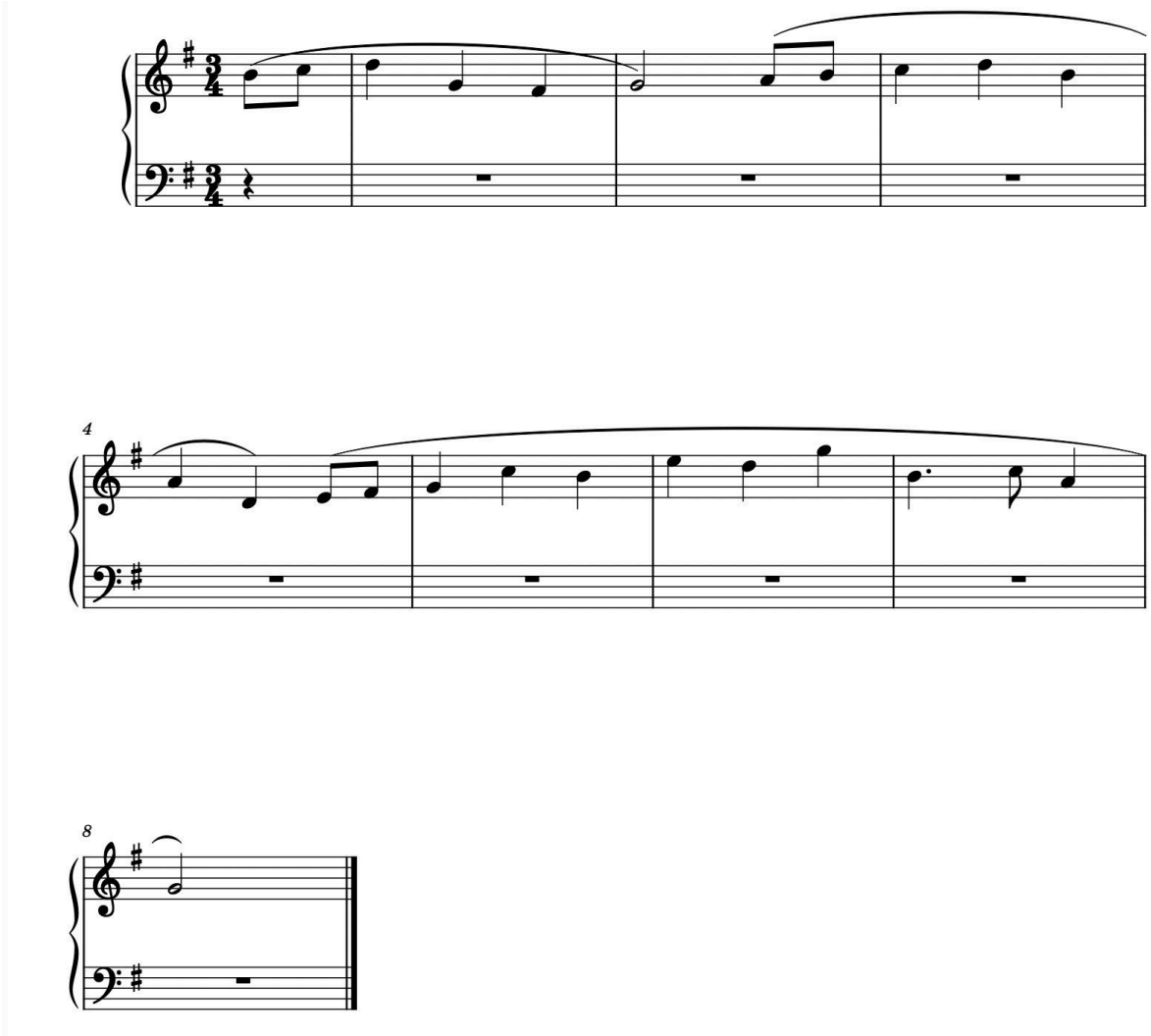
B) IMPROVISATION EXERCISES



This track begins with a long phrase of 8 bars (theme A). Even though the written score indicates three phrases (two short and one long) the music encourages us to feel, from the first note to the last, a single flowing phrase.

