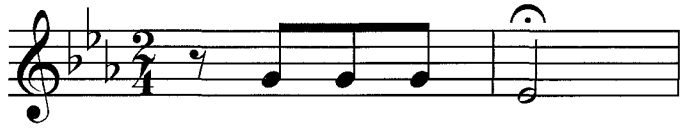
# *Basic Forms of Music—Motive and Phrase*

Writing begins with the most basic unit—a letter of the alphabet. Letters are then combined into words, then sentences, paragraphs, chapters, and finally into larger works.

Similarly, music begins with a basic unit—the note. It is then combined into larger and larger melodic and/or rhythmic units, until a song or piece is created. Understanding the basic forms of music helps to understand how a composition is organized and structured.

A MOTIVE is a short melodic, rhythmic or harmonic element that is used repeatedly throughout a piece. Most music is based on the development and expansion of one or more motives. Perhaps the most well-known motive in classical music is the four note pattern used in the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5:



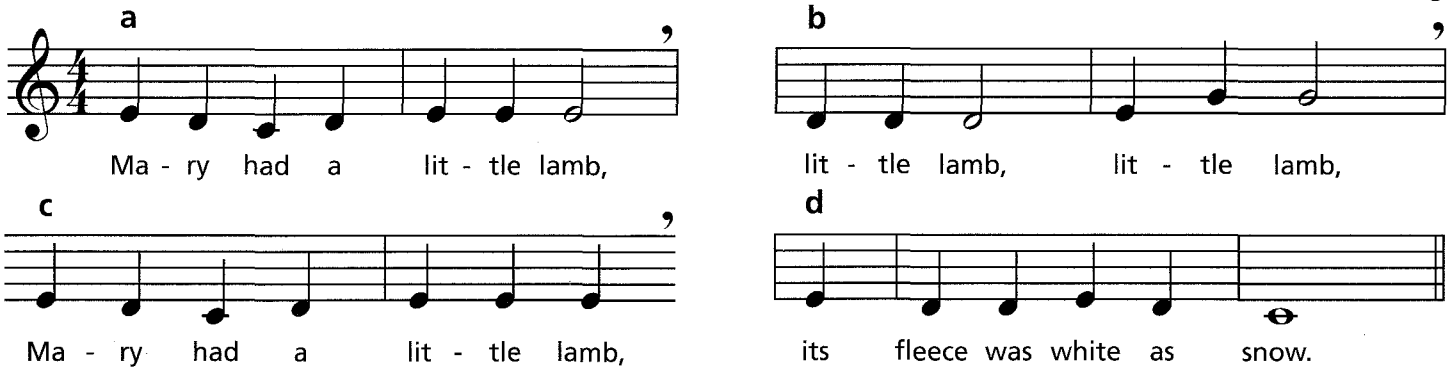
After its introduction, this melodic motive is used repeatedly in its original form, then later in transposition and other variations. The rhythmic pattern of this motive also appears as a motive in the 3rd and 4th movements.

A PHRASE is a short section of music that may be either a complete or incomplete musical idea. A phrase may contain one or more motives in their original form(s) or in some variation.

When one is speaking, the end of a phrase occurs when the speaker takes a breath, usually at a comma — there is a moment of pause. The end of a musical phrase provides a "lift" or breath for the instrumentalist or singer.

To demonstrate the way a phrase works, say the words of the following song, taking a breath (,) or pause at the end of each section.

**Mary Had a Little Lamb** Traditional Folk Song



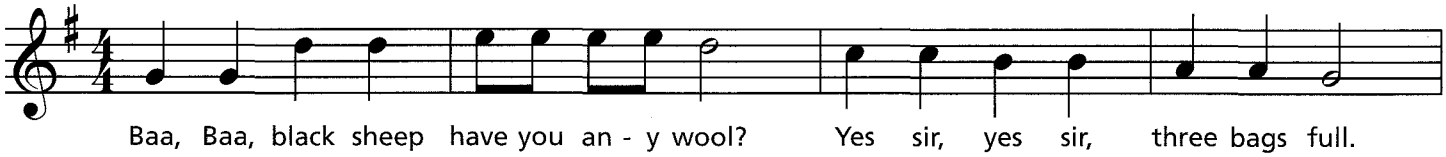

Each breath or pause was the end of a phrase. Now sing the rhyme and notice that the phrases of the music match those of the text.

# *Exercises*

**1** Which two phrases are similar in "Mary Had a Little Lamb?" #1, #3.

**2** Circle the number of phrases in the following example: 1 (2) 3 4

**Baa, Baa Black Sheep** American Folk Song



# A B (Binary) Form

In music, several phrases can be combined to form a complete section (or part). In TWO-PART FORMS, called AB (or BINARY FORM), the musical material of the first (or A) section contrasts with the second (or B) section. Sometimes the two sections may share a motive or end similarly, but each section is musically distinct from the other.

