AN ORGANIZED METHOD OF STRING PLAYING

Double Bass Exercises for the Left Hand

MURRAY GRODNER

DERIVED FROM
AN ORGANIZED METHOD OF STRING PLAYING
VIOLONCELLO EXERCISES FOR THE LEFT HAND
BY JANOS STARKER, ASSISTED BY GEORGE BEKEFI

FOREWORD

AN ORGANIZED METHOD OF STRING PLAYING – Double Bass Exercises for the Left Hand, is an attempt to consolidate the several left hand systems being practiced into one broad and analytical approach to basic left hand technique. It is necessary for the bassist to make use of all contemporary techniques in order to best accomplish control of his left hand facilities.

Several new terms and practices will be encountered in the book that will be unfamiliar to most bassists. All such "innovations" are introduced for the purposes of crystalizing, condensing and consolidating practices to make them more concise and universal.

The general purpose of the book is best described by the following quote from the foreword of the original version from which this method is derived, AN ORGANIZED METHOD OF STRING PLAYING – Violoncello Exercises for the Left Hand by Janos Starker, assisted by George Bekefi, . . ."It is intended to show the mathematical possibilities on a four stringed instrument. (The apparent resemblances to other exercises are due to the use of permutative variations.)

The contention is that in order to produce music on an instrument one has to learn the available steps as one learns the alphabet; the combinations thereof will provide us with "syllables", then "words" (phrases), and eventually the ability to play a musical composition will come within reach. Too often gifted instrumentalists learn to jump and skip without the awareness of how to walk.

It is not my intention to suggest the neglect of other books, methods, and exercises. Their use is imperative in most instances. However, as I am using samples and patterns to show available combinations, the most important element should be the attempt to ignite the dormant imagination and to stop the time-wasting mechanical repetition of a written text. Each player has to evolve his own patterns and exercises (teachers must do the same for their pupils) to suit the individual needs according to the physical and musical characteristics and available time . . ."

The demands on the contemporary double bassist far surpass any of the past. There seems no longer to be any limitations as to what is expected of him. I hope that the approach used in this book will serve not only as a foundation for a more broadly trained bassist, but also as an inspiration for his being continually innovative in seeking new solutions for challenges old and new.

Murray Grodner
Bloomington, Indiana, 1968

EXPLANATIONS

1. The positions are identified by the relationship of the first finger to the open string. Each half-step above the open string on which the first finger is placed creates a new positon. The positions thus will be numbered 1st through 12th. There will be no intermediate position designations as traditionally practiced. The use of this approach makes possible the standardization of identifying positions on violin, viola, cello and bass.

2. The use of Roman numerals in place of letter names will be used to identify strings. Thus G-I, D-II, A-III, E-IV.

3. When two fingerings appear above or below a note the uppermost numeral is for the 1-2-4 system and lower for the 1-3-4 fingering system.

4. Wherever feasible, various fingering systems have been indicated. Included are the 1-2-4 and 1-3-4, both spanning half-steps between adjoining fingers; 1-2-4 extended position covering a half-step plus a whole step; and 1-2-3-4 covering half-steps between adjoining fingers. The extended fingerings are not put to use until the fourth position.

5. Some examples included in the book (especially in Thumb Position) may be impractical, but are included because they are at least theoretical possibilities and in some instances might be playable by double bassists with large hands.

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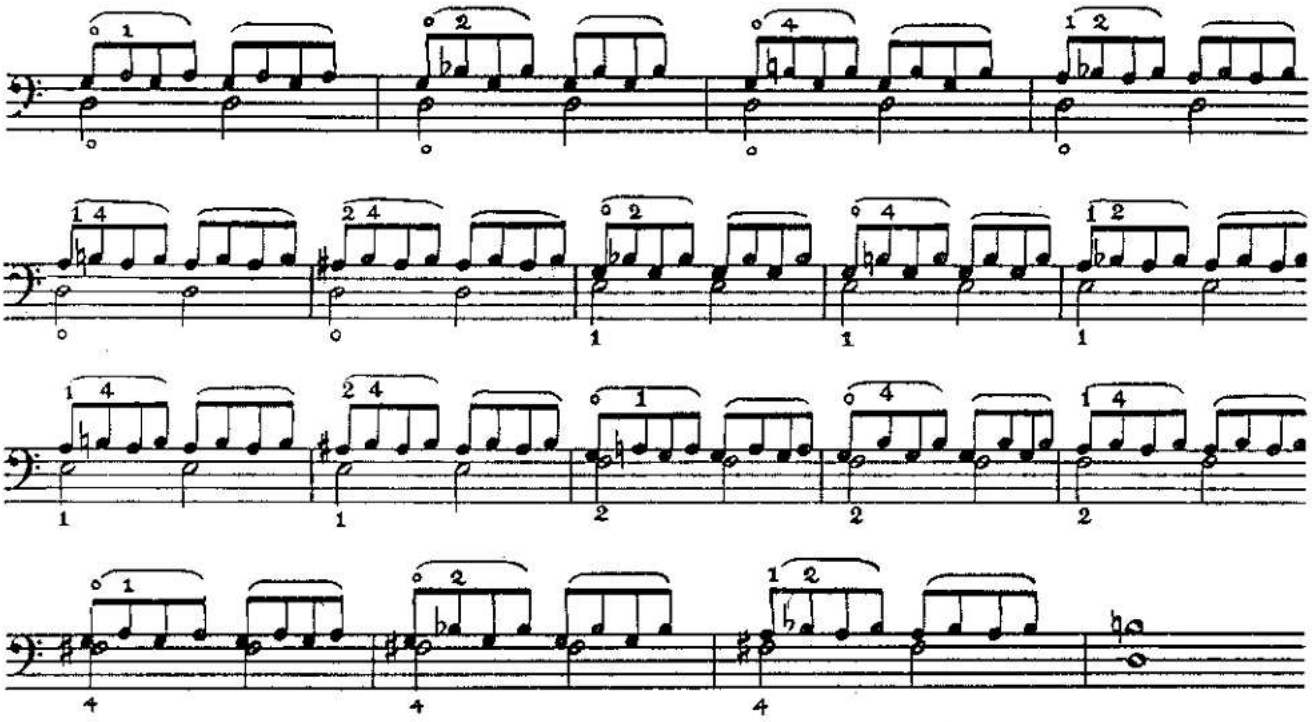
POSITION EXERCISES

* SECOND POSITION A



For fingering system employing 1-3-4, substitute 3rd finger wherever 2nd is indicated.

One finger rests on string while other fingers play all available combinations on neighboring strings.

Positions denoted as "A" positions indicate that the moving figure will be on the upper string and the sustained note on the lower string. Conversely, positions denoted as "B" positions will reverse this pattern.

The purpose of the exercise is to strengthen fingers, establish intonation within given position and to develop the "tendency" intonation.

The constantly changing double stops are part of different harmonies and therefore require adjustments accordingly.

To develop speed and the trill, use the rhythmic patterns on page 4.

All exercises in this book should be practiced in all available positions, mainly employing the upper three strings.

The aspect of visualization of the instrument should be a primary goal.

For beginning students, double stops should be omitted until fingers are strong enough.

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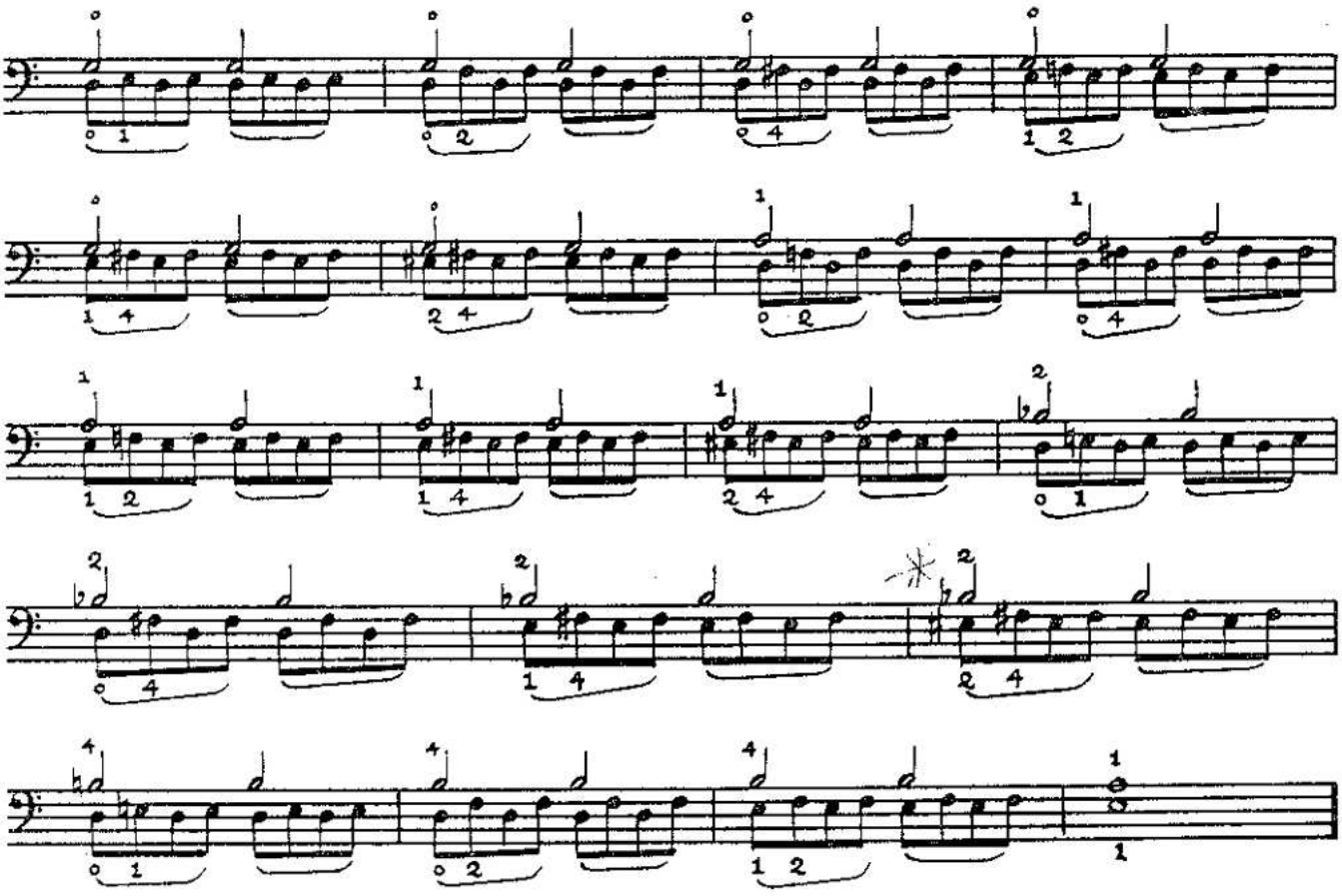
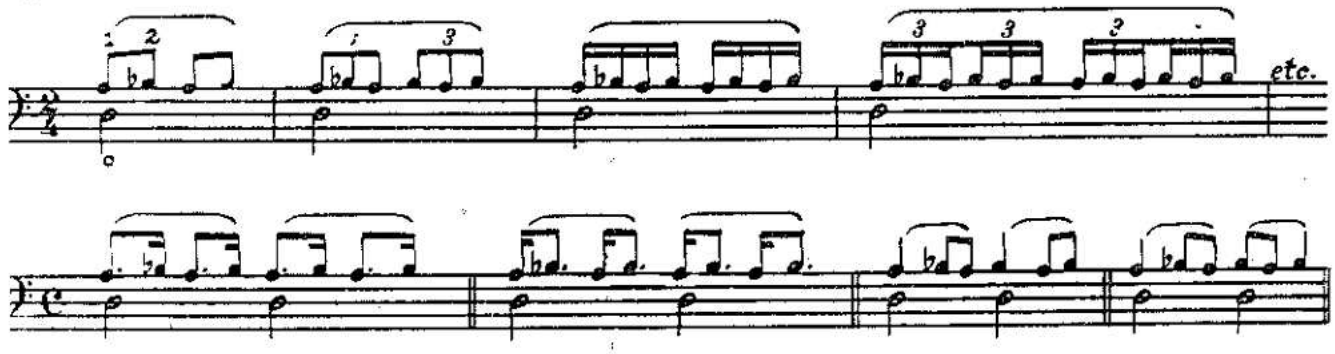
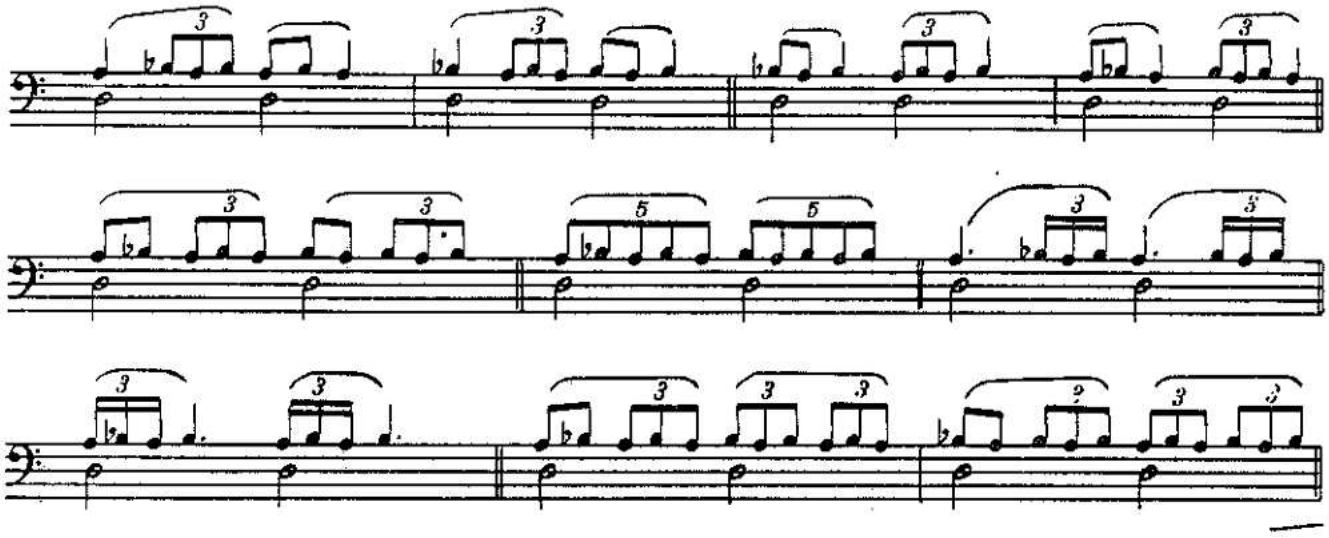
SECOND POSITION B



RHYTHMIC PATTERNS

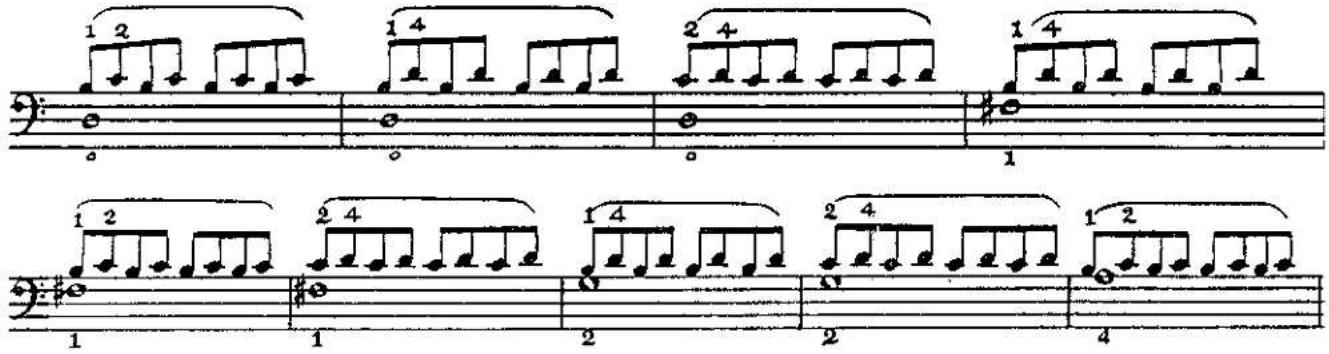




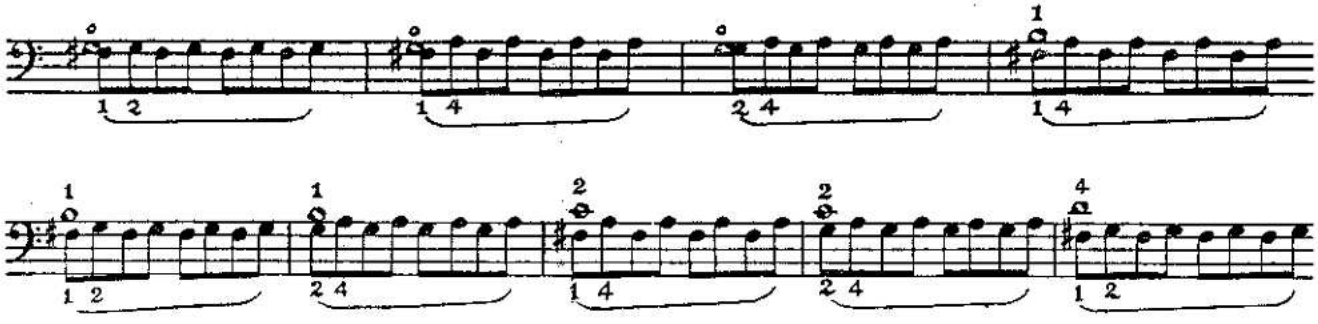
As this book intends to exploit all possible fingering practices, extended position exercises are also included. Extension fingerings are possible starting with Fourth Position as illustrated in the following exercise.

