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4 TEACHING AND STRUCTURING THE BASIC MOVEMENTS

4.1 Introduction

- Sitting position

  The starting point for beginners recommended by leading authors in the field of piano technique is the sitting position. The sitting position, as well as the position and support of the 'lower body' and 'torso', is clearly explained in Chapter 2.2.8, 2.3.8 and 2.4.8 respectively. Follow these descriptions meticulously when explaining the body's position in front of the instrument.

- Exercises

  Specific exercises are compiled; filling the void left by the generally accepted and most often used beginner courses. These exercises concentrate on the specific movements the beginner pianist should be able to perform, beginning with the bigger levers and moving on to the smaller levers. The majority of the exercises are in the form of duets for the pupil and his/her teacher. Note that all the exercises should be repeated by the pupil alone under the supervision of the teacher until he/she is secure and confident. Only then can the exercises be performed as a duet.

- Researcher's recommendation

  Although a keyboard sense should be established as early as possible, it is not recommended that the reading of notes be done simultaneously. The basic movements must be controlled or mastered comfortably in order to be performed within a limited time (regular beat). Thus the execution of the basic movements and the establishment of a regular beat need the pupil's full attention, as these movements and the regularity of the beat should become unconscious habits when progressing to the reading stage. Until he/she can read notes, the child's hands should be placed on the required keys for the different exercises. Certain 'landmarks' should be given to enable pupils to orientate themselves on the instrument when practising. For example all the C's on the piano are found on the left of the two black 'ears' of the 'D'onkey in the middle.

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4.2 **'Free fall'** (Movement of the whole arm)

This exercise can be done away from the piano. Physical contact between teacher and pupil is essential in order to verify that a relaxed falling movement is executed without the use of any muscles.

The teacher should pick up the pupil's bent arm (palm facing the floor) with one hand, holding it at the sides of the wrist. (The teacher should be able to move the arm up, down and sideways without any resistance from the pupil. **Do not continue** if the pupil's arm is not totally relaxed. It is of utmost importance that this relaxed starting point is achieved). Let the arm of the pupil (i.e. the total weight of the arm) fall into the other hand. Photo no 6 provides an illustration of this exercise. Repeat this exercise with both arms following the same procedure.

Photo no 6 (Original photograph of the researcher's and a pupil's hands)

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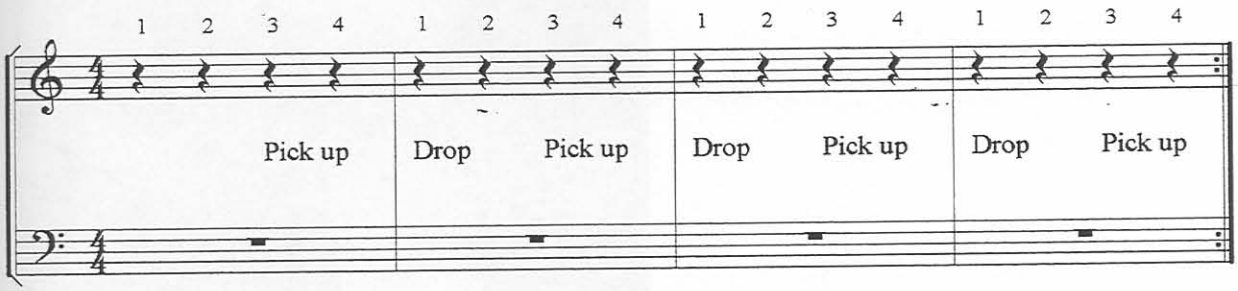
When mastered, this exercise should be done rhythmically, i e at an intended moment in time, for example: pick up the pupil's arm (contact point: the sides of the wrist) on the third beat of a 4/4 time signature and then drop it from one hand to the other on every first beat (contact point: the lower wrist). Repeat this exercise several times until a basic feeling/understanding of a regular beat is established.

Exercise 1



This exercise can now be done at the piano.

The teacher should pick up the pupil's arm to a height of approximately 5-10 cm above the keys (not more to avoid injury) and drop it onto the keys making contact where the wrist joins the hand as illustrated in photo no 7. Do this exercise with both arms as previously explained.

Exercise 2a

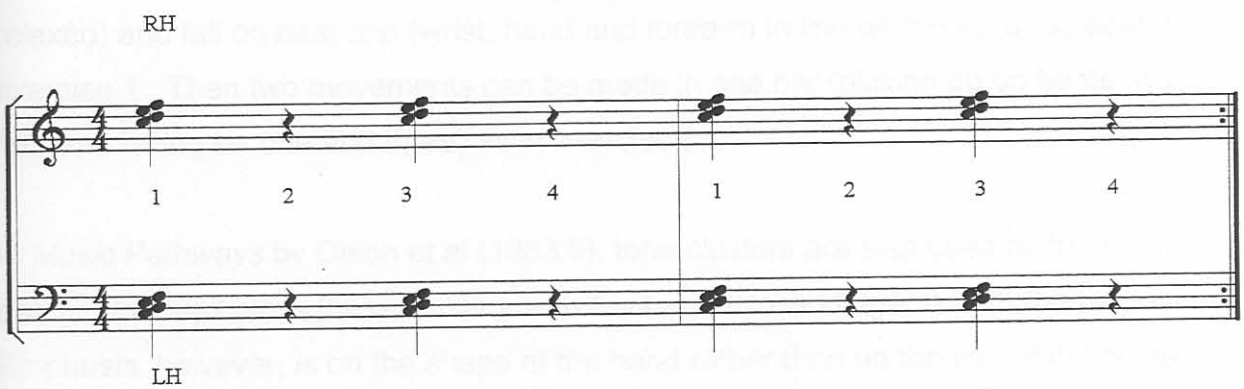


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Photo no 7 (original photograph of the researcher's and a pupil's hands)

Whilst counting a regular 4/4 beat, the pupil can now do this exercise on his/her own. The pupil must pick up on beat three (the wrist high, hand and upper arm hanging relaxed) and fall on beat one (wrist, hand and forearm in line on the keys) as done in exercise 1. Then two movements can be made in one bar (picking up on beats two and four and falling on one and three) as in exercise 2a.

In *Music Pathways* by Olson et al (1983:6), tone clusters are also used as the starting point. The pupil plays these clusters with the hand (closed fingers) from the beginning. Emphasis, however, is on the shape of the hand rather than on the use of the big lever.

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4.3 'Float off'

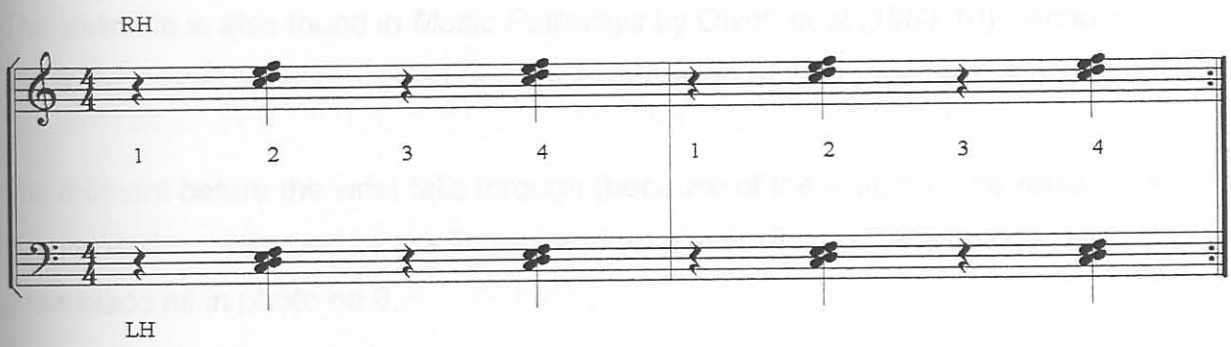
The completed position for the 'float off' movement is the position of the wrist when picked up by the teacher before letting it fall, as found in the previous exercise. The wrist is now at its highest point and the hand hangs relaxed from it. Thus the movement of the wrist during 'float off' controls the hand.

Repeat the first 'free fall' exercise 1, concentrating on the 'up' movement, then 'float off' and at the same time prepare the arm for the next fall.

The pupil can now do this exercise at the piano, on his/her own. See to it that nothing except the wrist is moving actively during the 'float off' movement. Do exercise 2a with the right hand, then the left hand, followed by the two hands together. Concentrate on the 'float off' movement.

As soon as these two movements are mastered, interesting rhythmical adjustments can be made. The 'free fall' can be done on the second and fourth beats of a 4/4 time signature and the 'float off' can be done on the first and third beats as in exercise 2b.

Exercise 2b



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It is essential not to continue with the next movement if a strong sense for a regular beat has not been established, and if the previous movements are not executed in a comfortable and relaxed way.

If the problem of tension still exists at this stage, start again. Repeat the first exercises away from the piano on a soft surface with the child lying on his/her back, pretending to sleep. The repetition of these phases can be done with different rhythms to keep the pupil interested.

4.4 Controlled 'free fall' and 'float off'

Now that a sense for a regular beat has been established and the first two basic movements have been mastered, the pupil should be able to use them in a controlled way at the instrument.

Place the pupil's right hand on a perfect 5th (thumb on F and fifth finger on C) above middle C. (See left hand notes: exercise 3, bar 5-8). The pupil does a 'free fall' movement and lands on a 5th. The weight of the whole arm is still moving down, but is controlled by 1) the contact of the first and fifth fingers on the keys, and 2) the wrist absorbing the weight and not falling through (this demands elasticity in the wrist).

This exercise is also found in *Music Pathways* by Olson et al (1983:10). Although the use of the bigger lever is implied, a clear explanation of the movement is not given.

The moment before the wrist falls through (because of the weight of the released arm) it is controlled or absorbed by the fingers and an elastic 'float off' wrist movement (4.3) takes place as in photo no 8.

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Photo no 8 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

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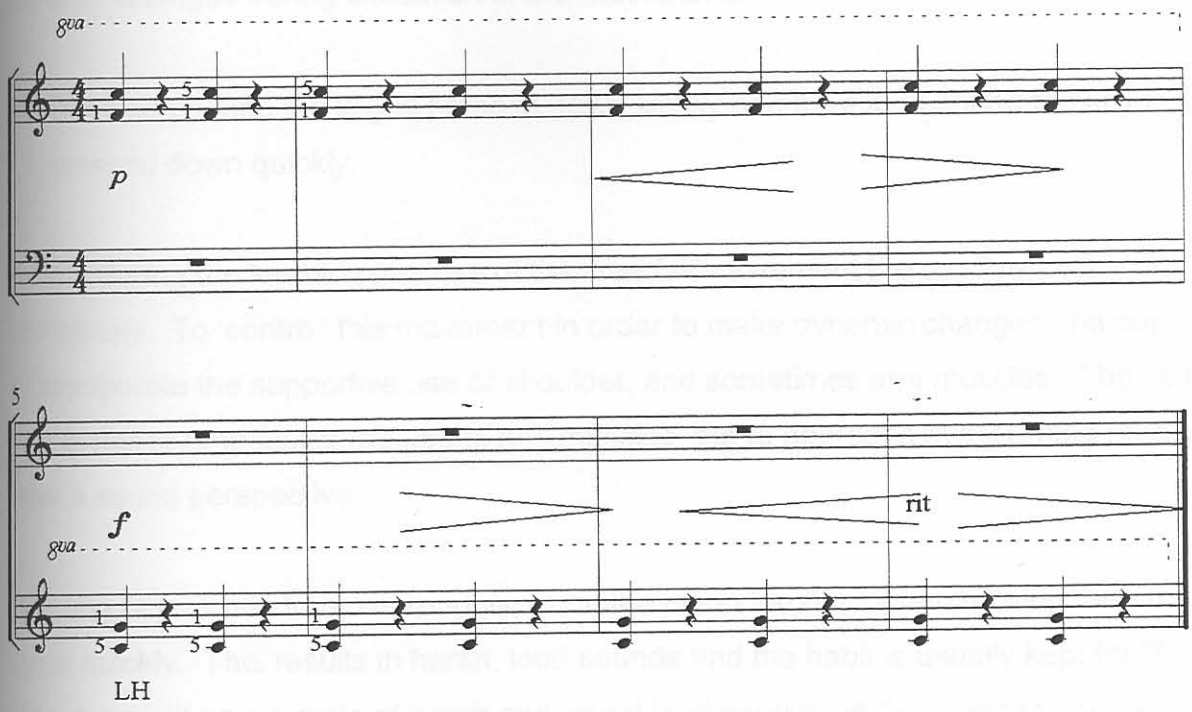
Pupil:

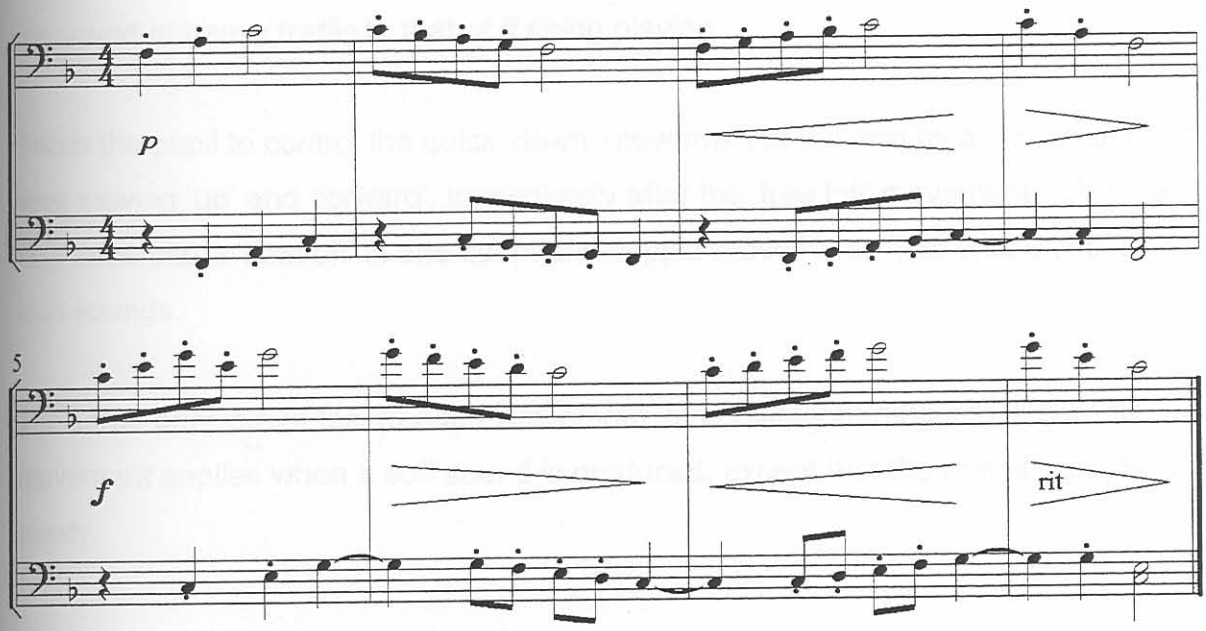
Exercise 3 **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The little horse



Teacher:

The little horse



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Do this exercise initially without any dynamic changes. When the movements are executed comfortably without dynamic changes, the pupil has to learn to control dynamic changes during execution of the movements.

- For a soft sound the key is pressed down slowly and for a loud sound the key is pressed down quickly.

Initially during the learning process of the 'free fall' movement the pupil relaxes completely. To 'control' this movement in order to make dynamic changes, the pupil has to incorporate the supportive use of shoulder, and sometimes arm muscles. The best way is **not** to emphasize the use of any muscles, but to approach this learning process from a sound perspective.

A young pupil tends to move roughly, or hit the piano too hard when moving the arm down quickly. This results in harsh, loud sounds and the habit is usually kept for life. Give the pupil an example of harsh and round loud sounds on the piano by respectively hitting the key, and then playing with a supple and controlled 'free fall' and 'float off' movement. It is of utmost importance that the difference in sound between harsh and round loud sounds is established. Real life examples can also be given by comparing the sound of heavy traffic to that of *ff* string playing.

Teach the pupil to control the quick 'down' movement of the arm by a supple or elastic wrist moving 'up' and 'forward', immediately after the 'free fall' movement. The 'free fall' now turns into a 'float off' in one fluent and supple movement. This would avoid harsh loud sounds.

The same principle of the 'free fall' movement immediately turning into a 'float off' movement applies when a soft sound is produced, except that the arm is brought down slowly.

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Do exercise 4 initially with the pupil's hand in a position, which is comfortable - usually on F and C above middle C. Then move up and down the keyboard whilst practising the use of a regular beat. The left hand mirrors the pattern. Again the use of dynamic changes should be pointed out. The movements supporting these dynamic changes and the difference in harsh and round sound colours should be emphasized.

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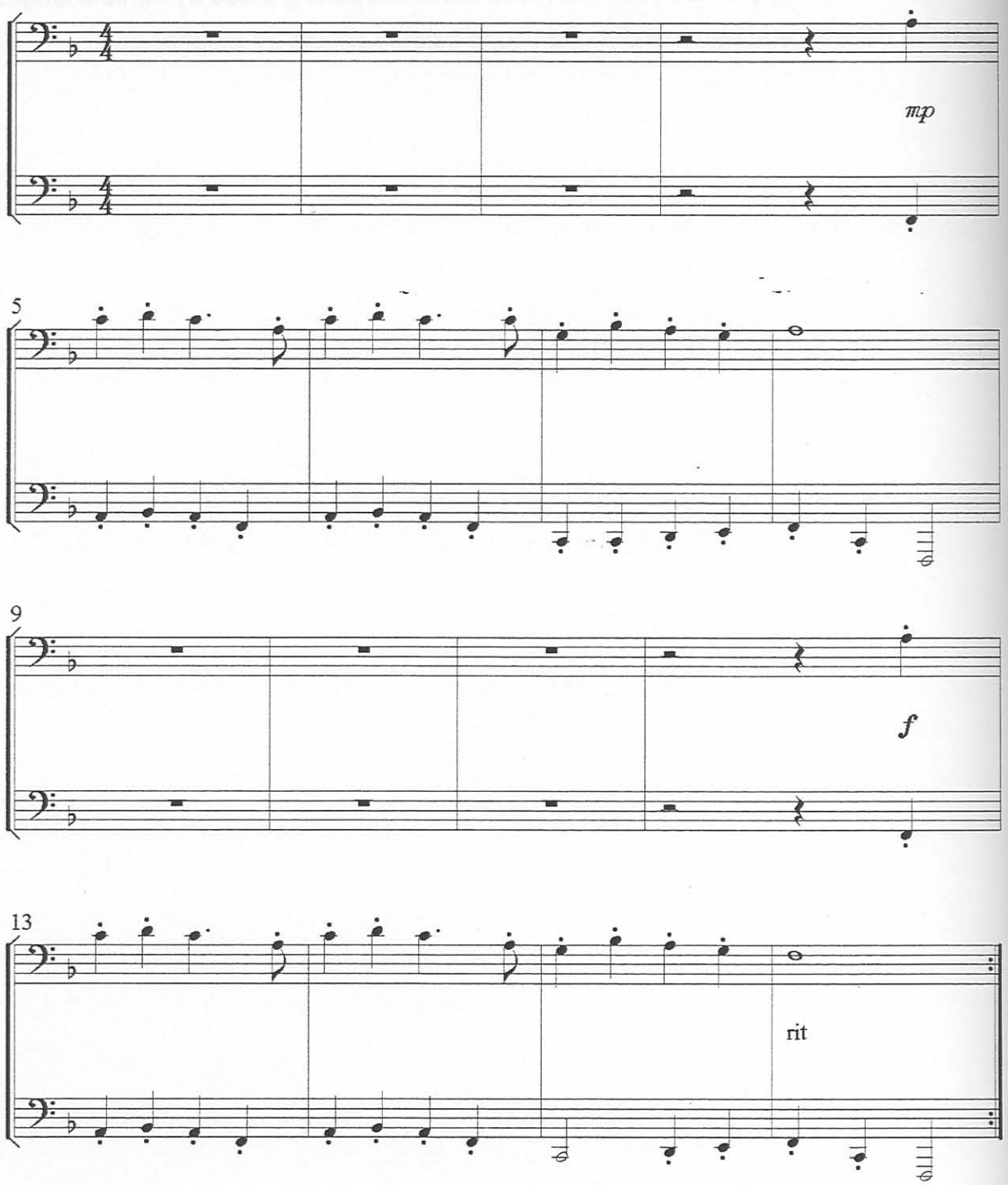
Teacher: **Exercise 4**

The train ride



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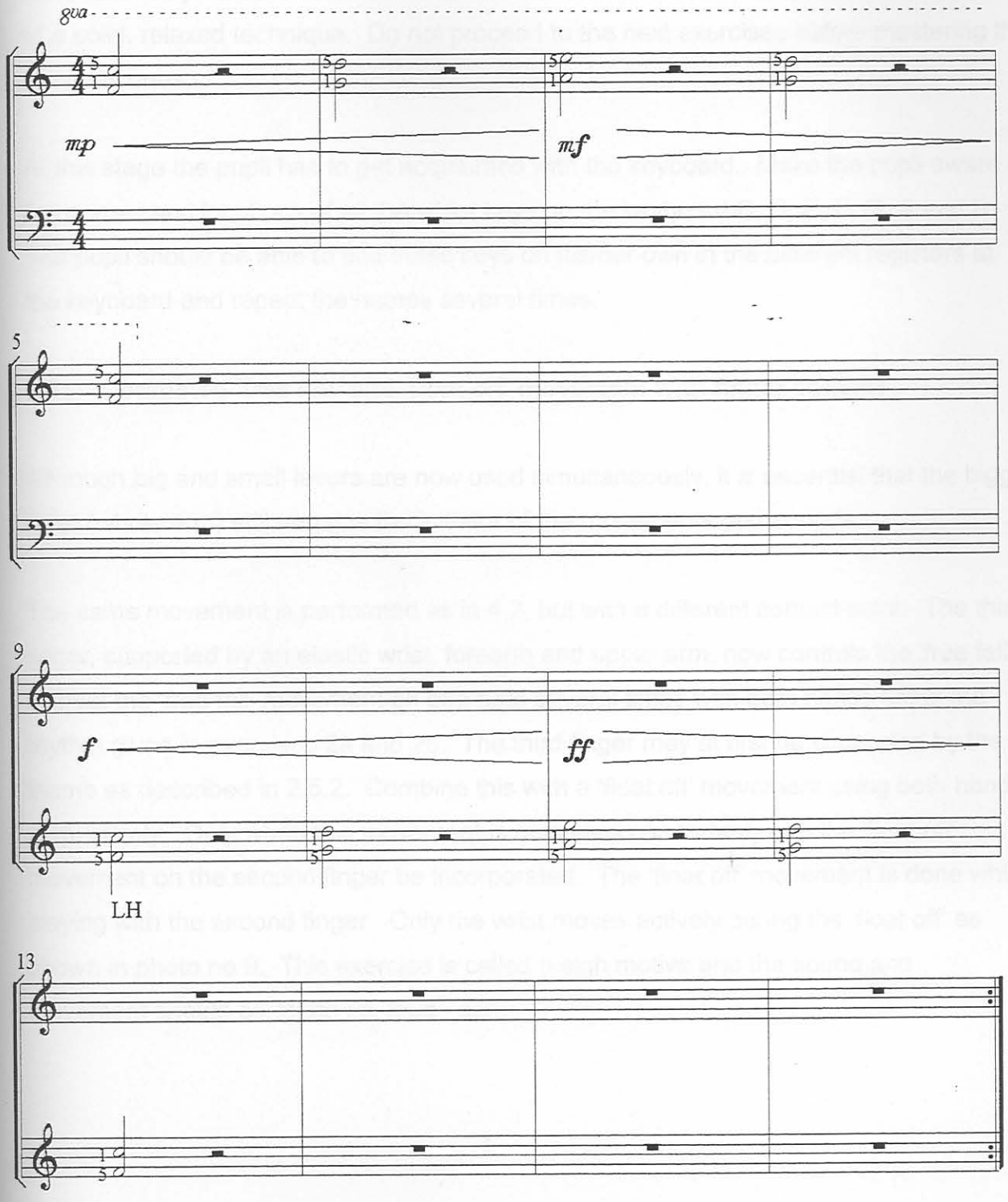
Pupil: **Exercise 4** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The train ride



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These exercises are done to ensure the use of the bigger lever (the whole arm) during the 'free fall' and 'float off'. The experience of a regular beat must be established simultaneously. This is the main aim of all the exercises up to now and is the foundation of a solid, relaxed technique. Do not proceed to the next exercises before mastering the previous ones.

At this stage the pupil has to get acquainted with the keyboard. Make the pupil aware of the names and locations of all the white keys on the keyboard C, D, E, F, G, A and B. The pupil should be able to find these keys on his/her own in the different registers at the keyboard and repeat the names several times.

4.5 Combined 'free fall' and 'float off' movement with finger contact

Although big and small levers are now used simultaneously, it is essential that the bigger lever (whole arm) still remains the initiator of the movements and sounds.

The same movement is performed as in 4.2, but with a different contact point. The third finger, supported by an elastic wrist, forearm and upper arm, now controls the 'free fall'. Repeat the 'free fall' movement on one note several times with both hands using the rhythm given in exercises 2a and 2b. The third finger may at first be supported by the thumb as described in 2.5.2. Combine this with a 'float off' movement using both hands respectively. Only when this movement is mastered comfortably can the 'float off' movement on the second finger be incorporated. The 'float off' movement is done whilst playing with the second finger. Only the wrist moves actively during the 'float off' as shown in photo no 9. This exercise is called a sigh motive and the sound and movement should correlate i.e. loud - soft.

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Photo no 9 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

The pupil learns the next exercise by rote, concentrating on the correct movement and regularity of the beat.

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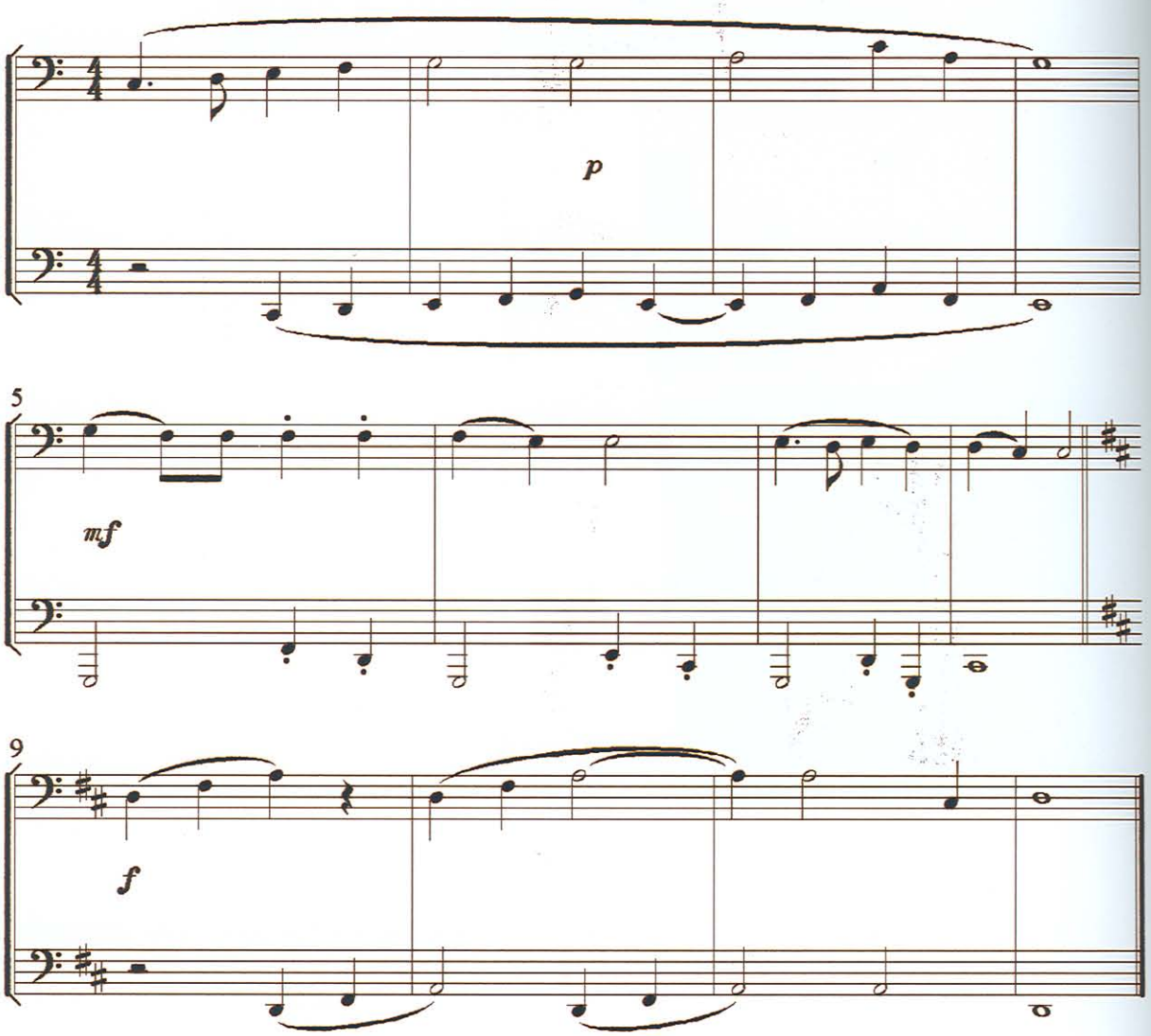
Teacher: **Exercise 5**

The hiding bunny



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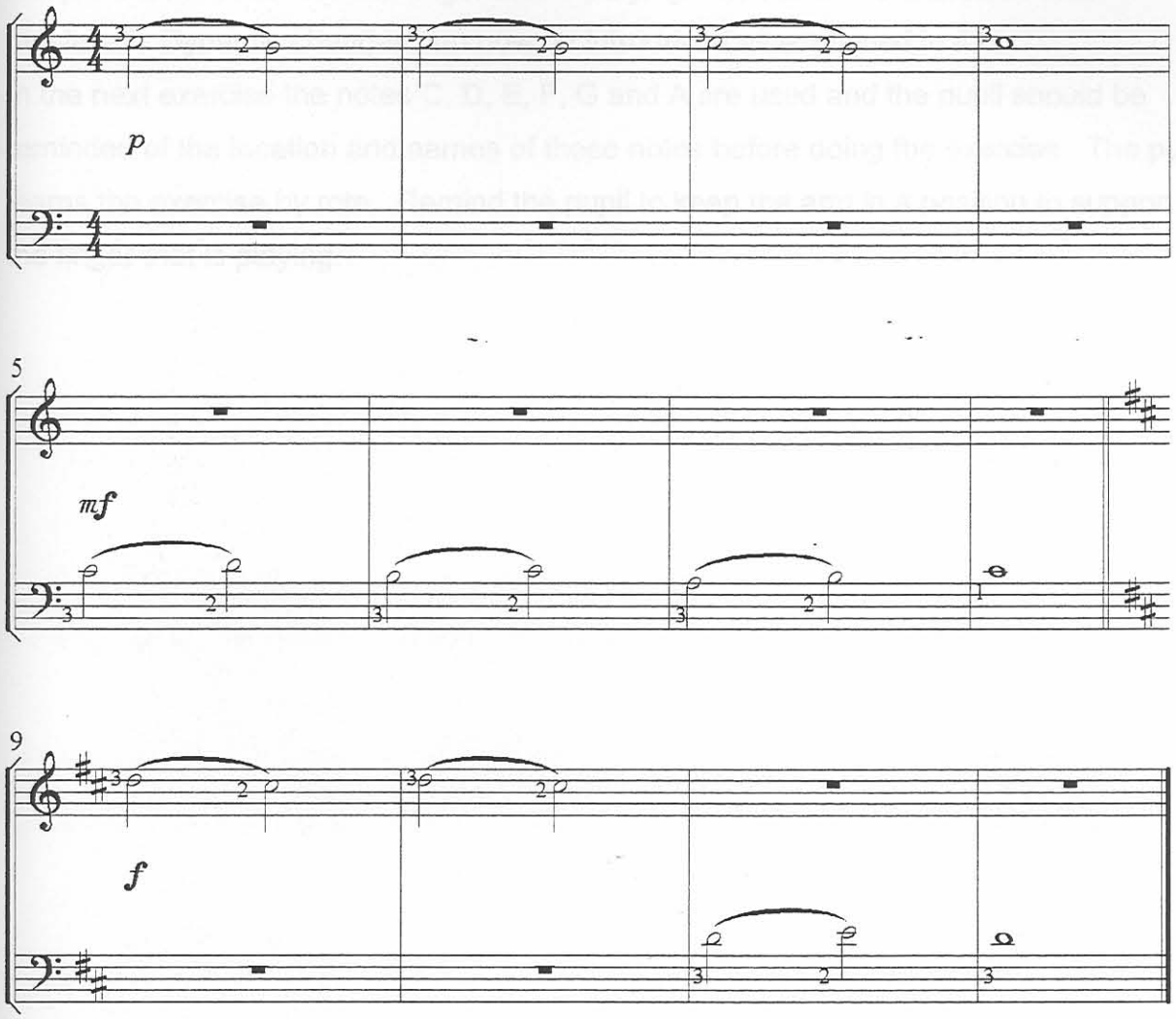
Pupil: **Exercise 5** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The hiding bunny



The previous exercise can be extended by using three fingers 4, 3 and 2 as shown in exercise 6a. The pupil should be encouraged to recognize the names and locations of all the white keys on the piano in the different registers.

