Clements High School 2017

# Front Ensemble Technique Guide

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# *Overview*

This exercise and technique packet will serve as a foundation for our keyboard percussion program. The enclosed concepts and exercises can provide years of challenge if they are practiced properly. Throughout the season, other exercises may follow, some designed specifically for the show material and others to provide a greater challenge.

# *Two Mallet Technique*

## Summary

In order for this ensemble to rehearse effectively, it is essential that we define our technical style and create a working vocabulary. To summarize greatly, our technique will revolve around:

1. A relaxed hand position with a natural curve to the fingers.
2. Playing from the wrist, while keeping our shoulders and elbows relaxed.
3. Creating the look and feel of natural rebound.

## Grip Criteria

1. Hold the mallet between the first knuckle of the index finger and the pad of the thumb. The other fingers should be wrapped around the mallet in a relaxed and natural manner.
2. The palm's angle should be as flat as possible to the instrument without causing tension.

## Setup Behind the Instrument

1. Stand with feet shoulder width apart with relaxed knees, centering your body in the register of the instrument you will be playing.
2. In the set position, the mallets/wrists are up, at the height of the dynamic you will play. The mallets are slightly angled toward each other.
3. Elbows are relaxed.
4. Make sure there is a natural curve to the hand.

## Stroke Guidelines

1. Continue to follow all grip criteria and setup guidelines.
2. Mallet pathway is straight up and down (no slicing).
3. The mallet head moves first, not the forearm or arm. If the mallet head moves first, this means you are playing from the wrist.
4. Check your height of rise consistency. Duplicate your stick heights to achieve a more consistent sound.

# *Stroke Types*

### FULL Stroke

This stroke can be played in either a legato or a piston style. The mallet starts at the height of the dynamic you will play, and returns to the same height. Full strokes are the most common type of stroke, and can be repeated one after another. This stroke can be played in a **legato** or **piston** style (along with all of the strokes below).

### DOWN Stroke

The mallet starts at the height of the dynamic you will play, but does not return to the previous height (no rebound). At the point where the mallet strikes the bar, the wrist stops and does not lift back up. The mallet will slightly rebound due to a small amount of bounce (don't let the mallet "dead stroke" on the bar). This stroke is ideal for going from a loud to a soft passage of music and maintaining stroke efficiency.

### TAP Stroke

"Tap" refers to a rudimental drumming stroke, where the stick only plays 1-3 inches off the head. For our purposes, tap strokes are basically full strokes at a very low height. They can also be played in a legato or piston style.

### UP Stroke

The mallet starts at a low height (tap stroke height) and after striking the bar, rebounds to the height of a full stroke. This stroke is ideal for going from a soft to a loud passage of music and maintaining stroke efficiency.

# *Stroke Styles*

### The Legato Stroke

In this case the word **legato** refers to the look of the stroke (smooth and connected) rather than the sound that it produces. The mallets move in a smooth and connected manner between the **downstroke** and the **upstroke** without interruption. The downstroke is slightly accelerated and the upstroke is slower and slightly decelerated. This is an excellent general purpose stroke and will be used for most of our music and exercises.

### The Piston Stroke

The **piston** stroke requires a downstroke that accelerates more than the legato stroke, and a natural, decelerating upstroke (like dribbling a basketball). There is a noticeable pause between strokes. This stroke is excellent for **shifting** in slower passages that demand the utmost accuracy, and for practicing **double vertical** srokes when using 4 mallets.

### Shifting

Basically, **shifting** is how you move from one note to another. The shift must be a part of your stroke's recovery (or rebound). In other words, while your mallet is coming off the bar you just struck, it is headed in the direction of its next target. Though this sounds like a simple concept, it will get a little more complex when we consider having four mallets in our hands and changing intervals and dynamics. The most common problem is waiting too long to shift. Efficient shifting will lead to greater accuracy and consistency.

### Flow

The four stroke types discussed above can be played in many different combinations, and have many musical applications. When mastered, they will give you technical efficiency to enable you to relax while playing.

**Flow** is the ability to combine the above concepts and guidelines into one fluid idea. This will allow you to see and experience the "bigger picture" in the music (musical and rhythmic phrases, dynamics, and expression). This is a big part of becoming a great performer.

## *4 Mallet Technique*

### Overview

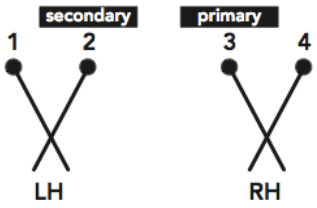
Our primary grips for 4 mallet technique **Stevens Grip** (for Marimbas & Xylophone)

Much of what you will need to know about 4 mallet playing is discussed in the included exercises, and will be taught in rehearsals. Also, almost all of the concepts and techniques described above also apply to 4 mallet playing.

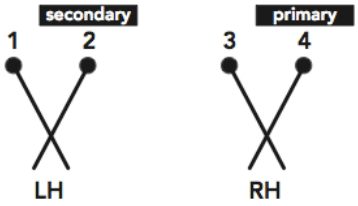
### 4 Mallet Stickings

Mallet Identification

- Stevens Grip mallet designations




- Burton Grip mallet designations

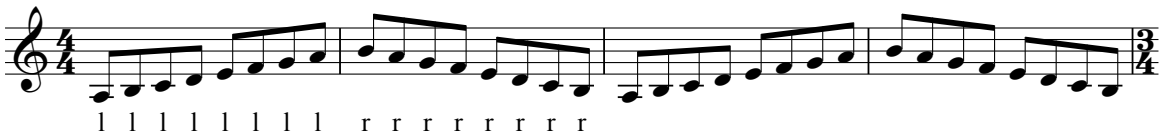


*Exercise 1.2*

# Exercise 1.2

**A**

Bryan Waites

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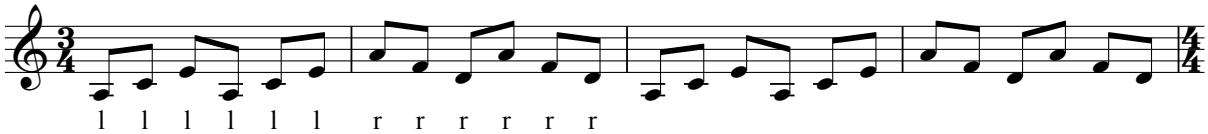


