Piano Practice

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PREFACE

My inspiration came from a presentation on syllabus development by Hamish Tait, Director of the Riverina Conservatorium of Music in Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia.

Hamish spoke to staff at the Murray Conservatorium Albury about how we might document our resources and teaching methods, developing within our departments material unique to the Murray Con. and of immediate practical benefit to our students.

As a pupil at Sydney Conservatorium in 1972, I had the great fortune to have been taught by Igor Hmelnitsky. His approach to technique included sets of arpeggios and broken chords with inversions, each built on a single bass note. To this I added: augmented, minor 7th, minor 6th, and major 6th chords.

With the 2018 release of the AMEB Series 18 Technical Work books, I modified my work so it could function as extension material for Grade 8 students heading to tertiary studies.

This booklet provides a guide to these exercises. Also included are notes on useful teaching or learning strategies that worked for myself and my students, plus insightful pedagogical hints and snippets of wisdom from books by concert pianists.

This is clearly not an exhaustive coverage of technical suggestions for intermediate pianists wanting to work beyond their examination requirements but it is, I think, a very good start.

Gregory Lewis

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PAUSING AT GRADE 8

The AMEB offers good repertoire choices and a well-considered technical book but it is of course possible that students have passed their exams by playing only five or six pieces each year...

In my view, you should pause to explore the music you have bypassed, back to Grade 4, before moving to Grade 8.

Consider books of the *Piano Classics* variety. These types of books generally stay below Grade 6, making them perfect for new repertoire and sight-reading development.

For added variety, play movie themes, Broadway tunes, jazz standards and games music. A search for "advanced piano" on musicnotes.com will reveal hundreds of suitable arrangements.

My list of core classical repertoire will provide many years of enjoyable study. For future professionals it will provide the basis for a career in performing and teaching.

If you intend to become a piano teacher, then you ought to have a working knowledge of all the music in my list at least, in addition to all the music in the AMEB grade books.

It may take several years to learn this list of over 200 pieces, adding a few each term along side more advanced work. Use music from earlier grades to build your quick-study skills. Some can be mastered in a single sitting, others may take a week or two.

Your sight-reading will improve as you learn so many different pieces, helping you master future music more quickly. If you choose to push on through the AMEB system then please allow some time each week to continue working through this music.

Don't just play notes. Always consider: rubato; phrasing; chord voicing; balance between the hands; forearm rotation with "activated" fingers; neck, arm and hand relaxation; varieties of legato and non-legato; over-holding (*legatissimo*); use of full and half pedal techniques; and playing with appropriate rhythmic style.

If a full sonata is too challenging then learn the easier movements now and the others in a year or two. Suggestions for where to start are given in brackets. *denotes an Australian composer

Bach C. P. E.	*Solfeggietto in Cm*
Bach J. S	*Inventions: 1, 3, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14; Sinfonia No 15; Little Preludes: 925, 928, 933, 934, 936, 937; French Suite 816 (1, 4, 7); Partita 825 (1); Prelude & Fugue: 846, 847, 850, 866.*
Bailey *	*Jazzin' Around - Books 4, 5, & 6*
Bartók	Selections from: *Gyermekeknek;*
Burgmüller	*25 easy and progressive studies Op. 100*
Beethoven	*Bagatelles Op. 33: (1, 3, 6); Sonatas: Op. 2 No 1 (1); Op. 2 No 2 (3); Op. 13 (3); Op. 14 No 1 (2); Op. 14 No 2 (1); Op. 22 (3); Op. 28 (1); Op. 49 No 1 & No 2;*
Blake	*Life Cycle: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 21.*
Brumby *	*Harlequinade (1, 2)*
Chopin	*Mazurka Op. 41 No 2; Op. 67 No 2. Preludes Op. 28: 4, 6, 7, 15, 20; Waltzes: Op. 34 (2), Op. 64 (2), Op. 69. Waltz Am Op. Posth; Nocturne C♯m Op. Posth.*
Chua *	*Assorted Fairies; Sonatina.*
Debussy	*Deux arabesques; Children's Corner (1, 5 & 6); Clair de lune; La fille aux cheveux de lin; Minstrels.*

PAUSING AT GRADE 8

Edwards	*Five Little Piano Pieces*
Fauré	*Pièces brèves Op 84 (5);* *Romances sans paroles, Op. 17 (3).*
Gershwin	*Promenade; Novelette in Fourths;* *'S Wonderful; The Man I Love.*
Granados	*12 Danzas Éspañolas (5)*
Grieg	*Lyric Pieces Op.12; Lyric Suite Op.54 (3, 4, 5);* *Puck Op. 71 No 3.*
Haydn	*Sonatas: Hob. 23, 36.*
Hyde *	*Woodland Sketch; Concert Waltz for Left* *Hand; Rhapsodic Study for Left Hand.*
Ibert	*Le petit âne blanc; Sérénade sure l'eau.*
Joplin	*The Cascades; Solace; Maple Leaf Rag;* *The Entertainer.*
Kabalevsky	Selections from: *Op. 27* and *Op. 39.*
Kats-Chernin *	*Cinema; Waltz of Things Past.*
Mozart	*Viennese Sonatinas: 1, 2.* *Sonatas: K 282 (3); K 283 (1, 2); K 309;* *K 331 (3); K 457 (1); K 545 (1).*
Prokofiev	*Musiques d'enfants*
Scarlatti	*Sonatas: K63, K95, K391, K455, K35,* *K85, K3, K27, K239.*
Schumann, R	*Album für die Jugend: 1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16, 18,* *19, 23, 28, 30, 36; Kinderszenen Op. 15 (1, 6, 7).* *Drei Klaviersonaten für die Jugend - No 1.*
Skryabin	*Vingt-quatre preludes Op. 11 (2, 4).*
Tchaikovsky	*Album pour enfants Op. 39: 2, 11, 16, 21, 22*
Vine *	*Semplice; Red Blues; Spartacus.*

Extending repertoire before the AMusA

The Associate diploma is a tall step up from the Certificate of Performance. It should not be considered as another routine annual exam unless the candidate has first received a High Distinction at certificate level.

I feel that for most students there should be a period of repertoire building in order to more fully explore music across the centuries. Switching styles convincingly from century to century and across countries takes much experience.

The following suggestions are from the Grade 8 and Certificate of Performance lists. Individual movements have been chosen as pathways into complete works at diploma level. It includes music from Spain, Germany, Hungary, England, France, America, Armenia, Russia, Australia and South America.

Numbers in brackets indicate individual movements for study.

Albéniz	*Cantos d'España (5)*
Bach J. S	*Italian Concerto; English Suite No 4 (1, 4, 6); French Suite No 3 (1, 4, 7), P & F: 854, 862.*
Bartók	*Three Rondos on Slovak Folk Tunes (1)*
Beethoven	*Sonatas: Op. 10 No 1 (1); Op. 14 No 1; Op. 31 No 2 (1); Op. 79.* *Bagatelles Op. 126 (any two).*
Bridge	*Three Sketches (3)*

PAUSING AT GRADE 8

Chopin	*Mazurka: Op. 24 No 4; Op. 33 No 4; Op. 50 No 3. Fantaisie-Impromptu Op. 66. Nocturne: Op. 9 (1, 2); Op. 15 No 1; Op. 32 No 1. Polonaise: Op. 26 No 1; Op. 40 No 1.*
Clementi	*Sonata Op. 25 No 6 (1, 3)*
Copland	*The Cat and the Mouse*
Debussy	*La cathédrale engloutie; La plus que lente; Prelude to Suite Bergamasque; Voiles.*
Falla	*Danza ritual del fuego*
Gershwin	*I Got Rhythm; The Man I Love; Three Preludes (1).*
Grieg	*Wedding Day at Troldhaugen*
Haydn	*Sonata: Hob. 37, 40, 44.*
Khachaturian	*Toccata*
MacDowell	*Shadow Dance, Witches Dance.*
Mozart	*Sonata: K332 (3); K330 (1); Rondo in Am K511.*
Parker	*Down Longford Way*
Prokofiev	*The Montagues and the Capulets (6)*
Rachmaninoff	*Morceaux de fantaisie Op. 3 No 2*
Ravel	*Le Tombeau de Couperin (4, 5); Pavane pour une infante défunte.*
Scarlatti	Select from: *K484, K209, K342, K427, K513, K28, K96, K140, K141, K366, K535 and K551.*
Schumann	*Noveletten Op. 21 (1)*
Skryabin	*24 Preludes Op. 11 (13, 14, 15, 16)*
Villa-Lobos	*Polichinello*

Recommended Editions

Bach	Henle (Schiff); Bärenreiter (Dürr).
Beethoven	Peters Urtext (Arrau); Henle (Perahia); Vienna Urtext (Hauschild); ABRSM (Cooper); Alfred (Schnabel); Alfred Masterworks (Gordon).
Chopin	PWM (Ekier); Henle (Müllemann); PWM (Paderewski).
Debussy	Durand (Howat); Henle (Heinemann). Alfred Masterworks (Gordon);
Gershwin	Alfred Masterworks; Henle.
Haydn	ABRSM (Ferguson); Vienna Urtext (Landon); Henle (Feder).
Mozart	Henle (Herttrich); Barenreiter (Plath); Vienna Urtext (Leisinger).
Scarlatti	Heugel & Cie ; Ricordi; Henle.
Schumann	Henle; ABRSM; Vienna Urtext.

INTERMEDIATE TECHNIQUE

"Personally, I practise scales in preference to all other forms of technical exercises when I am preparing for a concert. Add to this arpeggios and Bach, and you have the basis upon which my technical work stands."

— Wilhelm Backhaus

Prerequisites

- The entirety of the AMEB technical books, Prelim. to Grade 8.
- All major and harmonic minor scales at 72 bpm
  - Similar and contrary motion – one octave per beat.
  - Thirds, sixths and tenths – four notes per beat
  - Double thirds (HS) – four notes per beat
- All major and melodic minors in broken and double octaves.

Chord based routines

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a basis for a regular, tension-free intermediate level technical routine.

Major, minor, augmented, diminished, 6th and Dominant 7th chords appear in all keys except F♯ and E♭m. Practise those separately with arpeggios and broken chords with inversions.

Stay relaxed

In all your playing, keep your wrists mobile:

- left to right, aligning the active fingers with the arm.
- forward and back, as fingers 1 and 5 play black notes.
- down and up, as you add dynamic shading to phrases.
- side to side, as forearm rotation supports finger strength.
- elliptical motion to free up repetitive patterns.

High finger action with an inflexible wrist is not beneficial. This produces a tired arm with a loss of speed and musical control. Pain and injury must never be a part of your life as a pianist.

Play softly. Keep your fingers close to the keys. Do not keep your fingers stretched above notes already played. Avoid the "Garden Rake" hand shape.

Wherever possible, keep your arms moving to stay behind and aligned with the playing fingers. In general, you should maintain a straight line from your elbow to the finger being played.

Rather than consciously lifting your fingers high, let the natural elasticity of your hands and the upward pressure of the keys themselves lift your fingers automatically.

Use a whole-arm *non-legato* when learning arpeggios. Keep hands separate (HS) until you can play without tiring. At first, swap hands after every scale, arpeggio and broken chord.

Do not continue to press down after the note sounds. This is a common cause of tired arms. Allow your fingers to close naturally after each chord. Practice loud passages *pianissimo* as well.

At every volume level, voice your chords. Thumb-heavy right hand chords are seldom attractive.

Keep checking that your shoulders are relaxed. Unreleased physical tension can make arpeggios and broken chords quite tiring. Take time between repetitions to put your hands in your lap or hang them by your side.

The Complete Pianist by Penelope Roskell has excellent information with linked videos about how to warm up and play without tension or injury. Also included are detailed descriptions of practice techniques for many common technical issues. This book is highly recommended.

Scales

Try *staccato-pianissimo* with firm fingertips until you know the notes. Continue softly and slowly when playing legato. Play HS until you have a clear, even sound. Also practise scales descending first. Learn all scales with closed eyes.

To gain fluency and speed, try playing in groups of two, over two octaves only. Follow at the same tempo with groups of three over three octaves then groups of four over four octaves.

When you have them under control, play with one hand staccato and the other legato. Decide on a sequence of crescendo and decrescendo before you play.

Finally, go for high speed in similar motion, legato scales. Play in groups of seven notes at 50 to 72 bpm for each octave.

Block chords and arpeggios

Use the sustain pedal to create a rich resonance as you play each set of chords. Voice every chord. Move quickly to each hand position in advance and touch the keys before playing. This is a similar style to the opening of Tchaikovky's lst piano concerto.

Proceed to four octave arpeggios on the same chord. In major, minor and augmented arpeggios, play in groups of four to avoid thumb accents. Play hands together (HT) only when you can play HS without tiring.

For Dominant 7th, Diminished 7th and 6th chords omit finger 5 in block chords, hands separately. This is still the correct hand shape for the arpeggios.

Establish hand positions for new chords and inversions by playing gentle stretching or tapping exercises as shown at the end of this booklet.

Double scales

Double thirds are valuable for finger independence. Begin as broken thirds until your hand positions are secure. Then play staccato, moving your arm in the direction of the scale. Finally, play legato, holding at least one note of each pair as you change fingers.

In this booklet, a set of finger patterns for seven major and melodic minor double third scales are shown that differ from the fingerings used in the ABRSM technical book. My choices are based on the book *Natural Fingering* by Jon Verbalis.

Scales in parallel sixths, especially minors starting on black keys, are troublesome for many students. Play slowly over two octaves at first so your mind stays ahead of your fingers.

For fast double octaves only use fingers 1 and 5. Keep your eyes on your thumbs. Practise single notes with 1 then 5 alone, but with your hand open.

In repertoire, broken octaves and slow legato passages may benefit from using 4 on black notes if you have large hands.

Concentrate on playing with the least effort. If your wrists ache after a few octaves then you are doing it wrong. Keep your wrists free and rest often by letting your arms hang by your side.

There are many instances in concert repertoire where octaves need to go as fast as you can play them, so speed these up as soon as you can play without tension. At first play *pianissimo* with a gentle, bouncy wrist staccato. Keep as close to the keys as you can, avoiding any high "Woodpecker" action.

Also try simple pieces from the *Anna Magdalena Notebook* in octaves. Keep your hands separate and play very slowly until you can judge the leaps accurately. This is quite challenging but most worthwhile.

Broken chords in inversions

These are central to all piano literature. You need to recognise chords so well that your hands instantly make the correct shape as you approach the keys.

Learn new broken chords with a whole-arm *non—legato*. Keep your wrist mobile and your arm moving behind each note.

Resist the temptation to continue if you have missed a note. Identify the problem, check your wrist alignment and repeat.

As soon as you have played the first two notes of a broken chord, move those fingers toward the hand position of the next inversion. It is unnecessarily tiring to keep your hand open with your fingers hovering above notes already played.

Typical daily session

These exercises are quite demanding. Don't start your day with technical work. Playing with cold or stiff hands will quickly tire and discourage you. I often warm up with Bach, either a page of music I am studying or one of the *Little Preludes*.

Each day, choose a black note tonic. For example, A♭.

- Major and harm. minor scales at the octave, 3rd, 10th and 6th.
- Contrary motion starting an octave apart
- Double thirds: (HS), broken, staccato and legato.
- Chromatics at the octave and in minor thirds.
- Major and minor broken chords, with inversions.
- Major and melodic minor in broken and double octaves.

Choose a white note tonic. For example, F.

- All scales as in the examples above but in F and Fm.
- Chords, arpeggios, broken chords and double scales as shown in this booklet, with all exercises beginning on F.

Technique through repertoire

I never set Hanon or Czerny exercises. In my opinion, time could be better spent devising personal études for difficult passages in your repertoire, or playing Bach preludes or Scarlatti sonatas. Your technical facility and musicianship will develop naturally and you will have a more extensive concert repertoire.

> *"What it all comes down to is that one does not play the piano with one's fingers, one plays the piano with one's mind. If you have a clear image of what you want to do, there's no reason it should ever need reinforcement. If you don't, all the fine Czerny studies and Hanon exercises in the world aren't going to help you." — Glenn Gould*

Heinrich Neuhaus, the teacher of Radu Lupu, Emile Gilels and Sviatoslav Richter, set these Bach preludes from *The 48* instead of exercises by Czerny and Clementi.

- Book 1: 2, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 21.
- Book 2: 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 15, 18, 21, 23.

The following Scarlatti sonatas are an excellent alternative to Czerny studies from Grade 8 onwards. Select from: K484, K209, K342, K427, K513, K28, K96, K140, K141, K366, K535 and K551.

A study of fugues by Bach, Schumann, Shostakovich and Hindemith, with close attention to the articulation and phrasing of each voice, is most beneficial for building finger independence.

Professional pianists will study études by Moscheles, Chopin, Liszt, Brahms, Moskowski, Debussy, Godowski, Scriabin, Rachmaninov, Ligeti, Glass and Bolcom. Study at this level of technical proficiency is obviously well beyond the scope of this booklet.

BUILDING REPERTOIRE

"Practice is passing the day at the piano with patience and serenity"

— Artur Schnabel

Introduction

Practice is not just mechanical finger wiggling. It is concentrated mind work with sustained bursts of intense mental activity.

Serious students should practice six days a week. A minimum of 18 hours per week is needed from Grade 8 onwards. Do as much practice as you can before noon each day.

Listen to three professional recordings before you begin a new piece to help establish the stylistic and rhythmic idiom of the composer. Classical music often requires subtle *rubato*. Knowing where to push and pull the tempo is an art, not a science. Listening closely to master pianists helps you understand this sense of stretched rhythm — it is not on the page.

When learning individual sections, limit your dynamics to a *pianissimo* to *mezzo-forte* range. Save *forte* and *fortissimo* for full play-throughs and recitals.

Press all the way down on each key, then **relax immediately** — do not keep pushing down into the key bed. This will eventually cause pain in your hands and forearms.

Approach your piano practice as a time for creating beautiful sounds. Even at the first reading of a new piece you should be noticing the tone you are producing.

Identify chords before you play them. Always include articulations and expression. Look at the score, not at your hands when learning the notes. This will build your sight-reading facility.

The cycle of imagination, performance, self-evaluation, problem solving and continual improvement is difficult to sustain. The optimum session time at the keyboard varies with age and experience but should be in the range of 25 to 40 minutes.

Play as many sessions as you can in a day, but no more than three in a row before a break. Playing when tired is pointless.

Try to work at least three days in a row when starting a new piece. Your mind needs to know "this is important" so your subconscious can begin processing the material away from the piano. If you have worked intensively on the problems then you will continue to learn as you sleep.

Hear the music in your mind

Piano technique is mostly in your head, not your fingers. Play with a precise aural image of the music as you ultimately wish to perform it. Listen critically to every phrase. Provide a sense of rhythmic and melodic direction. Always be "going somewhere".

Follow these steps for each phrase within sections:

1. Identify all the pitches and rhythms in advance.
2. Inwardly hear the musical phrasing you wish to produce.
3. Imagine how the finger stretches and keys will feel.
4. Play the notes slowly and accurately. Do not guess.
5. Slightly accelerate each key to avoid an unreliable tone.
6. Evaluate your playing, noting problem areas for attention.
7. Play accurately and musically at least three times in a row.

Practice with purposeful intent until your sound matches your imagination. Think about the music, not mechanical repetition.

Are you ending phrases quietly unless the composer has marked otherwise? Are you including dynamic shaping in long phrases? Are you voicing chords and multi-part writing to enhance the melodies? Are you playing all articulations?

Have a clear plan

Never sit at the piano without first knowing what it is you hope to achieve. Otherwise you won't know when you have achieved it...

Rehearsal marks, capital letters inside boxes, should be added at regular intervals throughout the music. Most composers build their music by combining sections of four to twelve bars.

Learn the final section first, then the most difficult section. If you start at the beginning every day, then ultimately the opening pages will be more secure than the final pages. This is surely counterproductive.

After you learn the final section you will always be heading towards music you already know, rather than continually plunging into the unknown!

If you have rehearsal marks **A**, **B**, **C**, & **D** for a piece of 30 to 40 bars then learn from **D** first. Follow with **C**, **B**, **A** then from the top to letter **A**. After that, begin each day at a different place.

Minimise errors

At first, you must play very slowly to keep your brain ahead of your fingers. Establish complex patterns with slow raised fingers at *mezzo piano*. This is the only time you should ever lift your fingers high. Also use finger *staccato* to build accuracy.

After an error, never simply play the right note then continue. This will have the alarming effect of permanently inserting the wrong note into your performance. Remember, *"Practice Makes Permanent"*. Restart the phrase, pause before the wrong note then play it correctly.

Try difficult sections at full speed, HS, to ensure fingerings are effective. Pencil them in and stick to these when you move to playing HT. It is a huge time waster to redo fingerings later when you discover your initial choices only work at a slow tempo.

In challenging music, spend time purposely working with the left hand alone. Playing HT is easier when the left hand is confident and expressive. How would you perform if the left hand part was the complete piece?

As your memory develops, concentrate more on the sound, not the keys. Touch each key before you play. This is important in chords or when leaping large distances across the keyboard.

Notice the difference between working and performing. When working you imagine, play, evaluate, identify problems, devise solutions, then repeat until everything is fluent and musical.

Monitor yourself constantly. Do not let wrong notes escape. Identify errors — rhythm, accidental (pun intended), hand position or fingering — before repeating. You must understand what went wrong before reworking the phrase.

Often a simple solution for wrong notes or playing "in the cracks" is to verbalise the note or chord name, voicing, articulation and tone colour before playing.

If you can't play a difficult passage the first time then you may have never done that particular arm, hand or finger movement before. Answers often involve slow practice, careful articulation, and phrase by phrase memorisation.

Some music lends itself to a zigzag learning technique, alternating the hands from bar to bar.

Putting it together

Coordinating the hands is often the most difficult aspect in complex music. Play together as soon as each hand can play near the performance tempo, starting at the **speed of no mistakes**. Aim for a half-speed performance as soon as you can. Create an accurate, imaginative performance before speeding up.

Never play faster than you can manage accurately and musically. If there are large hand shifts then move quickly even at the slow tempo, getting into position early. For fast music, take a phrase at a time and switch between full speed and half speed.

In the early stages of complex HT work begin each practice session HS at full speed, taking careful notice of the fingering you are using. Perhaps you need more pencilled fingerings.

Unless playing a fugue with more than two voices or using a technique where both hands need to work as a single unit, begin your early HT learning sessions by playing Left-Right-Left separately at full tempo. Imagine that the music is to be performed only with that hand. Play softly and very slowly when putting the hands back together. Don't learn wrong notes!

Always end practice sessions of fast music at a much reduced tempo. Your final run each day should be a slow, note-perfect run through. One quarter speed is not extreme for a presto movement but take care to continue using quick movements to reposition the hands where necessary.

Sometimes errors are due to keeping your elbows too close to your body, or sitting too close to the piano. If the music ranges widely across the keyboard then your arms need room to move.

If you need the damper pedal then learn to play clearly without it first. Careless, inaccurate playing still sounds bad with the pedal. Often you can achieve pleasing musical effects under slurs by holding fingers down instead of using the pedal.

In 19th century repertoire, try not releasing the pedal fully, or using just the minimum pedal depression, to create a natural reverb mimicking the tonal quality of pianos of that era.

If you have a grand piano then learn to appreciate the sound quality of the *una corda* pedal. This provides a gentler, more diffuse tone colour.

One of Beethoven's pianos had five pedals — a damper and four effects. It is fine to use *una corda* for tonal changes rather than as merely a soft pedal. Try it for slow movements, or for a surprising tonal contrasts at higher dynamics.

During a recital, rhythmic flow and emotional projection is more important than hitting the right notes. Don't stop!