A 'free fall' movement is done on the first note and a 'float off' on the last. Controlled arm weight is used on the first note and taken off on the last. Do this exercise without

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any dynamic changes at first. The rhythmic pattern must be followed as precisely as in the previous exercises. This is a big lever exercise, **not** finger drilling. The movement of the fingers should be minimal in order to let the bigger lever control the movement. Keep the arm in line with the finger that is playing. Repeat all the exercises until mastered. Dynamic changes can now be introduced as explained in 4.4.

In the next exercise the notes C, D, E, F, G and A are used and the pupil should be reminded of the location and names of these notes before doing the exercise. The pupil learns the exercise by rote. Remind the pupil to keep the arm in a position to support the finger that is playing.

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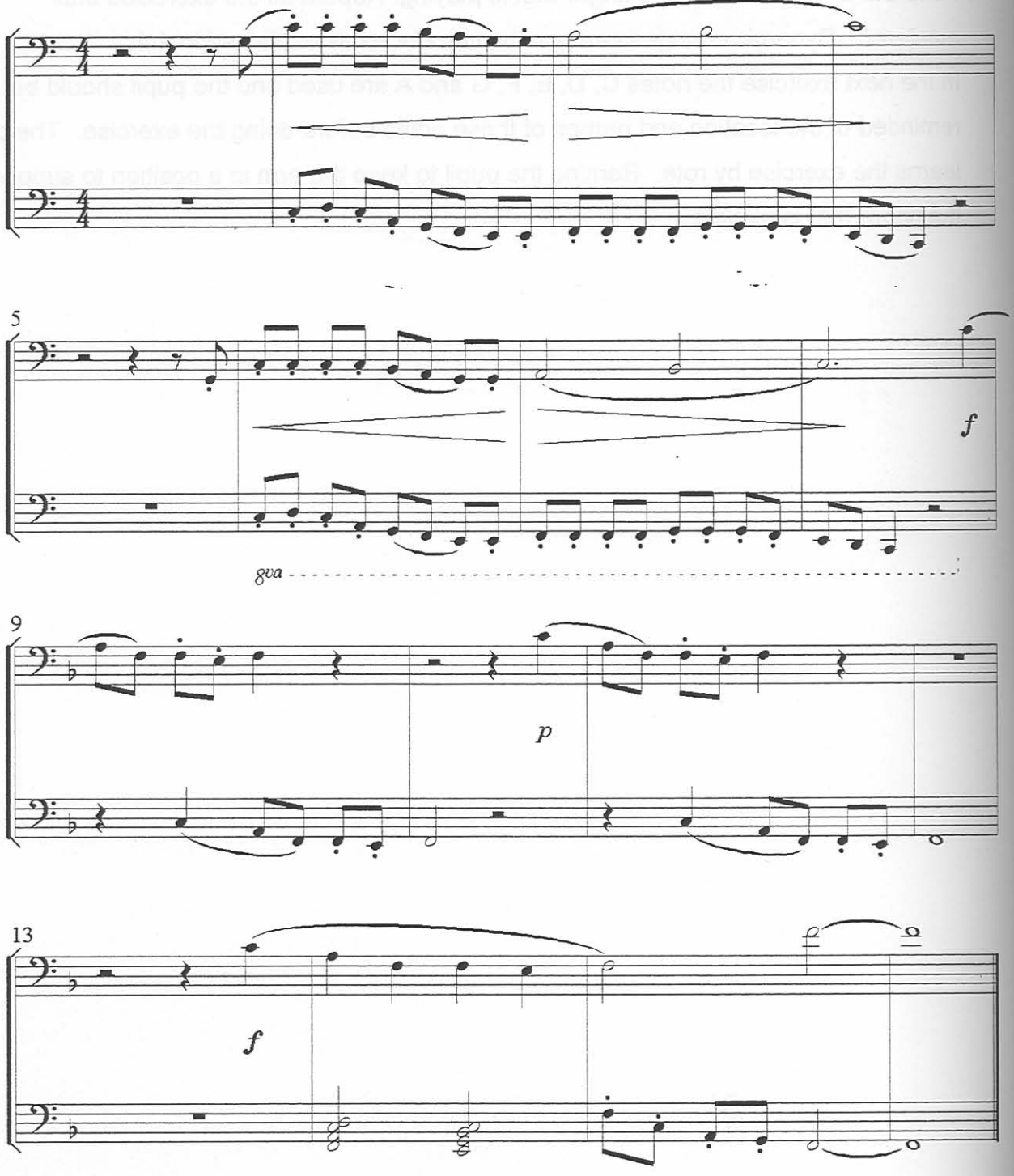
Teacher: **Exercise 6a**

On my little horse



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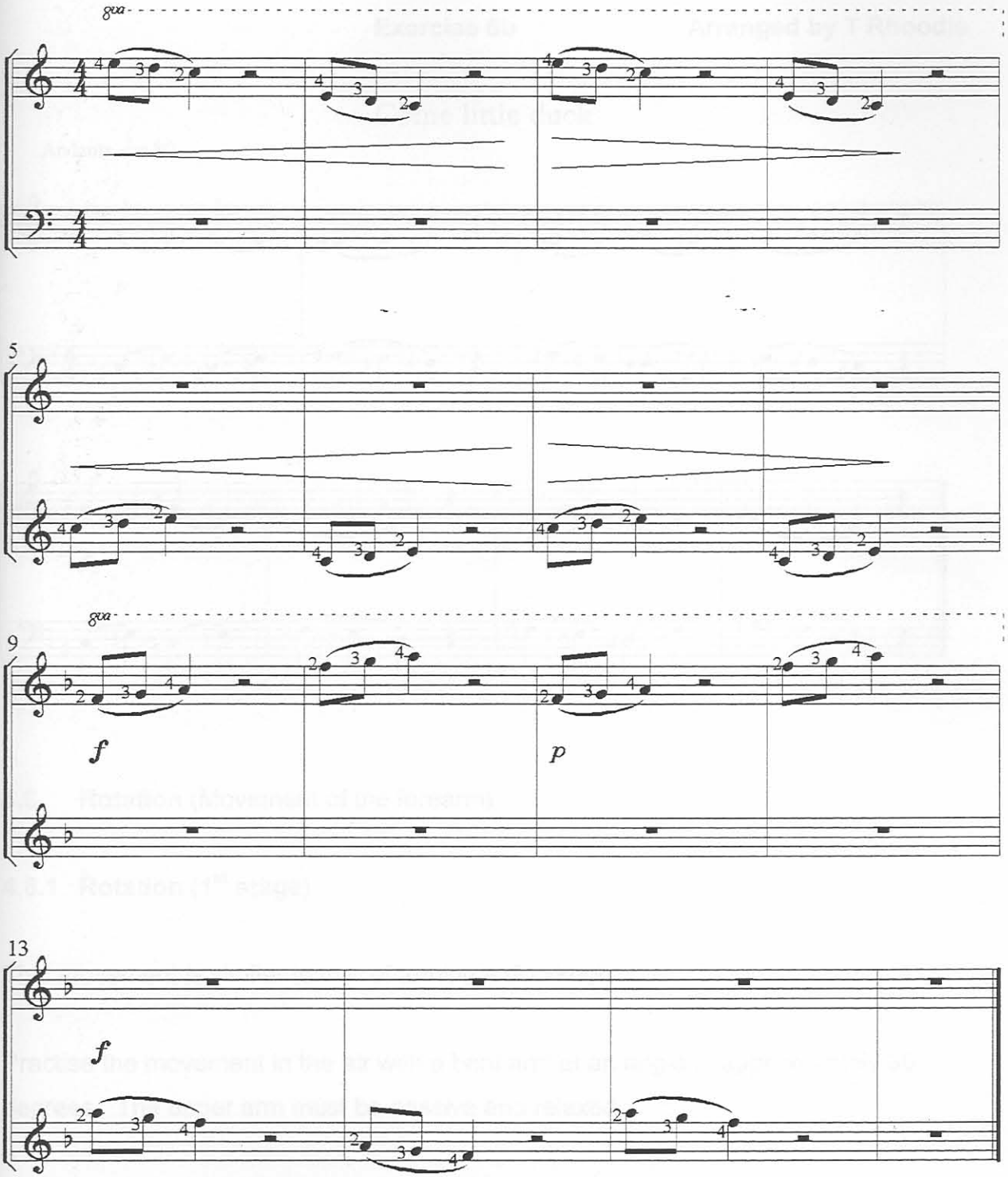
Pupil: **Exercise 6a** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

On my little horse



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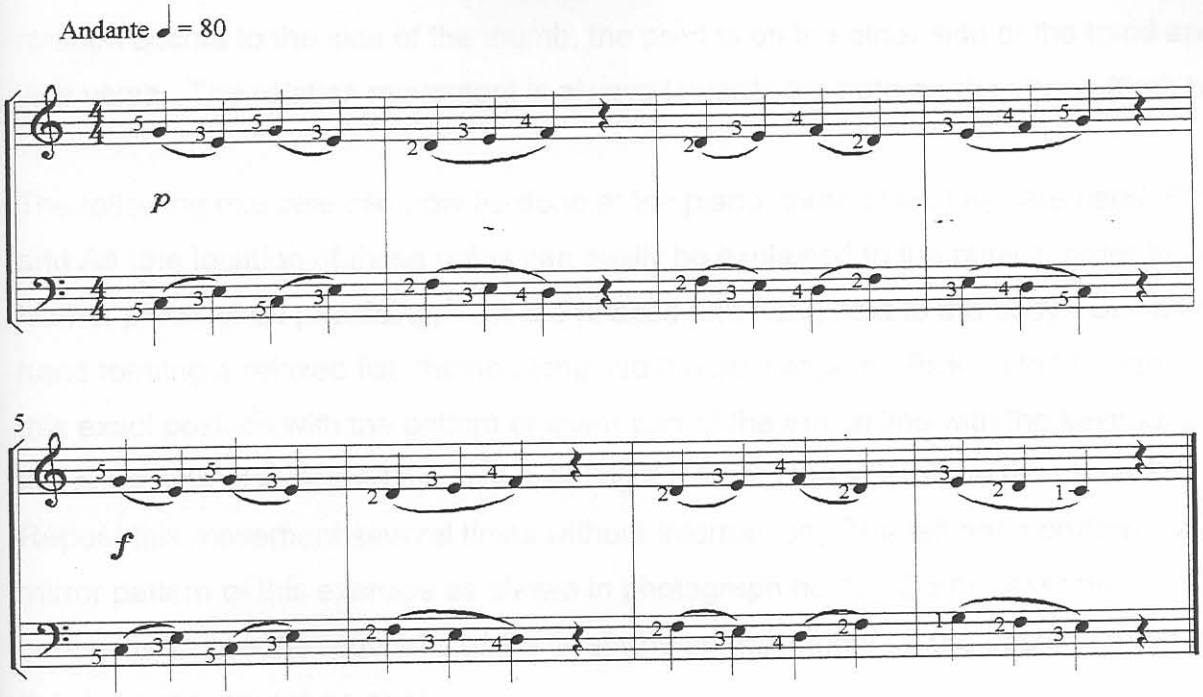
A solo piece is given in which the 'free fall' and 'float off' movements are practised, by using two and three note motives.

Exercise 6b **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Come little duck



4.6 Rotation (Movement of the forearm)

4.6.1 Rotation (1st stage)

This movement is similar to that of turning a doorknob.

Practise the movement in the air with a bent arm at an angle of approximately 90 degrees. The upper arm must be passive and relaxed.

To obtain the correct position at the instrument, let the relaxed arm hang next to the body. Lift the forearm in this position onto a table high enough to be in line with the side

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of the forearm. The hand should now be in a position to play the harp or accordion. Roll the hand to the thumb's side with the palm facing the floor. This rolling or turning movement is called rotation. An important point to remember is not to move the elbow during this movement.

The rotation movement is carried out by using the one side of the hand as a pivot. If rotation occurs to the side of the thumb, the pivot is on the other side of the hand and vice versa. The rotation movement is always towards the note on the strong (first) beat.

The following exercise can now be done at the piano: three black keys are used: F#, G#, and A# (the location of these notes can easily be explained to the pupil in order to find his/her place when practising). Let the relaxed arm hang next to the body. Close the hand forming a relaxed fist, thumb alongside the bent fingers. Pick up the forearm in this exact position with the bottom or lower part of the arm in line with the keyboard. Put the outer side of a relaxed fist on A#, letting it roll onto the side of the thumb on F#. Repeat this movement several times without interruption. The left hand performs a mirror pattern of this exercise as shown in photograph no 10. Do this exercise concentrating on the regularity of the beat (the up movement on the count of three and the down movement on one).

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Photo no 10 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

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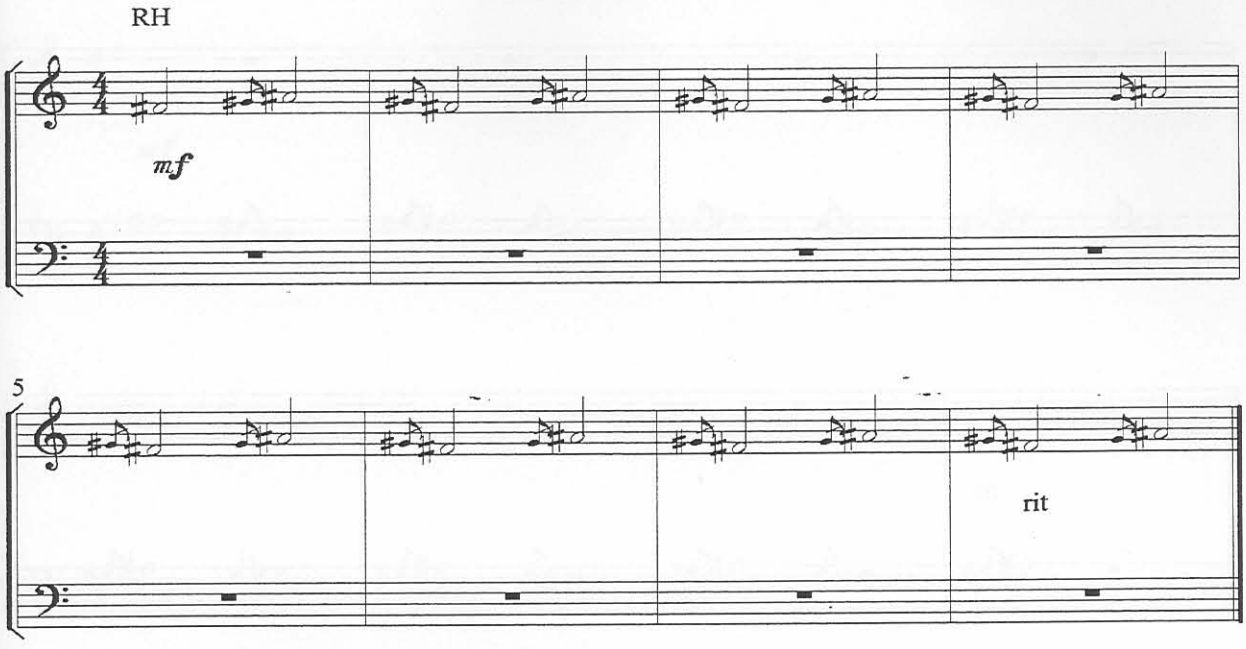
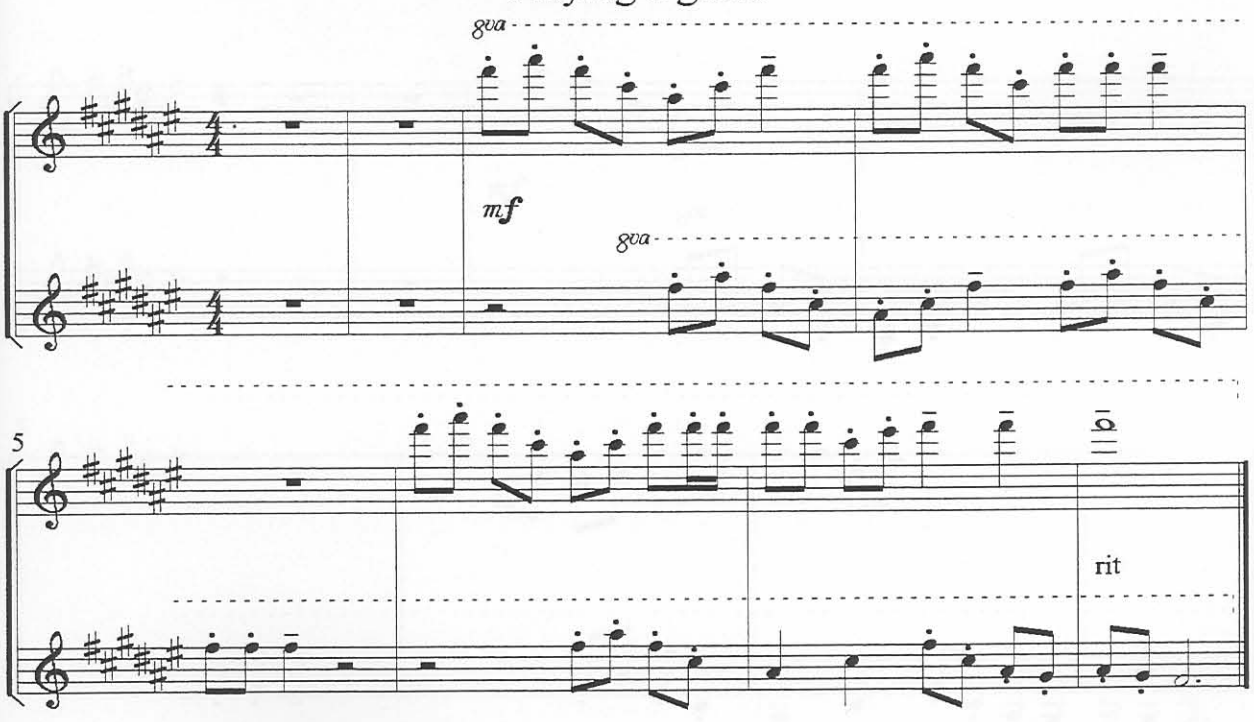
Pupil: **Exercise 7** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Playing a game



Teacher:

Playing a game



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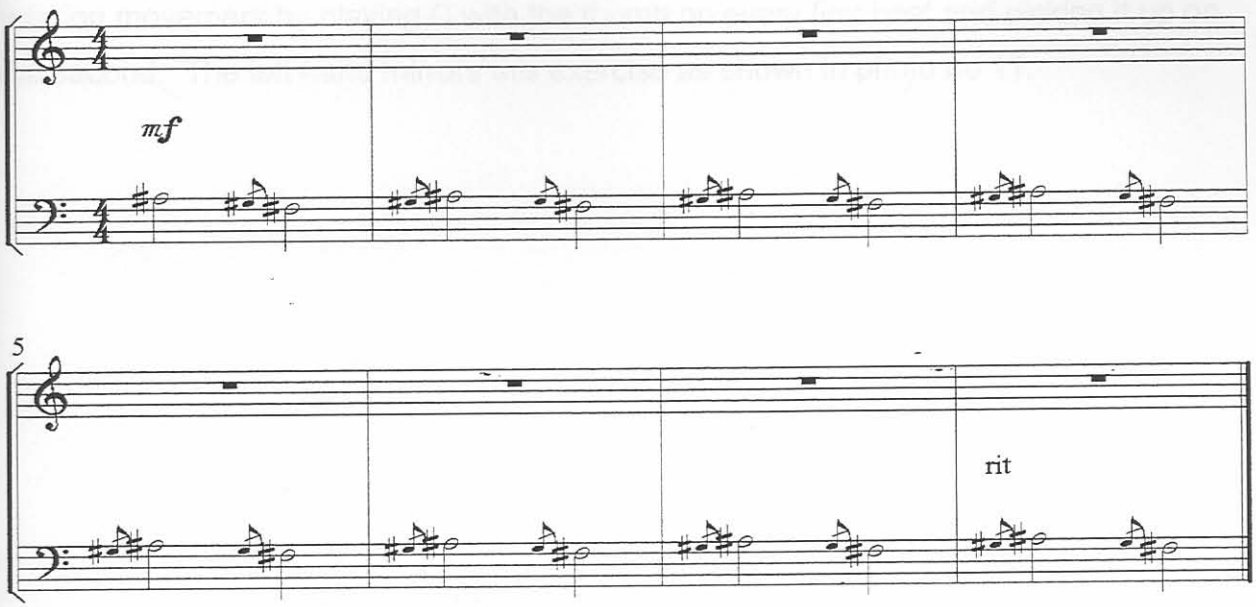
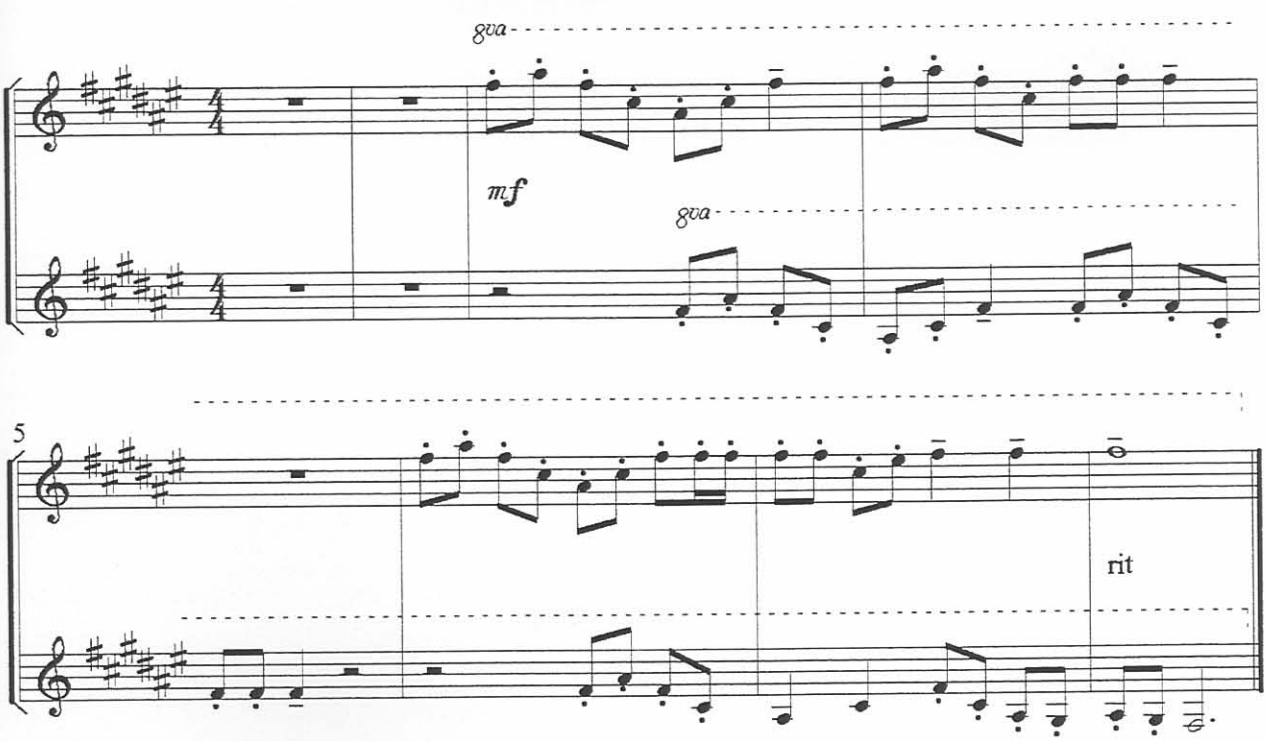
Pupil: **Exercise 8** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Playing some more



Teacher

Playing some more



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Exercises 7 and 8 can be extended and refined by using the fingers as contact point. Place the fifth finger on G above C as shown in exercise 9. Keep the G down as a pivot while the upper arm hangs relaxed next to the body. Do the previously practised rotation movement by playing C with the thumb on every first beat and picking it up on the second. The left hand mirrors this exercise as shown in photo no 11.

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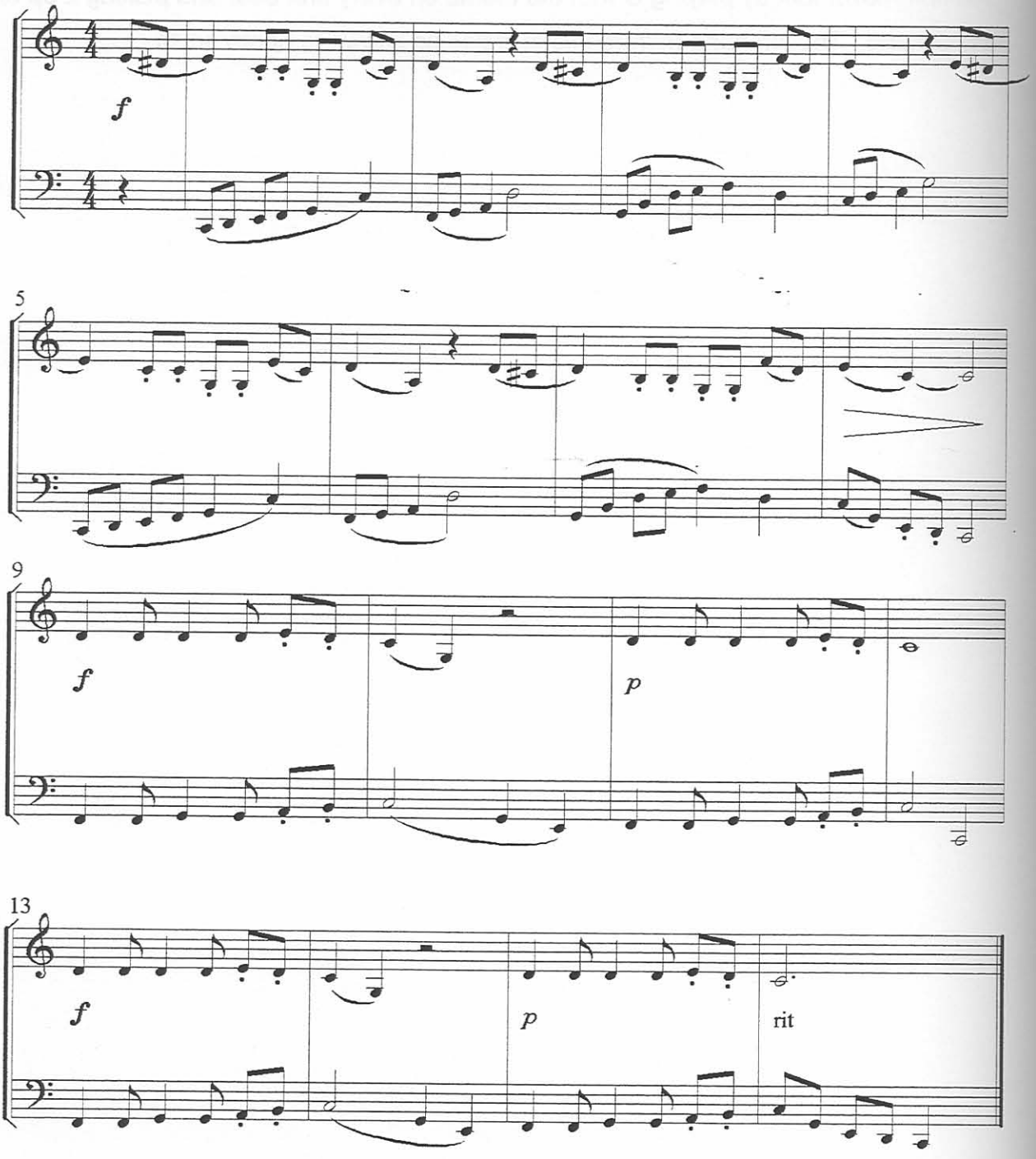
Teacher: **Exercise 9**

Piekanienie



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Pupil: **Exercise 9** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Piekanienie

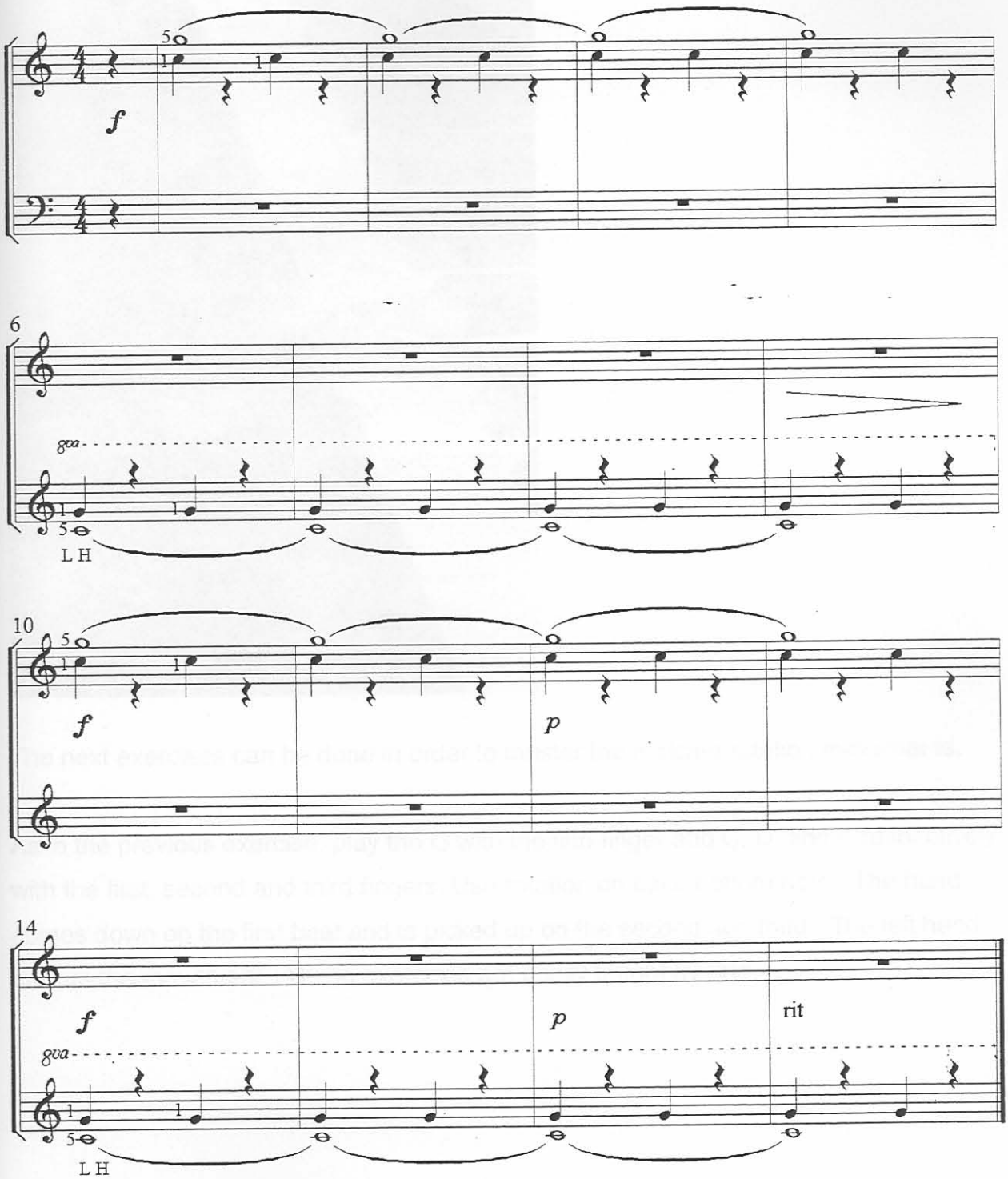

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Photo no 11 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

The next exercises can be done in order to master the intricate rotation movements.

