Syncopation Anxiety

Being "Off-Beat" is not a bad thing!

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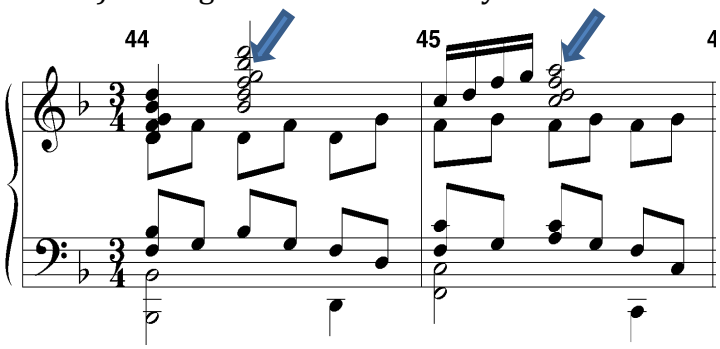
We will be working off this handout – so please print it off and bring it to class!

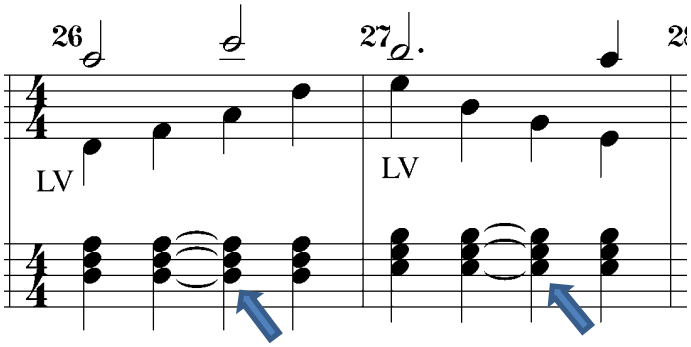
"Rhythmic flow" proceeds in music based on a predictable pattern of pulse and meter, defined by the time signature and a predetermined grouping of stresses. Stresses fall into groups of 2's or 3's, and these are grouped into measures containing a particular number of the basic counting unit – a beat. Within each measure is a set pattern of stressed and weak beats: in 4/4 time beat 1 is stressed, beats 2 and 4 are weak, and beat 3 is secondarily stressed (STRONG, weak, strong, weak.) Any additional eighth notes or triplets are even weaker, and sixteenth note groups have their own internal strong-weak patterns which mirror 4/4 time.

If this comfortable, predictable flow of stresses and weak beats is disrupted, syncopation results

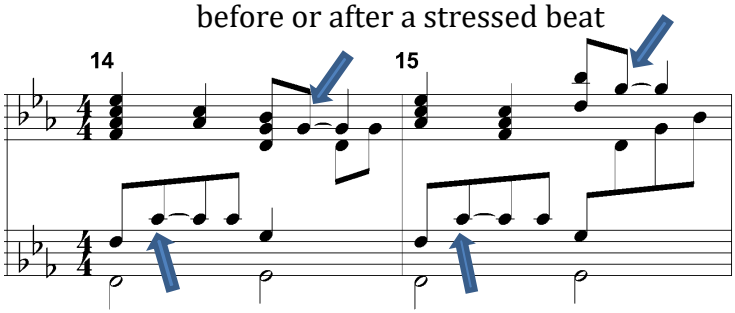
1) Placing stress on a normally weak beat



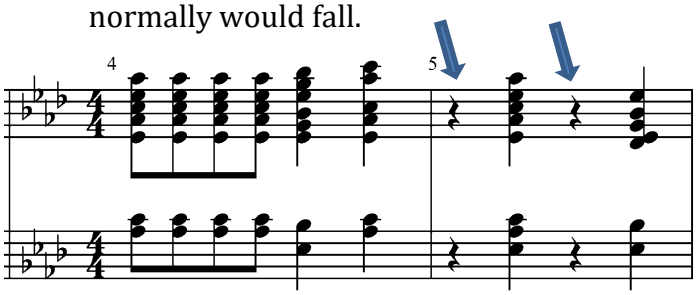
3) Sustaining a note across a strong beat



2) Playing a note "off the beat" either just before or after a stressed beat



4) Placing a rest where a strong beat normally would fall.