Performing means playing to an audience, or for yourself on a recording. How would you play with the composer in the room? What is he or she trying to communicate through the music?

Two or three consecutive sections are enough to start recording yourself. Are you playing what is in the score, with style?

As soon as you are under pressure to keep the music moving in a video, new unexpected errors will appear, to be noted and remedied during your next work session.

Identify musical issues and devise personal études to fix them. Correct solutions use comfortable physical actions to present your view of the composer's intentions.

If your audience is not thinking deeply about the music or feeling the hairs bristle on the back of their necks then your music lacks something essential.

Using a metronome

A page of Art music entered into a software notation program then replayed at a constant tempo is unbearably ugly. Each composer writes with a different rubato in mind.

Try tapping one hand while playing the other, or tapping the toes of your left foot, instead of using a metronome. Feeling the beat in this way helps you internalise the tempo and rhythms.

If you wish to use a metronome to detect unintentional tempo changes or force you to keep to a very slow tempo then set it as slow as possible, only once or twice per bar if possible. This allows for some minimal rhythmic flexibility.

Use a metronome for scales and arpeggios, and to build speed for fast pieces. Playing *Vivace* and *piano* is a strong rehearsal technique. It is always easier to slow down later, rather than go on stage fearing that you have to play at 100% of your ability.

With the metronome off, strengthen your internal pulse by counting aloud. This forces you to concentrate more fully, which increases your learning speed.

A metronome is useful when learning polyrhythms, such as two or four notes against three. Set the metronome to a slow tempo while alternating hands bar by bar, then beat by beat, before trying HT.

Listen only to the greatest artists

Set aside time each week to hear outstanding pianists. Computers can play fast, complex note patterns. From you, audiences need to hear Art. You can't hope to achieve this unless you are familiar with the great performers.

My favourites are: Friedheim, Rachmaninov, Hoffmann, Schnabel, Grainger*, Backhaus, Kempff, Rubinstein, Hess, Haskil, Horowitz, Arrau, Perlemuter, Joyce*, Cherkassky, Gilels, Richter, Lympany, Lipatti, Larrocha, Katchen, Fleisher, Demus, Gulda, Brendel, Ashkenazy, Argerich, Barenboim, Woodward*, Goode, Pires, Lupu, Sokolov, Rogé, Willems*, Perahia, Ax, Shelley, Jandó, Fergus-Thompson, Schiff, Zimerman, McCallum*, Tozer*, Lancaster*, Aimard, Lane*, Hewitt, Hamelin, Hough*, Harvey*, Thibaudet, Gray*, Selby*, Grimaud, Andsnes, Kissin, Volodos, Lisista, Goldsworthy*, Biss, Lang, Wang, Gavrylyuk*, Gillham*, and Trifinov.

(* denotes an Australian performer)

Memorisation

Consider this: playing the piano does not involve learning how to move your fingers so much as learning how to think clearly. Your brain is your most important musical asset, not your fingers.

You will play well if you have a vivid aural image of the sound you are about to produce before touching the keys. Memorising your music will assist you in developing this aural imagination.

Memorisation rarely comes easily unless you are constantly working on it during the learning stages. Make memory training a part of your every day routine. Memorisation should be an intrinsic part of learning new music, not left to the end as an additional task—that only lengthens your learning time.

Use effective, musical fingerings that assist the phrasing and work at full performance speed. Mark your page wherever you find yourself using more effective fingerings.

You may need to play a phrase many times before you can recall the music easily. Pause between repetitions, evaluate what you just played and re-imagine the phrasing in your mind. In simple melodies, can you stop anywhere and sing the next note?

Sometimes, play so slowly that you can't rely on muscle memory. This way you must know the next note, perhaps by seeing or hearing the next interval in your mind, imagining the sound of the next harmony, or recalling a pattern and its starting finger.

Muscle memory is a vital basis (with a minimum of 100 correct repetitions for advanced music) but you need more. Memorise difficult sections as soon as possible, including phrasing, rubato, tempo changes, dynamics, voicing and articulations. These aspects define the core of the music, they are not optional extras.

Your ears need to hear musical performances even at reduced speed. Don't be tempted to learn the notes in a mechanical fashion then add everything else later. Memorise music, not notes!

Force yourself to look only at the music of the phrase being memorised, then only at your hands as you repeat. Start slowly and resist the temptation to speed up until you feel that your brain is working well in advance of your fingers.

When playing hands together your mind tends to remember the right hand part. In difficult sections, memorise the left hand alone so you can hear it clearly at all times.

Sometimes it helps to lead with your left hand, basing your musical ideas on the harmonic foundations rather than the upper melodies.

Incorporate structural and harmonic analysis in your learning. In tonal music, always know what key you are in and what chord you are playing. Ensure you can stop at any time and say, for example, "E major, B^7 - dominant".

Mark sonata sections, variations, return of themes, modulations and switches — points where a recapitulation in the same key changes direction partway through.

Establish restart points so you can say to yourself, for example, "Development" and instantly play from there. Draw a simple form map including the main sections and modulations.

Try playing gently on the keyboard lid, hearing the music only in your mind. Do this with and without the music.

Since you cannot hit wrong notes when playing silently you can concentrate on aspects of rhythm, rubato, tempo changes and articulation you may have missed when playing the keys.

Also spend time with the score away from the piano. Play only in your mind, identifying melodies, chords, fingers and rhythms.

Eventually you should extend this mental play to experiencing the sound and feel of entire pieces in your mind alone.

Sight-Reading

Take every opportunity to learn short, easy pieces. If the music is well within your capabilities then playing at half speed, hands together, ought to be achievable almost immediately.

Strong sight-reading is the most important skill you can have. Learn a new page each day. This could be a complete piece or a section from a larger work. Experience will help you decide the length of pieces that you can play after a single sitting.

Build a library of sheet music or files for a large-screen iPad, with music from imslp.org or pianostreet.com.

Sight-reading suggestions.

- First, determine the key and notice any accidentals.
- Tap the rhythm of the first few bars on your knees.
- Read ahead. Don't look at notes you are already playing.
- Don't stop to fix notes. Play as if accompanying a singer.
- Play rhythmically and musically, with all articulations.
- Play without looking at your fingers. Play by touch alone.

After reading through three times, slowly and **without stopping**, use the music as a quick study item. Aim to perform it with all musical aspects in place at that same practice session, even if this is at a much reduced tempo.

- Learn phrases HS at full speed. Write in the fingerings.
- Put hands together at half speed, one phrase at a time.
- Do not repeat easy parts. Concentrate on new challenges.
- Play phrases with closed eyes to improve your memory.

The Russian School of Piano Playing Book 2, and collections by Béla Bartók, Miriam Hyde, Dimitri Kabalevsky, Christopher Norton, Alexandre Tansman, Sonny Chua, Kieran Bailey and Elissa Milne are all excellent sources for sight-reading sessions.

In addition, the ABRSM publishes graded anthologies of exam pieces. Also seek out intermediate level arrangements of popular songs. Modern rhythms are often more complex than in classical music. Learning syncopations or swing style is important.

Try sight-reading as a warmup before intense technical sessions. Begin gently to get the blood flowing into your arms and hands. Playing too fast or loud with cold fingers will cause instant fatigue, ruin your first practice session and lead to long-term muscle fatigue.

Music for life

There is little point in learning any instrument for many years if, given reasonable notice, you can't actually sit down and play for your family and friends. Music for personal enjoyment is a perfectly good reason to learn, but to deliberately avoid sharing with others seems to me a waste of a wonderful opportunity.

Challenge the flawed concept of "working for the exam". This restricts learning anything easy and joyful for public performance in deference to complex pieces for an audience of one.

Performing only four or five difficult pieces once a year is bad enough, but relegating those hard-won items to the "never again for the rest of my life" basket is unjustifiable.

A rich source of recreational music for grade 6 and above are the collections of anime composer Joe Hisaishi. This vibrant, intensely beautiful music is a joy to play at any age.

Themes from favourite movies or games are also fun. Play-along books are available for popular movies and musicals. Add to your life experience in an optimistic and satisfying manner by sharing a little of what you enjoy.

QUOTES FROM THE MASTERS

I have to be honest. I hate practicing. I've always disliked it. But it is a necessity. I have to do it because I love to play.

— Jorge Bolet

Never allow a wrong or split note to pass. If you do, it may become a habit, and you will not realise how many wrong notes you play. You will have a vague idea at the back of your mind "That's all right, I'll see to that next time." The habit will grow.

— Hetty Bolton

When I start to work on a piece it is important for me to work out everything — the suitable fingerings and the proper physical movement — in the real tempo in order to give the piece the right character.

— Alfred Brendel

(On playing finger studies) *It's like learning, for example, to walk on one's hands in order to go for a stroll. Eventually one is no longer able to walk properly on one's feet, and not very well on one's hands either. It doesn't teach us how to play the music itself — and the type of difficulty we are practicing is not the difficulty encountered in good music, the music of the great masters. It's an abstract difficulty, a new genre of acrobatics.*

— Frédérick Chopin

The indiscriminate giving of technical exercises may impede progress rather than advance the pupil... Your own difficulty is the difficulty which you should practise most. Why waste time in practicing passages which you can play perfectly well?

— James Cooke

If the passage is being practised wrongly, every repetition will only make it worse instead of better.

— Clifford Curzon

Nothing so much spurs the pupil on to the attentive and industrious practice of any piece, as the idea that he is to play it before others.

— Carl Czerny

I'll always start and end the day playing it slowly without pedal and very carefully listening to each note, every voice, knowing exactly where everything is going. No cheating.

— Janina Fialkowska

Successful practising depends on the clarity of our mental conception of a musical purpose, on the ability to concentrate attention and direct energy towards the attainment of this goal.

— George Kochevitsky

In the (Russian) conservatory examinations the student is examined first upon technique. If he fails to pass the technical examination he is not even asked to perform his pieces.

— Josef Lhevinne

The best teacher is one who creates a self teaching pupil and self developing artist.

— Vitaly Margulis

The improvement of dexterity requires the subtraction of unnecessary tension, not the addition of muscular facility.

— Vitaly Margulis

How much more important it is for a good pianist to have good parents than good teachers.

— Heinrich Neuhaus

PIANO PRACTICE

Practice:

1. with the music at the piano

2. without the music at the piano

3. with the music not at the piano

4. without the music not at the piano

— Heinrich Neuhaus

If you learn something slowly, you forget it slowly.
— Itzhak Perlman

However, I do not practise exercises. I just don't do that.
— Ivo Pogorelich

We have to develop in our students not finger dexterity but mind dexterity.

— Oscar Raif

However difficult it may be, there isn't a passage that doesn't become easy if practised 100 times.

— Sviatoslav Richter

Endeavour to play easy pieces well and with elegance; that is better than to play difficult pieces badly.

— Robert Schumann

If you play before you hear what you're going for, it's an accident, and everything is built then on an accident.

— Artur Schnabel

Do not seek the footsteps of the wise.
Seek what they sought.
— Matsuo Bashō

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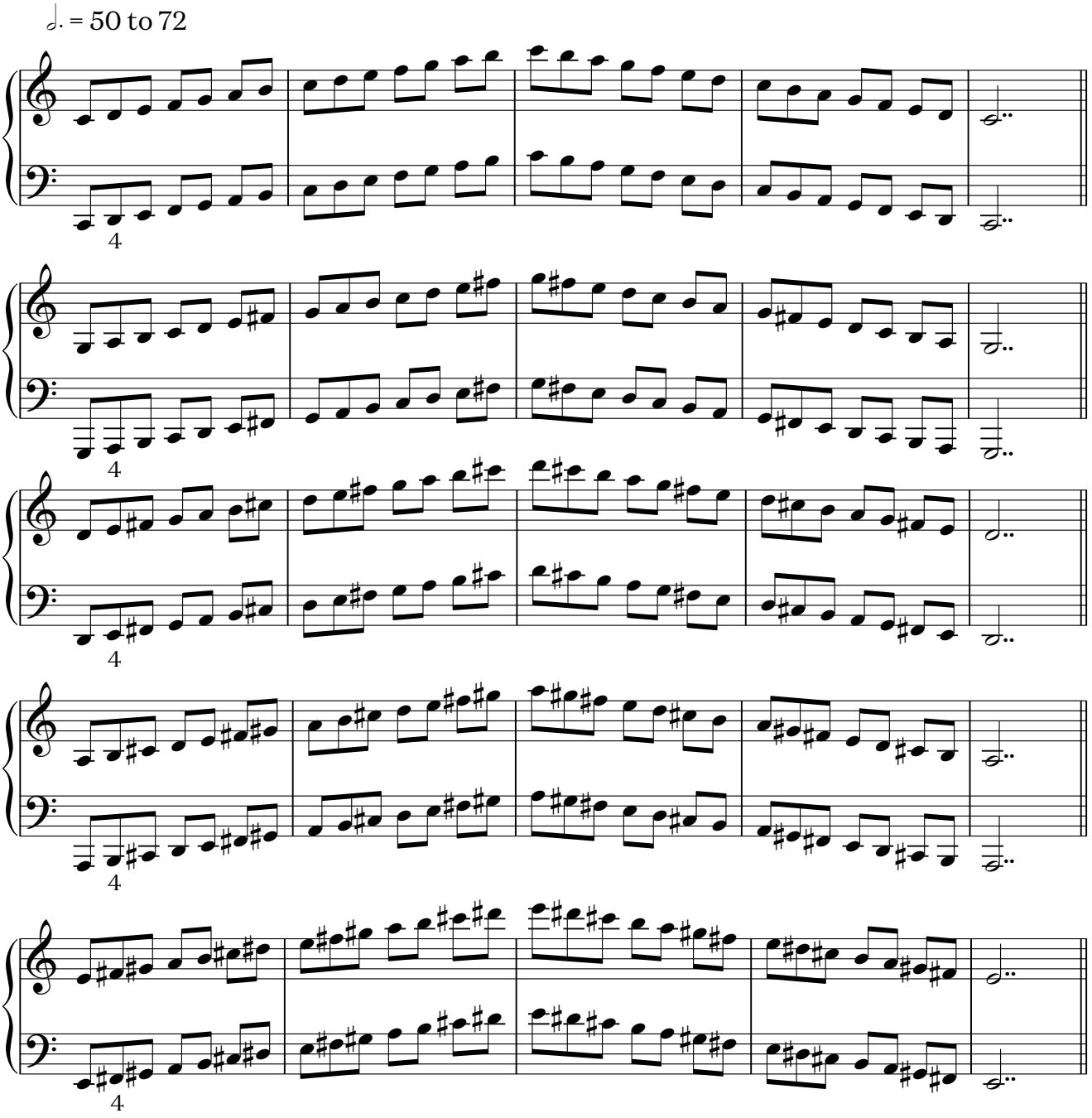
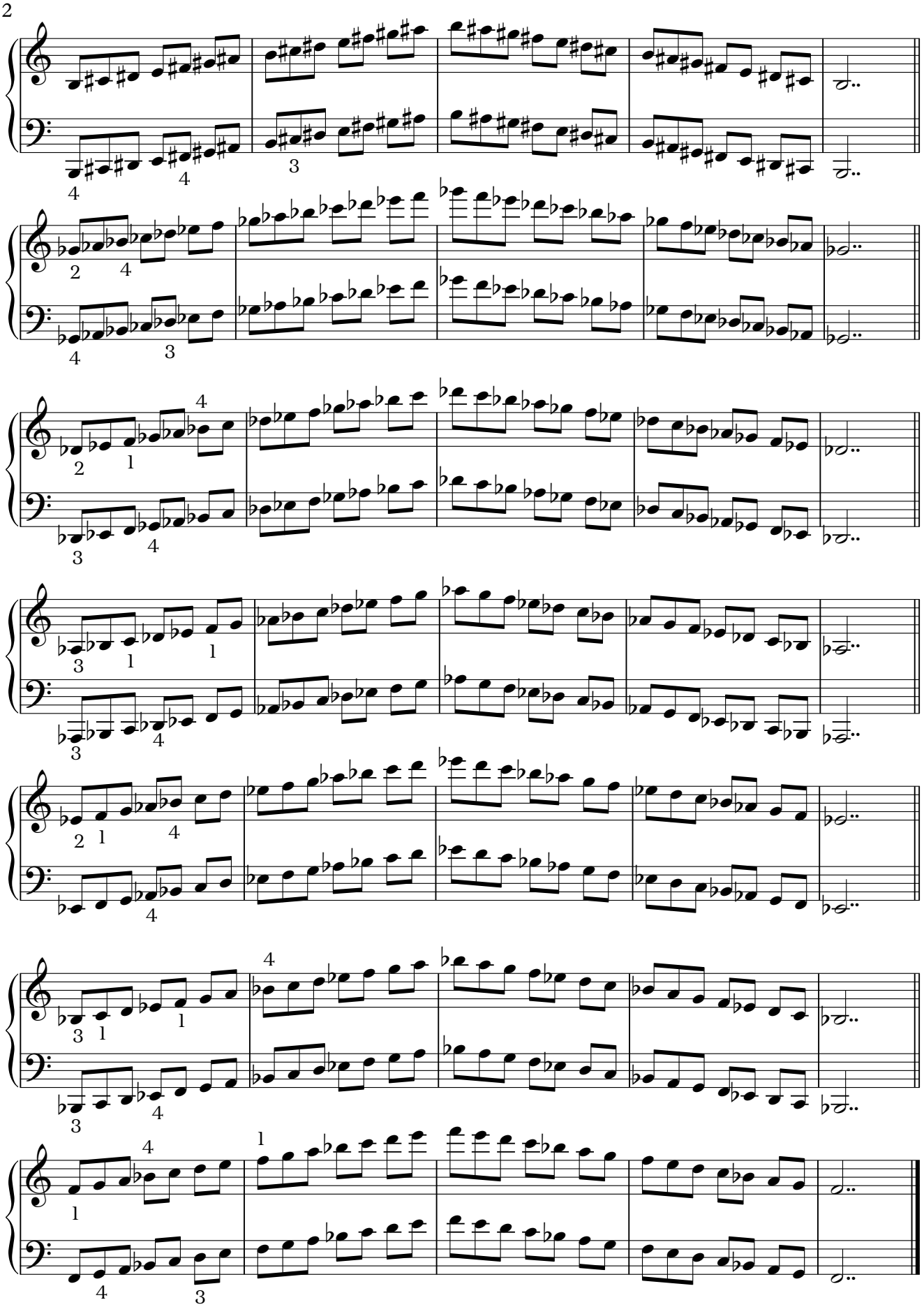
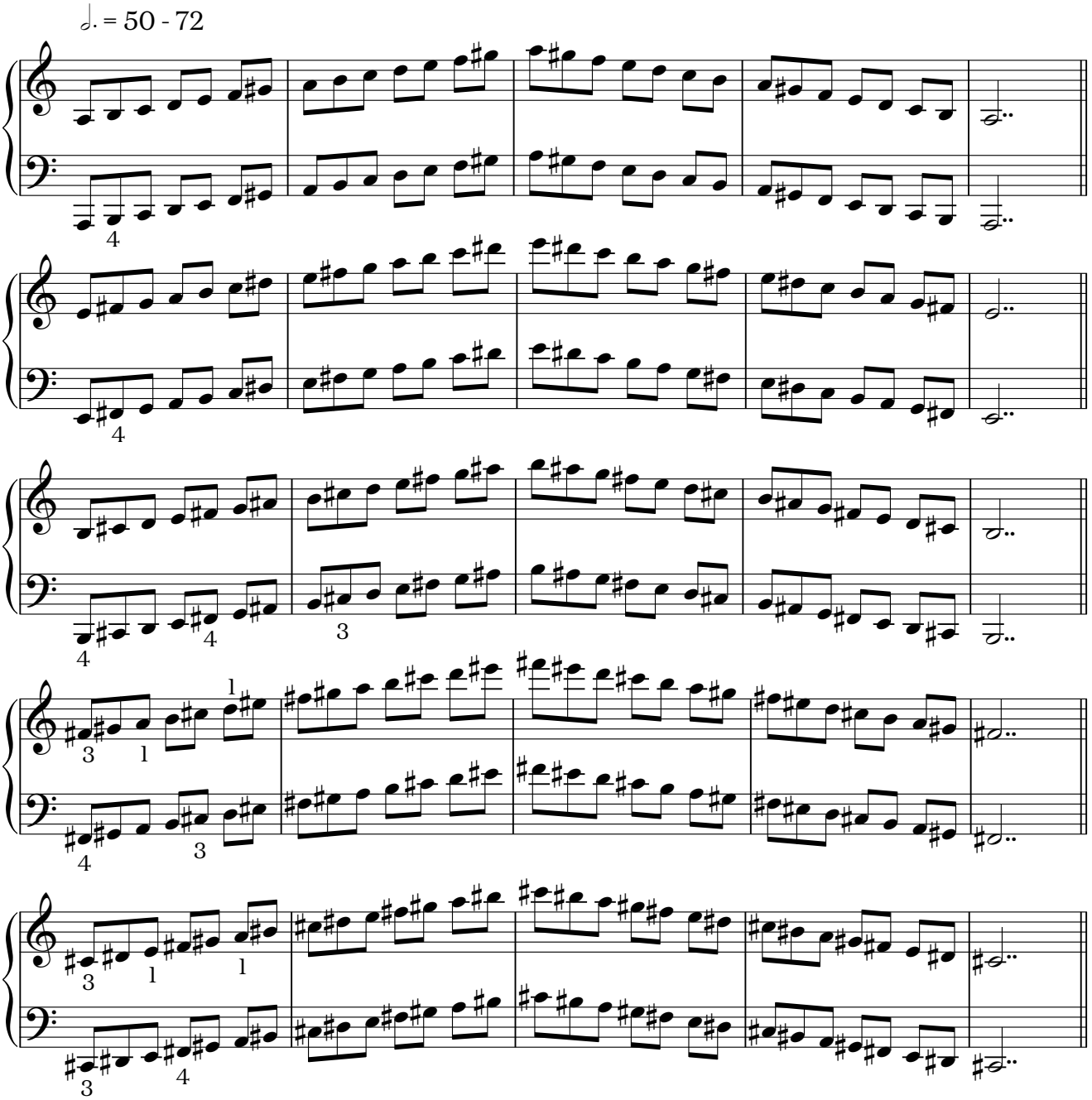
Major Scales



Chromatic	Minor third apart — 2 octaves
Similar	HS and HT — 4 octaves at 1 beat per octave
Third apart	LH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Sixth apart	RH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Contrary	Begin one octave apart — 2 octaves



