The POWER of Unison

Teaching Repertoire Through
Unison Based Concepts

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FACING REALITY

Kids are the SAME everywhere!
10%--30%--60%
How can we shift our classroom to better serve our clientele?

A CHANGE OF MINDSET

Kids don't practice? Spend more of class practicing!

THE PLANNING PROCESS

- Select music that follows your scope and sequence
  - Performance standards
- Preparation and study guided by creation of unison materials
- Starting with lead sheets made more sense for us
- Implement unison materials from "DAY ONE!"

CREATING LEAD SHEETS

- Best for "repetitive" or "programmatic" type music (medleys)
  - Great for grade .5 – 1.5 music
- Through-composed...consider the entire score before writing
- Written to be performed "top-to-bottom"
- Mimics the music measure for measure
- Emphasize melody, counter melodies, bass line at key points

CREATING PRACTICE LOOPS

- Works great for marches, fanfares, overtures
- Composed and rehearsed phrase-by-phrase
- Emphasize/teach the difficult or important parts
- Each loop can be rehearsed/taught individually
  - Multiple elements can be looped and then layered
- Grew out of a need to address more "involved" music (gr. 2.0-3.0)

PERCUSSION CONSIDERATIONS

- Mallets on their own parts if independent...flute part if not
- Battery on existing parts
- Auxiliary parts receive additional reps
- Deeper understanding of form and part function
- Increased engagement

IMPLEMENTATION

- 0.5-1.5 lead sheet...easier to write and teach!
  - Does not have to be "musical sounding"...cover the teaching points
- Keep it simple...one or two new concepts
- Prep students on new notes/rhythms etc. (same as always!)
- Modeling is not cheating! Play for your kids.

CLASSROOM BENEFITS

- Improved classroom management
- Faster classroom pace
- Everyone is challenged and supported
- Faster preparation and polishing
- Development of ensemble awareness

PERFORMANCE BENEFITS

- Better tone, articulation, dynamics (stronger chops!)
- Students challenged in more engaging environment (vs. book)
- Chromatics/Enharmonics
- Built-in differentiation (octave splits, Crossing the Break)
- Alternate fingerings/slide positions
- Aids students switching instruments

UNISON IN OTHER ENSEMBLES

- Jazz:
  - Students learn melody/form (a true "lead sheet)
  - Hits become tighter
  - Drummer learns form and function (long vs. short sounds)
- HS Concert Band:
  - Clarity of ensemble figures
  - Unison articulation concept
  - Tension/release, dynamic flow

ASSESSMENT VALUE?

- Can easily allow for small group assessment
- All students learn assessment material in rehearsal
- Have everyone play a portion of the melody
- Percussion might plan to rotate parts for assessment

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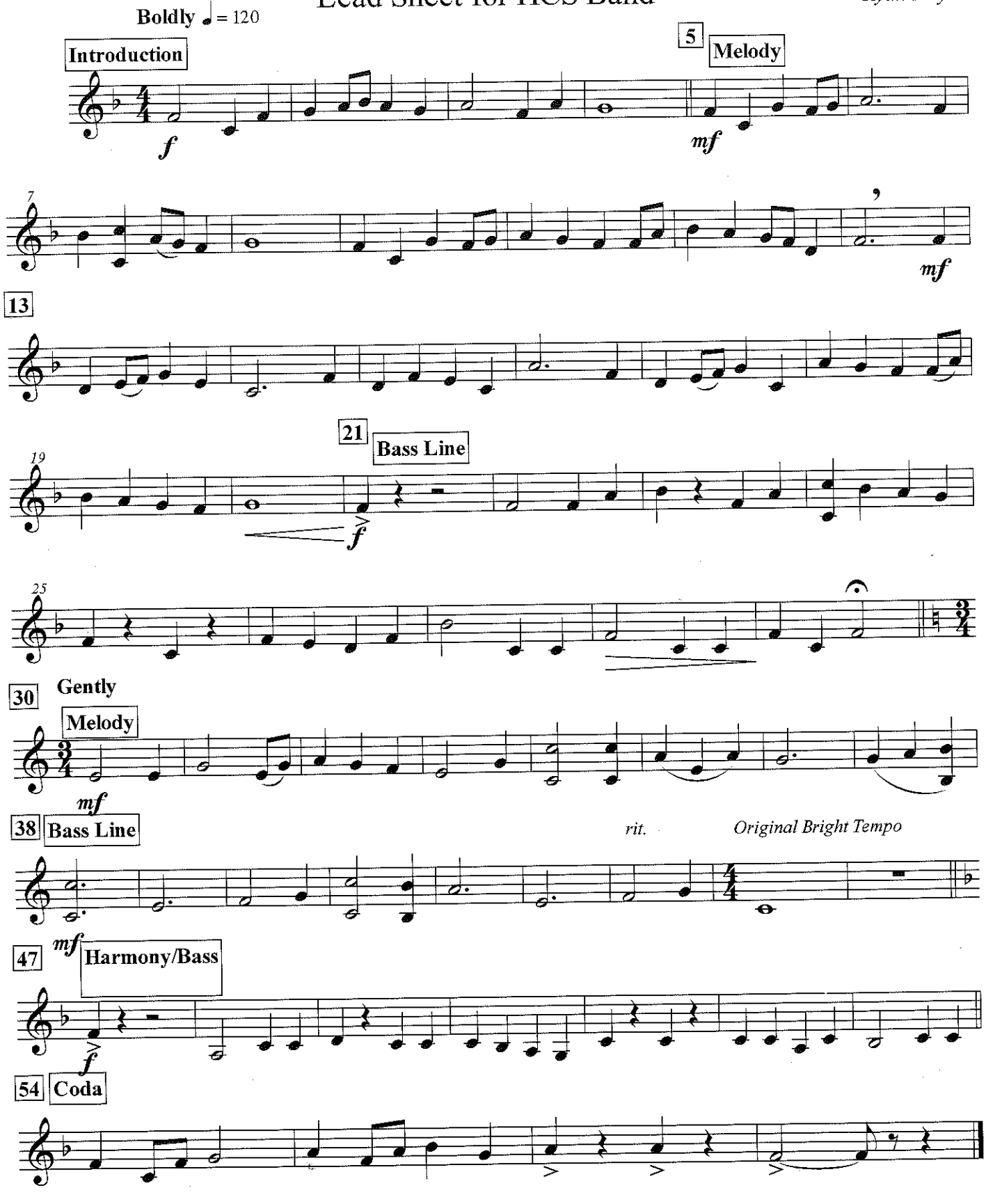
Clarinet in B♭