How do we give momentum and continuity to this type of phrase so that we can feel the common thread that connects all the sounds from the first note to the last?
Here are some clues:

1. The continuous presence of quarter notes - no matter in which voice - sets the tempo of the march here, inciting continuous movement through space.

(next...)

2. The choice of the bass line: to give the feeling of "going somewhere" and of not wanting to stop until the end of the phrase, chord inversions, passing notes and sometimes chromatic alterations are used, if the melody lends itself to it. The fundamental sounds of the chords are more often kept for the cadence (conclusion of the phrase).

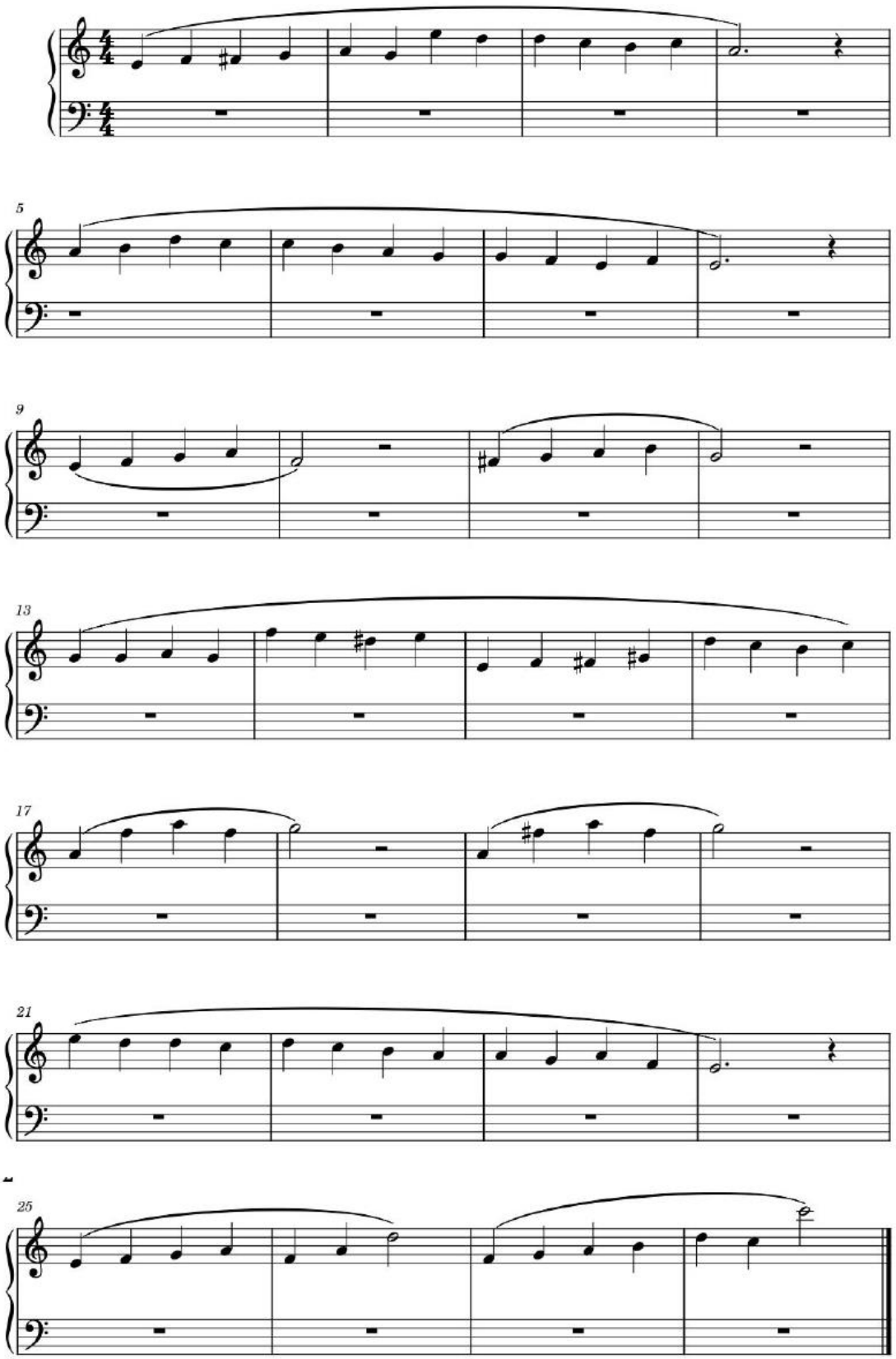
3. The anacrusis (upbeat) of two eighth notes also give momentum to the phrase.