As in the previous exercise, play the G with the fifth finger and C, D, and E respectively with the first, second and third fingers. Use rotation on each bottom note. The hand comes down on the first beat and is picked up on the second and third. The left hand mirrors the movement. These exercises are easily taught by rote.

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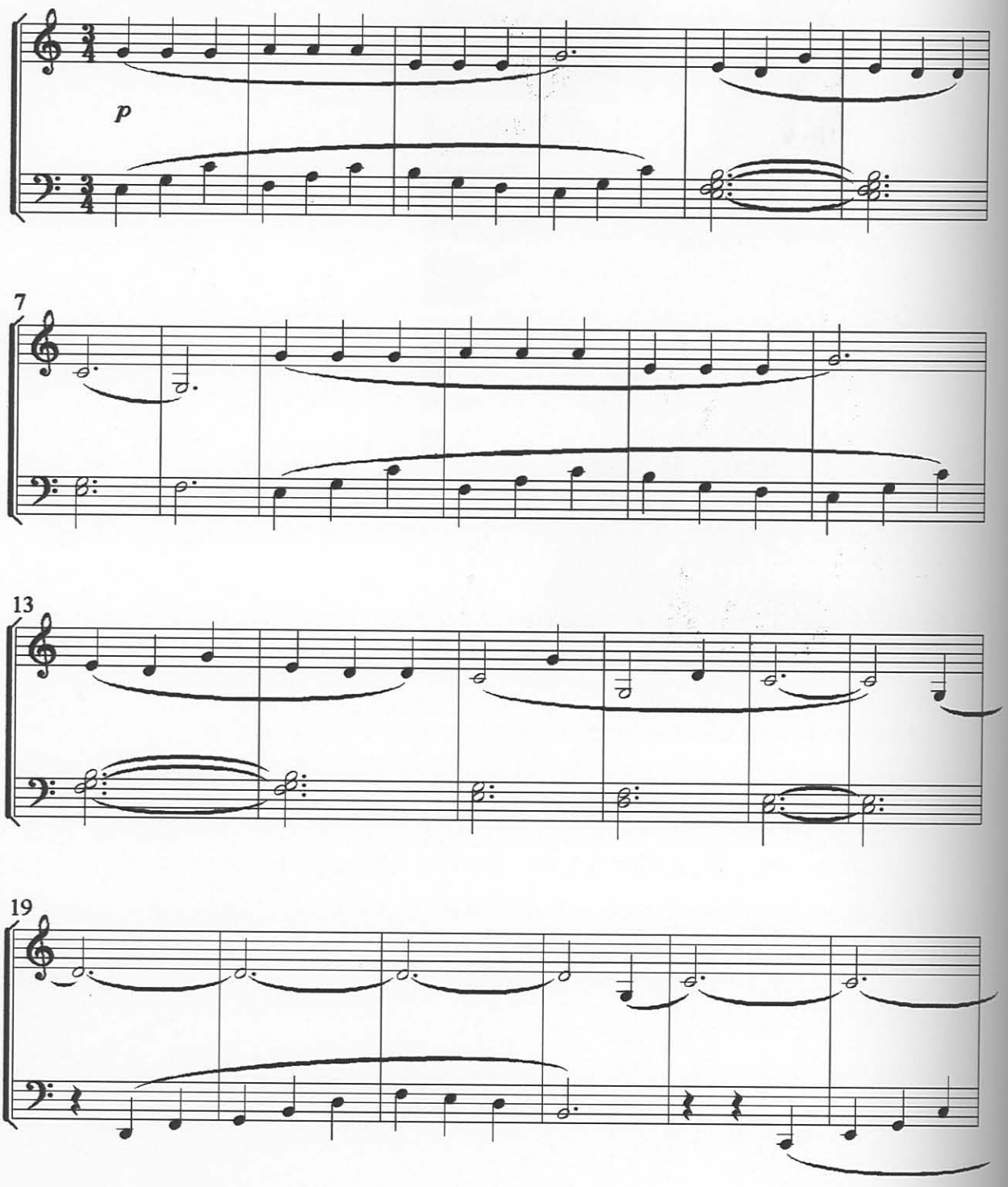
Teacher:

Exercise 10

Sleep little boy

Andante cantabile



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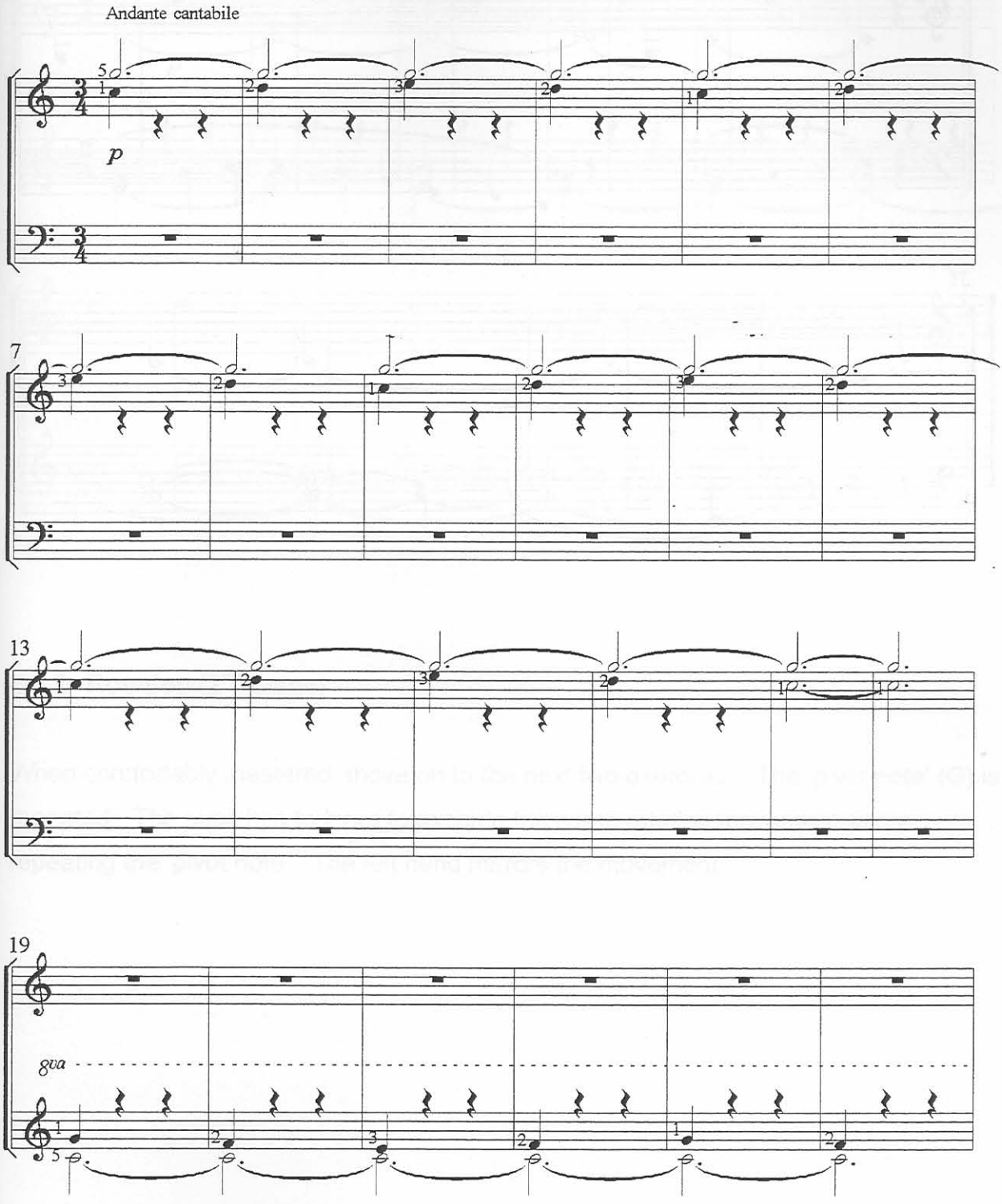
Pupil: **Exercise 10** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Sleep little boy



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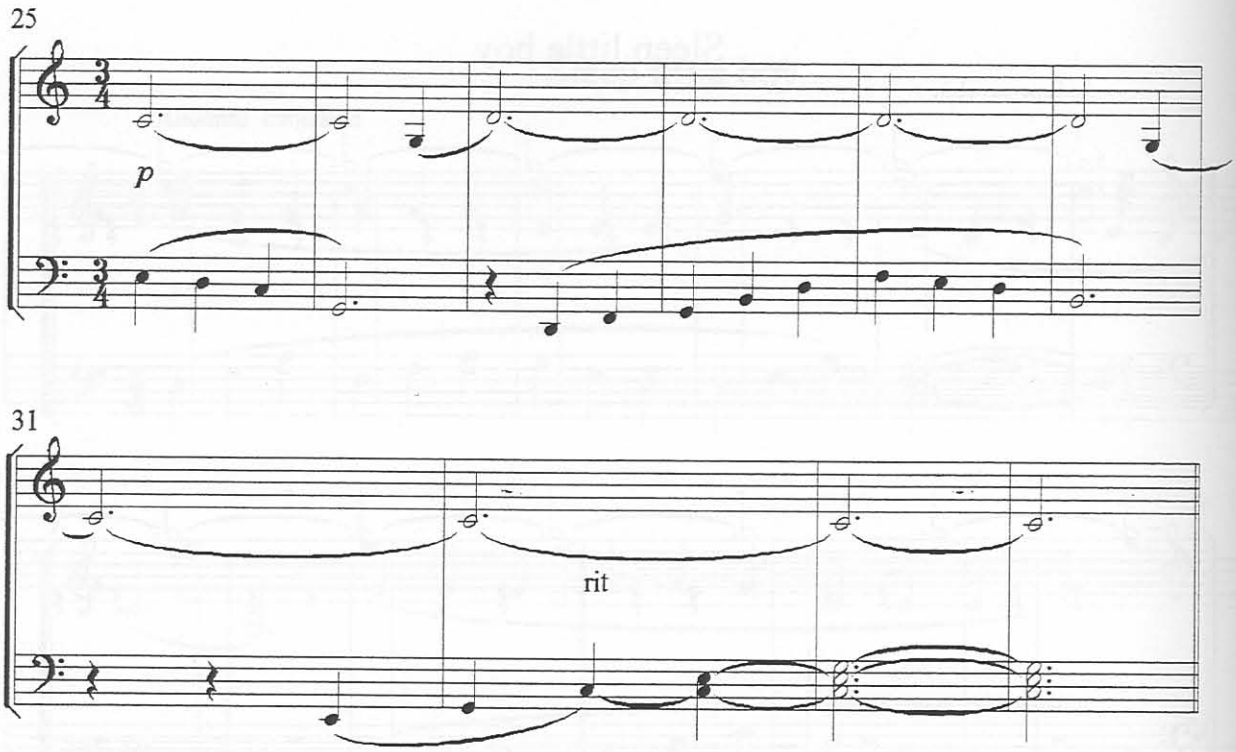

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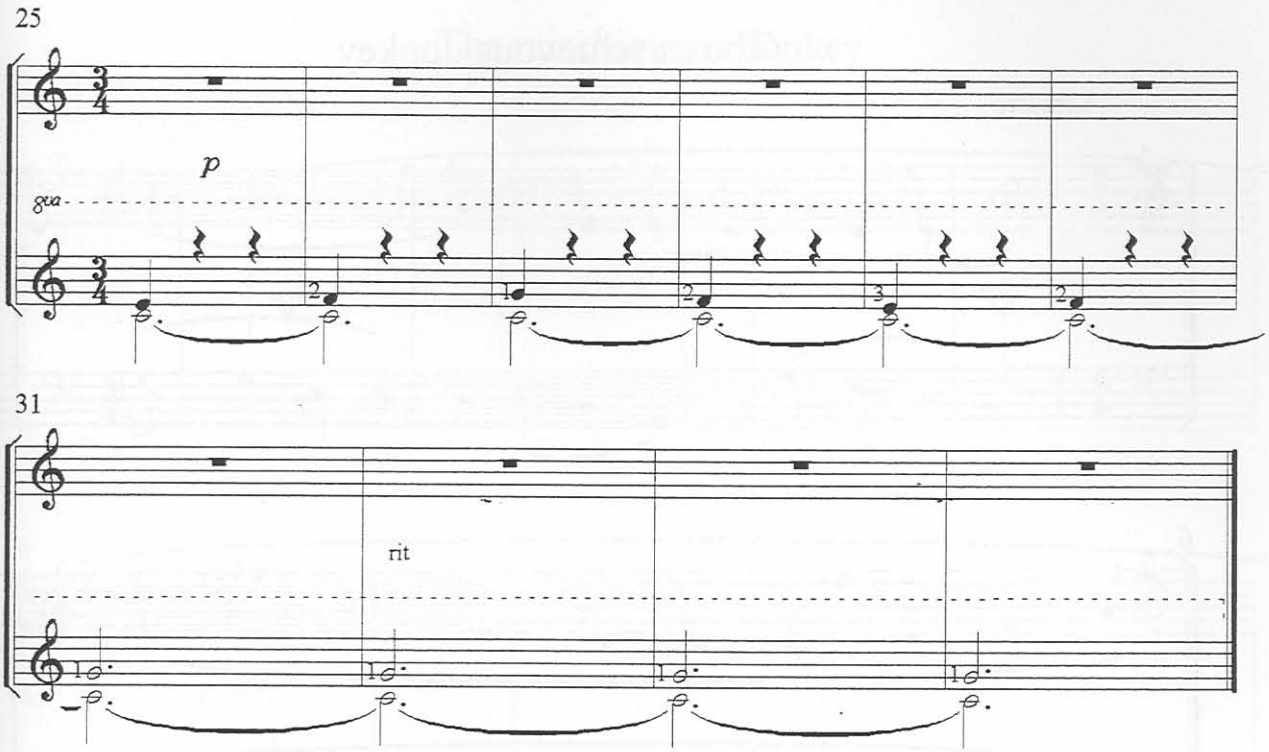

4.6.2 Rotation (2nd stage)

When comfortably mastered, move on to the next two exercises. The 'pivot note' (G) is repeated. The pupil has to learn to execute the same rotation movement whilst repeating the 'pivot note'. The left hand mirrors the movement.

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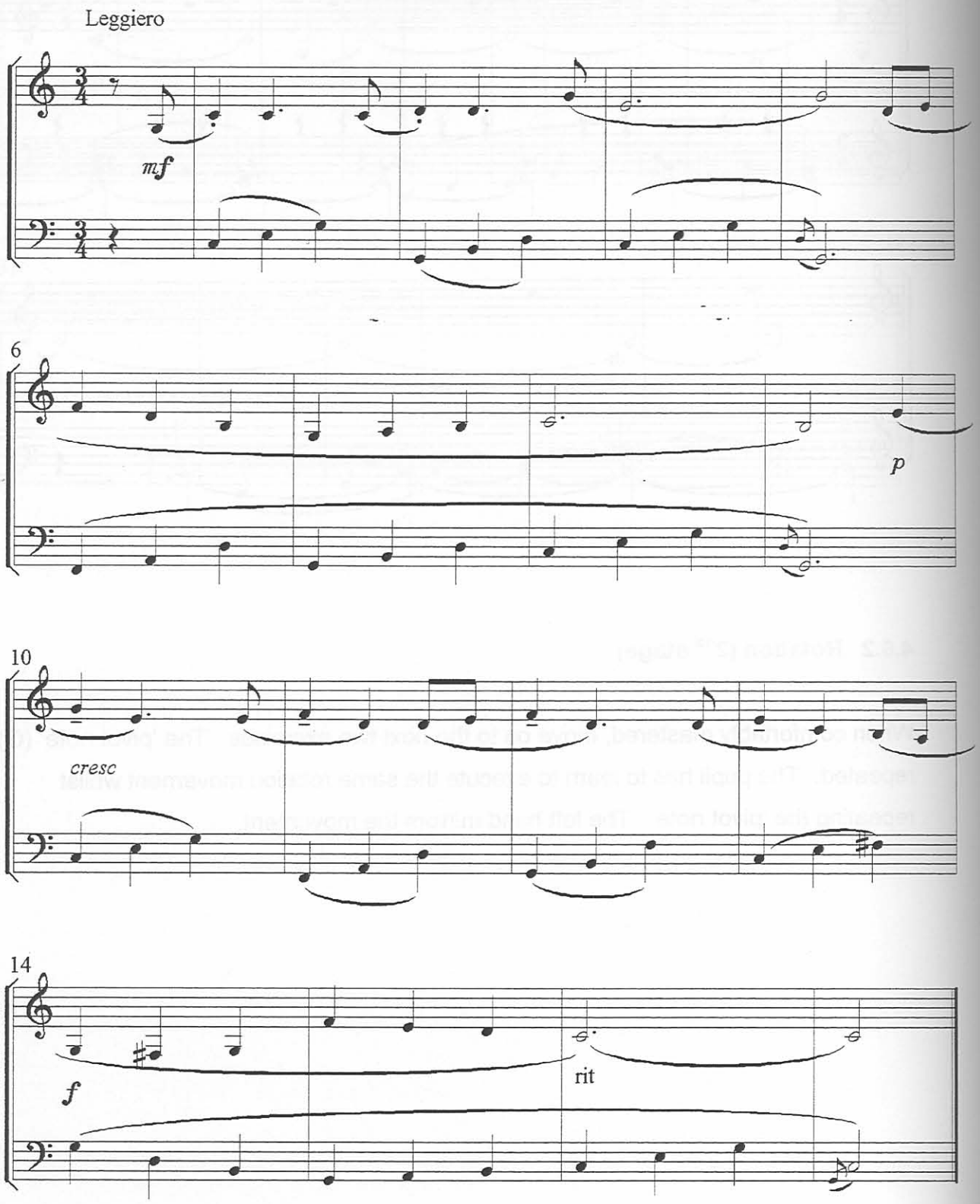
Teacher: **Exercise 11**

The mischievous donkey



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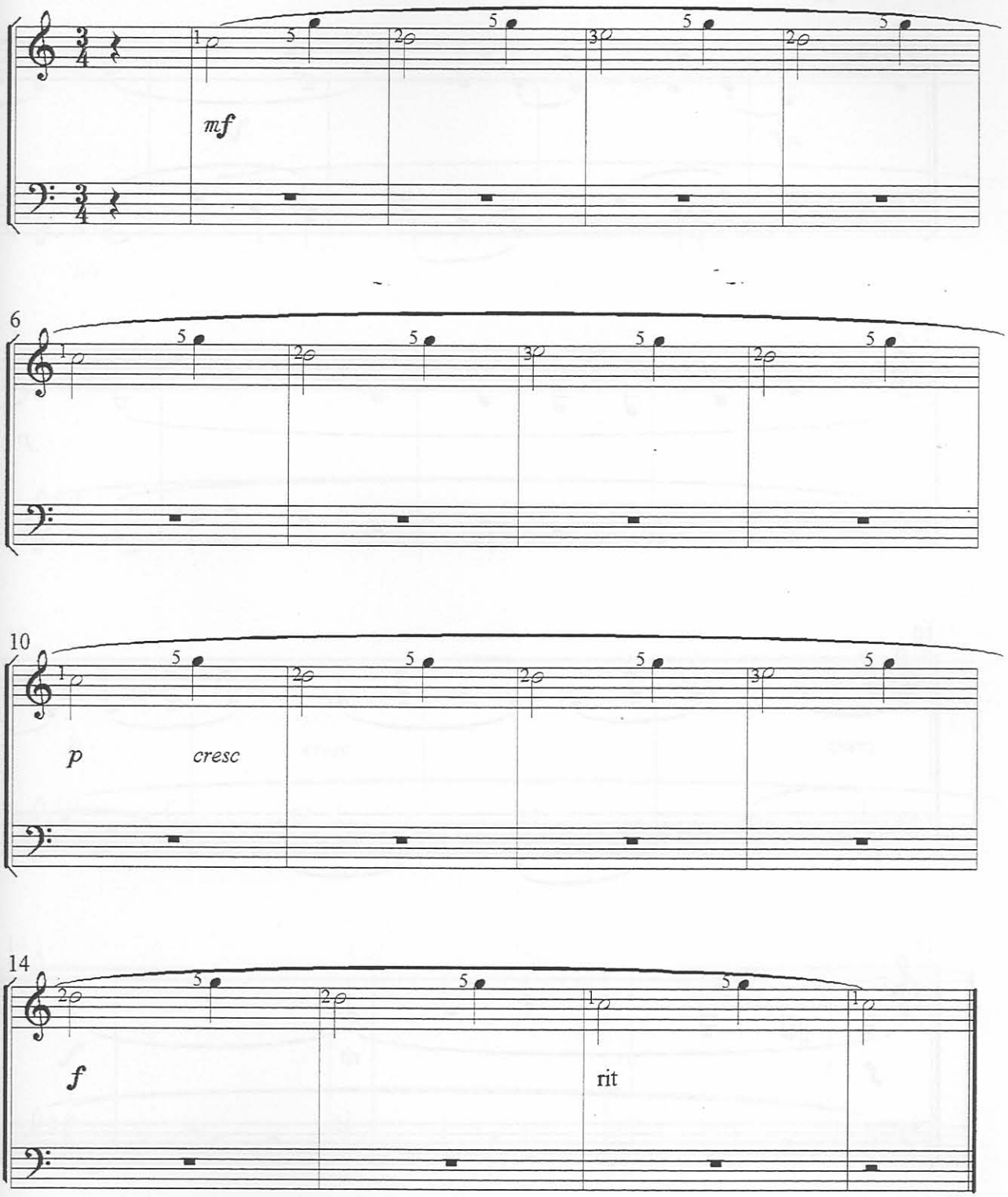
Pupil: **Exercise 11** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The mischievous donkey



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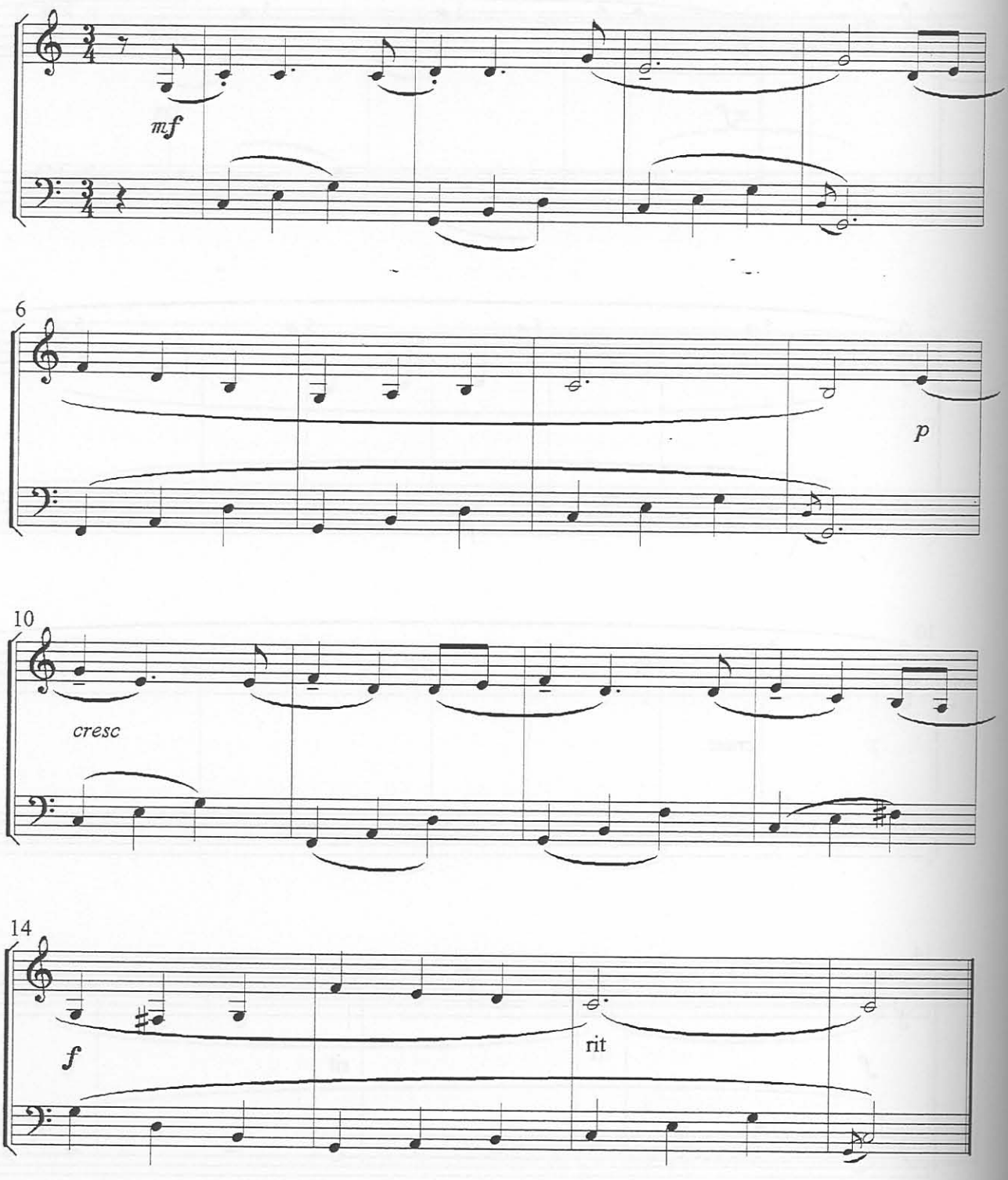
Teacher: **Exercise 12**

The donkey again?

Leggiero



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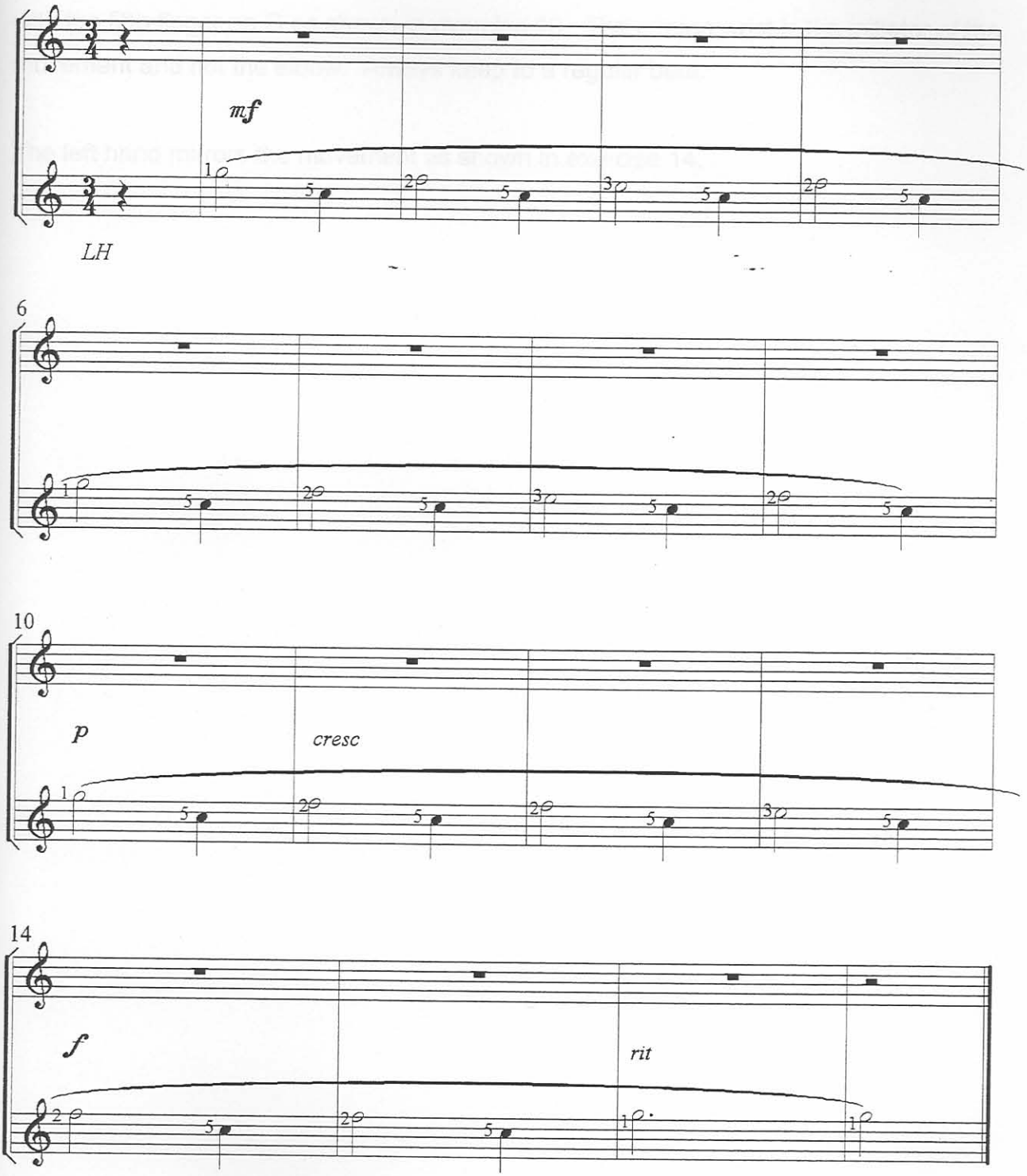
Pupil: **Exercise 12** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The donkey again?