Harmonic Minor Scales



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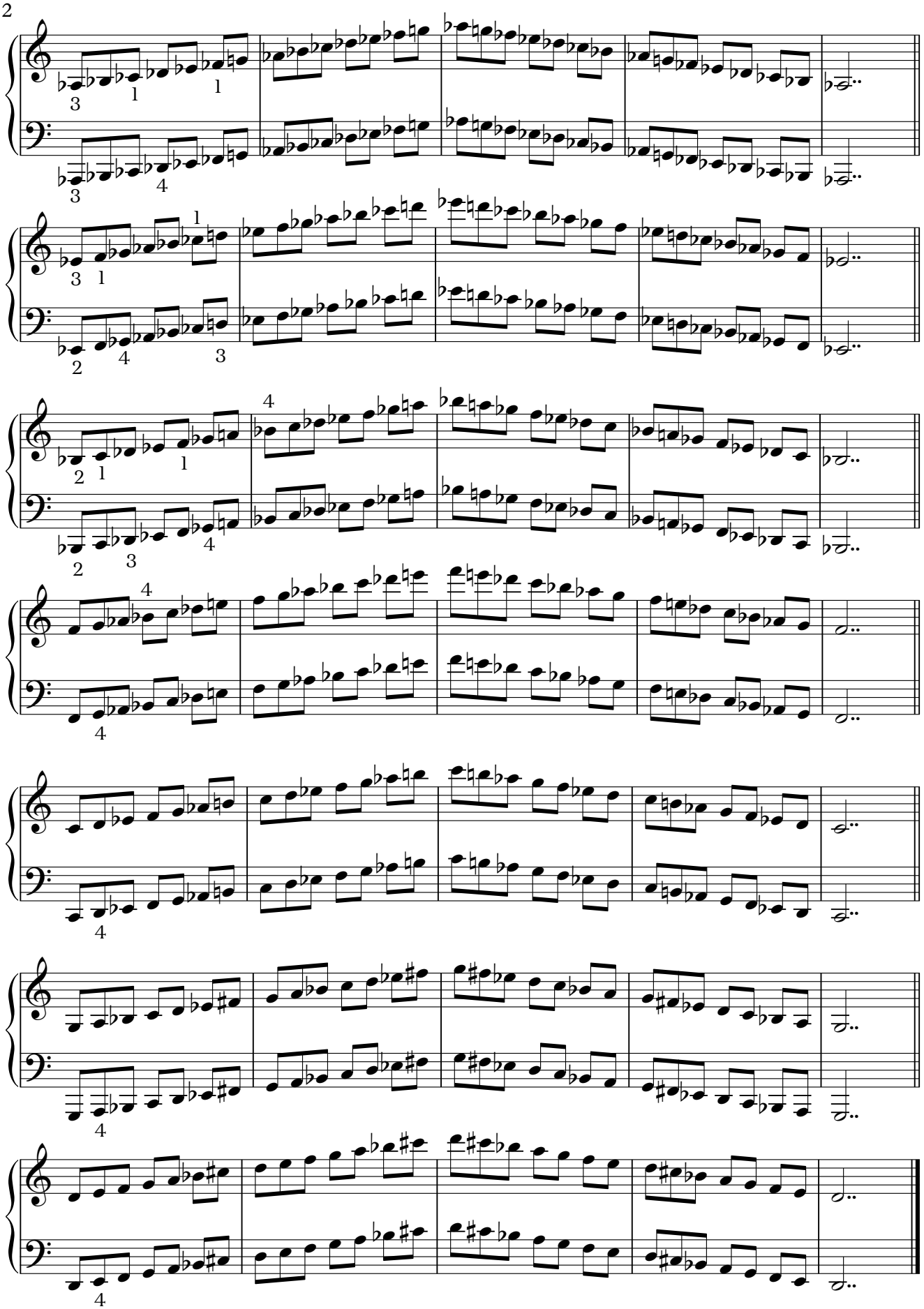
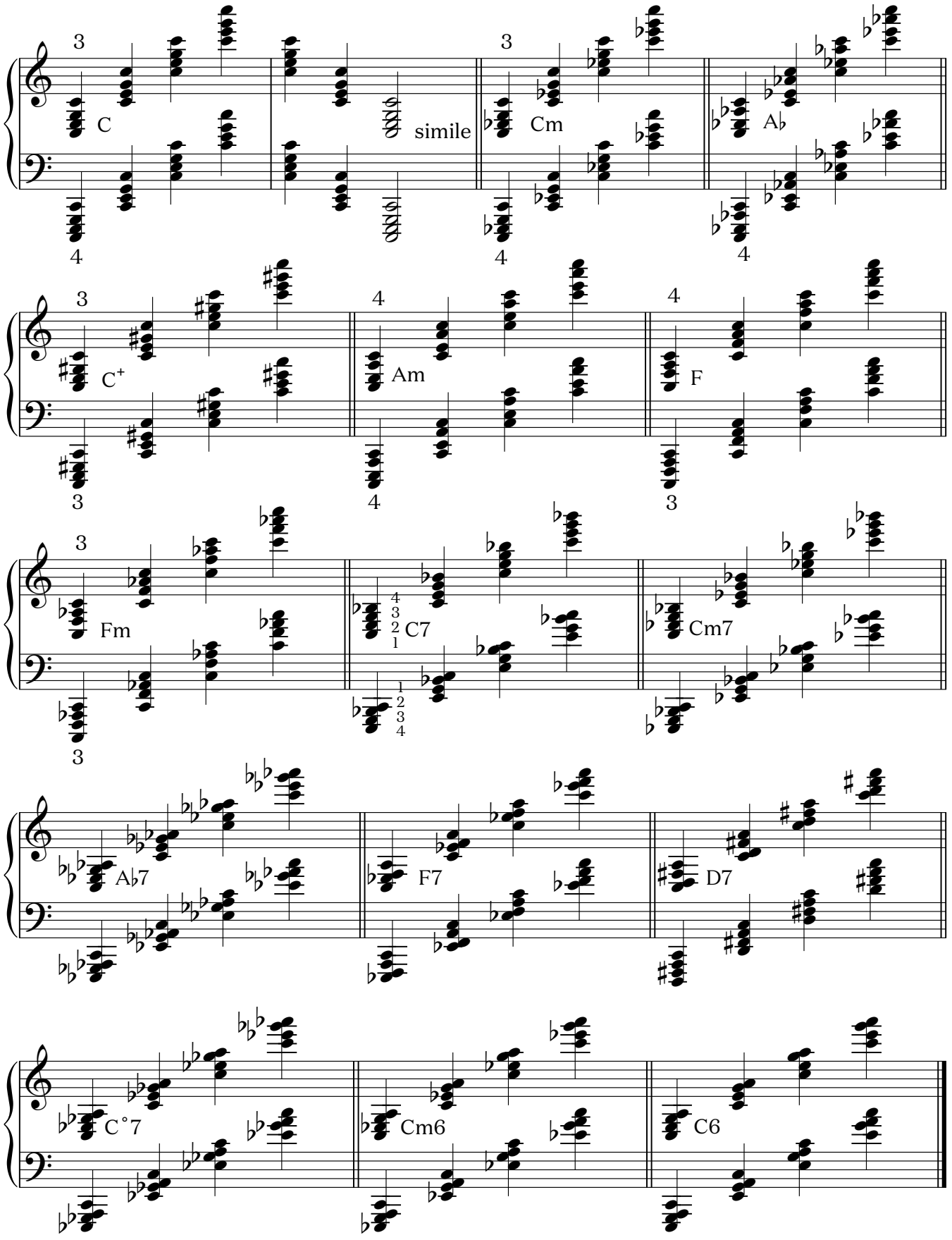
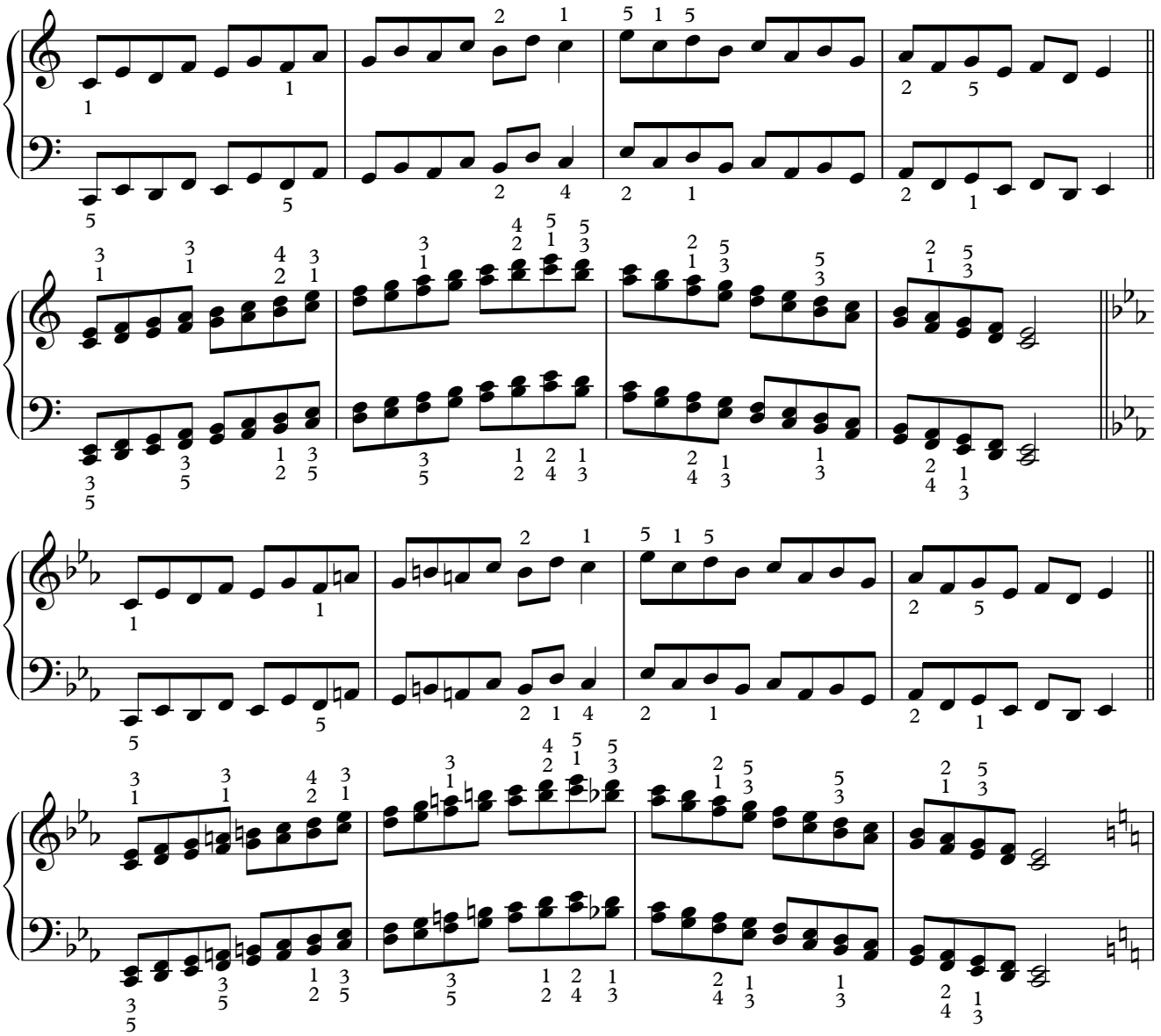


Chords and Arpeggios on C

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



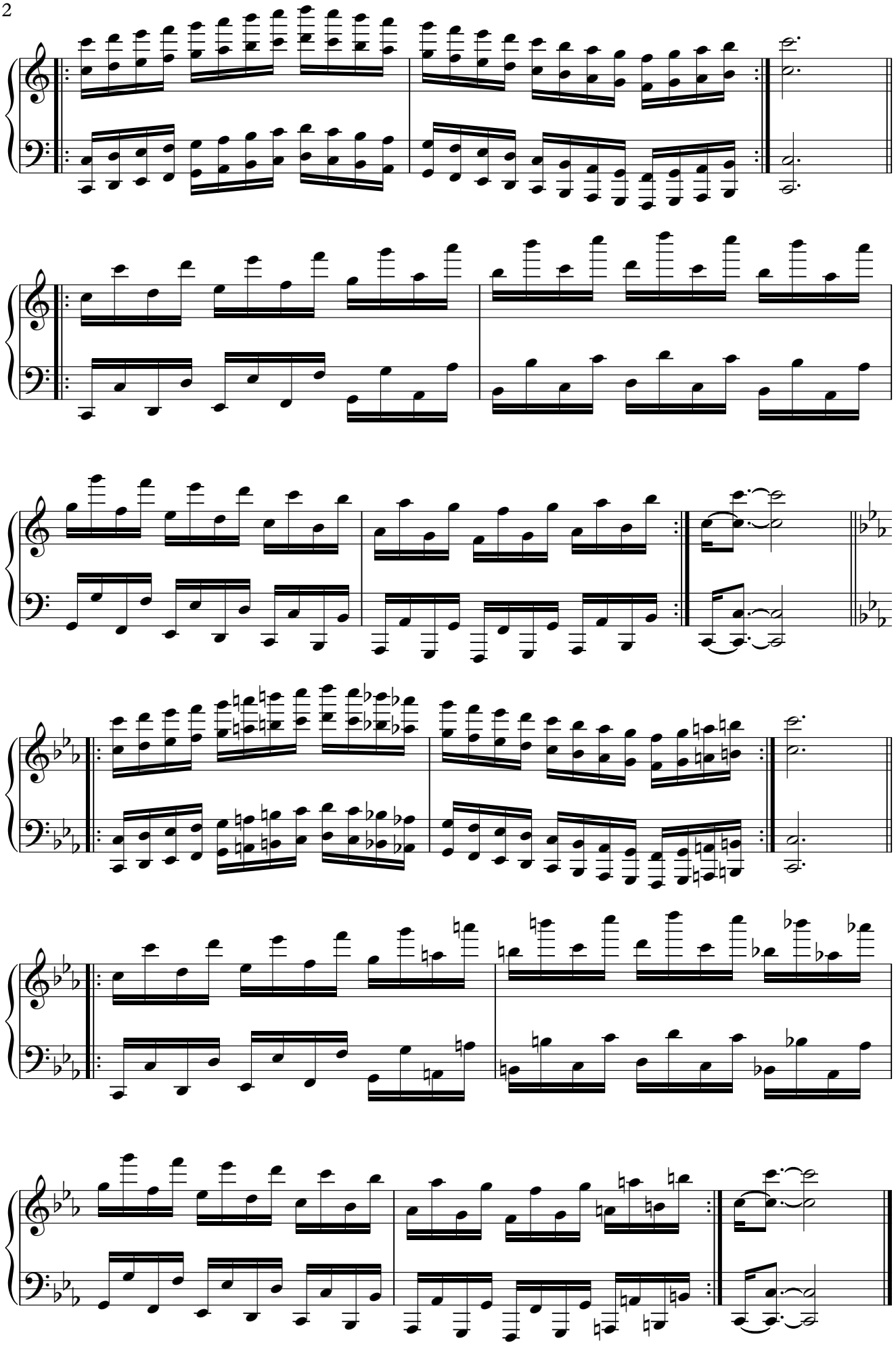
Double scales in C



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

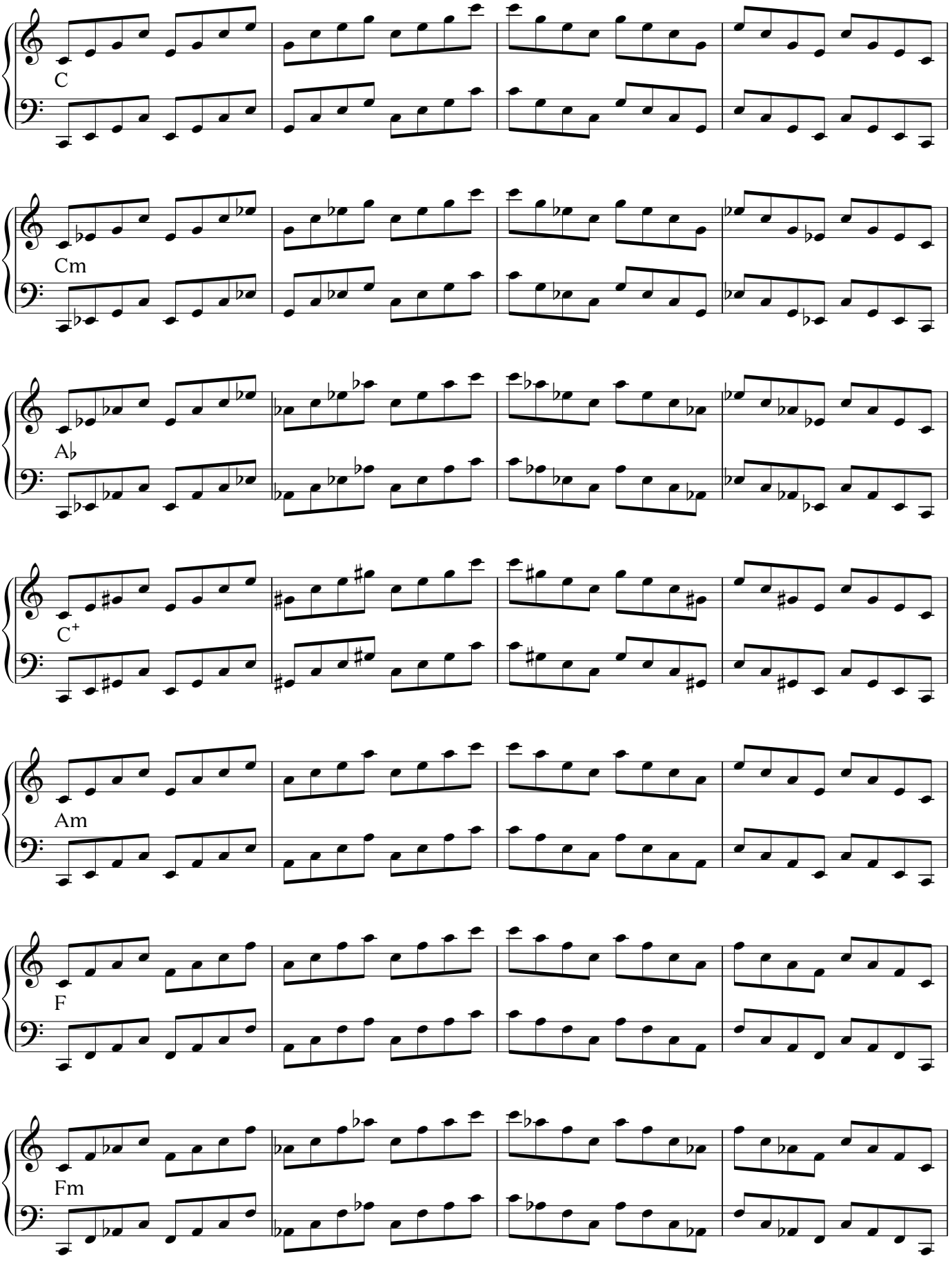
Major and harmonic minor scales:

Third apart LH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Sixth apart RH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Similar HS and HT — 4 octaves at 1 beat per octave
Contrary Begin one octave apart — 2 octaves

