Hip-Hop Sampling as Analytic Act

Jeremy Tatar (he / him)
McGill University
November 10, 2023
SMT, Denver

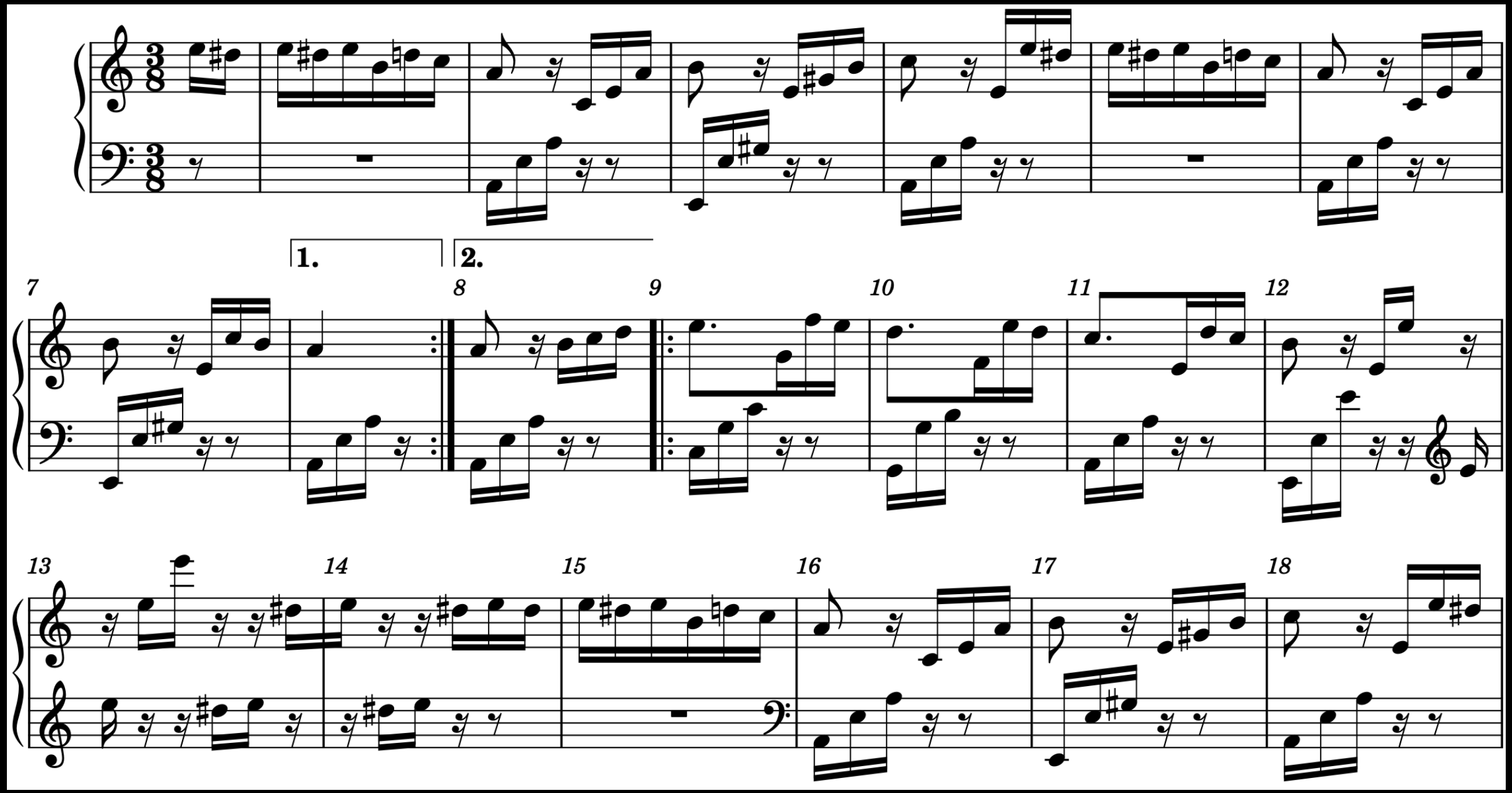
Why We Don't Teach Meter, and Why We Should

By Richard Cohn

An interplanetary visitor asks: "What is music?" The question requires a complicated response, but you want to be concise, so you might say, "Music is patterns of sound, in patterns of time."

Richard Cohn, "Why We Don't Teach Meter, and Why We Should," *Journal of Music Theory Pedagogy* 29 (2015): 5–24.

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)



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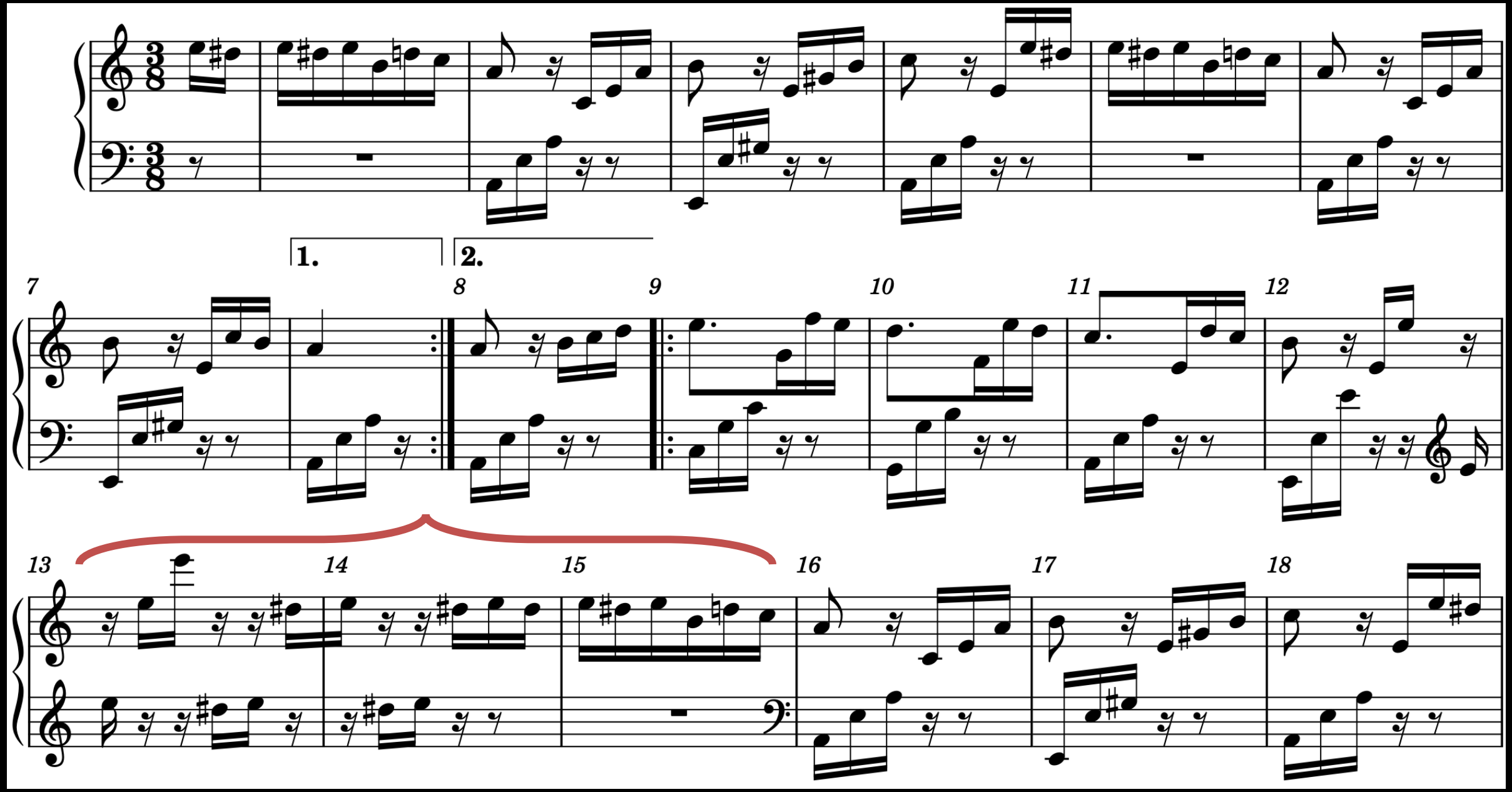

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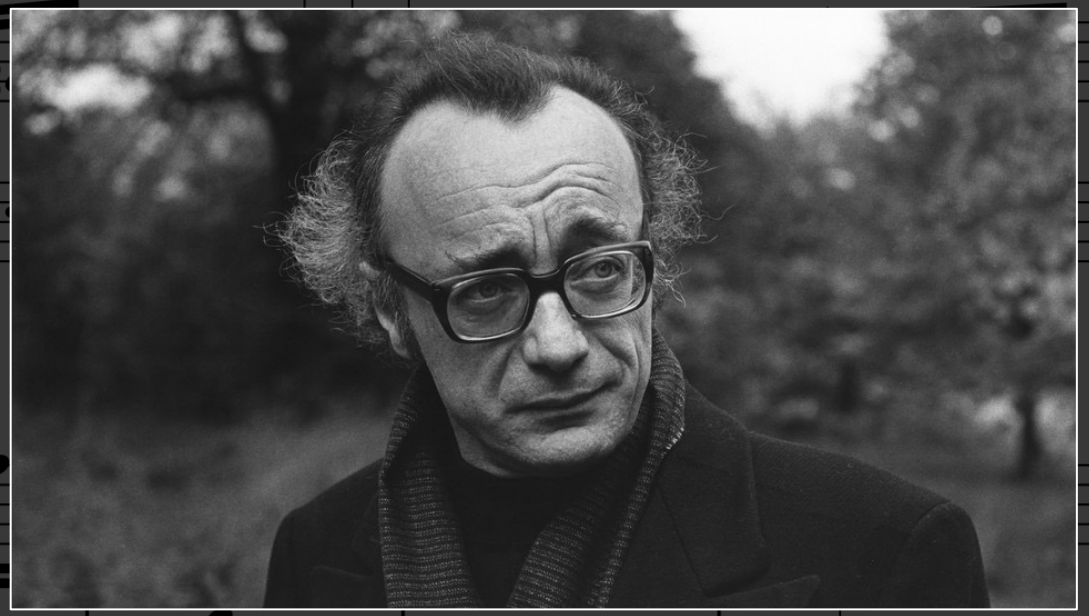

Artur Schnabel
(recorded 1938)

Alfred Brendel
(recorded ca. 1960)

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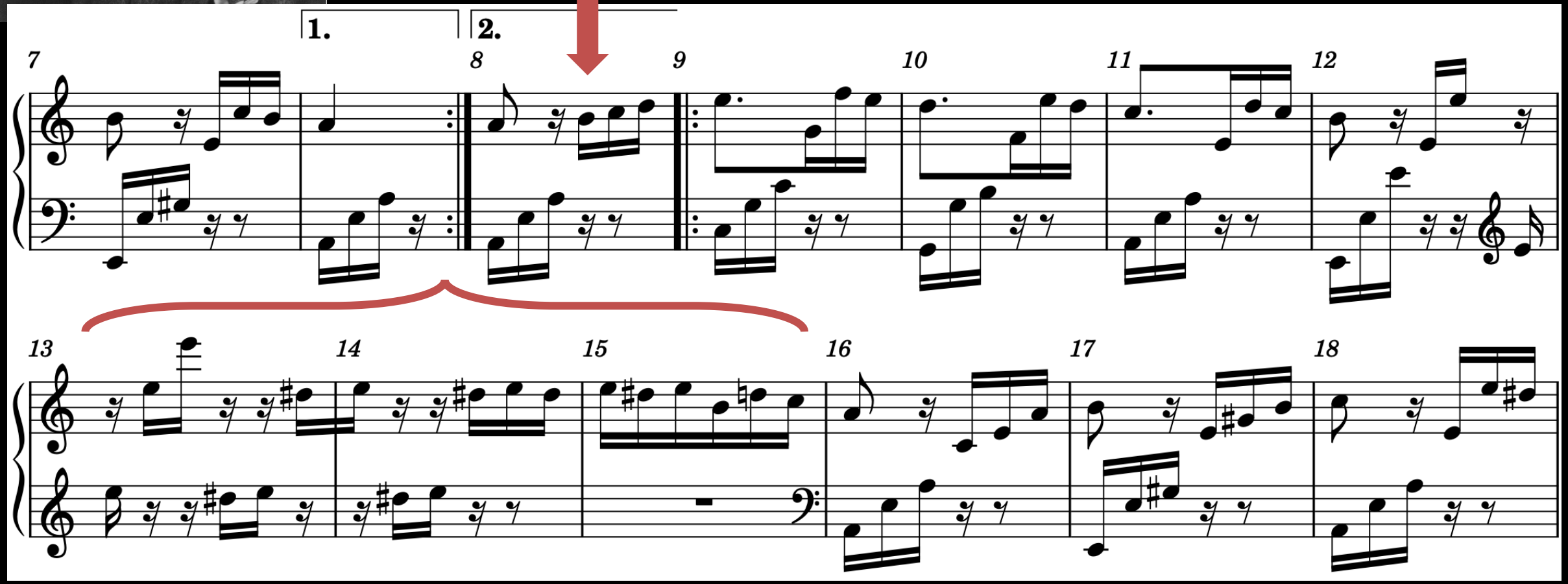
Artur Schnabel (1938)



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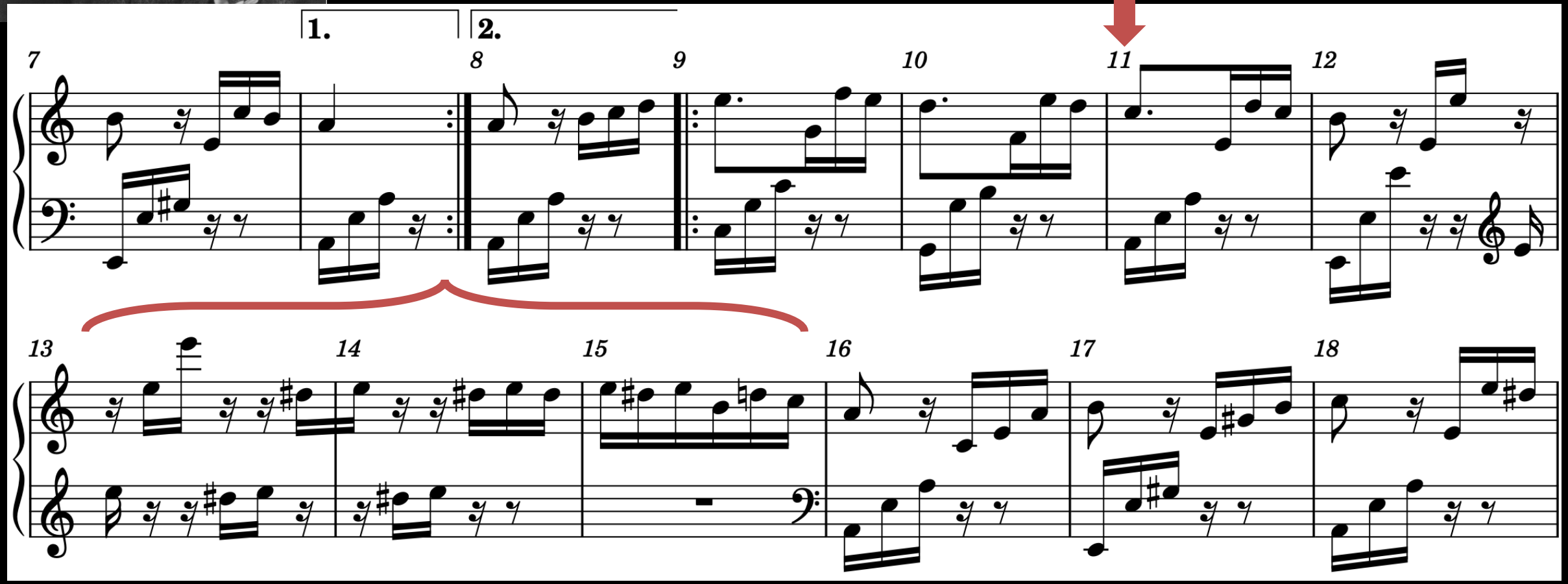

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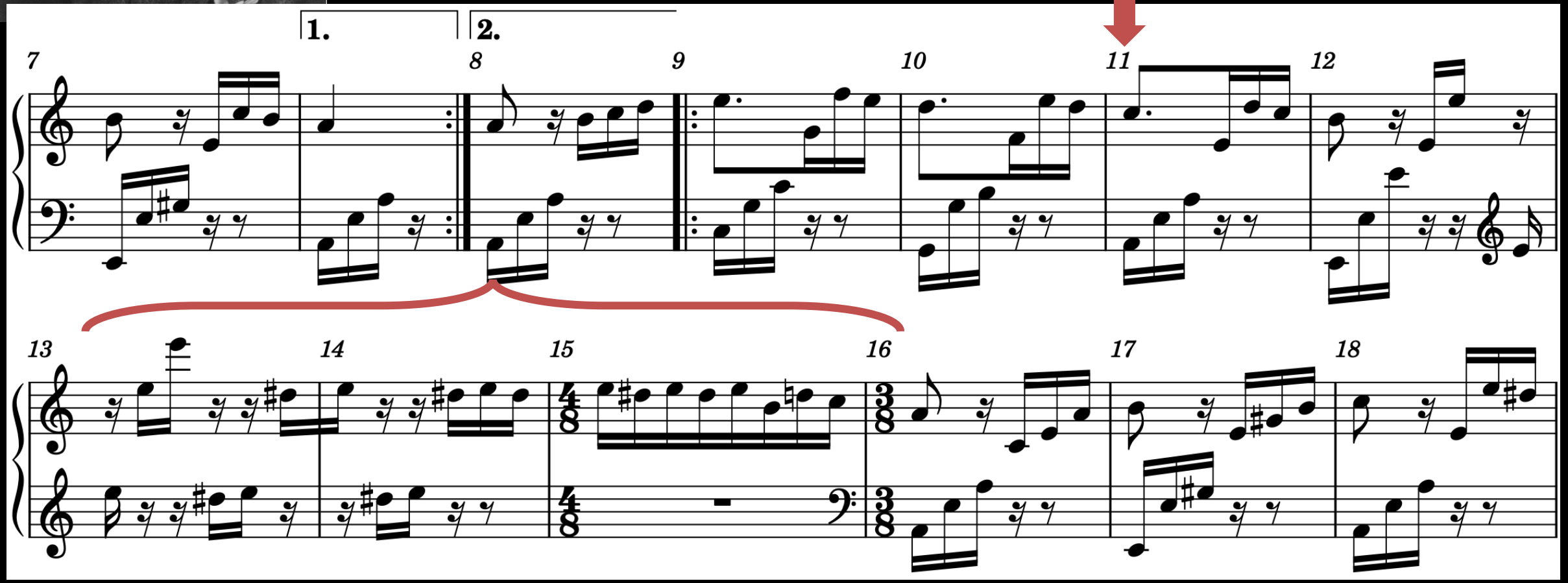
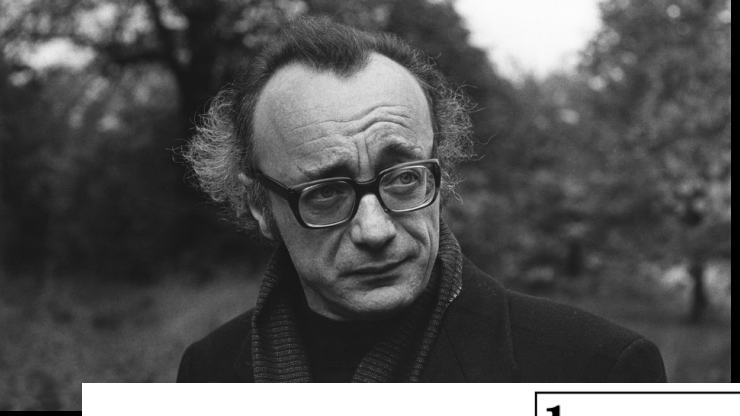
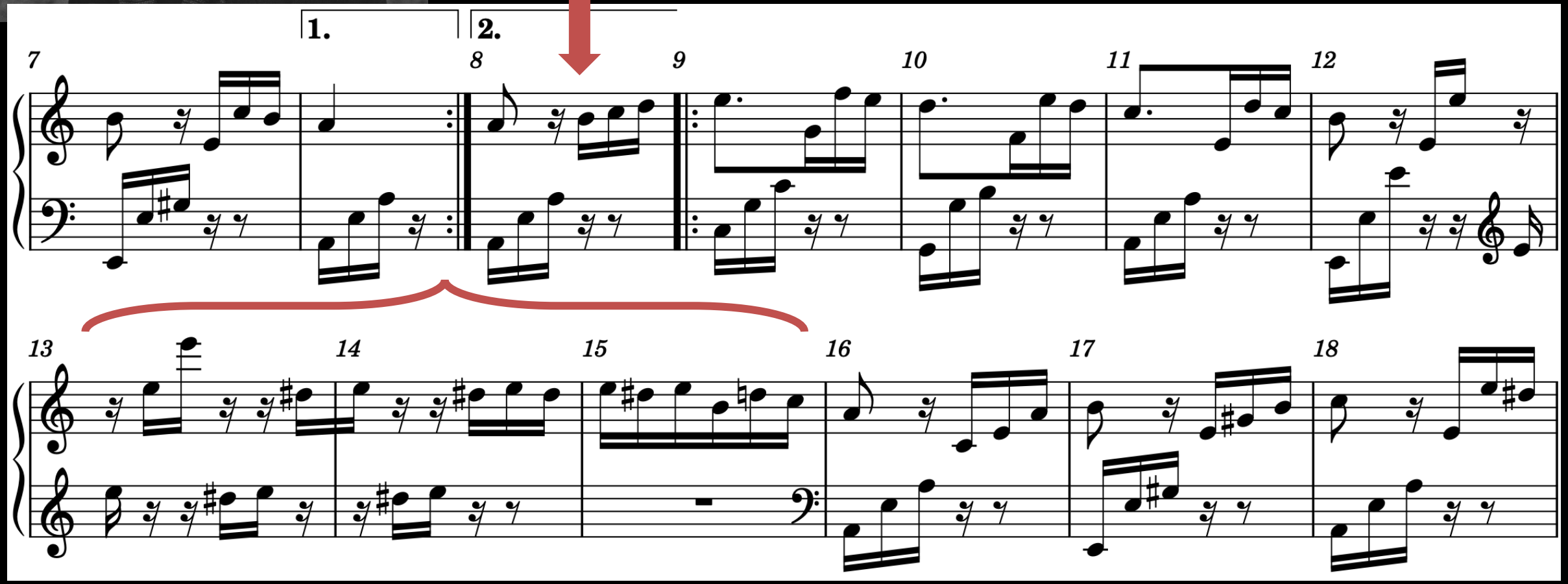


