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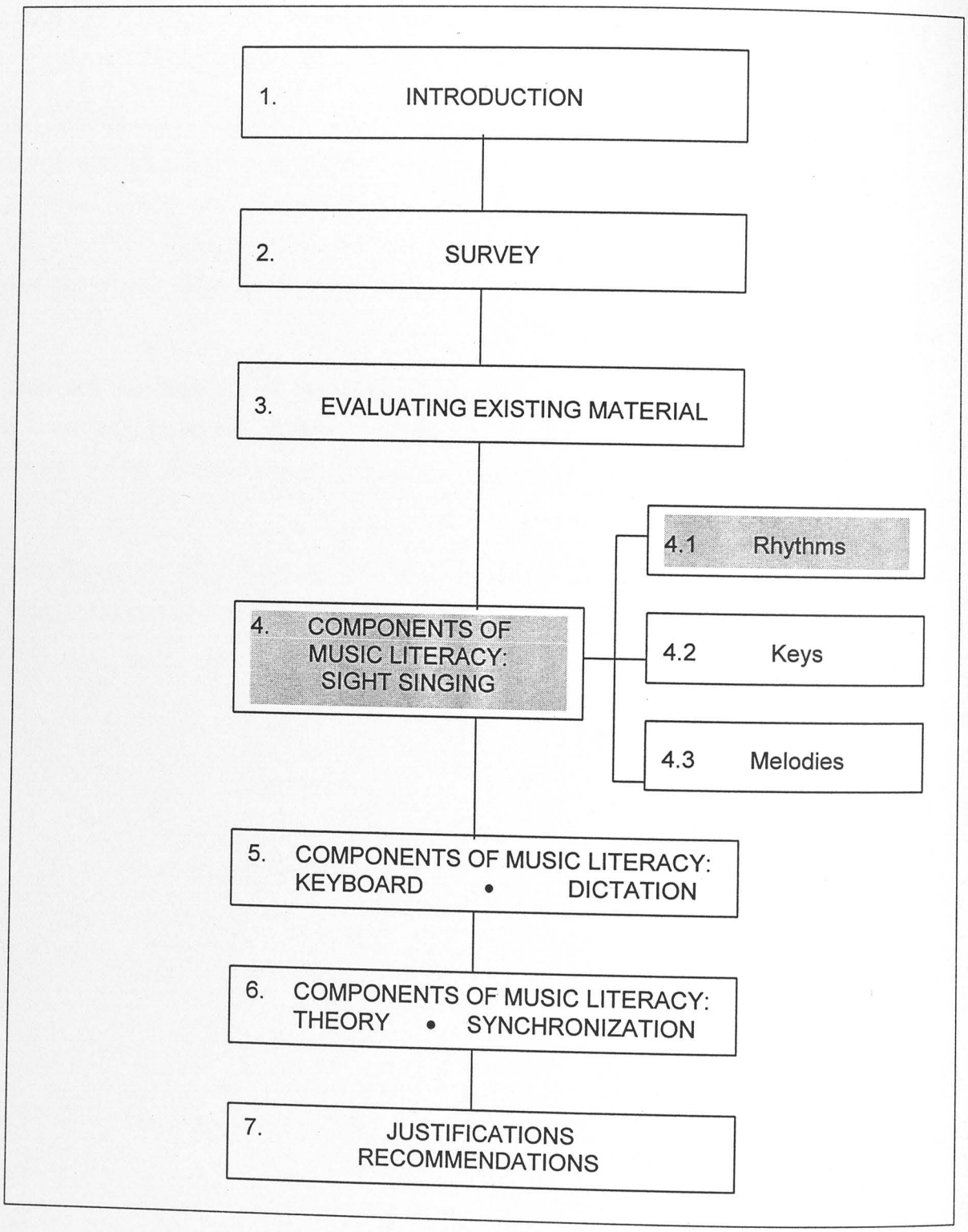
CHAPTER 4

Components of *Music Literacy*, the proposed programme: Sight Singing

4.1 Rhythms



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Contents for Rhythms

page

I. Notes on the use of this component 4-4

II. Time-beating 4-10

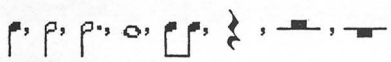
III. French time names *(adapted)* 4-11

IV. Note patterns *(adapted)* 4-12

V. Exercises: simple time, compound time, and the irregular & unusual 4-13

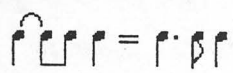
SIMPLE TIME:

Units 1-2: **Basic notes and rests:** 4-13

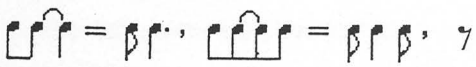


Unit 3: **Two-part writing** 4-17

Unit 4: 4-19



Unit 5: **Syncopated rhythms** 4-21



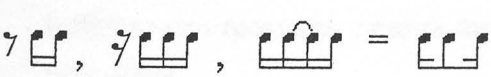
Unit 6: **Two-part writing** 4-23

Unit 7: 4-25

Unit 8: 4-27

Unit 9: **Two-part writing** 4-29

Unit 10: 4-31



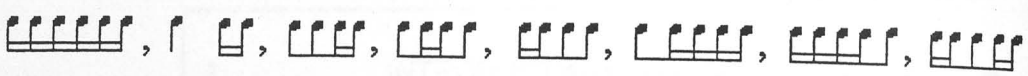
University of Pretoria etd – McLachlan, M M (2003)

page

COMPOUND TIME:

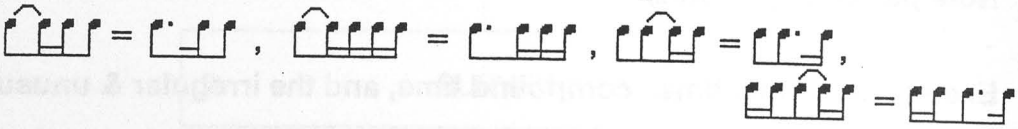
Unit 11: **Basic notes and rests** 4-33

Unit 12: 4-35

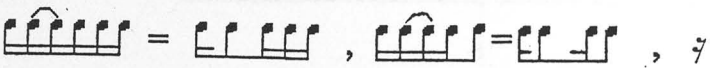


Unit 13: **Two-part writing** 4-37

Unit 14: 4-39



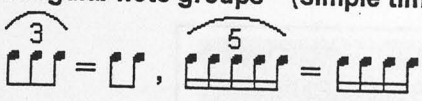
Unit 15: 4-41



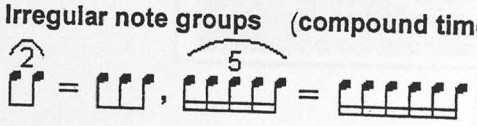
Unit 16: **Two-part writing** 4-43

THE IRREGULAR AND UNUSUAL:

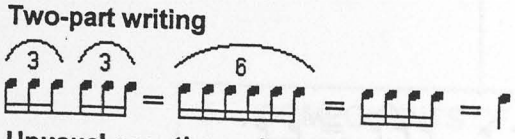
Unit 17: **Irregular note groups (simple time)** 4-45



Unit 18: **Irregular note groups (compound time)** 4-47



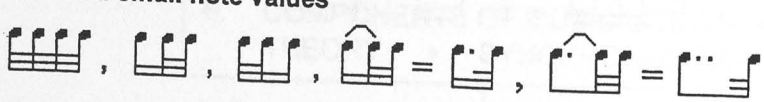
Unit 19: **Two-part writing** 4-49



Unit 20: **Unusual counting units** 4-51

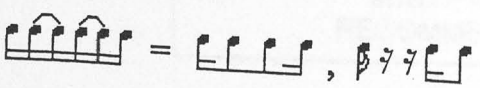
Unit 21: **Irregular metre** 4-53

Unit 22: **Unusual small note values** 4-55



Unit 23: **Two-part writing** 4-57

Units 24-25: **Variety** 4-59



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Notes on the use of this component

This component forms an integral part of the ***Music Literacy*** series. Together the five components in this set constitute a complete foundation programme. Hence, when studying **Sight Singing: Rhythms** it is necessary to bear in mind the contents of the other four components at the same time. Educators or facilitators should ideally be familiar with all five components in the series.

The five components are all interrelated. Used as a set, they gradually introduce learners to a full range of essential music literacy skills of increasing levels of complexity. They reinforce newly acquired skills musically through a variety of applications, integrating new competencies with existing abilities as learners progress.

The ***Music Literacy*** series has been developed to help a broad spectrum of learners achieve basic music literacy. The intention with the design of the series is to enable the user to proceed with confidence to further studies in a wide range of music fields.

More specifically the aim is to ensure that, on completion of the programme, learners will be able to:

- **sing** from notation in all major and minor keys, diatonically without modulation, in all commonly used metres
- **listen** to a given piece of music with the necessary insight and skill to:
  - ***identify*** basic elements such as character, form, cadences, harmony patterns, chords, and motif treatment
  - ***notate*** a simple melody on the stave
  - ***read*** a simple orchestral/vocal score
- **use the keyboard to:**
  - ***play*** four-part cadences and elementary harmonic progressions in all keys
  - ***assist themselves*** in independent analysis of music, sight singing activities, as well as theory and harmony
  - ***read and play*** elementary pieces
- **write general music theory and harmony** at the following levels:
  - **fulfilling pre-requisite criteria** for practical music examinations preceding the final grade
  - **making own elementary arrangements** for practical use
- **analyze** the form, structure, and harmony of an elementary piece of music.

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The contents of the five components in the series do not follow sequentially. Hence:

- With young children and total beginners, it is recommended beginning with 'Keyboard Introduction' (i.e. chapter 1 of **Keyboard Harmony and Music Dictation**) in conjunction with **Sight Singing: Rhythms** and **Sight Singing: Keys**.
- **Sight Singing: Melodies**, the remaining chapters of **Keyboard Harmony and Music Dictation**, as well as **Music Theory** should follow somewhat later.

The ***Music Literacy*** series employs a particular combination of music and learning conventions. To benefit fully from this approach, the user is advised to bear in mind the following:

Conventions used in Sight Singing: Rhythms

1. **New patterns appear at the top**. Where new matter such as note values or a new rhythm pattern is introduced, these new patterns appear at the top of the relevant unit. Familiar facts are, naturally, included in all exercises. For quick reference, consult the table of contents.

2. **Brackets linking lines** indicate that the lower line has been derived from the upper lines.

3. **Identifying the occurrence of each new pattern**. In order to benefit from the ***Music Literacy*** approach, users constantly need to apply new concepts to music they know quite well. Learners should be encouraged to think of representative examples from well-known songs whenever a new metre, the upbeat, a new rhythm pattern, etc. is introduced. Only when responses are inadequate or too time-consuming should educators offer examples. Applying new matter in this way promotes effective learning. The gratification derived from being able to recognize new patterns within familiar melodies, confirms the value of this approach. No specific melodies are suggested. Neither is the component restricted to learners of a specific age or developmental phase. This is also one way in which the component strives to create space for the expression of cultural diversity.

4. **Metre**. Triple time is used for introducing rhythm singing as it initially holds advantages over duple and quadruple time for purposes of learning. The basis for this choice is that:

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- **Accentuation is easier in triple time**. Although melodies and songs are often in quadruple time, accentuation comes more readily in triple metre. Besides, in quadruple time two different intensities of accentuation are required on the first and third beats of each bar. This compounds the high number of facts to take into account when beginning to read rhythms.

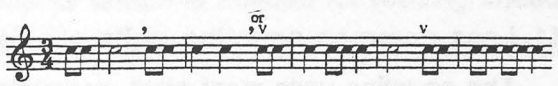
- **Bars and phrases are naturally shorter** in triple time than in quadruple time. Hence in triple time they are easier to follow as a whole.

- **Duple time is less common in general**. Moreover, given the limited possibilities of the rhythm patterns in its short bars, few exercises in duple metre appear in this component.

5. **Phrasing is not marked in the notation**. This is left to the user's taste and understanding of the music. Musical phrasing and comfortable breathing go hand-in-hand. This is essential for making musical sense. It is therefore always expected, also of the beginner in the initial phase.

   Inner phrasing and the highlighting of inner rhythms (motifs) are brought about through slight breaks without breathing and/or by means of accentuation. Such interpretation details would normally be expected of more experienced and, therefore, more advanced users.

6. **Natural breaks for breathing** occur mainly after long notes and/or at rests. Breathing at a bar line is the exception, not the rule, as the majority of phrases and rhythm motifs begin with an upbeat. However, sequences often necessitate breathing at a bar line. The main breathing moments obviously occur at definite cadence points. Other breathing moments, as mentioned above, depend on the user. It is recommended that the user mark all phrasing after the first run-through. This is done above the stave to be obvious, with e.g.:
   - a tick for definite breathing
   - a comma for inner phrases/rhythms.



7. **Eight-bar exercises**. The initial exercises, and most of the subsequent ones, are eight bars long. Symmetrical two- and four-bar phrases fall most naturally into place. One- and three-bar phrases and phrases differing in length occur only once the concept of regularity has been established.

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8. **Reinforcement of new materials**. The last few lines in every unit are a culmination of all the new matter dealt with. This is often in the form of pure technical exercises. Should the user find them too demanding initially, these exercises may be omitted. However, return to them when confirmation of the work is required.

9. **Clefs and pitch**. The exercises use clefs, in contrast to many existing rhythm training systems that mostly omit them. The rationale is that learners should become acquainted with these signs at the beginning of a stave, as the notation for almost all instruments makes use of a clef. The choice of a comfortable pitch, though, is left to the learner. In two-part exercises, nevertheless, good intonation is easiest to obtain when singing an interval of a third or sixth apart. Notes are written in the second and third spaces not to indicate specific pitch, but for ease in reading. This is necessary particularly where horizontal lines are used to group the smaller note values together. Using clefs also keep both learner and educator aware of the requirement to 'sing' rhythms on a specific pitch.

10. **Two-part exercises** make use of the material from the two preceding units. The very last and often tricky patterns are, however, sometimes avoided in the two-part work. This is to promote comfortable reading and to enable the user to attend to interpretation. It brings about spontaneous sight singing and enjoyable ensemble work, an aspect that can obviously only be experienced in two-part exercises.

    Many important composition techniques such as echo, contrasting rhythms, musical dialogue, canon, inverted counterpoint, and ostinato can occur only in part-work. This excludes implied part-writing in a single line for melody instruments or voice. Exercises in which, for example, parts take turns to be active, provide the player/singer with the opportunity to produce as well as to listen to rhythm patterns. In this way rhythm training becomes at one and the same time an objective and also a subjective, participative exercise.

11. **Less common counting units** are dealt with in the latter part of the component. The counting units most often encountered in beginner's music (for instrumentalists and singers) are and in simple and compound time respectively. The more unusual counting units should only be introduced once learners can read all the basic patterns comfortably. When less common counting units are used too soon it may result in confusion, especially in compound time.

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12. **French time names** are strongly recommended for initial reading. (See adapted Chevé system pp. 4-11, 4-12.) Once a learner is acquainted with all the basic rhythm patterns and all phrasing has been marked, these time names may be replaced by a single syllable of one's own choice. Windplayers, for example, can use ***du*** or ***tu***, while singers might prefer ***nô***. This is a direct technical preparation for the specific instrument. At the same time this simplification enables the user to attend more closely to interpretation.

13. **Rhythms should initially be sung** and not tapped, clapped, or said. Singing necessitates breathing and thereby encourages phrasing. The awareness of musically sensible phrasing is, therefore, imprinted in a natural way. Moreover, learners using the voice as their instrument interpret far better. This is because the voice lends itself best to the subtle rendering of various accents and tone colour nuances, as well as to presenting the exact value of notes and rests.

    Once the patterns have been recognized, learners could be asked to beat time with the appropriate hand-arm movements while singing. (See p. 4-10 for arm movements in the various metres.) This will assist them in keeping a steady beat. If learners prefer, they may also tap the main beats with their feet while singing. Clapping is not recommended at all. The hands are necessary for beating and/or playing, holding the music, paging or pointing. Besides, hands are clumsier than the tongue, as bigger muscles and hence longer levers are being employed when using the hands. Then it becomes almost impossible to attend to very quick notes and the finer details of accentuation. This is apart from the disregard for breathing and phrasing that frequently occurs when learners clap rather than sing rhythms.

14. **Steady beats are essential**. The ability to maintain a stable beat needs to be developed from the beginning. This should be applied throughout in all kinds of music exercises. It is only by continuously reading ahead that a basic steadiness can be obtained. The choice of a comfortable tempo is needed for reading ahead. Only then will learners be enabled to maintain a regular beat, in every exercise, at all times. This aspect should be a priority, as the musical success of any exercise depends firstly on a solid rhythm framework. Time inflections can only be of musical significance when done against a background of a precise, rhythmical rendering.

    An inner steady pulse is best developed through a group situation, where learners are required to keep up with the rest of the group. This cannot be generated

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effectively by a metronome. However, the metronome does remain a good device for monitoring main beats.

15. **Note values and time signatures through accidental learning**. Explanation of the arithmetic of note values and time signatures is not necessary. Instead it is recommended that the educator should begin directly with singing the first line on French time names as an example. Learners have to repeat this several times to ensure safe association, before continuing with the next line. The counting unit can then be called by its English name, i.e. crotchet, but definitely also by the Germanic/American term, i.e. quarter note. The latter usually suffices for the necessary arithmetical understanding.

    By the end of the third line, most learners have usually come to grips with the note values involved here through accidental learning. The other note values are minim for half note, semibreve for whole note, the equivalent rests, and the dotted minim. Thereafter follow two quavers/eighth notes per crotchet.

    By pointing out the three and four beats per bar according to the **time signatures** in blocks (see Unit 1), any possible remaining uncertainties can be clarified. The **upbeat** can be treated in the same way, with the last incomplete bar simply connecting with the upbeat.

16. **Short cuts to basic note values and main rhythm patterns**

- **Overview**: A learner who needs a rapid overview of basic note values and main rhythm patterns, needs to sing and study only those units introducing new information at the top.
- **Refresher**: On the other hand, learners wanting to refresh and consolidate their existing knowledge need to select only the remaining units, i.e. those without new patterns at the top. These units integrate new information with familiar facts and apply them musically. This also happens in the units with two-part exercises, as discussed in 10 above.
- **Semiquavers sooner**: Learners often need basic semiquaver patterns quite soon in their playing/singing. For this reason Unit 4 can be followed by Unit 7. The in-between exercises, with concentration on syncopated quaver patterns, can be returned to afterwards.

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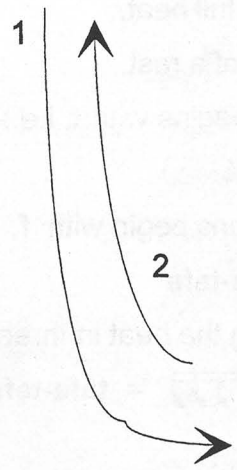
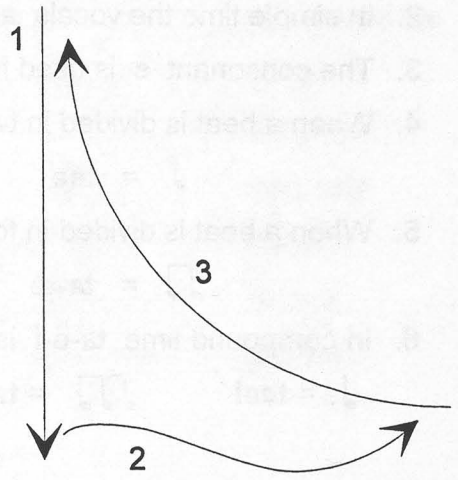
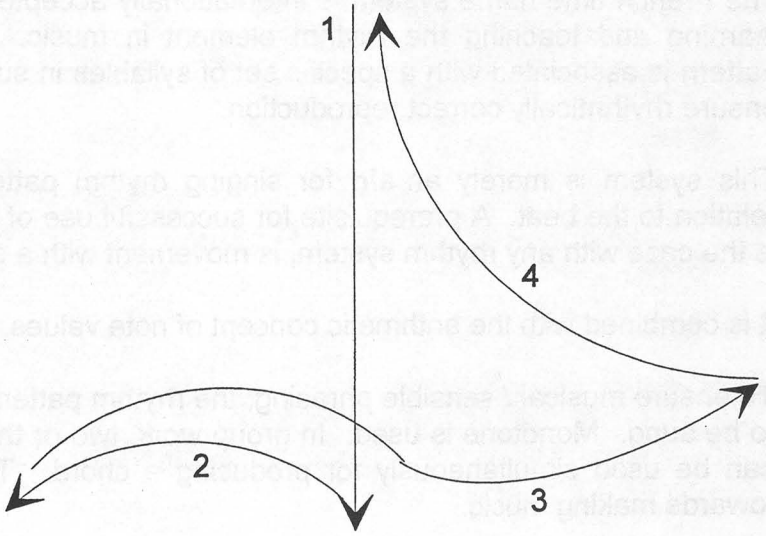
Time-beating



Duple time



Triple time



Quadruple time

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French time names *(adapted)*

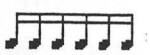
1. The consonants **t** and **f** are used to begin a note.
2. In simple time the vocals **ae** are used for a full beat.
3. The consonant **s** is used for the beginning of a rest.
4. When a beat is divided in two, the division begins with **t**, i.e.:

= **tae** = **ta-té**

5. When a beat is divided in four, the subdivisions begin with **f**, i.e.:

= **ta-té** = **tafa-tefe**

6. In compound time **ta-e-i** is used for dividing the beat in three, i.e.:

= **taei** = **ta-té-ti**  = **tafa-tefe-tifi**

Purpose and application

1. The French time name system is internationally accepted and used for learning and teaching the rhythm element in music. Every rhythm pattern is associated with a specific set of syllables in such a way as to ensure rhythmically correct reproduction.

2. This system is merely an **aid** for singing rhythm patterns fluently in relation to the beat. A prerequisite for successful use of this system, as is the case with any rhythm system, is movement with a steady beat.

3. It is combined with the arithmetic concept of note values.

4. To ensure musical / sensible phrasing, the rhythm patterns always have to be sung. Monotone is used. In group work, two or three monotones can be used simultaneously for producing a chord. This contributes towards making music.

5. It should be noted that **a** always occurs as the first part, i.e. the strong part of the beat.

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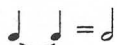
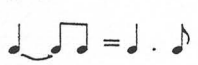
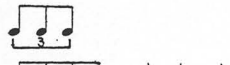
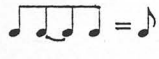
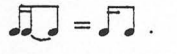
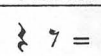
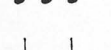
Note patterns *(adapted)*

Simple time

Notes:		*Rests:*	
	tae		sae
	tae-ae		sae-ae
	tae-ae-ae		sae-ae-ae
	tae-ae-ae-ae		sae-ae-ae-ae
	ta-té		sa-té
	tae-a-té		tae-a-sé
	tafa-tefe		safa-tefe
	ta-tefe		sa-tefe
	tafa-té		tafa-sé
	ta-efe		ta-sefe
	ta-té-ti		
	ta-té-a-té		
	tafa-é		
	tafa-efe		tafa-sefe

Compound time

Notes:		*Rests:*	
	taéi		saéi
	ta-té-ti		sa-té-ti
	taéiaéi		
	taé-ti		taé-si
	ta-téi		ta-séi
	tafa-tefe-tifi		safa-tefe-tifi
	tafa-té-ti		
	ta-tefe-ti		
	ta-té-tifi		
	taé-tifi		
	tafa-téi		
	ta-efe-ti		ta-sefe-ti
	ta-efe-tifi		

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Rhythms

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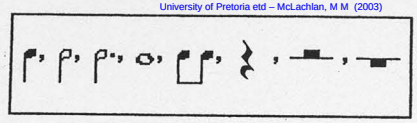
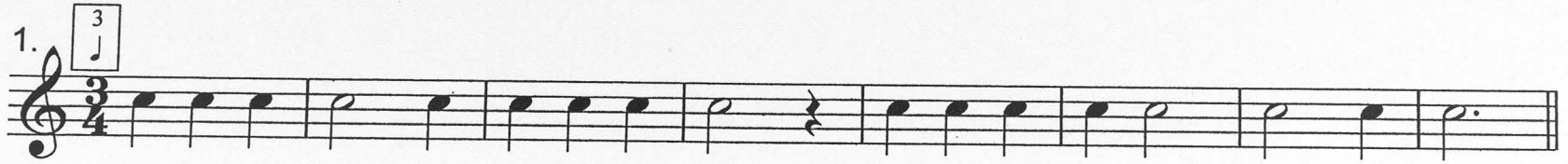


SIMPLE TIME

Unit 1

1.