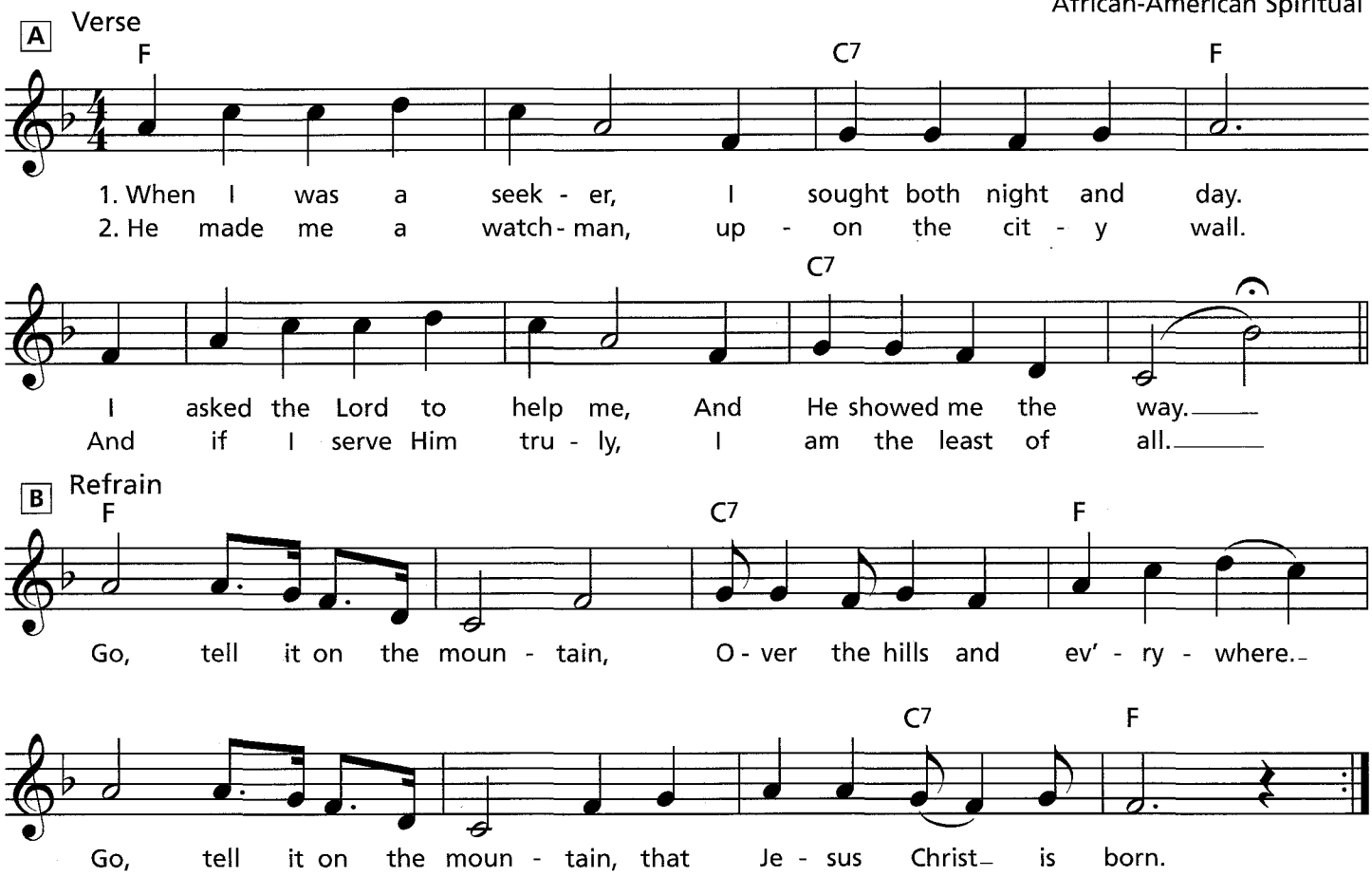
Variety and contrast is achieved in each section through differences in many *elements* such as melody, rhythm, harmony, time signature and tempo. For instance, in "Go, Tell It On the Mountain," the first measure of the A section features an ascending melody with quarter notes, as compared with measure 1 of the B section which has a descending melody and a rhythm of a half note, dotted 8ths and 16th notes.

The melodic and rhythmic contrasts continue throughout each section. The time signature remains the same for the two sections and the harmony is similar, differing primarily in the final chord of each section.

"Go, Tell It On the Mountain" is an example of AB form.

**Go, Tell It On the Mountain**

African-American Spiritual




A VERSE is a section of a song that tells a story and changes with each repetition, which is followed by the REFRAIN (or CHORUS), a section of a song that is repeated after each verse. The song format of verse and refrain is typical of AB form.

# Exercises

**1** Circle the letter of the refrain section of "Go, Tell It On the Mountain." A (B)

**2** Circle the letter of the verse section of "Go, Tell It On the Mountain" that ends on a $V^7$ chord. (A) B

**3** Name two elements that make the music of the A section different from the B section:

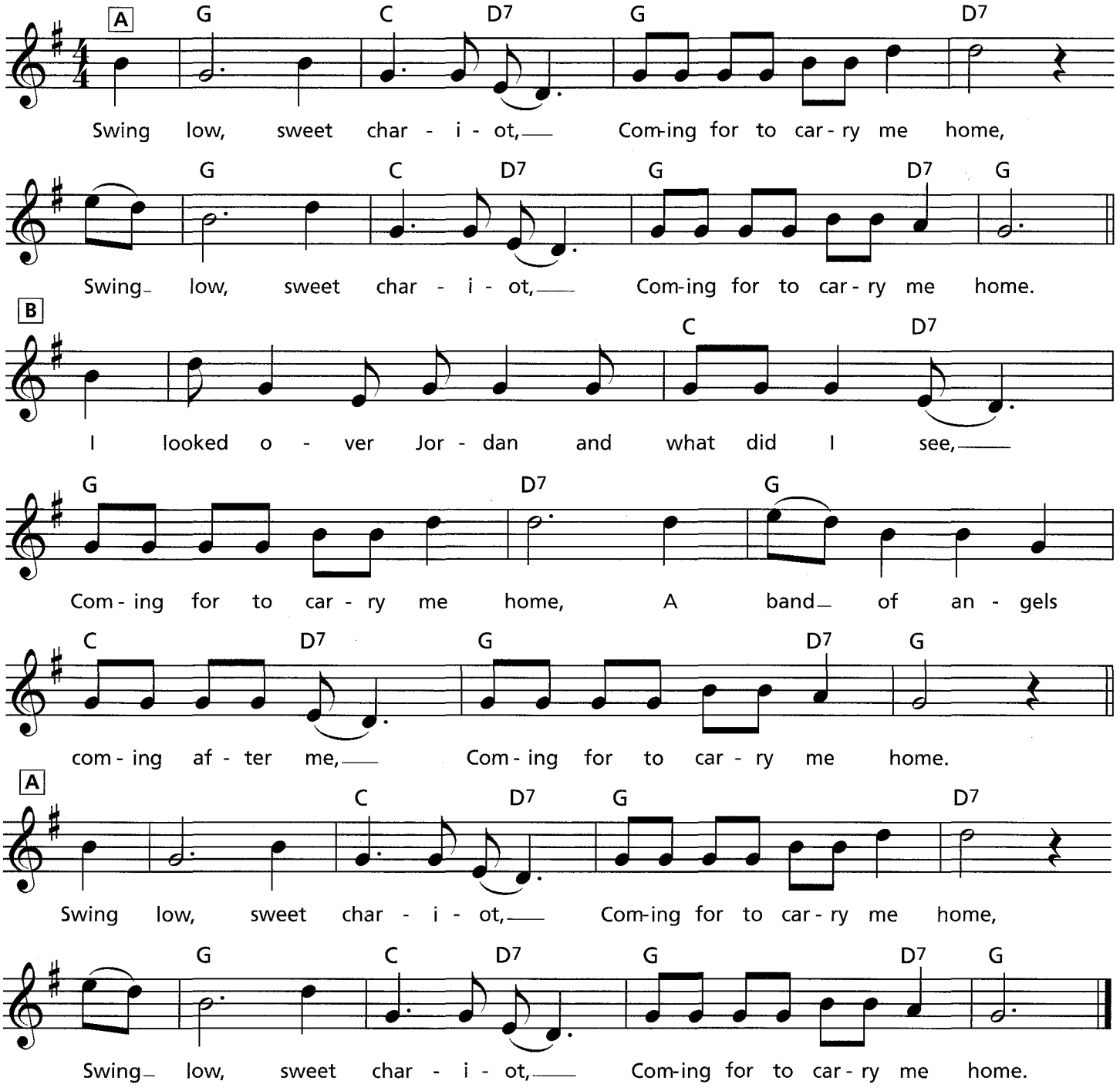
rhythm melody .