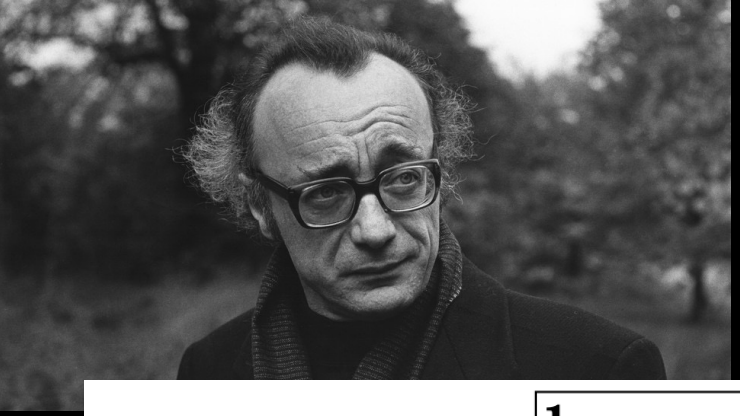
One E-D♯ too many !



Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

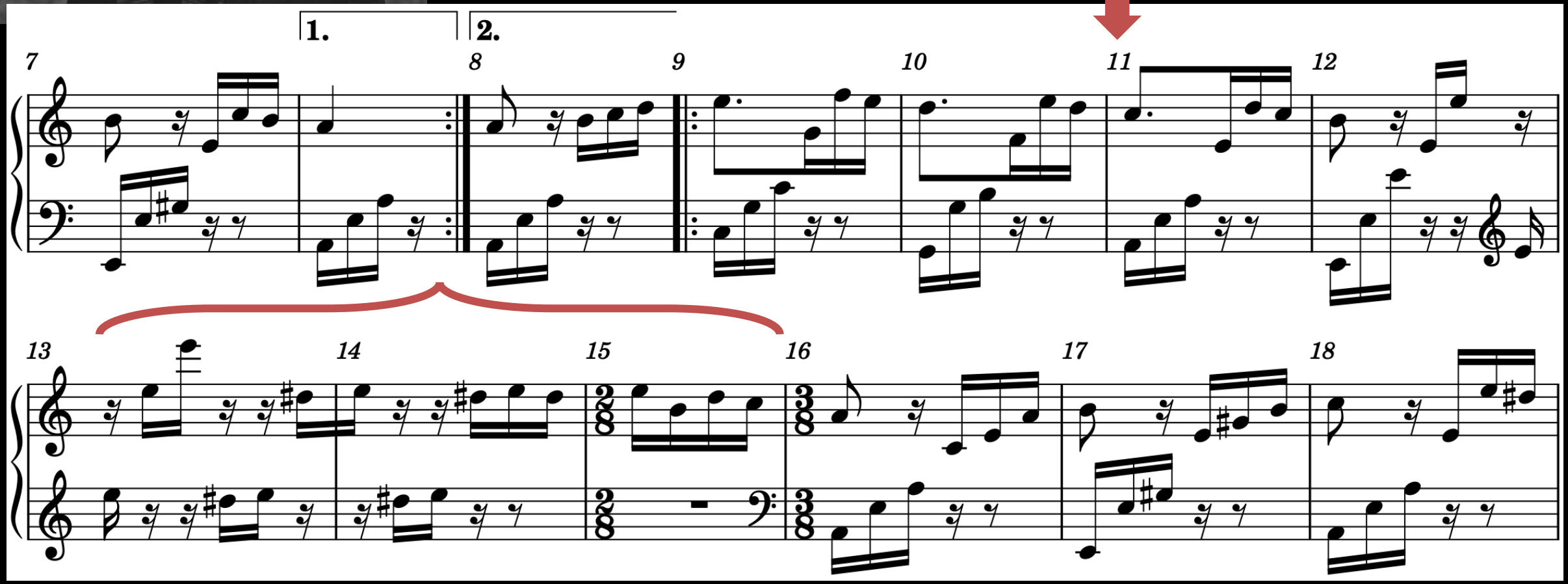
Alfred Brendel (ca. 1930)

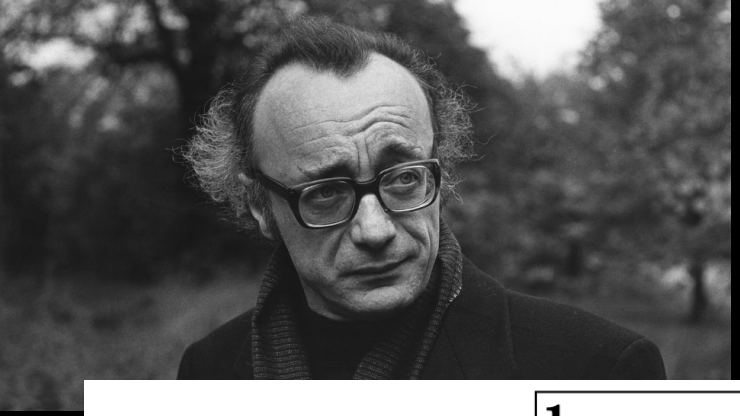




Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

Alfred Brendel (ca. 1960)





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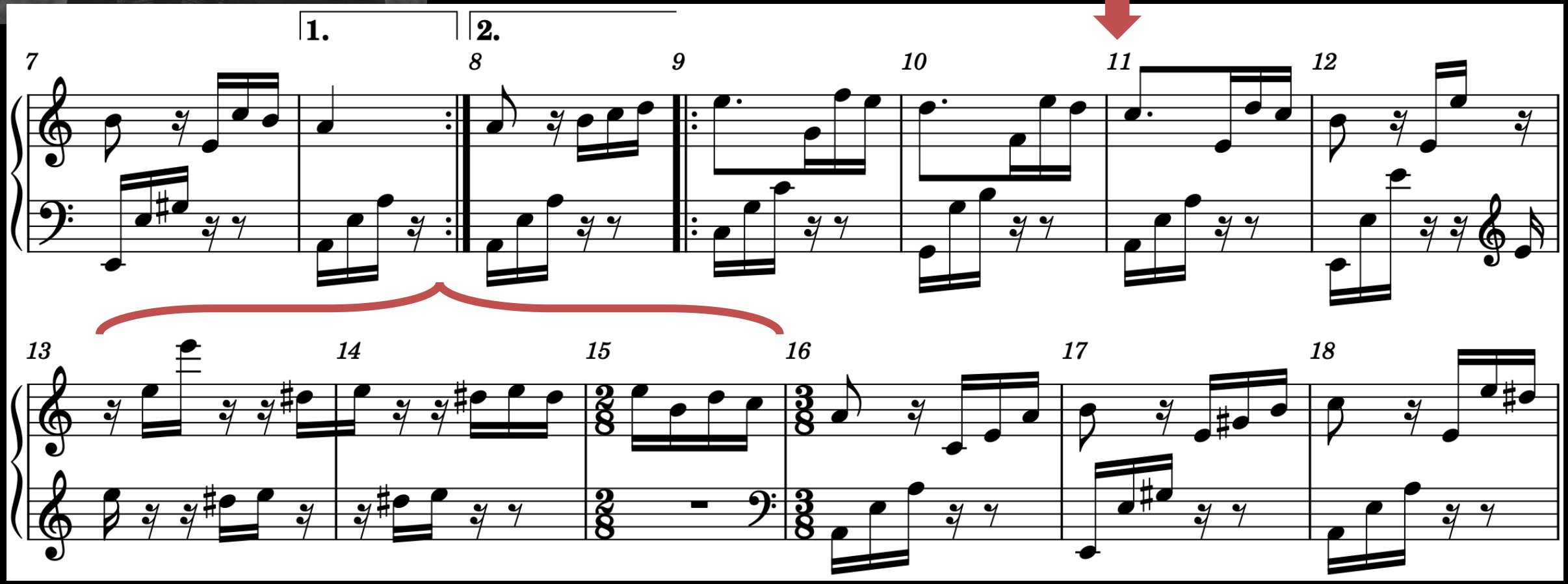

One E-D♯ too *few* !

Schnabel (1938):

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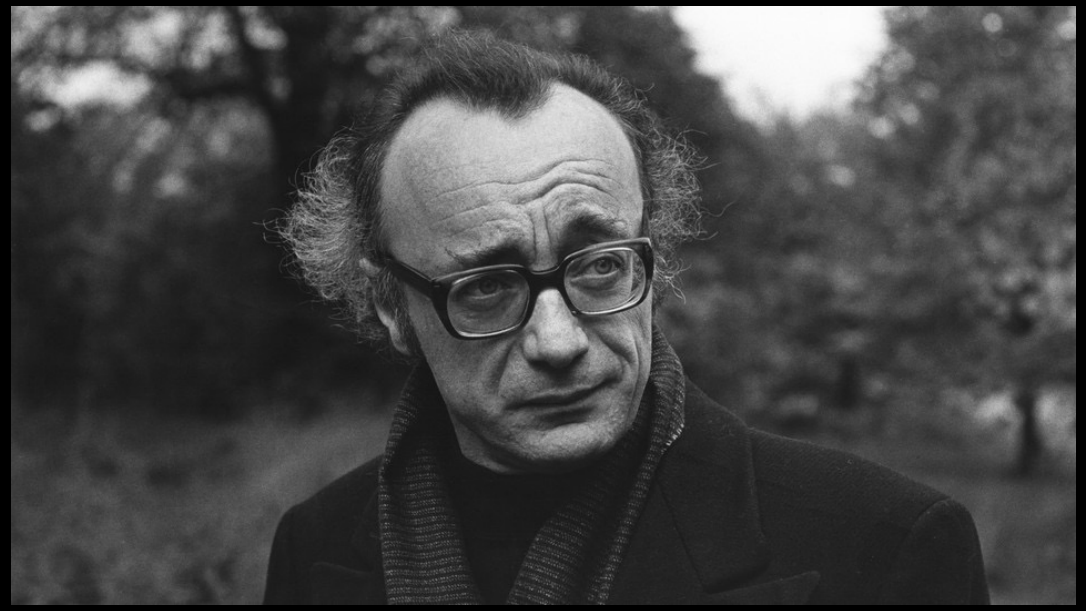
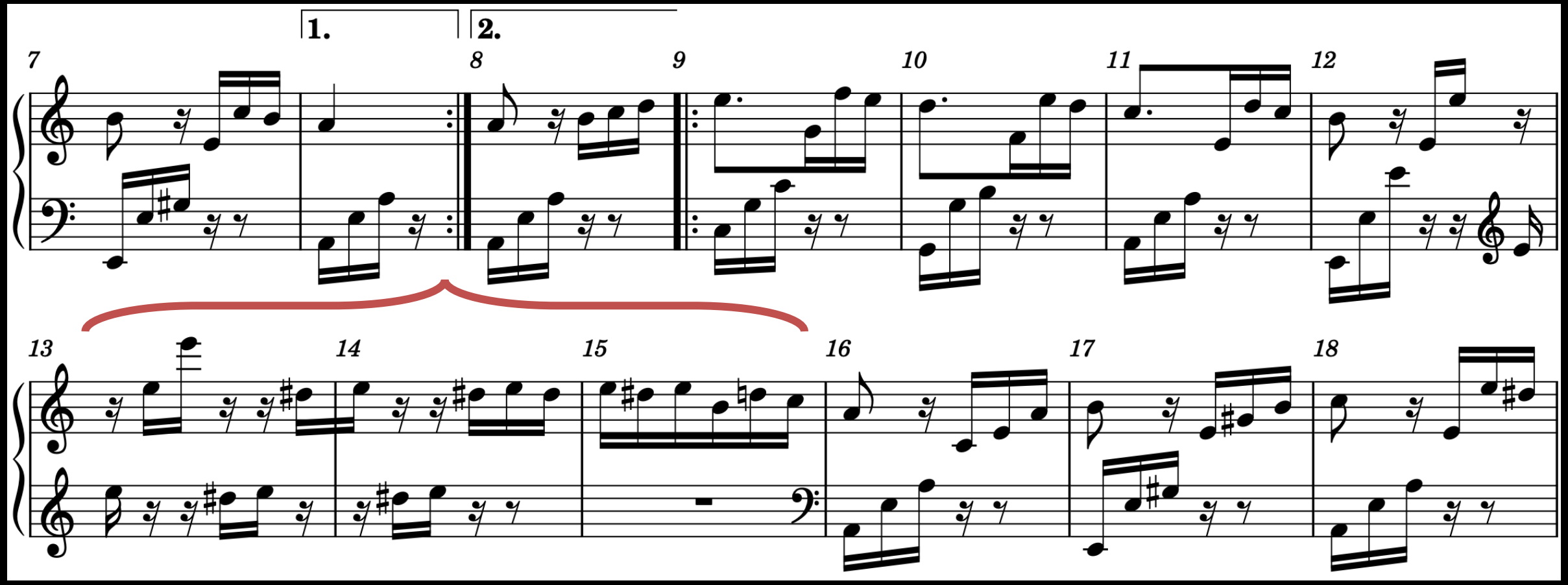


Brendel (ca. 1960):

One E-D♯ too *few*


1.
2.
7
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14
15
16
17
18

If the demands are not physical, then they must be cognitive. To get this passage right, these pianists don't need to return to the practice room and work on their scales and arpeggios. They need to sit with the score and think about it,

Cohn, "Why We Don't Teach Meter," 18.

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how one performs a work offers information about how one *hears* that work

Cohn, "Why We Don't Teach Meter," 18.

analysis is something which happens whenever one attends intelligently to the world. Whenever stimuli are grouped, ordered, and related into coherent patterns and processes, analysis has taken place. The performance of a piece of music is, therefore, the actualization of an analytic act—even though such analysis may have been intuitive and unsystematic. For what a performer *does* is to make the relationships and patterns potential in the composer's score clear to the mind and ear of the experienced listener.

Leonard B. Meyer, "Critical Analysis and Performance: The Theme of Mozart's A-Major Piano Sonata," in *Explaining Music* (University of California Press, 1973), 29.

[x] as analysis

Dancing/choreography

Rachel Short, "'A-Five, Six, Seven, Eight!': Musical Counting and Dance Hemiolas in Musical Theatre Tap Dance Breaks," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory, Columbus, OH, November 7–10 (2019).

Rebecca Simpson-Litke, "Flipped, Broken, and Paused *Clave*: Dancing through Metric Ambiguities in Salsa Music," *Journal of Music Theory* 65 no. 1 (2021): 39–80.

Rebecca Simpson-Litke and Chris Stover, "Theorizing Fundamental Music/Dance Interactions in Salsa," *Music Theory Spectrum* 41, no. 1 (2019): 74–103.

Headbanging

Guy Capuzzo, "'Dance to the Dissonant Sway': Groove, Headbanging, and Entrainment in Extreme Metal," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Music Theory, online, November 7–8, 14–15 (2020).

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Concert Light Shows

Olivia R. Lucas, "Performing Analysis, Performing Metal: Meshuggah, Edvard Hansson, and the Analytical Light Show," *Music Theory Online* 27, no. 4 (2021).

Covering Songs on Youtube

William O'Hara, "The *Techne* of YouTube Performance: Musical Structure, Extended Techniques, and Custom Instruments in Solo Pop Covers," *Music Theory Online* 28, no. 3 (2022).

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"beyond *coordination* with musical events to *communication of abstract ideas about the music*" ([2.4], emphasis in original).

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1. Close, expert listening

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1. Close, expert listening
2. Considered choice

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1. Close, expert listening
2. Considered choice
3. Outward communication

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4. Transformative potential

1. Close, expert listening
2. Considered choice
3. Outward communication
4. Transformative potential

"By emphasizing one rhythmic percept over another, the light show can offer clarity where the musical experience on its own might be more ambiguous.

Lucas 2021, [5.3]

1. Close, expert listening
2. Considered choice
3. Outward communication
4. Transformative potential

"By emphasizing one rhythmic percept over another, the light show can offer clarity where the musical experience on its own might be more ambiguous.

[...] the light show can also play with expectations, create musical climaxes, and generate understandings of form. In many ways, Hansson's light show determines *how* listeners hear the music."

