Double **Trouble**

Duets for Developing Bassists

Gaelen McCormick

sample

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About the Double Bass Duet Project:

In the fall of 2017, I began writing short duets after a very comical exchange between a student and myself in one of her lessons. "Why are there so many gavottes in this book? What is a gavotte anyway?" she asked me. (To be fair, there are at least three different gavottes in that volume we were using) "Why isn't there ever music that is something we know about... like 'Hot Dog'?" I found this very funny and also very revealing. Why do we insist that student keep studying old form dances? I know, I know.... It's classical music for a reason – classical form, phrase structure, music theory, etc etc.

But here's the thing: I teach mainly elementary and middle school age students lately. And I do so because I love to teach this age! They are so curious about everything, and unfiltered in their conversations with me. That can be great, or brutal, depending on the day. And one thing I do NOT want to do is squash their curiosity by asking them to play music they can NOT relate to.

I am not advocating dropping Mozart or Bach from our repertoire. Although, hey, neither ever wrote anything specific to the double bass! I value the great composers, I know you do too. But as this idea rattled around inside my head, I wondered what would happen if I wrote music for my own studio, and wrapped it around a few key things:

- Short technical ideas
- Easy to hear melodies
- Simple bass parts in the Bass 2 – so a non-bassist teacher could easily accompany, or a mixed level group could work on these together
- Using snack foods as the inspiration!

Snack foods – it's ridiculous, I know. But as soon as I opened up this can of worms on facebook, my peers replied with oodles of suggestions. Then my own studio had a gazillion things to recommend to me. Pretty soon I realized that my own students were so invested in this project, that I could begin writing them very specific "etudes" in the guise of duets. Aiming squarely at the technical ideas they needed to focus on, but delivering it in a bite-sized (pun totally intended) form, one that we could play together in lessons, or which they could show off at school with their lesson group.

And they didn't have to know they were learning. Isn't that our goal?!

I want to thank my colleague, Katrya Cichanowicz, for offering her students in group class to test these etudes as they came hot off the press. She and her students provided invaluable, immediate responses to the ideas I was crafting and generated even more great ideas for me to work with. I also want to thank my own studio for assisting me in testing these out. You see, I went deaf the year I started writing these. This was partly an "inner ear" training exercise for me. So I can't (literally) hear them. I asked my students to advise me if anything sounded weird, or if octaves needed to be shifted, etc. They are the BEST editors a teacher could ask for. Totally unfiltered and completely supportive!

sample

About the composer

Ms. McCormick was a member of the Rochester Philharmonic's double bass section from 1995-2017. Since losing her hearing in 2017, Gaelen has forged a new career path as a composer, arranger, executive director of Canandaigua LakeMusic Festival, and is the inaugural Program Manager for Eastman Performing Arts Medicine at the University of Rochester.

Teaching students of all ages is a significant part of Gaelen's life. She is a faculty member (double bass) of the Eastman Community Music School. Through the Arts Leadership Program at the Eastman School of Music, she teaches career skills for use on- and off-stage. Since 2014, she has been organizing and teaching the Rochester Bass Retreat, a workshop for all ages of players. She is a regular clinician at the NYSSMA Winter Conference. Her double bass bow pedagogy series, *Mastering the Bow*, is published by Carl Fischer. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the International Society of Bassists, and is the editor of their *Bass World* magazine's teaching column.

Gaelen holds degrees in performance from the Eastman School where she studied with James VanDemark and Carnegie Mellon University where she studied with Jeffrey Turner.