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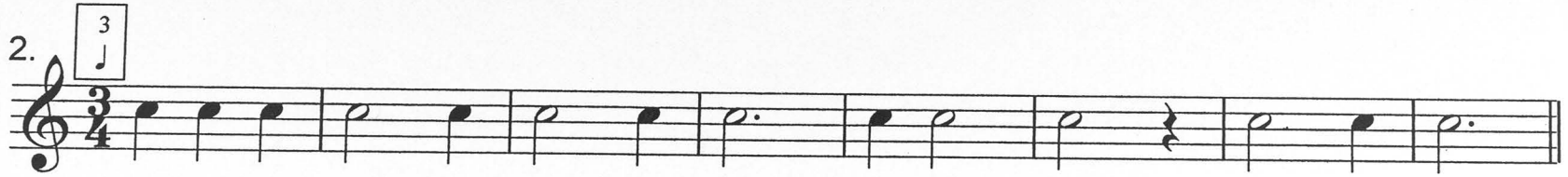

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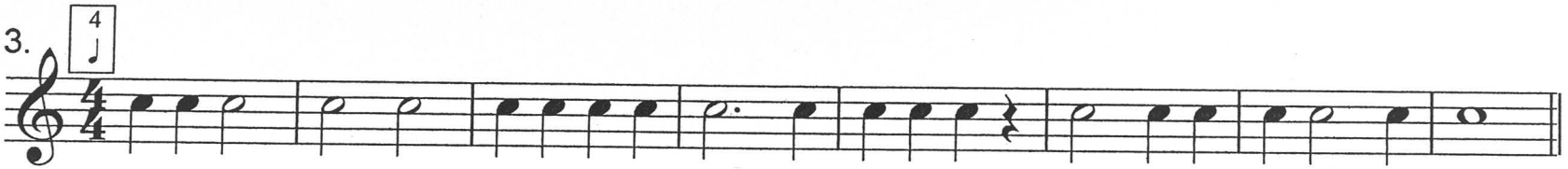

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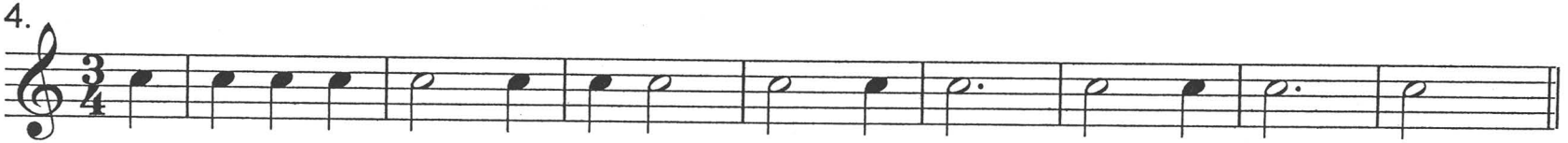

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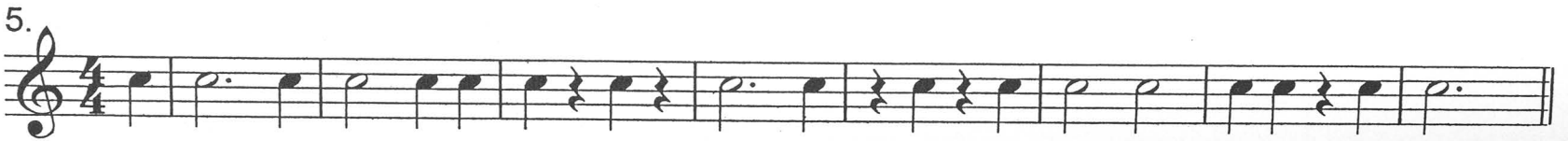

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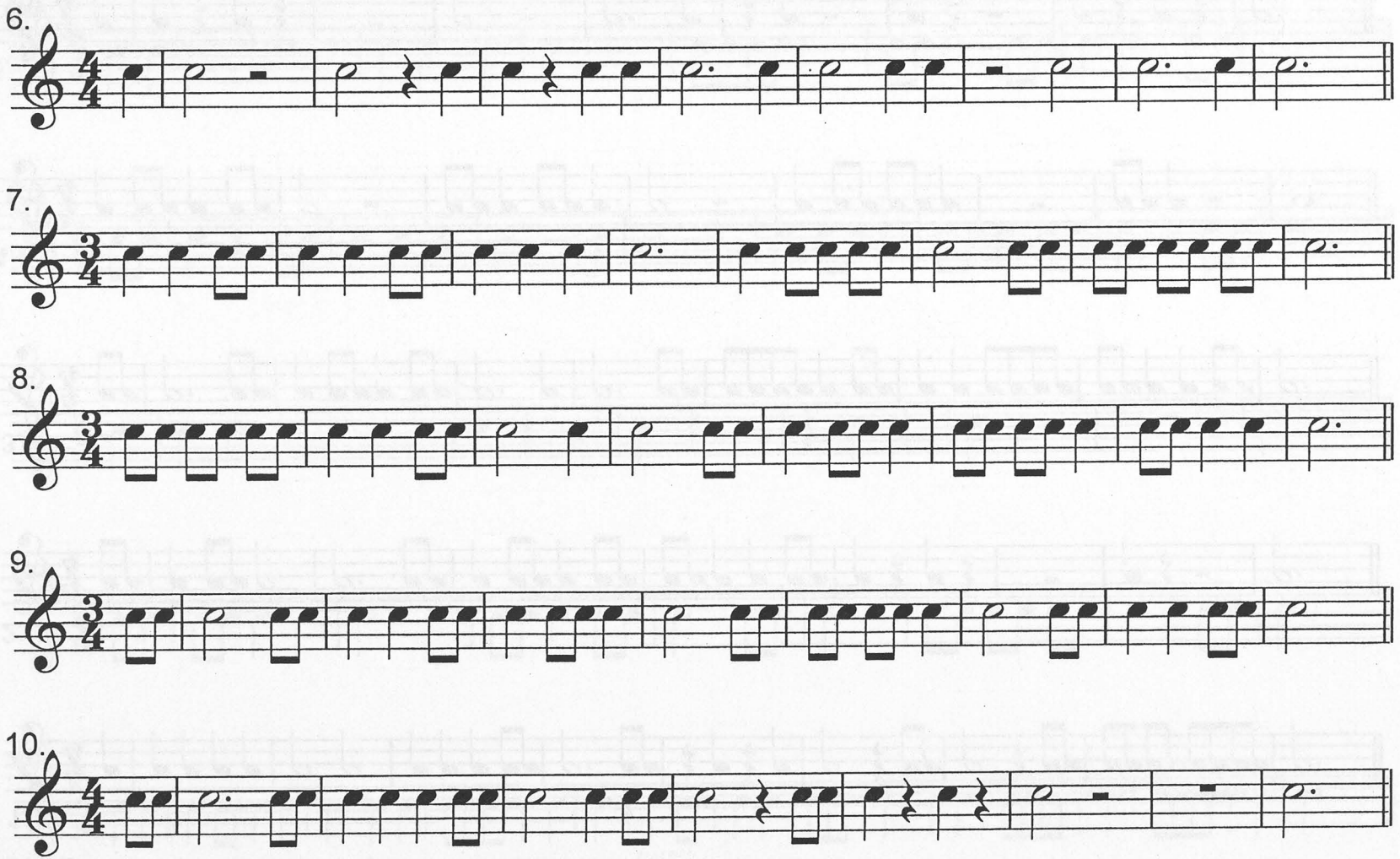

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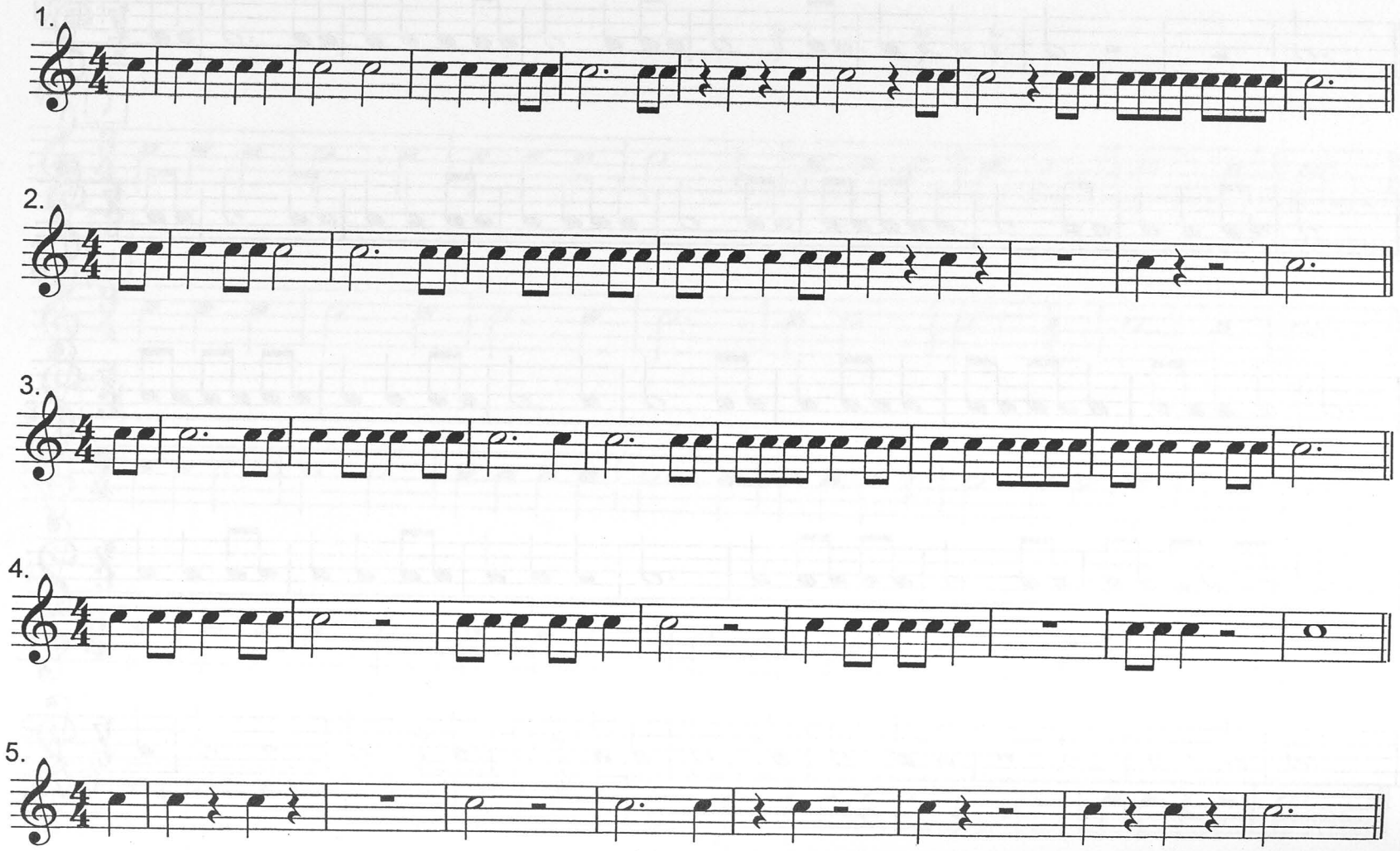
Unit 2



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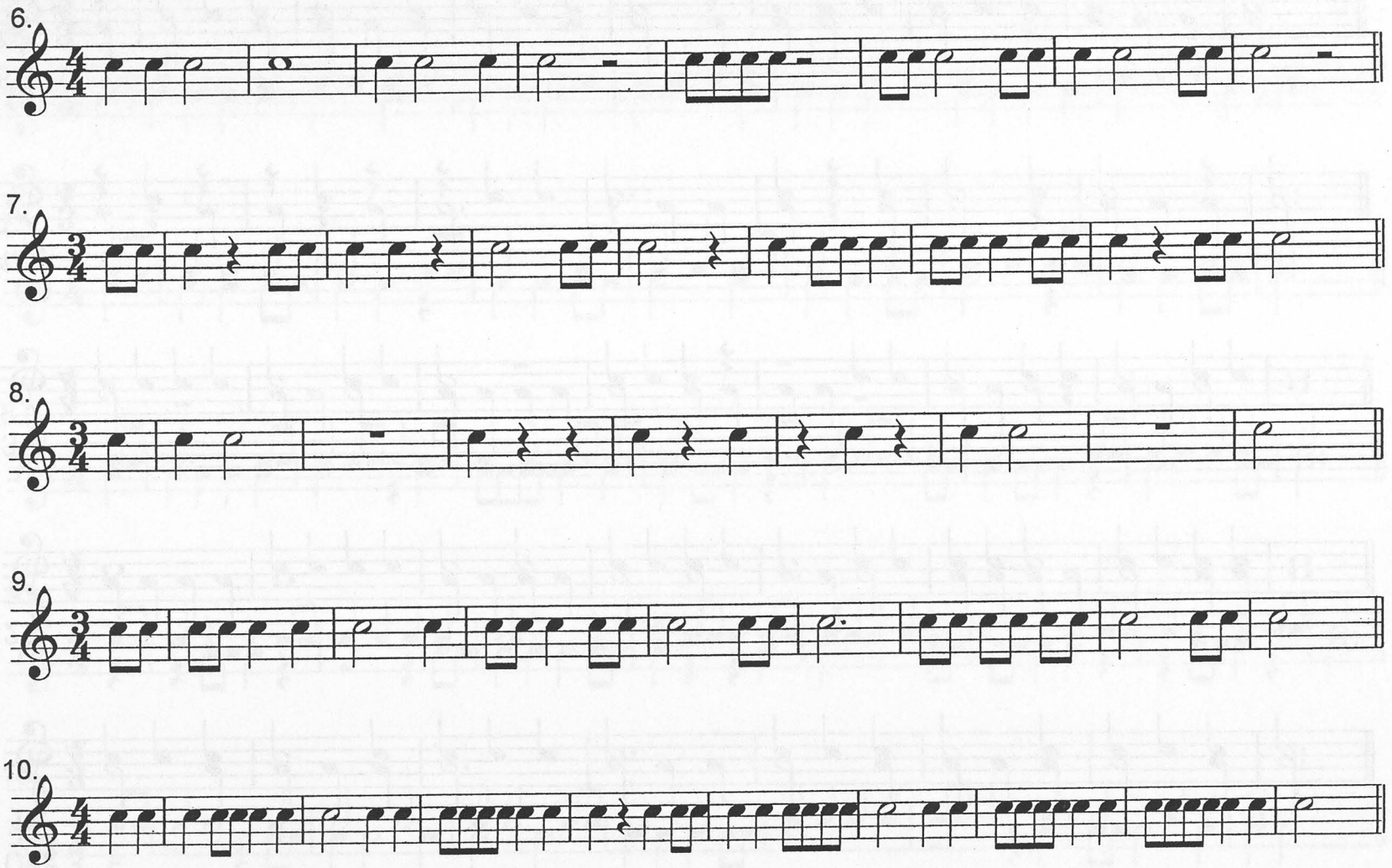

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Unit 3

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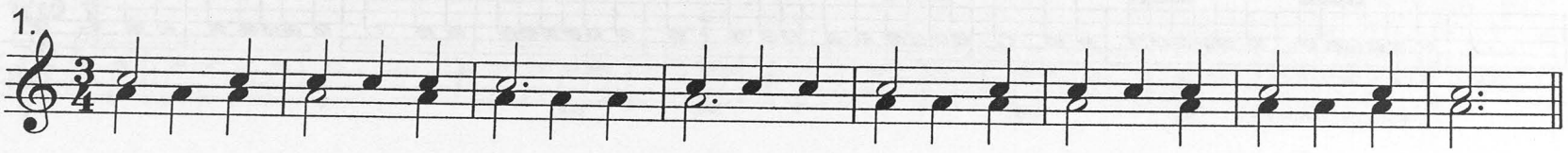

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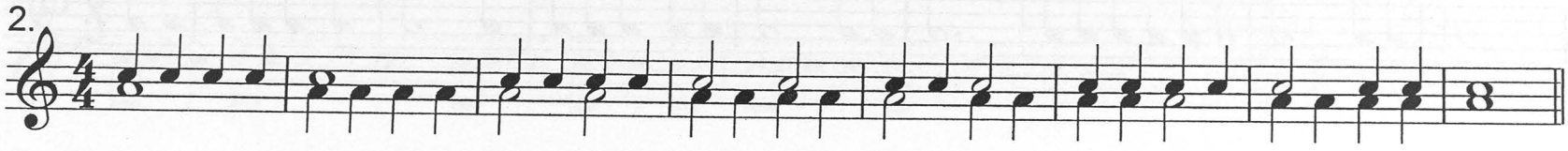

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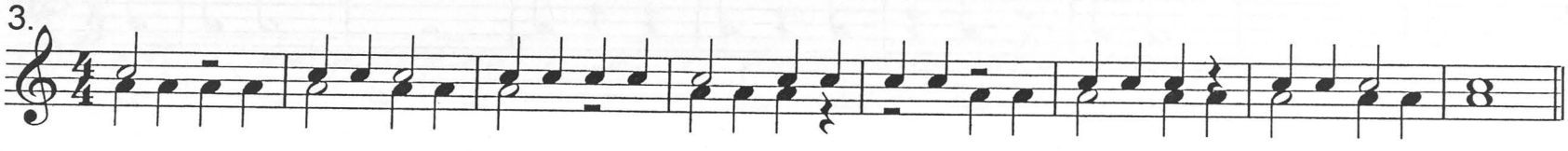

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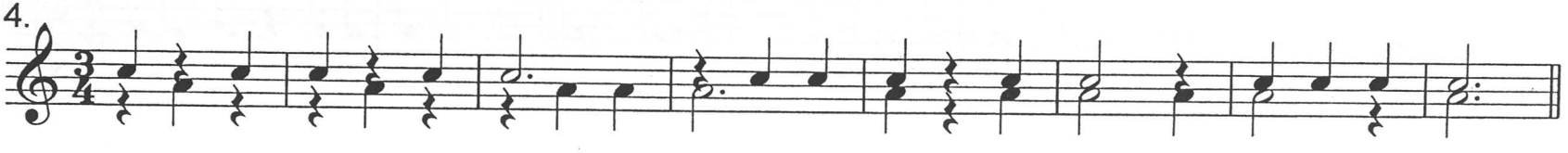

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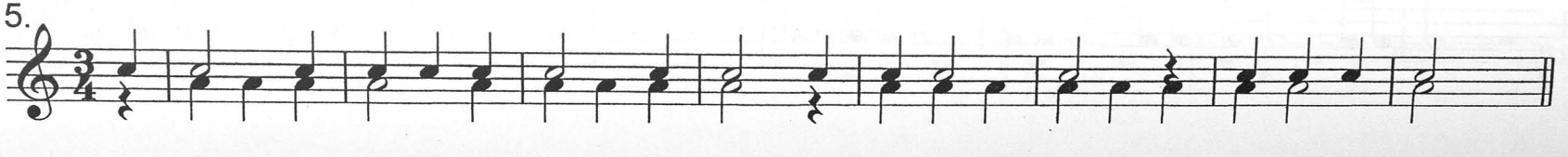

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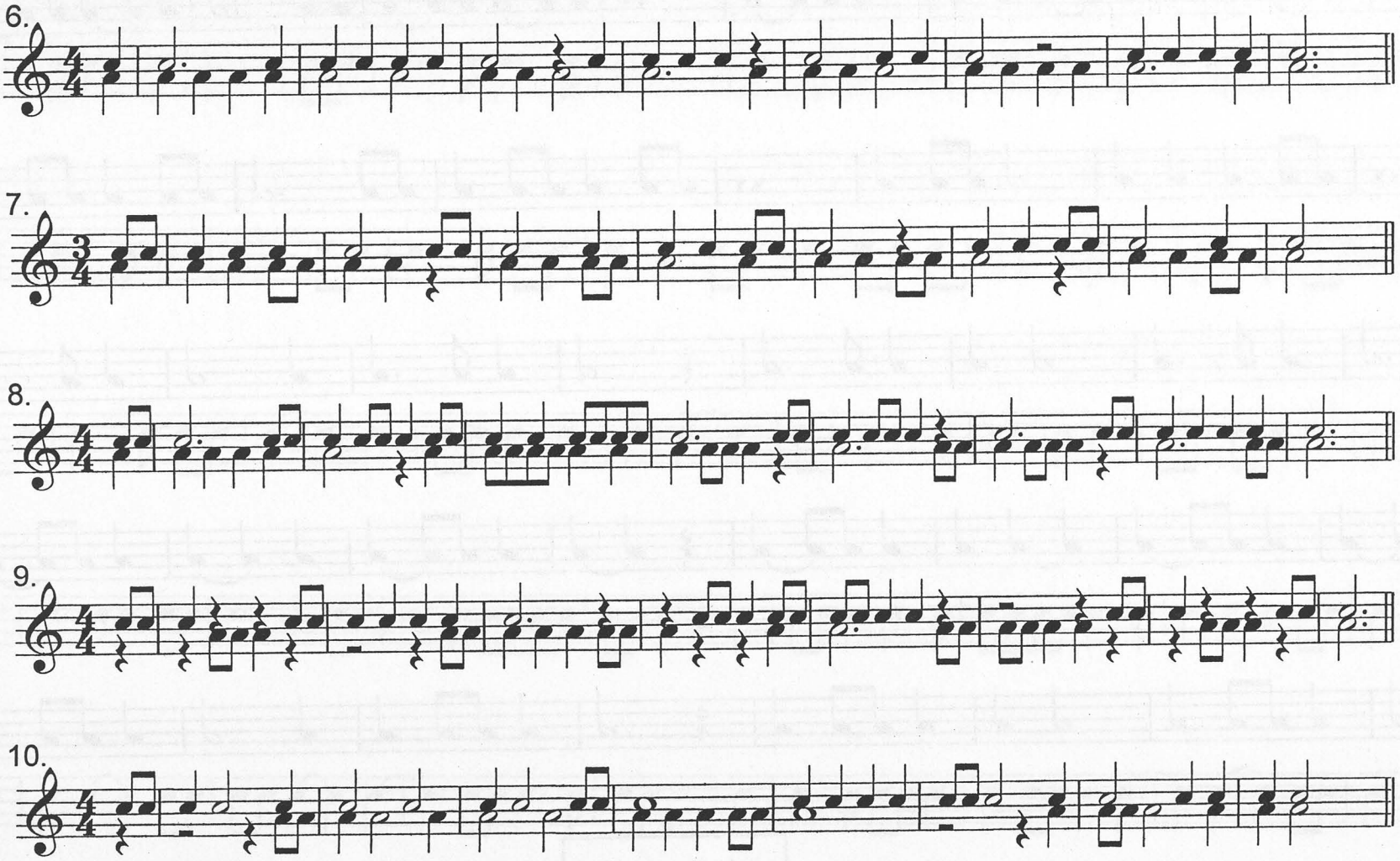

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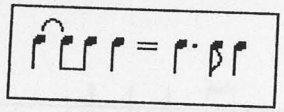

Unit 4

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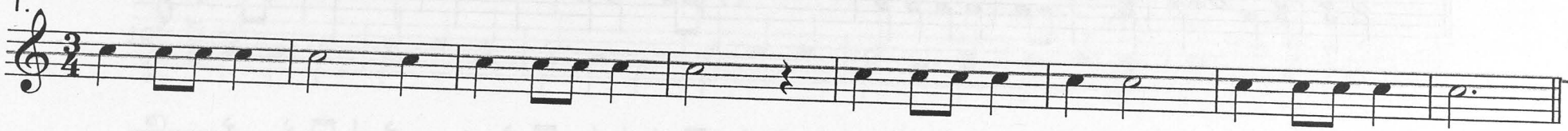

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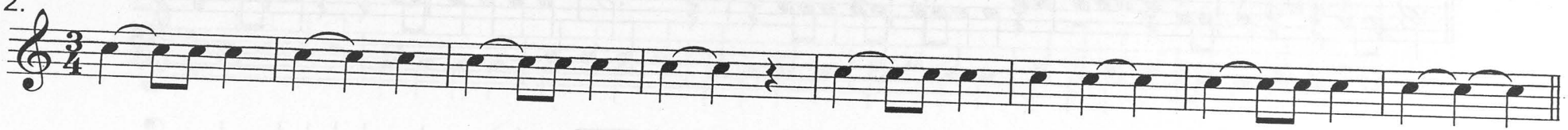

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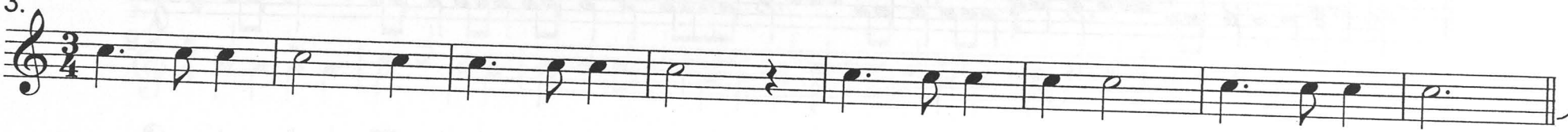

