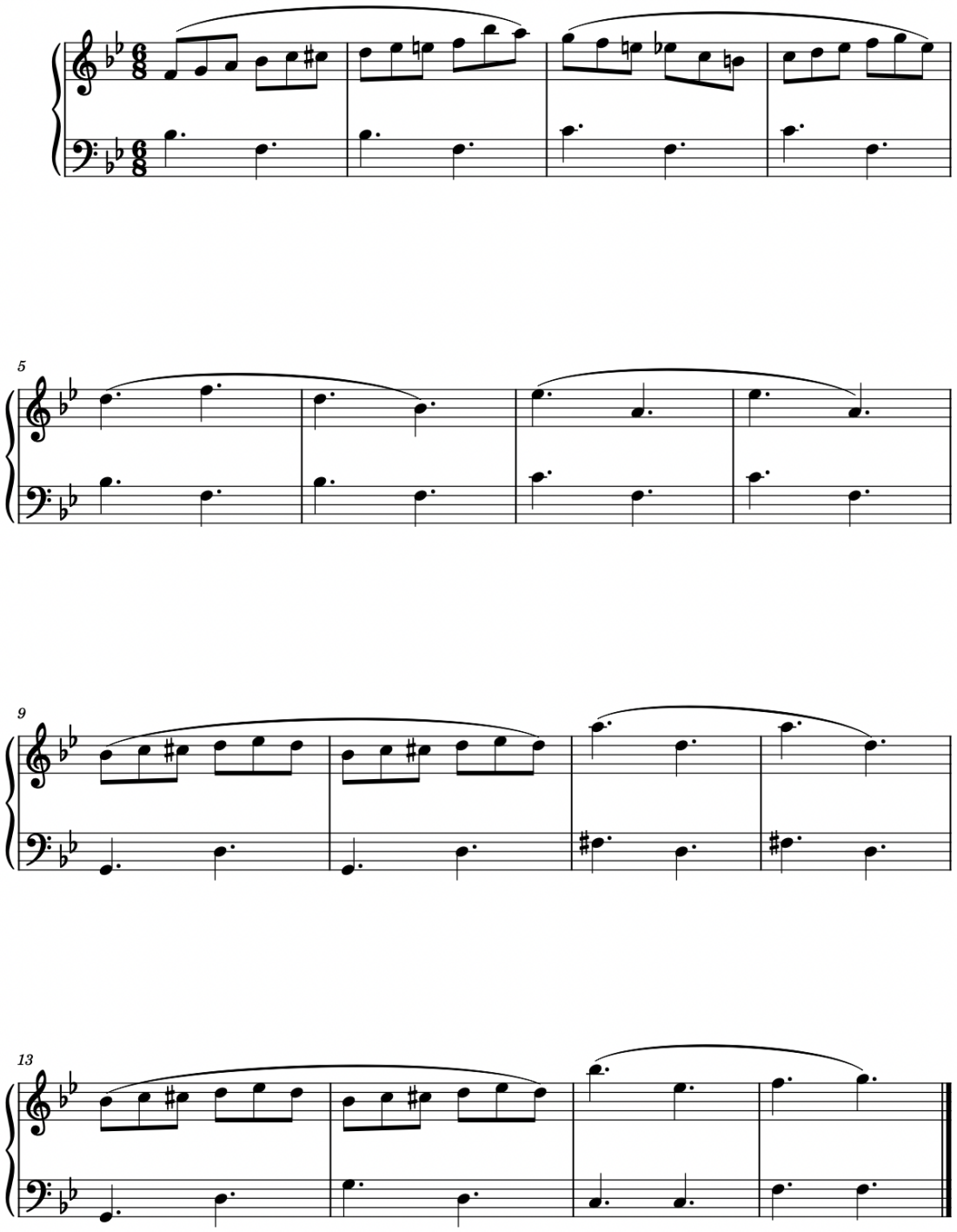
B) IMPROVISATION EXERCISES

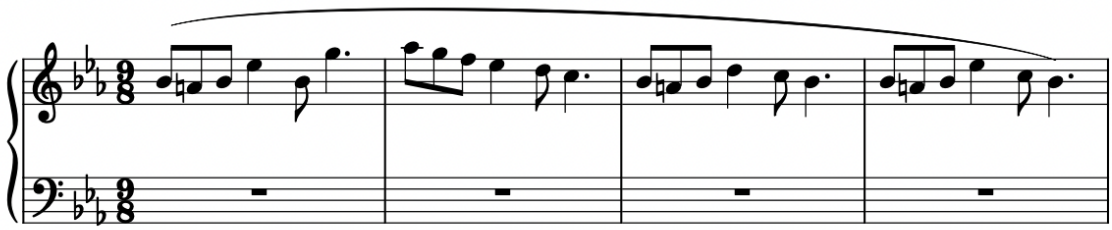


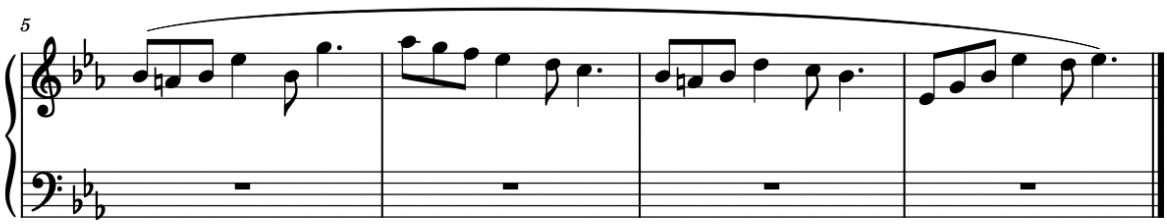
Here we have 12 measures of 6/8 time, in the key of Bb major, with a modulation to the relative minor after 8 measures. The division of the beat into 8th notes is effected by the use of chromaticism and ornaments in the melody without changes of harmony.

The harmony is simple: one chord which lasts for two measures. The sense of sway is created within each measure by the movement of the bass using inversions.

(next...)

- Start by playing the score: notice that each first eighth note of the RH is a chord note.