- Keep the same melody and find another bass line using the basic rules of counterpoint (contrary, parallel, oblique and similar motion). When the movement of the two voices is satisfactory to the ear, add a third voice in the middle to complete the harmony.

- Use this new bass and improvise another melody above.

- The form of this piece is A B A C A + coda. Parts B and C each have two phrases that are half as long as part A. Improvise a piece of the same form.

- Improvise a piece in 2/4 or 4/4 for two voices, using the means mentioned to create movement and continuity in the phrases.



The score starts as follows:

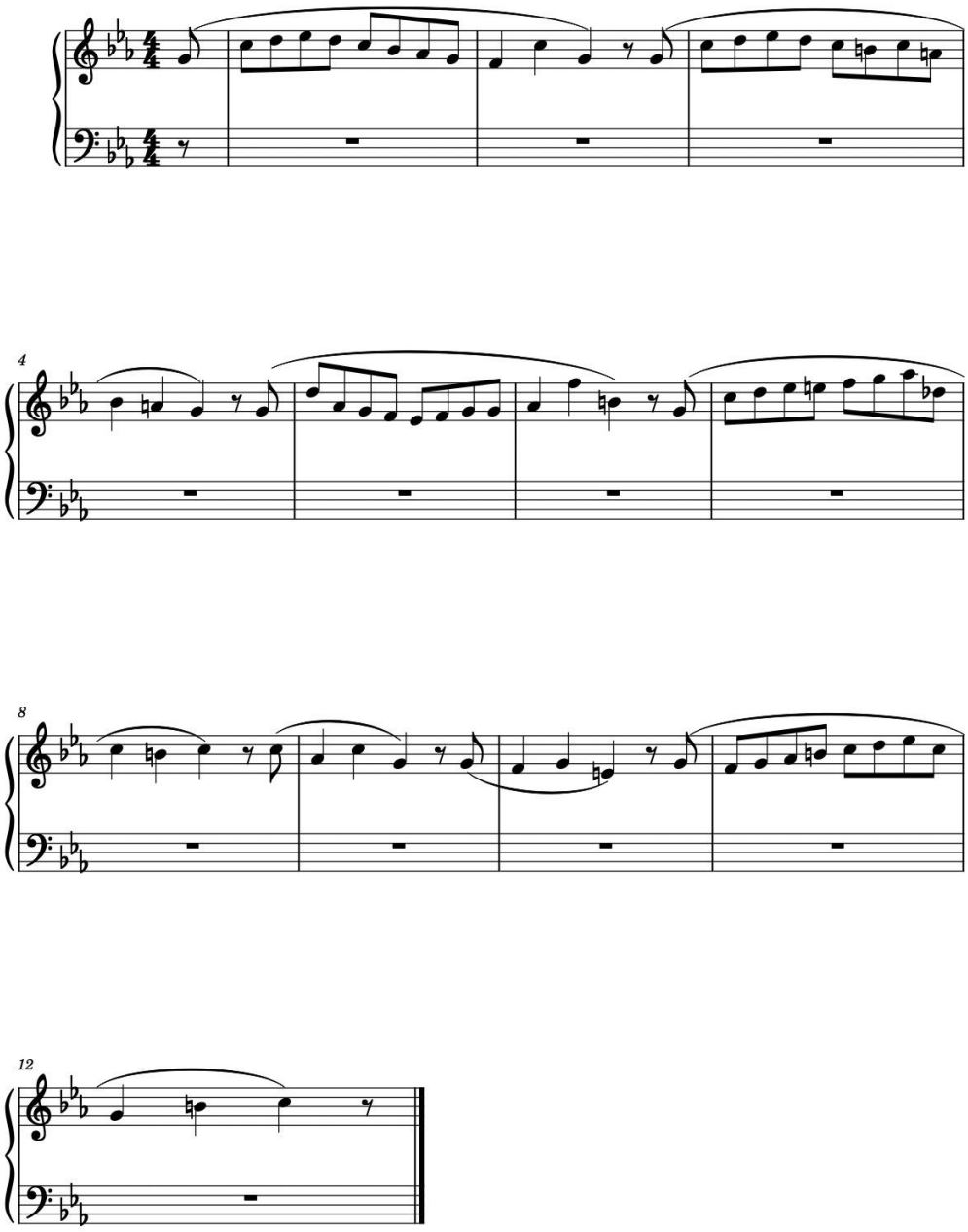
2 phrases of 4 bars, 2 phrases of 2 bars
1 phrase of 4 bars, 2 phrases of 2 bars.