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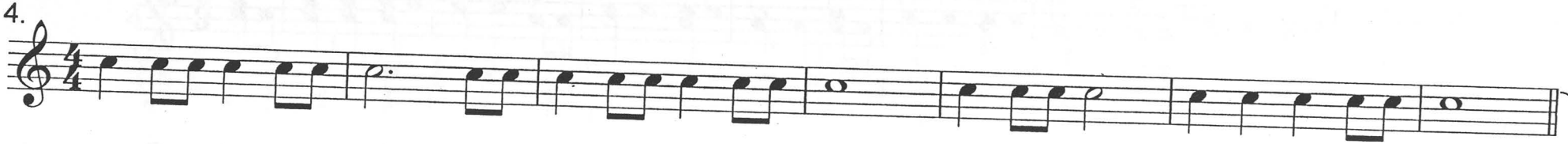

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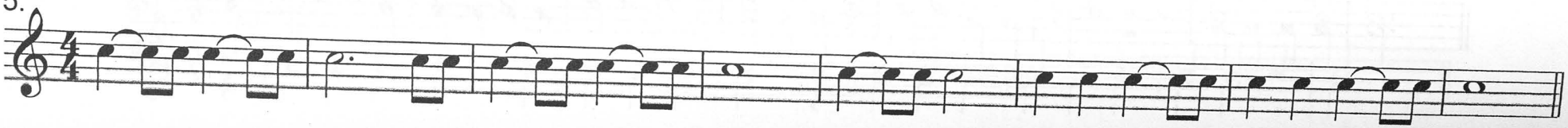

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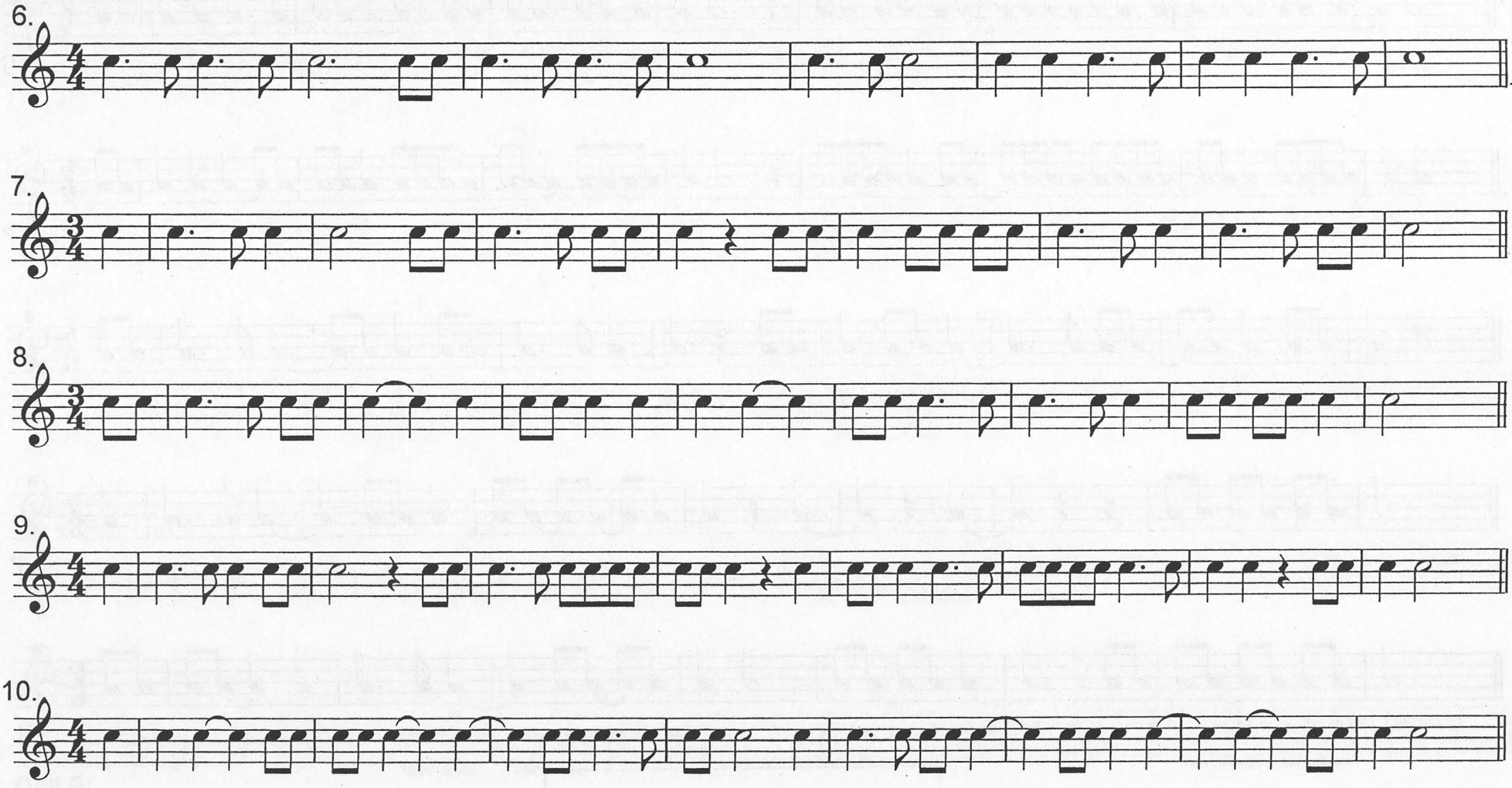

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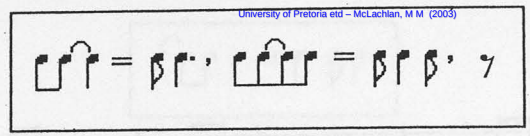
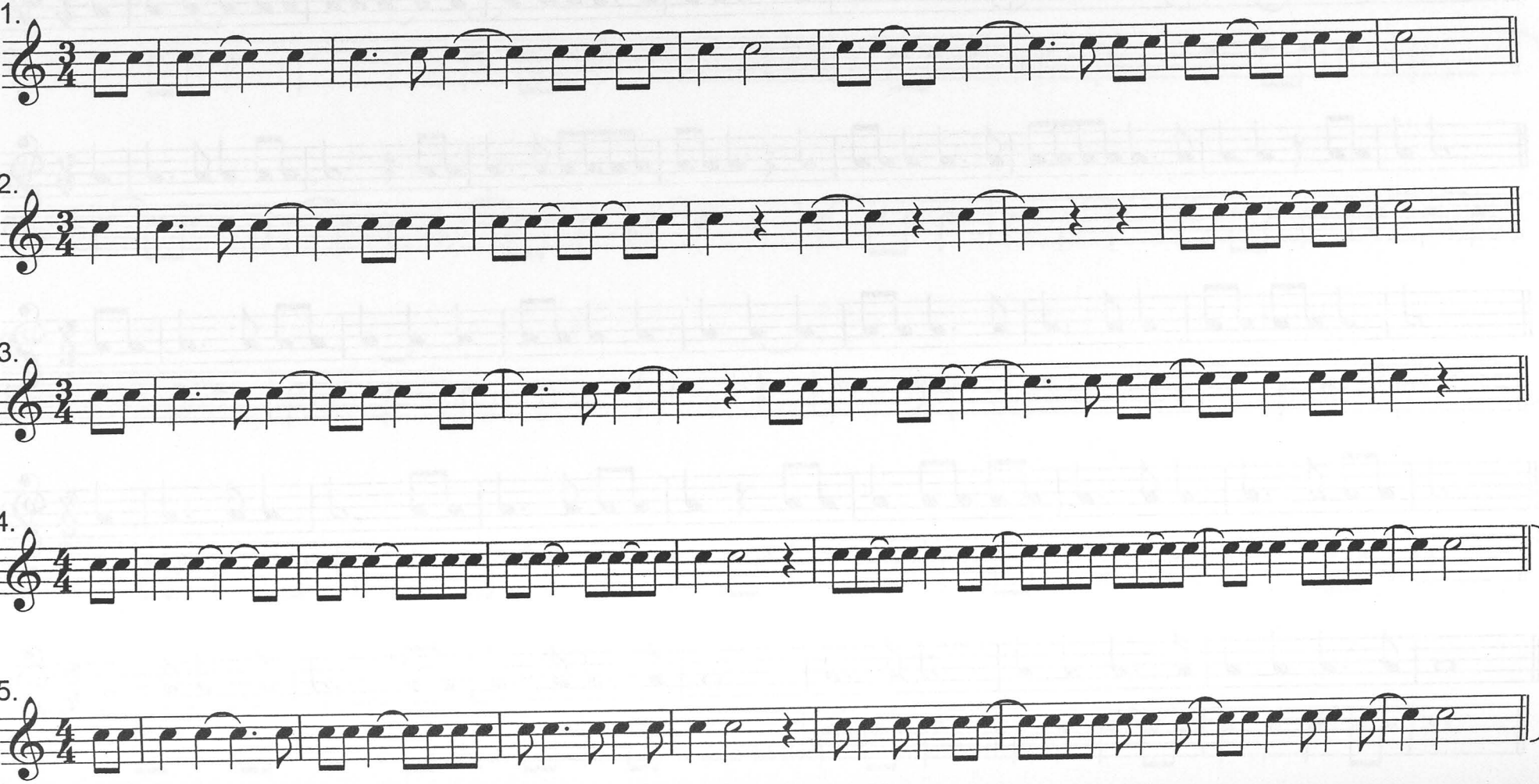


Unit 5



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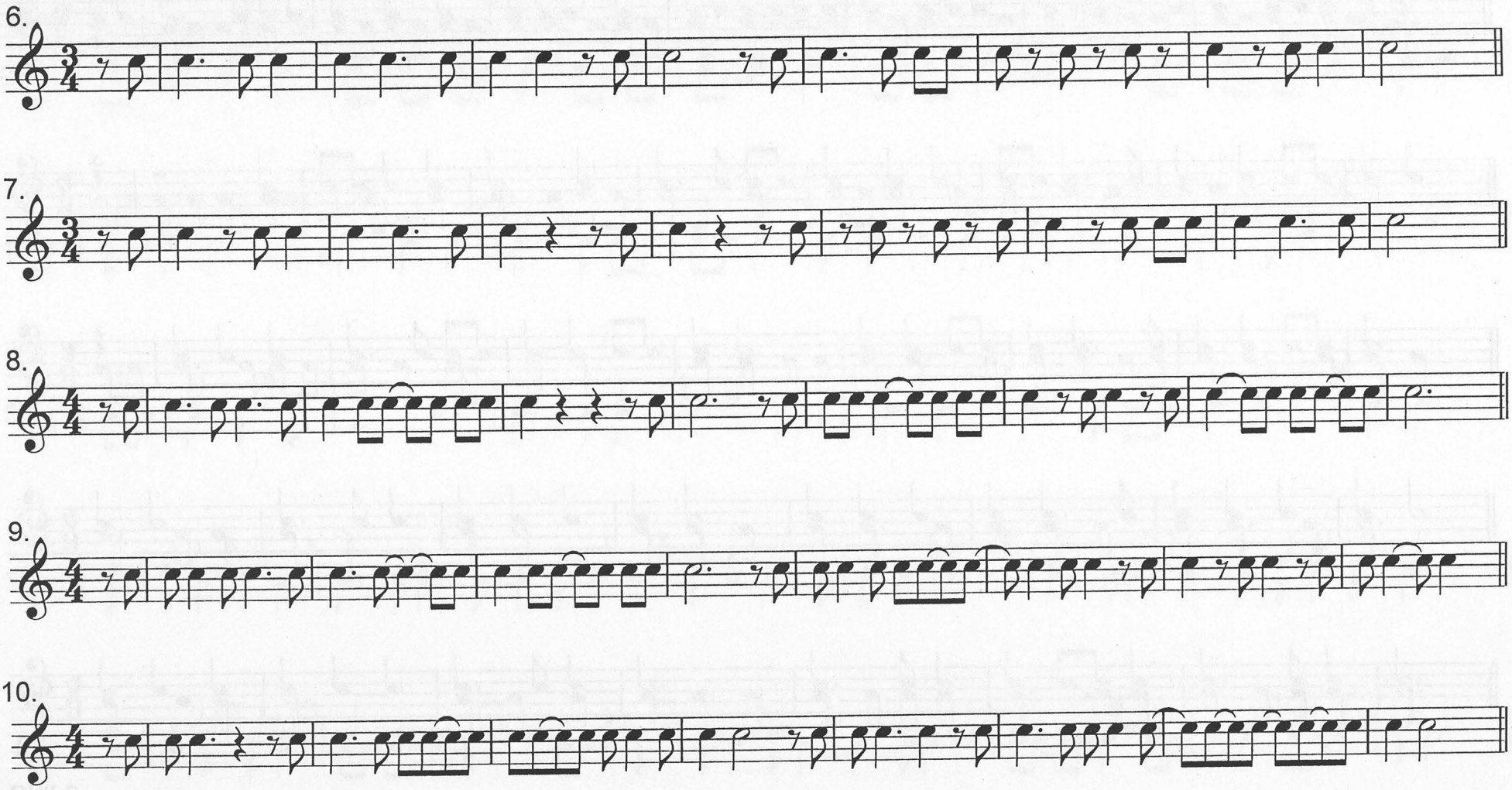

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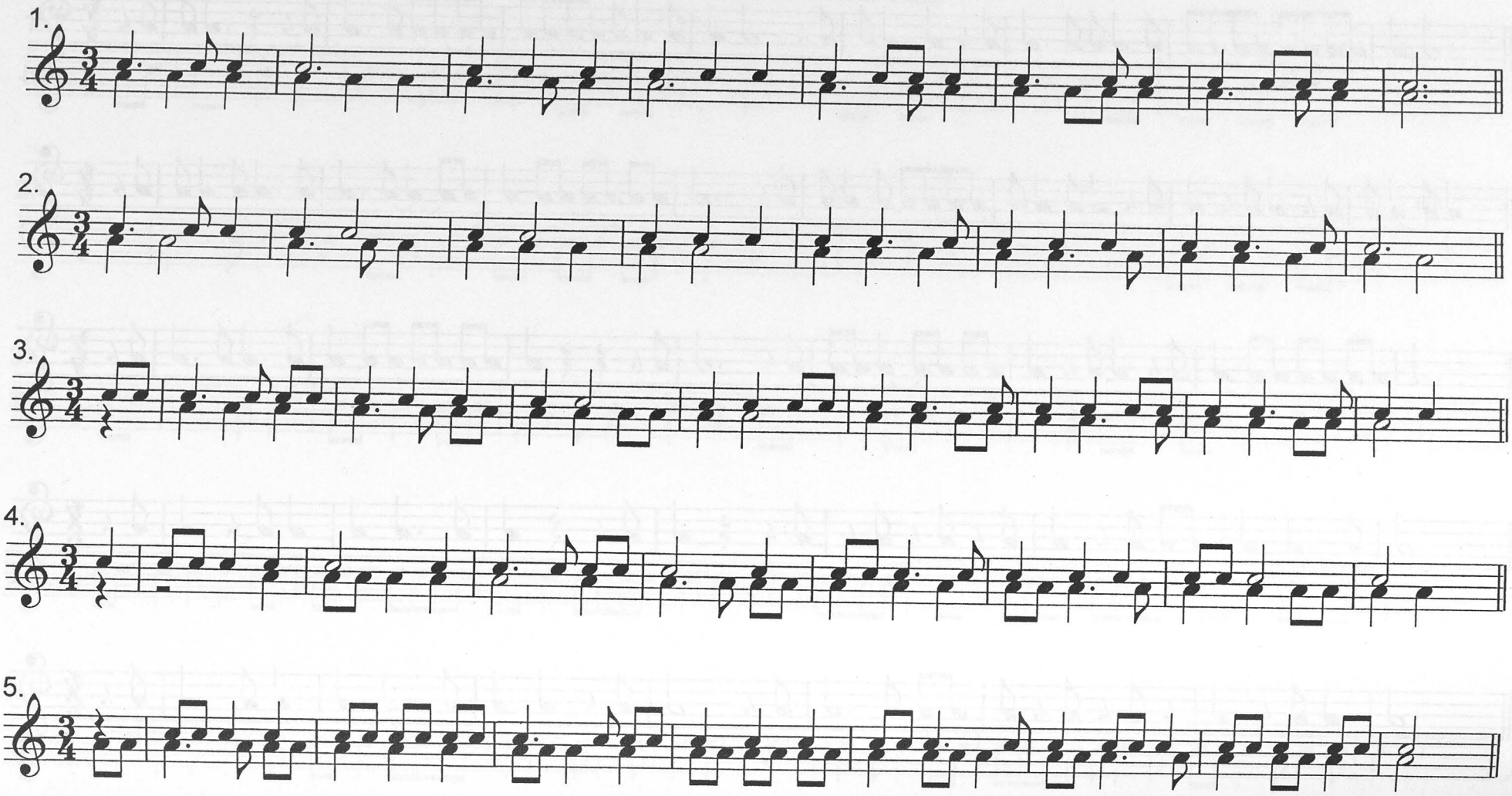
Unit 6



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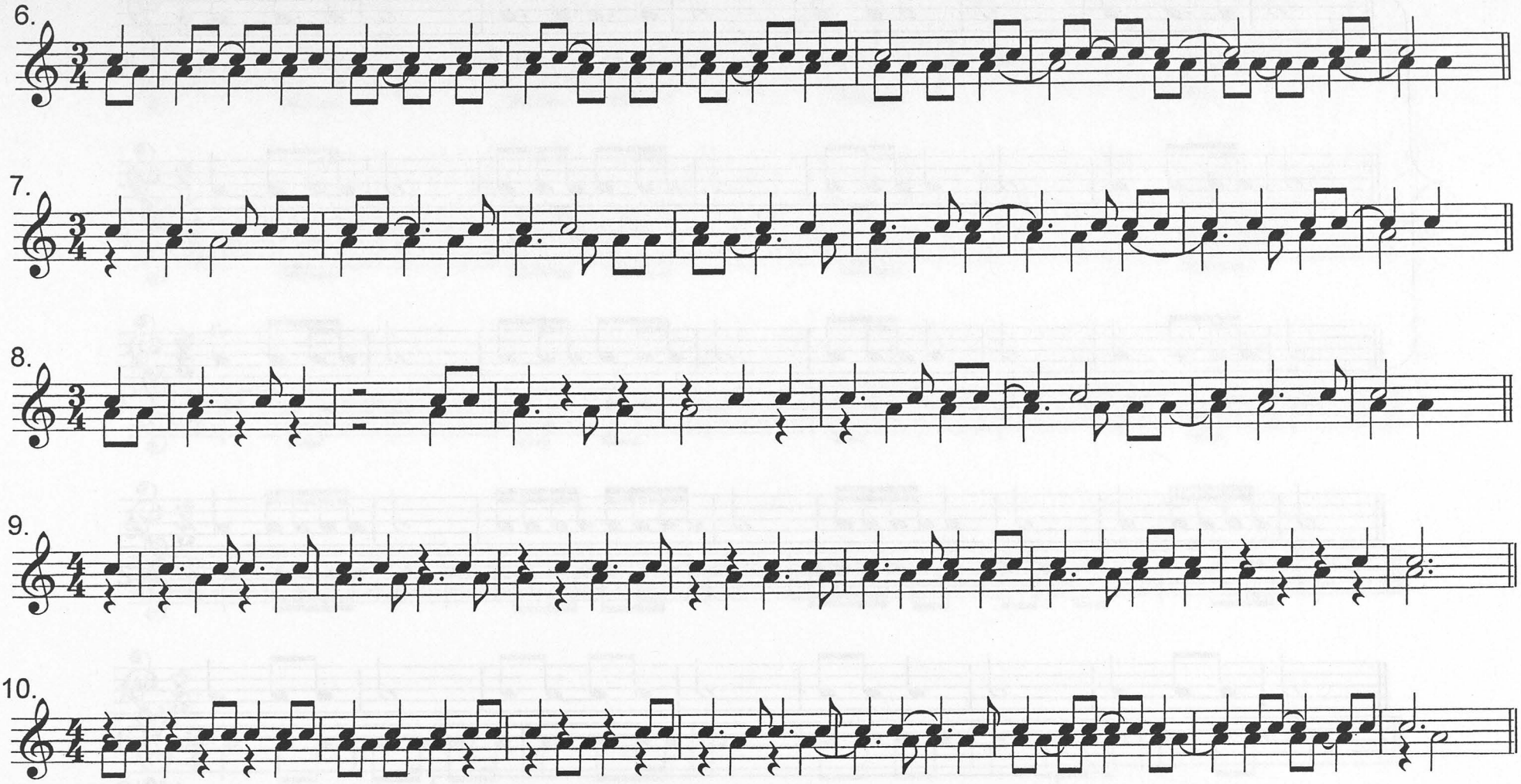

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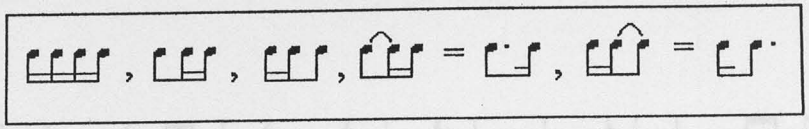

Unit 7

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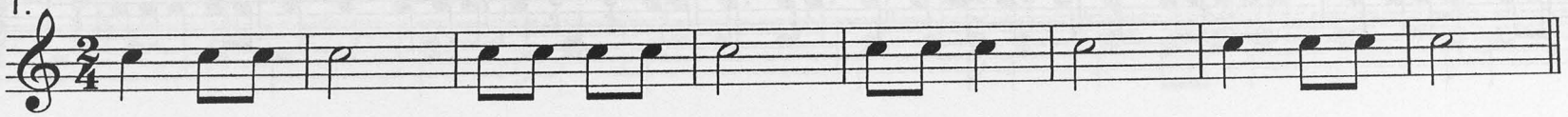

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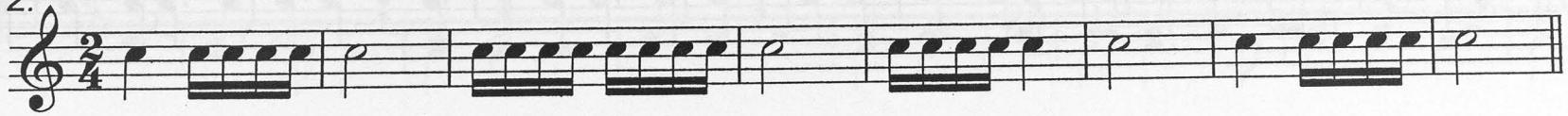

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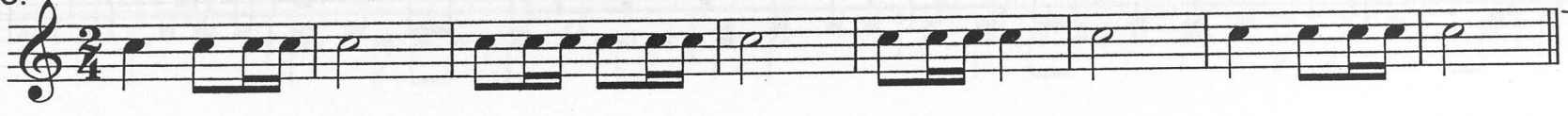

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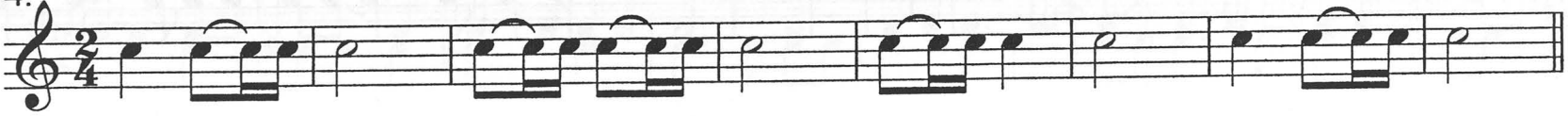

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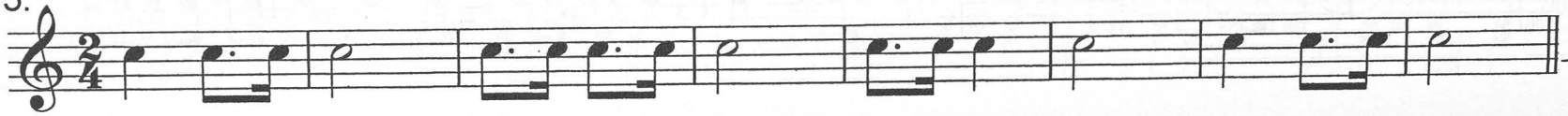