Photo: Daniel Fischer

Sample

GFGC - Gluten Free Gooey Cupcakes

- 1st and half positions
- Reading flats

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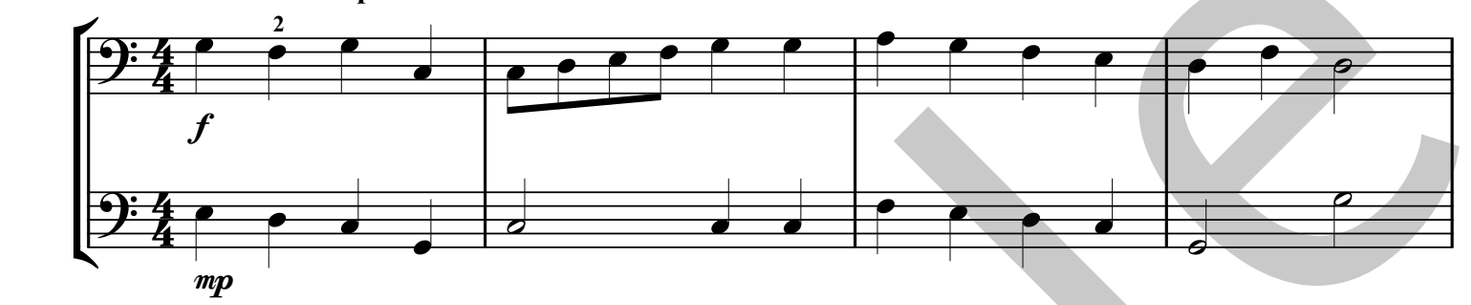
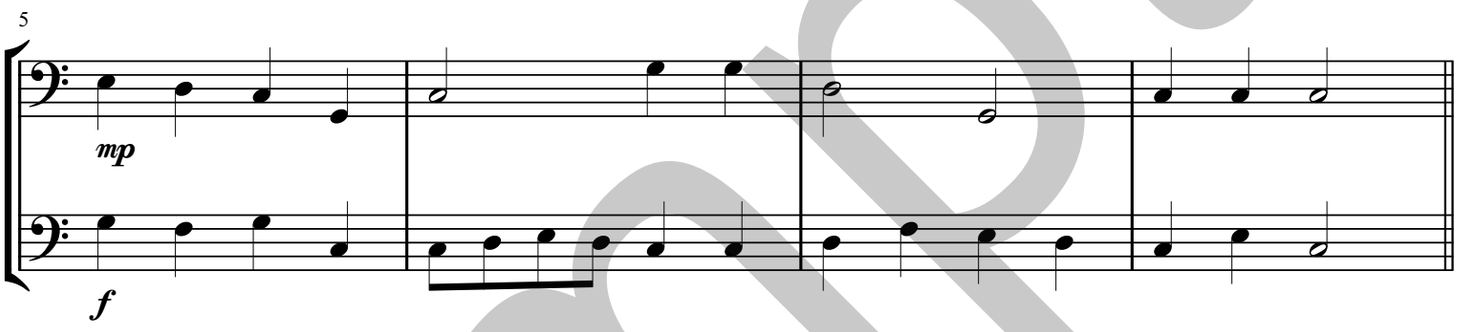
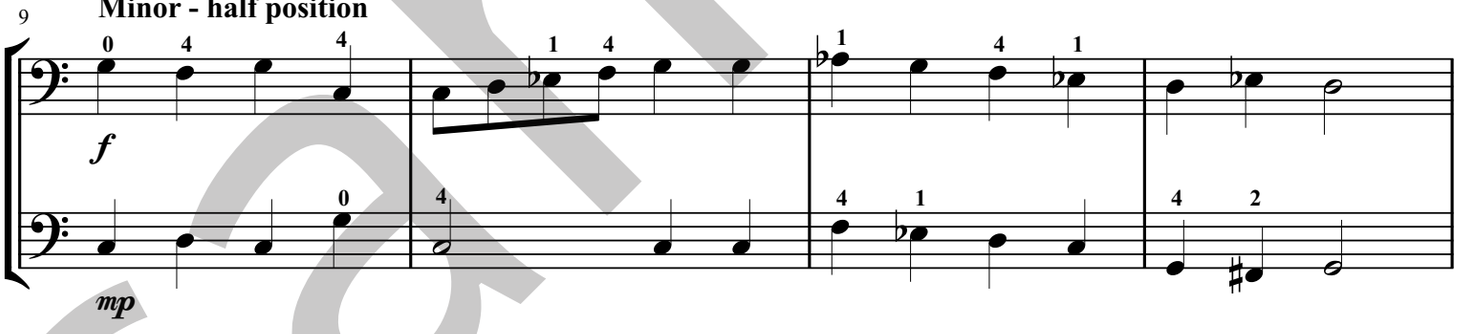
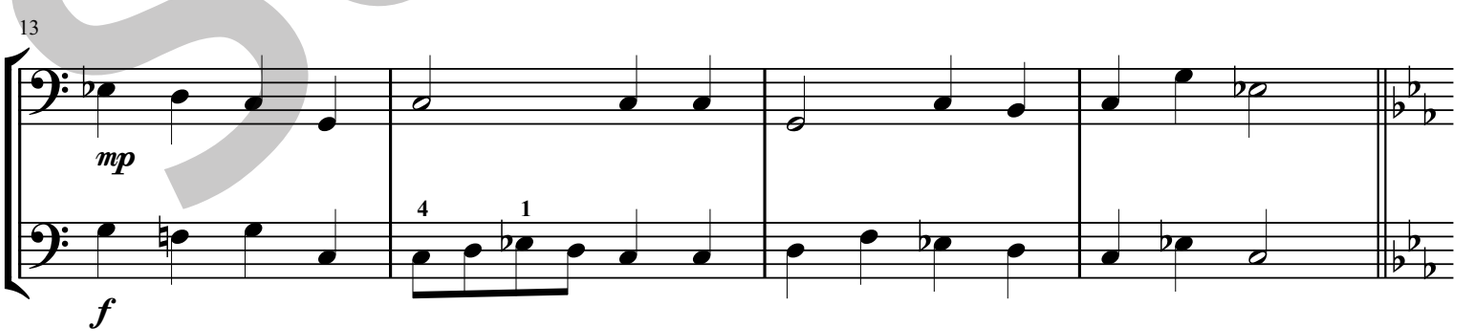
Theme - 1st position





