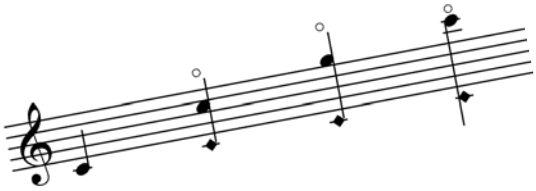
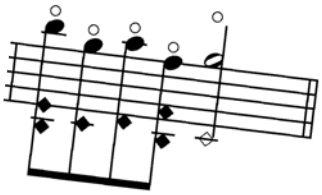
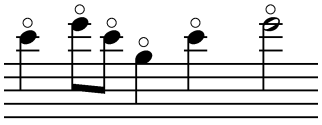
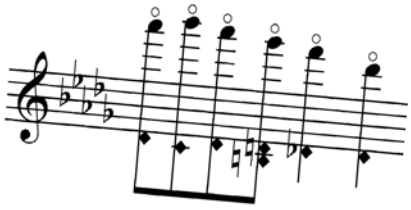
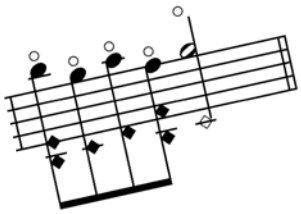


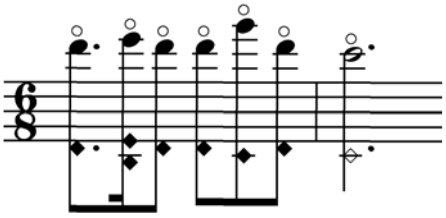




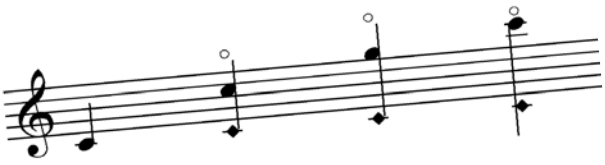
Fun With Flute Harmonics







By
Eric Ruyle



Fun With Flute Harmonics

by

Eric Ruyle

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First Edition 2002
Ebook Edition 2010

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Preface

I first encountered harmonics in the typical fashion, going straight up the overtone series. To vary it up, my teacher would have me alternate the notes in an "every other one" manner. But becoming bored with just this, I stopped doing harmonics.

In graduate school I began to delve more into tone and revisited harmonics. One day I realized that by combining the different harmonic series together I could play a chromatic scale. Up to that point I had worked the harmonics individually, staying on one fingering at a time.

This change in perspective opened a whole new world. I started doing scales and thirds on harmonics. After seeing this workout, my instructor, Dr. Nancy Andrew, encouraged me to write an article about it. "Practicing Scales with Harmonics," appeared in the April 1996, issue of Flute Talk.

My fascination with harmonics did not stop there. Having made the personal discovery about chromatic harmonics, I realized that the possibilities were limitless. Thus began my journey into playing melodies using harmonics.

Hopefully this book will make playing harmonics as exciting for you as it is for me! Do not feel that this is all that can be done with harmonics - the ideas within should inspire you to find new ways of your own to practice harmonics. The whole point is to enjoy harmonics; they do not have to be boring.

Enjoy and have fun!

Introduction

Harmonics are a great way of improving tone and flexibility. Unfortunately, there is not a lot written on harmonics. Trevor Wye does use them in Volumes 1 (Tone) and 4 (Intonation & Vibrato) of his Practice Book series, but even then it is brief. This book presents the player with more options.

The first inclination when trying harmonics is to pinch the lips together to force the air and note out. This only creates tension, which reduces the flexibility needed to produce harmonics.

Increasing the speed of the air, keeping the lips relaxed, making the aperture smaller, and slightly raising the direction of the air stream create harmonics. The higher harmonics require faster air AND relaxed lips. If the lips are pinched, the notes will not come out.

How To Use This Book

When you see a harmonic note without a bottom (fundamental) note that means you are to use the same fingering as the previous note. All change of fingerings (fundamentals) is notated.

The exercises are without articulation. Play them through first by tonguing all the notes. This will help produce the harmonics when getting started. Once comfortable with that and all the notes speak easily, slur everything.

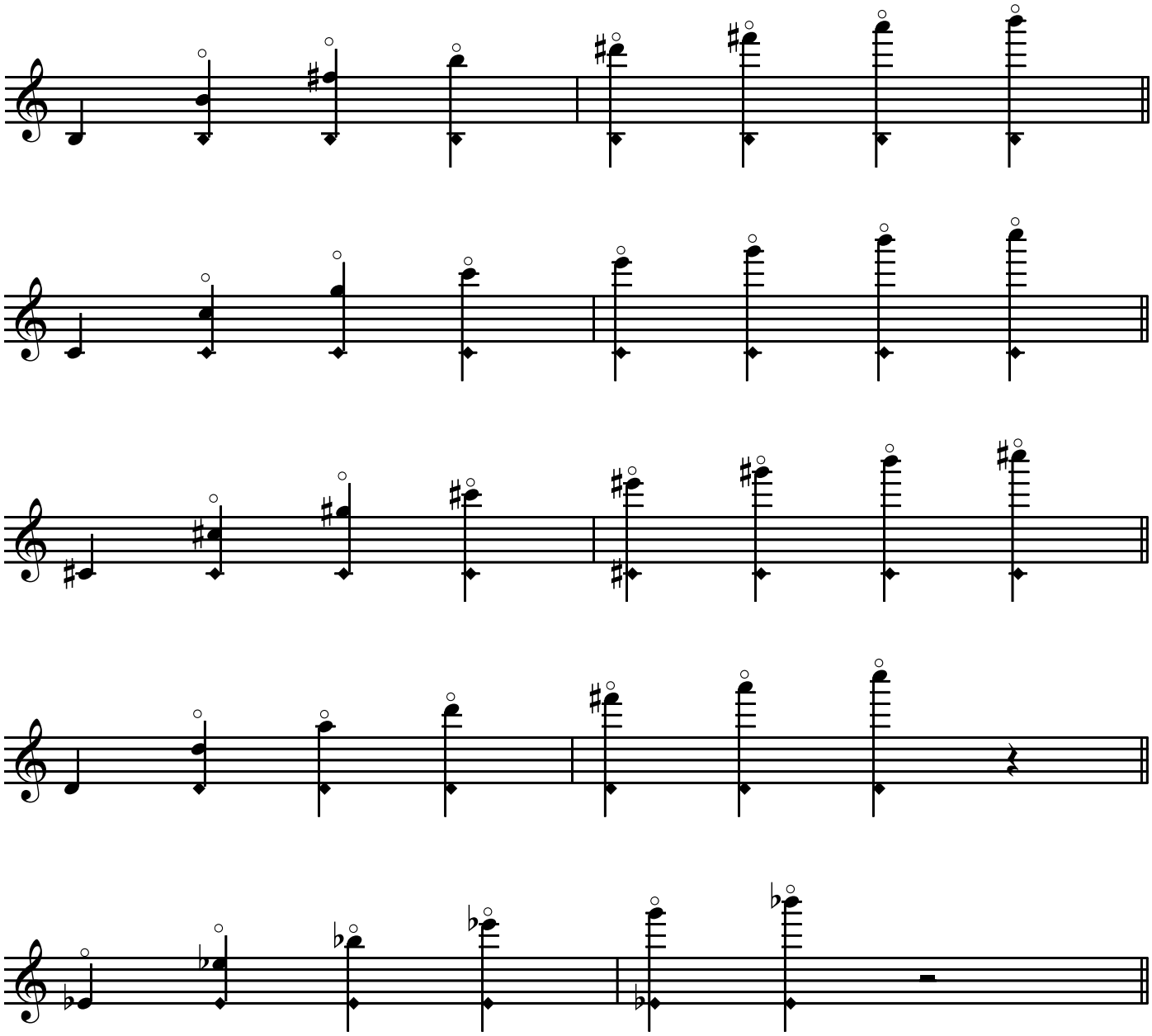
Slurring forces you to pay particular attention to the subtle changes in the direction & speed of the air, and the size & pressure of the aperture.

Do not be in a hurry to rush through the exercises. The purpose is not technique but tone quality. Strive for a full, even sound on every note. This is the secret to flexibility - quality of sound. The better the harmonics sound, the more flexibility you will have in your playing.

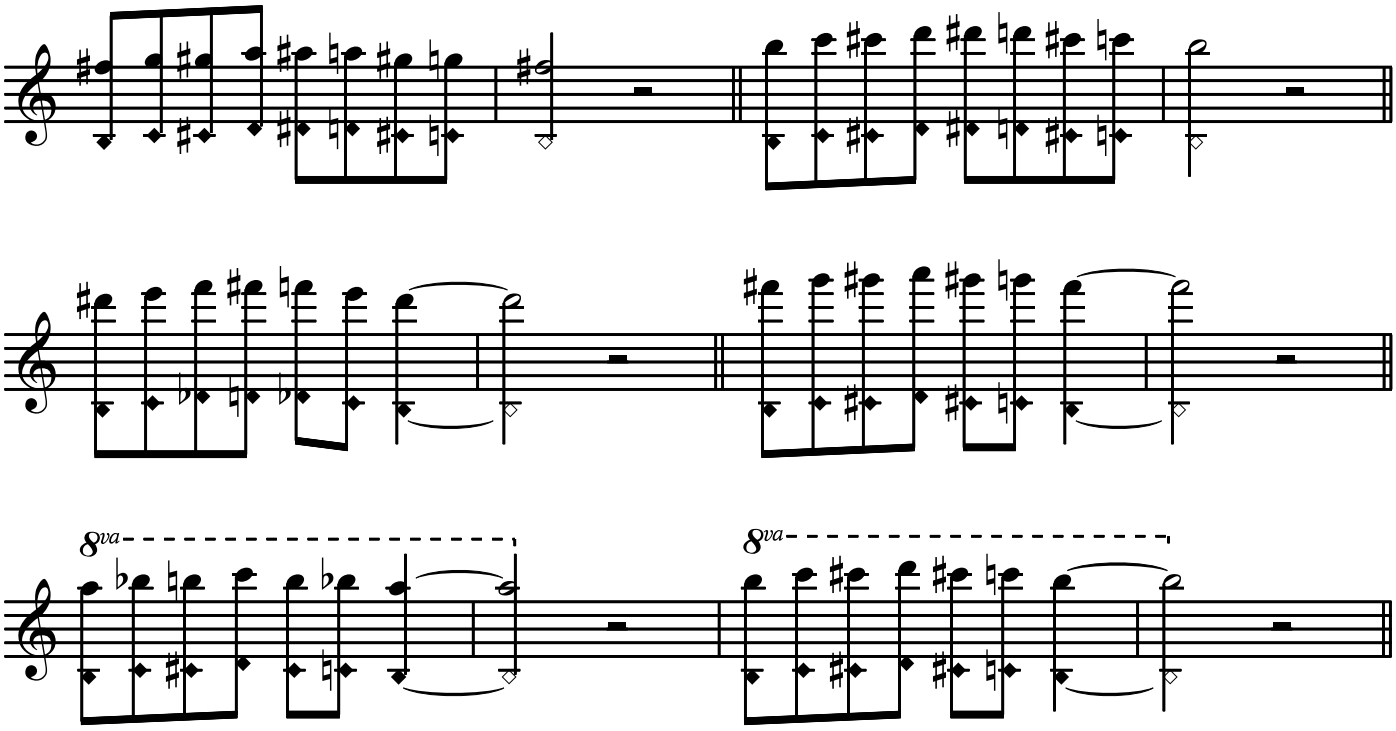
Mixed in with the harmonics are a few "regular" notes. Match the tone quality of the harmonics to the "regular" notes. Also, for those that do not have a low 'B' flute, I have included alternate fingerings. Use the lowest fingering whenever possible.