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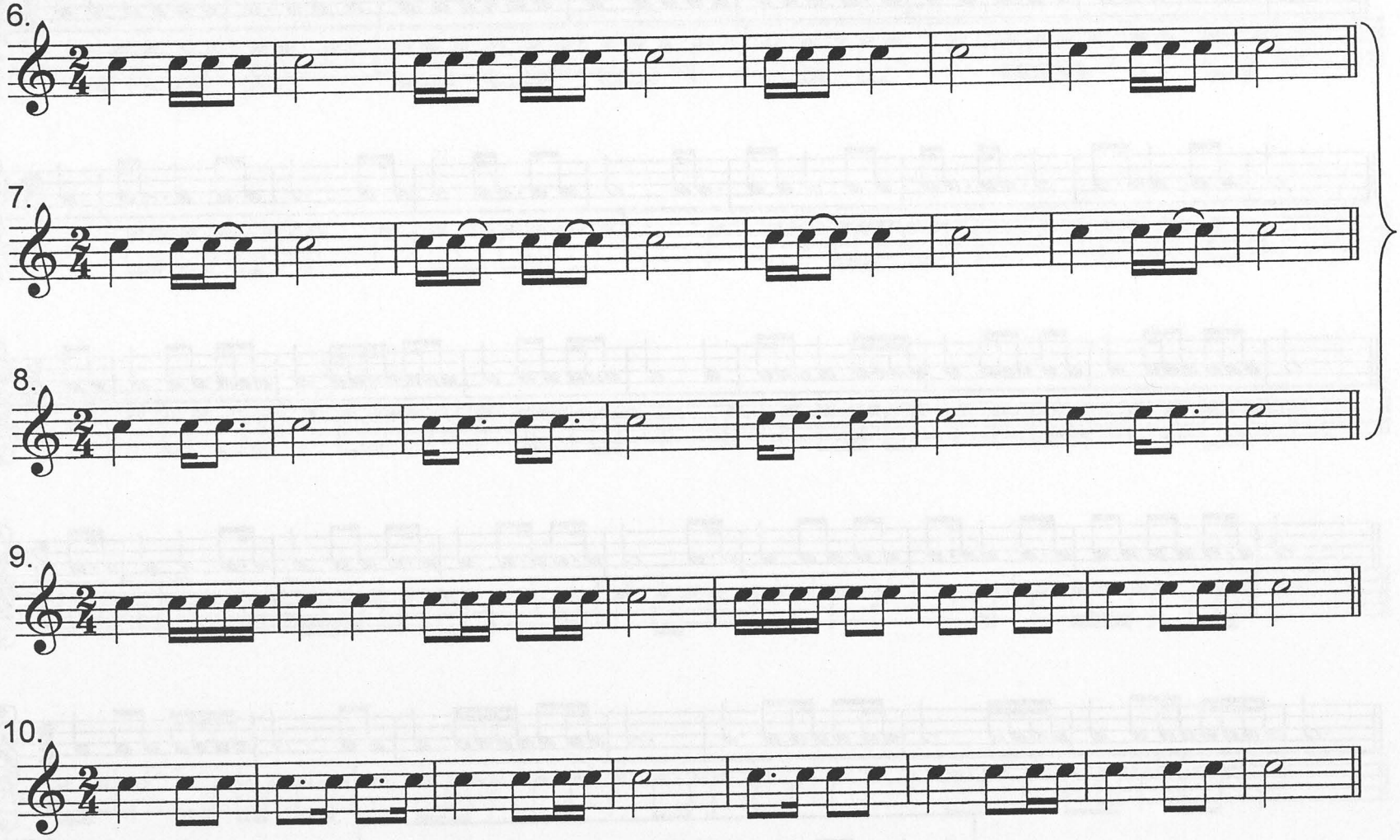

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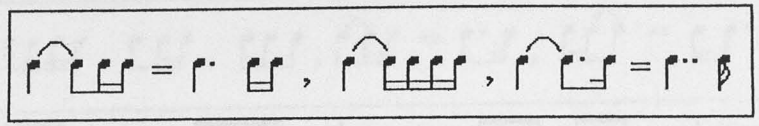

Unit 8

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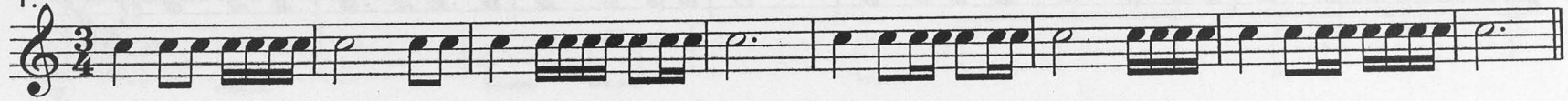

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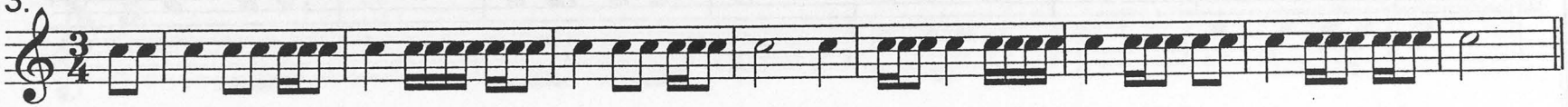

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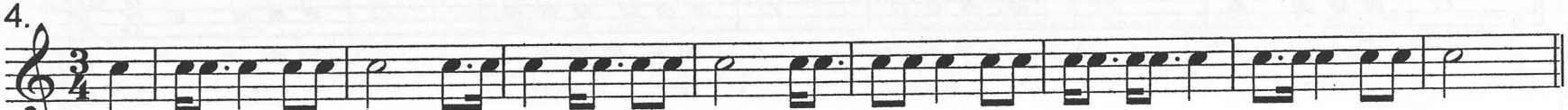

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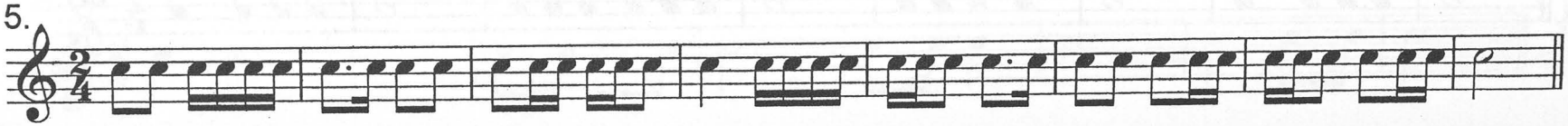

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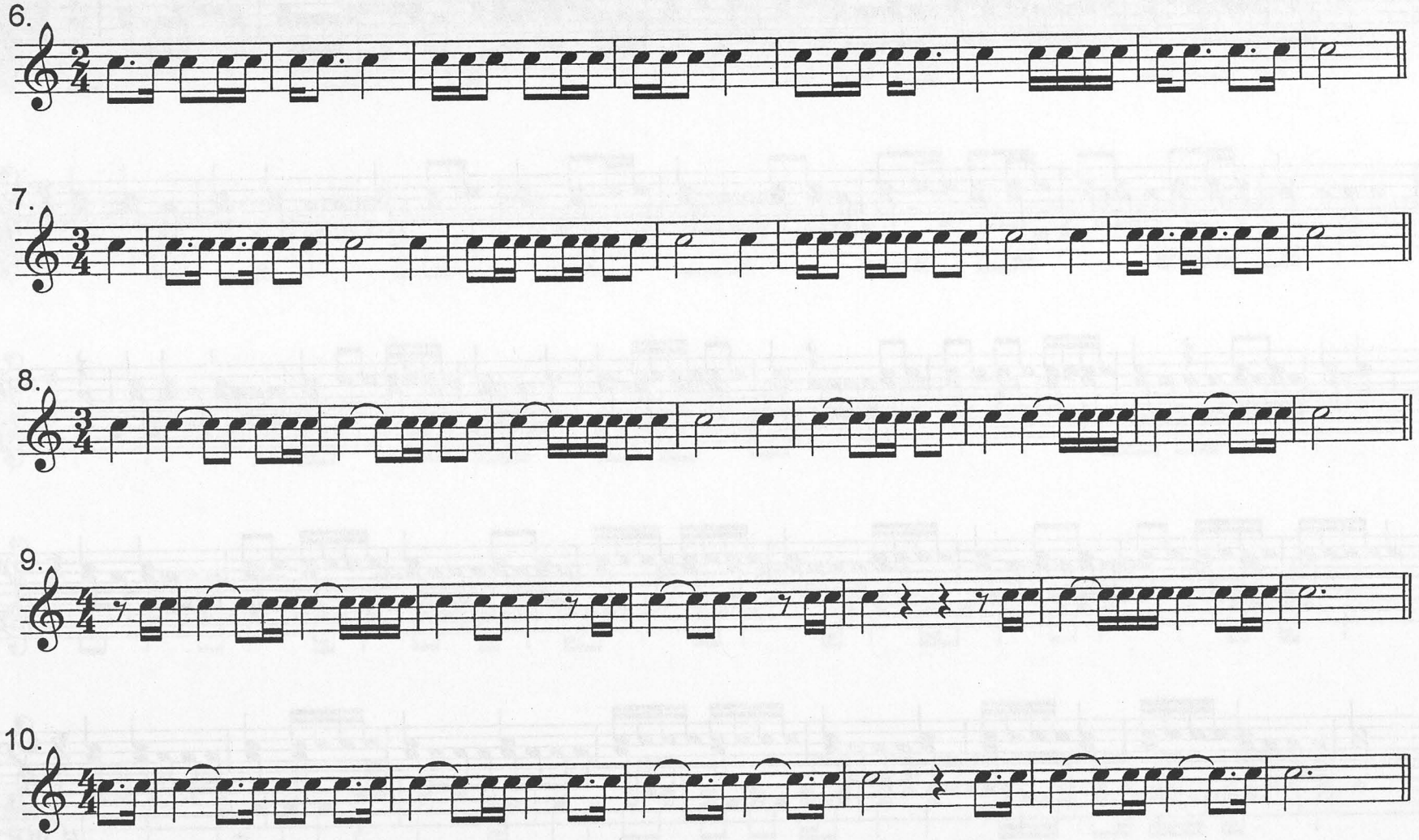

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Unit 9

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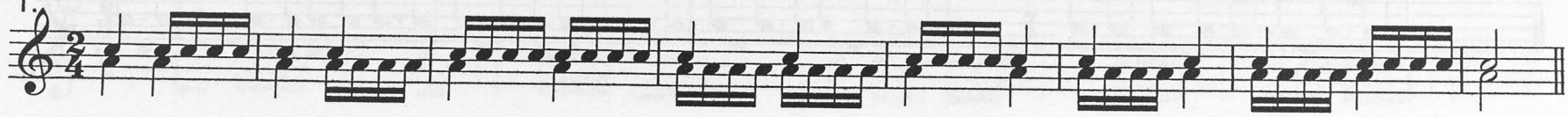

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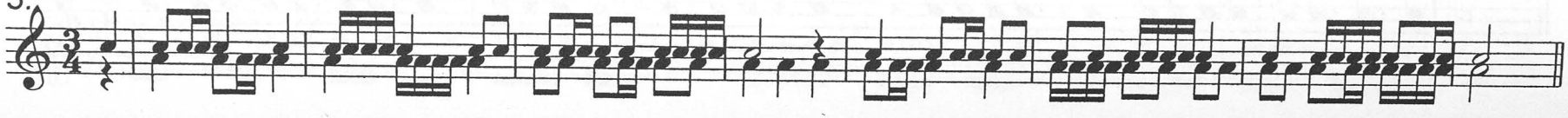

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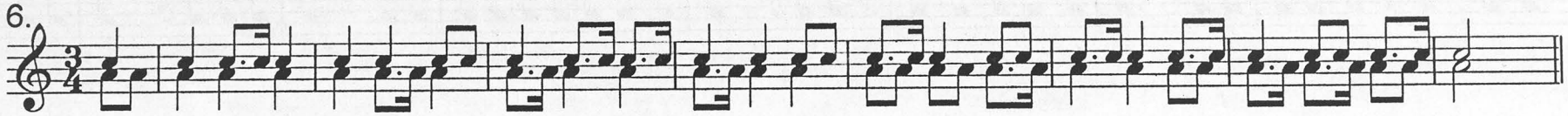

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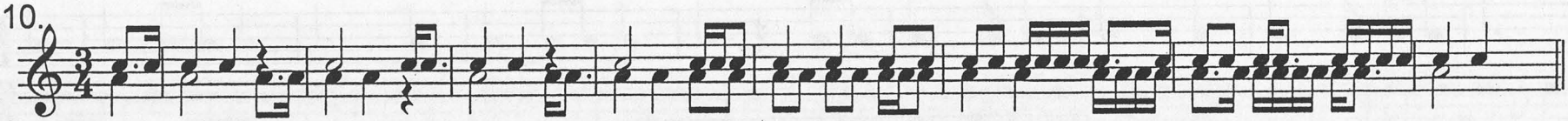

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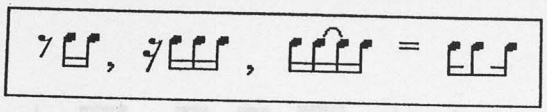
Unit 10



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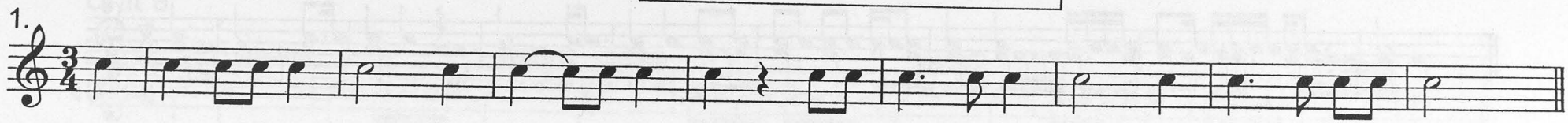

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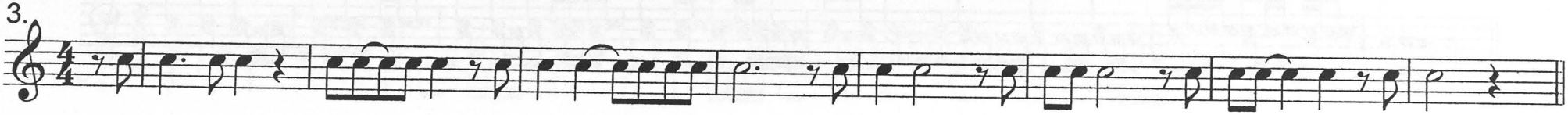

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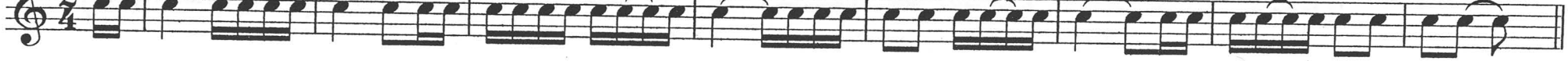

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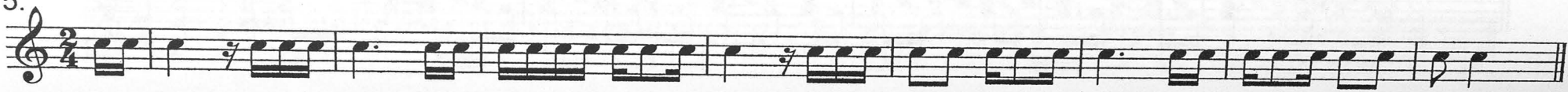

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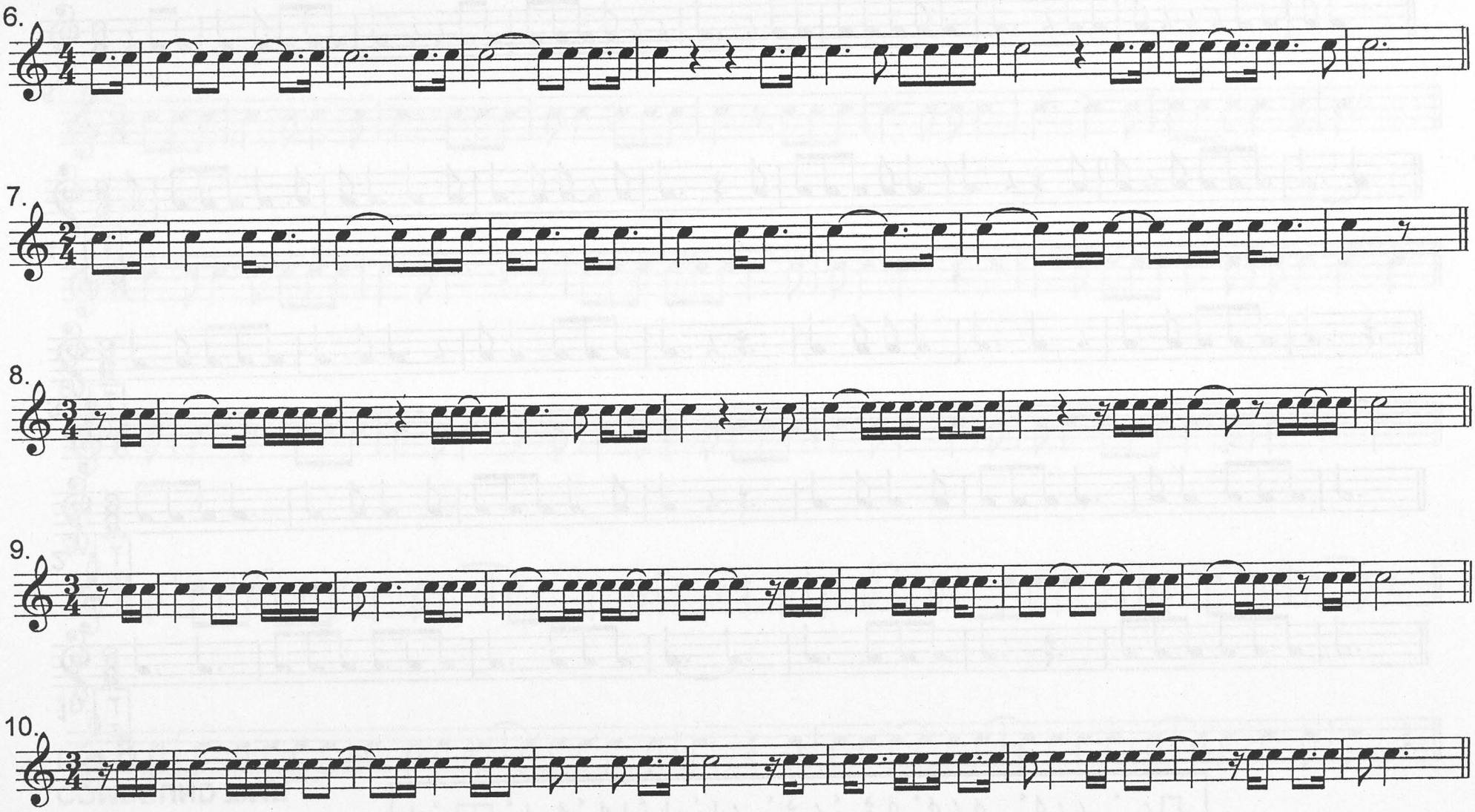

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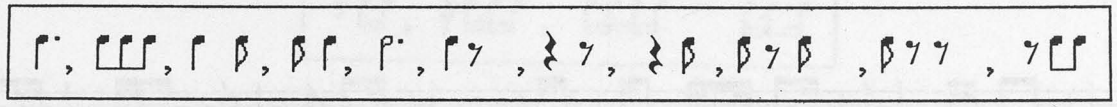

COMPOUND TIME

Unit 11

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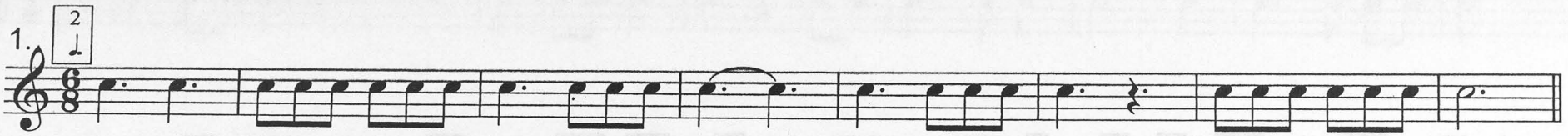

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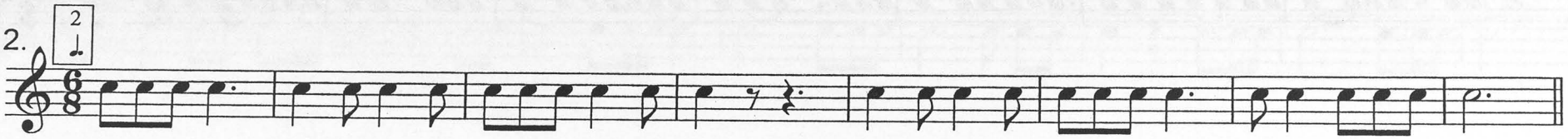

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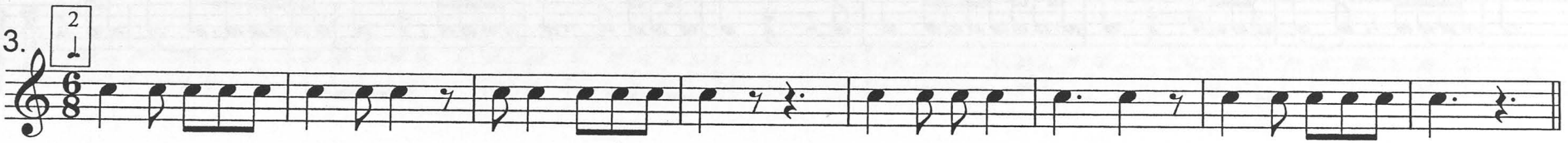

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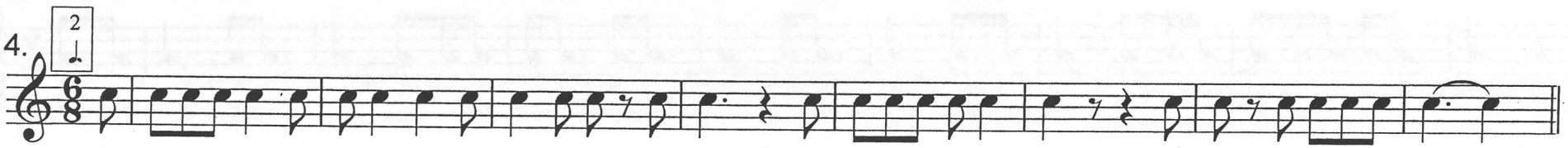

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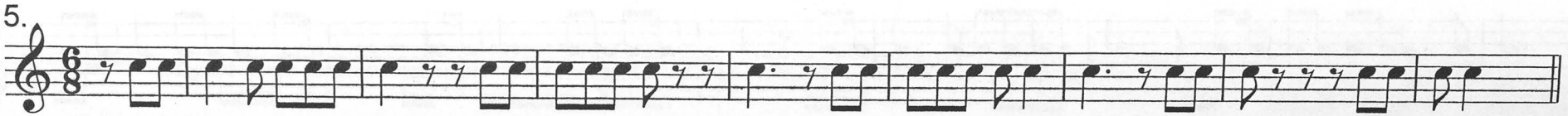

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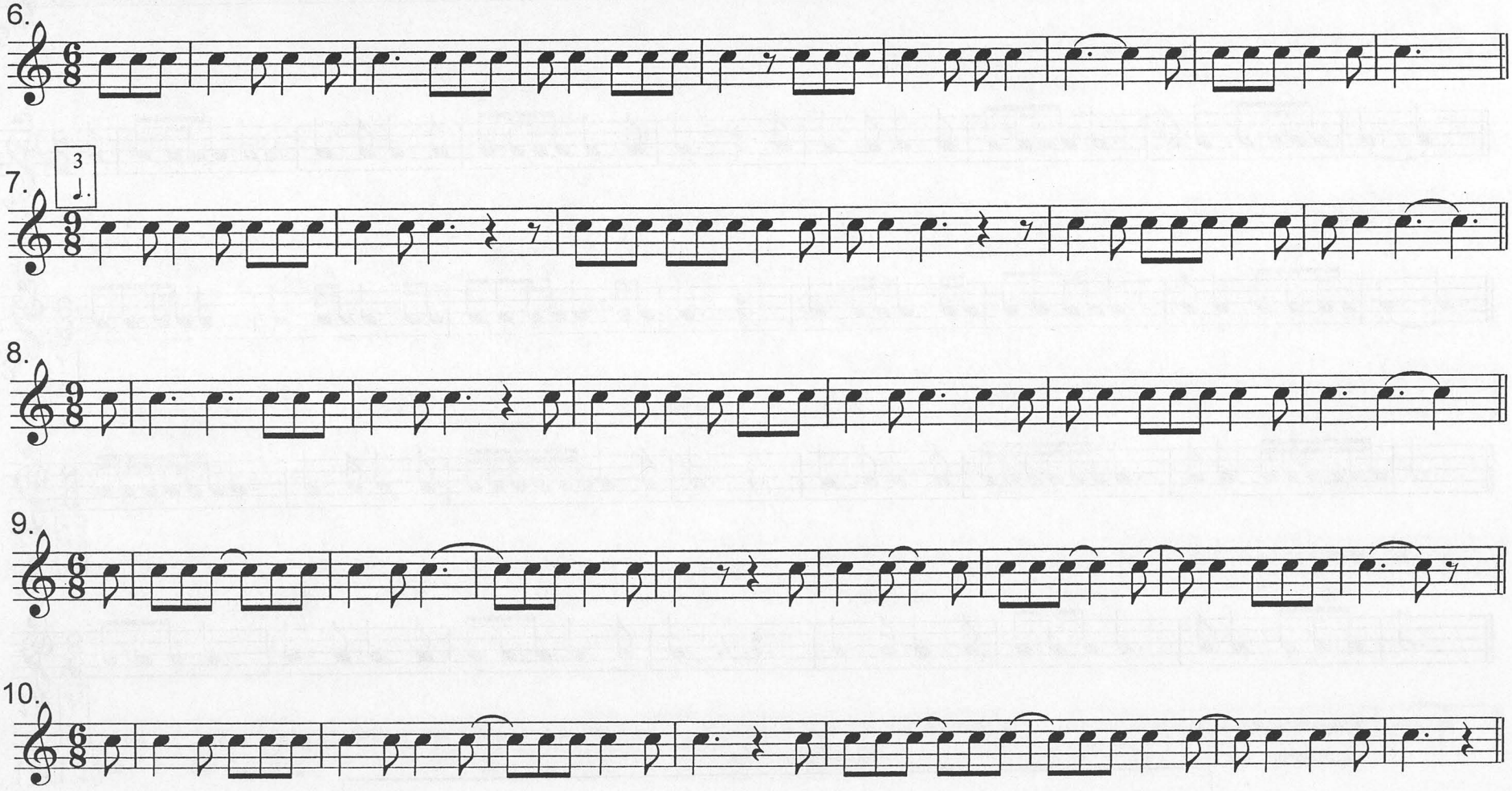