Minor - half position





Sample

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Ode to LVB

- Sustained bows
- 1st and half positions

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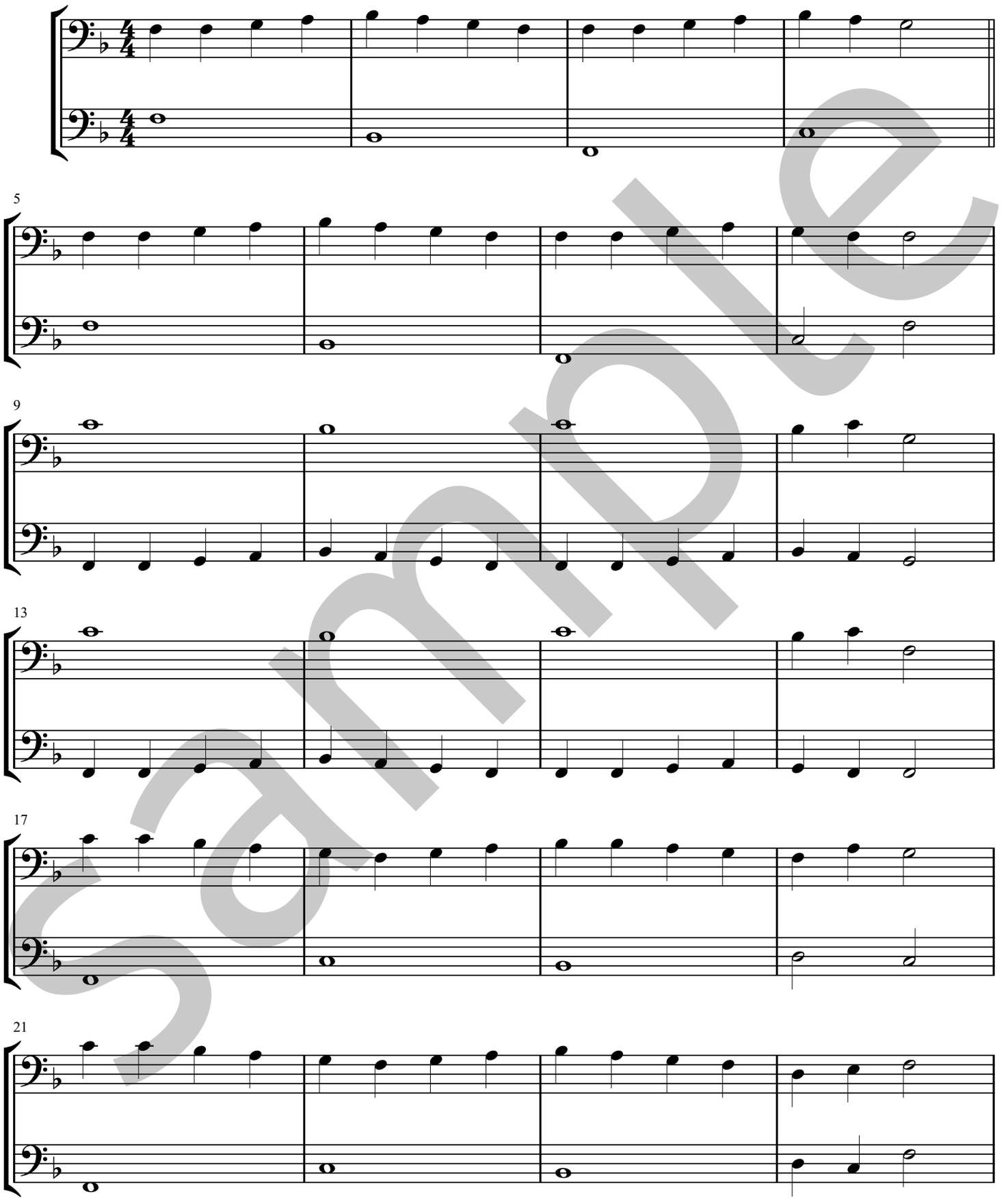

