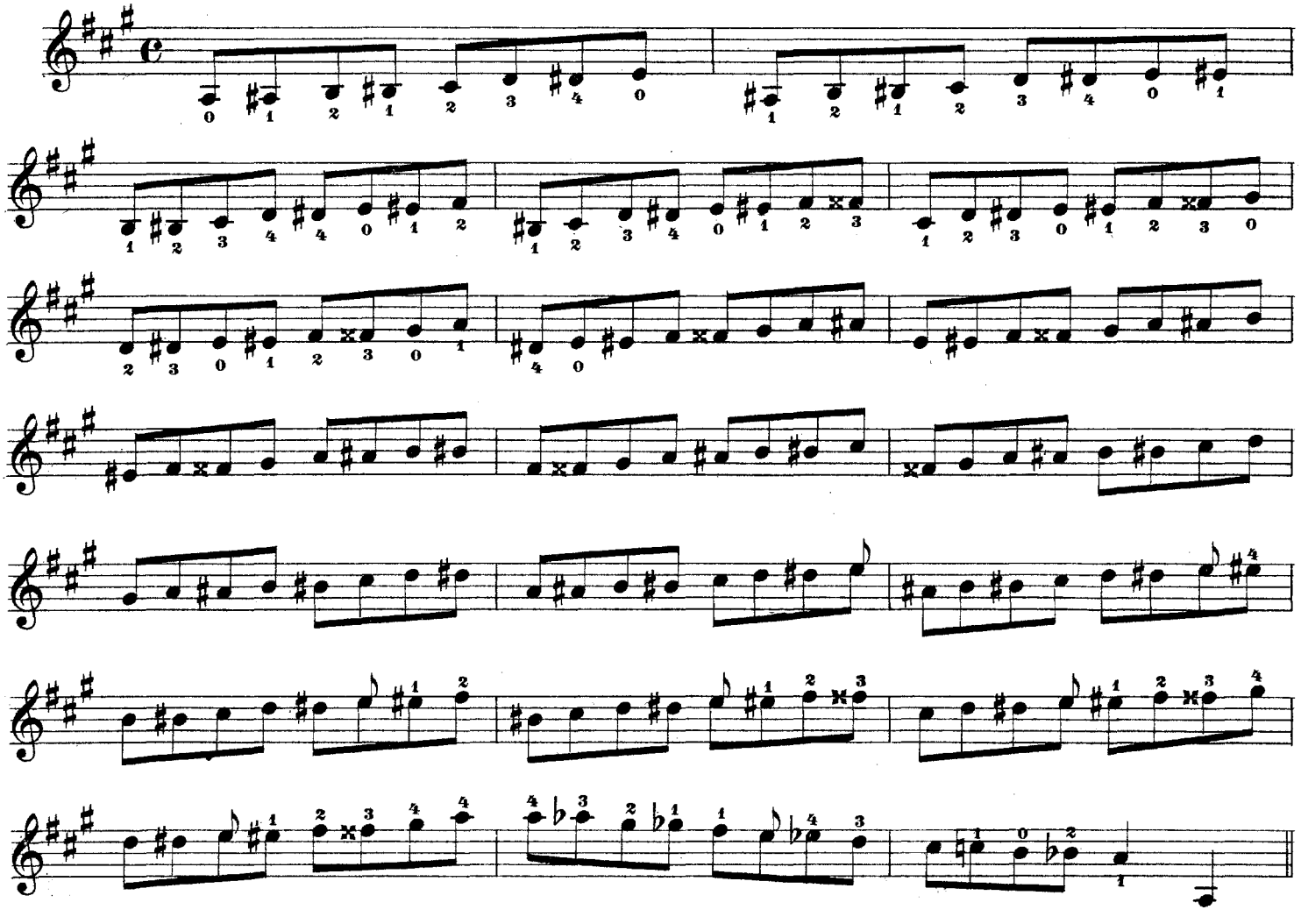
Con Espressivo



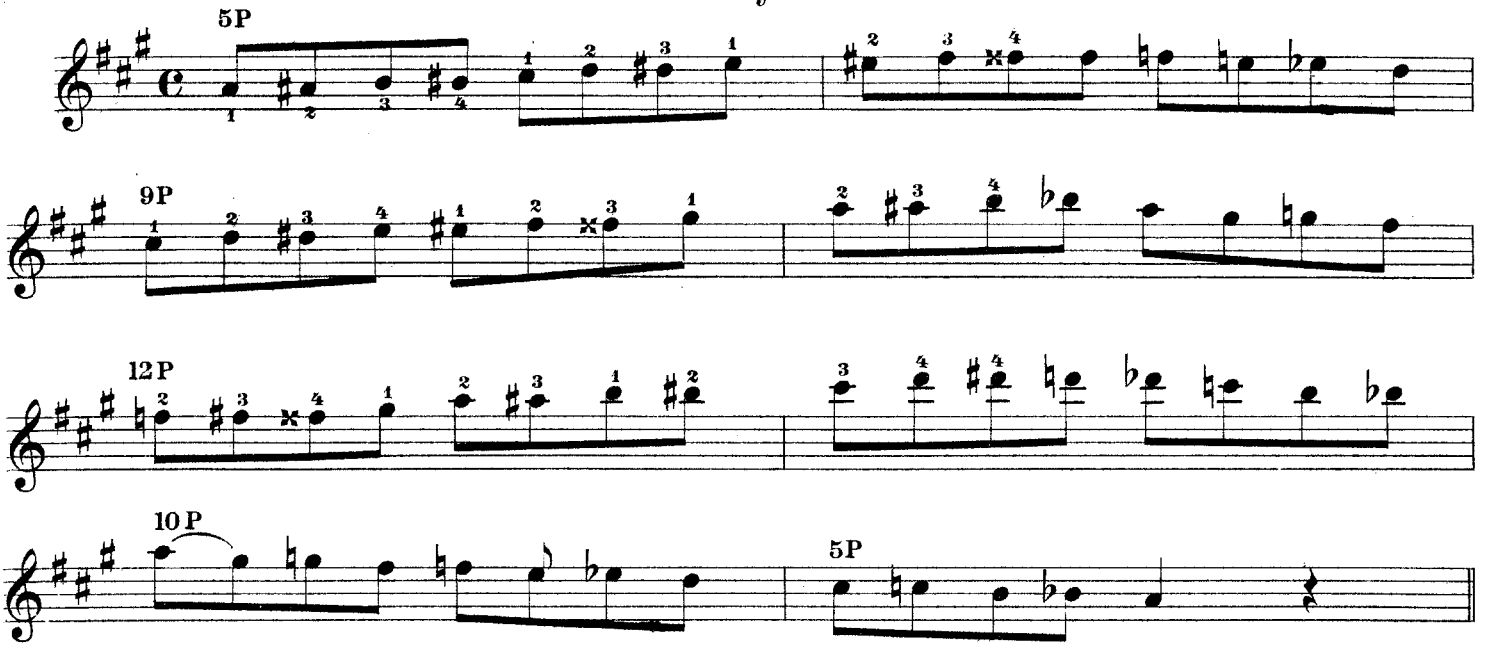
Chromatic Scales.



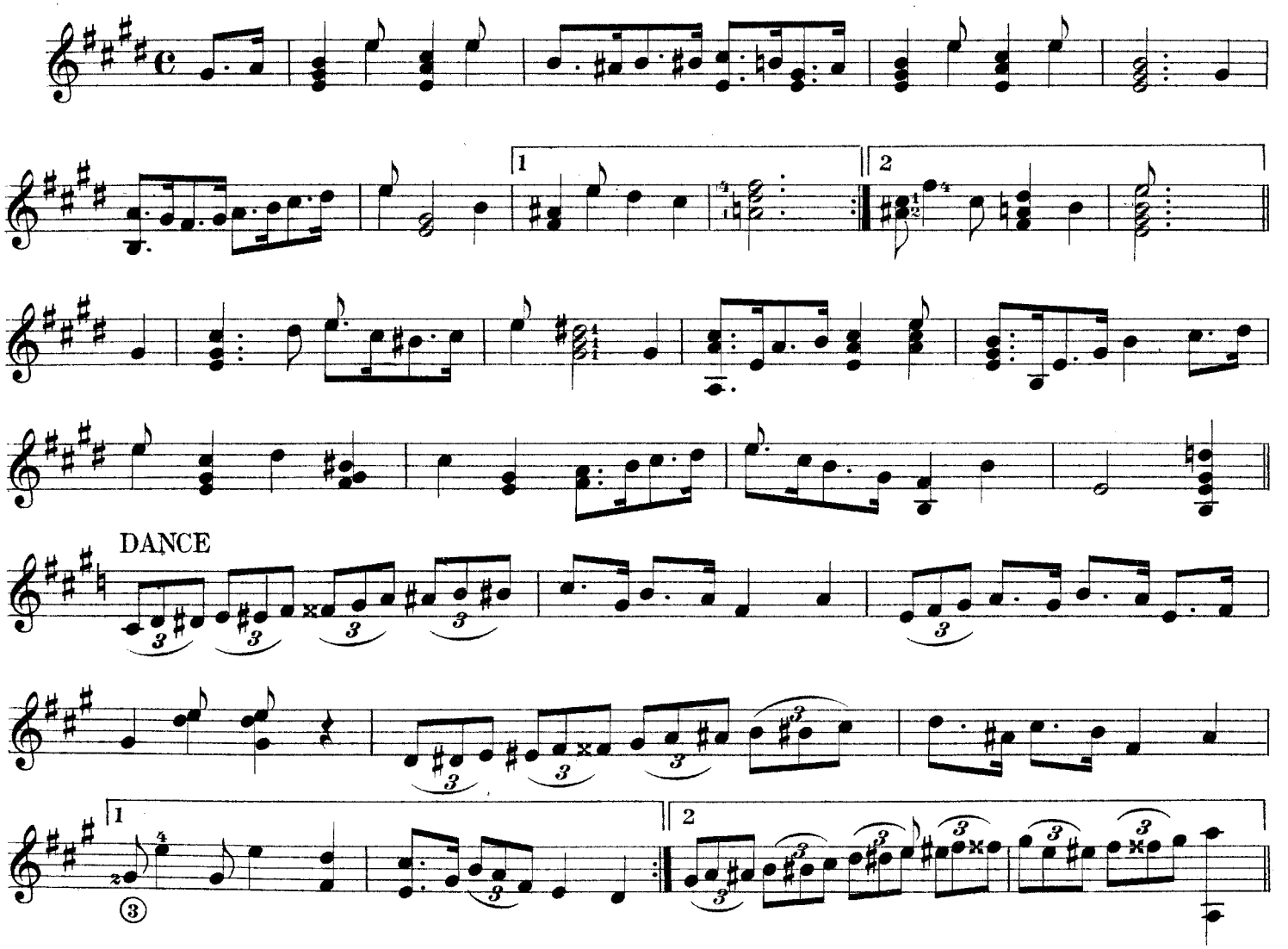
Chromatic Exercises



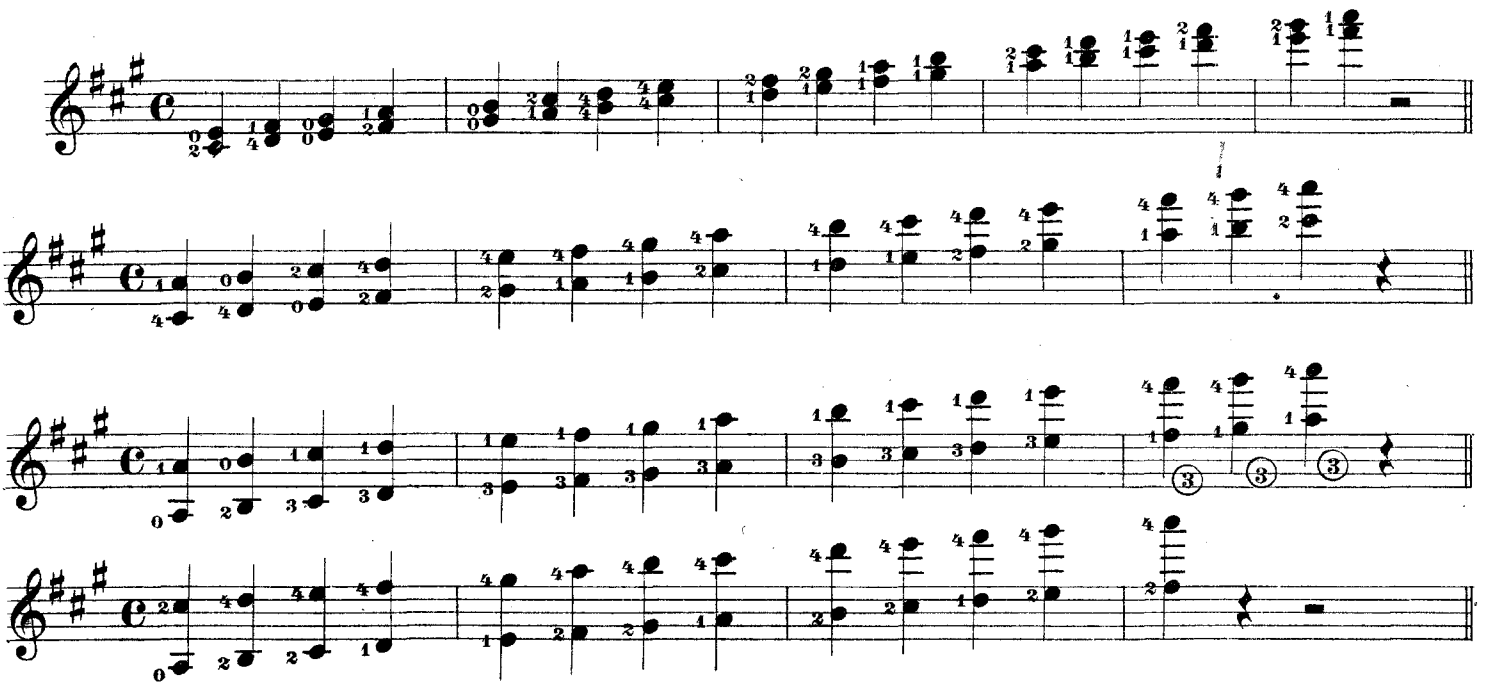
Chromatic Study in Positions



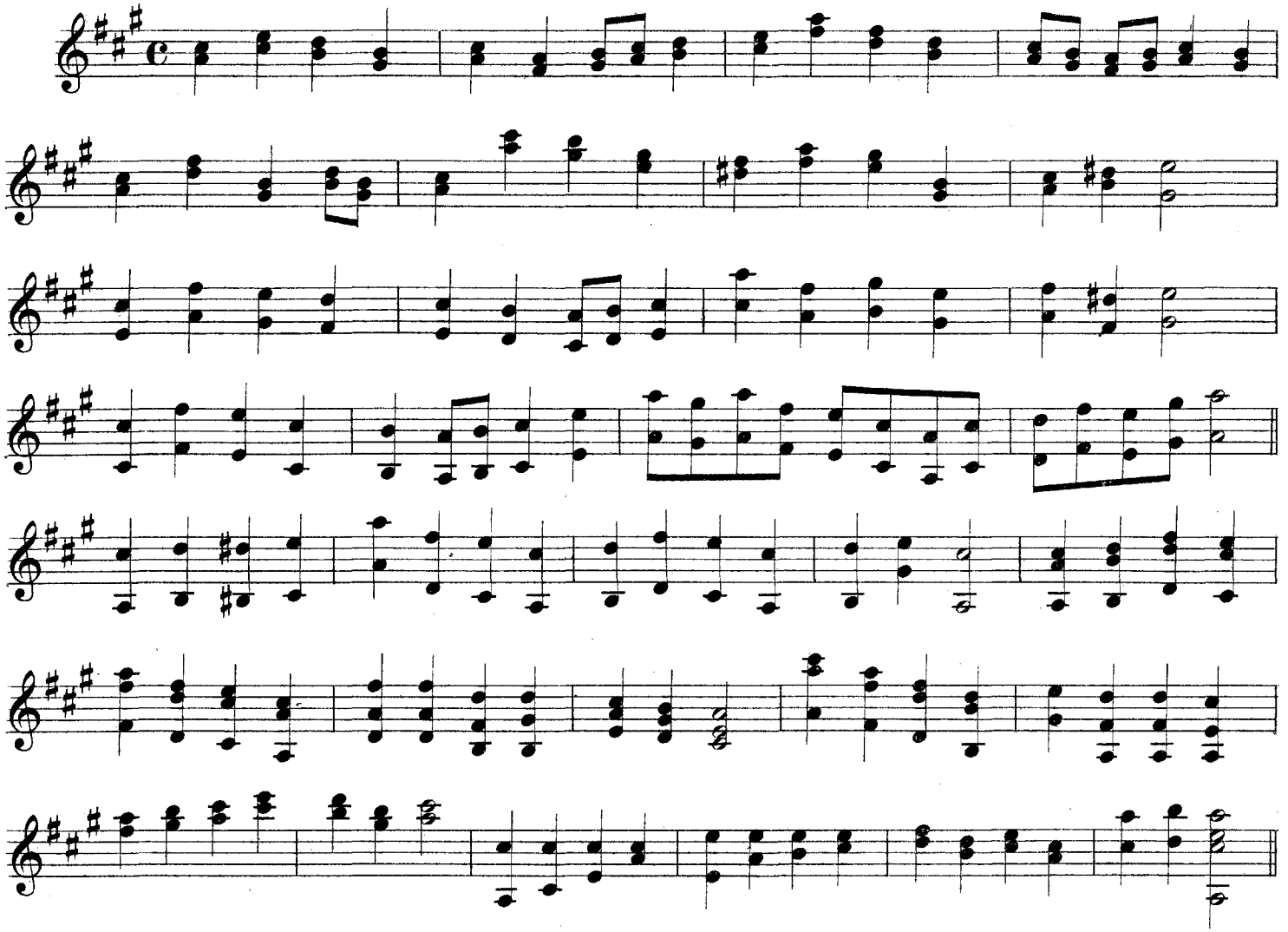
Song and Dance Air



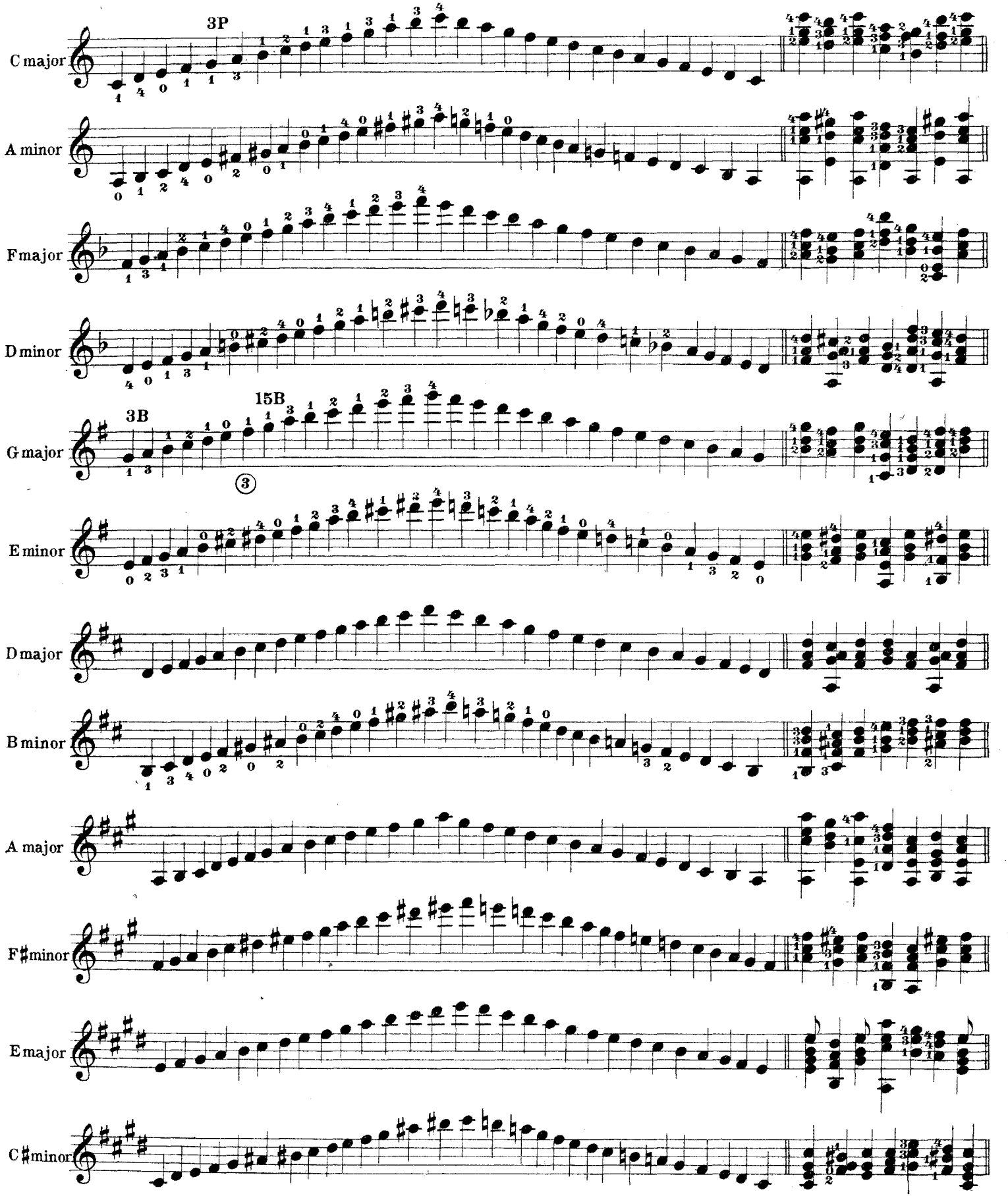
Studies in Thirds, Sixths, Octaves and Tenths.



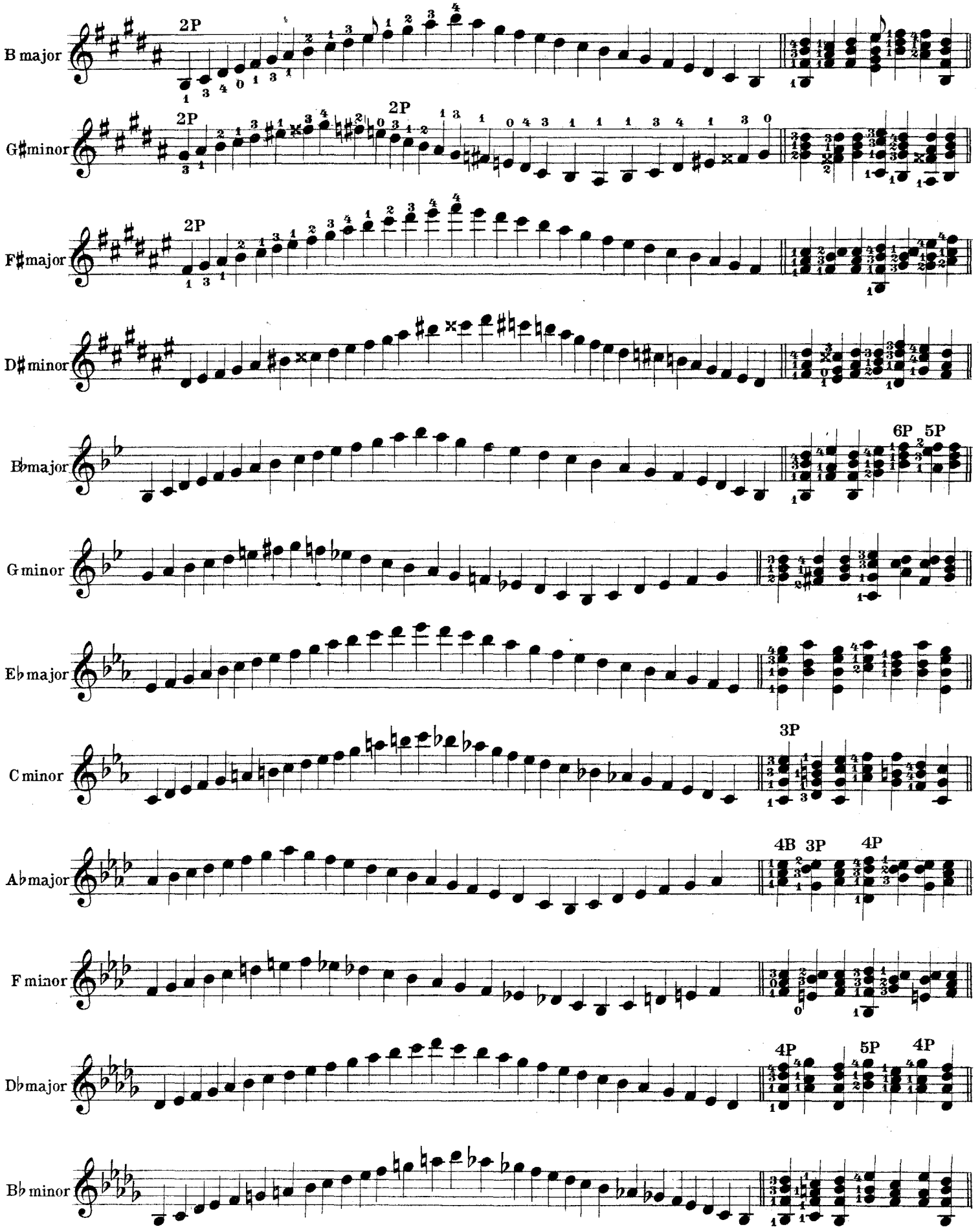
Etude



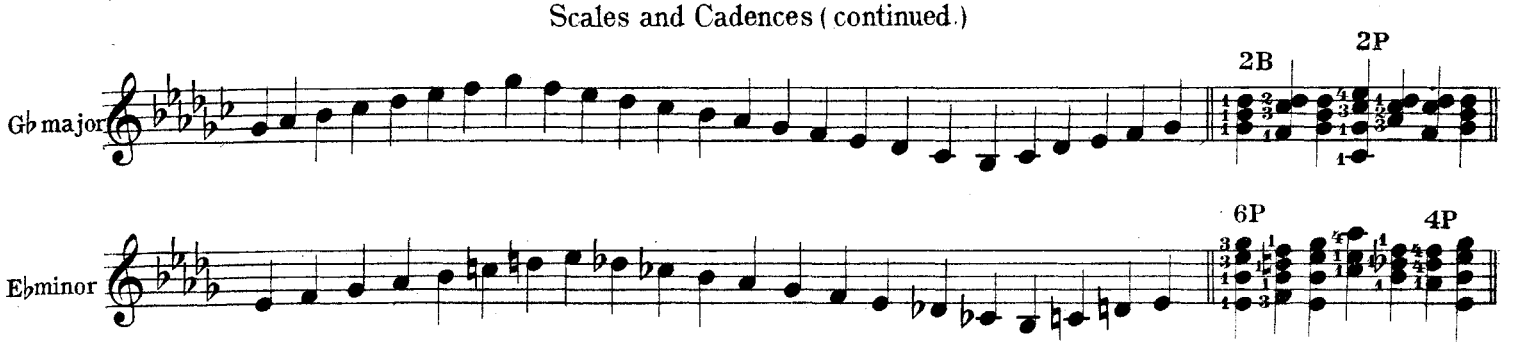
Scales and Cadences in all the Major and Minor Keys.