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4.6.3 Rotation (3rd stage)

Rotation to the outside of the hand is the opposite of what has been done previously. Place the right-hand thumb on middle C and keep it down. Rotate to the opposite side with the fifth finger on G as shown in exercise 13. The turning wrist is the initiator of the movement and not the elbow. Always keep to a regular beat.

The left hand mirrors the movement as shown in exercise 14.

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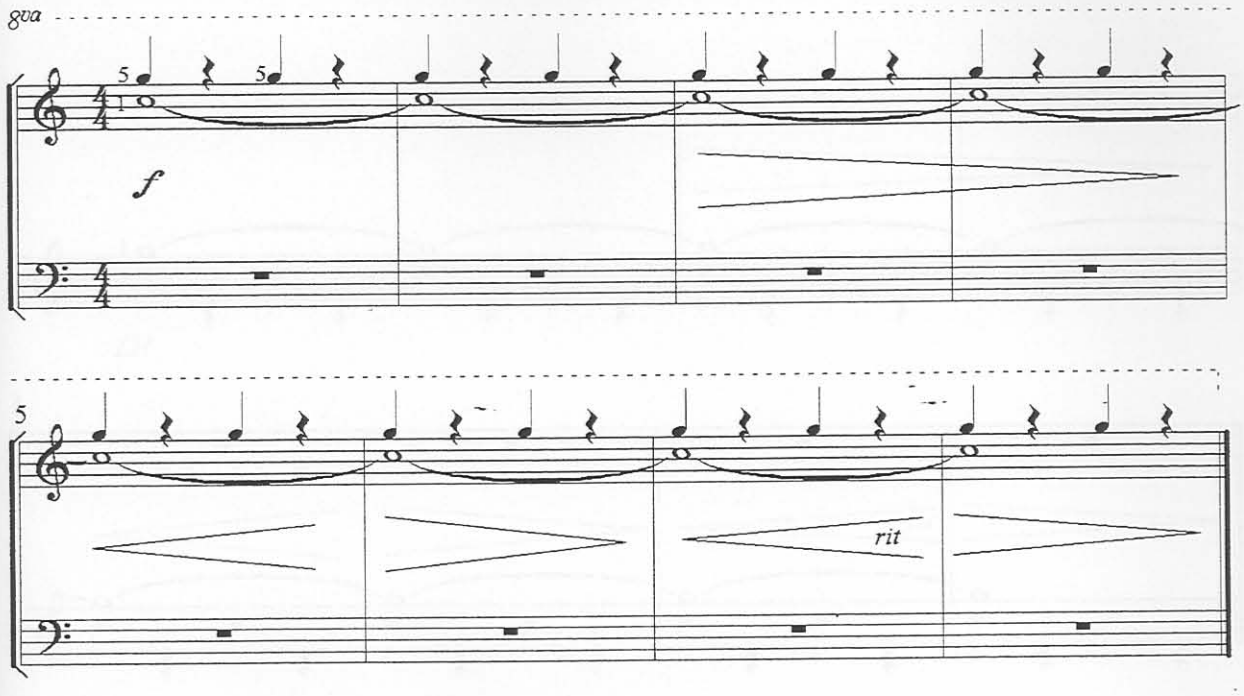
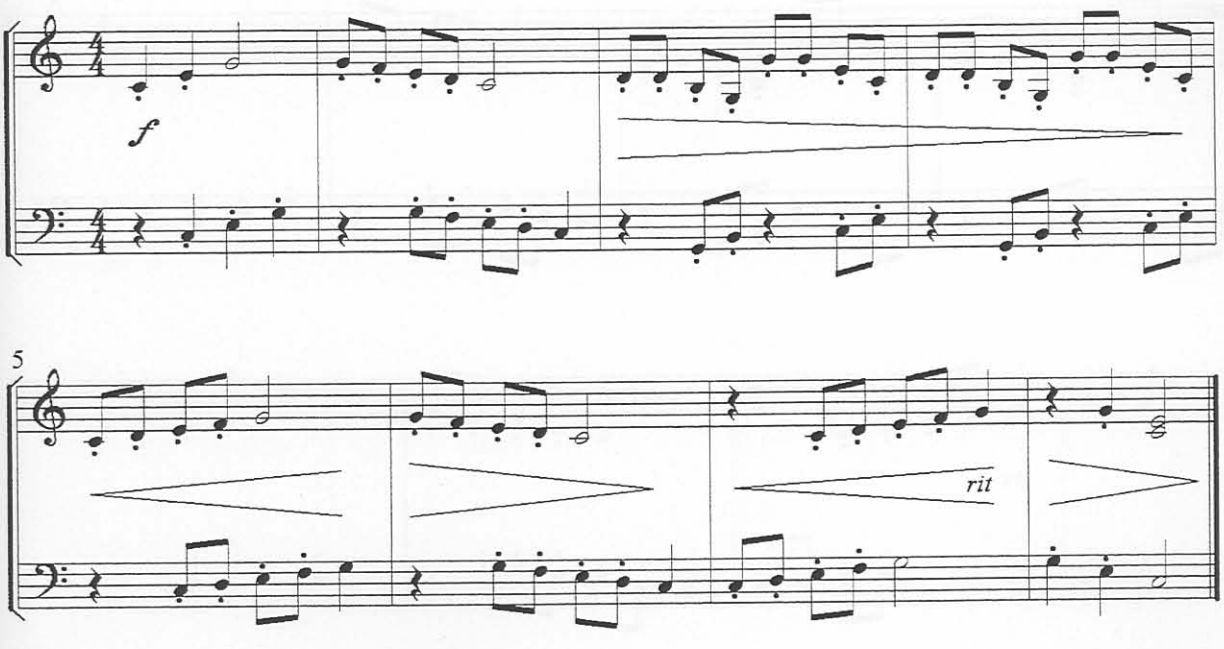
Pupil: **Exercise 13** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Hop-hop horse



Teacher:

Hop-hop horse



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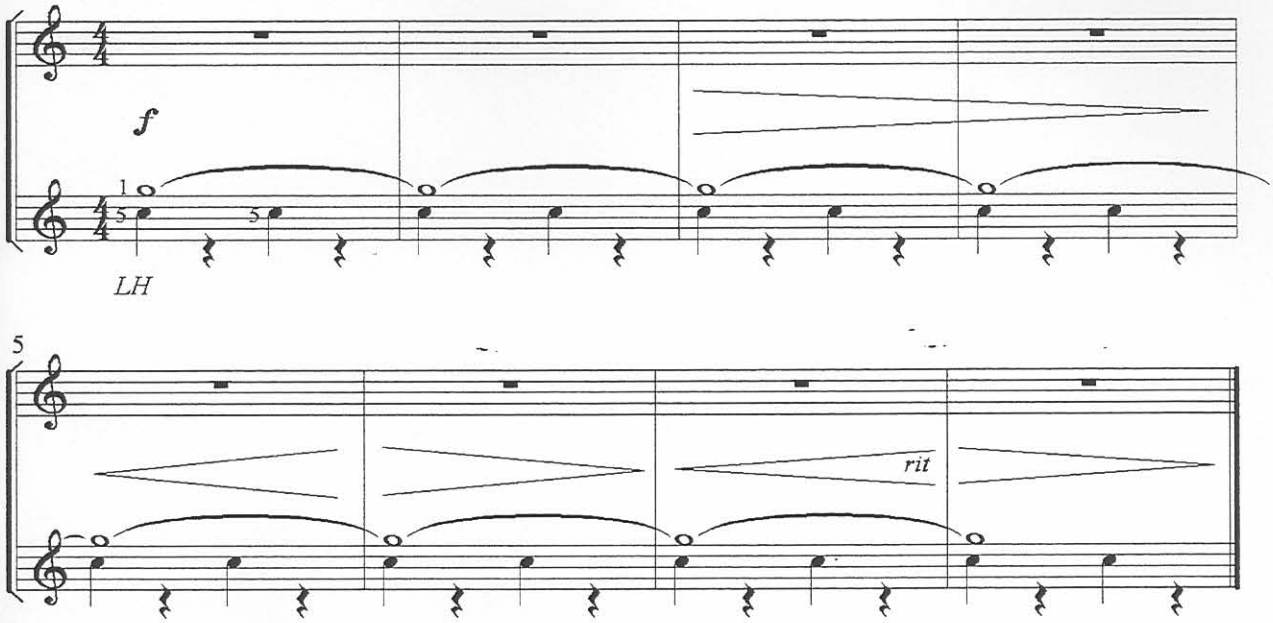
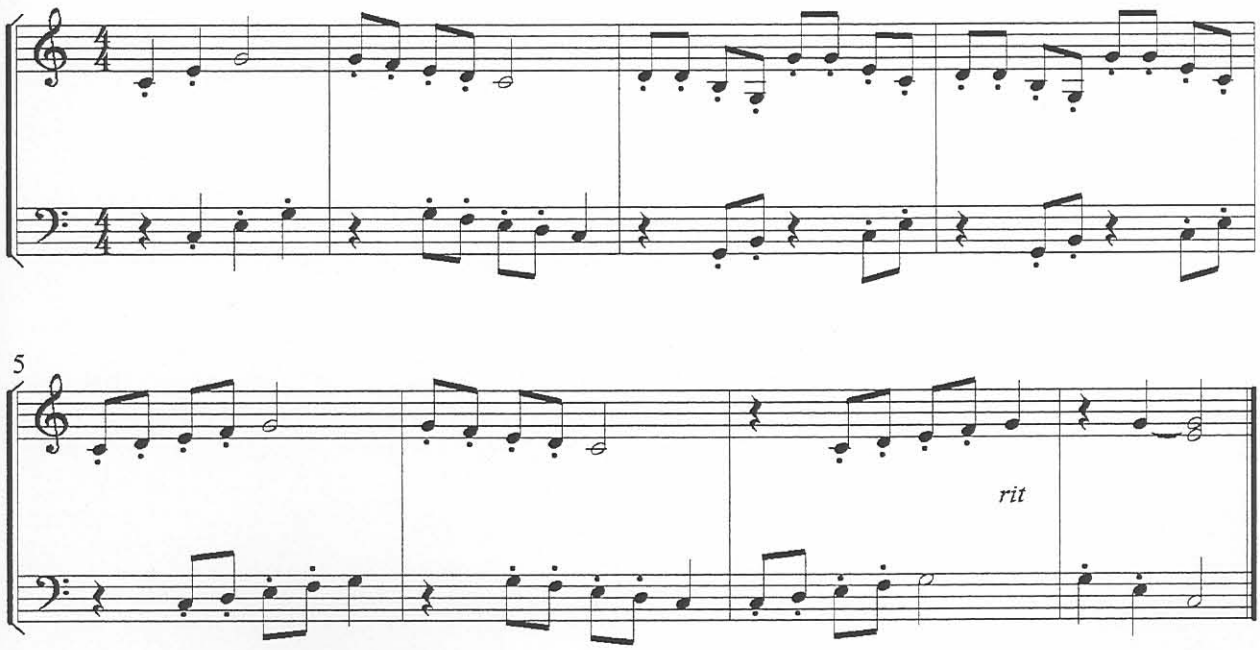
Pupil: **Exercise 14** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Galloping pony



Teacher:

Galloping pony



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Two more exercises can be done in order to master this rotation movement. As in the previous RH exercise, play the C with the thumb and G, F, and E with the fifth, fourth and third fingers respectively. Use rotation on each top note away from the pivot note (C) as shown in exercise 15. The left hand mirrors the movement as shown in exercise 16.

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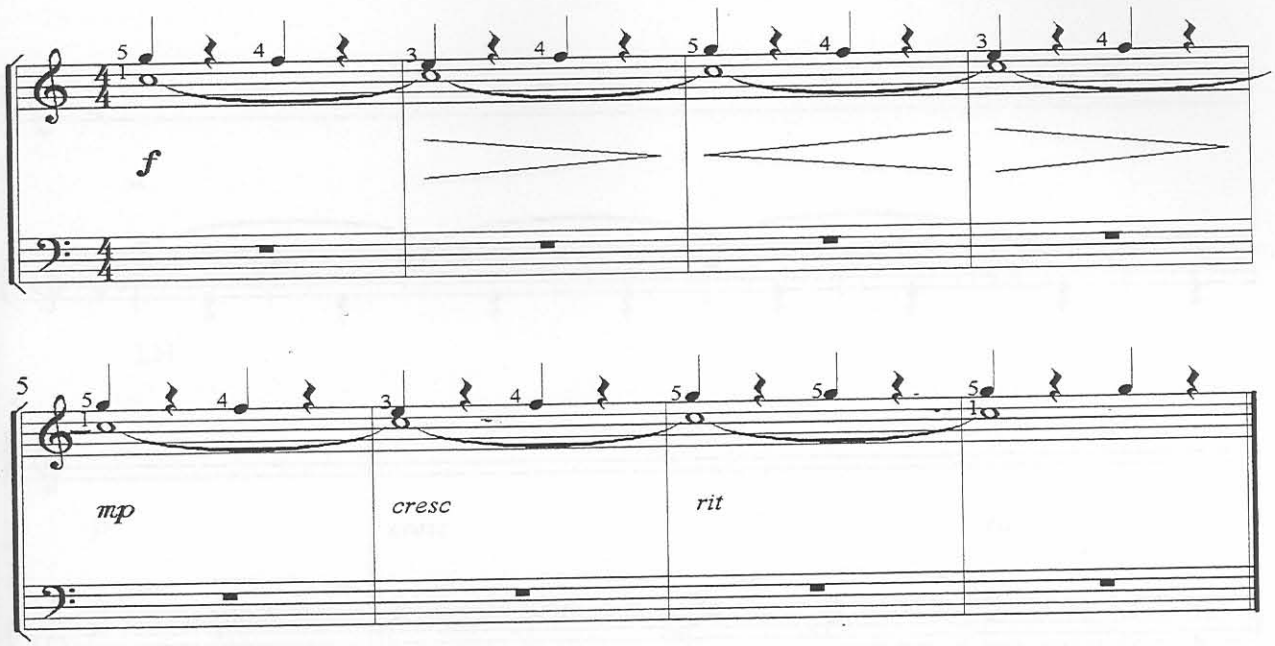
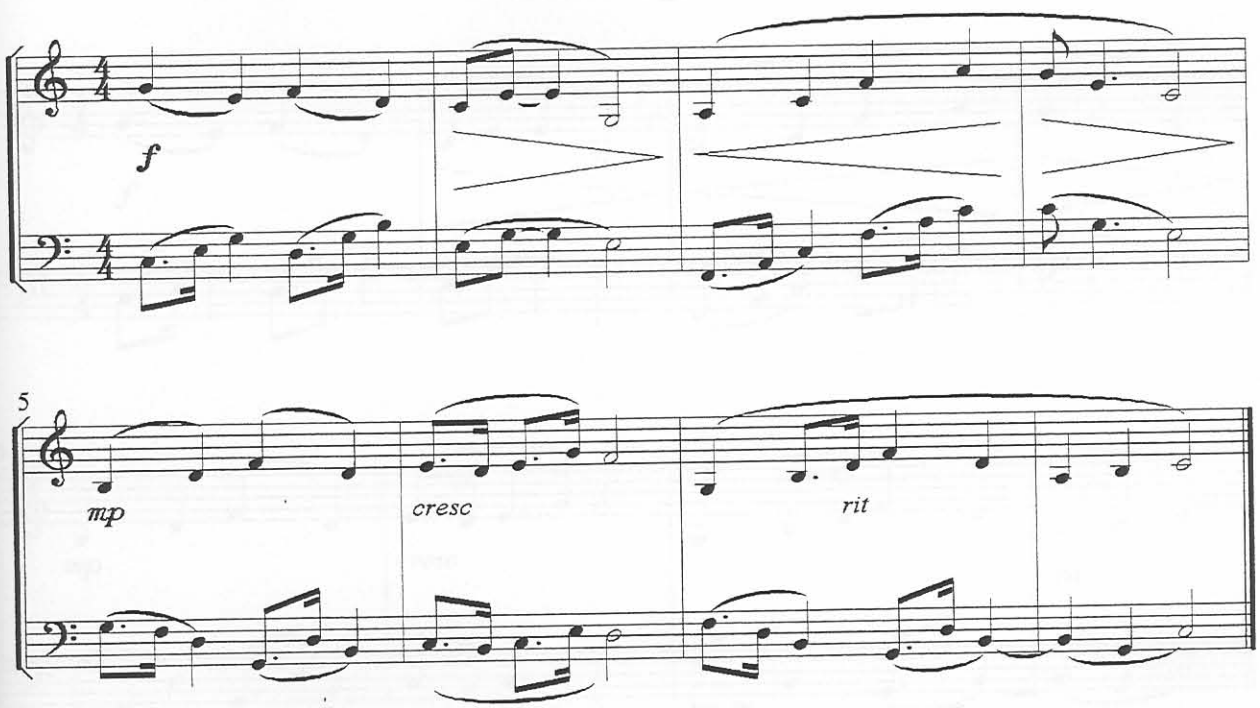
Pupil: **Exercise 15** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Lassie



Teacher:

Lassie



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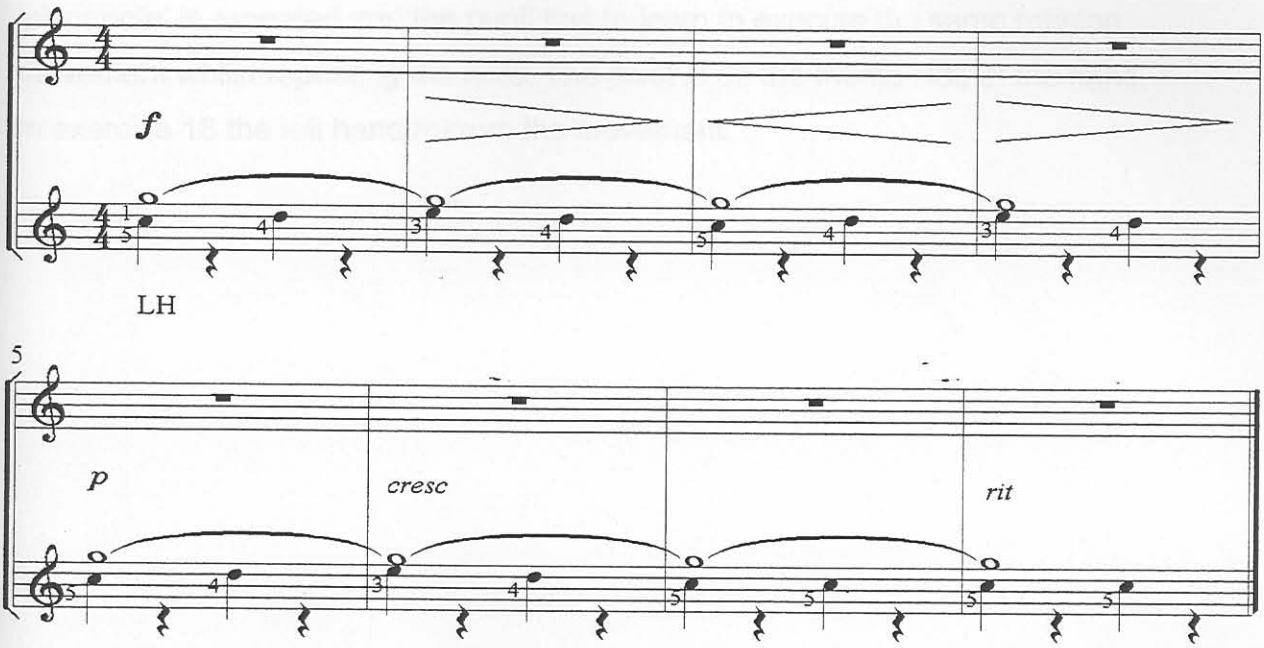
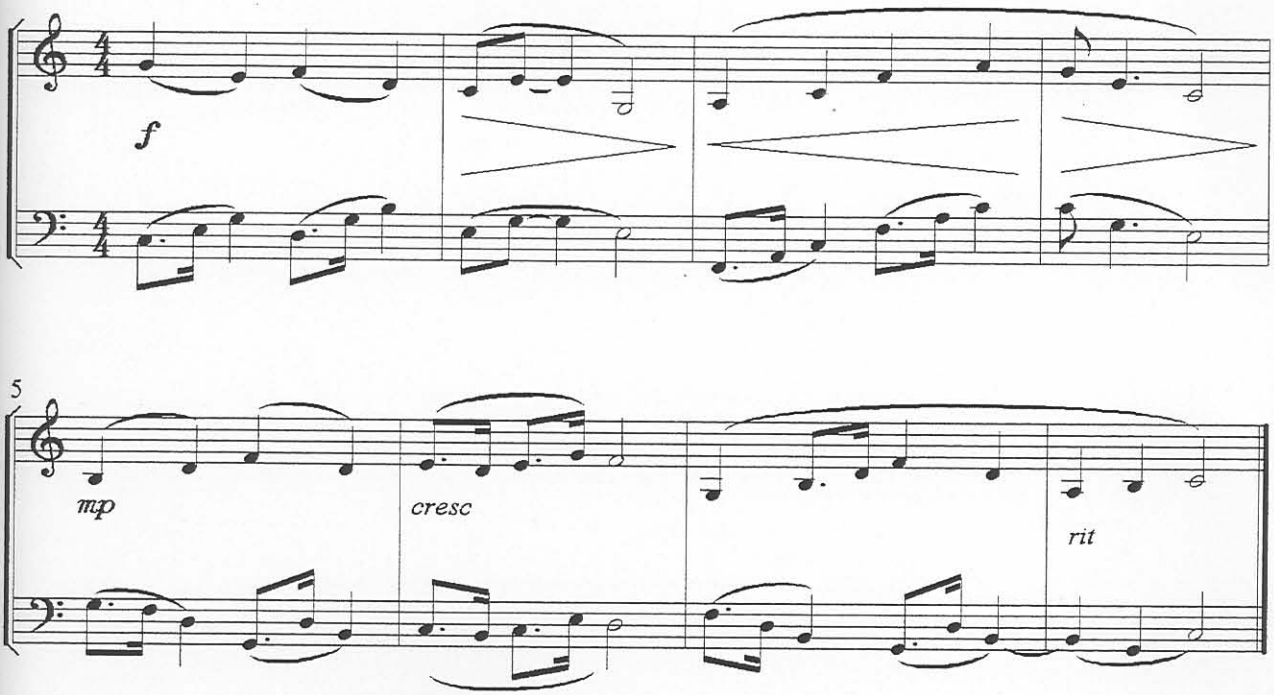
Pupil: **Exercise 16** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Lassie again!



Teacher:

Lassie again!



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4.6.4 Rotation (4th stage)

When comfortably mastered, move on to the next two exercises. In exercise 17 the 'pivot note' is repeated and the pupil has to learn to execute the same rotation movement whilst repeating the note. The pivot is on the thumb side of the hand. In exercise 18 the left hand mirrors the movement.

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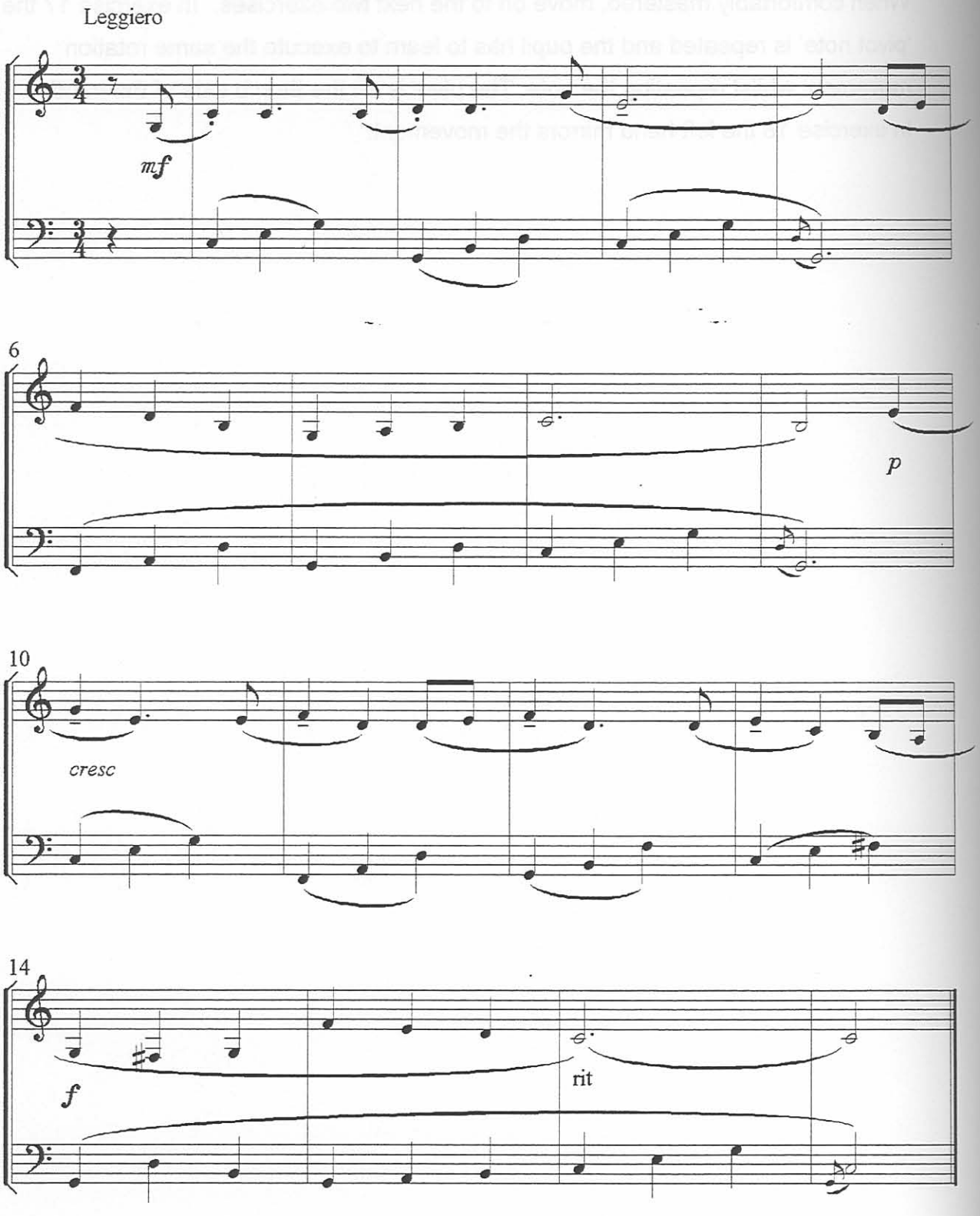
Teacher: **Exercise 17**

Donkey riding



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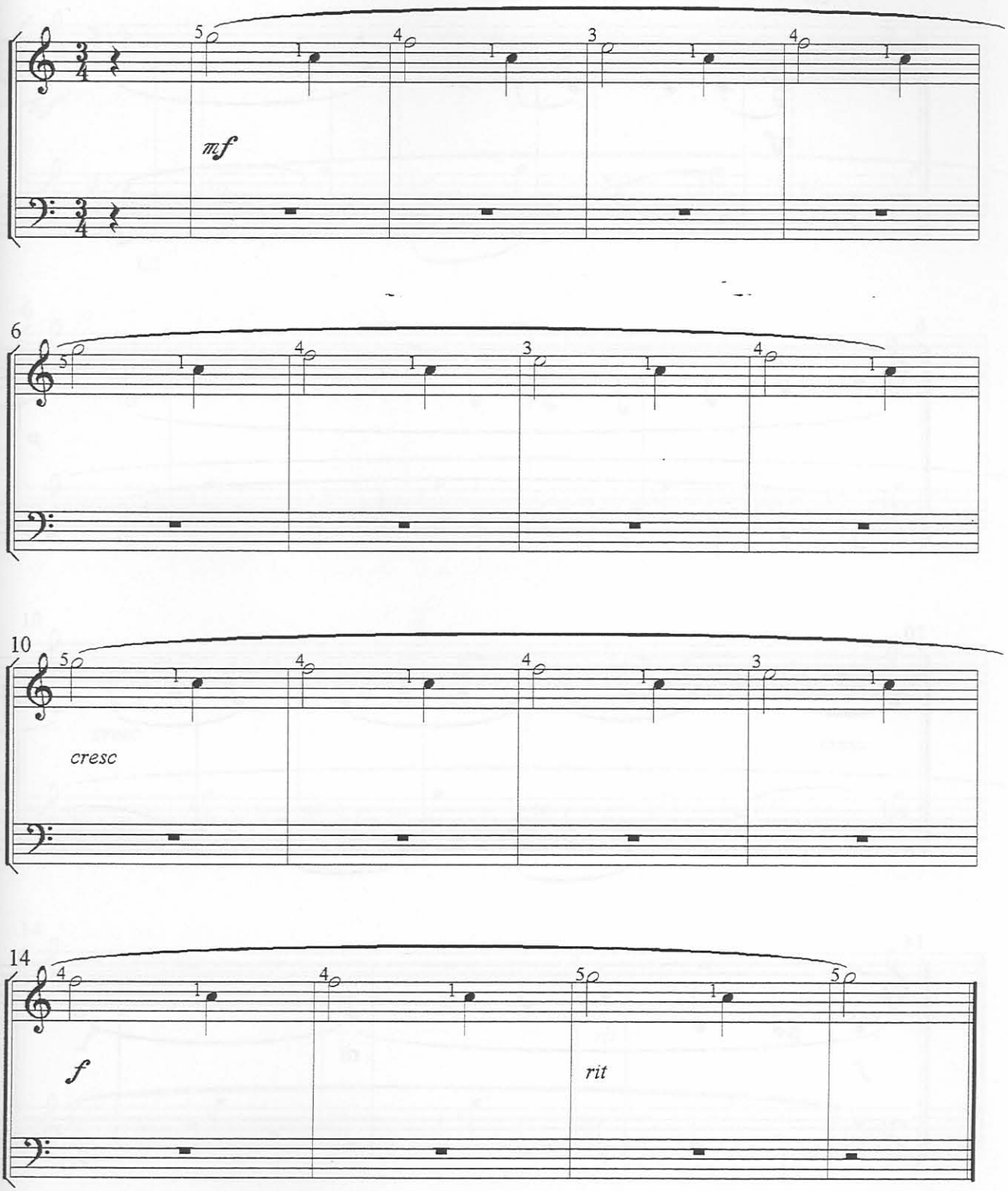
Pupil: **Exercise 17** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Donkey riding