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Cookie Prep Games

- 1st and 2nd position
- Reaching C with 4

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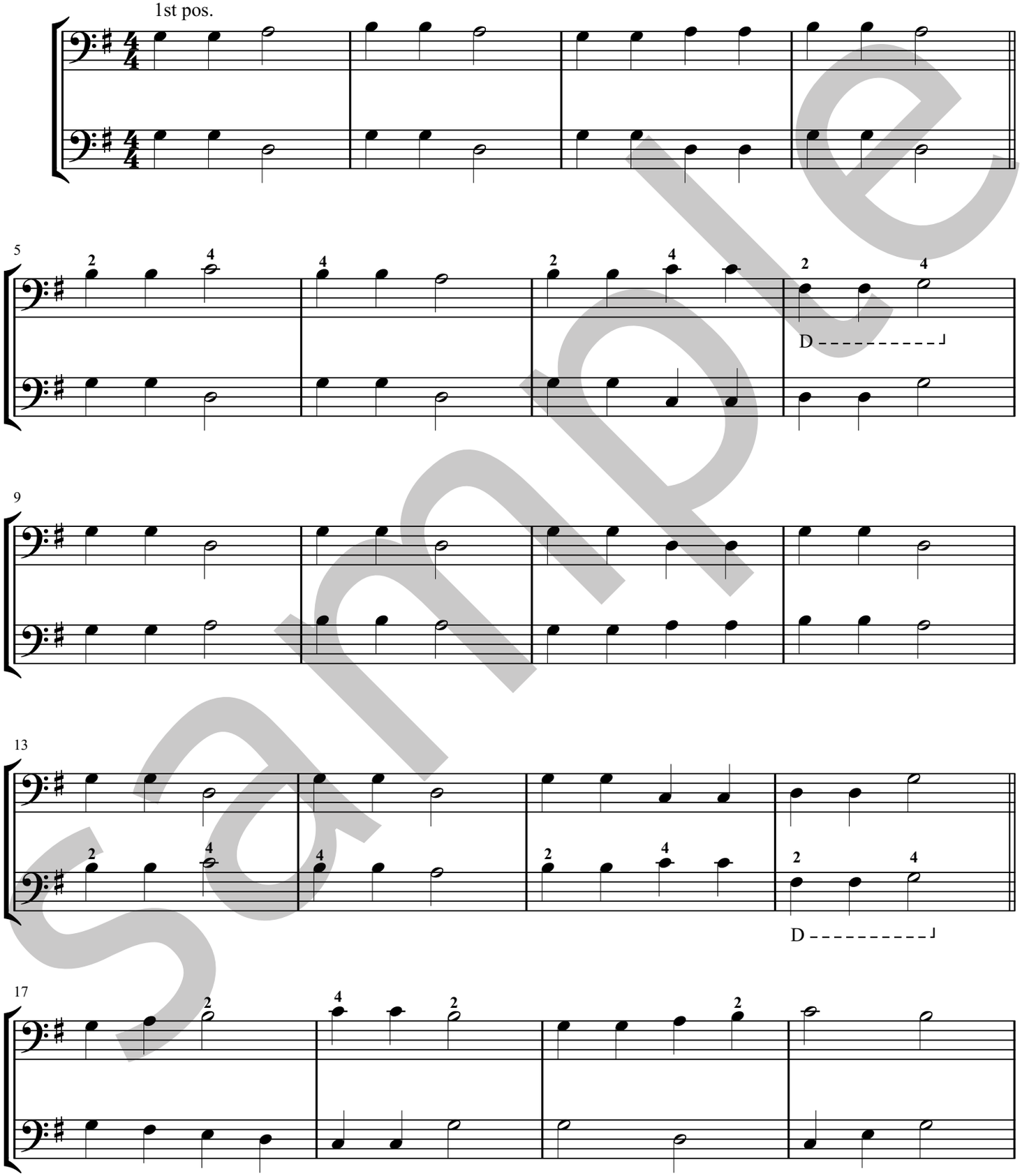
Moderato (Cookie Dough Tempo)