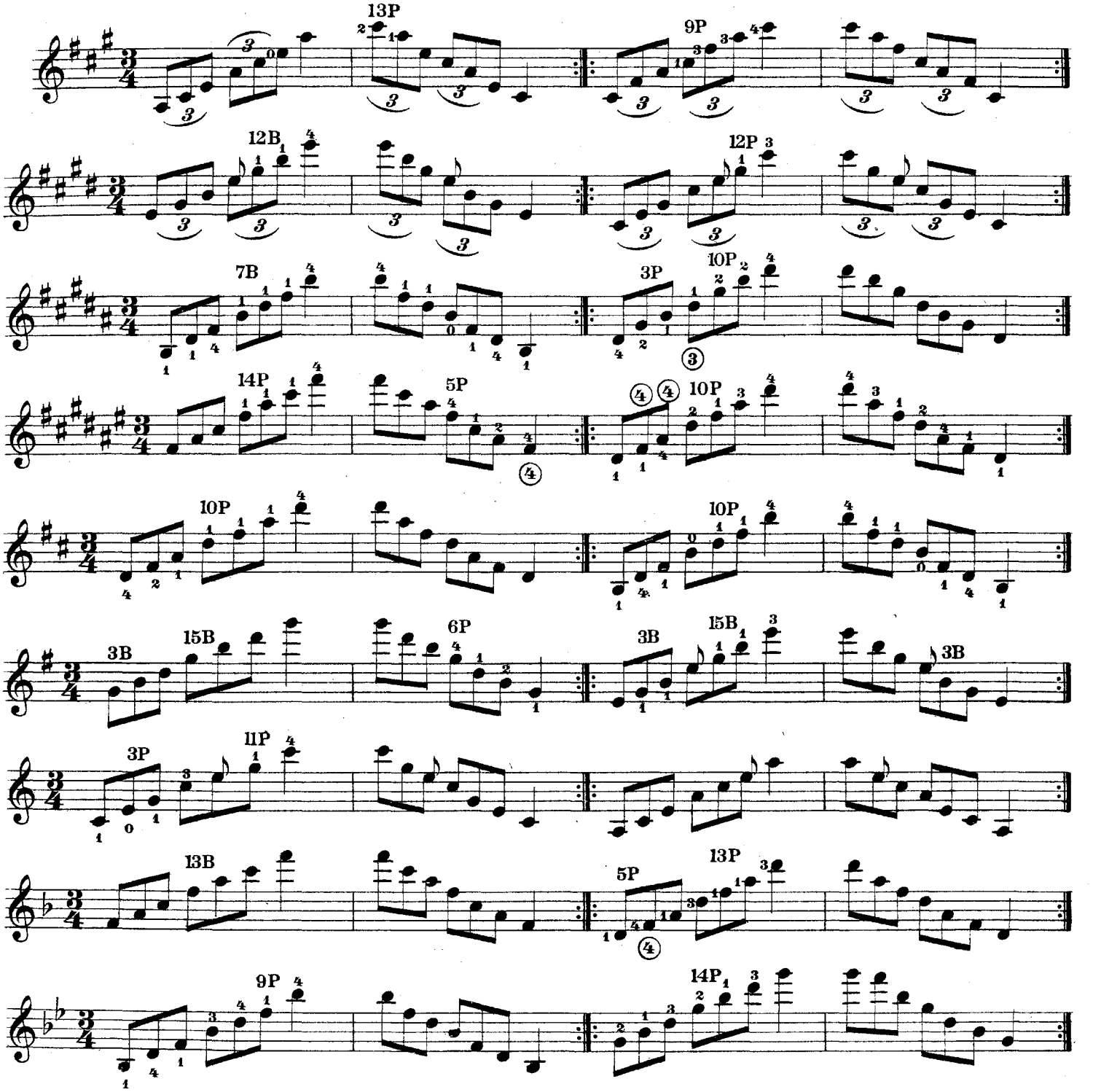
Scales and Cadences (continued)



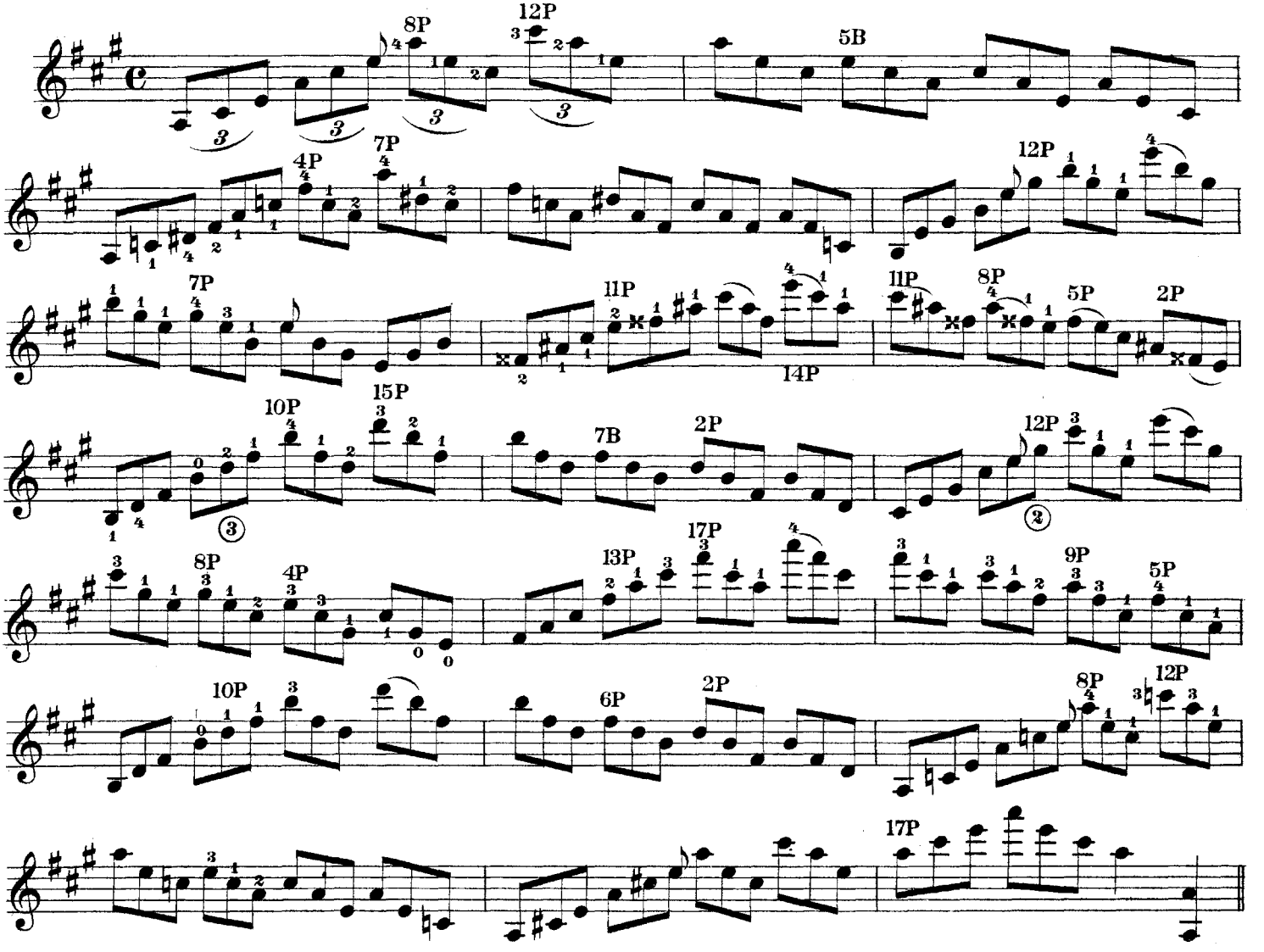
Scales and Cadences (continued.)



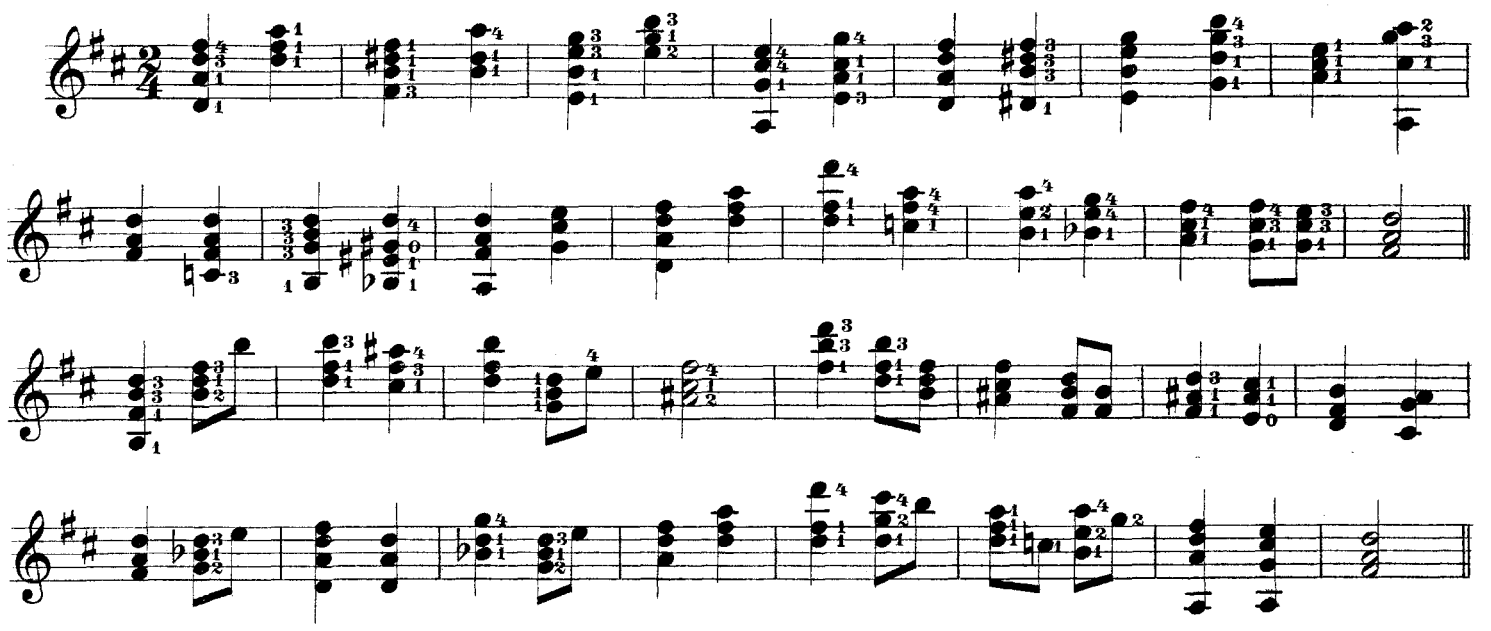
Broken Chords



Etude

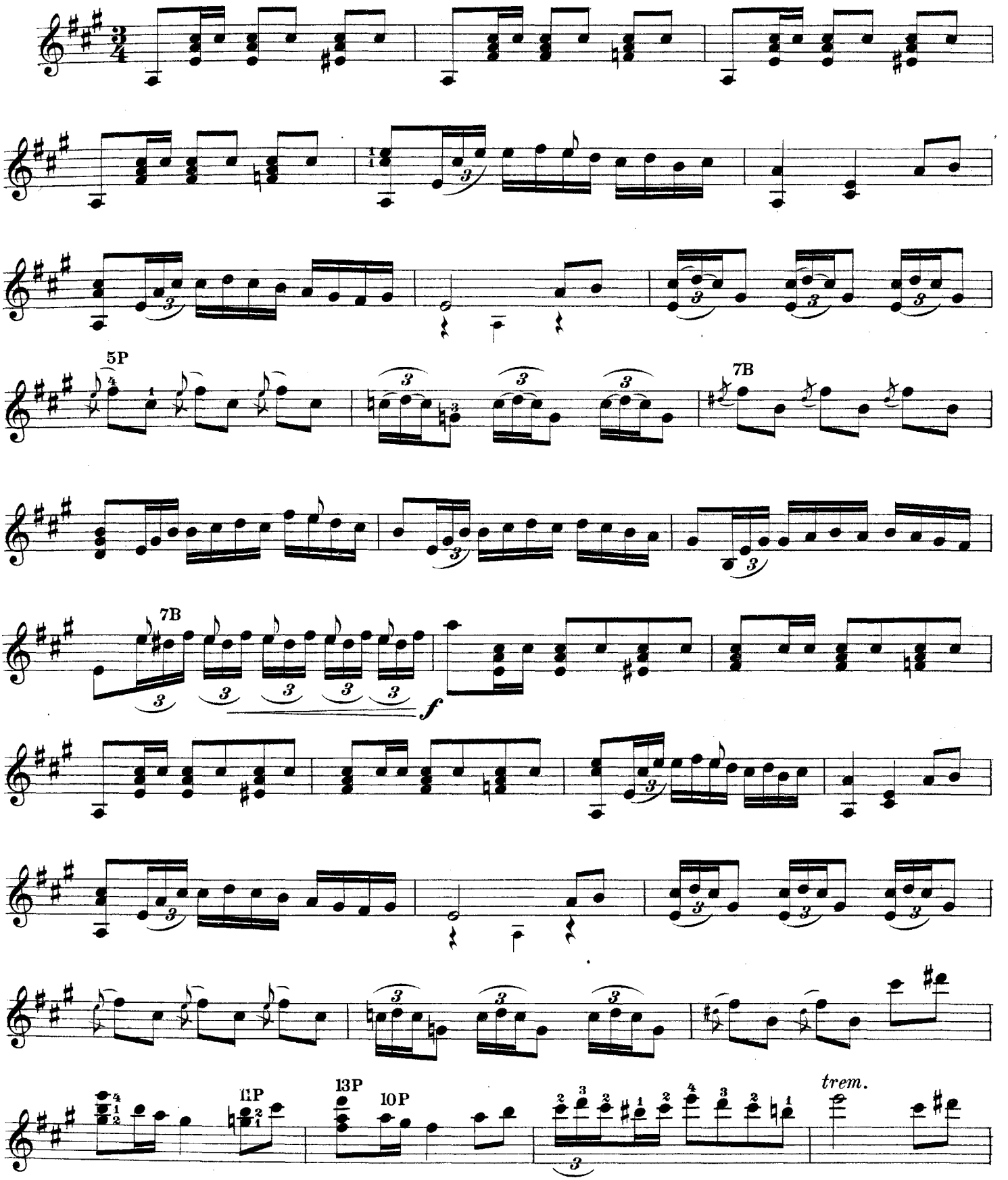


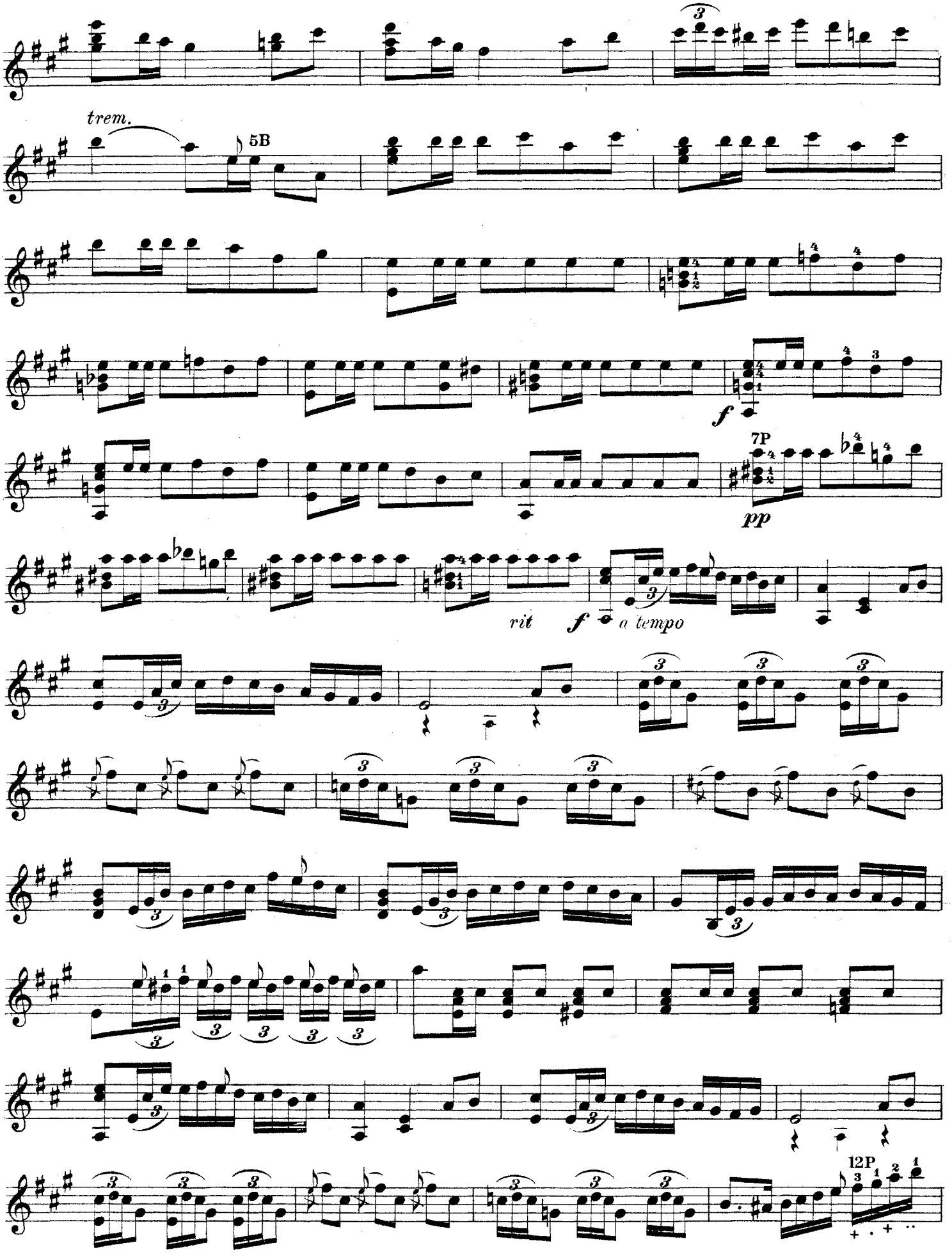
Chord Exercise



Bolero

(Moszkowski.)




trem.
5B
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rit
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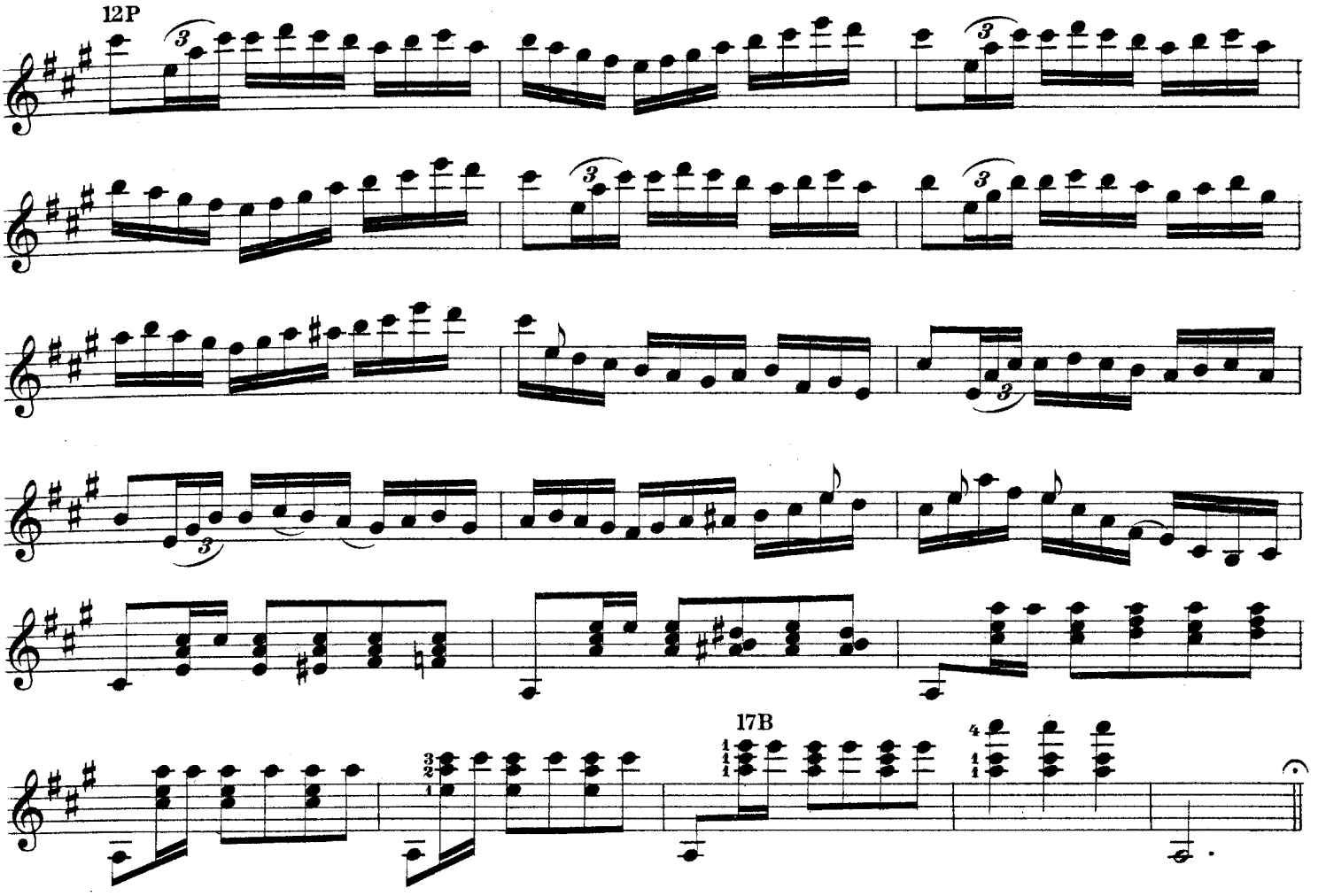
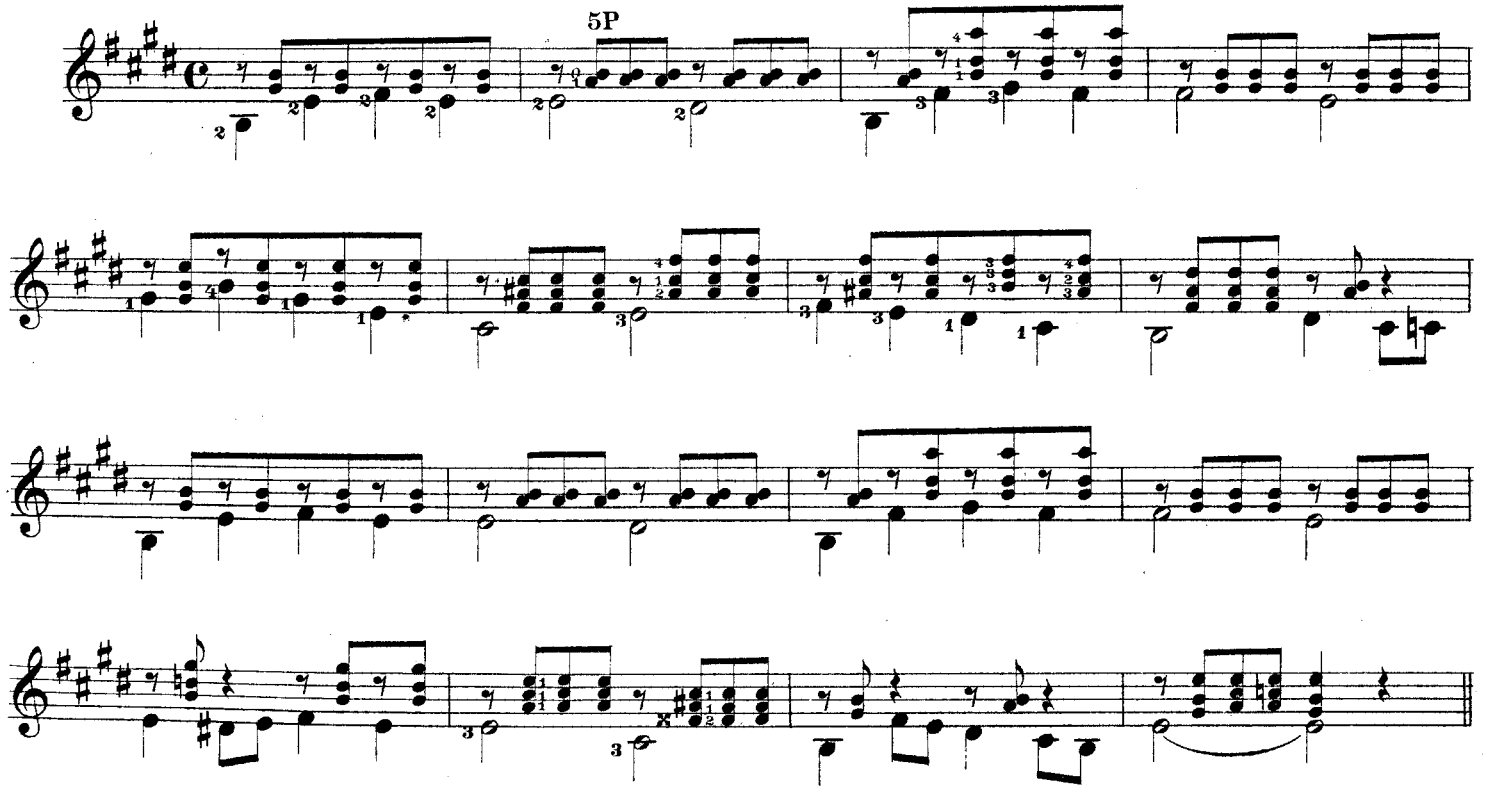
12P



