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BILBRO'S
Very First Piano Lessons

ONE YEAR'S STUDY FOR THE BEGINNER, FIVE OR SIX YEARS OF AGE.
FOUR MONTHS' STUDY FOR THE BEGINNER FROM SEVEN TO NINE.

BY

MATHILDE BILBRO

60c

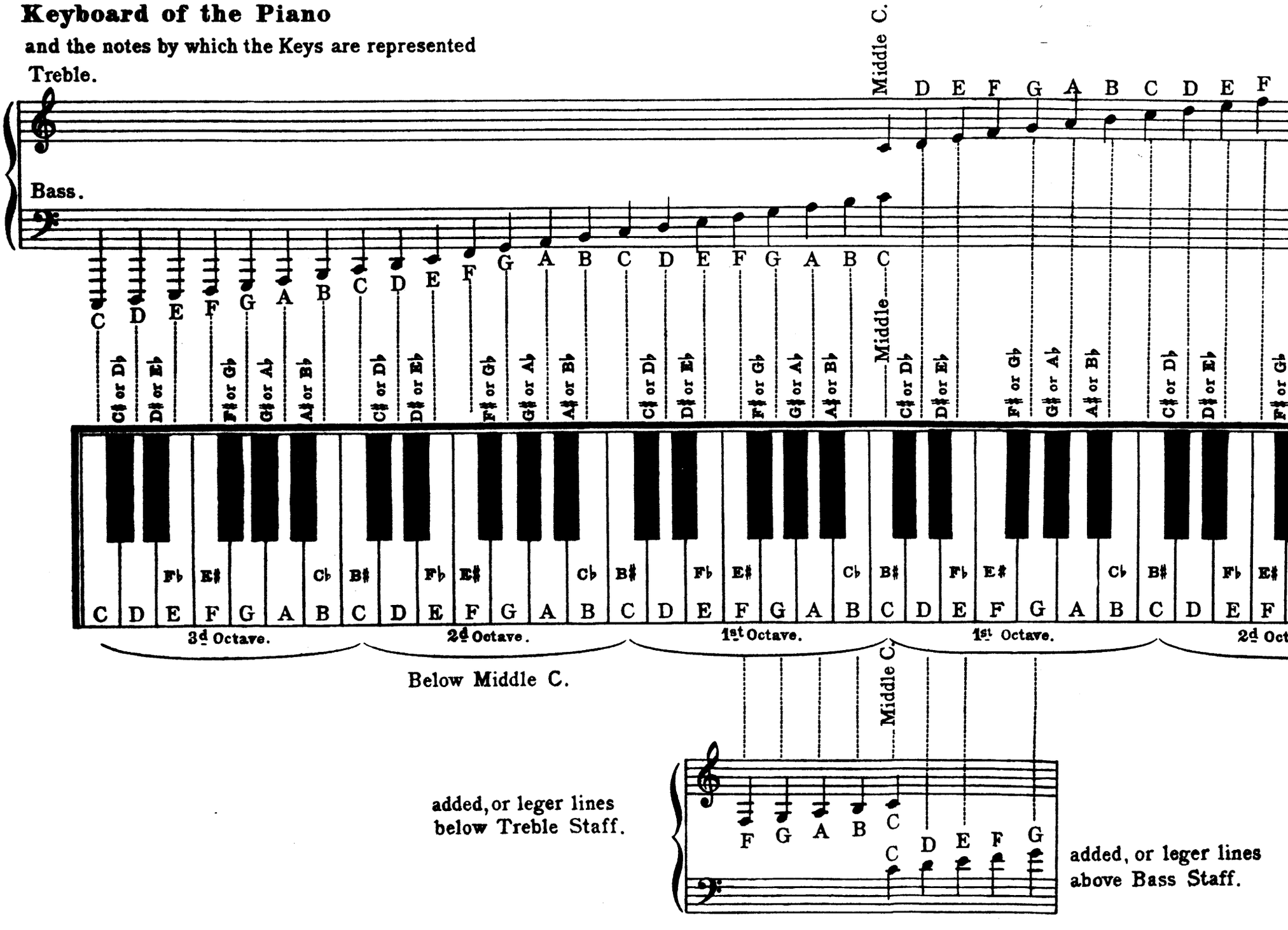
(In U. S. A.)

THE WILLIS MUSIC COMPANY
CINCINNATI

MT
146
B595B

Keyboard of the Piano

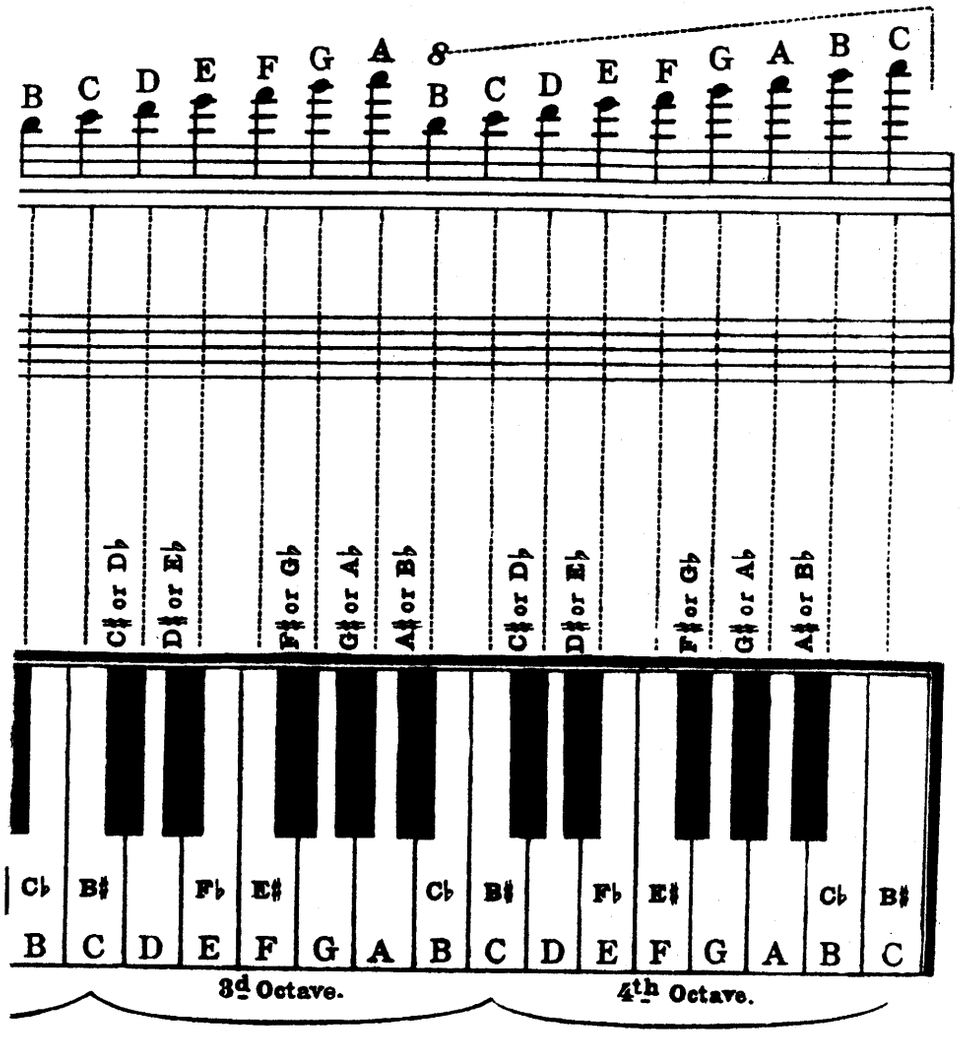
and the notes by which the Keys are represented



Below Middle C.

added, or leger lines below Treble Staff.

added, or leger lines above Bass Staff.



Above Middle C.

Teacher's Reference Book

Part I

(I)

Preliminary work for the pupil of five or six years.

Length of lessons, twenty minutes every week day, excepting Wednesday.

The lessons may be given individually, or in classes of two or three.

While this course is designed for the child of five years, it can be used successfully with beginners a little older, particularly if the child is a trifle slow.

Supposing, however, the child to be five years of age, he must first be taught the first seven letters of the alphabet, and the figures, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. These letters and figures he learns to write upon the blackboard which every music teacher is supposed to have in the studio. My blackboard has two long staves painted upon it in white.

FIRST DAY

Now for the first week with the little beginner, Claud, we will call him. First he must learn something about his hands. Teach him the number for each finger. Examine the child's hands. If, when he spreads the fingers, they are widely separated and an almost equal distance apart, well and good. If, on the other hand, the fingers seem contracted and do not separate well, or if the hand is unusually small, he must begin at once a little "hand culture" exercise, to be kept up every day. Let him spread his fingers to their utmost, stretching them all he can, hold them so a second or two and then relax the hands letting the fingers close limply. Then clinch the hands tightly shut, then after a moment let them fall open. Repeat this about six times.

Now for the table lesson. Let him sit, or stand, at a table with his hands on the surface in the proper piano position. Then call, several times the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, while Claud strikes the corresponding fingers, striking both thumbs at once. Keep this up a minute or two for several days, or until each finger is associated with its proper number. Next comes the piano lesson. (Let him use only the right hand at the piano for a few days.) Draw his attention to the black keys. Show him how they are all divided into "bunches", some having two keys, and some having three. Let him point out the groups until he distinguishes the difference. Next tell him that "A" is found in every "three bunches". Let him grasp a group of three, then drop off the key which his thumb is holding (F♯). Now show him how A lies between the remaining two black keys. Let him find A in many places. Next a little written exercise at the blackboard, where he practices writing his letters and figures, and he is through his first lesson. Remind him that he must tell you tomorrow how many "A s" he finds on his piano at home.

SECOND DAY

5 minutes each
- 1st Hand exercise. (Stretching and relaxing.)
- 2d Table exercise. Lift fingers and strike when a number is called.)
- 3d Blackboard exercise.

10 min.
- 4th Piano lesson.

Claud now knows "A" readily. Show him "B" and "G" on each side of "A". Now let him spell the word "Bag", striking each key as he spells, and beginning with his third finger on B. Thus from the start he forms the habit of "fingering". Let him spell "bag" on many places on the piano, then spell it orally, then write it on the blackboard. This should be done with every new word he learns. In this way, the child not yet in school, receives a little elementary schooling at his music lessons.

THIRD DAY

Repeat all previous exercises. At the piano lesson, show how "D" lies between the black keys in the "Two Bunch". Let him find "D" in a number of places. Now teach him to spell "bad" on the piano. Second finger on "B", first on "A" and fourth on "D".

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FOURTH DAY

Repeat all previous exercises. Show that "C" and "E" lie on either side of "D", and let him find the new keys. Now, with the thumb on "A", let him play and sing the little exercise "A, B, C, D, E" a number of times. Then spell a new word "Ace" with fingers one, three, five. (N.B. At this stage, of course, Claud's little fingers are too short to curve very much. In fact, it is about all he can do to reach from key to key with his fingers held straight. Yet it is very wise to tell him often that the fingers should be curved. Show him the proper position with your own hand, and tell him he will be able to hold his hand the same way when his fingers grow a little more. Thus, when he is older, it will not come to him as a sudden shock, that he must hold his fingers curved.)

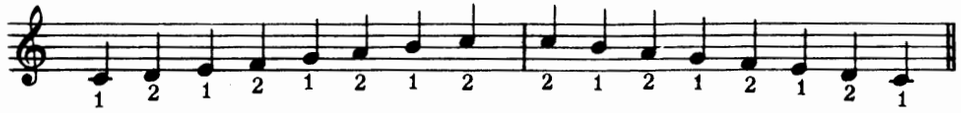
FIFTH DAY

Repeat all previous work.

Show "F" lying between "E" and "G". Now spell "Face" with fingers one, two, three and five.

SIXTH DAY

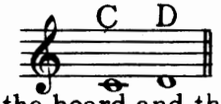
Claud is now growing familiar with his keyboard. Show him how to distinguish middle "C" by its position, and he is ready to begin learning something about turning under his thumb. Now teach him the following scale, using only the first and second fingers, and impressing it upon him that his thumb must go under just as the second finger strikes. Have him count slowly as he goes, "one, two; one, two". (N.B. This scale is of course, taught upon the piano keyboard, and not in notation.)



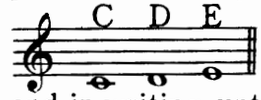
Claud should now be able to spell on the piano many words, such as Bag, Bad, Bee, Beg, Ace, Face, Cage, Babe, etc., and it is a good thing to keep up this practice of spelling words until he thoroughly knows his keyboard; one month anyway.

(II)

Repeat all previous work with the left hand, teaching him to play the scale just as he does with the right, beginning with the left thumb on middle "C". Then it should not be difficult for him to play the scale with both hands together, beginning with both thumbs on middle C and using only the first and second fingers. Now Claud is ready to begin learning a few notes. He should first be taught to make the treble mark at the blackboard, and the meaning of the mark explained to him. Now let him study the staff a little, learning that there are five lines and four spaces, and tell him that all these lines and spaces stand for certain keys on the piano. Begin with middle C and the D above.



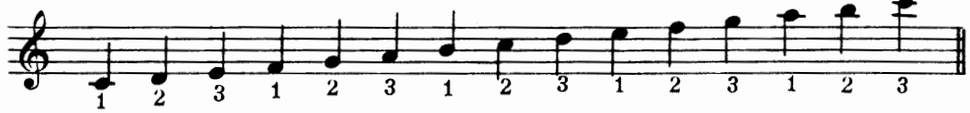
Let Claud write these two notes a number of times on the board and then play them on the piano. The next day add to his lesson the note E.



and let him study these three notes, both at the piano and in writing, until he knows them thoroughly. In the meantime, keeping up all the previous exercises.

(III)

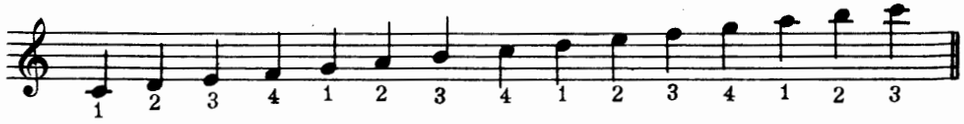
At this stage, the pupil, if he is fairly quick at learning, may begin to use the Book of Studies accompanying this Course. If he should be a little slow, let him wait a bit longer. Now, at the piano, let him play his scale through another octave, going to high C with the right, and low C with the left, still using only the first and second fingers. After a day or two he can begin to use the third finger in his scale.



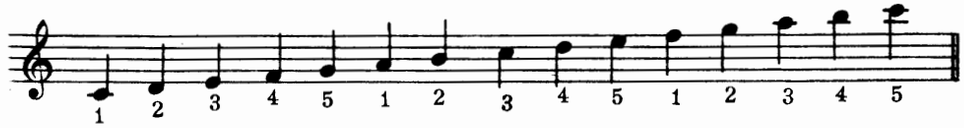
This with both hands in contra motion. Remind him that the thumb must go under as he strikes the second finger, then it is ready to strike after the third finger without jerking the hand. This one lesson of turning the thumb, impressed on the child in his earliest stage of study, is very valuable, in that it prevents in after years, that ugly habit of playing with the thumbs standing out.

(IV)

Now he plays the scale using the fourth finger:



This for a few days, and then:

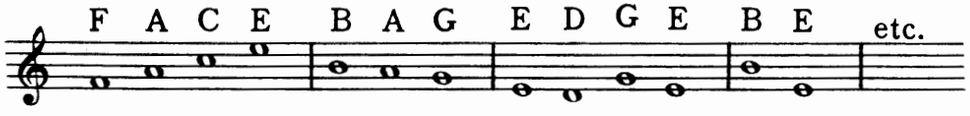


This scale exercise should be kept up every day until the thumb turns readily under any finger. At the end of a month he should be ready to learn the scale with the usual fingering, though it is often wise to keep up the "turning" exercise for several months.

(V)

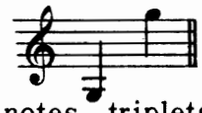
Claud is now fairly started in his Music Book.

It will be noticed that the introduction of half notes is deferred until whole notes and quarter notes have been studied for a while. This is done because the little five-year mind grasps the significance of the quarter note very readily. The half notes are a bit hard. Meanwhile Claud should be using constantly his music tablet, writing in it words containig every new note, just as he learns the note. Example:



When he has learned notes enough he should frequently write the C major scale in his tablet, using whole, half and quarter notes.

In these lessons for the five and six year olds, one new idea each day should be brought out. An older pupil of seven or eight will, of course, cover more ground at each lesson.

As we are dealing supposedly with the very youthful mind, it is best to defer the explanation of tones, whole and half steps, etc., until the following year. For the same reason, this course deals only with whole, half and quarter notes, $\frac{3}{4}$ and $\frac{4}{4}$ time, a little study of "long" and "short" touch, and the following range of notes:  leaving the intricacies of notes of other value, dotted notes, triplets, irregular accent, etc., to the time when this course shall have been completed, and the little student is ready to begin some standard first grade book. It will then be found that the child is well grounded in the essential elementary work, and is ready to go straight ahead.

With the pupil of very childish mind, there are many little games and plays that an ingenious teacher may introduce into the work.

In the piano scale, the fingers may be Mr. and Mrs. Thumb going for a walk. First they take the oldest sons (2d fingers) along with them. Next they take the oldest daughters (3d fingers) along. Next they take the little sons (4th fingers) and finally they take the babies (5th fingers).

The scale on the blackboard may be little boys and girls climbing a hill, or a ladder. Again, the spaces may be rivers, bearing their ships, and the lines may be railroads on which the trains run. In such cases it would be dangerous for an F ship to get on an E railroad track, or for a G train to get into an A river, etc. In fact, there are numberless devices by which the little one can be kept interested in his lessons. And right here, after all, is the secret of success with the little pupil: Keep him interested.

Part II

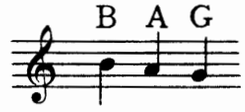
Occasionally a child progresses so rapidly, that he finishes Part I of the Music Book before he is at the age or stage where a regular First grade book should be taken up. If he is under six years of age he should wait awhile before beginning to study bass notes. For such cases, Part II of the Music Book was written. As will be seen, it carries the pupil a little further along, though still dealing in treble notes. Two new scales are introduced,– D major and F major. Also a new kind of time,– $\frac{2}{4}$ time. The fingering grows a little more difficult; the chords just a bit harder. A new note is introduced– the eighth note. A few more accidentals are used. Beyond that there are no new intricacies.

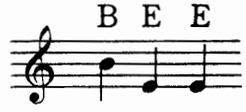
Part II is designed to bridge the gap that might possibly arise from a precocious child's going very quickly through Part I.

At the beginning of Part II the little fingers have grown longer and stronger. The teacher should now insist on the hand being held with the fingers curved and the thumb turned inward. Let it be remembered that a great deal of written work should accompany this course. At every lesson the child should write scales and chords, notes and rests of all values which he has learned. At the end of the year, he should write notes as readily as he writes letters.

With the daily written work, hand-culture exercises, scale practice, and note reading, a child even though below the average in development, will learn steadily, while the bright child will go straight ahead without a hitch. But remember that you must interest him. Never keep him after he grows tired. If he begins to show weariness at the piano, stop him at once. Send him to the blackboard telling him to draw a bag and a bee. He draws them thus: (having been shown before.)

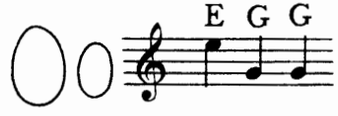
Now tell him to write it in notes. He writes on the blackboard staves:

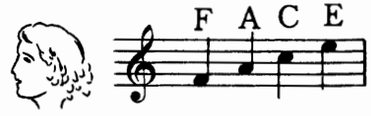




"Now come and let's read that on the piano"; you say to him. By that time he is probably interested in his piano lesson again.

There are other examples such as:





When he has had a very good lesson, let him draw such little objects as these, which are easily taught.

From the very first little exercises in Chapter III of Part I to the end, require him to memorize his studies. Never let him imagine that he knows a piece or a study until he knows it by heart. Do not keep him too long at a lesson and let him do something he likes best at the very last of his lesson. He will then be eager for the next lesson. Teach him from the beginning to play whenever he is asked, no matter if he plays only a scale, and have friends to come in frequently during the lessons. At the end of the year you will have an excellent First Grade pupil.