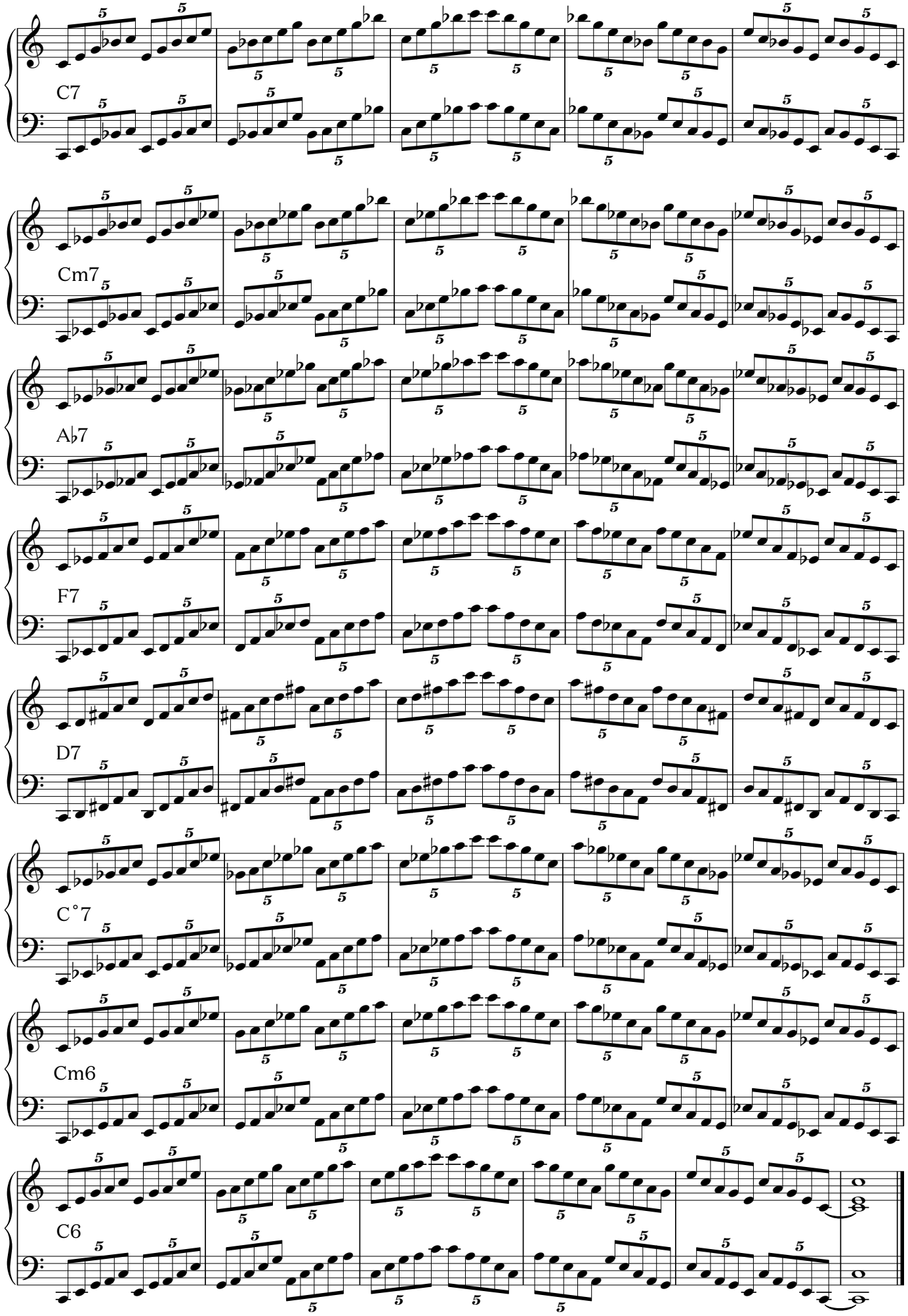


Broken chords on C

𝅗𝅥 = 60 - 80

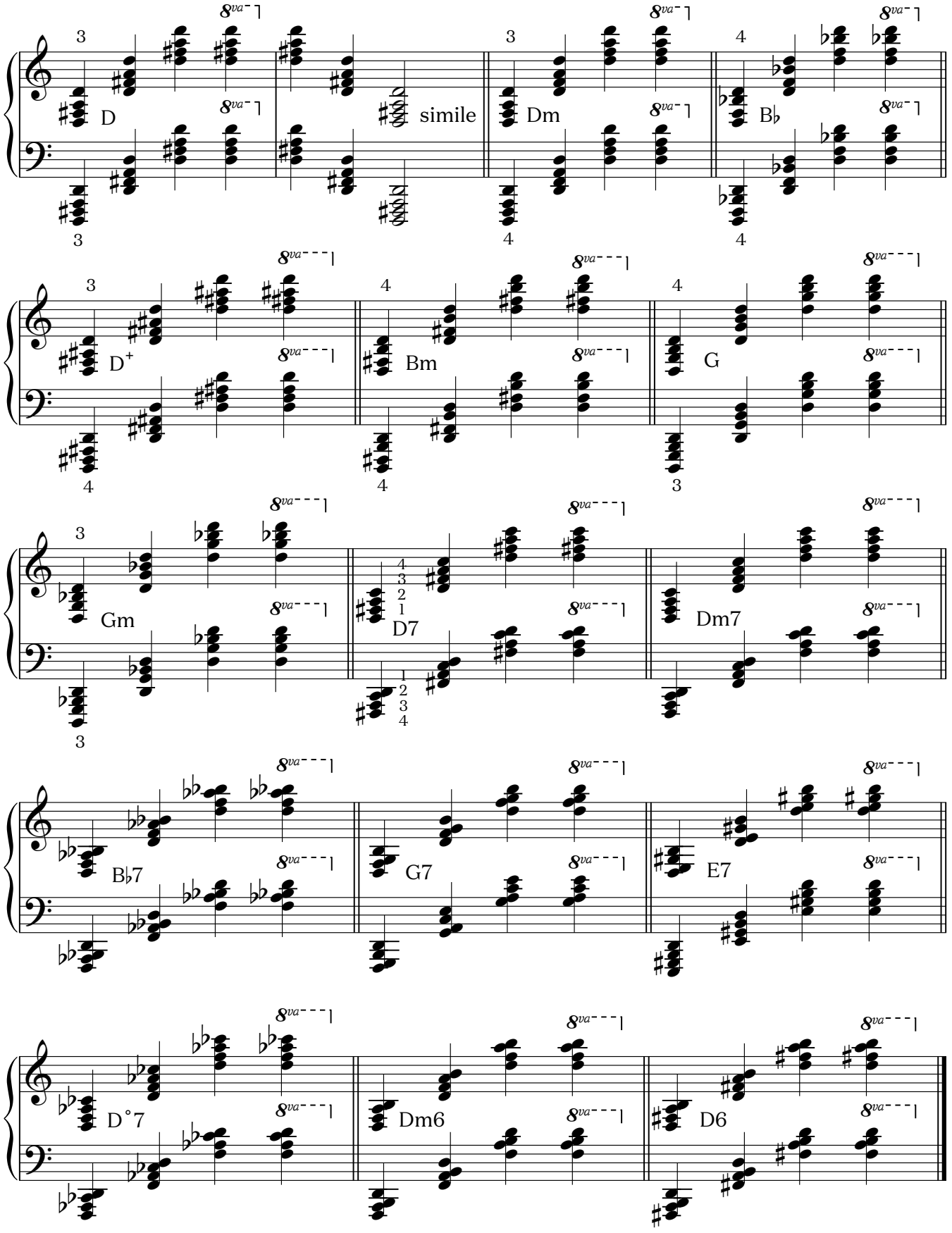


♩ = 50 - 63

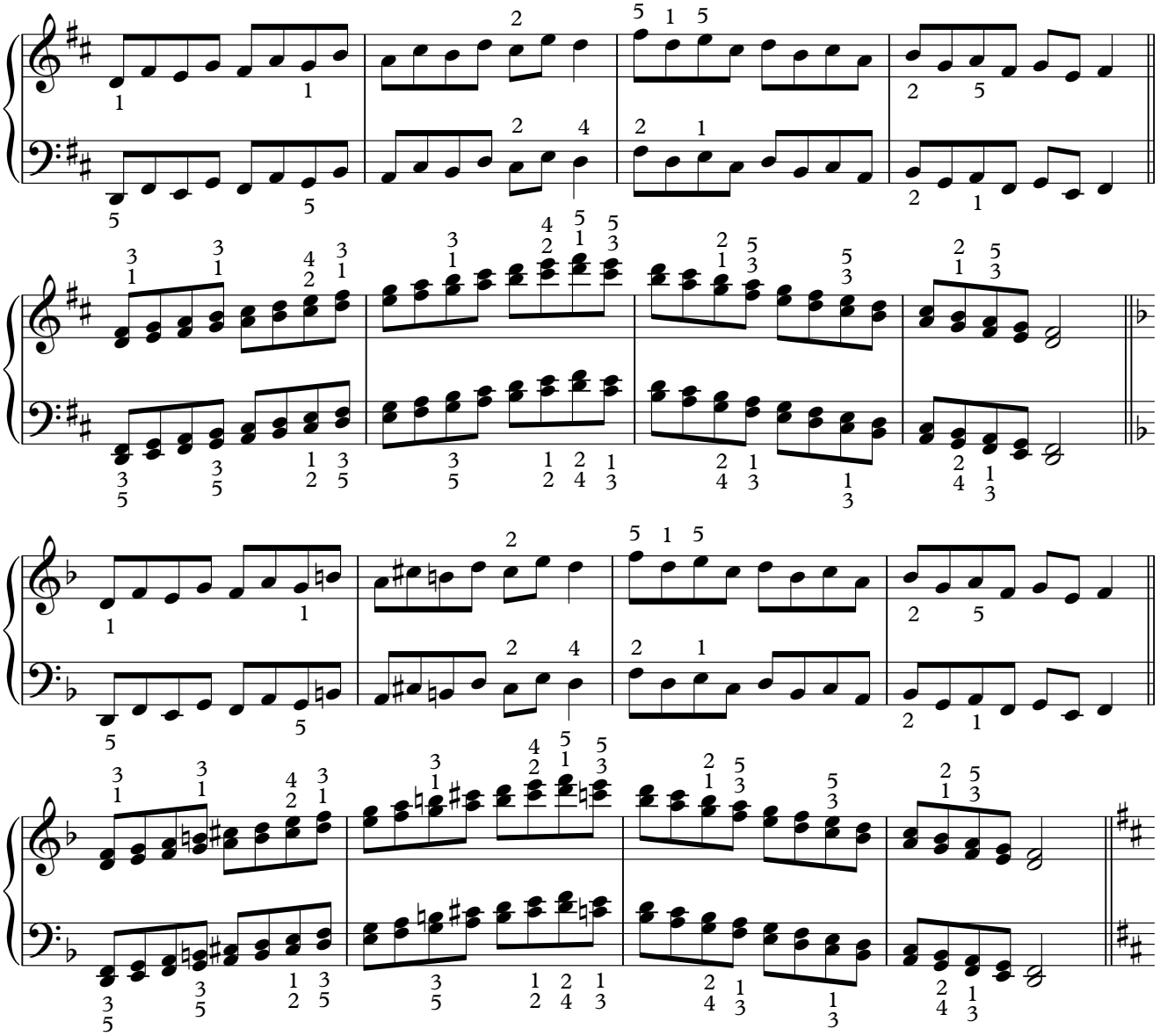


Chords and Arpeggios on D

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



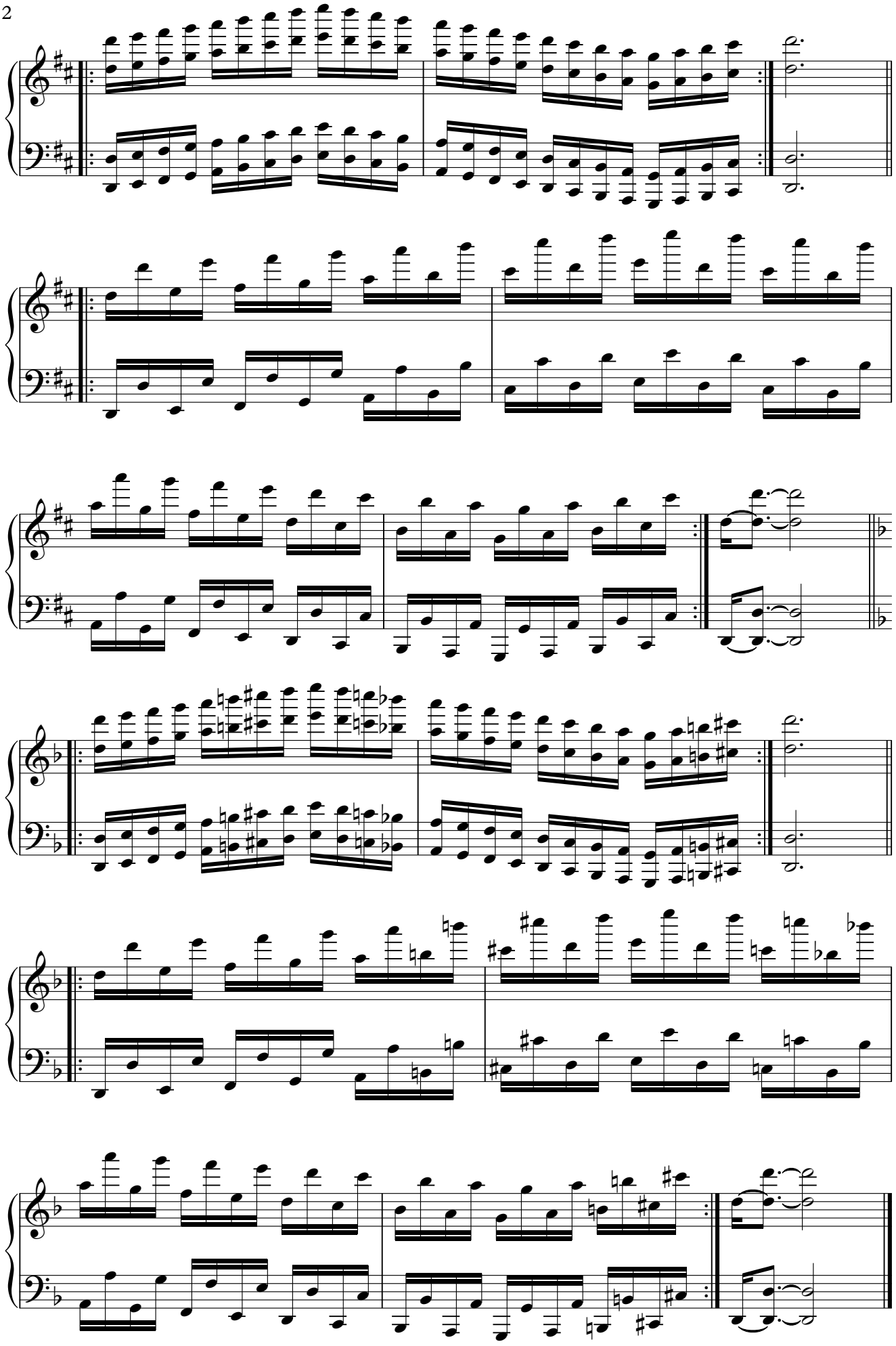
Double scales in D



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

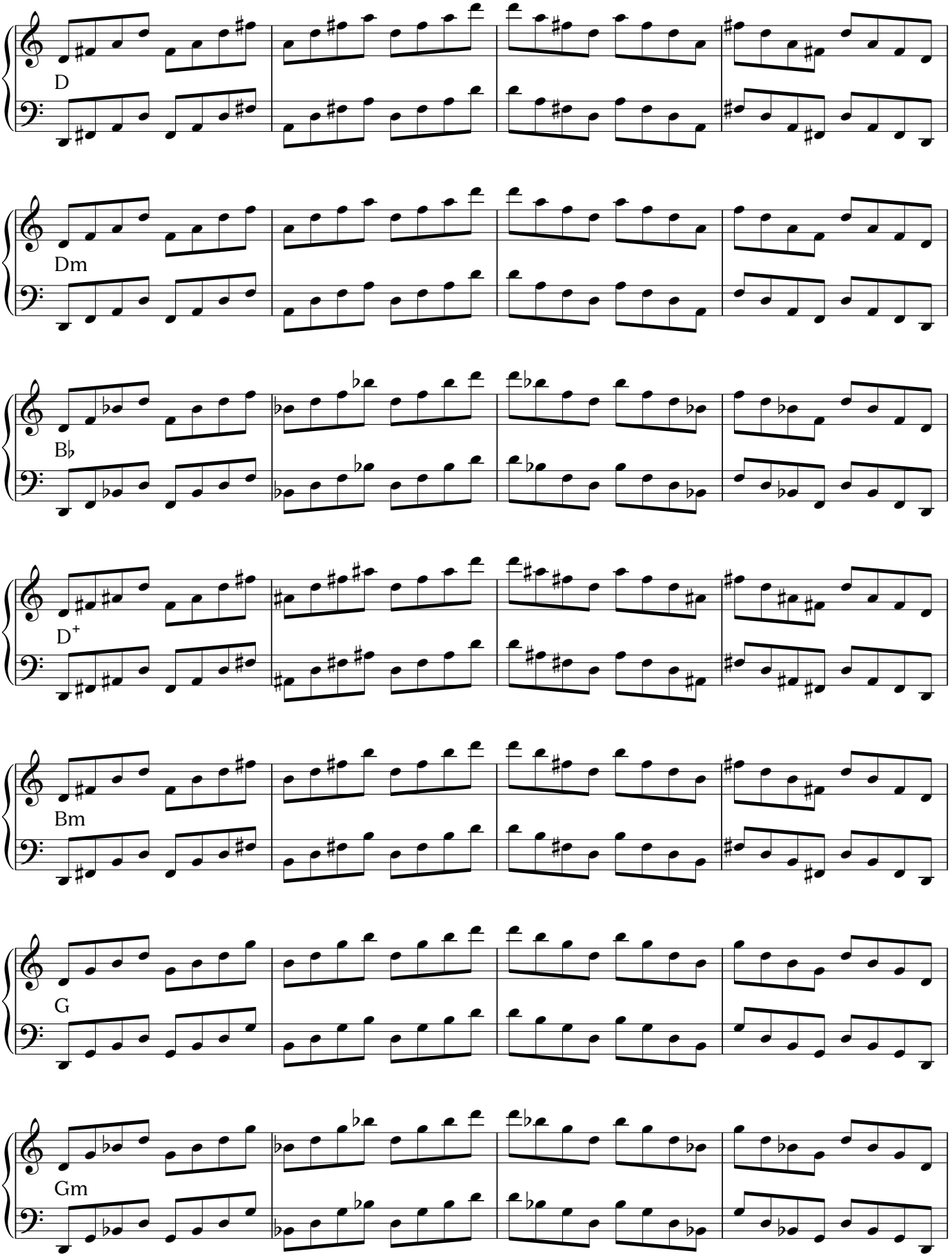
Major and harmonic minor scales:

Third apart LH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Sixth apart RH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Similar HS and HT — 4 octaves at 1 beat per octave
Contrary Begin one octave apart — 2 octaves



Broken chords on D

♩ = 60 - 80



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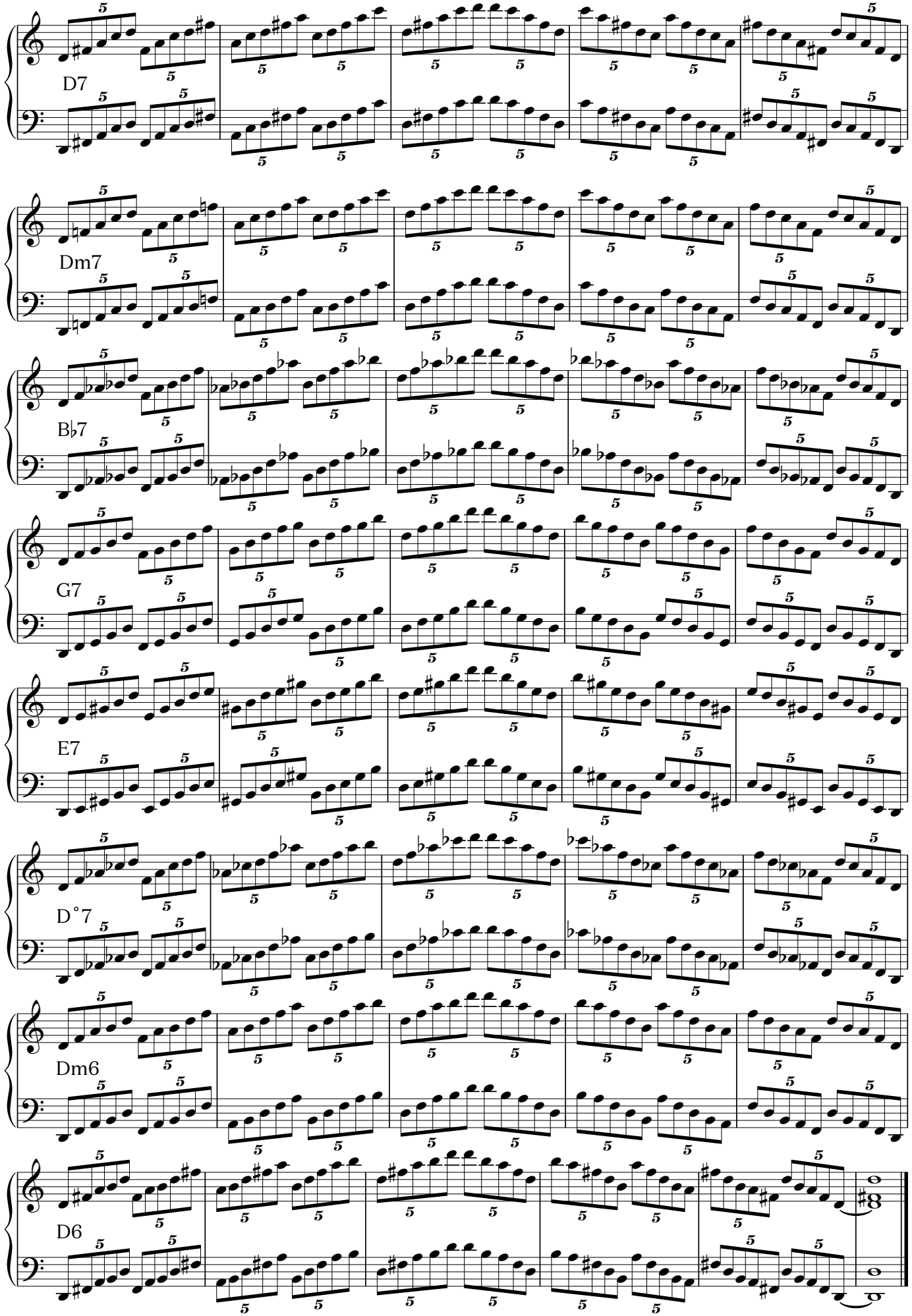
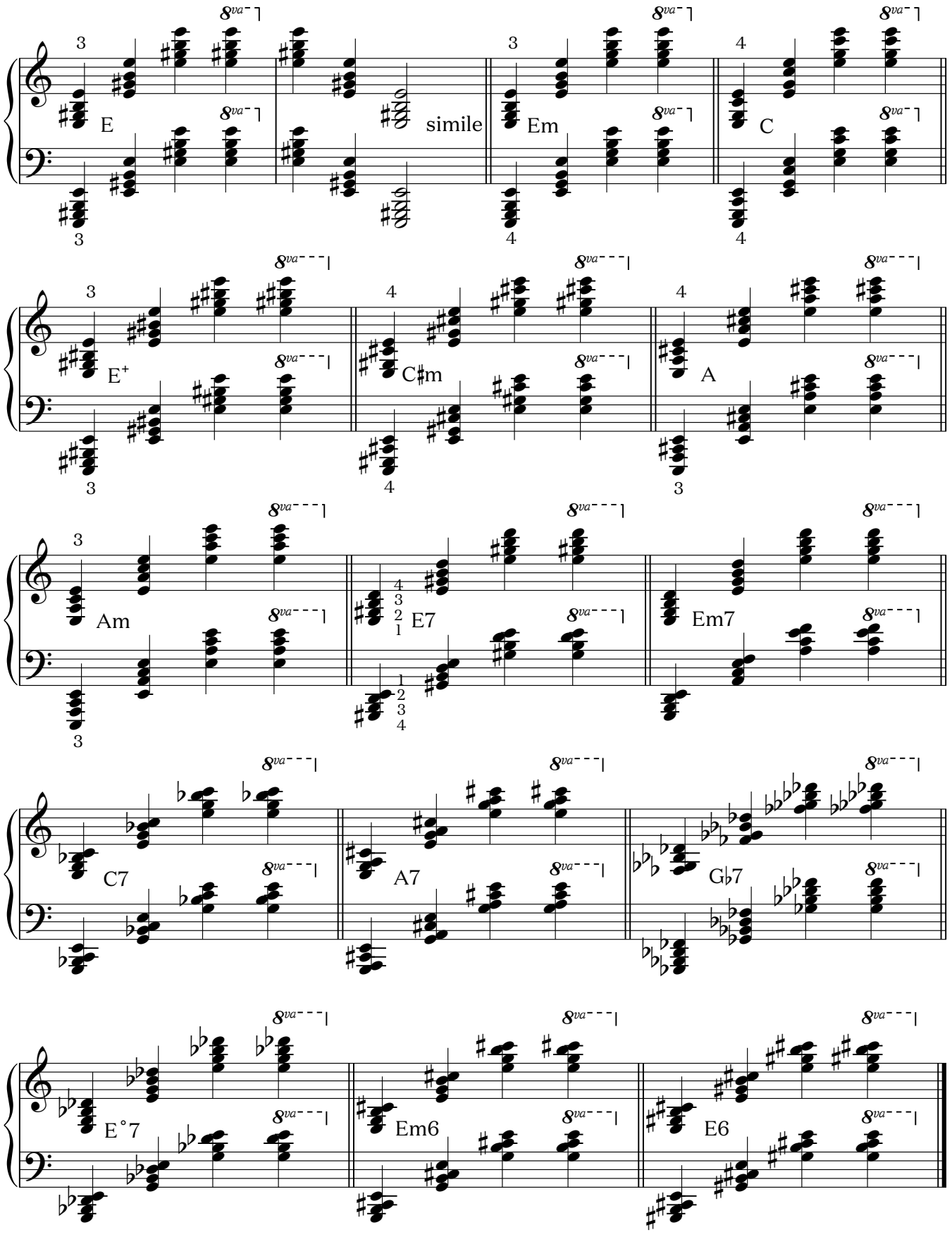


Chords and Arpeggios on E

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



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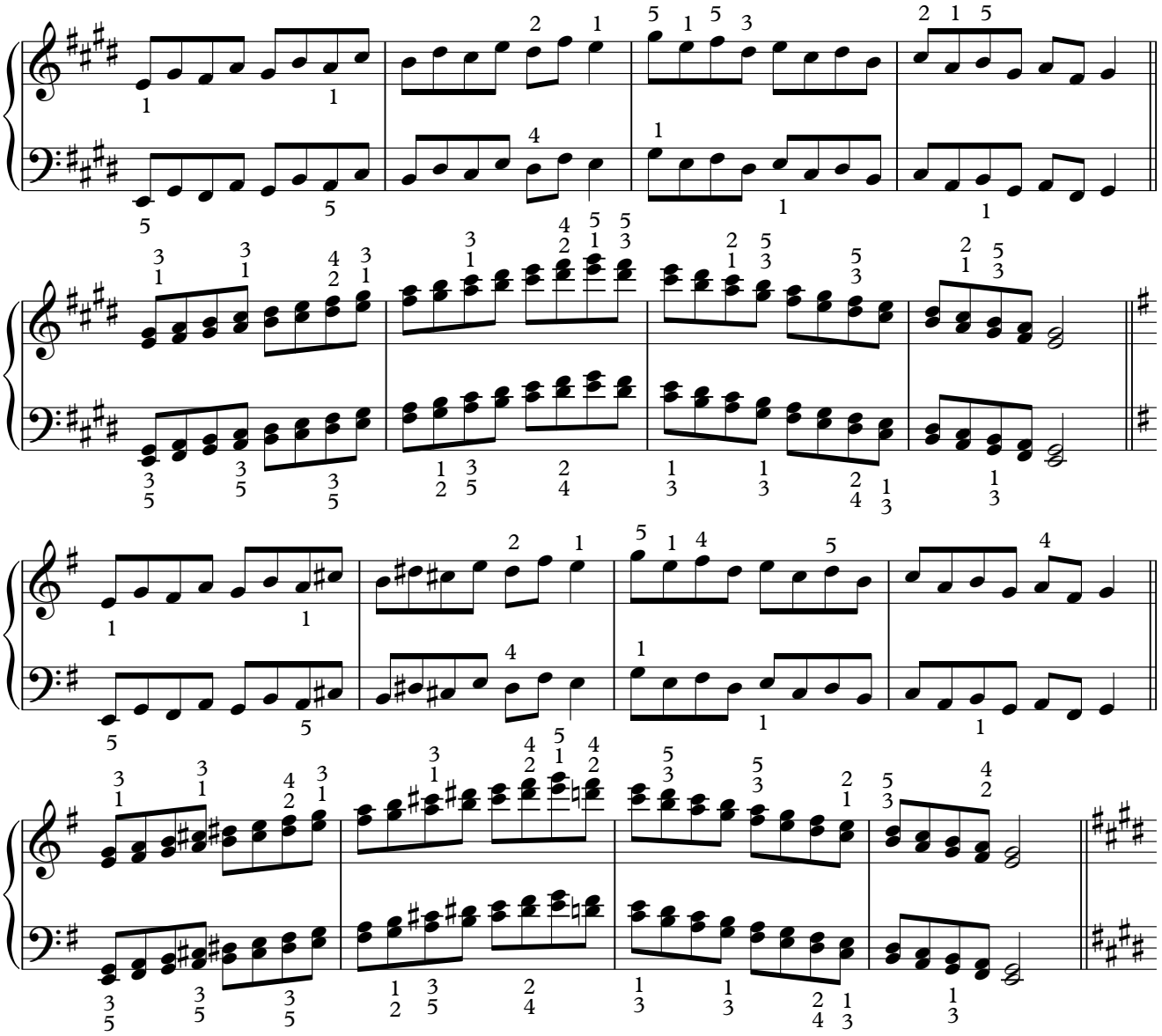