(next...)

Pay attention to the harmony of each phrase ending: most of them are suspensive (questions).

- First create an unaccompanied melody, with phrases of different lengths and suspensive endings (the melody ends on any degree of the scale except the first) before ending with a conclusive phrase (most often on the first degree of the key). Do not forget the importance of the rests which reinforce the expression of each phrase.

- Add to the melody a one-voice bass, with the option of a full chord on the last sound of each phrase. The bass follows the same indications for the suspensive phrases - it can even use a chromatic note. For the concluding phrase, the bass is resting on the first degree.

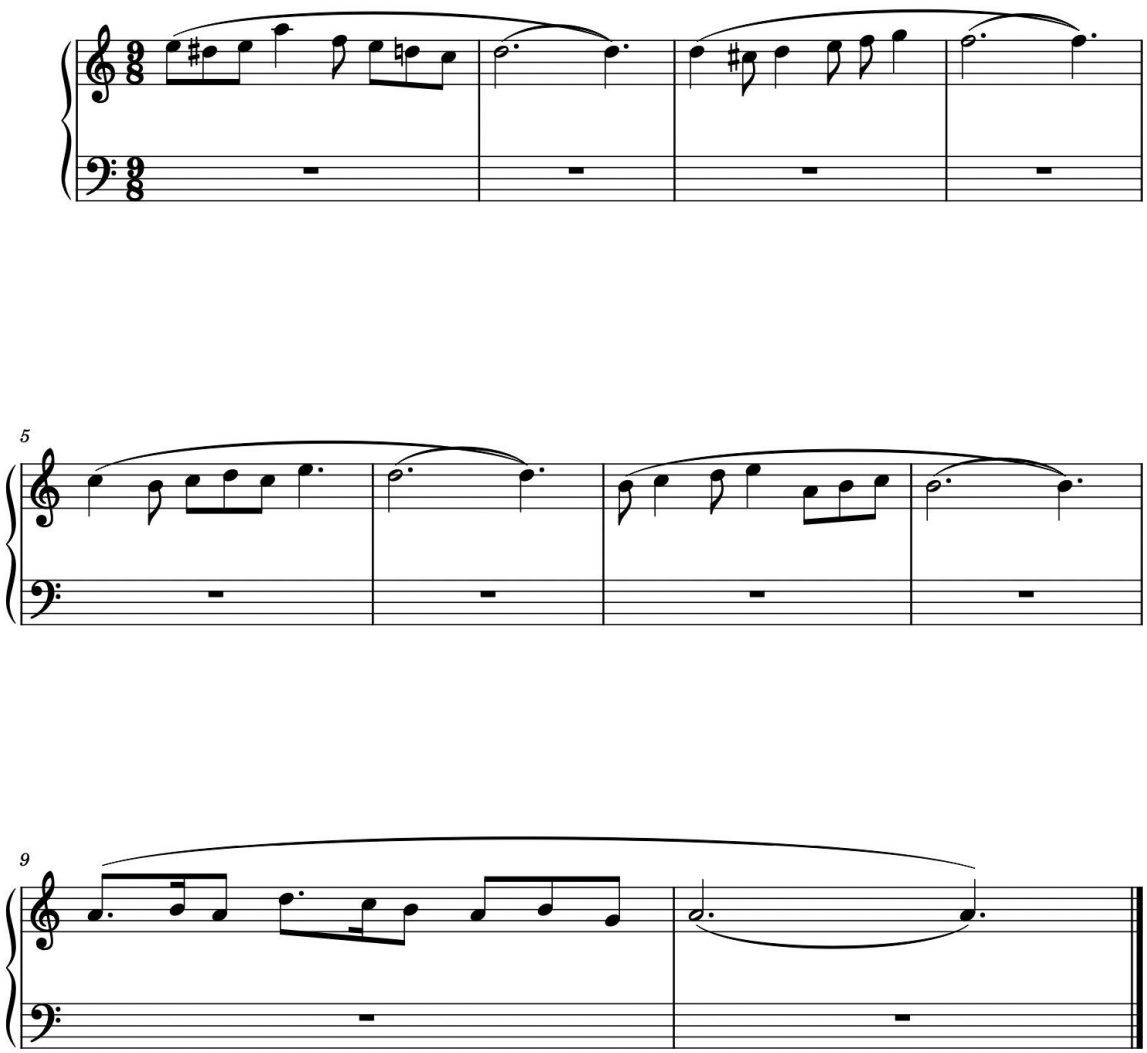


The phrases of identical length and rhythm - with two exceptions - have long anacruses.
On which degrees of the C minor scale do they end? On which chords?

- Play the melody as written and find the bass line - or chords - from the recording (track #2) by ear.

- Keep the rhythm and phrasing as in the score and create other melodic phrases to which you add a bass, then chords on the last three tones, to create either semi-cadences (suspension) or cadences (conclusion).

For phrase endings, refer to the instructions in the previous exercise.



In the modal style, the rules of harmony are not applied. Most of the time, we use chords in root position that we can move in parallel on the keyboard. Major or minor? Give yourself the freedom to choose the color of each of them.