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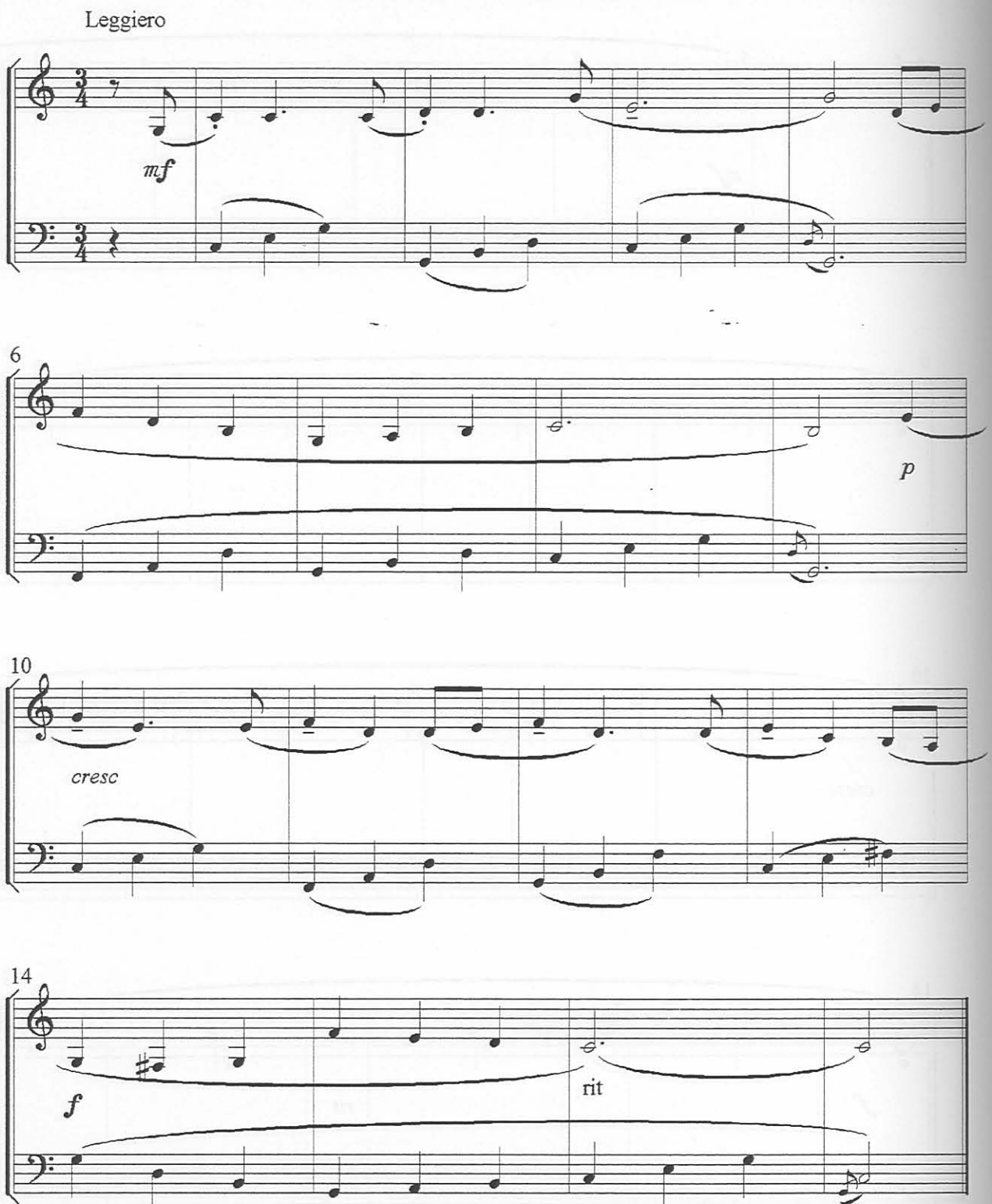
Teacher: **Exercise 18**

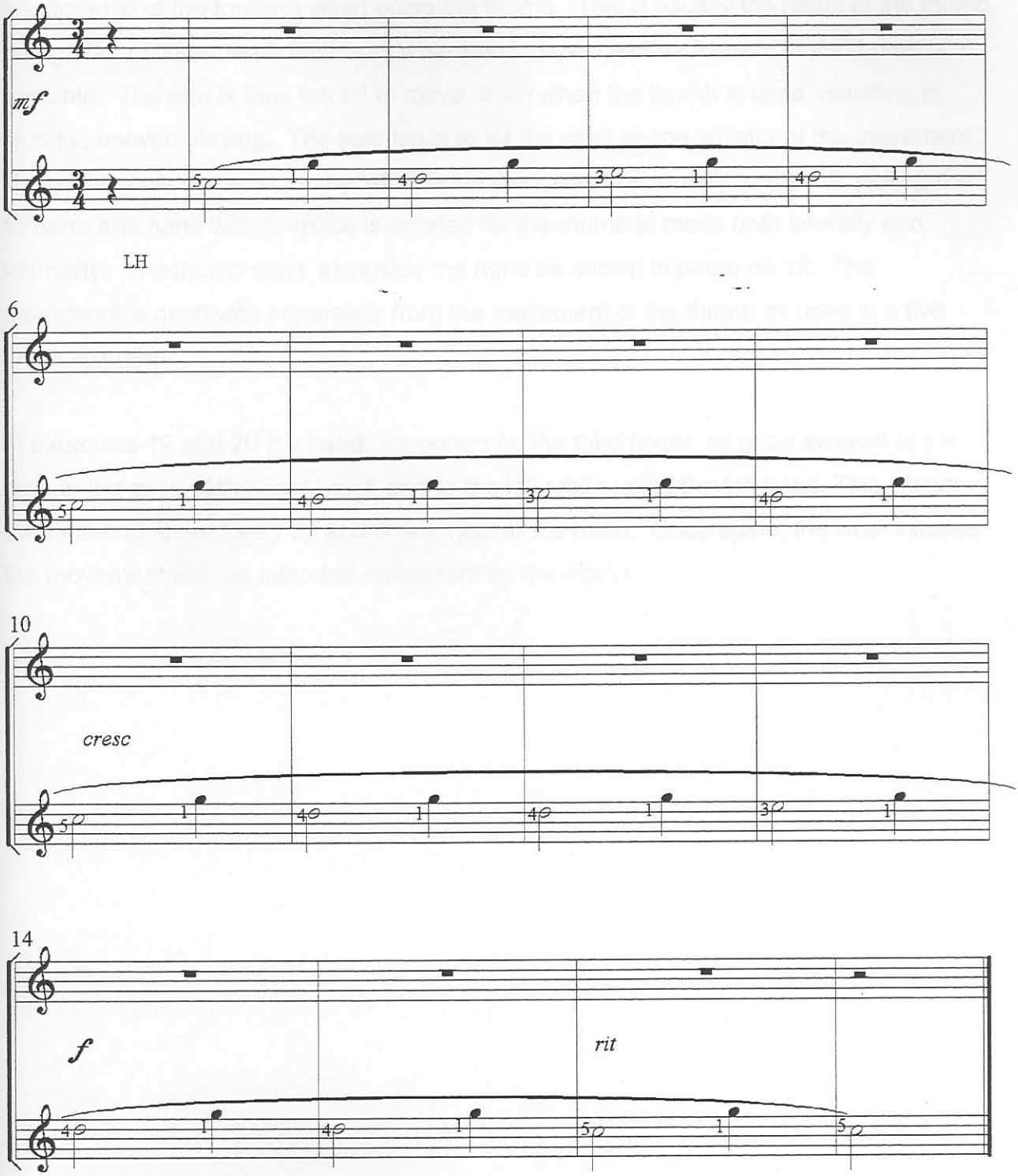
How do you ride a donkey?



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Pupil: **Exercise 18** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

How do you ride a donkey?



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4.7 The ' thumb under' movement

The most common problem generally experienced with this movement is the interference of the forearm when using the thumb. This is usually the result of the thumb being placed underneath the hand, where no independent movement of the thumb is possible. The arm is thus forced to move down when the thumb is used, resulting in clumsy, uneven playing. The solution is to let the wrist be the initiator of the movement. By moving only the wrist, of the left hand in this case, horizontally to the left, pulling the forearm and hand with it, space is created for the thumb to move both laterally and vertically. The thumb stays alongside the hand as shown in photo no 12. The movement is dealt with separately from the movement of the thumb as used in a five finger exercise.

In exercises 19 and 20 the hand, supported by the third finger, must be swayed to the right in the case of the right hand, and to the left when using the left hand. This allows the thumb to move freely up and down, next to the hand. Once again, the wrist initiates the movement with no intended movement by the elbow.

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Photo no 12 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

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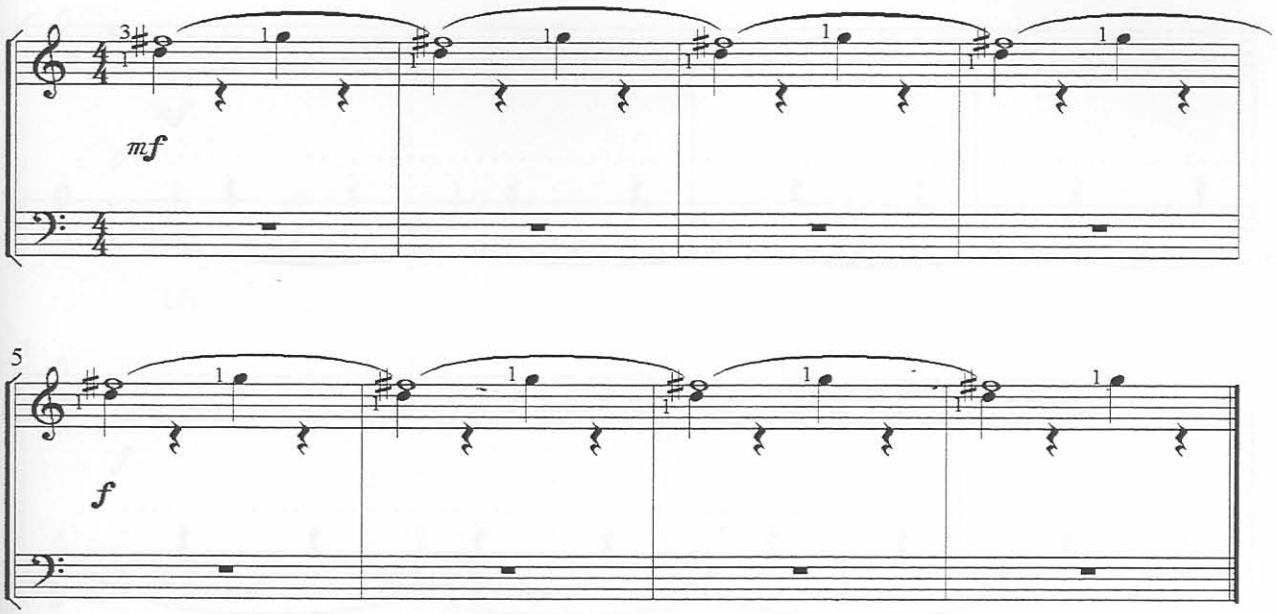
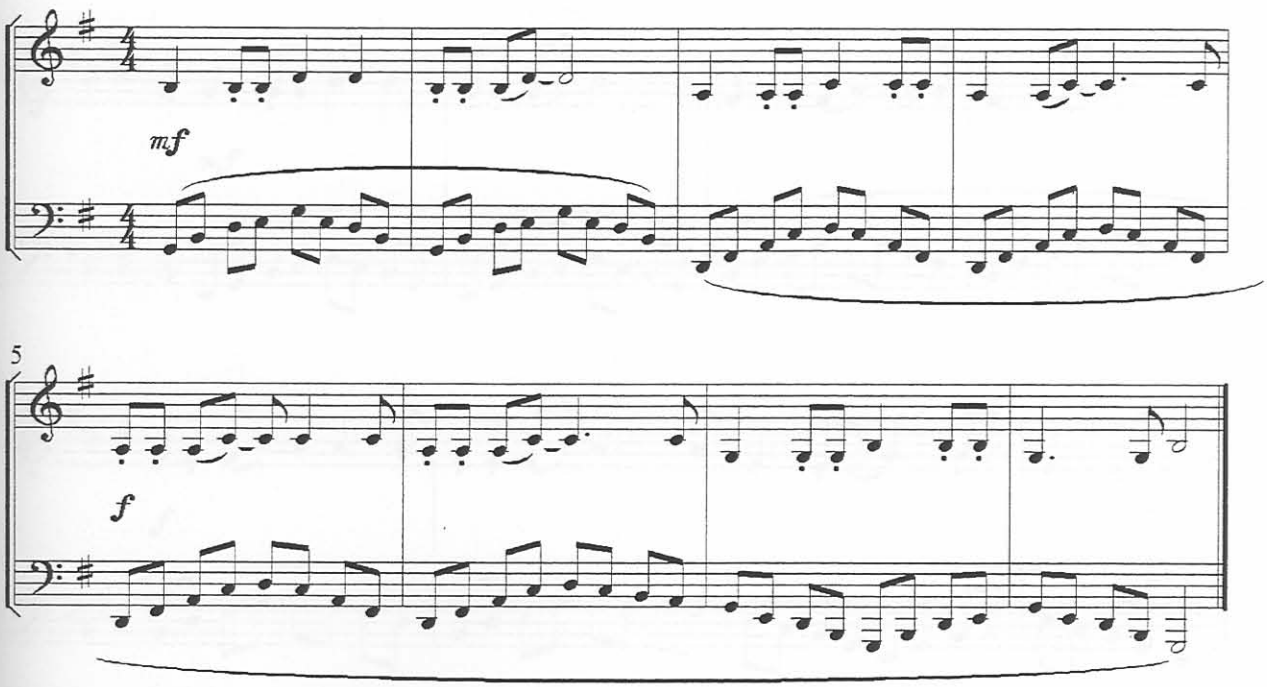
Pupil: **Exercise 19** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Humpty Dumpty



Teacher:

Humpty Dumpty



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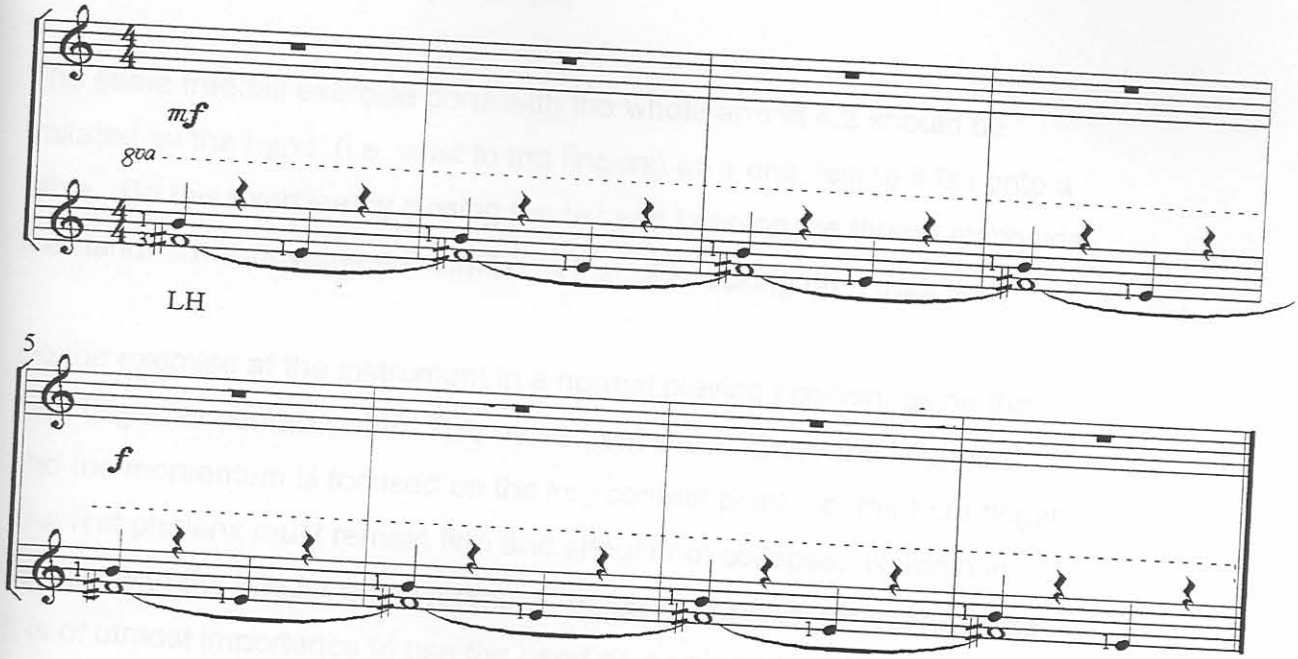
Pupil:

Exercise 20

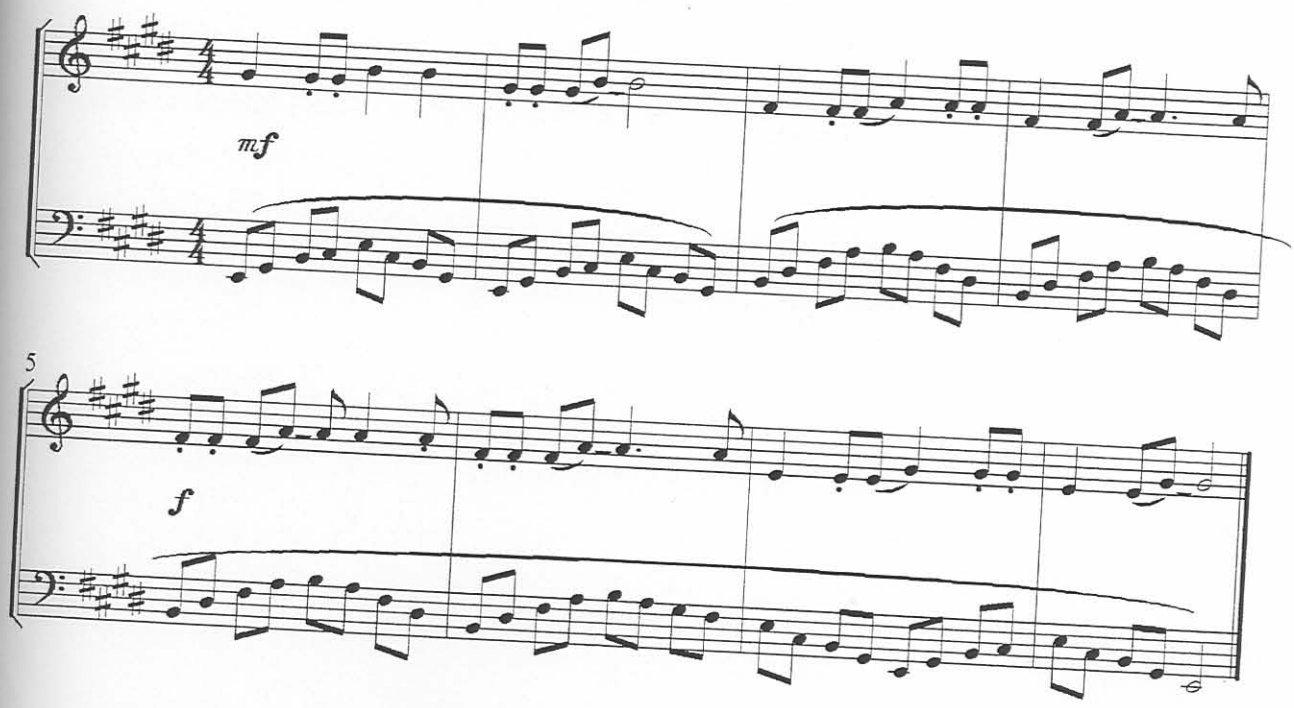
Arranged by T Rhoodie

I love Humpty Dumpty



Teacher:

I love Humpty Dumpty



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4.8 The hand 'free fall'

4.8.1 The hand 'free fall' (1st stage)

The same free fall exercise done with the whole arm in 4.2 should be imitated by the hand (i.e. wrist to the fingers) as a unit, letting it fall onto a table. Do this exercise by closing the fist and keeping the thumb alongside the hand. This movement is similar to that of knocking on a door.

Do the exercise at the instrument in a normal playing position, using the third finger as contact point. This movement starts above the keyboard and the momentum is focused on the key contact point, i.e. the third finger. The first phalanx must remain firm and should not collapse. Remain in contact with the key for a few moments before picking up for the next 'fall'. It is of utmost importance to use the hand as a unit and not to move the fingers independently as shown in photo no 13.

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Photo no 13 (Original photograph of the researcher's hand)

Do the previous exercise with the first and fifth fingers as contact points. Play a perfect 5th; F and C above middle C with the first and fifth fingers of the right hand respectively. Repeat several times with both hands separately. Remind the pupil continually of the note names and locations.

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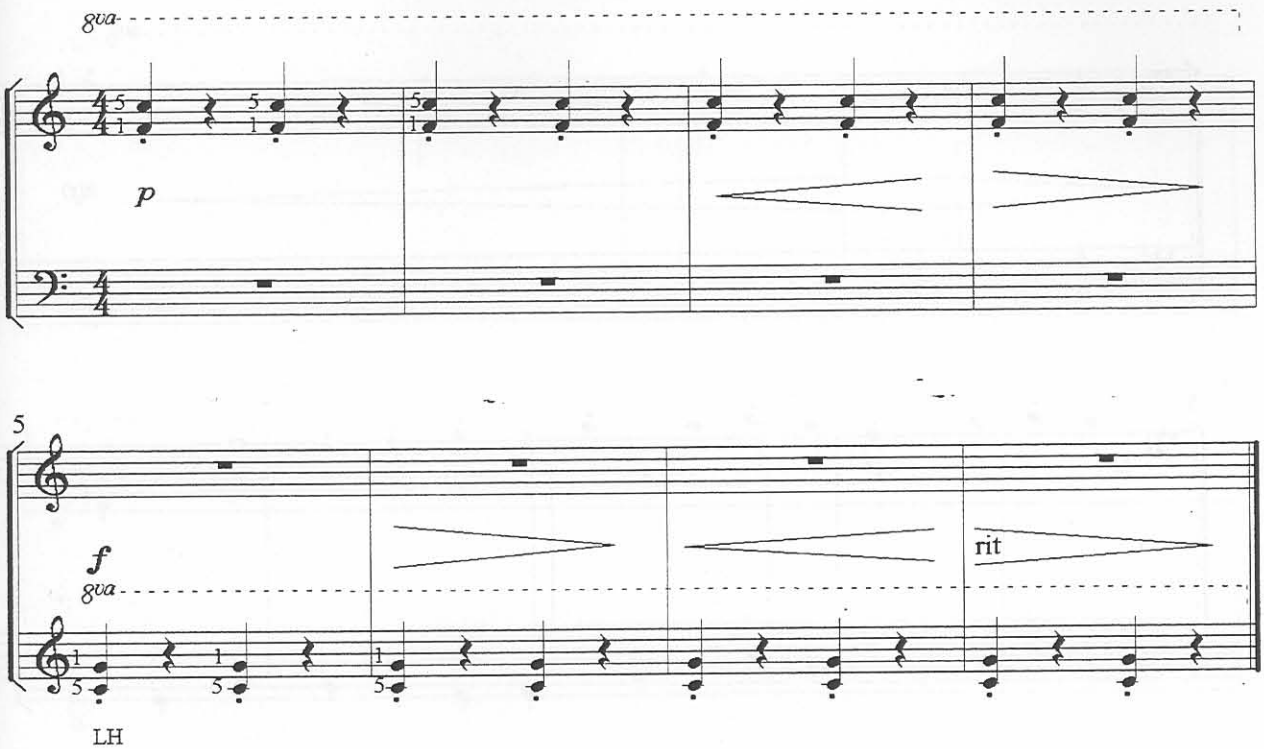
Pupil:

Exercise 21

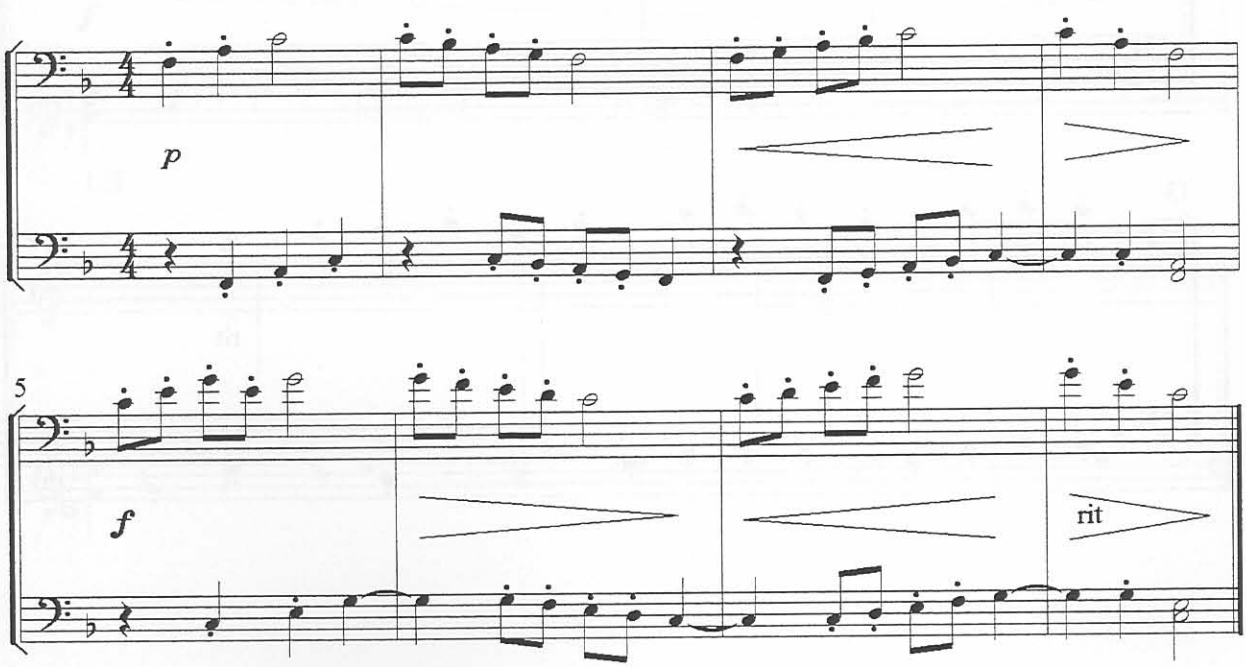
Arranged by T Rhoodie

A trotting horse



Teacher:

A trotting horse



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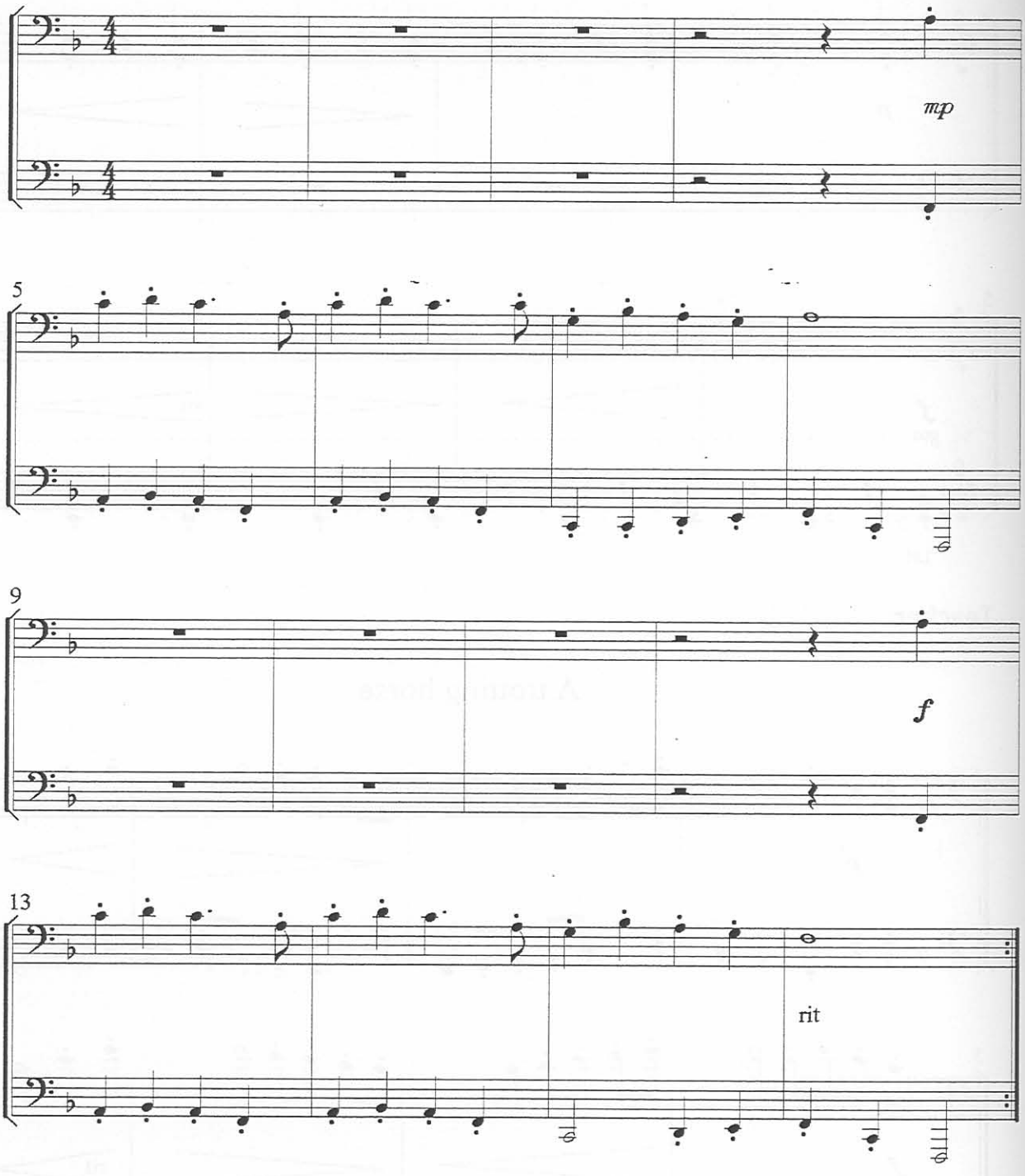
Teacher: **Exercise 22**