UNIT 18 **LESSON 74**

# *A B A (Ternary) Form*

THREE-PART FORMS, called ABA (or TERNARY FORM), consist of two musically distinct sections as does AB form. In this form, however, there is **A**, a statement; **B**, a contrasting statement of new material; and **A**, a restatement of the A section. This is one of the most common forms found in all types of music, from folk songs to symphonies.

**Swing Low, Sweet Chariot** African-American Spiritual




## *Exercises*

**1** Which section of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is the verse? B

**2** Which section of "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is the refrain? A

**3** How many phrases are in: the A section? 4 the B section? 4

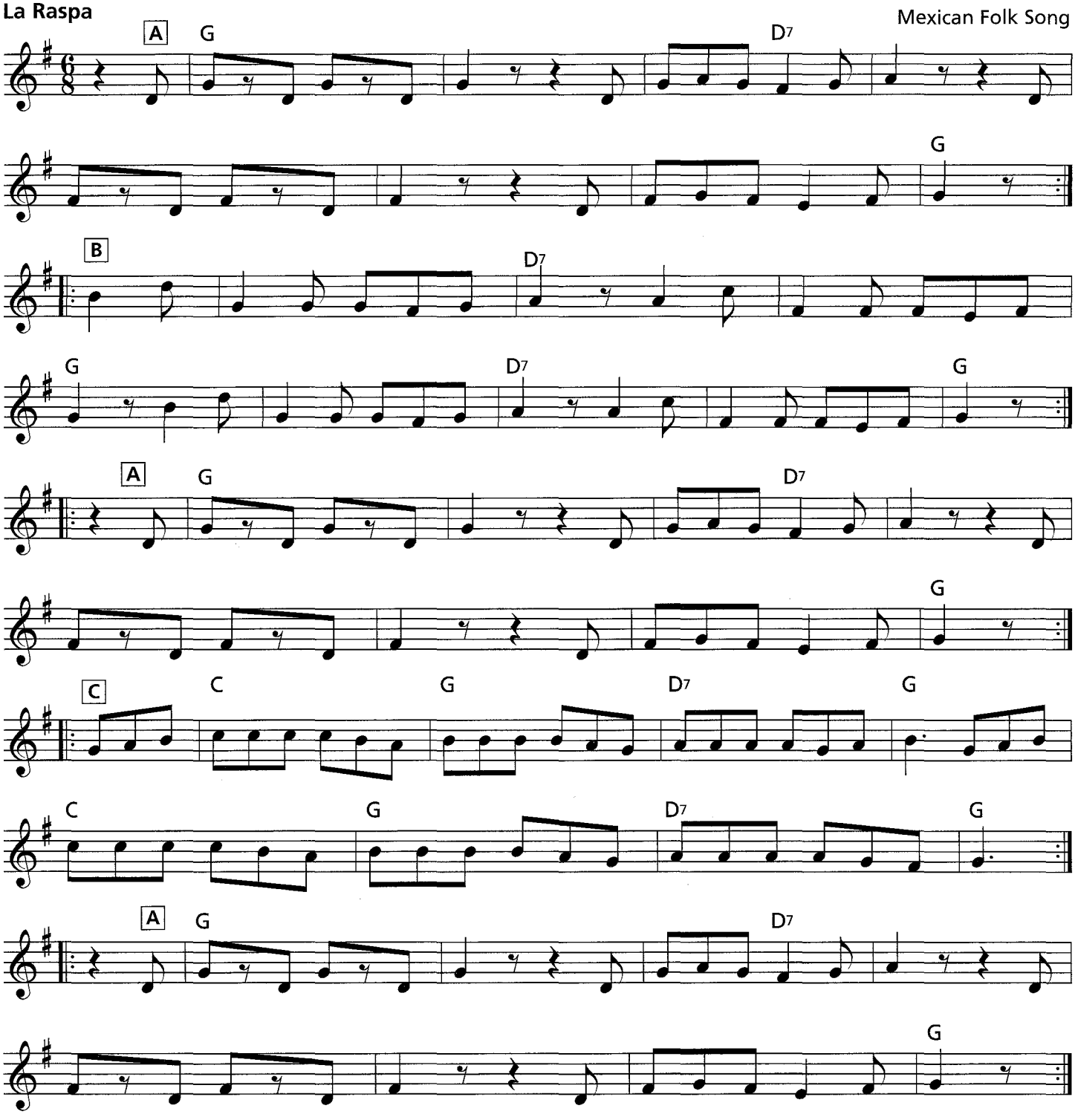
# *Rondo Form*

A RONDO is a form that consists of an A section alternating with other contrasting sections of musical material. A is the recurring section. The most common types of rondo form are:

A B A B A — A B A C A — A B A C A B A.

"La Raspa" is an example of a rondo.

**La Raspa** Mexican Folk Song




## *Exercises*

**1** What is the form of "La Raspa"? (Circle one) **A B A B A** **A B A C A** **A B A C A B A**

**2** Which section prominently features eighth and quarter note rests in its motive? A

**3** Which section differs harmonically from the others? C

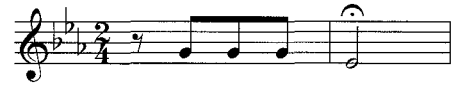
# UNIT 18 EAR TRAINING FOR LESSONS 72–75

Page 118 of the Student Book:

118 UNIT 18 EAR TRAINING FOR LESSONS 72–75

**Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67**
Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

Track 28 **1** Listen to a musical motive.