- Choose your own chord sequence or take this one; begin by experimenting with this structure (one chord for 2 measures and inversions in the bass) using only two voices: in both hands, play only dotted quarter notes belonging to the chords, one at a time.
- Then continue with one note in the left hand as before, and the melody in the right hand (eighth notes), using chromaticism, ornaments, passing notes or appoggiaturas.
- After this, you may add a light middle voice made of one or two chord notes as heard on the soundtrack.
- When these tools are well mastered, try to create a form by modulating after 8 measures to either the relative minor, the dominant or the subdominant.

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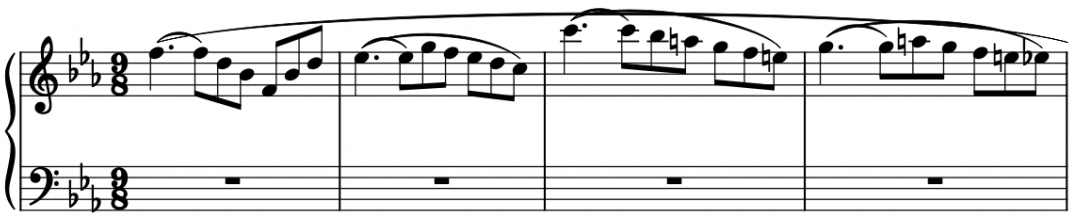