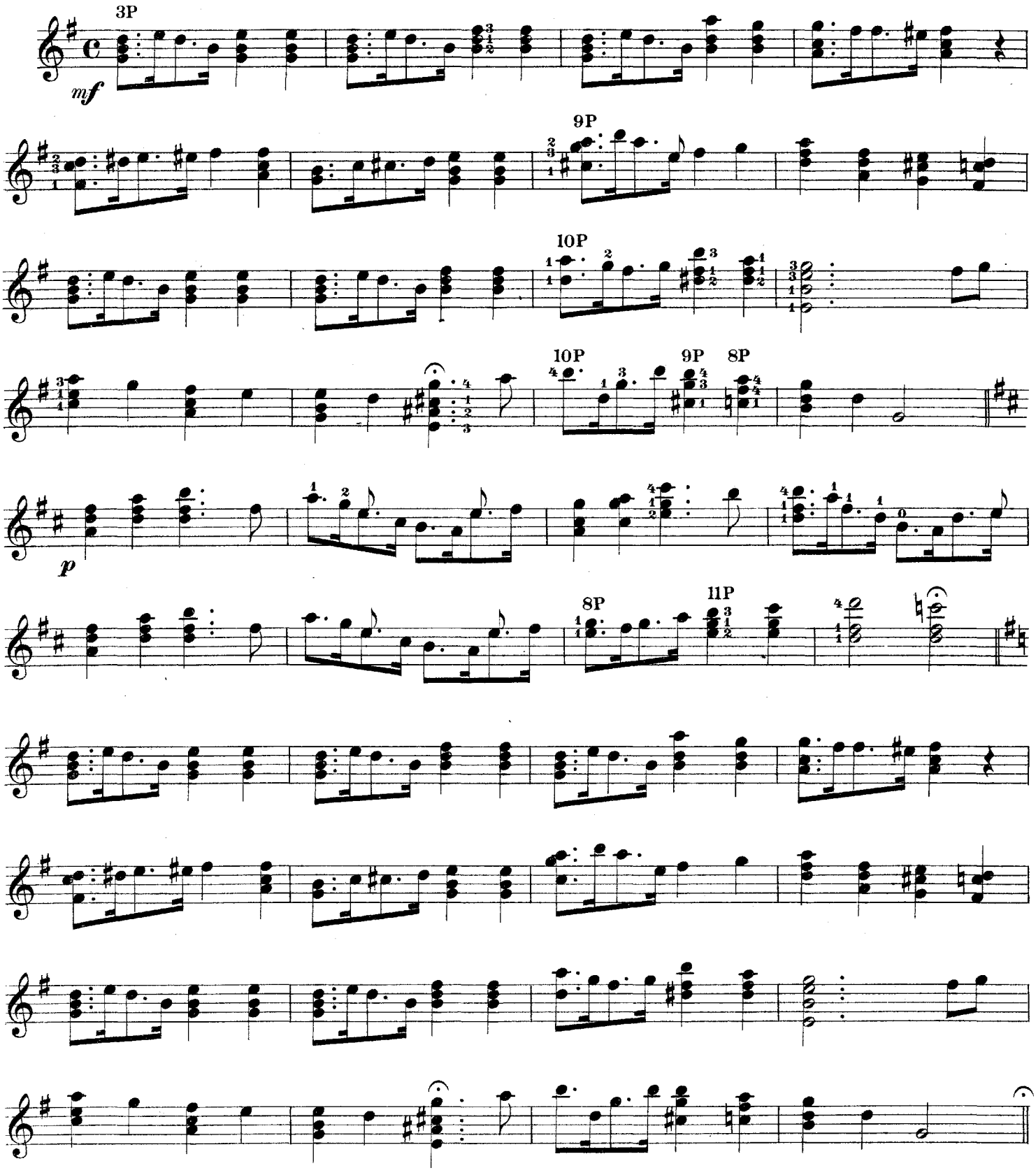
Melody for 4th String



The Hold or Pause

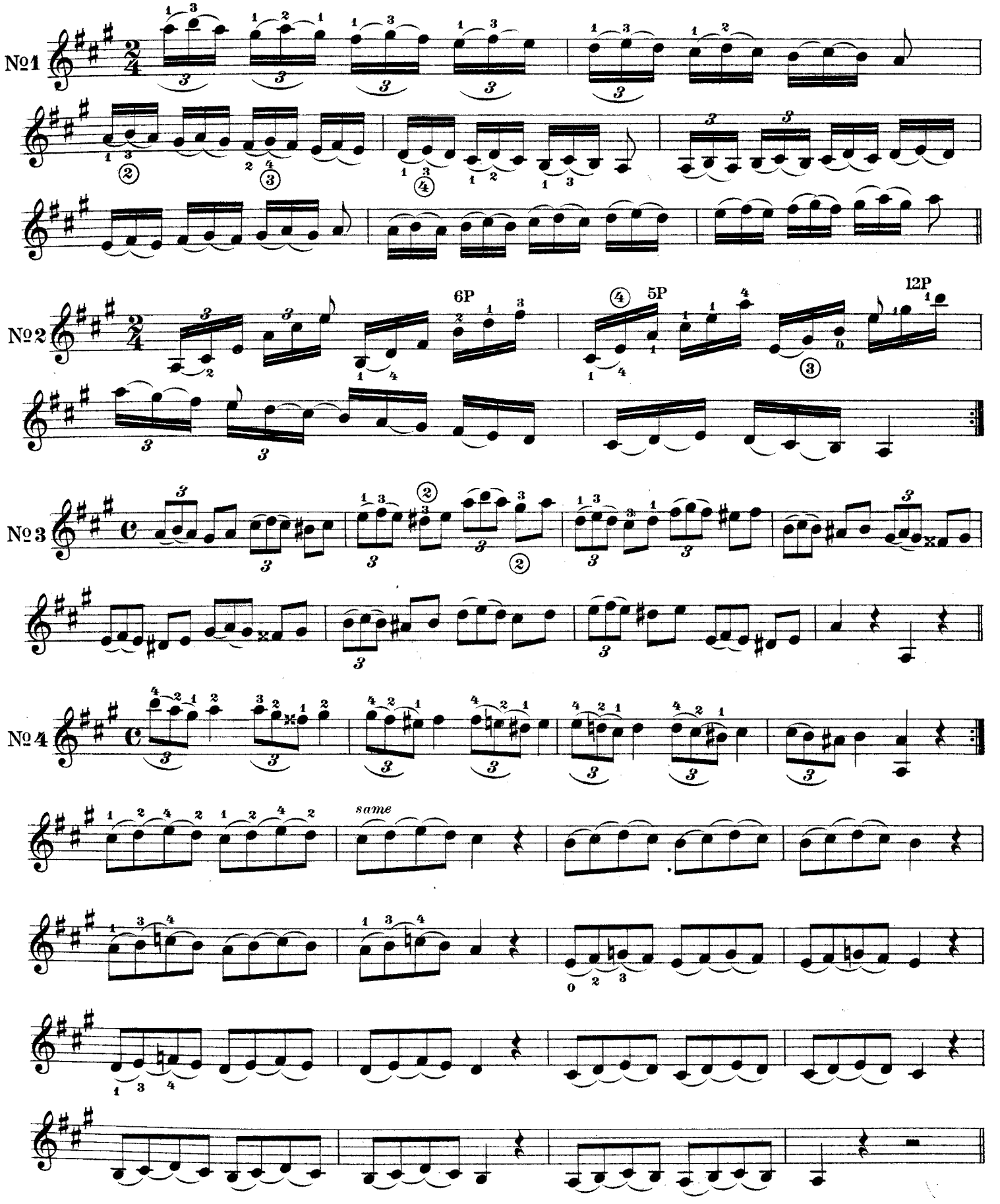
This sign 𝄐 placed over or under any note signifies that it is to be held at the discretion of the performer.

Caprice



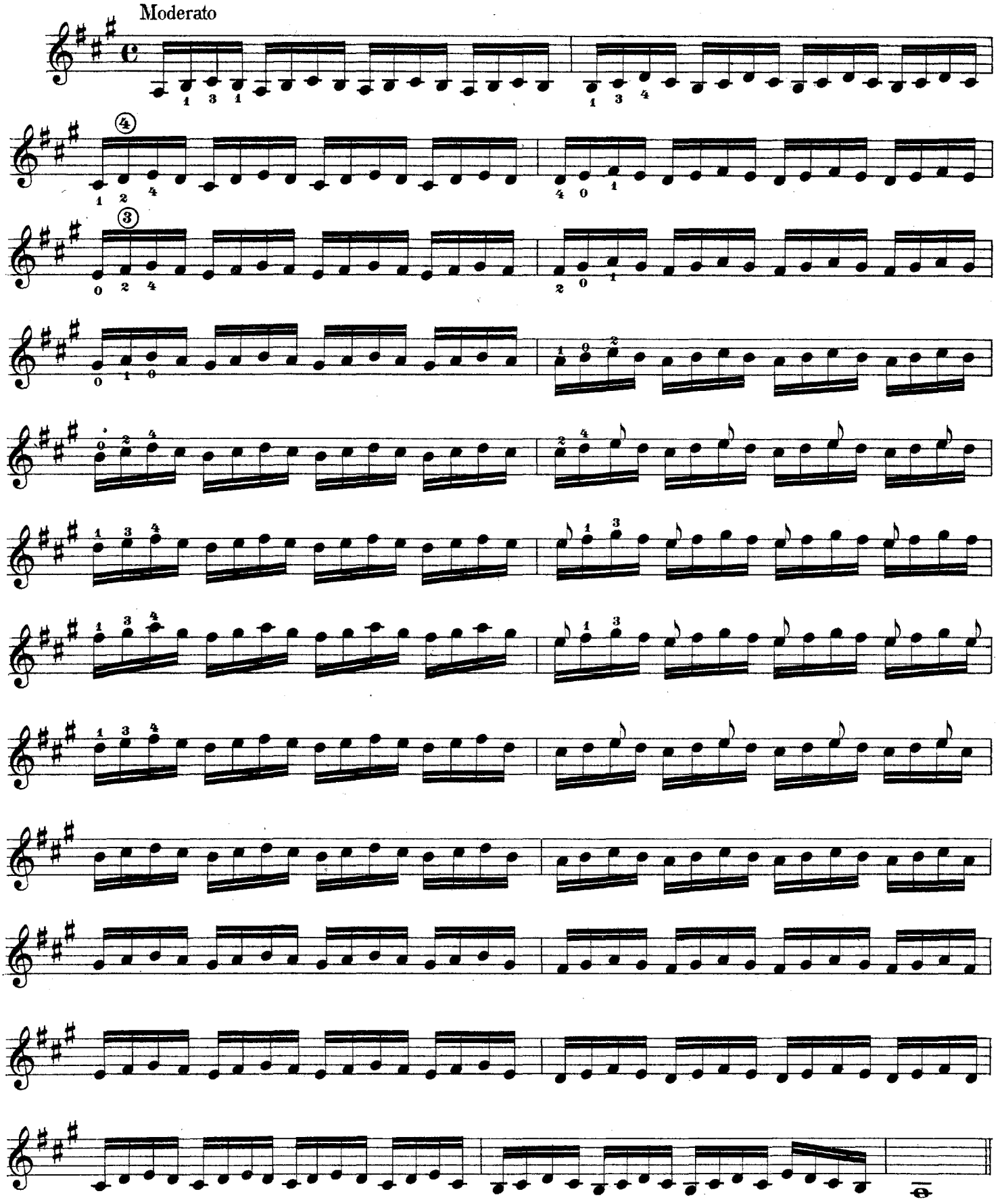
Studies in Slurring.

These should be practiced faithfully

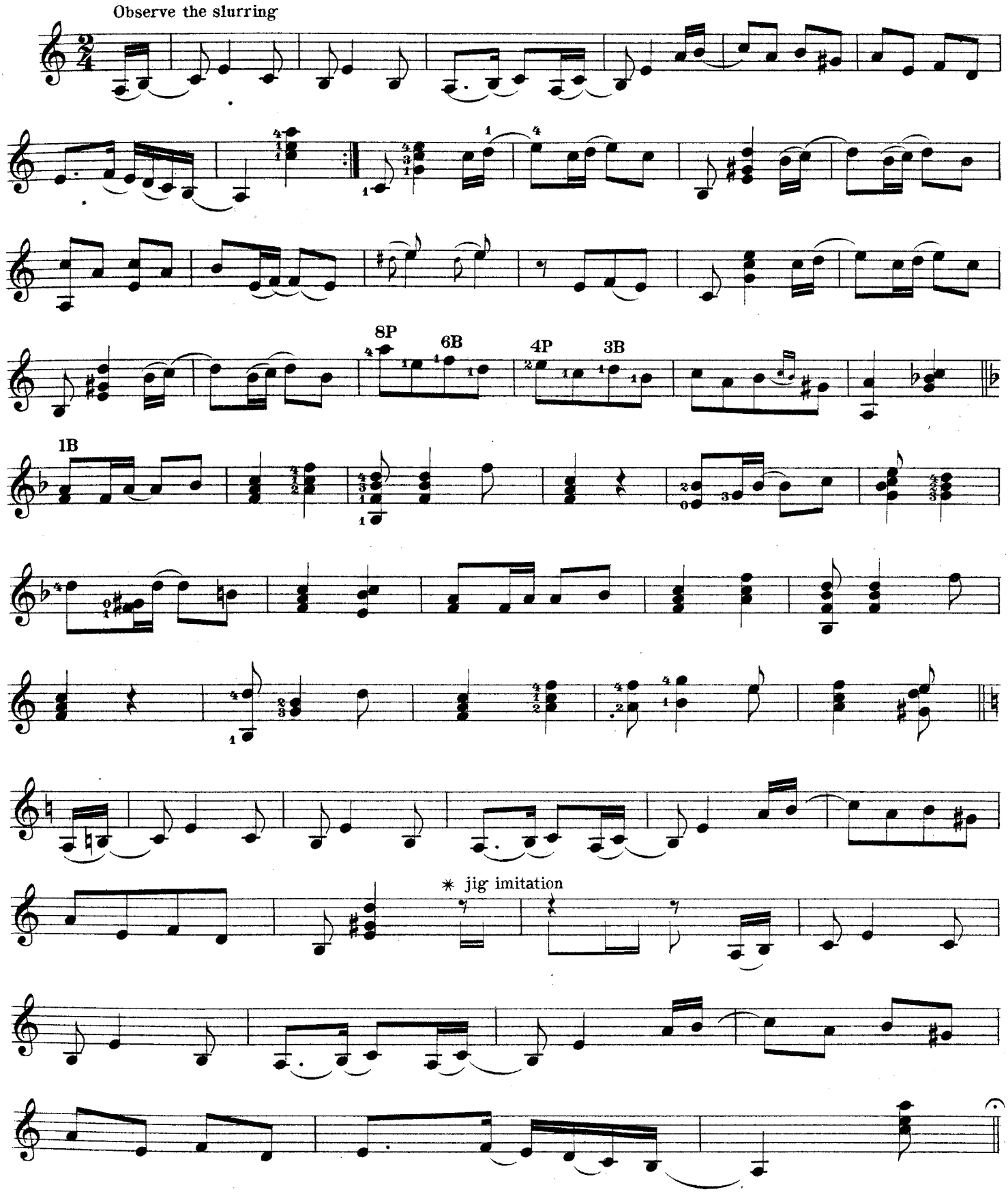


Exercises for Strengthening the Fingers.

Keep the finger on the lowest closed note of each bar



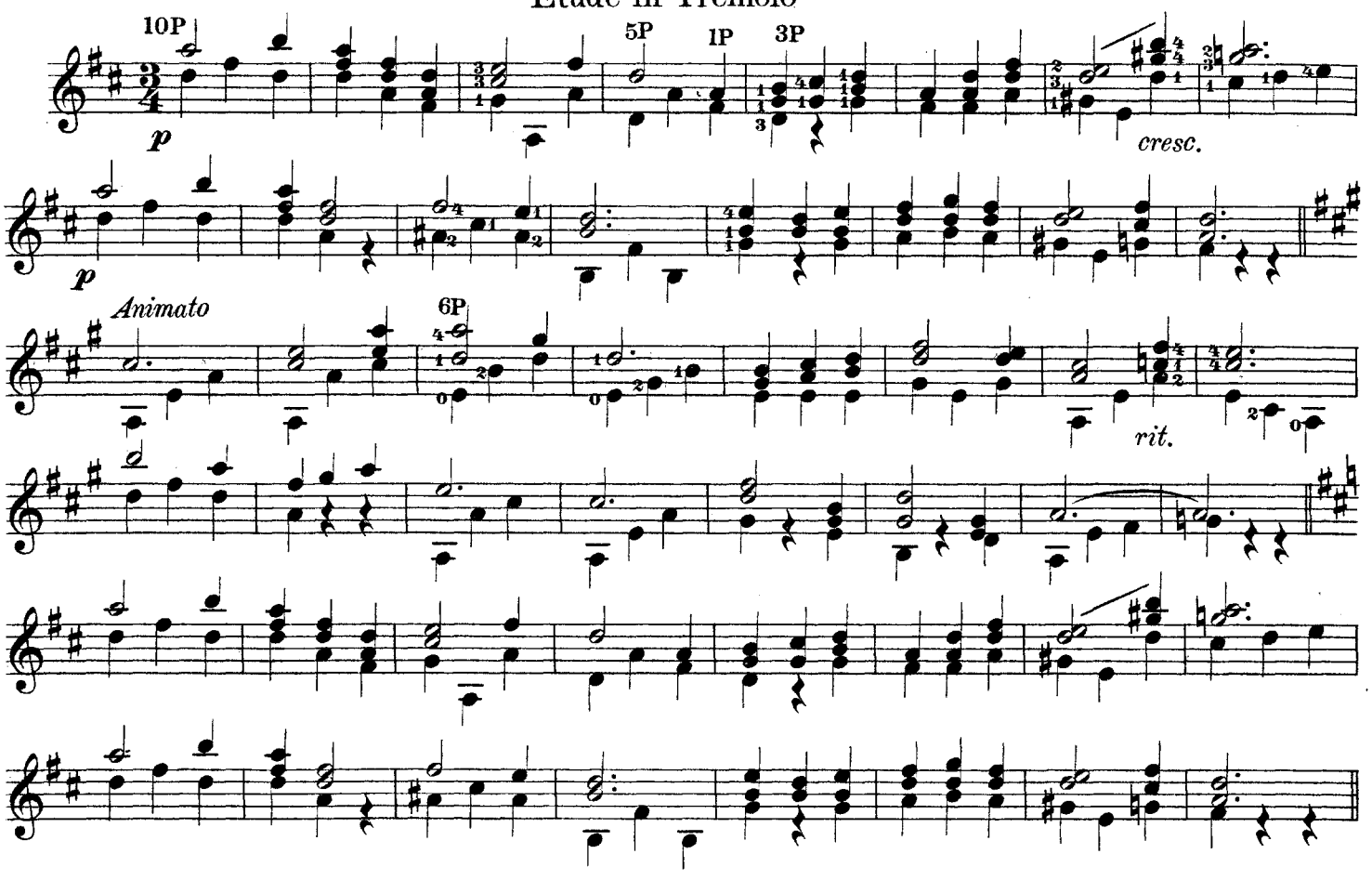
Levee Dance



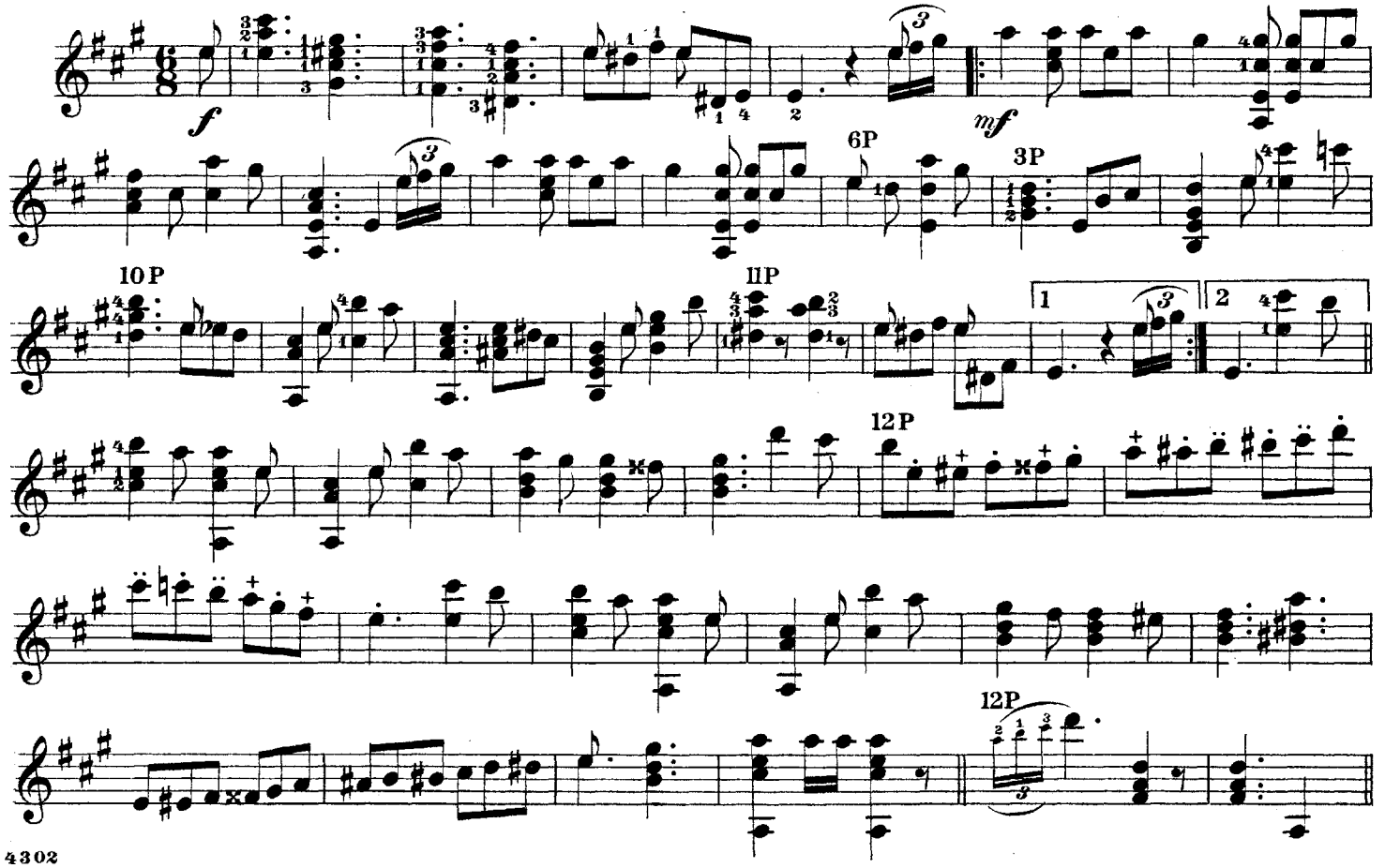
* To imitate jig, brush the head with fingers