Part I

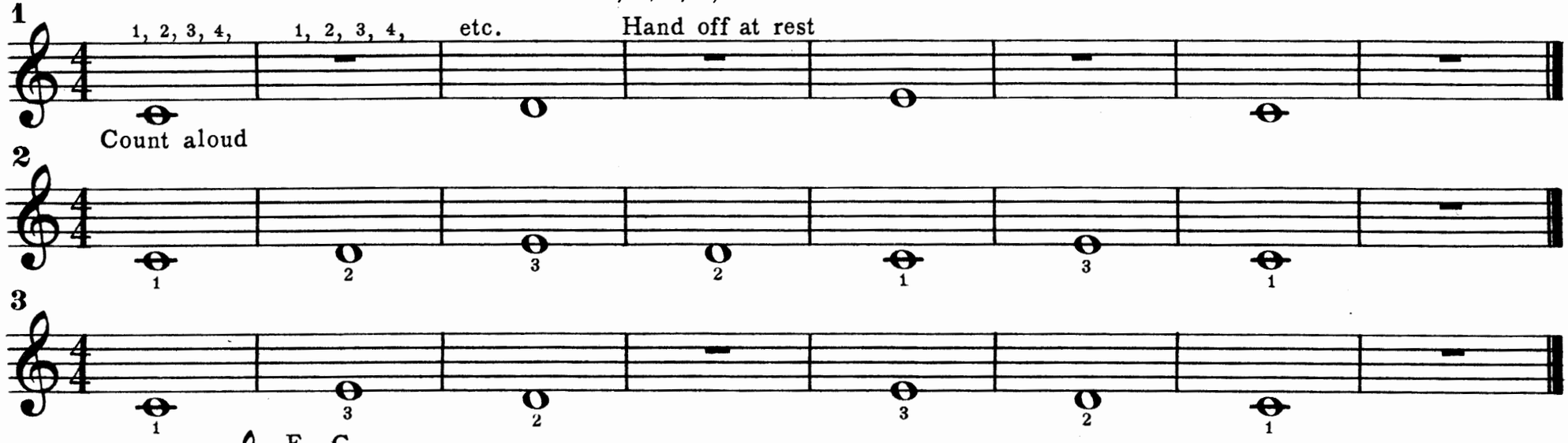
Throughout the study of this course, the child should be required to do a great deal of written work both at the blackboard, and in his tablet. Scales, chords, signatures, notes of different values, time exercises etc., should be written many times, as fast as they are learned. Part of every lesson should be devoted to written exercises.

I

Right Hand

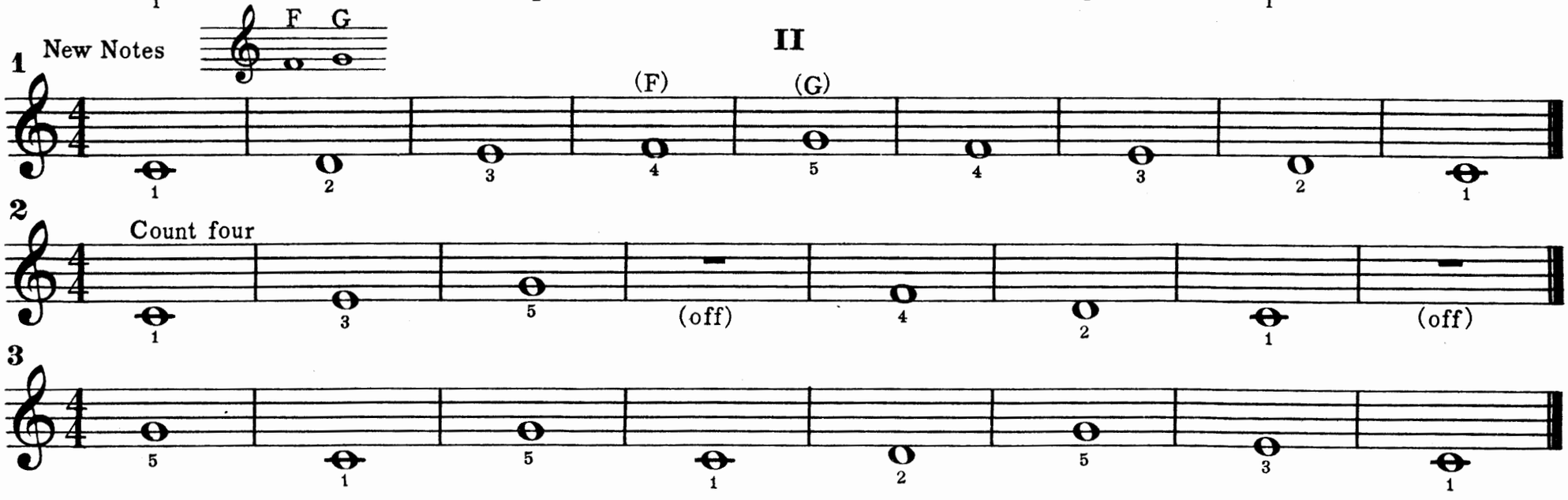
Whole notes and whole rests.

Notes to learn, C, D, E,



II

New Notes



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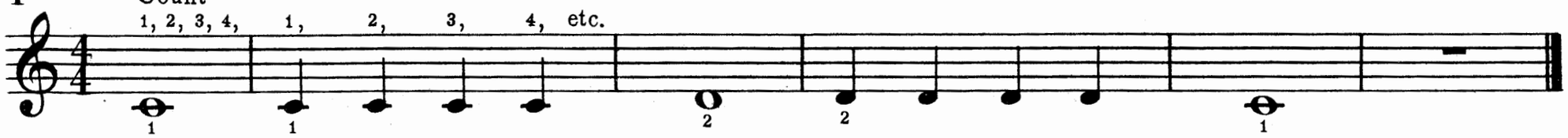
III

Whole notes and Quarter notes

One of the strongest points is the repetition of a note or an idea. Quarter notes should be taught before half-notes.

1 Count



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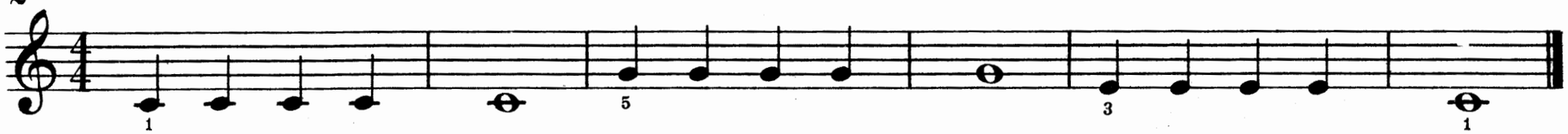
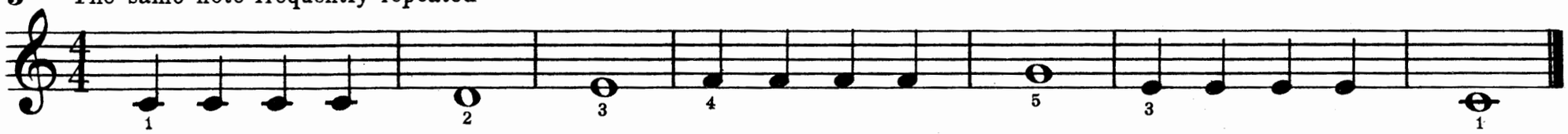
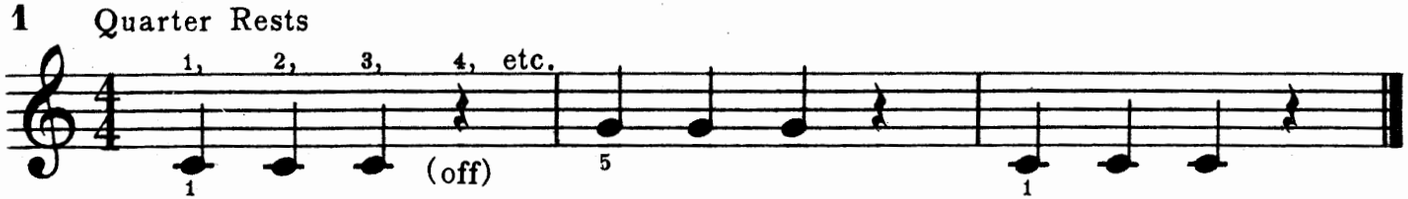


3 The same note frequently repeated



IV

1 Quarter Rests



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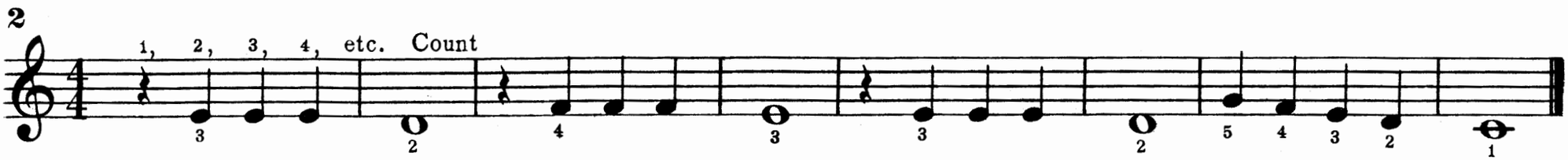
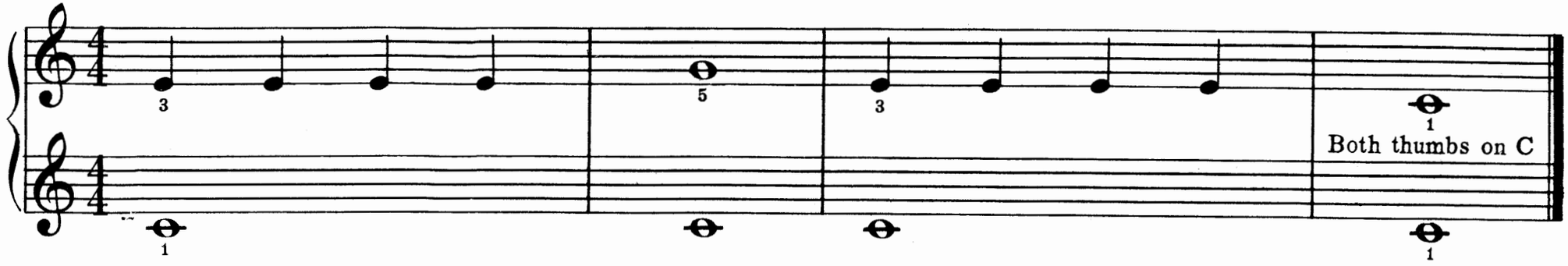
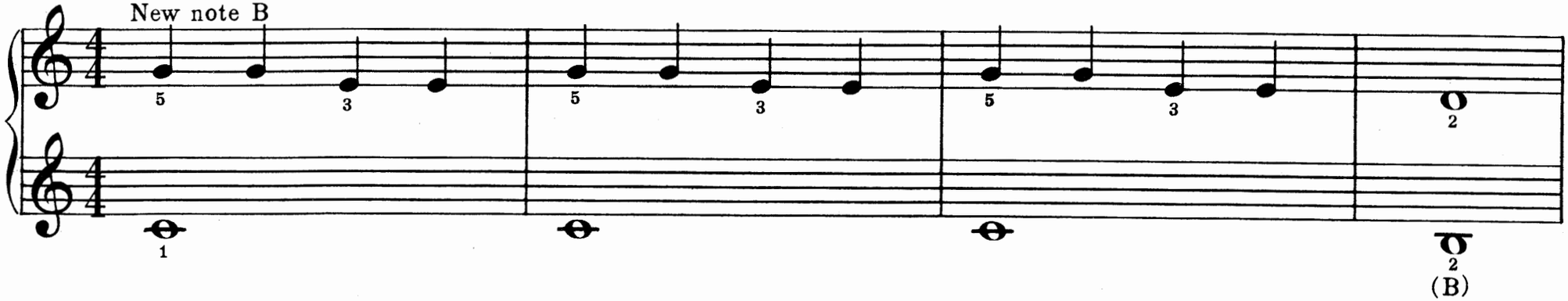


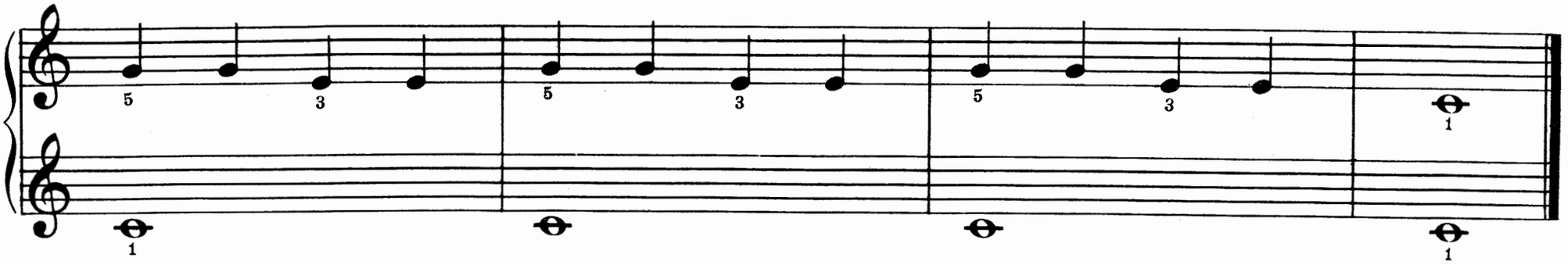
1 Learning to use both hands at once on notes *very close together*



Jumping off the Step

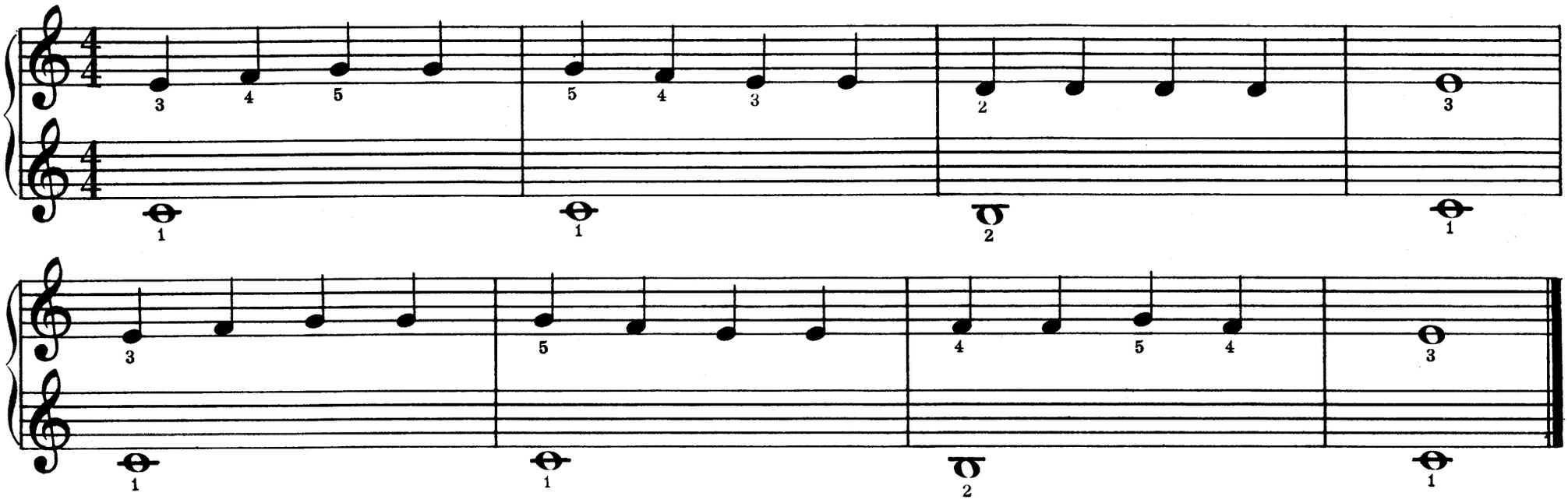
2 Extreme simplicity in left hand
New note B