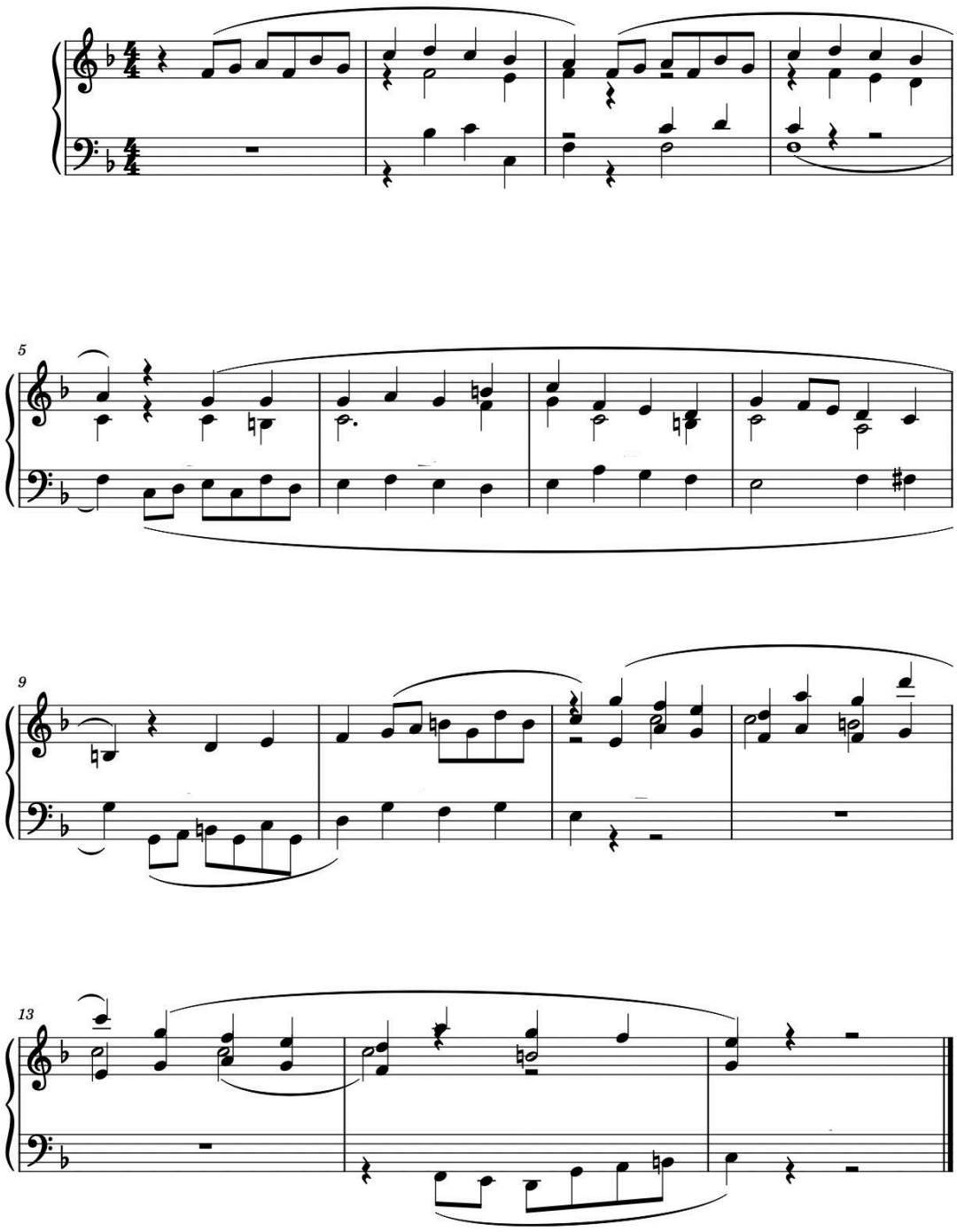
- Sing short melodies of your own invention like a chant, without any particular measure, from a departure note of your choice. Play on the last note of each phrase a triad in root position which contains the last sung note. Each time there are several options :

    a) the chord is major or minor;
    b) the last note of the melody becomes the root, third or fifth of the chord.

Develop your own taste without being limited to a particular mode (Dorian, Lydian etc.)

- In a chosen measure, invent a melody and accompany it using a single chord per measure on the first beat, or perhaps two chords.

- To create a rhythmic canon as proposed in this volume, one needs an alternation of melodic movement and long notes (one bar of each).



The Fugato is interesting because of the successive entries of the soprano and the bass (these will become musical cues for the rhythmic teachers for reaction exercises).

- Improvise simple one voice melodies, alternating left and right hands and using the same rhythmic cell (of one's choice) with possible melodic variations to start each phrase.

In the example given, the phrases start on a different note each time and thus create (when played with a second voice) a different harmony.
In the Fugato, the theme is two bars long, except in bars 5 to 9 where the number of quarter notes increases to lengthen the phrase, creating phrases of different lengths. This is a way of making the form more interesting, as playing a whole piece using the same rhythmic cell would lack variety.

Another way of organizing the music would be to decide whether and when to use suspensive or conclusive phrases.

- Add a second voice, choosing either a mode or a diatonic major or minor key.

In a modal improvisation, the movement of the voices is not restrictive, as the parallelism of the fifths and octaves sounds good (chords are often played in root position). In a diatonic mode however, attention is paid to the movement of the voices by using the basic rules of counterpoint (contrary, parallel 3rds and 6ths, contrary, oblique or similar motion).