A SUGGESTED PROCEDURE FOR IMPROVING THE INSTRUCTION OF BLIND CHILDREN IN BEGINNING WORK WITH THE VIOLIN

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A SUGGESTED PROCEDURE FOR IMPROVING THE INSTRUCTION OF BLIND CHILDREN IN BEGINNING WORK WITH THE VIOLIN

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose of this Study

1. General Purpose

The general purpose of this study is to improve the procedure for the teaching of the violin to pupils with defective vision. This method will attempt to arrive at a procedure, the incorporation of which, will seek to use only those elements found absolutely indispensable in developing a frame work upon which a solid violin technique can later be built. This method will further attempt to arrive at a means whereby greater numbers of pupils can be worked with than formerly. This serves the twofold purpose of enabling as many as are naturally inclined to benefit by an opportunity for study and to discover and encourage new and outstanding as well as normal musical talent. By the use of interesting material and short cuts, whenever possible and feasible, an attempt will be made to retain that first natural enthusiasm present in most children in beginning music and thus insure their pleasurable continuance of study. Lastly, the purpose of this study is to so train blind pupils that they will strive toward ensemble work and for the satisfaction derived from co-operative and self-performance.

2. Specific Purpose

The specific purpose of this study is to test and determine the relative merits of various kinds of experimental procedure in the teaching of violin to blind children.

An attempt will be made to arrive at a basis for the formation of authoritative conclusions to the following questions:

1. What procedure can be followed most advantageously in selecting blind pupils to study the violin?

2. Can blind pupils be taught more effectively in groups or individually?

3. Should Braille music be introduced at the same time as the instrument or is it more advisable to delay this until a rudimentary foundation has been gained upon the violin proper?

4. How can the mechanical difficulties of bowing be minimized with blind pupils?

5. Are the Hayes-Binet test averages for blind children a good prognosis for musical accomplishment when other factors are not controlled.

6. Is the string by string method of violin presentation to be preferred with blind pupils as compared with a consideration of the instrument as a single unit?

7. How can the study of the violin be motivated so as to do away with the problem of dropping out?

8. Can ensemble be attempted with blind beginners?

9. Should the violin be attempted with blind children

as young as eight years of age?

10. Are frequent instruction periods of short duration advisable over longer lessons at less frequent intervals?

11. Can the violin be studied to advantage without a previous foundation upon the piano?

B. Need for this Study

In order to eliminate much of the human waste that is prevalent today among blind violin pupils, one must develop a firm foundation using the child's interest as a means. It should be founded upon the present generally accepted practices of instrumental technique, but certain variations are necessary for improving these practices in their adaption for the use of blind children. Until the present there has been comparatively little done with orchestral instruments in schools for the blind and there has been almost no research published along this line. Yet case records of former students at the Michigan School for Blind offer much evidence to show that even with limited training upon the violin blind pupils have been benefitted greatly in a social and economic way. Logan,[1] in a recent article, remarks that:

> "Stringed instruments should be taught to the blind. For some reason they have been neglected in the past, and this should be remedied. The playing of stringed instruments, both in solo and ensemble would widen the musical outlook of the blind musician to an incalculable extent. Think of the joys and educational

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[1] Sinclair Logan, "The Teaching of Music in Institutions for the Blind". The New Beacon, 15:253-256, November, 1931.

> advantages of a school orchestra, to say nothing of string quartettes, violin or cello and piano sonatas, and other delightful, stimulating, and absolutely invaluable forms of ensemble. In my opinion, there might be a rich new field open to the really good blind string player, be he soloist or ensemble player."

Best[2] further relates that:

> "Musical instruction has always occupied a prominent place in the work of schools for the blind. This is both vocal and instrumental. In the former is included considerable choral work. In the latter are embraced piano and organ, and to a slight extent string and wind instruments."

From the above it would seem that orchestral instruments were not receiving the stress in the curricula of schools for the blind that their importance merits.

In the past much valuable time and talent have been lost before getting started upon the violin due to a necessity for a knowledge of Braille music. The average child entering the Michigan School for the Blind at the age of six or seven, according to school records requires from two to three years to acquire a fundamental knowledge of literary Braille. He is then either put into a class to learn Braille music or he gains it in chorus or in connection with piano instruction.

In a recent questionnaire submitted to teachers of music in schools for the blind, W. E. Allen[3] observes:

> "Summarizing all of the answers to the questions as to how to introduce pupils

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[2] Harry Best, Blindness and the Blind in the United States. New York: The Macmillian Company. 1934. Pp.386.

[3] W.E.Allen. "Current Practices in the Teaching of Instrumental Music in Schools for the Blind." Thirty Fourth Yearbook of the American Association of Instructors for the Blind, p.129. Lansing,Michigan: Michigan School for the Blind, 1938.

> to music, we find the following current practices: (1) acquainting pupils with the instrument; (2) discussing values of a musical education; (3) beginning with Braille characters; (4) discussing types of music; (5) discussing some of the great composers; (6) introducing the rudiments of music through games and singing; and (7) starting with individual pupil interest and status in music."

The indication is that there is little uniformity in methods of presenting music to blind pupils. Until the present at the Michigan School for Blind the pupil rarely came in contact with orchestral instruments at all until he was in the fourth or fifth grade of school.[4]

Observation conducted in several Schools for Blind has shown one common method of presenting orchestral instruments to be for the most part individual instruction with one or more lesson periods per week. The pupil is given an instrument and introduced to the proper method of holding and manipulating it. The objective seems to be the development of a certain skill through drill alone. The presence or absence of motivation depends invariably upon the individual teacher and the intensity of the pupil's desire to master the instrument at hand. The result of all this quite often has a tendency to create a feeling of indifference on the part of the pupil and a willingness to "drop the course" even before he has begun to master any of the fundamentals of the instrument. Hence, instrumental departments some-

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[4] Records, Instrumental Department, Michigan School for the Blind, 1931-1934.

times show distressingly large percentages of failures or drops in a single year.[5]

TABLE I
PERCENTAGE OF DROPS FROM 1931 THROUGH 1934

YEAR	ENROLLMENT	DROPS	PERCENT
1931	27	6	22.6
1932	24	6	25.
1933	26	7	26.2
1934	22	4	18.4
TOTAL	99	23	23.2

Table I shows that in the school years from 1931 through 1934 the percentage of drops ran from 18.4 in 1934 to 26.2 in 1933 with an average yearly mortality of 23.2 per cent.

C. Hypothesis

This study is predicated upon the hypotheses first, that the violin can be so presented as to do away with the problem of failures. Second, that these young blind people can be so taught as to continue their study of music long after the foundation has been laid. Third, that the foundation for playing the violin can be laid in such a way as to cause young blind people to enjoy it. Fourth, that this may be accomplished through the medium of class motivation, mechanical aids, ensemble playing from the very beginning, interesting material and a temporary delay in the introduction of Braille music. The latter enables the entire stress to be placed upon the technical aspects of instrumental mastery rather than the mastery of Braille. It is further assumed

[5] Records, Instrumental Department, Michigan School for the Blind, 1931-1934.

that the use of this method will result in better trained ensemble players and will reduce the time previously required to train a blind child to take his place in the school orchestra.

D. Scope of the Experiment

Although this method can be adapted to other orchestral instruments of the string group, for the purpose of this study it is being limited to the violin. The actual experiment covered the school year of 1935 but the results of the findings of this experiment were continued over a four year period and these were compared with the results of the years previous to 1935. It includes 36 children for study - 22 boys and 14 girls - with no cognizance taken of their sex in the study. (Table II).

E. Limitation of the Study

For the purpose of this study the pupils worked with were from the second and third grades of school. Those below eight years and above ten years were not included. Those with a Seashore average below eighty were not accepted. This limited the number to thirty six pupils. It is to be pointed out however, that this number included three-fourths of the pupils of the second and third grades and the Michigan School for the Blind enrolls two-thirds of the blind pupils of Michigan.

F. Sources and Treatment of Data

The Seashore test for musical aptitude was administered to thirty six totally blind children(without previous exper-

ience of any kind in instrumental music). These children, from the Michigan School for the Blind were between the chronological ages of eight and ten. They were in the second and third grades of school and had no knowledge of Braille music. Their entire experience in music had been vocal. The group was separated into three different sections: the first group was divided into three classes of four pupils, the second group consisted of four classes of three pupils each, and the remainder were worked with individually. Each class was given three forty minute lessons per week. The sections containing four pupils each were called group A. Those consisting of three children each were known as group B. The remainder were termed group C.

CHAPTER II
PROCEDURES

A. Specific Procedures used in Each of these Three Groups

The first procedure in this experiment was to test for musical aptitude in order to determine the basis for experimental groupings and the extent to which music should be stressed in the individual pupil.

Table II, shows the chronological age; the Seashore averages of pitch, rhythm and musical memory and the respective intelligence quotient of each pupil in the study as found by the use of the Hayes-Binet test for the blind.

TABLE II
COMPARISON OF EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

EXPERIMENTAL						CONTROL		
Group A			Group B			Group C		
C.A.	S.A.	I.Q.	C.A.	S.A.	I.Q.	C.A.	S.A.	I.Q.
9.4	87	99	9.5	92	101	8.4	89	100
10.1	86	113	10.4	90	98	9.3	85	112
8.2	88	100	8.3	93	112	10.4	90	98
9.3	85	104	9.1	90	99	8.2	90	99
9.5	89	99	9.5	93	98	8.7	91	100
8.6	87	111	8.5	93	111	8.9	90	110
10.2	85	113	10.1	92	118.5	8.1	89	102
8.4	89	96	9.2	90	116	8.9	90	100
9.5	84	101	9.2	94	108	9.4	88	99
9.6	90	99	10.1	92	97	9.2	89	101
10.1	87	104	10.4	92	99	9.4	90	100
10.5	87	117	9.6	93	103	8.6	89	99

Musical talent is largely a matter of degree and the percentage of pupils at either end of the scale is very small.[6]

[6]Manley E. Irwin, "The Arts". What Does Research Say? State of Michigan, Department of Public Instruction. Bulletin No. 308. Lansing, Michigan: 1937. P.93.

Violins of a size necessary to meet the physical needs of the individual pupils of each group were distributed and instruction was begun. Group A was first shown the correct manner of holding the instrument and then encouraged to feel of the hand and arm of the instructor. When a single point seemed to be gained by an individual the entire group was encouraged to feel the hand or arm of that successful pupil. The problem of developing correct control of the left wrist and fingers as well as accurate arm position was approached in the following manner. The pupils stood in an upright relaxed position with the greater weight of the body resting on the left foot. The left arm was suspended at the side, palm frontward. The hand was then brought up to a level just above the shoulder thus forming a V with the fore arm and upper arm. The violin was placed under the jaw at one end, with the neck of the instrument resting between the root of the index finger and the first joint of the thumb at the other. It was found that when the wrist was turned slightly toward the neck of the violin the fingers were thrown directly over the fingerboard of the instrument where they could ascend and descend in a semi-vertical manner. The striking surface thus fell on the tips of the fingers. Greater accuracy as well as surety and ease was acquired by curving the fingers at the joints. It was further found, after a week of experiment, that greater ease in moving the fingers were achieved when the wrist was help away from the neck of the violin. This served to form

an unbroken line with knuckles and elbow.

Past experience with beginners in the study of the violin has shown that a great deal of difficulty has been encountered in learning to place and control the left hand. With blind children this problem has been especially troublesome. Pupils have tended to play with the fingers curved inwardly or have allowed the wrist to rest upon the neck of the violin. Such practices when continued have resulted in faulty intonation and retarded progress in shifting positions during later stages of study. Once these incorrect practices have become fixed much time and effort were necessary to correct them. Experiment and observation have shown that the reason for these difficulties in the first place has been the necessity of watching so many different points in connection with the gaining of skills upon the violin. One needs but be reminded of such points as correct finger spacing, fingers curved properly, correct elbow position, correct violin level and proper relaxation to mention but a few.

B. Specific Procedure used with Group A

The first step begun by group A concerned correct finger and wrist placement of the left hand. An experiment was tried whereby group A could concentrate on one point at a time and a drill device consisting of raising and lowering each finger in succession, while retaining the remaining fingers in succession, while retaining the remaining fingers on the string was employed. It was found that frequent

rest periods were necessary due to the fact that the left hand and arm became cramped and fatigued. Complete relaxation of the hand and arm during these intervals tended to remedy the situation. Two weeks of careful daily concentration on the left hand and arm positions was sufficient to completely master this skill whereas formerly the teacher had to be constantly correcting faulty arm and hand positions for as long as an entire school year. To gain an idea as to proper violin level the members of group A were encouraged to rest the scroll of the instrument upon the back of a music stand. The level of the stand was adjusted to meet the need of the individual pupil. Use of this device was necessary for only one week. The next step begun with group A was the introduction of the open notes on the violin. This was effected by an attempt on the part of the children to produce a tone. It was readily noted that when the bow was drawn parallel to the bridge and midway between there and the fingerboard the results proved much more musical and less rasping. To facilitate drawing the bow at the correct angle and to keep it from slipping off the strings a mechanical device developed by the writer and known as the bow guide was employed.[7]

The next step in the procedure concerned that of bring-

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[7] This device is made of spring steel and fits on the fingerboard of the violin. There are two posts extending up between the A and D strings. The bow is placed against the post farthest from the bridge of the instrument and drawn to its full length with the wood constantly touching the metal. This insures a constant correct angle contact with the strings of the violin. (See page 13 for illustration.)

FIGURE 1.

ILLUSTRATION OF BOW GUIDE IN USE ON PUPIL'S VIOLIN

ing the right and left hands together on the part of the children of group A. Five note diatonic scales were practiced on the D and G strings. The object of this procedure was to introduce the various related tones produced when the different fingers were put down. These tones were practiced with long, slow bow strokes. Thus at the end of the third week of work the pupils of group A, working entirely by note, were producing slow tones on the G and D strings.

The unit next to be begun by group A was that of whole and half notes. The teacher first beat out the time and the children followed suit. This was then done in unison with the teacher. Each first beat was accented and in the case of half notes the accents fell on the first and third beats. This presented little difficulty and at the end of the third day group A was ready to begin to develop the C major scale. This scale was used due to the absence of sharps and flats and necessitated playing upon three strings. This group was considering the violin as a single unit and began from the bass register, whereas, groups B and C were considering the instrument string by string, beginning in the higher register and working downward. In the meantime a constant stress of position was being practiced with all groups as well as a continual challenge for listening. Emphasis was placed upon intonation by putting the finger tips close together on the half tones and leaving a distance in the case of the whole tones. Group A, by the end of the

fifth week of study, had covered the entire violin and had made progress with the help of the bow guide.[8] Their intonation was becoming sure and their bowing was becoming fixed. They were able to play the C scale in whole, half and quarter notes over two octaves.

At this point the routine of group A was changed somewhat in that they were given three lesson periods per week while the other two periods were devoted to ensemble. Their ensemble periods were devoted to supplementing the work covered at the regular lesson periods. In addition, training necessary to good ensemble was introduced. These points included such factors as intonation, release and attack. Here for the first time added meaning was given to their lessons by the addition of piano accompaniment. Thus by the end of the seventh week of study group A had begun playing folk tunes both individually and ensemble, with piano accompaniment. They were familiar with slurred notes and eighth note values as well as rests and the principle of accidentals, i. e., raising or lowering tones to gain sharped or flatted effects. The entire group was eager for continued study. They needed no urging to put forth their best effort. The attitude toward the ensemble was one of eagerness and pleasure.

C. Specific Procedures used with Groups B and C

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[8] In every case this device was discarded without further dependence upon its use. Formerly, experience has proven, from six months to a school year was necessary to develop the bowing skill. The bow guide reduced this time materially.

To groups B and C the following list of instructions, written in Braille, were handed out for reference:

LEFT HAND

1. Keep the fingers curved.
2. Play only with the tips of the fingers.
3. Keep the wrist away from the neck of the violin.
4. Let the elbow hang under the violin.
5. Hold up the violin.
6. Keep the shoulders down.

RIGHT HAND

1. Curve the thumb slightly.
2. Let the elbow hang.
3. Press firmly on the bow.
4. Bend the bow slightly.
5. Avoid tenseness in the wrist.

These instructions were carefully explained and demonstrated, point by point, in the same manner as employed with group A. Attention was called to the instruction sheet when such points as a sagging violin or faulty wrist were noticed. The first week was used in learning to hold the instrument properly and in producing a tone on the open E string. Extreme difficulty was encountered in drawing the bow across this string. Relaxation was very difficult to acquire. This may be explained by the fact that blind children, due to the constant necessity of having to be on the alert, tend to develop a tenseness which has a carry over into many of their consciousness movements. In an attempt to develop this skill the instructor would guide the bow across the string while holding on to the pupil's wrist and elbow. This process had to be repeated daily with each individual pupil. The next point to be taken up was that of producing the various diatonic tones in the first position on the E string.

This was done in whole and half steps. Due to the half tone difference between E and F natural it was noted, in a comparison with the identical notes on the piano, that the correct F was produced only when the first finger was placed close to the top of the fingerboard. With G, A, and B the notes fall a distance apart due to their being whole tone intervals. In the meantime it was constantly necessary to check the mechanical points previously taken up. The most troublesome factors were in drawing a straight bow and keeping the wrist away from the neck of the violin. Considerable checking had to be done to keep fingers curved in ascending and descending upon the string.