In order to sustain a feeling of syncopation, an underlying feeling of the pulse "on the beat" is usually used, either in a steady accompaniment pattern or at least partially implied. Otherwise, the "off beat" pattern will eventually feel like the "on beat" pulse. Syncopation produces a surprise in the rhythmic flow, but if repeated enough, it becomes its own predictable rhythmic pattern as well.

Look for ties and dotted notes!!

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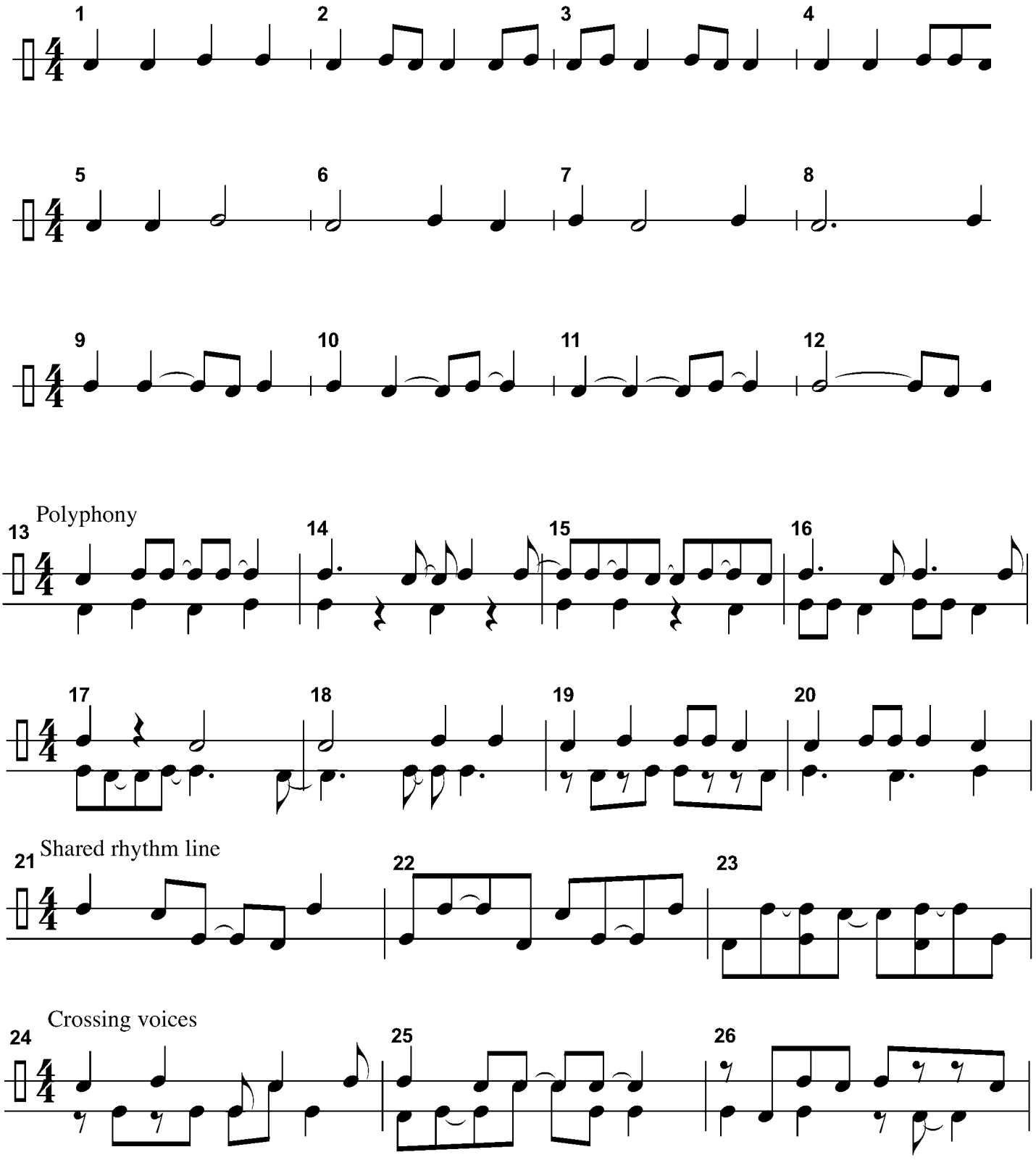
Syncopation Study