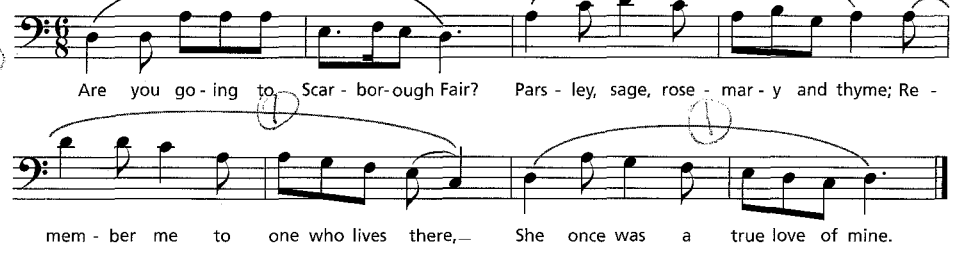


Track 29 **2** (Beethoven, Symphony No. 5) Listen to an excerpt that includes the above motive. How many times does the motive appear? **9** (**11**) **13** (Circle correct answer)

Track 30 **3** (Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star) Listen to the melody. How many phrases are there? 6

Track 31 **4** Listen to the melody of the following musical selection. Mark the phrases using curved lines over the entire phrase.

**Scarborough Fair** Phrase Mark English Folk Song



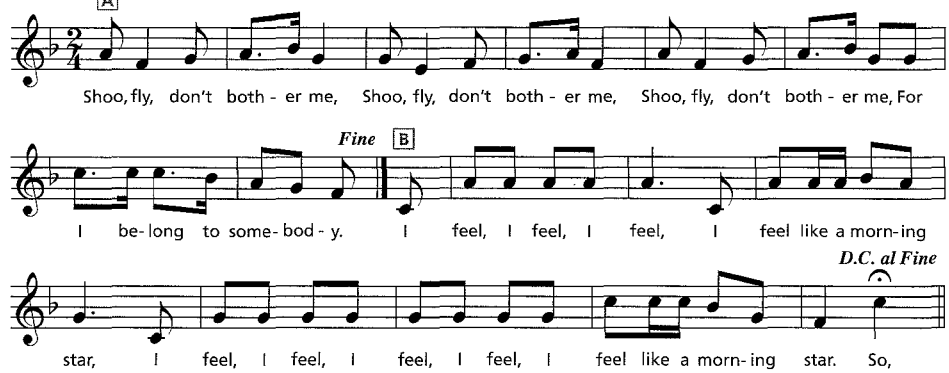

Track 32 **5** (Simple Gifts) Listen to a song in AB form.

Track 33 **6** (Get on Board) Listen to a song in ABA form.

Track 34 **7** (Home on the Range) What is the form of the following song? (Circle one) **AB** (**ABA**)

Track 35 **8** What is the form of the following song? (Circle one) **AB** (**ABA**) Write the letters above the music at the starting point of each section.

**Shoo, Fly** A American Folk Song



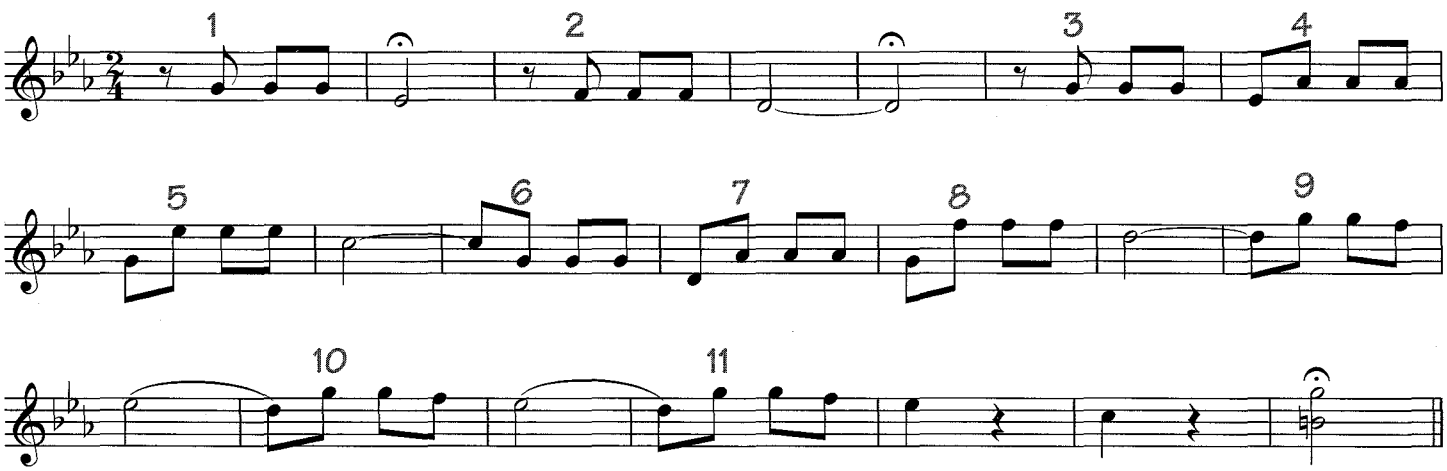

Track 36 **9** In what rondo form is Beethoven's *Für Elise*? Listen to sections A, B and C. Write the letter for each section as you hear it. A B A C A