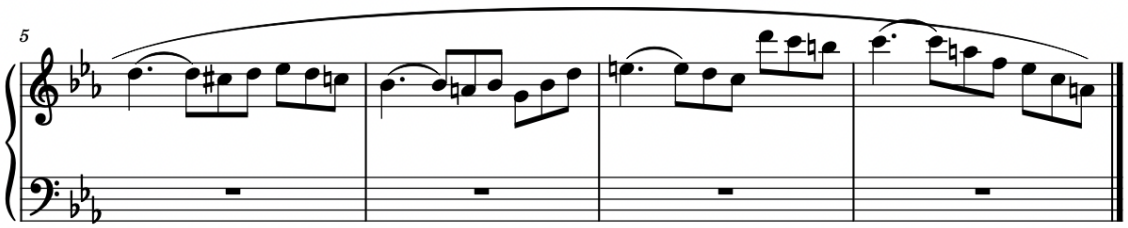
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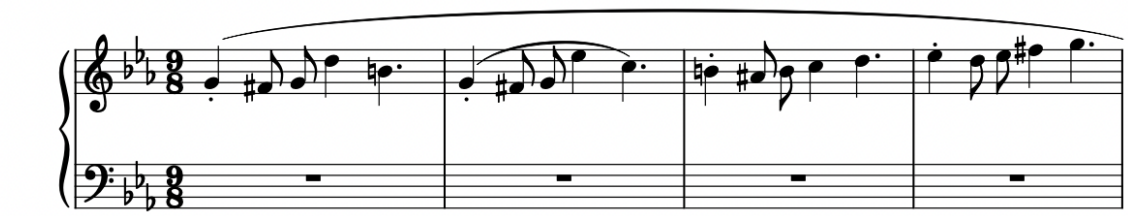

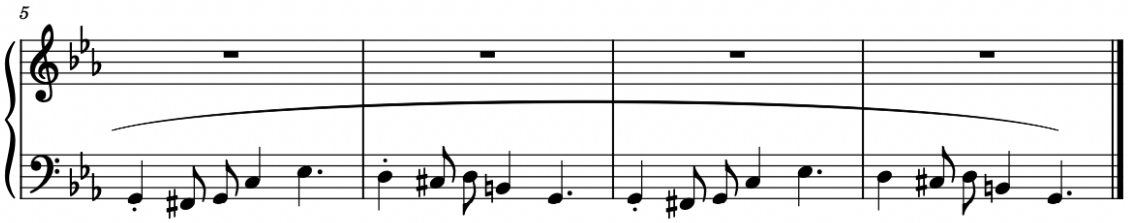
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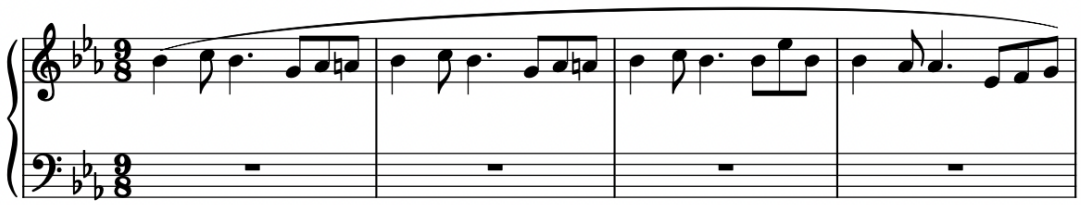

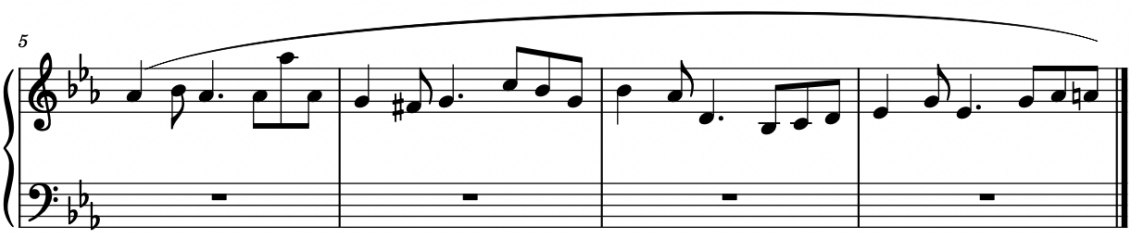
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In this track, one hears 4 different rhythmic cells each of one measure, plus a coda with a 5th rhythm.
The harmony changes on each first beat of the measure. Notice that the first note of each measure, melodically speaking, is mostly a note of the chord.