EXTENDED THREE FINGER POSITION

EXTENDED FOURTH POSITION A

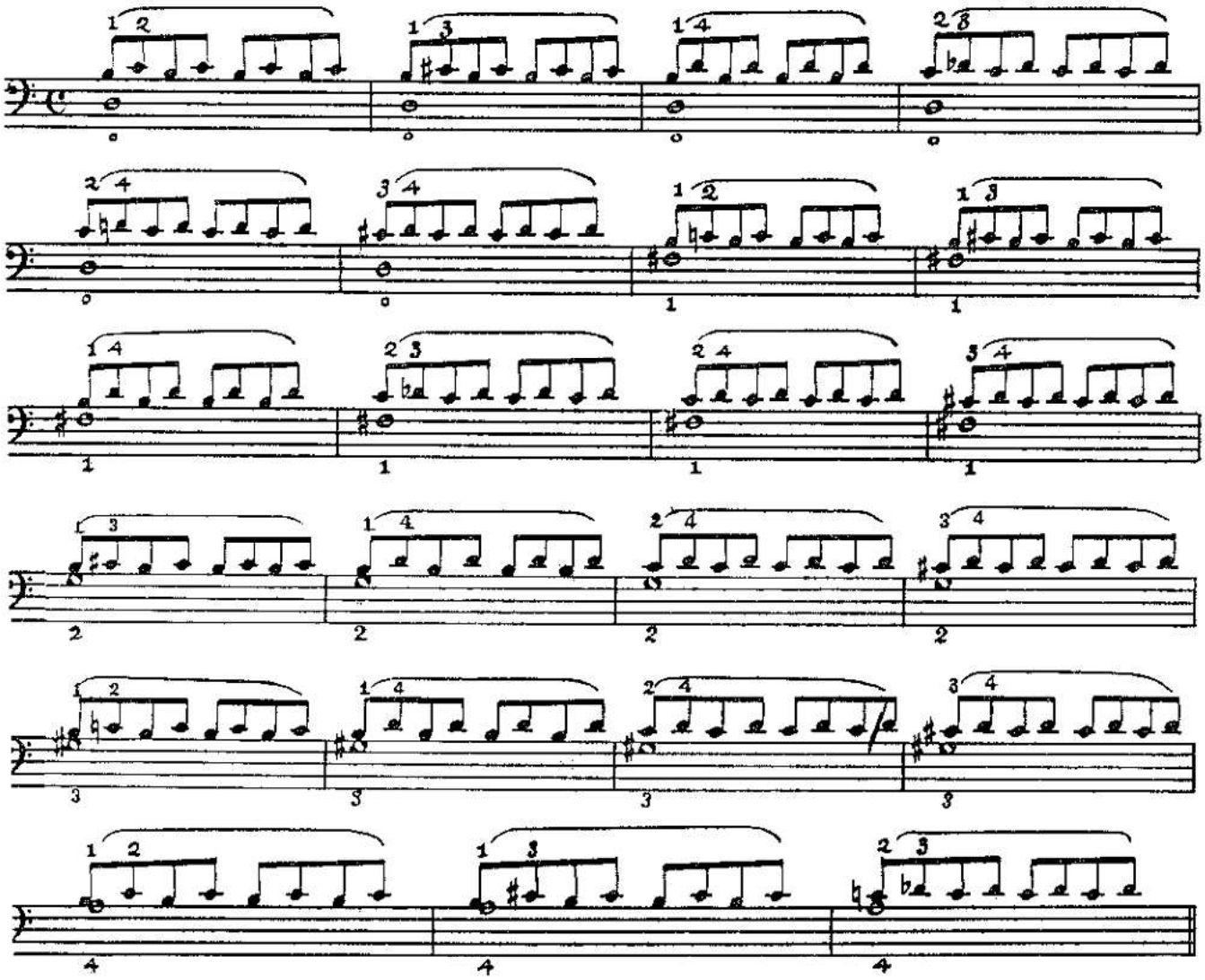


EXTENDED FOURTH POSITION B



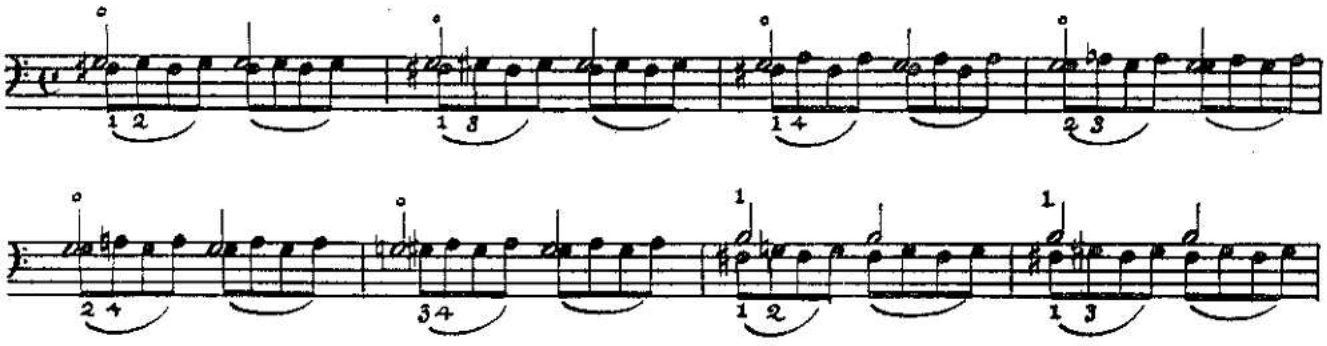
FOUR FINGER POSITION

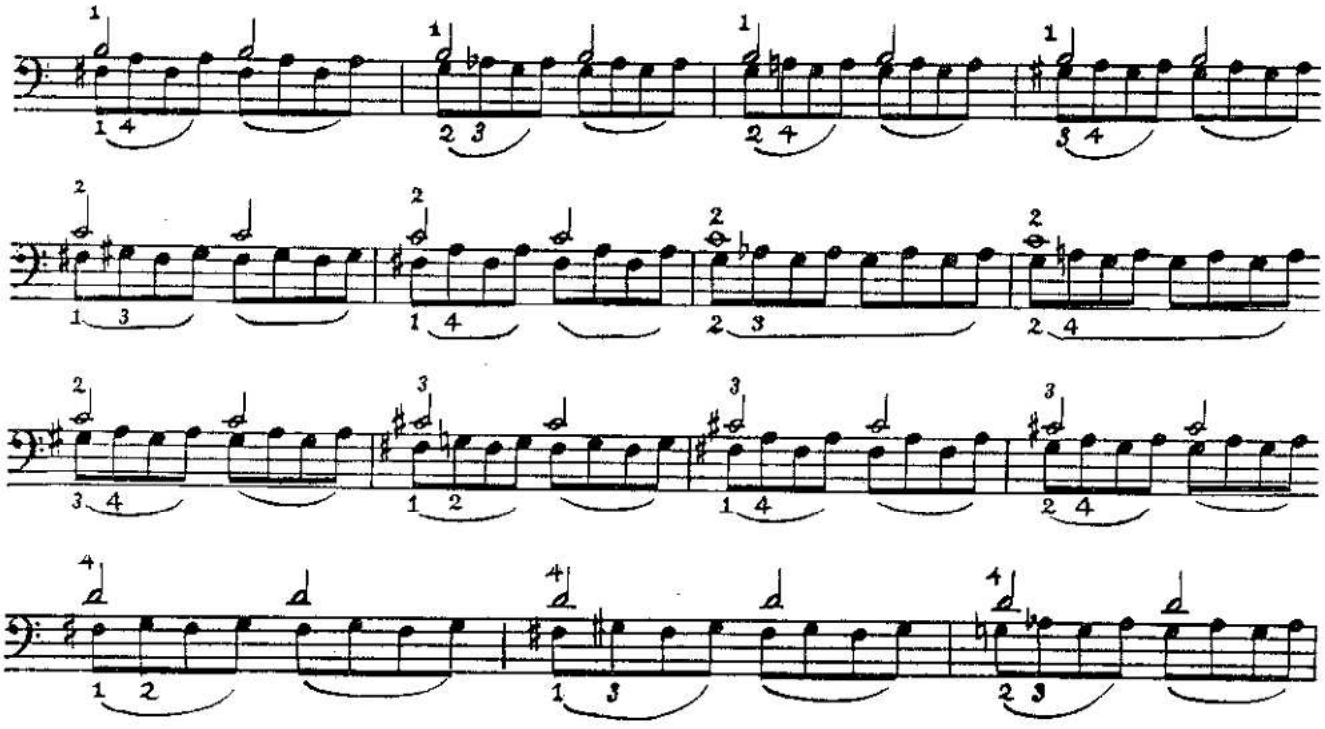
FOURTH POSITION A



FOUR FINGER POSITION

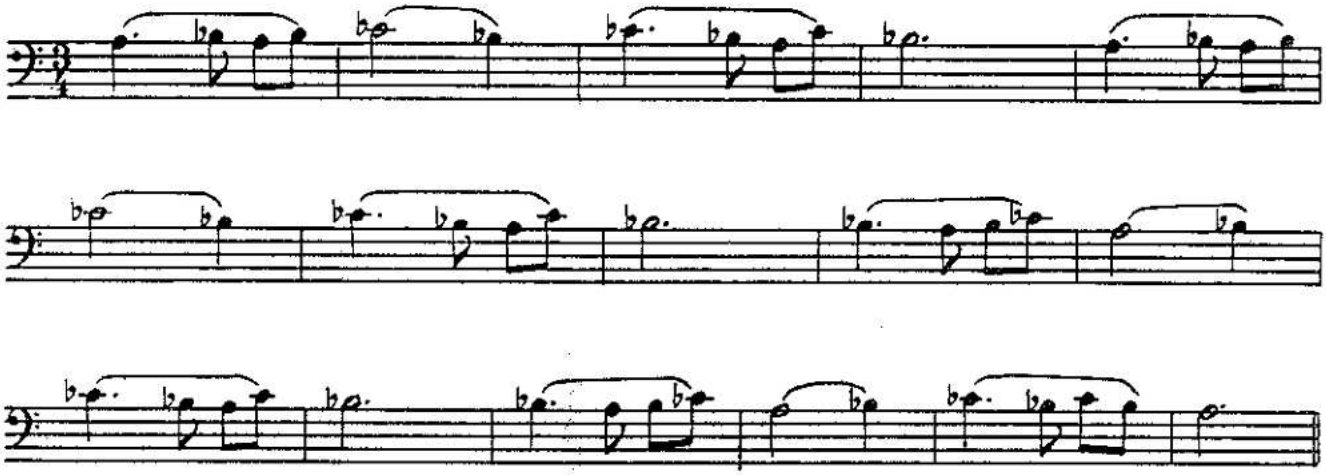
FOURTH POSITION B





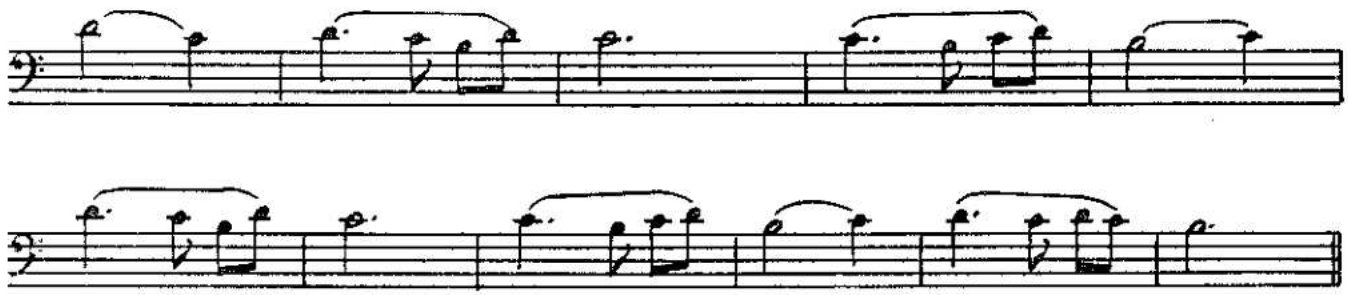
CONTROL EXERCISES

SECOND POSITION



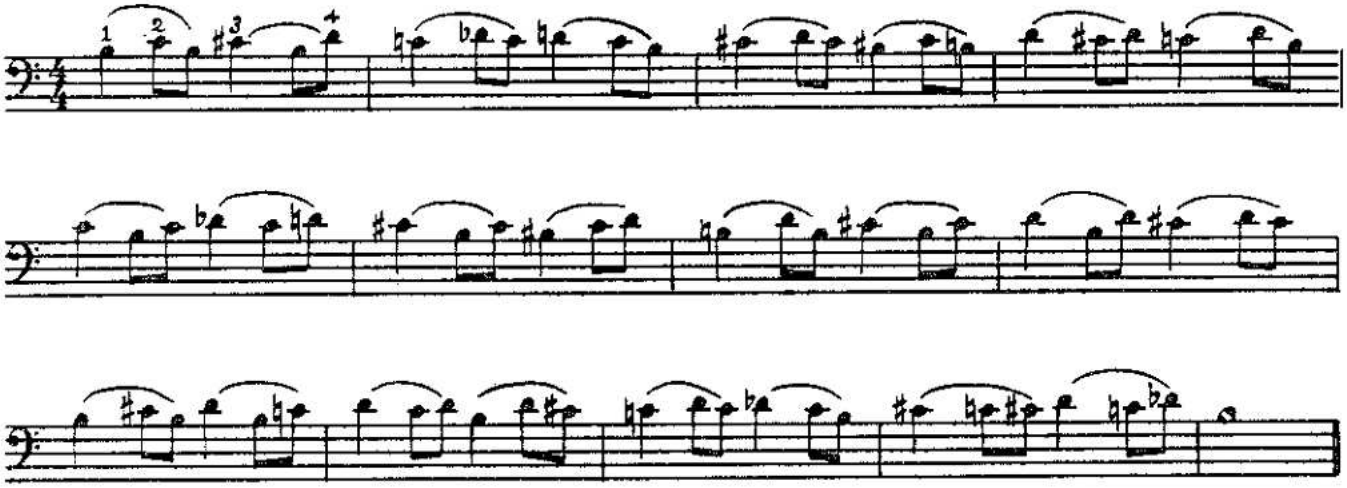
EXTENDED THREE FINGER POSITION

FOURTH POSITION

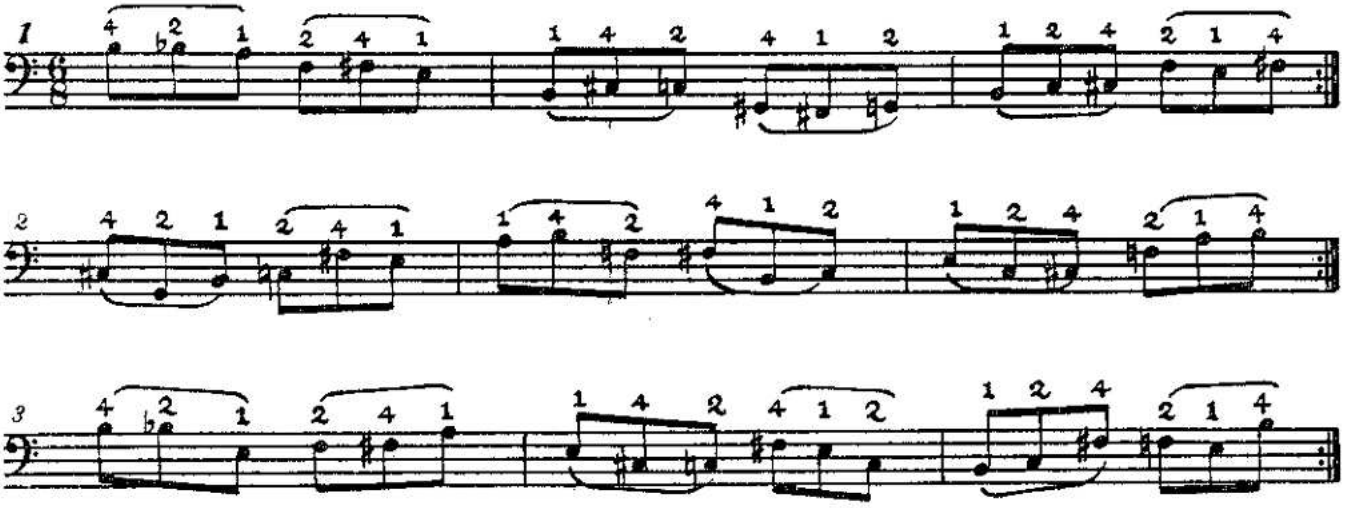


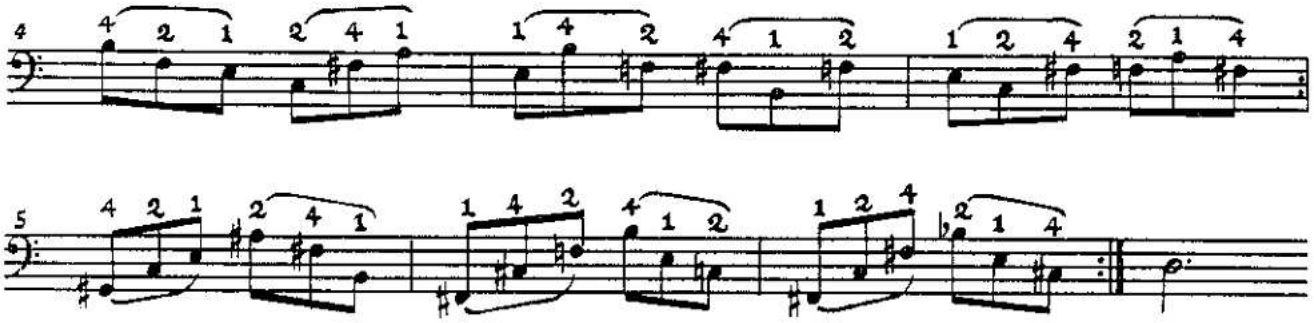
FOUR FINGER POSITION

FOURTH POSITION

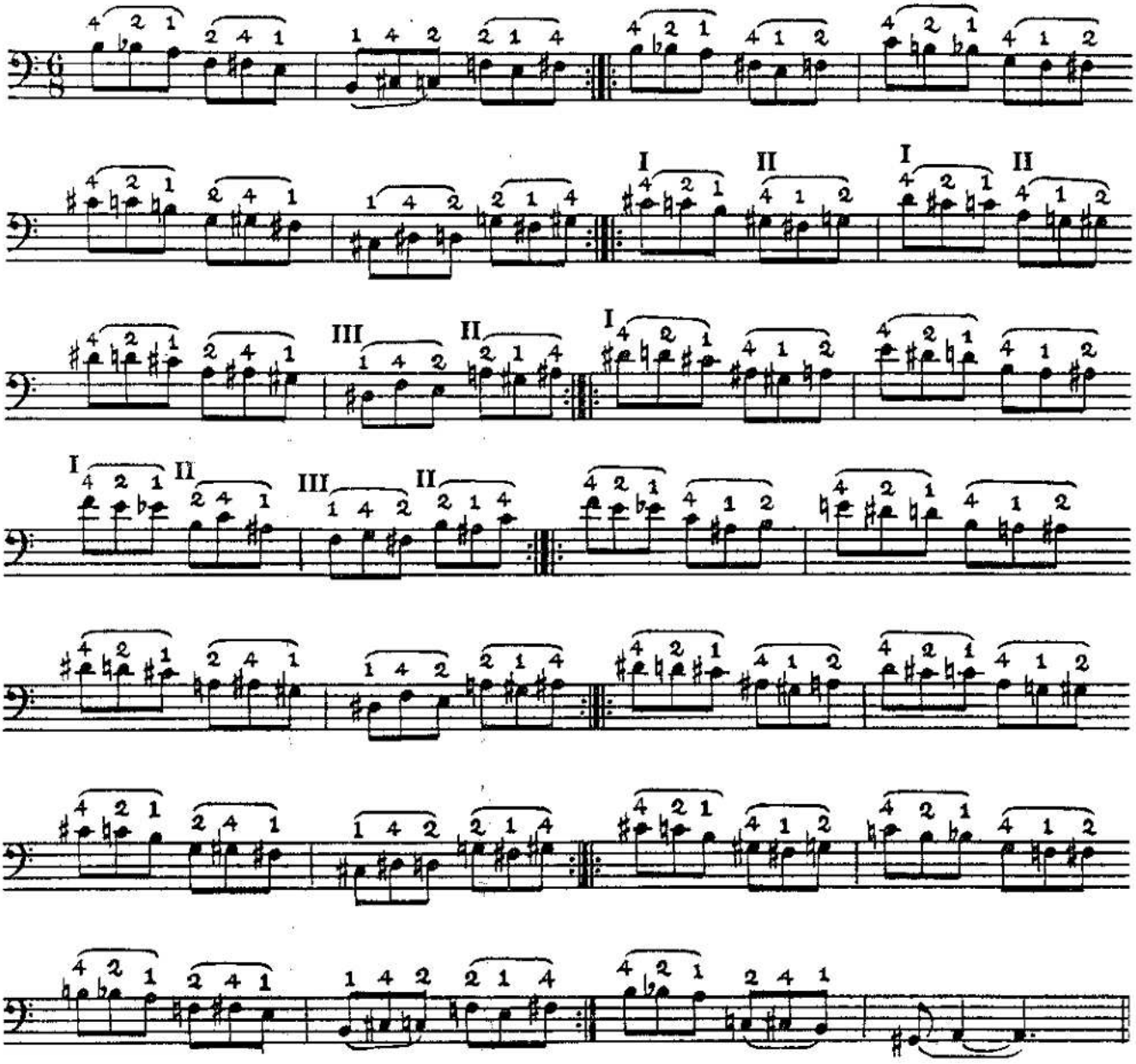


CONTROL EXERCISES FOR CROSSING STRINGS





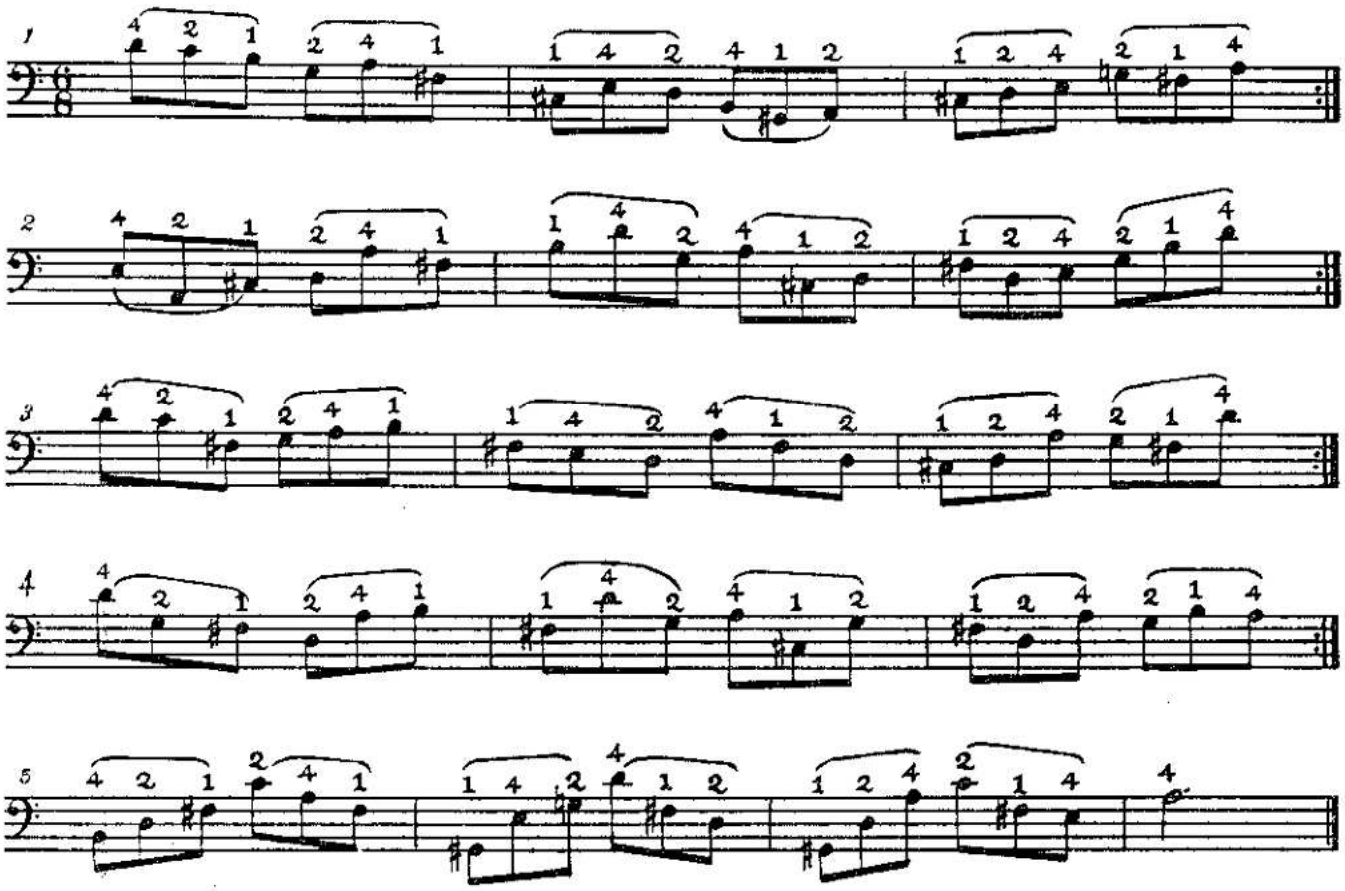
SERIAL CONTROL



CONTROL EXERCISES

THREE FINGER EXTENDED POSITION

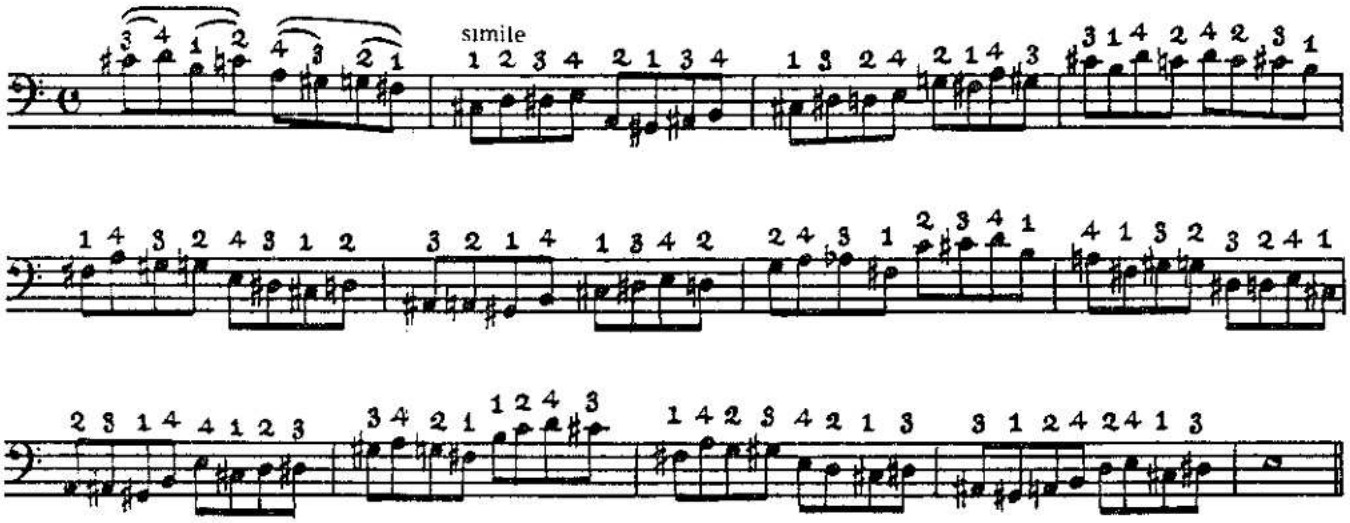
FOURTH POSITION



CONTROL EXERCISES

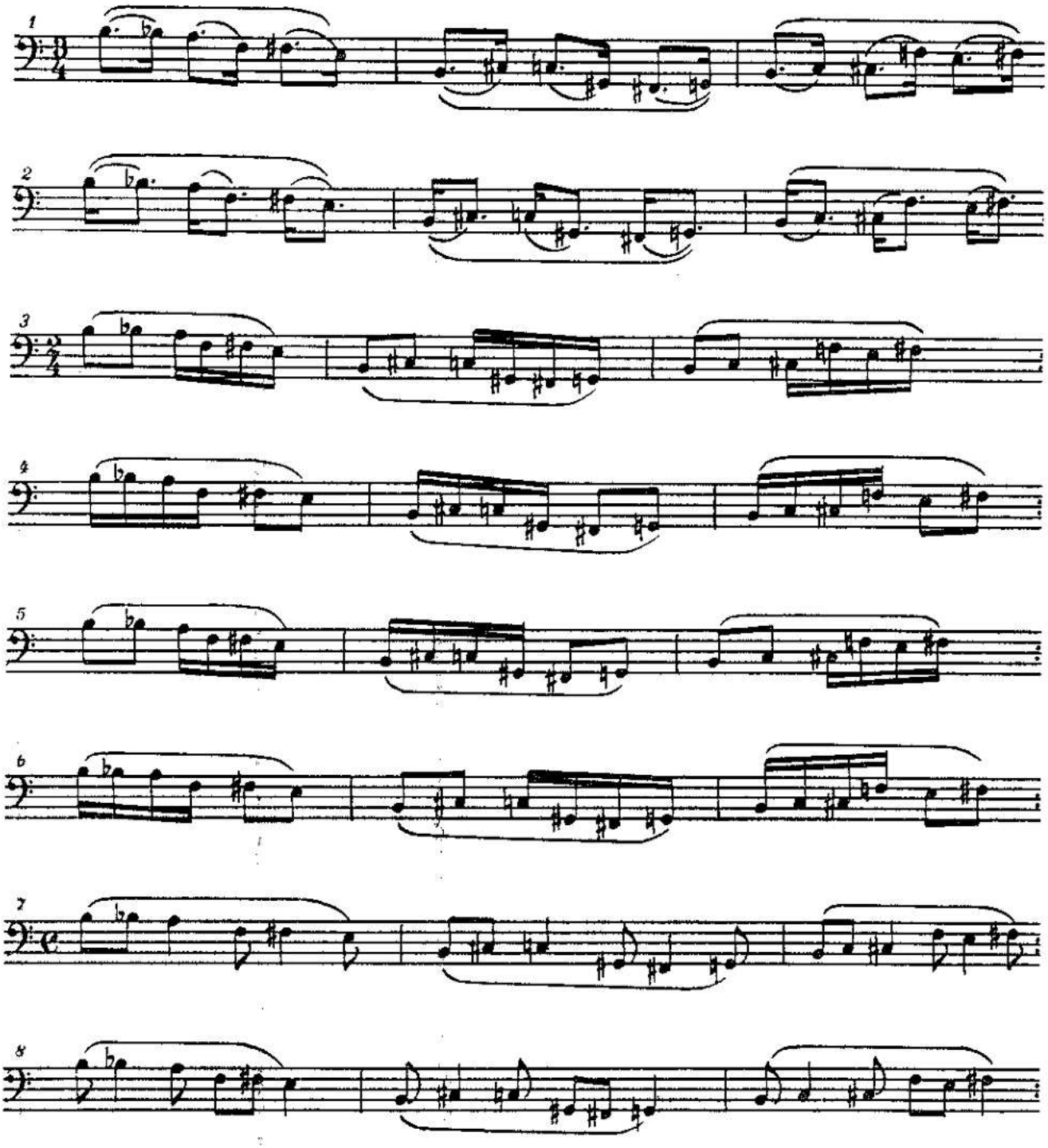
FOUR FINGER POSITION

FOURTH POSITION



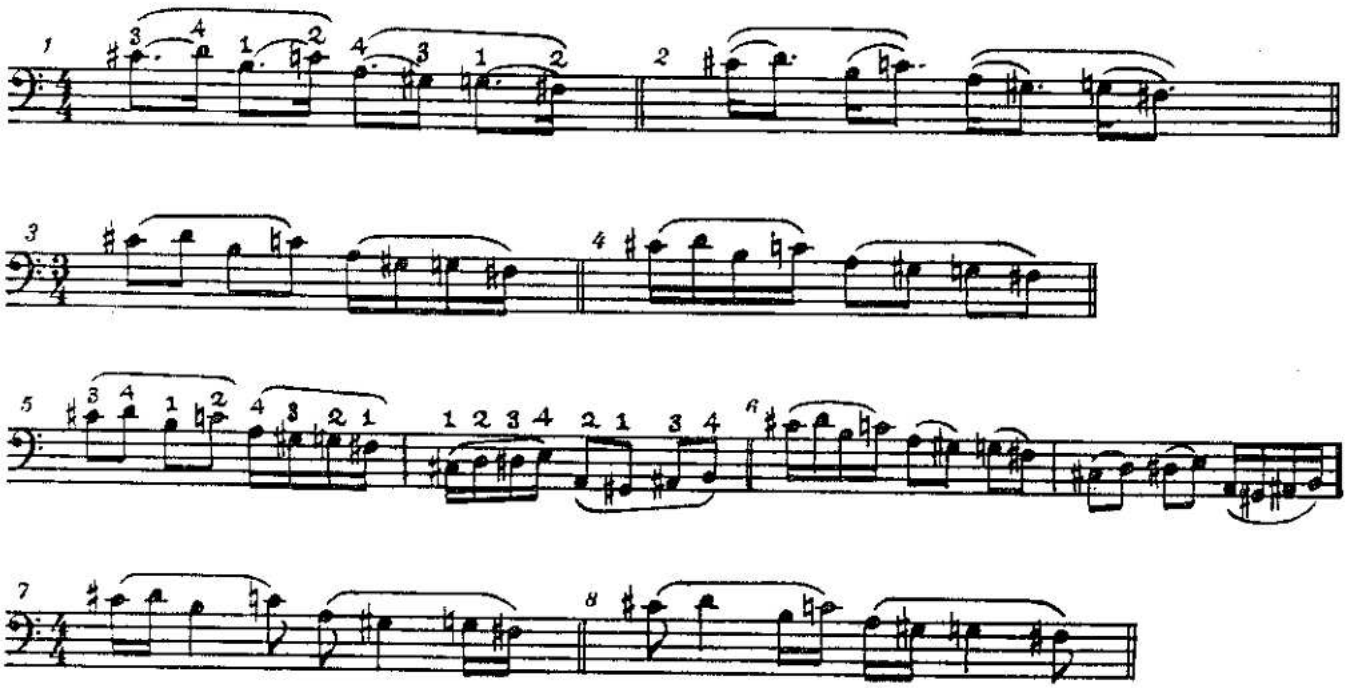
In order to develop all finger positions, play above sequences in positions 5, 6, 7 and 8 as well.

RHYTHM SAMPLES FOR PRACTICING CONTROL EXERCISES



These rhythmic examples are to be applied to all preceding control exercises written in 6/8.

RHYTHM SAMPLES FOR FOUR FINGER POSITION CONTROL EXERCISE



THUMB POSITION

The basic hand position for thumb position should encompass a perfect fourth or major third on a single string. On adjoining strings, with the thumb on the lower string and the third finger on the higher string, the basic hand position will encompass a major sixth or minor seventh. The interval between the first and third finger will be a minor third allowing either a whole-step half-step combination or vice versa. This usage of the left hand will hereafter be referred to as "Standard Position."

In the "Contracted Position", similar usage of the thumb to the third finger will result in a minor or major third. While playing on adjoining strings, the result will be a minor or major sixth. The interval between the first and third fingers will only be a major second or two half-steps.

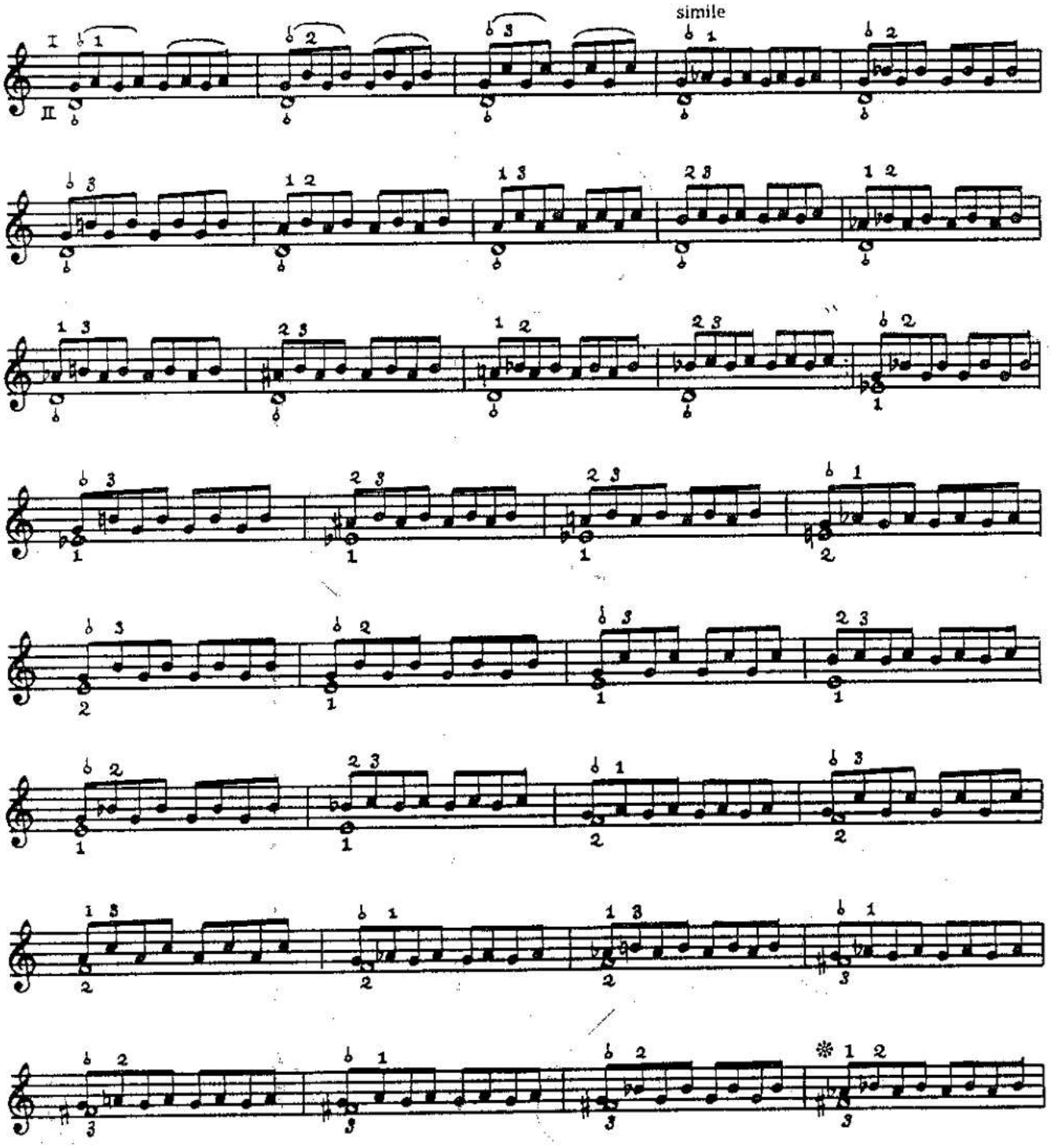
In the "Extended Position", the interval spanned by the thumb and third fingers will be a perfect or augmented fourth on one string and major or minor seventh on adjoining strings. The interval between first and second, as well as second and third fingers will always be a whole step.