Lucas 2021, [5.3], emphasis in original

1. Close, expert listening

2. Considered choice

3. Outward communication

4. Transformative potential

1. Close, expert listening

2. Considered choice

3. Outward communication

4. Transformative potential

Producers are expert listeners with expert knowledge;

1. Close, expert listening

Producers are expert listeners with expert knowledge;

2. Considered choice

Their beats represent their *hearing* of their source;

3. Outward communication

4. Transformative potential

1. Close, expert listening	Producers are expert listeners with expert knowledge;
2. Considered choice	Their beats represent their *hearing* of their source;
3. Outward communication	These beats are a tangible object communicating this hearing…
4. Transformative potential	

1. Close, expert listening — Producers are expert listeners with expert knowledge;

2. Considered choice — Their beats represent their *hearing* of their source;

3. Outward communication — These beats are a tangible object communicating this hearing…

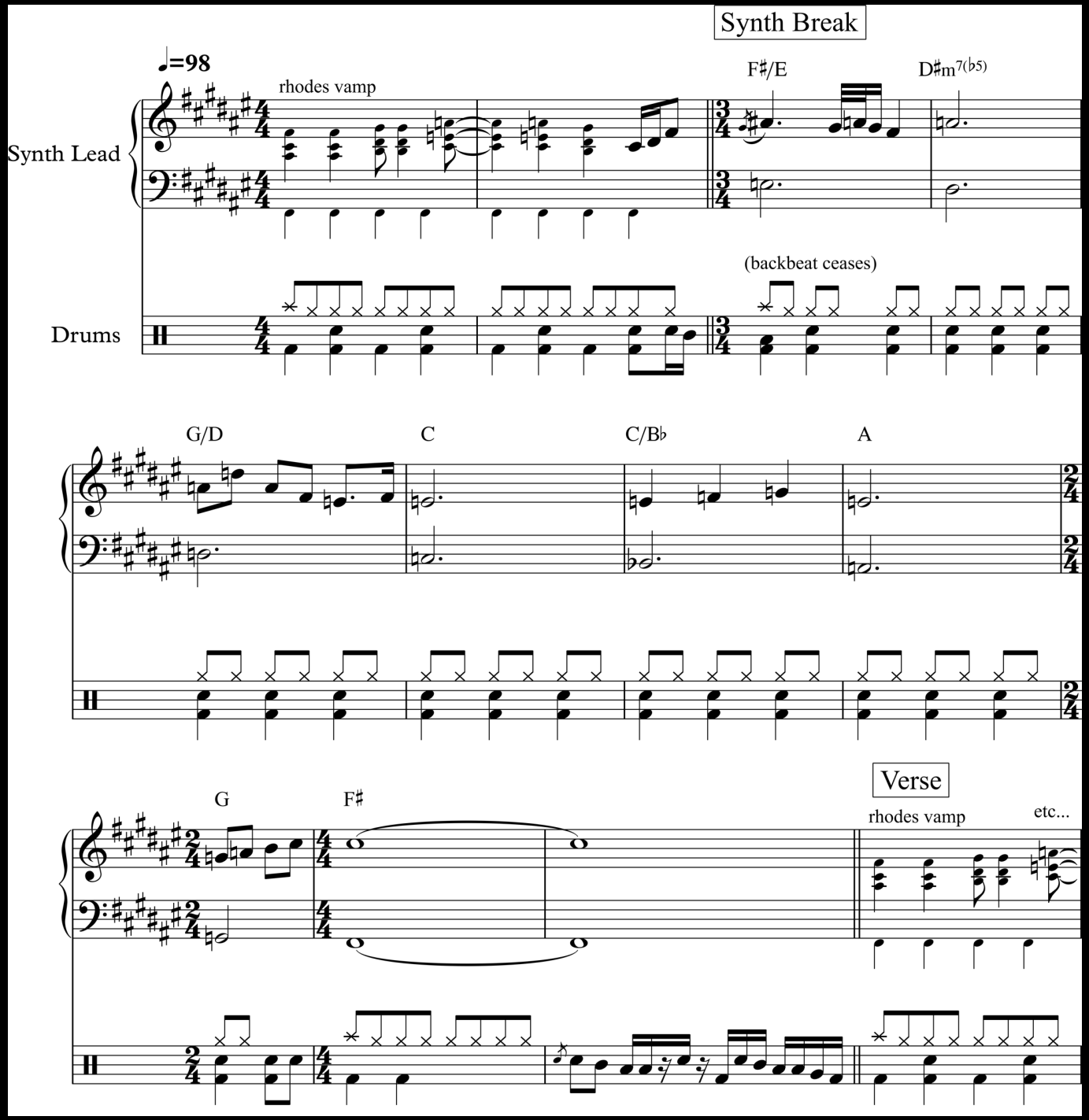
4. Transformative potential — Which can shape/alter how *we* hear the original sources

Excerpt 1:

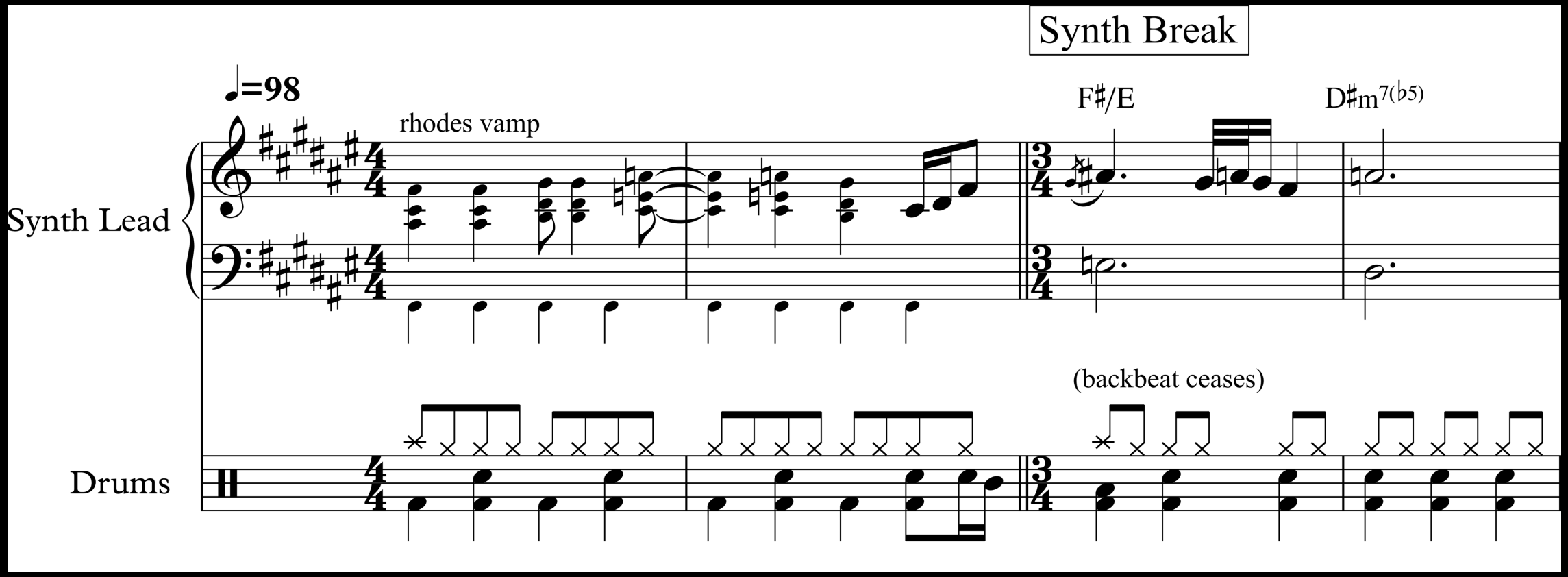
Stevie Wonder, “Living for the City,” *Innervisions* (1973)

sampled in

Usher, “Lil’ Freak,” *Raymond v. Raymond* (2010)
Produced by Polow da Don

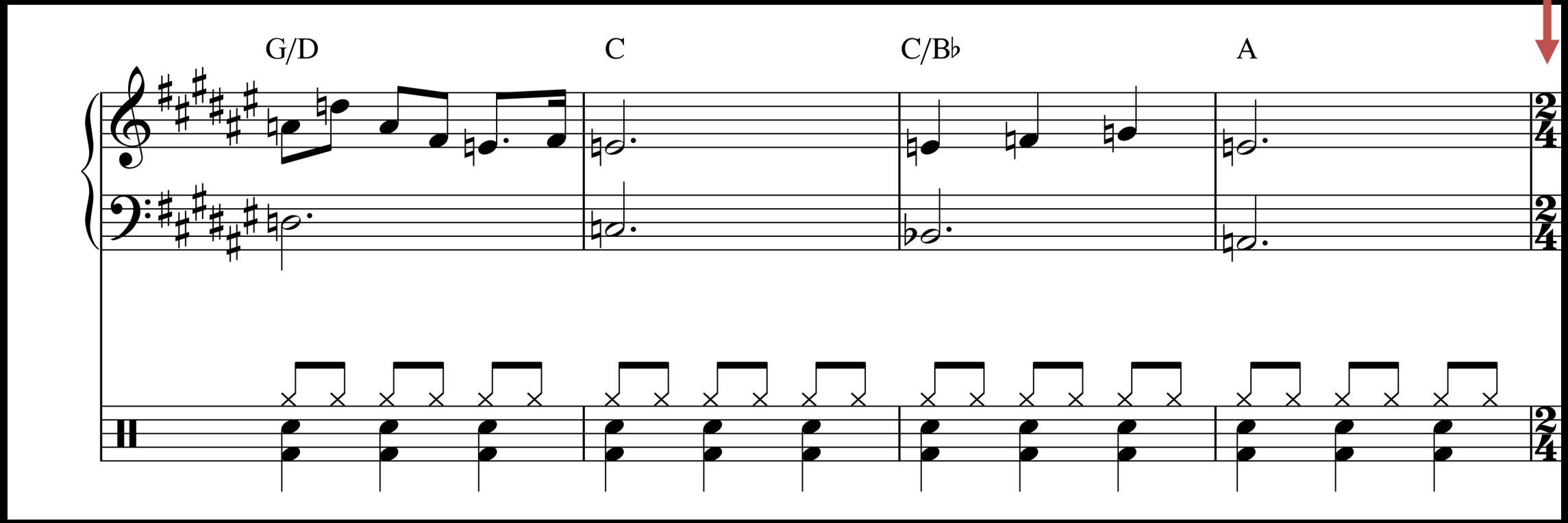

Synth Break
♩=98
rhodes vamp
F♯/E
D♯m7(♭5)
Synth Lead
(backbeat ceases)
Drums
G/D
C
C/B♭
A
G
F♯
Verse
rhodes vamp
etc...

Example 1



Wonder, “Living for the City,” Synth break (Example 1)

N.B. !!



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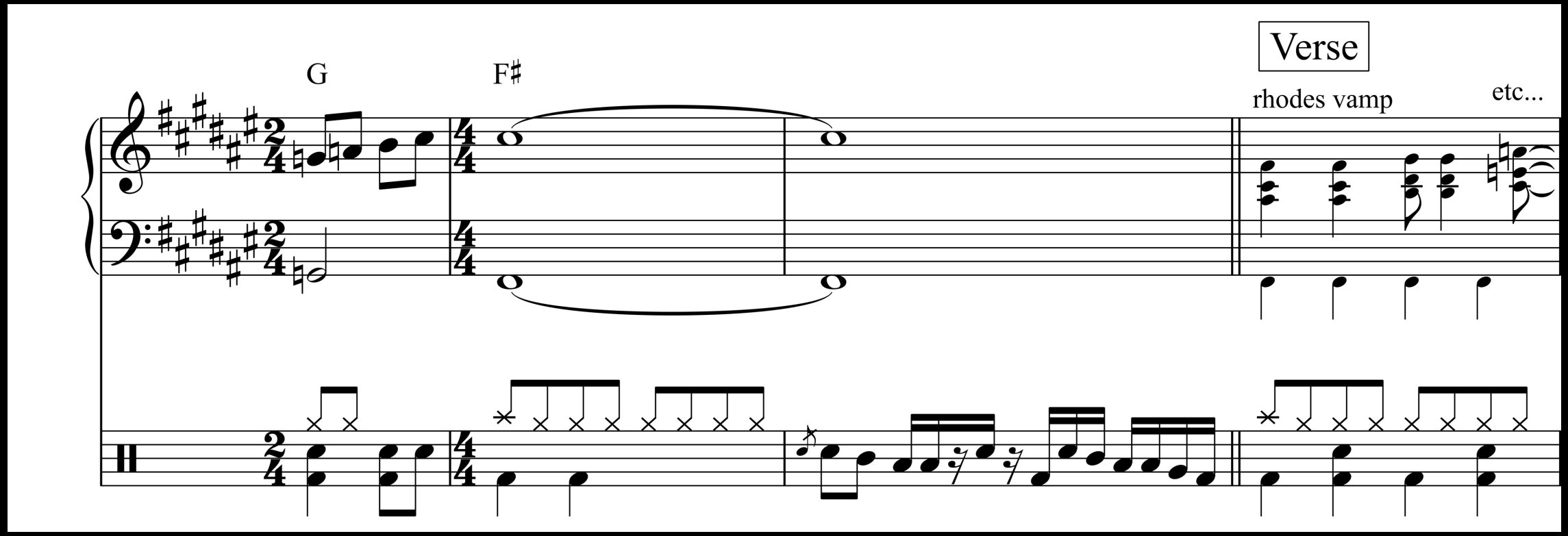

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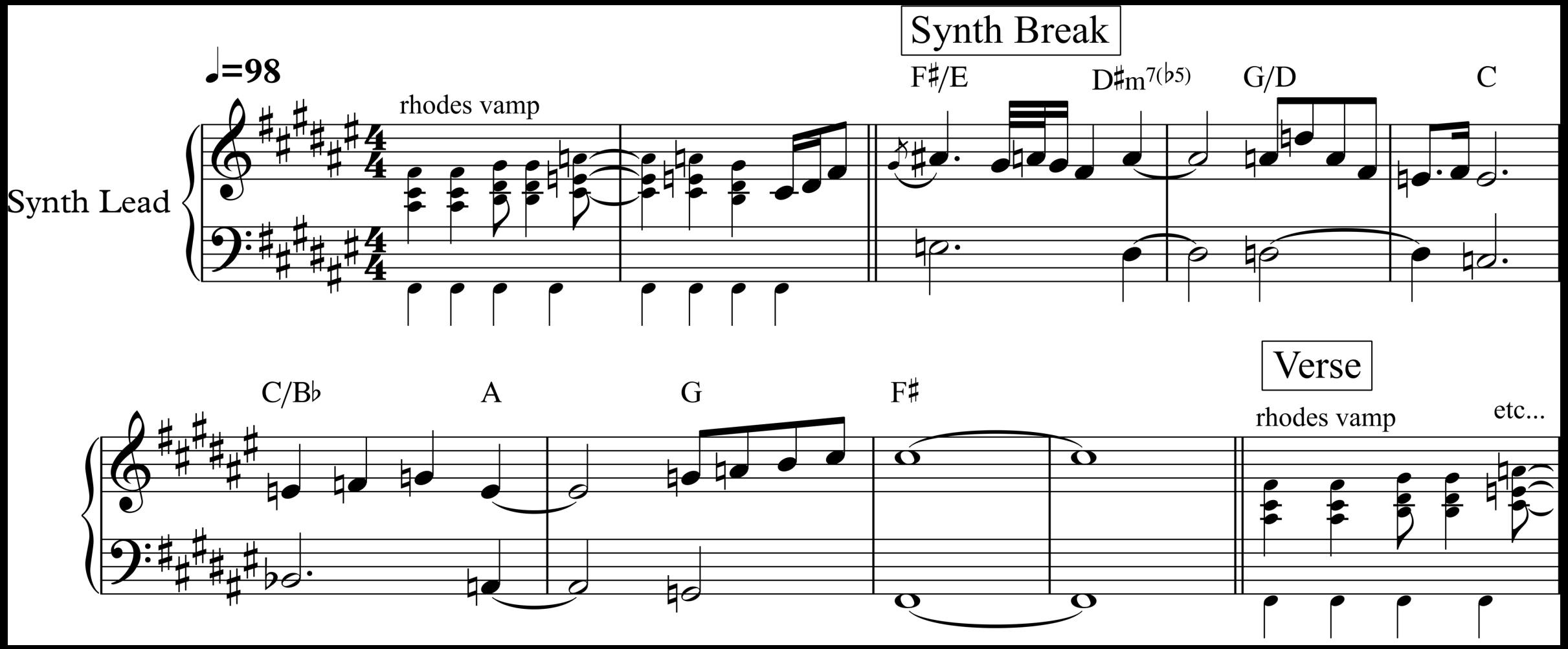
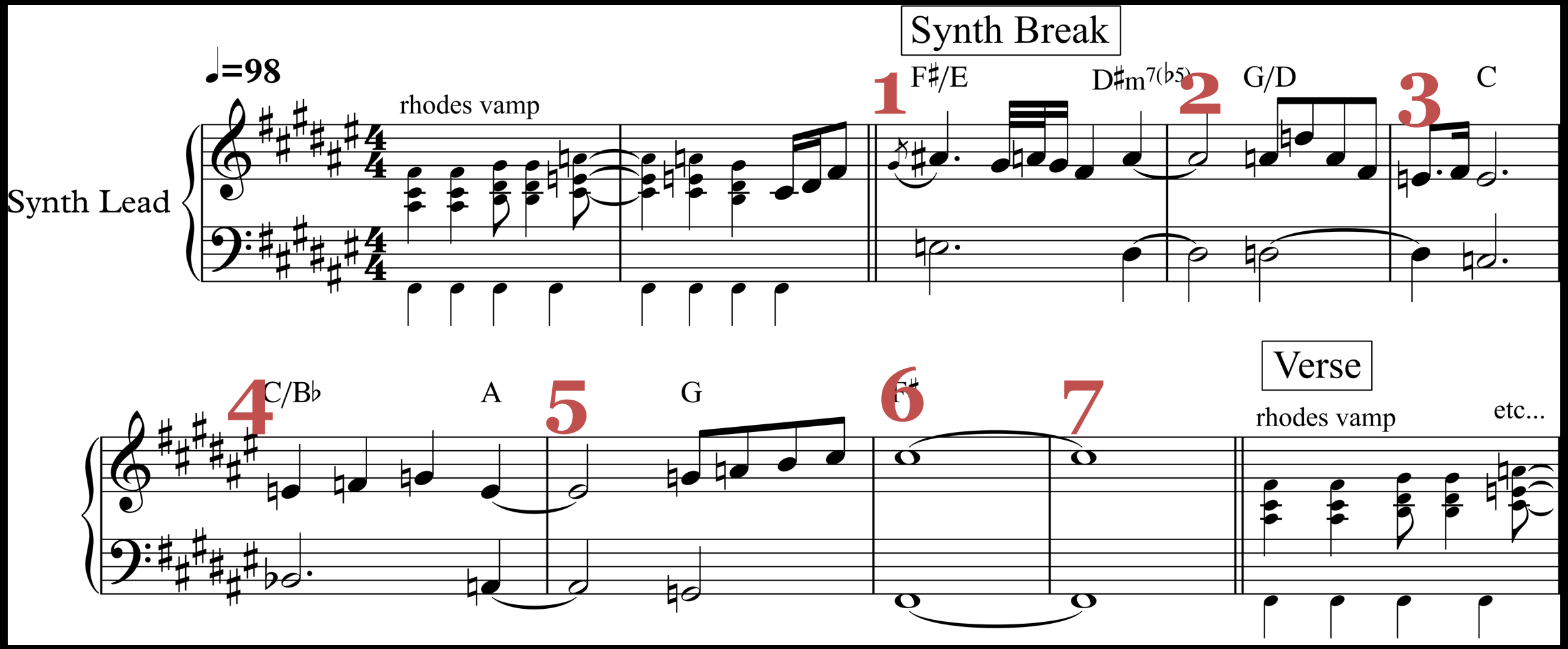


“Conservative” hearing of “Living for the City” (Example 2)