At the end of the first week, the study of Braille music was begun. Before this could be accomplished whole and half note time values had to be introduced. This was done by means of clapping the hands. The recurring accent falling upon the first beat of the group served to denote the value. From this point on half of the period was given over to Braille music. This, obviously, tended to slow up the whole procedure.

From the E string the pupils of group B and C took up the study of the A or second string of the violin. Here it was found that the half tones occur between the first and second fingers, on the notes represented by B and C. Only when these fingers were placed close to each other did they compare most favorably with the piano. The greatest difficulty here was in getting a true E with the fourth finger. It was constantly necessary to correct wrist position in

order to get correct finger spacing to produce the proper pitch. The corresponding Braille signs next introduced were D and C. This completed the scale which was to be covered in Braille. A period of two weeks was devoted to drill over the E and A strings.

Thus at the end of the third week of work while group A was producing slow tones on the G and D strings, groups B and C were working on the E and A strings as well as drilling on the reading of Braille music. Group A worked by rote while groups B and C were required to memorize. The progress of groups B and C was more retarded due to their drill on Braille music. The attendance of all groups had been regular and absences due to ill health were negligible.

At the end of the fifth week of study groups B and C were barely ready to begin the study of the D string. Their enthusiasm had begun to lag and there was some hint of a desire to drop out. In introducing the D string long open tones were first attempted. Then open tones on the A and D string were tried.

Here, it was noted, the arm had to be raised in passing from the higher to the lower strings. The half tones occur between the E and F on this string. In moving from string string the arm is raised and lowered from the shoulder. The elbow is allowed to hang at a level just below the wrist.[9] The acquiring of this skill caused considerable delay due to the fact that the bow would slip off the strings entirely,

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[9]Teachings of Michael Press.

or the pupil would try to raise the wrist without freeing the elbow in the process. Due to the training with the bow guide none of the pupils in group A had this difficulty.

Quarter note values were next introduced to groups B and C. They were able to write the Braille symbols for these notes and read them with some degree of hesitation.

The final unit to be covered with groups B and C was the G string. This string presented less difficulty than either the D or A due to the fact that in raising the arm to a sufficient height there are no other strings to rub against. With this string the half tones occur between B and C and are played with the second and third fingers. The main difficulties encountered are those of placing the second finger high enough to produce a true B and in remembering to place the third finger close to it.

The final Braille unit to be introduced to groups B and C concerned the location of notes on the violin according to octaves. This was explained by a comparison with the piano. The principle of scales being separated into groups of eight notes and these numbering consecutively from one to eight could be readily understood. The next step beyond this was merely to show the relationship of the identical tones on the violin.

Groups B and C having covered the strings of the violin were still having trouble with bowing and intonation. Their interest was lagging and constant motivation, through the media of the victrola, radio and stories were needed. Group

C (those receiving individual lessons) needed the most encouragement. Neither group B nor C was as yet ready for eighth notes, much less accidentals, far less folk tunes.

CHAPTER III

EVALUATION OF RESULTS

A. Method Used.

At the conclusion of each of three ten day periods a test was made of the playing of each individual member of the various groups. The exercise performed consisted of whole notes on the open strings. Evaluation was effected by a committee of three music teachers without previous knowledge of the identity of the individual pupils.* The committee sat in an adjoining room where they could hear but could not see the players. One member from each group took turns playing until the entire class had been heard. The committee members were then asked to rate their choice in order of excellence. The criteria used in making these selections were (a) firmness of tone (b) unity of tone, i.e., tones produced without accidentally brushing against other strings. The pupils being auditioned were entirely unaware of the presence of auditors. The combined results of the three tests showed the judges to be unanimously agreed upon the superiority of group. Group C was voted as being second and group B declared the weakest.

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* The judges, while but three in number, have an average of ten years of experience in working with the blind and are all music teachers.

TABLE III

JUDGES' RATING OF BOWING OF THREE GROUPS OF BLIND MUSIC PUPILS

TRIAL ONE						TRIAL TWO						TRIAL THREE					
CHOICE						CHOICE						CHOICE					
FIRST		SECOND		THIRD		FIRST		SECOND		THIRD		FIRST		SECOND		THIRD	
No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.	No.	Gr.
1	A	2	C	3	B	1	C	2	A	3	B	1	A	2	C	3	B
4	A	5	B	6	C	4	A	5	B	6	C	4	A	5	C	6	B
7	A	8	C	9	B	7	A	8	C	9	B	7	A	8	C	9	B
10	A	11	B	12	C	10	A	11	B	12	C	10	A	11	C	12	B
13	C	14	B	15	A	13	A	14	C	15	B	13	A	14	B	15	C
16	C	17	A	18	B	16	A	17	C	18	B	16	A	17	B	18	C
19	A	20	B	21	C	19	A	20	B	21	C	19	A	20	C	21	B
22	A	23	C	24	B	22	A	23	C	24	B	22	A	23	C	24	B
25	A	26	C	27	B	25	A	26	C	27	B	25	A	25	C	27	B
28	A	29	B	30	C	28	B	29	A	30	C	28	A	29	B	30	C
31	A	32	C	33	B	31	C	32	A	33	B	31	A	32	B	33	C
34	C	35	A	36	B	34	A	35	B	36	C	34	A	35	C	36	B

In examining the combined results of three tests we note group A to be in first place with a score of thirty out of a possible 36. Group C follows with a score of 5 while group B has a score of 1. In second place group C leads with a score of 18 while groups A and B total 12 and 4 respectively. It is to be noted that in the third test group A was adjudged best in every case.

The second test was given at the end of the second month. This test covered the progress of the left hand and wrist. The identical faculty committee who had taken part in test one were again asked to serve. The exercise consisted of a five note scale over each string of the violin. These scales were played from the G through the E strings both ascending and descending. The points to be checked were correct wrist position and violin elevation.

TABLE IV

JUDGES' RATING OF BLIND PUPILS PLAYING FIVE NOTE SCALE

FIRST CHOICE		SECOND CHOICE		THIRD CHOICE	
Pupil	Group	Pupil	Group	Pupil	Group
1	A	2	C	3	B
4	A	5	C	6	B
7	A	8	B	9	C
10	A	11	C	12	B
13	C	14	A	15	B
16	A	17	B	18	C
19	A	20	C	21	B
22	A	23	B	24	C
25	A	26	B	27	C
28	A	29	B	30	C
31	A	32	B	33	C
34	A	35	C	36	B

Table IV shows 11 pupils from group A and one from group C as being first choice of the judges. The second column shows five representatives from group C, six pupils from group B and one pupil from group A. Those pupils considered weak in this test, as listed in column three, included six from group B and a like number from group C.

These results indicate that pupils from group A were outstanding so far as wrist position and violin elevation were concerned.

At the end of the third month of experiment a test designed to indicate progress in intonation of the various groups was given. This test consisted of the C major scale to be played over two octaves in half notes. Long sustained bow strokes were used for each note. The point to be checked had to do with accurate finger placement on whole and half tones. Here again members of each group took turns.

The pupils were rated in order of excellence and the results noted in Table V.

TABLE V

JUDGES' RATING OF BLIND GROUP MEMBERS FOR INTONATION

FIRST CHOICE		SECOND CHOICE		THIRD CHOICE	
Pupil	Group	Pupil	Group	Pupil	Group
1	A	2	B	3	C
4	C	5	A	6	B
7	A	8	C	9	B
10	B	11	C	12	A
13	B	14	A	15	C
16	A	17	C	18	B
19	A	20	B	21	C
22	A	23	B	24	C
25	C	26	B	27	A
28	A	29	C	30	B
31	A	32	B	33	C
34	A	35	C	36	B

Here we note that in first place the jury have indicated eight pupils from group A, two from group B and two from group C. For second choice we find two pupils representing group A, five from group B and five from group C. Among those having the weakest intonation of the entire class there were two from group A, four representing group B and five from group C.

By the close of the eighteenth week of study the results from the point of view of accomplishment in the various groups were:

B. Findings

Group A:

1. Was playing eighth notes.

2. Their intonation was more true than either

of the other two groups.

3. Had learned three folk tunes.

4. Had begun work with accidentals.

5. Were able to play the C,D,G and F scales over two octaves.

6. Had continued keen and unflagging interest.

7. Had begun the study of Braille music.

8. Had progressed twice as rapidly as the other two groups.

9. Were having no difficulty in keeping the bow from rubbing against strings other than those upon which they were playing.

Groups B and C:

1. Had learned sufficient Braille music to read and interpret the symbols used in violin music.

2. Their interest had long been lagging.

3. Their playing was inferior to that of group A from the standpoint of intonation, firmness of tone, dexterity, surety of bowing and general manipulation.

4. They were less advanced than group A in actual amount of music learned.

5. They still had to be checked constantly for left wrist position.[10]

6. They were still having difficulty in keeping the bow from rubbing against strings other than those upon

[10]Group A, after the use of exercise one in the appendix, completely mastered this skill. Daily use of this exercise for two weeks eliminated all difficulty, even in the most stubborn cases.

FIGURE 2

INCREASE IN ENROLLMENT, VIOLIN DEPARTMENT, MICHIGAN SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND 1931 - 1938.

which they were playing.

7. Constant motivation was necessary to retain even mild interest.[11]

C. Further Findings

It was further found in this study that in a comparison of the enrollment of the department of the year 1931 with the year 1938 the increase amounted to forty per cent.

Figure 2 shows a steady increase in enrollment from the year 1935 through 1938. While the enrollment of the department increased the enrollment of the school remained the same due to a lack of additional living facilities.

In spite of an increase in enrollment in the department it was found that with the use of the findings of this experiment over a period of time the number of failures had decreased from an average of 26.2 per cent to 3.1 per cent per year. This can be noted in Figure 3.

Finally, it was found that in a comparison of the average marks of the year 1934 with the year 1938 in each grade bracket, the marks had improved appreciably. This is shown in Figure 4.

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[11] The case of pupil X might perhaps carry some significance. This boy has absolute pitch. His Seashore average for pitch, rhythm and musical memory was 93 and his Hayes-Binet score was 117. He was put into group C and introduced to the violin by means of the string by string method. In spite of repeated motivation he became discouraged and wished to drop the instrument entirely. After being transferred to group A his interest revived and within two weeks of application on his part had made advancement comparable to the rest of the group and lead the class for the rest of the term.

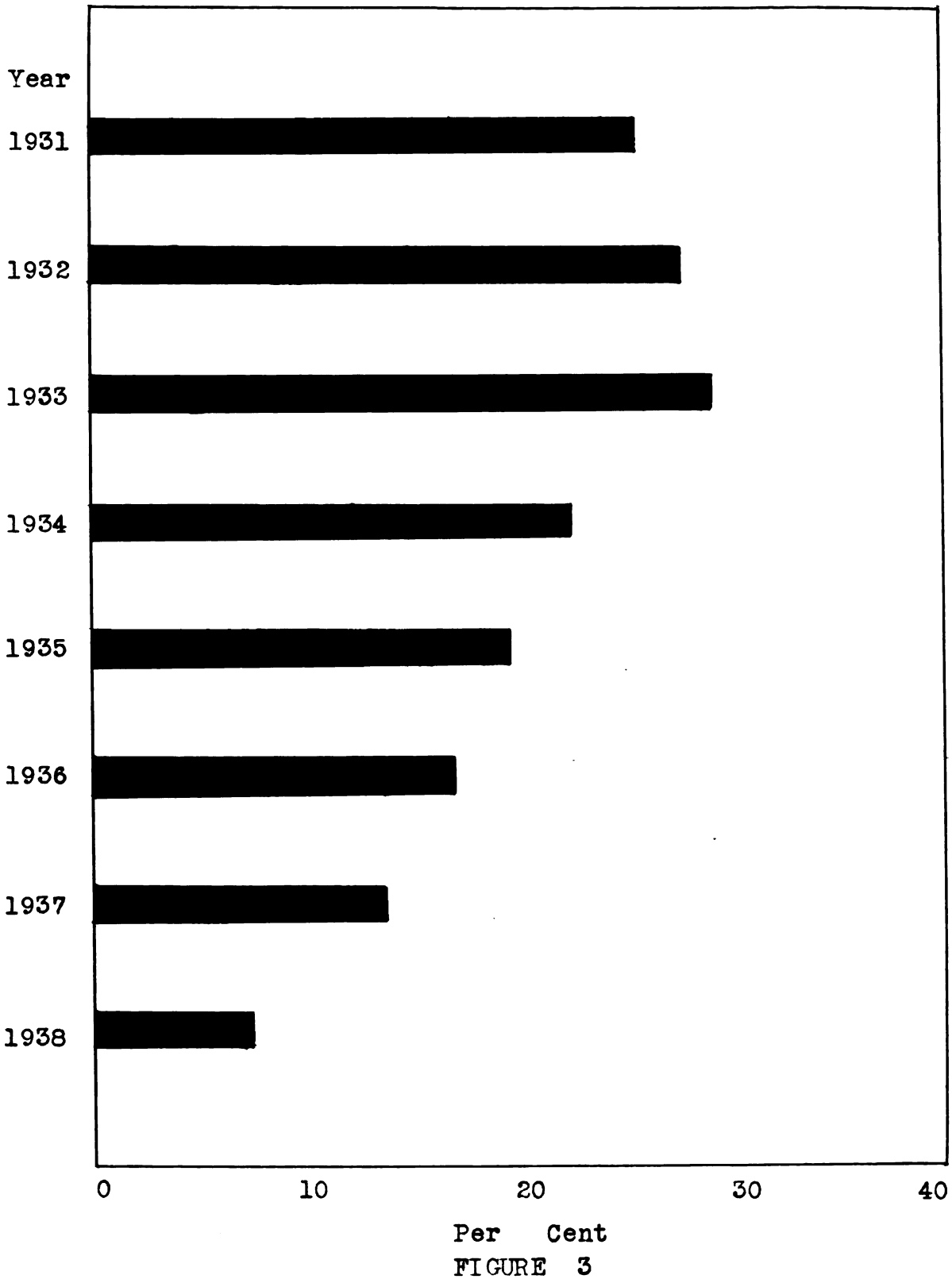
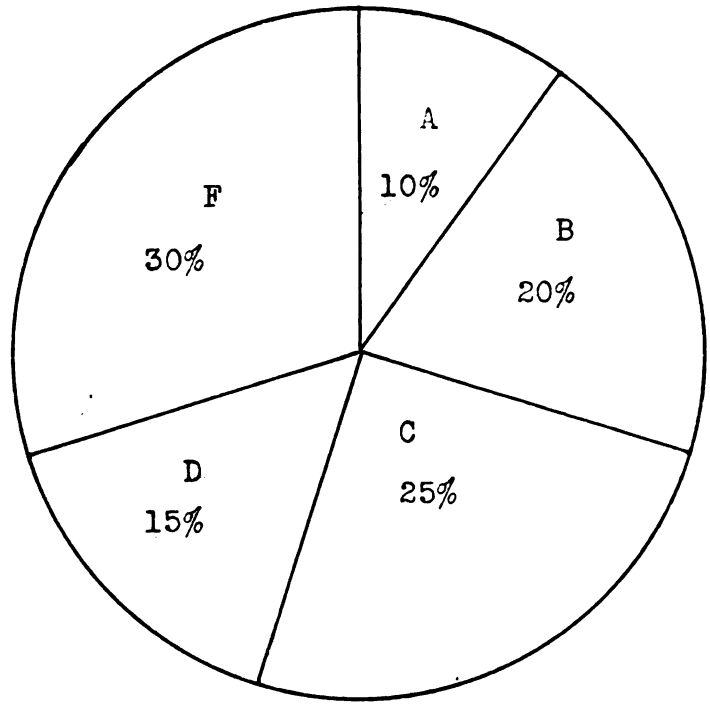
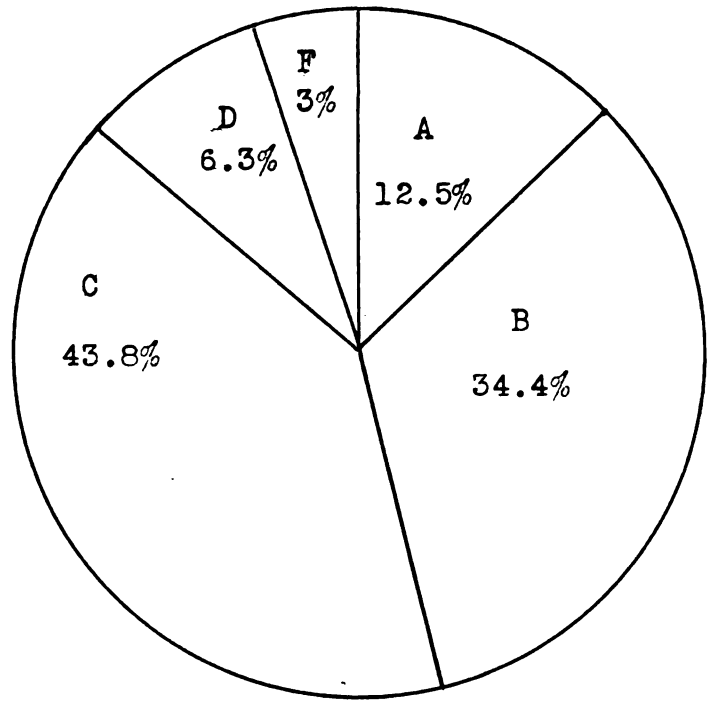


FIGURE 3

PERCENTAGE OF DROPS, VIOLIN COURSES, MICHIGAN SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, 1931-1938. 1931-1934 OLD SYSTEM. 1935-1938 NEW SYSTEM IN USE.