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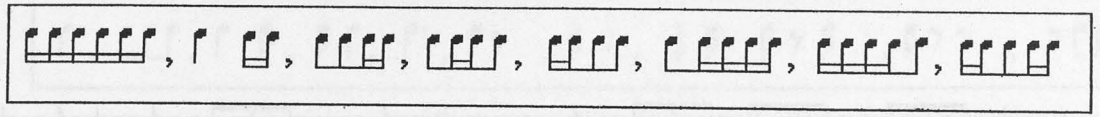

Unit 12

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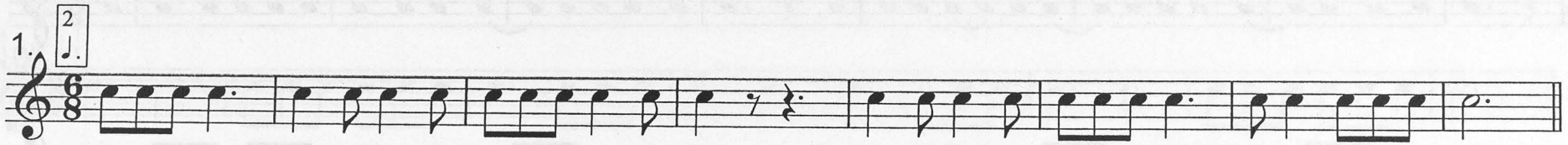

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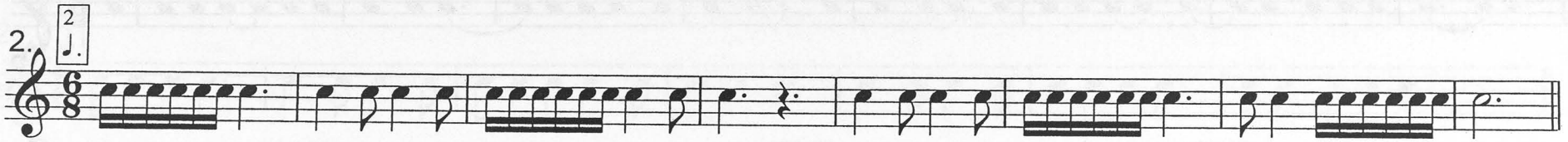

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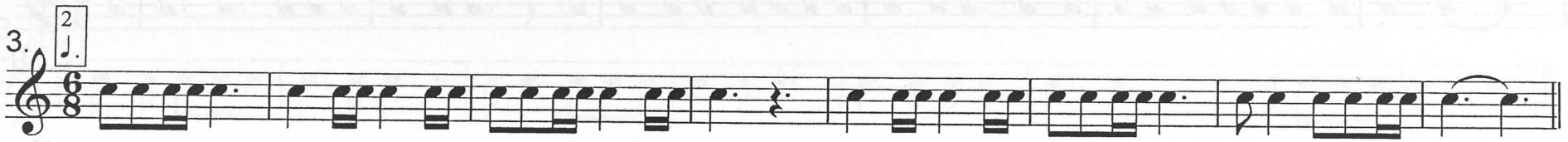

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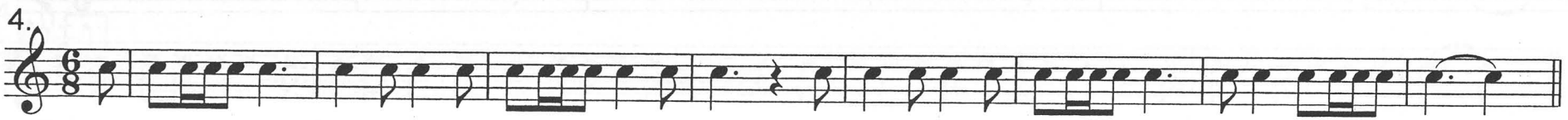

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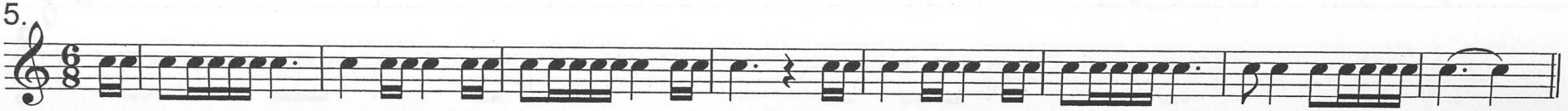

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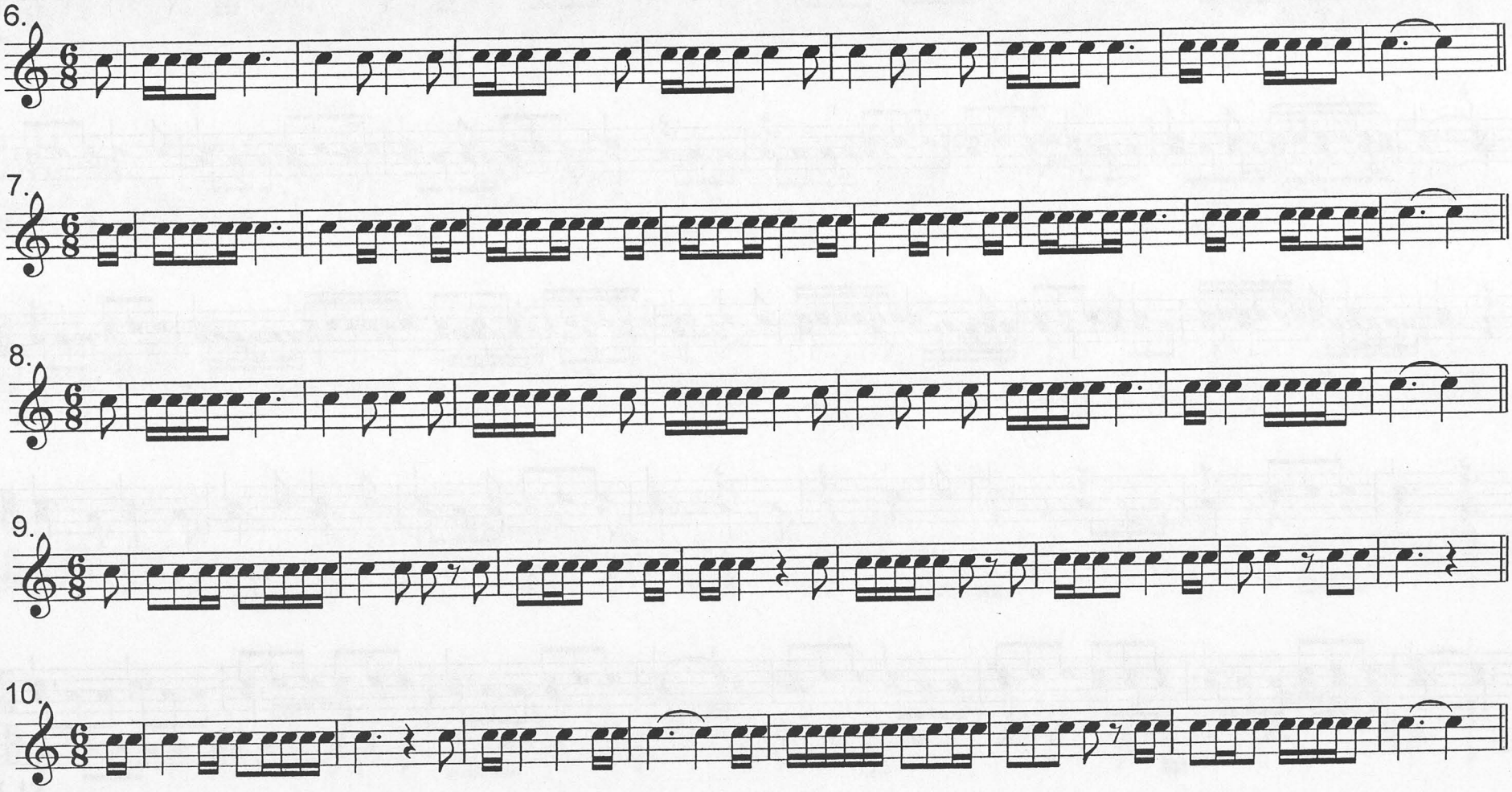

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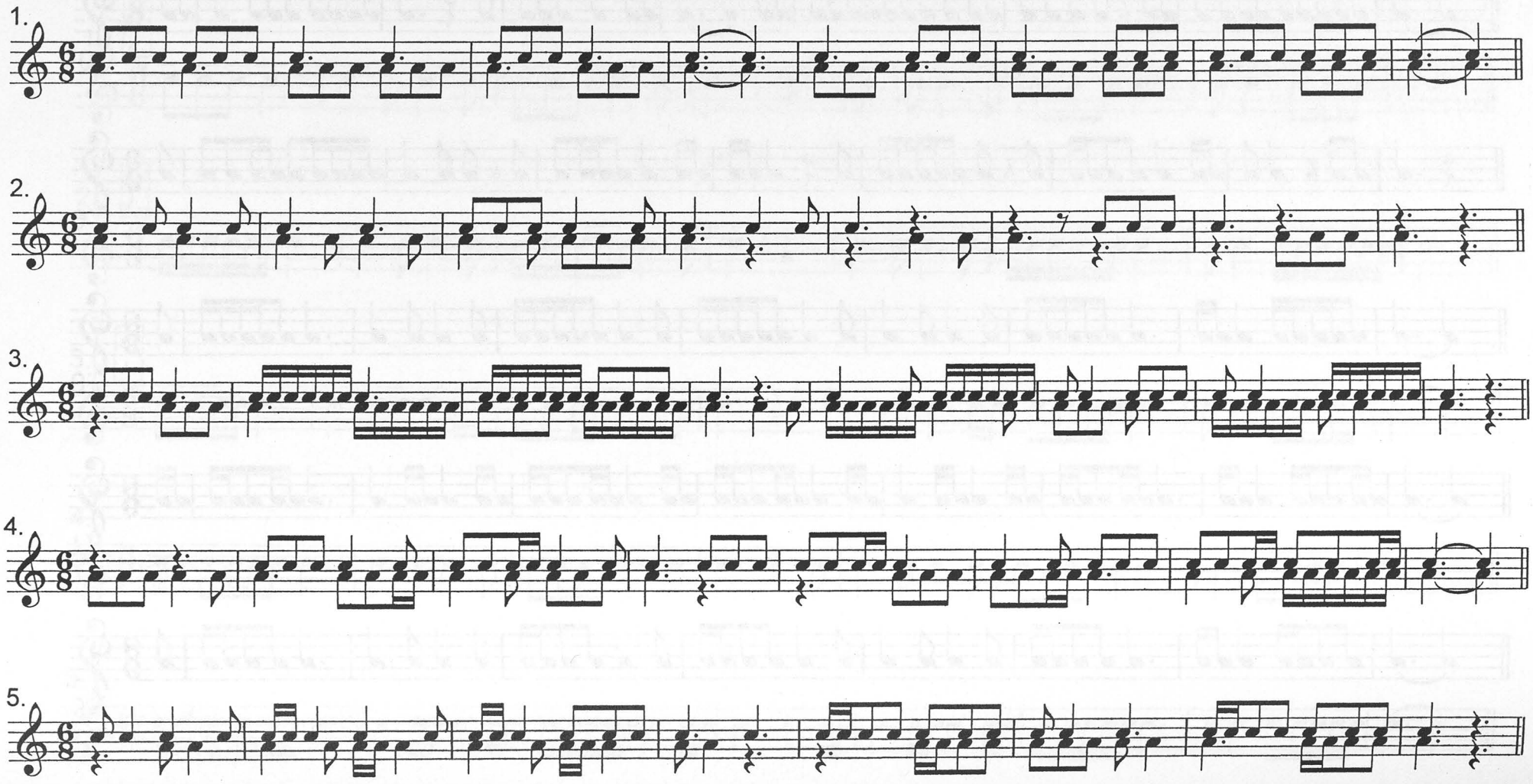
Unit 13



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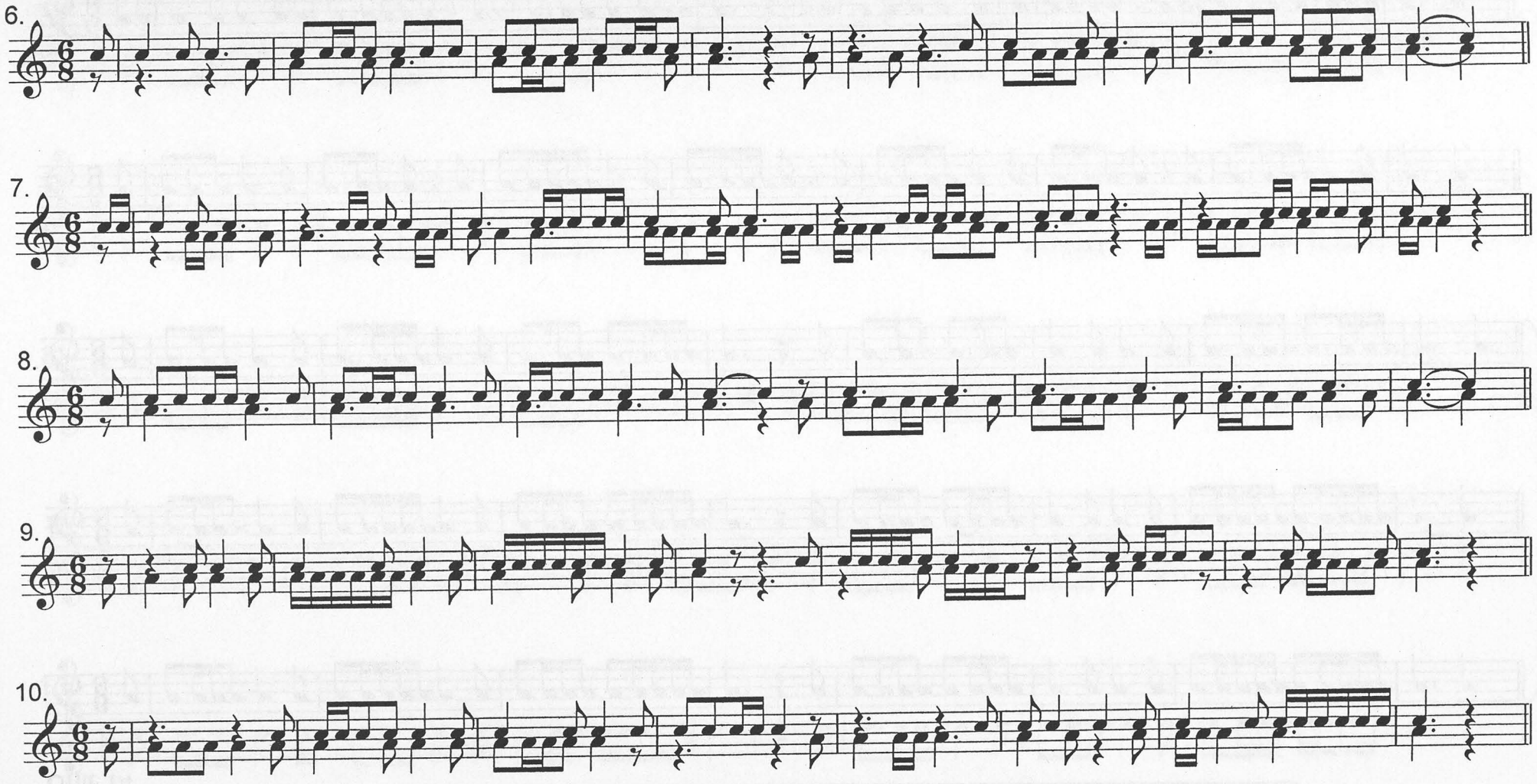

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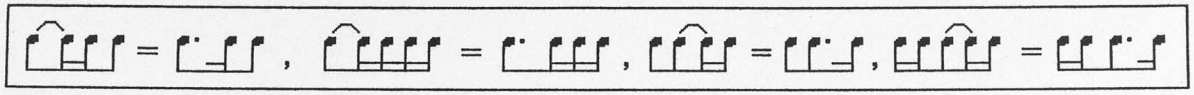

Unit 14

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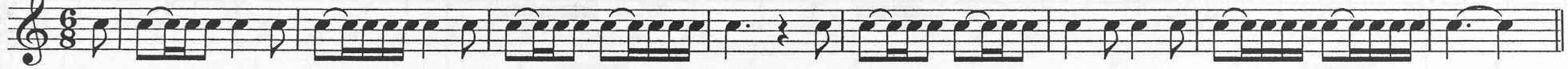

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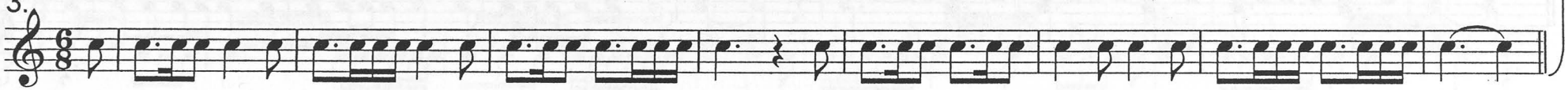

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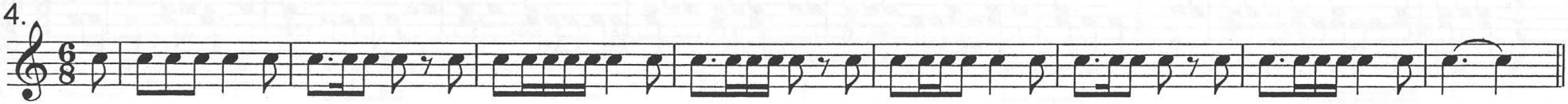

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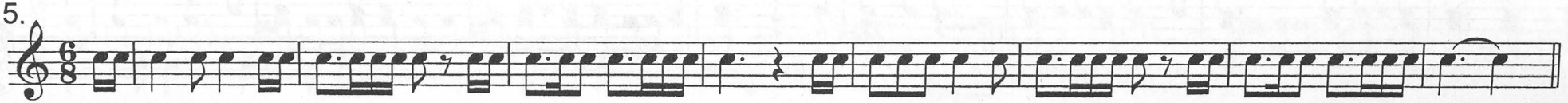

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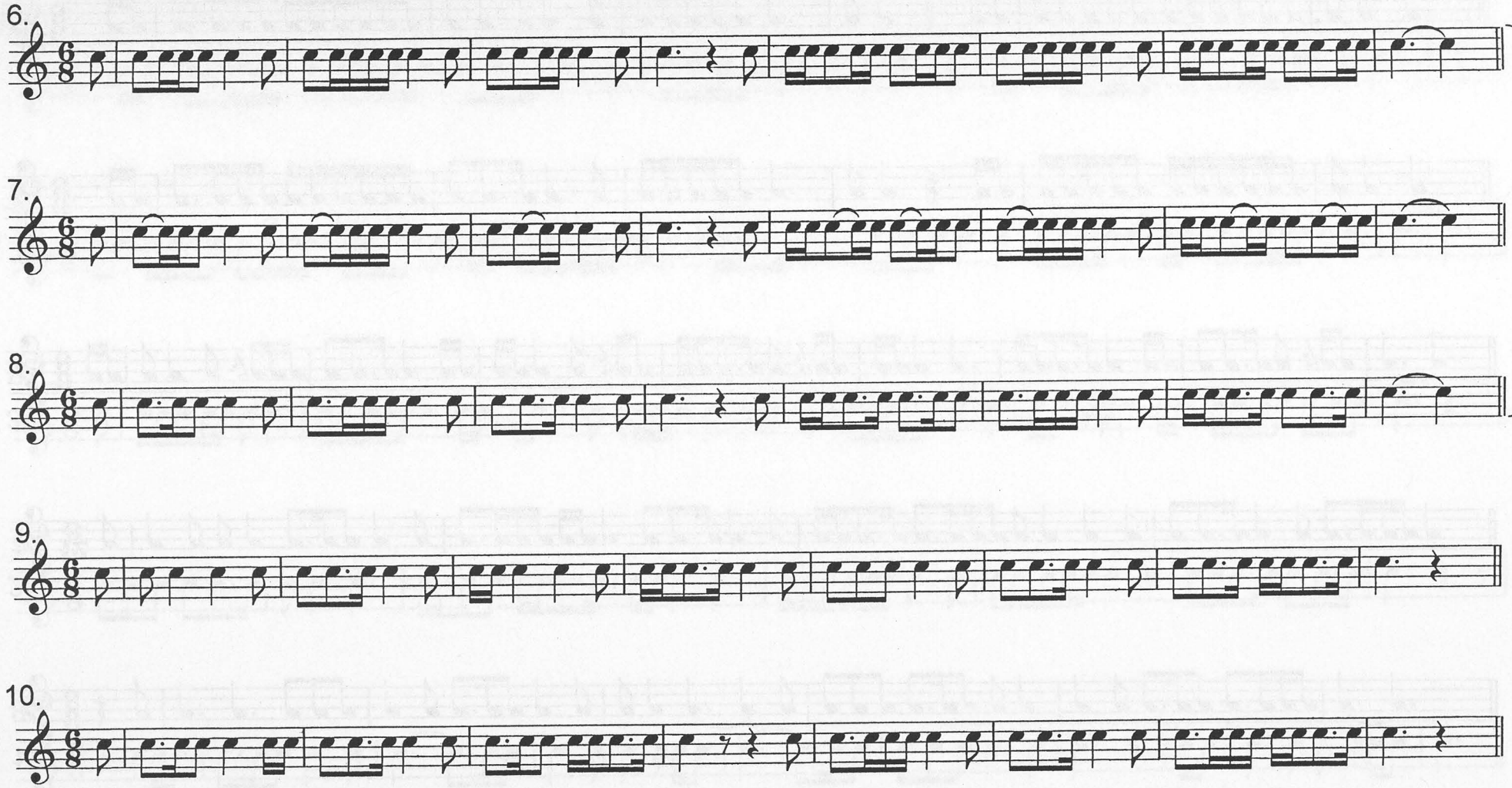

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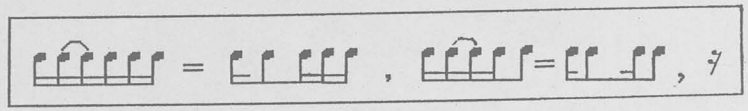

Unit 15

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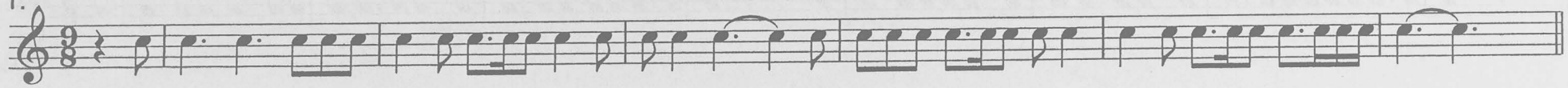

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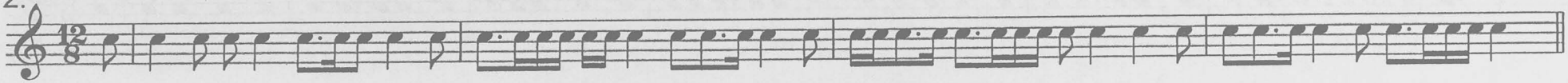

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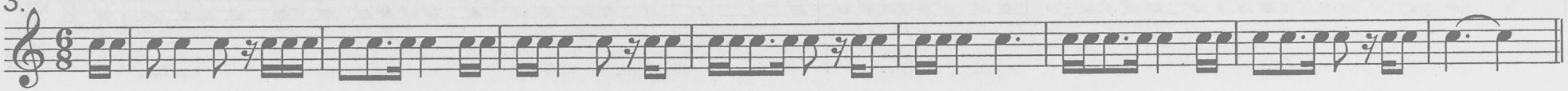