This should be only a starting point for working with harmonics. Use these as a guide to create your own exercises. With harmonics, the more you experiment, the better off you will be.

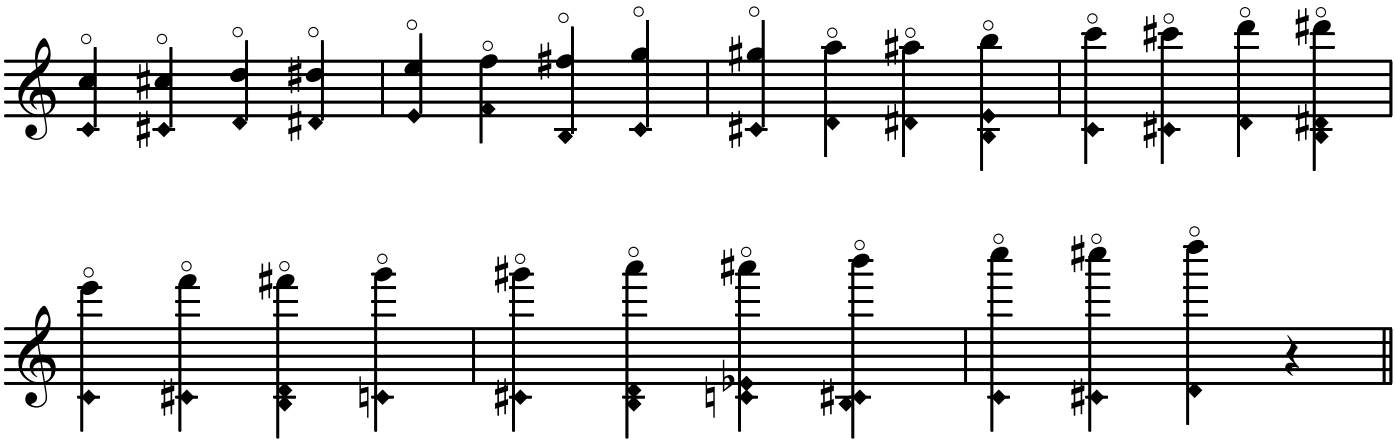
Basic Harmonics



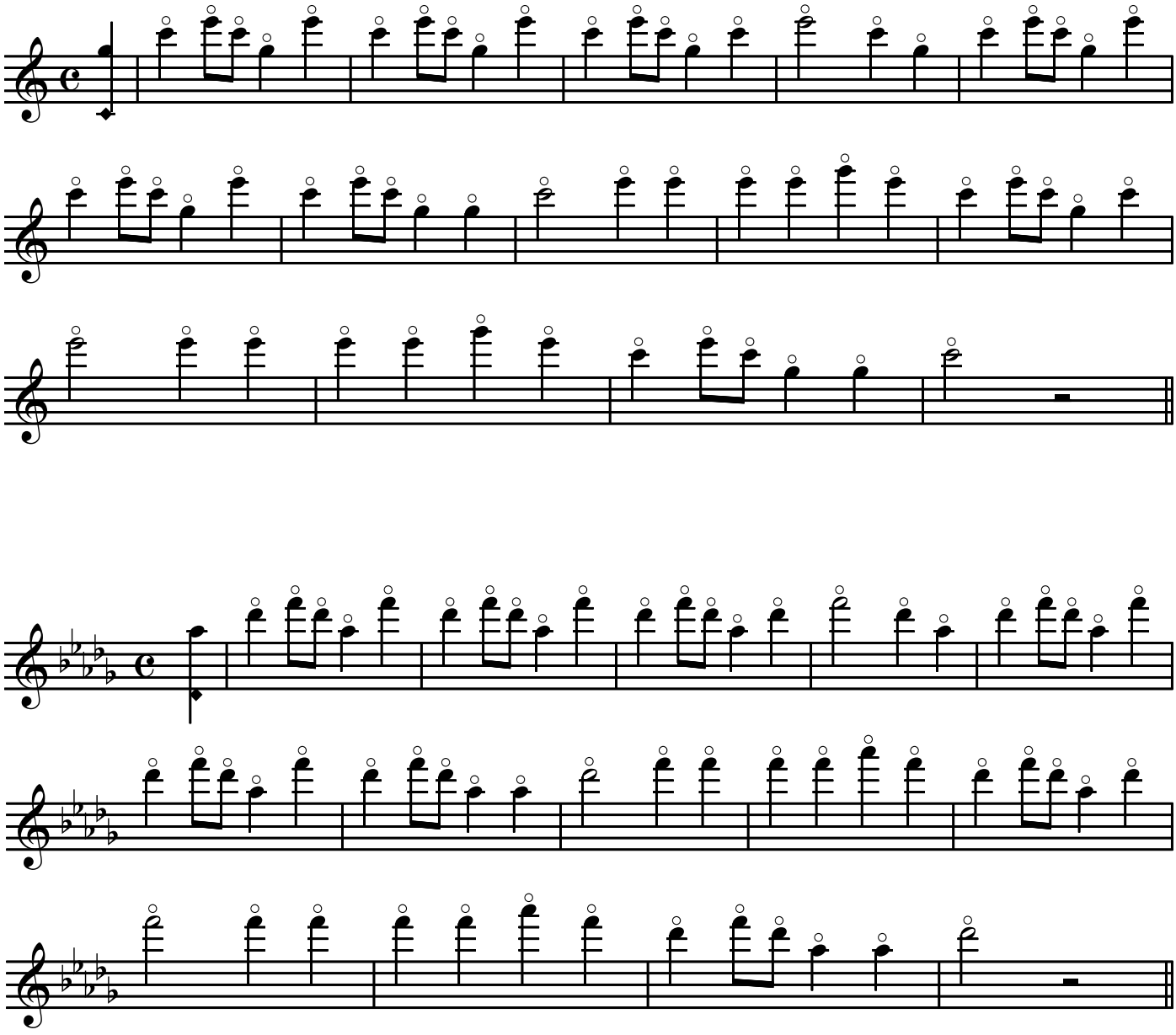
Practicing the Same Partials on Different Fundamentals