Music Marks in 1934, Old System in Use



Music Marks in 1938, New System in Use

FIGURE 4

COMPARISON OF MARK DISTRIBUTION AT THE MICHIGAN SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND IN 1934 and 1938. VIOLIN DEPARTMENT.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND PROBLEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A. Summary

It was first pointed out that a need was apparent at the Michigan School for the Blind for a more efficient means of teaching the violin. Past methods had resulted in a great loss of time before the pupil was able to become anchored in actual playing. Due to the difficulties encountered through both the developing of skills on the instrument in question and the necessity for an immediate knowledge of Braille music, a large percentage of failures resulted.

This study was predicated upon the belief that this instrument could be so presented as to do away with the problem of failures, to develop a more thorough foundation and to retain the interest of the pupil. This was to be done through the use of mechanical aids, delaying the introduction of Braille music temporarily, and through class rather than individual work.

Control groups were worked with over a period of four years and a comparison was made with the results of previous years. At the end of the fourth year of experimenting in the use of this method it was found that while the enrollment of the school had not altered, due to a lack of additional living facilities, the enrollment of the department had increased by forty per cent.[12]

[12] Records, Instrumental Department. Michigan School for the Blind. 1931-1938.

This can be explained in the following ways: (1) by being able to work effectively with classes, the instructor had time for additional pupils (2) by quicker and more positive results, greater numbers of pupils were encouraged to enroll in the department. Formerly the time required for a beginning blind child to acquire the necessary technique to play in the school orchestra was one school year. With the use of the new method this time was cut in half.[13] It was found that with the use of the old method over a four year period the number of failures had reached an average of 26.2 per cent.[14] This number was reduced to three and one-tenth per cent per year with the use of the new method. The number of drops declined in the same proportion. Due to better prepared and more advanced players within its ranks the school orchestra was able to attempt music that had previously been considered too difficult.[15] Finally, the growth of the department in enrollment has necessitated the retention of two new assistants.

B. Conclusions

In the light of the foregoing facts the following conclusions seem to be justified:

1. That the method of selecting pupils at random from the chorus and piano classes results in a great

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[13] Records, Instrumental Department. Michigan School for the Blind. 1931-1938.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Johann Strauss, Waltz, Roses from the South.

loss of time, money and talent. By the expedient of testing for musical aptitude the teacher is able to gain a clearer idea as to what might be expected in the individual pupil and can adjust the instruction accordingly.

2. That the method of teaching violin to blind children by individual lessons is not absolutely necessary and in many cases is less efficient than the class method. Small classes are able to accomplish more in less time and tend to exert more incentive and inspiration upon individual members than could be accomplished formerly with single pupils.[16] Thus by handling larger groups much time and money are saved through increased enrollment in the department.

3. That by the delaying the introduction of Braille music until a foundation is gained upon the violin the entire attention of the pupil can be directed towards the acquiring of that foundation and thus retain his interest as well as insure his gainful continuance in violin study.

4. That the use of a bow guide aids in the formation of correct bowing skill and can be used and discontinued without harmful habits resulting.

5. That the Hayes-Binet test averages for blind children are a poor prognosis for musical accomplishment when other factors are not controlled.[17]

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[16] Case of pupil X. See foot note page 27.

[17] When the Seashore musical ratings were compared with the Hayes-Binet scores of the pupils in question the result was a correlation of .2890.

6. That the violin considered as a single unit, rather than the string by string method of presentation, is by far the most satisfactory from the point of view of progress and ultimate results.

7. That the playing of folk tunes in ensemble with piano accompaniment acts as a distinct motivating factor from the point of view of retention of interest.

8. That ensemble, in its simpler forms, can be introduced advantageously from the very beginning of study, in the case of blind children.

9. That the violin can be studied profitably by blind children as young as eight years of age.

10. That frequent instruction periods of short duration are to be preferred over longer lessons at less frequent intervals.

11. That the violin can be studied to advantage without a foundation upon the piano.

C. Problems for further study

In working with this study over a period of time, several problems that might well bear additional investigation became apparent. In fact, the writer hopes someone will be interested in seeking the answers to some of the following unsolved problems:

1. What is the best age to begin work in violin with blind children?

2. How may the use of Braille in music be correlated with the use of Braille in literature?

3. What improvement in methods of teaching rhythm and intonation to the blind can be developed?

4. Does degree of vision have any effect upon the ability to master instrumental skills?

5. Does previous duration of blindness in children have any effect upon instrumental mastery?

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APPENDIX A

An attempt is made in the following pages to point out some of the skills and attitudes that need to be acquired by children with defective vision in gaining a foundation upon the violin. The instructions follow the teachings of the Russian school of violin playing as practiced by the late Michael Press, eminent exponent of that school. Some points, by way of contrast, are suggested in this appendix between the problems of the sighted and the blind child in learning to play the violin.

A. Skills and Attitudes to be Acquired

The fundamental skills and attitudes to be developed by blind children in the study of the violin can be classified under two headings, namely, those of a physical nature and those of a mental character.

The instrument from a physical point of view offers certain problems, the solving of which requires much added time and effort, especially to those handicapped by lack of vision. The normal child gains ideas from visual experience that aid him in mastering certain techniques. In drawing a bow at the correct angle to the violin, for instance, he needs but glance into a mirror to know instantly whether the stroke is correctly manipulated or not. The blind child cannot benefit by such means but is forced to obtain his impressions from such less vital means as verbal explanations and his sense of touch. The following points follow closely the teachings of the late Michael Press, a famous member of the Russian School of Violin Playing.

1. Physical Nature.

The first point to be considered is that of correct stance. The pupil should stand in a relaxed upright position. The feet should be slightly apart with the left foot supporting the greater weight of the body. The left arm is brought up and bent at the elbow forming a V. The tips of the fingers come just above the shoulder line, the wrist is turned slightly to the left.

The next point to be considered in violin mastery is

the correct way of holding the instrument. The violin is supported between the collar bone and the left side of the jaw at one end with the neck of the instrument resting between the root of the index finger and the first joint of the thumb. The instrument should be held straight from the shoulder so as to prevent drooping or sagging. Failure to observe this will result in a slovenly appearance and may retard easy manipulation in later stages of study. The shoulders should always be relaxed and in a natural position. The left arm hangs directly under the violin forming a straight line with the point of the index finger, were it extended, and the extreme tip of the elbow. This point is very important in that by keeping the forearm in a straight line the fingers are naturally thrown in a position where they can ascend from and descend vertically upon the fingerboard of the instrument. The next point to be stressed is that of preventing the wrist and palm of the left hand from touching the neck of the violin. The wrist should be in a position away from the neck of the instrument and held so as to continue the unbroken line between index finger and elbow. When the wrist touches the neck of the violin the fingers are robbed of much of their freedom of manipulation thus requiring extra effort in moving along the neck from one position to another in more advanced stages of study. Lack of attention to this is apt to result in an incorrect wrist formation that will later have to be corrected. The final point to be remembered in connection

with the left hand is that of keeping the fingers curved in order to produce the various stops with the tips of the fingers and as an aid in the acquisition of dexterity of movement as well as surety and correctness of intonation.

In perfecting the right or bow arm movement visually handicapped children usually require a greater length of time than sighted pupils since vision plays a most important part in developing this skill. In order to produce a smooth even tone free from rasp or squeak it is necessary that the bow move at right angles to the strings and parallel to the bridge midway between the fingerboard and bridge. It is desirable to begin early to connect the change from the down stroke to the up stroke and vice versa otherwise a rasp is apt to result during changes of bow that are extremely difficult to overcome later. The bow is retained by the thumb placed opposite and underneath the second finger of the right hand. The thumb should be curved in the same manner as when picking up some small object such as a pencil or inkwell and pressure is exerted from the second joint. The fingers of the hand are held in the shape of a fan but together enough so as to touch along their entire length. The bow lies along the first joints of the fingers while the tip of the little finger acts as a balance. In order to produce a fine singing tone, according to the teachings of the late Michael Press, it is necessary that the bow be tilted just enough to avoid using the flat of the entire filling of hair. It is advisable to exert considerable pressure at

first. This pressure should come through the fingers and from the wrist in order to develop a firm tone. This is done from the fingers with a relaxed wrist. Controlled relaxation is the most important rule to be remembered as without this the results are apt to be awkward and undesirable. In changing from string to string the arm comes in for stress since it plays a very important part in the smooth manipulation of this particular phase of violin technique. The relaxed arm is either raised or lowered to the desired position.

In moving from the frog of the bow to the point beginners usually have difficulty to keep from rubbing against more than one string at a time. This can be overcome by slow practice and a degree of care. The concluding point concerns the wrist which should be properly relaxed at all times. When the bow is at the frog the wrist should be slightly convex and when at the point the position is one of concavity. This will insure the bow's continuing at right angles to the strings and will make for smoothness in manipulation. Up to this point the techniques for teaching blind pupils are the same as for sighted pupils.

2. Mental Character.

As was previously stated the only means by which a blind child may gain ideas regarding all of these points is by the degree of patience and skill exhibited by the teacher in presenting the material, his own powers of reason and retention when the teacher is not available and

his own particular mental picture which he gains when led to feel of the instructor's hands and arms. The teacher can form the child's hands and arms into the approximate position temporarily but until correct habits are formed by the pupil this is apt to develop into an endless task and result in discouragement by both teacher and pupil. From the mental point of view, in considering the development of competent young instrumentalists among the blind, we find that it is of first and foremost importance to retain the initial interest and enthusiasm from the very start. This cannot be too strongly stressed; especially during the period when the physical difficulties are being mastered.[18] Karl Gherkens suggests in this connection that the reason so many fail in music is that the teacher very often neglects the fact that it is the beauty in music that the pupil loves--forgetting entirely his impatience for drill. We are further told that the lesson hour should make some appeal to the aesthetic consciousness. The pupil's end is for the present while the teacher is planning also for the future. There should be some method devised to take care of both. The purposes of the music lesson, according to this author, are: (1) to give immediate aesthetic satisfaction by playor listening; (2) to prepare the pupil for greater aesthetic satisfaction by growth of knowledge and skill. Often we stress the theoretical and technical too much, forgetting

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[18] Karl Gherkens, Music in the Junior High School. Boston: Birchard Company. 1936. Pp. 129.

that the pupil cannot become enthusiastic over far away objectives. Interest can be maintained only when there is a steady growth in skill, knowledge and power of some kind.

One of the first requisites for maintaining enthusiasm and interest is interesting material. There is generally much good music among the folk tunes and familiar music can be depended upon to prove popular with children--music with a definite rhythmic pattern being especially so.

Another requisite for successfully interesting blind children in instrumental music is a consideration of the psychology of the child. Frequent lesson periods of short duration, for instance, are to be preferred over longer periods given less often. The class lesson is advisable over individual instruction although in many cases a supplementary private period is necessary to the regular instruction time.[19]

One of the most discouraging factors from the point of view of the blind child is the constant necessity of laboriously perusing, memorizing, and interpreting music in terms of Braille signs. This naturally slows up his progress and presents a very challenging problem for the teacher. With the beginning pupil it has often proven disasterous, especially if he is working alone. Because of this it would seem that the problem of those teaching violin is to arrive at a teaching procedure that not only serves to build a

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[19]Manley E. Irwin, "The Arts". What Does Research Say? State of Michigan, Department of Public Instruction. Bulletin No. 308. Lansing Michigan: 1937. P.93.

firm foundation but also one that is exhaustive enough to give the pupil a thorough, fundamental knowledge of music. Such a method has to hold interest and be easy to perform. It has to move forward as quickly as possible and yet give ample opportunity for physical manipulation upon the instrument. When a blind child is forced to work alone, over a period of time, at a task as complex as the study of the violin, unless he receives more than the ordinary motivation he is apt to become indifferent to the task in hand or become discouraged. In either case, experience has shown his first impulse to be to discontinue that which has caused him such concern. On the other hand, if he can be encouraged to continue his study until he has attained sufficient musical proficiency to take part in the school ensemble the added interest derived from this activity is apt to prove a great stimulant toward a continuation of his study. Another factor contributing much toward discouragement is that of too infrequent lesson periods. Experience has shown that when a child can look forward to frequent periods of instruction in the company of other pupils of the same age and accomplishment he is apt to manifest enthusiasm that would otherwise be missing. This is especially true in the case of the musically gifted blind child. Experience has likewise shown that blind children, as a class, love music and when their fondness for it has not been made less acute through some distasteful experience, such as indifferent or too forceful teaching they will re-

tain this eagerness for it indefinitely.

3. Summary

It was pointed out at the beginning of this appendix that the fundamental skills and attitudes to be gained by blind children in a study of the violin were of a physical and mental character.

Under the physical such factors as stance, right and left hand and arm positions were considered while concerning the mental such factors as a need for continued interest and enthusiasm were pointed out. It was shown that with the sighted boy or girl visual experience plays a large part in the mastery of these difficulties whereas the blind child has to depend entirely upon his teacher for his information and training. Points which a sighted person might gain at a glance need to be carefully explained and demonstrated to his blind brother--not once but many times. He needs constantly to feel of the teacher's hands and arms and then gains but an imperfect and incomplete picture.

After having gained an idea of the skill to be learned, his task has just begun for he has to depend upon his memory for all of the music with which he comes in contact. This, as was pointed out, often results in discouragement and a feeling of frustration even before a fair beginning has been made.

It was further stated that working with individual pupils, as is common practice in the instruction of blind children, often results in a lack of interest. The suggest-

ions offered to offset these negative factors were (1) interesting material with a definite rhythmic pattern (2) a consideration of the psychology of the blind child (3) class lessons (4) frequent lesson periods (5) material not too difficult of memorization (6) material which moves forward but yet gives ample opportunity for physical manipulation.

In conclusion it was pointed out that experience has shown the blind child to love music and when his interest was stimulated by intelligent teaching this enthusiasm was apt to last indefinitely.

APPENDIX B

Violin teachers of the blind agree that there is little uniformity in methods of instructing violin to the blind. The following pages will attempt to point out the main points of difference between this suggested method and traditional practices as noted at the Michigan School for the Blind.

B. Differences between this Suggested Method and Traditional Practices

The main points of difference between this suggested method and former traditional practices are: (1) in the past all blind violin instruction was individual. This method assumes that pupils can be taught in groups. (2) Formerly no musical testing was done whatsoever. Pupils were chosen at random with little previous positive knowledge as to their ability. In order to insure the greatest efficiency in working with groups it is deemed necessary to have children of fairly equal musical talent and age. The Seashore musical aptitude tests for the blind will be used to give some indication in this respect. (3) In the past all blind pupils were required to have a fundamental knowledge of Braille music and some work on the piano before enrolling in the violin department. This method proposes to take them at a younger age than formerly regardless of previous musical training. Braille music does not come into the picture at all until a good foundation for handling and playing the violin has been attained. (4) This method assumes that a mechanical device known as the bow guide will be found most beneficial in the formation of skillful bowing habits.[20]

[20] It has long been agreed among violin teachers of the blind that the most difficult skill for a beginning blind child to acquire is that of drawing the bow across the strings of the instrument. While the problem has always been recognized, nothing has been done to solve it up until the present. The bow guide not only eliminates this difficulty but cuts down the time necessary to learn bowing. (See illustration Figure I page 13.)

(5) In the past the violin was taught string by string in working with beginners. This proposed method assumes the violin to be a single unit and proposes to introduce all of the strings at once by the use of scales. (6) Due to the temporary delay of introducing Braille music this method will depend entirely upon the rote system of presentation. It is further assumed that once literary Braille is acquired (which the child gets in his regular school work) musical Braille will follow as a matter of course, being but a fairly simple adaptation of the former. To introduce them both at the same time has caused confusion and discouragement. To wait until the child has learned both results in a waste of time.

APPENDIX C

A. A Suggested Teaching Procedure for Blind Children

1. Introduction

The following exercises were used in their entirety by group A. Groups B and C began at the folk songs, having previously used C. H. Hohmann Book I for their string by string foundation.

It will be noted that these exercises follow a definite rhythmic and melodic pattern thus making for greater ease in presentation and memorization. At the conclusion of these studies the average blind child is ready to begin the study of Book I by Franz Wohlfahrt.

2. Explanation of Signs and Terms

	Down Bow
V	Up Bow
w.b.	Whole Bow
h.b.	Half Bow
X	Half Tone Intervals(fingers close together)
0	Open String (no fingers down)
1	First Finger Down
2	Second Finger Down
3	Third Finger Down
4	Fourth Finger Down
sp.	The Point of the Bow
fr.	The Large End of the Bow
I	First String E
II	Second String A
III	Third String D
IV	Fourth String G

3. Exercises

The exercises given on the following pages are a few which have been used successfully with beginning blind pupils.

The following explanations should serve to clarify them.

Exercise I.

1. This exercise is practiced without the bow.
2. The fingers represented by whole notes are held down continuously.
3. The identical procedure is repeated on each string separately.
4. The fingers should move with vigor.
5. The "Piano Trill" method should be used also i.e., raising the fingers represented by eighth notes, simultaneously.