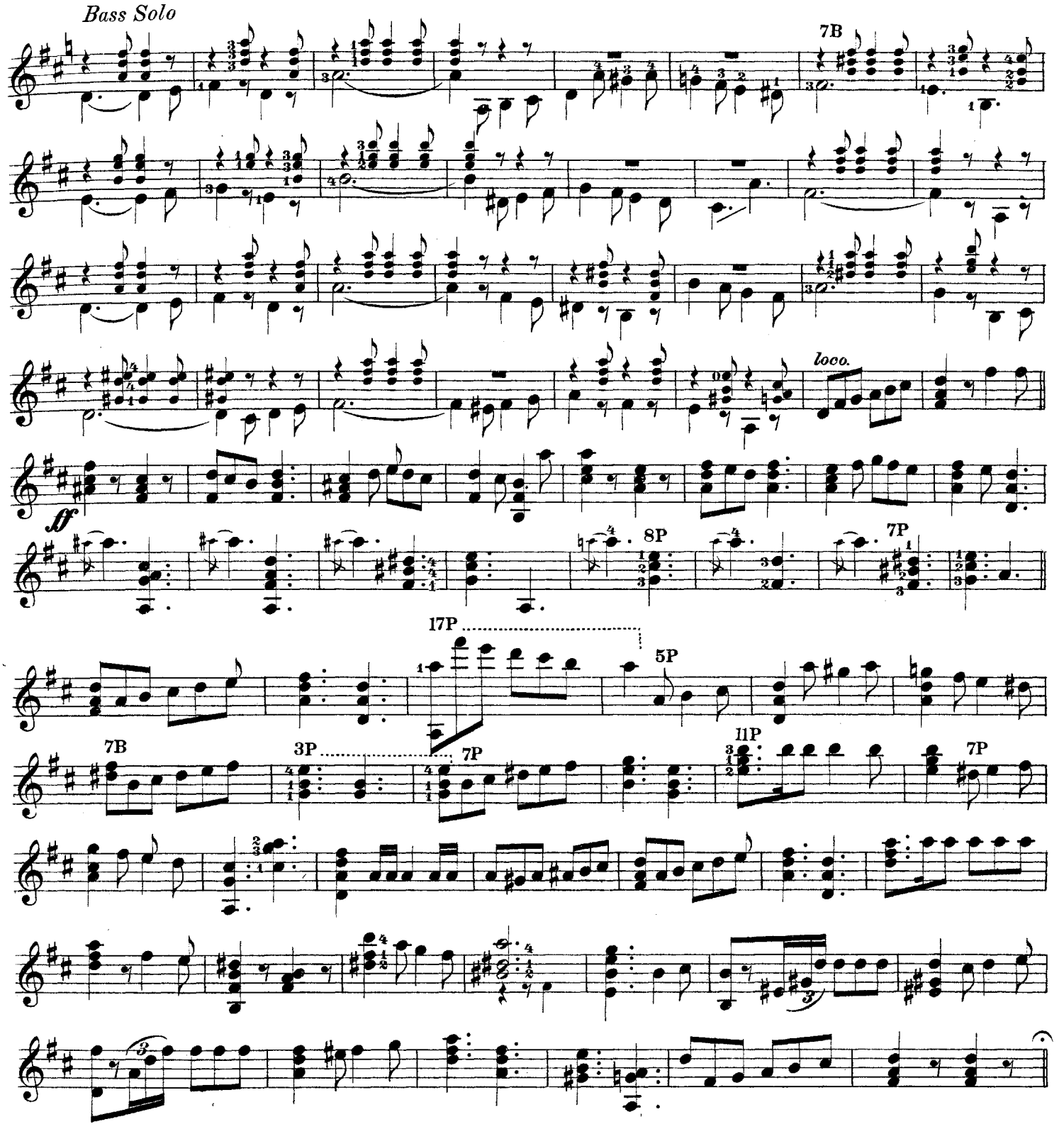
Andante moderato

Etude in Tremolo

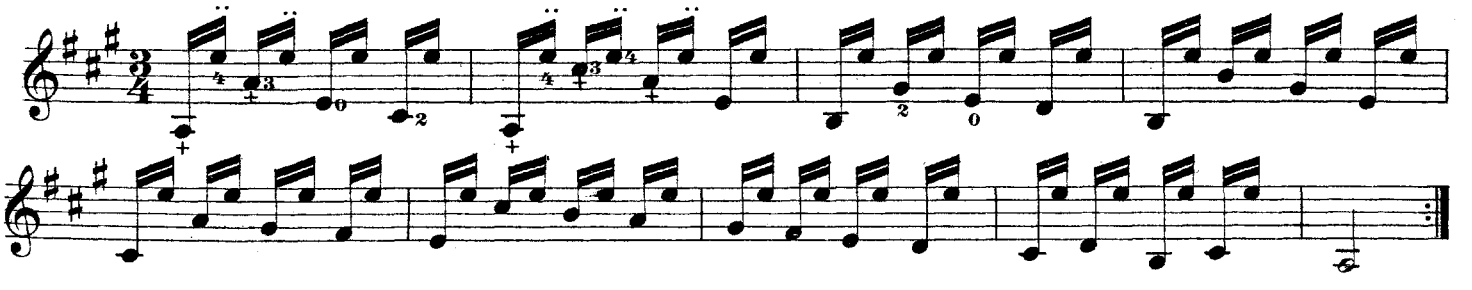


March and Two Step





Exercise for Flexability of the Fingers



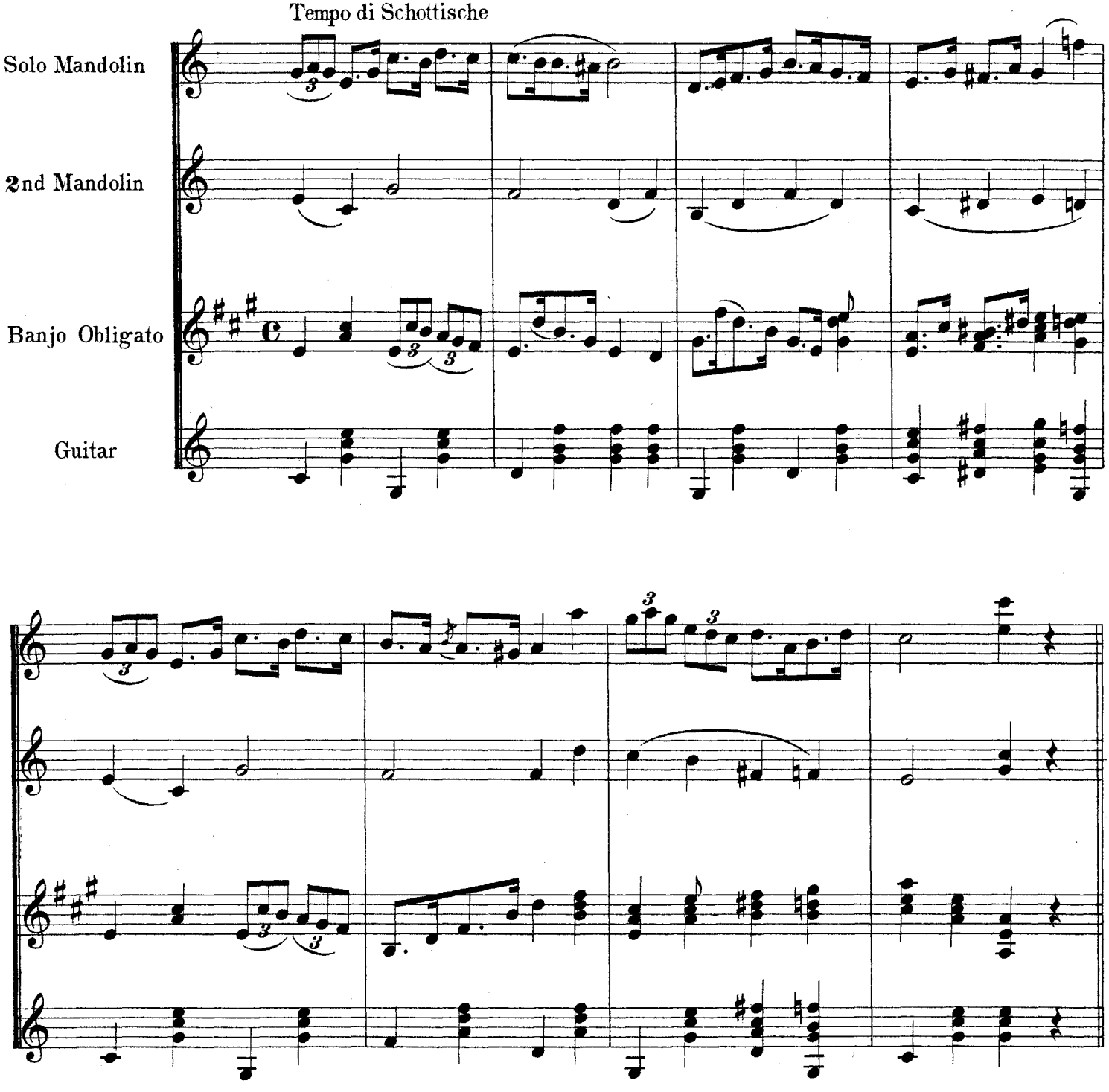
The Banjo as an Orchestral Instrument.

The Banjo is becoming almost indispensable in all well regulated Mandolin Orchestras.

Many of the best Orchestral Selections have either banjo solo or obligato parts published, and these cannot be played effectively on any other instrument.

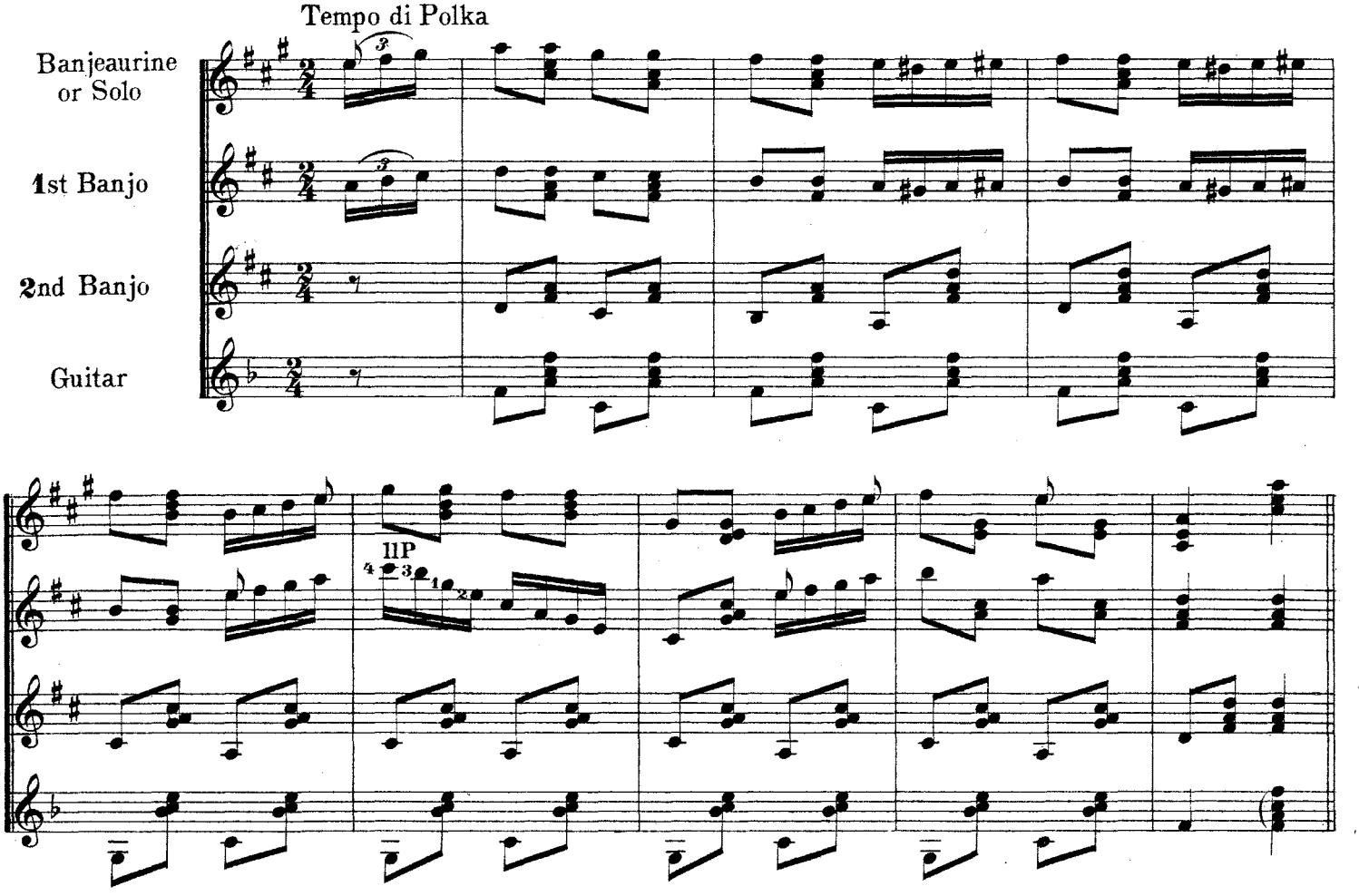
In the Mandolin Orchestra the banjo 4th String is always tuned to C although the score is read and played as usual.

EXAMPLE



The Banjeaurine.

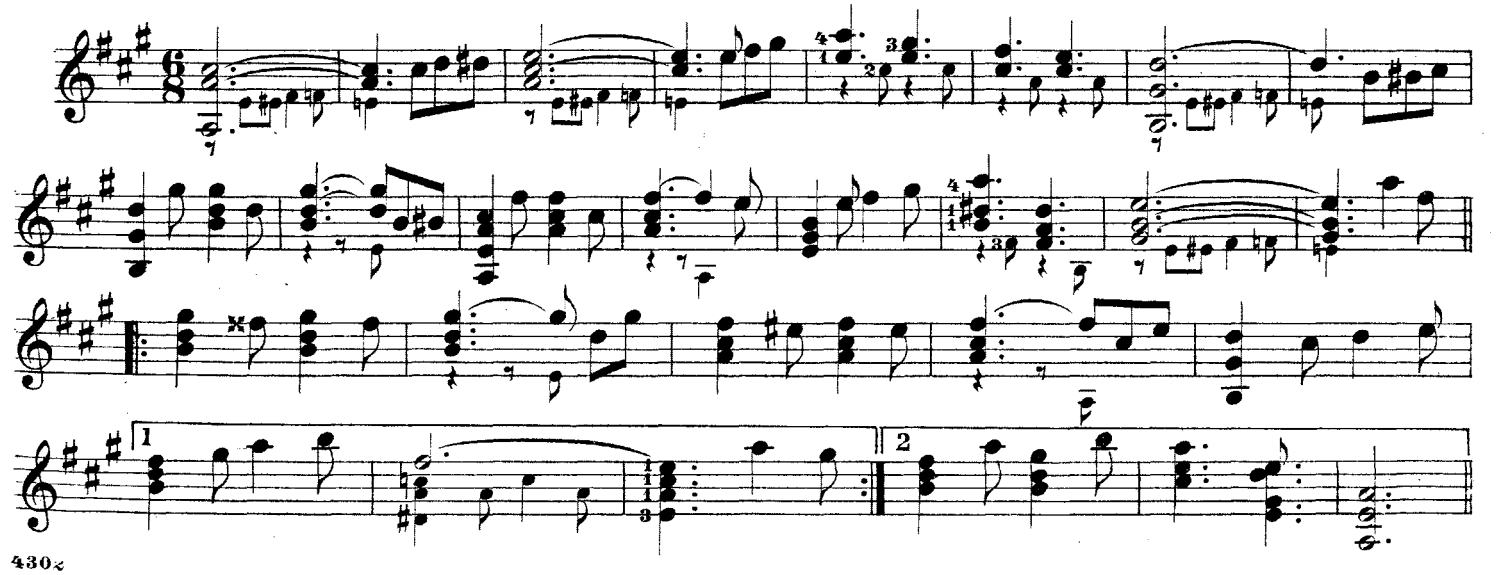
The Banjeaurine being smaller than the Banjo, it is tuned a fourth higher. The most effective arrangement for Banjo Clubs is the following form



Embellishments

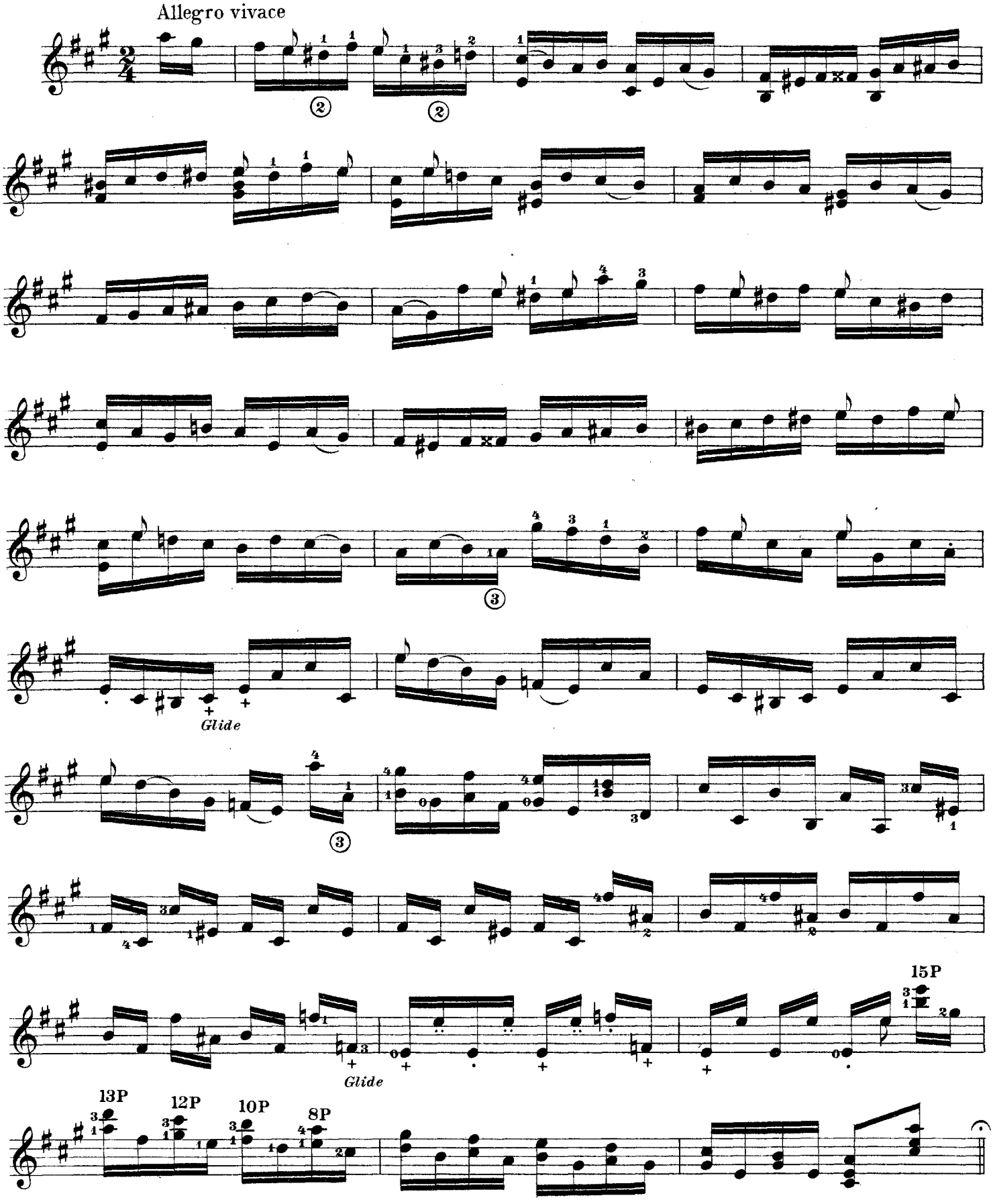
Extra notes usually written as grace notes are frequently added in banjo arrangements. These may be played or not at the discretion of the performer.

EXAMPLES

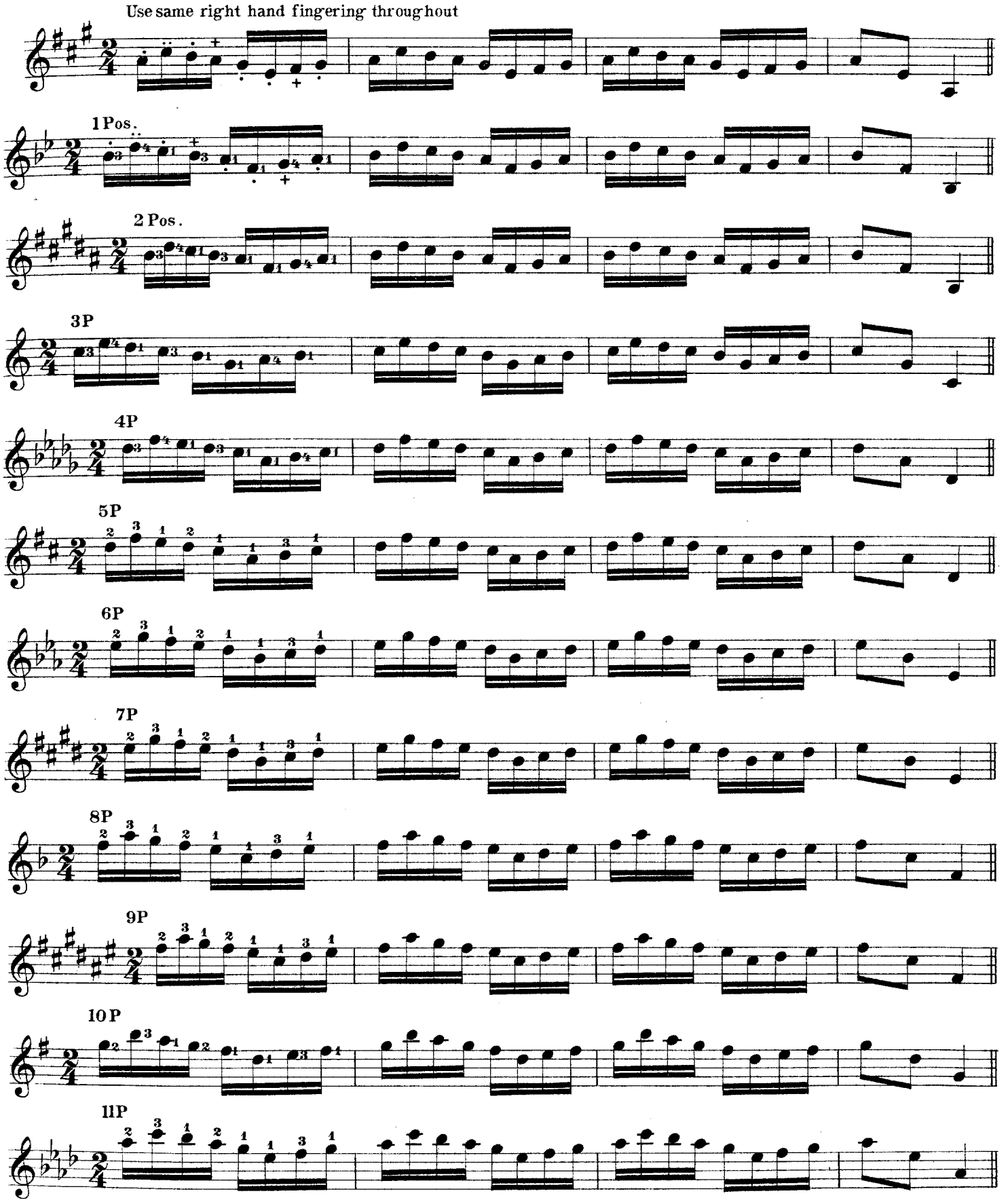


Study in Finger Technique.