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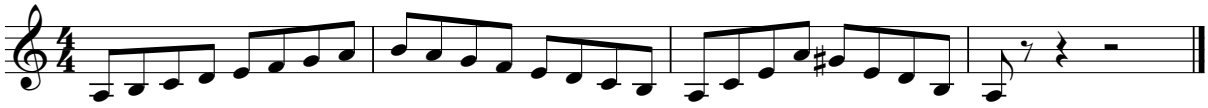
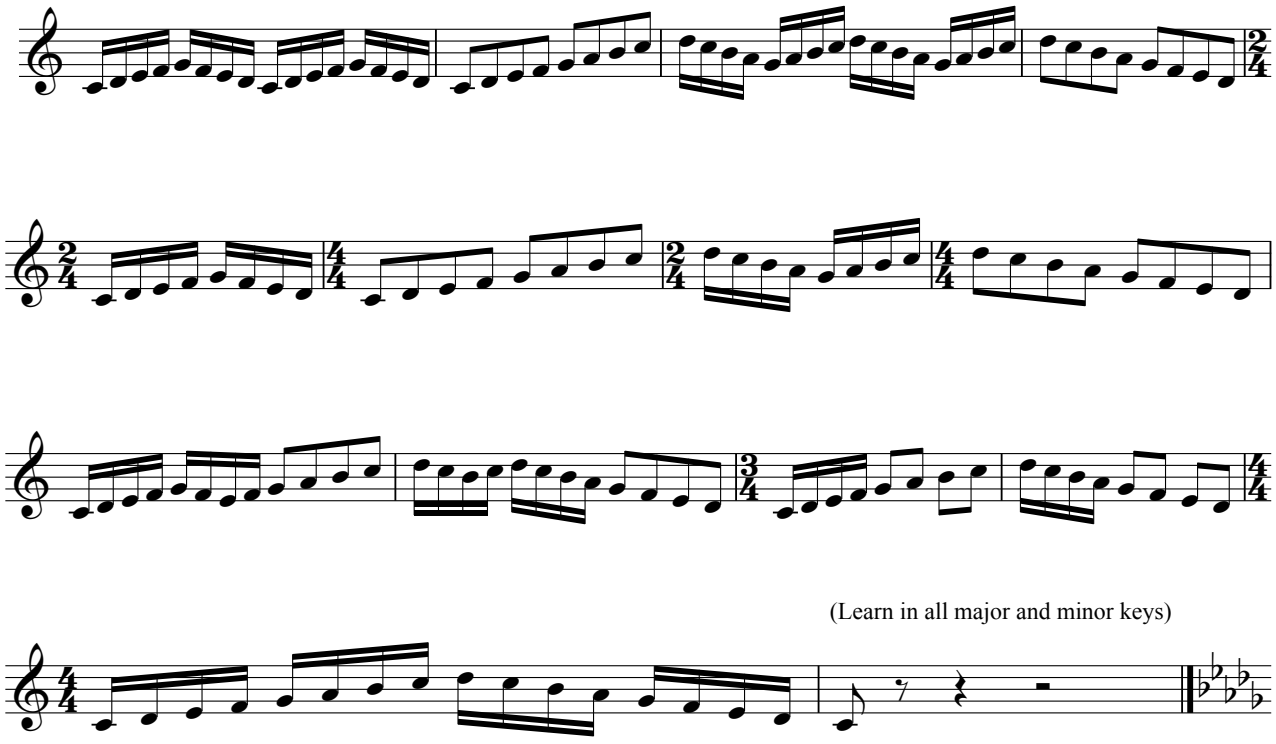