Exercise II.

1. This exercise is also practiced without the bow.
2. Each string should be taken up in turn.
3. The same directions apply as in Exercise I.
4. Care should be taken on the half and whole steps.

EXERCISE III.

Section A.

This exercise is played in unison with full bows and deals with whole notes. It should be introduced by an explanation that whole notes are of four equal beat duration. The pupils should first tap the time values accenting each first beat. Position is then stressed as well as correct movement of the bow. Counting is done aloud and the entire arm should go up or down in making the changes from string to string. This exercise is repeated daily for one month.

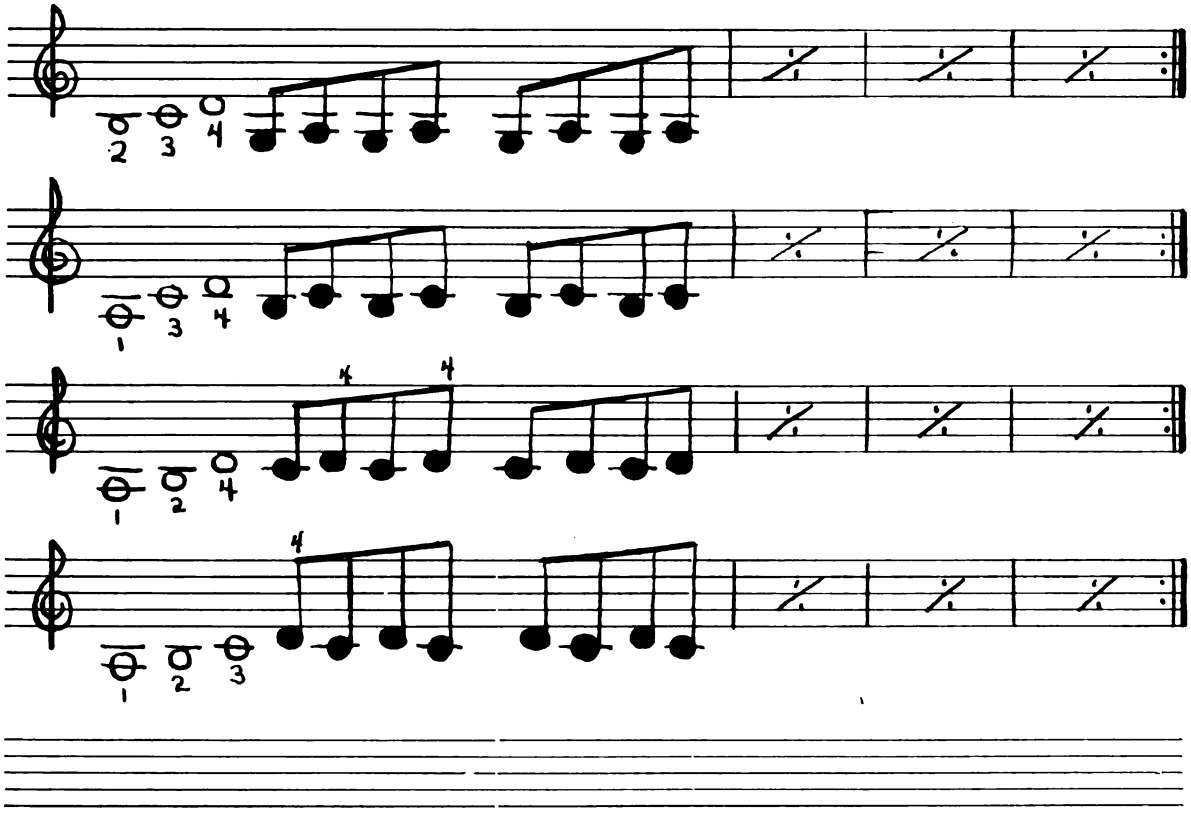
Section B.

The same exercise in half notes. The same directions should be observed as in the preceding study with the exception of the counting which should be slower. A slight pause while changing from string to string will help in placing the bow in position. Ten minutes daily should be allowed for the first two weeks in the repetition of these exercises.

Section C.

Combining half and whole notes and the execution of two strings at the same time. This exercise should be played very slowly and with firm bows. Repeat each part ten times daily.

EXERCISE I.



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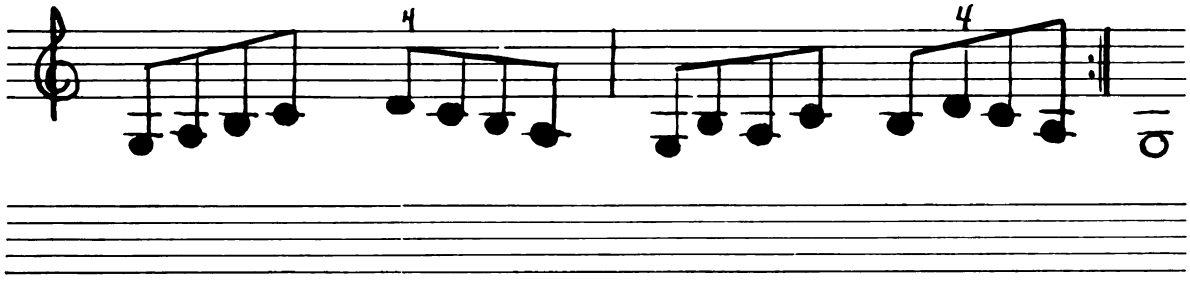
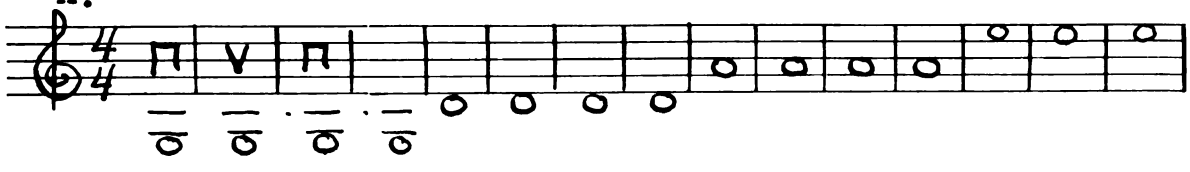


EXERCISE III.

A.



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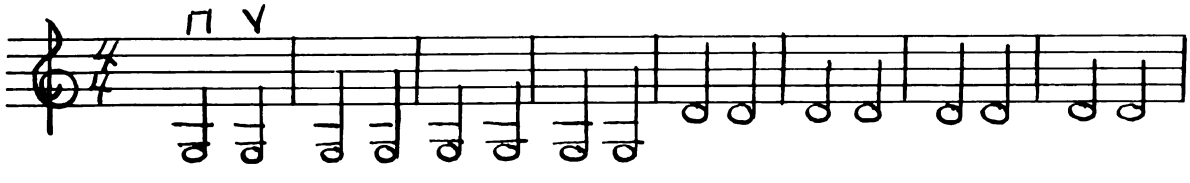
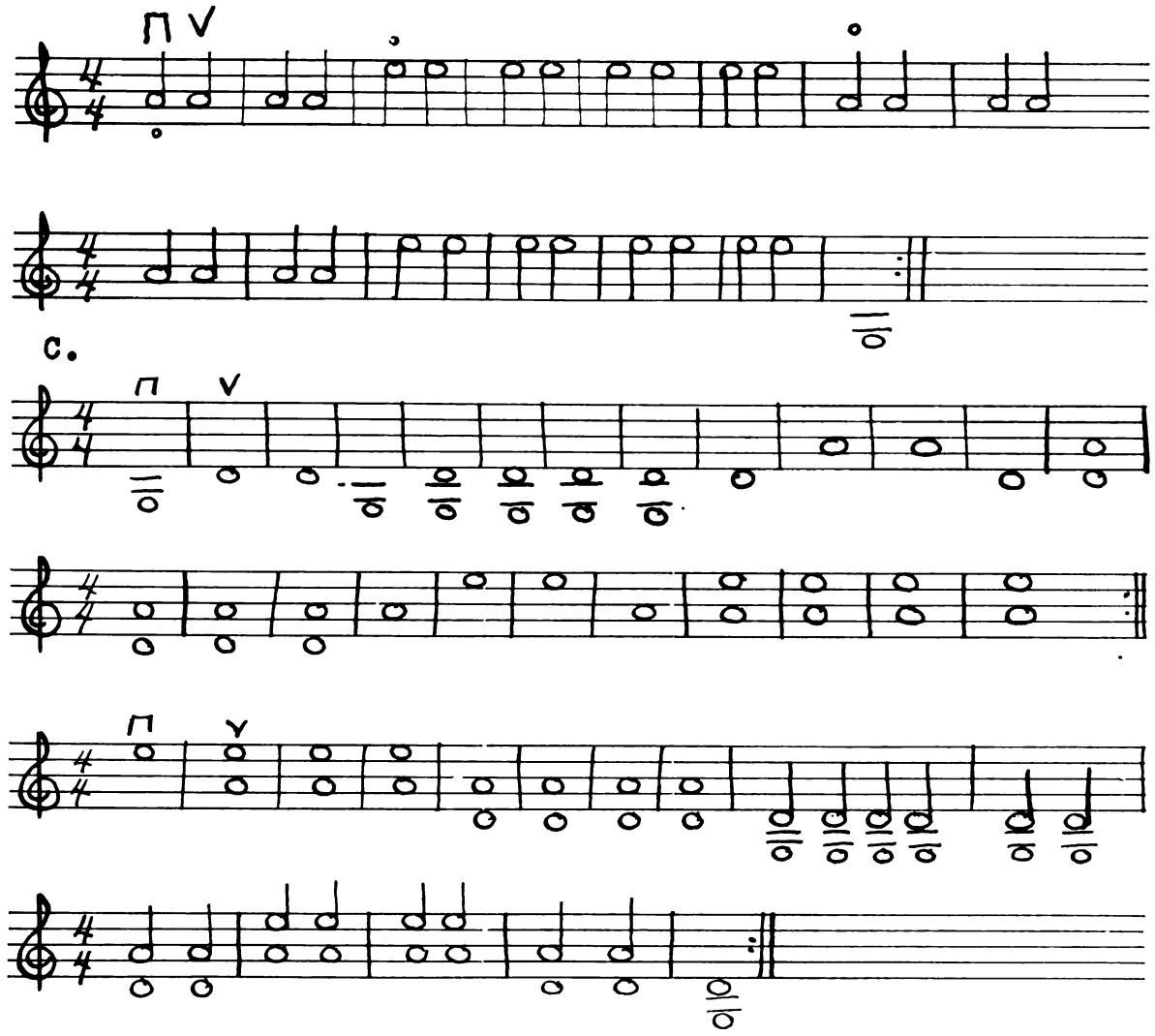
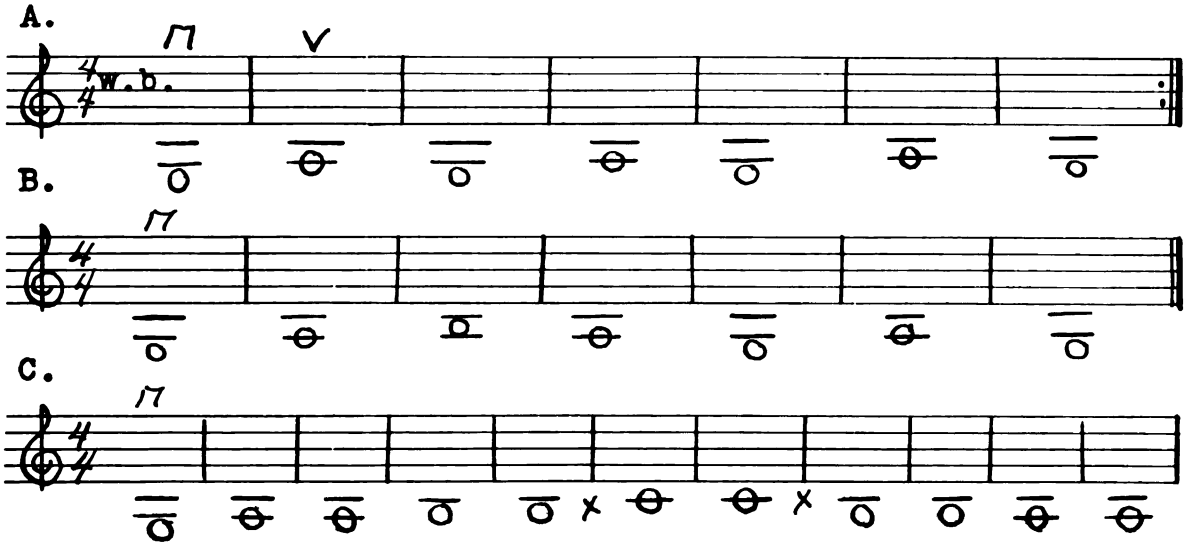


EXERCISE IV. DEVELOPING THE "C" SCALE

Care should be taken that the fingers are correctly spaced for the whole and half tones. On the half tone intervals the fingers should be close together as possible. Counting should be done aloud. This exercise will require one week.



EXERCISE IV. DEVELOPING THE "C" SCALE



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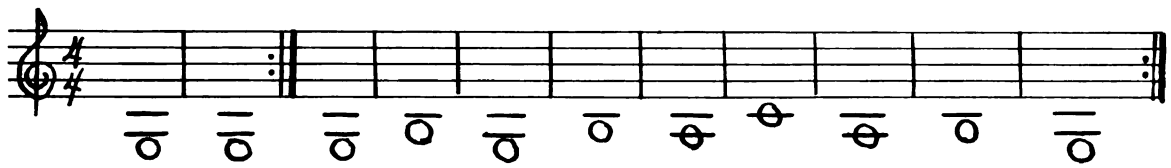
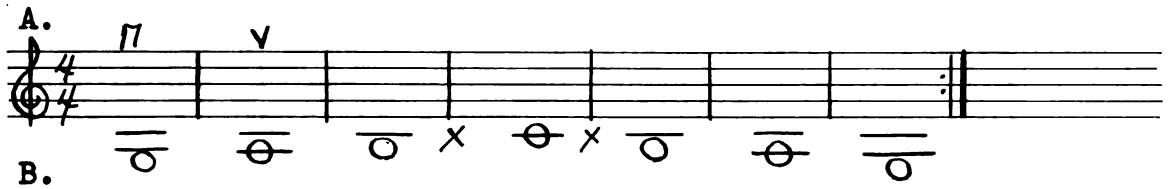


EXERCISE V. CONTINUATION OF THE "C" SCALE

A.



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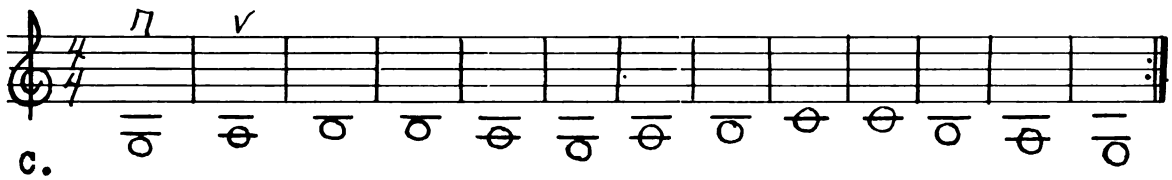

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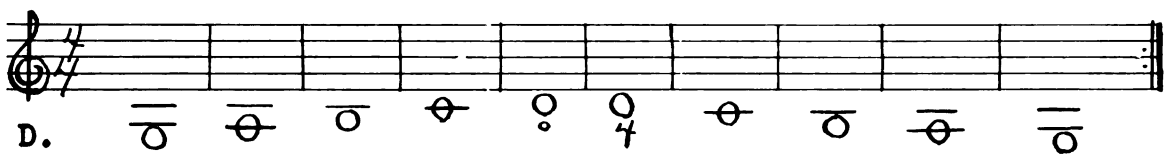

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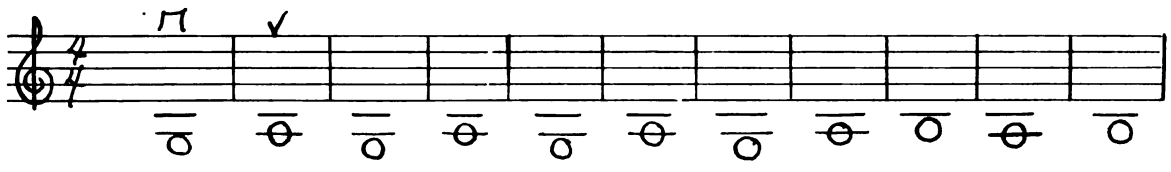