Always count the quarter notes! in X/4 time



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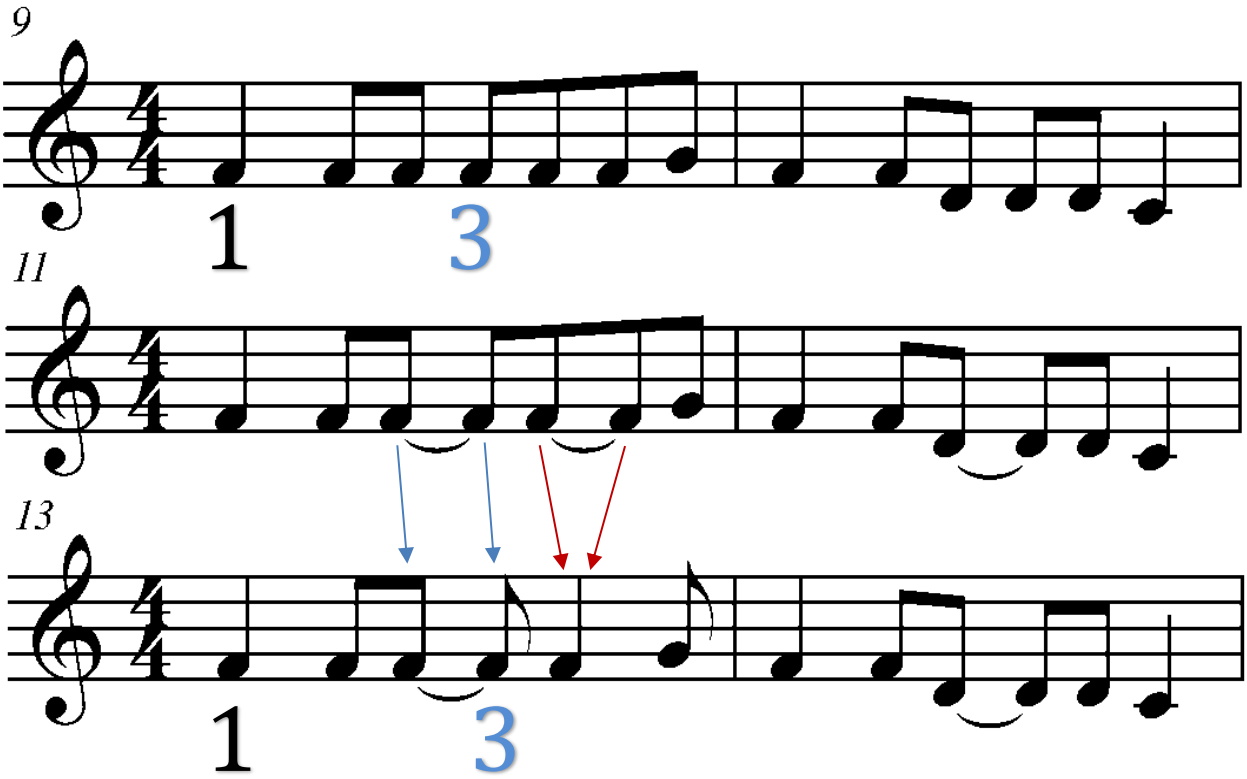
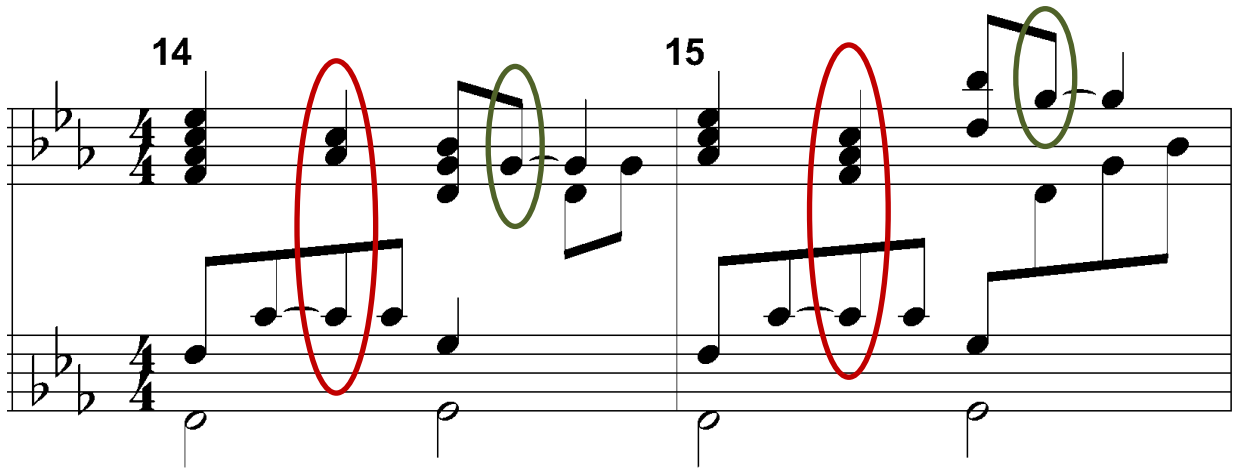
Deconstructing a syncopated pattern –Light and Shine (Wissinger) (HP2467)