1st pos.



Sample

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for Amelia

Salt & Pepper

- Trading same motifs
- Interlocking rhythms
- Accompanying at slow rhythms
- 1st and high position

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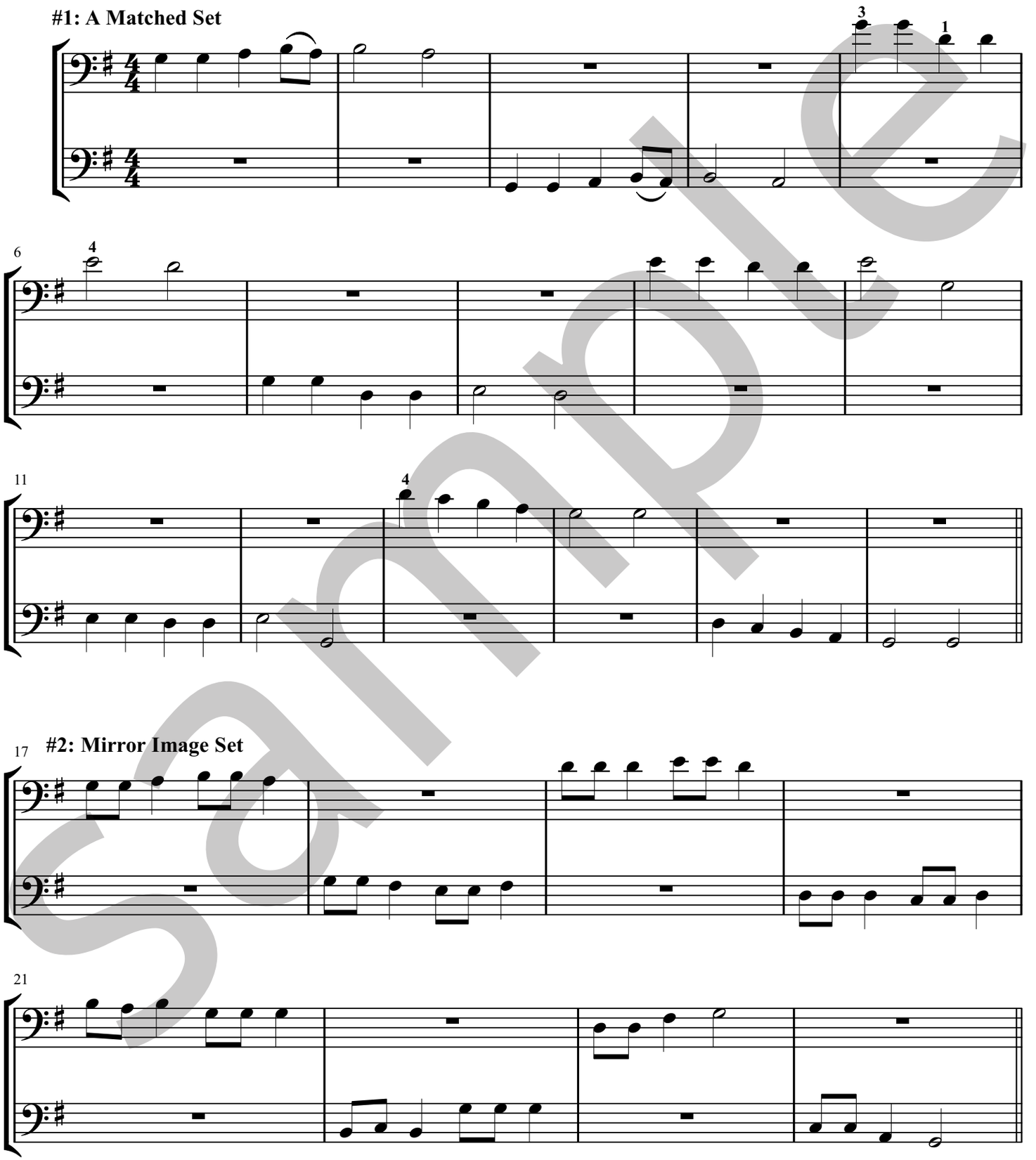
#1: A Matched Set