## Examples:

**1** Play Example 1, right.

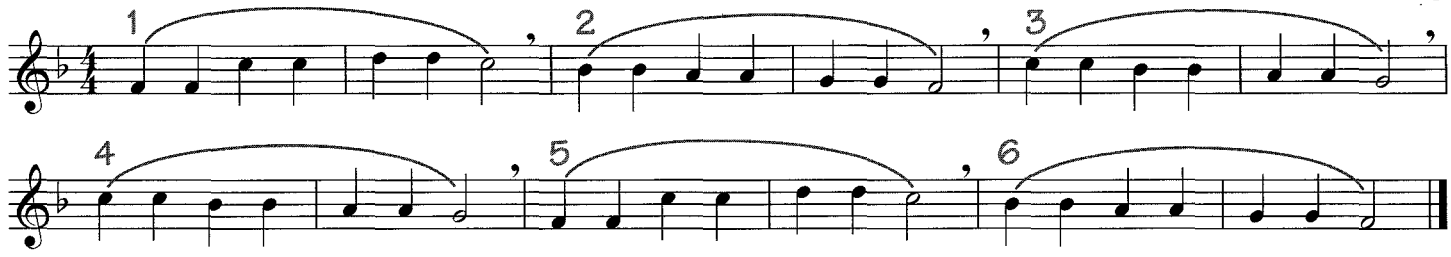
**2**

**Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Op. 67** Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)



**Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star** French