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Major and harmonic minor scales:

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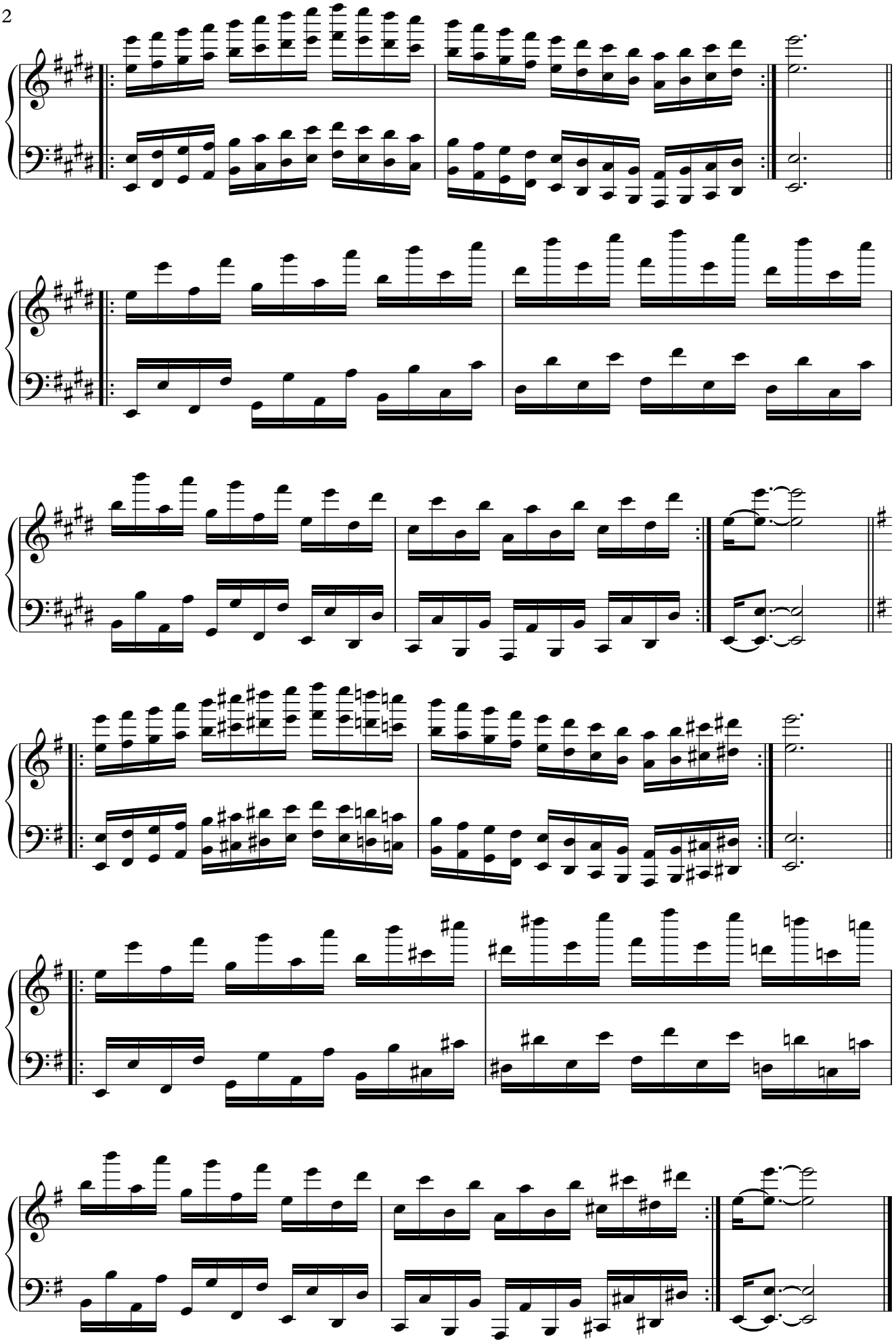
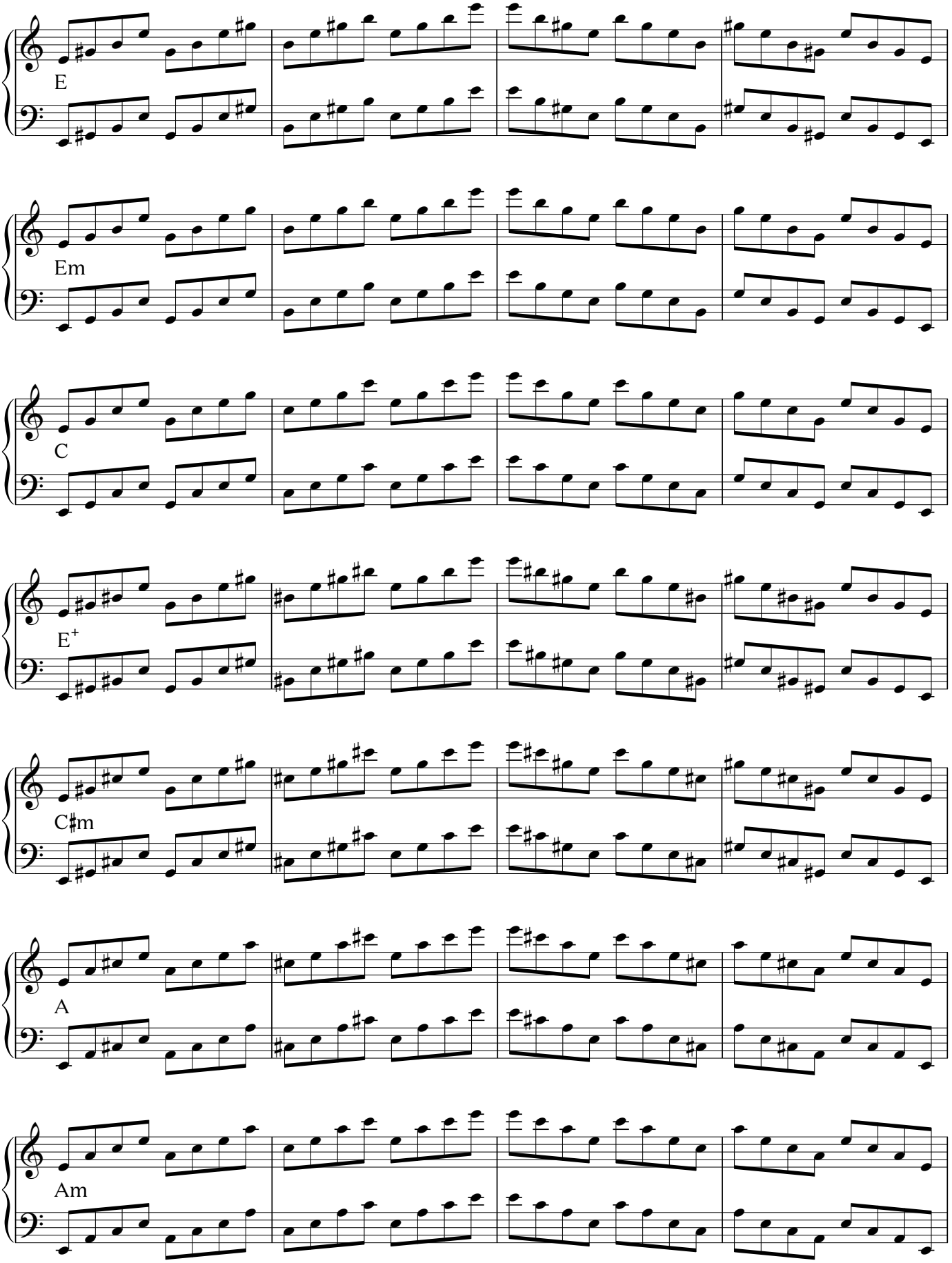


Broken chords on E

♩ = 60 - 80



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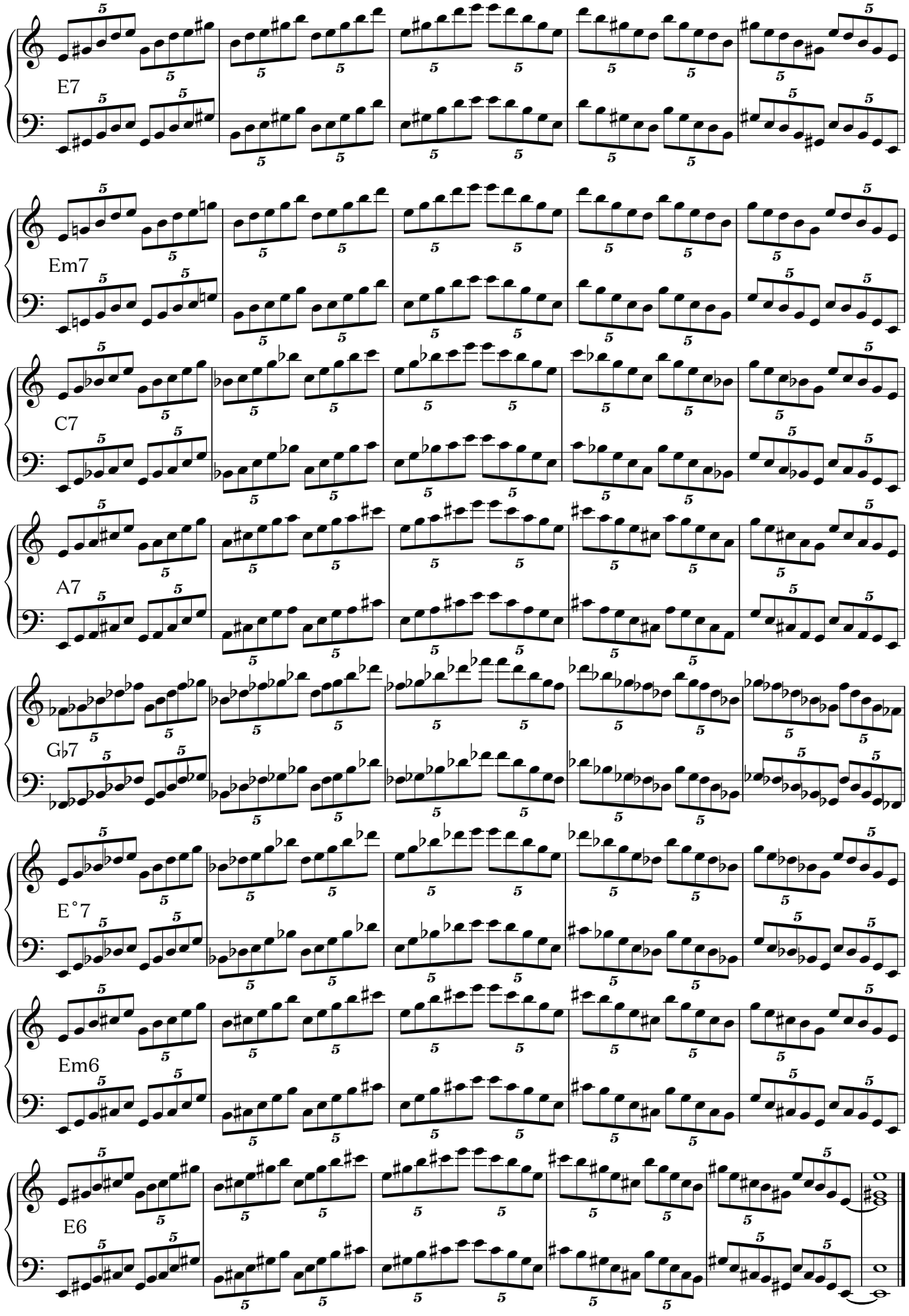
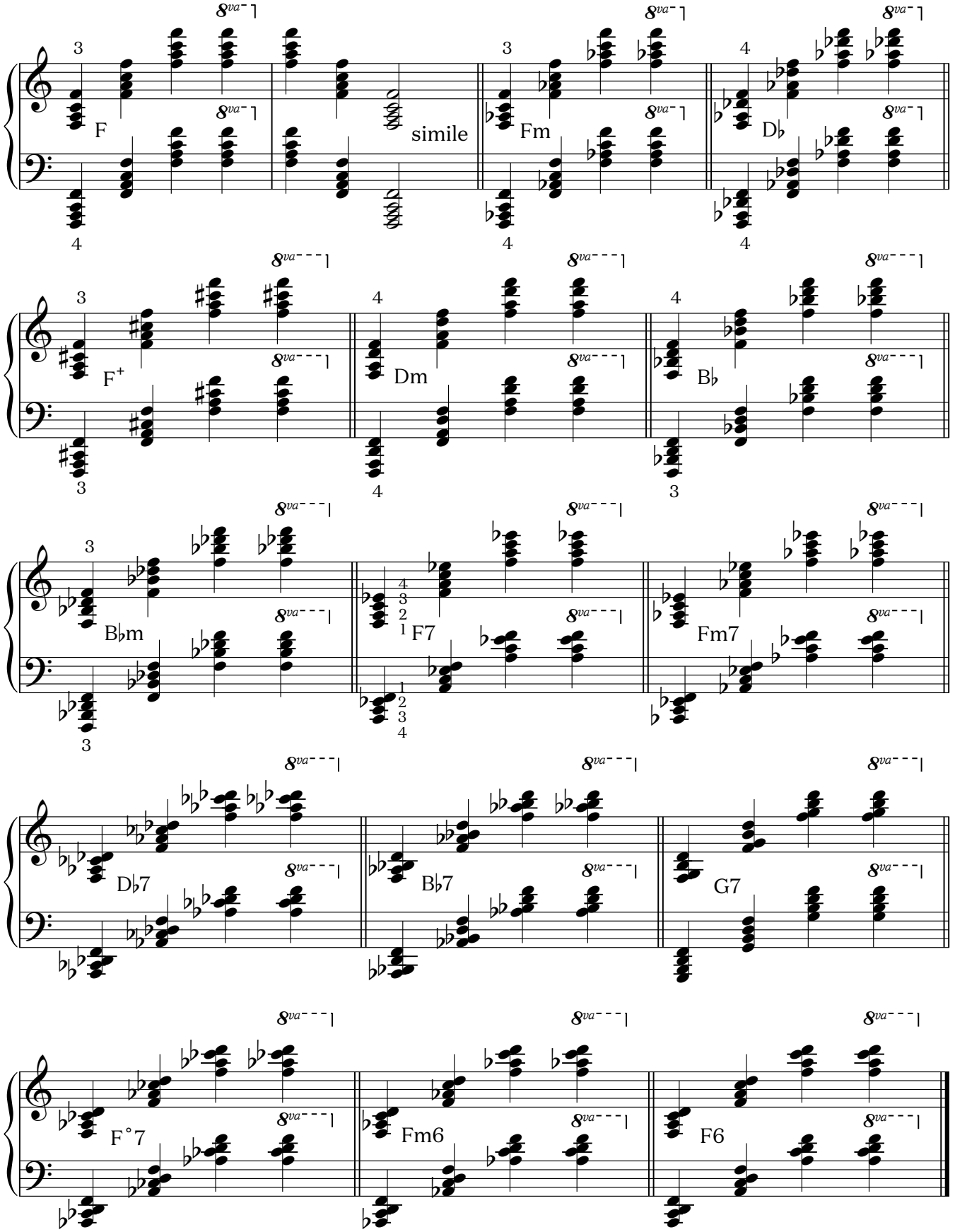
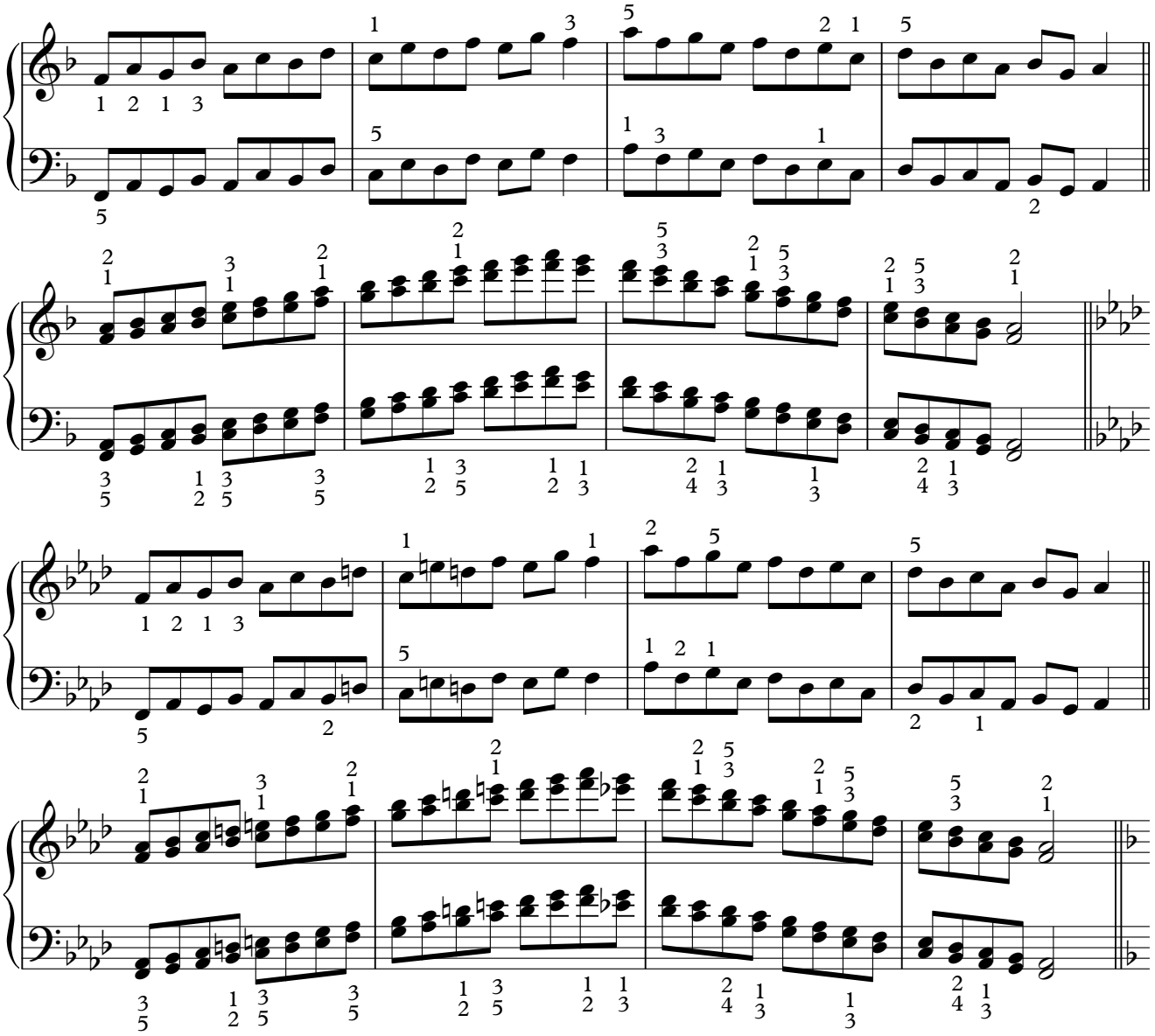


Chords and Arpeggios on F

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



Double scales in F



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

Major and harmonic minor scales:

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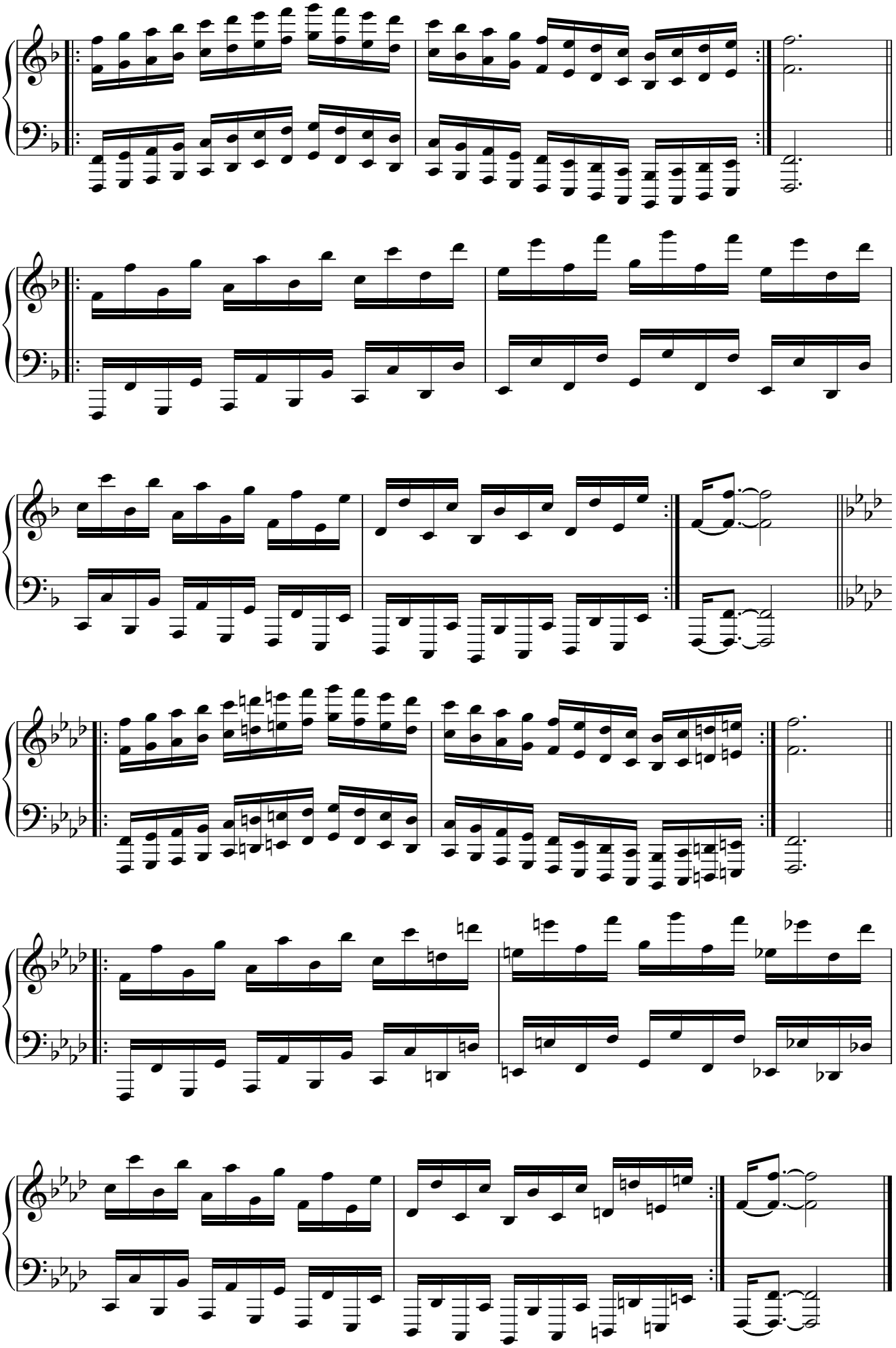
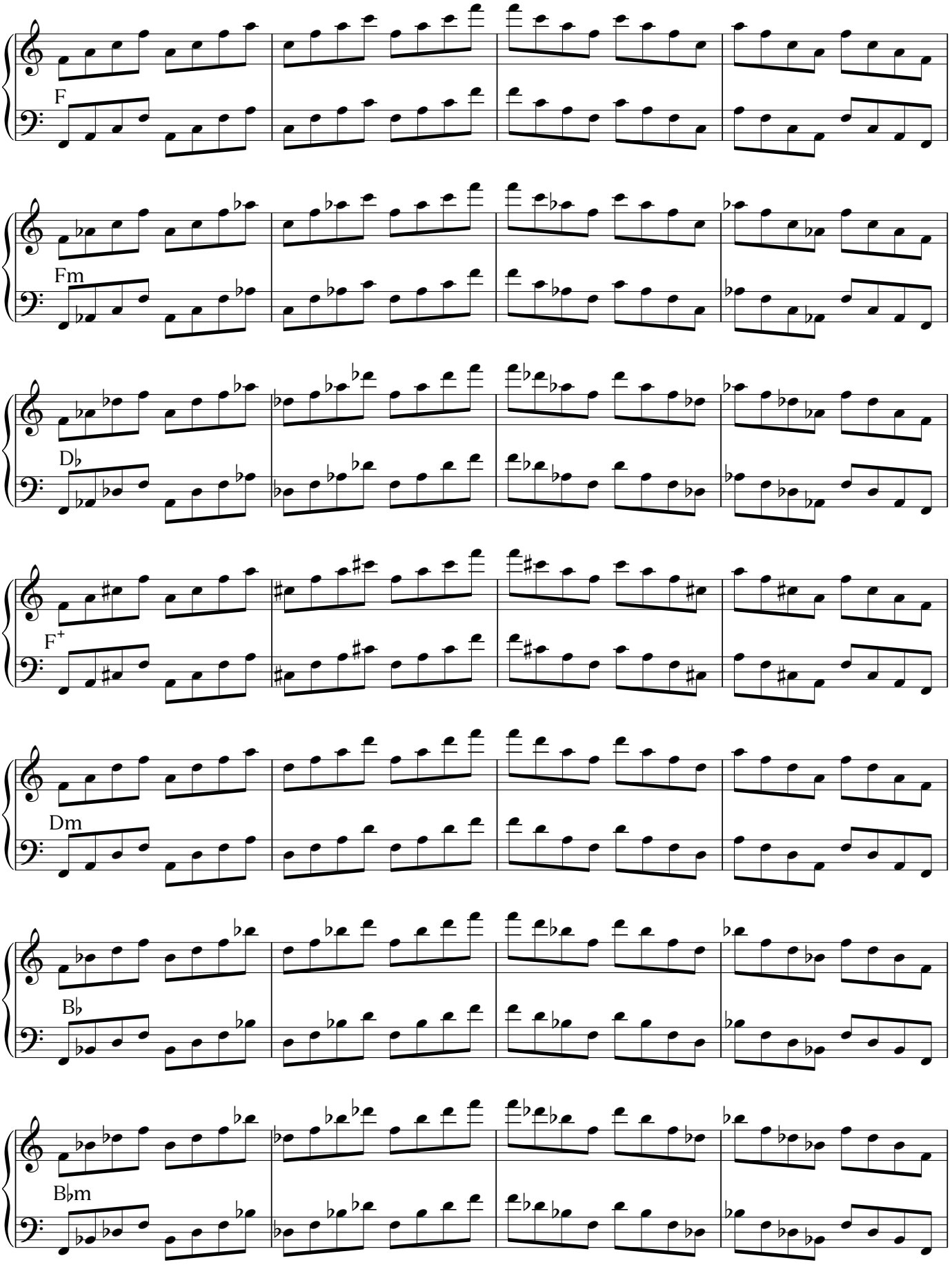
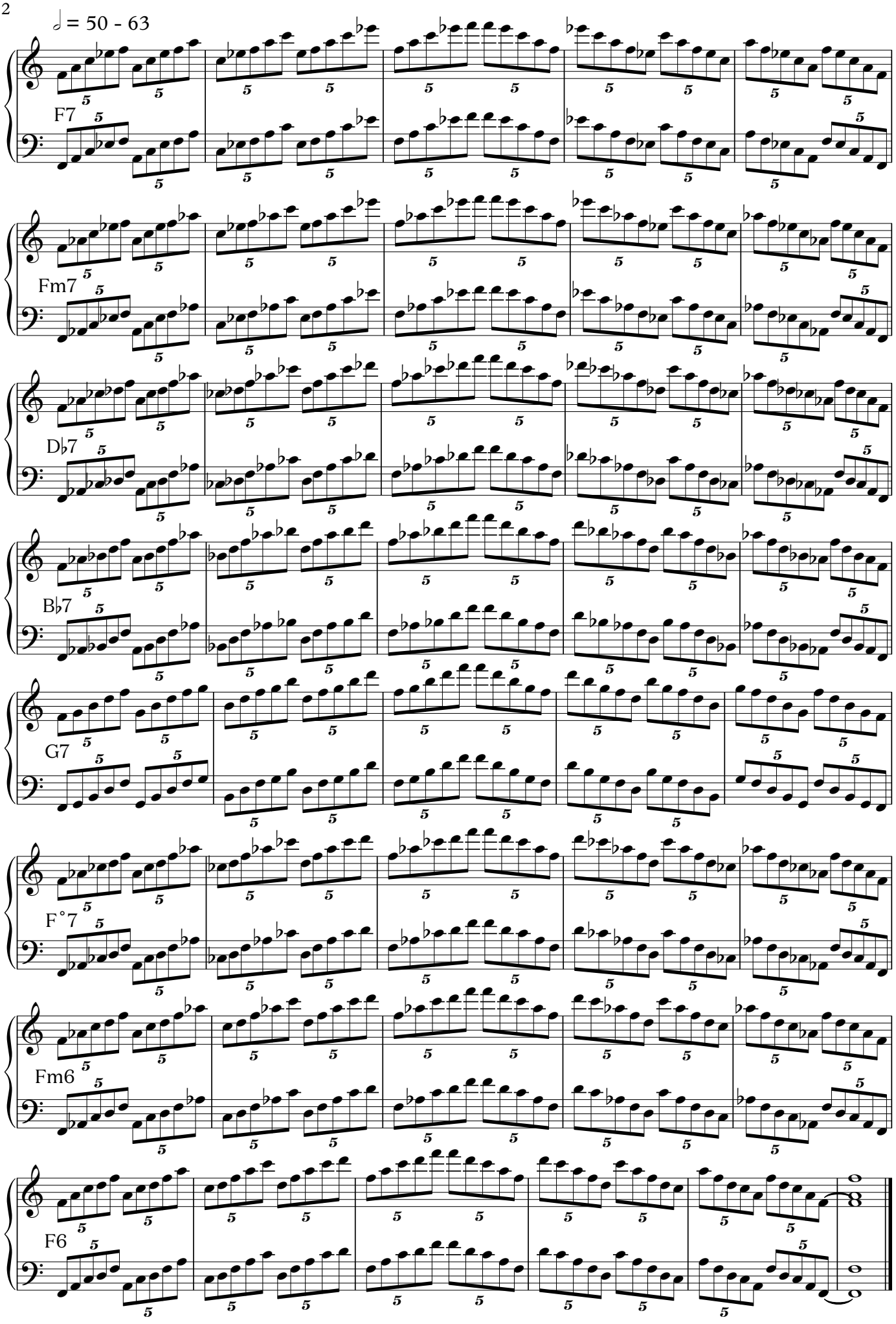


Broken chords on F

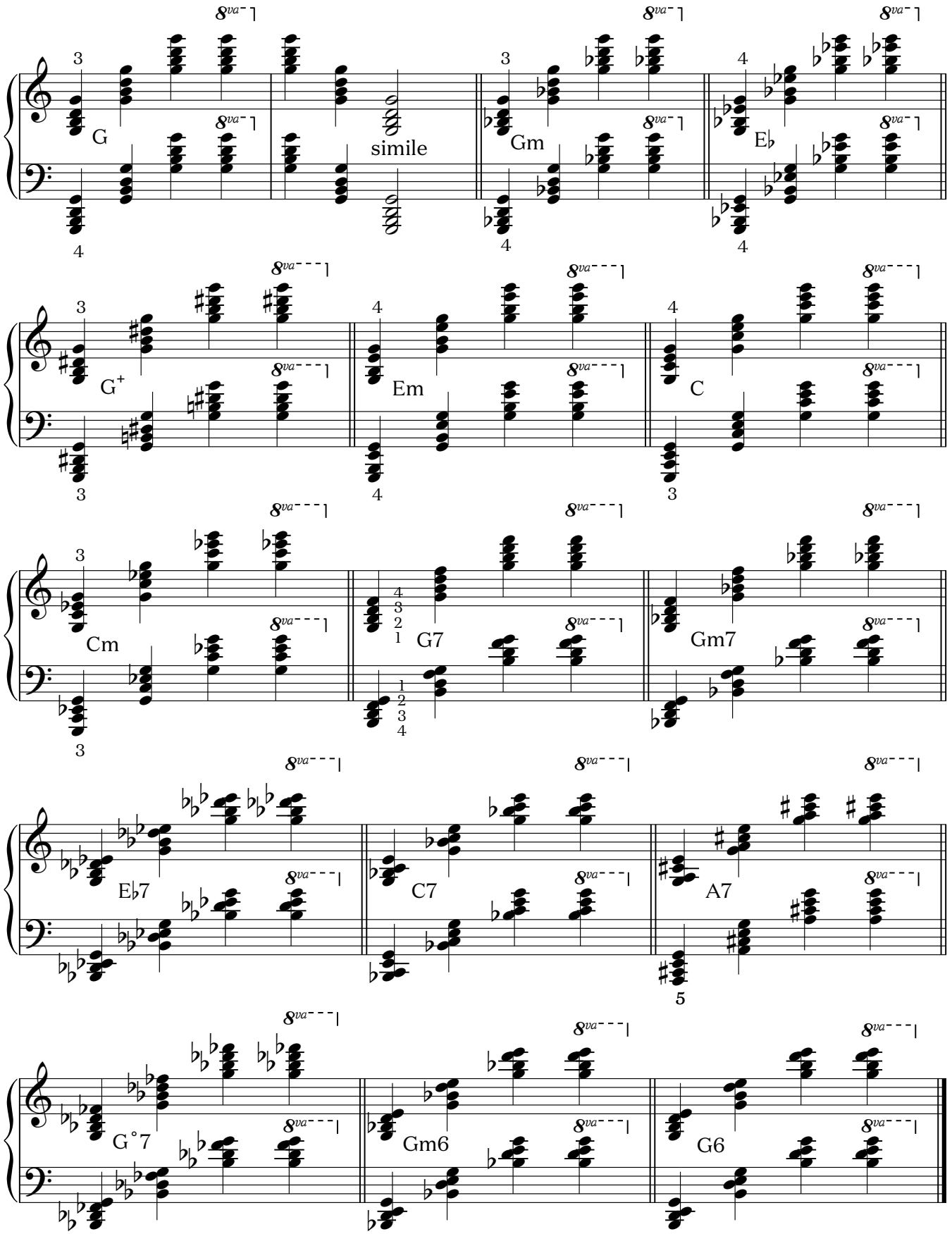
♩ = 60 - 80



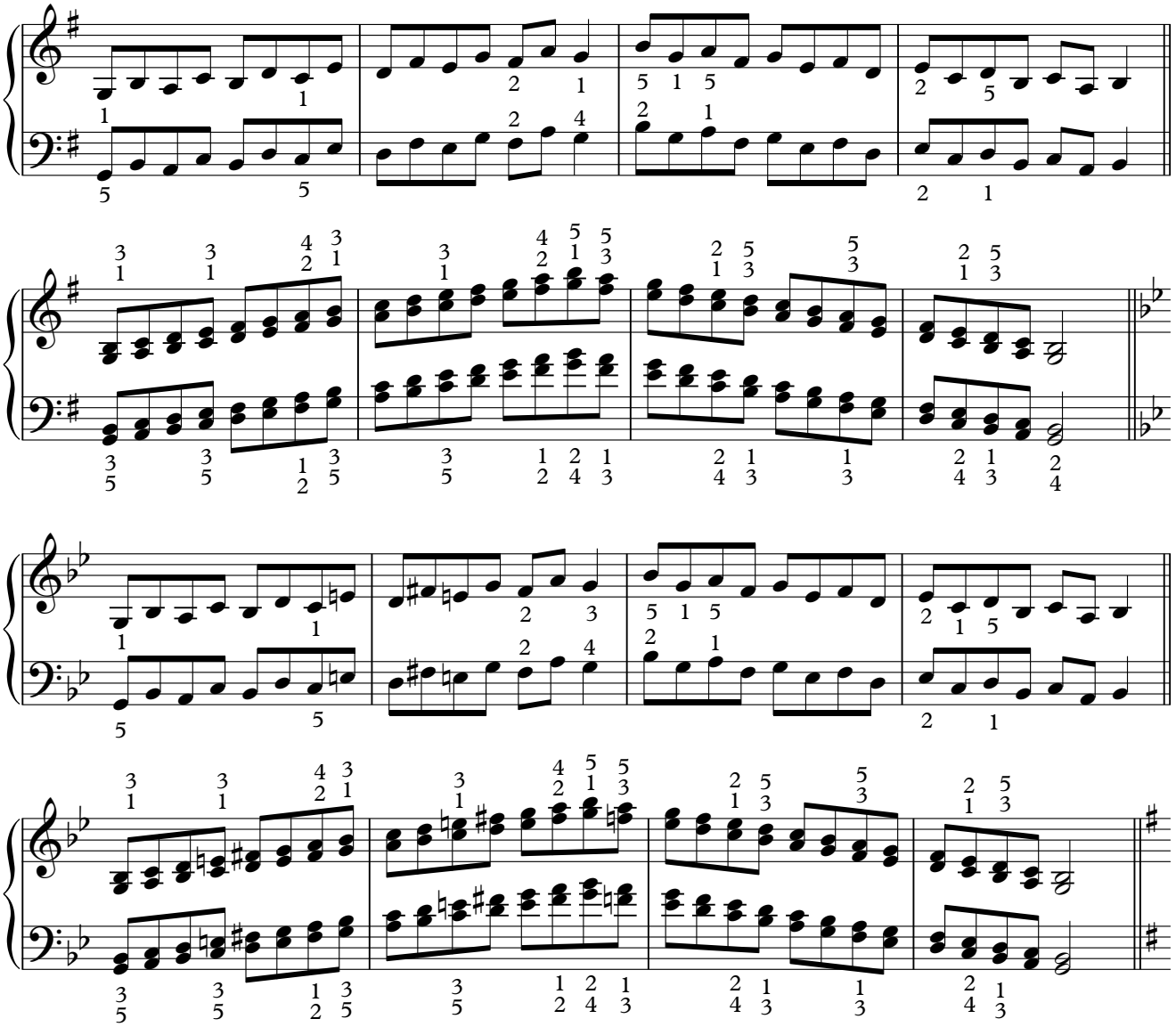

♩ = 50 - 63
F7
Fm7
D♭7
B♭7
G7
F°7
Fm6
F6

Chords and Arpeggios on G

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



Double scales in G



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

Major and harmonic minor scales:

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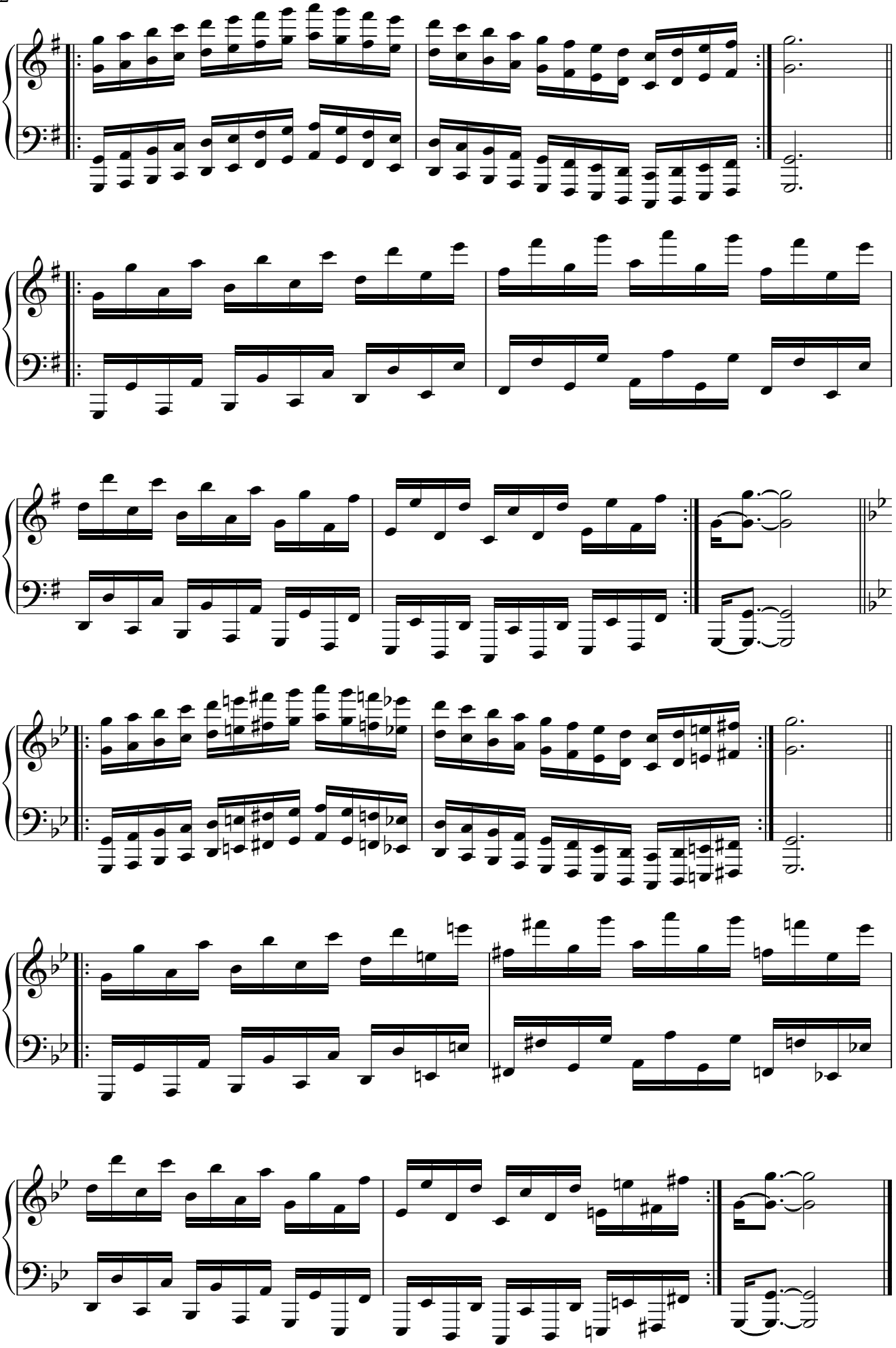
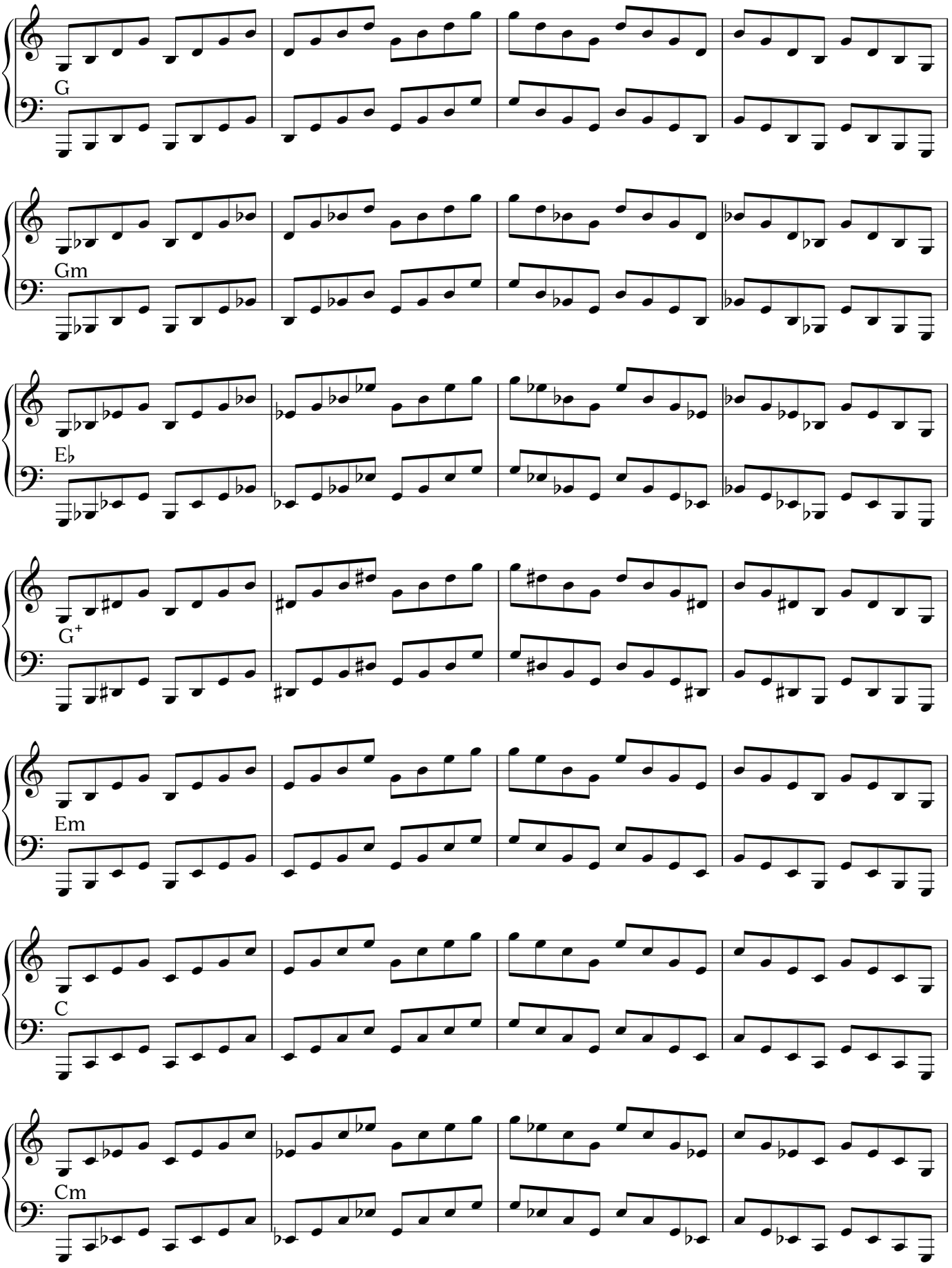
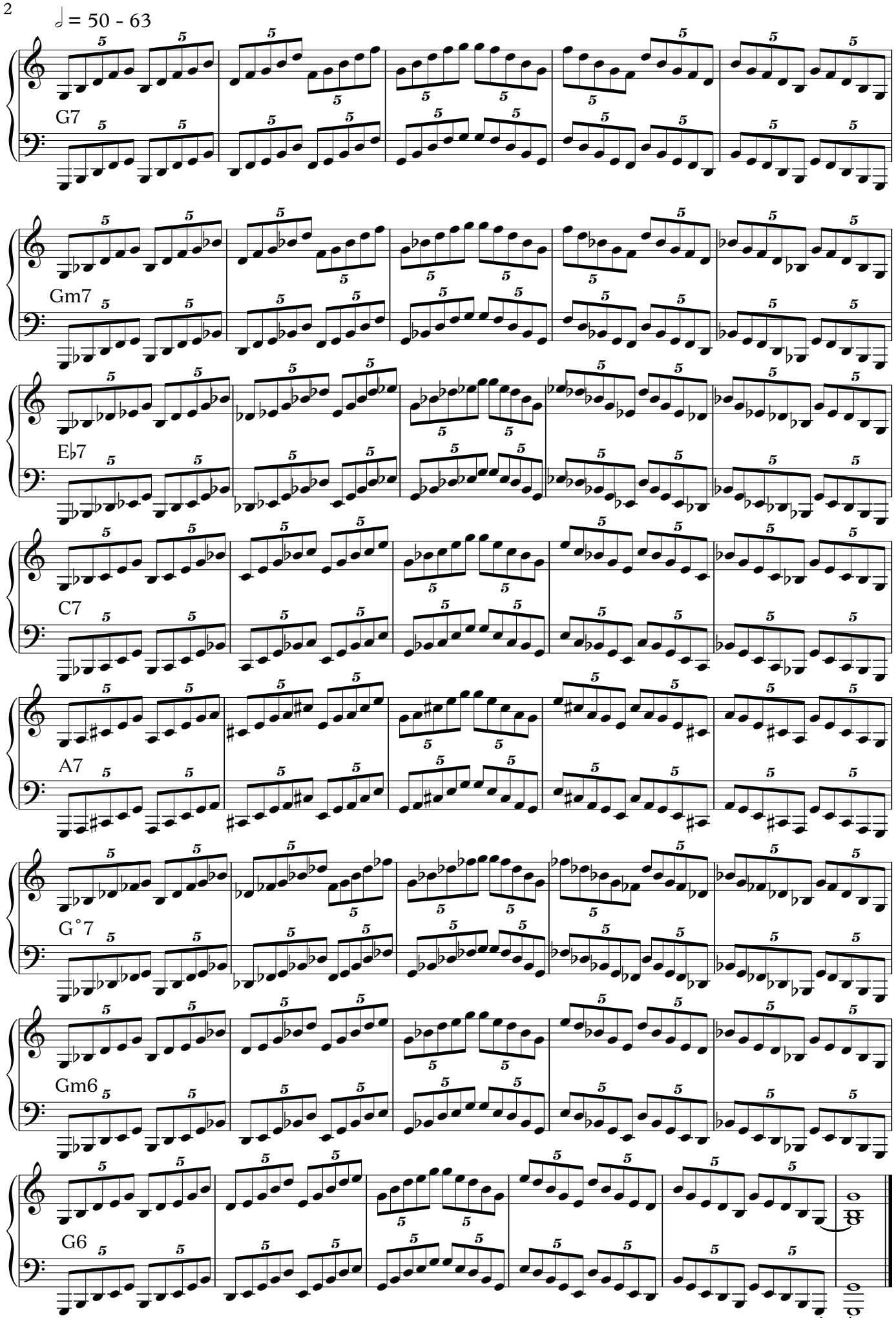
Sixth apart RH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Similar HS and HT — 4 octaves at 1 beat per octave
Contrary Begin one octave apart — 2 octaves