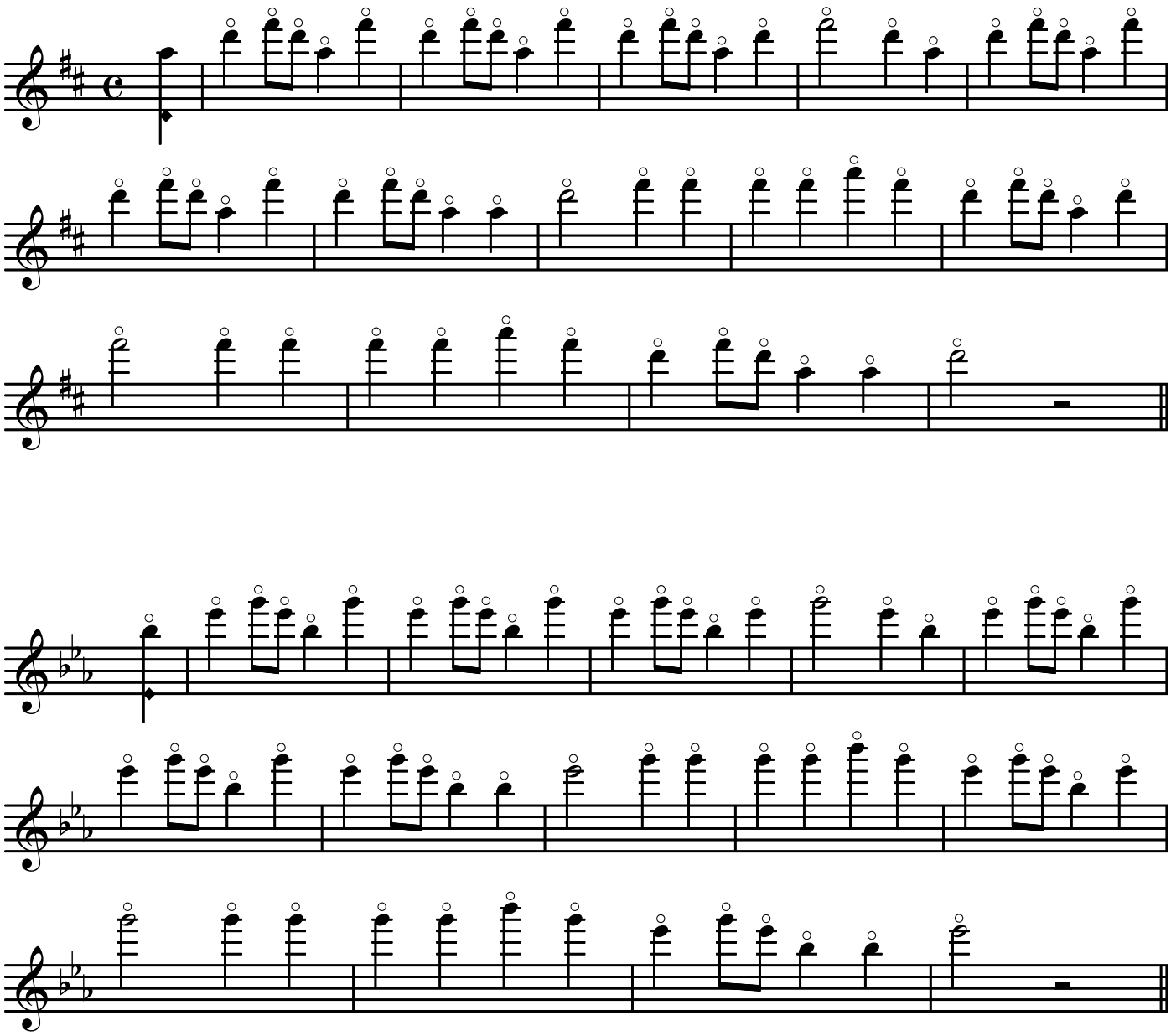


Chromatic Scale Using Harmonics

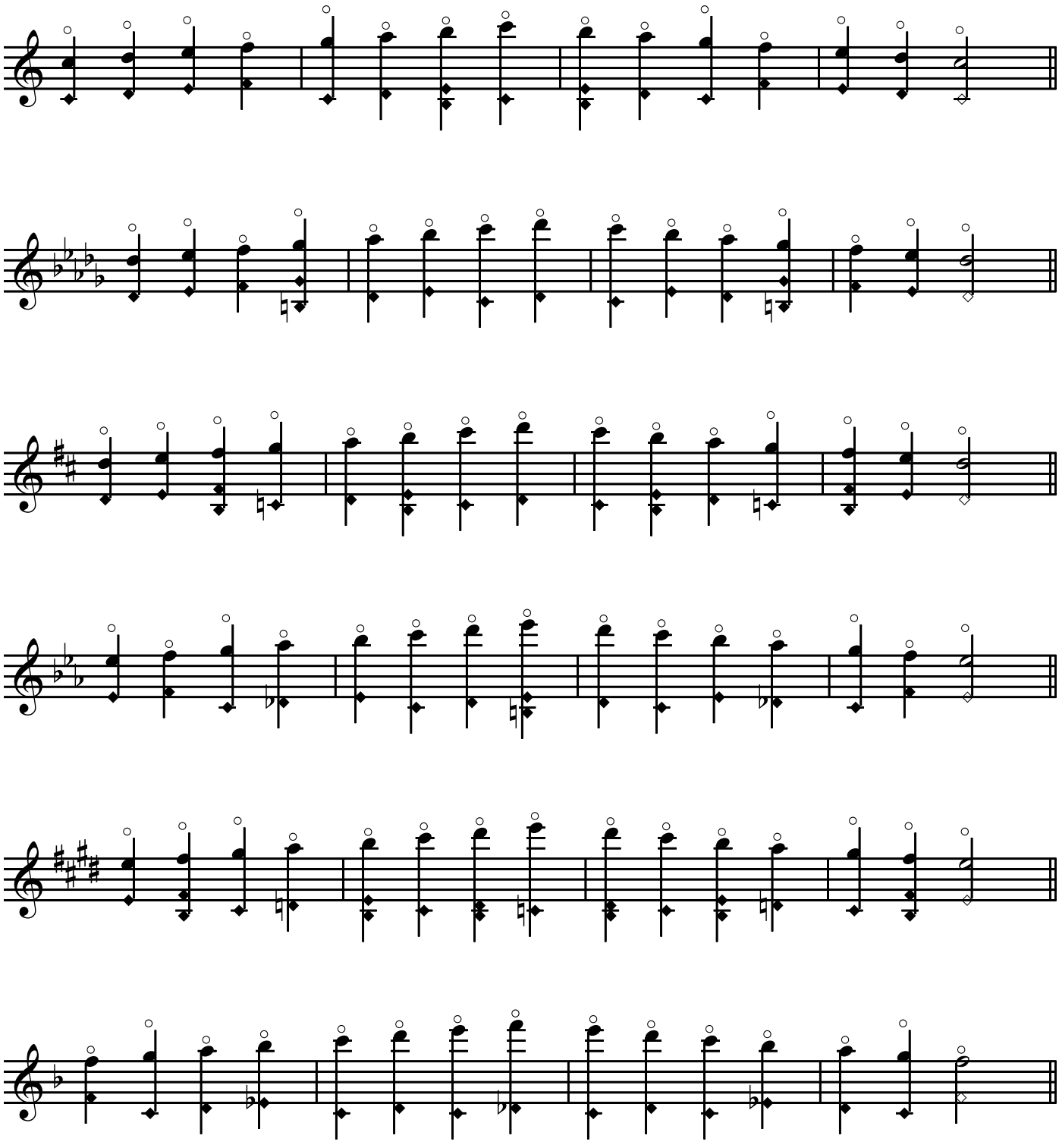


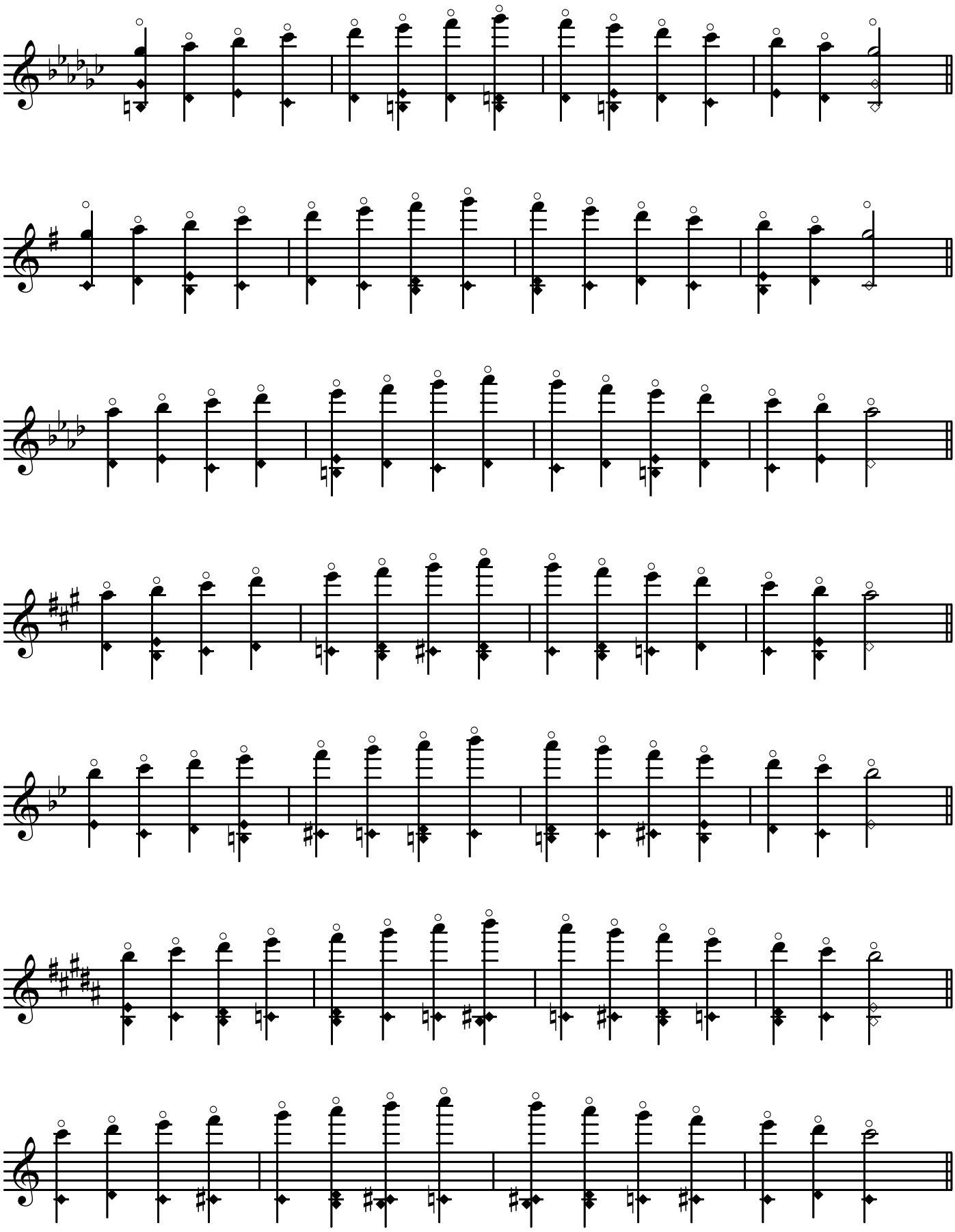
Bugle Calls



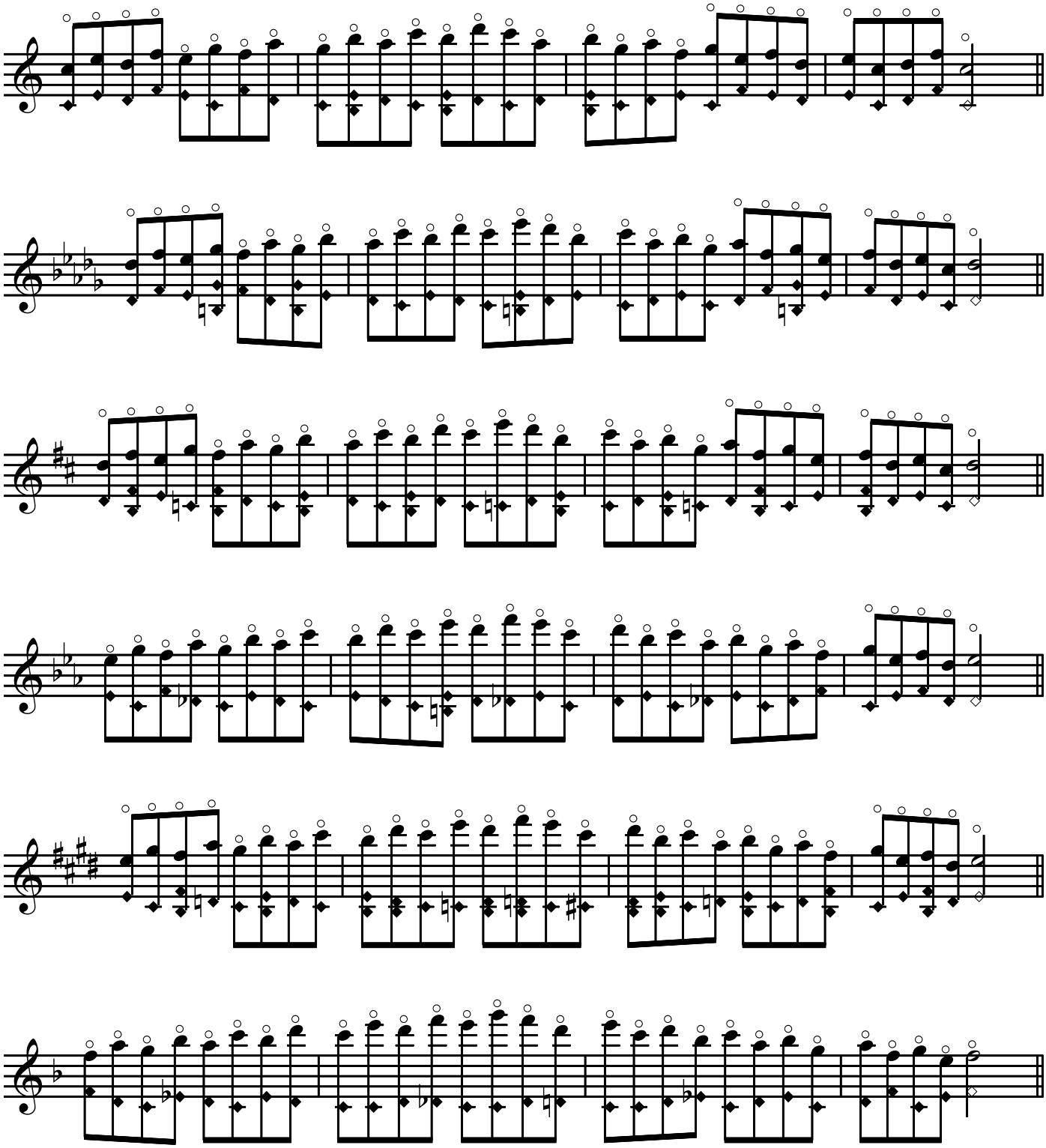


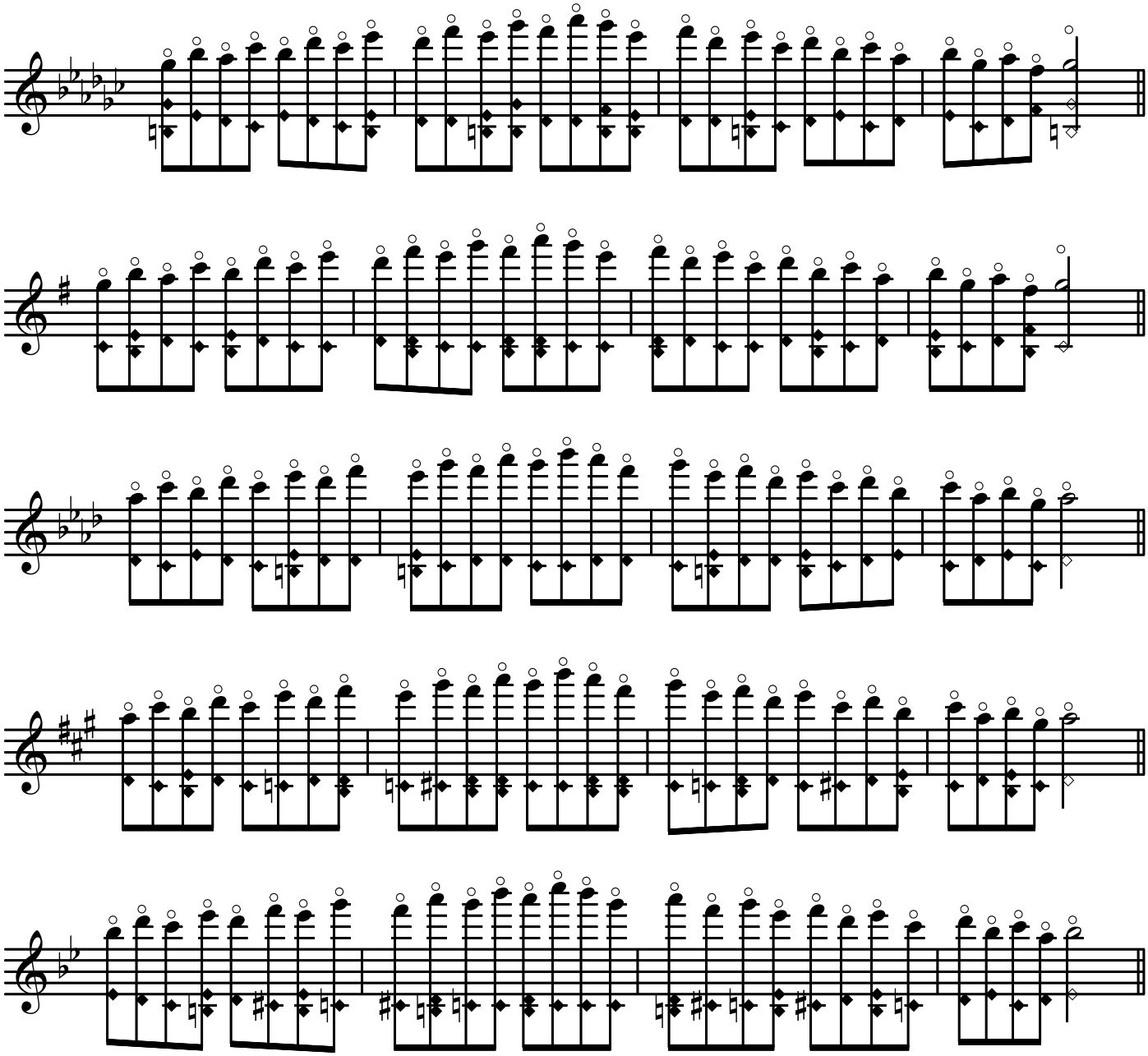
Scales



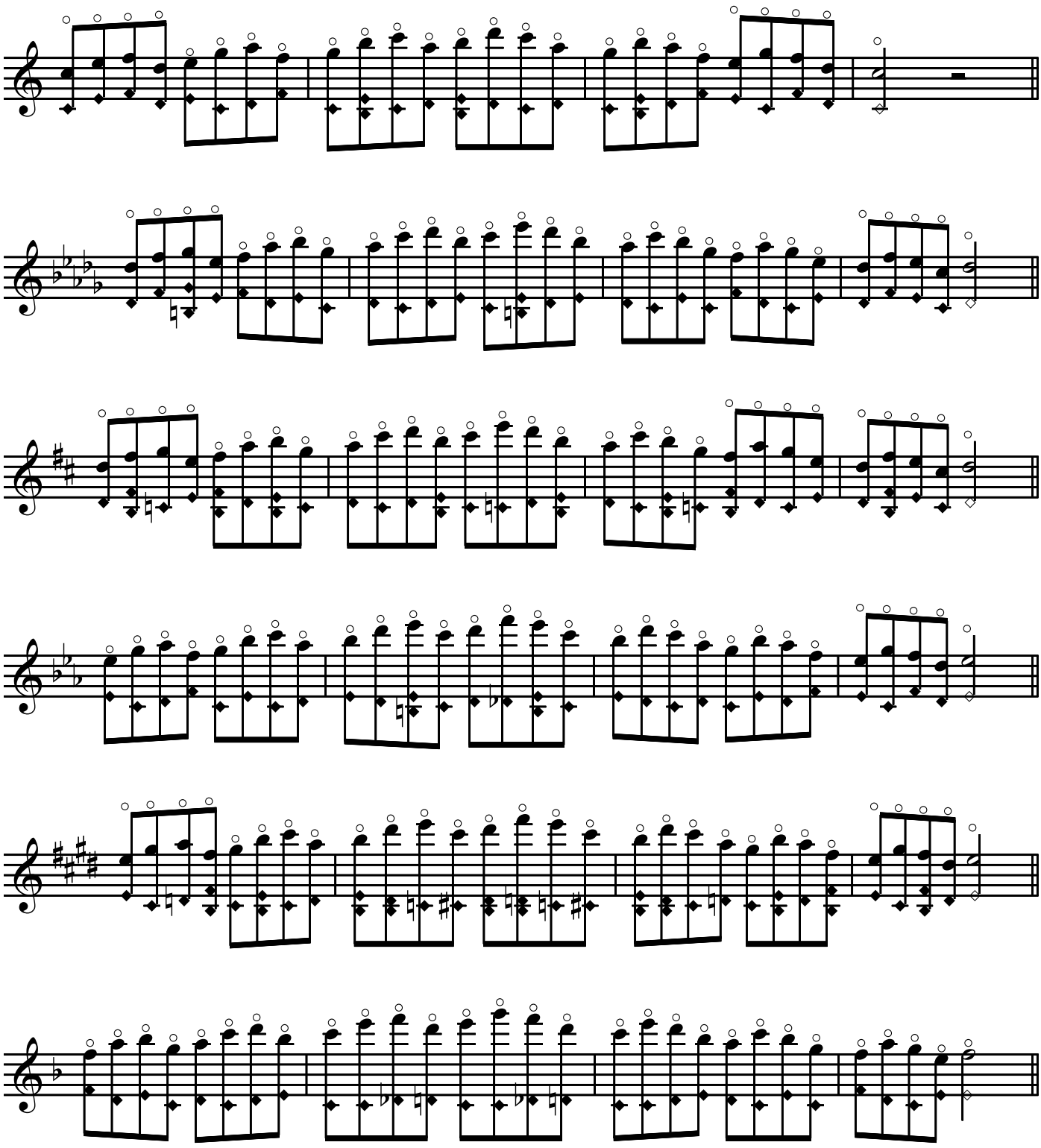


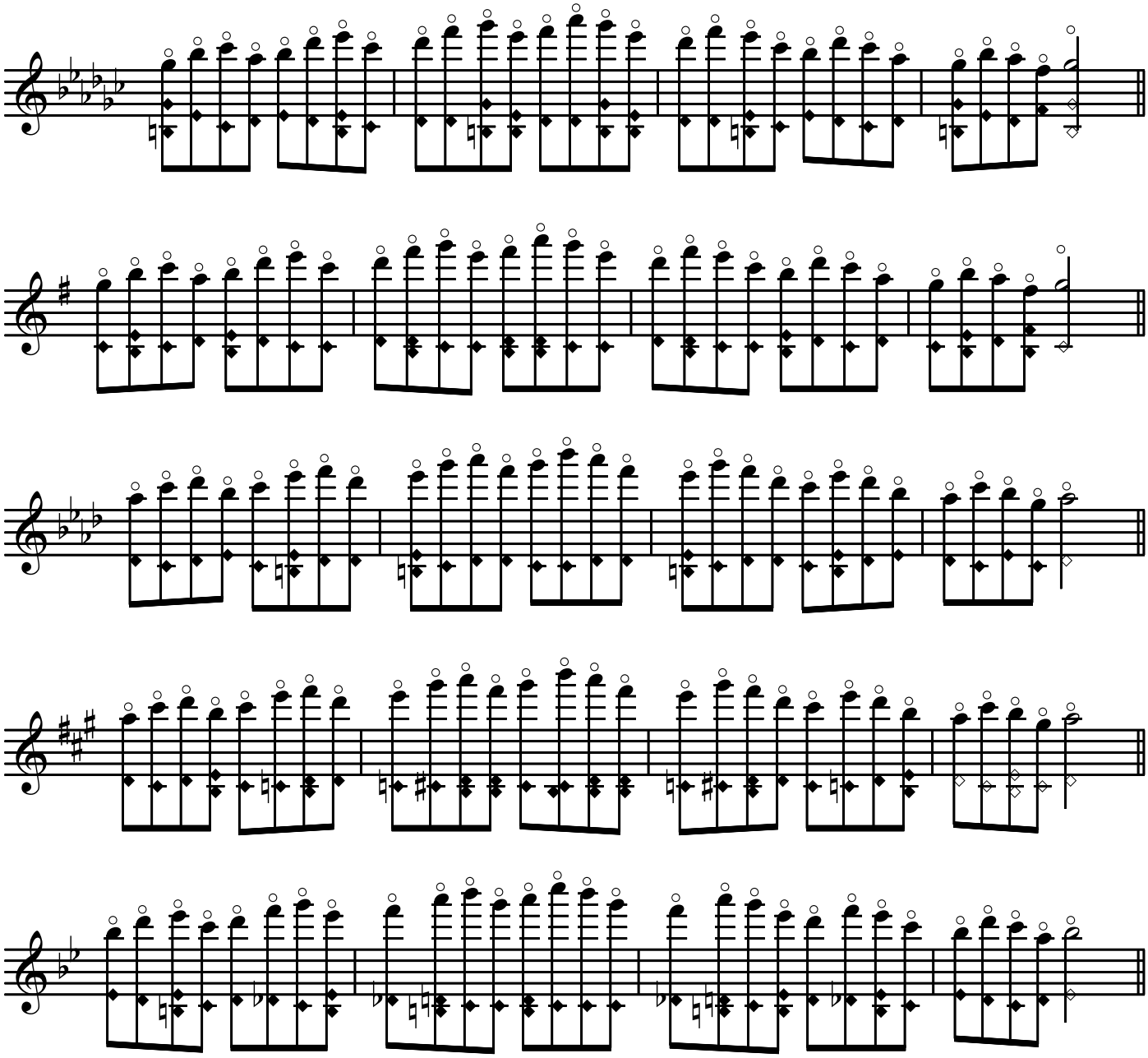