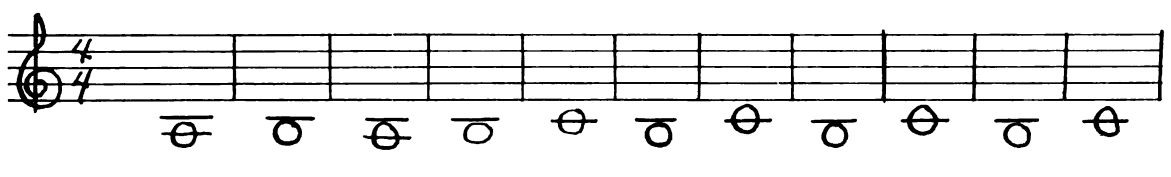

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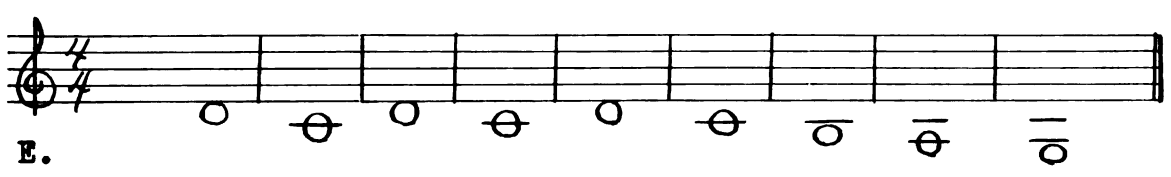
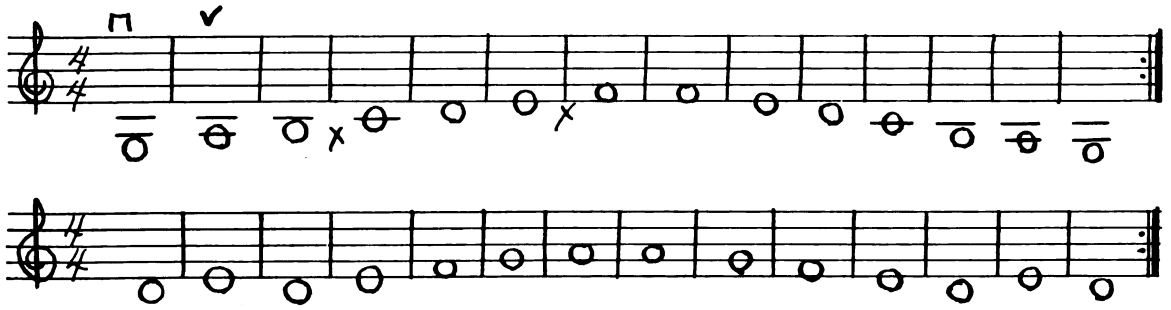
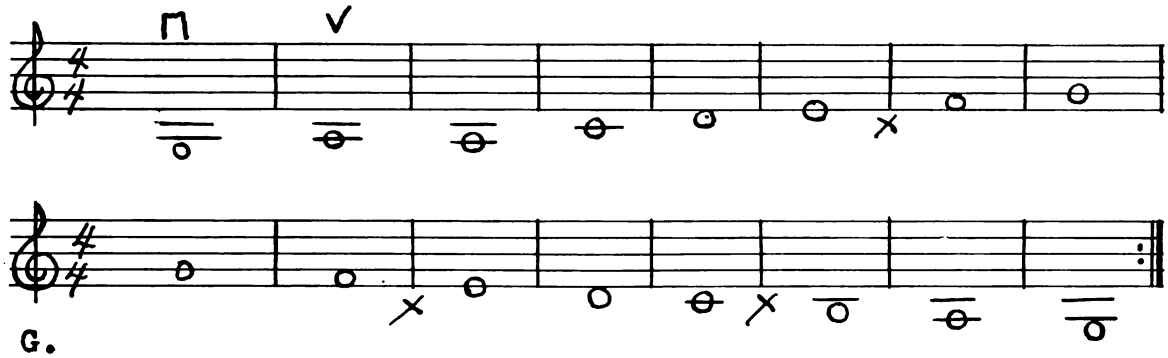




EXERCISE VI. QUARTER NOTES.

This time value is best introduced by comparison with familiar time values. The pupils should clap their hands lightly to whole notes accenting the first beat of each measure. Half notes, it is known, are whole notes cut in two pieces. The accent falls on every other beat. In the case of quarter notes the whole note is merely cut into four equal pieces and the accent occurs on every beat. Counting should be stressed and care should be taken for correct finger placement on the whole and half steps.

F.



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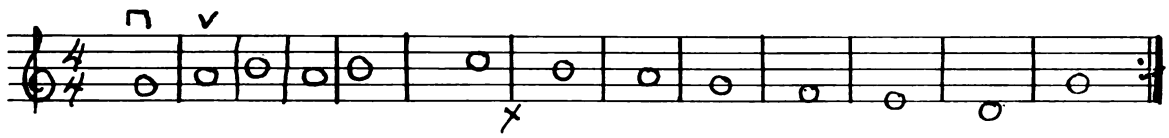

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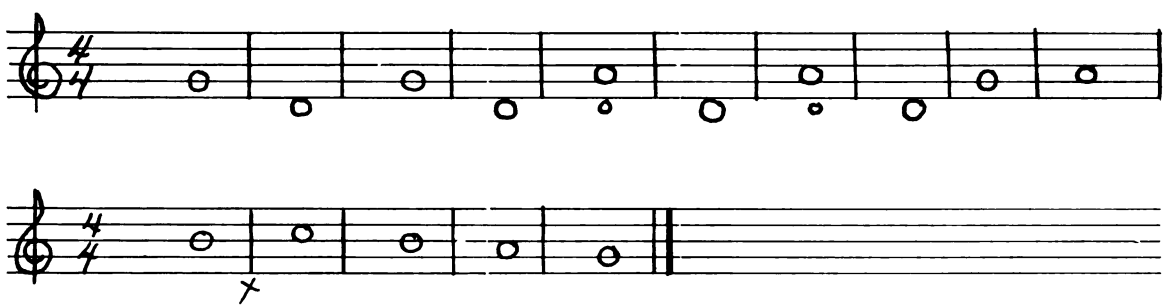
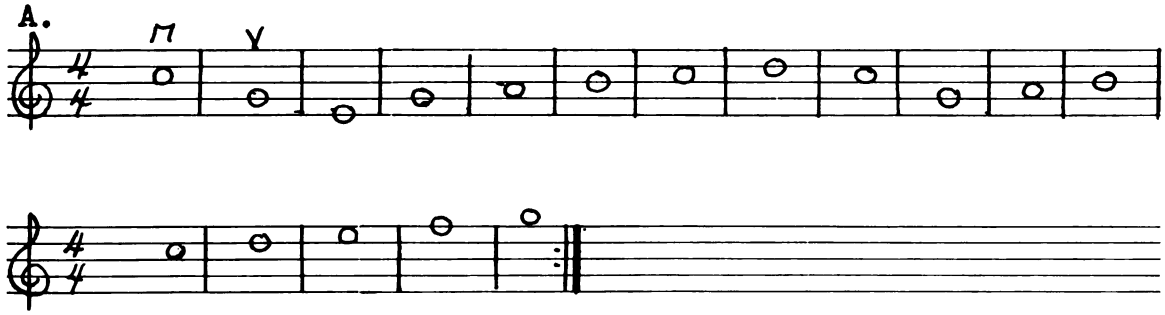


EXERCISE VI. QUARTER NOTES.

A.



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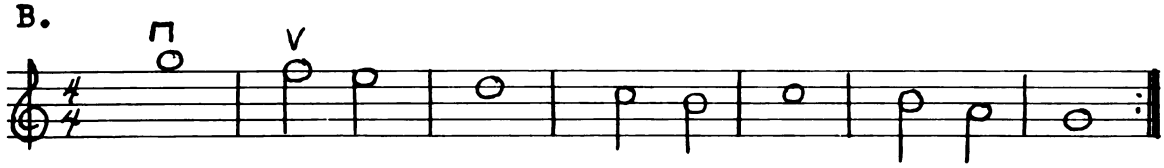

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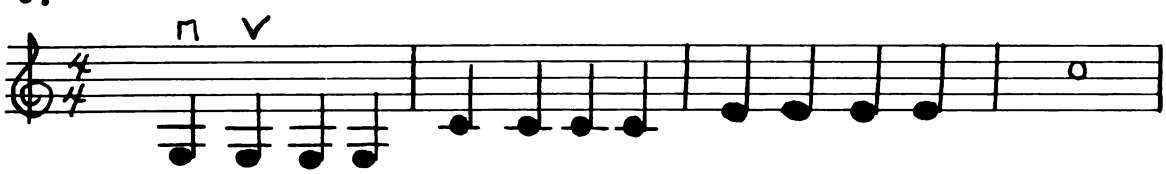
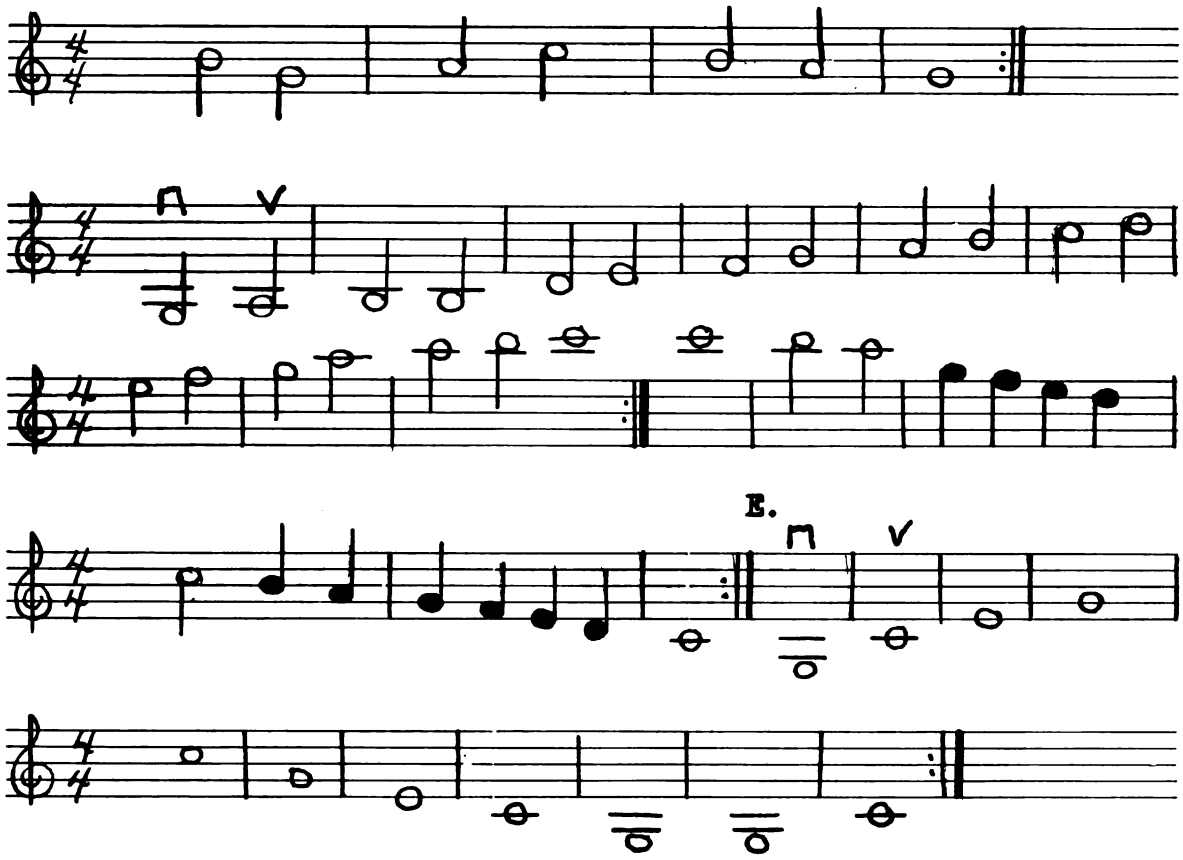


EXERCISE VII. RESTS AND SLURS

A. Rests are explained as being examples of where the pupil counts rather than plays. The counting should be done aloud and the bow retained on the string. Rests can be of different duration of time.

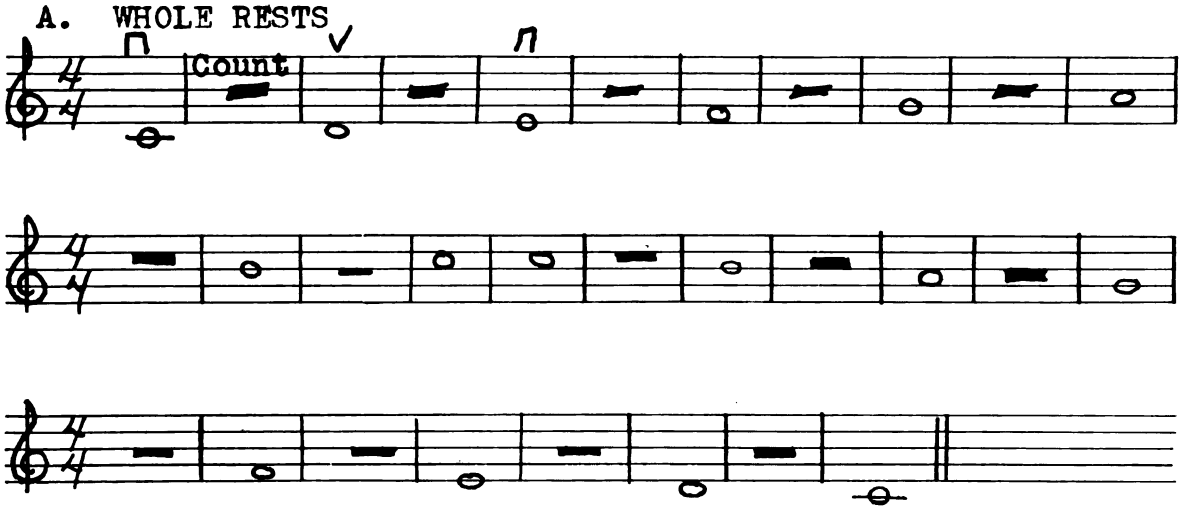
B. Slurs connect two or more notes on a single bow.



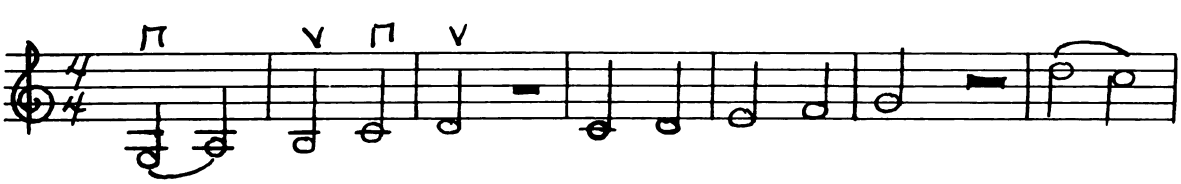
E.

EXERCISE VII. RESTS AND SLURS

A. WHOLE RESTS



B. HALF RESTS



EXERCISE VIII. FOLK SONGS.

This unit introduces easy selections covering all of the material that has been gone over so far. The pieces are learned by rote during the class lesson period and are played in unison. Folk material is used in that it is familiar for the most part and has a definite rhythmic beat. Deems Taylor,[21] the eminent music critic has to say in this connection:

> "Let the folk songs be his main diet. They are the ideal form of music for young children. In the first place they are good music, for the simple reason that music possessing vitality enough to last through many generations is bound to have some merit. Second, they are easy to grasp and to remember; for they are airs that have passed from mouth to mouth for centuries. They have been worn smooth by constant handling, so that the awkward and difficult phrases have been simplified. Third, they are the purest form of music--unadorned and unaccompanied melody. Any child who has grown up on folk songs has a musical background that he need never discard and of which he need never be ashamed. He will find these friends of his infancy embedded in the works of Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, Tschaikowsky, Rimsky-Korsakoff and a dozen other symphonic writers."

Continue to count aloud. Watch the position of the violin. Use ample bow. Keep the fingers together on the half steps.

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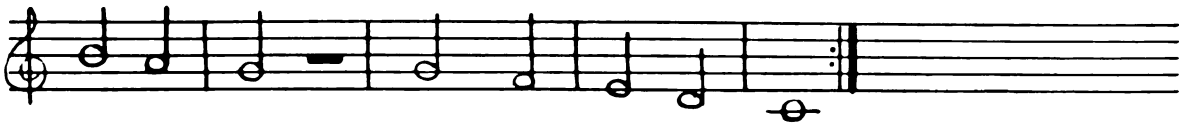
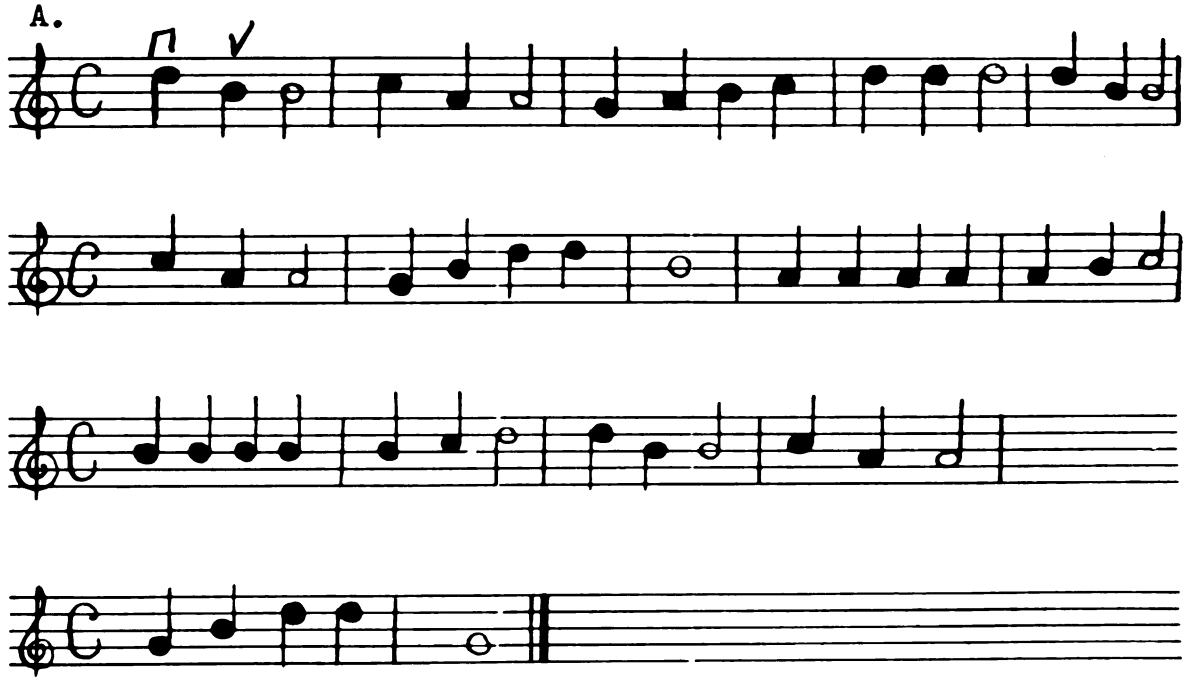
[21] Deems Taylor, Of Men and Music. New York: Simon and Schuster Company. 1937. Pp.276.