Note: -Eighth note beaming patterns often follow major stresses in the measure: "1" and "3"
- 8ths are usually tied across a main stress, but an offset quarter note may be used elsewhere
-Sometimes offset quarters or dotted quarters are used throughout the pattern
-Always count the quarter notes!!



Mnemonics **We** are **march-** **ing**___, we're **march-** ing **in**_____ the **Light**

Syncopated melody and accompaniment - People of the South Wind (Wissinger) (Prairie Suite AG36043)
Note the accompaniment pauses when the melody plays on beat 2, and the melody jumps on 3.5



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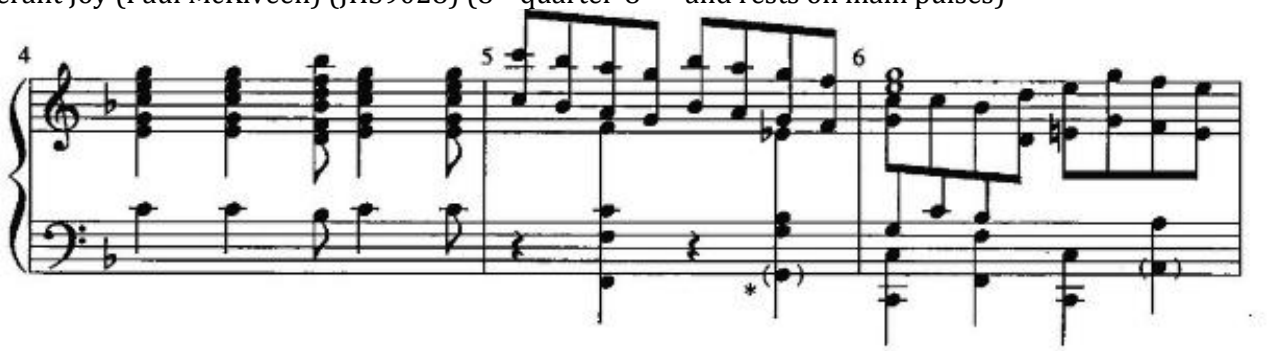
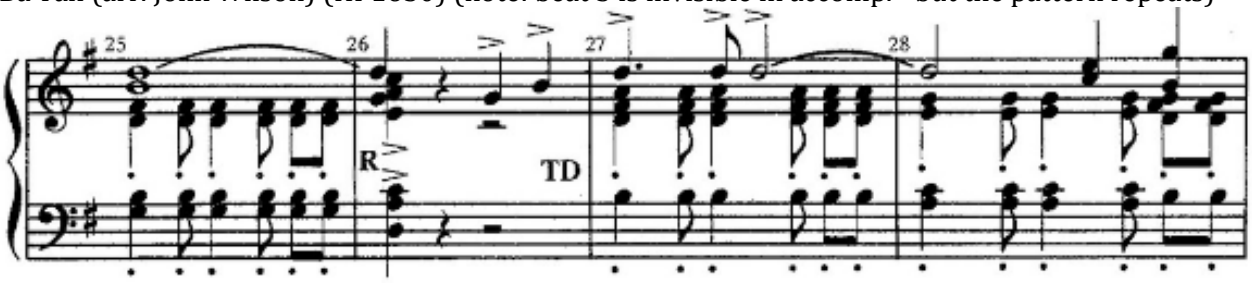
Class Repertoire:

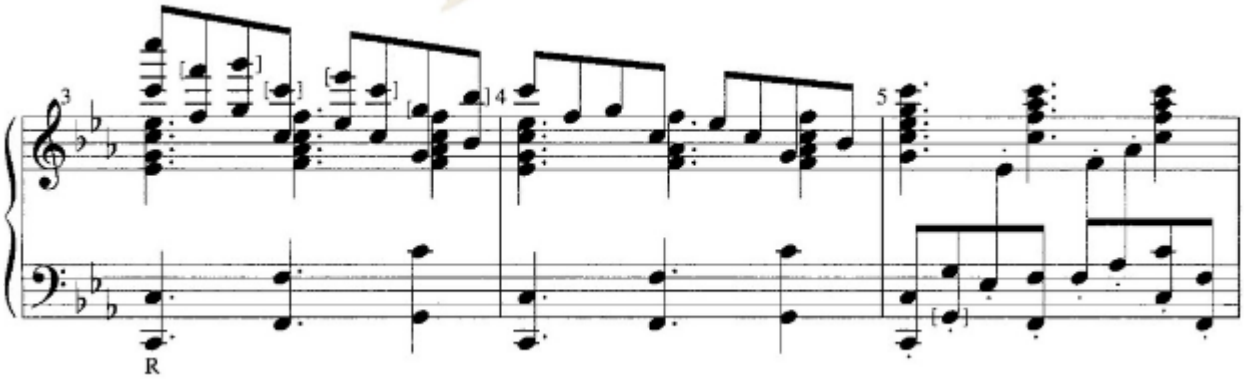
Exuberant Joy (Paul McKlveen) (JHS9028) (8th-quarter-8th – and rests on main pulses)



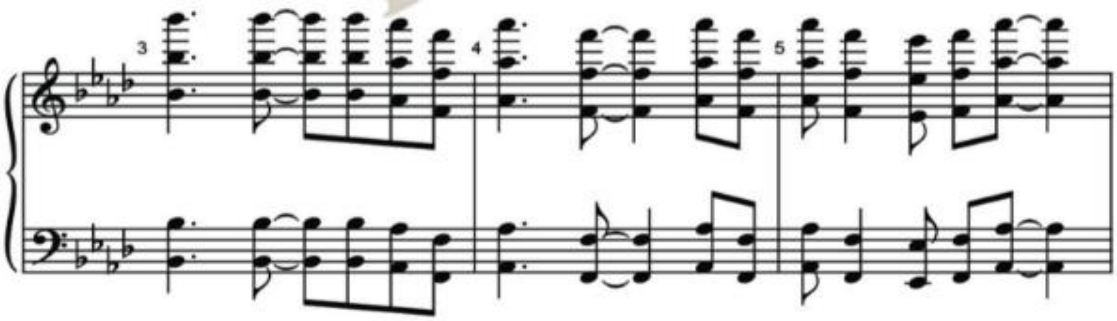
Kum Ba Yah (arr. John Wilson) (HP1650) (note: beat 3 is invisible in accomp. - but the pattern repeats)



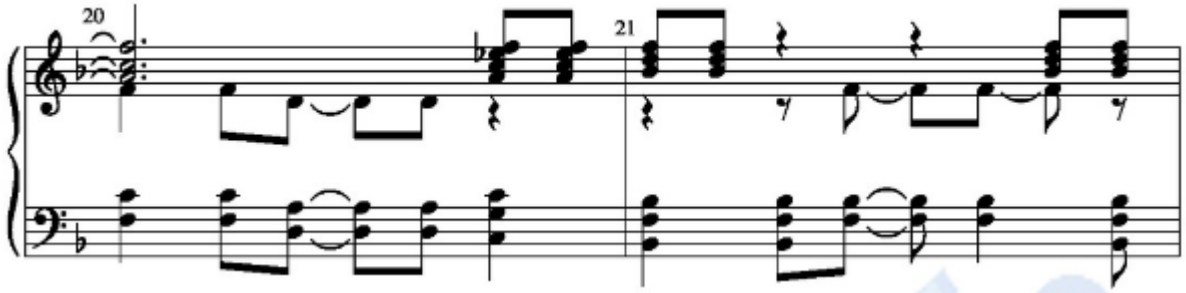
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (arr. Alan Lohr) (AG35146) (dotted quarters in 4/4 time – same idea as above)



Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel? (arr. Dan Edwards) (CGB464) (Swing rhythm, offset quarters & tied 8ths)



Light and Shine (arr. Kathleen Wissinger) (HP2467) (tied 8ths, shifting pulse)



For more detailed class notes, see "Building Blocks" series from ringTrue, Spring 2023

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