Thirds





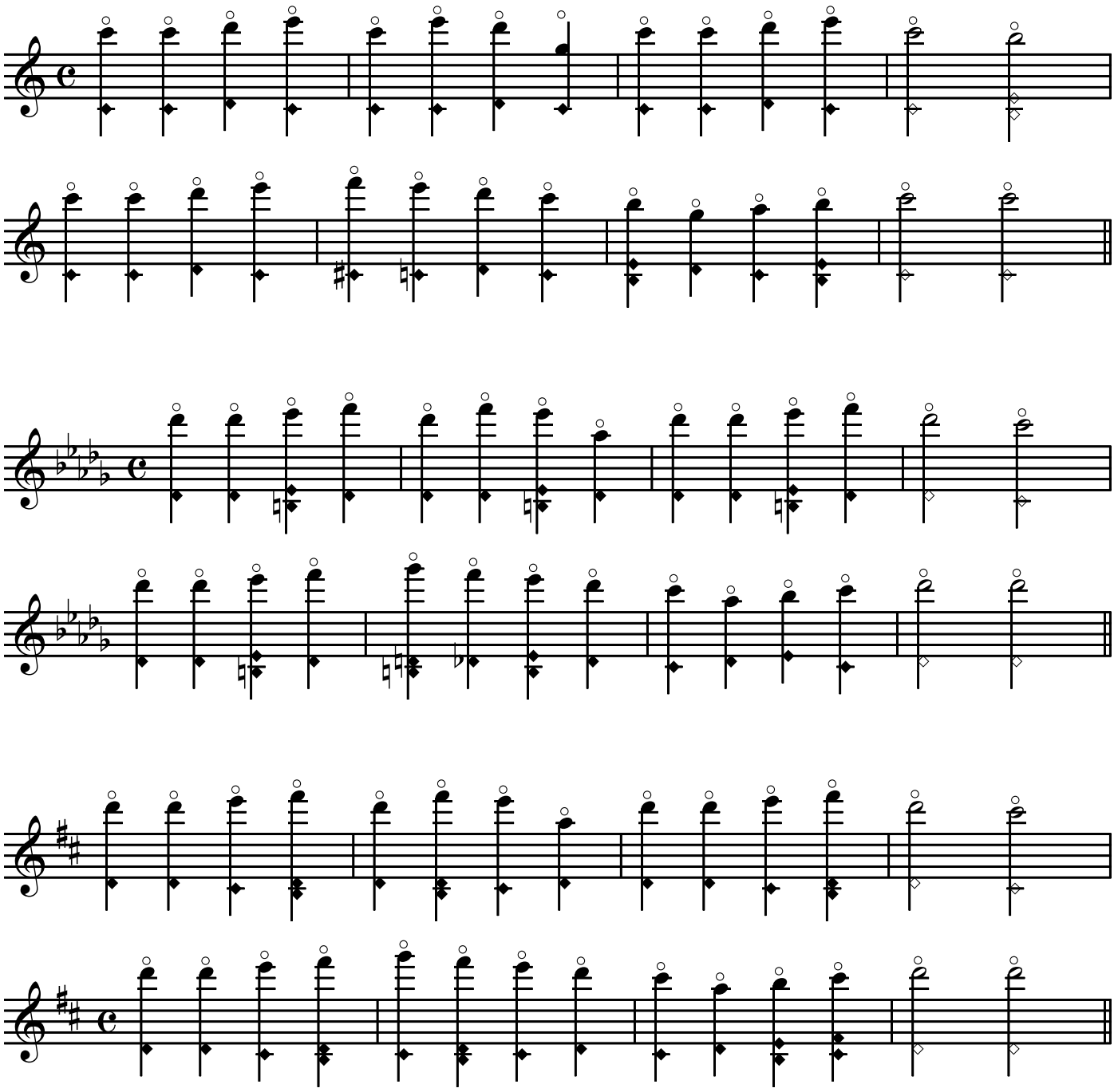
Turnaround Thirds

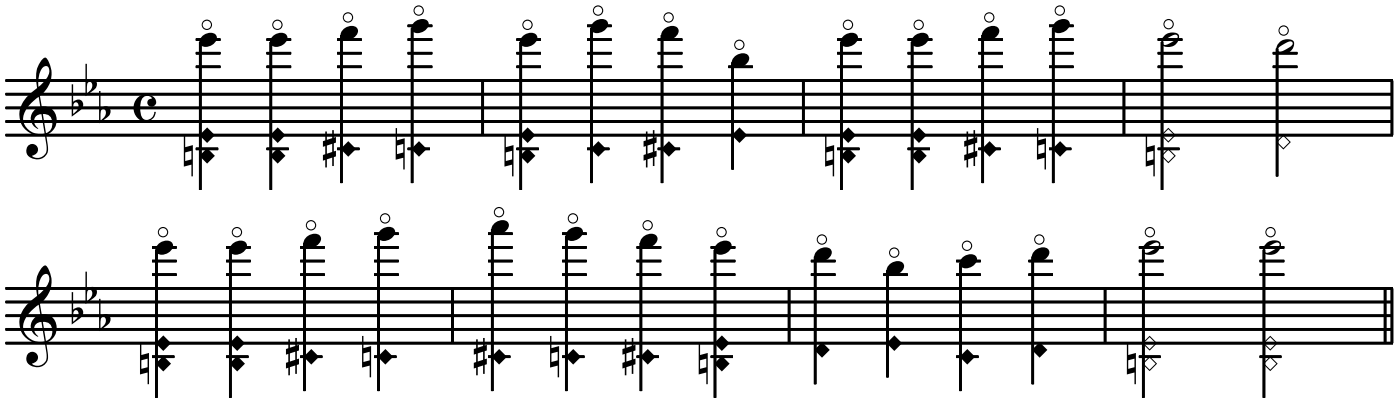




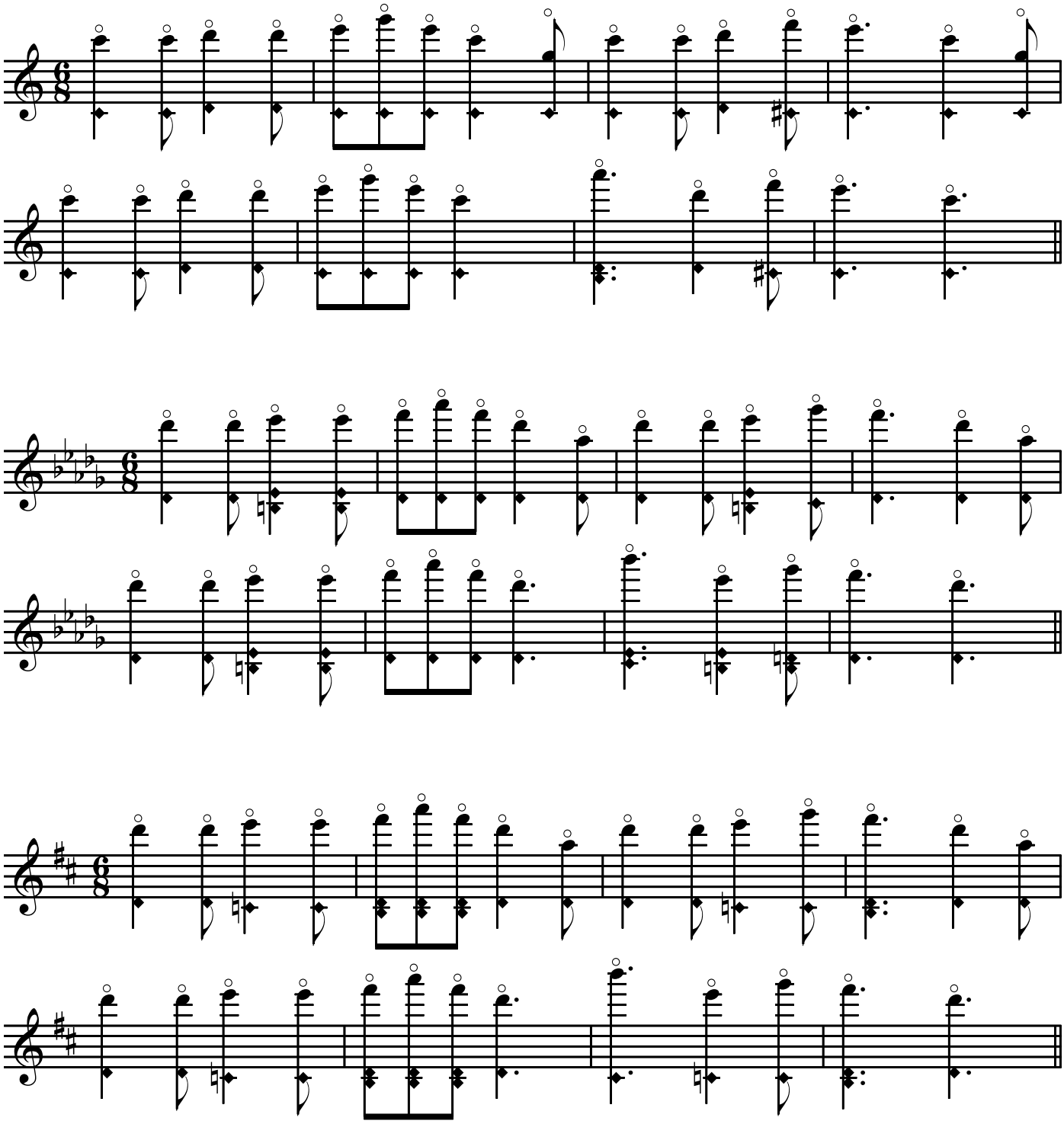
Folk Songs

Yankee Doodle

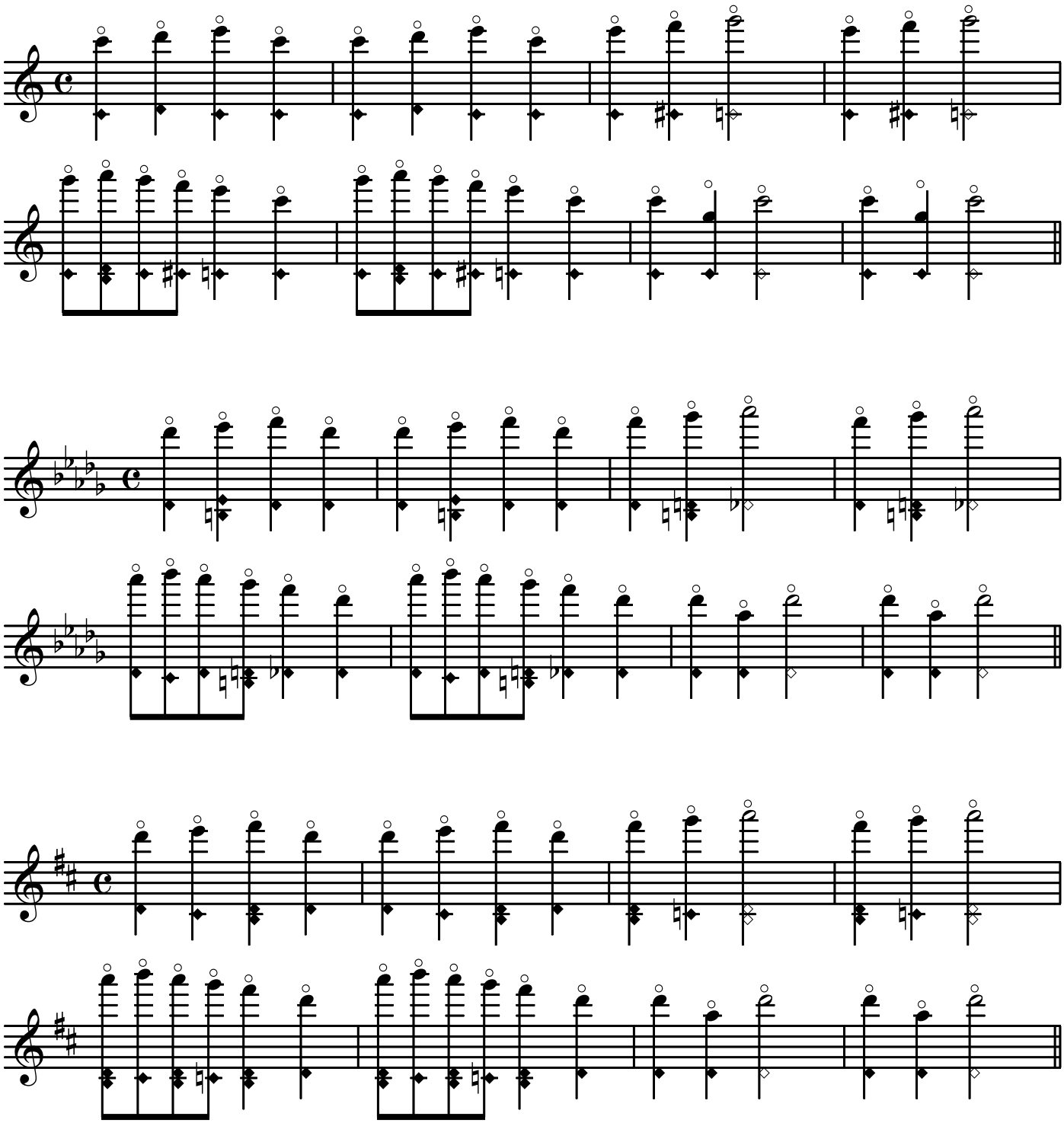


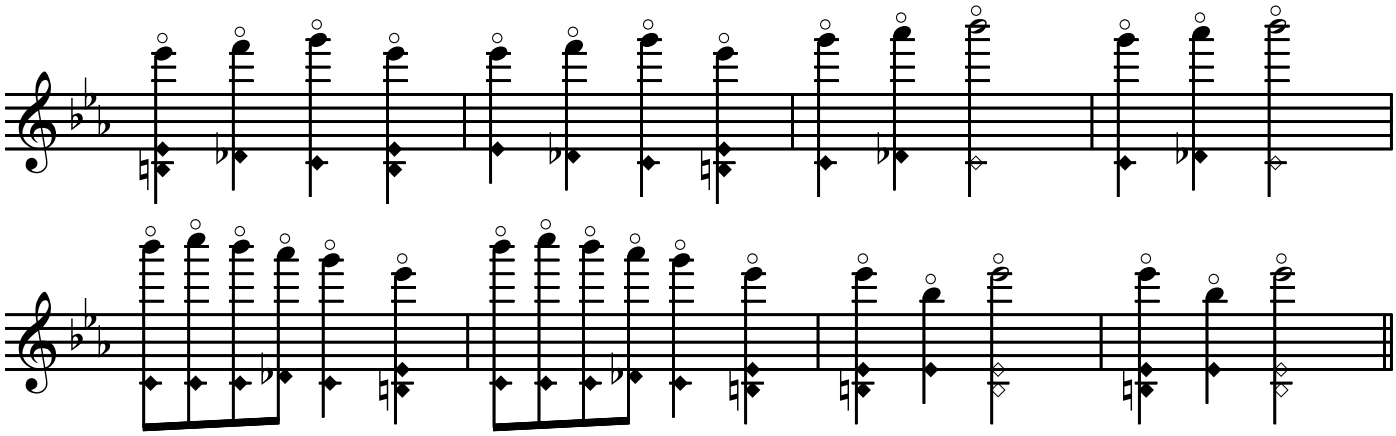


Pop Goes the Weasel



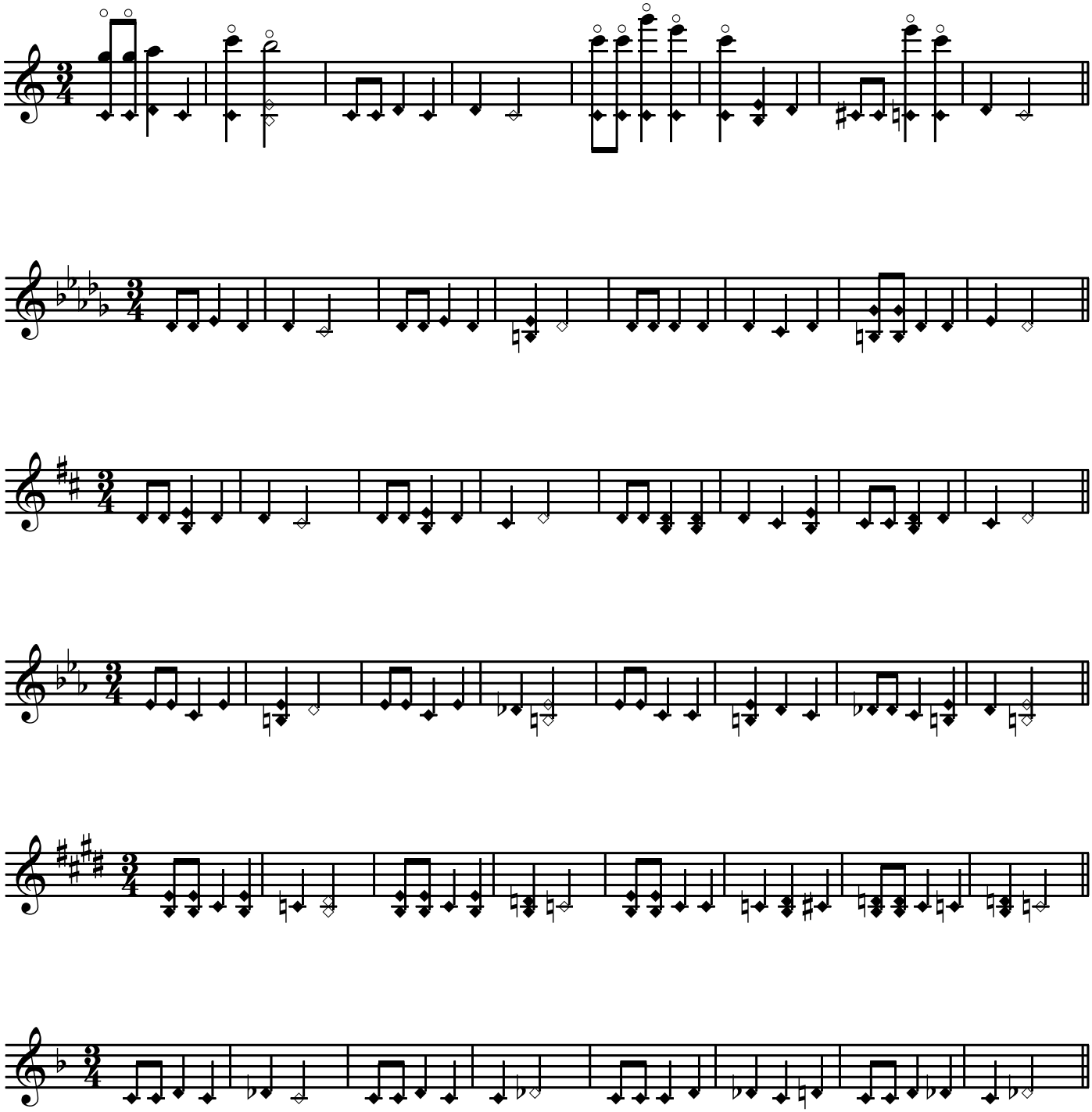