Folk Song

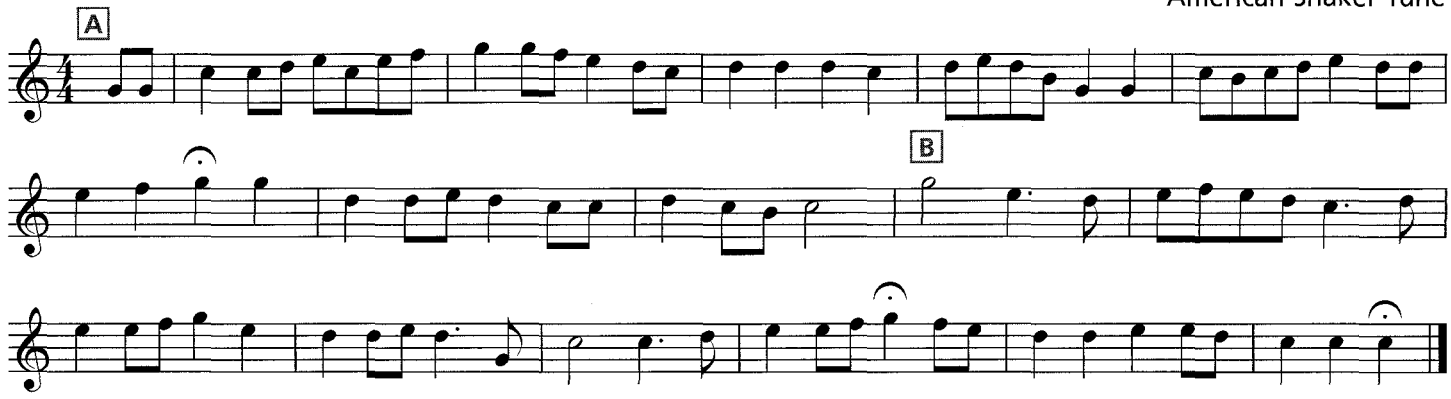
**3**




**4** Play Example 4, *Scarborough Fair.*

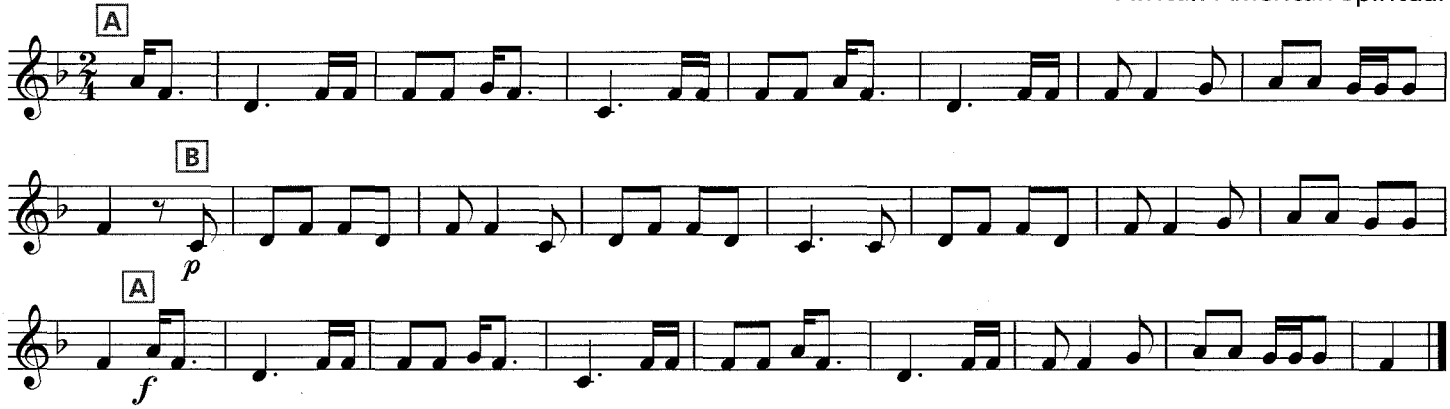
**Simple Gifts** American Shaker Tune

**5**



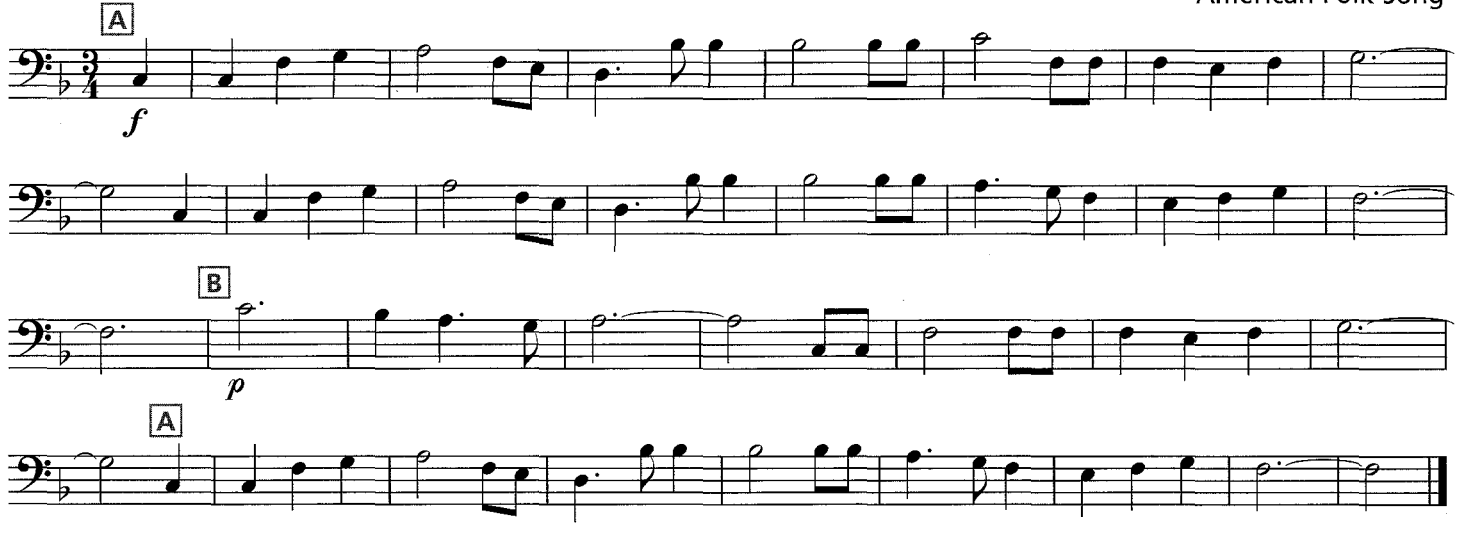