Bye-O-Baby

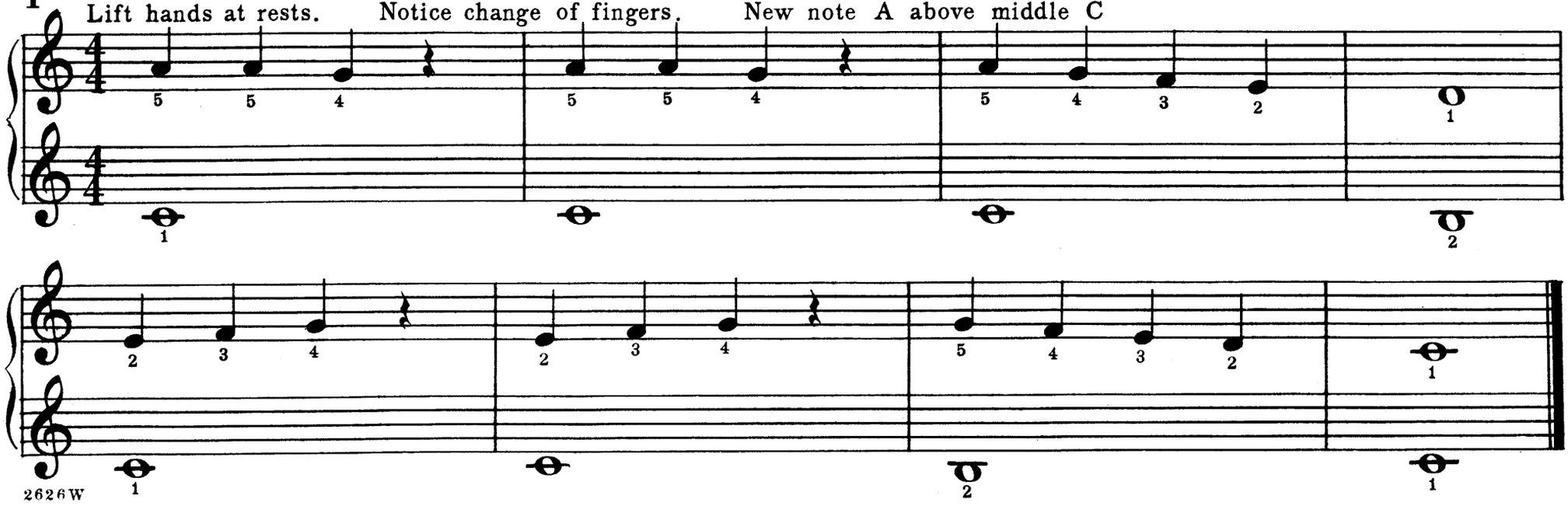
3



VI
Exercises

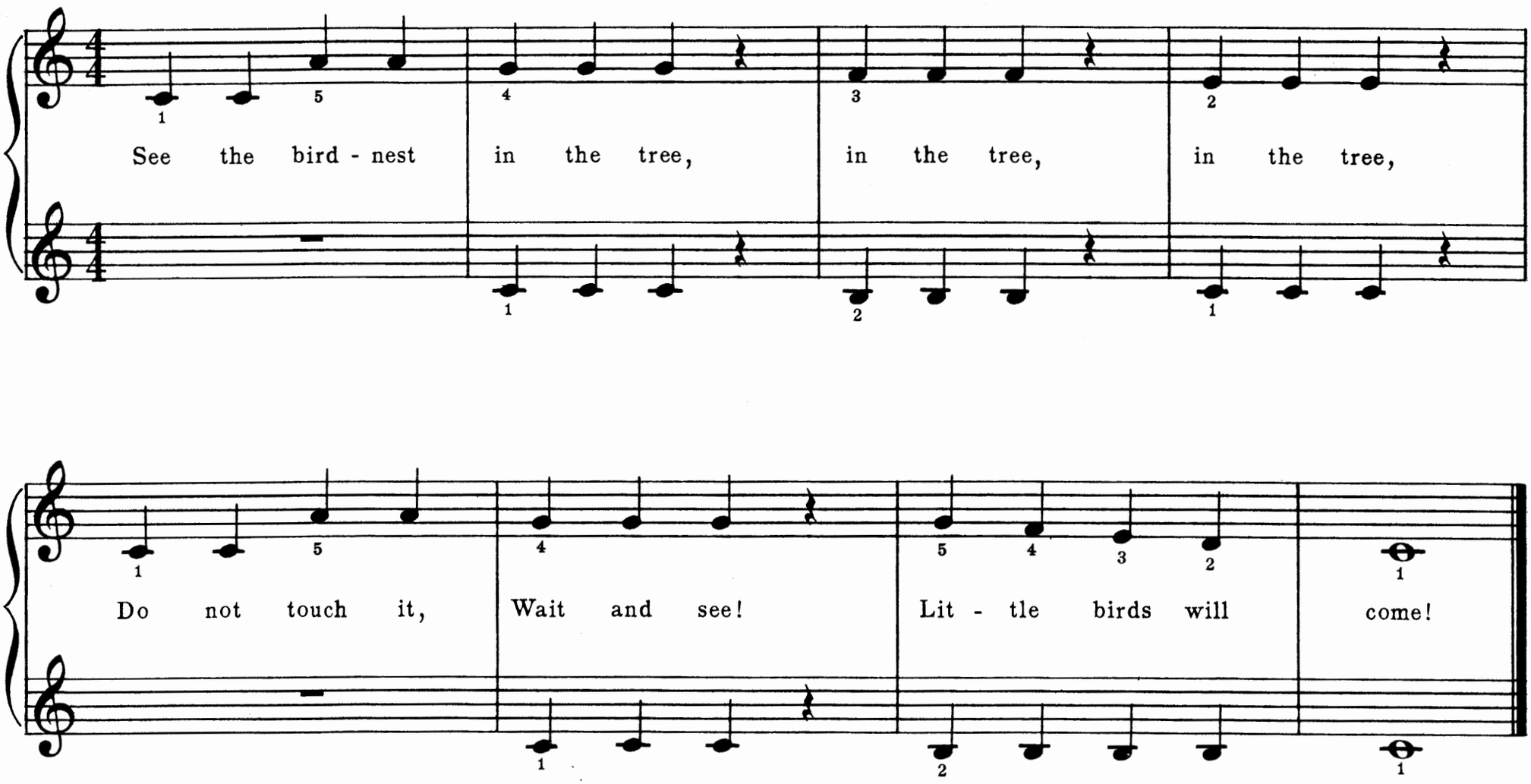
1

Lift hands at rests. Notice change of fingers. New note A above middle C



The Bird Nest

2

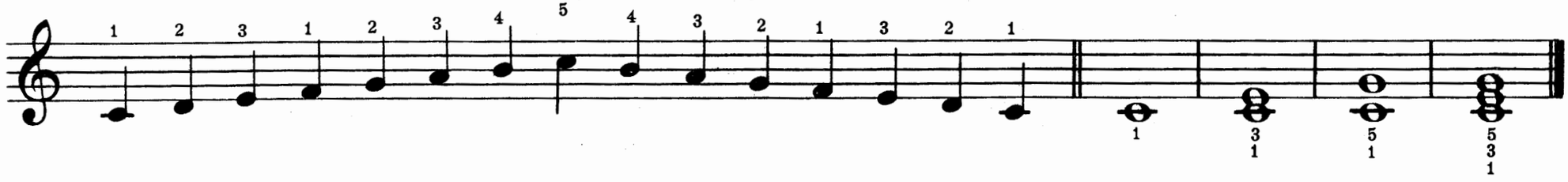


VII

New notes, B, C

Scale and chord in C major. Play in contra motion, both thumbs on middle C

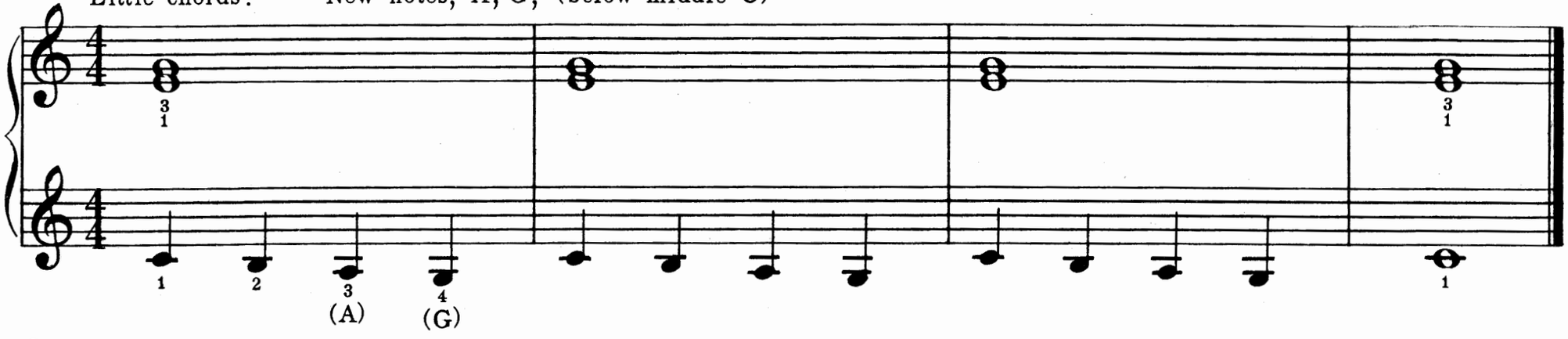
Always associate a scale with its tonic chord, from the very first



VIII

1

Little chords. New notes, A, G, (below middle C)



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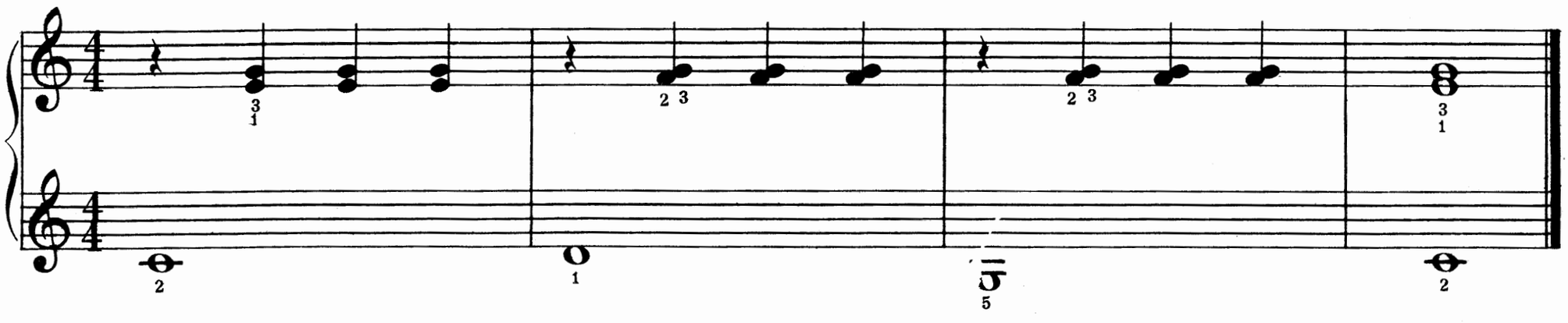
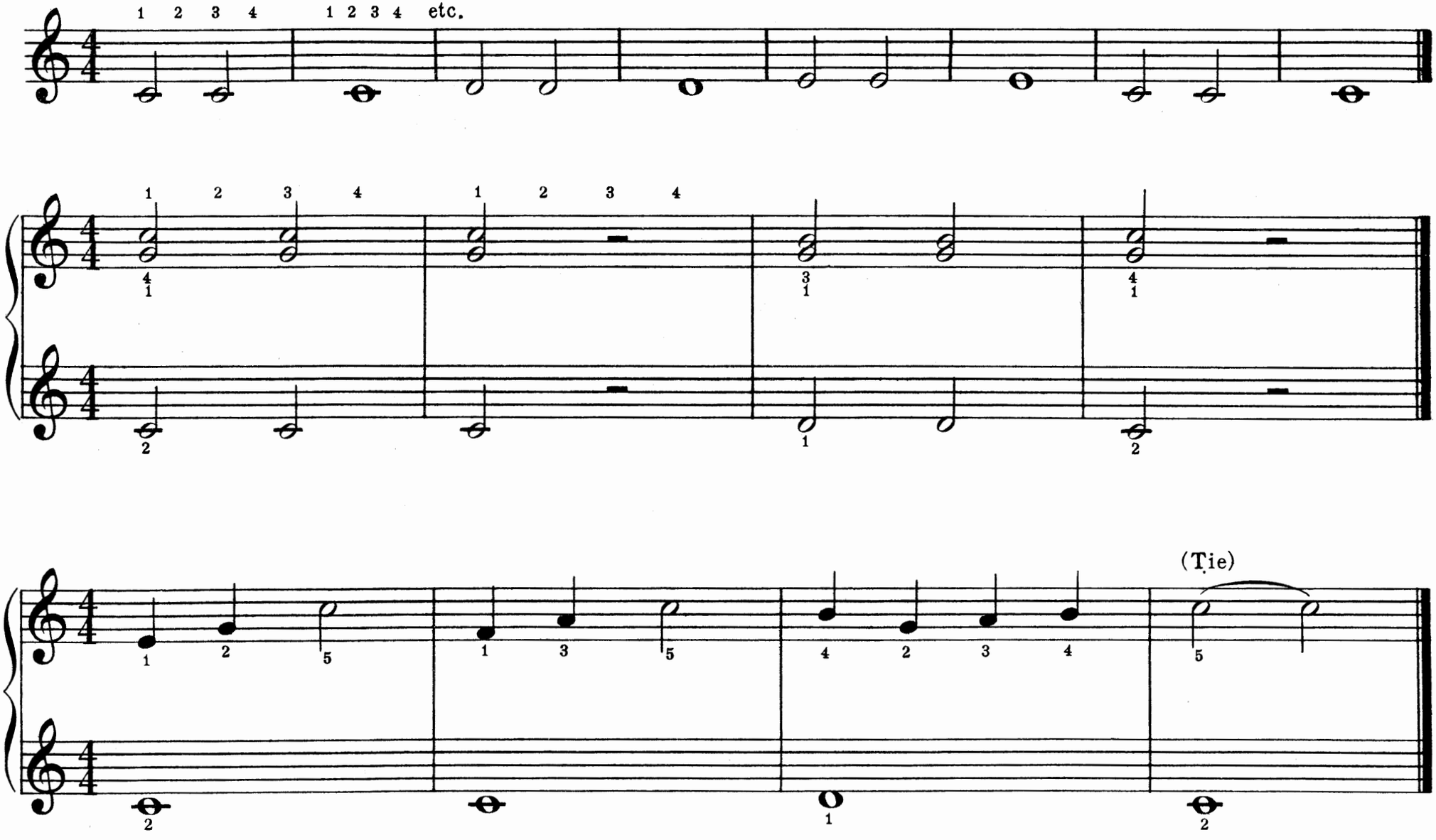


IX

Half Notes. Half Rests. Tied Notes



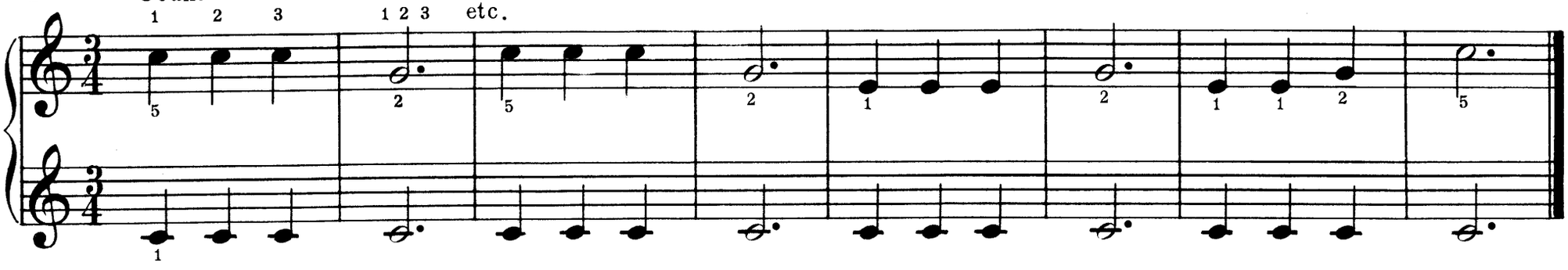
X

Exercises

Study of $\frac{3}{4}$ Time. Count three to a dotted half-note. New note D on 4th line

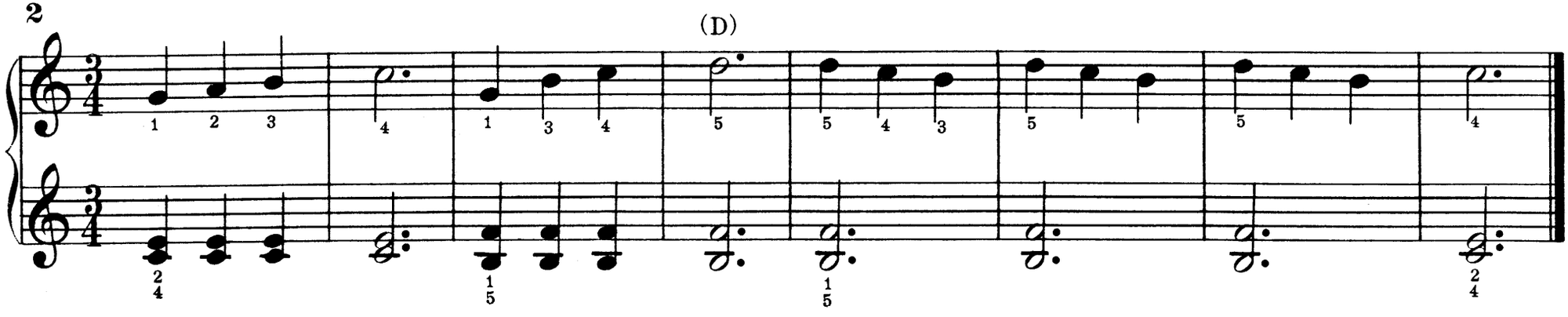
1

Count 1 2 3 1 2 3 etc.



2

(D)



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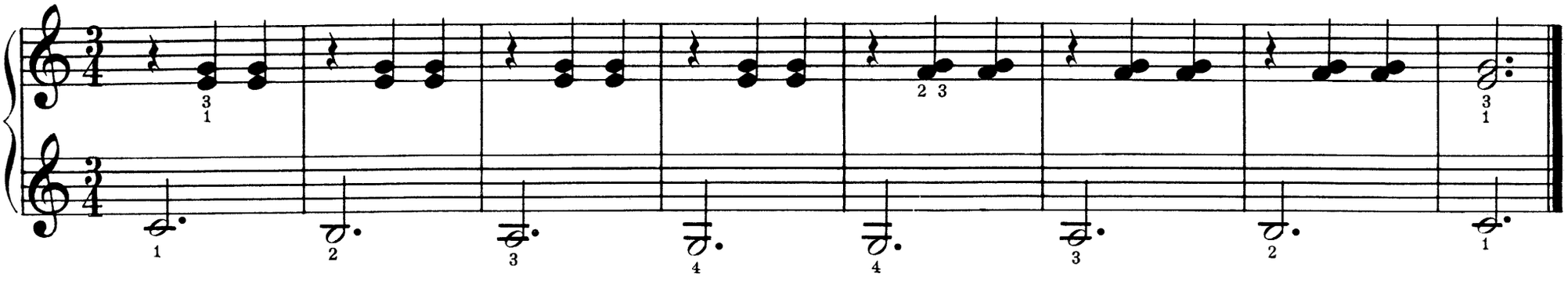
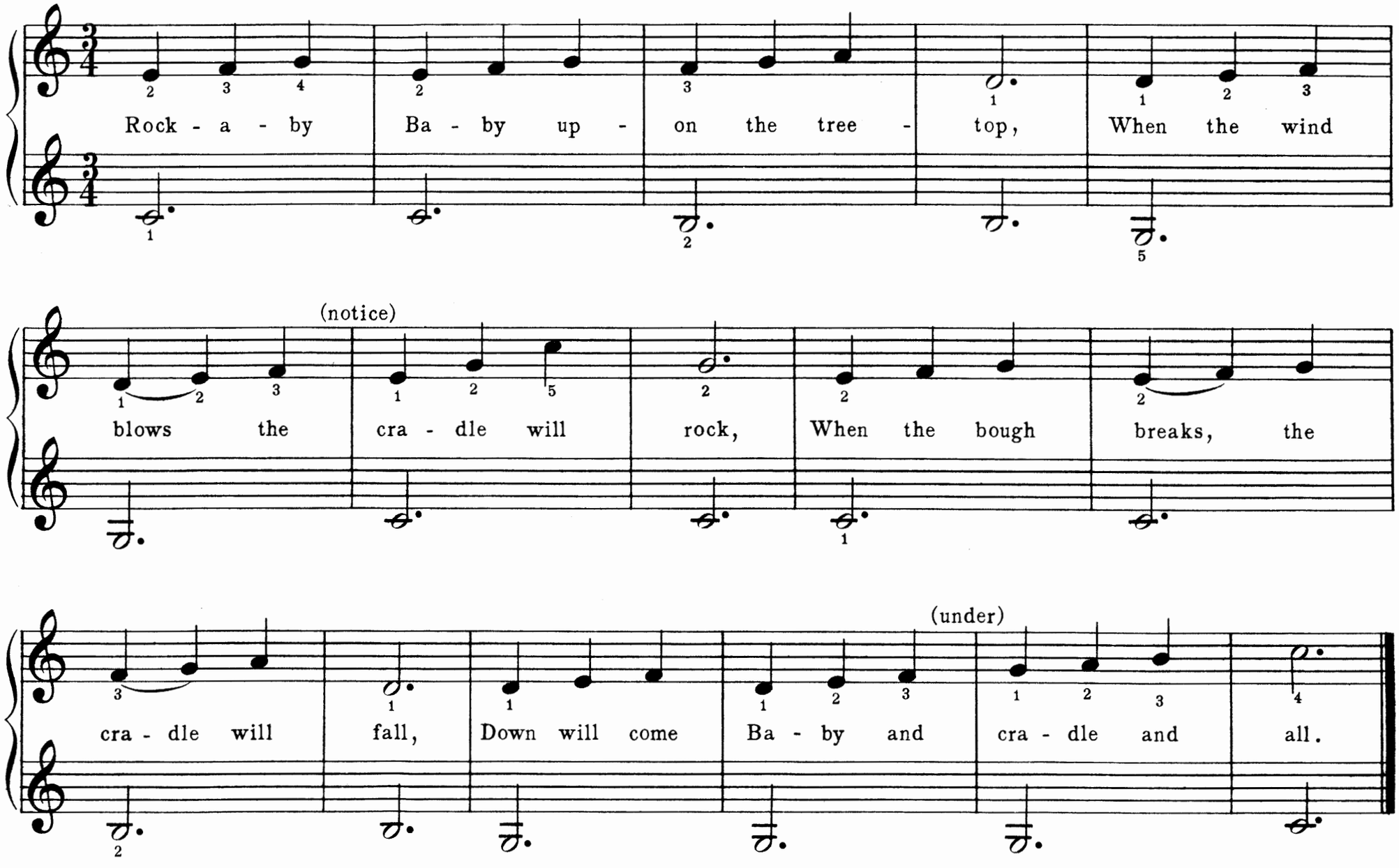


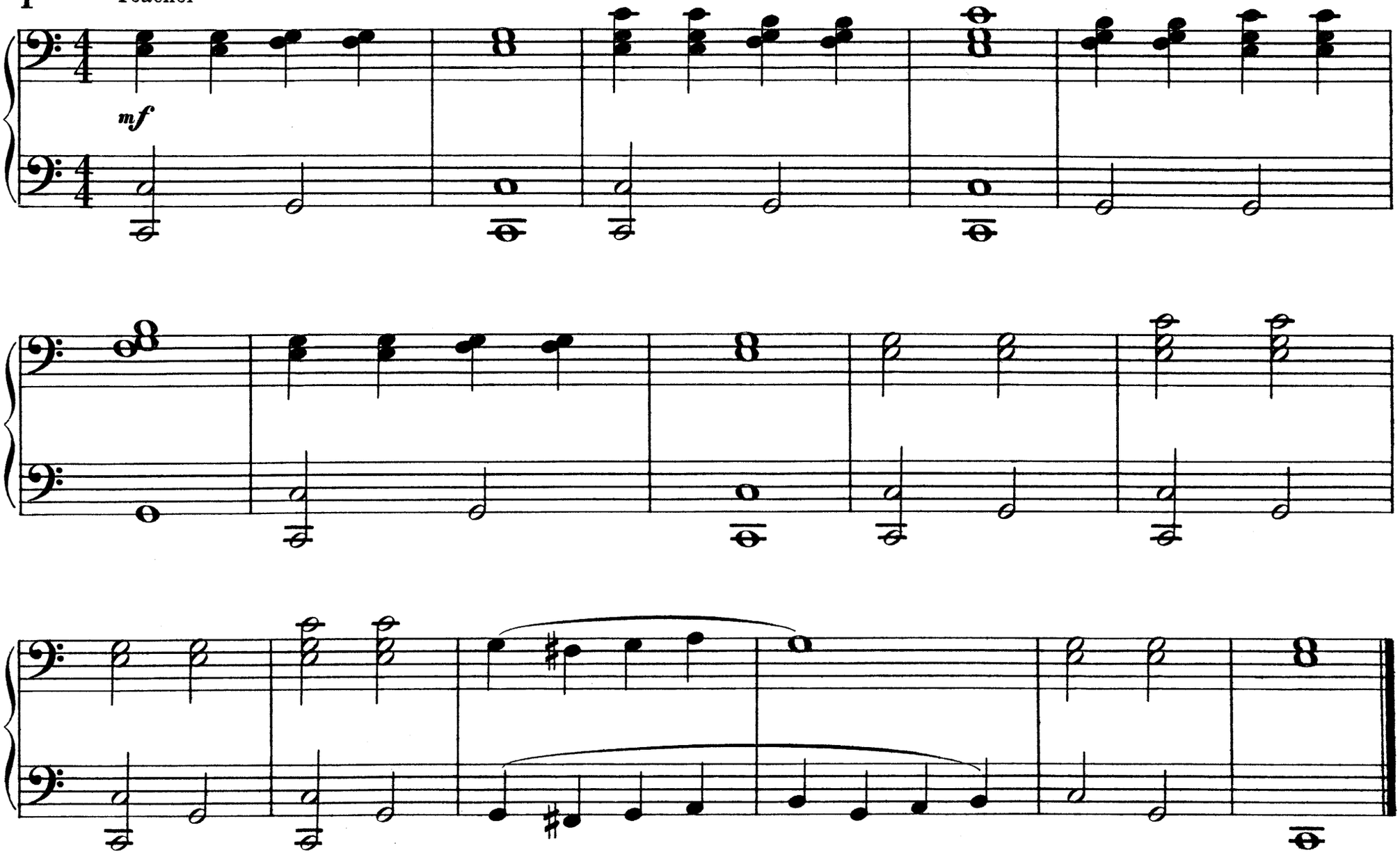
Rockaby


Rock - a - by Ba - by up - on the tree - top, When the wind
(notice)
blows the cra - dle will rock, When the bough breaks, the
(under)
cra - dle will fall, Down will come Ba - by and cra - dle and all.