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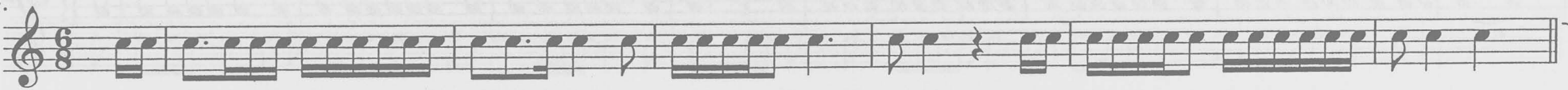

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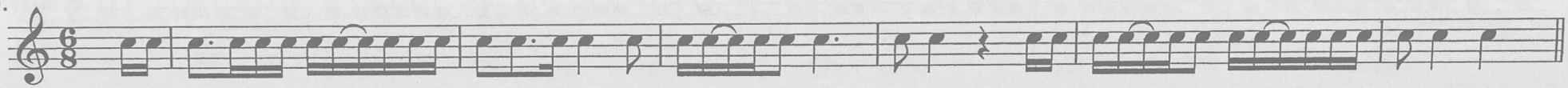

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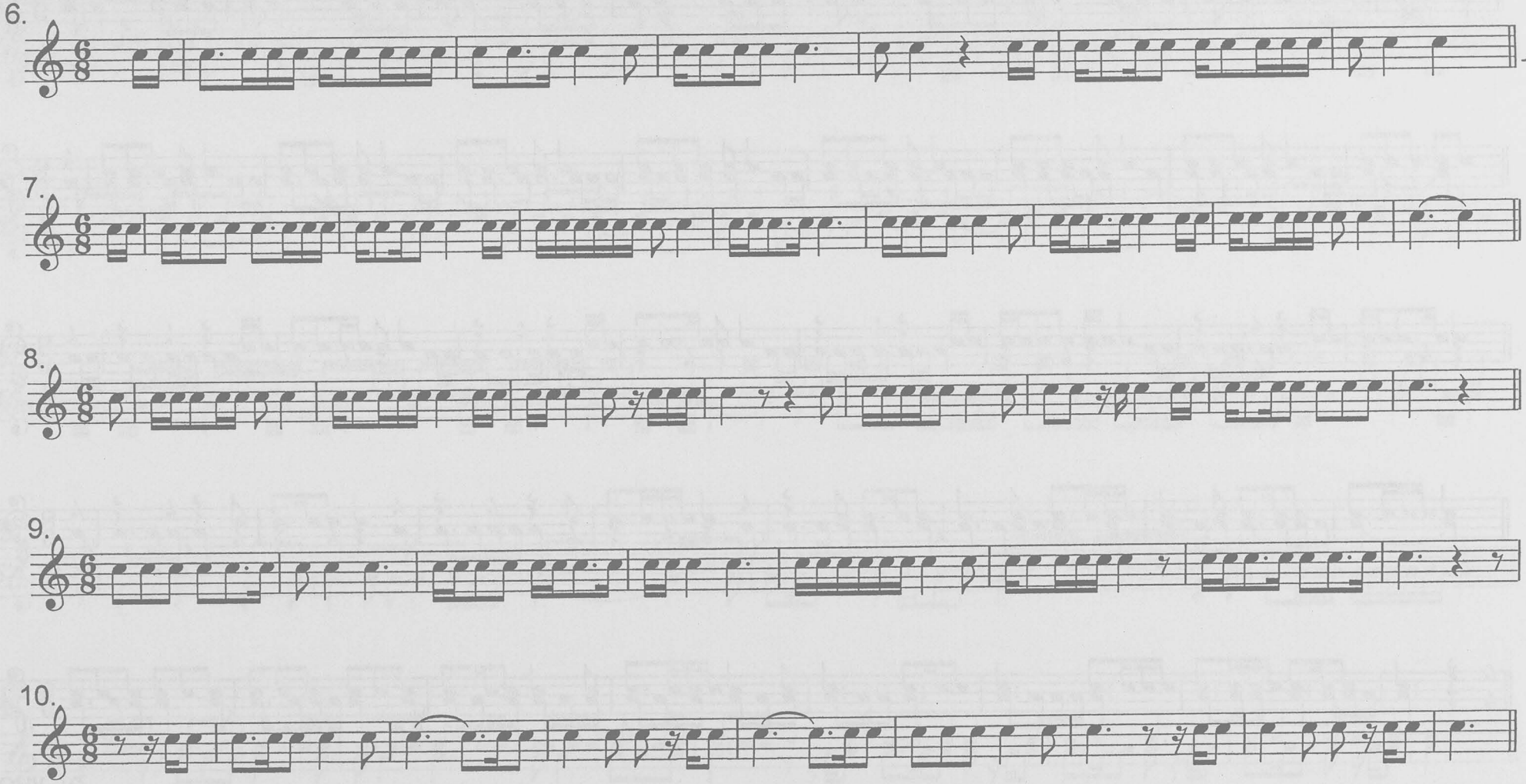

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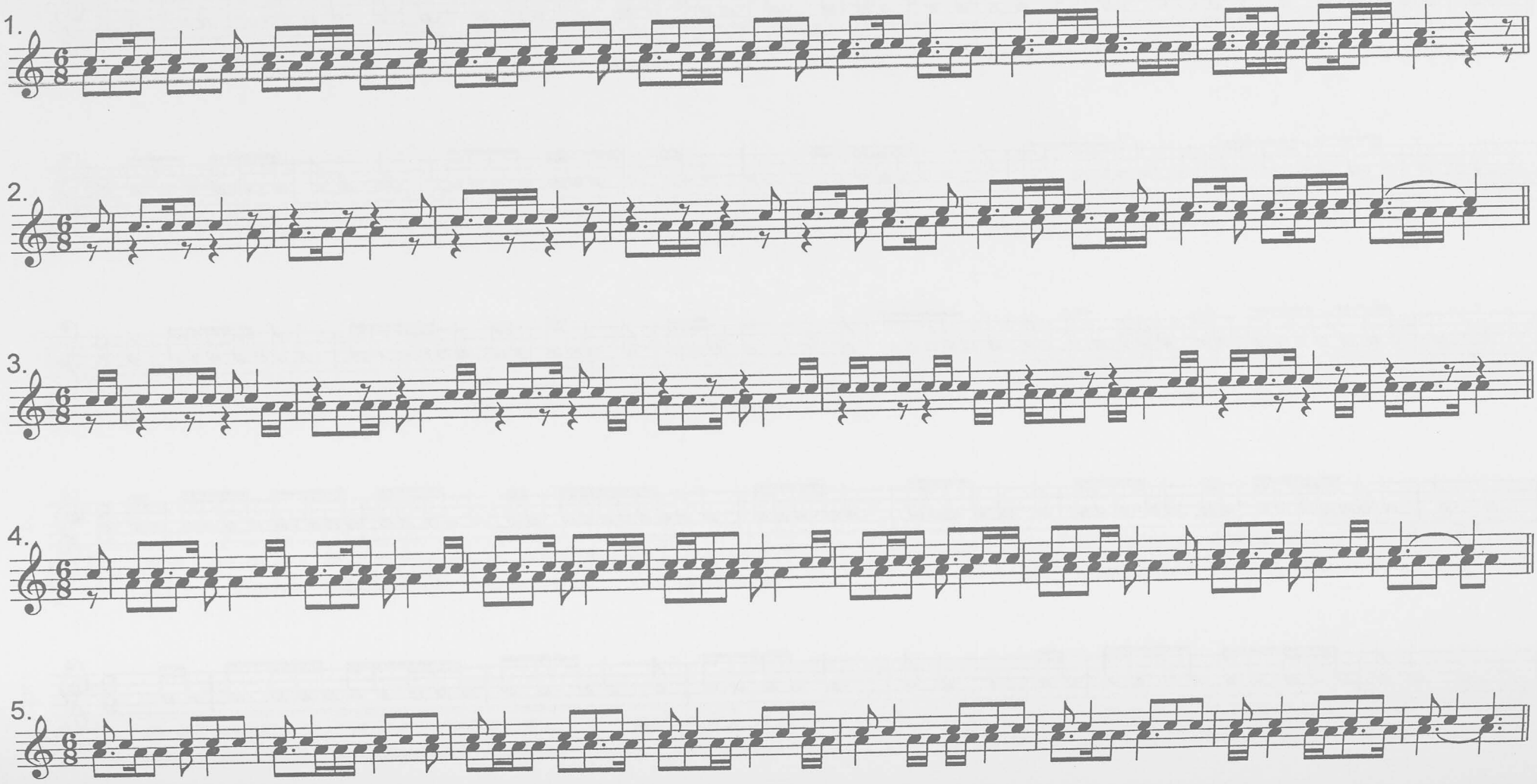
Unit 16



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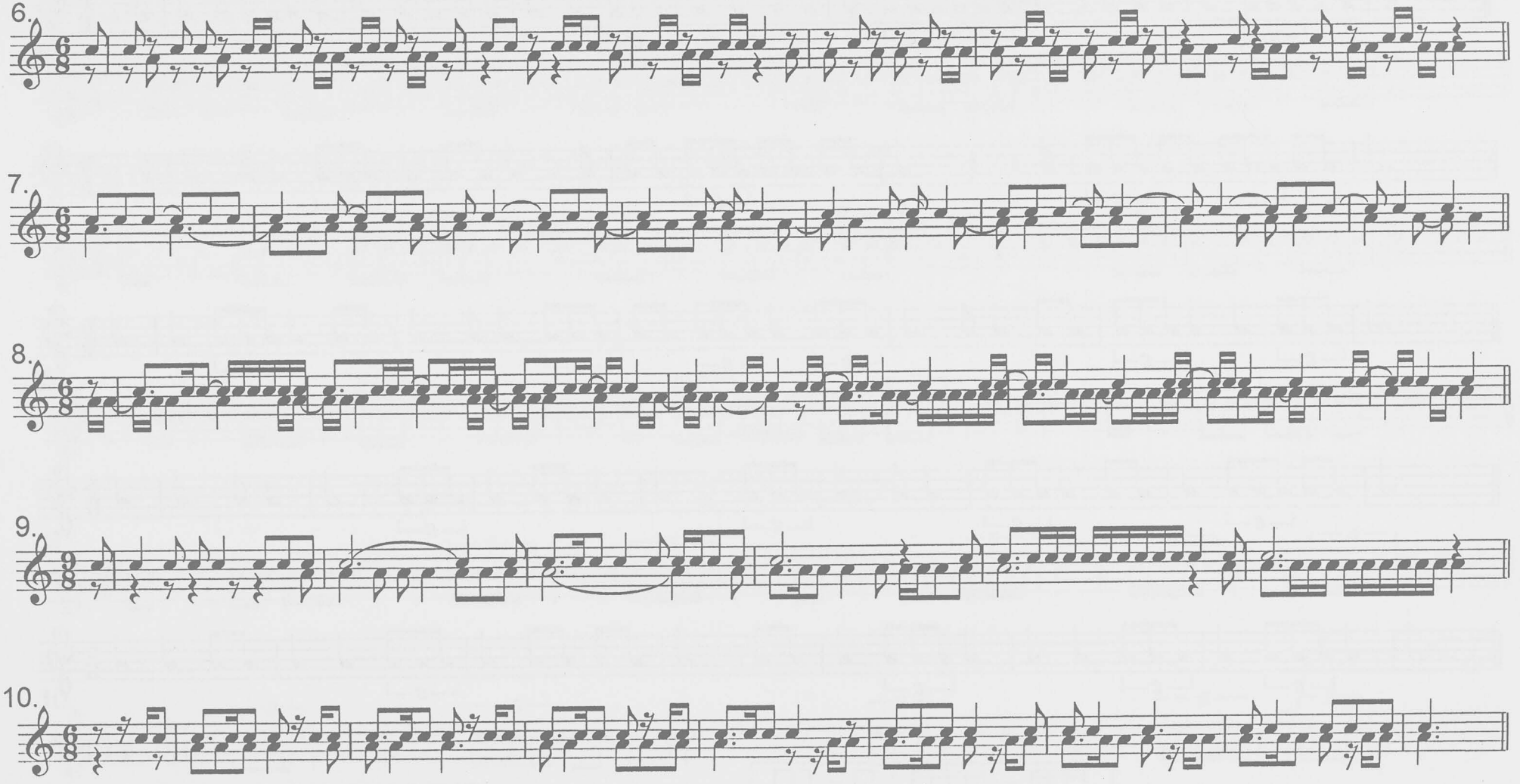

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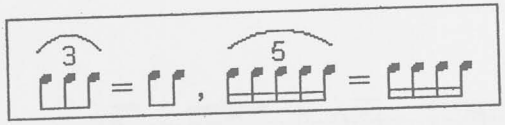
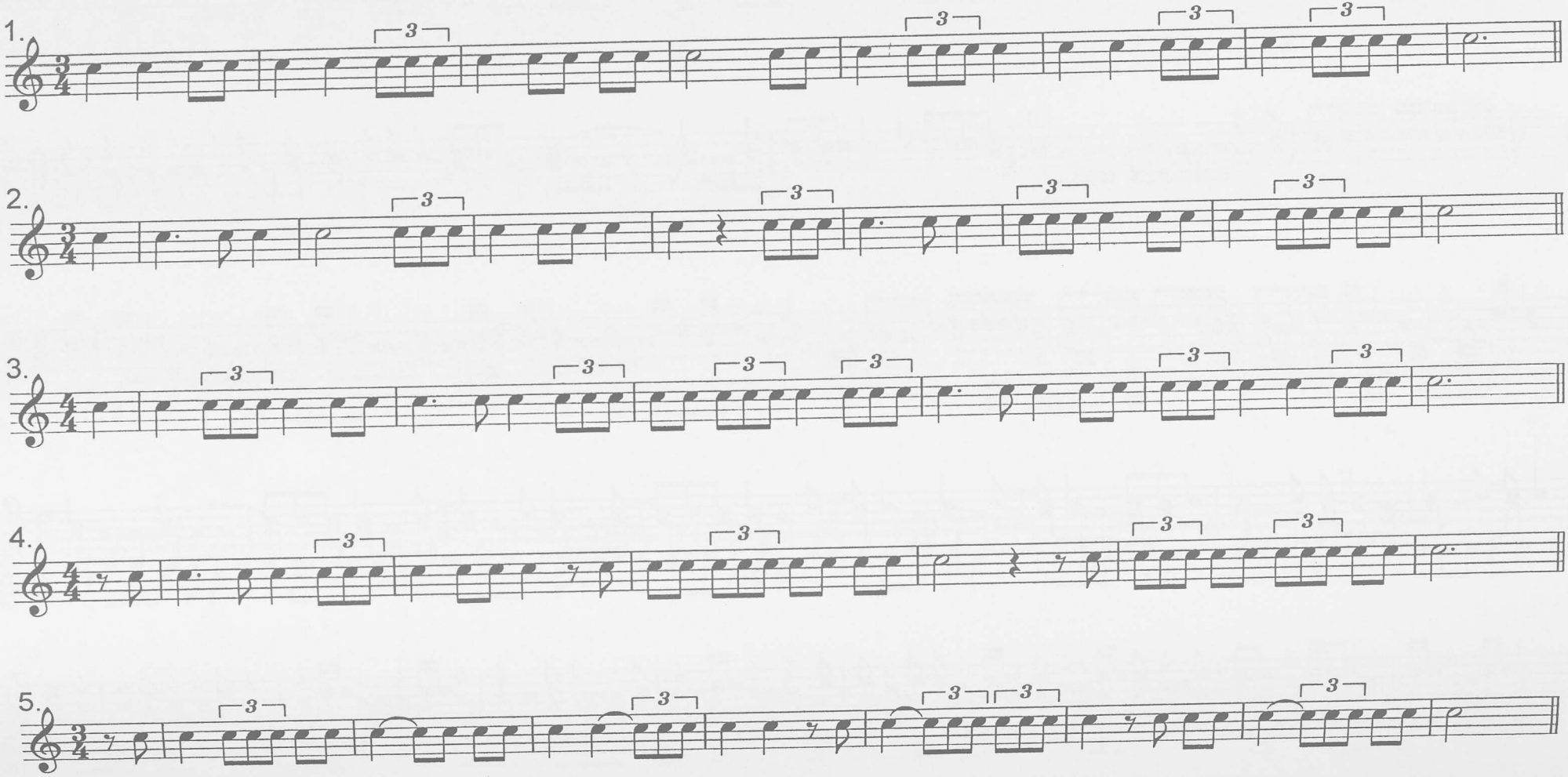
THE IRREGULAR AND UNUSUAL



Unit 17



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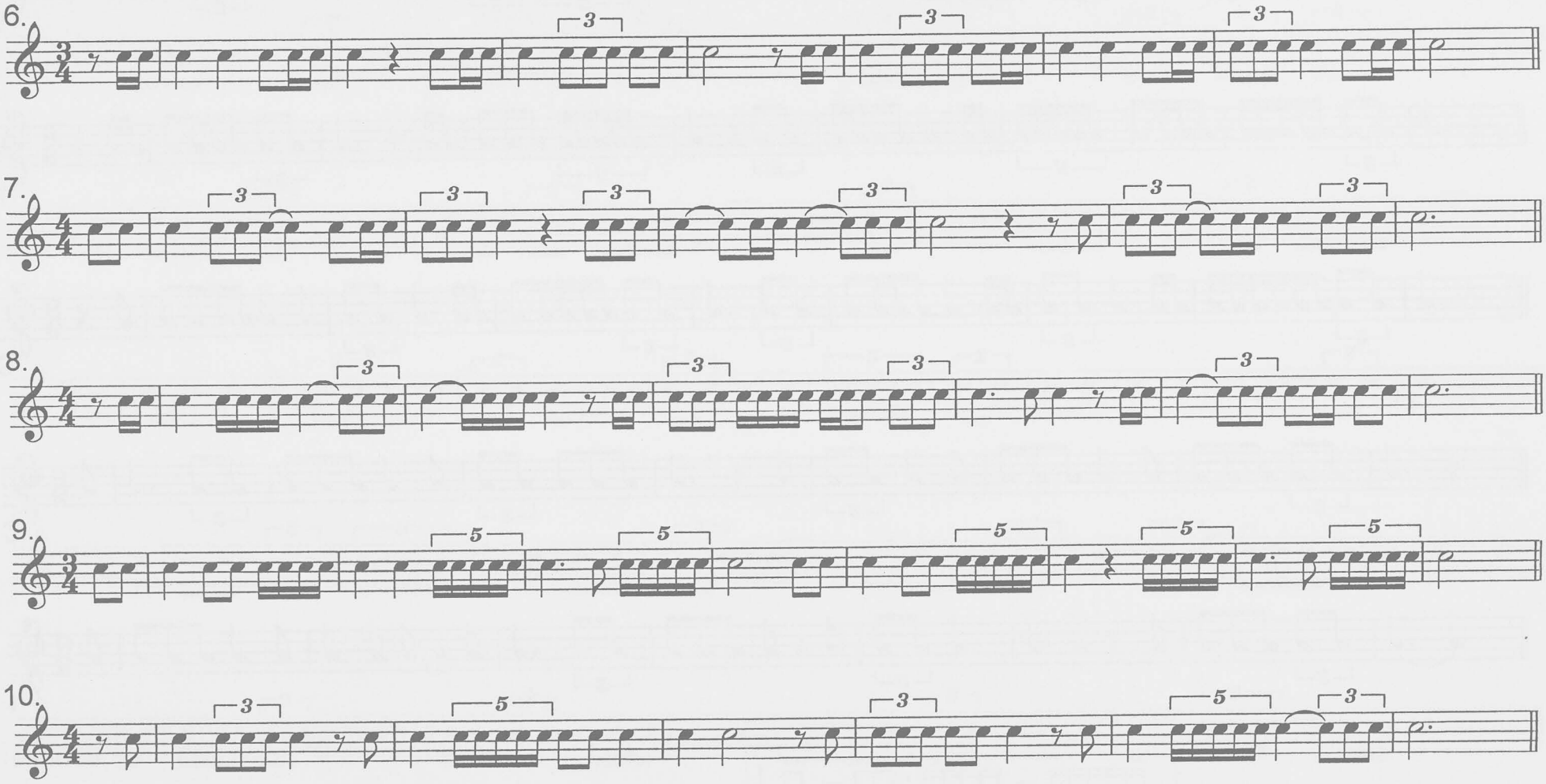

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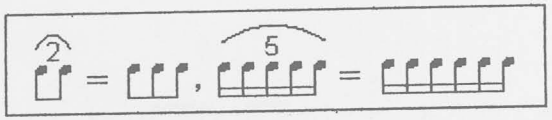

Unit 18

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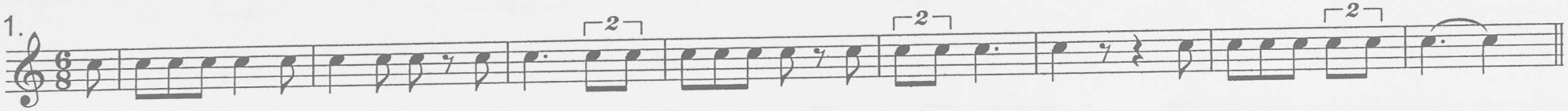

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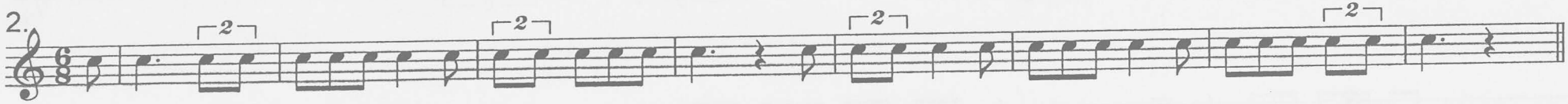

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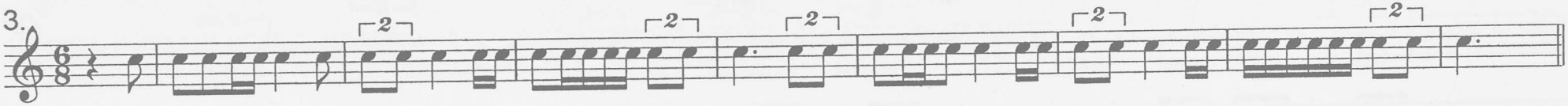

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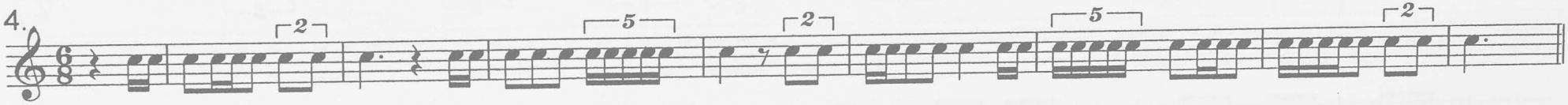

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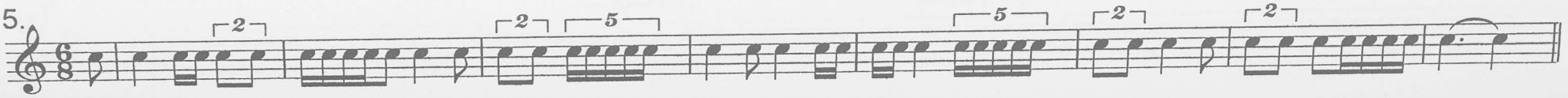

