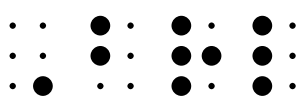
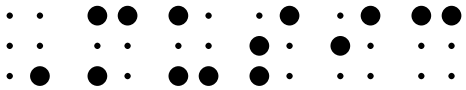
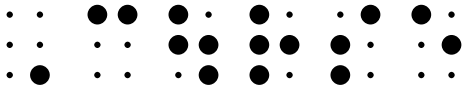
Braille



Music



Course



With thanks to Jane Ware, former RNIB Music Trainer, and RNIB's Specialist Transcription team.

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Introduction

This course comprises ten lessons with exercises. It is written primarily for sighted people who have knowledge of literary braille and an understanding of stave notation (print music). It is intended to take between 15 and 30 hours.

The course is designed to cover the single-line notation required by students studying general music in schools up to and including A-level standard (Highers in Scotland). In doing this, it will also be suitable for supporting instrumental teachers working with melody instruments to around Grade 5 standard. It does not cover multi-stave notation, such as keyboard music, in detail.

The course is appropriate for:

- anyone with musical interest who has completed the RNIB Certificate in English Braille,
- classroom assistants supporting students who are blind in mainstream schools,
- teachers in Sensory Services who work with blind students,
- instrumental teachers and tutors working with blind students.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

> **Read, interpret and transcribe simple single-line stave music notation into braille music and vice versa.**

The course does **not** aim to:

- provide a lesson plan for teaching braille music to blind students,
- give musical understanding of the code,
- provide full knowledge of braille music code.

Those learning braille music by touch can find suitable resources on our Braille music tutor books and reference materials webpage.

Required for the course are:

1. A means of writing braille, such as computer software that will work with six-key entry input, or a Perkins,
2. A means of writing stave notation, such as music notation computer software, or by hand on manuscript paper.

Important information

Dots in a braille cell are numbered:

1●●4
2●●5
3●●6

For support with the exercises, please refer to the Summary of Braille Music and other resources, linked at the end of this document.

Throughout this document, most braille examples have been double spaced for clarity. When producing real braille, single spacing is used.

Lesson 1: pitch and rhythm

Learning objectives:

- **pitch letter names**
- **note lengths, rests, dotted notes, ties**
- **barlines, double barlines**

1.1 The **pitch** of a note is indicated by combinations of dots in the top two rows of a braille cell:



C D E F G A B

1.2 The **duration** of a note is indicated by combinations of dots in the bottom row of a braille cell.

1.3 **Quavers** (♪) have no dots, so the notes written in 1.1 are all quavers.

The quaver rest is shown by:

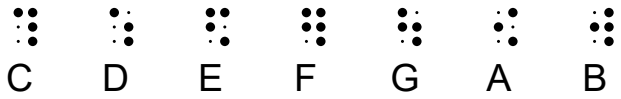


Exercise 1

Braille the following pitches as quavers:

E E E D G G A C C quaver rest

1.4 **Crotchets** (♩) are shown by adding a dot 6 to the pitch signs used in 1.1:



C D E F G A B

The crotchet rest is shown by:

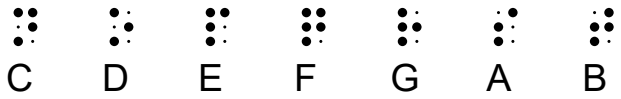


Exercise 2

Braille the following pitches as crotchets:

C D C C C A C B A G crotchet rest.

1.5 **Minims** (𝅗𝅥) are shown by adding a dot 3 to the pitch signs used in 1.1:



C D E F G A B

The minim rest is shown by:



Exercise 3

Braille the following pitches as minims:

G A C B A G A A minim rest

1.6 **Semibreves** (𝅝) are shown by adding both bottom dots, 3 and 6 to the pitch signs used in 1.1:



C D E F G A B

The semibreve rest is shown by:



Exercise 4

Braille the following pitches as semibreves:

A B G A G F D E semibreve rest

1.7 **Dotted notes** are written by placing a dot 3 in the next cell after the main note, as in:

𝅗𝅥. (dotted crotchet) 

𝅗𝅥. (dotted minim) 

Exercise 5

Braille the following pitches with the given rhythms:

Dotted quavers E F E D followed by dotted minim E

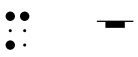
1.8 **Semiquavers** (𝅘𝅥𝅯) , and the semiquaver rest, are written the same way as semibreves, with dots 3 and 6 added to the pitch in 1.1.

Demisemiquavers (𝅘𝅥𝅰), and the demisemiquaver rest, are written in the same way as minims.

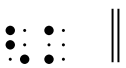
These are the first examples of the same signs having different meanings depending on the context as there are only 63 permutations of the braille cell to cover the whole of the graphic based stave notation symbols.

There are special braille music rules about grouping notes of semiquavers and demisemiquavers (see 4.1).

1.9 A **whole-bar rest** is shown as in print by a semibreve rest:



1.10 **Barlines** are shown by a blank cell, and a double bar line is written across two cells, as:



The double bar line sign is placed immediately after the last note (or other instruction).

All notes within a bar are written consecutively without spaces. However, as will be discovered, many other signs may interrupt the continuity of pitch/duration cells.

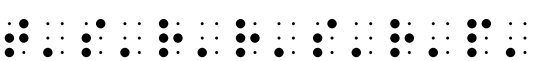
Exercise 6

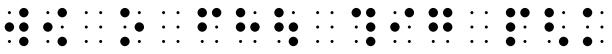
Give the pitch and duration for the following notes and, in part e., also explain the other signs included:

a. 

b. 

c. 

d. 

e. 

Exercise 7

Braille the following:

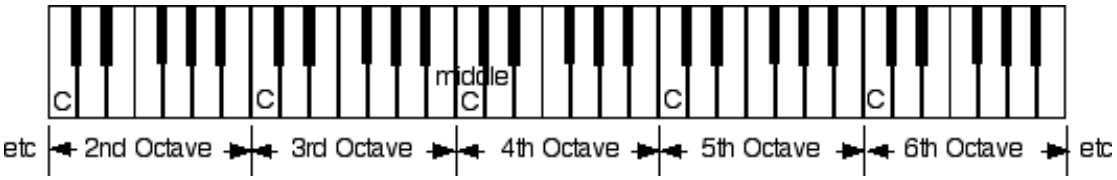
a. Quavers A C E
b. Quavers B A G
c. Crotchets C A B B A G E
d. Quavers D E, crotchet C, quavers A D, and minim E.

Lesson 2: pitch (continued)

Learning objective:

- **Pitch for treble and bass clefs**

2.1 Octave signs
To distinguish between **different pitches of the same name**, the pitch range covering the treble and bass clefs is divided into numbered octaves, with octave signs as given:



First octave 

Second octave 

Third octave 

Fourth octave 

Fifth octave 

Sixth octave 

Seventh octave 

The octave sign is placed immediately before the note cell but not every note requires an octave sign. An octave sign is required:

- at the beginning of a piece and at the beginning of each new section of a piece of music,
- after any literary words (such as "accelerando") in the braille music,
- when the second of two consecutive notes jumps the interval of a fourth or a fifth AND into a different octave,
- when the second of two notes jumps the interval of a sixth or more.

To check the "interval" between notes, count the first note as one and then count up or down each line and space to the second note. Include the second note in the counting. This forms the "interval" or gap between the two notes.

2.2 **Accidentals**, sharps, flats and natural signs written in the piece of music last (as in stave notation) for one bar only.

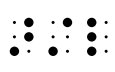
The signs are:

♯ (sharp) 

♭ (flat) 

♮ (natural) 
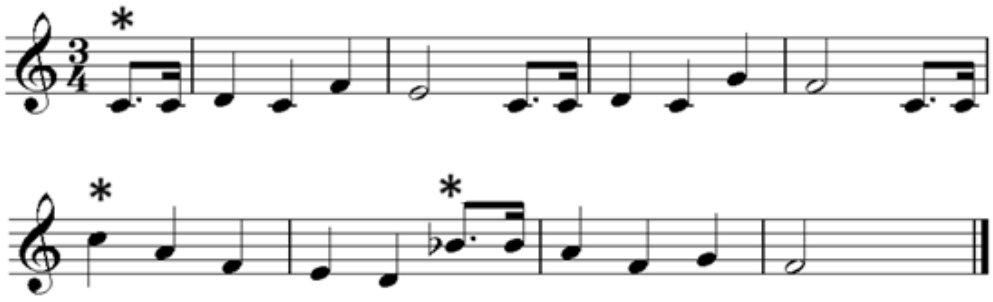
2.3 **Clefs** show pitches in print music. In braille music, clefs are used at the beginning of the first line of music only (unless there is a clef change). They are shown as follows:

𝄞 (treble clef) 

𝄢 (bass clef) 

Exercise 8

‘Happy Birthday’ is written below in stave notation with the places where an octave sign is required marked. Transcribe into braille music:



Exercise 9

In each of these examples of two notes, state whether the second note is higher or lower than the first:

a. ⠒⠿⠒

b. ⠒⠿⠤

c. ⠐⠶⠒

d. ⠒⠶⠒

e. ⠤⠶⠤

Exercise 10

Transcribe the following tune into stave notation in the treble clef:
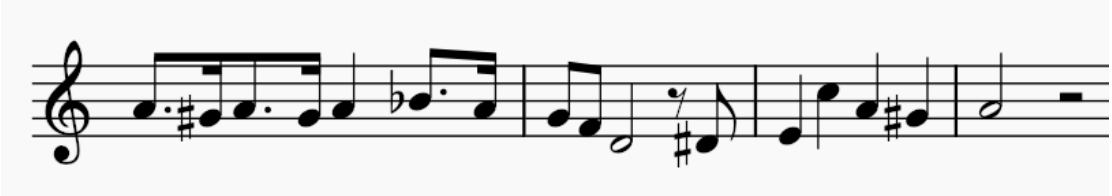
⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠳⠂⠂⠳⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠳⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠂⠂

⠳⠂⠳⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠳⠂⠳⠂⠳⠳⠂⠂⠳⠳⠳⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠂⠳⠳⠂⠳⠂⠂⠳⠂⠂

⠳⠂⠂⠳⠳⠂⠳⠂

Exercise 11

Transcribe the following phrases into braille music:



Suggestion: Firstly, mark up where octave signs are needed.
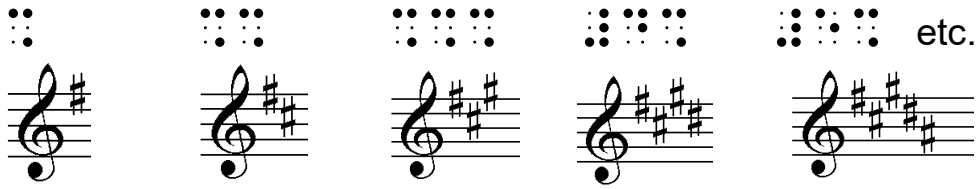
Lesson 3: key and time signatures

Learning objectives:
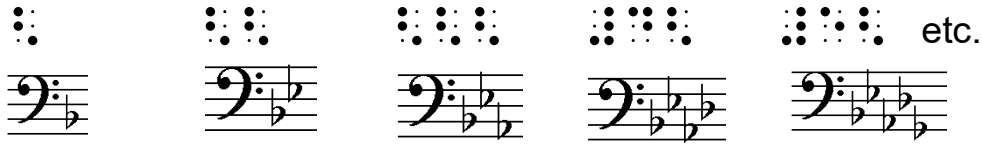
- **Key signatures**
  - **where they are placed**
  - **up to three sharps or flats**
  - **over three sharps or flats**
- **Time signatures**
  - **number examples**
  - **common time and alla breve**

3.1 Most pieces in stave notation have a collection of sharps or flats at the beginning of each stave known as the **key signature.** In braille music, the key signature usually appears centred on a line before the music itself starts. Very short pieces may start with the key and time signatures at the beginning of the melody line.