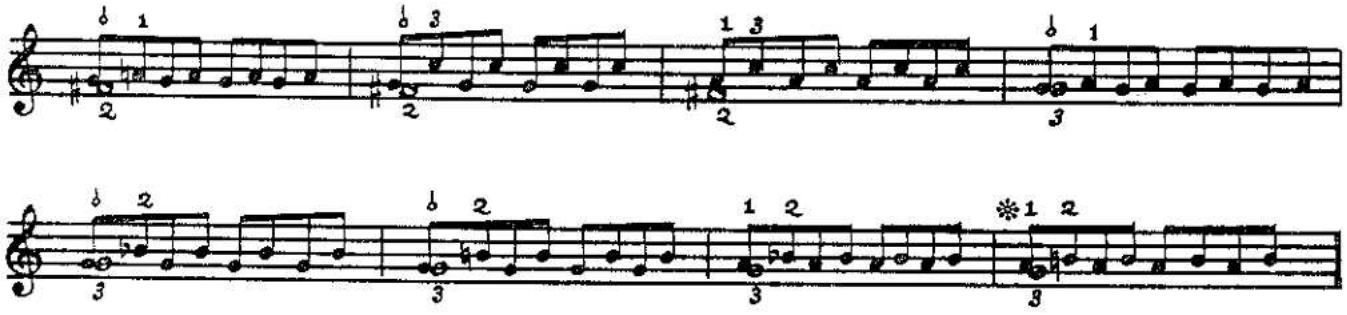
In all of these positions, the interval between the thumb and first finger can be a half or whole step on a single string or a diminished or perfect fifth on adjoining strings.

Only the symbol ($\dot{0}$) will be used to indicate the use of thumb and no separate designations will be made of a thumb stopping a harmonic.

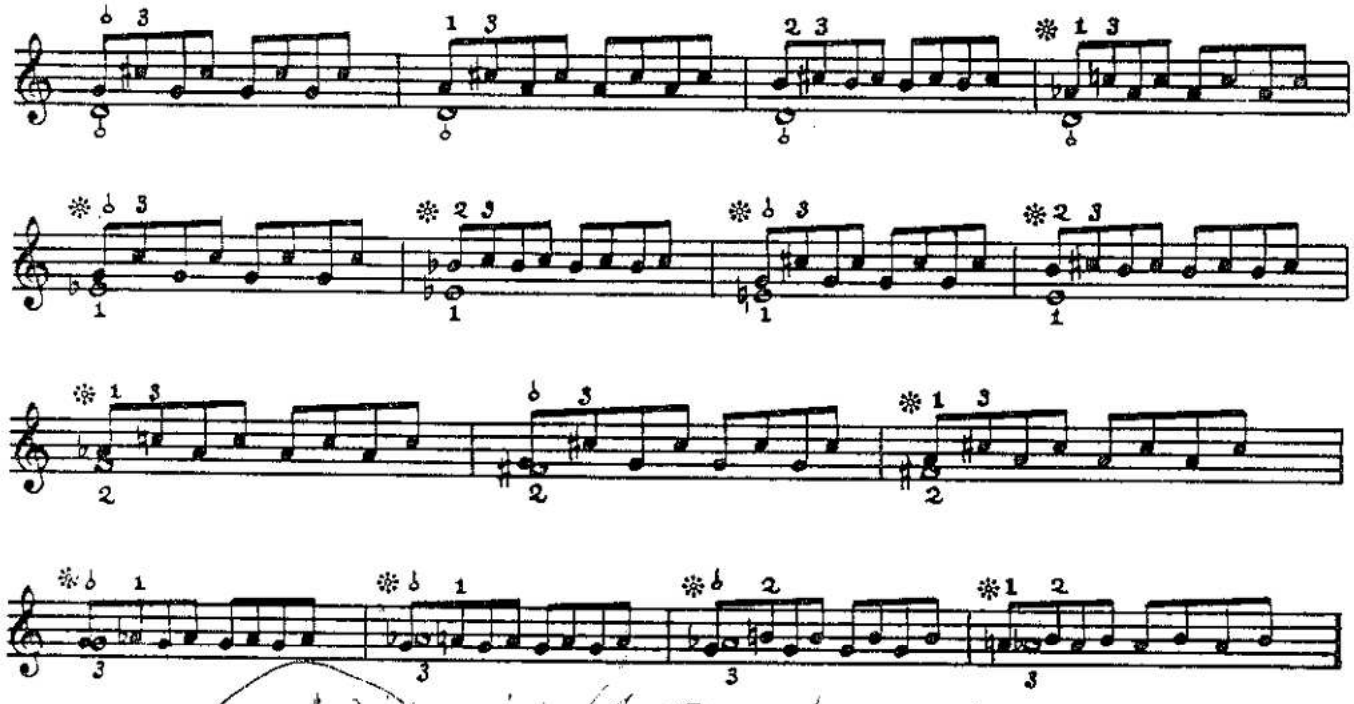
All examples in thumb position marked with an asterisk are theoretical possibilities but are either impractical or unplayable with indicated fingerings.

THUMB POSITION A EXERCISES
STANDARD POSITION

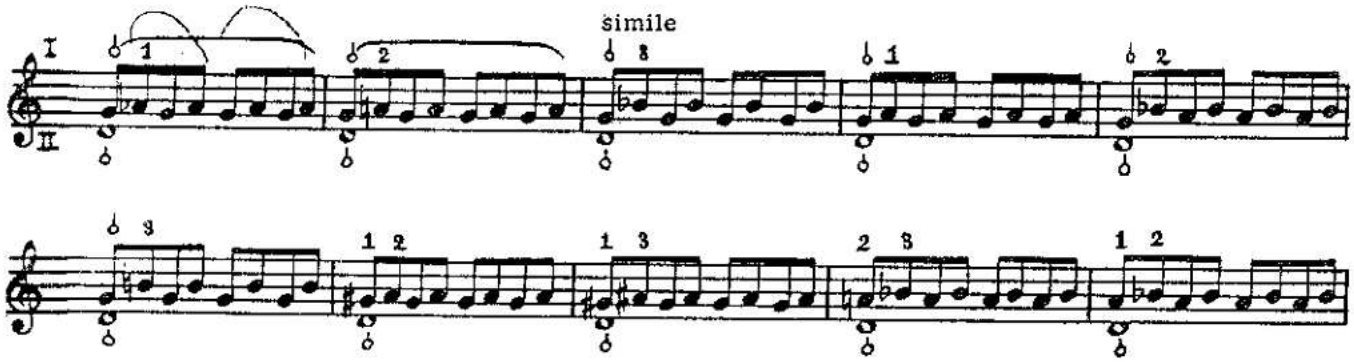


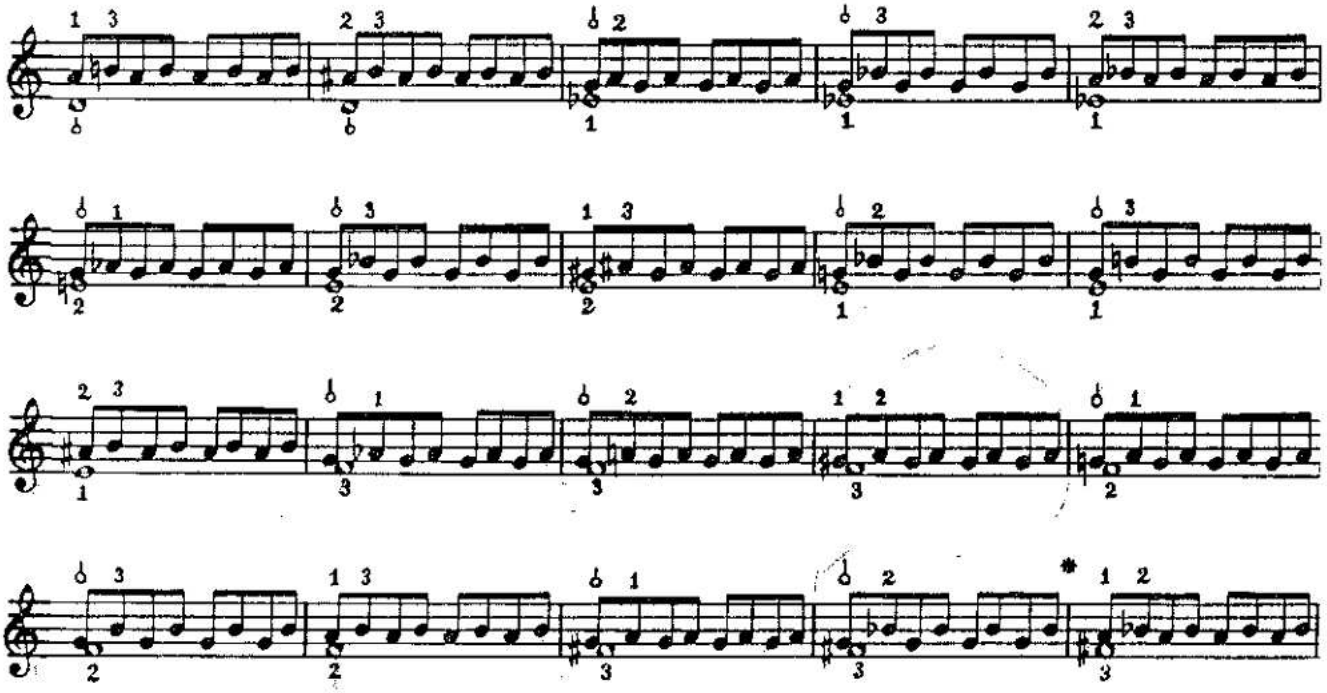


EXTENDED THUMB POSITION A



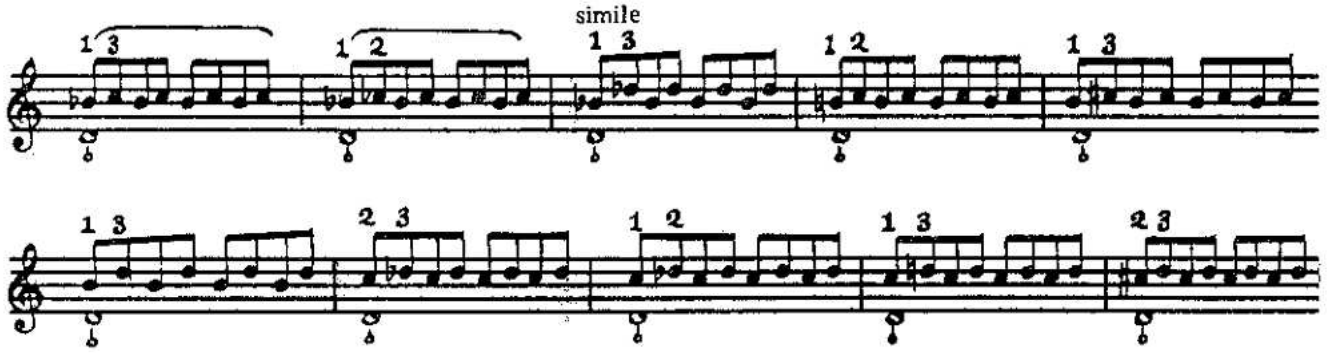
CONTRACTED THUMB POSITION A





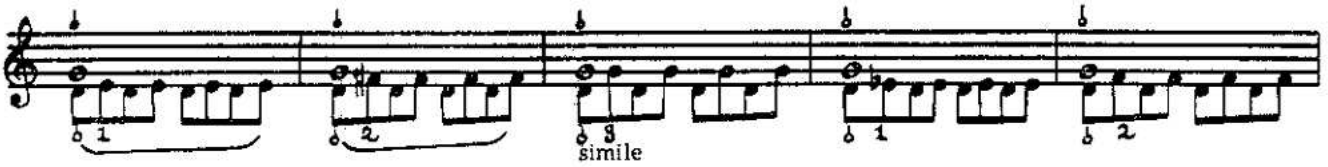
EXTREME EXTENSIONS A

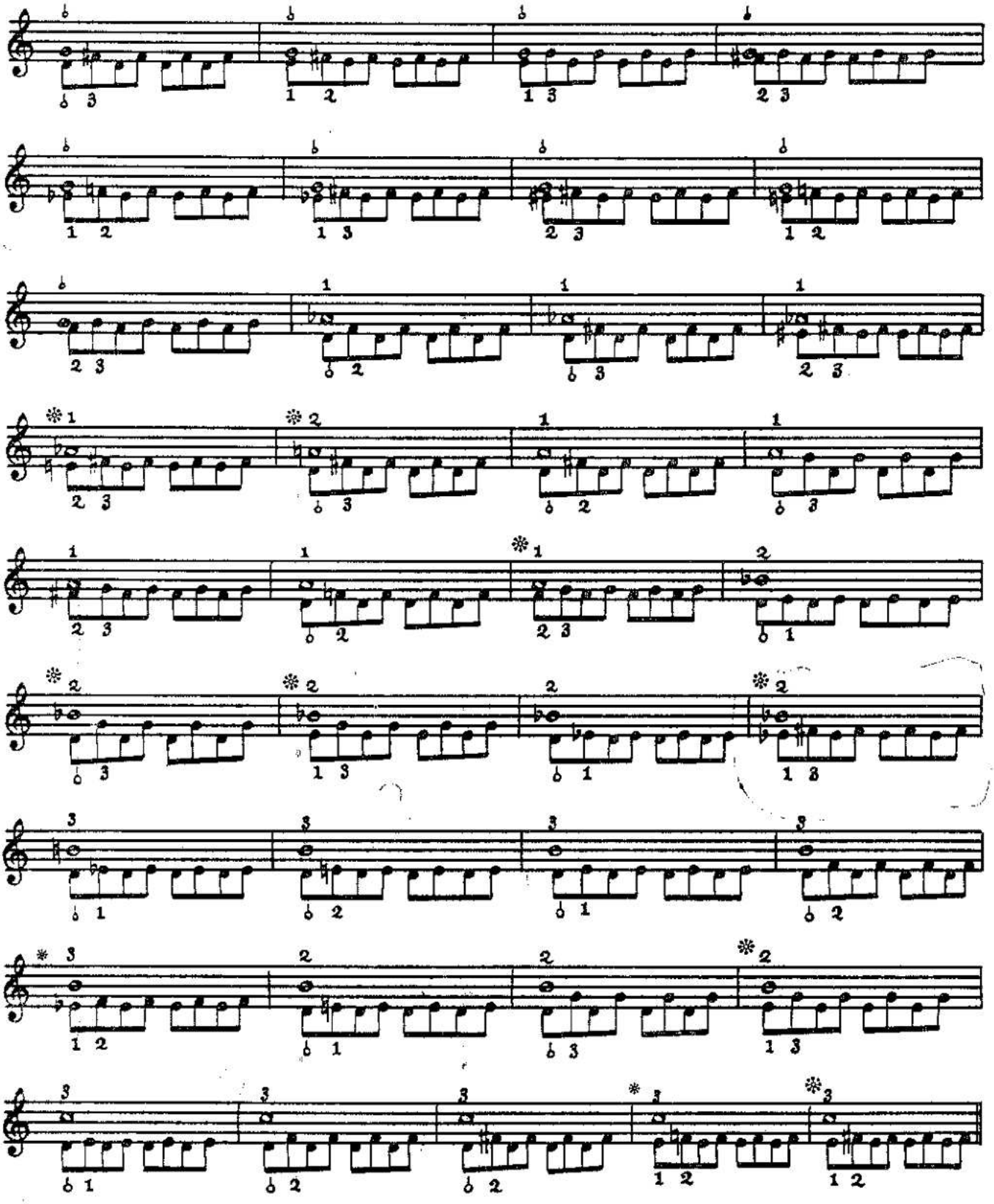
The following unusual extensions demand mild to extreme stretching of the left hand.



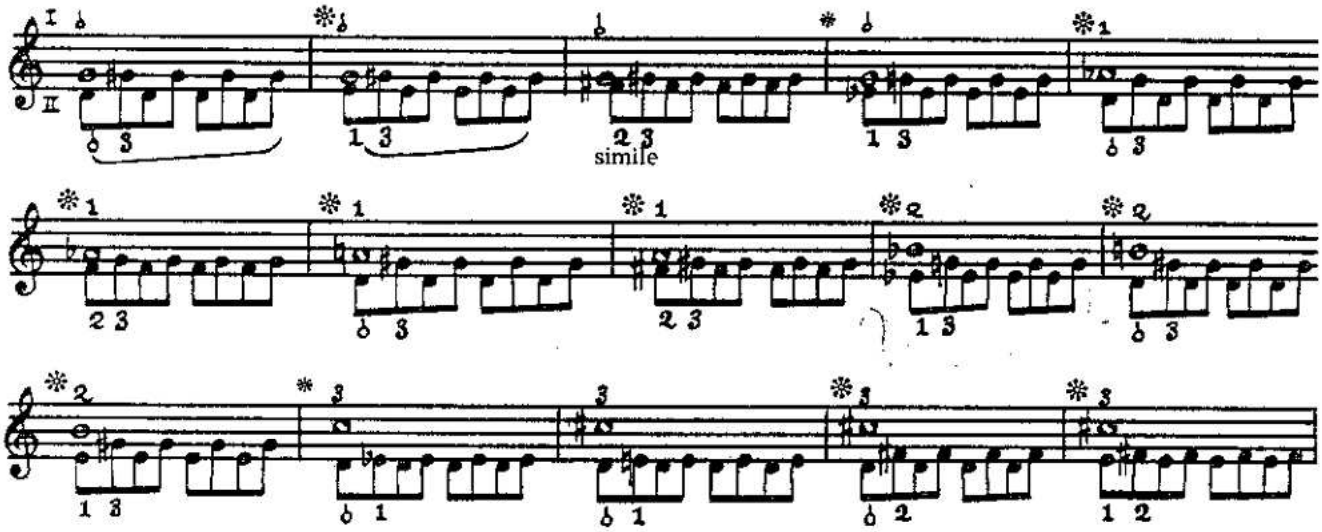
THUMB POSITION B

STANDARD POSITION

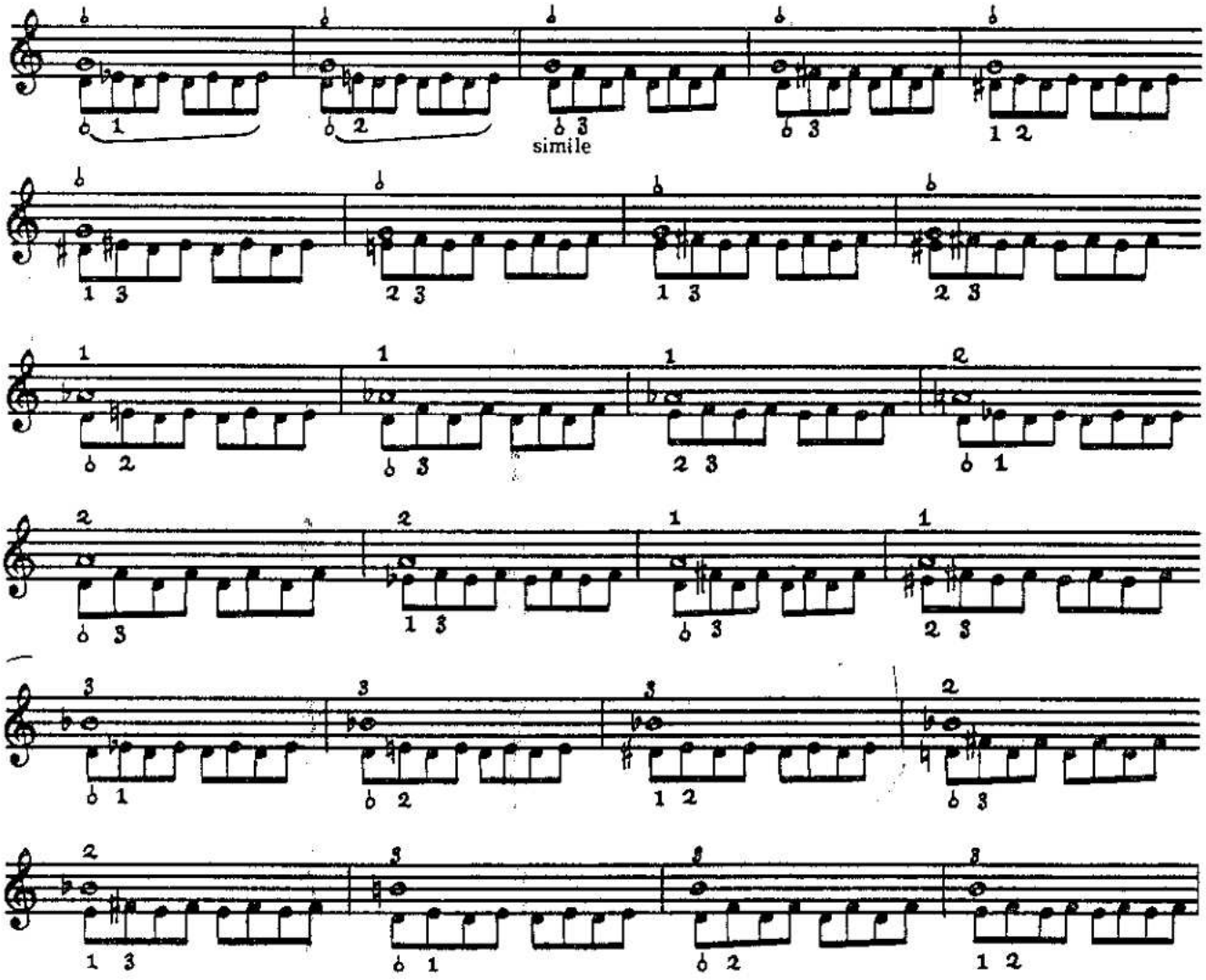




EXTENDED THUMB POSITION B

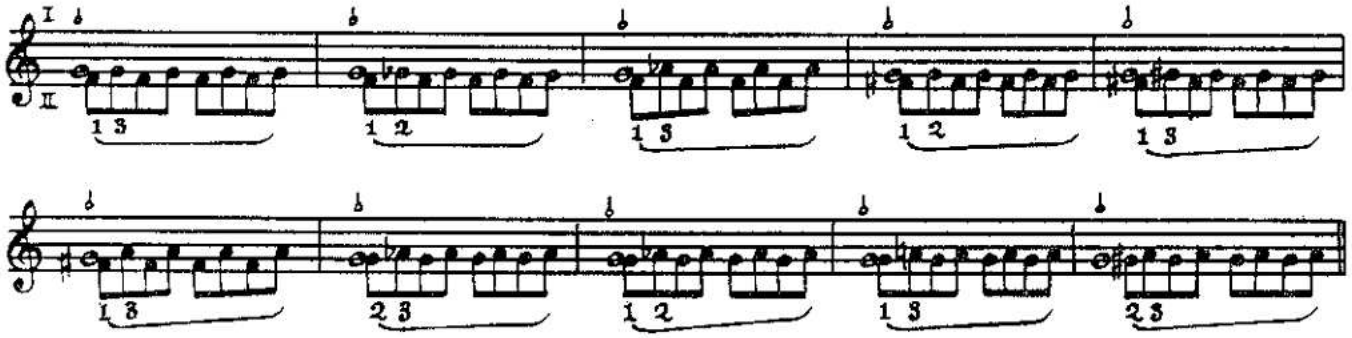


CONTRACTED THUMB POSITION B



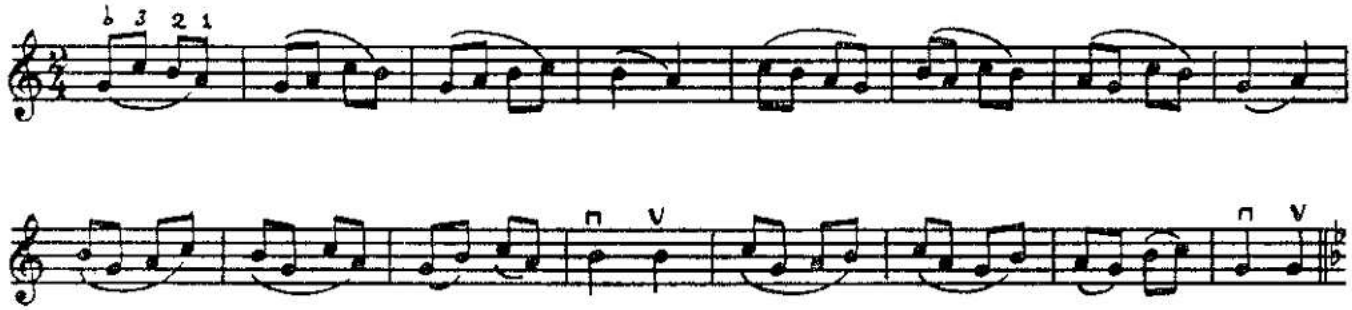
EXTREME EXTENSIONS B

The following extensions demand mild to extreme stretching of hand position.