17 **#2: Mirror Image Set**

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Piece of Cake!

- All high position
- Same rhythm to start
- Variations fill in long rhythms

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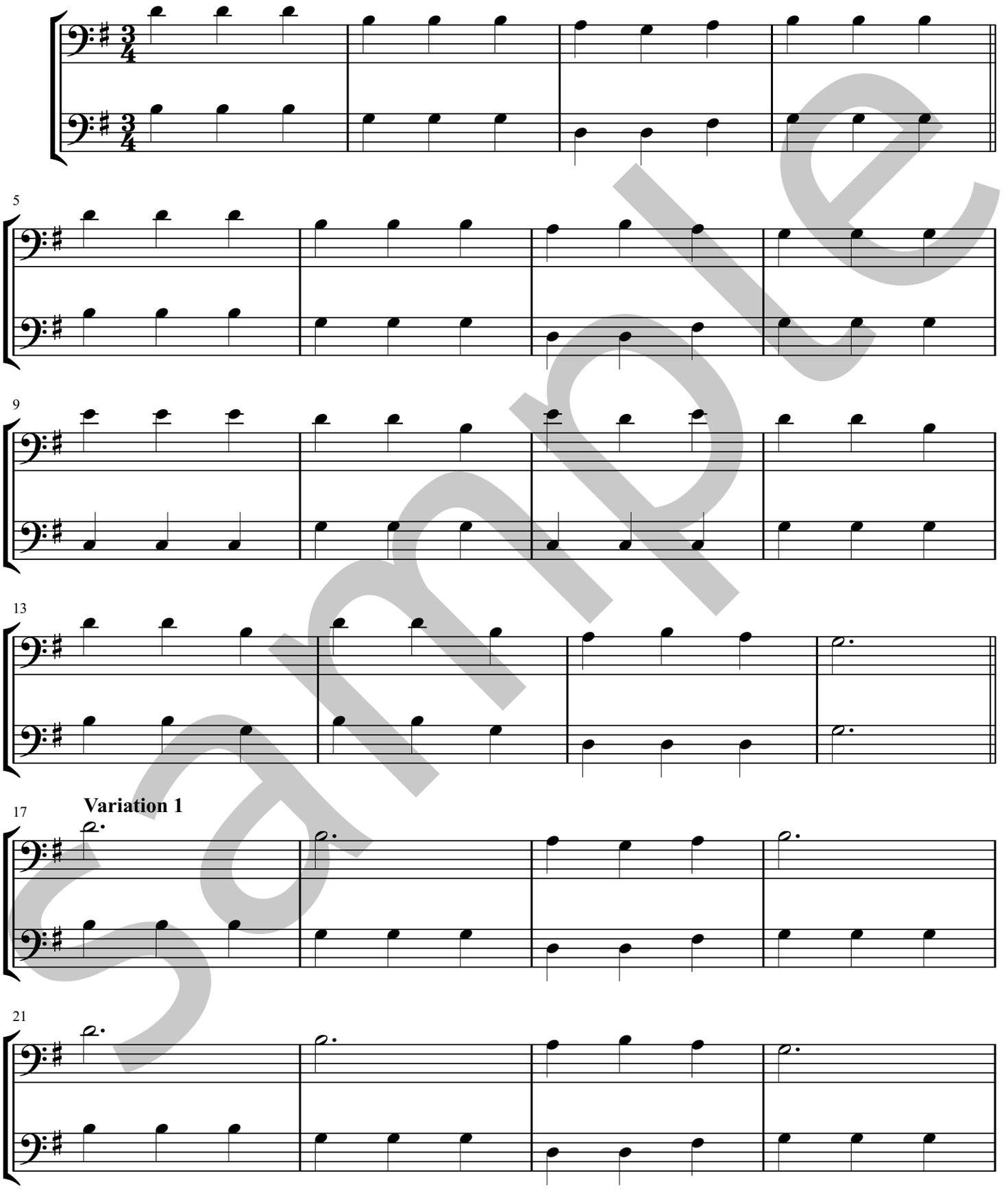