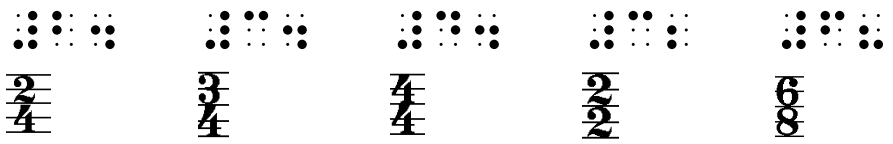
Key signatures appear as:



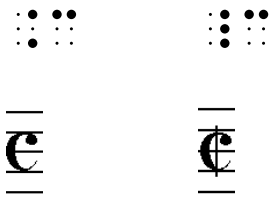
and:



3.2 **Time signatures**, the pair of numbers showing the number and kind of beats in the bar, appear as:



etc., with the special signs:
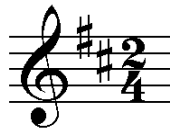


3.3 The key signature is written first, then the time signature, with no space in between.
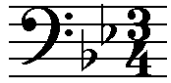
Exercise 12

Write the following key and time signatures in braille, centred on the page:
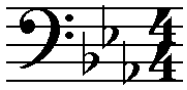
a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



Suggestion: When working manually, centre braille by working out the number of cells you are using in the writing to be centred, halve that number and subtract it from 18. Then indent that number.

Exercise 13

a. Rewrite your answer to Exercise 10 in braille, adding the key signature of G major and the time signature for common time.

b. Rewrite your answer to Exercise 11 in braille, adding a key signature of F major and a time signature of four crotchet beats per bar. Use your musical knowledge to alter the actual music to suit this addition.

Lesson 4: note values

Learning objectives:
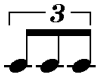
- **Grouping of notes**
- **Triplets**

4.1 In stave notation, quavers (and notes shorter than quavers) can be beamed together in various ways dependent on the time signature.

In braille music, **semiquavers** are "**grouped**", writing the first as a semiquaver (that is, with dots 3 and 6) and the remainder as if quavers, providing:

a. the whole beat is made up of semiquavers AND
b. the next sign is not any kind of quaver AND
c. there are no semiquaver rests within the beat AND
d. the semiquavers all appear on the same line of braille.

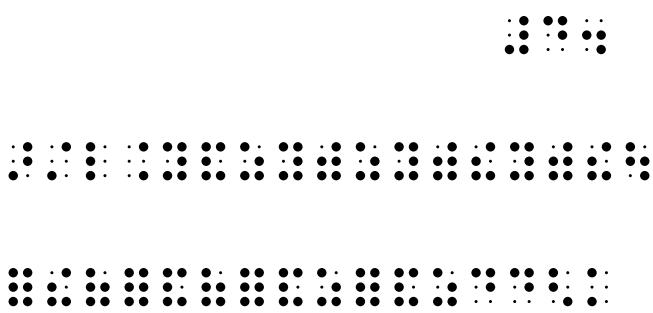
Similar rules apply to demisemiquavers but they are unlikely to be encountered at the level of this course.

4.2 A triplet, shown in stave notation as: 

is shown in braille by the sign ⠨ (dots 2 and 3) before the notes involved. If there are further signs around the notes, then the triplet sign goes **before** articulation, accidentals and octave signs but **after** dynamics and phrasing.

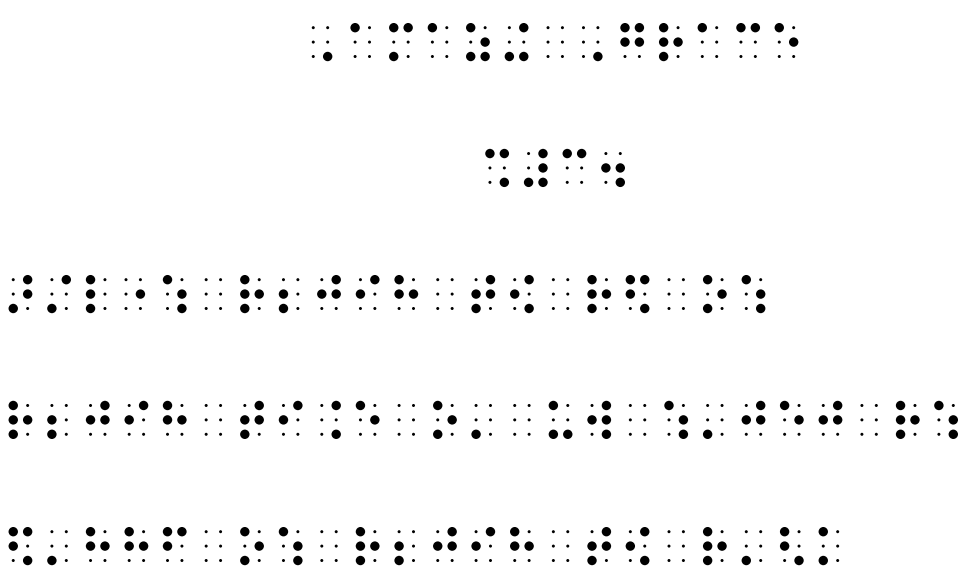
Exercise 14

Rewrite the following braille music, grouping the notes correctly according to the time signature and rules given above:



Exercise 15

Transcribe the following into stave notation:



Lesson 5: articulation

Learning objectives:

- **Staccato**
- **Accents**
- **Slurs and ties**
- **Phrase marks**

5.1 There are many kinds of markings in stave notation for altering the length and/or the style of a written note. Some of them are:



Staccato (a dot in print)



Semi-staccato (a dot and line in print)



Horizontal V accent



Vertical V (strong) accent

In braille, all these are placed in front of the note to which they refer, and before the accidentals and octave signs.

Doubling is a special braille device to save space. Where any of these signs are used for a series of more than three notes, the sign is written twice before the first note and only then once before the last note, no matter what there is in between.

Exercise 16

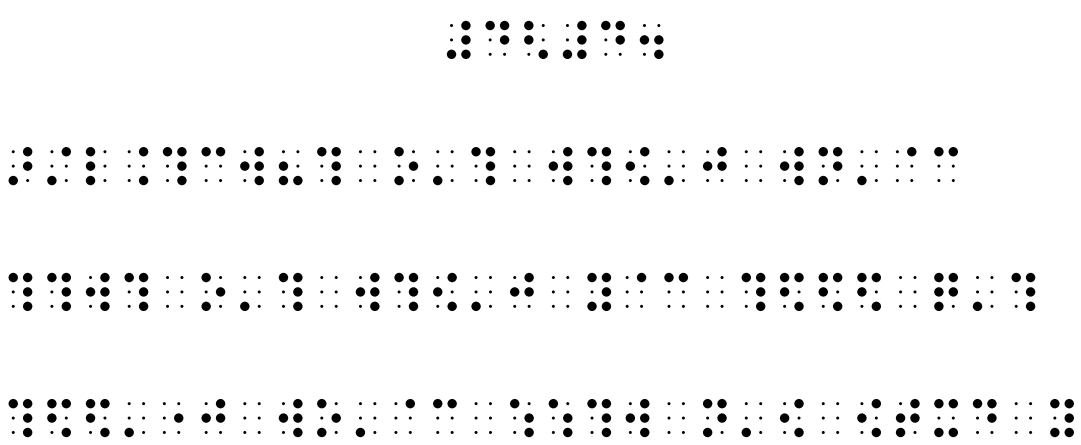
Transcribe the following bars from Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' into stave notation:

⠸⠸⠸⠸⠸

⠸⠸⠸⠸⠸

Exercise 17

Rewrite the following extract from Sibelius's 'Finlandia' in stave notation:



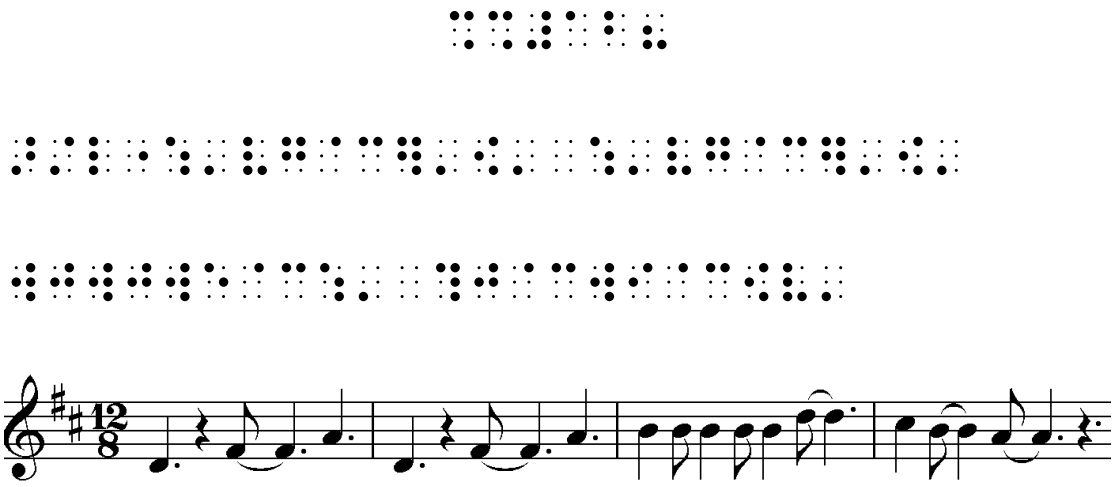
5.4 If more than four notes are to be slurred to each other, a **phrase** mark is used instead. Slurs and phrase marks are usually indistinguishable in print except when used in parallel, an instance beyond the scope of this course.

 opening of a phrase mark

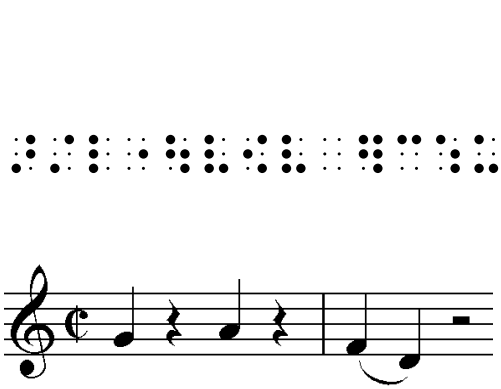
 closing of a phrase mark

5.5 Examples of the signs used in this chapter are given below.

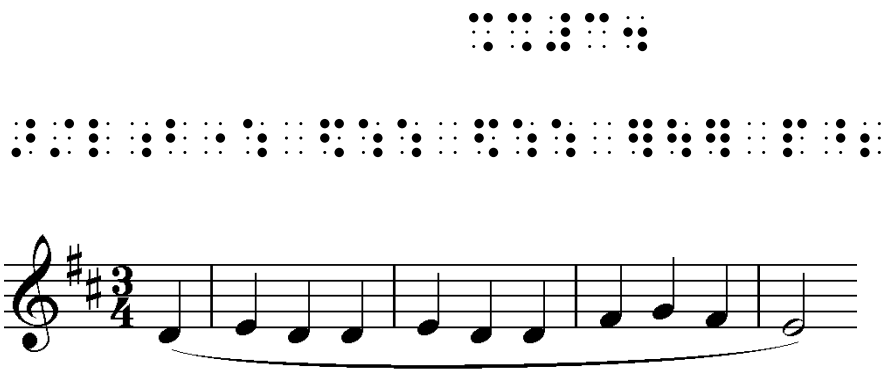
The **tie**, shown in the opening of ‘Left, Right’ from Adam Ockelford's ‘All Join In!’ (published by RNIB, 1996):



The **slur**, shown in the opening of ‘Clap your hands’ from ‘All Join In!’:



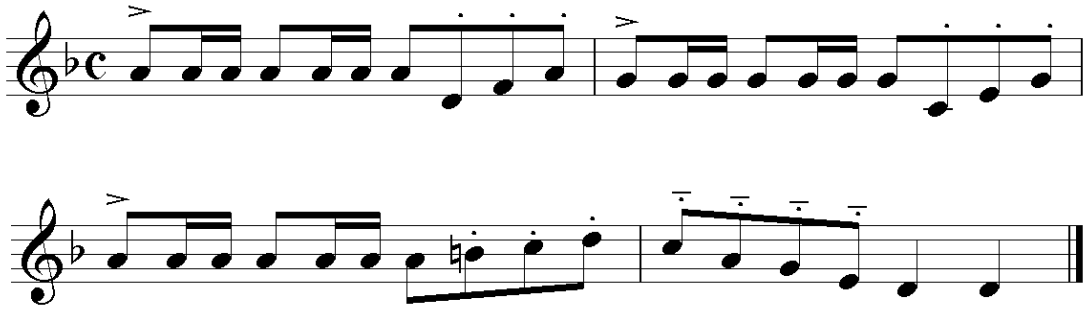
Phrase marks, the opening of ‘To and Fro’ from ‘All Join In!’:



A slur precedes a tie where they are applied to the same pair of notes.