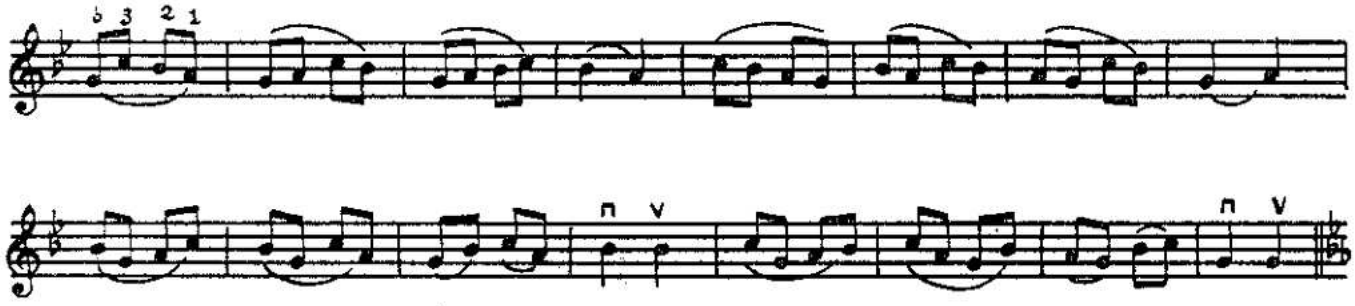


CONTROL EXERCISES

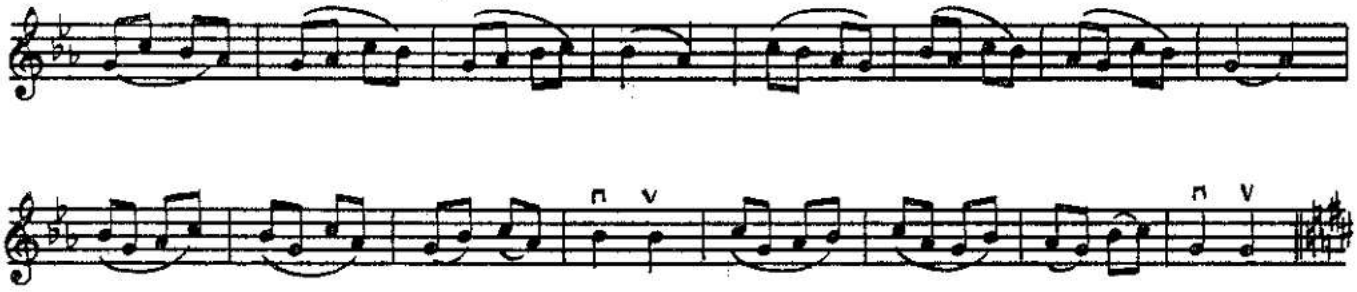
THUMB POSITION BASIC HAND PATTERN



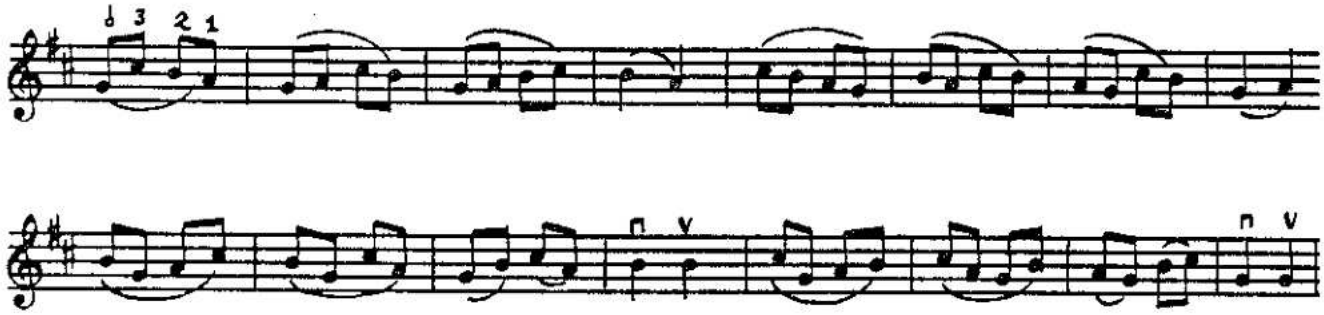
Var. I



Var. II (extended position)

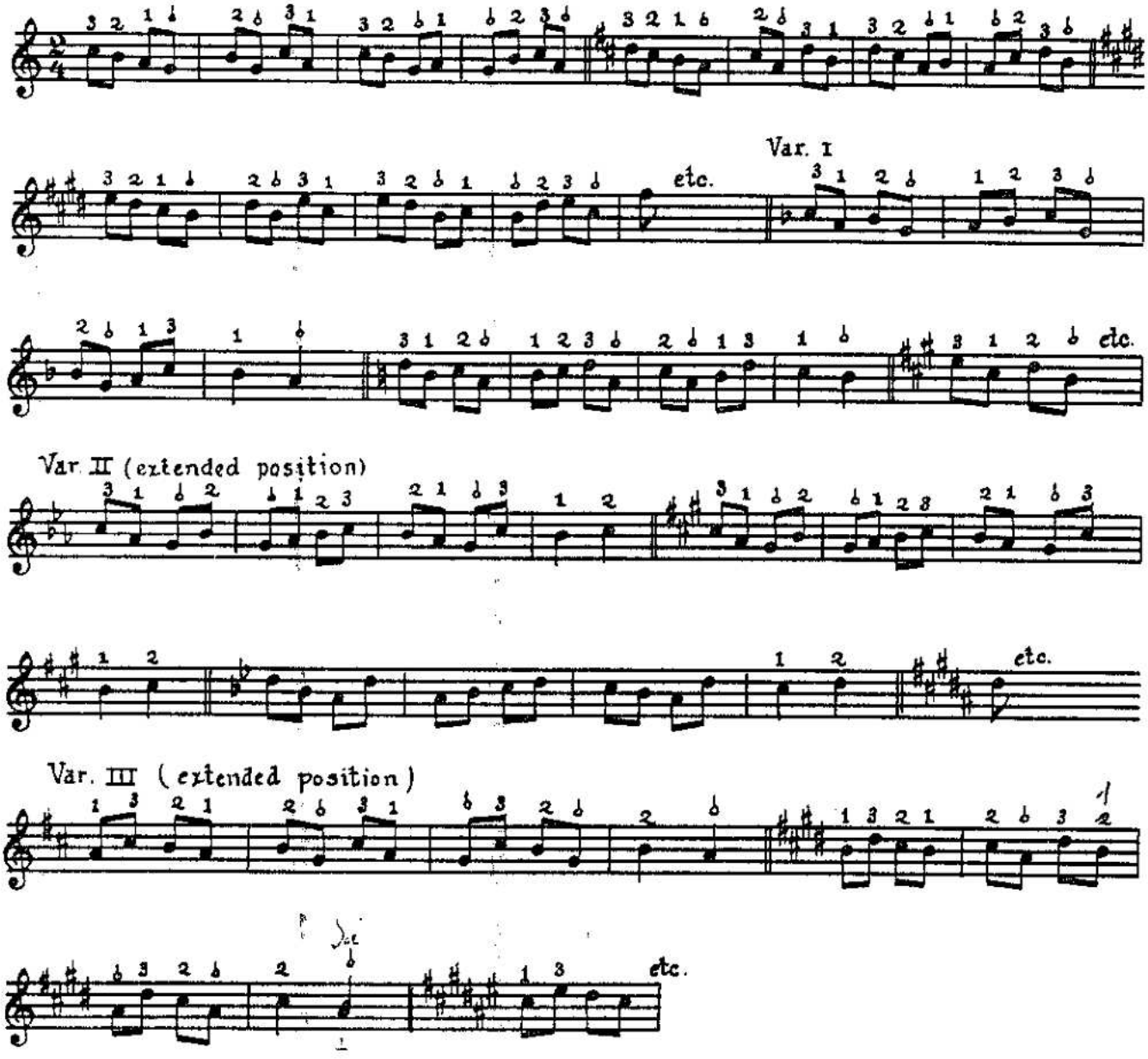


Var. III (extended position)



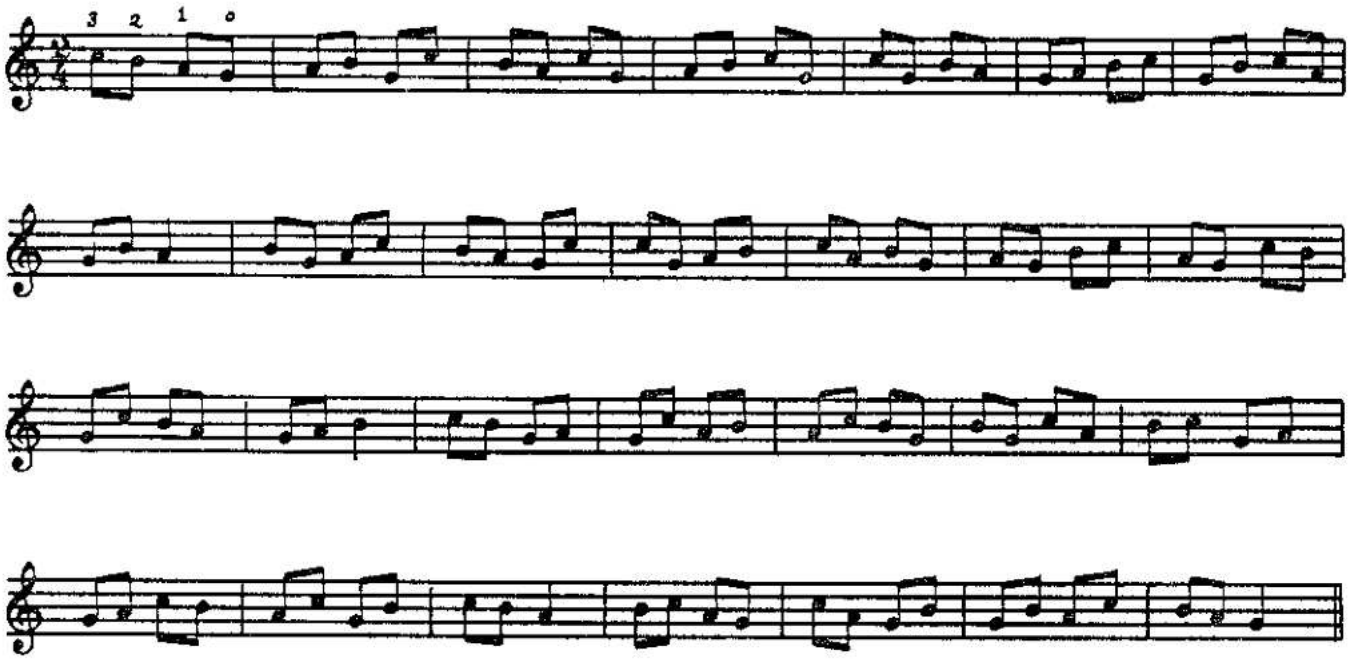
SERIAL CONTROL EXERCISES

THUMB POSITION



CONTROL EXERCISE

(Includes all possible single string finger combinations.)

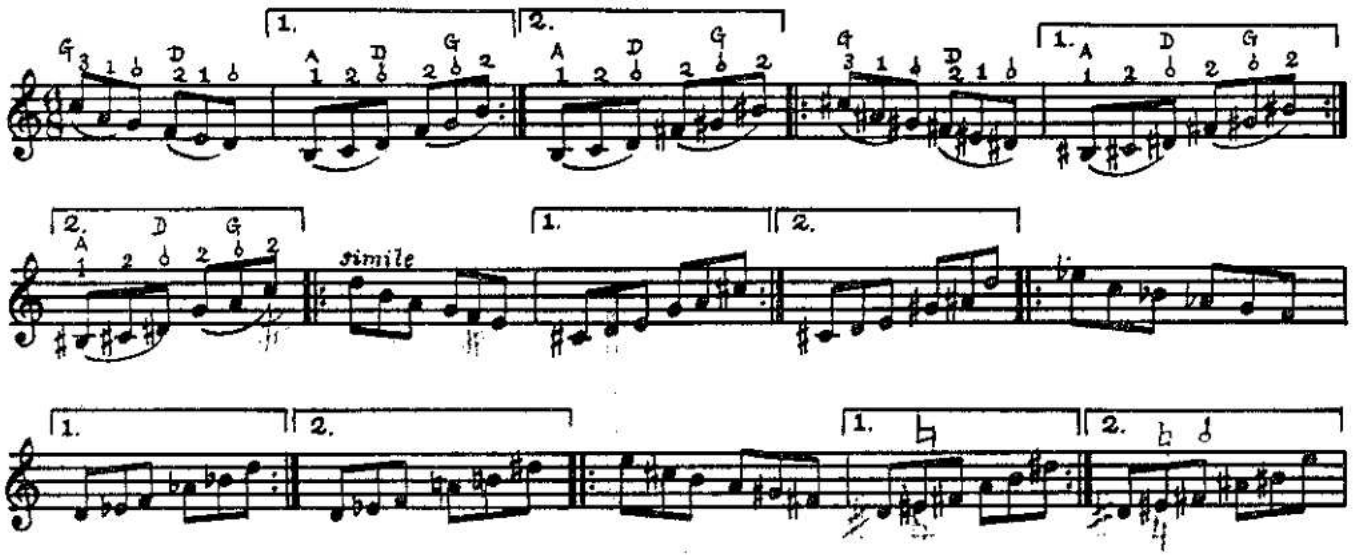


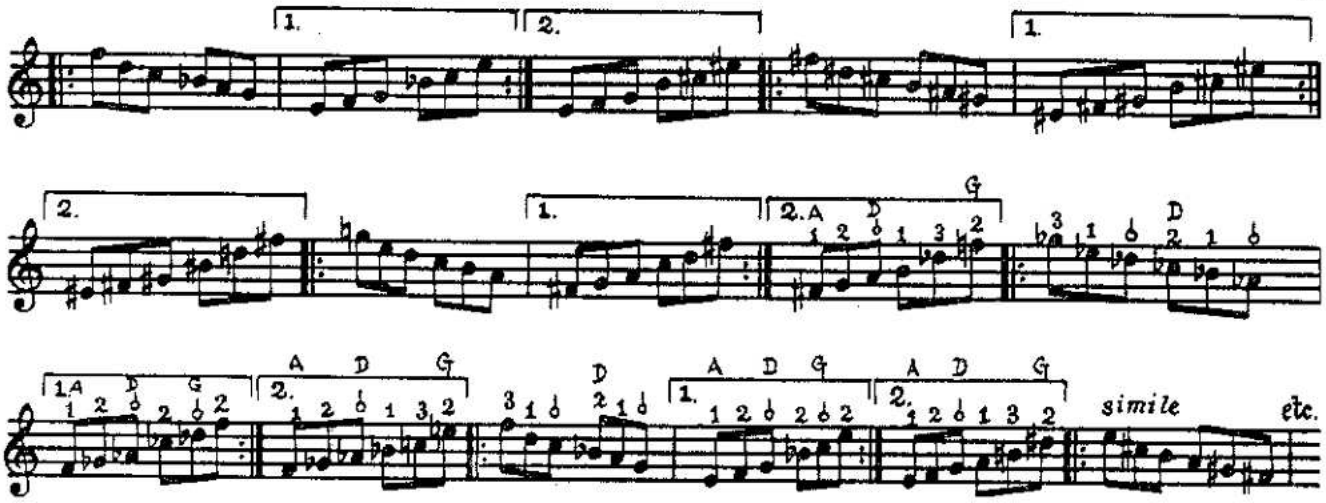
The above exercise can be transposed down a fourth and played on the D string. Similarly for A string.

SERIAL CONTROL

THUMB POSITION

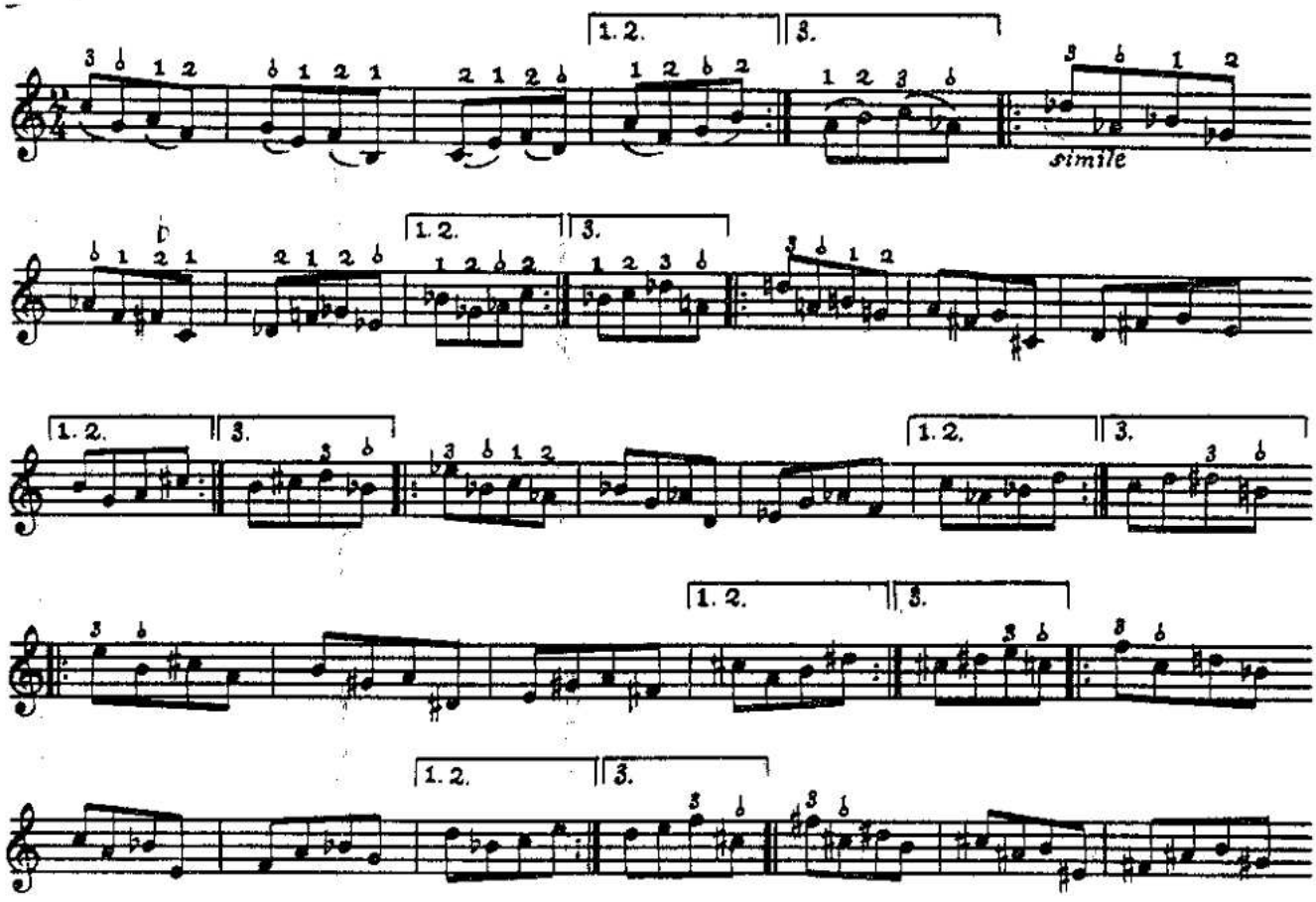
Example 1

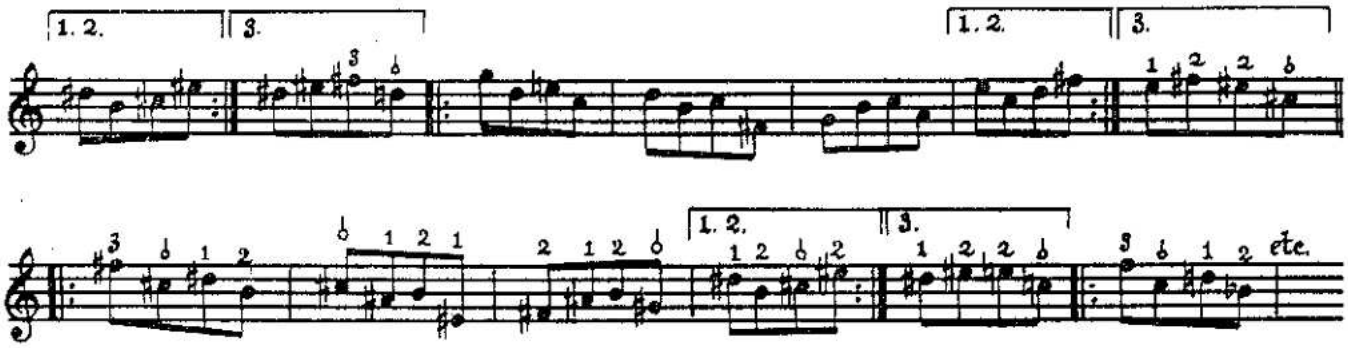




Continue practicing this two bar pattern progressing up by half steps every two bars, at least until first finger plays G and thumb is on Bb.

Example 2

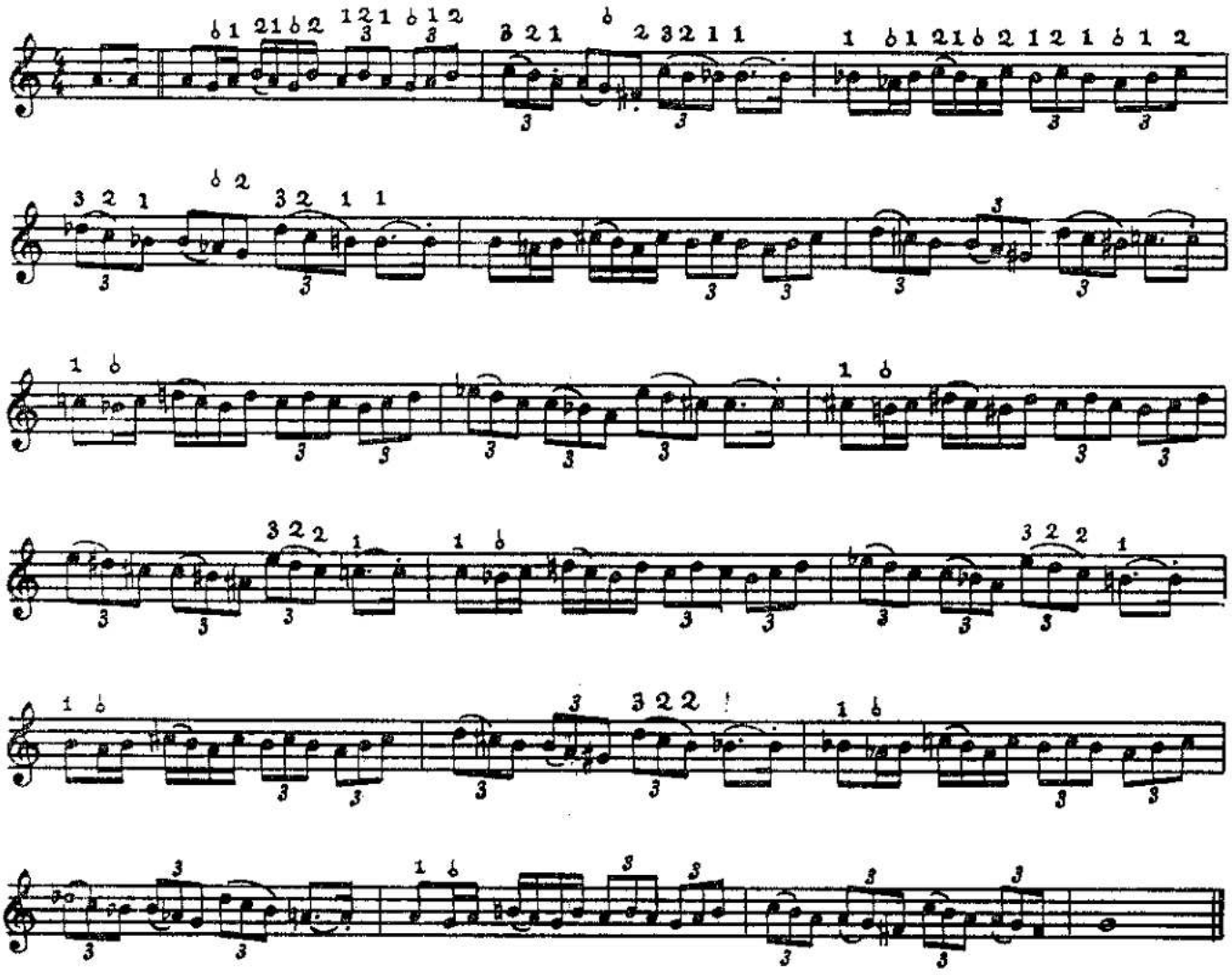




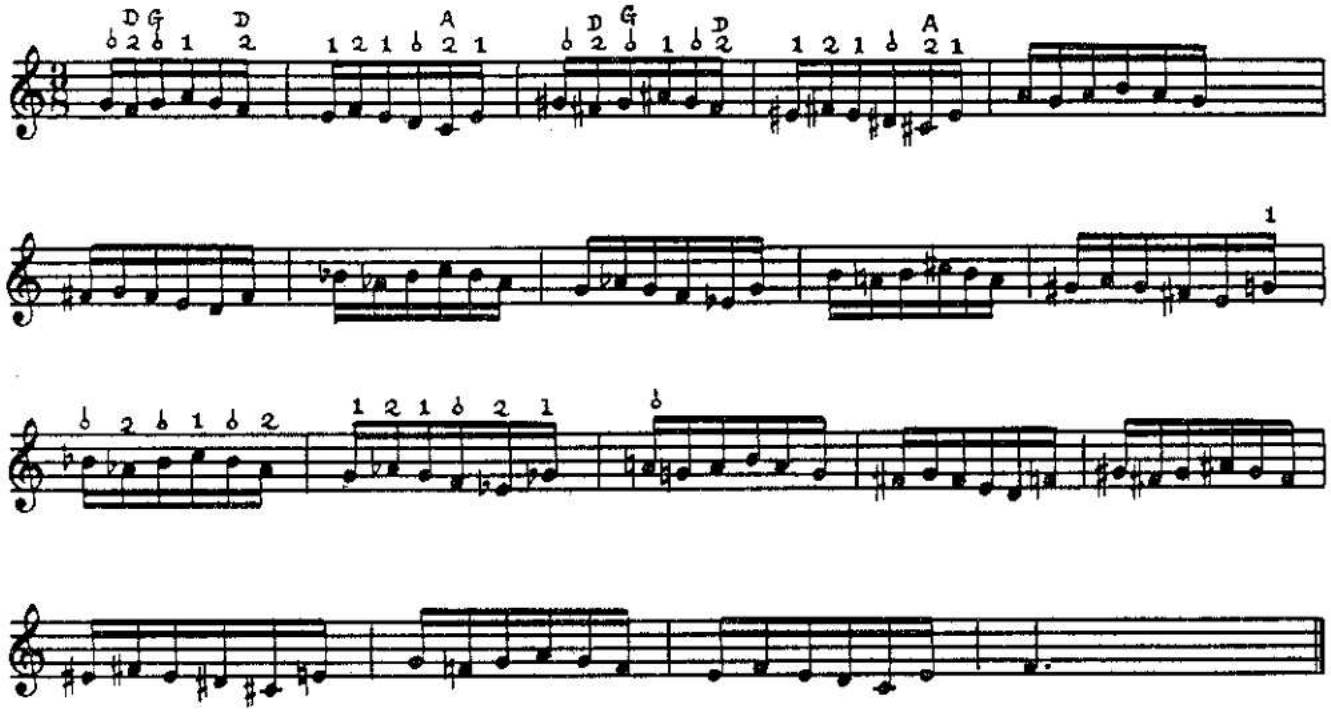
Continue descending sequence until you arrive at original sequence used in first two bars of above exercise.