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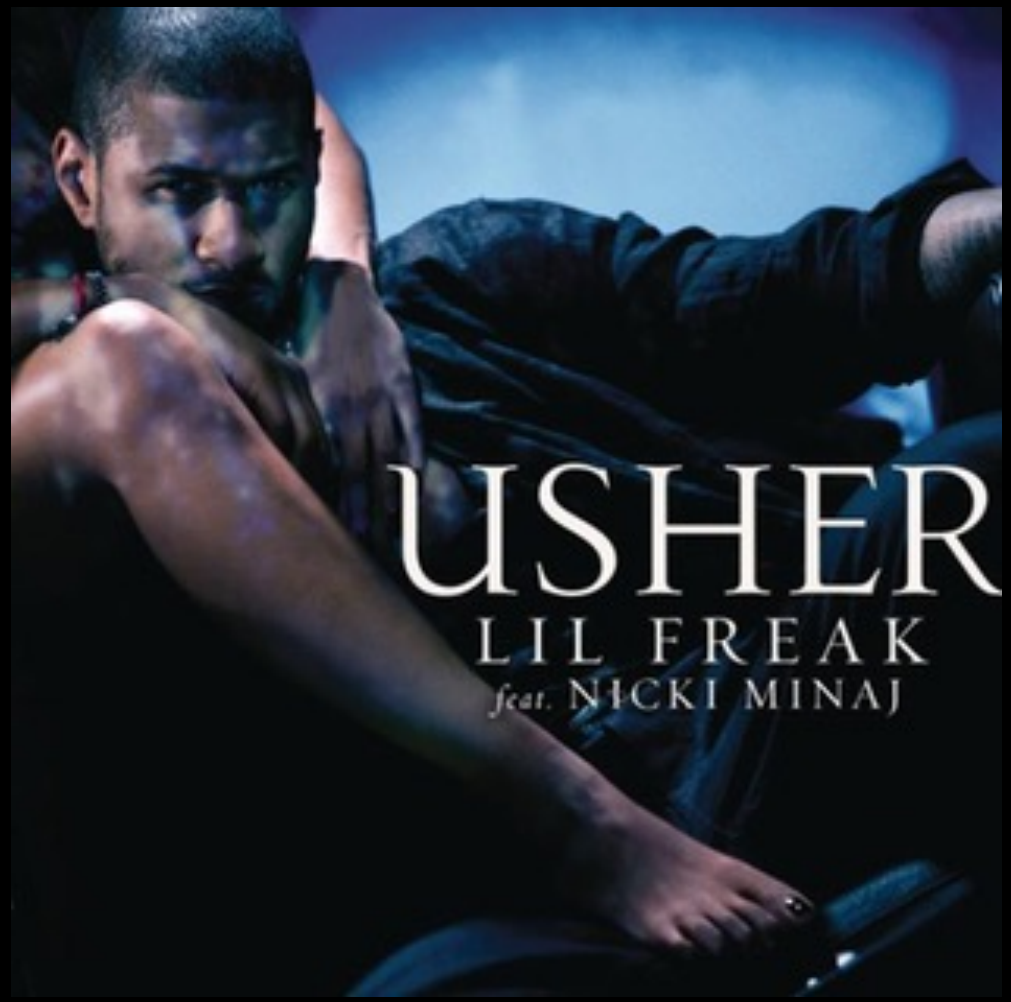
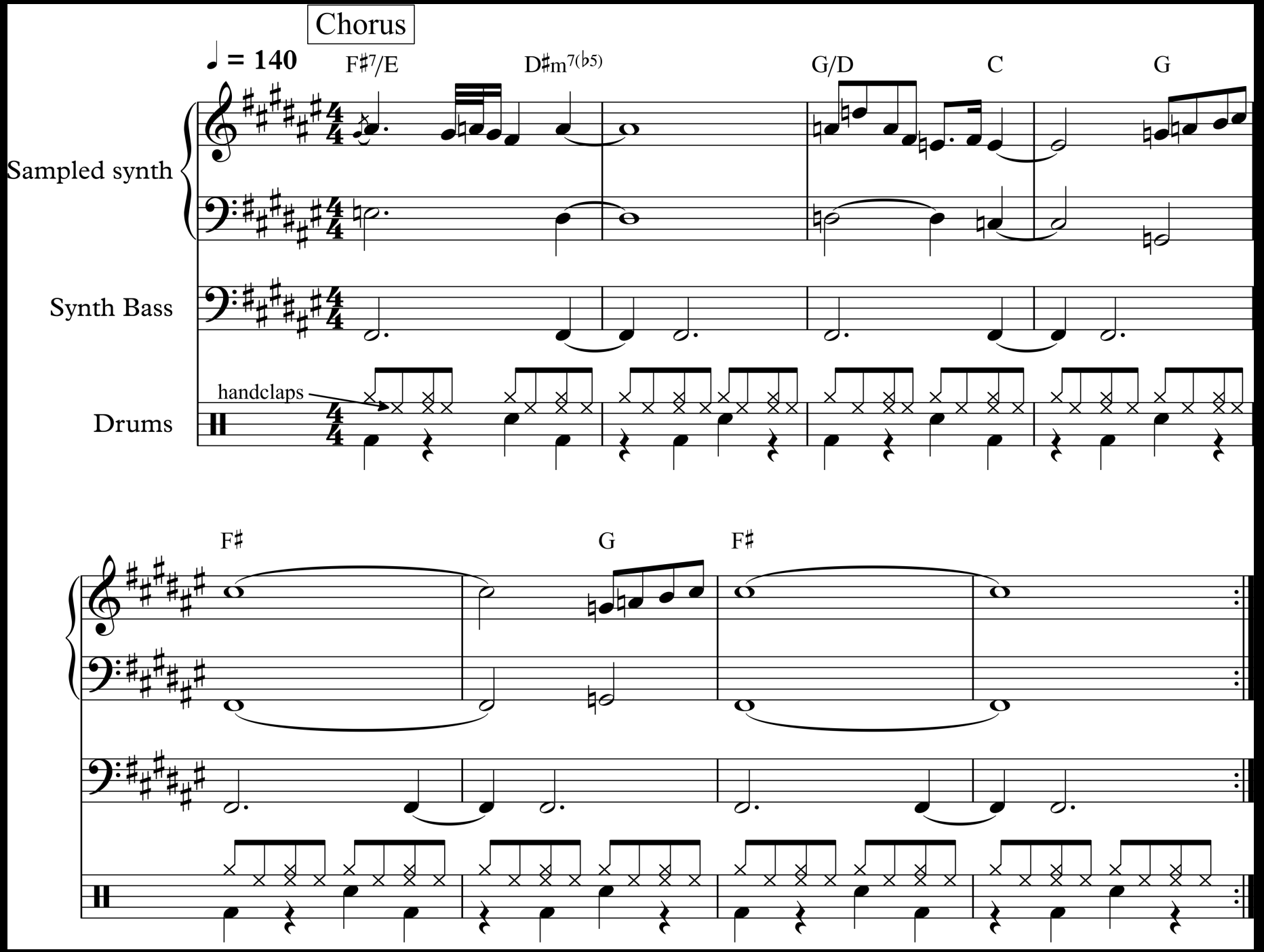
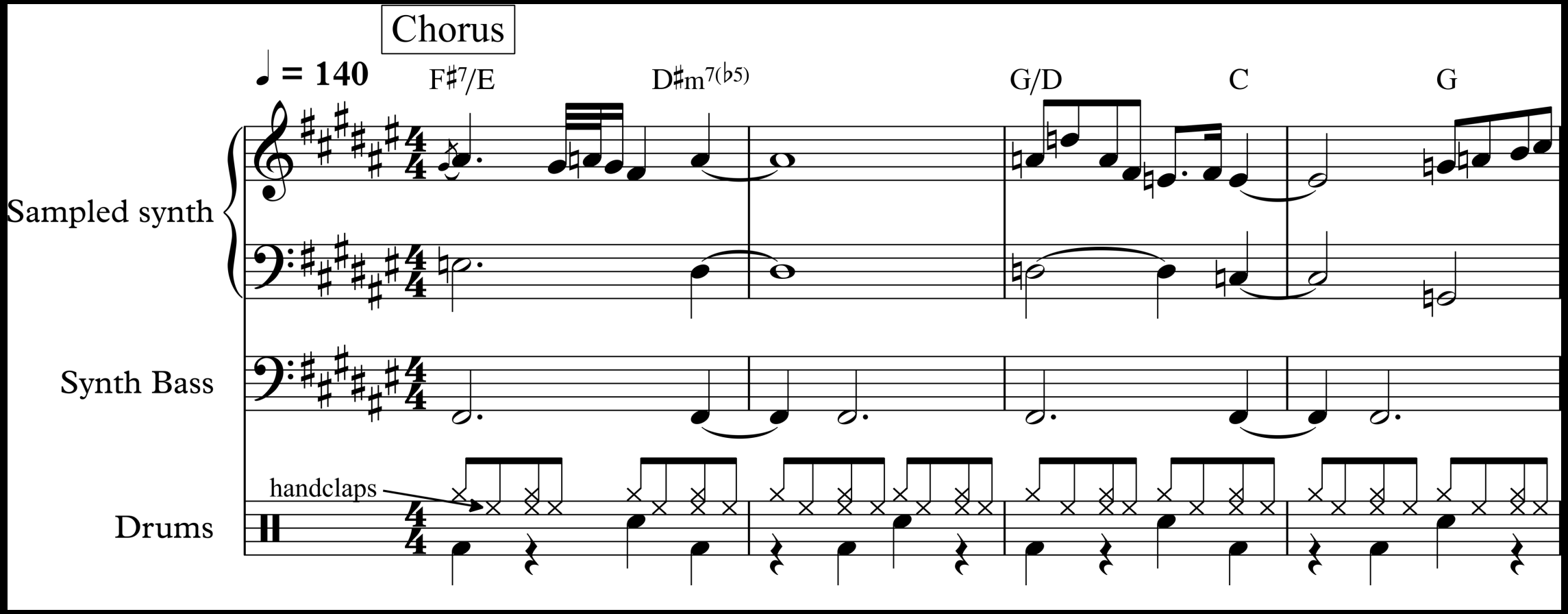


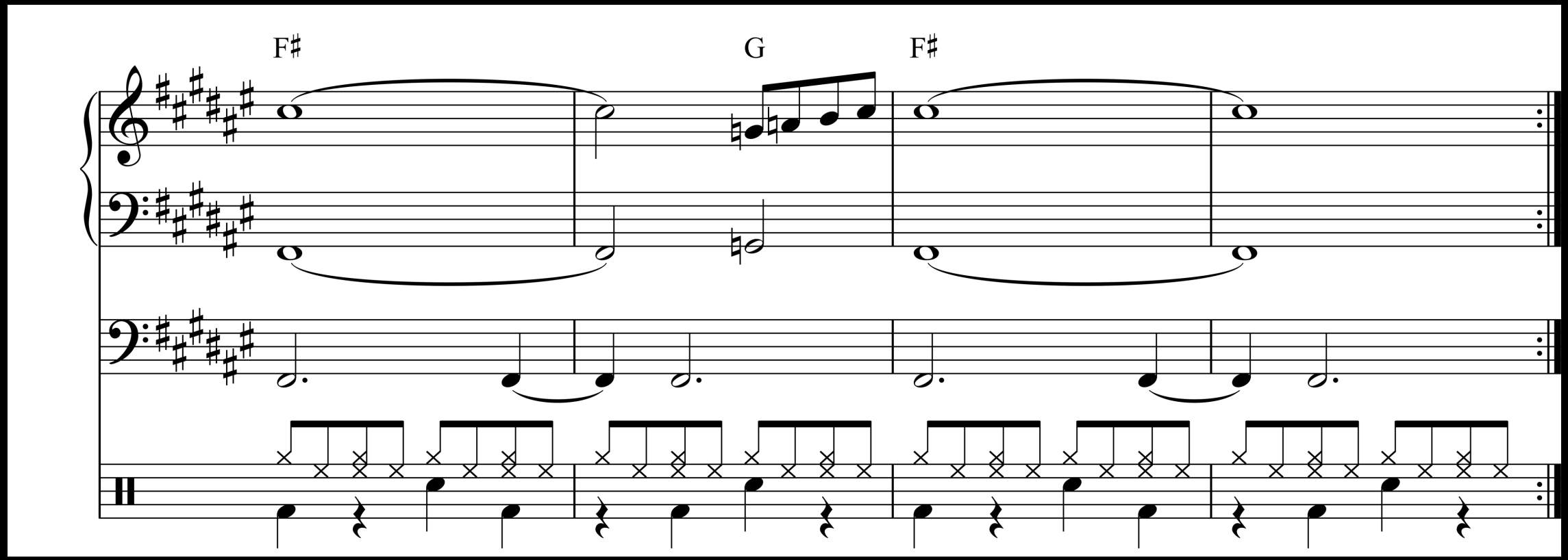
Usher, “Lil’ Freak” (2010), produced by Polow da Don


Chorus
♩ = 140
F♯7/E
D♯m7(♭5)
G/D
C
G
Sampled synth
Synth Bass
handclaps
Drums
F♯
G
F♯

Example 3



Usher, “Lil’ Freak,” Chorus (Example 3)



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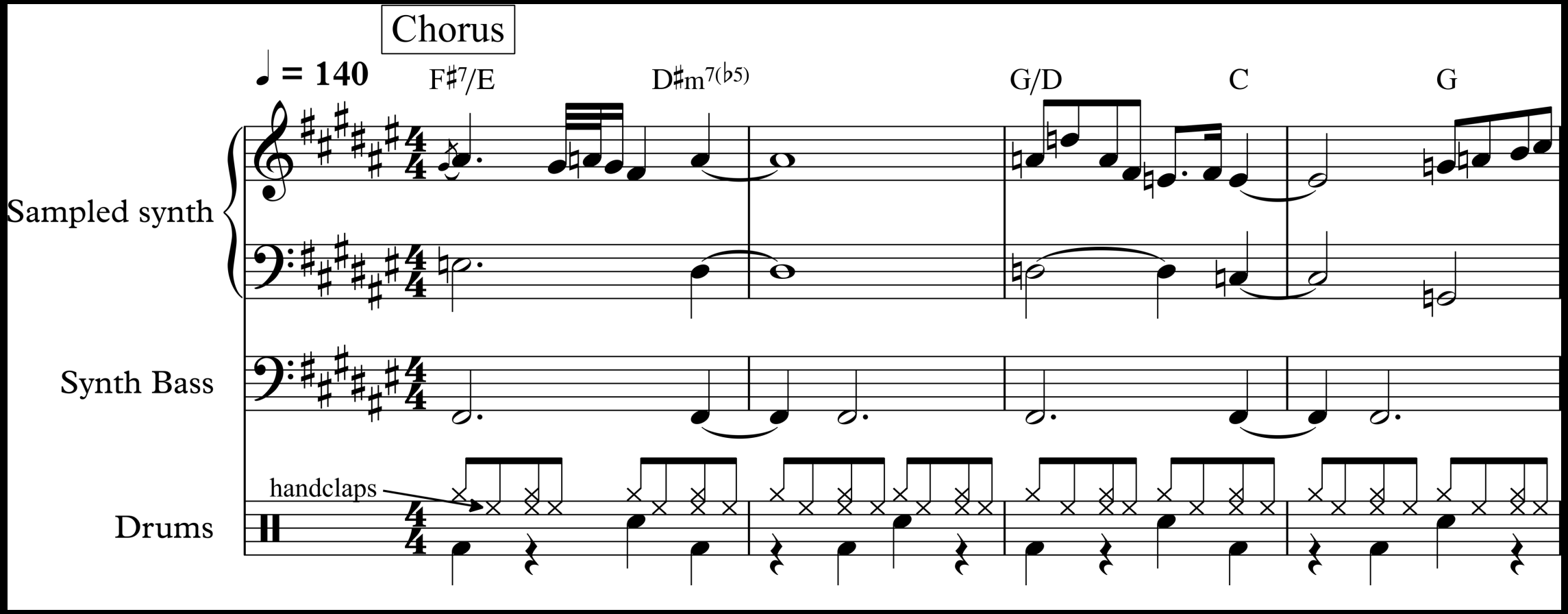

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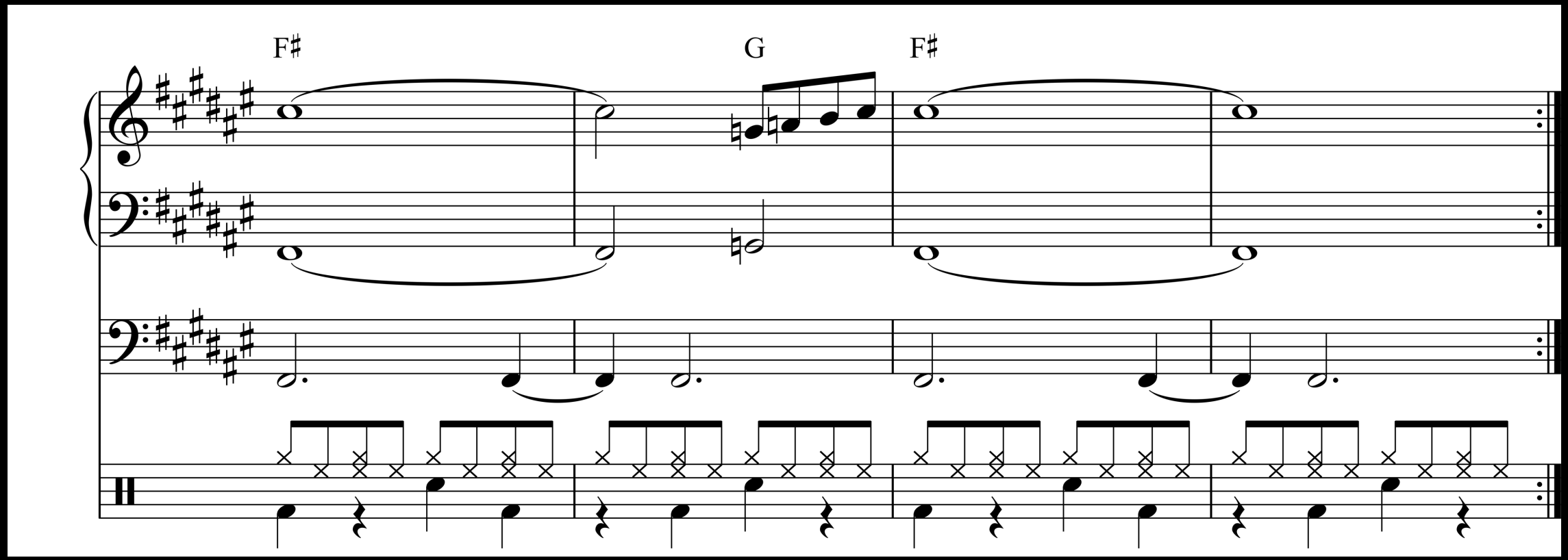