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Gracie's Gigue

- Neck position
- High position

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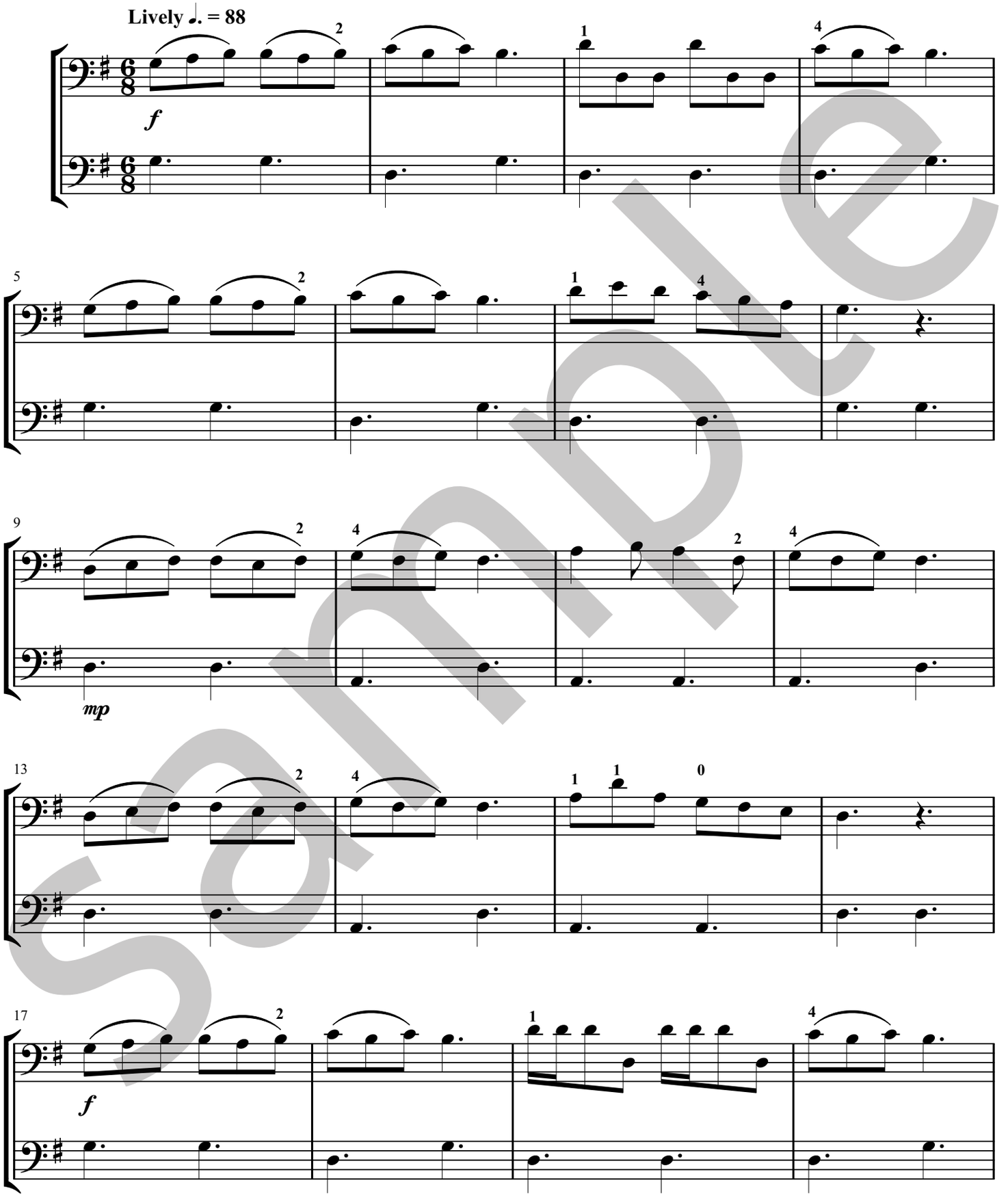