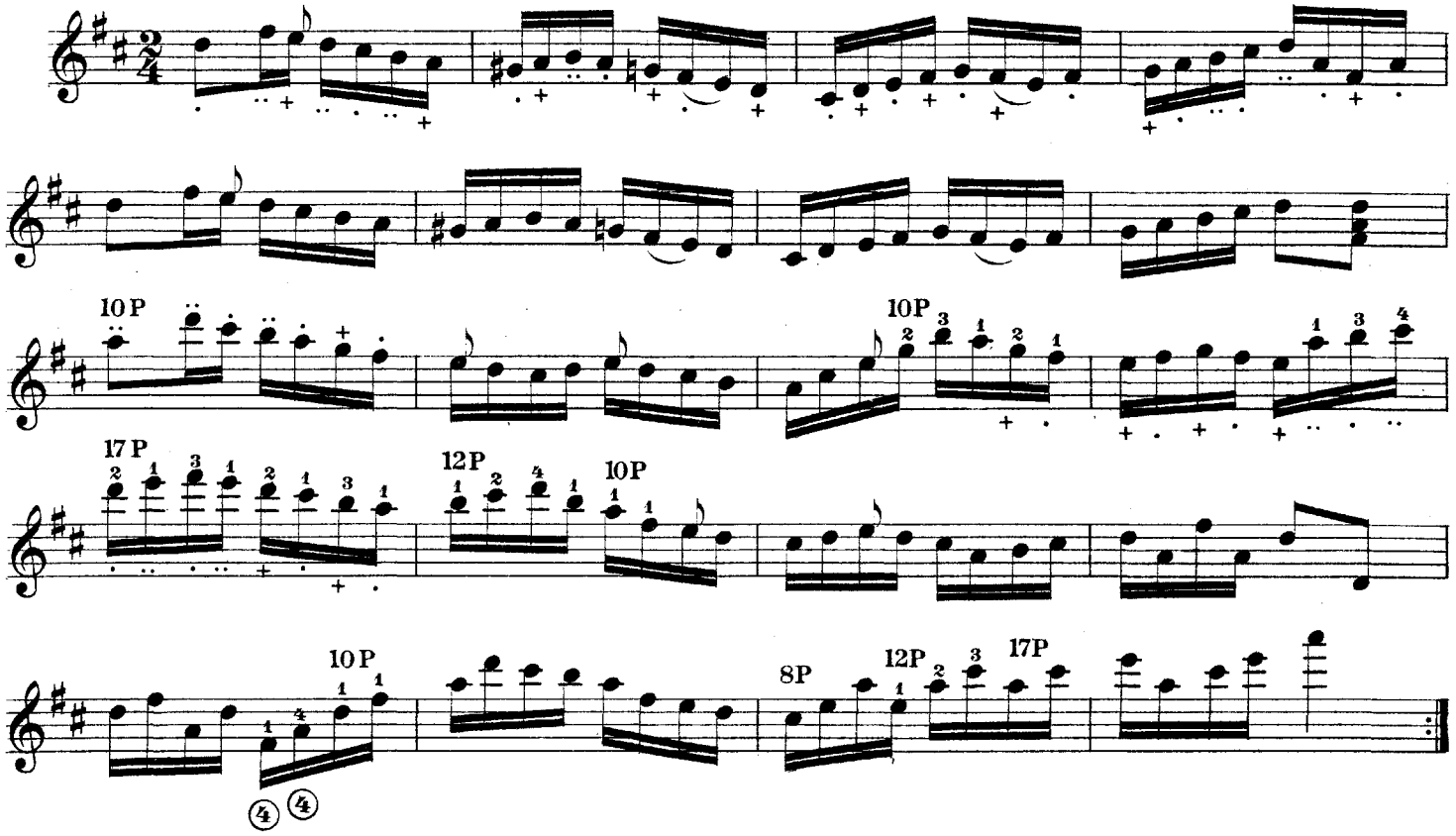
(Weber)



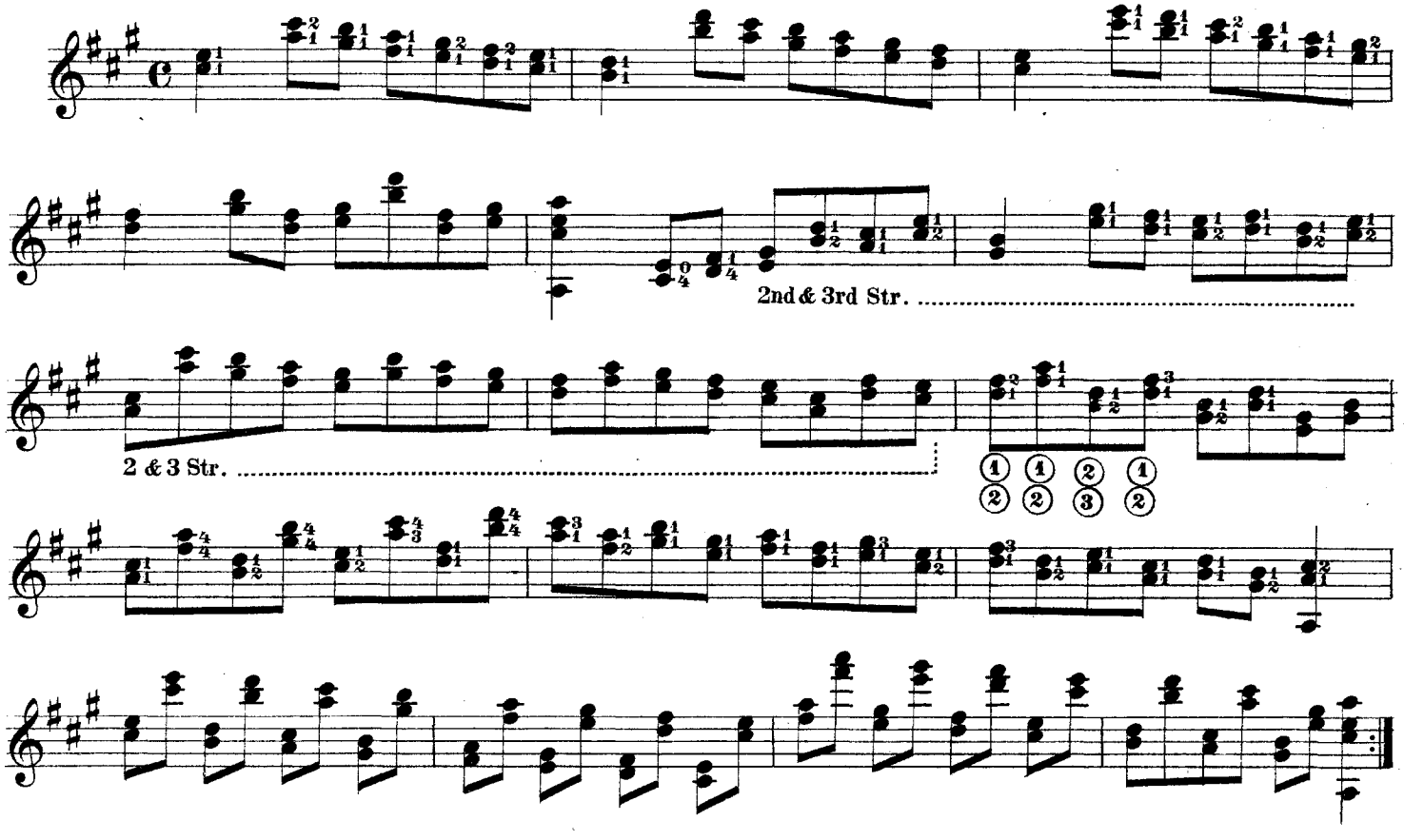
Fingering in Positions.



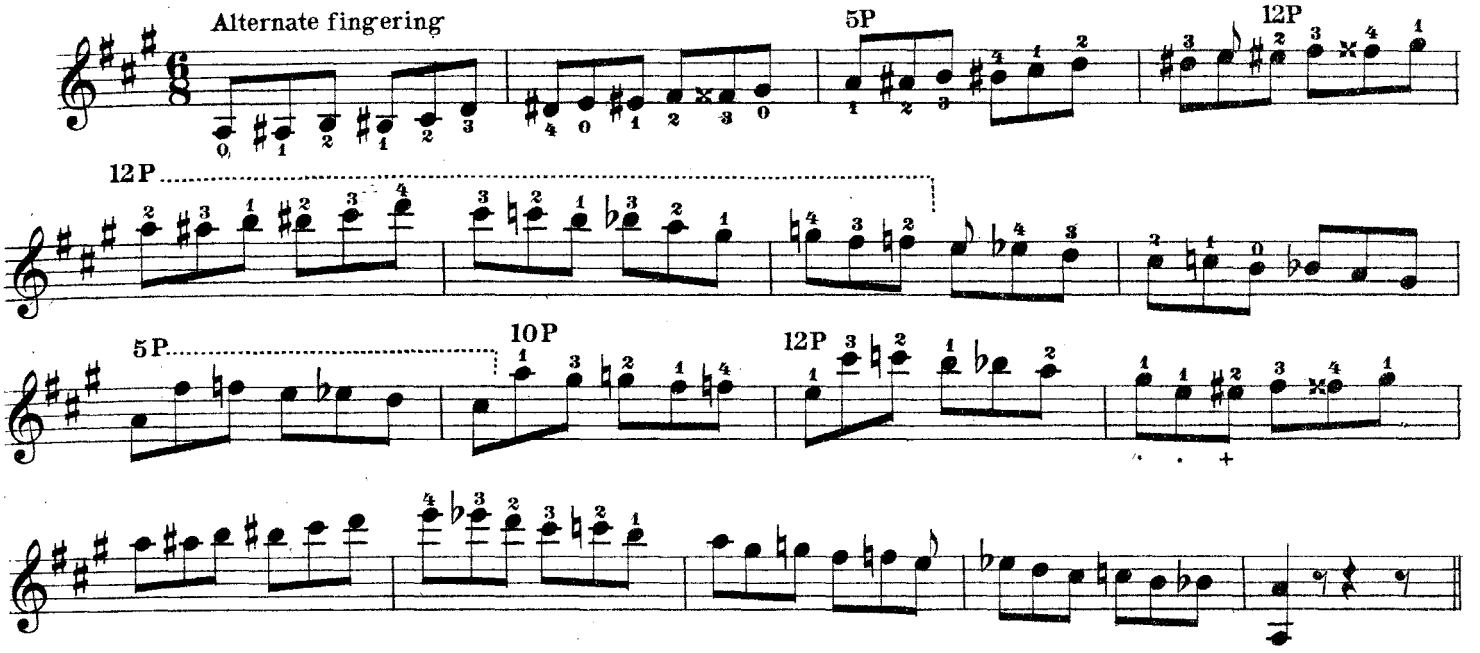
Etude for rapid fingering



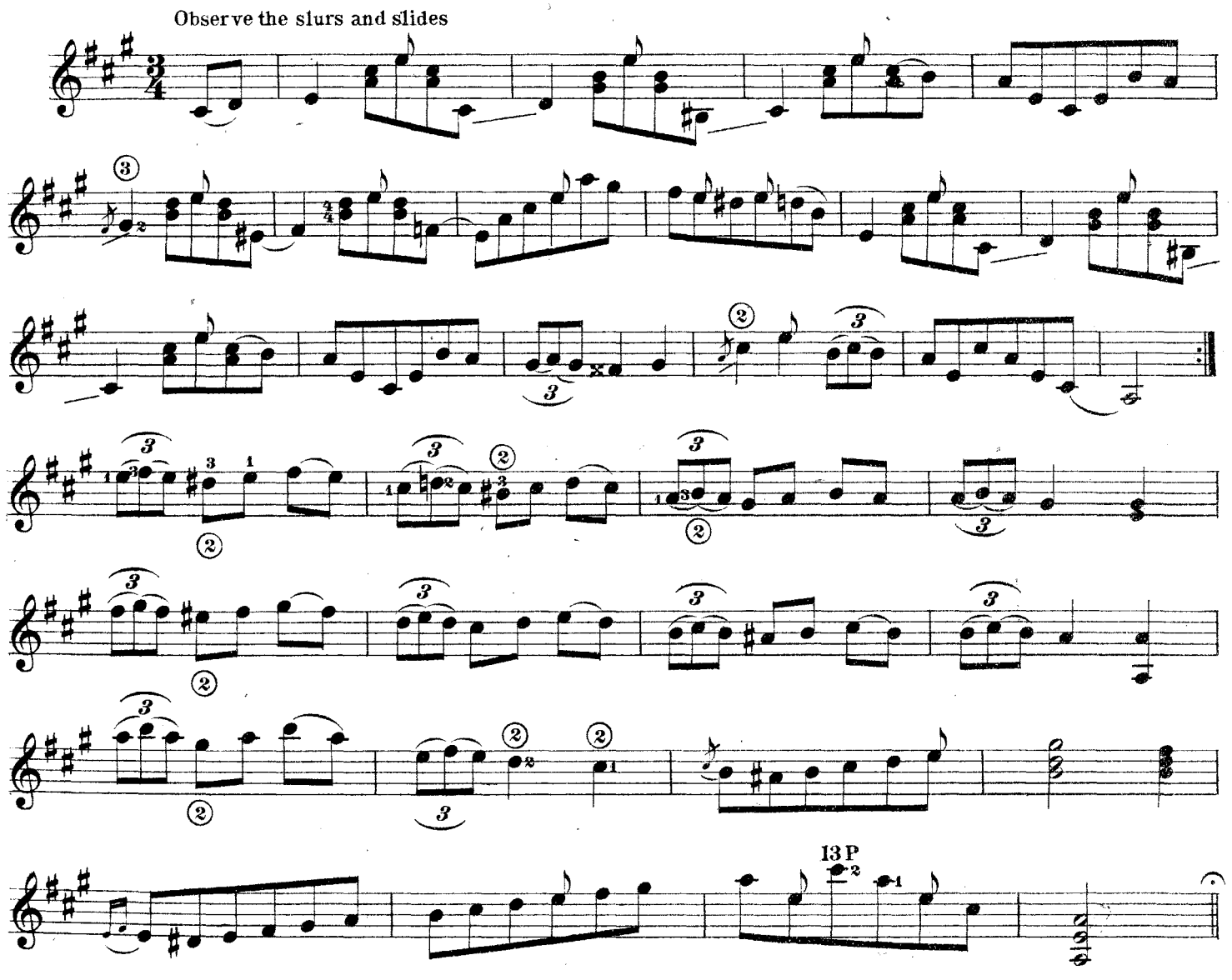
Study in Thirds



Chromatic Study

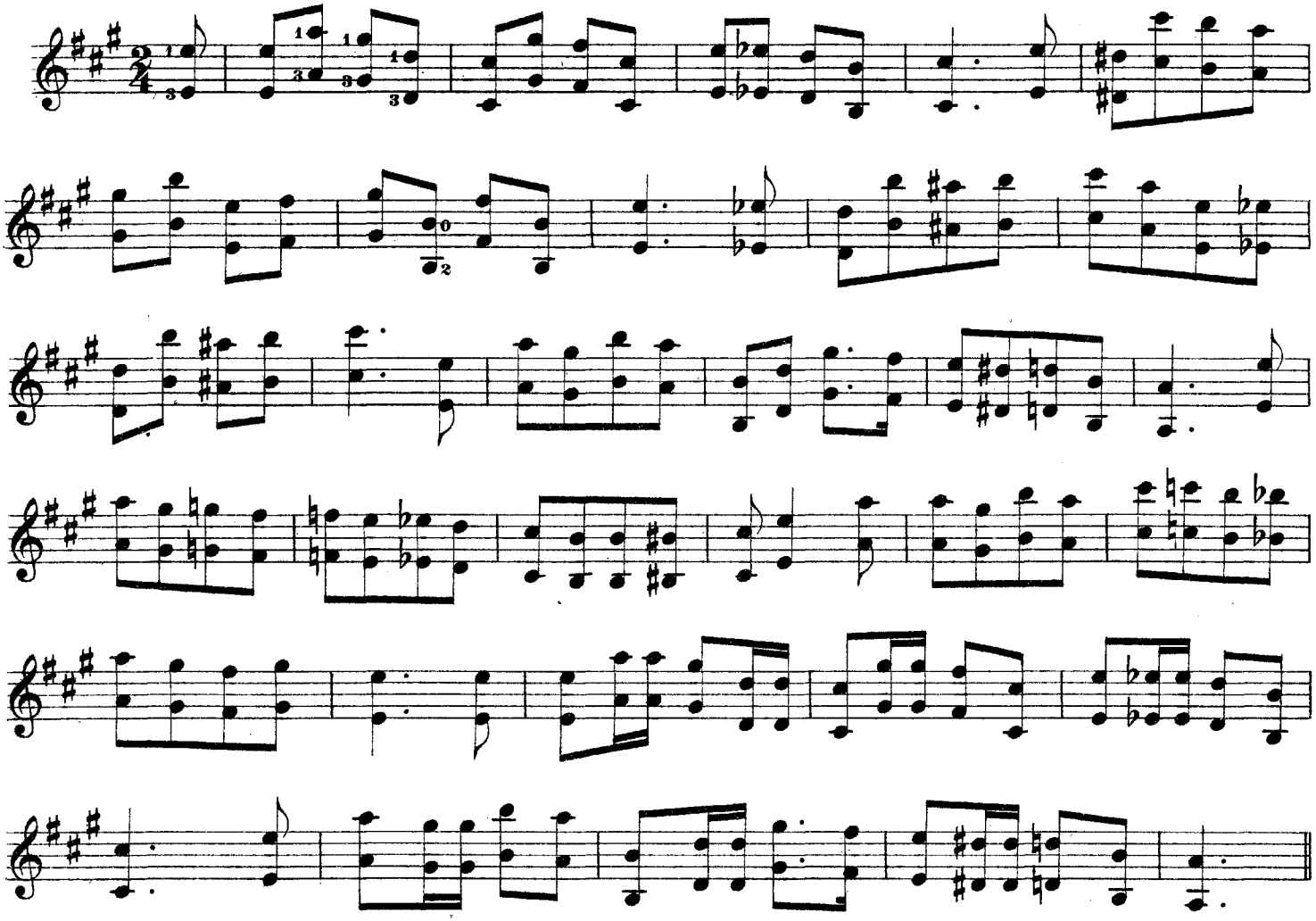


Waltz



Octave Studies

№1.



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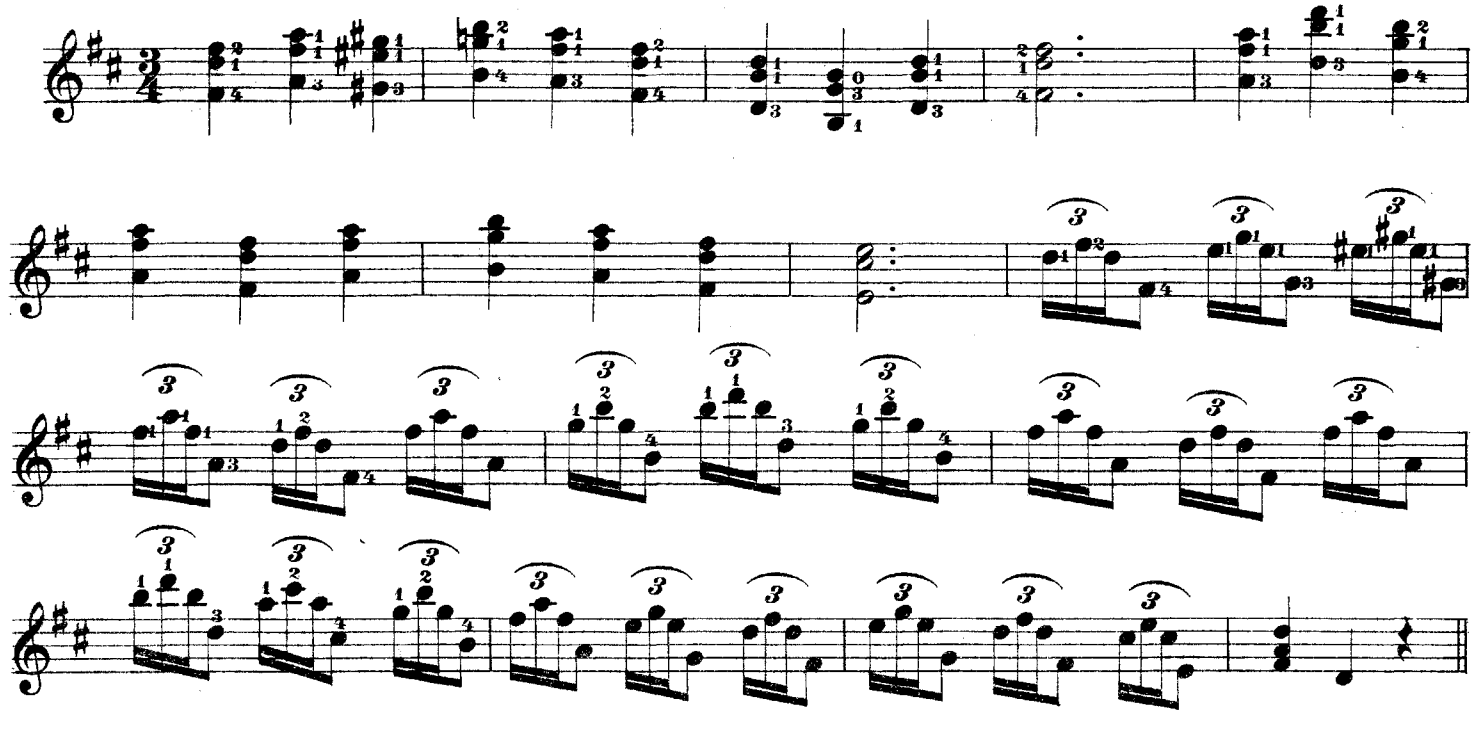
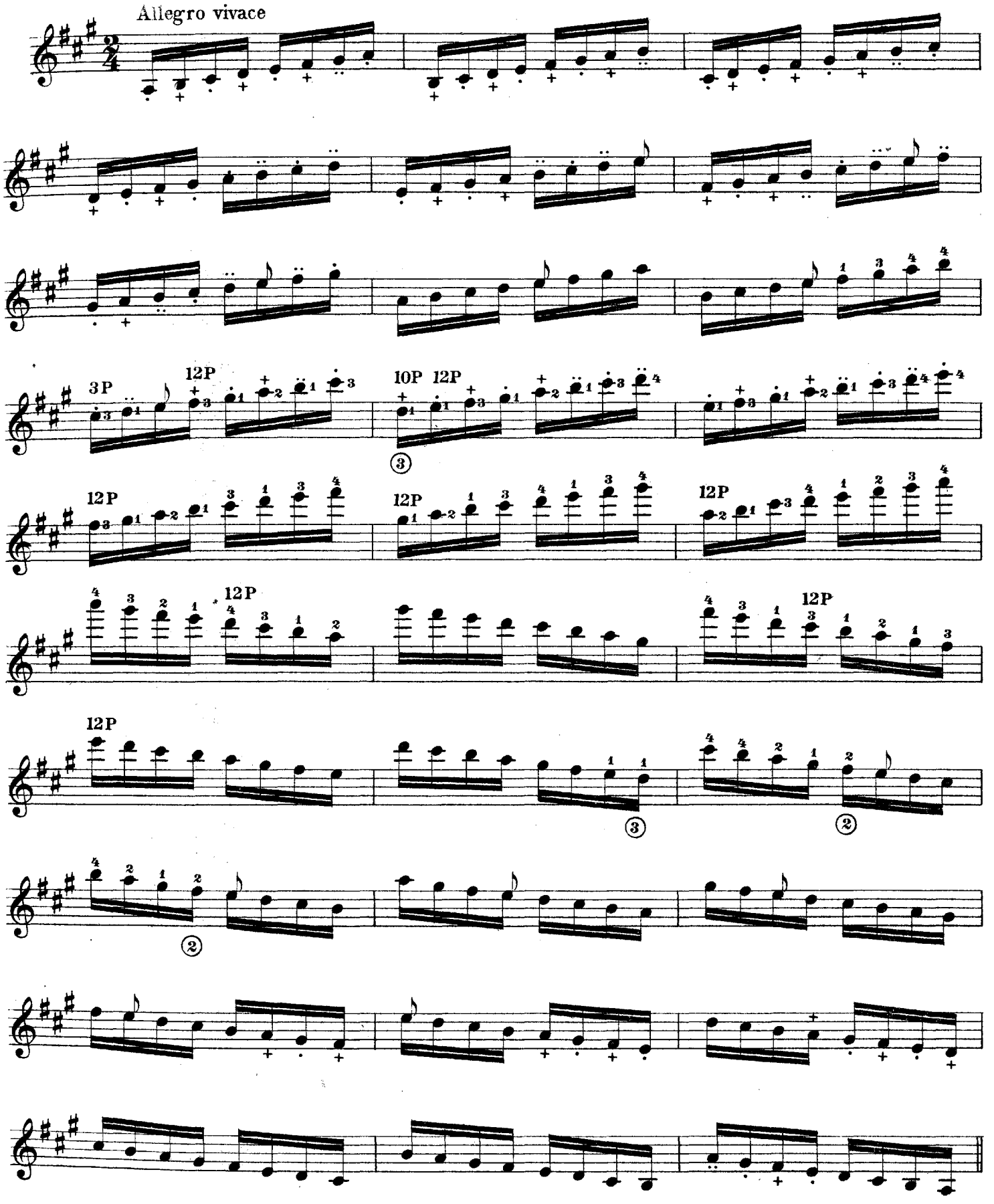