Courtlandt County Festival

Lead Sheet for HCS Band

William Owens
Ryan Meyer



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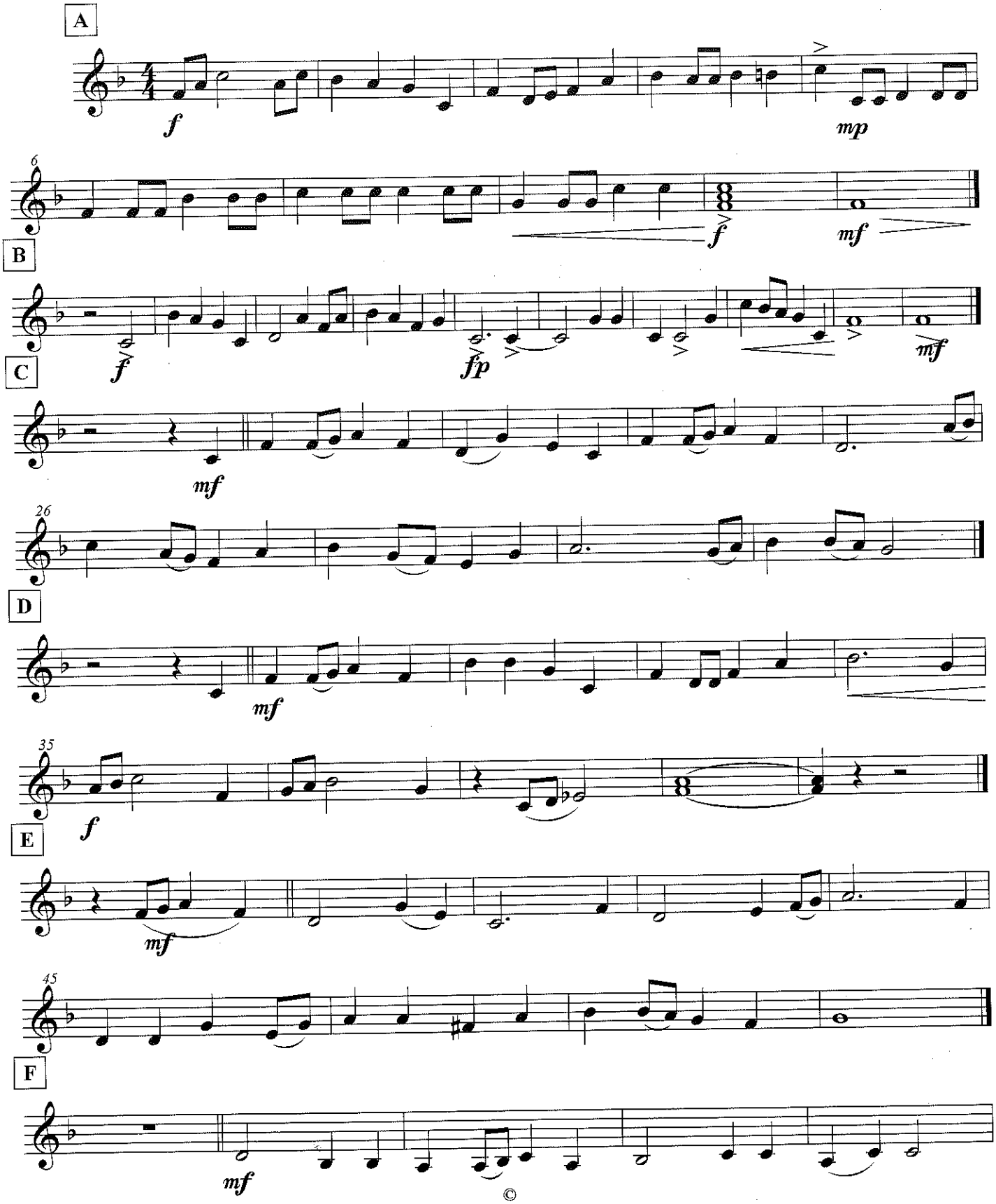
Clarinet in B♭