SERIAL EXAMPLES FROM REPERTORY

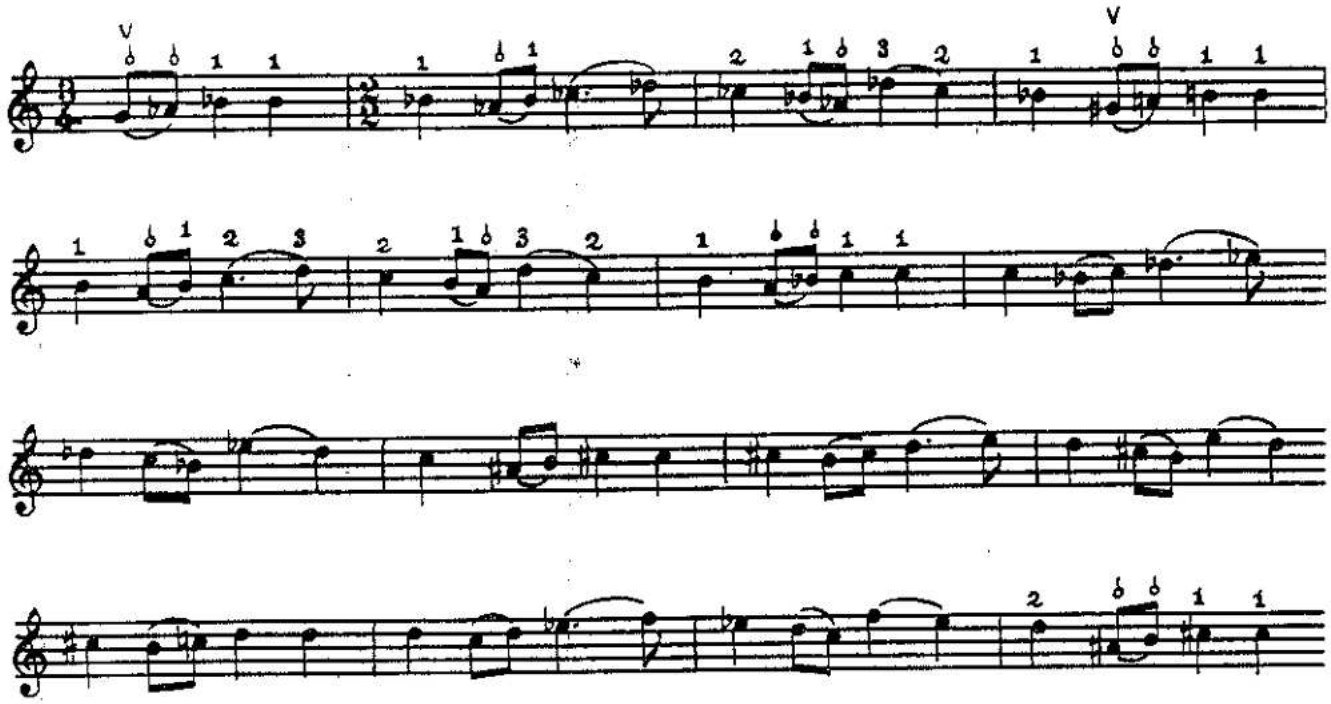
Dragonetti Concerto, 1st movement



Eccles Sonata in G minor, 4th movement



Hindemith Sonata, 1st movement



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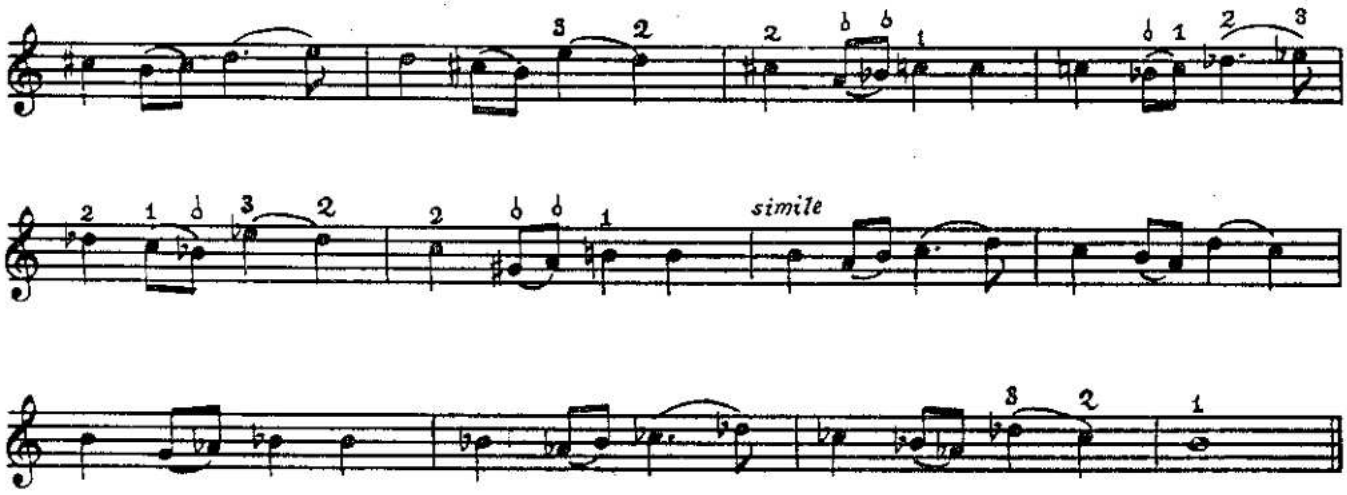
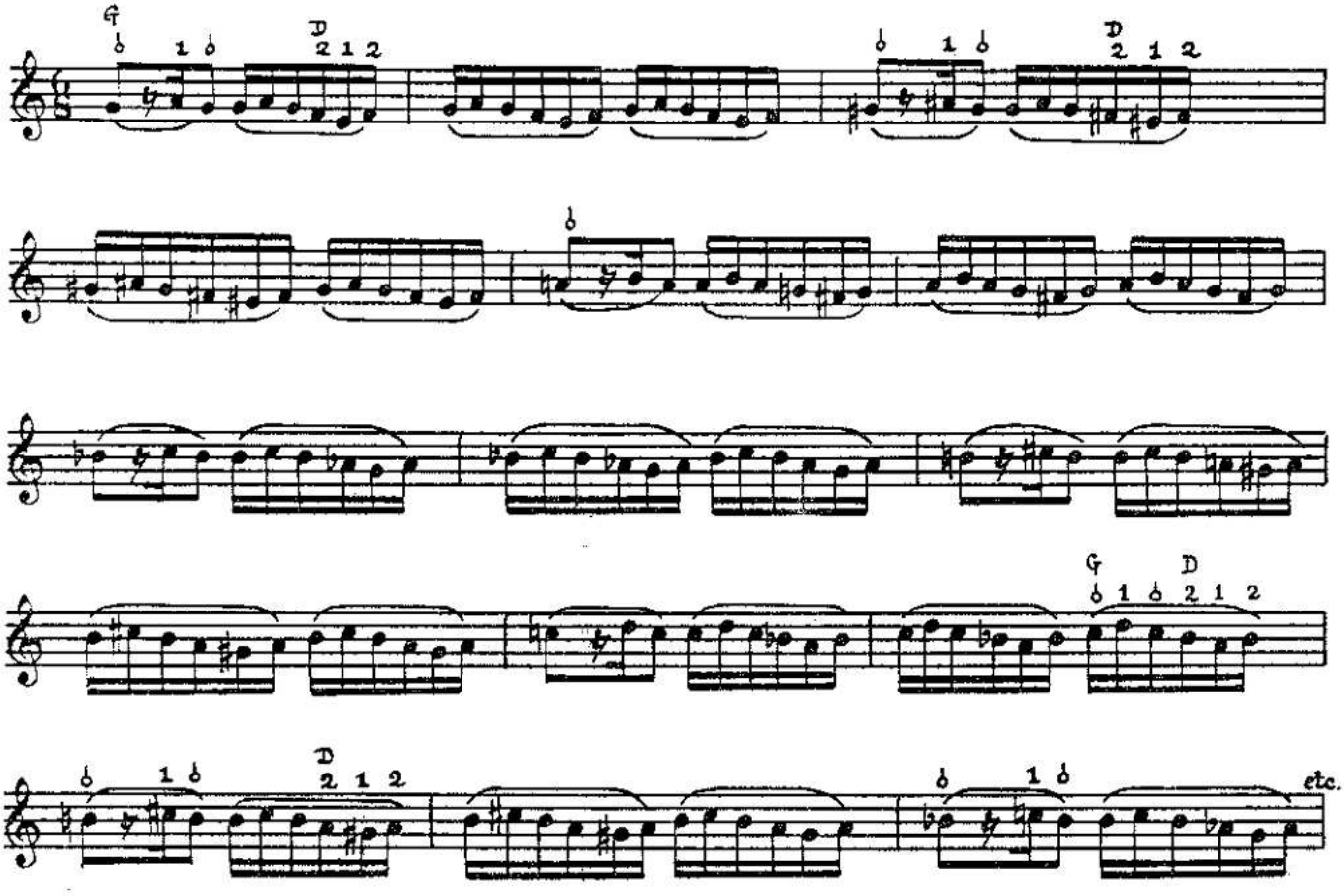


Larsson Concertino, 3rd movement



etc. until reaching original figure in first 2 measures.

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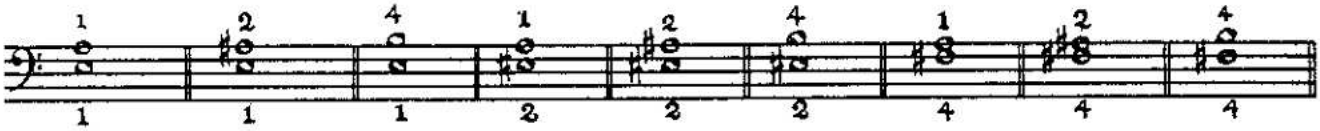
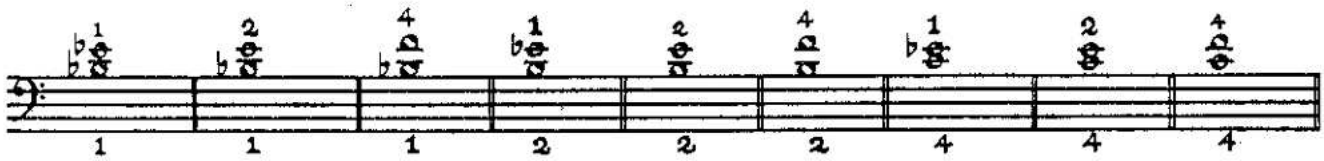
CONNECTION OF POSITIONS

Intervals in second position

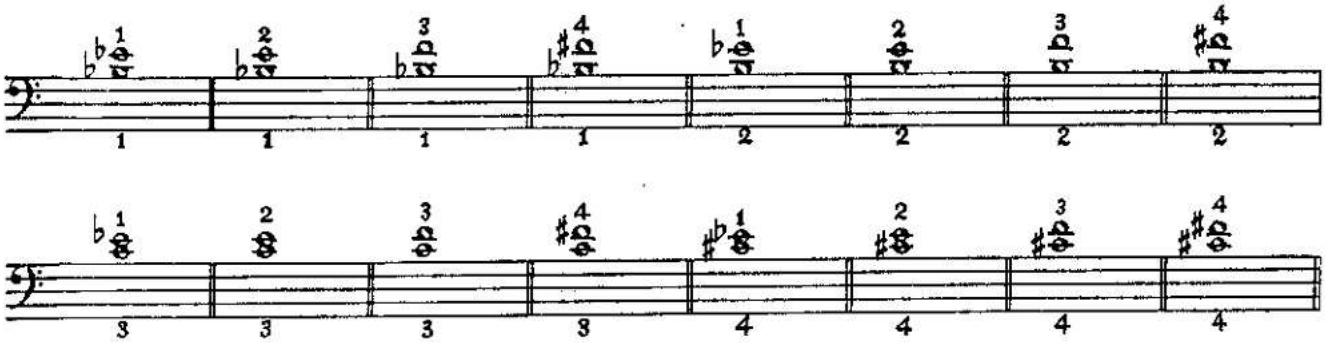


Intervals in eighth position



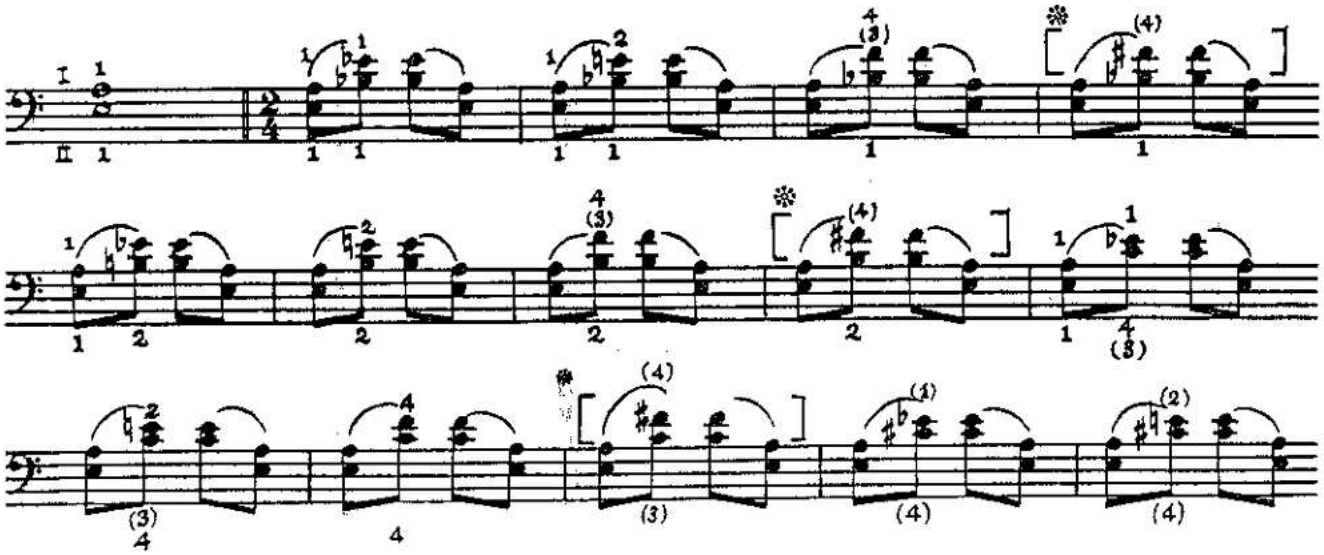
FOUR FINGER POSITION

Intervals in eighth position

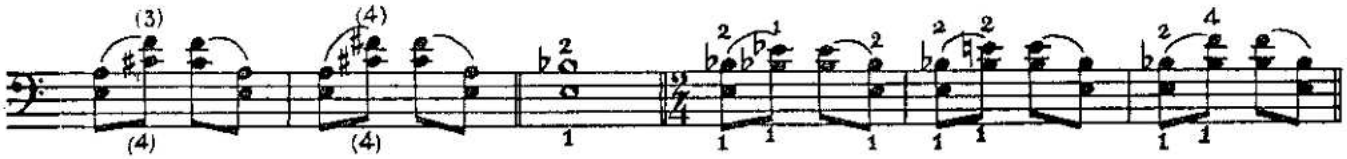


CONNECTIONS BETWEEN 2nd and 8th POSITIONS

(Fingerings for three and four fingered system included. Four finger system fingerings given in parenthesis.)

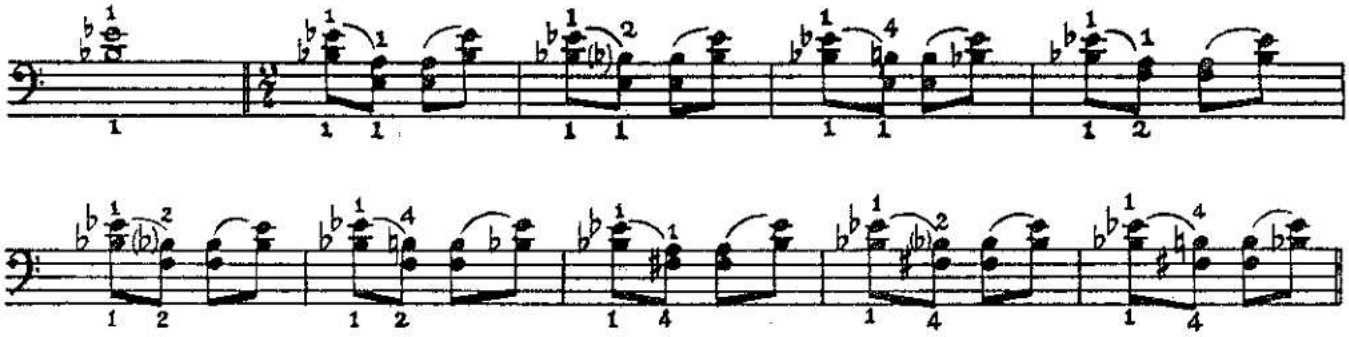


* For four finger position only.



Complete the above exercise by shifting to all of the possible 8th position double stops from all of the possible second position double stops illustrated below.

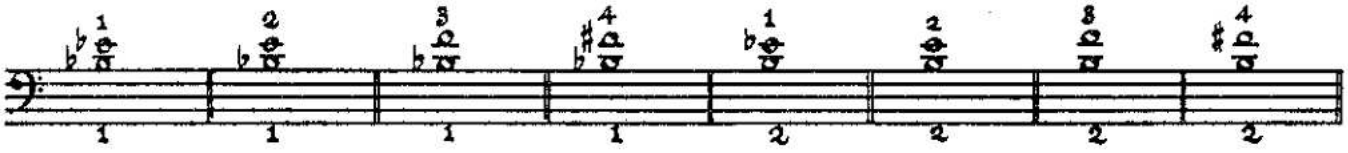
The following examples show the reversed version of the above position connections.



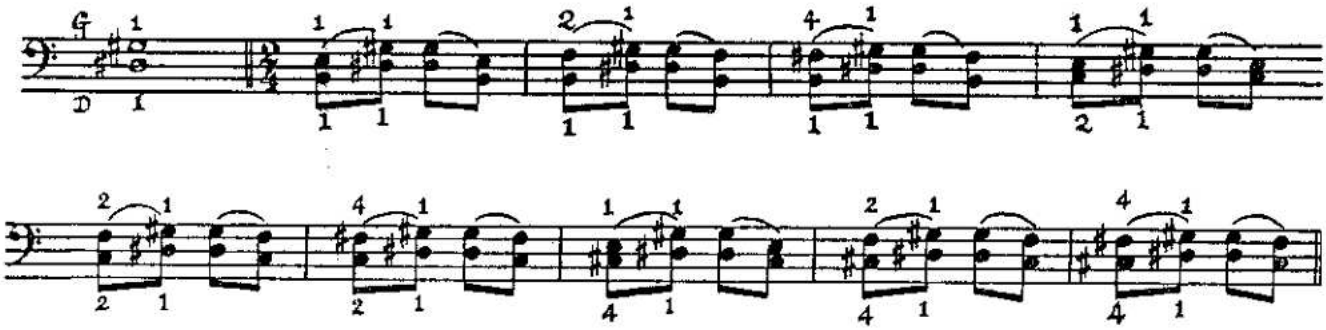
Using the 8th position double stops below, practice shifting to all the double stops in 2nd position as illustrated in preceding exercise.

FOUR FINGER POSITION

Intervals in eighth position

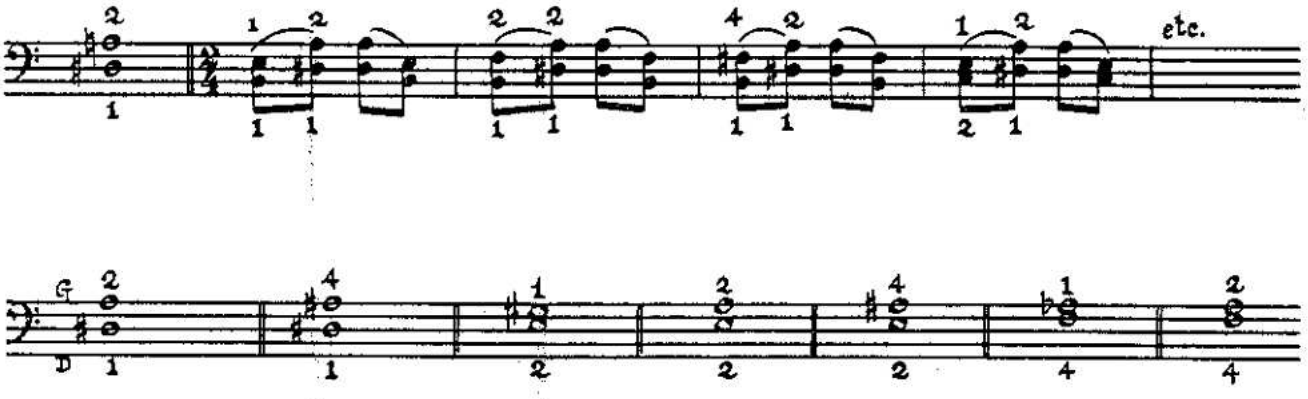


CONNECTIONS OF POSITIONS ACROSS STRINGS



Shift to the following intervals on the G and D strings, from the various intervals on the D and A strings illu trated in the preceding exercise for connecting positions across strings.

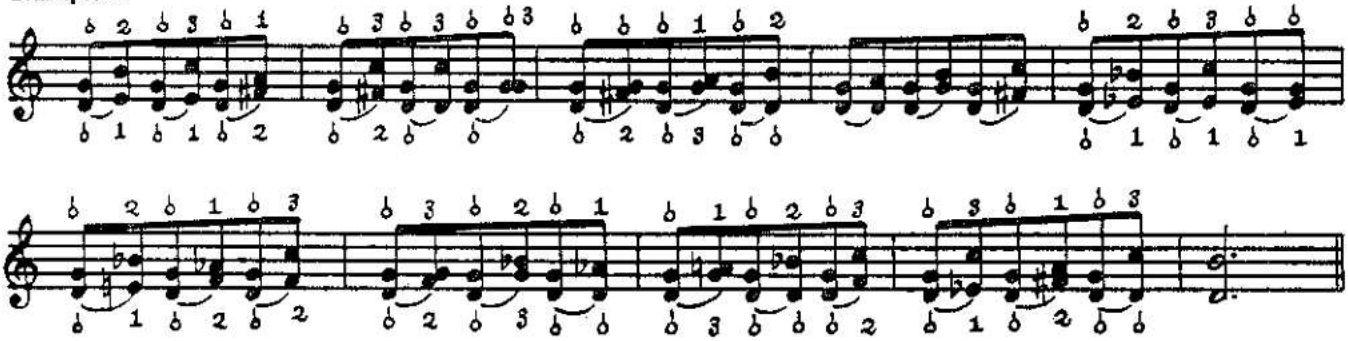
For example:



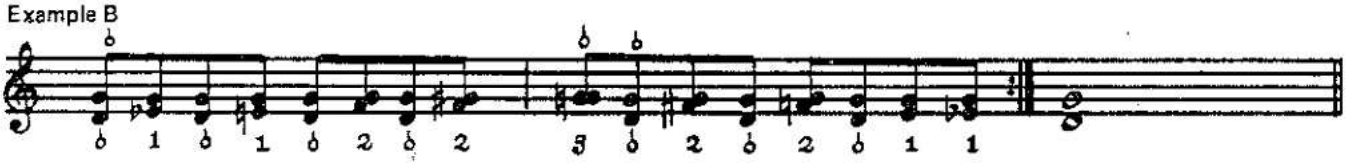
All variations of connecting strings and positions through shifting using either double stops or single notes, shoul be explored.

CONTROL EXERCISES WITH DOUBLE STOPS IN THUMB POSITION

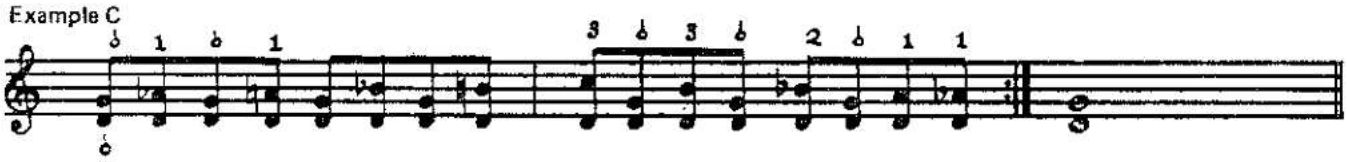
Example A



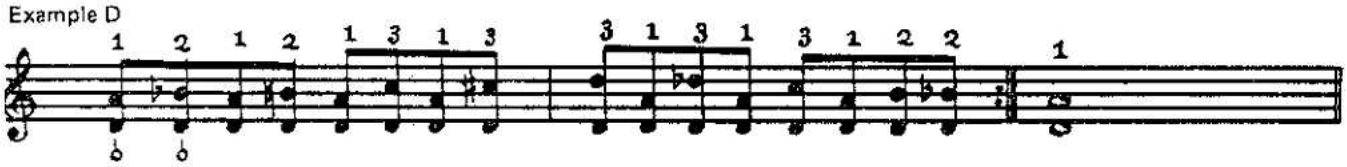
Example B



Example C

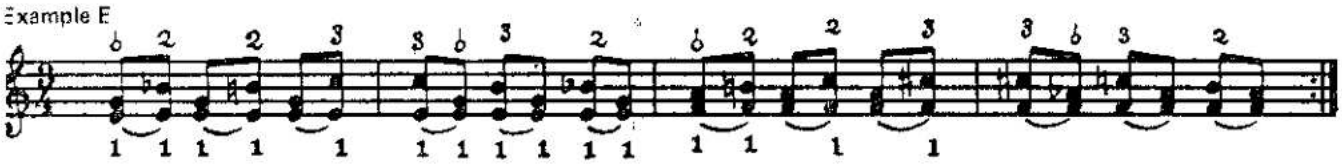


Example D



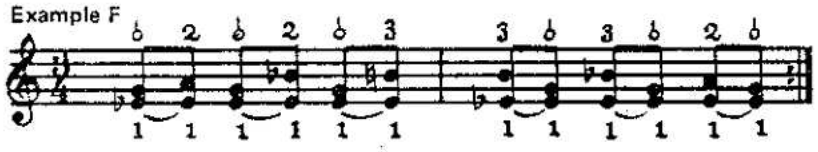
Repeat exercise D transposing it a half-tone higher each time,until thumb is used as a base on F-natural.

Example E



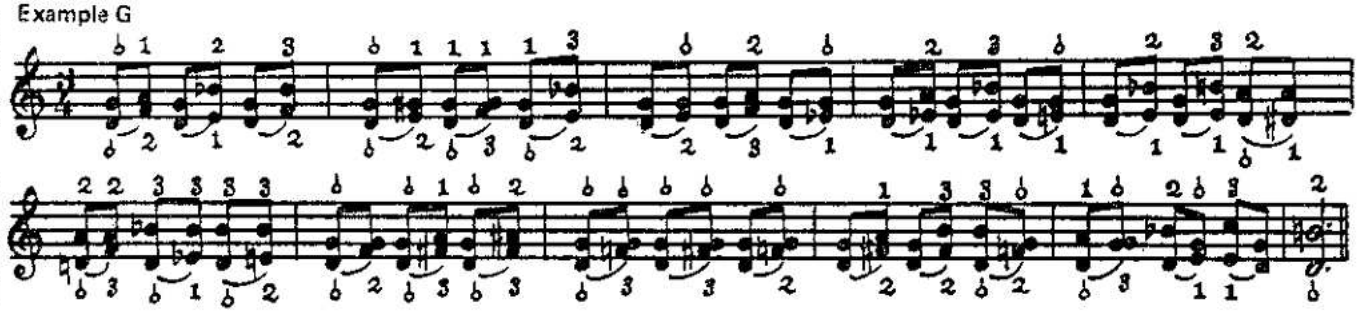
Continue practicing this two bar pattern progressing up by half steps every two bars, at least until first finger plays G and thumb is on B

Example F

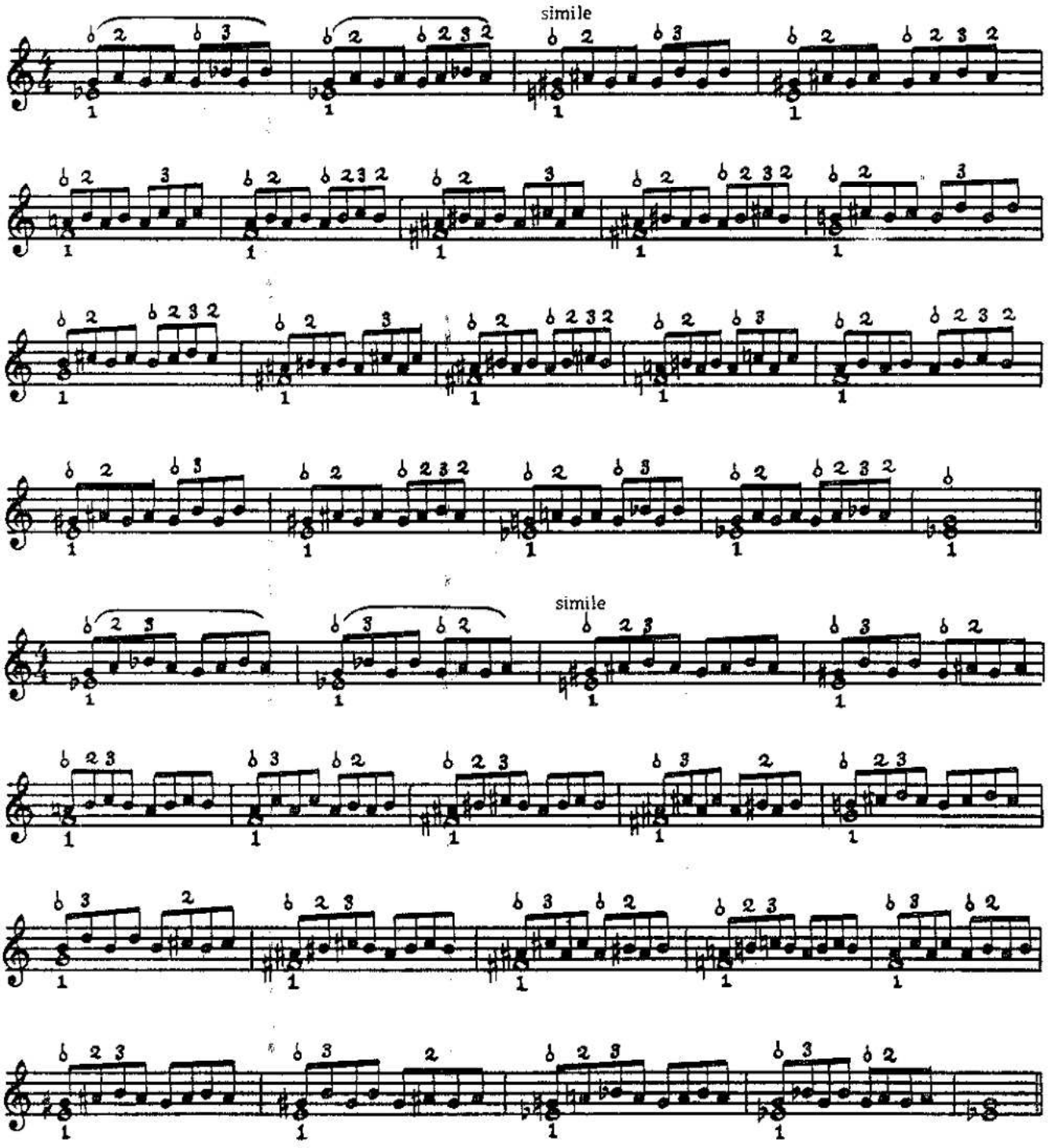


Practice Exercise F as a progressive exercise at least until the first finger plays G and the thumb is on B-natural.