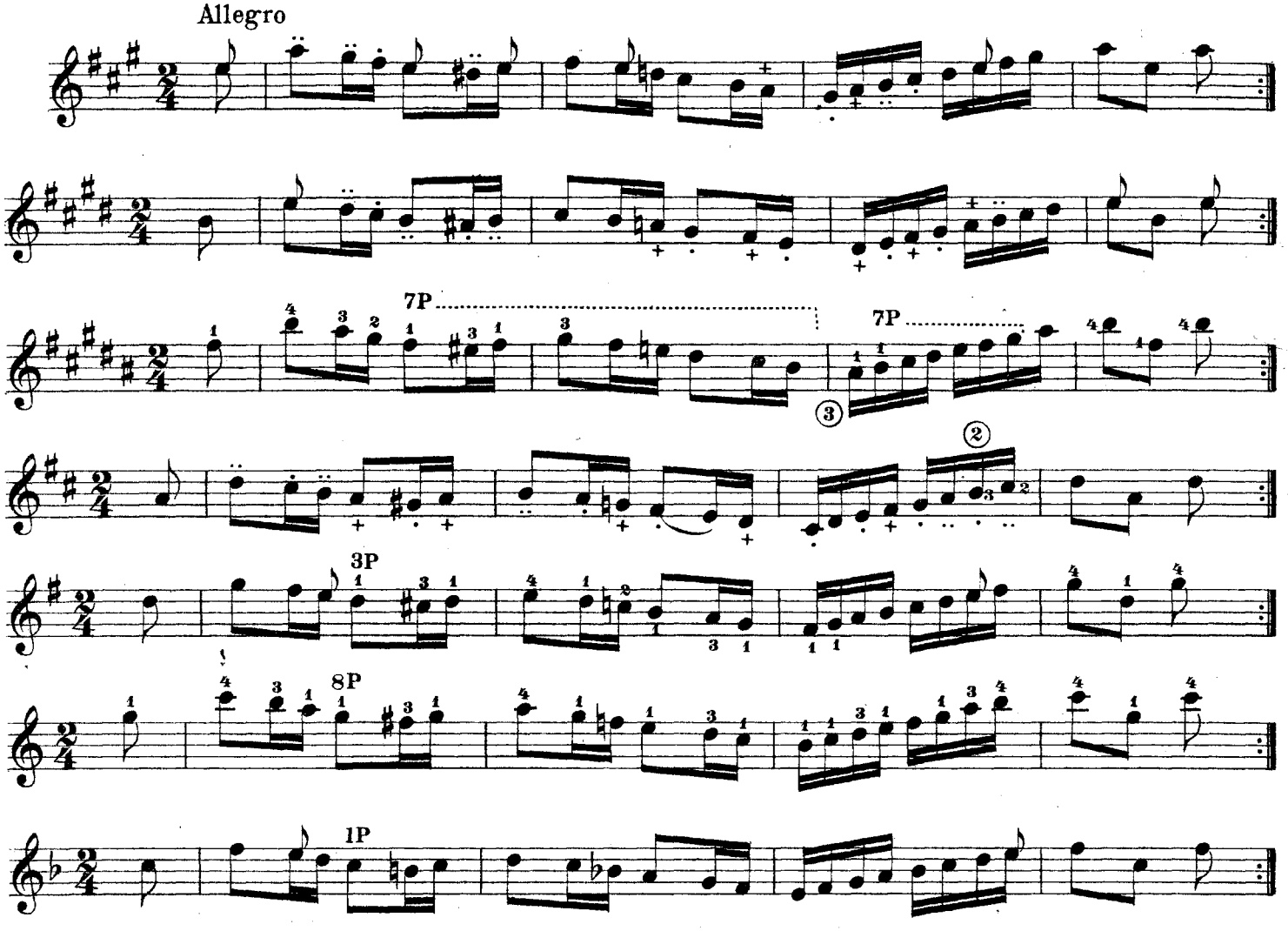
Scale Study



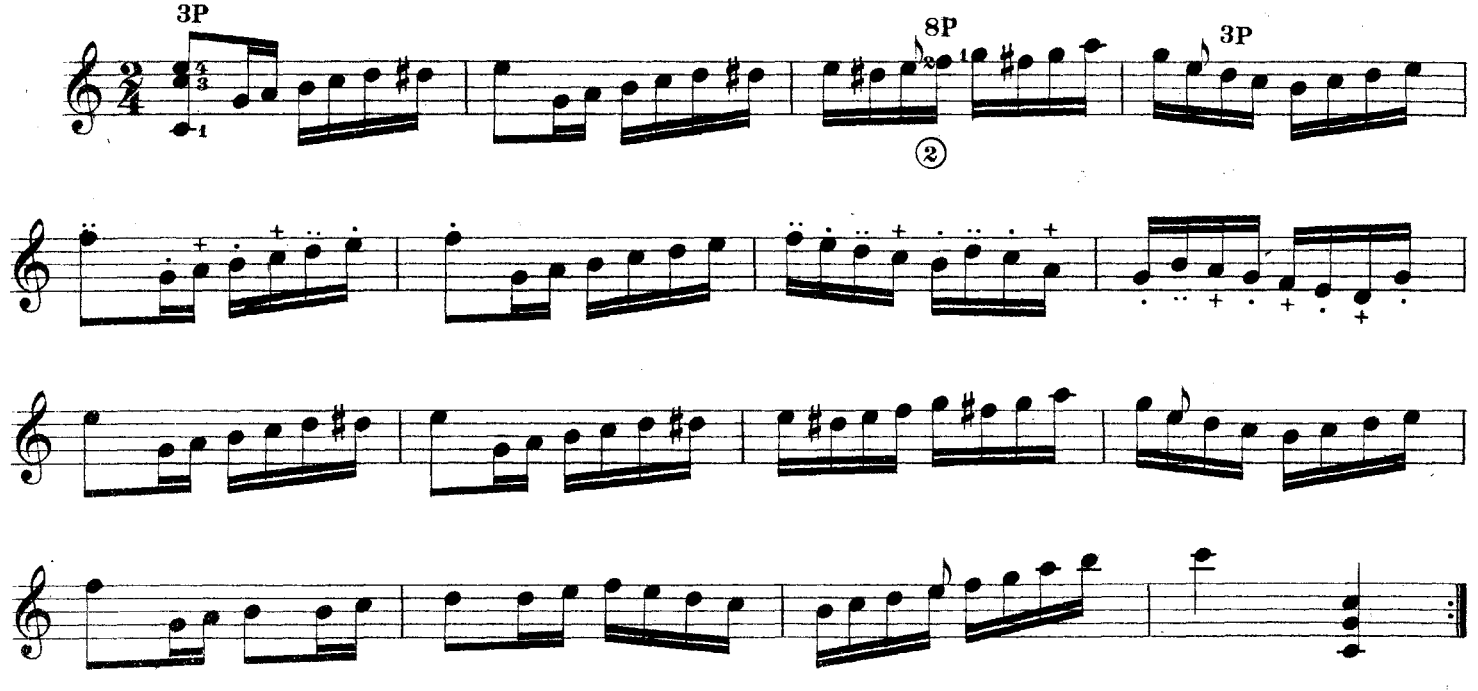
Etude

Repeat each line several times daily

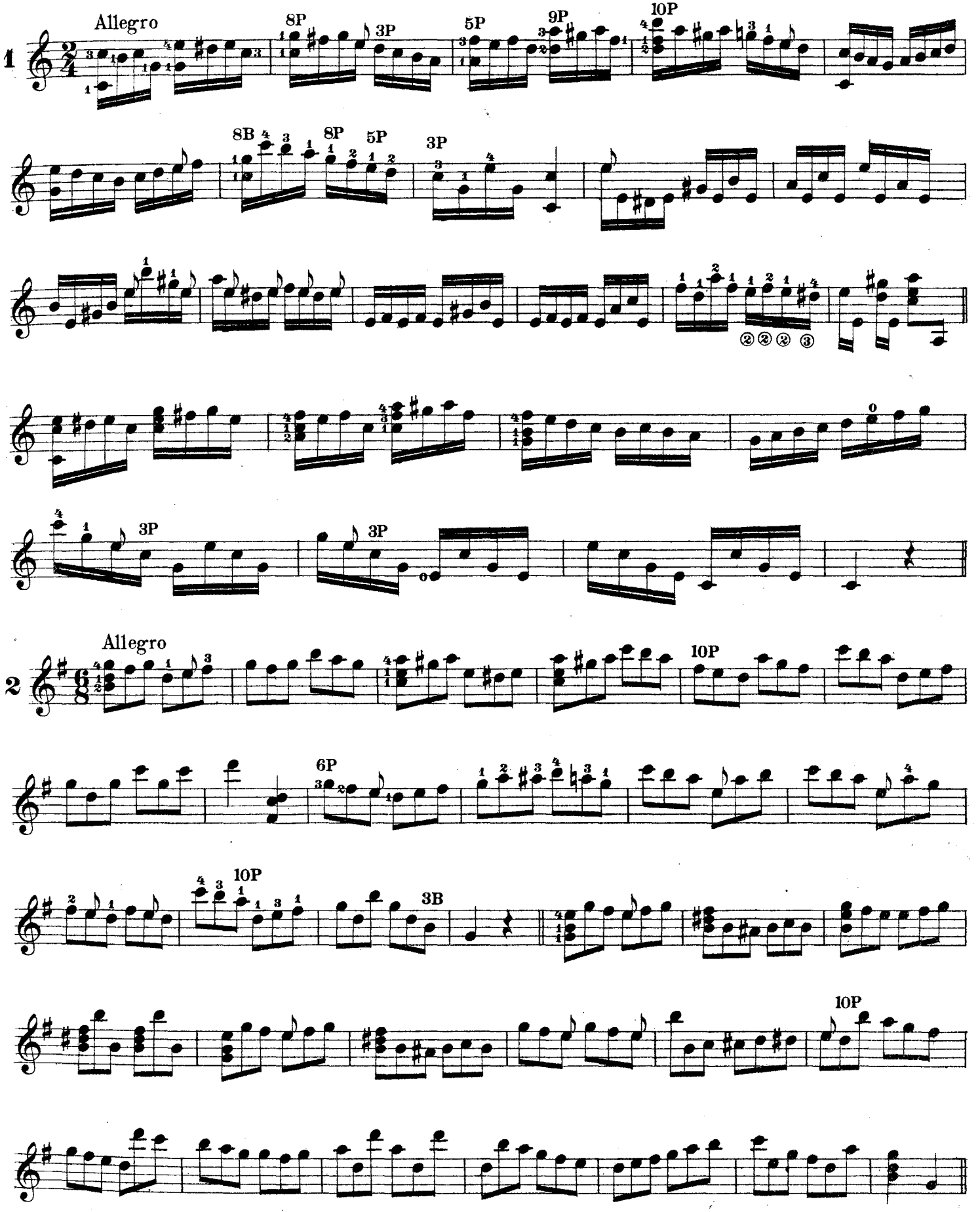
Allegro

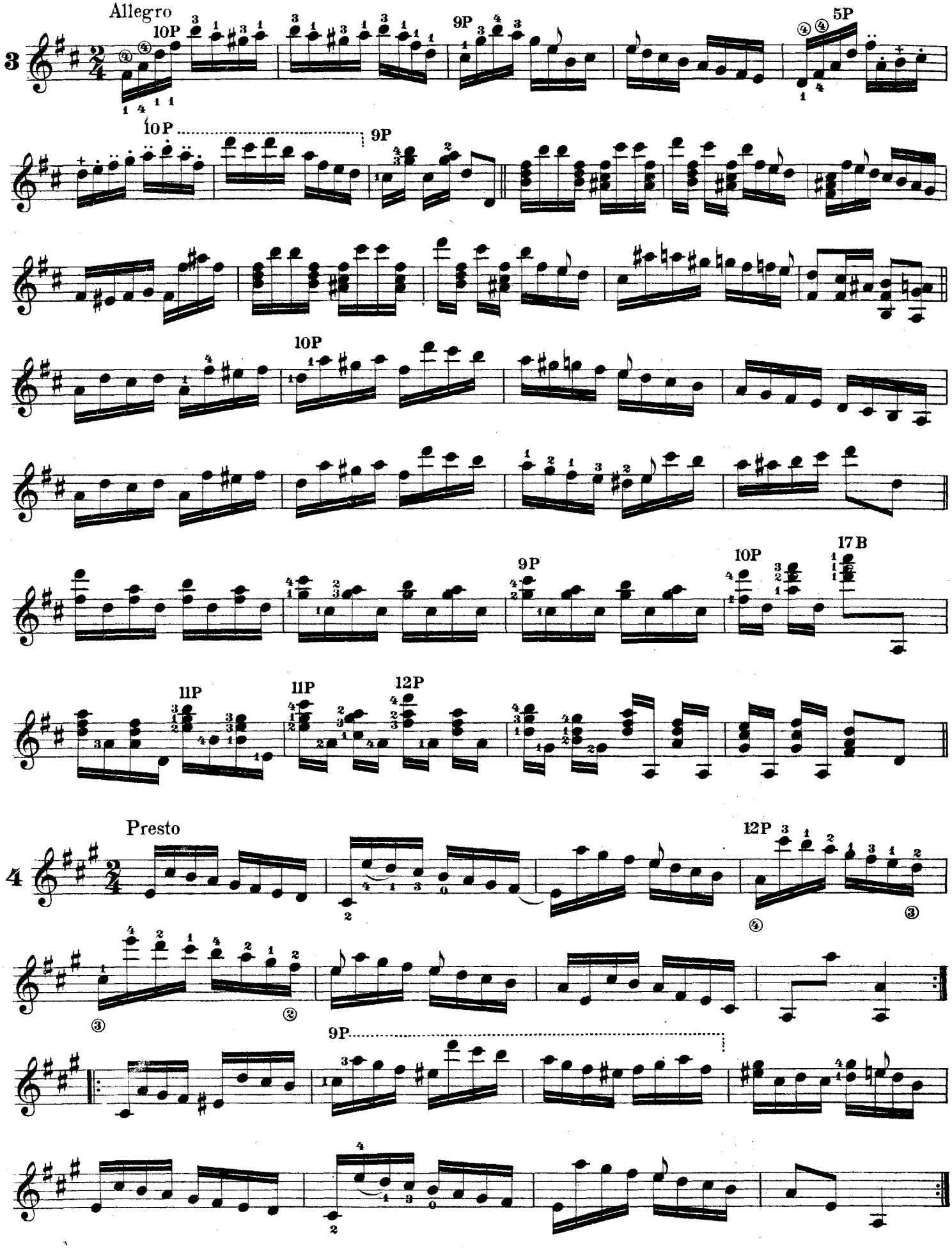


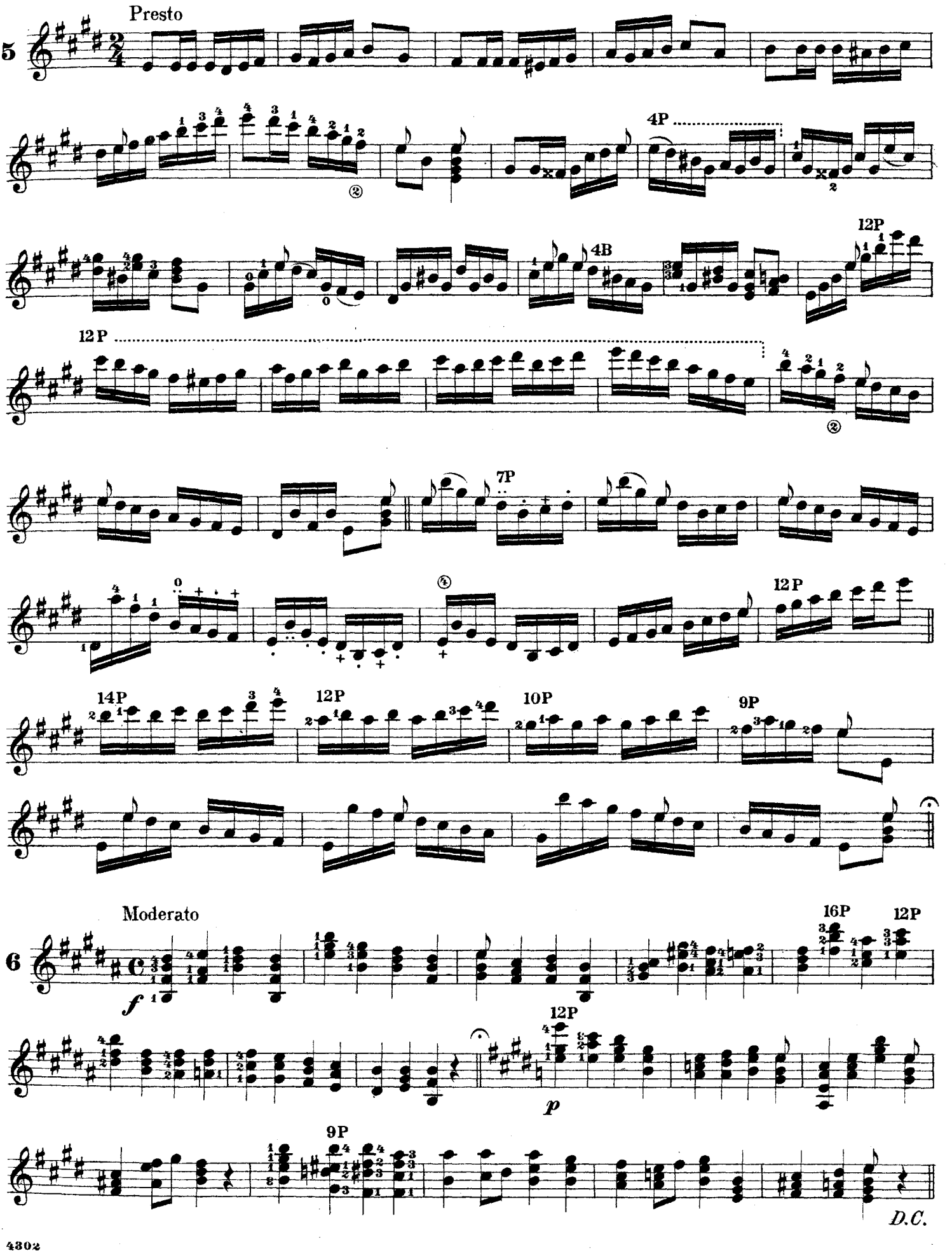
Recreation



Technical Exercises for Daily Practice.




3
Allegro
10P
9P
5P
10P
9P
10P
9P
10P
17B
11P
11P
12P
4
Presto
12P
9P

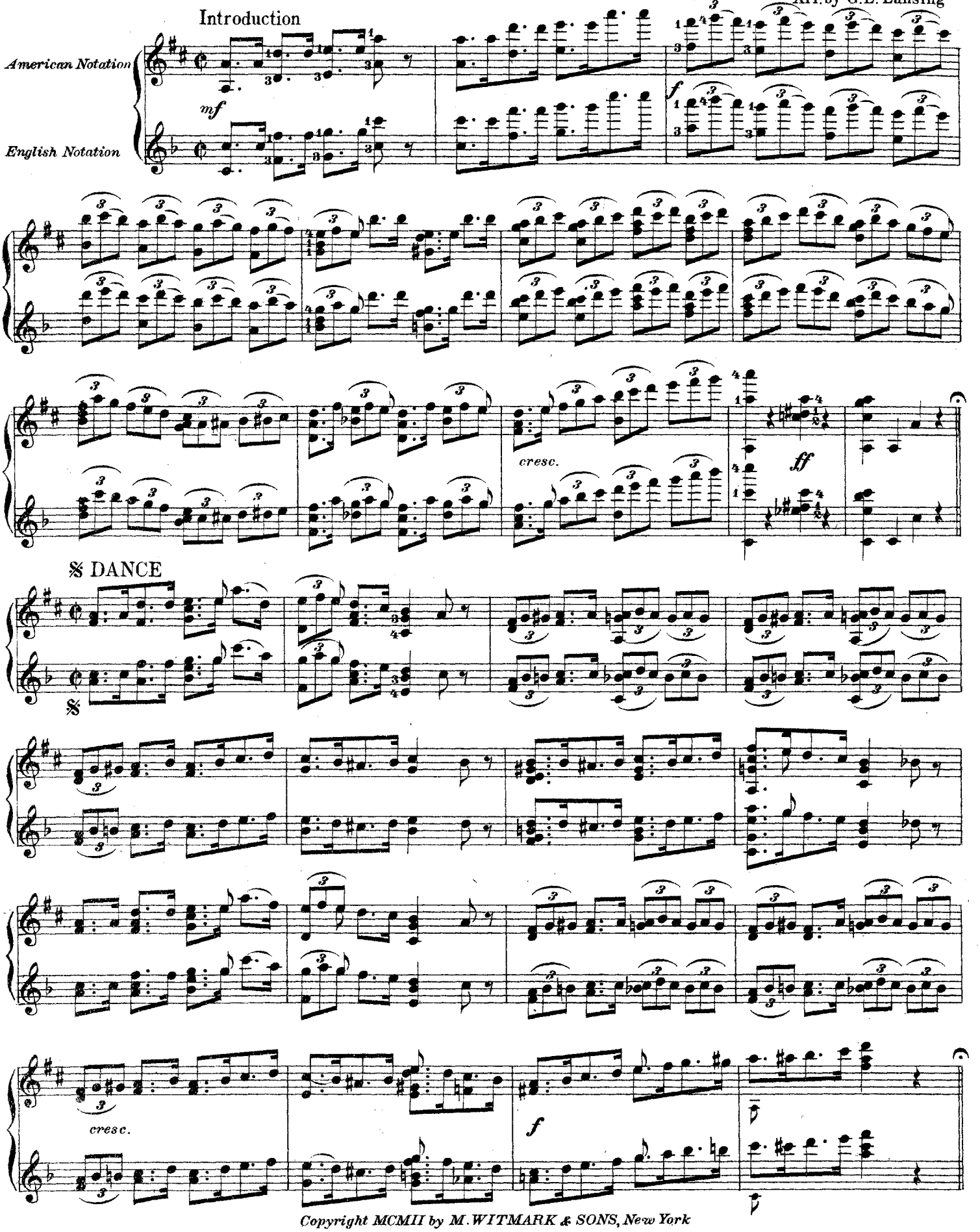

Presto
4P
12P
4B
12P
7P
12P
14P
12P
10P
9P
Moderato
16P
12P
12P
9P
D.C.

La Gazelle

Banjo Solo

Dance Characteristic

THEO. BENDIX
Arr. by G.L. Lansing



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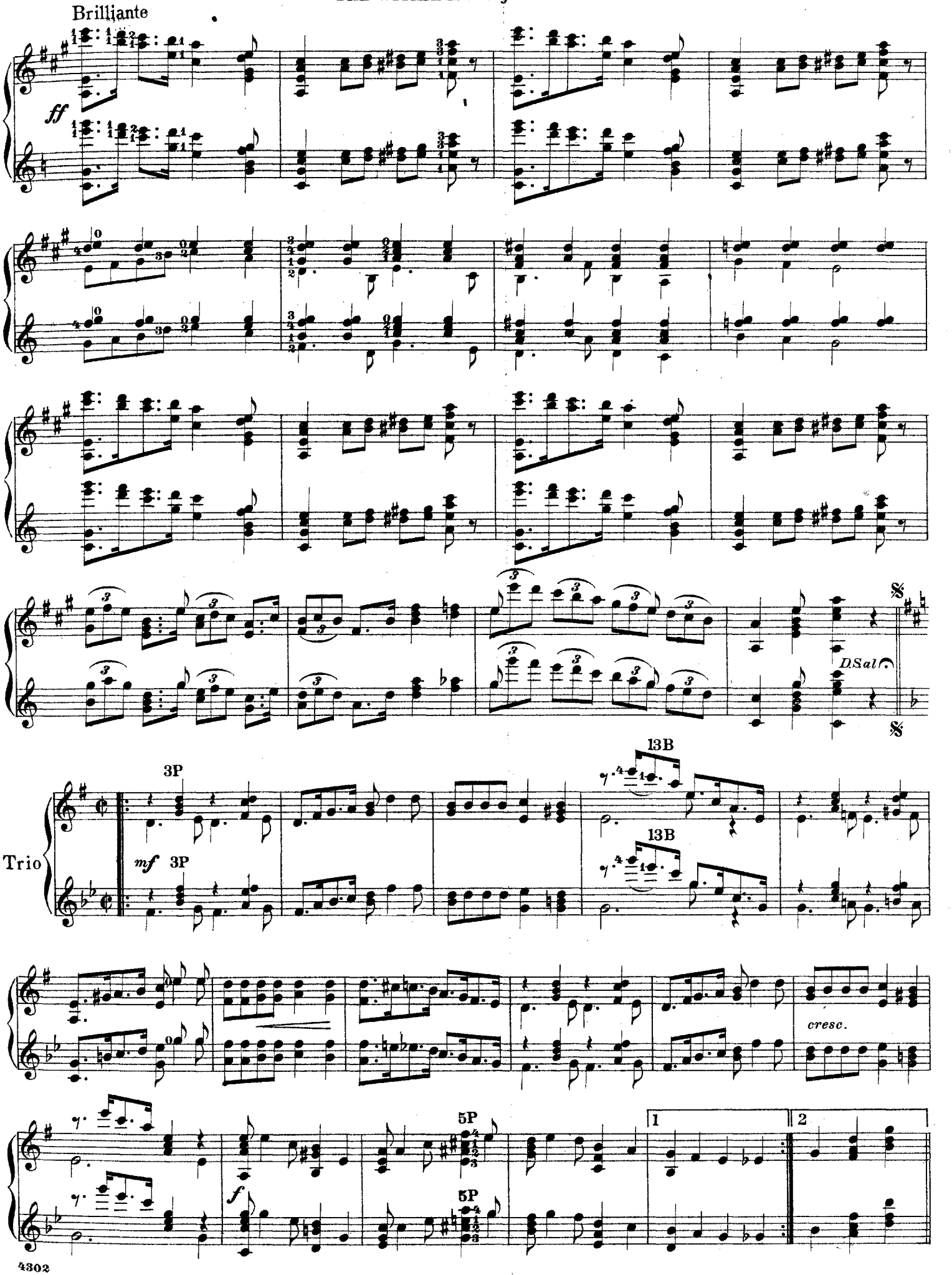
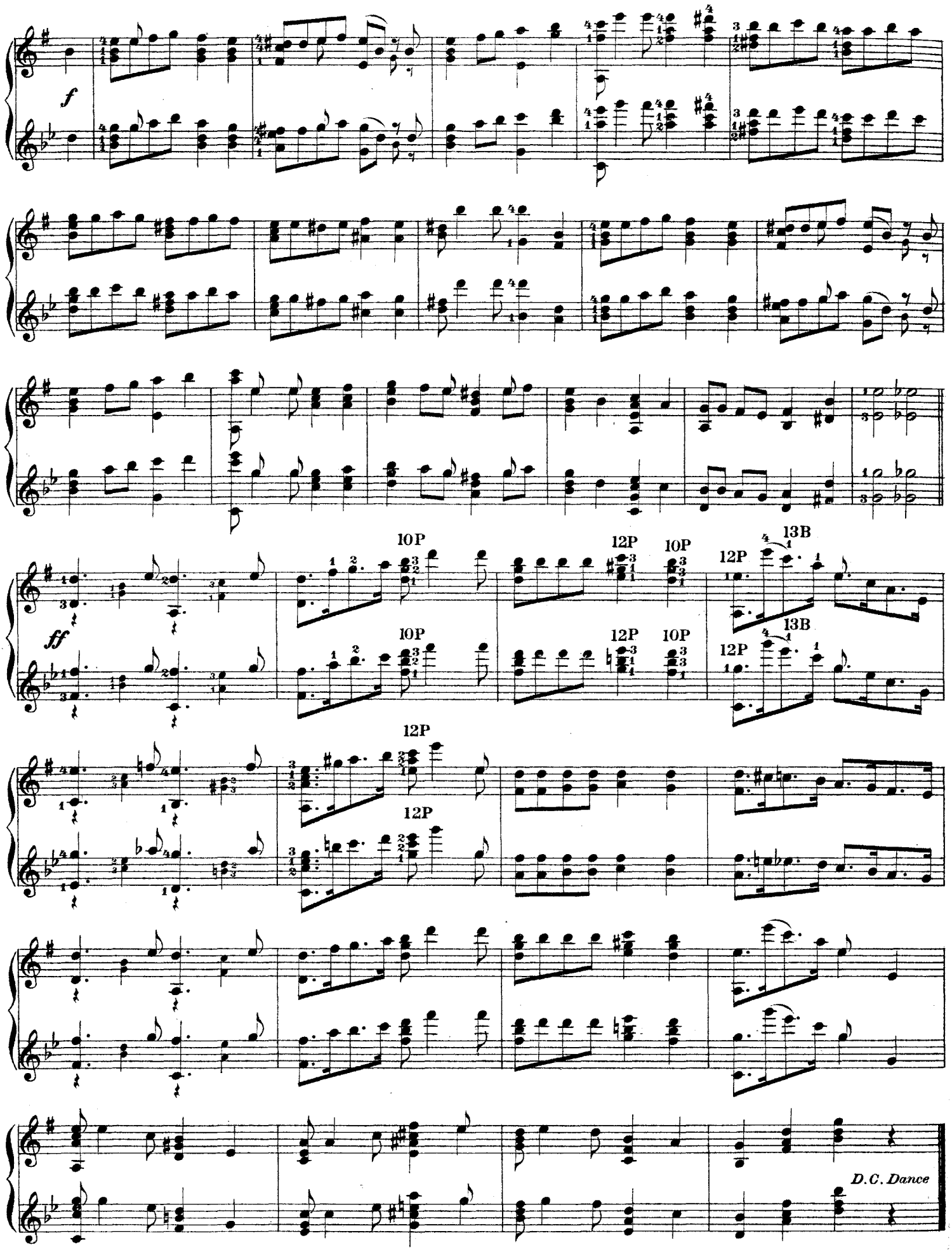