XI

Duet

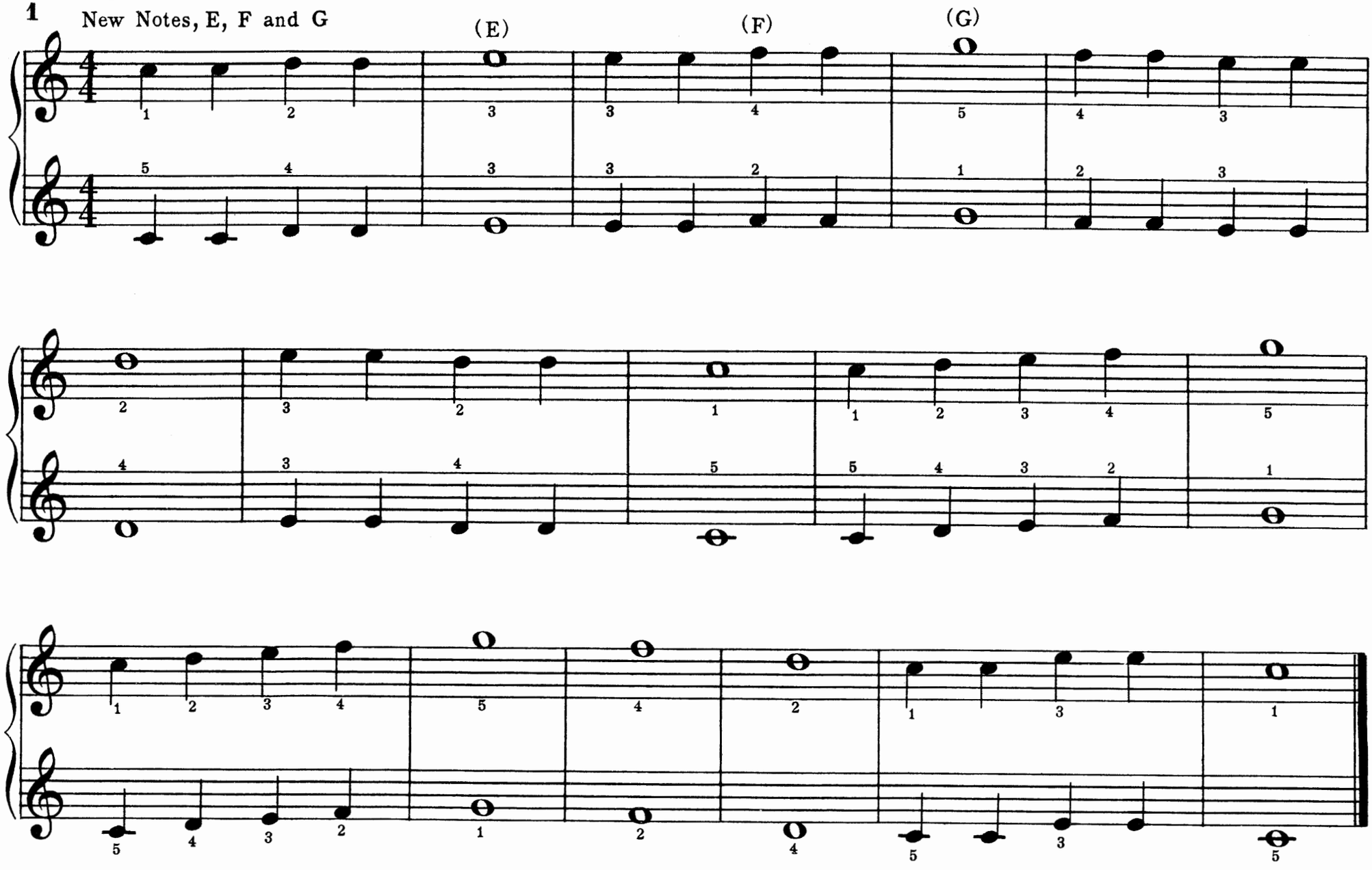
1 Teacher



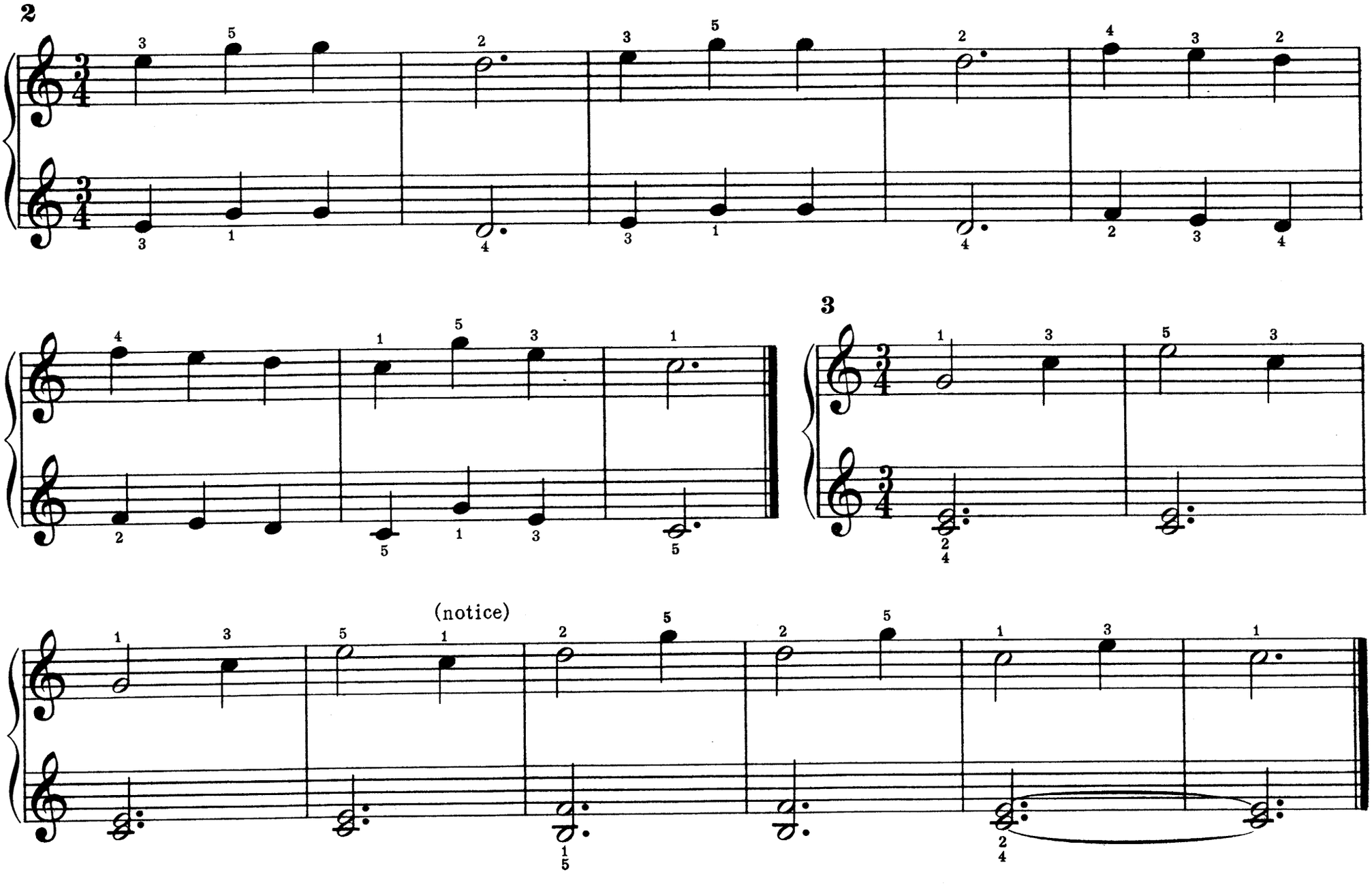
Duet

Pupil

1 New Notes, E, F and G



Exercises



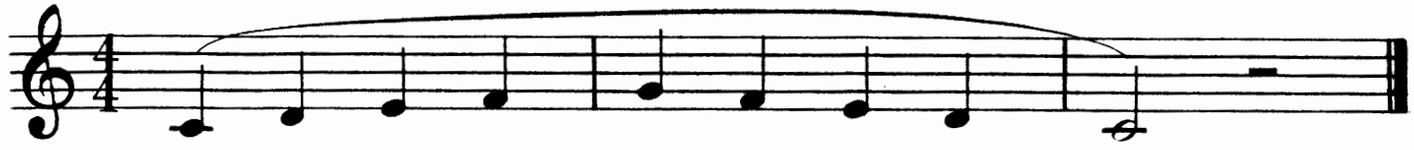
XII

Right Hand

Long and Short Touch. Explain Legato and Staccato

The difference in touch should be taught at a very early stage

1



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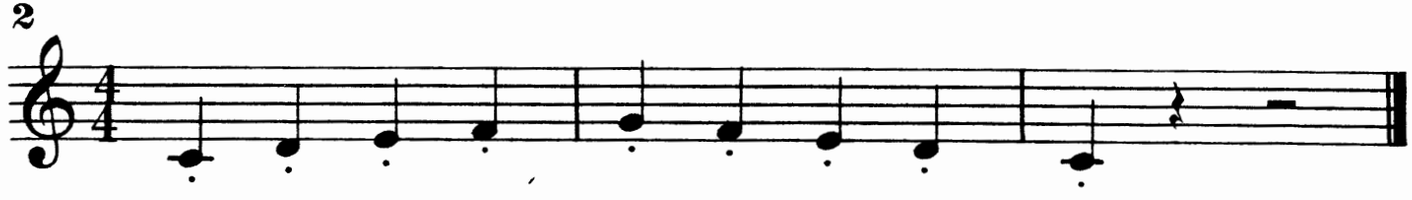

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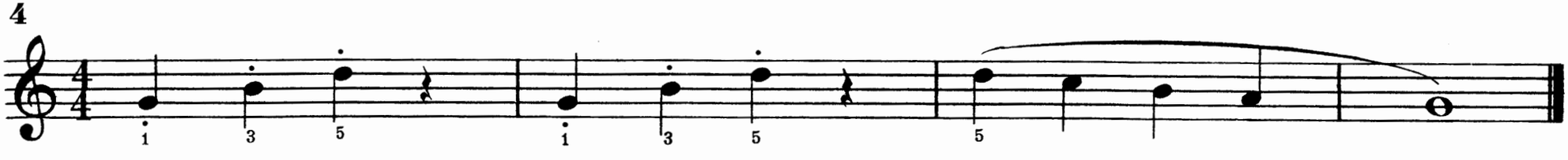
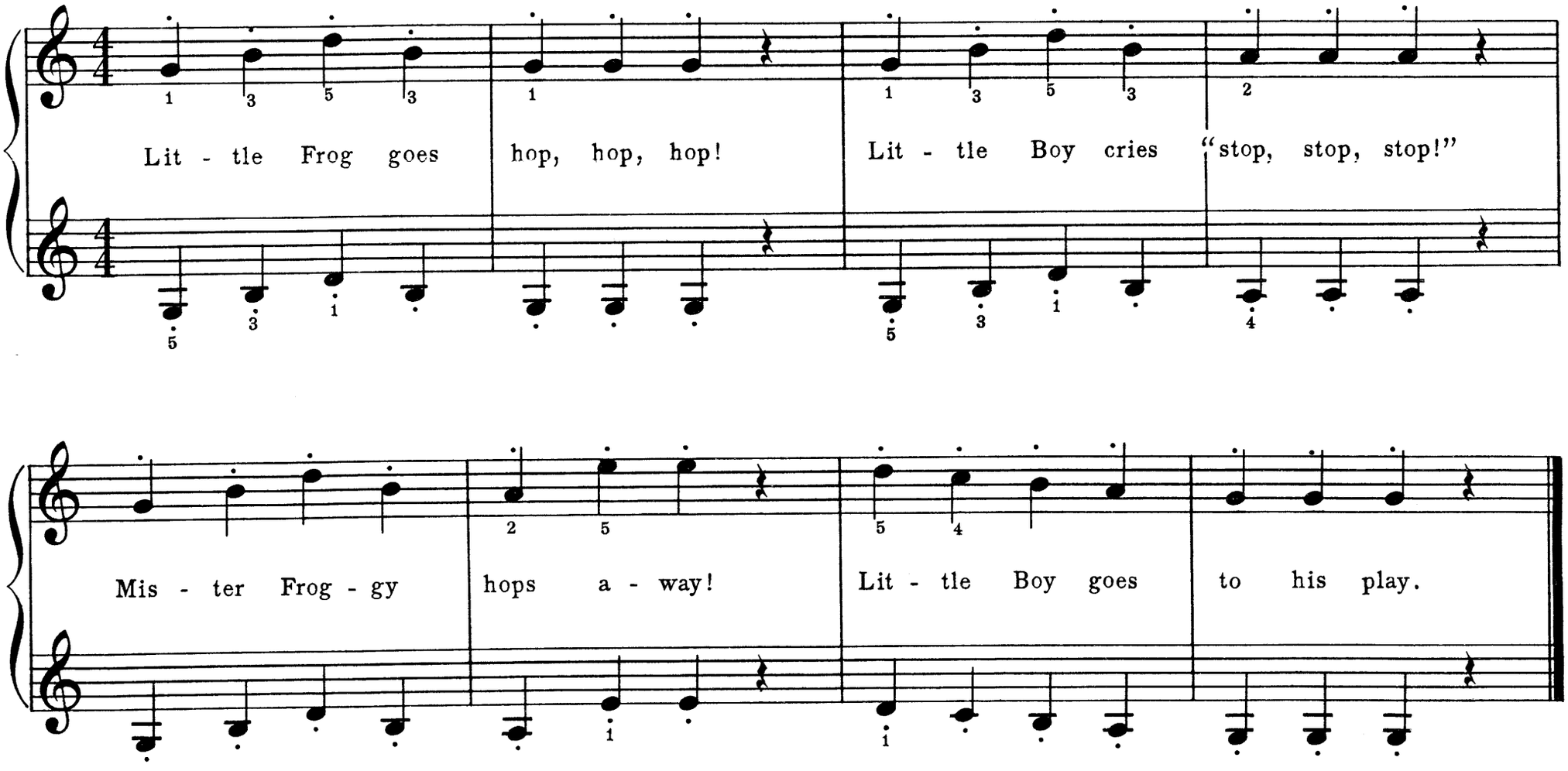
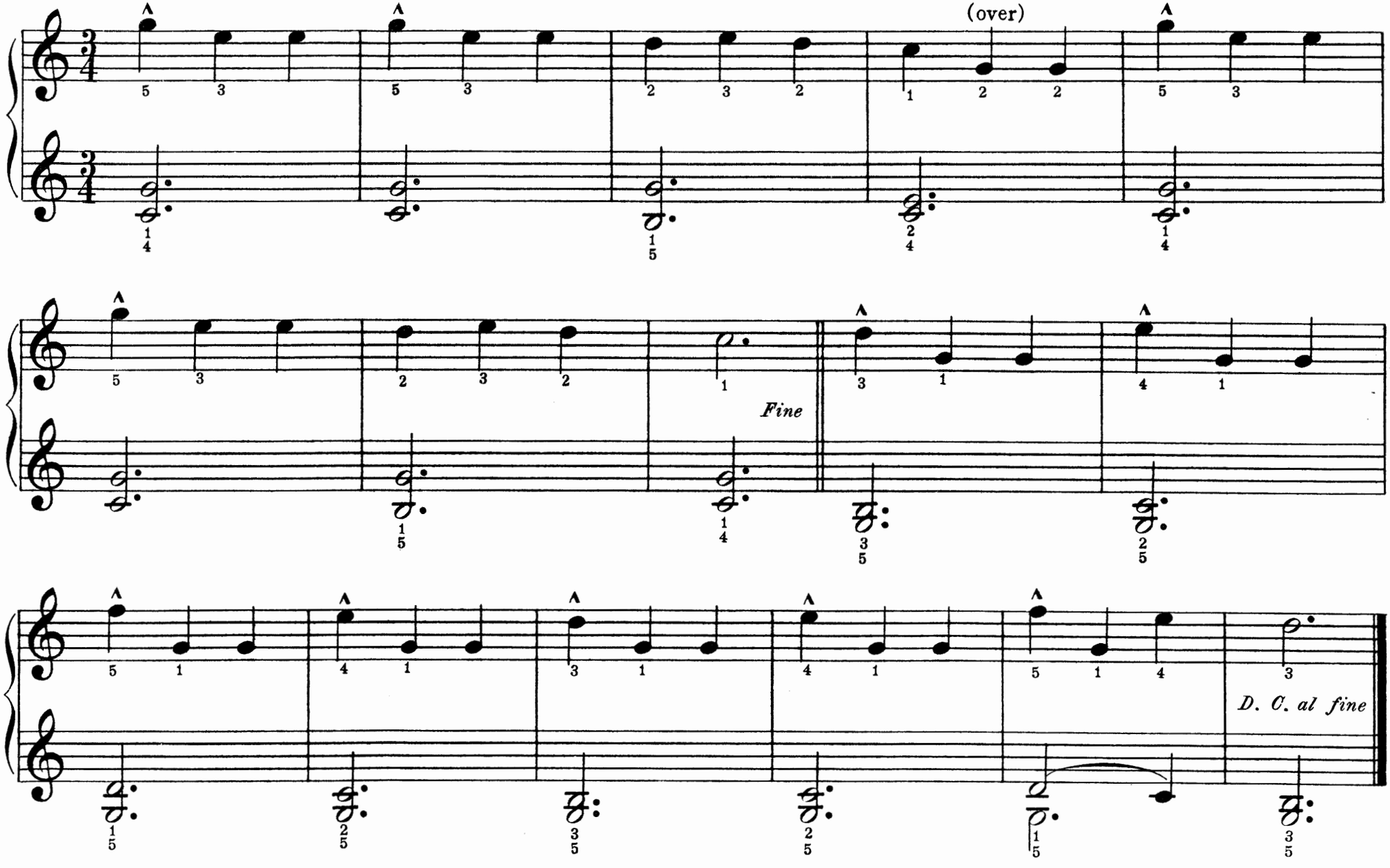