The musical signal which will introduce a new rhythm is at each time a modulation. This happens in different ways. The first modulation (and rhythm change) is a direct modulation from Eb major to Bb major. The next two changes (from Bb major to G minor and from G minor to Eb major) are effected by the use of the dominant chord of the new key (in the first case, a dominant 7th chord on D, and in the second, a dominant 7th chord on Bb).

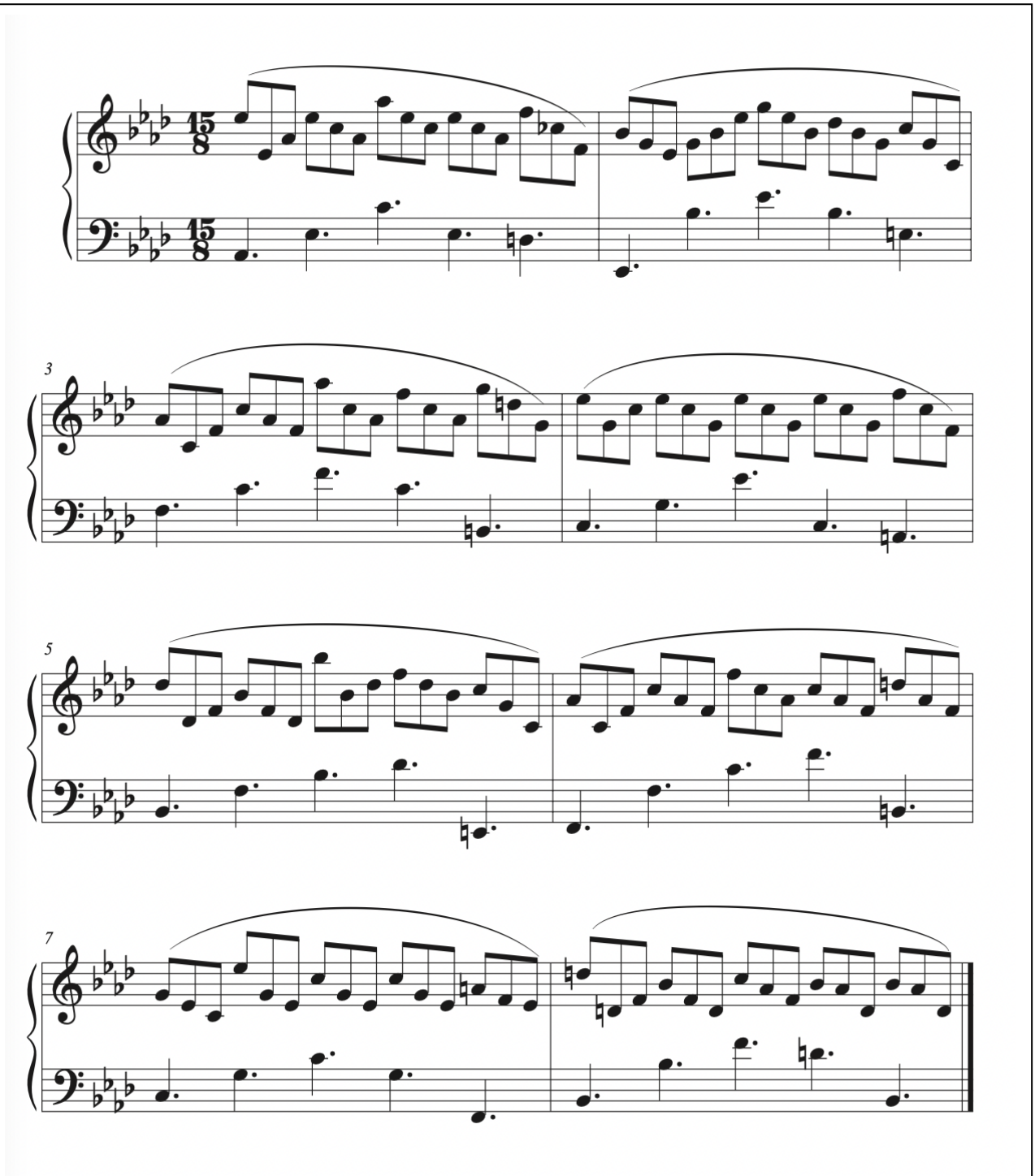
The chord sequence is never complicated and easily identified by the musical ear. Therefore, be aware to make the melody retain the interest of the ear, so that each time it gives new life to the harmony.