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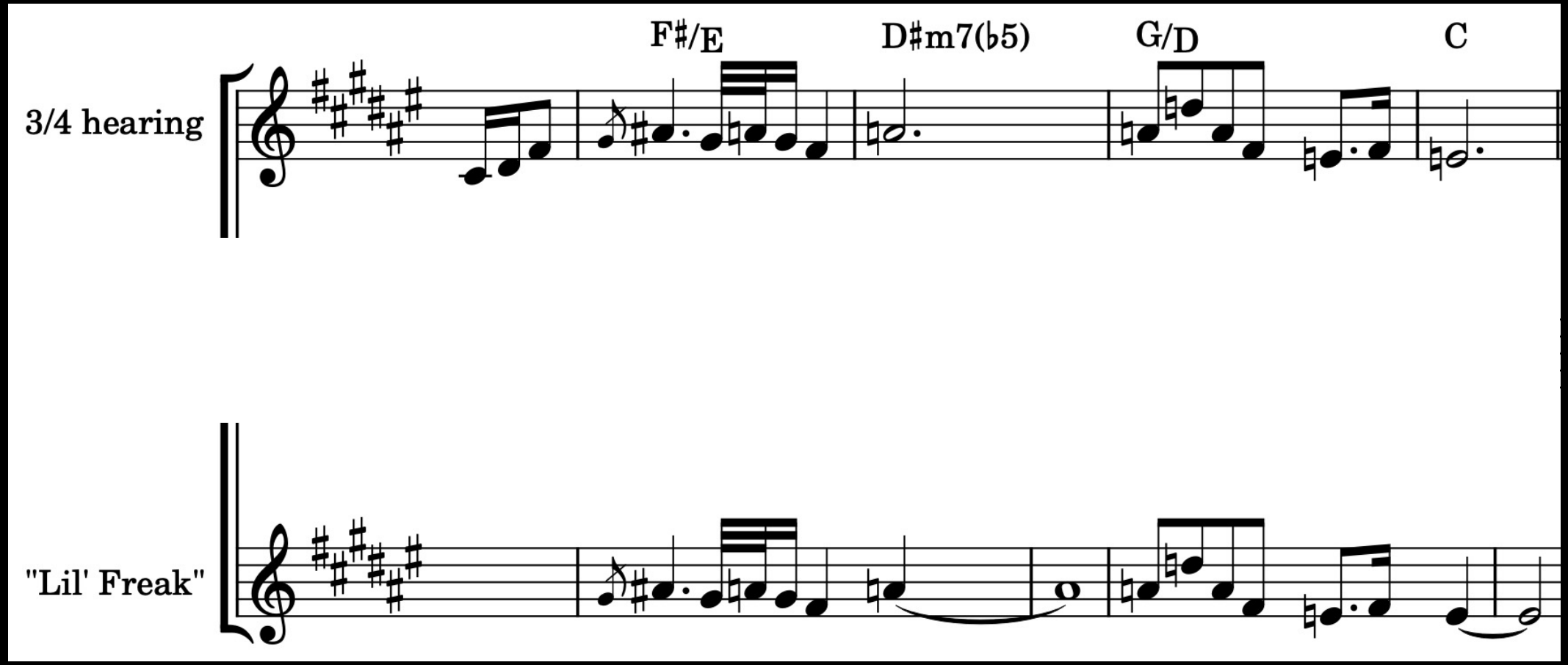
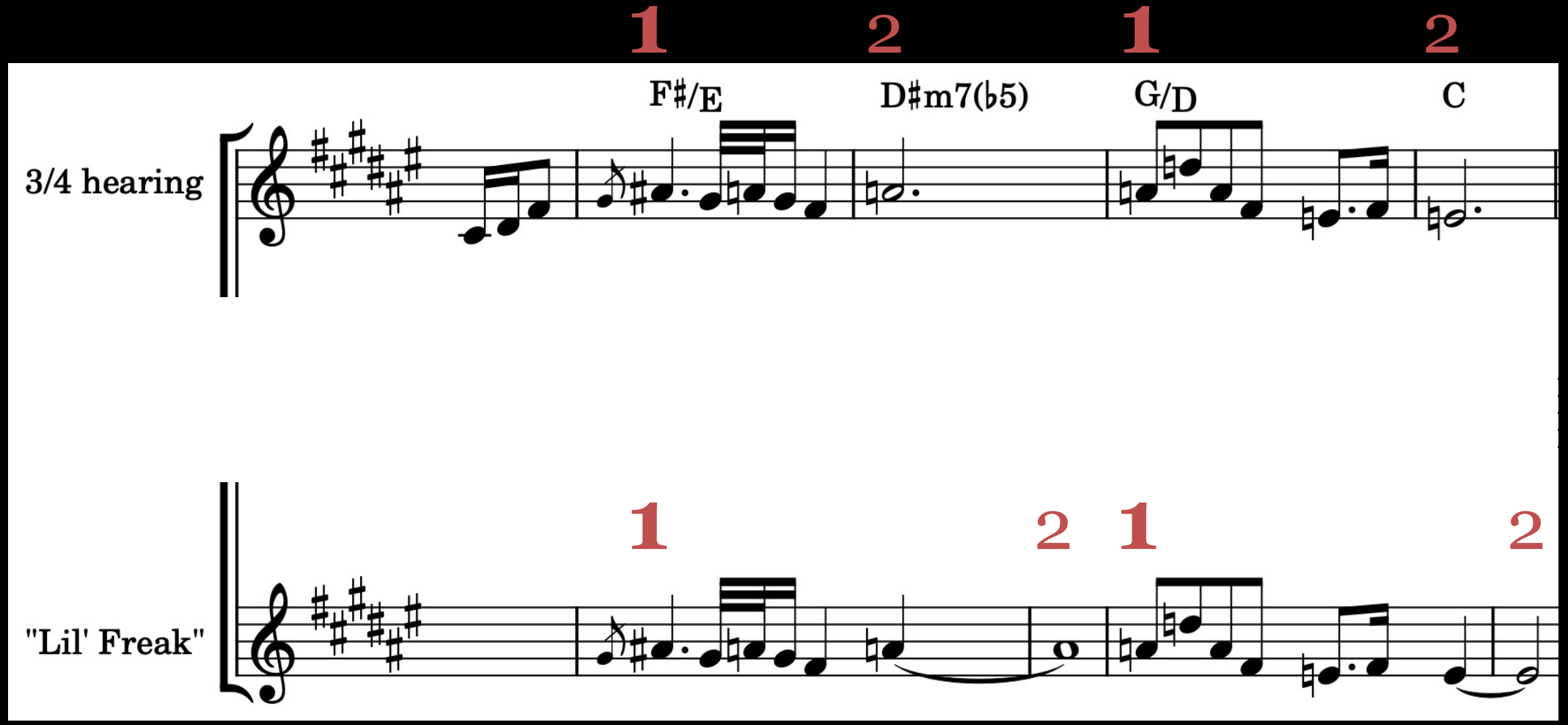


Comparison of different hearings (Example 4)



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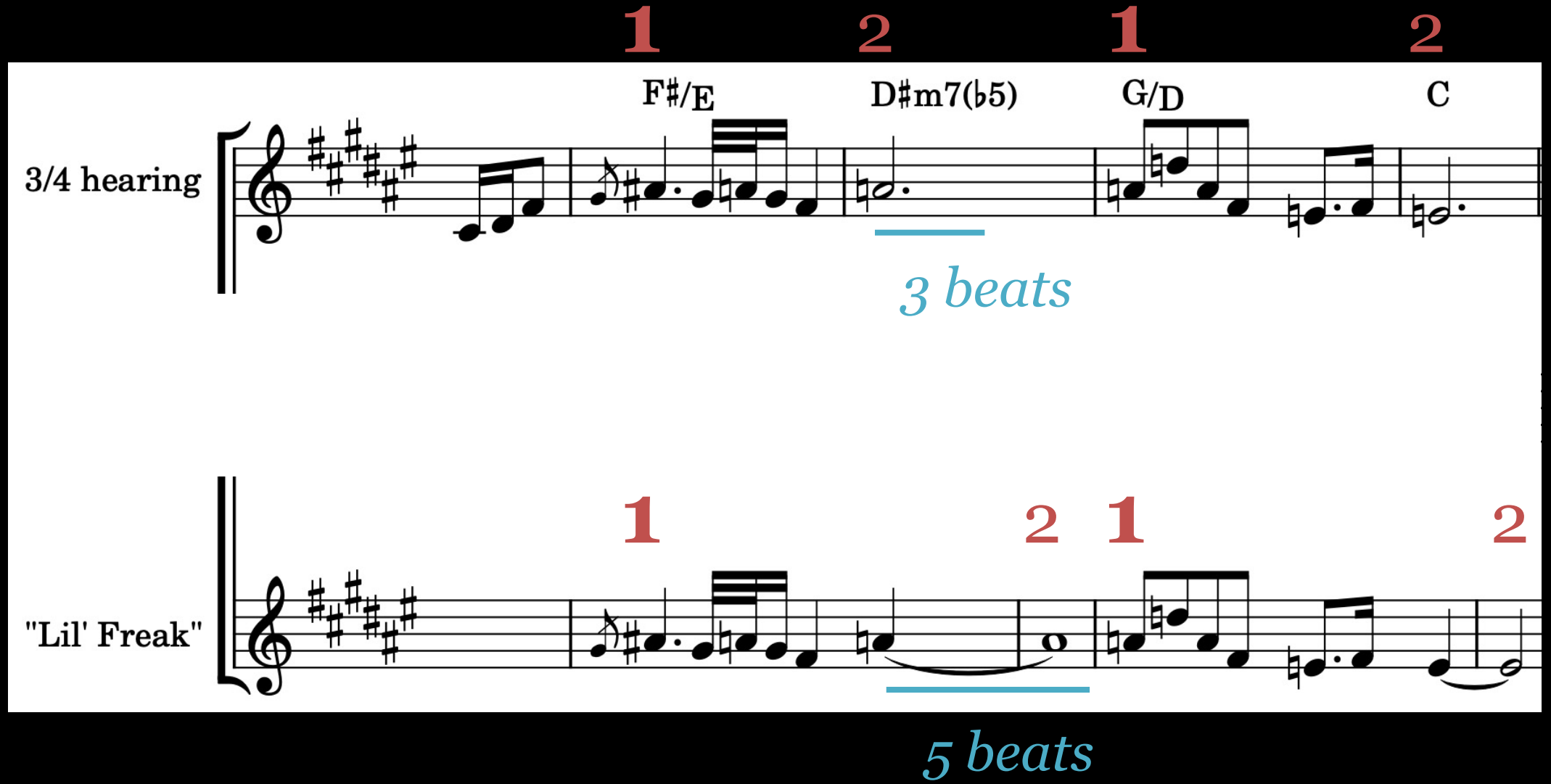

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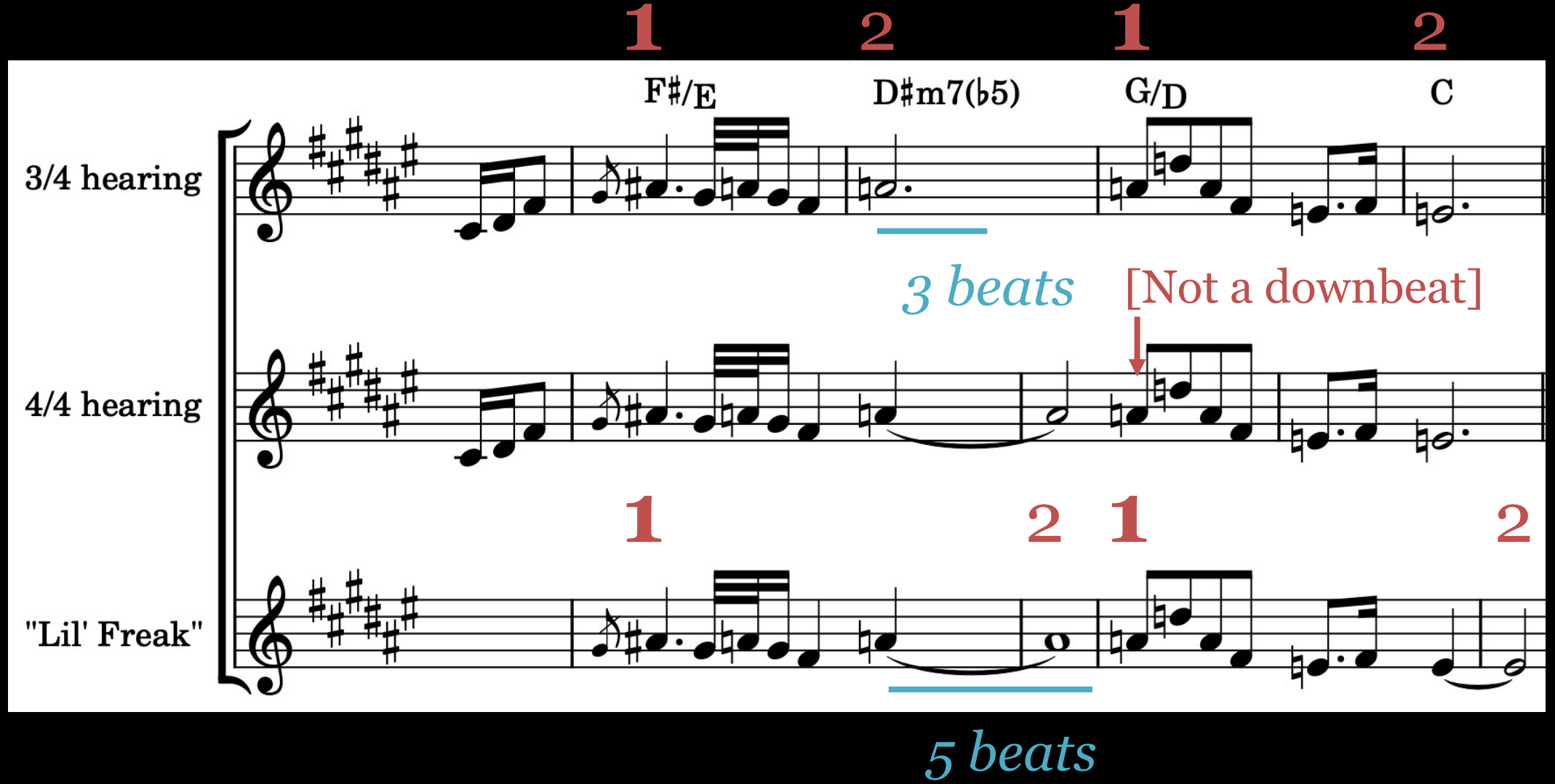

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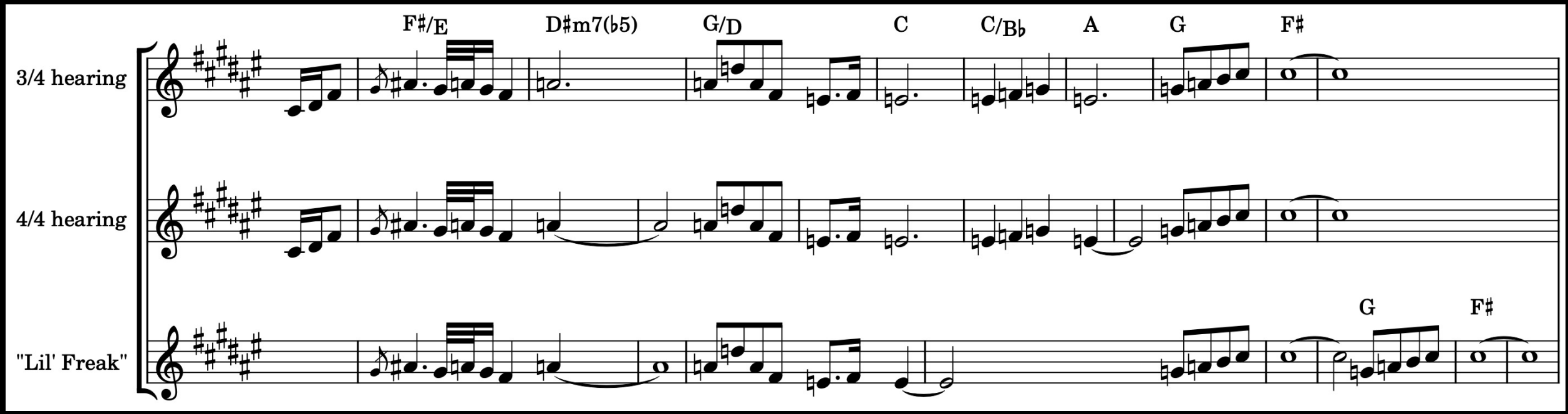

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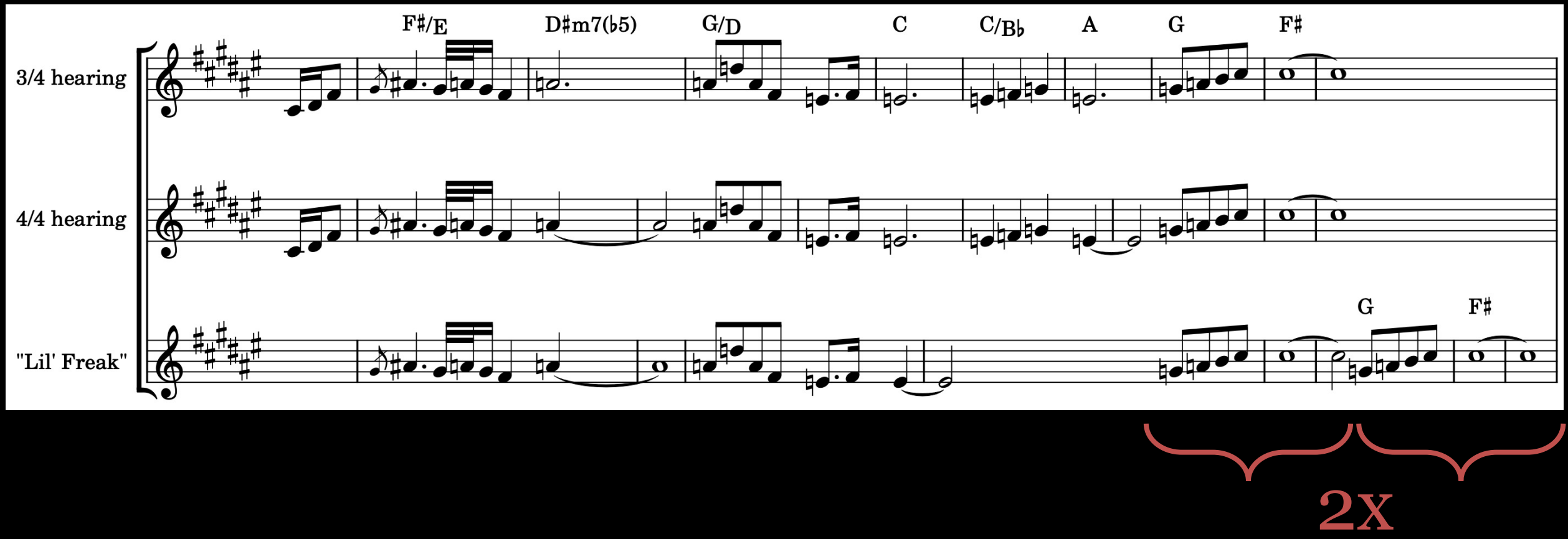