Die Kimberley se trein



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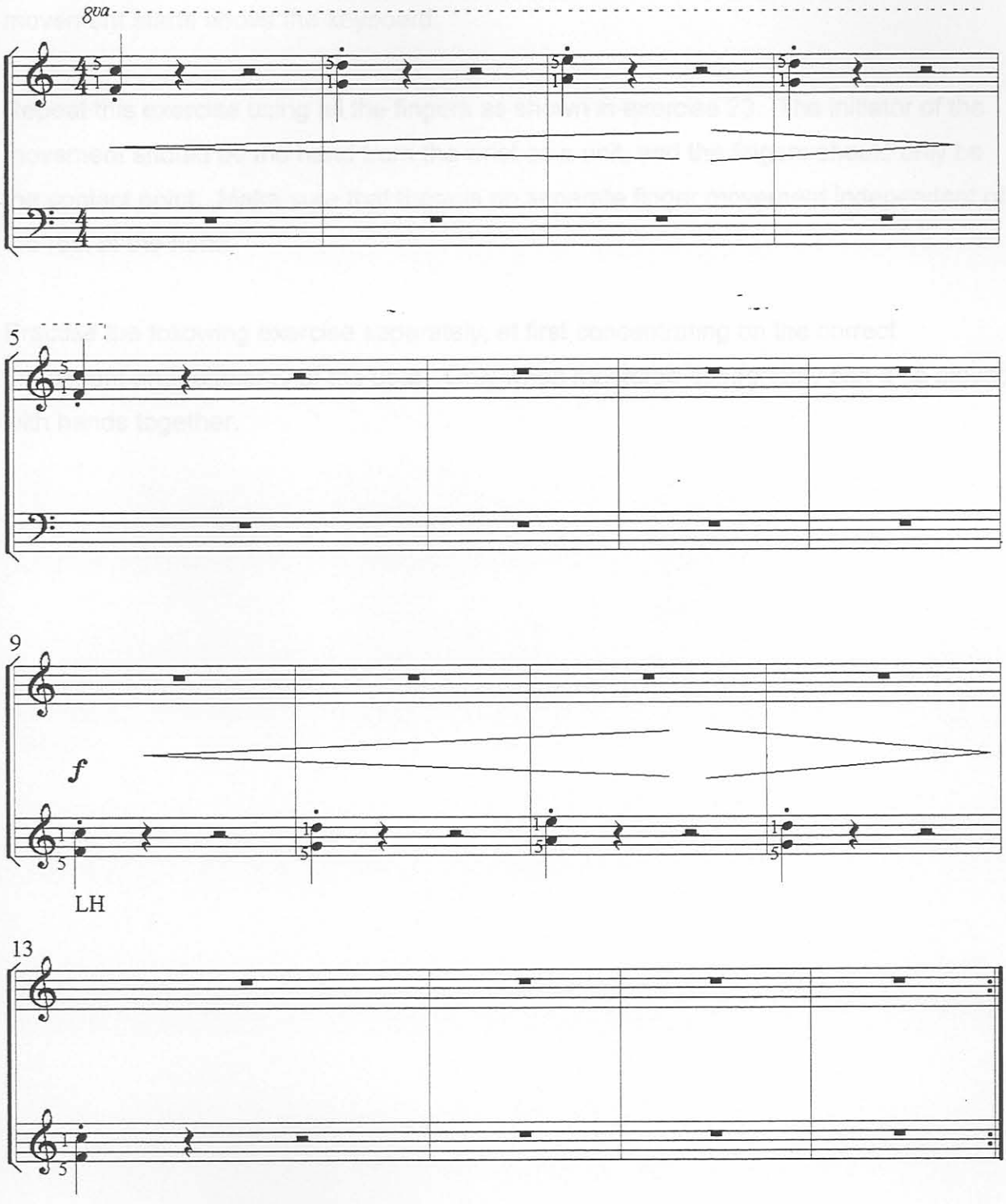
Pupil: **Exercise 22** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Die Kimberley se trein



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4.8.2 The hand 'free fall' (2nd stage)

The previous movement is the movement used when playing staccato. The staccato movement starts above the keyboard.

Repeat this exercise using all the fingers as shown in exercise 23. The initiator of the movement should be the hand from the wrist as a unit, and the fingers should only be the contact point. Make sure that there is no separate finger movement independent of the rest of the hand.

Practise the following exercise separately, at first concentrating on the correct movement and regularity of the beat. Only when mastered comfortably can it be played with hands together.

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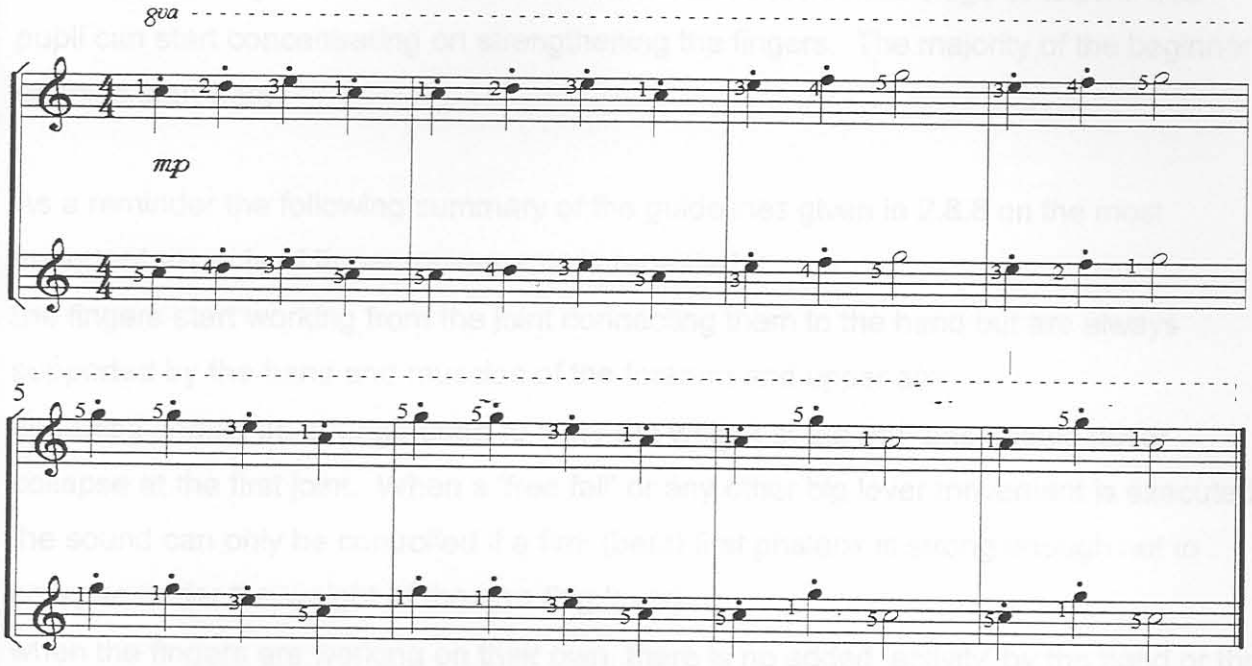
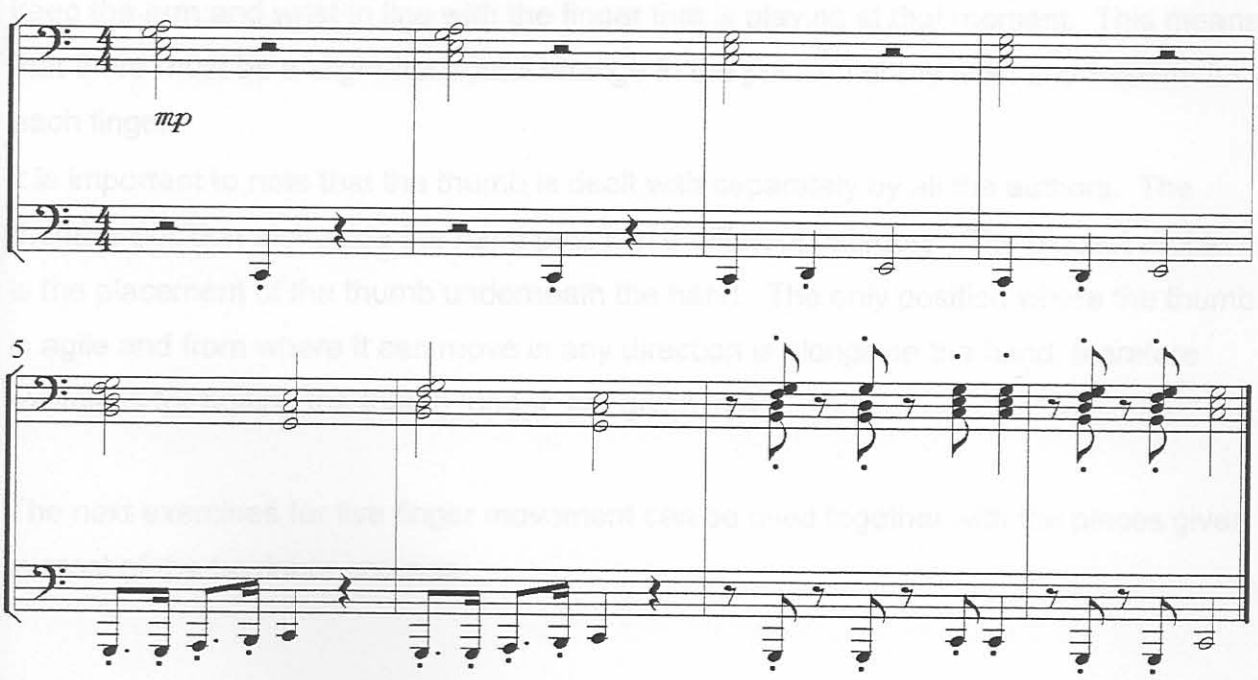
Pupil: **Exercise 23** **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Frère Jacques



Teacher:

Frère Jacques



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4.9 Finger movement

The important big lever movements are well established at this stage of tuition. The pupil can start concentrating on strengthening the fingers. The majority of the beginner courses start here.

As a reminder the following summary of the guidelines given in 2.8.8 on the most important aspects of finger movements is repeated:

- the fingers start working from the joint connecting them to the hand but are always supported by the hand and muscles of the forearm and upper arm
- fingertips should be strengthened to carry the weight of the arm and should never collapse at the first joint. When a 'free fall' or any other big lever movement is executed the sound can only be controlled if a firm (bent) first phalanx is strong enough not to collapse under the weight of the arm (big lever)
- when the fingers are working on their own, there is no added 'activity' by the hand or the wrist apart from support given by them. In this case the finger is the initiator of the movement and is the only lever that is actively moving
- freedom of movement in the bigger levers ensures support for the fingers. Therefore keep the arm and wrist in line with the finger that is playing at that moment. This means that there must be a slight horizontal change in the position of the wrist and forearm for each finger
- it is important to note that the thumb is dealt with separately by all the authors. The thumb's position alongside the hand puts it in a different category. The biggest problem is the placement of the thumb underneath the hand. The only position where the thumb is agile and from where it can move in any direction is alongside the hand, therefore exercises for putting the thumb 'under' are given in 4.7.

The next exercises for five finger movement can be used together with the pieces given in most of the beginner courses.

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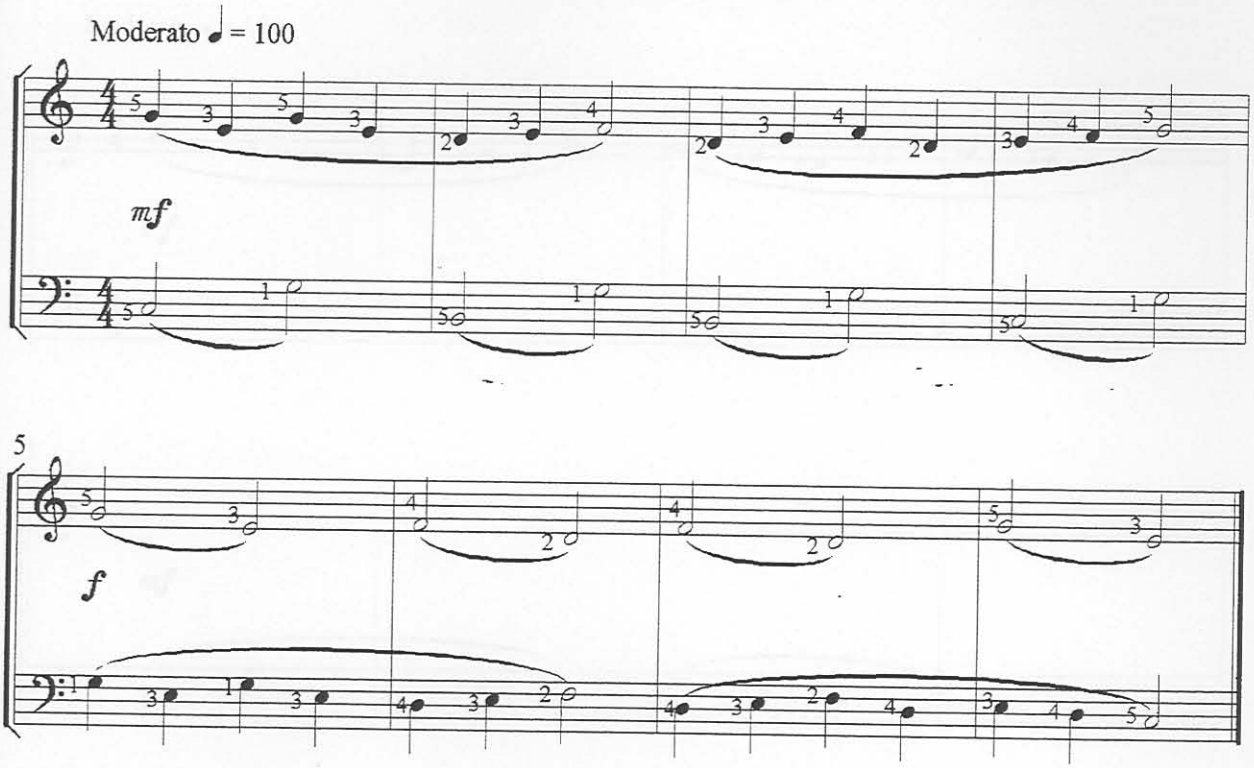
Exercise 24 **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The little duckling



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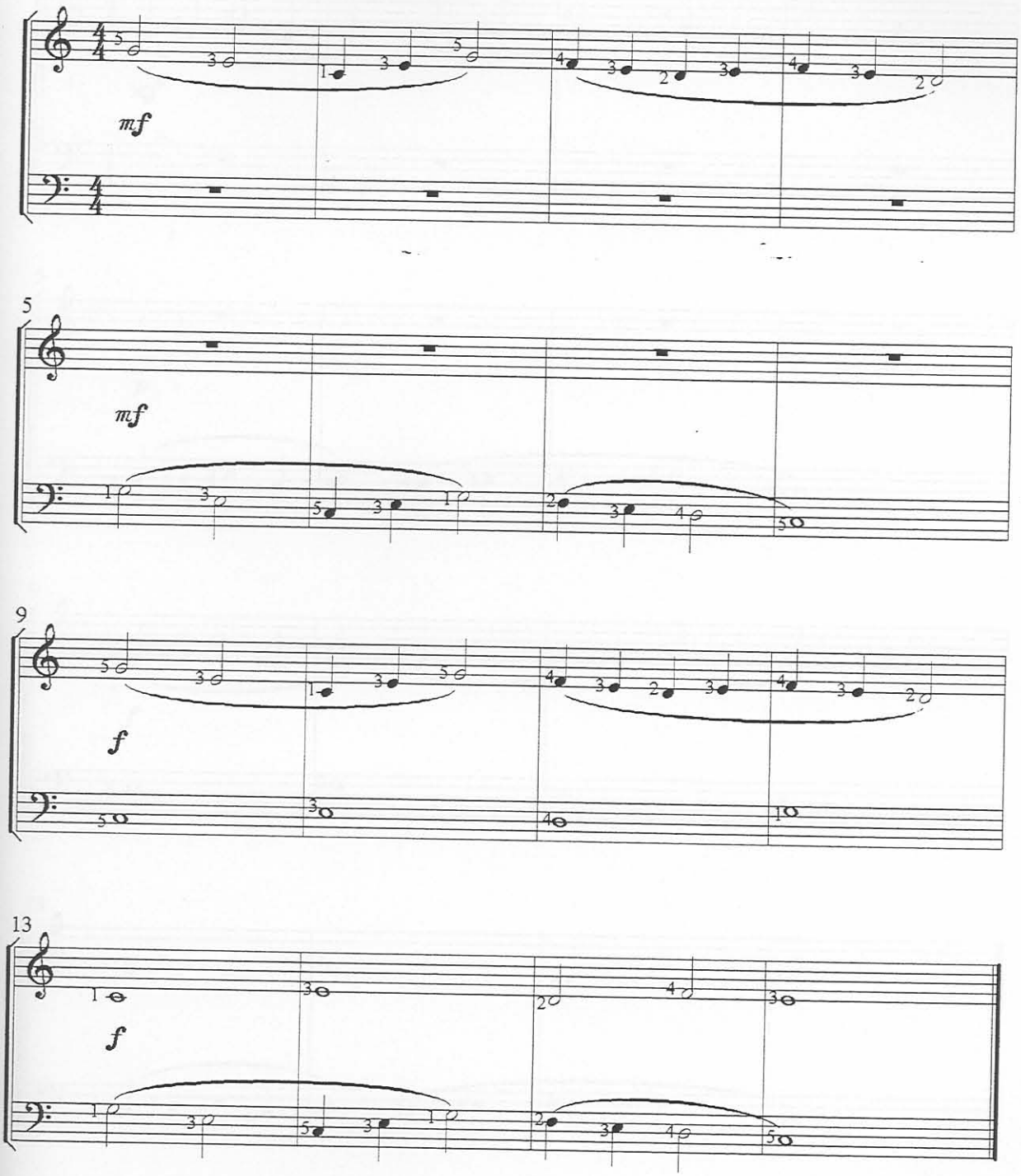
Exercise 25 **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

A Christmas song

Moderato ♩ = 100



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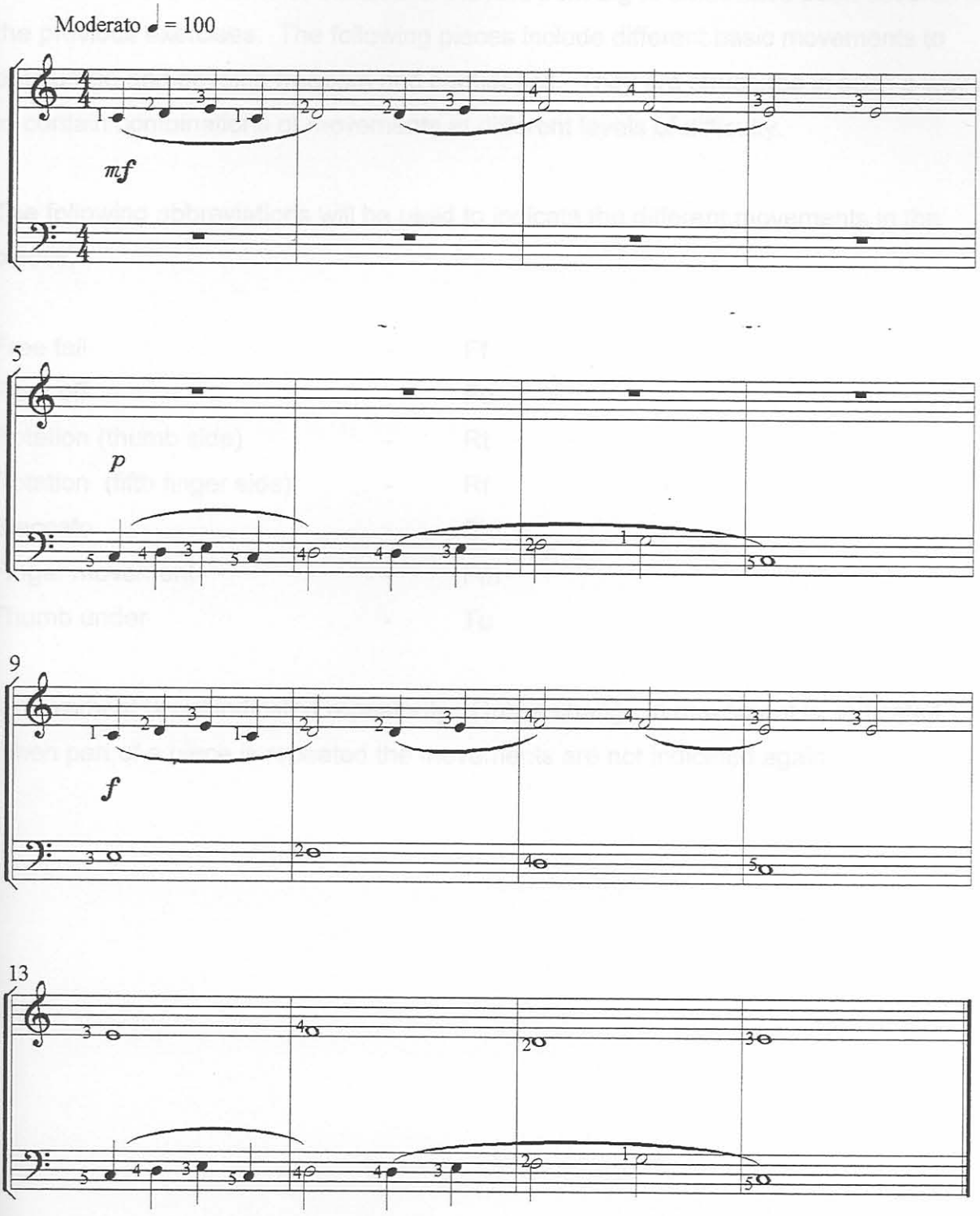
Exercise 26 **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

Grandpa's snuff-box



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4.10 Combinations of the basic movements

All the basic movements of the different levers from big to small have been covered by the previous exercises. The following pieces include different basic movements to encourage and develop freedom and confidence. They are structured in such a way as to contain combinations of movements at different levels of difficulty.

The following abbreviations will be used to indicate the different movements in the pieces:

Free fall	-	Ff
Float off	-	Fo
Rotation (thumb side)	-	Rt
Rotation (fifth finger side)	-	Rf
Staccato	-	S
Finger movement	-	Fm
Thumb under	-	Tu

A movement is not indicated repeatedly. Only a change in movement is indicated. When part of a piece is repeated the movements are not indicated again.

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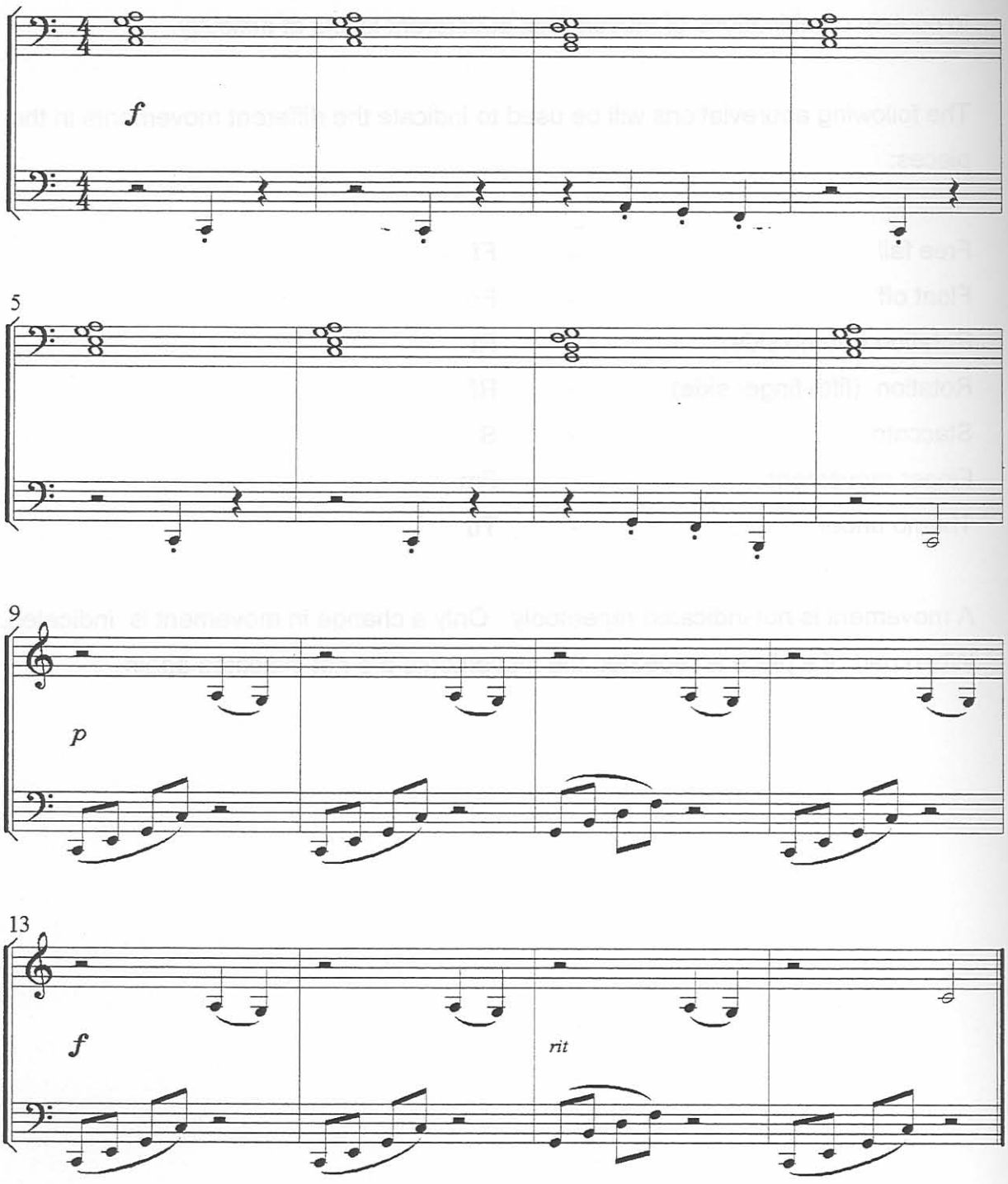
Piece no 1 includes 'free fall', 'float off', staccato movements and finger movements.
Teacher:

Swinging



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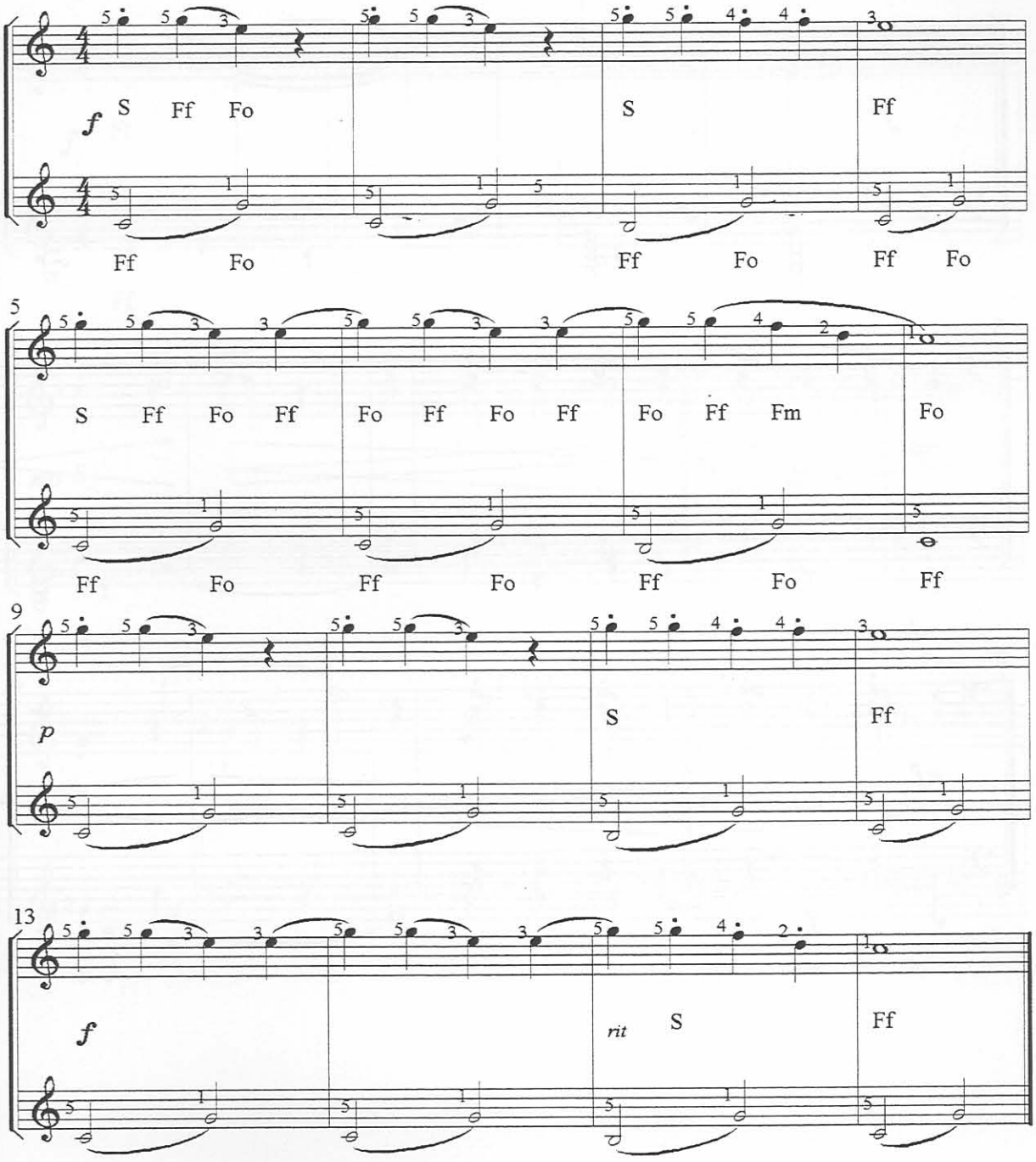
Pupil:

Arranged by T Rhoodie

Swinging

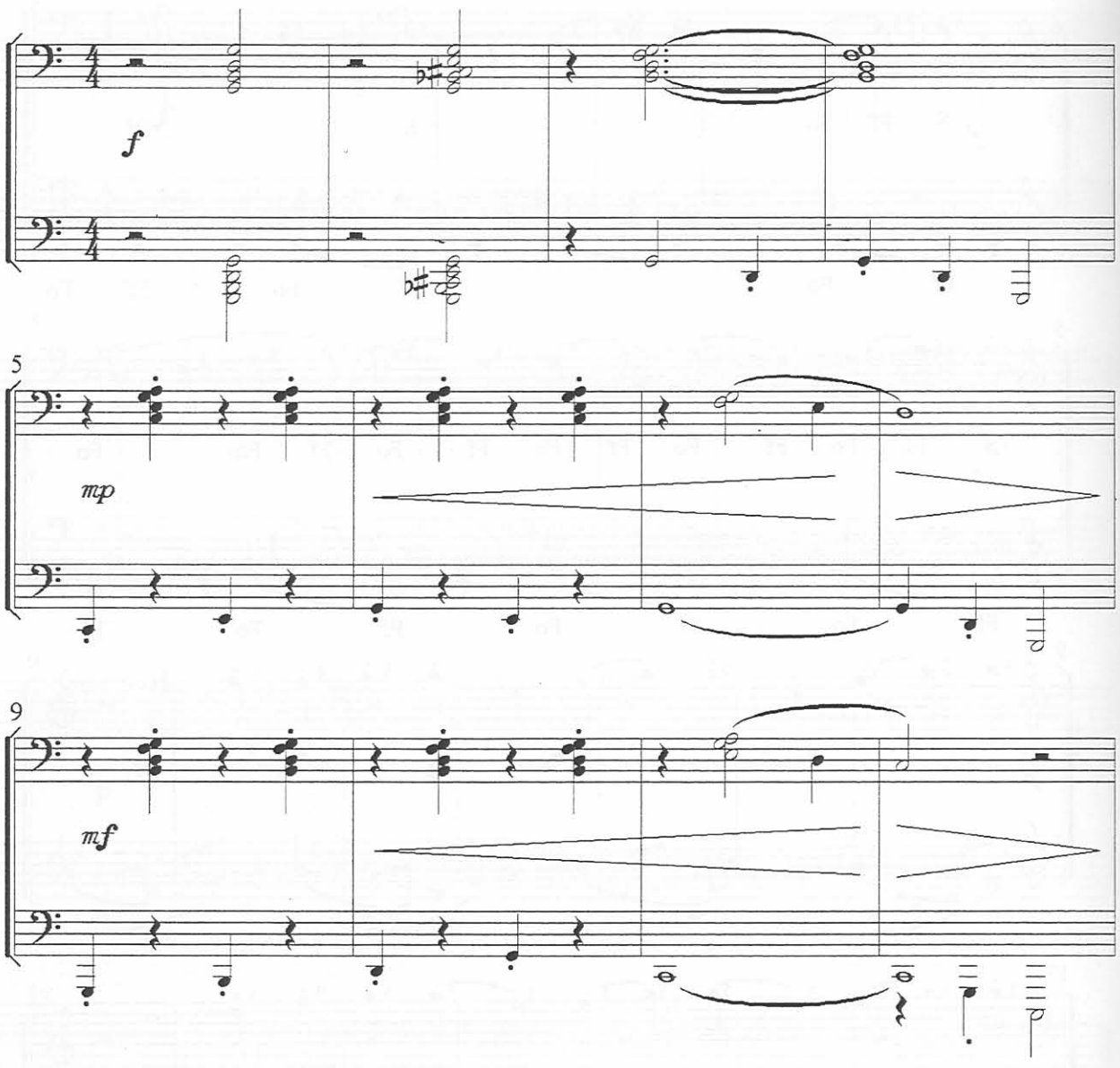


University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Piece no 2 includes 'free fall', 'float off', staccato and finger movements.