Broken chords on G

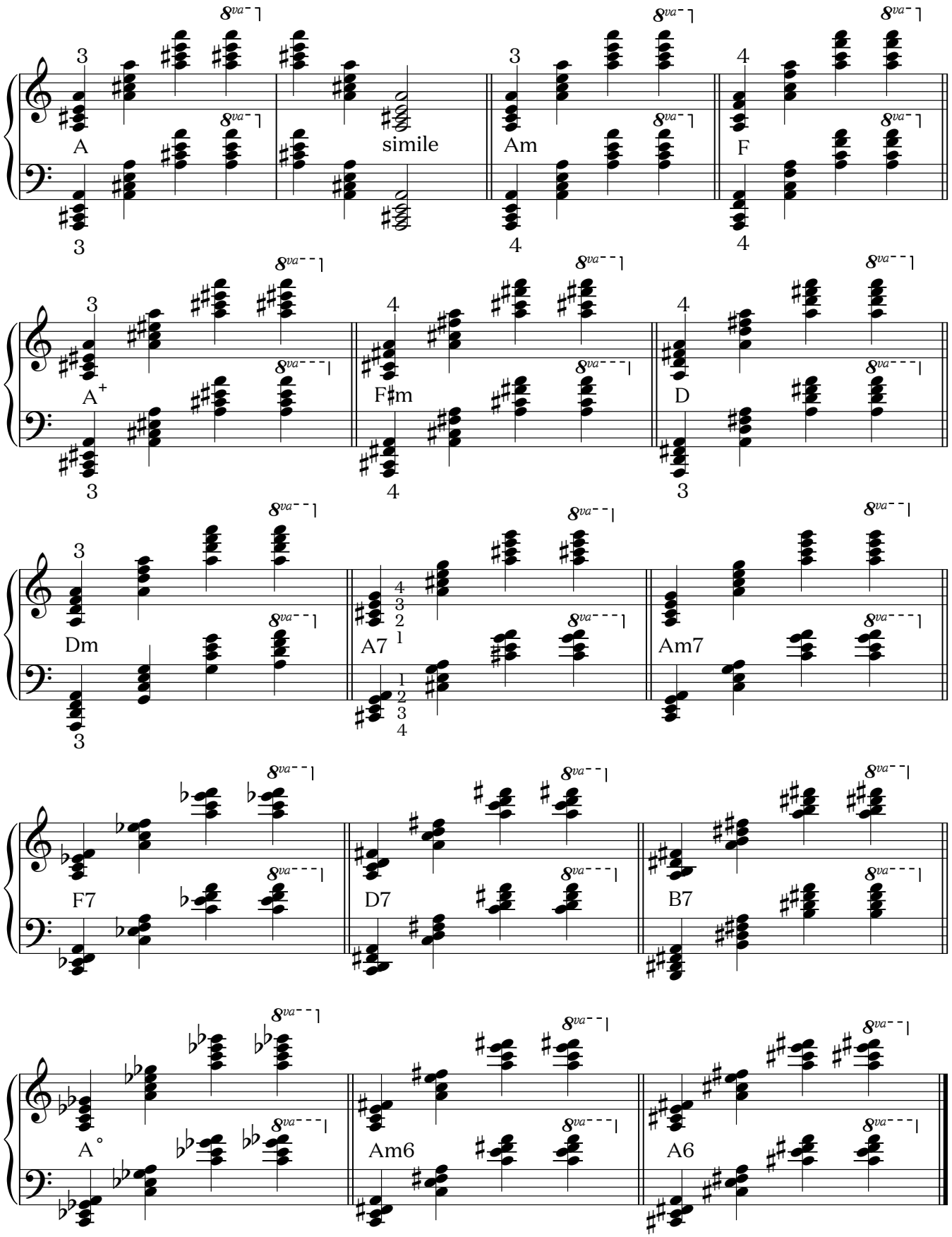
𝅗𝅥 = 60 - 80



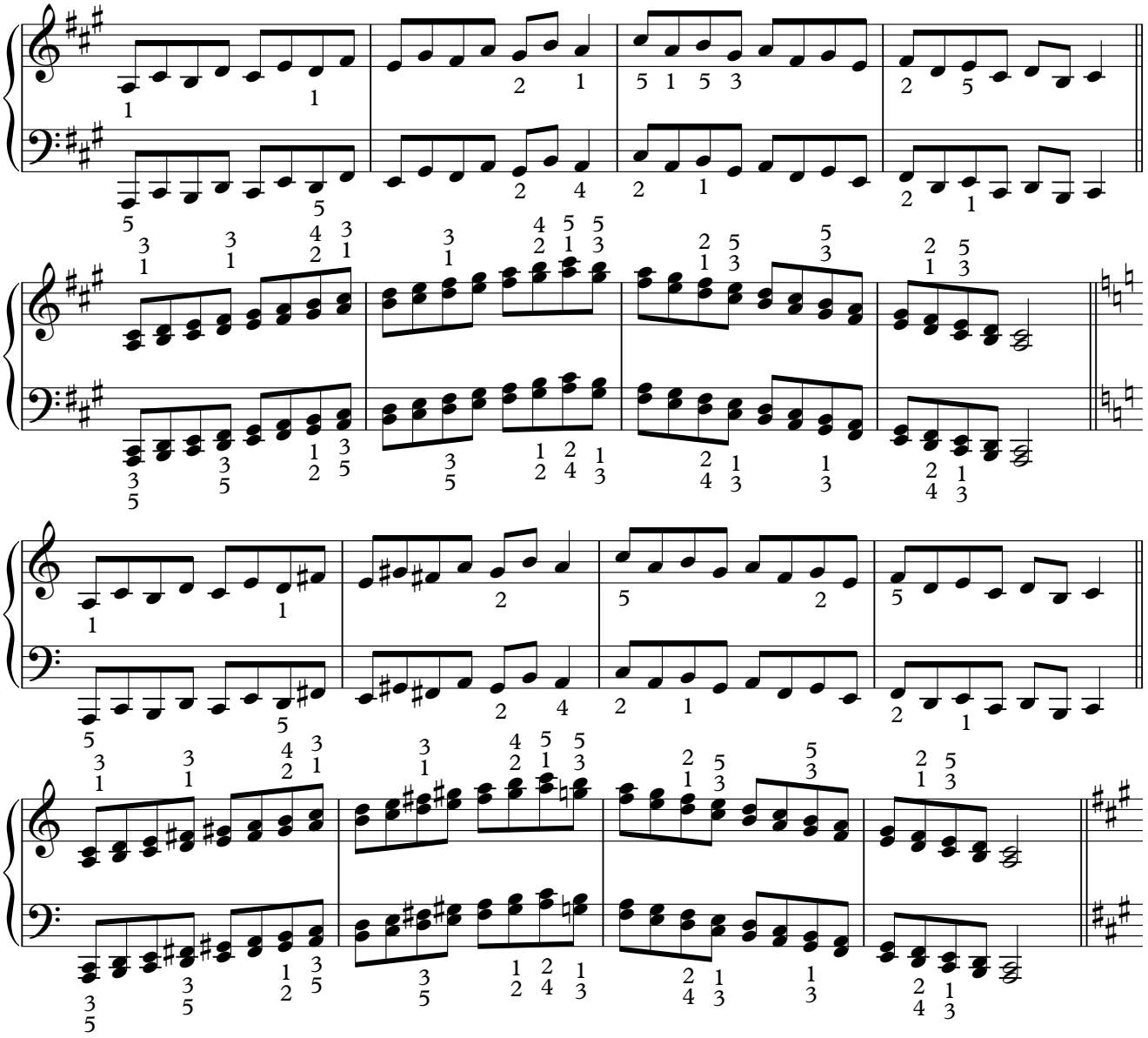

♩ = 50 - 63
G7
Gm7
E♭7
C7
A7
G°7
Gm6
G6

Chords and Arpeggios on A

♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



Double scales in A



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

Major and harmonic minor scales:

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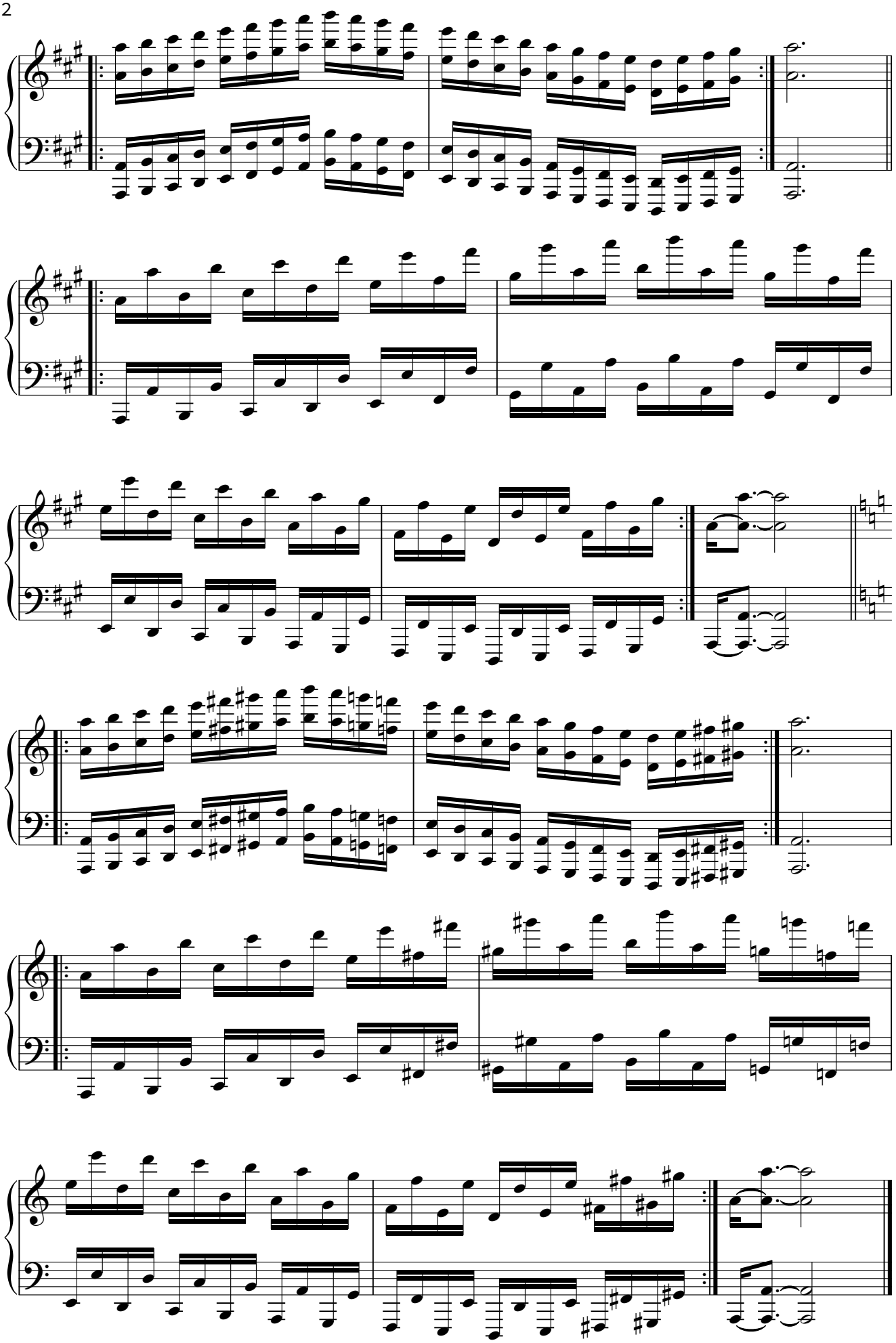
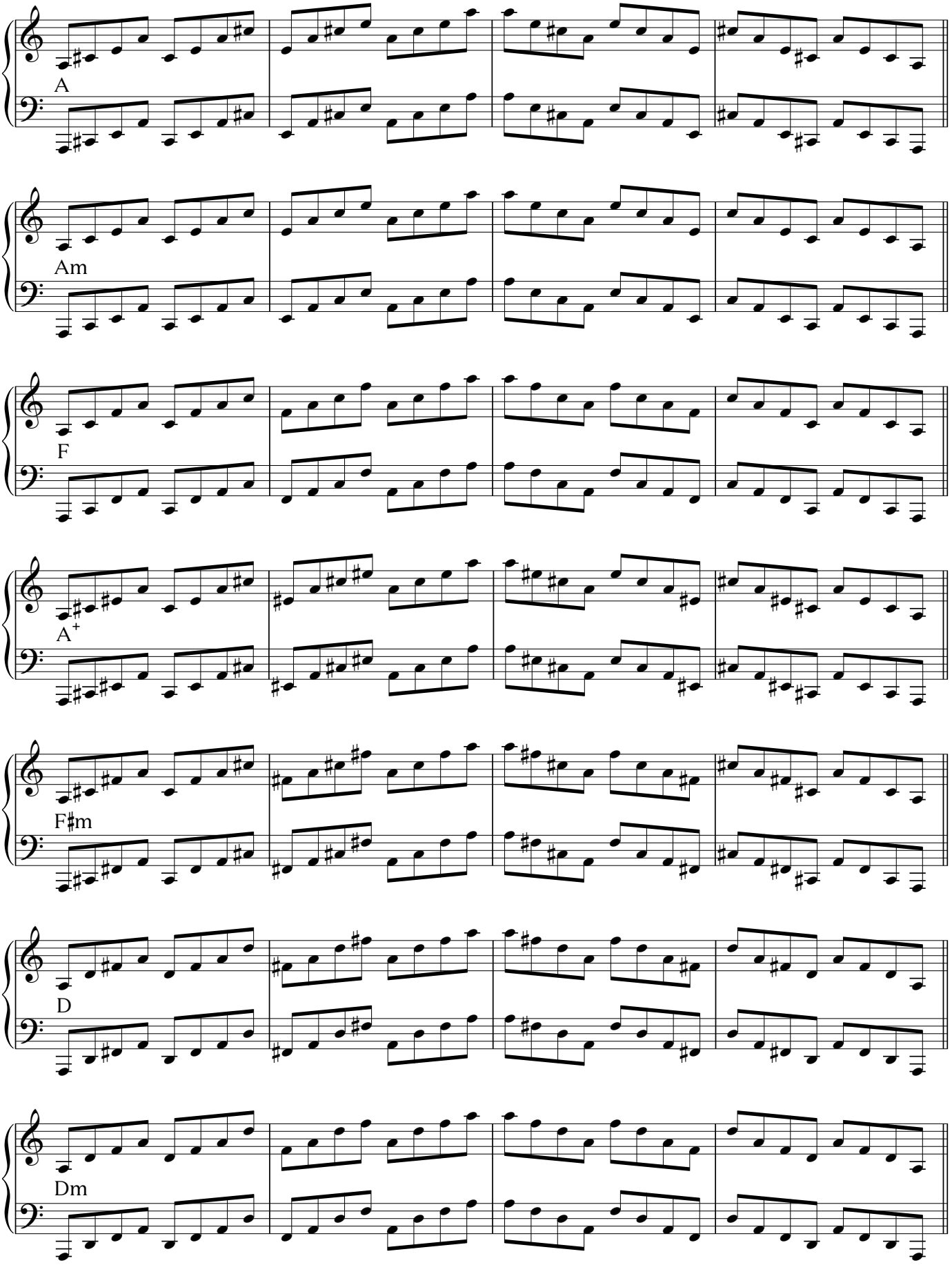
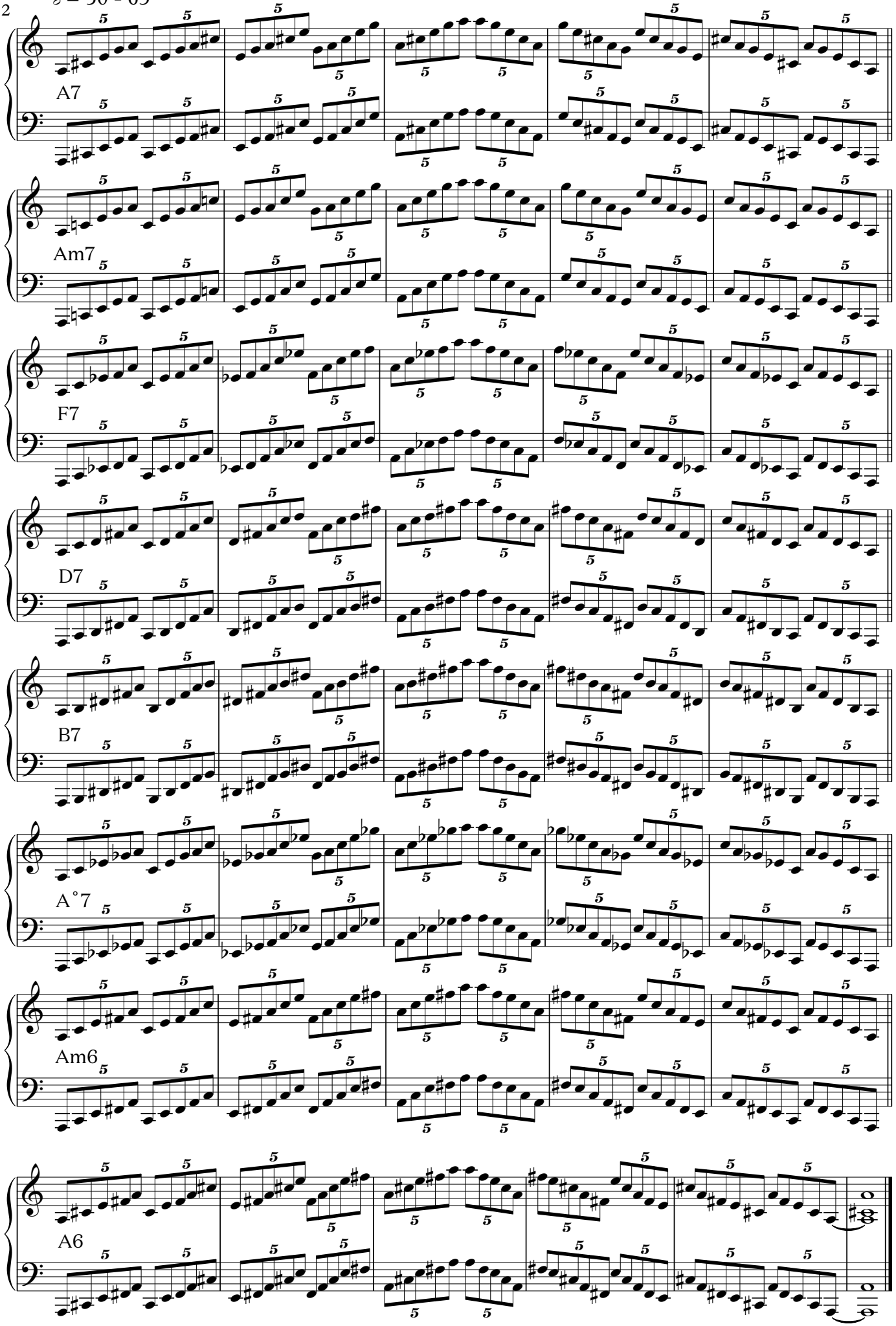