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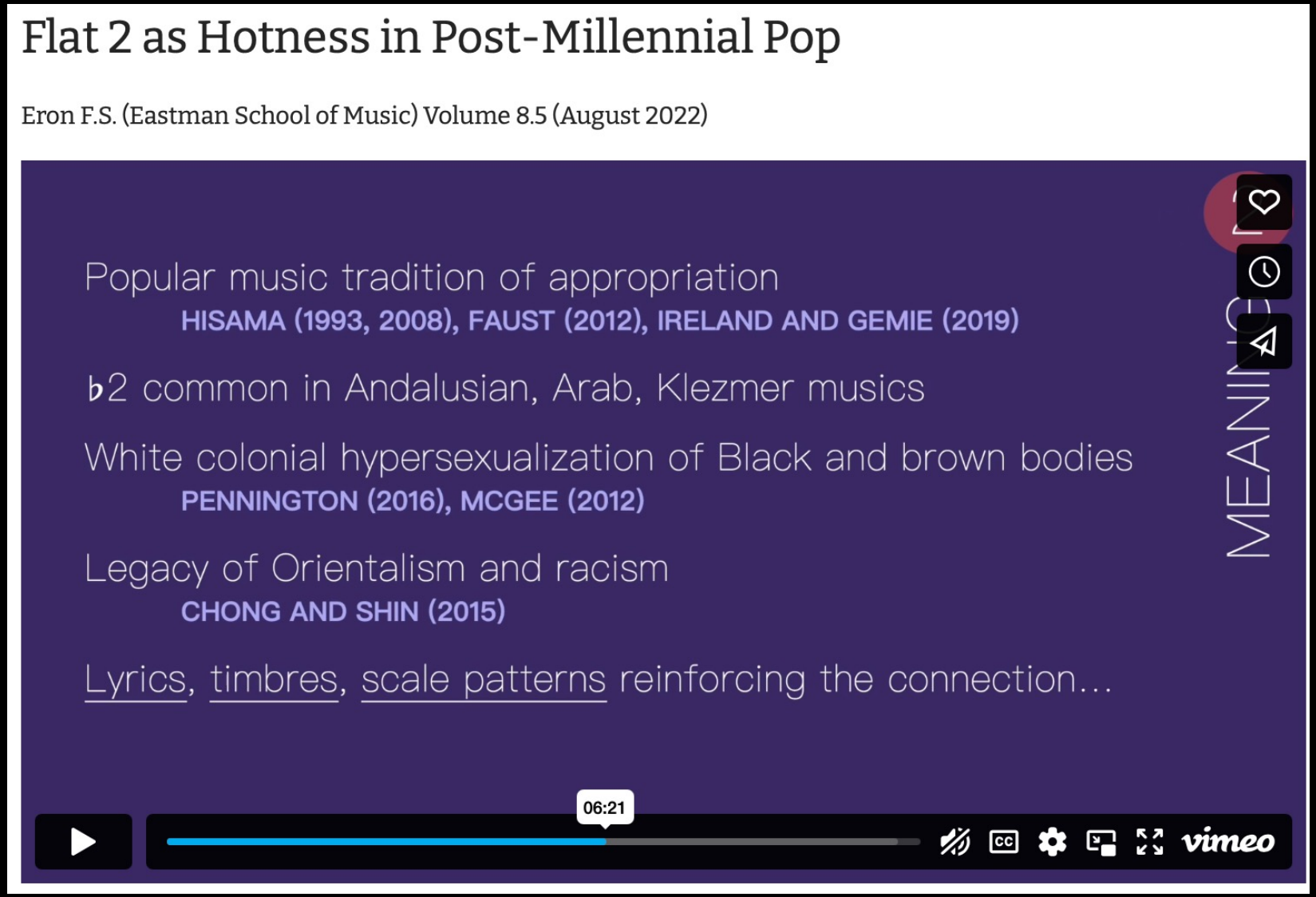
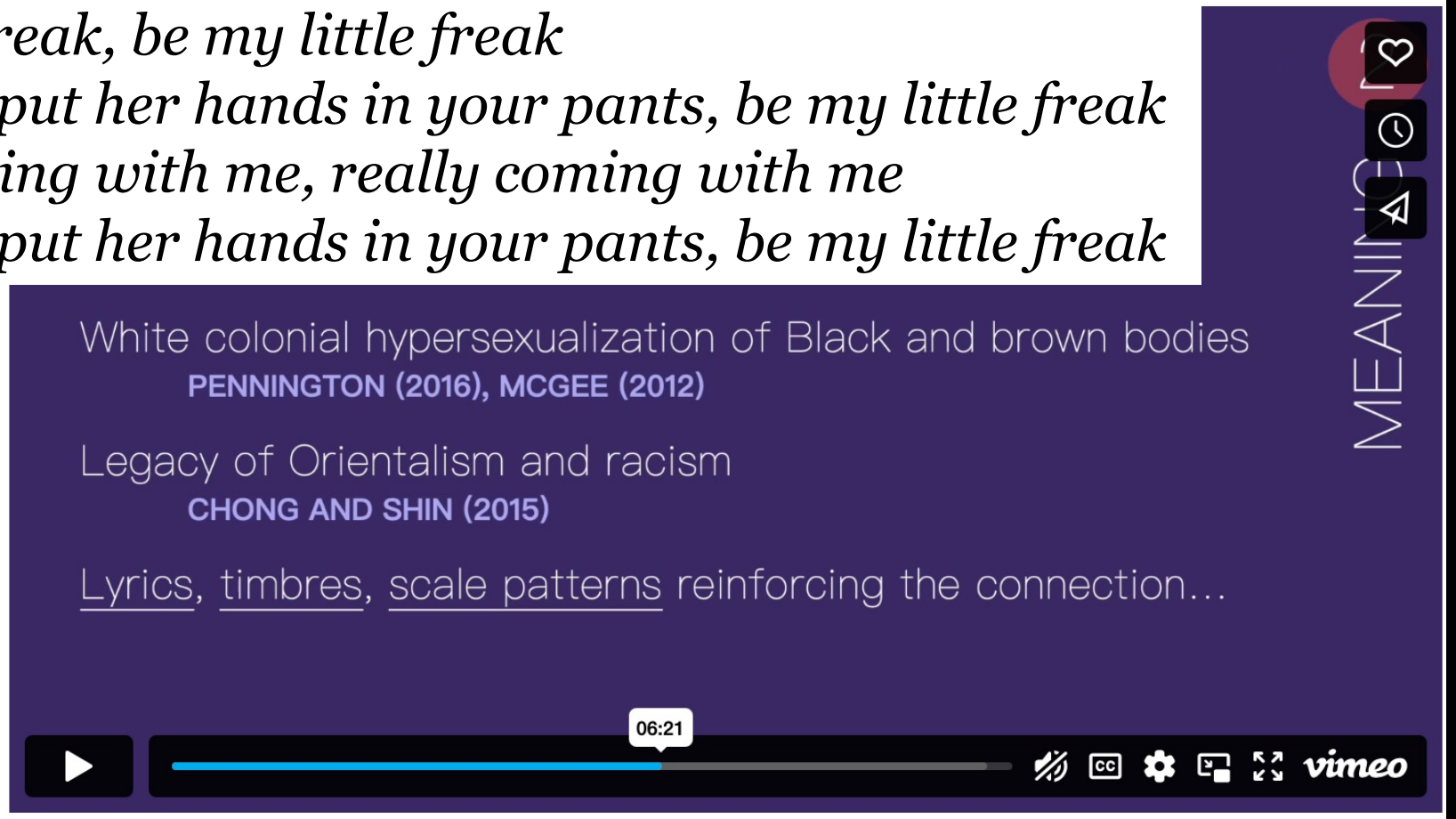


Eron F. S, "Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop," *SMT-V* 8, no. 5 (2022).

Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop

Eron F.S. (Eastman School of Music) Volume 8.5 (August 2022)

Be my little freak, be my little freak
You'll let her put her hands in your pants, be my little freak
If you're coming with me, really coming with me
You'll let her put her hands in your pants, be my little freak



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Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop

Eron F.S. (Eastman School of Music) Volume 8.5 (August 2022)

1x

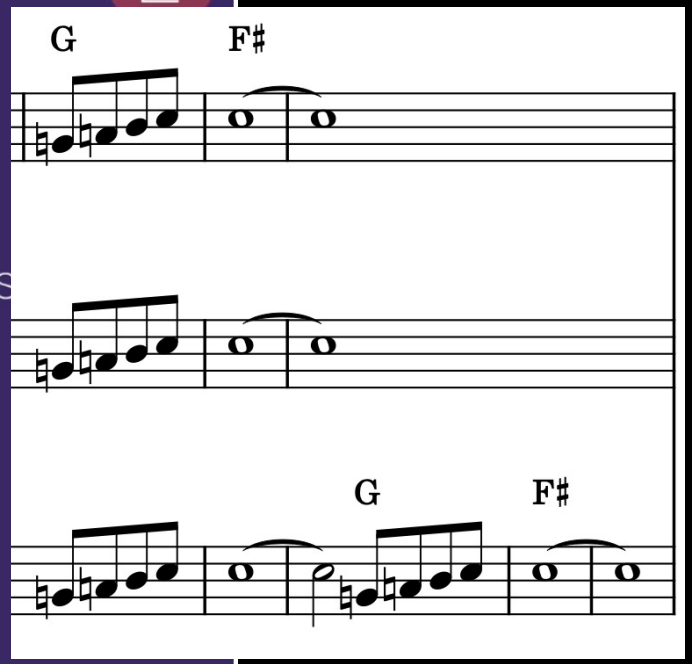
Be my little freak, be my little freak
You'll let her put her hands in your pants, be my little freak
If you're coming with me, really coming with me
You'll let her put her hands in your pants, be my little freak

White colonial hypersexualization of Black and brown bodies
PENNINGTON (2016), MCGEE (2012)

Legacy of Orientalism and racism
CHONG AND SHIN (2015)

Lyrics, timbres, scale patterns reinforcing the connection…

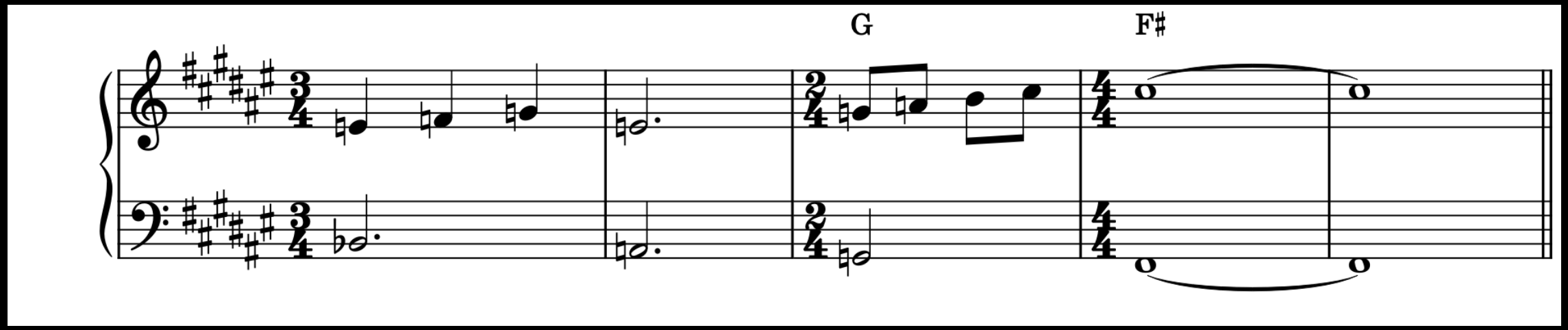
06:21

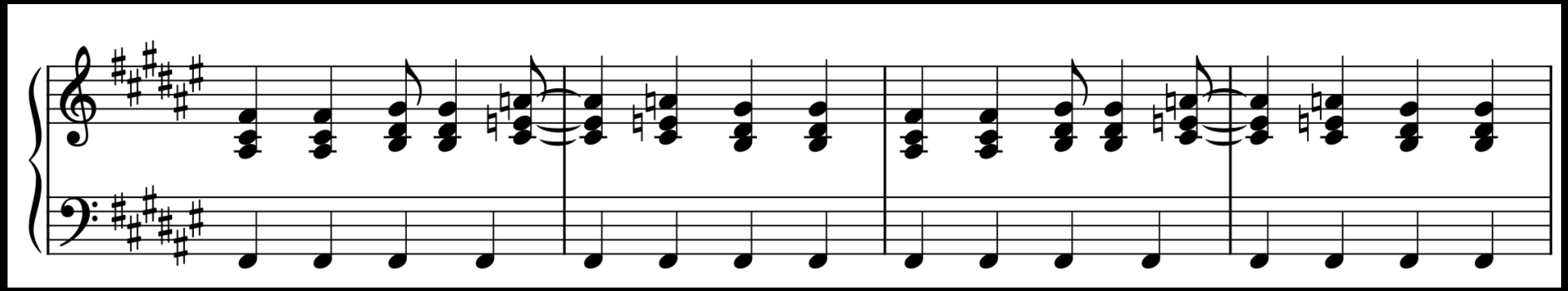


2x

Eron F. S, "Flat 2 as Hotness in Post-Millennial Pop," *SMT-V* 8, no. 5 (2022).

♭II





His sister’s black,
but she is sho’nuff pretty
Her skirt is short,
but Lord her legs are sturdy…

Excerpt 2:

Melba Moore, “I Don’t Know No One Else to Turn To,” *A Portrait of Melba* (1977) (Example 5)

sampled in

Destiny’s Child, “Is She the Reason,” *Destiny Fulfilled* (2004) (Example 6)
Produced by 9th Wonder

Sample-based hip hop shares much in common with other more widely recognized forms of musical “analysis”

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Hip-hop producers are EXPERT LISTENERS and EXPERT ANALYSTS

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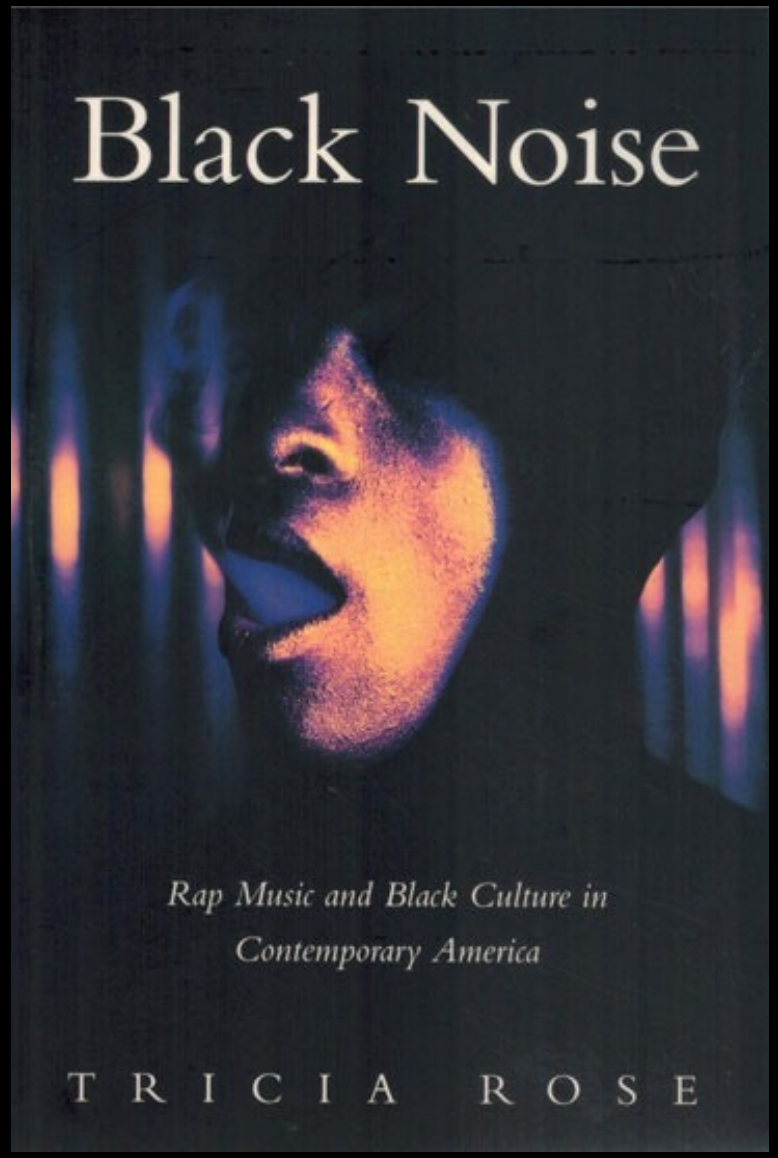
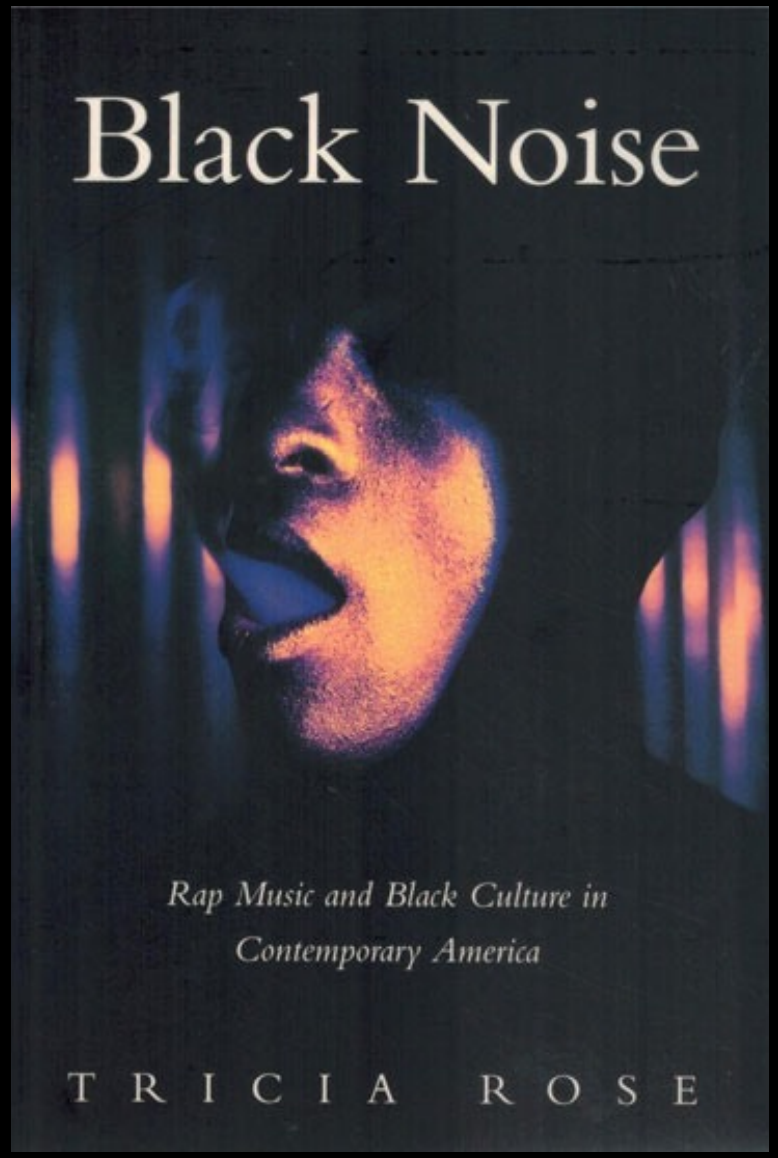
Hip-hop producers are EXPERT LISTENERS and EXPERT ANALYSTS

Producers’ beats offer transformative opportunities for engaging with the sources that they draw upon



Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 62.

"In the spring of 1989, I was speaking animatedly with an ethnomusicology professor about rap music and the aims of this project. He found some of my ideas engaging and decided to introduce me and describe my project to the chairman of his music department. At the end of his summary the department head rose from his seat and announced casually, 'Well, you must be writing on rap's social impact and political lyrics, because there is nothing to the music.'"