**Get On Board** African-American Spiritual

**6**




**Home on the Range** American Folk Song

**7**




**8** Play Example 8, *Shoo, Fly.*

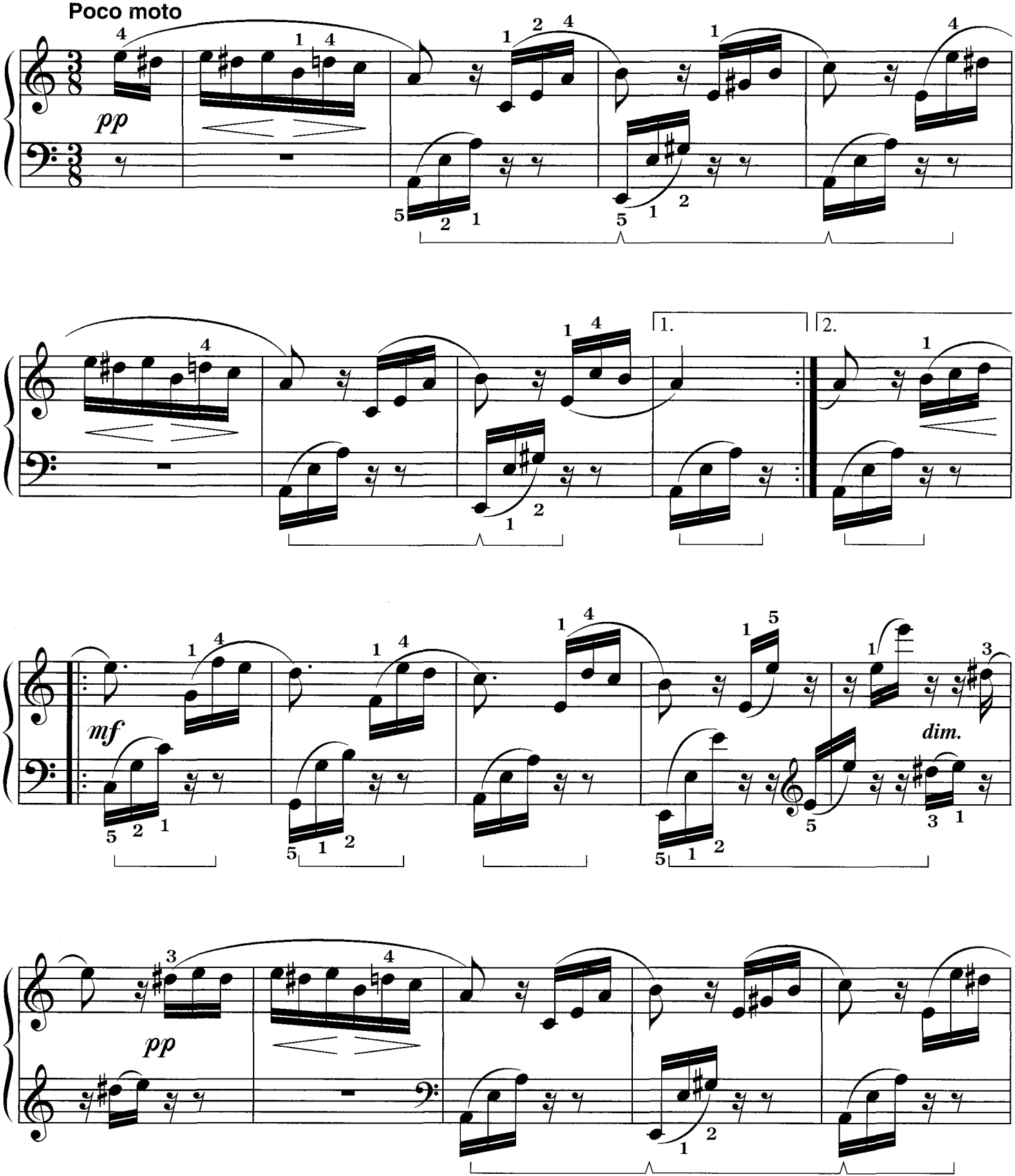
9

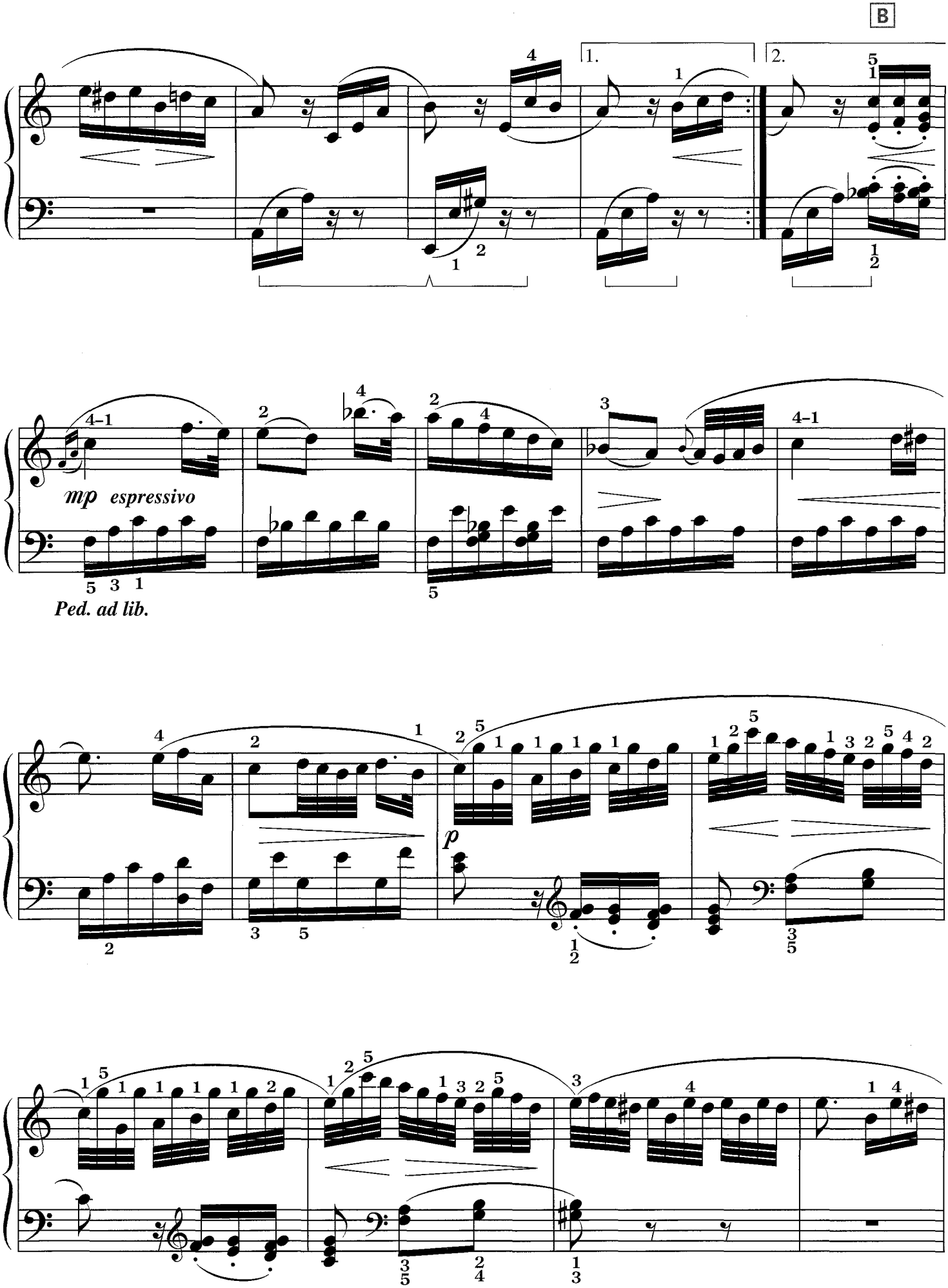
# Für Elise

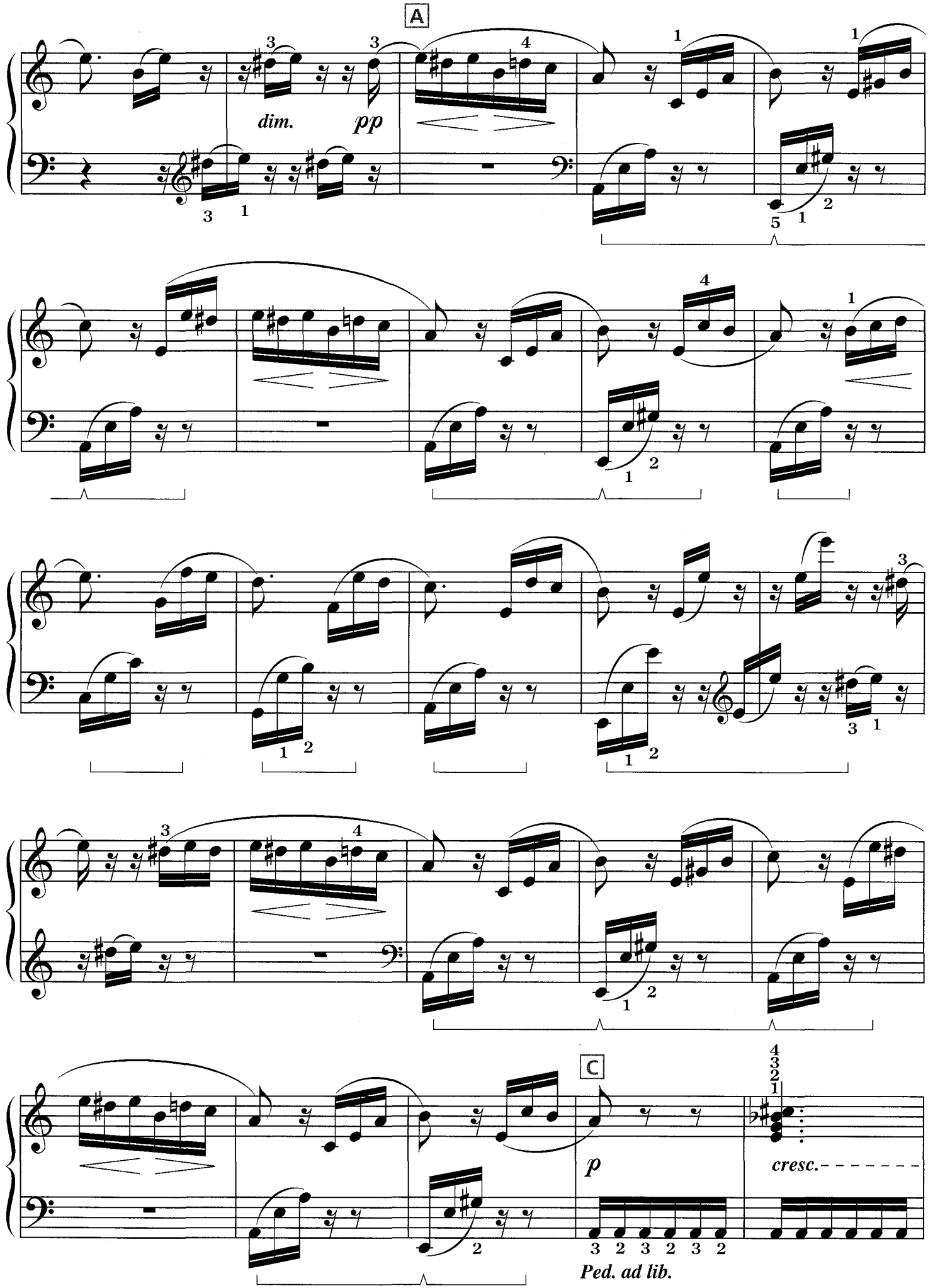
A