Freré Jacques





A Birthday Wish

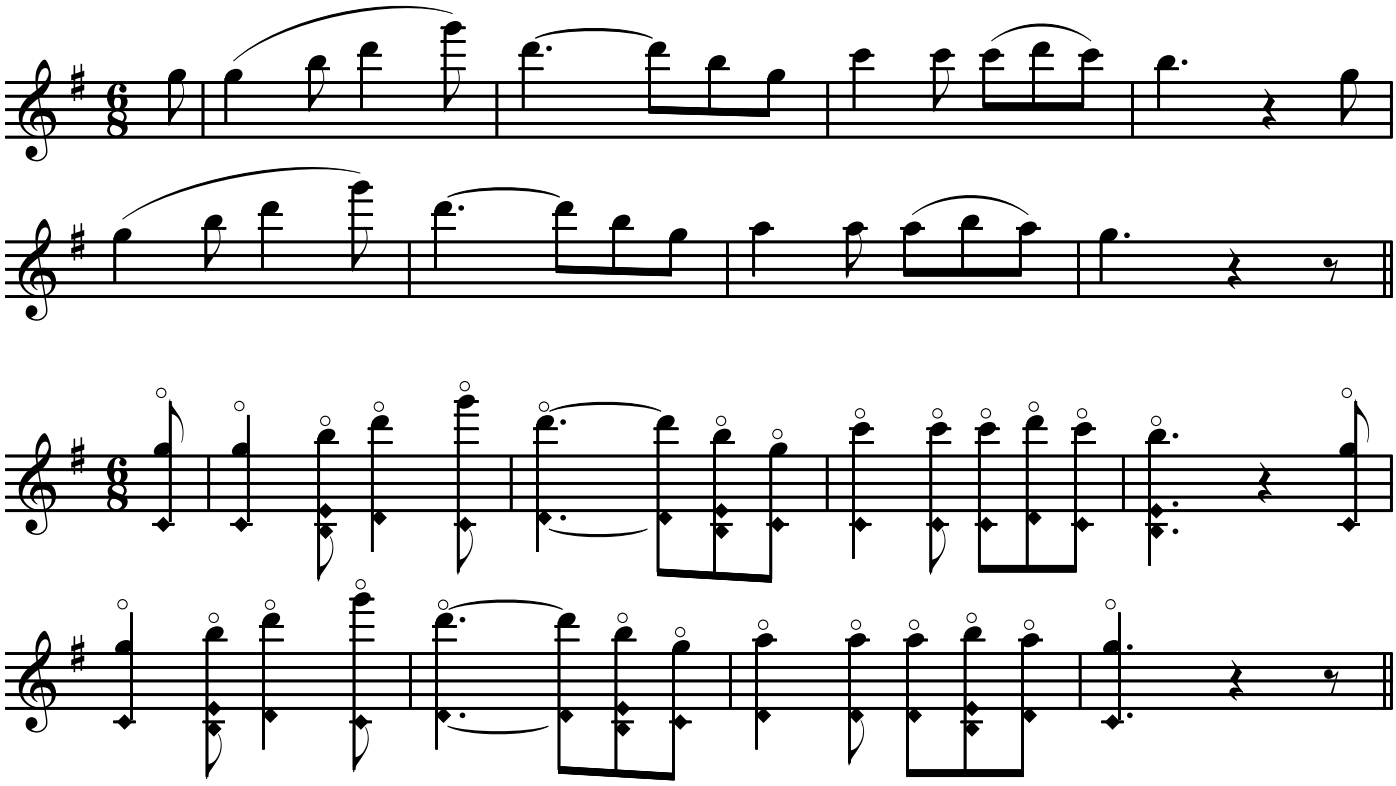
In this song, only the fundamentals are given (along with a few guide tones) in order for the player to see how they can apply harmonics to any song, in any key. Once this method is understood, apply it to other songs.



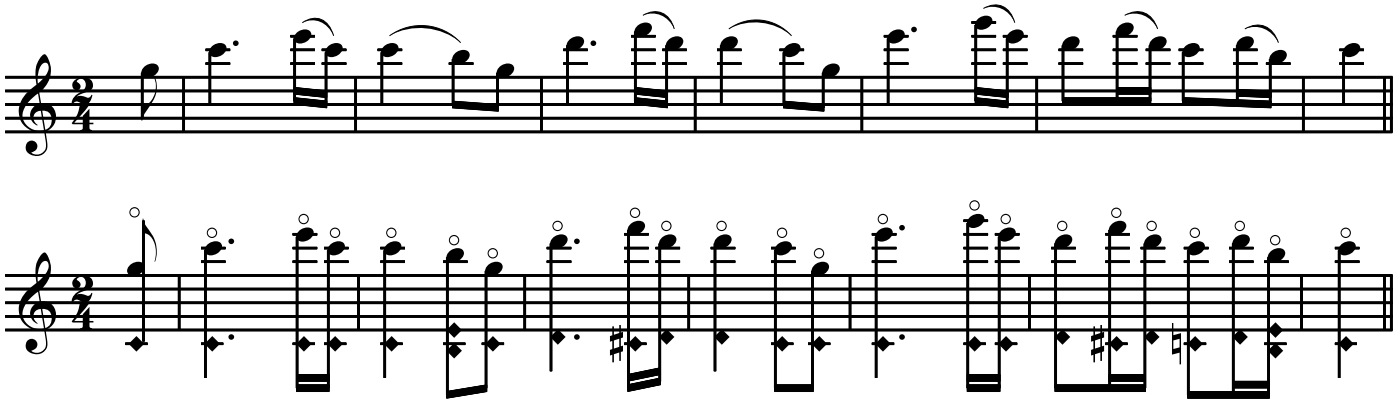
Classical Melodies

It can be fun to use familiar classical melodies as well as folk songs. Visualizing the melody can be hard with the notes in the high tessitura of the instrument, so the melody is given first (an octave lower where necessary), then the upper octave with the harmonic fingerings. The pieces are presented in order of difficulty.