Teacher:

Duckling

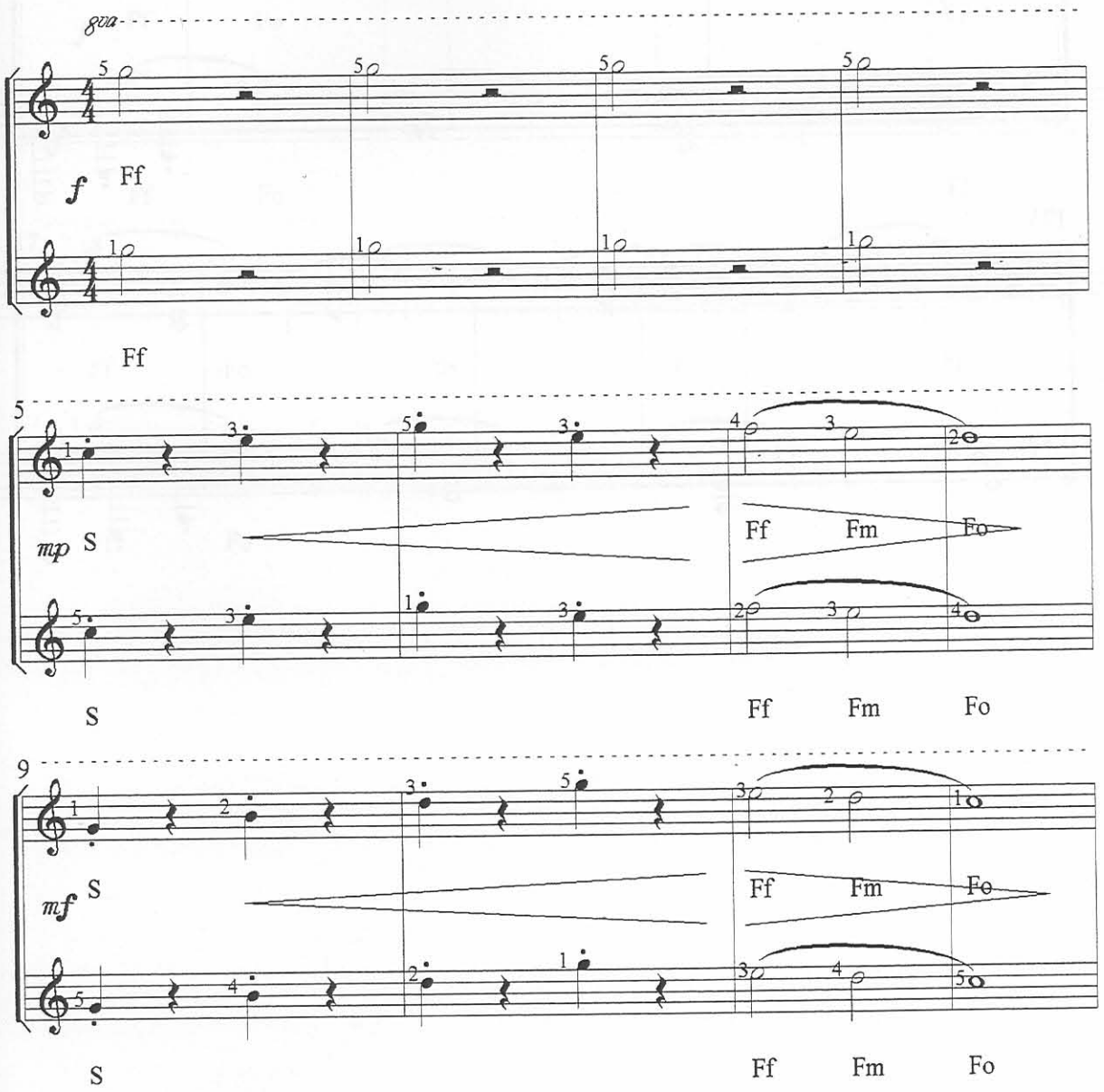


University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

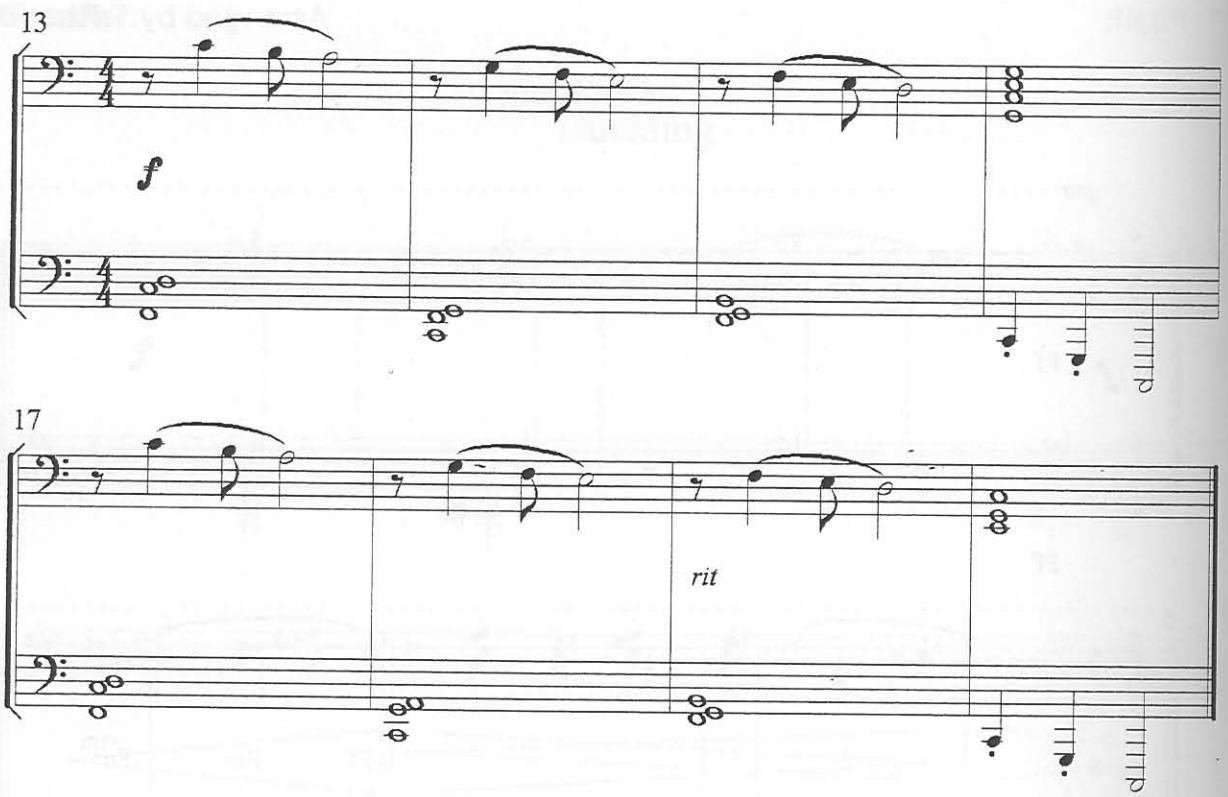
Pupil:

Arranged by T Rhoodie

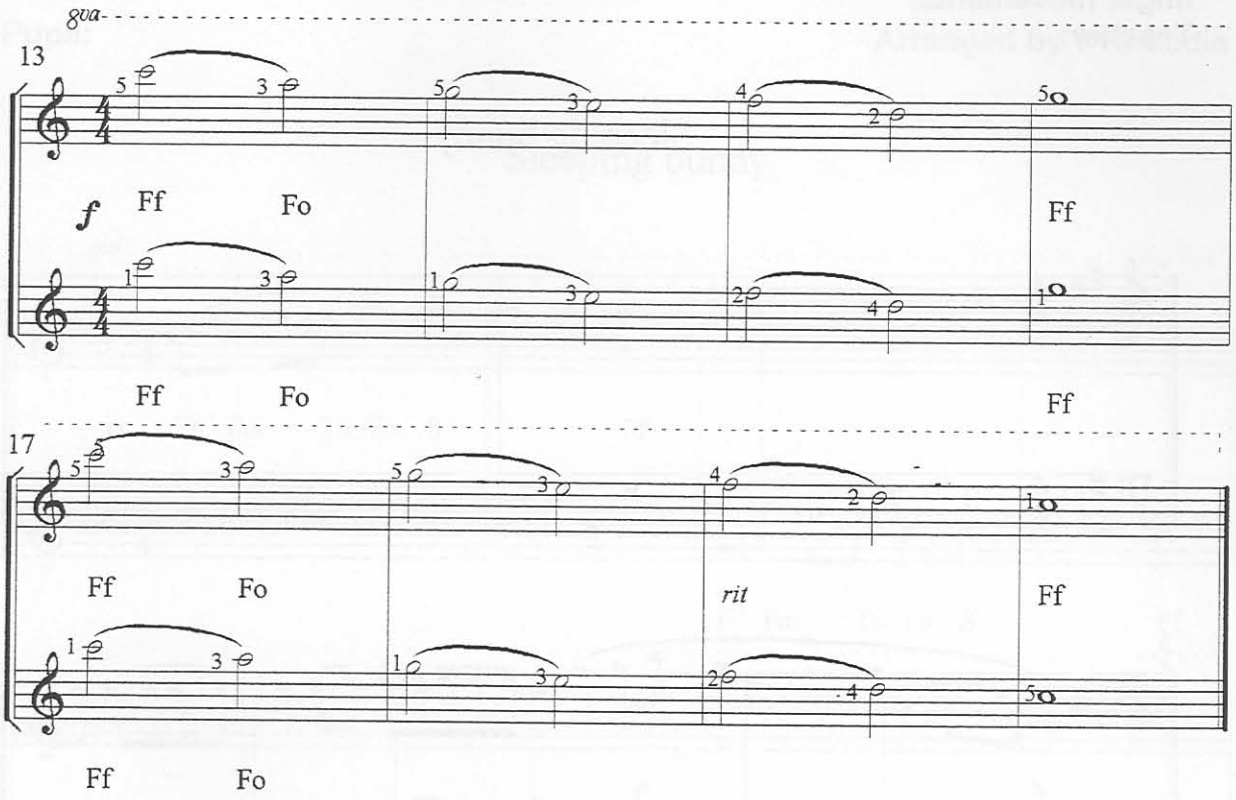
Duckling



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

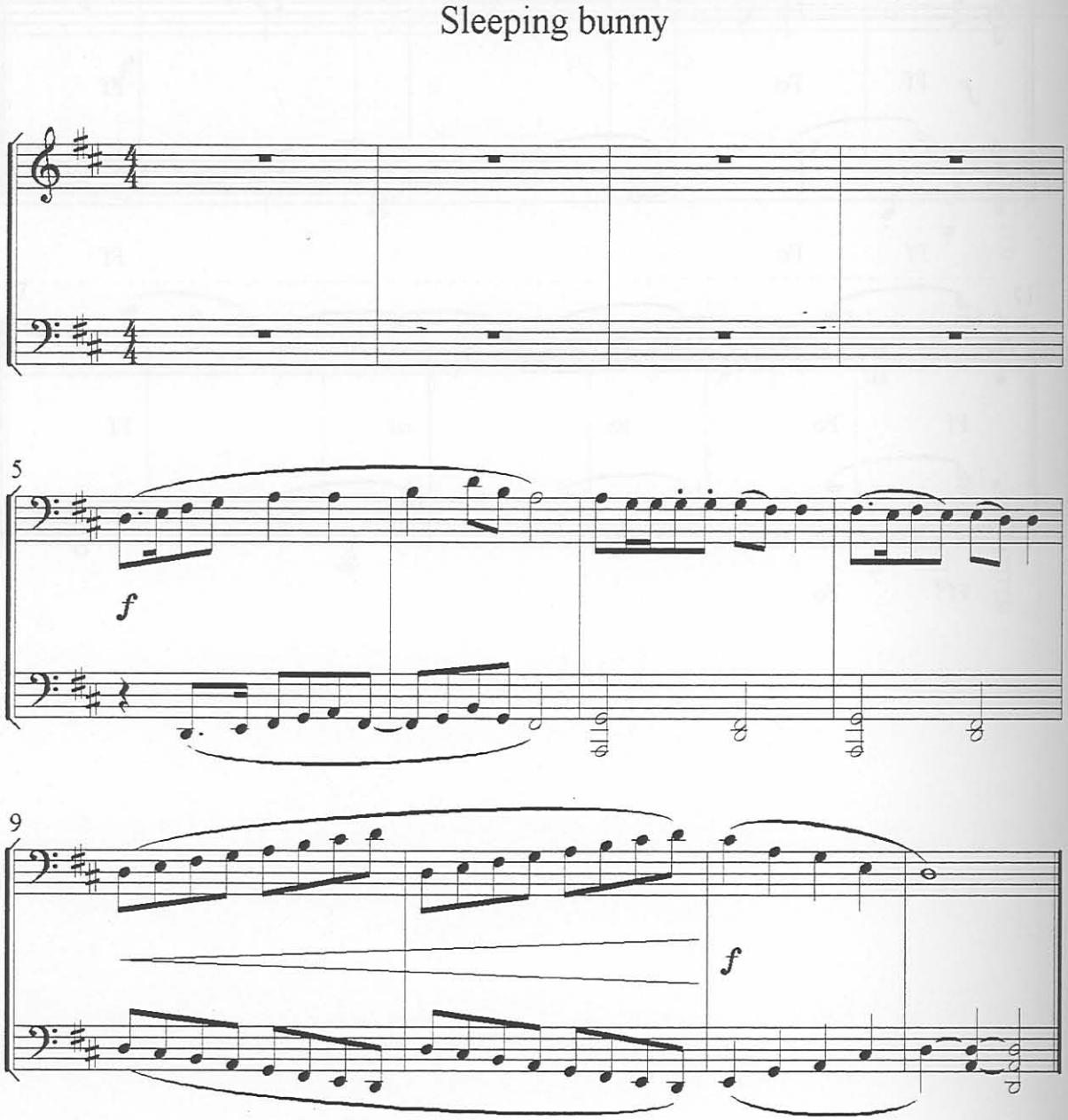


University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Piece no 3 includes 'free fall', 'float off', rotation,staccato and 'thumb under' and finger movements.
Teacher:

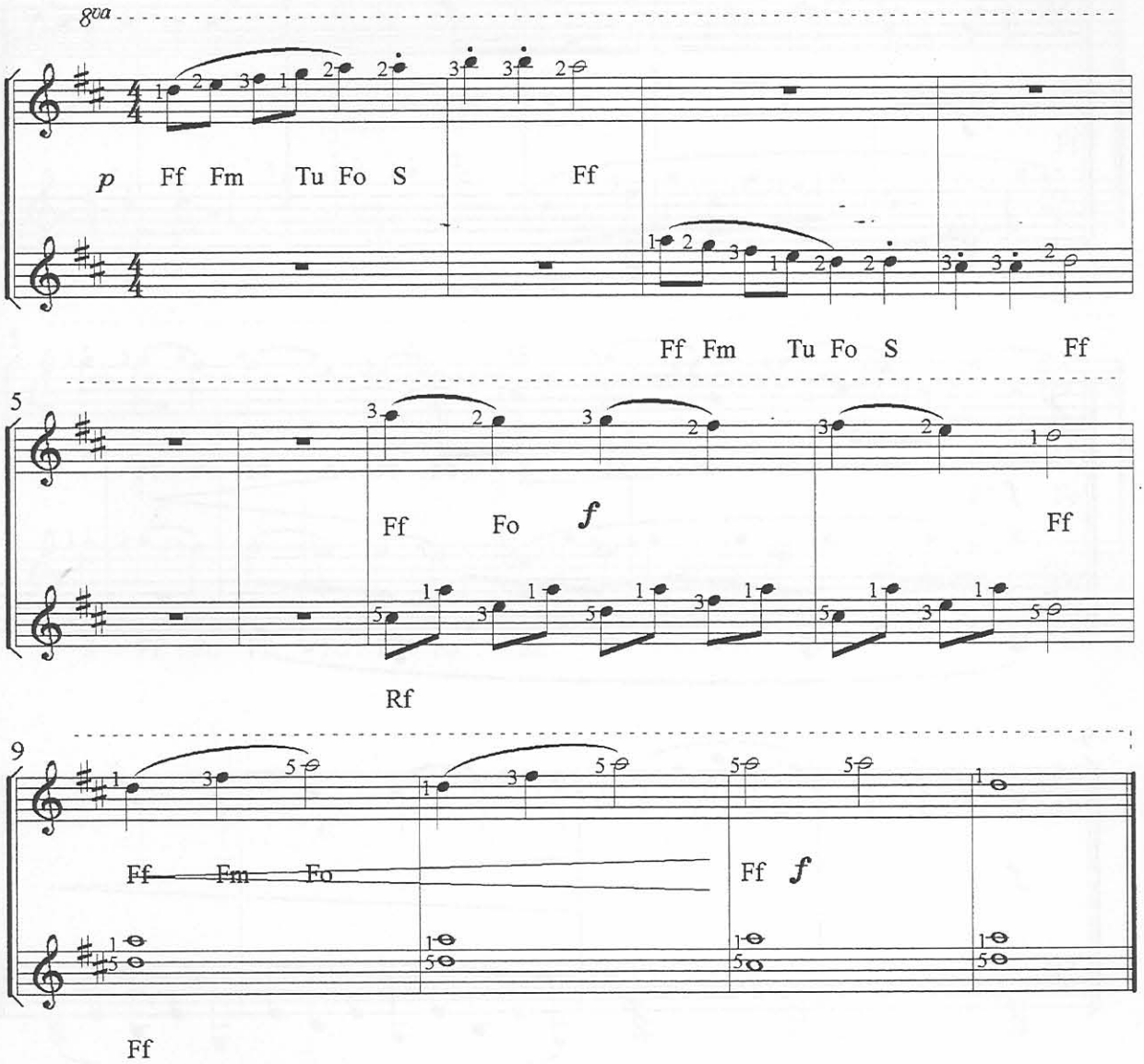


University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Pupil:

Arranged by T Rhoodie

Sleeping bunny



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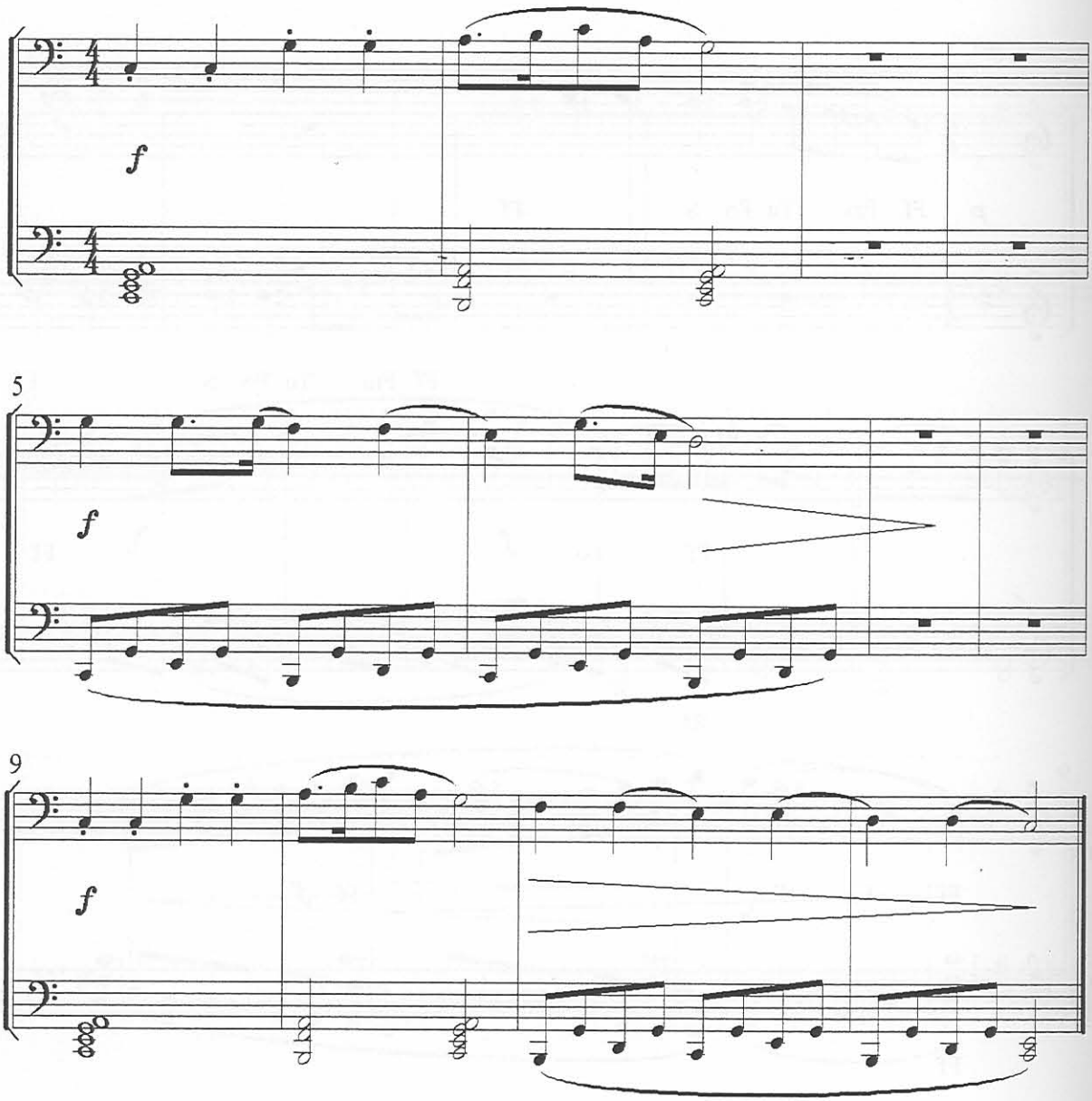
Piece no 4 includes 'free fall', 'float off', rotation and staccato movements.

Teacher:

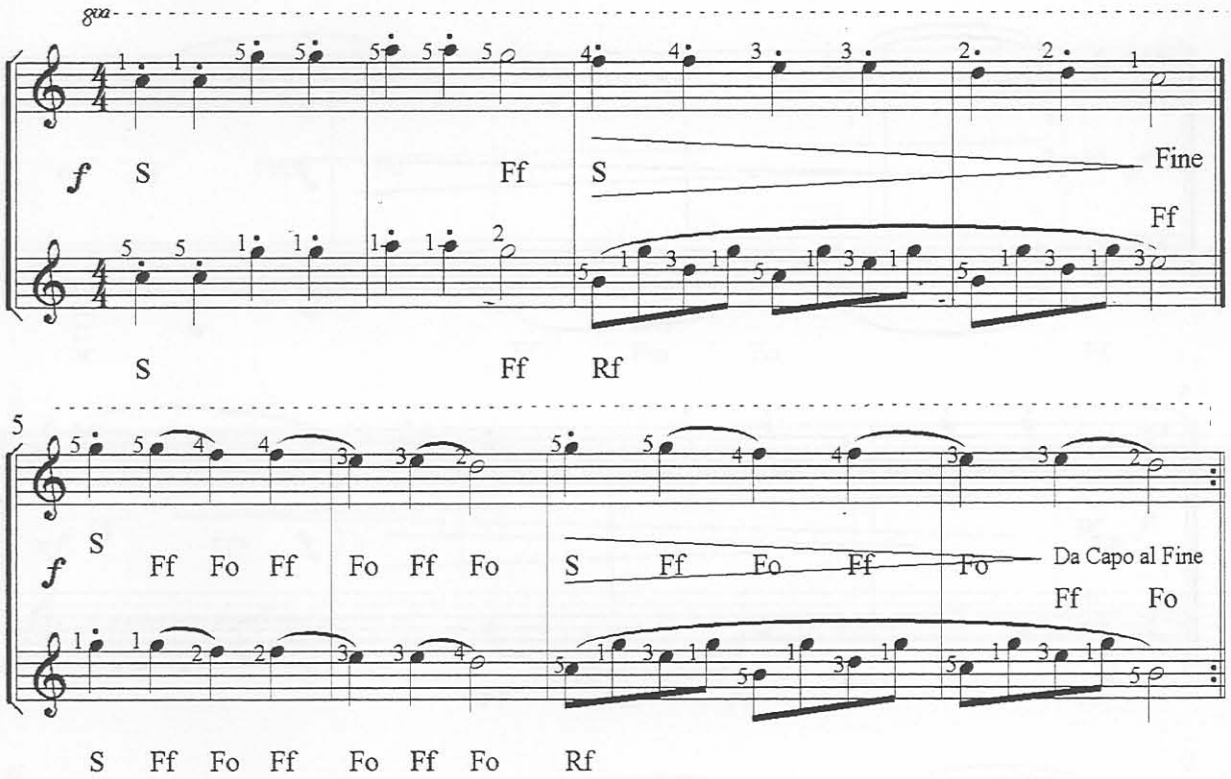
Baba black sheep



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Pupil: **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

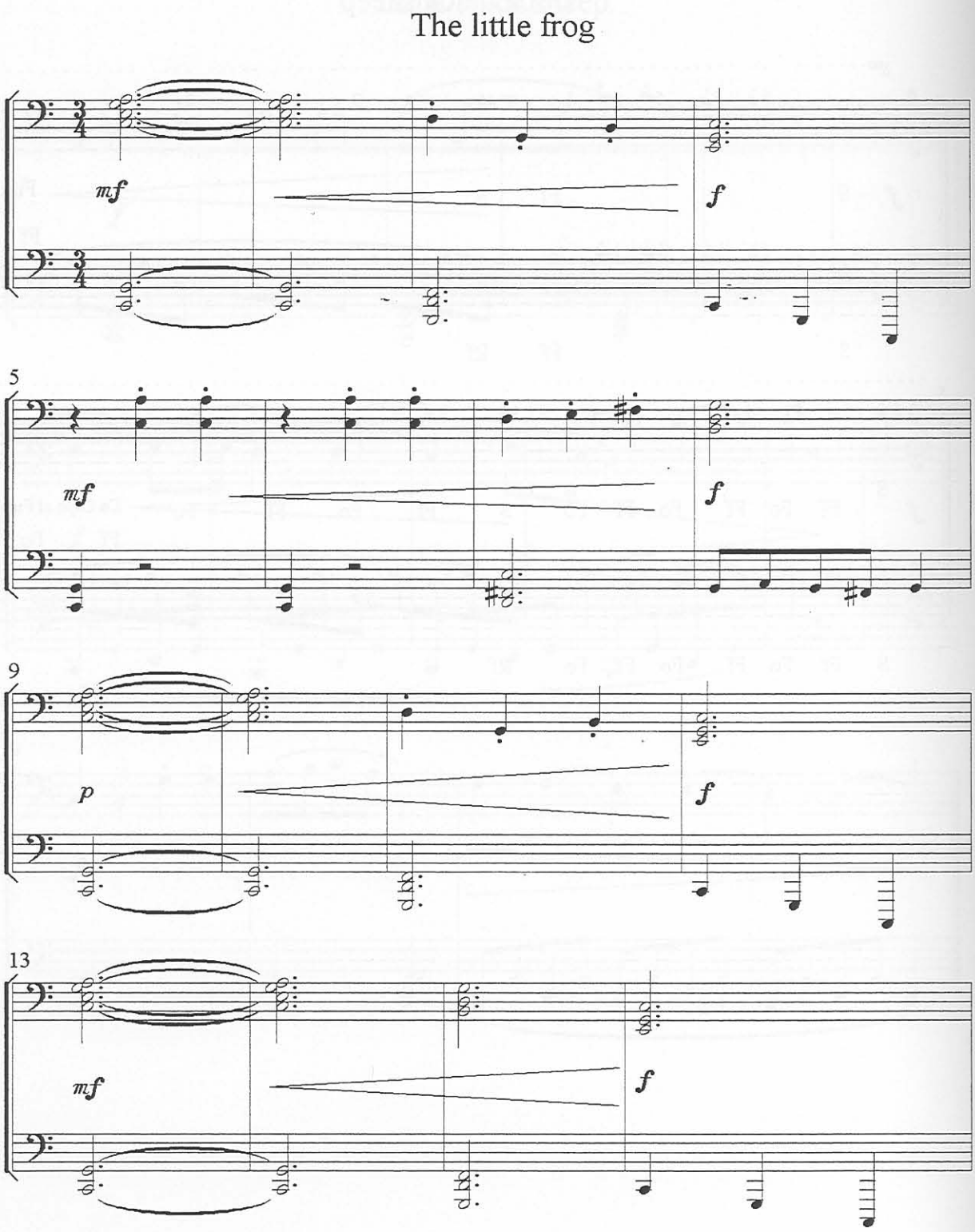
Baba black sheep



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Piece no 5 includes 'free fall', 'float off', rotation, staccato and finger movements.