Summit Fanfare

Practice Loops for HCS Band

William Owens
Ryan Meyer



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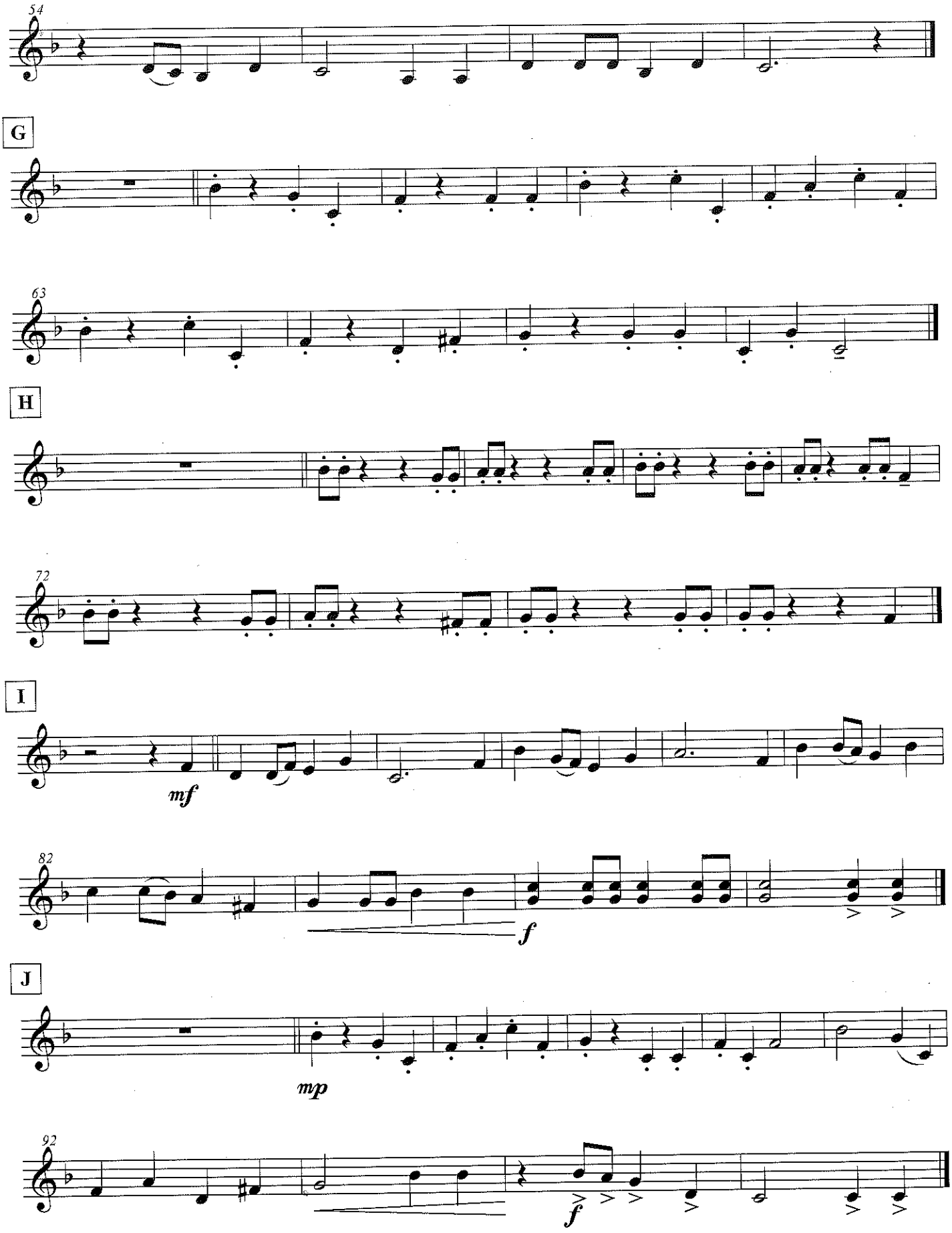
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