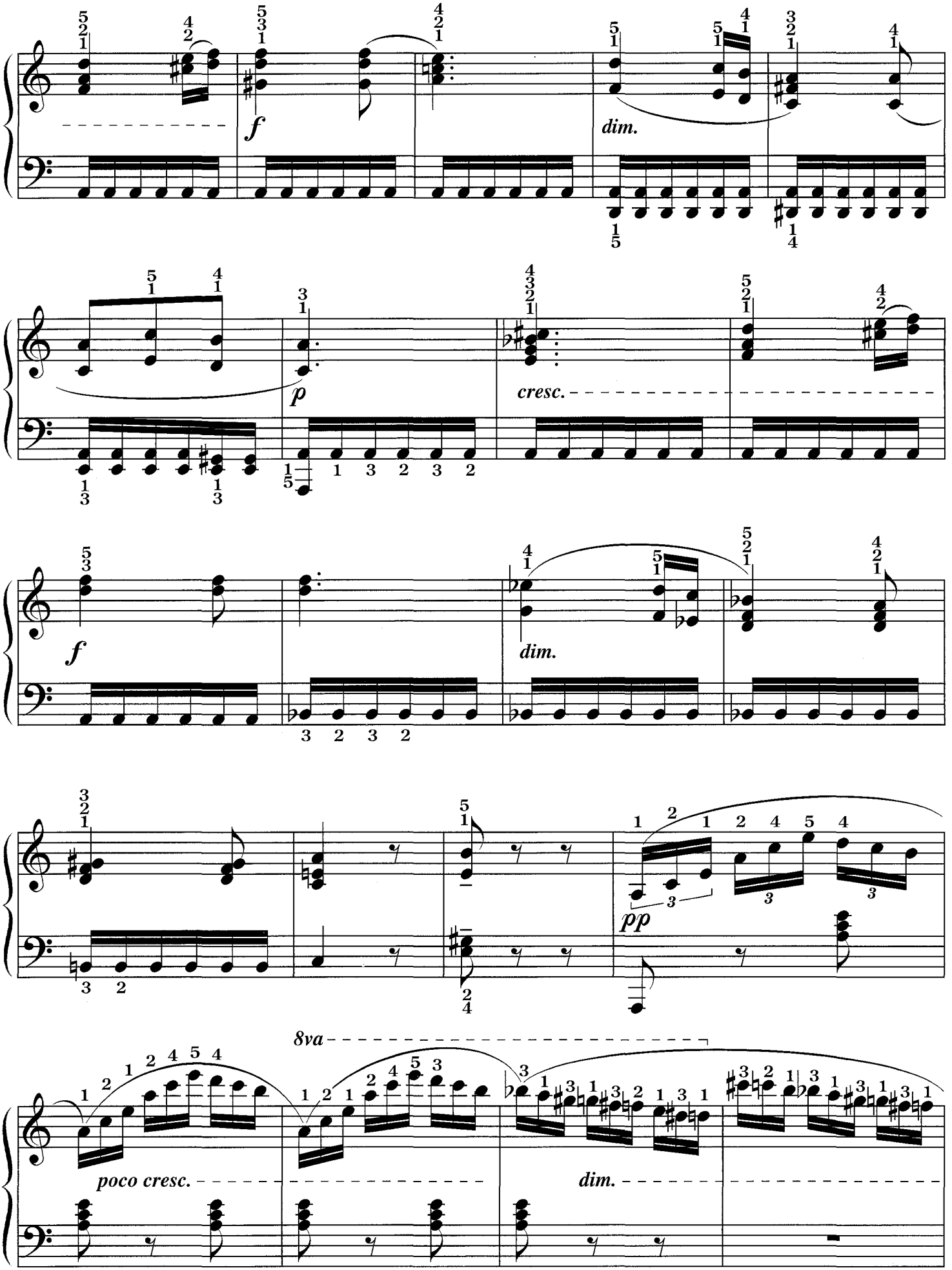
Ludwig van Beethoven

Poco moto




B
1.
2.
mp espressivo
Ped. ad lib.
p


A
dim.
pp
C
p
cresc.
Ped. ad lib.


f
dim.
p
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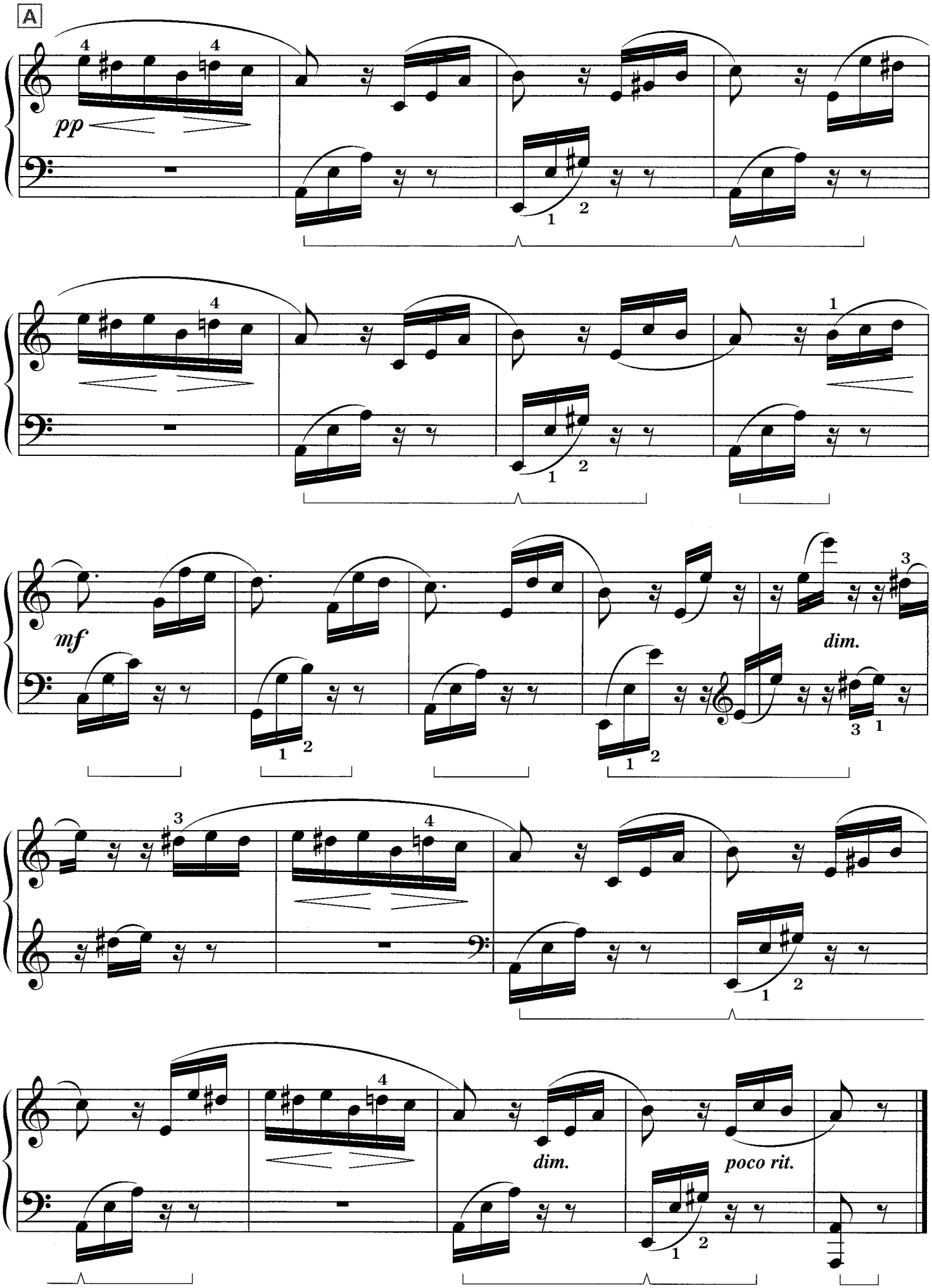
A
pp
mf
dim.
dim.
poco rit.