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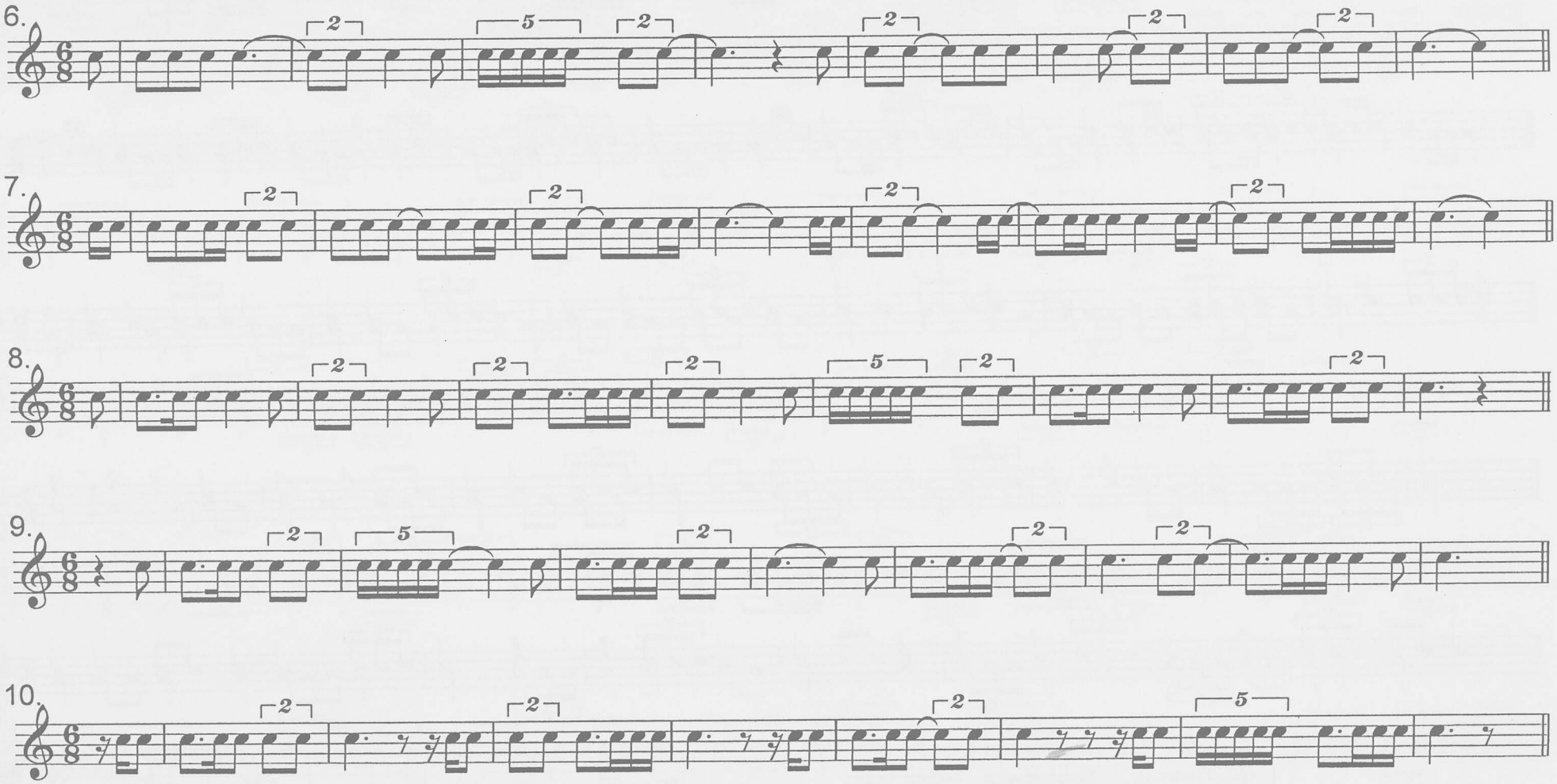

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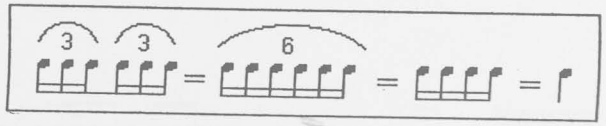

Unit 19

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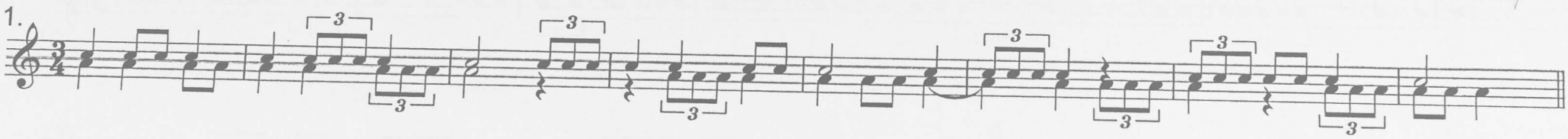

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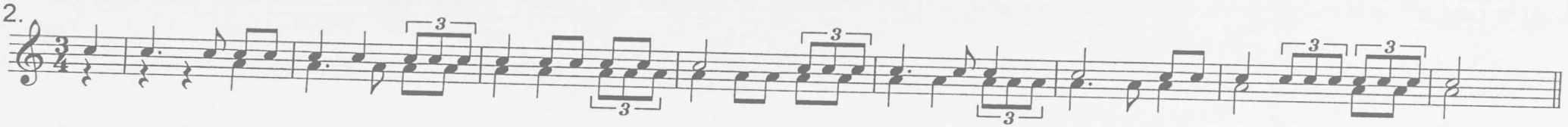

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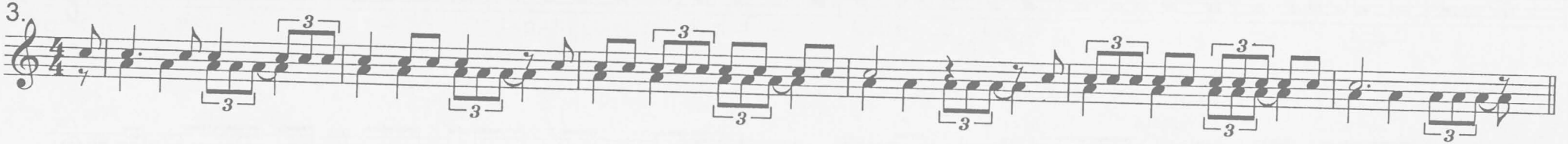

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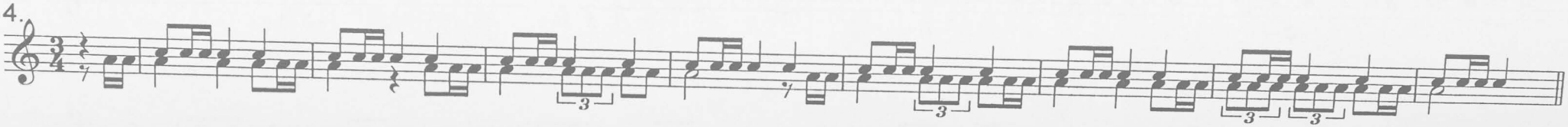

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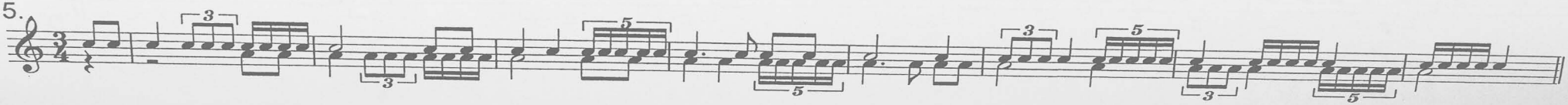

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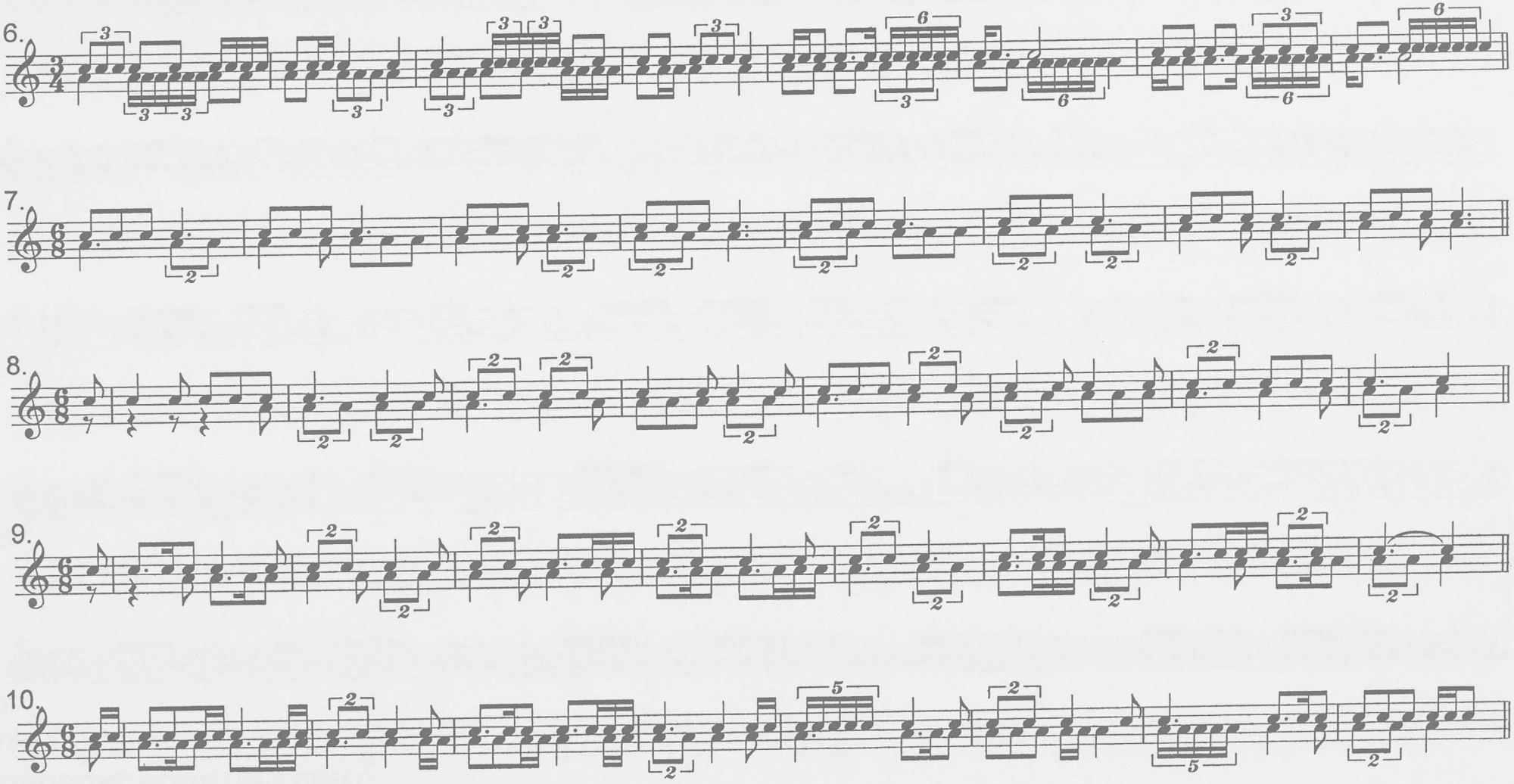

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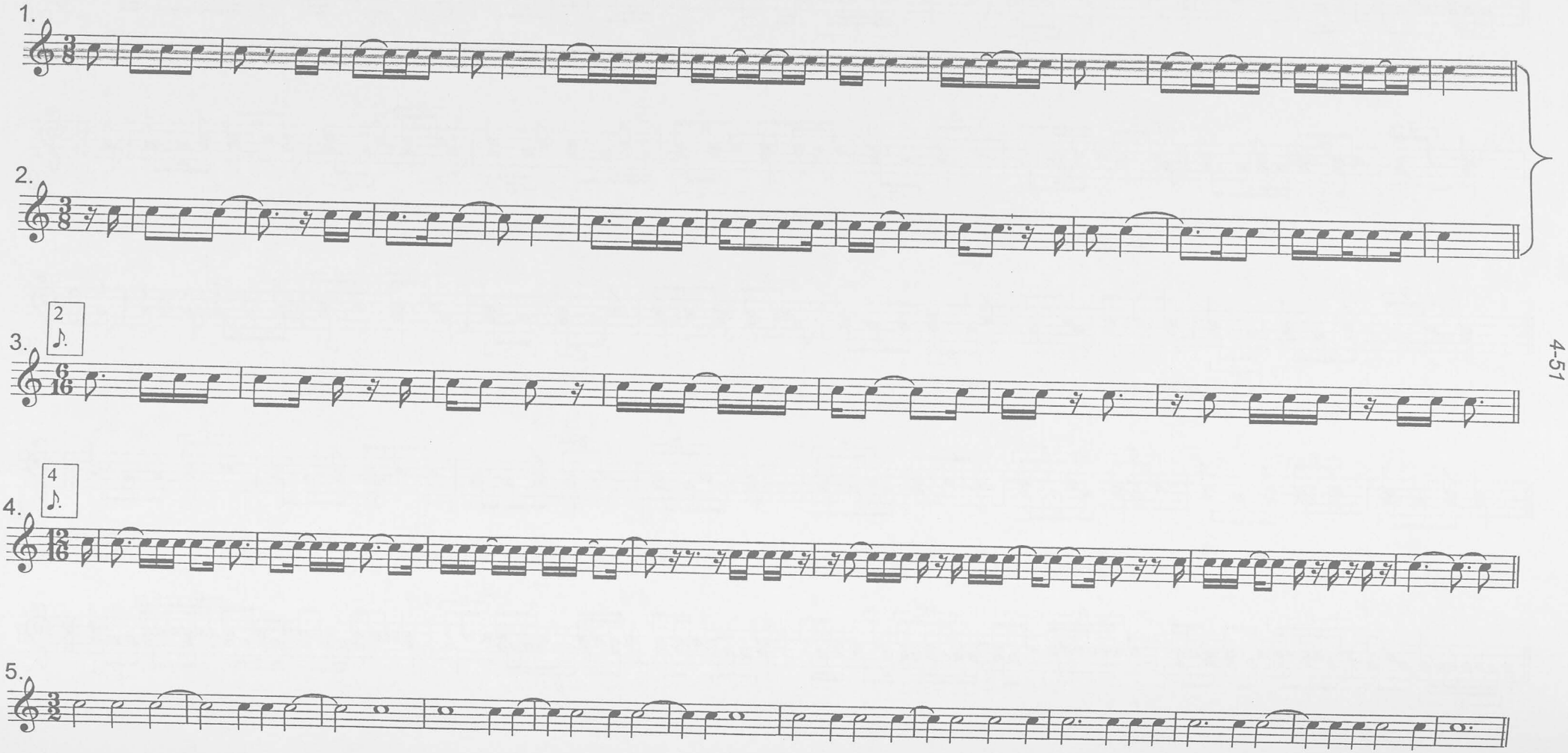
UNUSUAL COUNTING UNITS

Unit 20



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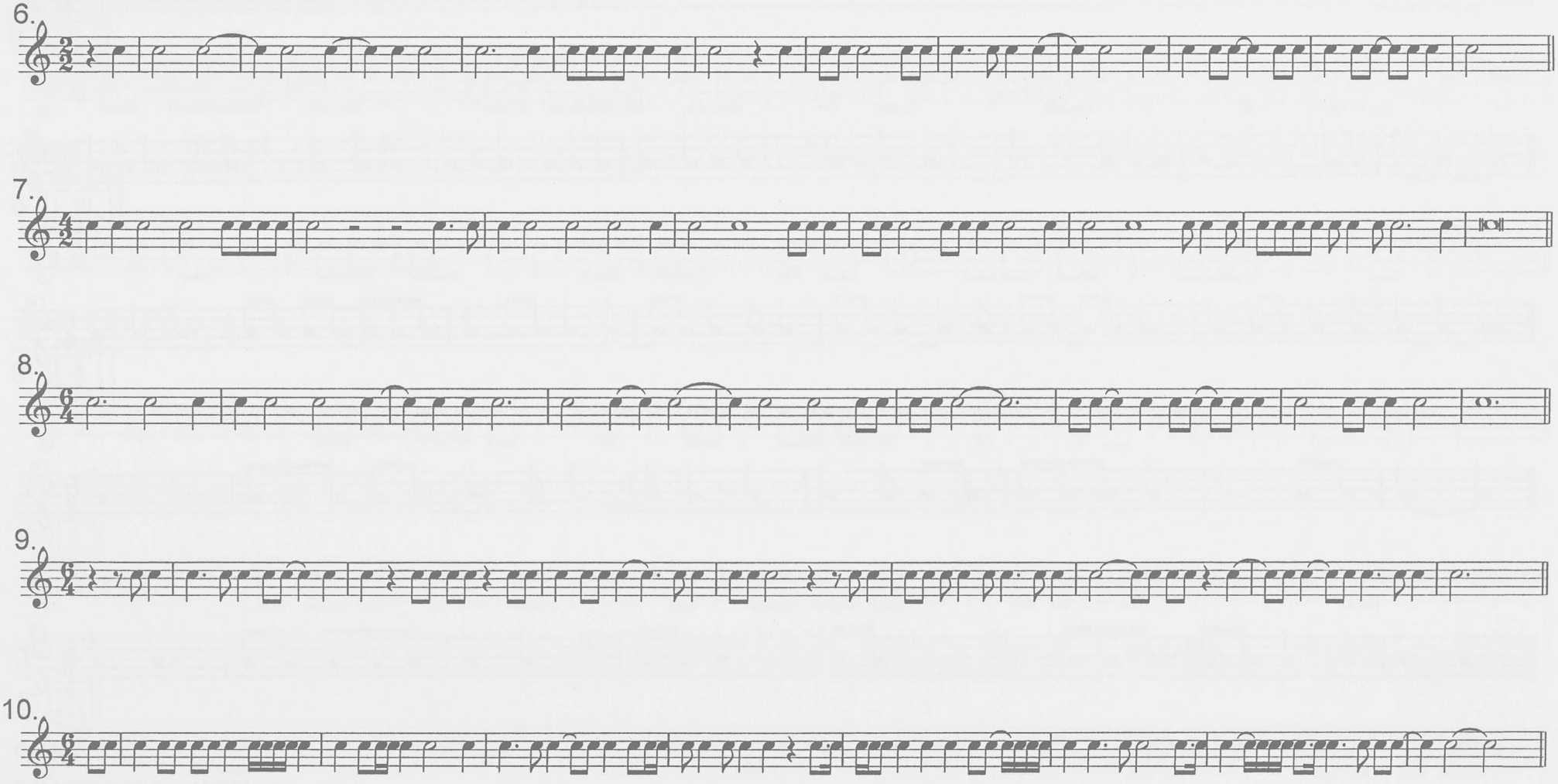

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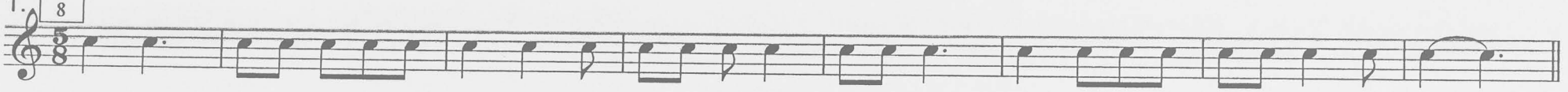
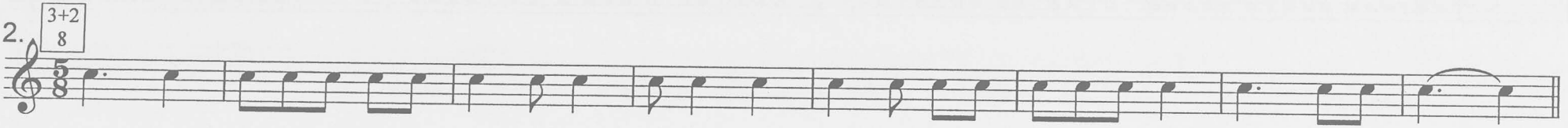
IRREGULAR METRE

Unit 21

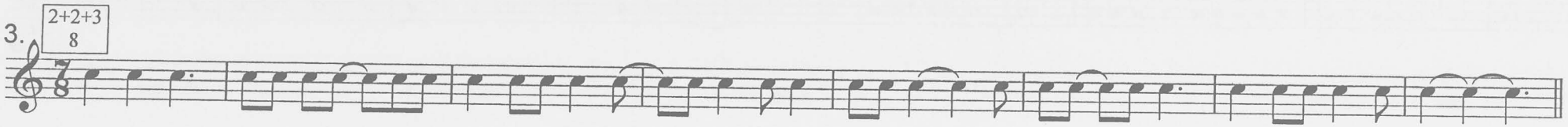
1. 2+3 / 8



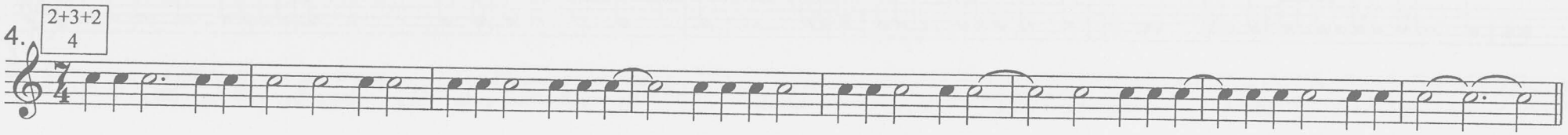
2. 3+2 / 8



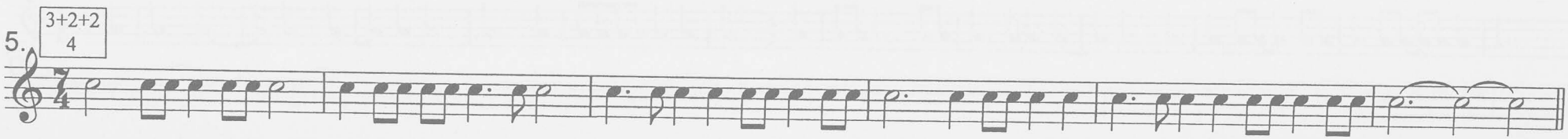
3. 2+2+3 / 8



4. 2+3+2 / 4



5. 3+2+2 / 4



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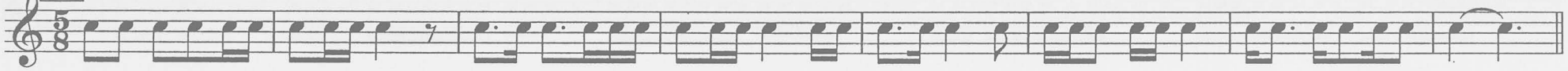
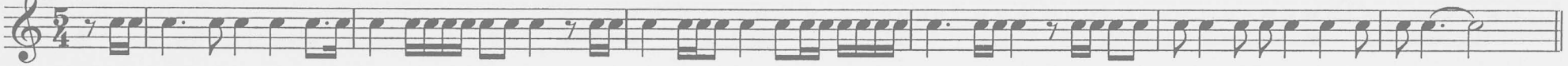
6. 2+3 / 8



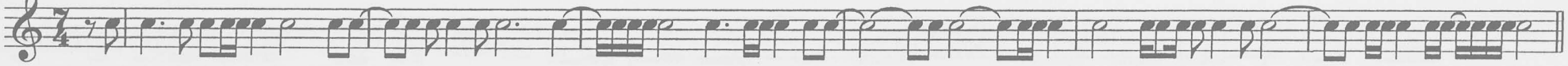
7. 2+3+2 / 8

8. 2+3 / 4



9. 3+2 / 4

10. 3+4 / 4



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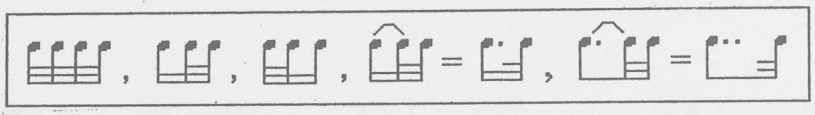
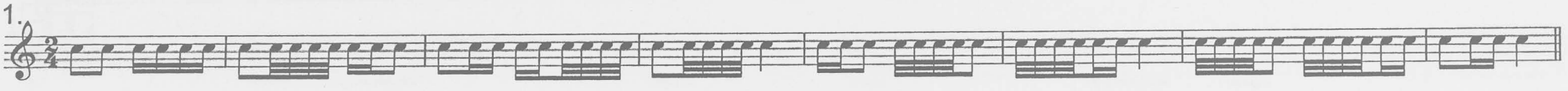
UNUSUAL SMALL NOTE VALUES



Unit 22

1.



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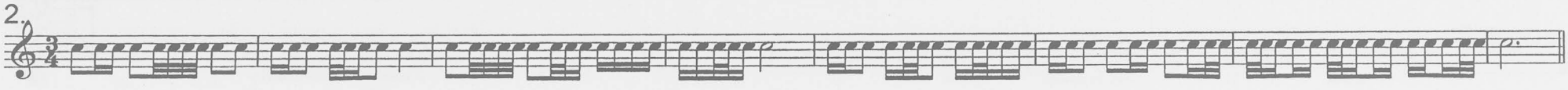

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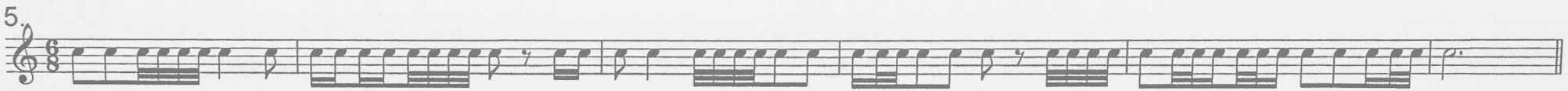
4.

5.