The Boy and the Frog



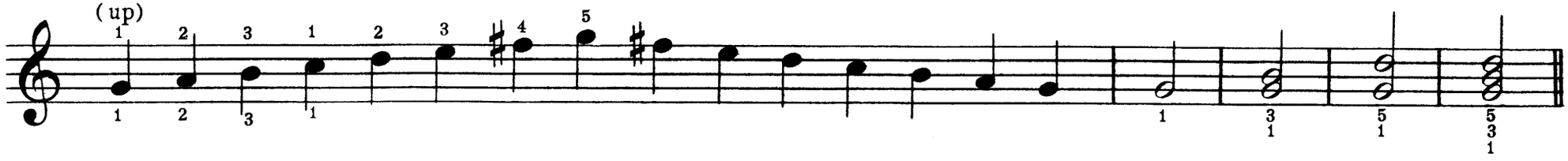
XIII
Accented Notes

The Mocking Bird



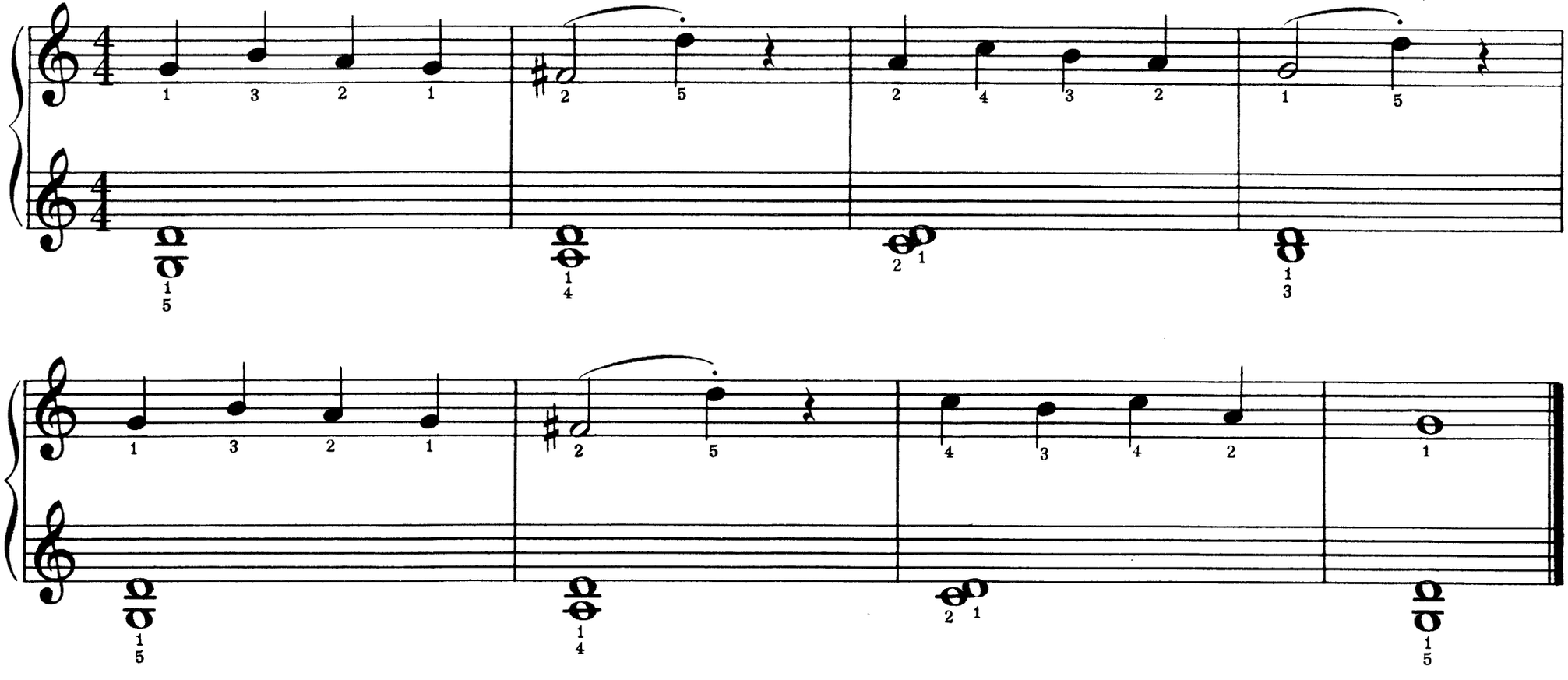
XIV

Play in contra motion. Both thumbs on G
Scale and chord in G major



Little Pieces built from the G major scale

1 Best to defer for a while the use of the G signature

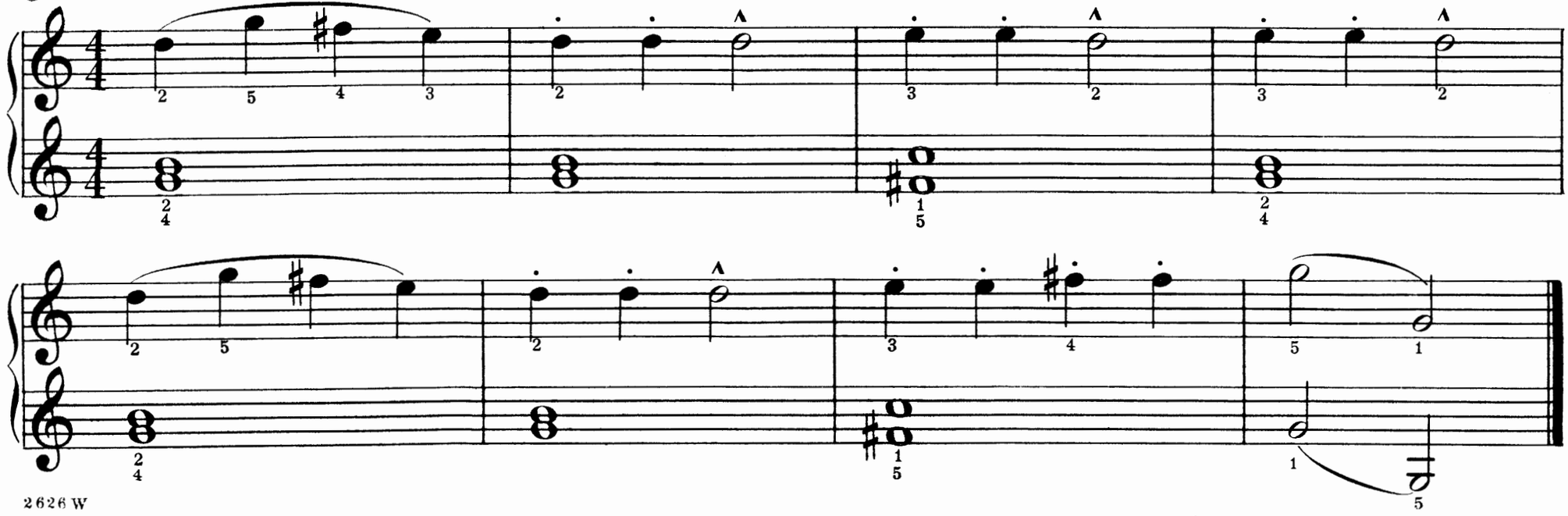


Exercise - Play Legato

2

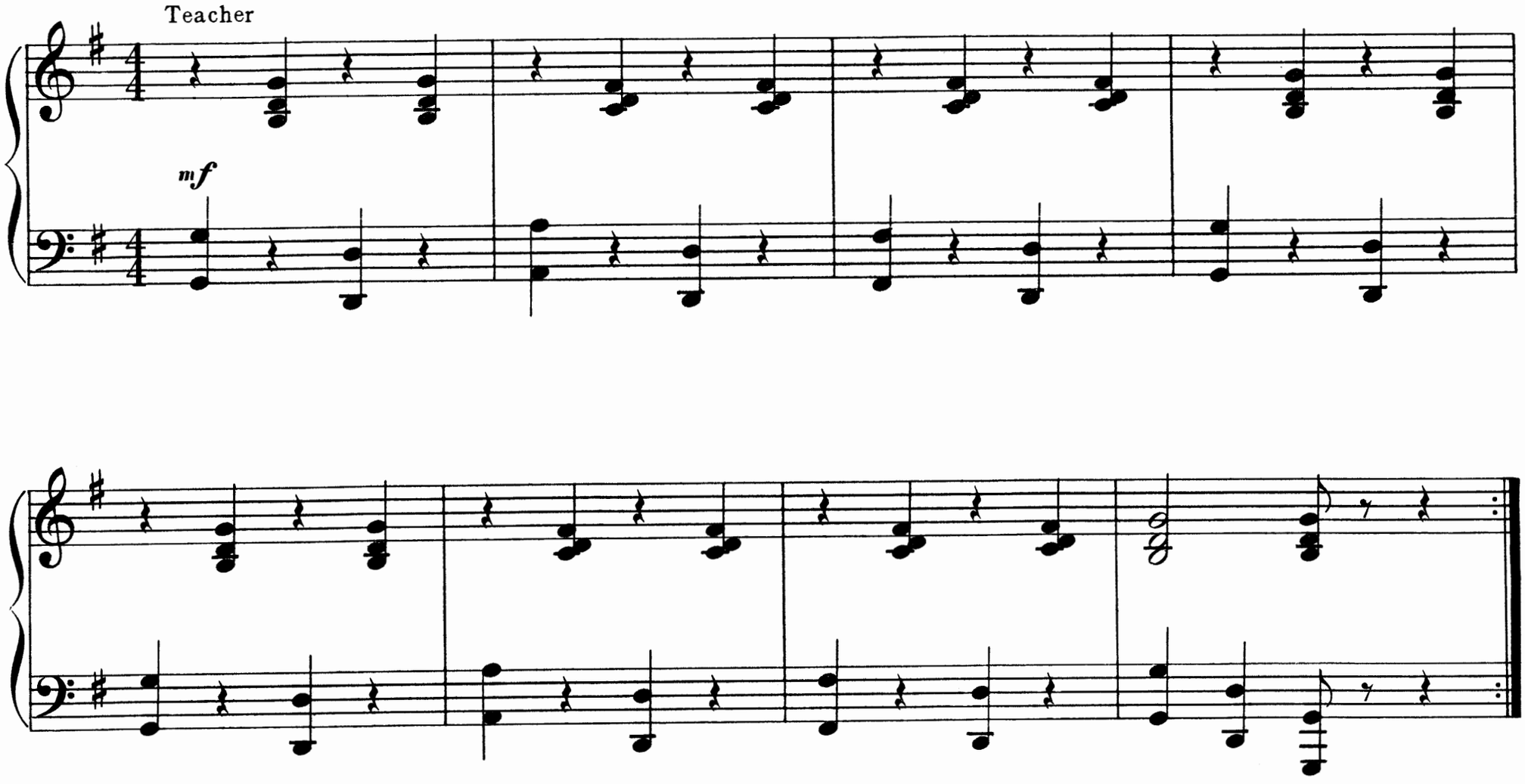
The Merry-Go-Round

3



Duet

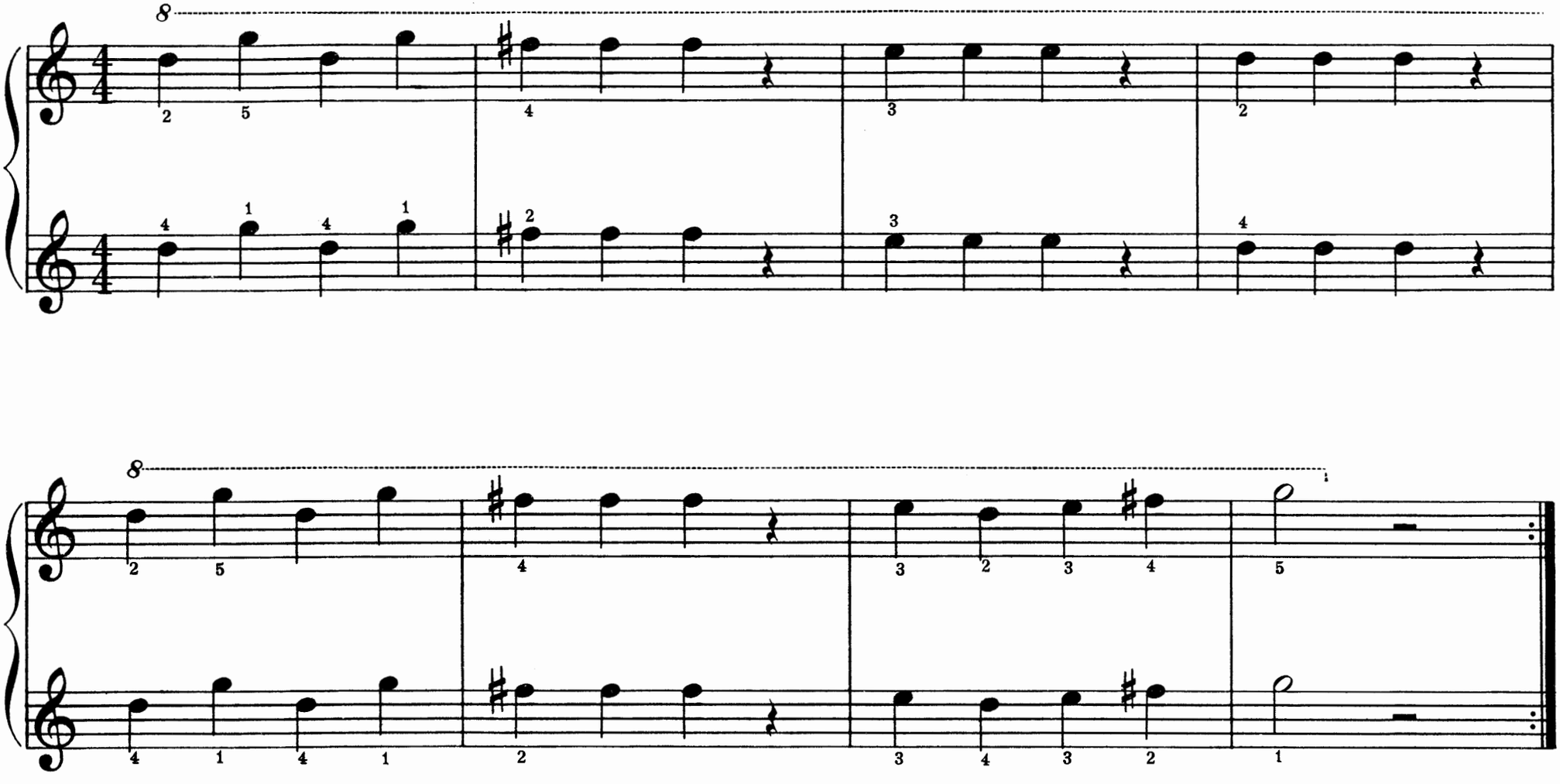
Johnny - Jump - Up



Duet

Johnny - Jump - Up

Pupil

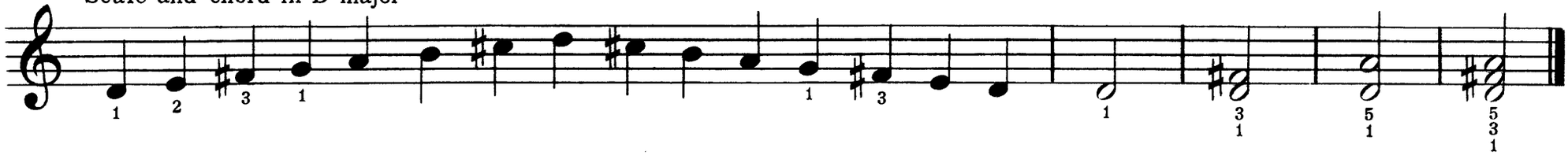


Part II

At the completion of this course, the pupil should be ready to begin the study of any standard First Grade Book, starting with the introduction of bass notes.