EXERCISE VIII. FOLK SONGS.

A.



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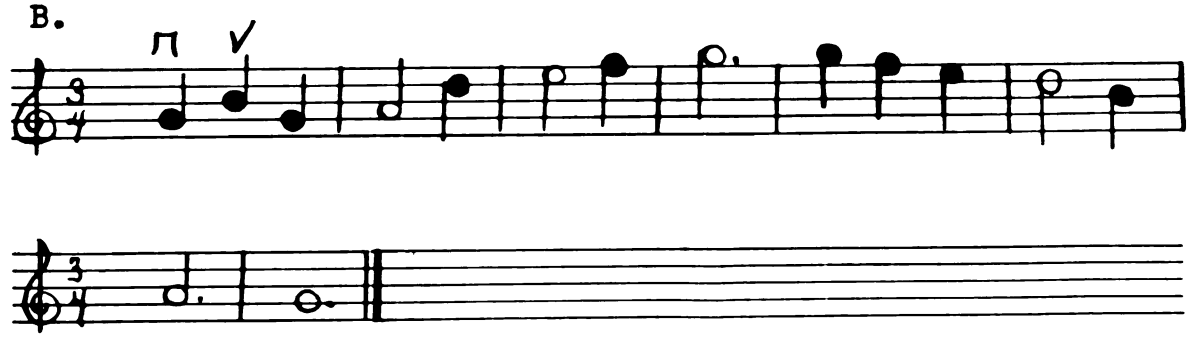

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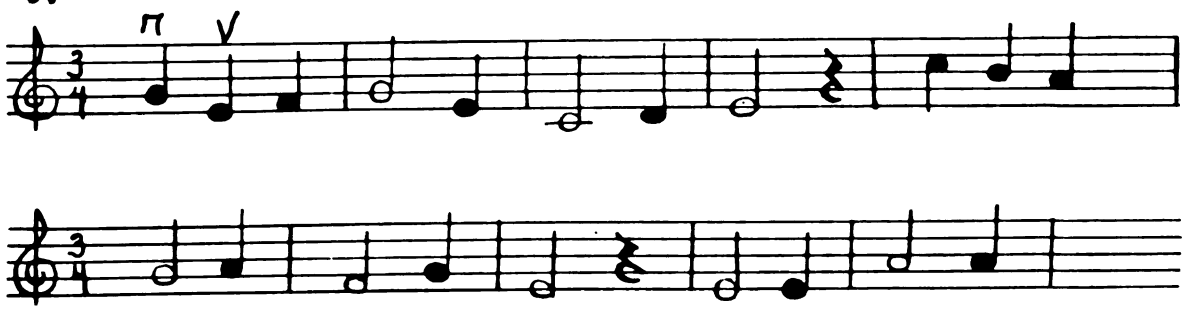
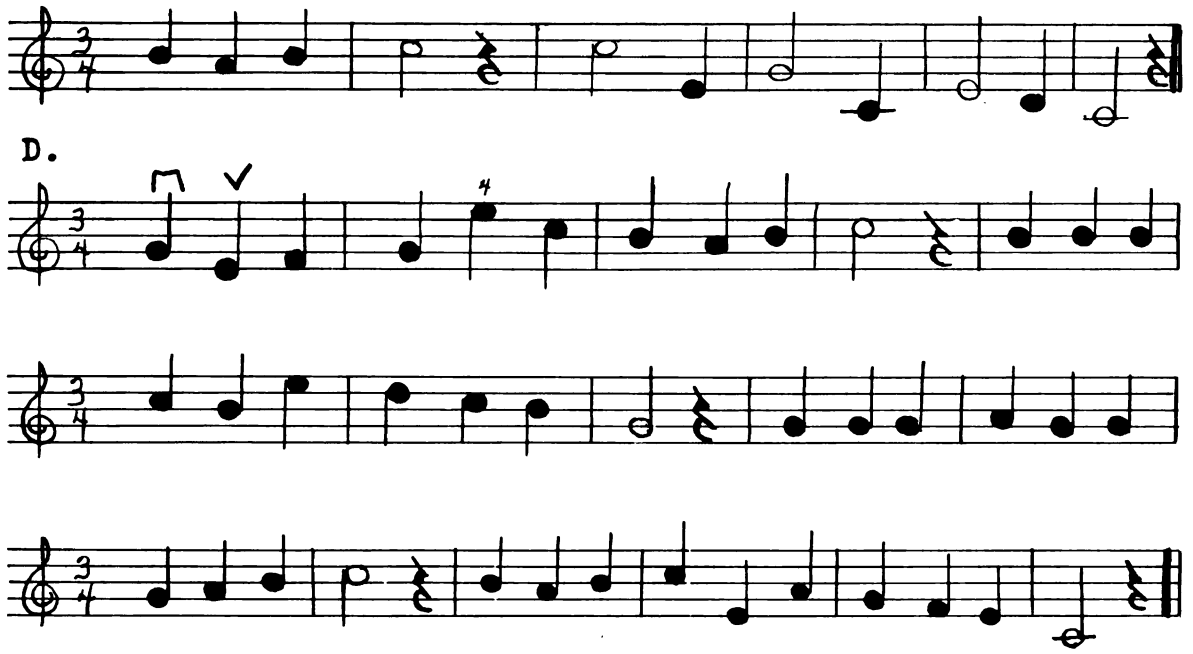


EXERCISE IX. EIGHTH NOTES.

Eighth notes can be explained as a continuation of the breaking up of time values. In other words, quarter notes broken into two equal pieces. These values should be introduced by means of quarter beats. These beats should first be tapped as quarters, then the time is doubled in speed for the eighth note values.



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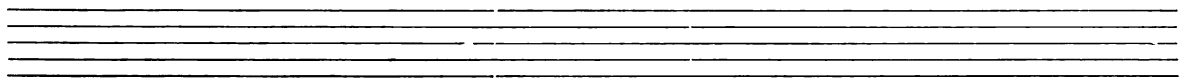
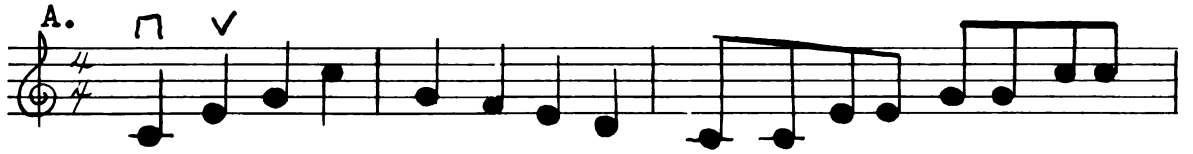
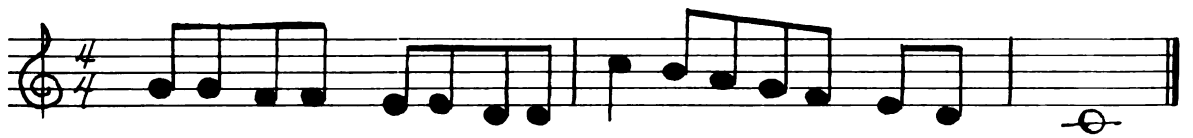
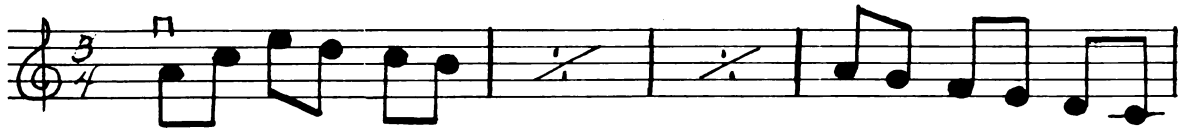


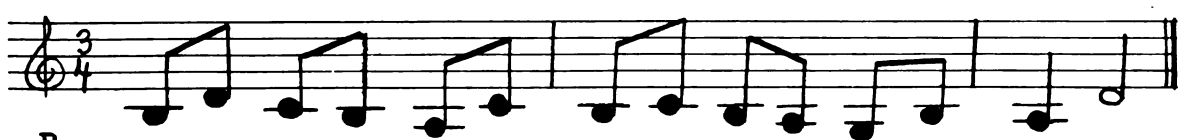
EXERCISE IX. EIGHTH NOTES.

A.









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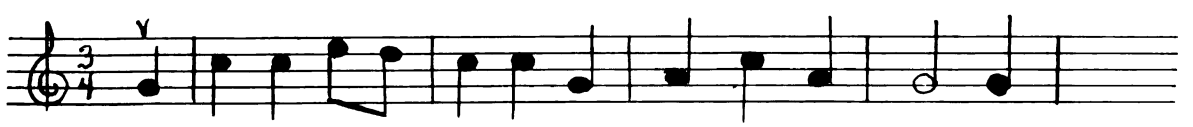
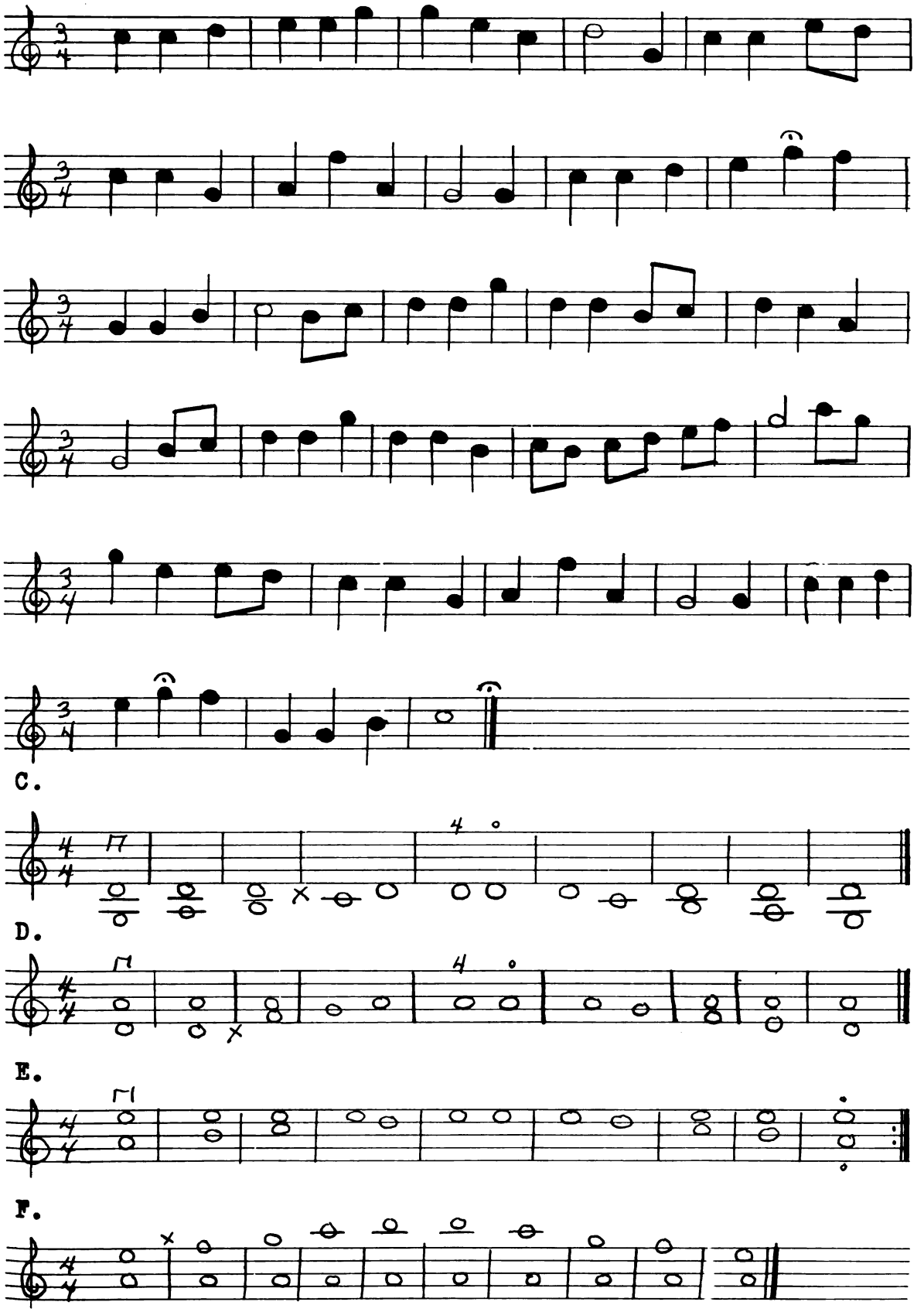


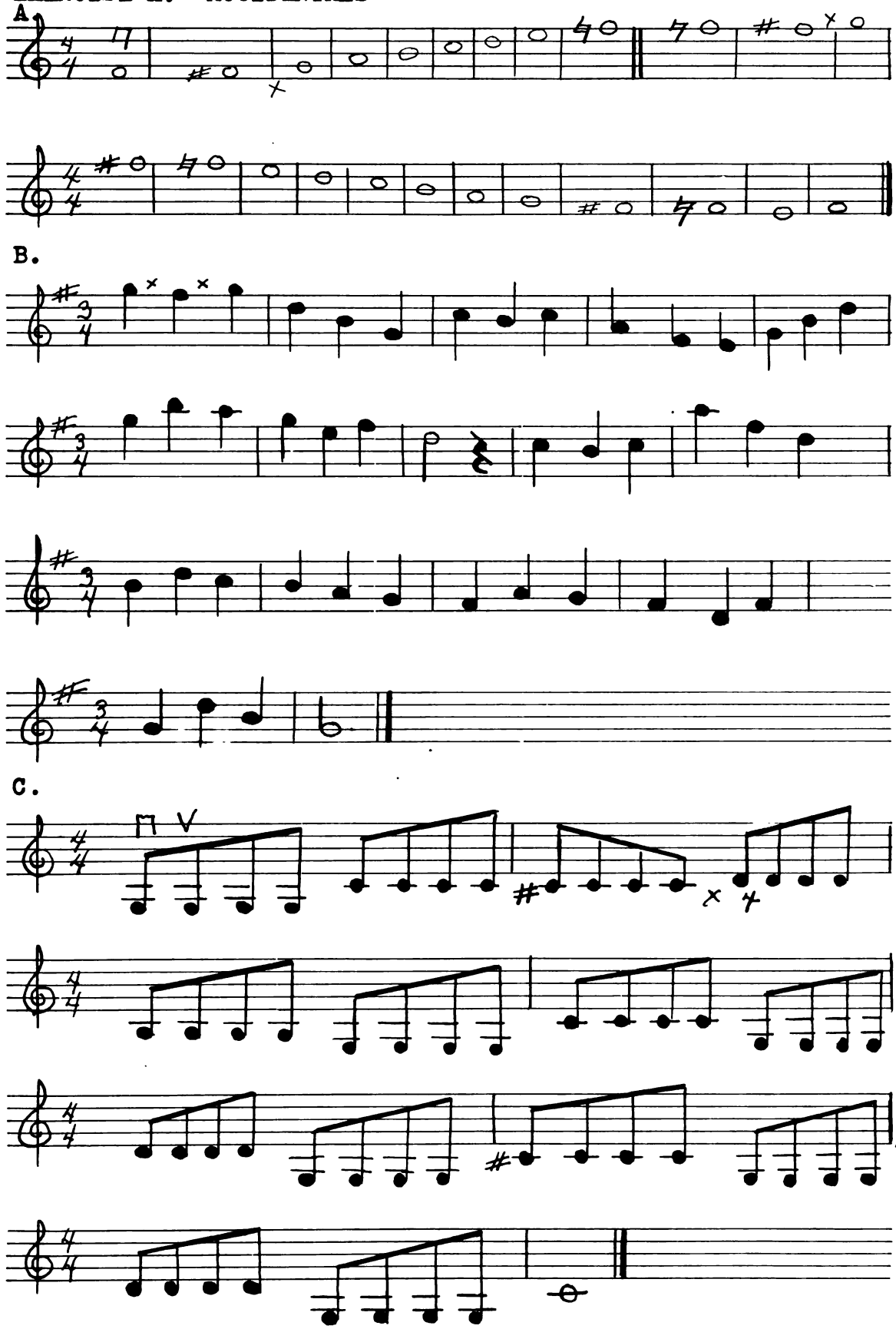

C.
D.
E.
F.

EXERCISE X. ACCIDENTALS

These notes are produced by moving the finger either forward or backward, as required by either sharps or flats.