Example G

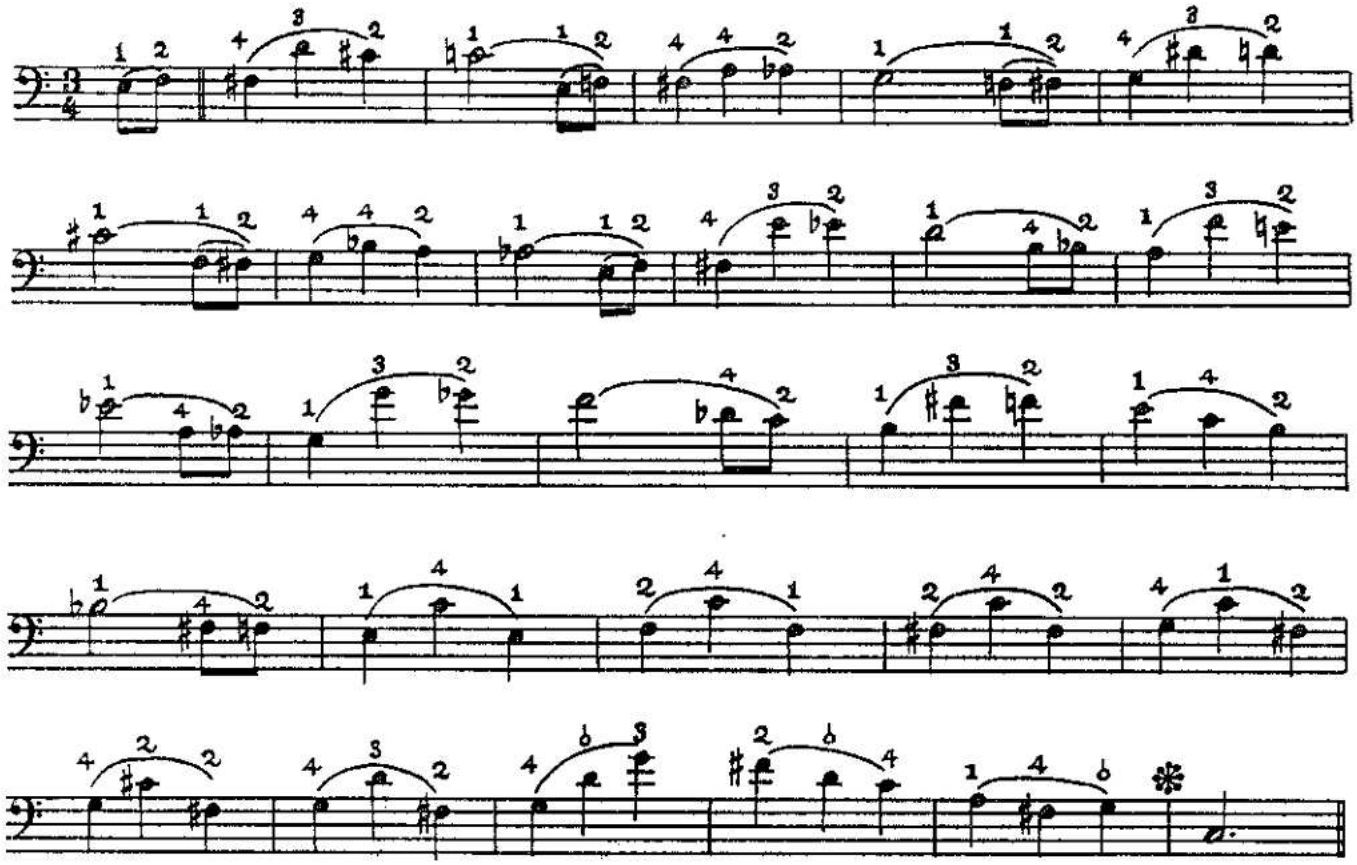


SERIAL CONTROL EXERCISES WITH DOUBLE STOPS IN THUMB POSITION



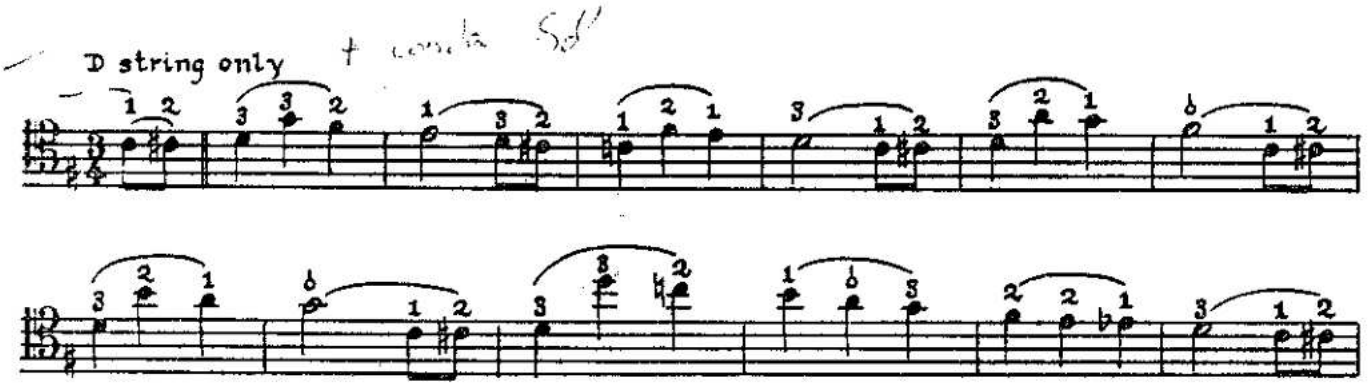
CONTROL EXERCISE

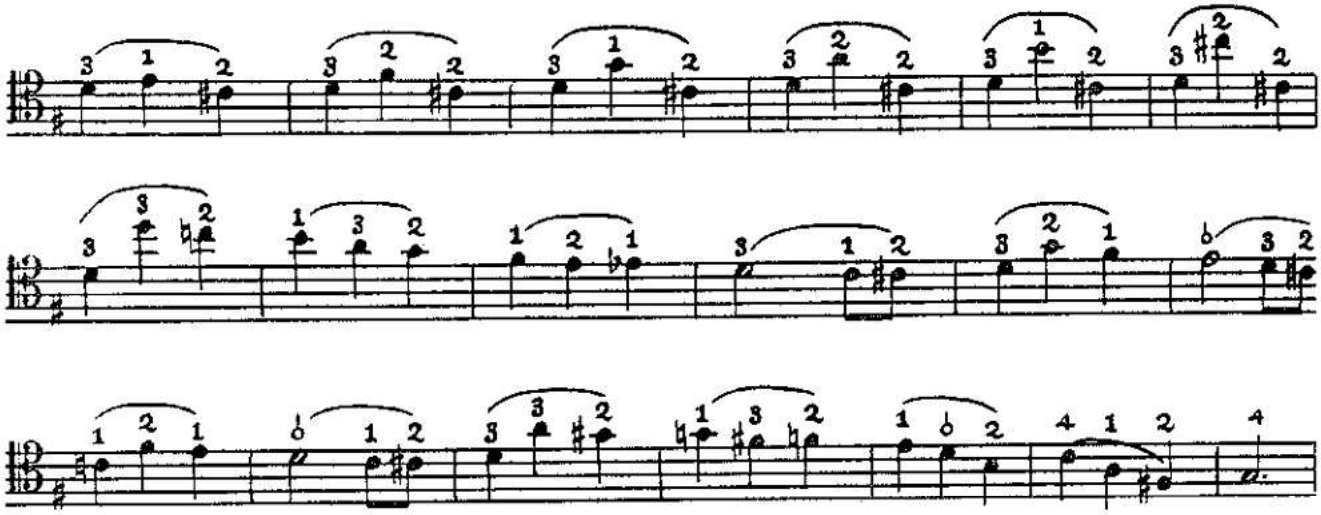
Connecting positions from Second Position



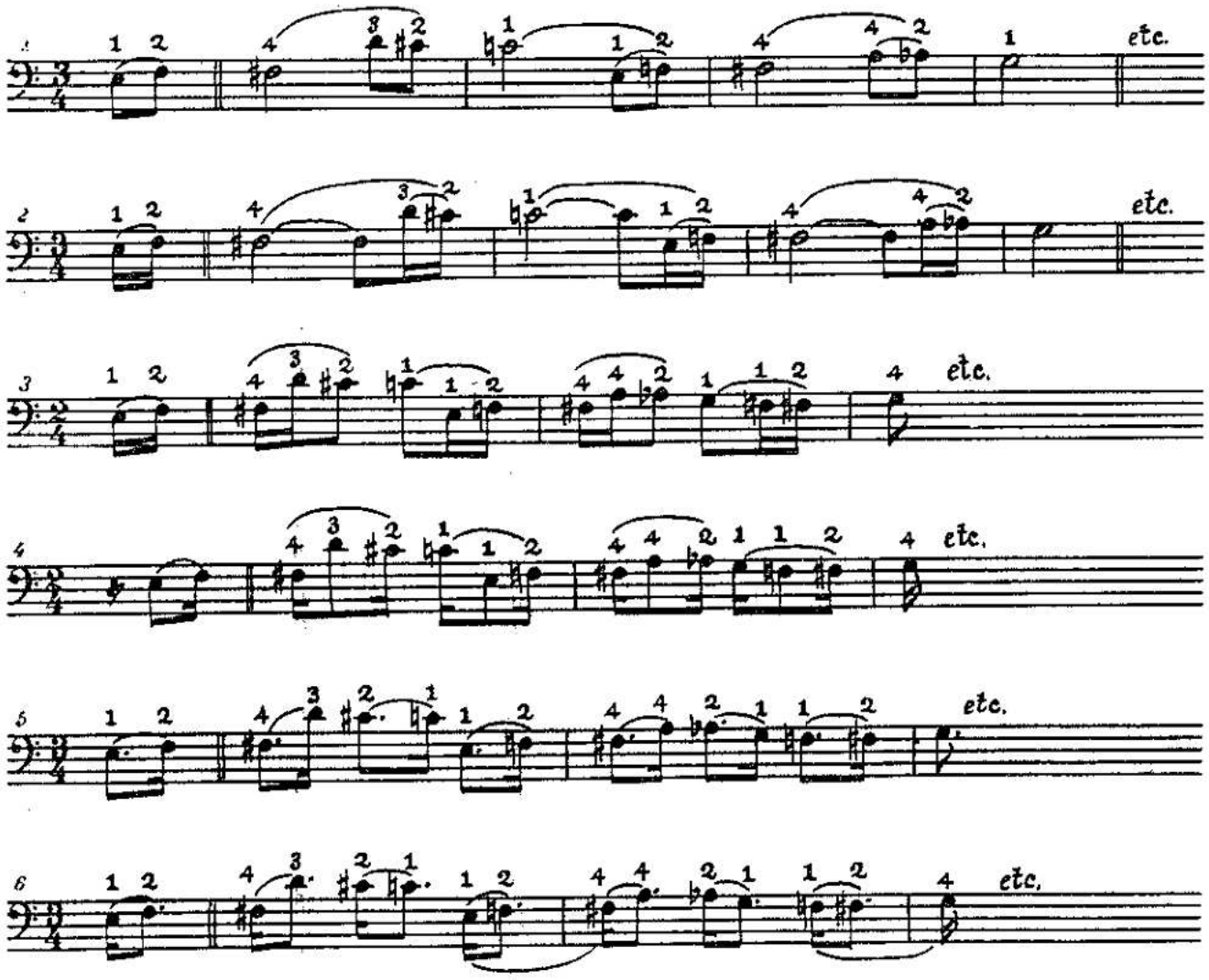
The above exercise should be played on the D string only, up to the sign ✻ . The same exercise should be transposed to different positions and to other strings.

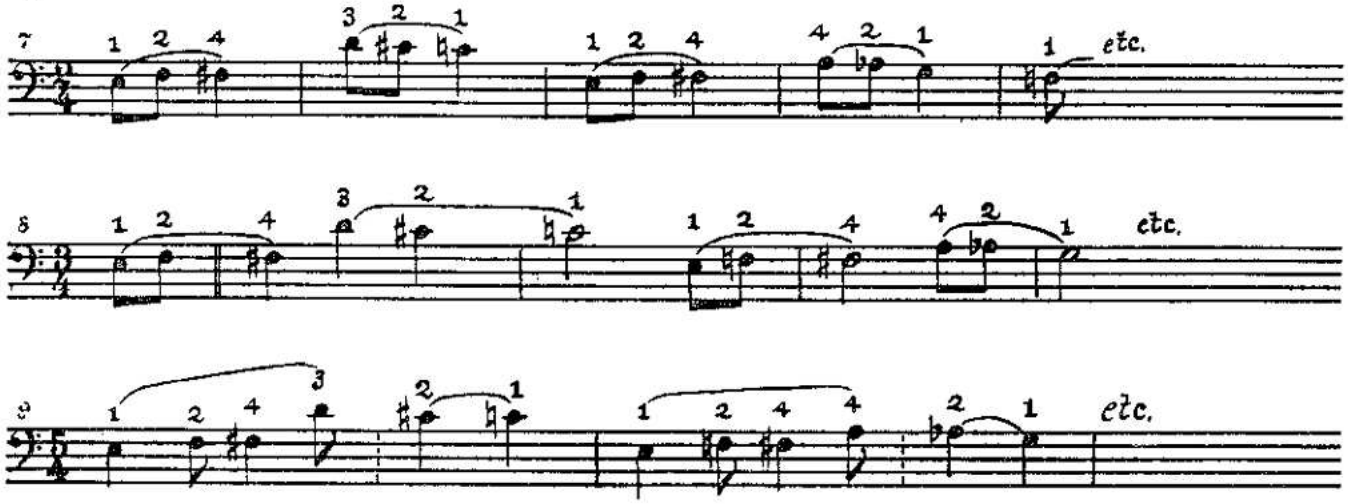
FROM TENTH POSITION





RHYTHM AND BOWING SAMPLES FOR PRACTICING
THE PRECEDING CONTROL EXERCISES FOR CONNECTING POSITIONS



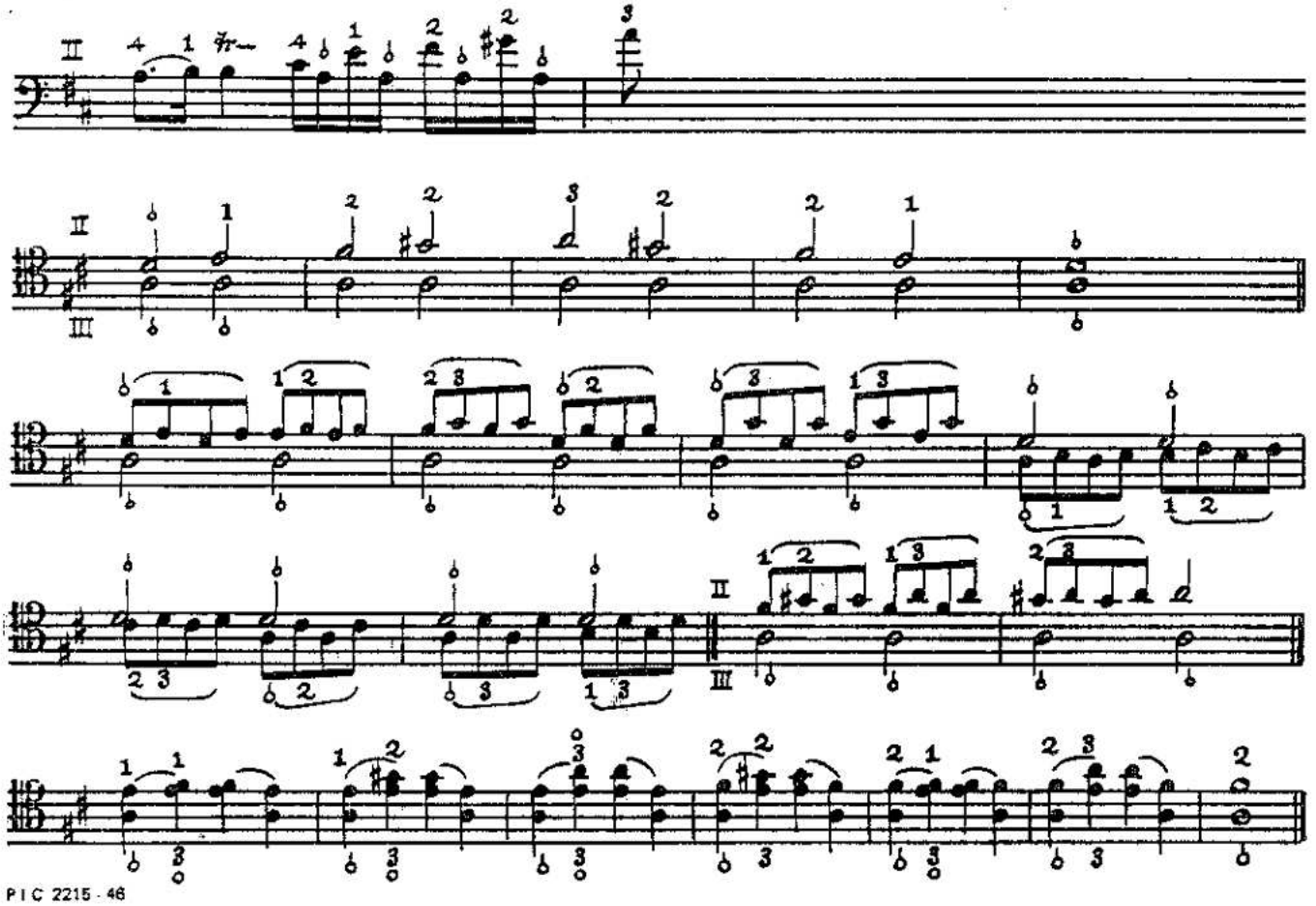


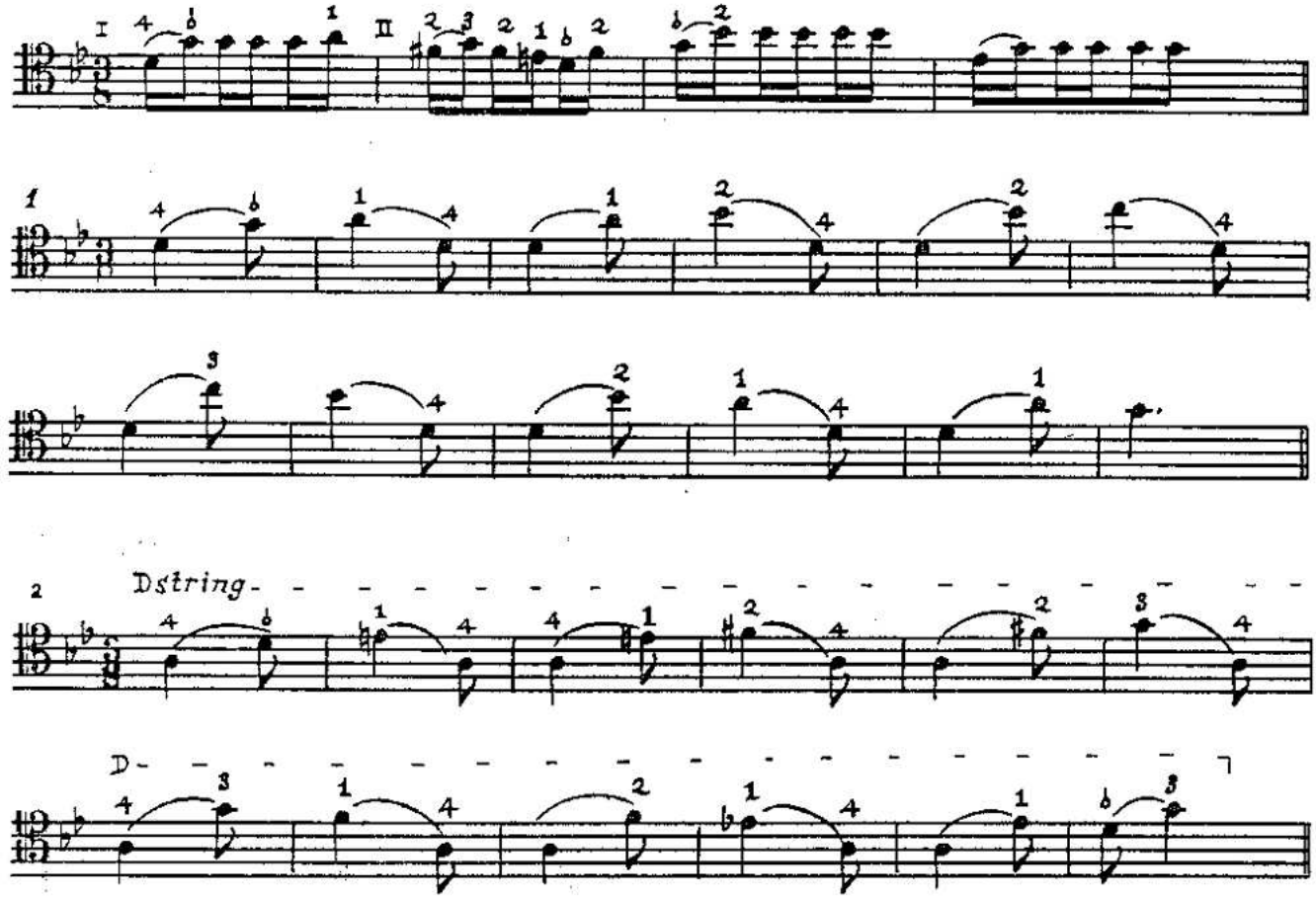
In the control exercises on the previous page, the indicated fingerings and bowings intend to develop the so called "anticipated" connections (shifts). The time for the shift is taken from the beat preceding the shift.

Examples 7-8-9, because of their bowing patterns, require the use of the "delayed" shift. Here the finger playing the note to follow, leads the shift. The action itself is faster and starts on the next beat and on the next bow. Combinations of timing should be experimented with individually.