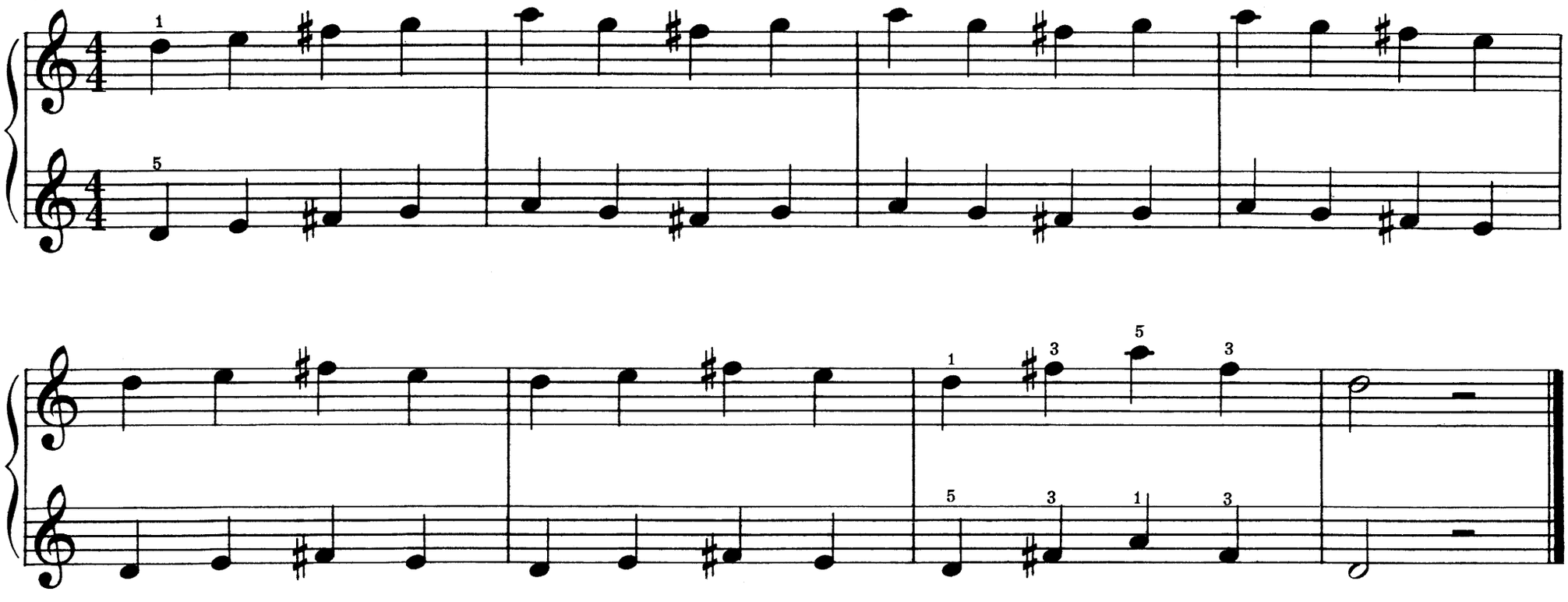
I

Scale and chord in D major



Exercise

1

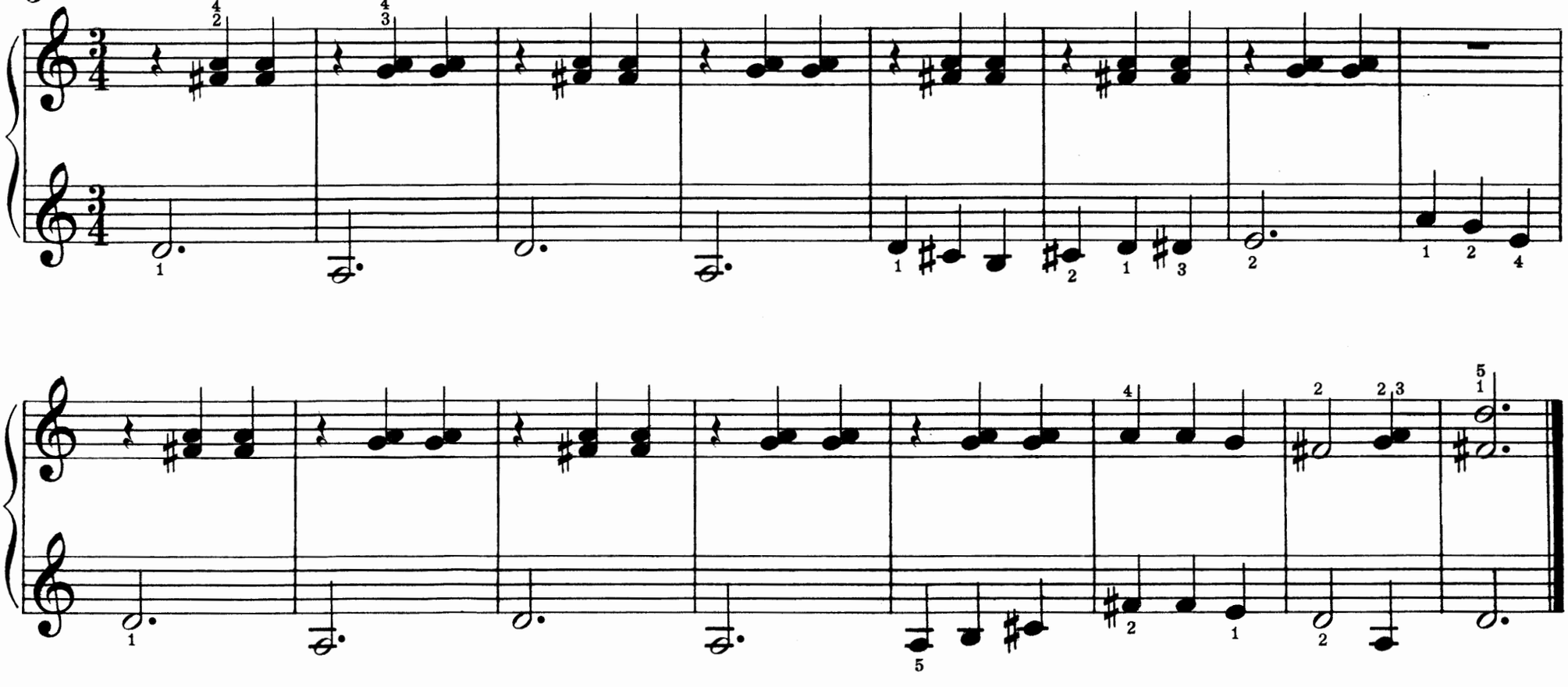


2

Right hand

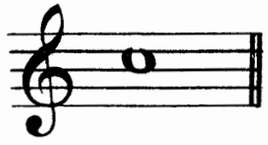
Swinging

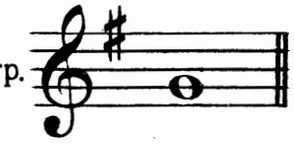
3

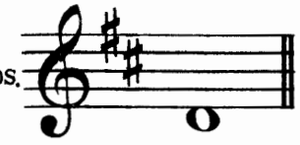


II

From this point, teach signatures.

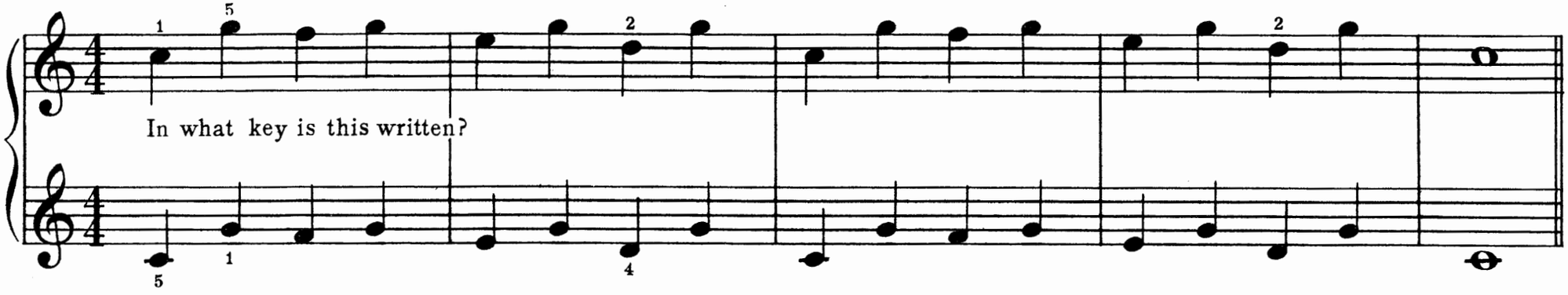
C major has no sign. 

G major has one sharp. 

D major has two sharps. 

Exercises

1



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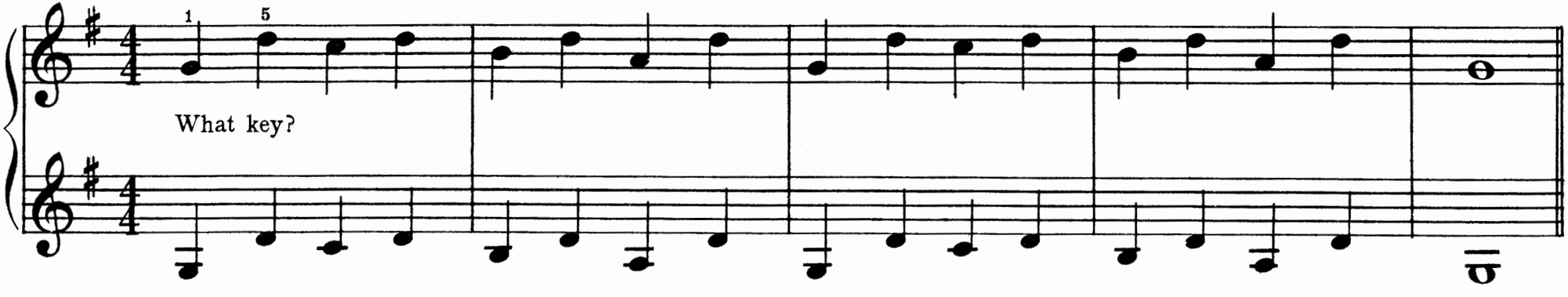

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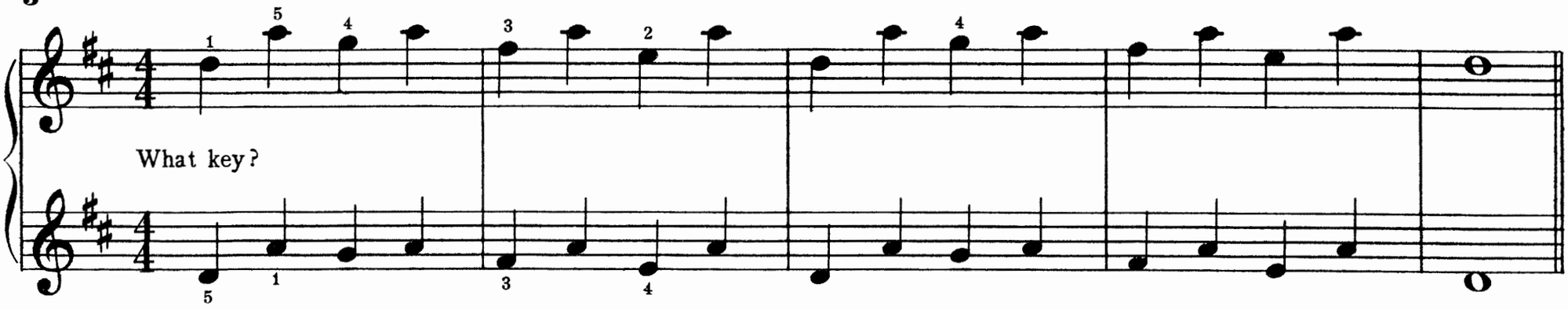


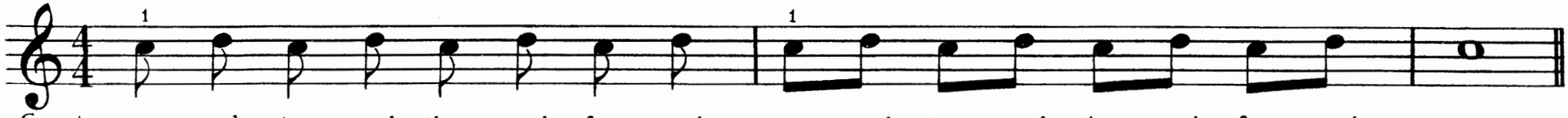
Pupils should write in their tablets the signatures learned until thoroughly familiar with them.

III

Right hand

Introducing Eighth Notes

1



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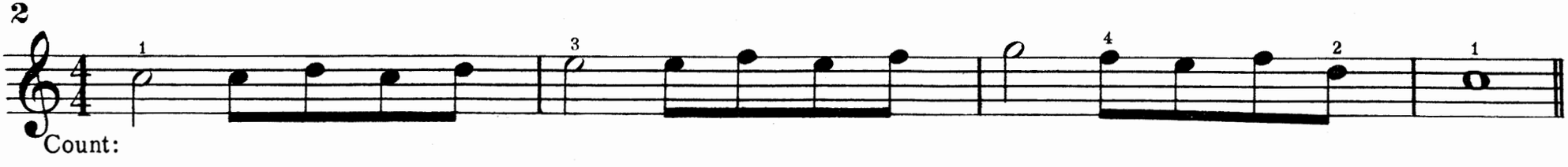
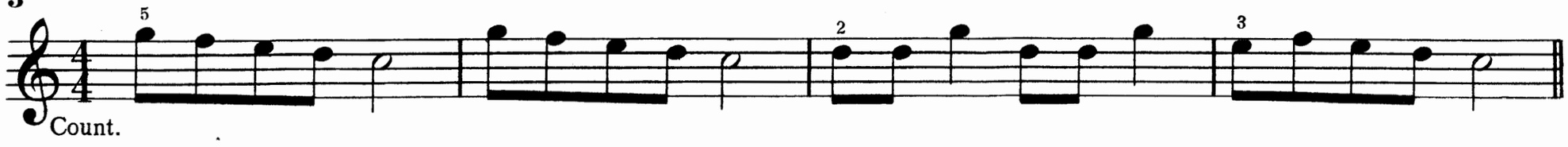


148500

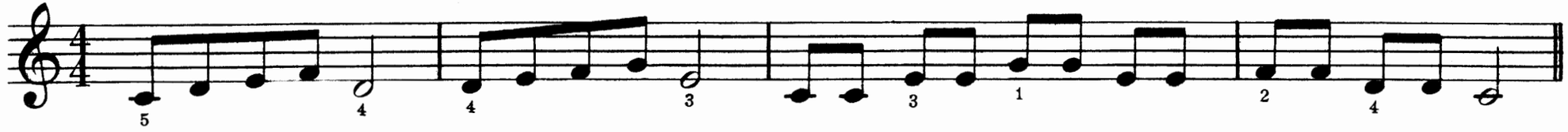
Right hand

3



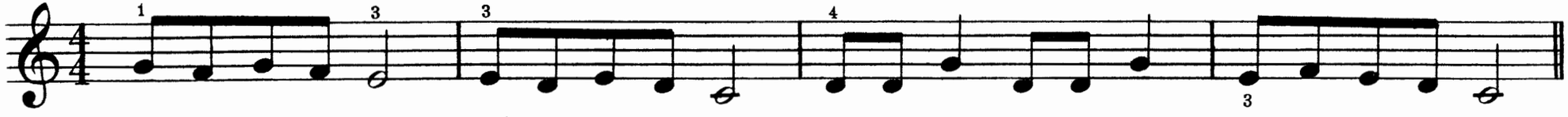
Left hand

4



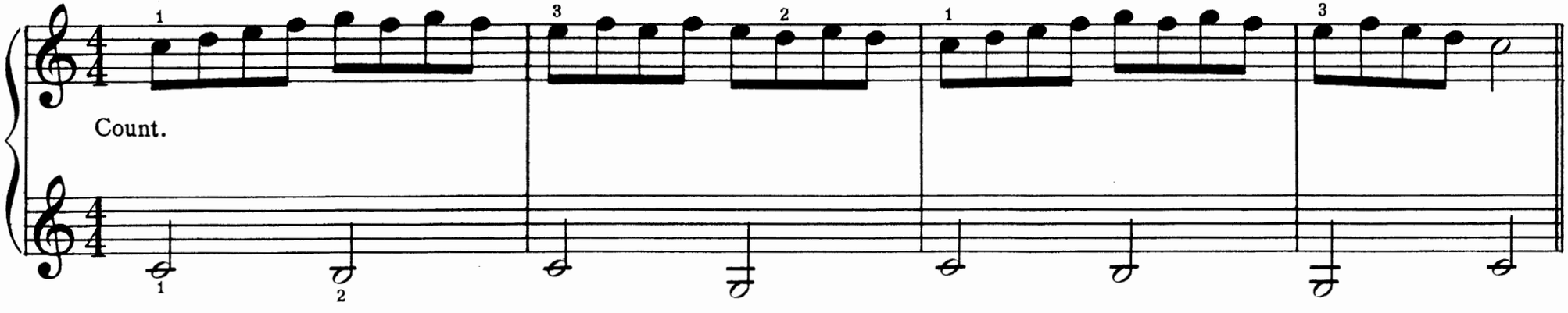
Left hand

5



What key?

6



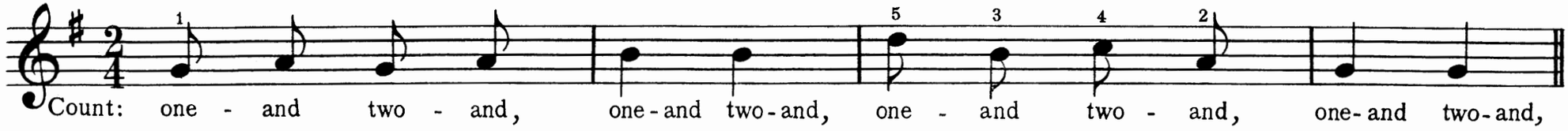
IV

Exercises

Introducing $\frac{2}{4}$ time

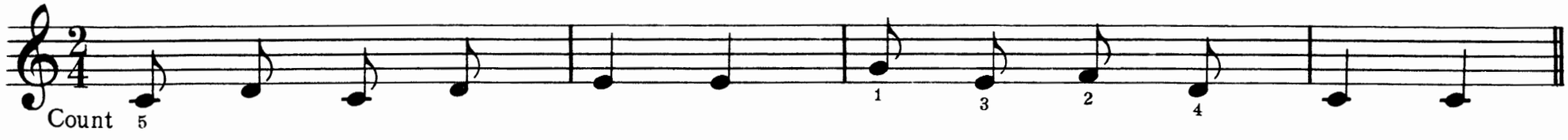
Right hand

1



Left hand

2



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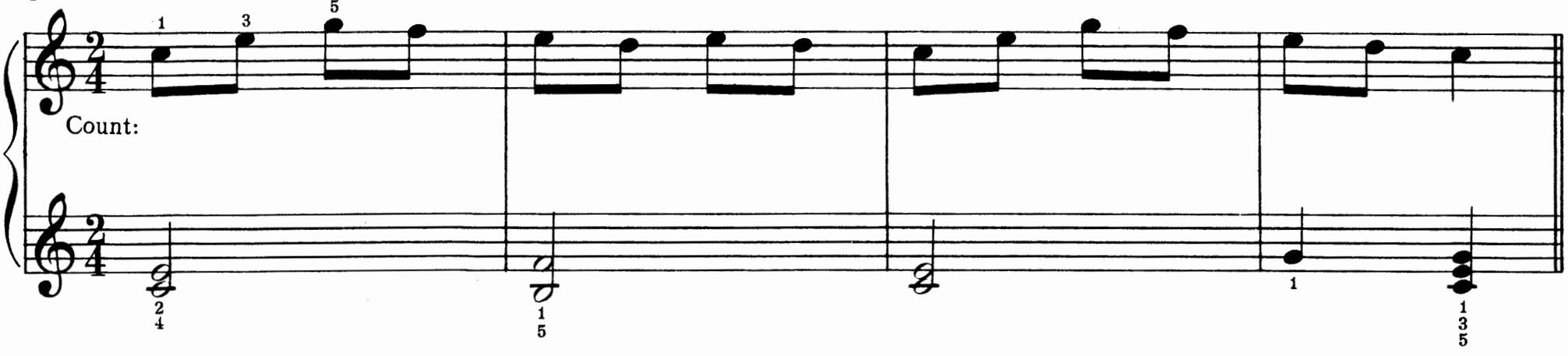
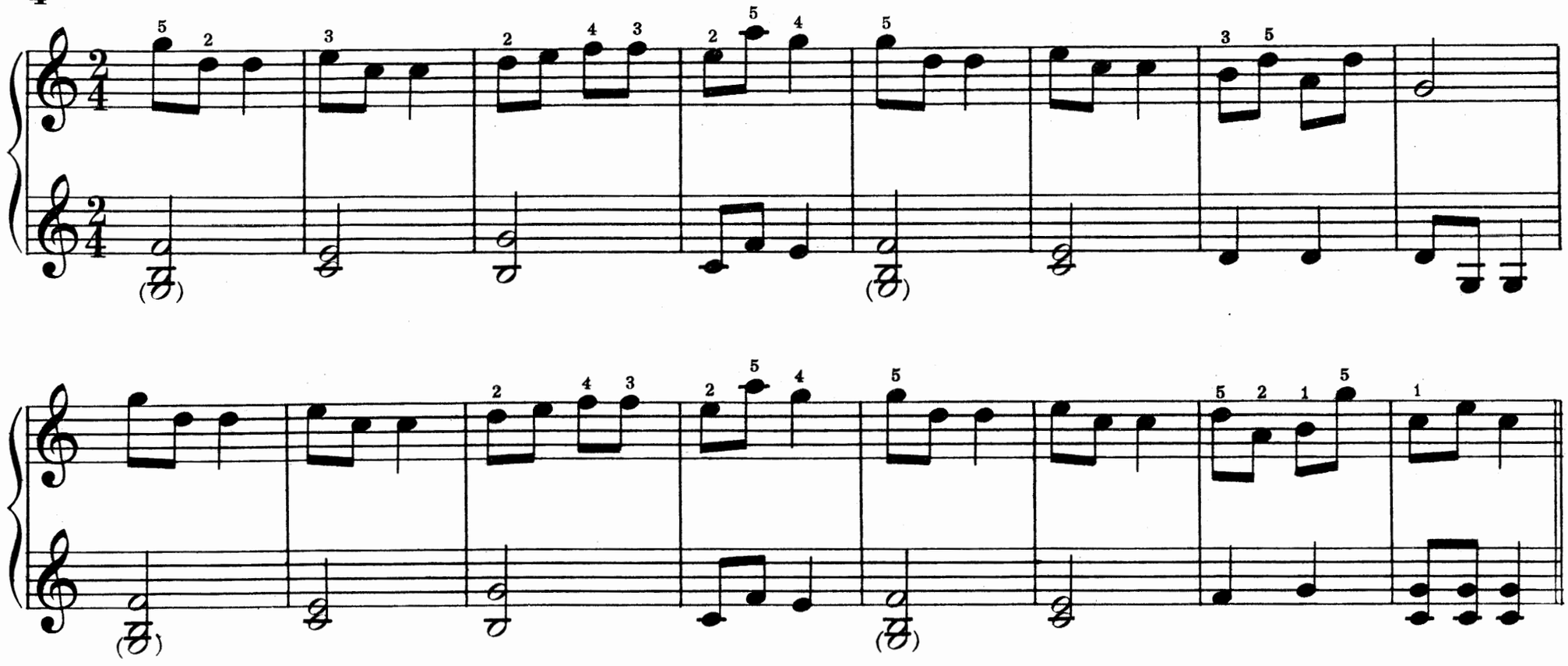