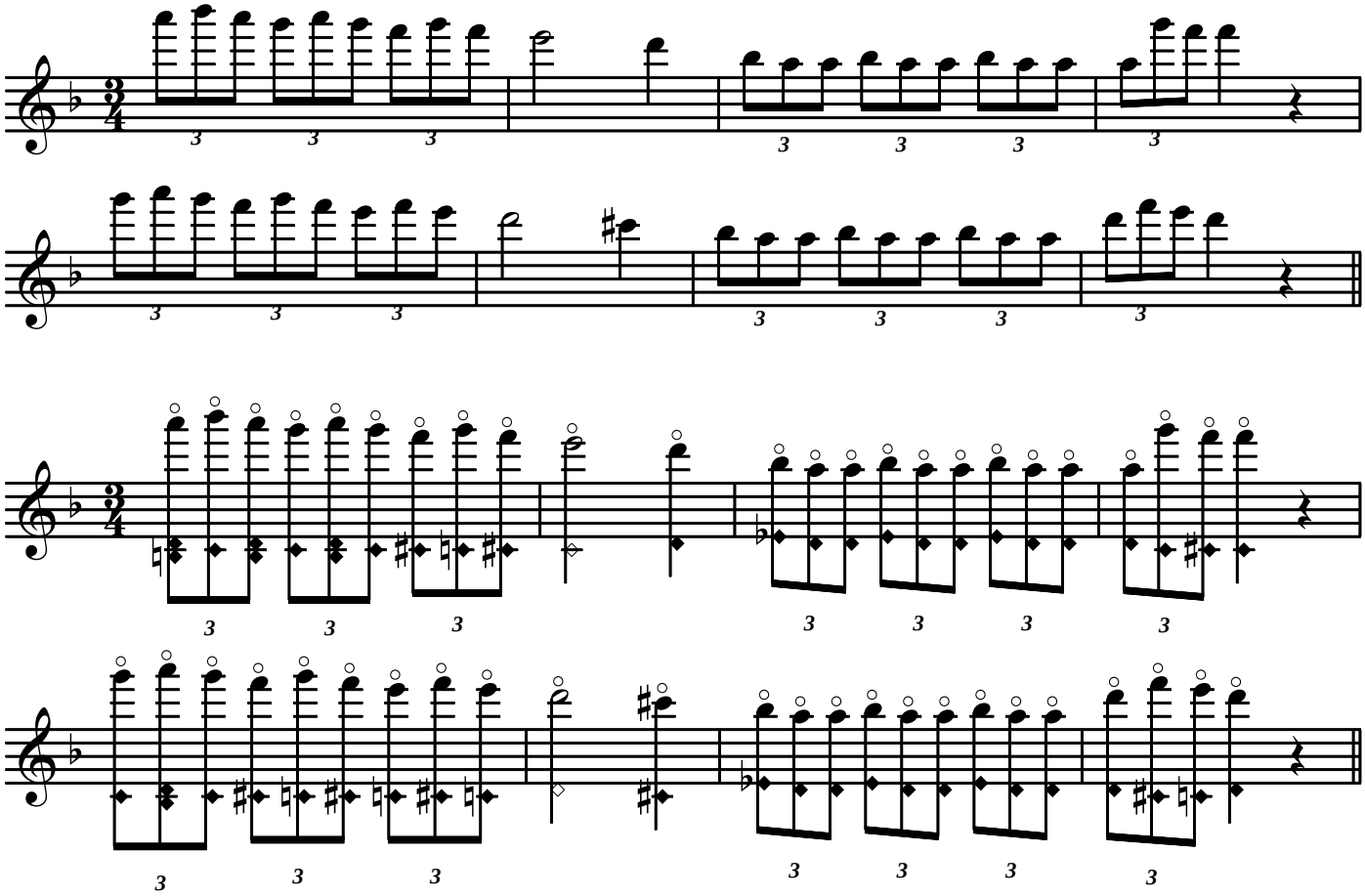
Longing for Spring - Mozart



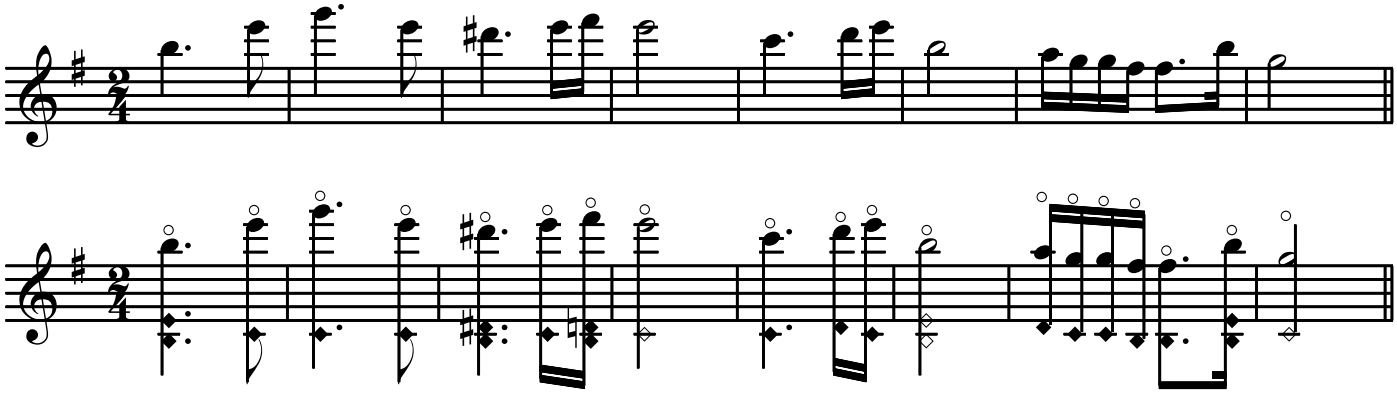
Sonatina (Based on Trio V) - Haydn



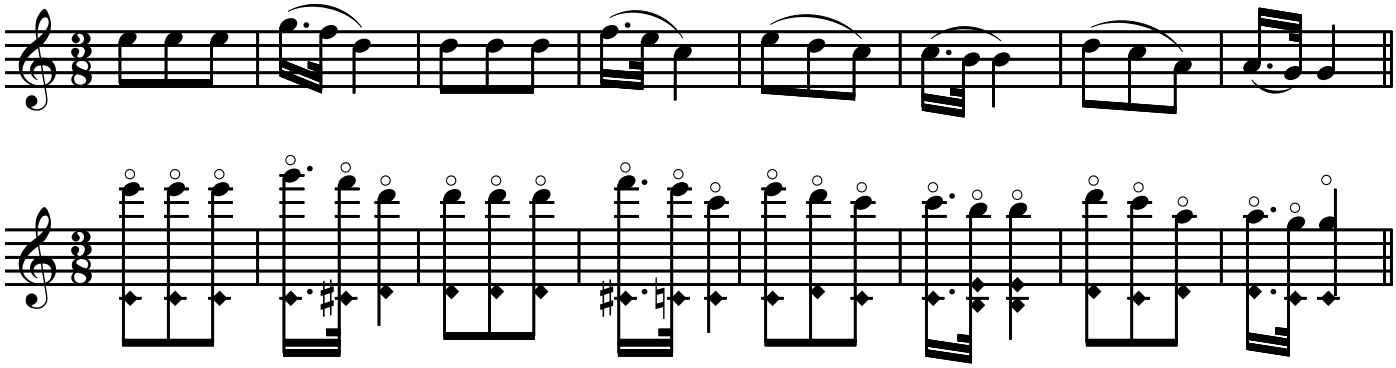
La Gazza Ladra - Rossini



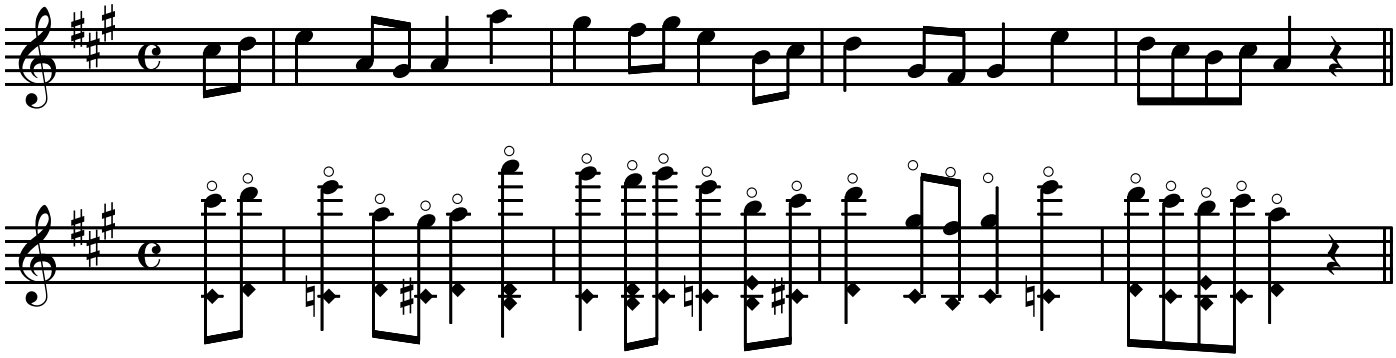
Hungarian Dance #5 - Brahms



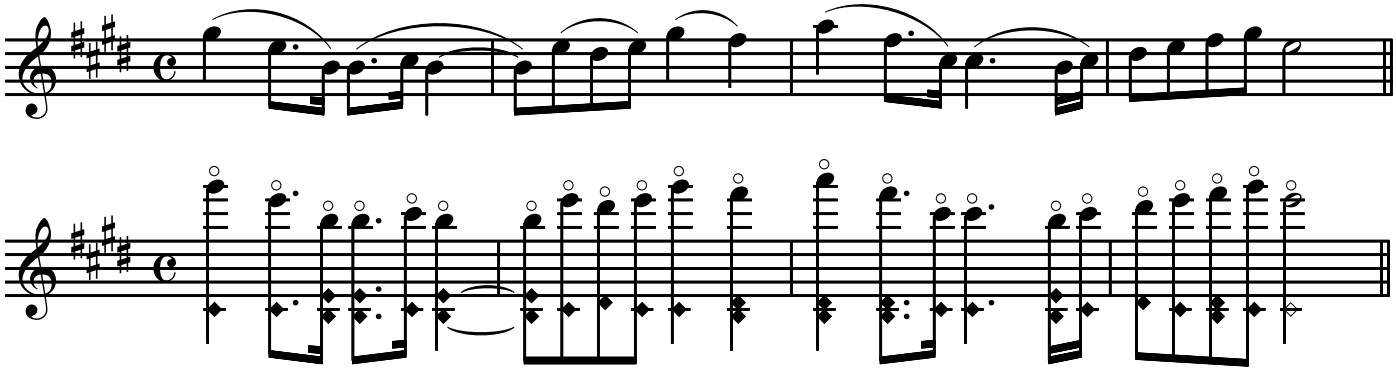
La Donna É Mobile - Verdi



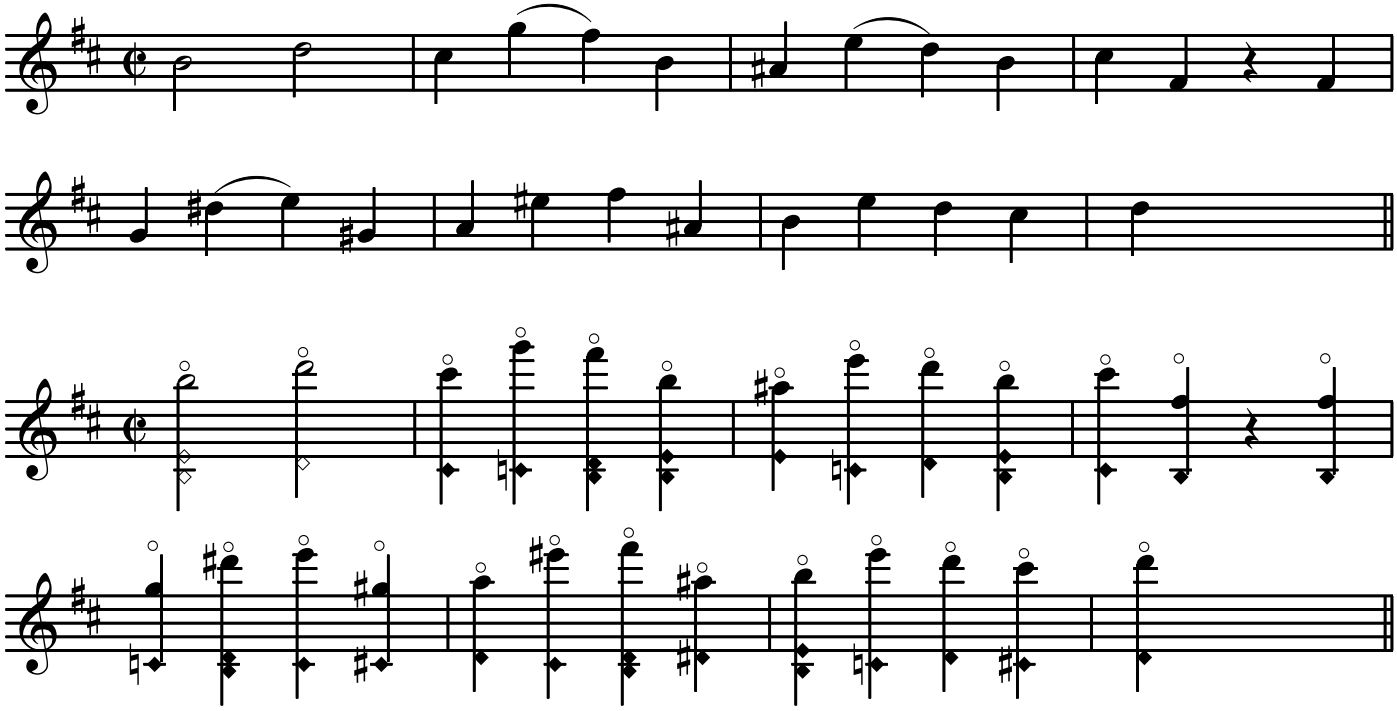