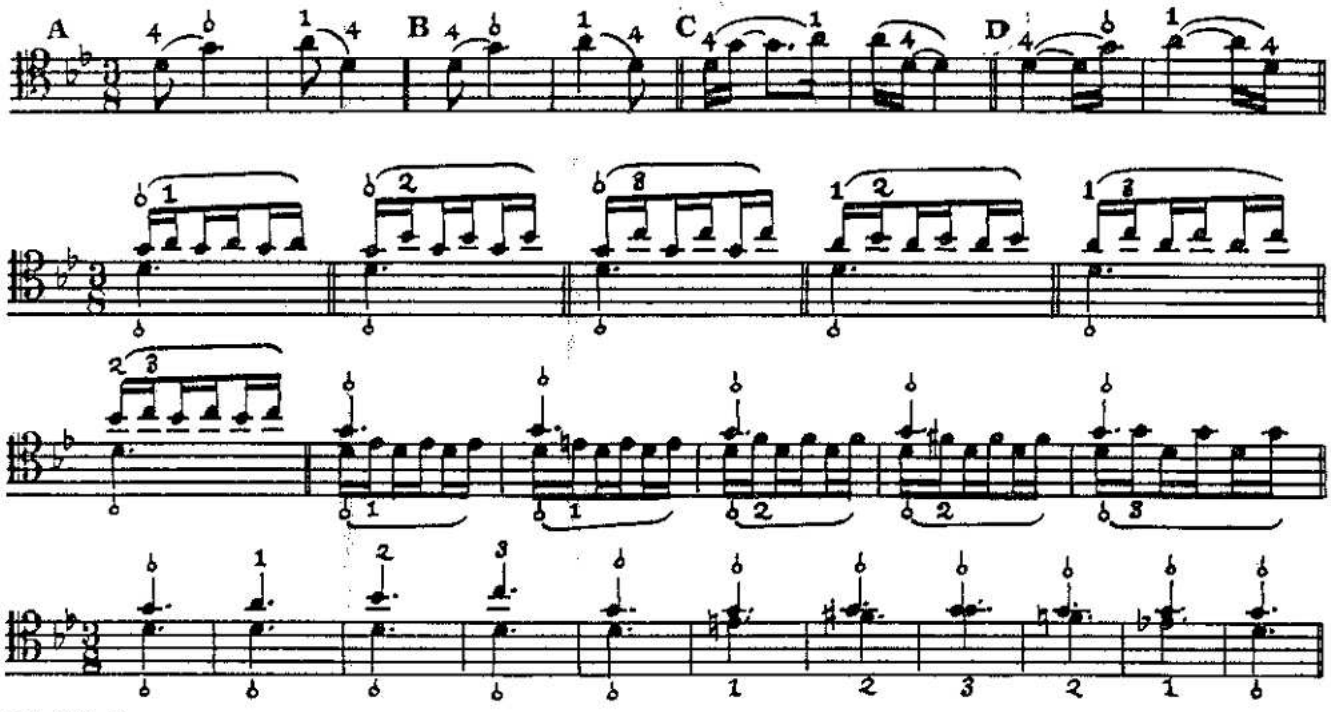
USE OF METHOD FOR PRACTICING THE LITERATURE

Dittersdorf: Concerto in E Major, 1st movement

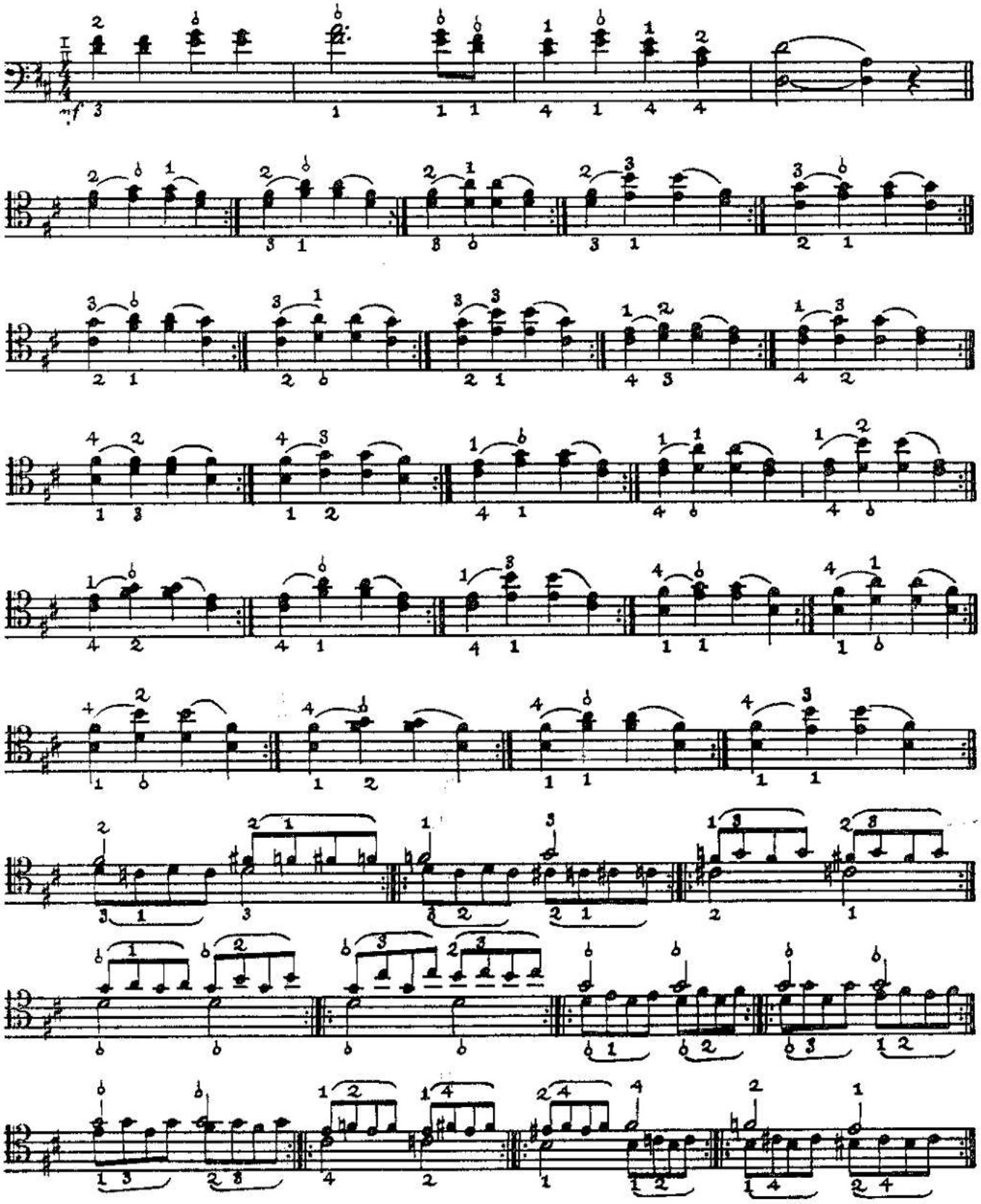




Rhythmic variations for exercises 1 and 2



Dragonetti Concerto, 2nd movement



GUIDE FOR POSITION EXERCISES

This guide is intended to help in the actual application and development of all available positions and the combinations thereof. We note 9 positions in which fingerings 1-2-4 or 1-3-4 are employed with a spacing of half-steps between adjoining fingers used. There are three positions employing 1-2-3 in the same manner. There are five positions using extensions with the fingering 1-2-4, the whole step occuring between 2 and 4. There are the same five positions in which the hand may extend using 1-2-3-4, with a spacing of half-steps between adjoining fingers.

In the main, thumb position covers an octave on each string. Thumb position exploration must be uninhibited, incorporating use of the thumb not only in the formal thumb position octave, but extending similar fingerings to the positions preceding thumb position. One should find his own limitations in the use of the thumb position practices. The exercises in the book are also meant to provide seeds for further thought and exploration.

The following is a suggested approach for utilizing the position guide:

Step 1. Select a position. Take two double stops within the position and repeat one after the other as shown on pages 1 through 5.

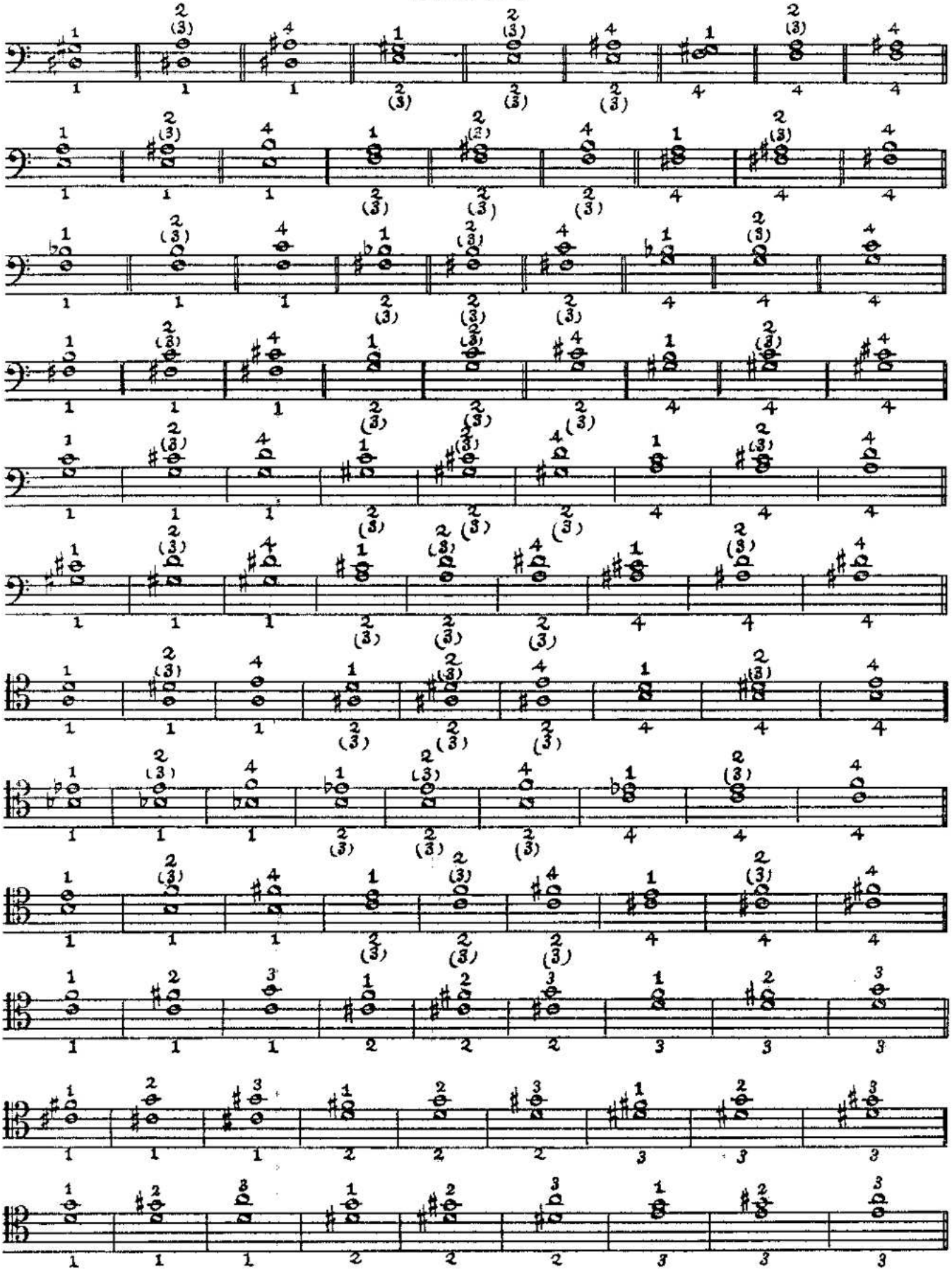
Step 2. Select any other position, preferably a distant one at the beginning, and proceed in the same way.

Step 3. Take a double stop from step 1. and connect to all double stops in Step 2 as seen in the connection of position exercises on pages 19 through 21.

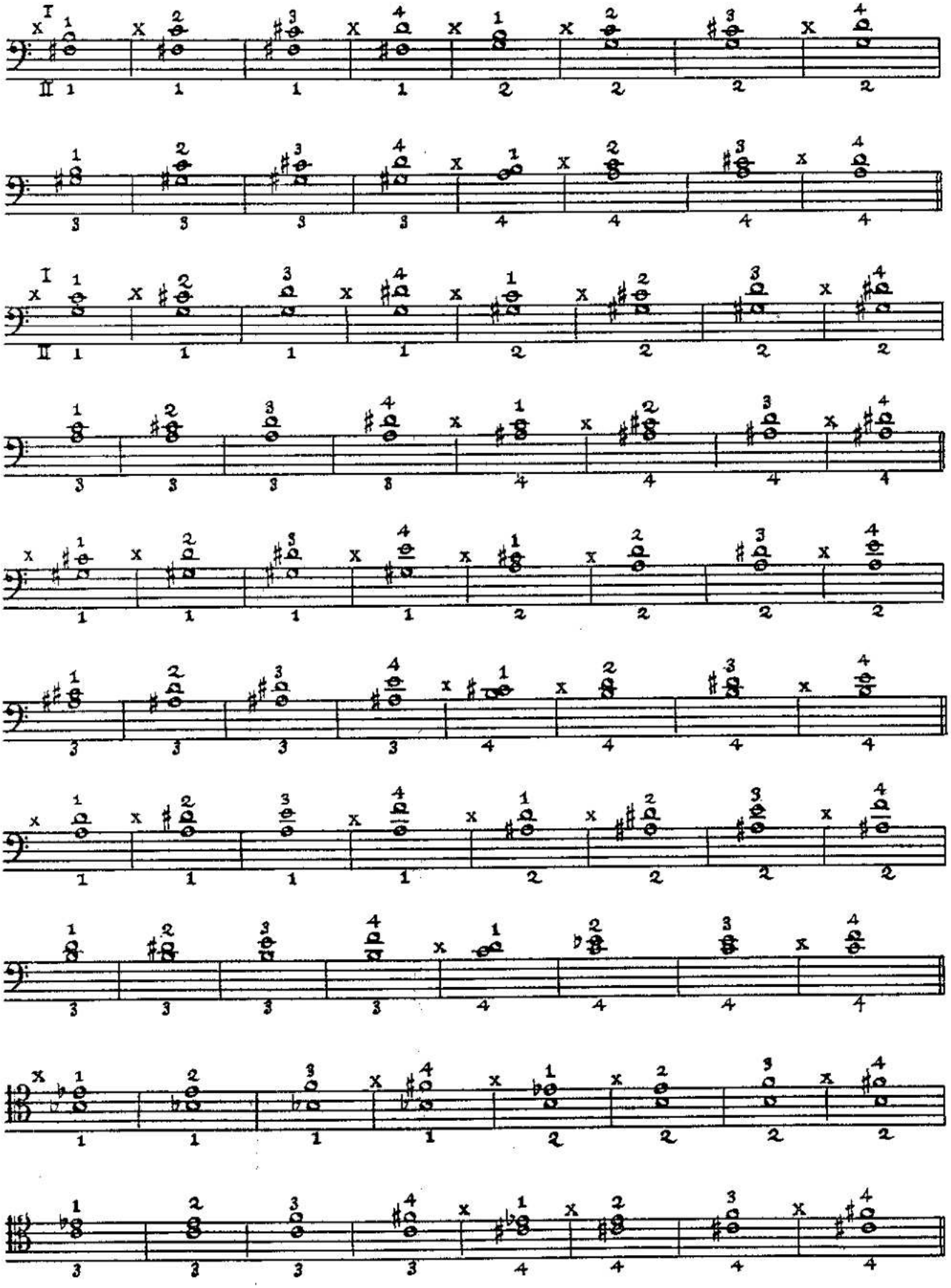
Step 4. Use the control exercises in both positions (Step 1 and Step 2) as on pages 6, 7 and 8. Naturally the positions shown in the guide are transferrable to neighboring strings making possible combinations on all adjoining strings.

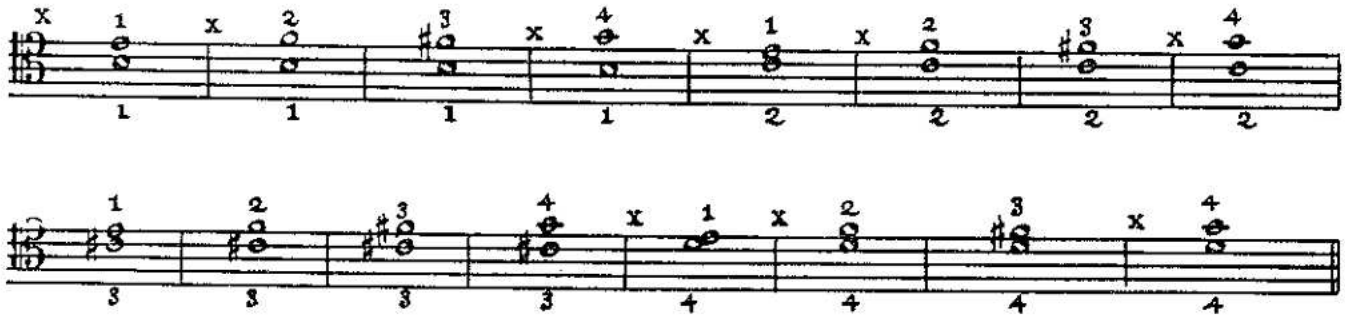
Beginners should start out exercises eliminating the double stops. Teacher should in addition devise short combination exercises for beginning students.

THREE FINGER POSITIONS
(1-2-4 or 1-3-4)



Starting with fourth position

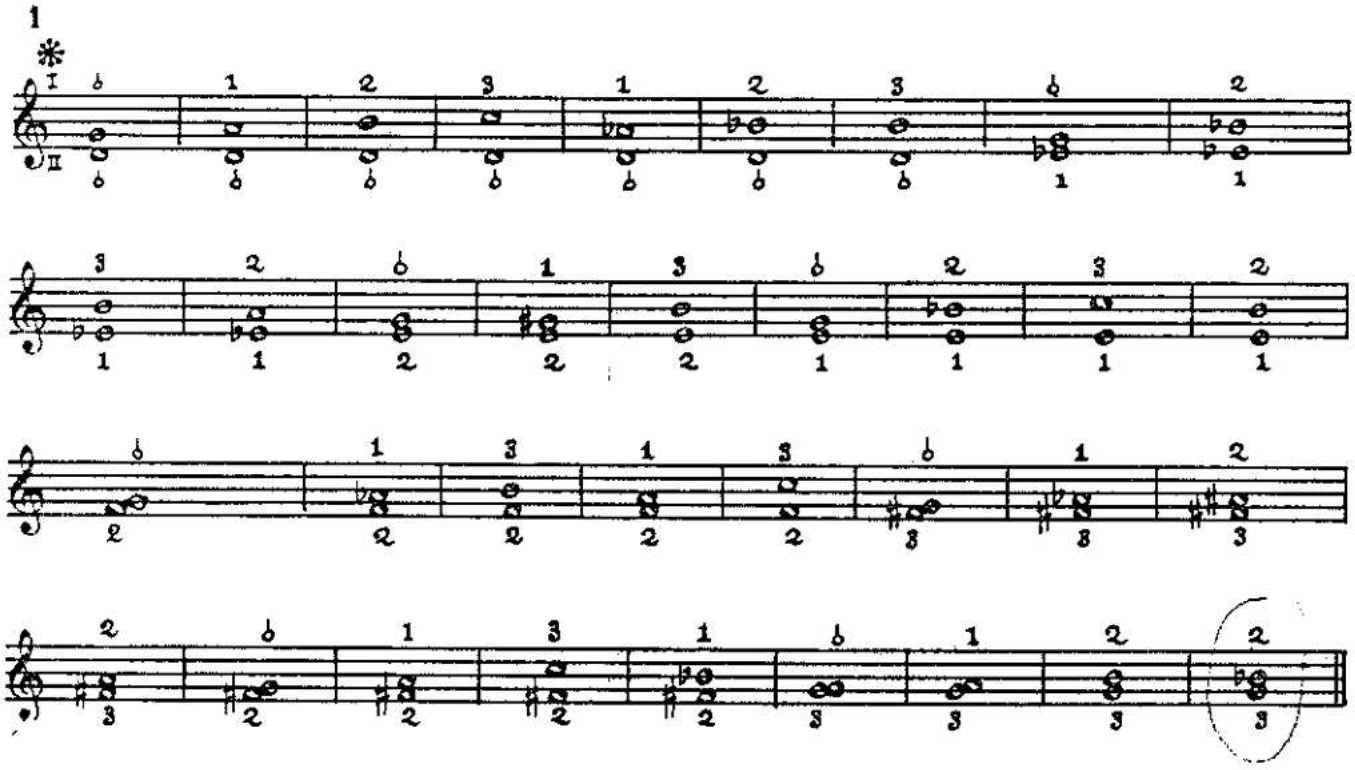




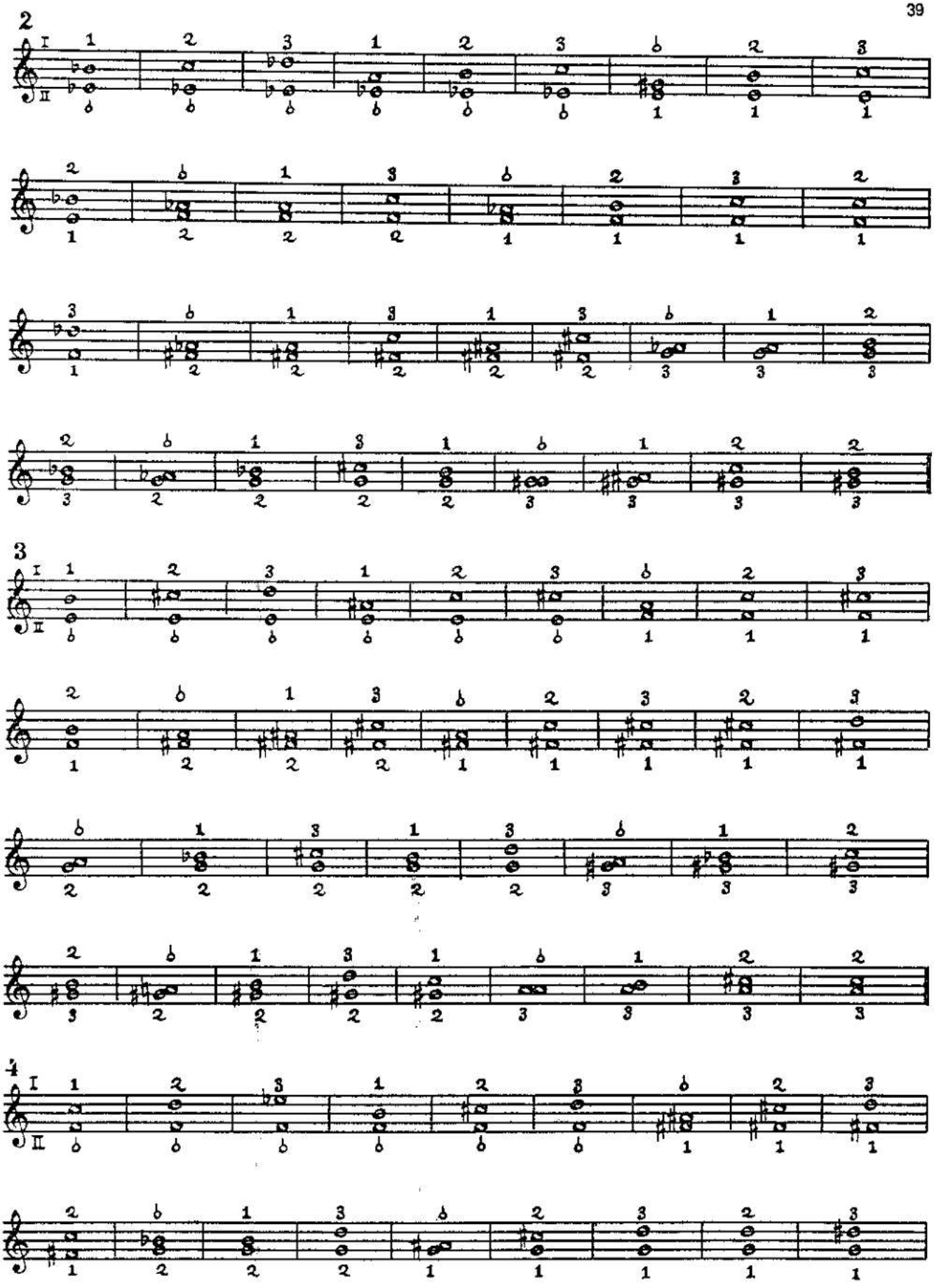
Since all the fingerings for the THREE FINGER EXTENDED POSITION are covered in the above chart for FOUR FINGER POSITION, those wishing to make use of THREE FINGER EXTENDED POSITION work only with bars marked with X.