- ❖ Some melodic cues:

- Alternate scale movement and bigger intervals or chord arpeggios.
- Don't hesitate to repeat a melodic pattern that you like, or to play it on different degrees of the key.
- Use passing notes and chromaticism.
- Play ornaments.
- If you land unwillingly on a foreign note, never stop playing, but give sense to this "accident", making it become an appoggiatura of the next note or a passing note, for instance.

- ❖ There are numerous ways to use this track, for example:

- Follow the same rhythmic and tonality changes as in the track, using one's own melody. (Choose simple chord sequences).
- Create a selection of 4 rhythms and decide in advance the key changes.



The interest of this track is to draw our attention to measures of 5 beats - not measures of 3 + 2 or 2 + 3. How does the improvisation reinforce the sensation of 5 beats without subdivision?

Some observations on the score:
- The harmonic rhythm is slow: one or two chords per measure, not more.
- The main change happens on beat 1.
- During the first part of the piece, we also hear a change on beat 5 which anticipates the change of measure; the next chord on the first beat confirms this new measure. This change might be only a seventh added to the triad, or a dominant chord, or a chromaticism in the bass.

(next...)

A measure of 5 beats is quite long (especially a 15/8 meter!), and the use of the harmony on beat 5 anticipating beat 1 helps to feel the duration of the measure and ensures that the music does not stagnate.

If the harmony changed on beat 3 or beat 4, it would give the impression of a 2 + 3 or a 3 + 2.