*Fierce 2.0*

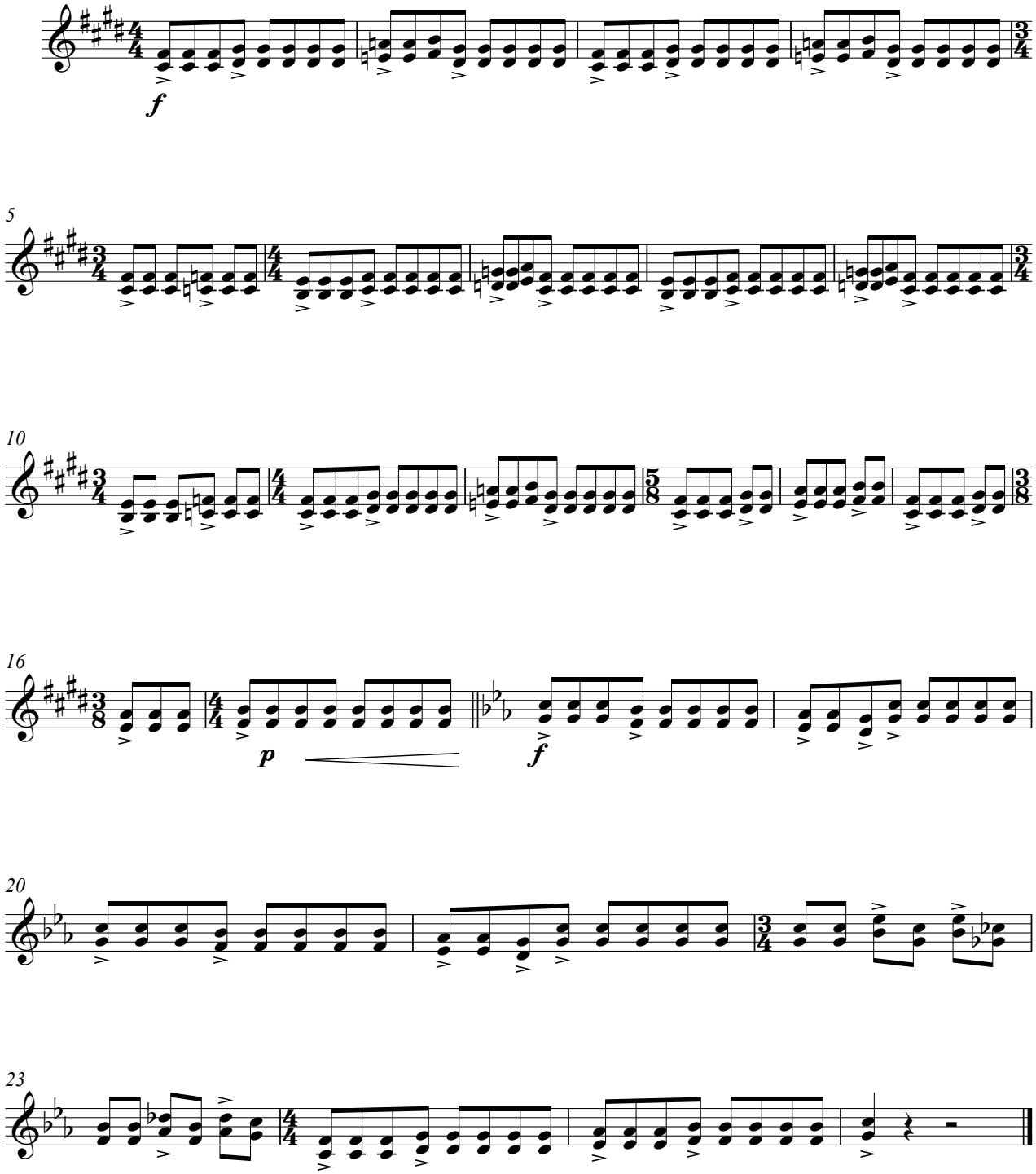
# Fierce 2.0

Bryan Waites



# Hyphie

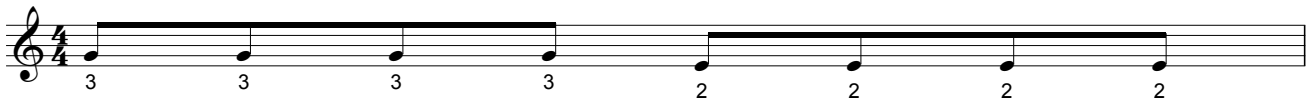
Bryan Waites



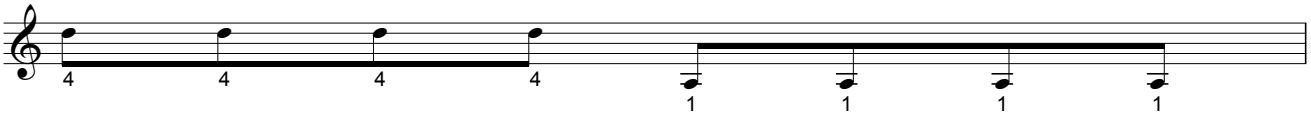
# 4 Mallet Stroke Types

There are 6 stroke types that cover nearly all 4 mallet playing:

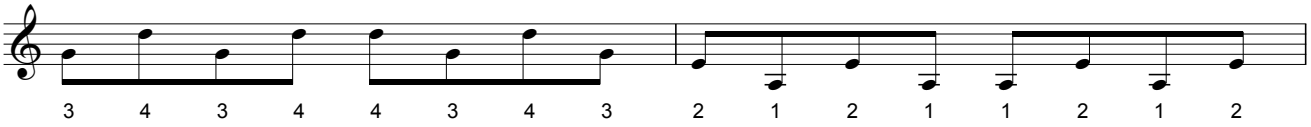
**1. Single Independent Inside:** Single notes played by the inside mallets.



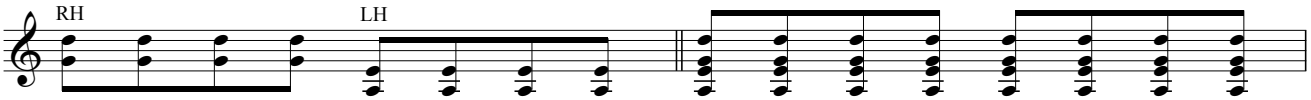

**2. Single Independent Outside:** Single notes played by the outside mallets.



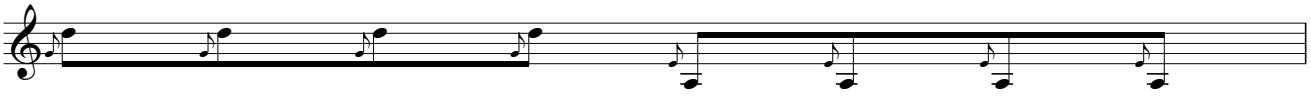

**3. Single Alternating:** Single note patterns to be played by the same hand, alternating the inside and outside mallets.



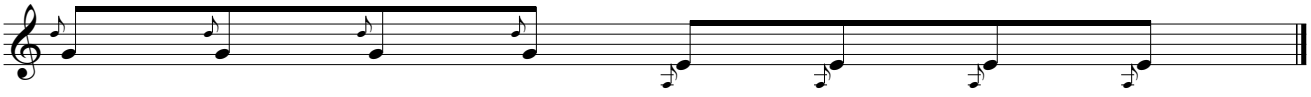

**4. Double Vertical:** Double notes to be played simultaneously by the same hand (or hands together).




**5. Double Lateral Inside:** Fast, rhythmically adjacent notes played by the same hand - inside mallet to outside mallet (2 - 1, or 3 - 4)



**6. Double Lateral Outside:** Fast, rhythmically adjacent notes played by the same hand - outside mallet to inside mallet (1 - 2, or 4 - 3)