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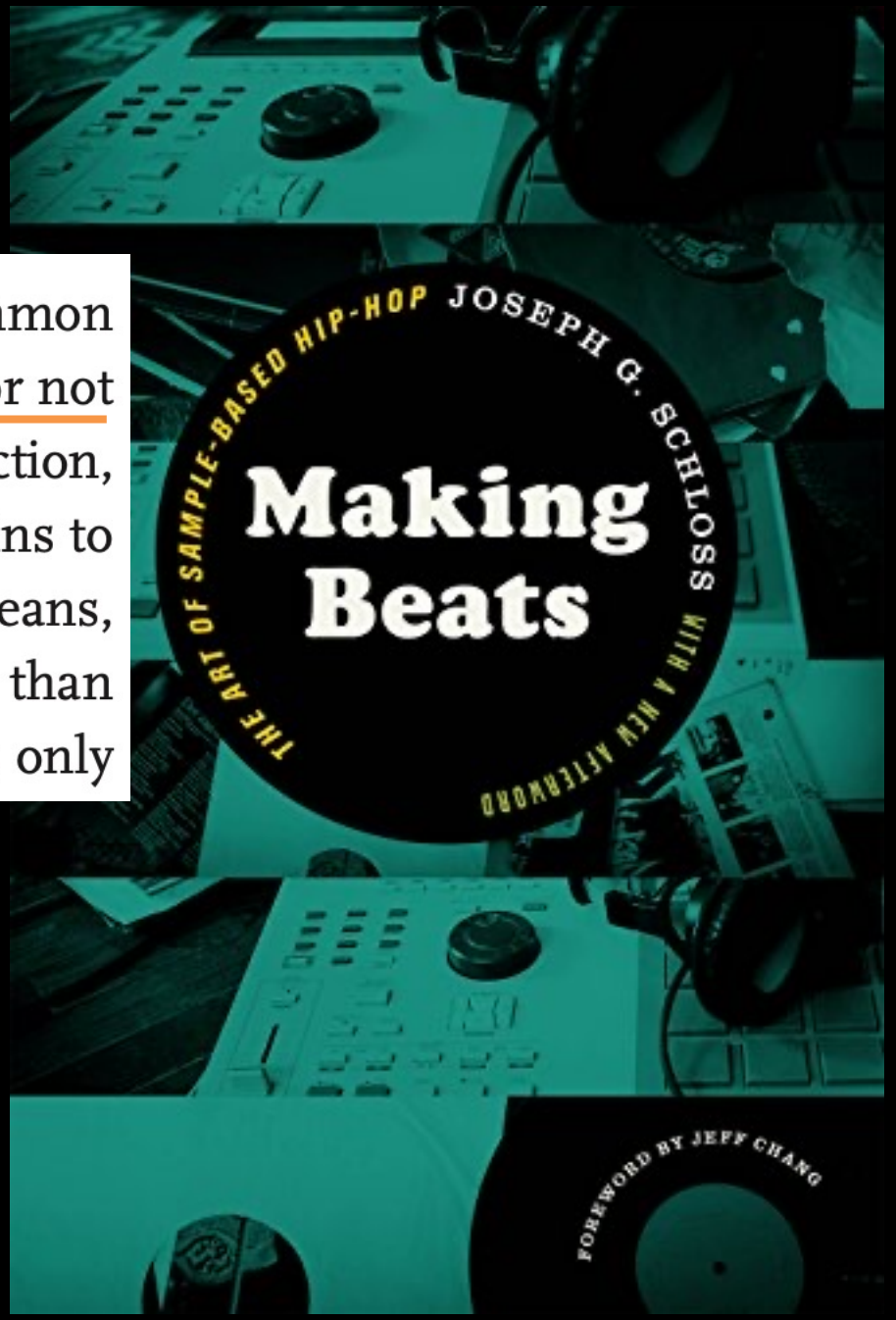
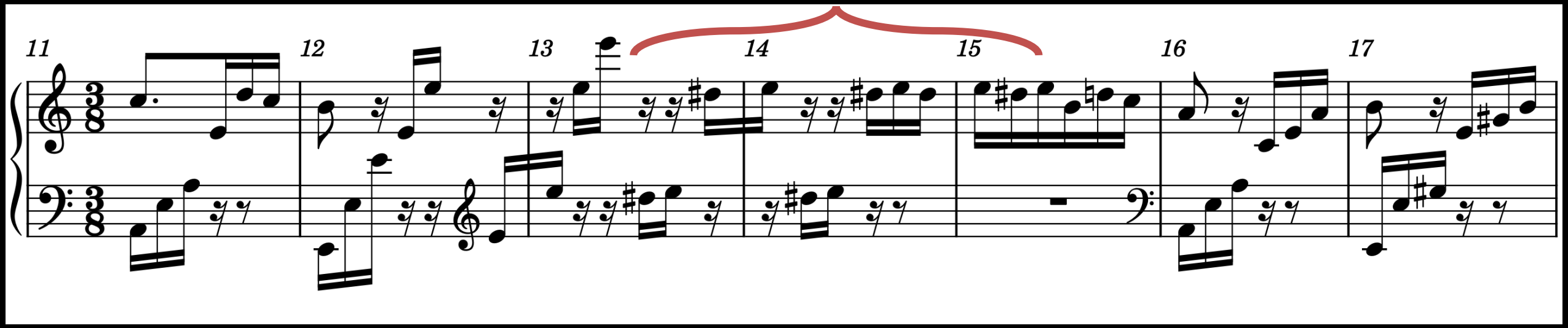
In the epigraph that opens this book, Mr. Supreme relates the common experience of hip-hop producers being questioned about whether or not hip-hop is "really" music. Whenever I speak about hip-hop production, this is almost always the second question I'm asked.[18] As I take pains to point out, it is actually a question about what the word "music" means, and it contains the hidden predicate that music is more valuable than forms of sonic expression that are not music. If one believes that only

Joseph Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 23.

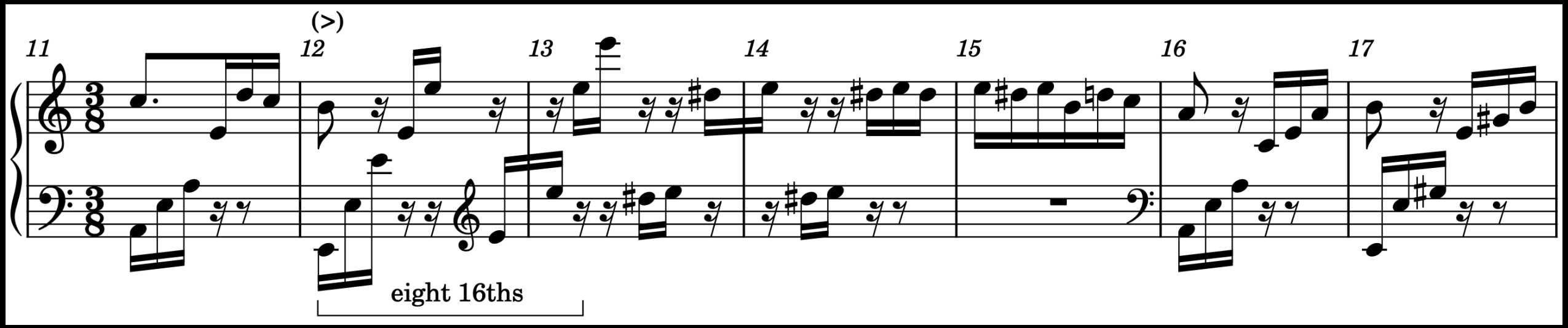


Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)



Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

m. 12:
dominant
arrival

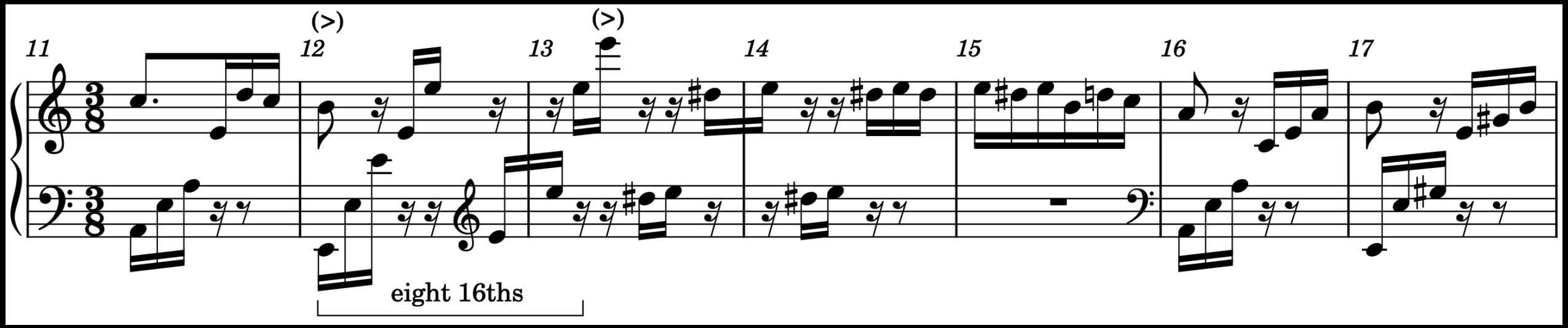


(i) V

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

m. 12:
dominant
arrival

completion of
8ve gesture;
melodic apex



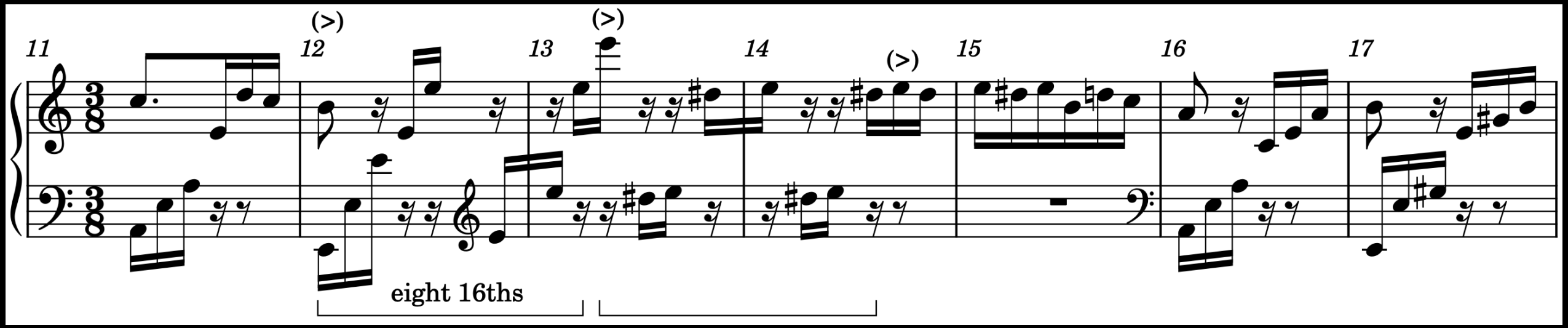
(i) V

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

m. 12:
dominant
arrival

completion of
8ve gesture;
melodic apex

reprise
begins!



(i) V

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

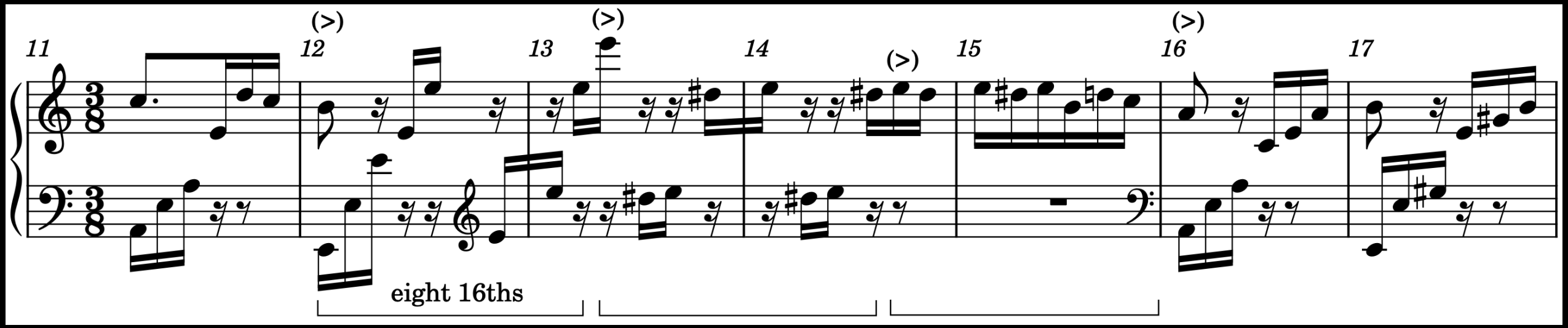
m. 12:
dominant
arrival

completion of
8ve gesture;
melodic apex

reprise
begins!

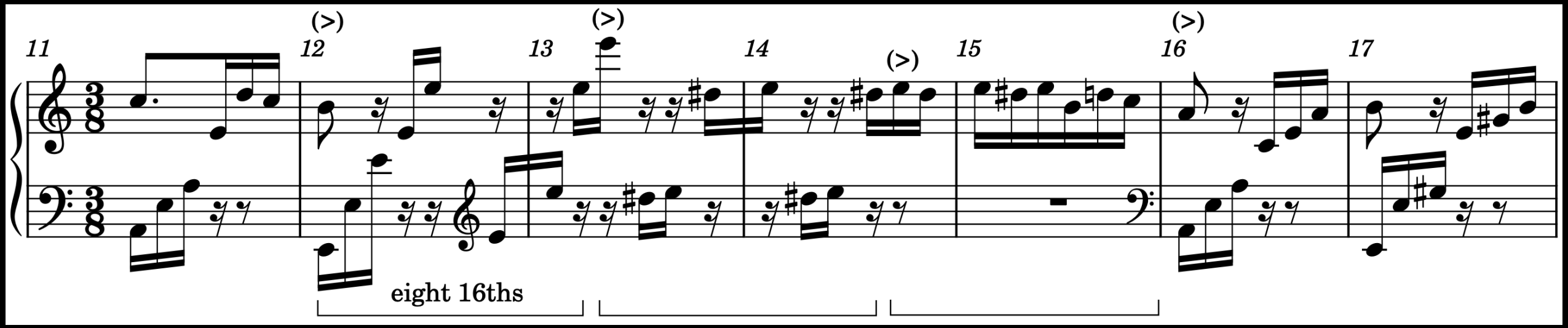
m. 16:
tonic arrival

3/8 resumes…



(i) V i

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)



(i) V i

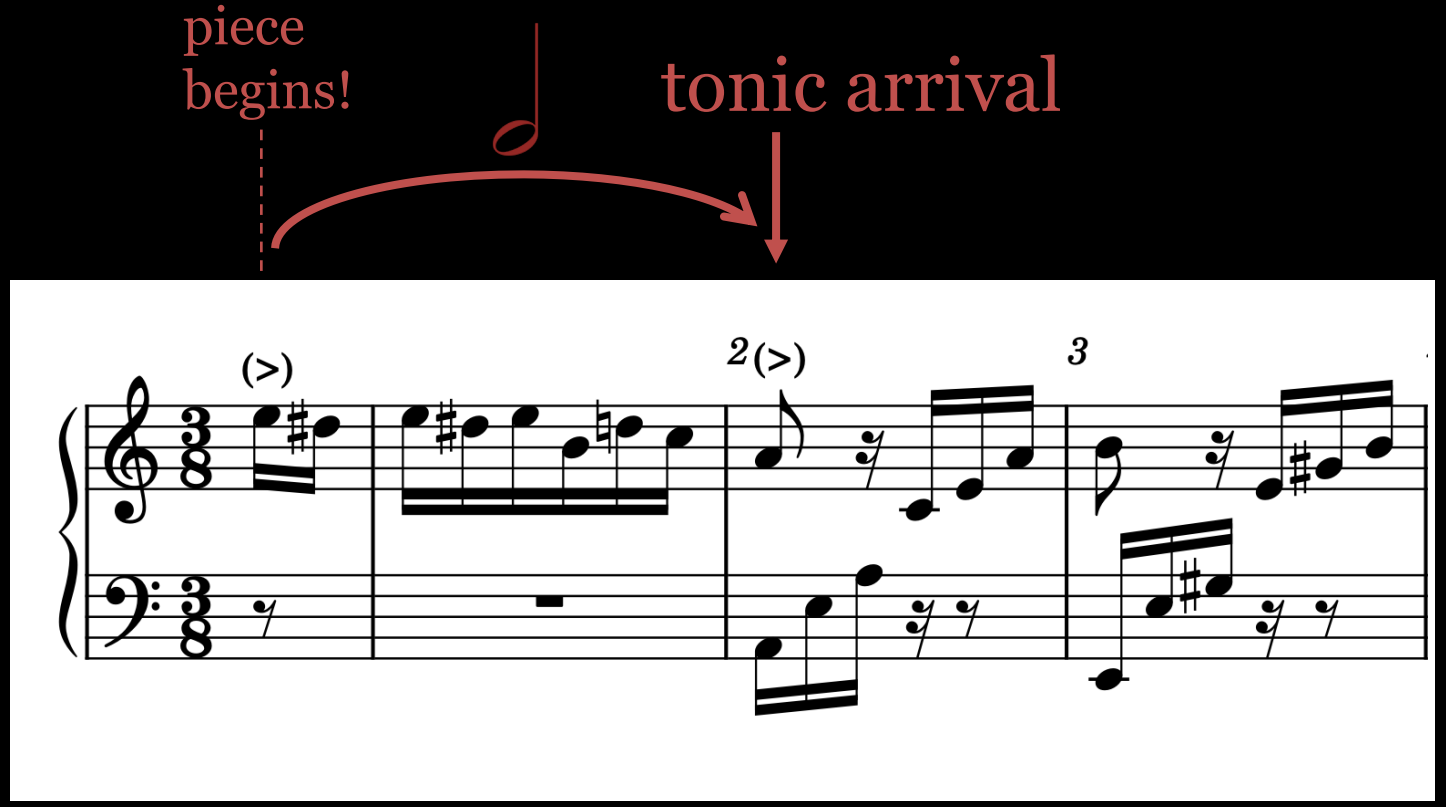
(Cohn 2015, 19)

Once the passage is heard in this way, the D♯/E alternation locks into the projected ♩ pulse, and there is no reason to play any more or fewer notes than what Beethoven wrote.

Beethoven, “Für Elise” (1810)

“Accordingly, we have strong reason to hear the opening eight-beat anacrusis as beginning at a metrically accented position, and projecting a ♩ pulse”

(Cohn 2015, 19)