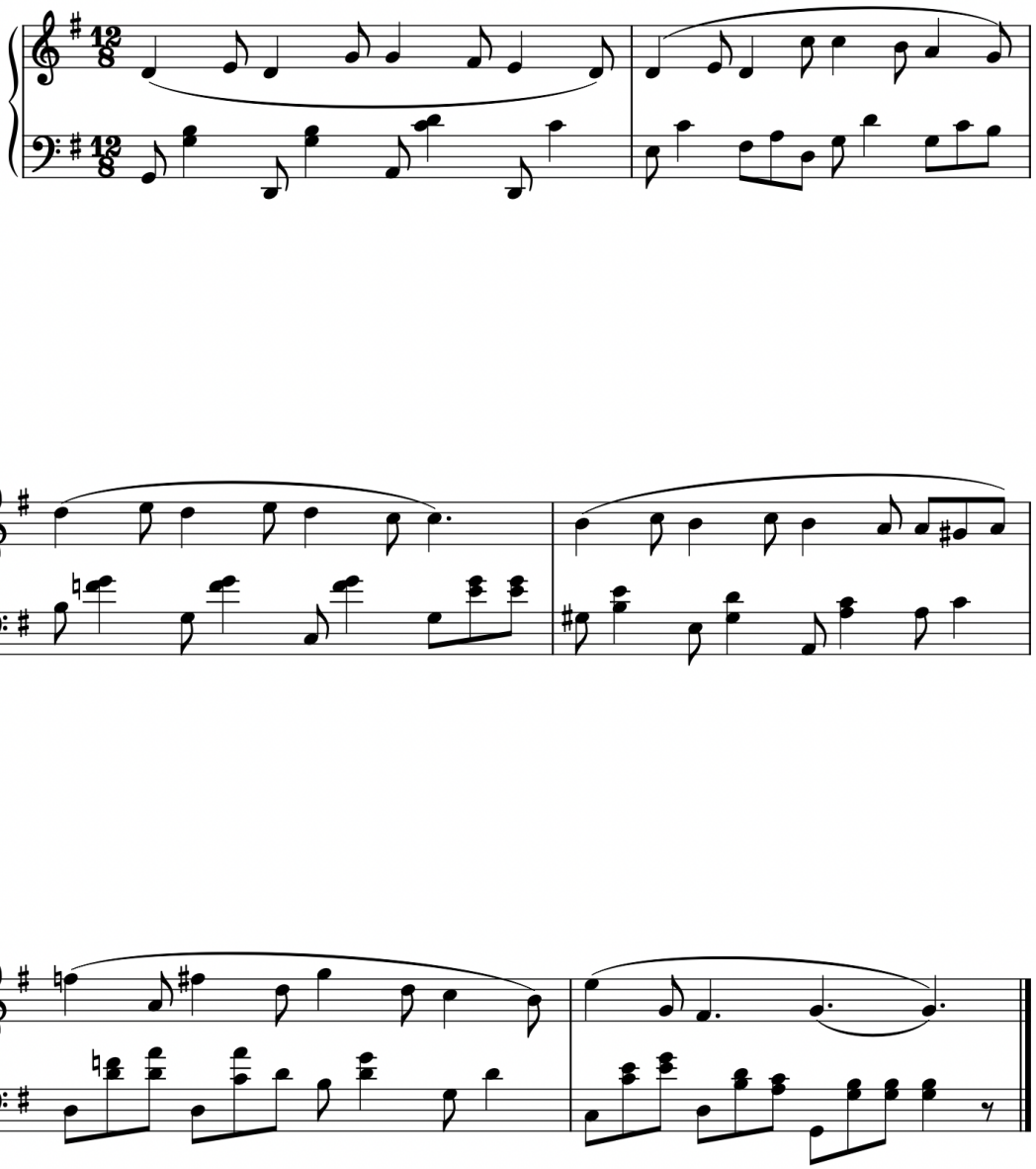
The melody spells out the notes of the chord. Try, if possible, not to double the bass but rather to complete it with another note of the chord.

- Start playing your own bass line in dotted quarters in the key of your choice, using a harmonic progression of one chord per measure - like a slow arpeggio - with or without a "passing chord" on beat 5.

- Add a soprano line of dotted quarters belonging to the same harmonies. Listen to the relationship between the two voices: it will help you make them communicate satisfyingly in regard to the lines that you create as well as in the quality of your playing.

- Add eighth notes in the soprano whenever you wish. Use chord notes, ornaments, passing notes, but sparingly, to ensure a simple and organic approach to this 5-beat movement. One could prioritize the chord notes - which give this feeling of calm and duration - and use passing notes on the penultimate or last beat, to give a momentum towards the next meter (anacrusis). One can also imagine the opposite: the beginning of the meter with joint movement and the end of the meter in arpeggios.

- To train the musical ear: play the bass line of the whole track by ear, and then construct the chords.



This track is a mirror image of track number 9. Here the trochee rhythm is in the right hand (soloist) and the iamb in the left (accompaniment). The presence of the iamb in the bass makes the trochee move forward; both are complementary rhythms. Three things are happening at once: the bass plays the beat, the soprano plays the trochee rhythm, and in between there is a voice - played by either hand - that fills in the long note of the soprano, essentially giving the feeling of something moving forward.

- Follow the score and complete it by finding by ear the middle voice as played on the track.
- In a chosen key, begin by playing only the trochee in the right hand, feeling its melodic and rhythmic movement.
- Then, add the beats of the left hand. Use inversions as in exercise 1.
- Afterwards, complete with a very light note or chord in the middle, which fills the long note of the trochee.
- The whole exercise can be reversed by playing the iamb in the right hand (soloist), and then playing firstly the beats in the left and then the trochee rhythm in the middle voice (listen to track 9 for ideas).