They should first be practiced without the use of the bow. The finger tips should be close together on the bars marked with an X.

EXERCISE X. ACCIDENTALS



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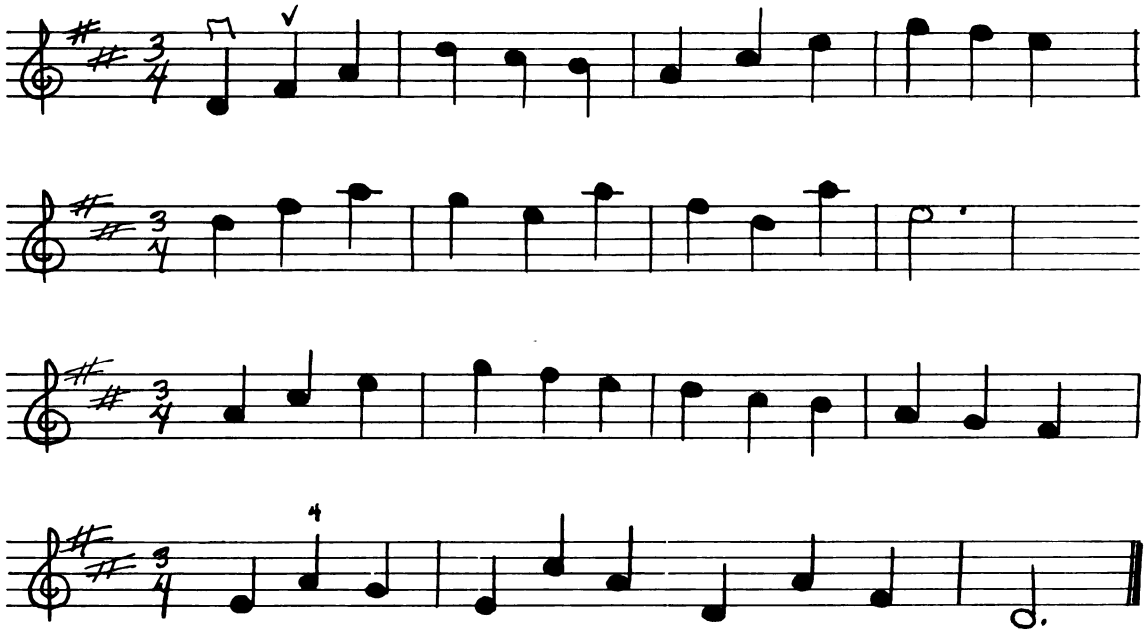

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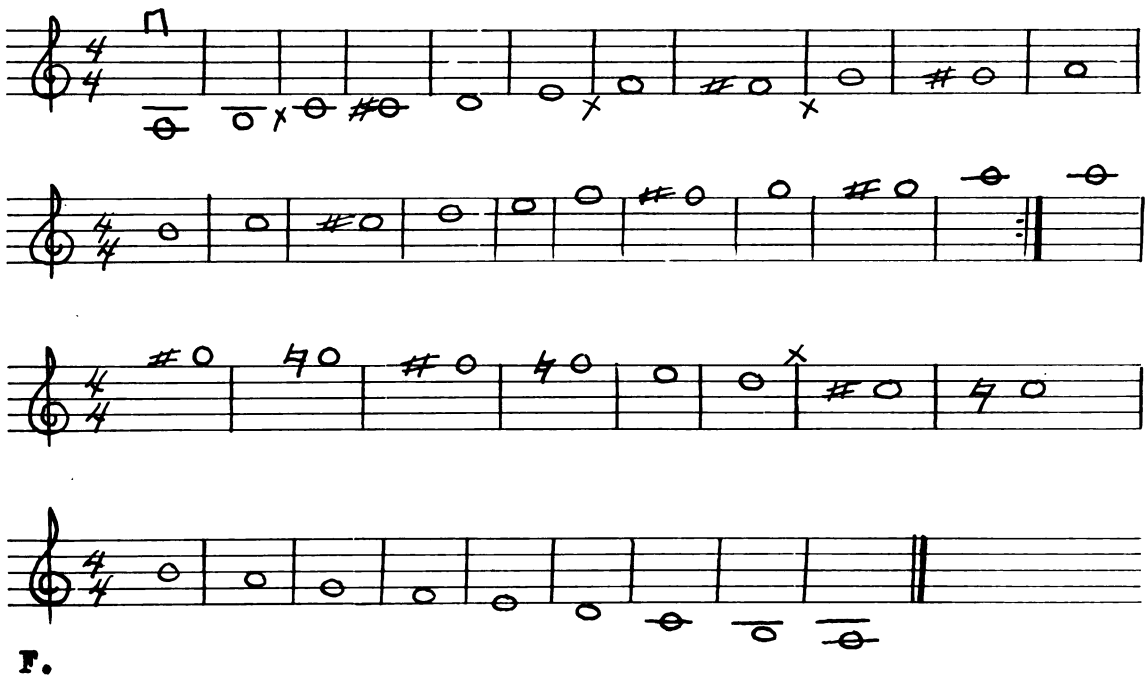
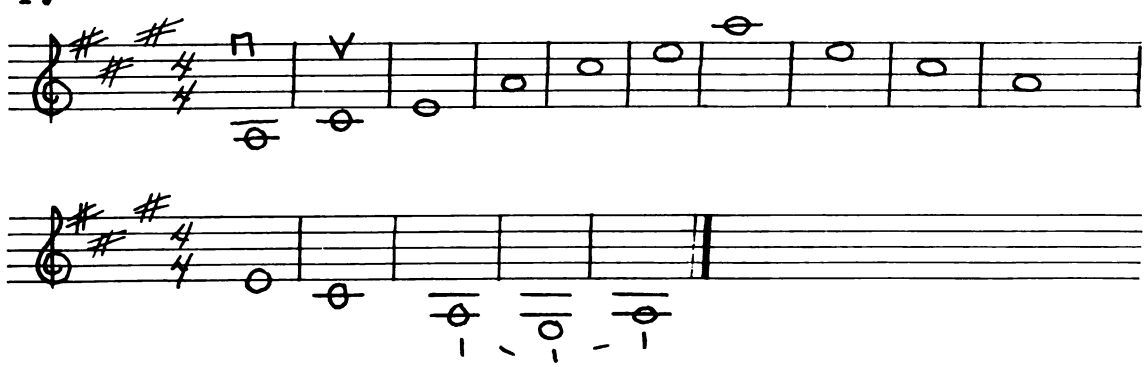
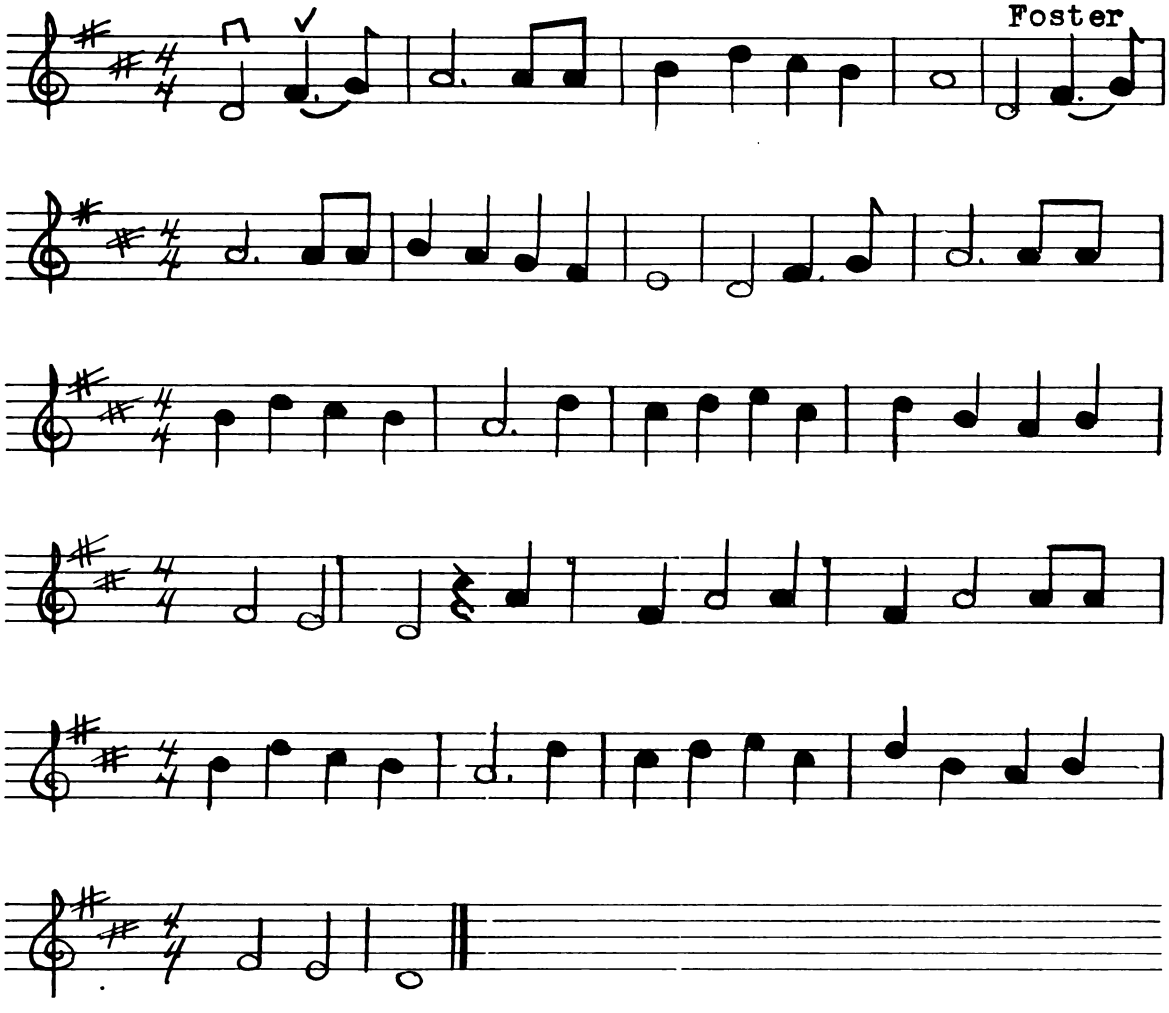


F.



G. OLD BLACK JOE

Foster



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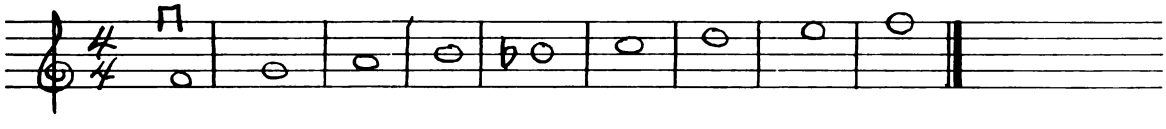
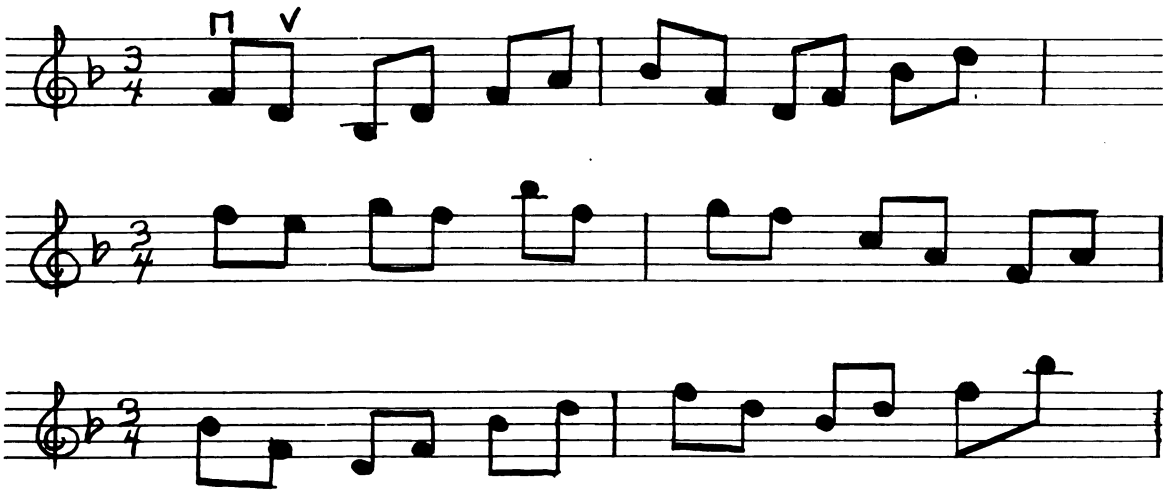
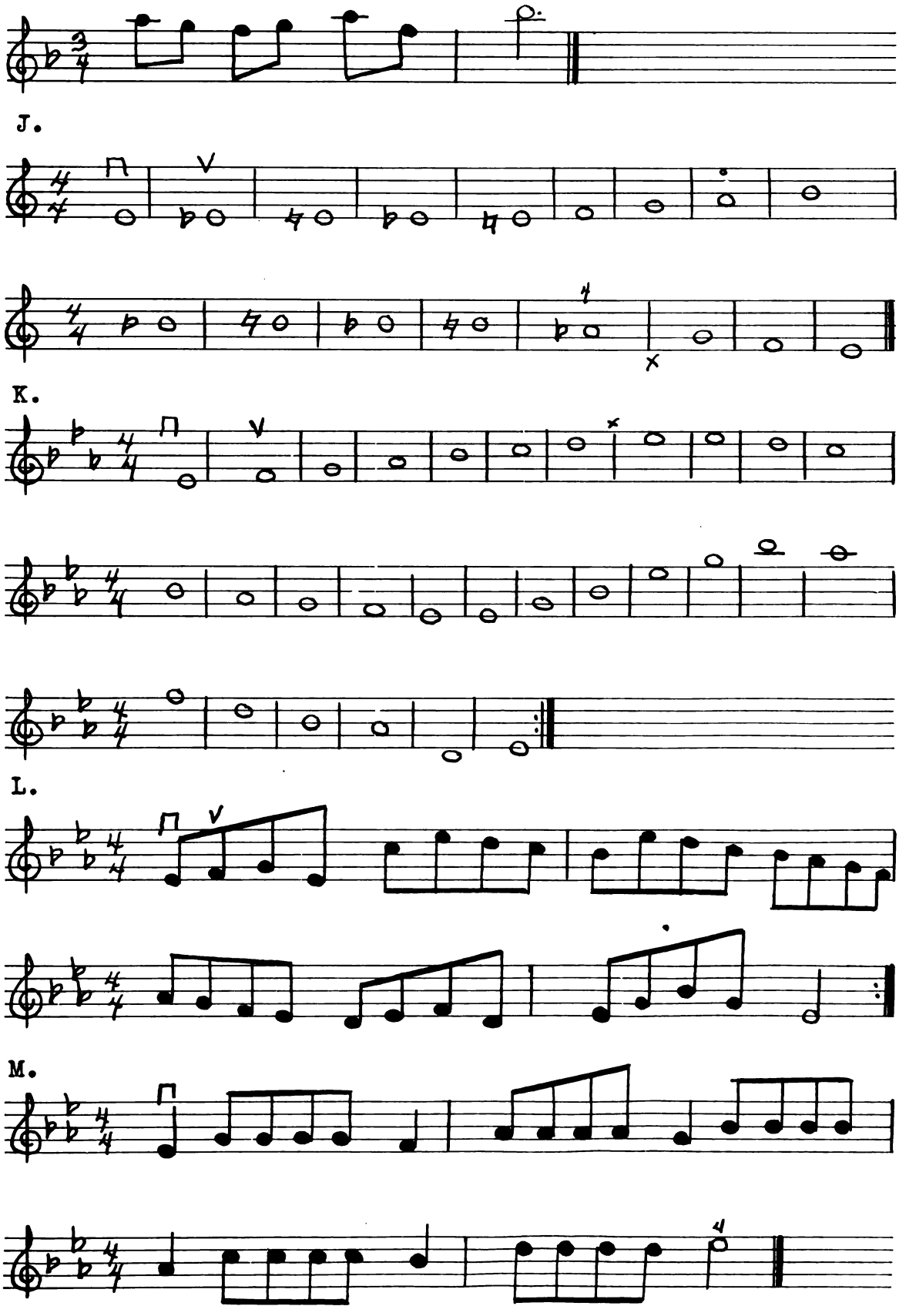
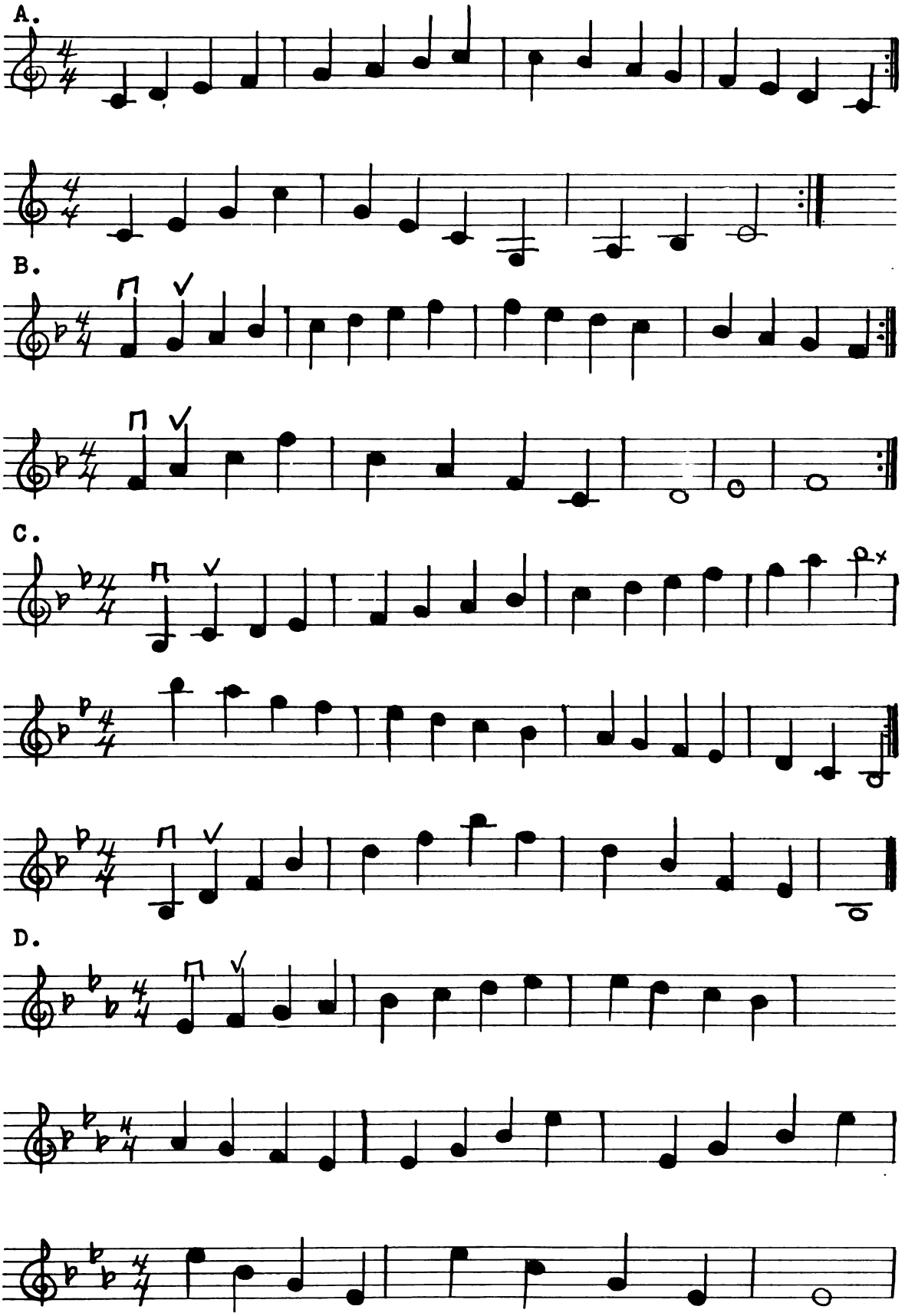