Brilliante
ff
D.Sal
Trio
3P
mf 3P
13B
13B
cresc.
5P
5P
f
1
2


f
10P
12P
10P
13B
12P
ff
10P
12P
10P
13B
12P
12P
12P
D.C. Dance

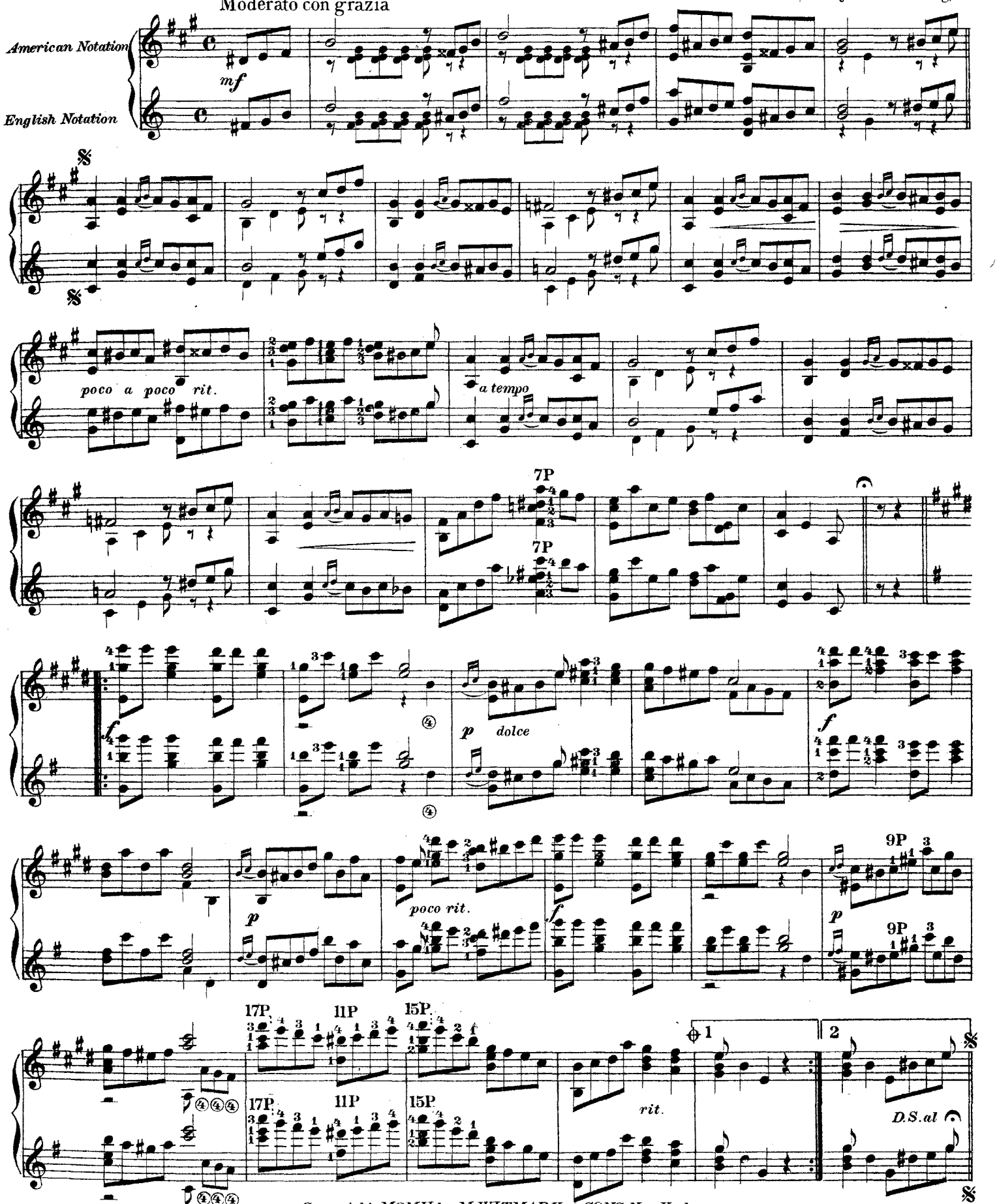
Prince and Princess.

GAVOTTE

Solo Banjo

RUDOLPH ARONSON
Arr. by G. L. Lansing

Moderato con grazia



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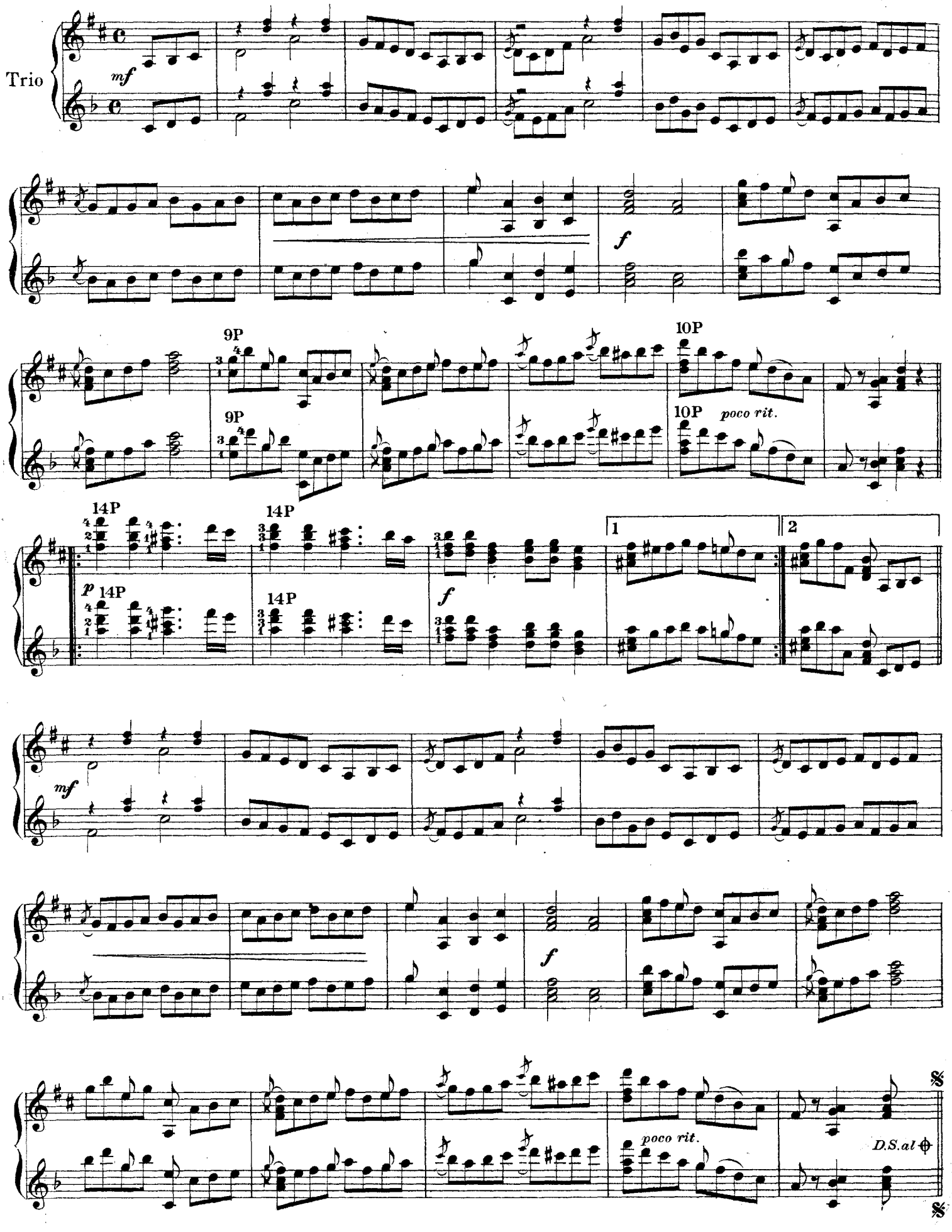
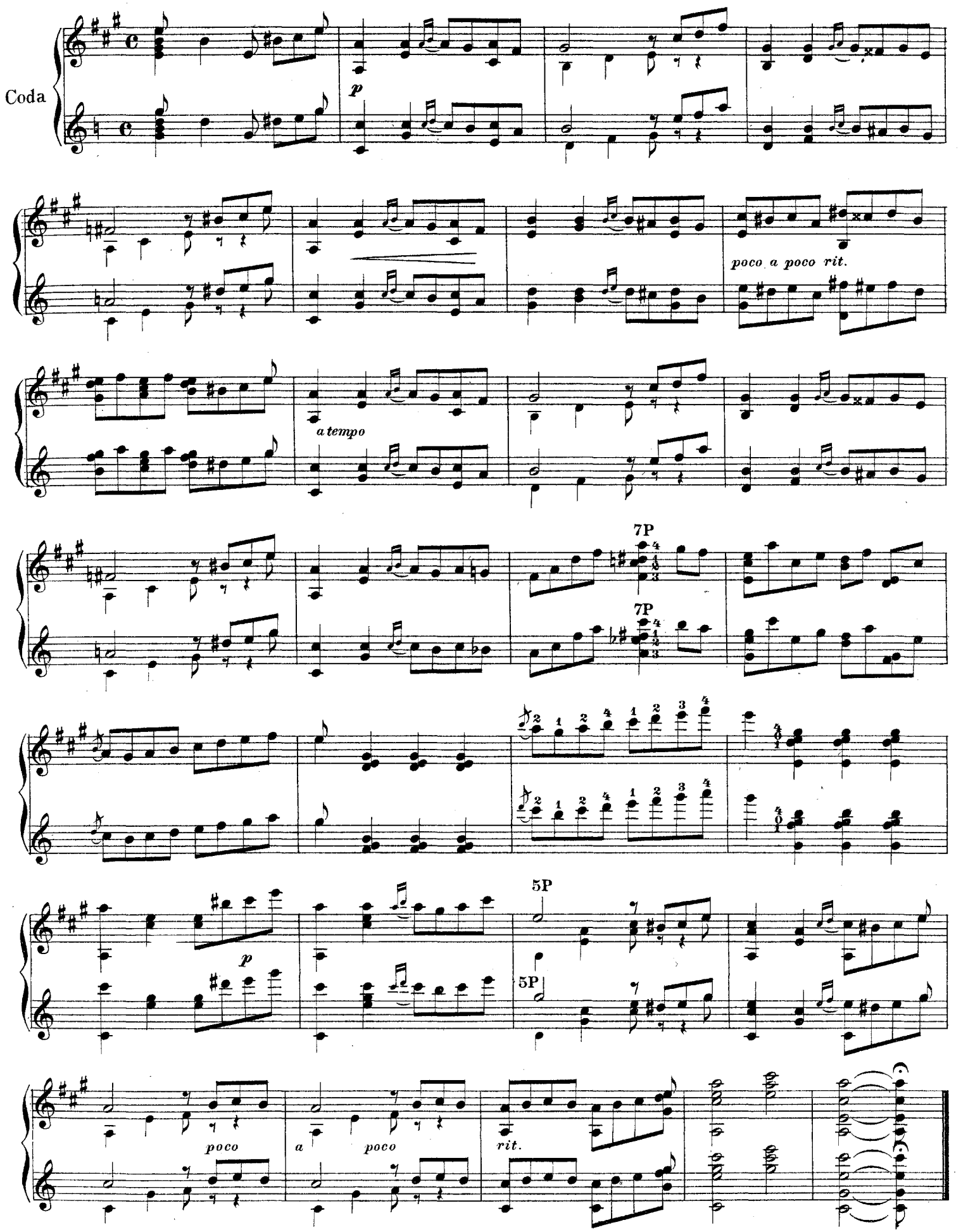
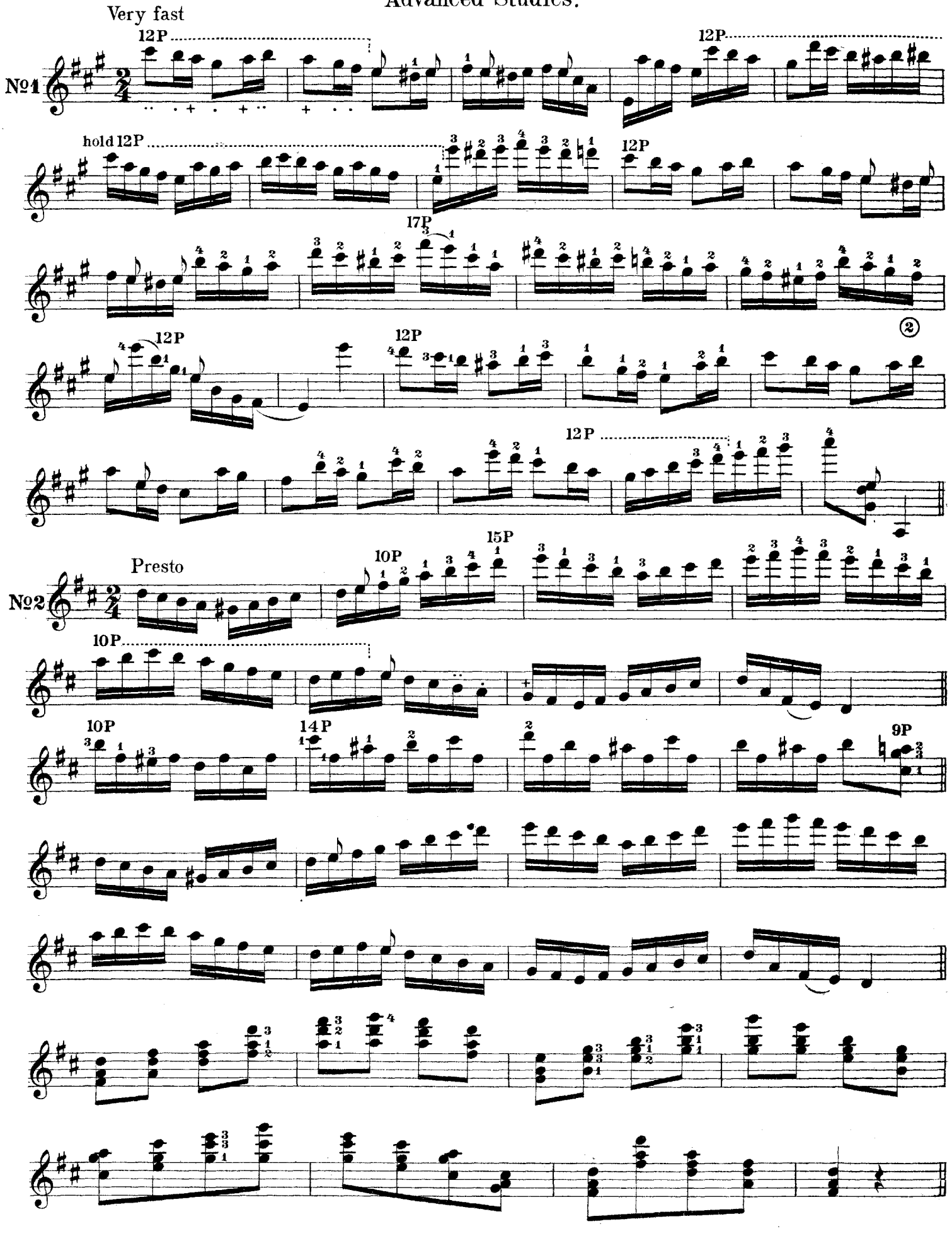

Trio
mf
f
9P
10P
poco rit.
14P
p
1
2
D.S.al

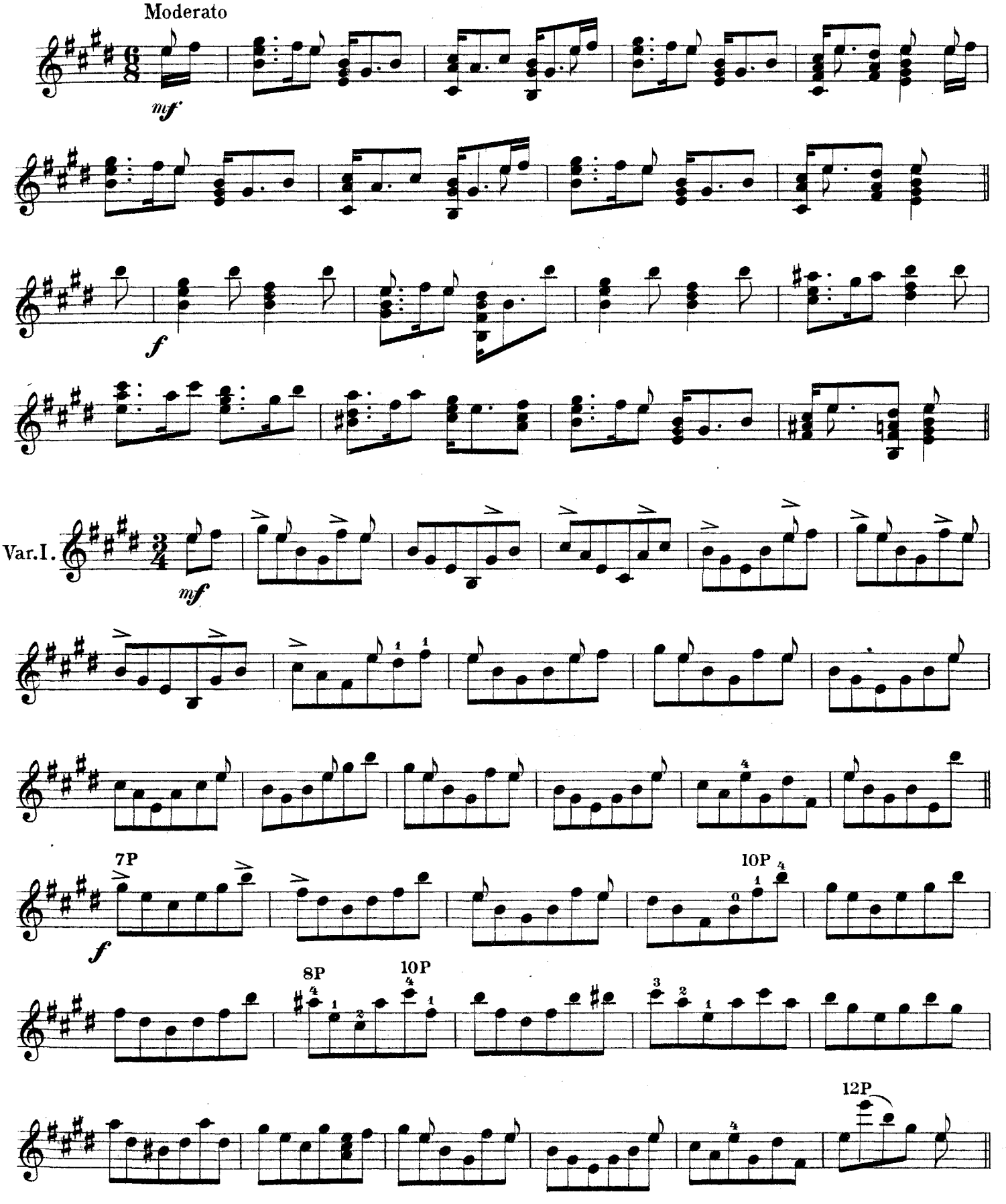

Coda
p
poco a poco rit.
a tempo
7P
7P
p
5P
5P
poco
a
poco
rit.

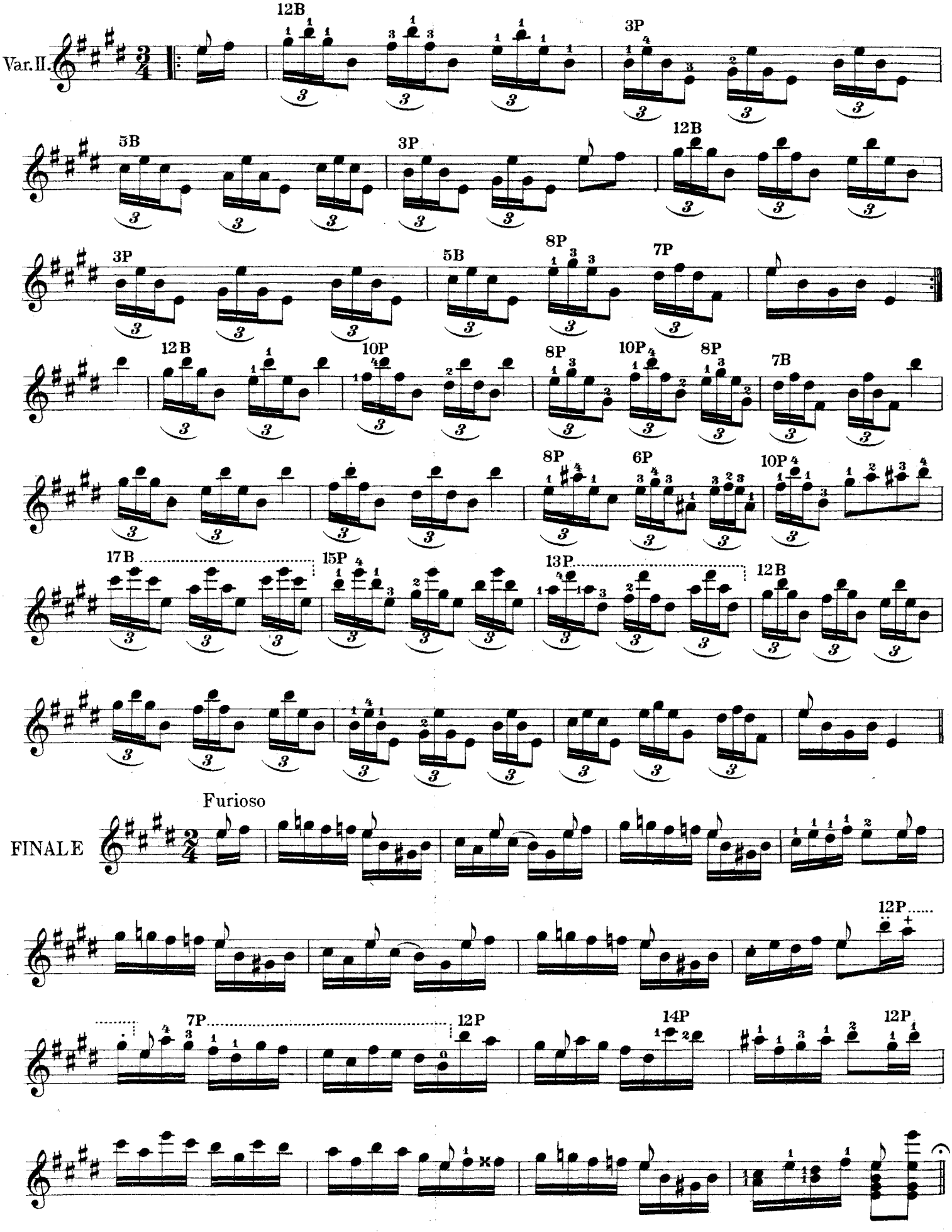
Advanced Studies.



Air and Variations.