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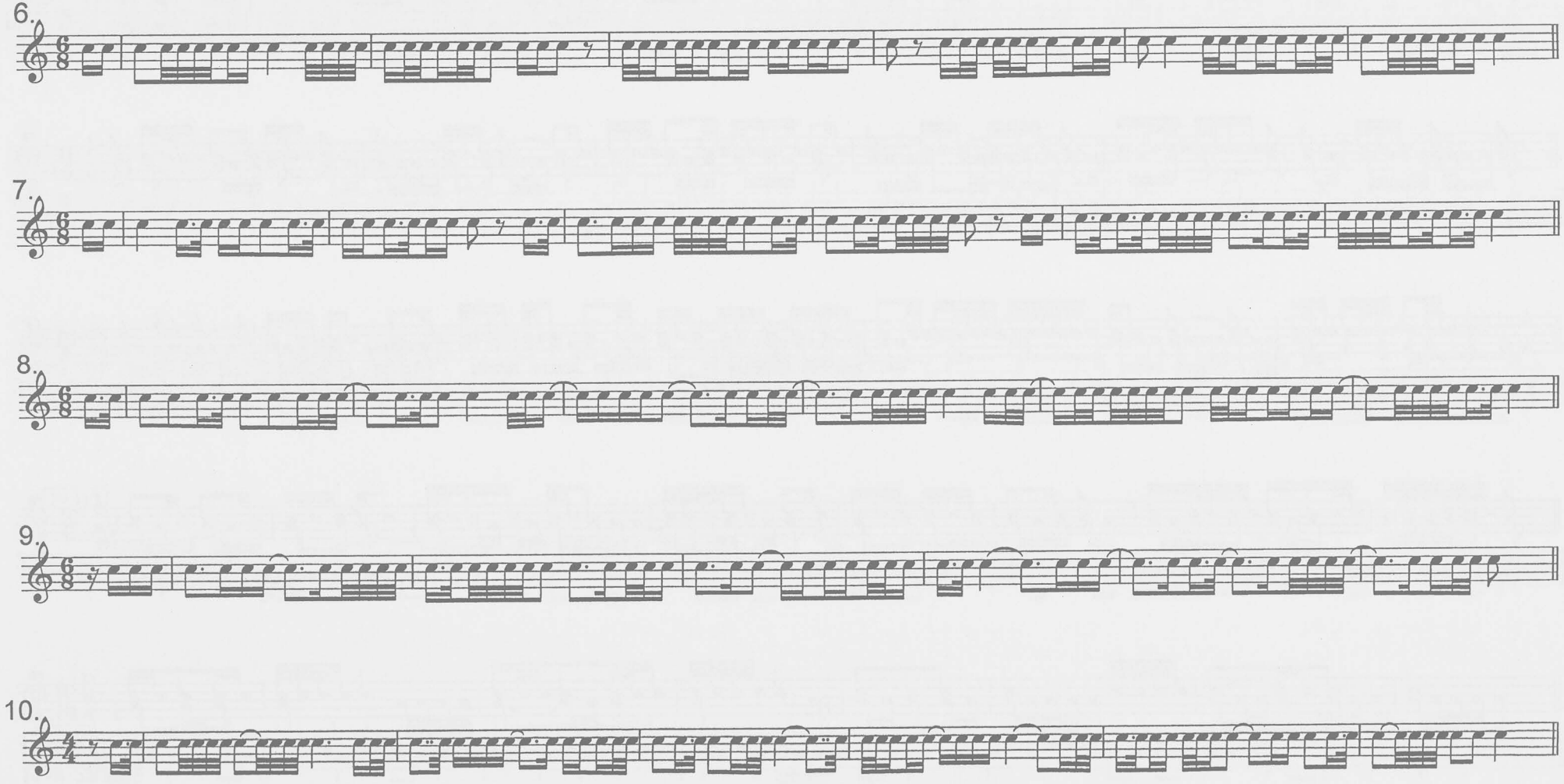

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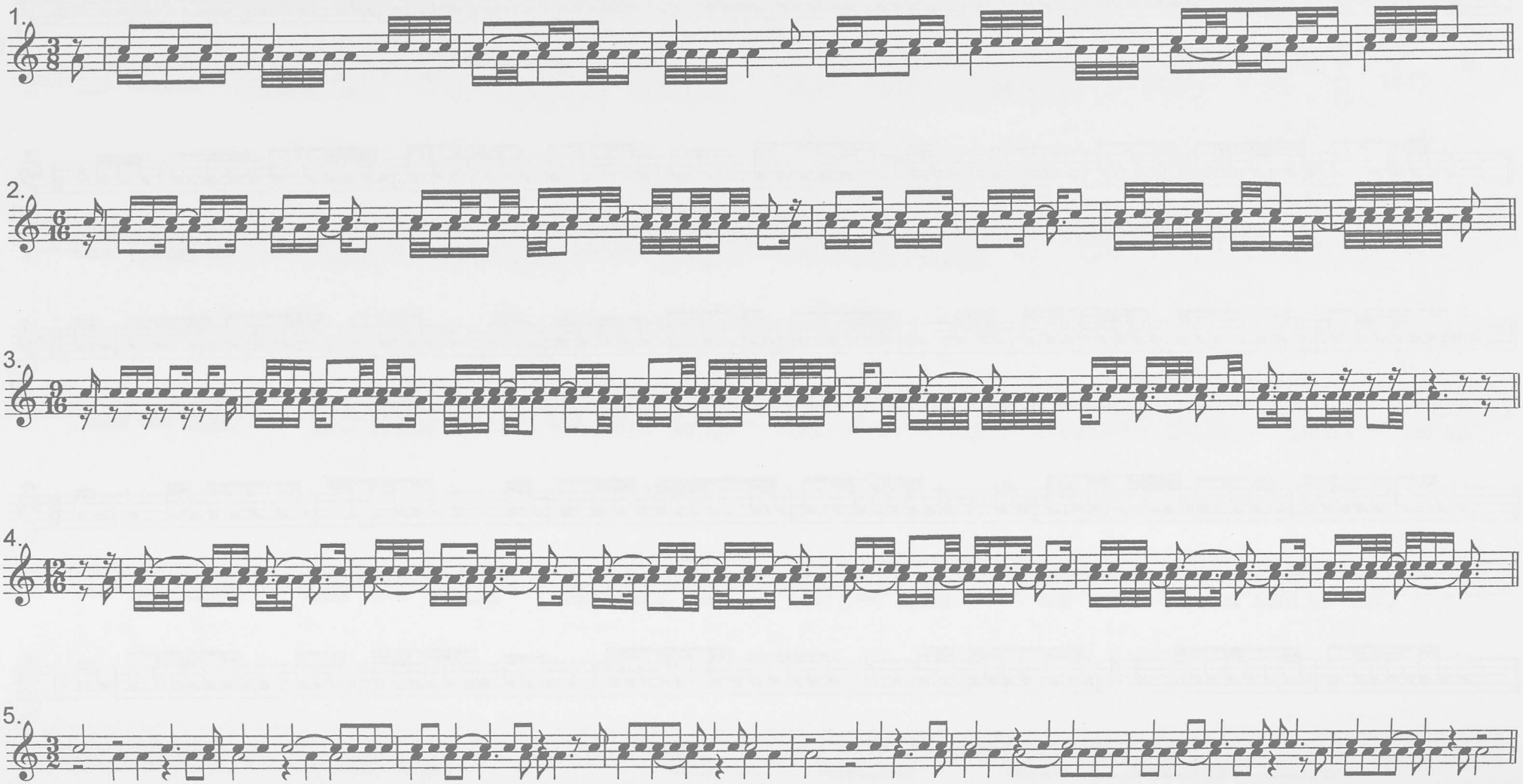
Unit 23



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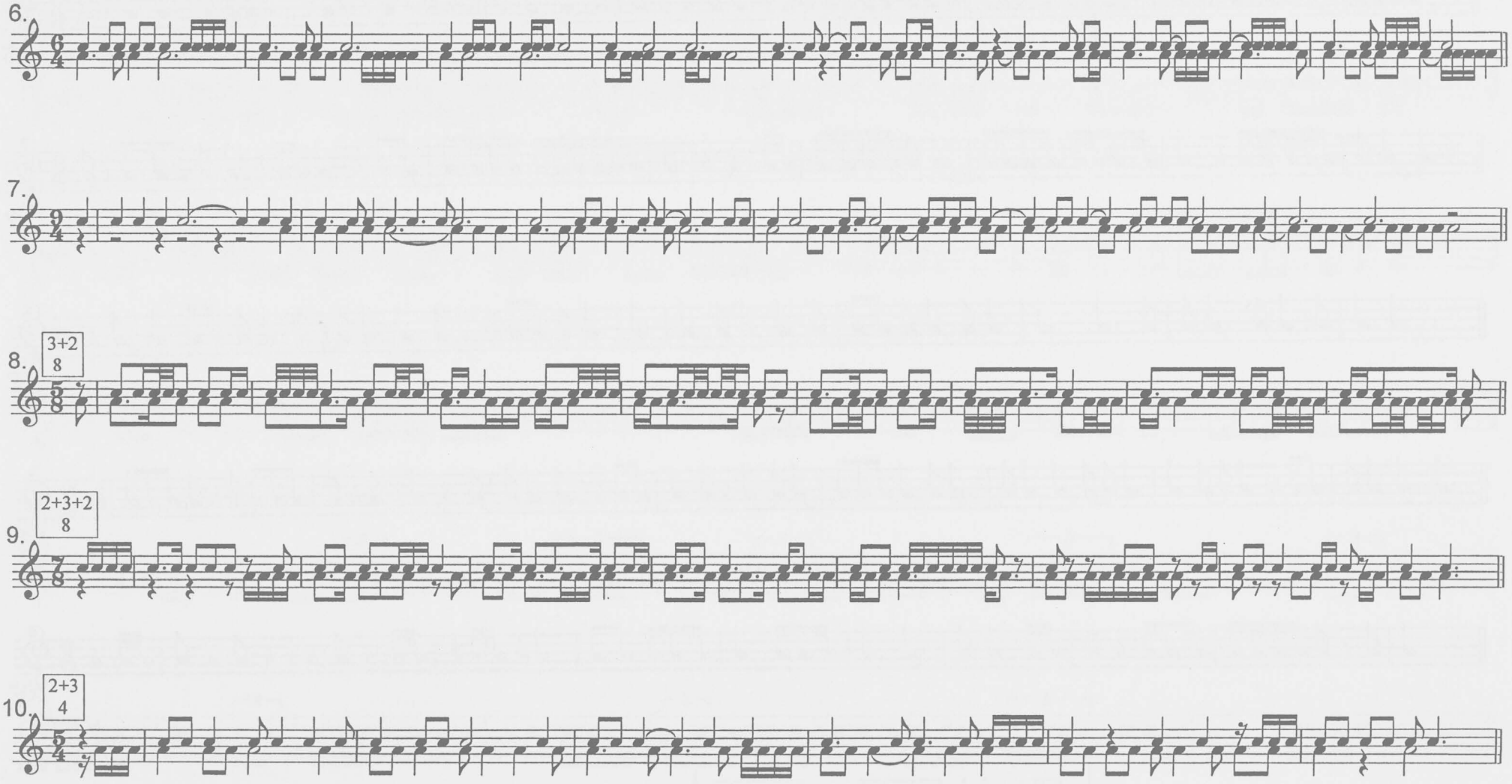

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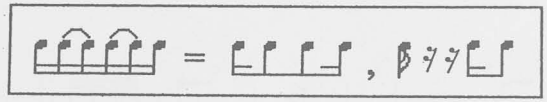

VARIETY

Unit 24

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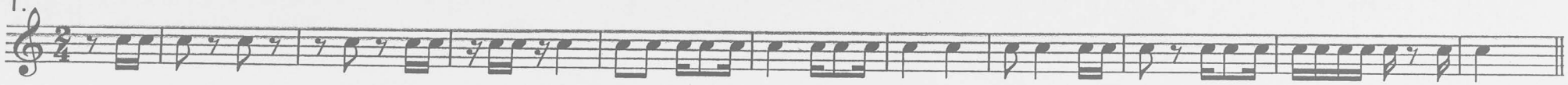

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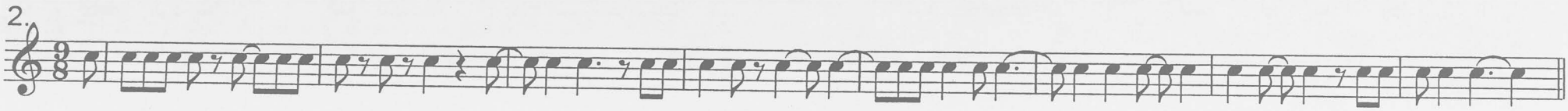

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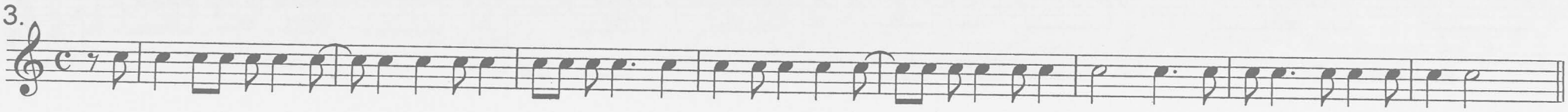

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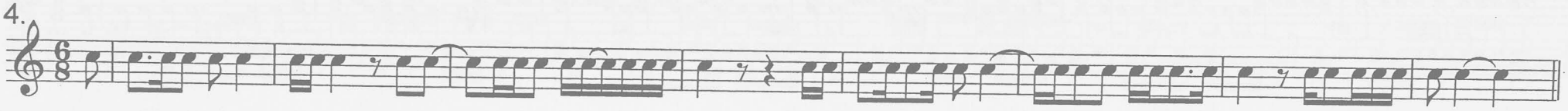

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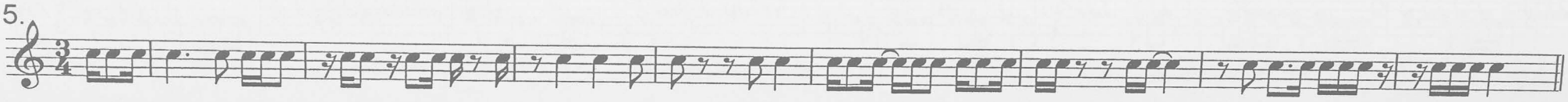

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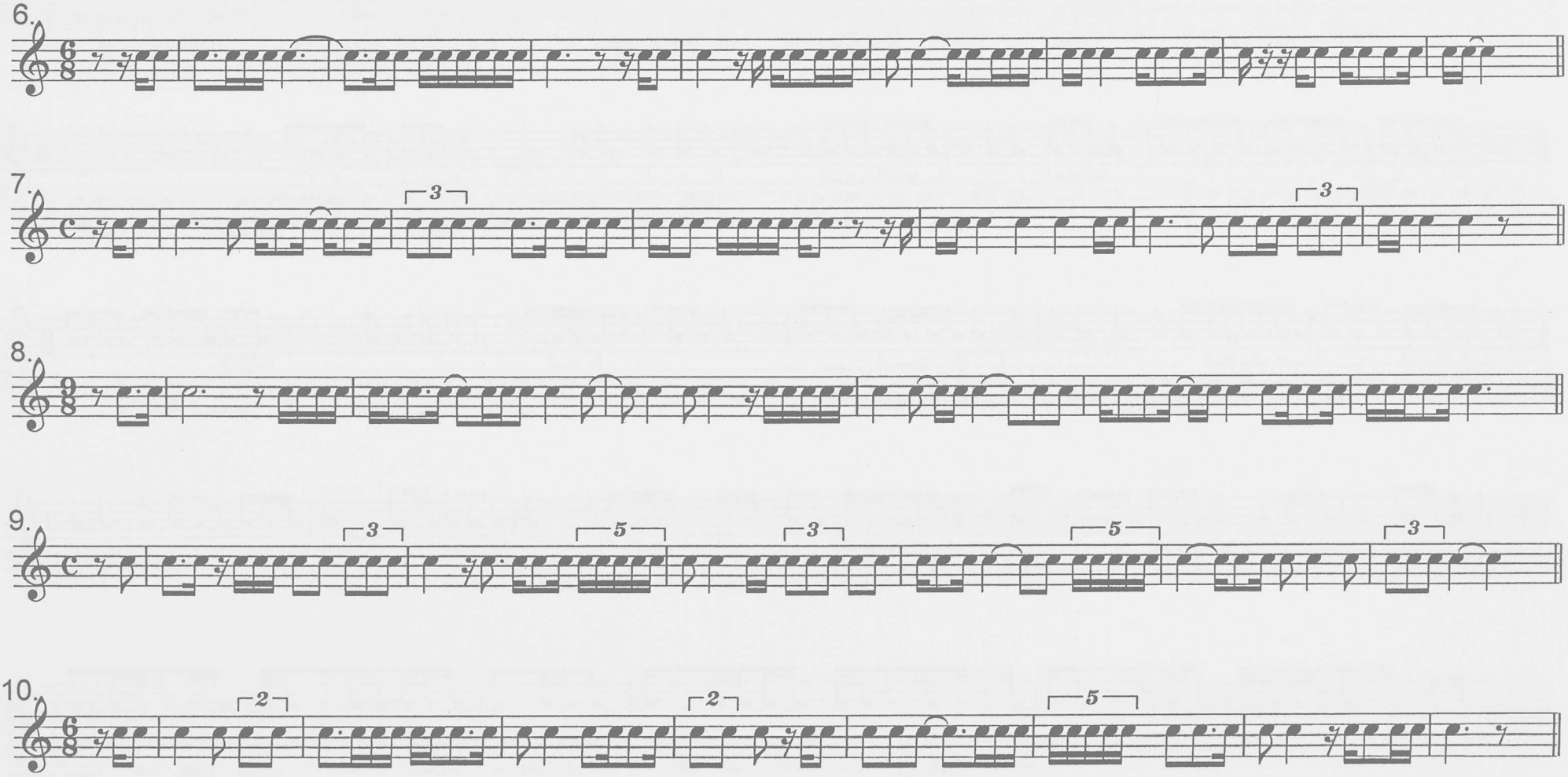

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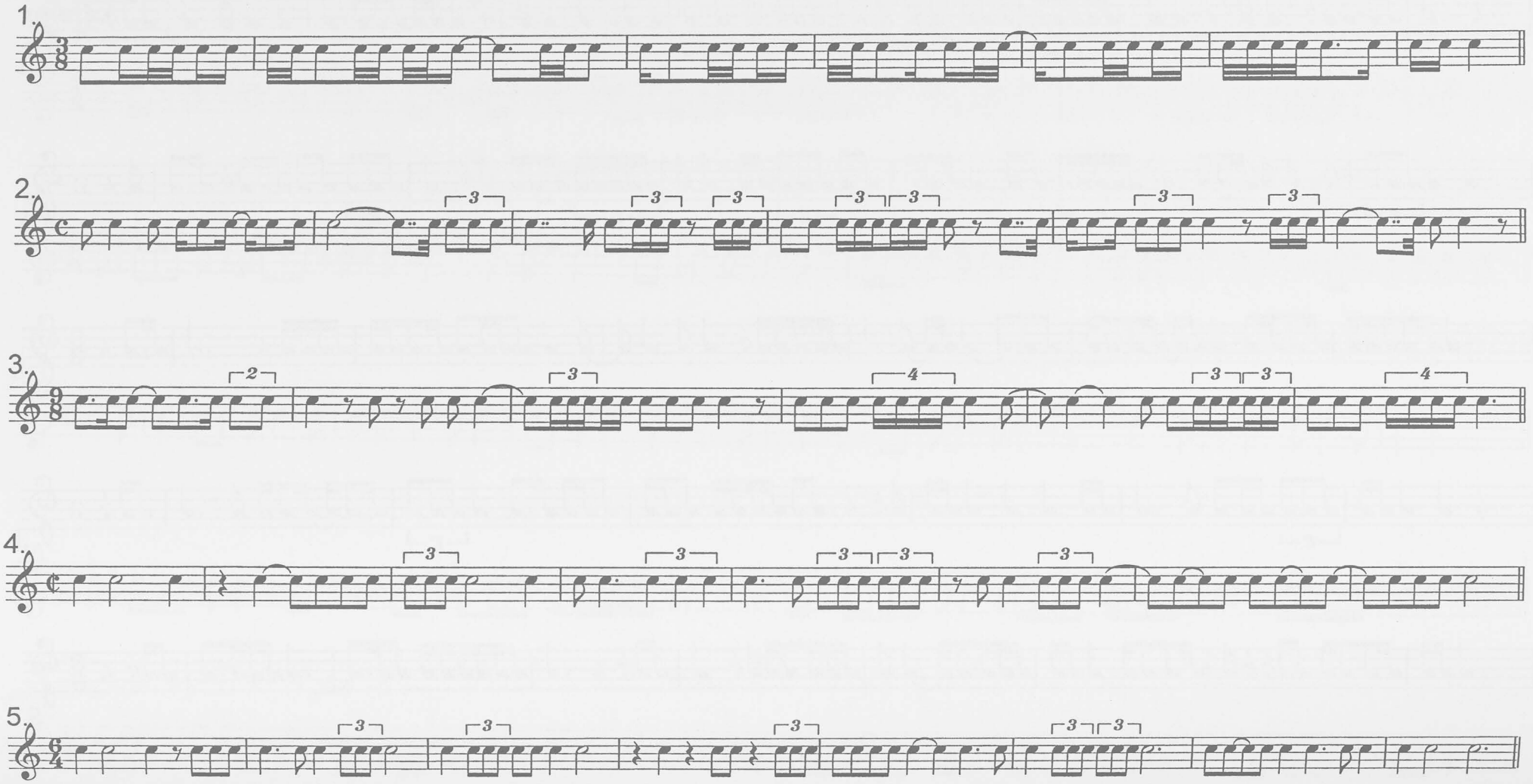
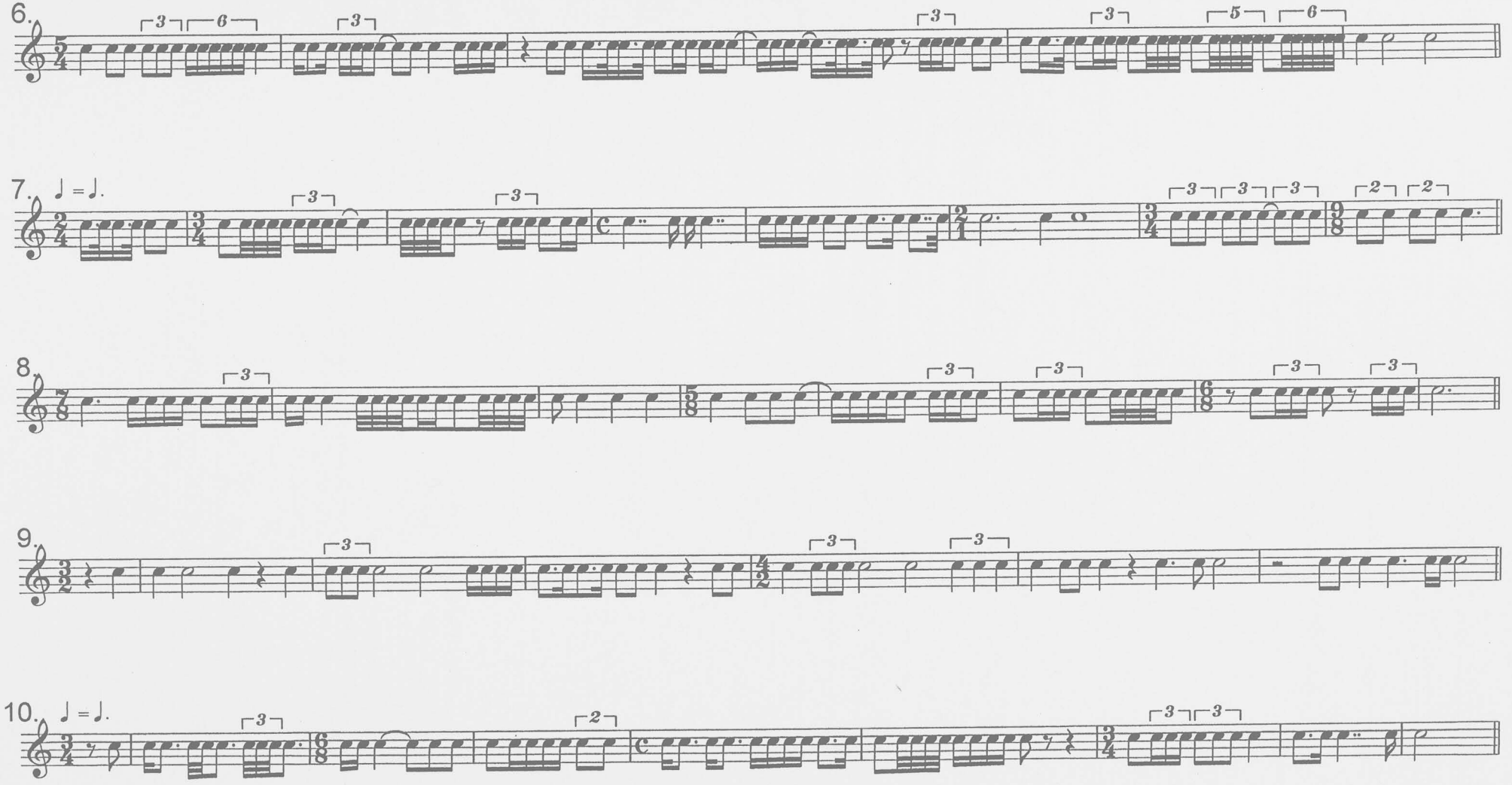
Unit 25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