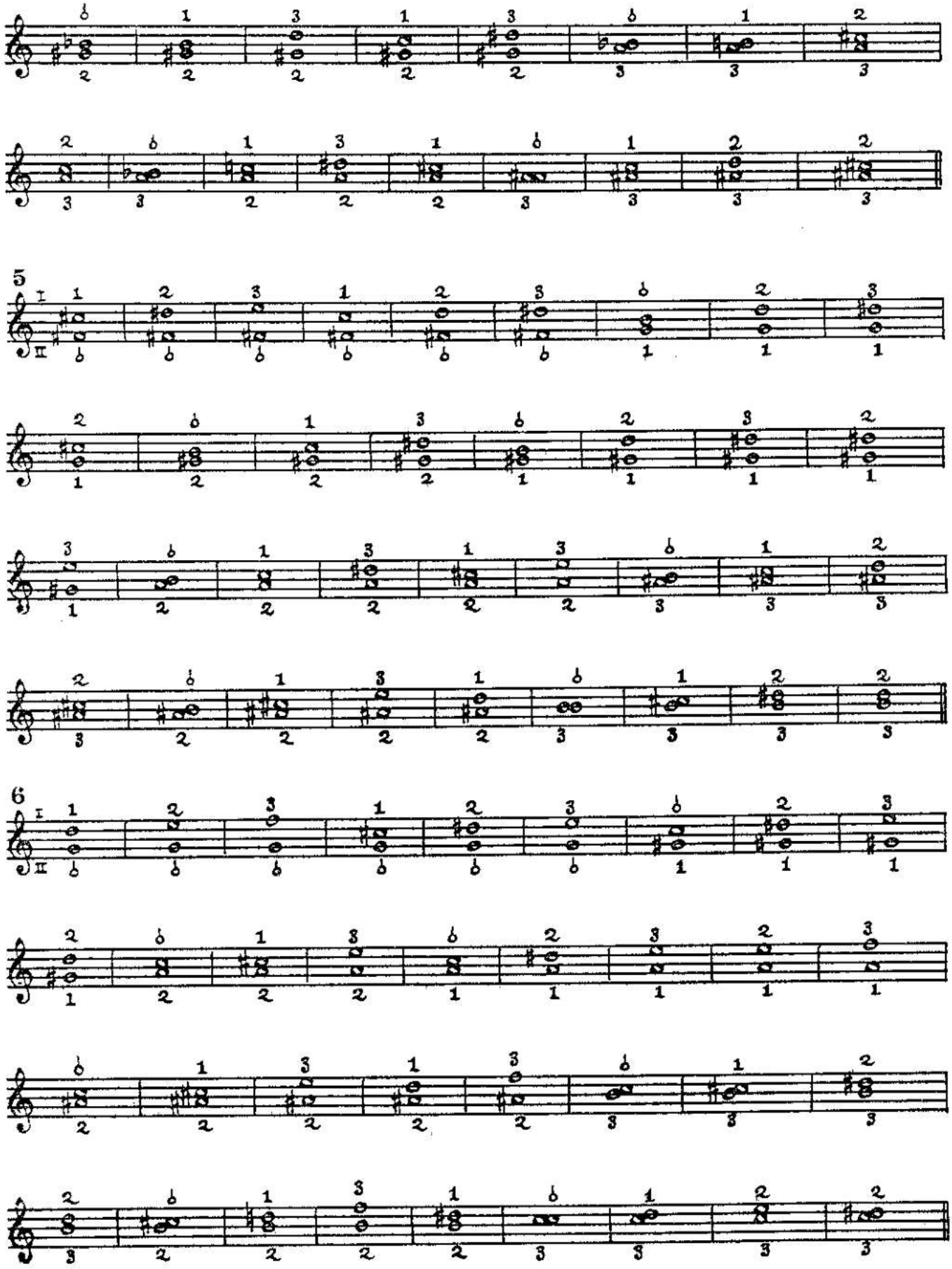
THUMB POSITION

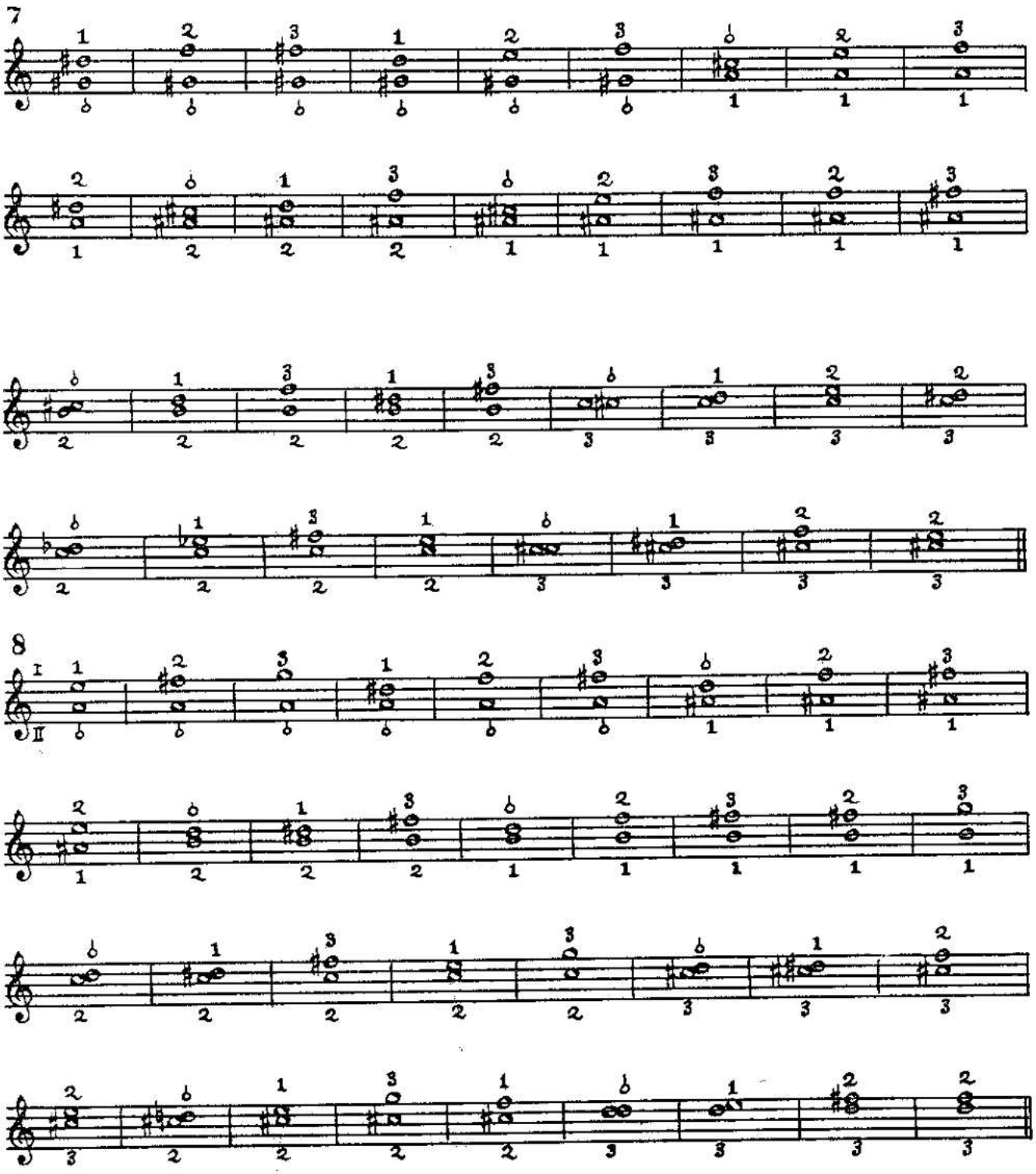
Standard position



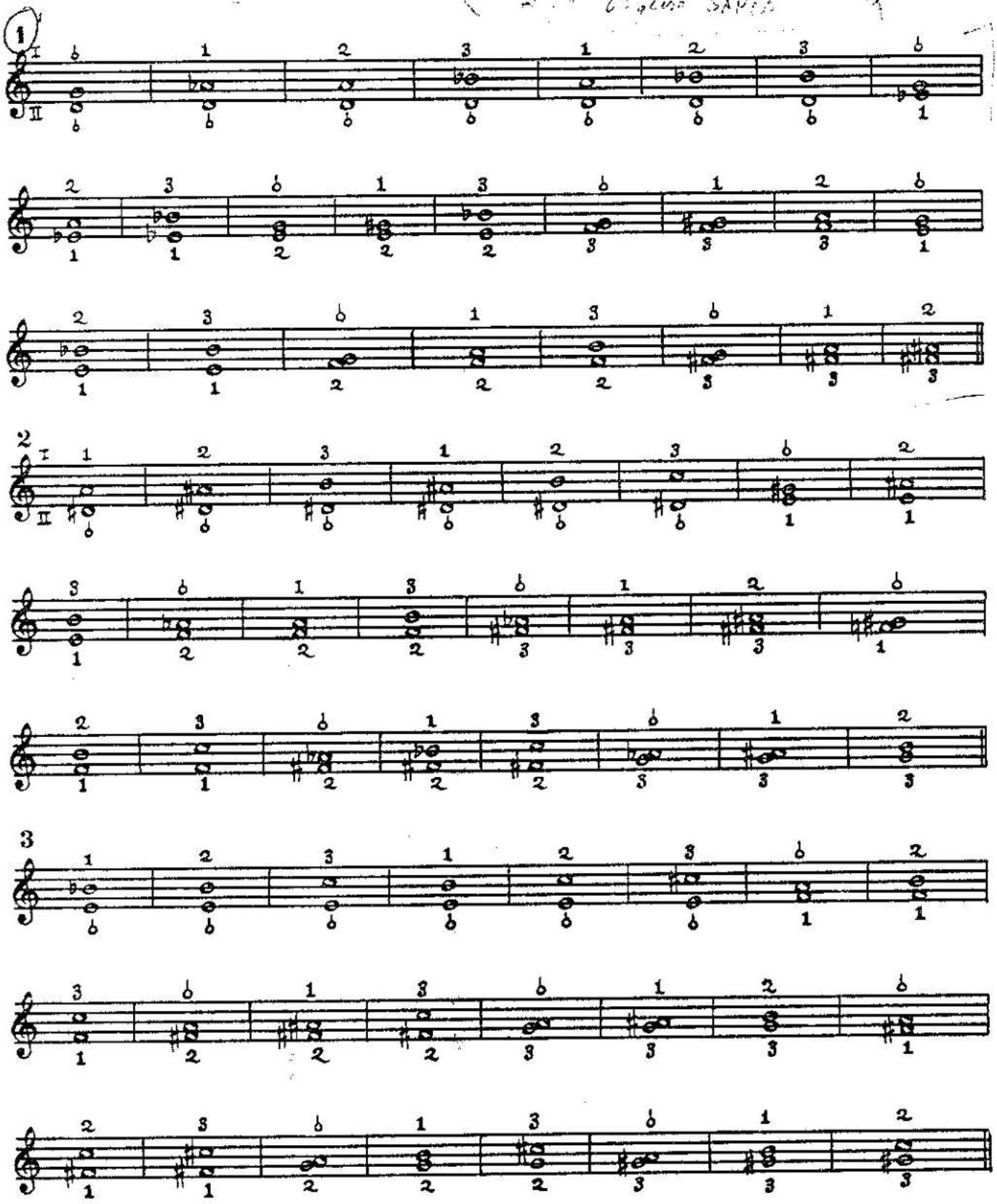
*Perfect fourths bridged by thumb are only practical when using harmonics.

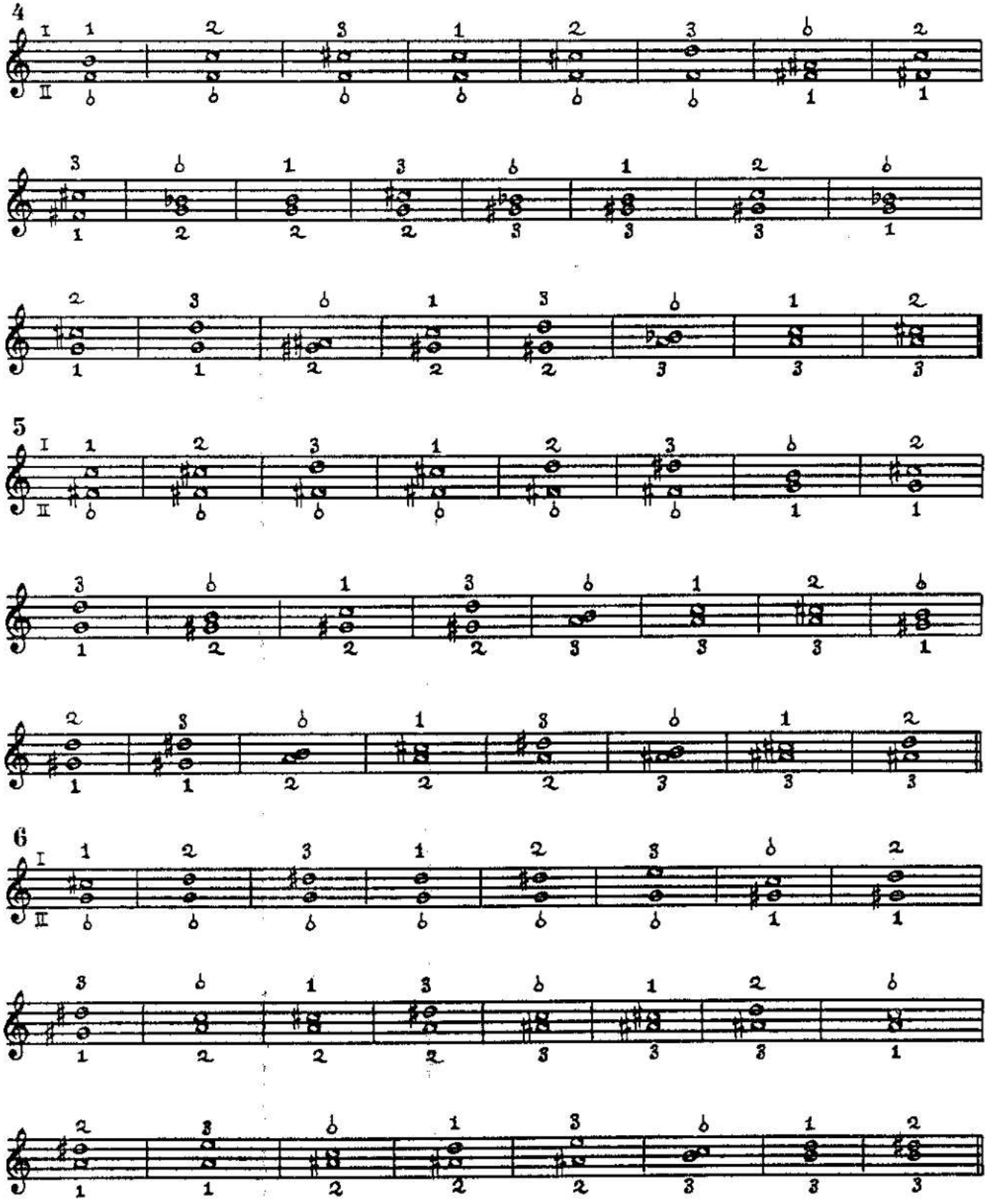

2
I
II
3
I
II
4
I
II

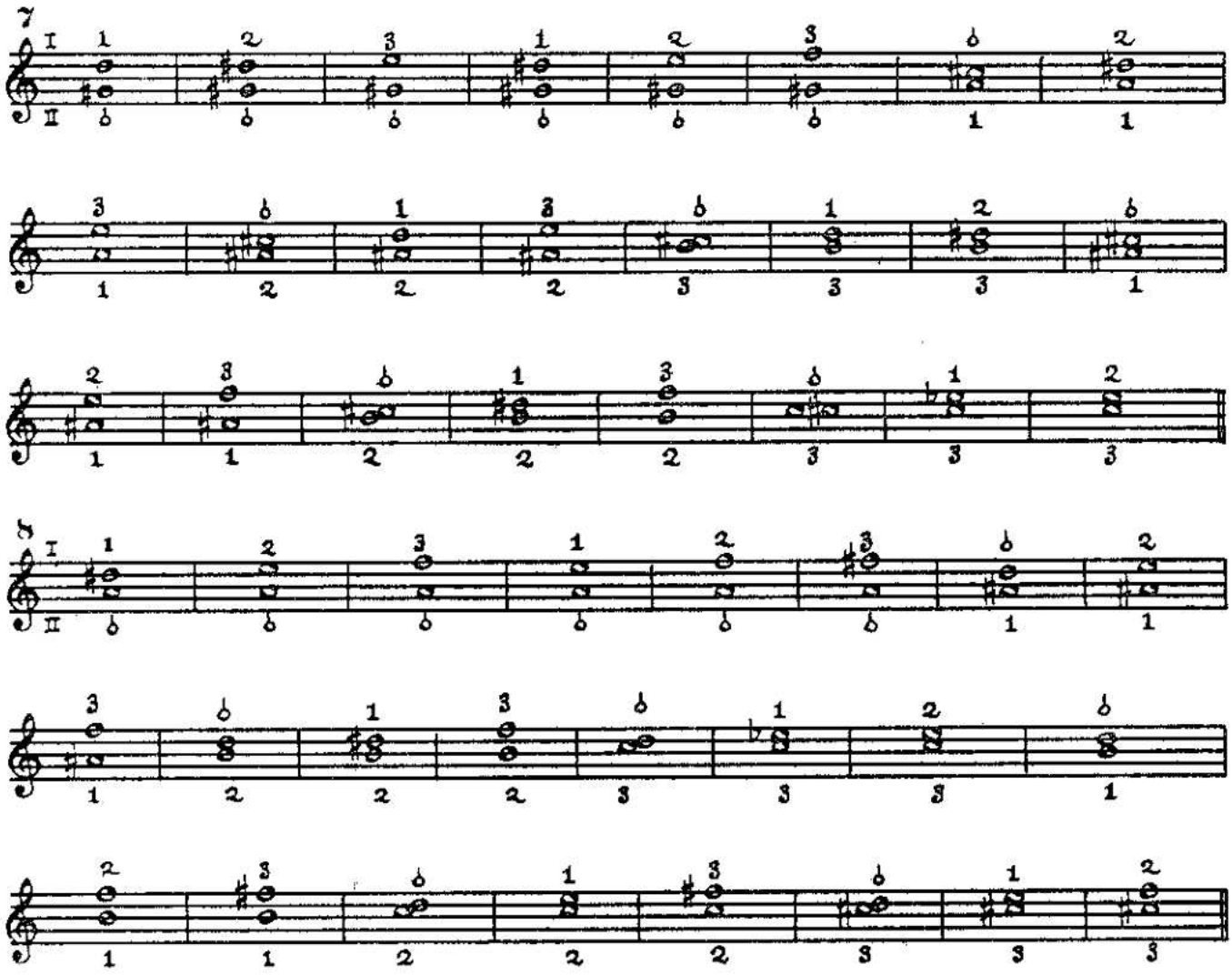



7
8
I
II

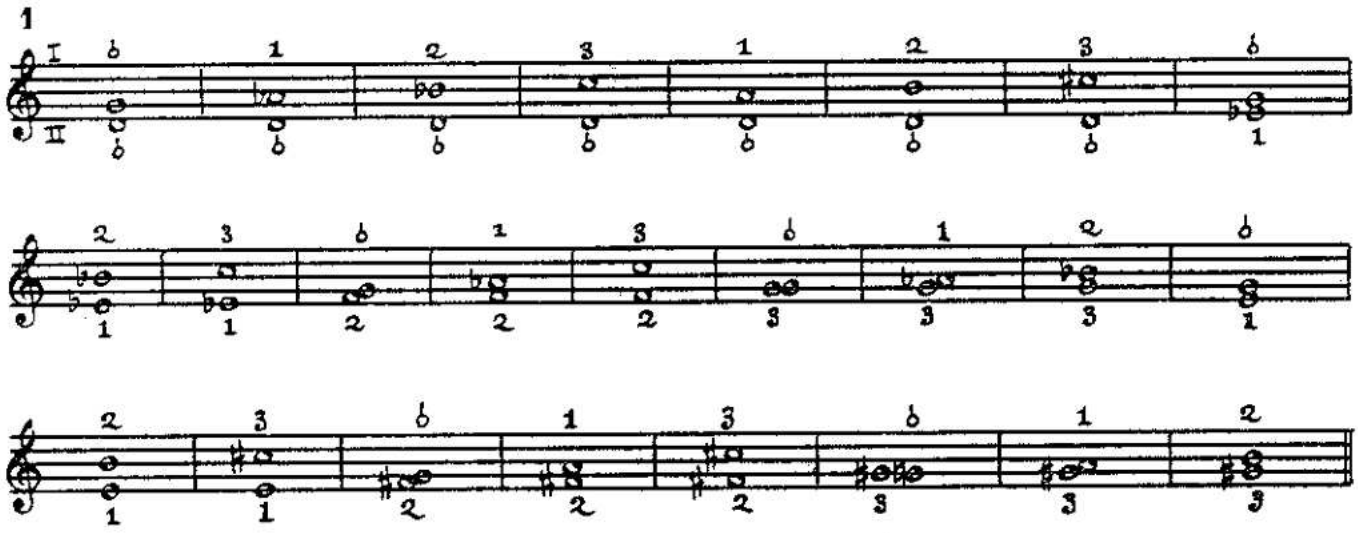
CONTRACTED POSITION

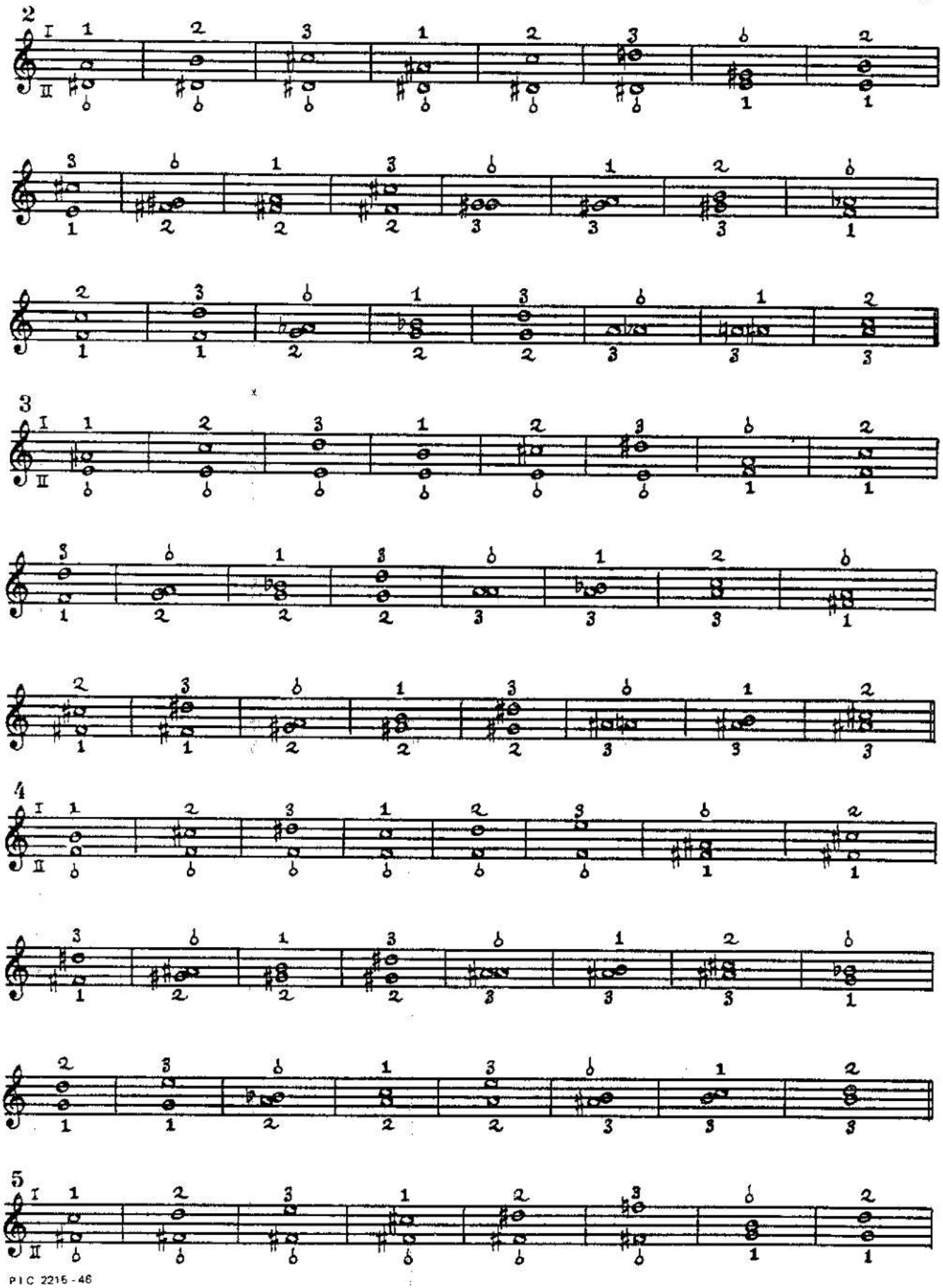


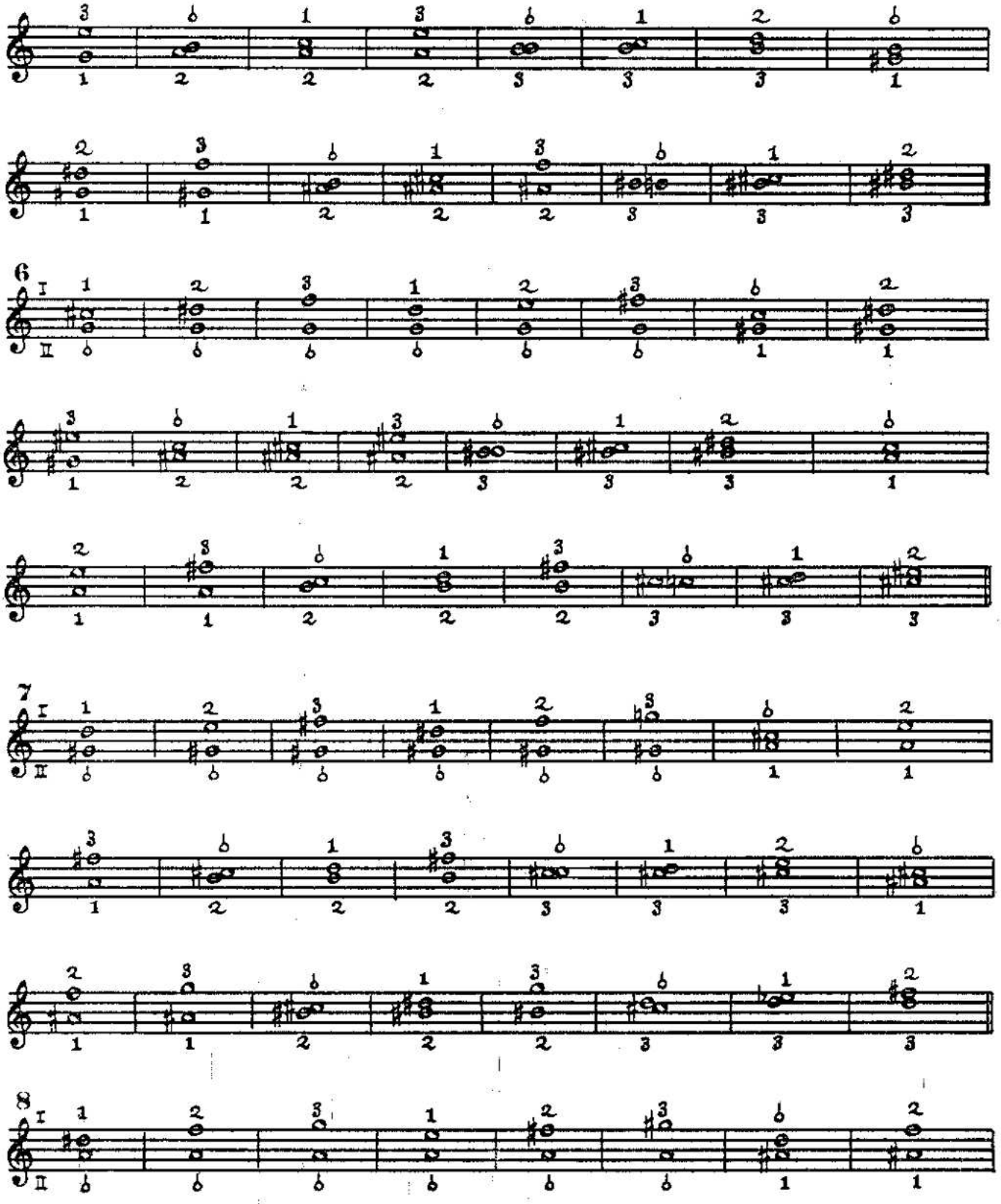


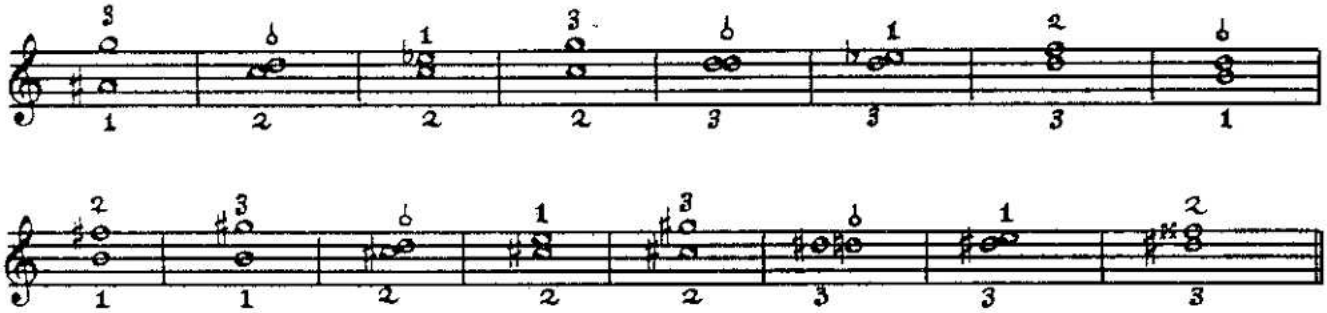
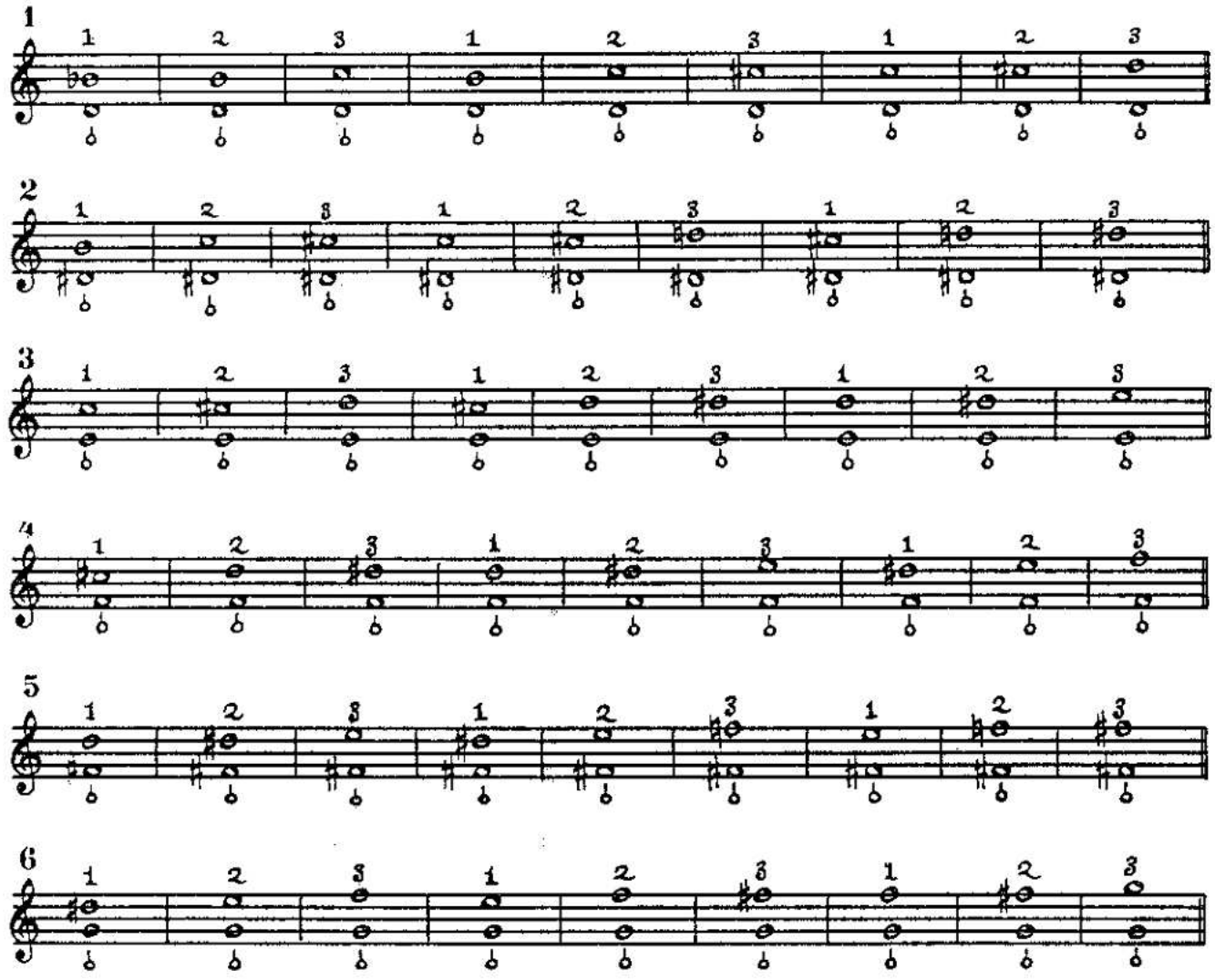


EXTENDED POSITION









THUMB EXTENSIONS