I.




J.
K.
L.
M.

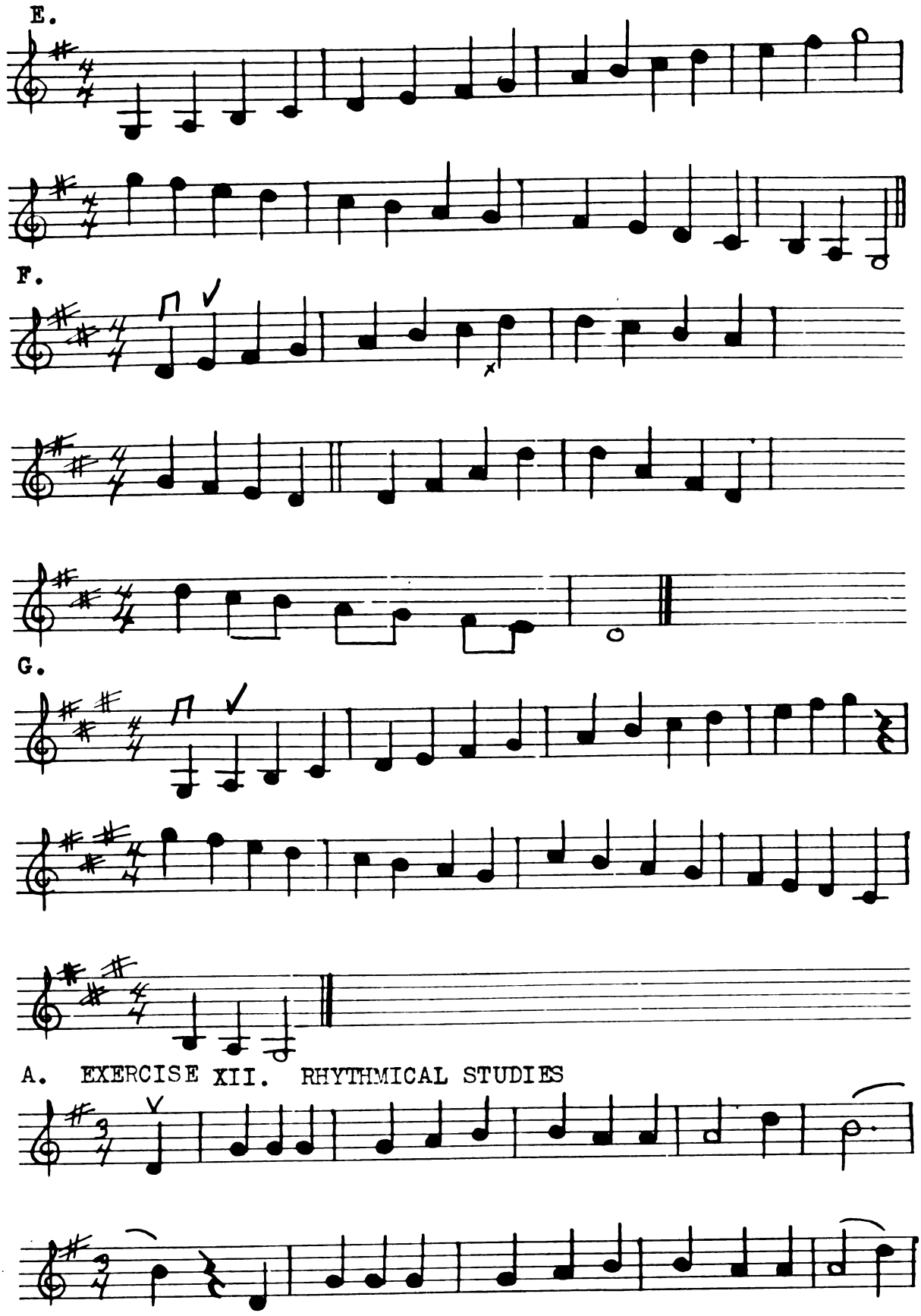
EXERCISE XI. SCALES AND ARPEGGIOS



EXERCISE XII. RHYTHMICAL STUDIES

Sixteenth notes are introduced in the same way as the preceding time values.

With the completion of the following chapter it will be found that the blind pupils have a sufficient foundation in violin technique to begin the study of Wohlfahrt Book I.


E.
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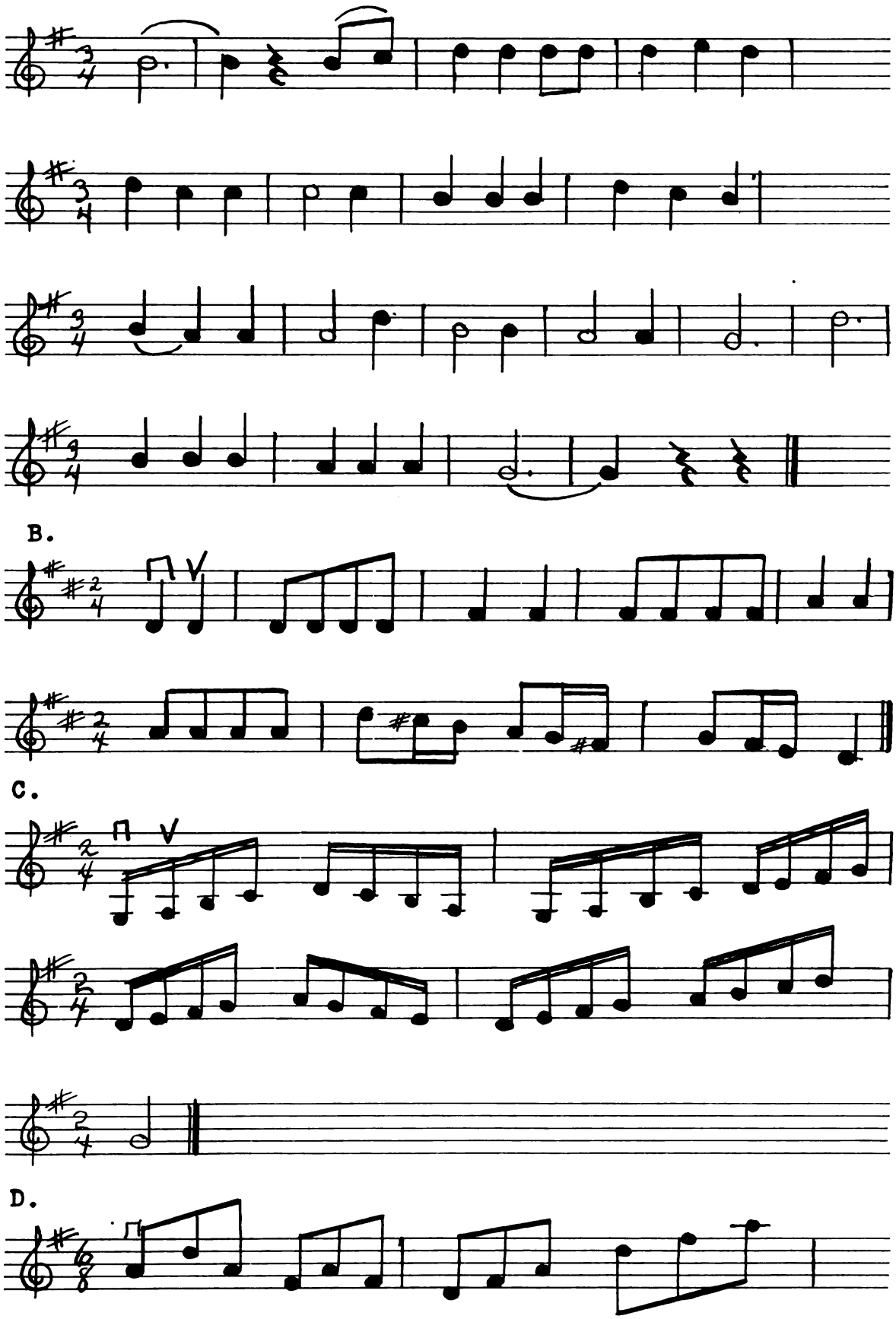
G.
A. EXERCISE XII. RHYTHMICAL STUDIES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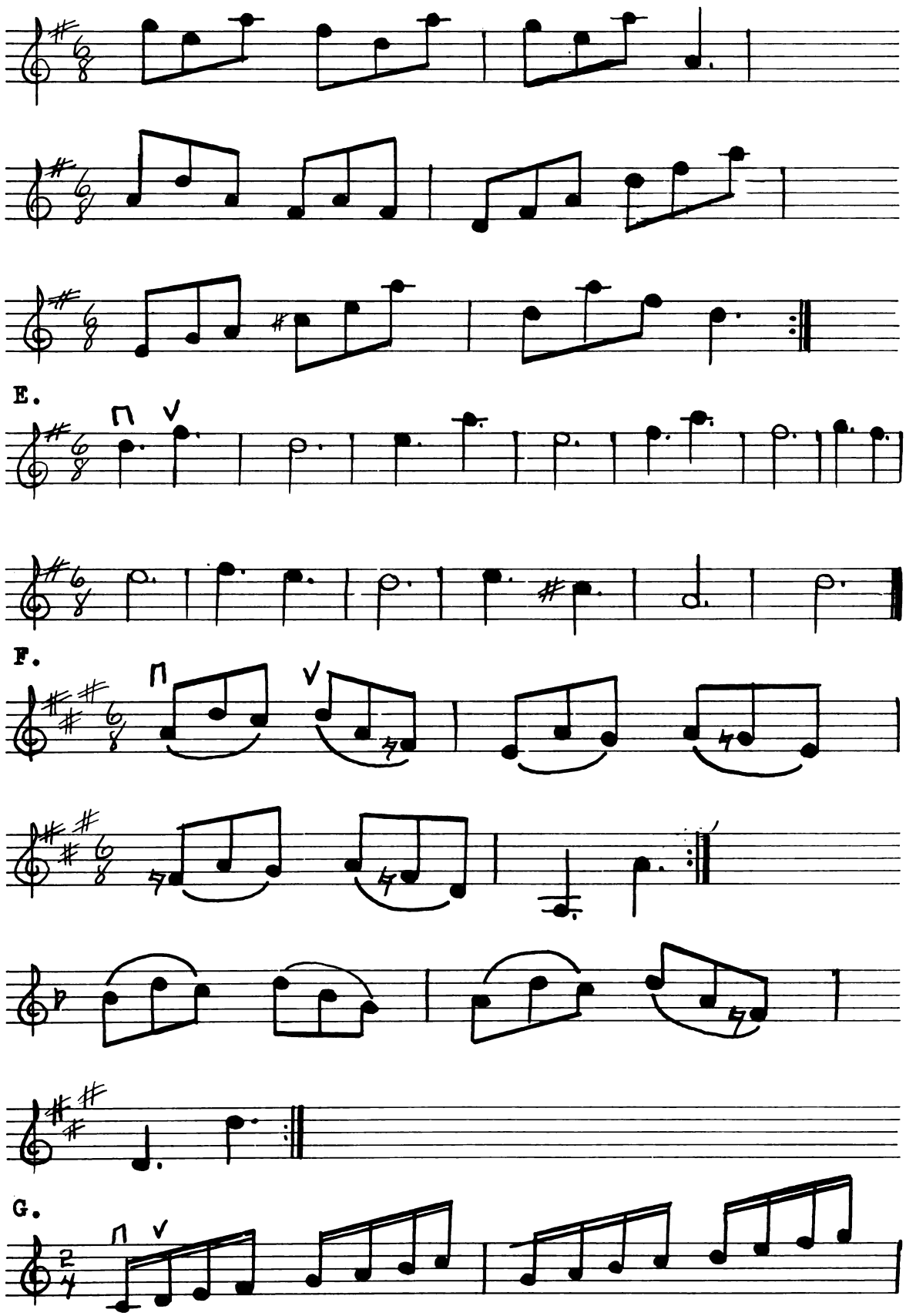
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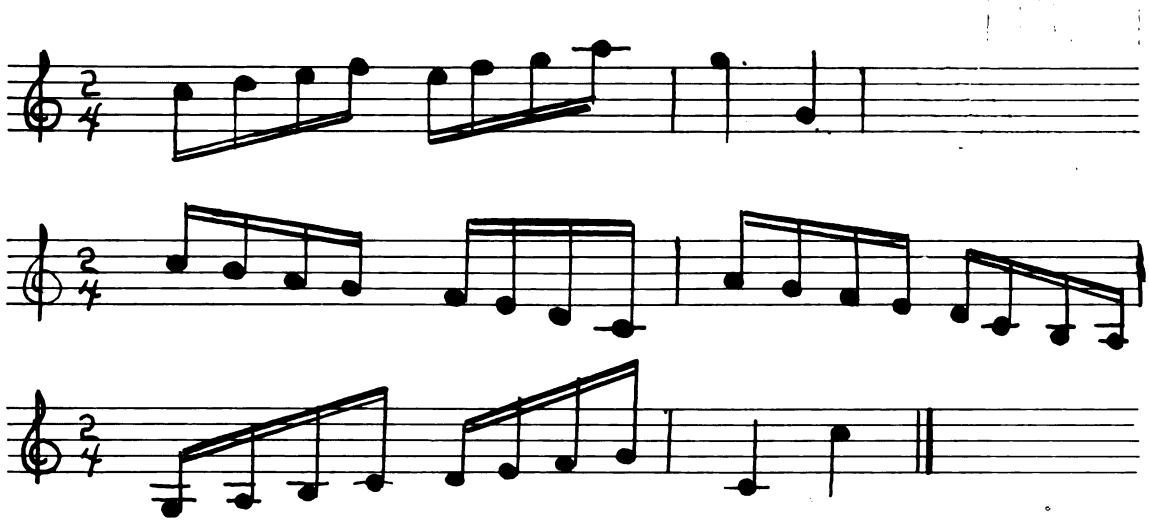

THE END