*Independent Strokes*

# Independents

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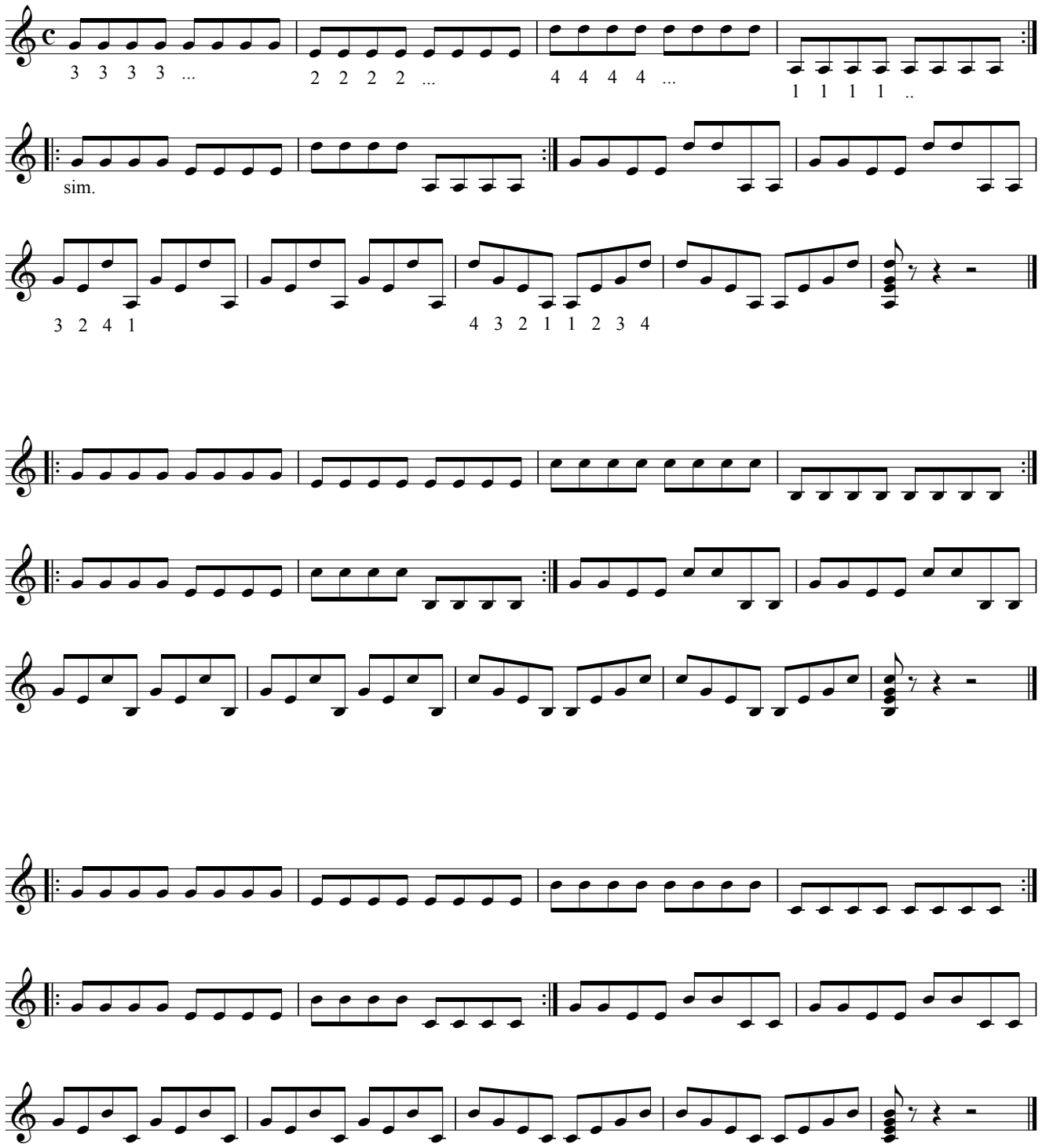
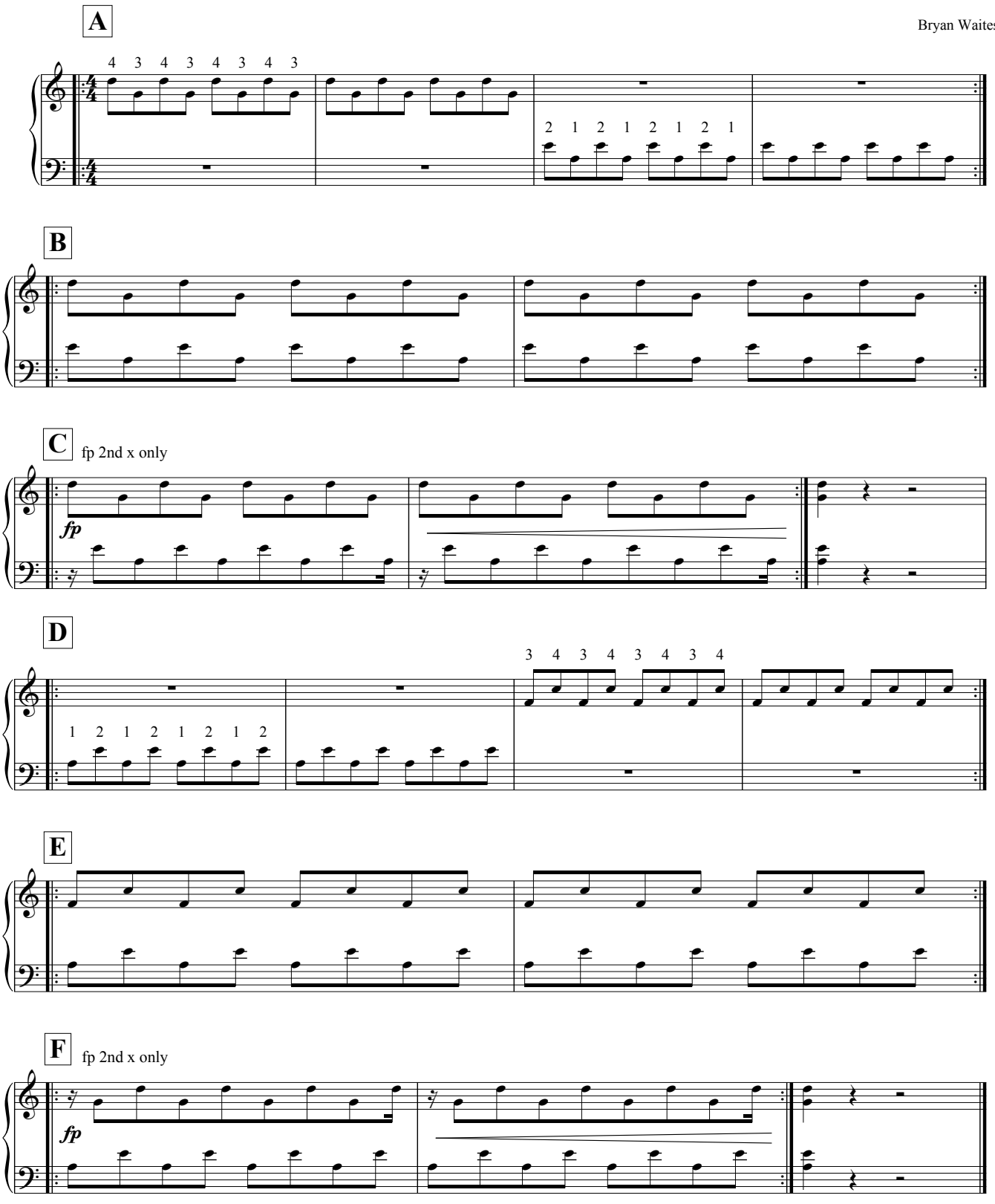