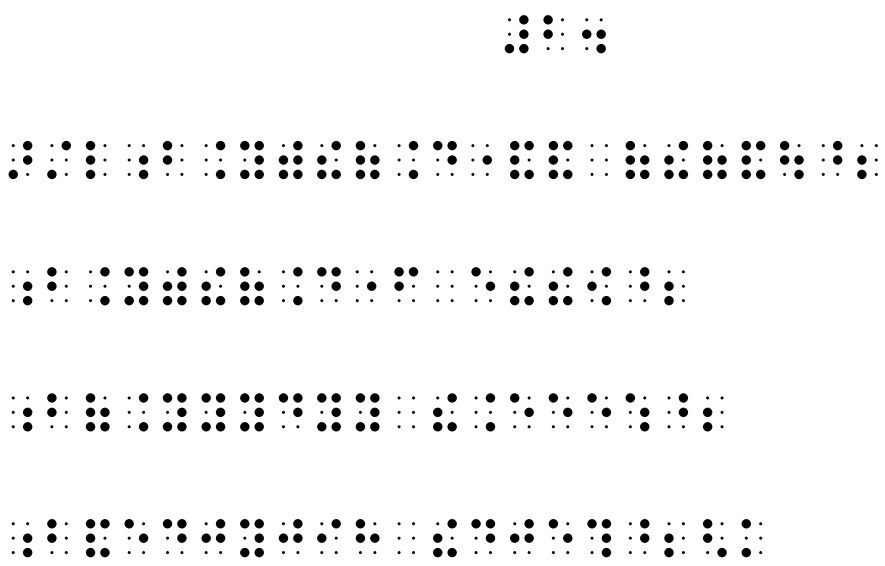
Exercise 18

Transcribe the following into braille music:



Exercise 19

Transcribe this version of ‘Sing a Song of Sixpence’ into stave notation:



Lesson 6: dynamics and tempo

Learning objectives:

- **Dynamic markings**
- **Tempo indications**
- **Stem signs**
- **Metronome speeds**

6.1 In stave notation, words, abbreviations, and special signs for volume are written around the stave. In braille music, these signs go before the nearest note to which they belong.

Words and abbreviations in braille are preceded by the word sign:



As in:

 for cresc. (abbreviation for crescendo)

A new octave sign is written after these text interjections. All the same abbreviations are used in braille as in print, such as "f" for "forte".

Note that dot 3 cell, used here for "abbreviation", is also used after unabbreviated text if the next cell uses the dots 1,2 or 3, to distinguish the text clearly.

6.2 In stave notation, graphic “hairpins” are often used to show crescendos and diminuendos. In braille, these are shown by a pair of signs – one placed before the first note of the crescendo or diminuendo, and another placed before the last note involved. The signs are:

⠨⠣ beginning of crescendo

⠨⠜ end of crescendo

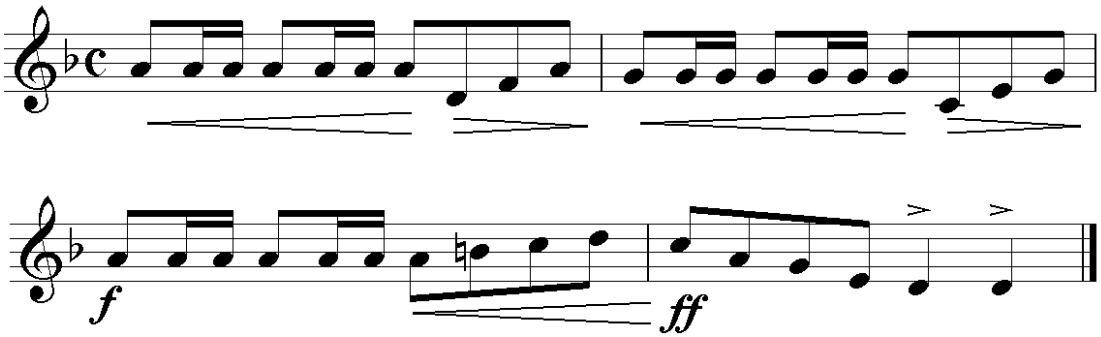
⠨⠩ beginning of diminuendo

⠨⠱ end of diminuendo

These endings are not, however, required if there is immediately another dynamic marking that makes it clear that the gradual change in dynamic has ceased.

Exercise 20

Mark up the following stave notation, indicating where dynamics and articulation should be shown in the braille with the correct order of signs.



6.3 In stave notation, **tempo markings** are often given above the first bar of music. In braille music, this appears before the key and time signatures, on the centred opening line. Foreign terms are spelt in Grade 1 braille with accent signs where required. If the key and time signatures fit on the same braille line as the tempo, then a full stop is used after the tempo.

6.4 In most UK braille music transcriptions, a **stem sign** is used within metronome markings (beats per minute). A stem sign represents a rhythm without a specific pitch. These are:

 Crotchet without pitch

 Quaver without pitch

 Minim without pitch

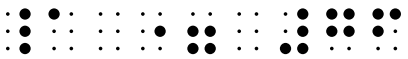
 Semiquaver without pitch

 Demisemiquaver without pitch

 Semibreve without pitch

Dot 3 is added as in ordinary duration to show a dotted note for any of the above.

6.5 Metronome markings are composed of a stem sign, a spaced UEB equals sign, and the number of beats per minute. For example:

♩ = 76 

Metronome markings are placed in the centred heading, after the tempo marking if there is one, and before the key and time signatures.

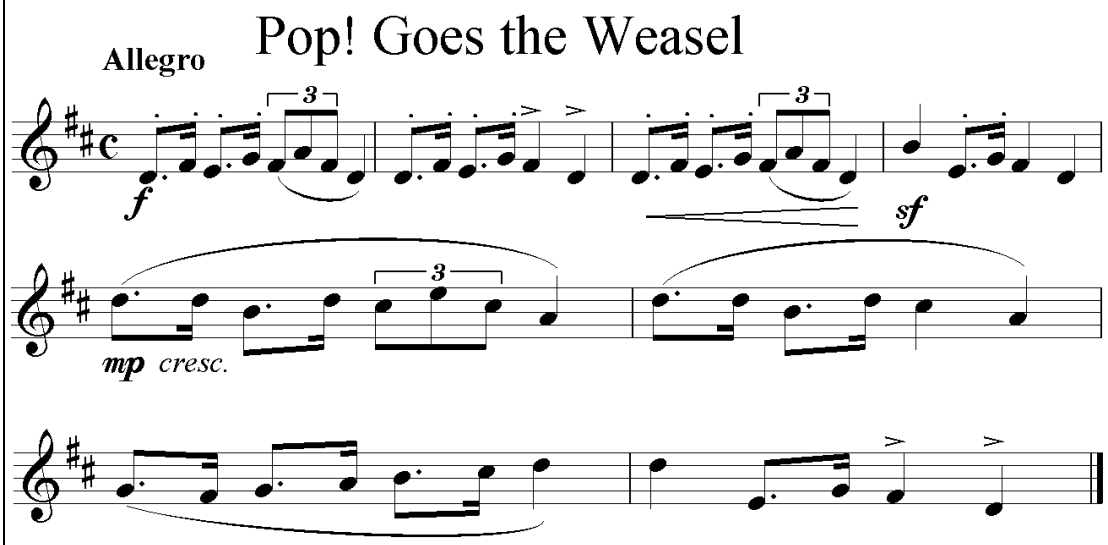
6.6 In international transcriptions, you may find that metronome markings are written in braille as in print. For example:

♩ = 76 

This course will use the UK convention described in 6.5.

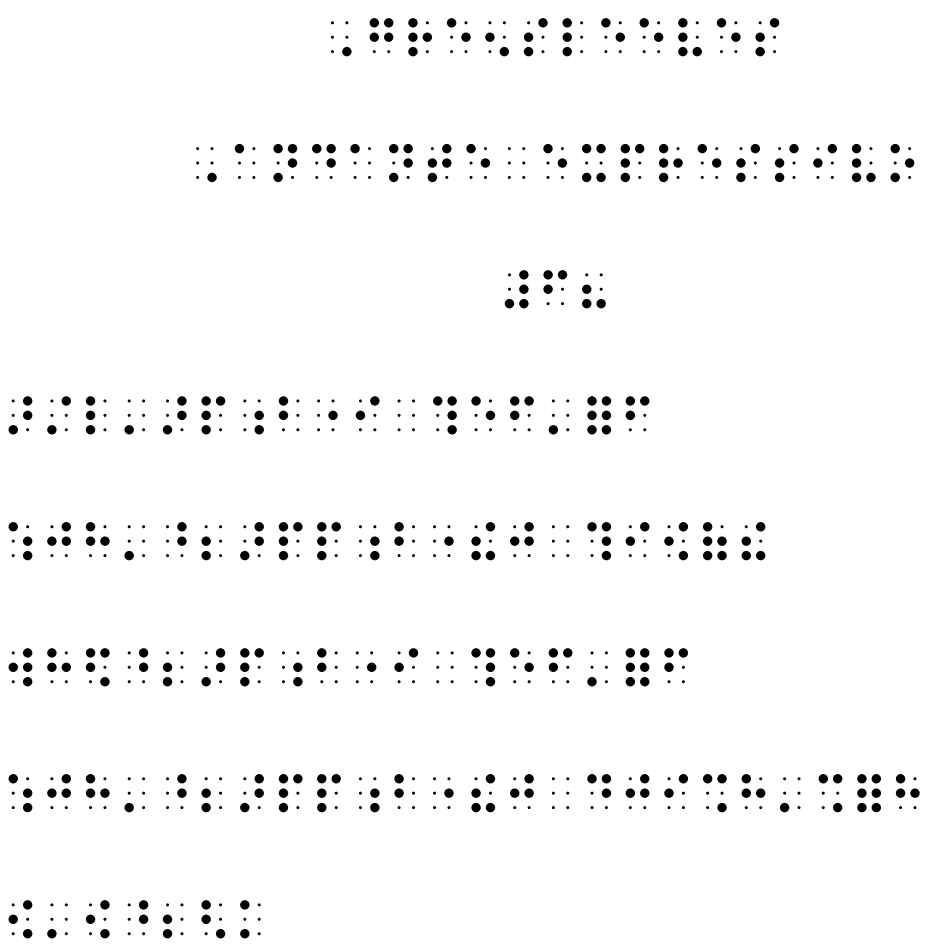
Exercise 21

Transcribe the following into braille music:



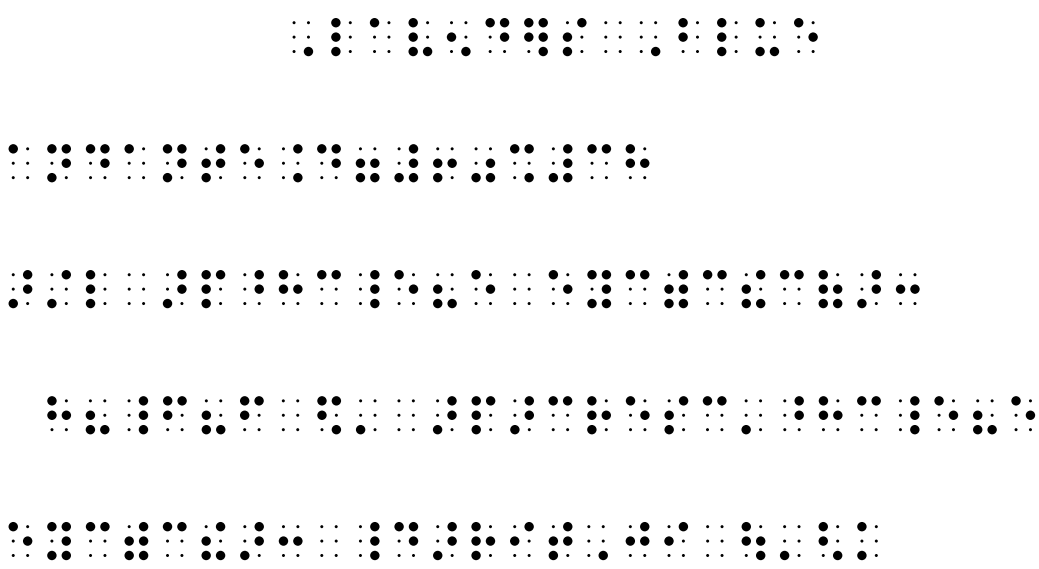
Exercise 22

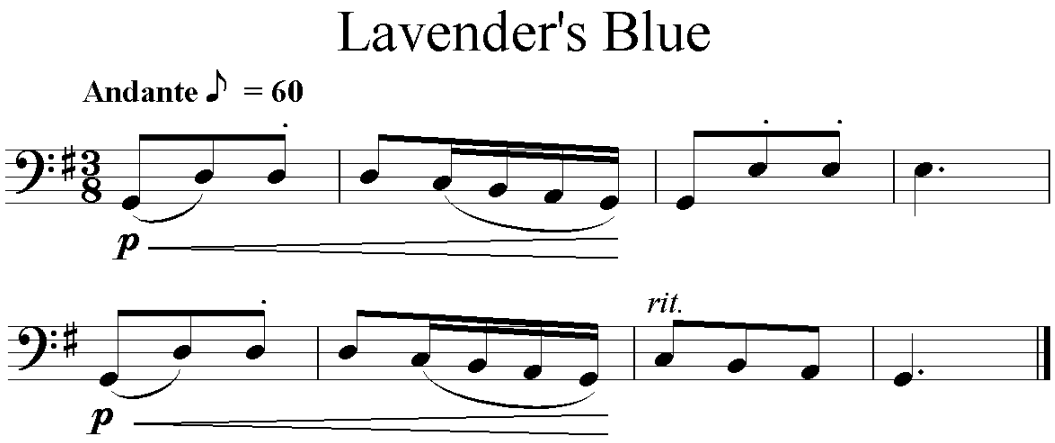
Transcribe the following into stave notation:



Exercise 23

Correct the following braille transcription of the stave notation below:





Lesson 7: repeats and incomplete bars

Learning objectives:

- **Repeat marks**
- **Incomplete bars**
- **The pause mark**

7.1 In braille music, some repeat signs operate in the same way as in stave notation and just need transcription and placing in the correct order. These include:

⠸⠸ Double bar and then repeat marks

⠸⠼ Repeat marks followed by double bar

⠼⠸ First time bar

⠼⠼ Second time bar

Normally, these braille signs are placed immediately next to the neighbouring sign.

7.2 In braille music, there are other abbreviations to save space which are not normally used in print. These include:

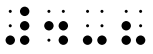
⠒ (dots 2, 3, 5, 6) which can be used to show a repeat of what has been in the bar so far or, if preceded by a blank cell, a repeat of the previous complete bar.

⠒⠲⠒ can be used to show a repeat within a bar that is a different length to the fully written out passage. For example, a print bar may have four pairs of quavers G and B; the braille would have one pair and then this sign, to tell the reader to fill the bar with the appropriate number of G and B quavers.

In braille music, a repeat sign may also be used where the notes are the same letter names and lengths but in a different octave. The new octave sign appears before the repeat sign.

These signs do not have to be used. If the music is clearer without them, or only a little space is saved, the whole passage may appear. In examination extracts produced by RNIB, these abbreviations are not used in braille notation to be read alongside hearing the music.

7.3 If a whole series of bars is repeated but written out in full in print, a section repeat (or “go-back”) can be used in braille. This is most used in “bar-over-bar” piano music. This simply states the bar numbers to be repeated, as in:

 Repeat bars 4 to 8

7.4 Sometimes in print music, particularly in textbook examples, the extract ends before a bar is completed. Also, in braille music more frequently than in print, a bar may be incomplete at the end of a line. For both these cases, a braille music break or hyphen is used:

 (dot 5)

It is placed immediately after the last sign.

7.5 A pause mark is shown in braille music as the sign:



A pause on the barline rather than on a note is shown as the sign below and is placed after the note:



Exercise 24

Explain each symbol, other than the note cells, in this braille music version of ‘Happy Birthday’:

⠸⠼⠸⠼⠸⠼⠸⠼

⠸⠼⠸⠼⠸⠼⠸⠼

Lesson 8: analytical markings

Learning objectives:

- **Analytical markings used in study and exams**

8.1 Many notation exercises in class music lessons start with just rhythms. In brailling these, a pitch can be nominated and then ordinary duration symbols used as in Lesson 1. Rhythm-only markings use the stem signs introduced in Lesson 6.

8.2 Stave notation that is used for analytical purposes rather than for performing often has brackets, asterisks, arrows and verbal comments above and below the stave.

In braille music, such things are usually explained in a comment which is placed before the music itself appears. Candidates must be encouraged to read these explanations.

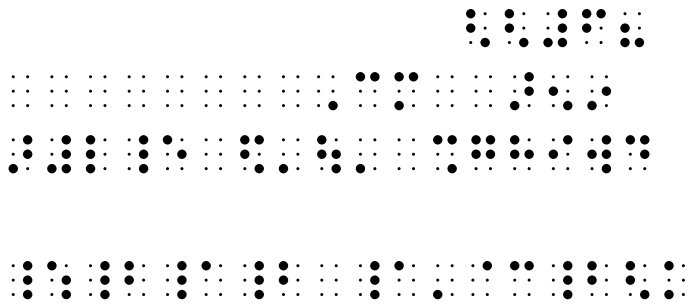
Amongst the common signs used are:

- Dot 5 followed by rests, to indicate that there is no notation at that point, e.g. blank bars or part bars, but that there is music to be heard at that point from the recording.
- ⠨⠔⠨ is an asterisk in music and can be assigned various purposes within the rubric.
- Brackets, braces and other literary signs are used to show the beginning and ends of passages in brackets in the print, and/or to include abbreviations such as "ch" for chord, "c" for cadence and "k" for key to be identified.

8.3 Often bar numbers are placed above the main line of music for every bar in examination questions to facilitate quick identification of specific points.

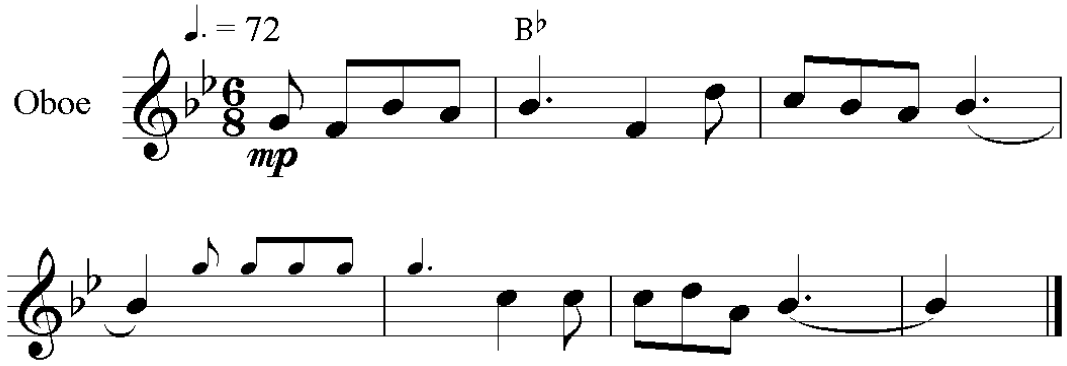
Exercise 26

Transcribe the following braille music extract, based on a GCSE paper required chord and pitch recognition, into stave notation:



Exercise 27

Transcribe the following stave notation, based on a GCSE paper required chord and pitch recognition, into braille music:



Lesson 9: instrument-specific considerations

Learning objectives:

- **Fingering**
- **Bowing**
- **Transposing instruments**
- **Other instrument specific signs**

9.1 For keyboard music, fingering is shown by:

 First finger (dot 1)

 Second finger (dots 1 and 2)

 Third finger (dots 1, 2, and 3)

 Fourth finger (dot 2)

 Fifth finger (dots 1 and 3)

with the signs written immediately after the notes to which they apply. The same numbers apply for string players, except that the fifth finger sign is used to show an open string.

9.2 For bowed string instruments, the following signs are commonly used:

 for up bow 

 for down bow 

If there are slurs with the bow signs, the slur sign is placed in front of the sign for bow direction.

9.3 For transposing instruments, the braille music appears in the same key as the print music.

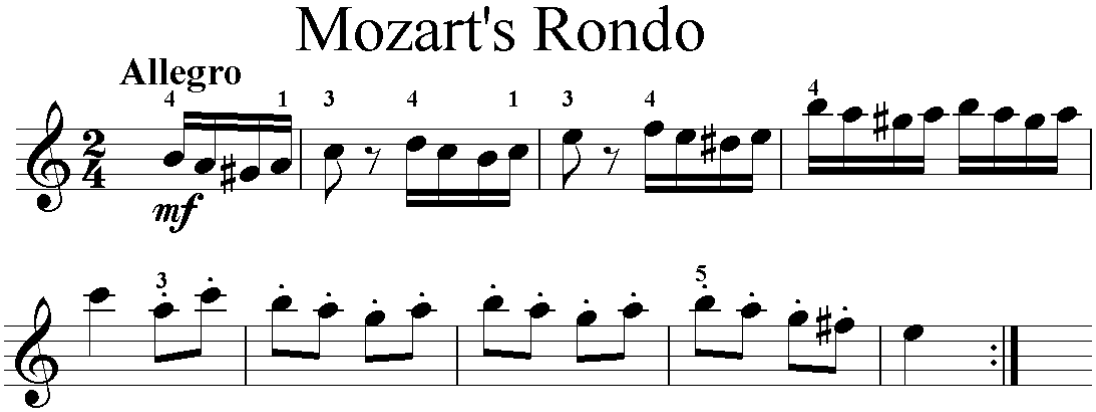
9.4 In percussion music, “R” for right hand and “L” for left hand are sometimes written. In braille music, these signs are placed after the note. The signs are:

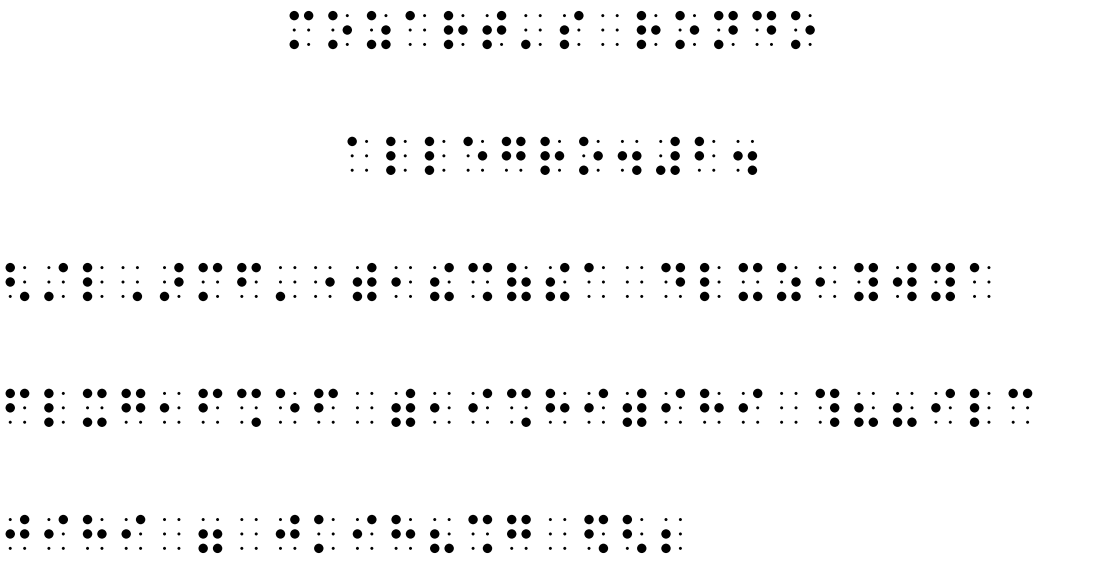
 (dots 1, 2 and 3) for right hand

 (dot 1) for left hand

Exercise 28

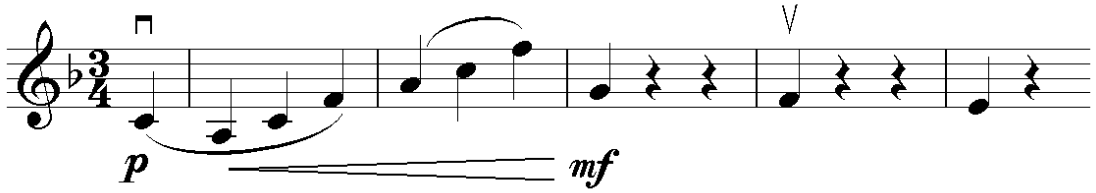
Criticise this braille music transcription of the given print music, which is taken from a keyboard course for year 9:





Exercise 29

Transcribe this piece of violin music into braille music:



Lesson 10: introduction to harmony

Learning objectives:

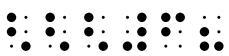
- **Harmony for the keyboard instruments**
- **Chord symbols**
- **Chorale writing for keyboard**
- **Simple part writing**

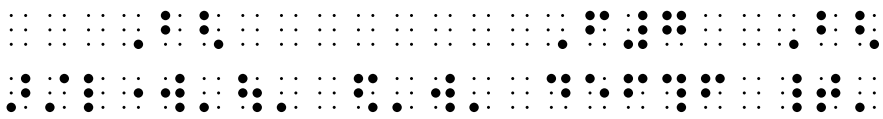
10.1 As in print, there are several ways of presenting **chord symbols** in braille music. The simplest is to use a capital letter sign (dot 6) and then the literary braille for the sign, so:

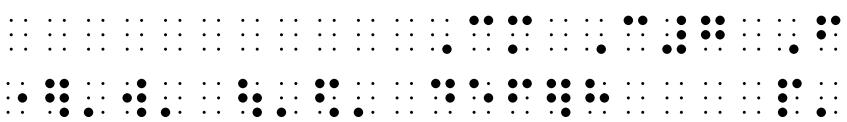


Dm7

When the chords appear with a melody, they can be written in parallel on a line above. The first chord should align with the note that it fits with, but subsequent chords should then be single spaced from each other:

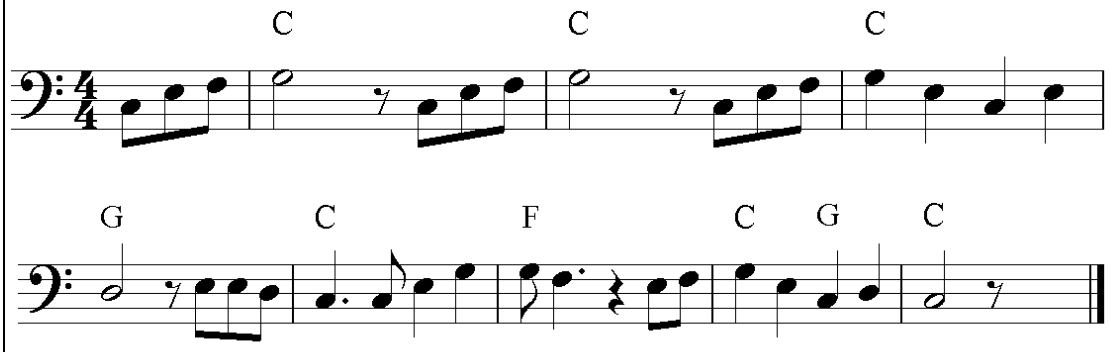




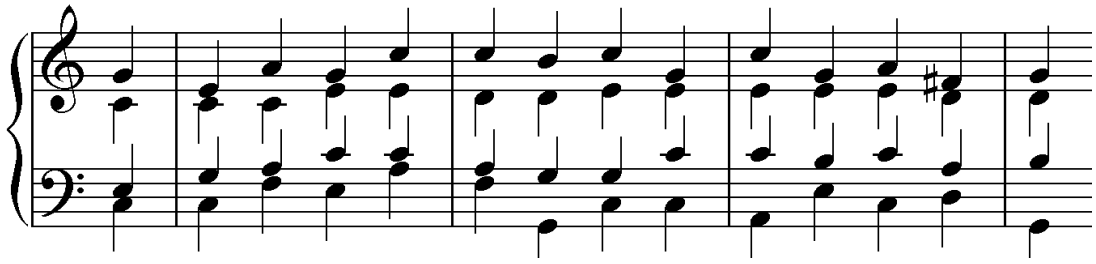


Exercise 30

Transcribe the following, starting with the music itself, with a spare line above in which to add the chords:



10.2 The simplest example of **harmony** is where all the parts move at the same time, as in the following hymn tune ‘St Anne’:



The usual way of writing this in braille music is by using interval signs.

The soprano (top line) notes are transcribed obeying the rules already learnt. In addition, the distance between each note and the alto note below is calculated and written in the next cell as an "interval" down from the soprano part.

The bass line is written "in parallel", that is aligned to the soprano part, and the tenor part written like the alto part, only this time as intervals going up.

The interval signs are:

⠒ (dots 3,4) Interval of a 2nd

⠖ (dots 3,4,6) Interval of a 3rd

⠶ (dots 3,4,5,6) Interval of a 4th

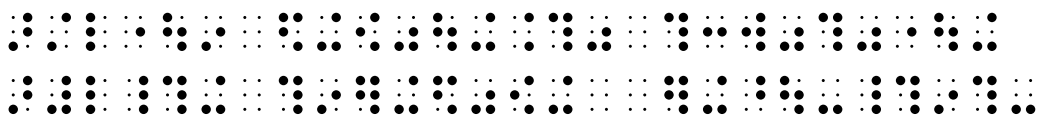
⠔ (dots 3,5) Interval of a 5th

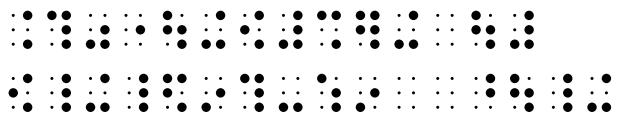
⠦ (dots 3,5,6) Interval of a 6th

⠤ (dots 2,5) Interval of a 7th

⠲ (dots 3,6) Interval of an octave

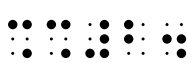
Thus, the braille music for the hymn tune written in stave notation above is:

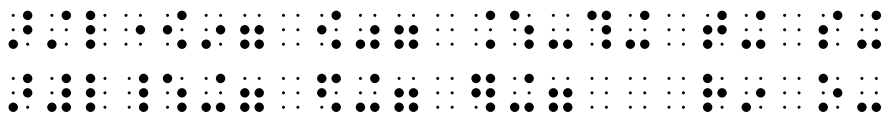


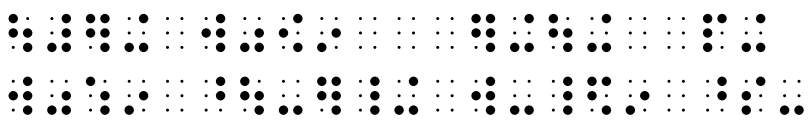


Exercise 31

Transcribe the following, the opening of ‘Praise my soul’, into stave notation:







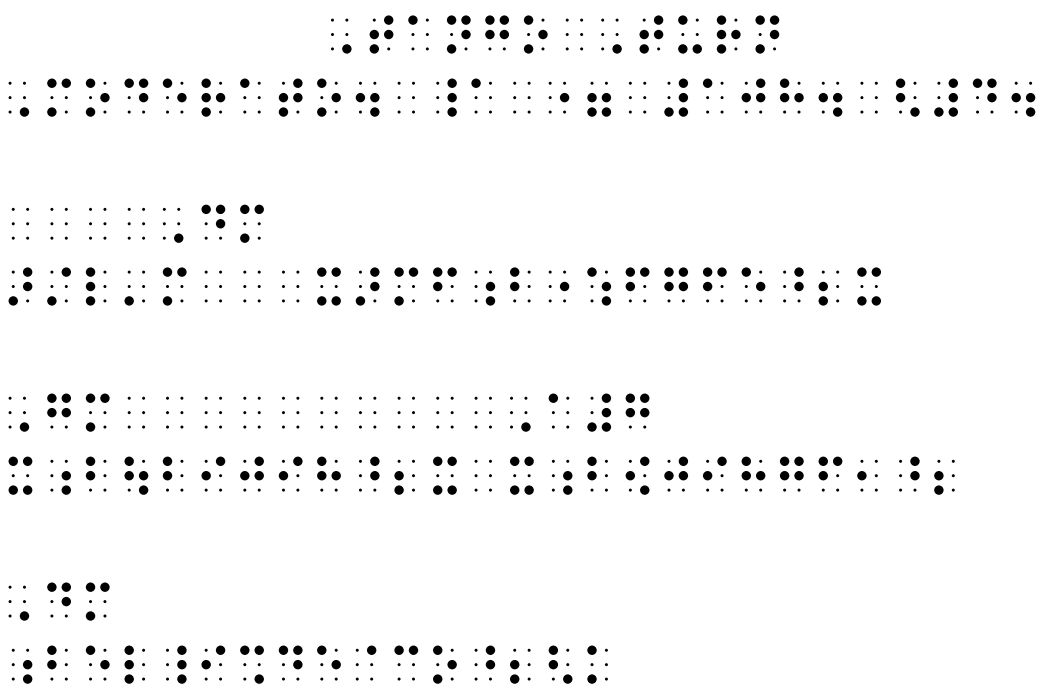
10.3 For passages where the rhythms are different in the inner parts, the main part (top line in the right hand, bottom in the left) is written followed by an "in-accord" sign:

⠸⠇

and then an octave sign and the inner part in ordinary pitched notes.