Bourree I from Cello Suite III - Bach



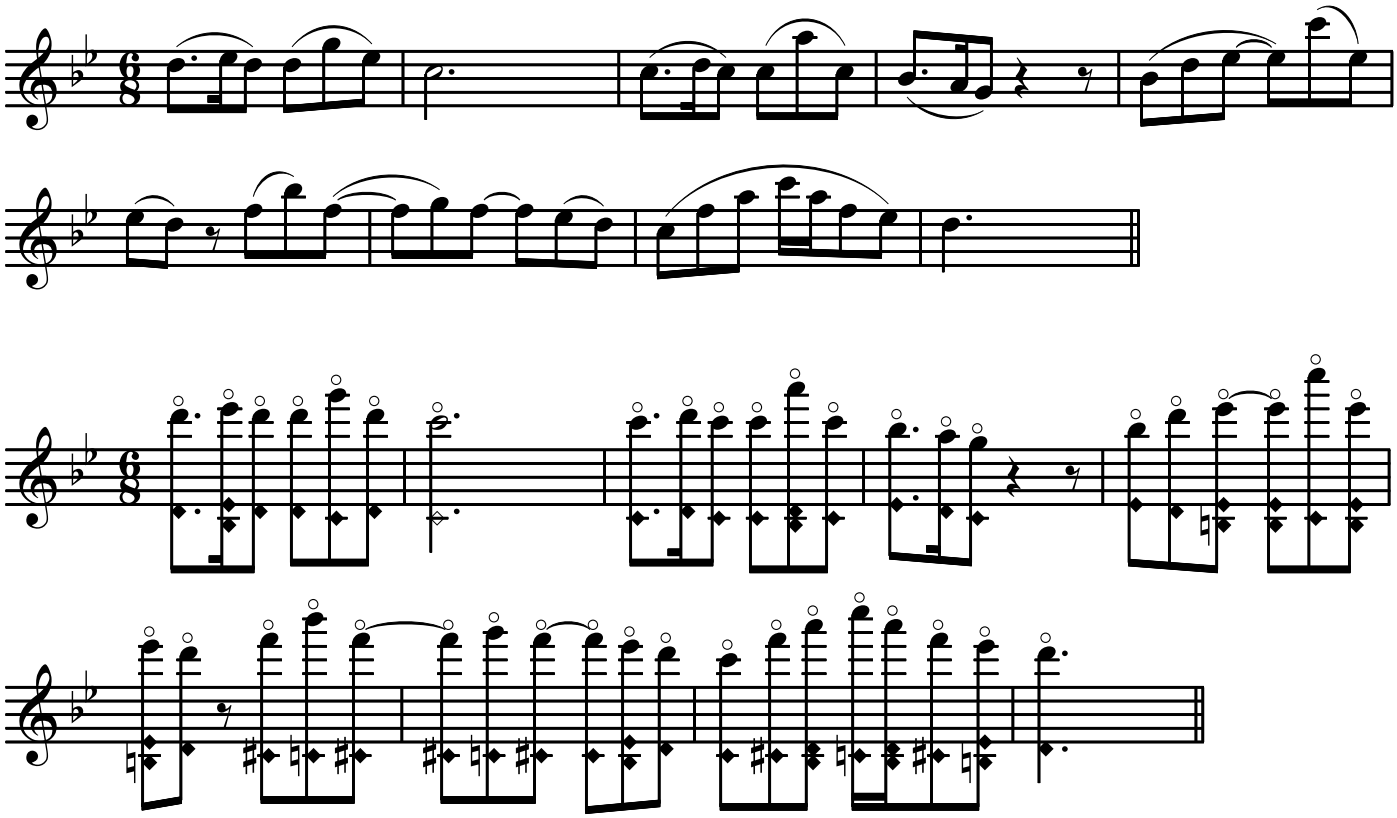
Song Without Words - Mendelssohn



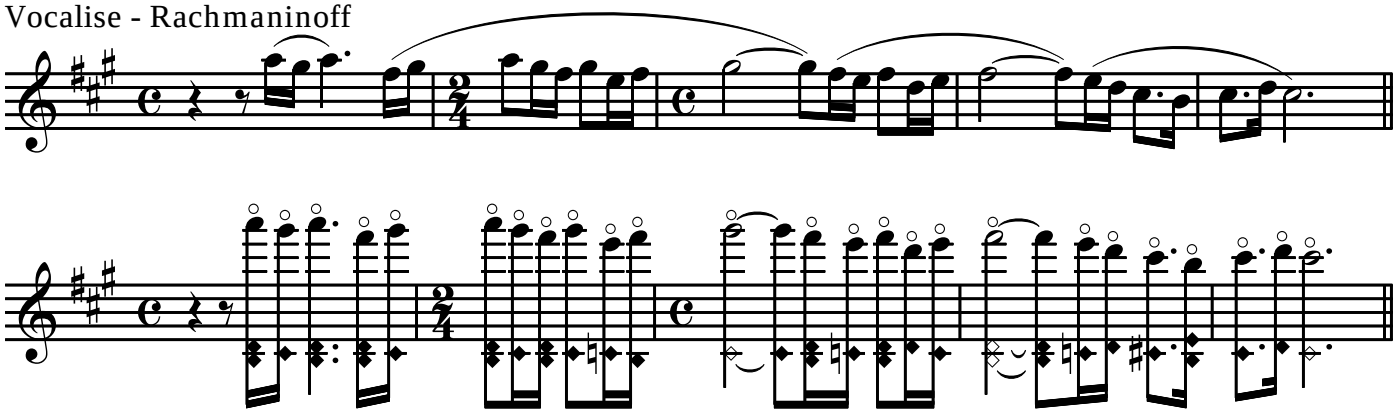
Presto from Flute Sonata I - Bach



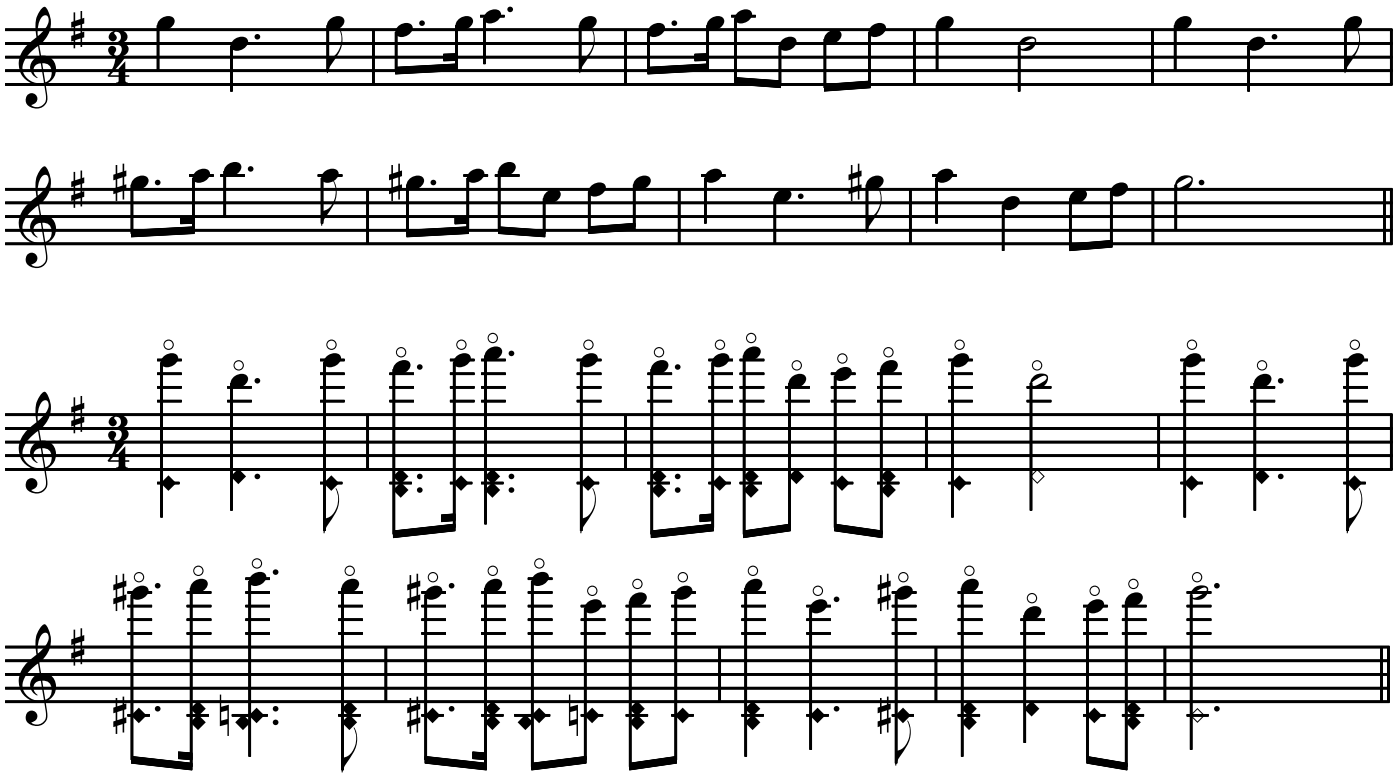
Siciliano from Flute Sonata II - Bach



Vocalise - Rachmaninoff



2nd Theme from Symphony #8 - Schubert



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