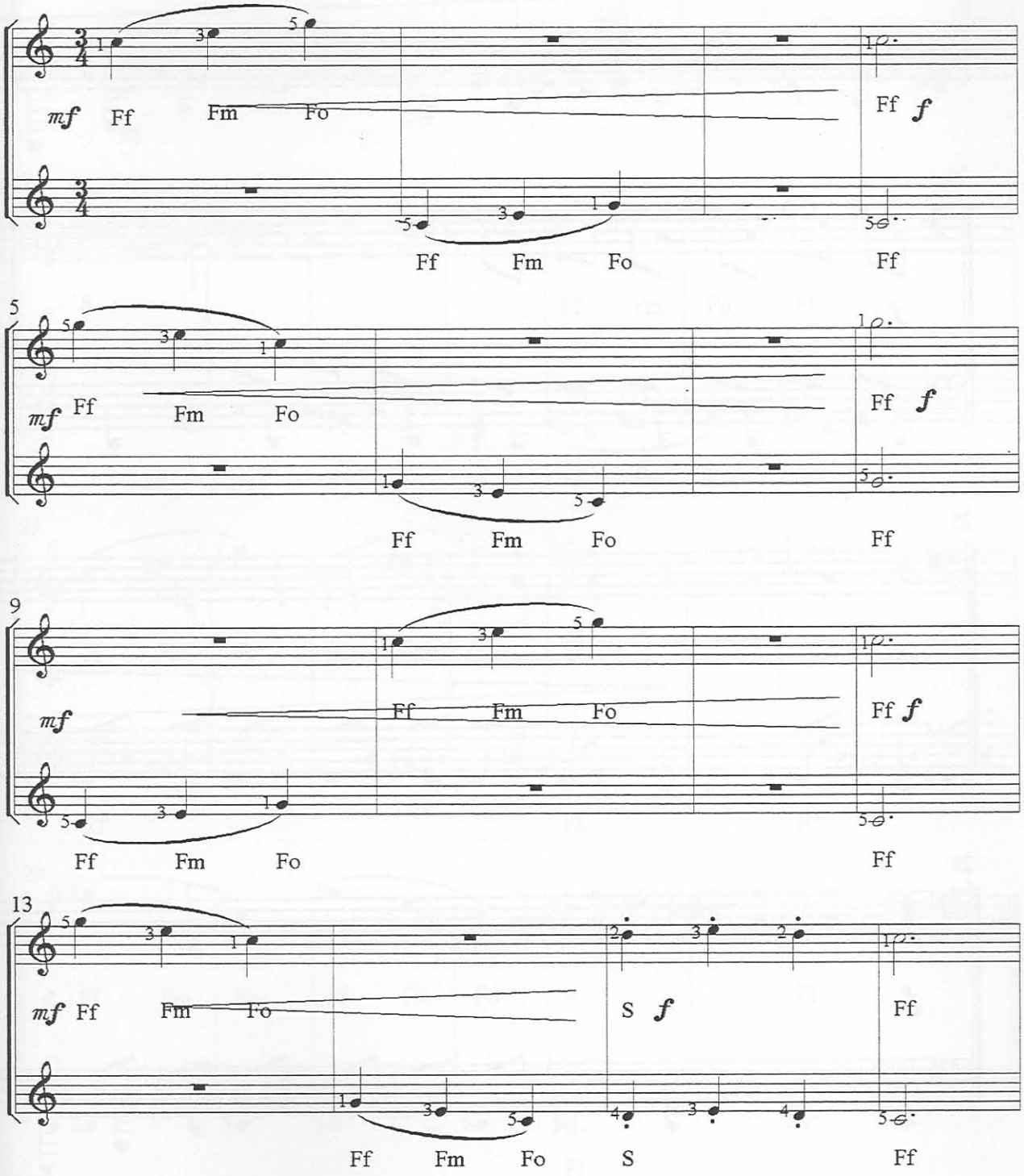
Teacher:



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Pupil: **Arranged by T Rhoodie**

The little frog



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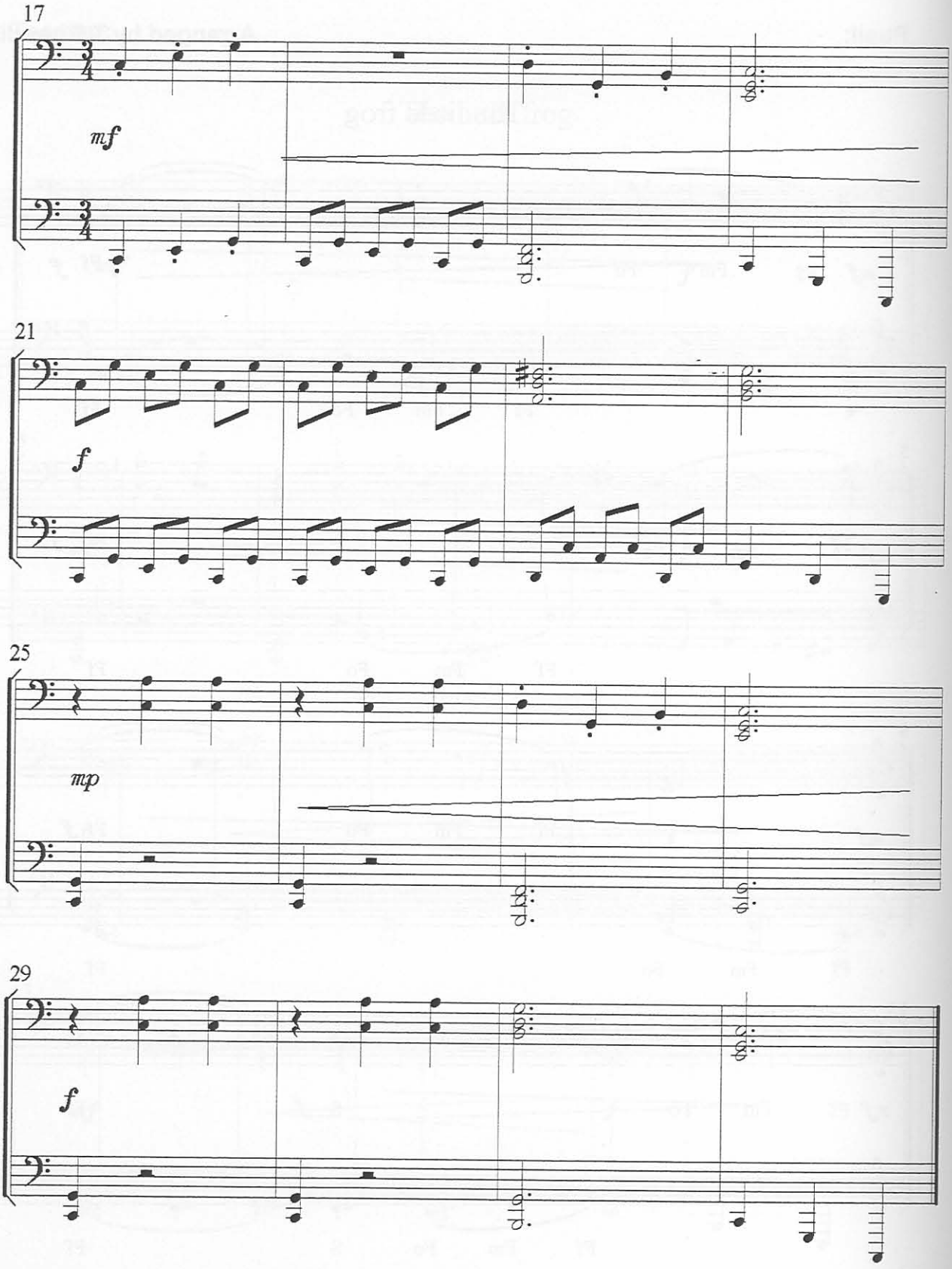
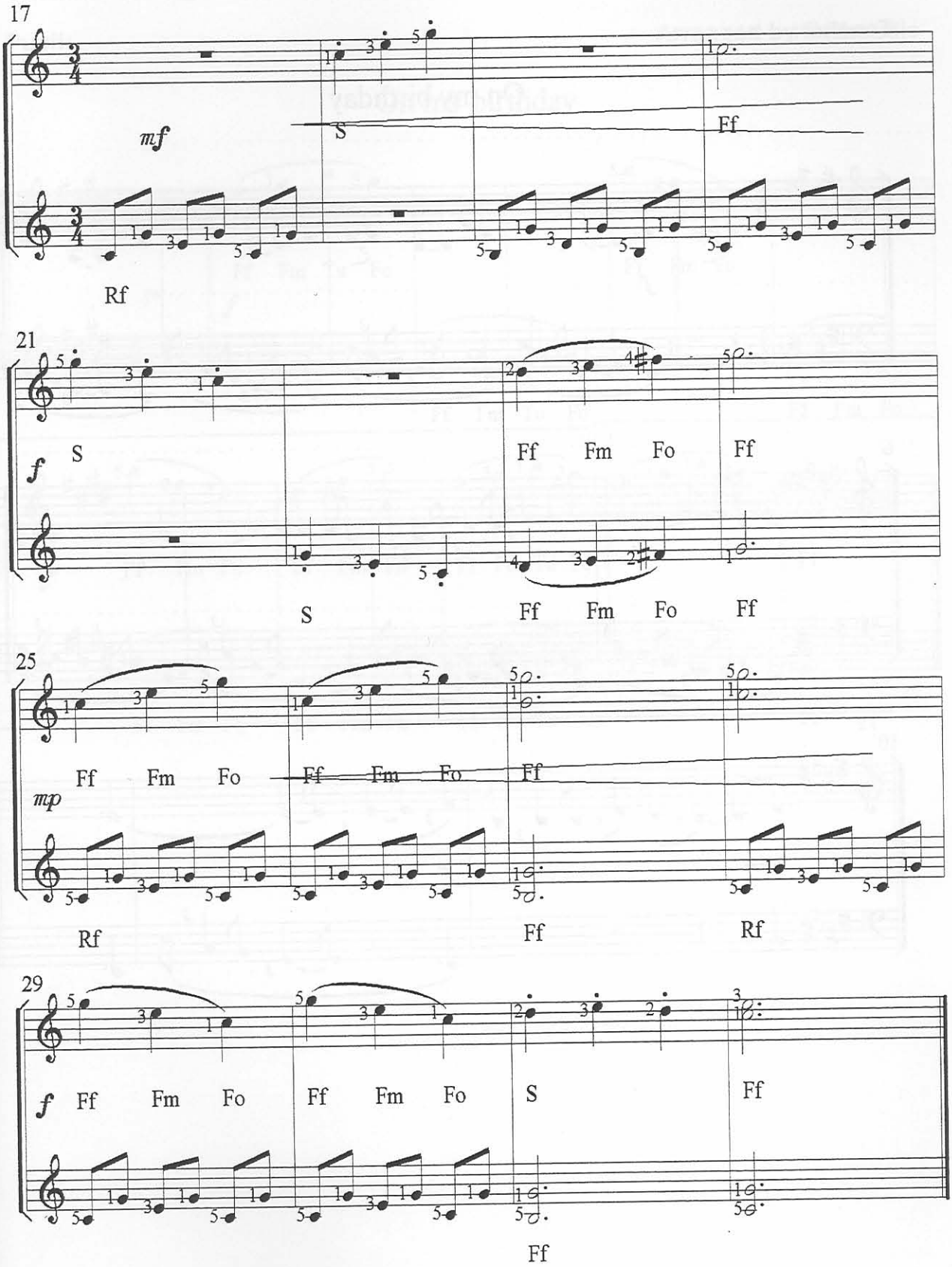


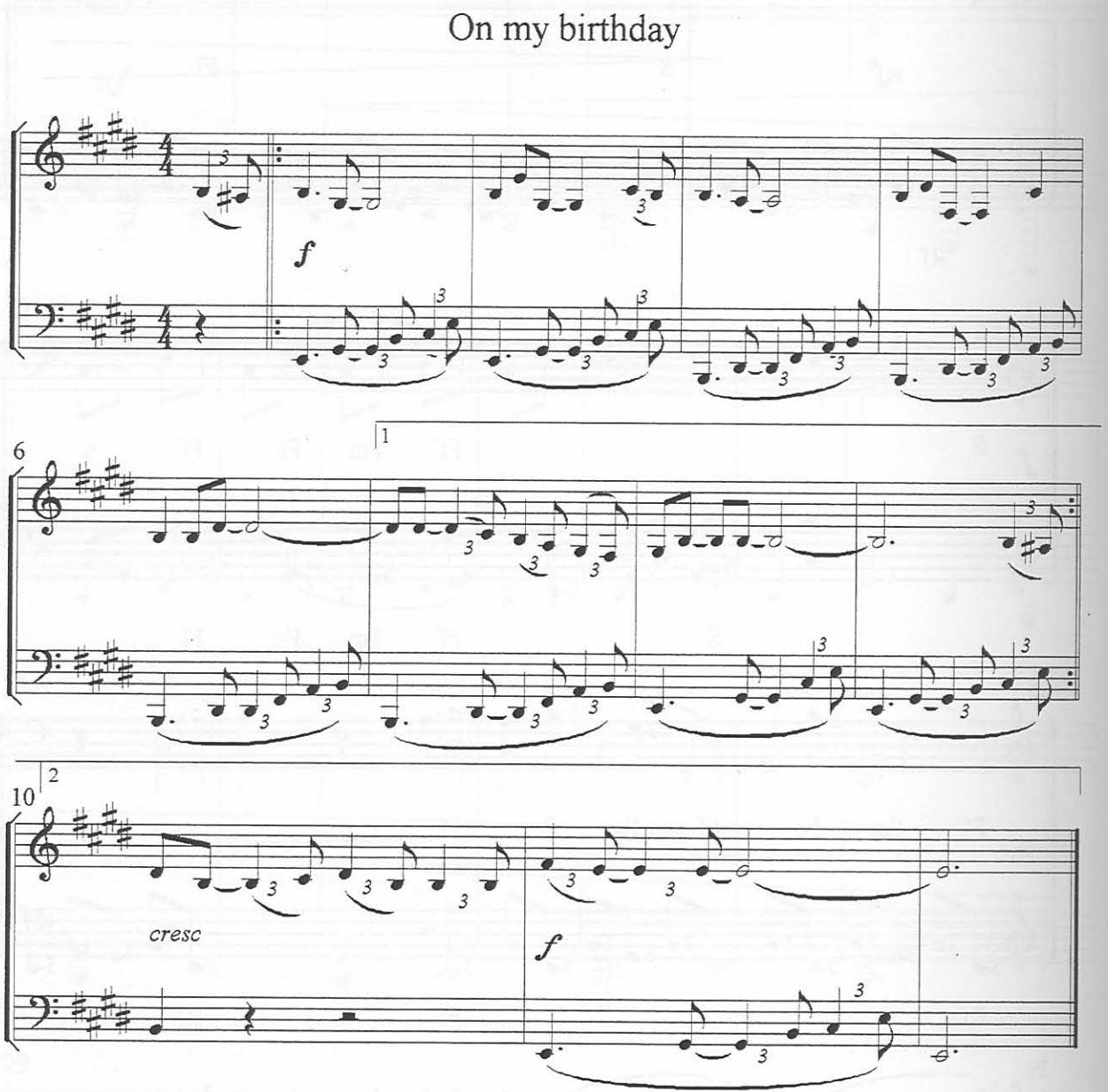
University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Piece no 6 includes 'free fall', 'float off', 'thumb under and finger movements.

Teacher:

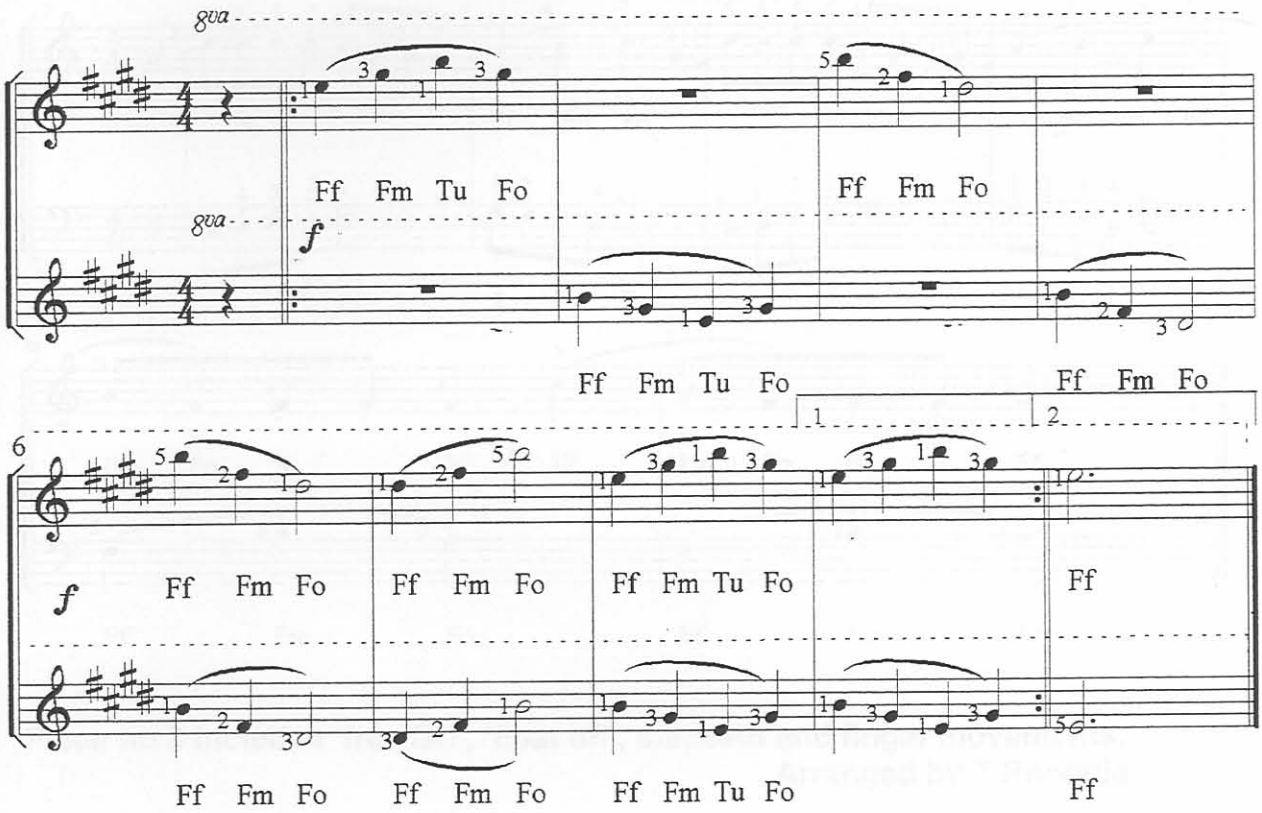


University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Pupil:

Arranged by T Rhoodie

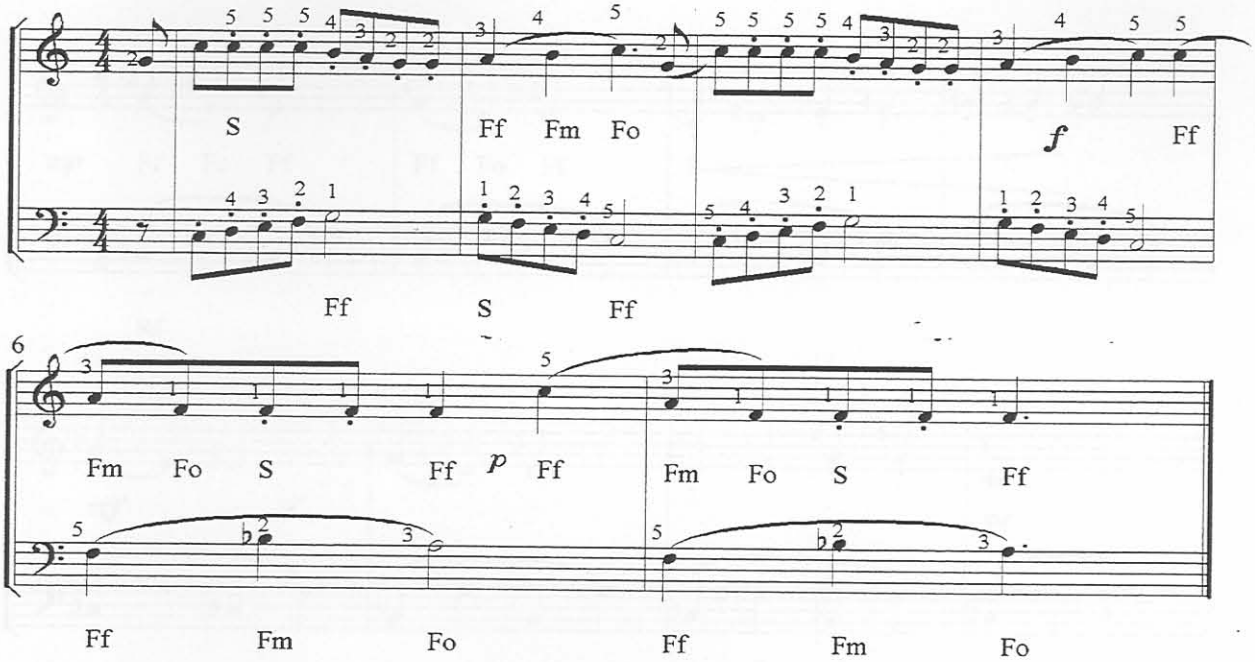
On my birthday



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

Piece no 7 includes 'free fall', 'float off', staccato and finger movements.
Arranged by T Rhoodie

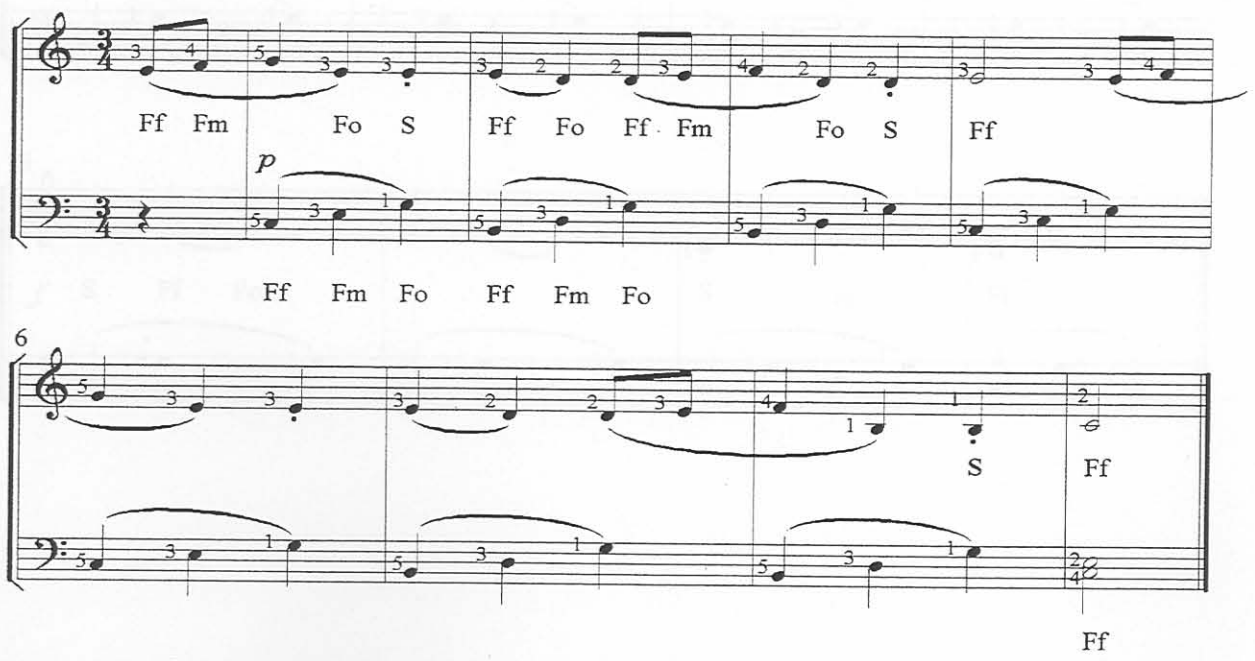
Galloping



Piece no 8 includes 'free fall', 'float off', staccato and finger movements.
Arranged by T Rhoodie

A little bird came to me

Andante



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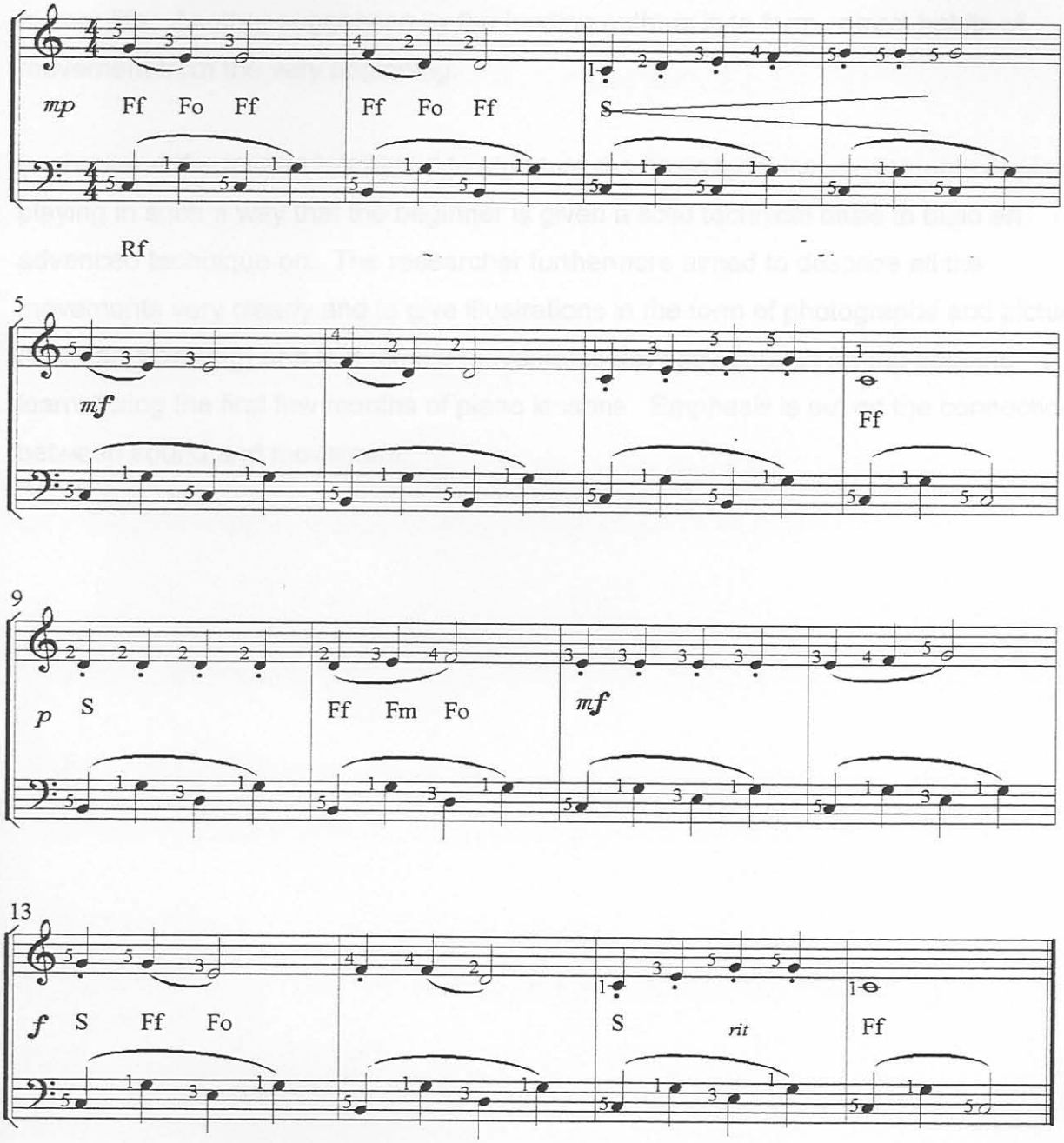
Piece no 9 includes 'free fall', 'float off', rotation, staccato and finger movements.
Arranged by T Rhoodie

Hänschen klein



University of Pretoria etd – Rhoodie, H S (2005)

4.11 Chapter conclusion

Starting tuition of a beginner pianist requires sensitivity and skill. Well-known authors in the field of piano technique emphasize the fact that the technical movements the beginner is taught during the first lessons provide the technical foundation for the rest of his/her life. Another suggestion by the leading authors is to form correct habits of movement from the very beginning.

In chapter 4 the researcher aimed to structure the basic technical movements of piano playing in such a way that the beginner is given a solid technical basis to build an advanced technique on. The researcher furthermore aimed to describe all the movements very clearly and to give illustrations in the form of photographs and pictures. All these slow (big) and fast (small) movements are easy enough for the beginner to learn during the first few months of piano lessons. Emphasis is put on the connection between sound and movement.