Exercise 32

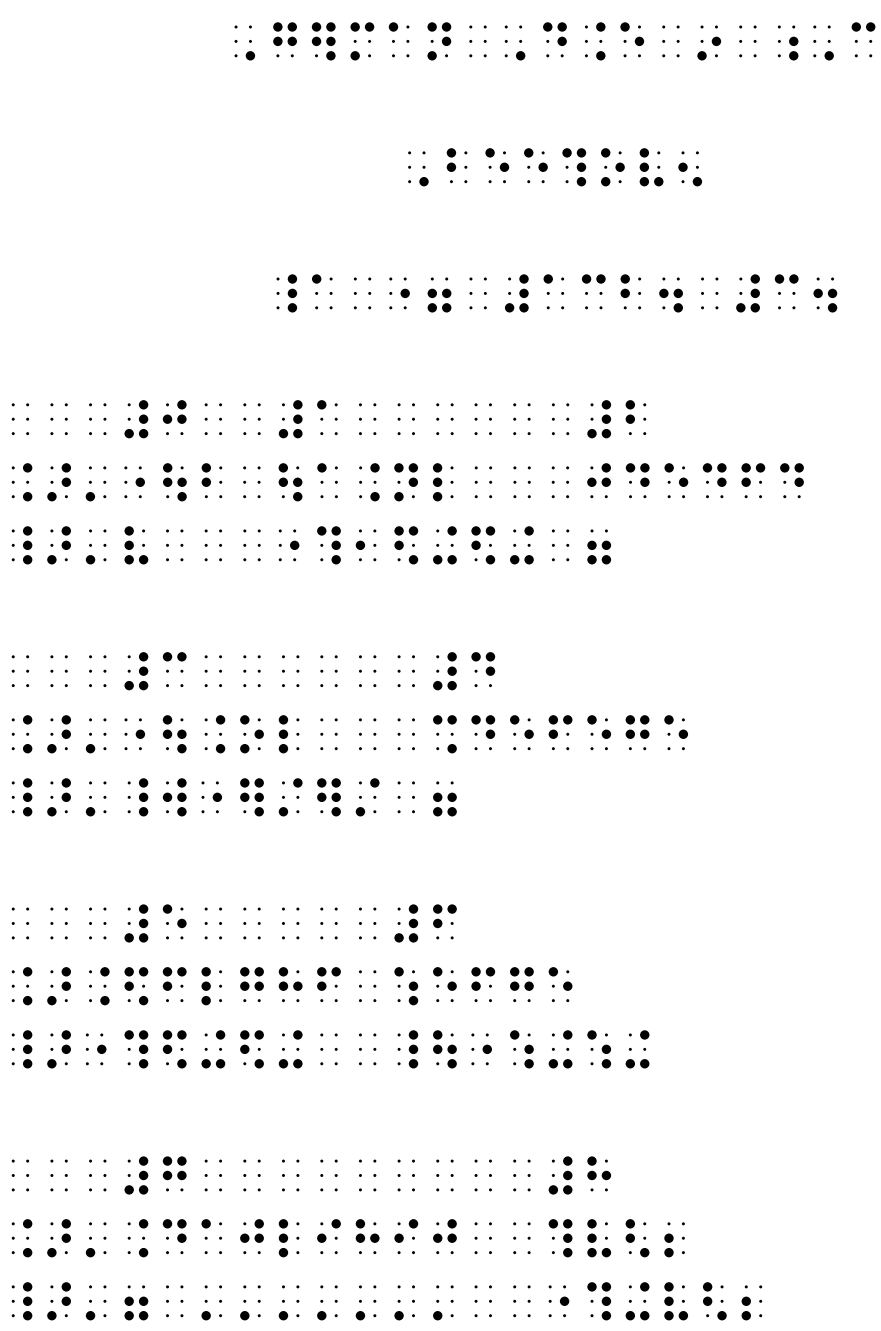
Transcribe this piece of electronic keyboard music into stave notation:



Exercise 33

Compare these two braille versions of the same piano piece, by listing the extra details in the second:

VERSION A - PUPILS' COPY



VERSION B - TEACHERS' COPY

Supporting resources and further study

Please visit our braille music tutor books and reference materials webpage, where you will find useful resources, including:

- Our Summary of Braille Music, which includes a dictionary of braille music signs, organised by type.
- Our Braille Music Certificate.
- Details of several publications available to support self-study.
- The New International Manual of Braille Music Notation, which includes an exhaustive list of braille music signs and detailed examples of the code.

To foster the skills of reading, memorising, and performing from braille music, the Gardner's Trust sponsor a progressive series of annual tests administered by RNIB. For further information, please see Gardner's Trust Braille Music Literacy Awards.

Appendix: exercise answers

Exercise 1



Exercise 2



Exercise 3



Exercise 4



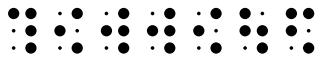
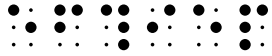
Exercise 5



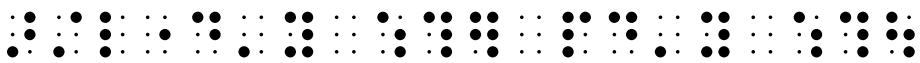
Exercise 6

a. Quavers G A G
b. Quavers D E A F
c. Crotchets B A D G + semibreve E
d. Dotted minims B A G G A G E
e. Crotchets B A; barline; minim D; barline; quavers E G; crotchet G; barline; crotchet C; quavers A F; barline; minim E; double barline.

Exercise 7

a. 
b. 
c. 
d. 

Exercise 8

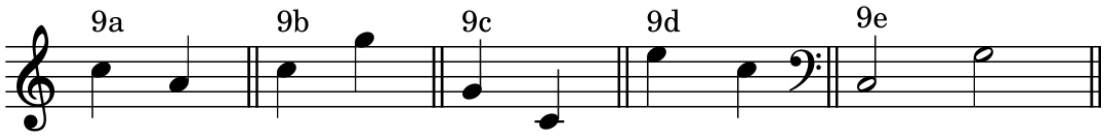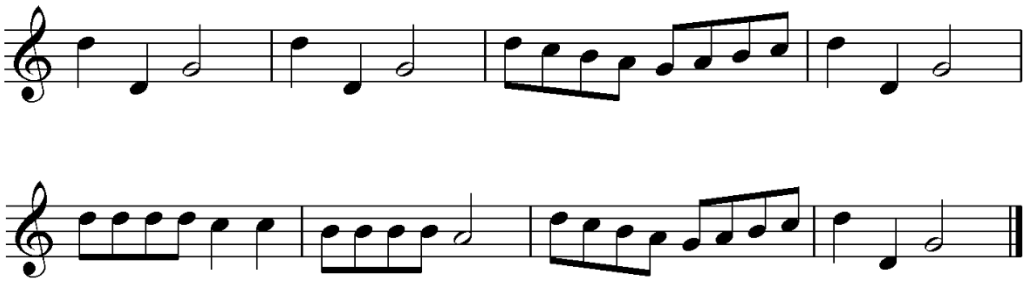






Exercise 9

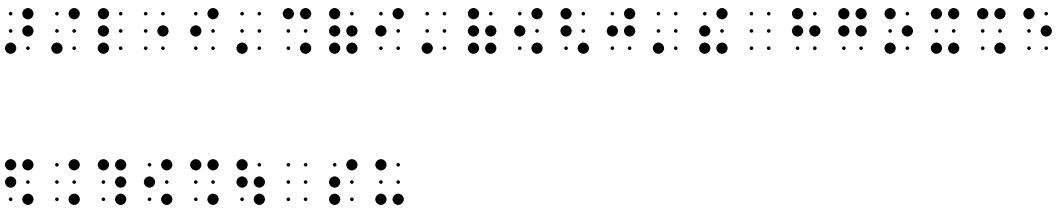
a. Lower
b. Higher
c. Lower
d. Lower
e. Higher



Exercise 10



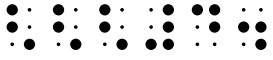
Exercise 11

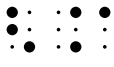


Exercise 12

a. 

b. 

c. 

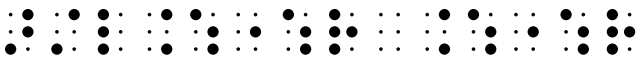
d. 

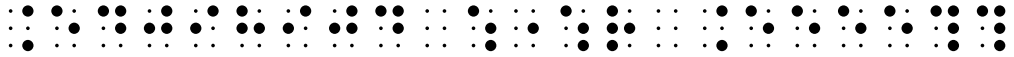
e. 

Exercise 13

a.