# Alternating Strokes

Bryan Waites

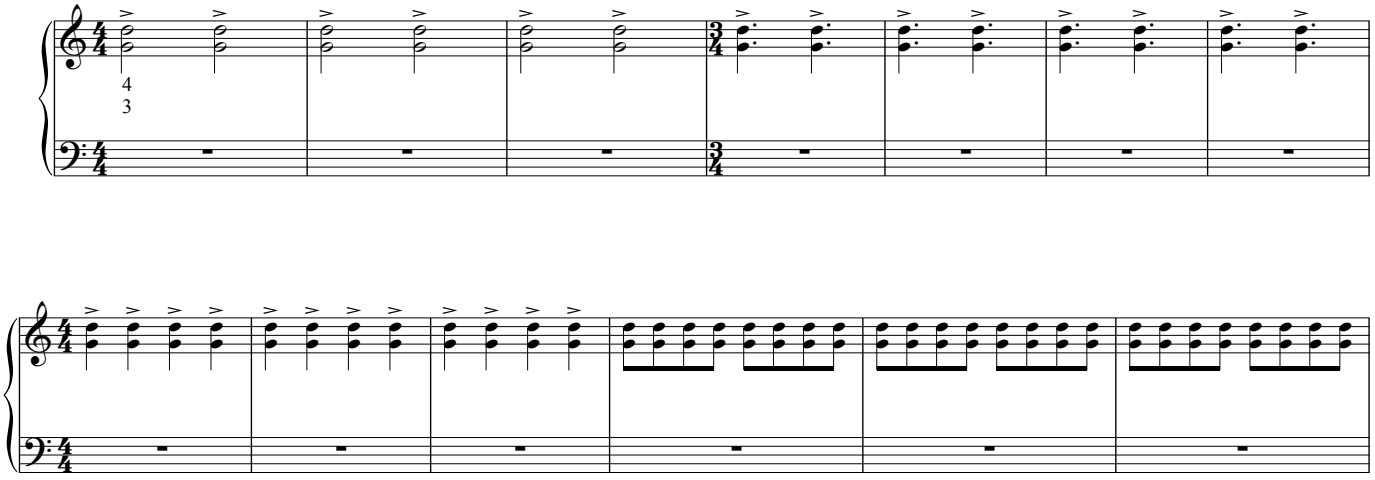


*Double Vertical Strokes*

# Verticals

**A**

Bryan Waites



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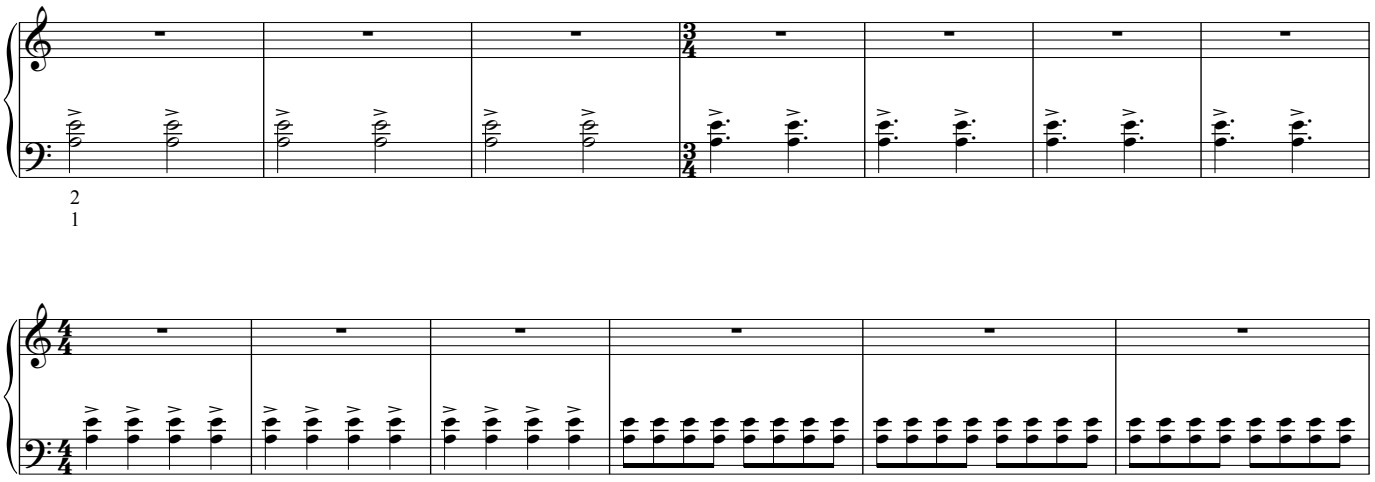