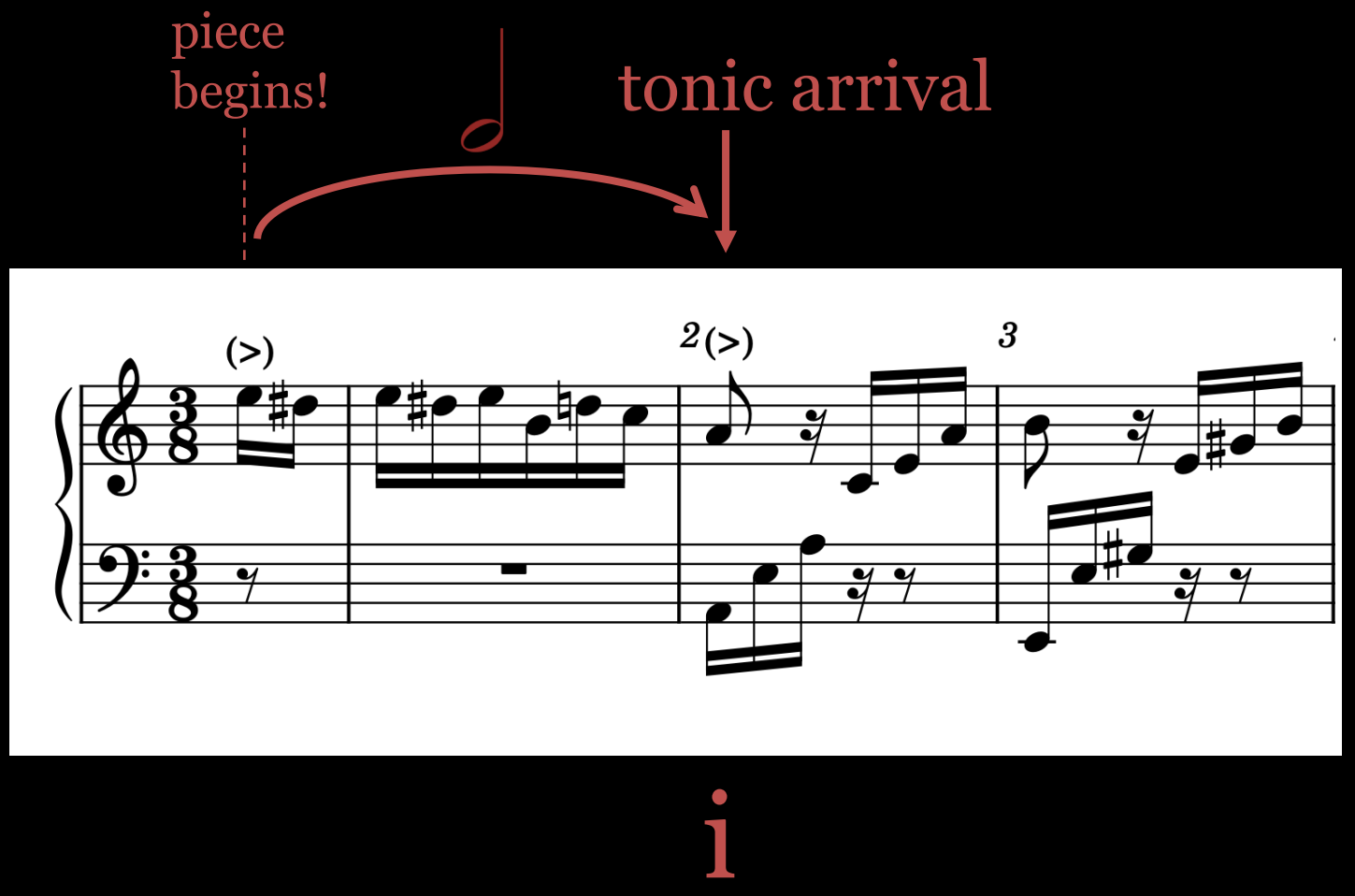


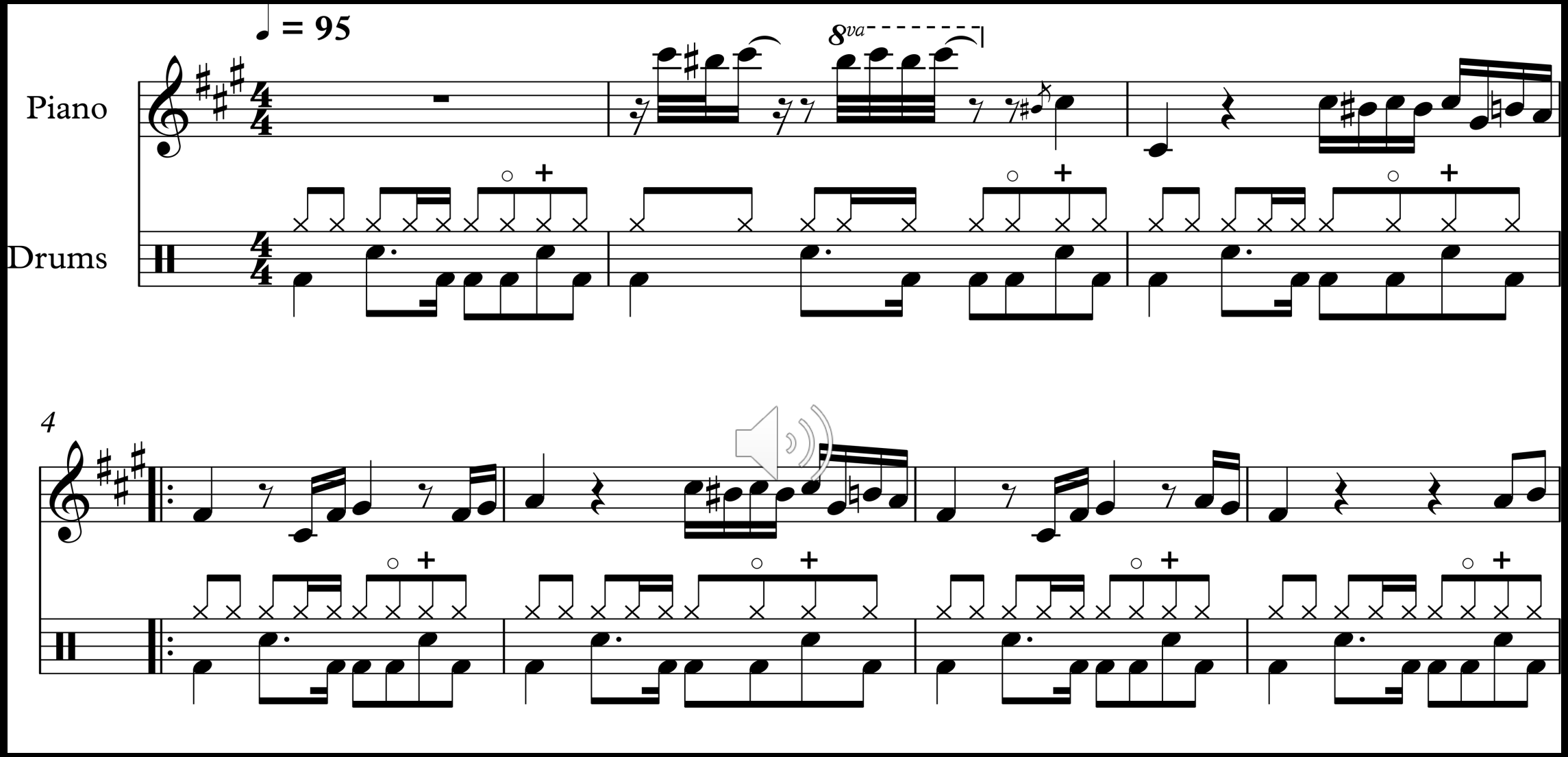
Remi 2002

"Accordingly, we have a strong reason to hear the opening eight-beat anacrusis as beginning at a metrically accented position, and projecting a ♩ pulse"

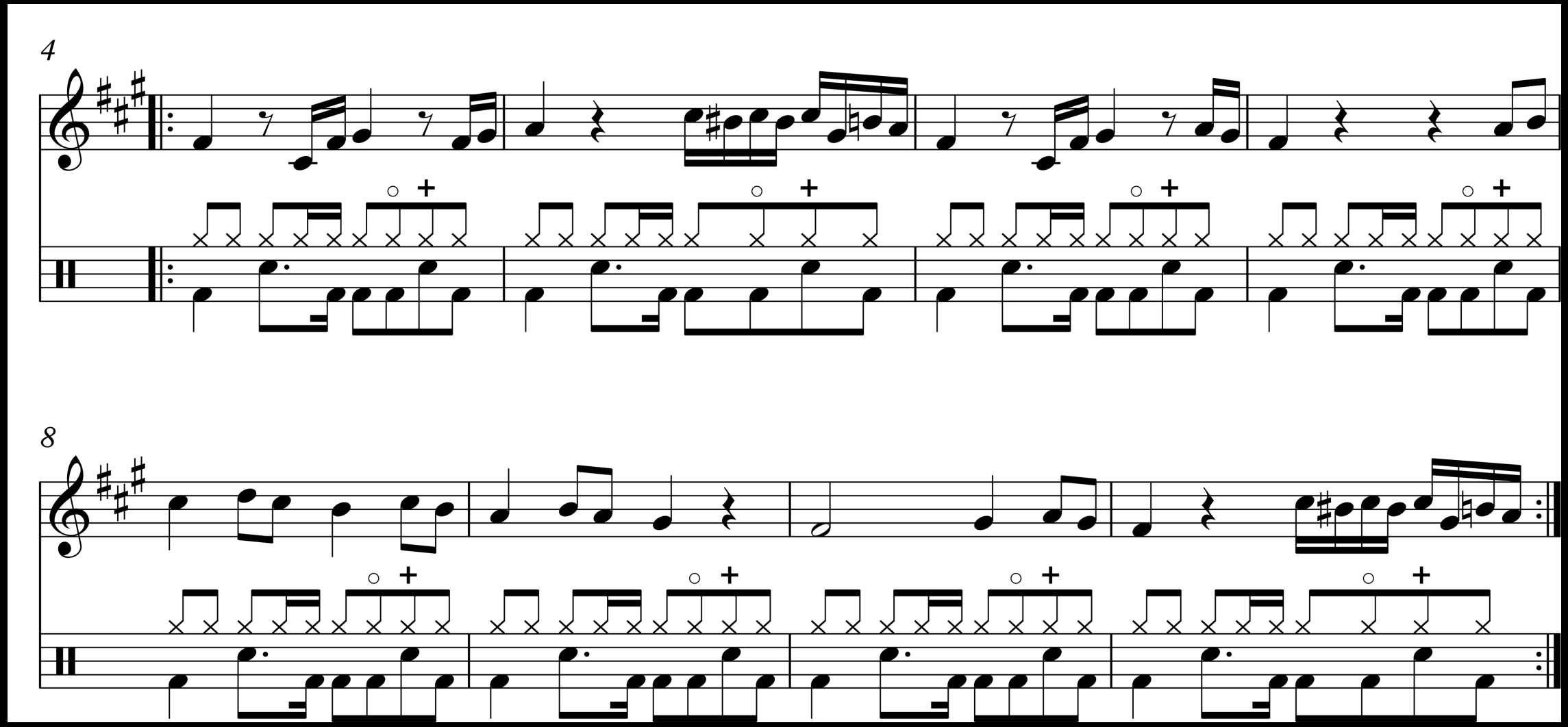
(Cohn 2015, 19)

Beethoven, "Für Elise" (1810)





Nas, “I Can” (2002), produced by Salaam Remi (example 8)

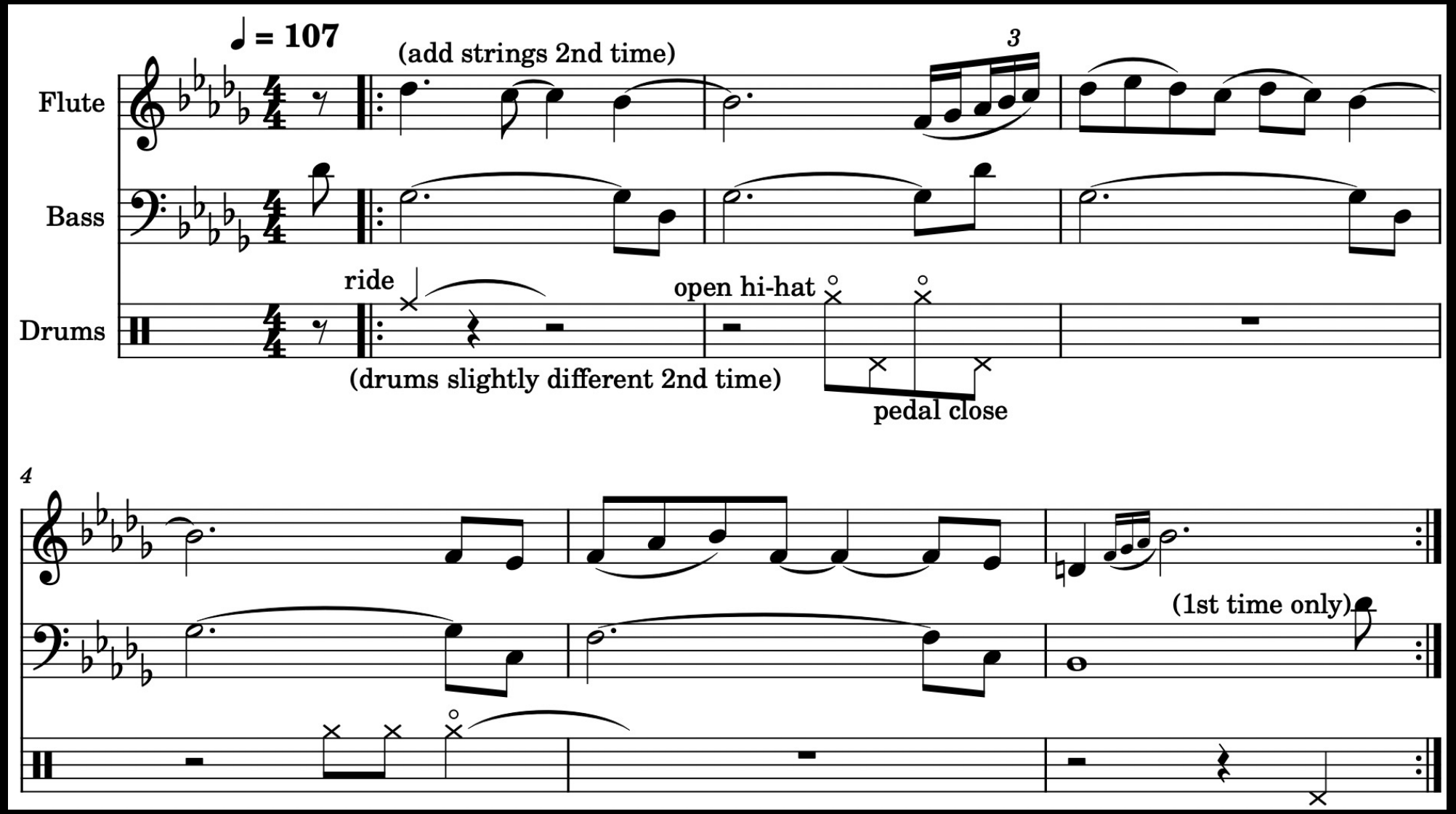


Nas, “I Can” (2002), produced by Salaam Remi (example 8)

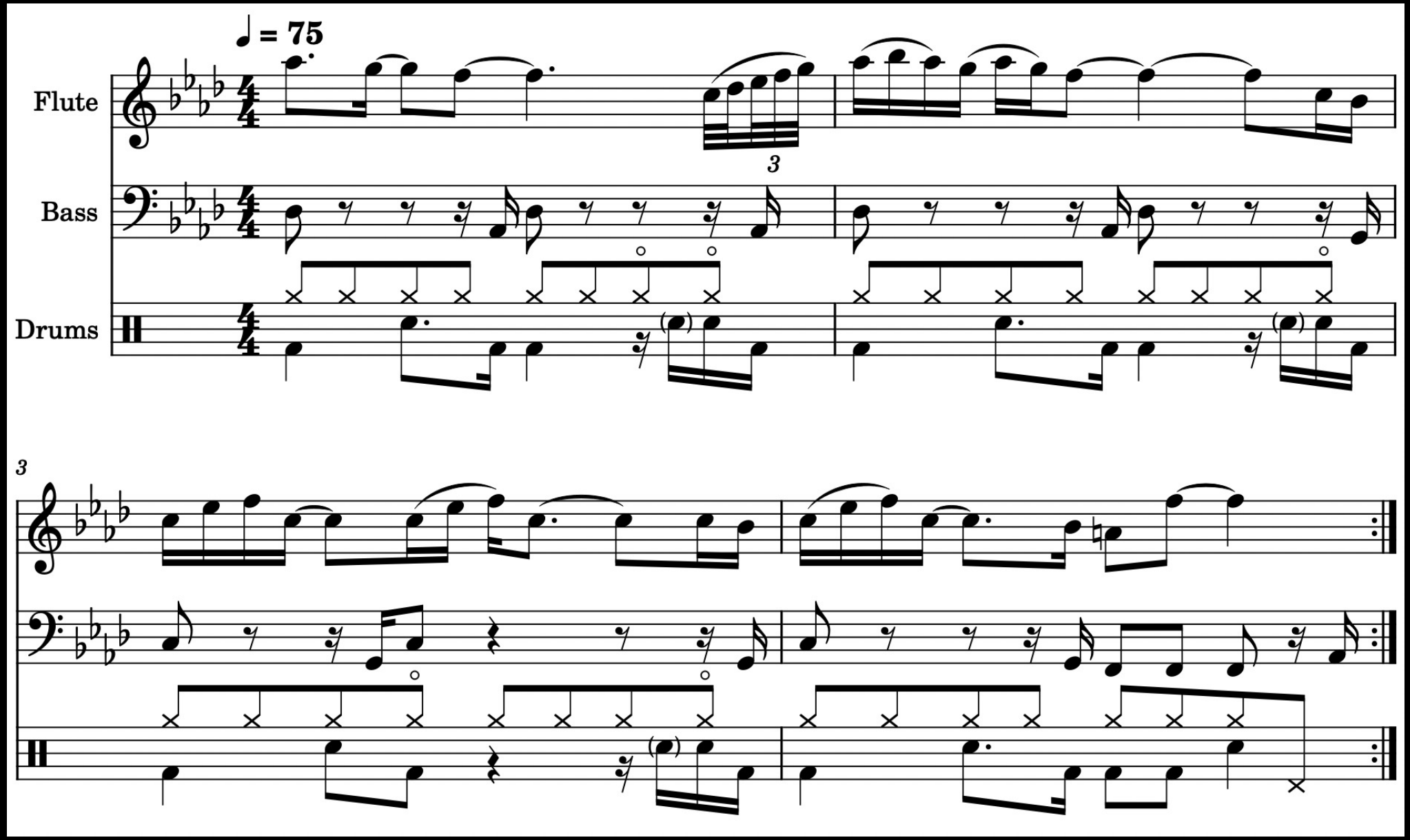
Thank you !!

Thanks to Jon Wild, Nicole Biamonte, Ed Klorman, and Emily Leavitt

For my script, slides, and handout (with bibliography), scan this…



Example 5. Melba Moore, “I Don’t Know No One Else to Turn To” (1977), introduction.



Example 6. Destiny's Child, "Is She the Reason" (2004), introduction

DJ Evil Dee

"Once you DJ … it's like you automatically become a producer. When you take a record and you're cuttin' it up, when you're blending it, that's your interpretation of that record. You produced that interpretation of that record."

Quoted in Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 122.

First, within this type of analysis, performers themselves are, in some sense, *analysts* of the music they perform; or, to put it more strongly, as many have done, a performance is itself a kind of 'analysis'.

Janet Schmalfeldt, "Who's Keeping the Score?," in *Investigating Musical Performance*, ed. Gianmario Borio, Giovanni Giuriati, Alessandro Cecchi, and Marco Lutzu (Routledge, 2020), 93.

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For the most part, irregular sources are “normalised” into 4/4…

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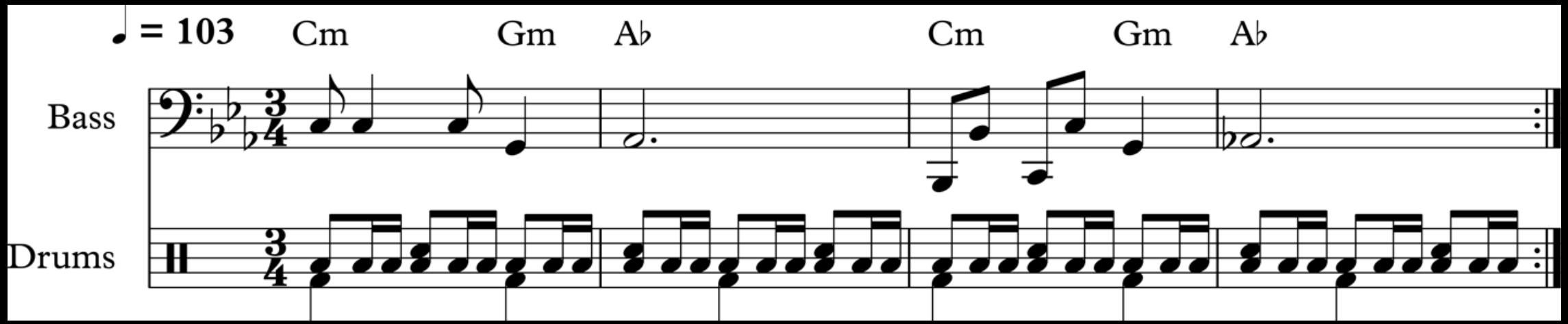
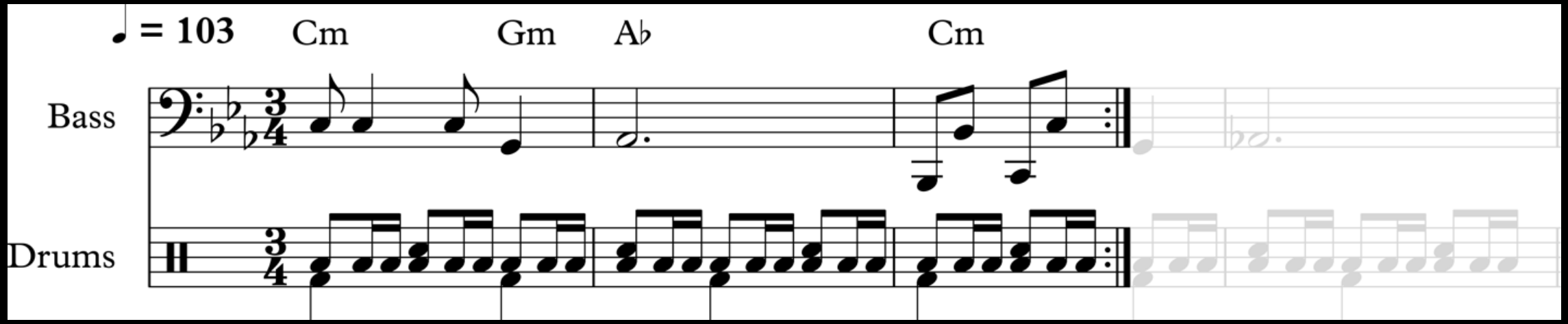
But there are always various ways in which this can be done!

Thinking about these possibilities brings us closer to understanding how different musicians might *hear* a common source

MGMT, “Electric Feel”



Frank Ocean, “Nature Feels”



MGMT, “Electric Feel,” JUSTICE remix