b.
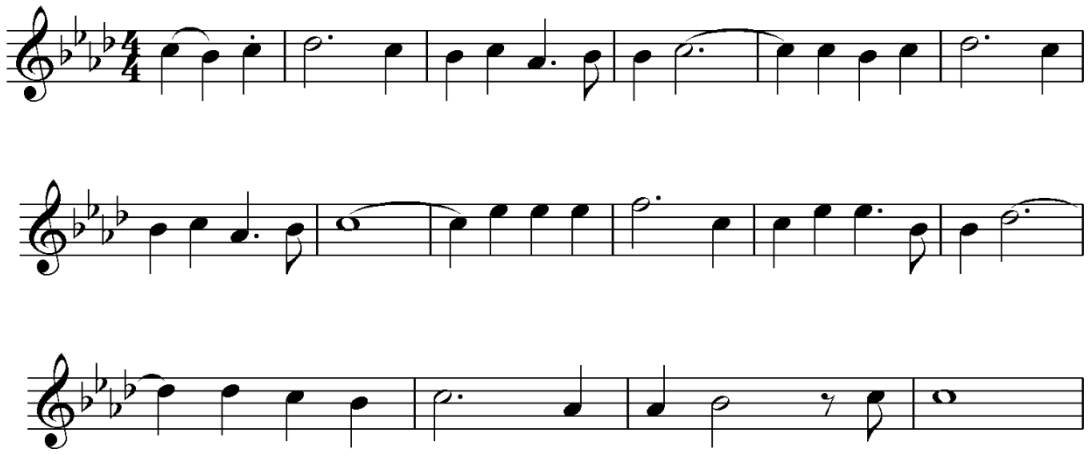






Exercise 14

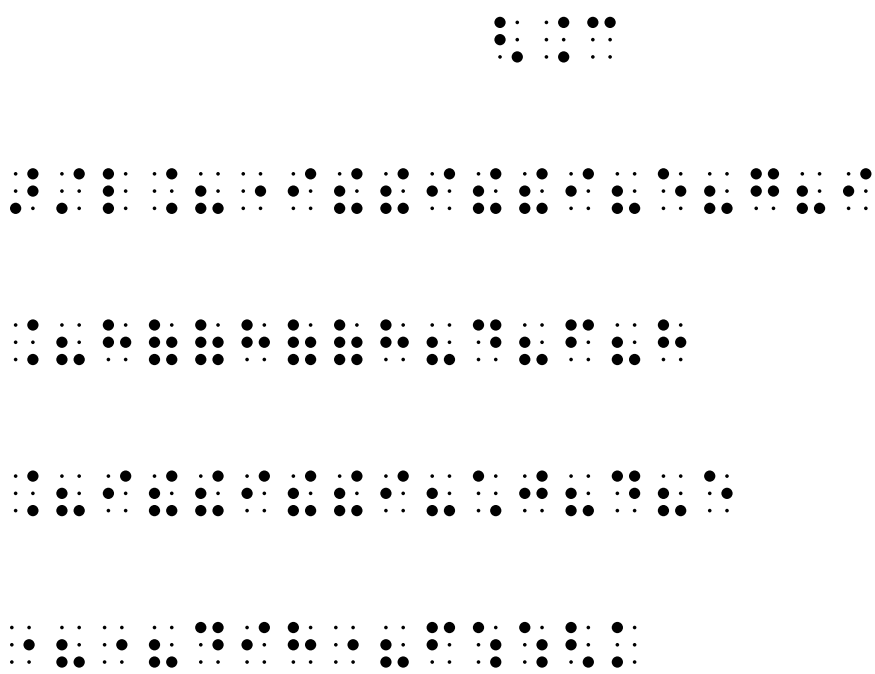
⠸⠂⠸⠂⠸

⠸⠂⠸⠂⠸⠂

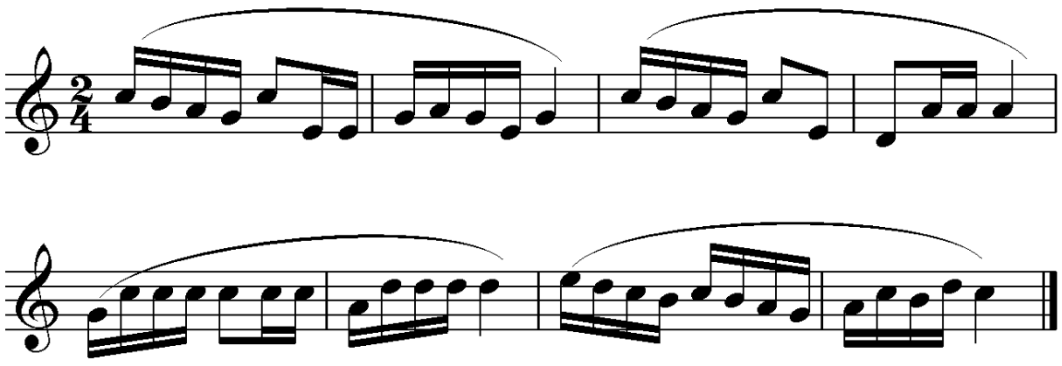
Exercise 17



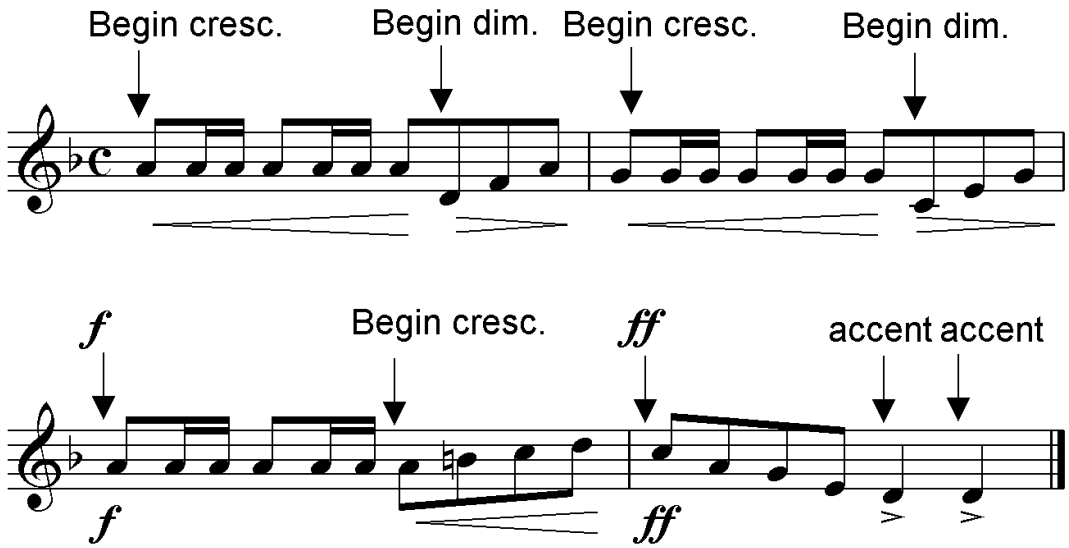
Exercise 18



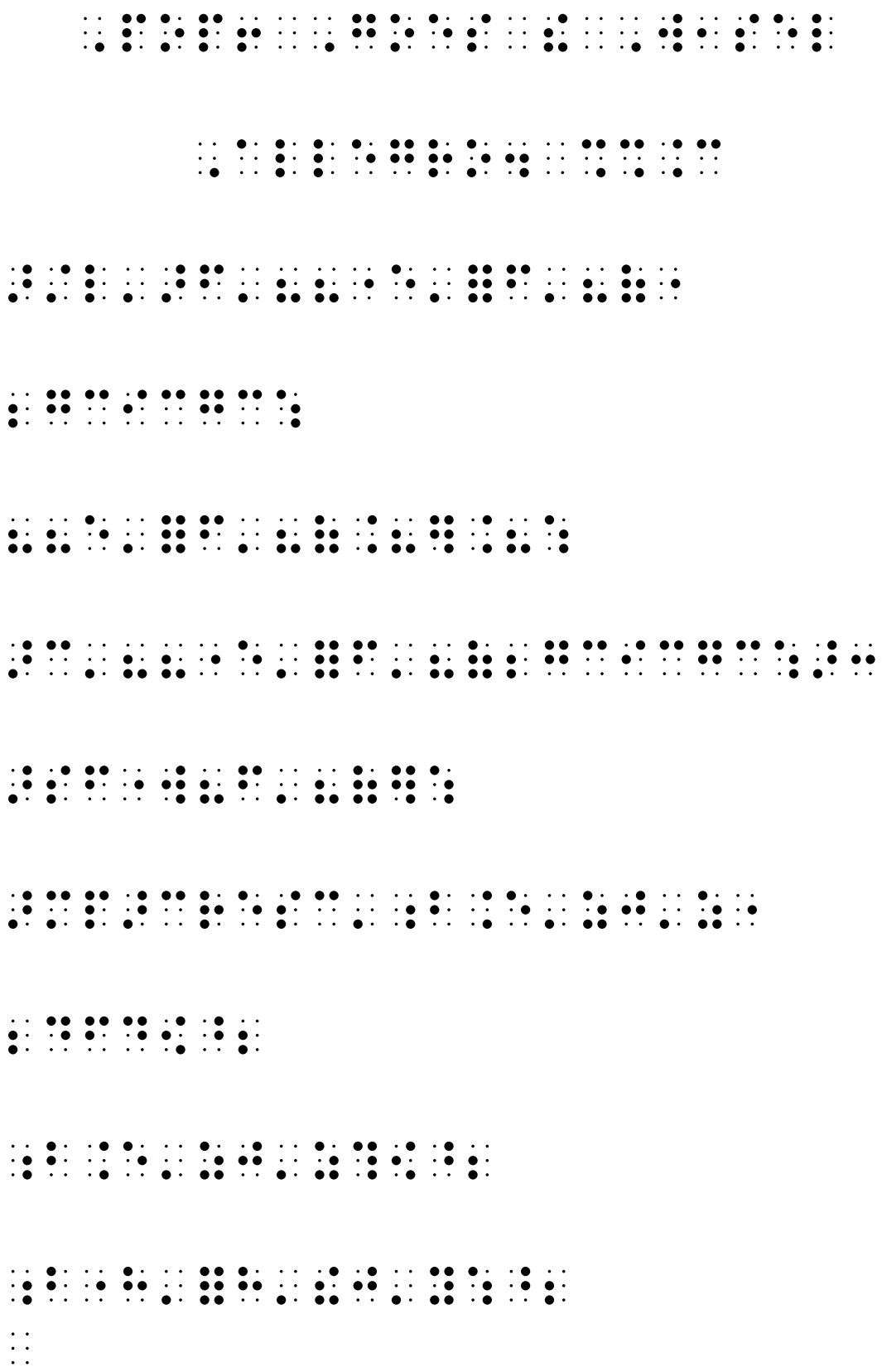
Exercise 19



Exercise 20


Begin cresc.
Begin dim.
Begin cresc.
Begin dim.
f
Begin cresc.
ff
accent accent
f
ff
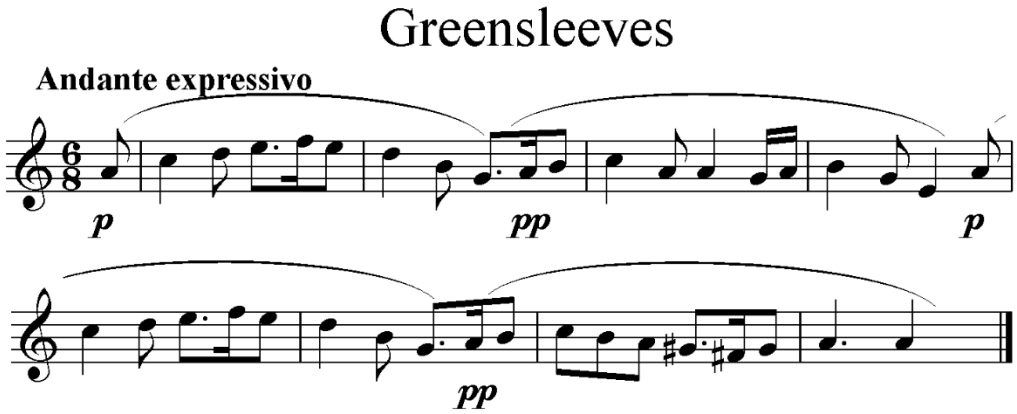
Exercise 21



⠸⠂ ⠼⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂

Dot 5 is used here to show incomplete bars of music in a line. These will frequently be required in braille music involving many additional signs to pitch/rhythm.

Exercise 22



Exercise 23

a. Apostrophe needed in "Lavender's."
b. Next line with tempo marking, key signature and time signature need centring, with a full stop after Andante. Metronome marking should be:

   ⠸⠆ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂ ⠸⠂

   The time signature last number should be lower case 8 (dots 2,3,6).
c. Clef sign should be a bass clef and is indented to start in the third cell with no space after it.
d. Bar 1: Crescendo, word sign and c, needs adding after p. the hairpin crescendo is missing after the dynamic p.
e. Bar 2: The semiquavers can be grouped.

f. Bar 3: should start in cell one. It should also have a 2nd octave sign before the first note, the quaver G. This is because of the end hairpin sign at the end of bar 2.
g. Bar 5: replace "cresc" with “hairpin” start of crescendo sign.
h. Bar 6: G semiquaver has been omitted and the last slur sign. The semiquavers can be grouped.
i. Bar 7: The rit. should be at the start of the bar, not after the first note; there is a dot 6 instead of a dot 3 for the abbreviation point in rit.
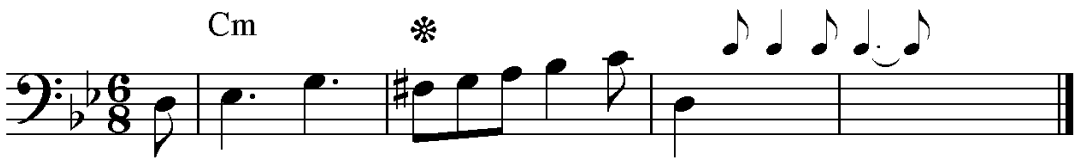
Exercise 24

Key signature of one flat - F major. Time signature 3 4 time. Treble clef. Fourth octave sign. In fifth full bar, a fifth octave sign. In the sixth full bar, a pause mark on the second beat fourth octave D crotchet, and a fourth octave sign. In the last bar, a pause mark (or fermata) on the note, a fourth octave F minim. Double bar line.

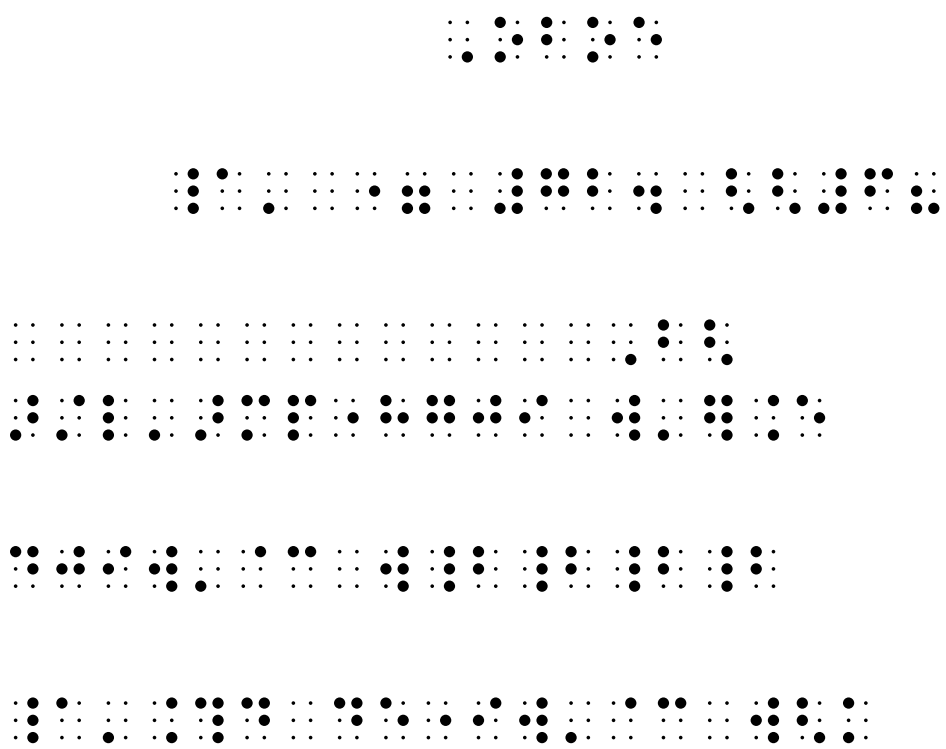
Exercise 25

Every even number bar is a repeat of the previous bar. Each of these bars could be written with a blank cell either side with dots 2,3,5,6. A repeat mark is needed at the end, dots 1,2,6; dots 2,3.