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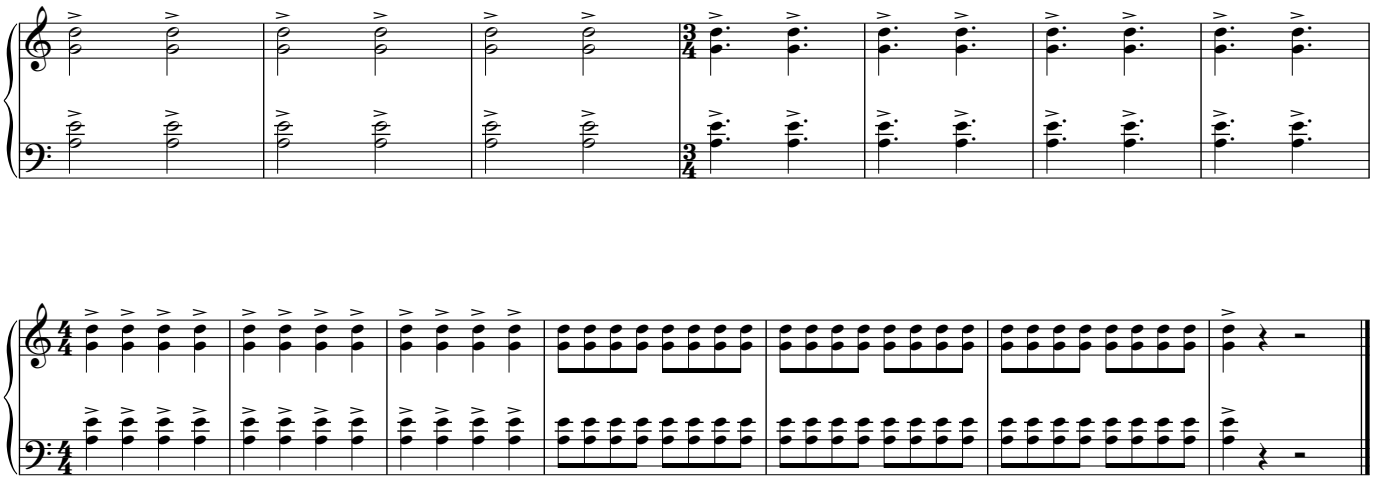
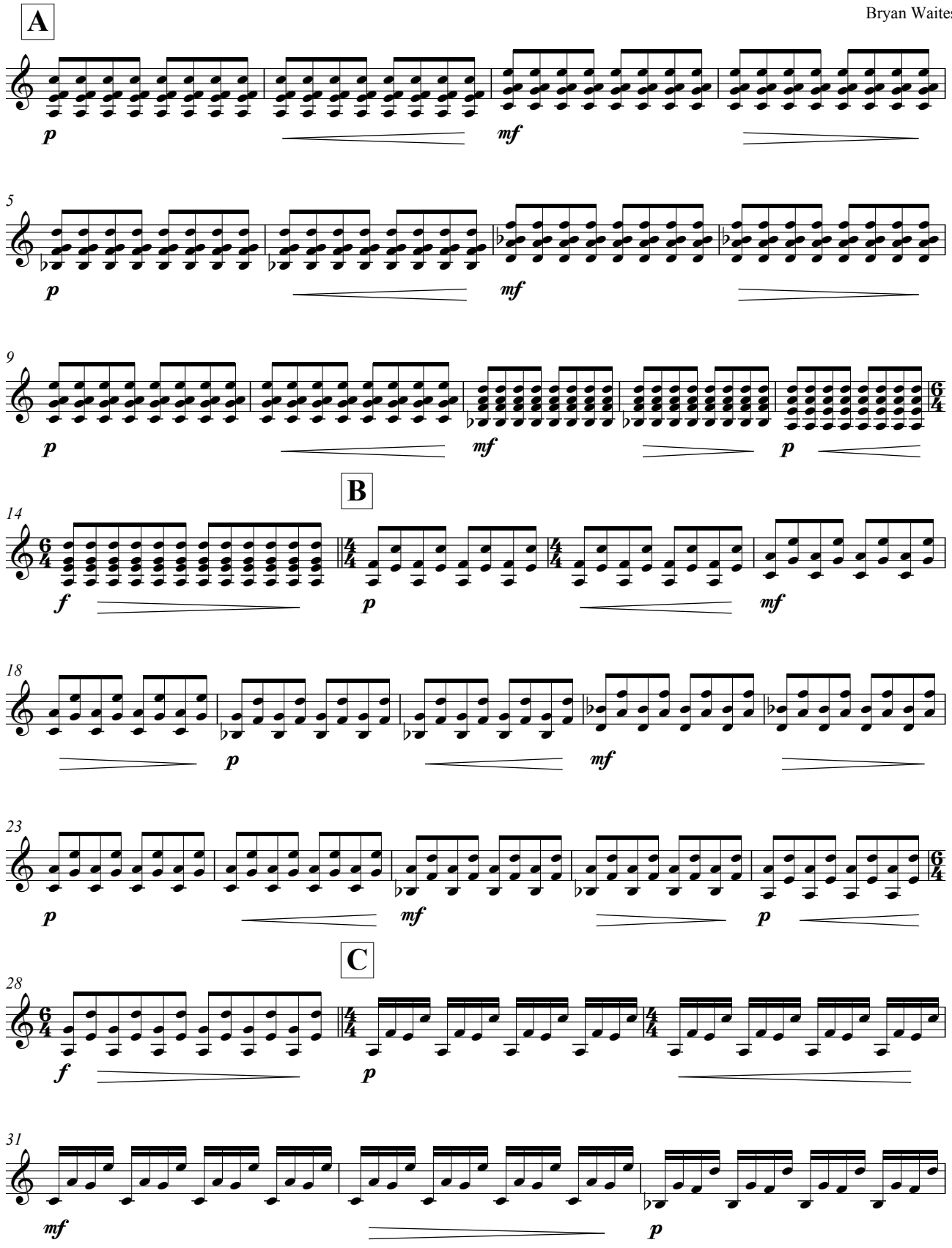
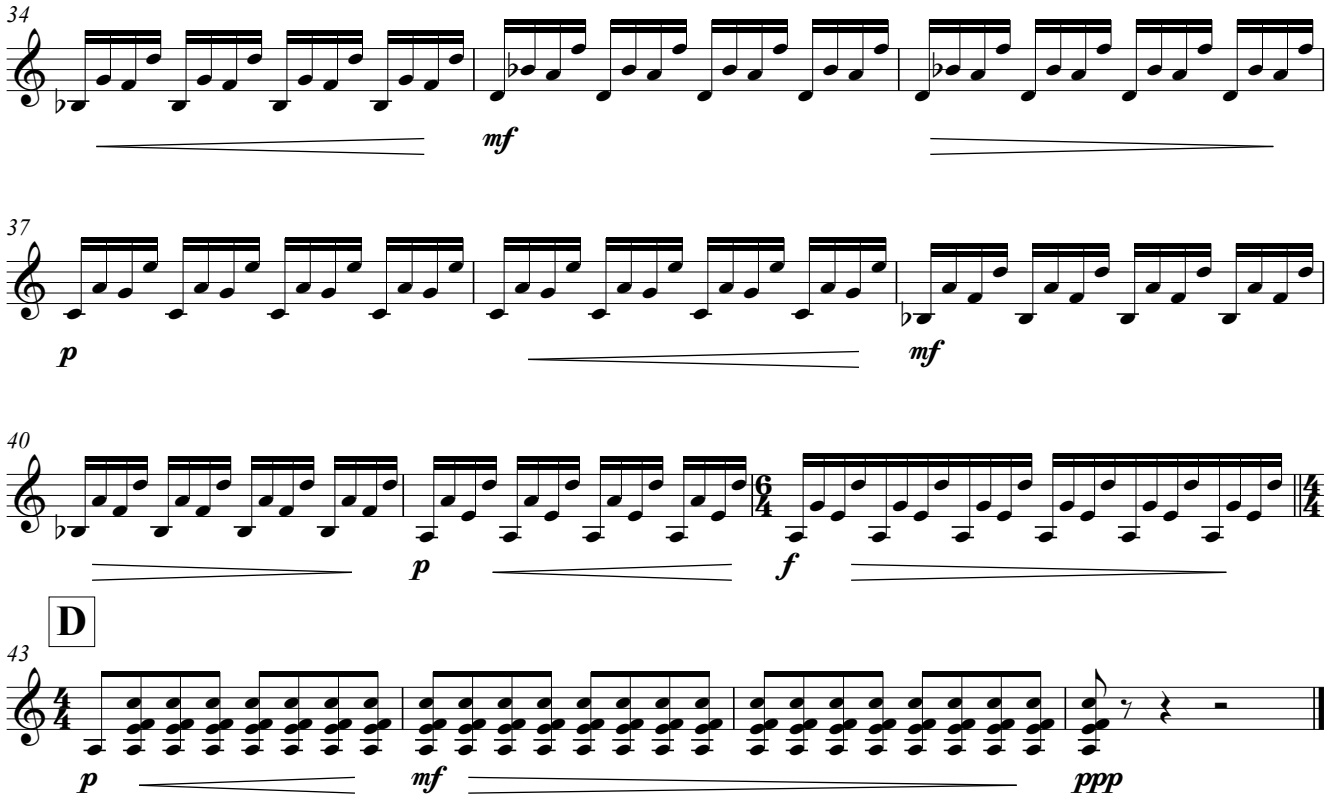