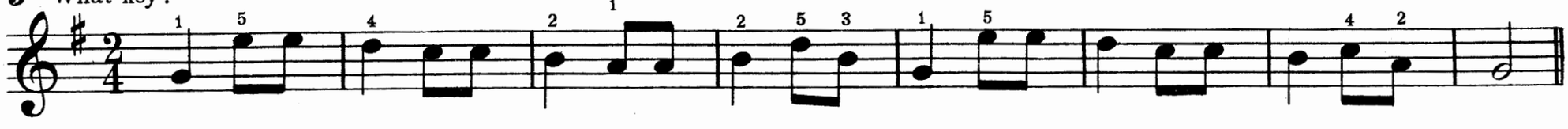
Blue-bird Polka

4



Right hand

5 What key?

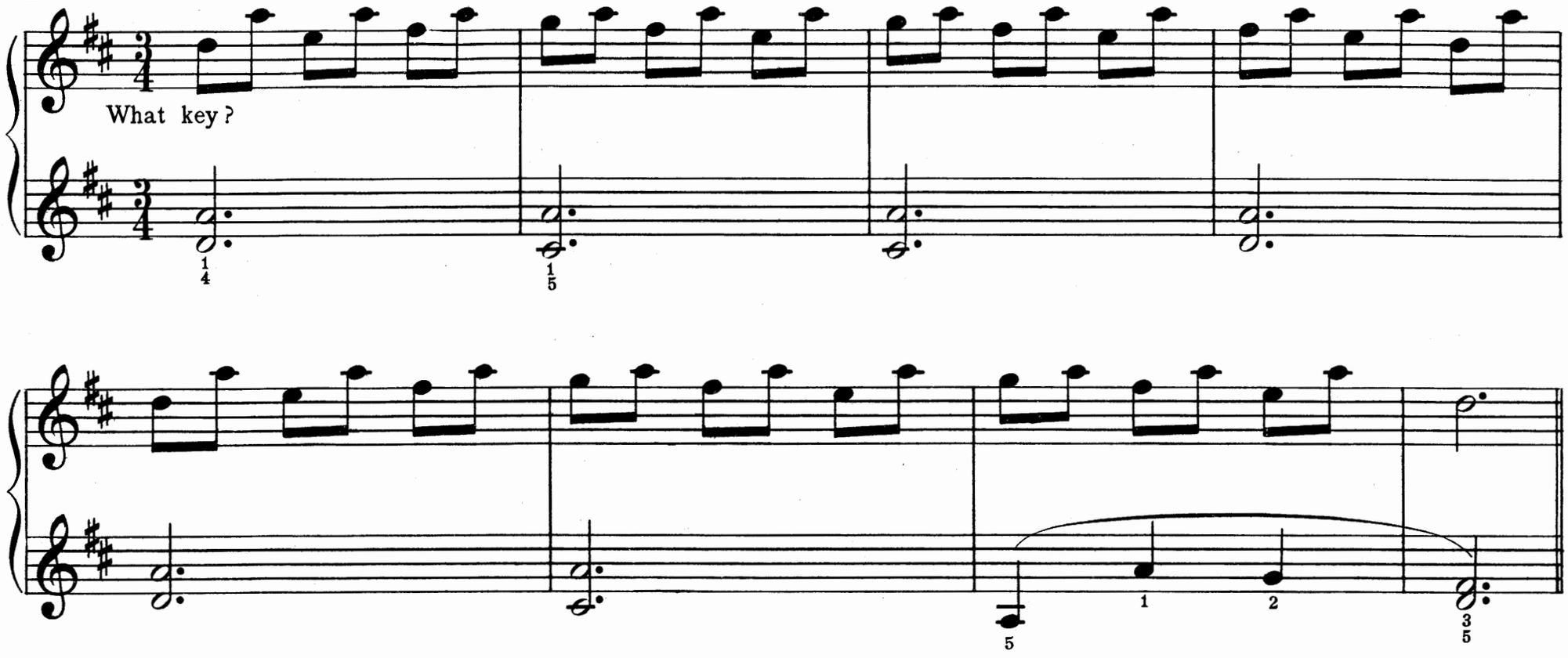


V

Exercises

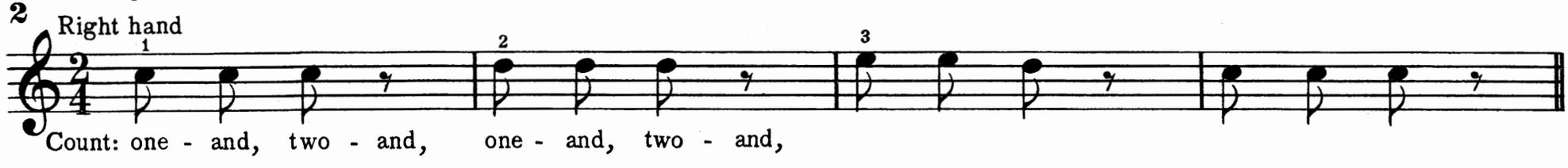
Introducing the eighth rest

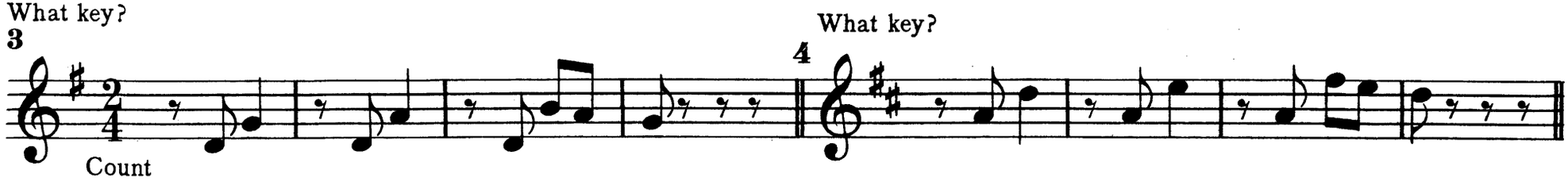
1



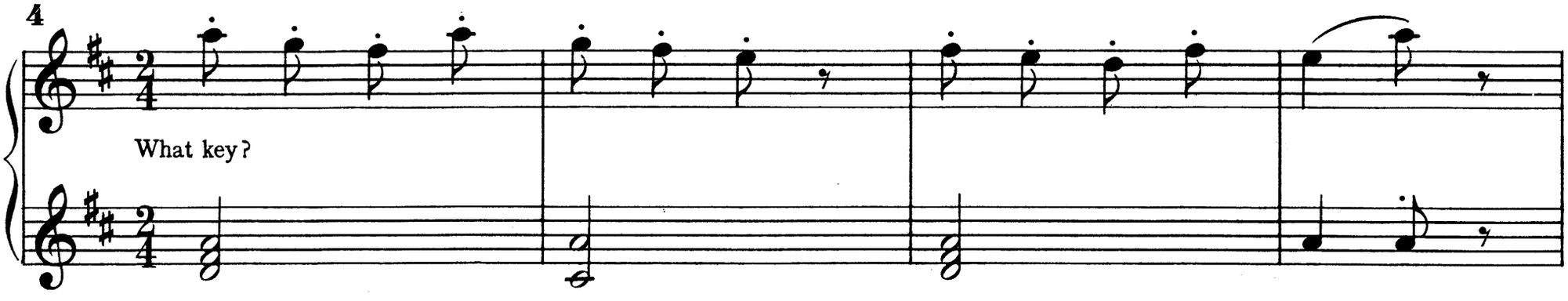
Explain eighth rest

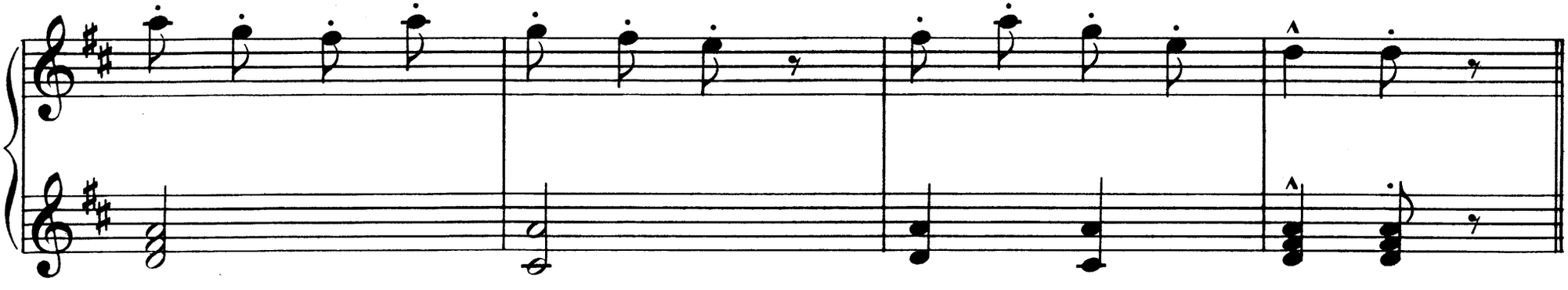
2





Playing Grown-up

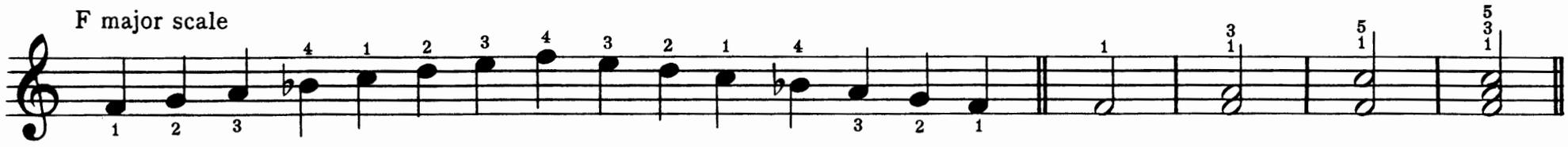




VI

Introducing key of F major

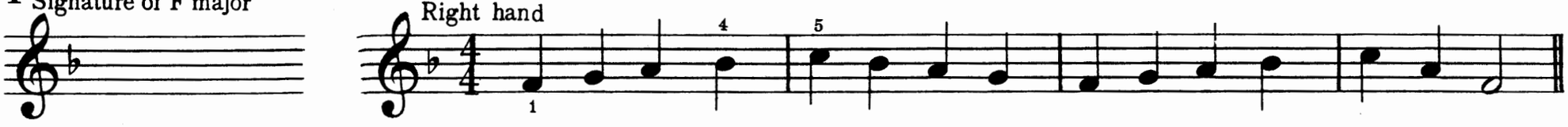
F major scale



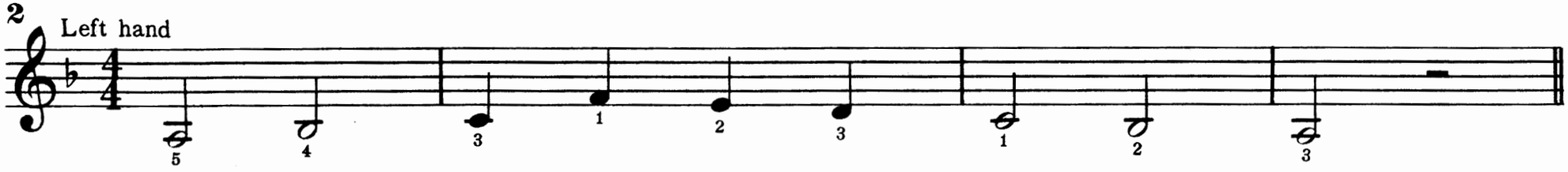
Exercises

1 Signature of F major

Right hand

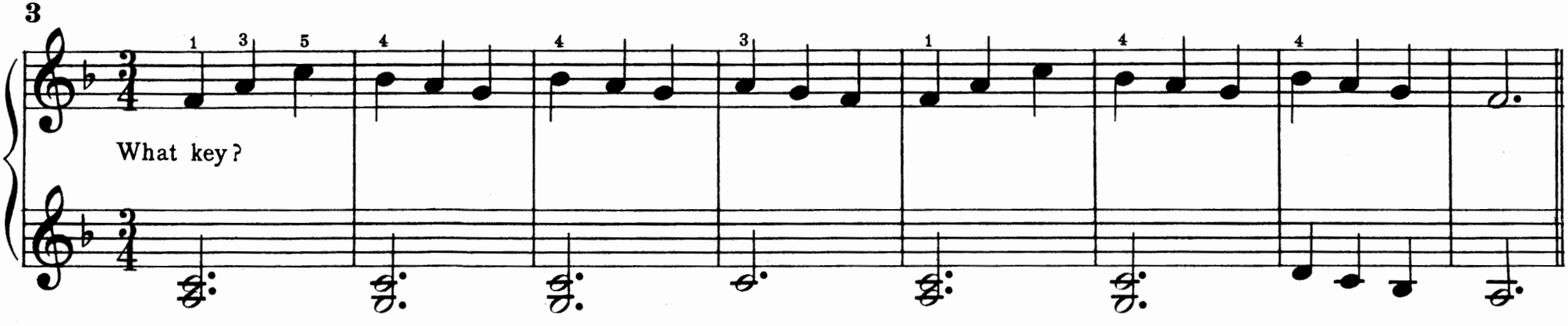


2 Left hand

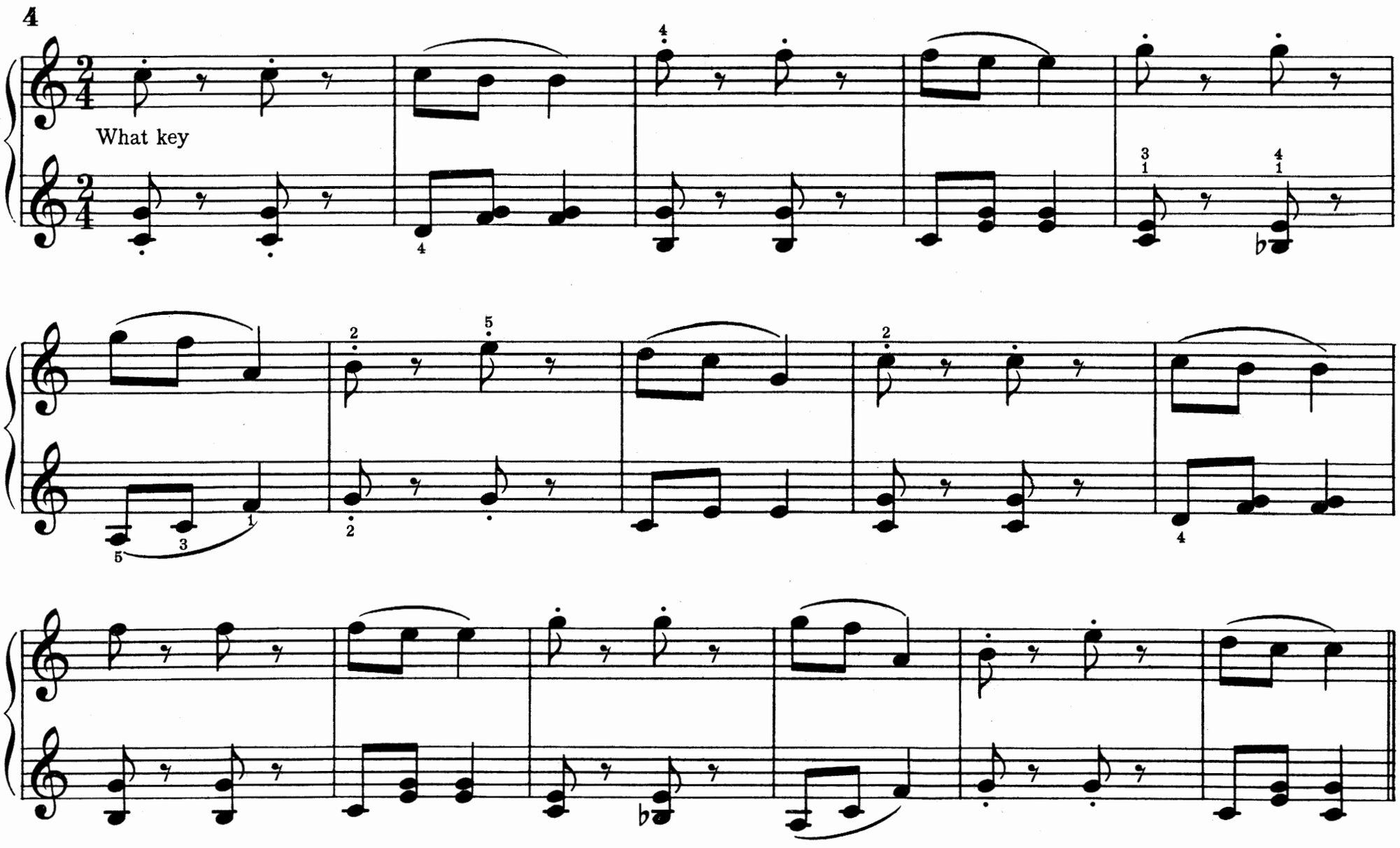


3

What key?