Exercise 26



Exercise 27

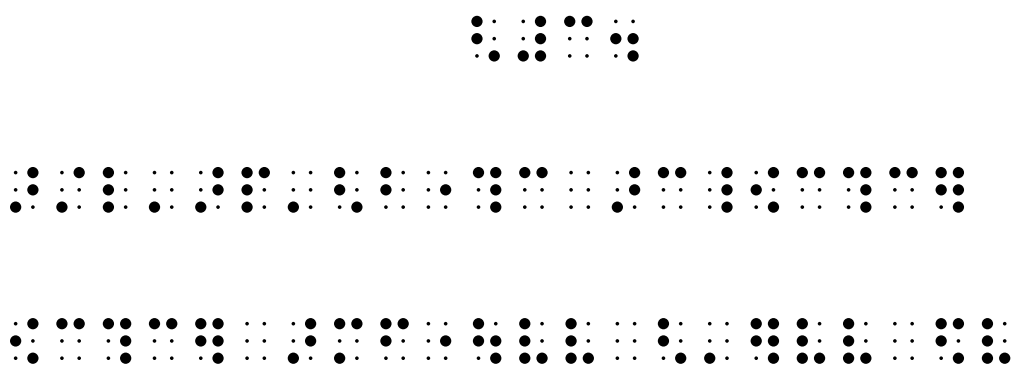


Exercise 28

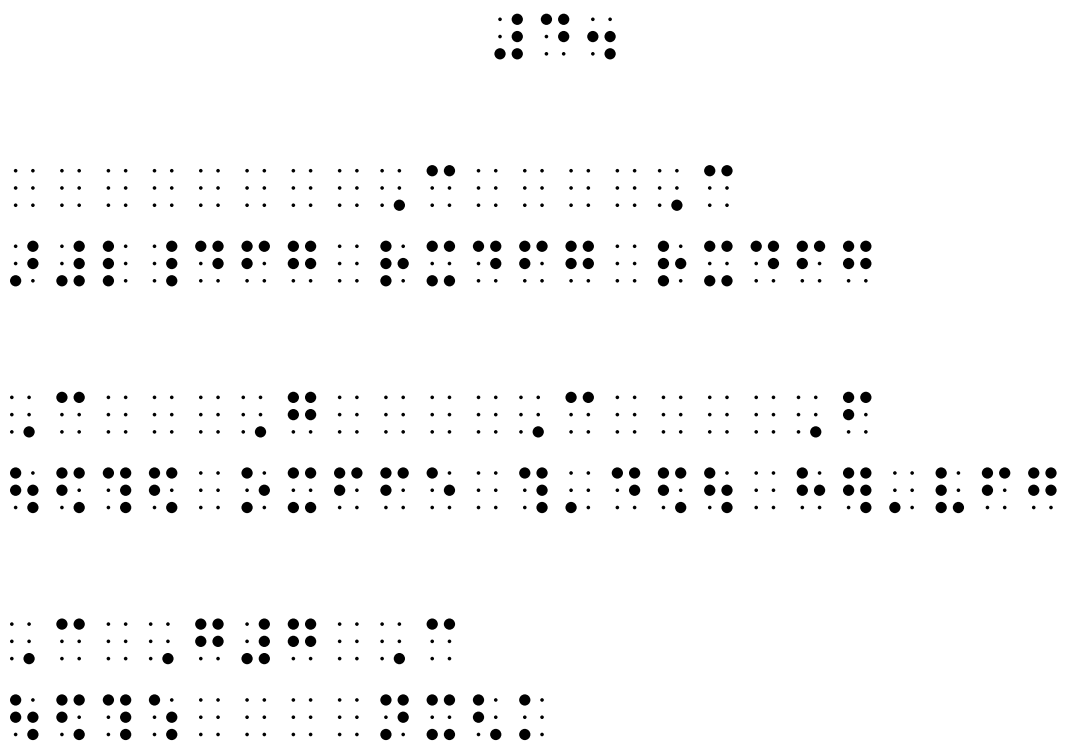
a. Contract the AR in Mozart's
b. Use dot 6 to indicate each capital letter in the heading and the Allegro tempo.
c. Leave a space before the time signature:

d. Treble clef first sign should be dots 3,4,5.
e. There should be a dot 6 after the treble clef sign, not dot 3.
f. In the first half bar, the semiquavers should be abbreviated with the first as a semiquaver and the rest as pseudo-quavers.
g. No dot 3 needed after the dynamic *mf* because the next sign is not in the left-hand side of the cell.
h. In the first full bar, again the semiquavers can be contracted.
i. In the second full bar, the last beat should all be semiquavers, and should be contracted.
j. In the fourth full bar, the last note should be a staccato quaver C and not dots 1 and 4.
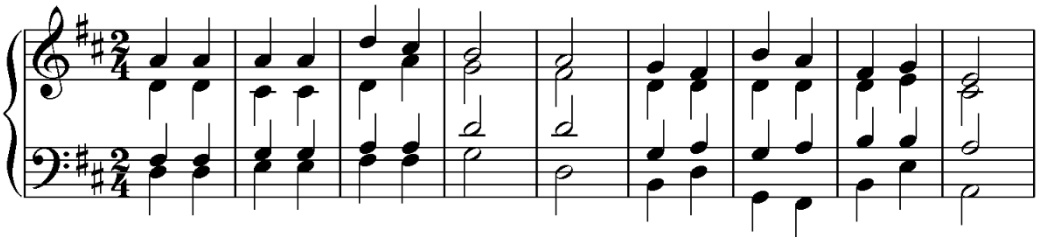
Exercise 29



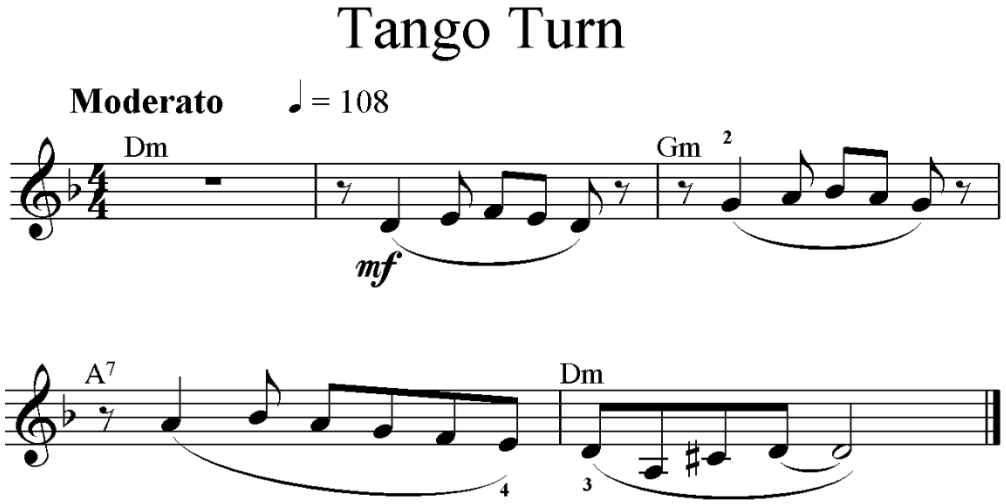
Exercise 30



Exercise 31
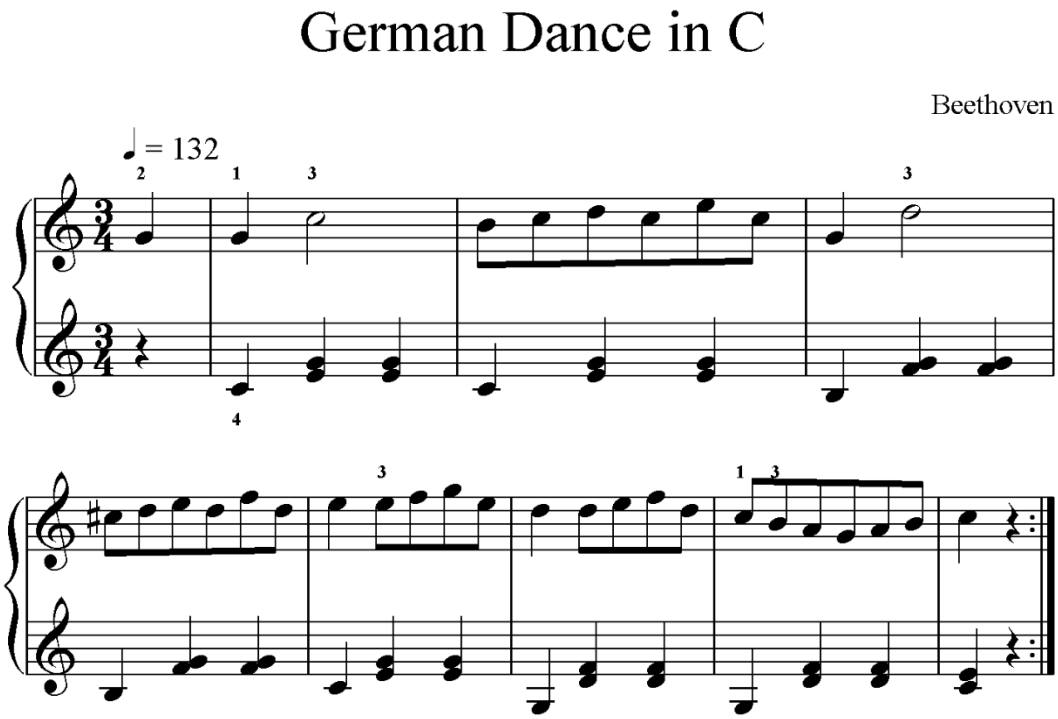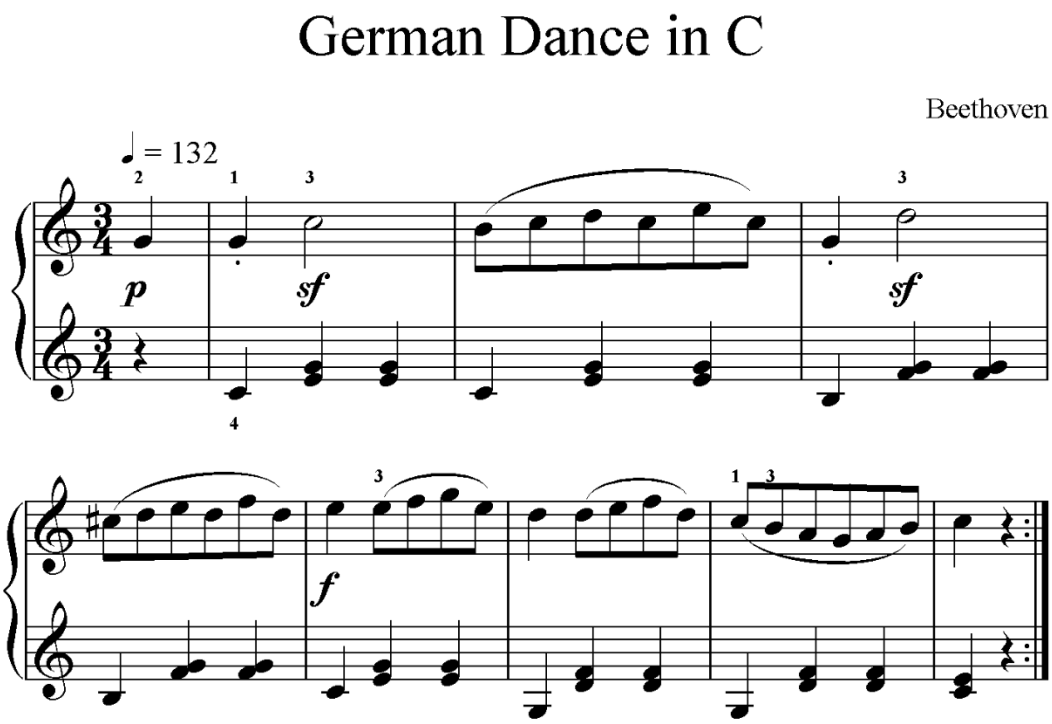


Exercise 32



Exercise 33

Pupil copy





The teacher copy includes:

a. staccato markings
b. dynamic markings - p, sf, f
c. phrase markings

Note also:

1. In the pupil copy, the bar numbers are given above the right-hand part throughout whereas in the teacher copy they are at the beginning of each line.
2. Each bar is numbered in the pupil copy, first bar in each line in the teacher copy.
3. Bar repeats are used.
4. Fingering appears in the pupil copy as this is essential from the start of rehearsal.
5. In the teacher copy, note, the clarification of the clef used in the left hand: vital information for a teacher who is blind and using braille music while working with a sighted student, who is using stave notation.
6. Tracker dots are used in the left hand where otherwise there would be seven or more blank cells.