# Waves

Bryan Waites



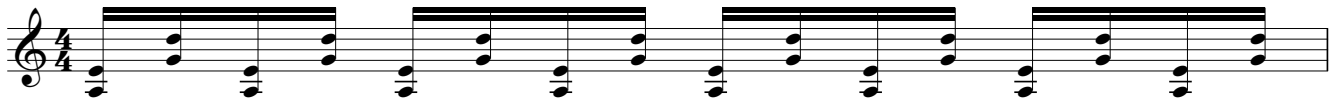
Waves - Page 2



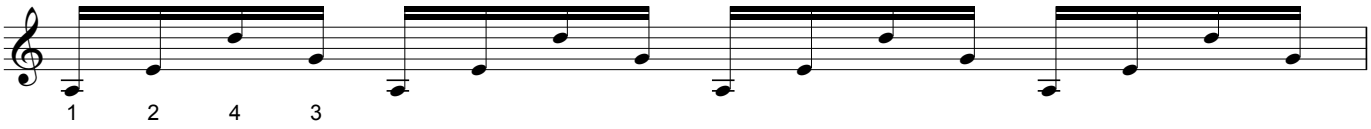
# 4 Mallet Roll Concepts

There are several methods of sustaining (rolling) pitches on keyboard instruments.
The following are the most commonly used:

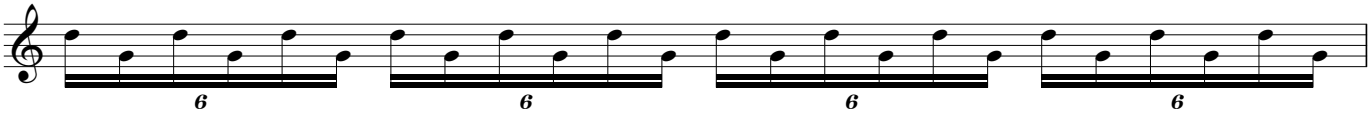
**Traditional Rolls:** Alternate double verticals between the hands.