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Nachos

-Shifts between high position and 1st
-Dotted quarter with rhythm support

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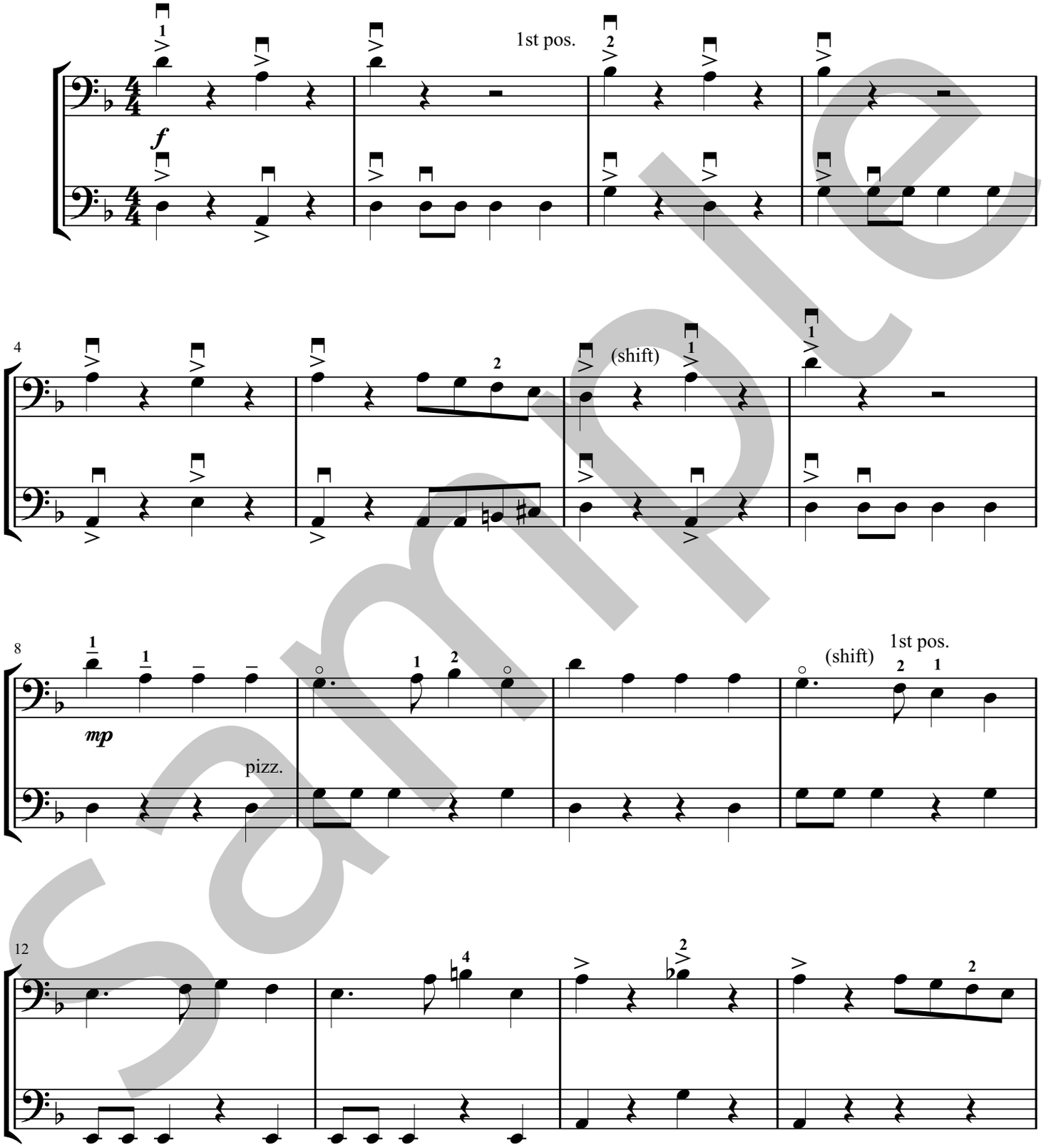

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