Elevated 4th String

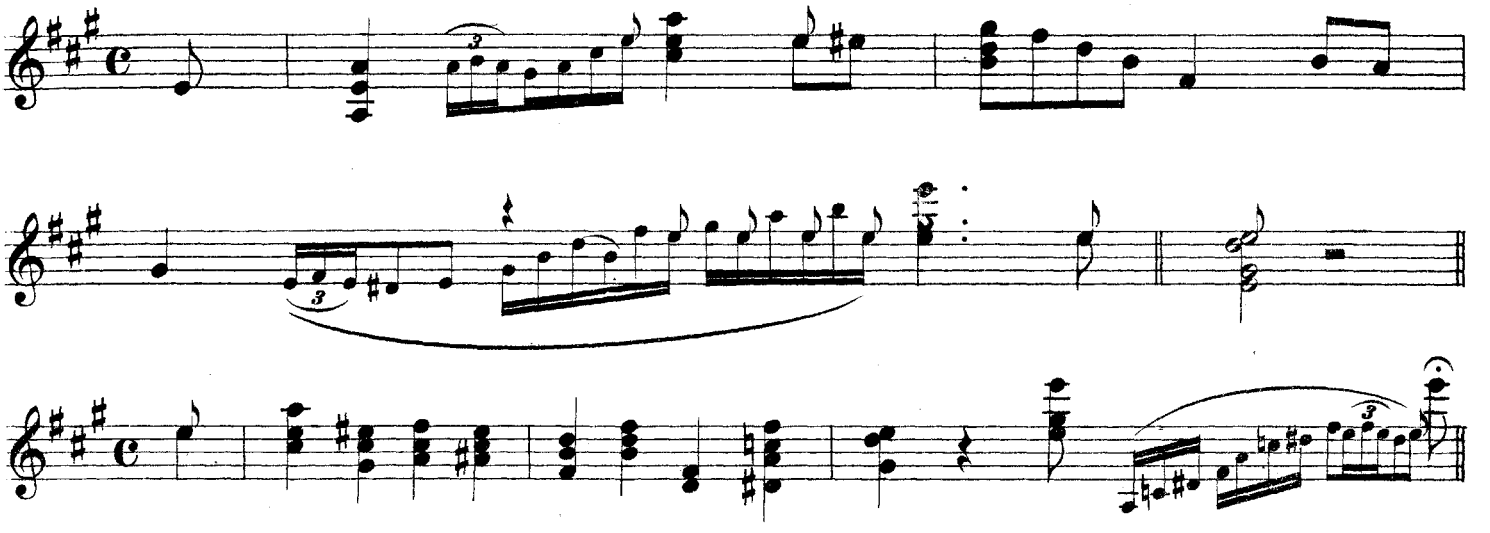



Var. II.
12B
3P
5B
3P
12B
3P
5B
8P
7P
12B
10P
8P
10P
8P
7B
8P
6P
10P
17B
15P
13P
12B
FINALE
Furioso
12P
7P
12P
14P
12P

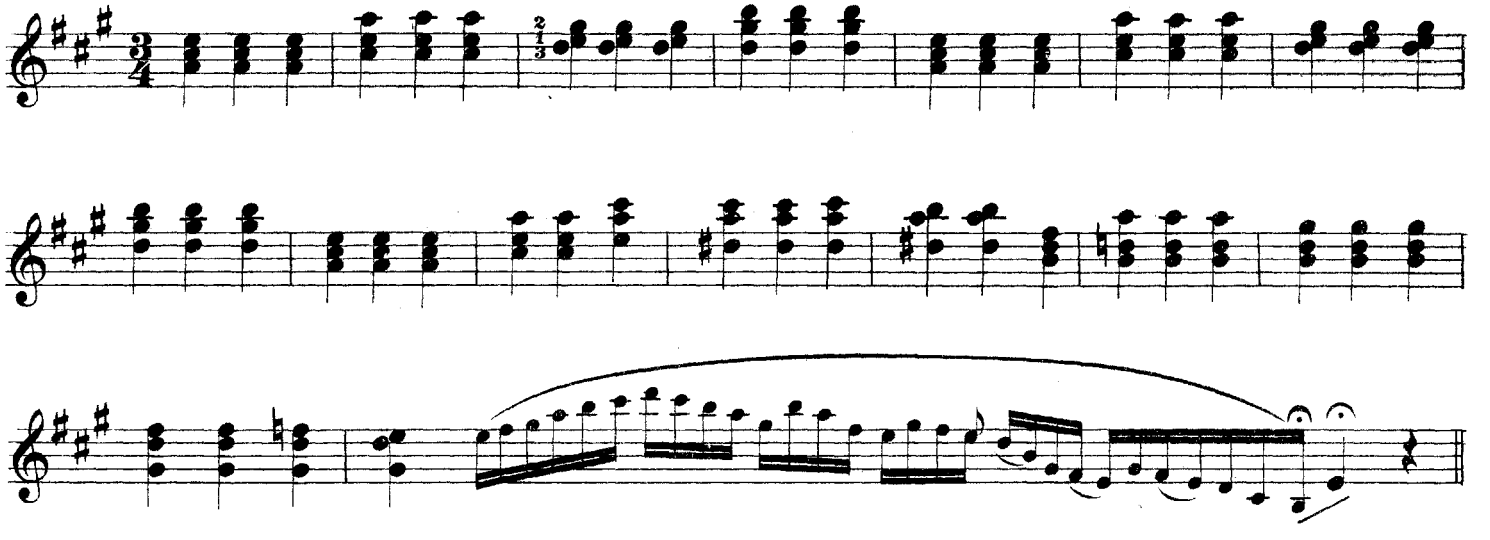
Cadenzas

A Cadenza is an interpolated passage, occurring usually in the introduction of a selection. Much practice is necessary to play them well, and when well executed they are very effective.

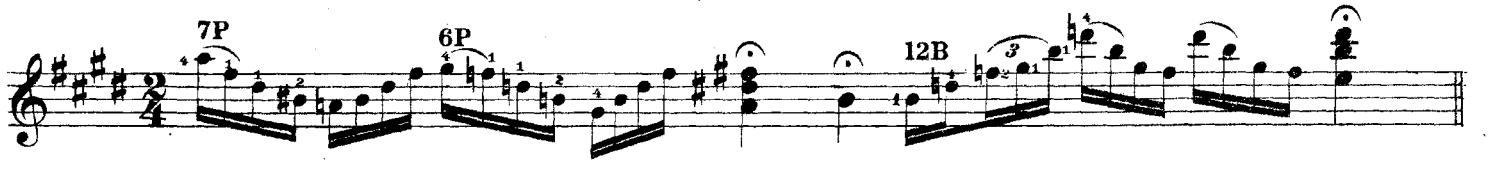
EXAMPLES



Introduction

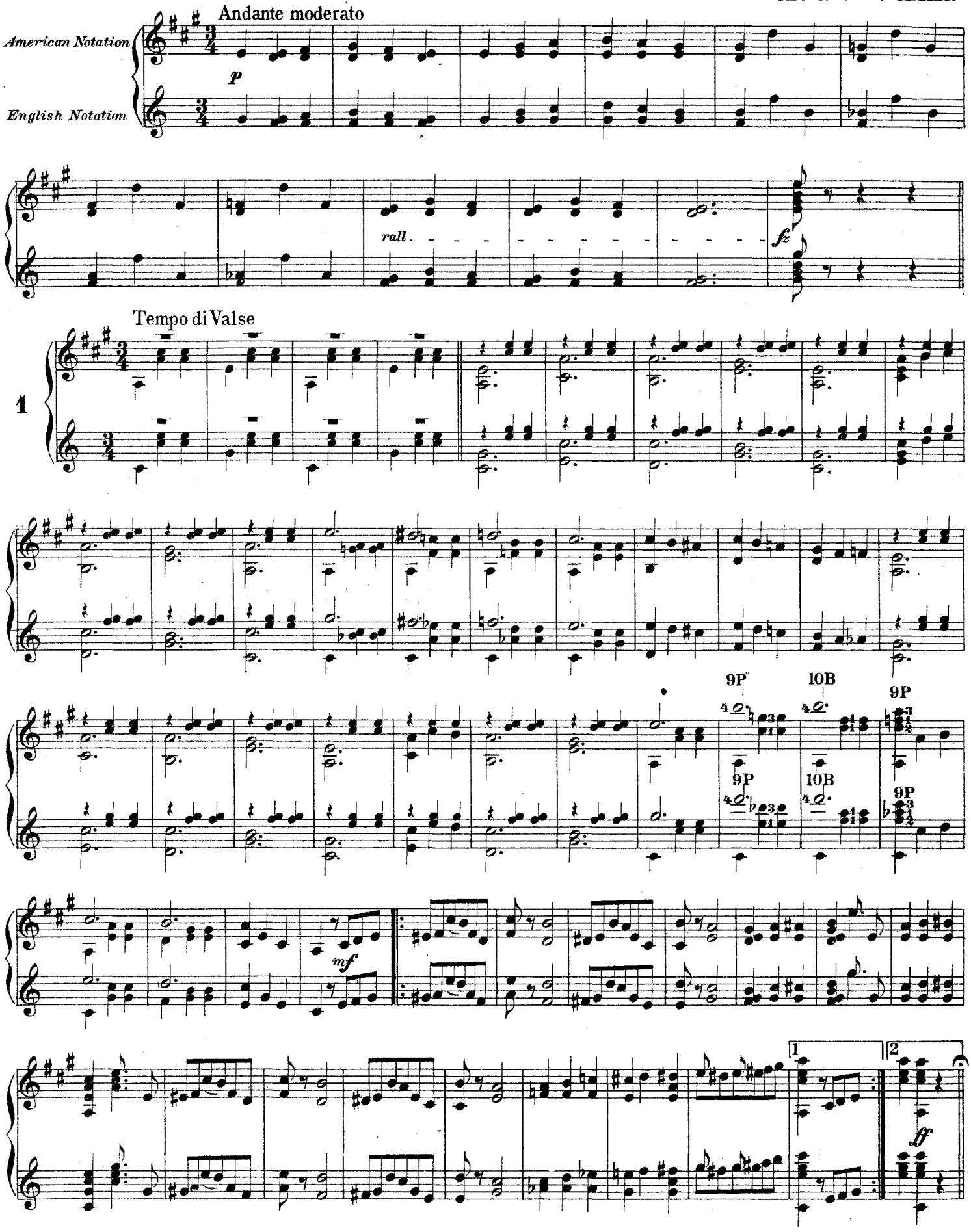


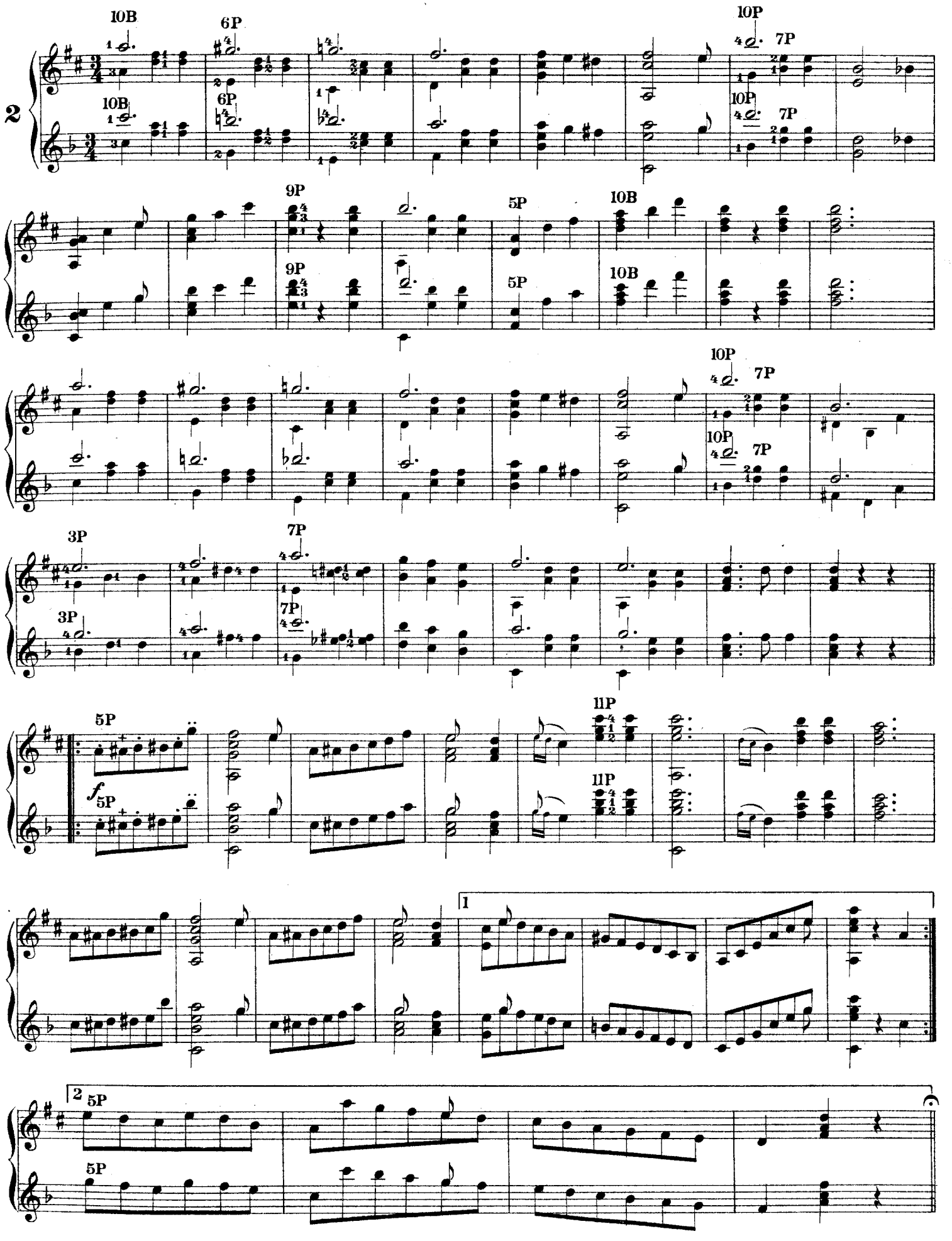
Cadenza with Bass String Elevated

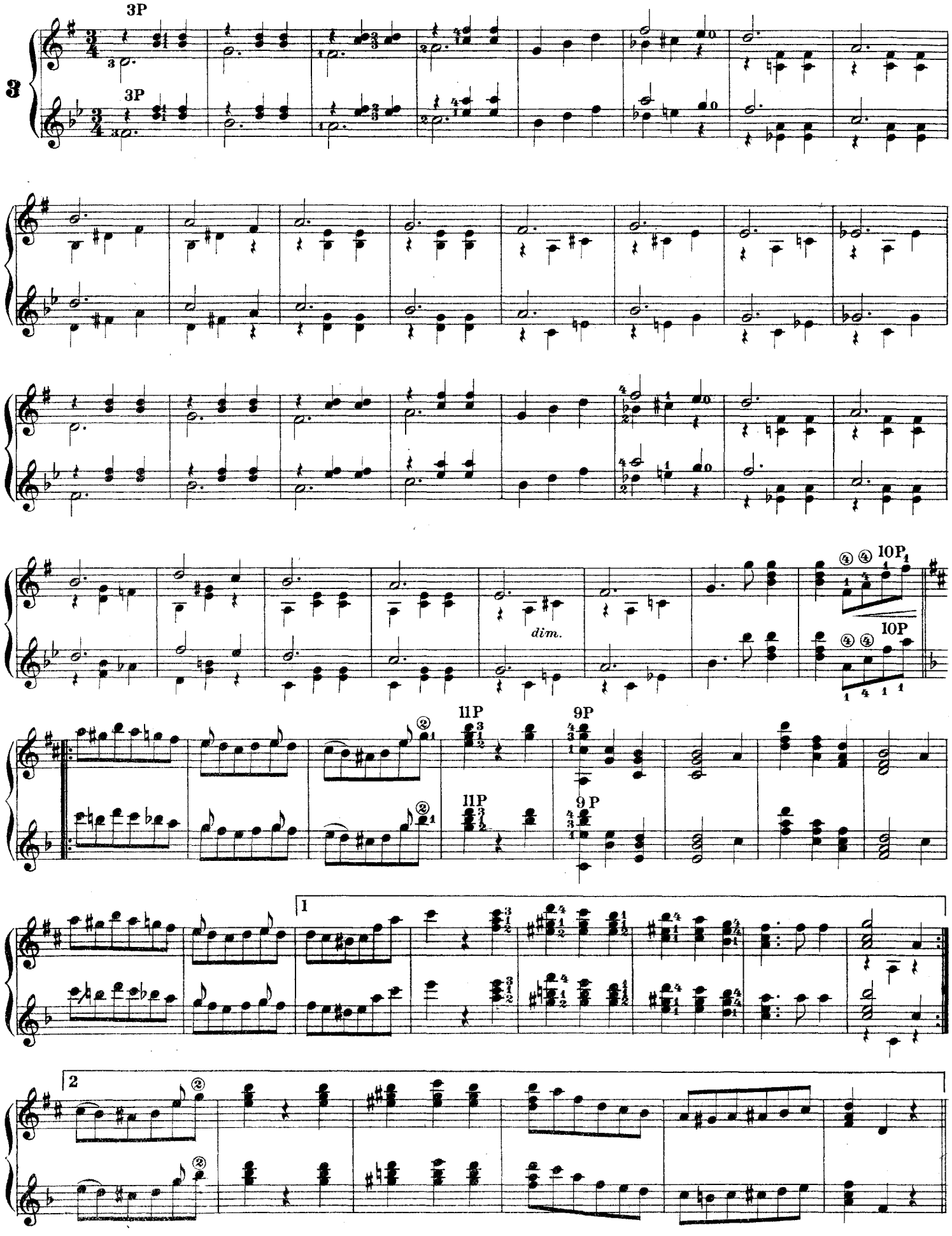


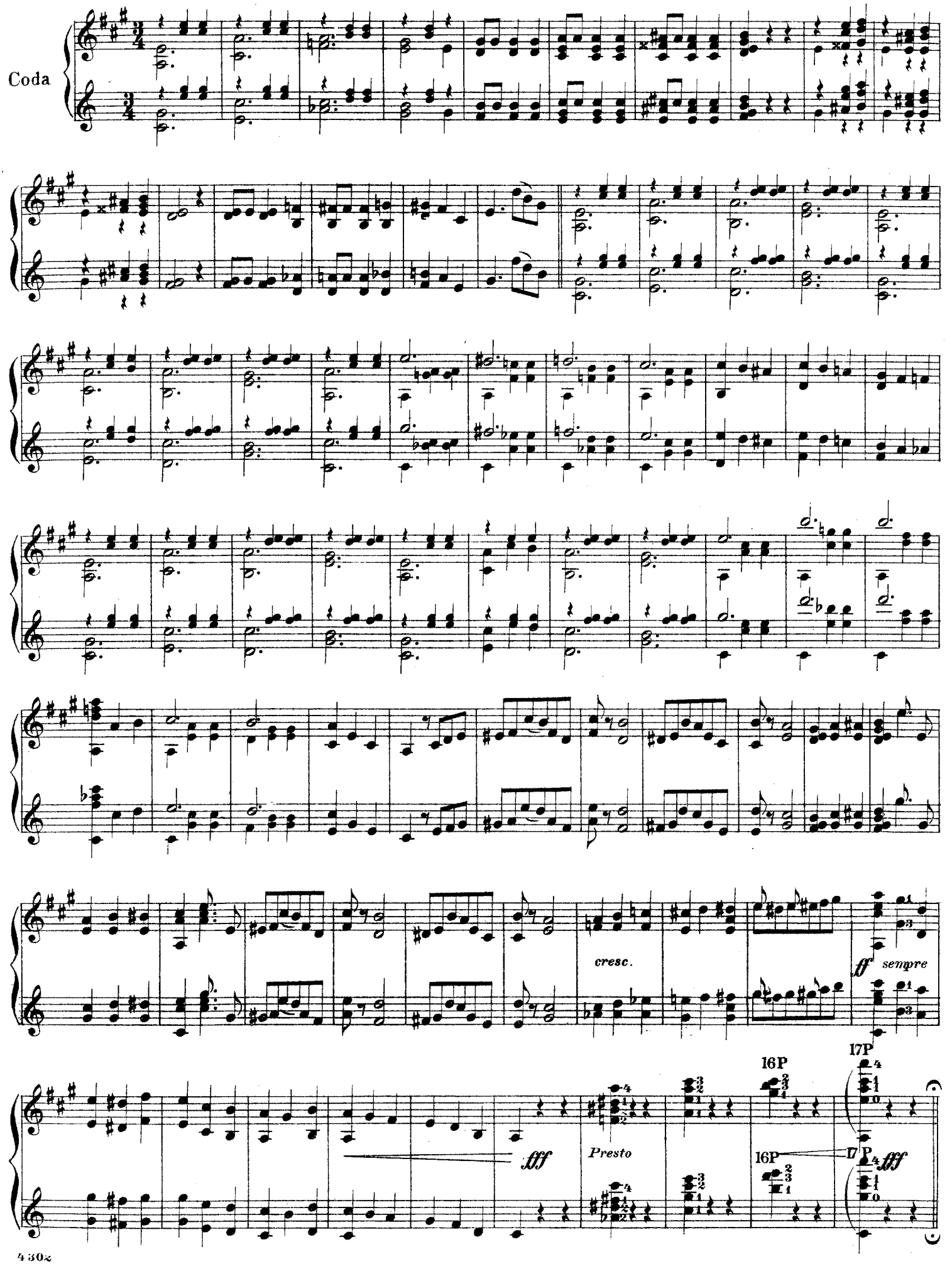
Majestic Waltzes.

RICHARD H. BARKER




2
10B
6P
10P
7P
9P
5P
3P
11P
f
1
2


3P
3P
dim.
10P
10P
11P
11P
9P
9P
1
2

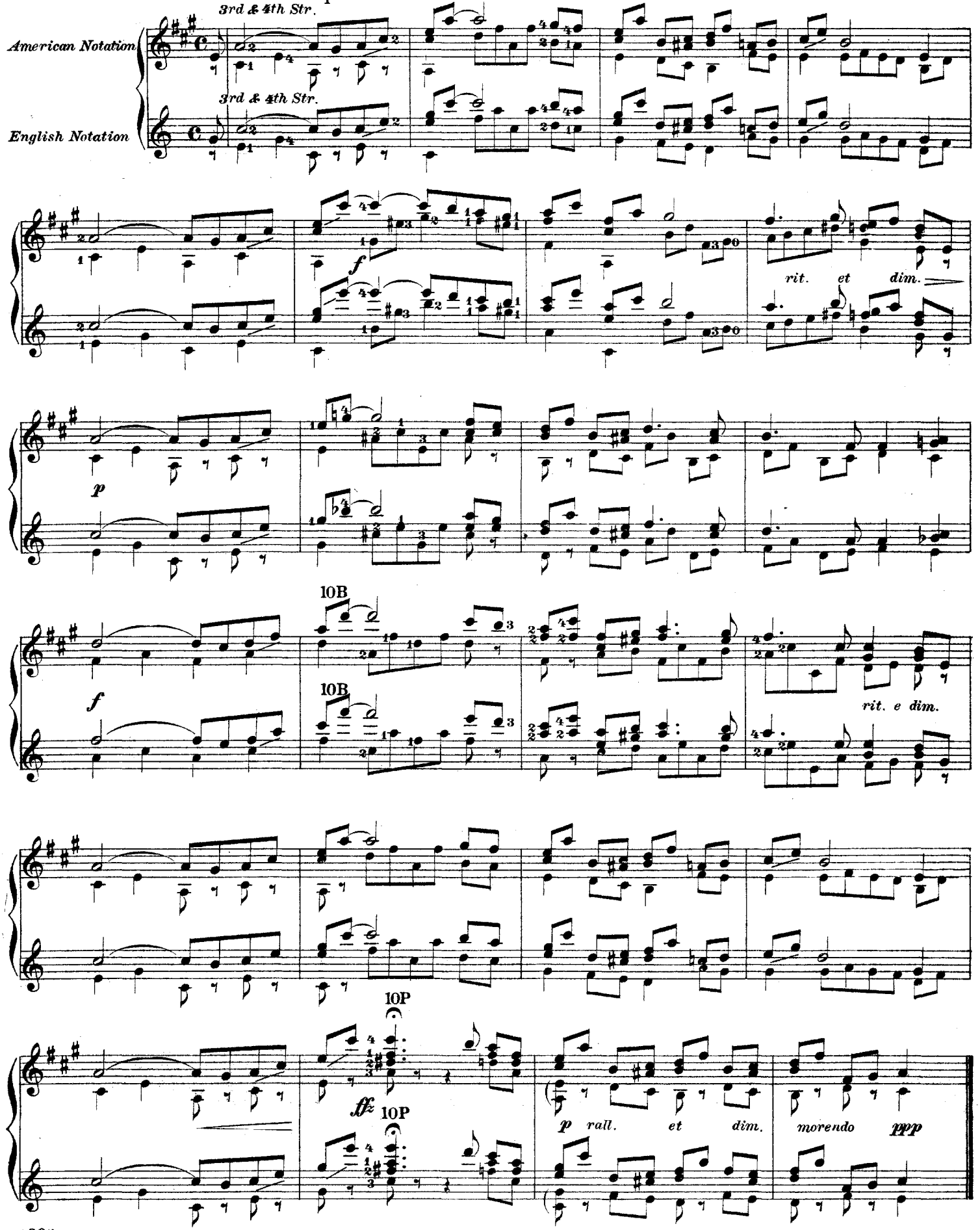

Coda
cresc.
ff sempre
16P
17P
fff
Presto
16P
17P
fff

Träumerei

Tremolo

SCHUMANN

Andante con espressivo



1st MANDOLIN.

Number Four.

THE WITMARK

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Arranged by T. P. TRINKAUS.

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