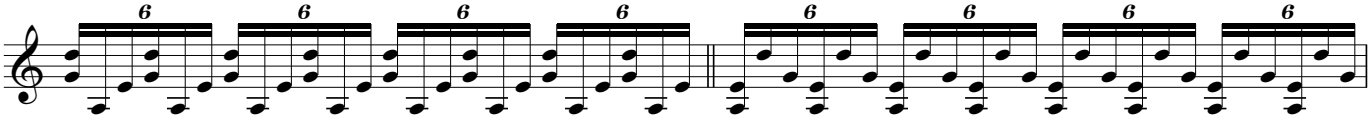
**Double Lateral Rolls:** Alternate any combination of double lateral strokes between the hands.



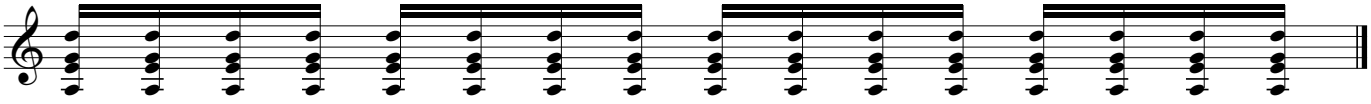

**Independent (One Handed) Rolls:** Sustain a pitch or pitches using both mallets in one hand.



**Combination Rolls:** Use double lateral strokes in one hand and double vertical strokes in the other.

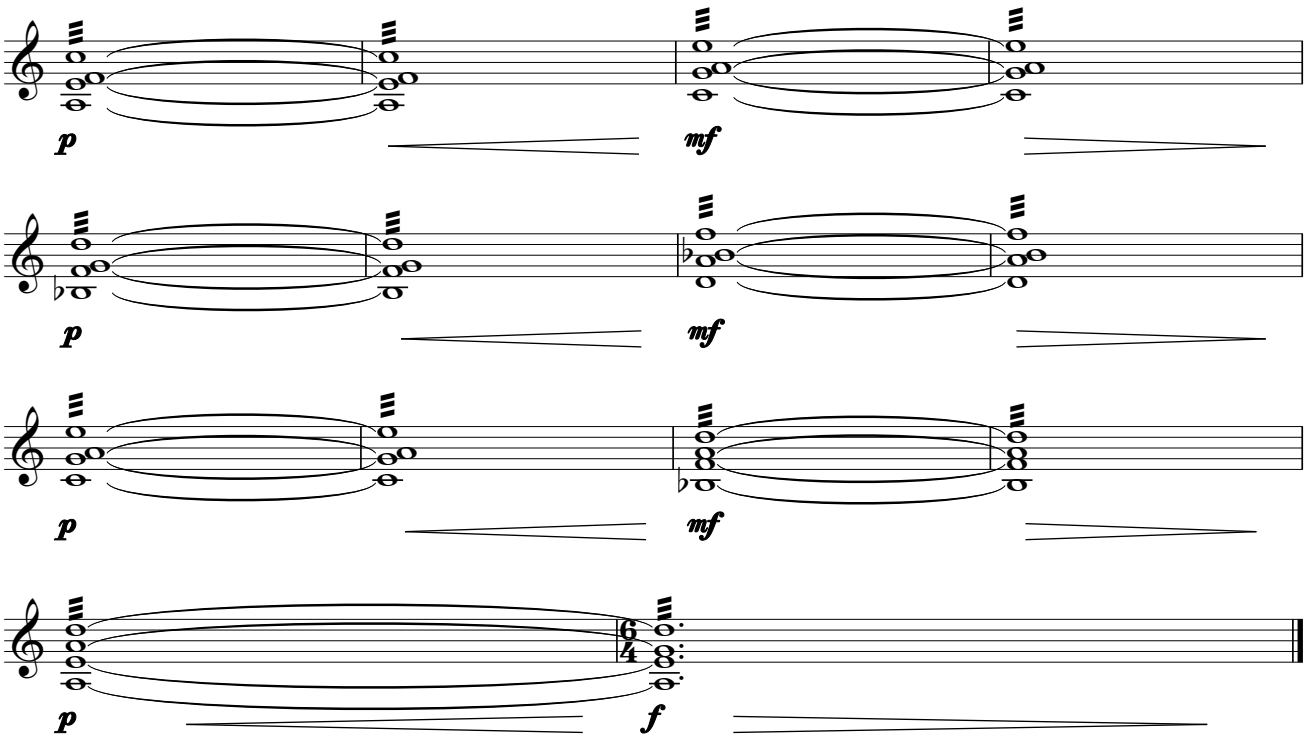


**Guatemalan Rolls:** Strike double verticals in both hands at the same time. Often these will change speeds in a rubato-type manner.



# 4 Mallet Roll Exercise

Bryan Waites




## Things to Keep in Mind:

### Roll Speed

Varying the roll speed is critical to a musically pleasing performance. Roll speed will vary according to register (lower register = slower roll; higher register = faster roll) and volume (soft = slower; loud = faster). The bottom line is to use your ears to create a pleasing, sustained sound. If you roll too fast you will distort the sound of the bar and if you roll too slow if will sound like an articulated rhythm.

### Relaxation

Performing different 4 mallet rolls, especially at the louder dynamics, can be challenging. Remember to stay relaxed so you are able to always create a smooth, musical look and sound.

### Mallet Choice

Often a softer mallet is the best choice for roll passages. Keep in mind the register you are playing in. Soft mallets in the higher registers often don't project and won't be hard enough to get the fullest fundamental tone out of the bar. Mallet choice, as always, should be determined by the specific musical goal.

### Roll Type

This exercise can be played using all of the roll types discussed earlier (Traditional, Double Lateral, Independent, Combination, and Guatemalan). Often times a unique musical texture can be created by combining different types of rolls between players, and/or changing roll type during the musical passage.