Broken chords on A

♩ = 60 - 80

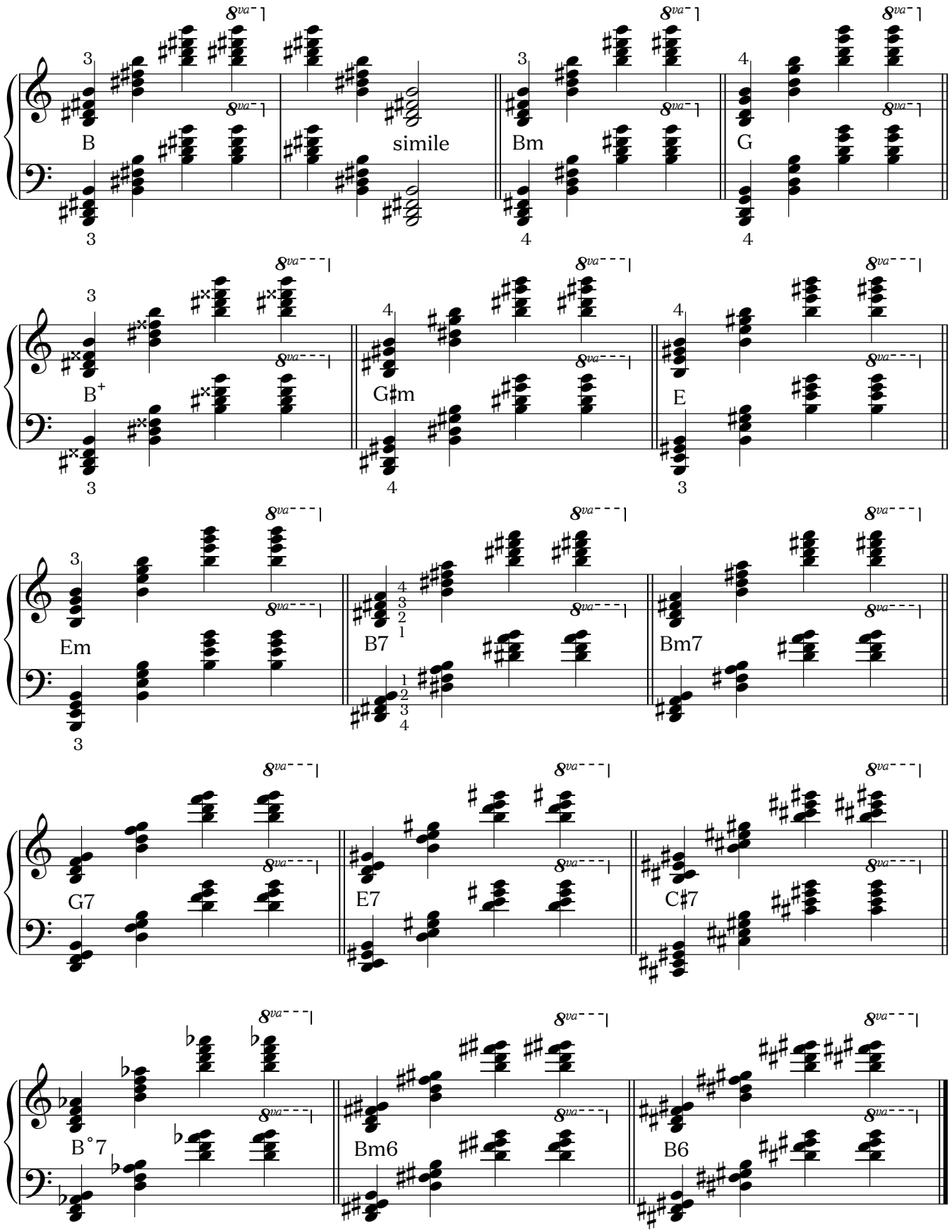


♩ = 50 - 63



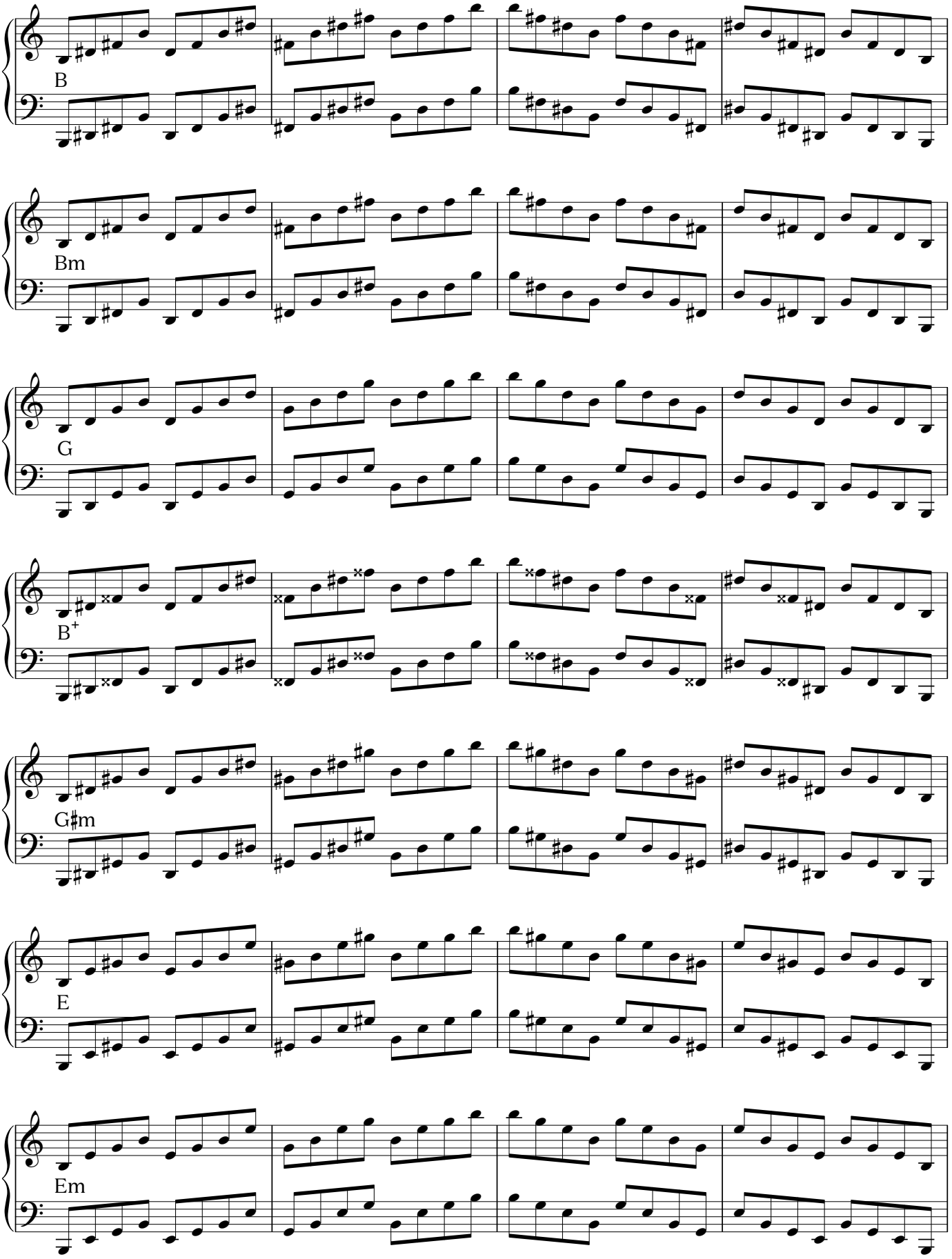
Chords and Arpeggios on B

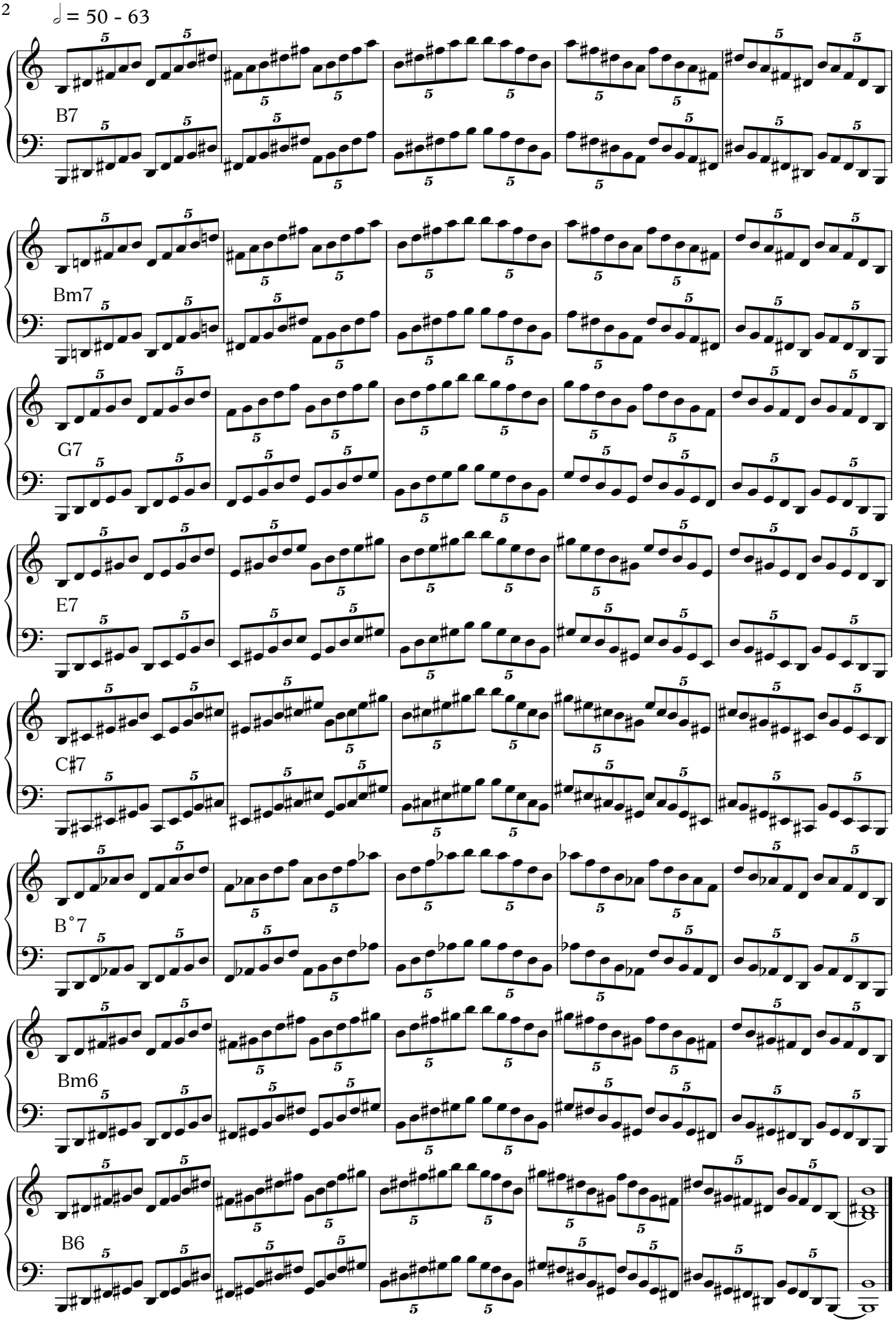
♩ = 60 - 100 — arpeggios in semiquavers



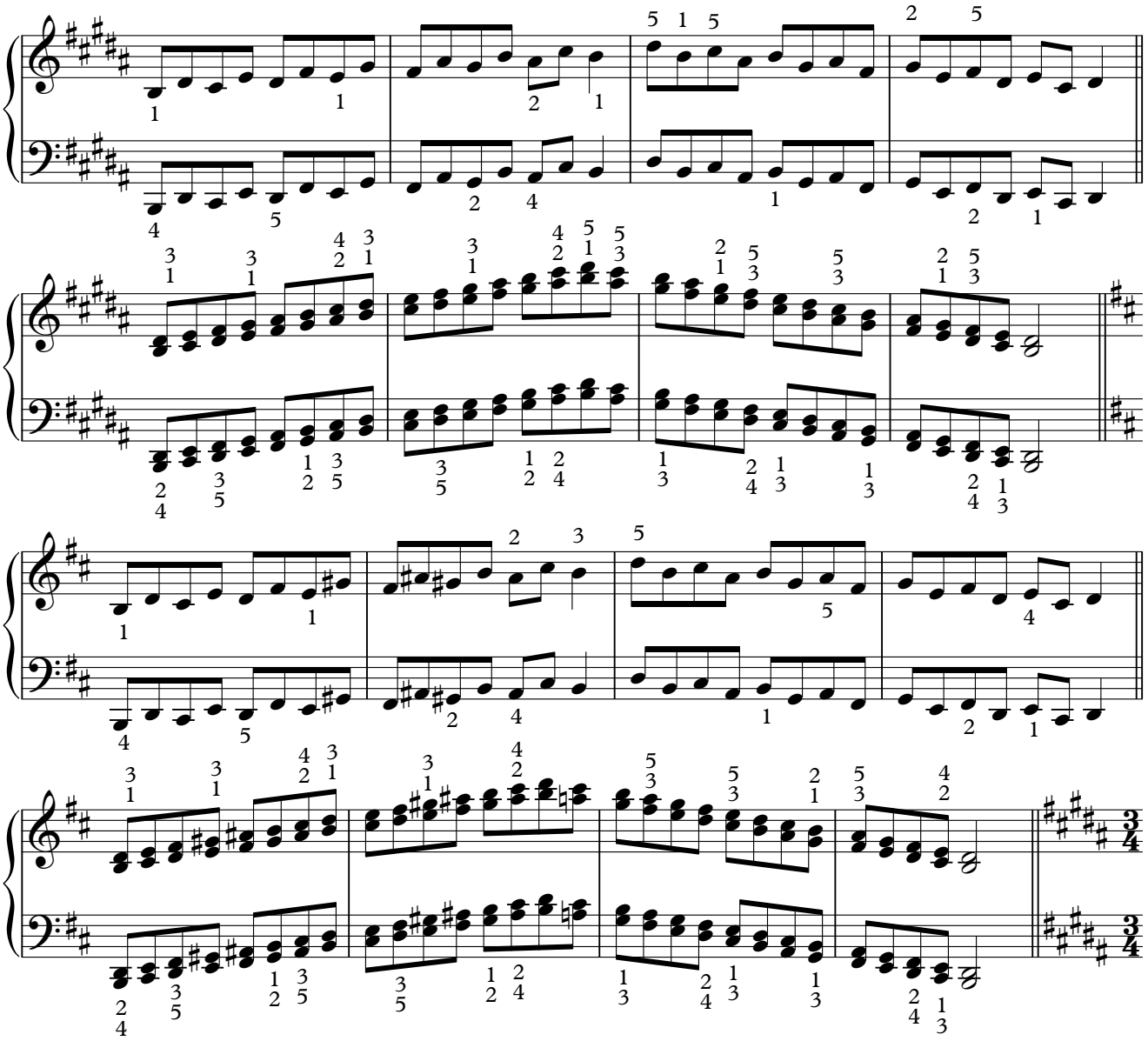
Broken chords on B

♩ = 60 - 80




♩ = 50 - 63
B7
Bm7
G7
E7
C♯7
B°7
Bm6
B6

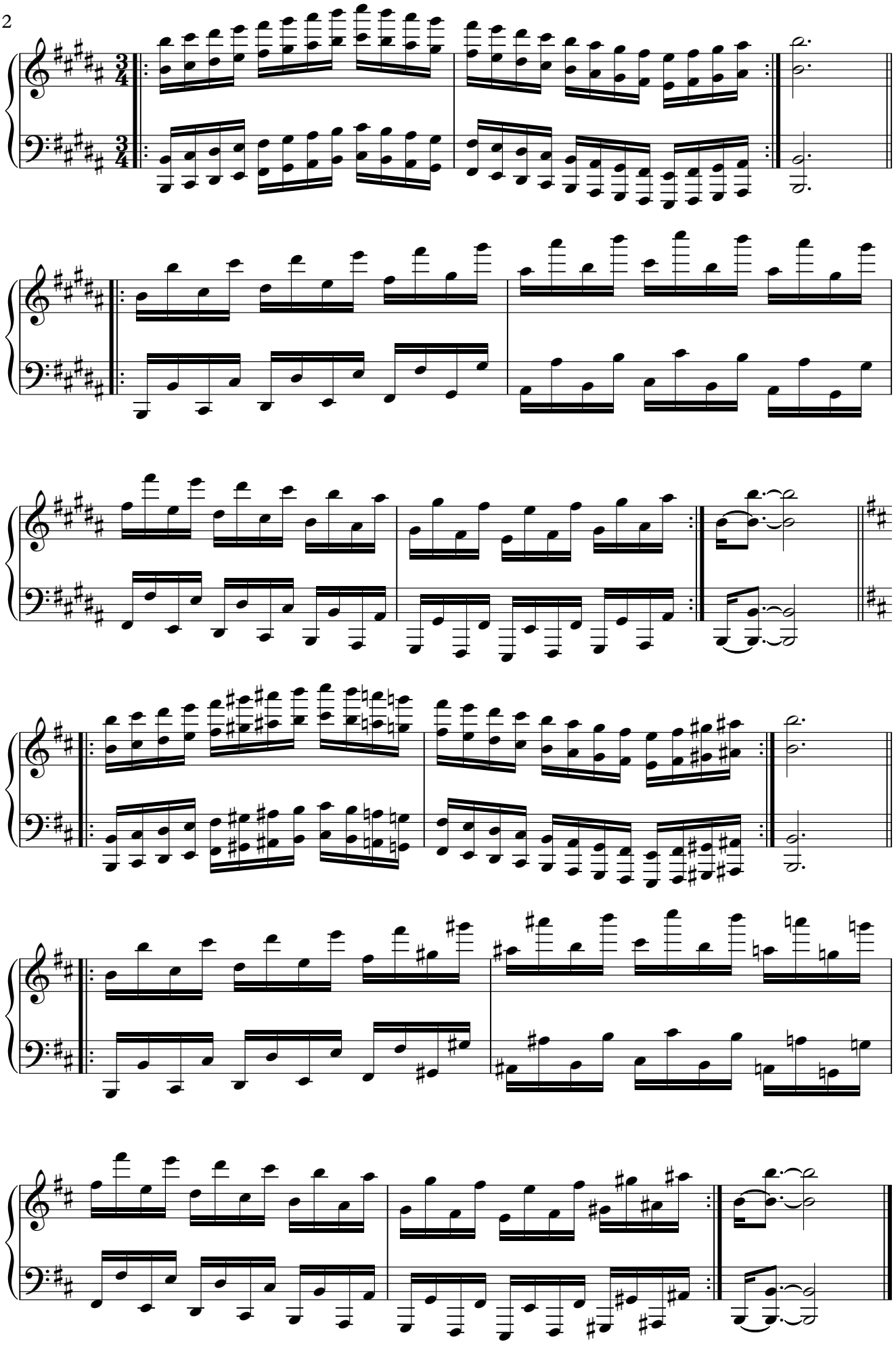
Double scales in B



Chromatic A minor third apart — 2 octaves

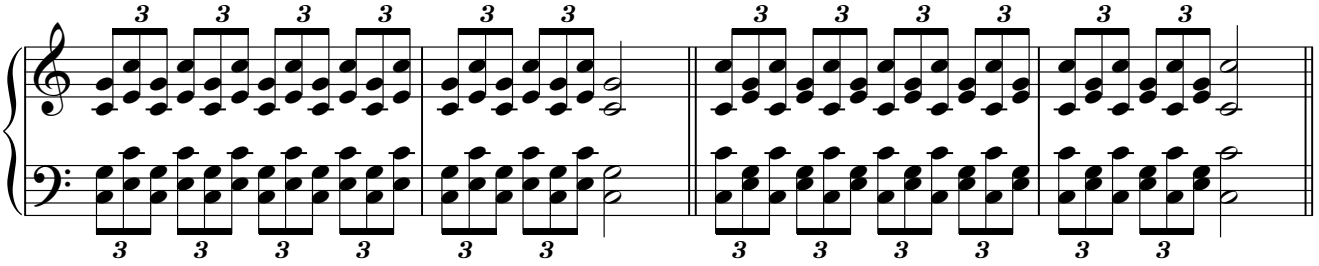
Major and harmonic minor scales:

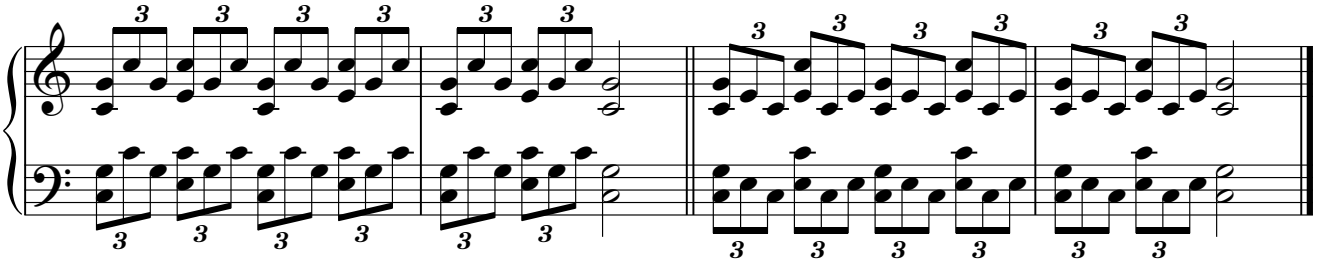
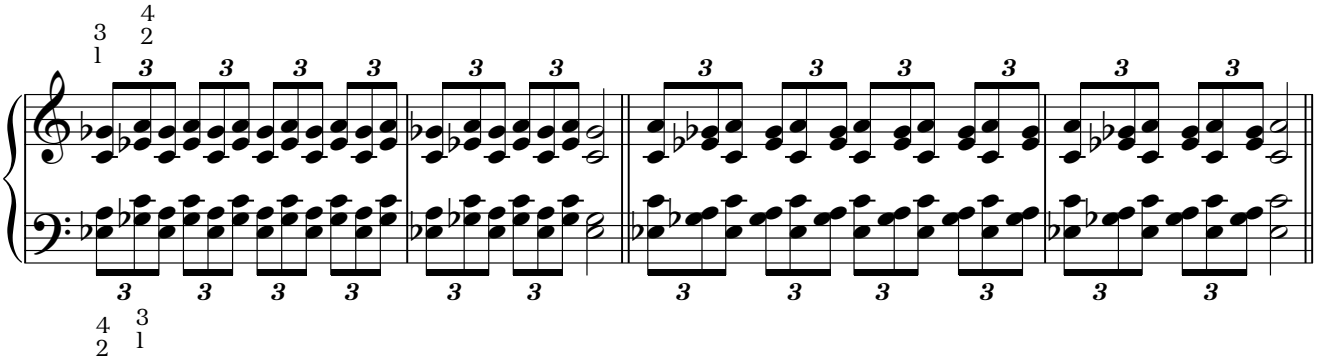
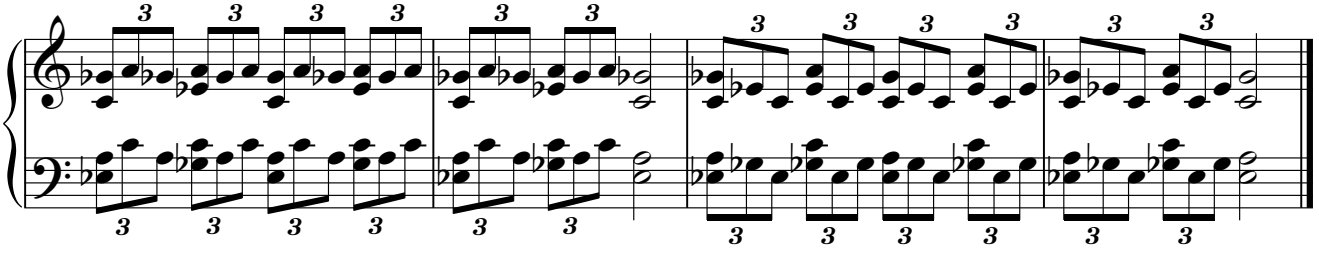
Third apart LH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Sixth apart RH starts on tonic — 4 octaves
Similar HS and HT — 4 octaves at 1 beat per octave
Contrary Begin one octave apart — 2 octaves



Stretching Exercise Examples

Major, minor and augmented chords





6th, 7th and diminished