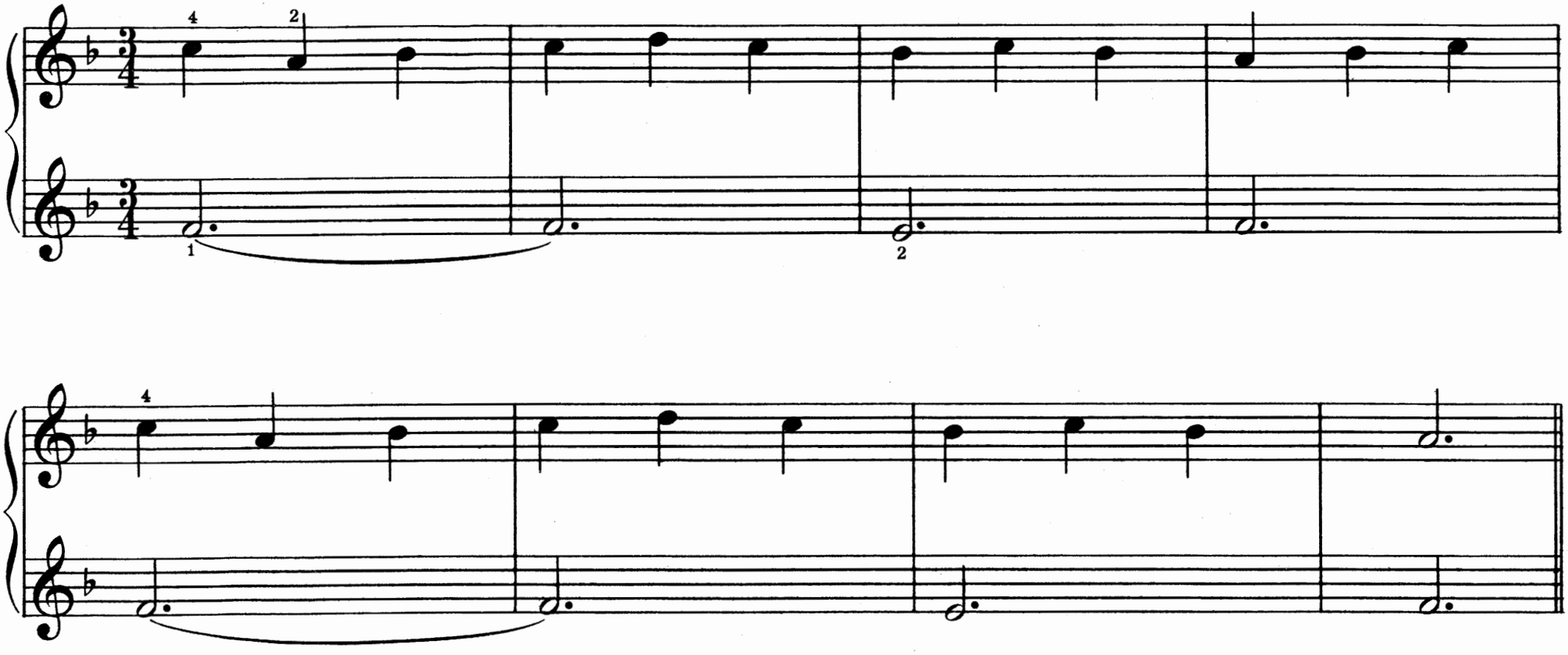


The Little Robin



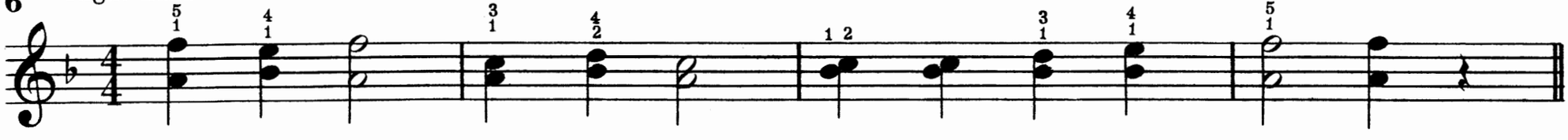
Exercises

5



Chord study

6 Right hand

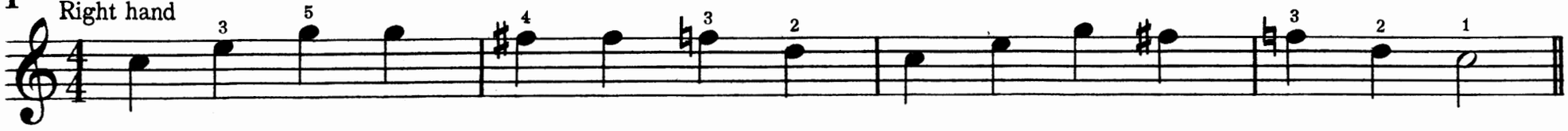


VII

Explain accidentals

1

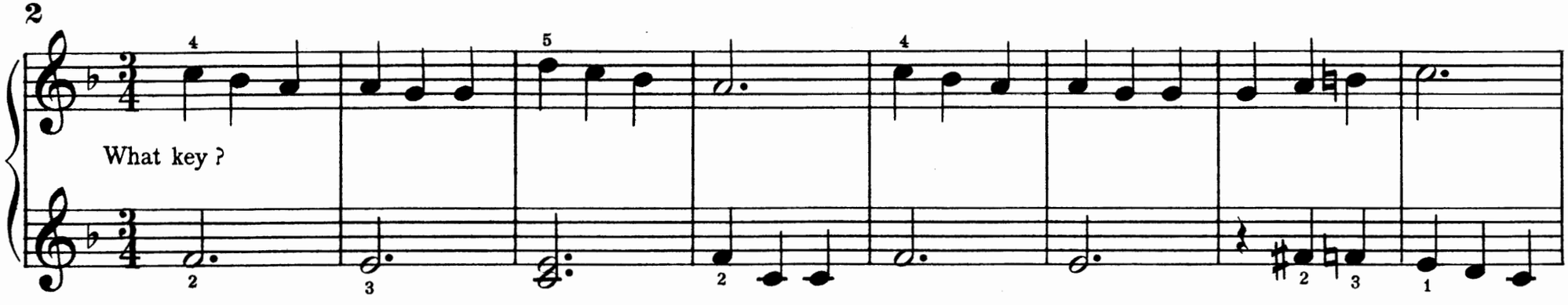
Right hand

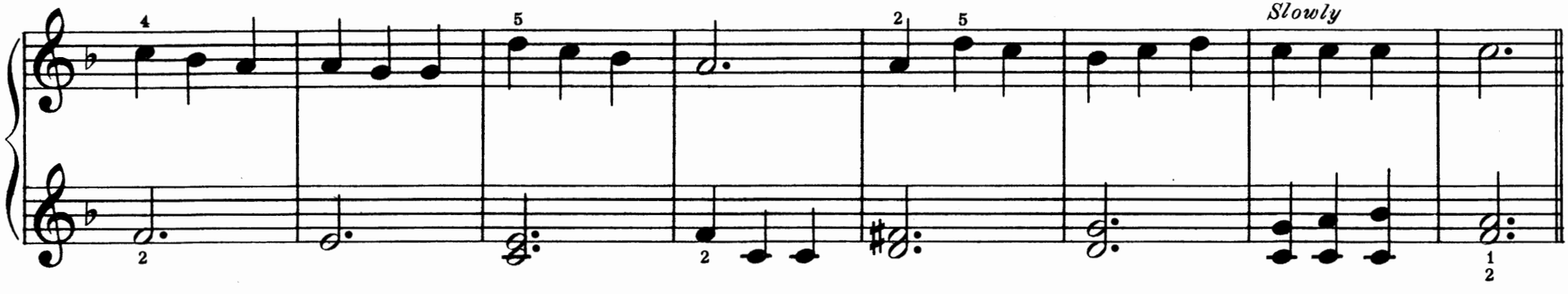


A Little Melody

2

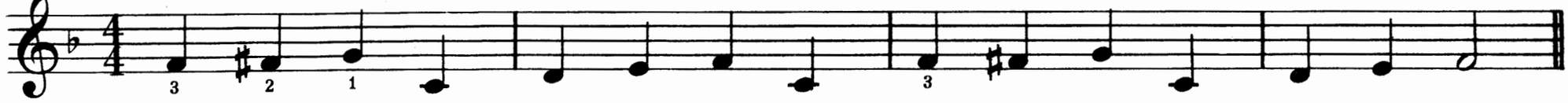
What key ?





3

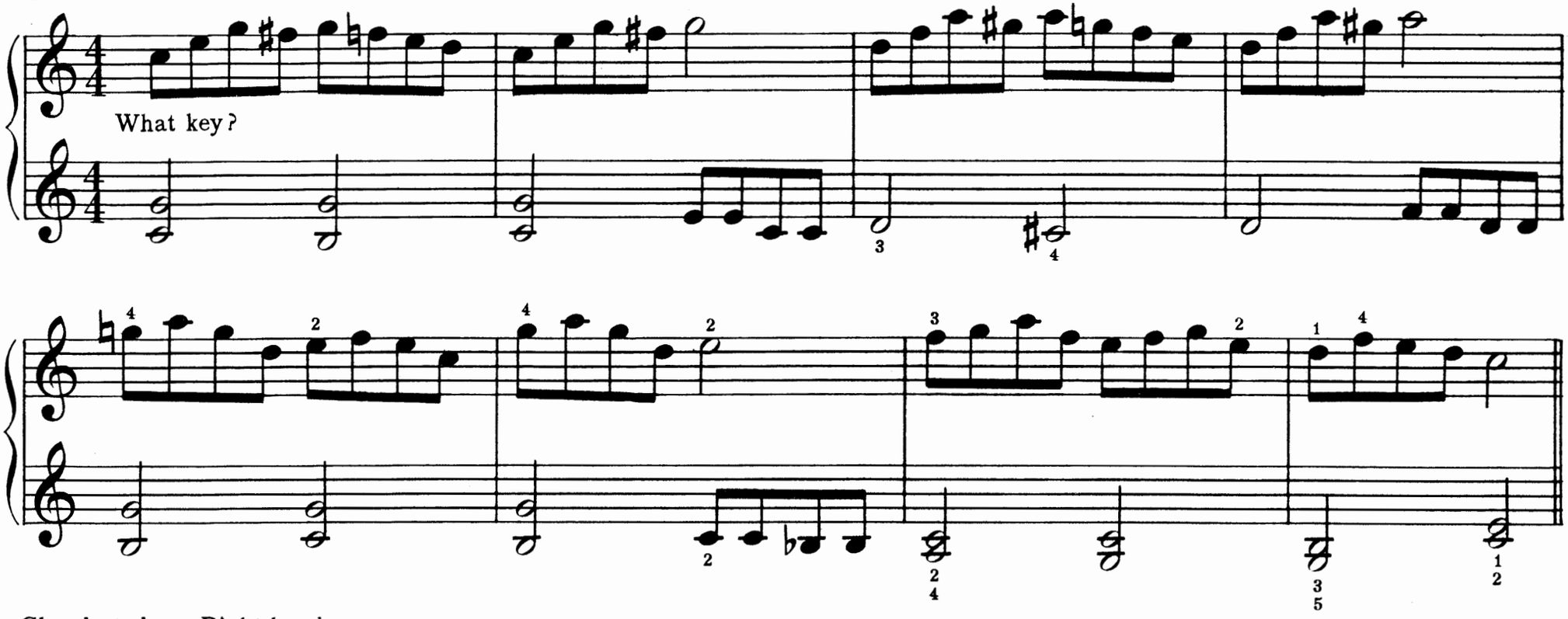
Left hand



Exercise

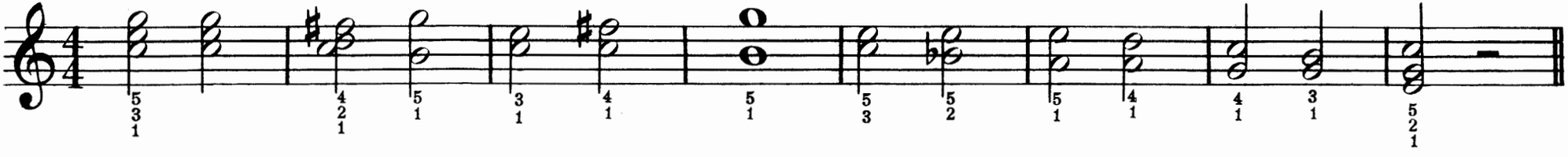
4

What key?



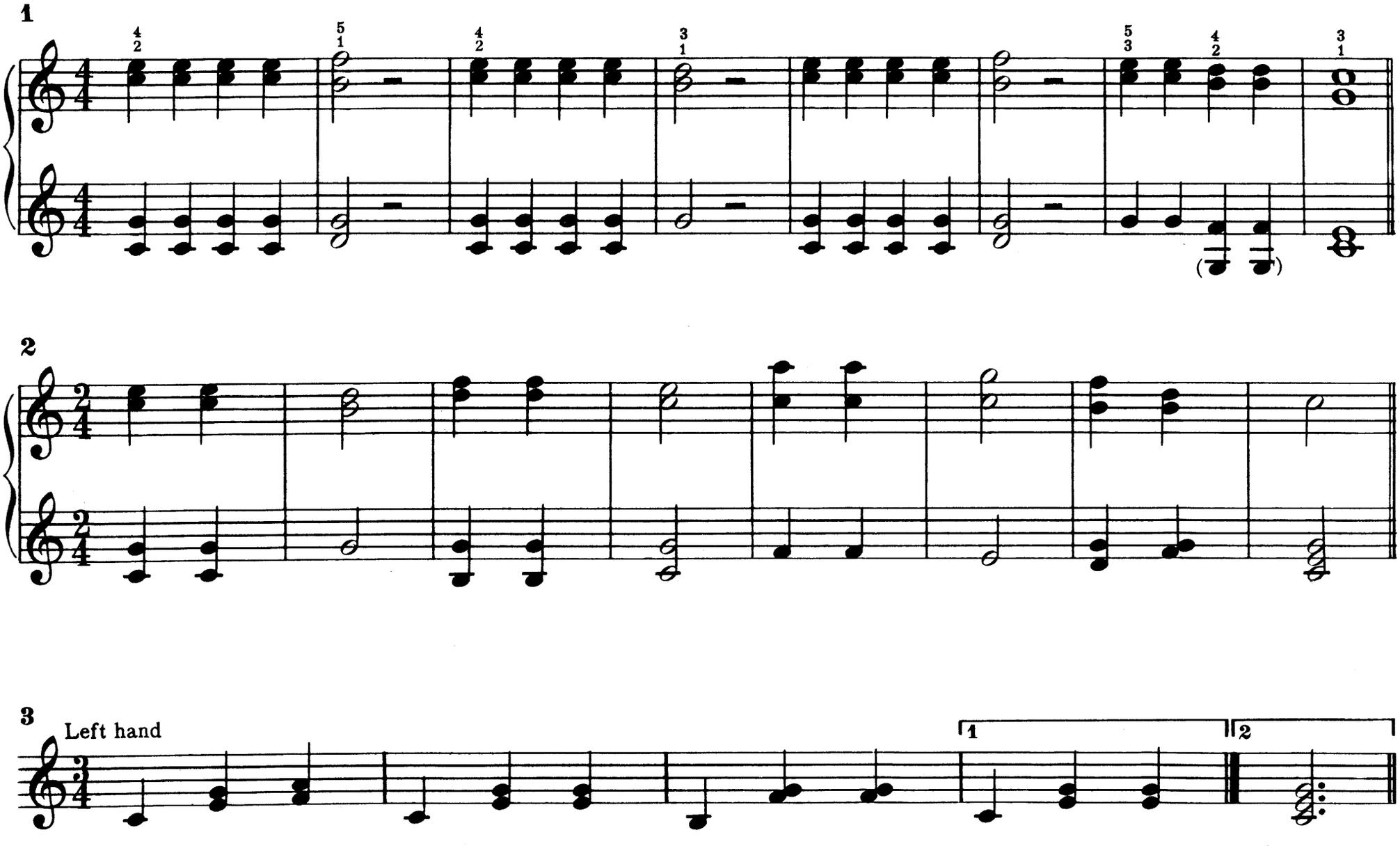
Chord study_ Right hand

5

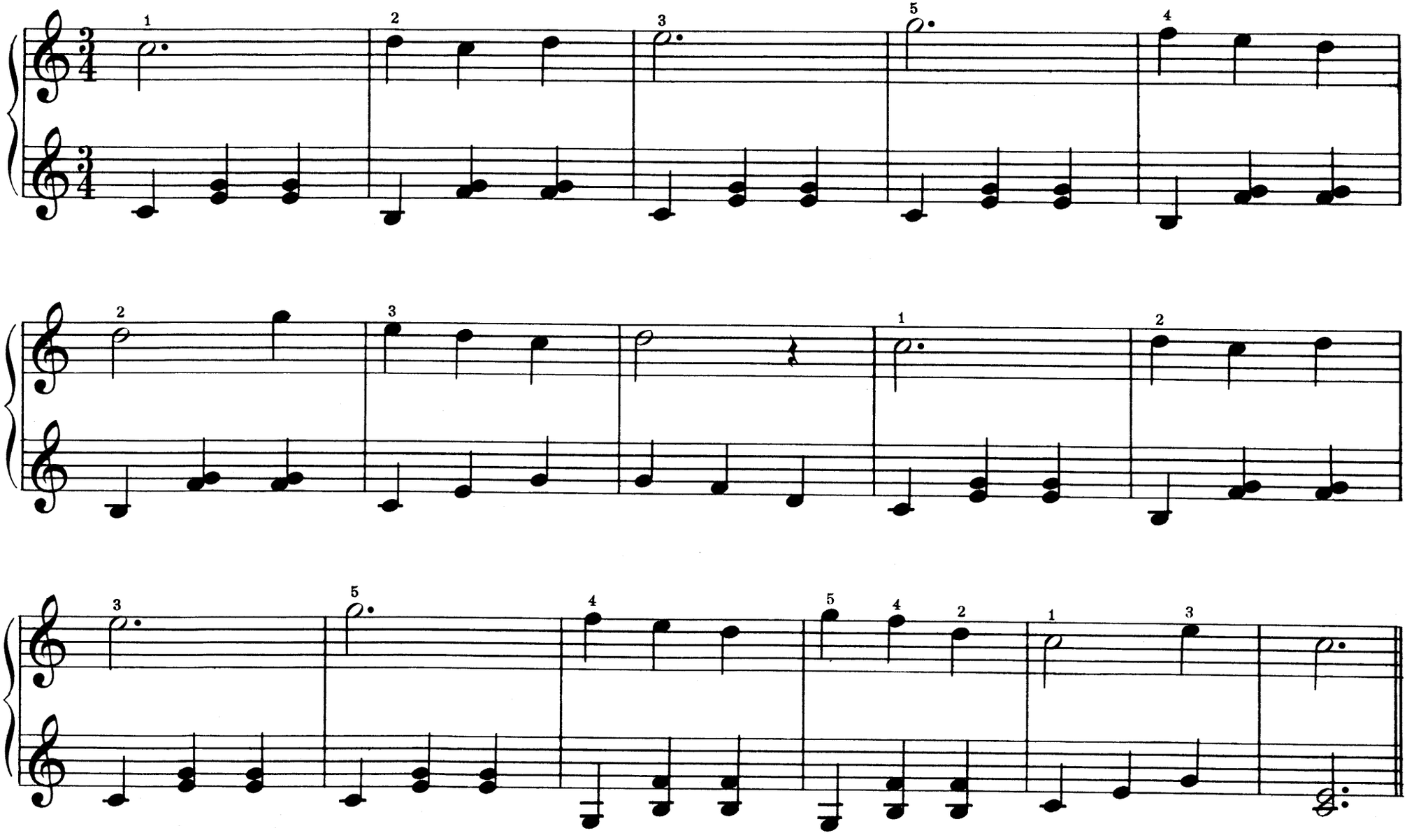
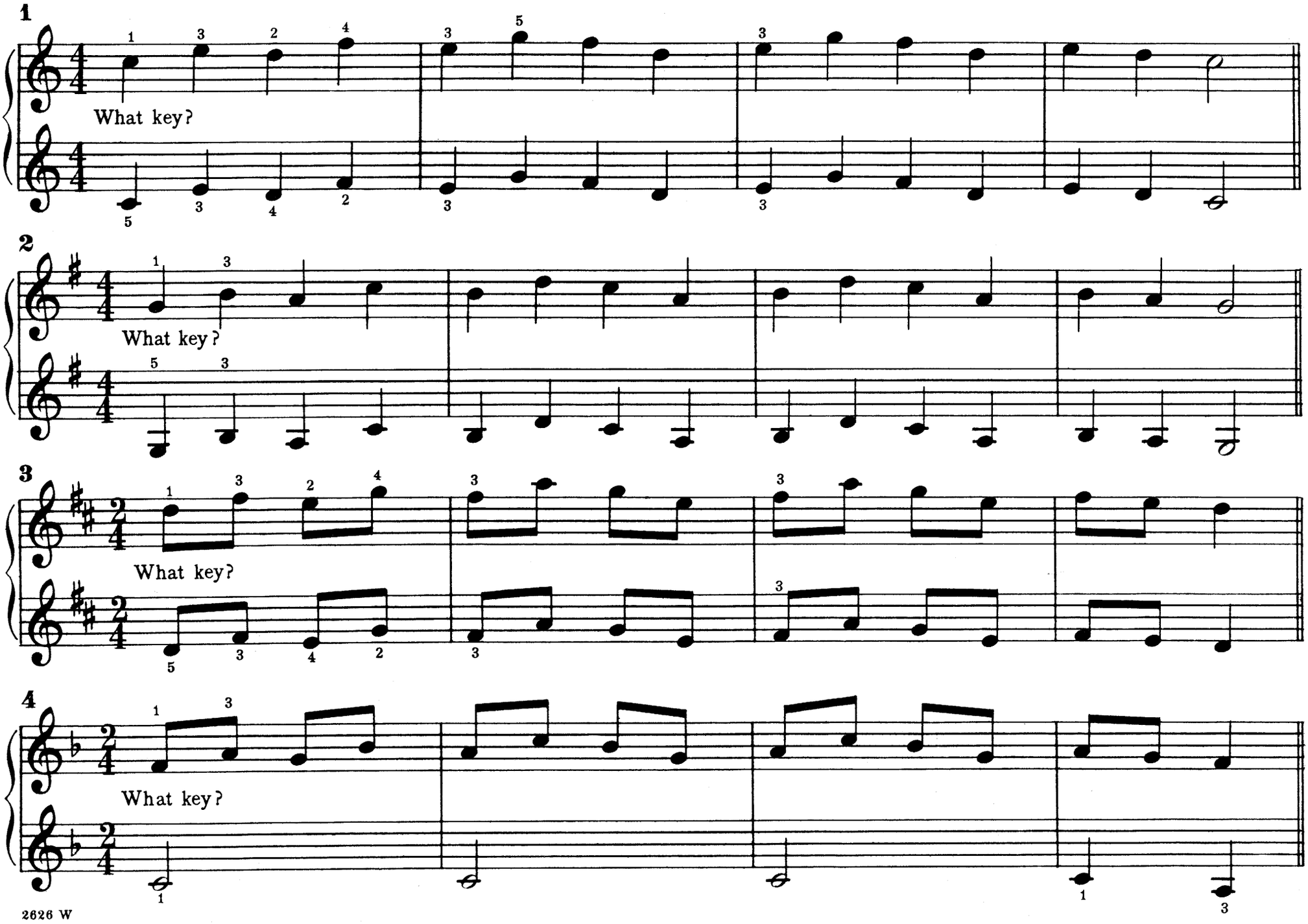


VIII

Introducing Chords in both hands



Rosebud Waltz



Exercises